Hermione's Furry Little Problem

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Hermione's Furry Little Problem

by Gandalfs_Beard

Summary

Hermione has a problem after the disastrous outcome of her ingestion of the polyjuice potion during second year. The results of the potion are irreversible.

How will her two best friends react when they find out that she is likely to remain half-cat for the rest of her life?

Notes
This began more or less as a challenge to myself to write explicit sex scenes without resorting to vulgarities, out of character slang, or hackneyed euphemisms like "throbbing members/heaving bosoms" (and it's bloody hard :P ). The purpose of the challenge was to avoid the pitfalls that usually arise when writing a proper story with a sex scene: mainly that they usually seem so out of place to be written in a language and style which doesn't match the rest of the story. In this case, the rest of the story is written in (largely) British dialect and in a style similar to kid-lit (hence you see the literary problem I'm attempting to resolve).

I should like to preface this by pointing out that this is a bit of a SATIRE of many Fanon and Canon Tropes. Having said that, this is also a Drama with a lot of emphasis on relationships, and a bit of a Political Thriller as well, so there are some semi-serious elements too.

There are mentions of triggering events such as sexual assault and rape, but it is largely "off-screen." This fic deals more with coping in the aftermath. If you're looking for non-con, there are plenty of other fics which feature it in great detail.

Likewise, though this story does feature teens in consenting sexual relationships, it does not feature minors having sex with adults (Tonks is young enough that she doesn't really count as an adult in my book... ;-) ). So again, if you're looking for that, there are other fics. This is intended to be enjoyed from the point of view of reliving one's teen years, first-times and fantasies, with a cartoony, hentai-ish vibe.

Finally, it may seem at first that this is a Ron bashing fic, but it really isn't, even though I do think he's a selfish idiot with a motor mouth and issues (and it's not a Ginny bashing fic either). Rather, it depicts the relationships between Ron and Harry and Hermione with its ups and downs (and admittedly, it starts off in a "downturn").

Again, this is fiction about consenting teens having sex with each other. The author absolutely does not condone predatory behaviours and creepy old men having sex with minors. :P
Chapter 1

Harry was rather disgusted by the time he and Ron had returned to the girl's bathroom. They had wasted vile tasting polyjuice potion on a useless pursuit while Hermione was clearly in some sort of distress. Ron didn’t seem too perturbed though. He was picking his nose and all he could think about was Slytherin’s Heir, and what sort of Christmas Goodies to eat when they got back to the Gryffindor common room.

“Hermione, what’s wrong?” Harry called through the toilet stall door.

“Ooooh!” giggled Moaning Myrtle, “It’s simply awful...”

“Go away Harry,” shouted a tearful Hermione, “I... I don’t want you to see me like this.”

“You’ve got to come out some time,” said Ron, sniffing.

Hermione relented and slowly opened the stall door. Harry’s jaw dropped. Hermione’s face was covered in fur, she had pointy ears and a bushy tail. She had turned into a cat—or rather, part way into a ginger tabby cat, and tears were dripping from Hermione’s whiskers.

Ron started guffawing loudly and Harry punched him in the arm hard, shooting him a dirty look. Ron shut up and looked miffed.

“It’s alright,” said Harry comfortingly, “I’ve got my invisibility cloak. I’ll take you up to Madam Pomfrey’s. She’ll sort you out in no time.” Harry looked at Ron with beckoning eyebrows. But Ron was slightly annoyed now, because he didn’t see what was wrong with having a laugh. Hermione would get over it. And he was hungry anyway. And he wanted to play with his new wizard chess set.

So Ron just shrugged and gave Harry a grin.

“Go on Harry, I’ll see you in the common room when you get back. We’ll play with my new wizard chess set.”
Harry just stared at his best friend, not sure if he was hearing right. Their other best friend was now half-cat half-girl, and all the stupid lump could think about was his bloody Christmas presents? Harry hadn’t paid much attention to Ron’s lack of sensitivity before. He had been disturbed when Ron had called Hermione a “Nightmare” their first year, but as they had all become friends after the Troll incident he had long forgotten it until now.

Harry frowned slightly.

“Right then, bye Ron,” he said while throwing his invisibility cloak over Hermione, “Come on Hermione, Let’s go to the hospital wing.”

Ron watched the pair leaving with an odd feeling that something had just happened between them all.

~00o~

“I’m not leaving Hermione,” Harry told Madam Pomfrey firmly. “It’s Christmas Holidays still—will be for a week—and there’s no reason I can’t sleep in a cot next to hers at night. She’s my BEST FRIEND” Harry said emphatically, forgetting about Ron briefly. “Please say it’s alright! I’m not going, but I’d rather not get into trouble if you can help it.”

Madam Pomfrey could see the hurt and determination in Harry’s eyes and relented.

“Alright Mr Potter,” she sighed, “Go and get what you need from your dormitory. You can stay until the end of the Christmas holidays, or until Miss Granger is better, whichever comes first.”

Harry beamed.

“Thank you Madam Pomfrey. I’ll go and get my things right now.” Harry startled Hermione when he turned around and gave her a big hug. “I’ll be right back Hermione. Don’t worry. I know it’ll all work out.”

Hermione’s tail twitched happily. Her whiskers were still dripping tears, but feeling Harry against her made her feel as nice as his words had. She had a sudden urge to kiss Harry, but instead she blushed under her fur and turned her face away.

~00o~

“Whaddy’a mean you’re staying in the hospital wing with Hermione?” Ron asked sullenly.

Harry just stared at Ron in amazement again. What didn’t Ron understand? Was Harry mumbling? Harry thought he had been clear, but given Ron’s gormless expression, perhaps he should have used simpler language. He’d try again.

“Hermione needs someone to be with her right now. She doesn’t have anyone else but us,” Harry said slowly, enunciating every word properly.

For some reason, that rankled Ron. That “us” didn’t seem to have quite the same pull as it had before today. But Harry was his best friend. Ron was sure he would forget about Hermione after the holidays and they could get back to wizard chess and playing quidditch and pulling pranks in their off-hours. So Ron just sighed.

“Yeah, guess you’re right mate. Well, I’d join you two, but Madam Pomfrey probably has matching pillows for you both already. Wouldn’t want to put her out,” he joked.
Harry was really feeling weirded out. Ron wasn’t behaving any differently than usual, but all of a sudden Harry realised how inappropriate and ill-tuned Ron’s “humour” was. It sounded more like a dig at him now. Had Ron always sounded this way? Mildly belligerent? Maybe to other people. But this was the first time Harry had felt it directed at him, and he didn’t like it. Harry suddenly felt ashamed of himself for not sticking up for Hermione more when Ron was antagonising her.

Ron realised he had said something wrong from the expression on Harry’s face. But he couldn’t for the life of him figure out what it was. He would have to apologise and bluster his way through this.

“Oh... er... sorry Harry. I just meant, ‘look after Hermione’ you know.”

Harry just looked at Ron funny for a moment longer then he smiled.

“Right. Of course you did Ron,” Harry said, trying to put on a cheery voice. “Well, I’ve got my trunk packed. I’m off till next week. I’ll drop by the common room to say hello, maybe a game of chess... Butterbeer...”

“Yeah,” Ron said, returning a stiff smile, “Sounds alright. I’ll stop by the hospital wing and say hi too.”

But Ron never did come by the infirmary, and every time Harry had gone to the Gryffindor common room Ron would mysteriously vanish.
Chapter 2

Despite the lack of success finding a solution to Hermione’s furry little problem, she couldn’t be happier when Harry spent the rest of the Christmas Holidays in the Hospital Wing with her. She’d never had many friends, and certainly never ever had another friend as close as Harry, someone who would put himself out like this to keep her company. It felt really good to be around him.

Hermione cried when the new term began and Harry had to move back into Gryffindor tower. But that night, she got a shock when Harry appeared from under his invisibility cloak. He shushed her and climbed onto her bed, not paying any attention to the fact that all she was wearing was her fur, as she hadn’t been fussed about it when he had been staying in the infirmary with her the previous week. It covered her as well as any clothing.

“Wake me early.” Harry whispered. He covered himself back up with the invisibility cloak and put his arm around Hermione. They fell asleep snuggled together right under the ever watchful eye of Madam Pomfrey.

“Pssst... Harry, wake up, it’s 5:30 am” Hermione whispered. Harry could feel her lips brush against his ear. It felt nice being so close to her. He didn’t want to get up, but he couldn’t risk being caught.

Harry never made it through the common room where Fred and George were waiting for him and snickering.

“It’s alright Harry...” said Fred.

“...we know about you...” said George.

“...and Hermione....”

“...and we approve...”

“...wholeheartedly,” concluded Fred, slapping Harry on the back.

“Good show Harry.” George said.

“You’re obviously a fast learner... Ron probably won’t even figure out what a girl is until fourth year,” continued Fred.

“And he probably won’t even have a snog until sixth year,” said George with a restrained guffaw.

Harry’s face was bright red and his cheeks felt like they were burning. This was bloody embarrassing. But still, it felt good to have some Weasleys around who still seemed to like him. Harry grinned at Fred and George.

“Look, Hermione’s just a friend...” began Harry.

“...whose bed you sleep in?” finished Fred.

“How did you know that?” gasped Harry in shock.

George laughed.

“I didn’t, but I do now,” retorted Fred as he chuckled.
Harry groaned. If Fred and George were going to be his new Best Weasley Friends, Harry was going to have to stay on his toes. He stuck his tongue out at them and grinned.

“Yeah, well we haven’t er... snogged or anything, but... but yeah, I guess I do really like Hermione a lot. It’s just she... she’s my first real friend. I thought it was Ron, but lately... I dunno about him. I just know... I just... I’ve never felt like this about a girl before.”

“We tried to warn you about Ron,” Fred said with a wink.

“But never mind that,” said George, trying to be serious for a moment, “Just treat Hermione nicely and she’ll be nice back. That’s all you really need to know to have a girlfriend Harry.”

“But if you need snogging instructions we’ve got a booklet we can sell you,” Fred interjected.

Harry turned beet red again, and fled to his dormitory.

Harry was taking copious notes in his classes to take to Hermione when they ended. Ron just glowered, wondering how he was going to pass without Hermione to do his work for him.

While they were hard at work studying, Harry absentmindedly started scratching Hermione behind one of her cat ears. It was something he had become accustomed to with Mrs Figg’s cats. Hermione began purring loudly and butting her head and under her chin harder against Harry’s knuckles like the cats did when they were being particularly affectionate. Harry suddenly realised what was happening when Hermione began to arch and rub herself against him.

He was starting to feel a bit giddy and Hermione seemed so happy that he didn’t want to stop her. But he heard footsteps in the hallway and he leapt up. Hermione gasped and quickly recovered as Madam Pomfrey returned with a healer from St Mungo’s.

They made to shoo Harry away, but Hermione was having none of it and she grabbed his arm.

“Please let Harry stay. He can hear whatever you have to tell me. He’s my boyfriend.”

The St Mungo’s Healer’s glasses fell off her nose and shattered on the floor.
Harry thought he should have been more startled himself. But after what had just happened, he was quite certain that Hermione was right; he was her boyfriend. He wasn’t sure if he knew what what love was, he just knew that he wanted to be with Hermione and make her happy, whether she had a furry little problem or not.

Madam Pomfrey eyed the two of them suspiciously and Harry wilted slightly. She conferred with the Healer in whispers. Then she turned back to Harry and said,

“You may stay Mr Potter. It is Miss Granger’s right to have someone with her during consultations, and as her parents can’t be here, you may stay and take their place.”

Harry and Hermione beamed at each other and he sat back down on the chair beside her.

“Well then...” the St Mungo’s healer began, “The good news is that not all of the fur is permanent. Your human half is asserting itself in that regard. Most of you will be relatively fur free by Thursday...”

“Most of me...?” squeaked Hermione anxiously.

“Well... erm... yes. That brings us to the bad news, the fur is the only thing that’s going to change. The cat ears, the tail, the erm... dear, are you sure you wouldn’t like your boyfriend to step outside?”

“No, you can talk about my private bits in front of Harry. I don’t care,”

Harry thought that HE rather cared, and wished he could hide somewhere. But Hermione was determined.

“Well, if you insist dear,” the Healer continued. “As I was saying, though you will lose the fur on most of your human body, your cat ears and tail will always be with you, and they will likely remain covered in fur. Also, your eight... er, ahem... nipples, will continue to develop as you continue through puberty. Though it is likely that only your human breasts will be functional--but we cannot be certain of that.”

“And... and... Oh please Miss Granger... Must we continue this in front of Mr Potter?”

“YES!” said Hermione, glowering. “If ANYBODY needs to know, it’s my boyfriend.”

“But he’s only 12 and a half...” the healer exploded.

“And I’m only 13. So what?” Hermione responded acidly. “You wouldn’t want us to engage in unsafe behaviours without knowing about any potential problems would you?”

Hermione had the Healer dead to rights on that point. It wasn’t the healer’s place to tell teenagers not to have sex (that was the parent’s job), it was her place to tell them how to be safe. Hermione’s logic actually made the Healer feel MUCH better about talking in front of Harry. Though Harry still wasn’t certain that he felt much better about it.

In fact, the Healer now appeared to be regarding Hermione quite proudly.

“Right then, I suppose that makes some of this a bit easier then Miss Granger--you brave Gryffindor--because you will need a boyfriend to settle your urges when you go into heat. But don’t worry
about getting pregnant dear. There are magic contraception charms you can use...”

Hermione gasped and Harry hid his face in his hands. Hermione had thought things between them would develop along normal teenage time-frames, maybe snogging for a year or so, then moving on to more interesting things as they got a bit older.

“How soon?” Hermione moaned.

“Well dear, as you pointed out, you are 13. But you are part feline. Instead of having a period once a month, you will go into heat...”

“But I’m due next week,” groaned Hermione. “I’ve been having my period for the last 4 months.”

“Oh dear...” said the healer, glancing at Harry, who was still hiding his face in his hands. “Well it looks like you and your boyfriend should get a move on then. There’s nothing else for it. We’ve performed all the tests we can, and have determined that this is irreversible.

Hermione felt less upset about that than she thought she would if the news went this way. She had got to like Harry scratching her behind the ear and stroking her tail, and just thinking about it was starting to make her feel excited. Harry too, wasn’t unhappy about the news. He loved Hermione’s ears and her tail.
When Thursday rolled around, Harry discovered a very happy (almost) fur free Hermione. Hermione was so happy, that she wanted to show Harry everything when he brought her lunch to the hospital wing. Madam Pomfrey was gone for lunch when Harry came in with Hermione’s. Hermione set a potent locking spell on the door which could not be undone with an alohamora spell.

Then she yanked a curtain all the way around her bed so that nobody else could see even if they did manage to break down the door.

“Hermione... What’s going on? Aren’t we going to have lunch?” Harry asked.

“Ssssh silly! I have more I want to show you, not just my face,” Hermione replied.

Harry opened his mouth again, but Hermione put a finger to his lips and directed him to the chair at her bedside. Then Hermione pulled her hospital gown over her head and dropped it on the floor. She stood in front of Harry utterly naked with what she hoped was a sexy expression, but she couldn’t help grinning and giggling instead.

At first Harry looked shell-shocked. When Hermione hadn’t worn any clothes at times last week, he hadn’t really noticed, because her fur was as good as clothes in covering everything. He couldn’t help himself and began to get an erection. His face began to get hot and his breathing became more rapid.

Hermione was beautiful even without fur. From the front, she was completely hairless. There was nothing even between her legs (which--unknown to Harry--had been covered in a trimmed light brown downy patch prior to her change). Her first set of breasts were surprisingly well developed, but were not too large for her petite frame. Her pink nipples were as erect as they could possibly be. Just under Hermione’s original human breasts, was a second smaller pair just as pretty as the first, and its nipples were just as perky and pink. Below that were 2 more pairs of nipples on her abdomen.

Hermione turned around so that Harry could see her furry ginger tail. There was a slender line of orange fur running down her spine to meet it

Harry felt very weak, but excited. Hermione kissed Harry on the lips and took his hands, placing them on her first set of breasts. As Harry gently squeezed them Hermione began purring loudly. She pulled Harry off the chair and onto her bed, tearing off his clothes.

Hermione had come into heat three days earlier than expected and she couldn’t control herself at all around Harry. For his part, Harry got over the shock of being naked with an erection in front of Hermione much faster than he thought he would. He stroked her ears and her tail—which twitched wildly. Hermione was purring and rubbing her body against his.

She rolled on her back, opened her legs and guided Harry to her entrance. He couldn’t believe that anything could possibly feel as good as this. Hermione purred some more and writhed under Harry as he instinctively began to thrust himself into her. She wrapped her legs around Harry’s and pulled him tightly against her while kissing his neck and face and nibbling his ears. They rolled over and continued as Hermione straddled him and meowed loudly while moving rapidly up and down with him inside her moistness.

The sensation took Harry into an ecstatic oblivion. Hermione and Harry both climaxed together. Harry didn’t know what was happening. He felt a fluid ejaculating from himself into Hermione. She
held him close as he continued to release himself inside of her.

When it was finished, he found that he was laying on top of Hermione again and they were both spent. It felt exceedingly pleasurable to just lie together naked and completely relaxed, But it was perhaps a bit too pleasurable as Harry’s penis began to stiffen again and press into Hermione’s thigh.

Hermione giggled to see it pop up again. It was an alright size as they were both rather small for their age. But Hermione was wondering what it would feel like if Harry were a bit bigger. It still felt like there was room for more. She grabbed her wand from her bedside table and pointed it at Harry’s penis.

“Engorgio,” she muttered.

Harry felt a tingling of magic in his erection, and it grew several inches longer and plumped up. Hermione straddled Harry again and lowered herself onto him, gasping as he filled her completely. She gazed lovingly at Harry as she sat on him, a thought striking her.

“I’m very sorry Harry. I didn’t ask you if you wanted to be bigger. Do you want me to make my breasts bigger? I know some boys like that.”

Harry shook his head.

“No. You’re perfect just the way you are Hermione. But I don’t mind you making me a bit bigger. Please leave it that way. I always feel stupid in the showers after quidditch because it looks so tiny next to everyone else’s.”

Hermione blushed at being called perfect. She giggled and began to slide herself up and down on Harry’s erect penis again. She leaned over while still riding Harry, butted her head against his, rubbed her face against him, and kissed him passionately. The second time took longer than the first, and it was even more intense. The pair of teens rolled off the bed laughing.

Hermione got onto her knees, she put her arms on her bed and thrust her bottom out at Harry who reentered her from behind while stroking her furry tail in one hand and rubbing her behind a furry ear with the other one.

With every thrust, Harry’s larger penis was hitting all of the right spots inside of Hermione and she began to yowl as her tabby ginger tail whipped back and forth. If Harry wasn’t so lost in the throes of passion himself, he might have been worried about all of the noise they were making. But he was enjoying himself too much to care at that moment.

Harry was thrusting harder and faster than he had the first time, and with much better rhythm. Hermione felt him stiffen and knew what was about to happen. She squeezed herself tightly around his penis to keep Harry in her as she felt him squirting inside of her again. She had a powerful orgasm as Harry ejaculated.

When they were finished, Harry pulled stickily out, and some semen dribbled down Hermione’s inner thighs. After a few minutes recovering, Hermione kissed Harry.

“I love you Harry!” she whispered.

Harry decided that perhaps he did know what love was after all. He realised that it wasn’t just about sex, though that had been incredible. He just knew that he couldn’t bear to ever be without Hermione at his side.

“I love you too Hermione!” Harry said, and he kissed her back.
After the euphoria ebbed, Harry and Hermione tidied themselves up and got dressed. Hermione had modified her dress to accommodate her tail; it was large and bushy, reaching almost to the top of her head, and all attempts to try and hide it were fruitless. And given that, there had been no point in bothering to try and hide her ears.

Harry noticed Hermione was subdued now, and turning her face away from him. He thought he knew what was wrong.

“It’s alright Hermione, we’re in this together now. I’ll hex anyone who gives you a hard time.”

Hermione sighed and looked at Harry with tears in her eyes.

“It’s not that Harry. Well, maybe it is a bit... But mostly I...” Hermione sobbed, “…I wanted to say I’m sorry and thank you all at once and...”

“Sorry? What for?” asked a very bewildered Harry.

“I... I took advantage of you Harry. I shouldn’t have done that. I don’t think you were ready yet.”

Hermione was crying in earnest now. Harry couldn’t think what to do, so he put his arms around Hermione and hugged her. He hadn’t expected this. He couldn’t have imagined ever having such a beautiful experience. If Hermione hadn’t been precocious, it would never have happened--and he was very happy that it had.

Then Harry understood. He remembered what the Healer had told them, that Hermione would need a boyfriend to “settle” her instinctive feline urges. Hermione was back to her normal self and not in heat anymore because Harry had “settled” her. He kissed her forehead.

“Look at me Hermione. Please!”

Hermione slowly lifted her tear-streaked face and looked into Harry’s green eyes. He smiled at her.

“It’s alright Hermione. I... it was lovely. I mean it. You didn’t take advantage of me. You couldn’t help it because you were in heat. But it didn’t matter anyway, because I AM ready. I... I don’t know how it happened. I knew something was wrong with you when you wouldn’t come out of the stall after taking the polyjuice potion.”

“I couldn’t stop thinking about you the whole time Ron and I were with Malfoy. By the time we got back to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom, I was different somehow. If anything, I’m sorry for not sticking up for you more with Ron. All of a sudden, I realised that he’s a bit stupid and mean--not to mention selfish. And... and I realised I wanted to look after you--not let anyone be mean to you.”

Hermione had stopped crying and her eyes widened. She was seeing Harry in a whole new light. Harry wasn’t a little boy anymore after all.

“Look...” Harry continued, “I’m not saying I wasn’t surprised--I was--but it was a very happy surprise. I want to be with you Hermione. I AM your boyfriend now!” Finished with his little speech, Harry suddenly kissed Hermione on the lips to show her that he meant it.

Hermione was feeling much calmer now. She smiled shyly at Harry and blushed slightly. The shyness was new to her. Nobody had ever made her feel this way before.
“I... I think I really do love you Harry. I don’t think it was just being a cat, or in heat. You’ve been so nice to me these last few weeks. And I’ve liked you since the day I met you on the train, but you and Ron seemed so... not interested in girls yet.”

“And thank you so much for being so understanding Harry... and for helping me with my problem. I feel normal again now. Not that I didn’t enjoy the sex too, but I felt out of control.”

Lunch time was almost over. Hermione undid her locking spell in the nick of time; Madam Pomfrey had returned. She spotted Harry with Hermione and smiled to herself. The boy was clearly besotted with Miss Granger, and she would need all the support she could get.

Hermione left the hospital wing with Harry very anxiously. She had a feeling that she would be in for a rough time. She was not incorrect. Other students had been wondering what had happened to her, and took immediate notice of Hermione’s new appearance. They didn’t even try to hide their laughter and rude comments.

It was made worse by the fact that most of the students were a bit frightened of Harry, which made them meaner when they realised that she was with Harry too. And it wasn’t just Slytherins. A Hufflepuff boy yelled out as she and Harry walked by.

“Is that your Pet Pussy, Potter?”

Several Hufflepuff girls nearby giggled. Some older Ravenclaws passing by laughed at Zachariah Smith’s crudeness and witty alliteration. One of the Ravenclaw boys grabbed Hermione’s tail and pulled it. She gasped in dismay and felt a sharp pain at the base of her spine.

Roger Davies dropped to the floor blinded by agony when Harry’s fist crashed into the side of his face.

“If ANYBODY else ever tries that again, I’ll hex the lot of you!” Harry yelled at everyone in the hallway.

The rest of the students in the hallway fled in terror, wondering why they had been so stupid as to anger the Heir of Slytherin. Harry looked on in satisfaction. Unfortunately it didn’t last long. Snape had arrived with Madam Pomfrey who immediately began to administer aid to Roger Davies.

“Well, well, Mr Potter. What a stunning display of muggle violence,” Snape said with a nasty looking smirk. “I would say 50 points from Gryffindor and a month’s deten...”

“I don’t THINK so Severus!” Interjected Madam Pomfrey angrily, who leapt up from Roger Davies and glared with venom at Snape. He paled slightly and stepped back. He had never seen Poppy so enraged.

“If you DARE try to punish Mr Potter for protecting Miss Granger, I shall lodge a formal complaint with the Headmaster!” she snarled at him.

Snape glowered at Harry.

“You’ve been spared by your ‘chivalry’ Potter!” he sneered, “...for now!”
Ron really wanted to have another laugh at Hermione, but he restrained himself and made an attempt to ingratiate himself with Hermione instead. He wanted his friend Harry back, and he wanted Hermione to do his homework again. For their part, Harry and Hermione returned the favour and made an effort to welcome him back. But their friendships would never be quite the same again.

That evening, when Harry and Hermione showed up in the common room, everything went quiet and all eyes turned towards them. Well this was awkward, thought Harry. It was bad enough that a number of fellow Gryffindors thought he might be the Heir of Slytherin too, but now they had the added impression that he might beat anyone to pulp who looked at Hermione wrong. Though that didn’t stop some of the girls in Hermione’s dorm from giggling and whispering to each other.

Fred and George looked around the common room in disgust. They had been planning on holding a celebration for Harry; for sticking up for Hermione, bashing Roger Davies, annoying Snape, and getting away with it.

“Sod off you lot,” Fred said, making a rude hand gesture.

“Yeah, this party is for REAL Gryffindors!” exclaimed George.

Some of the Gryffindors in the common room looked quite sheepish, while others glared at Fred and George. But all of them filed up the stairs to their respective dormitories, even Ron and Ginny, and left the twins with Hermione and Harry who were both quite upset now. They had expected better treatment from their own House.

“Bunch of bloody gits,” George said.

“Who needs them!?” Fred remarked.

George pressed butterbeers into Hermione and Harry’s hands. Then he sighed and pulled out a little vial of some sort of potion.

“Here you two. I was going to save this for later, but you need it more.”

“What is it?” Hermione asked, who was on the verge of tears again.

“It’s a... erm... cheering sort of potion...” began Fred.

“...and don’t ask where we got it from,” finished George.

“Bottoms up you two,” Fred urged.

Hermione and Harry regarded the vial dubiously, but the Weasley twins were the only ones unequivocally on their side, and they both felt that it would be rude not to give it a go. They each took a swig and emptied the vial.

Moments later they felt much better, and a bit buzzy. Fred turned on the Wizard Wireless. Celestina Warbeck was warbling away.

“Urgh,” grunted Fred, who immediately flicked stations until he found one playing a *New Order* song. George opened a basket full of pork pies, sausage rolls, pumpkin pasties, bacon flavoured crisps, Jammie Dodgers, Chocolate Frogs and a number of other assorted goodies...
Soon they were playing a game of Exploding Snap and having a good laugh as Harry did an impression of Snape’s features when Madam Pomfrey had told him off. It was midnight before they all made their way to their respective dorms.

Hermione entered her dorm in trepidation. Everyone was still awake and staring at her when she entered. But Parvati was sitting on Hermione’s bed glowering at everyone else. Hermione ignored the others, and approached Parvati.

Parvati jumped up and gave Hermione a hug.

“I’m so sorry Hermione. It’s awful. I don’t care what you look like—no, actually I do. I think you look adorable.” Parvati sniffed and an angry tear rolled down one cheek as she gave everyone else a quick glare.

“Well I think you’re a freak!” Lavender said with a sour expression. Fay Dunbar and her friend glowered and nodded in agreement. “You don’t belong with humans anymore, you belong in Hagrid’s menagerie!” Lavender concluded with a sneer.

Hermione burst into tears. Parvati gasped at Lavender’s cruelty and whipped out her wand, shooting a hex at her. Lavender sprouted antlers and shrieked. She whipped out her own wand and pointed it at Hermione, vanishing her clothes.

Hermione yowled in horror, covered her face with her hands and sobbed as the other girls stared at her naked body.

“See...” yelled Lavender, “She’s an animal! She’s got eight breasts. I’m not sleeping in a dorm with a freak!”

“You evil hag,” shrieked Parvati, who quickly shot another hex at Lavender. Lavender dodged the spell and it hit Fay Dunbar in the chest. Fay’s nightgown exploded as her breasts blew up and kept growing until they hit the floor. Taking advantage of the confusion, Parvati threw a blanket over Hermione and pushed her out the door before taking a hit from a spell shot by Fay Dunbar’s friend.

A horse tail sprouted from Parvati’s backside. She whirled around and dueled with Fay’s friend and the antlered Lavender. Spells ricocheted around the room and the other girls in the dorm screamed and hid under their beds.

Hermione fled down the stairs from the girls’ dorm, and then up the stairs to the boys’ dorm. Wrapped only in her blanket, she flew past a shocked Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan. Hermione ran to Harry’s bed, who looked equally astounded. Ron was staring at her slack-jawed as she yanked the curtains closed around Harry’s bed and flung herself on him sobbing loudly.

The boys could hear what sounded like a full-scale riot in the girl’s dormitories. Harry just held Hermione tightly as she cried.

After a bit, there was silence from the girl’s dorm. Then half an hour later Professor McGonagall stormed into the second year boy’s dorm. She was livid.

With a wave of her wand everyone’s curtains closed, temporarily trapping the rest of the boys in their beds. Then she approached Harry’s curtain, and with a valiant effort she brought her temper under control and spoke as gently as she could to the young couple inside.

“Potter, Miss Granger, please come with me immediately. We need to talk. And this is not the place.”

Harry peeked through the curtain, and saw that everyone else’s was shut.
“It’s alright Hermione,” he said, “you can come out now. Nobody can see you.”

Still sobbing hard, Hermione emerged from the curtains surrounding Harry’s bed wrapped in her blanket. Anger creased McGonagall’s face again when she saw Hermione’s state. She waved her wand and a flowery nightgown replaced Hermione’s blanket. She put one arm around Hermione and the other around Harry and led them out of the boy’s dorm.

She looked back at the enclosed beds.

“Lights out NOW!” Professor McGonagall said sharply before slamming the door behind her.
Half an hour earlier, Professor McGonagall had broken up the fight in the second year girls’ dorm and taken the four duelers to Madam Pomfrey, who looked equally enraged. The girls all started babbling at once.

“QUIET!” shouted Professor McGonagall. “I will hear your stories one at a time before I decide what to do with you all. Miss Brown, you first.”

“It was Parvati. She gave me these antlers. She started it!” said Lavender viciously.

“YOU’RE A FUCKING LIAR!” Parvati screamed, bursting into angry tears. “YOU WERE HORRIBLE TO HERMIONE! Professor, she vanished Hermione’s clothes and told her that she was an animal and that she belonged in Hagrid’s menagerie.”

“Well I never...” began Madam Pomfrey angrily. McGonagall put up a hand to shush her and spoke to the furious girls.

“Language Miss Patil. Alright then you three, I can see exactly what is going on here. You will all have detention every Saturday until the end of term, you will each get a black mark on your records, and your parents shall be informed. I have NEVER seen such despicable behaviour from Gryffindors in my entire time serving at this school. I can barely look at you lot.”

“I am docking 50 points from each of you. But because it is unfair that the rest of Gryffindor should suffer for your disgusting behaviour toward one of our own house, I am giving Miss Patil 150 points for defending Miss Granger. Madam Pomfrey will sort you all out. And tomorrow morning you three shall report to the headmaster.”

Lavender, Fay, and their friend scowled at Parvati who was still sobbing. Madam Pomfrey gave Parvati a vial of potion and she swallowed it. A few moments later she stopped crying and hiccuped. Her eyes glazed slightly, and a warm fuzzy feeling spread through her body.

~o0o~

Professor McGonagall led Harry and Hermione to a corridor which they had never seen before. At the end of it was a doorway. The room inside looked like a sitting-room, and Professor McGonagall beckoned them to sit. Then she pulled out two vials of potion and gave one to each of them.

“Down the hatch,” she said firmly. Harry and Hermione complied. They both recognised it as the same potion which Fred and George had given them earlier that evening. A few moments later they felt better. They were sitting on a settee together, and Hermione put her arm around Harry and squeezed closer to him purring as he comfortingly stroked her behind one of her furry ears, and the furry nape of her neck under her bushy hair.

“Well,” began Professor McGonagall, “This is quite a mess, but I don’t see anything else for it. The idiots in the rest of the school think Mr Potter is the Heir of Slytherin and they are either terrified of him, or ready to attack him. And Miss Granger, it is clear that you cannot spend another night in the second year dorm.” McGonagall’s face went ashen. “It would appear that you are in potential danger, even in my own House.”

“Therefore, I don’t see that we have any other choice but to give you two your own quarters together for the time being until everything settles down. Madam Pomfrey has informed me of the nature of
your relationship and why it is necessary. Under normal circumstances, it is a complete violation of school policy to allow boys and girls to cohabitate together. But these are not normal circumstances and I will have the Headmaster draw up a writ of dispensation for you two first thing in the morning."

Harry and Hermione both gave a deep sigh of relief. Professor McGonagall continued.

“Right then. You two are both excused from classes tomorrow. You can gather your things from Gryffindor tower then, and settle in here. You’ll have the entire weekend then to look after yourselves. I will be speaking to all of the other professors and the headmaster to insure that you aren’t accosted during classes, and to keep an eye after you in between.” McGonagall pursed her mouth and went on.

“I will ESPECIALLY be sure to remind Professor Snape that his duty is to protect ALL students, not just those of his own House. Rest assured, after Poppy... Madam Pomfrey informed me of his callous disregard of your plight, I will be monitoring his behaviour.”

Harry and Hermione’s eyes both widened. They glanced at each other, and looked back at Professor McGonagall in amazement. They hadn’t expected Snape to be admonished for his actions yesterday afternoon either. He had been absolutely horrible to Harry since Harry had first arrived at Hogwarts. And not once had any other teachers stepped up to protect Harry from Snape’s abuse. Hermione supposed that this time it was because he had been caught dead to rights by Madam Pomfrey.

“I... I don’t know what to say Professor,” Harry squeaked, looking a bit teary. “Thank you... thank you so much...” Then he leapt up from the settee and hugged Professor McGonagall tightly.

Professor McGonagall looked a bit uncomfortable. She wasn’t very keen on open displays of affection between Professors and their students. A boundary must be maintained. But she could feel a year and a half’s worth of pain wrapped in that hug, and she was determined to be more vigilant about keeping an eye on Severus’s actions in regards to Harry Potter and Hermione Granger.

~00o~

Professor Dumbledore was disturbed and pacing around his office at 2:30 in the morning. He had been woken up by a hysterical Poppy an hour ago and informed of the events beginning with the release of Miss Granger from the hospital wing yesterday afternoon. Then Minerva had accosted him and dressed him down in rather harsh terms for allowing Professor Snape to run roughshod over her students.

He sighed, took off his nightcap, and ran his fingers through his hair. All of his plans were going to hell. It was bad enough that poor Harry had had to put up with the Dursleys, something Minerva had been on about for years since Dumbledore had first left Harry on their doorstep. Dumbledore’s hands were tied though.

Lily’s magic would only protect Harry as long as he lived in an immediate blood relative’s house. And Dumbledore couldn’t directly interfere in the goings on at the Dursleys’ without incurring the wrath of the Ministry, who had placed a ban on meddling in the affairs of muggle guardians of young wizards.

Dumbledore knew that Severus had been treating Harry rather unfairly, and had stepped in once or twice himself to prevent him from being overly harsh. But he hadn’t realised that Severus would go as far as to abuse his authority by docking Harry for behaving quite appropriately given the
Then there was Dumbledore’s own behaviour to contend with. He felt dreadful about what eventually had to happen. But he couldn’t see a way around that either. Regardless, he would have to redouble his efforts to undo the damage that Voldemort had done to the boy. It wasn’t fair that Lily’s son should have to sacrifice himself after all that he had been through.

Dumbledore did have one idea though, which could possibly kill two birds with one stone, and at least solve his problems with both the Dursleys and Severus.
Chapter 8

After Professor McGonagall left, Harry and Hermione explored the rest of the previously uninhabited teacher’s private quarters. It was about the size of a small flat. As well as the sitting room, there was a small kitchen/dining area, a little study, a bathroom with an enormous tub, and a large bedroom with a king sized bed.

It was very late now, almost 3 in the morning. The pair of young wizards were exhausted and emotionally drained. It had been a very long emotional roller-coaster of a day for them. Hermione for once was glad that they could sleep in if they wanted to and miss their classes. Her tears had dried, and as she was alone with Harry now, her tail was perking up in happiness again.

Professor McGonagall hadn’t made allowances for the tail when she had conjured up the flowery nightie that Hermione was wearing. Now that her bushy tail was a bit more cheerful, it had lifted up the nightie behind, and exposed her pretty naked bottom to Harry. He stiffened at the sight, but he expected that Hermone would probably just want to sleep now.

But though Hermione’s cat hormones had been quieted for the time being, her adolescent girl hormones were kicking in. She could feel the breeze on her backside and knew that Harry was getting an eyeful.

Maybe it was just the hormones, or maybe it was the potion which Professor McGonagall had given them, or a combination of the both, but Hermione could only think of one way to really make herself feel better and put aside the awful memories of the previous afternoon and a few hours ago for a good night’s sleep. She wanted Harry again, so she could remember how good they had felt before leaving the hospital wing.

But Hermione was very tired too, and wasn’t sure that either of them had the energy for a full-blown romp again. She could see Harry’s erection making a tent in his pyjama bottoms, and she guided him to the bed where they both lay down facing each other.

Harry smiled at his girlfriend and put an arm around her. He began to stroke Hermione’s bushy tail, rubbing it up and down. The electrical tingles traveled down her tail and up her spine. She purred and arched her back as she began to moisten between her legs again. Some of her cat hormones were aroused again too, because she felt an urge to lick Harry and give him little love bites--which she proceeded to do after removing his pyjama shirt.

She pulled off her nightgown and placed one of Harry’s hands on a breast, and another between her thighs. Harry knew what Hermione wanted, and was more than happy to oblige. She had been licking his belly button and chest with her rough cat tongue, and nibbling his nipples. Harry was astonished at how pleasurable it was to have his own nipples sucked. He thought he would give that a try too.

He gave her breast a gentle squeeze and began tweaking the hard nipple lazily with his fingers, and he put his mouth on her other breast and began sucking hungrily. His wet tongue flicked around the nipple in his mouth while the one hand on Hermione’s breast moved down her torso and cupped one of her little lower breasts, playing with its nipple. She purred loudly as ripples of pleasure spread out from everywhere that Harry was touching her. Harry was rubbing Hermione’s damp hairless slit, and his fingers pushed into her opening while his thumb instinctively found the nub of her clitoris.

Meanwhile, Hermione’s warm hands had wrapped around Harry’s engorged penis and slowly began to caress and squeeze it. Harry felt a delightful throbbing sensation. Hermione began to masturbate...
Harry in earnest. He moaned, and tightening his buttocks, he began to thrust himself into the sheath her hands had formed.

Hermione’s fluffy tail began to whip around as it had before. Her cat ears flattened and she began to meow in delight as Harry kept sucking her hard nipples, and his thumb rubbed her clit with his fingers buried inside her.

Harry knew now, that once Hermione started yowling, she was getting nearer to that moment of utter bliss. He was barely able to contain himself any longer. Hermione’s hands felt so good around his erection.

Hermione couldn’t hold it back any longer and she began to climax ecstatically. That put Harry over the top, and a load of semen shot from the tip of his penis, splattering against Hermione’s abdomen. Panting, he jerked back and forth in her hands and volley after volley of his sticky fluid landed on Hermione’s belly, soaking her fingers.

In the ebbing heat of passion, Hermione’s cat curiosity got the better of her, and she licked the stickiness off her fingers. Harry’s dripping penis began to deflate as he sighed in contentment and lay back on his pillow. Sated, the two young lovers passed out, their arms wrapped around each other.
Chapter 9

Harry and Hermione had planned to retrieve their belongings from Gryffindor tower the next morning during class. They briefly endured glares, hoots, and cat-calls from the braver (stupider) students at breakfast. Harry noticed that Seamus was among the hecklers, and that Ron was taking the opportunity for a good laugh. That bloody git, thought Harry.

As soon as breakfast appeared on the table he and Hermione heaped their plates with fried eggs, bacon, sausage, ham, baked beans, toast, and chips, and they marched right out of the main hall carrying their plates, looking for somewhere more private to eat. They found a very dusty unused classroom full of cobwebs down a corridor they had never seen before, on the second floor in the East Wing of the castle.

The classroom looked like it hadn't been used in a century. Old cracked blackboards were full of strange symbols that even Hermione didn't recognise. But exploration could wait. The hungry young wizards ate their breakfast in peace. Hermione had piled her plate high with meat Harry noticed, who had come in with a much lighter plate than she had.

He grinned as he watched her tail wave happily while she ate. Hermione looked up and saw Harry grinning at her, but he had such a soft look in his iridescent green eyes that she knew he was happy because she was happy—which just made her feel even more elated.

After breakfast, Hermione was sorely tempted to have some fun in the empty classroom, but thought that their time would be better spent getting their things and settling into their private rooms. They found Parvati in the Gryffindor common room, who had just been let out of the hospital wing after having her horse's tail absorbed back into her human behind in the wee hours of the morning.

Parvati smiled shyly at Hermione, and looked longingly at her furry tail. Hermione beamed back at Parvati and ran to give her a big hug.

"Oh THANK you Parvati! I can't believe you did that for me. Why aren't you in trouble?"

"Because McGonagall gave me 150 points for sticking up for you instead," said Parvati, grinning. Harry and Hermione gasped. Parvati continued, "But don't get too excited, she docked Lavender and her friends 50 points each, so it's a wash."

"Well it sounds brilliant to me!" Harry said, grinning back at Parvati. "You're definitely a REAL Gryffindor."

"I agree!" said Hermione firmly.

Parvati blushed and looked down at her feet. She lifted her eyes back up and looked at Harry's. She'd never noticed how green they were before. Then she looked at Hermione's tail again, and got a little tingle in her tummy.

"Hermione...?" Parvati began, with a pleading look. Her face turned redder as she continued, "Can... can I touch your tail? It's so gorgeous."

Hermione's face turned red too, and she smiled back sweetly.

"Of course you can Parvati. Here..." Hermione turned around so Parvati could get a good look. Harry watched with a bemused expression. He noticed how pretty Parvati's big limpid eyes and glistening black hair were. And he noticed how happy Parvati made Hermione feel, which he found
extremely pleasing.

Parvati stroked Hermione's soft furry tail gently. Hermione began to purr. Parvati squealed with delight,

"OH! You purr too? That's sooooo cute."

Hermione giggled. Harry came up beside Parvati.

"Here," Harry said, "She likes it when you do this..." He rubbed a knuckle at the base of Hermione's furry cat ear while Parvati kept stroking Hermione's tail.

Hermione felt a little weak at the knees, and she tingled a bit between her thighs as she arched her back slightly and purred even louder. Harry stopped rubbing behind her ear.

"Are you alright with this Hermione?" he asked with concern.

"Oh, yes Harry," she replied happily. "...Keep doing that. Parvati, you can pet me under my other ear while you're stroking my tail if you want to."

Parvati was all too happy to oblige. Hermione's tabby fur was so silky. Hermione was definitely dampening her panties now as Parvati and Harry continued to stroke and rub her most sensitive spots besides her private bits. Parvati was positively gleeful as Hermione arched her back and rubbed the side of her face against Parvati's covered breasts, purring rapidly.

Harry was thrilled too. He snuck his hands under Hermione's blazer to cup her breasts. He squeezed them gently and he playfully tugged her hard nipples while Parvati continued petting Hermione's tail with one hand. Her other hand was now stroking the fuzzy nape of Hermione's neck under her bushy golden brown hair.

Hermione couldn't help herself and began to meow loudly. She put one of her own hands down inside the front of her skirt and under her panties to finger herself. Thirty seconds later her ears flattened back and she yowled as the ripples of pleasure surged with intensity. Hermione felt herself explode into bliss and she fell to her knees. Parvati and Harry gently lay Hermione on the woolly rug in front of the unlit common room fireplace and sat down beside her as she cooled off.

Hermione needed to change her panties before she packed her trunk, so she decided just to put all fresh clothes on. But she wanted Harry to come up with her just in case. She used wingardium leviosa to levitate him up the stairwell to the second year girls' dormitory.

"You can come up too Parvati," beckoned Hermione. Parvati squeaked with joy and skipped up the stairs after them.

Hermione could tell that Parvati really liked her--and Harry too. Parvati deserved a proper look under nicer circumstances than the previous night. Hermione slowly took her blazer off and undid her tie. Then she undid her skirt and let it drop to the floor. Next, Hermione peeled her wet panties gradually down her thighs, then her calves, before dropping them around her ankles and stepping out of them. Finally, Hermione unbuttoned her blouse, and let it slide off her arms.

She stood in front of Parvati and Harry completely naked and slowly turned in place so Parvati could see all of her. Then Hermione deliberately bent over with her naked bottom sticking out towards the other girl and flashed an eyeful of her hairless slit at Parvati. She pulled a fresh pair of panties out of her trunk and stood up straight again.

Parvati gave a little moan. Hermione was beautiful. She badly wanted to touch her some more but
she had to be getting to her next class soon—she had already missed her first one. Hermione could tell that Parvati needed more, and she wanted more too. She knew Harry wouldn't mind.

"Come by our private chambers after class..." Hermione said invitingly. Parvati just gulped and nodded with a little smile and fled the dorm before she changed her mind about going to class.

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Harry and Hermione levitated their packed trunks down the corridors until they came to their private quarters. They were stunned to find Fred and George grinning and waiting outside of their door.

"Shouldn't you be in class?" asked Hermione.

"Yes..." said George with an air of nonchalance.

"...we've brought a housewarming gift," Fred continued.

"It's a wrench giving this to you..."

"...but you and Hermione need it more than we do," finished Fred as he passed Harry an old bit of parchment.
"Who do you think Peter Pettigrew is?" Harry asked Hermione. They had been poring over the amazing map which Fred and George had given them, and seen someone named Peter Pettigrew in the second year boys' dorm every time they took a break from unpacking. Harry and Hermione were using the map to avoid Ron in case he went back to the dorm between classes. They went back up to Gryffindor tower for the last of their things, but there was nobody to be seen.

It was noon by the time Harry and Hermione finished moving into their private quarters, and they were famished. This time they strode with even more confidence into the Great Hall to collect their lunch. They ignored the jeers and mocking meows. But Ron was scowling angrily at Hermione.

As she made to walk by Ron he grabbed her arm and she gasped in shock. Harry whirled around to see what was going on.

"YOU ATE SCABBERS," Ron yelled, and many students began laughing at the outburst. "He's gone. All you left was a piece of his tail, see..." Ron shoved a grubby open hand at Hermione. Sure enough, there on his dirty hand was the tip of a rat tail, cut cleanly as if by a surgical blade.

"You idiot Ronald..." Hermione sniffed disdainfully. "That tail has been cut by a very sharp knife or razor. You might want to ask your friend Seamus if he's been mutilating any more animals lately," she hissed angrily and yanked her arm away from a gob-smacked Ronald.

"Come on Harry, he's not worth beating up," Hermione said as she tugged on Harry's sleeve. Harry agreed. Ron couldn't help being an idiot. But Hermione's words had the desired effect. Ron turned very pale, got up, and fled the Great Hall before lunch even arrived on his plate.

Harry and Hermione ate under a willow tree by the lake and watched some geese fly across the clouds.

"Harry," Hermione began, after she had finished eating, "That piece of Scabbers' tail, it's not rat, it's a human in rat form!"

Harry dropped his fork and stared at her with a confused expression.

"What? But that's barmy. How do you know that Hermione?"

"Because... Because I can smell it..." Hermione replied with a perplexed look. "I... I've just realised that I can smell all sorts of things that I couldn't before, and tell the difference between them. And that was not a normal rat tail Harry."

Harry considered what Hermione was saying and put 2 and 2 together. They had seen Peter Pettigrew on the map when he had been in Gryffindor tower, someone they knew was not a Hogwarts student. Then they had seen a rat tail that wasn't rat but human, and that fake rat had been Ron's pet. Scabbers was Peter Pettigrew. Hermione and Harry reached the same conclusion simultaneously. They stared wide-eyed at each other, mouths agape, stunned by the revelation.

After lunch, they didn't really have anything better to do but wonder who Peter Pettigrew was, and if he had anything to do with the Heir of Slytherin. They decided to go and chat to Hagrid and see what he thought. They hadn't had a chance to see him since Hermione's change anyway.

When they got to Hagrid's hut, they saw him handing a very disgruntled Ron a squealing Scabbers.
"You'll want to take better care o' yer pets Ron." They overheard Hagrid saying. "An' I reckon you should apologise to Hermione for sayin' tha' she ate 'im..."

Ron just scowled and stalked off.

"Oh, Hello Harry, Hermione... Good ter see you up and about. It's a lovely day," Hagrid said, sniffing the cool Scottish breeze. "And that is a beautiful tail I must say Hermione."

Hermione half-smiled and teared slightly. Hagrid sensed he had hit a sore spot.

"What's wrong Hermione?"

"Lavender Brown said Hermione was an animal and that she belonged in your menagerie." Harry said quickly, to get it out of the way.

Hagrid looked outraged, as if he might storm up to the castle to have a word with Miss Brown himself. But Hagrid was much better at controlling himself than people gave him credit for. He just sat there and angrily commiserated with Hermione and Harry.

"Blimey Hermione, I never woulda' thought any Gryffindors could be so cruel. An' Harry, I dunno how you put up with everyone thinking you're the Heir o' Slytherin. I woulda' hexed 'em all by now."

"Don't think I haven't considered it," Harry retorted. "Anyway, we've actually come to see you about something more important. Who is Peter Pettigrew and why is he Ron's pet rat?"

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The Headmaster was stunned. Peter Pettigrew, alive, and somewhere on the Hogwarts grounds. He had to be caught immediately. If he was alive, that meant an innocent man sat in Azkaban. Ronald Weasley had been brought to Dumbledore's office, but Scabbers had already escaped again, and was nowhere to be found.

Harry was angry and bitter. Hagrid and Dumbledore had explained to him that Peter Pettigrew was a friend of his father's, long believed to be dead. And that he had obviously framed a man called Sirius Black--another friend of his father's--for selling out his parents to Voldemort and murdering a dozen or more muggles.

That rat had been in Ron's hands, he thought furiously, and Hermione really could have caught and eaten that little traitor if Harry had asked her to.

When they looked on the map again, Peter Pettigrew had evidently departed Hogwarts, for he was nowhere to be found.

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Harry and Hermione were sitting in their little study, feeling anxious and going over and over everything they knew. It was mid afternoon and classes would be finished for the day in an hour. Hermione remembered that Professor McGonagall had left several more vials of the potion and said to use it as needed through the weekend in case of extreme upset.

This didn't really qualify as "extreme," but Hermione reasoned that the professor had meant them to use it up by the end of the weekend. Half a minute later, they had stopped obsessing over Peter Pettigrew and the Heir of Slytherin.
Which was good, because an hour later Parvati was knocking on their door.
Parvati had brought them all butterbeers and some chocolate biscuits for tea. Harry found a station on the Wizard Wireless playing a *Depeche Mode* tune. They all happily munched away while the station played the music of Wizard bands and musicians (and a few Vampire ones too) who were very popular in the muggle world.

Most of them tended to be Goth or Heavy Metal bands. But there were some Wizard Pop and Dance artists as well. Hermione and Parvati tried to pull Harry off the settee and make him dance when the DJ started spinning *Lady Gaga* and *Selena Gomez* tunes.

But Harry was reticent, so Hermione passed around another little vial of the potion, sharing it with Parvati too. And soon they were all buzzing happily, giggling and dancing. Now Harry and Hermione understood why Fred and George had nicked some from the hospital wing.

Parvati was getting hot and she pulled her school blazer over her head while she did a little belly dance move. Her shirt was already damp from sweat, and Harry could see her nipples poking through the fabric. Hermione spotted them too and began purring. She slunk up next to Parvati, as Parvati dropped her blazer to the floor.

Hermione turned around again for Parvati, and jutted her bottom ever so slightly. Her furry tail waved in time to the music as her back arched. Parvati's mouth gaped, she wanted to see it without the skirt in the way.

Hermione's cat senses told her what Parvati wanted. She found Parvati's scent intoxicating. Hermione undid the waistband of her skirt and let it drop to the floor, waving her panty-clad bottom and fluffy tail at the other girl. Then, slowly, Hermione tantalisingly peeled her panties down, exposing where her furry tail met her smooth perfect skin at the small of her back and the top of the cleft between her bottom cheeks.

Parvati moaned. She felt the tingly feeling in her tummy become stronger. When Hermione stepped out of her panties completely, Parvati felt a surge of pleasure in her groin, her undies moistening. Her knees weakened and she put a hand between her own legs to touch herself.

Hermione turned on the spot and blushed. But she also had a mischieviously determined sort of look in her eye. Hermione was still clad in her shirt, and though her naked thighs were still visible, the shirt covered everything else.

"Do you want to see a bit more Parvati?" Hermione slyly asked. Parvati just nodded, her mouth open.

"I'll show you more if you show me some too..." Hermione grinned as her tail twitched. Parvati reddened, putting a finger to her lips. She smiled nervously, glanced at Harry, and nodded again. She didn't trust herself to speak...

Harry was already stiff, but somehow he felt even longer and harder and he had to readjust his underwear as he watched Hermione perform for Parvati. He was surprised when Hermione asked the question, but he felt even more excited when Parvati agreed to return the favour.

Parvati wasn't sure where to start, but Hermione was. Purring loudly, she pulled off Parvati's tie and unbuttoned her blouse revealing the smooth satiny skin of her abdomen. Parvati's nipples poked through an elegantly cut sheer bra, and her breasts were slightly bigger than Hermione's. Hermione's
bushy tail waved gleefully as she undid Parvati's skirt and let it fall to the floor.

Parvati's cheeks turned crimson as she attempted a little pose wearing nothing but her bra and thong. But she couldn't help grinning at the ridiculous expression on Harry's face. She noticed Hermione's twitching cat ears and beckoning look. Parvati understood the silent invitation and unbuttoned Hermione's blouse revealing her four breasts and eight nipples.

Hermione purred and arched, perfectly naked. She took Parvati's hands and placed them on her first breasts. Parvati didn't resist, she cupped and massaged Hermione's breasts with her palms, gently giving her nipples little flicks with her thumbs. Hermione gasped. Parvati slid her palms down Hermione's torso to her second breasts and did the same. She caressed Hermione's abdomen feeling her nipples there pressing into her palms. Then she took her index fingers and rubbed Hermione's little nipples in circles. Hermione reacted as if every touch was an electrical charge and began to meow in pleasure.

Hermione didn't know that Parvati had had lots of practice on her twin sister, Padma. Parvati knew exactly what it took to bring another girl to her knees. Parvati got to her own knees and parted Hermione's thighs gazing closely at her hairless slit and inhaling her fragrance. She pushed apart Hermione's thighs a bit more and ran the tip of her tongue the length of Hermione's labia.

Hermione was in ecstatic shock. She hadn't expected Parvati to lick her there. It felt really good and she wanted Parvati to keep going. But Hermione wanted Harry too. She beckoned him closer then pulled off his shirt. Parvati momentarily stopped using her tongue on Hermione's slit and replaced it with two fingers. She wanted to see what Harry looked like.

Parvati was surprised to see that he wasn't a softy. She supposed it was because he was an unlikely quidditch player with exceptional talent and determination. But she noticed several (non-curse) scars too, and filed that away for later. As she was already on her knees, after Hermione undid Harry's shorts, Parvati pulled them off. She knew what she was about to see because she and her sister had been messing around a bit with a muggle boy when they were at home during the holidays.

Harry's erection was bursting. He was certain it was going to tear through his briefs, and decided then and there that he would wear boxers in the future. Parvati didn't stop with his shorts. She pulled Harry's briefs down and set his penis free.

Parvati giggled in nervousness and excitement. Harry was much bigger than she had expected. Hermione didn't say anything about the engorgement charm. Parvati reached out and wrapped her warm hand around Harry's penis. He gasped at the pleasurable sensation. It was a bit of a shock—a very good one—to feel another girl touching him, but he felt slightly guilty.

"Hermione," Parvati began, "Do you mind?" Hermione grinned, her tail curling up tightly as she squeezed her thighs together and shook her head. Parvati continued, "This is something Padma and I tried with a muggle boy. You should try it too. It's a lot of fun!"

With her hand at the base of Harry's penis, Parvati took it in her mouth. She tasted him with her tongue and gave it a suck. She bobbed up and down sucking it and twirling her tongue around the tip. Harry was amazed at the incredible feeling he got from having a girl suck his penis. He'd never thought about that before. He almost lost it, but Parvati stopped.

"Come on Hermione. Why don't you try? I think Harry likes it."

Harry nodded vigorously. He liked it a lot. Grinning, Parvati continued,

"And I'll finish what I started with you Hermione."
Hermione didn't need to be told twice. She sat Harry down on the settee and kneeled between his naked thighs staring at his erection. Her cat ears twitched joyfully as she wrapped her hand around the base and tentatively took the head of Harry's penis in her mouth. He tasted as nice as he smelled.

Hermione's cat tail quivered in delight, and the cat fur down her spine stood on end when she felt Parvati's face pressed between her bottom cheeks and her wet tongue slide inside of her again. Her fluffy tail began to whip around and she purred intensely, her ears beginning to flatten.

Harry stroked Hermione's furry cat ears with both hands as her head moved up and down. Parvati's mouth had felt incredible on his penis, but Hermione's rough cat tongue was out-of-this-world fantastic. He couldn't help himself and started thrusting, pressing against the back of her throat. Hermione choked slightly, but recovered, and held herself stationary for a few moments to see how far she could let Harry go without gagging. She discovered to her surprise that she had perfect self-control over her gag-reflex so she let Harry continue to thrust himself deeper.

She couldn't really yowl properly with a penis in her mouth, and she began to make a high pitched growly noise. Parvati's tongue was sending shockwaves of pleasure coursing through Hermione's body and she couldn't hold back anymore. Her cat ears flattened back and she had a powerful orgasm, wetting Parvati's face.

Harry could feel himself start to lose it and made to pull out, but Hermione held his thighs apart and wouldn't let him move. Uncontrollably he ejaculated into Hermione's mouth several times and she swallowed it. When she thought Harry had finished she released his penis from her mouth, but it jerked twice more and a splodge of semen landed on her nose. Spent and giggling, she wiped it off with a finger and licked it.

Parvati was right. That had been fun.
Parvati looked like she wanted to ask them something before she left. But then she just flushed and shook her head. She smiled shyly at Hermione and Harry.

"I've got to go, Padma's expecting me," Parvati said. "But... but I'd like to visit again. Can we do this again? Please? Soon?" she pleaded.

"Of course!" Harry and Hermione replied simultaneously with eager faces.

~o0o~

The rest of the weekend was relatively uneventful. Harry and Hermione did some studying on Saturday morning, then spent the rest of the day and most of Sunday making their presence felt around the most public places of Hogwarts. By the end of Sunday, it wasn't so bad. There were still a few hoots and catcalls (mostly from Slytherins and Seamus), but most students barely took any notice. And more and more girls were starting to look at Hermione's furry tail and ears with longing or envious expressions.

Monday brought potions with Snape. Harry and Hermione headed down to the dungeons with trepidation. Ron lingered behind with Seamus, making stupid faces and laughing obnoxiously. Fay and Lavender shot daggers at Hermione with their eyes.

Then there were all the smirks, sneers, and nasty comments from the Slytherins. Malfoy had a slight leer on his face--though Draco wasn't really sure why and he tried to shake it off.

"Settle down!" the professor snapped at the Slytherins.

They were shocked. Professor Snape never talked to pupils from his own House like that. It soon became clear that Snape was in no mood to tolerate disobedience from anyone--except for Harry and Hermione whom he studiously ignored.

Neville had 30 points taken off for spilling a jar of newt eyes. Ron got docked 50 points because Malfoy's cauldron melted and Draco pointed his finger at Ron. And it wasn't just Gryffindors. Crabbe and Goyle both got a week's worth of detentions for turning in work which usually got them a passing grade.

Professor Snape was infuriated. He had been banned from docking points from Harry Potter and Hermione Granger without first having Professor McGonagall and the Headmaster review the terms of punishment. As he had no wish to be called to account for the many trivial excuses he usually concocted to dock points, Snape decided to ignore Potter and the Granger girl altogether.

Which was excellent for Harry. He turned in a perfect potion. Snape was astonished, as Granger had been far too busy hovering over her own potion to have helped Potter.

Still fuming, Snape peered after the students departing the dungeons. It was bad enough that he wasn't allowed to punish Potter and his girlfriend, but the Headmaster had ordered him to go on a pointless mission to investigate the Dursleys surreptitiously without alerting the Ministry to any Hogwarts involvement.

~o0o~

Harry and Hermione passed Moaning Myrtle's bathroom and noticed water pouring out from under
the door. Peeking inside, they saw Myrtle crying.

"What's wrong Myrtle?" Harry asked sympathetically.

"S... somebody chucked a book at me," sobbed Myrtle. "I know I can't feel it... but... but that just makes it worse."

"I wish I could hug you," Hermione said. Myrtle stopped sobbing and regarded Hermione suspiciously.

"You... you do?" Myrtle asked

"Yes," replied Hermione sincerely.

"You could, you know..." Myrtle began, "You know how you go all funny and cold when a ghost passes through you? For us we actually feel warm and glowy for a moment. It's the only time we feel anything."

That was the saddest thing Harry had ever heard. He opened his arms invitingly.

"I'll hug you Myrtle. I'm sorry if I was ever mean to you."

"Oh, you're alright Harry," Myrtle sniffed happily as she gave Harry a hug. "It's your stupid freckled friend I don't like... and whoever threw that book at me."

When Myrtle hugged Hermione, Harry picked up the sodden book. It looked like a journal or diary of some sort.

"Be careful Harry," Myrtle said. "It could be dangerous. People don't usually chuck things in toilets unless they're trying to get rid of them."

"Right, well I've got to look," said Harry firmly. "If anything happens to me, just get a professor. They'll sort me out."

Harry opened the cover of the soggy diary. All it had written in it was the diary owner's name. T.M. Riddle. Where had he heard the name before?

"Hermione, have you heard of T. M. Riddle?" Harry asked. Myrtle gasped.

"He was here. He was a year above me. It was the year when the Chamber of Secrets was opened the first time--the year I died, right here in this bathroom," Myrtle squeaked. "Tom Riddle was really cute. But his eyes always looked so cold--he frightened me."

"I wonder why there's nothing written in it?" said Hermione, looking over Harry's shoulder. A fuzzy cat ear brushed his cheek.

"I dunno, we should go dry it out and have a proper look," said Harry. Hermione nodded in agreement with Harry's sensible suggestion.

"Thanks for the hug Harry and Hermione," said Myrtle, smiling shyly. "Please come and visit me again."

"We will," said Hermione. And she meant it. She had another thought. "Myrtle, why don't you go anywhere you want to like all of the other ghosts do?"

"It... it makes me too sad to see everyone else living and feeling. I wish I'd gone on. I don't know
why I'm a ghost." Myrtle's voice quavered. Harry couldn't bear for her to start crying again.

"Myrtle, why don't you come and visit us for a hug once in a while?" Harry invited, "Not too often. But, you know, just give us a bit of notice, and as long as our schedule..."

Myrtle blushed deeply and nodded, before fleeing in embarrassment and diving into a toilet. Hermione beamed at Harry, and gave him a kiss on the cheek, her furry tail dancing happily.

"That was SO sweet of you Harry. That's why I love you."

Harry grinned back at Hermione, stroked one of her ears, and stowed the diary in his book bag.

The Heir of Slytherin's Monster seemed to be laying low at the moment. Harry and Hermione dried the diary, but something about it creeped them out, so they left it in a drawer of the desk in their tiny study for the time-being.

The next class they had together was Defense Against the Dark Arts. When Hermione arrived with Harry she realised that she didn't like Gilderoy Lockhart at all anymore. In fact she had a distinct urge to scratch his eyes out every time he looked at Harry.

Nevertheless, as it began, the next hour and a half looked like it might be very embarrassing and informative. Harry wondered if he could get Lockhart in trouble for messing with Hermione like this. Gilderoy Lockhart's magnetic charm was perfect for the day's subject though.

"So class, can anyone... anyone at all tell me what a Neko is? Anyone? No?" Professor Lockhart got full into the swing of his character as the image of a nearly naked curvy Japanese girl with furry cat ears and a furry tail like Hermione's appeared on a large screen next to him. It was to the credit of the majority of the class that only a few people responded with titters.

"Well, let me tell you... I've still got the scars to prove what a feline she was. That was quite a night. Oh I gave her my Lockhart charm..."

Hermione snorted and rolled her eyes. Harry smirked.

"...Ahem, anyway," Professor Lockhart looked briefly disconcerted, then he continued, "A Neko is the Japanese term for a Catgirl. These Sensual Japanese Creatures are considered highly magical... erm... persons of a nonhuman nature..."

Harry stood up, his face darkening.

"Sir, are you sure you want to continue this lesson? Because I don't think telling people Hermione isn't human is a good lesson."

"Now... now! Let's not be hasty Harry," gulped Professor Lockhart. "I just meant that they are like Veela. They have a human nature--yes. But they are also more than human..."

Harry was still standing and glowing at Professor Lockhart. He reached for his wand. Lockhart kicked himself for allowing his personal life to determine the class syllabus. He really did have the scars to prove it.

"Class is dismissed," the Professor said quickly, dashing into his office and slamming the door.
Chapter 13

The rest of the week passed quickly for Harry and Hermione who focused on schoolwork until Friday afternoon. They tried to do a bit of studying in the Great Hall after classes, but it was too noisy. They spotted Parvati and her sister chatting to a pretty Ravenclaw with dirty-blonde hair and eyes as big and dewy as their own.

Parvati waved at them and the blonde girl with pumpkin earrings had lovesick eyes for Hermione's fluffy ginger tail. Parvati broke off from her sister and their friend and worked her way across the Hall.

"Hi Harry, Hermione. May I come and visit you this evening?" Parvati asked shyly.

"Absolutely!" Hermione and Harry replied simultaneously.

"Is 7 alright then?"

"That would be lovely," Hermione responded, beaming. Harry had a big soppy grin on his face.

~o0o~

Professor Snape angrily packed his weekend bags. He couldn't believe Dumbledore had given him this ridiculous job. And he didn't see why he needed the whole bloody weekend to give the Dursley home a once-over.

What could there possibly be to investigate about them that required his presence after performing a reading? He'd always hated Lily's sister, almost as much as he had hated James Potter and Sirius Black. But he couldn't see her as being involved in any sort of criminal behaviour affecting Harry Potter. To the contrary, from what he'd heard, the Dursleys had the right idea about the boy.

Once packed, Professor Snape took his Office Floo to his home in Spinner's End, and from there he apparated twice.

A lightning-bolt lit up Number 4 Privet Drive starkly against the billowing black storm clouds and a loud thunderclap peeled. Severus just stood there in the torrent for a moment, his long black cloak whipping in the wind. It was one of the dreariest muggle residences he had ever seen--utterly lacking in imagination.

A sense of unease flickered in his stomach. Potter had grown up here? That could explain a few things.

Severus had sent the Dursleys packing with a fake invitation, including fake free tickets, to a fake Bacon Convention in Sheffield. They wouldn't be back until Monday. He strode through the downpour and stepped onto the doorstep. Snape's cloak whirled around him as the front door blew open with a bang.

He stepped into the foyer, and the door slammed shut again behind him. Severus dripped on the floor and tracked mud onto Petunia's carpets as he stalked through the house from room to room. After completing an initial visual overview, he returned to the foyer.

Centering himself, Severus closed his eyes and breathed deeply, working the magic with his mind. The echoes of past violence he was picking up disturbed him.
He saw a young obese man with a bushy mustache hit his wife and knock her down the stairs. Snape stiffened. Petunia had had to put up with this? Severus felt something stir inside of him which he hadn't felt in a long long time.

Angrily, he fast-forwarded and saw Dumbledore leaving Harry on the doorstep with a note. Really? Just a note? At least Minerva seemed to know that was stupid. He watched her berate Dumbledore with some satisfaction. She was the only one who could make him feel guilty.

Next, an image of a fat baby picking up a rattle and whacking a skinny baby with it popped into his mind. The skinny baby in a basket was screaming by itself in a cupboard under the stairs in the middle of the night. Images of Harry began to flood into Severus's mind in a rush.

A visit to the hospital for a broken nose caused by the back of Vernon's hand. Another visit for a broken rib. Yet another for what was clearly the result of strangulation. What sort of monster lived in this house? Another image of a terrified Petunia insisting that Vernon punish her instead of Harry brought Severus to his knees.

What had the Monster done to Lily's son? The Monster--Severus--had heaped abuse and torment on a boy who had suffered every bit as much as he had himself, at the hands of a brutal muggle father figure. He--Severus--had tormented Lily's son because all he could see when he looked at him was James Potter.

But Harry was no longer James's son... Here, in this house, Harry was Lily's son. Severus broke. His carefully built walls collapsed into shards around him and a single tear rolled down one cheek as he gasped in agony.

The room lit up in a flash of lightning as another loud clap of thunder rattled the windows of the house.

~o0o~

Parvati was excited--and anxious. She was bursting to ask them, but she was scared. She knocked on their door and waited, nervously bouncing on her toes and biting her lip. But she didn't have to wait long. Hermione opened the door beaming, her tabby tail joyfully flicking back and forth. She pulled Parvati through the doorway with a big hug.

Parvati dropped the basket she was carrying. Harry picked it up with a bemused expression, and carried it to the kitchen table while Parvati shut the door. Parvati had brought a basket with some butterbeers, sausage rolls, samosas, and packets of crisps.

Parvati had also asked Fred and George to nick a bit more of that potion for her for tonight. If she didn't use it, she would be too afraid to ask the question.

So the evening began very much like it had the previous Friday, with giddy young wizards listening to pop music and acting silly. But then came a lull when the music took a very slow soft turn.

Parvati looked anxiously at Hermione. Even with the effects of the potion, her stomach still churned, and she knew she could never have done this without it. This was embarrassing, but the question burned inside of her.

Hermione had seemed very content with the fact that Parvati had touched her boyfriend last week. But Parvati had to ask Hermione first, before asking Harry.

Harry and Hermione looked at Parvati expectantly. They could see that she was having trouble asking for something. Parvati blushed furiously.
“Hermione...” Parvati uttered, looking like she might cry, “Do you... er... would you--Oh bother it! Hermione, would you and Harry let him be my first time? Please?”

Harry and Hermione’s jaws dropped. They looked at each other then back at Parvati with goggling eyes. Parvati wondered if she’d overstepped, and felt like she might burst into tears.

“I... it’s just that there aren’t any boys in our year that I like. They’re not as nice as Harry. And the older boys scare me.”

Hermione could see that Parvati was serious. And she opened her mouth to talk but no words came out. Parvati continued.

“I don’t want to steal him as your boyfriend. I just want to be with someone nice for my first time.”

Hermione was grinning from one fuzzy cat ear to the other now, and purring loudly. Harry *was* nice. And so was Parvati. And she didn’t mind sharing her boyfriend with someone else as sweet as Parvati.
Chapter 14

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing. He slapped himself in the face, and pinched himself. He wasn't dreaming. Parvati had just asked Hermione if she would let Harry have intercourse with her--for her first time. Hermione gave Harry an adoring look.

"You don't mind helping Parvati do you Harry?" She smiled sweetly. "Like you helped me my first time."

Harry opened and shut his mouth several times but no words emerged. Finally he managed to choke out a few words.

"Yeah... er... I would love to!" Harry began, with an unbelieving but happy expression on his face, "Of course I'll... Erm..."

"Oh Harry," squealed Parvati delightedly as she hugged him, "Thank you... thank you. You're so sweet. Thank you so much Hermione. You two are my best friends."

Hermione's ears twitched as her furry tail twirled happily. She wanted to make this perfect for Parvati. She whispered in Parvati's ear and Harry wondered what she was saying. His shorts began to tent and his briefs felt too tight again. He wondered if Hermione had a clothes catalogue he could order boxers from.

But Harry wasn't given long to wonder because Hermione began to kiss him and undo his shirt as she gently pushed him onto the bed, and Parvati was pulling off his shorts. Soon, the two girls had Harry entirely naked, his erection pointing at the ceiling.

They giggled happily. Hermione licked Harry's neck with her cat tongue, and Parvati wrapped her lips around his penis. Her wet, warm mouth sent a thrill through him, as it had the first time she had tasted him.

Hermione ran her hand across Harry's tummy and teased his belly button with a fingertip. Her bushy hair lay across his chest and he fondled her furry ears as her cat tongue gently scraped his nipples. Parvati was doing something new. While she sucked Harry's penis, bobbing her head up and down, she cupped his testicles in one hand and pressed a finger to a point on his perineum.

An instant shock of pleasure hit him like a lightning bolt and his loins jerked uncontrollably. Parvati let Harry thrust deeper and swallowed his semen as he ejaculated. She had stimulated him a bit overmuch though, and Harry filled her mouth to overflowing; his semen dribbled down her chin.

Harry lay flat on his back in bliss, wondering why Parvati and Hermione had brought him off so quickly.

Dazed, he watched as Hermione and Parvati undressed each other. They put on a bit of a show for Harry. Parvati had Hermione naked in seconds, but was rubbing her hands up and down Hermione's torso stimulating her nipples to their utmost and making her little breasts bounce.

Kissing Hermione on the neck, Parvati reached one of her hands between Hermione's thighs and pushed two fingers inside of her and rubbed them against her clitoris. Hermione moaned and purred, her furry ears twitched, and her furry tail curled around Parvati.

Hermione turned the tables. She pounced on Parvati and pulled off her school uniform. Hermione was really getting into it and she tore off Parvati's thong with her cat teeth, revealing a small triangle
of black fuzz and a clean shaven labia.

Hermione purred and cupped Parvati's little fur covered mound and slipped two fingers into her hairless slit. Parvati was damp and her dewiness clung to Hermione's fingers. Hermione put her fingers in her mouth and licked them off before shredding Parvati's bra into tatters with feline teeth and a loud yowl, her tabby tail whipping around.

Harry was even harder than before, and he grinned, realising why the girls had got him off so quickly. He would last much longer this go round. Parvati pulled Harry up off the bed and gave him a kiss on the lips. He didn't know what to do with his hands. Parvati wasn't Hermione and he was a bit nervous.

"It's okay, you can touch me anywhere you want to Harry," Parvati said softly as she fluttered her eyelashes at him and gave him another, longer, kiss on the lips. Harry relaxed and squeezed Parvati's breasts. They were beautiful, slightly larger than Hermione's, and they were tipped with long dark nipples. Harry rolled them between his fingers and heard Parvati gasp. He put his hand on her belly and slid it down between her legs.

He stroked the furry black little patch on her mound first, then his fingers found her wet slit and entered her. Harry flicked Parvati's clitoris with his thumb, sending little shivers of delight coursing through her. Parvati wanted Harry now.

Breathing heavily she gently pushed Harry back down on the bed and climbed up beside him. Then Parvati lay on her back, opened her legs and guided Harry into her, moaning with pleasure as his erection filled her completely. Harry thrust inside Parvati with strong regular strokes.

Hermione squeezed Parvati's breasts with both hands. She sucked Parvati's nipples and licked them with her cat tongue, nibbling them gently with her cat teeth. Harry was getting really close, but he needed to touch Hermione. Her fluffy ginger tail kept whacking him in the face anyway, so he began stroking the silky fur and Hermione's naked bottom came into view.

The next thing Harry knew, he was on his back as Parvati rode him. And Hermione's heated vulva was pressed against his nose and lips. Harry's tongue entered Hermione. She tasted sweet. He licked her the length of her labia and nibbled her clitoris. Hermione's purring quickened and she began to meow, her ears flattening.

Parvati spasmed and tightened around Harry's penis as she began to lose herself to bliss. The sensations were overwhelming and Harry began thrusting up as Parvati came down. They both climaxed hard. Parvati wailed in abandon, her flailing black hair drenched in sweat. Parvati pressed herself against Harry and felt him squirting semen deep inside of her.

Harry ejaculated into Parvati and drove his tongue deep into Hermione. Hermione's furry tail whipped around like crazy and she burst with ecstasy, drenching Harry's face.

Laughing, Harry wiped his face on a blanket. Parvati lay panting on top of him, his shrinking penis still inside her, her breasts pressed into his chest. Hermione put her lips to Harry's and began kissing him softly. The three of them passed out right there, without moving an inch.
Chapter 15

It was a wet grey dawn which broke over number 4 Privet Drive. It wasn’t storming as it had been for much of the night; nonetheless, the rain continued to fall steadily. Severus opened his eyes slowly. He was still on his knees where he had collapsed the previous evening.

He had raged though the night. Wandered through canyons of desolation. And he had returned; slowly rebuilding his walls piece by piece. But some of the pieces he discarded. He had no use for those anymore. And he would be even stronger for having removed the impediment of his hate for Lily Evans’ son.

It had been difficult. He’d had to remove his obsessive hate of James Potter to accomplish it. A task he had considered impossible. But he had managed it... Lily had managed it. Anything for Lily... anything.

Severus had pushed Lily away just when he needed her most, unable to see past his own pain. His love for her had been singular and possessive. His desire driven by a need to feel whole and heal his own tormented soul. If only Severus could have done all those years ago what he had done during the night, and put Lily’s happiness ahead of his own. She might still be alive, and Harry might have conceivably been his son instead of James’s. But it was enough for now that Harry was Lily’s son.

And there was no way in hell that Severus was going to let Lily’s son live under Vernon Dursley’s brutal thumb another moment longer if he could help it.

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Harry had a pleasant dream for once. In fact he’d had better sleep for the past few weeks than he could ever remember having. But the pleasant dream gave way to an extremely pleasurable sensation in his groin. Harry blinked sleepily and saw Parvati’s black hair strewn across his abdomen and her head bobbing up and down. He felt her draw a long deep suck on his penis, then twirl her wet tongue around the tip. Unlike last night, Parvati was taking her time to really enjoy tasting Harry.

Just as she was hoping that Harry might wake up and participate, she felt his hand slide through her hair and caress the side of her face as her lips moved up and down his erection. She heard Harry give a grunt of pleasure. His loins jerked and he thrust himself deeper. Harry instinctively placed both hands on Parvati’s head.

This was the moment she had been waiting for. Fully awake now, but giddy with passion, Harry controlled the depth and the speed. He thrust himself into her throat in deep strokes. Having Harry take charge fired up Parvati’s senses; she reached a hand between her legs, rubbed her clitoris and moaned.

Harry couldn’t hold off any longer. He stiffened, Parvati’s lips pressed against his pubes. Holding Parvati’s head in place, he groaned and released himself into her. Parvati held her breath as Harry ejaculated several more times. Harry slumped with a contented sigh when he finished.

Parvati lifted her head, lips glistening, and grinned at him.

“Good morning Harry. I thought you might like that better than an alarm clock,” Parvati said with a giggle.

“I thought so too,” said Hermione brightly.
Startled, Harry sat up and saw that Hermione had entered the room with a towel wrapped around her head and another around her torso. Her tail was dripping and bedraggled. Giggling, Hermione handed Harry a towel, turned around, and poked her bottom and wet furry tail at him.

“Can you dry me please Harry?”

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Parvati showered and dressed and made ready to leave. If she got in trouble for not being in her dorm all night, she didn’t care. It had been worth it. Hermione was very lucky to have someone as kind as Harry. Parvati liked it quite a bit when a boy asserted himself sometimes, but Harry was sweet enough that he would have stopped at any moment if she was uncomfortable—which she didn’t trust any of the older good looking boys to do.

Parvati gave Hermione and Harry both a quick kiss on the lips.

“I’m probably in trouble anyway, but I should get a move on,” Parvati said with a grin. Then the smile softened and she batted her long lashes. “Thank you both so much. You were wonderful Harry. I had a great time...”

“We did too,” said Hermione, “And if Harry doesn’t mind, you’re welcome to join us again.”

Harry nodded, blushing. He grinned.

“I really enjoyed it too Parvati. I think most guys in my position would be thanking you, not the other way around.”

After breakfast, Harry and Hermione went back to their quarters and took Tom Riddle’s diary out of the desk drawer in which it had been languishing all week. Hermione tried a spell for revealing invisible ink. Nothing. She tried something which looked like a big red eraser. Still Nothing.

“Let’s try writing in it and see what happens,” Harry began.

“Excellent idea Harry. Can you get me some ink and a quill from the drawer please?”

Harry had the ink bottle in his hand and he started to pass it to Hermione when he heard it again... an echoing hissing voice.

“Rip... Tear... Must kill...”

Hermione screamed. The ink bottle fell from Harry’s hands and smashed on the floor. Harry was stunned.

“Wait, you heard that this time?” he asked Hermione, whose face was still as white as a ghost. Her tail drooped to the floor.

“Yes... There’s something enormous slithering in the walls Harry. It said it was going to kill. Is that what you’ve been hearing?”

Harry felt a huge weight lift and he began to get excited.

“YES! I really was starting to think I’d gone mad Hermione. But why can you hear it now too?”

Hermione sniffed the air. She could smell the mildew behind the stone wall, but something else too. Hermione’s tail stiffened. She gasped suddenly and fell over backwards, but Harry caught her in his arms.
“What is it Hermione? What’s wrong?”

“It... Harry, I think I know what the monster is, it’s some sort of giant snake, perhaps a basilisk. I can smell it. I have no idea why I can hear and understand it too though.”

Harry thought for a moment.

“I dunno. Maybe cats and snakes have a similar language?” he proffered. Hermione looked dubious and put a finger to her lips as she pondered.

“I’m not sure about that Harry. But I know the ancient Egyptians thought cats could protect them from snakes. There’s a story about the Cat Goddess, Bastet, who kills Apophis—a Serpent Demon—to protect her father Ra. So there must be some sort of symbolic magical relationship.”

“Well whatever it is, we have to do something right now Hermione. That creature is on the move again and looking for someone to kill.”

“We’ll just have to go to Dumbledore quickly Harry. Bring the diary. If it’s connected to the Heir of Slytherin, Dumbledore should be able to help us sort it all out.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Professor Dumbledore was astounded! Tom Riddle's diary, The Heir of Slytherin, and a Basilisk! They were clearly connected. The Diary had a dark magical enchantment on it. And Dumbledore had his suspicions about what it might be.

Dumbledore dearly wanted to talk to the shade of Tom Riddle, which he realised must be residing in the diary, but decided it would be too risky. It was best to be done with this immediately. He had sent the rest of the staff to round up all of the students to keep them together safely. But Harry and Hermione remained with Dumbledore in his office.

The Headmaster took the Sword of Gryffindor from its perch. He gestured to the two students to stand clear. As Harry and Hermione watched in bewilderment, Professor Dumbledore placed the diary on the floor and struck it with the sword.**

A ghastly shriek reverberated through Dumbledore's office. The lights flickered ominously and an unearthly wind blew papers around the room and whipped their robes. A geyser of black ink exploded from the hole which the headmaster had just cleaved in the diary. And just as quickly as the ruckus began, it was over.

"Well, Harry..." said the Headmaster looking impressed. "That's the second time you and Miss Granger have done a number on Voldemort here at Hogwarts."

"What? You mean Tom Riddle..."

"Is Voldemort. Yes, Harry. This diary contained a bit of his soul if I'm not mistaken. I'm certain it was used to open the Chamber of Secrets. A student was likely manipulated by Riddle's memory to do so. But alas, though the diary is dead, we still need to find the Basilisk and the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets before we can put this to rest."

"But we think we know..." began Harry.

"...where it is," finished Hermione excitedly. "The entrance is in the girl's lavatory on the first floor. We worked it out. Moaning Myrtle is the student who was killed by the monster the first time and she was killed in the lavatory."

It took several hours--and a bit of Parseltongue help from Harry--but the professors of Hogwarts gained entrance to the Chamber of Secrets and slew the Basilisk when it returned without finding any prey.

Madam Pomfrey brought a sobbing Ginny Weasley to Dumbledore's office a short time later, and the entire sorry story was known.

An hour after that a perplexed Cornelius Fudge and an angry Lucius Malfoy stalked from the Headmaster's office. Fudge decided he needed a drink--or several--and asked Pomfrey if she would like to join him in Hogsmeade.

Lucius was followed by a dejected Dobby who kept pointing at the diary in Dumbledore's hands, then pointing at Lucius. Harry understood. He quickly pulled off a sock.
"May I borrow the diary a moment sir?" he asked.

"Certainly Harry," Dumbledore replied with a smirk hidden under his long white beard. He rather hoped that Harry had an idea to expose Malfoy as the perpetrator of this mess.

But Lucius Malfoy knew what was up when Harry accosted him, handed him the diary, and accused him of slipping it into Ginny Weasley's book-bag at Flourish and Blotts. Or at least he thought he did. Lucius whacked Dobby on the head with the diary, then thrust it into the house-elf's tiny little hands. Dobby opened the book and squealed with delight when he found the sock.

"Master has given Dobby clothes. Dobby is FREEEEE..." The House-Elf danced around gleefully.

Rage took Lucius Malfoy. Forgetting where he was, Lucius reached for his wand to curse Potter. He whipped it out furiously and pointed it at Harry.

"You cost me my House-Elf, Potter!" snarled the elder Malfoy.

A blast of magic from the elated House-Elf blew Lucius off his feet and knocked him out cold. Fudge and Poppy looked down at their feet in surprise.

"Oh... er Poppy! Shouldn't we help him before we go?" the Minister asked.

Madam Pomfrey regarded the prone Lucius Malfoy with a sour expression. Inwardly she grinned. Poppy sniffed disdainfully.

"He'll be fine Minister. Nothing a few years in Azkaban wouldn't fix. Come along, I could use a stiff Firewhiskey." She grabbed Fudge's arm and led him away before he could start asking Dumbledore more questions.

Harry was under attack. Dobby was clinging to one of his legs and sobbing happily at having been set free from his horrible Master, and Hermione had Harry trapped in a huge bear hug... er... cat hug. Her bushy cat tail waved joyfully and she smothered him with kisses for freeing Dobby.

The Headmaster averted his eyes and whistled a little tune. The corner of Professor McGonagall's mouth turned up in mirth and she made to take Albus's arm and leave the youngsters to it. But Dumbledore had one thing he wanted to say to Harry before going back to his office.

"Harry, I would like it if you and Miss Granger could come up to my office tomorrow at 3pm. We have a lot to discuss."

Minerva saw the anxiety in the young wizards' faces. She rolled her eyes and snorted at Albus, then spoke to Harry and Hermione herself.

"Never mind the Headmaster's cryptic behaviour you two. You may remain quartered in your private lodgings until the end of term, at which point we shall discuss future arrangements. For now, go and enjoy yourselves. you've earned it."

That evening, Fred and George threw a massive celebration in the Gryffindor common room and wouldn't take no for an answer from Harry and Hermione.

Most of Gryffindor welcomed Harry and Hermione back with open arms, and very apologetically. But a few Gryffindors sulked in a corner together glaring at Hermione and Harry. Seamus, Ron, Ginny, Lavender, Faye, and three others had a pity party for themselves while everyone else was toasting the Golden Duo.
Everybody wanted to stroke Hermione's furry cat tail and ears. She looked a bit overwhelmed. Harry was extremely cautious and he only let people have a couple of pets each so that Hermione wouldn't get worked up and embarrass herself. Parvati got kisses from both of them though. Harry wanted everyone to know that she was an exemplar of Gryffindor Chivalry.

The party went on well into the night. The younger Gryffindors had all gone to bed, but the common room was still a quarter full of giddy older teens, many of whom were now paired up and making out on the sofas. The lights were dimmed, and only the magical disco ball provided any significant illumination as it strobed.

Hermione's ears and tail twitched with mirth when she spotted Angelina pinning Fred to a couch, sitting on top of him, and pulling off her blazer. Angelina was taking advantage of the darkness and the strobing to fulfill a long held fantasy.

Only if one was paying attention--as Harry and Hermione were--would they have noticed Angelina slip off her panties and stuff them under a cushion. And only if they were paying attention would they have noticed her unzipping Fred's fly, pulling something out and repositioning herself.

Angelina adjusted her skirt and settled herself with a slight gasp. She took Fred's hands and placed them where she wanted them--on her large firm breasts. Fred was chortling with glee as he began to squeeze them through the fabric of Angelina's blouse. She began to ride Fred in time to the music and leaned over to thoroughly snog him.

If any of the other young wizard couples making out or dancing noticed, they didn't say anything. Hermione was sitting on Harry's lap with her arms and fluffy tail curled around him purring contentedly. They were in a soft recliner in the darkest corner of the common room, untouched by the flashing strobe lights, watching the show that Angelina and Fred were putting on. She could feel him stiffen under her bottom and her furry tail tightened around him in delight.

Hermione REALLY wanted to do what Angelina and Fred were doing, and she started to unzip Harry. But Harry put his hand on hers.

"Wait Hermione," Harry said quietly. "You know how loud you get. Are you sure you want to do this here? What if McGonagall shows up to shut the party down while we're at it?"

Hermione's fluffy tail drooped a bit. What Harry was saying made sense. She almost threw caution to the wind, but settled on a compromise. Harry didn't make very much noise, and she could get some satisfaction from making him happy. She continued to unzip Harry in the shadows.

Hermione put her face in Harry's lap and pulled his robes over her head. Wand in hand, she vanished Harry's briefs so that he would be more comfortable, and made a note to herself to order him some boxers.

Harry continued to watch Fred and Angelina writhing on the sofa near the fireplace. Fred had his hands under Angelina's blouse now, and her skirt had ridden up exposing her naked hips and bottom as she continued to ride him.

Harry felt Hermione's lips and her humid mouth envelop his erection. She wrapped her cat tongue around Harry's penis and sucked. Harry gently stroked her fluffy tail, but not enough to over-stimulate her senses. The pulses of pleasure in his groin surged and Harry placed his other hand softly on Hermione's head as it bobbed up and down underneath his robes.

The urge to thrust entered his loins. Hermione let Harry hold her head steady and he went deeper as
he thrust rhythmically. She didn't stop him when he pushed all the way in and stiffened. Hermione held her breath as Parvati had taught her to do at this stage, and she could feel Harry's penis spasming and ejaculating into her throat while he held her head down.

Harry had been so turned on by watching Fred and Angelina that he produced copious amounts of semen. Hermione waited until Harry finished and she swallowed as he pulled himself wetly from her mouth.

Chapter End Notes

Story fan Badkidoh (at fanfic.net) reminded me that Gryffindor's Sword could only kill horcruxes after being imbued with Basilisk venom.

Therefore, in true Superhero Comic fashion, I am going to retcon a backstory solely for the purposes of this fic. :P

**In 1328 the Sword of Gryffindor was previously used to drive a Basilisk from Cnoc na Teamhrach, Ireland. Several of its teeth were broken in the ensuing battle and the sword was imbued with Basilisk venom at that time.
Chapter 17

The Minister was disconcerted, but he was also very drunk. In the last week, Albus Dumbledore had informed him that Peter Pettigrew was alive and on the loose, having framed Sirius Black. Albus had insisted on a proper trial with veritaserum, and the Minister had been forced to release Sirius Black with an expunged record. That had been brutal. The attacks from the Daily Prophet had been harsh for the last 7 days--never mind that Millicent Bagnold had been Minister at the time.

And now this Heir of Slytherin business. The only good thing was that this had all happened at Hogwarts, and he knew that Albus was nothing if not good at keeping a tight lid on things. But it was clear. Voldemort was reaching out from wherever in an attempt to return to the realm of the fully living. And he had seen Lucius try to curse Potter before his very eyes, right after a perfectly legal dismissal of his House-Elf.

Even if Poppy weren’t blowing little kisses in his ear and dragging him up to a room in Rosmerta’s inn, he had already decided to grant Dumbledore’s request to remove the Trace from Potter and Miss Granger.

~o0o~

Unlike most British wizards, even most muggleborns, Severus was highly knowledgeable in many muggle fields. He wasn’t just a Potions Master after all, he was a Spy. After turning away from the Dark Side, he had thrown himself into work to forget the horrors of his past. And for every hour he put into teaching potions, he put an hour into learning more about the muggle world so he could be useful to the Order.

They all knew it would only be a matter of time before Voldemort returned. And they needed someone who could gather intelligence and run operations in the muggle world. Severus had dedicated his life to the Order after Lily’s murder. But he knew it could never be enough to wipe her blood off his hands. Now, he had an opportunity to begin paying back a blood debt, the correct motivation to do so, and the means.

Severus went to work immediately, using magic to invade muggle computer networks and update information, to create electronic trails and fingerprints which would lead right back to Vernon Dursley’s desktop computer, his laptops, and his mobile devices.

He investigated their financial records and determined that Petunia and Dudley would still have a sizable--though modest--monthly income from the Evans’ Estate Trust. Severus determined that if Harry would have to spend even one week in this house a year that he could be asked to contribute some of his funds from the Potter vault too. Severus knew now, that Harry would have no compunctions about sharing what he had once things were explained to him.

Finally, late Sunday afternoon, Severus had completed the necessary preparations.

When the Dursleys arrived home in the morning, they would find a swarm of muggle authorities invading their home and confiscating all of Vernon Dursley’s computers and child pornography--images of small children being molested and beaten by adults. Among them they would find all of the surreptitious images Vernon had taken of Harry in various stages of undress over the years after Vernon had given him a beating. They would also find all the names and ip addresses of people he had shared Harry’s pictures with.

Vernon Dursley would never see the outside of a prison wall again.
Severus knew it would be painful to Harry to expose how extensive the abuse had been. But it had
to be done. Harry had known only that he was being beaten. He didn’t know that images of his
beaten body were being shared among other muggle psychos by his twisted uncle. Nor did Petunia
or Dudley.

Severus owed Lily Evans his life. As much as he still could feel nothing personally but dislike for
Petunia, she was Lily’s sister. She had suffered horribly, Harry had suffered horribly, and Severus
would do whatever he could to protect the Evanses from ever having to suffer horribly again.

Even if that meant magically inventing all the imagery and electronic pathways which would put
Vernon away for life. If Dumbledore had wanted this done cleanly, he would have gone through the
Ministry and appealed for a waiver. Severus understood now that Dumbledore had intended this
outcome.

~o0o~

Sunday morning, Harry and Hermione took their breakfast down by their favourite spot under the
willow tree by the lake. They were both feeling pensive about the upcoming meeting with
Headmaster at 3 that afternoon. Hermione looked particularly troubled. Her eyes filled with tears, her
ears and tail wilted. Harry was alarmed.

“What’s wrong Hermione?”

“Harry... I... I don’t know what to do. I... I still haven’t told my parents I’m half cat yet.”

Harry looked shocked.

“Are you serious? Why not? It’s been over a month now. We’re already into February.”

“I know Harry! I’m just frightened. I can’t go back to the muggle world like this. What will my
parents say? What am I going to do? Look how bad it was trying to fit in here at first. I’ll never fit in
back in the muggle world again... Except maybe in Japanese strip-clubs.” Hermione snorted
tearfully, remembering the image of Professor Lockhart’s Neko “companion.”

Harry had been wondering about that himself. But he thought Hermione had already worked it out
with her parents. Now he started worrying. Harry didn’t care what Dumbledore said about staying at
the Dursleys, he wasn’t leaving Hermione to fend for herself, a cat-witch alone in a muggle world.

Harry couldn’t imagine Hermione having cruel parents. He wondered how hard they would take the
news. He hoped they wouldn’t be angry with Hermione, or take her out of Hogwarts. But whatever
they decided, Harry was determined that he would find a way to stay with her.
Chapter 18

At 3 pm, Harry and Hermione were nervously sitting in the comfy armchairs that Dumbledore had conjured up for them. He peered at the two young wizards over the top of his half-moon glasses with gimlet eyes.

"Thank you for coming Harry, Miss Granger! Today, my main concern for discussion is your safety, at Hogwarts, in the Wizarding World, and in the Muggle World."

"As Harry has already discovered last summer much to his detriment, Miss Granger, in Britain the Ministry tracks the use of magic in the vicinity of young wizards. The Ministry achieves this by means of a spell called the Trace. It is activated in all young wizards when they are registered and it evaporates when they reach the age of majority, which for wizards is 17. Violation of the laws regarding the use of underage magic after a child has reached the age of 11 can potentially lead to expulsion from Hogwarts and the breaking of wands."

"This has now become a problematic situation for both of you. Miss Granger, I don't know what arrangements you have made with your parents, but it is clear that you will have grave difficulties finding a place in the muggle world. To say nothing of the wizard world, which is just as fraught with prejudice and cruelty. The obstacles and potential dangers you face may require you to use magic with some regularity."

"Harry, Lucius Malfoy made an attempt to attack you. It is possible that he, and others like him may try to do so again when you are not attending Hogwarts. The Enchantment I used on you, based upon the magic of your mother's sacrifice, will protect you from attack at #4 Privet Drive as long as you can call your Aunt's house your home."

"But be clear, it only protects you from being magically located by Voldemort and his minions. You will still be vulnerable to attacks if you run into the likes of Malfoy inadvertently when you are outside of your home."

"Also Harry, last summer, you were warned by the Ministry for an act of magic which you did not commit. Further warnings could lead to your expulsion from Hogwarts. This is untenable. You must be able to defend yourself from attacks, and also from legal actions against you."

"Therefore, I have obtained for both of you a special waiver from the Minister. The Trace has been lifted, and once removed, it cannot be replaced. Now in order to do that, an emancipation order must be filed for the youth in question. Which means, Miss Granger, that by wizard law, you are now of the age of majority, a legal adult."

Hermione gasped, and Dumbledore paused, giving her time for the information to sink in.

"Sir... does this mean that I am legally an adult too?" Harry asked in wonderment. With a sigh, Dumbledore responded.

"Yes and No, Harry. Wizard law does indeed now recognise you as a legal adult. But the protection spell I placed on you--based, as I have already stated, on your mother's sacrifice--remains in place until you are 17, or until you no longer call your aunt's residence your home, whichever comes first. This means you have to spend at least seven days a year there. I implore you to continue to do so. As long as you do, Voldemort cannot find you through magical means, nor attack you in your Aunt's home. Once the seven days is passed, you are free to travel wherever you wish without being magically tracked by Voldemort--or anybody else for that matter, with the Trace having been
Harry was flabbergasted. He wasn't even 13 yet. But now he had all the freedoms of an adult—at least after spending a week at the Dursleys'. Harry decided he could put up with seven days of abuse at Vernon's hands if it meant that Voldemort couldn't track him down—especially now that he could use magic to defend himself.

"Right then Professor," Harry began, his face breaking into a grin, "I'll agree to stay at least a week at my aunt's at the beginning of the summer. So that means I can go anywhere I want to afterwards?"

Professor Dumbledore nodded. His eyes sparkled in satisfaction. He had more to tell Harry, but that could wait until next weekend.

~o0o~

Hermione was a jumble of emotions. Shock and delight at being considered an adult in the wizard world, and at being able to perform magic outside of school perfectly legally. But horror and despair at being reminded that she still hadn't been able to bring herself to tell her parents about her furry little problem. Her parents would be expecting to see her at Easter, and she didn't know what to do.

Harry was determined to cheer Hermione up, and they still had the rest of Sunday afternoon to themselves.

"Come on, Hermione. Let's go outside again for a bit."

"Alright Harry," she replied tearfully.

Harry stroked a furry ear, then he put his arm around Hermione and they made their way down to the lake again. They strolled through the woods on the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest. It was quiet and peaceful. Even the birds seemed to be whispering.

"Oh hello," said a girl's voice behind them, startling the pair.

Harry and Hermione turned around and spotted Padma and Parvati's blonde friend. She was wearing banana earrings today, and her big round dewy eyes were full of concern.

"Are you alright? Is someone being mean to you again?" the girl asked Hermione.

Hermione shook her head. She opened her mouth but no words came out. Harry just held her tightly.

"You're Parvati's friend aren't you? I don't think we've met," Harry said politely.

"I'm sorry." The girl blushed. "I'm Luna Lovegood. I thought you knew who I was but were just trying to avoid me like most people do. They call me Loony Lovegood usually."

Hermione stopped crying about her own problems and regarded Luna sympathetically. Harry frowned, wondering why so many wizards would treat each other so horribly just because they might be a bit different. He would have thought that wizards would be used to Different.

But so many wizards thought they were better than muggles and "halfbloods" and other magical beings. A lot of them—-not just Slytherins—were just as bad as the Dursleys when it came to lashing out at anybody who wasn't thoroughly "normal."

"Oh, well I'm Hermione... Hermione Granger." Hermione wiped her tears with one hand, and smiled. "It's nice to meet you Luna. This is..."
"Harry Potter. Everybody knows Harry," Luna said evenly with a sweet smile, peering into his green eyes. "I'm really happy to meet you two finally. Parvati has told me so many good things about you both."
Harry and Hermione both turned crimson, wondering what Parvati had been telling Luna.

"Oh... it's alright. Parvati doesn't tell me too many details about the sex. She just says it's really good... And that Hermione purrs if you stroke her tail and behind the ears," Luna said bluntly, with a bright smile on her face.

Harry facepalmed. But Hermione grinned at Luna. She liked her forthrightness. And Luna smelled nice.

"I saw you looking at my ears and my tail the other day. Would you like to touch them?" asked Hermione.

"OH... really?" gasped a delighted Luna. "I'd love to."

Harry put his hand down and smiled with relief, his blush fading. This was a perfect distraction for Hermione. He felt a big fat raindrop on his nose and groaned at the timing. A few more drops spattered, and then it began to pour in earnest. But the girls both started laughing. Harry wasn't sure why.

Luna grabbed Harry's left hand and Hermione's right hand.

"Come with me," said Luna, beaming happily through the wet strands of dirty-blonde hair clinging to her eyelashes.

She led them at a fairly quick pace along the shore of the lake. Luna clambered over the enormous roots of a copse of giant oaks at the edge of the water and dragged Hermione up after her. Harry heaved himself over the wet roots and found himself looking at a small hidden boathouse. He followed Hermione and Luna inside.

It had three walls and the platform was about two metres above the lake at its current level. A single little rowboat bobbed in the dock. Luna must be using the hidden boathouse as a little hideout, thought Harry. There was a mattress, numerous blankets, cushions, and pillows, a bookcase full of books, a little table, a nightstand, numerous trinkets, and a chest full of food and drinks, and a small open wardrobe with several changes of clothes.

Luna aimed her wand at a woodstove by the wall. It sparked and a flame could be seen flaring up through the grate. But the three young wizards were soaked to the bone and they shivered in the cold breeze coming off the lake through the opening. It would take a few minutes for the heater to warm things up.

Luna passed Harry and Hermione each a comforter.

"Here, get out of your wet clothes and hang them by the woodstove. You can wrap yourselves in these and get cozy. Don't worry. They're very clean. I know a lot of household spells because I have to look after my father when I'm not at Hogwarts. I'll make some cocoa shall I?"

"Oh please! Thank you Luna. That would be lovely," replied Hermione with chattering teeth as she pulled her wet Gryffindor blazer over her head. Luna's eyes widened in delight. The sodden fabric of Hermione's blouse clung to her breasts and eight hard nipples.

Harry felt a bit reticent to strip down in front of Luna, but less so than he thought he would. He was
starting to grow used to getting naked in front of girls who weren't Hermione. In any case, Luna seemed to be mesmerised by Hermione at the moment. He smirked in amusement. He didn't think Luna even noticed him.

He was wrong though. Luna saw everything in a little mirror on the nightstand next to the mattress while she peeled off her own wet clothes. Luna was surprised that Harry wasn't all shrivelled from the chill. She felt all tingly as she glanced back and forth from the mirror to Hermione, who was now peeling her wet panties off.

Hermione turned around, jutting her naked bottom towards Luna and shook the water off her tail, which turned into a giant bushy frizz. She wrapped herself in a comforter and sat on one of the cushions. Soon, all three naked young wizards were drinking hot cocoa, snugly wrapped in blankets and sitting on the mattress watching the rain come down in sheets on the lake, listening to it beat on the roof of the boathouse.

The heater took the chill away. The woodstove had been charmed so that the heat would stay in the boathouse and prevent the cold air from the lake entering. Comforters and blankets loosened as the young wizards warmed. Hermione was cozily snuggled under one of Harry's arms and purring as he stroked her furry ears, which had dried now.

Hermione smiled shyly at Luna and pulled her comforter round her front, exposing her backside and fluffy ginger tail.

"I think my tail is dry enough if you want to stroke it Luna," she said with a giggle.

Luna grinned gleefully and her blanket fell as she took her hands away to pet the silky fur of Hermione's tail with one hand, and stroke her behind a furry ear with the other. Hermione purred louder. Harry kissed Hermione on her other ear and little tingles of pleasure rippled through her body.

Luna was exposing everything now, and Harry began to get even harder. She had a slender but curvy frame. Her little breasts were about the same size as Hermione's with perky pink nipples, and she was completely hairless down below.

Harry put his other hand under Hermione's comforter and reached between her thighs. He continued to stroke Hermione's furry ear with the other hand and kiss her neck. His fingers rubbed Hermione's wet slit, flicked and tweaked her clitoris. Luna stroked Hermione's tail a bit more vigorously.

Hermione began to arch and meow in pleasure, rubbing the side of her head and under her chin on Luna's knuckle, before head-butting Luna's breasts and rubbing the side of her face against Luna's hard nipples. Luna gasped with a thrill. She hadn't really expected Hermione to return the favour.

Hermione licked Luna's nipples with her rough cat tongue, and nibbled them gently with her cat teeth before suckling on them. The waves of bliss roiling through Hermione's body began to take her. Harry's fingers pressed deep inside her heat, his thumb twirling Hermione's clitoris. He licked Hermione's hard nipples. Hermione arched, her ears flattening. She yowled and burst into ecstasy, wetting Harry's hand.

Hermione lay panting on Luna's mattress, completely uncovered now. Luna gently caressed Hermione's abdomen and gave her a kiss on the lips. Hermione responded. Luna's lips felt nice. Hermione parted her legs slightly. Luna gave her little kisses all down her torso until she came to Hermione's slit.

Luna's wet tongue darted out and twirled around Hermione's clitoris before penetrating her entrance.
Luna had her whole mouth over Hermione's vulva, thrusting her tongue deep inside and sucking her labia, sending new ripples of pleasure through her. She felt Harry stroking her fluffy tail and behind a furry ear. Hermione shuddered and yowled as she climaxed again, drenching Luna's face with dewiness.
Chapter 20

As Hermione came to, she noticed Luna glancing at Harry, who had managed to keep himself covered.

“I think Luna would like to see a bit more of you, Harry,” Hermione giggled as she tugged on his blanket. He gave her a lopsided grin.

“Oh... er... yeah! Alright,” he said, blushing.

Hermione pulled the cover away exposing Harry’s erect penis. Luna’s eyes got even bigger when she saw it up close. She had only ever seen real ones once before today, when she had from a distance spied on some teenage boys skinny-dipping in a pond near her home during the summer. But Luna had been looking at penises in issues of *Naughty Witches* magazine which Padma had hidden under her bed since the beginning of the year, and she had been dying to get a chance to play with one.

Padma and Parvati had told her how fun it was. Padma had even been bold enough to approach an older Ravenclaw boy she liked. But like Parvati, Luna was scared of the older boys. Most of the second year boys were dim and still thought girls were another species--and everybody thought she was a weirdo anyway.

Until today, Luna had been resigning herself to nobody who she liked ever wanting her. She was used to not being liked, but it made her sad. She was lucky to at least have Padma and Parvati, and Parvati had been right about how sweet Hermione and Harry were. They were really kind and generous to consent to being with Luna.

“Can... Can I touch it?” asked Luna eagerly. “Parvati showed me how.”

Harry’s eyes flicked to Hermione and she nodded, her tail bobbing happily. Luna was nice.

Luna touched Harry’s erect penis gingerly. Then she clasped it in her warm hands. Harry thrilled at her touch and let out a little sigh. Luna began to masturbate Harry, stroking him gently. Feeling yet another pretty girl’s hands on him was almost too much. Harry couldn’t believe that so many girls wanted to be with him now that he was with Hermione--and that Hermione was letting them.

Harry wondered if he was just getting lucky because of Hermione’s furry tail and ears. But the way Luna was hypnotically gazing at his erection with wide eyes, her face only inches away as she stroked it suggested otherwise. Luna was rapt, her mouth gaped, and the tingling in her groin pulsed, sending a pleasurable sensation cascading through her body. She continued to masturbate Harry with one hand, and put her other one between her own thighs.

Seeing Luna finger her slit, and her little breasts bouncing as she stroked his penis topped Harry off. He couldn’t help himself. Harry groaned as he lost himself in a wave of euphoria and ejaculated several times all over Luna’s face and into her open mouth.

Luna gave a happy little shriek of surprise and giggled. Hermione rolled on the mattress laughing, her furry tail flailing in the air.

“I’m sorry Luna...” gasped Harry, “I tried to hold it until you backed off a bit.”

But Luna just smiled as she curiously tasted Harry’s semen and swallowed it.
“That’s alright Harry,” said Luna, giggling. “Parvati told me what would happen, but I wanted to see it up close for myself.”

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Harry and Hermione had left Luna with an open invitation for another get-together, which she had joyfully accepted. Hermione was content for the rest of Sunday. Harry couldn’t be happier. He had enjoyed Luna’s attention, and he was very fond of Parvati, but the most important thing to him was that they made Hermione happy. For Harry, him having sex with them was a bonus.

Monday in Potions was very odd. Snape still seemed to be in a mood regarding the Slytherins and Ron, and by outward appearance he still seemed to be ignoring Hermione and Harry. But Harry could have sworn he had caught Snape glancing at him with an almost sorrowful look several times out of the corner of his eye.

Harry turned in another perfect potion. Snape raised his eyebrows in surprise, gave Harry a good mark, and said nothing. When it came time for Defence Against the Dark Arts, Harry and Hermione found that it had been mysteriously canceled, so they went down by the lakeshore to practice by themselves.

Tuesday was another stormy day. At breakfast, one of the school owls swooped in and dropped a soggy package on Hermione’s head. She looked up crossly only to have another owl throw a thick wet envelope in her face. Ron and Seamus rudely laughed. Hermione glared at them, her fluffy tail twitching angrily, then looked to see what the owls had brought.

Hermione was satisfied to see that Harry’s boxers had arrived promptly, but her heart leapt in her throat when she saw that the other piece of mail was a response from her parents to the letter she had sent them Sunday evening. With great anxiety she grabbed Harry’s arm. He looked at Hermione in alarm.

“Are you alright? Do you want to go Hermione?” he asked.

“Please. Yes Harry... I... I can’t look at this here,” said Hermione with a panicky voice, clutching the package and the large envelope to her chest. Hermione seemed so distraught that Harry thought it best to return to their quarters.

He sat next to her on their settee and put his arm around her. His own heart thumped anxiously when he saw that the envelope was from her parents. Hermione stared at the envelope for a moment. Then, biting her lip, she tore it open. A muggle newspaper and a letter flopped onto the table.

She read through the letter quickly and promptly burst into tears.

Harry’s heart sank. Whatever was in Hermione’s letter was not good. He picked up the letter and read it as Hermione sobbed into his chest. It appeared to have been written by her mother.

Dear Hermione,

I am so sorry darling. It’s simply awful what has happened to you. Thank you for sending us a picture. I wish you had written us sooner when it happened. Your father is beside himself. And I wish I could tell you that he is sorry for you too, but he seems to be extremely angry at the moment. He wants to pull you out of Hogwarts immediately and send you off to have plastic surgery to remove the abnormalities.
He is refusing to have you at home until you agree to have it done and leave Hogwarts forever. And I do understand his point. It will be too difficult for you to have a normal life in our world. And we have the practice to think of. How many people will want to have a dentist whose daughter is half-cat?

I don’t think your father should be issuing such a harsh ultimatum. It’s very unkind of him. But you must see that it is for the best dear. I miss you, and want to see you at Easter. Please come home from that horrible school and have the surgery as soon as possible.

I love you
Mum

PS: I know you really like the Potter boy. But how well do you really know him? You should see the papers, they’re all going on about his dreadful uncle. You might want to reconsider your friendship. By all accounts he is damaged goods, and potentially unstable.

Harry tensed. His hands trembled with rage. Hermione had always told him how kind and supportive her parents were. He didn’t understand how such supposedly nice people could treat her so cruelly. And what was that bit about Uncle Vernon?

He picked up Monday’s Daily Mail and his face turned ashen.
Harry embraced Hermione as tightly as he could, his own green eyes brimming with tears of humiliation, pain, and anger. He didn’t care that Uncle Vernon was going to prison. Harry was just ashamed that everybody now knew what a reject--what a freak he was. It had been bad enough that everybody in the wizarding world thought that Harry was either a saviour or a serpent, but now in the muggle world everybody would know him as a worthless--possibly dangerous--piece of rubbish.

Harry couldn’t bring himself to say a word to Hermione. He reckoned it was worse for her. His parents had been gone a long, long time, and his tormentor, Uncle Vernon was gone now too. People already thought Harry was a freak. He was used to it. Harry put his own pain aside and silently held Hermione close as she sobbed through their whole first lesson.

Parvati grew anxious when she missed Harry and Hermione in Charms. She knew something was wrong. Hermione and Harry never missed a lesson if they could help it, and Hermione had seemed very agitated at breakfast time. As the rest of the Gryffindor second years made their way to Herbology, Parvati dashed in the opposite direction through the castle.

Silent tears dripped from the end of Harry’s nose and his cheeks, wetting Hermione’s trembling tail as she continued to sob in his arms. An urgent knocking at the door startled Harry. Angry at being disturbed, he lashed out.

“Go away. Leave us alone...” he shouted hoarsely. But just uttering the words after the lengthy silence was too much for Harry and the dam burst. Parvati’s stomach churned when she heard Harry wrenching huge sobs on the other side of the door. She performed an unlocking charm and burst into the sitting room.

“Oh No! Harry, Hermione... What’s wrong?” cried Parvati, her own eyes filling with tears.

She spotted the muggle newspaper and Hermione’s letter on the table. Parvati gasped in horror as she read the top article. Now she knew where Harry’s scars had come from. Why hadn’t he ever told anyone how awful his family was? He’d always made it sound like they were just selfish, bigoted, pushy gits--nothing as dreadful as all of the beatings his uncle had given him.

Then Parvati’s eyes lit upon Hermione’s letter and quickly digested the information. She came over all dizzy and faint. Her knees collapsed, but gentle hands caught her and set her in a comfy chair. Luna peered with concern into Parvati’s tear-filled eyes.

“I’ll go and get Madam Pomfrey...” said Luna softly. “Wait here with them. I’ll be right back.”

Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall put the traumatised young couple to bed in their own room and gave them a sleeping draught. They left Luna and Parvati with instructions for one of them to remain with Harry and Hermione at all times until the next morning when Madam Pomfrey would look in on them again.

Poppy and Minerva shared a somber cup of tea in the hospital wing office.

“I should have seen the signs...” Poppy wept. “The scars. I thought... I don’t know what I thought. I never suspected... Mr Potter never said...”

Poppy’s tears dripped into her tea. Minerva had a pinched expression, looking thoroughly distressed.

“There, there, Poppy...” she said comfortingly, “You couldn’t have known. But I know someone
who could have, and mark my words, the Headmaster is going to get an earful tonight!” Minerva concluded angrily.

“And POOR Miss Granger...” sobbed Poppy, “It’s just dreadful! How could any parents send their child to be chopped into bits by butchers just because they look a bit different? And... and she’s so pretty too... That lovely tail...”

“That will NOT be happening...” Minerva said with authority. “I can assure you Poppy! I refuse to allow Miss Granger to be coerced by her parents into being mutilated.”

“Th... that’s good then. Thank you Minerva.” Poppy stopped crying and dabbed her cheeks. She knew that Minerva was as good as her word.

Luna spent the evening sitting in the comfy chair next to Harry and Hermione’s bed. She closed her copy of *Through the Looking Glass* when Parvati came to take over. They exchanged places and Parvati settled in the chair next to the bed.

“Look after them,” whispered Luna before giving Parvati a kiss goodnight.

When morning came, Harry woke to find Parvati asleep on the bed with one arm around Hermione. Despite the dull ache of pain inside of him, he felt a sudden surge of affection for the two girls. He gave them both a kiss on the forehead, stirring them.

Hermione blinked sleepily at Harry, gave him a sad little smile and pulled him in for a real kiss. She then turned to Parvati who was rubbing the sleep out of her eyes and surprised her with a kiss on the lips.

“Thank you for being there Parvati. You’re the best friend that Harry and I have ever had,” said Hermione with utmost sincerity. She knew now just how true that was, and Harry didn’t contradict her.

Now awake, Parvati kissed Hermione back. Then Parvati leaned over Hermione and gave Harry a proper kiss, her long black lashes glistening with tears.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone Harry?” asked Parvati.

Harry flushed, his eyes downcast.

“I... I dunno really. I... I know it’s not true in my head, but... but, it’s almost like I feel that if I told anyone, I would be admitting that I deserved it for being a freak. As long as I didn’t tell anyone, nobody would know what a weirdo and a loser I am.”

Both girls looked horrified.

“Oh, Harry that’s awful!” squeaked Hermione, her ears drooping as she hugged Harry. Parvati embraced Harry too.

“I love you so much Harry,” said Hermione. “You’re the nicest boy I’ve ever met. You’ve NEVER been a loser or a freak. You’re a Gryffindor.”

“I love you too Hermione!” said Harry softly. Then his features and his voice hardened. “I love ALL of you—your tail, your ears, every bit of you. I don't want you to get surgery Hermione. I love you just the way you are.”

Parvati started crying quietly as her heart melted for her two best friends.
Chapter 22

Rather than mope, the next morning after Madam Pomfrey came to see them, Harry and Hermione chose to return to classes. Neither one of them said a thing all day until after the last class ended. They sat on the bit of bluff overlooking the soggy quidditch pitch and watched some Hufflepuff’s training in the rain.

Hermione broke the silence with a small steady voice, her eyes downcast as she idly put a finger in her mouth and chewed a nail.

“’I’m not going to have the surgery Harry. I promise. I don’t know what I’m going to do, or where I’m going to go at the end of the term.” Hermione took her finger out of her mouth. ’’But I’m NOT going to let my parents bully me because they don’t like the way I look.’’

“I... I don’t understand what’s wrong with them. I never knew...” Hermione’s voice broke as tears rolled down her cheeks, but she continued with determination and a spark of anger seemed to flare.

“I never knew they could be like that. I can’t live with someone who hates who I am, who thinks they have the right to force me to get cut open—even if they are my parents—especially if they’re my parents. Dumbledore says I’m a grown-up now. So I suppose I’ll just have to work out how to live in the wizard world...”

“You won’t be alone Hermione,” said Harry quietly. “’Come with me to the Dursleys, and then we’ll figure out the next bit together.’”

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Harry and Hermione stared at Snape, not certain whether to be angry or anxious. Professor Snape had requested to speak to Harry after class at the end of potions on Friday, and he had been extremely annoyed when Hermione had insisted that she was staying to hear whatever the professor had to say to Harry.

Uncharacteristically, Snape had relented. His stomach churned. He wasn’t used to trying to be pleasant. He stared back, his face inscrutable. Finally, as if it hurt, Snape spoke,

“Potter... Harry... your work this week has been exemplary. It would appear that I have misjudged you—harshly. Left to your own devices, you have demonstrated an aptitude for potions which I haven’t seen in some... years.”

Professor Snape picked up an old battered Potions textbook from the bookshelf behind his desk and handed it to Harry.

“This is my old potions book Harry. It is well above your current year, but with your... talent, I expect you to grasp most of it by the end of third year.”

Hermione’s tail stood on end. Her ears pricked, her eyes widened, and her jaw dropped. Snape was right. Harry and she had both had top marks together in every Potions class this week. She flushed with a thrill of pride in her boyfriend. Harry was too confounded to think of anything at all. Snape continued.

“But please be careful Harry, some of the annotations contain spells which could potentially be dangerous. Do not attempt them without first testing the effects on inanimate or transfigured objects—or better yet, ask me first. In the meantime, I think you are ready for tutoring in advanced potions.”
Snape gave a sniff and peered at Hermione, distracted briefly by her twitching ears and tail.

“I suppose Miss Granger qualifies too... Her marks are always exceptional,” he said with a slight sneer, much more like his old self. But something seemed to catch in his eye, and he gave Hermione a look of silent apology.

“I knew your mother Harry. She was brilliant in potions... the brightest witch in her year. You and Miss Granger should do well... together,” Snape finished in a whisper. Then his face hardened and he stood up.

“Potter, Granger, Wednesday evenings, seven sharp. Don’t be late.”

Harry was gobsmacked, and he didn’t speak until they reached their private chambers.

“What was THAT all about Hermione? Snape was almost nice to me,” Harry gasped as he flopped on the settee.

Hermione’s wide eyes shone brightly.

“Harry... you don’t understand. Snape is considered the top in his field. He’s supposed to be a Genius... That means... he’s not just being nice, Harry. Snape must think you’re brilliant too.”

Harry couldn’t think of anything to say, but then he found his voice.

“Well, I suppose that means you’re a genius too Hermione. But I always knew that,” he concluded with a grin.

Hermione beamed at the compliment and began purring. She sat on Harry’s lap, curling her fluffy tail tightly around his waist and as they kissed, the pain of the last few days began to melt away. Every touch, every kiss, was a flame filling each other with warmth.

Harry lay back on the settee, his head on an armrest, one arm around Hermione who curled inside it with her head under Harry’s chin. With his other hand, Harry gently stroked Hermione’s silky ears as she purred, her tail giving happy little flicks, and they drifted off into a sound sleep.

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Saturday, Harry and Hermione found out why DADA classes had been canceled all week. Dumbledore invited them both to his office again. Two men—both a bit pale and gaunt—were already seated and waiting when they arrived. The young wizard and witch sat on the chairs directly in front of the headmaster’s desk. Hermione’s tail swished nervously.

One of the men lit up when Harry entered the room and began to stand, but the other tapped him lightly on the shoulder and he remained seated.

“Harry, Miss Granger, I believe introductions are in order,” said Dumbledore. “But first, I must thank Harry immensely for bringing the grotesquely inappropriate behaviour of Professor Lockhart towards Miss Granger during class to my attention. The subsequent investigation of his activities has determined that he had also been abusing his authority to engage in sexual relations with students and then wiping their memories with magic. He will be in Azkaban for a very, very long time.”

“This of course necessitated procuring a new DADA professor. Harry, Miss Granger, may I introduce Professor Remus J Lupin. He was a close friend of your father’s Harry, and he will be your new DADA instructor. And this, Harry...”
“...is my Godfather, Sirius Black. I saw the pictures,” Harry finished for Dumbledore. His heart felt like it was thumping in his throat. His mouth was dry, and his palms were sweaty. The man before him was the closest he had to a proper family, and Harry had never once met him in his memory.
Senior Undersecretary and Deputy to the Minister Dolores Umbridge was furious. She hurled five of her finest china plates with pictures of pink cats on them against the pink pinstriped wall of her office, shattering them all over her pink cushions and her pink shag carpet. Ministry staffers passing by ignored the sounds of outrage coming from her office. They were used to it, and they were thankful that Dolores didn’t have any real power.

Deputy Minister Umbridge turned back and glared at the files on her desk. Black, Potter, and Dumbledore. She added Hermione Granger’s file and Cornelius Fudge’s file to the grouping. She had known Cornelius Fudge was soft on Potter and overly reliant on Dumbledore. That was his weak point. Dolores had been working on Cornelius ever since she had heard that James Potter’s son was attending Hogwarts. But apparently Dumbledore had beaten her to Fudge’s soul.

Dolores decided then and there that it was time for a New Order in the wizard world—a Pureblood order under her thumb. She would eliminate the mudbloods and the halfbreeds once and for all. If Voldemort was after the Ministry, and actually managed to return from the dead, he would have to fight her for it.

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Hermione was confused. On the one hand, she could sense straightaway that Professor Lupin and Mr Black’s intentions were good, but they didn’t smell right and the fur on her spine and tail stood on end. Mr Black had a distinct canine odour mixed with his human scent. Professor Lupin had a canine/human whiff too, but his was somehow different—wilder.

Anxiously, Hermione tightened her grip on Harry’s arm when Sirius Black rose to greet Harry, and she instinctively hissed. Harry and Sirius both stopped. Sirius looked crestfallen. Hermione was appalled with herself and tears filled her eyes.

“I’m so sorry Mr Black... Harry! I don’t know what’s wrong with me. Something just came over me.”

“I know what's wrong,” said Professor Lupin quietly. “Miss Granger, Sirius Black is an Animagus--a skin changer. His animal form is that of a dog. And me... I’m a werewolf.”

There was silence.

“Would anyone like a sherbet-lemon?” Dumbledore asked, his eyes sparkling. “No? Perhaps some tea?”

The headmaster snapped his fingers and a tea-tray well loaded with a pot of tea and plates of sandwiches and biscuits appeared. Then he rose from his seat.

“Well, I just remembered that I’m meeting Aberforth for tea. I’ll leave you all to it. Try not to leave too big of a mess please,” said Dumbledore with a wink at Harry.

After Dumbledore left, Harry couldn’t help himself. He grinned at his father’s two best friends.

“I guess Hermione’s not the only one with a Furry Little Problem then!” Harry said with a chuckle.

Sirius and Lupin did a double-take, then they looked at each other and burst out laughing. Harry gave Hermione a little tickle under one of her furry ears, and she started giggling too.
“No she’s not, Harry,” said Lupin. He was still laughing, but there was a hint of bitterness in his tone. “Your father always used to refer to my lycanthropy as a ‘Furry Little Problem’ too. But as problematic as being a werewolf is, and the prejudice I have to put up with, I must say I think I may have the easier part of it than Miss Granger.”

“Most of the month I can pass as fully human. If it weren’t for registration, nobody would have to know that I am a werewolf. That option is unavailable to you--Miss Granger--just as it is unavailable to a centaur. I don’t know how much help I can be as you adjust to your new situation, but I’ll be here if you need to talk to someone who understands ‘Furry Little Problems,’” Lupin finished with a kindly smile.

“I’ll try not to chase you when I turn into a dog, Miss Granger,” Sirius quipped.

Hermione giggled, her furry tail waving in mirth.

“You can call me Hermione, Mr Black. Harry is the only family I have now. If you’re his godfather, you’ll be seeing a lot of me.”

“Well, Hermione, then you’ll just have to call me Sirius won’t you... or perhaps even godfather-in-law.” Sirius winked at Harry who turned crimson. Sirius sobered slightly, and looked a bit anxious as he continued.

“Harry... I know this will seem sudden, but you’re the only family I have left. Your father was a brother to me, and I swore to look after you in the event of... Well... I’ll understand if you don’t want to, but I would really like it if you would come and live with me...”

“Are you joking!??” gasped Harry, beaming as his heart swelled. “Of course I’ll come and live with you!” Then Harry paused, his features set in resolve and he continued, “But only if Hermione can live with us too. I’m not going anywhere without her.”

Harry’s godfather grinned from ear to ear. This was better than he could have possibly imagined. Number 12 was a dark, dreary place--hollow and lonely--like Sirius was himself. It was better than Azkaban, but not by much. Perhaps Harry and Hermione’s youthful exuberance would even make Number 12 habitable.

“I’ll be expecting a visit from you two at Easter then,” Sirius beamed.

Hermione’s furry ears flicked, her tail curled tightly, and she gave a little gasp of her own when Harry asked Sirius to take her in too. A thrill of happiness shook her. She squeezed Harry giddily and kissed him on the cheek, and appeared to be about to hyperventilate.

“Oh my gosh... Oh my gosh... Thank you Mr Bl... I mean Sirius. Thank you so much! I don’t know what to say...”

“Just say you’ll look after Harry for me when I’m not around,” said Sirius with a wistful smile--already missing Harry.

“Of course. Of course I will...” replied Hermione as she giggled. She jumped excitedly, her tail bobbing, and kissed Harry again.

Harry couldn’t stop grinning all the way back to their private chambers after tea with Sirius and Professor Lupin. Hermione skipped along beside him, purring joyfully. As soon as they got in the door they fell on the settee and embraced each other tightly.

Hermione began crying again as she kissed him, but this time they were tears of happiness streaming
“Thank you so much Harry. I never knew what love was before I met you,” said Hermione with adoration in her eyes as she ran her fingers through Harry’s untidy hair. “I thought I did. I thought my parents... But you’ve shown me what it really means to love someone.”

A wave of ardour took Harry like it never had before. He hadn’t realised how much he needed to hear someone say that they loved him in quite that way until today. Harry couldn’t talk; he replied with a deep long kiss. The young witch and wizard were swept up together, lost in a whirlwind of passion as they pulled each other’s clothes off and tumbled to the floor.

Harry stroked the fur on Hermione’s spine with one hand as he kissed one of her silky ears and stroked her abdomen with his other hand. Hermione was already meowing, her ears flattening. She rolled on her back with Harry on top of her, his hardness pressing against her inner thighs. Hermione needed him inside of her. She opened her legs and wrapped them around Harry’s.

Harry entered Hermione with one thrust and she curled her fluffy tail around his backside, pulling him into her heated depths, gasping and meowing ecstatically. Hermione’s labia clung to Harry’s erection as he slid hard and fast in and out of Hermione’s warm body.

The storm of passion which had taken them both was too much.

Harry moaned and stiffened inside of Hermione. She yowled loudly and the pair climaxed explosively together. Magic and Electricity arced from the young lovers, shattering the chandelier, knocking lamps off tables and pictures from the walls. But all Hermione could feel before she passed out in a tidal wave of bliss was Harry squirting semen deep inside of her, and his beads of sweat against her skin as she clutched him tightly.
Harry felt Hermione kneading his chest and purring under his chin as he awoke. He blinked a few times and noticed all of the spell damage to the sitting room, his mouth gaping in bewilderment.

“What happened Hermione?”

Hermione giggled in response.

“I’m not really sure Harry... But it might mean that we’re married now."

Hermione laughed at the shock on Harry’s face,

“Not really, silly. Not legally married. I think it’s probably something that happens to wizards sometimes when they have sex--especially when they’re really in love and it’s a particularly powerful experience. We can’t help but let magic out of us under those circumstances.”

“Oh... yeah! That makes perfect sense,” said Harry, slightly relieved and saddened at the same time. “Well... even so, that doesn’t preclude you being right to begin with Hermione. Maybe it’s sort of a magical sign of marriage. Shouldn’t marriage be good like that?”

Hermione looked thoughtful for a moment, and saw Harry again for the first time.

“Yes Harry. Yes it should.” Hermione melted into Harry’s liquid green eyes. Their lips met for an endless moment, and when they pulled apart they knew it was true.

“Hermione...?”

“Yes Harry?”

“D’ you...? Do you think we’re too young to get legally married?” Harry flushed as he asked the question. “It’s just... it’s just I already know I don’t want to be with anyone else. It’s nice having sex with other girls, and Parvati’s a good friend, but I can’t imagine ever being with anyone else but you.”

Hermione was stunned. She didn’t know what to say. She had made the comment to Harry in jest, but she had to admit that she had said it because she wished it were true. Then it really hit her; Harry had just asked her to marry him.

Hermione kissed Harry jubilantly and giggled excitedly.

“YES Harry... I mean no... I mean yes I’ll marry you, and no we’re not too young because we’re both legally of age in the wizard world now that we're emancipated.”

Harry grinned at Hermione, feeling like he would burst with happiness. He knew that they were very young and that it was all happening too fast. But he didn’t care. Harry also knew that he would never find anyone as nice as Hermione to be with, nor did he want to; and they only had each other now.

The weeks leading to Easter passed in a euphoric haze. Wednesday lessons with Snape were fast-paced and intensive. Snape’s normal no-nonsense manner was back, but he made no attempts to antagonise Harry or Hermione, nor look for trivial excuses to dock points.

In short, Snape was behaving like a proper teacher--even in regular classes--which unnerved Draco Malfoy. During regular potions lessons, Malfoy had noticed that Professor Snape wasn’t favouring
Slytherins as much. Snape still treated Draco very well--he was his father’s best friend after all--but Draco couldn’t understand why Snape was treating Potter and Granger fairly.

On the last advanced potions tutoring session before Easter, Snape seemed to be in a somber mood. This session was not to be a lesson.

“Potter...” Snape began in his normal strict professorial manner, but then his tone softened. “Harry... After the recent affair with the Heir of Slytherin and the diary, the Headmaster saw fit to share with me his concerns--having deemed that I was sufficiently... correctly motivated.” His pallid cheeks flushed slightly.

“The Headmaster has determined that the diary was a magical artifact housing a piece of Voldemort’s soul, a Horcrux. The purpose of a Horcrux is to tether the creator of it to life. Harry...” Concern crossed Snape’s features, “The Headmaster has also determined that your curse scar is also in fact, for all intents and purposes, a Horcrux.”

Harry and Hermione both looked shocked.

“A piece of Voldemort’s soul is attached to yours Harry. The Headmaster enlisted me to find a way to destroy it. I have indeed managed to develop a potion which will aid in that endeavour, based on one found only among the wizard clans of the Deep Amazon.”

“This will be a difficult experience--with a slim possibility of death... You will have to fight Voldemort within yourself with everything you have... and kill him.” Snape paused to let that sink in before continuing in almost a whisper.

“But I believe you will prevail Harry--I believe in...” Snape paused again dramatically and raised his eyebrows. His gaze was intense and slightly wistful, “I believe in you... Harry.”

Snape handed the vial of potion to Harry. Harry looked at Hermione. Her eyes widened and her furry ears pricked.

“I believe in you too Harry!” Hermione said with conviction.

Harry swallowed the potion without another thought.

He was spinning, falling through a rainbow whirlpool. Branches broke his fall when he emerged from the other end. Harry dusted himself off and looked around. He was in a dark forest of enormous ancient oaks. Cautiously, he advanced along an overgrown pathway.

An enormous beast with many legs startled Harry when it dropped from the trees and blocked his passage. The giant spider scurried towards him. He stood his ground and pointed his wand. The spider vanished and in its place appeared an enormous brightly coloured butterfly.

Harry stood in a ruined house over a baby's burned crib. A chill crawled over his skin, raising goosebumps. This was where his parents had been killed--where Voldemort had tried to kill him.

A tall, dark, menacing figure appeared in the doorway of the wrecked room. Harry held his breath. Voldemort!

Voldemort raised his wand and shot a green bolt of lightning at him. Harry dodged, instinctively trying to cast a shielding spell, but Hermione’s face flickered before his eyes and he somehow knew exactly what to do. Harry’s spell emerged from the end of his wand as a glowing ball of pulsing white light and shot right into Voldemort’s heart.
An explosion ripped through Harry’s brain and he began to convulse, foaming at the mouth. Hermione screamed and she threw herself on him. The storm in Harry’s head ended as rapidly as it had onset and he came to, gasping for air as Hermione tightly embraced him.

Harry felt different. As if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders and cobwebs had been swept from his brain. His scar was gone.
Chapter 25

Madam Pomfrey gave Harry a once-over, and declared him fit as a fiddle. More than fit in fact. He was an inch and a half taller without Voldemort stunting him. Exhilaration flooded Harry’s senses. He swept up Hermione and twirled around with her in his arms as if performing a ballet, his face beaming radiantly. Hermione giggled and kissed him when he set her down.

It was a clear night. Harry led Hermione up to the top of the astronomy tower to look at the stars. He wanted to hold Hermione’s hands, but his own were all sweaty with excitement. Harry wiped them on his robes, then put an arm around Hermione’s waist and she curled her furry tail around him.

“Hermione, let’s do it this weekend—get married I mean,” said Harry eagerly. “We don’t have to meet Sirius straightaway. We could go wherever we need to go first... I dunno, are there any wizard priests? I don’t really know anything about religion.”

Hermione giggled.

“It’s alright Harry. You don’t need a priest to get married. Besides, I don’t really care about a church wedding because I’m agnostic. The only reason I might have had for a church wedding was for my parents. They’re Anglican, and they take... they took me to church every Sunday. I suppose...” Hermione frowned.

“I suppose if they ever get over themselves, we could have a muggle church ceremony for them. I was never opposed to the idea. But I’m not really inclined to consider it anymore, even if they ever do welcome me home again.”

Hermione pushed that all aside and smiled again.

“Anyway Harry, we can find a wedding parlour in Hogsmeade or Diagon Alley. They’ll have someone licensed by the Ministry to perform the ceremony.”

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Saturday morning, while most Hogwarts students were departing on the Hogwarts Express, Hermione and Harry walked into Hogsmeade Village together and made their way to Madam Puddifoot’s Wedding Parlour, which was just around the corner from her tea shop.

Harry looked at Hermione anxiously. She was beautiful. Her eyes were sparkling and her silky ears and tail glistened in the sun. He didn’t care if they got married in jeans and sweatshirts, but he wondered if Hermione might like to dress up a bit for the occasion—and he had just remembered something else very important too.

“Hermione, I know we’re just sort of winging it, but would you like a proper wedding dress? I can easily afford it. You don’t have to if you don’t want to, but...”

Hermione shut Harry up with a big kiss, then she giggled at him.

“It would take them hours to fit me with my tail Harry. Thank you so much for offering though. Maybe I’ll take you up on it on our anniversary.”

Harry grinned at that.

“Right!” he said, “Well then, I only have one stop to make before we get on with this.”
Hermione began to protest when she saw that Harry was leading her to Hogsmeade’s small jewellery shop. But Harry was having none of it, and half an hour later the pair emerged from the shop, a ring box clutched in Harry’s hand.

Madam Puddifoot ran her tea-shop and had a friendly round witch in charge of the wedding parlour. The witch smiled cheerfully at Harry and Hermione as if she saw young wizards their age trying to get married every other day. Her eyes flicked to Hermione’s bushy ginger tail, but otherwise gave no other indication that anything was odd.

“Well dears, if you’re without your parents, I cannot help you. You must be 16 or older to elope.”

“But we’re both legally adults now,” squeaked Hermione. “Professor Dumbledore said so.”

The Marriage Clerk’s eyes popped.

“Really? You both look awfully young for emancipation. Wands please.”

The clerk put each wand in turn on her scales.

“My goodness gracious! You two really are emancipated. Well, there’s nothing standing in the way then. You’ll just need to sign a Ministry form, then I’ll perform a quick ceremony if that is your preference.”

“That sounds lovely,” Hermione replied.

The clerk led Harry and Hermione through their vows. She gasped when she saw the tendrils of golden magic bind their clasped hands together, unbidden. The marriage clerk had heard of them, but she had never seen a spontaneous Unbreakable Vow before. They were extremely rare. The couple were very young, but they were clearly meant to be together.

Finally it was time for the ring: a simple, elegant gold band set with a single sparkling diamond.

Harry put it on Hermione’s ring finger and kissed her.

The young married couple ran all the way to the station and caught the next train to King’s Cross. It wasn’t an express, and would take several more hours than they were accustomed to. They didn’t mind though. They were sure to find something to occupy their time.

Harry and Hermione found an empty compartment at the end of the train. Hermione locked the door, closed the curtains over the corridor windows, and cast a muffliato spell—which she and Harry had discovered in Snape’s tattered old Potions book.

Harry cuddled Hermione, kissed her silky ears and softly stroked her tabby tail as they watched the village and the castle recede into the distance. The sensation of liberation could not have been more profound, and the pair began kissing passionately when the castle and village passed out of sight.

Hermione was already steamy and purring loudly, her furry ears flicking. Her heart raced as she peeled off her jeans and panties and straddled Harry’s lap, facing him, clad only in her sweatshirt, socks, and sneakers. Hermione unzipped Harry and gently pulled Harry’s erect penis through the opening in his boxers.

Hermione slipped off Harry’s lap and kneeled between his thighs, pushing them apart. She grinned impishly at Harry, and took him in her mouth. Hermione wrapped her lips and her cat tongue around his erection and began to suck as her head bobbed up and down in time to the clattering of the train.

Hilly fields and farms sped by the window, but Harry didn’t notice as pleasure rippled through his
body. His hands reached out to stroke Hermione’s silky ears as she twirled her rough cat tongue around the tip of his penis.

Hermione sensed that Harry was drawing near and drew Harry wetly from her mouth. Then Hermione straddled his lap again, this time facing away, and impaled herself on his erection, gasping as he entered her. Breathing rapidly, Harry slipped his hands under Hermione’s sweatshirt and blouse to cup her breasts as he thrust into her moist depths.

Meowing, Hermione leaned over the little table between the seat-rows and her tail began to whip wildly as Harry continued to thrust his lance in and out of her and gently tweak her nipples, one pair at a time. Hermione yowled as the bliss took them. They both lost themselves in a surge of Ecstasy and climaxed as trees rushed past the window of the train.

Holding Hermione’s hips tightly, Harry ejaculated numerous times deep inside of her as he gasped in rapture. Finished, he pulled out stickily as a string of semen dripped to the floor of the compartment from Hermione’s labia. Panting, Harry slumped and lay back on the seat-row with a glowing Hermione on top of him.
When the train finally pulled into King’s Cross, Harry wrapped up Hermione’s bushy tail in his invisibility cloak and tucked it in while Hermione covered her furry ears with a knitted cap. It wasn’t a perfect solution, but it would prevent unnecessary attention in the wizard and muggle worlds.

When Harry and Hermione stepped onto platform 9 and 3/4, they were startled to find Professor Lupin and Sirius waiting for them, both smirking and holding enormous bouquets of flowers.

“It would appear that congratulations are in order, Harry and Miss Granger...” said Lupin, a wry smile crossing his features, “or is that Mrs Potter now?” he asked with raised eyebrows.

“How did you know?” Harry asked in bewilderment. Hermione’s eyes popped and her tail twitched anxiously.

“I didn’t see you on the Express this morning, and when I got to the Leaky Cauldron I heard that a young wizard and a cat had eloped in Hogsmeade,” Lupin replied with a straight face.

“This rather beats any of James’s youthful escapades at your age hollow,” said Sirius with a hint of awe in his voice. “We were both very big on rebellion... but responsibility, not so much. You’ve managed to demonstrate a large degree of both in a single act--and you’re not even in Third Year yet.”

“We... we’re not in trouble are we?” squeaked Hermione.

“No... not at all,” Lupin replied. “It is not generally advisable to marry at such a young age, but you both have the legal authority to do so.”

“Well, I think this calls for a celebration,” Sirius grinned.

Sirius’s house was dark and gloomy, but he assured Harry and Hermione that they would be going out for dinner.

“Harry can wrap your tail up in the invisibility cloak again, Hermione. But where we’re going, you shouldn’t need the cloak or cap once we get there,” he said.

“Where are we going then?” Hermione asked; her ears twitched curiously. Sirius responded with a wink and a smile.

“You’ll see soon enough.”

And indeed, an hour and a half later Harry and Hermione found themselves with Sirius and Lupin in a massive London muggle nightclub full of costumed people--many of whom also appeared to be sporting all sorts of furry ears and tails. Hermione was thrilled to be able to show off her fluffy tail and ears without being stared at and assaulted. In fact she received numerous compliments on how gorgeous and realistic her “costume” was.

Sirius and Lupin kept an eye on the young couple, and warned them strenuously against drinking excessively when it was obvious that it would take a shot to loosen Harry up enough for Hermione to drag him to the dance floor. Soon Hermione’s happy tail was bouncing in time to the music as she gyrated to the club beats with Harry.

After some Swedish House Mafia and Skrillex tracks, the DJ slowed things down a bit with some
Ellie Goulding. The young couple danced closely, arms around each other. Hermione curled her furry tail around Harry and she gazed adoringly into his green eyes which were sparkling in the strobe lights, her ears flicking slightly.

“I love you Mr Potter,” Hermione whispered into Harry's ear. She was purring loud enough for Harry to hear over the music.

“I love you too Mrs Potter,” Harry whispered back with a soft grin. Harry leaned his forehead against Hermione’s and kissed her deeply as they danced.

Lupin glanced over at Sirius who was watching the young pair, and saw tears in his eyes. He put down his cocktail and sympathetically put his hand on Sirius’s shoulder.

“They’ll be alright you know. Especially now that they have you,” said Lupin.

“It’s not that,” said Sirius. “It’s just... Harry. He’s so much like James with his boldness and impetuousness, and yet... and yet...”

“...and yet Harry is even more like Lily; he has her maturity and gentle soul,” Lupin continued for Sirius, who was choking up.

It was very late when they returned to Number 12, and Sirius was more than a bit drunk. Lupin put him to bed and then sat with Harry and Hermione in the sitting room with mugs of hot cocoa by the crackling fireplace. The young married couple were a bit tipsy, but only cheerfully so. Hermione settled in Harry’s lap with her furry tail curled around him as he stroked her furry ears.

The Easter holidays flew by far too quickly. Sirius managed to find several events and places to take the two young wizards to where Hermione wouldn’t have to hide her ears and tail. Surprisingly, all were muggle: a Spring festival, a comic/anime convention, a showing of Cats at a West End theatre. And with Harry’s invisibility cloak over Hermione’s tail, they managed to engage in many other muggle activities like going for a picnic in St James’s Park, or going to the cinema.

Harry had never had so much fun as a muggle before. He had never once been to a cinema or a play, or had a picnic in a park. The Dursleys had nearly always left Harry locked in his cupboard when they took Dudley out, except for the rare occasions that they had left Harry with Mrs Figg.

And for part of each day over the holidays, Sirius and Lupin cleaned Number 12 thoroughly, room by room. Harry and Hermione joined in eagerly. Many of the Black family’s dark artifacts being destroyed, turned in to the Ministry, or sold-off, were fascinating to look at. Hermione was brought to tears when she discovered Sirius’s miserable wizened old house-elf trying to hide objects to save them from the purge.

“Isn’t there something he can have Sirius?” Hermione asked as tears rolled down her cheeks. “It’s just so sad. I know he says lots of cruel things to me, but he can’t help it.”

Sirius was moved deeply by Hermione’s concern for Kreacher, who had been very horrible to Hermione from the moment she had set foot in Number 12.

“It’s just that nearly everything I’m getting rid of has been tainted by dark magic,” Sirius sighed. “I’ll try and find something of my brother Regulus’s to give to Kreacher. Kreacher loved him and mother best.”

The four of them finished their breakfasts together on the last day before the end of the holiday. Sirius regarded Harry and Hermione solemnly, he glanced at Lupin who nodded back encouragingly.
“Harry, I... I’m going to miss you and Hermione very much when you go back to Hogwarts tomorrow. I need you to know something. I’d like you to know that in the event that anything should happen to me, anything at all, all of this--Number 12 and my family’s Gringott’s vaults--now belongs to you.”

The young witch and wizard gaped at Sirius, stunned into silence.

“Everything except for one vault is being transferred into your name, Harry. And that vault I am leaving to you in my will. In so doing, you will be the Secret Keeper for Number 12, Harry.”

“What’s a Secret Keeper?” asked Hermione.

“That means that Harry will hold the secret of Number 12’s location,” said Sirius. “It can only be divulged by Harry, and only those to whom Harry has revealed the information can see and visit Number 12. This is very important. If Voldemort returns, this home will protect you as long as you are very careful with who you trust.” Sirius looked at his feet in shame as he concluded.

The wizards did some more cleaning after breakfast. Sirius had managed to wrest a gold locket from Kreacher after a bit of a struggle. He was just about to hurl it into his sack.

“STOP!” Hermione yelled.

Everyone stopped what they were doing immediately and turned their eyes questioningly to Hermione. Her furry ears drooped in fright.

“That... that locket--it’s Evil!” she said, sounding slightly out of breath.

“I know,” said Sirius, perplexed. “Most of the stuff I’m chucking is Dark.”

“No, I mean I’ve felt that exact same feeling before,” said Hermione. “It’s not just Evil, it’s a very specific feeling. It feels exactly like Tom Riddle’s Diary.”

Professor Lupin’s face paled, and Sirius looked shocked. Sirius had browbeaten Dumbledore into telling him everything he knew about Harry’s connections to Voldemort--including the Horcruxes. He knew precisely what Hermione was on about.

“We’ll take it straight to Dumbledore first thing tomorrow,” said Professor Lupin quietly. “This is bad. It could mean that Voldemort has more of these somewhere.”

A heavy silence hung in the air. It was broken when green flames sparked in the fireplace. The figure of Arthur Weasley emerged from the hearth.

Arthur looked a mess. He was out of breath, and he spoke with a panicked voice.

“Sirius, Remus, we need to get the Order together NOW! Fudge is dead. Umbridge is assuming control of the Ministry and she’s pointing the finger at YOU Sirius. She’s calling for you to be detained as a ‘person of interest’ in Fudge’s murder.”
Chapter 27

Sirius staggered, but Lupin caught him. Sirius sat down and collected himself before responding to Arthur Weasley.

“Right then Arthur... The Order will have to meet at Aberforth’s until we find an alternative. Number 12 is out of the question. It is off-limits to the Order. I have deeded Number 12 to Harry Potter. As the rightful Warlock of the House of Potter, it is of course within his rights to host the Order. But as his Godfather, I must insist that the Order not take unnecessary risks with Harry and his wife’s lives. The less people with access to Number 12, the better.”

Arthur quickly processed Sirius’s astonishing news, and added it to what he knew Sirius had to do in response to the new Minister’s false charges against him. He smiled warmly at Harry and Hermione— who both still looked in shock—before replying.

“I completely agree Sirius. I'll back you up 100% if Dumbledore gets testy.”

“As will I,” Lupin stated firmly.

“Excellent!” Sirius beamed, not at all looking like someone being forced to go on the lam due to false charges of assassination. “I’ll meet you at Aberforth’s in one hour.”

After the departure of Arthur Weasley, Sirius sat Harry and Hermione down, and looked soberly at them again.

“Harry... Please listen carefully. This is extremely important. And Hermione, please take note—Harry will need your support to assume the responsibilities he faces as the Head of the House of Potter. The House of Potter is one of the Ancient “Pureblood” families which make up the “Upper House” of the Wizengamot—which is more or less all of it really. Your family wasn’t the wealthiest, Harry—that would be the Malfoys and the Lestranges—and the Blacks—but it is one of the oldest of the current surviving bloodlines.”

"As the last surviving male in your House, having achieved the age of majority, you are now the Warlock—the Head of your House—as I am of mine. That means you may claim your House’s seat on the Wizengamot. I had planned to personally shepherd you through this Harry. But for now I will have to go underground.”

“Number 12 has an extensive and up-to-date law section in the library—and I highly recommend retaining Goblin attorneys and financial advisers should you need them, but I will remain in constant contact.” Sirius paused his monologue, and gave Harry and Hermione each a small hand mirror. 

“These are a bit like modern muggle mobile-phones, but they are very hard to come by. Just speak the name of the person you want to reach, and if they also have one of these mirrors you will be able to converse with them. Everyone in the Order has one, should you need to reach someone for help.”

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The next morning it was raining heavily again. Professor Lupin and the two young Hogwarts students got soaked on the way to King’s Cross. They settled in a compartment together on the Hogwarts Express and Lupin performed a drying spell on the three of them.

As the train traveled North and the day wore on, the storm became heavier and the sky became blacker. The train slowed down and came to a halt in the middle of a lonely heath and lightning lit up
the sky. Several seconds later, thunder roared across the plain.

“Stay seated,” Lupin quietly warned Harry and Hermione, “The train is likely being searched for Sirius. There may be Dementors--wraiths that guard Azkaban--and they are some of the foulest creatures to walk this Earth,” Lupin added, sounding disgusted.

Sure enough, a few minutes later the temperature dropped precipitously. Ice crawled across the windowpanes and a skeletal hand opened the door to the compartment as the wizards' breath froze in the air. A wraith in swirling black robes glided towards Harry and he heard a woman screaming in the distance--getting closer--a flash of green light... Harry fell into darkness and passed out.

Professor Lupin leapt up and a glowing white shield of energy from his wand cut off the creature’s advance on Harry. The wraith hissed its anger at being thwarted, and glided out of the compartment. Several minutes later, Harry and Hermione came to as the train lurched into motion again. Lupin passed Harry and Hermione a bar of chocolate each.

“Eat... the chocolate will counter the effects. Dementors stimulate one's darkest fears and misery, which they feed on, forcing people to relive their worst memories. When they attack, they literally suck out your soul with what is called the Dementor’s Kiss. For some reason, one of them just attempted to attack Harry.”

Harry and Hermione both gasped in horror. Hermione’s furry ears wilted even more. Tears were already streaming down her cheeks. She had relived the worst moment of her life--the letter from her parents--and fainted when the Dementor attacked Harry.

“But why...? What could they want with me?” asked Harry, his heart thumping in his ears.

Lupin responded worriedly,

“This could mean that the new minister is also targeting YOU Harry. In which case I will have to teach you and Hermione how to protect yourselves against dementors. Go on... eat the chocolate. You’ll feel better.”

They did feel warmer after a few minutes. But the feeling of doom lingered until the next morning. When they arrived at Hogwarts, Madam Pomfrey gave Harry, Hermione, and several other students a once over and more large bars of chocolate.

“Well, I never! Dementors accosting students. The new minister has a lot to answer for,” Madam Pomfrey groused to Professor McGonagall as the last student departed the hospital wing.

“I’m afraid this is just the beginning Poppy,” Minerva responded quietly.

Harry and Hermione caught up to Luna who was still crying profusely as she left the infirmary--despite the chocolate. It was very unlike Luna to collapse into tears. She usually had a very serene manner no matter what was happening around her.

Hermione hugged Luna.

“It... it was my mum...” Luna sobbed into Hermione’s shoulder. “I... I saw her die... again... before my eyes. She d... died in a horrible spell accident a few years ago--when I was nine. It was terrible--her melted body...” Luna sobbed louder and Harry put his arms around both girls, guiding them to the young couple’s private chambers.

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The Order meeting the night before had been a tumultuous one. Dumbledore had been forced after much argument to back down from his insistence that Number 12 was a more suitable place for the Order by nearly his entire inner circle.

Even Severus--especially Severus--put his foot down in a stunning display of solidarity with Sirius. Dumbledore hadn’t expected Severus Snape to become quite so protective of Harry that he would ever agree with Sirius Black on anything. In the end, that was what finally convinced Dumbledore that he was being an old fool.

And now that the cat was out of the bag regarding Horcruxes, the pressure was on to see if any remained. The removal of the inadvertent one which Voldemort had created in Harry meant that Voldemort could be killed without Harry if necessary. The prophecy as an absolute certainty had clearly been broken. But that didn’t mean that Harry wouldn’t still be forced to engage in combat with Voldemort as long as the Dark Wizard still lived. Harry would still need to be prepared for a long war... and possible death.

The following morning, after the Dementor attack on the train Dumbledore realised that things had become worse than he could have possibly imagined. The Order now faced war on two fronts.
Chapter 28

A pall settled over the wizard world over the next few weeks as the manhunt for Sirius Black escalated and a few “Undesirables” were indefinitely detained by the Ministry for “questioning.” It did not go unnoticed by the Hogwarts professors and the others who made up the Order that the “Undesirables” were all either halfblood or muggleborn. And it did not go unnoticed by the students that their professors were distracted by something worrying.

Harry and Hermione continued advanced potions sessions with Snape on Wednesdays, and now also spent Tuesday and Thursday evenings with Professor Lupin, practicing their Patronuses against a Boggart pretending to be a Dementor. The rapidity with which the two young wizards developed their Patronuses stunned Professor Lupin.

After four lessons the pair were producing some of the most powerful Corporeal Patronuses he’d ever seen and he declared them more than proficient. Even more remarkable, Harry’s was a Lion, and Hermione’s, a Lioness. Lupin had expected Harry’s to be a Stag...

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Despite the growing gloom outside of Hogwarts’ sphere of influence, Harry and Hermione continued to ride the high of their new life together as May Day approached.

Friday after classes, a week before Beltane, Harry was on the quidditch pitch teaching Parvati, Luna, and Hermione how to fly their brooms properly. Harry had bought them all Firebolts at Easter on an excursion to Diagon Alley. Hermione was still terrified of heights, and she took a lot of coaxing to get more than three metres off the ground.

Harry sighed in frustration. He was pleased that Hermione had reinforced his natural inclination to read and learn (which had diminished while Ron had been his best friend), but he loved flying, and he really wanted Hermione at his side. Finally he had Hermione get off her broom.

“Here Hermione, there’s actually room for both of us on my broom,” Harry said with an encouraging smile. Harry caressed Hermione’s cheek with one hand and stroked her just under her ear and chin until she began purring.

Parvati and Luna grinned as they floated nearby. Hermione clambered up behind Harry, wrapped her arms and furry tail around his middle, and clasped the broom between her bare thighs, clad as they were in the skirt of her school uniform. It felt good to be holding Harry so closely, and Hermione’s panties started to dampen with the vibrating broom pressed right against her slit. She moaned slightly and purred a bit louder.

“You just hold on tight, Hermione, and think of whatever you think of when you cast your Patronus,” said Harry—quite unnecessarily at that point. Hermione already felt much safer with her arms and tail around him, her breasts pressed against his back. She kissed Harry’s neck and purred as he lifted off the ground.

Harry swooped around the quidditch pitch as Hermione giggled in exhilaration, her bushy hair and tail whipping in the wind behind her, and her furry ears flat back against her head. Hermione’s panties were thoroughly wet now; the broom pressed the fabric deeply into her labia. A sudden, almost shameful, fantasy flashed through her mind as Harry soared higher and higher and she began to meow.
Luna and Parvati were doing their best to keep up—and doing quite well. They grinned again when they heard Hermione meowing. Harry did a loop, and Hermione gasped when the broom gave little shudders as Harry pushed its banking capabilities to the limits. The vibrations against her clitoris increased in intensity; the friction of the wooden broom shaft ground against her sopping wet panty covered vulva.

The tingling in Hermione’s groin surged in rapid pulses, rippling through her body as Harry dived and flew low above the treetops near the Whomping Willow. Hermione began to lose herself when Harry buzzed the surface of the loch and droplets of water stung her face. Hermione moaned and yowled, her furry tail whipping wildly. Hermione burst into an endless moment of bliss, soaking her skirt and the back of Harry’s shorts as her wetness traveled the length of the broom shaft.

Hermione’s orgasmic spasms rocked Harry. He was already more than a bit stiff having Hermione pressed against his backside so tightly, and his erection became even longer and harder as her orgasm surged through his own body. His breath quickened; his pulse raced. Harry needed Hermione NOW and he dove into the woods followed closely by Luna and Parvati.

As soon as they touched down Harry dropped the broom into the underbrush of the Forbidden Forest. Hermione fell to her hands and knees in the damp leaves and ferns, panting heavily and jutted her bottom and furry tail at him, knowing what Harry wanted. Her panties were so wet that the cleft of her labia was perfectly visible through the sheer fabric, and steam rose from it in the chilly Scottish air.

Harry was so hot that he didn’t care that they were outside, in the middle of the Forbidden Forest performing in front of Luna and Parvati—and possibly Hagrid or the centaurs should they stumble upon the quartet. In a sudden surge of passion, Harry grasped Hermione’s panties and ripped them from her body. He tossed Hermione’s torn, ruined undies onto a nearby bush, and cupped her pretty, naked bottom cheeks in his hands.

Hermione gasped in pleasure at his forcefulness and let Harry take possession of her. Harry pushed Hermione’s skirt up around her waist and spread her knees and thighs widely apart; her furry tail whipped back and forth. Luna and Parvati undid Harry’s belt and pulled his shorts down revealing his erection which tented his snitch emblazoned boxers.

Harry pushed apart the lips of Hermione’s tight slit with his fingers so that he and the other two girls could see right into Hermione’s pink wetness. Hermione flushed slightly as a wave of embarrassment at being so utterly exposed turned into a tingling surge of pleasure. Harry’s fingers pushed inside of Hermione’s tight, burning entrance, thrusting in and out while he squeezed one of her bottom cheeks with his other hand.

Luna began stroking Hermione’s fluffy tail and Parvati stroked Hermione’s bushy hair and furry ears. Hermione rubbed her neck and under her chin hard against Parvati’s knuckles, meowing loudly. Harry’s erect penis extended through the opening in his boxers, and with a jerk of his loins he buried himself deeply and completely inside of Hermione.

Harry was almost at his peak, and Hermione was about to burst again. He pistoned into Hermione hard, her passion-wrought face and elbows now pressed into the leaves on the ground. Harry felt the pulses of electricity flood his nerves as he exploded into ecstasy and sparks of magic began to fly.

Hermione climaxed again loudly. Her tail thrashed about as Harry pressed his penis inside of Hermione as deeply as could and released himself into her. He was so lost in the storm of pleasure that he ejaculated uncontrollably. Harry jerked back and forth numerous times, filling Hermione with his stickiness until it seeped out between her labia and the fleshy shaft of his erection, spattering on the forest floor.
Harry fell back panting, his head spinning, sweat running down his brow. Hermione was lying face down--also breathing heavily--with her legs still widely spread. Harry’s semen oozed in ribbons from her flushed labia and seeped into the dead oak leaves and fern which lay beneath her and clung to her sticky inner thighs...

Parvati moaned. She had a hand down under her own skirt pressing the string of her thong into her own damp folds. Parvati knelt between Hermione’s spread thighs and pressed her tongue inside of Hermione’s semen filled vulva, tasting Harry and Hermione both. Hermione gave another meow of pleasure and flicked her furry tail. Parvati licked Harry’s stickiness from Hermione’s labia and sucked out as much semen she could. Then Parvati swallowed it--before trying something new and slowly licking Hermione from her slit to higher up between Hermione's dainty bottom cheeks...

Meanwhile, Luna approached the exhausted Harry.

“May I...?” she asked, pointing at his sticky shrinking penis. Harry nodded and gasped when Luna put her lips around him and began to clean his and Hermione’s fluids from his penis. Parvati had clearly been teaching Luna well. Harry hardened again inside her mouth. Luna was on her hands and knees, but as her tongue twirled around the tip of Harry’s erection she grabbed Harry’s hands and pressed his palms to the sides of her head.

Harry understood what Luna wanted, though he didn’t quite understand why sometimes the girls liked him to be a little bit assertive. Not that he minded too much; it gave him a thrill as long as he knew he wasn't hurting them. Harry sat up on his knees, leaned over Luna's head, grasping it firmly in his hands, and forcefully pushed his penis over her tongue and deep into her throat with one thrust. Harry rocked back and forth hard and fast, his bare pubes smacking Luna’s nose and his testicles slapping her chin.

Luna moaned in pleasure with two fingers inside herself and a thumb on her own clitoris as she felt Harry’s engorged penis thrusting roughly into her esophagus. Harry stiffened and pressed her face hard into his crotch when he climaxed uncontrollably again. Luna held her breath as long as she could while Harry’s semen squirted into her throat.

Harry’s seed filled Luna’s tummy and began to ooze from her lips around his shaft. She tapped Harry’s thigh and he immediately released Luna’s head. She bobbed back gasping for air and swallowed Harry’s viscous fluids which also drooled from her lips and chin as his still ejaculating penis sprayed semen all over Luna's forehead, cheeks, and blonde hair.

As Harry started to come around from the ebbing passion, he grinned when he saw Parvati cleaning Harry's stickiness from Luna’s face with her tongue. Harry wasn't quite certain what had come over them all, but shortly the thought entered Harry's bemused brain that it must be Hermione's "time of the month;" Hermione was in heat and her cat hormones plus teenage girl hormones were all over Harry and their best friends.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Bright skies, and the buzz of bees greeted Mayday. Spring was in full bloom and it was Luna’s birthday. Harry and Hermione had a special party planned, inspired by Parvati’s hints weeks ago.

A red squirrel with a bushy tail started and ran up a tree when the quartet of wizards pushed through the underbrush into the concealed clearing in the Forbidden Forest in which they had “settled” Hermione’s heat the previous week. Luna had been thrilled at finding a new spot hidden in the oaks and bracken to play in, and it seemed the ideal place for a picnic.

The young witches and wizard spread out a red and gold blanket emblazoned with the Gryffindor crest. Cheerfully, they munched on cucumber sandwiches, pork pies, crisps, and treacle tarts, followed up with a double layer cake iced with whipped cream and strawberries. They washed the lot down with dandelion wine and butterbeers.

“I think it’s time for your presents Luna,” said Parvati, grinning, her eyes flicking to Harry as Hermione smirked.

Luna’s eyes widened in anticipation and she reached for Parvati’s parcel. Eagerly, with short sharp breaths, Luna tore the gold-embossed wrapping paper from the long rectangular box. Gently, she lifted the lid and gaped in delight at the gift. The long springy penis-shaped object shimmered when she held it up to the dappled light of the glade.

“It’s got an everlasting charm on it,” said Parvati. “I think you’ll really enjoy some of the things it can do,” she concluded with a giggle.

“It’s beautiful! Thank you very much,” Luna replied softly as she gazed in adoration at Parvati. Taking Parvati in her arms, Luna kissed her on the lips warmly. Parvati’s long lashes fluttered and she responded in kind.

Luna pulled back and flushed slightly, putting a finger to her lips. A smile crossed Harry’s lips. He knew that look, and he was happy that Luna and Parvati had made a connection; they both deserved someone nice to love.

“This is from both of us--Harry and me,” said Hermione, smiling when she pressed a small green velvet box into Luna’s hands.

Luna opened the box and gasped at the glittering diamond encrusted gold locket. It must have cost a fortune, and she could have never imagined anybody spending that much on her. Tears filled her eyes when she undid the clasp and a tiny Harry and Hermione waved back at her. Under the picture an inscription read “Amici Aeterni.”

“Thank you... thank you both so much! I... I don’t know what to say,” Luna’s voice cracked. “Before Padma and Parvati, and you two, I never really had any friends.” She gave Hermione and Harry each a kiss in gratitude.

“We... er... have something else for you,” Harry nearly whispered as he flushed. “If... if you’re ready that is. You... erm... you can unwrap me if you like. And... and then... er, whatever else...” Harry trailed off and gave Luna a nervous smile.
Hermione’s fuzzy ears twitched and her fluffy tail waggled in laughter. Luna grinned.

“Harry is from both of us too,” Hermione giggled.

Luna gave Hermione a bigger kiss, then she turned back to Harry and kissed him again too as she undid the top button of his shirt.

“I... I don’t really know of any other words to thank you both with,” said Luna quietly.

She stepped back from Harry and reached her hands to her own waist. Luna’s rather short sky blue skirt dropped to the ground revealing nothing but bare skin beneath. Luna must have “forgotten” to put her underwear on this morning Harry mused, hardening at the thought of Luna wondering around Hogwarts with nothing between her and the drafty castle breeze passing through her thighs. Harry wondered if Luna did that often.

Luna removed her white blouse and stood in the clearing with her friends, wearing nothing but her knee high stockings and buckled shoes. Her nipples hardened in the cold forest air. Harry could even see her clitoris poking out of its hiding place.

Harry squeezed Luna’s bottom cheeks and parted them a bit. Luna’s knees weakened slightly. Her hard nipples pressed into Harry’s chest and she slid a hand down inside his trousers and boxers to grasp his firm penis. Harry stiffened even more.

Suddenly, Luna fell back into the leaves of the forest floor pulling Harry on top of her. Being completely naked out in the open while her friends remained clothed had fired every nerve in Luna’s body. The leaves and brush under her back excited her as much as Harry’s fabric clad crotch pressed into her vulva.

Harry was thoroughly turned on too.

“Take me Harry...” Luna pleaded.

Harry understood. He unzipped himself and his hard penis pressed against Luna’s thighs. Then with a sharp thrust, Harry roughly entered Luna, taking her virginity, and Luna gave a little shriek of shock and pleasure. Harry’s engorged erection pistoned hard and fast in and out of Luna’s petite body, and her tightness clenched around Harry’s penis.

Luna felt the strike of metal and fabric against her labia at every thrust inside of her, and sparks traveled from her clitoris and up her spine. Harry’s shirt-covered chest pressed against Luna’s bare breasts and nipples. Tingles surged and rippled through Luna’s body; her brow beaded with sweat; leaves flew.

“Oh... Oh... Oh...” Luna gasped in pleasure as Harry continued to forcefully thrust himself inside of her, pushing her hard enough into the ground that Luna could now feel the grit between her bottom cheeks.

Harry couldn’t take it anymore; he stiffened, feeling the tip of his penis pressing against Luna’s inner-depths. Luna wrapped herself around Harry and clutched him tightly as he spasmed and released himself into her. Luna felt Harry squirting his sticky fluids deep, wailed in ecstasy and burst.
She held Harry close. Luna wanted to feel every drop of him inside of her. After what seemed like an eternity, Luna released him as they both panted. Though Luna was still in a daze, she wasn’t ready to stop. She got on her hands and knees between Harry’s legs and beckoned Hermione and Parvati. Luna held out the magic dildo and smiled sweetly at them as Harry’s semen seeped from her labia.

Hermione took hold of the dildo while Parvati leaned over Luna’s back and reached her hands around to grasp her little breasts. Parvati rolled Luna’s hard pink nipples with her fingertips and squeezed her breasts in pulses with her palms.

Hermione was feeling adventurous. She spread Luna’s thighs as widely as her own had been last week. Then, before she could change her mind, Hermione plunged her tongue inside of Luna. She tasted Harry’s semen and sucked it from Luna’s interior while she tickled Luna’s inner thighs. Luna’s sticky interior contracted around Hermione’s tongue.

Luna was meanwhile tasting herself on Harry’s sticky penis. Hermione swallowed everything she had sucked from Luna’s vulva, and a bit of Harry’s semen dribbled down her chin. Then without fanfare Hermione shoved the long dildo in Luna and muttered the incantation.

“Futuero Maximus”

Harry took Luna’s throat like he had last week, and the magic dildo went to work in Luna’s lower opening. It spiraled into her vulva and Luna’s bottom shuddered. It didn’t take long. Feeling Harry and the dildo both taking her hard simultaneously was more than Luna could bear.

Luna climaxed again as Harry ejaculated into her tummy. Harry pulled out before he had finished and shot half a dozen more loads onto Luna’s face and hair as she wailed in pleasure, strings of semen drooling from her lips and chin.

Harry grinned at Hermione when she approached the dazed Luna and began to lick Harry’s semen off Luna’s face. Hermione was having a go at everything Parvati had the week before Harry mused.

~o0o~

The rest of the school-year passed in a blur. As the summer holidays began, on the platform of 9 and 3/4, Harry and Hermione—happily displaying her ginger tabby cat tail and cat ears—said their goodbyes to a raven haired girl with a black furry cat tail and black furry ears, and a blonde girl with a fluffy white cat tail and ears. To Madam Pomfrey’s horror (and secret delight), the two young witches had brewed up a batch of their own polyjuice and had taken it a week before the end of school—and become an official couple in the process.

“You HAVE to come to the Quidditch World Cup,” begged Parvati. “My father got Luna and me tickets. He wasn’t upset at all about me turning into a cat. He thinks it’s funny and Mum thinks it’s cute.”

“I still can’t believe you both changed into catgirls on purpose,” Hermione moaned, feeling guilty for having given them the idea. “Why would you do that? Everyone will treat you badly too…”

“Partly because we both adore your tail and wanted our own,” said Luna honestly, “But really so that you wouldn’t feel so alone—because we love you Hermione.”

Parvati bit her lower lip and nodded tearily in agreement with Luna. Hermione began to cry. She didn’t know what to say.

Parvati spied Padma greeting their parents and knew it was time to go.
“Anyway, the World Cup is in August I think,” said Parvati hurriedly, flicking her satiny black cat-tail, “and Luna and I would love you to join us.”

“We’ll be there,” Harry and Hermione both replied at once. Then they each kissed Luna and Parvati goodbye.

Harry wrapped Hermione’s tail in his invisibility cloak, she put on her cap, and together--arm in arm--they stepped through the barrier and out into the muggle world, startling Petunia and Dudley Evans who were expecting only Harry.

Chapter End Notes

**Hermione’s Cat Powers:**
- Empath: can read intent, sense danger, detect evil and dark magic, detect horcruxes/Voldemort
- Heightened sense of smell
- Heightened hearing
- Can talk to snakes, cats, dogs, rodents, and owls
- Can see in the dark
- Prehensile Tail
- Retractable Claws

Thanks to the many fans of this fic for all of the reviews, kudos, and bookmarks. I am having a lot of fun writing this. :D
Chapter Notes

A couple of story notes in brief:

Just a reminder, this is AU, and the PoA storyline has been nullified by the events so far. So other familiar events have moved up a year (to third year) to take their place, and of course new plot threads have been introduced...

Part 2

The Goblet of Doom

“Hermione, this Warlock stuff--it just looks like a load of pureblood rubbish for men to me. I don’t want anything to do with it. I don’t understand why Sirius wants me to...”

“I think he wants you to take on the mantle because it’s the only way to have a political voice at all Harry. The British Wizarding World isn’t particularly democratic. The Wizengamot is made up of all the heads of the pureblood families or their proxies, and also just a very few members who were selected by committee to represent everyone else--and they elect the Minister and help to make many of the laws,” Hermione replied soberly, her furry ears twitching sympathetically. Harry groaned.

“It is a ridiculously awful lot to put on a 13 year old boy, Harry... But look, you’ve got me now.” Hermione gave Harry a wan little smile. “I’ll help you cross that bridge when we get to it, alright?!”

“Yeah... right then.” Harry sighed, then he grinned at Hermione and kissed her. “Thank you Mrs Potter. I’m still getting used to having a real family.”

Harry lay down the documents he had been reading on the table of #12’s library so that he could embrace Hermione properly. Hermione put down the texts she had been perusing and the pair of young wizards began to slowly sink to the library’s sofa as they lost themselves in a passionate kiss...

~00o~

The car ride back to #4 Privet Dr from King's Cross with Aunt Petunia and Dudley had been a silent one. Petunia and Dudley were both subdued and shamefaced. Petunia kept her tearing eyes firmly on the road and avoided Harry’s perplexed gaze. But Dudley’s apologetic eyes kept darting back to find Harry’s. Harry felt extremely awkward, and Hermione tightened her furry tail (still wrapped in the invisibility cloak) around Harry to comfort him.

Harry and Petunia had spoken briefly at the station when Harry had introduced them to Hermione, but not since then.

“I’m sorry, but it'll only be for a week alright. I’m not going anywhere without Hermione... And... and I can pay if you...”

Petunia stopped Harry right there, her eyes widening and filling with tears.

“NO! I... that’s absolutely not necessary Harry. It is awkward and unexpected, but I... well... I owe
you so much--and my... sister so much--already. I’m s... sorry, SO sorry about Vernon... and... and for ev... everything horrible I’ve ever done to you Harry.” Petunia gave a sob and dabbed her eyes with a tissue as several emotions crossed her features and she recalled how she had almost hit him on the head with a skillet the previous summer. “Lily and I... we never got on, and I hate m... m... magic, but... but I never should have taken it out on you. You and Hermione are welcome to stay...”

Then Petunia pursed her quavering lips and went silent. Dudley’s large round face turned red and his eyes cast down as he mumbled and stuttered an apology of his own. Harry didn’t know what to say; his stomach clenched. He opened his mouth but nothing emerged, so he simply nodded his acceptance.

Harry unloaded his and Hermione’s trunks from the boot of the car when they arrived at #4 Privet Dr. He was startled when Dudley even offered to help.

“I’m sorry Harry... if I’d known that you were bringing a friend to stay, I would have redone the guest bedroom,” Petunia said with a hint of sharpness as they crossed the threshold. She felt dreadful about things, but years of dislike didn’t change overnight, and the lack of notice was upsetting.

“No, I’m sorry...” began Hermione.

Harry interrupted her. He had been dreading this moment. He knew that Petunia wouldn’t understand, most adults wouldn’t, but he also knew that he wasn’t going to allow Hermione to be separated from him.

“Hermione’s not just a friend, she can stay in my room with me. She’s my wife.”

Petunia gasped, and Dudley dropped the bag of groceries which they’d picked up at Tesco on the way home, breaking all of the eggs and a jar of spaghetti sauce. Hermione looked at Harry in surprise. She had thought that they were going to hide it.

“Even... even in the wizard world I know that’s ridiculous,” Petunia huffed crossly, “Children don’t get married...”

“It’s the truth,” Harry said firmly and calmly, despite the anxiety he felt. “Dumbledore emancipated me in the wizard world so that I could defend myself without getting in trouble. And he emancipated Hermione so that she could protect herself too, because of this...”

Hermione’s fluffy ginger cat tail came into view as Harry gently unwrapped the invisibility cloak. Petunia felt faint, and put her hand against the wall for support. Dudley just stood there gaping, and reached a hand behind himself to touch his own backside.

Harry regarded Petunia with beseeching eyes. He needed her to accept this.

“Look, we’ll only be here for a week alright. Please... we won’t be any trouble, and I promise we won’t snog in front of the neighbours. But I love Hermione... and... and that’s final. I wouldn’t be here to put you out at all, but Dumbledore...”

“I know...” Petunia nodded curtly, then her expression softened and her lips trembled again, “I know why you’re here Harry. Though Lily and I never saw eye to eye... she was still my sister, my blood. Yes, you can still call #4 your home. Just please... please be careful--the neighbours...”

~00o~

Dudley didn’t have a gang anymore. His friends’ parents had all forbidden them from hanging out with The Pervert’s son. He was still quite round, but he had lost a lot of weight since Harry had seen
him last, and instead of being boisterous and belligerent, Dudley had become much politer and quieter.

At first Harry simply felt relieved, but after two days, Harry almost began to feel sorry for Dudley--despite the fact that it had been one of his kicks which had cracked one of Harry’s ribs when they had both been 7, and despite the fact that it was he and his gang who had given Harry several of his scars during their Harry Hunts.

Dudley wouldn’t leave his room for anything. He even had to be coaxed from his room at meal times. And instead of hearing the sound of Dudley’s wargames emanating through his door, his Xbox and television remained silent; all that could be heard were some occasional sobs and sniffles.

The pall over #4 was unbearable, and Harry had to do something about it. Hermione wanted to help too, but Harry knew she would just frighten Dudley even more. Harry knocked on Dudley’s door before pushing it open. Dudley cowered on his bed, terrified that a newly emancipated Harry would turn him into a pig completely. Harry sighed and closed the door behind him.

“Look, Dudley...”

“Please... d... d... don’t hurt me!” Dudley moaned.

Harry grit his teeth and almost rolled his eyes. The worst he’d ever intentionally done to Dudley in retaliation for all the abuse was insult him--and Dudley certainly hadn’t come to any harm when he’d fallen into the snake exhibit at the zoo. But then Harry remembered that he’d come in to offer a pax.

“I’m NOT going to hurt you Dudley... even though you deserve a good thumping.” Harry glowered at him, then his features softened. “Look... I...” Harry swallowed, “Hermione reckons you didn’t know any better because Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia spoiled you and egged you on when you and your gang were beating up on me.”

Dudley flinched and whimpered at being reminded of his behaviour. He wondered if some of the pictures of a battered Harry that the newspapers said his father had emailed to his creepy friends had been taken after Dudley and his friends had issued a beating upon him. Dudley understood now, that what he himself had done to Harry could have landed him in prison too had he been older and he’d been caught by the authorities.

“Anyway, I’ve come to say that I want to put it all behind us if... if you’re willing to be... alright?”

Dudley’s red swollen eyes widened and his jaw dropped. This was unexpected. He couldn’t think what to say. Dudley knew he didn’t deserve forgiveness, but Harry was offering it regardless.

“R... r... really?” Dudley stuttered “You mean it?”

Harry nodded. He didn’t say anything because he wasn’t sure if he could actually sound like he meant it at all. He reached out his hand. Dudley stared at it for several moments... Then he put forth his own sweaty hand and clasped Harry’s, shaking it.

“I... I’d like that,” said Dudley with a tearful smile.

An hour later he was showing Harry and Hermione how to shoot zombies on his Xbox.
Hedwig hooted happily when Harry let her out of the cage and opened his window for her. Hermione leaned against Harry with her arms and fluffy tail curled around him as they watched Hedwig soar into the night sky, silhouetted briefly against the full moon. Harry felt Hermione’s lips press against his cheek. He turned his face and gazed soulfully into her golden-brown eyes.

Harry returned Hermione’s kisses, and they became increasingly heated. His hands slipped under Hermione’s woolly jumper and cupped her breasts, giving them a gentle squeeze and feeling her hardening nipples pressing into his palms through the fabric of her shirt. They broke apart and Harry grinned as Hermione wriggled out of her jeans and panties and pulled her sweater and tee-shirt over her head.

Hermione stood there completely naked; her furry tail danced in the moonlight streaming into Harry’s bedroom and her furry ears flicked as she purred in excitement and began to kiss him again. Without another thought, a delighted Harry swept a giggling Hermione off her feet and carried her to his tiny little bed before hurriedly tugging off his own clothes.

He had never imagined that he might ever have a girl in his bed at #4 Privet Dr, and the unbelievable fact that it was Hermione and that she was actually his wife, had Harry more erect than he could have ever thought possible. He pushed apart Hermione’s legs and began kissing the inside of her thighs as he clambered onto the squeaking bed.

Harry’s kisses gradually moved up and his tongue darted out, leaving a wet trail up her inner thighs as he closed in on Hermione’s labia. The sensation between her legs was driving Hermione crazy already and her purring became more rapid. She felt herself dampening even before Harry’s tongue entered her.

Hermione meowed and wrapped her thighs around Harry’s head as he nibbled and licked her clitoris. Harry was glad that he had remembered to cast a muffliato spell around his room. Then Harry began to slather his tongue across her bare pubic mound. Hermione’s abdomen rippled as he licked his way up to her belly button. His fingers tweaked her smallest pair of nipples as his tongue pushed into the indentation. Then he sucked each nipple before moving up to the next pair on her belly.

Little shocks of pleasure surged from every place Harry’s tongue and fingers touched Hermione and her mews grew louder as she ran her fingers through Harry’s thick, messy black hair. She felt his hands cup her lower pair of breasts and his lips encircle each nipple and give them a suck. Finally he reached her first pair of breasts and gently squeezed them, tenderly biting those nipples. Harry took his time on them.

He felt Hermione’s humid slit growing wetter as she ground herself against his bare stomach, and knew she was almost ready. He looked up at her face and saw Hermione biting her lower lip, her eyes closed as she moaned loudly and her ears flattened. Unable to hold back any longer himself, Harry reached his hands under her bum and entered her, his erection filling her completely in one go. Harry began kissing her face and his own teeth replaced Hermione’s on her bottom lip as he began to thrust his penis inside of her hard and fast.

Hermione’s tail curled around Harry’s buttocks and pulled him in deeper. She was beginning to lose it and wave after wave of pleasure coursed through her body. She exploded into bliss with a loud yowl. The contractions around Harry’s shaft were too much for him to hold off and he groaned as he stiffened and burst, filling Hermione with semen.
Sparks of magic flew everywhere, knocking over his lamp, blasting books and Dudley’s old toys off shelves. Harry collapsed on top of Hermione, panting rapidly, feeling her breasts and nipples pressed into his sweaty torso as his penis jerked several more times, releasing more of his seed inside her with every twitch.

After several minutes on top of Hermione, Harry was still too dazed to notice that she was rolling him onto his back. Moments later, through blurry eyes, Harry saw Hermione’s bushy ginger tail whipping back and forth and her dripping vulva hovering above his face; her knees on either side of his head. He gasped when he felt her lips wrap around his softening penis and he stiffened again instantly. He peered down between her thighs at her bouncing breasts as her chin bobbed up and down the shaft of his erection.

Hermione’s rough cat tongue wrapped around his penis as she sucked. Harry couldn’t take it any more and he erupted again, squirting load after load into Hermione’s throat as she swallowed. After swallowing as much as she could, Hermione backed off, gasping for breath as Harry continued to ejaculate onto her face and hair.

When Harry’s penis finished convulsing, Hermione climbed off the bed. The young couple looked at each other and burst out laughing. Harry’s catgirl wife had his semen dripping in rivulets from her face, and his own face had few splodges on it too which had seeped from her labia.

There was a loud cracking sound and the naked pair of teenagers covered in bodily fluids both shrieked.

Hermione leapt onto the bed with Harry, her fur all on end.

“DOBBY!!! What the Bloody Hell are YOU doing here?” yelled Harry, mortified as he vainly tried to pull a bit of cover over himself and Hermione.

Dobby’s large round eyes grew even bigger, bulging out of his head. He clasped both hands over his mouth in horror at the scene, realising that he had just intruded on an intimate moment. Without another word he immediately slammed his own head into the floor before Harry and Hermione could stop him.

~o0o~

Minister Umbridge was infuriated, but what else was new!? She was often infuriated these days. The Headmaster of Hogwarts had categorically refused to allow Dementors to search Hogwarts for Sirius Black. She had approached the school’s Board of Governors, but with Lucius in Azkaban, she had nobody to bully them into forcing Dumbledore out of his post, nor even to accede to her wishes to place Dementors on the premises.

Nobody particularly liked the new minister. She didn’t have enough political clout yet, and there were not enough Slytherins on the board to overrule the others. Dolores Umbridge would need another plan to get a foot in the door at Hogwarts. She took out a self-inking quill, and began to scribble a memo to Ludo Bagman and Bartemius Crouch Sr.

~o0o~

Harry gave no more thought to his or Hermione’s nakedness, though Hermione huddled on the bed pulling the covers up around herself while Harry tried to hold the struggling House-Elf still.

“Dobby, stop squirming. I FORBID you to punish yourself alright!”
Dobby halted his outburst immediately, though tears continued to flow from House-Elf’s doleful eyes.

“Dobby is very sorry Sir,” the wretched creature squeaked. “Dobby should have asked Harry Potter first before entering. It will never happen again Sir. I promises.”

“Right. Good then! You do that in the future,” Harry sighed, wondering if this was going to be a frequent occurrence. “Anyway, why are you here Dobby? Another bloody warning?”

Dobby looked away sheepishly, then cast his eyes down.

“Y... yes,” he stammered in a very small voice. “Dobby heard things at a meeting of the Order at Hogwarts last night...”

“The Order? What’s that?” Harry recalled Sirius, Professor Lupin, and Arthur Weasley mention it briefly at the end of the Easter Holidays, but he had no idea what it was.

“It... it is a secret organisation Harry Potter sir: The Order of the Phoenix. They fought the Dark Wizard in the last wizard war. They is saying Harry Potter is in danger sir.”

Harry rolled his eyes. When wasn’t he in danger? It seemed that even the allegedly safest place in the Wizard World was a dangerous place for Harry. There was no place he could go to escape Voldemort completely it seemed. Harry was a Danger Magnet, and there really wasn’t anything he could do about it until the Dark Wizard was utterly destroyed.

Voldemort would apparently hunt Harry down to the ends of the earth if he had to, and Harry knew that one day he would either have to kill him or die trying. And that thought sat like a rock in the bottom of his stomach. Killing was not something he ever wanted to do, but it looked like eventually he would probably have to.

“It is the Headmaster sir. He is saying that the new Minister for Magic is determined to get into Hogwarts. Sirius Black doesn’t want Harry Potter to go back, but the Headmaster insists that you are still safest there sir. The others also agree with the Headmaster. But Dobby agrees with Harry Potter’s godfather.”

Harry sighed again as Hermione shivered in fright on his bed, her furry tail quivering anxiously.

“Look Dobby, Voldemort is going to come after me wherever I am, no matter where I go. And I need to learn how to do magic properly if I’m going to face him sooner or later. And the only place I know to do that is at Hogwarts. Besides, honestly, I’d rather not be by myself when he comes looking for me again. At least at Hogwarts there are teachers who will help me.”

Harry was much more certain about that last bit now than he had been, since Professor Snape had begun to treat him better and had helped him get rid of his curse scar. He had to admit that he had been starting to wonder a bit about the safety of Hogwarts himself up until that point.
Chapter 32

The rest of the week passed by quickly, and much more cheerfully after Harry had made friends with Dudley. Though Dudley was despondent on the day that Harry and Hermione took the Knight Bus to London, Petunia breathed a sigh of relief when the garish Purple Triple-Decker careened wildly out of sight.

Diagon Alley seemed darker and more subdued than the young witch and wizard recalled. Conversations were hushed, and people’s eyes darted furtively about, as if expecting to be accosted at any moment. Harry and Hermione’s breath froze in the air. At the end of the street they saw two Aurors accompanied by their patronuses and a hovering Dementor.

Quickly, Harry and Hermione departed, and took the Floo from the Leaky Cauldron to their new home at Number 12 Grimmauld Place. They were surprised to find it looking bright and cheerful, and doubly astonished to find a hot feast awaiting for them which looked as if it had arrived fresh from Hogwarts’ kitchens. But as far as Harry knew, Kreacher had been sent to work at Hogwarts by Sirius at the end of Easter, so he doubted it was his doing.

“Dobby!” Harry grinned when he spotted the contrite looking House-Elf peeking out from behind a cupboard. “Thank you. You didn’t have to go to all this trouble. Really!”

“But Harry Potter and his new wife is needing a House-Elf sir. Sirius Black’s House-Elf now works at Hogwarts, but I is wanting to work for Harry Potter sir!” pleaded Dobby.

Harry glanced at Hermione, whose ears twitched expectantly. He wasn’t sure what the right thing to do was, but he knew he didn’t want a slave.

“Only... only if I can pay you. Is that alright Dobby?” asked Harry. The tip of Hermione’s tail flicked happily and she kissed Harry on the cheek. Dobby squeaked ecstatically.

“Yes Master Harry Potter sir! Dobby accepts Harry Potter’s gracious offer. Master Harry Potter can pays Dobby what Dobby gets from Hogwarts sir. I is already telling the Headmaster I is applying for this position Master Harry Potter sir...”

“Just call me Harry, Dobby... please. Just Harry...”

“Yes, Master Harry sir...” responded the delighted House-Elf.

Harry rolled his eyes and sighed; Hermione giggled.

~o0o~

Fortunately, the spell-damage to Number 12’s library was minimal. But in any case, Harry and Hermione were getting quite good at performing reparo spells as their sexual exploits were magically explosive with great frequency. They tidied up the law books, and then Hermione’s tail bobbed gleefully when she opened the letter which an owl had just pushed through the letter slot.

“Harry, it’s Parvati, she says the Quidditch Cup is on August 22nd. They’ve got a campsite reserved already. She’s sent us the particulars so we can reserve a spot too.”

“Excellent!” said Harry, grinning from ear to ear. “We’ll go a day or two early so that we can explore the area a bit, shall we?”
Hermione replied first with a kiss on the lips, before returning the grin.

“That sounds lovely Harry... Oh, and Harry?”

“Yes?”

“Happy Birthday!” Hermione planted another kiss on Harry’s lips and dragged him into the kitchen...

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The scene at the campground couldn’t have been more different than Diagon Alley. The International Quidditch Association had threatened to pull out of Britain if the Ministry employed Dementors as security. Consequently, the wizards who had already set up camp were in a jubilant mood and the atmosphere was festive.

Hermione put the pair of omnioculars Harry had just bought for her in her handbag and looked up with a start when she heard someone squeal her name.

“Hermione, I’m so glad you’re here already.” Parvati pounced on Hermione and embraced her tightly. Parvati’s sleek black cat tail whipped out and yanked a bemused Harry into the hug too. Parvati gave them both a kiss on the cheek. “I’m very happy to see you too Harry.”

“Likewise,” said Harry, shooting her a grin and blushing. “Is Luna here yet?”

“Her father is dropping her off at my family’s tent tonight.” Then Parvati frowned slightly. “Mum and Dad decided to come too. I suppose they didn’t trust Padma, and Luna and me all by ourselves.”

Hermione giggled and her bushy ginger tail waved in mirth, her eyes following the annoyed wags of Parvati’s own satiny black cat tail.

“I should think not!” Hermione chortled. “Don’t worry about it though. You can come to our tent for dinner tonight if you'd like--bring Luna after she settles in.”

Harry and the trio of girls with furry cat tails and ears didn’t look out of place at all that evening as they made their way through the campground. Besides the haggling Goblin vendors, the sexy French witches wearing fake bunny ears and cottontails and very little else, the Jester flying upside down on a broomstick, and a rowdy group of drunk Leprechauns, everyone’s attention was on the aurors chasing around a naked elderly man who was muttering something about liking a, “nice ‘ealthy breeze around me privates.” The girls burst into giggles as the old wizard ran by them followed by a heavily out-of-breath auror whose name-badge read ‘Dawlish.’

Luna and Parvati gasped when they stepped into Harry and Hermione’s tent. It looked like the interior of a penthouse suite of a 5 star hotel inside. There was even a fountain in the foyer.

“I know...” said Harry, his cheeks flushing. He wasn’t used to such opulence. “It’s my godfather’s. He left it to me... not sure why really. He could probably do with this himself right now...”

The Patil’s had given Parvati a curfew, so she and Luna couldn’t stay too late; but they stayed for dinner. Dobby had outdone himself with a fantastic shepherd’s pie and the quartet finished the evening with a bit of snuggling and cocoa before saying goodnight.

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Ronald Weasley had apparently discovered that girls were more interesting since Harry had seen him
last. He and the twins looked like they were about to leap from the balcony into the troupe of sultry cheerleaders for the Bulgarian team which they were ogling. But then the Bulgarian seeker made a dramatic entrance on his broom, and Ron lost all interest in the girls. It took Arthur Weasley several moments though, before he could distract Fred and George long enough to notice Viktor Krum.

“They’re Veela, boys. Their magic makes it almost impossible for males to ignore them... But be very careful if you try to date one. You do NOT want to make them angry...” Arthur was telling the twins.

Harry wasn’t having any problem ignoring the Veela at all. It was true that they were quite lovely to look at, and they didn’t have very many clothes on, but they had nothing on Hermione. She could be wearing dirty jeans and a grubby sweatshirt and still put the lot of them to shame, Harry thought as he nuzzled her neck and inhaled her fragrance. Hermione giggled; Harry’s lips were tickling her.

Luna and Parvati’s lips were similarly engaged in the seats next to them, their black and white cat tails entwined and arms around each other. Mr Patil nodded and winked at Harry when he caught his eye before leaning over to whisper in his daughter’s ear. Parvati came up for air and blushed. She and Luna hadn’t intended to put on quite such a show.

With all of the distractions, nobody noticed a House-Elf apparently sitting all by herself in the stands behind them.

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After the match, Ron glowered jealously when Harry handed over Ten Galleons to the Weasley twins. Harry had lost his bet with them. Shockingly, they had correctly predicted that Ireland would win, but that the Bulgarian Seeker would catch the snitch. That had seemed like such an outlandish prediction Harry had felt quite safe taking it.

The Weasleys, Seamus, Luna and the Patils joined with the Potters in a big bonfire celebration outside of Harry’s tent. Parents pretended to look the other way as a little flask of Firewhiskey was surreptitiously passed among the joyful teens.

Harry was happy to see that Ron seemed completely cheerful for once... gushing endlessly about Viktor Krum’s prowess. At least he was until Ginny teased him about being in love with the youngest professional seeker in Quidditch history. Ron stormed off into the Weasley’s tent which was just the other side of the pathway. Seamus looked torn between wanting to celebrate some more with the rest of them, and going after Ron. Seamus made his decision and grabbed his butterbeer before following Ron into the tent.

It was well after midnight when Harry and Hermione finally entered their own tent and climbed into bed together in a euphoric haze, leaving a trail of clothing from the front door to the bed.

Harry’s rapid breathing quickened even more when Hermione ducked her bushy head down between his naked thighs and wrapped her soft lips around his erection. He felt her gently nibble the tip with her feline teeth, and then felt her cat-tongue swirling around it. Harry moaned in pleasure and stroked Hermione’s furry ears as her mouth worked on his penis. As he began to succumb to the sensations, Harry grasped Hermione’s head a bit tighter and thrust himself in a bit deeper.

Hermione felt Harry stiffen and she began to swallow as his sticky fluid squirted into her throat.

There was a loud boom and the whole tent shook--a wall erupted into flame. Hermione’s mouth opened to scream, releasing Harry’s still ejaculating penis. The conflagration tore through the tent as Harry dragged Hermione out of the front door. This was a very bad time to be naked.
Wizards and witches in pyjamas and nighties were running and screaming as a group of about thirty wizards wearing hoods and masks shot curses from their wands at the tents of known muggleborns and half-bloods. Several of the hooded figures were holding a screaming young woman down and tearing at her clothes. Harry’s blood boiled and he was thankful to feel a wand pressed into his hand. Harry remembered a spell from Snape’s potion book which he hadn’t asked about yet. All he knew was that it was for enemies.

“Sectumsempra,” Harry yelled, waving his wand at the man between the witch’s bare thighs. A spray of blood burst from the masked wizard’s torso; he screamed in pain and collapsed. The other two dark wizards aimed curses back at Harry but they missed by a wide margin. Hermione began shooting hexes back at them when Dobby passed her own wand to her, and the masked wizards fled.

Harry spotted someone not wearing a mask standing resolutely nearby. The man pointed his wand at the sky and an ominous green cloud took shape in the form of a skull with a serpent in its mouth above the decimated campsite before he disapparated. A cold silence fell. Harry knew that they were surrounded by Dementors and Aurors now.

The fur on Hermione’s tail was all on end and she was trembling, vainly trying to cover her nakedness with her hands. Dirt and soot clung to Harry’s stickiness on her face and hair. This was much more humiliating than being spied on by Dobby. Harry couldn’t think of any spells to make clothes. Then without even thinking at all, he waved his wand at a partially charred blanket nearby and it flew into his shaking hands. He covered Hermione with the blanket and re-aimed his wand at the Aurors who hadn’t put theirs down yet.


“But who cast the Dark Mark then?” inquired a brusque man with slick black hair and a toothbrush moustache.

“Over here, Crouch... Someone’s dropped a wand.”

“I’LL take that Amos,” Arthur Weasley said. “That’s my son Ron’s wand. He must have dropped it, and whoever cast the Dark Mark must have used it before throwing it away again.”
Chapter 33

The Patil’s tent was undamaged, and they had kindly found some clothes for Hermione and Harry to wear while Arthur Weasley conferred soberly with Mr and Mrs Patil and a grizzled Auror with numerous scars and a false eye. Harry interrupted them when he and Hermione were all cleaned up and ready to go.

“Thanks for the clothes Mr and Mrs Patil, and thank you Mr Weasley. I don’t know what would have happened if you hadn’t showed up. Hermione and I could’ve been arrested...”

“No thanks necessary Harry,” Mr Weasley responded with a concerned expression. “Thank YOU! Thank you both for your courage. Not many grownups would have stayed around to fight in your... erm... condition.” Mr Weasley looked briefly embarrassed for the young couple. “A very grateful young woman is unharmed thanks to you two.”

Harry fidgeted. He was very happy that he and Hermione had saved the girl from a gang rape—or worse—but he still felt terrible about using such a gory spell. The dark wizard had survived thankfully, so at least Harry didn’t have that on his conscience. Mr Patil could see the guilt in Harry’s eyes and was moved to reassure him.

“I don’t know how you managed that spell Harry; it was very advanced for an improvised curse. Many adult wizards couldn’t have managed it. But be very glad that you did. Death Eaters won’t be slowed down by a few jinxes or minor hexes...”

“He’s right Potter,” growled the intimidating auror with a mangled face, his glass eye spinning wildly. “That was an impressive bit of magic--and being who you are, you’ll need it.”

“Harry, this is Alastor Moody,” said Mr Weasley. “He’s very close to the... er, he’s a friend of mine and Dumbledore’s, and your father knew him very well.”

“Erm... th... thanks,” Harry stammered anxiously and Hermione put her arm around him. He shook Moody’s hand, “Nice to meet you sir.”

“I expect I’ll be seeing you again soon, Potter. Stay sharp,” said Moody. Hermione’s nervous twitching tail caught Moody’s eye, “And look after this one. She’ll be in as much danger as you now...” Moody looked meaningfully at Mr Patil. “And that goes for your girl and the Lovegood girl too. Constant Vigilance!” he concluded with a bark.

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Several days later, following the debacle at the World Cup, it was time to return to Hogwarts. Harry and Hermione squeezed past the other students in the narrow corridors of the Hogwarts Express, looking for an empty compartment. The passage was suddenly blocked by Draco, flanked by his gorilla shaped mates, Crabbe and Goyle. Harry angrily made for his wand and pushed Hermione behind himself.

“Watch it Potter!” Draco spat. “Your half-breed pussy is on a very short list...”

“You might want to be careful how you talk to Potter, Draco...” said a cool voice from behind Malfoy, startling everyone before Harry had a chance to retort. Draco whirled around to face the tall dark complexioned boy speaking. Malfoy’s eyebrows shot up in surprise.

“What do you mean by this Blaise? I thought we were friends. You’re not turning into a Blood
Traitor are you?” Draco sneered.

Blaise Zabini smirked at Draco’s consternation.

“You should know better than that, Draco. I’m just pointing out that it was Potter who put Nott’s father in St Mungo’s—probably until Christmas.”

The blood drained from Draco’s already pale face as he turned back towards Harry and Hermione. He looked terrified. Goyle and Crabbe had already backed up several steps at the news, their own faces etched with fear. Then Draco and his bodyguards fled down the hallway as Zabini laughed. Zabini gave Harry a sly look.

“I’m not afraid of you, Potter,” he sneered. Then he elbowed the flabbergasted Harry in the stomach and pushed past him down the corridor in the opposite direction.

Hermione gripped Harry’s arm tightly as they continued on their own way, her bushy tail angrily wagging. They both nearly jumped out of their skins when a compartment door suddenly opened with a clatter as they walked by.

“Ronald!” Hermione declared vehemently, her furry tail bristling. “What do YOU want?”

Harry just stared coldly at the youngest Weasley boy.

“I... I wanted to apologise t’you for being such a git last year,” Ron mumbled. “I... I want to be friends again. I’m really sorry!”

Harry relaxed visibly, but Hermione still clutched Harry’s arm with a firm grip, her bristling tail still wagging. She scowled at Ron, then after a moment her features softened.

“We’ll see Ronald. I’m still cross, but if you behave, Harry and I might like that...” She glanced at Harry and he nodded with a little smile.

“What Hermione said,” Harry asserted. “If you’re nice to her, I’d like to be friends again too.”

Ron beamed happily.

“Th... thanks you two. I swear, I won’t be mean to you anymore, Hermione.” Then Ron’s ears turned pink and he turned to sit back down with Seamus and Dean.

Harry and Hermione continued down the hallway when they heard a girl’s voice calling Harry’s name. It was another Weasley with a face as red as her hair, and tears streaming down her cheeks. Hermione looked distraught.

“What’s the matter, Ginny?” she asked, her voice filled with concern. She didn’t know the younger girl very well, as she had only seen her at mealtimes and occasionally in the Common Room during second year until the World Cup.

“I... I’m s... sorry about the snake,” Ginny sobbed. “I g... got Harry in trouble last year when everyone thought he was the... the Heir of Slytherin.”

Harry’s heart nearly broke to see the little girl crying so hard and without thinking, he hugged Ginny.

“It wasn’t your fault, Ginny,” he said. “Nobody blamed you--at least not Hermione or me.”

Hermione put her arms around the sobbing girl too, and the three of them entered the last empty compartment.
“Harry’s right, Ginny. We all know it was Voldemort and that horrible Mr Malfoy who did it to you.”

“Is that why you avoided us the rest of the year?” asked Harry as they all sat down together. “You thought we blamed you?”

Ginny nodded and hiccuped as she sniffled.

“I... I thought you’d hate me forever. And I couldn’t bear it. And... and I was jealous of you being with Hermione,” she admitted ruefully, turning her face away, mumbling, “I’m sorry. I know you’re married now--b...but I thought you should know.”

Hermione hugged the younger girl and kissed her on the cheek, her own eyes tearing slightly.

“It’s alright Ginny. Harry’s very nice; I don’t blame you for liking him. Thanks for being honest.”

Harry blushed furiously as the two girls both looked at him with adoration in their eyes. They were jarred out of the moment by a timid knock on the door. Harry let Neville into the compartment. Neville peered anxiously at everyone.

“Is it alright if I sit with you? It’s just...everywhere else is full--nobody will let me in.”

Harry’s face darkened. Neville glumly turned to leave as he thought about throwing himself under the wheels of the train.

“Neville, wait, where are you going?” asked Harry, bewildered.

“You don’t want me here either,” said Neville sadly.

“What?” Harry suddenly realised that his expression must have given Neville the wrong idea. He forced his face into a smile which looked more like a grimace. “No! That’s not true... not true at all! You’re welcome to join us--please! I... I’m just upset FOR you, that’s all--Really!”

“Are... are you sure?” Neville pleaded, hardly daring to hope.

“Yes he is!” Ginny said fiercely. “We ALL are. Come and sit next to me, Neville.”

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The mangy looking rodent scurried along the overgrown pathway through the abandoned graveyard and up the hill to the equally decrepit manor, keeping a sharp eye out for hawks and cats. It appeared uninhabited, but appearances could be deceiving. He darted into the broken letter-slot and morphed into an equally mangy looking human. He stumped up the stairs and ignored the enormous snake curled up at the top.

“Where have you been, Wormtail?” queried a high cold voice. “What took you so long?”

“I... I’m sorry my Lord,” groveled the Rat. “But I have good news--he will be here soon. Your most loyal supporter. I found him at the World Cup, my Lord.”

“Good, good... then it can be done as I had hoped. How soon? I need him at Hogwarts when term starts.”

“Tomorrow morning.” Wormtail breathed a sigh of relief. He would not be tortured for any mistakes today.
The freezing silence in the air at Hogsmeade Station told Harry and Hermione that Dementors were very near. They settled apprehensively into one of the horseless carriages with Neville and Ginny. As the cart slowly made its way up the road to the castle a gale came up and clouds covered the face of the moon. An icy rain began to fall and Harry beckoned Hermione closer to him under his own cloak so she could keep her tail covered a bit too. But by the time they got to the castle, everyone was soaked through anyway.

Harry and Hermione were alarmed to be pulled aside by Professor McGonagall the moment they arrived, but she quickly put their minds to rest after casting a quick drying charm over them.

“Well, Mr and Mrs Potter...” Professor McGonagall almost smirked, “It appears that you two have managed to find a legal way to remain in your private lodgings together for the rest of your schooling here at Hogwarts. I would have mentioned it before you left for the summer, but sometimes even a Professor can let things get away from her...”

Then Minerva’s face went red, surprising the two young wizards, who had never seen her look so embarrassed, and after a pause she continued.

“And as Professor Lupin reminded me a few weeks ago, my own experiences as a cat animagus may perhaps give me some insights which could prove useful, should you ever have any intimate ‘feline’ issues you wish to discuss, Mrs Potter. I must apologise for not offering my counsel from the start...”

“I am not generally disposed to sharing things of a personal nature with my students. And after I had determined that it would be impossible for you to become an animagus yourself to shift completely into one form or another, I gave it no more thought. That was a mistake. Again, I am very sorry dear.”

Hermione felt like hugging Professor McGonagall, but she knew how uncomfortable that would make her, so she squirmed closer to Harry instead.

“Thank you Professor. I... at first I wondered why you didn’t say anything about it, but I didn’t like to ask, because I know how you feel about getting personal with students. I did work out for myself that transfiguration wouldn’t be effective in my case though, because I knew you would have mentioned it if it could be.”

Minerva still looked a bit ashamed of herself.

“Thank you Mr Potter. That’s very kind of you. In any case you two had best hurry along to the Great Hall. The Sorting will begin shortly.”

After the Sorting, everyone dug into the feast. Hermione picked at her food for a bit, before turning
to Harry, her furry ears drooping. She looked troubled.

“Harry, Dobby said that Kreacher had come to work here at Hogwarts. Do you think that house-elves made all of this food?”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up. He hadn’t really thought about it before. But the idea that his dinner had been made by slaves began to make the roast beef and mashed potatoes in his stomach churn.

“I don’t know Hermione... I... I suppose perhaps they do though!”

“They do indeed,” proffered Nearly Headless Nick, who had been eavesdropping silently behind them. “There are well over a hundred of them.”

“But... but Dumbledore pays them right? And surely they get sick leave and paid holidays?” asked Hermione, appalled at the news.

Nick chortled at the hilarious notion of house-elves getting holidays.

“Of course not. They’d be very offended if anyone offered,” the ghost responded with bemusement.

Ron, who had been shoveling food into his face like there would be no tomorrow had heard the conversation from the other side of the table, and he began to guffaw, snorting mashed potato out of his nose. Hermione’s face turned livid, and Ron shut-up quickly, realising that she might not consider his laughter at the plight of house-elves, “good behaviour.” But Fred chuckled, and spoke up.

“They like it Hermione...”

“...they live to serve...” continued George.

“You KNEW!?” gasped Hermione, her furry tail and ears quivering in outrage.

Fred and George looked at each other uncomfortably, not wanting to give up the secret of their successful parties.

“Well... yeah! But...”

Harry could see steam beginning to come out of Hermione’s ears, and he put his hand on hers.

“Hermione, why don’t we ask Dumbledore about it later. I’m not very hungry anymore either, but let’s not spoil everyone else’s dinner, alright.”

“Maybe it should be spoiled,” she muttered angrily, “Slave labour!”

Neither she nor Harry ate another bite. Hermione hadn’t fussed Sirius about Kreacher, because Sirius and Lupin had preferred to do most of the household chores themselves over the Easter holidays. But Hogwarts had over a 100 slaves and that did not sit well with her at all--nor with Harry for that matter.

But after the feast, everything else was put out of their minds. Dumbledore had made his usual speech, but this year he had a bit more to say.

The Great Hall erupted noisily when it was announced that the Triwizard tournament would be occurring this year for the first time since 1792. Harry and Hermione immediately recognised Crouch and Bagman when they brought out a casket containing a rough wooden goblet. They were flanked by two aurors they also remembered from the Quidditch Final.
“It’s Mad-Eye Moody!” said Ron, looking very surprised.

Hermione stiffened, her furry ears twitching and her nostrils flaring. She grabbed Harry’s arm.

“What’s wrong, Hermione?”

“I sense evil. Something’s not right. I’m not certain, but I don’t think that’s Moody, Harry. I need a good whiff to be sure.”

Dawlish and Moody gave Hermione the opportunity for a sniff when they made their way to guard the main entrance of the Great Hall and passed right behind them. As soon as they had gone by, Hermione grabbed Harry’s hand and dragged him up to the Staff Table at a run, much to the shock of Bagman and Crouch who had just been about to go over the rules for entering the tournament.

“Well, to what do we owe the pleasure, Mrs Potter?” asked the headmaster, his eyes twinkling.

“Professor Dumbledore, sir,” began Hermione, her furry tail waving wildly as her breathing became more rapid, “That is NOT Alastor Moody! Harry and I met him at the World Cup and I smelled him. That is somebody completely different—he’s using a polyjuice potion.”

The twinkling in Dumbledore’s eyes vanished. He knew from the previous school-year that Mrs Potter’s feline abilities were indisputable. The two Aurors looked up at the commotion at the Staff Table with some disquiet. Finally, Crouch beckoned them both. Hagrid, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Flitwick joined the two Aurors at the front of the table. Crouch stared inscrutably for a moment at Moody’s spinning glass eye.

“Dawlish, arrest Moody at once. He is an imposter under the influence of a polyjuice potion,” Crouch uttered imperiously.

The False Moody was stunned beyond belief. This was impossible. How could they have discovered him? It was Potter and his wife. Somehow they knew. Desperately, he tried to make a break for it but Hagrid blocked his path and grabbed his arm.

“Yer not goin’ anywhere until yeh explain yerself, ‘Mad Eye,’ ” Hagrid growled.

Dawlish grabbed his other arm. Flitwick and McGonagall both had their wands pointing directly at the fake Moody.

“The Dark Lord WILL have you both...” snarled the Imposter at the two unnerved young wizards who had exposed him, “...you AND your oet halfbreed, Potter!”

“That will be QUITE enough!” Crouch snapped.

The Imposter went silent for a moment, and smirked at Crouch before speaking again...

“Hello father!”

Crouch’s eyes bulged, his face paled and his jaw dropped.

“Take him away... NOW!” Crouch Sr managed to choke out, before his knees collapsed. Professor McGonagall caught him and sat him down gently in one of the staff chairs.

Hagrid and Dawlish carried the hysterically laughing Crouch Jr out of the Great Hall past the incredulous student-body of Hogwarts. Dumbledore’s eyes began to twinkle merrily again as he regarded Hermione and Harry, who were both shocked by the revelation that Moody was actually
none other than the son of the man who had reintroduced the Triwizard Tournament to the modern
Wizarding World.

“Well, Mr and Mrs Potter, yet again you have foiled one of Voldemort’s minions,” said Dumbledore,
raising his bushy white eyebrows. “You appear to be making quite a habit of it.”

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“Are you planning on entering the Triwizard tournament, Harry?” asked Parvati. She and Luna had
accompanied the Potters back to their private chambers after the feast and the subsequent excitement
was over.

“He can’t, even though he is legally of age,” Hermione replied for Harry. “The new rules say that the
participants have to be either at least 16 years old, or in 6th Year or above...”

“Besides which, I’m really not interested,” said Harry firmly. “I don’t care about Fame or ‘Glory.’ ... I’ve
got more than enough of that already, thank you very much--more than I care to have, really. And I don’t
need any money--got plenty of that too. And I don’t know enough spells yet even if I wanted to enter.”

“But I expect you would still win,” Luna said, her fluffy white tail flicking dreamily. “You can do
stronger magic than a lot of grownup wizards Harry. And you're very brave. Most of the grownups
at the World Cup were running away from the Death Eaters instead of fighting them while naked.”

Hermione began purring with pride in her hero, and she almost squeed in delight when Harry
responded to Luna.

“Well, Hermione could win too then. Because she fought them beside me--and she’s brilliant!”

Hermione rubbed her cheek against Harry’s, purring loudly, and kissed him on the lips as Parvati and
Luna giggled. But even over the purring, Harry’s stomach could be heard grumbling. Hermione
stopped purring and looked concerned. Luna and Parvati raised their eyebrows questioningly,
wondering how anybody could still be hungry after the feast. Hermione’s cheeks reddened.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” said Hermione. Then she explained it to Luna and Parvati, “He stopped eating
dinner because I got upset and stopped eating mine when I found out that house-elves do all of the
work at Hogwarts and don’t get paid.”

“It wasn’t just because of you, Hermione. Don’t blame yourself...” Harry interjected, “It made me
feel sick too. I know what it’s like to be treated like a house-elf--like a slave.”

Hermione gave Harry a sad little kiss on his cheek, and wrapped her bushy tail comfortingly around
him. Parvati’s sleek black tail wilted a bit in shame. She had never thought of house-elves as slaves
before. Luna curled her own fluffy tail around her girlfriend.

“It’s alright Parvati. Most wizards don’t know that thousands of years ago European wizards
enslaved house-elves after defeating them in a long war. It’s not in most history books. I only know
because Daddy did a lot of research for an article about the cruelty of wizards towards other magical
creatures once.”

Hermione’s furry ears perked up. Because they had all become such close friends she hadn’t said
anything before about how silly she thought the Quibbler was when she’d found out that Luna’s
father published it. Perhaps the Quibbler wasn’t as ridiculous as she had thought.

“Luna, can I contact your father? I want to find out more about it and do something. It’s not fair how
house-elves are treated.”

Luna looked thrilled to be asked. Her fluffy white tail whisked happily and she began purring. She had sensed that Hermione didn’t like the Quibbler, because Hermione wasn’t very good at hiding her feelings. She was usually quite blunt in fact—much like Luna herself.

“Absolutely Hermione. Maybe we should start an organisation to help them.”

“I’ve already been thinking of that,” Hermione said excitedly. “We can call it the Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare.”

Parvati giggled.

“Hermione, that would be a horrible acronym: S.P.E.W. I think we should try and work on that.”

Hermione looked pensive for a moment before chuckling herself.

“You’re right Parvati. That wouldn’t really be very conducive to eliciting sympathy for house-elves would it!!?”

Hermione was so delighted to have found so much support that she gave her husband and best friends all a big kiss on the lips. There was a lot of purring, arching and head-butting, and cheerful tail-waving, and the kisses became more heated. Hermione was the first one to pull off her school blazer, and she was snogging Luna thoroughly when she put her hands up under Luna’s blazer to squeeze her little breasts.

Harry grinned when Parvati pushed him gently back on the settee and began to undo his tie, her satiny black cat-tail dancing happily. But then he thought they really all needed a bit more room. The three teenage cat-witches and Harry eagerly shoved the little coffee table out of the way and fell in a heap on the rug.

Items of clothing began to fly out of the scrum, and soon they were all naked. Harry was stroking Parvati and Hermione’s tails as they both kissed each other vigorously. Luna waved her own tail at Harry and he began to stroke hers as Parvati and Hermione were now both entwined around each other.

The next thing he saw was Parvati’s head nestled between Hermione’s thighs, and Hermione’s between Parvati’s as they both began to hungrily lick each other’s slits and caress each other’s breasts. Luna grinned and wiggled her own bottom in Harry’s face. He pushed apart her cheeks and inserted his tongue into Luna’s vulva as she wrapped her lips around his erection.

Luna’s furless slit tasted very nice. Harry nibbled and flicked the hard little nubbin poking from its hiding place with his tongue, eliciting a throaty moan from her. Luna’s fluffy white tail whipped around wildly when he thrust two of his fingers deep inside of her, her excitement beginning to boil over. Harry was very close himself, and Luna sucked harder on his penis.

Harry heard Hermione lose herself to Parvati and yowl in ecstasy. That was enough to finish him and he exploded into Luna’s expectant throat. He unloaded volley after volley of his stickiness into Luna’s tummy before she released him wetly from her mouth as she meowed and climaxed herself, squirting her own fluids onto Harry’s tongue and face.

Harry was so elated that he was still as hard as a rock. He pushed apart Hermione’s thighs and thrust his penis inside her heated entrance which was still flexing from Parvati’s ministrations. Harry pistoned into her burning sheath, her labia clinging to his shaft. Luna sucked and teased Hermione’s nipples; Parvati passionately kissed Hermione, their tongues dancing. Hermione began to lose herself
to all the attention being showered upon her by Harry and their two best friends, spinning into a
delirium. ... Waves of bliss shuddered through her and she climaxed again and again. Her contracting
inner-muscles clenched tightly around Harry's thrusting lance as her pelvis bucked, giving him access
to her innermost regions--she heard him gasp, then felt his convulsions as he flooded her interior with
his essence.

The foursome collapsed and passed out together in a sweaty, sticky pile on the sitting room rug. Half
an hour later they all came to and began again, squealing and meowing loudly in rapturous glee.
Hermione enervated Harry’s testicles with her wand so that he would have enough to go around.

It was very late that first rainy night back at Hogwarts when two very satisfied and very semen filled
young cat-witches stealthily crept back to their respective dormitories.
Before the end of the previous term, Second Years had been required to choose at least two electives for the Third Year from a number of options: Arithmancy, Muggle Studies, Divination, Study of Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures. There were other, even more specialised electives available too, like Alchemy, Wizard Law, and Healing, but those were only for 5th years and above.

Hermione had wanted to take all of the third year and up electives, but Harry had pointed out that there just weren’t enough hours in the day. Hermione had then excitedly discovered in a book about uncommon magical artifacts that the Ministry had a collection of Time-Turners. There had been a bit of arguing about that, before Hermione had reluctantly conceded that even with Time-Turners, she would never be able to get enough sleep to keep on track in all of the classes.

Not to mention that Harry had thought he would have quidditch practice to contend with, and he was determined to stick with Hermione in all of their classes. They had eventually compromised on taking three of the classes instead of two or five. Which had then left the question of which three to take for Harry and Hermione to argue about.

Choosing Care of Magical Creatures to support Hagrid’s newfound status as a professor had been easy enough. Hermione was keen to take Muggle Studies to get a wizard’s perspective, but had conceded that it was a rather unnecessary course for a pair of wizards who had both grown up only knowing the muggle world (though Hermione had pointed out that Harry’s experiences as a muggle had been sadly lacking most of the good bits).

When they had discussed Ancient Runes, Harry decided that it looked much more interesting than he had initially thought it would be. So now it was down to Arithmancy and Divination. Harry thought that Arithmancy looked far out of his league, though Hermione had insisted that it was much more exacting and predictive than a woolly discipline like Divination. But as Harry had agreed to do Runes with her, which he’d thought looked quite difficult, she made a deal with Harry to give Divination a go.

Parvati had chosen Divination and Care of Magical Creatures too, so the three of them made their way up the steep spiral staircase to the top of the tower to the Divination classroom after breakfast.

Purple velvet curtains covered the windows of the stuffy room, which was dimly lit by candles. The air was heavy with a haze of smoke and smelled of a pungent spice which appeared to be coming from sticks of burning incense. Harry began to feel dizzy and plonked himself into the first seat he spotted at a round tea-table. Parvati and Hermione both took seats around the table with him. Seamus, Neville, and Ron picked the table between them and a table at which Lavender and Fay were already sitting.

Ron gave Harry a grin and a thumbs up when he saw him. Harry smiled back, feeling a bit giddy, and thinking things might be starting to look up. A tall thin woman festooned with scarves, beads, necklaces, and charms entered the class. Her round glasses were bigger and thicker than Harry’s, and he thought she rather looked like the “Hippie Freaks” that Uncle Vernon had railed on and on about. But because his Uncle had hated “Hippies,” Harry was certain now that he had chosen a good class.

“Welcome children! My name is Professor Trelawney. How lovely it is to finally meet you in the physical world. In this class you will learn to use your inner-eye to look beyond the mundane illusion of reality to the Great Beyond, and there, together we shall discover the truth of our inner-selves and our futures...”
Hermione’s fluffy tail twitched, and she struggled not to roll her eyes. Parvati looked slightly awed, and her sleek black tail stood at attention. Ron and Seamus began chortling. Harry just tried not to fall asleep before class even got properly underway.

The professor passed around sheets of parchment with an overview of the course on them. The first thing Professor Trelawney touched on was Astrology and she had them all mock up a quick planetary chart based on their birthdays.

“Oh,” Harry heard Lavender say, “My planet is Uranus.”

“Can I see Uranus, Lavender?” Ron sniggered. Seamus guffawed and Professor Trelawney snatched up everybody’s parchments. Her dreamy expression changed and she briefly looked remarkably like Professor McGonagall.

“MOVING on--” she said sharply, “we will begin with the rudiments of reading tea-leaves...”

Everyone had a cup of tea and drank them down until all that was left in their cups were soggy tea-leaves. Parvati, Hermione, and Harry helplessly stared at the bottom of their cups, trying to find some sort of pattern in the sludge until Trelawney came by their table.

The Professor took one look at Harry’s cup and shrieked, waking up the entire class.

“My... my dear boy, I am so sorry, you have the GRIM!”

“The what?” asked Harry, bewildered and suddenly concerned.

“The Grim, dear--a Black Beast from the Underworld which takes the form of a large Canine! It is a Dark Omen of Doom. Death stalks you Mr Potter and I am afraid you are not long for this world...”

Harry’s cheeks burned, and his face darkened in fury. He'd had enough of being singled out by teachers for dubious attention based on his status as the enemy of Voldemort. It was bad enough that he actually had to face death without someone pretending it was some great riddle which could only divined through mystical means.

Harry stood up suddenly and instead of addressing the shocked Professor he turned towards his startled wife.

“Hermione, I reckon you were right. This class looks like rubbish. Let’s go and see if we can still switch to Arithmancy.” He grabbed Hermione’s hand angrily, noisily flung open the hatch-door to the stairs, and together they left the classroom and didn't look back.

Parvati was astonished and angry too. She had thought this class would be fun, but she wasn’t about to stay if the teacher was going to rabbit on about the death of one of her best friends. She glanced around at the rest of the astounded students, then followed after Harry and Hermione without saying a word, her tail wagging in outrage.

Parvati caught up to her friends halfway down the staircase. It was too late to switch to Arithmancy today, the double period would be over in half an hour, and then it would be lunch time. But the three of them decided to ask Professor McGonagall after classes to get them in. Hermione and Parvati both promised to help Harry as much as they could with it, as he had never been very good at maths in primary school.

The three of them decided to go outside onto the grounds for a bit of a walk in the meantime. The crisp, cool drizzle cleared the incense induced fog from their brains and they all felt much better when they returned to the Great Hall for lunch. They were all startled when a young female Auror-
in-training with neon pink hair who was guarding the Great Hall with Dawlish spotted Harry and gleefully pulled him aside.

Parvati and Hermione both bristled angrily at the intrusion.

“It’s alright,” whispered the girl to the trio; she barely looked old enough to be out of school. “I’m Sirius’s cousin, Tonks. He asked me to keep an eye on you two especially,” she said to Harry and Hermione.

“Don’t tell Dawlish though. I’ll get in trouble if he thinks I’m working with Sirius too. He’s with the Ministry, not the Order.” Tonks glanced over at Dawlish, who was standing on the opposite side of the Hall. “D’you three mind if I have lunch with you? I can tell Dawlish the headmaster said it’s alright.”

Hermione and Parvati could both sense that Tonks was telling the truth and they relaxed. Though they both appeared a bit cool to Tonks being quite so close to Harry and they each took one of his arms before agreeing. Tonks got the message and she chuckled.

“Don’t worry ladies, I like girls, and Harry’s a bit young for me. I just had my twentieth birthday not too long ago.”

Harry looked relieved, as did Hermione and Parvati. Tonks was really cute, and didn’t really look old enough to be out of school yet—much less an Auror-in-training—but Harry wasn’t sure if he was ready to be chased by an older woman. She was a lot of fun though, and the three of them found a dry spot near the quidditch pitch to eat lunch and chat.

“Harry,” said Tonks after hastily swallowing her last bite of food, “Sirius told me something interesting about you...”

Harry raised his eyebrows, and Tonks continued excitedly.

“’e said you told him about how your Aunt would always try to cut your hair and it would always grow back by the next mornin’...” Harry nodded, his own mouth still full of ham sandwich, and Tonks went on.

“You see my pink hair. That’s not dye. I can do the same thing as you, Harry, but I can control it. I’m what people call a Metamorphmagus. How’d’you like it if I told you that you could grow a cat-tail too whenever you wanted to?”

Harry’s jaw dropped and the piece of sandwich fell out of his mouth. Hermione spewed tea from hers and Parvati looked stunned; both of their tails quivered in wonderment.

Harry was so thrilled at the idea of being able to alter his appearance at will, that he was distracted throughout their entire first Care of Magical Creatures lesson with Hagrid. He managed to introduce himself to the Hippogriff well enough, but even a half-eagle, half-horse couldn’t keep himself from wondering what it would be like to be with Hermione, Luna, and Parvati with his own furry tail and ears, and he began to get really excited at the thought.

Tonks had said it would be a lot of work, but she reckoned that Harry could learn to do it quite well by Christmas. Harry was glad now that he didn’t have quidditch to contend with. With the extra classes, and learning how to become a Metamorphmagus, he would be kept very busy.
Chapter 36

Professor Lupin greeted the students warmly with a quiet voice, and everyone settled down as the first lesson of the third year’s Defence Against the Dark Arts class began.

“This year, we will start with things you would normally not be taught until 6th Year. But after the debacle at the World Cup this summer, the School Board of Governors has determined that all students should be made aware of the dangers they could be facing in coming months. What I am about to teach you, is how to respond to illegal curses...”

Hermione raised her hand. Professor Lupin smiled.

“Yes Mrs Potter?”

“Aren’t all curses illegal?”

“Not all curses are automatically illegal in and of themselves Mrs Potter. The intent with which they are used is always taken into consideration. Context is everything. Any curse used for self-defence is generally considered appropriate by the Ministry. But having said that, there are three which are considered Unforgivable, and there are a number of other curses which are legally in the same class as the Unforgivables--such as the Immolation Curse, which causes people to spontaneously combust.”

A collective gasp of horror emanated from most of the class at the notion that anybody might use such a horrible spell. Only the Slytherins in the class seemed unmoved.

“What makes Unforgivables distinct, is that they have the greatest potential for misuse, permanent injury, and death. Therefore, the Unforgivables are considered illegal under nearly all circumstances-though allowances are still made for the heat of battle in self-defence. Can anyone tell me which the three major Unforgivables are?”

Hermione had her hand up again and her bushy tail waved eagerly. Professor Lupin gave her another smile. But Neville’s hand had also shot up, and he looked very troubled, so Professor Lupin gave him the first crack at the question.

“I... I know one is... is the Cruciatus Curse,” Neville stammered.

Professor Lupin’s smile vanished. He had known Neville’s parents quite well, and he understood why Neville would be focused on that particular curse.

“Correct Mr Longbottom. The Cruciatus Curse is also known as the Torture Curse. Five points to Gryffindor.”

Everyone was surprised to see that Ron Weasley had his hand up too. So Professor Lupin gave him the next one.

“Er... I think one is the Imperio Curse Professor,” Ron mumbled.

“Almost correct Mr Weasley. It’s actually called the Imperius Curse. That curse has given the Ministry a lot of trouble...”

The Professor finally allowed Hermione to answer the last one. Hermione looked at Harry and her eyes filled with tears.
“Avada Kedavra...” Hermione answered in a small voice.

“Correct Mrs Potter. The Killing Curse is indeed also known by its incantation. It is a very dangerous spell which takes a very powerful bit of magic to make it work. Only one person is known to have survived it...”

Harry squirmed uncomfortably in his seat and Professor Lupin’s eyes caught his, with a look of silent commiseration. The rest of the class was spent explaining the curses in greater detail, and how to defend against them.

The students filed out of the lesson in a somber mood when class was finished. Hermione curled her fluffy tail around Harry as they made their way to the courtyard; Harry felt like he needed some space and air. But his plans for a bit of peace and quiet were dashed when Hermione shrieked and pushed him face first into the mud. She fell beside him, and a pillar crumbled from a hex which had been shot at Harry’s back and missed its mark.

Harry clambered back to his feet angrily with his wand out to face Malfoy and his henchmen. But before he could retaliate, Draco Malfoy morphed into a lizard before his eyes. Crabbe and Goyle ran for it. Before Draco could scurry off, a cage appeared from nowhere and trapped him.

Harry and Hermione didn’t have to wonder for long who had intervened. Tonks ran up to the muddy young wizards.

“Oi, you two alright? That little bastard tried to hex you from behind. ‘e must be a Slytherin.”

“Yeah,” groaned Harry, “That’s Draco Malfoy...”

“Right then. Well I’m taking the little bugger to Professor Dumbledore straight away.” Tonks peered at Hermione admiringly.

“Good show Hermione. You saved Harry from quite a nasty looking hex--it might have even been a curse. It looked dangerous enough to be one.”

Harry took his muddy wife in his own soiled arms and embraced her, giving her a kiss as Tonks strode back up to the castle with the caged reptile.

“Thanks Hermione!”

“Well... I guess it’s back to the castle then,” Hermione sighed. “We’re filthy.”

Returning to their private quarters, the pair stripped off their dirty clothes, threw them into a hamper, then stepped into the shower together. As the steam rose up, Harry began to squeeze the mud from Hermione’s tail and she began to purr.

Hot water cascaded down between Hermione’s legs, and Harry’s hands followed as they rubbed the dirt from her abdomen. Her nipples hardened and her clitoris poked from its hiding place. Harry’s fingers found it, and began to massage it tenderly. Hermione pressed her thighs together trapping Harry’s hand, moaning, while he continued to rub her nubbin and kiss her neck.

Harry’s penis sprang to attention, and he pressed Hermione softly against the tiles of the shower, parting her legs with a knee. He placed a hand under each bottom cheek and lifted her. Hermione gasped and meowed when Harry entered her. The hot spray of water streamed from the two young couple, and they began to lose themselves to the passion.

Harry vigorously and rhythmically thrust into Hermione’s depths, pressing her against the wall of the
shower, her bedraggled tail wrapping around his backside. Harry had Hermione completely lifted off the floor and she curled her legs around his thighs as he continued to drive his lance into her slick sheath, her labia clinging to his shaft.

The spray of water felt like a thousand pricks of soft needles against their skin, and tingles of pleasure turned into a surge of ecstasy which filled them both. Harry and Hermione melted together under the stream of water and she meowed loudly and her sopping tail twirled as they both climaxed hard. Sparks of magic flew and ricocheted from the tiles as pulsing jets of Harry’s semen filled Hermione’s womb.

Panting heavily, the pair slipped to floor of the shower gently as the water continued to fall.

A few moments later, Harry’s tumescence was full again and he entered Hermione from behind, pressing her breasts into the water puddling on the hard tiles of the shower floor. His turgid penis plunged between her soft slippery bottom cheeks again and again until they both burst into oblivion and he released his essence inside her once more.

Neither of them noticed the ghostly head of a girl which merged back into the wall.
Chapter 37

After their shower together, Harry and Hermione dressed and went to look for Parvati so that they could all switch from Divination to Arithmancy. They found her in the Gryffindor common room and the three of them made their way to Professor McGonagall’s office.

“I was hoping to see you two...” said Professor McGonagall, then she raised her eyebrows in surprise. “Oh, Miss Patil, hello. I can’t say I was expecting to see you as well.”

“Hello Professor...” Parvati smiled anxiously, and her tail twitched nervously. Hermione jumped in to save her.

“We all came because we want to switch from Divination to Arithmancy,” Hermione stated quickly, “We’ve decided its silly and...”

McGonagall held up her hand and Hermione stopped talking immediately.

“Let me guess,” she sighed, “Professor Trelawney predicted that Mr Potter would die a gruesome and horrible death!”

“How did you know?” Hermione gasped.

“Professor Trelawney is very fond of making dubious death ‘prophecies.’” McGonagall snorted, uncharacteristically displaying disdain for a colleague. “It does not surprise me that she chose Mr Potter as her foil this year. I cannot say that I myself place much faith in Divination, but I prefer not to cast aspersions... Suffice it to say that I give all three of you permission to switch to Professor Vector’s class.”

“Hang on!” said Harry, “Why were you hoping to see Hermione and me?”

“Because I have a stack of letters from Mrs Potter’s parents which they had sent here over the summer. Mr Filch brought them to me an hour ago. Apparently they didn't know how to reach you.”

Professor McGonagall arched an eyebrow questioningly. Parvati turned to look at Hermione, and Hermione flushed crimson in embarrassment, but there was a flash of anger in her eyes.

“I don’t want them!” Hermione said stiffly, her ginger tail wagging crossly.

But Harry put out his hand to take them, and Hermione gave him a quick glare, before her expression turned to guilt. Harry put his arm around her.

“It’s alright Hermione. We’ll look at them together okay!?” he said gently. Hermione didn’t respond, her eyes cast down, then she nodded.

With their new class schedules, and the stack of letters, Harry and Hermione made their way back to their quarters. Parvati had wanted to follow to make sure that Hermione would be alright, but Harry shook his head. He knew that this was hard enough for his wife.

“I’ll send Dobby to find you if I need you, alright Parvati!?”

Parvati nodded, her furry ears and tail wilting slightly, then she turned around and went to look for Luna.

Tears rolled down Hermione’s cheeks as she read the letters. They were all written by her mum,
begging her to come home, and wondering why she hadn’t written since. Unfortunately, Hermione’s father was as adamant as ever in his refusal to have her back unless she had the surgery and left Hogwarts. But Mrs Granger grew more and more desperate to see her daughter with each letter.

The last one, written just before the end of summer wrenched a huge sob from Hermione, and her furry ears drooped miserably. Harry had his arm around her, and he squeezed closer to peer at the letter, which was covered in Mrs Granger’s splotchy tear stains.

Dear Hermione,

I miss you so much. I’m so sorry about your father’s recalcitrance. I wish he wasn’t so bullheaded. While I agree with his concerns about you not fitting in, in our world, I would much rather have you just as you are than not at all. I love you very much, and I just want to see you again and make sure you’re alright. And I hope Harry is looking after you. It was very cruel of me to have suggested for you to stop being his friend.

Please write back. I’d like to come and see you--without your father. I’ll come to Hogwarts if I have to.

I love you
Mum

Harry held his wife as she wrapped her arms around him and sobbed into his chest. He kissed her head, and gently stroked her bushy hair and furry ears

“You have to write back, Hermione. Your mum needs to know... she needs to know that you’re alright—that we’re married. And... and I think we should invite her to visit.”

Hermione nodded, and after a few minutes her crying ebbed. She released Harry and wiped her tears. Picking up a quill and a bit of parchment, she began to write.

Dear Mum,

I’m sorry I haven’t written back. I was just so angry I couldn’t bear to. It wasn’t just that you and Daddy didn’t want me as I am now, or that you wanted to pull me out of Hogwarts. That was awful enough. It was also because Harry is my best friend. And you know I’ve never really had any friends before.

I’ve made a few others since, but at the time Harry was the only person that I knew well who had accepted me without reserve, and you had asked me to give up his friendship--after you found out how cruelly his Uncle had treated him. That just finished me.

I love Harry very, VERY much. I know this will sound mad to you--and you probably shouldn’t tell Daddy yet--but Harry and I got married last Easter. We’re allowed, because we’ve been emancipated for reasons best explained in person.

I do miss you too--and Daddy as well. But given his obstinence, I agree that it’s best for you to come and visit us at Hogwarts. I’m certain the Headmaster won’t mind if you come up this weekend. I’d suggest meeting in the village nearby; it’s very lovely. But for other reasons best explained in person, it’s probably better that we meet at school. I’m sure that Professor Dumbledore will fix things so that you will be able to find the castle.

Send the owl back with your reply straightaway, so that we can book you a ticket for the train as soon as possible.
A few stray tears glistened in Hermione’s lashes as she put the letter in an envelope and sealed it. But she felt a bit better now. She picked up her quill again, and another piece of parchment, and penned a letter to Mr Lovegood. Once finished, she and Harry left their chambers and made their way to the owlery.

~o0o~

Harry had been right. Arithmancy was extremely difficult. And it didn’t help that Professor Vector was extremely strict--making Professor McGonagall appear cuddly in comparison. But she wasn’t harassing Harry about his imminent death, nor going out of her way to torment him as Professor Snape had for a year and a half, so he supposed that was something.

Harry and Hermione ate lunch in the Great Hall with the rest of the students as it was pouring again outside. The billowing clouds in the enchanted ceiling lit up with flashes of lightning. Harry made to wave at Tonks who was guarding the entrance with Dawlish, but Hermione pushed his hand down and Tonks just winked.

“We have to be careful Harry,” Hermione whispered. “We can’t give Auror Dawlish the impression that she’s more than just keeping an eye on things. He might get suspicious and report her to the Ministry.”

“Oh, yeah! I suppose you’re right, Hermione. That’s a shame. I wouldn’t have minded having lunch with her again.”

Hermione grinned, and her tail waved merrily.

“She is adorable isn’t she! But she only likes girls and she’s a bit too old for you...”

Harry chortled in response.

“No, Hermione! She’s a laugh and a half--all those faces she can make--and I can’t wait to start practicing to be a metamorphmagus. But yeah... I suppose she is rather cute--definitely!”

Hermione giggled and ruffled Harry’s hair. Then she whispered in his ear.

“Well maybe in a year or two, and after you’ve got good enough at being a metamorphmagus, you can turn into a girl and we’ll all have a bit of fun together.”

Harry turned scarlet and shoved a spoonful of mashed potato into his mouth so he didn’t have to respond. But he had to admit, the idea was turning him on.

~o0o~

Care of Magical Creatures was a disaster. There was no help for it. They had to attend, even in the stormy weather, and the students all got drenched. But that wasn’t the worst of it. Hagrid had some rather ugly looking little creatures which looked like a cross between a crab and a scorpion without shells. Apparently they were just hatchlings, but that didn’t stop them from being rather painful to work with.

The males had stingers, and the females had suckers with prickles, and they would occasionally emit hot sparks. But the lesson wasn’t all bad. Several females managed to latch themselves onto Malfoy’s face and he had to be sent up to the hospital wing after Hagrid removed them.
Most of the class, even his fellow Slytherins, had a jolly good laugh when they saw Draco’s face emblazoned with blistering hickeys. And even Hermione’s tail twitched in mirth as she smirked. The creatures were too small to have done any real harm—and she thought he rather deserved it for trying to attack them both the previous day.

~00o~

A very wet and cross Hedwig dropped a soggy envelope in Hermione’s soup at dinner before giving Harry a peck for allowing Hermione to send her off with an urgent request to bring the reply back as quick as she could despite the ugly weather conditions. Harry apologised and gave her a dinner roll. Hedwig huffed a bit before finally accepting and flying off to the owlery to groom herself and get some sleep.

After dinner Harry and Hermione retired early to their quarters. Thankfully, Mrs Granger had used a waterproof ink in her return letter, and when it was dry, the young wizard couple read it hopefully.

Dear Hermione,

I’m thrilled that you finally replied. And even though I can’t pretend that I’m not shocked that you’re married now—at your age—I couldn’t be happier that you’ve found someone as kind as Harry to be with. I hope he’ll always treat you kindly. And I do hope wizards have good contraceptives.

I’m much too young to be a grandmother, and it’s really not a good idea to have children while you’re still in school yourselves. You’re right. I’ll have to keep this from your father for now. But I don’t know how long I can manage to keep quiet. I’m waiting for him to realise that his daughter is more important than our practice, and I’m hopeful he’ll come round soon.

In the meantime, I’m delighted to come and see you this weekend, and meet your husband properly. I never got a chance to say hello to Harry that day in the bookshop when your friend Ron’s father got into the fight with that horrid man. I told your father that I’m coming to Scotland to see your Auntie Joanne for a few days.

Which is half-true actually. She’s just had a little boy, but she’s all alone at the moment and without a job. So she could do with a bit of support. I’ll be staying with her and helping her settle into her new flat. I can’t wait to see you.

I love you
Mum

Hermione was so overwhelmed with emotion that she began crying, and even Harry couldn’t stop tears leaking from the corners of his eyes. He squeezed her tightly and gave her lots of kisses all over her happy, tear-streaked face.
The week flew by. Advanced Potions with Snape was progressing well, and Harry was picking up the basics of standard mathematics at least well enough to start following Arithmancy. Professor Vector was being as patient as possible with Harry after Hermione had asked Professor McGonagall to explain the situation to her.

Friday evening, Harry and Hermione met her mother at Hogsmeade train station, accompanied by Auror-in-training Tonks, whose hair was glowing violet that night. Harry had only ever seen Hermione’s mother once, at Flourish and Blotts, the day that Lucius Malfoy had surreptitiously given Ginny Weasley Tom Riddle’s diary. But he knew something was wrong the moment he saw her face.

Mrs Granger had a lot of makeup caked under one eye. Hermione didn’t notice at first because she had been so thrilled to see her mother again that she had nearly flattened her with one of her patented hugs. Hermione and her mother both wept happily to see each other again. When she released her mother, Hermione finally spotted the cosmetic covered bruise.

“Mum, what happened to your face?” she asked with concern.

“Oh, er... nothing dear. I... er... I just ran into a doorframe while I was rushing to pack.”

Harry could tell right away that Mrs Granger was lying. His stomach lurched. But Hermione just accepted her mother at her word, so he didn’t say anything. He felt awkward enough as it was when Hermione introduced them to each other.

“Mum, this is Harry--I don’t think you really got to meet him properly at Diagon Alley... What with all the fuss with Mr Malfoy...”

“So this is my son-in-law!” More tears filled Mrs Granger’s eyes, and Harry wished there was a hole to hide in. But she was beaming through the tears and she pulled him into a hug, causing him to flinch. “I’m so glad you were there for my Hermione, Harry. I’m so happy that she found someone who could love her for who she is...” she sobbed.

“It... it’s nice to meet you Mrs Granger!” Harry managed to croak.

“And it’s so lovely to really meet you finally Harry. I’m sorry for everything my husband and I put you two through. It must have been so hard for you.”

“I... it’s alright now. I’d do anything for Hermione. I... I just don’t want to see anyone hurting her...” Harry squeaked, not really knowing what else to say. He wished he’d thought of something better to say instead, though, because that just set Mrs Granger to sobbing again.

But after a few minutes Hermione’s mother calmed down and Tonks looked around nervously.

“Oi, er... sorry to interrupt, but we should get back to the castle soon.”

Harry let Hermione do most of the chatting as the horseless carriage trundled up the road to Hogwarts. The evening was crisp and clear and iced over puddles cracked under the wheels of the cart. But Harry began to feel warmer just to see Hermione looking so much happier in her mum’s embrace and he began to relax.

The Great Hall full of students was a bit overwhelming for Mrs Granger. Professor Dumbledore and
Professor McGonagall introduced themselves, and invited all of them to sit at the staff table for dinner. Madam Pomfrey pulled Mrs Granger aside after being introduced and spoke to her quietly.

“I’m so glad you’ve come Mrs Granger. I know your daughter has missed you terribly, but you have a wonderful son-in-law. He’s the best you could have ever hoped for...”

Harry’s face turned beet red and he looked around wildly for an escape route. But Hermione had her arms and fluffy tail wrapped tightly around him, her face shining with joy. Then Poppy stiffened when she noticed the ill-concealed bruising and puffiness under Mrs Granger’s eye.

“My goodness dear. How on earth...? You simply must come to the Hospital Wing and let me look at that...”

Mrs Granger winced.

“Oh... er, it's nothing really. I just bonked it on a doorframe while packing.”

“Nonsense dear! I can have that fixed up and you’ll be right as rain by the morning. No, as school nurse I must insist. Dinner won’t be for another half hour... Come along now.”

Harry and Hermione followed as Madam Pomfrey led an extremely anxious Mrs Granger up to the infirmary. Poppy glanced back at the pair, looking uncomfortable herself.

“It’s alright you two. I’ve got this... Why don’t you run along now and get ready for dinner?”

Harry waited for Madam Pomfrey to turn the corner and then addressed Hermione quietly.

“Hermione, I think something’s wrong with your mum, and I think Madam Pomfrey does too.”

Hermione gasped.

“Harry, what...?”

“I... I can’t say. Here, I’ve got my invisibility cloak with me... Let’s find out!”

Harry flung his cloak over the both of them and they silently crept behind Madam Pomfrey and Hermione’s mother to the hospital wing. They crouched behind one of the beds as they listened.

“Mrs Granger, dear...” said Pomfrey, giving her a friendly, warm smile.

“It’s Jean. Please, you can call me Jean...” said Mrs Granger desperately.

“Alright, dear--call me Poppy then. Here, let me have a look at that...”

Jean Granger gave a little moan of pain as Poppy wiped off the makeup under her eye.

“Look, Jean, I know that’s not a doorframe. There’s two bruises and a fracture here,” Poppy said firmly. “Why don’t you tell me what really happened?”

There was an uncomfortable silence.

“Please,” Jean let out a sob, “you mustn’t tell Hermione. She’d never forgive him...”

Hermione stiffened. Harry knew what was coming next, and quickly put his hand over Hermione’s mouth to stifle a squeal.
“Richard, my husband,” Jean sobbed again, “I’ve never... I’ve been with him over eighteen years and...and I’ve never known him to be a violent man. I don’t know what came over him.” Mrs Granger began weeping in earnest as she continued.

“Yesterday he found the letter Hermione sent me earlier this week. He found out that Hermione was married and had a fit... I tried to calm him down--tried to tell him that it was alright, that Harry was a good boy--not dangerous--and that he’d been looking after her. But he began raving like a madman.”

“I shouted at him, called him heartless for casting aspersions on an abused child who our daughter loved dearly, and... and that’s when he struck me. He screamed at me--told me I was a fool for giving Hermione my blessing. Then he... then he hit me again and I collapsed. He stormed out of the house. I packed an extra suitcase and left before he could come back and hit me some more.”

“I’ll be alright though. I’ll be staying with my sister Joanne here in Scotland to give him time to calm down. Then... then I’m sure he’ll come around... eventually...”

Mrs Granger began sobbing uncontrollably. Poppy just held her silently and let her cry.

Hermione’s tears flowed over Harry’s hands, which still covered her mouth, as she wept too. It was unimaginable. Her father had only once ever given her a swat on her behind. And that was just to stop her from running after a squirrel which had darted into traffic when she was four. She couldn’t believe that he’d ever do anything so horrible to Mum.

Hermione began to feel awful, that she was to blame for taking that stupid polyjuice potion. She had caused her father to strike her mother. How could her mother love her still after all this? It was all Hermione’s fault. She knew it and began to hate herself for it.

Harry felt it. He could feel Hermione blaming herself and he had to stop it before it went too far. He knew what it was like to feel like everything was his fault, and he never wanted Hermione to ever feel that way.

“Hermione,” he whispered, “Let’s go before they find us.”

But it was too late. Poppy’s sharp ears caught the whisper, and the rustle of clothing as Harry and Hermione began to creep back out of the hospital wing. She waved her wand and the door slammed shut, trapping the pair in the ward.

“It’s alright you two,” Madam Pomfrey said gently, “I know you’re under Harry’s invisibility cloak. I’ve always known when he’s been here under it... Come on out.”

Jean looked horrified when her weeping daughter and Harry emerged from seemingly a curtain of air. Hermione ran to her mother and embraced her.

“MUM! It’s all my fault... I’m s...s...sorry! I shouldn’t have taken that stupid potion!” Hermione howled.

“NO! You must never think that darling... never! You’re not to blame. It was never your fault...”

“It was nobody’s fault but your father’s dear,” said Madam Pomfrey consolingly. “You must believe that! Both of you! The only person to blame is the person who struck your mum, Hermione... You must believe me and your mother. You didn’t make your father hit your mother. He lost control of himself because he couldn’t control you... or control your mother. That’s what made him angry enough to become violent.”

Hearing Madam Pomfrey say her first name stopped Hermione’s sobbing and she listened.
attentively, crying silently instead. Her bushy tail drooped sadly to the floor. Harry stroked Hermione’s bushy hair and peered into her teary eyes.

“Madam Pomfrey’s right, Hermione. I know what it’s like to feel like it’s your fault when someone hits you. But it’s not true. It’s never true unless you hit someone first. Please... you have to believe Madam Pomfrey. It’s not your fault that your dad hit your mum. And it’s not your mum’s fault either...”

Mrs Granger caught Harry’s glistening green eyes, and she saw the truth. She understood deeply why her daughter loved Harry Potter now.

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They never did go back to the Great Hall for dinner. Madam Pomfrey gave them all a calming draught, and the four of them had dinner in her quarters instead. Then she insisted that Mrs Granger should spend the night with her while her eye healed.

Madam Pomfrey handed several more vials of the potion to Harry and suggested that he have Parvati or Luna spend the night with them to keep Hermione company.
Luna and Parvati spent the night with Harry and Hermione. They were outraged that Hermione’s father had hit her mother and both reassured her that it wasn’t her fault at all.

“My father didn’t hit me or my mum just because I turned into a cat too, Hermione,” said Parvati. “And honestly, I expected him to be a bit angry, because I knew what I was doing. You didn’t.”

“Nor mine. Daddy encourages experimentation,” Luna murmured, her big round eyes even wider than usual and full of concern.

“But... but it wasn’t just that,” Hermione replied with a sob, “I got married without his permission. And...and I disobeyed him--I didn’t come home and have the surgery done.”

“That’s still no reason for him to hit your mum, Hermione,” Parvati pointed out fairly. “You disobeying him didn’t cause that.”

“And you shouldn’t have needed his permission to get married to someone you love, Hermione,” chimed in Luna. “You’re emancipated--legally an adult. You can do what you like.”

“And NOBODY should be forced to get hacked up by butchers...” Parvati vehemently interjected, her sleek black tail whipping back and forth angrily.

It took a long while, but it finally sank into Hermione’s brain that she wasn’t to blame for her father’s violent outburst towards her mother. But the feeling that it might be still ached in her gut.

“I understand that, Hermione,” Harry gazed soulfully into her golden-brown eyes, “I still feel like that a lot about what Uncle Vernon did to me too. But I know it’s not true in my head. You just have to try and remember that when you feel bad. And I’ll help you. We’ll get through this together.”

Harry took his wife in his arms again and gave her a deep kiss. Luna made everyone some cocoa, and the rest of the evening Harry and the other two young cat-witches cuddled Hermione and stroked her until she began purring contentedly and fell asleep.

Jean Granger was feeling much better the next morning. She was stunned to see that the bruising and swelling had vanished, leaving only a hint of redness. Her orbital bone still felt a bit sore, but most of the pain was gone, and Poppy Pomfrey had reassured her that the soreness would be gone completely in a few days.

Jean was also surprised to find that the calming draughts and pain potions which Poppy had given her had left her with no groggy after-effects, nor a craving for more--despite the extremely pleasant buzzy sensations they had given her last night. She wondered if the potions could be replicated without magic. It would be wonderful if she could introduce her own patients to the drugs available in the wizard world. She suspected they would significantly reduce the narcotic dependency some of her patients experienced.

Harry and Hermione gave Mrs Granger the Grand Tour of Hogwarts after breakfast. The tour stalled a bit when Jean engaged in an erudite conversation with a portrait of Paracelsus. Even Hermione grew a bit impatient, but her mum seemed so much happier now, that she didn’t have the heart to interrupt. She and Harry slipped into the empty classroom near the portrait and snogged for a bit until Mrs Granger was ready to move on.

They demonstrated some of their spells for Hermione’s mother too. She was particularly impressed
with the transfigurations and their patronuses, and was beginning to understand how crucial it was for children with magical abilities to receive a solid education, despite the potential risks a magical academy like Hogwarts presented.

Without it, accidental magic could have done much worse damage to their family--they could all be dead. And she really began to accept that as things stood, it was her husband’s fears and attitudes which had caused most of the strife leading to the current dysfunction.

Jean Granger had gone along with her husband at first in part due to her own fears, but she hadn’t really wanted to pull Hermione out of Hogwarts herself. It was Richard Granger's anger which had frightened her most. She had never seen that side of him before. She had been afraid of Richard’s newfound rage at least as much as she had been of the magic. But there was no question in her mind now that Hogwarts was an absolute necessity.

It had been stupid really, to think that Hermione should have been pulled out of Hogwarts. Jean could see that there were any number of reforms which might improve things at the school, but the same could be said for many non-magical educational institutions. She was hardly in a position from which to cast stones at Hogwarts.

The three of them took a picnic lunch as it was a clear day. The sun sparkled on the rippling surface of the lake, and the branches of the willow they were sitting under swayed in the Autumn breeze. A pair of swans and their cygnets floated by in single file.

Hermione got Harry to open up a bit about how it was that he had ended up with the Dursleys, and Jean was horrified for him.

“I’m so sorry about your parents, Harry. So this... this Voldemort character, is he dead then?”

Harry and Hermione looked uncomfortably at each other, they didn’t want to overly frighten her mother now that she was more understanding of why they had to be at Hogwarts.

“Erm... not quite Mum!” Hermione responded carefully. “It seems that he’s hanging on somehow, and looking for a way to come back from his current state of being. You remember Ginny Weasley and Lucius Malfoy don’t you.”

Mrs Granger nodded and smiled fondly as she recalled the little red-haired girl. She had liked the Weasleys and had been very distressed when things had gone to hell in that bookstore. She remembered Lucius Malfoy as the man who had looked like he belonged in a Nazi SS uniform and shuddered. Hermione continued.

“Well, Mr Malfoy secretly slipped Voldemort’s diary into Ginny’s cauldron at the shop. It seems that the diary was something which housed a bit of Voldemort’s soul. He tried to possess Ginny Weasley... and... and in the end we had to kill the diary to save her. But Professor Dumbledore thinks that there are more of those things.”

“In first year, one of our teachers was possessed by Voldemort proper, but he escaped when Harry stopped him from coming all the way back to life then. Nobody knows where he is right now, but... but there’s no question that he’s trying to come back, and that he’ll try to go after Harry again.”

Jean was alarmed that her son-in-law was a marked man. But she could see the bravery, kindness, and determination in Harry’s eyes, and her heart went out to him. She understood that all people--muggles and wizards alike--were at risk if Voldemort returned fully to the land of the living, and a motherly feeling towards Harry welled up inside her as Hermione went on.
“And then Mr Malfoy was stupid enough to try and attack Harry here at Hogwarts in front of the Minister of Magic. Anyway, that’s why Harry was emancipated—so he could protect himself outside of school without legal repercussions for doing underage magic. And Dumbledore got me emancipated too, for more or less the same reasons, as ‘halfbreeds’ like me are considered second-class citizens, or even just filthy creatures to be tormented and abused, by many wizards.”

“Well, that seems quite sensible under the circumstances then,” Mrs Granger sighed, “Goodness knows, given your father’s reaction, and I’m sorry to say my own initial reaction, you would run into even more trouble in our world and be forced to use magic often. And... and I can understand now why you two felt it necessary to elope. You both must have felt quite alone, together against the world...”

Harry and Hermione both blushed furiously. They had both felt that they only had each other as family—together against the world. And their faces felt even hotter when Hermione’s mother continued.

“...and I–I understand about the sexual aspect of your relationship. Poppy explained to me that Hermione goes into heat once a month instead of having a period. I’m just glad my Hermione found a nice boy like you, Harry...”

After lunch, Harry and Hermione introduced Mrs Granger to their best friends, Parvati and Luna. Jean was astonished that they had intentionally replicated Hermione’s potions accident and turned themselves into catgirls at the end of Second Year. She was shocked and humbled that they would choose to go to such lengths to put themselves at risk of being ostracised by the wizard world to show solidarity with her daughter.

When Ron and the Weasley twins arrived with their broomsticks and quidditch balls, Hermione’s mother greeted them warmly. Mrs Granger hadn’t seen them since that fateful day at Diagon Alley. She remembered Ron fondly as the boy whom Hermione had written to tell her about when he had helped defeat a troll and thrown up slugs to defend her daughter. But Ron struck her as a bit gormless, and lacking in manners, and Jean was extremely pleased that Hermione had chosen a much more suitable companion.

The young trio of cat-witches and Mrs Granger all chatted in the stands while Harry and the Weasley boys played a bit of casual quidditch with Seamus and Dean. Ginny spotted them all at the quidditch pitch, and she dragged Neville over to introduce him to Hermione’s mother.

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Minister Umbridge was often incensed and enraged, but today she was anxious and worried. Arthur Weasley had convinced Ludo Bagman to finally report his underling, Bertha Jorkins, as a missing person. Bertha had last been seen on holiday in Albania, where Voldemort had been rumoured to be hiding.

Minister Umbridge had been hoping that Barty Crouch Jr was just insane when he had stated under the influence of Veritaserum that Voldemort had sent him to infiltrate the Triwizard tournament. But Bertha’s disappearance was another crucial piece of evidence which appeared to confirm his story.

The Minister mulled over what Crouch’s son had told them after he’d been captured at Hogwarts. The Senior Crouch had offered his resignation and sacked his house-elf for their part in the affair, but Umbridge knew that would do her no good, and had left him in charge of the Triwizard Tournament.

Dolores took out a quill and scribbled a memo to Kingsley Shacklebolt. She needed a team of Aurors on this yesterday.
After lunch on Sunday, Harry and Hermione walked her mother into Hogsmeade to the train station. The train to Glasgow where Mrs Granger’s sister had just rented a small flat was leaving at 1:30 pm, and the three of them were accompanied by Auror-in-training Tonks, whose hair was a vivid emerald green today.

The sun beat down upon them, and they were all quite hot and sweaty by the time they got there, as Autumn had turned warm again. There wasn’t a Dementor in sight and Auror-in-training Tonks seemed much more relaxed while the two students dawdled for half an hour with Mrs Granger waiting for the train to arrive.

Tonks made them all giggle by demonstrating some of her favourite faces—including a duck bill and a pig snout. They all burst into gales of laughter when the young Auror-in-training sprouted a long white beard, a bulbous nose, and did an eerily realistic impression of Professor Dumbledore. By the time the train arrived, Jean Granger was in stitches.

Mrs Granger gave Hermione a huge hug, then she embraced Harry warmly and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“Look after Hermione, Harry. I’ll miss you very much too.”

For the first time in his life, Harry didn’t flinch from the touch of an adult, and he wished that Mrs Granger didn’t have to leave so soon. He wondered if this was what having a mother felt like, and it saddened him that her husband had come over all Dursleyish.

“ Bye Mrs Granger. You should come and visit again.”

Mrs Granger wanted to tell Harry to call her Jean, but she suspected that would make him feel uncomfortable. She smiled lovingly at him.

“I will indeed, Harry.” Then Mrs Granger gave Hermione another hug and kissed her good-bye before clambering on the train.

“Bye Mum!” Hermione shouted and she waved madly, her furry tail bouncing, as the train began to chuff and clatter on its way. Harry grinned and waved too as Jean Granger waved back from the window of the carriage. They kept at it until the train rounded the village and passed out of sight beyond the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest.

“ Well, you two...” Tonks began, “It’s too nice to waste the afternoon hangin’ about Hogwarts. Why don’t we have a lark around town for a bit? Seein’ as I’m here with you...”

Tonks had been feeling cooped up at Hogwarts and wanted a bit of fun without Dawlish or any other Aurors around. So she peered hopefully at the two youngsters. Harry grinned and Hermione looked thrilled.

“ Is there a bookshop?” Hermione asked, her bushy tail whisking excitedly. Harry laughed, but in truth, he was very interested in having a look around one too.

“ Oh yeah, Tomes and Scrolls, you’ll love it,” said Tonks. “Let’s stop by Honeyduke’s Ice Cream Kiosk first though. It’s bloomin’ hot out here today.”

The three of them wandered around the village eating their ice creams then washed up in the
bathrooms at the Three Broomsticks before going to the book store. Tonks began reading the comic books near the front of the shop while Hermione dragged Harry back to the history and politics section.

“I got a reply from Mr Lovegood last night, Harry. He sent me his article and recommended some good, but hard to find books on the history of house-elves and wizard laws in relation to other magical beings. Fortunately it looks like they have them in stock.”

“Excellent! Here, bung them in the basket then, Hermione,” said Harry as she pulled from the shelves several of the books which she had already spotted.

While Hermione was busy finding the recommended books, Harry explored a bit more. He found a book on Asian monsters and magical creatures which looked really interesting and had a 17-and-over warning on the cover, and he popped it in the basket. He was browsing through the children’s section, wondering what wizard fairy tales might be like, and The Tales of Beedle the Bard caught his eye. It looked like just what he was looking for and he dropped it in the basket too.

When they were finished, Harry paid for all of the books despite Hermione’s protests that she had some money too. Harry whispered in her furry ear some other ideas for what she might like to spend it on and she blushed. Harry had to let the shopkeeper put his wand on the scale before he could purchase the book on Asian monsters.

"Emancipated at your age!?" muttered the shopkeeper. He shook his head and bagged it with the other books.

They left after the shopkeeper bagged Tonks’s rather large pile of comic books. Harry was surprised to see that most of them were muggle comic books. Tonks’s favourites seemed to be Spiderman, the X-men, and Kick Ass.

“Oh, yeah...” Tonks began to explain, seeing Harry’s puzzled expression, “Muggle comics ‘ave become very popular among wizard kids actually—especially the superhero ones—so you’ll find ‘em in most wizard bookstores nowadays.”

Hermione tried to hide a giggle, but Tonks caught her and laughed.

“You can’t ever be too old for fun, Hermione.”

They passed the headquarters of the Wizarding Wireless Network on the way to Zonko’s joke shop. Tonks went a little bonkers in there, and by the time they left she had a large bag of pranks, toys, and games.

“Don’t you dare tell Filch I’ve got these!” she said with a mock glare, and the two Hogwarts students both chortled at the idea of an Auror-in-training with a bagful of toys forbidden at Hogwarts.

Harry stopped for a browse in the sports-shop, Spintwitches, when Hermione dragged Tonks into a specialty clothing shop called Dezzie’s Delicates. Harry remembered how Ron had been looking longingly at the Omnioculars that Harry and Hermione had at the World Cup, and thought he might like a pair for Christmas.

He had taken his time looking at the Quidditch gear, and when he emerged from the shop with his purchase, Tonks and Hermione were already waiting for him and giggling. Hermione gripped the bag from Dezzie’s Delicates tightly and reddened, her furry tail and ears twitching with embarrassment.

The young witch and wizard and their escort—who-looked-much-more-like-a-student-than-she-
should-have finished the afternoon at Honeyduke’s Sweetshop, and Harry left the shop with a rather
large assortment of goodies to share with Ron, Dean, Neville, and Seamus. They had a bit much to
carry all the way to the castle, so Tonks hired a horse and cart ride to take them back.

Tonks helped Harry and Hermione lug everything to their quarters, and then arranged to begin
training Harry how to use his metamorphmagus abilities on Monday evenings after dinner.

“...but I’m not sure where we should train,” Tonks admitted glumly. “We can’t let anyone from the
Ministry know that I’m doing it. I ‘aven’t even told Dumbledore. Only Sirius knows.”

Hermione looked thoughtful, and then her face brightened.

“I know where we should train,” she said eagerly, “There’s an abandoned classroom on the second
floor that Harry and I found last year.”

“We?” Harry said, his eyebrows raised, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. Hermione flushed,
then she gave him The Look.

“You don’t think I would miss learning something, just because I can’t do it myself, do you?” she
responded a bit haughtily.

Harry turned pink himself and looked chastened.

“No... Of course not! Sorry Hermione, I don’t know what I was thinking. Of course we’re taking all
of our lessons together.” Then Harry addressed Tonks, “You’d better meet us here tomorrow after
dinner. We’ll have to find the room again before we can show you where it is.”

“Right then! Sounds lovely,” said Tonks, grinning. “And speaking of dinner, it looks like I’d better
go get myself cleaned up. We’ve got about half an hour.”

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Harry and Hermione followed the rest of the Gryffindors back to the common room after the feast,
carrying the Honeyduke’s sweet-bag. Harry beckoned Parvati and the Gryffindor third-year boys
over to the table and tipped the bag out. Ron and Seamus’s eyes nearly popped out of their heads at
the sight.

“Wicked!” Ron grinned, “I wondered where you two were. It was just me and Seamus against Fred
and George this afternoon and they murdered us.”

“Thanks Harry,” said Neville as he unwrapped a chocolate frog.

Parvati took a Sugar Mouse and a few Sherbert Lemons. “Ta, Harry!” she said, giving him a kiss on
the cheek.

Dean and Seamus thanked Harry too, and the pile of sweets gradually diminished as they all
cheerfully played a game of Exploding Snap. Harry glanced at Hermione and Parvati who were
giggling and eating a few sweets by the fireplace, their cat tails both flicking merrily. They spotted
Harry looking and both blushed before looking away with huge grins on their faces.

It was almost 10 pm and all that was left on the table was a pile of wrappers. Harry peered around
the Gryffindor common room, but could no longer see Hermione or Parvati. Then he spotted Ginny,
who had kidnapped Neville from the sugar scrum an hour ago. She came up from a snog, leaving a
very dazed looking Neville slumped on the sofa. She smirked at Harry.
“I think Parvati walked Hermione back to your private rooms about five minutes ago, Harry.”

“Oh... er... right! Thanks, Ginny. G’night then!”

Harry strolled back to his chambers much more casually than he felt, wondering if Hermione had gone to bed. It had been quite a long day for the both of them, and he was quite exhausted himself.

He opened the door to the Potter’s private chambers and his jaw dropped. He’d only been joking when he’d whispered in Hermione’s ear at the bookshop.

And it looked like sleep was the last thing on Hermione and Parvati’s mind...
“Shut the door, Harry,” said Hermione, beaming at him.

“Yeah, it’s a bit drafty,” giggled Parvati.

Harry felt as dazed as Neville had looked after Ginny had pinned him on the sofa in the Gryffindor common room and snogged him silly.

Mechanically, Harry stepped into the sitting room of his private quarters, and closed the door behind him—checking it twice to make sure it was well and truly locked. He turned back around and stared again. He could see why his wife and one of their best friends might be feeling a bit chilled with the door open.

The cozy orange-red glow of a roaring fire lit the sitting room and the closed door kept the cold breeze which swept through the corridors of the castle at bay. Which was good, because Hermione and Parvati were both standing there clad in nothing but a few bits of sexy lingerie.

Hermione’s golden brown eyes and hair, and her fluffy ginger tail and cat-ears were set off by a few silky white slips of material. The fabric was so sheer though, that “white” really meant “see-through,” and all eight of Hermione’s pink nipples were clearly visible through the clingy chemise she was wearing.

Likewise, her matching panties hid nothing, and Harry could clearly make out the crease of Hermione’s vulva. Only her long white stockings had any measure of opacity. In the dance of light and shadow caused by the flickering flames, the silky undergarments highlighted Hermione’s curves in all the right places.

Parvati’s rich skin tones, raven black hair, and satiny black cat ears and tail were enhanced by a powder blue set of lingerie as sheer as Hermione’s and of a similar cut. Her slightly fuller curves and eight darker nipples were equally enticing in the firelight.

Harry began to feel very hot, but he was quite sure that the fire had nothing to do with it. In any case, the two sexily clad young cat-witches were doing their best to relieve Harry of his excessive clothing. But rather than cooling him, their actions had precisely the opposite effect.

Now completely nude, Harry slipped an arm around both girls, first giving his wife a deep kiss, then turning to Parvati and giving her the same. The furniture had already been pushed to the sides of the room, and the cat-girls led Harry to the rug in front of the fireplace. Then they both lay down on their backs, grinning at him. Harry slipped his hands under their chemises, and had one on each taut belly.

Their skin was as smooth as the fabric, and he could feel their hearts racing and breath quickening. Even if all Harry had the chance to do was slide his hands across their bellies simultaneously, that would have been enough to bring him off. But both cat-girls were purring expectantly and Harry began to tease their nipples, and caress their breasts, giving them playful squeezes. Both girls purred louder, and the lower half of their bodies squirmed, begging his fingers to move southwards.

Harry’s hands slipped under the waistbands of the two cat-witches panties, to discover that they were both already sopping. His fingers caressed the folds of their labia, and where his hands had previously bared their torsos, Harry began to kiss them both and lick them, alternating between the pair of girls. His tongue darted out and tickled first Hermione’s belly button, then Parvati’s, sending shivers of delight rippling through their abdomens. As his fingers slipped inside both of them, and he
twirled their clitorises with his thumbs, Harry began to nibble and lick all of the nipples his mouth could reach in succession.

He looked up at the two girls faces and raised his eyebrows, as if to suggest that they take over up above. They blushed and giggled. Parvati got on it, and begin to kiss Hermione and caress her breasts. Hermione returned the favour and Harry tugged both of their panties down their thighs for easier access.

His manipulations of Hermione and Parvati’s vulvas became more vigorous as they grew hotter and even wetter, and he began to lick the inside of Hermione’s thighs, then put his head between Parvati’s thighs and licked her too. Harry nibbled first one clitoris then the other and thrust his fingers deeper and faster into each girl. His mouth switched from one fleshy pearl to the other every few seconds and he could hear the purring growing louder as his hands grew wetter.

Hermione’s fluffy tail swished and brushed across the top of Harry’s back, and he could feel Parvati’s sleek tail thumping on the rug. Both girls raised their bottoms so that his fingers could gain greater depth. Hermione began to yowl, and Parvati moaned.

Harry felt Hermione’s sheath clench around his fingers as he devoured her nubbin. Then Hermione spasmed and burst with a long meow of pleasure, discharging her own dewiness onto Harry’s fingers and tongue.

Parvati’s breasts were pressed against Hermione’s, and she was sucking on Hermione’s lower lip when she was rocked by Hermione’s orgasm. Parvati exploded into bliss and Harry’s other hand was soaked in the juices flowing from her convulsing tightness.

Hermione came out of her daze sooner than Parvati and knew it was time to reward Harry for his attentions. She drew him up between her and Parvati so she could kiss him on the lips. She could feel his erection pressing against her bare mound. Hermione lifted a leg, and with one of her hands she guided his shaft to her entrance.

Harry slid the length of his erect penis into Hermione, and Parvati pressed her breasts against his back while kissing and nibbling his neck. Parvati had both of her arms and satiny black tail wrapped around Harry’s torso, and crushed her own groin into his backside with every thrust he made into Hermione’s depths.

They writhed together in unison as Harry plunged in and out of Hermione’s burning sheath. Harry held out as long as he could, but finally, the surges of ecstasy took him completely and he erupted, filling Hermione with his many repeated spurts of ejaculate. He faded into bliss, and it was some time before he was ready to go again.

When Harry emerged from his euphoria, it was to find himself face to face with Parvati, and Hermione’s breasts pressed against his back, and her fluffy tail curled round his waist. He grinned, and began kissing Parvati passionately, before driving his hard-again penis into her slick crevice. Parvati wriggled with Harry inside her and Hermione nipped his ears. Hermione tweaked Harry’s nipples as he plunged into Parvati. Then she reached a hand between his buttocks to cup his testicles, and he lost himself again, this time flooding Parvati’s womb with his semen while the cat-girls’ tails thrashed around.

The young witches and wizard passed into oblivion for a few hours, before Hermione woke Harry for another go-round with her lips around his penis.

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Hermione tried coffee for the first time in her life at breakfast. Her face crinkled and her furry ears twitched in disgust,

“Urgh... that’s revolting Harry. How do people drink this?”

“It’s an acquired taste... usually acquired due to necessity like now, when tea just isn’t strong enough to do the job,” Harry replied with a grin. Uncle Vernon had been one of the few Britons to develop a taste for it, so Harry had learned of its remarkable energy boosting properties at an early age.

“You’ll need more sugar and cream than that Hermione. Here...” Harry added several more heaping spoonfuls of sugar and a lot more cream. Hermione took another sip

“Oh, that’s much better... Thanks Harry.”

“Yeah, with enough sugar and cream, it’s alright. It’s a bit like chocolate in that way... cocoa is horrid until you add the sugar and milk.”

Hermione looked surprised.

“Really? I didn’t know. I love chocolate. But I don’t eat much because, you know--dentist parents!”

“You love MILK chocolate. Have you ever tried a proper dark chocolate?”

Hermione shook her head.

“It’s very bitter without the milk...”

Hermione’s furry ears pricked attentively as Harry told her about baking with cocoa and how to make it taste nice as they made their way to Arithmancy. Harry had never really talked much about cooking for the Dursleys before, and Hermione began to understand why Harry was so good at potions when people just left him alone, or offered constructive advice instead of harassment.

Parvati caught up to them by the time they reached the door of the classroom. She appeared out of breath, and her eyes still looked a bit puffy from lack of sleep.

“I overslept,” said Parvati, blushing.

Which wasn’t surprising, as it had been after 4 am when she had crept back into Gryffindor tower and woken a very irritable Fat Lady. Parvati mused again that she was very fortunate that the Fat Lady was generally quite discreet regarding the nighttime prowlings of anyone associated with Harry.

In just a week, Harry had made a marked improvement in Professor Vector’s class, and she nodded curtly when she examined his homework assignment. Which was high praise coming from her.

At the end of classes, Harry and Hermione used the Marauder’s Map to help them locate the dusty old classroom they had discovered the previous year after the first night in their private quarters. They stopped by Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom to give her a hug on the way, and she seemed even shyer than usual. After embracing Harry, Myrtle giggled and blushed before diving into a toilet.

Tonks’s hair was a Royal Blue when she arrived at the Potters’ chambers after dinner, and she was amazed to see the old abandoned classroom they had discovered. She’d never seen it before either, during her entire time at Hogwarts. After a bit of dusting and cobweb removal, they got to work.

“Right then! Well, you won’t need a wand at all for any of this Harry. It’s all natural magic, based on
an innate talent. You either have it, or you don’t. And only a wizard with this talent can regrow hair overnight like you do. But it’s very hard to control at first, so don’t be surprised if nothin’ happens this lesson, alright?”

Harry nodded affirmatively and kept his attention on Tonks.

“Now, a lot of teachers will tell you to concentrate ‘ard, but I find that’s the opposite of whatcha want to do. What you really want to do is form an image of how you want to look in your mind, but just allow your thoughts to sorta just swim around it. If you try too ‘ard, you’ll just push it away. It’s best to start out with something simple, like adding colour to a fingernail.”

Tonks grinned when she caught Hermione scribbling notes with her quill. That was good, it would leave Harry with just being able to focus on the task at hand during the lesson. They really only needed about half an hour at a time for the lesson itself. Mostly it was just practicing once you had an idea of what you wanted to look like.

“...but when you want to get more complex, and change loads of stuff, that’s when things get tricky,” Tonks concluded before giving Harry the opportunity to attempt to change the colour of one of his fingernails. She was surprised when Harry managed to turn one of his nails into the same Royal Blue colour of her hair after about 15 minutes.

“Very good Harry!” she said with a hint of awe in her voice. “Most people take at least two lessons before they get one fingernail. I did it in about the same time as you, but my teacher told me I was a prodigy...”

Hermione beamed and her bushy tail swished with pride in her husband. Tonks continued.

“It’ll stay that way until you undo it Harry, but to undo it is much easier as your body will always want to revert to its natural form. All you really ‘ave to do is just want it to go back to normal. Just practice that until next Monday. If you can manage to change one fingernail within a second, try two, and then three, and so on, until you can manage to do ‘em all in a second. Don’t try anything more advanced though, unless I’m around, alright? Promise me...”

Harry was a bit disappointed, because last night was still a vivid memory, and he was imagining it with himself as having a cat tail too. But he caught Hermione giving him The Look again, and he knew that he’d have to play it safe.

“Yeah, okay Tonks, I promise...” Harry replied meekly, with a hint of a smirk.
Luna gave Hermione a hug and kissed her on the cheek.

“Thank you for the pretty undergarments Hermione! You were right, Canary Yellow is my favourite colour. I can’t say that I didn’t want to join you the other night, but I was in the middle of a gripping book...” Luna blushed uncharacteristically and stammered, “...and...and I thought maybe it would be a bit easier for Harry actually. It’s a bit much to expect one boy to satisfy three girls at once. He’s only got two hands and one penis...”

Harry didn’t mean to overhear the conversation, but there it was. He couldn’t help it, as he was standing just outside the door of the herbology greenhouse where Hermione had found Luna as she tended some venomous tentacula for her homework late Tuesday afternoon. Harry began to wonder just how much a boy with metamorph abilities might be able handle in the future. But that idea seemed a bit mad--still, Luna seemed fond of mad things. If he got good enough, maybe he could give it a go.

“Oh, that’s a very good point, Luna. That’s very sweet of you to consider Harry’s stamina,” Hermione responded thoughtfully, “...well, we’ll think of something--I mean, we can have fun with each other as well as Harry, right? ... Please join us next time. We don’t want to leave you out--you’re our best friend too.”

“Alright Hermione. I will then. Thank you! I love you both very much...”

Hermione gave Luna a hug and kissed her on the lips before departing the greenhouse and rejoining Harry.

~o0o~

The big black dog trotted through the streets of Hogsmeade as evening fell. It stopped every so often, sniffing the cool air and peering around cautiously. He sauntered over to the grotty looking pub with paint peeling from the walls and dingy windows, and scratched at the door.

“Bloody hound, you’re late,” Aberforth grumbled as he opened the door to let Sirius in. Albus, Minerva, Remus, Severus, Poppy, and Arthur Weasley were already present and seated around a grimy long table nursing drinks.

The dog shook himself into a human, and stood up, grimacing.

“Good to see you cheery as always, Aberforth,” retorted Sirius.

Albus’s eyes twinkled at the exchange, but then his features turned grave when Sirius took his seat and the meeting began.

“As you are all well aware, we have problems...”

Minerva snorted.

“That’s quite the understatement...”

“Yes, quite...” Dumbledore calmly replied. “We now face war on two fronts, and the new Minister appears to have found a way to get her foot in the door at Hogwarts. And unfortunately, there is little I can do about it. I have pressed hard against Bartemius, but he refuses to budge, and I have no
It was always a longshot,” sighed Remus. “He will no doubt do whatever the new Minister tells him to do.”

“Very true,” Arthur confirmed, “His already shaky position at the Ministry has been further eroded by the exposure of his son.”

Poppy’s face was crestfallen.

“So is there nothing we can do then? Children’s lives are being put in danger. People die in these tournaments Albus.”

Dumbledore took off his half-moon glasses, and massaged the bridge of his nose, feeling very much as old as he looked...

~o0o~

Harry practiced every chance he got, and he progressed much faster than even Tonks thought possible. Hermione was loathe to admonish Harry though, because technically, Harry was still following instructions. Tonks hadn’t said anything about sticking to one colour. When Hermione saw that Harry could turn his fingernails into all the colours of the rainbow by Friday, she even encouraged him to go a bit further over the weekend.

Tonks was shocked that Monday evening when Harry took off his shoes and socks, and before her eyes, all of Harry’s fingernails and toenails turned into all colours of the rainbow in three seconds flat.

“Right... er... Well Done Harry! That’s brilliant... I’ve never ‘eard of anyone progressin’ so quickly.”

Tonks recovered slightly and moved on.

“Okay then, next is to try changing the colour of your hair, and then doing your fingernails and hair together all at once.”

By the end of the lesson, Harry was as blond as Malfoy. Hermione couldn’t stop giggling as she ran her hands through his platinum moptop.

“You’ll need to do your eyebrows too Harry...”

~o0o~

The boarded up windows of the deteriorating manor did little to muffle the screams of pain and terror from within. But it was far enough from the village of Little Hangleton that only those brave enough to pass through the abandoned and overgrown graveyard would hear them. A wretched man with Rat-like features writhed in agony on the floor.

“Master... please! I beg you... It wasn’t my fault.”

“Beg a little harder Wormtail, and maybe I’ll forgive you.”

Purple lightning arced from the red-grey oozing homunculous swaddled in black robes on the threadbare armchair and more shrieks of torment echoed through the once stately home. The foul, stinking creature tortured Wormtail three more times before letting up. It waited several minutes for the Rat’s sobbing to subside.
“Enough, you miserable fool! Get up... Without an agent at Hogwarts I have no means to take Harry Potter’s blood for my own. What of Lucius?”

“H...He is in Azkaban already for attacking the boy in front of Cornelius Fudge My Lord.”

Voldemort cursed that he would have such incompetents among his followers.

“What of Nott?”

“The boy--he put him in St Mungo’s with a dark curse at the Quidditch Cup.”

“And what of the new Minister, she is one of us is she not?”

“My Lord, she is, but rumour among the Death Eaters who remain at large is that the new Minister has her own agenda, and means to keep the Ministry to herself. And no other Death Eaters will move against her. They believe you to be dead, Master... and... and my word alone will not be enough to convince them to go against Dumbledore to bring the boy to you.”

The Dark Lord cursed again. He was not at full power and was not prepared to fight a war on two fronts. And he now had nobody to bring him Potter. It would have to be done without the boy, and that meant he would be just as vulnerable to the protection charms cast by the boy’s mother in her last breaths as he had been before.

~00o~

Tears rolled down Hermione’s flushed cheeks and dripped into her porridge when she opened Friday’s post during breakfast. She had received a card with some money from her mother, and a promise to visit again soon, but as Jean Granger was still staying with her sister in Glasgow, there was nothing from her father.

Harry didn’t really know what to do. He’d had a little get-together planned with Luna and Parvati for Hermione, but it didn’t seem so appropriate under the circumstances. He put Luna and Parvati off, and decided he just wanted to share Hermione’s 14th birthday alone with her.

~00o~

Crouch Jr had been interrogated again under Veritaserum, and yet again under Dolores’s personal ministrations. His head lolled to the side, his eyes void of life. The blood loss from Dolores’s own methods of questioning had drained him and he had died slowly. Unfortunate, but no loss, Minister Umbridge decided. His mind had apparently been wiped of all knowledge of Voldemort’s actual hiding place.

She nodded to Rookwood, and he tossed the pale corpse of Crouch Jr through the veil. Minister Dolores Umbridge had managed to get Augustus Rookwood released by claiming that he had been a Ministry Spy--and now he was one of Hers.

Dolores had wanted Lucius. But Amelia Bones had denied Minister Umbridge’s request for his release, saying that the evidence against him was incontrovertible as Fudge had insisted that he be questioned under the influence of Veritaserum after attempting to curse Harry Potter at Hogwarts.

If Voldemort had truly returned to Britain, he would no doubt eventually try to get his followers back, and Umbridge needed to put a dent in his ranks. Every servant of his she could recruit to her own side, would be one less for him, and an asset in her bid to consolidate her power. Rookwood’s next task would be to recruit the Carrows, who had managed to lie and bribe their way out of Azkaban.
September passed into October and Harry had managed to change hair, nail, and skin colour by the first of the month. He began the next metamorphmagus lesson looking like a cross between Dean and Malfoy, and he wiggled his fingers, showing off Lavender’s sparkly fingernails. As Halloween approached, Tonks began to teach Harry how to control hair length, change the size of his teeth, and alter the shape of his nose as he was picking it all up very quickly.

The school was abuzz with gossip because soon the students from Durmstrang and Beauxbatons would be arriving to participate in the Triwizard Tournament. Teachers appeared to be a bit on edge and admonished students to be on their best behaviour and improve their skills.

Professor Binns droned on endlessly about Goblin uprisings while Harry and Hermione surreptitiously read books about the history of Elf enslavement during class, both already having had quite their fill of reading about the numerous Goblin/Wizard wars. Goblins could apparently look after themselves quite well enough, and were the only magical beings in Britain with a more or less equal status to Wizards.

Harry was improving rapidly in Arithmancy. Though it was clear that he would never be Hermione, he was achieving satisfactory marks on his assignments. Runes classes were fascinating. The ancient Norse script was apparently much more than a written form of language and had many magical uses which supplanted the need for wands. They were quite good for things like personal protection charms and very effective at warding homes. Harry thought they had a lot of practical application for Defensive Magic.

Neville had shown a marked improvement in Transfiguration since Ginny Weasley had become his girlfriend. His pincushion wriggled and turned into a rather adorable little hedgehog.

“Nicely done Longbottom. Five points to Gryffindor,” Professor McGonagall almost looked pleased, and thought that perhaps her friend Augusta needed to be set straight about a few things.

Hermione’s bushy tail flicked happily.

“Oh very good Neville. Well done!”

“Thanks Hermione. I couldn’t have done it without your help though.”

“That’s brilliant Nev,” Harry remarked enviously, “Wish mine looked a bit better. It looks more like a piglet with quills.”

“Practice makes perfect, Harry!” said Hermione in her ‘schoolteacher’ tone of voice.

Seamus and Ron were sent to the hospital wing when Seamus’s hedgehog exploded and they both ended up with a faceful of quills. Hermione winced, and was glad that transfigured objects weren’t really sentient creatures, but organic simulacra.
Things hadn’t improved much for Seamus and Ron in Potions. Snape sneered disapprovingly at their concoctions and deducted five points apiece from Gryffindor. Only Harry, Hermione, and Malfoy received top marks for the day, and Professor Snape warned the class to study harder on their antidotes, implying darkly that someone might require them before Christmas.

Even Harry was distressed by Hagrid’s classes. The Skrewts had developed shells and were growing larger by the day. Everybody was receiving ointments for their numerous nicks and minor burns from a fuming Madam Pomfrey. The only good thing about Hagrid’s classes was that the female Skrewts continued to painfully favour Draco Malfoy with their suckers. He’d had to be sent to the infirmary after one had latched firmly onto his privates.

Hermione was pleased that Harry had finally managed to perform the summoning charm in Flitwick’s lessons after she had patiently corrected his pronunciation and wand movements for the umpteenth time.

“It may be based in Latin, Harry,” Hermione sighed, “but for some reason the English pronunciation is more like the double c in Italian names like Puccini: A-chi-o, but with the accent on the first syllable.”

“But shouldn’t it be more like words like ‘accident’ or ‘succinct’?” asked Harry, feeling thoroughly exasperated.

“Yes it should Harry. Whoever made up this spell obviously thought it sounded better this way.”

Classes let out early on October 30th for the arrival of the students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. As the students looked on in amazement a massive blue carriage bigger than two Knight Buses put together swept through the sky pulled by flying palomino horses the size of small elephants. It swooped down and lit delicately upon the lawn.

An enormous but rather striking woman in a powder blue cloak stepped out of the carriage and she bent over for Dumbledore to welcome her with a peck on each cheek as his eyes twinkled merrily.

“Eet ees vairy good to see you again my dear Dumbley,” the woman greeted warmly.

“Likewise, Madame Maxime,” Dumbledore chuckled at her endearment.

She was followed by a number of students, boys and girls, who peered around the Hogwarts grounds with their noses in the air. Madame Maxime looked embarrassed and clapped her hands once to get their attention.

“Manners, please,” she snapped, “we are guests here.”

Most of the Beauxbatons had the decency to look chastened at her admonishment. But a few still appeared disdainful of their surroundings. Some Ravenclaws introduced themselves, and gradually the Beauxbatons began mingling with the Hogwarts students.

Everyone’s attention was caught by the sound of rushing water and peered at the Black Lake. A tidal surge rippled across the lake as first a mast appeared, followed by the rest of a ship that looked like it belonged in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, which Harry and Hermione had watched on the large flat-screen television they’d had installed at Number 12 during the summer.

Water poured off the deck and streamed over the sides of the ship. When the ship had stabilised and the water-flow reduced to a drip, people emerged on deck and filled several smaller boats which were lowered to the surface. After the smaller boats reached the shore, a sly looking wizard with long silver hair, wearing a burgundy cloak, stepped forth and grasped Dumbledore’s hand firmly.
“Ah, Dumbledore, my dear fellow, delighted to see you again,” the slippery looking wizard said in a sibilant unctuous voice.

“Likewise Karkaroff.”

Both men smiled at each other, but Harry noticed the smiles didn’t reach their eyes and Hermione’s tail bristled slightly.

“Madame Maxime, it’s very good to see you too!” said Karkaroff as he kissed her hand.

“Charmed,” she replied stiffly, looking anything but, though she did her very best to put on a gracious manner.

As the sun dropped behind the mountains, the guests from Durmstrang and Beauxbatons were invited into the castle and made their way towards the Great Hall for an early dinner. The tables had all been enlarged, but most of Beauxbatons gravitated to the Ravenclaw table, and most of the Durmstrang students sat with the Slytherins.

As several Beauxbatons girls passed by the Gryffindor table, all the boys heads snapped. Ron stared slack-jawed at the elegant blue-eyed beauty with platinum hair who had stopped suddenly. There was a fleck of drool in the corner of his mouth. Dean, Seamus, and the Twins all looked equally ridiculous.

Only Harry didn’t seem particularly entranced, though he did think the girl was very pretty. The blonde Beauxbatons wasn’t looking at any of the boys though. Her crystal-blue eyes were attached firmly to Hermione’s furry tail and ears.

“Ooooh,” she murmured with an almost hungry expression. Hermione blushed and began to feel a bit warm. The pretty Beauxbatons saw Harry’s arm around Hermione and caught his startling green eyes briefly. A slight smile tugged at the corner of her lips. The girl clearly wanted to sit at the Gryffindor table but some of the other Beauxbaton girls tugged her arm and dragged her off to sit with the Ravenclaws.

“Come ON Fleur, you don’t want to see wiz zees troglodytes do you?”

Fleur kept glancing back at Hermione as her friends pulled her across the Hall. Ron was still in a daze until someone else caught his eye. He gasped, and his eyes widened, looking even more thrilled.

“Krum! I didn’t know he was still in school,” Ron managed to croak. He excitedly tried to get the Youngest Professional Quidditch Player in History's attention, but Viktor Krum paid little heed as he unhappily joined his friends at the Slytherin table.

The feast was different than usual, as more dinner selections became available. Hermione’s eyes lit up in delight at the French dishes. Harry was quite impressed with the Bratwurst, Sauerkraut, and German Potato Salad. But he made sure to leave room to try some of the other dishes.

“Harry, you have to try this,” said Hermione when Harry had finished his first plateful.

She put some Coq au Vin and Gougères on his plate. He tried the cheesy pastries first and his eyes widened in amazement at the rich flavour. When he tasted the Coq au Vin, Harry’s face looked orgasmic.

“This is fantastic, Hermione. It’s as delicious as Shepherd’s Pie...”
Hermione rolled her eyes at the absurd comparison, but she flushed happily nonetheless. After the splendid feast was finished, and the plates were cleared away, Ludo Bagman explained the rules again for entering the Triwizard Tournament and placed the Goblet of blue-white flames in the centre of the Hall.

That evening, a number of Hogwarts students tried to put their names in the Goblet, but most couldn’t get past the age barrier. Draco tried, having attempted some sort of charm which he thought might get him through, but he only ended up shrieking in pain and had to be sent to the infirmary for the second time in a week, his hair completely frizzed and smouldering.

Several older Slytherins and Ravenclaws put their names in, followed by Cedric Diggory. He successfully dropped a slip of parchment with his name into the blue flames, to the applause of the Hufflepuffs. Harry and Hermione both burst out laughing when the Weasley Twins tried to get past the line after taking some aging potions. The twins both sprouted some excellent long white beards which put Dumbledore’s to shame.

Everyone was feeling very cheerful as the evening wore on and the Potters invited Luna and Parvati back to their chambers for cocoa and cuddles an hour before curfew. Harry went to the little kitchen to make the cocoa, and when he returned to the sitting room he was surprised to see Luna wearing absolutely nothing, and lying on her front on the rug in front of the fire, her bare bottom poking up and her fluffy white tail waving eagerly.

Harry grinned at Parvati and Hermione, who were both snogging and purring on the settee with their hands under each other’s blouses. They both looked up at Harry and giggled, their tails bouncing in merriment.

“We don’t have much time tonight, Harry, you’d better get on with it,” Parvati chuckled.

“With all the extra students, security will be a bit tighter than usual. So there really isn’t enough time for all of us to have a romp,” Hermione explained, “and as Luna wasn’t here for last time, we thought she should have a turn.”

“Oh, er... well alright then. Luna, erm... ?” Harry raised his eyebrows, feeling a bit awkward at the idea of performing while Hermione and Parvati just watched.

Luna stood up and peered into Harry’s liquid green eyes, a serene smile on her lips.

“Hello Harry...”

The cat-girl’s blonde lashes fluttered, as she pressed her naked breasts against his shirt covered chest. She wrapped her arms around Harry and kissed him. Then Luna slid down Harry’s front, and knelt before him, gazing intently at the tent in Harry’s shorts before gently unzipping him and releasing his joyful penis from its captivity.

Luna took Harry’s lance in her mouth and Harry began to stroke her fuzzy white cat-ears. Parvati lifted Hermione’s skirt and reached her hand inside Hermione’s panties, and Hermione returned the favour while they both watched the show. As they began to fondle each other’s slits, Luna’s head began to bob up and down Harry’s stiffness.

The blonde cat-witch slurped and sucked, her rough cat-tongue wrapped around the shaft of Harry’s erection. She looked up at Harry with her big soulful eyes, and he almost lost it right then and there. But he held on as Luna continued to taste him. As she began to suck more vigorously, Harry placed both hands on her head and began to thrust.
Luna’s purring sent vibrations of pleasure coursing through his body. He plunged his length deep into Luna’s humid throat and she took it all in. Pressing her face into his crotch, Harry exploded. He squirted load after load of his semen into Luna’s tummy as she swallowed hungrily. Luna tapped his thigh and Harry released her head, the last several spurts of ejaculate landing on her face as she gasped happily for air.

Luna wanted more, and she dragged a very dazed Harry down on top of her before his penis had a chance to shrink. She kept her hands wrapped around the shaft and manipulated it until Harry seemed ready to go again. Spreading her legs widely, Luna pulled Harry into her. She wrapped her fluffy white tail around Harry’s backside as he thrust himself deeply into Luna’s body.

She began to meow as Harry continued to slide in and out of her heated channel, her labia clinging tightly to his tumescence. Luna shuddered as the ecstasy rippled through her supple form and she climaxed. The contractions of Luna’s sheath wrenched another orgasm from Harry, and she felt his discharge fill her womb as she undulated beneath him.

On the settee, Parvati and Hermione had pulled off their panties, and both been taken by their own rapture. Hermione’s naked thighs were clasped around Parvati’s head and her back arched, her fluffy tail thrashing, yowling, her dewiness wetting Parvati’s face. Parvati, who had a hand between her own thighs, quivered, her silky black tail flailing wildly, and moaned in response.

All that could be heard after that was the crackling of flames, purring, and contented sighs.

Chapter End Notes

The film Karkaroff is nothing like the book version. I’ve always thought Udo Kier would be more suited to the role.
When Harry woke, he wondered why he felt depressed. Yesterday had been brilliant and had ended on a lovely note. Then he remembered it was Halloween. It had always been his favourite holiday until the day Sirius had told him the truth about precisely when and where his parents had really died.

Today was the anniversary of the day Voldemort had killed his parents.

It was 5 am—too early—but Harry didn’t think he could go back to sleep.

Some bile rose with his anger. But then Harry turned over in bed and saw the bushy head of his beautiful Hermione on the pillow next to him. She was still asleep. He snuggled closer to her naked form and inhaled her fragrance, calming instantly. Harry put his arm around Hermione, and drifted off again.

The next time Harry woke, Hermione’s lips were pressed against his. He put his arms around his wife and returned her kisses more deeply. The kisses grew heated; Hermione tugged tenderly on Harry’s lower lip with her teeth as she leaned back to straddle Harry’s bare torso. Tears glistened in her eyelashes and she smiled sweetly at him.

“Good morning Harry.”

“Morning, Hermione,” said Harry quietly, not certain why she appeared tearful yet also aroused.

His breath quickened when Hermione wriggled her bottom and furry tail until she had firmly ensconced herself on his morning stiffness. Slowly, Hermione rode Harry until they both began gasping with pleasure. Hermione uttered a soft meow and they melted into one another.

Finished, Hermione lay on top of Harry with him still inside her, purring, and gently kneaded his chest.

“Feel better?” she asked. Realisation hit Harry and he kissed Hermione’s bushy head as he stroked one of her furry ears.

“Yeah... actually I do! Loads better--thank you!”

After showering and dressing, the two young wizards made their way to the Great Hall for breakfast. The anticipation in the castle was high; everyone was eager to discover who would be chosen as champions for the schools.

Harry buttered another croissant and dipped it into the yolk of his fried egg. As he took a bite, he noticed Padma directly across the Hall talking to the French girl who had seemed so interested in Hermione. Padma appeared to be gesturing towards the Gryffindor table, but before he could look away, they caught him and giggled. Fleur turned pink, and Harry blushed furiously, focusing his attention back on his food. Hermione appeared not to have noticed as she was busy devouring a pile of sausage and bacon as daintily as possible to sate her feline appetite for meat.

Ron was digging into a pile of sausage and bacon as tall as Hermione’s, but dainty was hardly the word to describe his manner of eating.

Nobody could focus in classes that day, and the teachers all gave up trying. Except for Snape, who deducted another five points apiece from Ron and Seamus for gossiping in class. As soon as classes had finished Harry wanted to get away from everyone. He was feeling trapped and all of the
excitement had his nerves on edge.

“Come on Hermione, I need to get out of here for a bit.”

“Are you alright Harry? What’s wrong?” asked Hermione. She could feel the agitation rolling off him in waves.

“This... it’s all just a bit much for me. Today, of all bloody days! Why does this have to be happening today?” Harry growled.

Hermione understood. She curled her bushy tail around Harry and they went to look for a peaceful spot near the Hogwarts boathouses. But there was no quiet to be had. A rowdy group of Slytherins and Durmstrang boys were gathered by the stone steps leading from the castle to the lake.

The raucous laughter and jeering voices chilled Harry, and Hermione’s fur all stood on end. The group hadn’t noticed them yet though, as their attention appeared to be drawn on someone they had surrounded. And the two young Gryffindors had a bad feeling about who it might be.

“Bit early for Halloween dress-up is it not? Vot are you supposed to be?” sniggered a tall sturdy Durmstrang with spiky blond hair.

“I did not know zey let Haff-Breeds into your school...” guffawed a stocky lout with a shaved head.

“Yeah, they’ll let any-THING into Hogwarts these days!” sneered Malfoy. “Mudbloods, filthy Animals.”

“Ow! Stop it, don’t touch me there...” squealed a soft girl’s voice which Harry and Hermione both instantly recognised.

“Oho! Zat part felt human enough!” gloated another Durmstrang with slick black hair.

“Leave us alone! OH!... Get your hands off us!” another girl’s voice shrieked.

“DRACO! Stop it. You’re disgusting. I can’t believe you. Leave them alone. What’s wrong with you, you bastards. You’re all revolting.”

“What’s the matter with you, Daphne?” Pansy sneered. “I never figured you for a blood-traitor.”

“This has nothing to do with blood...you’re being horrid! They’re just girls--like you and me. This is just wrong--I hate you lot--I wish I’d never been sorted into Slytherin with you sick arses.”

Harry and Hermione whipped out their wands as Daphne Greengrass pulled away from the group. She dashed past them, shamefaced, and burst into tears. Harry was stunned. His face blazing with fury, he turned back towards the gang, his wand at the ready. Hermione’s features too were picture of rage too as she took aim.

“Potter, nice of you to bring the other Pussy to play with us,” said Nott, grinning.

“Get out of it Nott! Or I’ll put you in St Mungo’s next to your father!” Harry snarled

“What are you going to do, Potter? Take us all on with Dark curses? Here at Hogwarts?” Draco drawled. “Can’t think Dumbles would think much of that!”
“You’re a foul git Malfoy, and I don’t give a damn what Dumbledore thinks. If he won’t stop your bullying, I will. Now get away from my friends.”

Draco’s face darkened and he reached for his own wand. The Durmstrangs backed away from the Slytherins, suddenly realising that their presence was putting their school’s participation in the tournament in jeopardy.

“Expelliarmus,” Hermione yelled. Draco’s wand flew out of his hand and spiraled through the air before piercing the turf with a thunk.

“If you and your gang leave now, Malfoy, I won’t use the same curse on you that I used on Nott’s father at the World Cup!”

Draco’s face turned ashen.

“You wouldn’t dare, I’m unarmed!”

“Try me!” said Harry with an icy fixed stare.

The rest of the Slytherins dispersed rapidly, not willing to take the chance. Infuriated, Draco marched to where his wand was planted, and yanked it from the ground, pulling up a divot.

“This isn’t over Potter,” Draco sneered.

Hermione glared at Malfoy as he disappeared. Then she looked at Harry with worry in her eyes.

“You wouldn’t have really used that spell again, would you, Harry? ... While he was unarmed?”

Harry shook his head. But there was still fire in his eyes.

“Probably not. But I might have if he had kept molesting our friends, Hermione.”

She nodded as anger flared in her own eyes again and her bushy tail wagged in outrage.

“That’s alright then. I would have cheered you on if he had kept it up. I just don’t want to see you do something you might regret later.”

Parvati flung herself on Harry crying, her sleek black tail trailing on the ground.

“Thank you so much, Harry!” Parvati sobbed. “That... that was awful! I’ve n...n...never felt so violated.”

Luna wasn’t crying, but her fluffy white tail was still trembling with fright.

“They pulled up her skirt and put their fingers in Parvati, Hermione... It was dreadful! I’ll be alright. They only touched my breasts over the top of my clothes.”

Her face filled with revulsion, Hermione put her arm around Parvati, and the four of them made their way back up to the castle.

“Do you want to go to the hospital wing, Parvati?” asked Hermione. Parvati shook her head and angrily wiped her tears away.

“No! I just need a shower to wash the filth off.”

Harry looked troubled.
“D’you think Daphne will be okay? I’ve never heard anyone say they wanted to leave Slytherin before. I don’t want anyone to hurt her.”

None of the cat-witches knew how to answer that one.

Harry picked at his dinner, his stomach tied in knots. Hermione couldn’t eat either. Neither Parvatin or Luna were at the feast. Harry looked over at Fred and George who were still taking bets on who would be chosen to be champion after dinner. Harry really didn’t care, but he had another need.

“Oi, Fred...”

“You alright Harry?” asked Fred.

“You look a bit peaky!” said George.

“I... er, I don’t suppose you have any of that cheering potion do you?” Harry anxiously inquired. He had decided that even if Parvati wouldn’t go to see Madam Pomfrey that she might at least like something to help her relax.

Fred surreptitiously pulled several vials from his robes and slipped them into a napkin, then passed them to Harry.

“Anything for you, Harry,” said Fred quietly.

“Want to place a bet?” asked George.

Harry shook his head.

“Thanks Fred! No, I don’t really care who the champion from Hogwarts is, as long as it’s not a Slytherin.”

“Hear, hear...”

“Well said, Harry...”

“We think it’s probably...”

“...going to be Cedric Diggory anyway.”

Harry and Hermione left the Great Hall and went to look for Parvati and Luna. They found them cuddling in the Gryffindor Common Room by the fireplace. Harry passed a vial of the calming draught to Parvati and urged her to drink up. Parvati looked gratefully at Harry and took a swig, stoppering the rest for later.

“There’s one for you too, if you’d like,” Hermione offered. Luna shook her head and smiled.

“I’ll be alright... really. But thank you, Hermione.”

Hermione then turned to look at Harry meaningfully.

“Harry... what about you?”

“I’m fine,” said Harry stiffly. Hermione sighed.

“You’re not fine! You’ve been on edge all day, and then the Slytherins... We’ll all be expected to be there for the selection of the Champions in half an hour and you look fit to be tied.”
Harry hadn’t realised how angry he still appeared, and he didn’t want to upset Hermione any more than she already was. He sighed resignedly.

“Right then! Okay, Hermione, but only if you have a bit too.”

Hermione nodded, then they both shared a vial and downed it. Feeling a bit better, they returned to the Great Hall followed by Parvati and Luna. They quietly resumed their seats just as the lights went down and the blue flames in the Goblet cast eerie flickering shadows. A few other students who had just returned from relieving themselves in the bathrooms settled into their seats too.

Professor Dumbledore snapped his fingers and a parchment flew out of the blue flames. He caught it deftly, and his sonorous voice filled the Hall.

“The champion from Durmstrang will be Viktor Krum.”

There was a smattering of applause from the Slytherin table. Krum glowered as he was directed to a small door at the end of the Hall.

Dumbledore caught the next slip of parchment.

“For Beauxbatons, the champion will be Miss Fleur Delacour,” he called out.

From the Ravenclaw table there were a few claps and a few sobs too. Hermione was shocked that the Beauxbatons wouldn’t all be happy for Fleur.

Another slip flew out of the Goblet. Dumbledore smiled when he peered at the parchment. It was nice for Hufflepuff to get a bit of Glory for a change.

“And for Hogwarts--the champion is none other than Cedric Diggory.”

The Hufflepuff table uttered a collective gasp, before bursting into delighted cheers. They really hadn’t expected it. Most of Gryffindor table joined in the cheering, but Ron grumbled and Seamus just looked stunned.

“Come on, pay up you two,” Fred sniggered.

“You should know better,” said George.

Then the flames flared again and to everyone’s surprise another parchment shot out of the flames. Dumbledore sighed and snatched it from the air. He had been expecting this but had hoped that his fears were mistaken.

“Harry Potter,” the aged Headmaster said quietly.

The Hall went silent.

Harry squirmed in his seat and groaned, all eyes upon him. A feeling of Doom settled over Harry. This was all wrong. He shared a dark look with Hermione who squeezed his hand.

“No!” he said.

“Yes Harry--I’m afraid so. Please, if you will...” Dumbledore gestured towards the door at the end of the Hall.

Harry steeled himself and did as he was told. A buzz of outrage filled the Hall as he got up and made his way through it. Many people, including Ron, glared at him. Harry did his best to ignore everyone
and just kept moving.

When he had passed through the door and shut it behind him, he found himself facing the other three champions.

“Vot is this? Vot are you doing here?” grunted Krum. Cedric’s face darkened. Fleur turned around to see who they were looking at.

“What? Who is zis leetle b...” Fleur began angrily, before stopping herself and blushing in recognition. She gave Harry an apologetic look. Harry swallowed nervously and cast his eyes away.

Angry voices and heavy stomps grew louder and the Headmasters burst into the room followed by several professors, Ludo Bagman, Crouch Sr, and Dawlish.

“Explain yourself, Dumbledore. What is the meaning of this?” Karkaroff snarled.

“Oui, please! How can this be Albus?” Madame Maxime queried with a hurt look on her face.

“I do not know how this is possible. But I can assure you that Harry did NOT willingly enter his name,” said Dumbledore firmly. “If you wish for proof, I am sure Harry would gladly allow himself to be questioned under Veritaserum.”

The headmaster glanced at Harry and he found his voice.

“Professor Dumbledore is right! I didn’t put my name in the Goblet--I don’t even want to be in this bloody tournament...”

“You are a liar!” sneered Karkaroff.

“...and I’ll take some Veritaserum to prove it!” Harry heatedly finished. Dumbledore gave Harry a look of silent thanks for the confirmation.

“Professor Snape, if you would be so kind?” asked Dumbledore. Snape peered at Harry with an almost sad expression, and began to move towards the door.

“That won’t be necessary!” conceded Karkaroff. He turned his anger on Bagman and Crouch. Bagman looked shiftily away.

“So, Crouch, what are you going to do about this?”

Crouch stiffened, his moustache bristling.

“I can do nothing. The Goblet’s decision is a binding magical contract. The penalty for withdrawing is the same as for any other Unbreakable Vow,” he stated authoritatively.

Professor McGonagall gasped in shock.

“But they’re just children. How could you...?”

Crouch stared back at her inscrutably. Professor Dumbledore took off his glasses and massaged his temples.
“I can’t stand this, Hermione! Malfoy and his gang can’t be allowed to get away with it. That was way more than schoolyard bullying. If... if we’d been there too late... He bloody should be in Azkaban with his father.”

In tears, Hermione watched her husband pacing over the same bit of floor he’d been traversing for the last half hour. She knew he was right, but she also knew that they couldn’t have taken on seven Slytherins and three Durmstrangs if it had come to an open fight.

“Except for sectumsempra, I don’t really know any other fighting spells, Hermione. And... and well, I’d rather not have to use something as potentially deadly as that except as a last resort. We need to learn how to fight.”

“I... I agree Harry,” said Hermione with a small voice. “But now you have the stupid tournament to deal with too. Whoever put your name into the Goblet is trying to get you killed!”

Harry stopped pacing, shock written all over his face.

“People die in these tournaments Harry. That’s why they were discontinued.”

“That figures. Crouch as good as said that I’d die if I didn’t participate. He said that the magical penalty for breaking the ‘contract’ is the same as for an Unbreakable Vow.”

Now it was Hermione’s turn to look appalled.

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Professor Snape thundered into the Headmaster’s office in a swirl of robes with one of his prize students. Dumbledore had no twinkles or sparkles in his eyes, just bags under them from worry and lack of sleep. The Emergency Order meeting last night had run late, and he couldn’t have slept even if he’d tried.

Snape stumbled and nearly fell when he slipped on the sherbert-lemons strewn all over the floor. He caught himself and noticed in surprise that the chalice which usually held them lay shattered on the rug near the Headmaster’s desk.

“My apologies Severus. Be careful Miss Greengrass. Watch your step.”

Dumbledore waved his wand. The sweets and broken crystal vanished. He motioned to the armchair in front of his desk.

“Please, be seated Miss Greengrass. What can I do for you today?”

Daphne turned her red puffy eyes to peer at her Head of House. She couldn’t bring herself to say it again. Snape’s jaw clenched, and a vein his temple throbbed.

“Headmaster, Miss Greengrass has a very... disturbing tale to tell. And she has requested to be resorted. She no longer wishes to remain in Slytherin House. And speaking quite frankly... I cannot blame her.”

“Are you willing to grant her request, Severus?”
“I am. Though I fear she will be in danger no matter which House she ends up in. I know how... *lasting* House prejudices can be.” Snape actually swallowed, and his face flushed in guilt. Dumbledore peered shrewdly at Severus Snape.

“Quite! I am glad you have come to recognise that *Professor* Snape. Why don’t you tell me what brought this on!”

“Miss Greengrass has brought to my attention that she witnessed several of my students, and some of Karkaroff’s, engage in the sexual assault of two others before the selection of the champions yesterday evening.”

“Have the others come forth to press charges?”

“No! I have reason to believe that they are too afraid to, given the current... political climate.”

The Headmaster sighed. He understood the political climate all too well, as he had just received notice this very morning that he had been relieved of his position as Chairman of the Wizengamot. The new Minister was fast gaining allies and most of the Wizengamot was made up of “Purebloods.” Dumbledore had hoped to contain the fallout at Hogwarts, but it appeared that things were escalating rapidly.

“Very well! Without any official charges I am forced to leave things in your hands *Professor* Snape. I would hope that you can see fit to dole out appropriate punishments. Sexual Assault cannot stand at Hogwarts. Detentions and loss of House Points are hardly effective measures fitting to these crimes. If it were up to me, the culprits would be expelled immediately and brought to full-trial before the Wizengamot.”

Professor Snape nodded curtly. Dumbledore turned his piercing blue eyes towards Daphne.

“Miss Greengrass, you have my permission to leave Slytherin House. Unfortunately, once the Sorting Hat has made a decision, it cannot be undone. The magic which gives it life will not permit it. You will be unaffiliated. Therefore I have no choice but to give you private quarters. There are however, two other unaffiliated students here at Hogwarts, though they may not realise it yet. Your private lodgings shall be right next to theirs. Is this acceptable to you?”

Daphne was astonished. She had never imagined that Professor Snape would let her leave his House, nor that the Headmaster would give her private rooms. She didn’t know that there were any other unaffiliated students at Hogwarts, though she could easily surmise who they were.

“Y...yes sir! Th...th...thank you!” Daphne stammered, nodding her head. “B...but I’m afraid to go back to Slytherin to get my things.”

“Some house-elves will be dispatched to retrieve your belongings, Miss Greengrass. Now, if you will excuse me a moment.” Dumbledore tapped a hand-mirror sitting on his desk. A face appeared on it which Daphne couldn’t quite make out.

“Ah, thank you for responding so quickly, Minerva. Would you be so kind as to direct Miss Daphne Greengrass to her new quarters? I have granted her permission to depart Slytherin. You will find a new suite waiting for her right next to the Potters’ private chambers.”

There was stunned silence from McGonagall’s end. Then she nodded.

“Of...of course Headmaster. I’ll be right there,” Professor McGonagall finally replied.

“Thank you Minerva.” Dumbledore turned his attention back to Snape.
“Professor Snape, regarding my earlier comments about appropriate punishment. No doubt the culprits belong in Azkaban, and I am sure that Filch would be delighted to offer you his services, but please try to remember that this is an institute of education, not a Penal Colony. Until such time as I have the authority to remove these students. You will have to find some suitable measures of discipline beyond points loss and detention.”

Snape groaned inwardly as he departed the Headmaster’s office. If it were up to him, Filch would be a Very Happy Squib right now. He met Minerva coming up the spiral staircase when he was halfway down and he paused.

“Severus?” she began questioningly.

Snape gulped again.

“The Headmaster will explain...” he said, then continued on his way

After Professor McGonagall departed with Daphne Greengrass, Dumbledore called for a house-elf.

“Bring me Headmaster Karkaroff. His presence is required immediately.”

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There was a cough from the fireplace. Hermione shrieked, her tail bristling, and Harry whirled around aiming his wand. Sirius’s grinning head sat in the burning embers on the grate.

“Be careful with that thing. You’ll put someone’s eye out,” he chuckled.

“Bloody hell! Don’t scare me like that Sirius. I didn’t know anyone could floo in Hogwarts.”

“Only in the Common Rooms and public fireplaces. Private fireplaces require the permission of the owner, or the Headmaster. Hello Hermione.”

Hermione smiled weakly, and gave Sirius a halfhearted wave.

“Well, it’s jolly good to see you anyway Sirius. I’m going spare...” said Harry.

“No doubt. I know what’s happened. Under other circumstances, and were you older, congratulations might be in order. But in this case, I think commiseration would be more appropriate.

“Anyway, I’m here to tell you that Dumbledore has agreed to have you trained properly to deal with whatever tasks you might face in the Triwizard tournament. We know that you have the strength, but you don't have the level of spell knowledge or the combat skills required. Mad-Eye, the REAL Mad Eye, is being sent to Hogwarts to give you special combat training so that you have a fighting chance...”

Harry was flabbergasted. The timing couldn’t be more serendipitous.

“Excellent! Can he train Hermione too? How about our friends? Two of them were assaulted by Slytherins yesterday, and we all need to learn to protect ourselves...”

“I don’t see why Hermione can’t train with you. She’s your wife after all. But training your friends might be problematic. The school board of governors will never allow a full-fledged combat course to be taught at Hogwarts.”

Hermione gasped, and her bushy tail twirled in excitement. Harry grinned, and the knot in his stomach began to unravel.
“Okay... I understand Sirius. Well, I suppose we’ll just have to pass on whatever we learn in our spare time--alright Hermione?!”

Hermione giddily pounced on Harry, squeezing him tightly. too thrilled to speak, she began purring loudly and kissing Harry all over his face. Sirius laughed and started coughing again.

“Well... I suppose I’ll leave you both to it then. Bye for now--I’ll see you both again soon.”

~o0o~

Snape stared coldly at the six students sitting in front of his desk. They had all been sitting there in silence under his stony gaze boring into their souls for half an hour. Professor Snape felt physically ill at what he saw inside them. He had been ignoring the rot in his House for far too long.

He knew that ignoring it had been part of Dumbledore’s plan. As spy for the Order, Severus could not give away where his true allegiances lay. It may yet be necessary for him to convince Voldemort that he was still one of the Dark Lord’s. But it was easy to see that Dumbledore’s plan had utterly collapsed and that they were all facing an uncertain future. Dumbledore had admitted as much at the Emergency Meeting of the Order last night. If Severus could no longer serve as double-agent, so be it.

Finally, in an icy, even tone, Professor Snape spoke.

“Draco, Nott, Crabb, Goyle, Flint, Warrington: your wands are hereby confiscated...”

“But sir...” Draco gasped in shock, he’d believed that his father’s longterm friendship with Snape would always protect him from the consequences of his acts. The others just looked confused.

“SILENCE!” Snape roared. “You will keep your mouths shut until I have finished. The Headmaster has put up with the schoolyard taunts and playground scuffles, but sexual assault is not tolerated at Hogwarts.... Don’t bother lying to me. I know that each one of you were directly involved.”

“If Miss Patil and Miss Lovegood were to press charges, you would no doubt be looking at a lengthy sentence in the Junior Wing of Azkaban. Consider yourselves... fortunate. Also, you are quite lucky that the Headmaster is not given to corporal punishment, or you would find yourselves in Mr Filch’s hands. And believe me, his ideas of punishment are very... Slytherin.”

“Is that all sir?” growled Flint.

“I said to keep quiet. I will let you know when I am finished. As I started saying before Mr Malfoy rudely interrupted, your wands are hereby confiscated until the end of term. You will all be confined to Slytherin House for the duration of term—except for between classes and one hour after classes... and when I say ‘end of term,’ I mean the end of the school-year.”

The Slytherins began glaring angrily at Snape, unable to comprehend why he had turned against them. Only Goyle and Crabbe wore blank expressions. Snape continued.

“Flint, Malfoy, Warrington... you are all permanently suspended from the Quidditch team. As long as I am Head of House, you will never again play for Slytherin. And if the rest of you have any ideas about joining, you can just put aside that little fantasy. And for those of you who have your own brooms, they will be confiscated until term ends as well.”

At this, Draco couldn’t help himself.
“But SIR, that’s not fair...” he uttered in dismay before his tongue locked up and he began gurgling incoherently.

“To continue.... if I hear that you are harassing any of the girls in Slytherin House, or any other female students between classes for that matter, I will do my utmost to convince the Headmaster to hand you over to Filch. **DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR!??**” Snape thundered, banging his hand loudly on the table for emphasis.

The six Slytherins all glowered murderously at Snape, but one by one, they cast their eyes down and muttered, “Yes sir.”
Harry and Hermione puzzled over the new door which had appeared in their corridor sometime between breakfast and now. Feeling much better since seeing Sirius, they were heading off to find Luna and Parvati and tell them the news, and had just discovered it. Footsteps echoed in the corridor and they turned to see who was approaching.

Professor McGonagall strode towards them followed by a girl who was trying to hide her face behind her golden blonde hair. The Professor was very relieved to see the Potters. She hadn’t wanted to leave the poor girl to sort things out with the Potters herself.

“Oh, very good! Harry, Mrs Potter, I’d like you to meet your new neighbour, Miss Daphne Greengrass...” Professor McGonagall tried hard not to sigh as Daphne hid behind her; this was awkward enough as it was.

“Please, Miss Greengrass, the Potters won’t bite...” McGonagall pushed back at her own discomfort and put an arm around Daphne, steering her towards Harry and Hermione. “There, there dear, it’s alright...” she said, patting her gently on the back.

But Daphne was sobbing inconsolably now. She couldn’t face Harry and Hermione after what her Housemates had done and she tried to make a break for it. But Professor McGonagall was having none of it and blocked her. This had to be done.

Tears filled Hermione’s eyes, and Harry was having a hard time keeping his own composure and bit his cheek hard to stop his own eyes from leaking as his heart thumped violently. They both suddenly understood why there was a new door in their corridor.

Hermione’s bushy tail dipped to the floor and her furry ears wilted. Unable to bear it any longer, she dashed forward and threw her arms around Daphne.

“It’s alright,” Hermione sobbed as she held the other crying girl tightly. “We know you’re not one of them, Daphne... ” she whispered, “We know...”

Professor McGonagall let go of Daphne with a sigh of relief now that the young cat-witch had her firmly in her clutches. Minerva budged Harry gently away from the two weeping girls and both of them took deep breaths to steady themselves.

“Will she be alright, Professor McGonagall?”

“I don’t know, Harry,” Minerva said honestly, momentarily dropping her guard and speaking to Harry as a confidante, “You two are the first unaffiliated students in the history of Hogwarts, and now Miss Greengrass...”

“Wait, Hermione and I are una-what?” A bewildered expression was plastered across Harry’s face.

“Unaffiliated, you no longer officially belong to a House.” Minerva rolled her eyes in exasperation with herself.

“I’m dreadfully sorry, Harry. Clearly I’ve been around the Headmaster far too long and he’s rubbed off on me. I neglected to inform you at the beginning of this year that as official non-residents of Gryffindor, you are no longer bound by House Requirements.

“The House-Point system is meaningless unless you belong to a group which you can rely on to
have your best interests at heart, and keep each other in check. Your House is supposed to be your family here at Hogwarts, your friends.”

“When your wife was pushed out of Gryffindor, Harry, you stood beside her when nearly the entire school had turned against you both. At least you both had each other and eventually made two very good friends besides, from two different Houses.

“I don’t know if Miss Greengrass has any friends at the moment. Leaving Slytherin, for a Pureblood of her station, is to leave everything behind. Students from the other Houses can often form Inter-House friendships as the rivalries aren’t so severe.

“But Slytherins are hated by all the Houses--and not without good reason mind you. However it is cruel nonetheless, as not all Slytherins are Dark Wizards. And as Pettigrew demonstrated, Dark Wizards can come from any House. It is most unfortunate that this system was ever created, Harry. And as Dark as he was, Salazar Slytherin cannot bear the blame alone.”

Harry peered into Professor McGonagall’s eyes and nodded.

“I understand, Professor. Don’t worry about Daphne. Hemione and I-- we’ll look after her. I promise. She stood up to the only people she’s ever known as friends, for my best friends...” Harry choked up, and he couldn’t stop the tears from trickling silently down his cheeks.

“Thank you, Harry!” Minerva pulled a hankie out of her robes and dabbed her eyes. “I knew you’d understand.”

Harry felt desperate to hug someone himself now, but he didn’t want Minerva to fall apart. He could see she was about to crumble herself, and he understood that it wouldn’t look good for a Professor to be seen blubbering in the Hallways. So Harry darted across the corridor to the two sobbing girls, put his arms around both of them, and led them back to the Potter residence.

Harry settled the two young witches on the settee and went to make some cocoa. When he brought it back to the sitting room, Daphne seemed to be calming down a bit. Hermione brushed the golden strands of hair out of Daphne’s wet lashes, and passed her a mug.

After a few sips, Daphne gave Hermione a sad little smile.

“Thank you...” she said softly. “You’re both so nice. I don’t deserve it. I should have done something. I just ran away.”

“No!” Harry said firmly, “You were brilliant! You did more than anyone could’ve expected in your situation Daphne. I... I’d say it was very Gryffindor of you... but now--now I’m just not so sure about all that House rubbish anymore. You were very brave to leave Slytherin.”

Daphne’s Mediterranean blue eyes pooled again, and Harry’s heart sank. He really needed to work on his attempts to cheer up the ladies, Harry thought. He always just seemed to make them cry more. Harry was very taken aback when Daphne stood up with a big smile on her wet face and hugged him.

“That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever said to me Harry... at least here at Hogwarts.”

Hermione couldn’t help but giggle at Harry’s perplexed expression.

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Karkaroff scowled at the grizzled man with the mangled face and spinning glass eye who emerged
from the Fireplace in the Hogwarts Staff-room. The semi-retired Auror dusted the ash off his trench-coat and almost smirked at the ex-Death-Eater’s consternation.

“Good to see you again too, Karkaroff!” Mad-Eye glanced at the three sullen boys standing behind the Headmaster of Durmstrang. “Leaving so soon? I hope you enjoyed your visit lads, you’ll likely not get another chance.”

Mad-Eye grimaced and left the sorry lot standing there fuming as he stomped heavily out of the room.

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Draco stared at his mother in utter disbelief. His world was crashing around him.

“What do you mean you’re cutting me off? You can’t do that, Father...”

“Your father is in Azkaban,” Narcissa said coldly, steeling her resolve, “I told him long ago to put his past behind him. But he refused to listen, and look where he is now. I didn’t want that for you Draco. I had hoped for something better...”

“But we ARE better, we’re Pureblood...” Draco whined. His mother shook her head sadly.

“No Draco. Pureblood doesn’t mean better. I have witnessed firsthand the cruelties wrought upon this world by such beliefs, and cast my own aside. I have seen what such beliefs did to my family.

“What you do with your life, the choices we make. That is what determines who we are. The choices you have made are as ugly as those your father and my sister have made. How can I look at myself knowing that I have sired someone who thinks so little of women?” Narcissa concluded bitterly.

“She wasn’t a woman. She was a Halfbreed, an Animal...” snarled Draco, glaring at his mother in contempt. “But now I’m beginning to see why Father always said never to trust a woman!”

Draco’s words stabbed Narcissa like a sword through the heart, and she realised that she had never truly known her husband, nor her son.

Draco hated the tears in his mother’s eyes. She was weak and treacherous. His lips trembled with rage.

“When Father gets out of prison we’ll set everything right, including our family... GET OUT!”

Draco screamed, “I HATE YOU!”

Narcissa tried to hold it together as she entered the fireplace in Snape’s office, but gut-wrenching sobs echoed as the green flames took her.
Chapter 47

There had been more tears and hugs when Parvati and Luna were introduced properly to Daphne the previous evening and everyone had taken dinner together in the Potters’ quarters. After dinner, Daphne had introduced everyone to her sister Astoria, who was attending her first year at Hogwarts. Astoria was torn, as she had many friends among the Slytherin first and second years and she was having trouble understanding why her sister had left. She had been polite to her sister’s new friends, but it was clear that Astoria had felt uncomfortable around them.

Harry and Hermione sat with the Gryffindors at breakfast as usual but everything felt different now. Especially as they were receiving many nasty looks from everyone. It felt like Second Year all over again. The Potters moved to the very end of the table so they could talk quietly without being overheard.

“I wonder if you’ll still be allowed to play on the Gryffindor Quidditch team next year?” Hermione murmured.

“I don’t really know,” said Harry, “I’ll have to ask Professor McGonagall. Though to be honest, right now, I’m more concerned with learning how to fight. And with the classes we’ve got, and all the extra training, I don’t suppose I’d have enough time to do everything anyway. Besides, I’m not so keen to play for a bunch of bloody gits who look like they hate me again.”

Hermione wasn’t sure how to feel about that. She thought quidditch was more than a bit dangerous, and she was pleased that Harry was more interested in his studies now, but she knew how much Harry loved the game, and she wanted him to be happy. It wasn’t right how much of his childhood he’d missed growing up at the Dursleys, and she knew how fun quidditch was for him.

Harry could see Hermione’s mixed feelings written all over her face. He didn’t want her to feel badly.

“It’s alright Hermione. I can still play for fun in my spare time,” Harry gave her a half-smile and then glanced down the table at Ron, who kept shooting dirty looks at him every so often between shoveling piles of food into his mouth. Harry sighed and continued, “Well, I suppose if Ron ever gets over himself that is.”

Fred and George moved to the end of the table across from Harry, both grinning madly.

“That was brilliant Harry...”

“...we don’t know how you did it...”

“...but we’re behind you all the way.”

“I didn’t put my name in the Goblet,” said Harry, frowning, “and I really don’t want to be in the tournament.”

The twins’ eyebrows shot up in surprise.

“Oh! Well we believe you, don’t we, Fred?” George peered at his brother.

“Of course we do. Harry’s never steered us wrong...” Fred replied.

“...and if it weren’t for him and Hermione...”
“...our little sister would still be possessed by You-know-who...”

“...or worse!”

“Regardless Harry, we still support you...”

“...1,000%!“ George concluded.

Neville had finished eating and moved down the table too. He’d heard the entire exchange.

“I support you too, Harry, I don’t care what anybody else says,” Hermione’s happily swishing tail caught his eye, “And thanks, Hermione. I’m pretty sure it’s thanks to you that Gran was pleased with me. She took me to Diagon Alley yesterday to get me my own wand. It’s loads easier to use than Dad’s.”

Professor McGonagall had appeared behind Neville, and she smiled to herself, hearing the conversation. She was pleased that her friend Augusta had finally listened to reason.

“Well, Harry,” McGonagall interrupted, “It is time for the Weighing of the Wands and for the Champions to meet the Press. If you’ll excuse us everyone, I must take your Champion away for a short while.” Seeing Hermione’s anxious face the Professor added, “Yes, Mrs Potter, you may join your husband.”

A small classroom had been commandeered for the wand weighing and the photoshoot. Viktor Krum and Cedric Diggory both scowled when Harry entered the room with Hermione. But Fleur’s face lit up when she saw them both. Mr Ollivander appeared thrilled to see Harry again and he spent the most time examining and admiring Harry’s wand.

Bagman, Crouch, Dawlish, Tonks, and McGonagall, all looked on as the weighing was performed and the photos were taken.

After the photoshoot was completed, a buxom woman with heavy makeup and brassy hair done up in stiff curls approached Harry. Hermione gave a little hiss but tried valiantly to refrain from clawing the woman’s eyes out.

“Well, well, the Youngest Champion,” she said with a treacly voice, “I’m Rita Skeeter, reporter for the Daily Prophet. I don’t suppose you’d mind giving us an interview for the Daily Prophet’s readers, would you deary?”

Harry could feel Hermione bristling next to him and he knew the reporter was trouble.

“I suppose,” said Harry stiffly. The woman glanced over at the broom closet, but seeing Hermione firmly attached to Harry’s arm she thought better of it. Her eyes narrowed shrewdly and she sat down at a nearby desk instead.

“Lovely!” she said with a toothy grin which reminded Harry of a crocodile, “Well then, let’s get to it, shall we?” She placed a notebook on the desk and a quill began scribbling of its own accord.

“So Harry...”

“Mr Potter! You can call me Mr Potter. Only my friends call me Harry.”

Skeeter’s eyes narrowed even more, and her smile stiffened.

“Of course, my apologies Mr Potter. ... So, what made you decide to enter the tournament?”
“I didn’t. Someone else entered my name without my approval, but I don’t know who.”

Rita looked incredulous.

“Come now Ha... Mr Potter. Everyone loves a rebel. You can tell us the truth.”

“I just did.”

The quill darted across the page, but Harry ignored it. Rita shifted uncomfortably and decided to try another tack.

“So, Mr Potter, how do you think your parents would feel about their eleven year old son participating in such a dangerous tournament? Proud? Worried?”

It was Harry’s turn to look disbelieving. Was this woman irreparably brain damaged? Did she have a dreadful research department? Or was she just trying to get a rise out of him? Judging by the way Hermione’s grip tightened on his arm and from her increasingly bristly tail, he thought that perhaps it was the latter.

“I’m thirteen,” said Harry coldly, “And this interview is over!”

Harry stood up abruptly, and without another word he and Hermione stalked out of the classroom leaving a dumbfounded audience in their wake. Professor McGonagall appeared distraught and Tonks shot daggers with her eyes at Rita Skeeter.

Harry felt as agitated as he had all day Friday. But he had no desire to go on the grounds of Hogwarts again, so he strode around the castle looking for a new place to hide from everyone. Hermione curled her fluffy tail around Harry and kept pace silently beside him. They were on the seventh floor when he realised he was lost in a bit of the castle he’d never seen before.

Harry paced back and forth several times as his wife looked on anxiously. Hermione’s breath caught and she pointed at the wall where a door had just magically appeared. They both shared a look.

Harry raised his eyebrows questioningly and Hermione shrugged.

In great trepidation, they slowly opened the door. Harry and Hermione both gasped in awe at the sight they beheld: a cavernous room full of all manner of items from the mundane to the strange. Empty bottles of sherry, ancient, broken pieces of furniture, fanged frisbees, marble statues of half nude men and women draped in togas, self-slinging slingshots, oddly shaped skeletons, stacks of magazines with pictures of naked witches engaged in scandalous acts on the covers, half-covered paintings, stained swords and deadly looking battle-axes, dented suits of rusting armour--far too many things to catalogue in a month of Sundays.

Hermione’s fur stood all on end again when she felt a very familiar sensation, and her stomach clenched

“Harry, I think there’s a Horcrux in this room,” she said quietly, breaking the lengthy silence between them.

Harry jerked in astonishment.

“Really?” His breath quickened, “Can you tell where it is Hermione?” he asked, his heart pounding in his ears.

“I... I think so, Harry. The feeling will get stronger as I get near it.”
Hermione led Harry up and down and all around, through aisles of centuries’ worth of detritus. Finally, she stopped and stared at a crumbling stone bust wearing a decayed auburn wig. Perched on the wig was a gleaming Tiara.

“The Tiara, Harry,” Hermione whispered, “The Tiara is the Horcrux.”

With shaking hands Harry lifted the Tiara from the bust and carefully stowed it in his robes.

“We’d better get this to Dumbledore immediately, Hermione.” Harry didn’t know why they were both whispering. It just seemed like the thing to do.

In short order, they managed to find their way out of the room and back to the main part of the castle. Quickly, they made their way through the corridors and to the doorway leading to Dumbledore’s office.

“Fizzing Whizbee,” Harry wheezed at the gargoyle. The gargoyle let them pass and they ran up the spiral staircase. Harry knocked brass handle on the sturdy oak door.

“Ah! Harry, excellent timing!” said Dumbledore with a twinkle when the door opened. “I take it you recall Alastor Moody--the REAL Alastor Moody?”

Harry and Hermione glanced at the disfigured semi-retired Auror without any fanfare. They didn’t really have time for fresh introductions.

“I’m sorry Professor, but this is urgent. I think you’ll need the Sword of Gryffindor for this!” Harry gasped as he held out the glittering diadem.

Mad Eye’s electric blue glass eye stopped spinning and his jaw dropped. Professor Dumbledore shot up from his seat, pulled off his spectacles, wiped them on his robes, and put them back on again. His eyes bulged. He wiped his specs again just to be sure.

“Merlin’s saggy balls!” sputtered Mad Eye, “Is that what I think it is, Albus?”

“Why yes, Alastor! I do believe so--the Lost Diadem of Ravenclaw. And if I’m not mistaken, our two young heroes have just discovered yet another of Tom Riddle’s Horcruxes.”

The Headmaster took the Sword of Gryffindor from its perch.

“Stand back everyone. This could be a bit...violent.”

Dumbledore placed the Diadem in the centre of the floor and swung the sword. It struck the Horcrux and a ghastly shriek echoed as it had before. All the lights flickered and a turbulent wind blew papers from shelves and Dumbledore’s desk, sending delicate silver instruments clattering to the floor. After a few minutes the howling tempest came to an end and an oozing, pustulent black venom bled from the shattered crown.

Nobody moved. The four wizards stared silence at the dead Horcrux for a few moments.

Then Dumbledore went back to his desk and from a drawer he pulled out a bottle of Ogden’s Finest Firewhiskey, his hands trembling.

“Well, normally I wouldn’t offer this to third year students, but I think we could all use a sip of this right about now!”
Chapter 48

“I’m impressed, Potter. Thanks to you, we’re well on our way into turning Voldemort into Full-Dead!” Mad-Eye said approvingly.

“It was all Hermione really. We wouldn’t have found it and killed it if it weren’t for her. Same with Slytherin’s Locket.”

Moody gazed astutely at the young cat-witch, as if sizing her up. Hermione cringed, her furry tail and ears wilting slightly. She felt a bit creeped out by Mad Eye’s discerning eyeball; she wondered if it could see through her clothes and quickly put Harry between her and heavily scarred ex-Auror.

“Hmmm... Mrs Potter, indeed! Remus did say that you were the brightest witch he’d ever met since Potter’s mother. Looks like your cat traits come in handy too... But don’t knock yourself, Mr Potter. I saw what you did to Nott Sr. You have to be bloody powerful to pull off a curse like that at your age. And I saw how ready you both were to fight those scum at the World Cup...”

Harry and Hermione both reddened, remembering their state at of undress at the time.

“Looks like you’ll both be getting the Mad Eye Special boot camp training course then. We’ll have you two whipped into shape and ready to make Death Eaters eat death in no time...”

Dumbledore coughed. Mad Eye snorted.

“...but we’ll focus on gettin’ you through this tournament first. Mark my words though, there’s going to be no more foolishness about mollycoddling criminals when you’re in a fight for your lives. Right Albus?” Moody grimaced as his eye spun to the back of his head.

“Quite...” Dumbledore agreed in a small voice.

“Right! I’ll give you two a schedule sometime tomorrow, then we’ll get cracking. The first task is November 24th. That doesn’t give us much time. We’ll need somewhere to train where Dawlish and whoever else is on the Ministry payroll can’t spy on us though. As far as they know, I’m only here as added security.”

Harry and Hermione took dinner in their chambers again that evening by themselves so that they could discuss the best places to train. Even Professor Dumbledore had seemed to be at a loss when they had asked him. It was only when Dobby brought them dessert that he overheard them wondering about the Secret Room they had found, and he gleefully explained the workings of the Room of Requirement.

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Harry wasn’t sure why, but Professor Vector seemed to be really pleased with him, despite the fact that he was only pulling satisfactory marks on his homework. As she passed everyone’s homework back with their marks on them, she actually gave him a rare smile.

Only Hermione and Daphne had Outstandings on their assignments that day. Harry had never really noticed Daphne in class before, but that Monday morning, she switched desks so that she could sit next to him and Hermione and Parvati.

Harry was doing exceptionally well in Ancient Runes however. He was fascinated by the symbols and their application to defensive magic, and his parchment on the use of Runic tattoos as wards
against dangerous magical creatures earned him a mark which exceeded even Hermione’s—mostly due to his calligraphy though. Hermione still had the edge when it came to translations but she was a bit disappointed that she hadn’t done as well as Harry. She could see, however, that Harry clearly had an edge when it came to his artistic flair.

“That is absolutely beautiful Harry! I never knew you could draw and do calligraphy.” Awe clutched Hermione’s breath.

“I never knew I could either, Hermione. I’m a bit shocked myself to tell you the truth. I guess I’ve just never taken the opportunity to try anything like this before. The Dursleys never gave Dudley any art or calligraphy books and equipment.”

Professor Bathsheda Babbling couldn’t help overhearing and she was moved to gush in pride at her new prize pupil, much to Harry’s embarrassment.

“Your linework is so bold and impetuous, Mr Potter, but very fluid and graceful as well. See the sweep of that arc there, Mrs Potter? Your husband instinctively knows when to inject a subtle touch. Any symbols he paints or draws will be that much more powerful due to the strength of his artistry.

“And a Runic Spell can be more effective than protection charms, as they will last as long as the symbol is worn, whereas a charm cast by a wand can fade away or be broken.” Finally Professor Babbling returned to her desk and Hermione stole a kiss with her husband while her back was turned.

Daphne changed her seating arrangement to be near them in Potions too. She was usually the only other student in class besides Harry, Hermione, and Malfoy, to attain top marks. Harry smugly noticed that Malfoy seemed to have fallen out with Professor Snape, as even top marks hadn’t earned Draco any House Points or compliments. Malfoy glared malevolently at Snape every chance he got during class.

That evening, after lessons, Mad Eye caught up with the pair as they returned to their chambers.

“Ah, there you are, you two. Good! I’ve got workout schedules and lessons planned out,” Moody growled. “You’ll both need lots of practice to get you into fighting shape.”

“We’ve found a place where we can take the lessons and practice the spells,” said Harry excitedly while Hermione looked over the schedules. “Dobby–he’s a house-elf who works for me when we’re not at school–he told us how that secret room we found works. It’s perfect.”

Hermione’s face fell and her furry ears wilted when she saw that they’d have to spend at least an hour every day on physical exercises, as well as four hour and a half learning sessions a week. That meant less time for the library.

“I thought this was all going to be about learning spells,” she remarked sadly. Moody grunted.

“Toughening up your body and developing speed and stamina is just as important in a fight, Mrs Potter. The wizard who lasts longer and dodges faster is the one who lives. And sometimes there is just no substitution for well placed kick or punch. There’s nothing better than muggle fighting techniques for throwing wizards off their game when they’re expecting a spell.”

Hermione’s features brightened when she realised how sensible Moody’s plan was. Moody’s eye spotted someone at the end of the hallway and he lowered his voice.

“Look after that one, Potter. She’s in as much danger as you two are now. Keep your eyes sharp at all times—Constant Vigilance!” he barked before turning abruptly and lumbering away.
Daphne looked a bit frightened of the semi-retired-Auror and she shrank back against the stone wall when he passed her by and grunted with a curt nod of greeting.

“Hello Harry, Hermione. Who was that?” Daphne’s voice trembled slightly. “He’s really scary looking.”

“That’s Mr Moody. He’s an Auror,” said Hermione, reddening, as she wasn’t sure how to explain his presence in their corridor.

“I... I’m not sure if I’m allowed to tell you,” Harry said quietly, “but you’re our friend now--and I think you should know. He’s training me and Hermione to fight so that we can look after ourselves...and...and so I can survive the tournament.” Harry gulped.

“Is the tournament really that dangerous then?” asked Daphne, sounding worried. Hermione nodded, her bushy tail dipping glumly.

“It was discontinued in 1792 because of a rampaging cockatrice and all the champions were severely injured. Participants have been killed in these events...” Hermione trailed off, tears threatening to leak. Daphne bit her lip, and her eyes widened in shock.

“I...er... I think it’s time for dinner,” Harry said, desperate for something to distract the girls from worrying about him.

When the three of them appeared for dinner, not knowing what else to do, Daphne sat with the Potters at the end of the Gryffindor table. Harry and Hermione were used to getting malicious looks from their fair-weather ex-Housemates--though many looked more puzzled than anything. But Daphne looked like she was about to cry. Students all over the Great Hall began staring and whispering.

Neville’s face set in resolve. He lurched up from his seat, dragging a redfaced Ginny Weasley behind him, and sat across from the trio. Fred and George gave each other a quick look, and, picking up their plates, they followed suit.

Luna and Parvati usually sat together at the very end of Ravenclaw table with Padma. But everyone’s eyes were on the end of Gryffindor table now. Parvati looked questioningly at her sister, and Padma nodded her approval.

Fleur watched with great interest when the two cat-witches at her table picked up their plates and strode across to the Great Hall to sit with the Potters and Daphne. Indecision crossed Fleur’s features, but her little sister was clutching her hand tightly and trembling with trepidation as tension filled the Hall.

Snape and McGonagall both shot the Headmaster a dark look. Dumbledore nodded. Dinner would have to begin a few minutes early. Hopefully the arrival of food would prove enough of a distraction for now. Fortunately, it did. The whispers subsided as students became more interested in filling their grumbling bellies.

Minerva watched the far end of Gryffindor table and picked at her food.

“Albus, do you think we ought to consider adding another table?” she asked quietly.

“I honestly don’t know Minerva. I am at a loss,” said Dumbledore.

Despite the anxiety at dinner, Daphne didn’t feel quite so awful when she walked back to the Unaffiliated’s corridor with her new companions. She had been shocked but gratified by the
incredible solidarity that the Potters’ friends had shown.

When they reached the door of her suite, she couldn’t help herself. Daphne threw her arms around her two new friends and hugged them both, her aqua eyes shining through tears. She gave Hermione and Harry a peck on the cheek and smiled.

“Thank you both so much. You have such lovely friends. I...I hope I can count myself as such a good one someday.”

Hermione purred and startled Daphne with a brief kiss on the lips.

“You already are,” she whispered.

Once inside her chambers, Daphne shut her door and leaned back against it, her heart pounding as the Potters returned to their own quarters. She touched her lips where Hermione’s had been moments ago, surprised at the fluttery feelings in her tummy.

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After cleaning up from dinner. The Potters used the Marauder’s Map to avoid everyone on their way to meet Tonks for Harry’s metamorphmagus lesson. Tonks was extremely proud of how fast Harry was progressing and she decided to take things to the next level: changing his entire facial structure.

“This’ll be much ‘arder Harry! Because you’ll be altering the skin tone, bone structure, and musculature of many bits all at once. But again, it’s really all about how well you can hold the picture of whatchoo want to look like in your head. At this point, you’ll need to start practicin’ with a mirror so you can see the changes properly.”

Harry nodded. Hermione raised her hand and Tonks chortled.

“I’m not a Professor, Hermione, but alright. What’s your question?”

“I’ve just been reading in this book about transfiguring parts of the anatomy to animal forms, and I was wondering how functional some of the parts might be.”

“Well, that’s a bit far ahead, but really, it all depends on how good the metamorphagus is. A really good one can picture the internal structure necessary for functionality if they ‘ave access to a good image of how the cells all work. I can’t even do that though--never really bothered to try.”

“You’d ‘ave to be really brilliant at seeing it in your head and be able to follow complicated diagrams. That goes for changin’ human gender too. It’s all cosmetic unless you can visualise all the internal bits as well.”

By the end of the lesson, Harry had managed a rather disturbing blend of his own and Hermione’s features. Tonks and Hermione roared with laughter and had to hold their sides to keep from getting stitches. Tonks laughed so hard that she fell over backwards, but Hermione swiftly caught her before she could hurt herself.

“Merlin, Harry!” Tonks gasped for breath, “That’s ‘orrible--I mean--well done for changin’ your features--it’s just a ghastly look. Just keep practicing and soon Hermione will have a twin.”

Seeing the gleam in Harry’s eyes set Tonks off again. By the time she had calmed into chortles she admonished him.

“Mind you Harry, don’t forget you’re not to try anythin’ but changing your face alright?”
Harry grinned and Hermione kept giggling.

“Don’t worry Tonks. That was really hard. I don’t think I could manage more than that anyway.”
Chapter 49

When Harry and Hermione entered the Great Hall with Daphne the following morning, they were as astonished as everyone else to see the new table. It was set parallel to the Staff table and at the opposite end of the Hall.

The words *Misceo Miscui Mixtum* were inscribed in Gold inlay on the marble surface. It wasn’t as large as the other tables by any means, but it was large enough for at least a dozen people.

When everyone had settled at their usual places, puzzling over who the table was for, the Headmaster stood to address the Hall with sparkling eyes. Professors Snape, McGonagall, Flitwick, and Sprout stood to attention on either side of him. Dumbledore cleared his throat and began to speak, his resonant voice filling the Hall.

“Good Morning students, guests, and esteemed colleagues. Myself and the Heads of Houses have agreed to institute a new policy encouraging the formation of greater ties of friendship between the Great Houses of Hogwarts, and our friends from the Continent. Please let me introduce to you, the Mingling Table.

“Those who chose to do so, may take their meals, work on assignments, or simply... mingle with friends there. And it is my sincere hope that many of you will indeed choose to do so. Whoever sits at the Mingling Table is demonstrating their willingness to put aside long-held prejudices and create bonds of fealty across international, blood, gender, breed, class, and House, boundaries.

“It is only through forging closer ties that we can stand against the darkness which so often threatens to engulf us all. For now, the table is large enough to accommodate those few brave enough souls whose immeasurable kindness compel them to initiate such friendships, but it is designed to magically fit as many who wish to be so joined.

“And with that, I await your movements with great alacrity. Breakfast begins in ten minutes--Pip Pip!”

A pregnant silence filled the Hall but Harry had felt a swell of emotion as the Headmaster spoke. He knew who the table was for now. And as soon as the Headmaster finished his last “Pip,” fighting tears of joy, Harry took Hermione and Daphne arm in arm and they stood up as one.

Harry led the astonished girls to the new table and they took their places on the far side of the table in the centre, facing the Headmaster and the staff-table at the other end of the Hall. Harry grinned, finally feeling at home in the Great Hall since second year.

Dumbledore beamed and McGonagall couldn’t look prouder. And Snape... looked as inscrutable as ever, but Harry could have sworn he saw a tear glint in one eye. Hagrid gave Harry a cheery wave.

The Hall began to fill with a murmur of shock. Many glared at the Unaffiliated, but a few looked ashamed; some appeared frightened. Luna and Parvati were the first to rise from their seats, and with as much aplomb as they could muster, they traversed the distance to the Mingling Table and took seats next to Hermione.

Fred, George, Neville and Ginny stood up one after the other and found places on the opposite side of the table across from Harry, the Cat-Witches, and Daphne. Fleur swallowed and her crystal blue eyes filled with tears as she made her decision. She squeezed her sister’s hand.

“Se il vous plaît, chérie?” Fleur whispered to the little girl. The youngest Delacour nodded, tears
brimming in her own eyes.

Then, to the shock and outrage of the rest of the Beauxbatons, excepting a delighted Madame Maxime, Fleur stood straight and tall and strode resolutely to the Mingling Table with her sister in hand. The Delacours took seats next to Daphne as the table lengthened slightly, and Fleur smiled tearfully at Hermione and Harry.

Daphne glanced sadly at the Slytherin table where her sister squirmed indecisively and then hung her head dejectedly while her friends glared and whispered angrily at her. The rest of the Slytherins glowered malignantly and the Durmstrangs’ features were glacial.

The Ravenclaws appeared either indignant or embarrassed, except for Padma and a few of her friends who were whispering among themselves and giggling and waving at Luna and Parvati. The Hufflepuffs mostly looked frightened and abashed while Professor Sprout shot them dirty looks.

Ron and Seamus scowled. Dean flashed Harry a tentative thumbs up but remained in his seat. The rest of the Gryffindors wore expressions of confusion, but a fair few still bore countenances which appeared remarkably Slytherin.

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The tawny Hogwarts owl flew through the dungeon corridors, keeping an eye out for a tasty rodent snack on its way to the Slytherin Common Room. Arriving at its destination, it tapped on the door three times.

“Get the post, Goyle!” snapped Draco as he dipped a piece of toast into his boiled egg. Goyle obeyed his order and opened the door for the owl which dropped the pieces of mail before darting back into the corridor.

Nott grunted when Goyle passed him a letter from his father. Goyle set Draco’s letter and newspaper on the common room dining table, knowing better than to expect even a grunt of gratitude from him.

Draco finished his egg before opening the letter. He smugly expected it was from Mother, begging his forgiveness, but to his surprise, it was from his new German friend, Gustav Gehlen. Draco tore it open and read it quickly, his mouth curling up slightly at the corners for the first time in days.

“Oi Draco, look at this...” Nott said eagerly, thrusting a parchment in front of Malfoy’s face. “My father sent it to me from St Mungo’s after hearing that I’d been confined to the common room. He had Mum post it for him.”

Draco’s eyes widened and the slight curl of his lips turned into an cruel smirk.

“Excellent, Nott! Looks like we may have a way out of the castle after all.”

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“’allo, ees vairy nice to meet you properly, Madame and Monsieur Potter. Please, you may call me Fleur,and zis ees my leetle sister, Gabrielle.” Fleur licked her lips; her sultry gaze reminded Hermione of the first day that Parvati had asked to stroke her tail.

Hermione turned slightly pink and tried hard not to purr in front of the Gryfffindors who had joined them at the Mingling Table.

Harry smiled brightly at Fleur. Not only had she obviously made a bold statement by joining them at the table, but Hermione seemed to find her pleasing as well. Which was good, because Harry felt
rather warmly towards Fleur for not treating him badly as Krum and Diggory had.

“Nice to meet you too Fleur. Er... just call me Harry...”

“...and please...Hermione is perfectly alright with me,” Hermione squeaked. She cringed at the sound of her own voice and blushed when she caught Fred and George grinning at her, wishing they were close enough to give them a good swat.

Hermione was saved by the arrival of the Post Owls. Or so she thought. Glaring at her from the front page of the Daily Prophet was her own bushy head next to Harry’s stony features. But her face went livid and her tail turned into a bottlebrush when she read the headline.

**Harry’s Halfbreed! Pet or Monster?**

by Rita Skeeter

*This reporter was stunned when her crack research team uncovered the fact that the Youngest Champion of the Triwizard Tournament, eleven year old waif, Harry Potter, also regarded by many as saviour of the Wizard World, has, since Easter, been “married” to a halfbreed muggleborn--and older woman--going by the name of Hermione Granger.*

One can only imagine how much money must have passed hands to convince the previous Minister to have allowed such a travesty to take place. The question which comes to mind is, who is really the keeper? Is Harry the proud owner of a cuddly playmate sure to tickle his utmost fancy? Or does this Seductive Creaturess have our tragic hero’s Massive Estate ensnared in her wily clutches?

What must poor Harry's parents think as they look down from their etheric perch, having given their lives in the service of the Ministry, only to see their vast business empire fall into the hands of a Shrewd Succubus? Enquiring minds want to know!

Hermione’s face was nothing compared to Harry’s. For the first time in his life, Harry wished someone dead. He imagined using sectumsempra on the Evil Witch, but found it wasn’t helping very much. Harry thought perhaps dropping Skeeter in a pit brimming with full-sized Skrewts might be very nearly justice. Maybe if he chucked Draco Malfoy in with her too.

That seemed to do the trick. At least he could talk now.

“I’m very sorry everyone,” Harry said extremely calmly, “I don’t feel so hungry anymore. Hermione?”

Hermione couldn’t speak. But Harry was glad to see that she was more angry than sad. He glanced around the Hall; fortunately it appeared that most students didn’t take the daily paper. He knew it wouldn’t be long though before the few who did finished their breakfasts and started spreading Rita’s lies.

Harry glanced up at the staff-table and saw Snape, McGonagall, and the Headmaster all turning violent shades of purple which would do Uncle Vernon proud as they read their own copies. Jaw clenched, Harry passed the newspaper around the Mingling Table so that they all knew a storm was about to break.

“Lies... every bloody last word of it--except for me and Hermione being married of course,” Harry uttered through gritted teeth.
Daphne fought a losing battle with tears. She couldn’t believe anybody would print such horrible untruths about her new best friends. And she knew how miserable the rest of the school would make their lives over this trash. Fleur appeared to be straining to hold back tears too.

“I am so sorry ‘Arry and ‘Ermione. Do not worry though--I know how ze press operates. Eet ees vairy much ze same in France. I believe you.”

Fred and George did their best not to laugh uproariously at the insanity printed on the page, with little success. It was just too ludicrous to be believed. Surely nobody would swallow this rubbish. But then their faces fell.

“Oh No...”

“...Mum!”

Ginny put her face in her hands and Neville slumped in his chair.

“Gran...” he muttered.

Parvati’s tail whipped angrily.

“There has to be something we can do! There has to be....”

“I think anyone with guardians who read the Prophet should write a letter home immediately,” said Luna quietly.

“Tell them the truth about Harry and Hermione,” she continued. “I’ll send a letter to Daddy and ask him to come and interview Fleur and Daphne and Neville, and the Weasleys straightaway... except for Ron of course--he still looks a bit cross. You’re all purebloods--people will believe you.”

Fleur winced slightly, but she knew that most people believed that to be true of the Delacours because her pureblood father was quite powerful in France. Most people scoffed at the rumours that she was part Veela even though it was true.

“That’s a brilliant idea, Luna!” Hermione’s eyes glittered, but she felt much better and her bristling tail softened. “You’re absolutely right!”

“She is indeed, Mrs Potter...” Everyone stared at Professor Dumbledore. They had been so wrapped up in Rita’s article, that they hadn’t noticed the Headmaster’s approach.

“Though I do believe it best for the Weasleys, Mr Longbottom, and Miss Greengrass to use my office floo to get messages to your parents and guardians more quickly. And then, Miss Lovegood, perhaps you can have your father floo straight to my office to conduct the interviews before this day draws much longer.

“Might I suggest, Harry and Mrs Potter, that you take the rest of the day off in the meantime? Perhaps spend some time away from the other pupils. Your mood seems remarkably resilient at the moment, but I dare say that could change as the rest of the student body becomes aware of this insipid piece of propaganda and begins to act out”

“In fact, I think it might by wise for Misses Patil, Lovegood, and Greengrass to do the same until the next issue of the Quibbler can be made available to the school tomorrow morning.”

Everyone decided to take the Headmaster’s advice. The others followed Dumbledore to his office while the Potters went back to their quarters to finish breakfast there. It was nearly lunchtime when
Luna and Parvati knocked to be let in.

“How did it go?” asked Harry, raising his eyebrows expectantly. Luna grinned. Parvati shut the door behind them.

“Oh, it went very well,” said Luna, “You’ll see when the Quibbler comes out tomorrow.”

“Where’s Daphne?” Hermione looked concerned.

“Oh, she’ll be alright,” said Luna as her smile softened into her usual dreamy expression. “She and her parents were still chatting with the Headmaster and Professor Snape and Professor McGonagall when Parvati and I left. I think he likes you, Harry—Daphne’s father I mean.”

Everyone settled in the Potter’s sitting room and Dobby brought them all a light lunch. After happily munching on crisps, pork pies, and cucumber sandwiches, they washed it all down with butterbeers. Only Parvati still looked a bit anxious. Her ears and tail had no spring in them.

“What’s the matter Parvati?” Hermione thought she knew, but she had to ask.

“I...I still feel grotty from the other day. I can’t get it out of my mind.” Parvati’s lashes fluttered downwards and she flushed. “I thought maybe... maybe if I was with you and Harry it would make it go away. It always feels nice when Harry and you touch me there.”

Hermione purred and patted the settee between her and Harry. She retrieved one of the extra vials of calming draught from her robes and gave it to Parvati while Harry gently stroked Parvati’s sleek black tail.

“Here Parvati, drink the lot,” said Hermione, “It’ll help if being touched again triggers a nasty reaction.”

Parvati nodded meekly and did as she was told. But she was already beginning to feel a few tingles of happiness as her furry tail came back to life in Harry’s gentle hands. Luna purred from the armchair, reaching her hand under her skirt to fondle herself while she watched Hermione removing Parvati’s robes and giving her little kisses.

Harry began to give Parvati kisses too and he stroked her twitching furry ears as Hermione put her hand under Parvati’s skirt to draw down her panties. Parvati parted her thighs for Hermione’s fingers and she finally began purring when Hermione’s bushy head passed between her thighs and rasped her cat tongue along her bare slit.

Harry undid the buttons of Parvati’s blouse and unclasped her bra, slipping a hand inside to gently cup her breasts and tease her nipples. The kiss deepened and Parvati’s purring grew louder. Hermione’s tongue swirled her clitoris and Parvati moaned. Her blouse was completely open now, and Harry’s lips encircled her long dark nipples one at a time, sucking them and squeezing her firm globes.

The tingles of excitement surged when Hermione’s tongue entered her wet, burning sheath. Parvati’s satiny black tail whipped around ecstatically as Harry’s hand slid across the smooth velvety skin of her abdomen and he licked her belly button. Parvati meowed and shuddered with pleasure when Hermione’s tongue buried itself deeper inside her.

She was too inflamed. Parvati couldn’t hold back any longer. Her juices squirted into Hermione’s mouth as she burst into a fiery bliss and writhed in ecstasy with a long meow.

~00o~
Daphne felt much better after seeing her parents in the Headmaster’s office. They seemed very pleased that she had been removed from Slytherin and had asked Professor Snape to keep a close eye on Astoria as she had indicated that she still wanted to stay in his House.

Her father had even been so kind as to offer a few generous words about Mr and Mrs Potter to Mr Lovegood, even though he’d never met Harry or Hermione. Daphne was certain that would go a long way to calm the likely outraged response of the Wizard World to Rita’s vindictive article.

She couldn’t wait to tell Harry and Hermione the good news and she knocked on their door. It wasn’t latched properly and swung slightly ajar. Daphne gasped in shock. She knew she ought to shut the door and walk away, but she couldn’t. Butterflies fluttered in her tummy and her heart thumped rapidly.

Daphne’s hand instinctively reached down to press the fabric of her skirt into her own dampening recess. When Parvati quivered and meowed, Daphne knew it was over and she quietly latched the door before anyone noticed her.
After cleaning up, Harry and Hermione kissed Parvati and Luna good-bye.

“Thank you so much you two. I feel loads better now,” Parvati gushed, “I think I might be alright to let Harry have a go again next time.”

“Are you sure you two don’t want to stay for the afternoon?” asked Hermione. “If Professor Dumbledore is right, people might try and bully you at Gryffindor.”

“Oh, we’re not going back to the Tower,” said Luna, a gleam in her eye. “We’re going to spend the afternoon and evening cuddling in my little hideout in the woods by the lake, now that Parvati’s feeling a bit better.”

Harry grinned, but he had a thought.

“D’you two know where the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy is on the 7th Floor?” he asked. Parvati shook her head.

“I know where it is,” said Luna.

“Good,” Harry nodded. “Meet us there after classes let out. But try and stay out of everyone’s way alright!”

Hermione gave Harry a questioning look.

“I know what Sirius said, Hermione. But I don’t care. Now that we have the Room of Requirement, Parvati and Luna can at least participate in the lessons, even if they don’t always have time to join in our daily exercise routines.”

Hermione looked a bit anxious. She wasn’t sure how the cantankerous semi-retired Auror would take Harry’s obstinance. Parvati and Luna’s interest was piqued.


“You’ll see. Just meet us there okay. Just stay out of sight until we get there.”
“It’s professional courtesy, Harry. We cats have to stick together.” Hermione addressed the cat, “Harry is my husband, Mrs Norris. And he’s really very nice. Please don’t get him into trouble alright?!”

As Harry watched in amazement, Mrs Norris peered at him and nodded in understanding. When Hermione set the cat down gingerly, Mrs Norris arched and undulated against Harry’s leg, purring loudly. Grinning, Harry knelt down to pet Mrs Norris properly. She butted Harry’s knuckles affectionately, then abruptly darted onto the stairs when they started to move again.

They had to walk for a bit to find the corridor they needed, and Harry’s mind was going over something which had bothered him for a long time.

“Hermione, why do you think that Mr Filch cleans without magic?"

“He’s what wizards call a ‘squib,’ Harry,” Hermione replied uncomfortably.

The word felt wrong somehow, like a pejorative. And she didn’t like it. But as Mr Filch was always so horrible to everyone, and always going on about how he wanted to torture students in a gruesome manner, she’d never admonished anyone for using the term when they spoke about him.

“Yeah! I know. It’s just... it just doesn’t make any sense,” Harry frowned. “Hogwarts has over a hundred house-elves to do cleaning and stuff. Not that they should be doing it without pay and fair treatment of course, mind you--hopefully we can change that someday.

“And even if his job is to work on different bits of the castle than them, then why doesn’t he have magical equipment to do the work while he supervises it? It doesn’t seem fair to me. If a full-wizard had Filch’s job, they’d just wave a wand and watch the mops and brooms doing the work by themselves. Maybe Mr Filch would be a bit nicer if I ask Dumbledore to enchant his cleaning supplies,”

Hermione caught herself short, and turned to face Harry directly, her eyes tearing.

“You’re absolutely right, Harry. It’s very cruel to expect a non-magical person to clean without magic for a school full of wizards. It... it never occurred to me before now.” Hermione flung herself into Harry’s arms. “I love you so much, Harry--You’re the kindest person I know!”

After a few moments holding each other, they broke apart and continued through the hallways. They found Luna and Parvati lurking in an alcove by Barnabas the Barmy’s tapestry shortly after sundown. They all hugged in greeting, but when Luna began to ask Harry again about their purpose, he put her off.

“Just a moment Luna. I don’t know how things are going to go down yet, and I want to be sure before I...” then he heard the clomping footsteps that told him Moody was drawing closer.

“Well, I didn’t expect to find a couple of extras with you, Potter,” growled Mad Eye. “Dumbledore only gave me permission to train you and your wife.”

“I don’t care!” said Harry firmly, fixing his stare directly into Moody’s eyes. “They’re my best friends and they’re in danger too. We all need to learn how to fight. Now that we’ve got a secret place to learn, it doesn’t matter if they join in... I would’ve brought Daphne too, but she didn’t answer when I knocked on her door.”

Harry stood there, his stomach clenching in anxiety. He had no idea how Moody would react, and he was a bit scared. But Harry had put a Death Eater in St Mungo’s and faced a horde of Aurors and Dementors while naked at the Quidditch World Cup. He’d stood up to Petunia about Hermione, and
put off that horrid Skeeter woman.

And he had faced down half a dozen Slytherins and their Durmstrang friends—even if it had been a bit of a bluff because he didn’t want to get Dumbledore in trouble by using a dark curse at school. Harry had made his decision, and he was sticking to it, even if it meant standing up to someone who could snap him like a twig.

The three young cat-witches all trembled and shrank back into the alcove by the tapestry as they watched the tense stand-off unfold.

“You’ll do nicely, Potter...” Mad-Eye broke the tension with an ugly grin, “I knew you had it in you! Excellent! Dumbledore can blow it out his arse if he doesn’t like it. You’re all in then. Bring the Greengrass girl next time.”

Harry opened the door to the Room of Requirement after asking it for a place to learn how to fight in. Moody’s roaming eye took in everything approvingly. The room reminded Harry a bit of the dojos and kwoons in the karate and kung fu films he’d seen with Hermione over the summer. It even had wooden dummies, but they were far more detailed and had proper movable limbs.

One wall was mirrored, another was lined with all sorts of muggle weapons—Harry supposed the room had just copied what he had seen in the martial arts films. And another wall was lined with shelves full of books—which Hermione was already perusing. The floor was covered with a thickly padded mat.

“Bloody brilliant, Potter! I can’t say that I have the right skill set to teach you how to use most of those weapons, but I can certainly train you with some of those blades at some point. Though you shouldn’t really need ’em most of the time with the right spells at your fingertips—mostly just every now and then to throw off a wizard who’s expectin’ a spell when you’re in close quarters.”

“Right Then! Everyone fall in,” Mad Eye barked. When Harry and the three cat-witches were lined up at attention, Moody began.

“Now, Professor Lupin will be teachin’ you a few of the things we’ll be practicing here too. But the focus of the class here at Hogwarts is mostly defending yourself from dark magical creatures with only a very cursory look at the spells necessary for defending against dark wizards' curses. He’s not allowed to actually teach you how to fight back good and proper.” Moody muttered something about the "bloody school board" under his breath, then continued.

“I’ll be teachin’ you how to duel and proper combat techniques when you’re in a fight for your lives with multiple opponents—which means you’ll be learning how to do some dangerous curses yourselves. But pay attention in Lupin’s class, Potter, because you’ll need to know the spells to fight magical creatures for the tournament.

“I’ll be showing you how and when to use those spells to their greatest effect in actual practice—and show you some more advanced and alternative spells which the 6th year Champions will already know.” I know Lupin already touched on the three Unforgivables, but I’ll be putting you through your paces on those too...”

Mad Eye lectured for an hour before setting everyone to running around the gym and performing calisthenics for another hour. He worked them like a drill sergeant and they miserably collapsed in a sweaty heap when they were finished.

“Right! I suppose that’s enough for now then,” Moody chuckled. “I’ll start teaching you spells and combat techniques when we meet again on Thursday, same time.
“Oh, and by the way, Potter. You and your wife should be prepared for a late night. I’ll be by your place after midnight. And dress warm. There’s somethin’ you need to see in the forest...” Mad Eye stomped out of the Room of Requirement and left the aching young wizard and witches groaning on the floor.

~o0o~

Daphne’s breathing quickened and she threw herself onto her bed, glad that she had no Housemates to inhibit her. Only rarely, late at night in her dorm, with the curtains pulled tightly around her bed had Daphne ever dared to touch herself. And even then, she had been terrified that she would waken the other girls.

Flushed with pleasure, Daphne unclasped the hem of her skirt, and slipped it off, dropping it from the side of her bed. With fumbling fingers, she hastily unbuttoned her blouse and flung that aside too. Next to clumsily go was her bra. Finally, Daphne slid out of her panties and kicked them off her feet.

Clad only in her knee high white stockings, Daphne closed her eyes. And as she cupped one of her breasts, her other hand trailed down her abdomen and slipped between her thighs. Her fingers grazed the wheaten wisps on her mound, delicately traveling further until they reached the apex of her bare cleft to tease the fleshy pearl hidden within her dampening fold.

In her mind’s eye, Daphne replayed the scene she had just witnessed, imagining herself in Parvati’s position, with Harry’s lips on her stomach and Hermione’s on her moist entrance. Daphne moaned as she pictured Harry kneading her breasts and licking her pink budding nipples.

And when she envisioned Hermione’s tongue inside her, a storm of ecstasy took Daphne and bathed her fingers in dewiness.

Chapter End Notes

Many thanks again to Man of Constant Sorrow for being a sounding board and offering invaluable suggestions which he knows will fit my themes.
Daphne blushed furiously and her heart skipped a beat when Harry and Hermione invited her to dinner. She really wanted to have dinner with them, but she was scared. It was hard to look them in the eye. She couldn't stop thinking about what she'd seen, and she still remembered how Hermione's lips felt pressed against her own.

Daphne didn’t really understand why they both made her feel so sexy. She could understand liking Harry, but she had never dreamed that a girl could make her feel the same way. And Daphne didn’t know how to tell them how she felt about them both. Was it even possible to like two people so much, both at the same time?

Fortunately Daphne had a good excuse.

“Oh... er... I’d really like to, but Astoria’s having dinner with me tonight.”

“Is she alright?” Hermione asked. “Are the Slytherins bullying her?”

Daphne stepped into the corridor and shut the door for a moment, her face darkening.

“I’m not sure, to tell you the truth. She won’t say--and I’m a bit worried. But it’s obvious that her friends were pressuring her to stay at the Slytherin table last night. And I... I just don’t know how they’d treat her after that stupid article this morning knowing that I’m your friend. They could have been teasing her all day for all I know. I think they might have been... she looks like she’s been crying.”

Harry could feel his anger beginning to rise.

“Malfoy hasn’t been near her, has he? Because if he has...”

Daphne looked horrified at the idea, but she shook her head.

“I don’t think so. We’re close. I think Astoria would have told me if he’d tried anything nasty. I think it’s just her friends picking on her a bit.”

Hermione’s furry ears twitched pensively. She thought that Astoria might also be feeling too afraid to leave Slytherin--too attached to her friends, afraid that she wouldn’t have any friends if she left--and feeling guilty for choosing Slytherin over her sister, but she didn’t really know how to say all of that to Daphne.

“Just tell her you love her Daphne,” Hermione finally said, “…and if anyone’s mean to her, we’ll do everything we can to look after her. I promise.”

Daphne gave Hermione a watery smile, and looked gratefully at Harry. She gave them both a hug and kissed them on the cheek before opening her door again.

“Thank you! Thank you both again. You two are the best... really!” Daphne almost said she loved them both but caught herself, not sure how they would take it--not sure what she meant.

Her cheeks turned crimson and she shut the door behind herself in confusion as tears filled her eyes. Daphne took several deep breaths and tried to compose herself before returning to Astoria.

~00o~
“Got your cloak, Potter?” Moody growled. Harry nodded, his arm around Hermione and ready to go.

“Good! Throw it over both of you and follow me.”

The grass was frozen, crunching underfoot. But only Mad Eye’s thumping footsteps carried through the moonlit night. The Auror guarding the front door hadn’t given them a second glance, seeing only Mad Eye leaving the castle to patrol the grounds. Once past Hagrid’s hut, and well into the Forbidden Forest, Harry ventured to ask a question, being careful to keep his voice low.

“So, what’s this all about, Mr Moody?”

“We’re going to have a look at what you’ll be facing in the first task, Potter,” Mad Eye replied quietly.

“Isn’t that against the rules?” asked Hermione’s disembodied voice. Mad Eye snorted.

“Poppycock! Reconnaissance is all part of the game, Potter. The trick is to not get caught by anyone who matters.”

Hermione didn’t have a response to that. She jumped with a start when a nearby roar shook the trees. Moody stopped suddenly and whispered.

“Okay, don’t say a word right now, look where I’m pointing. What do you see?”

For a moment, Harry and Hermione couldn’t see a thing, but then they made out what looked like a person crouched under some bushes. Whoever it was, their attention was fully engaged on whatever was in the clearing ahead.

“That’s Karkaroff doing his boy’s work for him... Now that’s cheatin.’ If he’d brought Krum with him, that would be training, like I’m doing with you two.”

Mad Eye doubled back a bit with his two pupils and then worked around a thicket and a copse of trees to approach the clearing from another direction. The trees shook again from another loud rumble and a flicker of orange light briefly lit up a few near the clearing. Moody stopped and pointed again--this time at two enormous shadowed figures.

“That’s Hagrid and his lady-friend, Madame Maxime,” Mad-Eye whispered, shaking his head with a low chuckle.

“Poor sap doesn’t realise he’s being had... Oh! She likes him well enough, but she’s also playin’ him so that she can get a look at what’s out here without being taken for a cheater. But again, without her student here, she’s doing all the work instead of givin’ her girl the opportunity to learn a bit about surveilling undercover.”

When the trio had finally finished traipsing around more trees and foliage to find another view of the clearing they came to a halt. Hermione had to cover her mouth to stop from squealing. Her furry tail dipped, and her ears flattened in fright. Harry gasped, his heart thumping rapidly in his ears.

Dragons!

They could only make out one properly as the others appeared asleep. The wizard handlers were yelling at each other and trying to stay out of reach of the dragon’s fiery outbursts of fury. They kept shooting red bolts of lightning from their wands at the dragon to little effect.
“Those are stunning spells,” Mad Eye whispered, “Lupin will be demonstrating the spell later this year, but I’ll be teachin’ it to you this week, Potter, and training you how to use it properly in a fight. Mind you, it’s not very useful against dragons as you can see. You’d need at least a dozen wizards firing stunners all at once at a dragon to put ’em out--there, you can see some more dragon handlers coming to help.”

They watched for a few more minutes before Mad Eye led Harry and Hermione away from the dragons. Hermione was silent, decidedly glad that Moody had thought it worth “breaking the rules” to show Harry what he would be facing. Indeed, she was fuming at the incredible indifference towards providing the champions adequate information to prepare them for their tasks. Then Hermione remembered that someone had instigated the tournament with the apparent goal of killing Harry.

Once they were far enough away from the clearing, and Moody was sure that nobody was around, he spoke again.

“So Potter, whaddya thinkin’ ?”

Harry smiled to himself. He knew Moody couldn’t see his face though, so he gave a little chuckle as he responded, startling his terrified wife.

“I’m thinking that I’ve got a good shot at this first task Mr Moody.”

Mad Eye was stunned at Harry’s nonchalance and pulled up short.

“Really? Just like that eh! What gives Potter?”

“I agree Harry,” Hermione complained, sounding frightened and more than a bit angry as well, “You must be joking. You have to take this seriously!”

“Runes,” Harry replied simply with a grin.

Mad Eye raised an eyebrow, wondering if the lad was crazy, then decided to let it go for the night. Hermione couldn’t talk. She felt like someone had just punched her in the stomach.

~o0o~

Harry and Hermione were tired, achy, and sore when they woke up the following morning. They felt a bit better after a hot shower. But Hermione wasn’t talking to Harry. She was still cross with him for being so casual about the dragons. She didn’t start talking again until after they picked up Daphne and started walking down to breakfast.

Hermione’s bushy tail wagged angrily as she whispered huffily to Daphne, walking slightly ahead of Harry. She told her everything that had happened last night. Daphne stopped suddenly before they reached the end of their corridor, and the two young witches both turned to glare at Harry.

“Hermione’s right, Harry. Why aren’t you taking this seriously?”

“I am taking this seriously.” Harry sighed and knew that he’d have to explain himself with more than a one word answer. “According to Professor Babbling I’m brilliant at Runes. We learned fire protection runes three weeks ago. And I even beat Hermione on our last homework assignment on using Runes to ward against...”

“...dangerous magical creatures,” Hermione gasped, light suddenly dawning. She was crestfallen at how she’d treated Harry. “I’m so sorry Harry. I shouldn’t have got angry with you. I was just so
Tears welled in Hermione’s eyes, and Harry realised that he’d made a huge mistake. He swallowed guiltily and wiped a tear from her cheek, then reached his hand to stroke one of her furry ears.

“No, I’m sorry, Hermione. I didn’t mean to frighten you. I... I was just so excited that I already knew how to deal properly with something as magical and dangerous as a dragon that I wasn’t paying attention to your feelings. I should have been clearer last night. No wonder Mad Eye looked at me like I was a nutter.”

Harry embraced his tearful wife and kissed her tenderly; a bounce returned to Hermione’s fluffy tail. Daphne flushed and looked away.

“I’m sorry, Hermione. It won’t happen again. I promise,” said Harry softly.

The Great Hall was already half-full when Harry took his seat at the Mingling Table with Hermione on one side and Daphne on the other. Heads turned and the whispering began. Some Slytherins erupted into laughter, not even bothering to whisper.

“I’m surprised you let your pet eat at the table Potter! When are you going to put it on a leash?” yelled Montague.

“No! She’s a Succubus remember. Potter’s the one on a leash,” Pansy shrieked gleefully.

Several Gryffindors including Ron chortled. Dean got up, deciding he wasn’t hungry anymore, and departed the Hall.

At the same time, hearing the exchange as he entered the Great Hall, Cedric Diggory guffawed. A girl who had entered behind him gave Cedric a sharp slap to the back of the head and he stumbled forward, nearly losing his balance. Angrily, he rubbed his head and made his way to the Hufflepuff table.

Feeling much better, Fleur marched over to the table with her sister and sat next to Hermione.

“Don’t worry ‘ermione. Ze Quibbler should be arriving sometime during breakfast. And by ze way, your husband ees ze only real Champion of ‘ogwarts.”

Fred and George sat themselves down next, glancing over at the Slytherin table, then back at Ron.

“George?”

“Yes Fred?”

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

George smirked.

“Of course I am.”

Luna and Parvati sat next to Daphne, wondering what the Twins were on about, having missed the entire exchange. They peered questioningly at Hermione who just shrugged, as she really had no idea what the Twins were thinking. Harry had a pretty good idea though, but he kept it to himself.

By the time Neville and Ginny were seated, breakfast was already being served. A few minutes later, owls were dropping Quibblers on every table. Unfortunately for Hermione, they were also dropping dozens of letters into her porridge.
“I’ll take those, Mrs Potter,” sighed the Headmaster, startling the entire table, who had yet again missed seeing him coming. Professor McGonagall stood beside him nodding approvingly at Dumbledore as he continued, “I expect it is all hate mail. It’s best if you don’t look at any of it.”

With a wave of Dumbledore’s wand, all of the letters vanished leaving only Quibblers. The cover featured neither Harry nor Hermione, nor any of their friends. But there were gasps from Neville and Parvati. The faces shown on the cover belonged to Mr Greengrass, Mr Patil, and Augusta Longbottom. The headline brought a lump to Harry’s throat.

Mr and Mrs Potter: Heroes of Hogwarts

Lies of the Prophet Exposed
Chapter 52

Harry’s stomach churned. He didn’t really like that Mr Lovegood’s article revealed the Muggle Media coverage of Uncle Vernon’s arrest for his crimes against Harry. But he could see how it would make Hermione a much more sympathetic character for wizard audiences.

Harry was startled to see even Fred and George tearing up. Like everyone else in the wizard world, they’d had no idea how bad things really had been for Harry, because he’d never liked talking about it. The Twins had just thought the Dursleys were pushy gits who yelled at Harry and didn’t feed him properly.

Daphne was sobbing. She leaned into Harry’s shoulder and put her arm around him, coming into contact with Hermione’s furry tail which had also curled around Harry to comfort him. The article went on to describe how Harry had become Hermione’s closest friend at Hogwarts after an unusual potions accident had caused her to be shunned by nearly the entire school.

Wendy Widdershin recounted the joy of witnessing the exceedingly rare Spontaneous Unbreakable Vow for the first time in her life, the day she’d administered the Potters’ marriage vows in Madam Puddifoot’s Wedding Parlour.

Mr Patil described Harry and Hermione fearlessly putting a stop to an attempted vicious gang rape by Death Eaters at the World Cup (though he thankfully left out the details of the Potters' unclothed condition at the time). He expressed great pride in his daughter for standing up to fellow Gryffindors to protect Hermione from their bullying after her potions mishap.

Madam Longbottom revealed that Hermione had helped her grandson finally achieve success at Hogwarts. And Mr Greengrass was quoted as saying that Mr Potter was "one of the finest examples of Gryffindor bravery he’d ever heard of," and that he was proud that his daughter had crossed House lines to become Harry’s friend—though he wasn’t at liberty to speak about the occurrence which had led to their friendship due to “ongoing investigations.”

The Delacours expressed delight that their eldest daughter had found kindness and acceptance with Hogwarts' youngest Champion and his wife.

And most remarkable of all, somehow Mr Lovegood had managed to convince the Gringott's Goblins to acknowledge that the Estate of James and Lily Potter amounted to little more than a single-family dwelling and one lonely vault befitting a thoroughly middle-class lifestyle.

“I suppose the Headmaster and Daddy decided the grownups’ interviews would be more convincing,” Luna mused aloud. “It looks like he used some of our interviews more for background information.”

Hermione nodded but didn’t say anything. She noted to herself with much satisfaction that there was not a single word about crumple-horned snorkacks in the entire special edition of the Quibbler. Nor one word about the late Minister’s alleged penchant for cooking Goblins in pies.

But there were some extremely interesting Features about the darkening mood of the Wizengamot, and an article challenging the Ministry’s version of events surrounding Cornelius Fudge’s assassination. The employment of Dementors by the Ministry was also brought into question. The Quibbler had apparently taken on a decidedly hard-hitting and credible political bent.

There wasn’t a single dry eye at the Mingling Table that morning, and breakfast largely went...
uneaten.

It was difficult to determine the overall mood of the rest of the student body. But the confusion of trying to reconcile two such completely different narratives had most students doing their best to ignore the Unaffiliated and their friends.

Only a few determined scowlers at the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff tables sustained their dirty looks... and the Slytherins nearly as a whole of course. But Daphne was gratified to see that several of Astoria’s girl-friends were hugging her and appeared apologetic. That was something at least.

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Draco venomously hurled his copy of the Quibbler into the Slytherin Common Room fireplace.

“Bloody Potter and his Halfbreed Pussy! Fuck them and that Greengrass Whore! Under ‘ongoing investigation’ am I? Bring me a quill and some parchment at once Crabbe,” Malfoy snarled.

Crabbe followed his orders. Moments later, Draco was furiously scribbling a letter to his Durmstrang friend. Draco still had a substantial sum of money in his private account at Gringotts, even if it could no longer be refilled from the vaults of the Malfoy Estate. And he was determined to see it put to good use.

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“You coming Harry? We don’t want to be late for Arithmancy.”

“Just a moment Hermione. I need a word with Cedric.”

Hermione frowned, and hoped that Harry wasn’t going to do anything foolish.

“Oi, Diggory.”

Cedric scowled at Harry.

“What do want Potter? Your girlfriend Fleur already cufféd me one for laughing at you. Don’t think that Quibbler article changed anything between you and me, you little glory-hound.”

“You had it coming you prat.” Harry returned Cedric’s glare. “And I’d give you a swift kick in the bollocks myself for being a bloody stupid arse if I thought it would do any good. But that’s not why I want to talk to you.”

“What then?” Cedric snapped.

“Dragons!” Harry replied curtly.

“What...? What are you on about Potter?” Cedric was puzzled now. “What are you playing at?”

“The first task is Dragons. Just thought you should know, seeing as you’re the only Champion that doesn’t know yet.”

Now Cedric was really confused. Was Potter having him on? Trying to trip him up?

“Get out of it Potter! Why would you tell me?” Cedric snarled.

Which was a good question. Harry wasn’t entirely sure why he was telling Cedric. The git was obviously too thick to see that Harry was an unwilling participant. Harry really didn’t like unfairness.
That was all it really came down to.

“All the other Champions know already. It’s only fair. Though if you were a Slytherin, I’d probably let you find out the hard way. But I don’t think Sprout would appreciate that--she’s a good person. Mind you, she should’ve taken you to see them firsthand though. They’re in the Forest--go look for yourself.”

Cedric shot a look at Professor Sprout, who was just leaving the staff-table with Mr Moody, and caught her eye. She didn’t seem pleased with her Champion at all. Cedric gulped. He flushed in shame as the verity of his uncouth behaviour suddenly washed over him. He glanced back at Harry and saw that he wasn’t lying.

“Dragons? Really?” Cedric said plaintively, looking really small.

Harry’s features softened. He could see that his rival had finally made a breakthrough.

“Yeah Diggory! Really!” Harry sighed, “I just don’t want to see you get killed.”

“Th...thanks Potter. I still don’t really understand why you’re being nice to me. But I owe you one.”

“Just be nice to my wife and friends. That’s all I really care about, alright!” Finished, Harry turned on his heel and left Cedric to stew in his own disgrace.

Daphne knew that she shouldn’t be surprised by Harry’s graciousness, but it was still one of the most endearing selfless acts that she’d ever witnessed. She bit her lip and shared a look with Hermione, who was purring softly and tearing up.

“That’s why I love Harry!” said Hermione meaningfully.

~o0o~

After classes, Harry and Hermione were surprised to find Mad Eye waiting when they got to the Room of Requirement for their daily exercises. They thought he wasn’t meeting with them again until Thursday.

“I heard what you said to the Diggory boy, Potter.” Moody’s eye bore into Harry. “That was something else. Never seen anything quite like it--except for your mum though. She’s the only other one I’ve ever seen who could dress someone down good and proper for bein’ a berk and give ‘em a chance at the same time. It’s good to see that you can tell the difference between a bloody pompous jackass and a Death Eater.” Mad Eye paused before continuing.

“Anyway, I’m really here about your plans for fighting dragons...”

“Yeah, about that...” said Harry, flushing, abashed.

“You’re alright Potter,” said Mad Eye gruffly, “I spoke to Professor Babbling to find out what you were on about. And you’re right. Seems like you do stand a good chance. But overconfidence kills. You can never put all your eggs in one basket Potter. ... You always need a back-up plan--or two. I’ll show you a few things tomorrow. For now, just get crackin’ on your calisthenics.”

Daphne joined Harry and the three cat-witches at the Room of Requirement the following evening. Moody had everyone do an hour of exercises before he began teaching them all how to perform shield charms and stunning spells and had them practice on each other. He rebuked Harry more than once for being too soft on the girls. But after an hour Mad Eye grudgingly approved of Harry’s progress.
While everyone lay moaning on the floor, Moody discussed some alternative options for fighting dragons.

“Right then, Potter! I reckon you’ll do just fine with those Runes if you’re as good as Babbling says. But you’ll need to practice the Aguamenti Charm for water just in case your fire protection rune isn’t effective. If you get that shield charm perfected in time, it’ll actually protect against dragon-fire, but it has to be a bloody powerful shield--most wizards just have to dodge the flames.

“You also might want to consider summoning your broom for extra maneuverability--I hear you’re good at flyin’--but remember, dragons were born to fly. It’s almost impossible to outfly a dragon unless you’re the very best.

"I told you the other night that it’d take at least a dozen wizards firin’ simultaneous stunners to bring down a dragon, but there are exceptions to that rule. In muggle myths, the hero always goes for a weak spot, but the fact is that there are no weak spots on a dragon except for the eyes and inside the mouth--the only spots on a dragon which aren’t armoured. Aiming for a dragon’s mouth with a spell is problematic for obvious reasons.

“But if you can hit a dragon in the roof of its mouth with a stunner, it’ll drop like a sack of potatoes. Same with the eyes. If you hit a dragon in the eyes when they’re open, it’ll go down with one good shot. So practice your aim, and you won’t need the girls for that. Try using a snitch. If you can hit a snitch with a stunner, you can hit a dragon in the the roof of the mouth or the eye.

“Timing is important. After a burst of flame, it’ll take a dragon about 3 seconds before it can shoot another burst. So wait until after the first burst, then fire a stunner before it can get the next load of fuel into its jets. Again, as small and fast as snitches are, practicin’ with those will give you the best chance.

“If I were you Potter, I’d spend at least an hour and a half a day working on what I just told you, on top o’ your hour of calisthenics. On Saturday, we’ll get this room set up like a dragon arena so you can start practicing dodging techniques and cushioning charms to prevent broken limbs if you crash into a boulder.”

“Whatever you do, don’t try transfigurin’ anything to distract it, dragons’ll always be more interested in you. Stick with the basics, and don’t try any other fancy stuff you might see in books, and you’ll get through this Potter--and as always, stay alert--Constant Vigilance!” Mad Eye concluded with a roar.

“Is he always like that?” Daphne grumbled after Moody stumped out of the room. “I hurt all over.”

“Yes!” everyone else groaned simultaneously.

On the way back to their respective accommodations, Hermione walked ahead for a few minutes with Parvati and Luna talking quietly while Harry helped Daphne totter through the hallways.

There was a bit of giggling, tail waving, and nodding, and all three of them glanced back to make sure that Harry was doing alright with Daphne. The other two cat-witches kissed Hermione goodnight and Hermione rejoined Harry to help him half-carry poor Daphne the rest of the way to their own corridor.

It was nearly dinner-time, but nobody really had the energy to clean-up and change for the Great Hall. Daphne was too worn out to realise that she was in Harry and Hermione’s chambers until they settled her on their settee. Harry pulled the last vial of “cheering potion” from his robes and gave it to the girl in pain.
“I think you need this more than us, Daphne.” Harry gave her a soft smile. “We’ve had a couple of days to sort of get used to the aches.”

Daphne nodded and swallowed the draught while Harry and Hermione opened butterbeers and asked Dobby to bring them dinner. A few moments later, she felt some relief. The aches and pains were still there, but the pleasant tingles of the potion made them seem not so bothersome.

By the time they were done with dinner, Daphne still felt sore, but much better. Harry was sitting beside her on the settee, gently massaging her shoulders, having already finished eating.

“Thanks for dinner, I suppose I should get going...” she said a bit sadly.

“You don’t have to go if you don’t want to Daphne. Please stay,” Hermione implored. She brushed Daphne’s golden strands of hair from her eyes, as she had the first night Daphne had sat crying on their settee. Daphne’s heart fluttered; she didn’t know what to do, but her anxiety seemed blunted. This was what she wanted, wasn’t it?

Hermione leaned in closer to Daphne as she purred, her bushy tail flicking happily. Harry’s fingers were still tenderly kneading the sore spots in Daphne’s upper back and shoulders.

“We love you too!” Hermione whispered. Their lips met, and Daphne melted into the settee.
Chapter 53

When Daphne woke the following morning, she felt Hermione against her back, with her arm and fluffy ginger tail curled around her. So it hadn’t been a dream after all, she mused happily, but she didn’t remember coming to bed. Daphne was still wearing her schoolclothes, but Hermione was clad in a simple white nightgown.

Harry set some tea on the nightstand next to the bed and gave Daphne a kiss on the forehead.

“Morning, Daphne.”

He looked softly into Daphne’s bleary blue-green eyes with his own startling green ones, and she began to recall how she’d drifted off in his arms in the settee while Hermione was kissing her last night. But Harry’s lips against her skin reminded her that she had felt them brush against her hair while he had continued his gentle massage.

Daphne wanted to give him a real kiss, but she wasn’t sure if it would be okay with Hermione. Hermione stirred beside her and sat up grinning.

“It’s alright, Harry, I think Daphne would like a proper kiss good morning.”

Harry’s eyes smiled as he bent down and kissed Daphne on the lips. His lips felt so soft against hers, like Hermione’s had. It was the nicest kiss she’d ever had from a boy—not that she’d had many. The other two times had felt clumsy and rough. One had been administered by a thickhead under mistletoe last Christmas, and the other had been given to her without warning by someone she had come to truly loathe.

Hermione leaned over Daphne and kissed Harry properly too. Daphne returned to her quarters in a daze to get cleaned up and put on fresh clothes for breakfast while the Potters showered and dressed.

Someone was already sitting at the Mingling Table when the threesome arrived in the Great Hall. Harry settled into his seat directly opposite the Headmaster’s and grinned at Dean, who was smiling a bit sheepishly.

“Hullo Harry. I’ve missed you in Gryffindor. I never realised how many prats we had in our House until recently. I think I like it better over here.”

“I’ve missed you too, Dean. Thanks for joining us. It’ll be nice to have someone to fly with again. Taking the Twins on two on one isn’t exactly fun...more like begging for a bludger to the noggin.”

“Oi Harry...”

“...I think we resent that.”

But the chuckles and winks Fred and George gave Harry as they sat down with Angelina in between them suggested otherwise. Fleur gave Hermione a kiss on the cheek before taking Gabrielle to sit next to Daphne so that Luna and Parvati could sit next to Hermione when they arrived.

Ginny whispered something in Fred’s ear before sitting down with Neville next to Dean. Fred grinned and nodded. Harry raised his eyebrows and Hermione’s ears twitched questioningly.

“You’ll see soon enough,” George chuckled.
Partway through breakfast the owls began their usual post routine. Ron had received a small packet, as had two Slytherins. A smattering of envelopes arrived for Hermione, but they thankfully landed on the table beside her plate for a change.

Harry wondered if he should ask Professor Dumbledore to check them, but noticed that they all had hearts or little flowers scrawled on them. Harry picked up the envelopes tentatively and Hermione nodded when he glanced at her. Carefully, Harry opened the first one.

His eyes grew watery as he and Hermione read the letter which gushed happily that Harry had found someone so kind and deserving to share his life with. Another expressed gratitude that Hermione was filling the hole in Harry’s life left by the death of his parents. And yet another thanked her profusely for setting such a wonderful example for muggleborns and young witches everywhere to aspire to.

Harry and Hermione were snapped out of their reverie by yells and bursts of laughter. They looked up from the letters to see a very strange sight...

Ron had been so thrilled to receive a parcel—even such a small one—that he didn’t bother looking to see who it had come from. He tore it open excitedly. He wasn’t sure what it was though. It seemed a bit too small to be a belt and there was no watch-fob on the leather strap. Rather, it was dotted with metal studs.

As he puzzled over it, the leather strap wriggled in his hands and came to life. He dropped it with a gasp of fright, but the thing flew at him from the table and wrapped itself around his neck. Ron whimpered and grabbed at it, trying vainly to unbuckle it as the buckle had vanished leaving only a solid metal ring and unfurling chain in its place.

The other end of the chain whizzed past Seamus’s startled face and scrambled eggs spilled from his mouth. With a rattle and a loud clink, The chain met two others in the middle of the Great Hall which appeared to be attached to Slytherins. Pansy shrieked and Montague hollered as the chains began to tighten, dragging them away from the Slytherin table.

Ron was pulled to his feet and he staggered across the floor moaning until he found himself nose to nose with the two Slytherins. The three of them struggled, but that wasn’t the worst of it. Seconds after meeting in the middle of the Hallway their robes and outer clothes vanished.

Pansy and Ron turned crimson in mortification, because neither of them had bothered with underwear that morning, though both for entirely different reasons. Only Montague maintained that small measure of dignity. Fred and George collapsed on the floor in laughter as the three of them stumbled out of the Great Hall together.

Pansy continued shrieking as Ron unintentionally kept bumping into her with his uncontrollable swelling.

“That idiot...” howled George.

“Mum always told him that it would only take another two seconds to put on underwear before breakfast...” Fred wheezed.

“...and that she was tired of cleaning stains off his shorts.”

“We thought Ron had learned his lesson after the gnomes pantsed him once though.”

“I suppose not...” George snorted.

“Can I open my eyes now?” asked Ginny.
“It’s alright Ginny. They’re gone now,” said Luna with a big grin. Parvati was crying from laughing so hard, and nearly fell out of her own chair. Fleur and Gabrielle giggled.

Hermione couldn’t help herself. She felt terribly guilty, but she couldn’t stop herself from giggling and her bushy tail swished mirthfully.

“You two are dreadful...” she finally said, managing to chastise the Twins but with little indication of any actual indignation on her part. A part of her felt that this had been a long time coming.

~o0o~

Harry’s practice in the fake dragon arena in the Room of Requirement over the next couple of weeks improved his skills immensely. He had learned how to dodge, roll, and tumble. And Parvati showed him how to perform a few gymnastics such as cartwheels and a simple air-flip, much to Moody’s approval, and everyone’s surprise. Parvati explained that she and Padma had learned how to do them one summer after being taken to a circus.

Harry had also become relatively quick with cushioning charms—but that was the one spell he felt the least confident in. He had become quite proficient with the Aguamenti Charm though.

Harry’s aim with stunners had become extremely accurate after a week and a half of practice. And Moody had to order an entire stock of snitches as Harry’s stunning spells had proved explosively powerful.

Harry, the three cat-witches, and Daphne, gradually increased their strength and stamina, and the aches and pains of workouts lessened considerably. But Mad Eye had gathered a small supply of Madam Pomfrey’s calming draughts and doled them out anyway after the first night that he’d seen how much pain Daphne had been in.

“These aren’t painkillers,” he had said gruffly, “You shouldn’t need those unless you actually injure yourselves. But they’ll help a bit if you’ve had a particularly rough workout.”

Harry studied his Runework with just as much dedication while Hermione helped him translate to find the most useful combination of symbols. He practiced painting them on his skin while looking in a mirror which Hermione had charmed to show him an unreversed image of himself.

~o0o~

After a week and a half, and several letters back and forth, Draco received two packages in the post. His eyes narrowed when he addressed Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott in the Slytherin Common Room during breakfast. Warrington and Flint were eating in their dorm, tired of hanging out with Draco and the other Third Year detainees, and that was just fine with Malfoy. The less people who knew about this the better.

“Right you lot.” Draco addressed his gang with an authoritative glare, “Now don’t forget who’s boss around here. If any of you rat me out, I’ll make sure Fenrir Greyback knows how to find you. He’s done some work for Father before, so don’t think that I don’t know him and that I’m just pretending.”

Draco’s gang nodded their heads fearfully. They had no doubt about that, as their fathers had also done some “work” for the Malfoy Warlock on occasion. Draco opened the first parcel and his three minions oohed with awe.

Draco’s new wand was a masterpiece of construction, 10 inches of ebony stained wood with a
carved spiral along its length. Its grip was a silver serpent’s head which glittered in the flickering light of the common room fire.

“It’s a Gregorovitch Wand made to order based on the specifications of the wand that Snape stole from me. Gehlen says Gregorovitch makes Ollivander look like an amateur.”

Pleased with the way it felt in his hand, Draco waved it about and tried a couple of simple transfigurations. His mug turned into a mouse and scurried away. Delighted, Draco opened his second parcel. His gang’s eyes all widened and they gasped as one as Draco carefully unfolded a silvery piece of fabric.

“This, was much harder to come by, and it was bloody expensive” said Draco proudly. “Gehlen tracked down an Italian Wizard who makes really good ones–but he only makes two or three a year. I was very lucky that he had one in stock.”

~o0o~

A week before the First Task, a blizzard blew into Scotland from the North Sea. The first proper snow of the season. Harry and the girls took an afternoon off after the storm died to play in the snow with Neville and Ginny, the twins, and Dean. They built two snowmen and animated them with charmed Top-hats which the Twins had invented. Harry was surprised, because he didn’t think they’d ever seen any muggle television.

“We got the idea from some muggle boys who live in the village near us one Christmas,” Fred admitted.

They all cheered the snowmen on as they wrestled and pummeled each other into powder. Following that, they had a snowball fight: Harry, Hermione, Daphne, and the other two Cat Witches vs the Weasleys, Neville, and Dean. Harry delighted in shooting the snowballs thrown by the other team out of the air with stunners, and Team Weasley finally conceded defeat to Team Cat Witch.

By the time November 23 rolled around, the day before the First Task, Harry and Hermione were both convinced he was ready. Harry had decided which Runes he thought would be most effective. Hermione agreed with him that it was best to prepare them the night before.

Daphne blushed when Harry took off his shirt to paint the Runes on his skin with a special ink which would be indelible until he used a charm to remove it. Harry’s slight build was even more cut than it had been when he’d been playing Quidditch. An image of Bruce Lee flashed through Hermione’s mind and she purred, turning a bit pink herself.

Hermione and Daphne wanted Harry to go to sleep early so that he would be well rested. But Harry was too nervous. So they cuddled and shared kisses together by the crackling fire in the Potters’ sitting room with hot cups of cocoa until they drifted off to sleep one by one.
Hermione curled her furry tail around Harry as Professor McGonagall led them through the snow to the tent where the Champions were to wait while each of them had their turn in the dragon arena.

Harry had tried to eat some breakfast, but found that despite his confidence in his abilities, his stomach still roiled with anxiety. What if he’d made a mistake? Perhaps he should have tried a different set of runic symbols. What if the dragon attacked and he couldn’t dodge or get a shield charm up in time?

Harry was grateful that everyone had just kept quiet and left him to his thoughts that morning. He had given his Firebolt to Parvati and told her to hold on to it for him in the stands nearby, just in case. He didn’t really expect to need it. He hoped he wouldn’t.

When Harry entered the tent with his wife, all eyes turned to them. Krum appeared even grumpier than usual. Cedric gave Harry a nod, and tried to smile, but he looked like he was about to be sick. Fleur gave Harry and Hermione both a kiss on the cheek, but her usual radiance was muted by fear.

Bagman entered the tent followed by Crouch. Ludo was holding a purple sack in his hand and looking far too cheerful for Hermione’s taste. She knew something was off about him, and Crouch too for that matter. But there was really very little she could do about it.

Crouch’s darkness Hermione understood; his son had been exposed as a Death Eater in disguise, and his job was probably hanging by a thread. He would do whatever the new Minister told him to do. But Bagman was harder to read. He was a Ministry employee too, but all she knew for certain was that he didn’t have Harry’s best interests at heart.

Bagman held open the sack and urged the champions to each take the first item they touched, he fussed with the bag as it wriggled. Fleur reached in dejectedly and pulled out an animated replica of a Welsh Green dragon, the smaller, much less dangerous cousin of the Welsh Red.

Krum scowled and thrust his hand in as Bagman tried to stop the simulacrum dragons from squirming. The Durmstrang Champion pulled out a Chinese Fireball. Having done a lot of research over the last few weeks, Hermione and Harry both knew that Chinese dragons, while extremely dangerous if provoked, generally held humans in great regard and were highly sentient.

Bagman held the sack much more firmly when Cedric extended his shaking hand into it and retrieved a Swedish Short-snout. They were definitely ill-tempered and dangerous creatures, but not particularly large or agile.

Finally, with a sigh of resignation, Harry reached into the bag and pulled out the one which he’d seen in the clearing with Hermione and Mad Eye: the Hungarian Horntail. It was the largest and deadliest of all dragons—anywhere. None could compare to its size and viciousness. It was at least double the length of the Chinese Fireball, which was the second longest in the world, and was at least 5 times the mass.

Hermione’s blood began to boil, but she tried to keep her temper for her husband’s sake. Bagman caught the look in her eye and glanced away.

“Heheh!” the shifty-looking Ministry employee chuckled. “Well now that you’re all sorted, I can reveal your task. Nothing too risky mind you. All you have to do is grab the Golden Egg from the Dragon’s Nest...”
Hermione couldn’t help herself, her furry tail bristled and she lost it.

“Nesting Female Dragons?” she yelled furiously, “‘Nothing too risky?’ Are you bloody mad...?”

Bagman withered at the onslaught and backed up a few steps. He chuckled nervously again, and shared a look with Crouch.

“Well...er...that’s it then. Good luck all.” Ludo put his hand on Crouch’s shoulder and they hurriedly departed the tent before Hermione could really lay into them.

“It’s alright Hermione... I’ve got this,” Harry said quietly, much more calmly than he felt.

“I know Harry. I have utmost confidence in you,” Hermione responded firmly. Then she whispered anxiously, “It...it’s Fleur I’m more worried about.”

Harry had been nervous, but Hermione’s statement hit him hard. He had no real idea of the other champion’s strengths and weaknesses. He could only hope that their greater age and experience with magic would see them through this. Even Krum. Harry didn’t want to see anyone else get killed just because someone was trying to kill him.

“Hermione, maybe you should go and keep an eye on things. I’ll be alright by myself while I wait my turn. You’ve got your hand-mirror right?”

Hermione nodded at Harry.

“Good!” Harry continued, “I’ve got mine too. If it looks like things are going badly--for anyone--call me and I’ll be right there and I’ll do what I can.”

They kissed briefly, and Hermione tearfully exited the tent.

The clock ticked, and one by one, the champions met their beasts in turn. Harry could hear the dragons roaring and the crowd screaming, gasping, and cheering, as first Cedric, then Fleur, followed by Krum, entered the arena.

It was nearly an hour before Harry was called. He took several deep breaths to steel himself and departed the tent. The gate to the arena was only a few metres away and he strode resolutely towards it through the slush.

As Harry emerged from behind the boulders near the gate, the crowd went silent. Everyone wondered how the youngest Champion would handle the worst dragon of the lot.

Harry’s breath clouded in the biting air. The black dragon eyed him warily, hunched over her nest protectively. Harry stood rooted to his spot and cleared his mind. Slowly, without making any sudden movements, Harry slipped off his cloak. Then just as cautiously he removed his blazer and his shirt, while the audience drew a sharp breath in shock. They couldn’t fathom why anyone would remove their clothing in this weather.

Harry’s nipples hardened and goosebumps rose on his rune-covered naked torso. Harry stretched out his tattooed arms, openhanded, so that the dragon could see that he was unarmed. And carefully, Harry bowed to show his respect.

The dragon blinked twice, and visibly relaxed. She bowed her own horned head towards Harry, and lifted a wing invitingly. Only the sound of Harry’s footsteps could be heard as he steadily walked towards her. He pointed at the gold egg in her nest.
The dragon looked where Harry was pointing, then turned her amber slitted gaze back to Harry. She nodded, wisps of steam emerging from her nostrils. With her snout she carefully nudged the foreign object out of her nest, away from her own eggs. The golden egg rolled with an echoing clatter over the boulders and fell at his feet. Harry bowed again in gratitude, and picked up the egg, allowing a smile to creep to his face as he exited the arena.

The entire audience was stunned, not sure what had just happened. It didn’t make any sense. Where were the flames and violence? What happened to the running and the screaming?

They had expected action and a bloodbath—certainly not this.

Harry walked past the stony-faced dragon keepers and approached the tent. Only a red-headed dragon keeper who looked a bit like a younger Arthur Weasley showed any emotion. He flashed a thumbs up and whispered, “Good Show Potter,” as Harry strode by, and pointed him towards the first-aid tent where the other Champions were being taken care of.

Harry began to turn blue and shivered violently when he entered the first aid tent. He cursed himself for not thinking of adding a rune to ward off the cold. His fingers were too stiff, and he fumbled his clothing. His golden egg tumbled to the floor. Madam Pomfrey rushed over to examine him and threw a blanket over Harry.

“Sit Mr Potter. Stay still, you’re going into shock.” Madam Pomfrey rushed back to the table and shot a dark look at Professor McGonagall. “Dementors, Dragons, what else are they going to throw at the boy Minerva?”

Professor McGonagall had no answer. Madam Pomfrey darted back to Harry’s side with a steaming potion, and pushed back Harry’s forehead. Gingerly, Poppy drizzled the potion into Harry's mouth and it flowed through his chattering teeth. Gradually, a glow of warmth emanated from his stomach, and filled his body. After a few minutes, his shivering stopped altogether and he felt much better.

“That should do it Mr Potter. You’ll be absolutely fine in a few more minutes.” Poppy's relief was profound.

After he put on his clothes, Harry made his way up to the stadium to find Hermione. He barely got to the stands when the bushy haired missile pounced on him, her furry tail twirling jubilantly.

“That was brilliant Harry!” Hermione shouted over the crowd, which had reverted to noisiness.

“You were amazing! You were in and out in under three minutes. The next fastest was Krum, and he was over ten minutes, not to mention that his dragon went berserk and crushed some of her eggs--he lost a lot of points for that.”

They both turned around to watch the judges give their scores. Bagman and Crouch sat with the Headmasters. Bagman scowled at Harry, who had just lost him a lot of money. But he really didn’t have any choice. It would look extremely odd and raise a lot of questions about the integrity of the process to give someone who had just completed the first task to perfection less than a perfect score.

All the judges appeared to feel the same way, except for Karkaroff. One by one, each judge gave him a 10 except for the silver-haired Durmstrang Headmaster who gave Harry a 7.

Harry looked around for Luna, Parvati and Daphne with a big grin on his face, but the only person he spotted emerging from the stands and walking over to him had freckles and red hair. Ron gave Harry a tentative apologetic grin, but Harry’s features turned as icy as the Hogwarts grounds. This again.
“I’m sorry Harry! I mean it this time,” Ron said with as much sincerity as he could muster. “You’d have to be barking to enter yourself...”

Harry’s stomach clenched. He waited a minute before responding and Ron’s ears began to turn pink.

“Really? You’ve got to be joking Ron!” Harry paused, looking for something in Ron’s demeanor which he couldn’t find. “You’re an arse Ron! A Bloody Selfish Arse! You think I like being bloody famous because Voldemort killed my parents and because I avoided becoming Dragon Food?!” Harry’s voice began to rise, and people nearby turned to stare.

“You grew up with everything I never had Ron. Family. Friends. Three squares a day. Parents who love you. So what if you had some second-hand clothes? At least they bloody fit you. But you’ve always been jealous of ME haven’t you? Go on! Admit it!” Harry shouted.

Ron hung his head in shame. He knew Harry was right, but he couldn’t bring himself to say anything. Harry kept going.

“And look at how you always treat Hermione. That’s the real pisser Ron! You only like her when she’s doing your bloody homework. Well I’m over it. She’s my wife, and I’m not having it...” Harry thundered.

Tears began to run down Hermione’s face as she saw how worked up Harry was getting. She put her hand on his arm.

“Please Harry. It’s alright...”

“No it’s not! It’s not alright Hermione. I’m not going to let a bloody selfish git like this pig use you again.” Harry could see that he was upsetting Hermione though, so he turned back to Ron, and tried to bring his temper under control.

“It’s not all about you Ron. You need to fucking grow up and get over yourself! Maybe someday we can be friends again, but not today. Not like this...” Harry swallowed, remembering the good bits of their friendship, and a tear trickled down one cheek.

“Maybe someday...” Harry said quietly. “I don’t know why I still care about you, but I do. But we’ll never be best mates again Ron.” Harry turned away from Ron and gently took his wife’s arm.

“Come on Hermione, let’s go. I don’t feel in the mood to celebrate, or feel like being around anyone else right now.”

Hermione gave Ron an angry glare, then turned her back on him too as she marched back to the castle with her husband.
Hermione urged her heartbroken husband to swig the entire vial of “cheering potion.” She could see how much Ron still meant to Harry—and how much it had hurt Harry to let him go. But she knew Harry had done the right thing. Everything he had said was true.

Harry needed people around him who loved him for who he really was right now, not people wounded by their own fragile egos and delusions. Harry had enough problems without having to deal with jealous fair-weather friends. Hermione could feel Harry’s silent tears dampening her fluffy tail while she cuddled him.

“I love you, Hermione,” Harry whispered just before he fell asleep.

Harry felt much better after the nap. When he woke up, Hermione was having tea with Daphne.

“That was unbelievable Harry. How did you do that?” Daphne asked.

“I used runes which spelled out ‘dragon friend,’” Harry replied. “Mind you, I didn’t know if it would work. I’m not sure they would have if I’d had my wand in my hand. ... That’s why I took my cloak and shirt off and showed that I was unarmed. Then I bowed to show respect, like Hagrid taught us with hippogriffs at the beginning of the year. Dragons are a lot like people, they just want to be respected.”

Daphne frowned in puzzlement.

“But why don’t all dragon handlers do that then?”

“Because most dragon handlers are like most other wizards,” said Hermione in her ‘schoolteacher’ voice; her tone also held an edge of bitterness. “They don’t actually treat dragons with the kindness or respect deserved by sentient beings. They treat dragons as animals to be locked up in zoos, or beasts of burden, or as enemies to be subdued.

“Harry’s right. The runes wouldn’t have worked by themselves. They just told the dragon that he was a friend. If Harry hadn’t acted like a friend—if he’d just stolen the egg—the dragon would have still attacked him.”

Tears of shock and terror filled Daphne’s eyes.

“Wait, you mean that Harry was totally unprotected then? He put down his wand too?”

Harry nodded.

“Well, I did use a fire protection rune too... just in case. But I was still scared to death that it would just eat me.”

Daphne flung herself on Harry with a sob and nearly knocked him off the settee.

“Hermione’s right, Harry. You are the nicest, bravest boy. I can’t believe you did that. You could’ve been killed.”

Hermione purred, and gave Harry and Daphne both a kiss.
“You’re joking! You can’t be serious...” Draco was stunned. “Potter approached the dragon... unarmed... and it just GAVE him the egg?”

Blaize smirked at Malfoy’s disconcertion. He loved getting a rise out of him. It was just too easy to provoke the smarmy little coward.

“I know you’ve got something planned Draco. But you’d better watch yourself. I saw Potter have a go at Weasley after he finished with the dragon. I don’t think he’s going to be inclined to dole out any more second chances to people who don’t treat him or his friends right. And if he can stand up to a dragon unarmed, I don’t think he’s going to be put off by whatever you’ve got going on.”

The blood drained from Draco’s face, and he wondered if he should just give it up.

But when Zabini left the common room, Malfoy flushed in anger. He’d show Potter--and that Greengrass Bitch! He’d show Mother, and Dumbledore too! He’d show them all what it meant to be a Malfoy. He was of Noble Blood, and no peasants or blood-traitors were going to stand in the way of him claiming what was rightfully his!

Unfortunately, it looked like things would have to wait until after Christmas now. The Third Year Hogsmeade visit had been postponed due to a local sighting of Sirius Black.

Severus poured himself another shot of Ogden’s Finest and checked the door of his office again to make sure it was well and truly locked. His features, so used to being inscrutable or angry, were unused to the flush of grief and shame. And for the second time since he had come to know Harry James Potter, he allowed himself to feel things he hadn’t felt in years.

Harry had proved today, yet again, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he was truly Lily’s son.

His bravery, his steadfastness, and his generosity of spirit--not just with a highly sensitive magical being, but also with someone Harry had once counted as a friend. Severus had witnessed the upbraiding which the Weasley boy truly deserved, and he’d seen the forgiveness in his eyes that Harry had so desired to give him, but properly withheld for a true display of repentance.

Severus knew that he himself didn’t deserve that forgiveness which Harry held in his heart. But he knew that one day--soon--he would have to tell Harry the truth about what he had done. The truth burned like brimstone in his soul, and if he didn’t reveal it, he knew it would kill him. He could live with the spectre of his own death, but he couldn’t live for much longer with the knowledge that Harry deserved the Truth.

That evening at dinner, the Headmaster announced that preparations were being made for a Yule Ball for Third Years and above to celebrate good tidings with their friends from the Continent. Professor McGonagall followed up Dumbledore’s Speech with one of her own, and announced that dancing lessons were to be held after classes, and that anyone who wished to attend the Yule Ball would be required to take them.

Fleur was perplexed though. The Champions were required to have “dates,” partners to dance with as they would be leading the Ball Room. There was only one person she wanted to ask to the dance, but she was already married. Steeling her nerve, Fleur addressed Hermione quietly at the table just as
dinner was concluding.

“‘Ermione, may I please speak wiz you and your ‘usband when you are alone. Eet...eet ees ‘ard for me to speak of what I wish here.”

Hermione smiled and flicked her furry tail.

“Certainly Fleur. Harry, you don’t mind do you?”

Harry shook his head.

“Of course not.”

Parvati grinned at Hermione significantly and took Luna’s hand.

“We’ll see you later, Hermione. Luna and I have to get going so we can spend a bit of time together before curfew and start planning for the Yule Ball.”

Fleur followed the Potters and Daphne back to the Unaffiliated’s corridor. When they arrived, Daphne glumly made to return to her own chambers. Hermione touched her arm gently.

“It’s alright Daphne, why don’t you join us too!” Hermione glanced at Fleur apologetically, “Erm... sorry Fleur, but this will be easier if we just get this all over with right now.”

Fleur and Daphne peered awkwardly at each other as they settled in armchairs across from the Potters in their sitting room. Harry gave Hermione a questioning look. He felt a bit anxious himself. He wasn’t sure what was going on, and he didn’t want anyone’s feelings to get hurt. Hermione gave his hand a squeeze and smiled sweetly at him.

“Harry, would you mind if you and I both took Fleur and Daphne to the Ball together?”

~o0o~

Ron and Seamus grumbled all the way back to the common room.

“D’you suppose we really need dates to go to the Ball?” Ron sighed dejectedly. He couldn’t imagine any girl wanting to go with him after recent events. But it was a party, and he really wanted to go.

“Nah! I don’ remember anyone sayin’ we had to have dates. Just the Champions,” Seamus replied, “But we’ll have to take McGonagall’s dance classes. I’m not lookin’ forward ta that.”

Ron groaned.

“Blimey! That’s rubbish!”

“Come on Ron. Don’ be like that. Let’s just take McGonagall’s class an’ get it over with.”

~o0o~

“Oh stop it you two,” Poppy snapped at Minerva and Albus, who both shifted uncomfortably in their seats at the Staff Table when the Potter’s arrived at the Yule Ball arm in arm with Misses Delacour and Greengrass.

“The Potters aren’t the only one’s sharing dates,” Poppy said, pointing to the hors d’oeuvres table, "The Weasley Twins are both right over there with Miss Johnson.”
Minerva looked faint and Poppy rolled her eyes at her. Albus took off his spectacles and massaged the bridge of his nose with a huge sigh.

He must be getting old, Albus thought as he recalled his own numerous excursions to muggle nightclubs in 1960’s and 70’s London. When had he become such a fuddy duddy? Of course he’d only gone with his on again/off again partner Elphias Doge. But Albus recalled seeing numerous others sharing partners at the time. Albus had thought such times long gone, but he supposed certain trends came and went like the tides.

Neville and Ginny greeted the Potters and their dates warmly.

“You look gorgeous, Hermione,” said Ginny in amazement, admiring Hermione’s mauve evening dress. Its elegant low cut enhanced her double-breasted curves beautifully. Hermione’s Golden-Brown hair was sleek and pulled back with delicate curls framing her face. Her furry cat ears peeked out and twitched happily, and her fluffy tail bobbed in delight.

“I had a little help from Daphne and Fleur,” Hermione giggled. She spotted Luna approaching with her dreamy smile and waved at her. Luna was wearing a canary yellow ball gown that went over one shoulder. They gave each other a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“Where’s Parvati?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, she’s over there talking to Pansy,” Luna replied evenly, pointing to the entrance of the Great Hall.

“NO! You’re joking!” Harry’s jaw dropped.

Harry, Fleur, and Hermione all looked where Luna was pointing, and sure enough there was a very red-faced contrite looking Pansy Parkinson conversing quietly with Parvati.

“She apologised for being mean,” Luna said simply. “I think she’s gone off boys a bit herself now.”

Ron and Seamus hovered by the punch bowl, gawking at all the girls in evening gowns, then Ron saw Viktor Krum arrive with Lavender Brown. Krum was wearing an elegantly tailored black tuxedo and burgundy cloak. He looked a lot more cheerful than he had of late.

Seamus saw Ron ogling Krum and rolled his eyes, feeling slightly jealous.

“I’ve got a flask of Firewhiskey mate,” Seamus said, “Me pappy sent it to me in the post. Let’s go have a nip, eh!?”

That got Ron’s attention. Seamus and Ron ambled out of the foyer of Hogwarts into the courtyard. Snow crunched underfoot, but they were both dressed warmly enough. They found a bush behind a bench which hid them from prying eyes. Seamus chuckled when Ron coughed on the burning liquid.

“An’ there I thought ye were an experienced drinker Ronny boy. Here, have another. It’ll smooth out soon enough.”

As the pair of young wizards shared another sip from the flask, Hagrid and Madame Maxime plonked heavily on the bench with a slight cracking sound in front of the bush they were hiding behind. They both silently groaned when Hagrid began to whisper sweet nothings in Olympe’s gigantic ear. It looked like they might be awhile.

Cedric and Cho Chang began the dance, then Fleur led Hermione onto the dancefloor followed by Harry and Daphne. Krum put down the drink he was nursing and led Lavender to the floor. As they
waltzed slowly past Hermione and Fleur, Lavender flushed and buried her face in Krum’s chest. Neville and Ginny joined shortly after, and soon the dancefloor was full.

Hermione and Harry both switched partners on the next dance, and then took the last waltz together as Daphne and Fleur paired up. Hermione curled her tail around Harry, and mused at how much his dancing had improved since their visit to the London Nightclub at Easter. They gazed deeply into each other's eyes and their lips met.

When the waltzes stopped, and Lady Gaga took over the stage with Selena Gomez, the Hall erupted into cheers. The students couldn’t believe their luck at having two of the world’s most famous Musical Witches partnered up for their Yule Ball.

As the loud booms of the beats rocked the Great Hall, Dumbledore started to tap his toes and nod his head, his eyes twinkling merrily. Maybe he wasn’t feeling so old after all he thought, as the dance-rhythms took him back a few decades. He raised his eyebrows at McGonagall and held out his hand. Minerva pursed her lips and shook her head.

“I’ll take this dance, Albus,” giggled Poppy as she took his hand instead.

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas and Happy Yule
Finally rising after a long snog, Olympe stumbled and giggled when Hagrid caught her. The two drunk boys hiding in the bushes behind them breathed a heavy sigh of relief when the two half-giants headed back to the Ballroom.

Thankfully the magical properties of firewhiskey had protected Ron and Seamus from the freezing night. And fortunately for Ron and Seamus, the two famous musical witches had just begun performing a second set after a long break.

Shortly after midnight the Yule Ball was brought to a close. Luna and Parvati kissed the Potters goodnight, and snuck up to the Seventh Floor. The Gryffindor Common Room filled as Fred and George’s after-party kicked into gear. Ron and Seamus were smashed though, and when Dean began making out with a fifth year girl, and Neville began snogging Ginny, they both decided it was time to get some sleep.

They staggered past Fred and George who had Angelina sandwiched between them. She was giggling gleefully, as she prepared herself to fulfill another longheld fantasy.

~o0o~

Hermione leaned the tipsy Daphne against Harry as she opened the door to the Potters’ chambers. She planned to have a little chat later with the Twins about why spiking a punch bowl intended for use by everyone was more than a bit irresponsible. But in the meantime, nobody had come to any harm, and she was feeling pleasantly tingly herself. She turned to smile invitingly at their other date.

“Would you like to join us, Fleur?”

Fleur very much wanted to, but she eyed Daphne and returned Hermione’s smile knowingly.

“Zat ees alright ‘Ermione. Per’aps next time. I think someone else needs your--and your ‘usband’s--attention more right now. When she ees more ready...”

Hermione nodded in understanding, and her furry tail flicked happily. She was grateful for the older girl’s wisdom and graciousness. As Harry lay the giggling Daphne gently on the settee, Hermione and Fleur kissed heatedly in the doorway. Parting left them both wanting more, but in the meantime there was Daphne.

Daphne felt hot and giddy, trapped in her ball-gown. She tried to pull it off when Harry turned around to see what Hermione was doing, but only succeeded in exposing her pink tipped breasts. Frustrated, Daphne tugged at the satiny white fabric which had bunched up at her waist.

“Let me give you a hand with that,” Hermione giggled, “It helps to unzip the dress first.” She was thrilled that Daphne finally felt comfortable enough to take the next step, and decided not to be too hard on the Twins.

Harry grinned as Hermione helped Daphne to wriggle out of her white ball-gown. He stripped down to his tenting boxers, unzipped Hermione’s own gown and slipped his hands inside to cup her breasts as she freed Daphne’s feet from the dress. The elastic in her panties gave way to Hermione’s fingers and she slid them down Daphne’s parting thighs.

The girl moaned when Hermione stroked her lightly covered mound. Hermione’s fluffy tail waved gleefully as her own dress pooled at her feet. Hermione directed Harry, and he let go of Hermione’s
Daphne pulled Harry into a passionate kiss when he took Daphne’s breasts in hand and began kneading them tenderly. She felt Hermione’s lips against her bare slit and her hips bucked. Hermione’s cat-tongue slipped into the folds of Daphne’s entrance and sought out her clitoris. Finding it, she jiggled the tip of her tongue against it until it emerged from its hiding place.

Hermione lifted Daphne’s thighs onto her shoulders and licked the length of Daphne’s labia before plunging her cat-tongue deeper into her humid passage. Shudders of pleasure began to ripple through Daphne’s body. Harry’s kisses trailed down her neck to her breasts and he began to suck Daphne’s perky pink nipples and lightly run his hand across the smooth skin of her abdomen.

Daphne gasped when Harry gently nibbled and rolled her nipples with his tongue as he squeezed her breasts. Hermione sucked on Daphne’s nubbin and thrust two fingers into her heated vulva. This was even better than Daphne had imagined; her senses overwhelmed her. Daphne's thighs clenched around Hermione’s head, her back arched, and with a little scream of ecstasy she climaxed, drenching Hermione’s hand in dewiness.

Daphne slumped back onto the settee in a daze as Harry grinned at his wife. Hermione’s fluffy tail whisked in delight and she crawled on top of the panting sweaty girl to kiss her. Gradually Daphne became more lucid.

Hermione pulled Harry’s boxers down to mid thigh, and they dropped the rest of the way to the floor. She took Daphne’s trembling hand and placed it on Harry’s stiff penis. Harry gave a little gasp at the thrill of her touch. Daphne’s breathing quickened again. She had never seen a boy's nakedness before, not even in pictures, and Pansy’s descriptions hadn't done it justice.

“Gently,” Hermione said softly, as she guided Daphne’s hand up and down Harry’s erect penis. “Be careful, when a boy...erm...climaxes, it can be a bit messy,” she warned.

Harry smirked and Daphne giggled nervously

“I don’t mind,” she replied bravely, “I want to see for myself.”

Feeling both girls’ hands on his erection as they masturbated him together after helping Hermione bring Daphne to completion was more than he could take. His loins jerked as he erupted. Daphne squealed and giggled as his semen jetted from the tip and splattered against her breasts and collarbone. Harry spurted several times and a stray strand of his stickiness landed on Daphne’s chin.

Purring, Hermione leaned forward and licked it, stirring Daphne’s curiosity. Daphne dabbed a forefinger into Harry’s ejaculate and put it in her mouth to taste it. She giggled again.

“Salty... but alright, actually.”

“I can show you more if you’d like,” Hermione said, her furry ears twitching.

Daphne nodded, her eyes shining. Hermione took Harry’s softening penis in hand again and wrapped her lips around it, she licked the end of it and then took it all in her mouth. As she drew her lips back with a strong suck, Harry sprang back to fullness. Hermione leaned back to let the other girl get into a better position.

“It’s easier for Harry if you let him hold your head a bit,” Hermione instructed. “Don’t worry, he’ll be gentle, and he’ll stop if it’s too much for you--just tap him twice on his thigh.”

Daphne proved to be a good pupil, following Hermione’s directions to the letter while Hermione
reached her hand between Daphne’s thighs to fondle her slit again and nibbled her ears.

Daphne twirled her tongue around the tip, she slurped and licked, and she allowed Harry to press forth until she discovered how much depth she could tolerate. After a good long while of sucking Harry off, the head of his penis pressing against the back of her throat twitched, convulsing, and filled her mouth with his essence. Daphne held her breath and swallowed as much as she could until semen trickled from her lips.

Hermione’s ministrations brought Daphne to bliss once more, and a string of Harry’s sticky fluid dripped from her mouth as she gasped ecstatically and writhed in Hermione’s arms.

“Now that you know how it all works, next time, you can try the best bit,” Hermione whispered. “Harry needs to rest now.”

~000~

Ron woke groggily, wondering why his head hurt so badly. Then he remembered his mum warning his dad to take his hangover potion after a rather rowdy Weasley/Prewett New Year’s Eve party one year. He supposed Madam Pomfrey would have something that would help.

The second thing which puzzled Ron was that he was having trouble remembering when he had taken off his clothes.

The third odd thing which struck Ron was that he was in Seamus’s bed with the curtains pulled tightly shut.

Seamus groaned in pain as he sat up holding his own throbbing head. He blinked at Ron. They both began turning pink. Foggy memories began to flood into Ron’s blurry brain and his mouth gaped.

“Erm... Seamus,” Ron squeaked anxiously, “Did we... er...”

Seamus wasn’t sure at first, then slowly he nodded, cringing and blushing furiously.

“I...er...think I remember summat mate. Not sure how far we got though... Ye alright with it Ron?” Seamus peered at his best friend nervously.

Ron thought about the bits he remembered. They had all seemed quite pleasant at the time. He shrugged.

“Er...yeah! I suppose I am.” Then Ron’s features looked more resolute as he made up his mind. “In fact... I think I’m more than alright with it if you are.”

Seamus grinned at his best mate.

“Righ’ then, now how do we get you outta ma bed without anyone seein’ ya was in it?”
Chapter 57

A couple of days later, Hermione and Harry looked at the golden egg again for the hundredth time since the First Task trying to work out how to open it and glean its secrets. Ludo Bagman had explained to the Champions the day following the Task that the egg contained cryptic hints about the Second Task.

They had tried numerous spells, and hit the library many times for ideas about how to open the egg. It was nearly time for breakfast though, so Harry sighed and put it back in the desk of the little study in their chambers.

“Well, I’ve got until February 24th Hermione. And it won’t even be New Year for a few days yet.”

Hermione frowned at Harry.

“Once we get the egg open, we’ll still have to work out whatever the puzzle is to tell us what the second task is. And then we’ll have to work out how to deal with whatever the Minister is planning for you in that task Harry. We don’t have a lot of time if you think about it like that.”

Harry sighed again. He knew Hermione was right.

“Yeah, well, look--let’s give it a rest for now Hermione. We’ve got to do our workout after classes, and I’ve got my next metamorph lesson with Tonks this evening too. Then tomorrow evening its fighting lessons with Moody. Then Wednesday evening it’s advanced potions... I suppose there’s always New Years Day though--we’ll have all day then.”

“Then we’ll have Friday evening and next weekend too. We can try and get this bloody thing open by Sunday--so let’s just put this aside until New Years on Thursday alright!”

Hermione nodded in agreement. What Harry said made sense; he had far too much to be getting on with, and she had to admit that there really wasn’t time for much else over the next few days. But after breakfast, Hermione decided it could wait for the weekend.

That morning the Headmaster announced that the postponed Hogsmeade visit for Third Years would be taking place on New Year’s Day. Hermione thought that she and Harry could both do with getting out of Hogwarts for a few hours.

~000~

Draco had been hard at work for over a month, practicing silencing charms, the petrificus totalus curse, and the incarcero spell. Hogsmeade Day had finally arrived and he was ready to put his plans into effect. The Potters and Greengrass were sure to be out of the castle, and security would be stretched thin between the village and the castle.

It was time to put Hogwarts behind him, and find a way to break Father out of Azkaban. The map Nott’s father had sent him showed a secret passage leading from behind the statue of the one-eyed witch to the cellar of Honeydukes. Draco should be able to slip out from there, and the other students in Hogsmeade would provide good cover.

Lucius had promised Draco when he was much younger, that one day he would have his pick of
pureblood girls. Draco had always wanted Daphne, much to Pansy’s chagrin. But now Daphne was no longer accessible to him, and if Draco couldn’t have Daphne, he’d have her sister instead.

Gehlen was to meet them at the Shrieking Shack with a long-distance portkey to his Homeland. So far everything was going to plan.

Astoria was moping in the common room wishing she could have joined her sister in Hogsmeade. Her friends had gone outside to play in the snow, but she didn’t feel like getting cold and wet without Daphne to play with. She remained in the common room curled cozily in a poofy armchair by the Slytherin fireplace with her book. Despite the warmth, a chill sent shivers through Astoria’s body.

With a start, Astoria jerked around in her seat. Her aqua eyes widened in fright when she saw Draco leering at her. Astoria tried to tell him to get lost, but she was too late. Draco’s spell hit her. She opened her mouth to scream but no sound emerged.

Terror shook her, and Astoria made a break for the door. Draco shot another spell at her and the blonde girl collapsed on the floor, paralysed completely. Draco cast the incarcero spell for good measure and ropes bound the younger Greengrass.

Hurriedly, Nott tossed the small first year girl over his shoulder and Draco flung his invisibility cloak over the lot of them. They stealthily departed from the Slytherin common room, and crept through the Hallways until they found the statue of the one-eyed witch. Nott spoke the password and the statue made a grinding noise as it slid aside to reveal a dank, dark passage.

It took some time to travel through the tunnel to the Honeydukes cellar and Draco began to get anxious and hot. Sweat dripped from Draco’s forehead, and Nott was puffed from carrying Astoria the entire way.

Cautiously, under cover of the invisibility cloak, they slipped out of Honeyduke’s past a number of other Hogwarts students, and made their way to the edge of town. Finally, Draco and Nott spied the Shrieking Shack, and trudged through the snow towards it.

Draco began to gloat about how smoothly things had gone. They were early. Gehlen wouldn’t be arriving for another 20 minutes at least, plenty of time to play with his prize he thought. Draco stashed his invisibility cloak in his robes and Nott dropped Astoria into a powdery drift by the fence.

“Keep an eye out Nott, I’m going to inspect my new acquisition,” Draco commanded. Nott obeyed Malfoy and kept watch.

Astoria was frightened and the cold cut to the bone. She couldn’t move or scream as Draco began to viciously tear at her clothes.

~o0o~

Harry nearly tripped over Hermione when she came up short with a gasp in front of Honeydukes.

“What’s wrong Hermione?” Harry asked with concern.

“I smell Draco Malfoy,” Hermione replied, furry tail and ears quivering and bristling in consternation. Harry frowned.

“That’s odd! We haven’t seen him since the day he and his friends molested Parvati and Luna,” Harry pondered. “I suppose he got confined to Slytherin House. But how did he get out?”
“I... I smell someone else too Harry--the smell reminds me a bit of Daphne--but we only just left her with Luna and Parvati moments ago,” Hermione said anxiously.

The blood drained from Harry’s face.

“Astoria... Quick, Hermione, can you tell which way they went?”

Hermione nodded, her heart racing as she began to feel panicky. She began to jog in the direction which her nose led. Harry ran close behind her. She picked up speed, which was difficult in the trampled wet snow on the road. Hermione slid a few feet and fell. Cursing, Harry picked up Hermione and set her upright again.

The scent led them right into the woods at the edge of the Forbidden Forest on the side closest to the Village of Hogsmeade. There was a clearing up ahead with several figures near a boarded up hovel. Harry realised that two of the figures were Draco roughly groping a half-naked girl in a snow-drift near the Shrieking Shack.

A white-hot firestorm of Fury blazed through Harry.

Draco looked up with a start when he heard the slosh of footsteps in wet snow approaching and he went ashen.

“POTTER!” Malfoy yelled with fright.

Draco’s hand flew to his wand, and Nott whirled around with a stolen wand in hand just as Gehlen tumbled out of nowhere into a fighting stance, his own wand at the ready.

Harry was too enraged to speak. Wordlessly, Harry whipped his wand three times.

Draco shrieked in agony as his wand hand was severed from his wrist and a scarlet spray of blood blossomed against the white snow. Screams uttered from Nott as his fingers flew and landed nearby in another bloom of red. Gehlen’s own wand hand twitched and went still, separated from its owner in a pool of crimson. But he just groaned in pain.

Hermione’s trembling hands reached into her purse for her handmirror and she sobbed into it.

“Dumbledore, Moody, Tonks, HELP! Anybody...Please! --Can anyone hear me?”

Harry yanked the prone Durmstrang’s velvet Burgundy cloak off him. He wrapped it around Astoria who was turning blue and he lifted her gently. Boiling tears of rage streamed down Harry’s fiery red cheeks. She seemed so tiny and light in his arms.

Harry stalked over to the whimpering Malfoy who was holding his bloody stump with his other hand.

Harry kicked him hard in the balls twice–wrenching more screams from Draco–and finally managed to break his own silence.

“You fucking little coward! You sick piece of shite! I should have just ended you, you bastard!”

Load apparition cracks echoed in the snowy glade which was home to the Shrieking Shack. Moody, Tonks, McGonagall, Pomfrey, and Dumbledore ran over to Harry whose arms held a small girl swathed in a cloak many times too large for her.

Madam Pomfrey could see that Astoria was going into hypothermic shock. Poppy’s face was etched
in Horror as she took the delicate girl from Harry’s arms. Without a word, she nodded her head towards Dumbledore as to indicate that he should deal with the rest of those in need and she disapparated with Astoria.

Dumbledore walked slowly to the boys who were sobbing in the blood-stained snow next to their missing hands and digits. His gaze was as icy as the ground they lay on. The Headmaster saw Miss Greengrass’s blazer, underwear, and torn blouse laying nearby. As the moaning criminals looked up at the Headmaster, his piercing blue eyes bore into them.

Albus was sickened by everything he saw, and he felt an urge to vomit. He looked back at Harry sadly, who was being embraced by his weeping wife. Her furry tail was covered in ice and snow and dragging in the slush. Harry swallowed anxiously.

“Well done Harry!” Albus said softly, with a dangerous look in his eyes. “A most fitting reward for their crimes. I appreciate your restraint--not killing them. But I would have understood if you had done so. I shall do my utmost to see them all in Azkaban.”

Dumbledore’s face hardened and he turned to address Moody and Tonks with an iron voice.

“Please see to it that Shacklebolt, Dawlish, and the other Aurors deal with this filth. I’ve seen as much of them as I care to today. Dress their wounds, but be sure to immediately have veritaserum administered, and their memories examined in a pensieve before they are admitted to St Mungo’s. Please also have Mr Malfoy’s illegal wand examined.”

“You will find all the spells which he has cast recently on Miss Greengrass. A close inspection will also find traces of Mr Malfoy’s hands on Miss Greengrass’s clothing and person. Take the evidence to Madam Bones immediately, before the Minister has a chance to interfere with the investigation.”

~00o~

A little cough from the doorway alerted DMLE Head, Madam Amelia Bones to the presence of Minister Umbridge. The Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement looked up to see the Minister smiling at her insipidly. Amelia’s jaw tightened. Dumbledore had warned her of this.

“May I be of assistance Minister?” she inquired coolly.

“I am curious to find out more about the Potter Incident,” Minister Umbridge responded with a honeyed voice.

“If you are referring to the Malfoy Affair, the full report is available.” Madam Bones said stiffly.

“Quite! I’ve read it, but I do have some concerns that not all points of view have been adequately addressed.”

Madam Bones arched one eyebrow.

“Oh? All the evidence is enclosed, and it is incontrovertible that the crimes of kidnapping, sexual assault, and the attempted rape of a minor were committed by Draco Malfoy, accompanied by Theodore Nott and a foreign national.”

Minister Umbridge emitted a girlish giggle, and Madam Bones’ blood ran cold.

“Come now, Amelia, boys will be boys. The alleged assailter is but a child himself. Surely he thought it was a bit of innocent fun.”
Madam Bones had dismissed Headmaster Dumbledore’s suspicions regarding the assassination of Cornelius Fudge as ludicrous. Now she was far less certain. She made a note to herself to begin a full investigation of the Minister immediately.

“Really, Dolores? You are aware, are you not, that Warlock Greengrass pressed full charges, as did Mr Patil for a prior assault by the young Mr Malfoy on Mr Patil’s daughter when she finally reported it, giving us the authority to conduct a complete investigation. The veritaserum confession, the pensieve examination, the wand inspection of Mr Malfoy’s illegally purchased wand, Miss Greengrass’s torn clothing, and Miss Greengrass’s physical injuries and emotional trauma, all constitute absolute proof of the converse. Due to the conclusive nature of the evidence, a trial is not warranted.”

Dolores’s smile vanished. She did know that, but had hoped that Madam Bones would see reason when presented politely by someone of higher authority.

“Surely Madam Malfoy has something to say about all of this,” Dolores offered, in a chillier tone.

“Oh, she did indeed Dolores. Madam Malfoy demanded that the Senior Malfoy have no access to her son as long as they shall both reside in Azkaban. It is her hope that someday--after a very lengthy sentence--her son will recognise the error of his ways.”

Dolores was floored. She gaped at the Head of the DMLE in disbelief. That part wasn’t in the report, but it wouldn’t be of course, as such demands by the Madams and Warlocks of the Pureblood Houses were always kept off-record.

As she had nowhere else to go, Minister Umbridge tried another tack.

“And what of Mr Potter, surely his own actions--the use of a dark curse to mutilate three children--warrant an investigation.”

“Indeed,” Amelia Bones responded, “Warlock Potter and his wife immediately volunteered their own testimony under veritaserum, and their own memories for examination by pensieve. And he offered his wand up for inspection.”

“Aurors Shacklebolt, Dawlish, and myself have determined that the curse employed was not subject to Unforgivable Statute, and that it was used entirely for defensive purposes. Again, the evidence is Sustained as Absolute, and the DMLE will not be pursuing any actions in that regard. Is there anything else you wish to discuss, Dolores?”

Recognising defeat, Minister Dolores Umbridge regarded Madam Bones shrewdly.

“That will be all. Carry on,” Dolores concluded with a return to her girlish demeanor.

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Harry flinched when Mr Greengrass and Mrs Greengrass both embraced him. It still made Harry extremely anxious to have adults touch him.

Mr and Mrs Patil also both insisted on hugging Harry. Parvati had been convinced by Professor McGonagall to come forward in an effort to ensure that Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott would be expelled from Hogwarts and sent to Azkaban for as long as the law would allow for a Minor.

Professor Snape had revealed to the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall that Parvati had been the other most aggrieved victim of the previous assault as soon as he had been informed of the New Year’s Day attack. The Patil’s had been notified immediately, and they had done their part to assist in
the prosecution of Malfoy and Nott.

Severus had wanted to expel Crabbe and Goyle too, but there was no clear evidence that they had any knowledge of the kidnapping, sexual assault, and attempted rape of Astoria Greengrass. They were only aware that Draco was bent on escaping from Hogwarts and breaking his father out of Azkaban.

“Mr Potter, my family will forever be indebted to you and your wife for your courageous acts in protecting our daughters,” Mr Greengrass fought back tears as he spoke. “If you and your wife hadn’t been there...”

Mr Greengrass’s attempts to hold back the dam failed as he choked up and lost his voice. His wife took him in her arms, tears welling in her own eyes.

Mr Patil’s face was grim. He addressed the headmaster openly and directly.

“Professor Dumbledore, my family has only been in Britain a few generations--not long enough to wield any political power. But if there is anything I can to do to aid you in your attempts to end the corruption at the Ministry, I will do whatever is in my power as long as I know that you have the best interests of Mr Potter and his wife at heart.”

Mrs Greengrass spoke for her husband.

“Our family concurs with the Patils. Of course, Astoria will be coming home with us after we return to St Mungo’s to be by her side. But I have been given to understand that you have already placed our other daughter in a protected wing of the castle with Mr Potter and his wife.”

“You will have our full support in the Wizengamot--we will do our utmost to see you returned as Chief Warlock--as long as you continue to be so proactive in the protection of the Potters and our daughter.”

The Headmaster’s visage was as inscrutable as Professor Snape’s, but indeed he felt a large measure of shame for the fact that he had neglected Harry’s best interests in the pursuit of his goal to end Voldemort for so long, until his wife’s unfortunate potions accident had unleashed a chain of events which had broken the Prophecy and caused his inner circle to stand firm against his own crumbling plans.

Albus Dumbledore’s eyes had been opened to his own exceeding arrogance by his staff’s incredible show of support for the young Potters. And there was no going back. The only way out was forward together into an uncertain future with new allies.

Chapter End Notes

The map provided by Nott's father is nothing like the Marauder's Map. It is just a very simple one which only depicted the one secret passage.
Albus Dumbledore conjured some fresh ice for his tumbler and squeezed some lemon into his third glass of whiskey. Tears flowed freely into his whiskers. He had only barely managed to hold things together all afternoon as he dealt with the aftermath of the vicious attack against Astoria Greengrass.

It had been very trying, though ultimately gratifying, to have spoken with the parents of the victims and the primary attacker. Albus hadn’t expected to find new allies in his struggle with the new Minister and the pureblood supremacists in the Wizengamot.

And not just the Patils and the Greengrasses.

Mr Lovegood had declined to press charges, suggesting that his reputation may prove counterproductive to the cause of expelling and prosecuting the Nott and Malfoy boys. But he had offered to henceforth curb his instinct to publish sensational material about oddities, and promised to focus on hard journalism and the failings of the Ministry instead. And a new free edition of the Quibbler would be available to all in the morning, to counter whatever lies the Minister’s Mouthpiece was sure to tell.

Most surprising of all was Narcissa Malfoy’s pledge of support—not only against the current administration at the Ministry, but also against the Death Eaters who had not yet thrown in with Minister Umbridge. She had whispered of dark rumours and the hopes of those who remained loyal to Voldemort.

But Dumbledore’s own hope was not enough to assuage his heartbreak. He had forced himself to examine the memories of the Patils’ daughter, before having them delivered to Madam Bones along with the memories belonging to Astoria Greengrass. Twice today, he had allowed his mind to be assaulted by a pain which he had never again wished to endure personally.

Albus touched his fingers again to the glass covering the small picture of his sister Arianna which he kept in his desk and he wept. It hadn’t been fair that his father had been punished for delivering justice to those who had assaulted her surely as brutally as Draco had intended to violate Astoria. Those boys—young men really—had deserved everything his father had done to them.

Just as Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott had deserved the means by which young Harry Potter had prevented them from harming Astoria any further.

Harry Potter!

Albus wept some more, having come to realise that he had deprived Harry of his childhood. He hadn’t understood the dynamics at the Dursley residence. Not until Severus had completed his investigation of the Dursleys had Albus truly comprehended the torment to which he had abandoned Harry.

He had discounted Minerva’s concerns until it was far too late. He should have given Hagrid’s complaints about Harry’s retrieval more credence. He should have monitored the Dursley residence from Day One but had believed that Lily’s Magic would protect Harry from harm, never expecting that harm would come from within his own home

He had believed that Petunia as a grown woman had grown past her fear and jealousy of Lily’s magic, and would at the very least protect Harry and treat him with some measure of kindness. How very wrong he had been—about so many things. Albus Dumbledore had made so many mistakes
which could not be undone.

He had hoped that Harry might salvage some bit of childhood here at Hogwarts. He had hoped that the youngest Weasley son’s friendship and love of fun would be enough to provide Harry with the modicum of childishness he had thought every young person needed. Only now did Albus realise that after 11 years, it had already been too late.

And it wasn’t only Ronald Bilius Weasley’s extremely poor judgment, fickleness, and petty behaviour. Many boys his age lacked grace and manners, Albus thought.

Quite simply, Harry had never been a child. Harry could never get back that which he had never had, merely by being in the company of the Childish. No amount of hoping might make it otherwise. Harry was a young man who had turned out far better than anyone had a right to expect him to under the circumstances.

Harry had proved that time and again since coming to Hogwarts, demonstrating the kindness and maturity which could have only come from his mother. Even Harry’s occasional disrespect of certain teachers was far more like Lily than James—whose irreverence had been displayed in nearly all of his classes.

Like his mother, Harry had shown respect to all who had demonstrated the capacity to return that respect, and reserved his rudeness for those who had most certainly earned it.

After seeing what those boys had done to Arianna—correction, Astoria—Harry could have been driven to kill them, but he hadn’t. And something in Albus Dumbledore almost wished that he had. Something which Albus had tried to bury the day his sister Arianna had been killed—whether by his own wand or Gellert’s, he would never know.

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Hermione put everyone off at dinner, and eaten alone with her husband in their chambers. Daphne had left with her parents when they returned to St Mungo’s to be with Astoria. And that was for the best. When Harry’s anxiety and agitation were this high, he desired nothing more than to be left alone.

Except for his Hermione, whom Harry found to be a calming influence. And for that, Hermione was extremely grateful. She rested his head in her lap, and curled her fluffy tail around him, as she had after the First Task, and administered a calming draught while tenderly stroking his messy moptop. Gradually, she felt the tension drain from Harry’s body as he drifted into sleep.

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Mayhem at Hogwarts

*Does Hogwarts have a new Dark Lord in the making? That is what this sterling reporter set out to discover after rumours of a gruesome occurrence yesterday just outside of Hogsmeade reached her ears.*

*Certain Ministry officials—unnamed due to fears of retribution—revealed that a bloodbath unfolded sometime around Noon on New Year’s Day near the Shrieking Shack. The abandoned Manor House has been given a wide berth by local residents for many years, as it is locally known as a magnet for those with a penchant for Blood Rituals.*

*According to the unnamed official, a certain Harry James Potter, previously known as the Saviour*
of the British Wizarding Community engaged in just such a ritual. Utilizing an unknown Dark Curse surely belonging among the class of Unforgivables, Mr Potter, a man of the age of majority, mutilated three young children in a most horrific manner.

A healer at St Mungo’s, too terrified to reveal her name, revealed that multiple limbs had been savagely severed from the traumatised victim’s bodies.

Young Demon Potter’s thirst for blood must surely give the other Champions in the Triwizard Tournament pause to continue. Are the Headmasters of the foreign schools which are participating too frightened to withdraw? Enquiring minds want to know.

Hermione’s bushy ginger tail whipped angrily, but she noted with wry amusement that just under the fold of the front page of the Daily Prophet was an advertisement for Humdinger Extenders, and another for an assuredly fraudulent Philosopher’s-Stone-Making kit which could be brewed in under ten minutes.

Fleur was sitting in Daphne’s usual spot, as she had gone home for the weekend with Astoria and her parents. Fleur had an arm comfortingly draped around Harry’s shoulders and she kissed him warmly on the cheek.

“I don’t believe a word of it. Zey are all lies.” Fleur reassured him as she passed the new edition of the Quibbler to Hermione.

The Quibbler’s headline couldn’t have been more different.

**Kidnapping and Attempted Rape Foiled**

**Death Eater Scion Arrested**

The front page article factually revealed all of the events which had transpired in great detail, and quoted Madam Bones as admiring Harry Potter’s “great restraint in subduing the criminals who had been caught in the act.” Kingsley Shacklebolt, and even Dawlish, were cited as praising Harry Potter, and hoping that he would one day consider becoming an Auror himself.

Draco Malfoy, Theodore Nott, and Gustav Gehlen were all named as the criminals, and Gehlen was revealed to have reached the age of majority in October of that year. Astoria Greengrass was named as the victim, and Mr Greengrass offered his “utmost gratitude for Harry Potter’s courageous act” and preventing his 11 year old daughter from suffering a “fate worse than death.”

A copy of the DMLE’s full arrest and conviction report was enclosed inside. There were a number of other articles too. Including one about a healer at St Mungo’s who had been bribed by a lower-level Ministry Official from the Department of Magical Sanitation to lie to the Daily Prophet, and yet another article detailing corruption in the Wizengamot. There was also a feature on the crimes of Lucius Malfoy and Nott’s father. Every piece was hard-hitting, and backed up with named sources. Not a single advert could be found in the Quibbler.

A buzz of conversation and argument filled the Great Hall and students seemed to be divided between confusion, fear, anger, and pride. A number of students—mostly muggleborns—grinned at Harry and flashed thumbs up at him while the rest avoided looking directly at him.

Even Slytherin seemed awkwardly at odds with each other. Blaize Zabini smirked and nodded approvingly in Harry’s direction.
Fleur glared at the grim-faced Durmstrang Champion as he strode towards the Mingling Table while Karkaroff watched furiously from the Slytherin table. Krum peered inscrutably at Neville, and he reluctantly made space for Krum to sit down directly across from Harry.

Harry stiffened and eyed the Durmstrang student coldly. He recoiled slightly as Krum reached across the table.

“I would like to thank you very much. Gehlen vos a nasty piece of vork. His family vos responsible for some of ze worst crimes of ze second vorld vor. And he is known for specialising in rituals which require animal mutilation at Durmstrang. My Headmaster is no doubt quite angry with me, but I don’t care. Please accept my apologies for my previous behaviour towards you.”

Harry was too stunned to move. He hadn’t seen this coming at all. Hermione’s furry ears twitched, she nudged Harry slightly and he snapped out of it, extending his own hand towards Viktor Krum’s. He shook Viktor’s hand and swallowed nervously.

“Erm... thank you Krum. Apology accepted.”

“Please, call me Viktor. I would very much like to consider you a friend.”

A fuzzy warm feeling filled Harry, and his features broke into a grin as he continued to shake the Durmstrang Champion’s hand.

“Yeah... Alright then. Erm... I don’t suppose you’d mind flying around with me some time then?”

Fred and George groaned, knowing that their days of clobbering Harry were over. Dean hadn’t proved very effective as Harry’s back-up yet, but with Krum on Harry’s side, they wondered if they could have Dean and train him up to even things out a bit.

Luna beamed at Harry; her furry white ears twitched and her fluffy white tail flicked cheerfully. She wished her father was still writing articles about undiscovered creatures too, but she couldn’t be more proud that Daddy’s article had gained Harry a new friend.

Viktor finished breakfast at the Mingling Table. As everyone got up to leave for classes, Viktor pulled Harry aside.

“About zat egg...” he began quietly, “I dropped it in ze lake by accident. If you haven’t worked it out yet, I suggest you take it in a baths-tub with you?”
An enormous tank filled with murky greenish water and aquatic weeds took up the entire front section of the DADA classroom, including the space where Lupin’s desk had been. Harry and Hermione peered closely, but it was barely possible to see through the dinge. They both started and leapt back when an ugly teal face with big black eyes and sharp horns suddenly banged against the side, its skeletal fingers scratching at the glass.

Professor Lupin smiled at his two favourite pupils and urged them to their seats. His final lesson for the week was an overview of the course for the next 8 weeks.

“The creature in this tank is generally known as a Grindylow,” Lupin began, "Grindylows are the most common water demon in Britain and Ireland. But we will also cover Water-Sprites--which are a bit like pixies, Will o’ the Wisps--which are similar to hinkypunks but aquatic, and Kappas, which are Japanese water demons. We will also be covering sea-serpents and other dangerous magical creatures which can be found in the world’s oceans, but our main focus will be those creatures which you are most likely to find in our bogs, ponds, and lakes."

“I will also briefly touch on mer-folk, but it is very important to remember that they are a civilised sentient people--just like humans. They are not dark creatures, though they do have the potential for the full range of behaviours, from kind to cruel, which all highly sentient beings have...”

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Harry didn’t feel like being cooped up. After classes, he and Hermione dressed warmly and decided to jog around the lake for their daily exercises and watch the sunset. They were surprised to discover Krum stretching by the water's edge.

“I alvays do calisthenics to keep fit for qvidditch,” he explained. “I vould have done them at lunch-time, but zere are alvays too many silly fangirls following me then. It is too cold and dark for them now at zis time of day. Vy are you two outside now?”

“Hunh! Same as you really...” Harry grinned. “Hermione and I like to keep fit, and today I thought I’d rather be outside away from everyone. I... it sometimes feels like I can still sense everyone all around me when I’m stuck inside somewhere with a load of other people. Not claustrophobic really, just--edgy. And it's been a bit stressful the last couple of days,” Harry concluded in a rather understated manner.

As the three of them jogged around the lake together, Harry explained about having to get in shape and learning how to fight for the Triwizard tournament so that he could keep up with the older champions--and stay alive. Harry even felt comfortable enough to mention their suspicions that Minister Umbridge was behind it all to try and get him killed. Krum came to a halt, his face darkening.

“Your Minister, she sounds like Hitler. Grindelvald vos von of Hitler's leading Vizards in ze Thule Society. Grindelvald slaughtered my grandfather ven he vas defending Jews and Roma in our village.”

“Harry’s parents were killed by someone like that too,” Hermione said sadly.

“Yes, zis Voldemort character--so I have heard.” They were silent for a short while after that, but another question popped into Viktor’s head.
“Vot is vith Lavender and you Hermione? I like her very much, but I sense she does not like you, vich seems strange to me, as you seem qvite nice.”

Hermione turned red; she didn’t know what to say. Harry came to her rescue and spoke as tactfully as he could.

“It... it was after Hermione accidentally became part cat. I... I think Lavender got scared of Hermione and... erm... sometimes people don’t react very well when other people are different than what they’re used to and they’re frightened of them.”

Krum nodded glumly.

“Maybe I vill speak to her. I am sorry Hermione. I did not mean to upset you. It vos thoughtless of me to bring it up.”

“It’s alright... really!” Hermione squeaked; her furry ears and tail twitching anxiously. She didn’t want to spoil things with Harry’s new friend.

“Don’t worry Hermione. I vill not mention you directly. I just don’t vant my girlfriend to become somebody who would follow someone like your Minister. I must know zat she vill be okay with people who are different. If she cannot change, then I cannot be with someone like zat.”

Krum returned to the Durmstrang ship after the darkness fell completely. Harry and Hermione trudged back up to the entrance hall of the castle and began to cross the foyer to the stairs.

Harry came to a dead stop. Filch was staring at them with trembling lips and wide watery eyes. Hermione hid behind Harry and turned crimson; her furry tail quivered. They had both trailed muddy footprints and dirty snow in behind them.

Filch slowly limped towards them. Harry winced and closed his eyes waiting for the outburst. But to his utter shock, he felt Filch’s calloused hands pull him into an embrace and the man burst into tears.

“Thank you so much Mr Potter!” Filch sobbed, “Dumbledore told me ye were the one to thank for my Christmas Present... In all my years here, nobody, not once, ever stopped ta think about what it’s like cleanin’ up without magic in this castle. Not a one. I...I can’t thank ye enough!”

“The Headmaster not only enchanted all my cleanin’ supplies, he also gave me a self-spellin’ wand that obeys my voice commands in Hogwarts. I can do magic as long as I’m on Hogwarts grounds... It’s the nicest Christmas Present I’ve ever had! All thanks ta you...”

Harry cleared his throat, trying to think of something to say. He glanced at Hermione for help, but she was too stunned herself to do more than shrug her furry tail and tilt her furry ears uncertainly. Hermione had felt the surge of emotion from Filch as they crossed the entrance hall, but she was still only just beginning to intellectually process his intent.

“Erm... You’re very welcome Mr Filch!” Harry finally responded “I...I’m really sorry if I’ve ever caused you trouble.”

“No need ta apologise Mr Potter... No need at all. Ye’ve always been the politest of the lot really-- just like yer mum. Though... I must say Mrs Norris has always seemed ta have taken a bit of a shine ta Miss Gr... I mean Mrs Potter.”

Mr Filch dabbed at his happy tears with a dirty looking hanky, and a mop began to clean up their muddy footprints by itself.
When they got back to their chambers, Hermione ran a hot bath for the both of them and added some scented foaming bath oils. It felt really good to strip out of their clammy clothes and settle their aching naked bodies into steaming water and frothing bubbles. Harry sighed as the heat relaxed his tight muscles.

It was the same every time. Harry never realised how tense he was until he actually began to feel himself loosening up. Hermione purred as Harry leaned back into her wet arms. He could feel her nipples hardening against his back, and he thought that they really ought to take baths together more often.

Showers were nice, but this felt heavenly. Hermione reached a hand down between Harry’s thighs and gently began to masturbate him.

The golden egg sat next to the bathtub, but that could wait. Hermione stopped suddenly with a gasp, and Harry opened his eyes, perplexed.

“Myrtle,” Hermione squeaked in embarrassment, “I know you’re here. I can feel your presence.”

Moaning Myrtle’s blushing face peeked through the tiles, and slowly the rest of her emerged from the wall.

“I’m so sorry,” she wailed, “But, but how--? You didn’t notice me last time.”

“Last time?” Harry groaned. Myrtle looked crestfallen and began to cry.

“Probably because I was otherwise occupied...” Hermione mumbled in response to Myrtle's question, her own face flushing.

“I’m sorry,” Myrtle said again with a sob, “I came by for a hug one time and--and you were both having sex in the shower. I couldn’t help myself. I stayed and watched... it looked so fun. I’ve never... I’ve never...”

Myrtle trailed off into incomprehensible sobs. Hermione and Harry both started getting teary themselves. Harry gulped.

“Did you die a virgin Myrtle?” he asked gently.

The crying teenage ghost-witch nodded, unable to speak. Harry peered at his wife, not sure what to do. The unfairness of it all hit him hard, as it always did. Hermione melted in his eyes, and knew what she had to do.

“Myrtle,” Hermione began, “You know how you said ghosts feel warm when you’re in physical contact with mortal forms, do you feel anything else too?”

Myrtle’s sobbing subsided, and her nose crinkled in thought.

“Now that I think about it, perhaps so. It’s almost like we can feel what you’re feeling. I’ve never been in contact long enough though to be certain. When we glide through people by accident, it’s usually jolly quick because people don’t like the chill they get. But--I dunno, maybe we could even taste what you’re eating if we were merged...” Myrtle said pensively.

“Oh!” Myrtle gasped, as she realised what Hermione was getting at, but hardly daring to hope.

“Wait, you mean... you’d be willing to...er...let me share your body--while you’re...erm...having sex? With Harry?”
Hermione gave Myrtle a little smile and nodded.

“It’s really nice and hot in this bath Myrtle. I...I think I could manage a merge. The heat should stop me from getting too chilled.”

“Hermione, that’s so sweet of you,” Myrtle took off her ghostly glasses to wipe away the tears and fluttered her eyelashes, “I...I don’t know what I did to deserve such nice mortal friends.”

Myrtle actually looked very pretty without the thick bottle-cap glasses on. Hermione wondered if spirit clothing and accoutrements were “real,” then decided it wasn’t worth hurting her brain trying to wrap her head around that at a moment like this. Hermione was extremely curious to try this now.

“Shall we give it a go then Myrtle?” Hermione smiled invitingly and purred.

Myrtle nodded happily. Harry moved out of the way as Myrtle glided into the bath with the two of them. Hermione gasped as Myrtle slowly leaned backwards and merged into her until she was no longer visible.

Hermione mused that she had been correct. She didn’t feel chilled at all in the nice hot bath, just a bit cooler. She wondered what Myrtle was feeling. She’d have to ask her after this was all over.

Harry grinned at his wife and bent forward to kiss her. He began to massage Hermione’s breasts as their kiss deepened, and he playfully tugged on her hard pink nipples. Harry’s lips trailed down her neck and upper-chest and replaced his fingers. He flicked and twirled her nipples with his tongue, while sucking gently.

Harry’s fingers dropped below the bubbly surface of the hot steaming water between Hermione’s legs, finding her slit. He probed Hermione’s folds with two fingers before tenderly slipping them inside her entrance. Harry rolled Hermione’s clitoris under his thumb and she began to purr louder. Water sloshed against the side of the tub as she writhed under his touch.

Sensing her readiness, Harry slid forward, feeling her nipples and breasts pressed into his wet torso. With a thrust, his stiff penis plunged into her moist depths. Hermione’s slick sheath gripped Harry’s shaft as he drove into her. Her wet bedraggled tail splashed and thumped against the tiles as she began to meow and her wet furry ears flattened.

Harry had one arm under Hermione’s arching back, and he brushed his fingertips along the wet strip of fur on her spine as he rhythmically piston into her. The pulses of pleasure cascaded and Hermione lost herself to a maelstrom of ecstasy, yowling loudly. The bathwater surged and splashed everywhere.

The contractions of Hermione’s orgasm finished Harry. His penis spasmed uncontrollably; numerous jets of semen spurting into her womb. Harry gasped and clutched Hermione’s wet form tightly against his skin, pressing as deeply into her as he could as he continued to release himself inside of her.

As the storm of passion ebbed, Hermione slumped back into the roiling foamy water with her husband on top of her.

They both lay there panting as Myrtle slipped out of Hermione. Myrtle gave them both a kiss and grinned.

“I felt everything,” Myrtle whispered, tears of happiness shining in her eyes. “Thank you both so much!” she concluded before vanishing into the wall.
After a few minutes passed, Harry and Hermione grinned at each other.

“Well that was interesting.” Hermione said with a bemused expression.

“‘To say the least,” Harry replied with a smirk. “Not that I’ve ever imagined having sex with a ghost, but if I had, I certainly wouldn’t have thought it would be like that. You’re brilliant Hermione. Not to mention that was really kind of you to let Myrtle meld with you.”

Hermione purred; she could feel Harry inside of her still, half-erect. She gently tipped Harry backwards towards his end of the tub and wriggled her bottom. Her wet tail sprang from the water, spraying bubbles everywhere as she began to ride his restiffening penis.

She leaned over and licked Harry’s neck with her cat-tongue and teased his nipples with her fingernails. She tenderly kneaded his chest and she kissed him. Hermione’s hips moved up and down, her labia clinging to Harry’s erection.

Harry groaned in elation, deciding that sex in a bathtub was one of the best ways to do it. Hermione’s wetness felt so good as she slid up and down his penis. He cradled her bottom cheeks and squeezed them gently, eliciting a meow of delight from Hermione.

Then he wrapped his hands around Hermione’s slippery waist and began to slide them up and down the sides of her torso, giving her nipples little flicks with his thumbs as they passed by. Harry thrust up into Hermione in sync with her gyrations. They moved faster and harder together, moaning, gasping, and purring. Sparks of magic began to fly as the water churned again.

They both lost themselves explosively to euphoria and magic arced from the bathtub, ricocheting from the tiles. This time it was Harry who slumped back panting with his wife yowling on top of him, her furry tail whipping around madly as Harry ejaculated convulsively and filled her again with his stickiness many times over.

They lay there in bliss for a while, not noticing the puddles of water creeping across the tiled floor to the nearby golden egg.
A clattering and a loud shrieking echoed in the Potters’ bathroom, waking them from their blissful reverie in the bathtub.

“Bloody Hell! What’s that noise? It sounds like a banshee,” Harry shouted as he flailed and splashed about in a panic.

“The egg Harry,” Hermione yelled to be heard above the racket, “Grab the egg and submerge it quickly.”

Harry wiped his steamed up glasses on a towel and spotted the golden egg in a pool of sudsy water, open as if cleaved in half, and the dreadful howling coming from within had sent it chattering around on the tiled floor. Hurriedly, he reached for the shuddering egg and plunged it under the surface of the bathwater.

The screeching immediately halted. All that could be heard besides the sloshing water was an eerie lilting singing, but it was difficult to make out the words. Hermione dipped her bushy head into the water to listen, then she came up gasping, water dripping from her wringing wet hair.

“Your turn Harry,” she beckoned.

Harry nodded and dunked his own head beneath the surface of the bathwater and blinked at the golden egg nested between Hermione’s naked thighs near her slit. He couldn’t help but become aroused again at the sight. But the unearthly choir of voices couldn’t be ignored.

The voices were feminine and strangely compelling, despite the gloomy nature of the song itself. If Hermione weren’t his, he could imagine that he might have to follow those enchanting voices no matter where they led. But whatever magic the voices held were no match for Hermione. Harry loved her beyond anything any entrancing maidens might throw at him.

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.

Harry came up gulping for air and grabbed a towel to wipe his glasses. Once he could see properly again he spoke through gritted teeth, a vein throbbing slightly in his temple.

“Hermione, I don’t care what the stupid task is. I’m not letting a bunch of bloody mermaids take you.”

“Harry, we really don’t have a choice. It’s obvious Dumbledore can’t put a stop to this. The magical contract won’t permit anyone to withdraw. You’ll die if you don’t at least attempt the task.”

“But they’re going to kidnap you Hermione. And who knows what will happen to you down there?” Harry responded heatedly.

“You’ll have an hour Harry. I know it’s not a long time. But the mer-people will be bound by a
magical contract of their own to honour within that time frame.” Hermione paused as something struck her.

“Harry, how did you work the riddle out so quickly?”

“Dudley never did read his schoolbooks on Greek mythology, but I did,” Harry replied, his face still contorted with dismay, “As soon as I heard the voices and felt them pulling at me, I knew they were Sea Nymphs--Nereids, Mermaids--whatever. Not being able to sing above the ground--but apparently underwater--made it bloody obvious too.”

“But bugger them--nobody’s stealing you from me if I can help it, Hermione.... And... and if they think they can lure me with their pretty voices, they’ve got another think coming,” Harry concluded with a glower.

Hermione grinned at Harry, purring, and her tail thwipped the surface of the water happily.

“That’s brilliant Harry. You got it quicker than me. Most people have mixed up Nereids with Sirens for centuries because they have similar mythic backgrounds associated with beautiful women leading sailors to their deaths through their singing. Sirens are more commonly called Veela today. I think all that sailor killing tosh is a load of rubbish though.”

“Try not to be too upset Harry, please... We’ll get through this one too. I know we will. We’ll just have to work something out--and I’ve got an idea. It means you’ll have to put your metamorph abilities to the test, but now you’ve got nearly two months to practice.”

To Harry’s surprise, Hermione snapped the golden egg shut and chucked it all the way across the bathroom into the waste-bin by the door. Harry thought Hermione might have made a good Chaser, and determined to try and get her on a broom by herself again... Though come to think about it, he rather enjoyed Hermione only wanting to fly on a broom with her arms around him now--so maybe not.

“In the meantime, I think we need to get you good and relaxed again,” Hermione asserted as she immersed her hand in the bathwater and reached between Harry’s thighs.

Hermione ducked her head under the water and wrapped her lips around Harry’s again expanding penis. Harry leaned back and uttered a sigh of happiness as his outrage about mermaids vanished magically at the touch of Hermione’s cat-tongue.

Hermione’s bottom and wet furry tail looked tempting poking out of the water. Harry reached his hands over her back and squeezed her bottom cheeks while she sucked his erection. Every so often, Hermione came back up for a breath, water streaming from her saturated hair, which clung flat to her head.

After each breath, Hermione dove back down underwater to continue rasping her tongue along his length and take in his fullness. It took a little while because Harry had spent himself twice already. But Hermione kept at it, and finally Harry felt the urge to thrust enter his loins again.

Hermione’s head bobbed up for a deep breath when she felt Harry pushing deeper, and went down for one last time. She held her breath as Harry pressed his pubes against her lips and his penis lodged in her throat, jerking in rapid pulses, discharging volley after volley of his semen once more.

Hermione pulled back, taking Harry's last several loads into her mouth, before finally coming up for air and swallowing. She grinned at Harry, her wet furry cat ears twitching, as bathwater and a dribble of semen dripped from her chin.
“Better?”

Harry blissfully grinned back at his drenched wife.

“Loads... thank you!”

Minister Umbridge was distressed. She added several more spoonfuls of sugar to her steaming cup of tea and a dash of cream, scowling at the reports on her desk. She had hoped that Dawlish and Shacklebolt, as the DMLE’s top lead agents would show more discretion, and be her eyes and ears at Hogwarts. But now they too had succumbed to silly notions regarding the “Integrity of Law.”

Didn’t they realise that loyalty to the pureblood order must be maintained above all else? Where was “integrity” without loyalty to the system which had sustained British Wizard-kind and maintained their superiority over muggles and magical misfits for over a thousand years?

Dolores Umbridge had hoped that Amelia Bones would recognise the Minister’s Authority as paramount. But it had become clear now that the DMLE’s status as an Independent Authority would have to change—as surely as the Independence of Magical Britain’s preeminent Institute of Magical Education must be revoked.

As to Potter, if she couldn’t have him by Law, there was always the Tournament. Dolores wasn’t pleased at the outcome of the first task, but there were still two tasks left. It had been galling indeed to have to parlay with foul creatures who refused to recognise the Ministry’s authority over all magical beings, but sacrifices must sometimes be made in the short-term to address the Bigger Picture. And it wasn’t as if she had any intentions of honouring any deals struck with Lesser Beings.

Saturday morning before breakfast, Fleur knocked on the Potters’ door. When Harry let her in, she offered up the complete secret of the golden egg—including the mermaid riddle. She was very pleased that Harry and Hermione had already worked it out, and gave them both a sultry kiss before they all went down to the Great Hall together.

Still in a cheerful daze from Fleur’s kiss, Harry wondered if he should tell Cedric, or give him another day or two to work it out himself. But Cedric approached Harry first and pulled him aside by the entrance of the Hall.

“Erm... Potter. Have you worked out the egg yet?” Cedric appeared perplexed.

“Yeah! Actually I finally got it last night,” Harry responded. Cedric looked a bit disappointed.

“Oh... I... er... thought I might be able to help you out like you helped me. I only just got it this morning--still working on the riddle though!”

Harry gave a little half-smile.

“Thanks Diggory. I appreciate it anyway. Let me know if you want any help with the riddle. I worked it out last night.”

For a moment Harry thought Cedric was about to take him up on the offer. Then Cedric smiled sheepishly and shook his head.

“Not just yet, thank you. I want to give it a proper go myself first. Maybe I’ll take you up on it if I
“Can’t figure it out.”

“Fair enough,” Harry responded with a nod. “But don’t take too long about it. This isn’t going to be any easier than the dragons. Let me know if you haven’t got it by Monday.”

Cedric swallowed anxiously and returned Harry’s nod.

“Thanks Potter, I’ll do that,” Cedric said as he went to find his seat next to Cho for breakfast. Harry made his way to the Mingling Table where Hermione was already seated with their friends. He didn’t see Krum or Lavender anywhere in the Hall, and he hoped they were alright.

~o0o~

Luna and Parvati rejoined Harry and Hermione on their way up to the Room of Requirement an hour later. Mad Eye was already waiting for them outside.

“Right Potter! You worked out the egg yet? The whole thing mind you!”

Harry grinned and nodded.

“Good!” Moody gruffly acknowledged. “Because I think you’ll be needin’ a swimmin’ pool over the next month or two. Think fightin’ on land is hard... wait’ll you try it underwater!”

~o0o~

Spiders scurried to the corners of their webs as Remus Lupin paced back and forth anxiously across the creaking boards in a dimly lit room with boarded up windows. He breathed a heavy sigh of relief when the large black dog pushed open the rickety door and bounded up the steps. The dog put its paws on Lupin’s shoulders and gave him a lick before dropping back to all fours.

With a shake, the dog stood up straight as it turned into a man. Lupin was extremely happy to see him, but he shot Sirius a look of recrimination.

“Sirius, you need to be more careful. I don’t know that Harry could bear it to lose you again...”

“He’s my Godson,” Sirius began crossly, “You don’t think I’d pass up watching out for him do you? The way he handled that dragon was brilliant. But I would have bit the beast myself, if I’d had to...” Sirius paused, understanding hitting him.

“This isn’t really about Harry--is it Remus?” Sirius said softly. He swallowed guiltily, “I’m sorry Remus. I missed you too. Eleven years was far too long... I’ll try harder to stay out of sight, but I’m keeping an eye on every Task no matter what! Harry comes first--you understand me!?”

Remus nodded, casting his tear-filled eyes down at the cracked floorboards. Sirius knew he had to say something. It wouldn’t do for Remus to get maudlin at a time like this.

“That idiot Weasley woman,” Sirius continued, “She’s kindhearted and well meaning, but she has no idea... She has no business trying to foist you on a girl barely out of Hogwarts herself... and Dora doesn’t even like men in that way,” Sirius snorted. “I am here for you too Remus--not just for Harry. I promise, I won’t leave you again.”

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“I’ll hold you to that Sirius.” Lupin smiled sadly, “You’re right of course. We have to look out for James and Lily’s son together--like we promised we would--whatever becomes of either of us. We’ll just make the best of the time we have....”
“I’m glad you’re watching over the tasks too— I am extremely concerned about this next one, but I can do nothing should anything go wrong. I cannot ‘wolf-up’ at the drop of a hat if needed—unlike those who are werewolves by birthright. And if my concerns about the discord among the merpeople are correct—this next Task could get ugly. Harry might need your help Sirius.”
Chapter 61

Fleur could feel the hunger pangs which told her it was nearly time for lunch, and decided to go back to the castle and look for Hermione and Harry. She gave her sister a kiss on the cheek, leaving Gabrielle to take her lunch in the Delacour Suite in the Beauxbatons carriage. She carefully picked her steps through the fresh snow which covered the pathway up to the Hogwarts entrance courtyard.

The pathway met up with the main road leading up to the courtyard and Fleur spied two figures approaching. The Auror escorting the student returning from Hogsmeade train-station gave Fleur a nod, and something caught in her throat when she realised the student was Daphne.

“Wait please. I will take ‘er ze rest of ze way. She ees my friend.”

The Auror glanced at his bundled up charge, and Daphne nodded her assent.

“Thank you Miss Delacour. I’ll make a note of it in my report when I get back to the village,” acknowledged the Auror.

Fleur put her arm around Daphne and gave her a kiss. Daphne’s eyes were red and puffy. She had obviously been crying. They walked the rest of the way together silently and Fleur’s heart went out to the younger girl. Fleur knew that she herself would break if anything happened to her own sister. Anxiety gripped Fleur’s stomach at the thought of the upcoming task.

“Come Daphne,” Fleur began when they had reached the entrance hallway, “Let us find ‘arry and ‘ermione. Zey will wish to see zat you are alright before we lunch togezzer.”

~oo0~

Madam Pince found Harry and Hermione waiting by the door to the library already, and she shook her head. She had only just finished her Sunday breakfast herself and wondered how they had managed to beat her to it.

Hermione headed straight for the dusty unused section of muggle reference books while Harry began to look for books about merfolk. When she got back with several books of human anatomy and ichthyology, Hermione found Harry with his head buried in a book of Mermish.

“Blimey Hermione,” Harry said when she sat down, “There is no way I’ll ever be able to learn enough Mermish in time for the second task. And I know a few Runes saying ‘friend’ isn’t going to cut it this time for merpeople if I run into trouble with them.”

Hermione looked pensive for a moment before something popped into her head.

“Runes are a magical language Harry. Perhaps there are some Runes which will magically translate other languages so that you can carry on a conversation without you actually having to learn them. That’s probably something far more advanced than anything in our current course-year. If not, there might be a translation charm which would accomplish the same thing.”

“Yeah, that’s an idea,” Harry grinned, “Brilliant Hermione. I’ll start looking that up then. What’s that you’ve got there?”

“Well... originally I thought you could just use gillyweed, but there is no guarantee that it will last long enough for you to complete the task--it depends on how much you eat, and the potency. So then I thought that perhaps you could actually use your metamorph abilities to develop functioning gills...”
“It might be difficult, but well worth it— as you would be able to use either your lungs or gills as needed without having to worry about one interfering with the other, or having to worry about whether your gills would last for a long enough time.”

“Right! That sounds good,” Harry nodded in agreement, “What about you then? You won’t be able to breathe underwater...”

“I think I’ll use a bubble-head charm if needed. I looked that up yesterday while you were flying with Viktor and the Twins.” Hermione smiled impishly at Harry, pleased that he’d managed to relax enough to have some fun. She had told him to take the rest of Saturday off after Mad Eye had put Harry through a grueling session in the swimming pool in the Room of Requirement, and then come to the library by herself.

“I was just thinking though,” Hermione continued, “We’d probably better study the physical appearance of the effects of Gillyweed anyway. Because I don’t think we want to let on that you’re a metamorph if Sirius and Tonks haven’t even told the Headmaster about it. No doubt Professor Dumbledore will probably be able to work it out for himself easily enough when he sees you perform the task. But for now it’s probably best that nobody else knows.”

Harry nodded again, then he went off to look for some Advanced Runes books while Hermione's tail flicked cheerfully as she began studying the books of human and fish anatomy. They had been at it for several hours when they heard someone else enter the library—which was highly unusual on Sunday mornings.

The moment Daphne saw Harry she flung herself on him and burst into tears. Thankfully, Madam Pince was napping in her office as she knew that Sundays were usually slow. Fleur kissed Hermione on the cheek and sat down next to her, tears brimming in her own eyes. Harry didn’t say a word; he held Daphne tightly and just let her cry.

After Daphne’s sobs subsided, Hermione suggested that they all share lunch together in their private chambers. They passed the picture of the Fat Lady on the way to their corridor just as Lavender was emerging from the Gryffindor Common Room. Lavender looked like she wanted to say something, but she flushed when she saw all four of them and cast her face down instead, before traipsing off to the Great Hall.

Daphne picked at her food while the rest of them ate. When they were finished, Fleur kissed everyone goodbye, having decided to spend the rest of the day with Gabrielle. Hermione went to the little kitchen to make some cocoa while Harry stoked the fire.

“I called Moody on the mirror,” Hermione said quietly as she passed everyone their steaming mugs upon her return, “He said it’s alright if we skip training today.”

Harry looked at Hermione gratefully and visibly relaxed. They spent the rest of the afternoon cuddling Daphne on their settee in front of the fireplace and she finally dozed off peacefully in their laps.

/~000~

Tonks surprised Harry with a hug and a peck on the cheek when he and Hermione arrived for metamorph lessons Monday evening.

“That was somethin’ else Harry. You were brilliant...” Tonks said with a grimace, “You really gave that loathsome little pillock what-for. I ‘ope you’re thinkin’ about becoming an Auror yourself someday.”
Harry was beginning to wonder about that. He had always thought the idea was pretty cool, but he was no longer certain that he wanted a job so closely associated with the Ministry. Though he had been very relieved and more than a bit thrilled that Dawlish and Shacklebolt had taken his side and said more or less the same thing after he’d prevented Draco from hurting Astoria any more than he already had.

Harry hadn’t been sure that they would approve of the spell he’d used. In fact Harry still wasn’t certain that he approved of it either, though he knew he would use it again in a heartbeat in the same situation, and he had been surprised that Dumbledore seemed more than alright with it. So Harry shrugged noncommittally.

“Maybe! I suppose... Dunno really. I--I’ve thought about it a bit. I’m not really sure what I want to do after Hogwarts though.”

Tonks regarded Harry shrewdly, sensing the reasons for his reticence. Sometimes she wasn’t sure about the job either really. It rather went against her own rebellious nature.

She just liked kicking a bit of arse every once in a while whenever some berk went off half-cocked and did something like those Slytherin boys had done. Tonks remembered how Mad Eye had recruited her after she’d given a boy a good thrashing in 6th year for not leaving off her then girlfriend, and gave Harry a half-smile.

“Yeah! Well, Sirius told me he already signed over most of the Black Estate t’ you Harry. You’d never ‘ave to work a day in your life if you didn’t want to. Still, you don’t strike me as the pampered prince sort...”

“Anyway, let’s see ‘ow well you’re doin’ Harry.”

Before Tonks’ eyes, Harry’s face morphed into a perfect replica of Hermione and his hair lengthened and curled into her golden brown tresses. His already slender figure slimmed a bit and his chest swelled in just the right place. Hermione couldn’t help giggling and she gave Harry a little shove when she saw his chest bulging.

Tonks got a little tingly feeling when she saw Hermione practically twinned except for her cat-like features.

“Erm... that’s as far as I’ve got so far,” the fake Hermione grinned. “You said not to try anything else, and I’m not really sure how to... er... you know--the other bits.”

Hermione and Tonks both burst out laughing.

“Tell you what Harry, you might as well practice that next,” Tonks chortled. “You don’t ‘ave to show me though. Hermione can tell me how it looks.”

Tonks's comment sent all of them into a fit of giggles.

“Actually, I’m going to start working on gills and flippers Tonks, if that’s alright,” Harry-Hermione responded when he caught his breath, “I want to be prepared for the second task, and I think making the gills work properly is going to take all my effort over the next few weeks.”

Tonks nodded approvingly, but she couldn’t help feeling slightly disappointed.

“That makes sense Harry... Oi--by the way. Call me Dora, both of you.”

~000~
Daphne had seemed much happier at dinner time and had eaten at the Mingling Table that evening. She had still been a bit teary, but at least she was able to talk again. Harry and Hermione knocked on her door on the way back to their quarters after they had finished Metamorph lessons with Tonks.

Daphne’s heart leapt to see them again.

“Thank you so much Harry--Hermione. I... I don’t know what I would have done if... if I’d lost Astoria. She’s been my best friend most of my life--until you two. I hated leaving her behind when I came to Hogwarts.”

“Will she be alright Daphne?” Harry asked with a creaky voice, and a hollow feeling in his gut.

“I think so--eventually--I hope.” Daphne blinked back tears, “She still seemed terribly fragile when I left yesterday morning. But she’ll stay at home and Mum will tutor her for the time being. I don’t think she’ll be coming back to Hogwarts this year. I’ve got permission from Dumbledore to go home and visit one weekend a month. He said I can use his office-floo next time.”

“Do you want to spend the night Daphne?” Hermione inquired, her own eyes full of concern. “In fact, why don’t you stay with us a bit until you feel better. I... I don’t think you should be alone right now.”

Hermione glanced at Harry. She didn’t really have to. She knew he felt the same way. Harry nodded, trying to fight his own tears and took Daphne’s soft hand in his.

Daphne shut her door, and let the Potters lead her back to their chambers.
Harry had found no symbols in any of the Advanced Runes books which would work as a magical translator and had begun to tackle Advanced Charms books instead. He couldn’t find anything in the library, and by Friday he was panicking, and rifling through the extra Charms textbooks on the shelf from later years during Charms class.

Professor Flitwick almost deducted 5 points from Gryffindor when he noticed that Harry was reading an unassigned book in class. Then he tried to add 15 points when he discovered that Harry was reading a seventh year Charms book instead of his third year book.

It took Professor Flitwick a few seconds to remember why his points taking and giving spells weren’t working.

“Well Potter, I’m pleased you’re reading so far ahead,” the diminutive professor squeaked, “but you appear to be a bit lost. Perhaps I can be of assistance.”

“I’m not sure if you’re allowed to assist me Sir,” Harry responded with a pained expression, “I’m looking for something to help me in the Second Task.”

“Nonsense Potter. Of course I can help guide you in the right direction. I just can’t do your work for you. You’ll have to do all the research without my help, but I can certainly point you to the correct resources. What is it you’re looking for?”

Harry scratched his head before remembering the term he’d heard on an episode of Star Trek.

“Erm... a ‘Universal Translator’ spell Sir. I may need to talk to merpeople, and there’s not enough time to learn a whole language.”

“Oh, it’s no wonder you can’t find it in a school text-book then--as it could be used for cheating. Nor will you find it in a standard Charm Book in the library. That’s highly advanced specialised magic. Try Linguistic Legerdemain by Reddo Semanticus. You should find a good charm which will work for Mermish in that book which you can cast upon yourself.”

“The spells are quite complex, but they are lasting, and must be removed with a counterspell.” Professor Flitwick paused, his features becoming distraught and unsure. But his professorial nature compelled him to continue, “They are generally used for negotiations after...well, ahem...usually after diplomats have been killed in war, or civil strife between ethnic groups who speak different languages!” Then he snapped back to his usual self.

“Now Potter, how about you focus on Cheering Charms for the rest of the class, like everyone else is!”

The cheering charm took Harry about 10 minutes to learn. Compared to everything else he’d been learning lately, it was ridiculously simple. Which was good, because Hermione had been too busy surreptitiously looking at diagrams of the cellular structures of gills to pay attention to Cheering Charms herself.

Harry shook his head and sighed, wishing they had learned the charm earlier in the week. It seemed quite unnecessary now. The Potters had taken to sleeping on either side of Daphne with their arms--and Hermione’s furry tail--curled around her, and she had improved greatly. The only problem was that the Potters had felt it would be inappropriate to indulge themselves in the meantime.
Harry had woken that morning to find that Daphne had wriggled her nightie clad bottom right up against him, with his pyjama covered erection squashed against his lower abdomen and squeezed between her bottom cheeks. He had hurried to the bathroom to relieve himself and Hermione had woken up and walked in on him, arching an eyebrow and smirking.

At least that had concluded with a happy ending for Harry as Hermione had felt sorry for him and sucked him off, making quick work of it.

But Harry felt badly for Hermione and wished he had time to return the favour. Hermione was feeling a bit more sanguine about things though. She kept it to herself, but she rather thought that after 5 days, Daphne was telling them she was feeling much better, and was ready for some fun.

After classes, the Potters invited Daphne to their private calisthenics session, which they were taking in the Room of Requirement’s swimming pool on the days they weren’t meeting Moody for fighting lessons (on lessons days they had taken to jogging around the lake with Viktor).

Daphne hadn’t felt up to participating in Moody’s lessons all that week, but now that she was over the worst of the shock, she couldn’t wait to join in. Daphne delightedly ran back to her own quarters for her bathing suit and returned moments later with a little gym bag. When they arrived at the pool, Hermione opened a packet which Dora had picked up in the village apothecary-and-potions-supply shop for her during the week.

“It’s Gillyweed,” Hermione began to tell Harry when his eyebrows popped up questioningly, “I thought that you should try it out, so that you know what you should look like when you morph, and so that you have a good idea of how the gills will work.”

“Though of course yours will be slightly different as you’ll still be able to use your lungs when above water--you’ll be amphibious. So just have a little bit for right now. This should be enough for about 10 or 15 minutes.”

“Looks like you got a lot of it,” Harry mused. “Are you going to try some too then?”

“There’s plenty more for lessons with Mr Moody--I don’t know if it’s alright to tell him about you being a metamorph or not. We’ll have to ask Sirius first,” Hermione replied. “But he’ll certainly be expecting you to have some sort of plan for breathing underwater. And yes, at some point I’ll try a bit too, but not today. Today I just want to watch you to see what happens and keep an eye on things.”

“Do you think it’s alright for me to try as well Hermione?” Daphne asked anxiously.

Daphne was a bit nervous about the idea. But she would try anything to help her friends. They had let her in on the secret of Harry’s metamorph practice on the way up to the Room of Requirement, so that she wouldn’t be afraid of what he would be attempting to do when it came time for it. Hermione nodded.

“We’ll all give it a go,” Hermione responded, “And I’ll be showing you--and Parvati and Luna when they next join us--how to perform the bubble-head charm. Then we’ll all be able to participate properly in Harry’s underwater training with Moody.”

The three of them stripped down. Harry to his boxers, but the girls took everything off in front of him and put on bathing suits. Hermione wore a pretty sky-blue and white low cut one-piece with no back leaving her bushy ginger tail free to do as it pleased.

Harry stiffened at the sight. He glanced at Daphne who was adjusting the top of a white two piece
with bright pink trim; its cut showed off a bit more bottom than her father might have approved of. She had got it on a trip to Nice, France with her mum, and had been saving it for an occasion like this--being with people who made her feel nice inside. This was the first proper opportunity she’d had to try it out.

“Ooooh... The water’s nice and warm,” squealed Daphne happily after leaping in with a splash. “It’s not all cold like the sea or the lakes here.”

Hermione slipped into the water, beaming radiantly. She was thrilled to see Daphne looking cheerful again.

“I know. It’s lovely isn’t it!?” Hermione responded with shining eyes, her rapidly saturating tail swooshing gleefully in the water, “It’s even warmer than some bits of the Côte d’Azur in summer.”

Daphne’s eyes widened in surprise.

“I didn’t know you’d been to the French Riviera Hermione.”

“My...my parents love France. They took me every summer--except once we went to Spain.”

Hermione responded, crossly wiping a tear from her eye. She didn’t want thinking about her father to spoil things. Bother him... she decided then and there to put him from her mind. She was done with him. She just wanted to be happy with her friends--and with her husband.

Daphne swam over to Hermione and kissed her on the lips.

“I’m sorry Hermione. I didn’t mean to upset you...”

Hermione smiled and returned Daphne’s kiss wetly.

“Don’t be sorry Daphne. I’m over him for now.”

“Good!” Harry said, startling the pair as his head and shoulders emerged above the surface, and he put his dripping arms around both of them, giving each a kiss. “You’ve still got your mum, and me and Daphne, and the rest of our friends. We all love you very much Hermione.”

“But don’t get too used to the hot water,” Harry chuckled, “Mad Eye will want to turn this into a replica of the Black Lake in a couple of weeks so I can get used to it. Enjoy it while it lasts!” Harry concluded as he stuffed the pinch of Gillyweed in his mouth and began to chew.

After a few seconds, Harry began to feel very strange. Breathing started to hurt. His toes began to lengthen and webbing appeared between them and also between his fingers. He dove under the surface of the water and felt oxygen hit his brain as water flowed through his gills. The sensation was exhilarating.

Harry sat at the bottom of the pool for a few minutes, very much enjoying the view. The way their bathing suits highlighted the curves of Hermione’s and Daphne’s mounds was turning him on.

Hermione’s concerned face broke the shimmering surface and peered at him. Her voice sounded bubbly when she spoke--but he was surprised at how clear it sounded.

“Are you alright Harry?”

Harry nodded and grinned, moving closer to her. Hermione’s sopping head popped back up suddenly with a gasp and she giggled, the tip of her tail flicking in delight and spraying droplets of water.
“What’s he doing?” Daphne asked, seeing only Harry’s black hair rippling in between Hermione’s thighs.

“Returning the favour...” Hermione replied, giggling some more.
Chapter 63

Harry was thoroughly enjoying himself underwater. His webbed fingers pushed aside the elastic of Hermione’s bathing suit and his tongue wriggled inside her vulva. He could feel her moistness tightening around it. Harry rubbed his nose against Hermione’s emerging clitoris as his tongue plunged deeper into her wet sheath and he lifted both of her thighs onto his shoulders.

Daphne felt a shudder of pleasure and her breath caught when she saw Hermione’s expression. She leaned into Hermione and slipped one hand under the wet nylon covering Hermione’s breasts. Daphne began to roll Hermione’s nipples between her thumb and forefinger, and encircled Hermione’s lips with her own, while her other hand stroked the strip of wet fur on Hermione’s spine.

Hermione’s sodden tail thrashed wildly, churning the water, and she began meowing when Daphne started licking her just under her jaw. Harry’s tongue thrust further into her depths. Hermione wrapped her thighs around Harry’s head and with a yowl the surge of ecstasy took her, her lissome form rippling in the roiling tides.

Daphne held the dazed and panting Hermione above water as she continued kissing her. Harry finally emerged with a grin, his gills fading, and put his arms around both girls again.

Hermione felt particularly naughty when she finally came to. She knew Daphne was ready. Hermione dove under the surface and before Daphne realised what was happening, she found herself splashing about upended as Hermione swam off with Daphne’s bikini bottoms in her cat teeth. Giggling madly, Daphne gave chase as Harry followed in utter amusement.

They both briefly lost sight of Hermione, until she tipped Harry over and yanked off his boxers. He came up sputtering and laughing as his erection bobbed in the current.

“Oi... careful, my gills are gone.”

“I don’t think you’ll need them for the next bit Harry,” Hermione said with a grin as she swam behind Daphne and lifted her into her arms. Daphne’s eyes widened happily as she leaned back against Hermione, realising suddenly what was about to happen. Hermione tilted Daphne’s head back and kissed her tenderly.

“Are you ready for this Daphne?” Hermione asked.

Daphne was thrilled. She was more than ready, but the swell of emotion made it hard to speak. She nodded vigorously, and just barely managed to gasp out, “Yes please!”

Hearing Daphne’s consent, Harry swam over to her and put his hands around her waist. His eyes softened as he gazed into Daphne’s. Her eyelashes fluttered, catching strands of her wet golden-blond hair, and her breath quickened. Hermione pushed up Daphne’s bikini top. She kneaded Daphne’s breasts and tweaked her pink hardening nipples, murmuring a quiet incantation.

Harry took Daphne’s lips with his own as his hands pressed the small of her back. A tremor of pleasure took her when the bare skin of Harry’s torso came into contact with her own.

Daphne could feel his naked stiffness against her lower abdomen, and she parted her thighs. Her feet rose from the floor of the swimming pool as her light form drifted slightly in the water, held in place by the Potters’ arms.
Harry slid his hands across the satiny wet surface of Daphne’s hips and around under her bottom. Lifting her, Harry pressed himself against her fold. Harry surged, and with a gentle thrust he entered Daphne. She gasped to feel his penis sliding into her for the first time. It didn’t hurt like she’d heard that it might, it just felt good.

Emboldened by Daphne’s response, Harry inserted himself completely and began to rock her as he squeezed her bottom cheeks. Daphne folded her legs around Harry’s backside to pull him in closer, and he began to move harder and quicker. Her labia clung to his shaft as it drew back and plunged into her again and again.

Daphne moaned and bit her lip to feel Harry inside her. She ground herself against him and began to wail and undulate. Harry felt Daphne spasming around him as a swell of euphoria took her. It finished him.

Unable to hold back any longer, he lost himself to Daphne’s climax, ejaculating into her utmost depths. Daphne writhed between the Potters in the swirling water as she felt Harry’s semen filling her.

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Daphne felt as if in a dream until she woke up the next morning, naked, between Harry and Hermione’s own nude forms, cradled in their arms and Hermione’s furry tail. Gleefully, Daphne recalled her second time, when Harry had taken her from behind as she lay on top of Hermione and fondled her the night before.

After breakfast, Daphne went off to play in the snow with Luna and Parvati while Harry and Hermione studied and continued to make preparations for the second task.

“These are images of the gill-structures you’ll need Harry. It won’t be as difficult as I thought it would be. I thought you’d need special fish cells, but apparently fish gill cells for extracting oxygen and transferring it to the capillaries aren’t much different than those in our lungs--they just arrange them differently, in layers of epithelium instead of internal alveoli...”

Harry’s eyebrows had shot up at “won’t be as difficult as I thought” and his brain had gone a bit fuzzy when he heard the words “epithelium” and “alveoli.” Hermione saw his expression and blanched slightly, realising that she’d lost him already.

She sighed and tried to keep in mind that Harry was a very visual learner. If he could picture it, he could do it, and with enough verbal association he could pick up the correct terminology with ease; but he had to be able to create a visual framework in his mind first to hang the words on. Hermione decided Harry didn’t need any of that right now.

“Sorry Harry...” Hermione blushed slightly, “don’t worry about anything I just said for the time being. All you need to do is picture these gill cell-structures at the same time as you’re visualising the overall cosmetic form. I suppose that will be hard enough to do--hold more than one image in your mind at a time that is.”

Harry nodded and smiled at Hermione. That he understood. He cupped his surprised wife’s chin with one hand and kissed her softly. Hermione’s own brain went a little fuzzy, her furry ears and tail twitched, and her panties dampened. She gave him a puzzled look when Harry had finished kissing her.

“What was that for? Not that I minded of course....”
“For just being you. No apologies necessary Hermione. You’re brilliant, and I wouldn’t have you any other way. I like it when you go into lecture mode. You always get around to showing me what you’re on about eventually, and then I can work out what you just said.”

Hermione dropped the book as she melted in Harry’s green eyes and she pulled him into a passionate wet kiss, all work forgotten.

Heatedly, Hermione wriggled out of her wet panties and unzipped Harry as she reclined on the settee. Feeling Hermione’s intensity triggered Harry, and he buried his full length inside her in one go as her fluffy tail whipped about. Hermione was already yowling with pleasure and she bucked against him with every thrust of his own loins.

Hermione exploded ecstatically, sending Harry into a paroxysm of delight, and her convulsing tightness milked Harry’s voluminous discharge. But instead of fading into delirium, they were both hungry for more.

They rolled off the settee and Hermione straddled Harry on the rug in front of the fire as he tore open Hermione’s blouse to play with her breasts. She rode Harry until she felt him squirting his semen into her again as magic and electricity arced from them both, shattering their mugs and propelling the coffee table to the other side of the room.

But it wasn’t until the third time that they both lost themselves to oblivion and passed out in the wreckage of their sitting room.
Harry had been correct. Three weeks before the second task was to begin, Mad Eye had the Room of Requirement turn the swimming pool into a mini version of the Black Lake—and it was like swimming in ice until he swallowed the Gillyweed. It wasn’t really necessary to keep Moody in the dark—just for practice while Harry was still trying to perfect his gills.

The Potters had told Mad Eye about Harry’s metamorph powers and training after Sirius and Dora had assured Harry and Hermione that they trusted Moody completely. Dora had spent most of the last metamorph lesson telling them how Mad Eye had recruited her and taken her under his wing once she’d left Hogwarts.

Sirius had spoken to Harry and Hermione briefly on the handmirror, then told them how to get into the Shrieking Shack through the secret tunnel at the base of the whomping willow. The three of them had met there and talked for an hour or so. The Potters were startled when Sirius told them that he wanted to explain about Dumbledore.

“If the Headmaster finds out about you being a metamorph now Harry, I think that will be perfectly alright,” Sirius had said, “Dumbledore seems to have made a real breakthrough recently. Until that happened, I wasn’t at all certain that he would keep your best interests in mind. Quite simply, I didn’t trust him to do right by you.”

Harry and Hermione both looked shocked.

“You can’t be serious—but why?” Harry asked.

“You have to understand,” Sirius said with a pained expression, “Dumbledore has been on the Good side of things for as long as I’ve known him. He’s always given people second chances and tried to see the best in people. But he’s also been fighting a sometimes harsh war against pureblood supremacy since he fought and defeated Gellert Grindelwald at the end of World War Two.”

“When Voldemort became a force to be reckoned with, Dumbledore was the only one who could fight him to a standstill. After your mother’s protection charm broke Voldemort—which I didn’t really understand at the time, nobody did—Dumbledore apparently became obsessed with preventing his return according to other members of the Order; though he was still hampered by his loathing of killing if you ask me.

“Sometimes it’s necessary to use a killing move in a fight if you want to protect all that is good—Mad Eye understands. It’s good to forgive and not to kill indiscriminately—but if you hold back too much when you’re fighting, you can lose everything... everyone you love. Death Eaters won’t hold back, so you shouldn’t hold back when you’re fighting them. If someone tries to kill you or your loved ones, don’t give them the chance Harry.”

“And I didn’t know a lot of this until recently, but ever since I was released—thanks to you and Hermione discovering that Pettigrew was still alive—I’ve been on Dumbledore’s arse, as have most of us in the Order.”

“He finally let us all know about the Horcruxes, and he finally personally told me everything he suspected about your connection to Voldemort and Lily’s magic. That was a good start winning me over—having Severus help you get rid of the one that snake put in you inadvertently.”

“But I couldn’t understand why he placed you with the Dursleys when Petunia had always fought
with Lily. After he explained it to me, I understood why Dumbledore had to, but I still don’t really
understand why he never looked in on you in 11 years and dealt with that scumbag Vernon. I
suppose Dumbledore thought Petunia would look after you because he was blinded by his need to
see the best in people—probably thought she’d grown up.”

“Anyway, that’s why I still didn’t really trust Dumbledore completely to look after you properly until
you dealt with the Malfoy boy. Something in him changed that day Harry. I saw it in his eyes.
Dumbledore will do whatever is in his power now—including killing if he has to—to ensure the safety
of you and your wife. Of this I am certain. So if Dumbledore finds out about you being a metamorph
now, I’m alright with it.”

“And I absolutely trust Mad Eye. He trained Dora, and I have no problem with you telling him. I
expect you’ve told some of you and your wife’s girlfriends too... it’s hard to keep things like that a
secret from the people you love. I understand!”

“Just please—please be careful who you trust—don’t let anyone else know if you can help it.”

Harry was pensive for a good long while. Harry didn’t bother asking Sirius how he knew that he and
Hermione had girlfriends. Harry and Hermione were always with either Luna and Parvati, or lately
with Daphne and Fleur... They had taken them as dates to the Yule Ball together after all.

Harry supposed it was bloody obvious to at least a few of the Professors, and most of them were
clearly part of the Order.

He was surprised that he didn’t really feel embarrassed by the fact that half the Order probably
suspected that he and Hermione were engaged in something much more than casual friendships with
their “girlfriends.” But Harry didn’t really care who knew anymore when it came right down to it. So
much the better really. What was important was that he loved his friends dearly, and that he would
do whatever it took to look after them and their families.

In any case, since Moody had been told, he had wholeheartedly endorsed Harry’s metamorph
training, and tailored some of his instruction to match his talents. Over the weeks Mad Eye had also
added in several new combat spells to practice including the bombarda and reducto spells. He also
urged Harry to practice and refine his releasing, repulsion, and severing spells.

Hermione, Daphne, Luna, and Parvati all practiced their bubblehead charms and joined in
underwater mock battles with Harry, Moody, and Dora—who Mad Eye had roped into helping to
train the girls so that he could focus on Harry.

Over the last few weeks Harry found no time to relax, but he finally perfected his gills and a perfect
metamorphic mimicry of Gillyweed effects. And during that time, Fleur had only been able to spend
mealtimes together with them as she had been very busy training in the lake with Madame Maxime.

Likewise, Viktor had been hard at work training in the Black Lake with Karkaroff and some of his
friends in Durmstrang. Several times over the weeks, Lavender seemed like she wanted to stop and
talk to Harry and Hermione, but was unable to catch them alone as Daphne and Luna and Parvati
always seemed to be with them between or after classes.

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It was Monday, the day before the task, and Harry convinced Hermione that they both needed to
skip classes for last minute preparations.

“Take off your blouse Hermione, please,” Harry asked when they returned to their quarters after
breakfast. Hermione’s furry ears and tail twitched in puzzlement. It was obvious that Harry wasn’t making a sexual overture. Harry grinned at Hermione’s consternation.

“Sorry Hermione. I forgot to tell you. I’m going to put a couple of runes on you to protect you from the cold and ward off the Grindylows. The lake is going to be bloody freezing, and I think the merpeople are going to be enough trouble without us having to deal with Grindylows too. I’m going to put the same runes on myself. I’m not worried about the Giant Squid, according to the Creeveys, it’s alright.”

Hermione gulped anxiously and nodded.

“Thanks Harry. I didn’t think about that.”

“No worries Hermione,” Harry replied gently. “We’ve both been working hard on trying to figure this out, and focused on different bits. Thanks for helping me with the gills and metamorphing, not to mention practicing all the spells with me.”

“I’m going to let you cast the Mermish Translation Charm on both of us now too. I’m not sure if I’ve got it down well enough. I’ve just been so worn with all the combat training and learning the other new spells. I’d never be able to do this if it weren’t for you Hermione.”

Finally deciding they were as ready as they were ever going to be, they took the afternoon off to relax. Daphne joined them after classes and the three of them snuggled on the settee until dinnertime.

At dinner, Fleur sat at the Ravenclaw table with Gabrielle and their mother who had arrived the day before to look after Gabrielle and watch the second task. Krum and Lavender were nowhere in sight. Nor were Cedric and Cho, and Harry supposed that they were spending as much time as they could together before the merpeople took Lavender and Cho.

Luna and Parvati both hugged Hermione and gave her a kiss at dinner. It was just the two of them and Daphne at the Mingling Table that evening with Harry and Hermione, as Fred and George had shooed everyone else off so that Harry could collect himself for the task the following morning. But everyone had wished Harry good luck before going back to their House Tables.

As dinner concluded, a very grim-faced McGonagall approached their table.

“Good luck Hermione,” Parvati whispered, “Harry will find you tomorrow. I know he will.”

“Thank you Parvati. Can you and Luna look after Harry and Daphne tonight please. He’ll just need some company so that he won’t feel alone.”
Chapter 65

The ache in Harry’s gut when Professor McGonagall led Hermione away had been severe. But Luna, Parvati, and Daphne cuddled him in the Potters’ quarters, and stayed by him all night--lessening the pain. Luna had suggested that he swallow a vial of calming draught so that he could get some sleep, and he did.

When he woke early the next morning, Harry could barely make his way out of the tangle of limbs and furry tails wrapped around him to get to the bathroom. Harry appraised himself in the mirror for a few minutes before dressing. He strapped the holster which Mad Eye had given him to his forearm, and stowed his wand. Then Harry traced the runes on his chest with his fingers before pulling on a thick black t-shirt and covering them.

Harry stepped out of his pyjama bottoms and tugged on a pair of black spandex swimming trunks which wouldn’t get caught up in any underwater foliage. Finally, he dressed warmly and stowed a pouch of Gillyweed in his robes.

Yawning, Daphne, Luna, and Parvati hurriedly made themselves ready together in the bathroom while Harry waited in the sitting room, staring anxiously at the fire.

The three of them collected Harry and made their way to the Great Hall, but there was no question about eating--it just wasn’t happening for any of them. Fleur, Viktor, and even Cedric, all sat at the Mingling Table with Harry, Daphne, and the two Cat-Witches. None of them were hungry.

They waited patiently for everyone else to finish breakfast, and were finally led to the platform perched at the end of a new pier on the lake. Hundreds of visitors as well as students filled the stands at the edge of the lake--many times more wizards than there had been at the First Task. Harry shook his head, wondering what the idiots expected to see under the surface of the Black Lake.

Standing on the platform, the four champions removed their outer garments. Fleur knotted her platinum hair under a swimming cap and strapped it under her chin. She wore a tight-fitted pale blue wetsuit. Harry grit his teeth when he heard a lecherous chorus of whoops, wolf-whistles and cat-calls from Fleur's "admiring" in the stands. He took Fleur's hand and gave it a comforting squeeze as they shared a look.

Viktor stood stiffly in his black swimming trunks and burgundy t-shirt, his face stony. Cedric nervously jostled in place in his black and gold wetsuit. Finally, the starting wand fired.

Cedric and Viktor dove into the lake head-first. Fleur and Harry shared one last look before she plunged in after them. Harry took a huge swipe of gillyweed, making certain that all the judges could see him stuffing it in his mouth, and he followed the other three champions. Once Harry was several metres under the surface, he spat out the Gillyweed and morphed into the form he needed.

He gulped the cool water of the lake, and felt the sense of exhilaration which came from getting a rush of oxygen to the brain. Harry dove deeper into the forests of black and pale green water-weeds. He lit his wand so that he could see through the murk. He undulated through the dense flora keeping an eye out all around him, heading for the centre of the lake where he surmised the merpeople would have an underwater town of some sort.

Harry passed by some black rotting logs and a sunken vessel, and emerged into a field of aquatic grasses. His eyes darted across the plain, still seeing nothing. Harry sensed several ripples against the current and he whirled around to spy some Grindylows approaching. When they got within several
metres of him, their black eyes widened in fright and they sped back the way they came.

There was a pale green forest of delicate looking fronds up ahead. As Harry swam through it he felt something grasp his ankle. He flipped over and kicked out. A bubble emerged from his mouth when he gasped and discerned a green humanoid figure in a turtle half-shell wearing a black ninja costume rolling backwards. Several more kappas approached, flinging razor sharp throwing stars at him.

Harry managed to dodge all of the stars and shot a bombarda maxima spell into their midst, knocking out all but one. Harry fled into the pale-green forest with the one kappa following close behind. Harry spied another wreck and darted in one side and out the other. It swam by him and he caught it by surprise. The kappa whipped out a pair of sais and Harry knew this was a moment which called for something drastic.

Harry slashed his wand and the kappa’s hands drifted in a cloud of dark green blood. The sais sank into the sediment of the lake floor. A shrieking sound of agony hit Harry’s ears and he swam off leaving the howling kappa behind waving two stumps.

Finally he saw what appeared to be dwellings made of boulders and stone ahead. An eerie scream echoed through the basin. He turned and beheld a swarm of Grindylows attacking Fleur off to his right. As he swam towards her, Harry passed through more than a dozen blackened dead ones. Fleur was shooting balls of flame from her one free hand which were so hot that they stayed lit underwater like magnesium torches.

Harry marveled at the Siren’s magical defences, he and Hermione having guessed some time ago that she might be part Veela. Those Leprechauns at the World Cup had been very lucky to have only had a few sparks shot their direction, he thought.

Still, Fleur was surrounded by at least a hundred Grindylows and half a dozen of them had hold of her other three limbs. Harry didn’t want to hurt Fleur with a long-range attack, so he swam right into their midst. The Grindylows fled in terror from the wizard with the rune tattoos hidden under his t-shirt.

Fleur smiled gratefully through her bubble at Harry and he took her hand. They swam back towards the merpeople’s village together, passing by a number of houses as many silvery-grey, vaguely humanoid figures with fish-like tails, razor teeth, and tangles of black-green hair, watched them with frightened pale yellow eyes.

Harry and Fleur arrived in the centre of the village and the blood drained from their faces when they spotted Hermione, Gabrielle, Cho, and Lavender, all chained to an enormous rusting anchor, their robes and hair drifting in the currents. They were surrounded by raucous jeering and laughing mermen brandishing deadly looking tridents and spears.

The hour was almost up, but Viktor and Cedric were nowhere to be seen. Harry and Fleur turned to their own hostages and both uttered “relashio.” The chains fell from Gabrielle, but Hermione’s stayed attached. Hermione’s chains had clearly been charmed specifically to resist the releasing spell.

Several grinning mermen pointed their spears at him and shook their heads. One drew a blade and held it to Hermione’s neck, drawing several drops of blood. They had no intention of letting Hermione go and Harry knew it was the Minister’s doing.

The hour was gone.

Harry used a severing charm on Hermione’s chain and she woke up—a bubble forming around her head. She drove her elbow into the bridge of the nose of the merman behind her. He dropped his
blade and fell back screeching. Hermione chomped her cat-teeth into the arm of one of the others holding her while she slashed at the eyes of the other one with her retractable claws. They both fell away from her shrieking in pain.

Fleur had managed to free Cho with the Relashio spell. But mermen swarmed her with spears. She sent more of her fiery bolts of plasma into their midst, scattering them. Harry knew this was no time to hold back, and he slashed his wand at the three mermen bearing down on him.

He was surprised at the coppery colour of their blood and they wailed like banshees as their forearms floated away, their spears and tridents sinking to the bottom of the lake. Harry and Hermione were briefly clear of mermen. He used the severing charm on Lavender’s chain and bubbles emerged from Harry’s mouth when he screamed at Fleur to take Cho and Gabrielle and go.

Fleur nodded. She wanted to stay and help Harry and Hermione fight. But she knew that she had to save as many of the hostages as she could, including her sister. Fleur used an Ascendio charm and rose quickly to the surface. Harry thrust Lavender into Hermione’s arms and severed the forearm of the merman driving a spear at his face with another slash of his wand.

Harry was extremely glad of the Diffindo charm. Nobody could accuse this cutting spell of being a dark curse like the Sectumsempra spell, but it had the same immediate effect. He had gathered by Nott’s father’s lengthy stay in St Mungo’s that Sectumsempra wounds took far longer to heal properly than ordinary gashing or cutting spells like Diffindo.

Harry and Hermione began to ascend to the surface with Lavender, who was thankfully still unconscious, but they were rapidly surrounded by armoured mermen and the one in the middle wearing a gold crown encrusted with pearls aimed a staff at them. A globe shaped bronze cage appeared from nowhere, encircling and trapping them. The king of the merpeople approached, his silvery-grey face a mask of rage.

“When I turn you and your Demon over to your Minister, never again shall my people be forced to pay wizards a bounty for the right to live in our own homes, or be forced to work in your undersea mines for a pittance,” the Mer-King snarled venomously.

Harry’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. He had wondered how the Minister had managed to convince the Merpeople to be part of the Triwizard Tournament. Harry was now glad that he hadn’t had to kill any so far, but he had been steeling himself to use deadlier force against the mermen surrounding them before the cage had trapped him and Hermione.

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Fleur broke the surface gasping for fresh air and used a propulsion spell to send her speeding towards the platform with Gabrielle under one arm and Cho under the other. Shacklebolt and Dawlish each hauled a girl onto the platform. McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey grabbed Fleur’s arms and pulled her out of the water.

Shivering and sobbing, Fleur turned to look behind her and saw a bloom of coppery blood spreading across the surface in the middle of the lake.

“I must go back,” Fleur screamed, as Minerva and Poppy tried to hold her down, “‘arry and ‘ermione--ze Nereid are killing zem.”

The two older witches’ faces went ashen and they almost let Fleur go. But Shacklebolt and Dawlish pulled off their cloaks and dove into the lake followed immediately by Mad Eye and Tonks. The Professor and the Healer continued to restrain Fleur as Dumbledore and Maxime thundered onto the
“What the Hell is going on out there Miss Delacour?” Dumbledore asked as gently as he could, his own face contorted in wrath. “What are they doing to my students?”

“Zose water-demon, zey would not let ‘ermione go when ‘arry released ‘er,” Fleur sobbed. “I don’ know why. But zey tried to kill zem. ‘arry and ‘ermione were still fighting when I left. I was going to stay and fight too, but ‘arry told me to bring Cho and Gabrielle back, so I did as I was told.”

Albus Dumbledore nodded furiously. He drew his wand and lunged into the lake to follow the Aurors.

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Harry glowered at the idiot wearing the crown.

“Are you bloody mad?” Harry snapped, “D’you really think the Minister is going to honour any bargains she made with you?”

The Mer-King was astonished to hear the boy’s Mermish utterances. The Minister had told him the boy was a very young muggleborn criminal with little education in the ways of wizard-kind. But it took years for human wizards to learn Mermish. The King halted his advance, suddenly uncertain.

Harry continued, having got the Mer-King’s attention.

“The Minister hates ‘halfbreeds’--like you--and muggleborns. This girl with me--the one who I love--she is half-cat. The Minister wants to kill her, and she wants to kill me because I was raised by muggles.” Harry was just saying whatever came to the top of his head. He didn’t think the king needed to hear the full story--just the bits which might give him pause.

Suddenly there was an outraged babble of voices from the mermen behind the King.

“Get away, what are you doing here, this is for the King’s Guards,” yelled one of the soldiers.

“Stand back or I will gut you like a fish you coward,” a female voice said dangerously. “I heard what the King said, and he doesn’t deserve his title, making a foul deal like that with the Minister of Wizards is an act of treason to our kind. There are more of us than there are of you. We will take the King and kill him for his treachery.”

Harry glanced at Hermione. At first he had been happy to hear a mermaid stepping in, thinking it would spur the king to make the right decision. But threatening to kill the King and start a civil war could have the opposite effect.

“NO!” Harry yelled, and the arguing stopped. “The King only did what he did because he wanted to protect you. It was still stupid, but you shouldn’t kill him just for being stupid. He was trying to save you lot from being under the Ministry’s thumb. Don’t you get it?”

The Mer-King was really confused now. His prisoner was defending the king from those who might actually release the boy and the cat-girl. His grey face flushed coppery in shame as he realised that the boy was right. He had been a fool to jump at the Minister’s offer. He should have known that it was a trick. And he knew that his cousin was right; he no-longer deserved to be King.

The Mer-King raised his staff again, and the cage vanished just as another group of wizards swam towards them. He recognised one of them as the Headmaster of the school above the lake.

“Go!” the King said to Harry. “I will speak with the Headmaster of what has happened here today,
though I may not be King for much longer. I was a fool for allowing myself to be used. Thank you for putting an end to this. You have prevented my people from turning on one another.’’

Harry didn’t need to be told twice. He and Hermione swam towards the approaching Aurors and Dumbledore with Lavender in hand. Seeing his students safe, Dumbledore motioned for the Aurors except for Moody to return with them. He and Alastor would speak to the King themselves to determine what had happened here today.

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Lavender choked and coughed up water in Hermione’s arms when they broke the surface of lake. Harry was right beside her too, and several of the Aurors who had been securing the Tournament also began to emerge from the water.

“You saved me...” Lavender gasped.

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Harry didn’t care about the points. They meant nothing to him. He stormed past Karkaroff, Bagman, Crouch, and the stands full of onlookers, and headed straight for the castle. He was just happy that Hermione was safe—except for a very slight cut on her neck which Madam Pomfrey had healed in 2 seconds flat. He hated to think what would have happened if she hadn’t woken up in time.

Harry was very pleased that Fleur, Gabrielle, Cho and Lavender were all safe. Lavender had thanked Hermione for saving her life, and apologised profusely for being so horrible to her for so long. They had left Lavender crying in Viktor's arms as he gratefully thanked Harry and Hermione for bringing Lavender back to him safely.

But Harry was curious. Daphne, Luna and Parvati had all caught up with him and Hermione by the time they reached the front door of Hogwarts.

“What happened to Viktor and Cedric?” Harry asked Daphne as he sloshed into the entrance of the castle with his thoroughly doused wife, her saturated tail trailing mud and water weeds across the floor.

“Cedric never got past the Grindylows,” Daphne responded, “but he’ll be alright. He just got some nasty gashes which Madam Pomfrey fixed up fairly quickly. Viktor turned into a shark, but the giant squid apparently doesn’t like sharks and it flung Viktor onto the shore. He wasn’t hurt too badly fortunately; I heard he might be a bit banged up though.”
Chapter 66

Minister Dolores Umbridge was flabbergasted. Harry Potter had not only survived everything thrown at him and his halfbreed whore, but he had also emerged as the Victor of the Second Task.

Harry Potter was a Living Symbol of the defeat of the Pureblood Agenda, and had been ever since he had somehow apparently killed Voldemort at the tender age of one--perhaps with some sort of accidental magic--and that simply could not stand. Of course Dolores understood now that Voldemort had some sort of back-up plan which had sustained him, but that wasn’t the point.

Halfblood Potter was a traitor, just like his pureblood father who had married that mudblood slut. Dolores's face burned at the notion that she had ever found the 5th Year James Potter attractive when she had first attended Hogwarts.

Lucius was James Potter’s better in every way--except for losing his temper in front of the previous Minister. That had been a serious mistake. Dolores had desired Lucius ever since she had spied the beautiful young businessman in the Malfoy Apothecary in London when she was a little girl. Unfortunately, he had married Narcissa Black even before Dolores had begun attending Hogwarts, dashing her childish dreams. But that was now over--and he would soon belong to Dolores.

Harry Potter was a rallying point for all of the mudbloods demanding greater representation in the Wizengamot and the Ministry--all those who threatened to overturn the Natural Order of things. Harry Potter’s treachery even outstripped that of his father’s. At least Lily Evans had been a Human muggleborn “witch,” unlike Harry’s Halfbreed Abomination.

Dolores had been reticent at the idea of hiring water-demon assassins to prevent Potter from reaching the Mer-village. The Kappa appeared suspiciously halfbreed, but she had been assured by the Japanese Minister that none were better for marine assaults. And it would have been a delicious irony for the halfbreed herself to have perished at the hands of the other Abominations. Dolores had hoped that telling the Fish-King that the Cat-girl was a demon would guarantee the muggleborn halfbreed’s demise.

The Minister wasn’t sure what to do about Crouch. He was slowly drinking himself to death. It wouldn’t be much of a loss. But until the DMLE was hers, and her control of the Ministry thus ensured, the Minister needed him and his department as cover for her plausible denial.

Dolores knew that the focus of Amelia’s investigation would be on the Minister herself. When she had the Department of Magical Law Enforcement firmly in her grasp, then the Minister could be more open and rapidly move her agenda through the Wizengamot without being concerned about the wobbly support of halfbloods.

Bagman was dedicated, and his gambling addiction assured that he would remain so. She didn’t want to lose him. It had to be Crouch.

That’s when it struck her--Crouch’s intern. What was his name? Perry? Pierce? No... Percy--Percy Weasley. A cruel cunning smile curled the Minister’s lips as the irony struck her as even more delectable than one halfbreed killing another. The son of the Blood-traitor would be a perfect patsy if the investigation bore fruit. And if Dolores could take control of the DMLE before the investigation got that far, then so much the better.

Percy Weasley was even more dedicated to the Ministry than Bagman--and Percy Weasley didn’t have Bagman’s failings. If Dolores played her cards right, she could let Bagman take the fall and
have a far more superior intellect under her wing.

~o0o~

“You can’t be serious Amelia...” Dawlish gasped. Shacklebolt was unmoved however. He had been Dumbledore’s man in the DMLE for so long, that he was already prepared for this.

“I am absolutely serious John,” Amelia Bones stated grimly, “It is clear that the Minister herself has instigated, and is manipulating the tournament for her own gain. Though I have no proof. The statement of the Mer-King will not be accepted by the Wizengamot. And we do not yet have any evidence linking the Kappa kill-team to the Minister.”

“I need you John--you and Kingsley both--here at the Ministry to begin an investigation of Minister Umbridge. And I need you both by my side if the Minister takes bolder steps. I shall also need a security detail for when you are both otherwise occupied. Two of your best men. Meanwhile, I am reinstating Alastor and putting him in charge of Tournament Security.”

“From this point forward, the DMLE is coordinating with Headmaster Dumbledore in his protection of the Potters and Hogwarts. They are our last bulwark if we lose the Ministry completely. The muggle Parliament is already under the control of a Prime Minister and Party who share the Minister’s ideology.”

Even Shacklebolt’s blood ran cold at that thought. He considered where to send his family. He had relatives in both the Bahamas and the States. But the stability of the US wasn’t entirely certain either at the moment.

“But as of yet,” Madam Bones continued, “without wizard support, the Prime Minister and his Party cannot take complete control of the UK. We must not allow to happen here what happened in Germany in 1933 when Grindelwald and the Thule Society threw their full support behind Hitler.”

Being reminded of the Thule Society decided Kingsley. Even the Bahamas were too close to the US for his liking if the inbred so-called “Grand” Wizards should ever stop infighting and form a united front. And by all appearances in the muggle media they seemed to be making gains in parts of that nation where they had never had power before.

Perhaps his family would be safer in France where the Blood Purists had been banned from holding any political power.

~o0o~

Harry received 45 points and Fleur received 44 (Karkaroff, being who he was, had issued the 5 to Harry and the 4 to Fleur), but neither of them gave a damn, and neither of them were there to witness the judging.

Fleur spent the afternoon with her family and begged her mother to return to France with Gabrielle. She knew she had to complete the tournament one way or another, and Fleur had no intention of leaving her friends to fend for themselves when it was over. But she didn’t want her family to become targets.

Monsieur Delacour, who had cancelled his business meetings for the rest of the day and flooed to Hogwarts after the event, proudly concurred with his daughter. As far as he was concerned, she was living up to the family name. His own father had been part of the French Resistance during World War Two, and the Headmaster of Hogwarts had been open with him regarding what he knew about the British Minister and his suspicions about her. Mr Delacour would provide whatever support he
could from the Continent should the British Minister declare herself openly, and was already making the necessary arrangements.

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The Homunculus was livid, but he knew that cruciating Pettigrew would achieve nothing. He would have to move quickly, and he needed Pettigrew to bring him a young pureblood wizard, preferably one not yet of Hogwarts age, to regain his body and his full power. The Dark Lord cursed that he could not have Potter’s blood, but it could not be helped.

What few supporters he had left now mostly resided in Azkaban. Most outside had apparently thrown in with the Dark Witch who controlled the Ministry according to Wormtail. That meant Voldemort would have to give the Werewolf what he had wanted for so long to guarantee full support from the Lycan Clans which were most amenable to his goals.

And he needed Bellatrix by his side. With her talent for Blood Magic, together they could command an entire Army of Dead! And perhaps even call back and command Dark Creatures long banished from this world.

Of course that meant he would have to give Bellatrix what she had craved for so long too. Voldemort wasn’t concerned about Rodolphus though. Their marriage had been purely one of convenience, and the Dark Lord knew that Rodolphus was one of his most loyal followers and as dedicated to him as Bellatrix.

Rodolphus would be more than willing to preside over the consummation of the Bonding of his wife to the Dark Lord. The three of them together would be a force to be reckoned with. Voldemort would just have to do his best to put aside his own distaste for sharing some measure of power if he wanted to take Britain for his Own from the Blood-Traitors, Mudbloods, and the Dark Witch.

He suspected that Severus was lost to him. But he could not be certain until he had regained his form. Then he would see who else was still loyal. As to the Dementors, their support was no longer guaranteed when they had a Dark Witch who would promise them everything which Voldemort might have himself. But he might be able to split their forces and take some for his own.

The Dark Lord was also sick of residing in his muggle father’s residence. Once he had completed the blood ritual, he would depart this place forever. At least with a young pureblood to feed his Rising, the Dark Lord could purge every last drop of his father’s impurity from himself. He could use a different blood ritual for His rebirth than the one which he had been planning to use, and forgo the bone of his father.

Without Potter’s blood—the blood of his enemy—the originally planned for renewal ritual would no longer work in any case. Even if he still couldn’t directly kill Potter himself with the killing curse, survive Potter’s touch, or possess him, the Purity of the Dark Lord’s fresh blood should give him the power to take Dumbledore once and for all.

He could always use some other means to end Potter when it came time. And Voldemort knew it still had to be him. The Dark Witch had no idea of the Prophecy. It was no wonder the boy had survived the Second Task.

~o0o~

Albus, Severus, and Minerva shared a nightcap in the Headmaster’s office. The next meeting of the Order could wait for the morrow when everyone could join them at the Malfoy Manor—correction, the Black Manor, as the dissolution of Narcissa’s archaic marriage-contract to Lucius Malfoy had
been finalised—which she had graciously offered for the purpose. They mulled over the morning’s events at the lake and the aftermath, pondering the agenda of the meeting, and considered if there was anything they could do to prevent the Third Task.

“I do not believe so,” Albus sighed, “and we have been forestalled from having any input ourselves. We can only be thankful that the Skrewts which Rubeus has bred for the Task at the insistence of the Triwizard Commission have begun killing each other. Hopefully there will be few left by the time June arrives.”

Severus and Minerva both snorted at the notion that Hagrid needed encouragement from an outside agency to breed dangerous creatures.

“And what of the Acromantulas?” Minerva wondered, “perhaps Hagrid's friend Aragog will have some sway?”

Severus rolled his eyes.

“Don't be so naive Minerva,” the Potions Master sneered, “Even if Aragog so commanded, without his own presence to stay them, the Acromantulas chosen by the Ministry for the task will not obey him when the blood of wizards calls to them. We just have to face the facts. There is little we can do unless the Champions signal for help. The magical wards placed around the maze by the Commission will prevent any teachers or headmasters from entering the maze unless we are directly called upon to provide aid.”

The Headmaster sighed again at the pointless bickering.

“Well, regardless of whatever help we may provide the Champions, we must redouble our efforts to locate Voldemort. With the horcrux gone from Harry, the prophecy as a surety is broken... and if we can finish him before he reaches the lad, then we can focus all of our attention on the Minister and the Death Eaters who have flocked to her side.”

~o0o~

When Harry woke early the next morning, he found himself lying in bed sandwiched between Hermione and Daphne. He carefully got up, trying not to wake them. He was surprised that he didn’t feel as agitated as he had after the first task. He decided grimly that perhaps he was getting used to facing death time and time again.

But on the way to the bathroom, he spotted Luna and Parvati curled up together on the Potters’ settee and Fleur asleep in one of the cozy armchairs in the sitting room by the glowing embers of the fireplace. Harry’s features softened. He smiled and blinked back happy tears, feeling the warm glow in his chest swell and fill his body.

Harry realised he had been wrong. He wasn’t getting used to facing death. Harry was getting used to having people who loved him by his side.
The Mingling Table was slightly larger at breakfast the day after the task. Harry and Hermione sat in their usual spots directly across the Hall from the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall. Luna and Parvati took their seats next to Hermione, and Daphne and Fleur sat next to Harry.

On the other side of the table, facing them, Fred, George, and Angelina were back, as were Dean, Neville and Ginny. Viktor was accompanied by Lavender, and Cedric and Cho made a show of leaving the Hufflepuff table to join the rest of them.

Strangely, up at the Staff Table, next to Ludo Bagman, Harry spied Percy Weasley in Crouch’s seat glaring at him. Harry frowned, wondering what that was all about. Then he remembered that Percy had graduated a year early and taken an internship at the Ministry according to Fred and George, who had complained vociferously about it at the World Cup.

Nobody really knew what had happened in the Black Lake except for those at the Mingling Table, who were being filled in by Harry, Hermione, and Fleur over breakfast.

“That’s odd Hermione,” Harry remarked, his face creased in puzzlement as he perused the morning paper after giving Hedwig a piece of toast, “All it says in the Prophet is that Fleur and I came in second and first. There aren’t any details. You’d think Skeeter would be going on about how I tried to start a war with the Merpeople or something.”

“I don’t think the Minister and the Prophet have worked out how to spin the events to their advantage Harry,” Hermione replied.

“Well what do you reckon...?” Fred began.

“Should we start spreading the news?” George asked.

The Champions and their loved ones all looked uncomfortable. None of them were sure what to make of things. Harry peered into his wife’s eyes quizzically, and her furry ears and tail twitched noncommittally. Hermione wasn’t really certain what was best. Finally Harry shook his head.

“Look, all we know for certain is that the Minister has it in for Hermione and me,” Harry responded, “but there’s nothing we can do to really prove to everyone else what really happened in the lake. Or prove that she’s the one behind it. The Minister could say it was Bagman or Crouch behind it all.”

“All I know...” Harry swallowed anxiously and peered meaningfully at Fleur before glancing back to the other two Champions and continuing. “All I really know is that I don’t want any of you to get killed just because she’s out to get me and Hermione. I’m sorry you’re all being forced to participate because of the stupid magical contract. I don’t really know what else t’doo about it for now until we know what the next task is.”

Fleur got out of her seat and put her arms around Harry, giving him a lingering kiss on the cheek.

“Don’ be sorry ‘arry. You are ze only one ‘oo did not chose to be in ze tournament. All of ze ozzer Champions--we chose zees. We knew eet was dangerous when we signed up for eet.”

“Fleur is correct Harry,” Victor stated firmly, “Zis is not your fault.”

“And I’m the one who’s sorry Potter!” Cedric said glumly, “I should never have doubted you.”
As everyone finished eating, Harry actually spotted the Headmaster approaching the Mingling Table for once. Dumbledore appeared in a somber mood.

“Harry, Mrs Potter, you are both excused from classes today. Perhaps you could join me in my office after you have washed up from breakfast. We have some rather important things to discuss.”

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Harry felt a bit uneasy, and Hermione decided to sit on Harry’s lap with an arm and her furry tail curled around his shoulders in the comfy armchair in Dumbledore’s Office. Many of the Headmasters on the wall peered intently at the students while Fawkes fluttered and groomed his wings. Harry thought that he knew what Dumbledore wanted to talk about.

“It’s alright Professor Dumbledore. I understand the Minister is behind all of this. And I know about the Order... I have more or less since last Easter and the beginning of last Summer. Mr Weasley and Dobby told us...”

“Indeed,” began Dumbledore. Harry was surprised to see that he looked sad and a bit sheepish.

“Harry, there are a number of things I should have personally discussed with you from the very beginning--but for many reasons I either left it to others, or chose to keep things to myself. Some of those reasons were personal, others because I thought them dangerous to reveal, and--most unwisely--some because I thought you were just too young to comprehend. I now understand myself, that is not true of you, or your wife.”

“You are both far more mature than your years, and have borne burdens that many adults have not. And due to who you are--who you have become--my staff... my friends--have come to show me the error of my ways.”

“Professors Snape and McGonagall, Madam Pomfrey, and your Godfather Sirius, have been instrumental in helping me see who you really are Harry--who you both are. You yourself with your actions, helped me see who you are... and gave me a glimpse into myself in the process.”

“I have been an old fool and kept secrets far too long...” a tear glinted in the corner of Albus’s eye.

“I once told you that the Truth was a beautiful and terrible thing... as an excuse to hide it from you. Today, I must tell you that it is more terrible to keep the truth from those who most deserve to hear it. That forgiveness which I asked you for at the end of First Year, I do not deserve it.”

“I should have told you from the very beginning of First Year that Voldemort would be seeking you out. Harry... there is a Prophecy--however, in my view, Prophecies can often be dubious at best. Regardless, it was accepted as legitimate by Voldemort, and thus made real by his actions when he chose you as his target. It has been largely broken by a series of events beginning with Mrs Potter’s transformation--but you should know of it nonetheless because it was about you and Voldemort.”

“We have to fight each other don’t we!??” Harry stated simply, “And one of us will have to die.”

Albus Dumbledore stared at Harry, his eyes widening in surprise.

“Yes! Though with your Horcrux gone, it is no longer guaranteed that you must personally face Voldemort. Your mother's magic still protects you from Possession, his touch, and his Killing Curse. And there is more to it of course. There was another the Prophecy could have referred to before he chose you...”

“It’s alright Sir--really,” Harry interrupted, “I worked it out for myself when Dobby visited me at
Privet Drive. Prophecy or not, Voldemort thinks that I might be able to kill him again, and he won’t stop until he finishes me first. I understand. If there is more, it’s not really important. That’s all I really needed to know. Especially since you already had Professor Snape help me get rid of the Horcrux in myself.”

The tear in the corner of Dumbledore’s eye finally broke free and rolled down his cheek.

“Thank you Harry... Sincerely! I do not deserve your graciousness...” Dumbledore paused and heaved a great sigh as if to calm himself before continuing. “Henceforth, everything I know or come to learn of which relates directly to you, I shall make you aware of.”

“That is the second part of the reason you are here in my office. I am inviting you and your wife to participate in some of the Order meetings Harry. You belong there--and I dare say that those closest to you belong there as well. Misses Lovegood, Patil, Greengrass, and Delacour—all of their families have pledged their support to the Order. It is only fair that their children should join us as well.”

Hermione’s tail swished and Harry gaped, his eyes bulging in utter amazement. Neither of them had ever thought that they would be allowed to sit in on Order meetings--much less with their best friends.

“None of you are too young to know the Truth and participate at the very least in learning about the Evil which will take us all if we cast our eyes away and blind ourselves. I understand that now, like I did not before. I cannot protect you without also teaching you what you must know to protect yourselves.”

“There is a meeting tonight. After dinner, please be here in my office, all of you, and we shall depart by floo to the home of someone else--someone I once believed would always be an enemy--but who has become as much of a friend as one could ever hope to have. She is the cousin of your godfather Harry... Narcissa Black.”

Harry and Hermione both gasped in shock, knowing exactly who she was.

“Once her husband was Lucius Malfoy--but no more. She has truly forsaken her past... and even cast off those of her own blood who would commit acts of great evil. I know this Harry, because I have a special talent, much the same as Professor Snape’s. I can see into people’s minds and see what they see--and what they have seen.”

“Your wife, with her own special abilities, will be able to tell you that what I say is true, especially when she uses her gifts at the meeting tonight. You do not have to trust my word on this. Trust Mrs Potter, as the truth will be physically palpable to her.”

Hermione purred and blushed, the tip of her bushy tail flicking in happy embarrassment as she wriggled on Harry’s lap. Harry grinned at her and gave her a scratch behind a furry ear. He trusted Hermione with every fibre of his being.

The Headmaster averted his eyes briefly feeling his own heart warm at the tender sight of young love. Another tear broke free and rolled down his other cheek. He swallowed guiltily before continuing.

“And... and Harry, I know words will never--ever--be enough to make up for 11 and a 1/2 years of suffering. I am profoundly sorry for neglecting you for so long at the Dursleys... for not looking in on you in all that time to check on your well-being. That was truly unforgivable of me. I...” the Headmaster’s voice broke, and he tried to compose himself again as more tears followed the first ones, “I have no excuse for my behaviour in that regard.”
Harry’s cheeriness was suddenly shaken by the sight of Dumbledore’s distress. Enduring Vernon and Dudley’s brutish onslaughts, and dodging Aunt Petunia’s half-hearted swipes with frying pans had been painful indeed. But he was free of that now, and he was beginning to think that Dumbledore might have had something to do with that. Tears sprang to Harry's own eyes.

“Please Sir,” Harry squeaked, “It’s alright. It’s done with now. Uncle Vernon is gone. Really! I don’t care about that anymore now...” Harry gulped, “Now that I have a REAL family and a REAL home.”

“You are far too kind Harry,” Albus choked. “I do not deserve your graciousness... That would be Minerva... And Hagrid!”

“But--but there is one last thing. There is one other here at Hogwarts who may yet have something painful to reveal to you. It is however, not my place to speak for him. I trust... I trust that you will offer him some small measure of forgiveness should he ever be able to speak for himself...”

Harry cast his eyes down, wondering who the Headmaster meant. There really was only one person he could think of. Snape had mentioned Harry’s mother once--the day Snape had started being nice to him--and compared his mum favourably to Hermione.

Harry had hated Snape from the bottom of his heart since the first day that Snape had bored into him with his venomous gaze and chosen to do his utmost to make Harry’s life at Hogwarts miserable--something to do with hating Harry’s father apparently.

But Harry had stopped hating Snape when Snape began treating him and Hermione better. Harry had begun to wonder if Snape had liked his mum and been jealous of his father. Maybe Snape had done something really bad like Pettigrew had.

Ever since Snape had invited Harry--and Hermione--to study Advanced Potions with him, Harry had seen nothing but sorrow and grief in Snape’s eyes. And the day that Snape had helped him destroy the Horcrux in his head, Snape had said that he believed in Harry in such a soft, gentle tone, that Harry had sensed something in the Potions Master which reminded him of how Sirius felt towards Harry.

Whatever Snape had done, Harry knew it was eating at him, that it was causing him great pain... and Harry knew that when it came time, he would forgive him.

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Molly Weasley was still having some difficulty getting used to being in the house of someone who had been an enemy for so long. Narcissa was a courteous host though, and Molly was on her best behaviour--until Harry emerged from the fireplace. Molly’s eyes narrowed. Harry needed to be protected and looked after by those who knew what was best for him. He was too young to be in the Order, and he still looked too scrawny and in need of a good feeding.

Arthur beamed at Harry and greeted him warmly while his wife looked on pensively.

“Good to see you again Mr Weasley...” Harry grinned, before being embraced by Sirius.

The green flames flickered again, and Hermione joined the hug, twirling her fluffy tail. One after the other, Luna, Parvati, Daphne, and Fleur exited the fireplace... and finally Albus Dumbledore made his entrance and the green flames faded.

Molly was in a high dudgeon now.
“What’s the meaning of this Albus?” Molly scathingly inquired, “The Order is no place for children,” her voice began to rise and Severus glared at her while Poppy and Minerva cringed, “Harry I understand, but this is ridiculous...”

“Good Evening Molly,” Dumbledore interjected politely, “Harry would naturally share whatever he learns here today with those who love him. They may as well sit among us. Especially as their families are doing so much to support the Order--thanks to Harry...”

“You might as well just induct the lot of them then,” Molly shouted, “Do you really think their parents want them to be fighting Dark Wizards...?”

“Molly! Please,” Arthur said embarrassedly, “They’re just sitting in...”

“And why shouldn’t they be fighting Dark Wizards?” Sirius responded sharply.

“Sirius is right Molly,” Moody growled. ‘These ‘children’ are all being forced to confront Dark Wizards whether we like it or not. We all are. They need to know what they’re facin’... They need to be prepared. Is that what you want? For them to face danger without knowin’ what it’s all about?”

“Of course not Alastor,” Molly gasped angrily, “But...”

“But nothin’...” Moody snapped. “They’re here to learn what they will be dealing with in coming months. That’s just how it is. Get used to it.”

Molly quieted, and looked to Remus for support. But when he just raised his eyebrows at her, she knew that she had lost and settled for mutinous looks. Albus nodded gratefully at Moody.

“Well, if we’re all ready then,” Dumbledore said smoothly, “why don’t we join our gracious host at her table...”

Harry, Hermione, and their friends let out huge sighs of relief as the tension began to drain. But they were still quite anxious, and all sat quietly together at one end of the long dining table, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. Dora left the adults at the other end and went to sit with them.

“If you would please be so kind Narcissa?” Dumbledore began, as he glanced down the lengthy ebony table at the apprehensive youngsters, “Some here do not yet know the circumstances by which you have come to host us.”

Narcissa’s stomach tightened and she swallowed nervously. She looked to her cousin Sirius, and he gave her hand a comforting squeeze.

“I... My husband and I were betrothed at an early age,” Narcissa began, “There was a contract... For those too young to know, Marriage Contracts were once common among the Noble Houses. Though they are no-longer validated by the Ministry today, Contracts issued before times changed are still upheld. My father had pledged me to the Malfoys from birth.”

Hermione’s bushy tail bristled as she and Fleur gasped in horror. Daphne cast her eyes away, glad that her own father had steadfastly refused Lucius Malfoy’s many offers. Luna and Parvati cuddled closer together and shuddered, furry tails aquiver. Harry’s stomach churned in revulsion at the idea of an arranged marriage, bought and paid for. He felt like throwing up. It struck him as tantamount to slavery.

“I did grow to love my husband eventually, and at one time I shared his beliefs. We all did in those days... we were raised to believe in the superiority of our blood. But over time I came to see the cruelty and suffering that such beliefs wrought. I begged my husband to withdraw from the company
he kept.”

“When he did not, we grew further apart. There was war--and more distance between us. But by the
time it was over we had a son, and I had hoped to put it all behind us. But... but as you know, my
husband maintained his arrogant views, and passed them on to our son.”

“When my husband was finally sent to Azkaban for his many crimes after losing his temper at
Hogwarts, and our son eventually joined him for his own crimes, I sought a way out. There was a
clause in the contract...”

“A clause which gave me the right to divorce should my husband ever be arrested and convicted to a
life sentence. And if my husband’s heir were to also be convicted of a crime which would have
carried a life sentence had he been of the age of majority, the clause also allowed me to assume
control of his estate...”

Narcissa paused, and peered apologetically at Parvati, Luna, and Daphne.

“I... I am shamed by my own blood--my son. For his grievous offences I am truly sorry. Offering my
home as a sanctuary for those who have been wronged by my husband and my son will never be
payment enough. But it is the least I can do...”
Chapter 68

Luna and Parvati kissed their friends goodnight and made their way back to their respective dormitories after leaving the Headmaster’s office. It was late, and Fleur walked the Potters and Daphne back to the Unaffiliated’s corridor. Daphne was clearly downcast and Fleur put her arm around the younger girl as they strolled together.

“What ees wrong Daphne?” Fleur’s eyes filled with concern. “We learne’ much tonight. Please tell us why you are so sad.”

Daphne fluttered her eyelashes at Fleur, and gave her a wan smile. Harry and Hermione glanced over at them both.

“I... I’m not really sad--not for myself anyway,” Daphne replied, “I’m sad for Narcissa Black. But I’m grateful actually... Grateful that my father refused Mr Malfoy’s many offers to buy me for Draco.”

Everybody came to a halt. They all stared in shock at Daphne’s revelation.

“That’s barbaric! Mr Malfoy... In this day and age...” Hermione’s tail trembled angrily as she sputtered at the revolting idea. Harry grimaced in outrage too, but his feeling was leavened by a sense of satisfaction that both Malfoys were now in Azkaban.

“But I... I’m also sad for my sister,” Daphne continued with a gulp, “I’m afraid that might be why Draco tried to take her--because he couldn’t have me... I feel awful about that. And Narcissa Black’s story just made me think about it all again.”

Fleur pulled Daphne closer into both of her arms and kissed her cheek.

“Eet is not your fault Daphne,” Fleur responded comfortingly, “Though I know, I would feel ze same way if I was in your place and eet was Gabrielle. But thanks to ‘arry and ‘ermione your seester is safe now.”

Daphne’s face brightened as a warm feeling filled her. She felt protected in Fleur’s embrace, like she felt with Harry and Hermione.

Hermione’s fluffy tail twitched and a smile hovered on her lips.

“Do you want to spend the night with us Fleur?” Hermione asked, purring lightly, “There’s plenty of room...”

Fleur’s own feeling of despondency at the idea of returning to her now empty suite in the Beauxbaton Carriage evaporated and her face lit up.

“Thank you ‘ermione. I would like zat vairy much!”

Hermione was right. There was plenty of room on the Potters’ large bed for the four of them. Daphne slid into bed next to Hermione clad in a pastel pink slip and panties. Harry was surprised when Fleur sat on the bed next to him and asked him to unzip the forest-green evening dress she had worn under her robes. He had thought Fleur would want to sleep next to Hermione too.

But apparently Fleur had another idea. She fluttered her long silvery lashes at Harry, then smiled shyly at Hermione.
‘ermione, do you mind if we ‘ave a little fun before sleep?’

Hermione grinned. She had been waiting a long time for this... and she was thrilled that Fleur liked Harry too. Hermione purred and nodded at Harry and Fleur, batting her own dark lashes while Daphne’s eyes widened. A tingling swelled deep inside Daphne and she began to stroke Hermione’s fluffy tail and kissed her furry ears.

Harry felt a surge of elation as Fleur brushed her hand across his chest under his pyjama top while Hermione unbuttoned him.

“I don’t think you’ll be needing this tonight Harry.” Hermione giggled as she pulled off his pyjama top.

“Zis may surprise you, but you will be my first boy ‘arry. I ‘ave only ‘ad two girlfriends before zis. I ‘ave always wanted to be wiz a boy too, but I ‘ave not met one I liked before. Usually my girlfriends... we shared toys.” Fleur’s dress slid to the floor and she gracefully undid her strapless bra.

“But you are vairy special ‘arry! You make me feel nice--loved--like ze girls do!” Fleur concluded breathily as she stepped out of her thong.

Daphne tugged off Hermione’s nightie over her head and Fleur leaned over Harry to give the cat-witch a sultry kiss, her breasts quavering above him.

“Thank you ‘ermione, I love you vairy much.” Fleur’s smiling eyes flitted to Daphne and to Harry, “I love you all vairy much.”

Harry’s breathing quickened as the nude French girl slowly pulled off his pyjama bottoms. He gasped when Fleur took his erection in her soft hand and began to tenderly stroke it. She was fascinated, having never felt a real one before. Fleur took Harry’s stiff penis in her mouth, tasting him for the first time. She swirled her tongue around the shaft and gave it a suck until it was thoroughly moistened.

Harry put his hands around Fleur’s waist when she straddled his torso. Fleur leaned over to kiss Harry wetly, and his hands moved up to her full breasts. Fleur moaned when Harry squeezed them and tugged gently on her hard pink nipples.

She wriggled her hips and settled her bare cleft on Harry’s stiffness. Fleur gasped as she impaled herself, feeling the warmth of a real boy inside her for the first time. Fleur rode Harry a few times before rolling on her back and pulling him in deeper.

Harry buried himself inside Fleur and she crossed her legs around his backside, moaning louder as he began to glide in and out and lick her neck just under her ear with one hand pressed into the small of her back and the other running through her platinum hair.

Hermione and Daphne entwined themselves in a dance of their own, keeping a gleeful eye on the coupling next to them. As Harry and Fleur’s gyrations became more intense, Daphne drove her fingers into Hermione’s depths and licked her nipples drawing quick intense meows of pleasure from Hermione.

Fleur began to ripple spasmodically under Harry as the torrent of sensation began to overwhelm her. Fleur’s undulations gripped Harry and he lost himself.

“Oh... oh ...oh,” Fleur gasped as she felt jets of Harry’s semen squirt inside her. Harry groaned as he continued to release himself, sweat dripping from his brow. Fleur was adrift in an ocean of bliss.
Hermione yowled, her tail whipping wildly as the waves of ardor shook the bed. She burst with pleasure, drenching Daphne’s hand in stickiness.

Senses fired, Hermione took Harry’s place between Fleur’s thighs as Daphne gently drew Harry into her own arms. Hermione placed her hands under the dazed girl’s thighs and her cat-tongue dove into Fleur’s folds to taste Harry’s essence.

While Harry was still panting, Daphne lay on top of him, with her thighs on both sides of his head and she began to suck Harry’s still hard penis. Harry grinned and reached his hands around to massage Daphne’s soft bottom cheeks as his tongue darted into her twitching wet slit.

Harry thrust up, plunging into Daphne’s throat every time she pressed her lips to his pubes. Harry nibbled and licked her clitoris. He took one of his hands off a bottom cheek to deeply insert two fingers into Daphne’s damp sheath.

Hermione had one arm and her furry tail wrapped around Fleur’s back as their lips and tongues wrestled; her other hand between Fleur’s thighs. Fleur had one of her own hands between Hermione’s thighs while the other tweaked and teased all of Hermione’s nipples.

They writhed together in waves of passion. Hermione purred and meowed as her furry tail thwapped back and forth, her furry ears flattening; Fleur moaned and gasped.

The bed rocked in eddies of ecstasy as the four young wizards lost themselves pair by pair to a tempest of delight.

But the intensity of the fervor did not ebb. Harry found himself in Hermione’s embrace, his erection plumbing her depths as Fleur and Daphne clung to both of them and each other. Daphne’s lips somehow found Fleur’s and her hands ran all over the older girl’s body while the other returned her caresses.

As the tides shifted, Daphne discovered her arms wrapped around Harry’s torso as she ground herself into his backside while he continued plundering Hermione who was ensconced in Fleur’s grasp. Yowls, gasps, and rapturous moans echoed through the room.

A Hurricane of Bliss took them all ecstatically in one massive surge as magic and electricity exploded, ricocheting throughout and shattering every lamp and water-glass in the Potters’ chambers, and they all finally passed into a humid oblivion as the bed collapsed.

~000~

Daphne and Fleur were horrified at the spell damage to every room in the Potters’ quarters as the sticky naked foursome inspected the chambers the following morning.

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” Hermione nonchalantly responded.

“We’re used to it...” Harry grinned.

“Zis happens often?” Fleur gasped.

Harry nodded.

“Well, usually it’s just confined to one room. But this is the first time it’s happened when anyone else has been with us...” Harry raised his eyebrows in perplex at Hermione.

“I... I suppose it’s because all four of us climaxed together in that last bout,” Hermione concluded.
“...and... and I guess it’s also because we’ve all been really wanting this for a long time.”

“But really... it’s alright!” Harry said firmly, seeing the concerned looks still plastered on Daphne and Fleur’s faces. “Hermione and I are really good at repairing spells now.”

Finally a half-smile crept to Fleur’s lips.

“So you won’t mind if I breeng my toys for next time zen!?”
Chapter 69

It was a quiet morning at the Mingling Table, as most of the Potters' friends, except for the other two cat-witches, and Fleur and Daphne, were eating breakfast with their own Houses or by themselves with their girlfriends, as they did on occasion. Conversation turned to last night's Order meeting.

“That was so sad,” Luna began, “Poor Madam Black. Having to marry someone she couldn’t chose... especially someone as horrid as Mr Malfoy.”

“Her father more or less sold her when she was just a baby...” Parvati’s satiny black tail drooped, “That’s why my mum’s parents brought her from India when she was little; so that she could marry whoever she wanted. My grandparents love each other, but they were ‘arranged,’ and they didn’t want that for her. I didn’t know they did that here too.”

“The Ministry banned forced-marriage contracts in 1968.” Hermione's furry ears twitched, “But they decided to still enforce existing contracts, so it was too late for Narcissa. I looked it up before breakfast.”

“What about your father Parvati?” Harry asked.

“He was born here,” Parvati replied, “His parents eloped and moved to England because they didn’t like who they were supposed to marry.”

Daphne gulped nervously, deciding to get it over with and tell the rest of her friends quickly.

“Lucius Malfoy tried to buy me for Draco, but my father wouldn’t let him. I think that’s why Draco tried to kidnap Astoria--because he always wanted me. I didn’t know marriage contracts had been banned though...”

Luna and Parvati both looked appalled at the idea of Daphne being sold to the Malfoys. Their furry tails and ears wilted at the dreadful notion.

“Thank goodness your father is more forward thinking Daphne,” Luna remarked.

“I don’t get it. How would that work?” Parvati’s black tail wagged in puzzlement, “If it’s been banned, you could just get out of it.”

“Binding Magical Contract!” Harry stated grimly. “If your parents used magic on the contract, it wouldn’t matter if it was illegal. You’d be stuck anyway.”

Parvati cringed. Luna squeezed her hand and smiled sweetly at her.

“It’s alright Parvati. You don’t have to worry about that. Neither of us do. I already know who I want to marry,” Luna said dreamily, tickling Parvati’s cheek with her fluffy white tail. Parvati blushed and grinned at Luna, her own sleek black tail wriggling cheerily.

“In ze French wizard world, ze witches would not put up wiz forced-marriage contracts. Zey were banned over 150 years ago. Zat is probably why some French ‘pureblood’ families moved to Britain,” Fleur asserted.

Hermione’s bushy ginger tail was curled around Harry’s shoulder’s, but the tip flicked pensively as she frowned.
“I wonder...” Hermione mused aloud, “There must be some way to prevent magical contracts from being binding on unwilling participants. I looked into it after Harry was entered into the tournament. But I haven’t found anything yet...” Hermione filed that thought away into her and Harry’s “to-do” list, along with freedom for House-Elves and more rights for Merpeople.

“...anyway,” Hermione went on, “For now, the most important thing is getting Harry through the tournament alive—and Fleur and Viktor and Cedric too, of course. And dealing with the Minister.”

“Yeah!” Harry nodded, “I’ll have to let Viktor know what to expect in the next task too. Diggory should be alright, because he’s got the DADA class with Lupin. And Professor Lupin is going to be covering most of the creatures and magical obstacles we know for certain are going to be used in the maze.”

“I’ll ask Diggory if he knows about the Skrewts though,” Harry continued, "I’m not sure if he’s got Care of Magical Creatures. But we’re all going to be stuck if the Minister throws something unusual at us. And I don’t know about the Sphinx. I’m not very good with riddles.”

“I can help you with that Harry,” Luna beamed at him. “I suppose that’s one of the reasons I ended up in Ravenclaw. Daddy and I love riddles... And I can also ask him what sorts of additional unusual creatures he thinks the Ministry might be inclined to use in the third task. If they’re something already discovered, he may have some information which will be helpful.”

Hermione’s furry ears tilted cheerfully. Mr Lovegood’s information about house-elves had proved very rewarding. He might be a bit over-enthusiastic and overly-speculative about rumoured creatures with little evidence to show for them, but when it came down to it, he was quite empirical regarding the facts about known quantities.

The Lovegoods were intuitive, curious, and open-minded; and Luna in particular had strong reasoning processes Hermione had long ago decided—regardless of entertaining odd notions before all the evidence was in. Luna was very good at “out of the box” thinking, and Hermione had come to love Luna as much for her unique perspectives and intellect as she loved her for her kindness, loyalty, and forthrightness.

“Thanks Luna,” Harry responded gratefully.

As he glanced back towards Hermione, Harry caught the malevolent eye of Percy Weasley again, and an ominous feeling set the scrambled eggs in his stomach roiling. Hermione peered in the direction Harry was looking, and the fur on her spine stood on end. Noticing the shift in attention, Fleur, Daphne, and the other two cat-witches glanced up at the staff table too. Percy quickly focused back on his breakfast.

‘oo is zat?” Fleur frowned, “I ‘ave not seen him before. ‘e does not look vairy pleasant. Why ees he sitting zere. ‘e looks like a student.”

“That--is our dear brother Percy...” George stated as he sat down across from Harry.

“...and we were wondering the same thing,” Fred continued, plonking himself next to his twin. Both of them had just finished their own breakfasts and spotted Percy sitting in Crouch’s seat, staring at Harry, for the second day in a row.

“Maybe Crouch is sick,” Harry responded. But he had a bad feeling that there was more to it.

“Drunk off his arse more like...” George snorted.

“He could barely stand at the Second Task...”
“...and he looked like he was about start to blubbery...

“...mind you, so did Bagman...

“...but we reckon that’s because that git lost a lot of money betting against you Harry.”

“But Percy looks like he hates Harry,” Daphne remarked anxiously, “What’s that all about?”

Fred and George shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

“We think he might be interning directly for the Minister now,” Fred replied sadly.

“That’s why we came over here to warn you,” George concluded as his jaw tightened.

Hermione nodded. She hated to think that Percy had gone over, as she had thought he was alright at the beginning of First Year until she had started to really fall for Harry and come to understand that there was more to life than books and arbitrary rules. But Hermione could feel Percy’s dark intent strongly, and what the Twins said was the only thing which made sense to her.

“I wonder if Dumbledore knows yet?” Harry pondered, certain that the Twins were correct.

“I don’t think so Harry. He would have mentioned it at the Order meeting last night if he knew...” Hermione caught herself and shut-up, turning crimson. Fred and George looked at each other and sighed.

“It’s alright Hermione...”

“We know all about the Order...”

“Mum and Dad are always trying to keep us from prying into it.”

“We’re surprised they let you into a meeting...”

“...Mum must have thrown a fit,” George finished with a sardonic grin.

~000~

Cedric nodded gratefully when Harry caught up to him at lunchtime.

“Thanks Potter. Yeah, I’ve got Hagrid’s class--and Professor Lupin’s of course. I’ll be alright. How did you find out about the next task already?”

“I... I can’t really say Diggory. But I’ll let you know if I find out any more about it. Fleur already knows, and I’ll catch up Viktor after classes today.”

~000~

Harry and Hermione told Viktor everything they knew about the maze and the potential obstacles they would be facing as they jogged by the lakeshore together in the carmine glow of the setting sun. All the stands were gone, and there was no sign on the surface of the lake that anything unusual had occurred not more than two and a half days ago.

Lavender groaned miserably as she struggled to keep up with her boyfriend and her two new friends. Fortunately, Harry had one of the vials of “cheering potion” which Moody had procured in his jacket, and he gave it to Lavender as they made their way back up to the castle to clean up before dinner.
Harry gasped in surprise when they returned to the Unaffiliated’s corridor. Directly across the hallway from Daphne’s quarters was a new door. Hermione’s furry tail and ears wagged joyfully, and she gave Harry a knowing smile when she spied his consternation.

“I’m sure we’ll find out at dinner Harry.”

~00o~

Everyone was hungrily digging into Shepherd's Pie or Coq au Vin (or both in Harry’s case) when Luna proudly made the announcement.

“I decided I was tired of being in Ravenclaw. Padma’s very nice, but she’s the only one in Ravenclaw who talks to me...”

Cho, who was sitting with Cedric at the other end of the Mingling Table, flushed in embarrassment and coughed on a piece of carrot.

“...and she’s not Parvati...” Luna continued as she flicked her fluffy white tail.

“Are people still being mean to you Luna?” Harry interrupted, his face darkening, “If anyone’s taking your things I’ll...”

‘No, it’s alright, nothing like that Harry,” Luna said hurriedly and shook her head, her big eyes widening, “Nobody’s done anything mean to me since you dealt with Draco...”

Hermione snuggled next to Harry and purred lightly, tightening her bushy ginger tail around him.

“I just wanted to be with my friends, and I asked the Headmaster if Parvati and I could be unaffiliated too...”

“I still can’t believe it that Professor Dumbledore said yes,” Parvati interjected, her own face writ with amazement. Her satiny black tail and ears quivered. It didn’t seem real to her yet. “When Luna told me, I had to ask McGonagall if it was really true...”

“The Headmaster said that it was for the best,” Luna purred, and eyes shone brightly. She peered down the table at Harry, Hermione, Daphne, and Fleur as she concluded, “He told me that the Houses are supposed to be our friends and family, and that Parvati and I deserved to be with our truest friends. So he gave me and Parvati our own chambers together in the Unaffiliated Corridor.”

Everyone was astonished by Luna’s proclamation. Fred and George smirked and chortled a bit at each other and Angelina shoved them both playfully.

“Shut it you two...”

Ginny gazed adoringly at Neville and squirmed closer to him, imagining having their own private chambers. He flushed slightly, and smiled awkwardly at Luna and Parvati.

“Er... congratulations,” Neville said shyly. Cedric, Viktor, and their girlfriends offered their own felicitations to the two new Unaffiliated pupils. Luna wore a seraphic smile and Parvati blushed furiously. Harry, Hermione, Daphne, and Fleur were all delighted.

“Maybe... per’aps zis would be a good time to make my own pronouncement...” Fleur began tentatively, as the Mingling Table settled down. “Madame Maxime, and Headmaster Dumbledore, zey have both approve’ my transfer to ‘ogwarts pending ze completion of ze Tournament.
There was a collective gasp, and then silence, except for the happy sound of three swishing cat-tails. Daphne’s heart skipped a beat, and her breathing quickened. Daphne gave Fleur’s arm a gentle squeeze, and quietly broke the silence,

“You can stay in my quarters with me if you’d like to Fleur...”
Chapter 70

Luna and Parvati spent the rest of the evening between dinner and curfew moving into their new quarters while Daphne helped Fleur bring her things from the Beauxbatons carriage into hers. Harry and Hermione were delighted that they could all be together.

“It’s almost like having our own House,” Hermione told Harry with happy tears in her eyes as they cuddled together on their settee by the crackling fireplace. Harry stroked her bushy tail and kissed her on the forehead before taking a sip of cocoa.

“We don’t have a Common Room,” Harry smiled, “but yeah, it does feel like that. It’ll be easier for us to see Luna and Parvati in the evenings now. They won’t have to sneak so far around the castle after curfew.”

“I think our corridor actually has the same protection charms as the common rooms, even though there isn’t a door at the entrance Harry. So if Fleur and Daphne, or Luna and Parvati, want to visit after hours, they won’t be out of bounds in the hallway,” Hermione responded as she picked up a book she had never noticed on the coffee table.

“I don’t remember seeing this before, Harry.” Hermione’s eyes gleamed at the new book in her hands and she began to leaf through it.

“Oh... that!” Harry replied, grinning at Hermione’s excitement, “I picked it up the day we saw your mum off in Hogsmeade with Dora. It looked really cool. I forgot all about it, but I found it again in my drawer while I was getting ready for breakfast this morning. I don’t know why it has an age warning on it though.”

“By the way Hermione, maybe we should invite your mum to visit at Easter...”

Hermione nodded without really hearing, as she flicked past pages of Mongolian Death Worms, Kappa, and Yeti. A few of the creatures were covered in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Hermione was taken aback to discover that some of the details conflicted with *Fantastic Beasts*, particularly regarding Kappa and Yeti. Though she supposed that she shouldn’t really be surprised, as the book of Asian Monsters had been compiled by Asian Wizards and was much more thorough.

No doubt their information was more accurate. Certainly the Kappa which Harry had encountered in the Second Task were quite different from those described by Newt Scamander. And as Hermione recalled, Scamander's information about dragons had reflected the prejudices of his times and much of it had been rather outdated—though unsurprisingly most British Dragon Handlers still swore by Newt's book. There were numerous other Asian magical beings and creatures in the book of Asian Monsters which the British Magizoologist had either never encountered, or simply not bothered to write about.

“Oh, sorry... What, Harry?” Hermione looked up, feeling a bit ill after perusing some pages about Tibkalang, some sort of horselike Philippine monster, and Shokushu, horrific Japanese creatures with numerous tentacles which reminded her a bit of Cthulhu. Undoubtedly the book was restricted due to the rather graphic descriptions of their rapacious mating and reproduction habits which appeared to require adolescent female human incubators.

“I was just thinking it would be nice to see your mum again, as you didn’t get to see her at Christmas,” Harry replied softly.
Hermione tossed the open book onto the coffee table and flung her arms around Harry with a sob.

“Oh Harry, that’s a lovely idea... Thank you! I miss Mum so much right now.”

Hermione kissed Harry tearfully and wetly for being so thoughtful, purring loudly as her fluffy tail thumped the settee. Harry was bemused by Hermione’s mixed reaction and returned her kisses heatedly when there was a tapping on their door. Hermione leapt up joyfully and ran to open it.

“May we come in?” Luna asked with a beatific smile.

“We’ve finished moving our things,” squealed Parvati happily, twirling her silky black tail.

Harry’s face split from ear to ear in a big grin. He suspected that they would be having to perform a lot of reparo charms tomorrow morning before breakfast.

~o0o~

“Thank you for coming Severus,” greeted Narcissa as he emerged from the fireplace into the opulent sitting room of the newly rechristened Manor.

Severus swallowed with trepidation when he noted the tears glistening in Narcissa's long dark eyelashes. Dealing with tearful witches was something he had little experience with, and it unnerved him. His heart pounded and there was a slight ringing in his ears when Narcissa took his arm in hers and led him to the long plush deep-red sofa near the hearth.

Orange flames flared where there had previously been green ones, and bathed the room in a warm flickering glow. Severus sat stiffly where Narcissa bade him. Narcissa unstoppered the 175 year old bottle of Dragon Barrel Brandy and poured some into two crystal snifters sitting on the mahogany coffee table before sitting closely next to him.

They both sat in silence.

Severus swirled his goblet and inhaled the bouquet before taking a sip. The smooth rich liqueur washed over his tongue and steadied his nerves. Narcissa sipped from her glass and placed it back on the coffee table, heaving a deep breath. She took Severus’s unoccupied hand in her own two soft hands.

Severus was certain she could feel his pulse racing. Anxiously, he drained his own goblet before setting it down. Narcissa nervously cleared her throat before speaking.

“Severus... I must know. How close were you to my husband?”

He knew this was coming. The truth which burned in his soul had to be set free, not just for his own sake, but for Harry’s. If Severus was ever going to be able to be open with the son of his Lily, he knew he would have to start somewhere. He sighed.

“You have always been so kind to my family Severus. You looked after my son at Hogwarts and treated him with respect... which I now know he did not deserve--but I thank you for that. You provided my husband with friendship and companionship...” a flame sparked in Narcissa’s pleading tearful eyes, “Please, I must know.”

Severus swallowed again, and pain tautened his features.

“Narcissa, I...” Snape finally began softly as his voice lurched, “what I am about to tell you... I hope you can forgive me. The day Lucius and MacNair kept watch as the Dark Lord ended the life of Lily
Potter, is the day our friendship truly died. I have--since then, a short time before then--been Dumbledore’s Spy. And Lucius... my enemy.”

Bewilderment flooded Severus when Narcissa heaved a sigh of relief, her features brightening, and he felt a warmth creep up his arm from the hand she had clasped between her own.

“Thank you Severus...” Narcissa gasped as her breath quickened, “I needed to hear that. I have been alone... so alone... for so long.”

As the tears ran down her cheeks, she drew closer to Severus. His eyes widened as Narcissa’s lips drew nearer to his own.

~o0o~

It had been a long day for Daphne and Fleur, having got very little sleep the night before. Hermione invited them in when they knocked, but they both begged off and kissed the Potters, and Luna and Parvati, goodnight.

A second bed had magically appeared in Daphne’s bedroom, but the two girls ignored it. Both clad in slips, they settled into Daphne’s bed. Daphne sighed contentedly when Fleur put her arm around her, and felt Fleur’s breath against her skin. For the first time, Daphne felt truly happy in her own chambers, as she had previously felt only in the Potters’ bed with Harry and Hermione's arms around her.

Feeling warm and loved, no longer alone, Daphne drifted into sleep.

~o0o~

Parvati giggled as she and Hermione began tugging off Harry’s clothes. She fluttered her long black lashes and humidly kissed Harry, her satiny black tail whisking gleefully. Harry was all too happy to return her affections, glad that she had finally overcome the worst of her ordeal.

Luna had been about to join in with Hermione and Parvati’s ravishing of Harry, but the open pages of the book of Asian Monsters caught her attention. Her big limpid eyes widened as they lit upon the picture and the description of the Shokushu, and she felt a tingling surge in her groin.

Luna was about to make a comment, but she grinned and purred instead, as Parvati was now completely naked and straddling Harry’s waist.

Parvati gasped as she settled herself onto Harry’s erection. With Harry’s stiff penis firmly ensconced inside her, Parvati began to slide up and down it. Harry stroked the strip of black fur along Parvati’s spine which led to her waving tail with one hand and caressed her black hair with the other while they continued to wetly kiss.

Hermione came up behind Luna and put her arms around her, kissing Luna’s furry white ear. She chortled when she spied what had caught Luna’s eye in the book. It figured that Luna would be drawn to such a mad looking monster. Just feeling what Luna felt sent a little shiver through Hermione, and she began to get an inkling of what Luna saw in the creature.

Luna purred when Hermione unclasped Luna’s skirt and let it slip to the floor, and drew her panties down to her knees.

“Hermione what...?” Luna was a bit puzzled when Hermione nudged her and bent her over one armrest of the comfy chair, pulled the panties off Luna’s feet and spread her naked thighs, stepping between them. Luna squealed in delight when she felt Hermione’s bushy tail wriggling against her
slit and between her bottom cheeks.

“OH!” Luna gasped, “I love that Hermione... I never thought of that before. It feels so good.”

“It’s a bit too furry to be a proper tentacle Luna, but shall I try a bit more?” Hermione giggled again.

“Oh! Yes please...” Luna squeaked.

Luna bit her lip when the tip of Hermione’s tail began to push into her entrance. She gasped as the furry tendril forced its way deeper inside her and began to gyrate.

“Mmmm.... More Hermione. Can you put more in please? As far as you can?”

Hermione cheerfully complied. It was a bit difficult, as she had so much bushy fur on her tail, but she managed to plunge it into Luna’s depths. Hermione purred and moaned herself. She had never imagined being able to use her tail like this before. Ripples of pleasure surged up Hermione’s spine and connected with the sensations in her own spasming vulva as she felt Luna’s wetness contract around her furry “tentacle.”

Hermione thrust and twirled her tail in and out of Luna harder and faster as Luna kept begging for more. Both of them began to see stars and lose themselves as purrs became meows of pleasure. The two cat-witches in heat both began to yowl, their ears flattening. Hermione nibbled Luna’s fuzzy ear, and drove her tail into Luna as far she could go.

Rapture took them both, and Hermione fell panting against Luna’s backside as Luna’s juices flooded her tail, and her own stickiness trickled down her inner thighs. The two heaving, sweaty cat-witches’ looked up. Parvati and Harry had finished and were standing next to them, watching in stunned amazement.

Parvati’s eyes were huge.

“I can’t believe we never thought of that...” Parvati gasped as Harry’s semen dripped from her labia.

“Nor I...” Luna returned, her own eyes bigger than Parvati’s.

Harry and Parvati quickly helped Luna and Hermione remove the rest of their clothing, and they all jogged to the Potters’ bedroom to continue.

Harry grinned and leaned over Parvati’s head as she took his erection in her mouth and began to suck. Hermione inserted the tip of her sticky tail into Parvati as Luna positioned herself behind Hermione and tugged her nipples, plummeting her tail into Hermione’s moistness.

Hermione giggled at the ticklish sensation of Luna’s fluffy tail filling her where she had only ever felt fingers or Harry’s penis.

Luna sucked Hermione’s neck and vibrated her furry white tail deep inside the other girl, hoping that she was returning the favour as amply as she could. Luna needn’t have worried.

Meows, purrs, and moans of pleasure filled the room as the four sweaty teens writhed in unison. A firestorm of passion blazed through them and the bed quaked as they erupted in volcanic ecstasy.

~o0o~

Harry groaned cheerily as he awoke the next morning in the middle of a pile of sticky naked cat-witches. He felt sore all over, but he was as elated as he’d ever been. He plucked Hermione’s arm
from his chest, and tried to maneuver out of the rest of the tangle of limbs and tails without waking anybody too soon.

Twice more the foursome had rearranged their positions and exploded blissfully last night, and Harry had been correct. The entire Potter suite would once again need repairing from all of the spell damage.

He was halfway through his hot steamy shower when Hermione joined him, laughing her head off.

“I love you so much Mr Potter,” she giggled as Harry soaped her.

“Likewise Mrs Potter,” Harry retorted, as Hermione returned the favour.

After everyone was clean and dressed, and the Potters’ chambers had been repaired, the foursome made their way to breakfast. Harry was introducing Luna and Parvati to the best way to drink coffee when Fleur and Daphne arrived at the Mingling Table.
Chapter 71

Fleur gave everyone a kiss on the cheek before sitting down next to Daphne with the rest of the Unaffiliated. Harry smiled, then peered at her earnestly. They were still early for breakfast, and other students were only just beginning to trickle into the Great Hall.

“Fleur, after classes, my coach for the Tournament is sure to begin training me specifically for the Third Task. Would you like to join us?” Harry asked quietly.

Fleur looked pensive and bit her lip. She wasn’t sure what to do. Even though she would be transferring to Hogwarts pending the end of the tournament, and had already moved into the Unaffiliated Corridor, she was still officially a Beauxbatons and technically their Champion. But she wanted to be with her friends.

Madame Maxime entered the Great Hall with Hagrid, having spent the night in his hut, and caught the eye of her student who was looking troubled. Olympe had an idea what was bothering Fleur, having been invited to join the Order by Dumbledore before retiring with Hagrid last night.

“Excusez-moi mon chér, I weel join you momentarily... I mus’ speak wiz my student.”

“Oh, alrigh’ then Olympe. Don’ be too long--tea’ll be gettin’ cold,” Hagrid replied. Olympe gave him a kiss on the cheek and he blushed. Hagrid spotted Harry grinning at him and waved back, chuckling slightly.

Fleur swallowed anxiously when Madame Maxime approached her. The Headmistress smiled at her pupil.

“It ees okay Fleur. I ‘ave spoken wiz Headmaster Dumblydore. He explained zat he ‘as already informe’ you what awaits. Winning zis tournament ees not as important to me as your survival and being wiz your loved ones. You may train wiz ‘arry. His coach ees ze best for zis task.”

“Merci beaucoup Madame,” Fleur returned gratefully, relief flooding through her.

As Madame Maxime made her way up to the staff table for breakfast, Fleur uncharacteristically squealed with delight. She pounced on Harry, who had been thrilled at the Headmistress of Beuxbaton’s response, and kissed him on the lips while Hermione, the other two cat-witches, and Daphne, smiled and turned pink.

~o0o~

Remus Lupin seriously considered getting drunk before returning from lunch for afternoon classes. Morning lessons had been a disaster. If it weren’t for the fact that boggarts were easier to defeat when it was confused by many people, Lupin would have already begun making a schedule to teach each student individually. As it was, he was going to have to solemnly rethink how to present this particular lesson.

~o0o~

Professor Lupin’s desk was back, and the grindylow tank was gone, but instead of remaining in the classroom, everyone filed behind him when he led the class to the nearby room where Professor McGonagall had held dance lessons prior to the Yule Ball. In the centre of the room stood a mahogany closet with brass handles.
The first few students had perfectly average fears and the shapeshifting wraith-like sprite assumed the identity of a rat, a bloody eyeball, a severed hand, a jack-in-the-box, and for Ronald Weasley, a Spider. Lupin began to get an inkling that there might be issues with the standard approach for teaching teenagers how to deal with boggarts after Neville concluded.

Lupin made a note to himself to have Professor McGonagall investigate a member of her house, one of his older students in a different period, Cormac Mclaggen, for bullying and harassment after a very shaken Neville finally managed to dress the boggart-Mclaggen in his grandmother’s clothes, much to the amusement of the rest of the third year Gryffindors.

Parvati’s boggart was disturbing; her boggart-girlfriend-Luna told her that she didn’t love her anymore. Lupin had to step in to deal with that one as Parvati burst into tears and ran to be consoled by Hermione. When boggart-Lucius Malfloy stepped out of the closet to confront Daphne, the professor’s heart sank and he stepped in once again; Hermione was now consoling two crying girlfriends. But the final straw was when Harry stepped up and a dead Hermione-boggart lay on the floor.

Harry turned ashen and froze.

Professor Lupin banished the boggart back into the cupboard with some difficulty, as he was now in a bit of a temper with himself for having allowed this to get so out of hand.

“Class is dismissed. Please, I urge those of you who are still feeling badly to visit Madam Pomfrey. She will issue calming draughts to any of you who still need it.”

Lupin sighed as Hermione led her husband and their girlfriends to the hospital wing.

~o0o~

After the calming draughts and lunch, everyone felt much better. Classes passed relatively peacefully and cheerfully the rest of the afternoon for all except Lupin—who had resorted temporarily to explaining boggart theory—and Professor McGonagall, who was appalled to yet again have to address bullying in her House. Unfortunately, without someone coming forward, she could only wait for the other shoe to drop.

~o0o~

“Well Potter—looks like this one is probably the most dangerous one yet,” Mad Eye growled. “This should be right up your alley, but the Minister is sure to be adding things we don’t know about to the programme. Still, I reckon you’ve got the power and the willingness to use it... we’ll get you through this alive.”

The grizzled Auror peered appraisingly at Fleur and she blushed.

“That was a bang-up job you did in the lake Miss Delacour. Those natural powers of yours should come in handy in the maze. Right then, on Saturday, Bagman and the Weasley lad are going to be showin’ the Champions the maze and explainin’ the Third Task. Don’t forget to act surprised you two. You’re not supposed to be aware of it yet.”

Moody’s eye swiveled backwards into his head.

“Tonks, you stay in charge of that lot back there so I can keep my focus on these two. Mostly this is going to be a lot of advanced combat prep and strategy. Lupin’ll be focusing on the obstacles and creatures we know about in the DADA class, and I suggest you sit in on those with the Potters Miss
Delacour.”

Fleur nodded, and gulped nervously, keeping her attention on Mad Eye as he began an overview of the combat spells and started to drill them while Tonks conducted drills with the rest of the Unaffiliated.

It ended up being a brutal session for everyone, and all of them were groaning on the floor in pain when Mad Eye lurched out from the Room of Requirement. Dora had been expecting the escalation of training, and had quietly asked Madam Pomfrey for some actual Pain Potions earlier in the day.

“I nevair... I did not imagine zat training would be zis ‘ard,” moaned Fleur, as Dora passed her a vial.

“Yeah,” Harry grimaced and chugged his potion, “That’s Mad Eye for you. He doesn’t hold back.”

“He’s going to get tougher,” warned Dora, “But you’ll be able to ‘andle it a bit better after a couple of weeks you two. I’ll make sure that Pomfrey’s dolin’ out the good stuff until then. You’ll need it.”

“‘ere, I’ve got some for you lot as well, Hermione. Pass those to Luna and Parvati and Daphne will you please? I’d probably best be off now to get ready for dinner.”

Everyone finished swallowing their potions gratefully as Dora trotted out of the gym. Harry was feeling a lot better as the buzz of the potion began to kick in; it was much stronger than the calming draughts.

But he was surprised at how much he still hurt. Harry stood up, his joints and muscles screaming at him. Only the first set of drills had been with combat spells. The rest of the lesson had been spent on learning and drilling physical fighting techniques, and they had used up the entire exercise period too as Mad Eye had started right in on them.

“Thank you for zis ‘arry,” Fleur’s crystal blue eyes glazed over as her potion kicked in, and she kissed him wetly. “Zat was ‘arder zan I expected, but I know eet is necessary.”

Fleur tried to stand so she could go and get ready for dinner, and she nearly collapsed, but Harry caught her. He looked at the rest of the girls who were also holding onto each other and staggering to their feet. Hermione was practically carrying Luna, and Parvati and Daphne were leaning on each other.

“Oi, everyone,” Harry grunted, “there is no way I’m going to be ready in time for dinner. I’ve got an idea though. We can have Dobby bring us dinner later when we get back to our quarters. Let’s just step out of the Room of Requirement for a moment.”

Several minutes later, Harry opened the door again, revealing a crystalline grotto with a steaming, bubbling pool. The stalagmites and stalactites glittered in the light of a thousand tiny fairies flitting to and fro.

“Oh Harry,” gasped Hermione, her bushy tail perking up in delight, “That’s gorgeous! You’re brilliant. It’s just what we need.”

The rest of the girls thanked Harry, and everyone stripped themselves bare. Harry was too knackered to even think about having sex, but he couldn’t help becoming aroused at the sight of the five nude teen witches, three of them with very happy looking cat-tails.

“Ooooh, that’s hot,” squealed Luna as she dipped a toe in.

“I know,” purred Parvati, who was already immersed in the small pool, her first breasts just above
the surface of the churning water, “It’s lovely. Hurry up Luna.”

It was a very small pool, but just the right size for all six of them to sit on the submerged ledge in a circle. The heat from the roiling water penetrated their aching muscles and sore joints and they all began to sigh and purr contentedly. Harry closed his eyes and started to drift as the potion, the heat, and the pheromones of the happy witches began to really kick in.

Hermione was the first one to touch Harry, as her hand brushed his slightly parted inner thigh. She began to nibble one of his ears, and the hand gently began to masturbate him. Fleur began to nip and lick Harry’s other earlobe and stroke his chest with one hand while running the other through his hair. Harry let out a soft sigh, amazed that he could feel so relaxed and aroused at the same time.

Daphne giggled. Determined to join in, she sat in Fleur’s lap, straddling one of the knees of the older girl, her moist slit pressing into Fleur’s thigh as Fleur’s nipples poked into her back. Daphne kissed Harry slowly and roamed his abdomen with her fingers, tickling his belly button.

Parvati and Luna glanced at each other. There was no way they were going to be left out of this. They had a quick giggly little water fight over who would get to sit on Hermione’s lap, and Parvati won. Grinding her own slick cleft into Hermione’s thigh, Parvati wrapped her wet black tail and one arm around her and teased Harry’s nipples with her forefinger while licking his neck.

Luna knelt between Harry’s thighs as the hot water bubbled and foamed around her. She started tenderly kneading his inner thighs. Then she took a deep breath and ducked her head under water as her sopping tail bobbed above the surface, flicking gleefully. Luna wrapped her lips around the tip of Harry’s penis which Hermione was still gently stroking. Luna’s tongue swirled around it and she sucked it daintily.

Luna’s drenched head kept popping up. She would wait a minute before plunging back beneath the surface to take the crown of Harry’s erection in her mouth again while Hermione’s hand continued to encircle the shaft. The girls were as tender as possible, doing their best to draw things out.

Harry was in heaven. He gasped in short ragged breaths, trying to hold on as long as he could. He didn’t want this to end. But sitting in a hot whirlpool with five beautiful naked witches—five pairs of lips and tongues trailing across various parts of his anatomy while a number of hands did the same—was proving too hard to resist.

Finally he couldn’t hold off any longer. A swell of ecstasy took him and his erection spasmed convulsively in Hermione’s hand. Luna greedily swallowed as Harry’s semen spurted into her mouth. Luna had taken a deep breath before diving down as she sensed he was about to climax, and she was intent on drinking every drop of ejaculate that Harry released over her tongue.

Harry’s head was spinning pleasantly. He didn’t notice Hermione reaching to the side of the little pool for her bag. She had just remembered that she had some gillyweed left. Hermione gently tipped the giggling Parvati off her lap.

“Luna, why don’t you sit with Parvati and take over up here,” Hermione whispered with a grin as she stuffed a pinch of gillyweed into her mouth.

Luna was all too happy to comply with Hermione’s request. As the other girls continued to caress Harry with their fingers, lips, and tongues, Hermione ducked her bushy head under water and licked Harry back into stiffness.

Harry couldn’t believe it when he felt Hermione’s lips pressed against his pubes, and the tip of his penis at the back of her throat. Having just recovered from the first time, he knew the second time
would be much longer. But Hermione kept him inside her gullet, sliding back and forth only a few inches without coming up for air.

It dawned on him that Hermione must have taken some gillyweed. Harry put his hands around his wife’s head and began to thrust. The four girls continued to kiss, nuzzle, and lick; caress, tweak, and tease, while Hermione continued to suck and slurp. They all felt the elation surging within.

When the passion took Harry again, a Tsunami of Euphoric Bliss swept his wife and his lovers along with him. Harry and the girls exploded into a Turbulent Ocean of Ecstatic Delight, and the Maelstrom of Magic shook the fairy grotto to its foundation as Hermione drained every last drop of his semen.

~o0o~

Dinner was in full swing. Everyone was too busy feasting to notice that there was nobody at the Mingling Table tonight. The Great Hall trembled slightly.

“Bloody Hell! What was that...? What's going on?” Ron dropped his forkful of roast beef as the Great Hall fell into darkness when the candles flickered and went out.
Kingsley Shacklebolt groaned when he received the reply from one of his cousins in France advising that the safety of his family could no longer be guaranteed there. Apparently things were descending into chaos in the muggle world and emboldening the Blood Purists in the French wizard world.

Kingsley flung the parchment and muggle newspaper clippings which his cousin had sent him onto his desk in frustration.

Things were worse than he had thought. The world appeared to be on the brink of war yet again, and the most reactionary elements of many nations were forging secret alliances and staging terror attacks under assumed identities to stoke the flames of hatred and fear in order to ease their return to power.

It was only a matter of time before the blood purists in the wizard world threw their support behind those muggles who shared their own outlook. Such muggles were generally all too willing to accept the Rule of Wizards to maintain their own ideals of “purity” and regain the political ground lost to the more egalitarian members of their societies.

There was nothing else for it. Kingsley’s family would have to remain in Britain while the war to prevent the blood purists from restoring themselves here was waged. He was just glad that ties were being reforged across the channel to fight their rise. All thanks to Harry Potter and his wife’s friendship with the Delacour girl. Establishing Potter and his wife’s safety was paramount.

Shacklebolt’s rumination was interrupted by the sudden appearance of an etheric silvery fox. An echoey voice emanated from Auror Reynard Mulligan’s patronus, urgently beckoning Kingsley to an abandoned estate on the outskirts of a village in the North East of England known as Little Hangleton.

When Kingsley arrived at the scene, he discovered Auror Mulligan patting the back of Auror Abigail Brixton who was vomiting loudly into the mildewy broken toilet in the bathroom nearest to the landing at the top of the staircase.

“There, there... it’s alright Abby. We’ll find out who...” Mulligan started at Kingsley’s approach, not having heard his creaking footsteps on the stairs, “Oh! Kingsley, thank goodness you’re here...”

“What’s this all about Mulligan? What’s going on? I am needed in London...”

“S... Sir,” Abigail began shakily, still looking a bit pallid, “You said to notify you first if... if we found any evidence of You-Know-Who...”

Kingsley stiffened, his jaw tightening, grateful for the loyalty of his agents. Mulligan rolled his eyes.

“Abby, we have no evidence of anything except a horrible murder...” Mulligan admonished the female Auror before turning back to his Superior Officer, “Still--Kingsley, I thought it best for you to make that determination for yourself.”

Abigail narrowed her eyes.

“I haven’t seen a Blood Rite like this since You Know Who was still kicking about. Look in the room just through that door Kingsley. You’ll see what I mean. It’s revolting!”
Auror Abby Brixton was correct. The mutilated corpse of a red haired nine year old boy with his heart carved out from his chest lay on an oak coffee-table which had been turned into a makeshift altar. A septagram had been painted around the table in the boy’s own blood, and Kingsley felt the bile rising in his throat.

“How did you discover this?” Kingsley inquired evenly.

“Mafalda Hopkirk,” Brixton replied, “She got a hit on a Trace monitor from last night at midnight for little Bobby Prewett here. He went missing yesterday afternoon apparently...”

“Right then. Who else knows about this?”


“Good! Let’s keep it that way for now. Until I have Dumbledore examine the scene, do not inform anyone else except for Madam Bones. The Minister cannot know of this until we have completed our own initial investigation.”

The two Aurors nodded their understanding. Both of them were also part of the investigation into the Minister’s activities and could be trusted to keep this to themselves for the time-being.

~000~

Albus Dumbledore was still puzzling over the mild Castle Quake and the brief interruption of power during dinner the previous evening. Thankfully the candles had all flickered back on after nearly a minute had gone by. It wasn’t entirely unheard of for a magical power surge to overload the castle. It had happened on occasion over the centuries.

But usually the explanation was readily apparent; some sort of classwork or homework assignment gone awry. And none of the professors were reportedly running any experiments at the time of the occurrence. The Headmaster pondered the idea of accidental magic--teenage wizards could sometimes still lose control.

But not on that scale. It was impossible. Nobody had that sort of power. Not even Dumbledore or Voldemort could have accomplished it.

And in any case, the Headmaster had numerous devices to monitor and locate the source of magic of any sort--accidental or not--within the boundaries of the Hogwarts grounds and the castle itself. While the magic detectors had indeed been triggered, they hadn’t been able to pinpoint any source for the magical power surge; which made the unlikelihood of a student’s accidental magical outburst even more unlikely.

Albus shook his head and when his Handmirror activated, he decided that for the moment it would have to remain a mystery.

~000~

Hermione’s bushy tail flicked warily when Professor Snape approached Harry at the end of Potions. Something was wrong. Usually she couldn’t get a read from the potions professor at all unless he was angry at someone in class. Though ever since she and Harry had begun advanced potions with him, every so often Snape had let his guard down and she had sensed a deep sadness.

Today, though it wasn’t apparent from his outward demeanor, she could feel an urgent alarm and overwhelming sorrow, with a slight hint of rage which Snape still seemed to be maintaining some control over. Hermione breathed a sigh of relief as Snape drew closer. It was clear that the rage
wasn’t directed at Harry, thankfully.

“Potter...” Snape swallowed and softened his tone, “Harry, please meet me after classes today in my office—with your wife of course.” Snape’s eyes flicked to Hermione’s own. “I... I cannot say more here.”

~000~

The Headmaster sighed as he concluded his conversations with Kingsley Shacklebolt and Severus. Harry and his wife were likely to be in Transfigurations at this time of day, and the Headmaster never looked forward to interrupting Professor McGonagall’s classes. But if what he suspected were true, it was possible he might have need of Mrs Potter’s talents, and he had promised Harry to notify him of anything which concerned him.

After annoying Minerva briefly, the Headmaster tapped his mirror again and informed Alastor that he would also be requiring his services. With another sigh, Albus decided that perhaps it might be worth bringing the Sword of Gryffindor—just in case.

~000~

“What on Earth...?” McGonagall faltered when she bustled Harry and Hermione into Dumbledore’s office and spotted him with the Sword of Gryffindor firmly in hand, and Moody glowering by his side.

“I’m sorry Minerva, no time for explanations. This is urgent and cannot wait. Harry, Mrs Potter, if you would please follow Moody into the Floo, I shall be right behind you.”

~000~

Slivers of light pierced the whorls of dust and ash, striking Harry’s eyes and temporarily blinding him as he staggered out of the fireplace, coughing.

“Ow!” Harry yelped when Hermione stumbled out of the hearth and fell into him.

“Sorry Harry, we should get out of the way. Dumbledore is right behind me.”

Harry took his wife’s hand and stepped aside to wait for Dumbledore. He blinked and finally spied Mad Eye conversing quietly with Shacklebolt.

Sunlight streamed through cracks in the boarded up windows into the dusty sitting room with peeling wallpaper. At one time the room might have been opulent, but the threadbare armchairs and old furniture riddled with woodworm indicated that it was now passing into decay. A bloody sheet covered something lumpy on the coffee table.

Hermione’s breath caught in alarm and her nose wrinkled in disgust at the smell of death. She gripped Harry’s arm tightly and pulled closer to him, wrapping her bushy tail around his waist. Harry’s stomach clenched when the scent hit his own nostrils, but he was distracted when the green flames flared once more and Dumbledore emerged.

Dumbledore’s piercing blue eyes quickly took in his surroundings.

“So, this is Riddle Manor...” he murmured quietly.

Harry and Hermione both gasped in shock. Shacklebolt nodded solemnly.
“There’s a small cemetery at the bottom of the hill wherein lies the grave of his father--a muggle,” the Auror replied.

Everyone looked surprised--even Dumbledore. He knew that Tom Riddle had been left at a muggle orphanage, but he had never known why--Tom had never spoken of his past, and Dumbledore had never been able to determine his parentage. The magic which informed his register at Hogwarts that a wizard had reached the age of 11 only revealed the whereabouts of said wizard in Britain when they reached said age, and nothing more--unless their parents had registered them at birth.

Very curious indeed. Albus decided that when he had the time, he would have to delve into it deeper.

“Brixton and Mulligan have canvassed the village and surrounds,” Kingsley continued, We think we’ve found something else you need to see nearby…”

Harry and Hermione blinked in the bright sunlight when they followed Kingsley, Moody, and Dumbledore outside. They weren’t certain where they were in England, but it was a bit warmer than Scotland and there was no snow left on the ground. It felt closer to Spring wherever they were.

The traipse around the wooded hillside and the hedgerows which skirted the village took the three adult wizards and the two Hogwarts students a good twenty minutes. Finally, in the shaded midst of a copse of gnarled old oak-trees, they discerned a small cottage in worse condition than the Shrieking Shack. Ivy and moss crawled up the rotting walls; the door was nearly falling off the hinges and nothing was left in the windows but shards.

“The Gaunt house…” Shacklebolt said quietly. “Brixton is still gathering what information we can from a very old Auror--Bob Ogden--as we speak, to try and find out more about it. It’s a bit touch and go at the moment though, because Ogden is dying.”

“Apparently, from what we could glean from some of the older residents of Little Hangleton, putting it together with what we have from Ogden thus far--a witch, Merope Gaunt--was at one time married Tom Riddle Senior.”

“I’d like to see Ogden’s memories,” Dumbledore responded, “Please inform Brixton to collect them for me.”

Shacklebolt nodded and took a moment to send a patronus with the message to Brixton before the wizards continued down the lane towards the decrepit hovel. As the wizards left the road and strode up the weedy overgrown path towards the house, Hermione’s furry tail bristled and her stomach knotted. An invisible cloud of evil hovered thick in the air surrounding the shack.

Hermione shivered and halted, eyes wide; her breathing quickened by fear as they approached the broken door.

“There’s something here,” Hermione gulped in trepidation, “It’s another Horcrux…” she gasped.

The three adult wizards and Harry went rigid.

“I suspected we might find something,” Albus sighed. “I had hoped not though… How many of those damned things did Riddle make?” Dumbledore asked nobody in particular.

“Hermione,” Harry asked hoarsely, his heart pounding, “can you find it for us please?”

Hermione nodded, her furry ears flattening. She was frightened of the house, but she was with her husband, the Headmaster, and two Aurors, and she knew that she would come to no harm. Steeling
herself, Hermione reached out her shaking hand and pushed the creaking door open.

“Th... there,” she pointed, “it’s under that floorboard.”

Moody pried loose the cracked floorboard and found a small pouch. He brought it out into the sunlight and knelt down. Everyone knelt down beside him as he opened the pouch and shook it over a cobblestone in the path. A gold ring inset with an engraved black gemstone tumbled out and clattered onto the rocky slab.

“Morgana’s Sagging Tits,” sputtered Mad Eye, “Albus, you don’t suppose...?”

Dumbledore nodded, his eyes narrowing. Kingsley looked bewildered.

“Peverell’s ring,” croaked the Headmaster. “That engraving is indeed the Peverell ‘coat of arms;’ the ‘Deathly Hallows.’ It is quite probable that Voldemort is a descendent of Cadmus Peverell. Which would mean that Harry here is very likely distantly related, as he is a descendent of Ignotus Peverell.”

To say that Harry was shocked at discovering himself to be a distant relative of Voldemort in this manner was an understatement. The blood drained from his face and he gulped. He opened his mouth, but found he couldn’t speak. Harry glanced at Hermione, who was already afraid to begin with. Harry gave Hermione a comforting squeeze as she trembled beside him, sensing the Evil pulsing in the Ring like a heartbeat.

Kingsley was just confused. He had heard of the Peverells, but unlike Alastor and Dumbledore, he had no idea what the Deathly Hallows were. Very few wizards did.

Albus seemed entranced—lost in his own little world. His hand reached out to pick the ring up. Mad Eye sharply swatted the Headmaster’s hand away.

“Are you Bloody Mad?” Moody snapped, “That thing is probably Cursed Albus. Use the Sword on it and be done with it.”

The Headmaster’s eyes cleared. He was appalled at what he had almost done. There was no question that Alastor was correct. Albus motioned everyone to stand back. He lifted the sword and swung it, striking the ring.

The ring violently shuddered and a screech rent the air, whipping the wizards’ robes and the weeds surrounding them in a tempestuous gale. The gemstone cracked and black death venomously oozed onto the cobblestone.

Everyone let out a huge sigh of relief when it was finished. Moody grimaced at the Headmaster.

“It’s all yours now Albus. Do with it what you will.”

Harry embraced Hermione and kissed her forehead. Voldemort was one less Horcrux closer to permanent death.

“Thanks Hermione,” he said softly as he blinked back tears, knowing how terrified his wife had been. He hated to see her so frightened. Harry caressed her cheek and turned her face towards him. “I love you Hermione.”

Harry kissed Hermione again, this time on the lips, as a tear broke free and trickled down one of his cheeks.
Moody, Dumbledore, and Kingsley all turned away to give them a bit of privacy.

~00o~

Karkaroff was scared witless. The Mark on his arm had burned since midnight and he didn’t know what to do. Finally he decided he had to get out of Britain before it was too late. He ran down to the Hogwarts gates so he could get outside the wards and apparate to an International Floo-Port. The castle’s Floo system was locked, and Dumbledore was nowhere to be found.

Severus blocked his path, his eyebrows raised.

“Going somewhere Igor? I think not.”

“You don’t understand... He’ll kill me!” Igor gasped, “I betrayed him and the rest of them. You of all people should be able to grasp that. Are you not Dumbledore’s man now?”

Severus penetrated Karkaroff’s eyes with his own, and he saw that indeed, the man just wanted to get away--he had no intentions of rejoining Voldemort. A vein throbbed in Severus’s forehead. It would be so easy to just let Voldemort kill him. But too much was at stake. What if the Minister found him instead? It wouldn't do for her to blackmail him into joining her efforts.

Severus shook his head and sighed.

“Igor... I guarantee, you are much safer here at Hogwarts than anywhere else at the moment. Dumbledore will protect you. Please... I beg you, come back to the castle. I cannot let you leave, and I’d rather that you not make me hex you.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know the trace doesn't apply legally to those under the age of 11.

However, it seemed likely to me that the trace is active in pre-Hogwarts aged wizards to alert the Ministry to the presence of accidental magic outside of wizard homes

Likewise, it seems plausible to me that the trace is only placed on wizards when they are identified by the Ministry, therefore not necessarily applicable to Muggleborns of pre-Hogwarts age, or unregistered Wizard births--and it is very likely that Voldemort's birth was unregistered as I have indicated in this fic.
Chapter 73

As the Dark Lord Voldemort inspected his newfound body in the mirror of the bathroom belonging to the muggles which he and his Servant had killed as they slept, he found himself with a new appreciation for Wormtail.

The Rodent’s long-term stint as a pet in the clan of the red haired Blood-Traitors had proved invaluable, providing the necessary intelligence for the task of locating and procuring a suitable sacrificial victim for the Dark Ritual. And Wormtail had not flinched when it had come time for him to kill the boy without the use of a wand. Nor had he blanched at cutting out the boy’s heart and feeding it to the Dark Lord.

Wormtail had uttered the incantation and performed the ritual to perfection, releasing the Dark Magic which had restored the Homunculus to his former self. Time and again, Wormtail had shown more of an aptitude for Blood Magic than Voldemort had ever expected of the Rodent. He seemed to relish killing, and the Dark Lord began to think that he had been mistaken to doubt Wormtail’s loyalty and competence.

Who was it who had come searching for his Master in the Albanian wilderness when the others had forsaken their Lord? Who was it whose courage had inspired him to kidnap and sacrifice a Ministry Lackey in a rather spectacular Blood Ritual which had created a rudimentary Homunculus for Voldemort to inhabit?

Wormtail! That was who!

The Dark Lord had also plied from his Servant under one of his numerous torture sessions the remarkable story of how Wormtail had come to be missing a finger.

The Rat had killed 12 muggles and sacrificed a piece of himself to frame the Blood Traitor Sirius Black. Wormtail had bravely gone against those he had once called friends and handed the Potters to the Dark Lord on a Silver Platter to be killed. No doubt the fools he had betrayed believed the Rat to be a Coward. But had not his acts proved otherwise?

To kill without remorse took far more courage than most people realised. And the Rat had proved himself to be quite adept at it.

If the Rat could be said to have a Fear, it was only of Death. And who did not fear death? Certainly the Dark Lord had spent his own resources on conquering Death. Wormtail could not truly be said to fear pain. For did not the Rodent offer himself willingly to the Dark Lord for punishment?

Thanks to Wormtail, Voldemort was restored, not merely to his previous form, but to a superior form—purified of the imperfections of his father’s blood. Now, the Dark Lord was who he had been truly destined to be. Wormtail would be rewarded properly with the rank befitting someone of his dedication to the Dark Lord.

It was time to summon his minions, and to witness who was courageous enough to return to his side as Wormtail had. Those who had chosen the Dark Witch; he would deal with them soon enough.

Severus--the Dark Lord had hoped that Severus would take his place as his Second. But apparently he had turned away after the Potters’ murder. Now that the Dark Lord understood the true Courage of the Rat, he was more certain than ever that Severus was a Coward.

Severus, who had appeared willing to die for Voldemort.
Severus, who had begged the Dark Lord to spare the very same muggleborn witch who Wormtail had been so eager to destroy.

For what? Love? Pathetic! Power was the only force worth possessing. Severus could have taken any woman for his own under the Dark Lord’s rule. No! The truth was that Severus was not afraid to die only because he was afraid of living. He was afraid of pain. And above all he was afraid to kill.

"Are you alright Harry?" Hermione inquired after their meeting with Snape, her furry ears twitching anxiously at the pained expression on Harry's face.

"I... I dunno Hermione," Harry replied truthfully. "I'm not really sure. Today’s been really... kind of scary. Voldemort’s back and he murdered a little boy. You helped Dumbledore kill another Horcrux."

“And... and then Snape--he finally told me the truth about how he felt about my mum... and my dad, and also how...” tears sprang to Harry’s eyes “...how he told Voldemort about the prophecy...”

“My mum and dad... they might still be alive if...if...” Harry heaved a sob, “Why did Snape tell me the truth Hermione? He didn’t have to... I was getting used to him being nice to me. He could have just let me go on like that...”

“Don’t get me wrong--I understand that Snape changed sides so that Dumbledore could save my mum when he found out Voldemort was going to kill her. I know Pettigrew is the one who truly sold my mum and my dad out.... I’ve known that for a long while, since last year...”

“I know I forgave Snape... And I would again--knowing everything I know now... and after everything he’s done to help me since you turned half-cat... Especially because Snape was brave enough to finally tell me the truth himself.”

“But it still hurts Hermione... I almost wish he hadn’t told me!”

Harry’s dam burst and the tears flowed in earnest as he sobbed. Hermione cuddled her husband and curled her furry tail around him. She didn’t say anything. She just held him in her arms and let him cry.

Harry was always so brave. Even when he shed tears, he never really permitted himself to have a proper cry. He had even held himself back when his Uncle Vernon had been exposed in the muggle press for beating Harry and sharing pictures of Harry’s injured body with his twisted friends. Harry had let the tears out eventually over that--but they'd had to be pulled out like teeth.

And really, Hermione understood that those tears had been more for her pain than for himself--tainted with humiliation and anger over how they had both been treated by people who should have loved them.

For the first time in his life, Harry was just sobbing in grief, and allowing himself the luxury to do so. Hermione knew she had to help him let it all out. This wasn’t a time for comforting words or calming draughts. Harry just needed to cry and release the pain he had held within for so long.

Harry slowly blinked himself awake. He felt different somehow--lighter, freer, as if he could dance above the clouds without even a broom to hold him up. His brain and his heart felt cleansed, as if by a fresh Spring rain.
Harry also felt a bit puzzled because he didn’t remember coming to bed. The other thing which
became apparent as he emerged from unconsciousness was the sensation of many arms and tails
wrapped around him, and the soft sweet breath of sleeping girls against his skin. Harry sighed in
contentment.

He didn’t remember Parvati and Luna and Daphne and Fleur coming to bed with him and Hermione.
But there they were, all curled up in a heap around him, embracing him--his wife--his friends--his
family.

As the joy of love engulfed Harry, his thoughts again turned to Snape, and how much he had done to
help Harry, and Hermione, and Daphne.

Harry thought back over the past year. He could see how far Snape had come to treating everyone
more kindly--even Neville, whom Snape had stopped abusing not long after he had begun tutoring
Harry and Hermione.

Professor Snape had still been strict in classes, but it had become obvious--especially during Third
Year--that he no longer gave preferential treatment to Slytherins. Nor had Snape continued to dock
points for made-up reasons from Gryffindors.

Harry had forgiven Snape, but he hoped that someday Snape could forgive himself and find
someone that he could come to really love properly.

~o0o~

Albus felt freer that morning than he had in many, many decades. There was a slight lilt in his step as
he climbed the stairs to his office for a quiet pre-breakfast cup of tea. He squeezed a bit of lemon into
his steaming cup of Lady Grey and stirred in a single spoon of honey. He sighed with some
contentment after taking a sip.

Soon, Albus was swirling dregs in his cup and chuckling as he imagined what Sybil Trelawny
would see in his tea-leaves. Albus set his cup gently in the saucer and opened his desk drawer to
touch the picture of his sister Arianna. Picking up the cool gold ring inset with the cracked
Resurrection Stone, he turned it over and over again in the palm of his hand.

He had no need of it anymore.

Last night, Arianna had forgiven Albus, and assured him that it was Gellert’s wand which had killed
her when she had taken a death curse aimed at her brother. Now, Albus’s biggest regret was that he
had let Gellert live.

Be that as it may, it was time to give the Peverell ring to Harry Potter.

~o0o~

Green flames flickered in the the Hearth and Severus stepped out into his private chambers. Last
night had been painful beyond reckoning. Telling Harry the truth had no doubt hurt Harry more than
it hurt himself, but Severus had known that it had to be done.

Harry deserved to know how brave and kind and generous his mother had been--and how loyal his
father had been. And Harry deserved to know what a coward Severus had been.

Severus hadn’t deserved Harry’s forgiveness. And he thought that was perhaps why he had fled to
Black Manor and broken in Narcissa’s arms after his conversation with Harry and Mrs Potter had
concluded.
Narcissa had silently held Severus and let him weep. He didn’t recall when he had fallen into slumber, but when he had woken, she was still nearby at the other end of her sofa, fast asleep with a gentle smile on her lips.

When he departed Black Manor and returned to his chambers at Hogwarts, Severus felt more hopeful than he had ever felt in his life.

He hoped that the love Harry shared with his wife and new family would help him get through the pain of the Truth. Severus had lived with pain, humiliation, and darkness, all of his life. He didn’t want Harry to suffer like that any more than he already had. Harry deserved so much more than that.

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Minister Dolores Umbridge stirred several spoonfuls of sugar into her tea and added a dollop of cream. Her eyes narrowed as she flicked through the reports presented to her this morning regarding the investigation of yesterday’s murder in Little Hangleton.

This had been the first such Blood Ritual to have been committed since the last wizard war, and she was certain that Voldemort had finally made his move. He was no doubt restored to full power. The Minister’s stomach tightened in trepidation. Voldemort was certain to attack Azkaban, and release those he found there as soon as he could muster some sort of force.

The vast majority of Voldemort’s followers outside of Azkaban were the Minister’s now. But there were several who had still held out hope for his return, and they would no doubt rejoin Voldemort. Minister Umbridge couldn’t take the risk. Should Azkaban fall, she could lose forever the one she needed most.

Dolores had reached her decision. She would have to do it quietly without the knowledge of Madam Bones, and release them on her personal authority. Unfortunately for Lucius and Draco, their ancestral home was no longer available to them as Madam Black had no doubt recoded the wards of the estate which now legally belonged to her.

No matter, Dolores’s home should suffice.
As it was Saturday morning, nobody seemed inclined to wake up early for breakfast. Everyone was enjoying comforting and cuddling Harry too much. And Harry was rather enjoying it himself. He really needed to go to the bathroom, but there was no way he was getting out of the tails and arms without waking anyone up today.

Not to mention it was always rather difficult to go when he woke with an erection. But someone else was stirring and had discovered Harry’s pressing need. He strained his head to see who was taking care of his problem and saw Fleur’s platinum hair strewn across his waist as her head bobbed up and down with her soft lips around his morning stiffness.

All of Harry’s ruminations regarding the Potions Master were forgotten

Fleur’s tongue was skillful, and her moist suction brought him off quickly. It was her first time tasting semen, but Fleur had seen the other girls doing it and she was not to be outdone. When Harry groaned and released himself, Fleur swallowed his ejaculate curiously as it spilled over her tongue.

But she was unused to it and unable to keep up with the flow. Gasping, Fleur drew back and the last few spurts of Harry’s stickiness landed on her cheek and nose. She caught Harry’s eye and blushed, smiling sweetly.

“Good morning ‘arry. I ‘ope you did not mind zat.”

Harry grinned.

“Not at all. Thanks Fleur... that was lovely, really!”

Parvati had woken up and she smirked, her black tail waving gleefully.

“I didn’t think I would have anything to teach you Fleur!” Parvati chortled.

Hermione had stirred awake herself when she felt her husband climaxing, and she giggled at the exchange

Taking his opportunity as the rest of the girls began to wake, Harry dashed to the bathroom to relieve his other pressing need. Hermione followed him in and shut the door behind her with a wicked grin on her face.

The rest of the giggling girls began to sort each other out in the Potters’ bed while echoes of pleasure could be heard coming from the bathroom over the thrumming sound of the shower. Soon, everyone had brought each other off at least once.

Dobby delightedly served everybody breakfast in the Potters’ chambers, and he opened the door for Hedwig when she dropped by with Mrs Granger’s reply to Harry and Hermione’s invitation to Hogwarts for Easter. Hedwig nuzzled Harry’s ear while he buttered a crumpet for her. Clad in nightgowns, the satisfied six devoured their morning meal hungrily.

After breakfast, Fleur, Harry, and Hermione dressed warmly to meet Ludo Bagman and Percy Weasley at the transformed Quidditch pitch to be officially introduced to the Third Task. The most recent rain had melted the last few patches of snow, but the temperatures were still frigid and their breath hung in the air.
Bagman grinned and chuckled nervously during the entire explanation of the Third Task, avoiding Harry’s eye. But it took everything Hermione had to not claw Percy Weasley’s eyes out every time he glanced smugly at Harry. She did her utmost to control her breathing and keep her bushy tail from looking like a porcupine.

~o0o~

It had warmed up a fair bit by lunchtime, and the Unaffiliated took their lunch together under a beech tree by the Black Lake. A pair of starlings chirped and twittered happily in the branches above.

Luna was sitting on Parvati’s lap with her fluffy white tail curled around her girlfriend. After she finished her ham and cucumber sandwich and a packet of salt and vinegar crisps, Luna pulled a parchment out of her robes.

“This is for you and Fleur, Harry,” Luna offered, “It’s the list of creatures Daddy thinks the Ministry might add to the task. He said some might be more likely than others, but it’s probably best to prepare for them all.”

Hermione sat on Harry’s lap to read it with him; her bushy tail bristled and she gasped in shock as she glanced at the list. Harry’s stomach tightened.

“A Manticore... surely not!” Hermione muttered angrily. “They’re incredibly violent.”

“I dunno Hermione. According to Hagrid, the Triwizard Commission procured one to mate with a Fire Crab and gave him the Skrewt Eggs to raise.”

Fleur paled as she read over Harry’s shoulder.

“A Gorgon...?” Fleur gasped, “Ees your father seerious Luna?”

“Absolutely,” Luna nodded, “After what happened in the Black Lake with the Kappa and the Merpeople, he thinks you should be prepared for the worst.”

Daphne and Parvati peered over Harry’s shoulder too. Parvati’s normally sleek black tail bottlebrushed, and she shuddered in fright at the idea of an Egyptian Mummy possibly running loose on the Hogwarts grounds.

Harry sighed in resignation when he discerned Chimaera on Mr Lovegood’s list. It was surely more likely than a Sphinx. Harry was beginning to doubt that the Minister would have something as easy to deal with as a cryptic but relatively benevolent Sphinx in the mix. Harry thought Mr Lovegood was probably quite right to consider that the Minister would most likely choose those creatures most capable of murder to throw at the champions.

“I suppose we should be thankful there isn’t a Cockatrice on the list,” Hermione snorted sarcastically. “Mr Lovegood is probably correct to assume that the Minister wouldn’t employ the creature that got the Tournament canceled the last time it was held.”

Luna was scared for her friends, but she was quite pleased that everyone was taking her father seriously.

“Well, Hermione,” Harry sighed, but then he couldn’t help grinning her, “looks like we’ll have to cancel our date and spend it in the library.”

“Prat,” Hermione glowered in mock indignation and she poked Harry in the ribs, before returning Harry’s grin. They had both learned in recent months that mutual study sessions could be quite
stimulating in more ways than one.

The rest of the unaffiliated decided that they weren’t quite so keen to return to the castle as it was so pleasant outside, and told the Potters to go ahead without them. Luna thought back to the fun they had begun this morning, and had an idea about how to spend part of the afternoon, as Mad Eye had given them Saturday off this week, with a warning to be prepared for a hardcore training session on Sunday.

“Fleur, would you and Daphne like to see my--our little hideout in the woods?” Luna asked invitingly, as she squeezed Parvati’s hand.

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On their way back up to the castle, Harry and Hermione spied several students near some juniper bushes and a small cluster of birch trees. Harry didn’t need Hermione’s cat-senses to know something was wrong.

“What’s the matter you little fairy? Did being that close to a girl frighten you?” McLaggen’s pompous loud voice carried. “Aren’t you going to answer me...?”

McLaggen kicked out heavily and connected, wrenching a cry of pain from someone. Harry’s blood began to boil and he started jogging up the hill with his wand in hand and his angry wife by his side, her own wand at the ready.

“Funny, I never took you and the Bogtrotter for Nancy Boys, Weasley...” jeered McLaggen’s friend, issuing a kick of his own at the red-headed boy who was doubled over in pain on the ground. Harry heard a sickening crack as one of Ron’s ribs broke.

Without warning, Harry shot a stunner at Kenneth Towler and he dropped like a stone. McLaggen whirled around, and his eyebrows arched in surprise when he saw Potter bearing down on him.

“What do you care Potter?” McLaggen whined, “I thought you hated the little blighter.....”

Harry answered with another stunner, knocking McLaggen back against one of the birches. It hadn’t been a very strong stunner, as Harry wanted Cormac conscious. He strode up to McLaggen and kicked him in the balls. Cormac grunted in pain.

“I never hated Weasley you Tosser,” Harry snarled, “I hate Bullies!”

Harry hit Cormac in the face once with an open hand to drive the point home. Hermione almost grabbed Harry’s arm, but stopped herself when she realised that Harry was finished striking the groaning Fourth Year student.

“I didn’t like my mate being a stupid git himself, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to let a cretin like you hex or beat the piss out of him--or anyone else for that matter. Remember that, and tell all your sodding mates that those days are over here at Hogwarts as long as I’m around.”

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Wormtail was ecstatic. For the first time in his life he felt truly respected.

The Professors at Hogwarts, especially McGonagall, had always made him feel inadequate. Just because Wormtail valued fun more than homework didn’t mean that Pettigrew was inept. He had always managed to pull out Acceptables and a few Exceeds Expectations at the last minute. It wasn’t Wormtail’s fault that schoolwork was boring.
Padfoot had never really appreciated him, always mocking Wormtail’s hero worship of Prongs and treating him as an inferior.

And Prongs, though he had always seemed happy to have Wormtail’s admiration, Wormtail wanted more than James's appreciation. He wanted what James had.

James was everything that Wormtail wanted to be. He was famous for his abilities as a Quidditch Player, and he always got the girls--except for Lily Evans who thought James was a pompous bullying prat for pranking that greasy swotter who always had his head in a book about potions or dark arts, Snivellus Snape.

And James always seemed to be able to afford to buy nice things and the best snacks from the food trolley on the Hogwarts Express. Everything Wormtail owned was rubbish and all he had were mouldy homemade sandwiches. His parents could barely afford to send him to Hogwarts.

Then somehow, in sixth year, Prongs had settled down and swallowed his pride. He was “turning over a new leaf.” Those had been Potter’s own words when he had angrily dressed Sirius down for his nearly deadly “pranking” of Snivellus Snape, and Lily Evans had overheard the shouting match.

Wormtail flushed jealously again as he remembered how the girl he had always dreamed of the most while wanking had quickly fallen for James after realising that James had grown up finally and saved Lily’s once best friend from certain death.

Sirius had calmed down after his fight with James, agreeing that he had stepped over a line which should never have been crossed. He had apologised profusely to James, and then also apologised even more abjectly to Snivellus. Sirius too, “turned over a new leaf” that year, and he had even apologised to Wormtail.

But things were never quite the same between any of them after that. James had sensed Wormtail’s desires for Lily and kept him at arm’s length after she had become his girlfriend, and later his wife. And Sirius and Remus had grown much closer to each other, though they were careful not to advertise their affections.

Wormtail was the odd one out.

After Hogwarts, the Marauders had joined the battle against the Dark Lord’s reign of terror. But Wormtail always knew it was a futile endeavour. The Dark Lord was Superior in every conceivable way. Not even Dumbledore could stop him.

Wormtail had come to understand that he was on the wrong side. Under the Dark Lord’s rule, Wormtail could have all the gold and women he wanted. Lily was nothing...a Mudblood. She would beg to be one of Wormtail’s whores after James was dead--she clearly was done with Snivellus.

Wormtail couldn’t believe his luck when Sirius had insisted to James that Peter should be the Potters’ Secret Keeper. This was Wormtail’s opportunity to finally get the Glory, Women, and Riches he deserved.

And if Lily were foolish enough to stand in the Dark Lord's way, what did it matter? There would be plenty of other mudblood slags who would beg to have Wormtail if they wanted magic under Voldemort's Law--and he could take any muggle girl he wanted at any time.

The Dark Lord had rewarded Wormtail greatly for his services and made him a Death Eater. Then everything had gone to hell when the Potter Brat had apparently killed the Dark Lord in some sort of outburst of Accidental Magic. Terrified that he would be caught at the scene, Wormtail had fled with...
his Master's wand and hidden it before framing Padfoot as the Potters' betrayer.

Wormtail had sought out a suitable home in which he could hide undiscovered as a Rat, and had come to find much food and solace in the House of Molly, as the familiar of one of her many sons, Percy Weasley. For many years Wormtail grew fat, and reveled in his access to the comforts of Hogwarts, right under the unwitting nose of the Cat Mistress of Gryffindor--Minerva McGonagall. The irony was not lost on Wormtail--ineptitude indeed. Wormtail had shown her the true meaning of the word.

But it was only when Wormtail had returned to Hogwarts as Ronald Bilius Weasley’s familiar, that Wormtail had come to learn that Voldemort still lived on after a fashion.

It didn’t surprise Wormtail that the Potter Brat had chosen a brainy Mudblood as his father had. She had many of Lily’s qualities, though she looked nothing like her, and Wormtail had felt the stirrings of jealousy again. When the Potter scion’s own mudblood whore had turned into a halfbreed Cat, Wormtail decided to take it as a sign that the time was ripe to find his Master and return him to Power.

And now, it was all paying off. Wormtail grinned at himself in the mirror as he adjusted his robes. Tonight, with MacNair, Crabbe, and Goyle, as his bodyguards, Wormtail would offer the Wolf what he had wanted the last time around, a chance to be a Death Eater. And when Fenrir Greyback accepted, Wormtail, as the Dark Lord’s Second, would have a Lycan Clan at his disposal.
Harry’s jaw clenched tightly and tears trickled down Hermione’s cheeks as they sat holding each other next to Ron Weasley’s bed in the Hospital Wing. Ron was breathing shallowly and was conscious, but he was too groggy to do much more than notice the presence of his ex-best-friends.

Ron had a black eye and a gash on one cheek where McLaggen had hit Ron before kicking him. Madam Pomfrey had bound his ribs and given him a pain potion and a calming draught to ease him for a bit before administering the Skele-Gro, which had rather painful effects.

He was trying to say something but was having trouble. The Potters could just barely make out Ron whispering, “Thank you.”

Harry took Ron’s hand and gave it a gentle squeeze.

“Anytime Ron,” Harry responded quietly as Madam Pomfrey returned to clean the wound on Ron’s cheek and heal it.

Minerva McGonagall marched into the Hospital Wing in a rage, followed by a grim-faced Dumbledore. The other shoe had dropped, and she now had the confirmation she needed to proceed against two students in her house whose bullying had been exposed.

Professor McGonagall briefly glanced at the Potters with gratitude before turning to glare at McLaggen and Towler who were both sitting sullenly on beds on the other side of the ward. They had recovered already from Harry’s stunning spells. McClaggen had some bruising on his swollen cheek, but otherwise appeared none the worse for wear.

The Headmaster stared coldly into each boy’s eyes before speaking--first Towler's, then McLaggen's. The words which Harry had uttered to McLaggen echoed in Dumbledore’s own mind.

"...but that doesn't mean I'm going to let a cretin like you hex or beat the piss out of him--or anyone else for that matter. Remember that, and tell all your sodding mates that those days are over here at Hogwarts as long as I'm around."

The Headmaster had been quite impressed with the measures Professor Snape had devised to deal with the younger Malfoy and his accomplices. Taking Harry’s words and Severus’s actions together decided the Headmaster on the direction to take this proceeding. Dumbledore addressed both of the Gryffinders without any fanfare.

“If Mr Weasley’s parents file charges, you may both be facing sanctions by the DMLE. Pending that occurrence you are both on Probation here at Hogwarts. Now, some small measure of magical jousting resulting from mutual enmity is tolerated here and met with points loss and detention, as the effects of minor jinxes and hexes are easily reversible. However, unprovoked magical attacks and physical assaults of any sort are not acceptable at Hogwarts.”

“For the remainder of this year, both of you shall have your wands confiscated, and your broom flying privileges are suspended. All visits to Hogsmeade are suspended. In those classes which require wand practice, you will be issued a school-wand at the beginning of class by the professor, and the wands will be turned in at the conclusion of class.
“You will also both remain confined to your Houses outside of Class Hours. Your House Master, Professor McGonagall, may subject you to points losses and work details as well. I shall leave that decision in her capable hands. Should there be any more such incidents, you will be expelled.”

“What about Potter?” Cormac growled, “He attacked me...”

“Mr Potter showed remarkable restraint given Mr Weasley’s condition. His actions are deemed defensive. Mr Towler is quite lucky that he was unconscious, or he would have no doubt received some measure of justifiable physical retaliation from Mr Potter for breaking one of Mr Weasley’s ribs.

You would do well to heed Mr Potter’s warning Mr McLaggen. Please be sure to spread the word.” The Headmaster paused before making one final statement.

“Oh... I will also be informing your parents of your probationary status. That is all.”

If the two older Gryffindors were stunned at the sentences meted out to them by the Headmaster, the two younger Unaffiliateds who couldn’t help but overhear were no less so. These sorts of punishments were nearly unheard of at Hogwarts.

Professor McGonagall made note of that herself. She was pleased at the change in the Headmaster’s tactics, but she couldn’t help being concerned about the ramifications.

“Albus... don’t get me wrong.” Minerva began quietly, once out of earshot of the hospital wing, “What you did was fair and just, and no doubt far more effective than merely docking points and issuing detentions. But this change in school policy will very likely eventually be taken up by the School’s Board of Governors...”

“Would you rather that I reinstate corporal punishment Minerva?” Albus asked rhetorically. He knew what her answer would be. “That would most certainly be accepted by the Board...”


“Then this is the only means we have of teaching children what sort of behaviour is acceptable in a civilised society Minerva. I have young Mr Potter to thank for teaching me that serious consequences must be expected by those who would commit violence for its own sake— that sometimes defence against provocative actions requires offensive actions and retaliatory measures in the moment.”

“And I have Severus to thank for devising stringent options here at Hogwarts which do not require a violently authoritarian response after the fact which would only serve to reinforce the notion that such behaviour is permissible in society at large.”

~000~

Seamus arrived with Fred, George, and Ginny, shortly after McGonagall had departed with the Headmaster.

“Thank you Harry...” Ginny flung herself on Harry and sobbed.

Tears streamed down Ginny’s freckled cheeks as Harry returned her hug. Hermione sympathetically put her own arms around the youngest Weasley, clutched her tightly, and kissed her flaming red hair. Feeling comforted in the embrace of both Potters, Ginny began to calm down.

“S...s...sorry,” Ginny whimpered as she released them both, “He just looks--so broken... thanks for saving him Harry.”
“Yeah, thanks Harry...” George began sadly.

“...He may be a bit of an idiot..” continued Fred.

“...but he is our brother...”

“...and he’s not Percy.”

Seamus tried to speak, but tears sprang to his eyes and his voice caught.

“It’s alright Seamus... You don’t have to say anything,” Harry responded, seeing the thankful expression on his face, “You’re welcome, all of you.” Harry swallowed,

“Ron didn’t deserve what those arseholes did to him. I know Ron and I aren’t... well... No matter what--even though we’re not really mates anymore--I’ll always care about what happens to him.”

“Anyway, Ron needs a good friend like you Seamus. Stay close and look after each other alright!?” Harry concluded softly. Seamus nodded gratefully.

~o0o~

“Very well done Potter,” Moody growled at the beginning of Sunday's training session.

“Dumbledore had Pomfrey take a copy of that berk’s memory and I’ve had a look to see how you handled yourself.”

“Your response was an appropriate and measured use of force. Not too much--more than that could have left you open to reprimand for excessiveness. And not too little--less could have given the impression of weakness. Your enemy might think you don’t have the guts to do the job properly if you don’t match him blow for blow.”

“I like that you used a palm strike instead of a closed fist. You’re just as likely to crack one of your own knuckles as you are the enemy’s face if you go bone against bone. Always keep that in mind when you’re engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Hard strikes to soft areas, and soft strikes to hard...”

“And that other kid--the one who broke Weasley’s rib--he’s lucky you took him out with a stunner from a distance. You would have been justified to break one of his bones if you’d met him in close quarters. As it is, you stopped him from doing any more damage before you reached the scene, and you used a strong enough stunner to prevent him from coming back atcha while you were dealin’ with the other lad.”

Mad Eye used the incident as a launching pad for another grueling session of hand-to-hand fighting techniques. Warm up exercises were minimal; just enough to loosen up. He had Fleur and Harry practice joint locks and throws on each other, and practice strikes on realistic simulacra utilizing not just fists and feet, but also knees and elbows.

Dora followed Moody’s lead and drilled Daphne and the cat-witches on the same techniques. Two and a half hours later, everyone was collapsed on the floor, drenched in sweat and groaning in agony. Moody grimaced and nodded in satisfaction while Dora doled out vials of pain-relief potion.

“Nicely done--the lot o’ you,” Mad Eye said approvingly. “We’ll be focusing a bit for a few weeks on hand-to-hand to toughen you all up. After that we’ll be alternating between physical combat and spellwork, and then gradually focusing more on spells again as we get closer to the Third Task. We’ve got roughly four months. And you can practice spells and combat techniques in your own time.”
“In the meantime, keep your eyes and ears peeled. There’s some that won’t take kindly to the changes happening here at Hogwarts, and things could get worse before they get better. Don’t be afraid to step up if you see anymore bullyin’ around here.”

“If you don’t think you can handle somethin,’ don’t be afraid to ask a Professor for help. They’ve all been ordered by Dumbledore to take things seriously. Watch your backs! Constant Vigilance!” Mad Eye concluded with a roar.

~o0o~

The Dark Lord was most pleased indeed. He was so pleased, that once Voldemort and Wormtail had taken the manor they now resided in from a muggle bank executive and his wife, he had allowed Wormtail to keep their daughter alive as a plaything. Wormtail was no doubt enjoying his respite while the Dark Lord pondered their next moves.

Wormtail had done well yesterday evening. Fenrir Greyback had pledged the support of his own Fullblood Clan and promised that he could muster the support of at least two more Fullblood Lycan Clans.

The allegiance of the Turned Lycans could not be counted on, except for those werewolves who had been bitten and turned specifically to be used as slaves by the Fullbloods. Most of the Turned kept to themselves, terrified and alone, fearing both the Ministry and the Fullbloods.

The Dark Lord had considered seeking out some Vampires, but decided against it. The majority of Vampires remained aloof and were entirely too self-serving to serve Voldemort. They believed highly in their own superiority over wizards.

There had been a brief skirmish earlier in the afternoon, when Crabbe had been spotted enlisting some lesser wizards—petty thieves and street criminals—in a Newcastle Pub. But Crabbe had comported himself well and the Aurors had been stunned and obliviated before he returned to the Dark Lord with a dozen new soldiers in tow. The infantry would be tasked with guard duty and causing mayhem in other locations as distractions to keep the Ministry on its toes.

In the meantime, Wormtail would help the Dark Lord draw up a plan for the assault on Azkaban while Crabbe and Goyle would travel abroad to recruit some Giants, and MacNair enslaved some Mountain Trolls.

If Voldemort could not win enough Dementors over to his own cause, then the Creatures under the Dark Lord’s command would prove far more efficacious than wizards. Trolls and Giants were impervious to the effects of Dementors, as were those who were Lycans by birthright—the Fullbloods.

By the first day of summer, Azkaban would belong to Voldemort and the Dark Lord could raise his Army of the Dead.

Chapter End Notes

Undoubtedly, my portrayal of Werewolves is diverging somewhat from canon for the purposes of the themes and plot of this fic. However, I don't feel that the portrayal significantly upends anything which would have affected the plot of the original series.
It is conceivable to me that Fenrir Greyback might have casually allied with Voldemort, but held back full support of Voldemort due to never being granted the equalising status of Death Eater. It is unlikely that Greyback would be able to promise the support of Pack-mates without holding out some hope for them that they might one day be granted some sort of equality with dark wizards.

As to Wormtail, he will pay in spades for every vile crime he commits when the time comes, and he won’t be getting any sympathy from Harry in this fic.

Harry never had to protect the disgusting little vermin from Sirius and Remus in this story, so there is no relationship for Wormtail to play on. Harry won't be operating under any illusions that Wormtail actually regrets being responsible for the murder of Harry's parents.
Chapter 76

A roil of emotions gripped Harry as he left Dumbledore’s office with the Ring of Peverell in his hand. Stiffly, joints and muscles still aching from the morning’s workout with Mad Eye, he made his way through the drafty castle corridors arm in tail with Hermione.

He didn’t speak until they were near the school library where they were going to begin researching ways to deal with the creatures he might be facing in the Third Task.

“I dunno Hermione. I’m not sure about this ring. I could use it to talk to my parents—say goodbye properly. But... but I don’t know if I’m ready for that.”

“Just keep it safe Harry,” Hermione responded, furry ears twitching sadly, “Maybe one day you will be...”

“Oi, Potter...” a voice calling from down the corridor startled Harry and Hermione both.

Harry eyed Blaise Zabini warily when the Slytherin approached him, but Hermione wasn’t bristling; she just appeared perplexed. Zabini glanced about the hallway nervously; seeing nobody else except for Harry and Hermione he relaxed.

“Er... I... I just wanted to say that what you did for Weasley yesterday...” Zabini cleared his throat, “I mean... you’re not even his mate anymore—but you still stuck by him. And well... er... everyone more or less knows he’s with Finnigan now... Not many other blokes would stick up for him—”

Zabini paused.

“You’re alright Potter...” Zabini swallowed and held out his hand, “You’ve got a friend in Slytherin if you want one...”

Harry was floored. This was entirely unexpected. Harry glanced at Hermione and she nodded. Zabini was for real. Harry didn’t waste any more time gaping in amazement; he took Blaise’s hand and shook it.

“Er... alright! I’d like that... should I call you Blaise?”

The Slytherin grinned.

“Yeah, that’s cool Harry.... But maybe only in private. We’re not all scum like Draco in Slytherin--but too many are. I’m not sure it’s safe for me to... er... ‘come out’ as it were. Thanks for putting that knob in Azkaban... It was nauseating pretending to be that slimy lizard’s mate.”

~o0o~

Harry was surprised over the next few days by how many students quietly took him aside and thanked him—not for Ron’s sake—but for their own reasons, many vaguely defined. But in some cases it was obvious.

Ginny was by Neville’s side when he thanked Harry for giving McLaggen and Towler a well-deserved arse-kicking. They had been bullying Neville for months.

Ginny hugged Harry and tearfully thanked him again for hurting McLaggen. There was a slightly haunted look in Ginny’s eyes which suggested that there was more to the story of her profuse thanking of Harry at Ron’s bedside. Harry turned towards Hermione, his visage darkening as Ginny
clutched Neville tightly and walked away.

“Hermione, I’m beginning to think I should have given McLaggen’s bollocks a few more kicks...”

“I think I agree Harry,” Hermione’s bushy tail flicked angrily, and she was now wishing that Harry had punched Cormac few times too, but she didn’t say so. The last thing she wanted was for Harry to have broken any of his own knuckles or got in trouble for excessive force.

“I’ll try and talk to Ginny again later in private...” Hermione muttered.

Colin Creevey thanked Harry too, and mentioned that McLaggen had broken his camera.

But then there were the few other boys from various houses who Harry had never met before who shyly approached Harry and shook his hand thankfully, furtively glancing around as Zabini had to make sure that nobody was looking.

~o0o~

The next few weeks passed; the pain of the workouts gradually lessened and the potions were put aside. Harry noticed that Hermione was going all out, putting everything she had into learning how to fight, and he began to feel a bit worried. A sudden horrible thought occurred to Harry, slamming him in the gut.

After everyone else had departed the Room of Requirement he shut the door and glared at Hermione, a vein throbbing in his temple.

“Er... what’s wrong Harry?” Hermione asked anxiously. She could tell that she had done something to really upset him, but she had no idea what.

“Stay out of that maze Hermione,” Harry warned hoarsely, “I don’t want you in there... you could get killed.”

Hermione flushed. So that was it. Harry had correctly discerned the reason for her increasing intensity during training sessions.

“And what about you?” Hermione retorted heatedly, her furry tail quivering crossly, “You could get killed too...”

“That’s just it... I don’t want you to die as well... I couldn’t bear the thought of losing you in there. You’ve still got your mum...”

“And what makes you think I can bear it any better Harry James Potter?” Hermione screamed, hot angry tears streaming down her face. “I’m not letting you face death alone. I can’t live without you. Don’t you understand?”

Harry was taken aback. He hadn’t realised how much he was hurting Hermione. He faltered, and tried another tack.

“I... look... you won’t even be able to get in there...”

“The wards are only keyed to Professors and Headmasters,” Hermione snapped, “The Commission won’t be expecting any students to enter of their own volition. We’re in this together Harry, and that’s final!” Hermione finished vehemently.

Harry discovered his own face wet with tears; he felt on the verge of a panic attack; he couldn’t
breathe. Hermione could die and it would be all his fault.

Hermione broke. Her features softened and she flung her arms and furry tail around Harry, sobbing. Harry returned Hermione’s embrace and clutched her tightly, her warmth filling him, her scent calming.

“I’m sorry Hermione... I didn’t mean to hurt you. I just want you to live.”

“Whatever happens in there is whatever happens Harry,” Hermione sniffled quietly into his shoulder, “You don’t have to suffer all alone anymore Harry... never again...”

“Look at me Hermione... please!”

Hermione lifted her bushy head and Harry cupped her chin, wiping her tears gently with the forefinger of his other hand.

“I love you Hermione,” Harry uttered softly, melting into her golden-brown eyes. “I don’t know what I’d do without you. You’re right... I promised you that whatever happened, we’d always be in it together. I’m really, really sorry for letting my stupid old feelings get the better of me...”

Hermione shut Harry up with a tender, wet kiss, pulled back and gazed into Harry’s pooling green eyes, biting her lip in consternation, feeling bad for screaming at him.

“Don’t be sorry Harry. They’re not stupid feelings--I know how hard it is for you to not feel guilty about other people being in danger... I can’t expect you to stop having them altogether. I...I just want you to know that no matter what, I’m never letting them come between us.”

As they continued their embrace, it suddenly struck Harry, Easter Sunday was only a week and a half away.

“Hermione, I promised you a proper wedding dress on our anniversary, but Easter Sunday is a week or so before it this year, and your Mum will be here. Maybe we should renew our vows then... for her.”

“Oh Harry,” Hermione responded tearfully, “As beautiful as that sounds, I think you’ve got enough to be getting on with, without having to fuss over something formal like that. And really... I’d rather just have a quiet peaceful day with you and Mum and our friends...”

~o0o~

Ginny was still keeping whatever had happened to herself, but she seemed much more cheerful by Easter Sunday. She and Dean kept Seamus and Ron on their toes while Harry and Viktor flew rings around Fred and George, and Hermione filled her mum in about the Triwizard tournament on the lawn below.

Neville sighed contentedly as he lay back in the carpet of grass inhaling the fragrance of Spring and soaking up the sun, watching his girlfriend flying above him while Angelina sat beside him and heckled the Twins.

Jean Granger was delighted to see Luna and Parvati again, and thrilled to meet Daphne and Fleur, Hermione’s newest friends. They all seemed so close, and if Jean suspected there was something much deeper, she didn’t speak of it, unwilling to question her daughter finding so much happiness in her life after being friendless for so many years.

And as the girls told it, they all owed everything to Harry Potter. Jean was horrified by the stories,
and proud of her son-in-law, and moved to tears more than once. Daphne’s story was heartbreaking. But there was too much joy to be sad for too long; Mrs Granger could feel the strength of their bonds of affection.

Jean could read between the lines however, and she grew unsettled, wondering how safe it would be for non-magic people in the coming months. Hermione had mentioned the new Minister for Magic a few times and how she had risen to power after the assassination of the previous Minister.

But Jean Granger’s daughter seemed to be holding something back about the possible connection between the new Minister and the assassination, and about the Minister’s connection to the dangers which Harry was facing in the tournament. Mrs Granger was no fool. When Harry had finished flying, he flopped sweatily next to Hermione on the blanket covering the lawn.

Jean confronted Harry point blank.

“Harry, this new Minister, the one which came to power after the last one emancipated you two last year. She’s like the terrorist Voldemort, and that Mr Malfoy, isn’t she!? Someone who hates ‘muggles’ and ‘halfbreeds’... And she’s instigated this tournament as a means to get at you and Hermione, hasn’t she...?”

Tightness clenched Harry’s chest; he glanced anxiously at Hermione, and all of the girls froze.

“Yes...” Harry responded truthfully and quietly, “I don’t think it’s safe for us in the muggle world though Mrs Granger. The Ministry has some connections with the muggle government apparently. That’s why I asked Hermione to invite you here for Easter, instead of us coming to visit you. I didn’t want to put you in danger. At least there are a lot of wizards looking out for us here.” Harry paused as another chilling thought occurred to him.

“Mrs Granger, I don’t think it’s very safe for you in the muggle world at the moment either;” Harry continued, his heart thumping rapidly, “I have a home in London. It’s protected and secure. The Ministry doesn’t know where it is--nobody can find it or get into it unless I tell them how myself. I’d really like it if you lived there for now. If you want to, you can bring your sister and her baby...”

Harry peered at Jean Granger’s bewildered features hopefully, and swallowed. Hermione was speechless, shock all over her face.

Thinking of how he felt about his wife’s mother, growing to feel as if Jean were his own, Harry was reminded of someone else who may not be protected from the Minister. There was no way that he and Hermione could return to Number 4 Privet Drive--assuming that they survived the Third Task. Petunia and Dudley could be in danger too, and Harry resolved to find a way to get them to Number 12 as soon as possible as well.
Chapter 77

Auror Abigail Brixton glanced at Madam Bones when she entered the Department Chief’s office before noticing the Headmaster of Hogwarts and the Potters. Abigail had never met Harry or his wife, but she, like many Aurors close to Amelia Bones and Kingsley Shacklebolt, had nothing but admiration for the young man.

Nonetheless, it was a bit disconcerting to be called to a meeting with Albus Dumbledore and the boy who was responsible for not only the defeat of You-Know-Who, but who had also personally sent two Death Eaters and their scion to Azkaban. Auror Brixton shook both Potters’ hands shyly when Amelia introduced them.

“Abby,” Madam Bones began, “I know this is an odd request, as the DMLE is not generally disposed to providing personal protection details for muggle civilians, but the Headmaster believes that the immediate families of the Potters could be targeted by the Minister for Sanction... I concur. And for obvious reasons, such a situation is untenable.”

“I suggested that you might be the best suited to this task--if you are willing and the Potters agree. This would mean that for the time-being you would be taking up residence in Warlock Potter’s home.”

“Of course Ma’am,” Auror Brixton replied quickly.

The Headmaster’s piercing gaze always made Abby feel uncomfortable, but she breathed a sigh of relief when his eyes softened and he gave her a wink. Nervously, Abby turned her own gaze to Hermione Potter’s twitching ears and flicking tail.

Mrs Potter smiled, sensing nothing but kindness and good intentions in the Auror. She gave her husband a nod and it was settled when Warlock Potter gave his own approval to the middle-aged Auror.

“You can call me Harry...” he grinned.

~000~

“Abby seems really nice. She doesn’t seem as stiff as most of the other Aurors. I just wish Madam Bones could spare someone else too.” Harry mused once he and Hermione were back at Hogwarts in their private chambers.

“She’s really sweet--and completely trustworthy,” Hermione responded warmly, "She feels very strongly protective towards you Harry. I suppose Madam Bones suggested her because she’s muggleborn and will know how to get on with Mum, Auntie Joanne, and Petunia. I sensed a lot of compassion and empathy in Auror Brixton....”

“I... I’m a bit more concerned about Mum and your Aunt Petunia being under the same roof together to be honest.”

“Really? Why?” Harry asked, perplex crossing his features.

Hermione blushed, smiling bashfully.

“Since last year, Mum’s grown quite attached to you Harry. I don’t think she’ll be very happy with Petunia for how horribly she treated you all those years, and for letting Vernon and Dudley hurt
“Oh, I... er... I didn’t think about that.” Harry looked at his feet pensively. “Are you sure? I mean, after... you know... your dad. Maybe your mum will understand Petunia...”

Hermione’s blush turned into a flustered pained expression.

“That’s just it Harry... Mum isn’t quite so forgiving as you. She won’t understand why Petunia never left Vernon before he got arrested.”

“Mum told me that she’s filed for divorce. Dad tried to get her back. He went to Auntie Joanne’s place in Glasgow and begged Mum to come home. He promised he’d never hit her again. But she told him she wasn’t going to give him another chance to hurt her again anyway.”

“Oh...” Harry said again, even more awkwardly, “But... but what about you? Didn’t your dad even ask about you?”

Tears welled in Hermione’s eyes; Harry wished he hadn’t said anything.

“Yes... he said I could come back home too... and that I didn’t have to have the surgery or leave Hogwarts--but... but Mum said she wasn’t going to give him the chance to hurt me either,” Hermione heaved a big sob.

“She said... she said Dad is still angry about you being married to me. He wants to have our marriage annulled...” Hermione sobbed again.

“But that’s impossible, and even if we could I would never let it happen...” Harry interjected furiously, “I didn’t even know it until the wedding clerk mentioned it in Mr Lovegood’s article, but apparently we made an Unbreakable Vow when we got married...”

“I know Harry. I showed Mum the article yesterday. She knows too now. But Dad doesn’t understand magic; he doesn’t even want to try--unlike Mum, who has more or less accepted it. He admits it himself in this letter that he gave Mum to give to me. Dad says he doesn’t want to hear about magic, but that if I insist on continuing at Hogwarts he can ‘live with it’...”

Hermione paused, tears flowing as she tried to contain another sob and passed the letter she had received from her father to Harry. His face fell as he quickly glanced over it. It was an appallingly odd mixture of dubious contrition, negotiation, and demand. Hermione continued,

“...and Mum says... Mum apparently told him that he doesn’t understand Love either...”

Hermione trailed off as her floodgate burst and she collapsed into sobs in Harry’s arms. Harry was forced to agree with Jean Granger.

~o0o~

As the weeks wore on and Spring blossomed, Harry and Hermione spent every spare moment in the library or training with the rest of the Unaffiliated, Dora, and Mad Eye. Fleur, Daphne, Luna and Parvati had taken to joining them in their daily calisthenics as well, and practicing spellwork and fighting together in the Room of Requirement.

Harry really hoped nobody else was getting any ideas about the maze, but after Hermione’s reaction, he realised that there was really nothing he could do to stop them--short of getting the Headmaster involved.
But that really wasn’t an option. Feeling that it would be a grotesque betrayal, Harry dismissed the thought without even really considering it, deciding that it was better for his friends to be prepared properly for whatever choices they made. Every one of the girls had all made it very clear that they loved him and each other perhaps as much as Hermione did.

At meal-times, the Mingling Table expanded to make room for the others who had begun leaving their own tables to join the Unaffiliated and their “Regulars” since Harry had saved Ron from McLaggen.

Padma had already taken to sitting at the table with them fairly frequently since Luna had left Ravenclaw, and now Cho, with Cedric by her side, could often be found at their end of the table conversing with Luna, Padma, and Parvati.

Every so often the Creevey’s would sit in for lunch or dinner. Harry hoped Viktor and Lavender wouldn’t be too put off by the garrulous boy and his camera. But he didn’t really have to worry as Viktor and Neville both appeared to be amused whenever Lavender cheerfully engaged Colin and Ginny in gossip.

Occasionally Ron and Seamus would quietly join the table, but they seemed more inclined to keep to themselves these days, though the Twins and Angelina were always welcoming towards them both.

After Susan Bones made a point of introducing herself to Harry and Hermione as Amelia Bones’ niece one day at breakfast, Hannah Abbott and Ernie MacMillan followed her from the Hufflepuff table to join her that evening at dinner. A few meals together later, Hermione mirthfully noticed that Dean seemed to have been smitten by Susan’s titian hair and was chatting her up.

One evening, several weeks after making friends with the Slytherin, Harry grinned when Blaise Zabini strolled over to the Mingling Table arm in arm with Tracey Davis and Pansy Parkinson. Blaise smirked and gave Harry a wink. Apparently Blaise had managed to convince them it wouldn’t be so scary if they all made a show of force, while maintaining his "image" in the process. A few evenings after that several of Astoria’s First and Second Year Slytherin friends felt brave enough to join them, quietly thanking Harry for saving Astoria and sending Draco to Azkaban with only one hand.

Harry felt overwhelmed by all of the support. This was nothing like the attention he had got for being the “Boy-Who-Lived,” or the alleged “Heir-of-Slytherin,” or the “Cat-Witches’ Protector,” “Dark-Lord-in-Training,” or “Hogwarts Champion.” Everyone seemed genuinely interested in the Real Harry who stuck up for anyone in need and valued kindness and friendship above all else.

~00o~

The wrought-iron gates of the estate were now visible through the beech trees which lined the avenue at the edge of the woods. Yaxley and Avery cautiously stayed low behind the bushes with a scruffy hooligan firmly in hand. The last thing they wanted to do was trip the protection charms which warded the manor and its grounds, alerting the Dark Lord to their presence.

“This is it then? You’re certain?” Yaxley harshly inquired, his wand pressed forcefully into the temple of the tattooed thug with a nose ring and spiky black hair.

“Yeah...” gasped the hoodlum, “Tha’s it then... The Dark Lord’s ‘ouse...”

“You’d better not be lyin’...” Avery said roughly.

“If there’s one thing the Minister hates, it’s liars...” Yaxley sneered.
“I’m tellin’ ye, tha’s it mate... e’s in there with ‘is second in command. Some bloke name o’ Wormtail... an’ some young muggle bint they got locked up in the basement. There’s a couple other blokes too... got ‘is mark on their arms... ”

Yaxley and Avery glanced at each other, eyebrows shooting up in surprise at the idea of Wormtail as the Dark Lord’s General.

“Good enough then,” Yaxley nodded approvingly, “I reckon you might get a pardon from the Minister if you’re as forthcoming with her. Time to go then...”

“I don’t think you’re going anywhere, traitors...” growled an all too familiar voice, and the hairs on Yaxley and Avery’s necks rose.

A bolt of red lightning arced from Avery’s wand towards Fenrir Greyback. The werewolf rolled into the bushes, dodging the stunner easily. Yaxley shoved the spiky haired ruffian, sending him sprawling into the underbrush and whirled to face another lycan bearing down on him.

Avery vanished with a cracking sound, but not before an obliterating spell from Fenrir’s wand struck him. Yaxley’s stunner was too late. His screams rent the cool evening air as the second werewolf savagely tore off Yaxley’s wand arm with his teeth, crimson blood spattering the foliage in the clearing.

~00o~

As the beginning of summer and the Third Task drew near, Harry felt even more certain about his decision. Viktor and Cedric peered at Harry in puzzlement from their armchairs, wondering why he had invited them to his quarters a week before the Task.

Harry sat on the settee between Hermione and Fleur, his wife’s furry tail flicking expectantly. Harry glanced at both of the girls nervously; each took one of his hands and gave them an encouraging squeeze. Harry cleared his throat and took a deep breath before launching assertively into his proposition.

“Right... well, I really don’t give a hang who gets the Goblet–either one of you can have it, or we can all take it together. It’s more important that we all get through this alive. You’ve both had a chance to prepare for the creatures we were told about, and the ones from Mr Lovegood’s list which we expect will be added.”

“I think we should all work together. Fleur and I will be entering first, but we’ll wait for you two to arrive and then we can all fight through the maze as a team... And you should both know, Hermione’s decided she’s coming too...”

“You’re joking Potter...?” gasped Cedric.

Viktor nodded his assent.

“My Headmaster has been in a much better mood lately,” Viktor smiled ironically, “I do not really know vy, but for some reason, I sink it has somezing to do with you Harry. I swear, I do not know vot has come over him, but he told me zat it is more important zat I survive zan win.”

“Good... that’s good then, Viktor,” Harry acknowledged, “So what about it Cedric...? All of us... together?”

Cedric swallowed nervously. It was clear that Harry meant every word of it. He wasn’t sure what shocked him more, that Harry was willing to give up the Goblet, or that he was letting Hermione join
them in the maze. But either way, Cedric knew what the right thing to do was.

“Er…Alright, I’m in too then… Harry!”
Luna took off her Spectrespecs and handed them to Harry with a grin.

“All clear Harry. I don’t see a single wrackspurt...” Luna assured him. Hermione and Parvati giggled. “But you should probably give the rest of us a look just to be certain that we’re good too.”

Harry smirked as he took off his glasses and put on Luna’s mad spectacles. He and Hermione had been surprised to find that they really did reveal some invisible magical quantities—though whether the flying swarms of magic “insects” were actually creatures was entirely a matter of speculation. But the specs had also worked on Harry’s invisibility cloak, much to even Luna’s surprise; it was clear that they had some practical use.

“Are you planning on wearing those tomorrow Harry?” Daphne giggled when she and Fleur entered the Potters’ sitting room and spotted Harry wearing the garish pink and pale-blue sparkling glasses.

“Actually, I think I might at least take them with, just in case...” chuckled Harry, “They’re brilliant for seeing in the dark, and the Third Task will take place at dusk tomorrow instead of dawn.”

Hermione uttered an angry little hiss, knowing that the time had been set to maximise the danger of the task.

 Anyway, I don’t see any wrackspurts around anyone,” Harry concluded.

“What’s in the bag Fleur?” Parvati asked, her satiny black tail twitching curiously.

“Oh, er... eet ees a surprise,” Fleur responded, “I was ‘oping we could go to ze jacuzzi again and ‘ave some fun togezzer while everyone else ees at dinner. I am not vairy hungry now.”

Harry took off the Spectrespecs, putting his own glasses back on, and noticed that Fleur was very pale with anxiety. He glanced at his wife who was nodding.

“That sounds like a lovely idea Fleur,” Hermione agreed.

Fifteen minutes later, Harry and five giggling naked witches settled themselves into the small steaming, bubbling pool in the Room of Requirement’s Fairy Grotto.

Fleur opened her bag at the pool’s edge, revealing a number of curious implements. She held up what appeared to be a disembodied pair of vermilion lips.

“Zese are Rouler Pelle, een English known as French Kisses. Zey are vairy good for one or two lovers eef you need some extra lips. Zey will lick, neeble, or suck anywhere you want zem to. But zere are plenty of us tonight--many lips already. We will not need zem.”

Fleur put the magic lips back in her bag and pulled out two other items which looked more familiar to the cat-witches and Harry.

“Zere are ozzer items in ze bag, I also have ze Mains de L’amour, or as you would say, ze Hands of Love. But again, zose are for eef not enough ‘ands--and we ‘ave many ‘ands tonight. I think zese weel be mos’ fun tonight...”

Luna and Parvati’s eyes widened at the pale pink double-dildo, and what looked like some sort of black leather belt with a very strangely shaped multi-coloured dildo attached to it. The shaft had
numerous ridges and bumps, and the tip bristled like a hedgehog with soft bendy quills.

“Zis ees vairy fun, zis ees a magic strap-on. When a girl wears zis, she may feel like a boy. Eet magically stimulates ze clitoris of ‘oever wears eet, and she weil feel everything ze shaft feels. But ze dildo also magically vibrates in many different patterns for extra stimulation of ze ozzer girl...”

“Zere ees also Aphrodite’s Umtuous Lube to make everyzing slide better, but ees not necessary tonight in ze jacuzzi as eet ees vairy warm and wet already...”

‘ermione, would you please do me ze honour to demonstrate for ze ozzers?” Fleur beseeched as she passed the cat-witch the magical strap-on.

Hermione’s saturated tail wriggled gleefully in the water as Harry looked on in amusement.

“Thank you Fleur,” Hermione gushed. She hadn’t expected to have a first go. Fleur helped Hermione fasten it around her waist. The strap magically adjusted itself and dipped between Hermione’s legs, clinging to her skin, the shaft protruding from just the right spot.

She gasped as she felt it connect to her clitoris and an electrical tingle surged inside her own slickness. The tip began to quiver and rotate.

Fleur didn’t want the other cat-witches and Daphne to be left out, so she passed them the double-ended dildo.

“Zis also has an extra magical charge. It will move itself while you both move, but also, when zere are more zan two girls...” she grinned at them as another shaft protruded at a right angle to the main stem.

After a few moments, Parvati decided that she, Luna, and Daphne had gaped in amazement long enough. Reaching between her own thighs, she gasped as she inserted one of the flexible rods into her own entrance. Parvati beckoned Daphne to mount the mid-shaft, and for Luna to impale herself behind Daphne.

Harry almost lost it just watching the two cat-witches writhing with Daphne sandwiched in the middle as the hot water churned around them. The three of them wrapped themselves around each other, exchanging sultry kisses, their hands and lips roaming each other’s breasts, capturing their nipples, cradling their bottom cheeks.

They undulated in unison as the magic three pronged dildo plunged into their depths. It wasn’t long before the purrs and moans of pleasure became meows and wails.

Fleur kissed Harry, then Hermione as they watched Luna and Parvati’s tails whip the water into a froth, their arms wrapped around Daphne. Assured that their lovers were having a good time, Fleur leaned back against Harry while he kissed her neck and cupped her breasts, spreading her thighs for Hermione.

Hermione drove the shaft into Fleur’s passage and trembled at the sensation. The dildo felt a part of her. She could feel Fleur’s moist sheath clinging to it as she slid it in and out. Hermione squealed with pleasure, she could actually feel the tip twirling and vibrating as if it were her own inside of Fleur’s depths. Fleur moaned, Harry’s fingers tugging on her nipples.

“‘ermione, Oh... ‘arry... Oh zat feels so nice...” Fleur gasped, “‘arry, please, take me from be’ind...”

Harry was flummoxed. Surely Fleur didn’t mean...
“Er... what? Are you sure Fleur? Won’t that hurt?”

“Non, eet ees so nice... Please, ‘arry eet ees vairy good, you will like eet... take my bottom while ‘ermione ees inside me too...”

Hermione was just as surprised as Harry at Fleur’s request, but she was very curious. Furry wet ears twitching, Hermione leaned back against the side of the little whirlpool so that Fleur could ride her magic staff. Harry released Fleur’s breasts and put his hands around her hips instead. Gently, he inserted the tip of his erection between Fleur’s bottom cheeks.

Fleur’s anus was tight, but slick and wet; Harry was surprised at how rapidly and easily he slid his entire length into her backside. Fleur was right. It felt amazing. Harry thrust his stiffness into Fleur’s depths from behind while Hermione continued to plunge into Fleur’s chamber.

Fleur screamed in delight as the Potters took her to the raptures of nirvana. Fleur convulsed in their embrace, and they both lost themselves in her fervor. Harry spasmed, releasing himself inside of Fleur’s back-recess as the other two cat-witches and Daphne were swept into bliss beside them.

The whirlpool erupted into a water geyser and the fairy grotto trembled as the six once again found themselves adrift in a magical sea of ardour.

Panting, drenched, and giddy, yet invigorated, Parvati took a turn wearing the magic strap-on while Fleur joined Daphne and Luna.

Hermione’s curiosity got the best of her; she wanted to feel what Fleur had felt. Parvati’s wet tail swished and she giggled as she lay back against the rim of the pool, Hermione’s dewy moistness gripping the textured shaft of the twirling and vibrating dildo as she presented her bottom to Harry.

“Harry?” Hermione implored sweetly, looking over her shoulder with pleading eyes, quivering furry ears and sodden tail.

Harry couldn’t resist. Grinning, he penetrated Hermione’s narrow back-channel with his stiff-again hardness. Harry buried himself to his roots between Hermione’s bottom cheeks as she rode Parvati and the magical strap-on.

Hermione felt the the brushy tip of the magical fake penis spiraling and buzzing deep inside her as Harry rocked her from behind and tweaked her nipples while Parvati writhed beneath, their lips and tongues entwined. The eddies of Daphne, Fleur, and Luna’s gyrations swirled around Hermione’s threesome in the Fairy Grotto’s Cauldron of Ecstasy.

Hermione began loudly yowling wildly, furry tail thrashing madly; the water roiled and churned and Harry burst, jets of semen spurting into her back-passage...

~o0o~

Four times that evening during dinner the castle gently trembled and the lights in the Great Hall flickered out and back on again, perplexing the entire school. But none were more bewildered than Dumbledore who was determined to eventually uncover the cause.

However, there was no indication of magical breach, nor of Dark Attack, so the Headmaster decided to leave it until the conclusion of the tournament for a thorough investigation.
Unable to stay asleep any longer after a disturbed night, Albus Dumbledore poured himself a hot cup of Darjeeling, squeezed in a bit of lemon and stirred in a single spoon of sugar. Fawkes grumbled and squawked at having been woken so early—as did the portrait of Phineas Nigellus which Albus just ignored.

The Headmaster was pleased that moving Petunia and Dudley Evans into Number 12 with Jean Granger and her sister had gone smoothly. It would not have been at all feasible without a wizard to manage the magical residence and monitor the situation, but Abby Brixton appeared to be doing a fine job, and she had indicated that things had been going as well as could be expected the past couple of months, given the disparate personalities of the family members of both Potters.

At first, when Harry had asked the Headmaster for help, Albus had been reticent, but it hadn't taken him more than a few seconds to realise that Lily’s protection charms would only work against Tom Riddle and his minions at Number 4. The Ministry had access, and given Minister Dolores Umbridge’s agenda, that made her far more dangerous than Voldemort had ever been.

The Minister’s political skills were masterful, and her agenda—much the same as Voldemort’s—threatened to undo over a century of progress in wizarding Britain in a way which Riddle could never have hoped to achieve except through brute force.

As "Lord" Voldemort, Tom Riddle had frightened many into seeing things his way, but his habit of murdering his own supporters in fits of psychotic rage had also made that support rather wobbly. A fact that the current Minister had exploited to her advantage in Voldemort's absence.

Making Number 12 the home of Lily’s sister was the only logical option, and Albus Dumbledore had been once again impressed by the moral and intellectual maturity of Harry Potter. Albus desperately hoped that Harry would survive this last, most deadly task. And if Harry did indeed live beyond today, the Headmaster knew that Lily's son now had a home which was secure against all fronts.

But it was also clear that if Harry survived, that the Minister would escalate and move to secure the Ministry completely in an effort to drive Harry Potter and the Order underground.

Also, Amelia Bones was in danger while Voldemort lived. The Bones Family had been targeted with extreme prejudice and nearly wiped out by Voldemort in the last war, the only survivors being Susan Bones's parents, and her aunt, Amelia. It was almost a certainty that Voldemort would want to finish the job.

And now it was also quite probable that the Minister would find some means to wrest the DMLE from Amelia's control. An assassination attempt by Minister Umbridge was a distinct possibility while Voldemort remained at large as a convenient scapegoat. Should she gain complete control of the Ministry, the Minister would no doubt attempt to take Hogwarts at her earliest opportunity.

Dumbledore dipped his quill in the inkpot and began to scribble a rough plan to present to the Order at the next meeting.

Dawlish and Shacklebolt would have to stay glued to Amelia for the time being, but she would not be safe in her own home. Harry had indicated that he would feel better if the Evanses and his wife’s family had extra magical protection. Perhaps if Amelia and Alastor also took up temporary residence in Number 12 that would meet everyone’s needs.
As to the Order itself, it was clear that Hogwarts could not be left unattended over the summer. It would no doubt be targeted by both Tom Riddle and the Minister. It might be best for the Professors to remain at Hogwarts this year. And every effort must be made to protect the members of the School’s Board of Governors. Their homes must be provided with the highest levels of security.

Meanwhile, further efforts were necessary to locate and finish Riddle and his horcruxes. The Minister had become by far the bigger threat, and as long as Voldemort was a thorn in the Order’s side, their attention was divided.

And as to the odd magical power surges, one thing at least had been made clear by the instruments which monitored Hogwarts, the magic was highly purified and refined beyond anything Albus had borne witness to in his lifetime. Traces of such magic in recent history could be found only in ancient magical sites around Europe and the Isles which were currently ascribed to primeval Goddess worshippers by muggles.

The only other time Dumbledore had personally come across anything similar was during a tour of the Orient when he had been introduced to an Ashram in India, a Temple in Tibet, and a Temple in China’s Wudang range, all of which bore the signature of similar magic, and all of them the only schools dedicated to witchcraft in otherwise male dominated magical traditions. But their secrets had been fiercely guarded by the witches who maintained them.

If anything, the mysterious magic had strengthened every defence which Hogwarts possessed. With each event, four in just the course of last night’s dinner-time, and the one several months ago, the power of the protection charms which warded the castle had increased tenfold. The source must be discovered and given every opportunity to grow and flourish. With some direction, the magic could be utilised to provide an unmatchable level of security for Hogwarts.

Confident now that he had addressed all concerns, Albus Dumbledore lay down his quill, sighed, and poured himself a fresh cup of tea.

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Breakfast in the Great Hall was bedlam. Classes were dismissed for the day, though there were very few schooldays left before the end of June. And many officials and the parents of students had arrived early even though the task wasn’t scheduled until dusk.

Dora had been surprised when Fleur sleepily opened the Potters door wearing nothing but a bathrobe. Fleur turned crimson when she realised what she had done.

“Oi... er... it’s getting a bit late,” Dora said awkwardly, turning as pink as her hair, “Breakfast is starting in 10 minutes and the Champions are supposed to be greetin’ foreign dignitaries. Is Harry ready yet?”

“Oh, I think he ees getting ready wiz... er...” Fleur began.

“Who’s that Fleur? Oh... Hello Dora!” Luna beamed, her fluffy white tail poking out of the back of her dressing gown. “Harry’s in the shower with Hermione, he’ll be right out.”

Dora began to feel a bit faint and flushed a deeper shade of red. Were ALL of the Unaffiliated in the Potters’ quarters? The answer to that question resolved itself when she spotted Daphne in the doorway of the Potters’ bedroom.

“Is there another dressing gown? I think I left my clean clothes in my sitting r... Eeeep!” Daphne squeaked when she saw Dora. Quickly she pulled the bedroom door in front of her nakedness.
Dora’s eyes began to pop.

“I’ll... I’ll just wait out ‘ere for a bit for you and Harry, Fleur,” Dora groaned, “I’m supposed to be escorting you lot...”

Dora hurriedly shut the Potters’ front door and leaned back against it, trying to calm down. A tingly feeling surged as she imagined what they had all been getting up to.

“Stop it Dora... you’re a professional...” she muttered to herself, “or at least a professional-in-trainin’...”

But at that moment, Dora felt very much the Hogwarts schoolgirl again. It would be only three years since she herself had graduated at the end of June after all. She managed to pull herself together by the time Harry and Hermione emerged, their own faces flushed with embarrassment. Dora did her best not to smirk as they were followed out in single file by Fleur, Parvati, Daphne, and Luna.

~o0o~

“There he is--the little Dark-Lord-in-Training himself,” Amos Diggory sneered loudly when he spied Harry strolling into the Great Hall, “Watch your back in there Cedric. He might use that Dark Curse on you...”

Harry’s face darkened. Fleur and Hermione flushed angrily, and Auror-in-Training Tonks looked like she was about to lay into Amos herself; Daphne, Parvati, and Luna cringed.

“**SHUT-IT** Father!” Cedric snarled and his voice rose, “You don’t bloody know what you’re talking about. All you do is parrot the rubbish in the Prophet and I’m done with it... In fact, I’m done with YOU!”

“How many times do I have to tell you that if it weren’t for Harry, that I would have never got past the Dragon? And if it weren’t for him my girlfriend would probably still be at the bottom of the lake! Harry’s a good person and he’s my friend.”

Cedric turned his back on his gobsmacked father and stalked away. Harry thought Cedric’s mum looked rather proud of her son though.

“Don’t pay any attention to him Harry,” Cedric said emphatically as he put his hand on Harry’s shoulder, “He’s just an idiot who believes whatever he reads in that Ministry-loving Rag.”

“But... Alright then,” Harry swallowed uncomfortably, realising how hard it must have been for Cedric to finally stand up to his father, “Thanks for sticking up for me Cedric.”

Dora hoped that the awkwardness was over and that she could get back to doing her job and lead her charges over to the additional table laid out for the officials in the center of the Great Hall. Her face fell when she saw a middle-aged woman with red hair bearing down on Harry.

~o0o~

Molly Weasley spied Nymphadora Tonks enter the Great Hall with Harry from the staff table where she had just finished chatting with Poppy Pomfrey. She heard Cedric Diggory shouting at Amos and flushed as she watched the son turn his back on the father in support of Harry Potter. Steeling herself, Molly made her way through the crowded Hall.

As she drew nearer to Harry, Molly’s eyes narrowed when she saw Nymphadora’s face darken. Mrs Weasley hoped that Tonks wouldn’t make things any more difficult than they had to be before Molly
said her piece.

Harry groaned inwardly and halted when he saw Mrs Weasley. He put his arm around Hermione’s waist, drawing her closer as her furry tail curled over his shoulders. A knot of anxiety gripped Harry’s stomach. Molly smiled at the Potters stiffly, her face reddening.

“Harry--Hermione, I...” Molly choked up momentarily, then pulled herself together, “I can’t thank you enough for looking after Ron and saving him from that bully.”

“Especially after... well after everything that Ron put you two through himself. I didn’t really know how poorly he had treated you both, but the Twins and Ginny set me straight on that score. You’ve done so much for my family Harry...both of you really. For Ginny--and for Ron...”

Harry wondered if he should say something when Molly paused, but Mrs Weasley continued and he decided to just let her say whatever she wanted to say and get it over with.

“I...I want to apologise for my behaviour when I last saw you two. I’m so sorry. It was very wrong of me to have interfered. The thought of children facing...” Molly heaved a sob, “…children facing Death is just more than I can handle sometimes. Children deserve to be protected from fear and suffering by adults... they deserve to grow up with nurturing and love.”

“But of course Harry--it is your Right to face it head on, and your own burden to bear. You are at the centre of things after all. And Hermione, as Harry’s wife, of course you would be at his side.”

“That is how it... how it...” Molly sobbed again before continuing in a heartbroken voice and dabbing at her teary eyes with a hankie, “…That’s how it should be.”

“I’ve been doing a lot of soul-searching, and I realised eventually that you two aren’t really children anymore. Goodness knows you two behaved far more like adults than I did. I... I just didn’t want to see either of you hurt anymore than you have already been.”

“When I first found out about your Uncle Vernon, Harry--after Mr Lovegood’s article--I stormed into Hogwarts and read the Headmaster the riot act. I couldn’t believe he’d left you unattended in the house of a Monster for so many years. Arthur had to literally pick me up and carry me into Dumbledore’s fireplace while I was screaming blue murder...” Molly's voice was broken by another sob.

“And Hermione, last year, when Fred and George got home from Hogwarts and told me how Ron had been treating you after your potions accident, I had a fit. I gave him bread and milk for supper for a month when he came home last summer...”

“...and to think... to think that I might have ever thought that you and Ron might ever have something together... well, I can only say that never have I been more wrong about anything in my life.”

Molly stopped talking abruptly, and Harry wondered if she’d finished, but she finally managed to round out her thought.

“If anybody was ever meant to be together, it’s you two. You both deserve a long and happy life together...” Molly concluded as tears streamed down her scarlet cheeks, before wheeling about to find her husband.

Dora blinked back her own tears, moved deeply by Molly’s heartfelt apology. She had never seen the Weasley Matriarch so abject before. Dora glanced at Harry and Hermione who were similarly displaying signs of distress.
“Oh bugger it!” Dora huffed, “Forget the bloody ‘dignitaries.’ They can all sod off--it’s mostly just the Minister’s foreign pals anyway. Go ‘ave breakfast--I’ll deal with ‘em...”

Harry peered at Fleur and Hermione, uncertain. He didn’t want Dora to get in trouble.

“Go on you lot. I mean it. I’ve got this!” the Auror-in-Training said firmly, tears still glistening in her lashes. “You just get through that maze in one piece, alright!?”

“Thanks a ton, Dora,” Harry said gratefully, “For everything...”
Chapter 80

Harry took his seat at the Mingling Table and breathed a huge sigh of relief, hoping to put the emotional turmoil behind him and gird himself for the Third Task. Hermione gave Harry a kiss on his cheek and sat next to him, curling her fluffy tail around his waist.

Daphne squeezed Harry’s hand, giving him a kiss on the other cheek as the rest of Unaffiliated took their seats and some of their other friends took places at the Mingling Table. Moments later, Hedwig arrived with the post, dropping two newspapers in his lap.

Scandal at Hogwarts

by Rita Skeeter

On the eve of the Third Task of the Triwizard Tournament, it has recently come to this sterling reporter’s attention that Dark Wizard in Training and married man, Harry Potter, may be engaging in improper relations with underage students at Hogwarts. Several students revealed that he is frequently seen in the company of two other young females who have apparently sustained similar symptoms to those of his unsuitably young wife’s potions “accident.”

A number of students from the Illustrious and Noble House of Slytherin have indicated that Mr Potter’s unique Parseltongue abilities may be too titillating and tantalisingly temptatious for young girls to refuse his nefarious advances. Is Mr Potter using his cunning tongue to ensnare victims, only to surreptitiously dose and subdue them with an illegal potion?

Is it possible that Mr Potter is utilising his young victims to engage in secret experimental dark magic to breed a new race of halfbreed abominations? One can only imagine how such goings-on can possibly escape the Eagle Eye of Headmaster Dumbledore.

And one can only wonder, what must his put upon wife--and first victim--think about all of this? Enquiring minds want to know.

“Oh bloody fucking hell!” Harry swore resignedly as he shook his head. He had wondered when that wretched woman would notice that Hermione wasn’t the only half-cat student at Hogwarts. He had never imagined that Rita Skeeter would be able to spin it into something so ludicrous and revolting though.

Fred and George were doubled over laughing their heads off. Neville looked embarrassed and Ginny had turned scarlet. Harry understood the Twins’ reactions. He’d be laughing his head off too if it weren’t sure to devastate his wife and their best friends.

Hang on! They were giggling!

Luna and Parvati couldn’t contain themselves and had collapsed into a fit of giggles. Hermione rolled her eyes and snorted at the ridiculous article before she started to chortle. Fleur’s eyes widened, then she smirked and tittered, shaking her head, as she read through the lunacy.

Daphne was distraught at first. Like Harry, she had been certain the article would upset her friends. She and Harry glanced around the Mingling Table, stunned at all of the mirth, then they peered at each other in surprise. Harry shrugged his shoulders and grimaced.
“If that’s the best Rita Skeeter can come up with, she’s losing her touch Harry.” Hermione giggled, seeing his bewildered expression. “Most wizards ought to know that Parselmouth is snake language... not quite the lurid sex act she’s implying it to be...”

“Yeah...I know,” Harry sighed, “But look at Mr Diggory. A lot of people seem to switch-off when they read stuff in mainstream newspapers. They just assume its true, even if it flies in the face of known scientific facts...”

“I’m sorry Harry,” Hermione frowned, “You’re right of course. It’s just really hard for those of us who know what you’re really like to take this rubbish seriously.”

“You haven’t read today’s Quibbler yet...” Luna began.

While most everyone else was still in the throes of mirth, Harry glanced at the Quibbler’s headline and blinked back the sudden tears.

The Harry We Know

Under the headline was a picture of Daphne, Luna, and Parvati smiling and waving. The article was a series of interviews in which they all described the painful details of their--or in Daphne's case, her sister Astoria's--sexual assaults and how Harry had rescued them.

The second article on the cover was a reprint of the article detailing the facts behind the imprisonment of Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott for the kidnapping and attempted rape of Astoria. And a third article was a detailed interview with the young woman who Harry and Hermione had saved from being raped by Nott’s father and several other Death Eaters at the World Cup.

Ginny dropped her red face in shame when her sharp eyes caught what Harry was reading. Hermione reached across the table and took her hand.

“It’s alright Ginny,” Hermione said quietly so that the Twins--who were still guffawing loudly about Skeeter's article--couldn’t hear, “You don’t have anything to be ashamed about. I just hope one day you’ll be able to talk about it...”

Hermione suddenly stiffened, noticing a beetle sitting on the corner of the table. She gave a big sniff and her eyes narrowed, letting go of Ginny’s hand. Grabbing her cup of tea, Hermione drained it in one gulp, smiling brightly at Harry.

“Just stay there Harry, I’ll be right back...” Hermione stood up with her empty cup in hand, stalked to the end of the table and slammed the cup upside down over the beetle, trapping it inside.

“Do you mind if I have your saucer Luna?” Hermione asked sweetly.

“Of course not Hermione,” Luna shook her head with a surprised look on her face as she passed the saucer to her friend.

Carefully, Hermione slid the cup onto the saucer, keeping the beetle trapped. Then she serenely returned to her seat and sat back down next to Harry. He eyed Hermione questioningly. She gestured towards the cup with the saucer on top and grinned.

“Say hello to Rita Skeeter, Harry!”

~o0o~

Rita Skeeter couldn’t fathom how Hermione Potter had discovered her secret. But that wasn’t her
biggest problem. Her biggest problem was that she now faced Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall, and Madam Pomfrey in a dungeon deep in the bowels of Hogwarts. Judging from violent glares she was receiving from the two witches, Rita decided that Dumbledore was her best bet.

“You can’t keep me trapped here forever you know,” Rita purred, licking her lips and fluttering her eyelashes at the Headmaster, “I promise I’ll behave if...”

“You are very fortunate Ms Skeeter...” the Headmaster interrupted, his voice calm and his gaze frosty, “It was quite crowded in the Great Hall this morning. Someone might have accidentally stepped on you.”

Rita shuddered from a sudden chill when she realised that Dumbledore wasn’t joking. But surely he wouldn’t...

“You are also quite fortunate that I am unwilling to allow Minerva and Poppy to determine your fate,” Dumbledore continued, “They do not look kindly upon the damage you have done to Mr Potter and his wife’s reputations.”

“Nor do I... but I am more forgiving than they are. You will find that we can keep you here quite comfortably for the time-being, until such a time as the Wizengamot sees fit to unseat the current Minister and imprison her for her crimes--unless she perishes first. At that point, you shall be released under a binding magical oath to henceforth only publish factual information without spin.”

“Until then, the House-Elves of Hogwarts will look after you. They have been ordered to do you no harm--which is good, because many of them are quite friendly with the Potters who treat them very well.”

“You would do well to remember that this cell is enchanted to prevent animagus transformations. Though should the enchantment waver, you should also know that the House Elves are very fastidious when it comes to pest control--and I may have forgotten to mention your animagus form to them...”

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Preferring to stay away from the crowds milling around the Hogwarts grounds, the Unaffiliated relaxed in the Room of Requirement, which was currently doing a remarkably good impression of a sunny beach in the Bahamas. It wasn’t perfect, but like the enchanted ceiling in the Great Hall, it was a reasonable facsimile. Harry dipped one of his Rune tattoo brushes into the Rune Ink which he had brought and began to tattoo Hermione. Fleur sighed contentedly when Harry’s brushes touched her skin.

“Ooooh... that tickles,” giggled Parvati, when Harry started to ink her taut belly with one of the brushes after he had finished with Hermione and Fleur, “What are you doing me for?”

“Hmmm... I’d say I don’t trust you Parvati, but that could be taken the wrong way,” Harry smirked. “In fact, I rather trust that you and Luna have every intention of sneaking into the maze under the hedge while everybody’s attention is focused on the gate...”

Parvati groaned at being caught out.

“I told you we should have said something Parvati,” Luna grinned.

“Daphne, I expect you have ideas too,” Harry continued, “But we need someone to remain outside to stay in contact with if necessary. I’m going to give you my hand-mirror and Hermione will keep
Daphne pouted at being the one to be left outside, as she had made a pact with Parvati and Luna to sneak under the hedge with them. But she resigned herself, realising that Harry had taken charge of the situation.

“I don’t recognise some of these runes Harry,” Hermione remarked as she examined herself in a mirror which the Room had conjured up for Harry’s purpose.

“That’s because some of them aren’t Norse Runes.” Harry replied, “They weren’t in standard texts. I found some symbols in a book of ancient Greek Magic from the restricted section just a few days ago.”

“Judging from the layers of dust, I don’t think anybody has looked in the book for a hundred years or more. You were really busy rereading the book of Asian Monsters and also researching Incan Mummies at the time—just in case the Ministry got really creative...”

“I don’t know for certain if they’ll work, but they ought to. One set of symbols is supposed to protect us from the Gorgon’s Gaze, and another set should protect us from Manticore venom. I have some bezoars in a little pouch too in case an Acromantula or Skrewt gets one of us, but they may not work for Manticore venom which can kill you nearly instantaneously if you get hit with its stinger.

“The Egyptian Mummy wards you already know—those are the ones the Egyptian Ministry uses to keep the Mummies locked in their tombs. The Norse Runes are just the standards for Fire and Cold though... There weren’t any that would scare away Skrewts or Acromantulas...”

~o0o~

Hermione stood still and quiet under the invisibility cloak next to Harry and Fleur by the gate to the maze, though it wasn’t really necessary as the noise of the crowd in the stands and the ominous purple shadows of dusk provided distraction and cover.

Only Mad Eye appeared able to see her, but he winked and said nothing. Percy Weasley smirked nastily at Harry from his seat in the judge’s station as Bagman counted down. Bagman grinned when he fired sparks from the starting wand, certain that this time he would hit the jackpot, but if not, he knew the Ministry’s coffers would cover his losses.

Trepidation set in as Harry darted into the maze with his invisible Hermione, followed closely behind by Fleur. Cautiously the three of them crept down the aisle until they were enveloped by the dark shadows of the hedges, over six metres tall, and they waited...
Chapter 81

On the farthest side of maze a large black dog peered around carefully until he was certain that nobody was watching. Assured, the canine wriggled under the canopy of the hedge. He emerged panting on the other side. He looked both ways down the dark path, sniffed the air, and picked a direction.

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While everyone’s attention—including the Aurors who were securing the tournament—was focused on Viktor and Cedric at the gate, two lissome cat-like silhouettes slunk into the shadows at the side of the maze. Both of them wriggled through the gnarled trunks and branches under the thick foliage of the hedge. Gasping, covered in scratches, twigs caught in their furry tails, they emerged several metres behind Harry, Hermione, and Fleur.

“Oh, good, Parvati, Luna, you made it,” Hermione whispered as she whirled around to hug the other two cat-witches, tugging off the invisibility cloak and stashing it in her sweatshirt. Hermione's dilated pupils, like those of the other two cat-witches, glowed in the wandlight.

“And zere are Viktor and Cedric,” Fleur breathed a sigh of relief. Once the team was assembled, they slipped into the next ring of the maze.

“Right,” said Harry, taking the lead as his wand spun in the palm of his hand and shimmied to a stop, “The Goblet is supposed to be in the centre, and according to my wand, we should head this direction.”

Everyone murmured their assent and warily, the seven young wizards stole deeper into the maze.

The hedge came alive with a rush of wind as they passed into the third ring and the entrance closed behind them. Fleur uttered a small scream as tendrils and branches seized her and lashed out at Cedric, whipping around his ankles. Viktor dodged just in time.

“Relashio,” Harry shouted to little effect as his heart thudded.

“Lumos Solem,” Hermione squealed. Her wand light flared and pierced the darkness. The bushes trembled, releasing Fleur and Cedric.

“Devil’s Snare...” Hermione gasped, “Or rather, a hybrid form of it. Thank goodness it still reacted to the...”

Hermione was cut off by a skittering sound, and the group of wizards immediately took position in formation, backs to each other and wands out, as they had planned ahead of time. The sound was coming from several directions. Luna’s cat-eyes were the first to spot one of the skrewts scuttling towards them while it was still in shadow.

“Aim for the underbellies...” Harry yelled as several more emerged from the darkness.

Cedric and Viktor panicked and fired stunners at the one hurtling towards them, but the red bolts of lightning glanced off its shell. Harry waited until the one approaching him reared and he slashed his wand at its underside. The sectumsempra opened a long gash and the skrewt’s entrails spilled out as it shrieked and expired.

Fleur shot a firebolt from her hands at the one approaching from her side. The skrewt shrugged it off
and kept coming. It reared its tail to sting and briefly exposed its undercarriage as it lifted its front pincers, she shot another burst of plasma, hotter than before. It hit the belly and the skrewt exploded.

Viktor got himself back under control and slashed his wand, as Harry had taught him, at the Skrewt lunging at Cedric. He gasped in relief when sectumsempra worked and severed one of the Skrewt's legs. He whipped his wand several more times; the limbless Skrewt screeched, shooting a burst of flame as Cedric rolled backwards and slashed at its underside with the cutting curse. The Hufflepuff staggered to his feet in satisfaction as the crablike monster shuddered and died.

“Lookout...” Parvati shouted as a mist settled over the Hufflepuff.

Cedric screamed in agony as his skin blistered and burned, erupting in boils. Parvati and Luna lunged for Cedric’s feet as he collapsed and dragged him away from the mist. Hermione twirled her wand.

“A vortex of air burst from Hermione's wand and swept the mist away. Harry fell beside Cedric and pulled a bezoar out of his pouch; shoving it into the Hufflepuff’s foaming mouth. Cedric’s shaking gradually eased, and his rolling eyes cleared. The bezoar had stopped the Poison Mist from killing Cedric, but it was clear that he was too badly injured to continue. A stinking pus oozed from his blisters and boils.

Harry grabbed Cedric’s wand and fired the Golden Sparks into the night sky which gave a professor permission to apparate through the wards to retrieve the fallen student. Hermione and the cat-witches darted into the shadows as Professor Sprout apparated to Cedric’s side.

“Thank you three for staying with him... You truly embody the spirit of Champions,” the Professor gasped as she held her pupil and disapparated.

“We’d better get a move-on,” Harry groaned.

After several wrong turns, the young wizards finally discovered the entrance of the fourth ring. The six of them jogged down the paths until they spied the entrance to the fifth ring ahead. Hermione discerned the dark shadowy figures of numerous enormous spiders in the blackness before they emerged into the wandlight.

Harry knew this was bad; dozens of Acromantulas surrounded them. Stunners worked, but there were too many. He fired a bombarda maxima killing seven of them and scattering many others. Fleur’s fireballs took out eight. Viktor slashed his wand angrily and six acromantulas collapsed, screaming.

Hermione, Luna, and Parvati took out countless more with reductos and bombardas. The rest finally scattered.

“Keep your eyes peeled. They’ll probably regroup,” Harry gasped, his heart pounding, sweat dripping from his forehead.

The entrance of the fifth ring closed behind them, trapping the champions and their companions with the Chimaera. The creature pounced, opening it’s lion-like maw and a burst of flame poured forth. The wizards all dispersed and Viktor went down when the beast’s dragon tail slammed into the side of his skull, knocking him to the ground.

Luna was closest to him, her fluffy white tail quivering in fright. Thankfully Viktor was still breathing. Luna dragged Viktor into the bushes and fired his wand. Karkaroff appeared seconds
later, grabbing Viktor and Luna both when he saw the others fighting the Chimaera.

“Thank you for protecting Viktor. You are very brave, but you cannot stay,” the Durmstrang headmaster stated firmly. “It is too dangerous.” Luna struggled to get back to her other friends, but Karkaroff vanished with both students in his clutches.

Hermione and Parvati drew the Chimaera’s attention while Harry and Fleur circled behind the monster. As it lunged towards the two cat-witches, The two remaining champions whipped their wands. The Chimaera roared in agony as it fell apart at the seams, blood and viscera spilling onto the ground.

The four of them had barely stumbled into the sixth ring, out of breath and shaking, when the Gorgon attacked, hissing and slithering. Its massive tail whipped against Fleur’s legs and she fell screaming as they broke. The Gorgon was shocked that the humans had survived its gaze and it lunged at Hermione.

Hermione shot a reducto, but the spell had no effect on the creature and every serpent on its head opened its mouth in laughter as it cackled.

Tears streamed down Parvati’s cheeks. Her satiny black tail curled around Fleur protectively and she wailed as she shot Fleur’s wand into the night sky. Parvati didn’t resist when Madame Maxime swept her and Fleur both into her arms and disapparated.

As the Gorgon bore down again on Hermione, Harry’s head throbbed, and his stomach tightened painfully in rage. He steadied himself and utilised the spell which had thus far been one of the most effective.

With one clean swipe of his wand, the Gorgon’s head parted from its body and flew, tumbling, its mouth agape in a silent shriek, serpents flailing. The torso and tail of the Gorgon thrashed and writhed violently for nearly a full minute, spraying blood everywhere from its gaping neck, before it gave one final twitch and stilled forever.

Trembling in fear and anger, Harry ran over and embraced his wife who was shaking and crying, covered in the Gorgon’s blood. They held each other silently, kneeling in the slick stained grass, and both slowly began to calm. But Hermione’s breath quickened again as she sensed Acromantulas approaching once more.

“We’ve got to go Harry,” she gasped, pulling him to his feet. Hermione’s bushy tail, sticky with blood, whisked in agitation.

Together, they ran down the paths breathing heavily until they found the aisle which led to the centre of the maze. They groaned to see another skrewt in their path and twenty Acromantulas swarming behind them. Hermione fired a bombarda maxima at the arachnids while Harry slashed his wand at the Skrewt.

The Skrewt’s limbs separated from its body. Harry fired a reducto at its belly when it flipped on its back. Harry whirled around and joined his wife in firing bombardas until every enormous spider had been blown to smithereens. Without waiting to see if more would be coming they ran towards the centre of the maze which was bathed in the pale blue light of the goblet’s flames.

As the gap in the hedge closed behind them, Harry sighed wearily in recognition of the Manticore guarding the goblet. The enormous human-like head grinned as its lion body paced and scorpion tail unfurled. Harry slashed his wand but the creature was too fast.
“Foolish boy, you didn’t think the Minister would save the least for last did you?” the beast laughed, as it circled the two young wizards. Furiously, Harry whipped his wand several more times while Hermione fired reducto. The Manticore dodged every spell.

Harry’s blood turned to ice in his veins when the creature laughed again.

“Hahahahahahaha... I am the King in this Realm. My power is no longer bound by magical oath. The Dark Witch freed me to do as I will. All she asked for in return was your death. A simple...”

The Manticore's taunts were interrupted by a ferocious outburst of barking as a large black dog lunged at the monster.

“Sirius... NO!” Hermione screamed, furry ears flattening in terror as the beast’s fangs sank into Sirius’s neck.

But the distraction was all that Harry needed. In a blaze of fury, Harry whipped and slashed his wand until the manticore was a bloody pile of flesh. Padfoot choked on his own blood as the two young wizards fell at his side.

“SIRIUS! Please... don’t die,” Harry broke, hot tears streaking the dirt and blood on his cheeks. Harry bent over Sirius and sobbed.

Slowly, with careful deliberation, Padfoot morphed back into human form, the punctures in his neck shrinking.

“What? Sirius...” Harry gasped.

“It’s alright,” Sirius coughed and spat out some more blood as Harry tearfully looked on in disbelief. “I’ll be fine. It’s very difficult, but for animagi, it is possible to heal an injury from one form when transforming into the other...”

Harry sighed happily as relief flooded through him. Sirius was going to live. But something still wasn’t quite right. The first thing that Harry noticed was Sirius’s breath clouding, then he felt the bitter chill in the air and the grass whitened as ice crystals crept along the blades.

“Dementors!” Harry whispered as the tears on his cheeks froze. He should have known that the Minister would have a fallback plan.

The three of them looked up at the dark cloudy sky and their faces dropped. There had to be more than 200 wraiths drifting towards them, silhouetted against the quarter-moon.

Harry looked at his wife and took her hand, a flood of emotion filling him, the memories of the last playful encounter with their lovers vivid in their minds and hearts. Harry grinned, knowing that it wasn’t over, that the Minister wasn’t going to win this way. Hermione smiled back, furry ears twitching happily, cracking the frozen blood on her face.

Together they raised their wands and shouted the incantation.

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!”

The White Etheric Lion and Lioness sprang forth and flew into the midst of the Dementors as pulses of Blinding Magic lit up the Night Sky.

The first pulse of light stunned the Dementors; the second pulse trapped them, frozen in its matrix. The Dementors quivered and vibrated when the third pulse enveloped him. The fourth pulse hit
them and all of the Dementors shattered; the shards falling like black hail on the wizards in the clearing at the centre of the maze.

Sirius was shocked beyond measure as the pieces of black ice struck the ground around them and melted.

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Albus Dumbledore sprang to his feet enraged when he spied the Dementor Swarm invading the Hogwarts grounds, heading for the centre of the maze.

Wards be damned! He would destroy them all to get to his students before the Dementors did, even if he had to kill Bagman and the Triwizard Commission Members to do it. Dumbledore hauled Bagman sputtering to his feet and pressed the point of his wand to the whimpering wizard’s temple while Percy Weasley cowered in his seat.

“Release the wards now...” the Headmaster uttered softly, dangerously.

“Look...” shouted one of the onlookers. The Headmaster’s jaw dropped as he peered out over the maze.

“Something’s happening...”

“What is it?”

The crowd began to murmur in astonishment and a thrill swept through them when the sky lit up explosively four times in succession as a pair of ghostly white creatures spiraled up through the swarm of Dementors. When it was finished, all that remained was a precipitation glittering in the sliver of moonlight peeking from behind the clouds.

The Headmaster let Bagman collapse at his feet as warmth filled him. Albus realised that he had just witnessed not only the most powerful patronus charms in modern history, but quite likely the source of the magical power surges in Hogwarts.

Quite simply, it was unheard of for a normal patronus to actually destroy Dementors.
Minister Dolores Umbridge shattered every single last one of her collectible pink kitten plates against her pink pin-striped wall.

“I HATE CATS!!!” the enraged witch screamed at the shards littering the pink shag carpet in her office.

Dolores fumed, wishing she had more plates to break. She knew that somehow Harry Potter's continued survival had something to do with the halfbreed cat-witch, Hermione Potter. Dolores decided then and there that she much preferred dogs. Perhaps it was time to start collecting plates with pictures of pink poodles instead.

Dolores really wanted to sack someone over the turn of events too, but such considerations must not be taken without deliberate calculation. Bagman was the evident choice of course, but by paying off his gambling debts from the Ministry’s vaults, the Minister assured his unwavering commitment, and it really wasn’t his fault after all.

Crouch had already taken himself out of the picture by resigning and checking into St Mungo’s Rehabilitation Centre for Incurable Grief and Alcoholism. That would do, at least in terms of explaining the fiasco of the Tournament itself. That would do nicely indeed.

And Percy Weasley, well he was simply a delightful young man. He was eager to please, sharp as a tack, dedicated to the Ministry, the proper chain of Authority and Order, and of all the Weasleys, he expressed the most pride in his Pureblood Status.

Percy Weasley took great pains to loudly make it known to anyone in his presence how displeased he was with his father’s ways whenever they inadvertently came into contact during the course of the workday at the Ministry. And he had filled in admirably for Crouch at Hogwarts, keeping the Minister apprised of the staff’s routines, habits and overheard conversations.

And it was thanks to Percy’s Patronus that the Minister had been informed so quick off the mark not more than 20 minutes ago of the disastrous conclusion of the Third Task and the Headmaster’s rough treatment of Bagman. If anything, the lad deserved a promotion and a full-paid position in the Ministry.

The Minister had taken far too long to choose a Senior from among her pool of Undersecretaries. No doubt some might raise eyebrows at her choice of an Intern for Senior Undersecretary and Deputy to the Minister, but Dolores was certain that Mr Weasley’s stellar qualifications would put all doubts to rest.

Percy Weasley was quite simply the perfect man for the job, and if all went as swimmingly as she hoped, she could groom him to take her place one day when she was ready for retirement—far in the future of course.

Unfortunately the destruction of nearly 70% of Azkaban’s Dementors left it vulnerable. Someone must be punished. Harry Potter was of course obvious; he would be brought to trial as soon as he returned to Number 4 Privet Drive.

But the Minister was determined to have a sacking, and that left only one other choice—Amelia Bones.
Certainly, it would now be a relatively simple task to convince the Wizengamot that Amelia had to go. The Minister could easily lay the faulty decision to station a majority of Azkaban’s Dementors at Hogwarts for the conclusion of the tournament at Amelia’s feet.

This really was the most suitable arrangement, as Dolores had been seeking a good justification to sack Amelia and put the DMLE under the Minister’s Direct Authority for some time. And now, the Minister also finally had an excellent reason to bring Harry Potter to justice for his crimes against the Natural Order of Things.

Dolores had no idea how Harry Potter had wiped out the Dementors. A patronus charm was merely a shield which could protect one from the effects of maybe a dozen Dementors at best; and many adult wizards couldn’t even produce a corporeal patronus. Nor had she ever heard of any spell with the effects which Percy Weasley had described.

But that puzzle wasn’t really important at this moment, and the Minister would have to put that aside until she had complete access to Hogwarts. Then perhaps she would be able to unravel the mystery behind what must be a Secret Weapon of the Headmaster’s own devising.

For now, what was most important was that Harry Potter could be punished.

The Minister cheered up immensely, satisfied that events had actually worked to her best advantage. And as she commanded the Ministry’s House-Elves to bin the debris of her rubbished plates, Dolores Umbridge made a fresh cup of tea, added a splash of Brandy, and perused her Spode Magical Pink Room Collection catalogue, searching for plates featuring Poodles.

~oo0oo~

Remus Lupin embraced Padfoot tearfully, halfheartedly admonishing the black dog which he had sniffed out and discovered curled up in the shadows near the bloodied and thrashed Potters who had collapsed on the ground near the Goblet.

Remus was torn between anger that Padfoot had put himself in harm’s way yet again, and elation at finding him undamaged. And Lupin was more than relieved; he was overjoyed to find the Potters both alive. He had been terrified that he would find their mangled bodies at the conclusion of the task.

How could he possibly be angry with Sirius? If Remus could have controlled his own changes and lycan urges, and passed through the wards, he knew that he would have been there as Moony by Padfoot’s side, doing everything in his power to protect Harry and Hermione. Remus felt a gentle hand on his shoulder, and looked up to see Albus Dumbledore smiling at them both through watery eyes of his own.

“Go with Sirius, Remus.” Albus said tenderly, “Take some time to yourselves. We have everything well in hand here. The Potters appear to be safe and and mostly sound. Poppy will look after them for now.”

Madam Pomfrey apparated the pair of young wizards directly to the infirmary, to avoid a mob scene with the spectators at the gates by the stands. The Headmaster reset Hogwarts’ anti-apparition charms immediately upon his own arrival in the Hospital Wing.

The first thing the Potters did upon escaping Madam Pomfrey’s clutches was rush to Fleur’s bedside. Harry and Hermione both set upon the groggy young witch who was dosed heavily with pain-relief and calming potions, covering her with kisses and tears.
“Fleur...” Harry choked as he stroked her hair and kissed her forehead.

“Are you alright?” Hermione squeezed Fleur’s hand and hugged her carefully, kissing her on the lips.

“Mes Amours...” Fleur murmured as she returned their kisses.

Unable to hold themselves back, Daphne, Parvati, and Luna--who had all been hovering around Fleur until the arrival of Harry and Hermione--flung themselves on the Potters.

“I’m so happy you’re alright Harry!” Daphne exclaimed between sobs and she kissed him wetly, before turning to Hermione and kissing her as well, “I couldn’t bear it... I thought you were dying...” Daphne wailed, kissing Hermione again as Parvati and Luna were now tearily embracing Harry.

“Ahem... come along girls...” Madam Pomfrey interrupted, blushing furiously at the rather openly sultry displays of affection, “there will be plenty of time for that later. Both of the Potters should be in bed themselves...”

Poppy sighed as the girls took it upon themselves to act as her ‘nurses,’ tucking Harry and Hermione into a single bed. With a groan, Madam Pomfrey waved her wand and the bed widened so that there would be enough room for the young married couple.

Poppy’s eyes narrowed when she spied Cedric and Viktor grinning and smirking at the scene, both with their own girlfriends sitting beside them. With another big sigh, Pomfrey waved her wand again and a single curtain drew around both the Potters’ bed and Fleur’s to give them all a bit of privacy.

Poppy let out one more sigh--this time of relief--as the hospital wing became much quieter due to the silencing charms on the curtain. Poppy scowled at Albus, his eyes twinkling merrily, as if daring him to disturb her patients and their loved ones. Minerva had already fled the infirmary in discomfort at all of the commotion.

“It’s alright Poppy,” Albus chuckled softly, “I’m leaving now. Any ‘debriefings’ can wait for a day or so. I think everyone has earned a good rest.”

“And where do you think you’re going young lady?” Poppy snapped when Nymphadora Tonks stumbled into the infirmary past Dumbledore as he sauntered out of the door.

“Er...” was the best Dora could manage.

In truth, Dora had rushed up to the hospital wing in a panic, uncertain as to what had become of the Potters. Like everyone else, she had witnessed the astonishing light show in the night sky above the maze, but had no idea what had occurred. She couldn’t make out the details of the ghostly entities flying into the midst of the Dementors and feared the worst.

By the time the frightened young metamorphmagus had squeezed through the crowd up to the gate, Mad Eye informed Tonks that he had no idea regarding the Potters’ medical condition, but that Poppy had already collected them.

During Order meetings, Dora often found herself very close to Poppy when Sirius or Remus weren’t around--they were the only ones who “got” her. But back at Hogwarts, here in the Hospital Wing, Poppy was Madam Pomfrey, Ruler of her Domain. Dora couldn’t help feeling out-of-sorts, like an awkward schoolgirl again as Madam Pomfrey glared at the intruder.

“Dumbledore’s orders... protection,” Auror-in-Training Tonks made-up on the spot as she tried to calm herself, glowering back at Madam Pomfrey.
“Bah! Go on then...” Poppy huffed crossly.

Once she was behind the curtain with the Unaffiliated, Dora breathed a huge sigh of relief to see that everyone was alive and more or less in one piece. Overcome with happiness, blinking back tears, Dora suddenly realised that she didn’t feel any less the schoolgirl around this lot. But Dora felt much less out-of-place in their presence than she did in the Auror Corps or the Order of the Phoenix.

Madam Pomfrey threw up her hands in exasperation and headed back to her office for supplies to clean up the Potters’ minor injuries and relieve their discomforts, and to retrieve a bottle of Skelegro for Fleur.

~o0o~

The Dark Lord had been most annoyed when the first day of summer came and went; Goyle and Crabbe still had not returned from the Caucasus region. Fortunately Greyback and his pack had done well keeping the Dark Witch and her Ministry at bay. Fenrir’s obliviation of Avery had clearly taken well enough to prevent him from revealing Voldemort’s location.

Finally, early in the morning of June 24th, Goyle arrived with good news.

A phalanx of sixteen Giants which had been brought across the North Sea on a captured Russian Freighter were now awaiting the Dark Lord’s commands on an Orkney island very near to Azkaban. The Giants had been eager to leave the mountains of central Eurasia with the promise of starting a new colony in Northern Britain.

MacNair had captured and imperiused nearly 30 mountain trolls over the last few months, and he was waiting in an isolated natural harbour near Inverness where the freighter would pick them up. The Dark Lord made some final preparations with Wormtail and they departed for the Scottish coast.

It was nearly 9 pm on the 24th when Voldemort, Wormtail, Goyle and MacNair boarded the freighter with nearly 40 werewolves, the trolls, and twenty lesser-wizard recruits—which Voldemort had taken to calling “Snatchers.” Once they were well underway and nearing the island on which the Giants and Crabbe waited, the Dark Lord sent a message to a group of Snatchers which he had stationed in London to create mayhem in Piccadilly Circus and Diagon Alley, and on the Millennium Bridge, during the assault upon Azkaban.
Chapter 83

Silence echoed through the manor, but the naked teenage girl trembling in the basement hardly dared to hope. Not more than an hour before, she had heard that horrifying... thing, the monster with no nose and red eyes, shouting at his followers to hurry up and get a move-on.

There had been a lot of clattering and banging of doors, then many loud cracking sounds, and after that... nothing. She waited, sure that it was too good to be true, dreading the return of the slovenly balding fat creep with the long pointy nose, crooked teeth, and far too much ear hair.

The girl shuddered in revulsion, her flesh crawling at the memory of his calloused touch, his unkempt fingernails, unable to get the stink of his breath, which seemed to hover long after he was gone, out of her nose.

When the revolting older man whom she had come to think of as “Ratface” didn’t arrive at the usual time for what he liked to call “playtime,” she decided to take a chance. Her breathing quickened in trepidation as her bare feet padded up the steps to the door leading to the kitchen. Thankfully, though her wrists were still bound together by steel cuffs, Ratface had left the chain which often kept one ankle shackled to the concrete pillar undone--for good behaviour he had said.

Heart pounding, certain that it would be locked, she tried the handle. She was stunned when it swung open. Hurriedly, she ran up the stairs to her room and pulled on some panties and a pair of jeans. Hands shaking, she picked up the phone and dialed the police as she started to sob with a release of pent up fear and grief...

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The stolen Russian freighter crested over the storm surge as lightning lit up the decks, water streaming from the bow of the vessel. The ship dipped as it tilted into the valley of the next wave and many Snatchers lost their dinners while the Lycans jeered at their weakness.

Wormtail groaned as the freighter drew closer to Azkaban and he remembered that he had forgotten the girl and left the basement unlocked. He had just undone the lock when he had been distracted by a scuffle between one of the werewolves and a Snatcher, and then the Dark Lord had said it was time to go.

Storming the fortress proved much easier than the Dark Lord had imagined. The iron gates crumpled like tissue paper in the hands of the giants and the Aurors were no match for the Dark Lord’s forces. The lucky ones fell to the wizards’ avada kedavra curses. Those who were not so lucky screamed as they were torn apart by the Lycans and the Trolls.

There were barely a few more than a hundred Dementors hovering around the ancient keep, far too few; the Dark Lord was puzzled but not altogether displeased at the turn of events. Dozens of the wraiths hissed at the intruders and vanished, heading for London to answer the heed of the Dark Witch, abandoning the rest to their fate.

Those that remained gathered near the Rune-Wall as the Dark Lord approached and bowed. Only a wizard could release them from the magic which bound them to this fortress, allowing them access to human souls beyond the walls of Azkaban, and the ones which stayed had made their choice. Voldemort’s features broke into an evil grin. At least, of those Dementors which he had numbered, the Dark Lord and the Dark Witch were evenly matched.
As the prisoners were released, the Dark Lord counted his supporters. Antonin Dolohov grinned and bowed to his Master, as did Thorfinn Rowle. Mulciber and Travers were shaken awake, their eyes widening in surprise as they prostrated themselves, begging forgiveness for their failures; Nott and his son followed suit when they were dragged trembling from their cells.

Rabastan Lestrange and his brother Rodolphus stood straight and tall with thin smiles on their lips as they re-pledged their troth. Bellatrix Lestrange stretched and yawned, gazing languidly at the Dark Lord when one of the trolls ripped her cell door from its hinges.

“What took you so long?” she purred, bat her eyelashes as a smile crept to her lips. “I’ve been waiting for you...”

Voldemort chuckled softly and shook his head. Bellatrix was ever the same, her dark libido undaunted by years among the Dementors.

“What of Lucius?” inquired the Dark Lord, “His failures have earned him a punishment. And where is his son Draco? I was given to understand that he too had been sent to Azkaban, but neither are to be found.”

“The Minister has them,” Bellatrix cackled and leered, “Apparently that witch has had designs on Lucius for years. She visited numerous times before finally obtaining his release some weeks ago. She bribed the Aurors on duty. Lucius belongs to her now... He appeared most grateful--spineless coward that he is.”

Voldemort chuckled again and nodded.

“So be it. Lucius shall meet the same fate as all who have betrayed me then,” the Dark Lord sneered, “And Rookwood?”

“He was the first to go to her side when she claimed him as one of her own,” Bellatrix replied.

The Dark Lord frowned. That was a shame; Rookwood had been one of his best agents. Still, he would have been useless as a spy this late in the game.

The rest of the prisoners were released and added to the ranks of the Snatchers. One of them was making a fuss though and broke formation, falling at the Dark Lord’s feet.

“Please, my Lord,” the once quite handsome fellow begged, his golden curls now bedraggled and frayed, “I have skills... I can be much more useful as a Death Eater. I’m... I’m quite good at Obliviation Charms and Interrogations.”

~00o~

Bellatrix smirked at Wormtail as she strode through the fortress by his and the Dark Lord’s side.

She could see the change in the Rodent, wrought by his claiming of Power. He wasn’t the weak little thing she had surmised him to be when he had begged to join the ranks of the Death Eaters and offered up the Potters as the price of admission. Like herself and their Master, he seemed quite at ease walking among the Dementors.

Bellatrix decided that Wormtail would make a far better General than the coward Lucius, or Severus, whom she had always suspected to be a traitor. Bellatrix did not begrudge the Rat his status, as the Dark Lord had finally agreed to take her as his Dark Consort when they returned to the Mainland.

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The Minister had just placed an order for 20 collectible plates featuring Puppies—they weren't Poodles, but they would do—from Spode's Magical Division by owl when the first memo from the DMLE arrived. London was under attack. Scowling, Minister Umbridge decided that Muggle London could hang for now. She had already warned the Prime Minister of potential terror attacks by Voldemort, and he had assured her that as long as he himself was protected, he could turn any such situation into a political advantage for them both.

She was certain that at this very moment Azkaban was also under attack, but Minister Umbridge sighed in relief, secure in the knowledge that Lucius and his son were safe at her home, still recovering from the withering effects of the cold, damp, and malnutrition. Fortunately, the effects of the Dementors didn't seem to have damaged their mental state greatly. They had apparently been sustained by their fury and hate for Harry Potter, which had overridden their fears and despairs.

The Minister was surprised at how little the Dementors affected herself anymore. Upon her last visit to Azkaban, her Patronus had sputtered and vanished, but she found that she no-longer required it. Dolores almost felt at home amongst them. She tapped one of the rune-stones which she had taken from the Auror sentry at Azkaban whom she had bribed on her last visit with her wand, knowing that the Dementors would answer her call.

If Voldemort wanted Azkaban, he could have it for now, but the Dementors were hers to command directly; no more would the Minister be forced to supplicate herself to the Head of the DMLE for access, and soon the rest of the DMLE would belong to Dolores as well.

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The Headmaster had the worst headache he could recall having in some years—the worst one since the night Lily and James Potter died. Albus had been getting them with some regularity again over the last year and a half. He almost asked Poppy for a pain potion, but he needed his wits about him. A hot cup of Chamomile Tea would have to suffice.

Albus didn’t even know why he had the headache. It was not as if he had been surprised by last night’s turn of events; in fact, over the last year and a half, he had been more correct in his educated speculations than ever he had been in the preceding years. Albus supposed it was the price he had to pay for being attentive to details which he had been wrong about for so long.

He had been very nearly absolutely wrong in how he had dealt with Harry Potter and his connection to Voldemort for the first 12 and a half years of the boy’s life—or rather, the 11 and a half years since his parents' murder. Albus sighed as he took a sip of tea. Now that Albus was nearly absolutely correct in his assessments, over the course of the year and a half since Hermione Potter's transformation, NOW he got the headaches.

He reread the Daily Prophet Article and sighed again. Dumbledore considered releasing Rita Skeeter and forcing her to give evidence under Veritaserum to the Wizengamot, though it would likely be a futile endeavour as the Minister had turned the Wizengamot against him. Albus narrowed his eyes as he read between the lines and considered the implications of the slight change of tone of the Ministry's Mouthpiece. The current article, while clearly still favouring the Minister’s views, was written in a much more straightforward manner. It was becoming increasingly evident that there was far more to the “Gossip Columnist” and unregistered animagus than met the eye.

~o0o~

Rita was hopeful when Albus Dumbledore entered her cell the morning following the Third Task. She had not been expecting to see Dumbledore at all anytime soon; perhaps he was in a more reasonable mood. Rita’s hope turned to puzzlement though when the Headmaster of Hogwarts was
followed into the room by Severus Snape,

“Good morning Ms Skeeter,” Dumbledore began amiably enough, “I am going to ask you a few questions, and how you answer them could go a long way to assuaging my concerns and ensuring your timely release. Professor Snape has kindly agreed to provide some Veritaserum to aid you in providing truthful details if necessary.”

That wasn’t good. Not good at all.

“Really Dumbledore, surely you don’t think that I am in a position to lie to you...”

“Don’t play games Ms Skeeter...” Dumbledore cut across her, his tone becoming colder as his piercing blue eyes bore into hers, “You are a remarkably good Occlumens; skilled enough to protect your secrets, but not at all adequate enough to hide the fact that you are a liar... a very well paid liar.”

“The question which comes to mind is who is actually paying you? The focus of your propagandistic “gossip columns” seem to have rather a lot of political import for someone alleging to be more interested in celebrity worship....”

The hairs on Rita’s neck rose; she licked her lips nervously. Surely the Headmaster was speculating. She would have to bluff as much as she could, but her options were running out.

“So tell me Ms Skeeter, how long have you been an Unspeakable? When did you begin working directly for Minister Umbridge? And how much do you know about the Minister’s connection to the assassination of Cornelius Fudge and her attempts on the Potters’ lives?”

Rita’s blood ran cold and her breath quickened in fear. It was impossible for Dumbledore to know, yet the directness with which he asserted the “questions” was authoritative. She swallowed anxiously and replied truthfully.

“You won’t need the Veritaserum. I'll tell you all I know,” she gasped as her eyes widened, “But whatever you do, please--you can’t release me, or blow my cover while the Minister is in power. If you do, I’m as good as dead...”

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It had been a long night for Fleur, but the Potters had left their own bed to cuddle her as she sobbed, fighting the racks of pain caused by the reknitting of the bones in her legs.

It was true that Madam Pomfrey could “mend bones in seconds” for nice clean breaks, but too many bones had been shattered by the Gorgon’s tail, and several had had to be removed and regrown overnight. Fleur was sleeping soundly now as the bones had finally completed growing shortly before dawn and Madam Pomfrey had felt that it was finally safe to give her a sleeping draught and send the Potters back to their own bed.

“I’m so sorry Harry,” Hermione cried into his chest, her tears soaking his pyjama top.

Harry pulled Hermione closer, stroked her furry ears and kissed her bushy head, perplexed.

“Whatever for Hermione? Fleur’s fine now...”

“Last schoolyear... I...I never realised...” Hermione sobbed, “You had to have 33 bones regrown. Because of L... L... Lockhart. You must have been in so much pain... and n...nobody was w... w...with you, except for Dobby... And... and I was so dismissive...” she wailed inconsolably.
“Sssssh...Hermione, it’s alright...” Harry replied as tears filled his own eyes. It broke his heart for him to see Hermione feeling so awful. “Please... I was fine. It wasn’t as bad for me--I swear... I got over it... I love you Hermione!”

Harry held her tightly in both arms and gently rocked her, but Hermione couldn’t stop crying and berating herself.

“Bloody Lockhart! I hate that evil twisted bastard....” Hermione wailed, “I didn't know that he was raping students and obliviating them until after you turned him in for sexually harassing me in class and Dumbledore sent him to Azkaban...” Hermione's sobbing grew louder,“I had no idea... I had no idea...”

Hermione began breathing rapidly. Harry was desperate; he knew it was because Hermione felt dreadful for having been fooled by Lockhart's charms, and he had to stop this before it went any further. He needed Madam Pomfrey but he couldn't leave Hermione. Fleur was fast asleep. Harry grabbed a vial each of the calming draughts and sleeping draughts next to her bed.

“Please, Hermione, you have to stop. You're hyperventilating... Swallow this...”

Harry tipped the calming draught into Hermione's mouth. She sputtered and coughed, dribbling some onto his pyjama top, but it began to take effect after 30 seconds and her breathing slowed. When her eyes started to glaze, Harry knew it was safe to give her the sleeping draught.

Harry took Hermione's lips in his own and kissed her tenderly as she gazed gratefully into Harry's liquid green eyes.

“Th...thank you Harry! I love you so much....” Hermione murmured as she drifted into a dreamless sleep.

Moments later a distraught, bleary eyed Poppy Pomfrey burst through the curtain with more calming and sleeping draughts. She took one look at Hermione asleep in Harry's arms and relaxed.

“Oh... I'm so sorry Mr Potter. I...I dozed off and it took a bit for the monitor to wake me. You had better get some sleep yourself though.”

The tears had blurred Harry's own red bleary eyes, but his stomach rumbled as he spied the rays of the morning sun peeking over the top of the mountains and streaming in through the window between the Potters' bed and Fleur's. He hadn't eaten since yesterday morning, having been too anxious for lunch or the early feast just before dusk.

“Thanks Madam Pomfrey. I'll do that, but maybe it would be alright if I had some breakfast first.”

“Of course Mr Potter. I'll send for a House Elf immediately.”

Several minutes later there was a cracking sound and a teary Dobby appeared with a tray piled high with pancakes, fried eggs, boiled eggs, scrambled eggs, sausage, bacon, ham, chips, baked beans, toast, crumpets, pots of jam, steaming bowls of porridge and a pot of tea. Harry couldn't help himself, he began to chuckle and it felt good to have a laugh.

“Is Master Harry alright Sir?” the bewildered House-Elf squeaked. “Master Harry and Mistress Hermione and Mistress Delacour must be regaining their strength Sir.”

“It... it's just... a bit much really. Hermione and Fleur are both asleep finally, and will be for a while.”

“Oh... That doesn't matter Master Harry Sir. Breakfast will stay hot and fresh until Mistress
Hermione and Mistress Delacour are awake sir. Dobby is just very happy that Master Harry and his Mistresses is alive and wants to make sure you has everything you needs Sir.”

Harry thanked Dobby profusely and gave him a hug, which set the House-Elf to bawling almost as loudly as Hermione had been. He shook his head as the happily weeping House-Elf disapparated, chuckling again as the House-Elf had recently taken to calling all of the Unaffiliated Harry's “Mistresses.”

Shortly after he began eating, Hedwig swept into the hospital wing and dropped the morning paper on the bedside table. Harry stroked Hedwig’s feathers and gazed into her doleful eyes.

“You too? Hermione and I are alright... really. ”

Harry buttered some toast for Hedwig and began to read the paper, his eyes widening at the headline. He had expected to see something about the Third Task, not this.

Terror in London and the Fall of Azkaban

DMLE Head Sacked
Harry woke when he felt lips pressed against his. He blinked slowly and stirred as a second pair of lips kissed him. Two soft figures snuggled against him, filling him with warmth.

“Merci, Mon Cher...” Fleur murmured, running her fingers through Harry’s mess of hair. “Breakfast was vairy nice.”

“Thank you Harry,” Hermione kissed him again and smiled, her own fingers trailing across his chest. “It was lovely. I feel much better now.”

Harry sat up grinning and stretched, putting one arm around his wife and the other around Fleur.

“What time is it?” Harry asked after returning their kisses.

“About 2:30 pm Harry. Madam Pomfrey says we can finish recuperating in our quarters now,” Hermione replied. “Fleur and I woke a couple of hours ago and ate the breakfast that you had Dobby bring us. But Madam Pomfrey said to let you sleep a bit more.”

“Ze Headmaster, ‘e came to visit,” Fleur mentioned, “He said zat we--all of us, ze Unaffiliated--should meet him in his office later zis evening...”

~o0o~

Headmaster Dumbledore smiled, his eyes sparkling as he gazed warmly at the six students seated in cozy armchairs before his desk shortly after the conclusion of the feast. But he blushed as he pondered how best to reveal his reasons for inviting Harry, his wife, and their girlfriends to his office.

Fawkes fluttered his wings and uttered a soft musical note of encouragement. Feeling all eyes expectantly upon him, Dumbledore sobered slightly as he considered the dark news that required him to make the odd request. He cleared his throat and began.

“Ahem... thank you all for coming tonight. I suppose I should begin by expressing my delight that you, Harry, and your wife and Miss Delacour, are safely still among us at the conclusion of the Tournament--and that the rest of you are safe and sound as well.” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled as he peered at Parvati, Luna, and Daphne.

“And I should also express the gratitude of myself, Professor Sprout, Headmaster Karkaroff, and Madame Maxime for the solidarity and bravery displayed by every last one of you.”

Daphne flushed and flickered her lashes, casting her eyes down.

“Yes, even you Miss Greengrass.” Dumbledore continued, “I have no doubt that had Mr Potter not requested you remain as his outside contact, that you would have been among the rest of the Champions. And truly, you should ALL consider yourselves as Champions.”

“Along with Mr Krum and Mr Diggory, you have all demonstrated the courage and generosity necessary for the bonds of friendship which will see us all through the dark times ahead of us,” the Headmaster sighed, his features taking on a more serious expression. “I would that these ties have been forged under better circumstances, but I could not be more proud of you all. And I would like to congratulate Mr Potter for being the Finalist of the Tournament”

The Headmaster paused as the Unaffiliated glanced at each other and turned pink, the cat-witches’
furry ears and tails twitching shyly. Harry swallowed and met Albus’s eyes, feeling an odd mix of joy and trepidation; his heart swelled and his stomach tightened.

“Thank you Sir! I’m just happy that we all made it through alive--I really don’t care who won.”

“Indeed,” the Headmaster replied softly, “That is why I am especially proud of you Harry. You not only found the Courage and Fortitude necessary to see your own way through these deadly tasks, but you also displayed Leadership, Kindness, and Generosity of Spirit, seeing everyone safely through the tournament.”

“And as I have already stated, these are the qualities we shall all need in abundance in the times we face ahead of us. You have all displayed these qualities... and much more--and that is why I find myself in the position of requesting that you all remain at Hogwarts this summer...”

Harry’s jaw dropped and the girls uttered a collective gasp.

“Many people witnessed what happened above the maze Harry,” the Headmaster’s gaze caught Harry’s eyes again, “But of all the witnesses, I believe that I may be the only one who has an inkling of what actually occurred.”

“Sir?” Harry peered questioningly back into the Headmaster’s eyes, knowing that Professor Dumbledore would have some answers for his unspoken quandary. He allowed the Headmaster to reach into his mind for the answers which he himself could not find.

The Headmaster smiled in satisfaction and blushed again at the confirmation he found. His eyes twinkled again as he steeled his nerves.

“Well... this is indeed an awkward position for a Headmaster to be in... Let me explain. Harry, you and your wife did in fact generate a dual patronus charm. A most powerful, and most unusual form of patronus charm--a charm fueled by a most potent Love--and perhaps a bit more...”

“A very odd series of events occurred during dinner the night before last, and also during dinner several months ago... a magical ‘power surge’ of sorts caused the lights to go out in Hogwarts--not to mention giving the House-Elves quite a lot of chandeliers, lamps, crystal vases, and mirrors to repair...”

The Unaffiliated all turned crimson in embarrassment and squirmed guiltily in their seats as the Headmaster pushed forth.

“I must say Harry, I am quite impressed at the loyalty you inspire. Neither Alastor or Nymphadora saw fit to reveal the location of your secret training exercises to anyone, including myself. In any case, it would appear that your... erm... exploits in the watery crystalline environment conjured by the magical room transferred the magic released by said exploits throughout the foundation of Hogwarts itself.”

“Wait... are you saying that the water and the crystal chamber of the fairy grotto acted as a sort of magical conductor?” Hermione asked in astonishment, embarrassment temporarily forgotten.

“In a manner of speaking, much as if an electrical charge had been introduced to a pool of saltwater...” the Headmaster replied.

“So that’s why we didn’t all have to actually to be touching at the same time, unlike when we’re in our private chambers,” Harry mused. “The water connected us...”

“...and transferred the energy into the Room of Requirement...” Hermione continued excitedly.
“...releasing eet into ze vairy walls of ‘ogwarts eetself...” gasped Fleur.

“But how does that explain what our patronuses did Sir?” Harry asked, puzzled.

“It does not,” the Headmaster responded, “That only explains how the... er... Sex-Magic was so easily transferred between yourselves and throughout the entire castle.”

“What happened to the Dementors can only be explained by the fact that somehow, the extremely high magical frequencies produced by your loving sexual encounters, were amplified and multiplied a thousandfold by the strength of your bonds of affection for one another.”

“But Sir... doesn’t that fly in the face of Magical Core Theory?” Hermione queried.

“Yes, it does indeed Mrs Potter! But then I’ve never been satisfied that said theory held much water anyway.” Dumbledore punned, eliciting a groan from Parvati as her furry ears twitched mirthfully.

Luna whisked her fluffy white tail and listened attentively, her limpid eyes bulging as she soaked up the new information. Daphne too, focused intensely on the conversation, not wanting to miss a word.

“Wizards--as living biological entities--are to be more properly regarded as generators of magic, they are not like batteries to be filled and depleted, and magic does not fundamentally behave like electricity, though electricity itself can be viewed as a much lower order or frequency of magic...” Dumbledore continued.

“Magic is like the Force, isn’t it!?” Harry stated with exhilaration. Hermione’s eyes widened, and she nodded. The rest of the wizards--even Dumbledore--peered at Harry in bewilderment.

“Er... sorry. It’s an idea from a muggle entertainment, a film called Star Wars. ‘The Force’ is sort of a primary ‘energy field’ which everything is built on--supposedly it flows between everything and is always present, but is also generated by all living beings...”

“Ah, yes Harry,” the Headmaster nodded, “Indeed. Magic follows Intent, and it can only do so because Magic is always extant, a priori, and always surrounds us. The strength and power of magic spells are based primarily on the ability of a wizard to direct the flow of Magic. That ability is hampered when the mind is unfocused or when the Will is weak.”

“And when people are physically ill, injured, weakened, or unhappy, they are less able to focus their Intent, and can sometimes lose their Will altogether--making it impossible for them to perform even the simplest of charms until such a time as they have recovered themselves. However, that is not all there is to the matter. There is also Light and Dark...”

“Just like in Star Wars...” Harry grinned. Hermione giggled, her furry ears twitching, bushy tail twirling happily; she pounced proudly on her husband and kissed him on the cheek.

“Quite,” responded Dumbledore in amusement, “In any case, there are many frequencies of ‘Light,’ and it is not known if there is any upper limit. As I pointed out moments ago, electromagnetic fields can themselves be considered extremely low frequencies of magic.”

Hermione frowned thoughtfully; one thing was still bothering her.

“Why does magic still interfere with electricity then?” she asked, “When Harry and I installed a television and a computer at our home in London last summer, we had to magically enchant them so that they could operate without it.”

Dumbledore considered the question briefly before responding,
“There was a wizard whose life spanned the turn of the last century--skilled in both alchemy and muggle engineering--who was snubbed by both the Wizarding world and the Muggle world for his ideas regarding the hierarchy of resonant frequencies, and the amplification and transmission of electricity and magic. His name was Nikola Tesla.”

“In his view, and in mine, higher frequencies could produce powerful and unpredictable effects hitherto undiscovered by those of us working with lower orders of energy. Higher orders of magical energy operate far above lower orders like electricity, but as electricity is still a form of magical energy, those higher energies can still create havoc with the lower energies in regions where the generation of magic is highly concentrated.”

“You yourselves, in your loving sexual encounters generated magic of such high frequency and power that it interfered with the magic of Hogwarts. However, the magic of Hogwarts—with each ‘system reboot’ as it were--was able to adapt to it and absorb it, bringing up the levels of order and strengthening the magic of the entire school...”

“What the Sword of Gryffindor...” Hermione gasped.

“...Hogwarts imbibes what makes it stronger...” Harry continued, his eyes shining. Hermione went on, as full understanding began to flood her brain.

“...and because we ALL love each other without reserve or jealousy--rather than some of us just loving Harry and some of us just loving Fleur, for example--the mathematic level of the frequency and power must increase on some sort of logarithmic exponential scale.”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore nodded at Hermione, “I myself, have only ever detected echoes of frequencies similar to those generated by yourselves at long dead ancient sites dedicated to witchcraft, and in a very few currently operational magical schools of witchcraft in the Orient where the power levels are very high.”

“It is a very rare gift to love without reserve or jealousy--not at all common to our species, and perhaps even less so in the male of our species--though some might debate that. If there were even one among you who harboured doubts about the others during your...sessions, the release of magic would be of a far lower order, and very likely have very little effect at all on your surrounds.”

“I believe, Mrs Potter, that it is due to the very rare levels of Unconditional Love and the mutual activities in your charming little group that you and Harry were able to generate Patronuses of such high frequencies and intensity that they displayed hitherto unknown effects...”

The Headmaster paused, and turned the deepest shade of red yet when he continued.

“And that is why I find myself in the very uncomfortable position--as an adult charged with your safety and education--of asking you all to remain at Hogwarts for the summer, and of encouraging you to continue engaging in your rather precocious behaviours together...”
Minerva’s knees felt wobbly as a wave of faintness swept over her. She nearly collapsed but Poppy caught Minerva and set her gently in one of the comfy armchairs. Poppy rolled her eyes at the distraught professor, sitting down in the chair next to her.

“Really Albus, what were you thinking?” Minerva gasped, her visage flustered in outrage.

“I am considering the safety of this school, and every student in it,” Albus retorted calmly, “This school is the last, best magical sanctuary in Britain should it come to an open battle with Voldemort’s forces, and also if Britain—under the auspices of the current Minister—should fall into the sort of horror which Nazi Occupied Europe faced with Grindelwald and Hitler.”

“But surely... it isn’t the place of Teachers and Headmasters to have any say one way or the other in the consensual sexual activities of the students—that’s entirely for the parents to decide...” Minerva argued heatedly.

“And under normal circumstances I would agree completely Minerva,” Albus sighed, “However these are NOT normal circumstances, besides which...”

Poppy nodded in agreement as Minerva cut across Dumbledore.

“And what about the parents? How do you think Mr Lovegood, the Patils, and the Greengrasses will feel?” McGonagall snapped.

“I spoke to all of them briefly last night after the girls were brought out of the maze, and then again at length in private after the Potters were retrieved at the conclusion of the Third Task...” the headmaster responded as the professor interrupted again.

“And they were alright with it...?” Minerva gasped in shock, her voice squeaking as it shifted into an upper register.

“I must confess that there was some awkwardness, though surprisingly, most of it from my side of things,” Albus replied, “Naturally, everyone was quite concerned that their daughters had been caught up in the Third Task, and felt it necessary to address the possible reasons why they had done so.”

“I was not at all surprised that Mr and Mrs Greengrass--after searching everywhere in the stands, and upon finally discovering their daughter with Misses Patil and Lovegood at Miss Delacour’s bedside--would demand a complete explanation from her. But I must admit that I was quite stunned to witness their quiet acceptance of their daughter’s confession to have been engaged in intimate relations with the rest of the Unaffiliated.”

“I was far less surprised by the acceptance of the Patils and Mr Lovegood, as they have all been recently considering allowing their daughters to marry each other, young as they are...”

“Oh really Minerva!” Poppy groused, rolling her eyes again, as the other gave a little shriek of distress. “Surely you remember how it was during the last war. Everyone is more concerned that their children find some measure of love and happiness in the bleak, while they still have the opportunity...” Poppy’s voice caught, and a tear rolled down one cheek, “…because goodness
knows—it could be their last such...

“And of course, Miss Delacour is free to make her own decisions, as she is over the age of consent in her home-country,” Albus continued, “Try to remember Minerva, that all of these families committed themselves to the Order because they came to see what outstanding young people the Potters are, through the Potters’ defence of their daughters, and they have come to see how much their daughters love them.”

“They are willing to accept what everyone agrees is quite an unusual situation. Shall we do any less?” the Headmaster concluded softly, tears glistening in his own eyes.

Professor McGonagall looked suitably chastened as the sobering facts caught up with her.

“But please,” Albus implored quietly, “I must ask both of you to refrain from speaking openly of the details behind the Unaffiliated joining us here at Hogwarts for the summer with anyone else—including our friends in the Order. As far as they are concerned, please just tell everyone that it is merely for the students’ own safety as close friends of the Potters—which ultimately it is.”

“It is extremely important that nobody else knows what actually occurred to the Dementors if we wish to maintain an advantage against the Minister, and just as importantly, I wish to maintain at least some modicum of dignity for the young women and their families.”

“I have only told the two of you, because I trust you both the most to care for their intimate needs and look out for their interests. Though I am quite certain that Nymphadora already knows, as she has taken it upon herself to become their Protector and Confidant. She is, after all, much closer to them in age and orientation than the rest of us in the Order.”


After Poppy and Minerva departed his office, Albus sighed with relief that the day was drawing to a close and poured himself a snifter of Brandy from a two hundred year old bottle of Dragon Barrel. He felt reasonably satisfied that he had made the right decisions today.

Albus had ended term a few days early to allow time for all of the students to gradually depart for their homes through the Staff-Room Floo, having decided that it would not be wise to tempt Voldemort with the easy target that a train or a railway station full of Hogwarts students would present. Nor would it do to give the Minister an opportunity for a provocateur action while she had Voldemort as a convenient scapegoat.

That was the most pressing concern; one which would have to take precedence this summer for the Order of the Phoenix. Tom Riddle needed to be finished before the Minister could use him as an excuse for her own campaign of terror which Albus sensed brewing in the offing.

After the feast, before his chat with the Unaffiliated and then with Minerva and Poppy, the Headmaster had made his end of term speech and warned all of the students about the troubles in the wizard world with the return of Voldemort. Though he had taken care to avoid details, he had also warned against the machinations of the Ministry and the growing “darkness within.”

Albus swirled the Brandy, inhaling the fruity aroma, and took a sip. He thought about the long day ahead of him on the morrow, sighed, and drained his goblet in one gulp before saying goodnight to Fawkes.

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The next morning, Harry packed a few books and some of his clothes in a bag while Hermione gathered a few of her own things together in preparation to spend one week at Number 12 in London before returning to Hogwarts for the rest of the summer. At the end of the meeting last night, Dumbledore had reminded Harry that it was still necessary for him to spend some time in a home which was also the residence of his Aunt Petunia while Voldemort remained at large.

Harry glanced at Hermione. She looked a bit sad, but Harry thought he knew why. The rest of the Unaffiliated were staying behind at Hogwarts until she and Harry returned.

“It’ll only be a week until we see everyone again Hermione,” Harry assured her, “And you’ll get to see your mum again tonight when we go home after the Order meeting at Madam Black’s house.”

“You’re right Harry,” Hermione’s features brightened, “I just wish we could bring everyone with us.”

“Me too,” Harry agreed, “But it’ll be too crowded at the moment with Petunia and Dudley and your mum and your Auntie and Abby Brixton... And Mad Eye has already moved in with Madam Bones and Susan.”

Hermione nodded, her furry ears and tail twitched happily as she took Harry in her arms and melted in his glittering green eyes, reminded of everything she loved about him.

“It was very sweet of you to let Madam Bones bring Susan to Number 12, Harry--they’ve lost so much family to Voldemort. And I suppose we’ll have Dora to keep us company too...”

~o0o~

Albus faced the largest gathering of Order members since the last war, many more than the Inner Circle. There were a number of old members, and there were more than a few new ones, including the Patils, the Greengrasses, Mr Lovegood, and Narcissa Black, in whose home they were meeting.

Olympe Maxime had always been a valued ally, but she had insisted on full participation and Albus could never refuse her anything, and in any case she was now also acting as Monsieur Delacour’s liaison. The biggest surprise new member besides Narcissa Black was Igor Karkaroff, who had made an Unbreakable Vow to demonstrate his gratitude and resolve--truly remarkable. Albus had never imagined that Igor had it in him, and shook his head in amazement at yet another life turned around for the better by the vicissitudes of fate since Hermione Potter's potions accident.

All things considered, given the large amount of members, the meeting was going fairly smoothly, despite the bombshells and interruptions.

Amelia Bones had begun by informing Harry that while she was being sacked, she had learned that the Wizengamot had set a trial date for Harry to face charges of destroying 227 Dementors. The gathering had broken into quite a hubbub for a short time.

“That’s bloody ridiculous,” snapped Sirius, “They’ll never be able to prove that a Patronus killed the Dementors. Everyone knows that’s impossible. I saw what happened to those wraiths, and I know that was no Patronus that did it...”

Harry felt a bit awkward. He wanted to tell Sirius what he and the Unaffiliated had learned through their conversation with Dumbledore last night. But he couldn’t say anything in the middle of an Order meeting.

“It must have been some sort of coincidence.” Sirius continued to rage, “Something very strange had to have been happening at the same time. Maybe the Minister herself deployed some sort of secret
weapon developed by Unspeakables to set Harry up. And how can anyone be held criminally liable for killing creatures which are legally determined ‘non-beings’ anyway...?”

Amelia Bones arched one eyebrow and sighed.

“The Minister is determined to at least give it a go, and given her sway, all she needs is two or three votes on the current Wizengamot. Some of the ‘wobblies’ may see that as a mere technicality Sirius...”

Sirius snorted, his face twisted in outrage, but he nodded, understanding all too well the trouble Harry faced.

“Right then. Well there’s only one thing for it Harry,” Sirius began, as he handed Harry a card, “You’ll need a lawyer, as Dumbledore won’t have any pull with the Wizengamot at the moment. Ragnok is the best. He is a Solicitor Advocate for Gringotts and he’s done some occasional work for other members of the Order in a bind...”

Mundungus Fletcher had a coughing fit further down the table and Amelia’s eyes narrowed in distaste.

“Blimey ‘arry,” Hagrid gasped, clapping Harry on the back comfortingly “ ‘oever heard o’ such a thing...? Tryin’ ye fer doin’ somethin’ impossible fer any wizard to do. Don’ worry though. I’m sure ye’ll get off... Obviously ye didn’t do nothin’ yerself...”

“Thanks Hagrid, I appreciate it...” Harry grimaced, wincing at Hagrid’s “comforting” pat.

“Oi! Watch it Hagrid, you don’t know your own strength sometimes...” Dora glared at Hagrid, peeling his dustbin-lid sized hand from Harry’s shoulders.

“Oh... er... right Tonks!” Hagrid’s face fell. “Sorry Harry!”

In truth, it hadn’t really been that painful, but Harry still couldn’t help flinching when adults touched him. He relaxed considerably when Dora rubbed his shoulders where Hagrid had walloped him.

“Better...?” she asked.

“Loads, thanks Dora,” Harry replied. He gave Hagrid a proper smile, “It’s alright Hagrid. I’ll be fine... just a bit stiff from the Third Task still,” he fibbed, not wanting Hagrid to feel badly. Hagrid’s features brightened.

Hermione squeezed Harry’s hand, curling her tail around his waist a bit tighter, and smiled gratefully at Dora. There were so many at the Order meeting, some of whom Harry had never even met before. Hermione could feel the agitation and anxiety rolling off Harry in waves, and lessening under Dora’s touch.

The rest of the Unaffiliated were down at the far end of the table watching, and looking rather nervous themselves. Harry had been invited to sit at the head of the table with Dumbledore for the portion of the meeting which concerned Harry the most.

“I’ll be part of Harry’s escort,” Dora said firmly to Amelia Bones and Dumbledore. “I won’t put in my resignation until after the trial and I get Harry back outta the Ministry safely. But I’ll need someone else I can trust who ‘asn’t been sacked yet...” Dora peered at Mad Eye who grunted, “...or also resigned ‘in protest’ yet,” Dora narrowed her eyes angrily at Shacklebolt and Dawlish.

“Tonks, The Minister already suspects that we are too close to Amelia, and therefore too close to
Dumbledore,” Shacklebolt sighed, “We would be useless to the Order as Ministry employees…”

“How about Auror Mulligan?” Amelia offered, “He’s still loyal to me, and he’s Abby’s partner—well, was Abby’s partner. She resigned too as she’s a muggleborn and is currently looking after the Potters’ immediate families. It’s safer for all of them that way. But I am absolutely certain that Reynard still has standing in the Auror Corps.”

“Right then. He’ll do,” Dora agreed.

Amelia Bones and Albus Dumbledore exchanged glances and the Headmaster nodded his approval.

Harry let out a sigh of relief when the meeting moved on to the next point of business, arranging security for Mr Lovegood and the Quibbler, and for the School’s Board of Governors. Hermione and Dora quietly departed with Harry from the head of the table and went to sit with the rest of the Unaffiliated.

The Unaffiliated were surprised when Madam Longbottom asked the Headmaster to also allow Neville to return to Hogwarts for the summer out of concern for his safety. When Dumbledore agreed, Molly stewed for several minutes. Finally, making what was clearly a difficult decision, Molly begged Albus to keep her only daughter safe at Hogwarts for the summer too.

~o0o~

Daphne, Luna, Parvati, and Fleur, all gave the Potters and Dora chaste hugs as they said their goodbyes at the end of the Order meeting. Remus and Sirius both embraced Harry and Hermione, promising to see them again in a week’s time.

The Potters and Dora prepared to step into Narcissa Black’s hearth, back to the Hogwarts Staff-Room, to depart from there back to their own home at Number 12, when Mr Greengrass caught Harry’s eye.

Harry felt extremely uncomfortable under Mr Greengrass’s gaze. Harry knew that Daphne had spilled the beans about her intimacies with him and Hermione and the rest of the Unaffiliated, and he had a bad feeling that Mr Greengrass might be really angry with him.

“It’s alright Harry,” Hermione whispered in his ear as she held him close, her furry tail curled over his shoulder, “He’s not cross with you...”

But Harry still wasn’t convinced; the blood rushed in his ears, his breath quickened, and his palms began to sweat as Mr Greengrass strode over to him.

Mr Greengrass’s features were calm and even, but there was a glint of moisture in one of his eyes. He clasped Harry’s hand in one of his own.

“I will always be indebted to you Mr Potter. Daphne loves you and your wife very much—and the rest of your friends too. I admit, I don’t quite understand what you all have together. But my wife and I have spoken with the Headmaster at length in private, and we agree that there is something very special about your relationships which must be protected and nurtured. I fully support his decision to keep you all safe at Hogwarts with the rest of the professors this summer.”

“Please continue to look after Daphne well when you return from visiting your Aunt... I promise, I shall do everything I can in the Wizengamot to support you during your trial. And if you win—when you win—you should take the seat which rightfully belongs to you as the Warlock of your House. It will make a bold statement.”
Harry tried to speak, but found that he had lost his voice. He nodded vigorously and shook Mr Greengrass’s hand. Tears slid down Hermione’s cheeks and she bit her lip. Harry finally managed to croak out a few words.

“Thank you sir... I’ll do that... I promise too--Hermione and I will always look after Daphne... We both love her loads...”

With one final glance at their friends, Harry smiled anxiously and followed Hermione and Dora into the green flames.

Chapter End Notes

And thus concludes Part 2

Thanks again to the many fans and supporters of this fic. I don't have betas, but I consider all of my prolific reviewers as valued advisers. :-) 

A special shoutout to Man of Constant Sorrow who has been invaluable behind the scenes for pointing out unclear sections for revision and for allowing me to bounce my ideas off of him.

I have been working on Part 3 already, and expect to update the following chapter within the next few days.
Part 3 The Order of Things

Albus Dumbledore regarded Auror Reynard Mulligan and the teenage muggle girl trembling by his side pensively. He glanced at Amelia Bones and sighed. It was still quite early in the morning after the very long Order meeting last night, and Albus hadn’t had his second cup of tea yet.

Amelia pursed her lips; if it were up to her, the girl would already be obliviated and placed in a muggle orphanage. It would be best for the girl and best for the Order. But Albus seemed quite reticent for some reason. Finally, Dumbledore seemed to reach some sort of decision.

“Thank you very much for your service Auror Mulligan,” the headmaster said quietly, “Perhaps I could speak to you again later today about Mr Potter’s trial date. For now, I think Miss Watts will be best served by Madam Pomfrey. If you don’t mind, I think I shall have a private word with Amelia and Miss Watts.”

Mulligan nodded, understanding that he had just been dismissed, but he glanced to Amelia for approval.

“Yes, yes, you may go Reynard,” Amelia sighed. “I’ll sort things out later with the Dorset Police pending Dumbledore’s final decision. Don’t worry about any obliviations as of yet. Just make certain that Auror Sutton sits on them and keeps this away from Ministry eyes for the time being.”

Miss Watts shuddered violently when Mulligan stepped into the fireplace and disappeared into a swirl of green flames. Despite herself, Amelia put her arm around the girl to comfort her.

“There, there, dear. The Headmaster will explain everything to you no doubt...” Amelia tried hard not to roll her eyes. She almost thought she rather preferred the old Dumbledore who played everything close to the vest.

“H...Headmaster?” Miss Watts peered at the colourfully robed old man with a long white beard, and glanced around the bizarrely cluttered office she was in for the umpteenth time. Ever since the man who had introduced himself as an MI5 agent had collected her from the Dorset County Hospital, she had thought she was going mad.

In fact, even before that, she rather thought that her time as Ratface’s plaything had driven her round the bend. Things had happened which weren’t supposed to happen, like people vanishing into thin air and green flames, chains and other objects moving of their own accord or turning into other things at the wave of a wand; but such happenings only belonged in fairy tales surely.

And the portraits on the Headmaster’s office walls watching her--they couldn’t be real.

The man who had brought her here had introduced himself to her as an MI5 agent and spoken of “National Security,” but she had believed that she was imagining things and that he had actually been sent by Mental Health Services to take her to a mental institution for evaluation. Jennifer Watts was under the impression that she was sitting in the office of a psychiatric hospital and hallucinating.

The wizened old man returned her gaze intently with gimlet eyes. After a few minutes his features softened and he responded to her questioning tone with a gentle voice.
“My apologies Miss Watts, would you prefer that I call you Jennifer?”

Jennifer nodded, feeling slightly calmer at being addressed with some familiarity.

“I am not a doctor, Jennifer, I am a Headmaster, and this is a school for children with very unusual abilities. I am very sorry for the loss of your parents and for all that you have endured...” the old man’s voice cracked slightly, and for a moment his features appeared even more ancient as grief crossed them.

“The reason you are here, and no longer in the care of the police or the NHS is because the persons who committed the outrages upon you and your family also have such special abilities. As difficult as this may be to believe, you are not going mad, you and your family were attacked by dark wizards....”

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“Really Albus, did you have to tell the poor girl everything?” Amelia grumbled after Poppy had taken Wormtail’s victim to the hospital wing for an evaluation of her own. “Wouldn’t it have been better for the girl to have got the information we needed and obliviated the poor thing?”

Albus shook his head.

“Perhaps at one time I would have agreed wholeheartedly Amelia, but obliviations are not to be done lightly. No doubt for the foreseeable future it will still often prove to be to the benefit of all to obliviate casual observers for their own protection and ours. But I would rather avoid it when at all possible. Obliviation can be damaging to fragile minds, and Miss Watts’ has endured quite enough strain as it is.”

“Hestia Jones will be more than happy to look after Miss Watts for the time being and make sure that Miss Watts gets the care she needs. The young woman will be safe, and so will our secrets.”

“It is quite a violation of personal sovereignty after all, and I have rather come to think that obliviations ought to be reserved for enemies except under the direst of circumstances or utmost necessity. Remember, this is the Order, not the DMLE Amelia, and I am beginning to believe that our relationships as wizards with the muggle world would benefit from less secrecy rather than more.”

“Having said that, it would be best if the Dorset Police at least had their records altered to remove any indication of Voldemort’s involvement in the crime. No doubt Voldemort is about to commit many more crimes upon muggles and muggleborn wizards, but we can at least protect this one victim from being harmed again by either Voldemort’s forces or the Minister’s.”

“And in the meantime, please look after yourself and the Potters well. As Alastor would say... Constant Vigilance!”

Amelia smiled at Dumbledore's attempt to cheer her up, seeing a twinkle spark in his eye.

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Hermione’s furry ears flicked happily as she woke, her naked body pressed against Harry’s. She had to admit that it felt good to be at home with him again in the bed which they had shared all last summer. Hermione spied Harry’s morning erection tenting the covers and felt his hot breath against her forehead.

Hermione giggled to herself, feeling quite naughty at the idea of waking Harry in the manner which
he enjoyed the most while under the same roof as her mother. The Order meeting had run quite late last night, but Mum had waited up to greet her son-in-law and Hermione when they had returned to Number 12 Grimmauld Place for the first week of summer.

Hermione ducked her bushy head under the covers and wriggled down, taking care not to wake Harry until just the right moment. Gently, Hermione took Harry’s hard penis in her wet mouth and wrapped her lips around it. She felt it twitch as her cat-tongue swirled around the tip and licked the shaft.

Gradually, Hermione pressed forth until she felt the crown of Harry’s stiffness against the back of her throat. Placing her hand softly around the base, Hermione bobbed her head up and down as she began to suck and slurp. She heard a gasp of pleasure, and knew that Harry was awake.

Harry woke with a grin. He loved it when Hermione or the girls roused him like this. It was better than any alarm clock. He supposed that it must be Hermione’s “time of the month” again. No wonder she had been so reticent to leave their girlfriends behind at Hogwarts, even though it would only be a week until they could all be together again.

Hermione’s naked bottom jutted out from under the covers, her bushy ginger tail waving gleefully as he continued to suck him off. Harry brushed his fingers against Hermione’s inner thigh and she trembled slightly at his touch. Hermione parted her thighs with a purr, happily understanding what Harry wanted, and lifted one knee to the other side of Harry’s head.

Harry cradled Hermione’s bottom with both hands and gently pulled her backside down until his lips touched her moist slit. He darted his tongue out and licked the length of her fold before inserting it into her vulva. Hermione’s purring increased as Harry alternated between plunging his tongue into her wet sheath and jiggling it against her clitoris.

Elation surged within Harry as Hermione’s purring vibrated around his erection. His loins felt the urge to move and he began to thrust himself deeper. Feeling Hermione’s lips against his pubes, Harry lost it. With a groan his ejaculating penis began to spurt into her throat.

Harry’s waves of bliss flooded Hermione’s senses. A convulsive charge ripped through her body and she burst with a muffled yowl, her own stickiness squirting onto Harry’s tongue as they both writhed and sparks of magic crackled. The bed shook and the lamp on the nightstand tumbled to the floor and shattered.

Hermione’s head flew out from under the covers and without thinking she sat on Harry’s face in alarm at the knocking on their bedroom door.

“Is everything alright in there,” Jean Granger’s concerned voice called out.

“Y... yes Mum!” Hermione squeaked, Harry’s semen dribbling from her lips. “W... we’re fine. I...er...just knocked over a lamp getting out of bed,” she fibbed.

Jean smiled to herself and shook her head on the other side of the door. Hermione had always been dreadful at lying. Jean sighed as she made her way down the stairs to the kitchen, feeling a swell of awkwardness at having embarrassed her daughter, and no doubt her son-in-law as well.

“I’m so sorry Harry,” Hermione apologised profusely as she leapt up and Harry gasped for air, “I forgot to set a silencing charm on the room. Are you alright?”

Hermione’s expression turned to bewilderment as Harry burst into guffaws.

“Are you joking Hermione?” Harry gasped when he managed to catch a breath, “That was
I haven’t had such a good laugh in ages. But what about you? Are you alright?” he asked, suddenly concerned that Hermione’s feelings might have been hurt.

Half a smirk crept to Hermione’s lips and she giggled, as another wave of naughtiness swept through her. She dragged her husband out of bed and into their private bathroom. The two chortling naked teens set a silencing charm and the steam rose as they turned on the shower.

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The smell of bacon and eggs wafted through Number 12 and the clean, dressed, hungry couple ran all the way down the stairs. Jean glanced up with relief to see Hermione smiling bashfully and Harry grinning when they burst into the kitchen.

“Well, come on, breakfast is ready,” Jean Granger smiled back, “You’d better get a move-on before Dudley smells it and wakes up. That boy has lost a lot of weight and is looking much more fit, but he can still put the food away like there’s no tomorrow...”
“Thank you.” Harry beamed happily at Jean as he ate his breakfast, “It’s lovely, M... er...”

All of a sudden Harry felt very awkward. He wasn’t sure what to call Jean Granger. Calling her “Mrs Granger” didn’t really seem appropriate anymore, as she was in the process of getting divorced. But he still felt too shy to call her Jean.

Jean Granger caught on immediately to Harry’s quandary and her heart melted. Harry was the sweetest boy Jean had ever known and he made Hermione so happy. She just wanted to hug him and make all of his anxiety all go away.

“Why don’t you call me Mum dear!?” Jean said in nearly a whisper as she wiped a tear from one eye, hoping that she hadn’t stepped over a line.

Hermione’s eyes widened and she stopped eating a piece of bacon in mid-bite. Hermione felt the wave of emotion surging inside of Harry; she glanced at him and saw the tears filling his eyes.

Harry gulped. Harry knew then, that was exactly what he wanted to call Jean Granger--her hugs felt like how he imagined hugging his own mother would feel. Harry felt very close to Sirius and Remus, but he still felt uncomfortable hugging even them--and Sirius was the closest person he had to being like a father.

What Harry really wanted was a Mum, but if he couldn’t have his own, now he could at least share Hermione’s.

“I’d like that,” Harry croaked, “Thank you.... thanks for everything--Mum.” Harry pushed his chair back from the table slowly at first, then before he could stop himself he darted around the table and threw his arms around Jean as he lost control of his tears.

“Thanks for letting me be with Hermione...” Harry sniffled, “I love her so much...”

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Petunia smelled the bacon and realised she had overslept. Fortunately it was too early for most teenagers to be awake and Dudley was still asleep. Petunia quietly crept down the stairs and headed for the kitchen. She was about to step through the entrance to the kitchen when she caught the scene. Petunia witnessed everything. Her chest tightened and her stomach lurched. Petunia bit her quavering lip to stifle her own tears and turned to go back up the stairs as quickly as she could. Not wanting to wake Dudley, she tiptoed quickly all the way up the staircase and locked herself in the bathroom on the fourth floor. Unable to contain herself any longer, Petunia began sobbing for Harry and Lily. An image of Vernon forced itself into Petunia’s mind and she began vomiting in the toilet.

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Hermione whirled around in her seat when she sensed Petunia, but Hermione had been too overwhelmed to notice Petunia until she was already gone. Hermione really wanted to hug Harry and her mum, but something was very wrong with Petunia. Hermione spied Petunia at the top the stairs on the uppermost landing just as she entered the bathroom, and she heard the door click shut.

Hoping that Mum and Harry would understand, heart in her throat, Hermione ran up the stairs and knocked on Auntie Joanne’s door.
“What’s wrong dear?” Joanne asked, seeing Hermione’s tears when she opened the door. Joanne was wide awake as she was always up with David, her baby, early every morning; she had just put him down for a bit of a nap after his brekkie.

“It’s Harry’s aunt... Petunia. I think she’s ill. She just ran all the way up to the top floor and locked herself in the bathroom.”

Joanne hadn’t seen Hermione since before her potions accident, nor met Hermione's husband, as she had been asleep when they had both arrived late last night. So it took every effort to not be distracted by the highly agitated wags of Hermione’s bushy ginger cat tail or her twitching furry ears.

Baby David was sleeping soundly in his safety-charmed crib, so he would be fine for the moment. Following her niece, Joanne dashed up the stairs to the bathroom on the fourth floor. Hermione unlocked the door with an alohomora charm when they heard the retching sounds within.

Joanne didn’t much care for Petunia, as they had very different views on things, and Jean had told her of Petunia’s past with Hermione’s husband. But tears sprang to her own eyes at the sight of the sobbing, heaving woman hunched over the loo.

“Oh you poor dear...” Joanne said as soothingly as she could manage, reaching out to Petunia and gently rubbing her back.

Abby Brixton opened her door rubbing her bleary eyes, wondering what all the hullabaloo was about. Her eyes widened in distress when she heard the commotion above and she hurried breathlessly up the stairs. Seeing Petunia’s state, Abby waved her wand with one hand and caught the medicine kit which flew from her room with the other.

“It’s alright you two, I can manage Petunia,” Abby said kindly. “I know you haven’t seen each other in ages. Go on, off to breakfast both of you. Petunia will be alright in a bit, and then I’ll look in on your baby for you Joanne.”

Harry and Jean were both peering up the stairs wondering what on earth was happening by the time Joanne and Hermione traipsed back down towards them.

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Joanne was delighted to finally meet Harry, whom Jean had told her so much about. If Joanne thought it odd that Harry and Hermione were married at such a young age, she did a very good job of keeping it to herself. Like Jean, Joanne was very happy that her niece had found someone who would simply love and accept her for who she was, furry tail and all.

“...and thank you so much for letting us stay here Harry,” Joanne acknowledged appreciatively. “It means a lot to me to know that you invited me and my David to be safe here having never met me.”

Harry squirmed a bit and flushed, smiling awkwardly.

“That’s our Harry for you; ‘e’s a real love like that...” Dora said from the kitchen entrance, catching everyone’s attention.

Dora turned beet red and groaned inwardly at having put her foot in it when the two older women gawked at her in shock.

Jean had only briefly seen the neon-magenta-haired girl when she had stumbled out of the green flames last night with ash-brown hair, and had assumed that the girl was another Hogwarts student invited to stay at Number 12 as Amelia Bones’ niece had been. Jean had been so thrilled to see
Hermione and Harry again that she hadn’t recognised Dora when the girl had arrived as a more naturally shaded brunette.

But now she remembered the girl as the young Auror who had escorted them to and from Hogsmeade’s railway station when Jean had visited Hermione at the beginning of the schoolyear.

“It’s alright Mum!” Hermione rested her hand on Jean’s tensed arm, “Dora is our friend... a friend of both of us. If it weren’t for Dora, Harry and I might never have got through the tournament...”

Harry nodded vigorously in agreement as he started to panic, not trusting himself to say anything.

Hermione introduced Dora properly to her mum and aunt. Everyone began to mellow as Hermione explained how Dora had helped to train them and how they had all become friends. Harry finally relaxed enough to join in and he changed his hair colour to match Hermione’s as a demonstration of his metamorph abilities which he hadn’t had the opportunity to show Jean at Easter.

When Jean looked at Dora again, Dora was anxiously biting her nails and looking very much like the shy schoolgirl Jean had seen tripping out of the hearth last night.

“I’m sorry dear, I didn’t mean to upset you,” Jean said.

“It’s alright Ma’am... I shouldn’t ’ave been so forward,” Dora mumbled. “I’ve been trainin’ to be an Auror since I graduated Hogwarts three years ago--almost to the day. But... but since I’ve been back at Hogwarts this ‘ole past schoolyear with Harry and Hermione, I... er... I suppose I just forgot myself...”

Jean glanced at her sister. Joanne gave Jean an encouraging nod. Jean smiled warmly and patted the hand which Dora still had resting on the table.

“It’s alright Dora, I’m glad you’re Hermione’s friend. Please, call me Jean...”

Harry let out a huge sigh of relief when he saw Dora’s features brighten. He really wanted Hermione’s mum to get on with all of their friends. Harry was just about to mention the upcoming trial, and how Dora was going to escort him when Abby entered the kitchen with baby David in her arms, and Susan and Dudley in tow.

Dudley’s face lit up to see Harry and Hermione again. Joanne scurried across the kitchen to take her baby from Abby’s arms. Susan smiled to see the Potters.

“I’ve put Petunia back to bed for now,” Abby said. “She’ll be okay for the moment... Just go easy on her alright!?” Abby looked pointedly at Jean and Joanne. “I think Petunia’s having a bout of PTSD— that ex of hers was a right monster. And... and I think she’s only just finally starting to come to terms with it...”

Jean and Joanne flushed, both appearing slightly abashed. Dudley shrunk a bit and glanced at his feet. Susan peered at everyone uncertainly, not sure what was happening as she had only arrived yesterday morning with her aunt and Mr Moody.

Harry felt a swell of sadness, wondering if it was his fault somehow. He felt a bit dizzy and rather wanted to go back to bed himself now. This morning was just getting all a bit too much. Hermione comfortingly wrapped her arms and furry tail around Harry, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

“I’ll pop by St Mungo’s later when Moody or Amelia gets back,” Abby continued. “One of the Mind-Healers there may be able to give me some advice. I wish I could do more, but it’s a bit difficult at the moment with us all having to stay under the Ministry’s radar.”
Jean swallowed and stood up, putting a brave face and a smile on for the kids.

“I’ll make us all some more breakfast then shall I? Who wants some bacon then... Dudley?”

Dudley nodded eagerly, his face brightening again.

“I can help...” Dudley offered.

“That’s alright dear. Why don’t you and Susan hang out a bit with Harry and Hermione till I’ve got it ready.”

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Percy Weasley rubbed his hands together gleefully as he began preparing for the trial of Harry Potter. He didn’t care that it was very early Saturday morning and that he had a large stack of Law Books in front of him. Percy had less than a week to prepare.

Percy had been officially sworn in yesterday as the Senior Undersecretary, Deputy to Minister Umbridge, and he was determined to live up to her show of confidence in his abilities. The Minister was an outstanding woman, dedicated to the System and to Order.

It had been Percy’s greatest ambition to be Minister for Magic for as long as he could remember. He had been thrilled when Minister Umbridge had allowed him to take Crouch’s place at the Triwizard Tournament and given him an internship as her Junior Assistant.

Percy had been extremely disappointed in his previous boss, Mr Crouch, whom he had looked up to as a hero. Percy had taken Mr Crouch’s fall from grace as a personal betrayal. But the Minister had shown great forbearance in allowing Mr Crouch to continue for as long as he had. And when the Minister had approached Percy after the mess Mr Crouch had made of the Second Task and the tournament as a whole, Percy had leapt at the chance to take his place.

Now Percy was in a fully-paid position just a heartbeat away from the top job. Finally Percy Weasley had an opportunity to bring some dignity back to the family name, and put Harry Potter in his place. Percy had been exceedingly frustrated by his family’s obsession with Harry Potter.

Harry Potter, who had been thumping his nose at the rules and authority from his very first day in Hogwarts. And yet that old coot Dumbledore had rewarded Potter time and again for his obnoxious behaviour. Without a strict adherence to rules there could be no Order and Chaos would reign supreme. Percy hoped that eventually he and the Minister could get rid of Dumbledore as well as Potter.

It had been bad enough to have to put up with people always mocking the Weasley name because of his father’s obsession with muggles. But when Percy’s father had joined with the Headmaster in supporting Harry Potter’s emancipation and subsequent marriage to the halfbreed, that had been too much to bear.

Hermione Potter! What a disappointment she had turned out to be.

Percy had high hopes for Hermione Granger in her First Year until she had befriended that little hooligan, Harry Potter. And then Percy had discovered that she was a muggleborn. It hadn’t seemed like quite such a big deal at the time, but it had quickly become very apparent after joining the Ministry that it was Percy’s father’s muggle-loving ways which was holding the Weasley family back financially and ruining the Weasley family name.

It had been especially galling when everyone had started telling lies about Percy’s Ravenclaw
girlfriend Penelope Clearwater being a muggleborn, just because she had been seen studying near Granger in the library more than once during the younger witch’s second year at Hogwarts. That had particularly incensed Percy, because there was no way he would have dated anyone of less than Halfblood status.

And to top it off, Granger had deliberately turned herself into a creature, a halfbreed, and married Potter, upending the entire natural order of things.

Percy shuddered in disgust, wondering if he could find a law against that and put her on trial alongside her husband. The Minister was absolutely right; halfbreeds didn't deserve wands or the freedoms of wizards. They were filthy animals which belonged in zoos. Percy cracked his knuckles and began flicking excitedly through the Law Books.
“Thank you for inviting me and Auntie Amelia to stay Harry,” Susan said shyly after breakfast. “Dad and Mum were frightened that You-Know-Who would get us now that he’s back.”

“You’re welcome Susan,” Harry replied. “Madam Bones and Dumbledore told me and Hermione about your parents being in the Order,” his voice cracked, “I... I’m sorry about the rest of your family...”

Susan cast her eyes down and took a deep breath.

“I love Auntie. She’s all I have left besides my parents--but at least I still have mine. I’m sorry about yours Harry. I should have been a bit nicer to you in second year--but Ernie thought you were Slytherin’s Heir... and then this year there was the Triwizard tournament and Cedric...”

“Forget it,” Harry said quickly, “That’s done with. Besides, you and Abbott were the only Puffs who didn’t seem to have it in for me--anyway, Ernie came round eventually. And you’ve always been nice to Hermione.”

“That’s all I care about... really.” Harry glanced at Dudley who was twiddling his thumbs and staring awkwardly at his shoes. “You’ll be nice to Susan over the summer won’t you Dudley?”

Dudley looked up and swallowed, his eyes widening. He nodded.

“Of... of course Harry!” Dudley replied. He paused, but it was clear he had something more to say; Harry waited patiently.

“I...er...erm... I missed you Harry,” Dudley finally blurted out.

Harry was stunned. Dudley looked more embarrassed than Harry had ever seen him.

“...It’ll be nice to have someone else around a bit the rest of the summer,” Dudley mumbled, his face flushing, “I... I know what it’s like not to have any friends now. I promise I’ll be nice to Susan.”

Harry nodded and gulped himself.

“Okay, that’s good then. Thanks Dudley...”

Dudley relaxed and smiled a bit.

“Oh... er... and thanks for telling Abby the magic spell to make my Xbox work when we moved in Hermione. I would’ve gone spare without it. Does anyone fancy a game? Maybe some Resident Evil?” Dudley asked.

Hermione was already perusing the DVD’s and video-games on the coffee table. Giggling, Hermione picked a game up off the table and waved it at Dudley.

“Let’s give this one a go then Dudley...” Hermione said, her bushy cat tail and ears twitching with mirth.

Dudley groaned in embarrassment at having left that one lying about. Harry grinned. The cover of
the video game had a colourful picture of busty girls in skimpy bikinis playing volleyball and riding water scooters, several of them wearing assorted furry tails and ears.

Dora’s eyes popped when she entered the parlour and saw the images on the enormous flat-screen; she felt a little tingle and her heart began to race. Glancing around, all she saw were the teens playing the video game. Joanne must have gone back upstairs with David.

Susan was having a go at the controller and trying different bikinis on the red haired model. Hermione couldn’t stop giggling and Harry was roaring with laughter at the rather extremely jiggling breasts of the digital girls. Dudley palmed his scarlet face, wondering what he’d let himself in for.

“She does look a bit like you...” Hermione said.

“Hermione!” Susan groaned, blushing. “I’m not that big...”

“Go on Susan,” Hermione begged, “Try her bunny outfit and take some pictures of her in the jungle area.”

“Budge over Harry.” Dora grinned and shimmied herself between Harry and Hermione on the sofa. “I want a go at this...”

Half an hour later, Dora had a turn, trying different outfits on the model with mauve hair. She chortled when Hermione egged her to try that model’s raccoon swimsuit.

Hermione of course played one of the characters who had a cat tail and ears. Silly as it was, she much preferred this game to Dudley’s zombie-shooters.

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“Still no sign of any more horcruxes then?” the Headmaster asked the Potions Professor and the grizzled ex-auror who had just returned from examining the estate where Voldemort had been residing for some months.

Severus shook his head and Moody grunted.

“No. I performed a reading,” Severus began, “But Voldemort gave no indication that he is even aware we are onto them...”

“Course that’s not sayin’ much,” Mad Eye snorted. “He’s not bloody likely to be sharing that sort of information with his minions.”

“Indeed,” Severus raised his eyebrows and flared his nostrils at the interruption. “However I was surprised to discover that the ‘Dark Lord’ has made Pettigrew his second in command, and bestowed full Death Eater status on Greyback. Voldemort now has a Lycan clan at his disposal, and of his former supporters who remained at large, only Crabbe, Goyle, and MacNair returned to his side.”

“I was also able to determine that he means to raise an army of Inferi with the aid of Bellatrix whom he intends to make his Consort, and that Golgomath and enough giants to reestablish a colony have been brought back to Britain,” Severus finished.

“According to Mulligan, the Dementors are split on their allegiances more or less evenly between Voldemort and the Minister. And a number of hooligans have been recruited.” Moody added.

The Headmaster sighed as he pondered the implications.
“That is disturbing to say the least,” Dumbledore finally said. “It would appear that as tenuous as they were, Voldemort’s connections to humanity are further disintegrating. Yet he has managed to overcome his reticence to sharing some measure of power with the few of his most devoted supporters who remain in order to advance his own agenda.”

“Voldemort has always been willing to look past his obsession with blood-status and ‘Nobility’ to some degree to achieve his more narcissistic ends. But by isolating him, the Minister has forced Voldemort to attain his goals with the majority of his support coming from Dark non-humans and ‘lesser wizards’ rather than Dark ‘Purebloods.’” A pensive look crossed the Headmaster’s features.

“I suppose that could potentially work to our advantage however.” Dumbledore cryptically concluded.

Severus and Alastor both peered at the Headmaster questioningly, but Albus seemed satisfied to leave it there.

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Hermione was sitting on Harry’s lap with her tail curled around him in a cozy armchair in the library, reading a stack of superhero comics which Dora had given them to read.

“I think you two’ll love these,” Dora had said with a chuckle. “You might like the films too, but the original comics are better...”

Hermione giggled, furry ears twitching cheerily, as Harry carefully turned the page.

“He reminds me of you Harry. He’s got the same round glasses...”

Harry shook his head in amazement and began to feel a bit less ‘freakish.’ Apparently, often feeling like everything was his fault must be a more common trait than he had thought. The boy with a radioactive spider bite had even been raised by his aunt and uncle; at least they had been nice to him though.

Harry laughed and tickled Hermione, causing her to squeal, when they read the next page.

“Yeah... well she reminds me of you...” Harry pointed at the picture of the superhero’s sexy girlfriend in the issue they were reading.

“She doesn’t even have a tail Harry, and her hair is more like Fleur’s...” Hermione stuck her tongue out at Harry, but she squirmed happily on his lap at the favourable comparison nonetheless.

“Maybe so, but the Black Cat makes more sense as Spiderman’s girlfriend than the one who looks like Ginny...” Harry responded, earning himself a rather sultry kiss from Hermione.

A grunt and a cough from the doorway startled them and they both blushed furiously when they spotted Mad Eye grimacing at them.

“You’ll want to be careful with those comics Potter... Tonks won’t take it kindly if you squash them.” Mad Eye chuckled.

“Anyway, I just’ wanted to let you know, I’ll be escorting you to Gringotts on Monday, I’ve made an appointment with Ragnok for you... Right that’s it then! Carry On where you left off...” Mad Eye smirked and stumped down the stairs to the kitchen for a late supper.

Harry waved his wand, shutting and locking the library door behind Moody. Another swish cast a
silencing charm and he placed the comic carefully on the table.

“Harry!” Hermione squealed again and her furry tail flicked excitedly when his lips brushed against her furry ear and his hand slipped under her skirt, “What are you doing?”

“Carrying On!” Harry said airily. “You don’t expect me to disobey a Mad Eye order do you?”

“But everyone’s watching the television in the parlour,” Hermione squeaked as Harry’s fingers reached inside her moistening panties and found her nubbin, “Shouldn’t we go upstairs?”

“Orders are orders Hermione…” Harry grinned; his other hand pushed under her blouse and slid across the smooth taut skin of her abdomen. “And it is our home after all.”

Hermione purred and flushed, grinding her bottom against Harry’s stiffness.

“Honestly Harry, sometimes you are so literal... OH!” Hermione gasped when his fingers entered her wet channel and his thumb rotated her clitoris. His other fingers tweaked her hardened nipples and his lips trailed kisses across the side of her face and neck.

“Mmmhhmmmm…” Harry murmured playfully in response.

Hermione’s spine arched and she butted the side of her head against his own as her purring grew louder. Harry cupped and fondled a breast, gently rolling the nipple between his thumb and forefinger. Hermione’s purrs turned into short little mews of pleasure; her sheath clasped Harry’s fingers and she rippled with a tremor of ecstasy, drenching his hand with her dewiness.

Hermione leaned forward onto the library table, gasping from the orgasm and thrust her bottom and madly waving tail at Harry. Harry pushed her skirt up around her waist and slid her soaked panties to the floor. In a daze, Hermione briefly twisted around to unzip Harry and release his erection from its prison before returning to her position.

Panting, his heart racing, Harry leaned over Hermione’s backside, grasped her hips and plunged the length of his hardness into her crescent valley in one go. Harry was already nearly fit to burst from the delight of bringing Hermione off in his lap, the scent of her pleasure filling him with elation.

Hermione’s purring quickened again as Harry repeatedly drove his penis into her depths from behind, her bushy tail whipping in a frenzy. A tempest of ardour took them both and Hermione yowled.

Harry leaned over Hermione’s backside, groaning as he erupted; a fountain of his hot semen overflowing her chalice and spilling to the library floor as it oozed between her labia stretched tightly around his shaft.

Magic sparked and the library trembled slightly, but Dora’s comics just fluttered lightly, remaining safely on the table.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know DOA Xtreme2 doesn't have the "furry" swimsuits on the cover... It's a bit of Artistic Licence on my part! :D
Sparrows twittered in the birches and butterflies flitted among the wild primrose and azalea by the lake. Several geese flew above the little rowboat floating some distance from the shore. Daphne sighed peacefully, snuggled in Fleur’s arms, basking in the sun.

Both of the girls giggled when all they could see in the boat were two cat tails, a white fluffy one and a shiny black one, waving above the sides as the boat gently rocked. Except for birdsong and the hum of bees, it was quiet on the Hogwarts grounds, and there was something very satisfying about having it nearly all to themselves for the summer. Everything was almost perfect.

“I miss Harry and Hermione,” Daphne murmured.

“As do I, chérie d'amour. But we have each oozzer, no?” Fleur replied.

Daphne smiled. She nodded and melted into Fleur’s crystal blue eyes which were sparkling in the sunlight like the ripples on the surface of the lake. Fleur gently stroked Daphne’s golden hair, her soft pastel lips encircling the younger girl’s.

As Fleur cradled Daphne’s head and the kiss deepened, one of Daphne’s hands brushed across the fabric of Fleur’s blouse and slipped under the hem of her skirt. Fleur gasped when she felt Daphne’s fingers against the silky skin of her lower abdomen. Daphne’s fingers slid down further and pushed under the waistband of Fleur’s panties.

Fleur’s pulse raced as Daphne fondled her moistening slit and flicked her burgeoning clitoris. She released Daphne’s lips and uttered a cry of pleasure, wetly kissing and nuzzling the younger girl’s neck. Pressing her body into Daphne’s, Fleur reciprocated and reached her own hand under Daphne’s skirt between her thighs.

The girls both moaned, writhing together in the mossy grass under the warm rays of sunlight, fingers thrusting inside each other. The birches shook and the leaves trembled in a swirl of air as the passion took them both. Fleur and Daphne gasped and quivered blissfully, soaking each other’s fingers in stickiness.

They lay together dazed, arms still around each other, barely moving except for the rising and falling of their chests as they panted heavily. Finally, after several minutes they fell apart and sighed in contentment, relaxing into the carpet of grass.

Fleur and Daphne’s breaths caught and their eyes widened in shock when they heard a voice and footsteps drawing near.

“I could have sworn I saw them come down this way earlier,” Hestia Jones said, “They’re lovely girls dear. I’m sure they would be happy to show you around a bit and keep you company while you’re staying with me at Hogwarts Jennifer...”

Daphne bit her lip, flushing and groaning in embarrassment as she peered at the wet spots on her and Fleur’s skirts. Fleur put a hand to her own lips to stifle a giggle, and beckoned Daphne, pointing to the bushes nearby. Quickly, they both scrambled under the bushes and covered each other’s mouths.

Their hearts pounded together as one when they spied Hestia and Jennifer’s shoes through the leaves only centimetre’s away.

“Hmmmph... well, never mind dear, I expect we’ll see them at lunchtime. I’ll introduce you then. I
see a little boat on the lake, perhaps they’re all out there...”

The footsteps and Hestia’s voice faded into the distance as she and Jennifer traipsed back up to the castle. Daphne and Fleur burst into giggles at having almost been caught. Daphne was lying on top of Fleur, one knee between Fleur’s thighs, their breasts pressing against each other’s as they gasped in laughter and relief.

“Er... shall we...?” Daphne started to get to her hands and knees to crawl out.

Fleur shook her head and grinned, pulling Daphne back down.

“Non. Stay here, I like zis vairy much Daphne...” Fleur replied as she unbuttoned Daphne’s blouse. Before Daphne had time to register what was happening, her blouse and bra were cast into the underbrush and Fleur’s tongue was flicking a hard pink nipple while her hands tenderly kneaded Daphne’s breasts.

Daphne and Fleur hoped that Hermione and Harry were both alright in London. But temporarily at least, they lost themselves in one another under the canopy of the bushes as they removed every stitch of clothing.

~o0o~

“Oh...Oh...” Parvati moaned, “Don’t stop Luna...” Parvati opened her eyes, blinking in the blinding sunlight, wondering why Luna had stopped.

Luna was sitting straight up on her knees between Parvati’s bare thighs and peering over the side of the boat up at the shore, her furry white ears twitching and fluffy white tail flicking curiously, unconcerned that someone might see her nakedness from land.

“It’s not Nargles again is it?” Parvati asked.

“No silly, Nargles hate the water,” Luna replied. “I heard a voice carry across the lake... I think it was that nice lady from the Order...”

“Do you mean Hestia Jones?” Parvati covered her top breasts with her hands and sat up a bit to have a look as well. Which was quite difficult as Luna was still between her legs and there was no more room in the little boat to move.

“Yes!” Luna nodded, taking a big whiff of air. “I think there was someone else too. I can smell her now... a girl--maybe just a bit older than us, it's hard to tell. I wonder who she is!? I haven’t smelled her before.”

Parvati’s groin was aching from the pulsing sensation which had nowhere to go. Her satiny black cat-tail thwacked in frustration against the side of the boat.

“I’m sure we’ll meet whoever it is at lunchtime Luna.” Parvati moaned.

“You’re probably right Parvati.” Luna started to get back down between Parvati’s naked thighs, but her nose twitched again and she giggled. Parvati raised her eyebrows questioningly.

“Fleur and Daphne,” Luna responded. “They’re having some fun too...”

Parvati grinned, then a pensive look crossed her features.

“I hope Hermione and Harry are alright!?”
“They will be.” Luna reassured Parvati.

“How can you be so certain?”

“Because Daddy says that Gringotts lawyer, Ragnok, has never lost a case before the Wizengamot.”

“Oh... that’s good then... **OH! That’s REALLY good Luna...**” Parvati squealed, her furry black ears flattening, as Luna had decided that the conversation was finished and was burying her cat-tongue inside Parvati’s spasming wet vulva instead.

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“Oh, well done Mr Weasley! This will do very nicely indeed,” Dolores gushed. “I never imagined that you would find charges for Mrs Potter as well, and a new charge for Mr Potter.”

Percy Weasley looked very pleased with himself at having earned such high praise from the Minister. He had been working diligently since Saturday morning and it was Sunday afternoon. Minister Dolores Umbridge had flooed back to her office at the Ministry the moment Percy’s flickering and fading Rat Patronus had arrived and delivered his message.

“I want you to know Mr Weasley,” Dolores continued, “that whatever happens in the Wizengamot on Friday, you will continue to hold my highest regard. The Wizengamot is a political game. It will be up to me to convince those who may be reticent to prosecute the Potters that it is necessary. We will be treading on new legal ground, but the precedents which you have brought to my attention are quite clear. If we fail, it will only be due to the low standards to which far too many on the Wizengamot still hold Mr Potter.”

“Thank you Minister. I understand. The only problem now, is that I’m not certain how to inform Potter and his... er... pet, of the charges.” Percy said with a frown. “Apparently they never returned to Potter’s home at Privet Drive, and that’s the only address which the Ministry has on file.”

The Minister looked pensive for a moment, then she peered apologetically at her Deputy.

“I know this is asking rather a lot of you Mr Weasley, but perhaps you could give the summonses to your father tomorrow morning to deliver to the Potters. From what you have told me of your family’s connections to them, he is sure to know how to reach them.”

Percy’s face darkened at the mention of his father, but he wasn’t about to disappoint the Minister.

“Yes Minister,” Percy replied, nodding briskly, “I’ll do it first thing...”

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Breakfast at Number 12 on Monday was interrupted by the arrival of an extremely flustered Arthur Weasley. He stumbled out of the kitchen floo, coughing and covered in ash, holding two envelopes.

“What’s that you’ve got there Arthur?” growled Mad Eye. “Potter and I are just gettin’ ready to leave for Gringotts...”

“It’s...er... quite awkward really Alastor,” Arthur glanced at Hermione, “I think Mrs Potter’s presence in Ragnok’s office may also be necessitated. The Minister, unable to locate Harry or Mrs Potter in Little Whinging, had my son Percy deliver these to me first thing this morning...”

“Merlin’s bollocks Arthur, get to the bloody point,” snapped Moody, “Just let me see that. Two summonses? We were only expecting one!”
Mad Eye snatched the letters from Arthur’s hand and inspected them with his magical eye for booby traps. His jaw dropped, and silently, his face twisting in anger, he passed one letter to Harry and the other to Hermione.

Frowning, Hermione tore open her envelope and shrieked when she finished reading it.

“H... Harry, it’s a...awful. I can’t believe it.” Hermione passed him the letter, her hand trembling, furry tail quivering and bristling like a porcupine.

“You’re joking!??” Harry gasped furiously when he read the demand for Hermione to appear in court for violating the ban on experimental breeding, illegally marrying a wizard, illegally carrying a wand and worst of all, illegally wearing clothes. His own summons had also added the charge of an illegal marriage to a “Non-Human Being or Beast” to his charges of destroying 227 Dementors.

Hermione was on the verge of a panic attack, and had to be given a calming draught to stop her from hyperventilating.

“This is absolutely disgusting and outrageous!” Jean fumed, reading over Hermione’s summons. “These documents have been signed and approved by a Deputy Minister Percival Ignatius Weasley.”

Jean glared at Arthur Weasley, who looked as if he wanted to crawl into a hole in the ground.

“I...I’m d...d...dreadfully sorry...” Arthur stammered, his face flushed in shame. “I...I only just found out on Friday that my...” Arthur could barely bring himself to say it, “that my...er... son, has been promoted and taken on by the Minister herself.”

“It’s not Mr Weasley’s fault Mum,” Harry said glumly to Jean, “Percy’s never really cared for me more or less since the end of First Year... thought I was a bit of a troublemaker apparently. And when he took over for Mr Crouch at the Triwizard tournament, it was obvious he had it in for me.” Then a flare of rage blazed in Harry's eyes. “I thought he was alright with Hermione though...”

“We'll get this sorted,” Moody interjected, “We’ve got an appointment with Gringott’s Solicitor Advocate at 9:30 anyway...”

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Ragnok peered down his long pointy nose studiously at the summonses and snorted, shaking his head. Taking off his reading glasses, the goblin massaged his forehead then glanced back at the Potters and Moody with raised eyebrows.

“Well, I cannot promise anything in regards to the decision of the Wizengamot Mr and Mrs Potter,” Ragnok said, “Politics plays too large of a role for me to make any guarantees. But I can indeed promise you that the law--as it currently stands--is in your favour.”

“And though the Minister is very close to attaining a majority on the Wizengamot, I daresay she may have overplayed her hand with the ‘wobblies’ by bringing the additional charges against you both.”

Seeing the questioning looks on everyone’s faces, Ragnok steepled his fingers and continued.

“The charge against Mrs Potter of violating the 1965 Ban on Experimental Breeding is a stretch. Thus, attempting to reclassify Mrs Potter as either a ‘Non-Human Magical Being, or Beast’ is a very dubious proposition at best.”

“The statutes the other charges are based on currently apply to Centaurs, Manticores, Trolls, etc in the ‘Beast’ category, or, in the ‘Non-Human Magical Being’ category, House-Elves, Giants,
Vampires, and a few other sentient magical creatures.”

“It is still legal in some countries for Wizards to marry Giants and Vampires for example, but not currently in Britain. Nor are wizards allowed to marry House-Elves—which are only considered fit to be Slaves, and are not allowed to wear clothes.”

“In the 'Non-Human Magical Being' category, Wizards in Britain are only allowed to marry Registered Veela, Registered Werewolves, or Goblins. This is due to Veela and Werewolves being still considered at least 'nearly-human' in their untransformed state, and in the case of Goblins, we are the only other magical beings with near-human-rights in Britain, excepting the use of wands.”

“The marriage laws are really quite arbitrary in regards to which 'Non-Human Magical Beings' Wizards are allowed to marry. Though they are quite clear that marriage is forbidden between Wizards and ALL 'Beasts.' and nearly all Magical Creatures which are incorrectly deemed 'Halfbreeds' by most Wizards--such as Merfolk and Centaurs--due to having part animal and part human appearance, are considered 'Beasts.'”

“Most Beasts are not allowed clothes, excepting occasionally some form of loin-cloth if the Beast is an Enslaved or Indentured Beast and the owner or employer requires it for purposes of modesty when company is present. An example of these are trolls employed for security purposes. Clothes for familiars or pets are strictly forbidden. The single exception to this law are the Merfolk. And Centaurs don't bother with clothes anyway.”

“And as to carrying wands, no Beasts are allowed to carry them. The only exception to this is that the leaders of Merfolk Enclaves are allowed a Magic Staff or Trident. And of the 'Non-Human Magical Beings' only part-Wizard Werewolves and part-Wizard Veela are currently allowed to carry wands while they are in human form, however they are not allowed to carry them in Beast form.”

“The Minister would have to convince a majority of the Wizengamot that Mrs Potter is not human enough for a wand or clothes. The implication being that, while Mr Potter would be within his rights to have taken Mrs Potter as a slave, pet, or familiar, he had no right to marry you.”

Hermione gasped in outrage and Harry’s face contorted angrily.

“So whaddya say Ragnok,” growled Mad Eye, “will you take the case then?”

“Absolutely,” the goblin answered without hesitation, his eyes narrowing, “This is one of the most blatant and egregious cases of discriminatory prosecution I have seen in quite some time. The Minister is clearly planning on using these charges to establish new case laws.”
Jennifer had no idea yet what to make of Hogwarts. Hestia was really kind, but Jennifer missed her parents and she was still frightened. The old Headmaster was nice and talked to her gently, but Jennifer couldn’t bear looking at the male professors, or the boy with the accent who sat by the professor with the long silver hair.

Sometimes she would glance at them, and she couldn’t help but see Ratface’s head on their shoulders. Jennifer would do a double-take, and see that whoever it was, it wasn’t really him, but it was still terrifying. Jennifer grabbed her food and hid in an empty classroom at lunchtime and dinner, unable to sit for one minute in the Great Hall with anyone else.

She had spied the other girls from a distance, but the idea of actually meeting them scared Jennifer. Two of the girls appeared to have furry tails, but the tails didn’t quite register. Jennifer was getting used to the idea of magic being real, but she thought perhaps those tails and ears were fake, like the ones she had worn for Halloween one year when she was 9. Maybe it was just fashionable for some wizard girls. They didn’t really bother Jennifer. They were cute and more surprising than anything, as the girls looked a bit too old for that sort of thing.

It was the idea of being around the girls themselves. What if they didn’t like her? They might think Jennifer was a slag! Jennifer felt humiliated and filthy, as if she was just a worthless whore! Maybe she really was a slut; maybe she deserved to be treated like one. Jennifer didn’t understand why her body had reacted the way it had sometimes. Who would want to be around a slag who had sex with nasty older men?

At breakfast on Monday, Jennifer swiped a plate of food and ran outside before anyone could see her, hiding between some bushes and a low stone wall under a balustrade to eat. When she was finished, she didn’t know what to do next.

Jennifer angrily wiped some tears away. She was tired of crying. Mum and Dad weren’t coming back to make it all better, but she couldn’t help it. The tears kept falling.

She stopped crying suddenly when a pair of big round silvery-grey eyes peered at Jennifer through the leaves, belonging to a delicately featured face framed by dirty-blonde hair and a pair of twitching furry white cat ears. Jennifer started; she froze, not daring to breathe.

The dirty-blonde crawled through the bushes and kneeled in the soil, her fluffy white cat-tail dragging sadly behind her. The girl was slight, almost elfin, like a fairy; she didn’t look more than 12 or 13, and she was wearing a blue dress with a white pinafore.

“They aren’t all horrible,” the girl said quietly.

Jennifer blinked, swallowing uncomfortably, puzzled.

“Boys I mean,” the girl responded.

Jennifer shuddered.

“Well, I suppose a lot of them leave much to be desired. I’m not entirely fond of them myself. But I know one boy in particular who is really sweet... And there’s a few other nice ones too,” the girl replied.

Jennifer thought this was the oddest conversation she had ever had. Odder than the ones with the
Headmaster, who seemed to know what Jennifer was going to say before she said it. Jennifer wasn’t even talking; she had spoken to the Headmaster and to Hestia, but that was only because she knew she was supposed to speak when spoken to by adults who were looking after you. Jennifer couldn’t bring herself to speak to anyone else.

But the dirty-blonde with a very real looking fluffy white cat tail, and very real looking--twitching--furry white cat ears, seemed perfectly keen to carry on a conversation with a mute girl as if she understood the words behind every silent gesture.

Jennifer pulled up her knees to her chest and hugged her arms around them, casting down her eyes, long strands of ebony hair falling in her face.

“My girlfriend was hurt by a boy once too,” the dirty-blonde said sadly. “She couldn't bear to be around any boys for a long time--well, except for the really sweet one I told you about. But she even had a hard time being around him for a bit. Eventually we all had sex together again though.”

Jennifer looked up and gasped at the girl’s bluntness.

“You what?”

“We all had sex together. It was very nice.”

“You... and your girlfriend? Together... with a boy? How old is he?”

“Yes! He’s going to be 14 in a few weeks. We have sex with him and our other two girlfriends and his wife...”

“He’s married...???” Jennifer was floored. This was officially the weirdest conversation she had ever had--with anyone. This beat all of the conversations about magic hollow.

“Yes! She’s really sweet too. She’s already 14. She’ll be 15 just after schoolterm begins. So I suppose you could say that Harry is married to an older woman.” The dirty-blonde girl giggled and her fluffy tail perked up, swishing a bit.

“Is... is that normal--for wizards to get married so young I mean? I’m only 15 myself, and I can’t imagine it.”

“No. It’s very strange for wizards too... but Daddy is thinking of letting me marry my girlfriend. And her parents seem alright with it too. I’m not really sure why though.” The dirty-blonde girl’s tail waved cheerfully, her face shining. “Harry and Hermione eloped after they got emancipated.”

Jennifer couldn’t help herself and curiosity got the better of her. She had wanted to know about how six people could all be in a relationship together, but they had already rushed past that bit of the conversation, and getting married so young seemed even odder somehow.

“Is... is it alright for me to ask why they got emancipated and eloped? You... you don’t have to tell me if it’s a secret.”

“I think it’s alright. Harry and Hermione don’t really talk much about it, but it’s not really a secret, because it’s been in all of the newspapers. It might be a bit scary though, as some of it has to do with Voldemort...”

“Snakeface....” Jennifer trembled, thinking of no-nose and those terrifying red eyes. At least he hadn’t been interested in Jennifer too. Some of the other creeps had, but Ratface had kept her for himself.
“Oh... you’ve heard of him. That makes this a bit easier. He killed Harry’s parents when Harry was a baby...”

“OH!” Jennifer gasped and shuddered violently, tears springing to her eyes again, feeling a sudden connection to a boy she had never met, “He....he killed m...m...my parents too, j...just a few months ago.”

The blonde girl’s fluffy white tail drooped sadly again and her furry ears wilted.

“I’m sorry... should I stop talking?”

“N...no!” Jennifer replied shakily. “I’ll manage...”

“Okay! Anyway, Harry had to live with his dreadful aunt and uncle until about a year and a half ago. Hermione turned into part cat by accident when she took a magic potion...”

“Like you?”

“Sort of, but it wasn’t an accident for me. I’ll get to that bit. Anyway, shortly after that, two things happened to Harry on the same weekend. First, one of Voldemort’s followers actually tried to attack Harry in front of the Minister for Magic....”

“And then it was in all the non-magical newspapers that Harry’s uncle would often beat him badly and take pictures, and that he got caught and sent to prison...”

“Wait!” Jennifer gasped again, putting two and two together. “Sorry to interrupt again, but... but is your Harry... Harry POTTER?”

The blonde cat-girl nodded.

“I can’t believe it, that’s so HORRIBLE!” Jennifer began crying, briefly forgetting her own pain as she remembered the news coverage of Vernon Dursley, and a few of the photos taken of Harry’s bruises and scars after a beating which the Daily Mail and one or two other tabloids had deemed “fit-to-publish.”

Jennifer remembered crying at the time for Little Harry--as she had thought of him. It had been a huge scandal as Harry's pictures had shown up in the computer files of a number of prominent individuals who were part of Vernon Dursley’s circle. One of the bank managers for a Surrey branch had even been caught out. The branch manager had worked under Jennifer's father, the regional manager of the bank for all of South England.

“After his parents were murdered... how could that EVIL man do that to his nephew for 11 years?” Jennifer sobbed some more, imagining being tortured by Ratface for 11 years. She thought she might have killed herself if she’d had the chance.

The blonde cat-girl gave Jennifer a chance to calm down to a sniffle before continuing the story.

“And at the same time Hermione’s parents--who are non-magical too--weren’t being very nice to her. Well...we found out later that it was more Hermione’s dad than her mum. Her mum was just a bit scared to go against him at first--for good reason it turns out.”

“But at the time they sent a letter telling Hermione that she had to have her tail and ears chopped off, and that she had to stop going to school here, and to stop being Harry’s girlfriend. But Harry and Hermione really REALLY loved each other, and they didn’t have anyone else very close to them at the time, as most people were being quite mean to them both for various reasons.”
“Parvati, my girlfriend, and I liked them both a lot, but we had only really just got to know them. People were bullying Hermione for being half-cat, and obviously she would have problems in the non-magical world too.”

“Underage magic isn’t allowed outside of Hogwarts, and is punishable by law. The Headmaster got Harry and Hermione both emancipated so that they could protect themselves from Bullies and Voldemort’s followers without having to worry all the time about being expelled or worse.”

The cat-girl heaved a deep breath of emotion.

“And then... and then over the Easter Holiday, Harry and Hermione ran away together and... and eloped... it was SO Romantic!”

The blonde cat-girl lost her own composure at that point and sniffed, tears trickling down her cheeks. She tried biting her lip and rubbing her eyes to stop herself, but to no avail, and soon the tears dripped from her chin as she continued.

“Anyway... P...Parvati and I more or less f...fell in love with Harry and Hermione, and each other at the s...same time. I s...suppose it was partly b...because Hermione’s so a...adorable with her furry tail and ears. B...b...but w...we REALLY wanted to do something to s...support them both, so they wouldn’t be alone anymore, and... and to be R...Romantic too.”

“S... so Parvati and I--We r...replicated the potion that c...caused Hermione’s accident, but added a bit of the sort of cat we wanted to look like.... s...so we could always be t...t...together.”

Jennifer was crying again as well. It really was just about the most romantic thing she had ever heard. And she somehow suspected there was an interesting story behind the additional girlfriends that the blonde cat-girl had mentioned.

“M...my name is Luna by the way. Luna Lovegood. I can tell you’re non-magical. And...and Parvati and Fleur and Daphne and I, we guessed that someone m...magical, a boy or a m...man had h... hurt you. I just want you to know... that not all of us magicals are like that.”

“I’m Jennifer.... Jennifer Watts. But you can call me Jennifer....” Jennifer sniffled. “All of your friends can. They sound very nice.”

“They are.” Luna smiled, pulling herself back together. “Thank you! I’m sorry, I usually don’t get all worked up like that, but thinking about how much I love them is a bit overwhelming sometimes. I...I suppose I’m a bit sad too because I miss Harry and Hermione.”

“Where are they?” Jennifer asked, somewhat disappointed, surprising herself.

“They had to go back to London where they live. Students don’t usually live here in the summer. This is the first time that some of us are staying this year, but Harry had to go back home for a week and that horrid Minister of Magic is putting him on trial.”

“Whatsoever for?”

“That’s a bit complicated.” Luna stood up, brushed the twigs and dirt from her knees and skirt, and shook off her fluffy white tail, then she took one of Jennifer’s hands in her own, smiling dreamily. “Come on then, I’ll tell you about it if you’d like, but you should meet the others first...”

Jennifer swallowed anxiously, heart pounding, feeling the warmth of Luna’s soft hand around hers. Taking a deep breath, Jennifer stood up and let the cat-girl lead her out of the bushes.
Chapter 91

The next few days drew out agonisingly. Harry and Hermione spent some time with Dora, Susan, and Dudley playing games and watching films, but most of the time they spent in Number 12's library, going over the law books so that they knew what they were in for, even though Ragnok had insisted that he do all of the talking.

Finally it was Friday. Moody and Dora escorted them both through London to the Red Phone-box which was the Visitor's Entrance to the Ministry.

“Right then. This is where I get off,” Mad Eye growled. “I’m persona non grata in the Ministry at the moment, so Tonks will take you the rest of the way, and Mulligan will meet you inside. Ragnok will meet you outside the Wizengamot chambers. We’re four hours early, because I wouldn’t put it past the Minister to change the time to try and wrong-foot you. I’d say ‘good luck,’ but you’ve got Ragnok on your side, and he’s never lost a case.”

“Thanks Mad Eye...” Harry began, and Hermione peered at Moody gratefully.

“Well don’t stand about jawin’ all day! Get a move on...” Moody said gruffly. But then his features softened slightly, “Tonks has got your back you two.”

Auror Mulligan met them in the Ministry’s atrium after they had passed through the security checkpoints

“Looks like our expectations were on the money Tonks,” Mulligan huffed. “The trial begins in half an hour.”

Dora sighed. As she and Mulligan led them down to the lowest levels of the Ministry, Hermione clutched Harry’s arm tightly, curling her tail around him, casting her eyes down to avoid the stares of Ministry workers and visitors. Harry grit his teeth, his anger battling with his anxiety. Harry glared back at anyone he caught staring at Hermione until they looked away nervously.

Finally, they entered a little antechamber next to the Wizengamot’s trial chambers where Ragnok was waiting for them. Ragnok nodded curtly, and Mulligan remained outside the door.

“Good thing you’re early.” Ragnok said. “The trial will begin in a few minutes. Don’t forget: Say nothing until I give the all-clear.”

“I’ll be standin’ behind you two officially as an Auror,” Dora began, then, lowering her voice to a whisper, “But as your friend, I’m watchin’ out for you two. I won’t let anything happen. I promise.” Dora embraced Hermione and then Harry, giving them both a kiss on the cheek.

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“Father, I’m getting sick of being cooped up in here. I feel much better. When are we leaving?”

“Now, now, Draco. Our host has been most gracious--very kind indeed. Would you rather that we were still languishing in Azkaban?”

“She doesn’t even have any House Elves,” Draco whined. “I hate doing the dishes. It’s for servants. And it’s bloody hard with just one hand.”

“But the food is more than acceptable, it’s the least we can do.” Lucius sighed, passing Draco
another sudsy plate to rinse and set in the drying rack.

“I don’t know why we can’t just leave now.”

“Soon Draco. Until the Minister has purged Dumbledore’s people from the DMLE and issued a pardon, we are still considered fugitives. And I daresay we will have to watch our backs for the fools who have returned to the Dark Lord’s side.”

“Madam Bones is gone now. Why haven’t we been pardoned yet? I don’t understand,” grumbled Draco. “I want to get out of here and kill Potter. And when I do, I want to take his halfbreed pets for my own—and that Greengrass whore.”

Lucius smiled indulgently. Like father like son. Draco was too young to understand politics, but he at least understood his rightful place in the order of things.

Lucius had been appalled at the betrayal of his wife. She had belonged to him. His father, Abraxas, had paid a pretty penny to Cygnus Black for her. Lucius frowned as he considered the inadequacy of the Marriage Contract his father had signed though. The Blacks were cunning indeed, always seeking an angle to ensure the growth of their fortune, and they had unfortunately bred the most defiant and treacherous women as well.

Lucius shook his head. At least Dolores understood _her_ place. She was willing to do _anything_ for Lucius it seemed. She was a strong woman; perhaps not the most attractive, but she knew that her strengths were best employed in the service of a Master of superior social standing and blood-status.

Dolores had done well to get rid of that bumbling fool of a blood-traitor, Cornelius Fudge. Lucius had been working on Cornelius, offering sums of money for various projects, but Cornelius had still been too reliant on that muggle-lover Dumbledore for his political views, and his access to the Wizengamot.

Still, Dolores was a woman, Lucius reasoned. It would be foolish to ever completely trust a woman; and Abraxas had not raised Lucius to be a fool.

“Have patience Draco. If the Minister and Deputy Weasley are successful today, your wishes could be granted sooner than you think.”

“Percy the Poodle!” Draco smirked. “Good for him! I never thought I’d see the day that I actually thought a _Weasley_ had any potential.”

“Indeed...” a cruel smile played across the elder Malfoy’s features. Once he had reclaimed that which was rightfully his, Lucius would be certain to reward Percy Weasley handsomely for choosing to stand for the proper order of things.

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Harry felt rather sick with anxiety as he followed Dora and Mulligan into the trial-chamber with Hermione. There were perhaps slightly over 50 people in plum-coloured robes sitting in the benches staring at them as they entered, but seeing that smirking Toad of a Minister and the smug look on Percy’s face filled Harry with a rage which washed all nervousness away.

Feeling Hermione trembling beside him, Harry tightened his arm around her, and glared at Minister Umbridge. She and Percy, and a few others in the seats near the podium wore black robes.

Harry glanced at the inscription on the podium and snorted. “_Ignorantia juris neminem excusat,_” it read. He wasn’t brilliant at Latin by any means; but Harry had picked up enough from learning spell
incantations, and at least two of the words were close enough to their modern English forms that he could have worked it out without knowing any Latin at all.

The Minister’s smirk changed to a look of disgust when she saw the Goblin enter the chambers and stand between her and the Potters. Minister Dolores Umbridge felt her chest tighten. Why hadn’t she been informed of Ragnok’s presence? She glanced at the two Aurors present, and made a note to herself to find out who their immediate superiors were. Her confidence slightly shaken, Minister Umbridge cleared her throat and began the proceedings.

“Ahem...hem... The Criminal Trial, Third of July, of Harry James Potter and Hermione Jean Potter née Granger, residence unknown, is now called into session. Interrogators: Minister for Magic--Dolores Jane Umbridge, Acting Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement--Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister--Percival Ignatius Weasley. Court Scribe--”

“Is unimportant. Ragnok, Solicitor Advocate of Gringotts Bank--speaking for the Defence. If the Minister is finished wasting Gringott’s Client’s and the Wizengamot’s time, perhaps we can get on with things.”

Minister Umbridge narrowed her eyes and Percy gasped at the Goblin’s open display of disrespect.

Harry and Hermione were a bit perplexed themselves. Shouldn’t Ragnok be trying to placate those sitting in judgment on them? Harry caught the eye of Warlock Greengrass in the stands. Warlock Greengrass, and several other Wizengamot members seated next to him appeared to be smirking.

“If you insist Mr Ragnok, let’s get to it then, shall we!? the Minister began coldly. “Your client: Mr Harry James Potter is charged with the willful destruction of 227 Dementors and an illegal marriage to a Non-Human Magical Being or Beast.”

“Mr Potter’s...ahem... wife, Mrs Hermione Jean Potter née Granger is charged with violating the 1965 Ban on Experimental Breeding, illegally marrying a wizard, illegally carrying a wand and, illegally wearing clothes. How do your clients plead?”

A number of witches gasped at the charges leveled against Hermione, especially when the Minister got to the charge of illegally wearing clothes. Though a rather large percentage of warlocks and several rather nasty looking witches leered at the young cat-witch. Hermione shrank back against Harry and bit her lip, furry ears wilting.

“My clients Warlock Potter and his wife Madam Potter, plead Not Guilty on all counts, and we move that the court dismiss all charges immediately as being utterly without foundation in fact or law.”

Ragnok folded his spindly fingers together and peered shrewdly back at the Minister.

“Over 1,600 wizards and witches--including Hogwarts students and staff--witnessed the destruction of the Dementors by Mr Potter,” Minister Umbridge proffered in a treacly voice, “Not to mention the several hundred Muggles in nearby towns who reported odd lights in the night sky on the evening of June 24th.”

Ragnok raised his eyebrows.

“Can the Minister demonstrate that Warlock Potter cast the spell which destroyed the Dementors? Where is the evidence that he, himself cast the spell? And by what spell do you propose that Warlock Potter destroyed the Dementors? None that we know of exists...”

“Aha!” Umbridge perked up and pointed her forefinger at the ceiling, “None that we know of”
indeed... Perhaps if Mr Potter would offer up his wand for examination, and his testimony under veritaserum...”

“Absolutely not! Warlock Potter, as Head of his House, is perfectly within his rights to refuse the Court’s demands given that no charges have been brought forth by anyone of Standing. In fact, it is on that basis that I yet again request an immediate dismissal of all charges against him...”

“What do you mean?” the Minister snapped. “Of course charges have been brought by a Person of Standing. I, myself, as Minister, and Acting Head of the DMLE have...”

“No, you do not...” Ragnok interrupted firmly. “The Ministry has No Standing on Hogwarts Grounds. Only the Headmaster of Hogwarts, the Staff, the Board of Governors, or the Parents of Students have any Standing in filing charges regarding occurrences at Hogwarts.”

“The Dementors were on Hogwarts Grounds ILLEGALLY, as they did NOT have permission of the Headmaster to enter school property. Therefore, the Ministry has ABSOLUTELY No Standing on the matter whatsoever. I move for an IMMEDIATE vote by the Wizengamot to determine WARLOCK Potter’s innocence before this travesty of a proceeding continues any further.”

Minister Dolores Umbridge was fuming now. The Goblin was absolutely correct, and she knew it—that was one of the key reasons, besides going after Mr Potter, why she had instigated the Triwizard Tournament, to get a foot in the door at Hogwarts. But she wasn’t about to let up.

“A mere technicality! Ministry Property was destroyed on Hogwarts Grounds. SOMEONE must be punished. Mr Potter is the only...”

“Move to Disregard and Strike Testimony! You are Testifying without any Supporting Evidence and in Contravention of Jurisdictional Code. As Solicitor Advocate of Gringotts, I, Ragnok, assert Privilege, as Established by Treaty, to call for an Immediate Vote and be done with this part of the proceeding.”

The Wizengamot broke into a buzz of gasps and hushed conversation. The Goblin did indeed have the Privilege he had invoked, but it hadn’t been done in over 70 years. The Minister gasped and Percy slumped in his seat with a groan. Warlock Greengrass stood up resolutely to get things moving.

“I vote for Dismissal of the Charge regarding the destruction of 227 Dementors, and call for a Show of Hand in Favour of the Defendant.” Warlock Greengrass said evenly, with a nod in Harry’s direction.

The Wizengamot fell silent, and one by one, hands went up. When the raised hands were counted, it was clear that a slight majority were in Harry’s favour. The Minister mentally noted with disapproval the seven Wizengamot ‘wobbles’ who had voted against her.

“Very well,” Minister Umbridge sneered, “the charges of the destruction of 227 Dementors are dismissed. Now as to the other charges against Mr and Mrs Potter...”

“I move for the immediate dismissal on the grounds that there is no basis in the 1965 Ban on Experimental Breeding for bringing charges against MADAM Potter.” Ragnok interrupted again, pressing his advantage,

“It is very clearly stated in the Statute that said illegal Beast or Non-human Magical Being refers to the PROGENY of a magically assisted biological MATING of two or more separate species of Magical Beings or Beasts. MADAM Potter cannot have given birth to herself, therefore she cannot have violated the Ban in any way, shape, or form.”
“Therefore, MADAM Potter is to be considered an ENTIRELY HUMAN Magical Being, i.e. a Wizard or Witch--whichever term she prefers. I invoke Privilege once more, to reverse all further charges against both MADAM Potter, and her husband WARLOCK Potter.”

Warlock Greengrass made to rise, but one of the Witches who had previously voted with the Minister, against Harry, beat him to it.

“I vote to dismiss all further charges against the Potters,” the Witch stated firmly.

The Minister noted that the same ‘wobblies’ voted against her, and in favour of the Potters yet again, and that several other witches who had supported her charge of destroying the Dementors against Harry Potter had also voted to dismiss the rest of charges. Minister Dolores Umbridge angrily banged her gavel.

“Very well, the Wizengamot has spoken,” Dolores snapped. “All charges are dismissed. You are free to go, Mr and Mrs Potter.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped; Harry let out a huge sigh of relief, and roughly half of the Wizengamot broke into cheers and the other half into hisses, boos, and grumbles.

“We won... I can't believe it... WE WON, Harry!” Hermione squealed giddily, jumping up and down, her bushy tail bouncing with glee. Harry grinned at Hermione and she flung her arms around him, giving him a big kiss.

Elation and Anxiety simultaneously filled Harry. Warlock Greengrass was beckoning him. Harry glanced at Ragnok who nodded his approval to speak. Hermione nodded her approval too, and kissed him again. Harry briefly returned Hermione’s kiss. Harry took a deep breath, steeling his nerves; he turned back towards the Wizengamot and shouted over the hubbub which had erupted in the chambers.

“'I, HARRY JAMES POTTER, AS RIGHTFUL WARLOCK OF THE HOUSE OF POTTER, HEREBY CLAIM MY SEAT ON THE WIZENGAMOT!’”
A number of wizards and witches shook the Potters’ hands as they made their way up into the Wizengamot stands. Harry’s stomach clenched anxiously at being surrounded by adults in close quarters, but he couldn’t help grinning at the thrilling sensation of inclusion. Hermione felt similarly afflicted and her bushy tail couldn’t decide whether to bounce cheerfully or twitch nervously, so it did a bit of both.

A cacophony of adulations and apologies met their ears.

“Good show Mr Potter…”

“I’m so sorry about your potions accident dear…”

“Splendid to finally meet you Sir…”

“What a lovely tail dear. It reminds me of my Mittens…”

“Good on you for getting Ragnok. He really stuck it to the old Hag…”

Finally they reached Mr Greengrass.

“Well done Mr Potter,” Mr Greengrass said, clasping Harry’s hand.

“Thank you Sir... for everything. That was brilliant. But please, call me Harry...”

Mr Greengrass peered at Harry with a bemused expression.

“Are you ready to call me Cyril yet?”

Harry glanced at his shoes and swallowed.

“I’m sorry Harry,” Cyril said, “I didn’t mean to make you feel uncomfortable. I’d be happy to call you Harry if you prefer.”

“Thank you Mr Greengrass, maybe... maybe when I’m a bit older I’ll be able to manage it. It just feels weird to me. So... er... what do I do now that I’m a Warlock?”

“Nothing more for the moment Harry. You’ve done exactly what you needed to do. You will be called upon the next time the entire Wizengamot is called into session, but that generally isn’t very often—and you can appoint a proxy if you are unable to attend. For now, your declaration of intent is enough to give some of those in the middle pause before siding with the Minister.

“What you really ought to be doing now is enjoying the rest of your summer holiday,” Cyril Greengrass concluded with a kindly smile.

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Dora managed to hold herself together until she reached the departure checkpoint for visitors. She gave Harry and Hermione a wink then she unclasped her Auror badge and chucked it at the startled Security Wizard.

“Oi... What’s this then?”
“My resignation!” Dora grinned.

Once outside, before Harry had a chance to wrap Hermione’s tail up in his invisibility cloak, Dora pounced on them both, sweeping them all into a group hug.

“You’re free.... I’m free!” Dora squealed, “I say we all go celebrate...”

Hermione giggled in exhilaration, and before she could stop herself, she kissed Dora on the lips. Harry grinned at them and the girls both turned pink when they realised what had just happened.

“I’m sorry Dora...” Hermione squeaked, while Harry took the opportunity to gingerly wrap up her tail in his invisibility cloak.

Dora’s hair flashed through all the colours of the rainbow before fading to brown; she smiled shyly back at Hermione.

“Don’t be sorry, Hermione. I’m not... That was nice, but...er... let’s not move too quick eh! I only just stopped bein’ a Professional-in-training half-a-tick ago...”

“And I’m not sorry either...” Harry said, a huge grin still plastered on his face. “Hermione and I both agreed that we thought you were a Dora blames nearly the first day we met.”

The two girls groaned.

“Prat!” Hermione giggled, giving Harry a playful swat; Dora stuck her tongue out at him, blushing furiously.

Neither Harry nor Hermione had eaten much at breakfast, having both been too anxious before the trial, but nobody felt like going back to Number 12, and Diagon Alley was out of the question. Fortunately, they had picked up school supplies on Monday after their meeting with Ragnok.

The three of them reached a quick decision, Hermione covered her furry ears with her knitted cap and they all had a late breakfast at a little cafe, then spent the rest of the day in Muggle London, exploring museums and the Jubilee Gardens.

Harry and Dora even managed to convince Hermione to take a ride on the London Eye. With her invisible tail tightly wound around Harry’s waist, and both Harry and Dora’s arms wrapped around her, Hermione felt safe enough to open her eyes and actually enjoy the breathtaking view of London from the top of the enormous ferris wheel.

“It’s beautiful. I can even see Diagon Alley from here,” gasped Hermione.

“Yeah, it’s visible to Wizards from above. It’s not got unplottable or disillusionment charms on it. Just muggle-repellin’ charms,” Dora said. “Look, that’s the roof of Gringott’s.”

Late in the afternoon, they found a little Fish and Chip take-out shop near Buckingham Palace and took it to eat in St James’s Park. They sat on a bench together by one of the ponds from which they could still see the Palace and watch the ducks playing.

“So what’ll you do now Dora?” Harry asked, sprinkling some malt vinegar on a piece of fish.

“Dunno... not sure really. I suppose I could take a few ‘post-grad’ classes at ‘ogwarts while I think about it.” Dora responded, dipping a chip in some ketchup. She swallowed it then washed it down with a sip of Coke before continuing,
“I’ll still be your protection detail for the Order until everything with You-Know-’oo and the Minister is resolved anyway. So I’ll need a cover. Bein’ a ‘post-grad’ student works as good as any...”

“Isn’t there something you’ve always dreamed of doing?” Hermione asked.

“Er... well... to tell you the truth, before Mad Eye convinced me to become an Auror, I always wanted to be a musician or draw comics--I’m not ‘alf-bad on guitar and keys, and you know me, I love cartoons. But... but Mum and Dad were both pretty opposed--said they weren’t ‘realistic options,’ and that they wouldn’t pay to support me unless I was trainin’ for a ‘real’ job.” Dora sadly concluded.

“You should do it--either one, or both. I’LL support you Dora,” Harry said eagerly. “You’d be a brilliant musician or artist.”

“Oh Harry... that’s very sweet, really, but I couldn’t possibly....”

“I mean it!” Harry begged earnestly, “Look... I’ve got loads of money since Sirius just gave it all to me. But it’s not doing anyone any good just sitting in vaults... And you can live with us when we’re not at Hogwarts. Please... I want you to stay with us.”

Dora glanced at Hermione for back-up, but Hermione’s eyes had gone all big, teary, and pleading too. Hermione reached out a hand and took Dora’s in her own, squeezing it gently.

“Please Dora. Harry and I both want this. We’re both adults in all the ways that matter. We can make our own choices, and you should be able to as well. We want you to be happy... You can be an Unaffiliated too for now--doing ‘post-grad’ work. You already said so yourself. And when you’re not at school, you can live with us and do your music and art.”

Dora felt torn. She was supposed to be a grown-up, making her own way in the world in a proper profession. But here she was, eating fish and chips in a park with her whole life ahead of her and feeling like a giddy schoolgirl in love again.

That’s when it truly hit Dora; she really had fallen for these two, both of them, just like the rest of the Unaffiliated at Hogwarts had.

But how was that even possible? She only liked girls didn’t she? But Dora couldn’t deny that her feelings for Harry were as deep as those she had for Hermione. Dora gulped and shook her head, her pulse racing.

There was something very different about Harry. Dora saw it every time she peered into those amazingly green eyes of Harry’s; she vaguely recalled hearing Sirius going on about “his mother’s eyes.” And the way he behaved around the girls--Harry just wasn’t like any of the other boys Dora had ever known.

“Er... but what about your Mum...?” Dora cast about for excuses, her resistance fading. “She won’t understand...”

Harry peered anxiously at Hermione, hoping she would have an answer. Of course she did.

“Eventually, I have to tell Mum everything anyway Dora--just like the others told their parents about all of us being together after the Third Task. I’LL cross that bridge when we get to it. But we’re all going back to Hogwarts tomorrow...” Hermione smiled, though her brows were still furrowed pleadingly.
“So I can put that off for a bit. Mum’s got enough on her plate at the moment. Mum will be alright... It may take her a bit of time, but I know she’ll get used to it.”

“And anyway,” Hermione continued, her jaw tightening, and a flame sparked in her eyes, “Mum doesn’t make my decisions for me anymore. Not since before Harry and I got married. Nobody can tell us who we’re supposed to love...”

Dora slowly nodded and took a deep breath to steady herself, blinking back tears.

“Alright then...” Dora relented, “if you both really mean it, I’m in... I’ll let Harry support me until I can earn my keep, and I’ll come and live with you. But let’s just go slow for a bit longer on the rest of it while everything’s a bit topsy turvy in the world and... and see how things go with the rest of the girls first. I love the lot of you really... I don’t want to upset anyone.”

Hermione squeed, her bushy tail invisibly quivering in delight, and gave Dora a greasy kiss which set them both giggling. Harry beamed from ear to ear, holding both his and Hermione’s piles of fish and chips in his lap.

When the trio had finished eating, Harry banished the rubbish into a bin and they all leaned back against the bench sighing in contentment.

“So what about you Harry?” Dora asked, finally breaking the happy silence, “‘ave you thought anymore about what you want to do after Hogwarts?”

“I’m not sure either Dora.” Harry replied. “Funnily enough, I’ve discovered I really like drawing too.” Harry chuckled slightly at that, before becoming serious again.

“At one point I thought it would be really cool to be an Auror. I still want to stop Dark Wizards from hurting people, but I’m rather off the Ministry! Even most of the nice ones I’ve met like Madam Bones and Shacklebolt are all stodgy and stiff... except for Abby Brixton. She’s really sweet.”

“And I don’t really care if I get paid to do it--I’ve already got more money than I need. I dunno... do they have Wizard private detectives? I always liked Sherlock Holmes, maybe I could give that a go. But I... I’m probably more of a sidekick like Watson,” Harry said glumly, “I’m not as smart as Sherlock or Hermione...”

“Honestly Harry, don’t be silly, you’re brilliant,” said Hermione as she flushed in embarrassment. “There’s more to being smart than just being brainy and knowing lots of things. Besides, you’re much smarter and you know a lot more than you give yourself credit for.”

“You’re very determined when you set your mind on something, and you’re brave and compassionate--and you have excellent leadership skills. I think it’s a smashing goal.”

It was Harry’s turn to blush and squirm.

“I’m with Hermione, Harry. I don’t really know of any Private Aurors, but you’d be amazing. And look ‘ow you took charge in the Third Task--you’re a Natural Born Leader. In fact, I might join you-when I’m not on tour or drawing comics.” Dora grinned and peered at the young cat-witch. “So what about you then Hermione?”

Hermione’s eyes narrowed as she thought about everything that she and Harry had been put through, and all of the things which needed fixing in the Wizard World. It had been the very last thing she had ever considered; Hermione had always wanted to be involved in the sciences--muggle or magical, but there was too much else to be done. Like Harry, she wanted to save everyone.
“Magical Lawyer!” Hermione stated resolutely.
Jean had been looking forward to this all day, ever since the excited mirror-call from Hermione after the trial. Harry chortled when Hermione flattened Mum with one of her patented hugs before joining in himself.

Dora beamed giddily, but she blushed when Moody caught her with his appraising eye.

“Had a nice day of it with the Potters didja?” Mad Eye grinned, giving Tonks a wink.

Mad Eye shook his head and smirked when Tonks fled the room. It was a shame for the Wizarding World at large how things at the Ministry and the DMLE had worked out, but Alastor hardly had any room to cast aspersions on Tonks’s clear relief at no longer having to be part of it. Moody sighed, supposing that the Auror Corps had probably lost a chance at having Harry Potter on its team as well.

There had been more hugs with Auntie Joanne for Harry and Hermione. Even Aunt Petunia had tearily given Harry and Hermione a brief hug. Dudley smiled awkwardly at Harry and shook his hand.

“Glad you got out of that Harry,” said Dudley. “I wish you didn’t have to go back to Hogwarts tomorrow.”

“Thanks Dudley.” Harry returned the smile, realising with surprise that for the first time in his life that he would actually miss him a bit too. “Hey, Dudley... er... I’ll send you a letter every now and then. And if we get a chance, maybe we can even pop home for a quick visit with you, alright!!”

Susan gleefully embraced Hermione and Harry as well, before Amelia offered her own more reserved congratulations; Abby Brixton couldn’t resist giving the Potters a hug too. Though Harry and Hermione were worn out, they watched a bit of TV and had a light supper with everyone before going to bed.

Harry turned pink when Hermione returned from the bathroom, having finished washing up and cleaning her teeth a bit quicker than he thought she would.

“What are you doing Harry?”

“Oh... er... erm... practicing?”

Hermione’s ginger tail flicked in amusement and she raised her eyebrows. Harry was waiting for her in bed without any pyjamas on and he had looked up at her like a deer caught in headlights after quickly dropping the covers over himself. She had a sneaking suspicion what he might have been working on.

“Hmm... You wouldn’t happen to be ‘practicing’ your metamorphic talent on a certain body part would you?” Hermione asked with a straight face.

Hermione’s furry ears twitched with mirth and she burst into giggles when Harry turned a deeper shade of red. Hermione pulled off her Hello Kitty nightie and crawled onto the bed completely starkers, her bushy tail bobbing joyfully.

“Come on, let’s see it then...” she grinned, lifting up the covers. “Oh!!”
"You sound disappointed."

"NO! I'm sorry Harry, I didn't mean..."

Harry launched a tickle attack and soon Hermione was rolling on the bed with tears of laughter streaming down her face, furry tail flailing. Hermione ended up on her back gasping for air, nipples hardening, with Harry between her naked thighs gazing softly into her golden-brown eyes. Harry kissed her, gently brushing his fingers on the spot just under her jaw near the base of her furry ear and she began to purr.

"Next time I'll practice with your assistance," Harry said playfully, "I'm sorry, I just got embarrassed."

"I know," Hermione responded quietly. "But just to be perfectly clear, as exquisitely enticing as the idea of playing with you in girl-form is, I want you to know that I will never be disappointed with this!" Hermione concluded with a grin as she clasped Harry’s erect penis in her soft warm hand and guided him to her slit.

Harry kissed Hermione again as he thrust into her depths. Soon the bed rocked with passion as they both imagined sharing it with a neon haired girl.

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Dora moaned and bit her lip as she fingered herself, her other hand squeezing a breast and tugging a nipple, imagining sharing her bed with the Potters. Dora had already brought herself off once just imagining herself snogging the pair of them at the top of the London Eye and going a bit further.

She still didn’t quite understand how it was that she could love Harry as more than a really good friend. It didn’t make much sense to Dora; she could picture any other guy and--nothing! Picturing a male form still didn’t turn her on one bit. But picturing herself with Hermione and Harry--penis and all--turned her on something fierce. Weird!

Dora wondered again if there was anything to that business of Harry having his mum's eyes; there was definitely something almost feminine about them.

Now, fingers pressed deeper into her moistness, thumb twirling her clitoris, Dora's mind ventured to what it would be like if she and Harry both had furry tails while they made love to Hermione and each other. Parvati and Luna, with their own adorable tails, popped into the middle of that fantasy and Dora groaned as she trembled with bliss again.

Dora continued to breathe in ragged gasps as she sallied forth a third time, imagining herself back at Hogwarts in a steamy Fairy Grotto pressed between Fleur and Daphne’s supple naked bodies, their lips on hers, while Harry and Luna writhed rapturously with Hermione and Parvati in the frothing water beside them.

Damp purple hair clung to Dora’s brow as her eyes rolled back and her sweaty breasts heaved. Dora uttered a cry of pleasure, soaking her fingers and the bedsheets in stickiness as a torrent of ecstasy swept through her shuddering figure, sparks flying before her eyes.

With a rumble, the floor and walls of Sirius’s old room quaked and Dora’s eyes widened in shock. Dora burst into hysterical giggles when she remembered that she was just above the Master Bedroom and realised that Harry and Hermione must be going at it themselves.

~o0o~
Harry blearily made coffee for himself and Hermione the following morning. They had gone to bed early, but stayed up rather late. He hoped that the magical outbursts from their wild romp hadn’t woken anyone. Though he could have sworn that a small rumble had come from the room above theirs in between one of their numerous bouts last night.

Dudley burst into the kitchen, his eyes wide with fear and excitement.

“Harry, come quick. You’ve got to see the news on the telly. You’re not going to believe this...”

Dudley was right. Harry and Hermione were stunned by the ongoing BBC reports from the Metrocentre Mall in Gateshead.

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Deputy Minister Percy Weasley took a sip from his second cup of tea and glowered as he reviewed the trial transcript and the long-term voting records of the Wizengamot members at the Minister’s request. Minister Dolores Umbridge had made a strong point of it that he should draw his own conclusions after she had given him a basic understanding of her views on the matter.

The Minister had been absolutely right. There were far too many who still succumbed to worshiping Dumbledore’s cult of Potter, despite the relative success of Minister Umbridge’s campaign to force Dumbledore out of the Wizengamot and put a dent in Potter's popularity over the last year or so.

Things had come a long way from 13 years ago when everyone—including former He-Who-Must-Not-be-Named supporters—had fallen all over themselves to praise Potter for bringing an end to You-Know-Who, and had given Dumbledore carte blanche to preside over the Wizengamot. It was clear that the Headmaster had been abusing his position to upend the System which had maintained Order and Security in the Wizard World for hundreds of years.

Percy shook his head in shock when he realised that Headmaster Dumbledore had been trying to undermine the system for many decades—long before he had become Chief Warlock. Dumbledore had been at it since 1945 in fact, and had been responsible for most of the “reforms” which had come to pass, many of them in the 1960’s.

Before taking his internship with the Ministry, Percy had always imagined Dumbledore to be a great wizard, if a bit mad and rather lax. But then Percy had lacked a proper understanding of why his own family had always been so mocked and financially insecure until he had started working under Mr Crouch.

Percy could see now that he hadn't really comprehended the actual political currents well enough to put modern wizarding history in Britain into context until being in the thick of it himself. He was even more convinced than ever that the pureblood supremacists had the right of it, and began to think that the House of Slytherin’s reputation was undeserved.

The Deputy Minister couldn’t say that he approved of You-Know-Who’s tactics any more than the Minister herself did, but he was beginning to understand—as she herself had come to understand--why the methods of the self-appointed saviour of pureblood supremacy could be viewed as a necessary evil.

Dumbledore’s “reforms” had broken the System, and the previous weak-kneed and spineless Ministers had allowed him to do so. It had become impossible for a quite some time to fix the problem from the inside.

But now that there was a Minister in power who also understood what was necessary, everything
could be set to rights again from within, through the proper chain of authority and command. You-Know-Who could be put down like the narcissistic and unruly maniac he was.

Unfortunately it was clear that Dumbledore’s seeds of discord were still at work in the Ministry and the Wizengamot. Deputy Minister Weasley was forced to agree with the Minister’s assessment that a purge of muggleborns and blood-traitors was necessary to save the Ministry and the Wizard World.

Deputy Minister Weasley felt a knot of pain as he thought about his family, hoping that eventually they would see the error of their ways. Percy really didn't want them to have to face harsh measures, but it was clearer than ever that it had been his father’s support for Dumbledore and Potter which was responsible for the danger that Ginny had faced her very first year at Hogwarts.

Lucius Malfoy would have hardly deemed it necessary to surreptitiously provide Ginny with a means to unlock the Chamber of Secrets if Hogwarts had a more suitable Headmaster. Percy was still cross that Malfoy had chosen Ginny instead of Fred or George, but now he understood completely why Warlock Malfoy had picked a Weasley for the task.

Percy hoped that the rest of his family wasn’t too far gone, however it had become increasingly evident that there was little he could do, though perhaps he and the Minister could still rescue his sister from the corruption which had taken the souls of the rest of his family.

But they had to start somewhere, and the Minister was correct in that regard as well. It was too soon to move against the most recalcitrant bloc of the Wizengamot. The focus must continue to be on building the strength of the Traditionalist faction.

Percy dipped his quill in some ink and began to write a list of those in the middle who were unreliable. Once they were dealt with, and examples made, surely the rest of the Wizengamot would start falling into line.

That’s when the first memo hit his desk. Deputy Minister Weasley’s eyes bulged and he spat out his tea in horror. He groaned loudly, there was no way the Ministry was going to be able to contain this with a few obliviations. The muggle media were all over it.

He attempted to conjure his patronus to send a fast message to Minister Umbridge, but it wasn’t working properly--it sputtered and died as he attempted to think of something pleasant. Cursing Voldemort under his breath, Deputy Minister Weasley hurriedly scribbled a memo and threw some Floo Powder into the fireplace in his office.

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Minister Dolores Umbridge had just sat down with her first cup of tea when her hearth erupted into green flames and a memo flew out. She pursed her lips and snatched it out of the air. Minister Umbridge read over the short memo twice with a gasp. After the initial flash of anger faded, Dolores’s eyes narrowed and a cruel smile pulled at the corner of her lips.

This couldn’t be more perfect.

She would have to notify the PM immediately and offer the Ministry’s services of course--after all, only wizards could effectively halt an Inferi attack and rescue the muggles trapped inside the mall. But not until after she had arranged the assassination of two of the “wobblies” who had let the Potters off the hook.

Both lived very near Gateshead, and their deaths could easily be made to look like the work of Voldemort’s Inferi.
“I admit, I rather enjoyed my job at the Prophet, and embellishing the truth for Dolores, but I’m no
blood purist. It was just another job for me.”

“Perhaps the veritaserum Headmaster...?” Severus narrowed his eyes at the cagey woman with
brassy curls.

“Let us give her the chance to explain, Severus. Ms Skeeter is no longer a prisoner after all, but a
refugee seeking asylum,” Albus retorted calmly before taking another sip of tea. “This is a
conversation over breakfast, not an interrogation.”

Rita licked her lips nervously. The Headmaster’s gentle demeanor and pleasantries aside, Rita knew
better; she was still being tested by a master of manipulation—not quite the old fool she had long
taken him for. Rita smirked inwardly, realising that Dolores had finally met her match.

“You have to understand,” Rita began, “the Unspeakable Office is further split into sub-departments,
each of us with our own need-to-know-only directives. I work for the sub-department of Archives
and Propaganda, so our department knows a bit more than those who work in Research and
Development, or Magical Artifact Storage, let’s say... but we don’t know everything.”

“Dolores works for Operations--their focus is Interrogations, Intelligence gathering, and
Assassinations, or doing whatever other Dirty Business the Ministry needs done. But Operations
runs the whole show--nobody dare crosses that lot, and most of them ARE blood purists.”

“But the blood purists weren’t actually in charge until recently, a couple years ago, when the Head of
Operations--the Unspeakable Office Chief--died under ‘mysterious' circumstances and Dolores
moved up and took over. Shortly after that, Dolores wangled her way into a position as Fudge’s
Senior Undersecretary when his previous Deputy 'mysteriously' got ill.”

“So I can’t provide direct evidence for the fact that Dolores ordered the assassination of Fudge, or
contracted out the hit on the Potters during the Triwiz, but she’s really the only one who could have.
She’s bloody ruthless--like a little Voldemort herself--but Dolores has got a lot more self-control and
cunning than he has, and she’ll do anything to achieve her goals.”

“Sub-departments of propaganda and assassinations? This all sounds highly... illegal,” Severus said
coldly with raised eyebrows. “Why have no Unspeakables ever approached the DMLE?”

“Because the DMLE can’t protect us. Weren’t you listening?” Rita snapped, rolling her eyes. “And
anyway, according to the Unspeakable Office’s charter, we can only speak-up when ordered to by
the Minister.”

“We’re independent of the DMLE, and we’re supposed to lie to everyone by directive unless ordered
by the Minister to tell the truth. But our charter even allows us to keep knowledge from the Minister
unless he or she directly asks us a specific question--except for Dolores of course, as she is still the
Unspeakable Office Chief as well as being the Minister. It’s all supposed to be for the greater good.”

The Headmaster took off his glasses and massaged his temples as another headache came on. Secrets
and Lies and Unaccountability. Albus had run the Order of the Phoenix in a much similar manner,
having long believed that it was necessary to play things close to vest in order to fight the Darkness.
Albus had been blinded by his own arrogance for so long and kept far too much to himself, instead
of sharing it at the very least with those closest to him.
Albus had believed that it had been enough to cast aside his own views regarding wizarding supremacy and blood-purity when he had come to see that he and Gellert were on a path to Darkness and Evil, well over a century ago.

But even becoming a champion for muggles and muggleborn wizards had not, in and of itself, been enough to avoid the ever-creeping Darkness, which Albus had only recently come to realise. Darkness could only be defeated by shining the Light of Truth upon it.

Albus sighed with some measure of relief, knowing that he had been taking great strides in rectifying his own mistakes--thanks to the opening of his eyes by the Potters, and by those who had succumbed to the Love which the Potters had inspired in all who had come to know them best.

In the short term though, some secrets were still best kept in as small a circle as possible. But never again would Albus make the mistake of believing that he alone should know them all.

There was a knock on the door of the dungeon cell, which Albus had ordered to be converted into a rather nice room by the House Elves for Rita, as she was now more or less a defector from the Department of Mysteries to the Order of the Phoenix. Severus let in Minerva, who appeared quite panicky.

“Albus, quickly, you must come at once,” Minerva gasped. “A muggle shopping centre in Gateshead is under attack by an Inferi Swarm.”

“In broad daylight?” Dumbledore raised his eyebrows in perplex.

~o0o~

Ex-Auror Abby Brixton waved some smelling salts under Aunt Petunia’s nose, and she came to.

“Come on dear, you don’t need to see any more of this,” Abby said, leading Petunia back to her room.

“I can’t believe that Zombies are real,” Dudley gasped as he watched the images on the flat-screen television of Special Operations forces shooting ineffectually at the mass of lurching corpses surrounding and invading the Metrocentre Mall. The special police units were aiming for the heads, but nothing seemed to stop the “zombies.”

“Yeah... Though technically, wizards call them Inferi,” Harry said. “Apparently Zombies are something a bit different--I’m still not clear on what the difference is though.”

“Inferi are just mindless corpses reanimated and controlled by a spell--like a puppet, or more accurately, like a robot programmed to perform certain tasks,” Hermione explained. “Zombies are magically reanimated corpses too, but somehow, the soul of the person is also resurrected and trapped inside the otherwise still quite dead body.”

“That’s revolting...” Jean looked horrified.

“Voldemort used ‘em in the last war,” Moody growled. “Looks like he’s at it again. Bit odd seeing them still attackin’ in daytime though. They generally avoid the light and retreat when dawn breaks. I suppose Voldy is sending a message...”

“How do you kill them in real life?” Dudley asked excitedly. “Why don’t they die if you shoot them in the head.”

“Well, that’s just it. You can’t kill what’s dead already. They aren’t partially living and controlled by
brain-viruses like the ones in your video-games,” Mad Eye replied. “Inferi don’t feel pain or fear. Though they don’t like light and heat, and can be repelled by certain Light and Heat spells... but to destroy them completely you have to use some sort of fire spell, or de-animate them--which takes some doin’.”

“Disintegration spells like the Reductor Curse can work on ‘em too, but only the one you’re aiming at. If you’ve got people trapped by a load of the buggers, you’re in trouble...”

“The police could just use flame-throwers then, couldn’t they?” Dudley said.

The grizzled ex-auror snorted and grimaced. He was starting to like Dudley’s enthusiasm.

“Too dangerous, unless they want to torch the whole mall and every living person inside... and you run the risk of flaming inferi runnin’ around catchin’ everything else on fire before they finally succumb... Really, the only time you want to use a Firestorm spell is when you’ve got a load of them in an enclosed area away from other people and flammable surroundings.”

“What about a Patronus?” Harry asked pensively.

“Eh? I suppose it would be quite effective as a shield or repellin’ charm actually,” Moody began, “but that’s it. A patronus can’t destroy anything... Still can’t figure out what happened to those Dementors at the maze. Dumbledore doesn’t even seem to know...”

Harry and Hermione shared an awkward look, but nobody caught it. The only other person they had told so far was Dora. Harry had been wanting to tell Sirius and Lupin about it too, but he had thought better of it for the moment. It would have to wait until he had run it by the rest of the Unaffiliated.

After a somber breakfast, Harry, Hermione and Dora packed up and readied themselves to return to Hogwarts.

“Look after yourselves, dears.” Jean gave Hermione and Harry both a hug, and smiled at Dora.

“Bye Mum!” Hermione smiled tearfully, giving her mother a kiss on the cheek.

“I’ll miss you Mum!” Harry swallowed and blinked back tears of his own as he gave Jean one last hug.

One by one, they stepped into the green flames.

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The Dark Lord was most pleased. He stroked Nagini’s head absentmindedly as he admired his and Bellatrix’s handiwork on the muggle contraption called television in the parlour of the new muggle manor which he and Wormtail had taken several days ago after killing its inhabitants.

Voldemort had paid such muggle technologies little heed before, having been more inclined in his previous incarnation to reside in Pureblood wizard homes full of magic, where such technologies didn’t operate properly, if at all. But a number of Snatchers who were involved with muggle criminals had mentioned the practical utility of many electronic devices favoured by muggle burglars.

And the Dark Lord was nothing if not pragmatic. The corpses of the muggle residents of the manor had become the first Inferi which--with Wormtail’s skilled assistance--the Dark Lord and Bellatrix had created after the consummation of their union.
Wormtail had then organised the Snatchers into units and several groups had been turned into raiding parties to ransack hospitals and police morgues for the Freshly Dead. Others had sought out vagabonds and vagrants to kill. Subsequently, Bellatrix had ingeniously devised some new rituals and spells giving the Inferi the ability to operate in daylight without retreat.

The Dark Lord knew that this first strike would eventually be brought to an end, but it mattered little. The message for the Dark Witch and the Old Fool had been sent loud and clear.

The Dark Witch could have the Dark Lord’s old supporters for now—they would soon beg to return to their True Master’s side when they began to fall before his True Might.

And the Old Fool; he would learn once and for all that Love was a weakness. There was no Good or Evil, no “Light” or “Dark,” only Power; and the Old Fool would bear witness to the Truth that those without magical blood were destined to be ruled by those who were willing to use that Power.
Head of the Auror Office, Rufus Scrimgeour scowled appraisingly at the chaotic scene at the Metrocentre Mall in Gateshead. He had just arrived, and had been given carte blanche to take over as an “MI5” Anti-terrorist Operations Manager.

He wished that he had been called in sooner. It was shortly after noon now, and Scrimgeour wondered why it had taken so long for the Minister to call him! He supposed that perhaps it had taken the Minister a few hours to talk the muggle Prime Minister into letting wizards take over.

Scrimgeour also wished that he still had Kingsley Shacklebolt and John Dawlish to work with; they had been his top two agents. But they had been too close to Scrimgeour’s previous boss, Head of the DMLE, Amelia Bones, and she had been too close to the Crafty Old Coot who ran Hogwarts.

Head Auror Scrimgeour wasn’t entirely certain that he trusted Minister Umbridge--which wasn’t saying much, as he didn’t really trust anyone. She wore far too many hats for his liking--she had been Head of the Improper Use of Magic Office when she had also taken on the role of Fudge’s Senior Undersecretary.

Now, Dolores Umbridge was not only the Minister for Magic, but the Acting Head of the DMLE as well. And yet Scrimgeour was almost certain that Umbridge had also been a staffer in the Department of Mysteries--an Unspeakable. Her career path was baffling to say the least.

Still, the Minister certainly had the right idea about Dumbledore. And unlike Fudge, Minister Umbridge was willing to do whatever it took to get the job done properly--no matter how harsh the measures, so Head Auror Scrimgeour had to give her that.

Scrimgeour’s features hardened. First things first. It was time to issue a blackout on the muggle media coverage, and to clear all muggles from the area within a few mile radius so that the DMLE’s Hit-Wizards could put down the Inferi quickly with Firestorm spells without being observed. He would do his best to rescue some of the muggles in the mall, but he didn’t want to waste too much time, or put any wizards at risk trying to locate them all. If a few muggles died, then so be it.

There was a loud crack and Scrimgeour started.

“Mulligan, what are you doing here?” Scrimgeour noted Auror Mulligan’s sweaty disheveled appearance.

“Saving some muggles sir,” Mulligan responded with heavy breaths, “I got here an hour ago and I decided not to wait for the go ahead. I called in several other aurors too. We’ve just been rescuing and obliviating and staying out of sight of the muggle authorities.”

“Good... that’s good then,” Scrimgeour nodded, frowning, “Don’t worry about acting without orders. You did the right thing. My hands were tied until the Minister got the green-light from the Muggle PM.”

“So what now Sir?”

“You did your bit, let the Hit-Team do theirs. We’re going to use Firestorm Spells and let the place burn.”
“Should I have a Magical Repair Team ready Sir?” Mulligan asked, perplexed. Scrimgeour shook his head.

“No, the Minister said not to worry.” Scrimgeour actually looked a bit surprised himself. “The muggle Prime Minister told her that the owners have insurance, and that he would be able to sell the cover story better if we just leave it destroyed--the muggle PM was already considering using flamethrowers and other incendiary weapons anyway.”

“And he had planned on telling the muggle civilians that the Inferi are ‘walking dead,’ victims of an escaped, incurable, genetically modified necrotising virus. Apparently it’s a concept which muggles have become used to and will accept readily...”

~o0o~

Albus Dumbledore sighed with distaste as Minerva, Poppy, and Flitwick obliviated the last few muggles that they had evacuated from the mall and sent them wandering into the crowds beyond the perimeter which the muggle police had created. With the magically implanted memories the muggles had been given, it would just be assumed that they had somehow managed to escape the hordes of Undead who had invaded the Mall.

Severus appeared out of nowhere with a loud pop.

“Auror Mulligan and I have finished with our lot Headmaster,” Snape said. “Scrimgeour finally arrived, and I sent Mulligan to cover for us. He’s taken some of the muggles we rescued, so that Scrimgeour can claim a few saves.”

“Well done, Severus.” Dumbledore nodded approvingly. “We shall leave behind the bodies of those already dead for Rufus Scrimgeour to find.

“What on Earth took Scrimgeour so bloody long?” snarled Madam Pomfrey, who was covered in blood from the muggles she had treated.

“That is a puzzle indeed Poppy,” The Headmaster responded. “However, we should count ourselves quite fortunate that we had the time to rescue those that we could without being harassed or impeded by the Ministry. If I know Rufus, he is no doubt preparing to burn the place to the ground to eliminate the Inferi threat as quickly as possible, with little regard for the lives of non-magical humans.”

“Yes, well, speaking of which, perhaps we should leave before Rufus discovers us here,” Minerva said, glancing around anxiously.

~o0o~

Dora burst out of the green flames into the Hogwarts Staff-room. She tripped over the hearth and Harry caught her.

“Sorry Harry!” Dora coughed as ash swirled around them, “I dunno why I still ‘ave trouble with Floo travel. I much prefer brooms...”

Dora tried to let go of Harry but the room still seemed to be spinning. Harry clutched her to stop her from falling.

“I’ve got you Dora,” Harry said sympathetically, “and I know what you mean--I feel exactly the same way.”
“Ta Harry,” said Dora, giving Harry a little kiss of gratitude. “I think I’m alright now.”

“Welcome back Tonks!”

Dora looked up, eyes widening, spying Professor Lupin standing next to Hermione with an all too perceptive smile on his face.

“Wotcher Lupin!” Dora turned pink. “Where’s Pomfrey? I thought she was supposed to be greetin’ us.”

“There’s been an Inferi attack…” Lupin began.

“In Gateshead… we know! We were watching it on the BBC news just before we left.” Hermione’s furry ears twitched with worry.

“Indeed,” Lupin nodded sadly, “Dumbledore took Pomfrey, Flitwick, McGonagall, and a few other professors and Order members to rescue as many muggles as they could. I stayed behind with Hagrid to avoid trouble with the Ministry.”

“But why?” Harry asked. “I know the Minister hates Hermione and me and Dumbledore, but wouldn’t the aurors be happy for a bit of help?”

“It will be problematic as it is, if the current administration runs into any of the Order. If they found a werewolf and a half-giant at the scene too… well let’s just say we don’t want to give them any ideas about trying to pin this on Dumbledore,” Lupin replied.

“But that’s just mad!” gasped Hermione, her furry tail bristling with outrage. “Everyone knows Dumbledore wouldn’t create Dark Creatures and set them on Muggles…”

“Believe me, that would not stop the Minister from trying anyway.”

“Lupin’s right Hermione,” Harry said quietly, as understanding hit him. “The Minister… She won’t stop at anything to get us. She’s like Voldemort, but she’s a lot smarter and more devious than he is. She’s trying to make it look like we’re the bad guys, and she’s been doing a pretty good job of it. We were lucky to get Ragnok on our side--he really swung it for us.”

“Yeah… but now that you’ve claimed your Seat on the Wizengamot Harry, you’ve set ‘er back a bit,” Dora said with some pride. “You shoulde seen ‘im Lupin. Harry was amazing--a real hero. The whole Wizengamot was in an uproar when ‘e and Hermione won--between their supporters and their detractors--but he shouted over all of them and shut the lot up.”

Dora couldn’t help it. She grinned and squeezed Harry, giving him another kiss in front of Lupin. Hermione flung her arms around Harry, furry tail bouncing gleefully, and gave him a kiss too.

“That was fantastic. The look on that Foul Evil Toad’s face when Harry took his Seat as a Warlock made my day!” Hermione squeaked, eyes shining.

“That’s excellent Harry,” Lupin beamed. “Sirius will be absolutely thrilled to hear that…”

“Where is he anyway? I can’t wait to see him and tell him all about it,” Harry said with a grin.

“You can visit both of us in the Shrieking Shack before dinner for a bit if you would like,” Lupin replied cheerfully. “We’ve fixed it up and made it quite nice inside…”

“Brilliant,” Harry interrupted, his grin widened. “I’ll be able to see Sirius more often.”
“Indeed... But I should think that you would want to spend a bit of time with your friends first,”
Lupin concluded with another knowing smile.

~o0o~

Harry found himself under a scrum of squealing girls being peppered with kisses by all of them in the middle of the quidditch pitch. Hermione giggled as she was giddily dragged into the pile-up and snogged by Daphne and Luna before Fleur and Parvati each took a turn.

Fleur, Parvati, Daphne, and Luna, had all been flying around, throwing the quaffle between themselves and tossing it through the hoops for a bit of fun. The moment they saw Harry, Hermione, and Dora on the field they had all dive-bombed the trio and leapt off their brooms, pouncing on all three of them.

Dora hadn’t expected to find herself flattened on the lawn, on the receiving end of kisses too. She had been prepared for perhaps a few hugs at most.

“I missed you loads as well Dora!” Parvati giggled when she saw the puzzled expression on the royal blue haired girl's face after giving Dora a particularly wet kiss. Parvati was straddling Dora’s waist, purring. Her furry black tail snaked up to caress Dora’s cheek.

“My cat senses may not be as strong as Hermione’s--I swear, her cat half must have come from a part kneazle,” Parvati continued. “But I know how you feel about us. You’ve been training us for months--it was impossible to miss...”

“...And if it weren’t for you, we could have never helped Harry and Hermione get through the Third Task and helped to save Cedric, Viktor, and Fleur,” chimed in Luna, her fluffy white tail fanning breezily as she gave Dora a kiss too.

“...For which I am vairy grateful!” said Fleur as she brushed the royal blue bangs out of Dora's blushing face and pressed her humid lips to Dora’s.

“As am I Dora,” said Daphne, smiling sweetly, kneeling in the grass next to Fleur beside Dora. Daphne replaced Fleur’s lips with her own. “Thank you for being there for all of us,” Daphne whispered.

“See Dora...? We all love you loads!” Harry said, who was still flat on his back in the grass on the other side of Dora with Hermione and Luna both lying across him, their furry tails waving and furry ears flicking joyfully.

Harry reached a hand over to take Fleur’s and he squeezed it. Stretching his neck and shoulders, he twisted around to give Dora a warm kiss too, and finally, Hermione took a turn.

“Harry’s right you know, we do all love you Dora,” Hermione concluded quietly, gazing into Dora's eyes.

Dora’s blush deepened. She bit her lip and her hair began to flash through the colours of the rainbow as she peered back at the rest of the Unaffiliated, her chest rising and falling in short rapid breaths. She gulped, blinking back tears. Dora really hadn’t quite realised how much she had come to mean to all of the girls--how much she had become a part of them.

Dora had never felt like she really belonged anywhere before like she did with Harry and Hermione and this lot; certainly not with all the old fogeys in the Order of the Phoenix, who always made Dora feel awkward and clumsy, like a little girl playing pretend.
And Dora had never really fit in at the Ministry with the Aurors--like Harry had said, they were a stiff, stodgy lot, with hard edges and a narrow view of the world.

But this lot: Harry and Hermione, Luna and Parvati, Daphne and Fleur--they were gentle and sweet, and they just accepted Dora for who she was without reservation--and they apparently loved her as much as she had come to love them. A swell of emotion overcame Dora and she began to cry as she returned everyone's kisses in the middle of the quidditch field under the bright summer sun.

Chapter End Notes

"Hit-Wizards" are the Auror Office's equivalent of American SWAT teams. They are not Assassins.

Also, the Auror Office and the Improper Use of Magic Office* are both sub-departments of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and at one point Dolores Umbridge was Head of IUoMO*. Mafalda Hopkirk apparently worked under Umbridge.
After a bit more rolling around and snogging with Dora, Hermione, and the rest of the Unaffiliated on the quidditch pitch, Harry noticed a girl he didn't know sitting in the stands watching them, her black hair shining in the sun.

“Who’s that?” Harry asked with a groan as he turned pink.

~o0o~

It felt nice to have friends again. Jennifer Watts still couldn’t stand to eat in the Great Hall with all of the professors; she still hated being looked at by the men, and she still felt a bit uncomfortable around the other girls. But she didn’t feel quite so alone and afraid.

Parvati had shared her own experience with Jennifer, telling her how frightened and disgusting she had felt after being assaulted one day by several of the boys at school. Parvati had smiled and hugged her friend Daphne, recounting how Daphne had tried to stand up to the boys Daphne had once considered friends.

Daphne had cast her tear-filled eyes down, saying how scared she had been, saying that she hadn’t really done anything but run away crying after ineffectually shouting at the boys. But Parvati kissed Daphne and told her that just knowing that she had tried, and had been on her side was enough. Luna had purred and kissed Daphne gratefully too.

Luna told her own bit of the story, insisting that it hadn’t been so bad for her, as the boys hadn’t been so interested in her and just pawed at her breasts a bit over the top of her clothes—which sounded awful enough to Jennifer. Luna seemed remarkably resilient for such a fragile looking thing.

Daphne had still looked sad, and Fleur cuddled her, coaxing Daphne to talk about her little sister. Finally Daphne told Jennifer the story about Astoria--how she had been kidnapped, violently molested, and nearly raped by some of the same boys who had assaulted Parvati and Luna. Jennifer cried when she heard how badly injured and terrified Daphne’s little sister had been. She was glad to hear that the boys had finally been caught by Harry Potter and sent to prison.

Jennifer knew now that the girls wouldn’t judge her, but she still couldn’t bring herself to talk about Ratface. Jennifer only told them that her parents had been murdered by Snakeface, and that she had been hurt when Snakeface's henchman had locked her up in the basement.

That had been some days ago, and since then, Jennifer would spend a bit of time each day hanging out with the girls. They had shown her how to play wizard chess and exploding snap, and chatted a bit about their lives, and what it was like being witches and going to school at Hogwarts.

Some days, like today in the late morning, the girls would get some broomsticks and fly around a bit. Fleur invited Jennifer to sit on a broomstick with her while she flew, but Jennifer shook her head. It seemed too scary. She wasn’t ready for that.

But sitting in the stands and watching the girls swooping and diving, and throwing a ball through hoops was exciting. A movement on the field caught Jennifer’s eye. Her stomach tied in knots when she spied three people whom she hadn’t met enter the field.
Jennifer relaxed a bit when she realised that they were friends—er, very close friends—of the girls. But Jennifer became alarmed and looked for a place to hide when they spotted her and began to make their way into the stands. Jennifer hugged her knees to her chest and shrank back into her seat, letting her long dark bangs hide her face.

Trembling, Jennifer peered between the strands of her ebony hair. Luna approached with the three newcomers while the others made their way back to the castle. Jennifer’s eyes widened in recognition when they drew closer.

One of the newcomers was obviously the other cat-witch the girls spoke about lovingly so often, the girl with the colourful hair was the one who had taught them how to fight, and the boy...

“Hello Jennifer,” Luna said with a serene smile, “This is Harry Potter...”

~o0o~

Dora’s brows knotted and she felt a flash of anger when she saw the girl scrunch up and try to hide her face. Dora recognised that look. It was the same look which had caused Dora to go berserk on a boy at Hogwarts and nearly get herself expelled—until Mad Eye had made her the offer that she couldn’t really refuse. It was the look which Dora had seen in her previous girlfriend’s eyes.

Jennifer opened her mouth to say hi. But it had gone dry, and she couldn’t speak. Luna put her arm around Jennifer.

Harry swallowed nervously. All Luna had told him about Jennifer was that Voldemort had killed her parents and that she was a muggle. But he could tell that something much worse had happened to her. Jennifer's mannerisms reminded Harry of his own sometimes after Uncle Vernon had finished hitting him or shaking him by the scruff of the neck and slamming him against a wall.

“Er... Hi Jennifer... erm... it’s... er... it’s nice to meet you...” Harry trailed off lamely, mentally kicking himself for not being able to think of anything better to say. Hermione squeezed his hand comfortably.

Jennifer was startled, seeing that Harry was as anxious about meeting her as she was about meeting him. It suddenly struck Jennifer that Harry was the first male that she had seen since her ordeal who didn’t induce a superimposed image of Ratface in her mind.

Jennifer peered into Harry’s eyes, which his glasses did little to hide. They were so gentle and pretty, almost too pretty to be a boy’s eyes—and so green.

Jennifer relaxed slightly and Luna's smile widened.

“Hello,” Jennifer began, in a small voice, “It’s nice to meet you too Harry...”

~o0o~

Things perked up a bit after the initial meeting. Jennifer commiserated with Harry over his Uncle Vernon. Soon Harry and Hermione were sharing butterbeers and lunch with Luna and Jennifer in the visitors’ lounge on the ground floor, while Dora had gone with Fleur, Daphne, and Parvati to eat lunch together in the Great Hall so that Jennifer wouldn’t feel too overwhelmed.

“I thought Ginny and Neville would be here by now too. What’s happening with them Luna?” Hermione asked after she had finished eating.

“Oh, the Weasleys won a contest of some sort,” Luna replied dreamily. “They went on holiday to
Egypt. I think they’ll be back a few days after Harry’s birthday. And Madam Longbottom decided to take Neville on tour of famous European magical sites for his birthday—he should be coming back around the same time.”

Harry wasn’t paying much attention; he was staring at an amazingly lifelike pencil-drawing which he had spotted in the open sketchbook on the coffee-table. His face darkened and he began to shake.

Hermione curled her fluffy tail around his waist and embraced him.

“What’s wrong Harry?” she asked, alarm catching her voice.

Harry discerned the scent of parchment and toothpaste and began to calm, but his voice still trembled with a hint of anger.

“Th... that man in the drawing... Who drew that? Who is that supposed to be?”

Jennifer cringed. She had forgotten that she had left her sketchbook on the table.

“I... I d...d...d...drew it,” Jennifer stammered. “I....I... I c...can’t get his face out of my head.” Tears began to roll down her cheeks.

“Yes...” Harry swallowed and tried his utmost to steady himself. He didn’t want to scare Jennifer, “Is that the man who hurt you?”

“Ratface!” Jennifer whispered, nodding.

“Wormtail!” Harry muttered through gritted teeth. “That’s Peter Pettigrew—older now—**he’s** the one who sold my parents out to Voldemort. **He’s** the main reason they’re dead. **He was their friend... and he betrayed them.** Sirius showed me a picture of him with Mum and Dad.”

“H...he r...raped me...” Jennifer blurted out, sobbing. “...loads of times.”

Hermione gasped in horror; Harry’s blood began to boil-over as an inferno raged in his gut and spread to his extremities.

Jennifer had shocked herself with the statement. This was the first time she had been able to say it out loud—the first time she had been able to clearly articulate it in her mind.

Luna curled her own fluffy white tail around Jennifer and took the sobbing girl in her arms. Luna was sad, but she had suspected it all along, and she was relieved that Jennifer had finally been able to talk about what had happened to her.

Harry’s head started spinning. He couldn’t tell where Jennifer’s pain ended and his began—he just felt it all swirling together in the firestorm within. The walls felt like they were closing in on him. Harry couldn’t breathe properly—he felt like he was going to explode. He had to get away.

Harry leapt up and stalked out of the visitor’s lounge.

“I’m sorry...” Jennifer wailed, “I’m sorry... I shouldn’t have left my sketchbook out...”

“It’s not your fault Jennifer...” Hermione cried. “Please! You have to understand, Harry’s not angry at you. He’s angry about Wormtail hurting you... Luna tell her—Harry’s angry at Wormtail...”

Hermione jumped out of her own seat.

“Look after her Luna... I’ve got to look after Harry—stop him before he hurts himself...” Hermione
fled the visitor’s lounge using her nose to track Harry.

Thankfully, Harry hadn’t lost his common sense. He was headed for the Seventh Floor, looking for somewhere safe to release his rage. Hermione could see him on one of the stairs above, but they were already moving.

Hermione ran up the stairs as fast as she could and instinctively leapt from the end of the staircase to the landing on the next floor which was already several metres away, alighting on all fours, her bushy cat tail whipping behind her. Hermione had to do that for every staircase as she followed Harry. She almost caught up to him.

Too out of breath to yell at Harry to stop, Hermione raced down the corridor and barely managed to catch the door to the Room of Requirement before it clicked shut. Hermione ducked and screamed when debris from an enormous exploding statue of Wormtail rained down upon her.

~o0o~

“Hermione...”

Harry’s voice cut through the ringing in her ears. “Hermione... I’m so sorry--I didn’t see you...”

Hermione blinked and the stunning effects of the blast began to fade, but there was still a haze of smoke and dust.

“Hermione--are you alright? Say something... please...” Harry’s voice broke into sobs.

Hermione could see the hot tears streaming down Harry’s fiery red cheeks, dripping onto the floor. He was on his knees beside her.

“I... I’ll be fine... Harry,” Hermione managed to gasp. “Really--I’m fine, just a bit dazed. But what about you?”

Relief flooded Harry’s features. But his voice was still too broken by heavy wracking sobs of guilt. Hermione glanced around the steel reinforced room at the concrete statues of Voldemort, Wormtail, and the Minister. Harry had apparently conjured this room specifically to use blasting curses on his enemies.

Hermione threw her arms and furry tail around Harry, fighting her own tears to be strong for him.

“I’m alright... I swear Harry!” she said firmly.

“Okay... okay... That’s good then,” Harry gasped. “What about Jennifer? I... I didn’t mean to upset her. But I had to get out of there before I lost it completely.”

“I think she’ll be alright Harry. Luna’s with her...” Hermione replied, “And... and to tell you the truth, I think Jennifer needed the release too. I could feel it... all of her pain and guilt. She hadn’t been able to really face what happened to her until you... until you and she shared your feelings about Wormtail with each other.”

“I don’t understand... why would she feel guilty about being raped?” Then it hit Harry. “Oh... wait, I... I think I do understand. Sort of like the way I feel--I mean like the way I felt--about being hit by Vernon...”

Hermione nodded, holding Harry tightly, and he felt the last embers of his fury washing away.
“Oh crap,” Harry sighed. “I just had a thought... I bet Jennifer feels bad about upsetting me now--even though it wasn’t her fault at all.”

Hermione led a much calmer Harry back downstairs to the visitor’s lounge where Luna had finally settled Jennifer. Harry and Jennifer shared wan little smiles. Jennifer brushed her black bangs out of the way, wiping away the remnants of her tears.

“I’m sorry Jennifer...” Harry began.

“No, it’s alright,” Jennifer interjected, “I get it--I know you weren’t cross with me. I... I want to thank you actually. I think I’m finally beginning to realise that what happened to me wasn’t my fault. You’re the first person I’ve really been able to talk to about it.”

Harry nodded.

“Er... I...I don’t know if it’ll be the same for you, but... but sometimes those feelings might come back a bit,” Harry admitted ruefully. “But... but eventually you learn to live with it...” Harry glanced at Hermione, “especially if you find someone nice to help you get through those moments.”

Harry’s face hardened slightly, and a spark lit in his eyes again.

“And... and I want you to know... If I ever come across Wormtail, I’m going to kill him.”

Hermione stiffened.

“Not if I see him first,” Hermione said, her own eyes ablaze. “Because if I spot that Cretinous Rodent before Harry does, he’ll already be dead.

Chapter End Notes

I figured that seeing as the Weasleys never got their Egyptian holiday last summer, they might as well have it this one... ;(-)
Chapter 97

Jennifer picked up her sketchbook and smiled at Harry and Hermione, feeling her heart catch in her throat.

“Th...thank you...” Jennifer swallowed, “I... I think I need to be by myself for a bit. But it was lovely meeting you both--I mean it.”

“Will you come and have dinner with us?” Luna asked, her fluffy tail flicking and her eyes full of concern.

“I... I’m not sure,” Jennifer responded, “I don’t think I’m quite ready for that yet. But I promise, I’ll be alright. I’ll see you later then...” Jennifer’s eyes caught Hermione’s twitching furry ears. She glanced back at the cat-witch and Harry who both looked sorry to see her going, “...all of you. Tha...thanks again Harry.”

Jennifer hurried out of the visitor’s lounge, letting her bangs fall in her face before anyone could see the tears running down her cheeks again. She didn’t know what she’d done to deserve finding such nice people who really seemed to care so much for a girl they had barely met.

“Will she be alright?” Harry asked after Jennifer had left the room, wondering if he’d said the wrong thing. “She looked like she was about to cry again.”

Luna nodded, smiling sweetly, but Harry wasn’t convinced. He was sure that he’d put his foot in it once more. Hermione put her arms around Harry and hugged him tightly.

“It’s okay Harry, you didn’t do anything wrong,” Hermione said. “It’s just going to take Jennifer a long time to get used to having friends again.”

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. *That*, he understood. But he was still feeling badly about what had happened in the Room of Requirement minutes ago.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Harry peered into Hermione’s eyes, looking for signs of pain or concussion.

“I’m fine Harry--really...” Hermione pulled Harry closer and kissed him passionately to prove it.

Harry spied a dark haired girl in the doorway again out of the corner of his eye and looked up, seeing a royal-blue haired girl standing behind her.

“Hi Harry,” Parvati grinned. “Dumbledore’s back. He asked if you and Hermione could meet him in his office...”

“And I’m comin’ with you,” Dora said. “I wanna get this over with...”

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The Headmaster lifted his eyebrows when he spotted Nymphadora Tonks arriving in his office with the Potters. But then he realised that he really shouldn’t be surprised at all.

Harry, Hermione, and Dora took seats in the comfy armchairs in front of Dumbledore’s desk. They all noticed how disheveled and haggard he looked. The Headmaster waved his wand, and a pot of tea with four cups appeared.
“Please, help yourselves, and bear with me for a moment... I must apologise for my appearance. It has been a rather long and trying morning,” said Dumbledore.

“Professor Lupin told us you were rescuing muggles,” Harry acknowledged after taking a sip of tea. Curiosity got the better of him. “Did you have to fight any Inferi yourself Sir?”

“Ah, indeed, I did have to employ a disintegration curse several times myself,” the Headmaster replied, “…and I am most grateful for the quick reflexes of Professor Flitwick. If it were not for him, we would most likely be having this chat in the hospital wing.”

“Are you alright Professor?” asked Hermione, her bushy ginger tail quivering at the frightful notion of Dumbledore being injured by Inferi.

Albus Dumbledore’s eyes began to twinkle, seeing the care and concern in all of his student’s faces--Tonks’ included.

“Quite alright Mrs Potter... Just a bit shaken still. However, perhaps we should move on to why I asked to meet with you and Harry. First, I wish to express my utmost relief that you both survived your encounter with the Minister.”

“However, I also have some information to impart. I have managed to uncover some interesting particulars about Voldemort which I believe are important to share with you both. Though, I think perhaps it can wait until tomorrow, or even Monday. I am rather worn, and I expect your friends shall want to… erm... celebrate your return…”

Harry and Hermione blushed, but they couldn’t help grinning at the Headmaster’s own reddening cheeks.

“In any case, please feel free to make continued use of the delightfully magical Room of Requirement. I would also, at some point, after one of your… erm… sessions, like to examine some of your Spell-work and observe any changes…”

“Yes, indeed we shall Mrs Potter... Now, finally, to Nymphadora Tonks…” the Headmaster’s eyes sparkled as he peered over his half-moon spectacles at the fidgeting girl with royal blue hair and scarlet cheeks, “…I suppose I shall have to refer to you as Miss Tonks again.”

Harry grinned and Hermione squealed with delight when they saw the new door in the Unaffiliated Corridor. Dora giddily gave them both kisses.

“I can’t believe it…” Dora nearly swooned. “I can’t believe Dumbledore is actually alright with this.”

“And he’s even working out a proper new curriculum for a real postgraduate programme.” Hermione bounced on her toes gleefully, twirling her bushy tail, tears of joy streaming down her face. “That means Fleur can stay after she graduates next year too. We can all continue schooling together until Harry and I graduate…”

~o0o~
The rest of the Unaffiliated were just as elated as the Potters to discover that Dora was now officially one of them, and they spent much of the afternoon helping her get her things from the quarters which had been arranged for some of the Aurors who had been providing round-the-clock security during the Triwizard Tournament and move them into her new quarters.

Harry and Hermione left everyone to it after a bit, and went to visit Sirius, taking the secret tunnel under the Whomping Willow to the Shrieking Shack. They were both surprised. Lupin was right. The interior had been completely redone and they no longer worried about possibly putting their foot through a rotting floorboard. Sirius was as bright and cheerful as the decor.

“Remus’s touch,” Sirius smirked. “I would’ve been just as pleased if everything was painted red and gold.”

Remus snorted, but Harry and Hermione both thought Lupin looked happier than they had ever seen him.

“Yes, well I’ll likely be spending a lot more time here than in my private chambers at the castle,” Lupin retorted. “I see no reason to decorate our place like the Gryffindor Common Room.”

“I heard Ragnok really gave that Old Hag at the Ministry what-for,” Sirius grinned and popped open a bottle of Elf-made Wine. “...And that my little cousin has made quite an impression on you two.”

“Sirius...” groaned Lupin as the Potter’s both blushed. “You promised you wouldn’t tease them.”

“It’s alright,” Harry chortled. “I might as well tell you anyway. I asked Dora to come and live with me and Hermione while we’re not at school...”

“...and Dumbledore is setting up a post-graduate programme for her...” Hermione gushed with shining eyes, her furry ears twitching happily. “She’s going to be an Unaffiliated now too.”

“Really?” Lupin gasped. “Well that solves a real problem. We have all been trying to think of a good cover to keep Tonks at Hogwarts to provide extra security for you two...”

“That’s brilliant, Dora will need to train for a new career anyway,” Sirius said, taking a swig of the Elf-wine. “At least until we get a more amenable administration in the Ministry.”

“Er... about that...” Harry began, all of a sudden feeling a bit awkward, as he was more or less the one who had convinced Dora to follow her dreams.

“Please, don’t be cross with Harry,” Hermione squeaked, coming to his rescue, “but one of the reasons Harry offered Dora to come and live with us to begin with, is because he wants Dora to be happy and do her music or draw comics...”

“Why would I be cross?” asked a bewildered Sirius. “I’m her elder cousin, not her father. I think that’s an excellent idea.”

“Andromeda and Ted might have a few issues though...” sighed Remus, raising his eyebrows. “You’ll keep this to yourself for now I hope Sirius. It’s up to Tonks...”

“Of course I will Remus,” Sirius responded in a slightly wounded tone. “I want Dora to be happy as well. And frankly, though I’m a bit surprised at how smitten she is with Harry too, I’ve never seen Dora as happy she has been lately with Harry and Hermione--and their girlfriends...”

“Sirius, please, you have to be careful how you refer to them...” Remus admonished Sirius, “it’s one thing for us to know, but we need to be circumspect for their sakes around the rest of the Order or in
public. And if you're not careful now, you could slip up later...”

“See what I have to deal with!” Sirius rolled his eyes, then he winked at Harry and Hermione, taking another sip of the wine. “That’s why I love Remus though. He keeps me on the straight and narrow--keeps me sane.”

Lupin couldn’t help but smile as he palmed his reddening face. For their part, Harry and Hermione were too stunned and amused by the exchange to speak. All that could be heard was the sound of Hermione’s tail swishing mirthfully. They all took a sip of the Elf-wine from the glasses which Sirius had passed around.

Finally Harry broke the silence, his expression puzzled. “Er... I hope you don’t mind me asking, Sirius, but why did you have posters of muggle pin-up girls on your wall? They were still there the last time I looked.”

For the first time during the visit, Sirius looked slightly abashed.

“Well... erm... that’s a bit awkward to explain... On the one hand, I was trying to take the piss out of Mum and Dad by putting up pictures of muggles, but on the other hand, I...er... I didn’t want them or Regulus to know that I preferred blokes...”

Sirius glanced at Remus apologetically, continuing, “And... er... I did enjoy going out with girls once in a while too--I just eventually realised that I liked guys more... especially one in particular.”

~o0o~

“Where are we going Daphne?” Harry asked.

Dinner had been a slightly hurried affair, as all of the girls had been eager to celebrate the return of the Potters when it was finished. Dora had begged off, claiming that she was tired, but Hermione could see that Dora was still feeling a bit shy. Hermione had taken Dora aside and spoken to her in whispers. Dora had nodded, and retired to her new quarters with a grin on her face.

Now they were all headed to the Room of Requirement with blankets and a basket of drinks and snacks. Daphne had chosen a special place she wanted the Room of Requirement to be for them.

“You’ll see Harry, it’s a surprise.”

And it was a surprise. Harry stepped through the doorway into an Alpine Meadow under starry skies. It was stunningly realistic, even more realistic than the sunny beach which Harry had conjured up before the Third Task. Everyone oohed and aahed.

“My family has a chalet near here in the real Alps,” Daphne said. “Normally we visit it every summer. This is my favourite spot. Astoria and I would sneak out at night when we were little and lie here watching the stars. It’s a lot colder in real life of course, and it’s still a bit chillier than the Fairy Grotto. Sorry about that.”

“Don’t be sorry Daphne,” purred an awed Hermione. “This is brilliant--it’s gorgeous. I’ve been skiing with my parents in the Alps, but I’ve never seen it in the summer.”

They lay the blankets out, and for a while the six Unaffiliated just snuggled contentedly, feeling the warmth of their bodies as they nestled against each other and stargazed.

Daphne began to kiss Harry, pushing up his t-shirt with one hand, caressing his abdomen and chest, the other hand running through his hair. Fleur pressed against Harry from the other side, trailing her
lips wetly across his cheek and neck while she undid the belt of his shorts and unzipped him.

“I missed you and ‘ermione vairy much ‘arry,” Fleur whispered, unbuttoning Daphne’s blouse and unclasping her bra.

Hermione giggled, furry ears twitching happily, when Luna removed every stitch of her own clothing and lay naked on top of her. Luna tugged Hermione’s blouse above her breasts to fondle them and kissed her.

Parvati slid Hermione’s panties down, pulling them off her feet, and Hermione parted her thighs to make room for Parvati’s head. Hermione purred when Parvati’s cat tongue slipped inside her dampening fold.

Harry began to gasp as his pulse quickened, his hands massaging Daphne’s now naked breasts as she leaned over him. He heard Daphne moan when he took a hard pink nipple in his mouth and nibbled it, flicking it wetly with his tongue. Harry uttered a moan himself when he felt Fleur’s humid lips engulf his erection.

Harry sucked Daphne’s nipple, continuing to knead her breast with one hand while she ground her soaking panty covered slit against his abdomen which she was now straddling. He reached out his other hand towards Fleur’s bottom which was poking out of her skirt, well within reach as she knelt beside him, her tongue wrapped around the shaft of his stiffness.

Harry gave Fleur’s bottom cheeks a few squeezes and slipped his hand under the taut fabric of her panties. He felt Fleur shudder with pleasure when his fingers pressed into her wet vulva and his thumb found her throbbing clitoris. Daphne, Harry, and Fleur began to writhe in unison as the intoxicating pulses of ardour rippled through them.

Harry’s mouth enveloped Daphne’s breast and his hand moved to grasp and squeeze her other breast. He pinched and tweaked the other nipple while he continued to suckle the nipple between his lips. Harry’s loins jerked; he groaned as a wave of bliss took him and he burst, jets of semen squirting into Fleur’s throat. Lost in passion, Harry couldn’t discern between the stars in the enchanted sky and the ones in his mind’s eye.

Fleur’s sheath contracted tightly around Harry’s fingers, and her stickiness flowed over his hand as she too fell into the abyss of ecstasy. Gusts of pleasure swept through Daphne like a windstorm and she wailed, drenching Harry’s torso.

The three cat-witches quaked next them, meowing and purring, lost in their own currents of euphoria, furry tails undulating.

When they roused again, mere moments later, the perspiring young witches and wizard giddily stripped off the rest of their clothing and rolled together as one in the meadow grasses under the stars, blankets forgotten.
Daphne’s tongue and lips danced with Parvati’s as she lay on top of the dark-haired cat-witch, her fingers inside Parvati’s moist cleft. Daphne took a breather and saw that Harry was ready to go again. She looked up at Harry, jutting her bottom at him, her aqua eyes big and pleading.

Harry grinned. He had just finished ravishing Luna and his ejaculate oozed from the lips of her nethers, but he was still hard.

Fleur gasped and wriggled as the lubricated tip of Hermione’s furry tail spiraled into her vulva.

Luna had been kissing Fleur while Harry rocked Luna’s world and Hermione continued to rock Fleur’s; she turned around, placing her knees on either side of the older girl’s head, presenting her dripping labia to Hermione. Luna’s furry white tail waved joyfully when Hermione’s cat-tongue darted into her chamber to lap up Harry’s secretions as they splattered onto Fleur’s giggling face.

Harry crawled behind Daphne and leaned over her backside, kissing her golden-blonde tresses. Daphne spread her legs wider, as did Parvati, to ease Harry’s access.

“B...bum...” Daphne squeaked quickly, before she lost her nerve.

“Pardon?”

“I... I want to try it in my b...bum. I haven’t done that yet, but Fleur and Hermione seemed to like it.”

Parvati giggled underneath Daphne, in between her purrs of pleasure.

“I suppose I’ll have to give it a go too Harry... but maybe next time...”

Harry smirked. “Don’t worry Parvati, I think I can manage another round after this one. Alright then Daphne, I’ll be gentle...”

Harry parted Daphne’s cheeks and placed the head of his penis against her twitching anus. He grunted and pushed forth, his hands gripping Daphne’s hips firmly. Daphne gasped as her back-entrance yielded, and Harry’s shaft slid all the way in.

Parvati meowed happily as Harry’s thrusts squashed Daphne’s breasts against her own. Parvati could feel the grass of the Alpine Meadow digging into her back with every jerk of his hips.

In between her own moans and gasps as Harry’s stiffness plunged deeply into her back-passage, Daphne nuzzled and licked Parvati’s neck, one set of fingers tweaking Parvati’s nipples, the other continuing to probe Parvati’s soaking slit.

Luna was purring and meowing as Hermione’s tongue continued to lap at her interior. Stimulated further by the sight of Parvati writhing beneath Daphne and Harry, Luna reached out to clasp one of Parvati’s hands.

Daphne had been bracing for a bit of pain, but she was thrilled that Harry’s shaft didn’t hurt inside her bum at all. It felt a bit strange at first as his erection pistoned into her, but the oddness of the new sensation just made Daphne even more excited.

Daphne couldn’t take it anymore after a few minutes. The feeling of Harry inside her bottom drove her wild; she gave a little shriek and her entire body trembled ecstatically as she climaxed. Feeling
Daphne’s back-channel convulse around his penis tipped Harry over the edge; Harry groaned and exploded into bliss, spraying a fountain of semen into her recesses.

A crackling storm of magic and electricity swept through the lot of them, arcing across the meadow, lighting up the simulated night. The Room of Requirement trembled and the lights flickered in Hogwarts.

The witches and the wizard collapsed in a sticky heap on the grass under the starry night, and it was at least half an hour before they began again.

Parvati climbed on top of the still happily dazed Fleur, waving her glistening black cat tail and bottom at Harry with a grin.

“My turn Harry...” Parvati giggled.

Luna was busily licking clean the end of Hermione’s bushy ginger tail which had just been inside of Fleur. She reasoned that Harry would be too spent after the next round, and nobody had thought to bring any toys. But it suddenly occurred to Luna that the warm living appendage currently in her mouth was nicely lubricated.

Luna widened her silvery-grey eyes and brushed her own furry tail across Hermione’s glowing cheek, then wiggled it against Hermione’s sopping entrance. Hermione grinned. She understood what Luna wanted.

Luna lay on her back in the grass and kissed Daphne while Hermione wet the end of Luna’s tail with her tongue.

“Lie on top of me Daphne... no, turn over to face Hermione...”

“Like this?”

“Perfect...” Luna replied as she reached around to hold Daphne’s breasts.

“Mmmm... yummy, a Daphne sandwich,” giggled Hermione as she climbed on top between the two girls’ thighs.

Hermione and Luna positioned the tips of their moistened tails at each other’s rear-entrance, and both gasped, their eyes widening in delight as they plundered each other’s depths with Daphne squealing gleefully in between them.

~o0o~

“Blimey, wha’ the ruddy hell was tha’ ? There it is again. Wha’s goin’ on then?” gasped Hagrid when the castle shook and the lamps flickered for the fourth time.

Albus Dumbledore swirled the contents of his brandy snifter and chuckled, his eyes twinkling. He noted with satisfaction, that the magical lanterns and candles which lit the castle only flickered, and didn’t go out completely, settling at a brighter wattage after each tremor.

“Oh, nothing to worry yourself about Rubeus,” Albus replied. “Hogwarts is merely adjusting to some ongoing upgrades...”

Minerva McGonagall nearly snorted her cocktail out of her nose, and had a coughing fit. Poppy rolled her eyes.
“There, there dear...” Poppy said, patting Minerva on the back.

Filius Flitwick exchanged a bewildered look with Pomona Sprout, who just shrugged in response.

Severus might have been puzzled too, but he was spending the night again at Narcissa Black’s manor.

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“What are you reading Luna?” Hermione asked, seeing the other cat-witch with a book at the table as they ate breakfast in the Great Hall. She was glad that Madam Pince had finished her breakfast much earlier, and settled in for her usual Sunday morning nap after opening the library.

“A book on Mind-Healing.” Luna replied, “I’ve always wanted to be an explorer and find undiscovered creatures, but I think it’s nice helping people feel better too.”

“That’s lovely Luna,” Hermione said. “Is this about helping Jennifer then?”

“Partly, but I’m actually thinking I might like to help other people as well--on a professional basis. There’s no reason I can’t be a Magical Naturalist and a Mind Healer when I leave Hogwarts.”

“That is so sweet of you Luna!” Parvati smiled and gave her girlfriend a kiss on the cheek. “You’d be brilliant.”

“Thank you Parvati,” responded Luna with a blush.

“Have you thought about it Parvati?” Harry asked after swallowing a piece of bacon. “--What you’d like to do after Hogwarts I mean.”

“I don’t really know to be honest.” Parvati frowned pensively. “I was interested in Divination before Professor Trelawney made you feel bad Harry--that rather turned me off it. I’m pretty good at Arithmancy, and like Hermione said--it’s much more predictive and precise as a discipline--but it’s not really my cup of tea...”

“You used to hang out with Lavender before you got in that fight with her in second year over Hermione,” Harry mused. “Didn’t you two have any hobbies or dreams you shared?”

“Mostly we just gossiped about clothes and boys,” Parvati sighed, flicking her furry black tail in consternation. “And it really wasn’t me--besides being interested in Divination and growing up together, we really didn’t have that much in common. I like a lot of the same things that Luna likes really--and she’s very intuitive...”

Luna purred happily and curled her fluffy white tail around Parvati.

“Parvati is amazing at Transfiguration though,” Luna gushed. “She’s a smashing dancer, and she’s got a lovely singing voice...”

“But none of those things are much of a career choice unless I become a teacher...” Parvati managed to look pleased and glum at the same time, squirming uncomfortably, “...and I’m not really sure about teaching as a profession.”

Hermione took Parvati’s hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

“Well, you've still got plenty of time to work it out Parvati,” Hermione said. “We don’t really have to start making any hard choices until 5th year. Let’s see what fourth year holds for us before you try
and settle on anything--And even then, you’re brilliant enough that you can take an assortment of classes and keep your options wide open. You're obviously excellent at potions, and defensive magic too...”

Harry was still thinking about what Luna had said about Parvati singing and dancing. And despite what Parvati had said about not really being as into clothes as Lavender, he had always thought Parvati had a great sense of fashion.

As an interesting thought crossed Harry’s mind, Hedwig settled next to him with the Sunday edition of the Daily Prophet, and also the Quibbler--which had gone from a monthly to a weekly publication, still focused entirely on current events and politics.

“Daddy actually has staff now, thanks to the Order;” Luna remarked dreamily.

Both papers featured the Gateshead Inferi attacks on the front page, but the Prophet’s top story had a lurid headline indicating that the Minister had found someone just as “creative” as Rita Skeeter had been to replace her.

**The Potter Conspiracy:**

**The Wizengamot Compromised, Imperius or Bribery?**

Dora sat down, having just arrived for breakfast. She poured herself a cup of tea and nearly spat the first sip out when she read the headline.

“What a bloody load of rubbish...” Dora snorted and rolled her eyes.

“I’m glad you don’t have to work at the Ministry anymore.” Harry grinned at Dora as he picked up the Quibbler, contemplating Luna’s comments about Parvati’s singing and dancing. He frowned when he saw the Quibbler’s headline.

**Inferi Attack at Metrocentre Mall**

**Two Wizengamot Members Allegedly Killed**

“That’s odd! Does that seem strange to you Hermione?” Harry asked pensively after skimming the article.

“Yes it does Harry. According to this article, the two members who were allegedly killed by Inferi are Henry Wensleydale and Marmaduke Ventosus Dithers--two of the “wobblies” in the middle who supported us during the trial.”

“Mr Lovegood’s reporter seems to think it’s odd too,” Harry remarked.

“You’re right Harry,” Hermione nodded as she continued reading, “It says here that, though they both live in the Gateshead area, neither one of them have been known to frequent muggle shopping centres, and that the Aurors claim to have recovered no wizard bodies, nor any evidence suggesting that either Wizengamot member was at the scene.”

Daphne and Fleur wandered into the Great Hall yawning sleepily.

“What’s going on?” Daphne asked.

Fleur glanced at the Headlines and groaned. “Eet ees too early for zis nonsense today... Per’aps some coffee first.”
Harry looked up at the staff-table, where Dumbledore and the professors appeared to be shaking their heads and groaning as they read their own copies of the Sunday papers. At one end of the staff-table, Harry spied Karkaroff and Viktor sitting next to him, forlornly eating his porridge.

At the other end Harry spotted a rotund man in a maroon velvet jacket with a walrus moustache chatting to Hagrid.

“I wonder who that is?” Harry muttered. The rest of the Unaffiliated peered up at the staff-table.

“No idea...” Parvati said.

“Nor I,” Luna added.

“I haven’t seen him before today,” Daphne looked puzzled.

“He looks vaguely familiar,” Dora frowned pensively. “But I can’t recall where I might’ve seen ‘im before.”

Fleur shook her head. “I have nevair seen him eizzer, ‘arry.”

“I suppose we’ll meet him soon enough,” Hermione responded, furry ears twitching in contemplation. “Perhaps he’s just a member of the Order that we haven’t met yet.”

Harry nodded as he buttered a crumpet for Hedwig who was sitting on his shoulder and fondly nibbling his ear.

“I expect so,” Harry agreed. “Viktor looks sad though. I wonder why he’s still here? I know Karkaroff joined the Order so I can understand why he stayed behind. But why Viktor...?”

“Oh, zat I can say,” Fleur replied. “Viktor remained because ‘e does not want to leave Lavender behind in Britain. So Viktor has decided to transfer to ‘ogwarts for his last year of school as well...”

“But Viktor’s miserable because Lavender isn’t staying at Hogwarts for the summer, and Karkaroff doesn’t think it’s safe for him to leave,” Parvati interjected. “I know that Dumbledore offered her to stay, because Lavender wrote and told me that Viktor asked him if she could. But her parents wouldn’t let her, and Lavender’s very upset about it too--she’s really fallen for him.”

The girls all sighed at the romantic drama of it all and Hermione smiled sadly. Hermione was happy for Lavender, as she and Lavender had become friends since the end of the Second Task, but she knew how awful Lavender and Viktor must both feel to be apart, even if just for some weeks.

“Maybe we should try and cheer him up a bit later on today and do a bit of flying together,” Hermione said.

Harry raised his eyebrows and grinned at Hermione. She blushed and poked Harry in the ribs, sticking her tongue out at him.

“I’ll be on your broom with you, where I know I’ll be safe Harry.”

“Right, sounds like a plan then Hermione,” Harry concurred happily while the others giggled. “Later on it is then.” Harry paused and looked serious again.
“I... I’ve been thinking though,” Harry continued, “I want us all to keep training to fight. And... and I think everyone should learn how to perform the patronus charm. Perhaps after we do a bit of our summer homework, you and I can show everybody how to do the patronus, and Dora can keep training us in other magical combat techniques...”

“That’s an excellent idea Harry!” Hermione’s eyes shone, her furry tail and ears quivering with joy. “We need to be prepared for whatever Voldemort or the Minister throws at us.”

“I agree,” Dora gazed at Harry proudly, her heart aflutter. “That’s an outstanding idea Harry. I can help with the advanced combat magic and hand to hand--but we’ll follow your lead, alright?”

“Wait--er--what?” Harry gulped, suddenly nervous as the rest of the Unaffiliated peered at him eagerly. “Er... I...erm... I didn’t mean that I should be in charge--I just meant... Look, I don’t know enough--”

“That doesn’t matter Harry,” Dora retorted. “I can show you lot some things you may not ‘ave learned yet, but YOU Harry--you’re a natural leader. You’ve got all the right instincts. The way you took charge over the Third Task...”

“But... but I... I didn’t really do anything...” Harry interrupted, perplexed. “I fought as hard as I could, but it wasn’t enough. Fleur and Viktor and Cedric all got hurt--we could have all died...”

“But we did not--thanks to you mon amour...” said Fleur softly, giving Harry a kiss. “Eet ees because of you that we all lived. You brought us all togezzer--to fight as one. And don’t forget ze Second Task--eet ees because of you that ze Grindylows did not overcome me...” Fleur glanced at Dora.

“You may not know, because ‘arry is so humble ‘e does not talk about himself, but he took over ze Second Task as well. When he saved me from ze Grindylows I followed him into battle wiz ze Nereid. And when ‘e told me to leave wiz Gabrielle and Cho Chang, I did what he told me to do, even though I wanted to stay and fight. Eet ees ‘arry who really saved everyone in ze Second Task...”

“That’s the absolute truth,” Hermione said forcefully, glowering at Harry when he tried to interrupt Fleur. “Harry also knew exactly what to say to convince the Merpeople to let us go when they trapped us, and to stop them from fighting among themselves. He was BRILLIANT!” Hermione glared at Harry, daring him to contradict her.

Harry swallowed again, trying to think of something else to say.

“But you helped me loads Hermione,” Harry said in a small voice. “I would’ve never survived the Triwiz without you.”

Hermione’s features softened as she melted in Harry’s glistening green eyes. She leaned in and kissed him.

“I will always be there for you Harry... because I love you. Don’t you understand? We all love you because you always step up to look after us--no matter what the odds are. You try and protect everyone without even thinking about it, no matter who it is--without even considering yourself. You always put others first--put us first. That’s why we all want to be there for you--that’s why we’ll follow you... wherever you lead us.”

Harry gulped yet again, and the tears which had threatened to fall began leaking as he glanced at Daphne, Luna, and Parvati. Everyone seemed to be in complete agreement. How could he say no?
He had one final go at it.

“But what if I’m ever wrong?” Harry asked quietly.

“Nobody’s perfect Harry,” Luna answered. “But we know you’ll always try to do the right thing...”

“...and that you’re kind and brave...” continued Parvati.

“...and that you just want to save people...” said Daphne, her own tears streaming down her cheeks.

“...and we’ll always be there to help you find the right path Harry,” Hermione concluded.

Jennifer Watts quietly backed out of the entrance of the Great Hall before anyone noticed her; she didn’t want anyone to think that she had been eavesdropping. Jennifer had only come down to quickly grab a plate of breakfast and find a quiet place to eat. But she had heard everything from the point at which Harry had suggested that he and the girls keep training to fight.

Hermione had been intensely focused on Harry, but she suddenly became aware of another presence. She looked up, but Jennifer was already gone.

Hermione smiled. She could still sense the surge of affection she had felt emanating from the threshold of the Hall and knew that Jennifer was progressing on her journey towards healing.

~o0o~

Hermione and Parvati spent some time trying to teach Harry enough intermediate algebra so that he could start working on his Arithmancy summer assignment while Fleur checked Daphne’s work and Luna read her book on Mind Healing. Dora leaned back in one of the library’s comfy chairs drawing some pencil sketches.

“Why don’t you take a break Harry!? Do some runework, or maybe just some light reading for fun,” said Hermione, sensing his frustration. “We can pick this up again tomorrow--there’s plenty of time.”

“And you’re really starting to get the hang of it Harry,” Parvati said encouragingly. “You’ve come a long way over this last year. It’s amazing that you’ve managed to get to this level given everything else you’ve had to deal with, and you barely knowing regular math to begin with...”

“Thanks guys,” Harry sighed in relief, “My brain feels like it’s going to explode. I just don’t get quadratic equations. How can an equation have more than one correct answer?”

“Maybe we should go and fly a bit right now,” Luna suggested. “It says in this Mind Healing book that sometimes it’s best to move on to a physical activity when you’re stumped about something. I’m surprised really. I thought there would be more magic spells involved... or potions. But it seems that a lot of Mind Healing doesn’t involve any magic at all--not directly anyway.”

Soon Harry was gleefully swooping around the castle with Hermione wrapped around him purring blissfully, her bushy tail whipping in the wind as Viktor and the others followed on their own brooms. Viktor seemed delighted to have Harry back too. Flying with friends was more distracting than flying alone.

The only “problem” for Harry was that soaring over the lake and the treetops and doing loop de loops with Hermione squeezing him tightly as she sat on his broom behind him often made her a little too happy. Hermione squealed and climaxed twice as the broom shuddered and vibrated, pressing
deeply into the apex of her thighs.

Harry had to circle quickly around the castle the first time so that Hermione wouldn’t embarrass herself in front of Viktor, and when Hermione began to meow with pleasure the second time, Harry dove and put on an extra burst of speed, skimming the surface of the lake.

The girls giggled and beckoned Viktor back to the quidditch pitch to throw the quaffle around for a bit when they saw Harry's broom dive into the trees near the edge of the Forbidden Forest by the lakeshore.

Viktor followed the rest of the girls back, slightly puzzled--then he shook his head and smirked when he realised that Harry and Hermione were probably going to snog for a bit. Viktor sighed and decided he could manage for a few weeks; maybe he could at least meet Lavender for date or two in Hogsmeade in the meantime.

Harry and Hermione leapt giddily from Harry’s Firebolt and tumbled into the ferns and underbrush of the oaks, startling several squirrels who were arguing over a pile of acorns. The agitated squirrels scampered quickly up into the branches.

Hermione heatedly tugged off her sopping panties and tossed them in the bushes, glad that she wasn’t wearing jeans. She unbuckled Harry’s belt and unzipped his shorts as they rolled in the leaves, panting heavily, her furry ears flattening.

Harry gasped as he pushed up Hermione’s skirt and she parted her legs. Harry couldn’t resist, seeing Hermione’s nakedness again in these woods as he had so long ago, and dove face-first into her dripping slit. He sucked on her labia as he plunged his tongue into her moist crevice.

Harry’s tongue snaked into Hermione’s fold and slathered her nubbin. He licked and nibbled Hermione’s pulsating clitoris until she yowled and her back arched. Hermione’s furry tail thrashed and the trees trembled as her vulva spasmed for the third time that morning.

Hermione writhed ecstatically as Harry clambered on top of her and buried his tumescent penis deep inside her convulsing tightness. Harry drove his hardness into Hermione’s depths again and again as she continued meowing; magic arced and the ground quaked.

Hermione’s multiple orgasms cascaded into a crescendo and the contractions of her sheath around Harry’s throbbing staff were finally too much. Harry exploded as the cyclone of passion took him, releasing a flood of stickiness into her chalice.

Hermione’s clenching sheath milked Harry as he ejaculated uncontrollably. Harry rocked, his black hair dripping with sweat, and his eyes rolled as he erupted unceasingly inside of Hermione, semen spraying out of her labia and flowing into the ferns and leaves beneath her.

A flock of blue-tits took flight, chirping and twittering above the trees, and the squirrels clung to the branches until the oaks eventually stopped shaking. Harry slumped on top of Hermione, gasping, and they both finally succumbed to oblivion.
Chapter 100

When Harry came to, he felt the delightful sensation of Hermione’s rough cat-tongue cleaning off his stiffening again erection. He grinned as Hermione slurped, but he was amazed that she still had any energy left—and that he did too, especially after the previous night’s romp in the Room of Requirement.

Hermione stopped licking for a moment and grinned back at Harry. Sensing his puzzlement she answered his unasked question.

“I’m not really certain Harry. I... I think I just get a real thrill from riding on your broom with you. I suppose being scared of heights just adds a bit to the excitement of holding you--and feeling safe with you as the wind rushes by--and feeling the broomstick vibrating in just the right place... and... and...”

“Oh bother it--I’m over-thinking again...” Hermione shut-up and went back to sucking Harry’s penis while the squirrels watched, chittering in agitation.

Harry reached out both hands and stroked Hermione’s furry ears as she knelt between his thighs, her lips encircling the base of his shaft. Despite having recently concluded a quite robust sexual encounter, it didn’t take long for Harry to feel the surges of euphoria take him again.

Harry gasped, gripping Hermione’s tawny tresses and thrusting his loins as he released himself into her humid throat. Hermione’s bushy ginger tail waved happily, her naked bottom jutting out from the skirt gathered around her waist as she hungrily swallowed Harry’s seed.

A thundering of hooves broke the moment.

Hermione shrieked, and the last spurts of Harry’s ejaculate spattered against her rosy cheeks. She propelled herself into Harry’s arms and shivered, her furry tail bristling in horror. Harry’s eyes bulged and his gasps of pleasure caught. He held his breath and stared in trepidation at the centaur who had entered the clearing.

Harry gulped anxiously and held his trembling Hermione tightly. It was the last centaur in the world that he had ever wanted to see again.

Bane loomed over the pair darkly, his face displaying consternation and bewilderment. Hermione flushed and with shaking hands she pushed her skirt between her quivering thighs to cover herself.

The centaur with wild black hair didn’t seem to know what to make of the situation. He had angrily entered the clearing with an arrow strung in his bow, prepared to unleash it into whomever had disturbed the forest--grown wizard or student, he didn’t care. Firenze or Ronan weren’t around to restrain him today.

Bane’s rage battled his confusion as he peered from Hermione’s wagging furry tail and wilting furry ears to Harry’s fear-filled green eyes and back again. Bane’s nostrils flared and he pawed the ground with his hooves. He had witnessed the last moment of the pair’s coupling, and the air was heavy with their scent.

The atmosphere of the glade near the lakeshore seemed different. Bane’s skin prickled as he sensed the presence of magic surrounding him. But this was unlike the magic he usually sensed when wizards were near, which more often than not felt like a threat of violence. This felt more like... Spring.
Bane glanced in wonder at the green shoots of new growth and the blooming wild-flowers poking up through the underbrush. They hadn’t been there when he had passed through the clearing earlier that morning. The black centaur peered at Hermione’s fluffy ginger tail again, still bristling and thumping the ground in fright, and he stared at Harry once more.

The pounding of the boy’s heart caught Bane’s ears as the wizard-boy protectively clutched the cat-girl. Bane swished his black horse tail and began to calm, unstringing the arrow from his bow.

“You are a very unusual wizard Harry Potter... most unusual indeed.”

Harry let out his breath heavily, relief filling him as the fierceness departed the centaur’s countenance.

“You and your beloved are welcome in this forest at any time Harry Potter. My apologies for disturbing you...” Bane swallowed and a brief look of sorrow crossed his features.

“It is my sincerest hope that our interpretation of the Movement of the Heavens is wrong--the world needs more wizards such as yourself. May fortune shine upon you... young wizard.”

~o0o~

“Bloody Hell Hermione--that was scary! I thought we were done for... Bane always hated me! I don’t understand... What just happened?”

Hermione stopped walking and turned to face Harry. She reached out her hand to caress Harry’s cheek, adoration filling her golden-brown eyes.

“He... he saw you for who you really are Harry,” she replied, her own features filled with perplex as she tried to make sense of the roil of emotions she had discerned in the centaur.

“I was terrified when he found us--Bane was filled with such a hate for wizards. But... but then he saw you with me... loving me and trying to protect me...” Hermione paused. She smiled and gave Harry a kiss.

“And I... I’m still not entirely certain, but I think... I think suddenly, in that moment, Bane saw me as an equal; as... as being someone like him.” Hermione continued, “and... and I think that he finally realised that you’re different from most wizards--like the Dragon did.”

“You made a new friend today Harry,” Hermione concluded.

Harry blinked, then a smile crept to his lips and he shook his head in amazement. He leaned in and tenderly returned Hermione’s kiss before continuing the trek back up to the castle, his broom in one hand and Hermione’s hand in the other.

“Well... who would’ve guessed?” Harry said with a laugh after a few steps. “All I had to do to make friends with the centaurs was put on a sex-show for them with you.”

“Prat!” Hermione giggled, swatting Harry playfully with her free hand.

As they drew closer to the massive doors of the Main Entrance, Harry and Hermione were spotted by the Headmaster and the man with a walrus moustache. They appeared to be exiting the castle to take a stroll around the grounds.

Hermione eeped, and blushed, quickly rubbing at the dirty sticky streaks on her face with her hanky. She had forgotten the state of her appearance after the commotion with the centaur, having just
wanted to leave the clearing as quickly as possible. Hermione groaned, realising that she had also forgotten her panties and left them dangling from the branches of a bush. Hermione tugged at Harry’s sleeve and he stopped.

Harry tried very hard not to grin as Hermione hid behind him and performed a quick spell to clean and dry the sticky damp spots on her skirt. There was nothing she could do immediately about her panties though, and she hadn't the time to perform another spell to vanish the viscous fluid still leaking out and trickling down her inner thighs.

“Ah there you are;” the Headmaster said warmly as he and the man with the moustache approached. “Horace, I’d like you to meet Mr and Mrs Potter...”

Hermione turned crimson and bit her lips, keeping her thighs together and crossing her hands in front of her skirt. For his part, Harry did an excellent job of maintaining a straight face, and he immediately stuck his hand out to draw attention to himself.

“Er...Hello...” Harry began.

“Harry,” the Headmaster continued, his eyes sparkling in the sunlight, “this is Horace Slughorn. He was once one of Hogwarts finest potions professors...”

“Albus, please, you are too kind...” Horace interjected with an air of humility—though Harry could tell Slughorn was quite chuffed at the heaped praise.

“...and former Head of Slytherin House,” Dumbledore said as Horace took Harry’s hand and shook it.

“Delighted to meet you Mr Potter... simply delighted,” Horace gushed effusively.

“Er... nice to meet you too Sir,” Harry said with a polite smile.

“I have been following your career with quite some interest I must say,” said Horace, “and Severus has told me all about you and your wife’s exceptional talents with potions.”

Horace turned to Hermione and put out a chubby hand. “I am very pleased to make your acquaintance as well Mrs Potter!”

Hermione carefully kept one hand on her skirt and shyly reached out the other to take Slughorn’s and shake it.

“Er... Likewise Professor Slughorn,” Hermione squeaked, cringing at the sound of her own voice.

“Oh, I don’t know about ‘professor’ my dear... it has been many, many years,” Slughorn beamed at Hermione, then his eyes tracked her bushy waving cat tail. “But I must say it would be simply splendid to teach two such fine young pupils as yourselves...”

“Well, I think we should be able to do something about that Horace,” Dumbledore chuckled. “Your willingness to join the Order deserves to be rewarded with a paid position and perhaps a raise.”

“Really Albus?” Horace gasped, clearly surprised and elated. “However will you manage that?”

“Hogwarts will be offering a new post-graduate programme beginning this Autumn, and we will require more professors as the number of students remaining at Hogwarts increases.” Dumbledore replied.
“Well that is simply marvelous,” Slughorn responded. “I... I don’t know what to say. Thank you... thank you very much Albus.”

Horace Slughorn glanced back at Harry and Hermione. “I thought being given the opportunity to get to know you both was reward enough I must say... I taught your mother Mr Potter. She was one of my favourite students—the brightest witch I have ever known—and certainly one of the kindest. And... I am told by everyone that Mrs Potter is another in her mould...”

“And there I thought it was the protections that Hogwarts had to offer which had enticed you Horace,” Dumbledore teased.

“Yes... well seeing that Karkaroff is still alive certainly helped matters,” chuckled Horace. “I don’t know how you managed to sway him to join forces with you, but I wouldn’t be surprised if the Potters here had something to do with it.”

“Indeed...” Dumbledore peered at Harry proudly.

Harry gulped awkwardly and glanced at Hermione, not sure what else to say.

“Well Horace,” said Dumbledore sprightly, taking Slughorn’s arm, “I think we have taken up quite enough of the Potters’ time for now. You shall have plenty of time to get to know them better.”

“Oh... er, indeed. Quite!” Horace said, looking a bit disappointed, “Bye for now then...”

Dumbledore gave the Potters a wink and Harry nodded gratefully, breathing a sigh of relief.

~o0o~

“Slughorn seemed quite nice actually,” Harry said cheerfully as he shampooed Hermione’s furry tail in the shower. “I’m not sure if he was happier to meet me or you really...”

Hermione turned around and gave Harry a soapy kiss.

“What was that for?” asked Harry.

“For trying to protect me as usual,” Hermione grinned and kissed him again under the steaming spray of water. “Thanks for at least trying to keep his attention off me Harry. That was mortifying... I thought a breeze might blow up my skirt at any moment.”

“Er... you’re welcome! But if you keep kissing me in the shower we’ll never make it out in time for lunch,” Harry retorted with a smirk.

“Especially if you do that...” Harry groaned as Hermione pressed her wet soapy body up against his for yet another kiss and he began to harden again.

“Mmmm... Dobby can bring us lunch,” Hermione responded with a purr, rubbing herself against Harry, “We can meet the others in the Room of Requirement and practice Patronuses later...”

~o0o~

“Merlin, that was the blindingest Patronus I’ve ever seen,” Dora gasped as she rubbed her eyes. “Well, you lot, you’ve seen ‘ow Harry and Hermione do it. Why don’t you all give it a go then!?”
The others—except for the girl with neon pink hair—had never seen Harry and Hermione’s Patronuses, and they were awed by the sight of the glowing lion and lioness prowling the Room of Requirement.

“They’re beautiful,” gasped Daphne. The rest of the Unaffiliated murmured and nodded in agreement.

Now that she saw the etheric entities up close, Dora didn’t know how she could have mistaken them for the ghosts of Harry and Hermione at the conclusion of the Third Task. The memory of her fright briefly overwhelmed her. Dora wiped a tear away, cheered by the sight of a living, breathing pair of Potters and their stunning Patronuses.

“Right, er... well, like Dora said, I suppose it’s time for you guys to have a go at it,” Harry began, “The only thing is, I had a Boggart pretending to be a Dementor to practice on. We don’t have one of those, so we’ll just have to manage without I suppose...”

“That’s alright Harry,” Dora remarked, “You don’t really need a Dementor to learn how to perform the charm. It’s really mostly helpful for those with particularly dreadful life-experiences which might make them more susceptible to Dementor attacks.” Dora’s face darkened briefly, almost imperceptibly. “It helps people get used to overcomin’ the effects long enough to perform the charm.”

Harry and Hermione both glanced at Luna, who had watched her mother die in a terrible experimental-spell accident.

“Like Harry said, we’ll manage...” Luna said quietly, a flicker of grief crossing her otherwise serene features. “I’m sure that once I’ve learned the spell, I can make it work in a pinch. Goodness knows, I’ve got lots of happy memories too now.” Luna beamed at Parvati and the rest of her friends.

Harry and Hermione coached Parvati and Luna, praising the strongly pulsing shields they produced. Everyone was doing quite well for their first lesson, as they all had many very cheerful memories to rely on.

Everybody had a giggle when Dora demonstrated her Patronus several times for Daphne and Fleur as they practiced it together. Dora was stunned—and very pleased—to discover that it had changed; she didn’t know they could do that. Instead of an ungainly lollaping Jackrabbit, a glowing tiger sprang from Dora’s wand and bounced gleefully across the room, playfully licking Harry’s lion and rubbing its face against Hermione’s lioness.

By the end of the afternoon, Luna managed to be the first to produce a Corporeal Patronus. It appeared to be a Scottish Wildcat.

“Oh... Well Done Luna!” Hermione gasped, clapping her hands. She peered closer at the hearty looking feline, which was nearly twice the size of an average housecat. “Harry, is it just me, or does that cat look like it’s Grinning?”

Parvati and Harry both glanced at Luna who was wearing her favourite sky blue dress and white pinafore.
“I’d say we should be happy that it’s not a Hookah Smoking Caterpillar,” Parvati giggled.

“I’m glad it’s not the March Hare,” chortled Harry. “Excellent Luna! I love it...”

Daphne and Fleur both looked a bit puzzled, not getting the joke, but Dora snorted with laughter, thrilled that that her own Patronus was now something much more to her liking.

“I agree Harry,” Dora smiled. “It’s much nicer than the March Hare.”

“Well it’s adorable Luna,” Hermione said with a grin, giving Luna a kiss on the cheek, “much prettier than the picture-books.”

“Thanks Hermione!” Luna squirmed and blushed, swishing her fluffy white cat-tail happily, and gave both Potters a kiss. “Thanks Harry!”

“Right, that’s probably enough for today...” Harry smiled proudly at everyone, “That was brilliant—really! Let’s do this again tomorrow. I bet the rest of us will be doing Corporeal Patronuses by the end of next lesson.”

~o0o~

Yawning, Harry finished cleaning his teeth and made his way to bed; all the excitement and activity of the last few days had finally caught up with him.

He had to grin when he entered the bedroom and discovered Dora, already snuggled on the bed, heatedly kissing Hermione. One of Hermione’s hands was under Dora’s mauve nightie, roaming her inner thighs. Dora looked up at Harry and blushed; Hermione smirked at Harry’s expression.

“Hiya Harry,” Dora giggled anxiously. “I ’ope you don’t mind. Hermione invited me stay with you two for a bit.”

“Of course I don’t mind! I’ve been looking forward to this for a long time,” Harry replied, his grin widening as he shook his head. “But I hope you don’t mind if I’m a bit tired...”

Despite himself, Harry couldn’t help stiffening at the sight of Dora’s fuller breasts and hard nipples poking through the sheer fabric of her nightie. It also didn’t help that Dora’s nightie was rucked up above her thighs and that Harry could see that Hermione’s fingers were exploring very near the pouting damp lips of Dora’s entrance and the tuft of neon pink hair on Dora’s mound.

“Come ’ere you,” Dora grinned back, seeing Harry spring to attention, and patted the bed next to her.

Harry didn’t need to be told twice. He clambered onto the bed and Dora pulled him into steamy wet kiss while Hermione giggled, her furry ears and tail twitching joyfully.

Merlin, thought Dora, Harry’s lips were so soft and he tasted like Hermione. Harry tentatively placed his hand on Dora’s belly, slipping it under her nightie. Dora quivered slightly as Harry’s fingers delicately trailed across her skin and probed her belly button. Meanwhile, purring loudly, Hermione’s fingers had found their mark and slipped into the moist folds of Dora’s slit.

Harry nuzzled and licked Dora’s neck just under her ear and his hand slid up across her rib-cage to capture her breast. Hermione began kissing Dora humidly again, her fingers delving deeper into Dora’s sopping interior. Her thumb located Dora’s fleshy pearl, eliciting a throaty moan.

This was beyond anything Dora had imagined, much better than her fantasies. She slid one of her
own trembling hands inside of Harry’s pyjama top across his chest, feeling his heart beat rapidly against her palm. Dora’s other hand was now buried in Hermione’s bushy golden-brown locks, holding her head as Hermione’s lips tugged on Dora’s own.

Harry pushed Dora’s nightie all the way up, baring her torso, and now he had both of her breasts in his gently kneading hands. He teased Dora’s thick pink nipples with the tip of his tongue, giving them little flicks, before circling her wide areolas wetly.

Hermione’s purrs increased as she began to thrust her fingers more intensely into Dora’s slick channel and tickled Dora’s belly button with her fluffy tail; Harry’s lips surrounded a nipple. He sucked it hungrily, giving it a nibble, and Dora gasped, shuddering with pleasure under the ministrations of both Potters. Dora uttered an ecstatic cry and bathed Hermione’s hand in stickiness.

“Oh... Merlin...” panted Dora as her head spun, “that was lovely. You two... really know... ‘ow to make a girl happy...” Dora giddily reached for the tent in Harry’s pyjama bottoms.

“Let’s see what this is all about then Harry,” Dora chortled.

“Oh... er... I’m sorry Dora,” Harry said, blushing slightly, “I haven’t quite got that bit worked out for you yet.”

“Oh Harry,” Dora melted in his green eyes and kissed him. “That’s sweet... really. But I love you-- just the way you are. We can try that another time alright... I want to be with the real you first. You’ll just ‘ave to bear with me while I figure out ‘ow this works,” she said jokingly, brushing her fingers across his pyjama covered erection.

With a giggle and a gleeful wave of her tail, Hermione climbed over the other side of Harry and helped Dora pull off Harry’s pyjama bottoms, freeing his bobbing penis from its prison.

“I’ll show you what to do Dora, but we’ll just start out simple tonight,” Hermione grinned, “Harry must be exhausted.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” chuckled Harry.

“Just lie back then Harry. We’ll take care of this for you.” Hermione took one of Dora’s soft hands and wrapped it around Harry’s hard shaft. Harry thrilled at Dora’s touch.

“You have to be gentle,” Hermione said as she guided Dora’s hand, “like this then...”

Obediently Harry lay quietly with a contented smile plastered on his face while Hermione taught Dora how to handle his penis. Feeling the hands of two girls that he loved masturbate him together always made Harry blissfully happy. It didn’t take long for him to reach his peak.

“Oh my!” Dora giggled when Harry’s penis jerked and spurts of sticky white fluid jetted from the tip and flowed over her fingers. Dora leaned back out of the way of the flying strings of semen, but not before a strand had landed across her cheek and the bridge of her nose.

“Don’t worry Dora,” Hermione purred, “I’ve got this...” Hermione leaned over and licked Dora’s face and fingers clean.

Harry was fading fast. The last thing he remembered before he fell asleep was Hermione licking the rest of his abdomen clean, and both girls cuddling up against him with their arms around him, their hands clasped across his chest.

Dora lay awake for a good long while, tears of happiness leaking from the corner of her eyes, still
Dora had been alone for a long time, but she felt the warmth of Hermione's hand in her own, and the ebb and flow of Harry's gentle breathing as she pressed into him, and the pain melted away. It felt too real to be a dream. Her new Patronus had been strong and cheerful. Gradually, finally, knowing that she had truly found love again, Dora drifted off to sleep.
Chapter 102

Like Sleeping Beauty, she was woken with a kiss. Two kisses in fact. Two soft minty pairs of lips that reminded her that she was still loved and still in the Potters’ bed. Grinning, the girl with ash-brown hair awoke, and decided that today was a good day for electric-green.

After hurriedly showering and dressing, Dora followed Hermione and Harry out of the door of their chambers. Fleur and Daphne were already in the Unaffiliated Corridor, just about to head to the Great Hall for breakfast. Electric green hair caught their eyes.

“Good Morning Dora!” Daphne smiled sweetly and hugged the older girl, giving her an affectionate kiss and making her blush.

“Bonjour ma chérie,” Fleur cooed and kissed Dora with a bit of steam. “Eet ees nice to see zat you are settling in.”

Dora’s rosy cheeks flushed a deeper shade of red.

“Mornin’ you two,” Dora said, smiling shyly back at Fleur and Daphne.

By the time Luna and Parvati wandered, yawning, into the Great Hall for breakfast, the others were already eating.

“I think it’s a coffee morning,” said Parvati as she yawned again.

“We had a very late night,” Luna explained with a grin. “We were both fantasising about what it would be like if Dora and Harry joined in the sex with furry tails too.”

Dora nearly snorted her tea out through her nose and turned scarlet, remembering her own fantasy the night before she had returned to Hogwarts with the Potters. Daphne looked pensive for a moment.

“Isn’t there some sort of charm we could use so that Fleur and I could temporarily have cat-tails too?” Daphne asked.

“Zat ees a good question, and an excellan’ suggestion,” Fleur said, her eyes gleaming.

“I got jinxed with a horse tail when I got in that fight with Lavender and Fay in second year,” replied Parvati with a flick of her satiny black cat-tail. “So I’m sure there must be something...”

“We should look in the library...” Hermione responded excitedly.

“But if we can’t find anything, I bet I know someone who could work out a spell,” Harry grinned.

Everyone stared at Harry questioningly.

“Fred and George of course,” Harry smirked. “They’re brilliant at that sort of thing...”

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Hermione’s bushy tail quivered expectantly while she waited, seated on Harry’s lap, for the Headmaster to reveal the reason for their visit to his office after breakfast. Dumbledore peered at the couple with twinkling eyes, hoping that today’s discussion wouldn’t put a damper on their spirits.
“As you may recall,” began Dumbledore, “I mentioned on Saturday that I had come across some information to impart regarding Voldemort, whom we also know as Tom Riddle. Some of this information I already possessed, but much of it I did not, until after we recently discovered the identities and childhood homes of Tom Riddle’s parents.”

“Today, we will be going on a journey... a journey into the past--into memory--so that we may learn more about his nature, and also to discover the extent of Riddle’s horcrux production.” Dumbledore gestured towards a shallow stone basin sitting on his desk.

“What is that Professor?” Hermione asked as Harry raised his eyebrows.

“This... is a Pensieve, it is a means by which we can examine the memories I have collected--from inside the actual memories themselves.” The Headmaster held up a crystal vial which appeared to contain a swirling cloud. “This is the first memory we shall examine, as it contains the memories of someone who encountered Tom Riddle’s forebearers.”

“We shall be examining several memories today... I have perused them already, but your input is imperative before I draw any conclusions.” Dumbledore paused, and regarded Harry and Hermione earnestly before continuing.

“I have come to value the judgments of you both, on matters such as these, as highly as I once valued my own,” the Headmaster said quietly. “I believe, that with the information we have available, we can finish Tom Riddle in short order, once and for all, when we next meet...”

“Sir...?” Harry gasped in amazement, and Hermione’s tail stood erect as her eyes widened.

“...But I cannot be certain,” Dumbledore continued, “However, if you find that you both concur with my conclusions, then I believe that we can be assured of ending Riddle’s second reign of terror before it proceeds much further... and focus on She-who-has-become-an-even-graver-threat-than-He...”

“The Minister...” Harry scowled.

“Quite!” Dumbledore nodded. “Thus, I feel that I must set some boundaries... It is possible, that I may yet require the assistance of you both to eliminate the remaining horcruxes--however--I do not wish for either of you to engage in combat with Riddle or his minions unless it is an absolute necessity for you to protect yourselves...”

“Wait... What? Why not? That’s what we’ve been training to do...” Harry interrupted hotly.

“Because you are far more valuable alive than dead...” the Headmaster softly intoned with a wistful look in his clear blue eyes. “You are young, and have your whole lives ahead of you. You have a True Gift to offer the entire world--wizards, magical beings, and muggles alike--with the Love which you both inspire in others...”

“You bring people together--you inspire everyone who comes to truly know you to make sacrifices for each other, so that no one person must ever need to bear the burdens of the world by themselves, nor suffer misfortune alone--ever again.”

“It is very important that you both survive, as a demonstration of the power of Solidarity--which is what Love truly is... That is something which you have both taught me, and my Staff--my Friends.”

“It is possible, as in all wars for Defence and for Justice, that people we love may yet die and suffer... But nobody should face that alone, and only Together and Undivided can we stand strong against the Evil which strives to take root.”
“Voldemort--Tom Riddle--is a remnant of a time gone by, a task which by rights is one for myself and the Order to complete. The Minister, and those like her, are the True Threat to our Future.”

“It is easy for people to see the Evil in Voldemort. Even most of his own followers--those who remained outside of Azkaban after the last war--have turned against him because of his maniacal rages against even them when the mood suits him.”

“But the Minister... *she* operates in the shadows and in the mind... *she* seduces with *ideas* and *she* murders with deception and deflection. *She* is a master of manipulation and exhibits great self-control. *She* cloaks Evil behind a Mask of Order and False Justice.”

“Many of Voldemort’s former followers have joined her because she better represents their interests behind that Mask--a mask which *they* themselves have grown used to employing to maintain their images and the dominance of their pureblood status within the current Status Quo.”

“They are manipulating that Status Quo from within to create a Future which reinstates the past in a manner which Voldemort himself cannot hope to achieve through brute force alone.”

“Should those of us in the Order of the Phoenix be unable to publicly expose the Minister and *Her* Death Eaters through the political process, it will be up to those such as yourselves to fight this Future, because the Future belongs to you. Do you understand why that is?”

Harry and Hermione considered Dumbledore’s words. They thought they understood quite well.

“Yes sir,” Harry replied, his jaw tightening. “I do.” Harry glanced at Hermione who was nodding in agreement.

“The Minister has been working very hard to make it look like *we’re* the Bad Guys and *they’re* the Good Guys,” Harry continued. “*She*’s even managed to get a Weasley on her side... Which might convince more people that she’s right. It’s up to Hermione and me and our friends to grow up and show why their beliefs are wrong as long as they remain in power--until we can prove to everyone that she and her friends are just like Voldemort.”

“But I can’t make any promises that we won’t fight Voldemort and his forces too, Professor. I’m not just going to sit around and let people die while I’m hiding.” Harry concluded with a fixed stare.

“Well said Harry!” Dumbledore nodded proudly, seeing the resolve in Harry’s glittering green eyes. Hermione’s twitching furry ears and tail caught the Headmaster’s attention and he saw the same determination in Mrs Potter’s eyes.

“I really can expect no less of you--*either* of you,” Albus sighed, feeling humbled. “Frankly, I just wanted you to know, that this is not your battle to fight alone.” Dumbledore swallowed and his countenance flushed in shame.

“It is a fight which I wish I could have completed by myself years ago without putting you in harm’s way Harry...”

“It’s alright sir. You’ve already apologised to me once... and... and nobody’s perfect!” Harry interjected with a sheepish grin.

“Indeed...” Dumbledore smiled wryly. “In any case, my goal is to complete the task I had once set for myself alone, and then for you--but this time with the aid of my friends and colleagues... and my students, if they deem themselves ready...”

“With that said, I believe it is now time to begin our journey to the past. This first memory belonged
“Bob Ogden,” Hermione gasped and flicked her bushy tail. “I remember... when we killed the Horcrux in the Ring of Peverell. You gave orders to have his memory collected.”

“Quite correct Mrs Potter,” the Headmaster replied. “And as well as Mr Ogden’s memory, we shall examine two of my own, one belonging to a House-Elf, and finally, one of Horace Slughorn’s. Were it possible, I should have also liked to retrieve Morfin Gaunt’s memory. Alas, I believe that Voldemort most likely killed him when he took Azkaban.”

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Hermione was in tears after the viewing of Bob Ogden’s memory.

“That was so sad,” Hermione cried while Harry cuddled her and stroked her hair and wilted furry ears. “Poor Merope... Her father and brother were disgusting. They treated her horribly...”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore nodded sorrowfully. “That was very disturbing.”

“I still can’t work out how Merope and Tom Riddle Sr ever got married...” Harry said with a puzzled expression.

“Maybe a love potion...” Hermione sniffed as she wiped away her tears. “Though I don’t know what she even saw in that pompous creep. Looks aren’t everything.”

“Quite...” the Headmaster agreed. “That was my conclusion as well.”

“That doesn’t seem right,” Harry shook his head. “Look, I feel sorry for Merope too. And I agree Tom Riddle Sr seemed like a pompous git. But still, seducing someone with a love potion... that’s a bit like rape isn’t it?”

Hermione blinked. She looked pensive for a moment.

“You’re right Harry,” she said quietly. “I... I never really thought about it like that before. In fairy tales and stories, love potions are always portrayed as something romantic. But really--they’re a bit like ‘date-rape’ drugs in the muggle world... they ought to be illegal.”

“Yes... I must concur,” the Headmaster nodded again. “It is a tragic story all the way around. I think that poor Merope Gaunt also believed a love potion to be a romantic solution to her desperate quandary--not intending to act with evil in her heart...”

“But indeed, with clear eyes, one must see the surreptitious use of a love potion for what it is--a removal of consent,” Dumbledore went on, “Love cannot exist without consent. It is my contention that Merope came to realise the truth of that, and--feeling guilty--Merope discontinued the use of the potion when she became pregnant. Shortly after that, Riddle Sr must have departed...”

“Leaving her all alone with a baby. She must have been heartbroken.” Harry concluded glumly.

“Indeed Harry, which brings us to where I found Tom Marvolo Riddle,” Dumbledore held up the next memory vial, “in a Muggle Orphanage in which his mother died giving birth to him.”

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“He reminds me of Damien,” Hermione shivered violently, her furry tail bristling, as Harry held her close after exiting Dumbledore's memory.
“Damien?” Harry asked, bewildered, having never heard the name. As far as he knew, there was nobody named Damien at Hogwarts.

The Headmaster appeared equally mystified. He was curious to hear Hermione Potter’s reaction to the younger Riddle. Dumbledore had come to prize her remarkable perceptions of the inner nature of people, so he just listened as the Potters ruminated upon what they had just witnessed.

“Damien, he’s a character from a film called *The Omen,*” Hermione explained. “It’s a really scary movie. Mum was cross with Dad when he rented it for us one evening because I had nightmares for weeks after watching it... *Anyway,* Damien was born to a wealthy family, but it turned out that he was really Satan’s son. He was more or less born evil...”

“But I... I never really believed that anyone could just be born evil until I saw the look in young Tom’s eyes...” Hermione continued, “Myrtle was right--they were so cold... yet his vindictiveness--I could feel it radiating from him as if I had been in the room with him myself...”

“...and it’s not like anyone mistreated him at the orphanage,” Harry agreed. “Nobody beat Tom, or harassed him--all the children were well looked after and fed properly. He didn’t really have any reason to turn out more rotten than any of the other poor kids who grew up there, and they had to put up with *him* abusing *them* and stealing their things...”

“...except for his bad genetic heritage,” Hermione snorted. “The Gaunts appeared severely inbred, and despite being handsome, his father didn’t strike me as a very pleasant sort either--though *that* was probably due to being raised like a pampered prince.”

“Maybe being conceived under the influence of a love potion affected Tom’s mind too?” Harry pondered.

“Possibly...” Hermione frowned thoughtfully, “But whatever the reason, Tom Riddle Jr clearly has some sort of psychiatric disorder with a biological basis. I think you’re absolutely right Harry, it can’t really be attributed to his upbringing. Riddle was born to be a psychotic maniac...”

“And he’s quite the ‘collector’ apparently,” Harry said. “He seems to have a thing for trophies!”

Hearing the Potters’ cogent analysis of Mrs Potter’s perceptions of Tom in relation to Harry’s own upbringing, Albus breathed a sigh of relief. He had been feeling guilty for quite some time.

Ever since Severus had uncovered how very wrong Albus had been to leave Harry with the Dursleys without properly monitoring the situation, Dumbledore had wondered if sending Riddle back to the Orphanage every summer had been as damaging to Tom as Harry’s home life potentially could have been to Harry.

Albus could at least put that feeling to rest now. Riddle’s issues were his own--not of Dumbledore’s making. And considering that Riddle had by all outward appearance been on his best behaviour while a student at Hogwarts, Dumbledore had never been able to confirm his own suspicions about Tom’s inner-nature with the sort of certainty which Hermione Potter’s particular empathic insight gave her.

As a boy and young man, it was clear that Tom’s greater self-control had given him a high degree of natural ability as an Occlumens which had blocked Dumbledore’s Legilimency. As an adult, Tom had lost much of that self-control--which Albus could possibly exploit should he meet him again in person.

“Thank you both very much,” the Headmaster said gratefully. “Believe it or not, I have learned far
more from listening to your analysis of this memory, than I have from my own. I have a much clearer view of what drives Tom Riddle now....”

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled in amusement at the stunned expressions on his favourite students’ faces.

“Well then, perhaps we can pick this up again after lunch and well deserved rest. Perhaps at three O’clock then?”
“So Voldemort is ‘halfblood’ then?” Parvati was confused. “I don’t get that. Why would he be a pureblood fanatic if he was halfblood?”

“I don’t understand either,” Daphne looked even more baffled than Parvati. “I mean, I’m supposedly ‘pureblood,’ but I’ve never even cared about it. That was one of the things I always hated about Slytherin! Everyone seemed obsessed with being pureblood. I...” Daphne gulped and looked ashamed, “...I was just too scared to say anything against anyone...”

“Maybe it’s because your parents were never fussed about it,” Harry responded. “A lot of people learn to hate people who are different because they’re taught to by their parents. Anyway--don’t beat yourself up Daphne--you’re the only Slytherin I’ve ever known who was brave enough to stand up to the rest of them... even Blaise--he’s a good guy, and he’s brave enough to sit with us now--but even he’s still too scared to be true to himself.”

“And it’s not just Slytherins Daphne,” Luna said, looking a bit sad. “A lot of people in other Houses think purebloods are better too--even though they try to act like they don’t. But I admit, I don’t understand why a lot of halfbloods think purebloods are better too...”

“They do?” Daphne’s perplex deepened. “It’s not just Voldemort then?”

“Yes,” replied Luna with a nod. “A lot of Slytherins must be halfblood, but they will never admit it. Some in Ravenclaw are a bit like that too...”

“Luna’s right,” Harry clenched his jaw. “A lot of purebloods and halfbloods in the other Houses--even Hufflepuff--say they’re not prejudiced, but you wouldn’t know it half the time from the little things they let slip... Many halfbloods are actually ashamed of their muggle sides and wish they were purebloods...”

“And even in Gryffindor, people find excuses to think that they’re better than other people,” Hermione huffed with an angry wag of her tail. “Look at McLaggen. He thinks his family’s blood-status and wealth gives him a right to be a pompous arse and act like a bullying lout... and don’t forget Ron’s rat--Peter Pettigrew--he turned out to be one of Voldemort’s minions...”

“And then there’s Percy Weasley,” Harry snarled. His voice began to rise, “He thinks Hermione belongs in a zoo--without any clothes on...”

“She’s the one who signed the summons demanding that Hermione be put on trial too...” Harry continued furiously, “and he’s Minister Umbridge’s deputy minister now and we all know what She thinks about muggleborns and ‘halfbreeds.’ He and the Minister are as bad as Voldemort and Wormtail as far as I’m concerned.”

Everyone at the Mingling Table was shocked, and all of the cat-witches’ furry tails bristled angrily. This was the first time since Harry and Hermione had returned from London that they had taken the opportunity to talk about what had happened at the Trial--everyone had been too excited celebrating their return the last few days to properly discuss all the details.

They had all met for lunch after Harry and Hermione had left Dumbledore’s office, and the Potters had begun to tell the rest of the Unaffiliated what they had learned so far about Tom Riddle.

Fleur was fuming. Her father had warned her to be careful and not talk openly about being part-
Veela while she was in Britain, and now she was beginning to understand why he had been so adamant. She had almost blurted out proudly at the wand weighing at the beginning of the Triwizard Tournament that the Veela hair in her wand had come from her grandmother before she remembered what he had said.

The Pureblood Supremacists in France had been banned from holding any political offices for a long time, and people of mixed descent were able to be open about their heritage without fear. But it was not so in Britain, where Veela had to be registered and Pureblood Supremacists could still make law.

Dora was just happy she had managed to get the Potters out of the Ministry before the Minister had concocted new trumped up charges and arrested them. Apparently the rest of the Unaffiliated were now having similar thoughts because Dora suddenly found herself at the centre of attention, and everyone’s expressions had changed from shock and anger to looks of adoration.

Luna and Parvati pounced on Dora and hugged her.

“Thanks for looking after them Dora,” Parvati said, pepper ing the blushing older girl with kisses.

Hermione’s bushy ginger tail waved happily as the mood settled again. Harry was smiling at the two cat-witches embracing the girl with electric green hair.

Hermione felt another presence nearby; she looked up and saw Jennifer Watts watching them longingly from the otherwise empty Gryffindor table and picking at her food. Hermione smiled at Jennifer and the other girl shyly smiled back.

The Unaffiliated concluded lunch and Harry arranged to meet the following day for Patronus lessons as he and Hermione would be spending most of the afternoon in Dumbledore’s pensieve after three o’clock. Harry chased a snitch around the quidditch field for an hour with Viktor before cleaning up and returning to the Headmaster’s office with Hermione.

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Out of the corner of his eye, Albus Dumbledore could see the portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black shaking his head and frowning at him. Albus chuckled softly. Clearly Phineas disapproved of allowing students to reach their own conclusions and influence the Headmaster’s decisions. At least Phineas wasn’t rudely interrupting the proceeding.

“The horcrux that used to be in me was a mistake,” Harry mused, “Tom Riddle didn’t mean to create that one. And he told Slughorn that he thought seven was the most magically powerful number–so that means there were probably seven plus the one in me if he thought that seven was the strongest number doesn’t it?”

“I think six, Harry,” Hermione suggested, “If Riddle considered seven soul fragments as being the most powerful number, he would have included himself. So it seems most likely that he only made six total...”

“But what if he found out that we’ve been destroying them? He’d make more wouldn’t he? Surely his main soul--the one still in him would sense it...”

Hermione shook her head. “I don’t think so Harry. If Riddle could have sensed it, he would have collected the Ring of Peverell from the Gaunt shack and moved it to a new hiding place once he left Riddle Manor... Think about it--we had already destroyed the diary and the locket...”

“...and the diadem,” Harry nodded, his eyes widening as light dawned. “You’re absolutely right Hermione. Riddle obviously doesn’t know yet that we’ve been killing his horcruxes--thanks to your
senses!” Harry beamed at Hermione.

“And we got the ring as well,” Harry continued excitedly “so that means we should only have two left to kill, and one of those has to be Helga Hufflepuff’s cup. Tom was obviously after it according to Hokey the House-Elf’s memory...”

“But I haven’t a clue what the other one might be Harry,” Hermione sighed, clearly distressed that her brain didn’t have all the answers. “He must have hidden the diadem in the Room of Requirement’s Hiding Chamber the night he tried to get a teaching job from Dumbledore, and we have no idea where the last two might be...”

“YEAH!” Harry loudly interrupted, “That’s a creepy thought! Urgh-- Professor Voldemort? Blegh...” Harry made a face and stuck his tongue out, drawing a giggle from Hermione. Harry grinned at having successfully cheered her up.

“Voldy obviously loves Hogwarts as much as I do, but don’t worry Hermione. There’s only two horcruxes left and we know what one of them is, that’s loads easier than trying to find six...” Harry gently stroked Hermione’s tail and she purred slightly.

Professor Dumbledore’s right--the Order of the Phoenix can probably kill Tom Riddle when he tries to have another go at me, and then we can find the last two horcruxes afterwards if necessary and finish him off for good. But in the meantime, we can all be thinking of places he might have hidden the last two and keep looking...”

“Indeed we can Harry,” the Headmaster interjected cheerfully, “Splendid! Well done, both of you! I have been thinking much the same thing. Now I am certain that I--we--are correct.”

“I have also given some further thought to Tom Riddle’s next moves as ‘Lord Voldemort’ since our discussion this morning,” Dumbledore continued. “Thanks to you both, I have a better idea of what he will likely do next.”

“I believe that he may stage some more attacks to distract the Minister and to terrify the public, but that he will most likely make a play to take Hogwarts before the end of summer, believing it largely unoccupied. I think he would like to make it his base of operations for an attack on the Ministry itself...”

Harry’s features hardened and his green eyes glittered

“That’s when we’ll get him then!” Harry said decisively.

“Yes Harry!” Dumbledore nodded resolutely, his own blue eyes sparkling.

“I know that you will want to train your abilities to their maximum potential Harry, but remember... your greatest asset is your ability to Love!” the Headmaster concluded with a wink, blushing slightly.

The two students and the Headmaster peered at each other, but none of them could maintain a straight face after that last pronouncement.

The portrait of Phineas Nigellus rolled his eyes and snorted in derision. Fawkes ruffled his feathers and uttered a soft musical cry which sounded suspiciously like a chortle of laughter.

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“Right then,” Harry began, his countenance set with steely resolve as he faced the rest of the Unaffiliated at dinner, “Now you all know everything that Hermione and I know. Until Tom Riddle
has a go at Hogwarts, we’ll be training hard to fight. We need to be prepared...”

Harry was trying his utmost to mimic every call-to-arms and mobilisation-speech from every war film he’d ever seen, but a creeping smirk broke the effect. Hermione swatted him.

“But most of all we’re supposed to have loads of fun...” she giggled.

“Dumbledore’s Orders!” Harry grinned, and the rest of the Unaffiliated began cracking up.

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Wide awake, Harry finished cleaning his teeth, his mind and body abuzz in anticipation of the looming future. Sleep seemed a distant possibility as trepidation and exhilaration waged a battle for his heart and soul. Fortunately, he appeared to be in good company.

Occupying his bed was a shy looking naked Dora with ash-brown hair whose breasts were already in the hands of his equally nude wife, her furry ginger tail flicking excitedly.

“Why are you still in your pyjamas?” Hermione asked Harry with a mock glare, “We've got loads of hard training to do...”
Harry lay on the bed next to Dora after removing his pyjamas and gave her a deep kiss as he stroked her inner thigh. Hermione was lying on the other side of Dora, caressing Dora’s abdomen. With his other hand, Harry swept aside the strands of ash-brown hair which had fallen across Dora’s face and caught in her lashes.

“Your hair is beautiful Dora--this is your natural colour, isn’t it!?” Harry murmured, peering into her dark brown eyes. Dora blushed.

“Yeah,” Dora nodded, “Thanks Harry. I... I suppose I always thought it was boring. I like lots of cheerful, bright colours, but I... I wanted to be natural for you tonight--be the real me...” Dora glanced at Harry’s erection shyly.

“You don’t have to do that if you don’t want to Dora,” Harry said softly, “I only want to do things that make you happy--you don’t have to... er... erm...” Harry trailed off and he turned crimson.

“...shag you?” giggled Dora.

Hermione flicked her bushy tail, gazing lovingly and proudly at Harry as she gently pressed her lips to Dora’s shoulder.

“But I do want to Harry,” Dora replied earnestly. Seeing his nonplussed expression, Dora swallowed and tried to explain, even though she wasn’t entirely sure why herself.

“I ‘ave used toys before... with my past girlfriend. Even though we just liked girls, it doesn’t mean that we don’t like feelin’ something inside our quim--we like that feeling a lot. It’s more about what we find aesthetically pleasin’ which attracts us I suppose... We like the soft curves, the shape of a woman’s form, the scent...”

“The pretty eyes... like yours,” Dora nearly whispered as she gazed into them, brushing the back of her fingers across one of Harry’s cheeks.

“And there’s always more to it Harry. What’s in your soul...” Dora kissed Harry again. “And... and there’s just somethin’ very sweet about you--don’t take this wrong--somethin’ about you that reminds me of ‘ow I feel when I’m in love with a girl... That bit, I... I can’t really explain...”

“It’s alright Dora...” Harry chortled, “I’m not offended if I you think I’m like a girl... I have to admit, I’ve been really looking forward to being able to change into a girl--as much for my own pleasure as for yours... And I’ve always thought that was a weird insult. I’m more offended by the idea that anyone would even think that calling someone a girl was an insult...”

Hermione’s purring grew louder as she nuzzled Dora’s neck, hanging on every word Harry and Dora uttered.

“You're such a love, Harry! That’s exactly one of the many reasons I love you as much as I love Hermione or the other girls... You just aren’t like any of the other blokes. Anyway...” Dora grinned and gently grasped Harry’s penis, “what I’m sayin’ is that yeah--I’d like to feel this--the real you--inside o’ me...”

Indeed, far from feeling let down by the notion that Dora loved him “like a girl,” Harry felt overcome with affection, and ironically, even harder and more turned on than he had been at the start of the
conversation. Harry glanced elatedly at Hermione as they both took turns kissing Dora wetly.

Harry’s fingers crept further up Dora’s inner thigh and began to fondle her pouting labia. Dora’s warm moistness clasped his fingers as they entered her. Hermione leaned over Dora and kissed Harry heatedly before applying her lips to Dora’s thick nipples and encircling them.

Harry left Hermione to continue massaging Dora’s breasts and suckle their pink summits while he crouched between Dora’s widening thighs. Harry thrust his fingers deeper into Dora’s wetness and he began to lick her folds. He found Dora’s nubbin with his tongue and started to suck on it.

Dora’s hips tilted and she moaned as she grasped Hermione’s bushy head and stroked her furry ears. Still gently squeezing Dora’s plump breasts, Hermione trailed her cat-tongue from Dora’s nipples up to the sensitive region of her neck near the base of her jaw where it met her ear. Dora squealed and shuddered when the first tremor of ecstasy took her.

Harry knew it was time and he climbed higher between Dora’s quaking thighs. Hermione took Dora’s head and stroked the older girl’s hair as Dora ran her hands over the young cat-witch’s torso and squeezed her perfect little globes. Dora’s own lips and tongue traced a wet path from one of Hermione’s perky pink nipples to another as Harry grasped Dora’s hips.

With a single thrust of his loins, Harry entered Dora; she gasped to feel Harry’s stiff penis moving inside of her. Dora’s hands roamed Hermione’s lissome figure and found the younger girl’s bottom cheeks, giving them a squeeze.

Gleefully, Hermione understood what Dora wanted. She turned to face Harry and straddled Dora’s head, her bushy tail quivering with delight. Dora gripped Hermione’s thighs and pressed her face between the cat-witch’s firm cheeks, slipping her tongue into Hermione’s twitching wet vulva.

Dora hungrily devoured Hermione’s slit and Harry drove his shaft into Dora’s moist depths wrenching a passionate moan from her. Hermione leaned forward, meowing with pleasure as Dora’s tongue found it’s way deeper inside. Harry took Hermione’s bushy head in one of his hands, entwining his lips and tongue with hers, and Dora wrapped her legs around Harry’s backside as he continued to plunder her vessel.

Hermione’s ginger tail whipped wildly back and forth, thumping the bed; her back arched and her furry ears flattened as she wriggled her bottom against Dora's face, feeling the older girl's nose pressing against her back-entrance and her probing tongue in her dripping crescent. Hermione’s meows took on a muffled keening sound as Harry’s mouth continued its dance with her own.

A storm-surge of sublime intoxication engulfed them and Dora's muffled squealing grew louder; she writhed and heaved beneath the Potters as another wave of ardour rocked her.

Dora’s clenching sheath sent a shockwave of ecstasy through Harry, and Hermione rippled as they lost themselves to the tempest of bliss. Harry gasped; his loins jerked in a frenzy and he released himself convulsively into Dora. Magic arced and lanced from the threesome with explosive force as the chambers shook.

The last thing Dora remembered before she passed into oblivion was the sensation of Harry squirting inside of her, filling her nook with his stickiness, and the taste of Hermione’s sweet nectar as it flowed over her tongue.

~o0o~

Dora awoke the next morning with giddy giggle and a naked Potter still asleep, curled under each
arm. She lay there blissfully breathing in the aroma of their spent passion until they both stirred and kissed her. Dora couldn’t remember ever feeling this happy or this loved. She had loved her last girlfriend dearly, but never like this.

When Dora perused a *Naughty Witches* magazine many days later, looking at the pictures of other young wizards and their penises, which were busy pleasuring the images of the witches on the pages, she still felt not a whit of a sensual urge at the sight of them. It was only Harry who roused Dora’s passions as much as Hermione and the other girls did.

Hermione invited Dora to shower with them before breakfast.

“Washing each other afterwards is all part of the fun...” Hermione giggled.

Hermione got on her knees as the steaming water sprayed over the lot of them. At Hermione’s direction, Dora began to “wash” Harry’s morning erection. Dora chortled while she masturbated a thoroughly wet Harry, and Hermione sucked the tip of his penis.

Bringing Harry off this way, first thing, was usually a very quick experience, but Harry did his best to hold on as long as he could, enjoying the new feeling of Dora’s breasts pressed against his back and her hand around his shaft while Hermione sucked the crown as the hot water rushed over his skin.

Nonetheless, it didn’t take long, and Hermione was soon thirstily swallowing Harry’s spurts of semen as they filled her mouth. The Potters returned the favour by thoroughly soaping and rinsing Dora until she climaxed in their arms.

~000~

Jennifer was sitting at the end of Gryffindor table at breakfast time. As long as she didn’t look up at the staff table where all the male professors were, and kept her eyes on the girls and Harry at the Mingling Table, she could manage.

She wanted to join in, and every one of the girls and Harry had invited her, but Jennifer still wasn’t quite ready to sit with more than a couple of people at a time. Hermione smiled at her and said a few words to the others who all nodded in agreement. A moment later she and Harry brought their plates over and sat with her.

“Thank you,” Jennifer said quietly with a shy smile. “You didn’t have to do that. I’m working up the nerve to come and sit with all of you together...”

“I know,” Hermione reached out and took Jennifer’s hand, “Luna told us that everyone has been taking turns to share meals with you when you’re feeling up to it. Harry and I just want to be a part of that.”

“And Luna told us that yesterday and today are the first times you’ve even eaten in the Great Hall,” Harry said gently. He looked contemplative for a moment.

“Would you like to watch us do some spells Jennifer?” Harry asked. “We’re going to practice some after breakfast. I... er... I think you might like the ones we’re going to practice today. They’re big spells, but they’re very nice ones...”

Jennifer’s eyes widened. The only magic she had seen since her first day in the headmaster’s office was Wizard Chess, Exploding Snap, magical portraits, and people flying on brooms. Hestia had asked everyone not to scare Jennifer with magic spells. And Jennifer had overheard some of the professors arguing over the legality of her being around magic at all.
“You don’t have to if you don’t want to...” Hermione said quickly.

“Actually...” Jennifer began tentatively, “I... I think I’d like to... to see some nice magic. All I’ve seen so far was mostly done to keep me prisoner and to... to... to hurt me.” Jennifer swallowed apprehensively. “But I don’t want to get anyone in trouble,” she whispered.

“Don’t worry about that,” said Harry assertively. He glanced up at Dumbledore who was watching them with a twinkle in his eye. Harry relaxed. “I know the Headmaster won’t mind. He wouldn’t have let you stay here if he was too fussed about that sort of thing.”

~00o~

Albus peered at Harry and Hermione. He had more than an inkling that they were going to show the muggle girl a bit of magic, and he was glad. Seeing that not all magic was harmful would surely help her to heal in ways that he had wished his little sister Ariana could have healed.

If Albus were to be honest with himself, he had to admit that was why he had refused to obliviate Jennifer and send her back out into the muggle world, alone. Jennifer, with her ebony hair, didn’t look like Ariana at all, but Albus couldn’t help seeing Ariana whenever he looked at her.

Jennifer had suffered the same fate repeatedly at the hands of a Dark Wizard that Ariana had suffered at the hands of those muggle boys. After viewing Jennifer’s mind to glean what information he could, Albus knew that there was no way he could bear to allow her to continue to suffer, isolated and friendless, as Ariana had suffered.

Contrary to what the Aurors believed, obliviation did not eliminate memories completely. Though eliminated from the physical pathways of the brain, echoes remained lodged in the soul, and continued to burn like glowing embers, which once rekindled could destroy a mind completely in a firestorm of chaos and pain.

Albus smiled his blessing at the Potters through the glistening tears in his eyes.

~00o~

Jennifer was a bit frightened of the etheric glowing lions, tiger, and wildcat at first. But they were gorgeous, and when she saw how playful they were, she wished that they were physical enough to pet and run her fingers through their fur. Jennifer could almost sense the joy which Harry had told her fueled Patronuses.

With a thrill of excitement, Jennifer watched as Fleur, Daphne, and Parvati practiced until they too produced Corporeal Patronuses.

“Brilliant Parvati,” Harry grinned, “That’s a panther isn’t it Hermione?”

“I think so Harry... It looks like the right shape for a black panther,” Hermione responded proudly.

“Thanks guys!” Parvati squealed, her own satiny black tail waving delightedly.

Everyone including Fleur herself gasped in astonishment when Fleur’s Patronus exhibited the head, front talons, and wings of an eagle and the body, hind legs, and tail of a lion.

“Zat ees a Griffin, but are not Patronuses only supposed to be non-magical animals?” Fleur asked in bewilderment.

“I think it’s because you’re part Veela, Fleur... But it would have likely been a, er... normal Golden
Eagle before... before you... er... became our girlfriend,” Hermione replied, blushing fiercely.

Hermione was awed and humbled by the implications of everyone’s Patronuses. At Dora’s request, Hermione had taken a quick trip to the library to find out why Dora’s Patronus had changed, and discovered that Patronuses could often change to a species related to the Patronus of someone that one had fallen in love with.

Hermione was completely overwhelmed and brought to tears when Daphne finally produced hers. If the apparent dappling on her small, lithe jungle cat was any indication, Daphne had produced an exquisitely adorable Ocelot.

Overcome with emotion herself, Daphne embraced Hermione and kissed her tearfully. One after the other, Daphne turned to Fleur, Harry, Dora, Luna, and Parvati, giving them all kisses too. Then, at Harry’s direction, he and the six young witches all cast their Patroni together as one.

Jennifer Watts couldn’t speak. The spectral felines roamed around Jennifer, butting their heads against her affectionately, and tears streamed down her own cheeks as the intense surges of magic and the seraphic ecstasy which permeated the atmosphere of the Room of Requirement swept through her in waves.

Jennifer collapsed, but Hermione was close enough to catch her. Harry ran to their side in alarm. Hermione looked up and smiled radiantly at him through her tears.

“She’ll be fine Harry--Jennifer will be better than fine actually when she wakes up.”
Chapter 105

According to the readings of his instruments, something highly unusual was going on somewhere in Hogwarts, and Albus Dumbledore had a good idea of where it was happening, even though the room was an unplottable room within an unplottable castle.

Albus Dumbledore also had a very good idea of who was behind the unusual readings, which were literally off-the-scale, as several of his instruments would now need repairing, and others were oscillating wildly.

But there had been no Castle-quakes, so the Headmaster could be reasonably certain that although the Magical Frequency Signature bore a similarity to the Magical Outbursts which usually accompanied the quakes, the activity generating the current levels of Magic was of a different nature.

A thrill shot through the Headmaster when he realised that he was indirectly witnessing for the second time an Application of the most incredibly powerful and highly refined levels of magic he had ever seen. However, this particular Application appeared to have undergone yet another level of Transmogrification if the readings were any indication.

Headmaster Dumbledore quickly and excitedly made his way to the seventh floor of the castle and tapped his wand twice on the wall across from the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy.

~o0o~

Jennifer blinked as she came to in Hermione’s arms. The Patronuses were gone, but the room was still bright. It occurred to Jennifer that she felt very comforted and safe with Hermione’s arms around her. Jennifer sighed happily. She didn’t want Hermione to stop cuddling her.

That’s when Jennifer realised that something was different. She felt clean, as if washed in the purified waters of a mountain stream. Jennifer had a sensation of floating on clouds, being lifted by wings of gossamer.

And the brightness, it wasn’t just the room—it was inside her, the veil of Darkness had been swept from her brain. Jennifer no longer felt the looming presence of the rat-faced intruder haunting her mind; the humiliation, pain, and anguish gone.

But Jennifer’s skin tingled with the sensation of something else, something new which she had never felt before today. Clambering to her feet with Hermione’s assistance, Jennifer peered at the girls and Harry, who all bore expressions of concern. The furry tails of the cat-witches all flicked apprehensively.

“Wh...what happened?” Jennifer asked, flicking her dark bangs out of her face.

“I... I’m not entirely certain,” Hermione responded, her furry ears twitched and her brow furrowed in thought. “How do you feel Jennifer?” she asked, knowing what the answer would be.

“Good...” Jennifer’s features flickered with puzzlement, “Better than good actually--I feel happy. I... I don’t understand. I can still remember everything that's happened to me clearly,” she frowned slightly.

“I... I suppose I still feel sad about my parents being dead,” Jennifer continued, “but it doesn’t hurt so much. And... and I don’t feel dirty anymore about what Ratface did to me--just a bit angry, but... but mostly I just feel cheerful--I don’t understand...”
“I thought so,” Hermione nodded. “Do you remember what Harry told you--about Patronuses?”

“They’re for chasing away Dementors right? Dark wraiths that feed on despair and misery and suck your soul out,” Jennifer answered.

“That’s right,” Hermione smiled, “What I think happened, is that when all of our Patronuses surrounded you, they sensed your unhappiness--and somehow chased it away as if it was a Dementor. I don’t know enough about brain chemistry to be absolutely sure, but... but I think they altered yours--I think they stimulated the production of natural anti-depressants and endorphins...”

“I... I think I understand,” Jennifer cupped her chin pensively, “That makes sense. The last thing I remember before I passed out was feeling... erm... ” Jennifer turned red and trailed off, uncertain how to describe the intensely orgasmic experience.

A loud trilling echoed twice in the Room of Requirement, startling everyone.

“What the...? Hermione, did that sound like a muggle doorbell to you?” Harry asked, bewildered.

“Yes, I think somebody wants to come in Harry,” Hermione replied with amusement.

Harry dashed over to the doorway and turned the handle.

“Hello Harry, might I come in?” the Headmaster asked when Harry opened the door.

“Er... yeah, of course Professor Dumbledore.” Harry noticed the odd gleam of excitement in the old man’s eyes.

“Thank you very much Harry.” Dumbledore glanced around the Room of Requirement and nodded in greeting at the rest of the Unaffiliated. He spied Jennifer and smiled warmly at her.

“If I may Harry, were you all just now practicing the Patronus charm in this room?” Dumbledore asked. Harry nodded in response, feeling slightly awkward.

“And did everyone manage to perform a Corporeal Patronus?” Dumbledore counted his students silently.

“Er... yes sir.” Harry couldn’t help it; he grinned proudly at the others.

“Remarkable!” the Headmaster murmured, “I thought as much. Well Done everyone!” Dumbledore beamed at his students. “It is simply unheard of for so many at your age to be able to produce a Patronus of any sort without weeks or months of training. This is truly Exceptional!”

The students grinned nervously back, happy that they weren’t in trouble, all feeling quite pleased with themselves. Dumbledore peered at Jennifer again, shrewdly observing her demeanor.

The Headmaster felt almost giddy at what he saw. Glancing back at the Unaffiliated, Dumbledore appraised each student. His piercing blue eyes lit upon Daphne and she shivered slightly.

“Ah Miss Greengrass, yes... I think yours will do nicely--very nicely indeed!” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled.

“S...Sir?” Daphne looked puzzled.

“May I borrow your wand for a few moments please,” the Headmaster asked, “I wish to perform an experiment before I say more.”
Hermione’s eyes widened gleefully and her bushy tail began to vibrate in excitement. Dumbledore examined Daphne’s wand for a moment or two.

“Very nice Miss Greengrass,” Dumbledore nodded approvingly as he swished the wand, “Laurel wood, 10 inches, supple... and if I am not mistaken, I believe I detect a Unicorn tail-hair core.”

Daphne nodded in agreement. Befuddlement crossed everyone’s features when the Headmaster passed Daphne’s wand to Jennifer. No one was more confused than Jennifer. What was she supposed to do with the wand? Jennifer gasped when she felt a little prickle in her fingers as she took it.

“Jennifer, if you would be so kind,” said Dumbledore, “concentrate on the tip of the wand and say ‘lumos’.”

Everyone held their breaths in anticipation. Jennifer’s heart began to race.

“What? B...but I can’t...” Jennifer said anxiously.

“Please, indulge an old man’s curiosity,” Dumbledore’s eyes gleamed again, “just focus your attention on the wand tip. Again, ‘lumos’.”

Jennifer swallowed nervously. She knew the Headmaster well enough by now to know that he wasn’t just messing her about. He really wanted her to try. Certain that nothing would happen, Jennifer took a deep breath and concentrated on the tip of the wand.

“Lumos,” said the muggle girl.

There was a collective gasp of astonishment, even from the Headmaster, who had been doubting his senses. The tip of Daphne’s wand lit up like a beacon in Jennifer’s hand.

Jennifer’s breathing quickened; her pulse racing. She didn’t understand. She wasn’t magical; she couldn’t be.

“How... Wh...what’s happening?” Shock etched Jennifer’s features.

“Apparently Jennifer, you are now a Wizard--or a Witch, depending on the term of your preference.” Dumbledore tried hard to control his own breathing.

“But... but that’s impossible--isn’t it?” Harry asked, absolutely floored.

“Professor Dumbledore,” gasped Hermione, “Could Jennifer be one of the rare few who exhibit magic late?”

“It is certainly a possibility, Mrs Potter,” the Headmaster responded calmly, “But I think in this case not. The instruments in my office detected a highly unusual spell transmogrification occurring moments ago, accompanied by readings of magical manifestations which were literally off-the-scale. I may have to replace several of my detectors.”

“Merlin!” Dora swore.


“Nor have I Miss Patil,” Dumbledore replied, “This phenomenon has never happened before in my knowledge--at least not in Europe or the Near East within the historical record. However, even my
knowledge is not exhaustive. It may have occurred in some far flung land--perhaps in the Orient where they employ magical systems which are quite different from our own--or perhaps in secret in the ancient past.”

“In any case,” Dumbledore continued, “judging by the readings in my office, we are not talking about any mere spell. If I were to hazard a guess, when the seven of you conjured your Patroni simultaneously, something quite extraordinary happened.”

“You seven, are part of something special, a unit bound by a magic so sublime that your Patroni acted in concert--as one. For all intents and purposes, you are a tightly knit Coven.”

“And that potent magic permeates this room still--it is palpable to those whose senses are finely tuned. It is a magic based on a love so pure--so rarified--that raised to the 7th power it transformed the spell, achieving effects previously unknown....”

“I believe that what may have occurred, is that the potent manifestations of this purified magic infused young Jennifer, and activated within her the previously recessive gene which allows wizards to sense and manipulate magic. I cannot be certain how this happened, but this is the only reasonable assumption that I can draw at this time,” the Headmaster concluded.

“Fantastique,” Fleur’s jaw dropped. “Zat ees incredible.” Fleur felt a rush of giddiness as the magnitude of the event she had participated in hit her.

“Professor,” Fleur’s heart fluttered as she spoke again, “Per’aps eet ees because our Patronuses, zey all came into physical contact wiz Jennifer.”

Luna darted to Jennifer’s side and hugged her.

“I’m so thrilled for you,” Luna gushed, her white fluffy tail bobbing joyfully, “You can stay here at Hogwarts and learn how to be a wizard properly.”

Dumbledore blinked back a few tears. He was as delighted as his students. He knew he would have had to send Jennifer away with Hestia when term started, but he had been reluctant to do so. The Headmaster had been considering the creation of another self-spelling wand to perform with a voice activation charm as he had for Filch. But that was not an ideal solution as the spells were limited in power and function.

Nor would it do for news of a muggle masquerading as a wizard at Hogwarts to reach members of the School Board, though he had been willing to risk it. This circumstance was beyond everything Dumbledore had hoped for and believed possible.

Hermione looked at Professor Dumbledore optimistically, swishing her bushy ginger tail. Harry peered at him hopefully as well--indeed they all were expectantly observing the Headmaster.

“Yes,” the Headmaster intoned softly, his voice cracking slightly, “Jennifer may remain here at Hogwarts and learn how to be a wizard properly.”

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“Yes,” the Headmaster intoned softly, his voice cracking slightly, “Jennifer may remain here at Hogwarts. But she will need a wand of her own. I shall send for Ollivander immediately and give him the specifics of Miss Greengrass’s wand so that he can bring an assortment of the most suitable to test.”

“I know I can trust you all to assist Jennifer in acclimating to her new status... But if anyone asks--for now--we must keep the details of Jennifer’s transformation to ourselves. I believe Mrs Potter’s initial presumption of Jennifer as a Late Bloomer is the most appropriate narrative. It has indeed happened on occasion--rare though it may be.”

Jennifer’s head spun again, but Luna and Hermione clutched her tightly and kept her from collapsing
again. Jennifer couldn’t comprehend that this was actually happening.

But an hour later, when a 10 inch Holly Wand with a Unicorn tail-hair Core chose her in Dumbledore’s office, Jennifer finally began to believe.
“Merlin’s Beard, you can’t be serious Albus!” gasped Horace Slughorn. “The girl is 15 years old, and she is only now displaying signs of wizardry? Astounding--I cannot recall the last such occurrence... and a muggleborn to boot.”

“1973...” Minerva McGonagall eyed the twinkling Headmaster suspiciously, “The wizard in question was 28 at the time...”

“Really Horace!” Hestia Jones interjected scathingly, “What is so astonishing about muggleborns...?”

“No, no Hestia...” Horace cut in quickly, looking rather hurt, “You misunderstand, I’m not prejudiced--Lily Potter was my all-time favourite student, and I am quite looking forward to having a chance to teach Hermione Potter and her husband...”

“It is just that it is simply even more remarkable that someone with no apparent magical parentage at all should exhibit magic so late in life... Now that Minerva has jogged my memory, to the best of my recollection, the young man who discovered his magic at 28 years of age was a pureblood who was thought to be a squib.”

“Indeed!” remarked Filius Flitwick, “And the late bloomer prior to him was a young halfblood witch who didn’t discover her abilities until she was 17, in 1956... Horace is making a fair observation.”

“We are seeing more and more muggleborns all the time,” Poppy Pomfrey said pointedly, “It was bound to happen eventually... And I expect that if the muggleborn birthrates keep rising, Hogwarts shall have to expand eventually or open up another school to accommodate the increasing number of wizards.”

“True... true,” Horace nodded thoughtfully, “I have been following the trends myself. I daresay that humankind is evolving and that one day in the far-flung future the majority of humans will be wizards--I just hadn’t considered that I might be alive to witness the burgeoning of a new age of wizardry...”

Horace snorted with mirth when an amusing thought occurred to him, “This will be a real poke in the eye to Old Salazar and his modern followers. One day nearly all wizards will be ‘muggleborns’--I must say, I sometimes regret that I was ever sorted into his House.”

“There, there Horace. Never mind that,” Minerva sympathised, her features softening. She sighed heavily and continued, “Goodness knows, since Mrs Potter’s potions mishap, I have come to recognise that ‘pureblood’ prejudice, bullying, and dark wizardry is not confined to any single House...”

“Even in my own House--Peter Pettigrew, Percy Weasley, and Cormac McLaggen--Gryffindors all--and yet each has demonstrated that Slytherin is not alone in producing wizards with poor judgment and ill intent. It is more that such behaviour has long been expected and even advocated as a virtue in Slytherin House. That House is very fortunate to have had a few decent sorts such as yourself and Miss Greengrass, Horace.”

“Hear, hear... Minerva is quite correct dear!” Pomona Sprout said, nodding in agreement.

“Aye, ain’t tha' the truth though!?” growled Hagrid. “Yer a good man Horace... an' don' ferget it!”
“Thank you Minerva, Pomona, Rubeus,” sighed Horace, looking sad, “You are all too kind... I did my best to promote positive values while I was a professor and during my tenure as Head of Slytherin. But I have long felt that my best was not good enough... Tom Riddle is my shame! As is our current Minister...”

“No, Horace...” Albus Dumbledore shook his head, “They are the shame of us all. We have all made mistakes in our ongoing struggle to fight the Dark and forge a progressive and democratic future for the wizard world--and I am no less at fault, having made some of the biggest mistakes of them all.”

“But here we are, rectifying our errors and all working together. I cannot thank you enough Horace for joining the Order of the Phoenix and giving me your memory. I know how difficult that was for you.”

“Albus, my dear fellow, my friend--thank you for being so persistent. I had let my fears get the best of me, but you know me too well, and your offers were too good to pass up.” Horace smiled warmly again, knowing that he was safe among those he could count as friends. But there were two--those who had also been prized students--who were nowhere to be seen.

“I say Albus, what has become of Severus and Remus?” Horace asked. “I know they are among your staff, but I have barely seen either of them since I have arrived. Surely they shall also be taking part in helping Miss Watts catch up her wizarding education for the beginning of term?”

“Indeed they shall Horace,” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled merrily again. “However, both of them have earned a well-deserved respite with their loved ones...”

“Merlin’s Beard!” Horace gasped, and the others--even Minerva--cracked a smile, “Severus has found love at long last? That is simply splendid! Who is his paramour I might ask? You simply must tell me.”

Poppy Pomfrey’s eyes crinkled in mirth. Horace had always been quite the gossip. But it also gave her joy to be able to regale the old wizard with good news--particularly as none of the others appeared to be forthcoming.

“Horace dear, Severus is now with Narcissa Black, since a short while after the dissolution of her marriage. She sought solace in Severus’s arms, and has apparently found it--needless to say, we were all as shocked as you...”

The meeting ended a short time later, and the others filed out of the staff-room, leaving only the Headmaster and two shrewd looking witches.

“All right Albus,” snapped Minerva, “Why don’t you tell us what really happened? Please don’t tell me you created another self-spelling wand...”

“I can get naught past you, can I Minerva,” chuckled Dumbledore.

Even Poppy raised her eyebrows in concern, “Albus... surely not! The school’s Board of Governors...”

Dumbledore raised a hand and Poppy quieted.

“Please, do not fret. Jennifer Watts’ magic is her own, I can assure you...” he began. Poppy looked relieved but Minerva continued to eye the Headmaster narrowly, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“...but indeed,” the Headmaster continued, “the manner of young Jennifer’s manifestation of magic is not likely due to a late start. But I must again implore you both to keep this to yourselves, as it
involves our young friends--the Unaffiliated...”

Minerva leaned her head back and removed her glasses to massage her temples, letting out a long groan.

“Would you like a pain potion for that headache dear?” Poppy asked, trying her utmost to keep a straight face.

For her part, Poppy was delighted, and she knew that despite herself, Minerva would be very happy for the girl. Indeed, as the Headmaster made clear the circumstances under which Jennifer Watts’ recessive magical genes had been activated, Minerva’s countenance softened, and tears welled in her eyes.

“That... that is just beautiful Albus,” sniffled Minerva, dabbing her eyes with a hanky. “The poor girl, she deserves to be happy... deserves the chance to make a new life for herself. The Potters--we all have so much to be thankful to them for--they have made such a positive difference in so many lives...”

Poppy smiled and placed her arm around her colleague’s shoulders, giving Minerva a gentle hug. A thoughtful expression crossed Poppy’s countenance as she considered the implications; she glanced at the Headmaster.

“This means we have a proper new Coven doesn’t it, Albus!? The first real new Coven in Britain since the 1960's.”

Albus Dumbledore nodded, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

~o0o~

Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour regarded the Minister shrewdly for a moment, then glanced at the files she had given him.

“Pembroke Chamberlain?” Scrimgeour pursed his lips and furrowed his brows. “Are you certain of this information Minister? He is highly regarded by many, despite being somewhat... indecisive.”

“Oh, most certainly Rufus,” Minister Dolores Umbridge replied, her voice honeyed, “My Senior Undersecretary, Deputy Minister Weasley, uncovered these startling details of Mr Chamberlain’s dangerous associations.”

Scrimgeour considered that for a moment. He regarded Percy Weasley quite highly--the lad was brilliant and dedicated to Law and Order. He wasn’t soft, unlike his father. But the case file still struck Rufus as odd.

“His past associations with Voldemort were determined to have been due to the Imperius curse Madam Minister...”

“Oh no Rufus...” the Minister interjected, “it is Mr Chamberlain’s current associations we are most concerned with. The man has been consorting with criminals who are known to have connections to Albus Dumbledore--Mundungus Fletcher is quite an unsavory character, I can assure you.”

“Yes! I am well aware of Mr Fletcher’s record,” the Head Auror nodded. “Most of his criminal activities in the past have been rather petty. These new accusations, if true, are quite disturbing. Trafficking in enslaved muggles is a serious offence--I shall begin an investigation into Chamberlain and Fletcher immediately.”
“Thank you Rufus! I knew I could count on you.”

Minister Umbridge smiled appreciatively. She watched the Head Auror depart in satisfaction, knowing that he would find plenty of evidence to arrest and convict Pembroke Chamberlain--thus stripping him of his seat on the Wizengamot. Rookwood had made certain that there would be lots of evidence to find.

The Minister peered in her own copy of the file and scribbled a note, pleased at how swimmingly Deputy Minister Weasley was acclimating to his role. He had been slightly reticent at first, but Percy Weasley had quickly seen the political value of framing a Potter Appeaser like Chamberlain and a criminal associate of Dumbledore such as Mundungus Fletcher.

Dolores could scratch yet another Undesirable from her list of the “wobblies” who had supported the Potters during their trial.

Minister Umbridge opened the file which Scrimgeour had brought her regarding more muggle disappearances. She sighed heavily, certain that Voldemort was behind them.

As much as Dolores wanted Voldemort dead and gone, he was far too useful alive for the time being--providing a distraction for Dumbledore and his people. Not to mention that as long as wizards were afraid, they would willingly accept her authoritative leadership.

A sinister smile played on Dolore’s features. Another plan began to form as she perused the file of missing muggles. Yes indeed--this fit rather nicely with her own plans. Now Dolores could also link the crimes of Voldemort with the crimes for which she and Rookwood had framed Chamberlain and Fletcher.

~o0o~

Gilderoy Lockhart felt quite pleased with himself. He had successfully assisted in the capture of numerous muggles for the Dark Lord’s army of Inferi by planting evidence on, and altering the memories of yet another muggle. Muggle police would simply presume the man was a serial killer, and Gilderoy had earned himself a Dark Mark, placing himself above the lowlife who made up the ranks of the Snatchers.

And having also earned himself an evening of rest and relaxation, Lockhart regarded the muggle girl he had just obliviated with satisfaction, confident that she would never know what had just happened to her.

Gilderoy was more elated than he had thought he would be under the Dark Lord’s rule. Gilderoy felt more alive and much freer as the Dark Lord’s Servant than he had while trying to maintain his image of purity in the House of Dumbledore.
Chapter 107

Harry was surprised when the new witch with long ebony bangs gave him a hug and a peck on the cheek the following morning, before also giving the same to Hermione and taking a seat opposite them at the Mingling Table next to Dora. Hermione purred and whisked her fluffy tail, returning Jennifer’s smile.

“Er... what was that for?” Harry asked, flushing slightly.

“That’s for making me feel better, and turning me into a witch,” Jennifer giggled. “I still can’t really believe I have magic now. But I woke up this morning and my wand still works--and I didn’t have a single nightmare last night for the first time in months...”

“But it was all of us together...” Harry began.

“I know,” Jennifer earnestly replied, “but I also know it wouldn’t have happened if not for you and Hermione...”

“She’s right you know,” Dora said with a grin; her cheeks turned pink, magenta hair flourescing as she replayed last night’s fun in the Potters’ bedchamber in her head.

“I agree...” said Luna cheerfully as she and Parvati took their seats, “If Harry hadn’t looked after Hermione when she turned part-cat, things might have turned out quite differently.” Parvati nodded in concurrence.

Harry squirmed and reddened, uncertain that he deserved the credit just because he’d fallen in love with Hermione. Hermione purred a bit more and gave Harry a kiss.

“It’s true Harry,” Daphne said, giving Harry a kiss on Harry’s other cheek as she and Fleur took their own seats next to him. “Who knows where we’d all be today if it weren’t for you?”

“Er... thanks guys,” Harry’s blush deepened, but he grinned when he noted that everyone had decided on coffee this morning. They were all having a rather late breakfast.

Even Hedwig seemed a bit sleepy when she finally dropped off the morning paper. Harry grinned at Hedwig too and gave her a piece of bacon, wondering if she had found a mate in the owlery.

They all glanced at the headline, then hastily chucked the paper aside, unwilling to let the news of the arrests of Mundungus Fletcher and Pembroke Chamberlain dampen their moods. Harry was more keen on another topic altogether.

“So what’s this deal about us being a ‘Coven’ Hermione?” Harry asked. “Is it true? And what does it mean if we are?”

Hermione peered at the book that she, Harry, and Dora had found in the library on the way to breakfast.

“I think it is true Harry,” Hermione nodded as her eyes sped through the text. “It says here that Covens do spells together as a single unit--increasing the potentiality of the spells themselves. They are often... er... quite intimate, but apparently most tend not be very lasting, nor as powerful as they might otherwise be, because jealousy and infighting eventually disrupts most of them...”

“The last real one that formed was in the 1960's but it didn’t last beyond the mid 70's--I don’t think
we’ll run into that problem ourselves though,” Hermione grinned, glancing around the table at everyone as her bushy tail waved happily.

“If what Dumbledore says is true, the power of our spellwork indicates that we’re all in this together for the long haul—and I KNOW it’s true because I can feel it!” Hermione said, her eyes shining.

“What do you mean by ‘real one’...?” Harry asked.

“Well—it would seem that quite a few muggles form Covens as part of neopagan religious practice, and others are formed by those who are part of the muggle occult underground...” Hermione continued scanning the text rapidly.

“And apparently every so often wizards and witches try to make a go of it, but they don’t usually have what it takes to work spells together properly... and the ones that do work tend to be nearly always all female—nobody really knows why.”

“So it would seem that real Covens are very rare, and that successful ones with males are rarer still... I suppose that’s why Covens in muggle literature tend to be associated with witches,” Hermione mused, biting her lip pensively, furry ears twitching, “Though being all witches is still no guarantee of success. The coven which broke up in the 1970’s was all witches.”

Harry glanced around the table at the girls and swallowed as he tried to work up the nerve to ask the question in front of all of them.

“Erm... Hermione, ever since I found out I was a wizard, nearly everyone that’s ever known my mum and dad has gone on about me having my mum’s eyes...” Harry caught Dora’s eyes and blushed again, remembering what she’d told him the other night, “d...d’you think that has anything to do with it--me being part of a Coven I mean?” he asked.

The entire table was silent for a moment as an unspoken understanding awakened in the Unaffiliated. Except for Dora and Hermione, this was the first that anyone had heard about Harry’s eyes being like his mother’s.

“I... I think it might Harry,” Hermione finally responded. “Eyes are supposedly the ‘window to the soul.’ If that’s true, then it means you really do have a female soul...”

Jennifer stared at Harry, remembering her first impression of his eyes. No wonder she had felt so much more comfortable around Harry than the other males from their first meeting. Now it all started to make sense.

Fleur thought back to the reputation she had gained as a snob at Beauxbatons, based on accusations by the many good looking boys she had turned down. She had really wanted to be with one too, and her girlfriends had constantly pressured her to pick a boy to join in their fun.

But Fleur hadn’t liked any of the Beauxbaton boys well enough. They were all so arrogant, believing themselves to be “God’s Gift” to women, and all convinced that they would be the one with the prowess to make a Veela scream with pleasure. When Fleur refused them all to the last one, gradually her girlfriends had spent less and less time with her.

Fleur had fallen for Hermione Potter at first sight, but during the Triwizard tournament Fleur had rapidly come to know that Harry Potter was just as special as his wife. Harry had been the first boy to treat Fleur like a person instead of a prize to be won.

Fleur didn’t know if his ‘female soul’ had anything to do with it, but it seemed very plausible to her that was why she loved Harry as much as she loved Hermione, Daphne and the other girls.
Daphne was convinced. She had always thought she was more interested in boys than girls until Hermione had kissed her. But then Daphne had never actually met a boy she really liked before Harry.

And, Daphne couldn’t really say that she had ever really been attracted to any of the other “nice boys” at Hogwarts. Neville Longbottom was probably the only other one she had come across who seemed as kind and sweet as Harry, but he didn’t do a thing for her. Daphne rather liked the Weasley Twins, but they were a bit too pushy and aggressive for her tastes.

Harry was everything Daphne had always dreamed her prince would be; kind and gentle, and honest and brave. And Daphne loved Hermione dearly for sharing Harry with her and Fleur, and the rest of their girlfriends. Daphne almost felt like her heart would burst as she thought about how much she loved everyone.

Luna and Parvati didn’t need much convincing. They had always been interested in boys too, but had long since decided that they much preferred girls for the most part. It just made perfect sense to them that was why Harry was so nice and why they loved him too.

Except for the sound of purring from Hermione and the other two cat-witches, breakfast was continued in quiet contemplation. Feeling as if he were part kneazle himself, Harry could almost palpably sense everyone drawing even closer to him and each other.

~o0o~

After breakfast, Jennifer began lessons with the professors and Harry made his breakthrough with quadratic equations. Finally he had the tools to complete his Arithmancy summer assignment. Harry doggedly slaved away in the library, determined to finish the rest of his homework assignments quickly so he could focus on training with the Coven.

Confident that the books were safe with only the Unaffiliated and Viktor Krum currently at Hogwarts for the summer, Madam Pince had decided that she could leave the library unattended during open hours and enjoy the holidays as much as possible.

Hermione had already completed all of her assignments and sat on Harry’s lap as he studied, providing equal parts Inspiration to work hard, and Distraction when he needed to rest his brain. Distraction eventually won out. Though Fleur and Daphne were distracting him almost as much as Hermione’s kisses.

Fleur was assisting Daphne in a similar manner, with Daphne on her lap in one of the armchairs, rewarding her for correct answers with a hand under Daphne’s skirt. Harry chuckled when Daphne squealed ecstatically, squirming in Fleur’s clutches, a bloom of damp spreading across her skirt.

Gasp, gasping in the afterglow, Daphne giddily sucked and licked clean Fleur’s fingers which had just been inside her. Hermione giggled and purred, nudging Harry’s cheek with her bushy head.

Harry thought for a moment. Lavender had managed to convince her parents to let her meet Viktor in Hogsmeade for a date, and the professors were either helping Jennifer or lounging. It seemed safe enough in the library.

Harry flicked his wand and silently cast a muffliato charm at the library entrance while Hermione was occupied nuzzling his neck.

“Harry!” squeaked Hermione; her eyes widened in both trepidation and glee when he slipped his own hand under her skirt and into her panties. “What are you doing?”
“Studying of course...” Harry replied with a grin. “Just like Fleur and Daphne are.”

Harry trapped Hermione’s lips with his own before she could retort and his other hand cupped one of her breasts, squeezing it through the fabric of her blouse.

Hermione’s bushy tail thrashed back and forth joyfully, as Harry’s fingers probed her moistening slit and entered her. Harry thrust them deeper and fondled Hermione’s fleshy pearl with his thumb, rotating it in little circles. With his other thumb, Harry flicked the hardened nipple which belonged to the breast in the palm of his hand.

Hermione’s heart raced and every nerve tingled with excitement. She was afraid that they would get caught, but she didn’t want Harry to stop. Hermione mewled and wriggled in Harry’s lap, shuddering as she climaxed, soaking her panties and skirt with her dewiness.

Harry grunted with pleasure as Hermione’s bottom ground against his erection. He loved bringing her off in his lap. The friction of Hermione’s orgasmic response to his ministrations was all he needed to lose it, filling his boxers with stickiness.

Still giddy with delight, Hermione slipped off Harry’s thighs and kneeled between his legs, unzipping his shorts. Her bushy tail twirled as she lapped up Harry’s secretions and cleaned him with her cat-tongue.

Hermione swirled her tongue around Harry’s still hard penis and then engulfed it with her mouth. Harry grasped Hermione’s bushy head and began thrusting himself into her wet and willing throat. He was so excited that it didn’t take long to peak once more.

In short order, Hermione was thirstily swallowing Harry’s semen as Fleur and Daphne watched and giggled while driving each other to distraction yet again.
Chapter 108

Fleur cast a colloportus maxima charm on the library door and it clicked as it locked. Daphne shared a smirk with Fleur before slipping off her lap. Stealthily, while Hermione was finishing Harry off, they snuck up behind her.

Hermione licked her lips clean and was just about zip Harry back up when a pair of gentle hands reached around to fondle her breasts and unbutton her blouse. Another pair of soft hands unclasped the hem of Hermione’s skirt and it slid to her knees.

“Eep...” Hermione squealed, flicking her bushy tail.

This time it was Fleur’s lips who trapped Hermione’s wetly while she finished removing Hermione’s blouse and Daphne slid Hermione’s panties down. In a trice Hermione was utterly naked except for her stockings and shoes and she was being gently guided to one of the library tables.

Hermione gasped when Fleur released her lips.

“What if someone comes in?” Hermione squeaked as goosebumps rose on her skin. She spied Harry grinning and gave him a half-hearted glare, wondering if he was in on this.

“Zey will have to break down ze door before zey get through zat locking charm chérie,” Fleur tittered as she playfully pinched Hermione’s rock hard nipples.

“We know how much you love the library Hermione,” giggled Daphne as she kneeled between Hermione’s bare thighs and pushed them apart.

Fleur’s delicate hands roamed across Hermione’s supple torso as she sucked a tender spot on the cat-witch’s neck, and Daphne kissed Hermione’s glistening slit before sliding her tongue into the humid pink fold. The scent of parchment and leather bindings mingled with the musky aroma of passion; Hermione trembled and purred as shivers of arousal shot through her.

Hermione was soon meowing ecstatically. Her furry ginger tail whisked back and forth brushing against the floor, her bottom hanging over the edge of the table with her thighs wrapped around Daphne’s head. Fleur sucked Hermione’s nipples one by one and probed her belly button with her tongue as Daphne's tongue dove deeper into Hermione's slick channel. Hermione shuddered with a yowl and burst, drenching Daphne’s face with her honeyed cream.

Giggling madly, Daphne let Harry take her place between Hermione’s thighs. Daphne joined with Fleur in squeezing Hermione’s breasts and encircling her perky nipples with her mouth.

Harry had been just as surprised as Hermione when the other two girls had taken it upon themselves to relieve Hermione of her clothing and shower their affections on her. He chortled gleefully, knowing that Hermione was thrilled by the experience of being taken in the library.

Harry pressed the crown of his penis against Hermione’s twitching entrance while she was still quaking in the throes of her orgasm. Lifting Hermione’s naked thighs, Harry plunged his erection into her wet sheath. Thrusting his hips, Harry rocked back and forth rhythmically, driving his shaft into Hermione’s depths.

Hermione was already in the garden of delight under the enchanting spell of Fleur and Daphne’s lips, tongues, and caresses when she felt Harry’s stiffness gliding inside of her. The showers of bliss
became a raging torrent of ecstasy, as one climax after the other took her to new heights.

Hermione’s rapturous convulsions brought Harry quickly to a zenith. With a groan, Harry exploded, releasing his stickiness into Hermione’s chamber. A breeze swept through the library, riffling the pages of the books lying on the library tables, and sparks flew; a few books of dark magic in the Restricted Section shrieked in agony.

But when it was over, none of the books were worse for wear. All that could be heard was happy purring and contented sighs, and the splatter of Harry’s ejaculate dripping to the floor from Hermione’s still spasming labia.

~o0o~

A little hidden boathouse in the Forbidden Forest at the edge of the Black Lake shook, and ripples spread out across the surface of the water.

“Merlin!” gasped Dora, her neon magenta hair flourescing. “That was lovely...”

Her hands stroked Parvati’s shiny black hair and black furry ears as Parvati continued slurping one of Dora’s nipples and kneading the older girl’s succulent breasts. Luna looked up from between Dora’s naked thighs and grinned.

“Oh, we’re just getting started Dora,” said Luna, happily whisking her fluffy white tail, Dora’s sweetness dripping from her chin.

~o0o~

Later that afternoon, after lessons with the professors were completed, Jennifer joined the Unaffiliated as they practiced spells together in the Room of Requirement. She was surprised when Harry had them all begin with half an hour of calisthenics.

“I just want us all to start getting back in the routine,” Harry told Jennifer. “Being fit will help us stay sharp and quick on our toes.”

“On our toes...?” Jennifer looked puzzled.

“We’re going to practice basic combat spells today, because I bet none of the professors have showed you any. Am I right?” Harry asked. Jennifer nodded.

“Right, thought not...” Harry frowned thoughtfully for a moment, before realisation occurred to him. “Well, I suppose Dumbledore is expecting us to show you--probably wants to keep things simple for you at first in your regular lessons--and they don’t really have a class just focused on learning how to fight with magic at Hogwarts. Defence Against the Dark Arts is mostly how to defend against dark magical creatures and some dark spells...”

“We’re going to practice a bit of muggle martial arts too,” Harry continued, “but don’t worry about that for now. And Dora will train you when we get around to that. We’re just going to practice stunning and shielding spells today, so you can get the hang of it.”

Jennifer swallowed nervously and glanced at the other girls, who all looked eager to begin.

“Er... alright then,” Jennifer said anxiously, nodding again.

After showing Jennifer how to perform the spells, Harry decided to have Hermione practice with Jennifer just to be sure that Jennifer didn’t get too frightened. Harry and the others practiced together
in the meantime. After an hour, Harry wanted to try something new.

“Er... well--seeing as we’re a Coven, I thought maybe we could try doing some other spells all together.... Maybe just a Protego Maxima for today...?”

“That’s an excellent idea Harry!” Hermione beamed at him, and everyone nodded in agreement.

“Sh... should I join in too?” stammered Jennifer, “I... I know I’m not really part of the group...”

“Of course you are!” Harry interjected adamantly, “Maybe not officially yet... but as far as I’m concerned you’re one of us. When term starts, just be sure to tell Dumbledore that you don’t want to be sorted into a House. You’ll be an Unaffiliated--like us.”

“Th...thanks Harry,” Jennifer smiled shyly. Hermione purred and gave Harry a kiss on the cheek.

The air in the Room of Requirement rippled with magic as they all practiced the powerful shield spell numerous times. With each casting, the spell’s potency grew.

~o0o~

Albus Dumbledore took a sip of his fresh hot cup of Darjeeling and nibbled a lemon-ginger biscuit. He tossed a biscuit towards Fawkes who had been eyeing the plateful sitting on Dumbledore’s desk. With a quick snap of his beak the red and gold phoenix caught the biscuit and swallowed it hungrily, cooing musically in gratitude.

“Would you like another?” Dumbledore asked. Fawkes nodded and the Headmaster threw one more for the phoenix who gobbled it with abandon.

A tinkling sound distracted them both. Albus glanced at the delicate golden contraptions on the nearby shelf; his eyes sparkled merrily. He noted with satisfaction that his modified instruments and magical detectors were holding up well despite the intense surges of magic they registered which he was certain were coming from the Room of Requirement.

~o0o~

The Dark Lord was perplexed by the article in the Daily Prophet. Did not the idiots who ran the newspaper realise that He, Voldemort, was the one to be most feared? Why on earth would they be hinting that the Old Fool who ran Hogwarts was linked to the muggle disappearances?

“Wormtail, who is this... this miscreant--this associate of Dumbledore--Mundungus Fletcher?”

“My Lord?”

“The muggle disappearances,” Lord Voldemort responded, “they are being attributed by and large to this Mr Fletcher. He is apparently engaged in selling enslaved muggles to wizards of means, and the Prophet strongly implies that the Headmaster of Hogwarts may have operational knowledge of his activities,” Voldemort snorted in derision.

As if Dumbledore had it in him to harm a single hair on a muggle’s head--or anyone’s head for that matter. The Old Fool couldn’t even bring himself to kill Gellert Grindelwald after defeating him, the most notorious and murderous Dark Wizard in history prior to Lord Voldemort.

“To the best of my knowledge, Mundungus Fletcher is nothing but a petty thief My Lord,” Wormtail replied in bewilderment. “Not even fit to be a Snatcher. He was employed by the Order of the Phoenix during the last war as merely someone with criminal contacts which could be exploited for
information--he avoided any of the actual conflicts between the Order and the Death Eaters...”

“Ah... so that is why I do not recollect him. In any case, it would appear that he has moved up in the world to have drawn the attention of the Dark Witch,” Voldemort mused aloud. “I do believe it is time to remind the Dark Witch and my former supporters of whom it is that they TRULY need to fear. How many Inferi do we have now?”

“About 200 so far My Lord!” Wormtail replied, “If we are to raise the numbers you desire to take Hogwarts with, then we should conserve our forces...”

“I concur Wormtail,” the Dark Lord nodded approvingly. “I think perhaps two simultaneous attacks would strike the right note--but not with the Inferi. Maybe the Snatchers and a few Werewolves should pay another visit to London--to Diagon Alley... and another attack on a muggle location, this time by Snatchers with a few giants to maximise the damage. Unleashing a regiment of Dementors would not go amiss either... Make it happen Wormtail!”

Bellatrix had been listening to the exchange intently but feigning nonchalance as she filed her fingernails. It occurred to her that more needed to be done.

“My Lord,” the Dark Consort said seductively, “I think we should see some of the traitors dead--perhaps Avery and Yaxley. If I crucify them in a most public manner--maybe then the Unfaithful will beg to be spared from your righteous retribution.”

Nagini hissed slightly as the Dark Lord absentmindedly stroked her head. He chuckled. Bellatrix was getting bored already. Killing muggles and turning them into Inferi was not enough to satisfy her bloodlust. She wanted some real action.

“Indeed Bellatrix, a Public Execution would make quite a statement,” the Dark Lord agreed. “Find Avery and Yaxley then, and string them up in the Atrium of the Ministry! Take Rabastan and Rodolphus as backup along with some Snatchers--but take care not to be caught.”

“Thank you My Lord!” the Dark Consort purred, “Wormtail and I will begin to plan the attacks at once.”

An evil smirk tugged at the corner of Wormtail’s lips. This could be the opportunity to find himself another suitable plaything. Perhaps Wormtail would enlist the aid of Lockhart for the muggle operation--Gilderoy seemed to share his taste for the younger females.
Chapter 109

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hestia was happy to see Jennifer sleeping soundly by the time she had concluded a nightcap with Dumbledore and a few of the professors. It was nice to see the girl not shaking and crying out from nightmares anymore. All because of that sweet Potter boy and his wife--Hestia was sure of it.

She sat for a few moments in the chair at the side of Jennifer’s bed watching her sleep. Hestia gently stroked Jennifer’s black bangs and sighed as a swell of motherly affection filled her. Jennifer looked enough like her, and was still young enough, that Hestia could easily imagine the girl as her own daughter.

“Night Sweetie,” Hestia whispered, giving Jennifer a kiss on the forehead as she got up to leave.

Jennifer stirred slightly when Hestia reached the doorway.

“Night Mum,” Jennifer murmured.

Hestia’s heart skipped and she quickly stifled a sob with her hand as her eyes filled with tears.

~o0o~

Hermione was thrilled at how quickly Jennifer was progressing. In just the last few days, Jennifer had managed to learn a lot of the basic First Year spells. But Jennifer sighed at the piles of homework the professors had given her.

“I don’t mind all the reading,” Jennifer told Hermione, “It’s absolutely fascinating and I’m a pretty fast reader. It’s just... there’s so much to learn--I’ll never be able to catch up to fifth year by start of term...”

“Don’t worry, I can tutor you. You’re doing amazingly well,” Hermione replied encouragingly, “and it doesn’t matter if you’re not in fifth year classes. You can take fourth year classes with me and Harry... Daphne and Parvati are in most of the same classes as us too.”

“And I don’t know if I’ll ever get used to writing with these antiquated quills and inkpots,” Jennifer sighed in annoyance as a splash of ink stained her charms essay.

“Don’t worry about splodges, there’s a good spell for cleaning up the ink... Tergeo,” Hermione said, pointing her wand at the page and siphoning up the excess ink.

“Oh, ta Hermione,” Jennifer brightened.

“And actually, Harry can help you with your calligraphy... and Runes, as well as Defence Against the Dark Arts,” Hermione said glowingly, “He’s better than me in those classes. And either of us can help you with Potions... he’s brilliant at it...”

“Urgh! Potions--that teacher is really creepy,” Jennifer shivered. “He looks like a vampire, and he’s awfully strict...”

“He’s alright really,” Hermione said sympathetically. “He was horrible to me and Harry--especially to Harry--our first year and for a lot of second year. But something about him changed not long after
I turned part-cat... he’s quite nice to us these days--nicer to everyone really...”

“And you’ll find that a lot of teachers here are very strict... they’re a bit like the old-fashioned teachers in boarding-school stories...”

“YES! That’s exactly what I was going to say,” Jennifer interrupted animatedly, her eyes turning big, “Except for Dumbledore—he’s a real softy—I feel like I’m in one of Enid Blyton’s school stories, or those Jennings and Darbishire books...”

“Don’t tell Harry I said this,” Hermione giggled, her furry ears twitching mirthfully, “but he’s always reminded me a little bit of Jennings... and Professor Snape was Harry’s Mr Wilkins until Snape finally came around.”

Jennifer began giggling too, feeling much better about the piles of homework. “I just realised why I feel like I’m in First Form at St Clare’s... Professor McGonagall is SUCH a Miss Roberts...”

Hermione snorted and both girls fell into a fit of laughter.

~o0o~

“Zat Vos an amazing catch Harry,” Viktor panted as he dismounted his broom. “You are an excellent flyer. You came out of novero on zat last von.”

Harry grinned, clutching the struggling snitch in his hand as he sat next to Viktor on the field of the Quidditch pitch. Luna, Parvati, Fleur, and Daphne continued to fly around and throw the quaffle through the hoops while Dora sketched some action shots in the stands.

“Thanks Viktor!” said Harry, “I don’t really miss playing Quidditch for Gryffindor when I have someone to fly with. It’ll be fun to have a few more when the Twins, Ginny, and Dean come back... but what about you right now? Will you still be able to fly for the Bulgarian team if you’re doing your last schoolyear in Britain?”

“I vant to, but it vill be difficult, so zey are letting me take a year off to finish my schooling here. Zen maybe, after zat, I don’t know... it depends if I go back to Bulgaria or...” Viktor blushed and trailed off.

Harry had an inkling of what was bothering Viktor.

“Er...How did your dates go with Lavender the last few days?” Harry asked.

Viktor’s face lit up, but the blush deepened.

“Er... ze dates were very good. Ve found a nice private place to... I... er... I probably should not speak of it too much though,” Viktor heaved a deep sigh. “I vant to marry Lavender, but I think her parents might not approve vile she is still in school--but I vill wait for her if I haff too.”

“I’m glad for you both--Lavender has been really nice since she got over not liking Hermione,” Harry remarked, “I never really knew her very well, except that she and Parvati used to be close friends before...er... well, I suppose they’ve made up a bit too--and my...er... friend, Ron, seemed to fancy her a bit...”

“But I don’t think Ron would’ve been very good with Lavender. Other than both of them liking Quidditch, they never had anything in common,” Harry mused, thinking about some of the lewd comments Ron had made about Lavender's anatomy--to her face even. He thought that perhaps it was best not to mention those.
“Ron seems happy enough with Seamus now though...” Harry continued, pleased with the thought.

Ron and Seamus had both been a lot nicer since they had ‘hooked up’ at the Yule Ball. Harry supposed that Ron was happier having, rather literally, a best-mate whom he had much more in common with. They were both still a bit silly and thickheaded, but neither of them had been quite as rude to anyone since then.

Harry’s thoughts turned back to Viktor.

“So did you...er... ‘pop the question’ then?” Harry had to ask. It only made sense really, if Viktor was willing to wait until Lavender finished school.

Viktor’s sudden grin and nod was Harry’s confirmation. Harry grinned back. He expected Parvati was going to be getting an excited letter from Lavender by tomorrow morning.

Harry looked up when he heard Hermione’s voice and he spotted her entering the Quidditch Pitch carrying the rarely used Firebolt he’d bought for her. Jennifer was with her, looking really anxious.

“I think I vill take my leave,” Krum said to Harry with a smirk. “I think zese moments are special for you, no?”

“Er... yeah, I suppose,” Harry replied, turning a bit pink. “But it looks like Hermione brought her own broom today, so...”

“Hello Viktor! Hi Harry, would you mind teaching Jennifer how to fly?” Hermione asked brightly. “She can use my broom, and I’ll ride with you...”

“Vot did I say?” Viktor chuckled quietly, clapping Harry on the shoulder. Then he said a bit louder, “Good Afternoon, Hermione, Jennifer, I vas just leaving. Haff fun flying.” Viktor gave Harry a wink and strode out of the pitch carrying his broom while Harry palmed his reddening face.

“Are you sure you want to try this Jennifer?” Harry asked, eyeing the nervous looking girl. Daphne, and Luna swooped down to see what was happening, followed closely by Parvati and Fleur.

“Er...” Jennifer glanced at Hermione and gulped, “I do really--it looks like loads of fun. But I’m a bit scared...”

“Hi Jennifer! You can ride with me for a bit at first to get used to it if you’d like,” Luna offered dreamily.

“Oh...er...are you sure Luna? I don’t want to interrupt your game...”

“I don’t mind. I’m not very good at throwing the quaffle anyway, but I love to fly. Come on, get on behind me.” Jennifer climbed onto Luna’s broom and put her arms around Luna’s waist.

“Hold on tight,” Luna giggled as she ascended into the air and Jennifer gave a little shriek. Parvati, Fleur, and Daphne zoomed up after them, chasing them around the hoops.

“Wotcher Hermione,” greeted the bubblegum pink haired girl who had come down from the stands. Dora peered admiringly at Hermione’s Firebolt and Harry resolved to buy her one too the next time he was in Diagon Alley.

“Oh Hi Dora,” Hermione grinned, “You might as well have a go with my broom. It looks like Jennifer won’t be needing it after all right now.”
“Cheers Hermione!” Dora gushed, beaming at the cat-witch. “I’ve always wanted a go on one of these...”

“I’m sorry Dora,” Harry said bashfully, “I never realised. You could’ve had a go on mine...”

Dora shut Harry up with a steamy kiss.

“No worries Harry! I never said anything about it before, and I’ve not really ‘ad the opportunity to notice what sorta broom you had until loungin’ around Hogwarts this past week or so.” With a giggle at Harry’s goofy expression, Dora kicked off and gleefully rocketed into the sky.

Purring loudly, Hermione mounted Harry’s broom behind him. Harry smiled and let out a contented sigh when she wrapped her arms tightly around his waist and snuggled against his back. Moments later they were soaring around the towers of the castle, Hermione’s bushy tail whipping in the wind.

~o0o~

Minerva McGonagall sipped her tea, a smile hovering at the corner of her lips as she peered out of the window at the students flying happily around the Quidditch Pitch. She watched Harry zip up into the air with Hermione on his broomstick.

“That poor boy,” she sighed, “Albus, I’ve been thinking... perhaps we should allow the Unaffiliated to form their own Quidditch team. They have enough members now, and I’m sure Mr Potter misses it...”

Dumbledore pensively took a sip from his own teacup before setting it down and responding.

“Perhaps you are right Minerva. Though I am uncertain if that is what Harry truly wants... or even needs anymore,” the Headmaster let out a sigh of his own, “He has far too much to be getting on with as it is. An official Quidditch team would be a serious distraction from his studies and his focus on learning to defend himself and the Coven from the travails which are looming over us all...”

Minerva pursed her lips and gave the Headmaster a withering glare.

“But I suppose I should at least offer Harry the opportunity...” Dumbledore sighed yet again, “...if we can finish Tom Riddle before term starts.”

“Good! Fair enough!” Minerva said curtly. Then her features softened and she almost smiled again. “Hestia told me that you have offered her a position as Director of the postgraduate programme, and Horace was most effuse expressing his delight with his new position. It’s about time we had a permanent Professor of Alchemy on staff...”

~o0o~

“Don’t get too comfortable just yet,” Hermione said to Harry and Dora as they cleaned up after dinner. “We all have a date in the Room of Requirement... and Fleur’s bringing her toys.”

Chapter End Notes

For you young uns and Americans, have fun googling Enid Blyton school-stories and Jennings and Darbishire... ;-)
Dora gaped through the steam rising from the roiling hot water at the glittering crystal stalactites and stalagmites of the Fairy Grotto—and were those *real* fairies flitting to and fro? It was unbelievably stunning—and the vision of loveliness was set off by the mouthwatering nubile nymphs who had already shed their clothing.

“Per’aps you need some ‘elp wiz your clothes Dora?” Fleur giggled at Dora’s expression, so like Harry’s when he had seen Fleur nude for the first time.

“What? ...er yeah, I mean no... er... alright then!” Dora began giggling too as Fleur and Daphne undressed her. “I wish I was as pretty as you two,” she mumbled shyly.

“Don’t be silly Dora--you are *vairy* beautiful,” Fleur murmured as she kissed her.

Daphne could only nod vigorously in agreement as she already had one of Dora’s succulent nipples in her mouth and both hands on Dora’s ample breasts. Dora blushed, her hair flashing through the colours of the rainbow.

“It’s true Dora,” Hermione giggled as she stripped down, “You haven’t even made it to the water yet, but nobody can keep their hands off you.”

Luna grinned as she slid into the frothing whirlpool, followed by Parvati and a chortling Harry.

“Hurry up Hermione,” said Luna who was already wearing Fleur’s magic strap-on dildo.

Luna jutted her bottom and already waterlogged tail towards Harry. Grinning, Harry grasped Luna’s slender hips and inserted the tip of his penis between her bottom cheeks. Luna purred when Harry thrust into her back-entrance and she beckoned Parvati to ride the strap-on.

“Erm... Hermione, do you mind?” Parvati waved her sleek cat tail, splashing the water, and Hermione beamed, understanding immediately.

By the time Dora, Fleur and Daphne entered the water, Hermione had taken position behind Parvati. Hermione reached around to fondle Parvati’s breasts and Parvati moaned when she felt the tip of Hermione’s wet tail wriggling into her anus while Luna drove the strap-on into her pink channel. Luna began to meow blissfully as Harry continued ravishing her own rear-tightness.

“Merlin, that’s ‘ot,” said Dora as the water swirled around her.

Dora could feel Fleur’s lips trailing across her neck and Fleur's nipples squashed against her back as Daphne began kissing Dora humidly, grinding her own perky breasts and taut belly against Dora’s.

Dora was already groaning and gyrating in the throes of ardour when Fleur passed the magical three-pronged Dildo to Daphne to insert into the three of them.

Hermione had a fresh pouch of gillyweed which she had purchased by owl-post, and they all put it to good use. The bubbling water of the Fairy Grotto churned as the Coven romped, switching partners and toys after each rapturous bout. Meows, moans, and wails of delight echoed through the chamber.

Dora found herself on the receiving end of passion by everyone at least once, and by some of them twice, as lips and tongues, tails, fingers, and toys brought her to pinnacles of ecstasy she had never known.
She tried things she had never done before, and the last session Dora remembered clearly before being lost to an oceanic oblivion was feeling Harry’s seed squirting into her fundament and Hermione’s tongue wriggling inside her quim, while Dora’s own tongue was buried in Daphne’s wet, pink crescent.

~o0o~

Dumbledore lost count of the number of times Hogwarts rocked that night. Slughorn pressed Dumbledore, but received nothing but enigmatic responses from the Headmaster about “ongoing upgrades.” After the sixth quake, Minerva drained another nightcap, hoping it would put her out for the night.

Hestia was concerned, but Jennifer was fast asleep, secure in the knowledge that the shaking castle would do her no harm, as Hermione had already warned her about the possibility. Hermione had been a bit cryptic about the nature of the magic, but she had assured Jennifer that it was perfectly safe.

~o0o~

Dora had no idea how she and the Potters had got back to their chambers, as her last memory had faded into a happy delirium. But when she woke up between the two of them the following morning and saw Harry’s morning erection poking up, Dora decided to try one more new thing, even though it wasn’t something she had ever thought she would try.

Harry was so zonked, that he didn’t fully wake until he was already ejaculating into someone’s wet warm throat. He blinked a few times, startled to see a head of ash-brown hair between his legs.

“Dora! What the...?” gasped Harry, “You didn’t have to--Hermione would have...”

Dora finished swallowing, released his penis from her mouth, and looked up at Harry, licking her glistening lips clean.

“I know Harry... I just wanted to--for you...” Dora grinned, “I know I’d never do it for any other guy in a million years, but I wanted to make you happy for everything you’ve done for me. I love you so much, and I know ‘ow much you like that...”

Harry couldn’t believe that Dora had done that for him. He resolved then and there that he’d use every ounce of his ability to visualise to get the girl parts right once and for all before he had sex with Dora again.

Harry took Dora’s hand and beckoned her up beside him. Melting into her dark eyes, Harry kissed Dora deeply, stirring Hermione.

“Thanks Dora, I love you loads,” Harry said quietly.

“Me too,” said Hermione. She caressed Dora’s face gently with one hand and leaned in to kiss her as well. “You mean so much to both of us.”

Giddily, Dora showered and dressed. She was surprised to see the Potters both still in bed when she was finished.

“Oh, er, why don’t you go to breakfast with the others Dora?” said Hermione brightly, “Harry just wants a lie in for a bit more. We’ll see you for lunch, and then some training this afternoon.”

“Right then,” Dora grinned, “Later you two...”
“Thanks Hermione,” said Harry after Dora left, “I want to get this right finally...”

“Right, we’re not leaving this bed till you do then!” Hermione smirked and passed Harry a mirror before parting her naked thighs to give Harry a very close in-depth look at her. She pointed her wand at Harry’s glasses and muttered a magnifying incantation.

An hour and a half later, after numerous tries, Hermione declared that everything looked perfect.

“Okay Harry, it looks smashing!” Hermione giggled. “Now let’s try out the new plumbing to make sure all the sensitive bits are in the right place so that it actually senses everything like it ought to... Oh, and you might want to morph the rest of yourself into a girl for this bit too, so that you don’t feel awkward.”

Moments later, Harry gasped in pleasure as Hermione’s tongue slipped into his--er...her--moistening slit and found the clitoris. Then Hermione probed Harry’s wet passage with her fingers and found the g-spot.

“Perfect, Harriet!” giggled Hermione again when Harriet writhed ecstactically and squirted, bathing her fingers in stickiness.

~o0o~

“Right then,” Harry began, as he grinned at the rest of the Coven after they’d finished their calisthenics, “We’re going to do Patronus Charms again today. I’ve been thinking a lot about what we can do with it based on some of the things that have happened since Hermione and I used them at the end of the Triwiz...”

“Now, it’s supposed to be impossible to kill Dementors because they are supposedly ‘non-beings,’ and are thus not mortal, but as we and Dumbledore now know, that’s rubbish if you have a powerful enough Patronus--it's just never been done before because nobody’s ever performed Patronuses like ours... Though I suppose technically, we still didn’t ‘kill’ them per se--perhaps destroyed is a better term.”

“And that gave me some ideas. It says here in Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them that the Patronus charm also wards off Lethifolds--which we don’t have to worry about because they only reside in the tropics. But I reckoned, if Patronuses work on Dementors--which are ‘non-beings’--and if they work on Lethifolds--which are ‘beasts’--then they ought to work on some other Dark Creatures too.”

“I asked Mr Moody a few weeks ago if he thought they would repel Inferi too, seeing as Inferi don’t like heat or light spells... and he reckoned they would. So the way I figure it, if the power we generate with our...erm... er...” Harry stammered, seeing Jennifer listening intently threw him off. He was a bit embarrassed to say it.

“Sex-Magic,” Hermione said, giggling and rolling her eyes. “Come on Harry, you can say it...”

“Er...well, if you insist Hermione,” Harry grinned. “Because I was going to mention that I heard a few books of Dark Magic screaming in the Restricted Section the other day when...”

“OH! ...er... Okay Harry--alright, you don’t have to say it,” Hermione turned crimson as Fleur and Daphne tittered.

“Anyway,” Harry continued, “obviously it’s more than just the sex--it’s really the quality of emotion that goes along with it. Apparently we generate lots of Love when we’re... er... going at it...” There
were some more giggles from all of the girls at that, “And that’s what destroyed the Dementors. I’d bet anything that we can destroy Inferi too…”

“And I bet our ‘Super-powered’ Patronuses will have loads of other effects on other Dark Creatures too—so I think we should put most of our focus as a Coven on them for the immediate future.”

“I really want to teach you how to do a Patronus too Jennifer, but only if you feel up for it,” Harry glanced at Jennifer apologetically.

“I don’t know if you’ll be able to perform one yet—they’re very difficult for even the majority of grownup wizards—and you really do need some very cheerful or loving memories to generate them… It’s super-advanced magic beyond NEWT levels, and usually takes months of training.”

“I’ll give it a go,” said Jennifer, swallowing nervously. “I’ve been feeling loads better. I don’t mind if I don’t get it right away. I might as well start practicing now.”

“Good!” Harry let out a sigh of relief; the last thing he wanted was for Jennifer to get discouraged trying to do something that was beyond her current abilities.

As it turned out, Harry needn’t have worried. He and the rest of the Coven simultaneously performed their Patronuses for an hour first. And they were far brighter and even more corporeal than the day they had turned Jennifer into a witch.

The Room of Requirement was flooded with such intense surges of magic and sublime ecstasy that they were all overcome with Euphoria. After that, Jennifer had no problem generating a Patronus of her own. Hermione was brought to tears once again when yet another feline joined them. By all appearances, Jennifer’s Patronus was a Eurasian Lynx.

~o0o~

Fawkes screeched and Albus Dumbledore ducked when several of the modified magical detectors in the Headmaster’s office exploded.
Chapter 111

“My apologies Fawkes,” Dumbledore said with a shake of his head, chuckling as he daintily picked up the pieces of his magical devices and placed them carefully on his desk. “Apparently the Coven’s power levels have yet again reached unanticipated new heights.”

Fawkes ruffled his feathers crossly and peered disdainfully at the Headmaster, unconvinced of the adequacy of the apology. The Phoenix was slightly mollified by the appearance of a plateful of lemon-ginger biscuits.

At the direction of the Headmaster’s wand, the delicate magical instruments began repairing themselves and reconfiguring to support detection of higher frequencies and power levels with far less explosive results.

~o0o~

Bellatrix had been extremely annoyed and disappointed when Fenrir Greyback told her that he and some pack-mates had already killed Yaxley. She had been looking forward to torturing and gutting him. Bellatrix considered some of the others who most deserved to die.

Not the Carrows--Bellatrix hoped to bring them back into the fold. She missed her fun with Alecto. Bellatrix found herself growing misty at the idea of she and Alecto torturing Mudbloods and Muggle-lovers together again--she wanted a good excuse to wear her black leather and break out her whips again.

Lucius!

Her ex-In-Law’s cowardly betrayal of the Dark Lord was a personal affront. Bellatrix would break out her whips just for Lucius and his son.

But he was completely inaccessible for the time-being. Lucius was likely laying low at the Minister’s home--and her home’s location was utterly unknown. That was a shame. Bellatrix would have enjoyed breaking Lucius--but perhaps she would get another opportunity.

Then Bellatrix remembered that one of the most Treacherous could likely be found deep in the bowels of the Ministry itself and smiled.

~o0o~

Broderick Bode sighed. He was working late again, wondering if he should resign from the Department of Mysteries. He missed seeing his family, and he was concerned by the rumours swirling through the sub-departments that Operations had something massive in the works.

In fact, Bode had been concerned for a long time--ever since the Operations Division Chief and Head of the Unspeakable Office Umbridge had wormed into a position as Head of the Improper Use of Magic Office--and now she was Minister and ran the entire DMLE as well as the DoM. But there was nothing he could do about it. He was just a lowly technician, and Operations ran everything.

All he had to do was keep his head down and follow orders--or did he? Bode couldn’t speak of what occurred in the Department of Mysteries without risking arrest himself, but that didn’t mean he had to
do whatever he was told if it violated his principles.

Bode finished cataloguing and storing the latest magical artifact confiscated after being found in Muggle possession when he heard a shout. He looked up to see Rookwood scowling at him from the doorway.

“Look alive,” snapped the Assistant Chief of Operations, “We have a possible breach in the Atrium...”

“What?” gasped Bode, “But who would be mad enough to break into the Ministry...?”

“That’s what we’re going to find out!” growled Rookwood. “Now shut it and get a move on...”

“Wait...” Bode gulped in trepidation, “I’m just a Magical Artifact Storage tech--I’m not Security...”

“You are now...” Rookwood snarled, “Hurry up or I’ll kill you myself.”

~oo0~

Screams rent the air and the sound of shattering glass and small explosions filled Diagon Alley in the darkening evening as wizards and witches finished shopping for the day and store-keepers began closing procedures. Florean Fortescue shoved the last of his customers through the floo in his office and turned back to face the hooligans rampaging through his Ice Cream shop shooting curses from their wands.

Florean swore when he spotted that he had missed one of his customers lying sprawled on the floor. Dead or alive, he didn’t know. Angrily, Florean fired hexes and curses back at the Snatchers.

He dropped two of them with stunning spells, but when one fired a killing curse and missed, Florean retaliated with a concussive spell that slammed the Snatcher heavily into a brick wall with a sickening crack. The Snatcher screamed in pain andcollapsed in a broken heap. Florean magically bound the other two prone Snatchers and stepped over them.

Florean breathed a sigh of relief; he could still feel his customer’s pulse. Steeling himself, Florean carefully peered out of his door to see if there was anyone else he could save. His face fell when he saw through the haze two people lying in the street who were clearly dead.

Further down Diagon Alley, Fenrir Greyback roared in fury. Ollivander’s shop was empty--there were no wands and no wand-dealer to be found. And if the shop had moved, there was no indication of its new location; Ollivander had left no clues.

It was never good to disappoint the Dark Lord--Ollivander must be found. Seething in rage, Greyback set the place ablaze with a Firestorm Spell and disapparated.

~oo0~

Bode’s face went white, but Rookwood was unmoved by the sight of Avery’s body dangling by the neck in the Atrium of the Ministry as the gore from Avery’s disemboweled midsection oozed and dripped to the floor. Avery had clearly been the victim of an entrail expelling curse.

It was too quiet.

Rookwood heard a sudden noise behind him and whirled around too late as an Incarcerus spell bound him from head to foot. Bode collapsed lifeless to the floor, dropped by an Avada Kedavra from Rodolphus Lestrange’s wand.
Bellatrix cackled as she cast a Petrificus Totalus on Rookwood and the ropes of the Incarcerus vanished.

“Those will just get in the way,” the witch said with a lustful gleam in her eyes. She reached into her cloak and pulled out her ceremonial dagger as she knelt beside Rookwood.

“No curses for you Augustus,” purred Bellatrix, drawing a line of red with her dagger across the exposed skin of Rookwood’s forearm, “No, that would be too quick and easy! I think I’ll draw this out slowly--the old-fashioned way...”

Bellatrix cackled and slit another thin red line on Rookwood’s forearm, forming an X through his Dark Mark.

If Rookwood could have screamed, he would have, as the knife came down again, this time aimed at his gut.

~o0o~

Hundreds of fans watching the football* match at Sunderland Stadium, the Stadium of Light, began screaming when all the lights and video-cameras went out, and mobile-phone signals were lost. An explosion ripped through the field and a number of muggles fainted as giants tore through the walls and stands.

Snatchers began dropping panicked muggle spectators like flies with curses and stunners, and disapparating with several victims at a time or transporting them via Portkeys. Two dozen Dementors swarmed and began sucking out souls at random.

Lockhart was more careful in choosing his victims, using a discerning eye to locate young muggle girls for himself and Wormtail as he moved through the shrieking and gradually vanishing crowd.

When it was over, the bodies of hundreds lay strewn in the rubble and many were left behind alive, still screaming amid the smouldering ruins of the stadium. Maximum terror had been inflicted, and hundreds more muggles had been captured or killed and taken to be turned into the Dark Lord’s Army of the Dead.

~o0o~

By the time the Minister had flooed back to the Ministry from her home, reporters for the Daily Prophet, the Quibbler, and the International Wizard News Agency were already taking pictures from behind the taped perimeter around the dangling mutilated corpses of Avery and Rookwood; Bode’s body lay on the ground nearby. The WNN was doing a live radio report. A glowing green cloud in the shape of a skull and serpent hovered just above the bodies.

There would be no mistaking the hand of Voldemort for the work of a petty thief by the Press this time. Rufus Scrimgeour and numerous Aurors were scouring the area for magical and not so magical evidence, and he gave the Minister the rest of the bad news when she arrived.

“I have fifty Aurors and a Magical Clean-Up squad already in Sunderland,” Scrimgeour scowled at the Minister. “We had to move quickly to obliviate the memories of Giant Involvement from the muggle survivors. And I have another dozen Aurors in Diagon Alley. Florean Fortescue rescued a number of people and captured several Snatchers...”

“This is all clearly part of a coordinated assault by Voldemort’s forces!” the Chief Auror concluded.

“Indeed!” the Minister responded darkly.
The wheels in Minister Dolores Umbridge’s mind began spinning, seeking ways to turn this disaster to her political advantage.

Bode and Avery were no huge loss, but losing Rookwood was a serious blow. However, Dolores nearly had the entire Ministry and the Wizengamot in the palm of her hand, and she still had a whole team of operatives ruthless enough to do deeds as dirty as Rookwood had ever done.

Minister Umbridge needed to locate some of Voldemort’s minions and haul them before the Wizengamot. If she had enough to punish, and played her cards right, this could be the breakthrough Dolores needed to gain a majority on the Wizengamot and begin pushing through her agenda.

“That is two attacks by Voldemort in Tyne and Wear now,” the Minister said sourly. “Voldemort might be located in that region...”

“Possibly, Madam Minister,” interjected Scrimgeour, “I have Aurors scouring the area already. However, that could be a ploy to throw us off his trail altogether, we must be careful not to presume anything at this time.”

“Very true Rufus,” Minister Umbridge nodded. “You seem to have everything well in hand, but please inform me once you have finished interrogating the Snatchers under Veritaserum, and then turn them over to the DoM for further questioning.

“Excuse me, Minister?”

“People only reveal what they believe to be the truth under Veritaserum, and memories can be tampered with--sometimes we must dig much deeper, Rufus. The DoM has the magical means to go deeper--but it is highly top secret of course...”

The Head Auror regarded the Minister shrewdly for a moment before responding with a nod, “Yes Madam, I understand!”

Chapter End Notes

*Soccer to Americans... ;-)
Chapter 112

“My goodness gracious me!” Garrick Ollivander exclaimed, his features crestfallen as he read the new edition of the Daily Prophet. “You were absolutely correct Headmaster…”

“Please Garrick, we are all friends here. Call me Albus.”

“Oh…er, indeed sir; Albus it is then. In any case, I cannot thank you enough Albus! I do not know how you managed to foresee the necessity for my relocation, but you were quite right. It appears that my shop was especially targeted by the Dark Lord’s followers for complete obliteration…”

“And you would no doubt be one of Voldemort’s ‘guests’ by now, Garrick,” Minerva McGonagall proffered grimly. “Though I am as intrigued as you are by Albus’s remarkable prescience. How did you know Albus?”

“Tom Riddle will seek every advantage in this fight,” Albus Dumbledore replied. “Like the Minister and ourselves, he faces battle on two fronts. It seemed highly likely to me that he would seek to control Britain’s preeminent supplier of wands…”

“And I confess, I believed that Tom would have sought out Garrick’s expertise in wandlore should Tom have run into any issues if he were to face Harry Potter’s wand—their wands each contain the same core: a phoenix feather from Fawkes. I felt preventing him from obtaining that knowledge was of utmost importance.”

“Ah, but of course. That sounds quite… logical!” Ollivander’s gleaming eyes widened. “But not having faced young Mr Potter since his return yet, the Dark Lord still does not know that their wands share a core. So you are suggesting that this was purely a tactical ploy on his part then—quite ingenious of you I must say, Albus.”

Albus took a sip of tea before replying sadly with a shake of his head.

“No, just the terrible Logic of War Garrick,” the Headmaster responded. “He—or she—who controls the supply of weapons in a war has a great advantage—and wands are weapons after all…”

Garrick Ollivander regarded the Headmaster of Hogwarts cannily, taking a sip of tea himself.

“Yes—well, regardless, my dear fellow, you undoubtedly saved me from torture and eventual death…”

“Let us hope so,” Dumbledore interjected, “Tom Riddle’s next target will most likely be Hogwarts itself—but I believe we shall have the advantage should that be the case… no matter what sort of force he manages to muster,”

“I must also admit Garrick, that was another reason I had for cajoling you away from your Diagon Alley location. As you had been so kind as to do a ‘House-Call’ for Hogwarts’ newest student, you know that we have remained for the summer to protect Hogwarts from capture, and you know that Mr Potter is among us,”

“It would not have done for Riddle to have discovered yet that Hogwarts is currently inhabited. The longer I can maintain that element of surprise, the greater advantage we have!” concluded Dumbledore.

“Thank you,” Ollivander said quietly, peering keenly into Dumbledore’s unguarded eyes. “I
appreciate your honesty Albus--that makes this decision much easier. I shall do anything which is within my power to do to aid in the protection of Mr Potter. He and his wife must survive to do great things together... If I may be so bold, I humbly offer my services to the Order of the Phoenix...

~000~

“That’s the wandmaker,” murmured Jennifer at breakfast. “I wonder what he’s doing here again?”

Hermione shook her head as she chewed a piece of bacon. She had no idea why Ollivander was sitting at the Staff Table with Professor McGonagall and the Headmaster. The other professors had apparently taken breakfast elsewhere today. The rest of the Unaffiliated appeared equally bewildered. Harry’s brows knitted pensively.

“I dunno... maybe Ollivander is joining the Order. Maybe Dumbledore offered him protection. It’s probably a good idea to keep Britain’s top wandmaker out of enemy hands...” Harry suggested.

“Oh!” gasped Hermione, flicking her bushy tail, “Of course Harry. That’s very logical...”

“It does make a load of sense,” responded Dora with a nod before taking a bite of scrambled egg.

Hedwig dropped the Daily Prophet and the special edition of the Quibbler on the table next to Fleur before settling on Harry’s shoulder and nipping his ear fondly. Harry grinned and reached a hand back to stroke her feathers, passing her a sausage with his other hand.

Fleur’s eyes widened in horror as she read the headline of the Quibbler. Daphne gave a little squeak when she leaned over to read it too.

“Eet ees a good thing zat Ollivander ees here,” Fleur gasped. “I think you are correct ‘arry, look at ze paper...”

Harry was shocked at how close to the mark he had been; he swallowed in trepidation and passed the papers around.

“Looks like Ollivander left in the nick of time,” said Parvati as she read over Luna’s shoulder, their furry ears twitching.

Parvati almost missed the little tawny owl dropping off a letter for her. She put the letter aside to continue reading the paper and absentmindedly gave the happy owl a buttery crumpet. Breakfast at the Mingling Table continued somberly. Harry’s stomach tightened and he found that he wasn’t very hungry anymore.

Jennifer shivered violently in fright as she perused the newspapers, and tears began to trickle. Snakeface was on the move. Dora hugged the trembling young witch and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“It’s alright,” Dora whispered comfortingly, “You’re safe with us now...”

Hermione snuggled closer to Harry, curling her bushy tail around him. Harry took the newspapers back and he vanished them as a flash of anger sparked in his eyes.

“Right... I suppose this was inevitable,” sighed Harry, “But as horrible as this is, we need to try and not dwell on it.” Harry took Hermione’s hand in one of his own and Daphne’s hand in the other, “We need to remember why we’re here, and that we love each other. That’s what we need to focus on if we hope to have a chance of defeating Tom Riddle...”
“Indeed we do Harry,” said Dumbledore quietly, startling everyone at the table, “I could not have said it better myself.”

“If you don’t mind Harry, I would like to sit in on part of the Coven’s practice session today,” the Headmaster concluded brightly.

~o0o~

Albus Dumbledore was delighted that the horrific news hadn’t cast too large a pall over the Coven’s mood. Young Harry had wisely stepped in and put an end to the rumination before it had taken hold, and had decided that the Coven should have a bit of practice immediately following breakfast. And the very first thing Harry thought they should all have a go at was Cheering Charms.

Hermione’s tail quivered in excitement when the Headmaster began to explain how his magical devices worked. She could barely contain herself. Harry’s eyes shone with enthusiasm as well.

After performing the first set of Cheering Charms, the entire Coven listened intently to Dumbledore, all trying very hard not to giggle as the Charms had been extremely successful.

“This one here measures the frequencies, and the other measures the power level of the magic--I have had to repair those several times since you began meeting here...” Dumbledore chuckled. “Due to the necessity for precise calibration, I cannot place an Unbreakable Charm on them--it would rather defeat their purpose.”

“And this one detects the types of spells performed and locates them wherever they are performed on Hogwarts grounds. It is however, only calibrated to react to spells of a certain level of intensity due to the high degree of magic which flows through the castle during school-term. It would be all be 'noise' otherwise--a cacophony of signals...”

“Thus, it does not generally register every minor charm or jinx. And of course, it cannot locate magic performed in this room--the Room of Requirement--from the outside, as the room is Unplottable,”

“Now see this reading here? For an average class of eight performing Cheering Charms, it would not register at all, even if I were standing with my instrument right next to them, because it is a rather minor charm, requiring very little magical power--yet I am getting a clear indication that a Cheering Charm has been performed,”

“This other reading indicates the power level--and currently it indicates that the power levels of your Cheering Charms far exceed that of ordinary Cheering Charms, even done as regular group practice in class.”

“Would it make a difference if we were all touching--like holding hands--when we perform our spells simultaneously?” asked Luna.

“Physical Proximity and Directionality can certainly make a difference between the caster and the subject with certain spells, and it is quite likely that being in physical contact with one another may provide some extra measure of power for some sets of spells as well,” Dumbledore answered. “But the difference will likely be quite insignificant if you are all very near to one another.”

“However, the extent of your range is something worth discovering amongst yourselves during practice. It may vary from spell to spell. You may also find that certain geometric group formations, such as a circle, square--or perhaps an Octagram in your case--could affect the potentiality of the spells. I would ask that when you do experiment in that regard, please take notes and relay any pertinent findings to me so that I may observe them for myself in your next proceedings.”
After lecturing, Dumbledore sat in the comfy armchair he had conjured and felt the waves of bliss wash over him when the Coven simultaneously performed their Patronus Charms. Dumbledore was quite astonished when eight spectral felines prowled the Room of Requirement—but then he realised that he really shouldn’t be be surprised at all.

The Headmaster quickly took his leave before he was completely overcome with emotion, but not before expressing great pride in the Unaffiliated and their accomplishments in a rather hoarse voice.

“D’you think he’s alright Hermione?” asked Harry with a bemused expression. “Dumbledore looked a bit teary.”

“He’ll be okay Harry. He’s just feeling a bit overwhelmed,” Hermione replied giddily, “I think the euphoria created by our Patronuses may have affected him.”

~00o~

The Unaffiliated all took lunch together, seated in the stands overlooking the Quidditch Pitch. Parvati squealed and her furry black tail twirled madly in elation when she read her letter from Lavender.

“I can’t believe it! Lavender says that Viktor proposed to her... and she said YES!”

Harry grinned and Hermione gave him a funny look; he didn’t seem entirely surprised. She smiled at Harry, proud with him for managing to keep it to himself until Lavender had a chance to tell Parvati herself.

“When are they getting married?” asked Daphne.

“They can’t just yet,” Parvati sighed, flicking her furry black ears. “Lavender’s parents have said that she has to wait at least until she has passed her OWL’s...”

“Well, that seems sensible,” Luna responded, her furry white ears pricking. She giggled when Parvati glared at her.

“At least her parents aren’t making her wait until after school altogether Parvati,” Luna grinned, “And it’s not like we have to wait that long.”

“Really?” Harry’s eyebrows shot up. Parvati and Luna had mentioned that their parents had discussed it a few times, but nothing had been settled as far as he knew.

“So when have your parents decided to let you two get married?”

Parvati looked thrilled again and her sleek black tail stood at attention, vibrating ecstatically.

“At the end of summer, just before term starts,” she squeaked. “Mum and Dad are working on the arrangements with Luna’s dad—we were going to tell you when they’d finalised the arrangements. That means we’ll be emancipated too...”

“But we’re still going to do what our parents say by and large,” Luna added. “And I’m not sure that we’re really quite ready to be on our own yet—we won’t have a place of our own to live...”

“Come and live with us...” Harry and Hermione blurted out eagerly in unison—both of them with eyes as big as saucers. They peered at each other and started laughing.

“What?” gasped Parvati. “You’re not serious...!”

“Dora’s going to live with us when she’s not in school,” said Harry excitedly. “You and Luna can
too. I’m not saying you shouldn’t visit your parents at Christmas and Easter mind you... I’m just saying that you’ll need a place to call your own when you’re married, where you can be with each other whenever you feel like it--and it might as well be with us...”

“We’ve got loads of room at our house,” Harry continued, “--well, we will have when things are back to normal anyway.”

“And even if not--if things aren’t back to ‘normal’ I mean,” Hermione said, passionately waving her fluffy ginger tail, “I think that eventually, we should all stay together anyway-- all of us... If we’re truly a Coven then we’re meant to be together, as a family.”

Dora’s eyes were as big and pleading as the Potters. Daphne and Fleur glanced at each other and nodded, clasping each other’s hands and smiling, knowing what they would do when the time came.

“Of course we’ll live with you and Hermione, Harry,” Luna purred, happily flicking her fluffy white tail. “We love you both. It just makes perfect sense.”

Parvati was so overwhelmed that she couldn’t speak and began to cry. She nodded vigorously and kissed Harry and Hermione wetly.

“What Luna said...” Parvati finally managed to croak, her sleek black tail undulating.

Jennifer swallowed and folded into herself slightly, not entirely certain what was happening, not sure whether she belonged, not sure what she was ready for. She was only just getting used to the idea of having good friends again and of Hestia being more or less her new mum.

Harry glanced at Jennifer, not needing Hermione to tell him how awkward Jennifer felt right now.

“When Hermione said everyone, she meant you too Jennifer,” Harry smiled gently and earnestly, taking Jennifer’s hand and giving it an affectionate squeeze.

“You’re one of us now... Whenever you’re ready, we're all here for you,” Hermione purred and gave Jennifer a hug.
Harry was slightly disappointed when Dora mentioned that she was spending the night with Luna and Parvati. She had spent the previous night with Fleur and Daphne, and Harry was dying to show her that he could turn completely into a girl, but he wanted to surprise her.

“Never mind Harry,” Hermione said with a grin, “Besides, I rather think I’d prefer to be your ‘first time’ with you as a girl.”

“Oh... yeah, of course,” Harry blushed, looking quite sheepish, “Sorry Hermione. I didn’t mean...”

Hermione stopped Harry’s fumbling apology with a warm kiss.

“It’s alright silly. I know you’ve been practicing for Dora’s sake. But as it turns out, I’m as thrilled as she will be.”

“To be perfectly honest,” Harry responded, still feeling bashful, “I’ve been looking forward to this as much for me as for her ever since you suggested it--I’ve always wondered what it would feel like to be a girl.”

“Well you’ll definitely get to find out tonight,” Hermione smirked and leaned in close to Harry’s ear. “I borrowed one of Fleur’s toys,” she whispered.

Harry’s jaw dropped and he swallowed nervously; he hadn’t even considered that. Harry couldn’t stop thinking about it the rest of the afternoon and all through dinner. He couldn’t concentrate and fidgeted the entire time he was supposed to be helping Hermione tutor Jennifer, and his palms kept sweating.

Harry said goodnight to the rest of the Unaffiliated rather absentmindedly and nearly tripped over his own feet as he departed the visitor’s lounge, which had become their unofficial common room for the summer. Fleur gave Hermione a wink as she kissed her goodnight; Daphne looked puzzled.

“Eet ees a surprise Chérie,” Fleur murmured to Daphne. “You will see soon enough!”

Harry stared at himself in the bathroom mirror while he cleaned his teeth and wondered what the hell he was doing. He felt as anxious as if he were going on a first date and was glad now that it was just him and Hermione. He had no idea what he was supposed to do.

Should he morph now? Put on makeup? What was he supposed to wear? Pyjamas? Nothing?

Sighing, Harry undressed and reached for his pyjamas... they were gone. And in their place was a nightgown, a sheer slip, and a pair of silky white panties. He shook his head and smiled wryly. At least now he knew what Hermione expected.

Harry looked at his naked body in the mirror and began to morph. His jaw diminished and his face rounded, lips puffing and pouting slightly. The only feature on his now heart-shaped face which remained wholly unaltered were his eyes. His hair lengthened until it curled over his shoulders and his black bangs flopped in his face. Harry flicked his bangs back and continued.

His entire form slimmed and curved until there wasn’t a single sharp angle on his body and his chest expanded. Harry peered between his legs swallowing anxiously and completed the transformation. It felt really weird to watch his penis and his testicles shrink into his body and see a slit form.
Harry reached a hand between his own thighs and inserted a finger with a bit of apprehension—yep, definitely a vagina. He tried to think of himself as Harriet, but he still felt a bit awkward.

Harry spotted one last thing which he had been thinking about altering even before he had finally figured out how to transform his naughty bits. He had noticed Hermione picking a pubic hair out of her teeth the other day after sucking him off. She hadn’t said a word, but Harry still felt a bit embarrassed.

His pubes had come in gradually over the last year and he hadn’t really noticed quite how thickly until that point. As much as Harry enjoyed stroking Dora’s tuft, and the trimmed wisps on Fleur and Daphne’s mounds, Harry quite liked that the girls kept their labia shorn, and that Hermione was completely bare. He felt it was only fair to return the favour and he watched his pubic hair disappear.

Finally satisfied that everything was right—that he was now completely feminine and presentable—Harriet slipped into the nightclothes Hermione had left for her. She tingled slightly at the sensation of the silky fabric clinging to her skin. Harriet took a deep breath to steady herself, and exited the bathroom.

“You’re beautiful!” Hermione gasped when Harriet entered the bedroom.

“Th...thanks,” Harriet stammered nervously.

Hermione took Harriet’s glasses off so that she could get the complete effect.

“Gorgeous Harry... I mean Harriet. You can put your glasses back on again in a minute. I just want to see all of you without them for a bit. Here let me help you...”

Harriet got goosebumps when Hermione helped her slip out of the long nightgown. Harriet’s erect pink nipples were clearly visible, poking through the sheer fabric of her white chemise. Harriet gasped with a thrill of pleasure when Hermione cupped her firm perky round handfuls and gave them a gentle squeeze.

“Oh, they’re the same size as mine Harriet!” Hermione gasped again and flicked her furry tail, melting into Harriet’s green eyes. “You really meant it when you said you thought I was perfect...”

“Of course I did Hermione,” squeaked Harriet.

“But mine aren’t very big,” Hermione replied mournfully, “about the same size as Daphne’s I suppose. Fleur and Parvati are a bit bigger than me, and Dora’s are a fair bit bigger than mine.”

“I love all the other girls’... er... boobs too,” Harriet responded earnestly, “even Luna’s, and she’s smaller than you. I think I just love your size and shape best—they fit in my hands perfectly. I know they’ve grown a bit, but so have I--that's why I...er... I modeled my bum after yours too...”

Hermione purred and threw her arms and furry tail around Harriet, kissing her passionately. Feeling Hermione pressed against her, inhaling her calming scent, Harriet relaxed.

“How did you change your voice?” Hermione asked after separating her lips from Harriet’s, “I mean, I can tell it’s still you, but it’s in the right register, and I can tell you’re not putting it on...”

“I...er... I’m not sure really. I didn’t try to on purpose. I... I think my vocal cords just shrank slightly when I was adjusting my neck to look like a girl’s.”

“Hmmm... that makes sense,” Hermione trailed her fingers along Harriet’s delicately sculpted throat, “It must have altered when the muscles changed shape.” Hermione replaced her fingers with her lips;
Harriet trembled slightly and her heart began to race.

“This really is amazing Harriet…” Hermione murmured, “all the little details are perfect—even better than that day you mirrored me in your metamorphmagus lesson.”

“Because I had the perfect model Hermione,” Harriet whispered as she put her hands around Hermione’s waist and began tenderly returning Hermione’s kisses. “Next time I’ll try it with the tail too…”

Hermione melted again and purred loudly, thwipping her ginger tail joyfully back and forth as she pulled Harriet onto the bed, heatedly and wetly tugging the younger girl’s lips with her own.

New sensations tingled in Harriet’s body, and the silky panties Hermione had given her began to moisten as Hermione continued to ravish her, sliding her hands across Harriet’s taut, smooth abdomen. Hermione pushed the clingy chemise up above Harriet’s breasts and began to hungrily devour the attentive peaks.

Harriet shuddered as a ripple of pleasure swept through her from head to toe; her nipples were now many times more sensitive than she recalled them ever being before. She moaned and folded her legs around Hermione’s when Hermione’s hand slid under the waistband of Harriet’s panties.

Hermione slipped her fingers into Harriet’s sopping vulva while she continued to suck Harriet’s nipples; her thumb located Harriet’s fleshy pearl and the younger girl’s moans grew louder. It was too much. Harriet squealed and wriggled ecstatically, flooding Hermione’s fingers.

“Mmmm... you’re much more vocal as a girl Harriet,” giggled Hermione as she tugged off Harriet’s drenched, sticky panties.

“I... I never realised...” gasped Harriet, still in the throes of passion, “...so sensitive...”

When the fog of ardour in Harriet’s brain cleared somewhat, she saw that Hermione had stripped off her own chemise and panties. Hermione straddled Harriet’s waist, and with a gleam in her eyes she gestured towards Fleur’s magical strap-on which she had put on while Harriet was dazed.

Harriet’s eyes widened and she shivered slightly in trepidation.

“Are you ready for this Harriet?” Hermione asked, her eyes softening in concern.

She needn’t have worried. Harriet grinned.

“Be gentle Hermione... it’s my First Time!”

“Prat!” Hermione stuck her tongue out and swatted Harriet playfully with a giggle.

Hermione parted Harriet’s thighs and presented the spinning brushy tip of the dildo to Harriet’s soaking pink entrance. Hermione squeezed Harriet’s bottom cheeks and thrust her hips, penetrating Harriet to the core. Harriet gasped when she felt the vibrating knobby lance fill her completely.

Hermione purred and meowed as she felt herself inside Harriet’s moistness for the first time. Her furry ears flattened, and her fluffy tail undulated wildly.

Harriet was utterly blown away by the rapturous sensations engulfing her as Hermione plunged into her depths rhythmically; Harriet’s labia clung to the magical dildo stretching her as it pistoned in and out. She bucked her hips to meet Hermione’s thrusts as the sweat dripped from Hermione’s brow and spattered onto Harriet’s shimmying breasts.
Harriet wrapped her legs and arms around Hermione’s backside and writhed beneath her, stroking the strip of orange fur along Hermione’s arching spine.

Another wave of ecstasy surged and the magic crackled and arced from the squirming pair of naked witches. Harriet wriggled her bottom, wailing as Hermione yowled and the squalling tempest of bliss took them both. The bed rocked and the walls of the Potters’ bedchamber shook.

Harriet clutched Hermione to her breast and held her tightly, gasping in surprise as she felt something squirting inside her.

“What... what the...?” Harriet sputtered giddily.

“M...modification...” Hermione panted breathlessly, “Fleur gave me... the pamphlet which came with the strap-on... it included a modification charm... that she’d never tried... which takes the female’s ‘ejaculate’ and expels it from the tip...”

In a complete haze, Harriet kissed Hermione.

“That... that’s brilliant...” Harriet puffed, her chest heaving happily, “...I always wondered... what that felt like...”

As the storm of delight ebbed, Harriet peppered Hermione with kisses.

“That was fantastic Hermione,” Harriet gushed, her green eyes shining gleefully, “let’s have another go shall we?”
Chapter 114

When Harry woke, Hermione’s arm and tawny tresses lay strewn across his bare chest. He kissed his wife’s bushy head and she slowly stirred awake.

“Morning Hermione!”

“Morning Harry,” yawned Hermione, snuggling even closer and pressing her nakedness right up against him.

“That was loads of fun last night,” Harry grinned as he cuddled Hermione. “I wonder if Ozma and Dorothy ever had fun like that?”

“Ozma?”

“Ozma of Oz--from the Oz books. She was born a girl, but she didn't know because she was turned into a boy by a wicked witch when she was a baby, so she grew up as a boy called Tip. When she was much older she was turned back into a girl by Glinda the Good Witch, and she became best friends with Dorothy.”

“Oh... I’ve only read The Wizard of Oz--I didn’t know there were more,” said Hermione a bit sheepishly.

“Yeah--loads more. I only got to read a few though, because the Dursleys made me take them back to the primary school library when they caught me reading them...”

“That’s dreadful,” Hermione gasped in horror. “The only reason I didn’t know was because I mostly grew up reading the ‘literary classics’ and lots of non-fiction--though of course Mum and Dad did get me some children’s story-books too, but mostly just British ones. I’m more familiar with The Hobbit and The Chronicles of Narnia I suppose...”

“Oh yeah--I love those,” said Harry, his eyes shining. “I managed to read the Narnia books and The Hobbit without getting caught... But I only got a few pages into Lord of the Rings before Uncle Vernon found it one day and made me take it back to school...”

“Dudley did have a few children’s books with fairy-tales in, but he’d never read them. I dunno why they even got them for him. I suppose the Dursleys never thought I’d find them in his second bedroom and read them. I’ve always liked reading actually...”

Hermione purred and began kneading Harry’s chest.

“It’s funny, I’m more like you than you know,” Harry continued as he stroked Hermione's furry ears, “I even read all of my schoolbooks for First Year before term began. That’s how I came up with Hedwig’s name--it was in A History of Magic. I wish I was as brainy as you though--I don’t remember everything I read unless I read it loads of times...”

The purring grew louder and Hermione started licking Harry's chest with her cat-tongue.

“I would’ve done all my summer homework and read all my new books for Second Year too,” Harry went on, “except the Dursleys locked my school stuff in my cupboard under the stairs and then...”

Hermione paused licking Harry to gasp in shock again, “I can’t believe it... that's horrible. I never
knew--that’s why you started falling behind...”

“Er, not really...” Harry interjected, starting to flush, “I was just about to say--it was brilliant when Fred, George and Ron came and got me from the Dursleys, and we got my new books that day in Diagon Alley with your parents, but I never managed to get anything done the rest of that summer anyway. Every time I thought about doing some reading or homework, Ron wanted to do something else, and well...”

Harry looked thoroughly embarrassed now, “The Dursleys never really allowed me to just have fun before--ever--so I... er... I sort of put work out of my head when I was hanging out with Ron...”

“I’m so sorry Harry. I thought you just didn’t like schoolwork...”

“Nah... actually I’ve always found most of it really interesting--except Professor Binns' lectures--and I don’t mind working hard--just not so much when Ron was around. And there is always rubbish with people trying to murder me, or sabotage me every year at school--that’s a bit distracting. And the more I think about it, as much as I love Quidditch, I’m really glad I don’t have to play for a team anymore...”

“I just didn’t have enough time for everything between mucking about with Ron, Quidditch, and just trying to stay alive... If you hadn’t been there to help me with my assignments Hermione, I don’t know how I would’ve ever managed--you’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me...”

Harry stopped talking, because his mouth was suddenly humbly occupied by Hermione’s.

“I know I’ve said it before Harry,” began Hermione when their lips parted, “but you’re brilliant--as well as kind and brave. All you’ve ever needed was focus--and now I understand even more why that was so hard for you your first year and a half. You’ve been amazing in school ever since...”

“Ever since I fell for you Hermione!” said Harry softly, and Hermione melted in his arms when his lips engulfed hers.

The kiss heated and became wetter as Harry stroked Hermione’s fuzzy ears with one hand while the other slid across her stomach. One of Hermione’s legs came up over Harry’s, and she ground her moist slit into his hip. Harry’s morning erection ached as it grew even harder.

Harry rolled Hermione on her back as she parted her thighs. With a moan of pleasure, he drove his stiffness into her sopping channel. Hermione meowed blissfully as Harry’s penis plummeted to her depths again and again, his fingers tugging at her nipples.

Hermione wriggled and yowled, her furry tail thumping the bed as the passion surged. With a groan, Harry stiffened and burst, releasing his essence into Hermione’s womb. Giddily, Harry covered Hermione’s face with kisses as he slumped.

Panting and purring, still in a daze, Hermione rolled Harry onto his back and crouched between his thighs. With her bottom up, tabby tail waving joyfully, as Harry’s semen dripped from her twitching vulva, Hermione wrapped her lips around Harry’s erection before it could soften and began to clean it with her cat-tongue.

Harry made an effort to concentrate, and Hermione discovered to her surprise that she was sucking a pubic-hair-free penis.

“Oh, you didn’t have to do that just for me Harry,” Hermione gasped, gingerly cupping Harry's now hairless testicles with one hand while running her other fingers over his newly smooth groin, his shaft
glistening with her saliva.

“I wanted to,” Harry panted. “I’ve decided that I like it much better like this... at least if you do anyway... I feel cleaner somehow...”

Hermione grinned.

“I didn’t mind Harry,” she purred, “but thank you... very much! I do prefer it this way...”

And with that, Hermione continued to slurp on Harry’s penis until he climaxed again and filled her throat with his stickiness.

~00o~

An owl which Harry didn’t recognise delivered a letter at lunchtime while he was in mid-bite.

“Bit late aren’t you?” he chuckled, giving the obviously tired bird a kipper.

“Who’s it from?” Hermione asked, twitching her furry ears. The rest of the Unaffiliated looked up with interest.

“From Mad Eye,” Harry replied, his eyebrows perking in surprise. “He’s been watching the BBC, and they say that the Muggle Prime Minister is blaming the Sunderland Stadium attack on Muslims...” Harry gasped, “...and Sirius Black?”

“Bloody Fucking Hell!” Harry swore angrily. “They’re claiming that Sirius is a dangerous criminal with ties to international terrorists. Moody thinks this proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Minister Umbridge and the Muggle PM are colluding...”

“And he says that I should avoid being seen in the Muggle world because he thinks that the Minister may have also informed the PM that I’m Sirius’s godson.”

“A conclusion which I have also reached,” said Dumbledore, causing everyone at the Mingling Table to lurch in their seats. How did he always manage to sneak up on them like that?

“I was about to discuss this with you myself, but I see Alastor has beaten me to it,” continued the Headmaster.

“I think I already knew it,” Harry said glumly. “I’ve been worried about the Ministry’s likely connections to the Muggle government ever since the Second Task of the Triwiz. That’s one of the reasons why I thought Hermione’s mum should be looked after in a safe place... not just because of Tom Riddle.”

“Indeed! Very wise of you Harry,” Dumbledore nodded, then peered at Harry perceptively.

“However, if it should be at all necessary for you to walk for a time in the non-magic world, I trust that your special talents shall keep you unnoticed,” Dumbledore concluded with a wink before strolling back to the staff-table.

“Special talents?” Daphne asked with a bewildered expression.

“Harry’s metamorphmagus powers,” Hermione responded with a slightly guilty look while Fleur smirked.

Harry perked up and grinned at Dora who had a mouthful of mustard and cress sandwich.
“You’re staying with me and Hermione tonight, right Dora?”

Dora’s eyes widened and she hurriedly swallowed. Parvati and Luna giggled good-naturedly at her obvious delight.

“Oh yeah, ta Harry. I’d like that!” Dora replied, returning Harry’s grin.

Another owl fluttered into the Great Hall and flopped onto the Mingling Table gasping. It looked even more tired than the first. It gulped gratefully at the tea Hermione offered the poor thing while Harry undid the letter tied to its talon.

“It’s from Ron,” Harry gasped in surprise as he read the letter. “I can’t believe it.”

“What does he have to say?” asked Hermione, somewhat coolly.

Despite feeling really sorry for Ron after he had been beaten up by Towler and McLaggen, Hermione still hadn’t quite forgiven him for the way he’d treated Harry during the First Task of the Triwizard Tournament. Though she had to admit, Ron had been a lot nicer to everyone since the Yule Ball.

“He says he’s having a smashing time in Egypt,” Harry responded, “and that he and Seamus nearly got murdered by some rampaging Mummies...”

“Oh!” squealed Parvati. Her furry black tail bristled and she shuddered. “That’s dreadful...”

“Don’t worry Parvati,” Harry chuckled. “I’m sure he’s exaggerating. He seems totally thrilled by the whole experience--says he fought off half a dozen of them singlehandedly and saved Seamus...”

“Honestly...” Hermione snorted and shook her head, rolling her eyes, and Luna burst into giggles, unable to imagine Ron Weasley fighting off even one Mummy, let alone six.

“Still, I’m glad he’s having a good time with Seamus,” Hermione’s features softened and she smiled, “It’s nice that he’s happy and that Mr and Mrs Weasley let Seamus go with them.”

“Yeah, it is,” Harry grinned, “I expect we’ll hear the real story about the Mummies from Ginny or Fred and George when they get back.”

“I still can’t believe that things like Mummies, Vampires and Werewolves are real,” said Jennifer, who looked almost as scared as Parvati had.

“They aren’t all evil,” Hermione reassured Jennifer, taking her hand and giving it a comforting squeeze. “At least not all Werewolves and Vampires are--I don’t really know about Mummies. Professor Lupin is a Werewolf.”

“Really?” Jennifer’s eyes widened, “He’s so kind--I would have never guessed.”

“Yeah, Lupin is really nice,” Harry nodded. “He was one of my dad’s best friends--him and Sirius Black both were...” Harry’s nostrils flared as he thought about Wormtail again, and what the Rat had done to his parents and to Jennifer.

“After your lessons with the professors today,” Harry said to Jennifer, his green eyes glittering, “We’re going to practice some fighting spells as a Coven.”

~o0o~

Dora was thrilled with how well Harry was directing the Coven’s activities. That evening’s practice
had been brilliant. And he really knew how to get the most out of the Room of Requirement’s magic.

After some calisthenics, they had all practiced stunning and blasting spells on simulacra of Mountain Trolls and Giants which the room had conjured to respond to the spells just like real ones. Stunning and blasting spells would usually just bounce right off most Giants and Trolls without so much as giving them a nosebleed.

But not the Coven’s spells. After a bit of practice, they managed to knock out five Giants and an entire squad of Trolls with a single bombarda maxima cast by all of them together. Then they had concluded the evening with a group casting of their Patronuses. After that, Dora had hurried through dinner, excited by the prospect of spending the night with the Potters again.

Dora knocked on the door of the Potters’ chambers. She gasped when the door was opened by a pretty girl with tumbling black hair and beautiful green eyes which she would have recognised anywhere.
“Er... WOW!” Dora gaped at the black-haired beauty in the creamy chemise who had answered the Potters’ door. Dora’s hair flouresced and turned neon purple.

“Hi Dora, meet Harriet,” Hermione giggled, quickly ushering Dora in with a kiss and shutting the door behind them.

Harriet grinned at Dora and blushed as Dora’s hungry eyes roamed over her body. Dora gave Harriet a sultry kiss.

“Nice to meet you Harriet,” Dora chortled.

“Hi Dora,” Harriet said nervously, as she and Hermione each took one of Dora’s hands and led her to the bedroom, “I... er... hope you like this...”

“Harry... er...I mean Harriet has been practicing for ages Dora,” said Hermione, her furry tail waving proudly.

Hermione stood behind Harriet and slipped Harriet’s chemise off her shoulders; it slid to the floor, pooling at her feet. Harriet’s pink nipples stiffened as she stood there nearly naked in front of Dora who hadn’t begun undressing yet.

Reaching around from behind with both hands, Hermione gave Harriet’s breasts a gentle squeeze as Dora ogled the firm little globes.

“Go on then Dora, give it a go... cop a feel,” Harriet bravely chuckled.

Not waiting to be told twice, with a grin, Dora reached out and cupped a breast in each hand. Harriet’s breath quickened at Dora’s touch. Dora massaged Harriet’s breasts, feeling the rock hard nipples pressing into the palms of her hands.

A little moan of pleasure escaped Harriet’s lips as Dora grasped each nipple and began to roll them between her thumbs and forefingers. Dora leaned over and took one of Harriet’s nipples in her mouth, giving it a little suck and flicking it with her tongue. Harriet quivered as another tingle of delight rippled through her body.

While Dora sucked Harriet’s nipples and played with her breasts, Hermione slid Harriet’s panties down her legs until they joined the chemise on the floor. Dora let go of Harriet’s breasts and Harriet bent over, grinning; she put her hands on her knees and wiggled her bottom at Dora.

Hermione giggled at Dora’s goofy expression. They both squeezed Harriet’s firm, smooth round bottom cheeks and gave them a little smack.

“Oi...” Harriet snickered, “Nobody said anything about a spanking.”

Dora and Hermione giggled in response and gave Harriet’s bottom a couple more playful swats.

“Sorry Harriet, your perfect bum was just too tempting.” Furry ears flicking with mirth, Hermione rubbed Harriet’s bottom cheeks soothingly.

Then gently, the two older girls guided the nude younger girl to the bed. Her heart racing, Harriet parted her legs widely so that Dora could have a really good look.
Dora hurriedly stripped down and licked her lips as she eyed Harriet’s glistening pink wetness. Purring loudly, Hermione gleefully bounced onto the bed, removing her own chemise and panties. She began to give Harriet little kisses while Dora crawled between Harriet’s legs.

Dora brushed her fingers delicately along the inside of Harriet’s thighs, tracing a path to her twitching vulva. The younger girl trembled as tingles of pleasure surged through her again.

“I’ve never seen such a complete transformation,” Dora gushed as she fondled Harriet’s moist slit. “Even when I disguised myself as a guy for undercover jobs, I never went all the way--just formed the basic shape. I wouldn’t really know ‘ow to get the plumbing right.”

“It’s amazing isn’t it,” Hermione agreed, beaming from ear to furry ear. “Harriet is really good at visualisation...”

“Course, there really aren’t that many metamorphmagi,” Dora went on, “but I knew my teacher and all of the ones who are Aurors--guys and girls--because they were helping me practice my disguises. And they were willin’ to show me everything--purely professionally of course. Nobody--and I mean none of ‘em--could do their nethers with this level of detail.”

“I read a book on anatomy when I was practicing by myself, but Hermione’s the one who helped me get it right in the end,” squeaked Harriet, grinning and squirming as Dora’s fingers probed deeper into her wet passage.

“I didn’t... er... go all the way either though... oh!...” Harriet gasped, wriggling as Dora nibbled and licked her swollen clitoris, “I mean... Ah!... I didn’t bother... eep!... with the reproductive bits... OH!” Harriet squealed as she burst ecstatically, soaking Dora’s hand and chin.

“Well, that’s ‘ardly necessary,” Dora chuckled as she wiped off her chin and Hermione giggled.

Soon, the three witches were all rolling around the bed together, purring, moaning, meowing, and squealing, fingers and tongues busily occupying each other’s orifices. Hermione and Dora devoured Harriet, focusing most of their attentions on the younger girl. Twice the three of them lost themselves to the passion and the Potters’ bedroom quaked.

Harriet squealed and shuddered blissfully when she felt Hermione’s tongue buried inside her sopping sheath and Dora’s tongue between her bottom cheeks, wriggling wetly into her fundament. A tumultuous whirlwind of ardour swirled around the witches; they fell into ecstasy a third time and the storm of magic thundered through the entire suite.

“Merlin, that was fun!” Dora gasped as the giddiness ebbed, “Now why don’t you turn back into a boy Harriet, so we can have a bit more fun...”


“Yeah Harriet,” Dora’s eyes widened and she swallowed nervously, afraid that she had upset her. “That was lovely... I mean it. It’ll be loads of fun to mess about a bit with you as a girl from time to time--and we’ll do it again--I promise...”

“And I really appreciate it loads that you went to all the effort to change for me--but I fell in love with the real you... with Harry!” Dora gazed deeply into Harriet’s green eyes and kissed her tenderly. Dora’s hair changed back to her natural ash-brown.

“I know I’m not generally attracted to guys Harriet,” Dora continued softly, “but you turn me on something fierce when you’re Harry--alright!? Please don’t feel like you ‘ave to be a girl on the
outside for **me**--only for **you**self when you want to, for fun--‘oo you are on the inside is enough for me to love you...”

Hermione purred, thwipping her tail happily as she listened, snuggled sweatily against Harriet and Dora.

“And I love it that you’re different on the outside from the ‘other girls’...” Dora chortled and gave Harry a wink, “...you’re sexy to me as Harry. I like feelin’ you inside o’ me.”

Dora kissed Harriet again deeply and wetly to prove that she meant every word, closing her eyes, pressing her nakedness against the younger girl’s body. By the time Dora opened her eyes again, and their lips parted, she felt Harry’s erection squashed against her lower abdomen and she grinned.

Harry smiled sweetly and slightly tearfully at Dora, finally feeling completely reassured. He hadn’t quite realised that he had indeed still felt slightly inadequate for Dora until now that he no longer did. Harry really had wanted to be **everything** that Dora loved about girls.

“I even love doin’ **this** for you Harry--makes me feel kinky...” Dora smirked as she turned around, straddled Harry’s head, and took his stiffness in her mouth. “Oh, what about...?” she began, noticing the continued lack of pubic hair.

“Oh... I **like** it that way,” Harry grinned. “And just so you know, I really enjoyed being a girl for a bit too. It is fun--and I want to do it again sometime.”

“Cheers Harry,” said Dora, turning pink with happiness, and she encircled Harry’s shaft with her lips again.

Harry’s tongue entered Dora’s dripping vulva once more and Hermione joined in. Together, the Potters thrust their tongues into Dora’s crevices and squeezed her bum while Dora sucked Harry’s penis. Dora slurped and Harry thrust himself deeper, groaning with pleasure. Dora pressed her lips against Harry’s bare pubes and guzzled every last drop of his semen when he began squirting into her throat.

Harry and the two witches were swept away by yet another current of bliss, but refused to succumb to oblivion. After a brief respite the threesome began again. Harry wasn’t entirely sure, but he was beginning to suspect that the sex-magic had, over time, gradually increased his stamina and output.

Over the course of the evening, Harry filled both Dora’s and Hermione’s vessels with his sticky fluid, not to mention Hermione’s throat. The surges of electricity and magic which rocked the Potters’ quarters increased with intensity each time they climaxed, and by the time Harry finally passed out, in the wee hours of the morning, their quarters were a wreck.

Hermione purred, and began licking Dora clean shortly after Harry fell asleep in one of Dora’s arms. Dora ran her fingers through Hermione’s bushy hair and stroked her furry ears while the cat-witch’s tongue was engaged in lapping Harry’s stickiness from Dora’s vulva.

“I love you so much Hermione...” Dora murmured blissfully and sleepily, “Thanks for sharing Harry--and the rest of your girlfriends too for that matter. I love you all loads...”

Purring a bit louder, swishing her bushy tail, Hermione crawled up the front of the girl with ash-brown hair and kissed her passionately. Their tongues danced and another tingle of elation surged through Hermione as the naked cat-witch lay on top of Dora and put one of her own arms around Harry.
“I love you too,” Hermione whispered as she too drifted into slumber cradled in Dora’s embrace.

~00o~

As the days of summer passed by cheerfully for the Unaffiliated at Hogwarts, Jennifer continued to rapidly progress through the most critical coursework, and the Coven’s practice sessions in the Room of Requirement yielded ever increasing results, much to the delight of the Headmaster.

Jennifer was now well into Second Year material, and Dumbledore’s magical delicate instruments indicated that the Coven’s abilities continued to cross one rubicon and another, climbing from one pinnacle to the next.

The Headmaster was pleased that his headaches were less frequent. He felt assured that he and the Order were providing Harry with the best protection and the most fully informed preparation possible for facing Tom Riddle's forces. And if the ominous signs from beyond the walls and boundaries of the grounds of Hogwarts were any indication, he was more certain than ever that Riddle would take the opportunity to strike within the next few weeks.

Professor McGonagall gradually resigned herself to the idea of a group of randy teenagers being given free reign to express themselves intimately on school property. And in the end, it was at her and Madam Pomfrey’s insistence that the Unaffiliated be given their own common room located in their corridor, and a proper entrance to the corridor with its own passcodes.

Numerous portraits in the castle begged to be assigned the duty. But it was clear that many were just a bit too curious, and didn’t have a proper sense of decorum—the Drunk Monks being among the most eager and lecherous. Apparently they just wanted any opportunity to ogle the girls and Harry.

It was down to Circe, Cleopatra, and Aphrodite as all of them had expressed the most protective instincts towards the Unaffiliated. The decision between the portraits of the three sorceresses was too difficult, and the final determination was made by a game of rock-parchment-scissors among themselves.

Cleopatra won, but she felt bad as she had a major crush on the other two witches, and she promised to let them take turns looking after the Unaffiliated.

Harry’s 14th birthday rolled around, and it was the nicest he could ever recall having. He had everything he’d ever dreamed about, the best present he could have ever imagined, a loving family which accepted him for who he was without reservation. Not even the worsening news from beyond the walls and grounds of Hogwarts could dampen his mood.

Sirius and Remus hosted a party for Harry and the Unaffiliated in the Shrieking Shack on his birthday, and Jennifer finally got to meet Harry’s godfather. Given the current climate, Sirius couldn’t leave the Shack in human form. But he didn’t seem to mind.

Sirius was feeling more cheerful than he could ever remember, as was Remus too. Sirius could see his godson whenever he liked, and he was living with his Lycan lover in what was possibly one of the most magically protected homes in the British Isles.

The Shrieking Shack was now warded with even stronger Protection Charms than ever, as it was an unofficial extension of Hogwarts beyond its normal boundaries. And at Dumbledore’s request, the Bloody Baron had recruited some really scary-looking ghosts to provide some real haunting in the forest glade surrounding the shack.

Now the Shrieking Shack truly was one of the most haunted homes in Britain--and also one of the
happiest.
“Hey Harry!”

“Hi Neville. Good to see you!” Harry grinned when he spied the slightly pudgy boy entering the Quidditch stands where Harry and Hermione were lazily taking their time eating lunch.

“How was your holiday Neville?” asked Hermione.

“Smashing!” Neville’s face lit up, “Gran and I went all over Europe--visited some really cool ancient magical sites. But I think my favourite were in Greece and Cyprus. Greece was amazing, you should have seen...”

There was a whoosh and Neville looked up, startled by a rush of wind, and saw two girls he didn’t really know swooping by just a few metres away on brooms.

“Er... isn’t the girl with blue hair an Auror? I remember her from the Triwiz. What’s she still doing here?” Neville asked in bewilderment. “And who’s the new girl? I’ve never seen her at Hogwarts before...”

“Oh... er...” Harry gulped, “Erm... Dora was just in training to be an Auror--but she quit. And she’s going back to school--she’s... er... she’s an Unaffiliated now, like Hermione and me...”

“And the other girl is a new witch--a late bloomer...” Hermione interjected, jumping in to try and save Harry from further distress, as he appeared to be having trouble dissembling to someone he considered a friend, “We’ll introduce you in a bit.”

Harry peered gratefully at Hermione and she squeezed his hand.

~o0o~

“Are you sure about this Molly?” Albus asked Mrs Weasley once again. “I cannot give you all the details, but I am certain that Voldemort’s next major attack will be upon Hogwarts itself...”

“But you’ve got the Potters and all of their little friends here... for their safety you said at the Order meeting... And I know the Longbottom boy arrived today,” Molly glowered, “You promised that you would take Ginny and keep her safe too,”

“I’m worried that You-Know-Who’s minions might attack the Burrow. They know we’re members of the Order. If they should break the Protection Charms--Well, I don’t even like to think... What’s really going on Albus?”

Albus Dumbledore sighed. Getting anything by Molly Weasley was always a dicey proposition--she was a sharp and formidable woman. He’d had no luck attempting to dissuade Augusta Longbottom from leaving Neville at Hogwarts either.

“I promised to accept Ginevra at Hogwarts for the summer Molly, and I shall abide by that promise. I just need you to be clearly aware that there are risks here too. The Potters are here not only due to being under threat by Voldemort, but because they are also being directly threatened by the Minister herself,”

“And the rest of the Unaffiliated are simply here because of their strong bonds of friendship with the Potters and thus their parents have allowed them to remain to keep them company, even though I
cannot guarantee their absolute safety should Voldemort attack here...”

“I know there’s something you’re still not telling me Albus,” Molly snapped. Then she sighed, “Regardless, the Protection Charms are far stronger here than at the Burrow, and then there’s you and the professors—you’re all here. If You-Know-Who does attack Hogwarts, I feel more confident of Ginny’s safety with you lot than I do at home.”

“Very well then, you may bring Ginevra at your earliest convenience,” the Headmaster concluded.

Molly’s features softened and she smiled sadly at Dumbledore, “Thank you Albus. I really do appreciate it... I’m sorry for being pushy. I just want my Ginny to be as safe as possible. We’ll be picking up her school supplies tomorrow in Diagon Alley, and then I’ll floo her here.”

~o0o~

The glowing girls flicked their windswept hair from their faces and giddily clambered off their brand new Firebolts, both flinging their arms around Harry, giving him little kisses on each cheek while Neville looked on with bemusement and Hermione purred.

“Thanks for the broom Harry!” gushed Jennifer tearily. “I’ll pay you back when I get a chance to transfer some of my inheritance to Gringotts...”

“No, please,” interjected Harry, blushing and staggering under the dual hug attack. “They’re both presents...”

“Cheers Harry!” said Dora, looking more than a bit teary herself. “Really, you shouldn’t ‘ave... these must ‘ave cost a fortune.”

“And we’re supposed to give you presents for your birthday, not the other way around,” Jennifer responded. “You should have told me...”

“Look, I’ve got way more than I need already,” retorted Harry, his blush deepening. “Sirius’s family was filthy rich, and he just up and gave me nearly all of it. I just want to share what I have with people I care about.” Harry gave Jennifer a kiss on the cheek to prove it.

Not being one to pass up the opportunity for a hug, Hermione embraced Jennifer too and gave her a kiss on her cheek as Dora giggled. Neville flushed awkwardly, and slipped out of the Quidditch stands unnoticed, deciding that he could meet the new girl later.

“He really means it Jennifer,” said Hermione, curling her fluffy ginger tail around Jennifer and giving her another little kiss, this time briefly on the lips.

Jennifer was flabbergasted, and her heart began to race. She still couldn’t quite fathom how she had garnered the affections of a boy and his wife—and their girlfriends—whom she had only known for a few weeks.

And Jennifer didn’t really comprehend the swell of emotion she felt in response, she just knew that they made her feel loved in a way which was different from the way that she felt towards Hestia Jones.

When Hestia cuddled her, Jennifer felt like she was in the arms of her mum, which sometimes made Jennifer feel a bit guilty—like she shouldn’t love someone as much as her dead parents whom she still missed very much.

But the Potters and the rest of the girls in the Coven stirred something much more than that in
Jennifer, something romantic and erotic. She loved them and she would be lying to say that it didn’t scare her. Though she no longer felt the presence of Ratface in her mind, Jennifer was still frightened by the idea of being with anyone in that way.

Jennifer returned Hermione’s kiss then pulled back, anxiously biting her lip.

“It’s alright Jennifer,” Hermione said quietly, twitching her furry ears in understanding, “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do. I know how you feel about us. I just want you to know that you’re loved no matter what.”

“Thanks Hermione,” Jennifer blushed and flickered her eyelashes, casting them down as tears rolled down her cheeks. Dora gave Jennifer a hug and a kiss too, and the four of them returned to the castle.

That afternoon and evening, if Jennifer still harboured any doubts, they were put to rest for a while at least. Luna and Parvati helped her study for a Charms exam. Then Jennifer spent some time perusing magazines and catalogues with Fleur, Parvati, and Daphne while Luna read another book on mind-healing.

“I can’t believe it. Do wizards really dress like this every day?” Jennifer giggled when Daphne showed her a British wizard-wear catalogue.

“Mostly only older wizards and witches,” snorted Daphne. “Younger wizards, except for a lot of so-called Purebloods, tend to follow modern muggle fashion trends. I'm lucky; my parents always wanted Astoria and me to be knowledgeable of the wider world...”

“And as you can see, ze Continental wizard world ees much more wiz ze times,” tittered Fleur, passing Jennifer a French magazine.

Hermione was sitting on Harry’s lap with her tail curled around him as they read Lord of the Rings together which she had bought for Harry by owl-post for his birthday.

“Thanks loads for this Hermione,” Harry said, giving her a kiss, “and for the Oz books too.”

They both looked up at the other girls when they heard them all giggling.

“That was really kind of you to order those brooms for Dora and Jennifer Harry,” Hermione sighed and gazed at him adoringly.

“Jennifer’s great at flying!” Harry grinned. “She took to it jolly quick after she got used to it riding with Luna...”

~000~

Minister Dolores Umbridge would have rubbed her hands together and cackled with glee, but she didn’t want to give Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour the wrong impression. A squad of Aurors had managed to run down a small group of Voldemort’s Snatchers and Nott Sr as they had attempted to burn down a Liverpool homeless shelter near St Luke's Church Gardens and make off with its residents.

Despite being interrogated by the Aurors under the influence of Veritaserum, the Snatchers and Nott Sr had been unable to provide details of the current whereabouts of Voldemort. But that wasn’t particularly important for the moment.

The important thing was that Dolores now had a sizable number of hooligans to punish--including
those which Mr Fortescue had captured during the Diagon Alley attack--and someone of note that she could haul before the Wizengamot. And Scrimgeour had turned Nott and the Snatchers over to the Unspeakable Office for further interrogation as promised. This was the opportunity she had been looking for to solidify a majority on the Wizengamot.

“Thank you very much Rufus,” the Minister cooed in her most girlish voice, “Splendid--another job well done. I am quite pleased.”

“Thank you, Madam Minister,” Rufus Scrimgeour raised his eyebrows, “I shall pass your praises along to the Aurors who brought them in... However, I must say that I regret that we were unable to obtain any further details which could lead us to the Dark Lord.”

“Never mind that Rufus,” Dolores responded, smiling brightly, “I have faith that the methods of the Unspeakable Office will yield some actionable information, and if we do indeed obtain anything of use, I shall inform you immediately so that we can bring the rest of these criminals to justice. In the meantime, again--Good Work!”

Head Auror Scrimgeour’s forehead creased in consternation as he watched the Minister depart his office through narrowed eyes, a sense of unease settling over him. He couldn’t put his finger on any one thing in particular, but doubts continued to niggle at the back of his mind.
Chapter 117

The Dark Lord scowled at Wormtail, “Still no word of Nott?”

“My Lord,” Wormtail swallowed nervously, hoping that he would not be taken to account for Nott Sr’s failures, “The Dark Witch has him, and the Snatchers who were with him. The word is that he has been turned over to the Department of Mysteries.”

“What does it matter?” Bellatrix smirked, “Nott is no great loss. We already have what we need from him, and he was not a Secret Keeper...”

“But what of our Army of the Dead?” Voldemort hissed dangerously. “Where do our numbers stand?”

“We are nearing completion... Master,” purred Bellatrix, batting her lashes coquettishly. The Dark Lord relaxed. He knew that his Consort was buttering him up, but he had to admit that it pleased him greatly when she called him ‘Master.’

“Nott’s team’s contribution was minimal at best,” Bellatrix continued. She gestured towards the enormous flat-screen television, “And in any case, these muggle entertainments have given me an idea for a new breed of Inferi--With my latest modification, Inferi shall be able to pass on the Inferius Curse to the living through their bites... much as Lycans do.”

The Dark Lord’s features altered from an expression which promised danger, to one which indicated malevolent glee.

“Good, good...” Voldemort nodded, his red, slitted eyes narrowing as he stroked his chin and considered the possibilities such magically endowed Inferi presented, “That will do nicely indeed...”

Wormtail quietly let out a sigh of relief. The Dark Lord had been treating him very well and Wormtail much preferred to keep it that way.

~o0o~

Neville found himself under attack from behind by a red haired missile at Teatime the day after he had arrived at Hogwarts while the Unaffiliated all watched in amusement.

“Guess who Neville!” giggled the freckled girl who had her hands covering his eyes.

“Ginny...” Neville beamed.

“Ginny...” Neville beamed.

“Right in one,” Ginny responded happily, firmly planting a wet kiss on her boyfriend’s lips.

“I’m glad you’re back... I missed you,” Neville managed to gasp when Ginny’s lips released his own. He turned pink when he realised that they were the center of attention.

“Hi Ginny! How was Egypt?” asked Harry with a grin.

“You have to tell us all about it!” Hermione exclaimed, her furry ears twitching eagerly.

“Especially about the Mummies,” Harry chortled, just to make it perfectly clear what was at the top of everyone’s minds.

“Oh! Those...” giggled Ginny as she rolled her eyes, “I bet Ron told you that he saved Seamus from
twenty of them.”

“Only half a dozen actually,” Hermione smirked.

“Well it was really more like two Mummies,” Ginny answered wryly. “And Ron didn’t so much save Seamus as he did trip over his untied shoelaces while they were being chased. He fell on top of Seamus, accidentally knocking him to the ground out of reach of one of the Mummies which was attacking them.”

“Then the Egyptian tour guide incapacitated the Mummies easily with a spell... it all started when Ron and Seamus snuck into a side-chamber in a pyramid while Mum and Dad weren’t paying attention,” Ginny finished.

They all had a good chuckle, then Ginny spent a few minutes regaling everyone with more tales from the Weasleys’ Egyptian Holiday.

“You should have seen this chamber inside the Sphinx. It was magnificent...” Ginny faltered when she realised that she didn’t know two of the girls sitting with the Unaffiliated--though the one with ash-brown hair seemed familiar.

“Oh, this is Jennifer,” Luna serenely introduced the girl with ebony hair to Ginny. “She just started Hogwarts.”

“Hi,” Jennifer squirmed under Ginny’s puzzled gaze.

“Hello,” Ginny smiled sheepishly, “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to stare, but you look older than 11.”

“Oh... er... I’m a... l...late-bloomer,” Jennifer stammered. “I’m 15...”

“We’re helping tutor Jennifer,” said Hermione, coming to her rescue, “so that she can at least be prepared for Fourth Year classes when term starts.”

“It’s nice to meet you Jennifer,” Ginny surprised the dark-haired girl with a warm hug. “Welcome to Hogwarts. Did they sort you into a House yet?”

“Er.... I’m going to be Unaffiliated...” Jennifer gulped, reddening slightly.

“Oh... of course....” Ginny smiled perpectively, then she glanced at the girl with light-brown hair. “I suppose you’re a new Unaffiliated too?” Ginny chuckled.

“Heh!” Dora grinned. She had never been formally introduced to the youngest Weasley, but she had seen her around during the school-year and she liked the girl’s good humour and fiery spirit.

“Don’tcha recognise me then? How about now?”

Dora’s hair flashed neon purple and Ginny gasped in recognition. “Oh, you’re the Auror from the Triwizard Tournament...”

“Technically I was still in trainin’--but not anymore,” Dora responded. “I decided... it... er... wasn’t really me. So I’m back at Hogwarts for a bit. And yeah, I suppose I am a new Unaffiliated too...” Dora giggled, then she glanced at Harry, not sure how far to go in front of Neville and Ginny.

Harry peered questioningly at Hermione and she purred approvingly. As he glanced around the rest of the table, Parvati, Luna, Daphne, and Fleur, all nodded in turn.

“Er.... Ginny, Neville, you should probably both know that Dora is a member of the Order as well--
the Order of the Phoenix I mean,” began Harry. “She was helping to train me--train us--during the Triwiz... and Dora’s a... erm.... really good friend now,” Harry took a deep breath to steel himself.

“We’ve all been practicing spells together,” Harry continued nervously, “I... I can’t really go into detail, but we’re all... er...”

“A Coven...” Ginny snickered. “You’re all a Coven aren’t you?”

Neville gasped and blushed furiously. Covens were rare, but they had reputations which were as sexually provocative as they were awe inspiring.

“What the...?!” gasped Harry in astonishment. “How did you know?”

“Oh please!...” Ginny rolled her eyes and giggled. “I’ve read all about them... and I know you lot too well now! It was bound to happen eventually. It’s obvious how tight you all are...”

“That’s an understatement,” Luna chortled, her furry ears and tail twitching with amusement. Hermione giggled and her fluffy tail quivered mirthfully. Parvati and Fleur smirked while Daphne blushed, palming her face. Of course it was obvious.

“Don’t worry though,” said Ginny. “Your secret’s safe with us. Right Neville?”

“Er... yeah! Of course,” Neville responded quickly, his face still burning.

“Thanks guys,” Harry sighed with relief, glad to have got the embarrassing bit out of the way. “Anyway... we’ve been practicing combat spells and training to fight together for a long time. And... er... well, obviously you’re not part of the Coven--but... but still, you’re our friends, and I think you should learn how to fight and practice a bit with us...”

After Harry explained that Voldemort was probably going to attack Hogwarts, a strange glint flickered in Neville’s eye.

“The Lestranges... they’ll be with him won’t they?” asked Neville.

“Very likely!” Harry agreed.

“I’m in then,” Neville muttered hoarsely. Ginny gave him a puzzled look.

“The Lestranges...” Neville gulped, his face stricken with grief and anger. “They tortured my parents--until their minds snapped. And now they’re in St Mungo’s--probably forever... they don’t even really know who I am....”

Ginny’s eyes filled with tears and everyone gasped in horror. Neville had never talked about his parents before, and now it was clear why. Harry and Jennifer’s stomachs lurched. It was bad enough to have dead parents, but to imagine them still being alive and not knowing who you were, struck them both as even worse somehow.

~o0o~

Neville and Ginny were blown away by the magic of the Room of Requirement, and they promised to keep its secrets.

Neville was thrashed by the calisthenics the first day of practice. But over the next few days, his stamina improved, and side by side with Ginny, they both rapidly picked up the basics of the combat spells and hand to hand fighting techniques.
Harry wanted to train them in everything, and tried teaching them both how to perform a Patronus Charm. Ginny showed promise, and by her fifth lesson she managed to conjure a Corporeal Patronus, which turned out to be a Mare.

“That’s brilliant Ginny,” Neville said a bit enviously. “I’m still struggling just to generate the basic shield…”

“Don’t worry Neville... You’re doing great...” said Harry encouragingly. “Just keep practicing--you’ll get it eventually! I know you will.”

Harry gave Hermione a pointed look and they both glanced at Ginny. Hermione’s furry tail and ears flicked in understanding. While Neville kept at it, Hermione and Ginny conferred in whispers and giggles. Ginny’s freckles were lost in the crimson flush of her cheeks as she fixated on Hermione’s every word and took mental notes.

“Maybe next time,” Neville sighed glumly when the Unaffiliated concluded the afternoon training session.

“I’m sure you’ll get it then Neville,” Ginny embraced Neville and gave him a kiss. “Come on you... let’s have dinner alone together tonight--just you and me... I have a late birthday present for you.”

“But you already gave me one...” Neville replied in perplex.

“Another late birthday present...” Ginny giggled, wondering how some boys could be so thick.

~o0o~

Neville woke up the next morning and yawned, wishing that he could hold onto the dream a little longer. It had been the best dream that he could ever remember having, and he felt enlivened. At least he had the entire Gryffindor boys’ dormitory to himself. Neville could relieve his invigoration in complete privacy.

He rolled over in his bed and his eyes widened when he saw red hair strewn across the pillow next to him attached to the beaming freckled face and the partially covered nude figure of his girlfriend. Ginny snuggled right up against Neville’s own nakedness and his breathing quickened in excitement.

“It wasn’t just a dream...” Neville murmured giddily.

“Of course not, silly billy!” chortled Ginny. “But you woke too soon. I was just about to try something Hermione told me about to wake you up...”

“Er...?”

Ginny almost lost her nerve seeing Neville peer awkwardly at her, but she and Neville had shagged twice in his bed before passing out last night, giving of themselves to each other for the first time, and she really wanted to try this. Last night had been amazing, and what Hermione had told her about sounded like it would be just as much fun.

Heart beating rapidly in trepidation, Ginny fortified her resolve. Before she could talk herself out of it, Ginny leaned over, wrapped her lips around Neville’s morning erection and began to suck it vigorously and wetly.

~o0o~

Ginny beamed proudly and pounced on her Neville gleefully as Harry, Hermione, and the rest of the
Unaffiliated cheered. Neville had finally managed to produce a Corporeal Patronus at the next practice session in the Room of Requirement.

When the ethereal Shire Horse stamped the ground and sauntered over to the silvery spectral Mare, giving it a gentle nudge with its head, Ginny squealed and snogged Neville silly in front of everyone.
“What are you working on Harry? Can I help?”

“Actually--yeah you can Hermione! I want to try out these runic-type symbols at our next practice session...”

“That looks like Chinese...” Hermione gasped, wondering where Harry had found the book.

“It is. It's the English Translation of the Expanded Wizarding Edition of the *Tai Chi Classics*. It came with the Room of Requirement’s ‘Dojo’ setting,” Harry grinned, correctly discerning Hermione’s unspoken query.

“Kwoon...”

“Pardon?”

“Dojo’s are *Japanese*, if that's Chinese, then it's from a Kwoon,” said Hermione in her "schoolteacher" voice.

“Oh, yeah... er... right,” Harry acknowledged, feeling slightly abashed. He was glad he hadn't made that mistake in front of anyone else.

“Anyway...” Harry went on, “apparently some of the symbols in this book should provide the same sort of physical protection as practicing Iron Shirt and Iron Skull techniques. They protect bones and internal organs from damage, and also supposedly prevent serious wounds from edged and piercing weapons.”

“Oh, I thought that sort of thing usually took years of practice.” Hermione’s features were still etched with surprise.

“Yeah... for *muggles,*” Harry nodded enthusiastically. “But being wizards, *we* can use a shortcut, and get similar effects by tattooing these symbols on ourselves. It’s not perfect--not as powerful as becoming a ‘Master’ of the technique itself--and it’s only temporary while the Tattoo lasts of course--but it should still be jolly useful.”

“That’s *brilliant* Harry,” Hermione beamed, her furry ears pricking in excitement. “It’s a shame you didn’t know about this when you were still on the Gryffindor Quidditch team!”

“I know... I was just thinking the same thing myself,” Harry sighed and shook his head. “Still, I had no idea that I’d even be any good at runes and symbols in Second Year. I suppose there’s no guarantee that I could’ve even drawn them well enough to stop my arm being broken back then.”

“And I’d bet anything that these symbols aren’t at all common or even really known in European Wizarding usage Harry,” Hermione said reassuringly.

“I expect normally you would only learn them if you went to a Chinese wizarding school, or had a Chinese teacher,” she continued. “You got lucky to find this book probably because you envisioned the Kwoons and Dojos from some of the martial arts films we saw last summer, when you asked the Room of Requirement to conjure up a place to practice fighting. I'm just surprised that I never noticed that particular book before myself, really.”

“I only found it last week after I started thinking about helping Dora train Neville and Ginny up a
bit... Maybe I’ll show these symbols to Professor Babbling so she can add them into the curriculum,”
Harry perked up again. “Seems to me like we ought to be able to learn useful spells and symbols
from other wizarding cultures whenever we can.”

“I agree Harry,” Hermione purred as she unbuttoned her blouse.

Harry raised his eyebrows with a questioning smirk, wondering if Hermione was feeling a bit
aroused by the idea of learning new things.

“You were planning to use me as a guinea pig for the Chinese tattoos weren’t you?” Hermione
responded breezily to Harry’s expression.

“Oh... er... of course,” Harry reddened and reached for his runic tattoo brushes and ink.

He hadn’t been planning anything of the sort. Harry had in fact been planning on painting the
symbols on himself and having Hermione throw things at him and try to knock him out. But he had
learned not to refuse Hermione anything when she had that determined gleam in her eyes.

“Mmm...” Hermione’s purring grew louder and her tail quivered at the delightful sensation of
Harry’s ink-brushes dancing across her skin. Harry smiled to himself and began to wonder if his first
instinct had been correct in some sense after all.

The Chinese symbols were a rousing success.

It had taken some time before Harry and Hermione managed to test them, as they had both lingered
over-long before dressing after the tattoo ink dried. But after Harry had cheerfully concluded
fondling and nibbling his wife’s nipples and bringing her to climax, and she had returned the favour
with a quickie fellatio, they dressed and made their way to the Room of Requirement.

Not only did everything which Hermione conjured and threw at Harry bounce right off him with
minimal pain—if any at all—but the symbols also appeared to protect him from the worst of the
concussive effects of blasting spells as well.

Harry had managed to convince Hermione to test his runes first before he tried anything on her, but
Hermione refused point blank to try and cut him with one of the bladed weapons on the wall.
Finally, Harry took a dagger and tried ineffectively to slice the palm of his hand himself.

“Amazing!” Harry muttered.

Hermione eyed Harry with trepidation when he tentatively poked the knife at his ribs. Gulping,
Harry closed his eyes and plunged the dagger. Hermione screamed.

Harry grunted from the exertion and a pinching sensation, and the blade bent, leaving nothing but a
single drop of blood oozing from a pinprick.

~o0o~

A lot of the time was spent by all of the Unaffiliated, and Ginny and Neville, later that evening in the
Room of Requirement under Harry’s ink-brushes as he insisted on tattooing everyone. Ginny,
Neville, and Jennifer all blushed furiously when it came time for each of them to lift their shirts and
bare their midriffs.

“That tickles...” Ginny giggled as Harry delicately inked her belly.

“It does, doesn’t it!” chortled Parvati, recalling the last time Harry had used his ink-brushes on her.
“Now remember,” Harry admonished, “This is no substitute for a Shield Charm, but it should protect you from physical blows or a fall even if you don’t have your wand and can’t cast a Protego or a cushioning charm in time...”

“Got it Harry,” Dora nodded earnestly.

“...and it’ll even protect you from getting stabbed or cut.” Harry continued, glancing guiltily at Hermione who was still wagging her bushy ginger tail angrily and glaring at him at intervals.

“Prat!” she muttered. But Hermione could never stay cross with Harry for long, especially not when his face was as stricken with guilt as it was. “Don’t scare me like that ever again...”

“I’m really sorry Hermione... you were looking right at me,” Harry responded, his green eyes as big as saucers. “I just thought it was obvious--I thought you... er... knew what I was going to do. I was terrified too...”

“I know...” Hermione sighed, her furry ears wilting slightly sheepishly. “I’m sorry too Harry--I just wasn’t quite ready to watch you stab yourself with a knife--especially not without having Madam Pomfrey at-the-ready just in case. I didn’t think you were really going to do it... I’m just thrilled these symbols work like they’re supposed to...”

“You and me both!”

“Wait... what are you doing Harry?” Hermione asked, her face flushing when Harry lifted her blouse a bit, exposing part of her abdomen. Neville gulped and looked the other way.

“I’m just adding a couple of basic Norse Runes--the ones we used during the Third Task. I figured we should practice with a full slate of Protection Runes and Symbols for the next few sessions. The tattoos won’t wear off...”

Finally everyone was inked and eager to practice being attacked after Harry and Hermione demonstrated the effectiveness of the symbols.

Unfortunately, nobody was eager to take up the role of the attacker. It was one thing to practice stunning spells on each other, and basic holds, joint-locks and throws--which they had all long become used to, but everyone was too afraid of hurting each other with strikes and blows if something went wrong.

Harry was as reluctant as anyone to clobber someone. He sighed, remembering how he himself had been berated by Mad Eye for being too soft on everyone during training for the Triwizard Tournament.

Fleur attempted to cajole Daphne into whacking her with a Beater’s Bat to get things going, but Daphne was having none of it. She just couldn’t bring herself to thump Fleur. Daphne still couldn’t get the horrifying picture out of her mind of Fleur lying in the Hospital Wing in agony with two broken legs after the Third Task.

Finally, Dora suggested a game of Rock-Parchment-Scissors; the loser would have to be the assailant. Luna lost. Groaning, her furry ears drooping, Luna picked up the Beater’s Bat, closed her eyes, and swung it at Fleur.

“C’est Magnifique!” exclaimed Fleur when the bat broke against her arm. All she had felt was a sting as if she had been on the receiving end of a strong slap, and the bat lay in pieces on the floor.

“Oh thank goodness...” Luna opened her eyes and let out a huge sigh of relief, her fluffy white tail
perking up.

“Merlin!” Dora’s jaw dropped.

“That’s incredible,” gasped Parvati, her furry black tail waving in amazement as she examined the splinters of the bat which had shattered against Fleur’s forearm leaving only a red mark.

“Yes it is,” Hermione agreed, “But we should still be careful... we can still be injured or even killed. This just makes it loads harder...”

In no time, everyone was giggling and having fun breaking Beater’s Bats over each other’s heads and using hurling hexes to chuck heavy objects at each other with no ill effects except for a few red marks, and a couple of scratches. Dora and Fleur were even brave enough to have a little knife fight.

Only Jennifer had yet to join in. Hermione spied Jennifer trembling and nudged Harry who was coaching Luna, Parvati, Ginny, and Neville. Harry left them to it and approached Jennifer.

“I’m sorry,” Harry took a leaf from Hermione’s book and put his arm around Jennifer, giving her a comforting squeeze. “I didn’t think... If you want, you can sit this out. I know the runes will work... and honestly, I’m not comfortable with all the violence either.”

“It’s alright,” Jennifer shook her head. “I want to join in... I know I ought to for my own good. I just keep freezing up.”

“Oh, I know,” Hermione said, brightening, “Cheering Charms... we haven’t done any today Harry.”

“Oh of course,” Harry smacked his forehead. “We should have started out with that... saved ourselves a bit of time. I forgot.”

One Cheering Charm later and Jennifer was gleefully cracking Beater’s Bats across shins and ribs with the rest of them.

~00o~

Deputy Minister Percy Weasley was working late that evening when the reports of new Inferi attacks began to roll in. The first report was from Nottingham, and an hour later there was another assault reported in Stoke-On-Trent.

The Deputy Minister was hopeful that this could be dealt with relatively quickly and easily as both muggle locations were in Central England, but his hopes were dashed when another report came in from a Bristol suburb which was home to a small wizarding neighbourhood.

He began to resignedly scribble a memo to send directly to Minister Umbridge but was interrupted by a scowling, disheveled Rufus Scrimgeour.

“Deputy Minister, if that is a message for the Minister, I have some news to add...”

“Good or bad?” Percy asked in a voice which he hoped didn’t betray the panic he felt.

“A bit of both. A number of muggles and two wizards are dead, but we managed to contain the situation in all three cities. We were fortunate in that the numbers of Inferi in the attacks were small--no more than half a dozen at each location... to begin with.”

“To begin with? I don’t take your meaning, Scrimgeour...”

“Two of the muggles from the first attack.... turned into Inferi within an hour of being mauled. Once
we realised we were dealing with something new, I was forced to improvise a new protocol. All of
the dead have been incinerated, not just the Inferi--muggle and wizard alike--just to be on the safe
side.”

“The Clean-Up team certainly has their work cut out for them then...” Percy groaned. “This is
terrible. I’m just glad we managed to contain this before it got out of hand. Thanks Scrimgeour. I’ll
pass on the information to the Minister.”

Rufus Scrimgeour nodded curtly and turned to leave. As he shut the door to the Deputy Minister’s
office he overheard Percy Weasley muttering to himself. Rufus could just barely make out a few
puzzling words of the Deputy Minister’s private rumination over the sound of the scratching quill,
“...spin this... You-Know-Who or Dumbledore...?”

Rufus shook his head and wriggled a finger in his bad ear, wondering if he’d misheard.
When the *Daily Prophet* and the *Quibbler*'s reports of muggle disappearances shifted to reports of random Inferi attacks the following morning, the Headmaster of Hogwarts knew that an assault against Hogwarts by Voldemort’s forces was imminent. He and Professor McGonagall exchanged a dark look, then glanced down the table at several professors too busily engaged in conversation to have read the papers yet.

“I must say Remus, it is simply splendid to see you with a professorship at long last,” said Professor Slughorn proudly. “You deserve so much more…”

“Really Horace?” Professor Lupin raised his eyebrows with a bemused expression. “I was dreadful in potions…”

“Nonsense my dear fellow,” Horace responded, twitching his bushy moustache. “You may not have been a match for Severus here…”

Professor Snape snorted and rolled his eyes, but Horace ignored him and soldiered on, “…or Lily Evans, but your work was always excellent. I expected great things from you, despite your… erm… condition. You were among the few students of your year to graduate Hogwarts with Honours after all.”

“That’s very kind of you Horace,” Lupin flushed slightly. “But if Voldemort’s curse on the DADA position is true, then there is some question as to whether I will still be here when term begins—I managed to finish out Lockhart’s year, and complete one of my own, but… well… we shall see soon enough I suppose;”

“And I wouldn’t be able to manage it at all if it weren’t for Severus’s Wolfsbane Potion,” Lupin concluded with a grateful glance at Snape.

Something almost like a smile flickered in Snape’s eyes, but he merely nodded curtly in response. Severus didn’t care for the personal direction of the conversation, and despite having come to gradually respect one another, it wasn’t as if he would ever be best mates with Remus Lupin or Sirius Black.

“Ah, that is another thing I have been meaning to discuss,” Slughorn carried on, paying no attention to Snape’s obvious discomfort, “I think it is simply marvelous that you two and Sirius Black have managed to put aside past enmities and buried the hatchet. How did that come about?”

Snape and Lupin regarded each other uncomfortably, then Severus sighed and raised his eyebrows.

“I had... an epiphany!” said Snape finally.

Horace was not to be put off so easily. He gazed shrewdly at Severus.

“And did this ‘epiphany’ have anything to do with Lily’s son?” Horace asked pointedly.

“I suppose... you could say that,” Severus stiffly replied.

Slughorn was about to press for the juicy details, but the Headmaster thought this would be a good time to interrupt the conversation and come to Professor Snape’s rescue.

“Ahem…” Dumbledore passed the *Daily Prophet* and the *Quibbler* down the table, “have any of you
seen the news this morning?”

Once he had everyone's attention, the Headmaster began.

“I believe it is time. We must make final preparations immediately. I shall recall Shacklebolt, Dawlish, and some others of the Order to assist us in defending Hogwarts. However, I do not wish to leave the members of the school’s Board of Governors nor the publisher of the Quibbler unguarded…”

~o0o~

Harry’s stomach clenched when he read the ominous headlines and he glanced at Hermione whose furry ears twitched apprehensively. He looked up at the Staff Table, spotting a grim-faced Dumbledore approaching with Viktor Krum in tow.

Viktor, who had been keeping Karkaroff company at most mealtimes throughout the summer, sat next to Neville and Ginny and nodded in greeting at the Unaffiliated. After the Headmaster finished explaining, a sudden thought occurred to Hermione.

“Professor Dumbledore,” Hermione flicked her bushy tail anxiously, “I just remembered... when Draco Malfoy escaped from the Castle, he must have used a secret tunnel. The Map—the one which used to belong to Sirius Black and Harry’s father. I think I remember seeing some secret passages on it. What if Voldemort uses them to get in?”

Dumbledore looked troubled for a moment.

“Thank you for bringing that to my attention Mrs Potter,” Dumbledore replied after a moment. “Yes, that is certainly a possibility. Harry, if you would be so kind, I should like to borrow the map for a bit to be certain that we block any tunnels which we know about. I shall return it to you when the task is complete”

“Yes, of course Sir!” Harry nodded. “But what do you mean by ‘which we know about?’ Wouldn’t the map have all of them?”

“That is not very likely,” Dumbledore replied with a shake of his head. “Your map would only contain the secret passages known to those who created the map—your father, Sirius, Professor Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew. There are undoubtedly more passages which we are unaware of, but which may have come to the attention of others.”

“Thus, it is even more important that I return the map to you, so that you and your friends can keep track of any infiltrators. The rest of the staff, the Order, and myself can look after ourselves…”

The Headmaster paused and peered somberly around the Mingling Table at his students.

“I know that you have all been preparing for this moment,” Dumbledore continued. “I wish it were that you did not have to face this danger at all, but I have confidence in your abilities to defend yourselves. I simply ask that you please do not put yourselves in unnecessary peril to come to the aid of any professors,”

“And Harry—if at all possible—please avoid contact with Tom Riddle... I must reiterate that the Prophecy is now a moot point. It is not necessary for you to fight him unless you find yourself directly facing him—and he is immensely dangerous. The safety of you and your friends is of paramount importance.”

Harry swallowed as he flushed with a hot wave of anger. The wizard who had killed countless
people, who had murdered his parents, who had tried to steal the Philosopher’s Stone, and who had tried to kill Harry three times already, was going to be at Hogwarts again—with Wormtail. And Harry wanted to see them both dead.

Harry felt Hermione stiffen, and she curled her furry tail around him. He knew she was shocked at the waves of hate which she could sense rolling off him. He was shocked himself. But Harry also knew that Hermione understood—and that she was just as keen as him to put an end to Riddle and Wormtail once and for all.

Professor Dumbledore was still staring at Harry, waiting for some sort of response. Finally, Harry sighed and nodded.

“Yes sir… I’ll do my best to stay out of his way. I won’t fight him unless I absolutely have to.”

“Thank you Harry. That is all I can ask.”

The Headmaster made his way back to the Staff-Table and Harry glanced at Viktor Krum.

“Right then,” Harry began, “The rest of us are about as ready as we’ll ever be Viktor, and I know you can fight, but I was thinking we should maybe drill together a bit and later work out a plan with Dumbledore. And… er… well, I’ve tattooed everyone else with some protection Runes—it might be good if you had some too… if you want to that is. I don’t know if you…”

“Very good Harry,” Viktor nodded, “I vould like zat, yes.”

~o0o~

An eerie stillness fell over Hogwarts as the morning wore on. Clouds crept across the late summer sun, darkening the sky, and an icy rain began to fall.

The professors and Order members who had flooed to Hogwarts had all cast additional protective charms and inspected the grounds, and were now waiting after having organised into teams. The students had practiced spellwork all afternoon in the Room of Requirement.

Before dinner, the Headmaster had conferred with the Coven and their friends, and they were now biding their time in the Astronomy Tower as they had planned while trepidation set in.

Dora chewed her fingernails nervously while Luna and Parvati snuggled together, and Ginny and Neville chatted with Jennifer. Fleur and Daphne were taking their turn at watch, looking out through telescopes over the battlements as the rain thrummed against a conjured umbrella which covered them. However, there was little to see as the grounds were shrouded in mist and darkness.

“Thanks for the training Harry,” Viktor said quietly as it neared midnight. “The Room of Requirement is amazing. I haff never performed a Patronus Charm—zey vere not part of the curriculum at Durmstrang. I hope mine is strong enough…”

“Well, if it’s any consolation, they aren’t part of the standard curriculum at Hogwarts either, and even a Non-Corporeal Patronus will still provide some protection against Dementors,” Hermione interjected encouragingly, as Harry appeared to be somewhat distraught about not having included Viktor in the Coven’s practice sessions.

“I’m sorry Viktor,” Harry began, “I suppose I thought you already…”

“Zere is no need to apologise Harry,” Viktor replied firmly. “I know you and the Unaffiliated haff something deeper together vicz is something I could never be a part of. And except for ze defensive
Runes and the Patronus Charm, you were correct--I am well studied in the arts and spells..."

A clap of thunder interrupted Viktor and lightning lit up the sky. Moments later Daphne dashed in through the open door, her heart thumping so loudly that she was sure everyone could hear it.

“Harry, come take a look quickly, I think we saw something...” she gasped.

~000~

As the wind came up, Lord Voldemort gazed across the dark wet grounds of Hogwarts from a nearby mountainside bluff where he stood with his top lieutenants, unperturbed by the downpour.

“What news do you have for me from your rodent spies Wormtail?”

“They tell me that Hogwarts is occupied my Lord,” Wormtail replied nervously. “Dumbledore and members of the Order have apparently anticipated our arrival and...” Wormtail hesitated, hoping that the Dark Lord wouldn’t be angered by the news, “and the Potter boy--he is with them.”

The Dark Lord hid well his surprise. It was too late to alter his plans. The window of opportunity before the beginning of term was narrowing, and his forces were already in place at key locations, ready to breach the grounds of Hogwarts once he had countered the Protection Charms which warded the borders.

“It matters little,” Voldemort responded calmly, “We have an occupying force which is certainly now vast and powerful enough to overwhelm whatever piddling resistance the Old Fool can muster.”

“I have prepared for every contingency,” the Dark Lord said to Wormtail and Bellatrix, “I do not know for certain what protected the boy the first time I encountered him, though I suspect... an Ancient Magic invoked by his mother. It prevents me from touching him directly, or using the killing curse against him, and I expect it will also hamper my ability to possess him,”

“But I know this much, it will not protect him again. What I know of the Prophecy is clear enough--Harry Potter must die by my hand, and by my hand he shall...”

Lord Voldemort held aloft the ceremonial dagger which he intended to use on Harry Potter when the time was right. Bellatrix cackled gleefully as several Dementors hovered nearby. A cruel smile twisted Wormtail’s features.

“We shall carry on as planned,” the Dark Lord continued, “I shall wait in the Forbidden Forest with Crabbe, Goyle, a squad of Lycans, and a squad of Inferi while Macnair leads a regiment of Inferi, Giants, Snatchers, Lycans, and Trolls in a frontal assault. The Acromantulas will join us once Hagrid’s little friend is dispatched with. Rabastan and Rodolphus shall launch an attack with the Snatchers from this very bluff. Bellatrix, you and Wormtail will take your team of Snatchers and Lycans through the hidden passages directly into the castle,”

“When I give the order, moments before we begin the attack, the new Inferi with the Contagion Curse shall be unleashed in towns and villages across Britain, and Snatchers will hit wizarding districts to keep the Ministry occupied. We strike at midnight...”

Huddled nearby, shivering from the cold and wet, Theodore Nott edged towards the back of a group of Snatchers. He was sick of it all.

Without his father, Theodore's lot in the Dark Lord's army had grown even worse. He wished he'd never participated in the assault of Luna and Parvati, or helped Draco kidnap Astoria and escape Hogwarts. Since then, his life had gone into a tailspin. Theodore had lost a handful of fingers, and
ended up in Azkaban, and then in the clutches of a maniac who would just as soon torture and murder any of his own followers as look at them.

Nott knew he deserved everything which had happened to him. His father had always encouraged him to embrace the Dark Path and taught him that his blood-purity gave him the right to use and abuse those lesser than him as he wished, for his own pleasure--until they themselves had both ended up being tortured by the newly risen Dark Lord.

The night before Nott's father had been captured by Aurors during the Liverpool raid, he had made Theodore promise to try and escape if the opportunity arose. Now that a chance lay before him, Theodore decided that if he should make it out alive, he was done with blood-purity and Dark Magic, and that he would do whatever it took to make himself a better person.

While everyone's attention was focused on the Dark Lord, Nott slipped into the shadows of a copse of pines. The noise of the falling rain covered his footsteps. Once assured that nobody had seen him, his heart pounding rapidly, Theodore Nott scrambled around a rocky outcropping and disappeared into the darkness.
Despite the cold and damp, Gilderoy Lockhart was sweating profusely. For all of his bluster, dueling was not his strong suit. Indeed, if Gilderoy were being honest with himself—which was rare—he was quite pathetic at it.

And yet here he was, preparing to attack the school where he had once been a professor, waiting for Bellatrix and Wormtail to return, inside Honeydukes’ cellar with Fenrir Greyback and half a dozen Snatchers.

Lockhart considered making a break for it, but ruled it out almost as quickly as the thought came to mind. Running simply wasn’t an option; he had witnessed first hand what the Dark Lord did to those who disappointed him. A quick death would be a blessing in comparison.

Gilderoy and the Snatchers all started when Wormtail and Bellatrix reappeared with a loud crack, both of them drenched from the storm and dripping onto the floor. Fenrir grinned, hoping to see some action soon. He was getting bored.

“Get up fools,” Bellatrix snapped at the Snatchers who were lazing around eating sweets. “We move now!”

“What’s the rush?” asked one of the younger more foolish Snatchers—unaware of the danger he was courting.

“It will take us some time to travel through the the tunnels up to the castle and find an entrance which hasn’t been blocked,” Wormtail hurriedly responded as Bellatrix’s eyes narrowed at the young Snatcher.

“Dumbledore will almost certainly have blocked the passage which led from behind the statue of the one-eyed witch as that is the one which Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott used to escape the castle,” Wormtail continued.

“Fortunately, before he was captured, Nott Sr left the Dark Lord a map which shows a number of exits which lead to the main tunnel to Honeydukes. We have to find one which hasn’t been blocked...”

“Enough!” Bellatrix snarled. “All the idiot needs to know is that we need to get a move on to be ready when the Dark Lord gives the order.”

Everyone lit their wands and Gilderoy swallowed nervously. He followed the others through the trapdoor into the dark tunnel under the sweet shop, putting some distance between himself and the young Snatcher who had annoyed Bellatrix.

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Harry ignored the rain and glanced at the mountainside behind the castle where Daphne and Fleur were pointing. His eyes widened when he spied numerous flashes of brilliantly coloured light which appeared to be a hundred spells flaring against a nearly imperceptible globe enveloping the grounds of Hogwarts.

The near invisible barrier collapsed and a brigade of wizards raced towards the castle.

Harry tapped his handmirror and spoke, “Professor Dumbledore, they’re attacking from the mountain
behind Hogwarts. There have to be nearly a hundred of them...”

“Thank you Harry,” responded Dumbledore’s image in the mirror. “Stay at the ready and keep me informed of any other movements. I am sending reinforcements to that side of the castle at once...”

Hermione had followed Harry out and grabbed a telescope which was aimed at the front lawn while Daphne rejoined Fleur under the umbrella.

There was another flash of lightning and roar of thunder. Hermione gave a little scream and everyone else dashed out of the Astronomy room onto the observation balcony, their wands at the ready.

“Harry, look, on the front lawn...” beckoned Hermione, her wet furry ears twitching.

Harry’s feet splashed through the puddles as he ran across the cobbled terrace and glanced downwards, seeing a swarm of... something, moving across the lawn. He peered through a telescope, his heart pounding in his ears.

“Inferi...” gasped Harry, “Hundreds of them...”

“And Trolls,” moaned Hermione, wagging her bushy tail, which was quickly becoming saturated by the downpour.

“Not to mention Giants and Werewolves,” Luna said helpfully.

“And Wizards,” added Parvati, when she spotted sparks and beams of light being shot from dozens of wands towards the castle.

Dora swore when she saw the size of Voldemort’s army. Jennifer swallowed anxiously.

“Everyone, open fire!” yelled Harry, “Aim for the monsters. Leave the wizards for the Order. We’ll start with bombarda maxima on my mark... NOW!”

The Coven reacted as one and a powerful blast ripped across the lawn dropping two giants and a dozen trolls. A hundred Inferi flew as well. But the Inferi picked themselves back up and rejoined the throngs which were growing larger by the minute. The Werewolves were hanging back with the Wizards who kept the aim of their own explosive spells trained on the windows and the front door of the castle.

The Coven fired several more times dropping fifteen more Trolls and another Giant, but the Inferi kept coming in waves.

Ginny, Neville, and Viktor shot their own bombardas into the midst of the swarming monsters but they kept coming. At least seven Giants had already reached the castle and begun hammering the walls and the front door. The castle trembled under the blows of the Giants, but the walls, windows, and the door appeared to be holding strongly for the time being.

The groaning Inferi which had reached the castle began piling up against the walls, clambering over each other, forming a mound of undead writhing corpses which reached higher and higher.

Viktor began shooting fiery explosive spells at the Inferi as the concussive ones were not enough to stop them. Dozens caught alight and Neville followed suit. But the flames soon sputtered in the downpour and the Inferi kept coming.

“It’s too wet for normal incendiary spells,” Harry shouted. “Viktor, Neville, Ginny, you three keep aiming bombardas at the giants and the trolls. The Coven and I are going to try... ow!”
Everyone was startled and uttered little gasps at the stings of pain when the torrent turned to ice and large chunks of hail pelted them. But the stinging was rather minor and they all shrugged it off when they realised what was happening. Harry looked up; at least 40 wraiths swooped towards them.

“Dementors!” Harry grimaced. He knew that the Coven could at least deal with them easily enough. “On my mark... NOW!” Harry yelled again.

The Coven’s superpowered Patroni lit up the sky and the Dementors screamed. Moments later the Wraiths shattered, and black ice joined the clear hail which fell upon the students at the top of the Astronomy tower.

The Coven allowed their Patronuses to fade at Harry’s command. They refocused their aim at the grounds below which was teeming with groaning corpses.

“AGAIN!” roared Harry.

The pulses of supercharged Patronus light flooded the lawn and the glowing ethereal felines leapt from their wands, pouncing into the midst of the Undead. The grunts and moans of the Inferi turned into hideous shrieks and their eyes burst into flames in their sockets. The advance of the Inferi halted as all of those within the radius of the Patroni shuddered.

The dead flesh withered and combusted despite the deluge, turning to ash. A thousand Inferi suddenly collapsed into heaps of skeletons, stilled forever. The Giants and Trolls kept hammering the castle, but the spells being fired from the other side of the lawn temporarily halted as the Dark Wizards dropped their jaws in shock.

Macnair and the Snatchers were flabbergasted, and the Lycans were equally astounded. They had never seen anything like it.

~o0o~

Even though the strengthened walls of Hogwarts had already withstood the assault much longer than they would have prior to the Coven’s sex-magic powered “upgrades,” the Headmaster doubted that they would do so forever. He suspected that eventually something would have to give--perhaps some windows--and that some of Voldemort’s forces would gain entrance through the breaches.

Dumbledore had left Snape, Lupin, Dawlish, Karkaroff, Hagrid, and Slughorn to guard the front of the castle while he, Flitwick, Sirius, Shacklebolt, McGonagall, and Hestia Jones had taken to the battlements at the rear.

The Headmaster had given Rita Skeeter the option of remaining protected by the House Elves in the dungeons. But she had surprised him by offering to help safeguard Hogwarts. Rita joined those defending the rear of the castle. Pomfrey, Trelawney, Sprout, Augusta Longbottom, and Arthur and Bill Weasley took another wing of the castle.

Mad Eye and Amelia Bones had wanted to be at Hogwarts too, but Dumbledore had ordered them to remain in London at Number 12 to protect the Potters' relatives.

“Do not hesitate to kill,” Dumbledore warned everyone, much to their astonishment. “We cannot afford to be lenient or all shall be lost.”

As the wind and rain whipped Dumbledore’s beard, he gave the command, and the Order members with him on the stony ramparts facing the mountainside began firing spells at the phalanx of dark wizards approaching.
Theodore Nott heard the explosions in the distance and saw the sky light up time and again as he scrambled down the mountainside. He slipped and fell in a muddy stream. Picking himself up in a panic, he suddenly realised that he couldn’t get off the mountain without entering the grounds of Hogwarts.

The Centaurs assembled in a wet clearing deep in the Forbidden Forest.

“We cannot stand idly by and let the Dark One take Hogwarts,” demanded Firenze passionately.

“We should not interfere,” Ronan replied dolefully. “This war is for wizards. They must determine their own future. It is not our fight. The stars...”

“The stars be damned. Of course it is our fight,” retorted Firenze angrily. “Do you think that Voldemort will allow us to remain here in the forest should he take the castle? This is our home, and the master of Hogwarts is a good wizard and a friend to us all whether you accept it or not.”

Ronan looked troubled. He stroked his red beard pensively and glanced at the dozens of Centaurs gathered around to try and get a read on the general mood. Then he looked to the black Centaur with a wild mane who was being uncharacteristically silent.

“And what is your counsel Bane?” Ronan inquired softly.

Bane hesitated. In times past, he would have expressed himself without delay, proffering his hopes that the wizards would kill each other to the last man. But Bane’s recent encounter with a most unusual coupling in the woods weighed heavily on his mind. Finally he responded.

“Harry Potter remains at the castle this summer,” Bane returned quietly.

Ronan lifted an eyebrow and began to nod, feeling reassured. He well remembered Bane’s infuriated reaction when Firenze had taken the young wizard upon his back. Firenze had been acting for the best in protecting Harry Potter at the time, but that had been a matter of preserving the peace. Joining a war was another matter altogether.

“I concur with Firenze,” Bane continued, his voice hardening. “We must fight.”

A flash of lightning rendered the shock on Ronan’s visage in sharp relief, and a number of other Centaurs began to paw at the ground and whinny incredulously. But as stunned as they all were, none were as surprised as Firenze himself.

Bane’s nostrils flared and he whisked his tail when he realised that his apparent change of heart required further explanation.

“The Potter boy—he is not at all like most wizards. I discovered him mating... with a Felinus in our woods some weeks ago...” a chorus of gasps and neighing greeted Bane’s remarkable proclamation.

“Many in the wizard world revere him,” Bane carried on, ignoring the sounds of astonishment. “Harry Potter has the power to change the hearts of wizards—the example he and his mate present to their world must be protected. And there is more... his magic is Life itself—it must be nurtured and allowed to flourish.”

The gathering of Centaurs was silent except for the pattering of the rain. Finally a dappled Centaur
stepped forward.

“If Bane counsels that we should fight alongside the master of Hogwarts against the Dark One, then I stand with him,” said the dappled Centaur resolutely. A murmur of agreement swept through the Centaurs and Ronan sighed with resignation. The decision had been made.

~o0o~

Harry groaned when he saw another horde of Inferi surging forward from the shadows and mist, crushing the bones of the fallen. The wizards in the distance began shooting spells at the castle again. The sound of squabbling on the terrace caught his attention and he peered at Ginny and Neville who were arguing.

“Neville... NO! She’s too strong for you...” Ginny screamed as Neville darted back into the castle. “We’re supposed to stay here--come back.” But Neville was gone and Ginny chased after him.

Parvati picked up the Marauders’ Map which Ginny had dropped as she bolted after Neville. Parvati’s wet black tail bristled and her furry black ears pricked.

“Harry,” gasped Parvati, “They’re in the castle--Bellatrix Lestrange and some others...”

Harry’s chest tightened as he peered at the map, which was thankfully impervious to water. Harry was torn. When he spotted Peter Pettigrew’s name on the map, Harry was stricken with the same violent urge as Neville.

“Bloody Hell,” Dora muttered. “We’ve got to do something Harry! Fenrir Greyback and that loathsome cretin Lockhart are with Lestrange too.”

“Hermione,” Harry looked at her beseechingly, “What should I do? I have to stay here to fight the Inferi, but we can’t let Neville and Ginny face Bellatrix and Wormtail alone?”

“I’ll go after them Harry. You stay here...”

“No, you can’t go by yourself--I have to go with you...” Harry retorted heatedly.

“Harry, please, I'll be alright,” Hermione pleaded. “Someone else can come with me. You have to stay and direct the fight...”

“I vill go with her Harry,” Viktor responded. “You are needed here.”

“I... I'll g...go too,” stammered Jennifer. She gulped, but then her rain streaked face flushed and a flame sparked in her eyes.

Harry stared at Jennifer as his heart thudded. He knew why she wanted to go.

“I’ll go as well Harry,” Dora said determinedly.

Harry closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath to steady himself.

“Right then,” Harry finally replied. “You go Hermione. Viktor, Jennifer and Dora can go with you. I’ll stay here with Fleur, Daphne, Luna, and Parvati. I’ll notify Dumbledore immediately. Just... please...” Harry heaved a sob, “…please stay alive!”

“I will Harry. I promise,” Hermione tried to smile, but she couldn’t stave off the tears. “Just remember that I love you Mr Potter...”
Harry blinked back his own tears and embraced his wife, feeling a swell of warmth as he inhaled the scent of parchment and toothpaste.

“I love you too Mrs Potter,” Harry whispered, kissing her. “We’ll get through this--I just know it.”
Chapter 121

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a very soggy Dumbledore who sighed when Harry informed him of the turn of events. He turned and addressed the others as they retaliated against the dwindling legion of Snatchers below. He had to shout to be heard over the rainstorm and the barrage of spells being shot back and forth.

“Filius, Kingsley--Pettigrew and Bellatrix Lestrange are inside the castle with Fenrir Greyback and several others. Neville Longbottom and Miss Weasley have apparently taken it upon themselves to seek after Bellatrix...”

“I should go...” Sirius interjected forcefully. “She's my cousin--I know how she thinks!”

Dumbledore considered for a moment, then he nodded. “Right, you and Kingsley then--Filius shall remain here instead.... Please be aware, I have notified the others and also dispatched Bill Weasley and Hagrid after the infiltrators...”

~o0o~

Harry couldn’t believe the number of Undead. Where were the Hordes all coming from? Another troop of reanimated corpses lunged forward, piling up against the side of the castle, once more using each other as ladders. At Harry’s direction, the remaining Coven members recast their Patronuses and several hundred more Inferi turned into bones, and ash which washed away quickly in the rain.

Each time a wave of Inferi were destroyed, another battalion of them charged forth. The five young wizards at the top of the Astronomy Tower kept blasting at the Giants and Trolls while waiting for the next wave to form.

The Snatchers continued firing their own spells at the castle, frustration setting in as the walls of Hogwarts refused to submit to destruction, and trepidation setting in as the wizards at the top of the Astronomy tower demolished the monsters. McNair and several Snatchers tried to get in some shots at whomever was at the top of the tower, but the spells being fired from some of the First Floor windows of Hogwarts prevented them from getting a clear shot.

After what seemed like hours, the great hordes of Inferi were reduced to no more than a few stragglers, and the last Giant at the front of the castle keeled over, causing a minor earthquake.

The Snatchers and Lycans needed to get inside the castle, but for that, they needed to take out Hogwarts’ forward defences and create a breach. Lightning flickered again directly overhead, and a thunderclap rumbled through the grounds. As it faded, several squads of Snatchers darted forward across the muddy lawn, using the mist and the bodies of fallen Giants and Trolls as cover.

One team focused their fire on the Ground Floor windows while other teams targeted the parapets of the Astronomy tower and the windows of the First Floor above, through which the Order were returning fire.

The five Coven members fell back from the Astronomy tower balustrade and gasped for air as spells from below rebounded harmlessly off the battlements, finally allowing themselves a breather.

“What’s next Harry?” asked Luna as she flopped through the entrance of the Astronomy classroom, dragging her soggy tail through the puddles.
“We can’t just let the Order handle the wizards and werewolves by themselves...” Parvati said, shaking the rainwater off her own tail vigorously.

“And we’re not... going to...” panted Harry. “That’s why I told you to bring your brooms--we can’t stay here anyway. We’re a sitting target now... so we’ll take the fight to them and distract them for the Order...”

“We are going to bombard zem from above?” gasped a dripping Fleur. Daphne’s eyes widened as she pushed the wet strands of hair out of her face with her fingers.

“Yeah, you’re all good flyers now...” Harry nodded, “and on the Firebolts we’ll be moving too fast for them to draw a bead on easily. Still, be careful out there, and watch me for the cues...”

~o0o~

“They’ve split up,” groaned Hermione as she looked at the map, her furry tail wagging in agitation. “...the infiltrators I mean--they’ve split into smaller teams. Neville is heading right for Bellatrix and Ginny isn’t far behind him...”

“We must hurry zem...” said Viktor. Dora nodded in agreement.

“But keep an eye out--Wormtail and his team are nearby...” Hermione glanced at Jennifer, “in fact they’re unavoidable unless we go back the way we came...”

Jennifer nodded and took a breath to steady herself. She was as ready as she would ever be.

“Stop...” Hermione whispered. Dora and Viktor halted in their tracks on the other side of the corridor junction. Hermione’s furry tail quivered... she could smell him--Wormtail.

A bolt of magic lit up the intersection and a small blast rocked it, filling the corridors with smoke. Hermione and Jennifer were cut off from Dora and Viktor.

“Go...” Hermione yelled through the smoke at Dora and Viktor, “Find Neville and Ginny before Bellatrix Lestrange does--we’ve got this...”

“No,” Viktor shouted back, “I vill not go anywere wizout you both..”

Dora grabbed Viktor’s arm, “I’ll keep goin’ after the other two--you ‘elp Hermione and Jennifer, alright?”

Viktor could see the determination in Dora’s eyes and nodded, “Go zen, and hurry...”

~o0o~

Ginny finally caught up with Neville as he entered the dungeons.

“Ginny, go back,” Neville said angrily. “I need to do this... But I don't want you to get hurt!”

“No,” Ginny retorted, her eyes brimming with tears “We’re in this together Neville... I’m not letting you face her alone.”

An explosion to their left caught their attention. Ginny and Neville whirled to see Bellatrix Lestrange and three Snatchers standing with their wands all trained on the pair of them. Bellatrix returned her Foe-Glass to a pocket in her robes.

“Well, well, well...” Bellatrix cackled, “If it isn’t two little lovebirds. Oh my, my--how sweet...”
“Bellatrix Lestrange,” Neville muttered, glowering at the evil witch.

“Do I know you?” Bellatrix narrowed her eyes, “Why yes--I believe I do. You’re the Longbottom boy aren’t you? Oh yes... I had *lots* of fun with your parents.”

“I know you did, you hag...” Neville snarled.

“Tut, tut, such language for such a little bitty boy,” Bellatrix giggled madly. “I think your mouth needs to be washed out with soap.”

Neville couldn’t dodge the spell or get a shield up in time. He sputtered as his mouth filled with foam.

“Reducto,” Ginny screamed. But Bellatrix and the Snatchers dodged the spell and it disintegrated a 17th century vase on a shelf instead.

Ginny shouted another spell, “Bombarda!” and the Dark Wizards scattered as they returned fire. Ginny ducked into an alcove in the nick of time as their spells collided with the wall.

Furiously spitting out suds, Neville aimed his wand as Bellatrix darted into his line of fire to avoid being hit by Ginny’s spell.

“Avada Kedavra,” yelled Neville, hot tears running down his burning cheeks.

Bellatrix shrugged off the green sparks from Neville’s wand, and her laugh sent chills up his spine.

“Silly boy! Is that all the little bitty baby has? You need a bit more than righteous anger to do any damage my dear boy. You can’t just *wish* someone was dead--you need to really *feel* it in your bones! And above all, you need *control*. Allow me to demonstrate...”

~o0o~

Wormtail and his team had made it as far as the Fifth Floor. His nose told him that several wizards were nearby... and he recognised the scents of at least two of them. Wormtail furrowed his brow in consternation. One of the scents shouldn’t be here at Hogwarts at all.

Wormtail gestured at the junction at the end of the hallway, and the Snatchers nodded in acknowledgment. Two of them cast bombardas at the intersection and it exploded.

Viktor Krum stepped through the haze and fired a bombarda of his own, making himself visible to draw Wormtail and the Snatchers away from Hermione and Jennifer. Wormtail threw up a shield spell just in time to block it.

Two of the Snatchers gave chase after Viktor, and spells began ricocheting through the corridor, knocking over suits of armour and shattering busts when Wormtail and the other Snatcher began exchanging spells with Hermione and Jennifer.

The two young witches dashed back down the corridor they had come through and found themselves on the veranda in the Hall of Staircases, haphazardly aiming spells behind them as they ran. A tripping jinx felled Jennifer and Hermione tumbled over her, landing on all fours, wand still in hand. Hermione’s furry ears caught two people yelling expelliarmus and her wand flew from her fingers over the side of the balcony along with Jennifer’s.

Two more Snatchers appeared in the passage.
“He got away,” one of them said to Wormtail.

“Don’t worry for now,” Wormtail grinned as he eyed Jennifer and Hermione. He couldn't believe his good fortune. “We’ll deal with him when we catch up with him. In the meantime there are these two...”

Wormtail and the three Snatchers leered at Jennifer and the young Cat-witch, who were now both disarmed.

“You may as well give it up my pretties,” Wormtail chortled evilly as he pointed his wand at them. “You're both mine now...”

Jennifer froze, momentarily petrified in terror. Hermione’s eyes narrowed as she calculated the distance.

In a blur of motion, Hermione flipped in the air as Parvati had taught her during the Triwizard Tournament. With her cat-like reflexes and retractable claws she managed to gouge Wormtail’s face as she soared by him. Wormtail’s wand clattered to the floor as he palmed his face with both hands and howled in pain.

The 3 Snatchers tried to fire curses at the furry tawny and orange blur, but they were too slow. One of the Snatchers hit another with the green bolt of magic which he had aimed at Hermione. The second Snatcher keeled over and the light in his eyes faded. The remaining two Snatchers kept firing spells at the cat-witch and missing as pieces of decor exploded.

Hermione air-flipped again and whipped her bushy tail around one of the Snatchers’ necks. As she rolled and tumbled, the Snatcher went crashing into the last one. The momentum carried both Snatchers over the side of the veranda and they fell 6 Floors to their deaths.

Hermione landed on her feet facing Wormtail. He had managed to pull himself together and find his wand and now he had Jennifer in his clutches with his wand pressed under her neck. Blood dripped from the deep claw-marks gouged in Wormtail’s face and he was livid.

“Try that again you little Cat-Whore,” Wormtail snarled, “and the slag dies.”

A pilot-light clicked on inside Jennifer and her terror vanished as a furnace of fury burst into flame in her gut. Jennifer jabbed her elbow savagely into Ratface’s large, soft belly. Ratface groaned and doubled-over in pain. His wand went flying again, but this time it too disappeared over the edge of the Veranda.

Something snapped inside Hermione as well. This was the disgusting mass murderer who had been responsible for the death of Harry’s parents and who had kept Jennifer as his sex-slave for months. Hermione had never hated someone as much as she hated Wormtail in that moment--except for perhaps Draco Malfoy and Gilderoy Lockhart.

Hermione knew that the Chinese Symbols didn’t make them completely invulnerable, but they had even staved off the worst effects of the non-incendiary blasting spells during practice; perhaps they would be strong enough for her crazy idea. Hermione took the chance and charged at Wormtail who still had Jennifer in his grasp, sending all of them crashing into the railing.

The bannister broke and the three of them fell from the balcony. The last thought which went through Wormtail's head as the floor rushed up at him was one of utter disbelief.

Professor Remus Lupin heard the fighting above and paused in casting curses through one of the First Floor windows at the Snatchers, Werewolves--and now Acromantulas as well--who were
rushing in to get closer to the castle, now that most of the monsters were down for the count.

Lupin dashed across the First Floor veranda from the window and peered up 4 floors. For the umpteenth time tonight, Lupin wished that he had the sort of control that Born Lycans and Animagi had, instead of this wretched Lycanthropy--this Werewolf Curse--uncontrollable, except with medicine, like a disease.

Without a full moon, Lupin was only a wizard, but with a full moon he was nothing but a beast in agony, unable to discern friend from foe. The Trueborn Clans were descendants of Wolf Animagi... or so they claimed. Though only a minority of Born Werewolves ever displayed any Wizarding abilities, just the same as everyone else, so nobody really knew the truth for certain.

If Lupin could have “wolfed up,” he would have bounded up the staircases in seconds, but all he could do was watch in horror as three people tumbled--in slow motion--from a splintering balcony 4 floors above him all the way to the Ground Floor below.

“NOOOOO...!” screamed Remus Lupin as he charged down a staircase to the Ground Floor.

He was shocked when he saw one of the surely broken bodies crawling towards another one which was stirring to sit up.

“Professor Lupin... we’re alright,” Hermione shouted, waving her bushy tail weakly as she cuddled Jennifer several metres away from another crumpled form on the floor.

“Thank goodness you’re both alive!” Lupin gasped, thrilled to see the two girls apparently none the worse for wear. “How did you...? You fell six floors...!”

“Chinese Protection Symbols...” Hermione’s words were cut with wracks of pain. “Tattoos... Harry painted them on us... We’ll both be fine... I meant to push us all over... only way to get him...”

Hermione trailed off into a long groan. Every inch of her body hurt. At least she could move everything. Nothing seemed to be broken--though there would certainly be a lot of bruising. Jennifer sobbed in Hermione’s arms and the cat-witch curled her tail around the girl as well to comfort her.

“I froze...” wailed the dark haired girl. “I saw him--and I froze!”

“Sssshh... but then you unfroze, Jennifer,” Hermione reassured Jennifer with a kiss on the lips. Jennifer stopped crying, and melted into the kiss.

“We could both be dead if you hadn’t,” Hermione continued when her lips released Jennifer's. “You gave me the moment I needed to get the drop on the Bastard.”

Eyes wide open, her heart racing, Jennifer peered at Hermione and touched her own lips in wondemerment. She had never really understood how Hermione always seemed to know exactly what she was feeling. Jennifer had needed a kiss and Hermione had just known--she had felt Jennifer's need and just reacted. Suddenly Jennifer lurched forward and returned Hermione’s kiss, closing her eyes. Moments later Jennifer leaned back slightly.

“Thank you Hermione!” Jennifer whispered. “I’m alive--and Ratface is dead! You kept your promise...”

Professor Lupin tried to ignore the young witches' intimate moment and drew closer to the crumpled, unmoving “Bastard” to see who he was. The neck of the rotund wizard on the ground appeared to be bent at an unnatural angle, a crimson pool spreading on the floor under the head. The familiar looking wizard's dead eyes were still open wide with shock. Lupin gasped when he saw the bloodied
face.

It was Peter Pettigrew. Dead of a caved in skull and broken neck!

Remus Lupin’s eyes narrowed and he nodded in satisfaction. The manner of Wormtail’s death was fitting for someone who had betrayed his friends and participated in so much killing and torment—the Avada Kedavra too easy and painless. Lupin allowed himself a few moments to savour the moment that Wormtail’s role in the murder of Lily and James Potter had been avenged by their son’s wife.

A moment later Remus realised that his own face was wet with tears and turned his back on Peter’s inert form. Remus stalked over to examine the other two bodies on the ground nearby, neither of which he recognised.

Hermione accioed her wand, and then the map which had fallen nearby. As Hermione pored over the map, her bushy tail bottlebrushed and her breath caught.

“Professor Lupin, quickly,” Hermione squeaked, “We’ve got to get to the Third Floor—Lockhart and Fenrir Greyback are closing in on Dora...”

~000~

Gilderoy Lockhart had a girl with ash-brown hair in his sights but he hesitated. He had reacted in the nick of time and disarmed her after nearly running into the girl as he rounded a corner. She was young and pretty—such a waste. And besides which, Lockhart really wasn’t very comfortable with the actual killing part of being a Death Eater. He’d managed to avoid it so far by leaving it to the Snatchers and Lycans in the Dark Lord’s Army whenever he had gone on raids.

Truth be told, Gilderoy was quite squeamish about killing; which was why he had developed his ‘Charm, Capture, Obliviate, and Release’ strategy at a young age.

“Kill her and be done with it...” snarled Fenrir Greyback.

Well, there was a first time for everything, reasoned Lockhart. Better the girl with ash-brown hair than himself.

Gilderoy leered at Dora, “Sorry Love, nothing personal! I prefer The Living to The Dead—but... well, I prefer being among The Living myself, so I’m afraid this is good-bye... Avada Keda...”

A scuffling noise caught Lockhart’s attention.

“YOU!” Greyback roared at one of the figures in the hallway junction.

Lockhart’s momentary distraction was all that Dora needed; she silently reached out her hand and her wand skimmed across the floor in an instant. Lockhart looked back too late.

Fire burned in Dora’s eyes; a rage she had channeled into being an Auror-in-Training, a rage which she had forgotten she still had within her in the time that she had grown closer to the Potters and the rest of the Coven.

It was the rage which had nearly got her expelled from Hogwarts for unleashing it on the boy who had assaulted her first girlfriend. And it was a rage fueled by the pain she felt for every one of Lockhart’s young victims—wizard and muggle alike.

The controlled rage exited Dora’s wand in an arc of green lightning and Lockhart fell to the floor, dead.
It all happened so fast. Dora heard Hermione screaming Professor Lupin’s name and looked up to see Lupin struggling underneath Greyback, who was wolfing up. Lupin was losing the battle because it wasn’t the full moon and he was only a Turned Werewolf.

Another green arc of magic shot from tip of Dora’s wand, hitting Fenrir Greyback in his side; he collapsed on top of Lupin. Lupin kicked his feet up and pushed the dead half-transformed Lycan off himself with a grunt.

“Th... thanks Tonks...” Lupin gasped. “I’m sorry... I let him get too close. He was on me before I could curse him...”

“Don’t worry about it Lupin,” Dora replied, panting heavily. “Thank you! ...All o’ you--If you and Hermione and Jennifer hadn’t arrived right now... I’d be a goner...”

Dora had never killed anyone before, and it was unnerving to say the least to realise that she had it in her. But she was alive and Lupin was alive.

And Jennifer and Hermione were alive; Dora spied the same hollowness in their eyes and somehow she knew that Wormtail was dead. The three young witches flung themselves on each other and embraced tearfully.

Remus Lupin smiled and turned away to give them a moment to themselves. He heard a voice calling him and turned to see Bill Weasley running up.

“Is everyone alright Remus? Who’s that on the ground?” Bill gasped. “Merlin! ...Is that who I think it is?”

“Fenrir Greyback and Gilderoy Lockhart,” Remus nodded. “Tonks got them both...”

Chapter End Notes

Just a brief reminder, werewolves have been revisioned a bit for the purposes of this fic.
“Protego,” shouted Neville as Bellatrix Lestrange’s spell exited her wand and the three Snatchers converged on the alcove which Ginny was hiding in. But Neville’s shield spell wasn’t strong enough to block Bellatrix’s Crucius Curse and he collapsed with a scream, dropping his wand and writhing on the floor in agony.

“Neville!” shrieked Ginny.

One of the Snatchers took advantage of Ginny’s distraction, and disarmed her, sending her wand clattering down the dungeon corridor.

“Bring the girl to me,” Bellatrix snapped.

“No... please,” moaned Neville, “Don’t hurt her. Hurt me instead...”

“My, my! How noble of you Longbottom!” Bellatrix snickered, “Oh I will hurt you... yes I will. This is just playtime for me, but for you, this will be a demonstration of what it takes to really cause someone pain or kill them. You have to really enjoy it my dear boy...”

Moments before she did it, Neville had a horrible feeling that he knew what Bellatrix Lestrange was going to do next. It all seemed to happen in slow motion. Bellatrix aimed her wand at Ginny.

“Expulso,” someone yelled.

A blast of energy launched into the corridor startling Bellatrix. She staggered back against the wall and the spell hit the Snatchers, knocking them all off their feet. Ginny scrambled back into the alcove, her heart pounding against the wall of her chest.

Every nerve ending was still on fire but Neville used every ounce of his will to focus and summon his wand. Strong hands pulled him to his feet and Neville finally got a look at his rescuer.

“Th...thanks Viktor,” Neville stammered.

“You are velcome,” Viktor responded, dragging Neville behind a pillar.

“Ginny...” Neville groaned, sweating anxiously.

“Don’t worry,” said Viktor, “I haff reinforcements...”

The Snatchers shook their heads clear and looked up at the entrance to the dungeons to see who else had just arrived. One of the Snatchers raised their wand, only to be hit by a bolt of green lightning coming from the doorway. The other two clambered to their feet and took off running.

Bellatrix’s eyes went wide as she peered around a corner

“Sirius!” she gasped. “What are you doing here?”

“Hello dear cousin,” Sirius said drily. “Are you prepared to give up quietly? Or are you going to force me to kill you?”

“Kill me?” Bellatrix cackled. “You must be joking. You’re one of Dumbledore’s. You forget how well I know you. You don’t have it in you...”
“Really?” Sirius responded with a cold voice. “Two of your compatriots have deserted you, but look there...”

Bellatrix looked to see where Sirius was pointing and spied the unmoving Snatcher lying on the floor. She narrowed her eyes, flaring her nostrils as reality sank in.

“You’ll never take me,” hissed Bellatrix. Thick smoke poured out of the end of her wand, blocking Sirius’s line of sight.

Sirius shot another bolt of green lightning through the billowing clouds, missing by a wide margin. Bellatrix had darted into another dungeon tunnel, but from his vantage point, Neville still had eyes on her.

Another curse came to mind, one which he had heard Harry discussing with Hermione when they thought Neville wasn’t listening. They had both decided that the curse might be too dangerous and too advanced to teach him and Ginny just yet, but Neville remembered the incantation.

“Sectumsempra,” Neville snarled, hoping that his aim was true; the running witch was almost out of sight. He heard a scream and knew that he had hit Bellatrix, but the receding sound of her footfalls on the stone floors told him that she was still on her feet.

The smoke cleared and Neville ran to the alcove where Ginny was still trembling.

“Ginny!” Neville sobbed, throwing his arms around her. “I’m sorry! I shouldn’t have tried to go after her. I thought... no, I mean I wasn’t thinking at all... I just...”

“Sssh Nev!” Ginny said comfortingly as she clutched Neville tightly. “I’m alright... I understand--if she’d done to my parents what she did to yours, I would’ve done exactly the same thing.”

Ginny kissed Neville fiercely to show him that she meant it and he reciprocated. When they parted he felt much better, and they both looked for Ginny’s wand.

Viktor and Sirius strode down the dungeon passage which Bellatrix had taken to the next junction. But she was nowhere to be seen. All they found was a pool of blood on the stone floor and scarlet splatter dripping down the rocky wall.

“Damn!” Sirius swore. “She’s in these tunnels somewhere, and so are two of Voldemort’s men. We’ve got to find them. I’ll get Hagrid and Kingsley down here immediately...”

“Here is her vand,” said Viktor. “She must haff dropped it ven she got hit wiz Neville’s curse.”

“Good,” Sirius nodded. “I’ll give it to Dumbledore later.” Sirius glanced at the blood again, then peered down the corridor at Neville in surprise.

“That was quite a curse indeed,” muttered Sirius. “I never would have guessed that Longbottom had it in him...”

~o0o~

Harry swore when he spied Acromantulas swarming from the Forbidden Forest to join the Dark Wizards fighting below. He soared through the driving rain above the field of battle at the front of the castle, firing explosive spells at the Wizards, Werewolves, and enormous Arachnids.

He zigged and zagged to avoid the curses being fired back at him. Fleur and Daphne circled above the lawn blasting away as well. Members of the Order continued shooting their own spells from the
castle windows. Luna and Parvati swooped towards the Forbidden Forest, using every spell they could think of to cut the Acromantulas off.

It seemed to be working. The Acromantulas emerging from the forest saw the bodies of their brethren piling up and doubled back, thinking better of it. As much as they enjoyed the flesh of humans, they preferred living.

But then Harry’s worst fear came true. Dark Wizards were in the forest. He saw a spell hit Luna’s broom and it spiraled into the woods. Panic clutched Harry’s chest and he put on a burst of speed towards Parvati.

“Down there,” Parvati screamed when she spotted Harry flying towards her. “I saw her go down right there.”

“Right then,” Harry gasped. “I’m going in...”

“I’m coming too!” Parvati stated adamantly. Harry knew there was no time to argue. A flash of lightning over the castle made Parvati’s determined features all too clear.

“Alright,” Harry swallowed in trepidation. “Together then... But be careful. There are obviously more Wizards, and probably Werewolves in there too.”

Harry and Parvati didn’t want to provide whomever had struck Luna’s broomstick with another target, so they flew low just above the trees, coming from a different direction, and then dismounted near where Luna had crashed.

Rain streamed from the trees as they crept quietly through the sodden underbrush. The sounds of hooves and howling Werewolves nearby could be heard until another thunderclap drowned them out.

Harry’s heart beat loudly in his ears. He spied several wizards in a clearing ahead. A branch cracked to his left and Harry spun around, shoving Parvati behind him into the bushes. Harry didn’t recognise the spell which he took for Parvati. The last thing Harry saw before he blacked out was a slashing wand and a burst of purple flame.

~o0o~

Theodore Nott tromped through the woods along the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest, panting heavily when he heard a crashing in the branches above him. A body and a broken broomstick tumbled to the ground. He wiped the rain out of his eyes and ran forward to see who it was.

Nott recognised the dirty blonde hair, white cat ears, and now quite muddy white bedraggled cat-tail. Luna Lovegood? What was she doing here at school in the summer? Nott didn’t have time to think though.

“Over here... The witch went down over here somewhere,” a voice called out.

Panicking, Nott did the only thing he could think of. He picked up Luna’s inert form under her arms and dragged her into the wet bushes. Shaking with fear, Nott stayed as silent as he could under the dripping canopy of the bushes as he watched the feet of several wizards stalking by.

“I see a broomstick, but I don’t see the witch,” another voice shouted.

“Never mind that, we’ve got Potter,” someone else gloated. “Forget the witch. She probably broke ‘er neck when she fell. That was a hard crash.”
“You’ve got Potter? Are you certain?”

“Yeah! It’s ‘im alright. I’d recognise ‘im anywhere. The Dark Lord’ll be real pleased about this...”

“Good, because he’s right livid at the moment, the way this battle’s been going.”

Nott waited for the happy wizards to leave, then he carefully pulled Luna out of the bushes and examined her as rivulets of rainwater poured onto them from the trees above.

“Please don’t be dead...” Nott gasped.

Images from the day he had groped Luna and Parvati with Draco and the other Slytherins flashed before his eyes along with an image of a little blonde girl lying half-naked in the snow with Draco on top of her, and Nott felt an overwhelming wave of shame.

“Please don’t be dead!” Nott repeated with a sob.

Trembling, Nott put his ear to Luna’s chest. He fell back with a sigh of relief. Luna was still breathing.

“Get away from her, you lousy cretin,” snarled an angry witch. Nott whirled around and spied Parvati bearing down on him, her black tail undulating wildly.

“No, you don’t understand...” Nott moaned.

“What’s to understand? That’s my girlfriend you’re pawing at again,” Parvati's black tail quivered and bristled with rage, as she tried to decide which spell to use.

Parvati swallowed as her stomach tightened. She had thought herself prepared to kill any Death Eater or Dark Wizard she came across--especially someone like Nott. But finding herself face to face with him--and he didn’t even have his wand out--the idea of it just made her feel ill. It wasn’t the same as firing curses at people attacking her in the heat of battle.

“Please...” whimpered Nott, “I was just...”

“Shut up! Don’t even...” Tears began to stream down Parvati’s cheek as she saw Luna lying there, unmoving. Parvati didn’t know if Luna was alive or dead.

Parvati badly wanted to hurt Nott, but her hand wouldn’t stop shaking. Why was this so hard? It should be easy. Finally something snapped inside of her and Parvati began to flick her wand.

“Parvati, stop...” Luna weakly said as she began to stir and her eyes fluttered open.

Parvati gasped and nearly dropped her wand, “Luna, what...?”

“Nott saved me,” Luna groaned in pain as she sat up.

“No... that can’t be...” Parvati glared at Nott who remained as still as possible. “You were out cold Luna--I thought you were dead. How would you even know...?”

“I was knocked out when I crashed through the trees,” Luna replied calmly. “But as my brain began working again I heard the Snatchers looking for me, and Nott pulled me into the bushes so that they wouldn’t find me--I would be dead if Nott hadn’t saved me...”

Still not sure whether to believe Luna, Parvati slowly lowered her wand as she continued to scowl, her wet furry black ears and tail twitching furiously. Theodore Nott let out his breath in relief, and
burst into tears.

“I’m sorry!” Theodore sobbed, “I’m sorry for everything... I know I deserve whatever you were going to do to me. I... I know that what I did was wrong...”

Seeing that Nott no longer appeared to be a threat, Parvati allowed a surge of relief to flow through her and ran to Luna’s side. Parvati began to cry herself as she flung her arms and slick black tail around Luna who was smiling serenely now.

“I thought... I really thought you were dead,” Parvati wept. Luna wrapped her own muddy cat tail around Parvati and pulled her into a kiss while Nott continued to sob.

“Where’s Harry?” Luna asked when the kiss ended.

“We have to go find him,” Parvati looked stricken. “I’m sure he’s still alive--I heard the Snatchers say so. They took him... We have to get him back.”

“We can’t do this by ourselves,” Luna said reasonably. “Do you have a mirror?”

Parvati nodded.

“Call Dumbledore then,” Luna murmured. “We’ll need whatever help we can get.”

As the blackness of the stormy night turned to grey, the Headmaster realised that dawn was approaching. He was astounded that the walls of Hogwarts remained unbreached. Albus Dumbledore knew that the Coven’s ‘upgrades’ had been expansive, but he hadn’t expected them to hold out indefinitely.

The legion of wizards who had attacked Hogwarts from the mountainside were now strewn in puddles across the meadow behind the castle. No longer needed at the back of the castle, Dumbledore and the rest of those defending the rear had joined those at the front. He noted with satisfaction that the ranks of the attackers which were still standing there, were greatly diminished.

He was astonished that the Coven had wiped out what appeared to be the remains of several thousand Inferi. A dozen Giants and numerous Trolls also lay broken and defeated on the lawn. But a growing anxiety gnawed at the Headmaster when he only spied Misses Delacour and Greengrass flying above.

That fear was realised when he received the mirror-call from Parvati Patil. Hagrid, Sirius Black, and Viktor Krum were still searching the dungeons for Bellatrix and her companions. Dumbledore knew that the task was his own, but he needed backup.

“Severus, I require your assistance,” Dumbledore called out. “Voldemort has Harry.”

The blood drained from Snape’s already exceedingly pale face.

“Then you shall require more than my help,” Snape replied.

“Indeed, I have summoned Bill Weasley and Remus as well.”

“Have you informed Mrs Potter?” Severus asked, raising an eyebrow.

Dumbledore looked troubled and his chest tightened; he swallowed anxiously. Snape saw the unwillingness to put Hermione Potter in harm’s way once again in the Headmaster’s eyes, and he
sighed.

“You must...” Severus began. An eerie loud hiss of a voice echoed through Hogwarts, and everyone within and without the castle stilled.

~o0o~

The Dark Lord was wild with rage. Hours had passed, and except for those who had entered through the secret tunnels from Hogsmeade, his forces had yet to gain entrance to the castle, and his army was crumbling.

The Centaurs had routed the Lycans, and those Werewolves which remained alive were now scattered throughout the Forbidden Forest being hunted. All of the Dark Lord’s plans were turning to dust. This made no sense. Where had he gone wrong?

But as dawn broke, Antonin Dolohov, Thorfinn Rowle and several Snatchers burst into the clearing which held Lord Voldemort and his entourage. Voldemort saw that they carried an unconscious figure, and he dared to hope again.

“My Lord, I bear a gift...” Dolohov bowed before his master. “I have the Potter boy.”

Voldemort was flanked by Crabbe, Goyle, and his remaining Dementors which numbered no more than a baker’s dozen, Nagini curled at his feet. The Dark Lord nodded and a thin smile crept to his lips. With Harry Potter in his hands, Lord Voldemort’s plans could yet be salvaged.

“Good, good... Bring the boy to me,” hissed the Dark Lord. “You have done well. I shall reward you handsomely when this is finished.”

Dolohov and Rowle lay Harry Potter down on a makeshift altar before their master as the rain finally began to ease. The Dark Lord readied his ceremonial dagger, which had been specifically enchanted to absorb the lifeforce and magic of the victim, and transfer it to the owner of the blade.

Voldemort chuckled. It was time to make his announcement. Touching his wand to his own throat, the Dark Lord’s voice carried through the grounds of Hogwarts.

“Harry Potter is mine,” Lord Voldemort boasted. “Give up the castle and bow down before me, and I may spare him—But if you do not, I shall take his life and his power, and kill every last one of you with his magic added to my own. You have 5 minutes to decide how you want this to be concluded.”

The Dark Lord chortled. He wasn’t going to wait 5 minutes. He was going to end the Potter line right here and now, and put the bane of his existence out of his mind once and for all. Voldemort raised his dagger and drove it downwards.

Voldemort’s ceremonial dagger shattered when it hit Harry Potter’s ribcage. The resultant release of magic radiated explosively in a concentric circle which knocked everyone in the glade into the mud except for the Dementors.

Harry bolted awake with a gasp of pain and saw the Dementors swarming around him as he heard a number of apparition cracks. Harry could hear Hermione screaming his name. He didn’t know what was happening, but Harry knew he wasn’t going to lose his soul to a Dementor’s Kiss.

Remus Lupin had apparated closest to Harry and began to cast his Patronus. But Harry and Hermione beat him to it.
“Expecto Patronum,” Harry and Hermione both roared.

The last of the Dementors shattered in the crossfiring Patronuses, and Lupin was caught by the shockwave of light. The radiant, spectral Lion and Lioness bounded towards Lupin and bowled him over. Harry leapt to his feet.

“Professor Lupin,” Harry gasped, terrified that his and Hermione’s Patroni might have had some sort of ill effects on the Werewolf professor, “Are you alright?”

Lupin appeared dazed for a moment, then he grinned up at Harry.

“Never better,” said Remus giddily as the euphoria washed through him.

Everyone but Lupin was startled when Voldemort shrieked and rose in a wisp of black smoke.

“You think this is over?” the Dark Lord screamed. “I am the Master of Death. I am Lord Voldemort and you shall all fall before my might...”

Voldemort soared above the trees into the early morning sun which was now peeking through a cloudbreak above the mountaintops. Everyone stood dumbfounded as they watched Voldemort fly without the aid of a broomstick. Nagini slithered off into the woods.

Albus Dumbledore winked at the flabbergasted Boy-Who-Lived-Yet-Again, “Don’t worry Harry. I’ve got this...”

A white cloud swirled around Dumbledore and lifted him into the air. Dumbledore ascended rapidly and disappeared above the trees.

Hermione flung herself on Harry as tears of happiness streamed down her glowing cheeks, her fluffy ginger tail tightening around him.

“Harry... you’re alive!” squeaked Hermione.

“Was there ever any doubt?” Harry grinned.

“Prat!” Hermione retorted before she snogged Harry silly.

Severus Snape, Bill Weasley, and Remus Lupin all looked away as the young couple continued to embrace. An apparent thunderclap took everyone by surprise, as the rain was little more than a light shower now, and more gaps could be seen in the clouds through the trees.

“Come on,” Lupin beckoned. He grasped Harry and Hermione and the three of them vanished with a crack.

Moments later they reappeared on the front lawn of the castle where the few Snatchers still standing had thrown down their wands and were surrendering to the defenders of Hogwarts. Everyone looked up at the sky where a rainbow was forming.

A black cloud and a white cloud appeared to be in battle as bolts of multicoloured lightning arced between them. They swirled around each other and there was one final boom which shook the Grounds of Hogwarts. The Black Cloud descended rapidly and hit the lawn with a solid thump.
The white cloud drifted towards the ground and settled lightly on the lawn next to the groaning crumpled form of Lord Voldemort. The cloud dissipated, revealing the tall figure of the Headmaster looming above the dark wizard. Everyone stilled, silently watching in anticipation.

Hermione curled her bushy tail around Harry as they both drew their breaths. Albus Dumbledore sighed and drew the Sword of Gryffindor from within his robes as he peered unblinkingly at Tom Riddle.

Voldemort snorted angrily, then winced in pain, still not certain how all of his plans had gone so horribly awry. With his muggle father’s blood cast out, the Dark Lord should have been the Headmaster’s superior in every way. Still, Voldemort consoled himself with the fact that he had an ace in the hole, six of them to be precise. He would find another wizard to bring him back eventually. Feeling somewhat mollified, he silently returned Dumbledore’s gaze.

“Well Tom,” Dumbledore finally said, “It appears that your second reign of terror has come to an ignominious end.”

Dumbledore’s piercing blue gaze penetrated Tom Riddle’s blazing red eyes as he stood over the prone “Dark Lord” with the Sword of Gryffindor in hand. Voldemort cackled in response.

“You are a fool Dumbledore,” the Dark Lord hissed, confident that his horcruxes would continue to bind him to life. “I have traveled further into the realm of Death than any before me, and returned. I have defeated Death and I shall rise again, stronger than before. Besides, I know you... You are too much of a Coward to kill.”

Voldemort faltered slightly when he saw the Headmaster of Hogwarts’ eyes twinkling and a smile creep to the old man’s lips. Was Dumbledore really that stupid? Did he not understand that the Dark Lord was destined to rule Britain? Did he truly not see the futility of killing the unkillable? Had all those Lemon-drops gone to Dumbledore’s head?

Dumbledore had seen all he needed to see. Tom Riddle was rather adept at Legilimency, but he no longer had enough control to be a truly great Occlumens.

The Headmaster chuckled softly. At one time he might have felt some small measure of pity for the pathetic delusional creature which he saw lying before him.

After all, it hadn’t really been Tom Riddle’s fault that he had been marked by diseased inbreeding and magical rape from birth. Riddle had been left motherless by a severely damaged and emotionally stunted young woman dying of a broken heart. It wasn’t Tom Riddle’s fault that he could never feel love.

But the time for pity was long, long past. Lord Voldemort was the creation of a remarkably intelligent young man who had been given every opportunity to forge a new path for himself. As sad as it was that he had not the capacity to develop a more positive future for himself, and had fallen into psychosis and delusion, Riddle had for too long wrought too much cruelty and destruction to be afforded the luxury of sympathy.

“No this time, Tom!” Dumbledore sighed as he swung the Sword of Gryffindor.

The look of shock froze on Voldemort’s face as his head was violently cleaved from his body and
flew through the air. It struck the sloping lawn and tumbled all the way down the hill into the Black Lake as a red puddle formed in the grass by the gaping neck of Tom Riddle’s corpse.

Dumbledore reached out with his senses, then glanced towards the Forbidden Forest and spied Nagini slithering away through the field of demolished Inferi, and the dead and wounded Giants, Trolls, Lycans, and Wizards. With a crack the Headmaster apparated to within the serpent’s striking range. Nagini hissed and lunged at the Headmaster.

The Sword of Gryffindor flashed in the morning sun once again, and the Great Snake’s head was sent soaring after its Master’s into the Black Lake.

There was now only one Horcrux left, and thanks to Tom Riddle’s lack of control, the Headmaster now knew where it resided. Albus Dumbledore strode back through the fallen towards the castle with some satisfaction. Retrieving Hufflepuff’s cup should be a relatively simple task.

Pending the destruction of the last Horcrux, the Order and the Coven could now focus all of their efforts on exposing the Minister’s crimes and bringing her to justice.

~o0o~

Madam Pomfrey ignored the wounded attackers lying on the front lawn, leaving them to the devices of the Healers who were already arriving from St Mungo’s, and the Aurors who would soon be following.

All weariness from the long night forgotten, Madam Pomfrey bustled around the Hospital Wing tending to the members of the Coven. She was relieved to no end that they had all survived the tumultuous ordeal that they had faced. Fleur, Daphne, Parvati, and Dora seemed none the worse for wear, but the rest needed looking after, as did Neville.

“Well, Mr Potter, you shouldn’t be conscious at all,” Madam Pomfrey shook her head in amazement as she passed Harry a foul smelling potion to drink. “That was quite a nasty spell you took. It should have damaged your internal organs far more than it did.”

Harry winced as he sat up in his bed to take the potion. Once the battle was over and Voldemort lay dead, Harry’s adrenaline had diminished; exhaustion and pain had set in.

“It must be these Chinese symbols,” Harry replied as he took a whiff of the potion and wrinkled his nose. “I’m not sure why though—I thought they only protected our internal organs and bones from physical injury.”

Harry peered questioningly at Hermione who was lying in another bed next to his.

“I’m not sure why either Harry,” Hermione responded with a shrug which made her groan in pain. “All I can think is that they must have made our internal organs extremely resilient.”

“Well, be that as it may, your organs still received a nasty shock, and you’ll still need to drink that potion Mr Potter,” Madam Pomfrey said brusquely. “Come on then, drink up. I need to look after your wife and the others...”

Harry grimaced, then quickly downed the revolting potion so that Madam Pomfrey could move on to her next patient.

“Urgh, that’s horrid...” he gasped.

“Very good Mr Potter,” Pomfrey’s stern features softened and she smiled at him. “One more of those
tomorrow and you’ll be as right as rain. You should feel lucky—you might have been drinking that several times a day for a few weeks. You can have a pain potion and a sleeping draught after I’ve given everyone else a look.”

Harry nodded and took a sip of water to rinse the vile taste from his mouth as Madam Pomfrey examined Hermione who had come up black and blue all over.

“Well dear,” said Pomfrey after a moment, “except for some nasty bruising and a few hairline fractures, you seem all in order. Which is incredible after that fall—six floors, my word!”

Hermione peered gratefully and proudly at her husband, “Thanks to Harry and his excellent calligraphy skills…”

“Do Miss Watts and Miss Lovegood also bear these remarkable runes dear?” asked Madam Pomfrey.

“Yeah,” Harry replied, blushing slightly at Hermione’s praise. “I painted them on all of us a few days ago.”

“Then I daresay that you saved everyone’s lives including your own, Mr Potter,” Pomfrey concluded with a very pleased expression. “Misses Watts and Lovegood should be no worse off than Mrs Potter here.”

And with that, Madam Pomfrey waved her wand over Hermione and murmured an incantation which Harry recognised as the one which Gilderoy Lockhart had attempted to use on Harry’s arm in Second Year, much to Harry’s detriment.

Madam Pomfrey’s spell was far more effective of course. Then she passed Hermione a potion for the bruising. Hermione’s furry ears twitched and she sniffed the potion apprehensively.

“Oh, thank goodness! It doesn’t smell as awful as yours Harry,” Hermione glanced apologetically at Harry who grinned at her.

“Right then,” said Madam Pomfrey, “I’ll be back with the pain potions and sleeping draughts in a moment when I’ve finished. You two can share a bed now if you’d like.”

Fleur and Daphne came over to tuck Hermione in with Harry when Madam Pomfrey moved on to Jennifer. Dora was sitting between Harry and Jennifer’s bed, holding Jennifer’s hand. Once she had finished with Jennifer, Madam Pomfrey took care of Luna, who was being cuddled by Parvati.

Finally, Madam Pomfrey gave Neville a soothing potion which immediately eased any lingering inflammation of his nerves caused by the Cruciatus Curse. Then she went to find pain potions and sleeping draughts for everyone.

“Well, that ought to do it for you Longbottom,” Madam Pomfrey said when she returned, “You’re fit to leave now. Though I suggest plenty of rest for you as well… You too Miss Weasley—you look exhausted,” she nodded at Ginny who had been sitting with Neville.

“Here’s a vial of sleeping draught for each of you. I suggest you both take it as soon as possible—though you may eat first if you’re hungry.”

“Thank you Madam Pomfrey,” said Ginny happily. “Can Neville and I visit the others later.”

“Perhaps this evening dear, after all of you have had a good long nap,” Madam Pomfrey assured her with a smile. “Now run along while I finish up with the others.”
“Thanks Madam Pomfrey,” Neville said as he got up. “We’ll come back later then.”

~000~

Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape rejoined Hagrid and Sirius at the dungeon entrance. Viktor Krum, McGonagall, and Karkaroff appeared moments later.

“Blimey!” exclaimed Hagrid, “There’s not a ruddy sign o’ the hag anywhere...”

“There must be another secret exit from the castle in the dungeons,” Sirius sighed resignedly. They had been looking for several hours to no avail.

“At least we caught the hooligans who were with her,” sniffed McGonagall. “I have left them with the others being rounded up at the front of the castle.

“Quite!” Dumbledore nodded and sighed too. “Well, there is little else we can do for the moment. We have Bellatrix’s wand and she is injured--and from what young Mr Longbottom told me, we can be certain that she will not be up to any mischief anytime soon. Apparently, he used a cutting curse which is well known to you Severus.”

Snape raised an eyebrow in surprise.

“Really? That is quite a feat for Longbottom,” Severus looked slightly abashed for a moment, then he swallowed and his dark eyes glittered with satisfaction. “He has come a long way indeed from the little boy who was once terrified of his own shadow...”

“Regardless,” Sirius interjected. “We cannot count Bellatrix out. She will bide her time until she heals and finds a new wand. But when she does, she will be seeking revenge--and if Bellatrix should make a pact with the Minister...”

Sirius trailed off, and everyone shuffled uncomfortably at the unsavoury thought. The ruminations of the searchers were interrupted by the appearance of Kingsley Shacklebolt at the dungeon entrance.

“Albus, they are here--Scrimgeour and the Aurors just arrived.”

~000~

Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour glanced at the carnage littering the front lawn of Hogwarts as he approached the main entrance of the castle. The Aurors who had arrived with him fanned out to examine the scene. The bodies of the dead and injured were scattered everywhere in the muddy grass: Trolls, Giants, Wizards, Werewolves, and what appeared to be mounds of scorched bones and skeletal remains.

Scrimgeour spied Dawlish approaching and they peered awkwardly at each other.

“Well this is quite a mess John,” said Scrimgeour after a moment. “What happened here?”

“Perhaps you’d better speak to the Headmaster about it Rufus,” Dawlish replied stiffly.

Scrimgeour sighed, “I would like to hear it from you John--can’t you even give me that much? You were my friend once.”

“You know why I left. You should have too...”

“I am loyal to the Ministry,” Scrimgeour snapped.
“What about loyalty to your friends? You remember those don’t you? People that you know you can trust!” Dawlish retorted, growing angry. “Amelia was the best Head of the DMLE the department has ever had and you know it--but you just stood there twiddling your thumbs and let Dolores push her out...”

Scrimgeour didn’t reply; he looked away uncomfortably.

“Why are you still working for that... Toad?” Dawlish continued. “Can you honestly tell me that you trust her?”

Scrimgeour scowled, “I cannot put my feelings before my Duty to the Ministry...”

“Aha! So you do suspect...” said Dawlish.

“What I suspect doesn’t matter,” Scrimgeour replied with a sigh. “There is no evidence... without proof that the Minister is corrupt, it is just rumours and hearsay--Dumbledore’s hearsay I might add!” Scrimgeour scowled again for emphasis.

“You should trust him on this one Rufus--no matter what you think of him personally. Dumbledore is right about Dolores. I’m telling you...” Dawlish peered at Scrimgeour beseechingly. “Just... please, Rufus, you have to open an investigation!”

Scrimgeour stood there silently for several moments, looking pensive. Then he heaved another sigh and spoke again.

“John--I’ll consider it--but I can make no promises. At the moment, I have enough to be getting on with, cleaning up this mess...” Scrimgeour waved his hand at the chaotic tableau and stalked off, up to the castle to find Dumbledore.

~o0o~

Rufus Scrimgeour regarded the Headmaster coldly, who was returning the Head Auror’s gaze with an inscrutable look.

“Voldemort is dead,” Dumbledore said quietly. “And hopefully, this time he will remain dead.”

Scrimgeour raised his eyebrows. “Well that is something I suppose,” he said stiffly. “Do you have proof?”

“His body lies on the lawn with the rest of the dead,” Dumbledore responded, “Voldemort’s severed head was retrieved from the lake and lies with it.”

The Headmaster quieted and regarded the Auror Chief silently for a moment. Dumbledore decided that it would be wisest to leave Harry Potter’s role in the events out of it for the time-being, at least until he was certain where Scrimgeour stood. The Headmaster was surprised to see a hint of satisfaction and relief on Scrimgeour’s visage.

“Good,” Scrimgeour nodded, “Very good indeed! And you’re sure that he’ll stay that way then?”

“Yes,” replied Dumbledore, “At least reasonably so. I shall be able to give you a definitive answer to that question within the next few days...”

“You may also like to know that a number of Death Eaters and numerous other escapees from Azkaban have also met their demise,” Dumbledore continued, “including the Lestrange brothers--though Bellatrix Lestrange unfortunately remains at large. McNair is dead, and Crabbe and Goyle are
“Really?” gasped Scrimgeour, his eyes widening. “That is good news then. Colour me impressed Dumbledore. Very well then, I shall do my utmost to ensure that you are given a fair hearing at the Ministry. This is far better than I had imagined...”

Scrimgeour began to feel more and more pleased. This was beginning to look less like a disaster and more like an occasion to be celebrated. Dumbledore saw the gleam in Scrimgeour’s eyes and decided to press his advantage.

“Scrimgeour--Rufus, I beg of you...”

“You wish me to investigate the Minister,” Rufus Scrimgeour swallowed and looked troubled. “I know. John pressed me on the matter--I don’t know what to say. My hands are tied--I have nothing to work with...”

“So you would be willing then if you did?”

Rufus thought for a moment, then he nodded curtly, “Yes, but I shall need somewhere to begin... Albus.”

Dumbledore’s eyes sparkled, “Excellent Rufus! Then perhaps it is time that you met a former colleague of the Minister’s who is currently under my protection. Though she cannot provide you with a smoking gun, Ms Rita Skeeter can provide you with detailed knowledge about the Minister which should set you on the right path.”
Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour thanked Rita Skeeter and frowned as she departed the Headmaster’s Office. It was worse than he could have imagined. He had long suspected that the Minister had at one time been a staffer in the Department of Mysteries, but to learn that Minister Umbridge was actually the current Head of that Department—and that she had been for some time—was a shock.

That meant that Dolores Umbridge was the head of the two most powerful departments in the Ministry, as well as being Minister. And the Minister very nearly had the Wizengamot in her pocket; she would be able to operate with total impunity. Such a situation was untenable—a political disaster in the making.

“Well, Albus, it would appear that I owe you an apology,” Scrimgeour sighed. “I am confident that you have determined the veracity of Ms Skeeter’s story.”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore nodded. “Once Ms Skeeter understood her situation, she was most forthcoming, and allowed me to take copies of her memories to verify her tale. I just wish she had something more to give us.”

“At least we have some evidence that the Minister has been manipulating the Daily Prophet’s content,” Scrimgeour responded. “Ms Skeeter has confirmed my private suspicions in that regard. That is a start at least. But I am deeply troubled...” Scrimgeour paused with an abashed look on his face.

“Albus, I feel I must warn you...” the Head Auror continued, “The Minister directed me to turn over Nott Sr to the Unspeakables for ‘further interrogations.’ Who knows how far she might go to advance her agenda?” Rufus eyed the Headmaster pointedly.

“That is grave news indeed,” Dumbledore stroked his long white beard thoughtfully. “However, not unexpected. I am also concerned regarding some other disturbing news—are the reports of Inferi with a contagious curse true?”

“Yes,” sighed Scrimgeour, “There were numerous attacks scattered around Britain last night—clean up operations are ongoing. It is not known how many Inferi have evaded us so far and passed on their curse. We are using everything we have to track their movements and eradicate them. And, needless to say, my Department is currently stretched quite thin...”

~o0o~

It was late afternoon when Harry woke up with Hermione snuggled under his arm. She slowly stirred as well and gazed into his green eyes.

“He’s dead Harry,” Hermione murmured. “Wormtail I mean...” A brief flicker of pain crossed Hermione’s features; Harry peered at her in concern.

“Are you alright Hermione?” Harry asked.

Hermione’s furry ears twitched apprehensively and she suddenly cast her eyes down.

“I... I’m not sure Harry,” Hermione replied. “I... I killed someone... I watched him die, and I knew that I had caused his death—intentionally. A....and, the worst part is that I didn’t feel bad about it. I felt happy...” Hermione gasped and tears filled her eyes.
“Harry--I know Wormtail deserved to die--a...and I wanted him to. B... but I shouldn’t feel happy that someone is dead--should I?” sobbed Hermione.

“Sssh Hermione,” Harry whispered earnestly, stroking her furry ears, “It’s alright. I’m happy that Wormtail is dead too; he had it coming...”

“B.... but I’m the one that did it,” Hermione sobbed again. “Doesn’t that make me evil, to... to kill someone... and en...enjoy it?”

Harry was about to respond with a vehement “no,” but someone else replied first.

“If it does, then I’d ‘ave to count myself as evil too then,” Dora had woken, after having fallen asleep in the chair between the Potters’ bed and Jennifer’s.

Dora had heard the whole conversation. Unease had grown as she listened; the truth was that Dora was feeling as guilty as Hermione, but suddenly a feeling of conviction had surged, and she knew just what to say.

“If you were really evil, you wouldn’t even be questioning it Hermione. Look--you did what you ‘ad to do. If you hadn’t, ‘e woulda killed you and Jennifer--you did the right thing! But beyond that, you finished someone ‘oo really deserved it. And it was personal Hermione... Wormtail made it personal--just like that piece of shite Lock’art and that vermin Greyback did,”

A flush of anger swept through Hermione as she thought of Lockhart, followed by a feeling of satisfaction that he was gone too.

“They all took a piece of people we care about,” Dora continued, “Their evil touched all of our lives--they’re responsible for so much torment and death. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with bein’ ‘appy that those bastards are all dead--alright!”

“I couldn’t agree more,” murmured Jennifer, who had just woken up to hear Dora responding to Hermione. “I’m thrilled that Ratface will never be able to hurt anyone ever again.”

“See Hermione,” Harry said quietly. “We all feel the same way. You’re not evil, nor is Dora! You ended Evil--both of you did. It’s alright for you both to feel pleased that Wormtail and Lockhart are dead. I couldn’t be happier knowing that they’re gone--and that Voldemort’s gone too...”

Hermione peered at Dora and Jennifer gratefully, then looked back to return her husband’s gaze.

“Thank you Hermione!” Harry’s own eyes had grown watery, and his breath caught as his heart lurched. “And... th...thanks for staying alive. I... I couldn’t bear to be without you Hermione... I love you so much!”

“Oh Harry,” Hermione softly returned before drawing closer and kissing him deeply as her fluffy tail curled around him under the blanket. After a few moments their lips parted. “Thank you... I wouldn’t even be here without you. I love you too Harry.”

Hermione felt an overwhelming swell of emotion surge. Tears streaming down her cheeks, she faced Dora and Jennifer again, “I love you both too. I’m so glad we’re all here, together... all of us--Luna and Parvati, and Daphne and Fleur--we all survived...”

Madam Pomfrey shooed the Coven out of the Hospital Wing with potions and instructions when she discovered them all wide awake and appearing quite animated. Feeling hungry, they made their way to get ready for dinner.
Harry stiffened when he saw Theodore Nott enter the Great Hall. Harry finished chewing his piece of pork chop and swallowed carefully.

“What’s he doing here?” Harry growled.

“Nott saved my life Harry,” Luna replied firmly, flicking her fluffy white tail. “He’s very sorry for what he did now...”

“But...”

“It’s true Harry,” interjected Parvati, who still looked unsettled; her sleek black tail wagged back and forth uncertainly. “Theodore turned himself in to Dumbledore... promised to go back to prison if he had to.”

“He what...?” Harry gasped. He couldn’t believe it--Nott, of all people, turning over a new leaf.

“And Dumbledore said that promising to go back to prison showed character,” Parvati responded. “He’s considering allowing Theodore to come back to Hogwarts instead... if we--us, the Coven--agree he should get another chance. Dumbledore’s giving us the final say...”

“Wow... that’s... er... good!?” Harry glanced at Hermione in perplex.

Hermione understood what Harry needed. And Nott was near enough that Hermione was able to give Harry an answer. Her bushy ginger tail and furry ears quivered as she reached out with her senses.

“I... I think Nott is sincere Harry,” said Hermione after a few moments passed. “All I can feel in him is a deep sadness and remorse at the moment.”

Harry looked at Luna who peered back hopefully. He glanced at Parvati who started to shrug; then she sighed and nodded affirmatively.

“Yeah Harry--he deserves another chance,” Parvati stated.

Harry next gazed questioningly into Daphne’s eyes.

“I think Nott should get a second chance Harry,” Daphne said insistently, “He saved Luna’s life--I think he means it.”

“Are you certain Chérie?” Fleur asked concernedly. “'e 'elped zat Malfoy boy...”

Daphne nodded and gave Fleur a kiss, “Yes, I’m sure... Nott could have just made a run for it, but he didn’t. He came back to take responsibility.”

Jennifer and Dora both nodded and said yes too when Harry looked at them.

“Well,” Harry sighed, “If you’re all agreed that Nott deserves another shot, then I suppose he can come back to Hogwarts. I’ll tell Dumbledore what we've decided after dinner.”

~00o~

“Very well then,” said the Headmaster as he peered proudly at Harry and Hermione in his Office when dinner was finished, “I shall inform Mr Theodore Nott that he will be reinstated at Hogwarts
“Now,” Dumbledore continued, his eyes gleaming slightly, “I have something else to discuss--finishing Tom Riddle forever. I have the location of the last Horcrux...”

“And you need me to help retrieve it?” Hermione interjected excitedly.

The Headmaster’s eyes twinkled.

“Well, in this instance,” Dumbledore looked at Harry again and went on, “I believe Mister Potter’s talents will come in quite handy... you see, the item in question is Helga Hufflepuff’s Cup, and it resides in Bellatrix Lestrange’s vault at Gringotts. And if I am not mistaken, Harry’s metamorphmagus talents are advanced enough that he should be able to convincingly take Bellatrix’s place...”

Harry’s jaw dropped and Hermione’s furry tail flicked in surprise.

“I... I’ve never really seen her,” Harry muttered, “I mean I have, in pictures... but I’d really need a good look at her in person to pull it off.”

“Indeed Harry!” Dumbledore nodded. “That is why I have Mr Longbottom’s memory of his recent encounter with her for you to study in the pensieve at length. And actually, I do recommend that Mrs Potter go on this mission as well, under your Invisibility Cloak, to make short work of locating the Horcrux in the vault.”

“Professor,” Hermione twitched her furry ears, a troubled expression on her face, “are we stealing it from Gringotts then?”

“Technically, we will be stealing only from Bellatrix Lestrange’s vault,” Dumbledore replied. “I have spoken with Ragnok, and he has consulted with the Chairman of Gringotts. They have no more desire to see Tom Riddle return than we do--nor do they wish Gringotts to be associated with harbouring a Wizard Artifact of such a Dark Nature,;

“They were reticent at first, as they do not wish to undo Gringotts sterling reputation for protecting the property and the rights of their clients. But they eventually agreed with my request. Though, for the sake of avoiding the appearance of impropriety, they have agreed to allow a member of the Order to enter the Lestrange vault only if disguised as Bellatrix herself,”

“We have Bellatrix’s wand which you will need to present. And Bellatrix, being gravely injured and a fugitive, will have gone to ground... she will not be able to complicate things if we move quickly--within the next few days.”

Harry and Hermione glanced at each other in surprise.

“Right then,” said Harry resolutely, “Let’s do this Sir... When do we go?”

“As soon as you have perfected your disguise Harry,” Dumbledore replied. “You may begin practice tomorrow morning when I take you inside Neville Longbottom’s memory to view Bellatrix Lestrange.”

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Minister Dolores Umbridge scowled as she sipped a nightcap alone. Lord Voldemort’s sudden demise at Dumbledore’s hands was problematic. Dolores had got quite far capitalising on the Wizard World’s fear of the Dark Lord’s mad excesses. He had been convenient as a scapegoat, and for
keeping the Headmaster of Hogwarts on his toes.

The Minister was also perturbed that Rufus Scrimgeour had retained custody of Crabbe and Goyle, having claimed their usefulness to ongoing investigations of escaped Death Eaters who possibly remained at large.

She sighed and drained the rest of her snifter, plunking it on the table. It only made sense the Minister supposed. It would not do to allow any Death Eaters still loyal to a martyred Voldemort to continue running loose... unless they swore their fealty to Dolores.

The Minister still had Nott Sr, and the Snatchers. They would be enough to complete her plans. With their “cooperation”—willing or not—in telling the story which Dolores wanted told to the Wizengamot, both the Wizengamot and Hogwarts could be hers in a matter of weeks.

Then Dolores could finally begin implementing the next phase of her programme, and she could pardon Lucius and his son, giving them an opportunity to regain their previous status in the Wizard World. Adjusting herself to the situation, Dolores poured herself another brandy.

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Harry kissed his wife humidly when they settled down for the night in their own bed. It was well after one AM, long past the time that Madam Pomfrey had instructed her patients to take their potions and get a proper night's sleep. Harry reluctantly swallowed his sleeping draught after Hermione reminded him that they both ought to. But he was still keyed up with anticipation.

“We’ll be able to spend a night or two at home and see your Mum again in a couple of days Hermione.”

“I can’t wait Harry,” Hermione beamed. “I know we still have the Minister to deal with. But we’re finally going to be completely free of that horrid Tom Riddle. You won’t have to stay in the same home as your Aunt when Voldemort is completely gone...”

“Oh... yeah!” Harry nodded. He had forgotten about that. “Well, Aunt Petunia and Dudley are probably still safer being where the Minister can’t find them--but I bet they’re both going stir-crazy shut up in that house. Maybe I should send them on holiday somewhere safe... out of the country for a bit.”

“That’s a very sweet idea Harry,” Hermione agreed, burrowing into Harry’s shoulder as he stroked her bushy hair and fuzzy ears. “Maybe we could send Mum and Auntie Joanne somewhere abroad too? They might like a change of scenery. Then they wouldn’t need Abby Brixton or Mr Moody to look after them either...”

“Brilliant... We could have the whole house to ourselves again Hermione,” said Harry excitedly. “Madam Bones and Susan don’t have to worry about Voldemort anymore either--it should be safe enough for them to go back to their own homes. We’ll be able to invite the others to visit if they want to...”

“Mmmhmm,” Hermione responded sleepily, curling her bushy tail around Harry.

Harry and Hermione drifted off in each other's arms as the sleeping draughts kicked in, both dreaming happily of being at home in bed with the rest of the Coven.
Morphing into Bellatrix Lestrange proved harder than Harry would have thought. He picked up her outer physical characteristics quickly enough, but adjusting his voice, mannerisms, and behaviour to match hers was another matter altogether.

Fortunately, Hermione was a good coach. She witnessed Neville’s memory with Harry as they replayed it dozens of times--sometimes pausing and focusing on a particular trait.

“Perfect,” said Hermione when Harry’s vocal adjustments finally achieved the correct tone. “Now, you’ve got to think about how she acts towards those she sees as subordinates--Bellatrix treats her underlings poorly and she behaves like a petty tyrant. Did you see how she snapped at the Snatcher...?”

Harry nodded and sighed, not keen on the idea of having to be rude to Goblins, even though that’s what they would be expecting. He was glad that at least Ragnok and the Chairman of Gringotts were in on it. It wasn’t like he and Hermione were really stealing from Gringotts if two of its most Senior Officers were helping them, was it?

“So you’ll have to sneer a lot and look down your nose at everyone,” Hermione continued, “Do that, and then you’ll sound just like her...”

“Do you think you can manage it?” Hermione asked with concern when Harry didn’t respond right away.

Harry’s stomach lurched at the idea of actually trying to get inside Bellatrix Lestrange's head, but then a thought occurred to him and he laughed.

“Yeah... actually I think I can. I’ll pretend I’m Malfoy talking to Crabbe or Goyle when they’re being particularly stupid,” Harry chortled. “That should work...”

Harry practiced sneering for a while until Hermione was in stitches.

“That’s brilliant Harry,” Hermione giggled, her bushy tail shimmying with mirth. “Now it’s time to try your Bellatrix impression on Sirius.”

When Sirius roared with laughter and gave his seal of approval to Harry’s portrayal of Bellatrix, Harry knew he was ready to go.

Harry and Hermione packed a few things in overnight bags as Dumbledore had agreed that they could stay a day or two at Number 12 once the job was complete. When they were finished, they spent the rest of the evening in the Unaffiliated Common Room with the rest of the Coven.

They discovered Dora and Jennifer both sitting at the grand piano in the corner of the room and giggling as they tickled the ivories together. Luna, Daphne, and Fleur were trying to coax Parvati into singing along.

Not wishing to interrupt, Harry quietly sat in one of the cozy armchairs. Hermione curled up in Harry's lap and purred as he stroked her furry tail and ears, letting the joy wash over her.

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“Stop... don’t drink any more of that,” Snape hissed.
“You... don’t... have to tell me twice...” sputtered Lupin, spraying Wolfsbane Potion everywhere. “I’m used to it tasting vile... but it’s never been like drinking acid...”

“Fortunately, the burning sensation appears to be largely a sensory reaction. I am seeing only mild inflammation...” Snape said as he examined Lupin’s mouth, “Perhaps we should visit Madam Pomfrey.”

“Don’t you know what’s wrong?” Lupin asked in surprise. “You probably know more about the potion than anyone living or dead...”

“There is absolutely nothing wrong with the potion,” snapped the Potions Professor. “There is something wrong with... you!” Snape concluded in a puzzled tone.

“If I didn’t know better,” Snape continued, with a more concerned expression, “I would say that you no longer carry the werewolf curse. Only a human Wizard or a natural-born Skin Changer in their full-human form have the reactions you just reported. To those without the Curse, the potion presents a sensation of acidity upon the tongue.”

“But that’s impossible!” gasped Lupin.

“Precisely!” said Snape, raising an eyebrow, “That, is why we should be consulting with Madam Pomfrey...”

“Yes... yes of course,” Lupin muttered as he followed Snape to the Hospital Wing.

A strange thought crossed Remus Lupin’s mind; it seemed too ridiculous to be credible. But no matter how hard he tried to ignore the notion, he began to wonder if being “attacked” by Harry and Hermione’s Patronuses had anything to do with it.

The idea seemed ludicrous on its face. Nobody had ever heard of Patroni curing Lycanthropy before. But Remus had been feeling different ever since the ethereal lion and lioness had pounced on him. In fact, he felt more than just different...

Remus felt great.

Remus felt better than he could ever remember feeling since his childhood—since before he had been attacked and turned into a werewolf by Fenrir Greyback. He felt as if a shroud had been lifted from his soul, and as if his brain and body were swept clean. He felt fantastic.

Remus practically skipped all the way to the infirmary.

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“Wait, Harry can turn into a girl now?” gasped Daphne when Hermione finished informing the Coven that she was going on a mission with Harry to London to retrieve the last Horcrux.

Daphne’s mind boggled at the possibilities. Fleur giggled when Dora and Harry both turned red, and struggled not to smirk.

“Oui, Chérie! Our Harry... ‘e ‘as been holding out on us,” Fleur tittered as she winked at Harry.

“Ooooh, Harry, let us see,” begged Parvati, “Please!?"

“What... er... right now?” Harry gulped “Here...?”
“Why not?” Luna beamed radiantly. “It’s our common room, and nobody else can get in unless we let them.” Luna’s fluffy white tail waved and her furry white ears twitched expectantly as she peered at Harry.

“I know you’ve planned for this moment to be special ‘arry,” Fleur said softly, giving Harry a gentle kiss. “But this feels like a special moment to me. A moment to celebrate a little, non?”

Harry glanced at Hermione, who shrugged her shoulders and bushy ginger tail noncommittally. It was entirely up to him. Harry grinned nervously as he peered at everyone’s eager face, feeling a tingly surge of daring in his lower abdomen.

“Right then, here goes,” said Harry, steeling himself, “Sorry about my clothes... they’ll look a bit funny on a girl...”

“Don’t worry about those Harriet,” giggled Hermione as she waved her wand.

Harry’s clothes transfigured as he morphed into Harriet. Harriet groaned when she realised that she was now wearing a skimpy bikini which was the same iridescent green as her rolling eyes. Hermione had obviously been preparing a spell for this opportunity. Harriet couldn’t help snorting with laughter in an unladylike manner and shaking her head.

“Oh my God!” Jennifer squealed. “You’re adorable!”

Harriet flushed and Jennifer turned beet red as they both reached the same conclusion... that this was the most Jennifer had seen of Harriet in any form whatsoever. Dora grinned, remembering her own first meeting with a barely clothed Harriet.

“I mean... you’re still adorable,” Jennifer stammered. “You’re really cute as a guy too... wait-- I don’t mean... what I’m trying to say...”

“What Jennifer really means is that she can’t wait to see what else you look good in,” giggled Daphne as she pounced on Harriet and squeezed her tightly. “As a girl, you’re close enough in size to try some of our clothes on...”

“Oi... I’m not your dolly,” Harriet laughed. Inside, Harriet groaned, desperately hoping that Daphne’s ideas were soon forgotten.

“I can’t wait to see what’s underneath them,” Parvati beamed, her sleek black tail undulating gleefully as she leapt on Harriet too and gave her a kiss.

“Not that this bikini is hiding much though. You might as well be wearing nothing.” Parvati chortled. “I agree with Daphne. How about a little fashion show Harriet?”

“Come on, it’ll be fun Harriet,” Luna giggled.

Hermione tried vainly to hide a smirk. Dora managed to look both sympathetic and curious all at once.

“Alright, okay...! maybe next time--when we get back,” Harriet moaned, palming her face. “I have to get up early tomorrow...” but something stirred inside Harriet again, lingering in her groin.

“Not too early I hope,” purred Parvati as she unbuttoned her own blouse.

“Isn’t there time for a little bit of fun at least before bedtime?” Daphne pouted, giving Harriet a little kiss.
“Er... I suppose, that is if everyone is game...” Harriet raised her eyebrows at Hermione, and glanced awkwardly at Jennifer.

Harriet was very game herself, but she didn’t want Jennifer to feel out of place. Hermione nodded and Jennifer smiled shyly. Slowly, tentatively, Jennifer leaned in and gave Harriet a kiss on the lips.

When her lips connected with Harriet’s, Jennifer instantly felt the same electrical charge which had coursed through her when Hermione had kissed her the previous day. Jennifer was elated. Even though part of her had badly wanted to kiss him, Jennifer had also been quite sure that she did not feel ready to properly kiss Harry—a boy—just yet. She had still felt scared that kissing him would trigger a nasty reaction, but to her joyous surprise, Jennifer had melted into the kiss which she shared with Harriet.

“I think I’d like to give Harry a kiss too sometime,” Jennifer whispered happily when she had finished kissing Harriet.

Everyone took a turn kissing Harriet, and the kisses became deeper and more amorous as the members of the coven also turned to one another. Soon, they were all lost in each other as their hands slipped under blouses and skirts which gradually fell away, revealing more skin and curves.

As they had both already spent loads of time with Harriet, Dora and Hermione focused their attentions on Jennifer, leaving Harriet to the exquisite ministrations of Fleur, Daphne, and the other two cat-witches.

Jennifer felt safe and reassured wrapped in Hermione’s furry tail and Dora’s arms. She returned their kisses and caresses while the rest of the Coven ravished Harriet.

Jennifer was surprised yet again as she allowed herself to be swept away by the ardour. Ratface seemed like someone else’s memory, caught on a fading, spotted reel of film. Jennifer had been so afraid that she would never be able to enjoy being with another person after him—so afraid that he had destroyed her ability to feel anything but revulsion at another’s touch.

But it felt nice to be touched with care by people whom she had come to love. Jennifer was not as surprised by the realisation that she had truly grown to love everyone in the Coven, as she was that she was finally able to allow herself to act on some of those feelings.

Jennifer let herself go as one of Dora’s hands pressed into the small of her back and their kiss deepened. Dora’s other hand lightly brushed Jennifer’s ebony bangs. Hermione’s bushy ginger cat tail curled up around Jennifer’s torso. She stroked Hermione’s fluffy tail with both hands and soared; the silky fur felt heavenly under Jennifer’s fingers. Hermione arched in response, purring loudly.

As Hermione’s lips, and Dora’s, both pressed against her own lips, and trailed across the skin of her own cheeks and neck, Jennifer recalled wondering how more than two people could love one another at the same time.

Now Jennifer was beginning to understand. She hadn’t even known the members of the Coven two full months yet, but she already felt more deeply connected to all of them than she had ever known it was possible to feel to any single person. All of them had offered her nothing but acceptance, kindness, and affection since the day they had met.

When she had first arrived, they had instinctively known when to let Jennifer alone, and when to offer themselves despite Jennifer’s apparent reticence. And now, Jennifer knew that she never wanted to be alone again. She wanted this to last forever.
Through the fog of her own bliss, Jennifer could make out some intense activity and squealing and meowing on the other sofa. A short time after that, one by one, Dora, Fleur, Daphne, and Parvati kissed her goodnight. When it was Luna’s turn, Jennifer hung on a little longer and kissed her a bit more deeply.

“Thanks Luna,” Jennifer murmured, “You really were the first one to bring me out of my shell. I never could have... I... Oh... I don’t know... words can’t really describe how good I feel right now— I’m just happy to be here with you, and everyone... and I wouldn’t be if it weren’t for you.”

“You’re welcome,” Luna replied serenely, “We all love you too Jennifer. I don’t really know why things happen the way they do, but I’m really glad you ended up with us despite all of the bad bits along the way.”

Finally Harry--attired as himself again--and Hermione, both walked Jennifer back to the quarters which she shared with Hestia Jones.

“Thank you both... for everything,” said Jennifer, fluttering her lashes shyly downwards. “I know it’s silly, because you’ll only be gone a day or two. But I already miss you... and Harry, you really do make a very sweet girl,” Jennifer giggled.

Harry felt Hermione purring beside him. Suddenly Harry knew what he was supposed to do. He put an arm around Jennifer and leaned forward, softly pressing his lips against hers. Jennifer had stiffened at first, prepared to recoil if it went wrong, but instead, she turned to melting wax the moment their lips touched.

“Good night,” said Harry sweetly when the kiss concluded.

It was just as delightful as kissing Harriet. Jennifer was so thrilled that she had successfully kissed Harry that she kissed him again moistly.

“Night Harry,” Jennifer said with a grin.

Harry returned Jennifer’s grin with a slightly bemused smile. Hermione followed up with a long goodnight kiss of her own for Jennifer, curling her bushy ginger tail around the dark haired girl.

“Good Night Jennifer,” Hermione nearly whispered when their lips wetly parted. “We both miss you already too. But don’t worry... Harry and I will see you all again in a couple of days...”
Part 4: The Masters of Death

Part 4

The Masters of Death

“Tell me why this is a good idea again?” Bellatrix Lestrange nervously asked Hermione as they prepared to step into the fireplace of Number 12’s parlour. Hermione closed her eyes and kissed Bellatrix.

“Harry, you’ll be just fine,” Hermione reassured the young Metamorphmagus, “Gringotts Bank is Sovereign Territory. The Ministry has no jurisdiction there. Aurors can’t arrest you even if they’re standing right next to you…”

Harry felt a lot more relaxed after sharing a kiss with Hermione, but he was still anxious as it was he who was impersonating a dangerous fugitive—the ex-consort of the more-or-less dead, once again defeated Lord Voldemort.

“…unless the goblins turn me in,” the wizard-who-looked-exactly-like-Bellatrix-Lestrange sighed. “Yeah, I know Hermione--the Chairman of Gringotts and Ragnok have approved this operation. But I still don’t like it.”

“What if the other goblins catch us in the act and call in the Aurors? Obviously the Chairman and Ragnok must think that the rest of Gringotts’ Board of Directors wouldn’t approve if they’re only willing to let us get the last Horcrux through subterfuge…”

Hermione’s bushy ginger tail drooped slightly and her furry ears twitched pensively. It was all well and good having a positive attitude, but there was no getting around the truth.

“You’re absolutely right Harry,” Hermione nodded. “It is still risky. Obviously the Chairman and Ragnok want some measure of plausible denial for Gringotts Bank as a business entity should anything go wrong. They have a strong reputation for protecting their clients’ interests at all costs to maintain…”

“Exactly...!” exclaimed Harry-Bellatrix sourly. “As long as they can blame us if we get caught, they don’t care…”

“Maybe,” Hermione interjected, “but you have to realise Harry, the Chairman and Ragnok have both put themselves on the block too--If we get caught, their careers are finished, and they would probably end up in a goblin prison.”

“Oh!” Harry-Bellatrix took pause. “I hadn’t thought of that... Yeah, I suppose I can take some comfort in knowing that those two really don’t want us to get nabbed then.”

Harry-Bellatrix snorted and shook her head resignedly “Alright then, I suppose I’m as ready as I’ll ever be... How do I look Hermione? I feel really weird in this dress…”

Hermione’s furry ears flicked as she gave Harry-Bellatrix a once-over. Hermione flushed slightly. There was something about Bellatrix Lestrange’s black dress with its cleavage revealing low-cut top, its leather straps, and witchy collar, which sent little shivers through Hermione--not entirely unpleasant shivers. She crossly suppressed the feeling.

“You look like Bellatrix,” Hermione said brusquely. “Now don’t forget to sneer...”
Hermione began to fling the invisibility cloak over herself, but Harry-Bellatrix stopped her.

“Wait... close your eyes again Hermione,” Harry said softly in his own voice. A calmness had settled over him, and he could sense Hermione’s upset.

“Whatever happens, I just want you to remember this...” Harry whispered, before kissing Hermione with Bellatrix Lestrange’s lips once more.

Hermione felt a warm glow swell inside her as the kiss deepened. Somehow, she knew that everything was alright--she could deal with whatever came their way as long as she was with Harry, whatever form he took. When the kiss was finished, Hermione stepped back and grinned with a naughty gleam in her golden-brown eyes.

“Harry, when this is over... I want that dress.”

Harry’s chortle turned into a cackle as his voice became Bellatrix Lestrange’s once again, and Hermione disappeared inside his invisibility cloak. Harry flung a handful of floo powder into the grate and stepped into the green flames with his invisible wife as he called out their destination clearly.

“Gringotts Bank, London Office, VIP Entrance...”

~o0o~

The odd assortment of muggles and wizards sitting around the kitchen table of Number 12 Grimmauld Place regarded the Headmaster keenly, looking for signs of anything which would indicate knowledge of the outcome of the Potters’ mission. Dumbledore sipped his tea, returning everyone’s gaze serenely.

As the kitchen clock’s hands slowly crawled by, Harry Potter's cousin Dudley grew fidgety.

“I’m bored Mum, can I watch the telly?” asked Dudley.

In truth, Dudley was extremely anxious that something bad was going to happen to Harry, and he wanted a distraction. Dudley’s mother, Petunia, glanced at Jean, Hermione’s mother, who was frowning slightly at the inappropriateness of Dudley’s interruption.

Joanne stopped gently rocking her baby and looked up. She could see immediately that her sister Jean was too wrapped up in her own anxiety about Hermione and her son-in-law, Harry Potter, to see what Dudley was going through at the moment.

“Go on dear,” Joanne said to Dudley gently. “Don’t mind the rest of us. Why don’t you go watch the television for a bit too, Susan dear...” Joanne turned to look at Susan Bones who was sitting next to her Aunt Amelia, “there’s no need for all of us to sit here like a load of lumpkins worrying ourselves silly.”

Petunia nodded gratefully at Joanne as Dudley slipped out of the kitchen. Susan glanced at her own Auntie. Madam Bones nodded her assent and Susan followed Dudley to the parlour.

The clock continued to tick interminably, and Mad Eye Moody began to drum his fingers on the kitchen table until Abby Brixton glowered at him. Moody wanted to curse and rant; the Potters should have been back by now. But he didn’t want to upset Hermione’s mother so he just sighed.

Suddenly there was a clattering of footsteps coming from the stairwell and Susan burst into the kitchen.
“Come quickly, something weird is going on...” Susan gasped, “The BBC is showing something flying over London--and it looks like a dragon. The Muggle news shouldn't have dragons... should it?”

Dumbledore sighed and followed everyone to the parlour; even the best laid plans could be spoiled when dragons were involved. Dumbledore peered at his hand-mirror hopefully and after another ten minutes had passed, he was rewarded when he heard his name being called and spied Hermione Potter’s disheveled visage in the glass.

~00o~

Everything seemed to go well at first. None of the goblins dared to question Bellatrix Lestrange when she appeared in the VIP Fireplace and entered the main lobby of Gringotts. Harry couldn’t decide if the goblins were scared of Bellatrix, or just didn’t care that she was an escaped convict. They didn’t even bother to ask for Bellatrix’s wand.

Hermione stayed close to Harry-Bellatrix, under the invisibility cloak, hoping that nobody would bump into her. She and Harry were both startled when a witch grabbed Harry-Bellatrix’s arm.

“Oh my goodness, Bellatrix! How delightful to see you again after all these years... and looking ravishing as always. Clearly Azkaban didn’t do you any harm.”

Harry-Bellatrix looked wildly around for escape, but the witch seemed to be following their direction. He wasn’t certain that a sneer would be enough to put off the witch pawing at him. Harry surmised that the witch must be an old friend of Bellatrix.

“Oh... I’m sorry. I’m dreadfully busy right now...” Harry-Bellatrix said curtly as she followed an old goblin named Bogrod to the vaults.

“Oh, no matter,” said the other witch cheerily, “Griphook and I are going to the vaults as well. We shall have all the time in the world to catch up on things. Surely it hasn’t been so long that you’ve forgotten that the Carrow vaults are right next to your own?”

“Alecto,” Hermione whispered directly into Harry-Bellatrix’s other ear.

Harry started when Hermione hissed the name in his ear. He didn’t know how Hermione knew, but he was sure that she was right. In any case, he had no time to challenge the information.

“Of... of course I haven’t forgotten--Alecto!” Harry inwardly breathed a sigh of relief that the witch accepted the name without hesitation.

The heavy iron doors to the vaults shut behind Harry-Bellatrix and Alecto Carrow as they followed the goblins to the carts which would take them to the lowest levels.

“Well, I see no reason not to share a cart then,” Alecto said with a husky voice as she leaned closer to the witch who she believed to be Bellatrix.

Harry-Bellatrix swallowed nervously as realisation dawned on him. If he wasn’t mistaken, Alecto and Bellatrix had at one time been intimate with each other. Harry groaned inwardly, wishing that Hermione was the metamorphmagus and that he was under the invisibility cloak. He had no idea how he was supposed to talk to a past lover not seen in well over a decade.

“Er... after you,” Harry-Bellatrix offered Alecto.

There was just enough room for Harry-Bellatrix to sit next to Alecto in the cart while the invisible
Hermione sat squashed between him and the side with the door. The two Goblins clambered onto the front seats and settled in for the ride. Griphook turned around and glanced at the two witches, narrowing his eyes in suspicion.

Harry needn’t have worried; Alecto carried the whole conversation during the entire trip through the labyrinthine tunnels under Gringotts. And some of the discussion turned out to be quite informative. Shortly before reaching their final destination, Alecto dropped the bombshell.

“Well, my dear Bella, I cannot tell you how pleased I am that you survived the Dark Lord’s misguided attempt to take Hogwarts by force. I was quite concerned when I heard that most of Azkaban’s Death Eaters met their unfortunate ends... as was Dolores,”

“Believe me, the Minister has no desire to see the Blood of the Pure spilled--and Dolores has a much better plan for revitalising Wizarding Britain and restoring Hogwarts to its former glory. Soon it will be time for all of the halfbloods to learn that their place in the natural order of things is to glorify the purest among us, and the Mudbloods will be purged from our race,”

“I have a message for you from Dolores herself which you will not see in the headlines of the Daily Prophet, nor hear on WWN. The Minister is offering a full-pardon to all Death Eaters and Snatchers who turn themselves in and agree to follow her lead. She is most pleased that you were not found among the dead at Hogwarts, and is hopeful that you will join her...”

“Er... yeah! Maybe...” mumbled Harry-Bellatrix. Thankfully the cart finally came to a halt and Bogrod called out Bellatrix’s name.

“My stop,” gasped Harry-Bellatrix, eager to escape. She managed to get the door open and let invisible Hermione out of the cart unnoticed, before stepping onto the platform herself. Bogrod opened Bellatrix’s vault and stood patiently next to the open door.

Alecto climbed out of the cart as well and took Bellatrix’s arm as if to enter the vault with her. Harry couldn’t think what to do. Under the invisibility cloak Hermione began to panic. She performed the first spell she could think of and whispered, “Imperio,” three times.

Harry-Bellatrix was surprised when Alecto’s eyes glazed over, and the two goblins stared blankly. Hermione whipped off the invisibility cloak and darted into Bellatrix Lestrange’s vault, her furry ears and bushy tail quivering with agitation.

“Quickly Harry,” Hermione moaned, “We don’t have much time at all. I’ve never performed that curse before, and I doubt it’ll hold very long...”

“Never mind Hermione,” Harry responded gratefully, “That was brilliant. I couldn’t think what to do at all... can you feel the Horcrux?”

“Yes... it’s right up there Harry.”

Harry looked to see where Hermione was pointing and groaned. A jewel encrusted golden goblet glittered in Hermione’s wandlight at the top of a high shelf. Harry would have to climb over armour and shields to reach it. He remembered the instructions which had been passed on from Ragnok, that Harry could touch nothing but the item he had come for.

Suddenly, Harry realised that he was floating up towards the cup and he glanced back at Hermione who was aiming her wand at him. He quickly grabbed the cup and Hermione lowered him back down.

“Thanks Hermione,” Harry gasped, “I’m glad you remembered wingardium leviosa...”
“I was going to use levicorpus from Snape’s book, but then I thought you might prefer not dangling upside down by your ankle...”

“You thought right,” Harry agreed as he dragged Hermione out of the vault, “Now we’ve just got to figure out how to get out of here before...”

It was too late. Griphook had shrugged off the Imperius Curse mere moments before Harry-Bellatrix had exited the vault. Griphook was nowhere to be seen, and many voices could be heard approaching in the distance. Only the still imperiused Bogrod and Alecto Carrow remained, oblivious to everything. Harry thrust Hufflepuff’s cup into Hermione’s bag, threw the invisibility cloak over Hermione, and they both ran the opposite direction from the nearing voices.

The corridor they had dashed into opened up into a cavern which they had spied from the cart as it trundled down to the last, deepest vaults under Gringotts. And chained up in the cavern was a pale, sad looking dragon. They both whirled around to find another way, but goblins and wizard security guards cut off their escape.

There was only one way out now.

“Hermione,” Harry-Bellatrix whispered to thin air, “do you trust me?”

“Of course Harry,” Hermione whispered back.

“Then climb up on the back of the dragon, now!”

Hermione didn’t question Harry’s mad idea. She just did as she was told and clambered up the steely scales onto the dragon’s back while Harry-Bellatrix fired several stunners at the yelling goblins and the wizards who returned fire, angering the dragon.

Harry-Bellatrix aimed her wand at the shackles which kept the dragon chained up and they shattered under the impact of her releasing spells. She leapt onto the dragon and hauled herself onto the dragon’s back right behind where she believed Hermione to be.

“Are you still there Hermione?” Harry-Bellatrix shouted over the roaring dragon.

“Yes,” Hermione squeaked.

“Hold on tight then, I think...”

But Harry-Bellatrix didn’t get a chance to get another word out. The bellowing dragon fired a burst of flame at the wizards shooting spells, and the goblins, scattering them. It took every ounce of strength just to keep hold of the horned ridges along the dragon’s spine as it unfurled and angrily whipped its tail, sweeping aside another group of goblins and wizards.

With another thunderous outburst, the dragon began to blast and claw its way up through the rocky tunnels to the surface. At intervals, Harry and Hermione aimed their own explosive spells to help the dragon widen the passage and finally it burst furiously through the heavy iron doors which led to the enormous main lobby of the bank.

Sensing the outside world near, the dragon reared up and leapt, spreading its wings. It soared and crashed straight through the ceiling as wizards and goblins ran screaming to avoid the falling debris.

Ragnok peered out of the door of his office in horror. This was almost a disaster. As he watched the dragon vanish into the morning clouds above London through the gaping hole in Gringotts’ ceiling, Ragnok did manage a small sigh of relief.
At least most of the cover story had remained intact. Now, the worst that anyone could say was that Bellatrix Lestrange had gone barmy while visiting her own vault and stolen a dragon.
Chapter 127

Hermione screamed and shut her eyes as she clung for dear life to the jutting bony ridges along the dragon’s spine as the ceiling of Gringotts crashed about her. Splintering beams of wood, chunks of plaster, and shards of roof tile rained down on Hermione. She cursed inwardly, wishing that she hadn’t reminded Harry to remove the tattoos after they had been released from the Hospital Wing. Nor had either of them considered that they might be necessary for this particular mission.

Moments later the pale dragon soared above Gringotts, its great wings beating the air heavily as it blinked uncertainly, its eyes unused to the sunlight after many years held captive underground. Hermione opened her eyes finally, her heart thumping in her ears over the roar of the rushing wind. She spied the London Eye and the river Thames below and shut them again.

The dragon swooped over the Millennium Bridge and then caught an updraft, sailing up through the clouds. Finally the dragon settled into a steady flight pattern and Hermione managed to barely collect herself enough to tug off the flapping invisibility cloak with one hand and stuff it inside her blazer.

Harry gasped with relief when he saw Hermione reappear and her bushy tail whipping in the wind just ahead of him. He had caught glimpses of her feet and tail as the dragon had burst through the roof of Gringotts, but he had been deathly afraid that Hermione might be injured.

Harry wanted to return to his natural form, but then he remembered that he really wouldn’t fit Bellatrix’s dress properly. Hermione glanced back, her tawny tresses billowing. Harry-Bellatrix caught Hermione's terrified eyes, tear streaked face, and furry ears which were folded back completely with fright.

Harry decided that it was reasonably safe. The dragon seemed to be flying steadily enough. Carefully, Harry-Bellatrix crawled up the dragon’s back until she was pressed right up against Hermione with one arm curled tightly around her trembling figure. Hermione instantly wrapped her tail around Harry-Bellatrix’s waist.

“I’ve got you Hermione,” Harry said in his own voice, kissing her clammy wet cheeks. “I won’t let you go.”

Feeling Harry next to her, even in Bellatrix’s form, Hermione began to calm down. She had been chilled by the wind and dampness of the clouds, but now Harry’s warmth spread through her and her breathing slowed.

Hermione closed her eyes and pressed her own lips against Harry-Bellatrix’s cheek. It suddenly occurred to Harry that there was something else he could do to comfort Hermione, despite not being able to return completely to his natural form just yet.

Hermione opened her eyes again and stared gratefully into Harriet’s glittering green ones. Finally Hermione could speak.

“Th...thank you Harry... sorry... I mean Harriet. I feel much better now.”

“Good,” said Harriet, smiling softly, pressing her forehead against Hermione’s, “Because we did it Hermione. We’ve got the last Horcrux... Now all we have to do is work out how to get off this dragon before the RAF send jets after us.”

“I don’t think we’ll have to worry about that Harriet. They should only be able to find us by line of sight now. I think Dragons probably have a number of natural defences which should make them
invisible to radar.”

“Really? How d’you work that out?”

“Well, to begin with, I’m almost certain that modern muggles would have rediscovered dragons despite the best efforts of wizards to keep their existence secret if dragons didn’t have their own means of avoiding radar tracking. It would be impossible for dragons to exist in the wild otherwise,” Hermione replied.

“It’s quite likely that dragons produce their own magical energy field which can scramble electromagnetic signals. And it’s also a possibility that their scales and hide might have properties which absorb the signals--like stealth fighters.”

“Oh... yeah!” Harriet nodded thoughtfully, “That makes sense. So we’re alright as long as there’s a fair bit of cloud cover then?”

“I should think so. But you’re right, we’ll still need to get off the dragon sooner or later. Maybe Dumbledore has an idea...”

“Can you reach your hand-mirror then?” Harriet asked.

“Yes... I...I think so--as long as you keep a tight hold of me, I can use my right arm,” Hermione answered a bit shakily.

Hermione slowly reached her right hand into the bag slung over her shoulder and felt for the mirror nestled beside Hufflepuff’s Cup. Her fingers grasped the mirror tightly, and she pulled it out, speaking Dumbledore’s name. She was cheered to see the Headmaster’s very relieved features peering back at her.

“Sir,” squeaked Hermione, “we’ve got it, but...”

“You are currently on the back of a dragon speeding out of London,” Dumbledore interjected.

“How did you know?” gasped Hermione.

“Apparently numerous muggles spotted a dragon flying by the London Eye and the Millennium Bridge,” the Headmaster replied with twinkling eyes, “and their mobile-phone videos were quickly sent to the BBC. I am watching the BBC reports at this very moment...”

“How’s the Ministry going to cover this one up?” Harriet wondered aloud, overhearing Dumbledore.

“Oh, that shouldn’t be too much of a problem,” Professor Dumbledore responded. “A number of muggle ‘experts’ are already proposing that the beast seen in the footage uploaded to the BBC’s website is naught but an escaped parade balloon of some sort--and others are proclaiming it to be an elaborate publicity stunt promoting a film about dinosaurs run amok...”

Hermione couldn’t help giggling, despite being somewhat nervous still, and Harriet shook her head in amazement. It was incredible how easy it was for non-magical people to rationalise away things which didn’t fit into their narrow view of the world, even when the evidence was staring them in the face.

“In any case,” continued the Headmaster, “The important thing is for you to stay safe. The dragon will tire eventually, and likely seek out water and sustenance. You should be able to disembark when it comes to ground. Call me immediately when it does, and I shall apparate to your location.”
That seemed like the only sensible solution, so Harriet and Hermione continued to ride the dragon as it steadily flew Northwards. Finally, after several hours, it seemed to tire and dipped below the clouds somewhere over Northwestern England. The dragon swooped towards a shimmering lake which it spied in a verdant hilly wooded area.

Harriet nodded at Hermione as the dragon skimmed the surface of the lake, scooping up water and shoals of fish in its maw. The moment was now. Hermione returned Harriet’s nod and slid from the dragon’s scaly back into the clear blue water below with a splash, followed quickly by Harriet.

The two young witches swam to the nearby shore and dragged themselves, gasping and sputtering, onto the pebbly beach. The dragon continued to drink and sup, apparently either oblivious to their presence, or simply not caring. After several minutes and numerous gulps, the dragon belched and a puff of smoke emerged from its nostrils. Its thirst and appetite sated, the pallid dragon flew off to search for a hidden place to rest.

Saturated strands of normally bushy hair clung to Hermione's dripping face, and her rapidly heaving chest gradually slowed as she continued to gasp. Hermione sat up and smiled at Harriet, who was still lying on her back and panting, the replica of Bellatrix Lestrange’s dress clinging wetly to her own rising and falling breasts.

A surge of relief and emotion took Hermione. She set upon Harriet and swept her into a passionate embrace. The pair of them rolled around on the gravelly shore, lips locked, for an eternal moment of bliss. When they finally came up for air, Hermione grinned and rummaged in her bag for the hand-mirror. Harriet noticed Hermione's hesitance.

“So, are you sure you want to call Dumbledore to collect us now, or just enjoy this moment for a bit longer?” Harriet smirked.

Hermione glanced around the wooded lakeside, recalling the view of the surrounding landscape from above. They were in a relatively secluded area, a fair distance from any semblance of civilisation.

“The Horcrux can wait a few more minutes I should think,” Hermione giggled as she kissed Harriet again, “It’s not going anywhere. Now let’s get you out of that wet dress--and I think I’d like my Harry back now. Don’t worry, I’ve learned a drying spell, and you can change back before we call Dumbledore.”

Hermione dropped the hand-mirror back in the bag and Harriet shivered with a thrill of delight. She needed a release of her pent up anxiety as much as Hermione did, and she always got a bit of a charge from having a romp outside in the woods.

It wasn’t exactly comfortable on the rocky shore, but Harriet didn’t care. Moments later, Harriet was Harry again and free from the dress as Hermione stripped off her own blazer, jeans, and t-shirt.

Hermione temporarily transfigured their clothes into blankets to lie on, and the pair of naked teens resumed their wanton activities. Harry began by vigorously drying Hermione’s drenched tail with one of the blankets until Hermione’s purrs echoed across the small lake. Tingles of static electricity shot through Hermione, and the orange strip of fur along her spine stood on end.

Gleefully, Hermione took Harry’s stiffness in her mouth as he parted her thighs and applied his own lips and tongue to her convulsing damp slit. Harry squeezed Hermione’s bottom cheeks with his fingers and buried his tongue in her moist pink sheath as her fluffy ginger tail danced above him. Hermione sucked and swirled her tongue around the tip of Harry’s erection.

Both of them became giddier as they were carried away by tremors of joy. Harry thrust his hips,
sliding his shaft deeper into Hermione’s gullet as he lapped her fleshy pearl and drove his fingers into her slick passage.

A torrent of ecstasy raged through them both and the dam burst. Harry groaned and filled Hermione’s throat with his stickiness as her own creamy nectar flowed over his tongue. Hermione uttered a muted yowl, her bushy tail flipping back and forth.

A loud crack shocked the young couple from their euphoric reverie and Hermione squealed, Harry’s semen trickling down her chin.

The nude pair of startled teens grabbed their wands and each hurriedly wrapped themselves in a blanket as they peered around wildly, looking for the source of the sound. They gasped and blushed furiously when they spied Albus Dumbledore standing several metres away on the rocky shoreline with his wand in one hand, and the Sword of Gryffindor in the other.

“How did you find us?” squeaked Hermione as she un-transfigured the blankets and pulled her clothes back on.

“Oh, that was easy enough,” Dumbledore replied nonchalantly, his back still turned to the dressing pair. “I was able to determine your location from the coordinates of your mirror after you stated my name with it in your hand.”

By the time they finished dressing, Harry was Harriet once again, as all he had to wear was the dress he had worn as Bellatrix.

“It’s alright sir; you can look now!” Harriet gulped, her face still scarlet.

“Ah, very well then!” the Headmaster responded with a twinkle in his eyes. “Once again, I must apologise... I quite understand the necessity of release after your no doubt harrowing experience. Now, let us finish this once and for all, and send Tom Riddle’s shade to the underworld where it belongs.”

Hermione’s furry ears were still flicking with embarrassment as she rooted in her bag for Hufflepuff’s Cup. She couldn’t meet the Headmaster’s eyes when she handed him the jewel emblazoned goblet.

The golden goblet glittered in the midday sun as Dumbledore carefully examined it. The Headmaster managed to catch Harriet’s eye and he smiled kindly at the abashed witch.

“Well Harry,” Dumbledore began, as he passed the bejeweled goblet and the Sword of Gryffindor to Harriet, “I believe you should have this honour. After all, Tom Riddle is responsible for most of the travails in your life. It is only fitting that you should be the one to obliterate him completely.”

“Are... are you sure Sir?” Harriet squeaked, her iridescent green eyes wide with surprise.

“Absolutely certain, Harry!” Dumbledore replied.

Harriet couldn’t believe it. She held in her hands two of the most important artifacts of the British wizard world—and the opportunity to finally destroy the twisted wretch who had murdered her parents and killed so many others.
Harriet was being given the chance to end the monster who had brought so much suffering and misery to the world—the villain who had given Wormtail the chance to harm Jennifer. Harriet slowly nodded as a sense of steely resolve filled her. She set Hufflepuff’s Cup on the surface of a smooth flat rock and lifted the Sword of Gryffindor with both hands.

Hermione stood utterly still except for her quivering tail, holding her breath in anticipation. Harriet held the sword high for a brief moment. Then the blade flashed in the sun as Harriet swung it downwards and struck the golden cup.

An unearthly howl echoed, and ripples spread across the surface of the lake. A swirl of wind whipped Harriet’s dress around her ankles, blowing her dark hair across her face as the howl became a ghastly shriek of horror and agony.

The goblet shuddered and rocked, and with one final roar of disbelief, the last Horcrux cracked, spewing venomous black bile across the pebbles at the edge of the lake.

And then it was over, peace and quiet settling across the surroundings once more. Harriet felt something new—something which she had never felt before. She felt a sense of completion. The peacefulness of the wooded countryside lake was inside her, in her soul.

Hermione took Harriet’s hand gently and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“It’s over Harriet,” whispered Hermione, “Voldemort—Tom Riddle—he’s gone for good.”

Harriet turned to face Hermione, caressing her cheek with one hand, gazing into her golden brown eyes.

“I couldn’t have done this without you Hermione,” Harriet murmured. “Without you—Tom Riddle would have won—and I would be dead. You stuck by me through it all, through everything, until the very end.”

She reached out her other hand and drew Hermione closer for a deep kiss as the Headmaster turned away once more. Harriet didn’t know how long she and Hermione kissed, but when they had finished, she felt an incredible lightness of being which was beyond anything she had ever felt.

Harriet knew there were other challenges looming, challenges which were possibly even more ominous and deadly than those presented by the Darkest Wizard to threaten Britain since World War II. But for now, it was enough to know that the man who had cast a shadow across Harry Potter’s entire life would never cast it again.

Harriet reverted back to Harry, and kissed Hermione again, no longer caring whether the dress fit him properly or not. Hermione purred, curling her fluffy tail around Harry, melting into him.

Harry was ready to face the future, no longer having to look over his shoulder for the demons of his past. And he would face it with his wife and his family, the Coven, by his side. No matter what form he took—Harry, Harriet, or someone other—Harry knew they would always be there to support each other.

When the second kiss was over, Harry turned and saw Dumbledore holding what appeared to be a clean set of clothes. The old wizard’s clear blue eyes sparkled in the sun.

“I took the liberty of conjuring these for you while you were... otherwise occupied,” Dumbledore beamed. “I thought you might feel a bit more comfortable returning home as yourself.”

“Thanks Professor Dumbledore...” Harry grinned, “Yeah—that’ll be nice.”
The angry Shade of the Dark Lord had fled through the bodies of the fallen on the field of battle, and into the Forbidden Forest when his head had been unceremoniously stricken from his body. He sought a creature to inhabit which could bear him until he could find another wizard willing to bring him back.

Temporarily, the Dark Lord possessed a crow, and flew off into the wilds of the Scottish Highlands, transferring from one small animal to another as their bodies failed. Finally he found an adder and he was pleased. A venomous snake was the only animal capable of being possessed by the Dark Lord indefinitely without expiring.

The Dark Lord considered his options. He could find his way to a seaport, and hide on a vessel bound for Europe, and make his way to his old haunts in Albania, biding his time as he developed another plan. But the risks were too great. Dumbledore would be expecting that.

No, the Dark Lord needed to act quickly and find a wizard to possess who would survive the process until he found another one to return him to his rightful form. He needed to stay in Britain so that he could seek vengeance in a timely manner. But he couldn’t act near Hogwarts, where the Headmaster might surely find him out.

The Dark Lord needed to be elsewhere, so he slithered South and crossed the border into England.

It had been several days since the battle, and the adder inhabited by the Dark Lord was holing up near a small village in Northumberland which he knew had a few wizarding families. It was nearing midday and he was hungry. The Dark Lord glided through the long grasses of a meadow in search of prey when he felt something strange.

The adder hissed, venom spurting from its fangs involuntarily. Something was very wrong. The Dark Lord felt his tenuous grasp to life slipping away.

This could not be. How was it possible? The Dark Lord had never told a single person about the Horcruxes binding his soul to the realm of the living. He could not die unless they had all been destroyed.

The adder uttered a keening sound unlike anything any snake had ever made. It was the voice of dying man, terrified of what he would find on the other side of the veil.

Then the sound was gone. The adder shook its head clear, uncertain how it had come to be so far from its home. Puzzled, but hungry, the snake wasn’t picky. It swallowed a few ants and a worm—just enough for a quick snack. The adder flicked its tongue, tasting the air, searching for its own scent. Then it turned around and slithered back towards the border of England and Scotland.
Chapter 128

The Muggle Prime Minister never ceased to amaze Minister Dolores Umbridge. It was a shame that he wasn’t a wizard, she thought as she watched him take a sip of tea. The man was cunning and ruthless—he would have done well in Slytherin. He seemed unconcerned that an unknown number of contagious Inferi remained at large, and he was already processing the fact that Voldemort was dead.

The Muggle Prime Minister was very happy for his part. He knew the Witch thought non-magicals to be lesser beings, and frankly, he agreed. What he wouldn’t give to possess such power himself! He was all too willing to have aligned himself with Dolores. Their goals weren’t so different after all—it was only fitting that a superior breed of humans should sit atop the natural order.

And Minister Umbridge clearly understood who among the non-magicals were the most superior. She hadn’t given a second thought to using magic to help the Prime Minister’s party steal the General Election back in May. She had been all too happy to sway the election in favour of the party which best represented the non-magical elite of Britain.

That was the loophole in the magical rules which governed the magic that protected the British non-magical public from political exploitation by Wizards. And it was the PM himself who had helped Minister Umbridge discover the secrets of the magic.

It turned out that the magic of the Stone of Destiny’s protections only prevented wizards from ruling Britain directly, through the Institution of the Crown. As he and the Minister of Magic had learned together, the magic did not protect the electoral process from being manipulated by wizards to favour one group of muggles over another.

He chuckled as he recalled the stunned reactions from some sectors of the press, which had been predicting a much closer election, giving the other parties a chance to form a new governing coalition.

Instead, The PM’s party had “won” outright, remaining in power. And now his government stood poised to begin selling off huge chunks of the Public Sector to private interests at bargain rates. He and Minister Umbridge could begin to set in motion their plan to bring Order to Britain, keep the Lessers in their proper place, and eliminate the Undesirables—as soon as she had dealt with the meddlesome Headmaster of the most prestigious educational institute in Britain.

Still chuckling, the PM reached into his desk and pulled out a bottle of brandy.

“Well, Minister Umbridge,” said the PM as he added a dollop of brandy to his tea and stirred it in, “I know it is still early in the day, but it would appear that this is a momentous occasion. I don’t doubt that the death of Voldemort on the doorstep of Hogwarts shall play into our hands nicely indeed.”

~000~

Dumbledore returned to Number 12 with Harry and Hermione via the floo from the fireplace of a wizard pub owned by an Order Member in a village in the Lake District. Harry brushed the soot and ash from his clothes with a cough when he arrived in his own hearth.

“I am sorry that I cannot stay and celebrate, but must return to Hogwarts,” said the Headmaster. “But before I depart, I need to inform you of the latest developments.”

The tip of Hermione’s bushy tail flicked, and her furry ears twitched in curiosity. She peered
questioningly at Dumbledore’s grave features. Harry shared Hermione’s querying expression. The Headmaster reached into his robes and retrieved the latest issue of the Daily Prophet, passing it to Harry.

“This is an important reminder, that although Tom Riddle is utterly dead, we are not yet out of the woods. The Minister has launched an investigation into the recent events at Hogwarts, and we shall all be under intense scrutiny.”

“An investigation?” Hermione squeaked as she skimmed the top article. Harry shook his head and sighed in resignation. “What on earth is there to ‘investigate’?” asked Hermione.

“She’ll take any bloody opportunity,” Harry groaned. “She’s probably trying to work out a way to make us look bad for killing Riddle.”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore gazed at his two students. “She will no doubt draw this out a bit and focus the investigation on me for the time-being. Your critical roles in turning the battle to our favour, and making it possible to defeat Voldemort are still unknown to the public,”

“It will likely be necessary to reveal your part in things eventually, but I believe it ought to remain a secret for now, lest the minister should seek to use this as a legal excuse to detain you for ‘questioning.’”

Harry looked thoughtful for a moment as he considered the news, then he nodded.

“Yes Sir! That makes sense...” Harry began, “I was wondering though--our relatives--they must be going mental after being stuck here for months--looking at the same walls all the time, not being able to go outside. I... I was thinking of sending them somewhere else for a bit. D’you think it would be safe if I sent them out of the country?”

Dumbledore’s brows furrowed and he stroked his beard as he thought silently for a moment. Finally he seemed to reach a conclusion.

“Yes... I do think that would be a wise course of action Harry. Notify me when your families have decided where to go, and I shall facilitate the arrangements for leaving the country. I believe the window of opportunity before the Minister turns her attention back to you is narrow though,”

“When the Minister does set her sights back upon you, she will no doubt already be at the point of locking down all avenues of departure and monitoring Floo travel in Britain. So decisions should be made swiftly.”

~o0o~

Tears of happiness streamed down Jean’s cheeks as she embraced Hermione and her son-in-law. She was thrilled that the monster who had been the root cause of all of Harry’s suffering would never again walk the earth, nor be able to hurt another soul.

Everyone who had been waiting patiently for their return since early morning gave Harry and Hermione a hug, including Madam Bones and Mad Eye Moody. To Harry’s shock, even Petunia tearfully pulled him into a tight embrace.

The years fell away and the memory flooded into Petunia’s mind. So long ago... back before college, before Lily had received her Hogwarts letter, before the Headmaster’s reply to Petunia’s own letter explaining why she couldn’t go to Hogwarts too, before even that Snape boy.

Petunia was small again, maybe 6 or 7 years old. Petunia wasn't certain. But she could finally see
clearly the one last perfect day before the magic, the day before Petunia’s fear and jealousy had come between them and driven them apart. Petunia remembered her younger sister—her best friend Lily.

“Th...thank goodness you’re alright Harry,” Petunia sobbed. “And... and thank you--thank you so much for ridding the world of Lily’s murderer... I miss her so much.”

“Well, it was really all of us,” Harry gasped for air. “Dumbledore’s the one who did him in at Hogwarts, and if it weren’t for Hermione—it just wouldn’t have been possible at all.”

Petunia wept even louder and threw her arms around Hermione, startling the unprepared young cat-witch. For the first time in her life, Hermione was on the receiving end of a hug as bone-crushing as one of her own, or Hagrid’s. Hermione’s furry tail and ears quivered awkwardly, and her eyes filled with tears.

After a few moments, Hermione’s Auntie Joanne passed baby David to Jean, and put her own arms around Petunia, allowing Hermione to escape.

“There, there dear,” said Joanne kindly as she held the sobbing woman in her arms. “Let it all out...”

“I’ll make some tea then,” Abby Brixton offered, pointing her wand at the kettle.

“And you two must be famished. You haven’t eaten yet today,” Hermione’s mother said to Harry and Hermione as she rooted in the pantry’s magical cold-box. “Why don’t we all have an early Tea? Bangers and mash alright dears?”

“Oh... er, yes please,” Harry replied, suddenly feeling quite hungry. He grinned when he heard Hermione’s tummy give a little growl. Hermione gave Harry a little shove and blushed.

“None for me, thanks, Jean,” said Moody, looking pointedly at Amelia Bones “I’ve got to be gettin’ on with things. Gotta talk to Dumbledore...”

“Oh... er, yes, indeed!” Madam Bones added, “I’ll come with you Alastor. I ought to speak with Albus as well.”

After Mad Eye Moody and Madam Bones left, Hermione and Harry chatted and played videogames in the parlour with Susan and Dudley until Tea was ready.

“I suppose Auntie and I don’t really need to stay any more,” Susan beamed as her thumbs mashed away at the buttons on the videogame controller. “We’ll probably leave tomorrow. Thanks loads for letting us stay here Harry. It’ll be nice to see Mum and Dad again for a bit before school starts though—they’ll be thrilled to see us both.”

“You’re welcome Susan. Any time...” Harry swallowed, reddening, not sure what else to say. He was just happy that Voldemort hadn’t had the opportunity to kill off any more members of the Bones family. Hermione gave Harry’s hand a comforting squeeze and curled her tail around him.

Dudley seemed quiet. He wasn’t shouting at the pixels on the screen in front of him as he usually did when playing his games. Harry thought he knew what was wrong with his cousin.

“You alright Dudley?”

“Wha... oh, I suppose,” Dudley mumbled.

Harry was just about to press Dudley to open up a bit when Abby poked her head in the parlour and told the teens that Tea was ready. When the piles of bangers and mash had been demolished Harry
knew the moment had arrived. Everyone was still seated, either sipping a drink or leaning back looking full.

Harry swallowed nervously and glanced at his wife before turning back to face the small gathering. Hermione’s furry ears flicked and she squeezed Harry’s hand sympathetically. Harry cleared his throat.

“We... I’ve been thinking,” began Harry, peering at Hermione’s mother and auntie, and at Petunia, “well... Tom Riddle--Voldemort--he’s gone for good. But the Minister--she’s still after me and Hermione. I... I don’t really know for certain if she’s more inclined to obsess about chasing after family as Tom Riddle was or not...”

“But I know it must be maddening for you to still be cooped up here after so many months, and I was thinking you might all like a... er... long holiday of sorts.”

“I... I can afford to send you--all of you--anywhere in the world you want to go. I think you.... er.... should be safe out of the country. You can all go somewhere nice if you want. Anywhere--I mean it...”

~o0o~

Harry and Hermione undressed and climbed into bed, pulling the covers over themselves. They didn’t bother with nightclothes, as the sensation of being at home again in their own bed, with their own silk sheets against their bare skin felt nice.

“Well that was easier than I thought it would be,” Harry said with a smile as Hermione snuggled into the crook of his shoulder, purring.

Harry picked up the book on the nightstand next to their bed with one hand while he stroked Hermione’s bushy head with the other. He sighed contentedly.

“You were right Harry,” Hermione murmured, “Nobody likes to be stuck in one place for too long without being able to come and go as they please.”

“I was really surprised though,” Harry shook his head in amazement. “I can’t believe that they all wanted to stay together when they go to Canada. I didn’t think Petunia got on with your mum and auntie...”

“I’m as shocked as you are,” Hermione giggled, kneading Harry’s bare chest with one of her hands. “I... I think they’ve all just got used to each other--and nobody wants to be alone again.”

“I’m glad that Abby Brixton said she’ll stay on with them too,” Harry continued. “I feel loads better knowing that they’ll still have a wizard looking after them! D’you think they’ll like Canada? I thought they’d want to go to a tropical island, or somewhere exotic...”

“Well, it’s possible that they’re going to be gone from the UK for a while, so it makes sense for them to want to be somewhere that still feels a bit familiar,” responded Hermione. “Dudley will be able to go to school there until...”

Hermione paused, feeling a lump in her throat. Sensing her sadness, Harry kissed Hermione's forehead.

“I know Hermione,” whispered Harry. “I’ll miss them too. But we’ll get through this and deal with the Minister--they’ll all come home again one day...”
“Are you sure Harry?” Hermione’s eyes brimmed with tears. “What if Minister Umbridge hangs on to power and Britain just gets worse?”

“Do... do you want to leave as well?” Harry asked sincerely. “We can both quit Hogwarts and go to Canada too if you’d like. I’ll just be happy being with you--wherever you go, I'm going too. And we can invite the rest of the Coven to come with us...”

Hermione shook her bushy head without hesitation.

“No...” Hermione sighed, “I know that we’re needed here--we have to help the Order stop the Minister from turning Britain into a Nightmare. This is our Home. And besides, it’s not fair to ask everyone else to leave their families behind.”

“Good,” returned Harry softly. He cupped Hermione’s chin with his fingers and leaned his head forward to kiss her properly on the lips. “I would go wherever you want to go Hermione--I’d go to the ends of the Earth for you. But I’m really glad that you want to stay and fight, because I do too!”

Hermione melted as Harry kissed her a second time. When the kiss was finished, Harry smiled again. He lifted the book once more and began to read it aloud to Hermione as she continued to gently knead Harry’s chest. Hermione dozed off, purring happily while she listened to the sound of Harry’s voice as he read to her from *The Tales of Beedle the Bard.*
Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour peered at the few core members of the Order of the Phoenix gathered before him uncomfortably. He knew that some still didn’t trust him. And it didn’t help that he bore ill-tidings.

“It is out of my hands,” Rufus Scrimgeour said with a frown. “I did everything I could to close the investigation. The Minister overruled my recommendation for closure, dismissing my Final Report as ‘incomplete’...” Scrimgeour huffed. “She has directly taken over the investigation and has brought the Department of Mysteries in...”

“You don’t mean...?” gasped Amelia Bones.

“Yes. Apparently Dolores has Unspeakables leading the ‘investigation’ now,” Scrimgeour scowled.

Albus Dumbledore was disturbed, but his features remained as inscrutable as Snape’s as he absorbed the information. Professor McGonagall and Poppy Pomfrey both looked as appalled as Madam Bones.

“It was to be expected of course,” sighed Dumbledore. “You are confirming what I have already gleaned from reading between the lines of the rather misleading report in the Daily Prophet.”

“So whaddya gonna do about this Rufus?” growled Alastor Moody.

“All I can do is keep forging ahead with my own investigation of the Minister,” Scrimgeour sighed. “I have managed to root out a mole in the Operations subdepartment of the Unspeakable Office. But I have nothing actionable yet to counter her with, and it is clear that Dolores has garnered the support of several key Wizengamot committees...”

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Hermione was the first to wake, quite early the following morning. Too early really. It wasn't even light out yet, but Hermione felt too restless to go back to sleep.

She smiled to herself, remembering the stories Harry had read to her the night before as she drifted into slumber. For some reason, one story in particular kept replaying in her mind. It had been a story about three brothers, wizards all, who had encountered a personification of Death.

But for the life of her, Hermione couldn’t work out why the fable had caught her attention. Something about the story niggled at the back of her mind, ringing a bell which seemed familiar. Not being able to solve a mystery always unnerved Hermione, and she had been feeling a bit unsettled to begin with.

Hermione knew that she and Harry were at a crossroads in their lives together, a juncture between the past and things to come. Harry had finally got the closure he deserved.

They should be celebrating, moving on with their lives, and enjoying the next few years at Hogwarts with nothing more than normal teenage things to worry about. Well, at least normal enough for a pair of teenage wizards who had married very young and started a Coven anyway.

But the future was still so uncertain. And for some reason that story with the three brothers kept insinuating itself into Hermione’s thoughts. Hermione tried to put it out of her mind. She closed her eyes and just paid attention to Harry’s gentle breathing next to her, his chest rising and falling and his
heart beating under the palm of her hand.

Hermione began to moisten and she pressed herself closer to Harry, grinding her damp slit against his hip. She slid her hand down Harry’s torso, across his abdomen, and his morning erection twitched, brushing the back of her fingers.

Hermione smiled to herself again, deciding it would make a nice distraction. Harry stirred slightly when Hermione kissed him tenderly, and slid her naked form on top of his.

Harry was having a rather pleasant dream which began to evaporate as an even more pleasurable sensation engulfed him. Something warm and moist enveloped his penis, and hard nipples pressed against his chest and abdomen. Harry’s eyelids flickered as he awoke to find Hermione lying atop him, and feeling himself already firmly ensconced inside Hermione’s sopping vessel.

“Morning Hermione! Bit early isn’t it?” Harry grinned at her adorable blushing face and reached out a hand to pet her furry ear. Hermione purred and rubbed her bushy head against Harry’s cheek before giving him a humid kiss.

“Morning Harry,” giggled Hermione as she slid herself wetly up and down Harry’s shaft.

Harry gasped as the pleasure surged. He caressed Hermione’s back with his other hand, stroking the strip of fur along her spine as he began to kiss and lick the sensitive spots under her chin. Hermione mewed when Harry began to meet the gyrations of her hips with thrusts of his own, burying himself within her.

Hermione’s slick sheath clenched Harry’s penis as he plunged to her depths. The covers tumbled away as Hermione’s furry ginger tail flailed and her back arched. Harry’s lips encircled Hermione’s again and he had both hands on her breasts, fingers tugging on her hardened nipples as they continued to writhe in unison.

A current of bliss swept them both away. Hermione yowled and the milking sensation of her sopping tightness around Harry’s erection was too much for him. Groaning ecstatically, Harry climaxed, filling Hermione with his semen.

Hermione fell sweatily back against Harry’s chest, both of them panting. Hermione lay there purring serenely on top of Harry as his hand began gently stroking her bushy hair and fuzzy ears again. Hermione didn’t want to move. It felt nice just to lie there peacefully in Harry’s arms with his penis still twitching inside her.

Harry’s head swirled with intoxication as he breathed in Hermione’s aroma. He couldn’t tell where he left off and Hermione began. He didn’t know how long the two of them lay like that, completely absorbed in one another, but after awhile, Harry felt the eddies of ecstasy begin to move him again.

Soon, the bed rocked as Harry and Hermione resumed their passions. This time, Hermione was underneath, her legs and furry tail tightly wrapped around Harry’s backside as he plumbed her depths once more.

Magic crackled and sparked when the pair of them merged in an explosion of euphoria for a second time and the walls trembled.

Having accomplished completion, the Potters lay together in a blissful daze yet again, joined as one, for an indeterminate, seemingly eternal moment of nirvana.

When Harry next woke, he realised that it was several hours later, well past breakfast time. He also realised that he and Hermione were still quite literally and very stickily entwined. He couldn’t really
move without stirring Hermione, and probably getting them both all excited again.

Well, it couldn’t be helped. Harry would need to make a bathroom run soon. Harry attempted to extricate himself from Hermione’s clinging vulva, limbs, and furry tail. He thought he almost had it, but it was his still hard penis moving again inside her which woke Hermione.

“You’ll never be able to go with it like that anyway Harry. Let me fix it for you,” Hermione giggled blearily. Harry grinned at Hermione as she slid off his very solid erection and wrapped her lips around it instead.

Hermione sucked and licked Harry's penis clean while he ran his hands through her silky golden-brown tresses. Moments later, Hermione hungrily swallowed as Harry effusively ejaculated into her throat.

Hermione felt much happier and clearer-headed. She cleaned her teeth while Harry used the loo, then they shared a hot shower together. Something clicked in Hermione's brain as they both dressed and got ready to meet the rest of the day.

“Harry?”

“Yes?”

“Do you remember the story--about the three brothers? You were reading it to me last night.”

“Yeah...” Harry finished buckling his belt and peered attentively at Hermione. He wondered if she had had a similar feeling of deja vu. “Can’t forget that one really. There’s something about that story-the invisibility cloak for one thing...”

“And the Resurrection Stone...” Hermione said excitedly. Harry, I think the story is based on real people...”

“Come off it. You’re joking...” Harry peered at his wife with a thoroughly bemused expression. “Death can’t be a real character. He’s an anthropomorphism--it’s just a fairy tale for wizards Hermione...”

Hermione stared back at her skeptical husband and giggled as the absurdity of the situation struck her.

“Are you teasing me Hermione?” asked Harry, still with a look of bewildered amusement plastered on his face.

“No,” Hermione shook her head. “I mean it. Of course Death isn’t a real person--you’re absolutely right, but the rest of the story... Do you remember when we found the Ring of Peverell? And then Dumbledore gave it to you?”

Harry nodded.

“It’s the Resurrection Stone Harry--don’t you see?” Hermione’s golden-brown eyes gleamed brightly, “You have two of the three magical artifacts in the story. The three wizards in the story are the Peverell brothers, and you’re descended from the one who owned the Invisibility Cloak. It all fits logically...”

“You’re serious about this aren’t you?” Harry interjected, stunned by the seeming credibility of the revelation.
“Absolutely,” Hermione responded adamantly. “When we found the ring, Dumbledore said something very interesting to Mr Moody. Dumbledore called the insignia on the Stone in the ring, ‘the Peverell Coat of Arms—the Deathly Hallows’...”

“YES!” Harry’s own eyes widened in excitement as it hit him, “I remember the symbol. It looks a bit like an eye in the middle of a Triangle—but a slitted eye. It’s not an eye, it’s the...”

“...stone in the ring, yes!” Hermione finished for Harry. “And that slit wasn’t a slit, it was a wand...”

“...and the triangle was a cape—a cloak—my Invisibility Cloak. You’re right Hermione, it all fits, it makes sense. Invisibility Cloaks as good as mine are supposed to be really rare—it’s impervious to nearly everything...”

“I know; it’s perfect Harry,” Hermione gushed. “The cloak didn’t get torn or damaged at all when I was wearing it as we crashed through the ceiling of Gringotts. And the charm on it is as strong today as it must have been when your father owned it. That’s unheard of. The Peverells must have been incredible wizards...”

“The Elder Wand... That must be amazing,” Harry mused. “I’m not sure that I’d want it though. Seems more trouble than it’s worth, something like that. I’d rather have the cloak.”

Hermione nodded vigorously in agreement, “Me too... though I thought—given your parents...”

Harry shook his head, “Maybe at one time—but honestly, since I’ve been together with you, I haven’t felt as desperate about not knowing my parents...I haven’t really felt the need in a long, long time...”

“It’s weird. I want to see them—but I don’t as well. I... I don’t really understand. It’s more of a choice now, rather than an urge, but I don’t feel like it’s the right time yet—I’m still not ready. And besides, I feel I’ve come to know who they are better since... I’m glad that Snape told me everything now...”

“I... I think I understand Harry,” Hermione blinked back a few tears which threatened to leak and smiled at him. Harry reached out and caught a tear with the back of his forefinger as it trickled down her cheek.

“It’s alright Hermione,” said Harry softly. “I’m fine, really. I’m just trying to say why, if I had to choose—at this moment in time—why I would choose the Invisibility Cloak instead of the Resurrection Stone or the Elder Wand. Right now, I’m just mostly curious...”

“...Who has the Elder Wand?” Hermione concluded with a nod. “Maybe Dumbledore can tell us more about the Deathly Hallows, and what they mean...”

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Madam Bones and Susan departed shortly after a very late breakfast, both of them thanking the Potters profusely for their hospitality. Susan then gave Dudley a hug and a kiss on the cheek before stepping into the green flames, thanking him for keeping her company during the summer.

Harry grinned at the goofy expression on Dudley’s reddening face. He hoped Dudley would have a chance to make some nice friends in Canada, maybe even meet a girl. Dudley deserved it. He was almost a completely different person now.

Harry barely recognised Dudley as the boy which Harry’s horrible Uncle Vernon had trained to be a bully. All that seemed to be left of the old Dudley was an obsession with movies and videogames that featured lots of gunfire and explosions. Susan had assured Hermione and Harry that Dudley had been the perfect gentleman the entire summer.
Moody caught Harry’s eye after the Boneses had gone.

“Well Potter,” Mad Eye growled, “I’ll be about for a bit until we’ve got your relatives moved—which’ll likely take us till the end of the week. But I know you’ll be headin’ back to Hogwarts tomorrow. You and your wife need to know that there was an emergency Order meetin’ last night for some of us in the ‘inner-circle’.”

“There’s nothin’ ye need to worry about just yet. Dumbledore’ll fill you in on anything which affects you when you get back to Hogwarts. For now, just remember to stay vigilant.”

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“Thanks loads Harry,” said Dudley with a sad smile. “It... er... it’ll be nice to get outside and see other people again.”

Harry returned Dudley's smile a bit awkwardly and nodded, “You’re welcome Dudley. I’m sorry that Aunt Petunia vetoed your vote to live in Tahiti or the Bahamas.”

Dudley and Harry both began to laugh and Hermione giggled, her bushy tail swishing mirthfully. After a few chuckles, Dudley became serious again.

“I... I’ll really miss you Harry. I... I know I’ll have a chance to make new friends, but it’s not the same. It’s not really fair. All those years... I wasted on bullying you...”

Harry grew alarmed, seeing where this was heading. “Look... Dudley! That’s all water under the bridge. You’ve already apologised. You’ve been really nice since.... and anyway, I blame Uncle Vernon more...”

“No... that’s not what I mean. I mean... I am still sorry but...” Dudley floundered momentarily, then pulled himself back together. “What I’m trying to say is... is that I’m sorry that I didn’t have a chance to be your friend before you went off to wizard school. I think you’re really cool to hang out with--and... and I just wish we had more time to be friends now...”

Harry’s eyes felt a bit watery, then a sense of resolve set in.

“Hey!” said Harry firmly, “I’ll see you again... That’s a promise Dudley! Here... take this.”

“What is it?” Dudley peered at the hand-mirror which Harry had given him.

“It’s a bit like a mobile phone,” Harry replied. “If you touch it or hold it and say my name, I’ll be able to talk to you on one too. This one is mine--I can get another from the Order though, and I can use Hermione’s in the meantime,”

“If you need anything... or just want to talk, call me. Just try not to forget that you’ll be in a different timezone!” Harry smirked slightly and Dudley grinned back at him.

“Wicked! Ta Harry... does it er... take messages?”

“I... I dunno actually!” Harry’s eyebrows popped up at the question; he glanced at Hermione.

Hermione pricked her furry ears thoughtfully.

“It would be a bit silly if it didn’t have that feature really,” she said. “You can’t always expect that the other person will always have their mirror in front of them. Try leaving a message Dudley.”

Dudley said Harry’s name and spoke into the mirror. Harry waited a minute or two then took
Hermione’s mirror from her hand. As soon as Harry touched the mirror he heard Dudley’s voice emanating from it and saw Dudley’s moving visage. Harry nodded in satisfaction as he listened to the message.

“Well, guess that answers that question,” Harry grinned.

Harry and Hermione spent the rest of the day cheerfully playing videogames and watching action films with Dudley. For a special treat, Abby Brixton went out and brought back a take-out feast for everyone from a nearby Indian Restaurant. After a sumptuous spread of curries, rice, and samosas, the Potters went to bed, full and happy, feeling ready for whatever came next.
Chapter 130

Daphne distractedly dipped the piece of toast in the runny yellow yolk of her boiled egg, hotly anticipating Harry and Hermione’s imminent arrival later that morning. Daphne glanced at Fleur beside her, and the others, wondering if they felt the same as she did. Sensing Daphne’s disconcertion, Fleur put an arm around the younger girl and gave her a kiss.

“Soon Chérie,” Fleur murmured, “We shall all be togezzer again very soon my love.”

Daphne nodded and smiled at her girlfriend. She had missed the Potters more than she thought possible as they had only been gone for two days, but that wasn’t really what was bothering her.

The afternoon before last, Dumbledore had cheerfully informed the Unaffiliated and their friends that the Potters’ mission had been a roaring success. Daphne was thrilled and relieved that the scourge of the wizard world was no more, with the surety that he would never return. Nevertheless, she couldn’t help feeling a bit empty and confused.

Daphne hadn’t expected to feel a bit lost. In some respects, the wizard who had fashioned himself into a “Dark Lord” had defined her entire existence. Voldemort had been a looming presence over everyone in Britain for many decades. Even during the 13 years that most people had believed him to be dead, people had been too terrified to say his name.

And for months, Daphne and the rest of the Unaffiliated had been utterly consumed with the goal of protecting themselves and Hogwarts from him. Now that Voldemort was gone, Daphne was unsure of herself, uncertain of her purpose--the Coven’s purpose.

She knew that the Minister was the biggest threat to Harry and Hermione now, but she had no idea what the Coven could do about that. The Minister couldn’t be fought directly as long as the rest of wizarding Britain perceived her to be the legitimate head of the Ministry.

All Daphne could envision in her own immediate future was several more years at Hogwarts. But that was no longer enough for her; she needed more, something to fill the gap, some knowledge of her destiny. And Daphne hoped that with the Potters’ return, that she would find it.

Daphne’s eyes were still on Fleur who was chatting to Luna and Parvati, and Daphne’s ears caught the sound of Jennifer’s giggles. Daphne smiled when she saw that Dora had changed her features to a bear snout as she ate her porridge. Ginny nearly spat her tea out with laughter, and Neville was chortling softly as well.

Daphne continued to eat her own breakfast in silence, but she was distracted from her reverie by a gentle hand on her shoulder. She was surprised to see Professor McGonagall standing beside her. Somehow McGonagall had pulled a Dumbledore and snuck up on the Mingling Table without anyone noticing.

“Professor?” mumbled Daphne as she hurriedly chewed and swallowed the piece of toast in her mouth.

“My apologies Miss Greengrass,” began Professor McGonagall kindly, “I don’t mean to disturb you, but I need to inform you that you have a visitor--your father is here. When you have finished your breakfast, you will be able to find him in the Headmaster’s office.”

Daphne’s eyes went wide and her chest tightened.

“It’s alright dear,” Professor McGonagall continued, all eyes upon her now. “There is no cause for alarm. As far as I am aware, your sister Astoria is well and at home with your mother. Your father simply wishes to speak with you in person before term begins.”

“Thanks Professor,” Daphne nodded, her trepidation changing to excitement at the news. Hastily Daphne finished her breakfast and gave Fleur a kiss before dashing off to wash up and join her father in Dumbledore’s office.

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Saying goodbye to everyone at Number 12 had felt very different from any of the previous goodbyes in either of the Potters’ memory, but they had both taken loads of comfort in the fact that their relatives would have each other and a witch to keep them company.

They had shared a quiet breakfast with the others before leaving. And even though Harry and Hermione were both satisfied that Mum, their respective aunts, and Dudley, would be safe in Canada and well looked after by Abby Brixton, farewells were still quite tearful.

Harry and Hermione emerged from the green flames in the fireplace of the staffroom at Hogwarts to be eagerly greeted by a grinning Professor Lupin.

“Well, aren’t you two a sight for sore eyes,” said Lupin to the young couple after Harry had regained his balance and stopped coughing. “I trust all is well?”

“I bloody hate floo travel,” Harry grimaced as Hermione helped him brush the ash off his clothes with her bushy ginger tail. “I wish we could’ve just caught a train to Hogsmeade and had you meet us there.”

“Honestly Harry,” giggled Hermione, her furry ears twitching, “You just need to keep your eyes shut and hold your breath until the spinning stops. I think I’m finally getting used to it myself.”

“Well, we might be able to do something about that Harry,” said Lupin with a thoughtful expression. “You are both legally of age after all. I’ll speak to Dumbledore and see about getting apparition lessons for you both--though of course...”

“...You can’t apparate directly into Hogwarts,” Harry muttered, not sure that he would like apparating any better than floo travel. As far as he was concerned, broomsticks were the best means of transportation in the Wizard World, especially with Hermione snuggled against him.

“Indeed!” Lupin responded, smiling. “Most of the time anyway--unless Dumbledore temporarily takes down the anti-apparition charms. I was actually meaning that for the time being until the problem of the Minister has been dealt with, that for you, direct travel is perhaps for the best. The less time you are exposed, the better.”

“In any case,” Lupin continued, looking even more cheerful, “I believe some sort of celebration is in order. Perhaps you and your friends would like to join me and Sirius at the Shack this evening for a bit of a soiree.”

“That sounds great,” said Harry, finally smiling himself. “Yeah, I’d like that. Does that sound good to you Hermione?” Harry asked his wife.

Hermione returned Harry’s look, then regarded Lupin astutely, her furry ears and tail quivering as she sensed him holding back some joyful tidings.
“Well... that would be lovely, but I think Professor Lupin has some good news to tell us first Harry!”

Lupin groaned. He had wanted to surprise the Potters at the party, but he had forgotten about Hermione Potter’s keen senses. Harry questioningly peered back and forth between Hermione and Professor Lupin.

“You’d better spit it out Professor...” Harry said with a grin, “Hermione can be quite stubborn at ti... ow!” Harry bit his tongue and smirked at Hermione who was giving him a mock glare after swatting his shoulder teasingly.

“Hark who’s talking,” Hermione retorted. Then she set her sights firmly back on Professor Lupin, a bit of a smirk on her own lips. “Still... Harry’s not wrong! I’m not budging until you tell us now... Sir!” Hermione’s features softened and gave Lupin her best doe-eyed look. “Please?”

“Alright, you win,” Lupin shook his head with a laugh and rubbed his forehead. “This isn’t exactly how I wanted to tell you--but here it is then... I don’t really know how, but I’m cured. I am no longer a werewolf!”

“Shut up! You’re joking!” Harry gasped.

Hermione’s jaw dropped in shock, “But that... that’s impossible, isn’t it?”

“Well--so Snape and Madam Pomfrey keep reminding me,” Lupin chortled. “They are as astounded as you two. But the results of Pomfrey’s tests are quite clear, and undeniable. The only thing... Dumbledore, he didn’t seem quite as surprised as he ought to. Especially when I revealed my own thoughts on the matter to him...”

Professor Lupin gazed shrewdly at the young cat-witch and Harry. Suddenly it hit them both.

“Our Patronuses!” Harry nearly whispered, looking very sheepish.

Hermione curled her fluffy tail around Harry comfortingly, “Please don’t be cross with Harry, Professor. Dumbledore said we should keep it a secret, but we still meant to tell you and Sirius...”

“But somehow we never got round to it...” Harry blurted out anxiously.

“Oh, heavens no! I’m not cross in the least,” Lupin reassured the two young students, “Nor will Sirius be. We both understand the need for keeping some things a secret, in as small a circle as possible. None of us knew how we survived the battle with Voldemort. By rights Hogwarts should be in ruins, and we should all be dead. And we might be if anyone untoward had stumbled across whatever your secrets are...”

“All of us in the Order assumed that Dumbledore had some secret weapon which he had put Harry in charge of... But judging from your reactions, am I right to presume that your Patroni had something to do with that as well?” Lupin asked.

“Yeah, erm... they’re... er... ‘superpowered’ Patronuses, I suppose...” mumbled Harry awkwardly. He looked at Hermione and she nodded, putting her arms around him and giving him a kiss on the cheek.

“You and Sirius were spot on when you called the rest of the Unaffiliated our girlfriends,” Harry said quietly. He swallowed nervously. “In fact, apparently, somehow, we inadvertently... er... we’re a Coven...”

“Ah... say no more Harry,” said Lupin, light dawning on him. “I understand. Covens are well known
for their... er... erotic engagements—there’s no need for the details. I must assume that your... erm... activities, have something to do with the Castle-Quakes. And would I also be correct to assume then, that your ‘superpowered’ Patroni were indeed responsible for the destruction of the Dementors?”

“Yes...” Hermione squeaked. “But we had no idea that would happen when we used them at the end of the Third Task...”

“...and it was only a guess on my part that they would kill Inferi too,” concluded Harry.

Hermione’s furry ears twitched and she almost reminded Harry that technically Inferi were already dead, but stopped herself, realising that Harry was just being colloquial.

“And it was a brilliant guess, a very logical inference actually,” Hermione said instead. “You’re right Professor. We might not have survived if it weren’t for our Patronuses—if it weren’t for Harry...”

“And now we know of at least one more effect of such potent Patroni,” Lupin nodded with a satisfied expression on his face. He noticed the Potters’ eyes flicker towards each other uncertainly.

“Perhaps two more then?” Lupin raised his eyebrows as something clicked in his brain. “Should I also conclude that the Coven’s Patroni had something to do with Jennifer Watts’ newfound magical abilities as well?”

Harry swallowed nervously and Hermione’s furry ears twitched anxiously. Remus Lupin whistled, humbled by the Potters’ presence, and wondering how much more that he and Hogwarts really had left to teach the two powerfully magical young prodigies who stood awkwardly before him. According to Severus, they were both nearing Sixth Year levels in Potions already, and their Fourth Year was still nearly a week away.

“Don’t worry. Miss Watts’ secret is safe with me...” Lupin said gravely. “Given the current government, even with Voldemort gone, it could be quite dangerous for that information to get out. I must say... it is incredible. Never in recorded history—at least not that I know of—have muggles ever been turned into wizards. It is as unheard of as a permanent remedy for lycanthropy;”

“And I cannot thank you both enough for giving me my life back, inadvertently or not,” Lupin’s voice cracked and his eyes glistened moistly. “Words are truly insufficient to convey my gratitude...”

~o0o~

By the time Harry and Hermione left Professor Lupin, they had all cheered again in anticipation of the celebration of Tom Riddle’s demise, and buoyed by the knowledge that Lupin’s lycanthropy was cured.

“I still can’t believe it Hermione. Lupin’s going to have to learn how to be an animagus now if he wants to be a wolf again. He’ll have total control when he transforms.”

“It really is amazing Harry. Our Patronuses—we’ve gone further with that magic than anyone has ever done. We’ve accomplished things that the vast majority of wizards will probably never be able to do...” Hermione paused, her face awestruck. “I... I haven’t really quite thought about it like that before—what it all means about our place in the wizard world.”

“I know,” said Harry. “It’s almost like our Patronuses are... 'Curse-Busters' of a sort. They seem to destroy dark magic...”

“...they’re the opposite of death and despair—they’re the embodiment of life and joy...” Hermione continued as she embraced Harry tightly. She gazed into Harry’s lustrous green eyes and whispered,
“They’re love...”

Harry and Hermione’s lips met in a long, rapturous kiss as they stood in the hallway opposite the delighted portrait of Aphrodite.

The ancient Greek Sorceress known to the muggle world as the Goddess of Love waited patiently as the young couple kissed. When the Potters finished kissing, Hermione was the first to realise that they were home, spotting Aphrodite smiling blissfully at her.

“It’s my turn today,” Aphrodite cooed, batting her eyelashes. “You two know the passcode...”

The Potters blushed; they did indeed. The life-size portrait beckoned them forth and they both gave Aphrodite a kiss on her painted lips. The magical canvas shimmered as Aphrodite tasted the truth of their essence, and the Potters flattened as they stepped into the frame to join her. When they stepped out of the frame again, they were on the other side of the wall, facing what was now a Secret Corridor, hidden from the rest of Hogwarts.

“One day, I might change the ‘passcode’ to something a little bit more,” Aphrodite teased with a wink.

“And we’ll offer it gladly,” Hermione purred, giving the kind-hearted and beautiful painted sorceress another kiss. Aphrodite tittered and vanished, returning to her other frame.

“I love magic. I dunno if I’ll ever get used to that,” Harry grinned. “It’s weird; I almost feel like I’m turning two dimensional when we step into and out of the frames, but from inside...”

“...the painting feels three dimensional and the outer-world looks two dimensional. It’s almost like another world in there Harry...”

“Yeah it is. I suppose...” Harry blushed as he considered Aphrodite’s last remark, “I suppose we really could give her a bit more--and Cleopatra and Circe as well on their days... but only if we can’t be seen from the other side of course.”

“Of course Harry...” Hermione giggled. She never got another word out because there was a squeal as the door to their common room opened and Daphne pounced on the Potters.

“I thought I heard voices out here,” Daphne beamed radiantly, giving each Potter a kiss. “I missed you--we all did.”

There were kisses and hugs all the way around as Harry and Hermione settled back in with the Coven. Hermione spied the schoolbooks and papers strewn across the coffee table and the end tables by the sofa and cozy armchairs.

“We’re helping Jennifer study for third year exams,” Luna explained as she twirled her fluffy white tail cheerfully.

“There’s less than a week before term begins next Tuesday, so Dumbledore is setting Jennifer’s exams for Friday,” said Parvati, wriggling her own sleek black tail.

“And she’s bloody brilliant,” said Dora, her hair flourescing through all the colours of the rainbow as she squeezed the reddening Jennifer and gave her a kiss. “Dumbledore said they’ll only be testing for the third year essentials, but Jennifer could take the full tests and pass them all--I just know it.”

“Jennifer is magnifique,” Fleur added, “C’est incroyable--three years of material in less zan two months!”
Jennifer hid her crimson face behind her long dark bangs, “I’ve had loads of help—I couldn’t have
got this far without all of you, really...”

Relief flooded Jennifer when everyone began clamoring to hear details from the Potters about the
mission to retrieve the last Horcrux. Everyone listened intently and shivered at all the scary bits. The
girls giggled and Harry grinned, turning slightly pink, when Hermione recounted how she and Harry
had been caught in flagrante by Dumbledore at the lake.

Daphne wanted Harry and Hermione to stay longer after they had finished their tale, but she knew
that her father didn’t have all day.

“Harry, my father has some important things he needs to discuss with you—the both of you. He’s
with Dumbledore, probably still in Dumbledore’s office...”

“Oh, alright then,” said Harry, feeling nervous suddenly, “Er... d’you know what it’s about
Daphne?”

“I’m not sure exactly, but I think it has something to do with the Wizengamot,” Daphne replied.
Daphne looked like she was about to say something more, but after a moment’s hesitation she gave
the Potters a hug and sent them on their way.
Hermione could sense Daphne’s anxiety as surely as she had sensed Professor Lupin’s barely contained glee; she knew Daphne had wanted to say something more. Harry glanced at his wife as they made their way to the Headmaster’s office, a gnawing feeling growing in his own gut.

“Hermione, Daphne seemed a bit worried about something. D’you think she’s alright?”

Hermione’s furry ears flicked pensively.

“I... I think so Harry,” she replied. “I think that mostly she’s just uncertain about the future. While we were all learning how to fight and preparing for the war with Voldemort, we knew what we were doing--we had a goal. Now that it’s been accomplished, she’s not sure what the future will bring, and what she’s supposed to do with her life... and that scares her.”

“Yeah,” Harry sighed, “I know the feeling...”

“But there is something else,” Hermione continued. “She was going to tell us something--something else which is bothering her, but I got the feeling that it has to do with whatever Mr Greengrass is going to talk to us about.”

“Oh, so we’ll find out soon enough then. Still, whatever’s going on, we should talk to her about it afterwards. I don’t want her to feel bad.”

“I agree Harry,” Hermione responded as they reached the entrance to Dumbledore’s office.

Moments later, the two young wizards were greeted warmly by Mr Greengrass and the Headmaster, and seated themselves in two cozy armchairs. Harry swallowed nervously and Hermione instinctively took his hand. Though the greeting had been friendly, they both knew that this was no social call.

“Harry, Mrs Potter,” the Headmaster began, “As we all know, despite the final demise of Tom Riddle, we still face an uphill climb. I had hoped that we would have more time to devise a proper strategy for dealing with the Minister, alas... perhaps I should allow Mr Greengrass to explain.”

Cyril Greengrass sighed. He hated to be the bearer of bad news.

“Well Harry, the Wizengamot has been called into session for this upcoming Friday at 9 am. I had hoped to shepherd you through your first legislative session. However, given the rumours, I think it would be best that you not participate directly.”

“Why not?” Harry frowned. “I’m not scared of the Minister...”

Cyril Greengrass couldn’t help smiling at Harry’s directness and fortitude.

“Good,” Mr Greengrass responded. “Be that as it may, I believe that it would be far too dangerous for you to enter the Ministry at this time. If what I have been told is true, the Minister now has the support of two key committees...”

“Which has been confirmed independently by Rufus Scrimgeour, Head of the Auror Office,” Dumbledore interjected.

“Indeed,” Mr Greengrass nodded, “But most disturbing, is how the Minister has achieved this.
members of the Wizengamot have been indefinitely detained for ‘questioning’ following Voldemort’s failed attack on Hogwarts—all of them members of the governing board of Hogwarts.” Mr Greengrass paused to let the information sink in.

Hermione tried not to squeak when Harry’s grip on her hand tightened. Harry’s nostrils flared, his face turned white and his stomach clenched. He opened and shut his mouth twice, swallowed uncomfortably, and tried to steel himself before speaking.

“So what am I supposed to do?” Harry said as evenly as possible, his anger building, “I can’t just sit here and do nothing. If the Minister is looking for a legal maneouvre to get into Hogwarts, I should try and stop her by speaking out at the Wizengamot session.”

“I believe it is already too late for that Harry,” Mr Greengrass replied somberly. “And if you were to show up for the session, I believe that you too will find yourself in detention under armed guard. The only suggestion I have, is that you should appoint a proxy to at the very least vote on your behalf.”

Harry glanced at Hermione. She was as appalled as he was, and the tip of her tail wagged in agitation.

“Alright then,” Harry sighed in resignation. “The only problem is, I don’t really know anyone. Who should I appoint—and how will they know the right way to vote?”

Mr Greengrass smiled again; there was at least some small means by which he could help Harry Potter.

“My wife, Hippolyta, has already agreed to sit in your seat Harry—pending your approval of course...”

“But Sir,” Hermione anxiously interrupted, sensing Harry’s skyrocketing alarm, “What if the Minister tries to arrest you and your wife too. I... I don’t think we could live with ourselves...”

Harry jumped in, “Hermione’s right Mr Greengrass. I... I really appreciate the offer; I really do. But... but I can’t let anyone else take the fall for me. I’d never be able to forgive myself if Daphne lost her parents.”

Several emotions crossed Cyril Greengrass’s features as he peered admiringly at Harry.

“That should be of little concern Harry,” he replied. “Our family is quite well connected. I do not believe the Minister will wish to risk losing her newfound majority on the Wizengamot by going after us. I suspect that she would have done so already otherwise—as apparently, she has been harbouring the Malfoys and is preparing to have the Wizengamot ratify her Pardon of them.”

Hermione couldn’t help herself. Her furry tail bristled and she hissed angrily. Harry’s head began to swim as his blood started to boil.

“So you mean...” Harry hoarsely started to say.

“Yes!” Mr Greengrass’s features went icy and rigid, “Draco Malfoy will likely be returning to Hogwarts...”

“And there is absolutely nothing I can do to prevent it,” the Headmaster added quietly.

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“This is horrible!” Hermione snarled furiously, her bushy ginger tail still bristling as she departed.
with Harry from Dumbledore’s office. “It’s absolutely revolting...”

“No wonder Daphne is so worried,” Harry responded in a calm voice which belied the crimson flush of anger on his cheeks. “But I’m not going to let anything happen to Daphne, Hermione... no matter what!”

“You mean we’re not going to let anything happen to her!” said Hermione.

“Of course!” Harry agreed, “We’ll all be looking out for Daphne--and each other. That little arsewipe Draco won’t know what hit him if he tries anything. I’ll take off his other hand, or worse, if I have to!” Harry concluded with a growl.

“At least one good thing has come out of it,” Hermione sighed. “Daphne will be able to use magic outside of Hogwarts without violating any laws if it comes down to it and she has to leave.”

“Yeah, that’s really good!” Harry nodded. “Daphne’ll be able to defend herself without activating the Trace now that it’s gone. I suppose I shouldn’t really be surprised that Mr Greengrass signed emancipation papers for her.”

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When the Potters returned to their common room, they found a tearful Daphne curled up with Fleur on a loveseat near the unlit fireplace. Fleur was stroking Daphne’s hair and giving her little kisses, trying to cheer her up.

“I knew something was wrong Daphne, my Chérie. I am glad zat you finally told me.”

“I would have told you sooner Fleur,” Daphne sniffled, “I just didn’t want to spoil things when Harry and Hermione first got back. I knew Daddy would tell them...”

The two young witches both looked up when they realised that the Potters had returned.

“Try not to worry about Draco. We’ve all got your back Daphne,” said Harry firmly, leaning over the seat to kiss her.

Hermione squeezed into the seat on the other side of Daphne and curled her furry tail around the weeping girl. She gave Daphne a tender kiss as well and smiled at her.

“We’ll all be here for you Daphne,” Hermione said sweetly, “And we’re not going to let that loathsome little cockroach get away with anything.”

Fleur looked gratefully at the Potters, feeling Daphne relax in her arms.

“Merci Hermione, Harry--ze others, zey went to take a break from studying. But poor Daphne was too sad to go.”

“It’s nearly lunch time,” said Harry. “Do you feel up to it Daphne? We can stay and have it here if you want to--Dobby can bring us some.”

“No, I’ll be alright now,” Daphne smiled and wiped away her tears. “I’m just being silly. I tried to hold it in after I talked to Daddy, but I just couldn’t any longer. And... and I’ve been feeling a bit weird anyway. I thought I’d feel happier after Voldemort got killed--I was at first. But then... but then....”

Daphne’s voice caught. She was still having trouble articulating exactly why she felt adrift from her
“Oh Chérie,” Fleur gazed at Daphne sympathetically and kissed her again, “I understand. I feel the same--a hole in my stomach. Ze future--it ees in flux, an’ who knows what will occur now!? But we shall all find our way togezzer, yes?”

“Fleur is right you know--you’re not alone Daphne,” Hermione kissed Daphne again too and Daphne smiled.

Harry rested his hand on Daphne’s knee and gave it a gentle squeeze, “We all feel the same way Daphne. With the Minister out there--who knows what'll happen? But I know one thing for certain--we’ll make our own future, and we’ll do it together--ALL of us. I promise...”

Daphne beamed from ear to ear and leaned forward to embrace Harry.

“I know we will,” Daphne murmured, “Thanks Harry. I feel loads better now--really.” Then Daphne leaned back into the loveseat again and flung her arms around Hermione and Fleur, kissing them both. “I love you all so much--I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

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When Daphne, Fleur, Harry, and Hermione found the rest of the Coven flying around the Quidditch pitch, they all left to get some lunch in the Great Hall. Ginny was already at the table, glaring at a letter, her face as red as her hair.

“I can’t believe it!” Ginny fumed, “What a complete, utter, Tosspot--”

Neville rubbed Ginny’s back as he read the letter over her shoulder, a worried frown on his face, “Your brother wrote that...?” asked Neville

“What’s the matter Ginny?” Hermione queried.

“Percy the Prat, Percy the Pretentious Popinjay--he sent me a letter,” Ginny said angrily.

Harry’s eyebrows shot up as alarm bells went off in his head, “How did he know you were here? It’s still summer...”

“He doesn’t,” Ginny replied. “He sent it to the Burrow--that’s why I only just got it now. Mum sent it on to me. But she wouldn’t have if she’d read it--she’d have probably burned it and sent him back a howler. Here, read it. A lot of it is about you anyway...”

Ginny passed the letter to Harry, her hand shaking with rage. He sat down in his usual seat with Hermione at his side and they read it together while the others watched curiously.

Dear Ginny,

I hope this letter finds you well. As you are about to begin your Third Year, I deemed it appropriate to give you advance notice of certain changes being planned for Hogwarts, as you are my favourite sister and I do not wish to see you become entangled in the web of Dumbledore’s lies, nor fall victim to another one of his blood-feuds in his quest for power.

Harry almost started to laugh when he read the bit about Ginny being Percy’s favourite sister, but the look of humour slid from his face as he continued reading.
You are the only family member who has ever treated me with a modicum of respect, and you are young enough that I feel you can still be dissuaded from falling for the dangerous propaganda which has long ensnared our parents and twisted their minds beyond reason. I feel it is unfortunately too late to say the same for our brothers. For too long have they been plied with Dumbledore’s unfounded and baseless rhetoric regarding the “fair” treatment of Mudbloods and Muggles.

It may surprise you to learn this, but the Headmaster really has very little concern for the Muggleborn. In fact, the Minister’s investigation is uncovering disturbing details about his past which will soon be revealed in a thoroughly documented exposé in the Daily Prophet. When considered alongside the evidence of Dumbledore’s current treasonous activities, it shall substantiate this fact.

Dumbledore’s “concern” for the muggleborn who are stealing our heritage and wiping their behinds with the traditions of real wizards is nothing but a front. He is using them and their lack of knowledge and respect for wizarding tradition and culture to gain power and take over the Ministry. He is little more than a violent revolutionary who is plotting to upend everything we hold dear, flout the Natural Order, and destroy the Rule of Law.

It is to this end that Dumbledore has long promoted the Cult of Harry Potter, a violent and dangerous criminal who purports to come from a long line of wizards, yet who is known to have been raised by Muggles. I know that you have always had a soft spot for Potter, based on Dumbledore’s fairy tales about an infant who “saved” the wizard world from the “Dark Wizard” known as Voldemort.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, Voldemort’s methods may have been irresponsible and disruptive, but it has become clear (under the exceptional tutelage of our delightful Minister) that Voldemort felt that he was forced to act outside the Law to counter Dumbledore’s longtime meddling in Ministry affairs. Are you aware that Dumbledore’s seditious dirty-blood policies have been diluting our wizarding culture and genetic heritage since at least the late 1940’s?

In any case, I urge you to stay as far away from Harry Potter and his Halfbreed Pet as possible. The Minister’s investigation is certain to eventually implicate Potter and his Abomination. As you are no doubt aware from the Daily Prophet’s excellent coverage, Potter and his Pet were hauled up before the Wizengamot at the beginning of the summer on charges of murdering over 200 sentient beings and engaging in dangerous experimental breeding.

As I was a key part of the investigation and prosecution of Potter and the Halfbreed, I can assure you, they got off on a mere technicality. They will not be so lucky next time. I do not wish to see you harmed in any way when Potter and his Experiment are finally apprehended. It may be some time before the investigation yields any fresh fruit in that regard, but until then, please give Potter a wide berth.

This next bit, you must keep entirely to yourself. If all goes well in the Wizengamot later this week, and they accept the recommendations of the Educational Oversight Committee (and I have no doubt that they will) Inquisitors will be dispatched to Hogwarts to continue the investigation of Dumbledore and his Cronies, and to begin the implementation of new policies to facilitate an improved educational experience.

Please give these Inquisitors your utmost cooperation. If you do, your rewards shall be handsome indeed, and you will be able to take pride in yourself for having assisted in deposing one of the greatest threats that wizarding Britain has ever faced.

It would perhaps be best for you to burn this after reading to prevent Dumbledore’s operatives (our parents) from learning of the Minister’s plans to extend her authority over Hogwarts. It would not do
to tip-off the Headmaster and give him the opportunity to cover his tracks and escape Justice. For too long has Dumbledore believed that he could destroy the Traditions and Ancient Laws of our culture with impunity.

I place my utmost faith and trust in you, my precious sister.

Your brother,

Percy

Harry felt really ill when he finished reading Percy’s screed. He glanced at Hermione. She was as white as a sheet; her furry ears and tail were utterly wilted and her eyes were as big as saucers. Speechless, Harry passed the letter around the table for the rest of the Unaffiliated to read.

Gasps of horror emanated from the others as their brains processed the unbelievable text on the piece of parchment. Everyone looked sympathetically at Ginny who had a murderous expression on her face.

“You’d better take this to Dumbledore, Harry,” said Luna as she passed the letter back to him, her face uncharacteristically grave. Ginny nodded her approval. She had no desire to keep the letter.

“I’ll take it right now,” Harry said woodenly. “I’m not really hungry anymore anyway.”

Hermione left the table with Harry and for the second time that day they found themselves in the Headmaster’s office, discussing the perilous road ahead of them.
Headmaster Albus Dumbledore adjusted his half-moon spectacles and sighed heavily as he read Percy Weasley’s letter to his sister yet again. The second conversation with the Potters had been lengthy and even more unsettling than the one they had all had with Mr Greengrass earlier that morning.

Things were moving much too rapidly for Dumbledore’s liking, and it had taken a great emotional toll upon him, revealing the dark travails of his past to the Potters. But it had been an absolute necessity. Harry and his wife deserved to hear the truth from the Headmaster’s own lips before seeing it distorted in the pages of the Daily Prophet.

Fawkes ruffled his feathers as he eyed the headmaster with concern. The portrait of Phineas Nigellus Black snorted.

“Really Dumbledore...” the sour looking portrait sniffed disdainfully, “are you simply going to let the Minister’s puppets just waltz on in and take over Hogwarts? I thought you were smarter than that. Back in MY day, the Ministry would have never dared dream of it.”

The Headmaster couldn’t help chuckling at the pompous portrait’s boastfulness.

“Now, now Phineas, back in your day, the Ministry and Hogwarts were aligned completely in promoting a philosophy of Pureblood Supremacy--albeit not quite such an extreme version to be sure. Spare me the braggadocio,” retorted Dumbledore.

Dumbledore noted with satisfaction that Phineas actually looked slightly ashamed.

“My apologies Dumbledore,” Phineas replied, “Old habits die hard. It is still quite difficult for me to accept that there may be a few among the Muggleborn which might be as competent as those of such regal blood as myself, and I cannot say that I entirely approve of all of the changes you have been instituting over the years...”

“But I concede that such may be necessary if wizards should hope to progress and keep up with the evolution of Muggle technology--I have witnessed their advances through my portrait in London at the National Gallery,” Phineas concluded with a sigh.

“How I count on you to do your utmost to protect all the students of Hogwarts then--including the Muggleborn--if I should be forced to depart?” Dumbledore peered expectantly at Phineas.

The portrait of Phineas Nigellus fidgeted uncomfortably in his frame. Finally he nodded.

“Yes! You have my word. I am loyal to Hogwarts and its students,” Phineas answered. “And I have little respect for those such as the Minister who can only advance their ideology through deception and murder. If those of superior standing, such as myself, cannot lead by example, then perhaps we do not deserve to lead the wizard world.”

Many of the other portraits of Hogwarts’ past headmasters gasped in astonishment. The old Slytherin headmaster’s frank admissions and change of heart were unexpected. A few of the portraits applauded and nodded in agreement.

“Hear, hear... Well said Headmaster Black!” the portrait of a witch in healer’s robes commended him.
“I could not agree with Dilys more!” concurred the portrait of Armando Dippet. “Jolly good show Phineas! As headmasters, we are honour-bound by our duties to Hogwarts and to do our best by the students--each and every one of them.”

“Thank you Headmistress Derwent--and you have my gratitude Armando,” Phineas responded stiffly.

Dumbledore’s eyes began to twinkle. The portrait of Phineas Nigellus wasn’t used to being lauded by the other headmasters.

“Yes, very good indeed, Phineas,” said Dumbledore, “Thank you very kindly for your support.”

Then Dumbledore addressed all of the portraits on the wall.

“Much has been said here today which was not only of a personal nature, but also some highly sensitive information which must not be imparted to others. I would like to be able to trust that you will all be silent on that matter. I am afraid I must insist that you make a binding agreement to never reveal to anyone what you have heard here today without my express permission.”

~o0o~

The late summer sun sparkled on the shimmering surface of the water as Harry and Hermione walked in silence along the edge of the lake, letting the Headmaster’s story of his youth sink in. They found themselves a comfortable place to sit and watch a few geese play and dive for fish. Harry put his arm around his wife, and she curled her bushy tail around his waist, leaning into his shoulder.

“Poor Professor Dumbledore,” sniffled Hermione half balefully and half angrily, “That was so sad about his sister. Those awful muggle boys. It was vile and despicable what they did to her--she was so little. They deserved everything his father did to them. It’s no wonder that he used to believe in Gellert Grindelwald’s rubbish--that wizards should rule over muggles.”

“And then to lose Ariana in the crossfire when he fought Grindelwald--his best friend,” Harry responded somberly. “I’m glad Dumbledore finally found the Resurrection Stone. That must have been horrid--living for all those years not knowing if he’d killed his own sister. At least he doesn’t have that hanging over him anymore.”

They both sat in quiet rumination for a bit. Harry leaned over and kissed Hermione’s bushy head as he stroked her furry ears.

“And you were absolutely right about the story of the Three Brothers Hermione,” Harry murmured. “They really did create those three magical artifacts--the Deathly Hallows. I can’t believe that Dumbledore has the Elder Wand. Just to think--between him and me, we have all three of them--it’s incredible!”

“We’ll have to keep that bit to ourselves I think,” Hermione sighed. “It’s better that most people think they’re a myth.”

~o0o~

The gathering in the Shrieking Shack with Sirius and Lupin was more subdued than it might have been under different circumstances, but the Coven and their friends managed to summon a bit of good cheer nonetheless. Everyone had a butterbeer in hand or set on the table next to plates of hors d’oeuvres and bottles of Elfwine and firewhiskey. Viktor was deep in conversation with Ginny and Neville.
Dora had brought her guitar, and Jennifer joined in on the old piano in the sitting room of the Shack after Lupin used a magic spell to tune it up. Everybody danced when Dora and Jennifer played a few bouncy tunes.

After a few songs Lupin and Sirius sat down with the Potters for a chat and watched as Luna, Parvati, Daphne, and Fleur continued dancing.

“There’s going to be an Order meeting tomorrow night,” said Sirius, downing a shot of firewhisky. “Is it true that there will some ‘additional staff members’ when term starts? And that Draco Malfoy would be returning? That’s all Dumbledore told Remus.”

“Yeah... at least according to Percy’s letter to Ginny,” Harry replied with a sigh.

“‘Inquisitors’ he called them...” Hermione huffed crossly.

“They’re continuing the ‘investigation,’” growled Harry. “They’re going to try and get rid of Dumbledore apparently--and go after Hermione and me if they can catch us out in anything. And Draco’s being pardoned by the Minister.”

Lupin’s face fell, “Harry, you have to promise me you will keep a cool head--Azkaban may no longer be a threat, but the Ministry no doubt has some sort of detention facility...”

“I understand Professor Lupin,” Harry interjected, “I’ll keep my nose clean and do my best to stay out of their way...”

Alarm spread across Sirius’s features and he gripped the arm of his chair tightly. “Harry, I’d like you and Hermione to leave Hogwarts until we sort this out--maybe hole up at Number 12 for a bit.”

“What?” Harry was stunned, “I... I can’t do that--I’m not going to run away from a...”

“...From a fight Harry?” Lupin raised his eyebrows. “Is that what you were going to say?”

Harry opened and shut his mouth as his cheeks flushed. Hermione took his hand and squeezed it, saying nothing as her furry ears twitched. Hermione was beginning to think that Sirius might be right, but she knew that Harry would have to make his own decision, and she was going to support him whatever it was.

“Look...” Harry began, “I... I can’t just not go to school--and I can’t hide out at Number 12 while everyone else might be in danger...”

“Please Harry, I’m begging you to consider it!” Sirius pleaded. “It might be wise to take your friends too. This isn’t the same as fighting Voldemort head on. And from my understanding--if what Snape, McGonagall, and Dora tell me is true--over the past year and a half you’ve learned nearly as much about using magic as most adults who have graduated Hogwarts--perhaps more even in certain subjects. The rest you can learn from books and study on your own if you have to, for the immediate future.”

“Sirius is right Harry,” Lupin quietly agreed. “OWL’s and NEWT’s can wait--your knowledge in some of the key subjects is advanced enough for you to bide your time. And you have demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that your skills and power are prodigious. You could easily make a life for yourself with what you know if it came down to it.”

Harry glanced at Hermione and could see the trepidation in her eyes. He knew that Sirius was right about the danger of facing a foe who hid behind a veil of legitimacy.
But it rankled Harry to shy from a challenge. It was like letting the Minister and Draco Malfoy win. He was staggered to learn that Sirius and Lupin believed that Harry was knowledgeable enough to leave Hogwarts already though.

But Harry felt more at home at Hogwarts than anywhere else, even Number 12, which he had become attached to since the place had long been decontaminated. Lupin, Sirius, and Hermione, waited patiently for Harry to say something.

“Harry, the Order will do everything in its power to expose the Minister’s corruption to the public,” Lupin proffered as the young wizard remained silent. “Once that is achieved, we can tackle her directly and throw whomever she sends to Hogwarts out on their ear now that we know Hogwarts will withstand attack,”

“Until then, I’m afraid to say that I think Sirius is correct. Perhaps Madame Maxime will take you and your friends at Beauxbatons in the meantime if you wish to stay with a proper school curriculum.”

Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath to steady himself.

Finally Harry opened his eyes and spoke again, “If... if I absolutely have to leave, I will--but I’ve got to at least try to stick it out for a bit. It’s not just about me and Hermione anymore... there’s all the other muggleborn to think of, and whatever happens, I’m not leaving Britain.”

“Hear hear,” said Parvati, startling the two adult wizards and the two students. She and Luna had stopped dancing to take a breather and overheard much of the conversation. “Luna and I are with you 100% Harry... whatever you decide to do.”

“That’s right,” chimed in Luna. “If you and Hermione want to stay to help look after the other students, then we will too. And if you want to leave, then we’re both going with you.”

Harry suddenly realised that the music had stopped. Everyone was eyeing him now--including Viktor, Neville and Ginny. He swallowed nervously when it hit him that whatever decision he made would affect the entire Coven and their friends. Staying was a dangerous option with the Minister’s minions coming to Hogwarts. But leaving didn’t seem much safer unless the Coven all hid in Number 12 indefinitely.

“Of course...” Harry’s mouth was dry and he took another sip of his butterbeer. “Of course, you’re all welcome to come with me and Hermione if we go. We’re a coven--we belong together. B...but what about the Trace--you and Parvati are still underage. And Jennifer...”

“Jennifer won’t ‘ave a Trace on her,” said Dora, putting her arm around the younger witch. “She wasn’t born a wizard and she’s not been registered with the Ministry.”

“And Daddy already emancipated me a month ago...” Luna grinned.

“As did my parents,” Parvati interjected. “They did it so that Luna and I could legally get married...”

“But we decided to postpone the wedding for a bit after reading Ginny’s letter,” Luna added. “It would be a bit awkward if the Ministry is poking around Hogwarts.”

“An’ you know zat Daphne ees untraceable ‘arry,” said Fleur, her voice thick with emotion. “An’ I am not registered wiz ze British Ministry of course.”

Daphne took Fleur’s hand and nodded resolutely in concordance.
Harry looked at Hermione again as he wavered. Maybe they would all be safer if they left.

Hermione curled her bushy ginger tail around Harry and gave him a kiss. She knew exactly what he wanted to do. “If you want to stay and fight, Harry, we will. You’re right--this is bigger than any one of us. And together, I know we can accomplish whatever we set ourselves to.”

Sirius and Lupin both peered at each other, wincing, knowing that they were losing the battle.

Harry took off his glasses and sighed, rubbing his forehead. It was beginning to hurt almost as much as it had whenever his scar had ached before Snape had helped him get rid of it. His headache vanished completely as he resolved to follow through on his initial impetus.

“Right then--we’ll stay at Hogwarts for now,” said Harry firmly as he gazed at the steadfast features of his family, the Coven, a smile creeping to his lips. “But if things get too hot for us here, we’ll go back home--to OUR home, all of us--and work out what we can do to foil the Minister from there.”

~o0o~

Hermione purred happily, snuggling next to Harry in bed, as a wave of sleep rushed over her. The sensation of inner-peace radiated from Harry as strongly as his determination now that he had made a decision, and Hermione instinctively knew that it was the right one.
Chapter 133

It was still early when Harry woke and he felt more at peace than he could remember feeling in some time. Hermione’s gossamer breath caressed the skin of Harry’s neck, her hand stirring slightly against his bare chest and he smiled, letting out a deep sigh of contentment.

Let the Minister’s agents come. He was ready. With his wife, family, and friends, Harry had faced Voldemort and an army of his monsters and minions, living to tell the tale. Images and scenes of the recent events drifted through his mind, but the visions of death and carnage littering the grounds of Hogwarts had no hold on his soul.

Harry had thought the feelings of anxiety and horror which accompanied his reminiscences would be burned into his memory forever, but those emotions were already fading. Except for a distant feeling of sadness and pity for those who had chosen to kill and die in the service of a madman, Harry felt mostly a swell of joy that Hermione and the Coven had survived, none the worse for the wear of battle.

Without bidding, Harry’s thoughts turned to the story of the Three Brothers and the magical artifacts which they had created as he absentmindedly stroked Hermione’s golden-brown locks. He wasn’t really sure why his mind was making the connection, or why he kept thinking about the Hallows.

Hermione’s purring and soft hand sliding down across his stomach distracted Harry from his reverie. Harry’s gentle petting had roused her.

“Morning Harry,” she murmured with a smile as she reached for his erection. Harry grinned and kissed Hermione tenderly in response.

Deftly, Hermione stroked Harry’s penis until it erupted and his stickiness flowed over her fingers. Harry groaned with pleasure, vowing to return the favour—which he did when they hit the shower.

As the hot water cascaded over the pair, Harry vigorously sudsed and rinsed Hermione’s tail. Hermione meowed happily as his hands cradled and massaged her bottom cheeks, fingers sliding between the crack and slipping into her wet vulva.

The steam rose and rivulets of hot water tumbled across their skin. Hermione turned to face Harry and he dropped to his knees to pay fervent attention to her fleshy pearl with his tongue as his fingers probed her moist depths.

Hermione yowled and shuddered ecstatically, running her own fingers through Harry’s shaggy wet hair as a river streamed down her torso between the valley of her thighs, bathing Harry’s face.

Giggling, they both dried each other off before dressing and finishing their preparations for the day ahead.

It was still a bit early for breakfast, so they shared a pot of tea in their sitting room. Harry took a sip from his teacup, his thoughts once again strolling down the same path they had traversed as he had awoken.

“Hermione, I keep thinking about the Hallows, and for some reason Tom Riddle comes into it—even though there doesn’t seem to be a direct connection...”

Hermione’s furry ears pricked with interest. She sipped her own tea as she considered the possibilities.
“I think it must have something to do with the ‘Master of Death’ business Harry,” Hermione finally responded. “Whoever has all three Hallows is supposed to be the ‘Master of Death,’ and Voldemort was obsessed with beating Death…”

“Of course!” said Harry, smacking his forehead. “That’s it! Voldemort used Horcruxes to conquer death--and it worked for a bit until we found them all. The only thing is, I don’t really understand why anyone would actually think that having the Hallows would really make someone a ‘Master of Death’…”

“It’s not like they actually prevent Death--the Resurrection Stone doesn’t even really bring people back to life. Does it make any sense to you?”

Hermione shook her head. “Not really Harry! You’re right, the Resurrection Stone only brings back a person’s spirit and soul--a bit like a ghost. It’s not like they would have an actual body.”

“Right,” Harry agreed, “and the wand is just really powerful, and good for causing lots of death. And the cloak... well, it’s just a really good invisibility cloak. So why would anyone be so obsessed with having all three of them? It’s rather disgusting, but Horcruxes almost make more sense in terms of actually ‘defeating’ Death.”

Hermione nodded in agreement.

“That’s a good point Harry. I think it’s just the legend that was built up around the Peverell brothers and their creations. Even though Hallows Seekers know the real story, they’re still enthralled by the mystique of the Myth--that the Hallows were a gift from a personification of Death.”

“The Fairy Tale imbues the items with more meaning than they would otherwise have. And so Seekers almost seem to believe that having all three artifacts would make them more or less invincible, which they then--on perhaps an unconscious level--equate with immortality.”

“Yeah... alright... I think I get that,” Harry replied. “Thanks Hermione--that makes loads more sense now. I guess most people are just scared of death--and almost everyone wants something like a Philosopher’s Stone, the Hallows, or Horcruxes. The weird thing is, I... I’m not really scared of dying myself…”

Harry swallowed as it hit him that he couldn’t let his guard down or get cocky. “I’m more frightened by the idea of you or any the others dying. I... I don’t think I could bear it. Hermione--what if I’m wrong? Am I being thick? Maybe we should get out of here before... before something happens to any of you.”

Hermione’s furry ears twitched and she bit her lower lip in consternation; she could feel Harry wavering. She put her cup of tea down on the coffee table and embraced Harry, giving him a gentle kiss.

“No Harry--you’re being very brave... being a leader,” said Hermione firmly. “You always put others first, and you don’t let being afraid stop you from confronting evil no matter how bleak the odds seem, or how anxious you might get;”

“And you’ve put a lot of thought into this decision--you’re not just rushing into things bullheadedly. Believe me Harry, you’re doing the right thing,” Hermione concluded, kissing Harry again, curling her bushy tail around him.

Hermione felt Harry relax in her arms. When they finished kissing, Harry smiled and gazed into her soft golden-brown eyes, feeling reassured and at peace again.
“Thanks Hermione! I needed that.”

~o0o~

Hedwig nudged Harry affectionately after wolfing down the sausage he had given her. Harry stroked her feathers, peering happily at the rest of the Coven and their friends as they ate breakfast in the Great Hall. Ginny seemed to have cheered up and put Percy’s letter out of her head, much to Neville’s apparent relief.

Viktor was spending mealtimes with the Unaffiliated, as Karkaroff had returned to Durmstrang now that Voldemort was no longer a threat. Harry glanced over at the Slytherin table, seeing Theodore Nott sitting miserably by himself, clumsily spooning porridge into his mouth with his left hand—the one which still had fingers attached. Harry felt a small tug of pity.

Dabbing his lips with his napkin first, Harry gave Hermione a peck on the cheek.

“I’ll be back in just a minute Hermione. Wait here...”

Hermione watched Harry amble over to the Slytherin table, her furry ginger tail swishing with pride in her husband. Luna smiled and curled her fluffy white tail around Parvati, who looked torn between suspicion and sympathy.

Harry seated himself across the table from the Slytherin boy and cleared his throat. Theodore Nott shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He flushed in shame, casting his eyes down.

“It’s alright Nott,” Harry began, “You saved Luna’s life—and I’m very grateful for that. But I need to be sure I can trust you... I need to know that you’re dead serious about turning over a new leaf. It’s important—because Draco will probably be returning to Hogwarts in a few days with the rest of the students...”

Harry was pleased to note that Nott visibly paled at the revelation; that was a good indication of the truthfulness of the young Slytherin’s remorse.

“Are... are you sure?” Nott stammered.

“Yes, it’s almost a certainty,” Harry replied. “So, I need to know that you won’t rejoin Malfoy’s little entourage.”

“Fuck, that’s bolloxed!” swore Nott as he massaged his forehead, looking pained. “I’d hoped I’d never see him again. I swear Potter... I don’t want anything to do with Malfoy or any of his crowd anymore.”

Nott gulped, looking fearful as the gory terrors he’d witnessed flashed before his mind. “I... I’ve seen what true evil looks like,” he gasped, “and I never want to see it again. I... I don’t know how to make you believe me, but I promise, I’ll do whatever you want me to do to show you I mean it.”

Harry studied Nott’s features, then glanced back at Hermione sitting at the Mingling Table. Hermione nodded, sensing Nott’s sincerity.

“Alright then,” Harry smiled awkwardly. “I’ll hold you to that promise—I might need your help at some point, and you’ll need to keep an eye on Malfoy and whoever aligns with him when school starts. But for now, why don’t you join us for the rest of breakfast, okay?”

Theodore Nott’s eyes widened in surprise. “R...really? Are you serious... Potter?”
“Yeah,” said Harry, reaching his hand across the table. “And call me Harry. I can’t promise that everyone will trust you completely until you’ve done a bit more to earn it, but we’re all willing to give you one more chance--just don’t blow it.”

“Th... thanks, Po... Harry,” Nott replied, a tear trickling down his cheek as he took Harry’s hand and shook it. “And call me Theo...”

~o0o~

Along with the rest of the Coven, the Potters helped Jennifer prepare for Third Year exams. Before they knew it Friday was upon them. Knowing Jennifer would be spending the next six hours on written tests and practical spellwork with the professors, everyone else took a well deserved rest.

Harry and Viktor chased a Snitch on their brooms for a bit while the others flew around and tossed the quaffle through hoops. They both managed to catch it several times each. Seeing Hermione reading in the stands below, Harry figured it was time to take a break from flying and spend the rest of the day with her.

Hermione’s furry ears and bushy tail perked up when she saw Harry approaching. Purring, she put the book in her bag and followed Harry down to the lawn. They lay on their backs in the grass and cuddled, looking up at the sky as the rest of the Coven and Ginny continued their game while Viktor coached Neville. Harry was impressed; Neville’s flying skills were improving quite considerably.

After snogging for a bit, the Potters separated their lips from each other and settled back in the grass again, sighing contentedly.

“So, what were you reading Hermione?” asked Harry.

“A ridiculously advanced Charms book from the library,” she replied, her eyes lighting up. “I was really curious as to how Dumbledore managed to turn the portrait guarding the entrance to our ‘House’ into a portal. Here let me show you...”

Hermione rolled onto her front and retrieved the book from her bag, her bushy tail quivering eagerly. She flicked a number of pages until she found the right one and pointed at the spell. Harry leaned over to take a look.

“Pictura Portus eh?” said Harry. “Blimey, the wand movements look complicated. So can we use this on any painting then?”

“Yes... even Muggle paintings apparently,” Hermione replied excitedly, “You can jump into the picture, and then you can pop out of the frame of any copy of it, wherever the picture might be. And according to this, it’s even more amazing when you’re inside a wizard painting.”

“We could go from picture to picture just like the portraits do in the castle. And we’d be able to exit from any painting within the castle--and if there is a copy of the particular painting we’re in elsewhere, we can exit wherever THAT picture might be. Of course, the portal to our corridor has other charms too, to prevent anyone but us getting in.”

“Wow! That’s brilliant!” said Harry as a thought occurred to him. “That could come in really handy in a pinch. I remember seeing a portrait in Dumbledore’s office which looks exactly like one at Number 12. I’m not sure who it is... I’ll have to ask Sirius.”
Chapter 134

The tinkling of piano keys and a lilting melody caught Harry’s ear. He looked up from the “ridiculously advanced” Charms book which he had been studying intently, wondering when Jennifer or Dora had returned. To his surprise, it was Hermione who was sitting at the grand piano in the corner of the Unaffiliated common room.

“That’s beautiful Hermione. I didn’t know you could play...”

“I learned how when I was little. I used to play a fair bit before I came to Hogwarts,” Hermione purred happily at Harry’s compliment. “I wanted to see if I still knew how...”

“I’d say you do,” said Harry in admiration as Hermione’s fingers danced rapidly across the keyboard during a fast bit of the song. “What is that tune?”

“It’s Für Elise by Beethoven. I can show you how to play it if you’d like.”

“Maybe another time,” responded Harry. “Why didn’t you ever play the piano at Number 12? We were there all summer last year.”

Hermione blushed and flicked her furry tail in embarrassment, “Well, I suppose I was a bit too busy... er... having fun with you.”

Harry grinned as he recalled just how much fun they’d had when they weren’t studying to prepare for Third Year. And it hadn’t just been the sex either.

“Besides Harry,” continued Hermione, “there was so much about being a Muggle that you missed living with the Dursleys. I wanted to show you everything--cinema, plays, London parks, the museums...”

“The library,” Harry chortled.

Hermione rolled her eyes and giggled, “...and even television. I knew you’d like Dr Who and Star Trek...”

“Yeah, those are smashing shows,” Harry agreed cheerfully. “And it was lovely catching up on all the films I’d never seen. I only got to watch TV at the Dursleys on the odd occasions that they forgot to lock my cupboard door when they went out--or whatever Dudley was watching at mealtimes--which was mostly stupid comedies and cop shows...”

“That was bloody brilliant how you learned that complicated spell we found to make everything work with magic instead of electricity--and you taught me how to use it as well. You really are a genius Hermione!”

Hermione stopped playing. Purring, she flew across the common room in a trice and pounced on Harry, pinning him to the sofa, kissing him madly. The Potters were so lost in each other that they were startled when two girls burst into the room squealing.

“I did it... I passed everything,” Jennifer shrieked gleefully.

“She was amazing!” exclaimed Dora. “Jennifer got two Outstandings and E’s on nearly everything else...”
“Well... I only got Acceptables on History of Magic and Potions,” Jennifer interjected. “But still, I never thought I’d pass those at all.”

“That’s fantastic Jen...” Harry began.

But he didn’t get to finish his sentence as Jennifer flung herself on the Potters, occupying first Harry’s lips with her own, and then Hermione’s. The three of them snogged for several minutes. Hermione’s purrs filled the common room, her happy ginger tail thumping the sofa as her panties moistened.

Dora sat down in one of the comfy armchairs near the sofa, grinning at them all. When Jennifer came up for air, she plonked herself in Dora’s lap and kissed the older girl as passionately as she had just kissed the Potters. Harry and Hermione looked on in amusement, still dazed by Jennifer’s exuberance.

The Potters were distracted from the fervent display when Daphne and Fleur entered the common room, followed closely by Luna and Parvati. Spotting the new entrants, Jennifer giddily leapt off Dora’s lap and nearly bowled them all over. One by one, Jennifer kissed them each heatedly.

“I take it you passed all of your exams then,” Parvati giggled, her sleek black tail waving mirthfully.

“I did...” began the gleeful ‘turned’ witch. “I even got Outstandings in Defence and Charms...”

“That’s excellent Jennifer,” beamed Luna, whisking her fluffy white tail. “I knew you could do it.”

Daphne and Fleur offered their congratulations as well and Jennifer kissed everyone again until they were all giggling and blushing. A cracking sound drew their attention and Dobby appeared, holding a large cake as a sumptuous feast materialised on the coffee table before their eyes.

“Congratulations Mistress Jennifer,” squeaked the House Elf, grinning from ear to ear. “Master Harry asked Dobby to prepare for Mistress Jennifer’s celebration.” Dobby turned beet red when Jennifer embraced him and kissed him on the cheek. Speechless, Dobby began to hyperventilate.

“D...Dobby m...must be going now....” the thrilled and embarrassed House Elf stammered. “I... I is needed in the kitchen...” Dobby vanished with a popping sound.

“Thanks Harry,” said Jennifer, a puzzled expression on her face. “But how did you know I would pass everything?”

“There was never any doubt...” Harry grinned.

“You’ve been working really hard,” said Hermione earnestly. “We knew you would make it.”

The Unaffiliated gorged themselves in their common room until they could eat and drink no more. They lazed on the sofas and chairs contentedly until it was time for Jennifer to return to the quarters which she shared with Hestia Jones.

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The next morning, the Coven found an exhilarated Jennifer already waiting for them in the Great Hall. She could barely contain herself as the others seated themselves. Hermione was just about to ask her why she was so thrilled, but Jennifer burst and her words tumbled out before anyone had a chance to say anything.

“I’m going to move in with you lot,” Jennifer squealed. “Hestia told me last night when I got back to
“our rooms. Dumbledore told her that it would be for the best as term is going to start in a few days.”

“Brilliant,” Harry grinned. “You’ll be much safer in with the rest of us.”

“That’s excellent,” gasped Dora. “I’m the only one without a roommate at the moment—you can stay with me if you’d like.”

“I’d love that,” said Jennifer, flinging her arms around the older girl and giving her a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll move my things in after breakfast.”

The rest of the Coven were equally delighted and chattered animatedly through their morning meal. When breakfast was finished, Professor Lupin invited the Potters to take a walk by the lake with him, and the others left with Jennifer to help her move.

Following Lupin down to the Black Lake, the Potters were surprised to find Sirius waiting for them, but Harry suspected that this wasn’t strictly a social call. Despite the cheery brightness of the morning, Hermione felt a shiver prickle the fur along her spine.

“Well Harry, Hermione...” Lupin began after clearing his throat, “After giving it all due consideration, Dumbledore and I have decided that it might be best that I be scarce when term begins and the Minister’s agents arrive...”


“Ah, but the Ministry does not know that,” Lupin replied. “And as much as I would love nothing better than to prove to the Ministry that I am no longer afflicted with Lycanthropy and have myself removed from their registry, I do not believe that would be the wisest course of action at this time.”

“Of course!” Harry groaned. “I understand—but it’s still rubbish,” he asserted with a scowl.

“Who’ll teach Defence Against the Dark Arts then?” Hermione inquired, her furry ears and tail twitching anxiously.

“I am uncertain,” admitted Lupin. “There is some discussion about Professor Snape taking the position and having Slughorn take over Potions, but it is also quite possible that Hestia Jones may step in, as Slughorn is reluctant to give up the Alchemy post, having so recently acquired it.”

“So what are you going t’do?” Harry sighed.

“And where will you go?” bleated Hermione, her bushy ginger tail dipping sadly.

“There’s no need to look so forlorn Harry—and cheer up Hermione. I shall still be close by for the time being,” Lupin replied with a smile. “The Shrieking Shack is as safe now as anywhere else—probably safer even than most...”

“...Especially under my protection,” Sirius interrupted with a grin, winking at Harry. Lupin rolled his eyes.

“Yes—well the sooner I can manage to perfect my animagus technique, the better,” Lupin chuckled. “Then I can come and go as I please without attracting attention.”

“You’ll have to practice much harder then, Remus,” Sirius smirked. “At the moment, you can barely manage a few extra whiskers on your moustache—to say nothing about becoming a full wolf. And I’ve seen your in-between form when you were still stricken with the werewolf curse—you look quite pathetic as an almost hairless half-wolf. In the meantime, I’ll have you all to myself.”
The silliness of the two older wizards was infectious, cheering Harry and Hermione right up.

“Right, so we’ll still be able to visit you both at least,” Harry grinned.

“You’d better,” snorted Lupin. “I’ll go mad if I don’t see someone else every once in a while. It can take months to properly learn how to become an animagus. I’ll be stuck in the Shack until then. I can’t risk being seen around Hogwarts as myself as long as the Minister’s operatives are here.”

The four of them continued to amble along the lakeshore chatting, and Harry took the opportunity to broach the topic he had been meaning to ask Sirius about.

“Phineas Nigellus—my great-great-grandfather,” snorted Sirius in reply, rolling his eyes. “He almost makes me miss Mum’s portrait—I’m glad we managed to finally get rid of her...”

“Oh, he’s not so bad really,” Sirius laughed, seeing the disturbed expressions on the Potters’ faces. “He’s just a bloody arrogant sod, full of himself—a real preening Pureblood, easily as conceited as Lucius Malfoy—but not as much of a fop,”

“Why he became a headmaster, I’ll never know—he always seemed to loathe children, and the feeling was mutual. He was the most hated headmaster that Hogwarts ever had. He hasn’t been giving you two any trouble when you’re at home, has he?”

“No, none at all,” said Harry quickly. “I was just wondering because I noticed his picture in Dumbledore’s office too.”

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The rest of the weekend passed quickly. After some discussion between themselves, Harry had convinced Hermione that it would be a good idea to teach the others how to perform the sectumsempra curse in the Room of Requirement.

Harry exhorted everyone to rigorously practice combat spells, and hand to hand fighting as well. Even though he knew that they needed to be cautious and avoid trouble, he wanted everyone to be prepared for anything.

The Potters also spent some time trying to learn the Pictura Portus spell by themselves, though without any duplicate muggle pictures to practice on, they really didn’t know if it was working. They were a bit too nervous to try it on one of the magical portraits in Hogwarts without permission from Dumbledore, and Harry wasn’t certain that the Headmaster would allow them to gallivant through the paintings in the castle.

Finally on Monday, the day before term began, Hermione had enough. She adamantly insisted that Harry just ask Dumbledore or she would herself. Harry was surprised and pleased when Dumbledore gave them his wholehearted approval, and directed them to practice on some of the paintings stored in the unused classroom where Harry had once discovered the Mirror of Erised.

~o0o~

Tuesday evening, the Coven nervously settled in at the Mingling Table. Ginny and Neville had already seated themselves at the Gryffindor table, and Theodore Nott and Viktor had taken places at the Slytherin table. Everyone was ready when the other students began arriving from the Hogwarts Express.

Never had the start of term feast and Sorting Ceremony brought such trepidation. With the arrival of the pupils came two adults—no doubt the Inquisitors mentioned in Percy Weasley’s letter to Ginny.
Harry’s stomach tightened and Hermione’s bushy ginger tail bristled in recognition of at least one of them.

“Alecto Carrow,” Harry muttered through gritted teeth, “But who’s that with her?”

“It’s probably her brother, Amycus,” replied Hermione.

“Oh, that reminds me Hermione... I’ve been meaning to ask you since Gringotts. How d’you know about them?”

“After we got married--that Easter Holiday at Number 12--I overheard Sirius and Lupin complaining bitterly about how the Carrows managed to avoid Azkaban--we both did actually,” said Hermione. “Sirius and Lupin really hated the Carrows... they were going on and on about them one evening, ”

“They’re brother and sister, and apparently they’re particularly awful sadists. I’ll never forget some of the gruesome things that Sirius said they did,” Hermione finished, her bushy tail quivering angrily.

Harry narrowed his eyes and nodded. He couldn’t help marveling again at Hermione’s memory; but now that she mentioned it, he could vaguely recollect the conversation himself.

The Carrows raised their eyebrows at the sight of the Mingling Table and the students already seated there, but otherwise gave no indication that they were witnessing anything unusual. Harry wondered why they didn’t seem very surprised.

Then it occurred to him that of course they had foreknowledge--Percy Weasley was the Minister’s deputy after all, and he had overseen a fair portion of the Triwizard Tournament. It must be common knowledge that there was a new “House” at Hogwarts among the Minister’s inner-circle.

Alecto and Amycus both engaged in conversation with Dumbledore as more students began to enter the Great Hall. To the surprise of the Unaffiliated, the Headmaster appeared to greet the Carrows quite amicably, though Professor McGonagall and Madam Pomfrey both seemed to be giving the Carrows icy death glares.

Everyone was bewildered, but nobody was more astonished than Harry, Hermione, and Dora when an enormous blank screen was conjured, apparently out of thin air, by the wizard presumed to be Amycus Carrow. The giant screen hovered above the Staff Table, easily visible to every student in the Great Hall.

“What is that?” asked Luna, whisking her fluffy white tail in curiosity.

“It looks like a movie screen,” Dora replied, frowning in puzzlement

“Movie screen?” said Daphne with a questioning expression.

“Yeah,” Harry added as Hermione nodded in agreement. “Or a giant flat screen television...”

“Oh, right... like the muggle entertainment equipment you’ve told us about,” said Parvati as light dawned on her.

“But I thought you said electronics didn’t work in magical surroundings because of the magical interference,” said Jennifer.

“They don’t, generally speaking,” Hermione responded. “But there are some obscure charms for making electrical equipment work with magic though. Harry and I found them in a book in the library of our home in London and we used them ourselves. So some wizards must use the
enchantments, it’s just that most British wizards and the Ministry have never been inclined to adopt muggle technology..."

“It ees ze same in France,” Fleur interjected as she rolled her eyes. “Though zey are not anti-muggle, ze French wizard parliament still think zat magic is superior to electricity.”

“I think it’s the same in most of Europe from what I’ve read,” added Hermione. “During the tournament I met some American witches from the Salem Institute briefly at the Quidditch World Cup. I saw them using mobile phones and I asked them about it. Apparently American wizards even have wands designed especially to interact with electrical circuitry.”

“What about the wizard wireless though?” asked Luna, her brows furrowing as she tried to make sense of the incongruity. “Isn’t that a bit like muggle electronics?”

Hermione shook her head, “No. There’s no actual circuitry involved at all. Wizard radios are simply charmed units--just boxes with knobs really--more or less just designed to look and function like old fashioned muggle radios. But judging by the fact that a fair few pop music artists are wizards, I suppose that they must use some of the charms to make their equipment work when they’re playing in wizard venues--like at the Yule Ball.”

“Cor, so that’s ‘ow they do it,” Dora’s eyes popped and she looked excited. “I wondered about that. I’ve always wanted to get my ‘ands on a synth and an electric guitar, but I never knew ‘ow to make them work.”

“But why would the Ministry be bringing in muggle technology now?” Daphne frowned. “The current Minister seems as bad as Voldemort when it comes to being anti-muggle.”

Even Hermione didn’t have an answer for that one and she shrugged uncertainly, glancing at Harry questioningly to see if he had any ideas.

“The Minister is in league with the Muggle PM according to Mad Eye,” Harry muttered darkly, comprehension setting in. “She’s more pragmatic than most older British Pureblood Supremacists, and she’s not afraid to work with muggles as long as they share the same outlook--it’s only halfbreeds and muggleborns that she hates. I bet the Muggle PM convinced her that television and film would be jolly useful for...”

“...Propaganda!” Hermione gasped. “Of course Harry--it would be even more efficient than simply relying on the Daily Prophet. She must mean to introduce the technology--or at least a magical version of it--like the Wizard Wireless--to the British wizard world.”

“Well, that wouldn’t be all bad would it?” asked Jennifer, who looked a bit eager. “I... I hate to admit it, but I have missed having a telly.”

Dora’s features lit up in excitement too. Muggle entertainment had always been her favourite thing about visiting relatives on her father’s side of the family.

“It just depends on the programming really,” Harry conceded. “I can’t imagine it’ll be any good while the Minister and her cronies are running it--she’s probably going to put the Daily Prophet in charge. I suppose eventually it will be a good thing for wizards. But I can’t see the Minister and her lot using it for good reasons...”
Harry caught the eye of Ron Weasley who had just entered the Great Hall with Seamus. The pair of young wizards approached the Mingling Table after Ron briefly gave his sister Ginny a hug. Ron seemed quite disturbed.

“Blimey Harry!” exclaimed Ron, his face ashen, “Draco Malfoy’s back. We saw him on the train…”

“The bloody git was throwin’ his weight around,” fumed Seamus Finnigan. “…acting like ‘e was best friends with the Minister. So what’s tha’ all about then?”

“And is it true... did you really kill thousands of Inferi and help kill You-Know-Who?” Ron asked. “I overheard Dad telling Mum about it after he got back from the battle.”

Harry nodded, glancing anxiously at Hermione and the rest of the Unaffiliated before replying, “Yeah—we all did. But try not to spread it around…”

“Bit too late for that Harry,” said Fred Weasley, who had just appeared with George behind Ron and Seamus.

“Crabbe and Goyle,” George explained gloomily. “They were on the Express too. They were going on about how their fathers were knocked out by some sort of explosion when Voldy tried to stab Harry with a knife…”

“Said that Dumbledore’s lot captured them and killed loads of Moldy’s minions,” continued Fred. “But they were bragging about how the Minister forced the Auror Office into letting them go just yesterday…”

“What?” gasped Hermione, her bushy tail bristling in outrage. The rest of the Unaffiliated looked equally horrified and Harry groaned.

“Well... not exactly letting them go altogether,” George clarified, “Supposedly they’re under ‘house arrest.’ According to the Junior Death Munchers their fathers got a deal for promising to help the investigation.”

“That figures,” Harry sighed resignedly. “I should’ve known that Head Auror Scrimgeour couldn’t hold onto them indefinitely. I suppose everyone will soon know that we fought in the battle too then…”

George nodded sympathetically. Fred smirked a bit.

“You should’ve seen ‘em though,” Fred added, grinning. “Crabbe and Goyle both looked like they were going to wet themselves when they said that some of the Snatchers who had been arrested with their fathers had mentioned that you lot had killed heaping mountains of Inferi…”

“Not to mention you lot wiping out a whole battalion of Giants and Trolls, and loads of Snatchers…” snickered George. “Malfoy didn’t look half as cocky after they told him about that, and about how Harry KO’d the Noseless Wonder without lifting a finger…”

“There they are--with that smarmy little bastard Draco now,” said Seamus.

Everyone turned and peered in the direction that Seamus had indicated. Sure enough, Draco Malfoy was pompously swaggering into the Great Hall flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. Draco’s smug look
turned into a scowl when he spotted the Unaffiliated and their friends all looking at him.

Daphne squirmed closer to Harry, and he put his arm protectively around her. Fleur put an arm around Daphne too and glowered back at Malfoy. Luna narrowed her eyes and glared at Draco, curling her fluffy white tail around Parvati.

Harry didn’t know what came over him. Surprising himself, Harry grinned at Draco and winked.

Ron guffawed when Malfoy’s scowl turned into a look of utter dread and the Slytherin scurried to his table. “Y’know Harry, maybe it won’t be so bad if everyone knows that you helped do You-Know-Who in again and massacred an army of his monsters.”

“Yeah, you might have something there Ron,” Harry smirked. Hermione and Dora couldn’t help giggling. Luna grinned and gave Parvati a hug, feeling her fiancé relax.

Jennifer eyed the blond Slytherin and his mates curiously. So that was Draco Malfoy--the one who had hurt Daphne’s sister and abused Parvati. Jennifer’s sense of foreboding lessened considerably as she observed the little cretin’s cowardly manner.

Ron suddenly realised that there was a pretty new girl at the table with long ebony bangs, and his mouth gaped open.

“Who are you then?” Ron asked, managing to sound both accusatory and a bit lecherous all in one go. “Aren’t you a bit old for a Firsty?”

Jennifer shrank back and Dora put a protective arm around her, glowering at Ron. George smacked Ron’s shoulder as Fred rolled his eyes; Seamus looked a bit hurt and jealous.

“Don’t be rude Ronald,” Hermione snapped icily as Harry glared at him.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean t’be rude... Really!” Ron mumbled sincerely, his ears reddening.

He knew that they’d never be very close again, but Ron really wanted to try and stay friends with Harry and Hermione this time. He’d really have to try harder not to blurt things out without thinking.

Hermione sensed Ron’s sincerity and her features softened. She had come to understand that Ron really couldn’t help being thick, but regardless--his manners still needed a lot of work.

“Ron, this is Jennifer,” said Hermione. “Jennifer, this is Ron Weasley, Ginny’s brother. Fred and George are Ginny’s brothers too. And this is Seamus--Ron’s best friend.”

“Hello,” said Jennifer bashfully as the Weasley boys and Seamus greeted her. She felt a bit too awkward to say anymore, and something about Ron still made her feel uncomfortable.

“Jennifer’s a late-bloomer,” Hermione said for her, “Jennifer only just discovered her magic this summer, and Dumbledore allowed her to join the rest of us who don’t belong to a House because we’ve all become really good friends.”

“Come on, we’d better get seated,” said George to his brothers and Seamus. “The Gryffindor table is almost full.”

Harry sighed after he and the Unaffiliated said goodbye to the Gryffindors. He could see that Jennifer still felt anxious. Harry reached across the table and squeezed her hand comfortably, giving her a warm smile.
"Try not to mind Ron too much," said Harry, rolling his eyes. "He’s a bit of an idiot, and says stupid things--but he’s alright really..."

Harry spied Blaise Zabini taking a seat at the Slytherin table near Pansy Parkinson and some of the younger Slytherins who had been friends with Daphne’s sister. Even though Astoria hadn’t returned to Hogwarts, her friends still wanted nothing to do with Draco and his gang.

Harry noticed Theodore Nott and Viktor moving to sit with Blaise and Pansy. With satisfaction, Harry watched the four of them and the friends of Astoria separating from the group of Slytherins who were gravitating towards Draco Malfoy. Draco was milking the sympathy for his one-handedness for all it was worth from the rest of the Slytherins.

Soon all of the students settled, but a buzz of curiosity continued to fill the Hall as they pondered the enormous screen above the Staff Table and the two new adult wizards sitting with the professors. Professor McGonagall arrived moments later with the new First Years and the Sorting began.

Jennifer watched inquisitively as the rip in the rumpled, tatty old hat opened like a mouth and it began to sing.

The Carrows both sat through the Sorting Hat’s song, their faces growing stonier and colder. The last few lines were so pointed, that one could have heard a pin drop in the silence before the eruption of cacophony from the shocked students. Even the professors shuffled uncomfortably in their seats and exchanged worried glances.

Jennifer squeaked and leapt in her seat when an ethereal form glided up next to her. She still wasn’t used to the idea of ghosts being real, and had kept her distance over the summer. Dumbledore had warned all of the ghosts to give her space until she became more comfortable, but Sir Nicholas’s curiosity about the new girl had finally got the better of him.

“Oh, indeed it has,” proffered the nearly headless spirit with a grin. “The hat is honour-bound to provide the residents of Hogwarts with warnings of danger whenever the school is threatened...”

Professor McGonagall stood up and strode to the fore of the Staff Table and the murmuring died down. Jennifer followed the proceedings with great interest, but she was glad that she didn’t have to face the uncertainty and anxiety that the First Years must be feeling. Jennifer knew exactly who her friends were--her new family--and she snuggled closer to Dora.
Once all the new pupils had been sorted into their Houses, the Headmaster took Professor McGonagall’s place.

“To all new and returning students, I bid you welcome,” Dumbledore said as he spread his arms invitingly, his rich voice ringing throughout the Great Hall. “This year, I would also like to introduce two new Staff members--Alecto Carrow and her brother Amycus, and returning Professor, Horace Slughorn...”

“And beginning this year, Hogwarts will be offering a Cultural Studies course--an examination of our British Wizarding Heritage--to be taught by Amycus Carrow...”

The sour looking wizard nodded curtly at the students to a smattering of applause from the Slytherin table. Madam Pomfrey and Professor McGonagall clapped politely as well, but had difficulty hiding their disdain.

“And although I had in mind another for the post of Defence Against the Dark Arts professor, due to last minute changes, Alecto Carrow will be taking the position,” continued the Headmaster.

Hermione and Harry couldn’t help noticing Professor Snape scowling at Alecto as the Slytherin table applauded again.

“And finally,” Dumbledore went on, “we are also offering a full course in Alchemy this year after being without a full-time Alchemy professor for far too long. Welcome back Professor Slughorn!”

Professor Slughorn stood up and smiled warmly through his bushy handlebar moustache, taking a little bow. To the students, the rotund professor looked much friendlier than the Carrows, and this time more students at every table clapped and cheered. After Slughorn returned to his seat, the Headmaster resumed speaking.

“And before we begin our magnificent feast, may I please direct your attention to the screen above the table. To some of you, this magical technology shall appear familiar, but for many of you, this is something entirely new, a modern marvel finally being introduced to the British wizard world.”

“I have been asked to inform you, that smaller versions shall be available for purchase in shops in Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade, and your local communities, and that all wizard families are to be encouraged to make these items a part of your home life. This new medium has much to offer us in terms of conveying information and entertainment--though I daresay it may take some getting used to.” The Headmaster’s eyes twinkled as he paused for a moment.

“And now,” Dumbledore continued, “you shall bear witness to the historic first ever broadcast on the Wiz-Vision Network--a broadcast specially directed to all students at Hogwarts. Let me introduce someone who needs no introduction, our delightful leader, Minister Dolores Umbridge.”

Harry snorted, wondering how Dumbledore could manage to keep a straight face. Hermione wagged her bushy ginger tail crossly. Gasps of amazement filled the Hall when the screen came to life, and an enormous toadlike face appeared.

“Is this on...?” the face said as it looked off-screen. “Oh... we are? Yes, alright then.” Minister Umbridge’s visage seemed to peer directly at all of the students in the Great Call and she cleared her throat.

“Hem, hem... Greetings Hogwarts students,” the Minister began, as her voice took on a honeyed girlish tone, “It pleases me greatly to announce a new era for Hogwarts, and the British Wizarding Community at large. The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young witches..."
and wizards to be of utmost importance."

“The rare and splendid gifts with which we are graced are nothing if not fostered and refined by
cautious guidance. Our ancient magical knowledge and skills—only employable by those of sterling
magical birthright—must be passed down through the generations lest we lose them forever. Our most
noble heritage and culture must be conserved and cultivated by those who find themselves drawn to
the lofty vocation of educating and moulding young minds."

Hermione rolled her eyes and snorted derisively. Harry noticed that many students were already
tuning out. Even Luna’s eyes appeared to be glazing over. But a chill ran down Harry’s spine as he
continued to listen.

“Many wonderful and exemplary Headmasters and Headmistresses of Hogwarts have proffered
novel ideas to new generations of young witches and wizards, and that is to be expected, for progress
is a vital and necessary element of growth and the enrichment of our lives and our culture."

“The magical device by which my countenance and speech appears before you is a perfect example
of progress which can only enhance our experiences. However, progress for its own sake, without
regard for the wisdom of our most noble and ancient heritage must be discouraged. As the ancient
wisdom of our forebears informs us, a balance then must be struck between tradition and
innovation.”

“Some among us would have us dilute and contaminate our most noble and ancient heritage through
miscegenation and foreign ideologies. Such unrighteous teachings do not lead to true progress, but to
decline and decay, until the flower of our majestic privileges wither on the vine.”

“Such decomposition of our identities, our customs, and our abilities cannot be allowed to continue
unabated lest our culture be lost forever, to be little but a footnote in the annals of history as the
savages and the unclean inherit the Earth.”

“These ignoble practices have been promoted and encouraged with little regard for accountability
and transparency. Let us move forward, then, into a new era of openness, effectiveness, and liability,
intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected, and pruning
wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited.”

“It is to this end then, that I implore all students to strive for the greater good of our ancient and most
noble heritage, by speaking out wherever they see such unwholesome and base promulgations.
Should you have any concerns, I encourage you to bring them to the attention of your newest
instructors. The Carrows are sensitive to the inquiries, interests, and distresses of all students.”

“They shall give the questions and apprehensions of every pupil due consideration. Together we
shall boldly stride into the future, our heads high, as we forge a bright path into a robust tomorrow.
And with that, I bid you all a stimulating and scintillating educational experience for the school year
ahead.”

The screen flickered and went blank. All of the students were either utterly confounded or snoring
loudly. Crabbe and Goyle were completely out, drooling on the Slytherin table. Ron and Seamus
didn’t look in any better shape.

The entire Hufflepuff table was snoozing, and even half of the Ravenclaws were sleeping, and the
other half were scratching their heads.

Even all of the professors looked dazed—including Dumbledore—and Hagrid had actually dozed off.
The rest of the Unaffiliated looked as lost and asleep as everyone else.
Harry’s own head was swimming in circles as he shared a dark look with Hermione. He felt as if a swarm of wrackspurts had nested in his brain.

At one time or another, under other circumstances, Harry might have been as discombobulated as most of the other young witches and wizards in the Great Hall. But he knew the Minister’s intentions well, and his focus had improved immensely since marrying Hermione.

“Bloody Hell Hermione!” Harry muttered.

“Miscegenation!” she hissed as her bushy ginger tail wagged furiously. “I can’t believe that revolting horrid witch would be so up-front about it again, especially so soon after Voldemort’s defeat.”

“We’re probably the only ones that heard that bit though Hermione,” said Harry, shaking his head incredulously. “It sounds like Percy wrote her speech for her. What a meandering, repetitive piece of tripe...”

“The only good thing is that so far the Minister has absolutely no idea how to use television to effectively promote her agenda--We probably won’t be so lucky once she allows the Daily Prophet to write her material, or the Prophet starts putting up their own programming.”

“You’re right Harry,” Hermione nodded, “I suppose we should count ourselves fortunate that all she did was manage to put everyone to sleep.”

Dumbledore had understood the speech all too well, but the soporific effects of the Minister’s discursive rhetoric had nonetheless managed to disengage his mental faculties. Finally Dumbledore managed to shake his own head clear and his sonorous voice rang out through the Hall, waking everyone up.

“Well, that was most... illuminating. In any case, I believe that is more than enough for start of term announcements. I am sure that you are all quite famished--tuck in.”

And with that, the Feast began.

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Jennifer was exhausted and full, but she felt anxious. She tossed and turned, unable to get comfortable, glancing at Dora’s bed.

The last few nights Jennifer had felt perfectly happy just sleeping alone in her own bed in the chambers that she now shared with Dora. But not tonight; not with the knowledge that tomorrow would bring a Hogwarts full of people that she didn’t know.

“Dora,” whispered Jennifer tearfully, “are you still awake?”

“Yeah,” replied Dora as she rolled over, her voice full of concern. “Are you alright Jennifer?”

“I’m frightened--I can’t sleep. I don’t want to be alone.”

“There’s plenty of room in my bed if you’d like a cuddle,” Dora responded, her heart aching for younger girl.

“Are you sure?” asked Jennifer, hoping that Dora really meant it.

“Absolutely,” Dora replied, “Come ‘ere then,” she said, smiling and patting the bed.
Dora was thrilled; she had been hoping for this the last few nights. Dora hated sleeping alone, and had been alternating all summer between the Potters’ bed, Luna and Parvati’s, and Daphne and Fleur’s. She couldn’t sleep any better without someone to cuddle than Jennifer could tonight.

“Thanks loads Dora,” said Jennifer as she climbed into bed with the older girl.

Jennifer snuggled into Dora’s warm embrace and kissed her. Both of the girls sighed in contentment and soon drifted off into a sound slumber in each other’s arms.
Hermione purred and felt the tension drain away as Harry’s fingers gently kneaded the tense muscles in her neck, shoulders and upper back. Her bushy tail trembled with delight. Harry was pleased to feel her relaxing under his ministrations. For her part, Hermione was already planning how to release Harry’s tension when he had finished giving her a massage.

Despite the more sedating and less than terrifying performance of the Minister during her first dubious attempt at influencing the public through a visual medium, the Potters were both more agitated than they had realised when the start of term feast was over. Sleep seemed a distant possibility, so they were making the best of it.

“He’s going to try something sooner or later Harry,” murmured Hermione.

“Who... Draco?” Harry dug his knuckle into a particularly tight knot on Hermione’s shoulder blade and she let out a small moan.

“Ooh... that feels good! Yes, Malfoy--he’s planning to stir the pot, I could sense it,” Hermione responded.

“Of course he is,” snorted Harry. “He may be a bloody coward--he never tries to pick a fight without his gormless gorillas to protect him--but Malfoy always has some sort of dirty trick up his sleeve. No doubt he wants revenge... and he’s probably been ordered to try and provoke us by the Minister to boot.”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking too... Oooh, that’s the spot Harry...” Hermione’s furry tail quivered again as elation flooded her senses.

“Well, I can handle a few insults Hermione... I’m a big boy now. So no worries on that score. And I know all of Malfoy's little tricks for trying to get me into trouble now too. But sooner or later, he’s going to try and hurt someone again, and we’ll have to stop him one way or the other--permanently if absolutely necessary,”

Harry sighed, “And when that happens, we'll probably have to do a bunk and take the others with us... unless the Order manages to deal with the Minister first and get rid of the Carrows--which isn’t really likely in the short-term. But hopefully Malfoy’ll be too reticent to try anything straight off...”

“I agree! Mmm... thanks Harry, that felt nice,” Hermione purred and sat up facing her nude husband. “It’s your turn now.”

Gently, Hermione nudged Harry until he was lying on his back. She kissed him wetly, pressing her own nakedness against him as his arms enfolded her. Hermione felt Harry unwinding and his penis stiffening. Slowly, Hermione slid down Harry’s torso until she was straddling his calves. She leaned over, jutting her bottom and undulating fluffy tail in the air, wrapped her lips around his erection and began to suck.

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The first full day of term began much like any other, and the Potters were pleased that Draco indeed appeared to be avoiding them for the time being. The biggest difference at breakfast time was a three minute scene playing out on the screen above the staff table.

Images of happy young witches and wizards running through fields of flowers--then prostrating
themselves obediently before Ministry officials—flashed across the giant display. At the conclusion of
the sequence, bold text in a rather florid font appeared.

**Educational Decree #23:**

*The appointment of Alecto and Amycus Carrow to the posts of Hogwarts High Inquisitors
shall be acknowledged with the highest respect and obeisance by all Hogwarts Staff and
Students.*

This wasn’t news to the Potters and the Unaffiliated, nor apparently to Draco Malfoy who appeared
to be boasting about his foreknowledge to the Slytherins. But the rest of the student body buzzed
with bewilderment.

However, the curiosity didn’t last very long. Everyone was far more interested in the rapidly
spreading news that Harry Potter had once again been instrumental in the death of Voldemort, not to
mention wiping out legions of monsters.

But Harry was more prepared for being the centre of attention than he had ever been before, and he
ignored all of the stares and open chatter.

Susan Bones waved cheerfully at the Potters from the Hufflepuff table. Padma Patil and Dean
Thomas stopped by the Mingling Table to say hello before returning to their own tables. Ginny and
Neville departed the Gryffindor Table to eat breakfast with the Unaffiliated. The Potters glanced at
each other darkly when they spotted Ginny shooting a malevolent glare at Cormac McLaggen, who
bore a smug leering expression on his countenance.

Harry caught McLaggen’s eye and gave the Fifth Year Gryffindor an icy stare. Cormac smirked and
looked away, returning to his conversation with Kenneth Towler.

“McLaggen looks a bit too happy to me Hermione,” Harry growled under his breath. “And I don’t
like the way he’s still eyeing Ginny.”

“Nor do I Harry,” Hermione said quietly, her tail wagging angrily. “I don’t know why, but I’m
getting the distinct impression that he thinks he can get away with anything this year.”

“Did we miss anything?” asked Luna, who had just arrived with Dora.

“Just a stupid advert about paying ‘obedience’ to the ‘Inquisitors’ on the Wiz-Vision,” snorted
Parvati. “Where were you both?”

“Rearranging my schedule with Professor Dumbledore,” Luna’s serene smile widened into a grin as
she filled her plate with scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast. “He’s letting me advance a year so that I
can take classes with the rest of you. He said it’s safer for me to stick with the rest of you... and he
thinks that I’ve learned enough over the summer with all of you to keep up with fourth year classes.”

Parvati squealed joyfully and hugged Luna, giving her a kiss on the cheek as both of their furry tails
danced happily.

“That’s excellent Luna!” exclaimed Hermione, putting McLaggen out of her mind temporarily and
gleefully embracing the other two cat-witches

“Yeah, that’s brilliant,” said Harry, feeling relieved. That was one less worry. He wanted the Coven
to stick close to each other now that Draco Malfoy and the Carrows were at Hogwarts. “What about
you Dora?”
“I ‘ad a discussion with Dumbledore too,” Dora replied, “I’ll still be doin’ Independent Studies under Hestia Jones’s post-grad programme, and I’ll be taking Alchemy. But what that means is that I’ll actually be following Fleur around and learnin’ more advanced material while ostensibly being a ‘Teacher’s Assistant’ to the Professors in her Seventh Year classes...”

“Which means no more colourful hair for me,” Dora continued glumly. “I’ve gotta blend in while we’re all bein’ watched.”

“Well at least we’ll all have backup,” said Harry, feeling grateful that Dumbledore was doing his best to keep the Coven together. “Luna can take all the same Fourth Year classes as the rest of us now, and you’ll be with Fleur.”

But there was still one worry for Harry. He glanced down the table at Ginny and Neville, then narrowed his eyes and peered at McLaggen.

“You lot go on ahead to Potions,” said Harry to Parvati, Luna, Jennifer, and Daphne, as they all departed the Great Hall at the end of breakfast, “Hermione and I will be right behind you.”

The others headed towards the dungeons as Harry and Hermione waited near the entrance to the Great Hall until Cormac McLaggen appeared.

“Oi... McLaggen...”

“What do you want Potter?” McLaggen sneered, almost as magnificently as a Malfoy.

“I want you to stay away from my friends,” Harry replied in a measured tone. “And that includes Ginny, Neville, and Ron Weasley...”

“I’m not afraid of you Potter,” the older and much larger Gryffindor retorted, smirking again. “In case you haven’t noticed, things have changed a bit around here this year. Looks like Dumbles is on his way out...” McLaggen puffed up his chest, jutted his chin, and stepped into Harry’s ‘personal space.’

Hermione’s tail began to bristle and she glared at McLaggen; but Harry stood his ground and smiled dangerously at Cormac.

“You’re not very quick on the uptake--are you McLaggen!?” Harry chuckled mirthlessly. “After what I did to Voldemort and half of his army this summer, d’you really think I give a damn if your daddy is a personal acquaintance of the Minister...?"

*Hermione was so stunned at Harry’s blatant accusation that she forgot she was cross with Cormac McLaggen. There was no way that Harry could know; it had to be a bluff. But she noted with almost as much satisfaction as Harry, that the accusation seemed to take some of the wind out of McLaggen’s sails. Cormac unconsciously stepped back.*

“So what if he is then?” snarled McLaggen. “This is between you and me, Potter! I don’t need my father or the Minister to fight my battles--I’m not Draco Malfoy.”

“No--you’re right... you’re even stupider than he is,” Harry said coolly, pressing his advantage. “I’m only warning you once, because I’m betting that the Carrows are more concerned about protecting a Slytherin like Malfoy than you! Stay. Away. From my friends!”

“...Unless you want to end up with one less hand to wipe your arse with, like Draco... or worse, like Mouldy-shorts!” Harry concluded, as calmly as he had begun.
“Hmmmph...” McLaggen snorted, paling slightly. He stared at Harry a moment longer, narrowing his eyes, then turned on his heel and stalked away.

The Potters watched Cormac McLaggen until he was gone, then made a mad dash to the dungeon. Professor Snape raised an eyebrow when he spied the latecomers.

“I’m very sorry we’re late Sir...” said Harry as he looked straight into Snape’s eyes. “It won’t happen again.”

Severus peered inscrutably at Harry for a moment, then he nodded in understanding, “Be certain that it doesn’t Potter.”

The other students were already partnered up: Daphne was helping Jennifer, and Parvati was assisting Luna.

Draco Malfoy was fuming. He had two partners to make up for having only one hand. But even two partners weren’t much use when they were Crabbe and Goyle. When he was sure that Professor Snape wasn’t looking, Malfoy allowed himself a few murderous thoughts.

Professor Snape gave the Potters a completely different assignment from the rest of the class, as Harry and Hermione were nearing the completion of Snape’s old Sixth Year Potions book.

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Professor Babbling was delighted to see Harry Potter again, and she was quite pleased at the raw talent and artistry displayed by Jennifer Watts—despite the girl’s less than complete knowledge of the material. Having been informed by the Headmaster of Miss Watts’ unique situation as a late-bloomer, she allowed the Potters to coach Jennifer through the class assignment.

Likewise, Professor Babbling allowed Daphne and Parvati to assist Luna Lovegood, certain that they would be able to bring the intuitive ex-Ravenclaw up to speed in Ancient Runes in no time.

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It was with no small amount of apprehension that the Potters and the rest of the Fourth Year members of the Unaffiliated took their seats in Defence Against the Dark Arts. But they needn’t have worried. Despite the hard and frosty demeanor of Alecto Carrow, she appeared intent on teaching the class as little as possible, and made no attempts to antagonise anyone.

Indeed, Professor Carrow seemed to have no regard at all for teaching them to actually use the spells in practice. In fact after the briefest of introductions, she spent the entire lesson having the class read from the new course-book, Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Slinkhard.

The members of the Coven were of course lightyears beyond the material—even Jennifer was—and they were bored to tears. Hermione had to bite her tongue to stop herself from saying something she might come to regret later. Which was quite painful, as her feline teeth were rather sharp.

Harry felt more than a bit odd being this close to Alecto Carrow. The last time he had been this near, the icy witch had been all over him in an uncomfortably affectionate manner. Of course, Alecto Carrow had believed she was fawning over her long-lost lover, Bellatrix Lestrange, at the time.

As the lesson dragged on, Alecto Carrow studied the Potters and their little friends with curiosity—especially the pretty new girl. When all went to plan, hopefully sooner rather than later, she and her brother Amycus would have the lot of them in chains, and they could be done with this little farce.
But Alecto reminded herself that patience was a virtue. All of the pieces were falling into place. Hogwarts would be theirs completely soon enough--by Halloween at the latest. And then... then the corridors would echo with the delicious screams of the mudbloods and the halfbreeds, and the delectable shrieks of any who might dare come to their aid.

~o0o~

The DADA lesson had been as oppressive as it had been tedious, and the Unaffiliated were glad to be shot of the class for the day. They all heaved deep sighs of relief after leaving the classroom. Harry peeked at the class schedule to see when they would have to deal with the other Carrow, Amycus. He had a bad feeling that Amycus Carrow’s lesson would be much more odious.

“Thank Goodness!” Jennifer muttered as she scanned her own copy of the schedule, “Mr Carrow’s class is on Friday, and it’s only once a week.” Jennifer had been thoroughly creeped out by the way Alecto Carrow had looked at her and she stayed as close to Harry and Hermione as she could the rest of the day.

After dinner, Harry addressed the exhausted Coven in the Unaffiliated Common Room.

“Right then, well... today wasn’t quite as awful as I thought it might be, but it’s clear we have to stay on our toes. The Minister obviously doesn’t want to teach students how to defend themselves from dark magic–probably to make everyone easier to control...”

“So we’ll have to keep practicing and learning how to fight by ourselves... And as long as it’s alright with the rest of you, I want to keep training up Ginny and Neville.”

“Of course Harry, zat ees for ze best,” said Fleur as she cuddled Daphne in her lap, “I am certain we can all agree--Ginny and Neville are our friends.” The rest of the Coven murmured their assent.

“Good, thank you,” Harry responded. He smiled at his wife who had made a quiet suggestion to him in private after classes. “Hermione and I were also thinking of perhaps inviting a few more to join us too... but only people we can completely trust,”

“There’s others who I think should learn a few spells too, but, I’m not sure that I want too many people to know about us being a Coven, or knowing about the Room of Requirement for the time-being. The less who know about it, the better. So here’s the short-list... Susan Bones, Parvati’s sister Padma, and Fred and George Weasley.”

“I think loads more people should learn how to fight too,” Harry continued, “But I think it would be better if the people who train with us pass it on to the others themselves. Fred and George can teach Ron and Seamus for example, and maybe a few other Gryffindors too--without telling them about us being a Coven or where we’re practicing.”

“I don’t want to let in any dolts or thickheads who might let something slip inadvertently. It’s safer for them and safer for us if they don’t know everything, and if we work in small units that way. I’ll talk to Viktor and Cedric tomorrow. They both know a lot of good fighting spells and tactics already from training for the Triwiz, and can pass them on to people that they trust.”

“As long as everyone stays in small autonomous groups and don’t all meet in the same time and place, most of us should still be able to stay under the radar--there’s plenty of unused classrooms and they can use some of the stealth charms that Hermione and I have been learning from some of the more advanced books.”

“At some point, things will probably come to a head--very likely with Draco Malfoy, and maybe
with Cormac McLaggen—and we’ll have to leave Hogwarts... Hermione and I are working on an escape route just in case the Floo system is being monitored. But until then, I want to give as many people as possible a fighting chance—and they’ll be able to continue after we’re gone."

“Finally, tomorrow after classes I’m slapping every bloody protection Rune and Symbol I can think of on all of us. You’ll just have to get used to the idea of being tattooed all the time. I’d do it right now, but I’m bloody knackered.”

Dora couldn’t be prouder of Harry if she’d tried.

“That’s an absolutely smashing idea Harry!” Dora said as her panties dampened.

“It’s brilliant Harry!” gasped Daphne. “Loads of people will be able to learn how to defend themselves properly that way.”

“Oui, our ‘arry ees sensationnel!” cooed Fleur.

“That’s why Harry’s our leader!” Luna beamed radiantly as she swished her fluffy white tail.

“It’s pure genius! Parvati exclaimed with a grin, her satiny black tail rippling gleefully.

“Well, Hermione’s the genius who suggested it...” Harry chortled. Hermione purred and gave her husband a kiss, twirling her own bushy ginger tail.

“I only suggested that we train as many people as we could,” said Hermione as she turned pink. “Harry’s the one who worked out all the details of the safest way for us to do it. You really are brilliant Harry... and don’t you forget it.”

The members of the Coven all traded kisses goodnight as they left the Common Room for their private chambers.

Jennifer tearfully embraced the Potters, taking comfort for as long as possible before turning to leave with Dora. Jennifer had tried to hold it in, but her first day in a Hogwarts full of noisy students and scary new “teachers” had all been a bit too overwhelming.

“Wait Jennifer, Dora,” said Hermione, clasping Jennifer’s hand tightly, “Why don’t you both stay with Harry and me tonight... there’s plenty of room in our bed.”
Jennifer’s heart raced with anticipation as she and Dora entered the Potters’ suite with Harry and Hermione. The pent up anxieties from her first full day of sharing Hogwarts with over a thousand students and being subjected to the creepy forbidding gaze of Alecto Carrow had melted away at the thought of spending the night snuggling with Dora and the Potters.

And as Hermione Potter’s warm hand led Jennifer to their bedchamber, Jennifer felt a tingle of excitement in her lower abdomen. She began to hope it would lead to a bit more than cuddling. Had it really only been little more than a week since the snogging session which she had shared with the Potters, Dora, and the rest of the Coven? The memory of finally giving Harry a proper kiss, and realising that she felt like she might be ready to go a bit further still burned in Jennifer's mind.

Jennifer had thought about taking things to the next level when she had shared Dora’s bed last night, but it been enough just feeling cozy and safe in Dora’s arms and they had both fallen asleep rapidly. Jennifer had decided that she never wanted to sleep alone again and hoped that Dora felt the same way.

When she had sought solace in the Potters’ embrace only minutes ago, Jennifer had been planning on asking Dora for a bit more tonight. She hadn’t imagined that she would be lucky enough to be invited to stay with Hermione and Harry as well. But what if they weren’t ready for a bit more than cuddles with Jennifer yet.

Jennifer turned to Dora when the Potters went to their bathroom to get ready for bed.

“I don’t have a nightie,” she said anxiously. “Should I go back and get one?”

“Don’t worry about it Sweetie,” Dora smiled and gave the younger girl a kiss. “Harry and Hermione aren’t fussed--and they’ll give you space even if you’re wearing nothing at all...” Dora couldn’t help grinning when Jennifer blushed, suddenly realising that “space” was the furthest thing from Jennifer’s mind.

Jennifer stripped down to her bra and panties and slipped into the Potters’ bed with the similarly attired Dora. They lay on top of the covers together and waited patiently. Jennifer couldn’t help feeling slightly disappointed when Harry and Hermione returned wearing pyjamas and a nightie, but supposed that they were being polite.

Jennifer’s nipples hardened and she moistened when Harry looked at her, blushing, his pyjama bottoms tenting. This was the most exposed that Jennifer had been in front of any of the Coven except for Dora, and she had hoped that Harry would find her as attractive as she found him.

But as much as she wanted to be with Harry, Jennifer couldn’t help still feeling nervous. What if she freaked out at Harry’s touch? Jennifer didn’t think she could bear it if she put him off her. She wanted so desperately to be able to enjoy being with Harry as much as she had enjoyed the makeout session with Dora and Hermione while Fleur, Daphne, Parvati and Luna had been snogging Harriet.

Dora nuzzled Jennifer’s hair and gently put an arm around her when Harry and Hermione climbed into bed. Jennifer’s heart did a flip when Harry smiled and lay down beside her. Hermione’s furry ears twitched. She leaned over Harry and gave Jennifer a humid kiss.

“We can go as fast or as slow as you like Jennifer...” Hermione said sweetly, “Whatever happens is all up to you--we can stop at any time...”
Jennifer marveled yet again at Hermione’s ability to know just how she was feeling. She returned Hermione’s kiss, then she gazed soulfully into Harry’s sparkling green eyes and tenderly kissed his soft lips.

“Is... is it alright? Do you mind if...?” Jennifer tentatively reached for the top button of Harry’s pyjama shirt.

Harry grinned and blushed again. “Er... not at all Jennifer. I’m all yours tonight if you’d like...”

“We all are,” Dora whispered as she brushed aside Jennifer’s ebony hair and kissed her neck. “We’re all here for you...”

Feeling emboldened and secure, Jennifer began to unbutton Harry’s pyjamas, baring his chest. Purring, Hermione helped Jennifer slip Harry’s top off the rest of the way. Jennifer traced Harry’s musculature with the fingers of both hands as his nipples hardened--she was surprised at how chiseled he was for having such a slight build.

Harry’s breathing quickened at her touch. Jennifer sensed Harry’s own nervousness and took his hands in hers. Bracing herself, Jennifer pressed his palms against the sides of her ribcage. Harry was as relieved as Jennifer to feel her relaxing, and he knew it was alright to touch her some more.

Harry slid his hands across the skin of Jennifer’s abdomen, then up to cup her breasts. He squeezed them through the sheer fabric of her bra as she kissed him again. Dora unclasped Jennifer’s bra and slipped it off her.

Harry’s lips traced a path down Jennifer’s neck and wetly engulfed one of her nipples. Jennifer released a gasp of pleasure. Together, they explored each other’s torsos with fingers, lips, and tongues as Dora and Hermione both petted and nuzzled Jennifer too.

Jennifer was ready for a bit more now and reached down to the waistband of Harry’s pyjama bottoms. She giggled nervously as Dora and Hermione helped her slide them down Harry’s legs, freeing Harry’s bobbing erection. Gingerly Jennifer reached out and touched it, then she wrapped her warm hand around the shaft of Harry’s stiff penis and began to stroke it.

Jennifer indicated that Harry could explore her more as well and he gently tugged her panties down her thighs, revealing a closely trimmed dark thatch on her mound and a bare slit.

Jennifer was still stroking Harry’s stiffness, uncertain how far she wanted to go, but when his thumb began to rotate her clitoris the ecstatic shock of electricity rippling through her body decided her. Jennifer’s lingering anxieties evaporated as the loving touches of the Potters and Dora brought her nothing but joy. She was ready to take the plunge.

Hermione purred loudly and her bushy ginger tail thwipped back and forth happily as she and Dora assisted Jennifer in straddling Harry’s waist. Slowly, Jennifer settled herself, biting her lip, moaning plaintively as Harry’s lance filled her wet channel.
Passion surging, Jennifer leaned over to kiss Harry as she began to ride his shaft with his hands around her waist. Dora and Hermione continued to trail their lips, tongues and fingers across Jennifer’s body as she and Harry began to gyrate with greater intensity. Harry thrust his penis into her depths.

The room swirled as Jennifer lost herself to the intoxicating swell of ardour. She wailed as the vortex of desire took her. Jennifer’s spasms of ecstasy finished Harry off. With a groan Harry burst. Gasping, Jennifer clutched Harry tightly to her breast as she felt the spurting jets of his ejaculate flood her interior.

Still adrift in a sea of delight, Jennifer found her hands tangled in Hermione’s golden-brown locks as the cat-witch’s tongue delved into her nook to lap up Harry’s creamy essence.

From that point on, the roiling tides of passion swept Jennifer into a euphoric fog of bliss. In her next brief moment of lucidity, Jennifer found herself knuckle deep in Dora’s wet passage and hungrily sucking Dora’s nipples as Harry plundered her vessel again from behind and Dora devoured Hermione’s sopping vulva.

Meows, moans, purrs, and wails, echoed through the Potters’ chambers as the foursome writhed as one. Sparks of magic and electricity flew as the walls trembled.

~o0o~

Jennifer woke to find herself entwined stickily with Dora, a nipple still in her mouth. She couldn’t help giggling, but she was so overcome with emotion that tears streamed down her face and the giggles turned to sobs.

“Mornin’ Jennifer,” Dora whispered as she felt the younger witch stirring. “You alright Sweetie?”

Harry and Hermione both woke immediately and peered at Jennifer with concern. Alarm gripped Harry, but Hermione calmed as the nature of Jennifer’s emotional surge became clear.

“I am,” Jennifer sobbed, “I... I’m just so happy. I never... I never really thought I’d ever be able to enjoy being with anyone like that after... after... what happened to me. I love you all so much--you all make me feel so nice...”

Jennifer kissed everyone wetly as her weeping subsided. She smiled radiantly at everyone as she wiped away her tears of joy.

“...and I can’t wait to be with Luna and the others too. You’ve all been so kind to me.”

~o0o~

Luna beamed at Jennifer when she greeted the glowing girl in the Unaffiliated Corridor on the way to breakfast. Luna embraced Jennifer.

“I’m glad you had a nice time--and enjoyed the sex...” said Luna bluntly, waving her fluffy white tail gleefully.

Parvati’s furry black ears twitched. She couldn’t help tearing up as she gave Jennifer a hug and a kiss.

“I’m so happy for you Jennifer,” Parvati murmured, “I’m glad you’re well and truly feeling better...”

Daphne and Fleur both gave the blushing girl cuddles and kisses too, offering Jennifer their own
congratulations as Dora and the Potters grinned.

~o0o~

The Ministry flag rippled in the wind above a country manor as a rousing march played. A large gathering of witches and wizards supplicated themselves subserviently before Minister Umbridge as she rode a carriage pulled by a number of miserable looking house-elves.

But a single row of wizards and witches of regal bearing stood at attention in front of the kneeling crowd--Harry presumed the standing wizards were the most prominent heads of Pureblood Houses as one of them looked like Lucius Malfoy.

Deputy Minister Percy Weasley bowed to the Minister, then introduced her to the acquiescent throngs, extolling the virtues of loyalty to the Ministry, and of an orderly society in which everyone knew their proper place.

At the end of the sequence the Wiz-Vision displayed Educational Decree #23 again.

Harry rolled his eyes and snorted as Hermione bristled beside him. Fred, George, and Angelina had opted to eat breakfast with the Unaffiliated that morning and they burst into gales of laughter when the scene concluded. Many of the students immediately lost interest in what they had seen the enormous screen, but a few aimed fearful glances at the Carrows.

All things considered, lessons that day went quite smoothly. Malfoy and McLaggen both seemed to be keeping their distance, though Draco could be heard loudly boasting about his father’s “special relationship” with the Minister at every opportunity to anyone who would listen.

“Bloody git,” Harry muttered as the Fourth Year members of the Unaffiliated made their way to Care of Magical Creatures. “The way he goes on about the Minister, anyone would think that she’s his new mum.”

“She might be more or less Harry,” Hermione responded quietly. “The Minister has obviously been harbouring them personally since she got them out of Azkaban. And that was months and months ago. For all we know, Minister Umbridge and Lucius Malfoy have developed an intimate relationship.”

“Urgh... You can’t be serious,” gasped Parvati, flicking her sleek black tail. “She’s hideous...”

Daphne wrinkled her nose in distaste and made a retching sound. “I can’t imagine Mr Malfoy even being attracted to her--she looks like a toad. What would someone as high and mighty as him even see in her?”

“Well, looks aren’t everything,” said Luna, frowning slightly as her fluffy white tail whisked. “People can be attracted to each other for different reasons. But I admit the Minister is as revolting on the inside as she appears to be on the outside.”

“You’re right Luna,” Hermione nodded. “I don’t think looks really come into it. I expect it’s more a matter of convenience for Mr Malfoy. The Minister has what he wants--political access, and she released him from prison. He’ll probably do anything to keep her happy to stay close to Power. He’s probably just using her...”

“And she him,” Harry interjected. “She’s manipulating Lucius Malfoy as much as he is her. It’s obviously a mutually beneficial relationship. I just hope the Order has Narcissa Black well protected.” Harry concluded darkly as they entered the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest near Hagrid's hut.
Jennifer remained silent as she followed the conversation. She had never met Lucius Malfoy, but he sounded as horrid as any of the other followers of Snakeface which she had come across. But the topic was soon forgotten when Hagrid introduced the class to creatures that were invisible to most of the students except for the members of the Coven.

Jennifer shrank back from the eerie black skeletal horse-like creatures with bat-wings. The Potters instinctively put their arms around her protectively. Harry gulped, thinking the creatures looked rather ominous and forbidding, but Hermione purred slightly.

“Oooh... Thestrals!” said Luna happily. “They pull the carts up to school from the railway station that carry all the students after First Year...”

“Right ye are Miss Lovegood,” beamed Hagrid. “Very misunderstood creatures they are...”

“Oh, yeah...” said Harry, as recognition set in, “I read about them in Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them. But why haven’t I seen them before then? And why are we the only ones that can...?” asked Harry.

“Because we’ve seen Death, Harry,” Hermione responded in a sad voice. “And lots of it...”

“Oh... that’s right. I think I remember now,” Harry nodded as the description from Fantastic Beasts drifted back to the forefront of his mind. “I’d forgotten all about them. It’s alright Jennifer, they’re not so bad...”

“Quite righ’ Harry...” Hagrid cheerfully agreed as he chucked large slabs of raw meat at the Thestrals. “Very gentle creatures really!” he said as the creatures began ravenously tearing at the slabs of raw meat with razor sharp fangs.

~o0o~

“Wicked Harry!” Fred grinned.

“Isn’t it though!?” said Ginny, “Neville and I have been training with them for a few weeks here.” Neville nodded in agreement.

“This is bloody brilliant!” said George in an awed tone, “We had no idea this room even existed.”

“Remember, you’ve got to keep this a secret,” Harry warned. “It wouldn’t do for the Carrows, or any of the cretins like Malfoy or McLaggen to find out about the Room of Requirement.”

“Don’t worry Harry. You can trust us,” Padma promised as she gave him a hug.

“I know I can,” Harry said, his face reddening. “I just want to make sure you’re careful when you meet us here...”

“And thanks for inviting us,” Susan Bones beamed and threw her arms around Harry too, giving him a kiss on the cheek as his blush deepened. “Hermione told me that we were the only ones you trusted enough to let us in on everything.”

Hermione purred as her bushy ginger tail wriggled cheerfully. The rest of the Coven all made their confidence in Harry’s convictions abundantly clear.

Fred and George eyed Ginny with admiration, seeing her with new eyes.

“Good on you oh sister of ours--you’ve done the Weasley name proud...” said Fred.
“You managed to keep Harry and Hermione’s secret good and proper...” George continued.

“And you helped to fight the Noseless Wonder’s army...”

“Dad didn’t even tell us that,” George chortled.

“I suppose he didn’t want to alarm Mum,” snickered Fred.

“So, where do we start, Harry?” George asked.
“Bloody Hell Harry, I hurt all over,” groaned George. “What did you and Dora teach these girls?”

“Remind me never to prank this lot,” Fred moaned at his twin as he looked up at Ginny and Daphne from the floor.

“Are you alright?” asked Daphne, worry etched on her features. “I’m sorry... I didn’t mean to hurt you. I held back as much as possible.”

George guffawed, “Blimey, if that was you two holding back, I never want to be on your bad sides! Some Beaters we are--if Oliver could see us now, he’d cut us from the team.”

“That's why we're lucky Angelina's captain of the team this year...” muttered Fred.

“Nice work on Fred, Daphne,” giggled Ginny. “And I never thought I’d see the day that I could clobber Fred or George at anything.”

“Très bien Daphne,” said Fleur proudly, giving her a kiss.

Harry and Dora grinned. Hermione’s tail swished mirthfully; Neville chuckled and the rest of the Coven tittered. Susan and Padma were both sprawled out moaning on the floor as well, but they managed a few chortles, seeing that Daphne and Ginny had laid out the Twins with such little effort.

“Don’t worry. We’ll focus on combat spells this weekend,” said Harry sympathetically. “It’s good to know a few muggle fighting techniques too though. Once you’re halfway decent, you should start training some of the other Gryffindors.”

~000~

Following the training in the Room of Requirement, and after dinner, Harry spent the next two hours painting Runes and Chinese symbols on all of the members of the Coven in the Unaffiliated Common Room.

Harry grinned when all of the girls stripped down to their undergarments ready to be tattooed. Apparently modesty was a thing of the past now that Jennifer was completely comfortable.

“I visited Lupin and Sirius earlier today,” said Dora as Harry inked her. “Lupin told me I should teach you lot ‘ow to apparate seein’ as he can’t come up to the Castle at the moment...”

“I spoke to Dumbledore about it,” Dora continued, “and he says we can practice in the Room of Requirement--we won’t be able to go beyond the Room of course, but ‘e says the Room’s magic should allow us to apparate from one spot to another within its confines.”

Harry’s brows furrowed in thought. “Alright... it looks like we’ll be spending a lot of time in the Room of Requirement this weekend then. Maybe we’ll practice apparating in the mornings. I’ll tell the Twins and Padma and Susan to come for training in the afternoons.”

“Sounds like a plan Harry,” Dora agreed.

Harry glanced around when he heard the piano, spying Hermione and Jennifer both playing together. He smiled when he heard Parvati’s lilting voice joining in. Luna had finally managed to convince Parvati to sing for everyone.
Fleur and Daphne seemed moved to tears by the song. Harry thought he recognised the tune as a particularly soulful Celtic folk song that Aunt Petunia would often listen to when Vernon wasn’t around.

The only time he could remember Petunia ever listening to music was when Uncle Vernon had been at work. She had been particularly fond of folk music and opera but Uncle Vernon had apparently despised it. Harry felt his own eyes grow watery as the memories mingled with the present. He took off his glasses and wiped his blurry eyes so that he could see properly to finish tattooing Dora.

“Cor, Luna was right,” Dora marveled. “Parvati’s got a lovely singing voice... and I ‘ad no idea that Hermione could play the piano too.”

“Yeah, she just started playing again recently,” Harry said creakily. He cleared his throat. “Oh, by the way Dora. I’ve been thinking--Hermione’s birthday is coming up in a few weeks, and I had an idea that’s long overdue…”

~o0o~

“That feels lovely Jennifer,” Luna purred happily as Jennifer ran her fingers through the silky long white fur of the nude cat-witch’s tail.

Luna arched and meowed, rubbing her cheek against Jennifer’s. Luna reached one of her hands between Jennifer’s thighs and fondled her moistening slit. Jennifer began to stroke the furry white strip along Luna’s spine with one hand and captured one of Luna’s breasts with the other.

Parvati’s satiny black tail wriggled blissfully and she moaned as Dora’s skillful tongue delved into Parvati’s pink crevice. But Parvati’s moans were muffled as her own lips and tongue were busily occupied with Dora’s convulsing wet labia, the older girl’s thighs wrapped around her head.

Jennifer giggled when the bed shook as the other two writhing girls climaxed beside them. She turned her gaze back to the dirty-blonde cat-witch and melted in Luna’s silvery-grey eyes.

“Thanks for inviting me and Dora to spend the night with you and Parvati,” Jennifer kissed Luna humidly. “If it weren’t for you... I might still be hiding under a bush--frightened and alone.”

“We love you Jennifer,” murmured Luna. “We were just waiting until we knew you were ready. You belong with all of us--with the Coven... You always have!”

~o0o~

A delightful sensation slowly roused Harry. He blinked his bleary eyes and reached for his glasses. He grinned when he spied Daphne’s golden-blonde head bobbing up and down his erection as she sucked him off. Harry peered over at Hermione who was also stirring awake due to the fact that Fleur’s platinum head was engaged between his wife’s thighs.

Harry and Hermione exchanged wet kisses as Daphne and Fleur brought them both to completion. The bed rocked, and the chamber echoed with meows as Hermione drenched Fleur’s face and Harry’s semen spurted into Daphne’s throat.

As the foursome showered together that morning, the Potters returned the favour, wrenching squeals of delight from Fleur and Daphne. Dressed and ready for breakfast, Daphne, Fleur and the Potters exchanged grins and smirks with the other foursome exiting Luna and Parvati’s suite.

Everyone at the Mingling Table was drinking coffee that morning.
Harry had been dead tired after tattooing everyone last night, but the girls had all been so turned on by the sensation of his ink brushes dancing across their skin that he didn’t have the heart to turn Fleur and Daphne down when they had asked if they could spend the night with the Potters.

Thankfully, Luna and Parvati had been eager to invite Dora and Jennifer to their own quarters. Harry wasn’t sure that he could have managed a full romp with the lot of them... but his mind whirred with plans for the next most convenient time for a group get-together.

Harry was distracted from his rumination by the morning’s Wiz-Vision broadcast. This one was quite a bit longer than the previous ones. A well groomed wizard was discussing the Daily Prophet’s top stories with a brassy looking witch who appeared to be doing a remarkably good impression of an older Rita Skeeter with even sharper features, far too much make-up, and redder hair.

“That reminds me,” Harry whispered to Hermione, “I wonder where Rita’s going to hide now. I haven’t seen her since the battle with Tom Riddle...”

“That’s a good question Harry,” Hermione replied quietly. She shook her bushy head in disbelief, “I still can’t get over her joining the Order. She’s in as much trouble as the rest of us might be if the Minister catches her...”

Sitting next to Hermione, Luna couldn’t help overhearing.

“She’s working with Daddy and the other Quibbler reporters now,” Luna murmured with a grin. “I found out after Dumbledore gave me my own handmirror when I was rearranging my schedule. I called Daddy after classes that day, and he told me that they’re working on a way to break into the Wiz-Vision broadcast so that they can do their own pirate broadcasts eventually. The Order bought a Wiz-Vision screen for them to experiment on. It might take a while before they work it out though.”

“That’s brilliant!” Harry whispered excitedly. “That reminds me, I need to talk to Dumbledore and make sure that we’ve all got our own mirrors. I still need to get a new one myself...”

He was distracted again though when Hermione’s tail bottlebrushed and she hissed. Harry turned back to look at the giant screen to see what had caught her attention.

“...Muggleborn Wizard Dick Turpentine was arrested by Aurors today on suspicion of stealing wands,” the fabulously coiffed wizard announcer was saying. “The investigation has been ordered to be turned over to the Unspeakable Office in the Department of Mysteries by the Minister—as the stolen wands were allegedly being distributed to muggles for their own use in an apparent scheme to challenge the authority of the Ministry.”

“Surely not, William!” gasped the brassy witch co-anchor in clearly feigned surprise. “How could a muggle possibly make use of a wand?”

“Ah, Endora... well, that is the million galleon question,” William the wizard news-anchor replied. “And that is why Dick Turpentine has been turned over to the Department of Mysteries for investigation.”

“Well, Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour certainly can’t be happy about that...” Endora the witch co-anchor responded. “Could this possibly explain some of the recent statistics showing an uptick in the apparent birth of muggleborn wizards?”

“Indeed, perhaps this is even related to the recent events at Hogwarts and the second death of He-who-must-not-be-named,” William replied. “Who can be certain until the investigation is completed? But surely it is an open question given the muggleborn promoting proclivities of the Headmaster...”
Audible gasps of shock filled the Great Hall. Harry’s features turned livid as his nostrils flared; he glanced at Hermione who was as white as a ghost. Dora’s expression was nothing short of murderous and she instinctively put her arm around Jennifer. The rest of the Unaffiliated exchanged appalled looks.

“Well, William--that is certainly food for thought,” Endora said unctuously. “And with that, we conclude the very first broadcast of WVN’s Morning News Headlines in conjunction with the Daily Prophet. This has been Endora Le Fay...”

“...And William O’Hannity! Bringing Fair and Balanced news to you daily, because we’re looking out for you!” the wizard news anchor finished bombastically.

After the half hour news programme had finished, the screen once again displayed Educational Decree #23. Except for a few chortles from the Slytherin table, the Great Hall was silent.

All eyes turned to the Carrows whose countenances bore thin cruel smiles. Even the Headmaster turned to face them with the coldest expression Harry had ever seen on Dumbledore’s visage, since the day that Draco Malfoy had been arrested for the kidnapping and sexual assault of Daphne’s sister Astoria.

Gradually a murmur filled the hall as the students resumed eating their breakfasts and discussed the chilling turn of events. Many more students glanced fearfully at the Carrows that morning.

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Classes were subdued that day, and most of the Professors were on edge, but they did their best to reassure the students that the speculations of the newscasters were entirely baseless and without merit.

History of Magic was the biggest surprise since breakfast though. Professor Binns made not a single mention of Goblin Uprisings. Instead, his entire lesson was devoted to a lecture on the history of the accomplishments and valiant deeds of muggleborn wizards.

Harry and Hermione were even more determined than ever to focus intently on their subjects. After they both performed the Banishing Charm perfectly on the first go, Professor Flitwick took them aside while the rest of the class struggled--though Parvati was doing quite well.

“My word, Mr and Mrs Potter!” Professor Flitwick led the Potters from their desks to a corner of the room away from the other students, speaking quietly so as not to be overheard, “It would appear that your skills may far outstrip the current year’s syllabus. And I must say, I was more than impressed with your remarkable feats during the Battle against Voldemort...”

“Why don’t you give me an idea of the charms you already know so that I can teach you something more appropriate to your skill levels? Don’t bother with listing the charms you have learned in my classes the last three years--I already know that you are both highly proficient in those, and while they are revised for each year's level, I don’t doubt that you could both perform them at OWL level were I to test you at this very moment.”

“Well... we both studied all the coursework for this year over the summer,” said Hermione, her furry
ears flicking in consideration as she took a deep breath before she launched into a full speed recitation. “The spells are nearly all revisions of charms from earlier years except for the Banishing Charm, but Harry and I already know it because we read ahead during the Triwizard Tournament to try and learn as many useful spells as possible, and you taught us the Accio Charm last year already even though that had previously been part of the Fourth Year...”

“Ah, yes, of course,” Flitwick interjected with a nod, “Dumbledore suggested that I begin teaching that in the Third Year syllabus instead of Fourth Year. So... it would seem that it would be a waste of time for me to continue teaching you Fourth Year material. Alright then, go on...”

“Well, Hermione and I both practiced Protego during the Triwiz, and then the more advanced Shield spells over the summer in preparation for fighting Tom Riddle,” said Harry as he pondered the spells which they had learned outside of Charms courses in previous years, “And we both practiced the Stunning spell in Third Year...”

“Ah yes... If I recall Professor Lupin gave an all too brief overview towards the end of Third Year, those are typically taught in Fifth Year...”

“Actually, Harry and I learned Stupefy and the basic Protego before the First Task,” Hermione said proudly, “And we learned Bombarda for the Second and Third Tasks, then we practiced Bombarda Maxima and several incendiary explosive charms as well over the summer to fight Voldemort, and we learned the Aguamenti Charm for the First Task...”

“Hmmm... also Fifth Year Charms--and Aguamenti is a Sixth Year Charm...” the diminutive professor stroked his goatee thoughtfully. “Tell me--have you either of you practiced performing any spells nonverbally?”

“Er... nonverbally?” Harry looked puzzled.

“I mean without saying the incantations out loud.”

“Oh, I do almost all of them nonverbally,” responded Harry worriedly, “except for the Patronus Charm, I usually forget to say them out loud--I just do the spells automatically without thinking once I've lear...”

“Wait, did you just say you forget to say them out loud?” Flitwick looked a bit faint. “That... that’s perfectly appropriate Potter--usually people have to learn how to ‘forget’--in Sixth Year...” then it hit Professor Flitwick like a ton of bricks that Harry had mentioned something even more astonishing.

“Good Lord! Patronus Charms?” Professor Flitwick sputtered, his eyes bulging, “Those aren’t even part of the curriculum--they’re post-NEWT, generally only learned by wizards who are considering a career as an Auror or Unspeakable--and even then, most can only perform the basic shield... Can you perform Corporeal Patronuses?”

“All of us can,” Hermione beamed, “All of us who are in the Unaffiliated I mean--and so can Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom.”

Flitwick gaped at the Potters, momentarily speechless. It suddenly occurred to him that perhaps the Potters had actually employed Patronus Charms against the Dementors who had invaded the grounds of Hogwarts at the conclusion of the Third Task. But that still didn't explain their apparent destruction, or did it?

Had the Potters actually invented a new Patronus effect? Filius Flitwick had been as mystified as everyone else had been by the demolished Dementors, but he was beginning to wonder now if he
really had anything left to teach the Potters.

“Oh, and don’t forget Hermione,” Harry grinned at his wife, “Thanks to you, we learned the charms for making muggle electrical equipment work with magic instead of electricity.”

Harry reached into Hermione’s book bag and pulled out the “ridiculously advanced” Charms book they had been reading and handed it to Professor Flitwick.

“We’ve also been studying the spells in here, Sir,” said Harry. “We’re working on Pictura Portus at the moment, but I’ve also been looking at the Disillusionment Charm and wondering if I could modify it to work just on a section of a person... so that Hermione can go out in public without looking like she’s half-cat if she wants to...”

Hermione gasped, and forgetting that they were still in class, she flung her arms around Harry and kissed him as she blinked back tears. Fortunately, the corner of the class was relatively secluded and the other students were too busy practicing Banishing Charms to notice.

“I had no idea,” Hermione cried, “Th... thank you Harry... why didn’t you tell me?”

“It was supposed to be a surprise...” Harry reddened, realising that he’d said more than he meant to say to Professor Flitwick in his eagerness. “It’s going to be one of your birthday presents if I can manage to work it out in time...”

Professor Flitwick looked up from the thick book, shaking his head, still trying to process the incredible fact that the Potters should probably be in his Seventh Year class--with the exception of a few Sixth Year spells and perhaps one or two Fifth Year charms which they hadn’t learned yet.

Flitwick made a note to himself to create a structured Independent Study syllabus for the Potters to follow, so that they wouldn’t have any gaps in their knowledge as they moved forward with the Seventh Year material and the post-graduate book which they were already studying.

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Harry and Hermione basked in the glow of Flitwick’s praises the rest of the day, the distress of the morning news long forgotten.

“So, the only class that Harry is still struggling in is Arithmancy,” Hermione proudly told Luna, Parvati, Daphne, and Jennifer, as they all made their way to the next class.

“Well, I doubt I’ll ever be any good at it,” Harry muttered, blushing furiously. “I’ll just be happy if I can continue to scrape Acceptables...”

“Don’t be silly Harry--I’m sure you’ll be getting E’s in Arithmancy before you know it,” Hermione said airily. “It doesn’t matter anyway. You’re far advanced in all of the most important classes. It’s no wonder that Professor Lupin and Sirius think you could easily take an extended leave of absence from Hogwarts without damaging your chances of graduating with honours...”

“We’re both almost ready to start Seventh Year level Potions, you’re brilliant in Ancient Runes, you should probably be in a Seventh Year Defence Against the Dark Arts class, you could probably pass your OWL’s in Transfigurations...”

To Harry’s dismay, Hermione kept gushing about Harry’s prodigious skills and exceptional study habits at every opportunity without pausing to take a breath, while the rest of the Unaffiliated giggled. Hermione didn’t stop until it was time for Amycus Carrow’s class.
The Inquisitor's class was the last full period that the Fourth Year members of the Unaffiliated had that day. He held it in the Great Hall to accommodate the Fourth Year students of all the Houses all at once. Professor Carrow oozed a malignant joy as he launched into his lesson which focused on the Blood lineage of the most prominent pureblood families in Britain.
“Professor” Amycus Carrow cast his gaze across the Great Hall at the Fourth Year students, his eyes narrowing and a thin sly smile creeping to his lips when he spied Harry Potter.

“Well, well... Here we all are!” the Inquisitor drawled, “Finally, at long last, Hogwarts will be providing the knowledge which is necessary for a proper appreciation of the Traditions and Heritage of our ancient wizarding culture.”

“The Ministry believes that for far too long have those with less than full... genetic potential, been allowed to join wizard society with a less than adequate respect for their superiors, and an unacceptably low level of understanding of our Culture for complete assimilation...”

Hermione’s bushy tail bristled angrily, and it took Harry an incredible amount of restraint--every ounce of his will--to prevent himself from objecting in a furious outburst to Amycus Carrow’s vile rhetoric. He knew it would do nobody any good to deliberately antagonise the Inquisitor.

Professor Carrow’s first lesson consisted mostly of an examination of the Sacred 28--those families which had been considered the most Pureblood family lines of the surviving Pureblood Houses when the Pureblood Directory had been created in the 1930’s. Every student received an updated copy of the Directory to study, and the lecture was accompanied by images on the Wiz-Vision screen of the most important historical and current Heads of Houses, interspersed with diagrammes of some of the family trees.

As Amycus Carrow explained it, there were still roughly 50 “Pureblood” Houses in Britain, even today, but the Pureblood Directory only contained those whose families were deemed the “Purest” for one reason or another.

Early drafts of the Directory which had been discovered, had apparently contained 29 family names, and Professor Carrow seemed to relish revealing the fact that--although they were one of the oldest lines--the Potter family had been excluded by the time of publication due to their appalling lack of respect for blood-status. Amycus smirked nastily and looked right at Harry as Draco Malfoy and a number of Slytherins chortled gleefully.

Harry rolled his eyes and yawned to show that he couldn’t care less. But he was interested to see that as the Directory had originally been published in the 1930's, the Gaunt line appeared to end with a question mark.

By all indications, Tom Riddle had chosen not to update the status of the Gaunt Family with his name in order to hide the fact that his father had actually been a muggle--a fact that was apparently only known to members of the Order of the Phoenix and the Coven. Harry whispered his bemusement to Hermione.

“I expect only Wormtail knew,” Hermione quietly responded. “He was the only one with Voldemort at Riddle Manor when he returned Tom Riddle to a proper body. Maybe Tom told Bellatrix too--but it’s hard to know for certain. Obviously he didn’t see fit to tell anyone at all during the first war.”

Harry nodded in agreement and returned his attention to Mr Carrow’s lecture.

Decades had gone by with the Directory containing only the Sacred 28. A fair number of students looked thoroughly embarrassed to see their family names included on the list, including Daphne, Neville, Ernie MacMillan, and Hannah Abbott.
Harry wasn’t too surprised when Professor Carrow explained that the blood-status of the Black Family and the Weasley family had recently been downgraded to “Questionable” due to the “lack of respect” shown for their heritage by the current Heads of those Houses.

Harry knew Sirius and Narcissa Black wouldn’t care, and he presumed that Arthur Weasley didn’t give a rat’s arse either.

“Hey Weaselby,” Draco taunted Ron under his breath, “How does it feel to be disowned.”

“Shove it Malfoy!” Ron retorted bitterly. Ron honestly didn’t give a fig if his family was known as “blood traitors,” but he hated that Malfoy had another piece of ammunition to goad him with.

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As the students filed out of the Great Hall following the Cultural Studies lesson, Theodore Nott, Pansy Parkinson, and Blaise Zabini dawdled as Draco and the other Fourth Year Slytherins made their way to their common room in the dungeons. Finally they spotted Harry emerging from the Great Hall with Hermione.

“Oi... Harry, over here,” said Blaise, trying to get Harry’s attention.

“Hi Blaise,” Harry said warmly, “So, was your summer alright then?”


“I’m sorry Harry, Hermione,” Theo mumbled awkwardly, “I... I hope that stupid class didn’t upset you too much...”

“Me too,” Pansy agreed earnestly, also looking very embarrassed, “We don’t believe that pureblood rubbish anymore...”

“It’s alright, really,” Hermione gratefully interjected. “We know you’ve all changed...”

“It’s not just us,” Pansy added. “There’s loads more Slytherins who are questioning things this year. Mostly Astoria Greengrass’s friends, but a few others too.”

Pansy appeared to be straining not to cry, “I... I already apologised to Parvati and Luna at the Yule Ball for egging on Draco and the others last year, but I... I never properly apologised to you two for my previous behaviour. I’m really, really sorry... for everything I’ve ever said or done to you and your friends.”

The tears which Pansy was unsuccessfully trying to hold back began to trickle down her blazing red cheeks. “And... and after what Draco did to Astoria, it really made me see how utterly horrid and depraved he really is... I HATE him!!!”

Everyone was quiet for a few moments after that while Pansy cried. Hermione’s furry tail flicked as she and Harry regarded Pansy sympathetically. Hermione couldn’t help herself, startling Pansy with a hug. Blaise glanced around anxiously to make sure that no Slytherins were watching.

“Er... anyway Harry,” Blaise said when Pansy stopped crying and Hermione let go of her, “We just wanted you to know, there’s a small group of us Slytherins, who are all on your lot’s side. If you need any help with anything, just let us know!”

Theo suddenly spoke up again, “And... and you probably ought to know Harry--Draco and Crabbe
and Goyle, they’ve been talking about how Dumbledore must have given you a secret weapon to use against V...V...Voldemort’s army—and they’ve been saying that they and the Carrows have been ordered to try and find out what it is... by any means necessary....”

“But they’re biding their time for a bit,” Blaise added. “They’re just waiting for the Minister to get around to removing Dumbledore...”

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After talking to Blaise, Theodore, and Pansy, Harry and Hermione began studying the new lesson plan for Charms that Professor Flitwick had given them while the rest of the Unaffiliated got on with their own homework.

Harry flicked through his own syllabus and his eyes lit on an Invisibility Spell. It was ostensibly applied only to objects—like cloaks—but it struck Harry that it would be even more effective than a Disillusionment Charm if he could modify it. He glanced at Hermione who was also reading ahead in her syllabus to get an overview.

Excitedly Harry grabbed the Fifth Year Charms Book which Flitwick had given him, and studied the Invisibility Spell. He also opened his Achievements in Charming—the book of Charms Theory used to study for OWL’s—and found the section describing spell modification.

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It was an excited Ron and Ginny who joined the Unaffiliated that evening for dinner. Ron was accompanied by Seamus and Ginny by Neville, both of whom looked quite proud of their respective companions.

“I can’t believe it Harry,” Ron gasped, “I actually made the Quidditch team this year... I got the Keeper position.”

“We can’t believe it either,” snorted Fred, “I don’t know what Angelina was thinking...” he said with a wink.

Ron and Ginny both glared and George shot Fred a reproving look. Fred shut-up immediately, an apologetic expression replacing the teasing one.

“Don’t listen to him, Ron,” said George kindly, “Fred’s only joking—we’re both really proud of you—aren’t we Fred!?”

“Of course we are,” Fred hurriedly agreed. “I’m sorry Ron. Old habits... You practiced really hard once we got back from holiday in Egypt—you deserve it... really, I mean it!”

Ron looked mollified and nodded his acceptance of Fred’s apology.

“And I made the team too,” Ginny squealed gleefully. “I’m going to be the Seeker this year.”

“That’s bloody brilliant!” said Harry with a grin. He was really pleased that Ron was finally getting a chance to shine in something. “I can’t wait to see you both play in the first match...”

“That’s wonderful,” said Hermione, her furry ears twitching sincerely. “I’m so thrilled for you both!”

Dora gave Ginny a hug and smiled a bit stiffly at Ron. “Smashing! Kudos you two...”

Fleur, Daphne, and Jennifer all added their congratulations as well.
Luna’s fluffy white tail waved happily. “They’ll have to change the name of the team to Team Weasley...” she giggled.

“Mind you, not all of the Gryffindor’s are pleased about that...” George interjected.

“McLaggen wanted to try out for both positions, but McGonagall wouldn’t let him,” Fred smirked, “Said he was still on probation as far as she’s concerned...”

“...and some of the other Gryffindor’s are accusing Angelina of favouritism,” chimed in George.

“So who else is on the team then?” asked Parvati with a cheerful wriggle of her sleek black tail.

“Katie Bell and Alicia Spinnet are still on the team as Chasers,” Ginny responded gleefully, “That means for the first time in fifteen years the girls will outnumber the boys--according to McGonagall,” she chortled.

Fred made a face and rolled his eyes, but then he quickly gave Ginny a hug to show that he was just joking.

George gave Ron a serious look, “That means you’ll have to be on your best behaviour Ron.”

“I’ll do my best t’be nice...” Ron swallowed nervously, his ears turning pink. “I promise!”

“And I’ll try harder not to be such a berk too,” Seamus muttered, his own features flushing. “Mebbe it’ll help Ron if we both work on it together.”

Harry suddenly remembered something that he had forgotten about for a long time. He whispered in one of Hermione’s fuzzy pointed ears and she nodded, smiling.

“Er... hang on, I’ll be right back,” said Harry, getting up from the Mingling Table as everyone eyed him curiously. Ten minutes later, Harry returned with a small colourfully wrapped parcel.

“Erm... this was going to be your Christmas present last year,” Harry smiled awkwardly as he offered the parcel to Ron. “You might as well have it now...”

Ron gaped at Harry. Then he swallowed again and looked abashed, remembering how he had treated Harry during the Triwizard Tournament. He knew that his rather insincere attempt to apologise after Harry had won the First Task had been pretty pathetic. And Ron wasn’t sure that he had done anything to really make up for his behaviour yet.

It suddenly struck Ron how deeply Harry must still care about him, even though they weren’t best mates anymore. He knew it was true in his head, because Harry had saved him from Towler and McLaggen. But it hadn’t quite sunk in because Ron had also felt a deep sense of shame when Harry had told McLaggen that he hated bullying gits. And Ron still hadn’t got over feeling ashamed for being so jealous of Harry and belittling Hermione so often.

“Th...thanks Harry,” Ron stammered, his eyes stinging with tears.

“Go on then... open it!” said Harry, his smile broadening.

Ron tore at the wrapping and his jaw dropped. He couldn’t believe it.

“Omnioculars,” he croaked as the wetness in his eyes leaked. “Th... thanks again Harry. I... I dunno what else to say. They’re bloody expensive these are--I’ve been dying for a pair of these since...”

“Since the World Cup! I know,” Harry grinned. “I saw you admiring Hermione’s and mine, and I
got these for you at the beginning of Third Year, before the Triwizard Tournament started. But then... you know..."

Hermione purred and squeezed her husband’s hand proudly, knowing how lucky she was to have found someone as kind and forgiving as Harry to be with.

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“That was really sweet of you Harry.” Hermione kissed Harry tenderly in the unused classroom in which Harry had once found the Mirror of Erised.

“Thanks Hermione!” Harry responded softly. “I... well... it just seemed like the right time. I know Ron’s still a thickhead--but he really seems to be sincere about trying not to be quite so much... and it was just nice seeing him so happy, and having an opportunity t’be good at something everybody loves, like Quidditch.”

“I feel the same way Harry,” Hermione kissed him again and held him close, feeling his heart beat next to her own as her tabby ginger tail coiled in happiness. “It’ll give Ron a chance to step out of his brothers’ shadows a bit...”

“Even though they’re all on the same team?” Harry chuckled, knowing that Fred and George might not let Ron live it down if he blew his chance.

“Especially as they’re on the same team,” Hermione purred. “They really are proud of Ron! I know Fred can be a bit pushy at times, and the Twins and Ginny all think Ron is a dunderhead, but they really do love Ron much more than he realises. They’ll all help him as much as they can. I could sense it very strongly.”

“Good, that’s excellent then,” Harry sighed with relief. The last thing he wanted was for Ron’s experience on the Gryffindor team to end in disaster. “And it’ll be fun to watch them play. I turned down Dumbledore’s offer to form an Unaffiliated Quidditch team you know--I’m much happier doing well in school and having plenty of time to spend with you and the Coven...”

Hermione’s purring grew louder and their kisses became more passionate as her bushy tail entwined around Harry. She caught a glimpse of the sunny golden meadow by a glistening blue lake in the painting behind Harry out of the corner of her eye and had a naughty idea.

“Why don’t we continue this inside the landscape painting Harry--now that we’ve finally managed to perform the Pictura Portus Charm?”

“I thought you’d never ask,” Harry retorted with a smirk as he made sure the door to the classroom was well and truly locked.
Chapter 140

Hermione purred in contentment, kneading and occasionally licking Harry’s bare chest as they lay together in the field of long golden grasses and purple wildflowers by the shimmering deep-blue water of the lake under the bright sun. It felt amazingly life-like even though every brush-stroke was visible in every blade of grass which surrounded the Potters’ naked figures, and in every ripple on the surface of the lake.

A large wooden frame hung in mid-air nearby, through which they could both still see the unused classroom on the other side. The only other thing besides the painted textures of their surroundings which made it obvious that the apparently three dimensional world they were in wasn’t quite “real,” was the fact that to either side of the frame the world faded into a colourless blankness at an angle concomitant to the perspective at which it had been painted. It was as if they were inside a life-size diorama--the mountains behind the Potters even appeared to be quite some distance away.

“I reckon we could keep walking that direction and climb those mountains Hermione,” Harry marveled. “I suppose there’s no backside to them though...”

“I think you’re right Harry--it would seem that each painting is a finite space only containing whatever was in the visual field that the painter could fit onto the canvas. I expect if we walked off into the blank bits of space at the sides, we’d emerge into the ‘world’ of the next nearest picture in the classroom, just like the wizard portraits do.”

“It would be really weird if this was a lot less realistic picture--like a cartoon,” Harry mused.

Hermione giggled. “That wouldn’t be so bad. Can you imagine being inside an Impressionist, the later period ones I mean--or even worse--a Cubist painting?”

Harry thought back to some of the paintings in the London art museums that Hermione had taken him to and his mind boggled.

“Er... some of those Post-Impressionist ones like some of van Gogh’s would be really interesting actually--*Starry Night* would be amazing--but Cubist... no... definitely not! I think I’d go mad inside a Picasso. I wonder if someone saw us in a painting though, would we look like we were painted in the style of the painting too?” Harry wondered.

Hermione thought for a moment, imagining herself as a Monet girl, or even a Renoir nude. She began to flush and her nipples hardened again at the very idea.

“Well... have a really good look at me Harry.” Hermione giggled again as she shimmied her breasts in front of Harry’s face. “Do you see any paintbrush-strokes?”

Harry grinned and captured the pink tips of Hermione’s bouncing little globes with his fingers, shaking his head.

“Only the ones that I painted on you myself,” he replied with a chuckle as he eyed the Runic and Chinese symbol tattoos. “Shame really... you’d be a gorgeous Early Impressionist painting Hermione. I might have a go at painting you myself next summer when I’ve got the time... but I promise not to make you look like a Matisse!”

Harry found himself in another heated embrace with his nude wife as they rolled around in the painted grasses and wildflowers. Hermione wrapped her legs around Harry’s backside, meowing,
and her furry tail began to flail wildly as Harry’s penis entered her again.

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The Saturday morning sun glimmered on the surface of the Black Lake as some ducks flew by quacking. Harry peered around nervously, spying a few students further up the hillside on the lawn, and shared a look with Hermione before turning back to Viktor Krum.

“Are you sure it’s alright you being seen with us Viktor?” Harry asked.

Viktor snorted with a humourless laugh, and glanced at his girlfriend, Lavender Brown, and then at Cedric Diggory and Cho Chang.

“It matters little--the Slytherins, with the exception of Theodore, Blaise, and a few others, most of them do not trust me anyway.” Viktor replied. “They already know zat ve are all friends since the Trivizard Tournament last school-year. I vill help train those few zat ve can trust.”

“And whatever happens Harry, you can count on me.” Cedric smiled sincerely. “I’m in all the way. I’ll start training some of the other Hufflepuffs--but only the ones I’m sure of--and Cho of course. And we’ll give Padma and a few of the other Ravenclaws as much help as we can to form their own defence team as well.”

“Excellent! Thanks loads Cedric,” said Harry, returning his smile. “Hermione, Dora, and I have our hands full as it is. This’ll make it easier for Susan and Padma if they can train with you a bit too during the week... And it’ll be much safer for all of us to work in small groups when it’s most convenient--especially given our different schedules....”

“The Twins are fast learners, they’ll be able to pick up enough on the weekends with us to pass it on to the Gryffindors the rest of the week. I don’t know how much time we have before the Minister makes her next big play--but I’m thinking she’ll try to gin up a good excuse to sack Dumbledore sometime within the next few weeks.”

“After that, all bets are off on how long we have before she comes after me and Hermione. So we’ll just have to train up as many trustworthy people as best as we can in the meantime. And don’t forget--protecting muggleborn students are the top priority once Dumbledore’s gone--the Minister won’t be as keen on harming purebloods--and she’s more concerned about halfbloods ‘knowing their place’ than doing them in.”

“Except for Harry... and anyone who openly tries to help us of course!” Hermione exclaimed vehemently, punctuating her declaration with an angry wag of her bushy tail.

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“Bloody Hell!” gasped Harry when he reappeared on the other side of the Room of Requirement, doubled over and looking like he was about to throw up. Hermione regarded Harry sympathetically, still appearing rather green herself.

“That was even worse than side-along apparition with Madam Pomfrey or Dumbledore,” Harry muttered. “I felt like my head was going to implode...”

“It’s like being sucked through a straw...” Parvati agreed, who was still feeling quite ill.

Parvati’s sleek black tail drooped miserably to the floor. Luna gave her a comforting hug and kiss on the cheek. Surprisingly, Luna was the only one who hadn’t felt sick after her first solo apparition.
“Zat was ‘orrible...” moaned Fleur. “I was already in too much shock from ze pain of my broken legs to notice how awful it felt when Madame Maxime collected me from the maze!”

“Well, you’re doin’ very well, all things considered,” Dora said encouragingly. “Apparating gets a bit better after you’ve done it a few times. The fact that most of you ‘ave already experienced side-along apparition during the Third Task at least made it easier for you to accomplish by yourselves--If you ‘adn’t, it mighta taken you all a few more lessons...”

In fact, Daphne was the only one still struggling to twist into nothingness. Even Jennifer had managed to apparate. As she had been apparated more than once by the Auror who had collected her from the Dorset County Hospital before she had been brought to Hogwarts, Jennifer was able to remember how it was supposed to feel when it worked.

“Alright Daphne, let’s give it another go together then,” Dora kindly offered. She took Daphne’s arm, and with a loud crack they disappeared, reappearing seconds later with another noisy pop.

After a few minutes recovering, Daphne focused her intent with the destination firmly in mind. She turned on the spot and vanished. Moments later Daphne appeared next to the rest of the Coven and promptly emptied the contents of her stomach on the floor.

“Oh... well done Daphne!” said Hermione as she rubbed the other girl’s back. “Don’t feel bad--I threw up too.”

“Right... well that’s splendid,” Dora beamed as she pointed her wand and vanished the pile of vomit. “Now that you can all do it solo, we’ll just practice it for a bit, and then we’ll practice a bit more tomorrow mornin’...”

“Nobody splinched themselves, so that’s a jolly good sign. Once you know ‘ow to do it properly, it’s like riding a bicycle--you don’t really forget...”

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After lunch, the Coven, Neville, and Ginny, continued training with the Twins, Susan, and Padma. Hermione noted with a bit of surprise that Harry had been absolutely correct regarding how rapidly the Twins picked things up.

According to Ginny, the Twins didn’t perform as well in school as their parents would have liked. But it was clear that if they applied themselves, Fred and George could easily be at the top of their classes.

Harry and Dora tried to pack as much into the lesson as possible. And Harry was less reticent than ever to have everyone practicing some of the more dangerous spells.

“Right, you have to be jolly careful when using this one,” Harry warned the newcomers authoritatively. “This curse is a bit dark--so it’s one you want to keep in reserve as a last resort and use only if you’re facing a particularly evil enemy who wouldn’t hesitate to cause great harm or even kill you...”

“It’s not an Unforgivable, and it’s good for when you want to stop an enemy in their tracks without necessarily killing them. But still--Sectumsempra can be very dangerous, and it’s potentially lethal...”

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Sunday was much the same as Saturday as once again the Coven spent the morning practicing Apparition, and the afternoon training their friends how to fight with magical and muggle techniques.
But as full as their days were, Harry and Hermione diligently studied their advanced coursework in the evenings.

By Sunday evening, Harry was reasonably certain that he could modify the Invisibility Spell to work on portions of a person’s anatomy after he had managed to modify the spell to make only the handle of a teacup disappear. He lifted the teacup by its invisible handle and smiled.

He would have to experiment with the modified charm on an object transfigured into an organic ‘living’ simulacrum of an animal first though, before trying it on Hermione’s tail and ears. So Harry began skimming through the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Year Transfiguration books too, until he began to feel tired.

Feeling satisfied that he had studied enough for the evening, Harry decided to have a look at whatever Hermione was working on. She was intensely focused on a spell which had caught her attention in the “ridiculously advanced” Charms book.

“It’s an Undetectable Extension Charm Harry. It’s brilliant, but quite complex...”

“And illegal for private use too apparently,” muttered Harry as he peered at the page Hermione was reading. “I wonder why though? It doesn’t look like a bad thing. It just makes loads more space on the inside of things than there is on the outside--like Sirius’s tent.”

“It’s not so much the spell itself Harry,” Hermione responded, “It’s using the spell on muggle objects which might fall into their hands and possibly create a breach of the Statute of Secrecy which is illegal, so the Ministry has restricted the spell’s use to the Ministry itself, or licensed manufacturers of certain wizarding products like the tents many people had at the World Cup, and the trunks we bring to school...”

“Still... seems bloody ridiculous to me,” Harry snorted, rolling his eyes. “What a load of hypocritical rubbish. I mean, it’s an undetectable charm for one thing... and tents and trunks are used by muggles too!”

“The only reason I can think of for only allowing the Ministry and licensed manufacturers to use the spell, is to make whoever owns the company enchanting tents and trunks bloody rich. I wouldn’t be surprised if one of the pureblood families owns the company and got the law passed just so that they could make a fortune by monopolising the use of the spell.”

Hermione frowned as she considered what Harry was saying carefully.

“I think you’re right Harry,” she responded. “I was just going to use it anyway, because I think we’ll need to charm some bags so that we can pack everything we’ll need in them and carry them around with us if we have to leave in a hurry... And the Ministry is just a hotbed of corruption at the moment, so I’m not particularly fussed about breaking a capricious law!”

“And the more I think about it Hermione, why are some wizard families so filthy rich, and others so poor anyway? ...It’s even less fair for things to be like that in the wizard world than it is in the muggle world. As I look at all of the advanced material we’ve been studying, I can see that there is loads of stuff that wizards can do that I’d never even thought about until recently...”

Harry’s face flushed angrily and Hermione could see that Harry was starting to get worked up. But she remained quiet, because she had never considered all of the ramifications either. Hermione suddenly realised that was probably because she had grown up with plenty of everything, including attentive parents (at least until she’d turned part cat and her father had disowned her), and lovely holidays abroad.
Harry had grown up with next to nothing to call his own, and had been neglected and abused. His sense of the unfairness of things flooded Hermione’s own kneazle-enhanced sense of empathy and she let Harry continue to rant as her furry tail and ears quivered with emotion.

“The exceptions to Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration may mean that you can’t create basic things like gold and food out of thin air, but if you’ve got a bit of food, you can increase the quantity, and you can transform it into anything you like too,” Harry thundered.

“And why do WIZARDS need gold anyway? I mean sure... maybe a bit of it, but as far as I can see, there are loads of spells which could be put to use making whatever we need and comfortable spacious homes to live in really easily...”

“I know that not everyone is going to be good at every kind of magic there is, but it’s obvious that those who are good at certain things can help make up for whatever other wizards might lack...”

“It’s just so bloody unfair Hermione! Even though Purebloods have been frowned upon since the late 1940’s—until recently—they’ve still been allowed to manipulate laws to guarantee their wealth at the expense of everyone else!”

“I swear Hermione, if we can put an end to Minister Umbridge’s regime, I’m going to do everything in my power as a member of the Wizengamot to make some bloody changes in Wizarding Britain! And we should do something for Muggle society too. Why should poor Muggles have to suffer when Wizards have so much to offer to the rest of the world...?”

Harry was fuming, and he was intending to go on about putting the Gold that Sirius had given him to better use to help others too, but he suddenly noticed the tears streaming down Hermione’s flushed cheeks as she bit her quivering lower lip to keep from sobbing. Harry’s anger vanished as rapidly as it had onset, only to be replaced by an overwhelming feeling of guilt. His own eyes began leaking and he immediately hugged his weeping wife.

“I’m so sorry Hermione...” Harry gasped as he panicked, “I didn’t mean to upset you... I just... I just lost my head...”

Harry was stunned when Hermione crushed her lips against his own to shut him up. Her bushy ginger tail curled around him and her intoxicating scent began to calm him. After a few moments their lips parted wetly, and Hermione leaned back to peer into Harry’s iridescent green eyes.

“No Harry, don’t you ever apologise for being who you are,” Hermione began, “I’m only upset because I feel you in my heart so deeply that it hurts—everything you said is true! And that’s why I love you so much—your compassion—your sense of fairness and wanting to treat everyone kindly—that’s what I want as well...”

“I wanted to save House Elves from slavery... you actually FREED one Harry, and Dobby is happier for it. I’ve always believed in fairness, and kindness, and equality too...”

“But... but I thought that people would see who I was--I thought that they would be able to see beyond my intellect and my thirst for knowledge--to see the real me... but they never did! And when I first came to Hogwarts, I... I actually thought studying hard and following the rules here would be different... that people might actually like me more in the wizard world than they did in the muggle world...”

“I’d never had any real friends before Hogwarts, because people always made fun of me for being smart--but it turned out to be just the same here before... before you and I... Ron tried to be a friend
after the Troll Incident, but he's always hated me being smarter than him--except when I was doing his homework."

“Harry... You were the first person to ever not pick on me for being clever! You never once called me a 'know-it-all'--but you also made me see what I had missed... that some rules were arbitrary and unfair... that people in authority aren’t always right... and that there is more to being smart than book knowledge. You showed me that there were more important things... like friendship and bravery... and Love.”
Chapter 141

The Potters and the other members of the Unaffiliated were rather surprised to find Mr Carrow sitting in on Potions Class on Monday taking notes. Professor Snape appeared as inscrutable as ever, apparently doing his best to ignore Amycus, but Hermione could strongly sense his discomfort. And the atmosphere of the classroom, often heavy with steam and smells, was thick with the almost unbearable clouds of smugness emanating from Draco Malfoy.

Harry peered at Hermione with concern as he sensed her bristling beside him. She shook her head and he returned his attention to the potion which they were working on.

At the end of the lesson when Malfoy turned in his potion, Snape was forced to acknowledge him. Draco, never particularly good at keeping his thoughts or mood in check at the best of times, could barely contain his glee. But only Hermione could detect the sudden spike in Professor Snape’s consternation. Snape’s dark eyes glittered angrily as he watched Draco depart the dungeon classroom, following the Inquisitor.

Professor Snape spied Hermione looking at him with concern, and for a moment she could almost discern him trying to imperceptibly communicate with her. Then his walls went up and the door to his mind slammed shut.

Harry caught the exchange at the last moment when he looked up from the vial of potion he had just stoppered. Silently, Harry turned in the potion which he and Hermione had been working on. He raised his eyebrows questioningly at Snape, but the Potions professor simply jerked his head in the direction of Harry’s wife.

“What was that all about Hermione?” Harry quietly asked her as they left the dungeon, falling slightly behind the other members of the Unaffiliated. “Not Mr Carrow’s inspection—I understand that. He’s an Inquisitor, that’s what he’s really doing here... ‘investigating’ and trying to intimidate everyone. I mean what was up between you and Snape.”

“I think he was passing along a warning Harry,” Hermione replied with nearly a whisper. “I’m not sure how much longer Snape is going to be teaching Potions. Professor Slughorn may have to fill in after all...”

“Blimey... are you serious?” Harry’s blood ran cold. “I would have thought they were going after Dumbledore first...”

“I think they still are Harry...” Hermione’s furry ears flicked and worry crossed her features. “This was something else... something to do with Malfoy. I’m not sure what though.”

Harry considered the possibilities and his features darkened. There was only one thing which made any sense.

“Narcissa Black... Lucius Malfoy is going to try and get revenge. I just know it... I’ve been thinking about that since last week.”

“You might be right Harry... I’m just not sure. Professor Snape is a Legilimens, but I’m more of an ‘Empath.’ I’ve never practiced Legilimency, so all I could get was a general sense of whatever he was trying to communicate.”

Harry sighed. Legilimency seemed like it might be a worthwhile subject to pursue, but neither he nor
Hermione had the time to learn something as complicated as that. But he didn’t need to be a Legilimens to know that Snape would do anything to protect Narcissa Black.

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As he watched his students leaving the Potions classroom, Severus Snape hoped that Hermione Potter’s talents were enough to pick up at least the gist of the information which he had been trying to convey, without tipping off Draco Malfoy or Amycus Carrow that he had gleaned an inkling of what was to come from their minds.

Severus was infuriated that the Carrows had overturned the permanent suspensions of Draco’s gang from the Slytherin Quidditch Team. But there was nothing he could do about it due to the latest Educational Decree. After the morning’s newscast, the screen above the Staff Table had displayed Educational Decree Number 24 which had read simply: The Inquisitors shall have final authority to review and revise all disciplinary proceedings at Hogwarts.

But Severus took a small measure of satisfaction in the fact that the Carrows had no interest in reviewing and revising the disciplinary actions of the other Housemasters. At least Minerva had been able to prevent McLaggen from trying out for the Gryffindor team.

But that wasn’t what concerned him the most. Severus swallowed anxiously as he pondered the efficacy of the Protection Charms which warded Narcissa Black’s estate. He reached into his desk for his mirror and tapped it, uttering a name, “Filius Flitwick.”

“Ah... Severus, I was hoping to have a chance to speak with you today,” the diminutive Charms Master responded nearly immediately. “I wanted to confer with you regarding the Potters--to be certain that we are all providing them the tools which they will undoubtedly require in the very near future.”

“Quite,” the Potions Master said drily. “Well, you shall have ample opportunity Filius. If you would be so kind as to meet me at Narcissa Black’s Estate after classes today. I wish to appraise and fortify the Protection Charms...”

“Of course,” Filius Flitwick replied without hesitation. “It is imperative that the Order maintain top notch security for our meeting place.”

“It is more than that...” Severus began stiffly. He paused uncomfortably, still unused to discussing things which reflected on his personal feelings with other members of the Order, even insofar as he had come to consider them friends. “I believe that Madam Black--Narcissa--she is in danger...”

“I see,” Filius regarded Severus’s pained countenance gravely.

When Severus was no longer forthcoming, Filius was certain that the Potions Master was holding back on some information, still too reticent to completely reveal himself. But Filius Flitwick was no intellectual slouch. It was clear enough from Snape’s expression that he intended to personally kill Lucius Malfoy if the opportunity presented itself... and that the Potions Master believed the opportunity to be imminent.

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As the week progressed, every member of the Unaffiliated worked very hard, and Jennifer and Luna rapidly filled in the gaps in the knowledge which they needed to keep up with the Fourth Year material that they were studying. But none were more intensely occupied than the Potters, who were diligently slogging away through their advanced coursework and their own special projects.
Harry was thrilled when his doubly modified invisibility spell worked on the mouse which had previously been a teacup. It appeared quite odd-looking without its ears and tail, but he was certain now that the spell would work on the cat-witches.

Now they could all go out in public in the muggle world (and the wizard world too for that matter) without drawing unwanted attention. He was a bit sad that it was no longer a surprise for Hermione’s birthday though. Still, he had made other arrangements to make up for that.

“Oh Harry, that’s amazing!” Hermione said proudly, her eyes glistening with tears as she looked up from the handbag which she was working on. “Thank you so much! Have you worked out the counter-spell?”

Harry grinned and pointed his wand at the mouse. Its ears and tail immediately reappeared.

“Does that answer your question Hermione?”

Hermione responded by giving Harry a deep impassioned kiss. Then she dabbed at her happy tears and returned Harry’s grin.

“I have something to show you too Harry! Here... reach into my handbag.”

Harry extended his hand into the small bag, which was no bigger than the average purse. His eyes widened in astonishment as his arm disappeared inside all the way up to his shoulder.

It wasn’t so much that he was surprised; he knew Hermione would be able to work out how to perform the complex charm. It was just that no matter how much magic Harry saw, it never ceased to excite and astonish him. Even after witnessing all the dark magic, all of the nice magic continued to fill him with delight and wonder, inspiring him to try to be as good at it as his mum and dad had apparently been.

The thrill took him back... back to the night Hagrid had knocked down a door of a hut on an island in the middle of the sea... back to the first time Harry had returned from Diagon Alley and read all of his schoolbooks into the wee hours of the morning, discovering Hedwig’s name in *A History of Magic*.

Once more, Harry couldn’t stop thinking about how much happier he had been since he’d fallen head-over-heels for Hermione, who had reinforced his joy of learning all he could about magic.

“Fantastic Hermione... you’re a genius!”

“You are too Harry!” Hermione flushed cheerfully as her panties dampened, and she gave Harry another kiss. “I’m going to apply the charm to everyone’s bookbags and start packing tomorrow. Now... why don’t you try the modified Invisibility Spell on my tail and ears?”

The Potters were both delighted by the successes of Harry’s efforts. No longer would they have to worry that Harry’s invisibility cloak might slip off Hermione’s bushy tail at an inopportune moment... or that a gust of wind would blow off her knitted cap and expose her furry ears to the muggle world.

The pair of them locked lips again and heatedly rolled around on the settee, clothes loosening as Harry’s hands slipped under Hermione’s blouse and skirt, and hers reached into his shorts. After bringing each other off, they lay on the sofa, panting, sweaty, and giggly.

When Harry had recovered a bit, he undid the charm and stroked Hermione’s bushy tail and furry ears, wishing that the Invisibility Spell was unnecessary. As happy as he was that he had accomplished something which would make life much easier for Hermione in public, Harry loved
the way Hermione looked.

“You’re so beautiful Hermione,” Harry sighed as he brushed the back of his fingers across her cheek. “I wish we didn’t have to hide it to get by in the world--I’ve never been to a proper beach...”

“I’d love to go to the Riviera with you one day and see you enjoying yourself in a bikini without people freaking out because you’ve got four breasts and eight nipples--but I still haven’t seen any spells that can change that... You’re not a Metamorph and you can’t be an Animagus.”

Hermione smiled at Harry sweetly.

“It’s alright Harry, we can still go to the beach one day--I can wear a one-piece at a muggle beach, and my second breasts are small enough to strap up so that they won't notice. And anyway, as wizards, we can look for a remote beach and set up some muggle repelling charms so that we can be out in the open without worrying about it...”

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The rest of the week passed by quickly, without anymore upsets in Potions, but the Potters and the other Fourth Year members of the Unaffiliated were dismayed to find Mr Carrow haunting Care of Magical Creatures on Thursday.

Hagrid seemed rather unsettled, but Draco Malfoy wasn’t nearly as smug. Hagrid had moved on to Unicorns, and the one he had brought to class had taken a great dislike to Malfoy and charged at him. Hagrid managed to put a stop to it before it skewered Draco. The members of the Unaffiliated rather wished that he hadn't.

“Bloody Rhinoceros!” Malfoy fumed, “Forget this... I’m done with this stupid class! Come on Crabbe, Goyle... we’re dropping this stupid subject.”

Draco stalked away with his entourage and Hagrid cheered right up, as did the rest of the class. The Inquisitor seemed more amused than anything. Amycus Carrow lazily shrugged and departed with a smirk, clutching his clipboard.

Despite the somewhat provocative nature of the subject matter, Mr Carrow’s next lecture on Friday afternoon even managed to bore a number of the Slytherins to tears, as it focused almost entirely on proper etiquette in the company of Pureblood elites. Only Draco and his gang seemed to delight in what they thought should be a discomforting class for mudbloods and halfbloods.

But most of the students were simply perplexed and indifferent to the tedious and antiquated guidelines for proper decorum towards their “superiors.” Harry was sorely tempted to pull a Malfoy and storm out, just to show exactly how little respect he had for all of the pureblood rubbish. But as before, he and Hermione quietly endured the class until it was over.

The training session in the Room of Requirement on Saturday had been moved to the morning so that the Twins and Ginny could attend Quidditch Practice in the afternoon, as the Slytherins had booked the pitch for the morning.

“Mind you, it’s all for the best really...” Fred began.

“...Ron’s not really a morning person,” George concluded.

“But he’s doing brilliantly!” said Ginny. “Which is good, because our first match will be against the Slytherins next Sunday. You should come and watch the practice this afternoon.”
“That’s a lovely idea Ginny.” Hermione glanced at Harry who seemed quite keen on the idea. “I think we could all do with a bit of a break.”

Accompanied by Neville, Seamus, Dean, and a number of other Gryffindors, all of the Unaffiliated took seats in the stands to watch the Gryffindor team practice.

Jennifer was fascinated to see a full team play, as she had only ever seen other members of the Coven, Ginny, and Viktor play casually with the quaffle and the snitch. The game looked much more dangerous with a bludger hurtling around and beaters whacking at it with their bats, and she got caught up in the excitement.

Ron grinned when he saw who had come to watch him. It felt good to be the centre of attention for a change, and he was determined to show Harry what he could do. Unfortunately Ron was so busy thinking about impressing Harry, that he almost missed seeing a quaffle heading for the hoop to his right.

But it turned out to be a perfect opportunity to show off a bit. Ron dove for it and deliberately slipped from his broom while holding on to it tightly and dangling. He swung his legs around, kicking the quaffle away from the hoop and pulled himself back onto his broom in one smooth motion.

Ron grinned again when he saw Harry’s suitably impressed expression. He had been practicing that trick a lot since he had got home from Egypt.

“Good save Ron,” yelled Luna as she waved her fluffy white tail. Parvati joined her fiancée in applauding loudly. Fleur and Daphne noisily showed their appreciation for Ron’s remarkable feat as well.

Dora was stunned at Ron’s skill; he was far better than she had imagined he would be. And seeing Jennifer at ease and enjoying the performance relaxed Dora considerably. Feeling much more charitable towards Ron Weasley than she had since the first night of the new school term, Dora heartily joined in the cheering.

“Ron is actually quite good at keeping,” Hermione said quietly to Harry as she clapped dutifully.

“Yeah... that was a bloody brilliant manoeuvre!” Harry responded with a hint of awe in his voice. “I’ve never seen anything quite like it.” Then he noticed that Hermione’s applause was rather perfunctory.

“Are you still mad at Ron then?” Harry asked her bluntly with a chuckle.

“What?” Hermione was puzzled, then she realised what Harry was on about and giggled. “Oh Harry... the only reason I ever showed any excitement or interest in Quidditch at all was because you were playing! I couldn’t keep my eyes off you... Admittedly it was partly because I was always scared to death for you, but I’ve always thought your flying skills are amazing--ever since the day you got Neville's Remembrall back from Malfoy.”

“Are you serious? I always thought you were really cross with me about that... for breaking the rules.”

“Well, I was quite a bit upset about that...” Hermione looked thoroughly embarrassed as she remembered that day. “But to be perfectly honest Harry, that was the first time I saw in person how kind and brave you were too. You were the only one besides Parvati to stick up for Neville and to stand up to Malfoy! I have to admit, I actually hoped McGonagall wouldn't be too hard in you...”
“I had a lot of mixed feelings that day, because other children had always bullied me, and... and I always secretly wished someone would stick up for me. Mum and Dad taught me it was best to ignore bullies... and I actually believed that rubbish in my head until you taught me that it's better to stand up to bullies. But it always hurt inside...”

Harry felt a flush of shame as he recalled his own behaviour in the very early days at Hogwarts. He had been so happy that someone had actually wanted to be his friend for the first time in his life, that Harry had deliberately tried to ignore a lot of Ron's rudeness to other people, including towards Hermione.

Harry thought back to the day that Ron had called Hermione a Nightmare again, and the Troll Incident. Harry had almost had to drag Ron to look for her. For the millionth time since Hermione had turned part-cat, Harry wished that he had stuck up for her sooner.

“And your flying...” Hermione continued, her eyes lighting up, “it was incredible--your very first time on a broom. I couldn't even get my broom off the ground because I was so terrified. It was one of the first times I realised that I couldn't learn everything from a book...”

Suddenly a red haired girl zoomed by chasing a flash of gold, capturing both Potters' attention. Moments later, Ginny held a struggling snitch in her hand and the stands burst into applause again. Everyone was very impressed with Ginny’s skills. She caught the snitch half a dozen more times during the Gryffindor Quidditch practice.

The practice was only marred near the end by the arrival of some Slytherins in the stands. Harry thought they had come to see what they might be up against, until he heard Draco Malfoy’s boastful voice. Harry’s jaw tightened and Hermione’s furry tail bristled. The reason for Draco’s appearance suddenly became obvious.

“Yeah, I’m back on the team,” Malfoy gloated loudly to the Slytherins who were with him. “I’m very good at catching the Snitch with my left hand now after all the practice I got in at the Minister’s house over the summer...”

“And it’s all thanks to Dolores that the specialists at Saint Mungo’s invented this magical prosthetic hand just for me. Mind you, it can't do everything--I can’t use a wand or write with it--but it’s perfect for holding a broom...”
Chapter 142

The following week began with little untoward happening. Draco seemed to be kept too busy and distracted with practice for the upcoming Quidditch match to spend much time harassing anyone. Apparently he wasn’t quite as adept at catching a snitch left-handed as he was at boasting.

“You should have seen him in practice after classes yesterday!” George snorted at breakfast-time with the Unaffiliated on Tuesday morning.

“The idiot could barely hold onto his broom with that new hand of his,” Fred guffawed. “I reckon he didn’t get as much practice in at the Minister’s house as he claims.”

“Malfoy’s prosthetic hand seemed to spasm a bit every time he was reaching for snitch with his other hand, and he fell off his broom twice,” Ginny said with a grin.

“Shame though... Unfortunately he wasn’t high up enough to hurt himself,” George sighed.

“Don’t get too cocky!” Angelina admonished the Weasley siblings, frowning. “That’s only because Malfoy is used to reaching for the snitch with his right hand and gripping the broom with his left... The Slytherins have got the pitch booked for every afternoon this week to give him time to retrain himself--and he’s still got a good eye for spotting the snitch and a fast broom.”

“Sorry Angelina! You’re right of course...” Ginny sobered a bit. “And Malfoy was bloody irate at the end of practice. I almost thought he was going to curse Katie Bell for laughing at him when he stormed off the pitch as we were getting ready for our turn at practice.”

“Too true,” Fred acknowledged, his face darkening. “I wouldn’t put it past him and his mates to have a go at some of us to try and even the odds a bit.”

“Well, watch each others backs then. Don’t anyone wander around the castle alone--stick together as much as possible,” said Harry warningly, then he lowered his voice, “...and make some time to practice with the rest of the team what Dora and I showed you this week too... just in case.”

“I’ll make sure that they do Harry,” Angelina smiled gratefully. “Thank you lot... all of you! Ginny and the Twins already showed us a bit of what you’ve been teaching them yesterday. We don’t have as many Quidditch practices booked this week as the Slytherins do--so I’ve already made plans for the team and a few other Gryffindors to spend the rest of the time training...”

Angelina was interrupted when Hedwig flapped her wings exhaustedly and dropped two packages—one of them quite large—next to Harry on the table. She glowered at Harry and gave him a reproving peck. Hermione’s furry ears twitched in curiosity

“I’m sorry Hedwig,” said Harry. “You didn’t have to rush... there’s a few more days yet!”

He passed his snowy owl a cup of tea and she looked at Harry sheepishly as she dipped her beak in thirstily. Harry buttered her a piece of toast as well, and Hedwig cheered up.

“What’s in the parcels Harry?” asked Daphne.

“Oh... er... it’s a surprise really--for Hermione’s 15th birthday on Saturday.”

Hermione started to purr. Luna and Parvati whispered as Dora gave Harry a wink. Fleur and Daphne smiled at each other, knowing that they were prepared.
“Don’t worry sweetie,” Dora murmured when Jennifer clapped her hand to her mouth, eyes wide. “I’ve got us both covered—you ‘aven’t really had a chance to get situated enough yet in the wizard world t’do any shopping for anything—to say nothing of birthday presents.”

~o0o~

“Honestly Harry, you didn’t have to go to all this trouble,” Hermione blushed as he led her to the Room of Requirement. “It’s just another birthday.”

“Not really Hermione,” Harry said with a grin. “Last year was spoiled—I’d made plans with Luna and Parvati, but then we just spent it alone together because... er... well--things were upsetting and I got anxious....”

Hermione smiled at Harry’s gallant attempt to take the blame on himself. She remembered perfectly well how unhappy she’d been when she had received not even a card from her father. Hermione had just wanted to be alone and have a good cry without making everyone feel uncomfortable.

Harry had picked up on her feelings and been so understanding. He had just spent the day cuddling her and making her feel special. It had ended up being quite romantic actually. Fortunately, this year, Hermione had no expectations in regards to her father, and she was just happy that Mum was safe in Canada.

“...And this summer, when I had my first proper birthday party with a load of friends,” Harry continued, “I realised that you’d never really had a proper one either...”

Harry didn’t say what they were both thinking, that they were lucky that despite the ominous sense of foreboding, that things had not gone completely off the rails at Hogwarts yet. The worry was not quite enough to dampen their resilient spirits.

“Close your eyes Hermione...” said Harry when they reached the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. Hermione did as she was told, furry tail aquiver as her heart began to race in anticipation. Harry took Hermione’s hand and led her through the threshold, into the Room of Requirement.

“Alright, you can open them now.”

Harry grinned at the awestruck expression on Hermione’s face. Hermione wasn’t quite sure what she had expected, but it certainly hadn’t been this. It was a stunningly realistic environment—one of the best impressions of the natural world in full daylight that she had seen the Room of Requirement perform.

“Wotcher Hermione...” the girl with magenta hair giggled when she saw the look on the cat-witch’s countenance. Dora wriggled her matching magenta tail gleefully, and waggled her furry magenta ears.

The rest of the Coven were already waiting with grinning faces. Harry shut the door behind them as he and Hermione stepped into the humid tropical glade.

Golden rays of sunlight streamed through the verdant canopy of the rainforest, striking the spray of mist from the small waterfall which tumbled over boulders and ferns into the azure bubbling pool. Little rainbows formed where the sunbeams hit the droplets hanging in the air.

They were surrounded by palm fronds and vines. Marillion and lilac coloured Butterflies, and tiny fairies flitted to and fro among the orchids, hibiscus, and lilies. The aroma of vanilla, coconut, and citrus was intoxicating. Hermione took off her shoes and stockings, delighting in the feel of each step...
across the springy carpet of moss.

“Oh Harry--it’s beautiful...” was all Hermione could muster before being rendered speechless, her bushy ginger tail waving languidly.

“It’s gorgeous, isn’t it!” said Parvati as her own black satiny tail undulated. Luna’s fluffy white tail curled as she whispered something to Parvati and they both chortled.

“It ees even more lovely than ze fairy grotto,” Fleur cooed, her silvery tail and ears shining in the sunbeams. “Our Harry, ‘e has outdone himself.”

“Oh my God!” Hermione gasped.

Hermione’s furry ears flickered and her eyes widened when it finally hit her what she was seeing. She had been so entranced by the surroundings, that she hadn’t noticed the most incredible bit. Daphne tittered as she turned around and wiggled her bikini clad bottom and furry golden-blonde cat-tail at Hermione.

“I was wondering when you’d notice, Hermione!” giggled Luna.

Hermione glanced over at Jennifer, and sure enough, a silken ebony cat tail protruded from her behind as her furry black ears twitched. Hermione whirled around to see that Harry had already stripped down to his boxers, and was sporting a shaggy black cat-tail and furry black ears too.

“Harry--how? ...what...?” sputtered Hermione, “I know you and Dora... but the others...”

“A Seventh Year transfiguration spell Hermione,” said Harry, beaming from one furry ear to the other. “Actually, I used a transfiguration template and a spell modifier... Apparently they’re the basis for the jinxes that Parvati and Lavender used on each other when they fought over you in Second Year--temporary animal features.”

“There's a basic transfiguration to add some minor animal features... and the modifier chooses which animal is expressed--that’s how Parvati got a horse tail and Lavender got antlers--whoever originally created those jinxes must have used these spells. I'm fairly certain that the jinxes had another modification too though--a hex which made them too long-lasting... that’s why Parvati and Lavender had to spend the night in the hospital wing. They needed some sort of spell reversal potion.”

“But... but when did you even get a chance to practice?” asked Hermione, looking extremely puzzled. “I can’t think of a single moment that we’ve been apart except for the last hour before you brought me here.”

“They’re actually really simple transfigurations, surprisingly,” Harry replied. “They just aren’t taught until Seventh Year because it’s assumed that older students will be more mature...” Harry snorted with laughter, knowing that Fred and George would probably have a field day with the spells.

“It was just going to be me and Dora joining in with furry tails and ears until I spotted the spells while I was skimming the more advanced transfiguration books to make sure I managed to turn a teacup into a mouse properly--for something to practice the Invisibility Spell on... Anyway, Happy Birthday Hermione!” Harry said as his smile softened. Hermione melted in Harry’s adoring gaze.

The Potter’s shared a short tender kiss as Hermione ran her fingers through the fur of Harry’s black tail, which was as unkempt and shaggy as his black mop-top. When their lips parted, Harry reached into his bag and retrieved two brightly wrapped parcels.

As the rest of Coven watched with interest, Hermione carefully unwrapped the larger parcel. As she
had guessed, it was a book—a very large heavy book, bound in mahogany coloured leather with gold leaf trim, and it looked very old. The heady effect of the musty smell of the leather roused Hermione’s senses and her panties moistened as her finger traced the gold embossed title of the book: *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Illuminated Wizarding Edition*.

Breath quickening, Hermione gingerly cracked open the book. The illuminated script and illustrations nearly leapt off the page, displaying motion as all wizard pictures did. She recognised the frontispiece image as a scene from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Hermione gasped when she saw the date of publication written on the vellum pages....

“Harry... this is over 350 years old! And I had no idea that Shakespeare was known in the wizard world—how on Earth did you come across this?”

“Tomes and Scrolls,” Harry replied, smiling at Hermione’s obvious delight. “I wasn’t sure that wizards knew about Shakespeare either. But I sent a letter to the shop, and the owner said that he could get a wizarding copy for me...”

“But Harry, this must have cost a fortune,” Hermione squeaked, feeling rather dizzy, hardly believing what she was holding in her hands. “Rare muggle editions of Shakespeare’s works from this era go for millions of pounds...”

“It’s alright Hermione—really,” Harry said quickly, swallowing anxiously when he spied Hermione’s eyes glistening wetly. He wondered if he’d overdone it. “Sirius wasn’t joking when he said that his family was filthy rich...

“And honestly, it wasn’t even very much—all things considered—because as a muggle author, Shakespeare isn’t in very high demand in the wizard world. Apparently Tomes and Scrolls has had this copy for years—collecting dust! I... Hermione... please... I just wanted to get you something I knew you’d like... something as special as you are!”

Even through her own blurry eyes, Hermione could see a tear of worry trickling down one of Harry’s cheeks. Holding the heavy tome under an arm, she flung her other arm and furry tail around him.

“It’s exquisite Harry!” Hermione purred loudly as Harry calmed in her embrace. “I love it! Thank you very much... I don’t know if you know this Harry, but Mum named me after the queen in *The Winter’s Tale*.”

“R...really?” Harry gasped. He couldn’t believe his luck at having chosen such a perfect gift after all. “I had no idea. I only read a few of the plays for Sixth Year in primary school—and that wasn’t one of them. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was my favourite of the ones I’ve read!”

Hermione giggled. She wasn’t surprised in the least to discover that had been Harry’s favourite Shakespeare play.

“Mine was *Macbeth*,” she murmured. Finally, letting Harry go, Hermione picked up the other parcel. It was much smaller than the first.

“That one’s actually from Sirius,” said Harry. “I sent Hedwig to London to collect it from Gringotts for him.”

Hermione unwrapped the second present to discover a midnight-blue jewellery box.

“It’s lovely!” Hermione exclaimed when she lifted the elegant silver and gold necklace out of the
box. The oval shaped filigree pendant dangling from the necklace was inset with a gleaming Tiger Eye gemstone. “I’ll have to thank Sirius when I get a chance.”

After Harry put the necklace on Hermione, she turned around for the rest of the Coven to see it.

“Daddy says Tigers Eye is supposed to bring harmony and good luck,” Luna said admiringly.

A short time later, Hermione had opened all of the other presents the rest of the Coven had given her, and placed them in her bag where she knew they would be safe. Daphne opened a picnic basket, and soon everyone was eating the delicious strawberry shortcake and unmeltable vanilla ice-cream marbled with chocolate which Dobby had sent up from the Hogwarts kitchens.

Fleur had brought a bottle of champagne, and soon everyone was feeling very giggly. The teenage witches began shedding their bikinis as Hermione undressed and one by one they began to enter the bubbling pool, all of them giddily waving their cheerful furry tails. Harry slipped into the warm water with the rest of the Coven amidst the water lilies and tropical fern.

Hermione found herself at the centre of attention, showered with kisses and affectionate caresses. The rainforest glade echoed with purrs and murmurs of pleasure. Fingers entered Hermione’s heated vulva and hands roamed her body as numerous lips encircled her nipples; her body surged with exhilaration.

Hermione began to arch and meow, her furry ears flattening with bliss as her wet tail thrashed in the churning pool. As Hermione lost herself to the first throes of ecstasy, Harry took her in his arms and his hardness slipped into her sopping channel. In short order, Hermione burst again, meowing and seething with passion as Harry thrust himself, releasing his essence into her depths.

A feverish crescendo of ardour rippled through Hermione’s supple form when Parvati took Harry’s place between her thighs, wearing Fleur’s magical strap-on. Hermione yowled joyously, feeling Harry’s stiffness between her bottom-cheeks, sliding into her rear-entrance while Parvati plunged the vibrating lance of pleasure into her slick vessel. She bit her lip at the incredible sensation of them both moving inside her simultaneously.

A spray of mist and steam settled over the roiling tropical cauldron as Parvati pleasured Hermione, and Harry’s semen squirted into her back-passage. Drenched furry tails joined the arms and legs coiling around the birthday girl as she exploded into bliss again.

Hermione found herself next suckling one of Dora’s nipples and her hands kneading Dora’s ample breasts, but she was uncertain as to whose tongues were rolling her fleshy pearl and delving into her folds. Hermione was only certain that at least two tongues were involved, and that someone had been sure to bring gillyweed to the occasion.

As the turbulent tide of Hermione’s rapture swept her away once more, Luna’s grinning head finally emerged above the surface of the frothing water, and Hermione knew that at least one of the busy tongues had been hers.

In Hermione’s next moment of lucidity she realised that her own tongue was exploring Jennifer’s dripping pink hollow while Jennifer reciprocated in kind as both of their wet tails unfurled. The members of the Coven began to lose themselves in each other too, and Jennifer suddenly discovered herself clinging to Daphne and Parvati as they all devoured each other, gasping and purring.

Jennifer convulsed ecstatically and lost herself, moaning, grasping the next figures that swam up beside her. Harry couldn’t exactly recall whom he had left off with, but he gradually registered that it was now Jennifer’s lips which were wrapped around the base of his shaft, and that he was
ejaculating into her throat while Fleur was kissing him.

As the Coven reached a fever pitch, a vortex of magic whirled in the tropical grove, whipping the palm fronds with gale force winds. And each time they erupted with passion, the whirling pool geysered into a waterspout. Finally the Coven succumbed to oblivion.

When Hermione stirred awake, quite some time later, she purred at the sight of the wet naked pile of cat-witches and cat-Harry strewn across the ferns and moss at the edge of the jungle pool. It had been the nicest birthday she could ever remember having.

~o0o~

The Headmaster chuckled, his eyes twinkling as the walls of Hogwarts trembled numerous times that afternoon. Thankfully, the Carrows were too busy watching Draco Malfoy and the Slytherin team practice for the first game of the Quidditch season tomorrow. They would be none the wiser. Fortunately the Potters and the Coven had a very good sense of timing.

Dumbledore eyed his equipment, which seemed to be holding up quite well. Fawkes groomed his feathers without batting an eye—he was used to it by now.
Chapter 143

Ron Weasley glared at the heaping pile of scrambled eggs and bacon on his plate. It was just sitting there, mocking his clenching gut and pale countenance. He took a sip of pumpkin juice, hoping it would settle his stomach. When that didn’t work, Ron buttered a crumpet and contemplated taking a bite.

“Ye okay Ron?” Seamus asked sympathetically, after witnessing Ron staring at the crumpet in his hand for several minutes. “Come on mate... ye’ve got ta eat somethin’.”

“I... I dunno,” Ron muttered. “I’ve never felt like this before--not hungry I mean.”

“It’s alright Ron,” said Ginny kindly. “It’s just nerves. Don’t worry about eating breakfast if you’re not feeling up to it...”

“You seem alright though,” Ron scowled, wondering how Ginny could appear so calm. “Maybe something’s wrong with me...”

“But I am anxious,” Ginny responded, “This is my first real match too Ron...”

“You’ll be fine once you’re in the air,” said George encouragingly. “Everyone feels nervous their first time--right Fred?”

“Right on one George,” Fred agreed. “I threw up half a dozen times before my very first match... and we still clobbered the Ravenclaws 260 to 30.”

Ron looked even paler and George rolled his eyes at Fred.

Angelina thought that maybe it was time for her to step in and say something, “Whatever the final outcome is doesn’t matter Ron... Just remember that you made it onto the team on your own merits. I’ve seen you play, and you’re really good...”

“You’re more than good, you’re excellent Ron!” exclaimed Harry, interrupting Angelina.

Ron spun around in his seat, his eyes widened with surprise. Harry and Hermione both gave Ron an encouraging smile.

“That manoeuvre you performed the other day was brilliant,” Harry continued. “I know you can do this...”

Then to Ron’s shock, Hermione leaned in, giving him a hug and a peck on the cheek as her furry tail twitched.

“We both believe in you Ron,” she said as Ron’s cheeks began to flush.

The Potters returned to the Mingling Table and watched Ron digging cheerfully into his heap of eggs and bacon from their seats.

“Thanks Hermione!” Harry gave his wife a grateful kiss. “You were right... he did need our encouragement! I hope I didn’t put you out too much though. I... I just thought a hug from you might do him some good...”

“It’s alright Harry...” Hermione purred and flicked her furry ears, returning Harry’s kiss. “I know I did it more for your sake--but I’d like to see Ron do well too...”
Draco Malfoy smirked as he flexed his prosthetic hand, the mechanical joints moving smoothly. He had this in the bag. He had been practicing all week and secretly put an extra-strength Gripping Charm on his broom. Once his hand was wrapped around the shaft, nothing would make it let go.

Draco heard a roar and looked up in the stands. His eyes narrowed when he spotted one of Harry Potter’s little girlfriends--the loony one--wearing what appeared to be a lion’s head for a hat while waving her own fluffy white tail. He snorted disdainfully and shook his head.

“Oi... Malfoy, you ready for this?” Montague barked,

“What...? Of course I’m ready!” Draco retorted with a sneer.

Draco wished Marcus Flint was still in charge. But despite being allowed back on the Quidditch team, Flint had declined to return to his captaincy after waking up one morning with his knees reversed, a faceful of octopus tentacles, and apparently something painful lodged in a very uncomfortable part of his anatomy.

By all indications, Graham Montague had been unwilling to give up the captaincy, after having taken over when Flint had been permanently suspended from the Slytherin team the previous year. For his part, Montague reckoned it was his turn now. As the Triwizard tournament had been in session last year, he hadn’t even had a chance to show what he was made of yet--and this was his chance.

Angelina faced off against Montague, and when Madam Hooch gave the order to shake hands, Angelina returned the Slytherin’s vice-like grasp with a crushing grip of her own. Rolling her eyes when neither team captain seemed willing to let go, Madam Hooch blew the whistle.

“And they’re off...” Lee Jordan shouted into the megaphone “ It looks like Montague has a broken hand, well-deserved after his own pathetic attempt to show up the exquisitely endowed Angelina Johnson...”

“JORDAN!” snapped Professor McGonagall.

“Sorry Professor...” Lee grinned sheepishly, “Anyway--Pucey in possession of the quaffle--intercepted by Alicia--she goes for a goal--Bletchly misses--10 points Gryffindor...”

The Unaffiliated enthusiastically joined in the raucous cheering for the Gryffindor team. Nearly everyone seemed to be rooting for them, as most of the students couldn’t bear the idea of a Slytherin victory--especially with Malfoy back on the team. Only a few non-Slytherins appeared less than enamoured with the Gryffindor team.

“...Warrington with the quaffle now--he throws--smashing save by Ron Weasley--Angelina takes possession... fine legs on that girl, the Weasley Twins are lucky blokes...” Lee caught McGonagall’s steely glare and moved on “...Angelina passes to Alicia Spinnett--Spinnett cut off by Goyle--passes to Katie Bell...another one of Gryffindor’s finest lasses...Bell shoots--she scores... Gryffindor up by 20 now...”

The game was fast-paced and brutal as the players zoomed around the Quidditch pitch, and the Slytherins grew angrier as Ron Weasley prevented them from scoring time and again. Katie Bell had the quaffle once more; Goyle flew to intercept and barreled into her, nearly knocking her off her broom.

“...FOUL...” roared Lee Jordan “…blatant blatching by Goyle--yes, Madam Hooch agrees--Katie
looks a bit dazed--takes a penalty shot.... Ooooh, too bad, saved by Bletchly...”

Angered by Goyle’s foul, when he next had the bludger in his sights Fred wallowed the ball hard, aiming directly at the Slytherin beater. The ball slammed into Goyle’s head; he spun around and went into a nosedive as stars flew before his eyes, pulling up at the very last second.

Ginny and Draco Malfey both circled the pitch, high above the stands, keeping their eagle eyes out for the snitch. Ginny spotted it first, hovering down the far end of the field, she sped towards it on the Firebolt which Hermione had given to her with Harry’s blessing. Draco cursed and put on a burst of speed.

Montague signaled Crabbe, but the idiot just stared back at him gormlessly. Rolling his eyes, Montague pointed at Ginny Weasley and mimed hitting her. Crabbe finally appeared to understand. He cut Ginny off and threw a savage elbow to her head.

“...COBBING BY CRABBE! ...” Lee Jordan bellowed.

Hermione hissed, her bushy tail taking on the appearance of an angry hedgehog. Harry nearly leapt out of his seat, wand at his fingertips. The crowd let out a chorus of boos, but McLaggen guffawed loudly, catching Harry’s attention.

“Bloody no-good cheating git!” Lee Jordan snarled, “As per usual, Slytherin proves that they can’t win with the talent which they don’t have...” McGonagall caught Lee’s eye again.

“...Just telling it like it is Professor...” Lee said assertively. Professor McGonagall really couldn’t bring herself to disagree.

This time Angelina took the penalty shot, but she was so angry that the quaffle went wide off the mark. As the play resumed, George tailed Crabbe. When the bludger came their direction, George pretended to let his Beater’s Bat slip from his hand. It flew from his grasp and hit Crabbe square in the face.

“Do that to my sister again and you’re dead Crabbe!” George whispered venomously when he flew over to the other beater, feigning a look of concern.

There was a brief timeout while Madam Pomfrey fixed Crabbe’s broken nose and wiped the blood off his face. But as nobody could prove that George had done it on purpose, no foul was called.

The game continued for another hour. The Gryffindors matched every brutal foul committed by the Slytherins, confident that Ron would prevent the Snakes from scoring a penalty shot--and every time, Ron proved that their faith was warranted.

The match was still 20 nil to the Gryffindors when Draco spotted the snitch hovering near the stands not more than ten metres below. Draco dove for it. Ginny Weasley was nowhere in sight and he knew the game was won. The match was his, Draco gloated to himself as he reached for the snitch with his real hand.

“Too bad that one’s not prosthetic too,” giggled Ginny as she plucked the snitch out of the air. “You might have stood a better chance of catching it...”

Draco gaped at her as a loud cheer went up from the stands. He couldn’t comprehend how she had managed to beat him to the snitch. Furiously he tried to grab at the tail of Ginny’s broom with his real hand as she completed passing him. His fingers grabbed air and he lost control of his broom.

Draco panicked and tried to let go of his broom so that he could tumble and roll safely. But the
double-strength Gripping Charm on the broom prevented his prosthetic hand from releasing it. The broom spun wildly and flipped end over end as Draco crashed into the field.

When he came to, a few seconds later, Draco realised that his prosthetic hand was missing. He spotted his broomstick lying in splinters on the lawn, his prosthetic hand still attached to a piece of the broom handle.

Too angry to speak, Draco stormed off the field as the Gryffindors reveled in their victory. Draco fumed when he passed Ginny and Katie Bell hugging each other, gleefully leaping up and down. He caught the eye of Amycus Carrow and the Inquisitor nodded slightly. Draco felt slightly cheered, knowing that soon it would be his time, and then he’d teach those bitches a lesson that they would never forget.

The party in the Gryffindor Common Room after the match continued until dinner time, and the Unaffiliated had all been invited. Everyone had butterbeers, and flasks of firewhiskey were surreptitiously passed around. The prefects were well aware, but pretended to look the other way.

Dora and Daphne were forced to come to Fleur’s rescue, as a number of the older Gryffindor boys were gathered around Fleur trying to impress her. Meanwhile, Parvati and Luna were introducing Jennifer properly to Lavender Brown, who had invited her boyfriend Viktor to the celebration.

Ginny and Ron were both on the receiving end of intense adulation, and the youngest Weasley son lapped it all up, savouring the acclaim and glory. Ron was thrilled beyond measure when Viktor Krum shook his hand and offered his accolades.

But somehow, even receiving plaudits from his favourite professional Quidditch player didn’t mean quite as much to Ron as the praise he received from his once best-friend. Ron sauntered over to the Potters again, who were chatting with Dean Thomas and Susan Bones, whom Dean had invited to the party.

“Did you see that one save Harry...?” Ron crowed, almost spilling his butterbeer on Seamus. “I thought for sure I was gonna miss it--but then I thought, ‘use the tail’ so I whipped my broom around...”

“Yeah Ron, that was brilliant!” Harry acknowledged with a smirk. This had to be the third time that Ron had recounted that particular save to Harry.

Harry glanced at Hermione, but something had caught her scrutiny and her tail was bristling slightly. He peered the same direction, discerning immediately what had raised her ire. McLaggen and Towler were sitting on the edge of the landing above, feet dangling from the balcony. They were both nursing butterbeers and staring at Ginny Weasley who was snogging Neville silly.

McLaggen felt the hair on the back of his neck prickle, suddenly realising that Harry Potter was glowering at him. With a scowl, McLaggen tapped Towler on the shoulder. They both stood up and departed, climbing the stairs to their dormitory.

Eventually, it was time for dinner and everyone giddily made their way to the Great Hall. As the evening meal concluded, the Twins invited the Unaffiliated back to the Gryffindor Common Room for their after-party, but they politely declined. The Potters turned in early, feeling both exhausted and slightly agitated.

“That was quite a match,” Harry murmured to his wife as she lay next to him curled under his arm with her head on his shoulder, kneading his bare chest as he gently stroked her bushy hair. “I’m really happy for Ron and Ginny...”
Harry left the “but” unsaid, knowing that Hermione understood.

~o0o~

Severus Snape awoke with a start. He sensed that it was well after midnight, but he knew immediately that something wasn’t right. At the conclusion of the Quidditch match yesterday morning, Severus had been left with a deeply unsettled feeling. But not because the team of the House for which he was the Master had lost the match.

To the contrary, he had felt a measure of satisfaction at the outcome. No, Severus had been disturbed because he had discerned that events were coming to a head. And now... now he sensed that someone else was in the room with him.

“Light!” Severus muttered, and the warm glow of the bedside lamp lit part of the room, casting eerie shadows. A tall figure stepped out of the darkness.

Snape’s eyes widened in recognition of the lanky wizard with long platinum blond hair pointing his wand at him. Wildly, Severus looked around for Narcissa, but she was nowhere to be seen in the bedchamber.

“Looking for someone?” snarled Lucius Malfoy, “My treacherous bitch of a wife perhaps?”

“She is no longer yours,” Severus said coldly as he quelled his disquiet. “Your loss was of your own making...”

“Perhaps so, old friend,” Lucius hissed sarcastically through gritted teeth. “And perhaps I shall make her mine again—if only to show her the true meaning of pain. As I intend to take back what is rightfully my property, like my home...”

“Where is she?” Severus asked calmly as he stared into Lucius’s glacier blue eyes. “What have you done with her?”

“Oh, nothing yet,” replied Lucius evenly. He tapped his temple with his forefinger “And don’t bother looking here. You will not find anything. My defences are strong.”

Severus cursed inwardly. Lucius was correct; Snape could not break through those walls—at least not without his wand. But there was something off about Lucius Malfoy’s demeanor.

“You don’t even have her do you?” Severus raised an eyebrow.

Lucius faltered slightly, wondering if his old friend’s abilities were more prodigious than he had believed. Lucius snorted.

“Heh, she will be mine again soon enough,” sneered the elder Malfoy, “Narcissa cannot evade Warlock Nott and the others for long. And after we find her, I shall... no... WE shall teach her a lesson that she will never forget, and then... then I shall put an end to her miserable life.”

Severus couldn’t help himself; his nostrils flared and a hiss of anger escaped. If only he had his wand.

“How did you get in?” he asked, stalling for time as he reached out with his mind to locate and retrieve his wand.

“This is my ancestral home,” Lucius sneered, “Did you really think that I wouldn’t have some means to get around the new wards? Now get up... slowly...”
Snape sighed. Of course--there must be a hidden tunnel which linked the estate to the outside world, one which even Narcissa had never been aware of.

“I suppose you have my wand already,” Severus muttered as he slowly climbed out of bed and pulled on his trousers. “...No doubt hidden in your robes. Quite stealthy of you I must say... How long have you been here?”

“Not long... but long enough,” Lucius smirked. “And nice try, old friend, but you shan’t be overpowering me and reclaiming your wand--I gave it to Nott to hold on to. Now move... we’re going to take a little walk and we’re going to find my ex-wife!”

At Lucius Malfoy’s wandpoint, Severus silently traipsed through the Manor House from room to room looking for Narcissa, and he dared to hope that she had already escaped. Perhaps she had got up to relieve herself and discovered that her home had been invaded.

“Well, somewhere on the grounds perhaps!” Lucius exclaimed wearily, “No matter... she shall not evade me forever, certainly not here, on my estate. Come on--outside!”

The blades of dewy grass felt cool under Severus Snape’s bare feet, and the chill of the night air crawled across his shirtless torso. Nearly fifteen minutes passed as the pair strolled across part of the lawn and through the gardens. A rustling sound behind some bushes caught both of their attentions.

“There you are Mr Malfoy... Sir,” said a pleased looking Snatcher with a shaved head. “We got ‘er... just around the corner. Me an’ Bob an’ your mate, Mr Nott... we caught ‘er tryin’ to get outta the gate not five minutes ago.”

“Very good...” a cruel smirk crept to Lucius Malfoy’s lips, “It would appear that the Minister’s recruitment efforts were not in vain. I must admit I had misgivings about the Minister’s plan to bring you and your... compatriots... into the fold.”

“Yeah... I suppose so,” snorted the hooligan clad in leather jacket, chains, and blue jeans. “Well, not alla us managed ta graduate from ‘ogwarts. But that don’t mean we didn’ learn nuffin’. We know enough ta get by and make our way in the world quite comfortably really...”

The three wizards stepped around the corner of the hedge and spied two more wizards holding a witch in a nightgown at wandpoint further down the path.

“Severus,” moaned Narcissa, “I had hoped you might have escaped...”

“And I... you,” sighed the Potions Master as he struggled to maintain control of his breathing and heart-rate.

“Yes... yes, this is all very touching, I must say...” Lucius sneered. “Much more intimate than I have experienced with my dear wife in many, many years... Well, I think I will enjoy a moment of ‘intimacy’ with you myself before I make our goodbye permanent... Narcissa...”

“And no doubt these fine young lads and Nott would like to join in the fun--Severus can watch. But first, perhaps a taste of the torment that your son and I have been forced to endure...”

Severus regarded the Snatcher named Bob, and Nott with a keen eye. There was something about the elder Nott which seemed odd--almost beseeching. Severus peered deeper into Warlock Nott’s unblinking eyes.

Nott Sr had been doing a lot of thinking during his travails in Azkaban, then Voldemort’s Army, and now the Minister’s service--a lot of soul searching. He had examined the wreckage of his life and
found it wanting. He knew now where he had gone wrong, and though there was little hope for his own redemption, Warlock Nott still held out some hope for his son Theodore.

He had learned through the Minister, that his son had been captured by Dumbledore, and been given some measure of reprieve. Nott allowed Severus to see what he needed to see.

Lucius raised his wand and pointed it at Narcissa. “Crucio...” he incanted, and Narcissa fell to the ground screaming in agony.

Then something happened which Lucius had not anticipated. Nott flung Snape’s wand into the air and fired a green bolt of lightning at the Snatcher beside him. Severus summoned his wand from midair as the Snatcher named Bob fell dead.

“TRAITOR!” roared Lucius, as a green arc of magic leapt from the end of his own wand towards Nott.

As the light went out in Warlock Nott’s eyes, and his last rattling breath escaped his lips, his last thought was for the safety of his son and wife.

Enraged, Lucius whirled around to face Severus, but it was already too late. The bald-headed Snatcher beside him already lay dead, and the green lightning from Snape’s wand struck Lucius in the chest.
Severus Snape held the sobbing witch to his bare chest as her pain from the cruciatus curse ebbed, pressing his lips to her forehead. The night no longer seemed cold as Severus felt Narcissa’s warmth stir near his beating heart. Narcissa was alive and that was all that mattered.

As the world around them faded, Severus lost track of the passage of time. Never had he believed that another could possibly make him feel as Lily had. Severus had thought himself destined to wallow in bitterness and loneliness to the very end of his days.

Severus knew then that somehow, through Lily’s son and her daughter-in-law, he had been given a second chance at living and love—a chance to get it right. He had been given a second opportunity to care about another, and to put their life and their suffering before his own.

Severus had no idea how long he had been holding Narcissa when he felt her wet cheeks and her lips against his. They shared a deep kiss, and when they parted, gazed into each other’s eyes as he brushed the strands of hair from her glistening lashes.

Slowly Severus helped Narcissa to her feet and they turned their attention to the four bodies which lay before them as reality intruded on their interlude. They both regarded the fallen Malfoy coldly, but Severus sensed a stab of regret course through his beloved.

“Severus, what are we to do? My son...”

“...is too far down the path to darkness, I believe,” Snape murmured. “I wish it were not so. But when I witnessed the plans of Lucius and the Minister for you in his mind... I saw nothing but the savage joy of vengeance in his heart.”

Severus felt Narcissa flinch as she released another sob, and gave her another sorrowful kiss.

“Perhaps... if Draco knew--his father is dead...” Narcissa said hopefully.

“No doubt he will soon enough,” sighed the Potions Master, “but it shall only further harden his heart.”

Snape waved his wand and blankets covered the bodies. “These can wait until morning. We can make a decision after Dumbledore inspects the scene. For now, it would perhaps be best if we returned to bed.”

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Five wizards examined the tableau as a sprinkle of rain began to patter against the graveled path beside the hedgerow. Severus conjured an umbrella and held it over Narcissa.

“Never thought scum like Nott had it in him,” snorted Alastor Moody. “Comin’ round like that in the end. Good for him!”

“Indeed!” Dumbledore replied, his voice grave. “For which I am most grateful—Severus and Narcissa might not be standing among us now otherwise.”

“So, what should we do with them Albus?” asked Madam Bones uncomfortably, gesturing towards the dead. “We cannot simply turn their bodies over to the Ministry under current circumstances, nor can we allow Severus to be arrested. And yet...”
“I quite agree Amelia,” Dumbledore nodded, stroking his long white beard which was dampening as the raindrops continued to fall. “It would be uncivilised to dispose of them without any regard for human decency--For now, perhaps it would be best to simply preserve them in the estate’s mausoleum until such a time as we can arrange for proper burials... if Narcissa would not mind.”

“Of course Albus...” Narcissa quickly agreed. “It would be fitting.”

She swallowed as she regarded her ex-husband’s corpse. As much as she had come to revile him, Narcissa could not forget that at one time--before his eager contributions to the horrors of the first war had come between them--she had grown to love him. She had hoped that with the birth of their son, she could persuade Lucius to distance himself from the Dark Lord and renounce the Old Ways.

“And my son--Draco--should he be told?” Narcissa raised her eyebrows, a tear trickling down one cheek.

She knew the answer--Severus had shown her what he had seen in Draco’s mind in her Pensieve before the arrival of Dumbledore. But she still found it difficult to accept in her heart how completely her son had disavowed her. Narcissa had seen the flashes of Draco’s abhorrent imaginings of gleefully participating in her punishment for betraying the Malfoy “Honour,” and the pain cut her to the bone.

“I am afraid we cannot, Narcissa,” sighed the Headmaster. “Not without putting us all in great jeopardy. No doubt, the Minister shall presume that Lucius is dead, and shall inform young Draco himself--and I also have no doubt that the Minister will suspect the involvement of someone close to you--most likely Severus...”

“In which case, I believe it best if he remained with you here, where it is completely safe now that we have determined how Lucius and his companions gained entrance to the estate and sealed it. It would not do for the Carrows to detain Severus and turn him over to the Minister...”

Dumbledore glanced at Snape; the Potions Master sighed, having suspected as much. Still, it was a welcome price to pay for the death of Lucius Malfoy. Severus could not imagine a more gilded cage, to be shared with someone whom he had come to love.

“I understand Headmaster,” Snape remarked sadly, “But Madam Nott deserves to see what I saw in Warlock Nott’s mind before he sacrificed himself... She needs to know the truth of his passing, and of what his hopes were for his family’s future. I must visit her briefly, and reveal to her what I witnessed in his consciousness. Then I shall come back here and remain with Narcissa.”

“Very well,” Dumbledore agreed. “But Alastor and Amelia shall go with you to make certain that you are returned safely.”

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She stirred in several more spoonfuls of sugar, added a dollop of cream, and sipped her third cup of tea as she waited, growing more and more impatient as the morning wore on.

A feeling of doom gnawed in the pit of Minister Dolores Umbridge’s stomach when Lucius and his raiding party had not victoriously returned. Instinctively, the Minister knew something had gone wrong. Her nostrils flared as a spark of rage caught flame. If Lucius or any members of the raiding party had still been alive, at the very least he would have sent the Snatchers back to the Ministry with a message for her. But only one memo had arrived by floo--and it was on a completely unrelated but no less disturbing matter.
The idea of Dolores's beautiful man laying lifeless somewhere was almost unbearable. It would be too much to say that she had loved Lucius; she trusted him not at all, and knew that he did not trust her. Such was the nature of those drawn to Power and Control above all else. But Dolores had always liked pretty things, and Lucius had been very pretty indeed... not to mention extremely useful.

They had both shared the same goals after all, and had both been working on Cornelius Fudge, the previous Minister, to turn him against Albus Dumbledore since the day that Harry Potter had first turned up at Hogwarts after having been hidden from the wizard world for ten years. Their partnership had been mutually beneficial in more ways than one... particularly once she had obtained Lucius Malfoy's release from Azkaban. Lucius had shown his gratitude in a most desirous manner.

And to add to Dolores's distress, it had just been brought to her attention that Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour had surreptitiously reopened Amelia Bones's investigation into the Minister's activities. The Minister had no idea who the lead investigator was, but it didn't matter--the investigation could not stand.

Hands shaking with fury, the Minister began to scribble a memo to the lead Auror of a team that she knew was loyal to her, and her alone, directing him to send investigators to Wiltshire immediately.

Dolores couldn't bring herself to go to her office at the Ministry today. And she could deal with Rufus later; for now the most important thing was discovering what had become of Lucius.

Several hours later Minister Umbridge received a reply which confirmed her suspicions. The Wiltshire estate was inaccessible, undoubtedly due to the Fidelius Charm, and still clearly in Madam Black's hands. No bodies had been recovered, but there was no doubt in her mind--Lucius was dead.

But surely Madam Black could not have managed to overpower two Warlocks and their henchmen on her own. She must have had help. Surely it was too much to suspect that Albus Dumbledore... but perhaps not. Narcissa Black had turned her back on her husband and son--but had she turned her back on her heritage as well?

There was only one who knew Narcissa Black well enough to answer the Minister’s questions. And she was currently overseeing the establishment of the Unspeakable Office’s largest secret Installation while still recuperating from a grievous injury sustained during the Battle of Hogwarts.

Burying her anger, the Minister drained her umpteenth cup of tea and flung some sparkling powder into her kitchen hearth. She spoke the name of the secret installation and stepped into the green flames.

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Draco Malfoy wondered why Snape wasn't in class today. Instead, that bloated walrus Professor Slughorn was overseeing the lesson.

Malfoy grew anxious, knowing that something was amiss. He had heard nothing from Father or the Minister at breakfast. But they had promised that he could have the day off school to celebrate with his father once the mission to retake the estate had been accomplished.

Draco scowled at the Potters as they hovered over the potion they were working on. Whatever had become of his father, he knew they had something to do with it. Draco’s own potion began to turn a putrid green and boil over.

“Oi... watch it Crabbe!” snapped Draco, flexing his reattached prosthetic hand warningly. “You were supposed to add the rat spleen after the beetle eyes... Now we’ll bloody have to start all over
Hermione frowned and glanced at Malfoy, agitatedly twitching her bushy tail while Harry added the sopophorous beans to their Euphoria Inducing Elixir. They had finished Snape’s Sixth Year Potions Book the previous week and Professor Slughorn had asked them to brew up something just for fun as a demonstration of their skills.

Harry added the wormwood, stirred the potion counterclockwise 6 times, and let it simmer. That ought to do it.

“You alright Hermione?” whispered Harry.

“It’s Malfoy,” Hermione quietly replied. “Something’s gone wrong... and I don’t think it’s his potion that’s bothering him.”

“Well that’s good then,” said Harry, sounding relieved. “I was worried that something had happened to Snape. But if Malfoy’s worried, that means that his father must have failed when he went after Madam Black, doesn’t it?”

“The thing is Harry, Snape might have killed Lucius Malfoy...”

“Well, I know it might sound a bit cold, but that’s good too...”

“That’s not what I mean Harry--I don’t feel a bit sorry for the Malfoys. I think things are about to get very ugly! By this time tomorrow...”

Hermione trailed off and turned to face her husband. She really didn’t know what was going to happen next. Harry could see how scared Hermione was and gave her a hug. Both sensing a change of mood, Parvati and Luna looked up from their own potions at the Potters.

“It’s alright Hermione,” Harry murmured, “We’re all packed, and ready to make a hasty exit at a moment’s notice. And we both know they won’t make a move on us until they’ve managed to force Dumbledore out. I doubt the Minister will move that quickly--she’s very cautious. We’ve probably still got a couple of days at least...”

Harry went quiet when Professor Slughorn approached, beaming broadly.

“Well, what have we here Mr Potter?” said the rotund Professor “My word! It appears to be the Elixir to Induce Euphoria--and a most exceptional one at that. Is that a hint of Peppermint I detect?”

Harry nodded.

Hermione couldn’t help purring. Harry was right, there was little point in worrying about Draco and the Carrows while Dumbledore was still Headmaster. Curiosity piqued, Daphne and Jennifer both paused to see what was happening.

“Splendid!” continued the impressed Professor Slughorn, “Simply marvelous! Sev--I mean Professor Snape--was absolutely right--a proper pair of potions prodigies you are. I dare say you would have both given Mr Potter’s mother a run for her money...”

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“Severus Snape?” Minister Umbridge appeared disbelieving.

Dolores Umbridge knew that Snape and the Malfoys had fallen out over the Greengrass incident--but
that was quite understandable given that it had created an unfortunate rift between two of the most highly respected Pureblood families in Britain. Just as it had been equally unfortunate, but quite understandable, that Warlock Greengrass had thrown his support behind Harry Potter for protecting his youngest daughter.

But prior to that, Lucius had expressed nothing but the highest regards for his old friend, assuring Dolores that Severus Snape had always been dedicated to the Pureblood Agenda, and that he had tricked Albus Dumbledore into supporting him at the end of the first war.

“Severus Snape?” Dolores repeated. “Are you certain of this?”

“Oh yes...” the other witch smirked, “I never trusted Snape. He was much too enamoured of Lily Potter—he asked the Dark Lord to spare her life. But my dear sister--she was always fond of Severus, though she would never admit it. And it was Lucius who kept watch with MacNair when the Dark Lord killed the Potters... If anyone helped Narcissa kill Lucius, it would be Severus.”

“Thank you! Your information is immensely helpful.” The Minister flared her nostrils and pursed her lips. She had been planning to make her play at the end of October, but now it seemed that the regrettable demise of Lucius had nonetheless presented her with an opportunity that could not be ignored. With a bit of finesse, the Minister reasoned that she could move her timetable up and take Hogwarts completely by the end of the week.

Dolores turned her attention back to the other witch, and looked her over. Narcissa Black’s sister looked much better than she had the last time the Minister had seen her. Apparently the blood rituals had remarkable healing effects on the injurious dark curse which the witch had sustained. And though Dolores much preferred wizards, she had to admit that the witch was a vision to behold in her revealing dark-leather outfit.

“I trust you are well,” simpered Dolores, “But if you need anything more from me... anything at all, just ask.”

“Oh thank you Dolores,” purred Bellatrix as she fluttered her eyelashes at the Minister, “But you have done so much for me already--the Pardon, the medical assistance, the job as head of this new institution, the underlings, the use of these delightful facilities, and the screams of the mudbloods you have provided for my amusement thus far...”

“I knew you were a dedicated Slytherin Dolores, but I confess, I had no idea that we had so many pleasures in common. I cannot wait for the next phase of your campaign to go into effect and this detention centre becomes fully operational...”
The praises of Professor Slughorn and Harry’s reassurances had made her feel a bit better for awhile, but Hermione’s trepidation continued to grow throughout the day. The Professors all appeared to be on high alert. Fleur and Dora joined the younger members of the Unaffiliated for lunch and they took it outside to eat in the courtyard despite the sprinkle of light rain.

“Dumbledore pulled us both aside towards the end of last period and told us that Lucius Malfoy was killed by Snape last night when ‘e tried to storm Narcissa Black’s house,” Dora said quietly as she glanced around to make sure nobody was listening nearby.

“So it did happen then; I knew it...” Hermione gasped, her furry tail vibrating in agitation. Her words tumbled out one after the other in a rush as she tried to explain.

“Harry knew it I mean--He said Mr Malfoy might have a go at Narcissa Black last week after Snape tried to warn me that something might happen. Harry implied that Snape might do anything to protect her--I wasn’t certain, but what Harry said seemed logical--and then this morning I knew Harry was right--I don’t think Draco knows for certain yet though. He just seemed very worried in Potions, and Snape was gone, and I just put 2 and 2 together...” Hermione finally paused to take a breath.

“Ze Headmaster told us to let you know... and we are to try an’ remain with you as much as possible when classes are not in session,” Fleur murmured. “‘e is not certain, but ‘e believes zat the Minister may escalate ‘er investigation very soon.”

“Good,” Harry replied, “I’m glad that he told us so that we know for sure that Snape killed Lucius Malfoy. If the Minister suspects Snape was involved, it’s only a matter of time before she tries to have Dumbledore arrested as a co-conspirator...”

The Potters also received special attention from both McGonagall and Flitwick, who fussed over them and appeared quite concerned to be sure that Harry and Hermione were both prepared for any eventuality. By the end of the day, Hermione was in a high state of anxiety. Harry noticed that despite her best efforts to remain calm, Hermione kept glancing at Draco and the Carrows all through dinner.

After cleaning her teeth and changing into a nightie, Hermione entered the bedchamber and gasped. The Potters’ bed was much bigger than usual, and full of teenage witches.

“It was Harry’s idea,” Luna grinned as she waved her fluffy white tail.

“But please don’t be cross with him Hermione,” Daphne pleaded with a worried look on her face. “It’s partly my fault. I said I was scared too...”

Parvati and Jennifer giggled as Dora, Fleur, and Daphne gave Hermione beseeching looks.

“I hope you don’t mind Hermione...” Harry said apologetically. “I wasn’t planning an all-night orgy... I swear! I know it’s a school-night--I just thought...”

Hermione’s stunned expression softened into a sweet smile and she interrupted Harry with a kiss.

“It’s alright Harry... Thank you--I understand. You’re just trying to comfort me.” Hermione suddenly realised how much her agitation was affecting him. “I’m sorry Harry... I don’t know what’s come over me today--it’s not like we have anything really scary coming up... like exams.”
Harry relaxed as he felt Hermione calming in his arms, and they both clambered into bed to snuggle with the rest of the Coven. Hermione purred contentedly and the vestiges of her anxieties melted away as she and Harry settled in the midst of the other witches. It felt nice to be nestled in the curling tails of Parvati and Luna, and the arms of Daphne and Fleur, Dora and Jennifer, and of course Harry.

Despite Harry’s most platonic of intentions for inviting the entire Coven to bed though, Hermione couldn’t help but begin feeling aroused by the cozy cuddles. The warm tingly glow of love and comfort soon became sparks of amorous affection, and the hugs and kisses grew more heated and passionate. Hermione’s throaty rumbles mingled with Luna and Parvati’s in a chorus of purrs.

Hermione’s nightie rucked up as her lips locked humidly with Daphne’s, Jennifer’s, and Luna’s. Their caressing hands stroked her fluffy ginger tail, slid across her waist and between her parting thighs, fondling her breasts and hardening nipples.

Hermione’s own fingers probed into the moist recesses of her cuddly companions as she felt the first ripples of ecstasy coursing through her. Purrs gave way to meows and yowls of delight as Daphne’s tongue found its way into Hermione’s damp cleft, and toggled her fleshy pearl.

Harry was similarly being “snuggled” into a blissful daze. Fleur pressed her breasts against Harry and nuzzled Harry’s neck as Parvati’s lips entwined with his, her satiny black tail coiling around him.

Their fingers trailed across Harry’s abdomen and chest as Dora’s wet mouth engulfed his erection. A surge of euphoria began move Harry’s loins and he gasped with pleasure as Dora took him deeper, pressing her lips against the base of his shaft.

One of Harry’s hands somehow found one of Hermione’s, and their fingers interlocked as they succumbed to the delectable ministrations of their cohorts. Harry felt Hermione tremble in the throes of passion and he lost himself, releasing a fountain of semen into Dora’s throat.

The vortex of electricity and magic which had become such a ubiquitous feature of the Coven’s ecstatic engagements, crackled and swirled around them, shaking the walls of the suite.

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When Hermione rose early the next morning, she delicately extricated herself from the tangle of limbs and the furry tails of Luna and Parvati, and tiptoed to the bathroom. Her eyes widened and she gasped in surprise.

Harry came up behind Hermione and put his hands around her waist, kissing her bushy head as he peered at the sight which had caught her off-guard.

“It looks like no matter what happens Hermione--no matter how bleak and horrid things may get, even though we’ll probably have to leave--Hogwarts is telling us that it wants us all back someday... that we will be back...”

As the rest of the Coven gradually awoke, yawning and stretching, the Potters introduced them to their expanded bathroom.

The tiled-tub was now the size of a small swimming pool, more than large enough for eight with numerous shower nozzles, faucets, and jets. An array of gleaming silver and gold spigots offered an assortment of bubbles and scented bath-oils.

While the Coven giddily showered together and readied themselves for the day, Harry began to quietly contemplate the spells necessary to convert and expand part of Number 12.
There was little outward indication at breakfast that something significant had altered in the British Wizard World or at Hogwarts. Though nothing yet was being mentioned on the morning news report, Hermione was picking up clear signals from the mood of the Inquisitors and the Professors that Lucius Malfoy’s death had triggered the imminence of a substantial shift in power at Hogwarts.

And had Hermione not been buoyed by the cheering efforts of the Coven’s solace, she might have otherwise been more overwhelmed by the billowing mushroom-cloud of hate emanating from Draco Malfoy after he received a letter by Ministry Owl. Harry and Luna, both seated nearest to Hermione, put their arms around her for support when they noticed her bristling and reeling under the assault on her heightened senses.

“Avada Kedavra,” Draco Malfoy uttered malevolently for the hundredth time; green sparks emerged from the tip of his wand.

He watched in satisfaction as the rodent he was practicing on finally went limp. But the satisfaction wasn’t enough to quell his rage—and he knew that sparks were not enough to damage a wizard. He would need to focus much more power to kill Potter.

The letter from the Minister at breakfast had been devastating. Draco’s world was collapsing around him. His father was dead, and he didn’t care that “Aunt Dolores” had placed the blame squarely on Professor Snape. Malfoy knew that it was Potter and the Halfbreed’s fault; somehow, during Third Year, they had turned Snape against Draco and his father.

When the Inquisitors finally took Hogwarts, Draco would have his vengeance. The Carrows had promised him that much. They had approved time off from regular classes to practice the Unforgivable Curses so that Draco would be ready to take his place as their deputy, and to wield the power necessary for achieving his goals.

He was going to torture and rape the Halfbreed in front of Potter and then he was going to kill them both—after they had given up the details to the Carrows regarding the Secret Weapon they had used to destroy the Dark Lord’s Army.

“Find me some more rats Goyle,” snarled Malfoy. “I need to keep practicing the Cruciatus and the Killing Curse.”

“What about that other one... the Imperian Curse?” asked Crabbe as he picked his nose and peered at his bogey.

“It’s called the Imperius Curse you idiot!” Malfoy snapped. “And I don’t care about that one right now!”

As the next few days went by, Hogwarts filled with tension as the students became aware that something significant had occurred and odious rumours abounded. Thursday afternoon, after a discussion with Dumbledore, Dora, Harry, and Hermione met briefly with Padma, the Weasley Twins, Viktor, Cedric, and Susan to update them on the latest information.

But the Coven had largely managed to insulate themselves and Hermione from the most deleterious effects of the darkening mood. The others had all abandoned their own suites in the Unaffiliated
Corridor to spend their nights in the Potters’ chambers.

To Hermione’s surprise, though her senses were being buffeted by the intense anxiety and trepidation among most students and faculty, after the initial outburst of hate and fury from Draco Malfoy at learning of his father’s death, she was now registering some very unexpected feelings from him.

Draco Malfoy was on top of the world. Though Draco had keenly felt the loss of his father at first, his consternation had quickly been replaced with a sense of liberation and empowerment. “Aunt” Dolores and the Carrows encouraged and prepared him at every turn to take on the mantle of Warlock.

Draco was almost grateful now that his father was dead. Everything his father had provided was now being met by Dolores and the Carrows, but without the constrictions which had come from having to live up to his father’s expectations. “Aunt” Dolores had also replenished Draco’s dwindling personal account at Gringotts from the Ministry’s own coffers with a “special fund” which she had created just for him.

And if anyone did anything which he didn’t like, he could threaten them with the Minister or the Inquisitors. Much to Draco’s delight, he had discovered his new threats to be a far more effective refrain than “wait till my father hears about this.” Instead of rolling eyes and snorts of derision, Draco’s warnings finally brought the level of obsequious respect that a Malfoy deserved.

Draco almost felt giddy with power. When the Minister made her announcement on Friday, Hogwarts was as good as his, and everyone who had ever disrespected him, or stolen what rightfully belonged to him, would pay.

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Albus Dumbledore sighed as he squeezed some lemon into his tea and mentally prepared himself Friday morning for what was sure to be a tumultuous day. Fortunately, Auror Mulligan continued to be a valuable asset to the Order, and the advance notice had allowed the Order and the Coven to make provisions and back-up plans for any number of possible occurrences.

Fawkes uttered a soft musical note.

“Thank you Fawkes!” said the Headmaster, quickly draining his cup of tea. “Phineas... it is time--the Aurors and Unspeakables are here for me. Remember your promise...”

“Yes, yes... of course...” the portrait of Phineas Nigellus replied in his most weary put-upon tone, “Provide the Potters with whatever assistance they require... look after all the students of Hogwarts to the best of my abilities...etc, etc...”

“Very good Phineas,” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled and there was a knock on his door. “You may enter.”

Professor McGonagall opened the door, her features distraught.

“Headmaster, you have some... ahem... visitors...” she said with a hint of disdain.

“Indeed!” Dumbledore gave the Professor a stern look. “Remember Minerva--Hogwarts needs you!”

“Thank you most kindly Minerva,” said Deputy Minister Percy Weasley, who looked positively gleeful. He pushed past Minerva McGonagall followed by several Aurors and a dozen Unspeakables.
“And what may I do for you this fine morning, Senior Undersecretary Weasley?” the Headmaster asked sprightly, his eyes twinkling merrily as Fawkes flew from his perch and settled on Dumbledore’s arm.

“Not even breakfast time yet--but here you are, bright and early. Would you like some tea?” Dumbledore politely offered, stroking Fawkes’ carmine and gold feathers.

Percy Weasley was slightly taken aback by Dumbledore’s cheerful demeanor, but he chalked it up to the Headmaster’s deviousness and encroaching senility.

“Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore...” began the youngest Senior Undersecretary in Wizarding Britain’s history, in the most pompous and authoritative voice he could muster.

“...By order of the Minister, and by Law, I hereby place you under arrest for the crimes of Abetting in the Murder of Warlock Lucius Malfoy, Harbouring the Murderer of Warlock Lucius Malfoy, Treason and Sedition, Conspiracy to commit Treason, the Illegal Manufacture of Experimental Weapons, Corruption of the Innocent, Illegal Use of School Property for Private Gain...”

“Now, if you would be so kind as to follow these gentlemen, they shall escort you to the Ministry where you will be formally charged, and then to a High Security Facility where you shall await trial...”

Percy faltered when he heard Dumbledore softly chuckling. Perhaps the Old Coot was madder than he had suspected.

“You find this amusing...?” Percy frowned.

“Your dear boy,” Dumbledore responded in a slightly patronizing, sarcastic manner, “you and these fine upstanding officials with you, appear to be operating under the delusion that I am going to ‘come quietly’ as the muggles say... I can assure you, I intend nothing of the sort...”

“Indeed, my only aim is to expose the treasonous crimes of Minister Umbridge herself: political assassination, attempted assassination, colluding with muggle officials to commit treason, use of public finances for private political gain, bribery, corruption of Wizengamot and Ministry officials, illegal manipulation of the media for purposes of propaganda, corruption of the young and foolish...”

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows and looked pointedly at Percy Weasley whose face began to redden.

“Furthermore,” continued Dumbledore, “I am quite certain that the Minister and those under her command are committing many more crimes, such as the torture and murder of muggleborn, and collusion with known Terrorists...”

Percy began to turn purple, knowing full well that the Minister had been recruiting Voldemort’s Death Eaters and Snatchers to round up and suppress muggleborn insurgents intent on overthrowing the Ministry. The Unspeakables began to look at each other uncomfortably, wondering who among them might be a mole working for Dumbledore.

“Now look here Dumbledore...” Percy barked in outrage.

“In any case,” Dumbledore said loudly, cutting Percy off, “I can hardly affect the restoration of a legitimate and fully accountable political leadership to the Ministry from prison can I? So my dear boy, for now--as my dear friend Madame Maxime might say--I bid you adieu!”

And with that, Fawkes flared as brightly as the sun for an instant, and Dumbledore was gone.
Professor McGonagall tried to hide a smirk at the flabbergasted expressions on the faces of the crowd in Dumbledore’s office. Minerva caught the eye of the portrait of Phineas Nigellus who gave her a sardonic wink as Senior Undersecretary and Deputy to the Minister Percy Weasley stormed out of Dumbledore’s office with the Unspeakables and Aurors in tow.
A hum of nervous curiosity and bewilderment rose in the Great Hall as it filled with hungry students at breakfast time. As the Unaffiliated took their seats at the Mingling Table, snatches of conversation could be heard.

“What’s going on?”

“Dunno...”

“Why are those two sitting there?”

“Where’s Dumbledore?”

Harry swallowed anxiously and gave Hermione’s hand a comforting squeeze as they eyed the smug countenances of the Two Inquisitors. The Carrows were seated opposite the Potters in the centre of the Staff Table, looking for all the world like a king and queen waiting for their coronation to begin.

A quick look around the Hall also revealed the presence of wizards with insignia on their robes which Harry didn’t recognise.

“Unspeakables,” Dora whispered, seeing Harry’s puzzled expression.

Hermione bit her lip to stifle a sob as her bushy ginger tail drooped to the floor and her furry ears wilted; a tear escaped and rolled down one cheek.

“You alright Hermione?” Harry asked, giving her hand another gentle squeeze. She nodded forlornly.

“I will be Harry. We knew this was coming at any moment. I... I just... now that it’s actually happening...” Hermione trailed off, unable to say any more.

Harry glanced around the table at the rest of the Unaffiliated; their features were equally glum. The spring was gone from Parvati’s sleek black tail and Luna’s fluffy white tail flopped over the back of her chair instead of waving dreamily.

Fleur’s natural radiance had lost its usual lustre. Daphne was trembling, her face as white as a sheet. She clutched Harry’s other hand tightly with her left hand and one of Fleur’s hands with her right.

Jennifer was miserable--she had grown more comfortable being among the many other students at Hogwarts over the last month, and had enjoyed herself despite everything; she didn’t want to leave. Dora’s countenance was stony and she put her arm around Jennifer protectively when she spotted Malfoy ogling the Unaffiliated and chortling with unabashed glee.

“Well, looks like this is it,” said Harry quietly. “We’ll be alright--just try to stay together everyone, and we’ll jump ship at the earliest opportunity... If anyone gets separated, just get back to our Corridor and stay there until we meet up--Nobody else can get in there except for us...”

Harry was interrupted by the swell of music which heralded the morning news. The ever dapper William O’Hannity began the programme with his usual gratingly pontifical manner, but in place of his usual co-host Endora was someone that everyone recognised all too well.

“Thank you for that very kind introduction William,” said the pink clad toad-like woman in a breathy
girlish voice. Her tone dropped a notch and hardened as she continued.

“I am afraid I have some very grave news from the Ministry this morning. I felt that given the nature of this dire circumstance, it was imperative that I myself be the one to impart the information in the spirit of Ministry openness and transparency...”

“As you are no doubt aware, the DMLE and the Unspeakable Office have been investigating the events which occurred at Hogwarts shortly before the end of summer. What you may not know, is that the Ministry has also been investigating the recent death of one of Britain’s most esteemed Warlocks, Lucius Malfoy...”

“NO!” gasped O’Hannity with well-rehearsed sincerity. “Warlock Malfoy is dead? How dreadful...”

“Yes, it is a great loss to Wizarding Britain,” continued the Minister. “But his death was no accident—it was murder most foul. And the subsequent investigation revealed that it was inextricably linked to the events at Hogwarts. I cannot reveal everything due to the sensitive nature of the ongoing investigations, but I can say that the principal suspect is none other than the Potions Master of Hogwarts, Severus Snape...”

The well-coiffed O’Hannity gasped again and the Minister went on.

“The link became clear when it was discovered by Aurors loyal to the Ministry that the Headmaster of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore, was interfering with the investigation of Warlock Malfoy’s murder...”

“As it turns out—shockingly—Head Auror Rufus Scrimgeour has been working for Albus Dumbledore all along, and has been sabotaging both the investigation of Lucius Malfoy’s murder, and the investigation into Headmaster Dumbledore’s long-running blood-feud with the misunderstood misanthrope we have all come to know as ‘You-Know-Who’...”

“It became necessary to have the Unspeakable Office conduct an Independent Investigation to sort out all of the facts... Rufus Scrimgeour was placed under arrest late Wednesday, and the Unspeakable Office has since determined that the former Head of the Auror Office was covering up Albus Dumbledore’s affiliation with notorious wand-thief, and muggleborn insurrectionist, Dick Turpentine.”

“The evidence is now quite clear—Albus Dumbledore, long known for his disregard for our most noble and ancient wizarding traditions and genetic heritage, has for many years been surreptitiously plotting the overthrow of the Ministry and illegally training muggles how to use wands in order to raise his own army.”

“This very morning, Albus Dumbledore fled Hogwarts when Aurors loyal to the Ministry, and Unspeakables, were dispatched to apprehend him...”

“There are many questions which remain of course—while the Violent Revolutionary Albus Dumbledore and his minion Severus Snape remain at large—and a purge is being conducted within the Ministry to uproot any more of Dumbledore’s spies.”

“Meanwhile, the investigation continues at Hogwarts, this time with the full participation of the Unspeakable Office. The Inquisitors previously dispatched have agreed to assume the role of Headmaster and Headmistress until such a time as Hogwarts has been thoroughly cleansed of Albus Dumbledore’s contamination...”
William O’Hannity had been silent, rapt with attention until the Minister appeared to have concluded her statement. He took the opportunity to press for more information.

“Well, that is some shocking news indeed Minister Umbridge! Is there anything more that you can tell us?”

“I am afraid that is all I can impart at this time William,” the Minister responded, with a return to her initial honeyed tones. “When Albus Dumbledore is in the Ministry’s custody, and more of his agents have been apprehended, then we shall perhaps have a better understanding of how far this conspiracy reaches... The Ministry shall of course update the public regularly as more information becomes available.”

The enormous Wiz-Vision screen displayed two new educational decrees at the conclusion of the morning news as the Great Hall went silent except for a few nervous coughs from muggleborn students, and snickers from those who approved of the Minister’s message:

Educational Decree #25
Inquisitors Alecto Carrow and Amycus Carrow have accepted the position of Headmaster and Headmistress of Hogwarts.

Educational Decree #26
Students who wish to become members of the Inquisitorial Squad are to make themselves known to the new Heads of Hogwarts, and will be chosen according to a strict set of standards.
The Inquisitorial Squad are to be accorded full authority as deputies of the new Headmaster and Headmistress. The inquiries and commands of said deputies are to be obeyed as if issued by the Headmaster or Headmistress themselves.

~00o~

“Did you see the badge on Malfoy’s robes? looks like they’ve already picked out members of the Inquisitorial Squads!” Parvati muttered, wagging her sleek black tail furiously as the Unaffiliated departed the Great Hall.

“Maybe we should just leave right now--before anything happens,” Harry said worriedly.

“We can’t just yet...” Dora pointed at the Unspeakables patrolling the corridors, “…we’re bein’ watched to make sure we go to class. We’ll ‘ave to wait till lunchtime. We’ll make a break for it then.”

“I think it is best that we go wiz you to your classes though,” Fleur remarked. “Dora and I will be accepted as ‘Teacher’s Assistants’ by ze Professors.”

Harry sighed. This wasn’t good. Even with Dora and Fleur tagging along, he was loathe to go to Potions and risk being trapped in the dungeons. He had considered the possibility that the Carrows might bring in Enforcers from the Ministry, but there seemed to be far more than he had anticipated.

There was little choice though for the time being, so to Potions they all went. Harry was extremely thankful that the Professors were already prepared to acknowledge Fleur and Dora as ‘Teacher’s Assistants.’

“I’ve been thinking about that Dick Turpentine business Harry,” Hermione whispered as they made their way to class. “I don’t think it can be real... it’s all too convenient.”
“I was thinking the same thing,” Harry replied quietly. “It doesn’t make any sense. Everyone knows you have to already have magic to use a wand... it’s just rubbish!”

“And not only that Harry--the name Dick Turpentine--does it ring a bell?”

Harry shook his head. “I dunno... should it?”

“It sounds to me like a takeoff based on Dick Turpin,” said Hermione. “He was a Muggle Highwayman in the 18th century who was hung as a horse-thief--but people made up stories... and even a television show about him later which made him out to be more of a rebel against the government... more or less a Robin Hood figure. But what if...”

“...the Minister got the idea from the Muggle PM!” Harry gasped as a chill ran down his spine.

“You’re right Hermione--that has to be it. Umbridge concocted the whole story as an excuse to go after Dumbledore and round up Muggleborns...”

“...and to go after you Harry. She’s been making you out to be a sort of dangerous rebel on the side of muggleborn wizards all along!”

~o0o~

Potions seemed to go relatively smoothly. Professor Slughorn had accepted Dora and Fleur as his “Teacher’s Assistants” without any question, and Draco, Crabbe and Goyle were nowhere to be seen. Harry presumed that they had been given the freedom to do whatever they liked as members of the Inquisitorial Squad.

Harry knew the illusion of relative safety wouldn’t last long though, and he refused to let it lull him into a false sense of security. If Malfoy was going to try anything, he suspected it would be here in the dungeons.

When class let out, Harry’s worst fears were realised when he heard Draco Malfoy laughing. He peered down the passage, and spotted Malfoy dragging a screaming Ginny Weasley deeper into the tunnels. The two Unspeakables outside the Potions classroom smirked and pointed their wands at the few students still in the corridor, forcing them to back off.

“Bloody Fucking Hell!” Harry swore as he and Hermione both took off running after Malfoy and Ginny.

The rest of the Unaffiliated chased after the Potters. Dora had fallen a bit behind as she had stopped to pick up everyone’s bookbags which they had dropped when they took pursuit.

“This is probably a trap!” gasped Harry as they turned down the passageway they had last seen Malfoy and Ginny go down.

“Of course it is...” Hermione wheezed, her bushy tail billowing behind her as they ran. “But we can’t do nothing... Ginny’s our friend! This way...” Hermione pointed down a dungeon corridor at the next four-way junction. “I can smell them.”

Luna, Parvati, and Jennifer caught up to the Potters first, and the spells hit them from out of the shadows. Two Unspeakables emerged from the darkness pointing their wands at Fleur and Daphne.

Daphne and Fleur had their own wands at the ready, but Amycus Carrow stepped out from one of the tunnels behind them.
“Just hold it right there girls…” Headmaster Carrow growled. “Just put your wands away nice and easy like—and there won’t be any more trouble for you. It’s the Potters we want… but I’m perfectly willing to have one of these here gentlemen kill one o’ your other little friends right now if you don’t behave—at the moment, they’re all just in a Bewitched Sleep.”

Fleur and Daphne glared at the new Headmaster, and weighed the risks. They spotted Crabbe and Goyle approaching with Malfoy and realised that they were outnumbered.

“What about Ginny Weasley?” Daphne asked the new Headmaster bluntly.

“Heh! Just another Slytherin polyjuiced to look like her,” Headmaster Carrow snorted mirthfully.

“But ‘ermione, she would not be fooled…” Fleur interjected angrily, “Ginny’s smell…”

“…Was replicated,” the Headmaster responded. “It wouldn’ ‘ave fooled Mrs Potter forever… just long enough to get her where we wanted her. Anyway, that’s quite enough blabbing outta you two.”

The Headmaster pointed his fingers at the Unspeakables. “You two go keep an eye out, make sure no more students come down this way. Me and the lads here will take care of this lot.”

The Unspeakables nodded and jogged down the passageway the Unaffiliated had just come through.

Draco chortled at the slumbering captives as Headmaster Carrow, Crabbe, and Goyle, placed the Potters, Luna, Parvati, and Jennifer in a warded dungeon cell, relieving them of their wands.

“Nice work Draco…” Headmaster Carrow patted Malfoy on the shoulder. “You led them right into our trap. Be here tomorrow morning at 9 sharp... we’ll wake them and you can assist with the interrogation.”

“What about those two?” asked Draco, jerking his head towards Daphne and Fleur. “And the other girl… the one who gave us the slip!”

“Heh! The Minister says hands-off those two…” the new Headmaster smirked, noticing Draco’s leering features. “The Minister doesn’t want a bloody war with France, and if Warlock Greengrass hears that you’ve been messing with his other daughter, he could still cause us a bit of trouble in the Wizengamot--so don’ even think about it.”

Draco’s face fell; he’d hoped to have another crack at Daphne, and the French girl was extremely alluring. Amycus Carrow shook his head and chuckled, understanding all too well the needs of a teenage Slytherin wizard.

“Don’t worry about the other one, whoever she is--another Mudblood we think. We’re still looking into her records--she’s in the new post-graduate programme. But she won’t be able to hide forever--you and your mates can have a go at her if you find her... or any other Mudbloods in Hogwarts, or the bints in Gryffindor--there’s not a one from any family anyone important cares about in Gryffindor.”

Draco’s features perked up again at that piece of good news.

“Anyway, I think they’ll all behave if they don’t want one of their Mudblood or Halfbreed friends to wake up dead tomorrow!” snorted the new Headmaster. He turned to address Fleur and Daphne.

“And don’t bother alerting any other staff-members ladies. They’re all being watched by Unspeakables. And I’m not joking about killing a few of your little friends. Except for the Potters, they’re all expendable. You got me girls?” Amycus concluded with a bark.
Daphne and Fleur glanced at each other fearfully, then nodded and turned to leave, passing an Unspeakable who had just entered the dungeon corridor. Headmaster Carrow spotted the Unspeakable and handed him the wands he had collected from the Unaffiliated in the cell.

“Here, go lock these up in the Staff-Room Safe. We’ll be examining them tomorrow.”

The Unspeakable looked a bit surprised, but he nodded and turned back the way he had come, passing another Unspeakable who had arrived to take the first watch over the prisoners.

“Right then,” Headmaster Carrow addressed Draco again. “Why don’t you and your mates go have some fun--you’ve earned it.”

~o0o~

“Oi... Ginny,” yelled Dean Thomas when he saw her at lunch. “How’d you get away from Malfoy.”

“What?”

“I saw him drag you into the dungeons earlier...” said Dean, frowning in puzzlement. “After Potions... Neville, Ron and Seamus had already left. Lavender and I would have run after Harry and the rest of the Unaffiliated to help you, but a couple of those Fascist Ministry blokes forced us away...”

“I was never in the dungeons this morning... I don’t know what you’re talking about.” The blood from Ginny’s face drained when the implications of Dean’s bizarre pronouncement suddenly hit her.

“Wait, Harry and the others ran after me? Where are they then?” Ginny yelled. “Why aren’t you doing something about it?”

“I dunno really... I suppose they’re still in the dungeons.” Dean looked crestfallen. “I’m not sure what to do though. These bloody Unspeakables seem to be everywhere.”

“Gah!” Ginny exploded as the blood rushed back into her face. “Fred and George will know what to do, have you seen them? What about Neville? Does anyone know what’s happening?”

“I’m not sure really,” Dean shrank back; he’d never seen Ginny this angry. “I told Neville the first moment I got a chance just a few minutes ago, and then he started talking to the Twins but they all took off. They might have gone back to the Common Room...”

The last thing Dean saw was the back of Ginny’s red hair as she bolted.

Ginny ran back to Gryffindor Tower to find Neville and the Twins to see if anyone knew what was going on. As she flew by an open classroom door, strong hands grabbed her arms from behind and dragged her inside. Her wand slipped from her hand and clattered to the floor as someone else slammed the door and put a silencing charm on it.

She struggled furiously, and glared at McLaggen, assuming correctly that Towler was the one holding her arms.

“You bastards... Let me go!” Ginny shrieked. McLaggen slapped her across the face and grabbed her jaw.

“Or what, you little slag?” McLaggen jutted his chin and pointed at the Inquisitorial Squad badge on his robes. Ginny’s eyes widened in alarm. “Malfoy isn’t the only one with one of these. Scream all you like, there’s a silencing charm on the door. You’re mine now... No Dumbledore--and no Potters
to protect you... Now we’ve finally got a chance to finish the fun we started last year...”

“You’re a little minx in heat, the way you’re all over that little fairy squib, Longbottom.” McLaggen leered as he let go of Ginny’s jaw and gripped one of her breasts painfully instead. “Time for you to finally put out for a real man...”

Ginny’s heart thudded against the wall of her chest when Cormac began to unbuckle his belt and Towler sniffed her hair. McLaggen and Towler were much bigger than her, but Ginny put that out of her head as she tried to control her breathing and remember her training.

She tightened her jaw and neck muscles as she forced herself to watch McLaggen unzip himself and expose his swelling hardness, waiting for him to get closer again. When his hand slipped between her thighs and pushed up her skirt, Ginny reacted.

Forcefully, Ginny drove her knee into McLaggen’s groin and slammed the back of her head into Towler’s nose, feeling it shatter against her skull.

Towler stumbled backwards with a scream, releasing Ginny. McLaggen doubled over, groaning. Ginny silently summoned her wand from near the classroom door and circled to McLaggen’s side as he let go of his aching manhood and stood upright.

“You little whore!” he snarled, fumbling in his robes for his wand, not realising that Ginny had already retrieved hers. “I’m going to make you regret that...”

“No, I don’t think you will,” Ginny said evenly as she slashed her wand.

It took McLaggen a moment to realise what had just happened, then he peered in horror at the pallid fleshy thing lying on the floor as blood gushed from between his legs. Cormac fainted and collapsed.

Towler eyed Ginny in terror as he held one hand over his own bloody face. Ginny glared ferociously at him and turned to leave. Seeing his advantage, Towler whipped out his wand. Ginny spun around and slashed her own wand again.

Towler fell to his knees, howling in agony as crimson fluid spurted from the stump where his wand hand used to reside. Ginny snorted disdainfully, kicking the dismembered hand away from her would-be assailant.

“You two really are a pair of idiots!” Ginny muttered as she picked up and snapped Towler’s wand in two, surprising herself with her calmness. “Did you both really think I didn’t learn a few things from Harry and Hermione about how to deal with creeps like you? If you two don’t bleed to death before getting some help—don’t forget that.”

Squeamishly, Ginny searched McLaggen until she found his wand and broke it in half as well. Then she turned on her heel and stalked out of the classroom without looking back.
Ginny hadn’t got more than one corridor away before she started feeling guilty. She wondered if she should go back or get help when she heard someone call her name. Ginny whirled around, wand in hand, and breathed a sigh of relief to see Daphne and Fleur.

“What’s going on?” Ginny anxiously inquired. “I heard that Malfoy’s gang captured you lot and turned you over to the Carrows. Where’s Harry and Hermione and the rest of you?”

“Zat can wait a moment...” Fleur worriedly began as she took Ginny’s shoulders and turned her around.

“There’s blood all over the back of your head...” Daphne squeaked.

“Don’t worry, it’s not mine,” Ginny grinned, but then she looked guilty again as the sight of all that blood reasserted itself in her mind. “That oaf McLaggen and his friend Towler... they just tried to rape me.”

Daphne clasped her hands to her mouth and squealed. Ginny ignored her and continued speaking with a horrified look on her face; the shock of what she had done began to set in and she began shaking.

“I... I s...s...suppose they thought that with Harry out of the way... it was their ch...ch...chance, b...b...but I got them both g...g...ood--they’re bleeding all over the place. I used the curse Harry taught us... I cut off McLaggen’s... er... thingy! But... but now I’m r...r...really worried. I d...don’t really want them to die...”

Ginny faltered when she saw the look on Fleur’s face. The older girl looked angrier than Ginny had ever seen her, and Daphne looked like she was about to throw up.

“Eet would serve zem right eef zey did,” Fleur fumed, her accent thickening as she vanished the blood from the back of Ginny’s head. “But quickly--to ze ‘ospital wing wiz you--you are going into shock! Daphne... I am too angry to spik properly--call zomeone...”

Daphne reached into her robes for her mirror and called Professor McGonagall as they ran to the infirmary.

Madam Pomfrey was appalled by Ginny’s tale and tipped a calming draught into the trembling girl’s mouth. McGonagall and Flitwick arrived moments later and locked the door behind them. Ginny, Fleur, and Daphne wondered where McLaggen and Towler were until Flitwick undid the Disillusionment and Levitation charms, lowering the two severely wounded and unconscious boys onto beds.

“Too many Unspeakables around,” Flitwick explained. “The less they know about this the better...”

“Am I in trouble?” Ginny wailed, still shaking. “I... I d...don’t really want them to d...die! It... it’s just--McLaggen already tried to rape me once before--last year on the Hogwarts grounds. B...but he stopped w...when some other s...students walked by... and I ran away. And then he left me alone after H...Harry beat him up for hurting Ron.”

“I j...just didn’t want him to have another chance to d...do it again...” Ginny sobbed. Tears began running down Daphne and Fleur’s cheeks as they held Ginny’s hands and shared a dark look.
“Of course you’re not in trouble dear,” Madam Pomfrey replied as she poured another calming draught down Ginny’s throat.

“You did what you had to do to protect yourself,” McGonagall said hoarsely, looking as white as a ghost.

“I’ve managed to stem the bleeding,” Flitwick reported. “The boys will live. But if I’m not mistaken-Miss Weasley used Severus’s curse... we won’t be able to reattach Towler’s hand or McLaggen’s... er... part. And both lads shall have to be removed to St Mungo’s for long-term recuperation...”

“I’ve already modified their memories... as far as either of them know, they got into a violent altercation with each other over a girl, and injured one another--Miss Weasley will not be implicated.”

“Very Good... that’s good then! Thank you Filius!” Professor McGonagall breathed a heavy sigh of relief, as did Ginny. “Perhaps you should stay in the hospital wing overnight Miss Weasley.”

“NO!” said Ginny fiercely. “I’m fine now. The calming draughts helped... I can deal with the rest. I just didn’t want them to die...”

“But dear, I must insist...” Madam Pomfrey began.

“I’ll get over it,” snapped Ginny. “My friends are more important right now! Draco and the Carrows... they’ve got Harry and Hermione and Luna and Par...”

“So it’s true? It’s not just rumours?” gasped Flitwick. Professor McGonagall raised her eyebrows at Daphne and Fleur who both nodded miserably.

“We’re not supposed to tell you,” said Daphne in a small voice. “They said they might kill Jennifer, Luna, or Parvati if we make trouble, or if any of the Professors interfere.”

“But we must get zem out tonight...” Fleur said firmly. “Ze Carrows and that hideous Malfoy boy mean to torture and interrogate them tomorrow...”

There was a loud knocking on the hospital wing door and everyone gave a start of fright.

“It’s me...” a voice called through the door “...Dora. Are Daphne and Fleur in there?”

Madam Pomfrey let Dora in and locked the door again behind her.

“Oh thank goodness... you two are here,” Dora said with obvious relief, before glancing at everyone else. “Did they tell you what ‘appened?” she asked the Professors. They nodded and Dora continued.

“Listen, I’ve got a plan to break ‘em outta the dungeon, and I know Harry and Hermione have already worked out an escape route--we’ll all get out through the portraits--but you Professors will ‘ave to stay out of it if you want to stay at Hogwarts to try and protect the students without bein’ arrested.”

“They don’t know ‘oo I really am yet because Dumbledore registered me as Dora Underhill when ‘e signed me up this year.” Dora giggled nervously and paused for a moment to see if anyone got the literary reference to one of her favourite Muggle stories about Wizards.

When nobody did, Dora rolled her eyes and went on, “I replicated an Unspeakable cloak and disguised myself... that was me you two saw in the dungeons this morning...”
“Zat was you?” gasped Fleur.

“Then you have their wands?” Daphne’s eyes widened in excitement.

“Yeah...” Dora grinned. “I couldn’t believe it when Mr Carrow ‘anded me their wands. That was a real stroke of luck! I thought we’d ‘ave to steal some and make do. I got all of our bags too, so we’re all ready to go...”

“Anyway, I can disguise myself as an Unspeakable again tonight, when it’s time for the next watch to keep an eye on the prisoners. You two should just wait for us in the Unaffiliated Corridor tonight. I know ‘ow to reverse the Bewitched Sleep charm and open the cell door, so that’s the easy bit really...”

“We’ll need a distraction when we get outta the dungeons to get past all the Unspeakables and get to the portraits--we only need to get to the first portrait nearest to the dungeon, and we don’t want anyone to notice us runnin’ through all the other paintings...”

“Fred and George,” said Ginny.

“Way ahead of you, Love,” Dora retorted with a grin. “We already worked out a backup plan with the Twins on Thursday in case we needed a distraction, I’ve already notified them and Neville, and some of our other friends of our timetable... There’s gonna be a riot tonight, right around curfew.”

~o0o~

After dinner, Katie Bell and Alicia Spinnett flew around the Quidditch Pitch for a bit before it got dark. On their way back to the Gryffindor Common Room they spied a First Year Ravenclaw girl who looked a bit lost.

“Are you alright?” asked Katie.

“I... I think I’m on the wrong floor,” the girl muttered, looking very embarrassed. “I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going.”

“We’ll take you to your tower,” said Alicia kindly. “You really shouldn’t be wandering around alone.”

“Oh... thank you very much!” the girl replied brightly. On their way to the Ravenclaw Tower, the girl started looking very antsy, like she had to pee. “Is there a bathroom around here? I really have to go...”

“Just around the corner,” Katie replied. “We’ll all go in.”

As they entered the girl’s lavatory Katie felt a prickling sensation on the back of her neck. She spun around and gasped when Draco Malfoy and Goyle clicked the door shut behind them, both chortling and pointing their wands at Katie and Alicia.

“This is the girl’s loo--get out!” Alicia snapped as she and Katie whipped out their wands.

To their horror, the Ravenclaw girl pointed her wand at them too, and yelled “Expelliarmus,” at the same time as Goyle and Malfoy.

Draco leered at the disarmed Gryffindor girls. It was Katie Bell who really had it coming, but maybe he’d have a go at Alicia too. She was quite a looker as well. Draco supposed Goyle might also like a turn with the girls after he’d finished with them. But for now Goyle needed to keep watch.
“Petrificus Totalus,” Draco intoned, and Alicia toppled over, paralysed from head to toe. Katie felt a clutch of fear in her abdomen.

“We can go anywhere we want,” gloated Malfoy pointing to his Inquisitorial Squad badge. “You on the other hand are on the wrong floor and it’s almost curfew... I’d say that gives us the right to do a bit of inquisiting, wouldn’t you Goyle?”

Goyle gave Malfoy a blank look; Draco rolled his eyes.

“Actually, none of that really matters,” Draco snorted as he pulled off his robe and blazer, revealing his white shirt and his silver and green tie. “Now that the Carrows are in charge, they said I can do whatever I want to you...”

“NO!” screamed Katie, as Draco tore at her clothes.

The door to the bathroom flew open with a bang. Draco grabbed Katie and spun around holding her in front of himself, his wand-tip digging under her chin. His eyes widened with surprise to see Ginny Weasley, Fleur Delacour, and Daphne Greengrass. Draco glanced fearfully at Goyle when Fleur shut the door and cast a silencing charm on it.

“What the hell? How did you...?” Draco sputtered.

“We saw you following Katie and Alicia and the Ravenclaw girl, when Daphne and Fleur were walking me back to Gryffindor Tower... so we followed you,” Ginny replied, giving Malfoy a look which promised danger.

“Let go of her!” said Daphne coldly with her wand pointed squarely between Draco’s eyes. “NOW!”

Malfoy had a really bad feeling about this. Potter’s girlfriends and Ginny Weasley could have disarmed him and Goyle when they entered, but had chosen not to.

To hell with this and the political ramifications of fighting with Delacour and Greengrass... his life was clearly on the line. If they wanted a fight, he’d show them exactly what he was capable of now. He was done with the Greengrass Bitch! Draco yanked his wand away from Katie’s neck and aimed it at Daphne.

“AVADA KEDAVRA!” Draco roared. A bolt of green lightning struck the wall, shattering tiles as Daphne dodged and rolled, slashing her wand.

Draco’s one good hand separated from his wrist followed by a crimson spray which splattered against a bathroom mirror, dripping into one of the sinks. He screamed in terror, releasing Katie Bell from the grasp of his prosthetic hand.

Ginny was in a rage, and all she could see was red... First McLaggen and Towler, and now this. She whipped her wand when she saw Katie dive for a bathroom stall and a long scarlet rip tore across Draco’s chest. A bloom of red spread across his white shirt as a piece of his tie fluttered to the bathroom floor.

Time seemed to slow as the memories flashed through Daphne’s mind: humiliating visions of Lucius Malfoy trying to buy her for Draco over the years, each time raising his offer, only to be refused time and again by her father.

The degrading moment that Draco had forced a kiss on Daphne without warning in First Year--
Draco had laughed when she cried and had told her that one day he would own her and that she would like it.

Parvati and Luna on the Hogwarts grounds, her sister Astoria in St Mungo’s, and now Katie in a Hogwarts lavatory...

...not to mention that the bastard had just tried to kill her. Daphne slashed her own wand at Draco again, and a gaping wound opened in his neck. Rivulets of blood streamed down his front, staining the rest of his shirt.

Goyle and the Ravenclaw girl both snapped out of their stupor and yelled “Diffindo,” hoping to hit one of the newcomers with their own cutting spells. But Ginny, Fleur, and Daphne were already moving and retaliating. Confused by the First Year Ravenclaw girl’s attack, Fleur dropped her with a stunning spell.

Ginny rolled out of the way of Goyle’s spell and whipped her wand at one of Goyle’s legs. Goyle tumbled to the tiled bathroom floor shrieking, leaving half his leg still standing. As a crimson puddle spread across the tiles below his knee, the foot and calf he’d left behind slowly toppled over.

Ginny and Fleur helped the shivering Katie to her feet while Daphne saw to the groaning Ravenclaw girl who was coming around from the stunning spell.

“You’re not really a Ravenclaw... are you!?” said Daphne, her voice brittle and icy. The terrified girl shook her head and burst into tears.

“It was all Malfoy’s idea...” the girl sobbed loudly. “He m...made me take polyjuice potion--I’m really Crabbe. Please... don’t kill me...”

The girls heard a gurgling sound. They turned to peer at Draco Malfoy as his last breath escaped through the bloody foaming gash across his neck. Katie looked away and heaved, vomiting on the floor.

“You just keep your little mouth shut for now then, and we’ll take you to the hospital wing,” Daphne said, giving the polyjuiced Crabbe-girl a little shove. The fake Ravenclaw girl nodded miserably.

~o0o~

Poppy Pomfrey watched Daphne, Fleur, and Ginny depart from the infirmary for a second time in one day as she dosed Katie Bell, Alicia Spinnet, and Vincent Crabbe with calming draughts. Dutifully and sadly, she notified Professors McGonagall and Flitwick about the Slytherins bleeding out in the girl’s lavatory, near Ravenclaw Tower, mentioning that one was already deceased.

Ten minutes later the curfew bell struck. Poppy heard explosions as fireworks began to erupt throughout the castle and she knew that the members of the Coven were making their escape.

~o0o~

“Oh... yes... Oh... that feels good, Amycus... harder...” Alecto moaned blissfully as the bed rocked beneath them.

“Bloody Hell! What was that?” Amycus Carrow leapt off his sister when he heard the explosions.

Alecto groaned at the poor timing--she had been so close to release. But as she watched her naked brother pull his clothes back on, she knew she would have to follow suit. Hurriedly the Carrow siblings dressed and dashed from their quarters into the castle.
It was mayhem!

Students were pouring out from their common rooms and into the hallways screaming. Red and green pinwheels, purple rockets, silver comets, and golden shooting stars detonated all around them as acrid smoke filled the corridors. Roman Candles hopped about shooting up sparks and balls of fire as Sparklers flew around writing swear words in the air.

“Bye bye Losers!” someone yelled as a rush of wind swept by the faces of the Carrows.

“Send our love to the Minister...” shouted another.

The Carrows looked up to see two red-headed students swooping through the castle on their brooms. The front doors burst open and the Weasley Twins soared into the night sky followed by a large number of other students on broomsticks.

Unspeakables ran around madly, trying unsuccessfully to corral the students and contain the fireworks. But the Vanishing Spells and Counterspells only seemed to cause the fireworks to multiply and grow larger. To top things off, Peeves the Poltergeist was flying around and cackling as he pushed busts off their pillars and dropped chandeliers to shatter on the floor below.

The Carrows shared a look and their faces fell in horror. The Potters!

The newly crowned Headmaster and Headmistress of Hogwarts hurried through the pandemonium erupting all around them and down into the dungeons. But by the time they arrived it was too late; several Unspeakables lay unconscious on the floor by the empty cell.

~00o~

Hermione was the first to jump out of Phineas Nigellus’s portrait into the library at Number 12, gasping breathlessly as her bushy ginger tail flailed behind her. Parvati leapt down behind her, landing gracefully on all fours, sleek black tail aquiver, and as out of breath as Hermione.

Phineas grumbled as the other members of the Coven jostled by him and Harry guided them through the frame one by one. Finally, after Harry was sure everyone else was out, he gave Phineas an apologetic look and heaved himself out of the portrait into Number 12. Harry turned around and muttered the spell to close the Portal Charm behind them.

“Sorry about that Headmaster Black....” Harry said sincerely, “Emergency Exit! Thanks for your patience!”

“Yes... yes, never mind that,” moaned the portrait of Sirius’s Ancestor. “Patience isn’t really my strong suit... I made a promise to Dumbledore!”

“Thanks for the rescue Dora!” Luna hugged the older girl and gave her a kiss as her fluffy white tail waved happily.

“I hope everyone back at Hogwarts is alright,” said Jennifer anxiously.

“Is Draco Malfoy really dead?” Parvati asked Daphne hopefully. Daphne nodded awkwardly as tears rolled down her cheeks, feeling ashamed of herself.

“Eet was a fitting end to a very wicked young man,” Fleur said adamantly, embracing Daphne and kissing her. “Zat Malfoy... ‘e violated Parvati, ‘e hurt your sister, he tried to rape Katie, ‘e tried to kill you, and he was going to ‘elp ze Carrows torture our loved ones--you did what you ‘ad to do Daphne.”
“Bloody well right you did!” Dora agreed.

“But... but it was so awful...” sobbed Daphne. “All the blood... and I did it—I stood there and watched him die... that doesn’t seem right...”

“You were not the only one Daphne—Ginny... she also ‘elped put zat fiend where ‘e belongs... Malfoy, ‘e deserved every bit of it.”

Hermione entwined her arms and furry tail around Daphne and kissed her too. “I know it feels wrong Daphne, but that’s because you’re a good person. I felt the same way after I killed Wormtail...”

Harry put his arms around his wife, Fleur, and Daphne, and planted a tender kiss on Daphne’s lips as well.

“I love you Daphne!” said Harry softly. “We all love you... we all know what a kind, loving person you truly are! It’s alright to be glad that people as cruel as Draco and his father are dead. They can’t hurt anyone anymore.”

Daphne peered into Harry’s liquid green eyes and returned his kiss, she pressed her lips against Fleur’s and Hermione’s... Daphne suddenly realised that Parvati, Luna, and Jennifer were holding her too, and she kissed each in turn.

She felt the warm glow of the Coven growing inside her where she had felt nothing but ice since she had witnessed Draco and Goyle following Katie Bell and Alicia through Hogwarts earlier that evening. As the spark grew and caught flame, the glacial shard which had pierced her heart melted and she felt whole again.

“Welcome home Daphne,” Hermione purred.

Feeling much better, Daphne snuggled with Fleur on one of the sofas by the fireplace in Number 12’s cozy Parlour, where the Coven had migrated to from the library. Hermione purred a bit more and settled on Harry’s lap as he tapped his mirror and contacted Professor McGonagall.

“Oh thank goodness you’re alright Harry!” Minerva McGonagall exclaimed with relief.

“Yeah... we all got out safely,” Harry responded, smiling at Professor McGonagall’s rare use of his first name. “What about everyone at Hogwarts? Did the Weasley Twins manage to get any muggleborn students out?”

“It is still quite chaotic here at the moment,” McGonagall replied as the sound of fireworks exploding could be heard in the background. “But, yes, a fair number of muggleborn students departed on brooms much to the dismay of the Carrows... But I will not know if all the muggleborn escaped until we do a head count tomorrow most likely.”

“Is Ginny alright?” asked Hermione anxiously.

“Yes... Miss Weasley is quite alright,” Minerva answered. “Young Mr Crabbe and Mr Goyle made it very clear to the Carrows that Miss Greengrass was most responsible for the death of Mr Malfoy in response to his failed attempt at employing a Killing Curse against her...”

“The Carrows accepted the Slytherin boys’ explanation of events and seemed quite reluctant to force the issue any further... something about the Minister and Wizengamot politics.”
Daphne’s ears perked, overhearing the conversation between the Potters and Professor McGonagall. She wriggled off Fleur’s lap and closer to the comfy armchair in which the Potters were seated together. Daphne kneeled on the sofa, leaning over the armrest and peered into their mirror.

“Are you sure Ginny’s alright?” she asked, looking very concerned. “I don’t want her to get in trouble for what I did. She’s been through enough today as it is...”

Discerning the deeper intent behind Daphne’s query, Minerva McGonagall paused for a moment before answering.

“Yes dear,” Minerva replied, her features softening, “When I last saw Miss Weasley, she was with Mr Longbottom, who seems to have her well in hand. I will personally see to them both after things settle down this evening and be sure to have Madam Pomfrey keep an eye on her as well. Don’t you worry--we’ll look after her...”

“As to any potential reprisals--my reading of the situation is that the Minister has ordered a hands off approach in regards to Miss Weasley... possibly due to the fact that the Minister’s deputy is her older brother.”

“Ah... that makes sense,” Harry let out a sigh of relief, feeling a bit better about Ginny being left behind. “Of all his family, Percy seems to like Ginny best--and the Minister will probably do whatever she can to keep Percy’s loyalty.”

“It’s a good thing the Twins escaped then...” Hermione mused, flicking her furry ears pensively. “They never got on with Percy. Ron should be alright as long as he doesn’t try anything stupid I suppose.”

“Indeed!” Minerva sighed, “In any case, I shall do my utmost to keep the remaining students safe. Until we hear from the Headmaster—the real one that is—we should all try and keep our heads down for a bit. And Miss Greengrass—I shall be certain to inform your father that you are safe and sound—please be sure to let the others know that I will inform their parents of their safety as well.”

By the time the Potters finished conferring with Professor McGonagall, Harry realised it was getting late, and his stomach was grumbling. He glanced at the rest of the Coven, who all appeared to have settled down, the worst of the anxiety and stress of the escape from Hogwarts having ebbed.

“Anyone else hungry?” he asked. “Most of us haven’t eaten since breakfast. I can have a look and see what’s in the pantry.”

Hermione blushed, wriggling her furry tail in embarrassment when her own tummy rumbled in response. Fleur and Daphne both nodded; they had been too anxious to eat much at dinner time.

“Oooh... ta Harry! Yes please!” Parvati’s eyes lit up, her sleek tail perking. “I’m starving, but don’t put yourself out...”

“...we can help you make dinner if you’d like!” Luna concluded with a happy swish of her fluffy tail.

“Right then,” Harry nodded. “I’m not sure what we’ve got--but it’ll be a good chance to practice our transfiguration if there’s nothing interesting...”

Harry was interrupted by a loud cracking sound, and Jennifer squealed. Dora’s wand was instantly in
Harry’s eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw Dobby struggling with a very irate looking snowy owl. Apparently Hedwig didn’t think very much of traveling by apparition. The badly scratched but gleeful looking Dobby released Hedwig and she flew to the top of a tall mahogany bookcase squawking angrily at him.

“Dobby is rescuing Master Harry’s Hedwig,” squeaked the delighted House-Elf.

“Er... thank you very much Dobby!” said Harry, torn between bemusement and concern.

“Oh you poor thing,” Hermione dabbed at Dobby’s bleeding claw and peck marks with her hanky. “You really didn’t have to do that Dobby...”

“...We visited the Owlery on Thursday and told Hedwig where to find us,” Harry finished.

“But it be too dangerous for Master Harry and Mistress Hermione’s Hedwig to fly to London,” Dobby explained. “Dobby overhears new Headmistress order Unspeakables to put tracking spell on Mr and Mrs Potter’s owl... They might be hurting her!”

“Oh...” Harry shared a dark look with Hermione, then gave Hedwig a reproachful eye. Hedwig sheepishly turned her face away and hooted apologetically at Dobby.

“You absolutely did the right thing then! Thanks again Dobby--you’re brilliant! I’m giving you a raise...”

“Master Harry is too good to Dobby sir!” The House Elf interjected, bursting into happy tears. “Dobby be making dinner for Master Harry and his Mistresses now...”

Dobby disappeared with another loud crack before Harry could refuse. The girls couldn’t help giggling at being called Harry’s “Mistresses” by Dobby again. Harry rubbed his forehead and flushed with embarrassment. Moments later the sound of pots clanging and the smell of cooking food wafted up the stairs from the kitchen below.

Dobby had outdone himself yet again with a delicious feast, and soon everyone felt satisfied and very relaxed after the late supper he had whipped up for them. There were plenty of rooms available, but the members of the Coven seemed reluctant to split up when Hermione suggested that they try to get some sleep.

“Your house is very lovely, Harry,” said Luna, flicking her furry white ears as she peered at him hopefully with big round eyes when he and Hermione gave everyone a tour.

“It’s really nice,” Parvati agreed, curling her satiny black tail around Hermione.

“It’s your house too now...” Harry replied earnestly. “If you want to redecorate a bit of it, you’re welcome to.”

“Ze bedrooms--the decor is most elegant,” Fleur cooed, batting her eyelashes at Hermione, “Some of them clearly show a woman’s touch.”

“They’re very cozy,” Daphne remarked coquettishly.

“You should have seen it here before Sirius and Lupin cleaned this place up,” Harry said with a grin. “It was horrid...”
“And then Mum and my Auntie redecorated a lot of the bedrooms with the help of Abby Brixton--the Auror Madam Bones sent to look after them,” Hermione added, twirling her bushy tail happily.

“Yeah... Abby’s a real sweetie. I always liked ‘er best when I was still in trainin’.” Dora’s hair floresced a cheerful pink as she returned Harry’s grin and gave Jennifer a wink. Jennifer stifled a giggle and gazed at Harry and Hermione with big doe-eyes.

The Potters folded easily. Hermione purred and glanced at Harry who was smirking. Neither of them could resist the imploring looks of the Coven.

“Come on then,” Hermione said with a laugh, and led the way to the bedroom-suite she shared with Harry; he cast an Enlargement Charm on the four-poster bed upon entrance.

“I suppose pyjamas are out of the question then?” Harry chortled when Hermione, Luna, and Parvati began tugging his clothes off, waving their tails gleefully. The other young witches tittered as they undressed.

“Don’t be silly Harry!” giggled Luna as she tickled him with her fluffy white tail. “Pyjamas are an inconvenience reserved for when you have guests over--not for your ‘mistresses’...”

“Bah! I’m never going to live that one down,” Harry groaned, face reddening as his nude wife and the other two unclothed young cat-witches dragged him onto the bed, and the rest of the naked young witches clambered up beside them, “You know you all mean more to me than that...”

“...More to both of us!” Hermione added, kissing Luna and Parvati giddily as she stroked Harry’s erection.

Having everyone she loved finally here at home in her own bed was almost overwhelming; an exhilarating swooping sensation of freedom rippled through Hermione--she knew what she wanted first. Ecstatically, she rolled on her back and pulled a somewhat dazed Harry on top of her.

Already meowing with pleasure, Hermione wrapped her thighs and bushy ginger tail around Harry’s backside; he pistoned his stiff penis into her convulsing wet pink sheath while Luna and Parvati sucked her nipples and tickled her with their own furry tails.

Dora giggled, enjoying the show as Jennifer and Daphne played with her ample breasts. Fleur pushed apart Dora’s legs and licked the tender areas of her inner thighs until she reached Dora’s sweet spot, then she slipped her tongue inside.

Hermione’s spasmodic undulations and clenching tightness finished Harry; he gasped as the rapturous storm took him and released a torrent of semen into Hermione’s womb.

Hermione didn’t wait for the surging passion to ebb, and the next thing Harry knew he was on his knees with Hermione’s bushy head in his hands as his penis slid over her tongue and plunged into her throat.

Luna nuzzled Harry’s neck from behind, her arms and fluffy tail wrapped around his torso, her hard nipples pressing into his back as she clung to him, moving in time with his thrusting. Parvati’s sleek tail waggled joyfully as she buried her face between Hermione’s bottom cheeks and sucked Harry’s essence from Hermione’s dripping slit.

Hermione wriggled her bottom joyfully against Parvati’s face, feeling the other cat-witch’s tongue probing her inner-depths as Harry’s shaft propelled into her gullet. Hermione arched and trembled as the cascading orgasms took her to the next pinnacle of ecstasy. She felt Harry stiffen, pressing his bare pubes against her lips, and swallowed every last drop of his spurting ejaculate.
Harry wasn’t entirely sure where the energy came from that night, but it exceeded even that of the afternoon of Hermione’s birthday in the Room of Requirement. He supposed it was a release of the tension which had been building all week up to the eventual harrowing escape from Hogwarts. Before he first drifted off into a brief oblivion, he had also filled Parvati and Luna with his stickiness while Hermione tumbled into one euphoric squall of bliss after another with the other witches on their bed. Purrs, yowls, and squeals of delight echoed throughout Number 12.

When Harry came to, Daphne was in his arms hungrily devouring his lips and he filled her with his passion, before being taken up by Fleur, Dora, and Jennifer. Harry and Hermione gave of themselves to each and every witch numerous times through the night before finally succumbing to slumber.

The Maelstrom of Magic swirled and the Potters’ bed-chamber shuddered many times as the Coven consummated their first night together at Number 12 Grimmauld Place.

~o0o~

With shaking hands, Minister Dolores Umbridge poured herself an extra-large brandy, filling the snifter almost to the brim. She read the memo from Hogwarts again, then crumpled it up and hurled it into the fireplace.

To say that Dolores was angry or cross would be a serious understatement; perhaps infuriated or enraged would be better terms. But there was little point in allowing herself the luxury of succumbing to fury.

She liked her Spode Magical Pink Puppy Plates, and smashing them would serve no purpose, as unlike the kittens, she could not think of any puppies which were responsible for her current distress in any way, shape, or form.

And contrary to the opinion of some, Dolores Umbridge really didn’t like being angry. Anger led to mistakes and loss of control. And yet she was forced to admit to herself that sometimes anger was an appropriate response which indicated that she had never had control to begin with. Dolores had to concede that she had no control over the mistakes and incompetencies of others.

She understood implicitly that Draco Malfoy’s lack of control over himself was what had led to his unfortunate demise. Just as Lucius’s singular moment of poor judgment on the day he had inadvertently dismissed his House-Elf at Hogwarts had truly been the beginning of his end--and not only of his end, it had ultimately also led to the end of his son.

Dolores could see it clearly now. It was a crying shame that a single mistake had set off a chain of consequences which had extinguished the Malfoy line. Draco’s inability to control his impulses had surely been the outcome of overcompensating for the original loss of his father to Azkaban, his father’s eventual death at the hands of Severus Snape, and the unforgivable abandonment of his mother over what had clearly been a triviality on Draco’s part.

The poor lad had simply sought solace in the way that someone of such noble blood deserved, by demanding the submission of his inferiors to his desires the day he had shown his affections for the Halfbreed Patil. The Patil girl should have counted herself lucky to be chosen as a plaything by someone of such superior breeding.

And it was only to be expected that the poor boy would seek to escape the confines of Hogwarts to which he had been unfairly restricted over that incident, to rescue his father from prison.

But Draco had made a serious error in judgment the day he had taken Astoria Greengrass without offering financial compensation to the Warlock of that House. And that, Dolores could only attribute
to his fragile state of mind and lack of proper guidance at a time when neither of his parents had been available to offer him the nurturing that such a noble young spirit needed.

If the Old Ways had still been in effect, Draco’s parents could have purchased him a pretty plaything of his own--a pet such as a young muggle or mudblood girl could have provided some measure of comfort and release--and he might still be alive today.

The Gryffindor halfblood Katie Bell was of little consequence--Draco had been fully within his rights for demanding satisfaction from her. But Dolores could hardly blame Daphne Greengrass, a young woman of equal blood status, for defending her own life and the honour of her family.

And as much as Dolores despised the Weasley brood--excepting her deputy of course--and the treasonous politics of the Head of House Weasley, young Ginevra was still a pureblood--not of equal standing politically or financially to be sure--but she was still a member of a pure bloodline and of equal blood status to Gregory Goyle and Draco Malfoy nonetheless.

Ginevra Weasley had been entirely within her rights as well in defending her friend Miss Greengrass’s life and honour against Draco, and in defending her own life against Gregory Goyle, despite the recent downgrading of her family’s social and political status.

Draco’s inability to control his anger at being interrupted at play with an inferior, had led him to making another serious error in judgment, which had finally cost him his life. But it was a tragic waste which could have all been avoided if the Old Ways subscribed to by many of the Noble Houses in times long past had still been legally permissible. And that made Dolores angry.

One of the other events at Hogwarts, the loss of the Potters, while quite upsetting, was not due to any error in judgment on anyone’s part. Dolores could not assign blame for that. Their escape had obviously been planned well in advance, and was clearly part of the ongoing conspiracy being orchestrated by Albus Dumbledore.

And as much as Dolores wished that she could punish the Carrows or the Unspeakables, she knew that they had done nothing wrong. But not having anyone in particular that she could punish for the escape of the Potters and their little friends made her very angry.

Then there was the behaviour of the Weasley Twins, following in the treasonous footsteps of their father. Their insurrectionary behaviour and deliberate flouting of authority, their facilitation of the escape of the muggleborn students, their clear lack of respect for blood status, all made them as criminally dangerous as the man their father served, Albus Dumbledore. And that made Dolores extremely angry.

Dolores suddenly noticed that her snifter was empty, and she filled it with Brandy again.

~o0o~

Minister Dolores Umbridge woke the next morning with the worst hangover of her life.

It was true that she was a witch and had access to the best anti-hangover potions that Ministry Money could buy, but she was still infuriated and wished that she could get drunk all over again. Unfortunately, the Minister needed her wits about her as she had a long day ahead. She would have to make do.

~o0o~

The Coven slept until early afternoon. Dobby brought them all a late breakfast which they took in the
parlour. Harry turned on the BBC to see if anything interesting was happening in the Muggle World.

Hermione burst into giggles and Harry groaned when the most interesting news seemed to be a report of a mysterious series of earthquakes which had woken the residents of a row of old townhouses in a small neighbourhood in the Islington district of London. Fortunately no damage had occurred, and the sleep deprived residents of Grimmauld Place all seemed to be in strangely high spirits.
“D...dead?” gasped Deputy Minister Weasley, “Draco Malfoy is dead?”

“Yes Mr Weasley,” the Minister replied grimly as she continued the struggle to contain her rage. It wouldn’t do to lose her composure. She needed her wits about her to ensure that Percy Weasley would be able to perform a necessary task. If she misplayed her hand, it could unravel some of the work she had done with the lad.

Percy Weasley had come along very nicely in embracing many of the harshest policies of the Pureblood Agenda. It hadn’t actually taken very much effort to draw him further down the path he had already been traveling, but he didn’t need to know that Daphne Greengrass and Ginny Weasley had been justifiably defending themselves. Dolores needed Percy’s anger.

“Draco Malfoy was murdered most viciously last night.”

“So... so that means... the Malfoy line...” Percy sputtered.

“...Is extinct! Yes indeed, that is precisely what it means Mr Weasley!” Minister Dolores Umbridge’s nostrils flared.

“B...but how? ....Who?” Percy’s head spun as he considered the horrifying implications of the ending of one of the most prestigious Pureblood Houses in Britain.

“Can you not guess, Mr Weasley?” Dolores’s voice took on the treacliest tone which she always employed when she sought to lead someone to her desired conclusion.

“Potter!” the Deputy Minister spat venomously. “It was Potter wasn’t it? I knew we should have snatched him and his little brood the moment Dumbledore did a bunk and went to ground...”

“Indeed!” Dolores nodded. “Or rather, according to Gregory Goyle--who was seriously injured during the attack--it was a member of Potter’s little entourage... Miss Greengrass I believe, aided and abetted by none other than your sister...”

“NO! Surely not... Ginny?” Percy went white. “Not Ginny,” he muttered. But then Percy’s blood began to boil and the blood rushed back into his cheeks. “POTTER! He should be arrested immediately. He put her up to it... I just know it!”

“I am afraid it’s even worse than that,” Dolores said quietly. “It is too late to arrest him, or any of those known as the ‘Unaffiliated.’ They have all gone to ground--with the considerable assistance of your brothers Fred and George. Your brothers staged an uprising in the aftermath of the murder of Draco Malfoy, and escaped with numerous muggleborn students from the confines of Hogwarts...”

“Bloody Hell!” swore Percy, “I knew they were no good, filthy, treasonous, louts. What of my brother Ron, and Ginny?” Percy looked at Dolores imploringly. “I... I know they’re close to Potter--but they’re brainwashed. Can we not show them some leniency?”

Minister Umbridge would have cackled with glee if she could. She had Percy Weasley in the palm of her hand now. She knew he would do whatever was required.

“Perhaps so... Percy,” Dolores addressed her Deputy Minister personally with a sad smile, “I feel as you do, that the youngest of your clan may yet be shown the light. But in order to do so--we must
deal forcefully with the root of their dysfunction...”

“My father!” Percy snarled, “Where is he? He should be brought up on charges immediately.”

“Fret not my dear boy. He has already been detained,” Dolores said soothingly. “He is being held in the Department of Mysteries, awaiting interrogation. As a member of Dumbledore’s Order, I am hopeful that he will be able to yield actionable intelligence regarding the whereabouts of Dumbledore and the Potters—and perhaps also provide some information about the nature of the Secret Weapon employed by Dumbledore against Voldemort’s forces at Hogwarts...”

“Fred and George!” Percy scowled. “We should bring them in as well. It simply won’t do to have them running around spreading insurrection and thumbing their noses at authority.”

“I quite agree Percy,” sighed the Minister, hiding her glee at her protege’s erudition behind another sad smile and a voice dripping with honey. Yes, Percy Weasley was coming along nicely indeed. “It’s such a shame when family goes wrong. I know how hard this must be for you...”

“Not at all Minister,” Percy sniffed disdainfully. “I always knew that Fred and George were destined for Azkaban... er... prison anyway, seeing as Azkaban is defunct now.”

~o0o~

Having had the least experience with muggle media, Daphne, Luna, and Parvati were the most fascinated by the television programmes. Fleur was somewhat familiar with the general idea, due to following French muggle fashion and pop-culture magazines, but she had never actually watched muggle television either. Dora and Jennifer delighted in finding programmes on the cable access channels to show the others after Harry had his fill of the BBC news.

“I was just thinking Hermione, we really ought to get a Wiz-Vision to stay up to date with whatever the Ministry is up to,” Harry said quietly while the others watched an episode of Dr Who. “I should go to Diagon Alley and get one.”

“I think that’s an excellent idea Harry!” Hermione flicked her furry ears as she thought. “I wish I could go to Diagon Alley with you, but even with being able to turn my tail invisible, I think I’d be too recognisable—the Minister is sure to have people looking for us...”

“...Possibly even Aurors,” groaned Harry. “She’s bound to have an arrest warrant out for us on some concocted charges by now. I’ll have to morph and go in disguise...”

“...and you should take Dora with you,” Hermione added. “You can both go in disguise...”

“Go where?” Dora interjected when she heard her name being mentioned.

“To get a Wiz-Vision,” Harry replied.

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“Mr Ragnok sees clients by appointment only, Mr...?”

“Bond, James Bond,” the dashing wizard replied, saying the first thing which popped into his head. The elegant witch at his side did her best to stifle a giggle as the wizard continued speaking, “I think Mr Ragnok will make an exception in my case. I’m a former client of his.”

Griphook eyed the wizard and witch suspiciously. “I’ll see what I can do Mr Bond... just one moment.”
Moments later the debonair wizard and the sophisticated witch were in Ragnok’s office. The Solicitor Advocate of Gringotts steepled his long spindly fingers and regarded his clients shrewdly with dark glittering eyes.

“Mr Bond is it? Strange that I do not recall having a client by that name. However, I do believe that we can come to some sort of business arrangement... Mr Potter!”

“How did you know?” Harry gasped. “I was going to tell you anyway, but how...?”

“Trade secret!” the Goblin chuckled, giving Harry a wink. “Let me just say for now that I am extremely perceptive. I presume that you need to access your vault, without the Ministry being alerted to your presence on Diagon Alley today.”

“Er... yeah! Is that possible?”

“Absolutely, Mr Potter! Gringotts takes pride in being able to offer our high profile clients private and secure access to their vaults. It is not entirely unheard of for some to deign to enter Gringotts under an assumed identity. As long as you identify yourself to Gringotts properly, it is of little concern to us how you present yourselves to the wizard world... I’ll have someone take you to your vault in short order.”

While Harry and Dora waited for their escort, Harry was tempted to say sorry about the Dragon Incident—even though Harry felt a bit more sorry for the Dragon itself. But Ragnok seemed to understand Harry’s apologetic expression and shook his head slightly.

“You should be most pleased with our new security features Mr Potter,” Ragnok said loudly. “After the Lestrange Affair, Gringotts Management saw fit to reconsider employing dangerous creatures to guard the vaults... The Safety of our Clientele is as important to us as is the Security of their Valuables.”

A short while later Harry and Dora departed Gringotts, Harry’s pockets now full and jangling. An eerie gloom had settled over Diagon Alley which had nothing to do with the clouding over afternoon skies, and shoppers darted about furtively, not looking anyone in the eye. Aurors glanced at Harry and Dora, but all the Aurors saw were a well-heeled wizard and witch who were clearly of good breeding.

Harry and Dora were both discomfited by the new uniforms which the Aurors patrolling the streets were wearing. To their eyes, the long trench-coats were now less reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes and more resembling of those worn by Nazi SS officers in muggle films.

To set off the whole oppressive atmosphere, an enormous screen, taking up the side of an entire building, featured the smiling toad-like figure of Minister Umbridge herself, dressed in pink and waving a white-gloved hand. Large bold text flashed across the lower portion of the screen:

THE MINISTRY IS YOUR FRIEND

SERVING TRUTH AND JUSTICE FOR YOUR SECURE FUTURE

“Laying it on a bit thick, isn’t she!?” Dora muttered.

“Just a bit!” Harry snorted.

Harry nervously glanced at the Wanted Posters again, thankful that he and Dora at least were skilled metamorphmagi. Familiar faces peered at him from the Wanted Posters plastering the walls and
lampposts along Diagon Alley.

Dumbledore’s twinkling blue eyes gazed at Harry, and Snape’s scowling countenance glared at him, from Wanted Posters labeled Undesirable Number 1 and Undesirable Number 2 respectively. It had been a bit of a shock to see the faces of Fred and George grinning at him from a single poster, designated as Undesirable Number 5 and Undesirable Number 6. Harry supposed it had been inevitable, but it didn’t stop him from feeling guilty for getting the Twins involved.

But it was seeing Hermione’s anxiously twitching furry ears and his own opalescent green eyes staring back at him from the poster they shared which unnerved Harry the most. The Potters had been assigned the Number 3 and Number 4 rankings on the Undesirable list.

Dora glanced worriedly at Harry, knowing exactly why seeing Hermione’s face on a Wanted Poster next to his own was distressing him the most.

“Come on then, let’s get this done with and get outta here,” Dora muttered. “You don’t need to be lookin’ at these all day.”

“Y...yeah, you’re right Dora,” Harry gulped.

They strolled down the street and finally spotted Wiz-Vision monitors in the Wiseacre’s Wizarding Equipment window display.

“They’re a lot less expensive than I thought they’d be,” Harry murmured when he peered at the sticker prices inside the shop.

“Ah, those are the Ministry subsidised models you’re lookin’ at,” said the shop owner who had overheard. “Over here are the models designed for more discerning folk with such fine taste as yourselves--they have many more features...”

Harry managed to keep a straight face as the shop owner tried to sell him the most expensive model, which was quite large; the owner of the shop was delighted when he purchased it. Harry was a bit concerned about carrying the Wiz-Vision, but it turned out to be much lighter than it looked.

“This is a bit too bulky to apparate with though,” Dora remarked, frowning pensively.

“Why don’t we just go out through the Leaky Cauldron and hail a cab?” Harry suggested quietly.

“Yeah... suppose that’s best really,” Dora agreed with a nod.

Tom the Bartender looked up at the couple who had entered the Pub from the Alley side. He didn’t think he recognised them, but they looked posh.

“Can I get you two something, Mr and Mrs...?”

“...Bond, James and Vesper Bond,” tittered the elegant witch in her poshest accent. She looked at her smirking “husband” with pleading eyes.

“Oh... er alright then, what would you like Vesper dearest?” Harry asked, struggling to keep a straight face. He almost lost his composure completely when she put in their orders.

“Two Mad-Eye Martinis please--shaken, not stirred.”

They sat down with their drinks glancing up at the Wiz-Visions around the Pub. It felt a bit odd seeing the screens in the Leaky Cauldron. Harry supposed that the invention of the Wiz-Vision was
taking off internationally. The screens were all currently displaying an International Quidditch match between Venezuela and Germany, and Venezuela was leading by 70 points. Harry returned his attention to Dora and the drinks.

“Er...” Harry raised an eyebrow when he peered at the gruesome looking garnish on his Martini.

“It’s alright—it’s not a real bloody eyeball,” Dora giggled quietly. “It’s a peeled lychee stuffed with a blueberry and drizzled with raspberry preserve. And it’s always hilarious to order this when we’re having drinks with Moody. He hates ‘em!”

As they sipped their martinis, Harry and Dora both thought that it was a shame that Hermione couldn’t be there with them.

“We’ll ‘ave to use some transfiguration disguise spells or muggle disguise techniques on her and do this again in a muggle pub,” Dora softly chortled. “James Bond really isn’t quite right unless he’s got a girl on each arm...”

Big fat raindrops were already pelting by the time the taxi-cab pulled up next to the curb in front of Number 13 Grimmauld place. The elegantly attired couple got soaked as they waited for the cab to leave. Then they disappeared into the non-space between Number 11 and Number 13 carrying the enormous flat box between them.

“You’re both drenched,” squeaked Hermione, twirling her bushy tail happily when she saw that Harry and Dora had both arrived home safely. “Now let’s get you out of your wet things before you both catch colds!” she giggled.

Hermione dragged the dripping and amused Harry and Dora to the Potters’ bedroom to “get them out of their wet things,” and well over an hour passed before the three of them returned to the others with grins on their faces.

Parvati helped Fleur read the instructions and set up the Wiz-Vision in the parlour on the other side of the fireplace. Meanwhile Daphne, Jennifer, and Luna were roaring with laughter at a Monty Python rerun on the muggle television. Luna’s fluffy white tail quivered with delight as she rolled around on the sofa chortling. Jennifer was thrilled that they were thoroughly enjoying their first proper taste of muggle TV entertainment at its finest.

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Albus Dumbledore sipped the champagne that his charming host, Henri Delacour, had provided. Olympe Maxime was already on her second glass, wishing that she and Henri had better news for her good friend.

“I am so sorry Albus,” Olympe began, “but ze ICW Committee for the Investigation of Statutory Violations weell not interfere with ze sitting head of the British Ministry unless you have some more substantial evidence zat she has violated International Laws... At ze moment, to ze committee, eet simply appears to be an Internal Dispute.”

“I understand,” Albus sighed and drained his glass before continuing, “I was hopeful that the actions of Minister Umbridge might raise some red flags with the senior committee members... however, having been Supreme Mugwump myself before the Wizengamot rescinded my appointment to the ICW, I was all too aware that my petition would probably die in committee.”

“I wish we could do more openly,” said Henri Delacour glumly as he poured Dumbledore another glass of champagne. “I was most grateful when Madame McGonagall informed me that my daughter
managed to reach safe haven with young Monsieur Potter and his wife…”

“However, I am pleased to inform you that I now have several underground teams in position in Britain ready to assist you at a moment’s notice should you require them.”

“Thank you Henri!” Albus nodded gratefully as he took a sip from his refilled glass. “I may have need of them if the rumours are true.”

“And take heart Chéri…” Olympe added, “…at least ze ICW has denied your Minister’s request for ze issuance of an International Arrest Warrant against you. Her evidence against you ees also lacking.”

“That is something indeed,” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled, cheered by that bit of good news. He raised his glass. “Thank you both for your kindness and your solidarity--to friendship then?”

“Oui--to friendship,” Olympe replied, raising her third glass of champagne with misty eyes.

“To friendship!” Henri raised his own glass and smiled. “And to the brave continuing struggle for liberté, égalité, and fraternité!”
The Coven was appalled by the state of Wiz-Vision's Saturday evening programming. As of yet, only two channels were available to the public: WVN and WVN Sports—though adverts suggested that more would be offered in coming months. The third channel, WVN Hogwarts, was a special feed which only the Hogwarts screen could receive. WVN Sports mostly featured local, regional, and international Quidditch of course, but it was interspersed with Broomstick Racing, Troll Fighting, and Wizard Chess and Exploding Snap Tournaments.

Harry had expected that the evening news (which also featured William O’Hannity and Endora LeFay), would have wall to wall coverage of the mayhem at Hogwarts. But there was only a single reference to what had happened, delivered in a surprisingly perfunctory manner, accompanied by images of the Wanted Posters which he and Dora had seen earlier that afternoon.

“Ministry Officials are investigating reports of vandalism and violence at Hogwarts last night, following in the wake of Albus Dumbledore’s ouster,” the announcement began. “The death of a student has been rumoured, but Officials are keeping mum on the details until the initial stages of the investigation are completed.”

“The only information which is being released at this time, is that Harry James Potter and his wife, the Muggleborn Halfbreed, Hermione Jean Potter, were witnessed fleeing the scene of the crime along with two accomplices, Fred and George Weasley.”

“Warrants have been issued to detain them all for questioning, and all civilians are being warned to avoid confronting any of the suspects as they are to be considered armed and dangerous. Anyone who has any information regarding their whereabouts are being asked to pass it on to the Auror Office.”

Daphne gasped in horror.

“I’m sorry,” she wailed. “It’s all my fault--I can’t believe they’re blaming you two and the Twins...”

“It’s alright Daphne,” said Harry, giving her a hug, and trying to squash his own guilty feelings again for getting the Weasley Twins involved. “The Minister would have just made up a reason to come after me and Hermione anyway...”

“Harry’s right Daphne, and I’m just glad the Minister isn’t blaming you and Ginny,” Hermione added, twitching her furry ears sympathetically as she cuddled Daphne with her fluffy tail and gave her a kiss.

“Forget it Chérie,” Fleur murmured as she wrapped her arms around Daphne and kissed her as well. “The Minister, she will say anything to turn people against our Harry and our Hermione. You had nothing to do wiz this--she is just a liar.”

Daphne nodded glumly and did her best to put it out of her head as they all turned their attention back to the Wiz-Vision.

Following the news was a rather horrid hour-long game-show called Spot the Muggleborn, which invited thirteen contestants to compete in performing spells, and then to try and guess which one among themselves was a muggleborn—the winner to receive a 50 galleon prize.
Only one of the competitors was a muggleborn, who was pretending not to be, and if none of the other twelve wizards guessed right by the end of the programme, the muggleborn wizard would receive a 10 galleon prize. If more than one person guessed correctly, their names were all written on a slip of parchment and dropped into a wizard’s hat, the winner to be randomly selected by the muggleborn wizard who was blindfolded for the task.

The Coven only watched the one episode out of sheer morbid curiosity, and all of them felt rather ill by the end of it. Next up was an hour of children’s evening programming.

“Oh no!” Harry groaned and palmed his face when he recognised the character from one of Ron’s favourite comics, *The Adventures of Martin Miggs, the Mad Muggle*.

“This is dreadfull!” Jennifer moaned as the cartoon character engaged in one boorish, idiotic antic after another.

“What did Ron ever see in that revolting comic?” Hermione hissed angrily as her furry tail bristled.

“I dunno really... and in retrospect, I’m surprised that his mum and dad let him read it.” Harry muttered. “I have to admit, I got a bit of a laugh when I read them--but that was only because they were so stupid.”

“And why do they make this ridiculous character French?” Fleur fumed.

Nobody had a good answer for that, and everyone was thoroughly embarrassed. The detective show-*Auror Morris*--which launched the portion of the evening programming for adults didn’t seem quite so awful for most of the programme, but nobody was surprised when the murderer turned out to be a muggleborn wizard.

The period drama *Fly by Knight* appeared to be a soap opera regaling viewers with the travails of a wealthy 15th century pureblood family--many of them brought about by their bumbling muggleborn servants. The main protagonists reminded the Coven uncomfortably of the Malfoys, but they were portrayed as tragically noble, long-suffering characters.

“That’s stupid,” Parvati grumbled, her sleek black tail twitching crossly when one of the nieces was burned at the stake by a mob of angry muggles. “She could have just performed a flame freezing charm...”

“And even a First Year knows that nearly all the ‘witches’ who were persecuted were actually muggles,” Luna added, rolling her eyes and swishing her fluffy white tail.

The least offensive programme that evening was *The Wiz Factor*, a talent show for singers which was hosted by Celestina Warbeck--but it was rather boring as all of the singers just appeared to be doing their utmost to mimic Celestina. Even Parvati, who had been very interested at first, was cringing after the first 15 minutes of the show.

The comedy/talk show hosted by the smarmy Grayson Morton was just too much--every other joke was about muggles or muggleborn wizards, and Harry turned off the Wiz-Vision after five minutes of it, sick to his stomach.

“Well--that was bloody awful!” Harry said through gritted teeth. “Looks like the only thing this is good for at the moment is keeping us up on the news--skewed as it is--and a bit of sports.”

“Why don’t you turn the regular telly back on?” said Dora, “I need to watch somethin’ fun now to cleanse my brain before we go to bed.”
“Sounds good to me,” Harry agreed, flicking to the guide channel on the muggle television.

“Oh look, *Star Wars* is going to be on in a few minutes,” said Luna, her fluffy white tail perking up. “Can we watch that please, Harry? You’ve told us so much about it…”

“Oooh, please Harry?” Parvati looked at Harry hopefully.

Harry glanced at Dora, Jennifer, and Hermione, all of whom had seen it before, but none of them had any objections. If anything, they all seemed eager to share their enjoyment of it with the other witches. Dobby made them all some popcorn, and soon the horrible Wiz-Vision shows were forgotten as everyone got sucked into the exciting space adventure.

“You were right Harry,” Daphne chortled during a break for advertisements, “Obi Wan is a bit like Dumbledore…”

“But his beard is a bit short,” Luna giggled.

The Coven never did make it to bed that night. They all dozed off in the parlour, snuggled together on the sofas with buttery fingers, the room lit only by the glow of the flickering images on the television screen.

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Deputy Minister Percy Weasley took a deep breath to steady himself before entering the secret interrogation chamber in the Department of Mysteries. It was Monday morning, and he hoped that sitting in a cell all weekend would have made his father open to reason.

Percy really didn’t want to do this, but his father had left him no choice. Percy’s father had always been one of Dumbledore’s staunchest supporters, and it was long past time for him to see the error of his ways. Percy had agreed with the Minister that his father might be more inclined to be cooperative with Percy than with any of the Unspeakable Interrogators. Finally feeling ready, Percy gave the heavy iron door to the cell a push and it swung open with a groaning sound.

Arthur Weasley coldly regarded his son Percy, the Senior Undersecretary and Deputy to the Minister. Percy loomed over his shackled father and scowled.

“Hello Father. I hope that this little time-out has brought you to your senses.” When his father didn’t respond, Percy sighed and had another go.

“Please don’t make this harder than it has to be. I only want what’s best Father… It’s too late for Fred and George, they’ve made their bed. But I don’t want Ginny and Ron to go the same way…”

Arthur Weasley stiffened, but he still said nothing.

“Did you hear about Draco Malfoy? He was killed by Daphne Greengrass--according to the Minister, Ginny was involved.”

“What? The Malfoy boy is dead?” gasped Arthur Weasley in shock, finally moved to speak to his estranged son. He had been arrested the afternoon of the same day that the Unspeakables had been dispatched to Hogwarts to detain Dumbledore, and had heard no news since then. “Ginny… what’s happened? You haven’t arrested her have you?”

“No… and she’s alright for the moment,” Percy responded, pleased to have got his father talking. “The Minister won’t be seeking charges against the Greengrass girl--but that’s just politics--and the Minister is willing to let Ginny’s role in the affair go… Thank Goodness!”
“But it’s really all down to Potter. Ginny’s head is still full of the Saviour nonsense you and Mum fed us all with. We know it’s really Potter who’s to blame...”

“That’s ridiculous,” spat the elder Weasley. “If Draco Malfoy is dead, then he brought it on himself, and he only has his Death Eater father to blame!”

“Lucius Malfoy only did what he believed was necessary to counter Dumbledore’s political meddling,” said Percy, his voice rising. “Warlock Malfoy was sick of Dumbledore undermining our wizarding heritage and promoting the dilution of our bloodlines. Yes, Malfoy acted outside of the colour of authority, but the Minister and I know the truth now. We know that Dumbledore has been plotting for years to overthrow the Ministry with an army of muggles...”

“You can’t be serious--talk about filling heads with nonsense!” Arthur snorted. “That’s absolutely preposterous! You don’t seriously believe the swill the Minister has been pushing about muggles stealing wands do you? I thought you were smarter than that!”

“The Unspeakables are still working on that,” Percy admitted. “We don’t know how he’s doing it, but if anyone could figure out how to teach muggles to use magic, it’s Dumbledore. The man is a genius--a mad twisted genius, true--but brilliant nonetheless...”

“We know that Dumbledore invented some sort of weapon which destroys dark creatures. You were at Hogwarts when Potter used it to wipe out thousands of Voldemort’s Inferi and a swarm of his Dementors—not to mention killing and injuring a horde of Giants and Mountain Trolls. We’re hoping you can tell us about that...”

“Honestly Percy, I have no idea how Harry Potter and his friends did that!” Arthur peered at his son as if he were a three headed cat. “Dumbledore never told a single one of us how that was accomplished. I admit that the man does play some things close to the vest... but Dumbledore’s only goal has ever been the preservation of life and justice for all magicals...”

“That’s not entirely true father,” Percy interrupted. “Did you know that before they had a falling out, that the Great Protector of the Muggleborn was once Gellert Grindelwald’s best friend?”

Percy noted the look of stunned disbelief on his father’s face with satisfaction and continued.

“That’s right... Dumbledore never cared about muggleborn one bit. It was all part of his plan to take over the Ministry...”

“If that was true, then Dumbledore would have accepted the post of Minister when it was offered after Voldemort fell the first time around!” Arthur snapped. “Open your eyes Percy! These are all lies!”

Percy sighed and shook his head, seeing that he wasn’t getting through to his father.

“You’ll say anything to protect Dumbledore and Potter won’t you?” Percy snarled as pulled his wand from his robes. “Well what about your family? What about protecting us--protecting Ginny and Ron?” Percy’s voice rose as his blood began to boil.

“Is that why you never accepted a higher paying position in the Ministry?” Percy shouted, his face reddening. “...So that you could waste all your time helping Dumbledore promote his allegedly pro-muggle agenda? To help him pollute our gene pool and spit upon our culture? So that you could perform Secret Experiments on muggle artifacts at Dumbledore’s behest? You’re just as obsessed as he is with destroying the fabric of our society, and YOU had something to do with creating that Secret Weapon of his--I KNOW IT!”
“Come on, just admit it!” Percy growled, raising his wand. “Don’t make me do this…”

The blood drained from Arthur Weasley’s face when he realised to what lengths his son was willing to go. He swallowed, wondering how he had managed to fail Percy so utterly.

“Percy, please... think about what you’re doing...” Arthur began, trying to reason with his son. “You don’t have to do this...”

“I am truly sorry that it has come to this... Father;” sneered Percy, bitter tears stinging his eyes as he pointed his wand at Arthur. “Believe me, I’d much rather not have to do this--but the Minister’s other methods of interrogation are far more damaging and potentially lethal. And despite everything between us, I would rather not see you injured--you are still family after all...”

“I was hoping that you’d see reason... It would be to the Greater Good and to your own good--to our Family’s good--if you would simply renounce Dumbledore and Potter... tell us where they are and everything you know about the Secret Weapon...”

“Never! I don’t know, and even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you or the Minister!” Arthur looked at his son imploringly. “Percy, you have to know that the Minister is manipulating you--filling you with lies--she is as evil as Voldemort ever was...”

Percy peered at his father incredulously.

“Evil? ...Seriously? Let me tell you what Evil is--Father... Evil is perverting and denying our wizarding heritage with your unhealthy obsession for muggles and your misguided loyalty to Dumbledore. Evil is taking that obsession to such a degree that you have put our family name to shame and ruined our family financially...”

“Did you know that due to your obsessions, our family’s social and political blood-status has been downgraded to ‘Questionable?’ ...did you know that because of you, our name is a laughingstock? ...but you don’t care, do you father? You don’t care that you’ve betrayed me--betrayed us all--your family... your Blood!”

“This is going to hurt me as much as it hurts you,” Percy muttered as his bitter tears began falling. “I’ll give you one more opportunity father--it’s not too late to stand up for what’s right. Tell us where Dumbledore and the Potters are--give up the Secret Weapon...”

“Percy, please...” Arthur beseeched. “Wake up before it’s too late...”

The red arc of the Cruciatus Curse erupted from the tip of Percy Weasley’s wand, and the screams of his father echoed through the secret detention chambers in the Department of Mysteries.

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“I’m sorry... he won’t talk!” Percy said dejectedly. “I was so sure I could make him see reason--see how much he’s hurting the family...”

“There, there dear,” Dolores said soothingly as she patted Percy’s hand. She poured him a steaming cup of chamomile tea. “Never mind Percy--you did your best. And despite his recalcitrance, I have no wish to cause your father any great injury--he is still your family after all. I have a much better idea for achieving our goals...”

Chapter End Notes
Chapter End Notes

MARTIN MIGGS The MUGGLE

WHAAamm!

HERE IS MONSIEUR 'PUDBEC', YOUR NEW FRENCH TEACHER!

BONJOUR LES 'CHILDREN!'

ZEB IS 'LE COD'!

MARTIN MIGGS, YOU WILL REPEAT 200 TIMES 'THE FRENCH CON'

FRENCH, WHAT A ROMANTIC LANGUAGE!

THE END
The next few days passed busily at Number 12 for the Coven as they spent a bit of time working out a schedule to keep up with their schoolwork and continue their group-training. They managed to clear out one of the rooms in the basement, jamming everything except for a few statues into the other basement-room.

When it had been cleared, they strengthened the walls, floor, and ceiling, with every silencing and fortification Charm and Rune sequence that they could find in their schoolbooks, and in the books in Number 12’s library.

It was no Room of Requirement, but by the time they had completed the task, it was adequate enough to stand up to combat-spellwork without causing problems for their neighbours. Harry and Hermione had just finished testing a bombarda and a repairing spell on the statue that they had been practicing on when Dora called down the stairs to the basement.

“Harry, Hermione... you two might want to come watch the WVN news yourselves. The Ministry’s supposed to be makin’ some sort of announcement.”

“Thanks Dora, we’ll be right there.”

Moments later, everyone was in the parlour in front of the Wiz-Vision. As with the previous special announcement which they had seen at Hogwarts, William O’Hannity the news-anchor introduced the Minister. But this time the impeccably groomed announcer also introduced somebody else... someone who was all too recognisable--Percy Weasley, looking as stiff as a board.

“Thank you once again for your kind introduction William,” the Minister began warmly. “As I had previously mentioned I would do, in the Ministry’s bid to keep the public informed, I have returned to update you on current affairs in regards to the investigations at Hogwarts, and into Albus Dumbledore’s dirty dealings at large.”

And as before, the Minister’s voice grew stonier as she continued.

“No! I would do, in the Ministry’s bid to keep the public informed, I have returned to update you on current affairs in regards to the investigations at Hogwarts, and into Albus Dumbledore’s dirty dealings at large.”

“Now that the initial investigation into the events last Friday at Hogwarts has been completed, I can reveal to you that yes--a student was killed at Hogwarts. Young Draco Malfoy--who had been set to take on the mantle of Warlock following the assassination of his father by Dumbledore’s associate, Severus Snape--was himself assassinated.”

“No!” gasped O’Hannity. “You don’t say!”

“Yes!” the Minister returned, “And as indicated in the brief Ministry release on Saturday, the evidence points to Mr Potter and his wife. They fled the scene shortly after the commission of the assassination, accompanied by none other than Fred and George Weasley, who had started a riot to cover their escape from Hogwarts.”

“Is there any truth to the rumours that muggleborn students were involved?” asked the slick newscaster.

“No! I would do, in the Ministry’s bid to keep the public informed, I have returned to update you on current affairs in regards to the investigations at Hogwarts, and into Albus Dumbledore’s dirty dealings at large.”

“Not directly in regards to the assassination of young Mr Malfoy,” the Minister replied, “however, it is true that during the riot, the muggleborn students also fled Hogwarts. We believe that this was due to leaks regarding the Ministry’s next phase of the investigation into the treasonous activities of Albus Dumbledore and the muggleborn revolutionaries.”
“As part of our ongoing efforts to secure the future for our ancient heritage, and maintain order, the Ministry is announcing the formation of the Muggleborn Registration Commission. All persons of muggle descent—those with no wizarding parentage whatsoever—who purport to be wizards, must register themselves with the Ministry so that we can closely monitor their activities, and also to determine their true magical status... or lack thereof.”

“And it was with an eye towards these efforts, that the Ministry had been planning on expelling all muggleborn students from Hogwarts in any case; however, not before such a time as each and every muggleborn student could be registered, and then removed to a more fitting facility.”

“Someone—perhaps one of Dumbledore’s spies in the Ministry—must have leaked advance notice at Hogwarts... The flight of the muggleborn from Hogwarts thus represents a minor setback in terms of rounding up for examination these new entrants into our magical society.”

“As to our other efforts to uncover the extent of Dumbledore’s conspiracy, a purge has begun within the Ministry. I should preface this next bit to say that my Deputy Minister, Senior Undersecretary Percy Weasley, is beyond reproach—he has denounced the actions of his brothers, Fred and George Weasley.”

“It is to be understood that these young men are likely being manipulated by Albus Dumbledore, and if they do turn themselves over to authorities, renounce their affiliation with the Potters and Albus Dumbledore, and throw themselves at the mercy of the Ministry, they shall receive a fair hearing, and leniency shall be shown. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Head of House Weasley—perhaps it would be best if my Senior Undersecretary explained...”

Percy nodded at Minister Umbridge with an icy expression and took up the narrative.

“Thank you Minister, I would be delighted to...” Percy began.

“Much to my great distress, my very own father—Ministry Employee, Warlock Arthur Weasley—has been determined to be one of Albus Dumbledore’s spies within the Ministry itself,” Percy said coldly. “My father has been arrested, and awaits trial. He is currently being detained in the Ministry’s holding facilities.”

“Due to the ongoing investigation, and the purge within the Ministry, the date of his trial has not been set. It is hoped that Warlock Weasley will be cooperative in exposing the rest of Dumbledore’s agents. Until such a time, Warlock Weasley shall remain indefinitely in detention, and be subject to interrogation...”

“Now, in regards to the muggleborn insurrection, I urge all muggleborn to present themselves to the Ministry at this time for Registration. Things will go much easier for them, and all who are cooperative shall be treated fairly. However, those who are recalcitrant, and who attempt to avoid registration shall be shown no such leniency...”

Percy narrowed his eyes and his voice hardened as he spoke with even greater vehemence.

“Furthermore, given the violence and lack of regard for civilised behaviour on the part of Dumbledore’s supporters and the insurrectionists, the ban on the employment of Unforgivable Curses has been lifted—for Ministry Officials only...”

“We will use whatever means are necessary to restore Order, and to secure the rights of those with Ancient Blood to move about freely without being subject to violent repression by those of dubious status...” Percy glanced at Dolores “…Minister, do you have anything else to add?”
“Thank you Deputy Minister, I should just like to put some concerns to rest...” Dolores replied, then she turned to speak directly to the viewers in her sweetest, silkiest tones.

“Undoubtedly, the lifting of the ban on the use of Unforgivables is not without some controversy--even among those of the Ancient Houses. However, the majority of the Wizengamot has spoken in concord with the Ministry...”

“And we must stress to those among the Ancient Houses who continue to harbour reservations, that this is to the Greater Good in order to preserve our ancient wizarding heritage from dilution and sabotage. I look forward to the cooperation of all...”

“Please remember--the Ministry is here to serve you! Thank you, and good night!”

Harry gaped at the screen as moans and squeals of horror escaped from the other members of the Coven. Hermione gripped Harry’s arm tightly, hissing as her bushy tail bristled.

“Bloody Hell!” Dora murmured.

“I can’t believe she actually got the ban lifted!” Parvati fumed, her sleek black tail whipping angrily.

“The Unforgivables--those are the Death Curse and the Torture Curse, aren’t they!??” Jennifer gasped.

“And the Imperius--the mind-control curse...” Daphne nearly whispered.

Fleur and Luna sat in stunned silence, horrified expressions on their faces.

“If Percy’s alright with the Unforgivables--anything could happen to Mr Weasley,” Harry said quietly, his face ashen.

Hermione glanced at Harry anxiously, sensing his cold fury growing.

“Harry... it’s probably a trap. The Minister--she knows us too well--she’s baiting us...”

“Yeah! I know...!” Harry peered into his wife’s eyes and she nodded, flicking her furry ears.

“Good! Just as long as we’re all clear,” said Hermione. “So what are we going to do to rescue Mr Weasley then?”

“Ahem... Might I offer a suggestion?” said a familiar and vaguely supercilious voice belonging to someone unseen.

Harry, Hermione and the others turned in surprise to peer at the landscape painting on the wall behind the main sofa.

“Er... Headmaster Black, what are you doing here?” asked Harry in bewilderment.

“Please, Phineas Nigellus is good enough... there is no need for formalities outside of Hogwarts. And this is one of the homes of my portrait after all! I am free to wander the paintings in any building my portraits reside in...”

“Oh, er... right--of course! Sorry Headma... Phineas Nigellus!”

“In any case, that brings me to my point. I have a portrait at the Ministry as well, and I can tell you--Arthur Weasley is NOT in the Ministry’s official holding facility on level 10. I have it on good information from another portrait that Arthur Weasley was last seen being escorted into the
Department of Mysteries…”

“So the Minister is baiting a trap for us then!” Hermione stated, her bushy tail quivering in agitation.

“Without question…” Phineas Nigellus affirmed, “however…”

“…you can get us in!” Harry interjected, his heart racing as his adrenaline began to pump. “And Dora and I can slip into the DoM in disguise to find Mr Weasley, and then we can all get back out through your portrait.”

“Indeed!” the portrait said drily. “I just happen to know of a painting very near to the DoM’s secret detention and interrogation chambers. Though, if it is just the two of you, you may be at a disadvantage numerically speaking…”

“We’ll go late at night when there are less people, and Harry and Dora won’t be alone,” Hermione stated in a steely voice.

Harry peered at Hermione anxiously. The last thing he wanted was to get her captured or killed as well, but he recognised her tone of voice as one which would brook no argument. Harry supposed if he couldn’t extend the Invisibility Spell to cover Hermione entirely, there was always the Disillusionment Charm—that would work almost as well.

“Oui, Harry shall have our support…” Fleur added as the others began to raise their own voices.

“Wait... STOP!” said Harry in alarm. “Okay, alright... some of you can come too, but I don’t want to risk all of us in one operation. A smaller team will be able to move faster, and draw less attention anyway....”

“And if we don’t make it back out…” Harry gulped, “whoever’s on the outside can call in the Order for backup if absolutely necessary. But I don’t want to have to get them involved if we don’t have to. It sounds like they’ve got enough to deal with as it is, facing whoever the Ministry is using to round-up muggleborns...”

“Probably the Snatchers and Death Eaters under the auspices of the Unspeakable Office…” Dora muttered. “The Aurors are most likely to continue being used mostly for traditional policing and maintaining order—though obviously they’ll also have the power to arrest anyone they suspect of being muggleborn.”

“We need to work out who should take part in the rescue mission then,” said Hermione.

A babble of voices rose again, as nobody wanted to be left out. In the end, it was determined that Parvati would join Harry, Hermione, and Dora, and that Fleur would remain at Number 12 with Daphne, Luna, and Jennifer.

“But if you’re not back within two hours, we’re coming in after you all Harry,” Luna said sternly, wagging her fluffy white tail briskly.

Jennifer and Daphne had equally determined glints in their eyes. Fleur tried her best not to smirk at Harry’s reluctant expression.

“Only if you can get some of the Order to come along as backup too though, alright?” Harry muttered. “And just to make sure, I think I’ll give Lupin and Sirius a heads-up. It’s better if the professors remain at Hogwarts.”

Moments later the Potters were peering at Sirius and Lupin’s faces in Harry’s mirror. After quickly
getting the pleasantries out of the way, Harry and Hermione told them the plan.

“I should be there too,” Sirius said eagerly. “Don’t go in till I get there Harry...”

“No, Harry’s right,” Lupin interrupted, “A smaller team has a better chance of getting in and out quickly Sirius. We’ll only stage a larger assault on the Ministry if it becomes absolutely necessary. I think it’s best if we have Hagrid, Alastor, Kingsley, and John on standby with us. If we all have to come in after you Harry, with your remaining team members, we will.”

“I suppose that makes sense,” Sirius grumbled. “Right then, so what’s your timetable Harry?”

“Well, Dora reckons they’ll be expecting us tonight, in the main detention area for prisoners being held for Wizengamot trials,” Harry replied. “That seems likely to me, so we’ll wait till very late tomorrow night, and get into the Department of Mysteries using the portraits...”

“So you really did get out of Hogwarts that way then?” Lupin gasped, sharing a startled look with Sirius.

“I have to admit Harry, Remus and I were a bit skeptical when Minerva and Filius told us that was how you had all escaped,” Sirius confessed in amazement. “So that’s why you were asking me about Phineas Nigellus’s portrait then--simply ingenious...”

“It’s an unheard of method for long distance travel,” Lupin added. “Historically speaking, that particular portal spell is not well-known, and it is mainly noted for allowing entrance to Secret Treasure rooms... I don’t think I’ve ever heard of it being used for escaping from--or breaking into--warded buildings before, either.”

“Er... really?” Harry was a bit surprised to think that he and Hermione might be the first to come up with the idea of using the Pictura Portus spell in that manner.

“Well, there’s a first time for everything!” Sirius gazed at his godson and goddaughter-in-law with a slightly wistful, proud expression.

“I suppose Dumbledore must think of us as a ‘Secret Treasure’ then...” Hermione giggled, her bushy tail wriggling in amusement. “That’s where Harry and I got the idea from to begin with--the painting we access the Unaffiliated Corridor through.”

“Ah... That partly explains the Carrows being unable to locate your ‘House’ in Hogwarts then,” Sirius chortled. “According to Minerva, the Carrows and the Unspeakables have been searching the entire castle to no avail since you left--and none of the professors can seem to find it themselves anymore, even if they wanted to now. Dumbledore must have put an unplottable charm on it as well.”

“Oh...!” said Harry, “So that’s why nobody ever noticed us entering or exiting our ‘House’ once the wall went up at the end of our corridor. I always wondered why nobody seemed to see us going in and out through the portrait...”

“...The unplottable charm must extend beyond the wall into the main-hallway and be keyed to allow only us to see it.” Hermione mused, flicking her furry ears pensively.

“Anyway...” Harry shifted back to the main topic, “to get back to our plan--we’ll get into the Department of Mysteries tomorrow night at 2:30 AM, and we’ve given ourselves a two hour window to find Mr Weasley’s cell and break him out...”
In the end, the modifications which Harry had made to the Invisibility Spell to use on Hermione’s furry tail and ears proved quite effective, and extending it to envelop Hermione in her entirety was a simple matter. Harry waved his wand at Parvati as Dora watched, and she appeared to vanish as well.

“Cor... that’s amazing!” Dora murmured. “I coulda put the Disillusionment Charm on them if I’d had to--but this is even better. Seriously Harry... you could put Invisibility Cloaks outta business. How did you do that?”

“It took me a bit of effort to work out how to modify it to work on living beings instead of objects like Mr Weasley’s car or my Cloak, but honestly, it wasn’t all that difficult once I figured it out,” said Harry, sounding surprised.

“It may be that Harry simply has an affinity for that sort of magic,” said Hermione’s disembodied voice proudly. “He’s descended from one of the three Peverell Brothers, the one who made Harry’s cloak to begin with.”

“Wait... are the Peverell Brothers the ones from that story then?” asked Parvati’s voice. “...the Three Brothers story from The Tales of Beedle the Bard I mean?”

“That’s right,” piped up Hermione again. “It turns out that was just a fairy tale version. In reality the Peverell brothers invented the three items themselves.”

“So the other artifacts are real too?” gasped Dora. “Wow! I bet that wand would be somethin’...”

“Oh... er, I expect so,” said the invisible Hermione awkwardly as Harry raised his eyebrows and tried not to smirk.

“It’d be more trouble than it’s worth really,” Harry said after a pause. “Just look at what happened to the brother in the story. It didn’t end well for him.”

“That’s a good point!” the unseen Parvati agreed.

“Yeah... I suppose that’s right,” Dora said wryly. “Whoever had it would probably end up as paranoid as Mad Eye... always wonderin’ if someone was going to murder them in their sleep to steal the wand... I think I like the cloak better!”

“Maybe we should go invisible too then Harry?” Dora mused. Harry thought about it for a moment.

“That’s not a bad idea actually,” he answered. “At least while we’re in the pictures. When we’re in the Department of Mysteries, we should probably be visible though, because we’ll at least have to interact with Mr Weasley. Do you have the invisibility cloak Mad Eye gave you?”

“Yeah, I’ve still got it,” Dora nodded. “It’s not as amazing as yours--but it’s never failed me yet.

“Well, I suppose we’re as ready as we’ll ever be then,” Harry grinned. “I’ll just make you two visible again until tonight then shall I? Er... hello? Hermione? Parvati...? Are you two still there...?”

Dora clasped her hand to her mouth and giggled in shock when Harry’s trousers and underwear dropped to the floor.
“Oi... what are you two doing?” Harry chortled, not noticing Dora shut the basement door with a gleam in her eyes. “I am so getting you both back for this...”

Harry gasped with pleasure when a wet, warm, and invisible mouth engulfed his exposed erection and invisible hands slipped under his shirt. He felt an invisible cat-tongue swirl around his shaft and invisible lips nuzzling his neck.

“Oh... you’d better get us back for this Mr Potter,” Hermione’s giggly disembodied voice whispered in his ear.

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One of the three Unspeakables guarding Arthur Weasley’s cell grumbled, as another shuffled a deck of cards.

“This is a ruddy waste of a good night’s sleep,” he moaned. “It’s impossible to break into the DoM.”

“And besides... nobody even knows about this detention block,” muttered another. “If Potter ever actually bothers to show up, he’ll head for the holding facility near the Wizengamot chambers with the other ‘Arthur Weasley’...”

“Haha... no doubt!” laughed the first Unspeakable. “I’d love to see Potter’s face when the polyjuice wears off of Brookstone.”

“That’s if Potter actually shows—he didn’t last night,” snorted the second. “And if he were actually able to get through more than a dozen of the Ministry’s finest, and if he actually escaped with Brookstone... What a Bloody Joke! A 14 year old boy and a kitten breaking into the Ministry?”

“You might want to be a bit more cautious,” said the Unspeakable who was still shuffling the cards. “He may just be a kid, but we still can’t figure out how he got out of Hogwarts without anyone seeing...”

“Inside help obviously!” retorted the first Unspeakable. “If I didn’t know you both so well, I’d be worried that one of you is Dumbledore’s mole...”

“Well there you go then!” the card shuffler replied. “How do we even know it’ll be Potter? Maybe Dumbledore or some of his lot will show up... it doesn’t pay to get cocky!”

The first two looked a bit uncomfortable at that.

“Well, even if Dumbledore did show up and got Weasley out, so what?” the second Unspeakable said after a pause. “It doesn’t make much difference in the long run. Everything’s a go now, and the Chief has the Wizengamot locked up in her back pocket...”

“...There’s really nothin’ he could do about it beyond starting a real war against the Ministry--a full on civil war at that. He’d look like the actual villainous rebel that the Chief is makin’ him out to be--and he knows it.”

“Yeah...” agreed the first. “And anyway, if the techs did their job right, the whole point is moot--we’d find him in no time. Like I said, watchin’ the real Weasley is a waste of time.”

“Is that so?” said a cold high pitched voice which made all of the Unspeakables jump out of their skins. “Perhaps you’d prefer to have a lot more time on your hands--say, to visit the Ministry’s Unemployment Services Division?”
“N...no Ma’am... Sorry Chief!”

“Really... we didn’t mean anything by it Minister! We... er... weren’t expecting either of you at the Ministry tonight...”

“That much is obvious!” the Minister snapped.

“I tried to warn them,” muttered the card shuffler.

“That’s very true! This one at least seems to have his head in the right place,” said the Minister’s Deputy in his most condescending tone.

“Too bad it won’t be for long,” the Minister giggled uncharacteristically.

“I beg your pardon Ma’am?” The card-shuffling unspeakable was utterly bewildered.

All of a sudden he had a bad feeling that something was terribly wrong. Stunning spells emerged from thin air behind the three Unspeakables, and all three of them collapsed to the floor in a heap. The Minister, short and squat as she was, loomed over the prone Unspeakables and pointed her wand at each in turn.

“Obliviate,” the Minister murmured three times. Then she and an unseen force hauled the unconscious Unspeakables back to their seats around the little table.

“I’ve found the keys,” said a disembodied voice, and a jangling key-ring festooned with keys floated out of the card-shuffling Unspeakable’s robes. “That’ll make things even easier.”

“Excellent Hermione!” said the Deputy Minister, who was rifling through papers, files, and pamphlets on a nearby desk. “Let’s get Mr Weasley out of here now.”

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Arthur Weasley moaned as he shifted, and his iron shackles clanked. Every nerve ending in his body was on fire, his stomach hurt from lack of food, and his mouth was cracked and dry. Arthur’s jailers had fed him, but a few slices of bread had done very little to curb the hunger pangs. And the most water he’d had was when some Unspeakables had tested out a muggle torture technique on him the day before yesterday.

His foggy brain couldn’t quite remember what they had called it. For some reason he wanted to say “surfboarding,” but that didn’t seem quite right. A deep groaning sound caught Arthur’s attention, and he looked up to see the heavy iron door of his cell swing slowly open. He narrowed his eyes when he saw who it was, and glared venomously at Percy.

Wait... something was wrong. Percy’s face seemed to melt and change. Arthur began to wonder if he’d finally cracked and gone loopy. That couldn’t possibly be...

“No! Impossible...” he said in a creaky voice. “It can’t be you!”

“Mr Weasley--it’s really me, Harry Potter! We’re getting you out of here. But bear with me alright...” The figure with Harry Potter’s face pointed a wand at Arthur’s shackles, and they burst open, releasing his wrists and ankles.

Arthur peered at the toad-like form next to the person claiming to be Harry Potter. He gasped when her face turned into wax and reshaped itself.
“T...Tonks, is that really you?” he gasped.

“Wotcher Arthur... it’s really me!” Tonks replied, grinning broadly. “And we’re really bustin’ you loose. Just stay quiet for a bit. And don’t mind this for now...” Tonks bound Arthur’s wrist to her own. “…that’s just so I don’t lose you on the way out, alright. Now stay quiet and watch yourself-- Harry’s turnin’ you invisible, and I’m gonna put my invisibility cloak back on in a few minutes when we get to the exit...”

Arthur couldn’t believe what was happening. Tonks helped him stagger to his feet as her face changed back into the Minister’s; Harry’s features changed back into Percy’s. The next thing Arthur knew, his entire body became transparent, then vanished completely.

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As the fake Minister and the invisible Parvati helped the equally invisible Arthur Weasley stumble through the corridor in the Department of Mysteries, the unseeable Hermione murmured in the fake Percy’s ear.

“Harry, that’s the room with the Time-Turners which we saw on the way to Mr Weasley’s cell, I think we should do something about it. What if...?”

“...What if the Minister thinks of using them to change what’s happening right now when she finds out that Mr Weasley’s gone? Good point Hermione,” Harry-Percy muttered in response. “I’ll set a few delayed spells in the room to go off in five minutes.”

It only took a moment for Harry-Percy to set the delayed charges: a Bombarda Maxima, a Reducto, and a Confringo... Perhaps it was a bit of overkill, but Harry wanted to be certain that the job was done completely. Then they continued on, keeping an eye out for more Unspeakables as they followed behind Dora-Umbridge.

Harry walked hand in hand with his invisible Hermione, past the door which had mysteriously opened as they had strolled by ten minutes ago going the other direction. Harry-Percy glanced once more into the room at the fountain of Amortentia and shook his head with a snort. The door shut of its own accord once Harry and Hermione had passed it.

The Potters both knew implicitly that the Ministry would never understand the pulsating glowing Orb in the centre of the room which had sung out to Harry and Hermione as they had passed it previously. The Ministry’s comprehension of Love was almost as lacking as Voldemort’s. Having a vat of Amortentia at their disposal was never going to help them unlock the secrets of the Orb of Love.

Harry and Hermione had both been entranced by the glimmering Orb when the door had opened and invited them in; they had been left with the distinct impression that it was trying to communicate with them. The Orb’s luminescence pulsed, throbbing silvery violet, golden red, and blueish white. The shimmering sensation of seraphic ecstasy had sent rippling tingles of static electricity and magic across their skin, its music filling their souls with a sublime joy.

The Potters had been in the room for only a few moments at most, but the tone and intensity of the experience had been eerily similar to the day that the Coven had performed all of their patronuses simultaneously in the Room of Requirement and turned Jennifer into a witch, making her one of their own. Neither of the Potters had wanted to leave the room, but they had dragged themselves away to find Arthur Weasley, their faces wet with tears.

As they made their way back to their exit point, Harry hated leaving it behind in the hands of the
Unspeakables, deep in the clandestine bowels of the Ministry.

“This shouldn’t be a secret, Hermione--none of this research should be. It should all be accessible to the public,” Harry whispered to his invisible wife.

“One day Harry, when we’ve dealt with the Minister... we’ll try and set all of this right.”

Finally Harry-Percy reached the portrait of Prometheus where Phineas Nigellus was waiting for them all. Harry helped the invisible Hermione clamber back into the painting. Once he was certain that Parvati, Dora, and Arthur Weasley were all inside the painting too, Harry leapt up into the frame to join them.

“Thanks for everything Prometheus...” Harry said as he slipped on his invisibility cloak.

“You are welcome Harry Potter... I am most grateful to have met you--and your charming invisible wife,” Prometheus said with a wink. “Do not worry about the abomination who calls herself the Minister... Your secrets are safe with me!”

“Yes... yes! The Potters are delightful--everyone loves them...” snorted Phineas Nigellus “...let’s get a move on...”

As Harry passed beyond the edge of the frame he heard the rumble of an explosion and knew that the Room of Time was destroyed.

Phineas Nigellus led his invisible charges through the other paintings and portraits in the Ministry--none of them the wiser--past the bored Aurors and Unspeakables guarding the corridor which contained the cell of the polyjuiced Unspeakable named Brookstone--and finally reached his own portrait. Then he walked out of the frame and disappeared from the Ministry.

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“Gone? What do you mean Arthur Weasley is gone?” fumed Minister Umbridge. “I just came from the Detention Centre--and Brookstone is still there.

“N...no Minister... I m...mean the r...real Arthur Weasley is gone!” stammered the Unspeakable “I...I was s...sitting outside his cell all night with the other g...guards. We o...opened his c...cell t...to do a morning check... and he was just... gone. And...and th...the T...T...Time Room. It’s utterly destroyed!”

The Unspeakable led the Minister to the Room of Time and she stared at the smouldering, twisted wreckage. The time-turners, the hour-glasses, the bell jar, the clocks--all demolished. Nothing was left but the mangled, blackened innards of Brass clockwork, scattered sand, shards of glass, and charred splinters of wood.

“But that’s impossible!” the Minister snarled. “There is no indication that the Ministry was breached last night. There is absolutely no sign of entrance at all.”

Dolores Umbridge rubbed her forehead, feeling a migraine coming on. The Time Room was a dead loss, but maybe the Weasley situation could still be salvaged.

“What about the Experimental Tracking Spell? Is it working?”

“That was the first thing we checked. B...but no! If Arthur Weasley travels, we might be able to get a hit. But if he’s inside of a warded home with Unplottable and Fidelius Charms--we still haven’t managed to crack those yet.”
“Right then!” Dolores snapped, “Tell the next watch to keep their eye on the tracking monitor. Weasley will probably have to travel at some point. We’ll track him then! Hopefully he’ll lead us to Dumbledore or the Potters when he does move.”

Still seething with rage, the Minister thought it best to take the rest of the day off and dose her migraine heavily with pain potions and calming draughts. Dolores couldn’t afford to let her anger get the better of her, but her last Potter induced hangover had truly been dreadful and she had no desire for a repeat.
“Zey are back,” Fleur let out a huge sigh of relief when she spotted the Potters appear in the painting. “Oh thank goodness...” Jennifer squealed, as Harry and Hermione emerged from the portrait of Phineas Nigellus. “...You’re all safe!” Daphne flung her arms around both Potters as Dora and Parvati helped Mr Weasley clamber out of the picture frame.

Harry had undone the Invisibility Spells before climbing out of the painting, so that everyone could find their footing easily. Luna gave Harry and Hermione a quick kiss, then darted over to hug Parvati and Dora.

“Here, let me help,” said Fleur breathlessly, taking the arm of the groaning Arthur Weasley from Parvati, who looked like she was about to collapse. “Mr Weasley should be in bed...”

Dora and Fleur settled Arthur into the bed in the room nearest to Number 12’s library. Moments later Daphne and Luna arrived with fresh water, towels, washcloths, and medical supplies.

“Just sips Mr Weasley...” Daphne said worriedly as Arthur tried to gulp from the glass of water she was holding for him. “Too much all at once could make you throw up!”

“Does anyone know a good healing spell?” Luna asked as she dabbed Arthur’s sore, bleeding wrists with a wet cloth.

Dora fumbled for her wand, puffed as she was from hauling Mr Weasley back to Number 12 with Parvati, but Fleur already had her own wand in hand. Fleur muttered the incantation and the marks left by the iron shackles faded from Arthur’s wrists. Luna began to dab at Mr Weasley’s feverish sweaty brow instead as Daphne put the empty glass of water down and tipped a pain potion and a calming draught into his mouth.

“Will he be alright?” Jennifer asked anxiously as she peered around Harry, Hermione, and Parvati in the doorway.

“He should be now...” gasped Harry with a nod, still panting as his pumping adrenaline began to subside.

“...but it might be a few days,” continued Hermione, her bushy tail twitching and her glistening eyes full of concern. “He’s clearly been neglected and tortured...”

“Probably the Cruciatus Curse, and who knows what else...?” Harry muttered angrily.

“Eeek!” Parvati squealed and jumped, her sleek black tail bristling when Dobby startled everyone, suddenly appearing with a loud crack.

“Dobby will take over now,” squeaked the eager House-Elf, who appeared to be holding a tureen of broth and a ladle. He set it down on the bedside table and took the damp wash-cloth from Luna to dab Mr Weasley’s forehead himself.
“Are you certain?” Fleur asked dubiously.

“Dobby knows what to do, Mistress Fleur--Dobby is looking after many sick people before. House-Elves is knowing how to do some healing... Master and Mistresses must get their rest now.”

“It’s alright Fleur,” said Harry, grinning for the first time since his return. “Mr Weasley is in good hands.”

“Master Harry and Mistresses must go now--must eat and rest after long day. Dobby leaves late-night snack in the kitchen...” Dobby said, giving everyone a stern look.

Feeling much more cheerful, everyone began to realise that they were indeed famished, as nobody had been able to eat much all day, and gradually they all filed down the stairs to find the “midnight snack.” They discovered that Dobby had indeed prepared for a triumphant return. On the table in the kitchen they found trays loaded with crackers, cheeses, sausage rolls, cucumbers, carrot and celery sticks, and a variety of olives and dips, next to bottles of butterbeers.

The Coven picked up the heavily laden trays and retired to the parlour. But before regaling the others with the details, Harry made a very important mirror-call.

“You’ve got Arthur? Excellent!” Sirius beamed at Harry, “How did it go? You have to tell me everything...”

“Later Sirius,” Lupin admonished Sirius with a grin. “Let Harry rest--he can fill us in on the details tomorrow.”

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Luna was holding her sides, in stitches from laughing so hard as she rolled around on the floor, her fluffy white tail flailing madly.

“That’s f...funny-- ‘more time... to v...visit... Ministry’s Unemployment Services Division’ -- Hahahahahaha...!”

“Mind you, he probably will be looking for a new job when the real Minister discovers that Mr Weasley’s gone in a few hours,” giggled Parvati, her silky black tail waving mirthfully as she opened another bottle of butterbeer.

“Anyway,” Dora continued, roaring with laughter herself, “My favourite bit was when Harry said, ‘This one at least seems to have his head in the right place’... ‘e sounded just like that pompous prat, Percy Weasley...”

“I almost lost it when the one Unspeakable said that they weren’t expecting you two--and Dora retorted ‘That much is obvious’....” Hermione giggled, her bushy ginger tail vibrating with amusement.

Daphne and Jennifer both had tears of laughter in their eyes and Fleur was giggling too. It was nearly 4:30 AM now, but sleep appeared to be an impossibility for the near future. After the giggles died down, the muggle television was turned on and the sun was pouring through the window before the lot of them fell asleep on the sofas and comfy armchairs in the parlour.

When Hermione awoke it was well after noon, and she had Fleur and Daphne’s arms wrapped around her instead of Harry’s. She tried to move without waking either of them, but Fleur felt Hermione stirring.
“Oh... ‘arry did not want to wake you,” said Fleur with a yawn after giving Hermione a kiss. “... ‘e
ees in ze library.”

“Thank you Fleur...” Hermione returned Fleur’s kiss warmly and rubbed the sleep from her eyes as
she went to find Harry. She found him poring over documents in Number 12’s library.

“Oh, Good Morning Hermione... er... Afternoon I mean...” Harry looked up from the table and
smiled when he saw that his wife was awake, but Hermione could sense Harry’s somber mood.

“Hi Harry...” Hermione murmured, returning Harry’s smile with a sad one of her own. “Are those
from the Ministry?” she asked, her furry ears twitching in curiosity.

“Yeah...” Harry replied, “I spotted these pamphlets and files on a desk in the Department of
Mysteries while you and Parvati and Dora were dealing with the guards. I used that Gemino spell
that we found in the really advanced Charms book we brought from Hogwarts to replicate the
documents, and I shoved them in my bag before we got Mr Weasley...”

“How bad is it then?”

“Not good Hermione!” Harry sighed, running his fingers through his messy black hair. “Not good at
all... We’ll have to find some way to get these files to the Order. They should be useful to
Dumbledore in building a case against the Minister...”

“It looks like Minister Umbridge and the Operations Division of the Unspeakable Office has had a
lot of what’s going on now in the works for a long time. They must have been planning this even
long before Voldemort came back--since at least the beginning of our Second Year at Hogwarts if
not earlier! Fudge can’t have known about it though...”

“They’ve been building secret facilities all over Britain--unfortunately they’re unplottable, though
there are at least general locations. There’s a big one in Wales for example.”

Hermione picked up one of the pamphlets from the table, and her bushy tail bristled as her eyes
widened in shock.

“Yeah... that’s a publication they’re producing for general consumption,” Harry muttered darkly. “If
that’s the stuff they’re actually telling the public, then you can bet that whatever they’re doing at the
secret facilities is much worse... Look on page Nine!”

Hermione’s breath quickened and as she flicked through the pages of the pamphlet, *Mudblooms, and
the Dangers they Pose to a Peaceful Pureblood Society.* She bit her lip, her eyes filling with tears
when she found page Nine.

“*Mudblood Relocation Programme?*” Hermione squeaked; her voice quavered and broke into sobs
as the tears began falling, and she began to shake. “This is horrible... I c...c...can’t believe that she’d
g...g...go this far!”

“Here... swallow this--quickly...” Harry could see Hermione was going into shock as she began to
hyperventilate. He picked up one of the vials of calming draught which he had placed on the table,
anticipating this eventuality, and tipped it into her mouth.

“I know...” Harry whispered as he held his sobbing wife tightly and kissed her forehead, gently
stroking her furry ears. “…it’s like Nazi Europe and Grindelwald all over again--except in Britain this
time. I had a bad feeling it was going this way after the trip to Diagon Alley with Dora--you haven’t
seen the new Auror uniforms yet--and the announcement of the Muggleborn Registration
Commission.”
Jennifer and Dora appeared in the doorway of the library with a tea-tray, puzzled expressions on their faces, as the other sleepy yawning members of the Coven peered over their shoulders.

“You should probably put that tray down before you look at this stuff,” Harry warned. “There’s more calming draughts here if anyone needs one.”

Dora picked up the file marked Dick Turpentine after setting down the tea-tray carefully.

“Looks like you and Hermione were right,” she muttered. “They made this bloke up outta whole-cloth. They’ve just had some polyjuiced Unspeakables stealing wands, pretendin’ to be him and a gang of muggleborn...”

~o0o~

Arthur Weasley blinked and the smiling faces came into focus. For the first time in he didn’t know how long, Arthur felt lucid and it no longer hurt to move. As he shifted, he realised that he was in a comfortable clean bed. He really hoped this wasn’t a dream.

“Mrs Potter, Harry, Tonks--is it really you? Is this real? You really did get me out then?”

“Yeah Arthur,” said Dora with a grin, fluorescing her hair violet so that he would know it was really her. “You're really outta that hellhole!”

“It’s really us Mr Weasley!” Hermione smiled sadly at him and squeezed his hand comfortingly.

“Hi Mr Weasley... How are you feeling?” asked Harry, looking concerned.

“Much better... Thank You!” Arthur replied, still feeling a bit confused. “But... but I can’t imagine how on earth you managed to break into the Ministry--the Department of Mysteries especially--and set me free... Where are we?”

“You’re in Number 12 Mr Weasley,” said Harry, his features broadening into a smile as Arthur sat up properly in bed without wincing. “In any case, we had a little ‘inside help’ from Phineas Nigellus...”

Arthur still felt a bit puzzled, but something important forced it’s way into his mind.

“H...how long have I been here?” he asked, suddenly becoming alarmed.

“Two days--you’ve been either asleep or a bit delirious for two days Mr Weasley,” Hermione responded, twitching her furry ears. She gave Arthur’s hand another squeeze. “We’ve been really worried about you.”

“You’re in Number 12 Mr Weasley,” said Harry, his features broadening into a smile as Arthur sat up properly in bed without wincing. “In any case, we had a little ‘inside help’ from Phineas Nigellus...”

Harry sighed and rubbed his forehead, peering anxiously at Hermione.

“Bloody hell! I was just getting used to the idea of holing up here for a bit until Dumbledore came up with a plan! I dunno... what do you think Hermione? Is it worth the risk, us staying?”
“I... I really don’t know Harry--not for certain. We might be alright... but if they’re still working on the other end of it--who knows? It might be best for us to leave...”

“But where would we go...?” moaned Dora.

“We... we could go to my place for a bit,” said a small voice from the doorway. Everyone turned to look at Jennifer.

“It’s in Dorset--in the countryside near Corfe Castle--not far from Poole...” Jennifer continued, looking slightly disturbed. “I don’t think the Ministry knows about it, because I remember Dumbledore and Madam Bones talking about keeping everything that... that... that happened there a secret.”

Everyone was quiet and Hermione’s bushy tail twitched as she tried to gauge Jennifer’s emotional state.

“Are you sure Jennifer?” she gently asked. “You did go through rather a lot there.”

“I... I think I can manage!” Jennifer responded. “And I... I think I need to go there anyway... to really face up to things--to Mum and Dad being gone. And... and there’s loads of room for all of us--it...it’s really nice.” Jennifer peered at Harry almost pleadingly.

Harry felt a surge of emotion as he looked into Jennifer’s pooling dark eyes, and even though he no longer really believed in the House system at Hogwarts, he knew that if Jennifer had been sorted, she would have been in Gryffindor.

He swallowed and blinked back tears, knowing that one day he needed what she needed--closure. With the world in turmoil, Harry had been putting it off--he really hadn’t had a good opportunity. But he had known that one day, he needed to go to Godric’s Hollow... to go home and put the ghosts of his own past to rest.

Hermione took Harry’s hand and gave it a comforting squeeze.

“Yeah... alright Jennifer!” Harry agreed with nod, his voice hoarse. “We’ll do that then. We should get packing--we’ll go as soon as we’re ready.” Harry glanced back at Arthur who looked very relieved. “But what about you Mr Weasley? We can’t just let the Minister take you again.”

“She won’t,” Arthur responded with conviction. “The Order has acquired a number of safe-houses. I can meet Dumbledore at one of them. He should be able to remove the tracking spell--if anyone can, it’s him--and then we’ll just move on to another safe-house and abandon the first...”

~o0o~

It had been a while since Harry had peered into Dumbledore’s piercing blue eyes, and he felt a profound sense of comfort when he saw them again, even if only in the mirror. Dumbledore looked thoughtful for a moment, then he nodded.

“Yes... I do think that would be best for the moment Harry. Jennifer is quite correct, the Ministry has no knowledge of Jennifer’s true background. Send the intelligence you gathered from the Ministry with Arthur. He can apparate to a safe-house the Order has near London. In fact I can meet him there as soon as he is ready.”

Dumbledore’s grave expression softened into a look of pride and gratitude.

“And Harry--thank you! What you and the Coven have accomplished is truly remarkable, please be
sure to give everyone my best. Stay safe for the time-being... If we can prove that the Minister is doing what we think she is doing at these facilities you have uncovered, then we shall be able to rally support and move openly against the Ministry..."

~00o~

The wispy pink clouds caught the rays of the setting sun as the sky turned purple above the copses of beeches, willows, and evergreens encircling the overgrown lawns and gardens of the Elizabethan manor house at the top of the hill. The Coven stood in awe of their new surroundings as the evening breeze brought with it the smell of the sea. Stretched out around them was a patchwork vista of rolling meadows, farms, and woodland, and the steeple of village churches in the distance.

“Wow... this is amazing Jennifer!” Dora’s jaw dropped at the sight. “I ‘ad no idea you were this well off.”

“You have a lovely home Jennifer!” Luna said quietly, her wide eyes drinking in the beauty of the estate as her fluffy tail swished.

“It’s gorgeous!” squeaked Parvati, her sleek black tail undulating in awe.

“Très magnifique!” Fleur gasped.

“What a beautiful view!” said Daphne breathlessly. “I can see the ruins of a Castle in the distance one direction and the sea in the other...”

“The ruins... That’s Corfe Castle,” Jennifer replied, blushing, feeling a bit embarrassed by the opulence. “The house is probably a mess inside though... after...” she trailed off, her eyes stinging with tears.

Hermione curled her bushy ginger tail around Jennifer and Harry embraced the ebony haired witch, as first one then the other gave her a kiss.

“Thank you Jennifer!” Harry murmured, giving her another kiss.

“We’ll make it feel nice again Jennifer... I promise!” Hermione squeezed Jennifer in a tight hug and kissed her again as well. “We’ll make some new happy memories for you here!”

Chapter End Notes
MUDBLOODS
RELOCATION PROGRAM

MUDBLOOD RELOCATION CAMP
WELSH CAMPSITE NO. 1234 000937

RELOCATION PROGRAM 1++ 2++
Chapter 154

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Ma’am, I’ve got a ping...”

“What?”

“Arthur Weasley--I’ve got a ping. It’s not precise, but somewhere in the Borough of Islington. He must have stepped outside of the wards to apparate.”

“Can you narrow it down before he disappears again?” The Unspeakable Operations Division Shift Supervisor began to get excited. This could be the break they were looking for.

“Working on recalibration now Ma’am... I don’t think I can get an accurate current location. But I think I can get enough of a lock on him so that we can pinpoint his reappearance more easily. There... Gah! He’s gone...”

“Damn!” swore the Supervisor, “keep a close watch on the map. Maybe we’ll get lucky...”

“He’s back Ma’am... There he is! Blimey! Much better... I’ve got a general street location--just outside of London in Waltham Cross. He’s just gone inside an Unplottable and a Fidelius Ma’am--I still can’t quite penetrate those... maybe...” The Unspeakable Tech fiddled with the equipment and sighed. “If he steps outside to apparate again, I’ll have another chance to recalibrate--the next place, I think we’ve got him for sure!”

“Excellent... good work! Keep an eye on him. Keep working on those Charms--I’ll send a team to canvas High Street... maybe we’ll get lucky before he moves.” The Supervisor barely dared to hope as she darted into the Operations Centre to quickly mobilise a squad.

~o0o~

“Hmmm... let me see...” Dumbledore peered at Arthur Weasley and held a palm up towards him, reaching out to feel the magic with his senses for several minutes, then he flicked his wand.

“Ah yes...” Dumbledore waved his wand several more times; an emerald and gold spell matrix centred on Arthur Weasley became visible. “I see it. Stay very still Arthur, this will be a bit tricky as I do not wish to simply remove the spell--I want to send a feedback signal...”

Arthur held his breath as Dumbledore traced a complex web of scarlet, silver, and amethyst around Arthur with his wand. The scarlet, violet, and silver filaments of light entwined with the green and gold, flaring brightly, then vanished. Arthur let his breath out and raised his eyebrows questioningly.

“Is it gone?”

“Yes...” Dumbledore nodded as he passed Arthur a new wand, “but we should move quickly! This location is probably compromised... Though with any luck, they shan’t be attempting to use that spell on anyone again anytime soon.”

Dumbledore and Arthur cautiously stepped outside of the brick flats to apparate, peering up and down High Street. A hissing red bolt of magic barely missed them as they ducked, twisting the iron railing at the side of the doorsteps into molten metal with a burst of sparks and smoke, and they heard
shouting. Arthur dropped the Unspeakable who was calling to the others further down the road with a stunning spell, and they both disapparated before anyone else drew near.

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“AAAARGH! Bloody Fucking Hell!” screamed the Unspeakable Tech who was monitoring the map and the now smouldering, sparking tracking apparatus. “I was so close...” he moaned with his head in his hands. “I almost broke through the wards...” he sobbed.

The blood drained from the Unspeakable Supervisor’s face as she examined the wreckage of the equipment. Months of work on the Experimental Tracking Spell had just gone up in smoke.

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“We should probably set up some protective enchantments around the estate before it gets too dark,” Dora murmured.

“Good idea,” said Hermione as she summoned a seventh year Charms book, the advanced Charms book, and a highly specialised book on Protection Charms from her bag. “But I’m not sure which ones would be best...”

“Maybe just a few basics,” Harry responded. “It depends--if we use an Unplottable and a Fidelius, Jennifer’s friends and the post won’t be able to find the place anymore. Jennifer, what do you think about that?”

“Oh... er... I can just set up a postbox at the post-office in the village nearby if necessary,” Jennifer replied, then she reddened and looked slightly tearful. “And I... erm... I haven’t really had any close chums since I was little...”

“After Daddy got promoted to regional manager of the bank for all of South England, he made some clever investments and got super-rich--then we moved here when I was about eight. I do... I did have a few friends from school nearby... but we weren’t very close. I... I didn’t really fit in. It... it’s probably best just to put whatever Charms up you think will keep us safe.”

“Well... er... if you’re sure!?” Detecting more than a hint of ambivalence, Harry’s brows furrowed slightly and he looked at Hermione.

Jennifer bit her lip uncertainly, glancing at Dora and Luna and the others. Hermione could sense Jennifer’s inner-turmoil, her reluctance to confront what must have been a bit of a sore point, warring with her need to tell someone about it.

“Harry and I just don’t want you to feel cut-off from everyone you ever knew before, now that you’re home,” said Hermione gently, curling her bushy ginger tail around Jennifer comfortingly again.

“It... it’s just... you’re the best friends I’ve had in years! More than friends really...” Jennifer finally said in a near whisper, a tear trickling down one cheek. “After primary school, Daddy tried to send me to a public* school at first--but I hated it...”

“Everyone was snobby, and looked down on me because I didn’t come from old money or a peerage--they tormented me horribly for a whole year. So he and Mum let me go to the nearest state high-school the following year.”

“I liked it better at the high-school, because the kids are more like what I was used to growing up
when I was little, and most of them were nice enough I suppose, but... but I could tell that most of my ‘friends’ just thought of me as The Rich Girl. They’d hang out with me a bit, but it was mostly superficial when they did... and they’d often snub me for being a ‘Toff’... even though it was the last thing I’d ever wanted to be.”

“And... and the one girl I really liked--she went off in a huff one day, and I found out that it was because she had always really been jealous of me; that happened not long before... you know...”

Jennifer sniffled and wiped away a few tears, but now that she’d started talking she couldn’t stop.

“I... I didn’t even quite realise how shallow my friendships were until I met you lot! Or at least I tried to pretend not to. And at... at first... I... I thought it was just you all being so nice to me, accepting me... and then turning me into a witch, and making me feel better...”

Jennifer smiled tearily at Hermione and Harry, then at Dora, Luna and the rest of the Coven.

“...but I think... I think it was more than that right from the start--ever since I met Luna... I realise now--more than ever--I’d felt something that very first day--a connection--like I’d finally met people I belonged with... people I could love!” she concluded with a whisper.

~o0o~

The stars shone brightly and the moon had risen over the Coven by the time they had completed warding Jennifer’s estate with every Protection Charm they could think of. The Fidelius had taken the longest to figure out, as not even Dora had learned how to do that one yet. Worn out, they all flopped on the overgrown lawn, the warmth of their affections keeping the chill of the evening sea-breeze at bay.

“We should be able to work out how to key the Charms to make exceptions for non-magical people that we like and trust,” Hermione purred, kissing Jennifer humidly as they lay in the long grasses of the unkempt lawn looking up at the stars, “...just in case. But this should do for now.”

“Thanks loads guys!” Jennifer passionately returned Hermione’s kiss, then leaned over to kiss Harry.

She grinned when Luna and Dora both pressed their lips to hers, and then found herself in a scrum of cuddles and kisses from Daphne, Parvati, and Fleur as well. After a bit, Jennifer sighed in contentment and sat up.

“Well, here goes...” she said. “I suppose we should take a look inside.” Feeling much less anxious, Jennifer lit her wand and unlocked the heavy oak front door with her key.

“So... er... I forgot--there probably won’t be any electricity because nobody’s been paying it for months, and it mightn’t work with all the Magic Charms up anyway. But you can fix that right?”

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” Harry responded as he lit his own wand and entered the Foyer. “Hermione and I both know the spells to make everything run on magic. We can probably just charm the junction box for now--it should go through all the circuits and make everything work...”

“Oh!” Jennifer swallowed and her stomach clenched when she realised where they’d have to go. “It’s... it’s in the basement...”

“We can probably find it Jennifer,” said Hermione, her furry ears twitching with concern. “You don’t have to...”

“No... I’ll be alright!” Jennifer replied, steeling herself. “I should get this over with now!”
Dora put her arm around Jennifer as they made their way to the basement door, which was still ajar. Heart pounding loudly, her breath quickening, Jennifer pushed it open and led the Coven down the steps. The glow of eight lit wands pierced the darkness of the cavernous subterranean room.

“Th... that’s wh...where he usually kept me ch...chained me up... naked...” stammered Jennifer, pointing at the iron leg shackles attached to one of the pillars. “Ratface...”

Daphne squealed and Fleur gasped in horror; the three cat-witches, Hermione, Parvati, and Luna, all hissed and bristled angrily. Dora and Harry felt their stomachs churning in quiet rage. They all knew what Wormtail had done to Jennifer, but seeing where it had happened for themselves for the first time was still a nasty shock.

Jennifer stared at the shackles as her trepidation melted away. She had been dreadfully afraid that seeing them again would trigger a nightmarish relapse into terror, shame, and crawling revulsion.

But all Jennifer was left with was some residual anger; everything else had evaporated in the Room of Requirement the day that her recessive magical genes had been activated by the literally off-the-scale potency and high frequencies of the magic which fueled the Coven’s Patronuses.

Not to mention that Ratface was dead and gone!

“Right then...” she said almost brightly, kicking the shackles out of her way, “The main junction box is over this way."

~o0o~

When the Coven returned up the stairs from the Basement, they found that much of the house was ablaze with the lights which had apparently been left on by the police at the conclusion of their fruitless investigation. Jennifer had been right, much of the house had been left in quite a mess when Voldemort and the forces which had been meeting there had departed to take Azkaban.

“I’m famished now! It’s a good thing we brought sandwiches,” said Jennifer as they walked down the corridor and approached the kitchen, “because everything is probably rotten...”

She gasped in shock as she pushed the door open to the kitchen, coming to a dead halt, bringing up the rest of the Coven short as they all bumped into her. Everyone tried to peer over Jennifer’s shoulders to see what was wrong. Harry burst out laughing.

“Dobby... when did you get here?” he chortled at the cheerful bustling House-Elf.

“Dobby gets here hours ago Master Harry... when Master and Mistresses leave London. Dobby is bringing Master and Mistresses’ owl, just in case of trouble. Hedwig is being much nicer to Dobby this time. But Dobby is sorry he has not had time to clean most of the house yet...”

Jennifer giggled and shook her head as she and the rest of the Coven filed into the bright spotless kitchen, wondering how they could have all missed the delicious smells of the feast that Dobby had prepared for them.

“Where did all the food come from Dobby?” Hermione asked, her furry ears twitching in curiosity.

“House-Elves is being very good at kitchen magic Mistress Hermione,” Dobby replied gleefully, “Where there is little fresh food--we is making into much, and is changing it into what Masters and Mistresses like best. Dobby is finding many tins of food in cupboards...”

“Oh... of course! ” Hermione mentally kicked herself. “That makes sense.”
“I’d forgotten about tins of food,” murmured Jennifer. “Of course most of those would still be good.”

“So you’ve been in here cooking and cleaning the kitchen the whole time we’ve been outside setting up Protection Charms then... and we didn’t even know it?” Harry said in amazement; he had told Dobby and Hedwig where they were going and to follow along, but he hadn’t really expected this.

“Oh no...” the Happy House-Elf beamed. “Dobby is also cleaning all the bathrooms, one of the parlours, and one of the bedrooms besides the main kitchen and making dinner. But Dobby is not having enough time to clean all the rest of the house...”

Jennifer gaped in awe.

“I should think not,” she squeaked. “There’s eighteen bedrooms if you include the servant’s quarters, six bathrooms, a library, two studies, two dining rooms, the main kitchen and the servant’s kitchen, three parlours, a sunroom, a ballroom, and a recreation room with a swimming pool. And that’s not including the basements, the coal cellar, the attic, the garage, and the three bedroom farm-cottage near the stables... and the barn.”

“It’s no wonder Voldemort picked this estate,” squeaked Daphne, half in amazement, half sorrowfully. “It’s bigger than my family’s. Though... we do also have a Chalet in Switzerland.”

“I think it’s almost as big as Madam Black’s estate!” Dora interjected.

“Even my family’s, our home ees large, but not so grand,” Fleur added.

“Did you have horses then?” asked Parvati, her sleek black tail quivering almost hopefully.

“And a farm too?” chimed in Luna.

“No,” Jennifer shook her head. “The main farm had already been sold decades ago. That’s at the bottom of the hill behind us, with a much bigger farm house. The cottage on the estate was for the stable and grounds-keepers. We didn’t have horses though. But there’s a beautiful pond in the gardens which you haven’t seen yet, and I think there’s over a 115 acres on this hill, about half of it woods.”

“Honestly...” she continued, sounding a lot like Hermione, “this has always seemed too much to me. We were just average when I was little. I don’t really know what possessed my father once he’d made a fortune... It was only the three of us in this house with a butler and a maid. I would have been happier in a nice little cottage with just Dad and Mum and having my old friends around to play.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” Harry said, nodding as he sat down at the kitchen table next to Hermione and took her hand. “I still feel really weird about my godfather just giving me Number 12 and three of his family’s vaults at Gringotts stuffed to the ceiling with all kinds of gold and treasures... I suppose I could buy a posh place in the country too without making much of a dent in even one vault, but I don’t really see much purpose to that.”

“I’d rather just share what I have with people in need... and people I love!” Harry added earnestly as he looked at Jennifer with a tender expression. He turned his gaze to Hermione, who was purring, and kissed her. Then Harry looked around at the rest of the Coven before turning back to Jennifer.

“Number 12 is much nicer when it’s full of family.”

Jennifer smiled tearily at Harry in commiseration as she sat down at the table and took Dora’s hand. She wiped the tears away again and peered around the table as Daphne and Fleur, and Luna and Parvati took seats as well.
“I miss Mum and Dad...” Jennifer said in a slightly croaky voice, “but you’re right Harry. You’re all my family now, and I’m happy you’re all here to fill this house up. It’s not just my house anymore, it’s yours too. Now we’ve got a place in the country, and a place in the city for when we get rid of that awful Minister.”

~o0o~

After dinner, Harry had to order Dobby to get some rest, when it appeared that the all too eager House-Elf was ready to spend all night cleaning every room in the Manor and in the cottage as well.

“But only Mistress Jennifer’s bedroom is being cleaned yet,” moaned Dobby. “Dobby must still clean rooms that werewolves and rodent-man has stayed in. They be shedding everywhere... And rooms which had dirty Snatchers and Misters Crabbe and Goyle is needing much sanitising!” Dobby grimaced as he concluded his complaint.

“It’s alright Dobby,” said Jennifer, grinning at the rest of the Coven, “I’m sure we can make my bed big enough with magic for all of us tonight.”

The portrait of Phineas Nigellus grumbled about being dislocated from Number 12 when he was placed on the wall in one of the parlours after being pulled out of Harry’s bigger-on-the-inside bag. The Wiz-Vision screen was taken out of Hermione's bag and set up in the same parlour while Phineas went exploring through the muggle paintings in the manor.

Jennifer took everyone on a tour through the rest of the opulently decorated house. Dora and Hermione were both tempted to have a go at the grand piano in one of the other parlours, but thought that could probably wait. One of the studies had been turned into an art studio.

“Wow... these are amazing!” said Dora as she admired the oil paintings.

“Yeah, they’re fantastic!” Harry agreed, wondering if he’d ever be able to manage anything quite as nice whenever he got around to making some time to do some painting himself.

“Who painted them?” asked Hermione a bit breathlessly as her bushy ginger tail flicked.

“Some are my Mum's, but most of them are mine,” Jennifer blushed.

“Oh... this one has a first prize,” Luna swished her fluffy white tail when she peered at the landscape painting that Parvati, Fleur, and Daphne were swooning over. “Is that one yours too?”

“Er... yeah,” Jennifer nodded, turning even redder. “That... that’s when my friend--the girl I really liked--that’s when I found out she was jealous of me... I didn’t know--she hadn’t told me she was going to enter a painting too. I wouldn’t have entered this in the show if she’d told me she was going to enter one herself!”

Everyone began making sympathetic noises and giving Jennifer kisses when a familiar figure wandered onto the canvas. Harry regarded the painted person with raised eyebrows, trying not to smirk at the awed expression on the figure’s features.

“My word!” gasped Phineas Nigellus after a stroll through the paintings of the manor, “Well... it’s a bit untidy--could definitely use a few house-elves, but this is quite an upgrade from Number 12, Potter!”

Chapter End Notes
* "public schools" in England are actually private schools... :P (in England real public schools are called "state-schools")

Generally speaking for centuries they were boy's boarding schools. But by the mid 20th century there were also girl's boarding schools. It's children's stories about such schools which largely inspired Hogwarts. In later decades many became coed, and started also accepting day-pupils.
Chapter 155

Jennifer awoke to the pitter-pat of gentle rain on the balcony and the muted light of a wet dawn, stretching out her toes and sighing contentedly in the nest of warm bodies that belonged to her new family. It felt really good to be with them in the bed which she had grown up in, enlarged though it was.

She could feel Dora’s sweet warm breath and soft lips against the bare skin of her shoulder, the older girl’s arm around her slender waist. And she could hear from the other side of Dora, the peaceful slumbering purrs of Luna and Parvati, and the soft breathing of Fleur and Daphne.

Hermione’s nakedness was snuggled right up against Jennifer’s own nude form on the other side, her bushy ginger tail curled around Jennifer’s midriff. The cat-witch’s golden-brown tresses spilled across Jennifer’s other shoulder, and one of her hands rested between the top of Jennifer’s inner-thighs.

A swell of emotion came over Jennifer and she leaned slightly, pressing her lips against Hermione’s forehead. As she did so, her hand came into contact with Harry’s arm, which was coiled around Hermione, and realised that he was stirring awake too.

“Morning Harry,” she whispered when his green eyes smiled at her from under his messy black hair as he lifted his head over Hermione’s shoulder.

“Morning Jennifer,” he whispered back.

“Hermione was right,” she murmured happily as she clasped Harry’s warm hand, “I’ve only been home one night with you all, and you’ve already made some nice new memories for me here.”

Harry gave Jennifer a lopsided grin. He had to admit, he’d been a bit surprised when Jennifer had stripped to the skin at bedtime, expecting everyone else to follow suit. It had been more of a heated snugglefest than a full-on romp. But everyone had been brought to completion at least once--if not twice--with caressing fingers in their slick folds, gentle hands encircling Harry’s stiffness, entwining tongues and lips, breasts pressed against each other.

Harry leaned over Hermione a bit more as Jennifer leaned towards him and their lips met for a moist, tender kiss. Hermione began to stir, feeling Harry’s erection pressing into her backside.

“Morning you two,” she said, furry ears twitching cheerily as her lips joined Jennifer’s and Harry’s.

Hermione giggled when she realised that her hand was still trapped between Jennifer’s naked thighs. She slid it up to gently cup Jennifer’s downy covered mound, then slipped her fingers inside the other girl’s moist bare cleft, wriggling her own naked bottom to make room for Harry’s stiffness between her cheeks.

Harry grinned and slid one of his hands under and around Hermione to squeeze one of her firm little globes, tugging on the hardening nipple with his fingers. His other hand grasped Hermione’s hip as he began to thrust his penis into the valley of Hermione’s bottom cheeks. He could feel the tip poking Hermione’s humid slit, sliding along its length as he pressed forth.

Hermione purred, her bushy tail thrumming back and forth over Harry, and then over Jennifer as they gyrated together. Dora woke suddenly with a grin when she realised what was happening. She slid her own hands across Jennifer’s smooth, satiny belly, and up her torso to entrap the younger girl’s shimmery breasts, pressing her own breasts into Jennifer’s back while nuzzling her neck.
“Oh, are we starting again?” giggled Luna as she rubbed the sleep from her eyes and whisked her fluffy white tail. She gave Dora and Parvati both kisses, before leaning over Parvati to kiss Fleur and Daphne.

“Mmm... ees always a nice way to start ze day,” murmured Fleur as the bed began to squeak.

“I’d say so too,” Parvati yawned, wriggling her sleek black tail as she stirred between Daphne and Luna. “Rise and shine sleeping beauty,” she giggled, giving the still slumbering Daphne a wet kiss on the lips.

When Fleur pressed her own lips to Daphne’s, Daphne’s eyelashes finally fluttered open. Daphne had felt every kiss, but been drifting on a peaceful sea of bliss.

“Can’t you guys let a girl sleep?” Daphne teased, as she returned everyone’s kisses. Then she felt the bed rocking and grinned, understanding why they’d been so insistent.

Harry was surprised at just how nice it felt to simply thrust his erection into the hollow where the cleft of Hermione’s bottom cheeks met her thighs, wondering why they’d never tried that before. Hermione’s purring grew louder as Harry’s motions became more vigorous and his shaft rubbed between the damp lips of her entrance, the tip striking her fleshy nubbin. Jennifer moaned as her sopping tightness clenched around Hermione’s probing fingers, and Dora tweaked her nipples, sucking and nibbling her neck.

Finally Harry succumbed the delightful friction; he groaned as the waves of bliss took him and he burst. Jets of his viscous white fluid spurted between Hermione’s legs, flooding her labia and upper thighs, spilling onto the sheets of the bed.

The force of Harry’s release sent several ribbons of ejaculate flying from the tip his penis poking out from between Hermione’s thighs, spattering against Hermione’s busy hand. Strands of his semen landed on Jennifer’s thighs and mound. When she felt Harry’s stickiness strike her sensitive skin as Hermione’s thumb twirled her clitoris, and Dora tugged on her nipples, Jennifer trembled and quaked, exploding into ecstasy, dousing Hermione’s fingers with her own dewiness.

The bed continued to rock as the Coven greeted the morning with aplomb.

~o0o~

After everyone had showered and dressed, Dobby brought them breakfast in the parlour with the enormous flat-screen television and Harry turned on the BBC morning news. One news segment in particular drew little gasps of horror from the coven. The eggs and bacon in Harry’s stomach churned, and he was glad that he had finished eating.

“Blimey!” Harry muttered in surprise, “Another Inferi attack in Yorkshire... I thought those would be done with by now.”

“Walkers...?” squeaked Daphne. “Is that what muggles call Inferi then?”

“Well, the BBC just called them zombies during their coverage of the Gateshead attack,” Harry replied with a puzzled frown.

“The media must have taken to calling them ‘Walkers’ because of that popular American television show,” said Hermione, her furry ears twitching pensively. “I suppose there are still some of those ‘contagious’ ones running around...”

“...and the Ministry hasn’t been able to catch all of them!” Harry nodded in understanding.
“Or worse...” Hermione added, trailing off.

“Wait... you don’t really think...?” gasped Fleur. Dora’s eyes widened in shock when she realised what Hermione was implying.

“...That the Ministry might be making a few of their own!” Hermione bit her lip anxiously. “They might be...” she said in a small voice. Jennifer and Daphne shared frightened looks with Luna and Parvati.

“Bloody Hell!” swore Harry as he rubbed his forehead. “You’re right Hermione! I wouldn’t put it past the Minister to make a few Inferi as well. She might be doing it to help the muggle Prime Minister...”

“...to add to a climate of fear for him to exploit politically,” Hermione concluded with a nod.

“I suppose we’re just lucky that wizards will stop them from turning everyone then?” said Jennifer hopefully.

“Yeah...” Harry sighed. “The Ministry will probably keep them from getting out of hand. It wouldn’t do to have too many running amok--just enough to keep people frightened. I'm just glad that the Inferi were put down and only a few people were killed. I suppose it could have been much worse...”

Everyone hoped that the worst of the news was over, but the final segment was perhaps even more disturbing, if that was possible.

“Oh no!” groaned Parvati, her glossy black tail whipping in agitation. Everyone turned to look at Harry, who appeared surprisingly unperturbed.

“It was *bound* to happen sooner or later,” said Harry, grimacing. “I’ve been thinking about it ever since Mad Eye wrote and told me that the Muggle PM was calling Sirius an ‘International Terrorist’ and blaming him in part for the Sunderland Stadium attack...”

“But now the muggle government is trying to say that *you* are too Harry!” said Parvati angrily. “They’ve got a warrant out for your arrest!”

“How can they do that? You’re only 14!” Daphne looked stricken.

“Your face is all over the news!” Jennifer moaned.

“Harry will be alright...” said Luna serenely. “He’s a metamorphmagus... like Dora!”

“Yeah... try not worry too much,” said Dora with a wry smile. “Harry’s brilliant at it. And except for Dumbledore, Sirius, and Lupin, nobody else knows that Harry is one besides us.”

“I just won’t be able to go out in public as myself for awhile,” said Harry.

“And it’ll *really* throw them off if Harry goes out in girl form,” Hermione smirked, curling her bushy tail around him. “They *definitely* won’t be looking for him as a girl.”

Harry grinned when he spotted the sudden hungry gleam in everyone’s eyes and remembered an unfulfilled promise. Dora shook her head and chuckled sympathetically.

“Looks like you lot will be getting your supermodel-Harriet fashion show finally,” Harry chortled.
“Oooh! I’ve got loads of lovely clothes for you to try in my wardrobe Harry!” said Jennifer eagerly, her face brightening.

~o0o~

The girls spent the next few hours giggling and ransacking Jennifer’s chests of drawers and her wardrobe, making Harriet try on everything they could find while Hermione and Dora watched, chuckling in amusement. Daphne, Fleur, Parvati, and Jennifer were the most excited about choosing the clothes which would best suit Harriet, but Luna thought it was loads of good fun.

Harriet didn’t mind as much as she had thought she would. And Harriet had to admit that she rather enjoyed the satiny feeling of the girls undergarments against her skin, and she considered ordering some silk boxers from Hermione’s catalogue for when she reverted to boy form. But she was still a bit relieved when they finally stopped after finding a dress which set off her skin tones and eye colour nicely.

“Very pretty...” said Jennifer with a grin.

“You’re gorgeous Harriet!” said Hermione happily, giving her a warm kiss. “I’m glad that some of us have such good fashion sense. Now we can go into the little village nearby with Jennifer...”

“But not until after we’ve disguised you up a bit, Hermione,” Dora interjected. “The transfiguration disguise spells aren’t nearly as good as being a metamorphmagus of course--they’re not as complete, they’re not long-lasting, and they’re easily undone by other wizards if they suspect who you really are... But it should be good enough to pass you off for a short time, especially in a muggle village where nobody knows you.”

After Harriet made Hermione’s bushy tail and furry ears invisible, Dora waved her wand and muttered a few incantations. Hermione’s hair straightened and lengthened, turning a dark shade of auburn. Her face rounded, eyebrows and nose taking on a slightly different shape, and her eyes turned hazel. Harriet could still just make out that it was Hermione, but she could see that it would be effective enough to fool anyone who didn’t know her.

“Yeah... you just can’t do such a complete job, but it’ll do!” said Dora. “The most important thing is that you’re just as pretty as before!” she concluded with a wink and a giggle.

“So... er.... should we all go?” Harriet asked the others.

“No... The rest of us can come down another day for a look around the village together,” said Luna wisely, giving her head a little shake with a sad smile at Jennifer. “It might be a bit much for us to all visit Jennifer’s parents’ grave the first day she’s back.”

Thankfully, the rain was only moderate as Harriet, Dora, and Hermione walked down the driveway to the wrought-iron gates at the bottom of the hill, and then down the country avenue lined with dripping beeches and elm trees to the nearby village. Jennifer led the way, holding Dora’s hand, each with an umbrella in their other hands.

Harriet walked arm in arm with Hermione, holding a large umbrella over the both of them, glad that Jennifer had nice sensible walking shoes to go with her dresses. She was certain that she wouldn’t manage even a few metres through the puddles in heels, to say nothing of three kilometres. Harriet was wearing a pretty tan overcoat over the green dress which had been chosen for her by the others. She tingled slightly when she felt a cool breeze between her thighs, unused to the sensation.

Hermione spotted the slightly awkward look on Harriet’s face and smiled impishly.
“So how does it feel?” Hermione asked. Harriet grinned, turning a bit pink.

“It’s a bit weird not wearing trousers or shorts...” Harriet replied. “As a boy, I never really got the appeal of kilts, or how loads of older wizards just wear robes. But there’s... there’s something sort of... er... nice about it actually.”

Their first stop was in the little village grocery-and-post-office. Several villagers gawked in surprise when they spied the new arrivals, and whispered to one another. A fat grey tabby cat lazily reclining on one of the counters spotted Hermione and began purring loudly.

“Miss Watts!? ” gasped the cheery round shop-owner when she turned around to see who her cat was purring at. “It’s so lovely to see you again dear! I’m dreadfully sorry about your parents... such a shame,” she said sympathetically.

“Er... thank you Mrs Kindling,” said Jennifer, swallowing nervously as she squeezed Dora’s hand for support.

“Are these lovely young ladies some new friends of yours then?” asked Mrs Kindling, smiling warmly at Dora, Hermione and Harriet.

“Er... yeah, they’ll be staying with me for a bit,” Jennifer replied, blushing. “I... er... I just thought I’d hire a post box if you’ve got one available.”

“Of course dear...”

After leaving the shop, they strolled through the cobbled streets peering at the buildings, many of which were centuries old.

“That’s the village church which Mum and Dad went to over there...” Jennifer began, before being interrupted by a squeal.

“Jennifer?” squeaked a blonde girl who looked about the same age as Hermione and Jennifer. “Is that really you? Where have you been?”

The blonde girl darted across the street and gave Jennifer a teary hug. Judging from Jennifer’s stiff response, Harriet thought it might be the same girl that she had liked, but fallen out with.

“Er... Hello Anna...!” Jennifer said awkwardly.

“I... I heard about your parents... and that you had been taken to the hospital...” sniffled Jennifer’s old friend, wiping some tears away. “I... I just...” Anna’s voice caught as she trembled. “...I’m sorry! ... For everything! ... I was horrid the last time I saw you.”

Jennifer bit her lip and glanced at Dora and Harriet who both appeared a bit uncomfortable, then she caught Hermione’s eyes. Hermione smiled and nodded slightly. Jennifer softened and turned back to her old friend.

“Thanks Anna...” she said, returning the other girl’s hug. “I’m sorry too! If I’d known...”

“No... it’s alright! Really... I was silly not to tell you I was entering a painting too. I just wanted so badly to win... even though I knew you’d entered... especially because you’d entered,” Anna nearly whispered, shamefaced. “I... I thought if I could beat you...”

Anna couldn’t bring herself to finish her sentence. She peered at Dora, Hermione, and Harriet, seeing their concerned faces, and squeezed Jennifer’s hand.
Anyway,” Anna continued haltingly, casting her eyes down. “I... I know I hurt you badly... I’m glad you’ve made some new friends Jennifer! Maybe one day... Well... I should let you go... see where your parents are buried!”

The blonde girl released Jennifer’s hand. Before Jennifer could voice a response, the girl dashed back across the street, splashing through the puddles as she turned a corner and disappeared. Jennifer swallowed, blinking back tears.

“It’ll be alright Love,” Dora murmured as she took Jennifer’s arm with one of her own. She brushed some stray strands of ebony hair out of Jennifer’s face and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You’ll see ‘er again someday...”

~o0o~

The peaceful cemetery of the little church backed onto a small wooded area of hawthorn, elm trees and shrubbery, beyond which lay an open field. The church itself was hidden by hedges and trees except for the steeple, and nobody else was around in any case, as morning services were long over.

Several little red fox kits played nearby in the wet grass, squeaking and tumbling over the graves. They hid behind a gravestone when they spotted the newcomers, but didn’t run away when the young witches approached. Harriet’s breath caught in delight as she quietly pointed out to Hermione the adorable little faces with quivering whiskers peeking out from behind the stone.

Dora and Jennifer both smiled when they spied the foxes as well. Jennifer gave a little gasp when she realised whose names were on the stone they were hiding behind. She bit her lip and tears trickled down her cheeks as she said goodbye to her mum and dad, feeling comforted in Dora’s arms, glad to have Harriet and Hermione with her as well.

Harriet cuddled Hermione as the raindrops began falling again, not bothering to open their umbrella, feeling the sting of tears in her own eyes. Hermione looked about furtively to make sure that nobody was spying on them and gave Harriet a kiss on the lips.

“One day Hermione...” Harriet whispered as her tears were lost in the rain. “One day soon... I need to visit Godric’s Hollow!”
Chapter 156

Hermione could feel Harry tossing and turning in the bed, and even without her extra senses she knew that he was more upset than he’d been letting on all afternoon and evening. Dobby had finished cleaning all of the bedrooms since breakfast time and they had taken their own room, as had Luna and Parvati, and Fleur and Daphne. Dora had stayed with Jennifer of course. It wasn’t that the Coven wouldn’t have minded sleeping in the same bed every night, but unfortunately that was all-too-often a recipe for very little sleep, as they tended to become a lot friskier when they were all together.

“Are you alright Harry?” Hermione asked as she coiled her bushy tail and arms around him. “Are you thinking about your parents?”

Harry pondered for a moment before replying.

“Actually, no...” sighed Harry. “I can’t stop thinking about what the Minister is doing. Every day, more muggleborn are going to disappear into her pits... and there may be more Inferi attacks. I can’t just sit here and do nothing, hoping that the Order eventually works it out--I’ve got to do something--I’ve got to help...”

Hermione trembled slightly; she had known it would eventually come to this, and she couldn’t bring herself to disagree. She couldn’t counter with the fact that the muggle government was now after Harry as well, because Harry could be whoever he needed to be. And in any case, Hermione rather felt the same way.

“What should we do Harry?” she murmured.

“We need to help the Order find those detention centres and expose them for the death traps that they surely are... catch the Ministry in the act and make it public--rally support to fight the Ministry head on. We need to take the fight to them... tear those places down.”

“If they really are making Inferi, they have to be using those facilities to make Inferi from whoever they’re killing--they wouldn’t dare do it at the Ministry... We should start by looking for the big one in Wales...”

“I... I agree Harry...” Hermione sniffled. “It’s just... it’s... it’s so nice and peaceful here with you and the others... I wish we could just all stay here and grow old together.”

“Me too Hermione,” said Harry, pulling her closer to him and squeezing her tightly as she wept quietly. Harry kissed Hermione deeply until they both relaxed.

“We will grow old together Hermione... all of us...”

“...but we have a job to do...” said Hermione, nodding as she wiped away her tears. “I know! But we can’t just rush into it headlong...”

“...we need to be sure about what we’re doing! Of course Hermione. We should stay here for a little bit--but not too long, maybe a few days--and find the most useful spells in our books that we can...”

“...we’ll practice them for a bit and then... when we think we’re ready, then we’ll go...” Hermione agreed, nodding again.
Albus Dumbledore felt haggard and old. He sighed as he continued to peruse the information gained from the Coven’s excursion to rescue Arthur Weasley from the Ministry. As he had been dreading, all the signs pointed to a situation surely as bad as had been faced in Europe in the 1930’s and 40’s. He sipped his tea and set his cup down, took off his spectacles and massaged his forehead before looking up at some of the key members of his inner-circle.

Minerva McGonagall, Severus Snape with Narcissa Black at his side, Amelia Bones, Alastor Moody, and the rescued Arthur Weasley: they all sat huddled at one end of the long ebony table in Narcissa’s home, shuffling their own copies of the documents relieved from the Department of Mysteries. Severus flared his nostrils and peered at Dumbledore, raising his eyebrows.

“Potter... Harry--he won’t wait long. You know that don’t you?” said Severus evenly. “He’s not the sort who will sit out a fight while others are being harmed. We must act... and we must act soon.”

“I agree,” growled the grizzled ex-Auror. “We have actionable intelligence for the first time thanks to the Potters and their friends... Now’s the time! We need to take the fight to the Ministry...”

“Severus and Alastor are right Albus,” said McGonagall as Amelia Bones nodded vigorously. “If we wish Harry and the girls to survive, and live to grow as old as us...”

“Well... as old as me hopefully,” Albus interjected with a sardonic chuckle. “Of course we shall act! We cannot just sit on this! We must find these facilities and destroy them, collecting as much evidence as we can. And then we need to retake Hogwarts so that it can be a proper sanctuary, and a proper base for a larger force against the Ministry.”

“Mr Lovegood and Ms Skeeter are very near to finding the keys to unlocking the Wiz-Vision. We need to be ready to make our appeal to the public at large and show them the evidence the moment that the Quibbler is ready to interrupt the broadcasts. Once that has been accomplished, we can indeed, ‘take the fight to the Ministry’...”

“And the Minister is very near to overplaying her hand by having the muggle Prime Minister order that an arrest warrant be issued for young Harry, in terms of exposing her own collusion and drawing the attention of the ICW...”

“It is my considered opinion, that the only reason she has not yet had the muggle authorities issue one for me, is because she knows that I have already petitioned the ICW myself to intervene. But currently, the ICW views this as an ‘internal matter.’ That would likely change if they feel that the Minister is overstepping her bounds by revealing me to the muggle world... it would bring her collusion into sharp relief, and they would no doubt begin an Investigation at the very least...”

“Maybe we can cause her to slip up then... if we make her angry enough!” said Arthur Weasley. “What if we can get her to try and expose you? Surely, if we find some of these facilities and take them out...”

“That is a distinct possibility!” Dumbledore nodded thoughtfully as he stroked his long silvery beard. “It may be a longshot... she displays a remarkable amount of restraint for one such as herself, but it is indeed something to hope for, as she does also have a penchant for pushing her plans to their breaking point...”

“In the meantime though, we cannot rely on help from the outside, except for those forces which Monsieur Delacour has placed at our disposal. Yes... it is time for us to make our move...”
“What about Mr Potter?” said Amelia, a worried expression on her face. “If Severus is correct, should you not order Mr Potter, his wife, and friends to remain safe wherever they are hidden...?”

“Believe me Amelia,” Albus peered at her with his clear blue eyes, “If I believed that the Potters and their friends would obey that particular order, I would issue it in a heartbeat. However, I do not wish to give Harry any reason to act with willful disregard. Should he feel the need to act against my explicit wishes, it is possible that he could become reckless...”

“Harry has proved time and again how capable and resourceful he is, when encouraged and given the tools he needs to accomplish the task at hand...”

“But he’s only 14 years old Albus,” snapped Minerva as Amelia nodded and indicated her agreement with Professor McGonagall. “You can’t just send a 14 year old boy...”

“And yet...” Dumbledore said in a tone which quieted Minerva at once, “...at 11 years old, he had the courage, moral fortitude, and the presence of mind to defeat Voldemort with nothing but his prodigious abilities, an Invisibility Cloak, the considerable assistance of the young lady who is now his wife, and a well played chess match by Arthur Weasley’s son.”

“Then, between him and his wife, at 12 and 13 years old, the pair of them uncovered the plot behind the opening of the Chamber of Secrets, and also exposed the truth of Voldemort’s Horcruxes... Following that, not only did Harry and his wife survive the Triwizard tournament--with proper training from Alastor and Nymphadora Tonks I might add--they also saved every other contestant from certain death...”

“And I do not think I need to remind anyone, how the Potters helped us locate and destroy all of the Horcruxes... and how they and their friends destroyed most of Voldemort’s army of monsters, and made it possible to kill Voldemort once and for all!”

“Finally, the Potters and their friends penetrated a secured facility in the heart of the Ministry which has long been considered impenetrable, and executed a successful rescue of Arthur... with members of the Order on standby if needed, as thankfully, Harry had the presence of mind to inform Sirius and Remus of their extraction plan.”

“Harry, his wife, and their friends have proved their worth as full members of this Order, and proved their ability to survive the most terrible dangers... especially when fully informed, when encouraged, and when given the proper tools for the job.”

“I do INDEED wish them to survive... which is why I shall be calling Harry on the morrow, and advising him to act as he sees fit... as long as he continues to keeps us informed of his team’s activities, and continues to seek council from Order members...”

“If I do not... Harry may feel it necessary to act anyway, without our knowledge, and with clouded emotions--and that would be far more likely to lead to him--or a member of his team--coming to grave harm!”

Minerva and Amelia glanced at each other, then back at Albus, both of them sighing, realising sadly that Dumbledore was correct.

~o0o~

Harry was stunned when he received the mirror call the following morning. He had just finished cleaning his teeth when Hermione entered the bathroom.
“Harry... it’s Dumbledore. He wants to speak to you.”

Harry peered into those clear blue eyes in the mirror and he felt a surge of emotion as the real Headmaster of Hogwarts spoke for several minutes.

“Really sir?” gasped Harry. “You’re alright with this? And how did you know what I was thinking of doing?”

“Well, Harry,” said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling at Harry’s surprise and eagerness, “let me just say that after knowing you for some years now, I and a few of my colleagues have gained a fairly good understanding of your true nature--and the natures of those who love you most...”

“I only ask that you proceed with utmost caution, and continue to keep members of the Order apprised of your current situation... and that you continue relying on your wife’s keen senses and intellect!”

“Yes sir... of course I will!” said Harry, filling with a sense of elation as he grinned at Hermione, who was blushing furiously at the last part of Dumbledore’s admonition.

Harry and Hermione chatted with Dumbledore a few minutes working out a plan before saying goodbye. Barely a few seconds passed between the disappearance of Dumbledore’s image and the flickering appearance of two familiar faces in the mirror as Harry’s name was called out.

“Sirius... Lupin,” Harry beamed. “What’s up?”

“Dumbledore,” said Sirius with an easy grin. “He called us earlier to let us know what the current plan of attack is. And Remus and I will both be able to assist you if you need us...”

“I’ve just managed to complete my animagus wolf form in record time,” interjected Lupin, who looked positively thrilled. “Apparently all those years as a turned werewolf were good for something! The transformations...”

“They left you some sort of cellular memory didn’t they?” squeaked Hermione as she peered over Harry’s shoulder at Lupin and Sirius in the mirror.

“That they did Hermione!” grinned Lupin.

“In any case,” Sirius continued. “That means we can both leave the Shrieking Shack in our canine forms without discovery, and then apparate to your aid as needed.”

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“...so we’ll all be looking up any other useful spells we can find and practicing for a bit--I’d say about a week tops! And then we’re heading for Wales to search for the facility there!” said Harry as he peered around the kitchen table, pleased to see the eager faces of the Coven.

Hermione’s bushy tail flicked happily as she sensed everyone’s readiness. Jennifer had a steely look of resolve in her eye.

“We’re ready any time you are Harry!” Luna stated matter-of-factly as Parvati nodded in agreement, both swishing their furry tails.

“Smashing Harry!” Dora exclaimed. “I can’t wait to show those bastards what for...!”

“Hear, Hear!” said Fleur, her eyes glinting. “It is time to do battle...” she glanced at Daphne and gave
her hand a gentle squeeze.

But Fleur needn’t have worried. Daphne’s own features had hardened as Harry spoke, and Daphne had felt a thrill at having a clear goal—especially one which included ridding Britain of those like the Malfoys.

“I’m ready too Harry!” said Daphne, a hint of ice in her voice.

“Good!” said Harry. “But don’t forget... This isn’t just about destroying these facilities and fighting whoever’s running them. If we want to go after the Ministry directly, we need evidence that Mr Lovegood and Rita Skeeter can show when they break into the Wiz-Vision broadcasts...”

“Harry,” Jennifer interjected breathlessly, her eyes gleaming with a sudden idea, “I’ve just been thinking. I’ve got a video camera and a laptop. If you and Hermione can make them work with magic...”

“...Then we might even be able to use them for live feeds once Mr Lovegood and Rita are up and running!” gasped Hermione, her bushy tail quivering with excitement. “That’s brilliant Jennifer!”

“Excellent!” Harry exclaimed with a grin, “That solves one of the issues that Hermione and I were both considering... Right then! Once we’ve done as much damage as we can and have some evidence, we’re to meet up with the Order at Madam Black’s house and then we’re going to make a plan to retake Hogwarts...”
Chapter 157

After breakfast the Coven used magic to clear out the barn—which was really more like an enormous shed—and moved the muggle grounds-keeping equipment to the stables. Luna, Daphne, Parvati, and Jennifer, all began flicking through pages of schoolbooks looking for useful spells to practice. Harry pored over the Advanced Charms book, and also numerous advanced and specialised books which they had brought from Number 12’s library, while Hermione, Dora, and Fleur began casting Fortification Spells on the barn.

“What are you looking for Harry?” Hermione asked when he sighed in frustration after leafing through the tenth book he’d looked at.

“I’m trying to work out how to make a sort of Room of Requirement of our own,” Harry replied with a frown. “I wanted to do that at Number 12 when we cleared out the basement there, but we didn’t really have time because we were in a hurry to rescue Mr Weasley. I figure that if we’re going to spend a week here practicing and preparing to locate and assault a secret Ministry compound, it might be worth taking a bit more time to find the right spells.”

“Oh yeah! That would be somethin’...” Dora chortled. “It’s funny--I only just realised--the Room of Requirement is a bit like the ‘Danger Room’...”

“‘Danger Room’...?” Fleur peered at Dora questioningly.

“It’s from a muggle superhero comic--the X-men,” said Dora.

“The Room of Requirement is also a bit like the Holodeck from the second Star Trek series,” said Hermione as she flicked her furry ears thoughtfully. “But there’s much more to it, as everything it provides is completely physical and can be removed from the room--I still have some of the training books...”

“The Room of Requirement seems to be able to create an infinite amount of extra-dimensional bubbles, tailored to the meet the needs of the individual, though as many people have similar needs, it reuses some of the same rooms it has created over the years...”

“...Like the Room of Hidden Things. Exactly!” Harry nodded excitedly. Hermione smiled at him apologetically.

“I’m sorry Harry, but I don’t think we’ll be able to do that here--at least not in the limited time we have. The Room of Requirement is based on incredibly complex layers of magic... far beyond our current level of knowledge. And it’s in a Castle which has been imbued with the magic of thousands of wizards for over a thousand years...”

“I don’t think we’ll be able to find such a thing as a ‘Room of Requirement Creation spell.’ Even as smart and advanced as we all are, it could still take us years of study and research to develop the skills and learn all of the magic necessary to create something like that from scratch--not mention decades saturating a chamber with enough magic for it to eventually become self-perpetuating and generate its own magic. I doubt even Dumbledore could do it--at least not by himself with a simple wave of his wand,” Hermione concluded.

“Oh!” Harry deflated. If Hermione thought that it was even beyond Dumbledore, Harry would just have to try and forget about it for the time-being and put it on his and Hermione’s ever-growing to-do list.
Fleur put a fingertip to her lips and sucked on it pensively.

“Hermione, as a Coven, should we not be able to generate enough power to imbue a location with the levels of magic required for such a thing?” Fleur asked. “According to ze headmaster’s equipment, the power levels and the frequencies we... er... produced in ze Room of Requirement, they were enough to accrue to Hogwarts and amplify many, many times exponentially its Protection Charms.”

“Fleur’s got a point Hermione!” said Dora, her eyes gleaming eagerly. “Even as protected as Hogwarts was before we started ‘aving fun in the Room of Requirement together, it still would’ve been badly damaged by Voldemort’s attack...”

“After all the professors’ extra Shields and Protection Charms were knocked out, Hogwarts should’ve been ‘alf-destroyed by all of the Death Eaters’ and Snatchers' blasting spells, and the Trolls and Giants hammerin’ on the walls... but there wasn’t a single scratch on castle, nor a single window broken during the entire battle!”

Hermione’s furry tail quivered, and her own eyes began to shine with excitement as she gave the idea more consideration. Harry peered at her hopefully. Luna and Parvati, and Daphne and Jennifer, all looked up from their books to see what Hermione had to say.

“Yes... yes, I think you’re both right. And we’re only talking about one small building,” Hermione said finally as she began to nod. “It would still take us a fair bit of time to work out the right combination of spells and learn how to do them properly--that could still take months or even years of study. But once we do--all of us together--we could probably generate enough magical power within a few weeks to turn a small building like this into our own Room of Requirement.”

“Not to mention that this Hill is already really magical,” chimed in Luna, swishing her fluffy white tail happily. “I could feel it the night we first arrived...”

“Really?” gasped Jennifer, surprised to hear that the home she had lived in for years was on a magical piece of land.

“Oh yes!” said Luna brightly. “When you were in the village yesterday afternoon, Parvati, Daphne, and Fleur, and I had a lovely explore. There’s fairy rings all over the estate, and the pond is enchanted. Fleur could feel it too--I could tell.”

Parvati flicked her satiny black tail and nodded; Daphne grinned. They had both got a lovely magical feeling too, but had thought it was just because the estate was so pretty.

Hermione’s furry ears pricked in surprise, but she’d learned a long time ago to trust Luna’s intuitions. And after the wrackspurts had turned out to be real, Hermione had become much more open-minded about things. And now that Luna had mentioned it, Hermione thought that perhaps she had sensed something ineffable herself. Hermione peered at Fleur, who reddened slightly.

“Er... oui,” said Fleur. “I did feel something per’aps--especially by ze pond in the gardens--but I did not want to say as I am unsure. Maybe, being part-Veela, I sometimes feel things others do not... but I do not know if that is true.”

Hermione was extremely curious now, and she wondered if her kneazle-senses would detect anything.

“Come on then...” said Harry, grinning when he saw the expression on Hermione’s face. “The barn is strong enough for us to practice combat spells in now--we can start training after Tea. We might as
The Coven wandered through the overgrown gardens and hedgerows, through long meadow grasses, past vine covered trellises, past rose bushes gone wild and moss covered Greek statues, until the manor was out of sight behind copse of tall trees. The wild mushrooms growing in concentric circles—the ‘fairy rings’—were easily visible in the shorter bits of lawn.

Hermione began to tingle pleasurably all over, the sensation of static electricity becoming stronger as they neared the pond. She gasped as waves of elation overtook her when they reached the clear pool, its surface shimmering in the golden sun-rays peeking through the scudding clouds.

Harry could easily believe it. If anything looked like an enchanted pond, this would be it. Rushes and fern grew along its edge under willows and groves of evergreens, interspersed with wildflowers of all hues, stone benches, and more statuary. Iridescent Dragonflies flitted to and fro, and Harry knew a Unicorn wouldn’t be out of place here. He felt it, the ethereal blissful thrum of soundless music calling him and Hermione, rippling across his skin as it had in the mysterious room with the glowing orb in the Ministry.

Jennifer was ecstatic. This was her first time in the gardens of her family's estate since she had become a witch, and it was an utterly different world to her now—more vibrant and alive than she had ever noticed before.

“Luna was right!” Hermione whispered, her face glowing. “I can feel the enchantment—it's very strong. Witches must have lived here at one time—in ancient times—long before the manor was built. And I can feel them—the fairies. They’re staying out of sight right now. They’re still not sure of us—they’re frightened.”

Harry wondered why, remembering the live fairies Flitwick had decorated the Christmas Tree with during the Yule Ball. They had seemed to enjoy showing off for wizards. Then it hit him.

“Yeah...” Harry murmured, “I expect so! Having a Dark Wizard and his henchmen living nearby in the manor for a few months probably made them a bit shy...”

The Coven managed to find a number of spells that they hadn’t learned yet, which might prove most useful, in the advanced books from Number 12’s library. Harry had discovered the Firestorm spell which Mad Eye had told him about, and also a powerful Shield Penetration spell in one of the books.

“These two would be good to practice as a Coven. I think Voldemort and some of his Death Eaters must have used the Shield Penetration spell at Hogwarts when they were attacking from the mountainside. And the Firestorm spell should be easier to control than a Dark spell like Fiendfyre,” Harry told everyone as they sat in a circle on the floor of their refurbished practice room.

“I want to rescue any prisoners they might have, blast the place to bits, and then burn it to the ground,” he continued. “But I don’t want to start something that could spread uncontrollably. And I want to avoid killing unless we absolutely have to.”

“That sounds good Harry!” said Hermione. “What do you think Dora?”

“That sounds like a good plan to me too,” Dora nodded. “Anyway, we won’t all have time to learn all of these spells in a week.” Dora mused as she perused the list of spells that everyone had come up with. “Some we’ll have to forget about. And others we should portion out—just one or two of us should concentrate on learning them...”
“For example, I already know the Homorphus Charm--that’s the one for forcing an animagus, or someone who has disguise or animal transfiguration spells on them--back into their true human form. But Hermione’s the one who’s best at figuring out an animagus or someone in disguise with her abilities--so I should teach her that one.”

“That makes sense Dora,” Hermione agreed. “What about the spell that Daphne found--the one that detects Proximity Alarm Charms and disarms them?”

“Yeah...” Dora muttered as she chewed a fingernail. “Yeah... I think you’re right Hermione. We don’t all need to know that one, but at least two of us do--we should be prepared to split into two smaller four person teams if necessary...”

“I don’t want us to split up...” Harry interjected, feeling a surge of anxiety.

“But we might have to--Dora’s right Harry!” said Hermione. “We need to be prepared for that possibility. We all have mirrors, so we’ll be in constant communication.”

“Okay... I suppose so!” Harry sighed. “But not unless it’s absolutely necessary!”

“Alright then Harry,” said Dora. “If we do have to split up, I’ll lead the second team. I’m thinking that for the most balanced teams, it should be me and Jennifer with Fleur and Daphne. You and Hermione should be with Luna and Parvati. So I suppose I’ll learn the Alarm Detectin’ and Disarming Spell. Haha... Never thought I’d ever be learnin’ breaking and entering spells,” Dora giggled. “You should be the other one to learn it, Harry.”

“I should learn a basic healing spell then,” said Parvati, flicking her furry ears thoughtfully. “You and Fleur are the only ones who know that one Dora.”

“Good point Parvati,” agreed Dora.

“I want to learn the Piertotum Locomotor spell,” said Luna with a grin. “It’s like a good version of the Inferius Curse. It was used mostly to animate and direct regiments of suits of armour and statues to fight for their masters in battles, instead of reanimating dead bodies.”

“Ooooh... I like the sound of that one!” Daphne said excitedly as Fleur tittered and gave her a hug. “Maybe I’ll give that one a go too.”

“If you can manage it, you two--that one’ll take a bit of doin’--but I’ve ‘eard that’s a good one. It oughta’ work on any group of objects and cause them to hurtle at the enemy,” chortled Dora. “Now, I already know ‘ow to Obliviate, but someone on your team Harry...”

“I’ll do that one too,” said Hermione. “Harry’s going to have enough to deal with as it is.”

“Right!” Harry grinned. “Well, we’ve all got our work cut out for us. We’ll be up against a load of highly trained Ministry wizards, so we need to focus on our combat spells in group practice, and make sure that we’re up to scratch.”

“And we should bring along some of Jennifer’s mobile electronic devices,” Fleur added. “When they start going crazy, and stop working properly, we shall know zat we are close to a magical area.”

“That’s genius, Fleur!” Harry exclaimed. “That’s the last thing the Ministry would expect to have to counter for at a hidden facility away from any muggle cities.”

“I am only uncertain--how do we find ze place if it has Unplottable or Fidelius Charms?” asked Fleur.
“Too many Ministry wizards will need access to it for a Fidelius Charm to be feasible,” Hermione answered. “And for similar reasons, it’s nearly certain that it only has the mapping version of the Unplottable Charm—not the visual-field version. It should be visible to wizards once we’re very near it.”

“Alright... I think we’ve nearly got everything covered,” said Harry. “I'll check everyone's Runic and Chinese Symbol Tattoos... make sure they haven't faded. Anybody else have something to add?”

“If we’re going to be searching in woods and mountains for hidden places, we might be gone for days,” said Jennifer. “I’ve got loads of camping gear, but you’ll need to put that Space Extension Charm on the tent so that there’s room for all of us in it, Hermione.”

“Brilliant!” Harry beamed. “Right... let’s get cracking then. Dumbledore and the Order will be scouring the country for these facilities too, and I want us to be out there doing our bit by the end of the week.”
An icy rain began to fall from the slate-grey skies as the Coven looked out from the top of a mountain across the rigid peaks and green valleys of one of the most remote regions of Wales. Fleur shivered, grateful for the thick anorak and the Rune tattoo which would protect her from the worst effects of the biting cold.

Jennifer peered from under the hood of her own insulated raincoat at the mobile-phone in her gloved hand. She had no bars in this location, but the phone wasn’t doing anything weird otherwise, and seemed to be all in order. Hermione glanced at Jennifer’s tablet which she was holding to confirm that the electronics still appeared to be functioning normally. The rest of the Coven shuffled and glanced at one another, awaiting the next decision.

Harriet sighed as she peered down at the mist shrouded lake below, seeing nothing in the vicinity to indicate a settlement or wizarding facility of some sort. She had to remind herself that this was only the second day of searching the entire country of Wales, and she hoped that the Order was having better luck searching for the other facilities around Britain.

“Right... well, I suppose it would be best to set up camp down by the lake before it gets dark,” said Harriet.

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If one were looking from the outside, all they might have seen would be what looked like a perfectly ordinary, pale-blue two person tent near a copse of trees by the lake. They would have been very surprised if they had managed to open the flap and peer inside, for they would have seen what appeared to be at first glance, eight perfectly ordinary teenage schoolgirls of varying ages, on holiday in a tent large enough to fit at least twenty lying down.

Sleeping bags were piled on four large mattresses at the rear of the tent, and towards the front was a large rectangular wooden table with two attached wooden benches--big enough to seat ten comfortably, five to a side. In between the table and the mattresses was a brazier filled with warm, smokeless blue flames.

Five of the girls were snuggled cozily on the mattresses, chatting in low tones, peering at a glowing laptop, and occasionally giggling. The other three girls were sitting hunched over one end of the table, poring over a grid map.

“You can cross off all of those squares Harriet,” the girl with bushy golden-brown hair said brightly. “We’ve apparated through all of that region and checked it thoroughly with spells and Jennifer’s mobiles...”

“Yeah... that just leaves a few hundred squares to go Hermione!” Harriet retorted in a weary, vaguely sarcastic tone. “Blimey--this could take us weeks!” she concluded with a sigh, giving Hermione an apologetic look.

“Cheer up Love,” said the eldest girl with ash-brown hair. “We shouldn’t ‘ave to do all of Wales. We’ll hit all of the National Parks and Wilderness areas first, and we’re bound to run across it before we ‘ave to branch out to more traveled countrysides and farmland...”
“Dora’s right, Harriet!” Hermione murmured sympathetically as she hugged and kissed the girl with tumbling black hair and pretty green eyes. “Try not to feel too discouraged.”

“I’m trying... I know you’re both right!” Harriet sighed again. “It’s just... who knows how many muggleborn have been rounded up so far!? I know it’s good that we prepared as best as we could, and learned some more spells, but I wish we hadn’t had to take the time.”

“Well, the Minister didn’t start openly operating her programme until the day after she sent Percy Weasley to Hogwarts with the Unspeakables to arrest Dumbledore,” Hermione replied. “That’s only just over two and a half weeks ago. And I think most muggleborn are going to be too sensible to offer themselves up to the Ministry--so they can’t have got too many yet.”

“I hope my dad’s okay,” Dora muttered. “I ‘aven’t spoken to my folks in a good while--not since I quit workin’ for the Ministry--and he’s muggleborn. I shoulda’ asked Dumbledore to have the Order look after him and Mum.”

“Your Mum... she’s Narcissa’s sister isn’t she?” asked Harriet. “The one who Sirius’s mum blasted off the Black family-tree tapestry?”

“Yes... that’s right Harriet!” Dora nodded.

“I never really thought about it much until Mr Carrow started going on about the pureblood families at school, but Sirius told me that my grandparents on my dad’s side were Charlus Potter and Dorea Black--I asked him when I remembered that I’d seen the Potter name on the Black family tapestry,” Harriet mused aloud.

Hermione’s invisible furry ears pricked and her eyes widened. She recalled Harry asking Sirius about it, but hadn’t given it much thought either.

“Is that right? I never really looked at that tapestry hard enough to notice,” Dora’s eyebrows popped up in surprise. “I suppose that means we’re cousins somewhere along the line--third or fourth cousins I think--or maybe second or third cousins once removed or something. I dunno really... past second cousins, I can never keep that sorta thing straight... too bloody complicated!”

“Harriet...!” Hermione gasped. “Doesn’t that mean that Draco Malfoy was one of your cousins too then?”

“Er...” Harriet gulped. She really hadn’t given her family tree much thought beyond her father and mother until very recently.

“Yeah... I guess so Hermione! Urgh! That’s bloody disgusting!” Harriet muttered in horror, her face reddening as it fell. “I can’t believe I was that closely related to such a revolting person. At least with Tom Riddle, we were only very distantly related through the Peverell brothers.”

Hermione could feel Harriet’s growing sense of shame and threw her arms around the younger girl, kissing her again.

“Harriet, I’d love you no matter who you were related to!” said Hermione earnestly, giving Harriet half a dozen more kisses for good measure.

“We would all still love you Harriet!” Dora leaned across the table and gave Harriet a humid kiss as well. “You’re the sweetest boy... er... girl... we’ve ever known!” Dora giggled, giving Harriet a wink.
Harriet grinned. “Thanks! I needed that! I just hope I’m not related to Minister Umbridge too!” she said, making a gruesome face and sticking her tongue out.

Feeling much better, Harriet looked at the map again, her eyes flicking back to where they had originated from.

“You know, that’s another thing I never realised... until looking at the map before we left,” Harriet continued. “Godric’s Hollow isn’t very far from where Jennifer’s home is really. It’s in the Dorset countryside near Lyme Regis. If I’d known, I could’ve visited during the week... well... when we’re done... I suppose...” Harriet trailed off.

Dora didn’t want to see Harriet’s improved mood evaporate; quickly she moved around the table to sit on the other side of the younger girl with tumbling black hair and green eyes. Harriet suddenly felt two pairs of arms wrapped around her middle, and two pairs of soft lips pressed against her own at once, as Dora and Hermione swept her into their embrace.

Harriet grinned and felt a damp spot growing in her panties, suddenly wishing she were wearing one of Jennifer’s dresses again instead of her jeans—to give easier access to Hermione’s and Dora’s wandering fingers.

Having decided that it was best to remain in girl-form for the duration of the hunt, even in the tent—just in case, Harriet was glad for their distraction. She was enjoying very much the opportunity to be a girl with them and the rest of the Coven for a bit again.

But Harriet needn’t have worried. Hermione and Dora didn’t let the jeans and woolly pullover get in the way of their fingers.

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“Zis technology, it is incredible,” Fleur murmured breathily.

“You’ve got the whole world at your fingertips...” Daphne said with more than a hint of awe in her voice.

“It’s even better than the television,” said Parvati, wriggling her invisible furry tail.

“Yeah, I suppose... but I love magic!” said Jennifer gleefully as she opened another browser page on her laptop. “Magic is brilliant! We wouldn’t be getting any internet service out here at all if this were running on electricity. It’s only because of magic that we’re able to access the web without a proper connection.”

“If everyone had access to a mix of Magic and muggle technology...” Luna murmured wistfully, swishing her invisible fluffy tail. “...the world might be a much better place.”

A little moan of pleasure caught the sharp invisible furry ears of Luna and Parvati. They both looked up and grinned when they spied Hermione tugging Harriet’s jeans and panties from her ankles, and Dora pulling Harriet’s jersey and t-shirt over the younger girl’s head. Jennifer snapped the laptop shut when she saw what Luna and Parvati were grinning at.

“Oooh... now that’s better than television or the internet!” Jennifer giggled when she witnessed Hermione’s tongue darting into Harriet’s bare slit, Dora’s hands massaging Harriet’s breasts, and Dora’s lips hungrily encircling one of Harriet’s nipples as Harriet lay blissfully on her back across the wooden table.
“It would appear zat we are missing out on something...” Fleur smirked as she licked her lips.

Hermione looked up at the naked French girl from between Harriet’s quaking thighs, a slightly guilty expression on her dripping face as Harriet’s glistening vulva twitched. Harriet’s orgasmic squeals were muted by Dora’s deep steamy kisses.

“Harriet needed a bit of comforting,” said Hermione with a straight face, her invisible bushy tail quivering joyfully as she eyed the rest of the Coven behind Fleur hurriedly stripping off their own clothes. “I see that the rest of you are all ready to assist me and Dora on this very important aspect of our mission now!”

“We would not be a very good Coven if we were not ready for such things,” tittered Fleur, giving Hermione a sultry kiss before taking her place between Harriet’s naked thighs and placing her own lips on Harriet’s labia.

Hermione wasn’t quite ready to move out of the way completely though. The hard pink tips of Fleur’s jiggling breasts were just too tempting. As Fleur’s tongue continued the task of probing Harriet’s wet passage and twirling Harriet’s fleshy pearl, Hermione crouched down a bit further, taking Fleur’s breasts in hand, and began to suck the older girl’s nipples.

Fleur surged with delight as Hermione continued to lick and nibble her sensitive peaks; she moaned when she felt Hermione’s fingers slip between her own parted thighs and into her own moist entrance. Fleur felt another member of the Coven squash their breasts into her back as their hands slid across her abdomen, their lips nuzzling Fleur’s neck. Fleur briefly removed her tongue and lips from Harriet’s vulva to kiss Jennifer, then returned to her delicious task.

Harriet undulated in a cascading crescendo of ecstasy as Fleur’s tongue busied itself where Hermione’s had been. A part of her watched in bemused detachment, amazed that she could manage to enjoy a moment of such torrid bliss amid the gathering storm of the Coven’s dangerous venture.

But when Luna and Daphne straddled Harriet’s middle, grinding their sopping slits against Harriet’s belly and kissing each other as Dora presented her own dripping crescent to Harriet’s eager tongue—and when Parvati squirmed next to Harriet on the table, kneading Harriet’s breasts while Harriet played with Parvati’s own delectable globes—that part of Harriet soon became lost in a swirling sea of pleasure, merging back into the whole.

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The wind picked up and howled through the valley as the freezing rain continued to beat against the rippling fabric of the little tent near the copse of trees by the remote lake. The trees began to sway, limbs whipping in the strong gusts as torrential sheets of rain swept across the surface of the lake.

If one were looking from the outside, they might have seen the pale-blue tent glowing with the light which indicated that the occupants inside were weathering the stormy night in perfect warmth and safety. They might even have seen the glowing tent brighten and flare numerous times from what could appear to be a dangerous sparking electrical discharge. And if it weren’t storming so heavily, one might question the shaking of the ground around the campsite.

But one would be very unlikely to see or notice such a thing even if one were walking very near the tent.

Indeed, even a wizard would have missed the sight, because the little camp bravely enduring the
weather which accompanied the autumnal march towards winter was well-warded with every Concealing and Protection Charm the witches inside could think of.

Chapter End Notes

It's not really clear that Charlus and Dorea are James Potter's parents. They're not mentioned by name in the books, and Rowling hasn't been particularly helpful in that regard, making contradictory comments... :P

It seems most likely to me that the films based their inclusion on the Black family tapestry on Rowling's notes, and that they are indeed James's parents, and that she has been fudging things ever since, once certain contradictions became apparent (otherwise surely she would have clarified things by now). So, at least for this fic, and until Rowling retcons something else, that's what I'm going with.

Also, all we know for certain about Godric's Hollow is that it is located in the "West Country" region of Britain which includes Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Dorset. So, for the purposes of this fic... Dorset it is.
Chapter 159

The third day of searching had been just as fruitless as the first, and Harriet had been forced to concede that it would be better to split into two smaller teams to cover more ground. But by the end of the fourth day of looking in the woods which the Coven was currently searching, all thoughts of continuing the search in separate units had been abandoned.

It was nearly midday when Fleur, Daphne, Dora, and Jennifer came across the little village. Though even the term village was perhaps a bit too grand to describe the small community, which was little more than a grouping of about thirty cottages on the outskirts, surrounding a village centre which was no more than a dozen townhouses, a church, some offices, a tiny schoolhouse, and a few little shops. The rain continued to fall, though not as heavily as it had the day before.

“Where is everyone?” said Daphne curiously as they strolled along the cobbled pavement, peering into the window of the local druggist.

“Maybe everyone’s in the church?” suggested Dora.

“Maybe,” Jennifer frowned apprehensively, glancing at the few empty vehicles at the side of the road. “But today’s only Saturday…”

“I do not like this, eet is too quiet,” murmured Fleur, shivering from a little chill which raised the hairs on the back of her neck.

“Well, surely there’s someone minding the Grocers’,” Dora said brightly, hoping to raise everyone’s spirits. “Why don’t we find something for lunch then?”

The others nodded and murmured their agreement, stepping carefully around puddles as Dora led them to the little village grocery. A bell tinkled when Dora pushed open the door and entered the shop. One by one, Jennifer, Fleur, and Daphne stepped under the dripping eaves and followed her inside.

“That’s funny, the dates on these labels are a few days old,” said Jennifer as she peered at the ready-made sandwiches through the glass of the refrigerator window. “I suppose they should still be alright though... just a bit stale.”

As Dora grabbed some bags of bacon flavoured crisps and Fleur picked through fruit looking for the best apples and oranges, Daphne walked to the rear of the shop where she spied the fridge containing fizzy drinks, next to the storage room door which was slightly ajar. A low groaning sound caught her attention, and she heard shuffling footsteps.

Probably just the shopkeeper, she thought, reaching for a bottle of Coke. The muggle drink was new to Daphne, but she had decided that she quite liked it.

“Does anyone else want a Coke?” she called out to the others.

“Oh... yeah! I’d love one... Thanks!” said Dora.

“Yes please!” Jennifer replied.

“Do zey have any lemon-ginger fizzes?” Fleur asked, glancing around nervously, as another wave of trepidation came over her.
“I’ll see...” began Daphne, turning back to have a look.

Daphne gave a start when the door of the store-room swung out a bit further. A mottled grey hand, fingers sticky with a dark reddish brown substance, gripped her arm and she screamed. The bottle of Coke tumbled from her own hand and shattered on the floor.

Dora, Fleur, and Jennifer had their wands out in an instant, their eyes widening in horror when they saw the figure clutching Daphne’s wrist.

“Relashio!” yelled Dora. Daphne stumbled backwards, quivering with fright and falling into Jennifer’s arms when the figure released her.

“What are you doing?” Jennifer shrieked at the lurching, moaning figure. “What’s wrong with you?”

“She can’t hear you, Love,” Dora said in a shaky voice as everyone backed up towards the front door of the shop. “She’s dead--that’s an Inferi...”

The figure of a woman lumbered forward, arms reaching out again, her face as grey and discoloured as her arms. She appeared bloated, fluids leaking from her sunken eyes. Her mouth and chin were covered in the same dark stickiness which could only be blood, which also appeared to be splattered down the front of the woman’s blouse and skirt. Now that everyone could see the woman better, the ragged gaping hole in the side of her neck was more than apparent.

“Zere ees nothing zat can be done for ‘er now zen,” said Fleur thickly, swallowing as a tear trickled down a pale cheek. “R...reducto!”

The staggering corpse lunged as Fleur muttered the spell, disintegrating before it could reach any of them. Shaking and white, the foursome stumbled out of the shop back into the rain, splashing carelessly through the puddles, all thoughts of lunch forgotten.

“D...D’you think the wh...whole v...village is dead then?” stammered Jennifer, blinking back tears.

“Some mighta got away,” said Dora, peering at the vehicles again. “But it’s a very small town... who’s to say?”

“But why... why didn’t help come?” asked Daphne, who almost looked ready to cry herself. The idea of everyone being dead too awful to contemplate. What about the children? “Couldn’t... couldn’t they have called for help on those telephone things?”

“Dunno really!” muttered Dora. “Maybe it all happened too quick--nobody knowing what was happening before it was too late...”

“We must call Harry,” said Fleur, forgetting momentarily that Harry was still Harriet. “Eef ze village is all dead.... zere could be more of those things. Zey cannot be allowed to run amok!”

“Good idea!” Dora responded, fumbling for her mirror as she tried to keep herself together. “We should do a thorough search--find any survivors--and make sure all the Inferi are destroyed. We’ll need all hands on deck for that.”

Moments later four apparition cracks echoed in the village centre.

“Bloody Hell!” Harriet swore when Dora told her everything. Hermione’s features were ashen; Luna and Parvati gaped in horror.

“Yeah... that about describes it...” Dora muttered sardonically.
“We’d better go house to house then,” said Harriet, her face stony and her voice grim, “And we’re all sticking together,” she continued adamantly. “If we just find one or two of them, Reductos will be good enough. But if we’re swarmed, don’t hesitate to use a Patronus.”

“Alright Harry!” Hermione nodded, “Let’s start with the Grocery then, make sure there’s nobody still in there, and work our way outward...”

The sight in the Grocer’s storeroom was dreadful, and the stench of death awful--turning everyone’s stomachs. Daphne didn’t know how she could have missed the smell, which had surely been wafting through the slightly ajar door while she was getting drinks.

Blood spattered the walls, and the floor was still slippery where the blood of the other victim was still puddled too deeply to have dried yet. The other victim’s body had clearly been too badly mutilated to be lumbering around and infecting others with the Contagion Curse.

Much of the flesh had been eaten away, and a leg gnawed off, the head dismembered from the rest of the body. But what remained twitched convulsively on the floor. Harriet grit her teeth, trying very hard not to throw up as she disintegrated the main part of the corpse while Dora and Hermione took care of the separated leg and head.

They spent the afternoon together exploring the entire village, finding nobody alive. Every member of the Coven was called upon to disintegrate scores of victims who were too mangled to chase them, and also to vaporise more than a few Inferi who staggered in their direction, seeking fresh blood to feast on. They were forced to use their patronuses twice--once when they came across at least a dozen in the church lurching towards them, and again in the schoolhouse where a number of small Inferi were gathered.

There wasn’t a dry eye in the Coven after that. But at least eight homes at the edge of the village simply appeared empty, looking ransacked as if families had rifled through their belongings for the barest necessities and fled.

Her own face wet with tears, Harriet slumped miserably onto a sofa in the last house and immediately found herself being cuddled by the rest of the Coven in a scrum.

“Thank goodness some got away!” sobbed Parvati.

“I hope none of the people who escaped were bitten...” said Luna tearfully.

“But if some got away, surely they would have warned authorities!” Harriet muttered darkly. “I understand the Ministry not knowing or caring if there weren’t any wizards in the village, but why... why wouldn’t the muggle government send people to mop up?”

“Perhaps it was too small of a community for them to care about?” proffered Dora, not quite believing it herself.

“But they all voted the wrong way in the last election,” sneered Hermione cynically, dabbing at her tears with a hanky before trying to shake off that horrible thought. “But that doesn’t really explain why the government wouldn’t want to put them down once they’d all ‘turned,’ like they have when ‘Walkers’ attacked other communities in Britain...”

“Ees eet not like Harriet ‘as said before?” Fleur mused aloud. “Like ze Ministry, ze muggle government leaves a few around to create terror, but zey cannot ‘ave too many in more populated areas. What better zan jus’ to ‘ave a few roaming ze countryside where there are not so many people, but just enough to frighten everyone else...”
“Yeah...” Harriet nodded. “Yeah, that seems most likely. The PM probably only calls the Minister to fix things when there’s too many of them for muggles to deal with, without burning everything to the ground. And the Ministry is obviously keeping track of the ones they know about to make sure there aren’t too many.”

“We’d probably better search the surroundin’ area too,” said Dora, “...make sure there aren’t any more of ‘em.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” Harriet remarked sadly as everyone nodded. “We’d better get to it while it’s still daylight then. I don’t want to be doing this after dark...”

As the rain continued to steadily fall, the Coven went back to work, combing the surrounding woods carefully. They spent the last few hours of the afternoon searching, and were slightly cheered when they found no more Inferi.

Just before dusk, they apparated to the area located on the next square on the grid-map, and set up the tent under some yews near a stream after doing a sweep to make sure that there were no Inferi lurking in the new area to be explored.

Somberly, the Coven stripped off their wet clothes once inside the tent, and huddled together wrapped in soft robes next to the warm blue flames which Hermione conjured in the brazier. After they had dried and warmed a bit, the Coven’s appetite returned finally, as nobody had eaten since breakfast.

“There’s no need to make anything tonight, I’ll just call Dobby,” said Harriet, when Luna started to rummage in one of the bags for some food. “We should just try and rest up--today was horrible.”

Harriet felt a bit less miserable when a gleeful Dobby appeared--it was nice to see a happy face. Half an hour later everyone dug into the delicious meals which Dobby had prepared. Having sensed the gloomy mood, the happy house-elf had provided each of them their favourite comfort foods.

“Thanks Dobby, that’s absolutely heavenly,” said Harriet with an orgasmic expression as she took a bite of the mouthwatering shepherd’s pie. “You deserve another raise....”

“Oh no Master... er... Mistress Harry,” Dobby replied cheerfully. “Dobby is not knowing what to do with the riches which Mistress Harry already provides!”

Harriet was pleased when Hermione and Fleur nearly spat out their coq au vin in snorts of laughter and the rest of the Coven burst into giggles. After dinner, everyone snuggled in a heap under some enlarged blankets, as close together as possible to ward off the nightmares.

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Albus Dumbledore whirled around, flames lancing from his wand and engulfing the group of roughly forty moaning Inferi which he had lured into a rocky gully. Snape and Mad Eye blasted several who tried to escape with Reductos. The three of them stood watch as the rest burned, making sure that none of the flaming Inferi could run off to start a wildfire.

Night was upon them, and they were beyond the outskirts of a tiny village in Northumberland, near the wild area where they had been searching for one of the Ministry’s facilities. Dumbledore was relieved when Remus and Sirius called him to report that the villagers all appeared to be safe and sound, though he felt a deep sense of loss for the poor souls of the victims of the Contagion Curse in the gully.

“Bellatrix’s handiwork I expect,” said Snape coldly as he disintegrated another escaping Inferi. “She
is no doubt working for the Minister now...”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore nodded, stroking his long silvery beard which was glowing orange in the light of the blazing inferno below.

He glanced at Severus, grateful for his presence. Snape looked up and saw the flicker of orange flame in Dumbledore’s blue eyes.

“You didn’t think that I’d be any more contented than Potter and his friends to remain safely hidden while the world turns to ash around me, did you Headmaster?” Severus asked wryly, lifting his eyebrows.

“No... I suppose not!” Dumbledore chuckled.
Breathlessly she stumbled through the doorway as her heart pounded in her ears, beads of cold sweat dripping from her forehead. She was in another room that she didn’t recognise, hopelessly lost. Flinging open the next door with a bang, she heard the grunts and moans of the horde approaching, the stench of rotting flesh unbearable. She ran down the unknown corridor, hoping it would lead to escape.

Her foot caught on the ragged edge of a hole in the threadbare carpet, sending her tumbling to the floor, skinning her knee. She struggled to get back to her feet but an oppressive weight seemed to be holding her down. Panic set in when she realised that they were in the corridor now; she rolled over to face the approaching Dead and fumbled in her robes for a wand which she couldn’t find.

The lurching corpses were upon her, viscera spilling from their middles, blood drooling from their gaping maws as they began grabbing her arms and legs with cold grey hands, tearing into her with their teeth. The terror took her and she screamed.

“This is alright Daphne... they’re not here... they’re not here...” murmured a gentle voice.

As she shook violently with fright, Daphne realised that the arms around her were comforting, the bodies against her soft and warm. Tender lips pressed wetly against her own, the scent of breath sweet and fresh, and as Daphne’s nightmare faded she realised that they were Jennifer’s.

“Chérie... my love... do not fear... you are safe...” whispered Fleur in her ear, cuddling Daphne from behind, kissing and stroking her hair, an arm curled protectively around her waist.

Daphne’s trembling began to ebb under Fleur’s and Jennifer’s consoling caresses and kisses. Someone dabbed the cold sweat on her forehead with a soft cloth and she looked up to see Harry’s worried green eyes and messy black hair, and Hermione’s anxious face framed by tumbling golden-brown ringlets.

“We've got you Daphne... we won’t let them take you...” said Harry warmly with his own voice, leaning over and kissing her with his own lips.

As Daphne returned Harry’s kiss, she marveled once again that they were as soft and sweet as Harriet’s. He had changed back into a boy just to comfort her, but it really hadn’t been necessary. Harry still tasted the same, still felt the same, no matter which form he took. Harry or Harriet, either way he was still everything Daphne had dreamed her prince would be, kind and brave, loving and gentle.

“We love you Daphne,” said Hermione softly, tears glistening in her lashes.

When Hermione’s lips encircled Daphne’s, and Hermione’s arms enfolded her, Daphne couldn’t help but recall the first time that Hermione had hugged her, and the first time that Hermione had kissed her, the first time that Daphne had felt that fluttery sensation in her tummy which she now knew was love.

Parvati, Luna, and Dora, each also took their turns cuddling and kissing Daphne while Fleur continued her caresses; Daphne couldn’t help but feel safe and warm in the embrace of the Coven, knowing that they all loved her.

“Thanks guys,” Daphne murmured with a little smile. “I feel loads better now!”
Fleur leaned over and took Daphne’s lips with her own for a deep passionate kiss. Daphne rolled over to face Fleur; she could feel Dora snuggling up behind her now with an arm around her waist. As Hermione, Harry and Jennifer rearranged the enormous covers, Daphne wasn’t quite sure how they managed it, but Parvati and Luna had somehow curled up under them lower down. She could feel them purring next to her, their arms and furry tails resting lightly across her legs.

Daphne could hear Hermione, Harry, and Jennifer settling back down under the covers and sighed contentedly, wondering who she’d wake up next to in the morning. Slowly but surely, Daphne drifted into a peaceful slumber.

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Though her terror had been perhaps the most profound, having actually been briefly in the clutches of an Inferius, Daphne was not the only one feeling unsettled that night. Fleur had lay awake long after Daphne had fallen asleep earlier that evening, heart aching for the younger girl, sensing how deeply she had been affected.

Fleur had been unable to get the image of the youngest victims of the Contagious version of the Inferius Curse out of her mind. She knew that there was nothing she could have done for the little ones, once dead. But surely, there must be a way to counter the curse carried by the bites of the Inferi before it took hold and killed the victim, passing along the curse from one to the next. Fleur had still been awake, her mind churning ceaselessly, when Daphne had begun quaking in her sleep and woken with a scream.

“Thank you Hermione,” Fleur whispered gratefully when Hermione returned to bed next to her. The hollow in her gut began to fill as Hermione snuggled against her, purring, curling her arm and bushy tail around Fleur’s middle, planting little kisses on her neck. Fleur turned her head to receive a warm kiss from Hermione and Harry both, as they settled behind her; her tension unwound and her racing thoughts finally quieted. A smile crept to Fleur’s lips at the sensation of Parvati purring as the young cat-witch nestled between her thighs and Daphne’s.

Harry had been beyond disturbed himself; the same gruesome images that haunted the minds of the others were in his as well, the same heaviness on his heart. But he put his own fears and grief aside to focus on those he loved. He’d had more than his share of horrifying nightmares in the past, but those had been muted by time. It was the flashback to his boggart when Lupin had been teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts which had returned full-force.

Harry was having as much difficulty clearing the refreshed image of the dead-Hermione-boggart from his mind as he was the scene of the Cursed children they had come across in the schoolhouse. But Daphne and the Coven--seeing to them was more important than his own anxieties right now. After helping settle Daphne, Harry had given everyone a hug and a kiss before lying back down next to Hermione.

“Are you alright Harry?” Hermione whispered as he cuddled up behind her, sensing him trying to squash his own trepidation to be strong for everyone else.

“I will be,” murmured Harry in reply as he nuzzled Hermione’s neck and stroked her hair and furry ears. “How about you?”

Harry was glad that Hermione and Luna and Parvati had decided to make their furry ears and tails visible again for tonight when Daphne had woken up screaming. Harry felt as comforted by the cuddly familiarity of their furry presence as he was soothed by Hermione’s closeness and minty aroma. His arm around Hermione’s waist, Harry could feel her purrs and began to relax.
“Mmmm... good! ... That feels nice!” Hermione sighed after a moment, feeling much better herself when she sensed Harry unwinding—and having her furry ears stroked always helped of course. Hermione tilted her head as Harry leaned over to share a deep kiss with her.

Dora had seen a lot of horrible things during her stint as an Auror-in-training, but nothing like what she had seen that day. And the battle with Voldemort’s Inferi had been distant, from the top of a tower. This time had been up close and personal, seeing the Inferi as victims in their own homes and places of business—not as monsters—and someone she loved had nearly fallen victim to one of the already Cursed.

She’d had trouble falling asleep herself, but had just dozed off between Jennifer and Hermione when Daphne’s screams had brought her back instantly, gasping in momentary panic. As she cuddled Daphne now, a flicker of rage burned deep inside Dora, knowing that her Aunt Bellatrix was most likely the one who had developed the new strain of Inferi, but she struggled against the fury, unwilling to be consumed by it.

After everyone else had kissed Dora goodnight again, Jennifer had as well, enfolding the older girl in a warm embrace as she clambered back into bed beside her. Jennifer could feel Dora’s silent tenseness and began to knead her shoulders.

“It’s alright Dora,” Jennifer whispered as she leaned over the older girl’s shoulder to kiss her again after Daphne had fallen back to sleep. “You don’t have to tough it out all the time now that we’ve all got each other.”

“Yeah... I suppose not,” Dora murmured tearfully, “It’s just ‘ard... I don’t wanna lose any of you...”

Still holding the peacefully slumbering Daphne, Dora allowed herself to shed a few quiet tears as Jennifer cuddled her. Dora could also feel the purrs of Luna deep under the blankets between Daphne’s legs and her own; she breathed a sigh of relief when the flames inside of her diminished, and the fear of losing her loved ones quelled.

For her part, Jennifer felt a sense of tranquility supplant her own feelings of dread as she snuggled next to Dora after she had given everyone else hugs and kisses. Surprised at herself, Jennifer felt a surge of joy after their day of horror. Perhaps it was having so recently been able to put the death of her parents behind her. Jennifer wasn’t really certain; all she really knew was that as long as she was with people she loved, she could be happy.

Luna couldn’t help but be reminded by the Inferi of witnessing her mother’s death in a horrible spell accident. She had always done her best to take a philosophical view of things, not always as successfully as she would have liked. But ever since she had discovered friendship and love with Parvati, Hermione, Harry, and the others, Luna had come to terms with Death. Luna had people that she loved, and that was all that mattered.

Luna sensed that seeing the Inferi up close had brought back everything that Parvati hated about Mummies, a stark reminder that one day Death would come for them all. But hearing Parvati’s purrs, it was obvious to Luna that Parvati was trying very hard not to show it. She lit her wand so that she could see Parvati’s face under the blankets.

“It’s alright to be sad Parvati,” whispered Luna as she squeezed Parvati’s hand comfortingly which she had clapsed across Daphne’s legs. “But we’re never really gone, even after we die.”

“Do you really believe that?” Parvati asked quietly.

“Sometimes I see Mum... in my dreams,” Luna replied with a serene smile. “I know that dreams
aren’t always real—but sometimes they are too. Sometimes I know that she’s talking to me from the other side…”

Parvati smiled tearfully. She pulled Luna’s hand closer and kissed it.

“I’d like to believe that,” said Parvati. “Mum and Dad have some books from India at home that say the same sorts of things—they talk about the cycles of life and death. Some of them say that life is an illusion—that the world beyond is more real…”

“I suppose that’s why I was interested in Divination before Trelawney badgered Harry about Death stalking him. But after I fell in love with you and Hermione and Harry—and then later the others too—I wasn’t so sure anymore… This feels real to me… holding your hand, being able to touch you! I never want to lose that…”

Luna blushed slightly as her smile broadened, and she considered Parvati’s words.

“I think it’s all real,” said Luna finally. “Just on different levels. I mean… even if it’s just in your head, your head is real—right? It doesn’t mean everything is the same sort of real at this very moment in this particular time and space… from this side of things, the other side might look like an illusion… and when we’re on the other side, maybe this side does…”

“And if something’s conceivable, then it has to exist somewhere… somehow… even if it’s in another dimension or universe with a different set of rules,” Luna continued, “I think that after death… maybe… we just cross over to another dimension… maybe even live different lives—multiple lives in multiple dimensions—and somehow communicate still with those we’ve temporarily left behind…”

“But one thing I feel very strongly, is that when you really Love someone, they’ll be connected to you no matter where they are—that Life will always find a way—that Death is as temporary as Life appears to be.”

“I think there are cycles of life and death—and that our souls will go on and meet each other again someday. But for now, we should live in the moment…and make the most of the lives we’re leading right now…”

“It doesn’t really do to dwell too much on the past or the far-flung future—just enough so that we see where we’re coming from and where we’re going to—because you’re right Parvati—what we’re experiencing right now is the most important bit really!”

“You’re so smart Luna,” Parvati grinned. “That’s one of the reasons I love you…”

“Well, I was in Ravenclaw…” giggled Luna.

Hermione smiled and sighed happily as she listened to Luna and Parvati’s hushed conversation with her sharp furry cat ears. Parvati was right; Luna was as brilliant as she was sweet and bluntly honest.

Sandwiched between Harry and Fleur, Hermione felt at peace, a luminous glow within keeping the darkness she had witnessed at bay. At one time, like Luna and Harry, she had been all alone and friendless, but she and Harry had eventually found each other, and taught each other what it really meant to be in love.

And now—after gradually finding others that they could love enough to share each other with—Hermione and Harry had more love in their lives than either of them could have ever imagined before coming to Hogwarts and meeting one another.
No longer alone, Hermione knew that she and Harry had the family they had both always dreamed of, and she would do anything for every last one of them. Death would never keep them apart; each of them a beacon of light in the dark, they would always find one another.

The rain pitter-patted gently on the tent, the sound mingling with the soft purrs and quiet breathing of the Coven as serenity finally settled over them all.
Despite the continued lack of success over the next few days of searching, Harriet was just grateful that the Coven had come across no more Inferi, and that the rain had stopped. Though without the cloud-cover, it seemed even colder as November drew ever nearer. Everyone was grateful for the warmth of Hermione’s blue flames after the tent had been set up as dusk fell.

“Well, that’s another half a dozen squares done today,” Harriet sighed. “I suppose that’s something.”

“Yeah, we’re definitely narrowing things down, Harriet,” said Dora. “We should be stumbling across it any day now...”

“Sssh...! There’s someone out there,” said Hermione, her invisible furry ears twitching. “I can hear voices...”

Harriet and Dora quieted immediately; Daphne snapped the laptop shut as Fleur and Jennifer turned to look at Hermione. Luna and Parvati flicked their own invisible furry cat ears.

“I hear them too,” whispered Parvati, and Luna nodded.

“How close to our perimeter d’you think they are?” hissed Harriet.

‘Fairly close... maybe thirty five to forty metres!’ Hermione replied.

“We should check ‘em out,” said Dora quietly. Harriet and Hermione quickly agreed. Dora cast the transfiguration disguise spells on Hermione--just in case.

“Right then,” said Harriet as the Coven exited the tent into the darkening woods, “Hermione and I will move in closer once we get past our wards--see who we’re dealing with. The rest of you hang back and stay out of sight in a surrounding pattern. If Hermione and I run into trouble, then move in!”

Hermione and Harriet crept stealthily through the trees and the bushes towards the voices which had caught the ears of the cat-witches, as the rest of the Coven fanned out. Harriet could hear the voices as she and Hermione drew nearer, and the crackling of flames as well.

“Er... nice to meet you...” said a nervous voice which seemed very young and very familiar. The voices which responded sounded like they belonged to much older men.

“Dirk... you can call me Dirk...”

“And I’m Jason. Mind if we share your fire mate?”

“I suppose...” answered the anxious voice.

“It’s alright mate...” the voice which belonged to Dirk said soothingly. “Me and Jason--we’re on the run too--been out here for days...”

“How’d you know I was on the run?” the youthful voice asked suspiciously.

“A younger like you--out ‘ere all alone...” responded the voice belonging to Jason. “It’s alright though... we’re like you...”

“Really?” muttered the suspicious young voice, “How’s that then?”
“Muggleborn...” replied Dirk. “You are a wizard... right?”

“Er... maybe... I suppose,” the youthful voice replied. “But how do I know you’re not...”

“Snatchers?” Jason laughed mirthlessly. “If we were, you’d be in Ministry hands already and we’d be collectin’ the loot. So why’re you out here all alone then?”

“Didn’t want the Ministry getting their hands on my mum. I’m not really sure if they’d do anything to her—but I didn’t want to take the chance of going back home after I left Hogwarts,” said the young voice, sounding relieved. “I dunno if I’m muggleborn or halfblood really. My dad left us when I was young. He could’ve been a wizard I suppose. The name’s Dean by the way...”

Harriet and Hermione peered at each other, eyes widening when they realised it was Dean Thomas. Hermione sniffed the air a few times to be certain, then nodded at Harriet. Uncertain whether or not to reveal themselves, Harriet decided to remain hidden for the moment and listen a bit longer.

“Blimey... so you’re one of the lot that escaped from Hogwarts then!” said Dirk.

“Smart of you not to hook up with that Potter thug and Dumbledore’s rebellion...” Jason asserted.

“You got that right!” agreed Dirk. “Bloody murdering bastards—if it weren’t for those two, us muggleborn wouldn’t have to register with the Ministry...”

“Bollox!” growled Dean. “There was never any rebellion or murders. The Malfoys were scum... they brought it on themselves. It’s all a lie...”

“That’s not what the Daily Prophet or the Wiz-Vision says...” Dirk’s voice grew frosty and brittle.

“You should read the Quibbler then!” said Dean sharply.

“What?” snorted Jason. “That Conspiracy Theory rag which used to go on about Snorkacks and Nargles? I’ve seen stuff on the telly about Ancient Aliens and the Illuminati which is more believable than that tripe...”

“The Minister... she and her supporters are Pureblood fanatics—just like Voldemort was,” Dean responded coldly. “If you two believe the rubbish in the Prophet, then why are you both running?”

“Already said, mate...!” snapped Dirk. “We know there’s trouble, but we reckon Dumbledore and Potter are to blame for causin’ it...”

“I’m not your mate!” Dean’s voice hardened. “And I don’t think I want to share my fire with you two anymore...”

“Well, that’s too bad for you kid. We like it here...” said Jason dangerously. “There’s two of us and only one of you, and you can’t be more than thirteen or fourteen. The way I figure it, that makes the fire ours then...”

Harriet and Hermione crept closer as their alarm on Dean’s behalf skyrocketed, both of them with their hearts pounding, wands at the ready as they crouched low.

“Piss off!” snarled Dean. There was a rustling sound, and Harriet knew that everyone around the campfire had their own wands out now.

“Don’t be stupid boy!” muttered Jason.

“You sure you want to do this kid?” warned Dirk.
Dean swallowed in trepidation, breath quickening as he peered at the two much older and much larger muggleborn wizards, kicking himself for allowing his anger at their prattling to get the better of him. He might have been able to take on one of the wizards, but Dean wasn’t sure that he was fast enough to take on the both of them.

Dean’s eyes widened in shock when red arcs of magic jetted from the darkness beyond the foliage, and the two threatening wizards collapsed in a heap on the forest floor, both unconscious.

“What the...?" gasped Dean. “Th...thanks for that, but wh...who are you?” he stammered breathlessly when two very attractive teenage witches entered the clearing, their wands still trained on the fallen wizards.

Despite his anxiety, Dean couldn’t help noticing that one of the girls had gorgeous auburn hair. He felt a pang, hoping that Susan was doing alright at Hogwarts.

“Don’t you recognise me then Dean?” chortled the pretty girl with green eyes and windswept black hair spilling around her shoulders.

Dean’s eyes nearly fell out of his head as the hair shortened into a shaggy moptop and the face became more angular. Dean felt his own face blazing with embarrassment when he realised who he had been ogling.

“H...Harry?” Dean groaned questioningly. “Is that really you?”

“Call me Harriet for now!” Harry winked, turned his features back into a girl’s and grinned, nodding.

“We should talk back at the tent behind the protection and concealment charms. Dean probably still has the Trace on him,” said the auburn haired girl quietly to Harriet. “But these two can stay here, seeing as they like your fire so much!” she concluded, glaring icily at the fallen wizards.

“Hermione?” said Dean, recognising her voice.

“Yeah, it’s Hermione, and she’s right...” murmured Harriet. “Let’s go back to our tent before these two arseholes come to, or Ministry officials show up.”

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Harriet changed back into Harry when they returned to the tent to make Dean more comfortable, and Hermione reverted to her normal bushy-haired self. Dean tried his best not to appear hot and bothered when the witches--the rest of the Unaffiliated--all cheerfully gave him warm hugs after he set his broom and rucksack down. Keeping Susan at the forefront of his mind helped a bit, but Dean sobered rapidly when the discussion turned to what had brought everyone out to the wilderness to begin with.

“I’m glad you’re safe Dean,” said Parvati

“Thanks for sticking up for the Quibbler Dean,” beamed Luna.

“Of course I would! I can’t believe any muggleborn would pay any mind to anything else! Of all the rotten luck...” Dean griped. “In the middle of nowhere I had to run into two of the thickest berks...”

“You should stick with us for tonight at least,” said Dora, covering very well her mild disappointment that the Coven would have to restrain themselves from being too intimate with each other while Dean was with them.
“...It’ll be safer for you behind the concealment and protection charms we’ve got set up!” Dora continued. “Whoever’s monitoring the Trace back at the Ministry, if they send anyone to check it out tonight, they’ll only find those two idiots when they show up.”

“So, you lot are hiding out here from the Ministry then?” asked Dean. “And what’s up with these muggleborn relocation camps I’ve heard about...? D’you know anything about them?”

“From the information we gathered during the raid on the Ministry, it’s clear they’re more like concentration camps,” Hermione muttered grimly. “As awful as those two out there were, I hated leaving them behind... But it's obvious that we can't trust them.”

“Wait... you lot broke into the Ministry?” Dean gasped. Then Hermione’s implication hit him like a punch in the stomach. “You mean...?” Dean trailed off and gulped, glancing at all of the somber faces of the Unaffiliated.

“If we’re right--these places--they’re more than just relocation camps... more than prisons!” said Harry darkly, his jaw tightening. “They’re much worse...”

Harry blinked, a muscle on his temple twitching. Dean’s blood ran with ice; he shivered—he’d had a very good idea how bad things were with the current administration in the Ministry, but he had struggled to keep his head and not fall into paranoia.

“So Dean... how are you with fighting spells?” asked Harry after a moment passed.

“I... I trained with Fred and George and the Quidditch team a bit before... before we all had to leave Hogwarts,” said Dean hoarsely. “I can do a decent stunner and a basic shield spell--that’s how I got away from some Snatchers last week. I... I stunned one--managed to escape on my broom before anyone else found me. Wh...why?”

“Good... That’s good enough for now,” said Harry, nodding. “We’re not on the run Dean... There may not have been a rebellion against the Ministry before--but there damn well is now!”

“...We’re going to find the internment centre they’ve got here in Wales--we’re going to document what they’re doing there, rescue any prisoners we can... and raze the place to the ground!”

“...I just wanted to know that you can handle yourself when things get hot. I’d let you stay and search and fight with us, but the problem is that you’re underage--you still have a Trace on you. The rest of us are all either emancipated or of age... I’ll call my godfather and Professor Lupin in the morning to take you someplace warded and safe before we all leave tomorrow... alright?”

Dean swallowed again, blinking back tears. He could see the fiery determination in Harry’s eyes--somehow Harry looked far older than his years. Dean found himself wishing that he could help Harry fight the Ministry. Taking a deep breath, Dean smiled and nodded.

“Yeah... sounds good! Thanks Harry!”

“Excellent!” said Harry, relaxing and grinning. “You hungry? We were just about to get some supper when we heard you and those other blokes nearby...”

“Famished!” Dean grinned. “I haven’t eaten properly in days... I stole some food from a muggle shop in a village last week and felt guilty as hell about it... Most of it’s gone now.”

Dean ravenously wolfed down the plentiful meal which Dobby had brought everyone, as Harry and the rest of the Unaffiliated began to fill him in on what they had been up to since Hogwarts, and told him a bit about Dumbledore’s plan to retake the school once they had exposed what the Ministry was
really up to in their secret facilities.

Dean was thrilled and astonished by the story of the raid on the Ministry to rescue Arthur Weasley. Though Dean supposed he really shouldn’t be too surprised, given the rumours which had been flying around Hogwarts about Harry and his closest friends defeating most of Voldemort’s Monster Army over the summer holidays.

No wonder Dean hadn’t seen much of Harry and Hermione except during meals at the beginning of the school-term—they’d been too busy studying and training, preparing for the moment they knew was coming—really learning how to fight and make the best use of their skills. It was almost scary how grown-up the Unaffiliated seemed, even Luna who was younger than Dean.

Dean was horrified to hear about the village of the Dead, extremely glad that he hadn’t run into any Inferi himself. Dean’s own story of being on the run after sending his mother a message to go and stay with his aunt seemed to himself like a walk-in-the-park in comparison; his day-to-day attempts to stay out of sight while avoiding the use of magic except to ride his broom under cover of night, his gnawing hunger, and his run-in with the Snatchers, all barely worth a mention.

“Are you joking? Surviving this long while barely using any magic...?” gasped Dora.

“And escaping even when you did? That’s bloody brilliant Dean!” exclaimed Harry.

“The Trace... eet is a shame that it is still upon you,” said Fleur. “We would do very well to have you fighting alongside us.”

As Dean settled on the mattress under the sleeping bag provided by the Unaffiliated, his trusty broom beside him, he felt full, safe, and warm for the first time in weeks. He glanced over at Harry and the Unaffiliated snuggling under their covers together and smirked, feeling slightly envious when it occurred to him that they might all be much closer than he had previously suspected—as well as proud to have been considered worthy of fighting with them.

But Dean’s mild envy vanished as he drifted off to sleep, imagining his titian-haired Susan back in his arms again when Dumbledore and Harry retook Hogwarts.
“So this is where you found Dean then?” said Lupin as he and Sirius examined the clearing and the remains of the campfire, the early morning sun peeking through the trees.

Harry and Hermione both nodded uncomfortably, peering at the many extra sets of footprints which indicated that others had been there after they’d left the two muggleborn wizards lying unconscious the night before. Hermione’s sensitive nose had also picked up the scents of those who had come after. Broken branches on bushes surrounding the site also indicated that whomever had been there had searched the area, and they were both glad that the concealing charms had worked so well on their own campsite.

“You did the right thing, you know!” said Sirius reassuringly, seeing the guilty expressions on Harry’s and Hermione’s faces. “Clearly you couldn’t trust a pair of dolts who believe the swill that the Prophet and the Wiz-Vision are peddling. They would have likely turned the lot of you in to protect their own hides...”

“In any case, I think those two were long gone before anyone from the Ministry arrived looking for Dean,” Lupin proffered. “There’s no sign of struggle--indicating that they departed quickly when they revived... No doubt when they came to, the fools at least had the sense to realise that the Ministry would be keen on apprehending any students who had escaped Hogwarts when the use of magic in their vicinity was detected.”

“Good... that’s good then!” said Harry, letting out a sigh of relief, and Hermione's invisible furry tail perked up. “As thick and pushy as they were, I’d hate to think that the Ministry had them,” Harry concluded.

Having finished their perusal of the site, Lupin and Sirius followed Harry and Hermione back to their own camp, where they were greeted warmly by the rest of the Coven and Dean Thomas.

“Hi Professor,” said Dean, very happy to finally see a familiar adult who didn't inspire paranoia in him.

“What’s going with you lot?”

“Might be better, but we think we’re closing in on the facility we believe is somewhere in Northern England,” replied Sirius. “But the ones we think are in Scotland and Northern Ireland are less certain... We’re still stretched quite thin, as we’re also trying to protect Muggleborn from the Ministry as we come across them--Monsieur Delacour’s people have been instrumental in helping those with families who wish to leave Britain escape the country, and others are staying in hiding or offering to join the fight...”

Fleur beamed proudly to hear that her father's contributions were having beneficial effects.

“Unfortunately those two that young Dean here ran into last night are not the only ones who find it difficult to believe that the Ministry’s ‘Registration Programme’ is more than a means to protect purebloods from ‘Dumbledore’s Rebellion’...” added Lupin with a heavy sigh. “A few are even turning themselves in. And we’re also doing our best to protect muggle and wizard civilians from Inferi attacks. Harry informed us of your own run-in a few days ago.”
The members of the Coven murmured and nodded sadly in response.

“Would you like to stay for breakfast,” asked Luna, flicking her invisible furry tail.

“Afraid not... We’d best be off with Dean and get him to an Order Safehouse as soon as possible,” said Sirius with a shake of his head. “As animagi with our particular set of traits, we’re both very much in demand right now...”

“But don’t hesitate to call us again the moment you need us,” concluded Lupin.

~o0o~

Deputy Minister Percy Weasley scowled at the reports crossing his desk as he sipped his second cup of tea. He glanced up when he heard the door to his office open and spied Minister Dolores Umbridge approaching.

“Why so glum Percy?” asked the Minister in her sweetest voice. “Things have been moving forward relatively smoothly since the debacle in the Department of Mysteries. It is to be expected that it will take quite some time to uncover all of the Muggleborn and to remove them from our society... but things are moving apace.”

“There was another hit on the Trace last night for one of the muggleborn who escaped Hogwarts--stunning spells apparently--but by the time Aurors arrived, he was already gone. And besides that, there’s been another round of resignations in the Auror Office,” the Deputy Minister muttered crossly. “We lost three more this morning who refused to arrest Muggleborns who resist registration and relocation.”

“Never mind dear,” Dolores smiled comfortingly. “The Snatcher adjuncts to the Unspeakable Office are by and large more than making up for personnel losses in the Auror Office... And it is better that we know who stands with the Ministry and who stands against us. It simply won’t do to have more potential spies for Dumbledore in our midst after all.”

“Oh!” Percy raised his eyebrows and his features brightened. He hadn’t considered that angle. “Right then... I suppose I should go through my files of the resigned and relist them as possible threats to the Ministry then.”

“Splendid Percy!” beamed the Minister. “That will do very nicely indeed.”

~o0o~

The mist drew across the wooded valley as evening approached on the day following the departure of Dean with Sirius and Lupin. Harriet was getting set to call it a day, but Parvati yanked the earphones from her head when the little mp3 player and FM radio of Jennifer’s began to squawk.

“Ow! That hurt...” muttered Parvati, rubbing her invisible furry ear as her invisible furry tail bristled. “It’s not supposed to do that is it?”

“Not like that... no,” Jennifer replied; she could hear the ear-piercing squeal without even having to put the headphones on herself. “Let me see then.”

Jennifer glanced at her mobile smart-phone. Her heart began to race when she saw the screen pixelating. Everyone’s eyes widened and turned to Hermione who had Jennifer’s tablet in her hands. Harriet swallowed apprehensively as she drew closer to peer at the screen herself. The pixelation pattern appeared as little snowy swirls, all colours of the rainbow.
“D’you reckon...?” Harriet began, her breath quickening. Hermione nodded, her invisible furry ears and tail twitching.

“We **must** be near some sort of strong interference for all three electronic devices to be reacting so strangely,” Hermione answered quietly. “It could definitely be a magical source.”

“Right then... we’ll keep heading this direction when we’re ready,” murmured Harriet, nodding at Dora.

As Dora altered Hermione’s appearance, Harriet cast the alarm detecting and disarming charm ahead of the Coven before leading the Coven forward. When Harriet felt the pulsating vibration in her wand, she was certain.

Having already decided that she didn’t want to spoil her incognito identity as Harriet, she altered her own features further, giving herself blue eyes and short, straw coloured hair. As they had planned in advance, Dora altered everyone else’s features as well. Harriet had considered making some of them invisible for the operation, but decided against it, not wanting anyone to be lost and left behind inadvertently.

“Stay quiet and low, and look out for guards,” she hissed at the others. “The alarm deactivating spell interacted with something, so there’s definitely some sort of magically protected facility ahead...”

Luna, Parvati, and Hermione crept ahead of the others silently, keeping their sharp invisible cat ears on alert, their pupils dilating widely in the gathering dusk, invisible furry tails aquiver. Harriet felt her heart thudding in her ears as they slipped deeper into the woods.

After about fifteen minutes creeping through the forest, in the misty twilight Harriet could only just make out a clearing ahead with a low shadowed building with no windows set dead in the centre. When Hermione and the other two cat witches halted and signaled, Harriet gestured to Dora, Jennifer, Daphne and Fleur to stay back. According to Hermione’s hand signal, the cat-witches’ keen senses had detected three guards.

This was it, thought Hermione as she led Luna and Parvati towards their targets, wands at the ready. Her heart was pounding so hard, that even though she knew it was silly, she was afraid the sentinels would hear them. She nodded at Luna and Parvati, and each of them chose a guard wizard.

The Unspeakables guarding the exterior of the nondescript, windowless building never knew what hit them. Shadows reached out from the darkening swirls of fog and before any of them could react, each guard collapsed as a stunner from a wand pressed to the back of the head brought them down with little more than a brief, very muted crackling sound. The sentries disabled, Hermione beckoned the rest of the Coven forth.

“Excellent!” murmured Harriet. “That was brilliant guys!”

“Incredible,” Fleur marveled quietly at the three prostrate and unconscious Unspeakables. “I have never seen the like...”

Daphne and Jennifer both nodded in agreement.

“Blimey!” muttered Dora, “You three would put ‘al’ the Auror corps to shame with your stealth skills... I barely passed the Stealth classes myself--which isn’t sayin’ much mind you, as clumsy as I was.”

“That’s how we managed to sneak by everyone into the maze for the Third Task,” whispered Luna, beaming. “Being half-cat has a lot of benefits.”
“I’ll say...” agreed Parvati, grinning.

“Anyway, this is convenient,” said Dora. “Harriet and I can lead the rest o’ you in lookin’ like these blokes—if anyone’s inside the entrance, we can take ‘em out before they realise anything’s wrong.”

Daphne peered at the small windowless concrete building, which barely looked larger than a bungalow.

“Shouldn’t it be much bigger?” she asked, bewildered. “I thought it was supposed to be a prison camp of some sort.”

“I expect it’s larger on the inside,” Hermione responded.

“It looks a bit like a bunker... I suppose it could be an underground facility,” sighed Harriet, hoping that Hermione was right; the last place she wanted to be was trapped underground.

The Coven dragged the three unconscious guards into the bushes and took their wands. Despite a thorough search, no key was found on any of the wizards. Dora cast a bewitched sleep spell on the wizards to keep them out for the duration of the raid. Removing the robes of two of the Unspeakables and pulling them on over their own clothes, Dora and Harriet also took their forms, morphing into the wizards.

“Got your video camera ready Jennifer?” asked Harry in a deeper version of his own voice, sounding much calmer than he felt. He had no idea how the older male wizard was supposed to sound, and just hoped that looking like the man would be enough to get them past any checkpoints.

“Yeah...” said Jennifer, swallowing in trepidation as she showed Harry the small handheld video camera which was operating entirely on magic, “I already got some exterior footage... and of the guards in their robes.”

“Good,” Harry nodded. “Just keep it on from here on out... Alright everyone, try to stick together—focus on finding prisoners and gathering the wands of anyone else we take down, and take anything else that looks like it’ll be useful for evidence—artifacts, documents—just chuck the lot in your bags.”

“I just wanna say somethin’ too, before we go in...” said Dora in her own voice to emphasize that it was really her speaking; it seemed odd to hear her voice coming from a wizard’s mouth.

“...I know none of us wants to kill anyone if we don’t ‘ave to, but don’t ‘old back once any fighting starts. I don’t doubt that ‘oever’s in there wouldn’t bat an eye at killing or torturing every last one of us. So use whatever spells you think are appropriate—nobody’ll think any less of you.”

“Dora’s right...” Hermione added firmly, seeing everyone’s anxious faces. “We know what they’re capable of...”

“Yeah... we do!” Harry sighed, “You’re both right! We have to treat this like we’re battling Voldemort and his army all over again...”

“Or Malfoy...” muttered Daphne, her voice icy and brittle; Fleur nodded in agreement.

Seeing the steely determination in everyone’s eyes, Harry knew they were all ready. The Coven approached the low building in the mist shrouded forest glade once again, unlit wands pointing at the locked entrance. The darkness was even deeper now that night had properly fallen.

“Right then!” said Harry, “The lock probably unlocks only with a coded spell, and likely has an anti-alohomorona charm on it, but I bet they didn’t account for the power of a Coven spell. Everyone all
together... alohomora on my mark...”

~000~

The Unspeakable sitting at the intake desk twiddled his thumbs in boredom; nobody had been brought in on his shift for several days. He looked up in surprise when he heard the heavy iron door groaning open. He had received no memos of any imminent arrivals, and the magically locked door wasn't supposed to be otherwise unlocked until the shift was over.

“What’re you doin’ in here?” growled the intake wizard when he saw two of the sentries entering.
“Your shifts aren’t up for another hour.”

“Yours is though...” muttered one of the sentries, pointing his wand at the intake wizard.
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Harry counted his blessings that Hermione had been correct about the internment compound being larger inside than out, rather than an underground facility, and also that Dora was willing and able to perform the Imperius Curse on the intake wizard. Unfortunately, it appeared that their window until potential discovery was limited.

“Alright, we’ve only got an hour at best until the guards change their shift,” Harry muttered as the Coven tentatively entered the long dark corridor past the entrance room. “We’ll have to move quickly…”

“At least all ze offices are in this corridor,” hissed Fleur, “and the administration personnel have all gone for ze day.”

“But there’s still a dozen more guards in the detention blocks,” Dora added quietly. “Not to mention that according to the sentry, my dear Aunt Bellatrix likes to work late on occasion and has a personal office floo. So stay alert…”

“Okay, I hate having to do this,” Harry said through gritted teeth, “but we’ll need to make short work of the offices. Dora... you and Jennifer, and Fleur and Daphne take the offices on the left--Hermione and I, and Luna and Parvati, we’ll take the ones on the right. Just empty the desks of all files as quickly as possible, grab any identifying items, and we’ll meet up at the end of the hallway in ten minutes and move on…”

~o0o~

Antonin Dolohov rolled his eyes when he heard Thorfinn Rowle’s stomach rumbling.

“How again already?”

“What?” grunted Rowle, “I’m starved, and we’re the lucky one’s pullin’ a double today…”

“True that,” Dolohov shrugged, grinning. “I suppose I’ve worked up a bit of an appetite myself on that muggle bint in Cell-block C…”

“Huh… talk about a big appetite,” Rowle muttered with an evil looking smirk. “Can’t even keep it in your trousers for barely ten minutes at a time.”

“Gotta get the good uns while they’re still fresh... and before Bellatrix gets her hands on ‘em...” Dolohov retorted. “They’re no good after they’re dead…”

“Hunh... tell that to Bowdler! ‘E’d do an Inferi if it wouldn’t bite ‘is willy orf!” Rowle chortled, “‘E’s probably in the Chamber right now ‘avin’ ‘is way with the corpses... Anyway, I’m headed to the kitchens--want anything?”

“Yeah, why not!? Bring me back a sandwich.”

“Righto...” Rowle nodded. “And mebbe after we’re done eating, I’ll join you in Cell Block C... she’s a real pretty little bird, that one is.”

Still shaking his head, chuckling about Bowdler’s proclivities, Rowle made his way through the corridors to the kitchens by the staffroom at the end of the main corridor. He rifled through a cupboard looking for the bread before rummaging in the coldbox for some corned beef and cheddar
cheese. Laying out four slices of rye-bread, he busied himself making sandwiches for himself and Dolohov.

“Wish we ‘ad some bleedin’ ‘ouse-elves ‘ere,” Rowle groused to nobody as he spread a thick layer of Colman’s mustard on two slices of bread, and slathered the other two pieces with some chutney.

Sandwiches finally completed and wrapped in wax-paper, Rowle grabbed two bags of crisps and threw them on the plate as well. He kicked open the kitchen door and stepped into the corridor, his eyes widening in surprise.

“ ‘Oo the bloody hell are you?” Rowle barked at the two startled witches, his wand instantly in his hand.

~o0o~

Fleur and Daphne spun around to face the wizard who had appeared in the dimly lit corridor just after they had finished ransacking the office near the end of the hallway. When the wizard saw their two wands pointing at him, he threw himself back through the door he had exited a moment before, his plate of sandwiches clattering to the ground.

“Avada Kedavra,” shouted the wizard as he dove through the doorway.

Fleur rolled out of the line of fire; the green bolt of lightning sparked against the wall on the other side of the corridor, barely missing her by centimetres. Instinctively she raised her other hand to shoot a ball of fire, then remembered that they didn’t want to rouse too much attention yet. She motioned to Daphne who nodded in understanding.

Daphne stood on one side of the doorframe, and Fleur on the other, both of their chests heaving rapidly as they peeked to see where the wizard was inside. Another arc of green lightning shot through the opening and they both fell back.

Fleur signaled Daphne again and flung herself flat to the floor in the doorway, silently firing a Reductor spell at the table the wizard had tipped over to hide behind. The wizard’s third killing spell missed again, as he had been aiming where he thought the witch would be standing.

Daphne was in the doorway the moment the green arc of magic had dissipated, furiously whipping her wand three times through the cloud of disintegrating particulates which had been the upturned table. The wizard’s eyes bulged with shock when his wand arm fell away in a spray of blood, severed at his elbow.

Rowle gasped in short, ragged breaths, his body wracked with pain from the two long gashes across his chest. He couldn’t believe this was happening--this was supposed to be a secure location. What had happened to the alarms? But as bad as his situation appeared, he felt a glimmer of hope when he saw the indecision in the young witch’s eyes. She wasn’t prepared to issue a killing blow.

“DOLO...” he began to yell. Rowle never finished, his last sound a gurgling rattle of breath through the gaping hole the witch opened in his neck with another slash of her wand.

Daphne was still standing, her wand still pointed at the dead wizard, her hand still shaking when Luna and Parvati appeared in the doorway, both looking alarmed. Luna helped Fleur to her feet as Parvati gave Daphne a hug, kissing her wetly.

“That one was originally one of Voldemort’s,” hissed Parvati, glaring at the wizard. “He’s one of the ones who captured Harry in the Forbidden Forest when Harry shoved me into the bushes and took a spell for me before they realised I was there too.”
“Th... thanks Parvati! I... I’ll be alright now,” Daphne whispered, her trembling diminishing in Parvati’s embrace. She returned Parvati’s kiss heatedly, then peered at her gratefully before glancing at Luna and Fleur who were similarly engaged in warm consolation.

Everyone stiffened, wands at the ready when they heard footsteps running in the corridor. They relaxed when a familiar face appeared.

“It’s alright, it’s me...” muttered Dora--who had reverted to her natural form briefly to reassure the others. She changed back into the sentry wizard’s form as she spied the blood and the fallen wizard in the kitchen.

“Blimey, what 'appened here then?” she asked as Jennifer arrived behind her, followed by Harry and Hermione.

“Fleur and I...” murmured Daphne. “He almost killed her, but... but we got him.”

“Good! That’s Rowle!” said Harry as Jennifer trained her camera on the body. “He was one of the Death Eaters that Voldemort broke out of Azkaban. He and his partner Dolohov evaded capture after the Battle of Hogwarts--He must have been recruited by Minister Umbridge at some point.”

“Someone might be expecting him back very soon,” Hermione said anxiously. “We should probably get a move-on before he’s discovered missing.”

“Yeah...” Harry agreed, “Yeah... we should! You alright then Daphne?”

“I’m okay...” Daphne nodded, giving Harry a sad little smile as she picked up Rowle’s wand and dropped it in her bag.

“Right... the cell-blocks should be this way then,” Harry said as he led the way. The Coven turned down one passageway, and then another, passing a set of iron double-doors with the insignia of a skull painted in black on the exterior.

“Wait...” whispered Harry, “We should see what’s behind here then...”

Cautiously, Dora and Harry opened the doors as the others stepped back, wands in their ready position. Harry grimaced and the cat-witches all winced at the grinding sound of the iron hinges.

“Why don’t they bloody oil their doors?” Dora muttered crossly.

But the sound was the least of their concerns when the stench hit their noses. The Coven gasped in collective horror at the gruesome contents of the enormous chamber. Jennifer stuffed a hand into her mouth to stifle a scream, and tried her utmost to keep her other hand from shaking as she continued filming.

Nearly two hundred bodies in various states of decay were stacked like cordwood in piles near a tridecagram painted in blood on the floor. A heavy oak table nearby was covered in deadly looking metal instruments.

Harry nearly threw up when he spied the bodies of little children among the stacks of corpses--some of them mutilated--waiting to be reanimated. Luna and Daphne both lost the battle to control their stomachs, vomiting on the floor, heaving several times.

Hermione turned her tearstreaked face away and flung herself on Harry, sobbing into his chest. Parvati burst into sobs as well, and fell into Dora’s arms.
“Don’t look sweetie,” Dora murmured, blinking back her own tears and reverting back to her natural form again as she stroked Parvati’s hair. “Don’t look…” she repeated, unable to tear her own eyes away from the hideous sight.

Tears dripped from Fleur’s pale cheek as she reached for what was clearly an inventory sheet on a clipboard on the table. She placed it into her bag, then she wrapped up the tools of Death and Blood Magic in the piece of canvas they had been lying on and put them in the bag next to the clipboard.

Harry clutched Hermione tightly, and closed his own eyes to steady himself, but the smell burned the afterimage into his brain. Harry knew he would never be able forget this horror as long as he lived. This wasn’t at all unexpected, but seeing it for himself ignited something deep inside him, something akin to what he’d felt the day he’d taken Draco Malfoy’s hand.

A raging inferno began to roll inside Harry. He knew from discussions with Dumbledore, Sirius, and Dora, that the Necromancy was Bellatrix Lestrange’s work. But it was Umbridge who was sponsoring Bellatrix this time.

Umbridge! She was as foul and loathsome as Voldemort had ever been. Worse even! The Venomous Toad hid her sadism behind a veneer of moderation, and justified it all in the name of “Order” and “Security.”

With Voldemort there had been no such pretense to lofty ideals. Tom Riddle had simply been a Psychotic Madman obsessed with blood purity and bent on personal aggrandizement—a Dark Wizard with great ego and no self-control.

Umbridge was cold, calculating... a Merchant of Death, and the very embodiment of Control. She was certainly as megalomaniacal as Voldemort, and surely as sadistic as Bellatrix, but every murder was just a number in Minister Umbridge’s scheme to “save the wizard world” from ruin by the Undesirables—the “mudbloods” and the “halfbreeds.”

And it was a scheme which she had managed to legitimise through propaganda and lies.

“I’ll kill her...” Harry muttered through gritted teeth. “If I ever get my hands on Umbridge, I’m going to fucking kill her!”

Harry passed his weeping Hermione to Dora who was also cuddling Daphne and Luna now. Fleur had an arm around Jennifer who was still valiantly filming everything. As the rest of the Coven departed from the Chamber of Death, Harry set a number of incendiary and concussive explosive spells, timed to go off in ten minutes, slowly following behind the others. The immolation should hopefully distract the rest of the guards as well as providing some measure of dignity for the Souls of the Dead.

~o0o~

Dolohov was tired of waiting for Rowle, and he was bored.

“Probably stuffing his face already,” he muttered to himself with a sardonic grimace. “Hope he remembers my sandwich.”

Rowle was right about one thing though, a double-shift in this place was tedious unless called upon to assist Bellatrix in her work. Dolohov decided to pay another visit to Cell Block C. Bellatrix didn’t mind if her toys were broken in a bit already, and Rowle knew where to find him whenever he was finished munching.
The members of the Coven were still pale and shaken by the Death Chamber, but had recovered somewhat by the time they had reached the wing of the compound which contained Cell Blocks A and B. They slipped inside a broom closet to take stock of things before carrying out the next phase of the mission.

“The spells should be going off in about a minute,” Harry murmured, “Hopefully it’ll draw most of the guards away. There’s about sixty prisoners currently, and they’re all in this wing according to the sentry at the front desk…”

“...and then we ought to be able to slip out into the Courtyard in the centre of the compound with the prisoners once we’ve released them, and call Lupin and Sirius for backup,” continued Hermione. “They should be able to apparate into the courtyard and bring some portkeys to get the prisoners away once we’ve broken through any shielding spells from the inside…”

Hermione was interrupted by shaking walls and the sound of explosions coming from the Death Chamber. Some supplies fell off a shelf as the broom closet continued to rock, and guards could be heard shouting and running by.

“How many charges did you set Harry?” Luna asked after the sixth shuddering report, as everyone peered at him questioningly in their wand-light.

“Er... about a dozen in the Chamber itself and maybe six more to go off after that in the Corridor,” Harry muttered, feeling slightly embarrassed. “…I was angry... Hopefully the follow-up explosions will take a few of those sick bastards out…”

“GOOD!” interjected the rest of the Coven in unison, and Harry quieted.

They counted the explosions, and when they heard no more guards running by, they exited the broom closet in haste. The glow of the blaze that Harry had set could be seen at the far end of the corridor as they darted into the hall which contained the Cell-blocks.

“What’s going on?” yelled one of the two guards who had been left behind to watch the prisoners.

“Shut up you idiot!” snarled the other guard as he whipped out his wand. “That lot ain’t with us... Avada Kedra..”

Fleur snapped. The guard never got to complete the incantation to his killing spell. He burst into flames, staggering down the hallway screaming when one of Fleur’s Veela fireballs hit him. Dora hit the other guard with an Imperius spell.

“OPEN THE CELL DOORS!” she bellowed at the hapless guard.

The Unspeakable had no choice but to obey Dora’s command; he waved a wand and all the cells opened. Dora relieved the wizard of his wand when the task was finished. Jennifer kept her camera trained on the corridor which was filling with acrid smoke as Hermione, Daphne, Dora, Fleur, and Luna began to direct the terrified and bewildered prisoners to the corridor which led to the courtyard while Harry and Parvati kept their eye on the end of the passage. A number of the freed captives began to babble.

“Wh...who are you?”

“Where are you taking us...?”
“We’re bustin’ you lot outta here... no time to explain!” yelled Dora, “Follow the others... go on, move! Quickly...”

“Not without my daughter!” screamed a hysterical woman. “They took her to Cell Block C...”

“Bloody Hell!” groaned Harry, his face turning ashen. “LUNA! ...” Harry shouted. “Leave the prisoners to the others... stay here with Parvati and keep watch for any guards. Hermione and I are going to Cell Block C...”

Harry darted through the throng of released prisoners, grabbing Hermione’s arm, and they both took off running down the hallway amidst the chaos while the others continued to help the internees escape into the courtyard. Parvati spotted two Unspeakables returning from the blazing inferno in the Death Chamber corridor. Apparently they had managed to avoid the secondary set of explosions.

Parvati glanced apprehensively at Luna. “Er... are you ready?”

“Of course!” said Luna calmly, understanding implicitly what Parvati was asking.

They waited until the flummoxed Unspeakables began firing killing curses and dodged them effortlessly. Before the guards had time to raise shield spells, Parvati and Luna were already returning fire with Reductors. The screams of the disintegrating wizards were lost in the cacophony of the mayhem when another delayed explosive spell went off, which Harry must have forgotten that he’d set in his anger.

~o0o~

“Fucking Hell? What the blazes...?” muttered Dolohov as he let go of the crying naked girl who was shackled to the cot.

The cell shook again as the sounds of explosions continued to echo through the empty passage which contained Cell Blocks C and D. Zipping up his trousers and belting his robe, bemoaning the interruption before he’d even had his chance at a little fun, Dolohov tentatively stepped into the corridor with his wand at the ready. He waited until the explosions had stopped and began to make his way back to Cell Blocks A and B when he heard a babble of shouting voices and the sound of spell fire. One last explosion shook the building and he halted.

Dolohov spied two figures rounding the corner and aimed his wand, but confusion stayed his hand when he saw who it was. The Unspeakable he knew, but the witch was unfamiliar to him. Then the blood drained from his face when the Unspeakable’s features melted like wax and turned into someone else’s which were all too familiar.

“POTTER!” Dolohov barked in shock, too surprised to raise a shield spell in time to prevent Harry’s Reductor spell from hitting him in the chest.

“Harry... why did you show yourself like that?” Hermione asked in puzzlement.

“I... er... I’m not entirely sure. It... it was his spell that took me down in the Forbidden Forest!” Harry answered with an odd expression somewhere between fury and bewilderment. “I dunno... I just thought if anyone should know it was me--it was Dolohov!”

Hermione nodded, accepting Harry’s reply without question as they both jogged towards the open cell-door. She bit her lip in consternation when she saw how young the naked girl shackled to the bed appeared to be.

“Relashio,” Hermione incanted. The chains and cuffs fell away from the girl’s wrists and ankles as
Harry tugged off the Unspeakable robes he was wearing. Harry’s face was a devastating picture of burning rage.

“Put those on the girl and get moving...” Harry growled. “I’ll be right behind you--I’m just going to set some more delayed explosive spells.”

Gasiing breathlessly and struggling against tears, Hermione practically carried the sobbing girl to the exit. She wasn’t much bigger than Astoria had been when Harry had rescued her from Draco Malfoy. Fleur was waiting just inside the doorway.

“Where’s my mummy?” wailed the girl.

“Outside... Everyone else ees already out!” said Fleur anxiously as she took the girl from Hermione’s arms. “Where ees Harry?”

“He said he’d be right behind me...” Hermione peered down the corridor through the smoke worriedly. “THERE... there he is...!”

Massive explosions began to rock the entire building as Harry ran down the corridor at full speed, waving and yelling at the girls to get out, casting more spells behind him. Fleur picked up the young one and hurried down the other passage to the courtyard, but Hermione refused to budge--instead, casting some of her own explosive spells down towards the opposite end of the corridor.

Hermione didn’t breathe a sigh of relief until Harry swept her under one of his arms and barreled down the short passageway to the courtyard firing several more parting shots as he ran. Hermione gasped, staggered by the power of Harry’s concussive and incendiary explosive spells, having expected that it would take the entire Coven to accomplish what he was doing to the Ministry compound.

With his last spell as he burst into the courtyard, Harry unleashed a Firestorm Charm into the corridor behind them for good measure. Gasping for breath, sweat dripping from their sooty brows, he and Hermione both clutched each other tightly as they regarded the chaos unfolding around them.

The girl whom they had freed was clinging to her mother, both of them sobbing. A number of freed prisoners--as frightened as they already were by the collapsing building and the billowing smoke and flames pouring from blown out doorways and gaping holes in the walls--shriekeed in terror at the sound of numerous apparition cracks in the courtyard.

“Hermione was right--the anti-apparition wards broke when we used the Shield Penetration spell while you were still inside rescuing the girl...” explained Dora when she saw Harry’s bewildered expression.

“...And some of the prisoners are actually muggles!” added Luna, her silvery eyes boggling. “The mother of the girl you saved told me that she used to work for MI6 as an analyst before uncovering the PM’s secret communications with muggle terrorist groups, and also documentation of war-crimes by the Prime Minister’s government in the Middle East...”

“There’s other muggles too,” gasped Jennifer, who was still filming everything. “Mostly political activists of different sorts... I can’t believe it Harry! They really are working together--you and Hermione had the Minister of Magic and the PM dead to rights on that score...”

“Indeed they do,” murmured a voice which Harry knew very well.

Harry spun around, one arm still tightly clutching Hermione. He was stunned to see Dumbledore in their midst next to Lupin, having only expected Sirius and Lupin to arrive. But as he and Hermione
both glanced around the courtyard, he could see Arthur and Bill Weasley, Amelia Bones, Dawlish, Snape, Hagrid, Moody, and Shacklebolt among the arrivals as well.

Some of them were already gathering around portkeys and vanishing with about six rescued detainees at a time, as Dumbledore explained the presence of so many from the Order.

“When Lupin informed me several minutes ago of what was happening here, and mentioned that you had freed numerous prisoners, I knew you would need as many as the Order could spare to remove them all to safety,” said Dumbledore, his long white beard blowing around in the swirling air currents, blue eyes glittering in the flickering orange light of the flames.

“Sir...” gasped Hermione, speaking for Harry who was still too breathless to speak for himself. “We’ve got lots of proof that they were turning people into Inferi and there’s three knocked-out Unspeakables in the bushes in front of the building...”

“We’ve already got them...” said Lupin.

“Sniffed them out the moment we got here,” added Sirius. “By the way... any sign of my dear cousin Bellatrix?”

“I... I don’t think she was here tonight,” Harry replied, finally managing to catch a breath as his heart-rate began to return to something approaching normal.

“Damn!” swore Lupin. “That would have been something! Still... you’ve done splendidly! Is this all the Coven’s handiwork?” Lupin gestured at the crumbling, burning fortification surrounding them.

“It’s nearly all Harry’s!” said Hermione, a hint of awe in her voice. “I set off a few explosive spells just as we were leaving... But Harry’s spells were really powerful.”

“I... I’m not exactly sure how, really!” Harry muttered, swallowing anxiously. “I originally set off a few on that side over there... where the Death Chamber was. They were a bit stronger than I even realised apparently...”

“...Then I set off another load of spells on the other side just a few minutes ago,” Harry continued with almost a pleading expression, “...and then Hermione and I did the last few spells on that side there as we left the building.”

“Honestly, I thought it would take all of us... together... t’d do that much damage. I... I don’t know if any of the Unspeakables inside escaped or not...” Harry trailed off, not quite sure how to say that he didn’t mean to kill every last Unspeakable he could find, not even certain that he would have meant it if he had said it.

Albus Dumbledore peered thoughtfully into Harry’s green eyes, which were glittering in the flames just as his own were, sensing Harry’s fear at what he had unleashed within himself. Dumbledore glanced at Harry’s wife, who was determinedly staring at her husband.

“You have nothing to feel guilty about Harry!” said Hermione fiercely, curling her still invisible furry tail around him. “We saved everyone who needed to be saved... and everyone who died brought it on themselves the moment they knowingly took part in the Minister’s EVIL operation!”

Harry bit his lip and returned Hermione’s gaze with a watery one of his own, still uncertain.

“You must listen to your wife Harry,” the real Headmaster of Hogwarts said softly, blinking back his own stinging tears. “She speaks truly... If anything, you continue to show remarkable restraint given
the power raging within you. Many would have been utterly consumed by it after witnessing what you have seen... I could not be prouder of the man you have become!"

“...And the Minister, I have no doubt now that she shall rue the day that she woke the Dragon within you!”
Chapter 164

Having just dozed off, Minister Umbridge bolted upright in her bed when she heard her Floo-Alert sound. She glanced at her clock and noted that it was shortly after midnight. Grumbling as she pulled a dressing-gown over her nightie and grabbed her wand, she made her way to the fireplace in her sitting room. She peered at the small picture on the mantle which informed her of an incoming communication from the Ministry and waved her wand, unlocking her Floo. Green flames flared in the hearth and a memo shot out.

Dolores snatched it from the air, knowing that it could not be good news at this time of night. Her lips pursed, and her nostrils flared as her eyes darted through the memo. Furiously, she dressed in a hurry and quickly departed for the Ministry.

“What wasn’t I informed hours ago?” the Minister barked at the Unspeakable when she arrived at the monitoring station in the Department of Mysteries.

“Only just found out ourselves Ma’am,” the nervous looking Unspeakable replied. “The Night-Shift at the Welsh facility never responded to our Midnight check-in. We sent a team to check up as per protocol, and they determined that it happened shortly before shift change... Whoever’s responsible must’ve waylaid the Night-Shift when they showed up...”

The Minister looked up when she heard the door slam open, and spied her disheveled deputy bursting into the room.

“I came as soon as I heard Minister...” gasped Percy Weasley, trying to smooth his frizzy red hair with his fingers. “How bad is it?”

Minister Umbridge calculated quickly in her mind, wondering if her Senior Undersecretary was ready to see everything. He had come a long way from the eager, greedily ambitious, yet naive boy she had initially recruited, even going as far as to torture his own father. He had supported completely the recruiting of Voldemort’s Death Eaters and Snatchers, the ending of the ban on the use of Unforgivables by Ministry personnel, and wholeheartedly approved the purging and incarceration of the Mudbloods and other Undesirables, but was he ready yet for the next step...?

Or would he balk when he came to understand the finality of the solution to the Mudblood problem which she and the Purebloods in Operations had been working on for so long? Finally Dolores made up her mind. If Percy Weasley wasn’t ready now, he never would be.

“Well, Percy,” sighed Dolores, “perhaps we should see for ourselves! A team is already in place investigating, we may as well join them...”

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Senior Undersecretary Weasley strolled beside Minister Umbridge through the haze of smoke and the devastation at the Ministry’s Welsh detention centre, his face ashen. The fires had been mostly put out, and bits of the compound were still standing, but the rubble where the building had collapsed was still smouldering.

Dolores eyed her Deputy Minister approvingly as he registered the right level of shock at seeing the burned corpses of the Unspeakers. Her brows furrowed pensively as she studied his reaction when they came across what appeared to be the partially cremated remains of perhaps two hundred persons piled in one demolished room.
“Well, that doesn’t make sense...” Percy Weasley muttered. “Surely they would have freed the prisoners, not burned them alive. Unless...” Percy’s eyes widened and he swallowed when the implication suddenly struck him. He glanced at the Minister as his breath quickened.

“...Unless they were already dead,” the Minister said softly in a saccharine tone, regarding Percy with her most sympathetic expression. “Yes... it is most unfortunate that it has come to this Percy. There are some who are far too recalcitrant, and who are too determined to destroy everything which we hold dear...”

“There are indeed also some who have proved themselves willing to give up their goals of stealing our identities and our culture, and they are of course being shown all due mercy. But these... these are the remains of those who were lawfully deemed as representing the gravest threat to our way of life...”

“It simply would not do to have given them the opportunity to escape and join Dumbledore’s rebellion. And you have seen the violence the rebels are capable of--the lengths they are willing to go to attain their goals... assassination and murder, lawlessness, destruction, chaos... and a complete upending of the Natural Order. It is sometimes necessary to fight fire with fire--for the Greater Good--do you understand, Percy?”

Percy felt unsteady on his feet, his head swimming. He closed his eyes briefly to steady himself. Percy had supported legally ending the ban of the use of the Cruciatus and the Killing Curses, as a means of defending the Ministry and restoring Order against the murderous Insurrectionists, but he had never imagined that Death would be employed as a means of punishment after capture. Had the Ministry gone too far?

But he had viewed the wanton destruction of the detention centre, and gazed at the broken and charred bodies of the Unspeakables. He had seen their faces frozen in pain and horror; Percy knew that many had died screaming as they burned alive.

His nostrils flared when he thought back to the mutilated corpse of Draco Malfoy which had been delivered to the Ministry. At least the Insurrectionists had been offered a merciful ending, clean and painless in a flash of green light.

Percy felt a surge of anger when he realised that the Minister was right--the Rebels would stop at nothing. There was no depth to the levels of their depravity in their bid to spread Chaos and Disorder, Abomination and Filth, polluting wizardkind with impurity and disease.

“Yes Minister...” Percy said stiffly, slowly nodding as his jaw tightened and his eyes narrowed. “I do understand!”

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Tears sprang to Narcissa Black’s eyes as she assisted Remus Lupin and Poppy Pomfrey--who had sneaked out of Hogwarts to apparate to the outskirts of Black Manor--in treating the dozens of freed internees from the Ministry’s Death Camp. Many of the released had clearly been imprisoned for some time, nearly skin and bone, and some bore the unmistakable marks of torture with bladed implements, a signature technique of Narcissa’s own sister, Bellatrix.

In another room of the manor, Albus Dumbledore struggled to keep himself together as he interviewed Andrea Mason, the ex-MI6 analyst as she held her still frightened daughter on her lap. Albus felt his heart breaking when he peered into the young girl’s hollow eyes, so much like his sister's. Had she been a witch, this would be the girl's first year at Hogwarts, and Dumbledore felt a surge of satisfaction that Harry Potter had ended the lives of her tormentors.
Severus Snape filmed the interview with Jennifer’s camera, as he was quite familiar with the operation of muggle technology. He was extremely impressed that the Potters had mastered the advanced spells necessary to make muggle electronics work with magic instead of electricity.

Snape and Dumbledore had already viewed the footage filmed by Jennifer Watts on her laptop, along with Amelia Bones, Alastor Moody and Sirius. And Dumbledore had already spoken to the other muggles who had been imprisoned among the muggleborn wizards and witches--and had collected their memories for Pensieve viewing as well. Every last one of the muggle detainees had been political enemies of the muggle Prime Minister’s party, activists for various causes.

Meanwhile, Shacklebolt, Hagrid, and Dawlish all kept watch over the Unspeakables captured at the Ministry’s Death Camp: the three who had been rendered unconscious by the Potters and their friends, and the dozen who had showed up for the Night Shift while the Internees were still being evacuated.

~o0o~

Hermione purred as Harry wrung out her bedraggled tail with his hands under the hot spray of water, rinsing the soot and filth away with the suds. She watched the muck and foam swirl down the drain before turning to face her silent husband through the steam.

“Penny for your thoughts?” she asked as she pressed her naked wet form against his and gave him a kiss.

“Hunh?”

“I know you’re still feeling dreadful Harry. Do you want to talk about it?”

“I... I dunno Hermione...” Harry responded, swallowing anxiously.

“Please Harry!” she whispered, tears stinging her eyes as the steaming water cascaded over the pair of them.

“I... I’m afraid Hermione,” he reluctantly admitted. “I... I’m not sure who I am anymore! I killed a load of people tonight, and... and I wanted to... I wanted to see them all suffer and die. I was so angry... angrier than I’ve ever been! ... I know they killed and tortured people too, but that doesn’t make me feel any better...”

“That anger... I know that’s why my explosive spells were so powerful... and it scares me because it’s still inside of me! ... I hate that feeling Hermione! I don’t want to be just like them--I’m afraid I’m turning evil...”

“But you’re not--and the fact that you feel remorse proves it! ... We all feel the same way Harry...” said Hermione, giving him another kiss. “None of us really wants to kill anyone, even when we feel like we do--even when we know how horrid and deserving of it those disgusting people are... I’ll never be able to get what I saw in that Death Chamber out of my mind! ...”

“Nor I...” Harry muttered.

“I know Harry! But every time I see that again in my mind, it reminds me that there is a difference--you’re not like them--we saved a lot of lives tonight Harry! We saved that little girl...”

“Yeah... you’re right Hermione!” Harry sighed. “I know it in my head... I know what we’re fighting for... and I know it’s something I’m just going to have to learn to live with! It’s just... what if this
feeling never goes away? What if I ever lose control of it? Wh...What if I ever do become ‘consumed by it’ and start to hurt innocent people... people I love?”

“You won’t Harry! I know you won’t... if you don’t trust yourself, trust me! I can feel everything you’re feeling inside yourself Harry... It’s what I feel too... and I’m telling you, that anger, that pain, the grief... it’s not coming from Hate! It’s Love Harry! ...”

“And... and that love will continue to guide your hand--and stay it when it needs to be stayed... you have GOOD instincts Harry! I trust them with all my heart, and so does the rest of the Coven!”

Harry turned off the shower and peered at his wet dripping wife, biting his lip, unable to contain himself any longer. The steel and concrete walls he’d been putting up all evening collapsed like wet cardboard as the truth of her faith in him thundered through him like a tidal wave. The surge of emotion swept his senses away as he embraced her tightly, crushing his lips against hers, tears mingling with the shower water still clinging to his face.

Harry didn’t really understand how or why, but the raging volcanic fury which he’d been trying to contain within himself, exploded as a turbulent blend of ardour and grief. Hermione sobbed and arched as she cradled her husband in her arms, yowling as she released her own pent up cyclonic mix of passion and sadness, her furry wet tail whipping madly.

Together they slid down the slick tiles into the draining puddles at the bottom of the marble tub, limbs entwined, clinging to each other, their anguish flowing away with their tears as they poured their hearts into one another.

~o0o~

Jennifer and Dora were already cleaned up and snuggled in their enlarged bed under satiny sheets, together with Luna, Parvati, Daphne and Fleur, comforting each other as nobody wanted to sleep apart tonight. They had all seen too much death and horror over the past week.

Dumbledore had sent the Coven directly back to Jennifer’s manor with a Portkey which had been set with a permanent link to Narcissa Black’s manor. The true Headmaster of Hogwarts had assured them that the Order had things well in hand, and that the Coven had done their bit for the moment.

“As soon as we have things sorted here, I shall recall you so that we can begin making plans to retake Hogwarts, and broadcast everything we have to the public through the Wiz-Vision. Please... look after each other well for the next few days, as the battle is just beginning, and we shall certainly all find ourselves in the thick of things again soon enough...”

Having returned to Jennifer’s, the other members of the Coven were now sharing gentle cuddles and kisses, waiting for Harry and Hermione to join them. Their tearful eyes widened in astonishment when they felt the entire manor quake, as sex was the last thing on anyone’s mind. Luna’s fluffy white tail quivered, and she glanced at the others, seeing their puzzled expressions.

“It’s not what you think,” she said quietly with a seraphic smile. “They’re just loving each other... healing...”

“Really? How can you tell?” Daphne asked, looking intrigued. Parvati, Jennifer, and Dora peered at
Luna questioningly as well.

“I’m not sure really,” Luna replied truthfully. “The vibration I suppose--it just felt a bit different.”

Fleur looked pensive for a moment, then she smiled and nodded.

“Oui, I sense it too Luna...”

The stars shone brightly through the parting clouds in the night sky above the rolling Dorset hills, shimmering upon the rippling surface of the pond in a clearing surrounded by copses of willows and evergreens. But the starlight wasn’t the only thing shining in the glade with the pool near the Elizabethan manor.

From a distance, the silvery glowing creatures flitting among the bulrushes and ferns, illuminating the greek statuary and stone benches, might have easily been taken for fireflies. But if one were much nearer, and paying much more attention with an open mind, one might have noticed that the tiny luminous figures basking in the purified ambience were much more human in appearance, despite being attached to gossamer wings.
Harry stirred, feeling a very pleasurable sensation as the pink glow seen from behind his eyelids indicated that it was morning. He blinked and grinned to see dirty-blonde hair strewn across his lower abdomen and a bobbing fluffy white tail. Harry reached out his hands to stroke Luna’s furry white ears as she continued to suck his morning stiffness.

Luna pressed her lips against his bare pubes and took him deeper when she sensed Harry surging. Holding her head in place, Harry groaned as he blissfully erupted into Luna’s humid throat. He heard a squeal, feeling a quake of ecstasy beside him, and through the fog of ardour he saw Hermione’s naked thighs wrapping around Daphne’s head as Hermione’s bushy ginger tail happily thumped the bed.

“Morning Harry,” said Luna with a grin when she had finished, his stickiness trickling down her chin.

“It’s been two days... we thought you and Hermione might be ready for some cheering up,” said Parvati, who had disengaged her lips from Jennifer’s to speak.

“I approved the operation,” chortled Dora as Fleur looked up and fluttered her eyelashes at Harry, her own tongue too busily engaged with Dora’s heated slit to say anything. “I figured we could all use a bit of cheerin’ right about now...”

“Er... yeah! ... suppose you’re right!” Harry grinned again, thinking about how mopey they had all been yesterday, having spent it mostly just cuddling each other and trying their best to get past things and move on—though everybody knew it was something they would never truly be able to forget.

“Mmm... I agree! Good Morning Harry...!” said Hermione, smiling and flicking her furry ears as she tingled, still in the throes of delight. “That was lovely... thank you Daphne!”

“It was my pleasure... really!” giggled Daphne, giving Hermione and Harry both a wet kiss.

Daphne and Luna began to explore each other as Harry leaned over to kiss his wife. His hand slid across the satiny skin of Hermione’s belly, up to cup one of her breasts and gently tweak a nipple as he kissed her. Harry’s lips trailed wetly down her neck and across her collarbone until they encircled the hard nipple which belonged to the breast in the palm of his hand.

Harry wasn’t sure why, but there was something powerfully comforting about the feel of Hermione’s nipple in his mouth as he rolled his tongue around and sucked it. A sublime sense of peace settled over him as his arms wrapped around her, his hands stroking the soft strip of orange fur along her spine; he never wanted to let go. Hermione gasped at the tingling electrical surges rippling through her as Harry continued voraciously sucking.

Fleur came up behind Hermione and began to nuzzle her neck, one hand sliding across her tummy, squeezing her other little breasts, flicking nipples with her thumbs, as the other hand slipped between Hermione’s thighs to rub her damp slit.

Dora pressed her own ample breasts into Harry’s back as she ground herself against his backside and nibbled an ear. One of her hands slipped under and around to roam across Harry’s chest, as the other reached for his throbbing penis.

Hermione arched, meowing, her dripping sheath clenching around Fleur’s fingers, and Harry’s loins
began to jerk as Dora masturbated him. Gently, sensing their readiness, Hermione and Harry’s lovers guided them towards one another. Hermione lifted a leg over Harry’s thighs and bit her lip as he entered her with a single thrust.

The swirl of passion fell upon them. Giddily, Harry plummeted to Hermione’s depths in repeated long strokes as her wet heat gripped his shaft. Dora rocked in tandem with Harry, her arms still around him as he plundered Hermione. Fleur’s hands and lips continued to caress Hermione’s undulating form, but the girl with flourescing hair took hold of Fleur’s hand, and began sucking on the fingers which had been probing Hermione’s vulva only moments ago.

A similar scrum wrestled on the bed beside them. It was difficult to tell precisely where Luna, Daphne, Jennifer, and Parvati were in the tangle of limbs and furry tails, as hands cradled and squeezed breasts and bottom cheeks—lips and fingers applied themselves to nipples and quivering pink wet entrances. Gasps and moans of pleasure mingled with the joyous purrs and meows echoing through the chamber as the bed quaked.

Hermione yowled and lost herself in the euphoric storm of bliss which engulfed her as she felt Harry’s sweaty brow pressed to her heaving breast, his lips still firmly and wetly attached to the nipple, his swelling tumescence burrowing into her nest. The sensation of Hermione’s velvety slickness milking Harry’s shaft as she trembled in his arms was too much; he was swept away on the currents of ecstasy and convulsed, a torrent of his essence flooding her womb.

The frenzied hurricane of passionate release sucked the entire Coven into its ecstatic vortex and the entire manor rocked...

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Infuriated by the loss of the Welsh compound, Minister Dolores Umbridge had considered her options the morning following the attack. It was clear that Dumbledore and his people—and perhaps even Potter and his wife themselves—had been keeping busy rather than laying low in hiding. They were no doubt seeking out the other facilities, but it simply was not logistically feasible to hide them completely, due to their very nature. It was only a matter of time before another detention centre was located and attacked.

And worse than that, it appeared that a number of prisoners had been freed. And if Dumbledore had some of the muggles, then things with the ICW could soon become extremely complicated. It was quite possible that Dumbledore had enough evidence to convince the ICW to begin an investigation.

While International Law prevented the ICW from determining most internal policies and intervening in internal disputes, their power to Sanction wizarding governments and issue International Arrest Warrants, should they have the votes on the responsible committees, could greatly hamper Dolores’s efforts and restrict her ability to travel abroad. Some sort of countermeasure which could cloud the evidence needed to be taken—perhaps at Hogwarts.

Minister Umbridge had restrained the Carrows, much to their dismay, as there were no Mudbloods left at Hogwarts to punish. However, there were still those at Hogwarts who had been close to the Potters and apparently favoured by Dumbledore. It was perhaps time to let the Carrows’ leash slacken—particularly regarding certain Gryffindors.

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It was the second night since the attack on the Welsh facility, and Dolores was supping at home with her deputy, Percy Weasley, who was distraught as his girlfriend had apparently decided they needed some time apart.
“Penelope says she needs her space,” Percy grumbled as he picked at his dinner, “…to work out what she wants out of life or something--says she doesn’t know who I am anymore, and that she needs to sort out whether it’s me or her that’s changed…”

“Never mind Percy,” said Dolores sympathetically, gently patting the back of Percy’s hand. “I’m sure she’ll come around eventually. In any case, please believe that you are quite the catch… any young pureblood witch would be very lucky to have you for their own. Perhaps some more elf-wine dear…?”

“Oh... er... yes please!” Percy blushed slightly, considering Dolores’s words as she poured some more wine into his glass.

Dolores was right he decided. Penelope had seemed withdrawn for quite some time; they had been growing more distant ever since he had joined the Ministry in fact. And come to think about it, things hadn’t been the same between them since Percy had put Hermione Potter on trial alongside her husband.

Percy narrowed his eyes, thinking that perhaps he was well shot of Penelope if she harboured sympathies for Halfbreeds and Mudbloods. He took a sip from his wineglass as he turned his attention to the evening news on the Wiz-Vision. The news of the incident at the Ministry’s Welsh detention centre had been suppressed of course. It wouldn’t do for the Ministry to look weak, or for news of Dumbledore’s successes to receive any free publicity.

The splendidly coiffed William O’Hannity was regaling his cohost Endora with his well considered opinion on the news of the day when suddenly the screen went snowy. For a moment it went black altogether. Percy and Dolores regarded the Wiz-Vision with puzzlement as the image returned.

Wine sprayed from their mouths and their eyes bulged in shock; the Minister and her deputy would have recognised those clear blue eyes and that long silvery beard anywhere. They both gaped in horror as the former Headmaster of Hogwarts announced what they were just about to witness.

~00o~

After cleaning up and a sumptuous breakfast provided by Dobby, the Coven felt better than they had for over a week, though the future still loomed uncertainly. It was clear that dark days still lay before them, but every last one of them knew that they would be ready to meet the challenges ahead.

Harry had decided to have a go at painting in Jennifer’s art studio while Hermione relaxed with a science fiction novel which she’d found in the library of Jennifer’s manor. It was nearly teatime when Hermione glanced up from the book she was reading in the lounge chair.

“That’s lovely Harry,” she said encouragingly.

“Thanks...” Harry chuckled as he regarded the splashes of colour on the canvas, “it’s a rough start anyway...”

“No... really, it’s beautiful,” Hermione insisted.

“She’s right you know. The palette is gorgeous, and your brush strokes are strong,” asserted Jennifer, who was standing in the doorway with Luna. “Are you sure you’ve never painted before, Harry?”

“Only runes and symbols before now,” Harry replied. “This is the first time I’ve ever had a go at painting a picture. It’s more... er... ‘impressionistic’ than I wanted it to be...” he laughed. “I don’t really know enough about oil painting techniques to do anything more realistic.”
“Well I’d certainly recognise the place if I ever saw it Harry,” Luna chimed in. “Where is it supposed to be?”

“Er... I dunno really!” Harry scratched his head and bit his lip pensively, reddening. “I... erm... I just sort of made the landscape up! Anyway... I suppose it’s teatime then?”

“We’re taking a picnic to eat by the pond as it’s nice out. Do you want to join us?” said Luna, smiling at Hermione as they both picked up on Harry’s embarrassment at being praised for something he was uncertain of.

Harry and Hermione both nodded. Harry quickly cleaned up and they all headed for the pond behind the manor. Dragonflies buzzed about, skimming across the shimmering surface of the pool. Jennifer noticed the book that Hermione was reading as they sat by the water’s edge with the rest of the Coven.

“Stranger in a Strange Land? Do you like Robert Heinlein then?” asked Jennifer after finishing her sandwich.

“I’ve never actually read any of his works before. When it came to fiction, I mostly just read the classics and some British children’s literature.” Hermione turned a bit pink at the admission. “Besides classic science fiction like Jules Verne and HG Wells, I’ve only read a bit of Isaac Azimov and few others. This book caught my attention because of its reputation and the... er... subject matter...”

Several emotions flickered across Jennifer’s features before she grinned.

“That was one of my father’s favourite books,” she said. “I don’t think Mum liked it very much though—I thought it best not to tell her I’d read it. I prefer some of Heinlein’s books for kids. Honestly, I always thought that one was really weird and sexist. I... I’m not sure how I feel about it now.”

“I see some of it differently now that... er... we’re all together--though it still strikes me a bit as a teenage boy’s sex fantasy,” Jennifer concluded with an eyeroll.

With more than a bit of curiosity, Harry picked up the thick book and flicked through it as Dora looked over his shoulder and the others glanced to see what they were talking about. A wry little smile crept to Harry’s lips when he noticed from the bookmark that Hermione appeared to be nearly finished with it already.

“I know what you mean... I’m not quite sure what to make of it either,” Hermione confessed. “It’s got some interesting ideas that seem ahead of its time--ahead of our time even--but some of the attitudes of the characters still somehow seem a bit dated... and... and I think I know which line put you off...it’s enough to put off any woman off nowadays.”

“I can’t imagine any woman today actually saying that ’nine times out of ten, it’s partly a woman’s fault when she gets raped’...”

“I should say not!” Parvati interjected with an angry wag of her sleek black tail and Daphne looked horrified. Harry glowered at the book in his hand.

“Yes... that’s a very old-fashioned attitude--though some people still believe it, most won’t admit to it,” Hermione agreed. “But the book was written in the 1950’s when lots of people still openly believed that sort of rubbish. And in any case, the character--the woman that says it--is supposed to be a bit of a judgmental straightlaced character before she becomes more openminded--becomes part of a ‘group marriage’ more or less...”
“Besides, you can’t just assume that because a character in a book says something, it means the author believes it... My Auntie Joanne liked this book, and according to her it inspired some of the communal values and openmindedness about sex in the counterculture movement of the late 1960’s... that’s why it caught my interest when I saw it on the bookshelf.”

“So what is it all about then?” asked Fleur.

Jennifer answered with another grin. “It’s about a man brought back to Earth after being raised by Martians. And funnily enough, he’s sort of got magical powers that the Martians taught him, and he ends up starting a sort of ‘sex-cult’ where everyone loves each other and they all learn magic...”

“Oh... that sounds right up our alley then,” Dora chortled. “Maybe I’ll give that book a go when you’re finished with it Hermione.”

~00o~

Harry pushed back his empty plate with a pleasantly full feeling when he’d finished dinner. Some of the others were still eating. Thinking that it must be nearly time to check in with Dumbledore, Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out his mirror. He had barely touched it when the Headmaster’s features appeared.

“Ah... Harry, you’re available. Excellent!” said Dumbledore.

“Hi sir!” Harry peered eagerly at the Headmaster, who looked as if he had some news to impart. “Yeah... just finished dinner. So what’s happening then?”

“I wish that I could give you and the Coven more time to refresh yourselves, but we shall have to move quickly. Can you all be ready to join us at Narcissa Black’s estate tomorrow morning at 7 am?”

“Of course we can Professor Dumbledore!” Harry responded excitedly. Hermione and the others nodded as they were all listening with bated breath. “So, are we going to...”

“...Retake Hogwarts?” Dumbledore interjected, his eyes twinkling. “Yes indeed! And I have you and Mrs Potter to thank for inspiring the plan of attack. With the element of surprise, we should hopefully be able to minimise casualties on all sides. If you would be so kind, please bring the portrait of Phineas Nigellus...”

“We’re going to use the pictures then?”

“Yes!” replied Dumbledore. “There are a number of other paintings here at Madam Black’s which are copies of those at Hogwarts, so we shall be able to move several teams into the castle all at once. Now, I must be going as I have a pressing engagement. You may wish to turn on your Wiz-Vision for this...”
Chapter 166

Having concluded his very important mirror-call in private, Albus Dumbledore took a seat in the elegant armchair in Monsieur Delacour’s sitting room with Henri Delacour, Olympe Maxime, and the three others who had been invited. Albus regarded the three most important members of the ICW Committee for the Investigation of Statutory Violations with twinkling eyes as they took their own seats. Henri poured everyone glasses of wine from his own private reserve.

“Vell, Dumbledore... I hope you haff much more for us to go on zis time,” snapped Angelika Machschnell, the stern German witch who headed the ICW’s investigatory committee.

“And you must remember Albus, there is very little we can do regarding internal blood-status policies unless they threaten to spill over to the International stage,” the Greek wizard from the committee added with an oily tone.

“Ah, indeed I do Pericles,” Dumbledore warmly replied. “I may be getting on in my years, but it has not been so long since I was Supreme Mugwump after all...”

“Though, if certain rumours prove to be true, surely there must be something that we at the ICW can do to help Britain!” interjected the Nigerian witch, narrowing her eyes at the other two committee members.

“Oui! Olubunmi speaks wiz compassion and wisdom Monsieur Papadopoulos,” said Madame Maxime haughtily. “If ze British Ministry ees employing the methods of Grindelwald and Voldemort, eet is imperative zat those with a powerful voice speak up to convince the rest of the Wizengamot to act.”

“You see what is happening around ze world--Blood-Extremists everywhere are emboldened! If Britain falls, ozzers take notice and then where are we?...” Olympe continued.

“Thank you Olympe, Olubunmi,” Dumbledore interjected pointedly. “I am certain that Pericles and Angelika will make the most appropriate decision. I do not expect the ICW to join a potential civil war on one side or another. All I ask for the time-being is that the current laws against collusion with muggle heads of state, and against muggle oppression be upheld...”

Henri Delacour cleared his throat and took a swig of his wine, thinking it was probably best to not mention that he and Olympe had already mobilised a number of French forces to assist Dumbledore’s people. It wasn’t illegal for private alliances across international borders, but some in the ICW might frown on it nonetheless. Henri swallowed the mouthful of wine and listened to Albus’s mellifluous voice as the true Headmaster of Hogwarts continued.

“...Though I daresay that in the future, it is my hope that what you are about to witness will cause the ICW to revisit the International Secrecy Statutes. It is my contention that the strictures are far too narrow...”

“As it stands, the Statutes allow for some interaction between wizards and muggles at only the Highest Level of State, with only a single point of contact with muggle governments--Ministers of Magic with muggle Presidents and Prime Ministers. Thus leaving the unwitting muggle public at large at the mercy of those in power with no recourse when the most virulent and mendacious members of the ruling classes of both societies have assumed control...”

“In my view, this is political disaster for the muggle world, to say nothing of our own. In any case,
“please bear with me--the broadcast is about to begin...”

“Hmmmph... I suppose you might have something there Albus,” muttered Pericles, eyeing the Wiz-Vision in distaste.

“Indeed!” Dumbledore chuckled. “I did also bring all the relevant evidence with me to turn over to the committee--the broadcast is largely for the British wizarding public, but it is a good overview of my case against the Minister...”

Tuned to the British Wiz-Vision feed as it was, Henri Delacour’s screen was currently displaying the WVN evening news. The image and sound broke up with a burst of distortion and faded to black, before returning with the pre-recorded video the Order had made for the pirated broadcast.

Taking a sip from his own wine-glass, Albus Dumbledore noted the reactions of the ICW committee members with great interest. Olubunmi’s tears and stifled sobs were expected--Albus had always appreciated her compassion and humanity. But the horrified expression on Angelika’s face when she saw the footage of the corpses in the Death Chamber and the prisoners--including the child--gave him a grim sense of satisfaction.

Pericles was harder to read, a twitching muscle on his temple the only evidence of emotion. Dumbledore momentarily wished he had Hermione Potter’s talents, which didn’t rely on constant eye contact and force of Will.

All three of the committee members were rapt with attention when the Dumbledore on the Wiz Vision screen presented the evidence from the files liberated during both the rescue of Arthur Weasley, and the raid on the Ministry Death Camp. The pre-recorded Dumbledore described the contents: lists of enemies, supporters, and recruits, details of operations, plans for the "detention facilities," lists of the detained and the killed, among many other details. Dumbledore pointed to the file which confirmed that the entire story of Dick Turpentine and wand-stealing muggleborn rebels was an utter fabrication concocted by the Minister and the Unspeakable Office.

He explained the Inferi, and Bellatrix Lestrange’s role in their creation under Ministry auspices, showing the implements of torture and necromancy onscreen, and replaying the footage which revealed the tridecagram on the floor of the Death Chamber next to the stacks of corpses. Dumbledore punctuated the information with the footage depicting Thorfinn Rowle’s presence at the compound as evidence confirming that the Minister had recruited those of Voldemort’s Death Eaters who had been interned in Azkaban for their previous crimes.

Finally, the Dumbledore on the Wiz Vision was shown interviewing several of the rescued prisoners, muggleborn wizards and muggles, including the MI6 analyst and her daughter, confirming the collusion between Minister Umbridge and the muggle Prime Minister.

When it was over, one could have heard a pin drop in Henri Delacour’s sitting room, and Albus Dumbledore was nearly certain that he finally had the ICW Committee in his corner. Dame Machschnell was a hardnosed character and a stickler for rules, but Dumbledore’s hope for her sense of honour and human decency appeared to have been rewarded.

“Vell Albus, zis is quite shocking,” said the Head of the Committee. “Vhen ze evidence you haff brought confirms your allegations, I can assure you zat our committee shall begin an immediate investigation...”

“Angelika will have my complete support of course,” Olubunmi interjected, her nostrils flaring angrily as she dabbed at her tears.
“If the rest of your evidence substantiates these... images... Albus, I suppose I can offer my own recommendation in support of an investigation,” Pericles added silkily.

Angelika Machschnell rolled her eyes at the Greek committee member; she was the head of the committee after all, and all she needed was Olubunmi's second to carry the motion to investigate.

“I cannot promise that the vote of ze entire ICW vill go your way of course Albus, but vot you haff presented is very damning and quite convincing!” said Angelika firmly. “My committee can certainly Censure your Minister Umbridge, and introduce a motion to ze Wizengamot to Sanction her administration, and to issue an International Warrant for her arrest, should she dare to step on foreign soil...”

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Before he had completed the mirror-call with Harry, Dumbledore had cautioned the Coven that some of the footage filmed during the raid on the Ministry’s Death Camp would be shown during the broadcast over the hacked Wiz-Vision feed. Forewarned, the Coven had braced themselves for the ugly images that they knew were coming.

It had been hard to relive the sickening scenes again, but they had managed it, feeling an odd mix of relief and sadness that the rest of the wizard world would finally see what the Ministry was really up to. And with the anticipation of what the morning would bring, sleep seemed a distant possibility that night, but one by one, slumber gradually took the Coven as they all snuggled together in Jennifer’s bed.

The second to last person to fall asleep was Harry, still anxiously contemplating the plan to retake Hogwarts, hoping that it wouldn’t turn into a bloodbath—hoping that what they found there wouldn’t drive him to lose control of himself. When Hermione felt her husband’s tension melt in the embrace of her arms and furry tail, and his breath slowed as he nodded off, she finally relaxed enough to let oblivion take her.

~00~

“Too bloody early--it’s Sunday morning! Leave me alone...” Ron grumbled as someone tapped his cheek. The tapper ignored Ron’s complaints and gently patted his cheek again.

“Come on Ron; wake up! You've been asleep for long enough... or are you just going to sleep your whole life away then?”

The voice sounded familiar, but it was one which Ron hadn’t heard in quite some time. It must be a dream... or a nightmare! Blearily Ron opened his eyes as his senses jangled. His surroundings were unfamiliar and pink--pink bedding, pink curtains, pink carpet, pink wallpaper--but the visage which peered at him was a face he knew all too well and Ron’s trepidation turned into alarm.

“Bloody Hell!” Ron gasped, feeling naked when he realised that he was all alone and that he didn’t have his wand. “Percy! Where am I? What’s going on?”

“It’s alright Ron--you’re safe!” said Percy in a soothing tone. “Nobody’s going to hurt you...”

“Like hell! I know what you did to Dad,” snarled Ron, beginning to panic. “What happened to you Perce...?”

“Believe me Ron, I hated that I had to do that! But our father has been in cahoots with Dumbledore for donkey’s years--he’s a traitor Ron...”
“Rubbish!” shouted Ron. “You’re completely mental...”

“Ron... Please, calm down! Hear me out!” Percy pleaded, and Ron quieted.

“I promise--I’m not going to hurt you,” continued Percy. “I know you’re Potter’s best friend, but I’m also aware that you don’t really know who he truly is... or who Dumbledore really is...”

“What are you on about Percy? I’m not...” Ron trailed off, his heart pounding. It suddenly struck him that it might not be in his best interests to tell Percy that he hadn’t been Harry’s best mate since Second Year. “You... you don’t seriously expect me to believe all that barmy stuff about Harry and Dumbledore being violent criminals do you...?”

“Yes... yes I do Ron! You know what they’re capable of--what happened to the Malfoys...”

“The Malfoys? You must be joking! They had it coming... and... and Ginny told me what really happened to Draco Malfoy! I’m surprised you haven’t tried to arrest her too!” said Ron angrily. “Since when did you turn into a Slytherin, Perce?”

Ron could hardly believe what he was hearing, despite what Ginny had told him about her letter from Percy, and even though the Twins and his father had managed to get a message to Ron telling him to keep his head down at Hogwarts, and he’d seen Percy disavowing Dad on the Wiz-Vision. Percy had always been a bit of a pompous git--a bossy know-it-all who thought he was better than everyone else--and Ron had always known that his brother was exceedingly ambitious. But Ron had never imagined that Percy would ever go so far, and seeing his older brother peering at him with concern, it was still hard for Ron to accept that he had actually come to believe all that pureblood rubbish.

“Ron... please!” Percy rolled his eyes, trying to control his temper. He needed Ron. It wouldn't do to antagonise him, but it was high time that Ron grew up. “It’s long past time to put aside House prejudices...” Percy continued, “for the sake of the wizard world. If we want to put an end to all of this strife--if you want to save your friends--we need to work together...”

“Whaddya mean, ‘work together’...?” Ron asked suspiciously.

“We need to stop the violence before it gets worse Ron--before it tears the wizard world apart. A lot of people still look up to Harry Potter. And as long as Potter follows Dumbledore down the path of madness and chaos, people will continue to blindly follow behind him...”

“YOU can help bring the violence to an end Ron,” Percy continued earnestly. “As his friend, you might be able to get through to Potter like no others can. If you help us end this Ron, you’ll be a hero! Go on the Wiz-Vision--tell Potter to turn himself in--and I promise, I’ll do everything I can to see that Potter is treated fairly...”

“Never! You’re barking if you think...”

“How many more must die Ron? What will it take to convince you? Please... think about it!”

Percy peered at Ron, considering other approaches. Following Dumbledore’s pirated broadcast, the Minister and her Senior Undersecretary knew that they would have to move fast to counter his spin on the revelation of the death and destruction at the Ministry’s detention facility, before people had a chance to give Dumbledore’s warped perspective and lies any credence.

It was imperative for the wizard world to see that Dumbledore and his protege would fabricate any
story to justify their attacks on the Ministry, and that what the Ministry was doing was necessary for the preservation of wizarding society as a whole. If they could see that even Potter’s best friends had turned against him...

“Ron, haven’t you ever wondered why we were so poor? Why Dad never got ahead at the Ministry? Didn’t you ever stop to think about why other wizard families always looked down on us and mocked our name? ...”

Ron scowled at Percy.
Harry grinned when he spotted Fred and George chatting with Dean Thomas in Narcissa Black’s sitting room. Harry had arrived by Portkey ahead of time with the rest of the Coven as the Order of the Phoenix was preparing to retake Hogwarts.

“Hey Dean, good to see you again. And I’m glad to see that Percy didn’t get his hands on you two,” said Harry, catching the Twins attention.

“There he is... the man of the hour,” Dean said with a grin. He looked much better; more rested and not as thin as he had some days ago when Harry had last seen him.

“Heh!” Fred snorted, smirking, “We’ve had a lifetime of experience evading Percy the Prat and keeping his pointy rodent nose out of our business.”

“We saw your handiwork on the Wiz-Vision--that was bloody brilliant Harry!” exclaimed George. “And thanks for rescuing Dad...”

“When this is all over, you’ll be the Boy-Who-Made-the-Ministry-Look-Like-Amateurs,” added Fred with a snicker.

“It wasn’t just me,” Harry said quickly, his face reddening. “I couldn’t’ve done it without Hermione and the others... They were all brilliant!”

“How’s your mum doing?” Hermione asked with a wave of her bushy tail, coming to Harry’s rescue.

“Oh, Mum’s alright,” Fred replied, “Dumbledore’s put up all sorts of protection charms at the Burrow. But she’s still having kittens about what a bloody sod Percy turned out to be...”

“Cruciating Dad was the final straw for her,” George added, scowling. “She went ballistic about the business of Percy putting you on trial with Harry of course, but Mum still held out a bit of hope that Perce would eventually come to his senses until he tried to arrest Dumbledore and locked up Dad...”

“...and when she found out that Percy tortured Dad after you and Harry rescued him--not to mention finding out how much he really believes all that pureblood rubbish now--Mum finally wrote him off as a bad egg.” Fred continued as his own face fell. “But she’s still heartbroken about it,” he concluded quietly.

Harry and Hermione heard a squeal and turned their heads to see Dora tearfully embracing a man whom they had never met before in the hall on the other side of the sitting room entryway.

“How’s your mum doing?” they heard Dora say with a sniffle. “I’ve been so worried about you Dad! How’d you get here?”

“Sirius and Remus,” Dora’s father replied, “they sniffed out me and your mum in hiding--rather literally actually,” he acknowledged wryly. “They thought I’d be safer here, so your Aunt Narcissa invited us both to stay. We arrived yesterday--your mum’s still upstairs in bed, exhausted. I just came down to bring ’er up some tea.”

“I’m so sorry Dad--I ‘aven’t talked to you and Mum in so long...” Dora sniffled again, looking very ashamed of herself. “I... I just didn’t know ‘ow to tell you and Mum that I’d q...quit Auror trainin’... especially as I was this close to bein’ a full Auror. And... and by the time the Minister started goin’
after muggleborns I was... I was..."

"...You were helping Harry Potter and tryin’ to stay undercover!” said Dora’s father. “It’s alright Dora love! Me and your mum–d’you really think we’d be fussed about that at a time like this? Narcissa told us a little bit about what you’ve been up to for the Order--and Sirius mentioned briefly that you helped raid that concentration camp that Dumbledore was showin’ on the wizard telly last night... We couldn’t be prouder of you sweetie...”

At that moment Dumbledore arrived in the hallway, looking very grave.

“I know you’ve got to go--that you’ve got another mission right now...” Dora’s father told her quickly, trying to keep the worry out of his face, “Just know that your mum and me--we both love you very much. Try an’ stay safe, and maybe when it’s all over, we can talk... and you can introduce us to Harry Potter and his wife...”

Dora bit her lip and nodded, flushing in embarrassment, not sure that she was up to explaining the full extent of her relationship with the Potters, Jennifer, and the rest of the Coven.

“See you later then Dad! I love you... and tell Mum I love ’er too!” She swallowed nervously and smiled, giving her father a kiss on the cheek before hurriedly following Dumbledore into the sitting room where most of the Order’s assault team and the Coven were now gathered.

For a moment, feeling slightly perplexed, Ted Tonks watched his daughter scurry away. He knew there was something else that she still wasn’t telling him--which was odd as they had always been very close. Ted sighed and picked up the tea tray, making his way up the grand staircase to tell Andromeda that he’d seen their daughter.

Dumbledore addressed the Coven and the Order, who were all gathered near the portraits which had been chosen for each team.

“We must move swiftly,” the headmaster grimly began. “Minerva has just informed me that Neville Longbottom and Ronald Weasley were not to be found in their dormitory this morning. She believes that the Carrows took them sometime last night and may have them in the dungeons...”

Harry felt his blood run cold and Hermione gave a little squeak of distress as the rest of the Coven drew a collective gasp, glancing at them both. Fred and George paled. Harry swallowed guiltily, wondering if Neville and Ron had been targeted in retaliation because of his destruction of the Ministry’s death camp.

“It wasn’t your fault Harry,” said Hermione perceptively, twitching her furry ears. “And there really isn’t any way that they could know it was us specifically who had attacked the facility. It could’ve been anyone--even Dumbledore--as far as they know. None of the footage shown on the Wiz-Vision had us in it...”

“I suppose,” Harry muttered, not entirely convinced, “but that probably didn’t stop the Minister or Percy just assuming I was behind it somehow. Why else would they pick on my friends?”

“Because they know that you would do anything to save them Harry,” said Luna with a flick of her fluffy white tail. “They might be hoping to convince you to go against Dumbledore and turn yourself in.”

“Whatever ze reason, it does not matter,” Fleur asserted. “The Minister is responsible for this evil, not you, Harry.”

“Quite true, Miss Delacour,” Dumbledore agreed. “In any case, locating and rescuing Longbottom...”
and Weasley shall be a top priority when we reach Hogwarts. Most of the students ought to be in the Great Hall for breakfast by now--it is time..."

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Minerva McGonagall entered the Great Hall feeling an odd mix of anxiety and relief. She nodded at Flitwick who was sitting up at the Staff Table with several of the other professors and Amycus Carrow.

Before the Unspeakables guarding the entrance to the Great Hall knew what was happening, the oak doors slammed shut with a wave of Professor Mcgonagall’s wand, also startling a number of students. The shocked Unspeakables inside the entryway aimed their own wands at her. Minerva dropped one of them with a strong stunning spell, only barely dodging out of the way of the other Unspeakable’s stunner as some students began to scream.

“Bloody Hell! What’s all this then?” shouted the Inquisitor pretending to be a headmaster.

“A coup,” Flitwick said simply with a grin. His stunning spell was so powerful that Amycus hurtled across the Hall and slammed into a wall with a thud before collapsing, unconscious.

McGonagall just managed to avoid being hit with a white-hot spell which grazed her cheek. The Unspeakable began to aim another spell, but a student had recovered from their initial surprise and come to Professor McGonagall’s rescue. A stunning spell from the Hufflepuff table caught the Unspeakable in the side of his head and he tumbled to the floor, out like a light.

“Thank you Mr Diggory,” Professor McGonagall gasped, still out of breath. “Fifty points to Hufflepuff.”

The massive oak doors to the Great Hall started to shake with a noisy banging. The frightened pupils began clamouring Professor McGonagall for answers, especially Ginny Weasley who was beside herself with worry.

“What’s going on Professor?” yelled a Ravenclaw.

“Professor McGonagall, where’s Neville and Ron...?” Ginny shouted.

“Shouldn’t we open the door?” squeaked a terrified First Year.

Finally catching her breath, Professor McGonagall raised her hands for quiet as Flitwick cast a silencing charm on the doors.

“Everyone, please keep calm,” McGonagall said loudly. “Most of you caught the beginning of the broadcast on the Wiz Vision before it was turned off by the Carrows last night, and must have some inkling that the Ministry has committed grave crimes against humanity. Given the public exposure of the Minister’s lies, Professor Dumbledore is taking the opportunity to return to Hogwarts and we are all to remain here safely while he and his compatriots deal with the Unspeakables.”

“And Miss Weasley,” McGonagall continued, “I am sorry, but we cannot be certain what has become of Longbottom and your brother until the castle has been retaken. Please try to be patient. This should all be over soon...”

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The dungeon passages echoed with screams as Alecto Carrow cackled at the boy dangling before her, hanging by his ankles from chains attached to the ceiling. She tossed aside the bloodied brass
knuckles she had been using on Potter’s little friend and picked up one of her whips again.

Alecto’s face flushed with intoxication, her chest heaving with feverish release. She was delighted that at long last Dolores had given the go ahead for a punishment, and Alecto had been working on the boy since the wee hours of the morning.

“Such a shame that Bellatrix couldn’t be here,” Alecto purred at the sobbing boy, sucking on the fingertip which she had dabbed in the blood trickling down his cheek. “She loves a good whipping as much as I do, and she would no doubt find your punishment particularly delicious my dear...”

“But you should count your lucky stars Longbottom,” Alecto carried on, “as she tends to favour blades—a penchant she shares with Dolores—and sessions which end in death... when she’s not cruciating people beyond the edge of madness. You are much safer with me, my dear boy. I shall make certain that no permanent harm befalls you once we’re finished here.”

“I’ll even let Pomfrey regrow your teeth...” she cackled.

Alecto lifted her whip. Neville closed his eyes and grit his remaining teeth, bracing himself for the pain to begin afresh. Another shriek echoed through the dungeon corridors, but this time the howl of agony did not belong to Neville.

He opened his eyes again just in time to see the severed hand which had held Alecto’s whip sailing across the room followed by a spray of blood from the wrist it had been attached to.

“Potter!” Alecto bellowed, her eyes bulging in astonishment and pain. “How... What the hell are you doing here?”

“Saving my friends!” Harry snarled, standing in the doorway of the cell, his features ablaze with fury. “What have you done with Ron?”

Alecto Carrow snorted with disdain, ignoring Harry’s question as she darted behind Neville, out of Harry’s line of fire, whipping out her wand with her left hand. Furry tail bristling and quivering with rage, Hermione sprang through the doorway into an air-flip, silently slashing her own wand.

Horror crossed Alecto’s features when she saw a fountain of blood spurting from her other wrist, and both of her hands lying on the cold stone floor of the cell. Alecto’s eyes rolled to the back of her head and she fell into a dead faint.

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It almost felt good to be sitting in the Headmaster’s office again with Dumbledore and Fawkes, along with Hermione and the rest of the Coven as the portraits in the Headmaster's office cheered their return. Except for the fact that Ron was nowhere to be found in the Castle, and that Neville was in the hospital wing being healed with Ginny crying her eyes out at his bedside, Hogwarts had been retaken without a hitch, the only casualty with permanent damage being Alecto Carrow.

The Order had taken the Unspeakables by surprise, capturing about fifty of them, a dozen escaping through the Floo system which Dumbledore had locked down after returning to his office. Shacklebolt, Madam Bones, Dawlish, Hagrid, and a number of other Order Members had removed them and the Carrows from the Castle to a secret detention facility of their own: a proper one where they were to be held over until trial at the conclusion of the war.

Harry took some satisfaction in the fact that Alecto would probably never be able to hold a wand again, as they didn’t seem to work with prosthetic hands, and that he had restrained himself from
killing her. Hermione felt much the same way. They had both used the sectumsempra curse, but as Alecto hadn’t tried to kill anyone, neither one of them felt they could have justified taking her life.

“Well... I couldn’t be prouder of you all,” said Dumbledore, as he regarded the Coven warmly. “You have conducted yourselves with utmost professionalism, and we have managed to retake Hogwarts without turning the school into a morgue...”

“Although I daresay that more than a few Unspeakables will think twice before ever trying to kick a cat...” Dumbledore continued with a wink at Hermione, Luna, and Parvati, who all grinned sheepishly as the rest of the Coven chuckled.

The cat-witches had clawed their way through nearly two dozen Unspeakables, distracting them while Harry, Dora, Fleur, Daphne, and Jennifer stunned and restrained them—snapping the Unspeakables’ wands for good measure—as they cleared a path to the dungeons and searched them for Ron and Neville.

The moment of levity passed and Harry peered worriedly at the headmaster again.

“So what about Ron sir?” Harry asked. “How are we going to find him? I wouldn’t even know where to start. There’s no way they’d try and hold him at the Ministry after we got Mr Weasley out.”

“You are quite correct Harry,” sighed Dumbledore. “Locating Ron Weasley could prove problematic until the Ministry falls. However, I think we can take a small measure of comfort in the fact that Percy Weasley is not likely to cause serious harm to his youngest brother. Arthur has indicated to me that Percy seems to believe that his youngest siblings are still capable of being ‘saved’...”

“Yeah... that makes sense,” Harry muttered, nodding. “Percy never really seemed to hate Ron and Ginny quite like he did Fred and George. Right... so what do we do in the meantime?”

“I think that you and the Coven should continue to recuperate at Jennifer’s estate from your ordeals for a few days more at least--perhaps even up to a week,” the Headmaster replied.

“Seriously?” Harry frowned in bewilderment.

“Yes!” Dumbledore said in a tone which sounded like more of a command than a suggestion. “There will be more battles coming up ahead--which are likely to be much deadlier than the one we faced this morning! When the Order locates the smaller facilities, or comes across a particularly unmanageable Inferi Swarm, you will likely be called upon to assist us. And at some point, we shall move to take the Ministry itself--but that will require careful planning.”

“Arthur revealed something else of import about the mindset of the Minister and her Deputy,” Dumbledore continued. “They believe that I harbour some sort of Secret Weapon which gives me an advantage over the Ministry. And in a sense, they are correct Harry... You, Mrs Potter, and the Coven are the Order’s ‘Secret Weapon.’

“But first and foremost, you are human, and for many humans, recovery from the sort of emotional traumas you have faced recently--and will undoubtedly be called upon to face again--can take years of recovery. I wish I could give you those years, but all I can guarantee for the foreseeable future is a few days at a time at best.

“I know that you and the Coven are remarkably resilient, but that resilience is based upon your abilities to Love, rather than your equally inestimable abilities to fight, and I wish to nurture that for as long as possible--to give it a chance to flourish and grow...”
Harry was surprised at himself when he realised how much he was actually looking forward to stepping back from things for a bit longer and returning to Jennifer’s manor. He felt a deep sense of relief that Dumbledore had more or less ordered him and the Coven to take some more time for themselves.

A part of Harry was more determined than ever to be out there fighting Minister Umbridge--and he couldn’t just let Ron rot--but he had to admit that seeing Neville being pulverised had also stirred up certain feelings again that he didn’t like. Over the last couple of days, Harry had been beginning to work out how to push aside some of the horrific things he’d witnessed--been a participant in--and the attendant misery and rage it had fueled, but seeing Neville looking so broken had brought much of it flooding back.

Sensing Harry’s inner-turmoil--and his relief--Hermione curled her furry ginger tail around him and wrapped him in her arms, pressing her lips to his cheek. Harry returned Hermione’s embrace and they held each other as they looked out across the rippling surface of the Black Lake at the deceptively peaceful, mountainous landscape of the Scottish Highlands.

“This is a good thing Harry,” Hermione murmured reassuringly, flicking her furry ears. “We all need this.”

Harry nodded, his eyes stinging wetly.

“Yeah... we do,” Harry admitted, his voice hoarse. “I want to make sure that Neville’s alright before we go back though... And maybe talk to Seamus and Ginny a bit too--let them know that we’re not giving up on Ron.”

“Of course Harry,” said Hermione, smiling through her own tears. “Madam Pomfrey said we can visit Neville and Ginny for a bit after lunch... we can go home later this afternoon if you’d like.”

Harry nodded again and managed a smile as he peered deeply into Hermione’s golden gaze, giving in to his urgent need to kiss her.

Making their way back up to the castle, among the many students celebrating the removal of the Carrows and the Unspeakables by lounging around outside, Harry and Hermione spied a happy Dean Thomas kissing Susan Bones under an elm tree. And they weren’t the only ones eagerly making up for lost time; Angelina Johnson was snogging Fred and George silly near the Quidditch Pitch. Of course the story that the Potters and their friends had helped get rid of the Unspeakables and incapacitated Alecto Carrow had already spread through the school like wildfire, and all were greeted like conquering heroes.

The mood in the Great Hall was almost festive as the Unaffiliated ate lunch at the Mingling Table with Padma, and a number of their other friends stopped by. Viktor and Lavender stayed for lunch. Seamus Finnigan, Cedric and Cho, Blaise, Theo, and even Pansy Parkinson dropped by the table and said hello. But the Unaffiliated were all feeling a bit unsettled by the reverent attention from the many well-wishers whom they were far less acquainted with at Hogwarts.

“I know we’ve only been gone a few weeks--and that we’re not staying for long--but it feels a bit weird being back,” Daphne murmured, looking a bit anxious.

Dora glanced at her with a wry expression, considering her own unusual situation being a student
again after having graduated just a few short years ago. But Dora had to concede that this was a bit different.

“\textquoteonly{I think I know what you mean,}” said Parvati, her furry black ears flicking pensively and sleek black tail twitching as she gave voice to what the others were thinking. “\textquoteonly{Most people seemed to ignore us more or less before...}”

\textquoteonly{I mean, when we became part-cat, Luna and I were looked down on for a while at first--and I know that Luna was always treated a bit poorly, but nobody had ever paid me much attention one way or another before that,} Parvati continued. “\textquoteonly{...I was just another Gryffindor then--but after Harry dealt with Draco Malfoy, people just sort of went back to not really paying us much attention... we were just part of ‘Harry Potter’s lot’... Now it’s like everyone wants to know us...}”

\textquoteonly{Yeah... it is a bit odd!} Harry muttered. “\textquoteonly{I would’ve thought that a load of people would be believing all that rubbish about me and Dumbledore being criminals and violent rebels... But not even the Slytherins are really giving us a hard time, and now everyone seems to think I’m a hero again--that we \textit{all} are...}”

\textquoteonly{You don’t know what it was like after you left,} Padma said to Harry and Parvati. \textquoteonly{At first, loads of people didn’t really know what to believe. All they really knew was that Malfoy had been killed, and that Fred and George and you lot had fled Hogwarts with all of the muggleborn students... a lot of people thought the rubbish on the Wiz-Vision might be true at first.”}

\textquoteonly{But when Crabbe and Goyle publicly backed up Katie Bell’s and Ginny’s version of events, most people began to question things over the next few days. By the end of the week, the Carrows put their foot down and threatened harsh measures to stop people talking about it, and the Unspeakables had the school on total lockdown...}”

\textquoteonly{Wait... Crabbe and Goyle did \textit{what}?} Hermione’s jaw dropped and her bushy tail quivered in stunned disbelief. Luna and Parvati whisked their own furry tails, glancing at each other in bewilderment.

\textquoteonly{You mean they actually told everyone in school the \textit{truth}?}” Harry’s eyes nearly popped out of his head as he gaped.

\textquoteonly{Zey vere frightened of Ginny Weasley.}” Viktor chortled, pointing at the Slytherin table where Goyle was sitting with crutches and a wooden leg.

Fleur guiltily tried to hide a smirk as she recalled the events of the evening they had all departed Hogwarts.

\textquoteonly{I almost forgot,” squeaked Daphne, clapping a hand to her mouth. “I don’t think Fleur or I ever told you what Ginny did to Goyle that night after they tried to rape Katie, and Draco tried to kill me.”}

\textquoteonly{Most of ze rest of the Slytherins haff been on their best behaviour ever since,}” Viktor added with a grin.

\textquoteonly{Blimey!}” Harry wasn’t sure whether to feel proud of Ginny, or guilty for teaching her the sectumsempra curse, but all in all he was extremely glad that he had.

Apparently the spell had been very useful when Ginny had helped to rescue Katie and Alicia, and defended herself, Daphne, and Fleur from Draco Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle. And that was after Ginny had also used it to save herself from being raped by McLaggen and Towler.
“Looks like Ginny’s really good at looking after herself now,” Harry said quietly, guiltily half-smirking himself. Hermione nodded, furry ears twitching, not sure what else to say.

“Good for ‘er,” Dora muttered, “… hopefully the lesson learned sticks with the rest of the Snakes.”

Even though she’d had very little personal interaction with Slytherins beyond meeting Blaise, Theo, and the few others whom had become friends of the Unaffiliated, Jennifer quite agreed, having been given a thorough history of relations between most of the Slytherins and the rest of the school.

“Anyway,” Padma finally continued. “After the Carrows and the Unspeakables tried to stop people talking about what really happened, nobody could even sneeze without getting detention and humiliating punishments.”

“The Carrows didn’t actually beat anyone half to death like they did to Neville last night, but people were afraid that they might... So now that everyone knows that all of you thrashed a load of Unspeakables, crippled Alecto Carrow, and helped kick them out of the school, you’re all going to be really popular!” Padma concluded with a grin.

As lunch came to a finish, the Unaffiliated couldn’t help but feel as if there were also something a bit more to their sense of discomfort. But it was hard to put their finger on it, and it went unspoken.

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Ginny’s eyes were still red and puffy when Harry and Hermione found her at Neville’s bedside in the Hospital Wing. Neville was fast asleep, heavily dosed with pain potions and sleeping draughts. Though the cuts had been healed, and the bruising and the swelling had diminished, Neville’s face still looked a bit of mess. Ginny flung her arms around both Potters gratefully when they arrived.

“Thanks so much for rescuing Neville,” Ginny sniffled, fresh tears in her eyes as she clung tightly to Hermione and Harry.

“How is he?” Hermione asked, gently stroking Ginny’s flaming red hair and giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“Pomfrey says he’ll be alright in a few days,” Ginny replied. “She’s letting him sleep for most of today before she regrows his teeth and heals some of his most damaged bones though, because she’ll have to use Skele-gro...”

“That makes sense,” said Harry. “Neville’s already been through a lot of torment, and regrowing bones is rough.”

“And how are you holding up Ginny?” asked Hermione sympathetically.

“I’ll be fine I suppose. I... I’m just really worried about Ron too.”

“We’ll get him back eventually,” Harry tried to reassure Ginny. “And we reckon that Percy won’t actually try to hurt Ron...”

“...We think he’s trying to win Ron over,” Hermione concluded. Oddly, Ginny smiled sardonically and dabbed at her wet cheeks with a hanky.

“Fat chance of that! Percy’ll be wasting his breath—he’d have to Imperius Ron to turn him against you two,” said Ginny. “Ron’s been one of your biggest supporters since you had to leave. Alecto Carrow vanished his clothes and made him take all of his lessons in his underwear one day when he called her a liar during class. Neville and Susan Bones too actually...
They backed Ron up and they all ended up having to go to classes in their underwear that day. Alecto Carrow told them they’d lose their underwear too next time, and threatened them all with a flogging as well if they did it again. Nobody crossed the Carrows to their face after that.”

Harry groaned and rubbed at his forehead as if he still had a burning scar; Hermione gave him a comforting squeeze.

“See Harry,” said Hermione, “we told you it wasn’t your fault!”

~oo~

Delicate wisps of magenta drifted across purple skies as the sun slipped over the horizon. The first stars had already begun to twinkle in the darkest bits of sky when the air rippled above one of the rolling Dorset hills.

Eight dizzy figures spun from the swirling vortex and collapsed on the overgrown lawn in front of the Elizabethan manor at the top of the hill. The cold wind brought with it the scent of the sea, and the Coven let out a collective sigh of relief to be home as they scrambled to their feet.

“Of all the methods of wizard travel, I think I prefer brooms,” grumbled Jennifer.

“Me too,” said Harry and Dora simultaneously as the others giggled.

The smell of delicious food cooking wafted through the house when Jennifer opened the front door. Somehow, Dobby had known that they would be arriving just in time for dinner. Worn out from the long day, and curious to see what the WVN news would have to say about the turn of events, Harry elected to take dinner in the sitting room with the Wiz-Vision, and the others followed.

The news began as always with the introduction of the ever smarmy and splendidly coiffed William O’Hannity and his brassy, overly made-up co-anchor, Endora LeFay. Harry was a bit surprised not to see Minister Umbridge, as he had been expecting her to issue some sort of new proclamation now that Hogwarts was back in Dumbledore’s hands.

Instead, O’Hannity gravely announced the takeover of Hogwarts by the dastardly rebels with stock footage of the castle in the background.

“Perhaps ze Minister is too angry to make an appearance,” Fleur tittered. But the mirth was short-lived as the news segment continued.

“...Surviving Ministry security officials who managed to flee, described a bloodbath, forced to leave behind the mutilated bodies of fallen colleagues, and possibly students as well...” O’Hannity was saying.

“According to the officials, Harry Potter and some of his experimental halfbreed assassins were at the scene, and responsible for much of the carnage. It is not known how many were killed during this incredibly violent act of terrorism. Though, escaping Ministry officials were able to rescue at least one student from the bloodshed, someone known to be a close friend of the young insurgent...”

The Coven’s groans at the all-too-expected utter contrivance quieted as they glanced worriedly at Harry when a boy with red hair and freckles appeared on the screen. Harry’s nostrils flared as his face darkened with fury. Hermione drew closer to Harry and curled her fluffy tail around him.

“Harry, please... how many more must die for Dumbledore’s madness?” Ron pleaded, staring glassily into the camera, dark circles under his eyes. “This violence has to stop. Can’t you see that Dumbledore is manipulating you? Please, if you turn yourself in now, you can help bring all this
“Well, there you have it,” said William O’Hannity with a sad shake of his well-groomed head. “Ronald Weasley, youngest brother of the Senior Undersecretary, and Harry Potter’s best friend, urging Mr Potter to turn himself in to the proper authorities...”

Furry tail bristling, trying desperately to stop from hyperventilating, Hermione clicked off the Wiz-Vision and peered at Harry.

“We don’t need to see any more of this rubbish,” Hermione hissed furiously. “It’s obvious that Ron’s been imperiused.”

Harry nodded slowly and sighed, allowing his own anger to drain away for his empathic wife’s sake. He could at least take some small comfort in knowing that Ron was relatively safe for the moment.
Even if Dumbledore hadn’t mirror-called Harry the following morning, and suggested watching the Wiz-Vision’s morning news, Harry’s near obsession with keeping up with what the Ministry was saying might have compelled him to in any case.

Hermione was less sanguine about turning on the Wiz-Vision again, especially as she still felt a bit worn out after the Coven’s long day at Hogwarts. But she was rather glad that they had when the WVN’s morning news programme was interrupted by another pirated broadcast. The others had joined Harry and Hermione in the parlour with cups of tea, yawning and not feeling quite ready for breakfast just yet.

Thankfully, they didn’t have to watch much of William O’Hannity; the news was interrupted within seconds. Fleur winced when she saw the footage of Neville being interviewed by Rita Skeeter in the infirmary at Hogwarts.

“Zey must have filmed this yesterday morning after ze rescue, before Neville was allowed to rest,” Fleur muttered when Neville appeared on-screen, battered and bloodied.

Harry thought Rita looked quite different with only a modest amount of makeup and straight mousy-blonde hair falling naturally around her shoulders. She could have passed for a BBC documentarian.

“...Alecto Carrow, the Inquisitor, she did this to me...” Neville was telling Rita Skeeter, his eyes swollen shut, and badly slurring his words like a savagely beaten boxer who had lost 15 rounds, “Harry Potter saved my life...”

Though Neville’s serious injuries and interview were a big focus of the hacked broadcast, Rita didn’t stop there.

“...that was of course Neville Longbottom, scion and heir to the House of Longbottom,” said Rita as she addressed the camera, “one of the ‘Sacred Twenty-eight’ still listed in the ‘Pureblood Directory.’ Is this how Minister Umbridge means to restore an openly Pureblood dominated Order in Britain? By beating Purebloods who oppose such efforts into submission?”

“And moving on, another who can tell of the Inquisitors’ reign of terror at Hogwarts is Susan Bones, niece of the highly regarded former head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement,” Rita continued.

“I only asked a s...simple question in class,” sobbed Susan convincingly, “and... and Inquisitor Carrow v...vanished my c...c...clothes. Sh...she m...made me go to all of my classes n...naked...”

Harry raised his eyebrows at Hermione who was giggling.

“It looks like Dumbledore is putting Rita’s talents to good use,” Hermione chortled. “She must have coached Susan a bit.”

Finally Rita Skeeter introduced Ginny Weasley, placing great emphasis on the fact that her family was also listed in the Pureblood Directory among the Sacred Twenty-Eight. Ginny’s weeping was as convincing as Susan’s had been.

“Th...they kidnapped Ron from his dormitory in the n...night,” Ginny sobbed. “They’re probably t....t...torturing him too. He would never t...turn against H...Harry otherwise. I just d...don’t understand wh...what happened to Percy... how he turned out so horrible... how he could do that to
his own brother…”

“And what can you tell us about the night that Draco Malfoy was allegedly killed by Harry Potter?” Rita Skeeter asked pointedly.

The tears which might only appear somewhat dubious to those who knew Ginny well dried up, and a very real flare of anger sparked in Ginny’s eyes as they narrowed.

“Harry wasn’t even there,” Ginny spat. “He was being held prisoner in the dungeon when that happened. I was with Daphne Greengrass and Fleur Delacour. We came across Draco Malfoy as he tried to rape Katie Bell--Draco had been given permission by the Carrows to rape Gryffindor girls.”

“When we stopped him, Draco Malfoy tried to kill us. We were only defending ourselves... and we didn’t really have a choice, as he was acting with impunity given to him by the Minister herself. If he was still alive, I don’t doubt that being paraded naked in front of the school would have been the least of Susan Bones’ worries!” Ginny concluded.

“So, this then is our current Minister’s legacy,” said Rita Skeeter as she began her closing remarks. “Her dedication to ‘Law and Order’ going only as far as those laws she makes herself--laws which hearken back to a time of medievalism and savagery--wherein only the ‘noblest’ bloodlines have any rights, and children may be beaten within inches of their lives and raped if they belong to the ‘wrong’ families…”

“...and if you are muggleborn in the Minister’s regime, then even beating and raping children is not the least of the punishments to be expected. Those of you who were watching several nights ago saw what the Minister’s administration is ultimately capable of--torture and mass murder on a scale which would make Grindelwald proud, and make Voldemort himself green with envy.”

At this point, quick-cuts from the footage of the raid on the Ministry’s Death-Camp flashed on the screen in a montage behind Rita as she continued to speak.

“Voldemort!…” Rita’s eyes narrowed as she peered into the camera with earnest conviction, “the scourge of the wizard world who was finally defeated once and for all earlier this summer by none other than the Boy-Who-Lived and the Headmaster who taught him! Voldemort... a Dark Wizard who thought nothing of murdering and raping children! A Dark Wizard whose many one-time supporters are now committing these very same acts again--these vile affronts to humanity--in the service of the Ministry!

“One might think that Voldemort himself had actually won and achieved his long-time objectives, given the Ministry’s current alignment and activities…” As she continued, Rita's voice began to rise with passion.

“And yet, there is one crucial difference--Minister Umbridge’s careful campaign of deception has achieved what Voldemort could not have done through terror alone... by convincing much of the wizarding public of the justification for such methods... by giving credence to the utter falsehood that Purebloods are the victims... and through the LIE that the wizard world is in danger of extinction if drastic measures are not taken against the muggleborn... measures which threaten to extinguish the lives of those such as Harry Potter’s beloved wife.

“And THIS is what Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore stand against... they stand against the same horror and violence which they have always stood against, from the day that the Boy-Who-Lived brought an end to the first Wizard War, to the day that the Boy-Who-Lived ended Voldemort’s Second Reign of Terror.
“And now... now Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore mean to put an end to Voldemort’s Spirit, which lives on in Minister Umbridge’s Reign of Terror today!

“...And if you stand against killing and raping children... if you stand against torture and mass-murder... then you must stand with them... you must stand with Harry Potter... and you must stand against the Minister and her corrupt regime!

“This is Rita Skeeter, reporting from Hogwarts, where the children are now safe, and the Spirit of Voldemort’s Ministry can no longer reach them!”

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Minister Dolores Umbridge struggled mightily to contain her rage when the regularly scheduled programming resumed on the Wiz-Vision. She had wondered for months what had become of Skeeter, the best propagandist the Unspeakable Office had ever produced. Dolores had been beginning to think that someone had accidentally stepped on Rita Skeeter while she had been surreptitiously covering the Third Task... and now Dolores desperately wished that someone had.

The Minister’s deputy glanced at her, his freckles standing out against his ashen face. This response was the last thing that Percy had expected when he had imperiused Ron and made him go on the Wiz-Vision. And Percy instinctively knew that Ron’s lacklustre performance, and the stagey delivery of the WVN newscasters, couldn’t hold a candle to what he had just watched.

“Lies!” Percy Weasley blurted out vehemently, as the colour rushed back into his cheeks.

“Dumbledore obviously put Skeeter and Ginny up to it. He must have kidnapped Skeeter at the end of the Triwizard tournament, and he’s been brainwashing her ever since, just waiting for a chance to spin it all around and turn things back on us. We have to find out how they’re breaking into the broadcasts and put a stop to this, Dolores!”

“Indeed, Percy!” Dolores nodded, fuming as she spoke through grinding teeth. “I already have Unspeakables in the Research division of the Department of Mysteries working on it around the clock...”

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“Wow!” Parvati gasped, her sleek black tail quivering as her heart raced. “Wow!” she repeated, unable to articulate anything but shock and awe at Rita’s devastatingly sincere and rousing presentation. The rest of the Coven had been rendered even more speechless as they sat gaping in silence.

Harry’s eyes bulged and his head was spinning as his world tilted. Even though he was perfectly aware that Skeeter had switched sides and was working with Luna’s father--and that she had even fought in the battle against Voldemort--it was still hard for him to process that this was the same woman who had blindsided him and Hermione almost a year ago within a week and a bit to the day. Harry was utterly flummoxed, and yet for the first time in his life, he felt ready to take up the mantle of the “Boy-Who-Lived,” not as a glorious title promising him fame and fortune, but as a promise to tyrants everywhere that their days were numbered.

Hermione was equally flabbergasted, but she couldn’t help feeling a thrill course through her, raising the strip of orange fur along her spine and her furry ears pricking as Rita’s electrifying rhetoric--backed up by the powerful onscreen evidence--fired up her senses.

Harry’s bewildерment only increased when he suddenly realised that Hermione was sitting on his
lap, purring and arching as her furry tail twitched wildly, affectionately rubbing her flushed cheeks and bushy head against his face.

It took Harry a moment to discern why the purring seemed to be in stereo; Parvati’s long black hair spilled over his other shoulder as she wriggled next to him, butting her own head under his chin, tickling him with her furry black ears. Hermione trapped Harry’s lips in a heated kiss as her hand slipped under his pyjama top and Parvati began to nibble his earlobe.

Fleur hungrily licked her lips with a frank look of arousal. Both grinning, Dora and Jennifer took it upon themselves to begin snuggling Fleur and showering her with kisses.

Daphne appeared to be in the throes of bliss already as she gazed longingly at the other members of the Coven; Luna pounced on her, purring and giggling. Luna’s fluffy white tail vibrated as she kissed Daphne, sliding her hand up Daphne’s inner thigh and under her slip.

“Wh...what’s going on?” Harry managed to gasp when Hermione’s lips wetly released his to kiss Parvati.

It took Hermione a moment to respond as she and Parvati kissed with abandon. When their lips parted, Hermione looked pensive.

“I... I’m not really sure Harry,” she confessed. It was true that something about Rita Skeeter’s impassioned oratory had stirred her, but Hermione wasn’t quite certain why.

“Seriously Hermione?” Parvati giggled as she tugged off Harry’s pyjama top over his tousled head. “Skeeter’s speech was just exciting... Not to mention convincing!”

“I’ll say,” Dora gasped, who had already been quickly denuded by Fleur and Jennifer. “Loads of people will be ready to fight the Ministry after that...”

“Oui, zat is so!” Fleur momentarily paused in the middle of sucking Dora’s neck to agree. Jennifer merely nodded in concurrence, unwilling to unwrap her lips from Fleur’s nipple as she gently squeezed her breasts.

“Oh... of course!” said Hermione, her eyes gleaming as she purred some more and raked her fingers across Harry’s bare chest. “That’s it Harry... arousal can be a sympathetic nervous system response to inciting rhetoric...”

“Er...?” Harry grinned, brows still furrowed with bemusement, and gave up trying to understand as Parvati was now pulling his pyjama bottoms down to his ankles and Hermione clasped his bobbing erection.

At that moment Daphne moaned with release and soaked her panties as Luna’s ministrations brought her to a peak; Luna was grinding her wetness against Daphne’s thigh and had her fingers knuckle deep in Daphne’s own sopping entrance.

It didn’t take long for Hermione and Parvati to strip themselves bare, and Harry quickly found himself sandwiched between two naked cat-witches on the sofa. After some gleeful squirming and wriggling, Hermione had Harry’s face nestled in her lap and Parvati was lying on her back between Harry’s legs as he knelt above her while she stroked his hard penis.

Harry parted Hermione’s thighs and plunged his tongue into her humid slit as Parvati took Harry’s stiffness in her mouth. Hermione mewed and rippled ecstatically, her bushy ginger tail thumping the side of the sofa as Harry’s tongue delved into her moist pink folds and his fingers toggled her fleshy nubbin.
Parvati’s own cat-tongue swirled around Harry’s shaft as she sucked it voraciously. Harry’s loins began to thrust and she took him deeper as the crown surged forward. Parvati’s wet suction and Hermione’s quivering thighs around Harry’s head brought him to his zenith.

Harry stiffened and groaned, pressing his pubes to Parvati’s lips as he unleashed a torrent of semen into her throat at the same moment as Hermione quaked, yowling and flooding his face with her dewiness.

Giddily, Harry took note of the others as he lay back on the sofa and Parvati and Hermione traded places. Everyone had shed their clothing by now; panties, nighties, slips, and pyjamas lay strewn around the opulent parlour. Dora’s hair fluoresced a bright shade of fuschia, having been brought to completion, and she was busily mauling Fleur’s breasts as their tongues wrestled. And Jennifer had joined Luna in her ravishing of Daphne. Squeals and moans of feverish delight filled the room.

Hermione straddled Harry, his hands cradling her hips, her warm sheath gripping his rigid shaft as he entered her. Parvati purred; her furry black tail undulated as Harry’s nose nestled between her satiny smooth bottom cheeks and he applied his lips and tongue to her twitching vulva.

Hermione entwined herself with Parvati in a heated embrace as they rode Harry together, trailing her kisses down the other cat-witch’s neck until her lips wetly encircled Parvati’s long dark nipples.

Dizzying tremors of elation rippled through Parvati’s supple figure as Hermione sucked her tender peaks and Harry’s tongue probed her channel. Harry met Hermione’s gyrations with deep thrusts; the fervor overtook Harry again as he pistoned into her depths.

The three of them were carried off together by the rushing tide of passion and both cat-witches meowed ecstatically. Harry groaned as he erupted, filling Hermione’s nook with his essence.

Arcs of magic crackled; the parlour rocked and echoed with meows and moans of ardour as the Coven continued their wanton escapades. Soon enough they were all left gasping and panting as they floated, dazed, on a sea of bliss.

When Harry came to, he discovered Jennifer snuggled under one arm and Luna sprawled across them both, purring and kneading his chest as her fluffy white tail waved languidly. Hermione was cuddled up with Daphne and Dora on one of the other sofas, and Parvati was purring in Fleur’s lap as the older girl stroked her furry black tail. Nobody had bothered to get up and get dressed yet, apparently.

“Er... how long was I asleep?” Harry asked with a grin.

“A few hours I think...” Jennifer yawned. “We all were... It’s almost noon.”

“No wonder I’m famished,” Harry responded. “We missed breakfast.”

“We might as well just have lunch then,” said Hermione. Fleur looked thoughtful for a moment.

“Eet is not too cold out today, per’aps we should take a picnic by the pond,” she suggested hopefully.

“That’s a lovely idea,” Luna beamed; the rest of the Coven nodded and murmured in agreement.

“Sounds good to me,” said Harry as he reached for his pyjamas, preparing to get up and get dressed for the day. He raised his eyebrows when Jennifer snatched them away with a giggle.

“We don’t really need those do we?” Jennifer peered at Harry impishly. “It’s only us here on a 115
magically protected acres…”

“Er…” Harry gulped and glanced at Fleur, as she was the one who had suggested taking lunch by the pond. Fleur smirked.

“Jennifer has a very good point, Harry,” said Fleur. Harry peered at Hermione who grinned at him unhelpfully, her furry ears twitching with mirth.

“Well… it wouldn’t be the first time we’ve had fun outside with nothing on,” Hermione pointed out. Luna and Parvati giggled and nodded in agreement.

“Yeah…” Harry began, “but that was dif…” he trailed off when he noticed Dora and Daphne beaming at him eagerly, suddenly wondering if it really was so different. And it occurred to him that he’d never had sex outside with half of the Coven.

It hardly seemed fair to deprive Fleur and Dora and Daphne and Jennifer of something that he’d done with Hermione, and Luna and Parvati. And Harry had to admit that it would be more than a bit thrilling to have some fun with the rest of the Coven outside by the pond.

“Alright then,” Harry grinned. “Why not?”

“Excellent!” said Luna, smiling beatifically, “I’ll go and pack us a picnic lunch then. Just wait here… I won’t be long.”

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Dobby had learned to be very careful about entering rooms around Harry Potter and his wife, keeping his big ears open, and his house-elf senses on high-alert for intimate activities so as not to intrude on their private moments. But he was finding it more and more difficult to avoid embarrassing moments since Harry and Hermione Potter had been residing at Number 12 Grimmauld Place, and then in the Dorset manor house, with six other frisky witches.

Dobby was never quite certain whether a room was safe to enter when they were all at home, but so far he had managed admirably to avoid an incident. And at least he was safe in the kitchen.

Dobby’s tennis-ball sized eyes nearly fell out of his head when he spotted Luna wandering into the kitchen as naked as the day she was born. Blushing furiously, Dobby clapped his hands over his eyes as his bat-like ears trembled.

“Hello Dobby,” said Luna brightly, swishing her fluffy white tail and utterly unabashed. “I was just going to make a picnic lunch for all of us, as it’s not too cold out…”

“No, no… Mistress Luna,” Dobby squeaked anxiously, his eyes still tightly shut, “Dobby will make lunch…”

“Is that part of house-elf magic?” Luna interjected. “Can you do it with your eyes closed then?”

“Er… M…Mistress Luna need not stay... Then Dobby can open his eyes.”

“I don’t mind staying! I like making sandwiches,” Luna giggled. “You can open your eyes Dobby.”

“But Mistress Luna is not wearing any clothes,” Dobby moaned.

“Oh… does that bother you?” Luna asked earnestly.

Dobby wasn’t sure how to answer, as he didn’t want to upset Mistress Luna, so he just nodded
vigorously, his big ears flapping.

“Alright then Dobby,” Luna responded kindly. “I’ll just wait with the others and come back in for
the lunch basket when it’s ready.”

Dobby breathed a huge sigh of relief. “Dobby will have lunch ready in ten minutes Mistress Luna.”

~o0o~

Luna brazenly stepped out through the doorway and onto the red brick path to the gardens whisking
her fluffy white tail, picnic basket in hand and without a stitch of clothing on. Harry took a deep
breath to gird himself before following after her and the other nude young witches. There was a bit
of a breeze after all, and he began to stiffen.

Hermione caught his blushing features, and turned a bit pink herself as her nipples hardened. Daphne
looked a bit nervous as well.

“You were right Harry,” Hermione said a bit sheepishly, her furry ears and tail twitching. “It does
feel a bit different just wandering around the house and walking outside with no clothes on...”
“Alohomora,” muttered Ron, waving his hand at the locked door for the hundredth time.

He tried the brass handle and swore when it still refused to open. Ron had another go at the latched window, and it wouldn’t budge either. Ron knew it was a long-shot that he’d ever be able to pull off a wandless spell; they were supposed to be incredibly difficult even for the most experienced adult wizards, and he knew that he was only an average fourteen year old wizard at best. But he had to try.

Ron angrily flung himself back on the bed, glowering at the cold scrambled eggs and bacon and the congealed porridge sitting on the breakfast tray. Ron was starving; it was almost noon and Ron hadn’t eaten a thing since dinner at Hogwarts the night before last. Percy had brought him plenty of food, but Ron had furiously rejected every meal.

Ron ripped his eyes away from the cold breakfast and stared at the pink ceiling, guiltily doing his best to squash the bitter feelings which Percy had stirred within him again in an attempt to make him turn against Harry. The words still echoed in his mind.

“Just think Ron,” Percy had said, “if Dad had taken a higher paying position at the Ministry instead of tinkering on experiments for Dumbledore, and put aside his ridiculous muggle obsession, you could’ve had everything that Potter has: gold, new brooms, a girlfriend...

“We could have lived in a proper house with house-elves instead of in that miserable hovel--and you could have been proud of our family’s name and status...”

Percy had kept at it most of the day yesterday, but Ron had thought about Seamus and refused to give in to his old envies. Sure, Ron had to admit to himself that he still felt the occasional pang of jealousy that Harry was rich and famous, that Harry was better at magic than Ron, and that girls seemed to like Harry more; but it didn’t seem as bad as before.

Ron had been surprised to find that it no longer had any hold over him, and he didn’t really know why. He supposed it might be because he was good at quidditch now and people had seemed to notice him a lot more since the match against Slytherin... even a few girls had. But all Ron really knew for certain was that he had been a lot happier since he and Seamus had become best friends and grown intimate. Seamus really seemed to get him, and just accepted Ron without judgment--warts and all.

It didn’t matter so much that Ron wasn’t best friends with Harry anymore. Ron knew that Harry still cared about him a bit, and that was enough.

When he saw that he wasn’t getting through to Ron, Percy had finally had enough of it and simply imperiused him. Ron could only recall a few fuzzy vague snatches of what had followed, his memories of late afternoon yesterday muddled and foggy.

If Percy hadn’t made Ron watch the news last night, Ron probably wouldn’t have even recollected enough to feel guilty for betraying Harry on the WVN news. Mostly Ron just remembered that the rest of this house seemed to be as disgustingly pink as the guest room in which he was imprisoned.

The gnawing emptiness ached in the pit of Ron’s stomach. Finally deciding that his hunger strike was over, Ron picked up a piece of bacon and savagely tore into it with his teeth as he considered his options. He had been taken somewhere else by floo to make his statement on camera, and it was possible that Percy might make him do it again.
Maybe Ron could catch Percy off guard the next time--steal his wand and escape somehow before they flooed away. Fred and George had taught him a few fighting spells along with the rest of the quidditch team and Seamus. But Ron couldn’t do any of that if he was imperiused; he would have to try and convince Percy--pretend that he’d finally come around...

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The tingling sensation seemed even more pronounced than usual as she left the path and walked through the meadow grasses towards the pond in the gardens behind the manor with the others. Hermione presumed that her heightened reaction had less to do with her kneazle-enhanced senses picking up the residual charge of the ancient enchantment which permeated the atmosphere of the glade surrounding the pond, and more to do with the fact that she was completely naked.

Luna and Fleur spread out a large blanket between a statue of a Faun playing pipes and a statue of a Nymph by the water’s edge, and opened the picnic basket. Hermione was a bit surprised, but not at all unpleased, when a pretty girl with windswept black hair and iridescent green eyes sat beside her, as unclothed as she was.

“How come you changed into Harriet?” she asked, flicking her furry ears questioningly as she moistened, nipples hardening at the sight of Harriet sitting cross legged next to her. The other members of the Coven glanced at them both, seeming equally pleased to see a nude Harriet among them.

“Er... dunno...” said Harriet with a shy grin. “Just seemed a bit less awkward than sitting around outside eating sandwiches with the rest of you and my... er... thingy poking up I suppose.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow and struggled not to laugh; it suddenly struck her that she couldn’t recall ever hearing Harry refer directly to his private bits before--not even anything as innocuous as ‘willy.’ Dora and Fleur chortled as the others tried hard not to giggle.

“Thingy!? ...Seriously?” Hermione couldn’t help a little smirk as her bushy ginger tail quivered with mirth. “After everything we’ve been up to?”

“Erm...” was the best that Harriet could manage in response as she reddened.

“I suppose it’s better than ‘dangly bit’...” said Parvati, losing her battle against the giggles.

“I’ve always been partial to the term ‘tallywhacker’!” Dora snorted with laughter.

“I’m perfectly happy with the word ‘penis,’” Luna chimed in with her dreamiest smile.

“And some girls like a bit o’ salty talk during sex,” Dora added with a roguish wink. “We might ‘ave to teach you a few naughty words Harriet.”

“And a few French ones,” Fleur tittered. “Zey do not sound so wicked in French.”

“It’s alright Harriet...” Hermione gave Harriet a hug and kissed her. “We’re just teasing. We all think that it’s very sweet that you don’t like to use vulgar or silly words.”

“Hear, hear!” Daphne agreed. Fleur nodded, her platinum hair gleaming in the midday sun.

“Indeed, that ees one of the many things which makes you so charming, Harriet,” Fleur murmured as
she leaned in to kiss the girl with tumbling black locks.

“Well, I do swear a bit sometimes when I’m cross...” Harriet admitted ruefully.

“That’s different,” said Daphne. “And it’s not like you do it very often.”

Puffy white clouds scudded across the late October sky as the Coven happily munched their sandwiches and crisps. Harriet took a swig from her bottle of fizzy lemonade and began to relax. It felt nice and peaceful in this secluded spot with the others. And despite the occasional chilly gust which raised goose bumps and perked her pink nipples, it was surprisingly warm considering that November was now only days away.

Harriet’s eyes widened with a precipitous flash of inspiration as she polished off her cheese and cucumber sandwich. A fluffy black cat-tail sprouted from the base of her spine and furry black ears emerged from her messy head of hair.

“It’s almost Halloween,” explained Harriet with a grin when the others peered at her questioningly. “Just thought it would be fun to get a head start, and I haven’t tried the cat look in girl-form yet.”

“Oh, you’re gorgeous as a catgirl, Harriet!” Hermione beamed, her own ginger tail quivering with excitement.

“Brilliant Harriet, that’s a smashing idea!” Dora grinned, and moments later she was sporting a violet pair of cat-ears and a matching furry tail.

Luna and Parvati giggled and waved their own tails gleefully when the blanket filled with naked cat-witches as the rest of the Coven quickly followed suit, giving themselves furry cat-tails and ears with the spell which Harry had worked out.

Harriet suddenly found herself at the centre of attention, mobbed by her elated companions. She fell backwards into Hermione’s waiting arms. A thrill shot through Harriet as Hermione kissed her furry ears and began to nuzzle her neck. Purring loudly, Hermione reached around from behind to cradle Harriet’s firm little globes, squeezing them gently, pressing her own breasts and hard nipples into Harriet’s back.

Dora had joined Hermione behind Harriet, licking and nibbling the other side of the younger girl’s neck, sliding one hand across her smooth belly and stroking her fluffy black tail with the other. Luna and Parvati each took to one side of Harriet, trailing their own caresses and kisses along the satiny skin of Harriet’s torso until their lips wetly engulfed Harriet’s tender pink peaks and began to suck as Hermione continued to knead Harriet’s breasts.

Harriet squirmed and uttered a little “eep” when her legs were gently and widely parted by Fleur and Jennifer, feeling equal amounts of nervous anticipation and delight as they kissed her sensitive inner thighs and fondled her humid entrance. Daphne smiled sweetly as she kneeled between Harriet’s thighs, waving her own blonde cat-tail.

Daphne bent over, jutting her bottom and furry tail in the air, and began to lick Harriet’s pink glistening inner folds which were exposed as Fleur’s and Jennifer’s fingers splayed the outer lips of Harriet’s labia and strummed Harriet’s fleshy pearl. Harriet’s wet channel spasmed, clenching Daphne’s tongue as it probed further into her depths, and Fleur leaned in to kiss Harriet again.

Harriet moaned and began to undulate as she lost herself to the cascading ripples of ecstasy brought on by the ministrations of the Coven, her fluffy black tail coiling around Dora and Hermione. With one hand tangled in Daphne’s golden hair, and the other stroking Luna’s furry ears, Harriet squealed,
her hips bucking, and Daphne lapped up her flowing dewiness as she burst.

Still bobbing giddily on the churning eddies of passion, Harriet was nonetheless aware that Fleur had taken Daphne’s place between her quaking thighs. Harriet’s eyes widened when she realised that Fleur was wearing her magical strap-on. Fleur batted her long silvery lashes at Harriet, smiling sweetly.

“Chérie?” she asked imploringly, delicately caressing Harriet’s cheek.

Harriet glanced at Hermione who had been the only one to have the pleasure of enjoying her in that manner to date.

“If you want to Harriet!” Hermione purred, giving the younger girl a kiss. Harriet grinned and nodded, flicking her furry black ears.

“Yeah...” Harriet managed to gasp as she panted joyfully.

Fleur’s lips met Harriet’s in a passionate wet kiss. Harriet clasped Fleur’s waist and tilted her own hips as the older girl leaned forward. The vibrating brushy tip of the magical dildo nestled in Harriet’s dripping entrance; then Fleur surged and drove the ribbed shaft in to the hilt as Harriet squeaked with pleasure.

Harriet slid her hands up Fleur’s sides and clutched the older girl’s breasts, tenderly tweaking her nipples as Fleur plundered her vessel. Harriet bit her lip and folded her legs around Fleur’s thighs, moaning in delight, her fluffy black tail thumping the ground as Fleur continued to rock her world.

Fleur’s own platinum cat tail whipped wildly. Harriet shuddered, her convulsing sheath tightly gripping the pistoning magical lance as it wrenched one orgasm after another from her, and the glade surrounding the pond echoed with moans and cries of ecstatic bliss.

Hardly content to be mere spectators, the rest of the Coven continued apace, joining in the ravishing of Harriet and frolicking with each other. After Fleur had finished, Luna and Hermione had both been keen to wear the magic strap-on and have a turn with Harriet as well.

A turbulent intoxicating storm of ardour swept them all away, and the next thing Harriet knew, she was splashing in the pond, sandwiched between Dora and Jennifer as they all rode the magical multi-pronged phallus.

Hermione, Fleur, and Luna were rather literally tailing each other in the pond with their wet furry cat-tails, as were Parvati and Daphne. The pond had become a bubbling cauldron of carnal delight, and the Maelstrom of Magic swirled around them; the glade filled with giggles, meows, and the joyful sound of amour as the trees swayed.

Harriet wasn’t certain exactly when it happened, as the wet and wild bacchanal continued throughout the afternoon, but at some point she had reverted to Harry at Hermione’s request. He had spent at least an hour or two as Harry, and the last thing he remembered before he passed out, was filling Luna and Fleur with his semen.

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Harry wasn’t sure if he was awake or asleep. It appeared to be night, and he felt as if he were floating on gossamer, drifting through a sea of luminous stars, nestled in the warm embrace of the Coven. An ethereal swell of breathy tinkling music filled his soul with a sublime, peaceful joy, and tingles of magic rippled across his skin.
It was only when Hermione and Fleur stirred and gasped that Harry was certain that he was awake. Though the night sky above was dark and clouded over, the glade surrounding the pond was lit with the silvery luminescence of a thousand tiny glowing fairies cheerfully flitting to and fro. The surface of the pond shimmered in the starry light.

But as Harry, Hermione and Fleur glanced at each other, their eyes widened when they realised that the silvery luminous glow wasn’t just coming from the fairies, but from themselves—their own wet nude figures—as well.

“What’s going on?” Harry murmured when he realised that it was also raining on them. “We should be freezing our arses off, shouldn’t we?”

“I... I have no idea Harry?” Hermione was utterly flummoxed as she held up her glowing arm to the night sky. “Maybe it’s something to do with the ancient enchantment on the pond?” Hermione peered at Fleur, who seemed equally perplexed.

Luna yawned and stretched as she roused from her slumber with a wiggle of her fluffy white tail. She grinned when she saw that everyone in the Coven—awake and asleep—was glowing.

“Oh... did we all turn into fairies then?” asked Luna.

“Er...” Harry rubbed his chin pensively and peered at the statues of the Faun and the Water-Nymph, wondering if they held any answers. Something about the Naiad in particular rang a bell.

“Well...” Hermione raised an eyebrow at her metamorphic husband and the Greek statues, flicked her furry ears, half-smirked, and looked at their part-siren lover, Fleur, again. “...Has anyone heard of the myth of Hermaphroditus?”
Chapter 171

After they had roused, the rest of Coven peered around the illuminated glade and at each other’s glowing figures in bewilderment as the raindrops fell. Fleur put her arm comfortably around Daphne, who looked a bit frightened, and gave her a kiss. Jennifer shrugged when Dora looked at her questioningly.

“What’s going on?” Parvati asked, flicking her dampening furry tail and raising her eyebrows at Luna who was quivering with excitement.

“I think we might have turned into fairies,” said Luna eagerly. “Hermione was just going to tell us how...”

“Well... er... I wouldn’t say that exactly,” Hermione interjected, her face reddening even through the silvery luminescence radiating from her skin. “We shouldn’t jump to conclusions. I was just going to make some inferences and speculations based on the symbolism of some of the Greek myths associated with some of the statues surrounding the pond--they were obviously placed here when the manor was originally built in the 16th century...”

“That’s right,” said Jennifer. “When Daddy bought the place, that’s what the estate agent told him. The Countess who originally lived here had this whole place built here just because she liked the pond--she’s the one who had the statues put around it.”

“Right,” said Hermione as she geared up for lecture mode, “but the magic here feels much older--predating the Romans even by many hundreds of years. So I think the Countess might have been magical and sensed the enchantment at this site then--or she knew about it somehow...”

“If the Countess was a witch, maybe she was descended from one of the original inhabitants?” Harry proffered.

“That’s certainly a possibility,” agreed Hermione. “There’s really no way to be certain when we’re talking about thousands of years before her time even.”

“So, what were you going to tell us about the myth of Hermaphroditus?” asked Luna.

“Well, one of the versions of the myth of Hermaphroditus--who was the son of Aphrodite and Hermes--involves a Naiad...” Hermione began.

“Oh... you mean the son of Aphrodite, the Greek Sorceress in the portrait who helps guard our corridor with Circe and Cleopatra?” Daphne interrupted, glimmering with surprise.

“Possibly... that’s not very likely actually,” Hermione smiled kindly at Daphne as she tried to explain. “You have to understand, muggles built up a lot of myths and legends around ancient sorcerers, and many were made out to be gods and goddesses, or demons, and that sort of thing.

“And many of the stories associated with ancient witches and wizards are actually based on earlier stories from even older human societies, and prehistoric beliefs about nature spirits from before writing was invented. So it’s all mixed up really, and it would be very difficult to sort out which stories have a basis in fact, and which were just made up to explain natural phenomenon and human nature.

“In any case, in Ovid’s version of the myth, Hermaphroditus was born a boy and one day he encountered a Naiad--a water nymph--named Salmacis at her pond. She was smitten by him and
tried to seduce him, and he was... er... a bit reticent,” Hermione flushed in embarrassment at telling a story which featured a lack of consent, “So she forcibly embraced and kissed him, and begged the gods to let them never be parted.

“The gods granted her wish, but in a way that she probably didn’t expect. Salmacis and Hermaphroditus were merged into one being, and so Hermaphroditus who had entered the pond as a boy, exited as a ‘creature of both sexes’... both boy and girl.

“The upshot is, that Hermaphroditus prayed to his parents to curse the pond to change any man who enters it into a half-man, half woman...”

“Well that’s not a very nice story,” squeaked Daphne, who started to look alarmed again.

“You’re right, it’s not.” said Hermione, giving Harry an apologetic look. “I was really just joking a bit because of the irony of our situation... the magic pond, the Greek symbolism, us with Fleur’s toys, Harry being able to change from a boy into a girl...”

“But you don’t have to worry Daphne... I didn’t curse the pond. I promise!” Harry grinned. “It’s not a bad thing--whatever happened to us is good... I just know it! But it is oddly coincidental...”

“And it’s just one of many myths,” Hermione added quickly. “It’s a later version by Ovid of how Hermaphroditus came to have both boy and girl parts. The symbolism of Hermaphroditus him/herself had already long stood as a representation of marriage and love--the joining of both sexes...”

“That’s a bit like some of the stories in some of my Mum and Dad’s books from India,” Parvati interjected, blushing furiously through her own silvery luminous glow. “I’m actually glad that most wizards don’t read muggle myths....”

“I don’t think I could have lived it down if everyone at Hogwarts knew that my name comes from a love goddess--Parvati, the consort of Shiva. And in some of the later myths, Parvati and Shiva merge to become Ardhanarishvara: ‘the Lord Who is Half-Woman.’”

“Exactly!” Hermione agreed, gleaming. “I think what these characters and stories embody is most important. They shouldn’t be taken too literally. It’s the mythic symbolism which has the most bearing on the magic. Aphrodite, Pan, Eros, Hermaphroditus, etc... their stories are symbols.

“Fertility, sexuality, marriage, Love--all Creative, life affirming acts and rituals... that’s what these particular mythological beings in these particular stories most represent. And I expect this site used to be one where Celtic witches--covens probably--performed Sex Rituals not unlike what we experienced here this afternoon.

“In a sense... this is literally Hallowed Ground! And we may have inadvertently triggered the Ancient Magic--reactivated it--by re-enacting the Sex Rituals which created it to begin with.

“And I feel exactly like I did in that lab we found in the Department of Mysteries!” exclaimed Harry eagerly, feeling absolutely certain that Hermione was on the right track. “The one with that glowing ‘Orb of Love.’ D’you think there’s a connection Hermione?”

“I think there might be Harry,” Hermione nodded slowly. “That may be why the Fairies are attracted to this area--or perhaps the Fairies were here first and attracted the witches.”

Fleur had been listening intently the entire time. Her breath quickened as she felt a thrill of
understanding, a connection to her Veela heritage in a way she never had before.

“It is as the Headmaster says, is it not?” said Fleur quietly. “After the Third Task, he told us that he has not felt magic like this in modern Britain and Europe, except in the most ancient magical places for witchcraft, and also only in some schools for witches in ze Orient.

“It was told to me by my grandmother, that the Veela also have an affinity for such places--and that we are related to these little creatures flying around us now--zese fairies... I do not know enough to know for certain, but at this moment, it feels true.

“When Veela dance and sing, when Veela experience joy, when Veela love--there is something about our spirit which makes us glow, like zis... But as only a small part Veela, I have never experienced it as strong as this before.

“Per’aps zat means Luna is onto something, not so much that we are all turning into fairies, but rather, that as witches--as magical humans--our spirits are now of such a high frequency that we are in alignment with ze fairies... We cannot help but glow as they do, as the Veela do...”

“I knew it!” Luna beamed, pricking her furry ears.

Parvati’s eyes widened and she gasped as her sleek wet tail rippled with exhilaration.

“That actually makes sense if the bits that I’ve read of my Mum and Dad’s books are true,” said Parvati. “If someone practices certain types of yoga long enough, they can ostensibly activate something called the Kundalini Shakti. It’s the primal Female Energy which the Universe is supposedly created from. And when people produce a lot of it, their auras are supposed to be so bright that everyone can see them.”

“Shakti the goddess is also the personification of the Shakti energy from what I remember reading in my Auntie Joanne’s books on Hinduism,” said Hermione, her bushy tail vibrating excitedly, “In some schools of thought, she’s worshipped as the Supreme Being--the top of the Hindu pantheon... and isn’t Parvati just another name for Shakti?”

Parvati’s silvery glow reddened again as she grimaced and nodded, glistening in the rain.

“Yes... but she’s got loads of other names too,” Parvati squeaked. “It depends on which aspect she’s displaying at any given time.”

“So I guess all this more or less proves I really do have a female soul then?” said Harry. “But I still don’t quite get how that squares with the hermaphrodite stuff, the androgyny--having a... er...”

“Penis...” said Luna helpfully with a swish of her increasingly saturated tail.

“Yeah... that!” said Harry wryly. “Even with a female soul and being able to turn into a girl, having a penis too, how is it possible to activate this magic if it’s primarily generated by females? I mean, I turned back into a guy partway through while we were... er... having sex in the pond.”

Dora had been thinking about it the whole time, wondering exactly what Harry was wondering as she listened, and suddenly everything seemed to fall into place.

“Because we all have male and female aspects to our natures,” Dora said, flourescing brightly as her eyes widened with a flare of gnosis. “Maybe we don’t all ‘ave the outer physical potential to be both, like you and me Harry, but we must all have male and female aspects of our spirits and our souls--even though one might be more dominant than the other.
“In our group, we might all be predominantly female on the inside, including you Harry... but ultimately we girls must’ve ‘ad to activate all aspects of our own energy to trigger the magic too—the male aspect inside of us as well. It must be necessary to ‘ave both parts activated to bring us to this level of magic. That’s what the myths about the bisexual and androgynous deities seem to be sayin’ anyway...

“And when we were usin’ Fleur’s toys, and the cat-tails on each other, the physical act was enough symbolically to activate the male aspects of our spirits. That probably goes both ways... guys ‘ave to be able to activate the female aspect in themselves to make it work--and yours is already active Harry.”

“Okay... yeah,” Harry nodded as he pensively chewed his lip. “Yeah, I think I get that.”

“Of course! That’s it Dora!” Hermione beamed, droplets of water flying from her dancing tail.

“Obviously some men have historically achieved such high frequency levels of magic... but it must be much more difficult because most men aren’t comfortable at all with their feminine aspects. They’re afraid of it and aren’t willing to let that side of themselves grow strong...

“Maybe not so many women are put off exploring their bisexual natures, and maybe that’s why most of the successful Covens have been all witches. Perhaps in the ones with men that worked, they were willing to take on female sexual roles during the rituals,” Hermione concluded.

“Well, considering that loads of guys still seem to think that they’re superior to women, it’s not that much of a surprise really,” Harry growled. “Most guys think being ‘girly’ is a bad thing.”

“Yes, but it’s actually not so bad in the wizard world as it still is in much of the muggle world really,” said Hermione. “For all of its problems, and the misogyny that still does exist to a degree, in some respects, gender relations are a bit more equal than they are in the muggle world.”

“It’s not perfect parity by any means,” Hermione continued. “I know that there’s vestiges of patriarchy left in the Wizengamot, what with mostly men being Heads of the Pureblood Houses--and openly gay wizards aren’t treated very well. But look at all the powerful witches throughout history, and gay and bisexual witches seem to be generally accepted.

“Even today there’s lots of witches with power--even though some of them are quite dreadful at the moment. It’s only the most retrograde families that want to reinstate things like forced marriage contracts and human slavery.”

“That’s a good point Hermione,” said Dora. “Though with a witch as ‘orrible as Umbridge running things right now--she seems dead set on bringing some of that sort of thing back ‘erself--at least when it comes to Purebloods lording it over ‘lesser’ witches and muggle women.”

“Yes... that’s true!” Hermione said sadly. “But once she’s gone, and we’ve cleaned up the Ministry a bit, things will hopefully at least go back to the way things were my first year at Hogwarts...”

“Yeah,” Harry interjected, looking hopeful, “...and then we can start trying to improve things in the Wizengamot--push for a more democratic structure so that it’s more representative of modern wizard society and other sentient magical beings.”

Hermione smiled at her dripping husband as the shimmering Coven fell into a contemplative silence, growing soggier as the rain grew heavier. Only the tinkling sound of the delighted fairies flittering around them, and the thrumming of the rain on the blades of grass and the surface of the pond could be heard. Despite the rain, with the warmth generated by their luminosity, nobody felt inclined to return to the manor.
“So how long is this glowing going to last, do you think?” Jennifer finally asked, giving voice to the question on everyone’s mind. “And more importantly, what does all this mean for our magic?”
Chapter 172

The silvery luminous glow of their auras had faded by the time the Coven awoke the following morning, and Hermione really didn't have a good answer for what it meant for their magic in practical terms. They were in completely uncharted territory. Fleur was the only member of the Coven who had ever experienced the phenomenon at all, but never as strongly before, and only because she was part Veela. There was no knowing what it meant for everyone else.

“Per’aps our wizard magic ees simply more potent now?” Fleur proffered uncertainly over breakfast.

“Maybe it will only affect certain kinds of spells,” mused Parvati.

“Like our Patronuses,” said Luna enthusiastically. “It felt a bit like the magic in the room of requirement the day we turned Jennifer into a witch.”

“I was sort of thinking the same thing. I suppose we’ll just find out when we practice,” said Harry.

“I expect so,” Hermione agreed. “We’ll just have to experiment and see what happens with our spells for the time-being. When we go back to Hogwarts we can ask Dumbledore to use some of his equipment...”

“...and look in the Hogwarts library for any information we can find,” Harry added, nodding.

“I don’t know if they’ll be any help, but there are some books about auras in my Mum and Dad’s library,” Jennifer suggested eagerly, her eyebrows raised.

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Alastor Moody, Horace Slughorn, Snape, and Lupin departed from the Staff-Room following their meeting with Hestia Jones, McGonagall, Flitwick, and Dumbledore after breakfast. Slughorn gave Snape an apologetic smile.

“I’m dreadfully sorry Severus,” said Professor Slughorn. “I certainly didn’t intend to steal your thunder, nor your position as Head of House...”

“Not at all Horace,” Severus interjected; his nearly inscrutable expression inexplicably bearing a hint of relief. “I am restored to my position as Potions Master, but my work for the Order will keep me too busy to focus my attention entirely on the students.

“As Alchemy Professor and the former Head of Slytherin House, you were the obvious choice for the task, Horace... and you will no doubt continue to be called upon to fill in for me on occasion for the foreseeable future.”

“Speaking of restored positions, I’d best be off to see what sort of mess Alecto Carrow has made of Defence Against the Dark Arts,” sighed Professor Lupin. “I don’t suppose anyone’s learned much the last couple of months while she’s been running the class...”

“Well in any case, we’ll be changin’ things up a bit, Lupin,” Moody growled. “Don’t be too quick to revise the Defence syllabus until after our meetin’ with the Potters’ friends this afternoon--we’ll hammer out the details for the class after that.”

The mangled ex-Auror turned and grimaced at Slughorn and Snape. “Right then... if either of you two see Krum, make sure he’s at that meetin’...”
Neville glanced up from his bed, peering over Ginny’s head, when Fred and George entered the hospital wing. Ginny separated her lips from Neville’s, sensing his distraction, and turned to see who had interrupted their kiss. The Twins smirked as Neville’s face reddened; Ginny’s eyes narrowed as she regarded her older brothers.

“Don’t mind us.” Fred grinned. “We’ll only be a moment. You can carry on to your heart’s content when we’re gone.”

“We just came to let you know that we’ve all been invited to a meeting with Lupin and Moody in the Staff-Room this afternoon,” George added.

“What’s up?” asked Ginny, frowning pensively.

“According to McGonagall, Dumbledore wants to make sure we’re all keeping on learning to fight properly,” Fred replied. “And to start training up more students...”

“...probably to prepare us all to defend ourselves and Hogwarts if the Ministry attacks,” continued George. “You’re both to be teacher’s assistants apparently...”

“U...us?” Neville squeaked. “Why us?”

“What about the... er... Hermione and Harry and the others? Aren’t they coming back then?” Ginny queried, glancing anxiously at Neville.

“Dunno really,” Fred shrugged. “I suppose we’ll find out at the meeting.”

“I’m sure they’ll be back Ginny.” George gave his sister a reassuring smile. “It’s just that you and Neville have had the most training with Harry and Hermione, and they’ll probably be too busy what with studying themselves and going on missions for the Order when they do return.”

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“Cor... look at all these books of magic!” Dora exclaimed as the Coven continued pulling books from the shelves in the library of Jennifer’s manor looking for the ones about auras.

“Yeah... those were mostly my father’s--he was a bit New Agey,” Jennifer explained. “Daddy was more into that sort of thing than Mum--she was into it a bit for fun, but she tended to be more skeptical.”

“I don’t understand,” Daphne muttered. “I thought muggles didn’t know anything about magic.”

“Well loads of this is probably rubbish,” said Harry as he flipped through a book which reminded him uncomfortably of the useless books he’d had to purchase for Divination--glad that he’d given it up. “Some muggles make up a lot of stuff and believe it’s real. I suppose some of them even think they really are magical...”

“Hmmm...” Hermione’s brows furrowed and her furry tail flicked in thought as she leafed through a book about Tantric Yoga after skimming through several books of Occultism and Neopaganism. Recognising the tone of Hermione’s “Hmmm,” Harry raised his eyebrows and grinned. “Really Hermione?”

Parvati and Luna closed the books they were perusing and their furry ears pricked in anticipation.
The entire Coven turned their attention to Hermione.

“Well... I’m not so sure what to think anymore Harry. Here... look at these pictures of chakras in this book--what do they remind you of?”

“Hunh... that’s interesting! They look a bit like some of the pictures in the *Wizarding Edition of the Tai Chi Classics.*”

“Yes... they do Harry,” Hermione agreed. “They’re pictures of the major energy centres of the human form--the Chinese system is just more detailed and depicts all of the minor points and the meridians as well...

“And at least one of those books of Muggle Occultism seems to be quite accurate regarding the way magic works--too accurate to be coincidence or simple guesswork. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if some of the spells in it would work for someone with magical abilities.”

“But wouldn’t the Ministry and the International Confederation of Wizards try and keep books about real magic out of muggle hands?” Daphne asked in bewilderment.

“Per’aps zey are not so concerned about books written by muggles, because muggles have no magical ability?” Fleur mused.

A little shiver of excitement ran up Harry’s spine as something clicked in his brain and he shared a look with Hermione, his eyes wide. Parvati’s sleek black tail began to vibrate and the rest of the Coven held their breath, sensing that the Potters were on the verge of an illuminating revelation.

“Hermione, if muggles really were totally non-magical, then shouldn’t it be impossible for any of them to learn how to do some of the amazing things that some of them manage to do--even after decades of practice--like muggle Shaolin Monks...?”

“...and muggle Hindu Yogis, and muggle Tibetan Lamas... among others. One would think so Harry.” Hermione bit her lip as her breath began to quicken.

“Before I found out I was a witch, I didn’t really believe in any of those sorts of things--I thought it was all explainable through standard scientific methods or otherwise fraudulent. I was very confused and upset when unusual things would happen around me until the day I got my Hogwarts letter.

“And I think you’re partially correct Fleur,” Hermione continued. “But for some muggles to write accurate books about magic, they’d have to have some sort of experience with it.

“To answer your question Daphne, it’s probably almost impossible for wizards to control all of the information about magic because so much of it is tied into Muggle religions, myths, and legends--and most wizard governments probably don’t even bother to try because they know that a lot of it is made-up... and I expect they think that the bits that are real don’t matter because they believe that Muggles have no magical abilities at all...”

“But what if they do? ” Harry interjected eagerly. “What if *all* humans have a magical gene Hermione...?”

*Exactly* Harry... it *might* be in everyone--just Recessive in most people--like it was in Jennifer--just waiting to be activated!” Hermione exclaimed, her bushy tail bristling, not with anger, but with the same electrifying sensation which was rippling through the entire Coven.

“But for the vast majority of humans it never happens because it takes decades of diligent practice to activate it... and very few people are able or willing to actually put in the effort...”
“Hermione, maybe THAT’S why the Pureblood Supremacists in the Ministry are so worried and are claiming that Dumbledore is training Muggles how to be wizards...” Harry postulated. “We all know it’s rubbish of course—that they’re just making it up—but what if the Unspeakables in the Department of Mysteries are worried that he actually MIGHT work out how to turn Muggles into Wizards?”

“That... that could be why they’re bein’ so harsh and killing off Muggleborns!” Dora gasped.

“Yeah... Maybe it’s not for the same reason they used to hate muggles at all,” Harry muttered. “Maybe now Purebloods hate muggles and muggleborn wizards because they’re afraid they won’t be so Superior and Special as more and more wizards are born to muggle families... The Purebloods that are smart know that their days of lording it over everyone are numbered and they’re trying to hang onto power at any cost...”

“Does... does that mean that one day in the future all humans might be born magical then?” asked Daphne.

Eyes as wide as saucers, Hermione slowly nodded. Luna grinned and swished her fluffy white tail.

“If we’re inferring is true, then there are muggles right now who have turned themselves into wizards of a sort—who have somehow activated their magical genes and learned to perform some rudimentary or limited magical techniques—but who aren’t generally believed to be magical by most other muggles... or by born wizards.

“And if what we discussed with Dumbledore about other forms of energy like electricity being lower orders of magic is true, and what’s in these books about ‘auras’ and ‘light bodies’ is true, then all people must have very minor access to a certain amount of magic, whether the genes which allow them to sense, observe, channel, and manipulate magic are activated or not...”

“Because it really is like the Force in Star Wars—all around us and inside us,” said Harry excitedly as another thrill shot through him, “because we’re all made out of it—our atoms—everything... the whole Universe is made out of it...”

“I... I think I’m really beginning to understand now Hermione... Wizards aren’t really any more inherently magical than muggles... it’s just that we were born with more natural ability to control the magic than other people do.”

“Y...yes, that’s a bit oversimplified Harry... but I’m really thinking that’s basically the right of it in a nutshell,” Hermione beamed. “Magic is more or less Life itself...”
Chapter 173

The Japanese Minister of Magic drank in the rays of the heavenly sunlight as he sunned himself on the golden sands of a beautiful stretch of beach not far from Rio de Janeiro, nursing a cocktail with a tiny umbrella sticking out of the glass, his eyes closed. Several sultry young witches—who might as well have been naked for all that their barely-there-bikinis covered the most intimate bits of their plentiful assets—cooed and giggled as they nuzzled, kissed, and caressed him, fingers and lips trailing along the lines of his elaborate tattoos.

He was basking in the glow of glorious victory. The Japanese International Quidditch team had resoundingly defeated the Brazilian team in their own home stadium the night before, and now he was enjoying the fruits of their Win. His Brazilian hosts had been very gracious indeed, putting him up in their ritziest resort for VIP’s, and making their sexiest Companion-Witches available to him—completely free of charge.

A shadow loomed over the Japanese Minister, and the tittering of the witches went silent as their soft touch fell away from his skin. The Minister opened his eyes to see what had interrupted his pleasure. He frowned in puzzlement when he spied the Brazilian Minister of Magic peering down at him with a thin smile on his lips.

“Ramón... is this important? Is there a problem?”

“That remains to be seen, Asahara,” the Brazilian Minister replied. “I am merely here to facilitate a meeting...”

The Japanese Minister clambered to his feet, groaning inwardly, a knot of trepidation forming in his gut when he saw the delegation from the ICW striding across the sand towards him. His two bodyguards scowled, but he kept his own features neutral, unwilling to show weakness.

“I must apologise, my friend,” the Brazilian Minister continued, raising his eyebrows. “But the duties of my station come first--I cannot flout International Law. I suggest that you cooperate fully...”

“But of course...” Tsuchinoko Asahara muttered. He bowed stiffly towards the stern German Witch approaching with another member of her committee, a number of large grim-looking, impeccably groomed wizards wearing dark sunglasses and black muggle suits, and a dour square-jawed witch with a monocle.

“Dame Machschnell, to what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Minister Tsuchinoko!” Angelika Machschnell returned, politely bowing to the Japanese Minister. “Madam Ogoba of the Nigerian delegation to ze ICW--I believe you are both already acquainted... and zis is Madam Bones--formerly Head of ze British DMLE.

“We are here on a fact-finding mission, and I am hoping zat you can tell me vot these vere doing at ze bottom of the Black Lake... They vere discovered after an attempt on Harry Potter’s life during ze Tri-Vizard tournament, and recently passed along to our committee... ”

The Head of the ICW Committee for the Investigation of Statutory Violations narrowed her eyes shrewdly as one of the International Aurors accompanying her opened a briefcase. Sure enough, despite Minister Tsuchinoko’s determination to maintain his composure, a slight twitch in the corner of his right eye gave away his recognition of the items, two sais and a throwing star etched with an intricate design.
Another International Auror opened a second briefcase, with somewhat morbid contents: two well preserved severed hands, which had formerly been attached to a kappa.

Despite his increasing angst, Minister Tsuchinoko took some satisfaction in the knowledge that there was nothing which tied him directly to the kappa assassination team which he had recommended to Minister Umbridge.

~o0o~

The last few days leading up to Halloween passed pleasantly for the Coven. They were all feeling much better after their wild romp in the pond at Jennifer’s estate. The Coven even risked a day out on the town in disguise, taking a trip to Poole for a bit of fun and shopping.

Following the morning spent in Jennifer’s library, Harry had been eager to get back to work training, and Hermione had wanted to do some more research, reading some of the Curse-breaking books which they had brought from Number 12's library. But Fleur had snatched the books away from Hermione, and Daphne and Luna had blocked Harry’s path.

“Ze Headmaster said we are to relax.” Fleur gave Hermione a stern look. “You and Harry work too ‘ard, Hermione... When was ze last time you truly had a proper holiday--more than a day or two off I mean?“

“B...but I don’t need...” Hermione sputtered, as Harry simultaneously said, “We’re fine, really...”

“No! Fleur’s right!” Luna interjected, cutting them both off. “I can’t remember the last time you two let yourself have a proper break for more than a few hours or a day at a time. After all you’ve both been through...”

“But we’ve all been through a lot,” Harry insisted, feeling slightly exasperated.

“That’s right,” Daphne agreed, “but some of us not as much as you two. And as long as I’ve known you both, you’ve constantly been studying or training hard. You both need to take more time to unwind... do some things just for fun.”

“But we do...” Hermione tried again, her furry ears and tail twitching in frustration.

“Not just sex, sillies...” Luna giggled, swishing her fluffy white tail. “We mean other activities, like when you actually read a fiction book the other day Hermione...”

“Or play the piano a bit,” Jennifer pleaded. “You’re good Hermione, but I’ve only ever heard you play it once for about five minutes--and Harry could do some more painting.”

Harry and Hermione glanced at each other, then peered beseechingly at Parvati and Dora.

“Don’t look at me,” Dora smirked. “Fun’s my middle name!”

“Come on Hermione, you know they’re right.” Parvati hugged Hermione, curling her sleek black tail around the other cat-witch, and kissed her on the cheek.

Hermione was unable to maintain her frown while being embraced by one of her cuddly companions. Harry grimaced and shook his head, sharing a look of resignation with Hermione as he sighed. It was true, the last time they had just let themselves have fun without reserve or interruption for an extended period of time had been the summer after Second Year, which had more or less been their honeymoon in London.
“It’s a conspiracy Hermione,” Harry grumbled, before breaking into a grin. “I suppose there’s nothing for it--we’ll just have to laze around for a bit...”

“And I think I shall be holding onto these, just to be sure that you do,” Fleur tittered, giving Daphne a wink as she clutched the Curse-breaking books.

Harry spent the rest of the afternoon and evening with Hermione snuggled on his lap, reading another science fiction book by Heinlein together. He wondered if Hermione had chosen *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* for a reason, when it became apparent that it was about Lunar settlers waging a revolution against their Earthly oppressors.

The next morning, the Coven all thought that a day out sounded lovely when Jennifer suggested it. They spent the morning in Poole Park under cloudy skies and a light sprinkle of rain, first taking a ride around it on the mini-railway. And they had loads of giggly fun paddling about the lake in pedal boats and watching the ducks.

After lunch in a fish and chip shop, they took in a film at the local movie theatre, and the rest of the afternoon was spent browsing through shops. Dora was particularly thrilled when they perused a musical instrument shop, and Jennifer splurged on some musical equipment, purchasing a synthesizer/workstation, an electric guitar, and a couple of small amplifiers.

“You shouldn’t’ve, sweetie... really!” Dora moaned weakly, feeling guilty at having so much money spent on her. First Harry, now Jennifer. Dora didn’t know how she’d ever make it up to them.

“I wanted to,” Jennifer asserted. “I know you’ve been dying to get your hands on some electrical instruments. Now you can really play some rock music...”

“Besides,” continued Jennifer with a grin as she went back to grab a microphone, and a couple of effects processors which she had forgotten on the first trek around the shop, “How are you and Parvati supposed to start a band without the proper equipment?”

Parvati gasped, her Invisible furry tail quivering. She flushed in embarrassment, having never considered that her singing voice was actually good enough to share with the world, despite the encouragement of Luna and the other members of the Coven.

“Now all we need is drums,” Luna giggled, her eyes shining eagerly.

“At some point, yeah,” Jennifer agreed, laughing when she saw Luna’s excitement. “We’ll just be able to manage to lug this lot of stuff back today, between us all. But the synth has an onboard mixer and sequencer and loads of drum patches--we’ll have to make do with that for now.”

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Another day passed by lazily. Hermione and Harry made certain that the musical equipment was properly enchanted to operate with magic instead of electricity, as it hadn’t been connected the day they had charmed the junction box in the basement, and Dora spent much of the day with Luna and Parvati messing around on the synthesizer.

Fleur and Daphne smuggled the Curse-breaking books which they had confiscated from Hermione to their room, and spent most of the day skimming through them, reasoning that they didn’t need the break from studying and training as much as Hermione and Harry did.

Harry had another go at painting after he and Hermione finished the book they were reading. Jennifer joined in, giving Harry pointers while Hermione found the others in the bedroom which had
been converted to a music studio. By the time Jennifer and Harry had finished painting for the day and cleaned up, they discovered everyone in the music room.

Hermione, Luna, and Parvati were all giggling, having fun creating weird sounds on the synthesizer while Dora made the electric guitar scream. Daphne and Fleur were laughing their heads off at all the noise.

“Blimey, what a bloody racket!” Harry chortled when the cacophony hit his ears. “It’s a good thing we put silencing charms on all of the walls.”

“I’d say so,” Jennifer agreed with a grin.

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Dora yawned as the filtered grey light of a wet dawn heralded the morning. The rain was coming down hard, pelting against the panes of glass of the French doors leading to the terrace outside of Jennifer’s room. She smiled to herself, sighing in contentment, feeling cozy in the nest of warm naked girls and Harry on Jennifer’s bed as she listened to the roar of the wind and rain outside.

Without any concern about waking up in time for classes, or for training, the Coven had taken to sleeping all together every night for the past few days. Not to mention that they had all grown rather attached to sleeping together during their mission, and were now loathe to being separated for any great length of time. And as was often the case when the entire Coven slept together, they couldn’t keep their hands off each other at bedtime.

Dora was apparently the only one awake as the rest seemed content to sleep-in. Despite the state of affairs in the world, and the stresses of the Coven’s recent adventures, Dora felt happier than she could ever remember, sandwiched as she was between Jennifer and Fleur. But finally she had to get up for a trip to the loo. Dora managed to gently peel Jennifer’s arm from around her waist without waking her. Fleur’s hand on her breast was another matter though.

As Dora shifted, the hand gave her boob a little squeeze, and Fleur’s silvery lashes fluttered open. Fleur leaned in and gave Dora a wet kiss.

“Bonjour Dora,” whispered Fleur, an eager gleam in her eye. “Everyone else seems too tired after last night, but per’aps you would like some company in ze shower?”

“Er... yeah,” Dora grinned, “that sounds smashing Fleur.”

Moments later, as the steam rose, the two eldest members of the Coven soaped and fondled each other under the hot spray of water. Gasps and moans of delight could be heard over the thrum of the falling water as fingers slipped into wet crevices and hands kneaded ample curves. The young witches squealed ecstatically, sparks of magic flying when they brought one another to completion.

As they towelled each other off after the shower, there was a knock on the bathroom door.

“It’s alright, you can come in,” said Dora.

“Would you care to join us?” Fleur tittered when she saw Hermione’s bushy head peeking through the doorway.

“Oh... er... that sounds lovely,” Hermione purred, her furry ears twitching with arousal as she took in the enticing view. “But really, I just came because Sirius is on the mirror for Dora...”

“Per’aps you would help me finish drying then, Hermione?” Fleur gazed at the cat-witch longingly.
Hermione couldn’t bring herself to refuse the offer. Dora smirked and shook her head as she left them both to it, expecting that Fleur might shortly be indulging in another shower with Hermione. The giddy feeling was quickly replaced by slight trepidation as Dora wondered why her cousin Sirius was calling her. Wrapped in a bathrobe, Dora took the mirror-call in the sitting room.

Sirius’s grinning face came into view.

“Mornin’ Sirius! What’s up?” Dora asked.

“Sorry about this Dora!” The grin was replaced with an apologetic smile. “I’m actually just acting as secretary. There’s someone else here who’d really like a chat with you...”

Dora flushed and groaned inwardly, knowing that she couldn’t put it off any longer when her parents both appeared in the mirror.
Chapter 174

She couldn’t help sweating profusely as she nervously chewed a fingernail and regarded her parents’ shocked expressions. Now Dora knew exactly how Daphne and Parvati had felt after the Third Task when they’d been grilled by their parents about the nature of their relationships with the Potters, Luna, Fleur, and each other. Luna’s father had been the only parent who hadn’t batted an eye when Luna had revealed herself to him.

Dora hadn’t mentioned the fact that they were a Coven, as none of the others had told their parents about that yet either. That tidbit of information was still very much under wraps. Only a very few members of the Order (and Ginny and Neville) were aware with a certainty. And for the safety and dignity of the Coven’s families, it had seemed best to keep things that way for the time-being. Perhaps at some point in the future--after Umbridge had been deposed and the Unspeakable Office exposed for what it was, a viper’s nest of Death Eaters and Pureblood Supremacists who shared their goals...

On some level, without conscious awareness, the members of the Coven had instinctively known in their hearts--even before Dumbledore had so recently characterised them as such himself--that they were the Order of the Phoenix’s “Secret Weapon.” Such knowledge was dangerous, and nobody had wanted to risk the chance that their families might be tortured for more information should they fall into the hands of Legilimens who worked for the Ministry.

Ted Tonks was frankly baffled. His daughter had “come out” to him and Andromeda while still in fourth year at Hogwarts, revealing that she had a girlfriend. And now, here she was, not only engaged in a sexual relationship with a whole group of girls--all of them still teenagers--but Harry Potter as well.

“I... I don’t understand!” Ted sputtered, his face reddening, “How--You--H...Harry Potter? And... and the others? They’re all underage...”

“Technically, no...” Dora moaned, cutting him off. “Fleur’s of age, and the rest ‘ave all been emancipated...”

“What? ... Oh... er... I see...” Realisation dawned on Ted as he shared a look with his wife; at least one mystery had been solved.

Ted and Andromeda had both wondered how the Unaffiliated had managed to avoid activating the trace while undertaking missions for the Order. Andromeda peered at Dora, trying to keep her anger under control, and struggling to understand why her daughter didn’t see the problem.

“Regardless,” snapped Dora’s mother, “You’re an adult... You should know better! How do you think their parents will feel? They’re just young girls messing around...”

“They wanted to be with me! They begged me--they told me that they loved me...” Tears began to trickle down Dora’s crimson cheeks as she tried to explain. “I... I tried to put the Potters off--really... I promise--but they weren’t havin’ it--wouldn’t take no for an answer. And... and after them, the others did too...”

Dora let out a sob. “Th...they were already all together--with their parents’ blessing--even Mr Greengrass’s...”

Andromeda gasped as her eyebrows shot up, stunned into silence. She wasn’t entirely surprised at
Xenophilius Lovegood’s lack of concern--he was decidedly a Very Odd Duck--and she didn’t know the Patils--but for Warlock Greengrass and his wife to have offered their approval of such behaviour beggared belief.

“...and... and they **w...wanted** to be with **me** as well,” Dora continued, sobbing some more as she wept without restraint. “They **L...love** me... and... and I love them... the entire lot of them. I don’t know ‘ow it’s possible Mum... but we **all** love each other... w...we’re a family...”

A deep ache in the region of his heart gripped Ted Tonks when he heard the conviction and the plea for acceptance in his daughter’s quavering voice. He turned to his wife, a sympathetic look in his eye.

“Andie... Dear,” he began uncertainly “...perhaps--well, they **are** all legally within their rights apparently--if the other parents are alright with their admittedly... er... odd arrangement, can... can we really do any less...?”

Andromeda considered her husband’s words while her brain continued attempting to process the bizarre fact of the Greengrasses’ consent. It never even occurred to Andromeda to question her daughter’s word. Dora had always had a child-like outlook on life, her penchant for toys, comics, and fun more than just a passing childish phase--it was obvious that in some respects her 21 year old daughter hadn’t really grown-up yet, that she was still more or less a young teen at heart. But Dora had never been anything less than honest with her mother and father.

Andromeda’s features softened as an odd thought occurred to her when it hit her that Hermione Potter--Harry’s wife--appeared to be just as happy with this seemingly tawdry arrangement as he was. A teenage boy--she could understand perfectly well his satisfaction with it--but the fact that his wife was equally enamoured of Dora had to mean that there was something more to it... didn’t it?

And if that was so, could it be possible that one day--perhaps--Andromeda might find her desire for a grandchild fulfilled? She had long ago given up hope for such a thing when Dora had told her that she liked girls. But now... that just left an odd question which Andromeda felt too awkward to ask.

Fortunately, her husband Ted seemed equally curious, and unable to restrain his curiosity when he finally saw Andromeda’s unspoken acquiescence. Ted smiled gently at his wife, then turned to his daughter.

“Dora--sweetie--I... I’m not sure that we entirely fathom what you ‘ave with your friends, but I think we’ll manage to eventually get used to it. There’s just one thing that doesn’t quite make sense...”

“**Harry,**” Dora interjected in a small voice, nodding and smiling wanly at her parents as she wiped away her tears on the sleeve of her bathrobe. She wasn’t sure if it was safe to reveal that Harry was a metamorphmagus either just yet, but she thought she could explain a bit of the rest better now than she could have a few months previously.

“I... I still don’t **quite** get it myself, Dad... I still much prefer girls for the most part! But... but I think I just fell in love with Harry as much as I love Hermione and the others because ‘e’s got a lot of the qualities I like in girls. And... and we ‘ave loads of common interests--and Hermione--I dunno--it’s just not possible to love one Potter and not love the other--they’re both the loveliest--well... them and the others too of course...”

Andromeda saw her daughter’s eyes shining joyfully as she spoke of the Potters, and felt a bit better that her daughter wasn’t simply taking advantage of the situation. Now she just needed to know for certain what the Potters thought of Dora.
“Dora, Dear...” she began gently, “I’d like to meet the Potters. Will you invite them to Tea? Please...?”

~o0o~

Dora peered glumly at the Potters’ anxious faces, and glanced apologetically at Jennifer as they all strode towards the front door of Narcissa Black’s manor from the portkey arrival site, under umbrellas as the rain continued to fall. She was glad that at least they had all managed to land on their feet and miss the worst of the puddles.

“I’m really sorry...” Dora started to say.

“It’s alright Dora,” Harry interjected, making a feeble attempt at putting on a brave face. “There’s really nothing to apologise for, and anyway...”

“...we knew it would have to happen eventually,” Hermione continued nervously. “You can’t be expected to hide things from your parents forever.”

As she said it, Hermione wasn’t entirely certain who she was trying to reassure more--Dora or herself. Hermione knew that eventually she and Harry would have to tell her own mother--once things had been set to rights in Britain and it was safe for her to return. And Hermione wasn’t sure how well her mother would take it.

Of the two, Hermione’s aunt tended to be much more open-minded about most sorts of “alternative lifestyles” than her mother. Mum was very good when it came to issues of sexual preference and gender identity, but Hermione’s impression had always been that she took a rather traditional view of partnership and marriage.

“Don’t worry Dora--I’m sure everything will be fine...” Jennifer gave Dora’s hand a comforting squeeze, nodding in agreement with Harry and Hermione.

Parvati and Daphne had thought that the rest of the Coven should come along as well at first, to offer their moral support and convince Dora’s parents that they loved her very much. But Luna and Fleur had both suggested that might be a bit much, not wanting to overwhelm Mr and Mrs Tonks. In the end, everyone had agreed that perhaps it was best if only Jennifer joined Harry, Hermione, and Dora in meeting Dora’s parents.

Of the four of them, Harry and Dora were the most nervous when Dora introduced the Potters and Jennifer to her parents. Harry wiped his sweaty palms on his trousers, his heart thumping in his ears, feeling much the same as he had when he’d seen Mr Greengrass at the Order meeting before returning to London for the trial at the beginning of the summer. But this time it was the frankly appraising looks he was getting from Mrs Tonks which unnerved Harry the most.

Hermione curled her bushy ginger tail around Harry to comfort him; she had immediately discerned that the Tonkses had already more or less resigned themselves to the situation, though they were still clearly concerned. But she had also picked up a puzzling sense of hopefulness from Andromeda Tonks.

Madam Black’s house-elf served up a delicious tea-spread in the main parlour of the manor, which was thankfully devoid of all other Order members at the moment. Harry gradually began to relax as he and Hermione politely answered questions, and it became more clear that nobody was going to be cross with him. But he still felt a bit perplexed at the conclusion of the meeting.

After Mrs Tonks had given Harry a warm hug and Mr Tonks had shaken his hand, both beaming
happily as they said their goodbyes, Jennifer and Hermione had both been a bit giggly, and Dora beet-red with embarrassment.

“What was that all about?” asked Harry in bewilderment as he clutched the portkey in his hand, watching Dora’s parents return to the manor.

“Isn’t it obvious, Harry?” Hermione couldn’t help smirking a bit as her furry ears twitched. “Dora’s parents are hoping you’ll give them a grandchild someday.”

Harry turned scarlet and groaned.

Dora hid her face in her hands, mumbling, “I’m so sorry Harry!”

~o0o~

Amelia Bones adjusted her monocle while Dumbledore poured them both a cup of tea in his office. After taking a few sips, she began.

“It was quite apparent that the Japanese Minister of Magic knew much more than he let on. Unfortunately, the ICW does not have enough to charge him with any crimes, or to compel him to reveal any more information about Dolores’s connection to the Kappa Kill Team.”

“That is a shame indeed,” Dumbledore sighed and nodded. “But not entirely unexpected.”

“Quite!” Madam Bones replied drily. “However, he did not deny the connection outright, but rather, indicated that Dolores may have approached wizards associated with the Yakuza for referral to the assassins... which is nonsense of course!”

“Of course!” agreed Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. Amelia was thoroughly in her element when engaged in uncovering a mystery.

“I have no doubt that Minister Tsuchinoko himself provided Dolores with the contacts necessary for hiring the Kill Team,” Amelia continued. “Regardless, he at least gave us enough to track down the surviving assassins sent to kill Mr Potter. Once the International Auror Office has them in hand, the assassins should be able to provide direct evidence that Dolores—or someone closely associated with her—hired them.

“The evidence collected by the Potters and their friends is being sifted through by the Committee. The most damning of all, will of course be the direct testimony being provided by those imprisoned at the compound. Kingsley and I will be heading to Brussels the day after tomorrow with Ms Mason—the MI6 analyst—to provide evidence of collusion with the muggle Prime Minister. If all goes to plan, the Committee can bring a motion to the floor of the ICW to issue an International Arrest Warrant for Dolores within a few weeks.”

Satisfaction crossed Dumbledore’s countenance as he listened to Amelia’s report.

“Excellent!” he said with another nod. “In the meantime, we can continue to focus our own efforts on countering the Minister’s forces here at home. We simply must locate and shut down her remaining facilities...”

~o0o~

Eleanor Dolittle’s breath caught as she peered through her lacy curtains at the men in long black trenchcoats patrolling the oak-lined street without regard for the dismal weather. She let out a sigh of relief when they passed by her bungalow with barely a glance and disapparated.
The greying witch scurried to the kitchen and waved her wand. The Welsh dresser slid aside, revealing the door to the cellar. Opening the door, she called out down the steps to the muggleborn hiding below.

“It’s alright, they’ve gone for now...”
“They want Harry to give them a grandchild?...” Daphne clapped her hand to her mouth and squeaked, reddening in sympathy with Harry and Dora when Jennifer and Hermione regaled the rest of the Coven with the outcome of their visit to meet Dora’s parents. “I’ve always thought it would be nice to have a baby someday myself, b...but, we’re too young...”

“Of course we’re too young--but they’re perfectly aware...” Hermione smiled and flicked her furry ears reassuringly at Daphne.

“That’s definitely what Mum and Dad were fussin’ about the most to begin with anyway,” moaned Dora. “...Practically accused me of cradle-robbing! They didn’t seem quite so bothered after Harry promised them that ‘e loved me very much!”

Harry rubbed his crimson face with both hands, groaning, unable to meet anyone’s eyes. Luna and Parvati were both giggling, their furry tails swishing mirthfully, and Fleur tried her best not to smirk. Daphne was looking at him with new eyes, clearly imagining him as a father. Harry began to wonder if any of the other parents were having similar hopeful ideas, given that their daughters seemed to be more enamoured of girls for the most part.

“But I really don’t think we need worry about it at the moment,” Hermione insisted. “They’ll be quite alright with waiting, Dora!”

“I ‘ope you’re right, Hermione...” Dora muttered. “I don’t have anything against kids--but I never really gave much thought to ‘aving one myself! I never really thought of myself as the ‘Mum’ type.”

“It would be nice to have a baby though some day,” said Luna dreamily, glancing at Parvati who blushed in response. “Parvati and I were thinking it would be nice if you didn’t mind us having one with Harry eventually, Hermione.”

Harry began to look around desperately for an exit, but Hermione was sitting on his lap with her bushy ginger tail curled around him. He sighed in resignation, and buried his blazing face in Hermione’s golden-brown tresses.

Truthfully, Harry thought it would be really nice to have kids one day with Hermione himself... one day in the far flung future... maybe in their late 20’s or early 30’s. But he certainly hadn’t given a great deal of thought to it until now, and had been very glad for the effectiveness of Contraception Charms. Harry hadn’t really considered that any of the other girls might actually be interested in having his baby as well.

“I’m sorry guys!” Parvati peered apologetically at Harry and Hermione, her sleek black tail twitching. “Luna and I weren’t planning to broach the topic until much, much later--well after we’re all finished with Hogwarts”

“There’s nothing to apologise for Parvati,” Hermione beamed radiantly. “I think that’s a lovely idea for the future. We’re a family after all...”

“Oui, Hermione! Zat we are!” Fleur nodded. Leaning over the back of the armchair and wrapping her arms around both Potters, she kissed Harry’s burning cheek. “Chéri, please do not worry so. There ees much time before that day comes...”

“And there’s plenty of us to look after the children when it happens, Dora,” added Jennifer with a
As a flash of lightning lit up the rainy gathering dusk, the small group of wet witches and wizards cautiously approached the dark, unlit cottage at the end of the oak-lined road, wands at the ready. A wizard with shaggy dreadlocks glanced around worriedly before turning the handle of the front door. It swung open with a creak, revealing only silent darkness.

“Mum,” called out the wizard in a slightly panicky voice, “...are...are you there? It’s only us--you can come out...”

A middle-aged witch with streaks of white in her curly black hair slowly emerged from the kitchen with her muggle husband, both of them letting out sighs of relief.

“Joseph! Thank goodness you’re safe...” The witch lowered her wand when it was apparent that it was her own son and some of their neighbours.

“I’ve just been round at Mrs Dolittle’s--Eleanor's--she’s been looking after some of the muggleborn. We’ve been goin’ around town looking for the rest of them, and there’s a few of us gathered at her house for a meeting...”

“Good!” The witch nodded, her features hardening. “It’s about bloody time we pulled together and did something... Dumbledore and his lot can’t do this all by themselves.”

Apparition cracks and screams caught the ears of everyone gathered near the hallway, and they all ran to the front door in alarm. Several figures in long black trenchcoats loomed over two prone figures on the wet pavement, ignoring the rain and pointing their wands at the group emerging from the cottage. A few more stood nearby, their faces stony and grim.

Joseph’s heart caught in his throat, regretting now that he had allowed his wife to keep watch along with one of the other neighbours. The small congregation of wizards in the doorway faced off nervously against the Aurors, their own wands aiming right back.

“Cease and Desist! Drop your wands immediately!” shouted one of the Aurors. “Things will go much easier for you if you just hand over the mudbloods and submit yourselves for confirmation of blood status. Don’t force us to use Unforgivables...”

“That’s my wife!” Joseph roared at the Aurors. “What’ve you done to her? ... You Bloody Bastards!”

The lead Auror narrowed his eyes at the dreadlocked young upstart. The darkening street lit up in a myriad of colours; jets of magic flew, bursting and sparking as spells ricocheted. Two of the defenders fell, dropped by stunning spells. A car exploded and an oak-tree burst into flame when those still standing returned fire, missing the dodging Aurors.

Terrified muggles peeked through their windows as the battle raged outside. A streetlamp jumped into the fray, knocking down one of the defending wizards with a sickening sound of breaking bones. A bush extended its limbs to capture the Auror who had animated the street-lamp, but the Auror wriggled away, leaving her trenchcoat in the clutches of the foliage.

“You lot asked for this,” snarled the lead Auror as he fired a bolt of green lightning, scattering the group.
Of the defending wizards, only Joseph had both enough rage, and the skill necessary to retaliate in kind. But the others were at least skilled enough in Charms to keep up while managing to dodge the Aurors’ killing curses. More spells flew through the rain which had turned into a downpour. One of the Aurors crumpled when Joseph’s killing curse struck him.

Taking a leaf from the book of their attackers, a defender aimed his wand at another streetlamp. The lamp coiled itself around an Auror and began to squeeze; forcing him to apparate to safety before being crushed. A Volkswagen van came to life and chased one of the other Aurors down the road.

Realising that they were outnumbered, and that the halfblood traitors and the mudbloods were no-longer too frightened to resist, the lead Auror yelled at the others to retreat.

“I hope you’re satisfied!” he barked at Joseph. “We’ll see how well you lot do when we return with reinforcements!” the lead Auror snarled before disapparating.

When it was all over, Joseph was beside himself with joy to find his soggy wife was recovering from the stunning spell, looking none the worse for wear, and that his mum had made it through the battle unscathed.

But as a number of shocked muggles opened their doors and spilled into their front yards for a better look, Joseph’s heart fell when he realised that one of his best friends was dead in a puddle, bashed by the first rampaging streetlamp. Gritting his teeth, blinking back tears, Joseph took savage solace in the fact that he had killed one of the Aurors.

Furiously, as rivulets of water streamed from the ends of his saturated dreadlocks, Joseph determined that he would be ready to take out some more Aurors when they returned, no doubt augmented with a phalanx of Snatchers. Hopefully he’d have enough time to train up some of the other Puddleby wizards a bit with proper fighting spells.

~00o~

He hadn’t even had time for breakfast yet, but the Prime Minister was already swirling brandy in his snifter as he peered out of the rain-streaked window of an upper-level office in Number 10 Downing Street, a pensive expression on his features. His future was inextricably tied to Minister Umbridge’s, having benefited greatly from their collaboration in more ways than one.

His grip on political power in non-magical Britain was stronger than any Prime Minister’s since Thatcher--the privatisation of huge swaths of the NHS and other public institutions was progressing apace. His enemies in the opposition party were cowed--not to mention Unions smashed, whistleblowing hackers trapped in foreign embassies, students and minority ethnic groups in disarray, immigrants in hiding--all terrified of clandestine reprisals while the general public clamoured for ever more security to protect them from Terrorism and the “contagious” Walking Dead.

The Bankers had never been happier; London had reached new heights of power in the past year, becoming the Global Centre of Finance under the Prime Minister’s watch for the first time in nearly a century. They were on the verge of restoring the British Empire to its former glory--this time without paying any heed to the Royals; the current batch were too soft to sanction the necessary extreme measures.

And the Prime Minister’s own personal fortunes had grown immensely--not to mention the magically secured cells in the secret basement of Number 10 full of his private playthings, upon whom he could indulge his darkest proclivities without fear of discovery or retribution. And he owed it all to Minister Umbridge.
Yet he could not deny that everything was teetering precariously on the edge of a precipice. The Prime Minister swallowed his brandy with one gulp. Jaw set in steely resolve, he returned his gaze to the Minister of Magic.

“Yes!” the Prime Minister nodded. “I concur...”

“It simply won’t do, Dolores,” he continued softly, “...these rebels you speak of could destroy everything we have worked so hard for. Do whatever you believe is necessary. If some non-magical communities get caught up in the net you cast for the ‘muggleborn,’ then so be it. Make an example of them if you must.”

“Thank you dear!” Dolores Umbridge replied, her voice dripping with treacle. “I had hoped to keep the disruption of muggle lives to a bare minimum, confined to only the smallest mixed communities. But Order must be restored, and the recalcitrant simply must be punished...”

“Indeed,” the Prime Minister agreed wryly. “In any case, as long as those that I serve continue to profit by our arrangement and remain unharmed, the loss of a few Lesser ‘muggles’ is hardly worth consideration. To my mind, and the minds of my constituents, such losses are simply a calculated cost of doing business--you can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs after all.”

Dolores chuckled and raised her own brandy glass, reassured that her alliance was still solid, even in the face of expanding her reach to quell the insurrection. She drained it quickly and after making a few more hurried arrangements with the Prime Minister, Dolores bid her muggle counterpart good-day before stepping into the green flames in the hearth.

~o0o~

“How long will transport to Puddleby take then?” asked the Minister, pursing her lips. Bellatrix Lestrange considered the question for a moment, calculating in her head.

“Well Dolores,” Bellatrix finally responded, “...given the number of units required for the task, the numbers currently available at our two remaining facilities in Britain--tapping the facility in Northern Ireland will belogistically unfeasible--and with all available personnel on hand with portkeys, I believe I can have a horde in place by eight this evening. Though I will have to empty more than a few muggle graveyards as well to bring the numbers up.”

“Excellent!” Dolores nodded brusquely. “This uprising simply cannot stand. And I have no wish to waste anymore Ministry lives on the matter. The Unspeakables and Aurors will be taking a hands off approach, despite the size of the town.

“The Prime Minister assures me that he will provide the personnel and the incendiary devices to mop up with extreme prejudice. If Dumbledore learns of the operation, I’d like to see him try and stop this one. If he dares to show up, he’ll end up facing the muggle military, and put himself under the ICW’s spotlight.”

“What about Potter and Dumbledore’s Secret Weapon?” Bellatrix pointedly asked, raising an eyebrow.

“A calculated risk!” Dolores replied, her expression sour. “Potter hasn’t been seen since he left Hogwarts--except during the retaking, in which he and his friends participated with the full backing of Dumbledore’s people. I seriously doubt that Potter and his little friends destroyed the compound in Wales--I have it on good authority that he is quite squeamish about killing indiscriminately.

“And it is highly unlikely that Potter has the skillset required to pull off the rescue of Arthur Weasley
without leaving any trace whatsoever of entry at the Ministry, given his age--only a supremely skilled wizard with years of experience could have managed it. I suspect Dumbledore has Potter hidden safely away, and that he and his own forces took on the tasks.”

“Hmmm...” purred Bellatrix, “I wouldn’t count him out, Dolores! It doesn’t pay to underestimate Potter--as the Dark Lord discovered, much to his detriment.”

“Yes! I quite see your point Bellatrix,” Dolores frowned, sighing. “Regardless. Potter can’t be everywhere at once, and given the layout of Puddleby, even if he shows up with Dumbledore’s Secret Weapon, the Inferi will be too spread out--they won’t all be amassing in one spot conveniently for him, as they did at Hogwarts.

“And even if he does manage to destroy many of them, he and Dumbledore will nonetheless be in quite a pickle when the muggle military show up to quell the Inferi with missiles and incendiary weapons...”

~o0o~

A delectable sensation infiltrated Harry’s dreams, and he knew that someone was engaged in a wake-up call. The Coven had gone out of their way the night before to comfort Harry and Dora after their stressful afternoon, and they had all finally passed out in a sticky naked heap after rocking the manor a number of times.

When Harry’s eyelids finally fluttered open, it was Hermione’s golden-brown coils of hair--furry ears poking through--which he spied strewn across his abdomen as her head bobbed up and down his erection while Daphne and Fleur cuddled and kissed him. With a groan, Harry’s dam burst, releasing a flood of semen into Hermione's throat.

“Good Morning Harry,” Hermione grinned, licking her lips when she had finished. “Feeling better?”

“Yes, loads...” chortled Harry.

He parted Hermione’s knees to return the favour, lavishing her sopping entrance with his tongue, plunging it into her twitching sheath. He had just brought Hermione to completion, her quaking thighs still clenching his head as she let out a long yowl of ecstatic bliss, when Dora entered the room in a bathrobe and a towel wrapped her head, drinking a glass of orange juice.

“Oi, Harry... sorry to interrupt.” Dora grimaced apologetically as Harry lifted his head from between Hermione’s naked thighs, his face dripping. “...Message from Dumbledore on the mirror. Apparently a few of our friends at Hogwarts are missing us, and are hoping that we’ll show up to celebrate Halloween with them this afternoon.”

At first thought, the idea sounded brilliant to Harry. So why did he suddenly have an ominous feeling that something was going to spoil it?

Hermione couldn’t help sobering quickly when she picked up on Harry’s sudden sensation of foreboding, and his questioning stance.

“I know Harry...” Hermione embraced him and kissed him on the cheek. “Something always seems to go wrong on Halloween. First Year it was the Troll...”

“...and Second Year the Chamber of Secrets was opened...” groaned Harry.

“...and then last year your name came out of the Goblet of Fire,” Hermione concluded with a sigh.
“But seriously Harry, the odds of something dreadful happening to us on Halloween four years in a row would have to be astronomical...” Hermione trailed off when Harry raised his eyebrows at her. “...So of course something’s going happen!” she finished with another sigh.
As the rest of the Coven gawked at Padma’s new appearance, Parvati squealed, her sleek black tail quivering with delight as she hugged her sister. Luna beamed, purring as she whisked her own fluffy white tail.

“Padma, what... how...?” Parvati sputtered with bemusement. “You... you didn’t use polyjuice did you?”

“No silly!” Padma giggled as she wriggled her own furry black cat-tail and twitched her furry black cat-ears. “It’s temporary... just one of the transfiguration spells the Weasley Twins invented for the Halloween Ball this year.

“Halloween Ball, hunh? That’s a new one...” Dora grinned, thinking this would be a brilliant opportunity to sport more colourful hair again.

“Yeah...” Padma nodded. “It was Dumbledore’s idea to cheer all the students up while everything’s so horrid. It’s not just me, come and have a look at the others then.”

Sure enough, as the Coven walked up to the castle from the portkey arrival site on the soggy front lawn and entered the foyer, a number of other students bore a variety of features: rabbit ears and tails, canary yellow feathers, lion’s manes, lizard scales, and much, much more. Daphne squeaked; Jennifer and Fleur burst into giggles as the others gasped.

“Harry, look!” Hermione grabbed Harry’s arm and spun him around to see what everyone else was gaping it.

Harry chortled and shook his head when he spotted Fred and George, both of them tomato red from head to toe. They trotted around on cloven hooves, wickedly curved horns poking up through their ginger hair, and long red tails with a barb on the ends jutted from their backsides.

Angelina Johnson stood between them, clad in what could only be described as a rather revealing Amazon Warrior Princess outfit, complete with golden armoured bikini style breast-plates which barely covered her ample bosom, a bare midriff, and a very skimpy white skirt. Hermione’s bushy ginger tail twitched in mirth, knowing that Professor McGonagall must be having a fit.

“Excellent!” exclaimed Harry as he grinned at the Twins. “Showing your true colours at last then? I should’ve guessed that you two were the devil’s minions.”

“Oi, I think we resent that...” said Fred in mock outrage.

~000~

As evening fell upon the picturesque town of nearly five thousand residents near the coast of Somerset, the darkening clouds above churned and the rain began to fall once again. Numerous seaworthy boats bobbed on the rising waters in the quay along the river which led to the nearby sea. A street lined with oaks on the edge of town nearest the marshes was quieter than it had been much of the day.

The muggle authorities of Puddleby had long since finished canvassing Oakridge Road and questioning local residents about the mayhem of the previous evening, after clearing away the debris. They had removed two bodies to the local morgue—one of which was still unidentified—the night before, shortly after arriving within minutes of the frantic phone calls to find a tree and a Honda
Civic still in flames, despite the heavy rain.

The police were still quite puzzled as to how two steel lamp posts had ended up twisted in knots, as the explanations from the residents hadn’t made any sense. Several homes were apparently unoccupied, though if there had been any wizards on the local police force, they might have noticed the fifty-plus occupants crowded into Mrs Dolittle’s bungalow.

Joseph Chambers, his wife, his mother, and Mrs Dolittle did their best to keep the anxious wizards and their muggle relatives calm. They had grown more perplexed throughout the day at the apparent lack of Ministry response to their Resistance the previous evening. Though Joseph had been pleased to at least have had the chance to gather the rest of Puddleby’s wizarding population—nearly all of them halfblood or muggleborn—and teach a number of them how to use stunning, shielding, and explosive spells properly.

“Maybe we should just leave now,” suggested a frightened blonde witch when she looked nervously at the clock on the mantelpiece as the evening wore on, “before they do arrive!”

“And go where, Madge?” asked another witch with short auburn hair. “Eventually the Ministry will find us whether we’re on the run or not. You’ve seen what they do to muggleborn on the Wiz-Vision. We have to make a stand together with our friends somewhere, or we’re done for!”

“And Puddleby is our home,” added a tall, balding wizard. “If we don’t defend it, nobody will. I’ve sent an owl to Hogwarts. Maybe Dumbledore’ll send someone to help...”

“If they get the owl in time,” moaned an elderly, miserable looking wizard. “It could take a couple o’ days for the owl to get there from here—especially in this weather.”

A little boy about eight years old fidgeted as he sat with his little sister, listening to the grownups. Bored, he wandered across the living room to peek between the curtains at the rain coming down in buckets outside. A flash of lightning lit up the street and a loud clap of thunder rattled the window. He fell back with a scream.

Joseph ran to the window and peered through the curtains. His face dropped in horror.

“Mum,” he yelled frantically, “get the kids and the muggles downstairs to the basement and barricade the entrance... right now!”

~00o~

The loud dance beats shook the Great Hall as clouds roiled and lightning flashed across the Enchanted Ceiling. Flickering candlelight glowed from the eyes and mouths of grinning jack-o-lanterns and hundreds of live bats flitted above, apparently unconcerned by all of the noise.

Minerva pursed her lips in disapproval as she peered around the Hall, spying far too many girls wearing far too little for her liking. She spotted the Headmaster dancing with Professor Sinistra and groaned, rubbing at her forehead. Aurora’s thigh revealing toga was altogether unbecoming for a professor.

“Oh for heaven’s sake!” Minerva sputtered, waving her hand. “What sort of example are we setting for the First and Second Years present?”

Poppy Pomfrey smirked at Professor McGonagall and opened the bottle sitting beside her on the Staff-Table. She filled a snifter to the rim with brandy and passed it to her colleague.

“Oh go on Minerva,” Poppy giggled. “Live a little... let your hair down for a change. Goodness
knows we can all use a distraction at the moment.”

Minerva glanced at Poppy and sighed.

“I suppose you’re right Poppy,” Professor McGonagall moaned. She took one last look of reproach at the scene and drained the goblet with a single gulp.

~o0o~

“I love magic,” Jennifer shouted to be heard over the Selena Gomez song currently booming in the Great Hall. “It would’ve taken me ages to look like this with makeup and make a costume!”

Dora grinned as she danced with Jennifer, both of them with fluorescent bubblegum pink hair and rainbow sparkles glittering on their faces. Jennifer fluttered her iridescent butterfly wings as she gyrated slinkily with her girlfriend on the dancefloor.

“Yeah!” Dora nodded. “It’s amazing what you can do with a few transfiguration spells if you know what you’re doin’....”

“I know! It’s brilliant!” yelled Harry as he bounced by giddily with Hermione. “The Twins are bloody geniuses. I knew they’d eventually find those spells...”

Neville--dressed as a pirate--couldn’t help but agree as he danced nearby with his own foxy girlfriend... his literally foxy girlfriend. Ginny was sporting a big bushy white tipped fox-tail which was otherwise as red as her hair, and a pair of pointy red furry ears. Ginny leaned in and whispered something in Neville’s ear. Turning pink, he nodded and grinned as she dragged him out of the Great Hall to find someplace a bit more private for a short while.

Breathless and sweaty, Parvati and Luna left the dancefloor and headed for the punch-bowl. Parvati took a long cool gulp from her glass. She gave a little start when someone tapped her on the shoulder. Her eyes nearly popped when she turned around and saw who it was. Luna giggled.

“Lavender... I... what on earth possessed you?” gasped Parvati as her eyes were drawn to the top of Lavender’s head.

“Viktor,” said Lavender simply, grinning at her boyfriend.

“Ven Lavender told me vot happened between you both so long ago, I knew zat one day I had to see for myself...” Viktor began, winking impishly at his antlered girlfriend. “She is qvite sexy in antlers, no?”

“Viktor, you don’t look half bad yourself with those moose-racks on your head,” Lavender tittered.

“Just be careful not to get your horns locked when you go in for a kiss,” Luna proffered sagely with a dreamy smile.

~o0o~

Albus Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled at Aurora as she begged her leave to take a breather. He sighed happily as he glanced around at the students joyously carousing in the Great Hall, glad that the Halloween Ball had turned out to be such a great success.

But his cheery thoughts were interrupted by a musical keening sensation, a silent tune vibrating within him. Frowning slightly, Dumbledore hurriedly departed the Hall to answer the alert sounding in his office.
Fawkes ruffled his scarlet feathers and ended his cry when he spied the Headmaster entering. A
voice called out again from the mirror on the desk. Dumbledore regarded the agitated features of
Auror Mulligan, glad to still have at least one reliable asset inside the Ministry.

“Thank goodness you’re there...” gasped Mulligan. “Sir, we have a situation...”

“What seems to be the trouble, Reynard?”

“Puddleby--I’ve only just found out--the Minister--I tried Amelia first--but she’s preparing to leave
for Belgium...”

“Please Reynard--calm yourself and start from the beginning.”

Auror Mulligan nodded and took a deep breath before having another go, speaking in rapid-fire.

“Apparently there was a minor uprising last night in Puddleby, Somerset. An Auror was killed, but
the Auror Office and the Unspeakable Office were ordered to stand down. And I’ve only just heard
through the grapevine... Inferi--a whole load of them--are attacking Puddleby... right now as we
speak!”

Dumbledore’s face paled. The last thing he wanted was to interrupt the Coven during their time of
respite. But perhaps the problem could be resolved without calling upon them.

“Very well,” Dumbledore sighed. “Contact some of Monsieur Delacour’s people. I shall call up
some Order members and we shall all meet in Puddleby to evaluate and respond to the situation...”

~000~

Harry breathed in Hermione’s fragrance as he held her close, swaying gently in time to the Adele
song currently playing in the Great Hall. As the slow, haunting tune came to a close, and Adele’s
soaring vocals faded, he gazed into Hermione’s tear-filled eyes, feeling the tug on his own heart.

“I’m alright,” she whispered, dabbing her wet cheeks with a hanky. “It’s just the song Harry.”

“Yeah... I know,” murmured Harry, nodding as he leaned in to kiss Hermione. “That one really gets
me too.”

When their lips parted, Harry sensed someone approaching as the next song began. He felt a stir of
trepidation at the grim expression on Professor McGonagall’s face, and he knew that their
momentary escape from the travails of the world had come to an end.

“I am sorry Mr and Mrs Potter,” said Minerva quietly. “I have just received notice from Alastor
Moody. I am afraid your services will be required...”

~000~

The Coven was horrified by the mayhem which greeted them when they appeared at the high end
of a road lined with oak trees. Lightning lit up the dark street and they were quickly drenched by the
downpour, thunder drowning out the sound of their apparition. For a moment they were taken aback
by the chaotic scene, mouths agape, the soggy furry tails of the cat-witches bristling, furry ears
flattened against their heads. Their stomachs churned, as they were assailed by the unbearable stench
of death.

The screams of muggles rent the air as they were dragged from their homes through broken doors
and windows by the hordes of moaning Undead. Spells crackled and sparked as the wizards did their
best to defend themselves and the non-magical residents of the neighbourhood from the lurching corpses. Some of the wizards were grabbing muggles and apparating them to safety, returning moments later to the battle.

But for every “Walker” which was disintegrated or exploded by a spell, ten more seemed to take its place. And despite the best efforts of the Wizards, some of the Living had already fallen--magical and non-magical alike--as the Inferi feasted upon them, blood dripping from their maws. There were too many, and it was hard to make out who was whom in the chaos.

“Harry, look...” squealed Hermione. Daphne clapped a hand to her mouth, stifling a scream.

The rest of the Coven looked down the slight incline in the direction that Hermione was pointing, gasping at the unthinkable, terrifying sight. Two wizards very dear to the Coven appeared to be faltering, surrounded by an overwhelming mass of Inferi.

Sirius was kneeling in a puddle, holding tightly onto a pale and shaking Dumbledore. For a moment Harry froze when he saw the torn flesh hanging from the Headmaster’s right arm, and blood gushing from the ragged wound which appeared to have been caused by ripping teeth. Sirius fired a reductor into the midst of the inferi bearing down upon them.

“Leave me Sirius...” Dumbledore gasped, “...before it’s too late. I shall be one of the Inferi myself before too long--kill me now before I do...”

“Never--there must be a way to break the curse...” Sirius snapped as he blasted a hole in the group of Inferi with a bombarda.

But the concussive explosion merely sent the Undead flying. Undaunted by shattered limbs, those that could still crawl dragged themselves through the deepening puddles; those with legs which remained unbroken picked themselves up, and those still standing were already closing ranks around Sirius and Dumbledore.

“Nooooo!” screamed Harry.

Tears poured down Hermione’s white cheeks. The Coven didn’t need to be told what to do. Propelled into action by Harry’s voice, they huddled together and raised their wands--each of them gasping for breath, hearts thudding against the walls of their chests.

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!” they bellowed as one.

Pulses of blinding white light flooded the entire street. The groans and death rattles of the Inferi turned into shrieks as eight glowing spectral felines bounded into the fray. Sparks and flame burst from the eye-sockets and mouths of all the Undead within the radius of the throbbing illumination. Shimmering rainbows formed by the scattered light rippled through the beaded curtains of rain.

Stunned wizards and witches, and astonished muggles blinked, holding up their hands to shield their faces, puzzled as the swarming shrieking Inferi halted in their tracks. Only the few wizards who had been at the battle of Hogwarts had an inkling of what was occurring. The Potters and the rest of the Unaffiliated had apparently just arrived, seemingly the only ones to have mastered the Secret Weapon that Dumbledore had presumably created.

The shocked wizards and muggles looked on as best they could while shading their faces; the flesh of the Walking Dead shriveled and blackened. Steam rose from the internally combusting Inferi as they turned into cinders, and hundreds of skeletons collapsed into heaps as the ash washed away in the rain.
Then it was over, and for a moment all that could be heard was the thrum of falling rain as the pulses of light faded and the street darkened once more. Hearts pounding, Harry and Hermione dashed through the puddles to where Sirius was still holding the fallen Dumbledore, followed closely by the rest of the Coven.

“Professor Dumbledore,” gasped Harry, his tears lost in the rain, “Sir... your arm--the Inferi...?”

“Are ‘contagious’... yes Harry,” Dumbledore nodded sadly. “I am afraid that I have little time left. You must finish me...”

Harry felt the world closing in around him, his breath quickening, a deep chill in his bones as if Dementors were wrapping him in their deathly embrace. Sirius cast his eyes down, unable to meet his godson’s as he reached the same regrettable conclusion.

“No,” said Hermione softly, a puzzled expression on her face as her wet furry ears twitched pensively. “That won’t be necessary...”

“Miss Granger--you must...” Dumbledore interjected.

“No!” Hermione repeated, more forcefully. “Professor Dumbledore, I... I don’t sense any Darkness in you. And if you had been taken by the Inferius Curse completely, you would be dead... a pile of bones and ash like the others. But instead--look at your arm...”

Everyone peered at Dumbledore’s mangled arm. Moments before it had been bloody torn skin and muscle, but now it was as withered as a mummy’s, and as scorched as a tree-limb exposed to a forest fire before the flames had been put out. Dumbledore lifted his arm and stiffly flexed his charred, nearly skeletal fingers in astonishment.

Fleur gasped as understanding hit her and she caught Hermione’s eye. Hermione nodded as the others glanced at her in bewilderment.

“I... I’m not entirely certain,” Hermione continued, flicking her bedraggled furry tail, “but I think our Patronuses prevented the Inferius Curse from spreading and taking you over. I don’t think you’re going to die and become one, Professor Dumbledore.”

“Blimey!” Harry muttered, his eyes widening. “Of course Hermione! That makes perfect sense...”

“Perhaps it had something to do with our... er... experience at the pond,” Luna whispered in Hermione’s ear.

“Erm... I’m not sure Luna,” Hermione murmured in reply. “Our Patronuses might’ve had this effect before. We’ve just never had the opportunity to find out until now.”

“Can... can it be true?” Sirius glanced hopefully at Hermione, then returned his gaze to Dumbledore.

Dumbledore stroked his soggy blood spattered beard thoughtfully with his good hand as he continued to peer at his bad one. Slowly he nodded.

“I do believe Miss Granger is correct, Sirius.” Dumbledore’s eyes lit up. “If so, then any others on this street who have also been bitten, may yet live to see another day as well...”

“But not for bloody long if we don’t get a move on,” growled a familiar voice.

“Wotcher Mad Eye!” Dora beamed at the grizzled ex-Auror limping towards them.
“The job’s not done yet,” muttered Alastor Moody. “Puddleby is completely overrun by the buggers. If we don’t stop ’em, every man, woman, and child in this town will soon be dead...”
Chapter 177

Harry looked up when he heard fast-paced footsteps splashing through puddles in the street, spying several wizards running towards them. Two of them he recognised, but the one with dreadlocks who appeared to be in his early or mid twenties was unknown to him. Arthur Weasley grimaced and his son Bill let out a low whistle when they spotted the state of Dumbledore’s shrunken and blackened leathery right arm.

“That looks nasty,” said Bill as he winced, wiping the wet strands of his long ginger hair from his face which had broken free of his ponytail.

“Quite,” said Dumbledore drily as Sirius helped him to his feet. “Nevertheless, it appears that the Inferius Curse has been broken before it had a chance to overcome me, and that I shall live--thanks to the remarkable Patronuses produced by our young friends.”

Dumbledore beamed at the Coven and Harry swallowed, feeling a bit disconcerted. The dreadlocked wizard’s jaw dropped in astonishment, and Alastor Moody’s natural eye widened to nearly the same size as his piercing electric blue magical eye.

“What?” gasped Mr Weasley. “Those were Patronuses then? But how...?”

“That’s impossible... isn’t it?” said Bill, frowning with puzzlement. “I’ve never heard of a Patronus breaking any sort of curse, especially not an Inferius Curse. And I’ve broken more than a few curses in my time working for Gringotts...”

“Not eempossible, no...” began Fleur excitedly, “Our Patroni, zey ‘ave much power...” She caught herself and trailed off, suddenly thinking better of revealing too much.

Harry glanced at Hermione who looked equally anxious, neither of them sure what to say. He caught Dumbledore’s eye, and the headmaster shook his head slightly. Harry felt some relief, knowing that Dumbledore would continue to keep the Coven’s status a secret.

“Ah...” said Dumbledore, “suffice it to say that the Potters and their friends are quite prodigious with the Patronus Charm, having apparently discovered unusual effects through great practice and experimentation...

“Even I was unaware of their full potential for defeating Inferi before Voldemort’s forces attacked Hogwarts. And this particular effect of countering the spread of the Inferius Curse is certainly new to me--to all of us--as was the very recent modification of Inferi to pass on their curse to the Living itself...”

Dumbledore looked directly at the wizard that the Coven was unacquainted with and raised his eyebrows as he continued, “Mr Chambers, I trust that you will keep this information to yourself for now. Only myself and a few key members of the Order of the Phoenix are currently aware of the extent of the rare abilities of my students. I believe it would be to our advantage if it were to remain so as long as possible.”

“Y...yes sir,” stammered Mr Chambers as he nodded. “I understand.”

“Right then...” interjected Moody, finally finding his voice as his penetrating eye swiveled to peer at the Coven. “Well, secret or not, we’re gonna have to put the Potters and the Unaffiliated to work. There’s no time for us to stand around jawin’...”
And indeed, the sound of spells could be heard crackling as wizards at the far end of the street began engaging with the Inferi which were swarming through the rest of Puddleby. Harry took a deep breath to brace himself; he knew exactly what they needed to do.

“Okay, we need to get to the highest point in town,” said Harry, “hopefully somewhere that we can see most of it. If we can, we should be able to deal with most of the Inferi, leaving the stragglers for the rest of you to pick off.”

“Very good Harry.” Dumbledore nodded. “A wise course of action...”

“I know just the place,” said Mr Chambers. “An office building downtown--it’s the tallest one--you should be able to see most of the town from the roof. But if you don’t know Puddleby, you won’t be able to apparate there directly. I’ll have to take you.”

“Er... alright then!” Harry agreed. “Thanks Mr Chambers...”

“Joseph...” The dreadlocked wizard offered Harry his hand. “Call me Joseph, please... All of you. I can’t thank you enough for coming!”

“Well... you can thank us when we’re finished, Joseph,” said Harry, shaking his hand. “We’d better get on with it and try to save as many as possible.”

Bill Weasley clapped his father on the shoulder. “I’ll go with them too, Dad...”

“Harry, Mrs Potter...” Dumbledore caught their attention. “Stay in contact with the mirrors--and good luck!”

Harry nodded, feeling a lump in his throat, then turned to make his way down the road. As the Coven followed after Joseph and Bill, stepping around piles of inert skeletons, in the flickers of lightning they spied a number of wizards and witches, some of them openly weeping, seeing to the wounded--fallen wizards and muggles whose injuries now looked much like Dumbledore’s.

Some had been too badly hurt to survive, though the Inferius Curse had been broken before they could be reanimated. Joseph darted to where his wife and mum were standing with some muggle children, still in shock, and quickly explained that he would be escorting the Potters and their friends before giving them both a kiss goodbye.

Harry took the opportunity for one last instruction to the Coven, glancing around at Hermione, Dora, Jennifer, Fleur, Daphne, Parvati, and Luna, as Bill Weasley looked on.

“Okay,” he said quietly, just loud enough to be heard over the falling rain and claps of thunder, “if we’re going to try and keep most people guessing about the spell we’re using, we’ll have to do it nonverbally. We’ve practiced it, so it shouldn’t be a problem. Just watch me for the cue.”

“Got it Harry,” said Dora with a crisp nod.

“We’re ready Harry.” Hermione gave him a wan smile and a shake of her sodden ginger tail as the rest of the wet Coven murmured their acknowledgment.

“I know you are.” Harry returned her sad little smile, and gave everybody one last look of encouragement. “You’re all brilliant!”

The Coven reached the end of the street where the battle still raged; a phalanx of Order members, locals, and French wizards holding the line against the Inferi. Bill directed the fighting wizards to be prepared to move through the small city when the crossroad had been cleared. Fleur waved at a
young French wizard who had apparently been a year or two ahead of her at Beauxbatons. She blushed and gave Daphne a reassuring squeeze when he blew a kiss at her.

The throng of groaning corpses in various states of decay lurched and surged, as the Order and the French wizards continued to heavily favour the Reductor curse, unwilling as they were to set the entire town ablaze with a firestorm spell, which might not even be effective enough given the continuing downpour in any case.

Harry took a deep breath to brace himself, then lifted his left hand and gestured a count of three as he raised his wand with his right hand. The rest of the Coven gathered around him in close formation and raised their wands; Harry’s last finger unfurled on the third count, and a pulsating blaze of dazzling white light erupted, filling the crossroad, swallowing up the eight ethereal felines which charged into the midst of the swarm of Undead.

The moans of several hundred Inferi became screams as their decaying flesh combusted and turned to ash. The French wizards and witches, locals, and Order members who were less than familiar with the Hogwarts students blinked, many shielding their eyes as they tried with difficulty to make out what was happening in the shining flare of light, frank expressions of awe and surprise on their faces.

When the last Inferius within the radius of the pulses of luminosity collapsed among the heaps of bones and skulls, the light faded and the wizards and witches began to move out, dividing into smaller teams as they spread out through the town.

“This way...” shouted Joseph as he ran, trying to avoid stepping on skulls and tripping over femurs. Bill and the Coven followed, keeping an eye out for more “Walkers” as they jogged along the street.

With Joseph and Bill, the Coven shot their own Reductor spells at random Inferi as they hurried through the town; Daphne and Luna gave Harry beseecching looks when they heard the screams of muggles coming from the side streets. They stopped once or twice to set their Patronuses loose on the most concentrated knots of the Walking Dead which they came across, but Harry’s and Dora’s grim looks reminded the rest of the Coven that the entire town was at stake, and that they needed to get to high ground as soon as possible to make the most of their skills.

Soon, the quaint houses and picturesque buildings which made up much of the very small but growing city of Puddleby gave way to those which looked more modern, and they knew that downtown was very close. Breathing heavily, sweat from exertion and trepidation mingling with the rain dripping from their hair and faces, their hearts fell when they came across a traffic jam at an intersection.

A lorry lay overturned in the middle as traffic lights turned from red to green and back again, surrounded by the twisted metal of mangled cars smashed together in a pileup, some of them still emitting sparks and smoke, at least one of them now a burnt out husk of steel. Lights continued to spin and flash on the roofs of several Police cars, a Fire Engine and an Ambulance with broken windows as the rasping groaning sound of the throng of Walking Dead filled the air.

Hundreds of Inferi swarmed around the vehicles gnawing on the limbs and gory entrails that they had torn from the recently Living, fresh blood dripping from their hungry mouths. There didn’t seem to be anyone left alive, only animated corpses with peeling and rotting grey flesh.

Daphne briefly looked away from the horrid gruesome sight and bit her lip in an effort to stop herself from crying. Hermione’s soaked tail bristled as angry tears flooded her cheeks. Harry squeezed her hand and squashed his own rage to keep himself together. Once more the Coven raised their wands and Bill and Joseph protected their eyes from the blindingly bright luminescence which ripped through the Inferi Horde.
They cautiously picked their way through the block which had just been cleared by their Patroni, past storefronts with brightly flashing neon signs and shattered windows. Except for the continued sound of rain beating the pavement, burbling gutters fall of rushing water, and the occasional peal of heavy thunder, the silence and stillness of the urban setting was unnerving. Harry desperately hoped that the people living in the flats above the shops had managed to barricade themselves inside their homes.

Finally, after taking out another swarm of Inferi and passing through another block of buildings built in the late 1970’s before the National Trust had waged a successful campaign to halt the tearing down of Puddleby’s historical architecture, Joseph pointed to a building a fair bit taller than the rest. It was about seventeen or eighteen stories high, an ugly grey boxy looking concrete building with small windows.

“There...” he panted breathlessly. “That’s the one--Puddleby City Hall--we should be able to apparate to the roof from here.”

“Maybe you and Bill should rejoin the others and try to keep things in control down here,” suggested Harry. “Once we’re up there, only our Patronuses will be any use. But they’ll still need all the help they can get down here.”

Bill shook his head. “I’m not so sure about that... If the building itself is overrun with Inferi, you’ll need some backup to keep the roof clear while you lot do what you have to do.”

Harry glanced at Dora and Hermione as Jennifer, Parvati, Fleur, Daphne, and Luna disintegrated a number of nearby Inferi emerging from dark alleyways and broken shop windows.

“Makes sense to me, Harry,” said Dora; Hermione nodded in agreement.

“Right then, let’s do this,” Harry replied. The street rang out with the sound of ten disapparition cracks and was quiet once more.

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Rivulets of rainwater cascaded from the rooftop as Hermione, Harry, Dora, and the rest of the Coven peered down at the town below, assessing the task at hand. The two tallest of the buildings nearby were only ten stories high, the rest no taller than six or seven, and downtown was no bigger than eight city blocks maximum. Most of Puddleby was in relatively clear line of sight, and the Corporeal Patronuses would be able to sweep around corners into most of the blind spots.

Bill stood by the door which led to the stairwell from the roof to the floors below inside. The troubled look on Joseph’s face was easy to read. Sighing, Bill passed Joseph one of the Order’s communication mirrors; he always carried a spare these days.

“Okay, this is just in case you get into trouble. Just touch it and say my name if you need me to get you out of a sticky spot... I know you want to make sure that anyone working late is safe, but if things look bad in there--if you see a whole load of them--don’t try to take them all on yourself,” said Bill firmly.

“Just get back up here,” he continued. “The most important thing right now is to make sure that no Inferi get onto this roof so that Harry and his friends can wipe out as many of them as possible without interruption... That’s the way we save the most lives--got it?”

Joseph nodded, giving Bill a look of gratitude for even a small chance to rescue a few people.
“Yeah... alright then. I’ll just give the upper floors a quick check and be right back...”

Harry shook as much water from his shaggy mop-top as he could, and impervious his glasses to make sure that he could see clearly. The hordes of Undead looked like ants in the wet streets below. The soggy furry tails of the cat-witches--Hermione, Parvati, and Luna--quivered with anticipation as they waited for Harry’s lead with Jennifer, Dora, Fleur, and Daphne.

“Okay... We might as well start from this side of the building,” said Harry. “We should be able to sweep a fairly wide swath across the town with our Patronuses--I’m thinking that what happened in the pond really did affect our abilities--they’re even brighter than before, and I think we have more range than we had at Hogwarts... Anyway, we’ll keep going and work our way around the building, then check in with Dumbledore and the Order to see if there’s any missed areas that we can help them with.”

Satisfied that everyone was ready, Harry nodded.

“On my mark--NOW!” he barked.

Bill kept watch by the door, marveling at the radiant bursts of brilliant light jetting from the wands of the Potters and their friends. From their high vantage point, they were apparently able to reach all the way to the edges of the town, which he guessed was perhaps 10 to 15 square kilometres in size.

There was a knock on the roof-access door. Bill cracked the door a bit and peeked, relieved to see Joseph back and unharmed; he opened the door wide to discover that Joseph had with him a number of muggles: several women and one man who had apparently been working late in their offices.

“What on earth is going on up here?” asked an authoritative woman with dark brown hair in business attire when she saw what appeared to be eight teenagers projecting massive floodlights as bright as the sun around the small city from thin sticks by the edge of the building. Even odder was the fact that three of the younger girls seemed to be wearing extremely lifelike costume cat-tails and cat-ears.

“Er...” Joseph wasn’t sure what to say without violating the International Statute of Secrecy any more than they were already. Fortunately, Bill, as a practiced Order member close to the Inner Circle had a pat answer ready for the occasion.

“Sorry Ma’am--we’re not at liberty to give the details. Suffice it to say that we’re employing a new Top Secret weapon designed to attack the ‘Walkers’ without killing everyone else and burning the city down...”

“Really? You lot don’t look like MI5,” said the man with closely cropped greying hair--also wearing a business suit--as he took in the catgirls, Bill’s long wet ponytail, his fang earring, and Joseph’s dreadlocks with an air of disdain. “You look more like mad Ravers to me...”

Bill rolled his eyes. “We’re a Special Unit--mostly scientists and a few undercover security agents. They let us wear what we like.”

The greying man--Puddleby’s Finance Manager--continued to look more than skeptical. But one of the younger women seemed not to mind Bill’s appearance in the least; if anything her expression suggested that she found him enticing, and she seemed more excited by the presence of the catgirls than anything.

“Ooooh,” said the young blonde woman, batting her eyelashes at Bill. “Is your Unit like the ones on Dr Who then? Are the catgirls enhanced DNA mutants? Can’t we at least have a look at what’s goin’ on?”
Bill felt himself growing a bit warm. He gave the young woman a winning smile. She was very much his “type,” and looked to be of a similar age as himself.

“Oh alright then... as long as we don’t get in the way of the... er... Prodigies...” Bill motioned to Joseph to keep an eye on the door and the others as he took the young woman by the arm and led her towards the Unaffiliated.

Joseph rolled his eyes and smirked a bit with a shake of his head. This was hardly the time to be chatting up muggle women. The authoritative looking woman with dark hair frowned, apparently thinking much the same thing—though entirely unaware that such things as wizards were in fact real. As the mayor’s deputy, it was simply her duty to see to the safety of the town’s employees.

“Miriam,” she said warningly, “be careful. We don’t know these people...”

“So what are those sticks they’re pointing?” Miriam asked Bill, ignoring her boss entirely. “Are they like the Doctor’s Sonic Screwdrivers?”

“Sorry—I really couldn’t say!” Bill looked extremely apologetic. “At least not unless we were much more closely acquainted,” he said quietly as he leaned in closer so that the others couldn’t hear.

“Well... I suppose I’ll just have to get to know you much better then,” giggled Miriam. “Perhaps I can get your number.”

As they gradually made their way around to the other side of the building, at least half the town hopefully cleared of Inferi, Harry and Hermione noticed Jennifer whispering and giggling with Luna and Parvati, whose wet furry tails quivered with mirth. Harry, Hermione, Daphne, Fleur, and Dora all looked to see what had distracted them and spotted Bill standing nearby and getting on like a house on fire with a blushing muggle girl who looked about college age.

“Oi—we’re working here,” Harry barked at the distracted members of the Coven; he was more amused than annoyed, and frankly glad for a moment of levity amidst all the darkness and horror.

“Sorry Harry!” giggled Jennifer, Parvati and Luna in unison.

“My fault Harry,” said Bill. “Sorry about that—don’t mind us. We’ll stay back.”

Hermione took the opportunity to make contact with Dumbledore. His crystal blue eyes looked back at her warmly from the mirror; she could see relieved people in the streets behind him.

“You’re doing splendidly,” Dumbledore beamed proudly at Hermione. “We are easily handling what few Inferi that are left in the shadows of the areas you have cleared thus far. And more of us are able to spend some time attending to the injured. I have called in more Order reinforcements and also for more of Monsieur Delacour’s people to assist us in going house to house.”

“That’s brilliant!” said Hermione, her wet furry ears twitching happily. “We’ll get on with it up here, and hopefully be finished soon. Then we can come down and help mop up...”

Harry peered over Hermione’s shoulder, having overheard the last bit.

“Excellent sir,” said Harry, feeling a swell of accomplishment. “We’re just about to tackle the other half of the city. We’ll keep you apprised of our situation.”

“Very good Harry!”

After quickly saying goodbye to Dumbledore, the Coven continued flooding the streets of Puddleby
with pulses of blazing light and luminescent etheric felines fueled by their joyous affection for one another. As time ticked by, Bill rubbed at his eyes, wondering if it was a trick of the light sparkling in the rain, but when his new muggle girlfriend gasped, he knew he wasn’t just seeing things.

“Blimey! Is it just me...” Miriam whispered to Bill, “or are they actually glowing?”

Joseph and the muggles atop the tall grey building also buzzed with curiosity when they noticed the increasingly luminous silvery glow emanating from the teenagers. But the members of the Coven were too intensely focused on the task at hand to pay attention to anything else.

“Well that’s it then, isn’t it?” said Daphne hopefully, wiping the rain and wet strands of hair out of her eyes when they had finally returned to their original position peering down the front of the City Hall building.

“Should be,” Harry replied. “I’ll give Dumbledore a call and see how things are going... Hang on, are we glowing again?”

“Yes!” said Luna, nodding vigorously and beaming, flinging droplets of water everywhere as she shook off her wet and bedraggled fluffy white tail.

“Wait, what’s that noise?” asked Daphne, frowning.

“Sounds like thunder to me!” said Parvati as she wrung some of the excess rainwater from her own tail. Dora shook her head as her eyes widened.

“That’s not thunder,” Dora muttered.

Sure enough, what appeared to be a number of small planes dropped below the clouds flying in formation, approaching Puddleby at a high rate of speed. Hermione squealed, furry tail bristling in horror when it suddenly struck her what was happening.

“HARRY!” she shrieked, grabbing his arm.

“Bloody Hell!” swore Harry, eyes bulging in horror as the fighter jets swooped low and roared overhead. “The RAF--but that means...”

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The lead pilot of the RAF fighter jet squadron took stock of the situation below. The city streets looked a mess--in the darkness, with only city lights illuminating the town, he couldn’t quite make out what the piles of debris were--but the “Walker” hordes which had reportedly overrun Puddleby seemed to be strangely absent. He did see some movement below, but as far as he could tell they could be a mix of survivors and a small incursion of zombies, relatively easy to control with the Prime Minister’s secretive “Special Units” which were usually called in for these sorts of operations.

Frowning, he contacted his base for further instructions.

“You have a go! I repeat, you have a go!” barked the base commander over the crackling radio.

“But sir...”

“This is a direct command--straight from the PM. You have your orders! Now carry them out!” the commander snapped.

“Yes sir!” sighed the squadron leader as he wheeled his jet around for another pass while the tanks
and ground troops below encircled the small city to cordon it off.

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The Coven looked on in horror as the jets turned around and headed back towards town.

“\textit{What the bloody hell is going on?}” shrieked the deputy mayor of Puddleby. “They said they were sending troops and helicopters to evacuate us... not this!” She yanked her mobile phone from her purse in a panic and let loose a stream of expletives when she realised that her service had been cut off.

Finally coming to his senses, Harry grabbed his mirror.

“Professor Dumbledore! Sir! We’ve got a problem...” Harry shouted. Dumbledore’s features appeared instantly in the mirror.

“So I see Harry!” said the headmaster with an air of calmness which he certainly did not feel. “Filius and I shall apparate to your location with some others. We should be there momentarily...”

“We might not have time sir! Will Protego Horribilis work against physical attacks?”

“Generally speaking, yes, over a relatively small area--such as Hogwarts--with enough wizards casting it simultaneously. But to protect a small city of this size against high speed projectile weapons has never been accomplished to my knowledge. It would require far more wizards with the necessary skills than we can round up in time. But we have no option but to try...”

Harry didn’t waste anymore time listening to Dumbledore; his mirror fell from his hand and shattered on the wet concrete roof of Puddleby’s city hall when he saw a dozen missiles soaring towards them.

“Get in a circle, backs to each other, like we practiced,” he yelled at the Luminous Coven. “Protego Horribilis--we need to try and project it as far out around the town as we can, and concentrate hard on not letting anything through--NOW!”

Hearts thudding wildly against their ribcages, the Coven followed Harry’s instructions and concentrated with all their might as they raised their wands at the sky as one.

Bill and Joseph were still in shock, not knowing what to do. They were startled when the rain suddenly stopped, apparently prevented from reaching them by the shimmering barely visible dome which reached from one end of Puddleby to the other.

Harry prayed this would work. He had no idea if the Coven was strong enough to project a shield powerful enough to protect a town which was a dozen square kilometres or more in size. He could only hope that the glowing associated with their recent adventure in the pond at Jennifer’s house and the increased power of their Patronuses was an indication that they might actually be able to pull this off.

The Deputy Mayor scrunched her eyes tightly shut, crying as she embraced the quaking secretaries who had been helping her and the city Finance Manager crunch numbers late into the evening when the Walking Dead had invaded Puddleby. The Finance Manager himself was ashen and had fallen to his knees in a puddle, hands clasped before him, promising to never cheat on his wife again if he lived.

Wishing that he was with his wife and his mum, Joseph looked over at Bill Weasley who was cuddling and reassuring the now sobbing blonde muggle girl.
The lead pilot of the squadron began to panic when his instrument readings began to oscillate madly the closer he drew to the shimmering gossamer curtain which had suddenly appeared to fall over Puddleby. Something was very wrong. His gut told him that he was dead if he hit whatever that thing was.

“PULL UP! PULL UP!” he screamed at his squadron as he pulled all the way back on his steering unit.

As the jets soared up into the storm-clouds, the pilots glanced back to see their missiles explode against the nearly invisible dome which covered the town below.

“MERLIN’S HAIRY BALLS!” yelled Alastor Moody when he saw the massive fireballs bursting against a glimmering barely visible shield above them. His magical false eye nearly flew out of his eyesocket as his one natural eye bulged. “Is... is that the Potters and their friends? ... All by themselves?”

Albus Dumbledore gaped at the sight. He was absolutely floored. He knew that even for a Coven, their power levels were in uncharted territories. But this was beyond what he had believed possible. He had been quite hopeful that with the added support of himself, and a sizable number of other wizards that they might be able to augment the Coven’s shield enough to ward off a missile attack, but he had not been at all certain that it would be enough.

Filius Flitwick, who had arrived a short while ago with Severus Snape and Poppy Pomfrey, looked on in astonishment; his jaw dropped. It had taken him and all of the Professors to set up a shield at the Battle of Hogwarts, and he knew that even their shield over such a relatively small area would have likely collapsed under a concentrated missile attack.

At least two or three of the dozen or so missiles would have struck the castle. Not to mention that generally speaking, when casting such shield spells, one didn’t usually bother to try and block natural phenomenon such as wind and rain as the shield above was doing. The Potters and their friends had apparently gone all out to not let anything through.

A light clicked on in Filius’s head and he smacked his forehead, groaning as everything that had happened fell into place. Of course! He should have known!

The Castle Quakes! The supposed “Ongoing Upgrades” which had protected the walls of Hogwarts! The Unaffiliated! Their apparent closeness! The destruction of the Dementors! Their destruction of Voldemort’s Inferi hordes hadn’t been a Secret Weapon at all. The Potters and their friends WERE the “Secret Weapon,” a Coven, but one so extraordinary, the likes of which hadn’t been seen in centuries perhaps.

“Albus,” squeaked the diminutive Charms Professor indignantly, “I do believe you have been withholding information from us. The Potters and their friends...”

Albus Dumbledore gave Flitwick a stern look and put a finger to his lips. Filius fell silent and Albus winked.

“Yes...” said Dumbledore very quietly. “But our advantage could be lost if the Minister were to learn of this fact and were to manage to somehow separate them. Let us keep everyone guessing for now!”
“Of course... Of course! I understand!” Filius squeaked excitedly. “You’re absolutely right Albus! Mum’s the word!”

Albus Dumbledore twinkled at Filius and nodded. His eyes returned to the cloudy and once again dark night sky as he stroked his long wet beard thoughtfully. Dumbledore found himself wondering how many muggles in Puddleby would find themselves exhibiting signs of accidental magic in the coming months.
Chapter 178

Relief was written all over the muggle girl’s features, thrilled as she was to still be alive, and Bill Weasley was pleasantly surprised to find himself the recipient of a joyful kiss as rain began to fall again. The sound of his name being called interrupted Bill in mid-snog. Miriam watched with interest as he reached into his pocket for a mirror and saw an elderly man’s concerned features and clear blue eyes staring back at Bill.

“Ah good!” said the elderly man in the mirror, “I tried Harry, but he didn’t answer. I thought I’d try you first before interrupting any of the oth...”

“His mirror broke sir!” Bill replied before Dumbledore could finish his sentence. “But did you see what he and the others did?” he continued excitedly, “That was incredible! I’ve never seen...”

“Bill,” interjected Dumbledore, a hint of urgency in his voice, “it is imperative that Harry and his companions resume the shield spell immediately!”

“Oh course, Professor Dumbledore... sir!” Bill gulped when it became apparent that it wasn’t over just yet; he looked up and was about to call out to Harry when he saw the glowing teenagers raise their wands at the sky again. “Er... looks like they’re already on it...”

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Harry tried to slow his breathing as his heart continued racing. The billowing smoke and orange flame of the fireball from the last missile to strike the shield dissipated above, and he felt a drop of rain. He swallowed nervously when he realised that the Coven’s shield had only barely held off the attack. Harry raised his eyebrows questioningly at Hermione and Dora as more raindrops fell.

“Sh...should we do it again? Or d’you reckon that’s it?” he asked, afraid that he already knew the answer.

Hermione’s furry ears and soggy tail twitched uncertainly as she peered at the older girl. Dora sighed; her own experience with military tactics was quite limited despite her Auror training and being a few years older than the others, but she’d seen enough muggle war films to at least give her an inkling.

“I dunno if they’ll try again, but it’s better to be safe than sorry,” Dora muttered.

“Right!” Harry agreed. “Again it is then...”

The seven wet young witches all nodded at Harry and returned to formation. The Luminous Coven raised their wands at the sky and the rain stopped once more. They held their breaths when moments later more fiery explosions struck the invisible shield closer to the edge of town, coming from all sides. The building seemed to tremble slightly as the thunderous roar of the attack echoed throughout the small city.

“We’ll have to do it again!” barked Harry. “Before this one fails...”

The Coven kept their wands in the air and cast the spell again and again, wondering for how long they’d have to keep this up, and if they could manage to continue to ward off the heavy bombardment. They were briefly distracted by the sound of apparition cracks, but returned their focus to the Protego Horribilis Charm they were recasting every few seconds at Harry’s direction.
The deputy mayor of Puddleby and the secretaries jumped and gasped when they heard the cracking sounds and saw more odd looking people arriving out of thin air, but they were otherwise not particularly alarmed given everything else that they had borne witness to so far that evening. The city’s finance manager, however, shrieked with fright and passed out, sprawling face first in a shallow puddle.

After a quick glance at the Coven, surprised by the silvery bright luminescent glow surrounding them, Filius Flitwick immediately began organising the other wizards and witches who had arrived with him and Dumbledore, having managed to quickly assemble nearly twenty of the Order and the French wizards who were highly skilled with shield charms.

“Elphias, Dedalus, and the rest of you... do as the Potters and their friends are doing,” the diminutive Charms professor squeaked. “Backs to one another in a circle, Protego Horribilis on my mark... concentrate your efforts on projecting to the edges of the town...”

Confident that Flitwick and the other eighteen wizards had things well in hand to fortify the Coven’s own immensely formidable shield spells, Dumbledore strode over to the authoritative woman in business attire huddled nearby with several younger looking women.

The deputy mayor of Puddleby raised her eyebrows as she took in the long silvery hair and beard, the halfmoon spectacles, the gaudy wet robes, the slender stick in the man’s hand... She half expected him to pull out a long thin pipe, strike a flint, and begin blowing smoke rings.

She almost laughed when the irony of the situation struck her. The city overrun with zombies, the three young catgirls and the other five teenagers--two of them with bright pink hair and sparkling makeup--all of them waving wands, and now the old man who was one of several who had appeared out of thin air looking for all the world like they had just come from a casting call for the next Lord of the Rings or King Arthur film--and it would still be Halloween for another forty-five minutes.

“You lot really aren’t MI5, are you?” she said wryly, struggling to keep a straight face. “Do I have the honour of addressing Merlin or Gandalf?”

“Dear me, poor old Merlin is long since departed this mortal coil, and Gandalf is unfortunately still fictional,” chuckled the old wizard with twinkling blue eyes. “My name is Albus Dumbledore, and you might be...?”

“Barbara Spencer, deputy mayor of Puddleby... and whoever you lot really are--wizards or not--I can’t thank your youngsters enough for saving my town...”

“Well, we aren’t quite out of the woods just yet, Ms Spencer--not until the military decides they have wasted enough firepower and cease their bombardment,” sighed Dumbledore. “But yes, they are quite remarkable young people. They are very exceptional, even among wizardkind, and I couldn’t be prouder of them.”

“Are they all yours then?” Barbara couldn’t help asking. “Your grandchildren perhaps?”

“Oh no, I never had children myself,” Dumbledore replied, sounding slightly wistful. “I am merely the headmaster of the school they attend. I operate a school for those born with magical abilities--young wizards and witches--to prepare them to join the larger community of the wizarding world, and also to teach them how to control their powers when they are among those without such abilities, such as yourself. It is all kept quite secret as a general rule of course...”

“Of course!” Barbara nodded seriously, then she glanced at the finance manager who was still lying unconscious in a puddle and rolled her eyes. “Very sensible no doubt. Some people seem to have
very little stomach for things which challenge their narrow views of the world.”

“Indeed!” agreed Dumbledore. “Unfortunately, there are those even among wizardkind who also harbour such narrow ideologies.”

“Why am I not surprised?” Barbara Spencer shook her head sadly. “No doubt there are some who think themselves better than all the rest of us lowly mortals.”

“Quite!” Dumbledore’s eyebrows popped up as he gazed admiringly at the sharp-witted muggle woman. “And that brings us to why I have introduced myself to you…”

“You’re going to wipe our memories, aren’t you?” Barbara interrupted, looking even sadder. “I must assume that you have some sort of spell then, to make non-wizards forget things in these sorts of situations!?”

“Well, this sort of situation is highly unusual.” Dumbledore gestured towards the exploding artillery shells in the near distance which were being launched by tanks, missile launchers and cannons. “Normally we do not have to contend with such large hordes of the Undead sweeping through non-magical communities and the military taking such extreme measures to suppress them with no regard for possible survivors.”

“And given the circumstances surrounding these events, when it comes to ‘wiping your memories,’ I rather think not!” Dumbledore continued pointedly. Then he glanced at the man lying in a puddle. “Though perhaps in his case it might be for the best if we did,” he sighed.

“You will need all your wits about you to piece your community back together when this is over, and Obliviation can be quite befuddling. And I have no doubt that you will also be calling into question the current government’s actions here tonight…”

“Damn right I will be!” the deputy mayor of Puddleby uttered vehemently. “We were working late tonight on the end of the month report for the city’s budget, when the mayor’s wife called and told me that the mayor had never made it home and that those bloody Walkers were swarming through their neighbourhood.

“That’s when I looked out the window, saw what was happening down below and heard the sirens... I have no idea what happened to the mayor--and I fear the worst. Then when I called London, I was told that troops and helicopters were on their way to evacuate as many as possible and that MI5 were sending their special teams to deal with the zombies... But that was clearly not what the PM had in mind...

“That is unfortunate, and unsurprising,” sighed Dumbledore, “...As I was saying, I believe that making you forget all about wizards would put you at a grave disadvantage should you call the Prime Minister to account.”

“As things stand, he is in collusion with the current Minister of Magic--and she is one of the sort you aptly described as thinking that certain wizards are better than non-magicals, and especially, superior to wizards born into otherwise non-magical families…”

“Are you joking?” squeaked one of the shocked looking secretaries as Deputy Mayor Spencer gasped, a horrified look on her face.

“Sadly, no!” Dumbledore shook his head. “The attack against Puddleby by Inferi--those to which you refer as either ‘zombies’ or ‘walking dead’--was in fact instigated and engineered by our Minister to put down with extreme prejudice a group of wizards who live among you, some born of
non-magicals, and some born of mixed families.

“It is my grave displeasure to inform you that your town was targeted as part of an escalating civil war between a group of wizards who call themselves ‘Pureblood’--those who come from families of wizards whose magical lineage stretches back hundreds or even thousands of years--and wizards who are born into non-magical and mixed families.

“Currently, the Purebloods--the worst of them in any case, the Supremacists--run the Wizard Ministry. It is a bit more complicated than that of course--not all who belong to ‘Pureblood’ families are Supremacist, and many so-called ‘Halfbloods’ support the Supremacist Agenda...

“And even the current Prime Minister--completely non-magical though he is--is in league with the Pureblood Supremacists, no doubt in part to profit himself and his party, and to also improve and maintain the profits and privileges enjoyed by certain sectors of the non-magical Elite and the Wealthy. Judging from the non-magical papers which I read, his main constituency appears to be many leaders among the banking and corporate communities...”

“Unbelievable!” gasped the appalled deputy mayor of Puddleby. “The mayor and I never trusted the PM’s lot--but it’s still quite shocking to see how far he’s willing to go. Are... are the Royals involved too then?”

“To the best of my knowledge, no!” Dumbledore replied. “They are as unaware of wizards as are most other non-magical people. As a matter of law in the global governing body of wizards--an organisation similar to the United Nations--only a single point of contact is legally permissible between the heads of wizarding governments and heads of non-magical governments--preferably those belonging to elected and semi-elected bodies--Prime Ministers, Presidents, Premiers... etc.

“Only in nations with entirely non-elected governments are aristocrats or self-appointed leaders in contact with heads of wizarding governments. Thus, in the UK, only the Prime Minister is allowed to know of the existence of wizards without restriction... though legal exceptions are made for immediate non-magical blood relatives and those who are married to wizards.

“It is part of a law called the International Statute of Secrecy. And given its extreme narrowness of interpretation, it is a situation which I have come to believe is politically disastrous for all concerned,” concluded Dumbledore.

“Yes... yes! I think I quite agree with you Mr Dumbledore!” Deputy Mayor Spencer clapped a hand to her mouth, feeling more than a bit panicky. “Wha...what can I do? This is horrible! How can I possibly confront the PM over his decision to try and destroy Puddleby if he’s being backed by wizards and it’s all a big secret?”

“For the time-being, it would probably be best for you and your secretaries to maintain the illusion that you know nothing of our world. The PM would just use it against you,” said Dumbledore wisely. “Act as if you believe that MI5 and the military are solely responsible. That will put the onus upon the Prime Minister himself to come up with some sort of explanation to the non-magical media as to why the town largely survived the hordes of ‘Walkers’ and why it also survived his government’s decision to obliterate the town.

“He will not be able to deny that he took such a decision after tonight--no doubt the BBC and Sky TV are already broadcasting live accounts from beyond the military containment lines at this very moment--and they will no doubt be quite puzzled as to how Puddleby passed through the bombardment unscathed.

“I would be quite surprised if the Opposition in the Parliament did not at least begin an Inquiry into
what has happened here and the Prime Minister’s role if you are careful in how you word your charges…”

“Yes... yes! That sounds a very sensible course of action…” the deputy mayor agreed, nodding.

“I will also be leaving a sizable contingent of wizards to look after you personally,” Dumbledore continued, “and to look after Puddleby, to prevent any attempt to send Ministry Wizards to take control of the town. It will stretch our forces a bit thin in terms of confronting the Ministry in other parts of the UK... but I believe it to be necessary, and our ranks are growing in any case as more wizards join our cause…”

“Ah, thank you! Very good! I cannot thank you enough Mr Dumbledore!” Deputy Mayor Spencer let out a sigh of relief. “Will... will I be able to speak with you again?”

“Absolutely!” Dumbledore smiled at Barbara Spencer warmly and handed her one of the Order’s communication mirrors. “This is a bit like your mobile phone. Simply touch it and say my name, and you shall either be able to speak with me, or leave a message. And I shall be able to call you back in much the same way.

“There is no question that we shall be speaking again, as you and your secretaries may possibly be called upon to provide testimony to the ICW--the wizarding ‘UN’ that I previously mentioned... I am doing my best to put an end to Supremacist control of the Ministry, and I am currently working with International Authorities to expose…”

At that moment Dumbledore was interrupted by one of the wizards who was helping to maintain the shield against the muggle military weapons. The man who shuffled over looked as ancient as Dumbledore himself, though he was shorter, paunchier, and jowlier. But his robes were just as brightly coloured and just as sparkly as Dumbledore’s.

“Albus, I do believe the muggle military has spent themselves,” he proffered cheerfully.

“Ah, splendid news indeed Elphias!” beamed Dumbledore. “We should be able to finish cleanup operations and depart shortly then.”

“And by the way Albus, your young Mr Potter and his wife and friends, have you noticed their remarkable illumination?” Elphias shook his head in amazement as he peered at the exhausted teens who were finally putting their wands away at Flitwick’s insistence. “I’ve heard of such things in the Orient and in the Western world’s ancient past of course, but I thought them only myths. In all my years I’ve never seen anything like it…”

“Nor I, Elphias!” Dumbledore admitted with an intrigued expression. It crossed the headmaster’s mind that the visibility and intensity of the Coven’s auras was very likely related in some manner to the apparent increase in the power of their spells that they had displayed tonight, but he was very curious as to how it had come about.

“Potter?” The name rang a bell with the deputy mayor of Puddleby. Barbara Spencer frowned pensively, suddenly realising why the boy had looked vaguely familiar; she had been so wrapped up in the immediate situation that it hadn’t occurred to her until now. “Is that Harry Potter then? ...the fourteen year old boy who is Wanted in connection with the terrorist Sirius Black?”

“Indeed!” said Dumbledore with a sigh, half-smiling. “The PM ordered a warrant for the arrests of Sirius Black and Harry Potter at the behest of our Minister Umbridge. The charges are quite false, I can assure you.”
The young secretaries all gasped and peered at Harry Potter sympathetically, who was none the wiser as he and the teenage girls with him were now sitting on the wet roof, slumped against a low concrete wall surrounding a bank of air-vents and taking a well-deserved rest.

“It was a frame-up all along! I said it right from the start, didn’t I Veronica...?” said one of the secretaries to one of the others who nodded vigorously.

“And too right you were!” the one named Veronica responded. “Poor kid!”

“I knew there was something fishy about that warrant,” snapped Barbara indignantly, her motherly instincts getting the best of her. “That poor boy--after all he went through with that horrible uncle of his... to be hounded by the PM...”

“Wait, did you just say ‘e was married?” Veronica gasped, when it hit her what the old wizard named Elphias had just said. “He’s a bit young for that isn’’t he?”

“Oh... young love! It was frightfully romantic!” sighed Elphias wistfully as Dumbledore twinkled at him. “Mr Potter and his wife--the girl with the ginger cat-tail next to him--were both emancipated at a young age due to the harrowing circumstances in their lives.

“And at the time, they relied on each other heavily for the support which they weren’t receiving from their respective guardians, so they eloped--according to Xeno Lovegood’s publication in any case--and I’ve always been quite a fan of the Quibbler...”

“Ah, thank you for reminding me Elphias...” began Dumbledore, “Ms Spencer, this is my very dear friend, Elphias Doge, and as he has just reminded me, Mr Lovegood and his reporter Rita Skeeter are somewhere in the vicinity documenting the evening’s events... Would you mind giving a televised interview for a wizarding audience?...”
When everything seemed to have settled down, and Rita Skeeter had begun doing interviews, Bill Weasley quietly slipped away with Miriam. Mr Lovegood and Skeeter had agreed with Dumbledore that interviewing the secretaries wasn’t necessary.

Miriam bit her lip, peering at Bill uncertainly when it appeared that he might be preparing to say goodnight. She looked more than a bit anxious. Finally she seemed to reach some sort of decision.

“Erm... Bill, I... I hope you don’t think this is too forward of me,” Miriam began tentatively, “but... er... I don’t think I wanna be alone tonight--and I don’t have any family in Puddleby. D’you think... erm... would you mind, c...coming home with me? ... We don’t have to... you know... I mean...” she sputtered, turning all red and flustered.

“Oh blimey! I’m sorry, I must seem a right idiot--a real trollop... but I’m just scared to be alone right now!” Miriam finally managed to blurt out.

Bill swallowed nervously. He was quite pleased to have made a real connection with someone he liked, despite the dreadful circumstances, and Miriam seemed to be really sweet. But he hadn’t expected things to move quite so fast. As Bill gazed back into Miriam’s earnest eyes, it struck him that she really was just frightened to be alone and simply wanted to be with someone she felt safe with.

“Yeah, okay,” said Bill gently, nodding, “They don’t seem to need me anymore. Dumbledore’s got loads of other wizards to keep an eye on the military while they try to figure out what happened. D’you want me to take you home now?”

“Y...yes please! I c...could really use a cuppa tea right now. M...maybe something a little s...stronger even to s...settle my nerves.” Indeed, even though everything seemed to be quite over, the emotional rollercoaster of an evening had taken its toll, and Miriam was beginning to tremble like a leaf.

“Alright then,” Bill agreed, giving Miriam a smile as he wrapped his arms around her again. “How far away are you? Close enough to walk?”

“Yeah... just th...three blocks that way.” Miriam pointed, her hand shaking. “I have a flat in that building over there... Hopefully it’ll s...still b...be okay...”

“I’m sure it will be, but if there’s any damage, I can fix it,” offered Bill.

“Y...you can do that?”

“Well, I’m no Harry Potter or Dumbledore, but I think I can manage,” said Bill impishly, giving Miriam a wink as he showed her his wand. “I’m not half-bad with magic myself... In fact, I probably ought to Disillusion us so we don’t have to worry about being stopped by any military patrols on the way back to your place.”

“Wh...what’s that then?” Miriam asked nervously.

“It’s a bit like invisibility--more like a chameleon’s camouflage though, but more effective...”

“Oh... you mean like those alien hunters in the Predator films?”

“Er... pardon?” Bill looked flummoxed.
Miriam grinned. “I’ll throw on a dvd when we get home... you’ll see...”

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It was well after midnight and pouring with rain when Harry, Hermione and the rest of the Coven returned to Hogwarts with Dumbledore, Sirius, and Professor Flitwick. Exhausted and wet, the Coven retired to the Unaffiliated Common Room within their hidden House after seeing Sirius off to the Shrieking Shack at the base of the Whomping Willow. Circe, Cleopatra, and Aphrodite were all three gathered in the portrait to greet them that night, thrilled to see their young charges again.

“Will you be staying long this time?” asked Cleopatra.

“I’m not really sure,” Harry replied, glancing at the others. “I’m still thinking about it... Dumbledore said we can take more time off if we’d like...”

“We missed you terribly,” said Aphrodite sincerely.

“You should ask the headmaster if he would allow you to have copies of our portraits made,” suggested Circe. “Then you could take them back home with you...”

“Oh, that’s a splendid idea, Circe,” Aphrodite interjected. “Then we could see you whenever we wanted...”

“And travel to Hogwarts and back without having to use a Portkey,” Cleopatra happily added.

“You know, that’s a smashing idea,” said Dora after the Coven had kissed the painted sorceresses goodnight and emerged from the portrait on the other side of the wall. “I hate portkeys almost as much as I hate traveling by Floo...”

Luna, Parvati, Daphne, and Fleur giggled when Jennifer and Harry both nodded vigorously in agreement.

“Yes, that was a rather brilliant suggestion,” agreed Hermione, swishing her sodden bushy ginger tail mirthfully. “The Gemino spell ought to work if Dumbledore says its alright.”

Though Hermione had gradually got used to the effects of Portkey travel, as dizzying as Floo travel but without all the ash and soot, the storm system which was deluging Britain from one end to the other continued to rage outside. It was possible to depart by portkey from within a building, but the whirling and flying made it decidedly unsuited for arriving at one’s destination inside a structure--unless one wasn’t fussed about damaged furnishings and decor--and the Coven had arrived at Hogwarts as drenched as they had been for much of the evening.

But at least they hadn’t felt the cold; and now that Hermione thought about it, she was glad that it was late enough that none of the students had seen them arrive, still glowing as they were. She really didn’t want to have to deal with awkward questions until they’d thought of something to tell everyone.

“You’re right, I suppose we could’ve been using Headmaster Black’s portrait,” Harry mused out loud, interrupting Hermione’s thoughts. “I almost forgot.”

“He’s still at Madam Black’s house, isn’t he?” said Daphne. “We never did bring his portrait back after we used him and the other portraits at her house to retake Hogwarts.”

“Yeah...” Parvati replied with a flick of her wet black tail. “But I like Circe, Aphrodite, and Cleopatra much better...”
“Good point,” Harry agreed with a grin.

“And we wouldn’t have to pass through Headmaster Black’s portrait in Dumbledore’s office first,” added Luna, taking the opportunity to shake some more excess rainwater from her saturated fluffy white tail while they were still in the stone corridor.

“I suppose we should at least ask Headmaster Black if he’d like us to take his portrait back to Jennifer’s manor or Number Twelve though,” said Hermione considerately. “He really seemed to like it at Jennifer’s, and he’s not so bad really.”

“Yeah... that’s true,” Harry admitted, his brow creased, nodding slowly as he gave it some more thought. “And he’s been jolly helpful. Who knows, we might need him to break into the Ministry again!?”

“And he’s actually good for a bit of a laugh,” Jennifer giggled. “He’s really funny, the way he puts on airs and acts all superior, but underneath it’s obvious that he likes us.”

“Zat is true,” tittered Fleur. “I think we should have him back.”

“Right then,” sighed Dora, “I suppose I should be the one to pop over to my aunt’s house and fetch Phineas’s portrait--maybe tomorrow.”

Harry swallowed when he saw Hermione looking at him expectantly, knowing that Dora must feel very awkward still about seeing her parents... as awkward as he himself still felt about it. He sighed resignedly.

“It’s alright Dora, Hermione and I can come with you if you’d like,” offered Harry. Dora’s face brightened.

“Oh, ta Harry. You sure about that?” she asked.

“Yeah... absolutely!” said Harry a bit squeakily. Realising that he still sounded more than a bit dubious, Harry tried to make a bit of a joke out of it. “I suppose I ought to try and get used to hanging around with the grandparents of our future kids,” he added with a grimace.

Dora turned pink and grinned, feeling much better about the idea of visiting her parents again as the rest of the Coven giggled. Hermione beamed at Harry and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Despite it being as late as it was, and as worn out as they felt, when Fleur suggested they dry off in their Common Room with hot cocoa and a midnight snack, everyone thought it was a lovely idea. Truth be told, though feeling a bit drained, they were all still quite wound up and didn’t feel ready for sleep anytime soon.

A roaring fire in the hearth greeted the Luminous Coven, and everyone stripped down to their underwear without a thought to modesty, tossing their soggy clothes in a pile. They were surprised to find a large Wiz-Vision screen waiting for them as well though. The Coven puzzled over it while drinking the cocoa and munching a variety of biscuits, jam and custard tarts, and little tea-cakes.

“Maybe it’s for the pirate broadcast tomorrow morning,” said Luna, whisking her wet and bedraggled tail, “so we can watch the interviews that Daddy and Rita Skeeter did with that nice lady-the deputy mayor of Puddleby--and with Mr Chambers, the wizard that lives there.”

“I expect you’re right Luna.” Hermione’s brow furrowed and her furry ears twitched pensively. “I suppose Dumbledore stopped making all the students watch the Wiz-Vision in the Great Hall after retaking Hogwarts, but wanted to make sure that we still had access so that we could stay informed.”
“Makes sense to me,” said Harry, who was very pleased about being able to keep up with whatever was going on in the wizard world.

“Too bad it’s not a proper telly though,” sighed Jennifer. “I suppose it’s for the best if we’re staying at Hogwarts and have to study for classes again instead of on our own time though…”

“Oh…” Harry interjected, “I almost forgot to tell you… Before we left Puddleby, Dumbledore told Hermione and me and Dora that we’re not to worry about regular classes for the moment—whenever we’re ready—because our schedule has been so disrupted, and probably will be for the foreseeable future. We’ll all be doing Independent Studies now under Professor Jones’s supervision…”

“That’s lovely,” Jennifer beamed. “I can’t wait to see Hestia again.”

“…I’m afraid that you and Luna will probably still have a bit of a heavier workload though,” Hermione continued, flicking her furry ears sympathetically. “Most of us are much more advanced in many classes than most fourth years, but you both still have a bit of catching up to do in a few subjects—mostly only on the Theory end of things as you’re both brilliant when it comes to Practical spellwork of course. But there’s also Potions and Herbology, and Magical History…”

“But don’t worry,” Dora jumped in quickly, seeing the anxious look on Jennifer’s face. “You’ll still be getting loads of help from us, and tutoring from the Professors as needed. And Dumbledore said Slughorn’s got loads of time to do a couple of Independent Potions lessons a week with us as Alchemy is an elective only taught to interested fifth, sixth, and seventh years…”

“…which Harry and I have been thinking of studying too…” Hermione interjected, beaming lovingly at her husband.

“Anyway, we’ll just be easing back into things Jennifer,” Harry said reassuringly, shooting an amused grin at his eager Hermione. “We’re just going to meet with Professor Jones tomorrow to go over the lesson-plans and work out schedules if you’re ready.

“Dumbledore did offer to let us take some more time off after all the stuff we dealt with tonight, but I reckon that we’re probably as ready as we’ll ever be to get back to training, and Hogwarts is still the best place to train… it’s got the Room of Requirement after all…”

“…and the Library of course,” added Hermione, to the giggles of the rest of the Coven. “And if Dumbledore says it’s alright to make copies of Circe, Cleopatra, and Aphrodite to take back to your house, we can still go back home on some weekends,” she concluded sympathetically.

“No, it’s alright… I’ll be fine,” said Jennifer with grin. “Really! Home on weekends sounds lovely! I’d like that. But I’m ready to come back to Hogwarts during the week… I actually missed it here. It was fun except for the horrid people—and they’re gone now.

“And I love the castle and the grounds… and I’m really keen to learn more about magic…” Jennifer trailed off as she leaned across the sofa and gave Harry and Hermione both steamy kisses.

As Hermione began to purr, her now quite dry bushy tail twitching blissfully, the rest of the underwear clad Coven seemed to take the kissing as a sign that it was time for a bit of fun. As Jennifer was making out with the Potters, Luna and Parvati took it upon themselves to pounce on Dora, their own furry tails waving gleefully.

Grinning at the others, Daphne plonked herself on Fleur’s lap for a cuddle. Kissing her younger companion deeply and wetly, Fleur’s fingers slipped into Daphne’s moistening panties, finding their way to her humid slit. Her other hand slid up Daphne’s satiny smooth belly until it pushed under the
cup of Daphne’s bra to capture the younger girl’s breast.

Daphne moaned into Fleur’s mouth as the older girl’s ministrations reached their mark. She squeaked with pleasure, her damp sheath clenching around Fleur’s fingers as the older girl’s thumb rotated the fleshy button hidden in her fold, while Fleur’s other hand engaged in massaging her heaving globes and tweaking her hardened nipples.

When Fleur’s lips trailed to her neck and began sucking a tender spot, Daphne wriggled ecstatically and squealed, drenching Fleur’s fingers, sparks of magic flying.

Meanwhile, Luna and Parvati had quickly stripped Dora of her bra and panties, flinging them across the Common Room. Parvati had her face between Dora’s thighs, her tongue buried in Dora’s sopping channel. Luna was straddling the pink haired girl’s waist, snogging Dora heatedly and mauling her ample breasts while wetly riding her thrusting fingers.

The young cat-witches purred and meowed with delight as Dora moaned and writhed beneath them and more sparks of magic flew.

Harry grinned when Jennifer and Hermione yanked off his boxers and began to take turns wrapping their lips around his stiff penis and sucking him off. It didn’t take him long as they went back and forth. Hermione took one last long suck and rasped her rough cat-tongue along the underside of Harry’s erection before passing him off again to Jennifer.

He lost it just as Jennifer took his length deeply, pressing her lips to the base of his shaft, his semen spurting into her throat. Not being greedy, Jennifer released the still erupting Harry from her mouth, swallowing the load he left on her tongue and licking the strand dangling from her lip as she passed him back to the giggling Hermione.

Hermione’s bushy tail quivered with mirth as she took Harry’s still ejaculating penis in her mouth and sucked him dry. When she had finished, Hermione was only too happy to lie back on the sofa as Jennifer’s tongue delved into her dripping wet pink crescent. Jennifer naughtily wiggled her bottom at Harry.

Still hard, seeing Jennifer bottom up with her face planted between Hermione’s thighs was too tempting for Harry. He leaned over Jennifer’s backside and entered with a single thrust, burying his lance to the hilt in her slick, tight sheath. Grasping her hips, Harry drove himself into Jennifer again and again with abandon while she made Hermione purr and meow with her skillful tongue.

It took a bit longer the second time around, but hearing Hermione let loose a long yowl, and her tail thumping the sofa as her cascading orgasms reached a crescendo, was too much. The whirlwind of ecstasy took Harry by storm; he released volley after volley of his stickiness into Jennifer’s depths while Hermione flooded Jennifer’s face with her own creamy essence as more magic filled the charged atmosphere.

Giddy and flushed with passion, the Coven traded partners and began again. The maelstrom of magic crackled, arcs leaping from one sofa to another across the Common Room as the Luminous Coven exploded into bliss repeatedly before finally fading into oblivion in the wee hours of the morning.

~o0o~

Harry yawned, blinking as he awoke; coffee might be a good call today. He was a bit puzzled at first by his surroundings before remembering that he and Hermione had never made it back to their quarters. In fact, Hermione and Daphne were both draped across him on one of the sofas in their
Common Room. Luna and Parvati were curled up together purring on the settee, and Jennifer, Fleur, and Dora were sprawled across the other sofa. Their glowing had finally abated.

Harry glanced at the clock on the mantlepiece. It had just turned seven. Thinking that it would be nice to be Harriet for the next session, he grinned as the rest of the Coven began stirring, all of them still as naked as Harry himself.

The Common Room was a bit of a disaster, though thankfully some things were still intact, and Harry knew they would have to spend a short while repairing things before cleaning up and dressing to meet with Hestia Jones. Breakfast might have to wait.

“Mmm... Morning Harry,” murmured Hermione with a smile, blearily giving him a kiss as Harry stroked her messy hair. “I suppose we all needed a bit of stress relief.”

“Yeah... I’ll say,” Harry chortled in response.

A flickering in the corner of Harry’s eye caught his attention, and the sound of rousing music hit his ear. The Wiz-Vision had apparently been set to turn on with the morning news, no doubt soon to be interrupted by the Order’s pirated broadcast.

~o0o~

They had both almost been expecting it. The Senior Undersecretary had arrived early that morning at the Minister’s house, and they were both sipping their tea feeling a slight sense of trepidation when the bombastic music heralding the WVN morning news began.

Sure enough, a burst of static swamped the screen before it faded to black and new images appeared- the image of the dark streets of Puddleby inundated with lurching corpses, the sound of screams and crackling spells, and the voice of Rita Skeeter--onscreen herself as she described the events she was witnessing live at the scene.

The scene changed several times as Rita made her way through the small city with various groups of wizards--their faces blurred, excepting Dumbledore’s which was visible to all--saving muggles from the marauding Inferi. The footage was unflinching, showing also the bodies of muggles and wizards who hadn’t escaped the carnage.

The Minister and her deputy watched, mouths agape when they witnessed for the first time the blazing effects of the Secret Weapon as pulsating bursts of blindingly brilliant light swept through the city and the Inferi turned to ash and bone. Then the screen displayed scenes of muggle fighter jets and heavy artillery bombarding the town, unsuccessfully trying to destroy it.

Finally, the scene changed again as Rita conducted an interview with an unblurred local wizard, a man with dreadlocks who explained how the Inferi had been sent to quell their resistance to the Ministry’s attempts to take the muggleborn.

Another interview followed with the muggle deputy mayor of Puddleby, who explained how the Prime Minister had sent the military to obliterate the town of Puddleby, instead of rescuing its residents as he’d promised--Rita Skeeter suggesting strongly that he must have made a deal to coordinate with the Ministry of Magic at the expense of the non-magical people of Puddleby.

When it was over, and the regularly scheduled programming had resumed in progress, Deputy Minister Percy Weasley was white; his freckles, splashes of red paint against a blank canvas. He glanced at Minister Umbridge who appeared to be turning a plum shade of purple.

“I... I c...can’t believe it!” Percy sputtered, waving a hand wildly, “He’s openly violating the
International Statute... Dumbledore can’t get away with that, can he, Dolores?”

“Unfortunately, it would appear that he can!” snarled Dolores. “My own friends in the ICW tell me that the Committee for Statutory Violations is nearly entirely in Dumbledore’s corner, including the Chair of the Committee, the Senior German delegate to the ICW, Angelika Machschnell. There is only one on that committee who is sympathetic to us, but he cannot speak his mind freely without risking his seat.

“This is a complete disaster--Dumbledore knows exactly what he is doing. Now that he’s brought Puddleby’s muggle deputy mayor to the wizarding public’s attention to spread his seditious nonsense, we shan’t be able to touch her without raising more questions in the ICW...

“He’s just daring us to try something--goading us to launch an open attack on Puddleby! But we can’t rise to the bait Percy... Dumbledore has no doubt left forces there hoping to entrap us and ensure that the ICW Inquiry goes his way”

“What are we going to do about Puddleby then?” Percy fumed.

“For the moment, Puddleby will have to be written off as a dead loss. But Dumbledore’s scheming gives me an idea. We must turn the tables on him--we shall have to devise a means to draw him out and entrap him instead...

“But failing that--and we must be prepared for that possible eventuality--at the very least we must force him to reveal the Secret Weapon with which he is destroying the Inferi... and he now also appears to have devised a means of generating a powerful shield large enough to defend an entire city.

“And I just know Potter was involved somehow--he was the one to employ the Secret Weapon at Hogwarts according to the accounts of those who witnessed it--I am certain he did so again. If we can get a hold of the Weapon and discover the means by which Dumbledore shielded Puddleby, we will at least be able to employ countermeasures and gain an even footing, and possibly capture Potter while we’re at it.

“We can work out a plan later though Percy,” Dolores shook her head and pursed her lips, grinding her teeth, “In the meantime, I must be off to Number Ten Downing Street--the PM must be having kittens...”

“We need some sort of response to Skeeter too...” Percy suggested loudly. “Ron seems to be coming around finally. Perhaps another direct ‘appeal’ to Potter might have some effect at least in suppressing Dumbledore’s recruiting efforts? ...especially if Ron’s heart seems to be more in it this time?”

“Perhaps!” Dolores looked skeptical. “I agree that a media response is a necessity, and I shall certainly be conferring with the Prime Minister on that score--he is closely acquainted with an exceptionally powerful muggle propagandist who owns media outlets in the US and Australia as well as Britain who could be quite helpful. But I’m not certain that Ronald will have much impact on a second go round...

“Still--maybe as part of a larger effort--it couldn’t hurt to at least prep him for a short spot. Why don’t you remain here and try working with Ronald while I’m in London today...”

~o0o~

Ron Weasley gulped nervously as he pulled his ear away from the door and flung himself back on
the bed next to the tea-tray with his half-eaten breakfast when he heard his brother Percy’s footsteps coming back up the stairs. Ron had managed to overhear bits of the conversation—not everything, but he had heard enough. The Minister had left for London through her Floo, and Percy was staying, in the belief that Ron had finally been turned to their side.

Ron’s heart thudded in his ears as he contemplated his plan of action, wishing desperately that he could have thought of something better. As Percy’s footsteps drew nearer, Ron held his breath...
Chapter 180

Molly Weasley waved her wand at the pan with the bacon, trying very hard not to think about her two missing sons. One had gone astray the day he had joined the Ministry, and the other was currently being held captive by him somewhere. She took some solace in the fact that Charlie was safe in Romania at the moment, looking after dragons at the Preserve because they were understaffed.

One by one, the bacon strips rearranged themselves for a nice even crisp while she flipped over the fried eggs in the pan she was tending to. She was just arranging the food on the plates when her husband blearily staggered down the rickety stairs.

“Here you go Arthur, eggs over easy, just as you and Bill like them,” Molly beamed at her husband. “Where is Bill anyway? Still in bed? I know you didn’t get in till after three last night, but still, it’s already seven thirty...”

Arthur flushed as he looked guiltily at his wife.

“Oh... er... Bill didn’t come back with me last night,” he muttered, focusing his attention on his steaming cup of tea.

“Why ever not?” snapped Molly. “I told him I’d feel much better if he stayed at home with us while he’s taking time off from Gringotts to help the Order...”

Molly’s husband sighed, knowing that she wouldn’t let it go. If he wanted a peaceful breakfast, he’d just have to get it all out at once and hope for the best.

“Erm... well, he met a girl last night while helping to rescue muggles from the Inferi...”

“And he went home with her already?” Molly frowned. “That’s a bit quick off the mark don’t you think? Who is she? Another French trollop? One of the witches that Mr Delacour sent over to help the Order no doubt!”

Arthur struggled not to roll his eyes, thinking back to the French girl that Bill had met during the Triwizard Tournament while visiting Hogwarts for the Final Task. She and Bill had got on like a house on fire in the stands while everyone else had been eyeing the outermost hedgerow of the maze in boredom and anticipation.

Then Bill had invited the pretty blonde Beauxbatons girl to dinner the following week and it had been a complete disaster. Molly had done her utmost to restrain herself and be on her best behaviour, but it had been impossible for her to totally hide her disdain, and Ginny’s attitude hadn’t helped. Not to mention Ron openly ogling the girl with a gormless expression on his face.

The poor girl and Bill had felt uncomfortable the entire time, and the next time Arthur had seen Bill, his son had glumly told him that she couldn’t be with someone whose family had such little regard for the French.

After that, Arthur had taken Ginny aside for a serious conversation about not being rude to people just because her mother didn’t like them. He’d also tried to impress upon Ron that it was considered impolite to drool while staring at pretty girls--that it was better to just take quick surreptitious glances out of the corner of one’s eye--but he expected that his breath had been wasted on Ron.

Arthur noted that his wife was still glowering at him while breakfast began to cool. He adjusted his
glasses, took another sip of tea and cleared his throat.

“No... the girl is British actually,” he began, eyeing his wife warily, “a muggle secretary he met in the building he was securing. He does seem to like her, but he only went home with the girl to look after her because she was frightened to be alone--her family doesn’t live in Puddleby.

“And I don’t blame the poor girl after all those Inferi, and then having the muggle military set loose on her town...”

“Oh!” said Molly brightly, her frown vanishing. “Well why didn’t you just say so to begin with Arthur? She sounds delightful! You should have Bill bring her to tea or dinner... Just remember this time not to scare her off...”

“Me!” said Arthur incredulously, forgetting himself momentarily.

“Yes, you! ...With your silly self-deprecating jokes about rubber duckies and pretending you don’t know how to say ‘electricity’ or ‘plumber’...”

“Nonsense Molly--it puts muggles at ease to think that they know things that wizards don’t.”

Molly rolled her eyes. For such a smart man with exceptional muggle engineering skills as well as having been top of the class at Hogwarts, her husband could be quite thickheaded at times.

~00o~

Percy Weasley unlocked and opened the door of the room that was currently occupied by his youngest brother. Percy smiled wryly and shook his head slightly when he saw Ron still digging into his breakfast, currently shoveling sausage and the remnants of the scrambled eggs into his mouth.

Ron looked up from his tea-tray, hoping his own expression was more nonchalant than he felt, his heart thumping wildly.

“Heypercewazup!?” Ron mumbled with a grin as he tried to swallow the huge mouthful of food and nearly choked.

Percy rolled his eyes and chortled. The poor table manners were a good sign that Ron was obviously feeling much better about things and that Percy’s efforts hadn’t been in vain.

“I was wondering, Ron, how would you feel about being on the Wiz-Vision again?” Percy asked hopefully. “...Without being imperiused this time? If all goes well, I’m sure that I can talk the Minister into arranging an outing to Diagon Alley... maybe even to buy you a Firebolt while we’re there...”

“Really? That sounds smashing Percy...” answered Ron, looking extremely interested. “And if I go on the Wiz-Vision enough, I’ll be more famous than Harry in no time.”

“Precisely!” beamed Percy. “Excellent, Ron! If you’re finished with breakfast, we can go downstairs and work on your lines in the sitting room for a bit.”

“Yeah, sure! I’m done eating for now...” said Ron eagerly, hastily downing the rest of his pumpkin juice.

Ron followed Percy out of the horribly pink room into the equally horribly pink hallway. At least the bannister of the stair railing was plain wood, mahogany polished to a high sheen. At the bottom of the stairs Ron spied the kitchen and dining room to his right, and a hallway leading to what looked
like a laundry-room near the back door.

Through the threshold on his left, where Percy was heading, Ron could see a Welsh Dresser with shelves full of collectible plates with pictures of horribly pink puppies gamboling across them. Ron reckoned now was as good a time as any.

“We’ll just take a seat on the sofa...” Percy began saying as he turned his head to look at Ron. Percy’s smile was replaced with a look of horror.

“What the hell...?” were the last words that Percy managed to blurt out before Ron’s fist crashed into the side of his face. Ron furiously slammed his fist into Percy’s face two more times and his brother dropped to the floor, out like a light.

Ron scowled at his prone brother on the floor, his fist still shaking with nervousness and anger, and not a small bit of pain, his knuckles bleeding. Nostrils flaring, Ron almost kicked his brother, unconscious though Percy already was, barely managing to restrain himself.

“If you weren’t my brother...” Ron muttered savagely. “...Bastard! It’d take more than a bloody Firebolt to turn me into a Slytherin! That was for torturing Dad...”

He had hit Percy hard enough to hurt his knuckles, but still, Ron didn’t know how long Percy would be out. Ron looked longingly at Percy’s wand. He considered taking it, but thought better of it. Ron knew he’d be tempted to use it and he didn’t want to draw attention to himself once he’d departed.

“...Still, I reckon it’s safe enough while I’m still in the Minister’s house,” he told himself out loud. Ron took Percy’s wand and used a stunning spell on him for good measure, thanking his lucky stars that Fred and George had taught him the spell.

“That oughta keep you quiet for a bit,” Ron muttered again, replacing the wand in Percy’s pocket. “Wonder if that hag has a broom in this bloody place...”

Ron searched the hallway and the kitchen, looking for a broom closet, not bothering with the Floo system because he knew it was being monitored closely. He breathed a sigh of relief and grinned when he spied an old Comet 220 which looked like it had been used more for sweeping than riding in a cupboard under the stairs.

“Excellent! You’re no Firebolt, but at least you’re better than Charlie’s old Shooting Star.”

As he headed for the back door, Ron shot another furious glance at Percy who was still out cold on the pink shag carpet in the sitting room. He swallowed and fought back sudden tears, wondering if he would ever see Percy again—the annoying old Percy who was only a pompous prat, a bossy know-it-all... not this mad twisted Slytherin version of Percy that he’d become.

“...Though I suppose you always were a bit of a Slytherin,” Ron said quietly as he thought back to how Percy had always been selfish, greedily ambitious, and looked down on the rest of the family as if he were a vastly superior being adopted into a family of dunces.

A sudden flush of shame crossed Ron’s features, recognising a few of his older brother’s worst traits in himself. Percy had known only too well the buttons to push to try and turn Ron against Harry. Then Ron felt a little better, knowing that he’d managed to put most of his jealousy and feelings of inadequacy behind him. And there was no way that Perce could’ve ever got him to believe in that Pureblood rubbish.

He thought again of Seamus, and of some of the girls who had seemed more interested in Ron after he’d helped Gryffindor win the quidditch match. With pleasant fantasies in the back of his mind--
now much more realistic--of a girl or two joining in with him and Seamus and messing around all together, and of eventually becoming a famous professional quidditch player, Ron stalked out of the Minister’s back door and jumped onto the broom, soaring up into the clouds without once looking back.

Once above the clouds, Ron tried to decide which direction to go. He had no real idea where in Britain the Minister’s house was, but it hadn’t looked like Scotland or Wales down below.

But it was still morning and the sun was still rising, and even though he was no Hermione, Ron at least had an idea of which way was North and South. He considered trying to find his way back home, to the Burrow, but then he reckoned that there was only Mum and Dad, and that it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Ron sighed when he realised that he would be safer at Hogwarts, which was probably hundreds of miles away. And it should be easier to find as there was no mistaking the mountainous region surrounding the Castle and the Black Lake. He’d know the landscape when he saw it. There was nothing for it. Keeping the sun to his right for the time-being, Ron began heading North.

~o0o~

The Coven’s friends were all thrilled that the Potters and the rest of the Unaffiliated had returned to Hogwarts sometime late the night before, after mysteriously departing halfway during the Halloween Ball.

“So what was up with the glowing last night?” Ginny Weasley asked quietly as she and Neville sat with the Unaffiliated at the Mingling Table during lunch time.

Hermione cringed, her furry ears and tail twitching with agitation. Harry turned beet-red and Parvati nearly choked on her meat pasty. The rest of the Coven turned pink and glanced at each other anxiously, not knowing how to respond. Ginny, Neville, and Viktor, were the only students who knew they were a Coven, but the Unaffiliated were hardly prepared to discuss the intimate details of the things they got up to in private.

“How... how did you...?” Harry managed to gasp.

“Neville and I were closest to the window in the Common Room last night, snogging when we spotted you lot arriving on the lawn,” Ginny replied with a puzzled expression on her face. “Fred and George were throwing their usual after-party...”

“...What’s wrong?” she asked when nobody said anything more.

Neville gulped when an odd thought occurred to him. There was only one thing he could imagine Harry and Hermione not sharing with him and Ginny, good friends as they all were. Ginny’s jaw dropped as comprehension dawned on her at the same time. Then she clapped a hand to her mouth and blushed furiously.

“Never mind! I’m sorry!” Ginny squeaked. “Forget I asked...”

“Don’t worry,” said Hermione quickly, giving the rest of the Coven a quick glance. “It’s alright. I know you won’t tell anyone else. Anyway, I’m not sure exactly what triggered it last night, but the... er... the glowing did originally occur after a... erm... a Coven ritual...”

“We won’t say anything,” Neville muttered, as red-faced as everyone else. “We promise! Right Ginny?”
“Of course!” Ginny immediately agreed, nodding. “We’re just happy you’re all safe and back at Hogwarts with us for now.”

“We should have a bit more time to hang out too,” said Harry. “Our schedules will be a bit more flexible now that we’re all doing an Independent Study programme…”

“Brilliant…” said George Weasley who had just appeared at the Mingling Table with his twin and Angelina in tow, all of them grinning.

“…That means we’ll have another chance to prove that we can clobber you and Viktor on the Quidditch Pitch, Harry,” added Fred with a wink.

“Fat chance of that!” chortled Angelina, swatting Fred on the bum...

~o0o~

Minister Dolores Umbridge felt much better after visiting with the Prime Minister. The PM had been in a bit of a panic when she had arrived, but he too felt a sense of relief at the conclusion of their meeting with his good friend--the muggle media mogul who had arrived from New York on a private jet shortly after Dolores and the PM had downed their first round of brandy while grimly watching the BBC.

The deputy mayor of Puddleby had been sworn in as Acting Mayor by the Puddleby City Council early that morning, and she had been giving interviews on television ever since, demanding that Parliament open an investigation into the failure of the military and MI5 to evacuate Puddleby as the PM had promised, and expressing equal befuddlement as to how the city had survived both the rampaging Walkers and the military’s mysterious decision to attack the city instead of rescuing it.

For their part, muggle television News Announcers and Experts were having a field day speculating about the events--a few of them even going so far as to suggest that an Act of Providence which proved the existence of God had saved the town of Puddleby. A rather well known gadfly had responded by pointedly asking if that meant God hated all the people in small communities and neighbourhoods who had previously been killed by Walkers.

And there were indeed rumbles among the Opposition Parties in the Parliament about opening an Investigation. Even a few rogue members of the smaller party in the Coalition with the current Majority had implied that they might support an Inquiry. The Royals had of course maintained their neutrality in a Press Release from the Queen’s office, expressing her utmost confidence in the government to conduct itself fairly and with openness and integrity.

The media kingpin had snorted with derision and laughed outright at the Queen’s written statement, tossing back his third whiskey before the television had been turned off. He had peered shrewdly at Dolores.

“So, you’re the one ‘oo introduced television to the wizard world eh?” the perceptive man wryly drawled in his Australian accent. “And I hear that you’re quite the fan of my American news network…

“Don’t look so shocked Minister Umbridge, I’ve met a few wizards in my time--some that aren’t too fussy about the International Statute of Secrecy for the right price--and they are currently in my employ, keepin’ me informed of everything goin’ on in the countries that I’ve invested in the most.”

Dolores returned the muggle’s smirk with one of her own, knowing that she had met another who would have done well in Slytherin had he been a wizard.
“Splendid,” she replied in her sweetest, breathiest tone, “This shall be much easier without the pretense then!”

“Too right, it will,” the man chuckled. “And I must say that I’m quite the fan of what I’ve seen of your programming. Looks like you and your people are doin’ just fine...”

“Ah, well thank you very much,” Dolores had responded. “Unfortunately, one of my best propagandists is now working for the other side, and they have been... what is it you muggles say? Ah... yes, they have been ‘hacking’ into our feed with broadcasts of their own.”

“Yeah, I caught it on the flight over.” The mogul nodded sympathetically. “Still, I daresay you’ll need less help crafting an effective media response than my good friend here,” he added with a wink at the Prime Minister.

The mogul had been right in the end. Dolores had quickly run her ideas to counter the pirated broadcasts by him to his great approval. The rest of the morning had been spent devising a media strategy to paint the Prime Minister as a victim of circumstances, military bungling, and hounding by his political enemies. Which was for the best, as there was very little that magic alone could have done to solve the PM’s problems.

As it was, he would still likely face an Inquiry in the Parliament, but it would no doubt peter out eventually after a few months of media reports blasting the Opposition as loony ‘Conspiracy Theorists.’

Satisfied that they had all done the best they could, given the situations they faced, Dolores had entered the green flames in the hearth and arrived in her office back at the Ministry to make plans with the subdepartment of the Unspeakable Office which handled propaganda before returning home to see how Percy was getting on with Ronald.

It was nearly noon when she stepped out of her own fireplace at home. Dolores’s face fell when she spied Percy Weasley sprawled on the floor groaning and holding his head, one of his eyes swollen shut and purple, his cheek bruised and bleeding.

“Oh you poor dear,” Dolores gasped as she scurried to Percy’s side and helped him stagger to the sofa. “Did Ronald do this to you? Did he get your wand somehow?”

“No! He didn’t take it at all. The little bugger actually hit me... three times! I can’t believe it!” Percy moaned.

“I can’t believe it!” Percy repeated. “I was so sure... He’s always been jealous of Potter--just as much as he hero-worshiped that jumped up little blood-traitor! ... That’s why I thought he’d be easier to unbrainwash than Ginny! I don’t understand! I swear... I thought Ron had finally seen reason...”

“There, there, dear,” said Dolores in her most motherly fashion as she summoned her first-aid kit from the bathroom. “Never mind, never mind...” she sighed, pushing back at her own bitter memories, Percy’s relationship with his family reminding her strongly of her own. “I know how painful it can be when family disappoints you... Please don’t fret dear. Ronald’s escape is no great loss.

“Just remember that you’re worth a hundred times more to me than any other member of your family. You’re the smart one, and you have done more to restore your family’s good name than any other Weasley...”

~o0o~
The smell of bacon and eggs frying woke Bill Weasley. Yawning, he looked around the living room of the flat from which he had been sleeping, reminding himself of where he was. The clock on the wall indicated that it was after noon, fast approaching one o’clock. He had been snuggled with Miriam on the sofa watching the television until finally falling asleep as the sun came up.

“Oh good, you’re awake,” said Miriam, grinning as she bustled into the living room with a tea-tray which she set on the coffee-table in front of the sofa. “I hope you like your eggs over easy.”

“Perfect! Just the way Mum makes them,” Bill beamed back at Miriam, taking a few sips from the glass of orange juice she had brought him.

“So what did you think of the Predator films?” Miriam asked as Bill buttered a crumpet.

“More terrifying than the Inferi,” Bill chortled. “Especially that huge bloke with all the muscles in the first one...” he added with a wink and a fake shudder of fright as he dipped his crumpet into the runny yolk of the egg.

Miriam giggled.

“You were right though...” Bill continued after swallowing a bite of the crumpet and a piece of bacon. “The Predators’ camouflage is a lot like the Disillusionment Charm. It was really interesting to see their more complex portrayals as warriors with a special code of honour in some of the later films--the ones with the Xeno-whatsits...”

“Xenomorphs...” Miriam interjected.

“Yeah those...! Speaking of which, I know a bloke by the name of Hagrid who would give anything to have one of those horrors as a pet...”
Even though their first full day back at Hogwarts didn’t involve any regular classes, it soon became apparent to the Coven that the strange sensation had little to do with their fame and popularity. There was indeed something distinctly different and vaguely unsettling about the way it felt to be back, but it seemed to have much less to do with how the other students regarded them and much more to do with the way they felt about themselves which they still couldn’t quite put their finger on.

After working out new schedules with Hestia Jones that morning, and lunch with their friends, Professor McGonagall had informed Harry and Hermione that Dumbledore wished to meet with them.

With twinkling eyes, the headmaster warmly received the two students seated in his office. They appeared slightly apprehensive, as if they had some inkling of the primary reason he had called for the meeting. Fawkes nonchalantly preened his feathers, but the portraits on the wall had abandoned all pretense of inattentiveness. There was no question that the Potters were the most interesting students that Hogwarts had seen in many generations.

“Well,” Albus Dumbledore began, “I certainly hope you are settling back in as well as can be expected. To begin with, I must apologise again for the current interruptive state of affairs regarding schooling for yourselves and your companions.”

“It’s alright sir,” said Harry resolutely. “We understand that things are different now—we’re all ready for whatever comes next, whenever you need us.”

Hermione’s twitching furry ears and tail caught Dumbledore's clear blue eyes as she nodded firmly in agreement with Harry. Dumbledore was immediately struck by the incongruity of their fresh-faced youthful features--those of still young teens--juxtaposed with a bearing which at once both heartened and humbled him.

“Yes!” the Headmaster said quietly, with an almost wistful expression. “I can see that. No doubt it feels quite odd to be behind the walls of Hogwarts once more as students. That is because you are all truly adults now, in every way imaginable, even the youngest among you.

“You and the rest of your compatriots have all faced more burdens and shouldered more responsibilities than many wizards and witches have in their entire lives, and you have all done so with great courage, grace, and dedication--more than anyone has any right to expect from those of your age.

“You have acquitted yourselves admirably, and I must confess, I am somewhat saddened for whatever vestiges of innocence you have lost, facing the terrible burdens of war. For indeed, warriors you have all become.

“Whatever education there is to come--and believe me, learning never ceases as the boundaries of knowledge are infinite--please be assured that I have no doubt that you two in particular are quite capable of seeking out your own lives beyond these walls, should you so chose...”

Harry swallowed, unexpectedly feeling his eyes stinging, stunned to hear Dumbledore echoing Sirius and Lupin’s words. Hermione’s eyes grew bigger as her tail flicked.

“But we want to stay, Professor Dumbledore!” she squeaked, feeling just as surprised as Harry. “There’s so much more to learn. We really do, don’t we Harry?”
“Yeah!” said Harry quickly, sharing a look with his wife. “Hermione’s right sir. Hogwarts is still the best place I know of to learn magic...”

“And yet it no longer quite feels like home, does it?” said the headmaster, peering over the top of his half-moon spectacles knowingly at the Potters. “I would like to suggest, that if you wish to do so, you may leave Hogwarts on the weekends with your companions... My understanding is that Miss Watts’ residence is still entirely unknown to the Ministry, and is as well warded as I could have provided for myself. All that remains then, is to decide the most efficacious means of transport.”

Hermione shared another quick glance with her husband, then nodded at Dumbledore.

“Professor, we were actually wondering, would it be alright if we replicated copies of Aphrodite, Cleopatra, and Circe to take home?” she asked excitedly. “Harry and I can both do the Gemino Charm, and we can take the paintings back in our bottomless bags on one last trip via portkey...”

“...and we were planning on picking up Phineas Nigellus from Madam Black’s house,” Harry added, “if that’s alright too.”

“But of course,” said an eager voice on the wall behind them.

The Potters grinned and turned around; Dumbledore raised his eyebrows wryly at the Slytherin headmaster on the wall. Phineas Nigellus flushed slightly, and quickly adopted a supercilious expression and tone of voice.

“Narcissa’s home is far too crowded these days,” Phineas continued. “Order members coming and going... riff-raff and refugees of all sorts,” he muttered. “I am quite looking forward to a quiet life of contemplation once more.”

“Of course you are Phineas,” retorted Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling as Harry chortled and Hermione did her best to restrain a giggle.

“Well then,” the headmaster began again, “That sounds a splendid plan. Now that’s all sorted, I wish to express my gratitude once again.”

Dumbledore held up his withered and blackened arm and flexed the spindly fingers of his charred hand.

“This was a small price to pay for my life... I am not sure how I can ever repay you and your companions for affording me the opportunity to continue shaping young minds. If there is anything more that I can do to make your lives as full members of the Order more bearable, by all means, do not hesitate to ask...”

“Erm...” Harry felt slightly awkward, not sure how to respond to that. “Er... really sir, that’s not necessary...”

Hermione chewed her lip, glancing at her husband as an idea impressed itself upon her.

“Professor Dumbledore, sir,” she began, “we’ve been wondering what it would take to create a Room of Requirement of our own at home. Harry’s been wanting a proper place to continue training when we’re not at Hogwarts, and anything you could do to help would be brilliant.”

Dumbledore’s eyebrows rose again as he stroked his long silvery beard thoughtfully, looking most impressed at the request of his students. The office fell into silence as he considered it.

“Well, such a thing would be quite beyond me to create from scratch of my own accord,” he said
finally, “and would under most circumstances take many decades and many, many wizards vastly skilled in Arithmancy, Charms, Transfiguration, and a highly specialised branch of Alchemy known as Metaphysicorum to accomplish...”

Hermione gave Harry an apologetic look for having got his hopes up.

“It’s alright Hermione,” Harry started to say, smiling at her, “You already told me as much...”

“However,” Dumbledore interjected brightly, “I do believe there is a way that I can assist you in that regard. What you need is an artifact—a piece of the Room of Requirement itself—which I would be happy to provide. All you need do is incorporate the stone into the architecture of the room you wish to transform—which is a simple matter—and I daresay that a session of your... erm... activities with the rest of the Coven shall accomplish the rest...”

Harry and Hermione stared at the pink-cheeked headmaster in surprise, the cat-witch’s bushy tail quivering with excitement.

~o0o~

“Blimey!” exclaimed Dora, her eyes popping.

“Ze headmaster said what?” Fleur’s jaw dropped.

The rest of the Coven was speechless, equally amazed by the news. All that could be heard were audible gasps as a thrill shot through them.

“He’s going to give us a piece of stone—a brick from the Room of Requirement,” said Harry excitedly. “And then we replace a piece of the wall in the room we want to transform with it...”

“And then all we have to do is have an orgy in the room to charge it up!?” said Luna bluntly, swishing her fluffy white tail and grinning. Daphne blushed; Parvati and Jennifer peered at the Potters expectantly, as if needing to hear it again to prove it was true.

“Erm... That’s more or less what Dumbledore said,” Hermione squeaked, turning crimson. “Not in those words of course... an ‘Ecstatic Ritual of primordial magic from before the dawn of history’ he called it. He had apparently gleaned from our glowing and the power levels of our spells in Puddleby that our own Coven Magic had ‘very likely been enhanced’ by such a ritual—so Harry and I told him a bit about the Enchanted Pond...”

“...without going into details, of course!” Harry quickly added, looking equally red-faced.

“Of course,” said Daphne faintly.

“But in any case,” Hermione continued, “the upshot is that Dumbledore thinks our Coven Magic is still growing exponentially, and he agreed that the synergistic effects of reactivating the pond’s enchantments through inadvertently re-enacting the sex rites originally performed there has something to do with it as well...”

~o0o~

Carmine wisps of cloud crossed the purple backdrop as the day drew closer to an end. Ron was starving; not to mention being tired and thirsty. He had been flying for hours, having only taken a break at midday when the sun’s position in the sky made his direction of travel uncertain. He had resumed flying the moment the sun began to descend the downward slope of the sky.
To his delight, Ron was sure that he had discovered the railway tracks upon which the Hogwarts Express traveled. His certainty was assured when he spotted a bridge that he recalled from the ill-fated flight that he had taken in his father’s car with Harry at the beginning of their second year.

It briefly occurred to Ron that Second Year had been the year that everything had changed. He wondered where he’d be today if Hermione hadn’t permanently changed into a catgirl. Would he still be Harry’s best mate instead of Seamus’s now? If the Triwizard tournament had still happened, maybe not. Things might have ended up the same regardless.

Ron reckoned that he still would have been jealous and believed that Harry had cheated to get in. But maybe Harry would have forgiven him more readily if he and Hermione hadn’t been together?

Ron’s head started to hurt as he tried to consider all the possibilities and he put it aside. It didn’t matter anymore anyway; overall, Ron was perfectly happy now--happier than he had ever been despite everything... except for the fact that it was getting dark and he was freezing his arse off.

That was when he spotted them in the growing dusk, three wizards on brooms in the distance. Gasping with fear, Ron dropped below the tree line into some nearby woods, hoping that they hadn’t spotted him. He almost set down, but then decided he was better off hidden in the leafy branches.

“Over there--I saw ‘im go down over ‘ere somewhere...” he heard someone shout. “Must be a mudblood tryin’ to evade capture.”

“Hah, we’ll find ‘im soon enough. ‘E can’t be far,” yelled another.

Heart pounding in his ears, Ron inwardly cursed and held his breath when the third drifted closer towards the tree he was hiding in. His eyes grew bigger when he saw through the leaves how close the wizard was. Ron knew that they’d spot him at any moment, and he had no wand with which to fight. But fleeing simply wasn’t an option on the stupid slow broom he’d stolen from the Minister’s house.

The broom! That was it! Ron couldn’t believe his eyes when he realised that the Snatcher a mere few feet away from him was riding a Firebolt. Ron gulped and wished he hadn’t looked down when he saw how far below the ground was. Ron took a deep breath to steel himself; he’d only have one chance to get this right.

The idiot on the broom was closer than ever and Ron saw his opportunity; he leapt from the tree limb onto the back of the Snatcher’s broomstick and grabbed at his wand.

“OI... WOT THE BLOODY HELL?” yelled the startled Snatcher.

Ron slugged him on the jaw and heard it crack. The unconscious wizard tumbled from his broom, crashing through the branches as he fell. Without a second thought, Ron spun the broom around and began shooting stunning spells at the other two bearing down on him.

They both returned fire and missed, shocked when Ron charged at them instead of turning tail as they’d expected he would. Ron was amazed by the Firebolt’s speed and handling. He passed right between the pair of Snatchers and stunned them both.

Ron couldn’t help hoping that they’d break their necks when they hit the ground as he flew off at high speed. And with any luck, on the Firebolt, he’d be long gone before anyone noticed that Ron had activated the Trace.

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Kingsley Shacklebolt kept a watchful eye as he led Andrea Mason and Amelia Bones along the Rue Belliard towards the headquarters of the ICW, barely more than a block away from the Brussels offices of the muggle UN. Kingsley felt only mildly reassured that he had three other undercover agents dressed as muggles tailing them in case of trouble.

Though he trusted most of the members of the Committee for the Investigation of Statutory Violations, there was one that Kingsley trusted not at all. He wouldn’t put it past Minister Umbridge to have her man on the inside stage a hit before they reached the heavily warded building which housed the ICW head-offices.

He breathed a sigh of relief when they finally reached the international wizarding institution and the doorman let them in without incident...
Hermione picked herself up from the ground and dusted herself off, thankful that she at least had avoided the puddle. Harry hadn’t been so lucky, but Hermione admirably restrained a giggle and reached out her hand to help him up as he swore like a sailor.

“Bloody portkey travel!” grumbled Dora, wiping some mud off her face with the sleeve of her robes as she clambered up. “At least we didn’t get skewered by a tree limb—suppose that counts for something...”

“I reckon we’re lucky we didn’t miss the lawn and fall in the Black Lake at this time of night,” Harry groaned as he yanked off his dripping robes and wrung them out.

“Well... Phineas Nigellus is fortunate anyway,” said Hermione. “I didn’t think to impervius the bottomless bag. He would’ve got soaked.”

“I’m just happy that Mum and Dad were too busy to harass me and Harry about havin’ a baby when we picked up Phineas’s portrait,” Dora said with a grin.

“Yeah, there is that,” Harry agreed, nodding and allowing himself a wry smile. “I suppose things could’ve been worse.”

Hermione giggled, then trailed off as her eyes grew larger and her tail began to bristle.

“Harry!” she squealed, pointing at someone on a broom approaching in the night sky, silhouetted against the waning moon.

“Blimey! Who’s that?” muttered Harry, whipping out his wand.

“Hopefully someone alright!” said Dora, reaching into her robes for her mirror, frowning in puzzlement. “Dumbledore, Flitwick, and McGonagall set up wards to keep any Ministry folk out... Mightn’t work against someone imperiused if they’re staff or a student though.”

In the darkness, the figure was still too distant for normal human eyes, but Hermione’s pupils widened, glowing in the silvery moonlight.

“I can’t believe it... It can’t be...” she gasped.

“Who is it, Hermione?” asked Harry, beginning to feel alarmed, wondering if it was someone mad like Bellatrix Lestrange.

“It... it’s RON!”

“Ron? ... Bloody hell! Are you sure?”

“Yes Harry! It’s definitely Ron!”

“Wow!” Harry exclaimed, gaping in amazement as the figure drew nearer at a rapid clip. “Whatever he’s flying is bloody fast.”

Harry lit his wand and began waving it, jumping up and down to get Ron’s attention. Dora snapped out of her own amazed stupor and joined in. Hermione followed suit, and all three of them began yelling Ron’s name.
A wispy cloud drifted across the moon in the starry sky as the shadowed walls and towers of the castle loomed ahead, warm yellow light pouring from all of the windows. Ron felt a surge of relief; he’d made it, finally! As he dropped closer to the treetops, several moving lights caught his attention in the darkness below.

Ron was surprised to see three dark shadows on the lawn at this time of night, leaping wildly and waving lit wands. When he was close enough, he could faintly hear them shouting his name. Ron put on one last burst of speed and swooped down towards the three figures.

Lighting gracefully upon the ground, Ron couldn’t believe it when Harry rushed at him, beaming, and a bushy haired missile with luminous, glowing eyes and a fluffy cat tail flung her arms around him. Dora stood back grinning as both Potters set upon Ron, hugging him and slapping him on the back.

“Blimey you two!” chortled Ron. “Let a bloke breathe...”

“Are you alright Ron? What happened with the Minister and Percy? How’d’you escape? ...Is that a Firebolt?” The questions flew from Harry’s mouth in rapid-fire.

Ron staggered, briefly overwhelmed by the onslaught, his muscles screaming after being frozen to the broom for so long.

“Easy you two!” said Dora. “Give ‘im a chance to catch his breath.”

The Potters stepped back, blushing slightly. Hermione’s own breath caught sharply when Ron’s disheveled state became readily apparent.

“Ron!” she squeaked, her furry ears flattening. “You poor thing! Your hand, it’s all swollen and your knuckles are bleeding...”

“Er... it’s nothing!” Ron muttered nonchalantly, “I might’ve busted a finger though--but you should see Percy and the other bloke!” he concluded with a grin.

Harry raised his eyebrows and looked impressed, opening his mouth to ask for details; but Hermione was having none of it.

“A broken finger is not nothing Ronald Weasley!” Hermione snapped, giving Ron a stern look. “And look at you! You must be frozen half to death. You’re going to the hospital wing this instant!”

“Can’t it wait?” Ron groaned, “I’m bloody famished...”

“You can eat in the hospital wing after Pomfrey’s seen to you. Come on then...” said Hermione firmly but kindly as she began to march Ron up to the castle.

Harry grinned at his wife, then shot Ron an apologetic look as he strode beside them. Dora couldn’t help letting out a muted guffaw.

Madam Pomfrey hadn’t the heart to turn the Potters out as she settled Ron into bed and healed his finger. She gave him a number of potions for swelling, pain, and exhaustion, and called for a house-elf to bring Ron some supper. It was a testament to how worried that both Potters had been for Ron, that neither of them fussed him about his dreadful table manners as he regaled them with his exploits.
“You should’ve seen me...” Mashed potatoes flew from Ron’s mouth as he told them about the Snatchers. “There must’ve been at least half a dozen of them--maybe more. But I canooed the one bloke after I leapt on his Firebolt and snagged his wand...”

“Pardon?” interjected Harry, looking slightly bewildered. “Canooed?”

“Yeah... I hit him real hard like this...” Ron jerked his closed fist and a few peas rolled off his dinner plate. “Probably broke his jaw! Fred and George told me you were the one who showed them...”

Hermione looked a bit ill at the thought of someone’s jaw breaking, or maybe it was the sight of gravy dripping from Ron’s chin. Light dawned on Harry and he grinned, shaking his head.

“Oh, you mean you Kung Fu-ed him,” said Harry with a little laugh. “You might’ve been better off with a palm strike though--at least your finger would be. Still, that’s bloody brilliant Ron!

“So how’d you take out the other five Snatchers,” Harry asked pointedly, smirking. Ron’s ears turned red and Hermione stifled a giggle.

“Erm... well... mightabinclosertatwo,” Ron mumbled. He washed down his mouthful of food with some pumpkin juice before finishing his story.

“Anyway, the Firebolt handled like a champ--really fast. The Snatchers were shooting spells but they couldn’t hit me. I flew right between ‘em and stunned one, then the other. They both fell off their brooms and I hoofed it before anyone else showed up.

“I found the railway tracks again and kept flying. I must’ve still been pretty far from Hogwarts though, because even as fast as the Firebolt was, it still seemed to take a couple of hours to get here...”

Ron thought he’d better finish his dinner before telling the Potters the rest of it when he saw Hermione looking a bit green. Hastily he wiped the gravy from his chin and cleared his plate in no time flat. He had just eaten his last bite when Dumbledore entered the hospital wing.

The Potters listened as the youngest Weasley son told his story again for the headmaster, which Ron was only too happy to do. When Ron got to the bit that he hadn’t told Harry and Hermione yet, Dumbledore shared a dark look with the Potters. Ron revealed that he’d overheard the Minister and Percy plotting something to draw out Harry and Dumbledore in an attempt to capture them, and unlock the mystery of the Secret Weapon once and for all.

“...I dunno what though. They hadn’t worked anything out yet,” said Ron. “They were going to when the Minister got back from talking to the muggle Prime Minister and some other muggle bloke--a ‘proper-grandist’ or something like that. Anyway I knocked Percy out and left before she came back...”

“And I am quite glad that you did, Mr Weasley,” the headmaster responded warmly. “You have done splendidly indeed, returning safe and sound--and on top of that, providing the Potters and myself with vital information upon which we can act when the opportunity arises... Your parents should be very proud! Speaking of which, I had better inform them of your safe return before the night wears on much longer.”

Dumbledore twinkled and turned to Harry and Hermione.

“Well Harry, Mrs Potter, perhaps it is best that we all leave our young hero to his well deserved rest
before Madam Pomfrey decides it is time to turf us out... We can discuss our own countermeasures in coming days."

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The Potters and the rest of the Coven greeted the following morning with a small amount of trepidation, wondering what sort of response the Minister had planned for the Order’s previous broadcast regarding the details of the Halloween mayhem in Puddleby. When the Wiz-Vision flickered on, they were unsurprised to see the magnificently groomed William O’Hannity introducing Minister Umbridge.

And they were equally unastonished when the blame for everything was laid at the feet of Dumbledore’s rebellion, and that Harry in particular was singled out as having instigated the entire affair at the headmaster’s behest.

“...Indeed,” continued the Minister in her steeliest voice, “we have substantial evidence that Dumbledore and Mr Potter staged the entire event as a means to cast a bad light on the Ministry, going so far as to breach the International Statute of Secrecy.

“And one can only imagine the lengths to which the insurrectionists must have gone to corral enough Inferi, setting them upon Puddleby in a desperate ploy to cast themselves as the heroes which saved the town from the foul creatures. Such falseness is of course standard operating procedure for those who are accustomed to conspiracy and lies...”

Harry groaned and rubbed at his forehead; Hermione gave him a consoling squeeze and curled her ginger tail around him. Dora and Fleur rolled their eyes as Jennifer and Daphne glanced at each other worriedly.

“I can’t believe this rubbish,” fumed Parvati, her sleek black tail wagging angrily. “She almost makes it sound believable...”

“Don’t worry Parvati,” said Luna comfortingly, wrapping her fluffy white tail around her girlfriend. “All the Minister has is words. They might sound good, but all the footage that Daddy and Rita Skeeter showed yesterday will have much more impact on people.”

“Are you certain?” asked Daphne, looking doubtful.

“Luna ees quite right,” asserted Fleur. “People will believe their eyes more than words. In France, when people see scandalous pictures, even if fake images, zey believe pictures more than denials. It will be ze same here, except our images are very real.”

“She’s right, Daphne,” said Dora. “I’ve seen enough on the muggle telly to know that people are more likely to believe their eyes... even if ‘experts’ say it's rubbish...”

“I think that’s true,” Hermione proffered. “I’ve read about psychological studies which indicate as much.”

“Yeah, I suppose so,” sighed Harry. “I dunno if that UFO stuff is real, but loads of people believe even the most unconvincing and splotchy looking pictures and films... even when experts can prove they’re fake. It’s just weird to think of that sort of thing actually working in our favour...”

“That’s a good point,” added Jennifer. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

The Coven did the best they could to forget about it, which wasn’t difficult as they began their
studies again after breakfast. But there was also another distraction which was even more pleasing.

Dumbledore had apparently made a special announcement at breakfast marking Ron’s triumphant return—which the Coven had missed as they had been watching the news—and Ron was enjoying his newfound notoriety, recounting his harrowing adventure at every opportunity.

Seamus was rapt with awe, and stuck to his best mate like glue, unwilling to let him out of his sight. Dean and Neville listened intently, their jaws dropping at all the most exciting bits. A number of third and fourth year girls seemed to have gathered around to listen as well, some of them even from the other Houses.

Harry had a good chuckle, as Ron had returned to his tale of fighting off half a dozen Snatchers... or more. Hermione smirked a bit and flicked her bushy tail mirthfully, but left Ron to it, not wishing to spoil his fun. Ginny was simply thrilled to have her brother back, but raised her eyebrows questioningly at Ron’s story. She smiled knowingly when Harry gave her a wink, and halved the Snatchers in her mind.

Despite knowing Ron well enough to guess that he was exaggerating, the Twins were nonetheless extremely impressed with him. They were especially admiring of the fact that he’d won himself a Firebolt, and a wand which Professor Dumbledore had let him keep as nobody knew what the Carrows or the Minister had done with his old wand.

“...just the spoils of war,” said Ron with a shrug. But he couldn’t help beaming at his brothers’ praises.

“Brilliant Ron!” said Fred, slapping Ron on the shoulder. “You’ve truly done the Weasley name proud...”

“...and you’re worth more than a hundred Percys!” insisted George. “That git deserved a good pummeling.”

Ron had also received a very large parcel by owl post from Mr and Mrs Weasley, full of his favourite cakes and sweets, along with a letter promising a visit at the weekend. And after classes let out, Ron was ecstatic when Harry and Viktor Krum joined him and the Gryffindor quidditch team for a casual game.

Harry had never been happier for Ron than he was that day, and was delighted to have a diversion from his sense of foreboding about whatever the Minister was plotting next.
Chapter 183

The first week of November flew by for the Coven as they settled into the new schedules for their Independent Studies. Parvati and Daphne continued working with Luna and Jennifer on fourth year material. Fleur carried on with her seventh year course-work while Dora helped tutor the fourth year members of the Unaffiliated and furthered her own education beyond NEWT’s and Auror Training.

Except for fourth year History of Magic and Herbology, Harry and Hermione had both by and large moved on to advanced lessons: fifth year Runes and Astronomy, the few spells from sixth and seventh year Charms and Defence Against the Dark Arts which they had yet to learn, sixth year Transfiguration, and seventh year Potions.

Most of the study was taken under the supervision of Hestia Jones in the spare classroom that Harry and Hermione had discovered after her potions accident in second year. But the professors had made some time to perform demonstrations and monitor progress as needed. And for practical reasons, Herbology was still taken with Professor Sprout in the greenhouses.

Likewise, the Potters and Fleur were taking their seventh year Potions lessons with Snape twice a week in the dungeons, and the fourth year members of the Unaffiliated continued to join the fourth year Gryffindors and Slytherins for Potions. Harry still couldn’t get over the change which had apparently come over the Slytherins. Parvati and Daphne had assured him that even the worst of the Slytherins continued to be on their best behaviour during class.

“D’you really think it’s just because Malfoy was killed, and Goyle lost a leg?” Harry had asked. “And I’m surprised that they’re all still here now that Dumbledore’s back. I would’ve thought a load would’ve left by now.”

“Some of them are probably missing their families, and thinking twice before stepping out of line,” said Hermione, “I expect that Dumbledore’s not letting them leave--for their own protection, and also to prevent them from being used by the Minister against us while she’s still in power.”

“Oh, of course! That makes sense...”

Harry had also been very pleased that he no longer had to suffer through Professor Binns’ lessons. Though he’d always been fascinated by History of Magic, Harry had never been able to endure the soporific effects of the ghostly professor’s lectures. Reading the Magical History books was more than sufficient to learn the subject.

One class Harry missed though, was Care of Magical Creatures with Hagrid. The Potters had both put that aside for the time-being, apologising profusely to a disappointed Hagrid.

“Ah, I unnerstand,” Hagrid had said with a sigh. “Yeh both need ter focus on the mos’ useful subjects while yer fightin’ fer the Order. If yeh wanna though, I’ll be happy ter help yeh catch up when it’s time so’s yeh can pass yer Care o’ Magical Creatures OWL.”

“That sounds lovely Hagrid,” Hermione had beamed, and she and Harry promised that they would at least finish Hagrid’s class through OWL level when the war was over.

Much to Professor Slughorn’s delight, Hermione had convinced Harry to give Alchemy a go. The rotund professor was all too happy to set aside two periods a week to teach the Potters along with Dora and Fleur. Harry was still struggling with fourth year Arithmancy, and Alchemy promised to be just as challenging; but Hermione was determined and Harry simply couldn’t bring himself to say no
when she pleaded with him as she curled her bushy tail around him and kissed him like *that*.

Despite the heavy workload, the Potters did manage to schedule a bit more downtime now that they were working at their own pace. Madam Pomfrey had been most insistent that rest and relaxation were just as important as education, and vital for their health and well-being.

All in all, things at Hogwarts began to seem so normal, that Harry and Hermione could almost forget that Magical Britain was in turmoil. Nor had there been any indication from the WVN news that the Minister was plotting her next move. But the Potters knew better, having attended an Order meeting with the rest of the Coven. And the tension grew as they waited for the other shoe to drop.

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Friday arrived in Brussels, drizzly and grey. The two women in the muggle hotel room watched the rivulets of water trickling down the windowpane, nervously fidgeting with anticipation. Andrea Mason glanced at her daughter when she heard a giggle behind them. Amelia Bones smiled to see the young girl laughing at the cartoons on the television, pleased that she was recovering from her horrific ordeal at the hands of dark wizards.

“She understands French?”

“Yes!” Andrea nodded proudly. “I began teaching her myself when she was little--and while I still worked for the government, I made sure she went to a school which taught foreign languages. She also knows a small amount of German...”

The muggle woman trailed off and bit her lip, frowning pensively. Madam Bones understood. Not more than three blocks from the hotel, in a building normally inaccessible to muggles, a proceeding was taking place, headed by the German witch to whom Andrea Mason had presented her testimony.

The two women fell silent once more, the laughter of Andrea Mason’s daughter the only distraction from their rumination on the outcome.

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“This meeting of the Committee for ze Investigation of Statutory Violations is hereby called to order--presiding officer, Dame Angelika Machschnell.” The stern looking German witch’s voice rang out in the chamber as she banged her gavel on the wooden trivet. She peered at the other six members of the seven member Committee.

“Ve are here today to consider bringing charges against ze British Minister of Magic, Dolores Jane Umbridge. The charges before us stand as follows: First--that Minister Umbridge has knowingly colluded with a non-magical Official. Second charge--that Minister Umbridge has engaged in ze subjugation of non-magical persons, specifically those unfavoured by the aforementioned non-magical Official.

“Third charge--that Minister Umbridge has engaged in ze systematic oppression of wizards born into non-magical families. Fourth--that in carrying out ze subjugation of non-magicals, and the oppression of wizards from non-magical families, the Minister ordered the commission of multiple Crimes Against Humanity.

“And lastly, but certainly not least, Minister Umbridge is also charged with ordering ze attempted assassination of Harry James Potter. Further charges may be issued, pending a full investigation, but zese charges alone are enough to detain Minister Umbridge, and hold her over to face an International Tribunal.
“It is my recommendation that this committee shall bring to the floor of the General Assembly of the International Confederation of Wizards a motion to issue an International Arrest Warrant for Minister Umbridge, and that sanctions be brought to bear against the British Ministry until such a time as Minister Umbridge is taken into custody. How say you all?”

The Nigerian delegate, Madam Ogoba, was quick to respond.

“I second the motion!” she stated firmly, with a look that dared the others to disagree.

“Perhaps... a measure of caution is warranted before we render a decision,” said the Greek committee member in an oily tone. “We should not move with undue haste. I still have questions regarding the veracity of Ms Mason’s testimony, and the evidence presented by Dumbledore’s people.”

“Perhaps then, you also question the integrity of the committee’s own investigators, Herr Papadopoulos?” snapped the German head of the committee. “Ms Mason’s testimony was confirmed by pensieve examination of her memories...”

“Memories may be altered or manipulated,” interjected Pericles Papadopoulos.

“However, such alteration always leaves traces,” Dame Machschnell glowered at the Greek delegate. “Our Legilimens have verified that Ms Mason’s memories are unaltered--a true representation of events.

“Likewise, our investigators have confirmed all the evidence collected thus far: the documents, the artifacts--including the wands of torturers and murderers--and the tools of necromancy, the footage filmed during the raid on the concentration camp...”

“We also have the written testimony of the other non-magicals, including Ms Mason’s young daughter--the girl is available to speak if you wish to subject her to the torment of recounting her travails in person...”

Pericles narrowed his eyes and shook his head.

“That will not be necessary,” he said quietly.

The head of the committee barreled on, her jaw set, eyes glittering dangerously.

“Then there is the testimony of a Kappa assassin--who we have in our custody should you wish to speak to him...”

Pericles shook his head again, and Dame Machschnell continued.

“Ze confirmation of a single piece of evidence would be enough to bring even one charge against the Minister... and we have many such pieces of evidence. And over these past weeks, you were here in these very chambers as we examined all this evidence, were you not?” the head of the committee concluded pointedly.

“Yes, indeed I was,” the Greek delegate answered slickly. “I merely wished to be certain of all the facts before irreparably damaging the sterling reputation of such a highly respected head of government as Minister Umbridge.”

“How very noble of you Pericles,” Madam Ogoba offered coldly, her nostrils flaring. “We wouldn’t want to harm the reputation of someone who encourages the rape and murder of children now, would we?”
Several members of the committee coughed and shuffled uncomfortably in their seats at Olubunmi Ogoba’s pointed remarks. Dame Machschnell raised an eyebrow; her steely look made it clear that the time for debate was long past.

One by one, the committee members raised their hands to affirm the decision to bring charges against Minister Umbridge. Finally, slowly, when the count reached him, Pericles Papadopoulos raised his own hand as he smiled thinly at Madam Ogoba.

“A unanimous decision! Excellent!” exclaimed Dame Machschnell. “I shall call for a full session of the ICW, and we shall present our findings on the floor for a vote on Monday.”

~o0o~

The excitement among the members of the Coven was palpable as they prepared for their return to Jennifer’s estate for the weekend after dinner. The Potters had copied the portraits of Cleopatra, Aphrodite, and Circe, and Hermione had carefully stowed them in one of the bottomless bags next to the portrait of Phineas Nigellus. She had been sure to impervious the bag, as it was raining again.

Hermione’s furry tail twitched when she glanced up to see Harry lying on the bed, reading a book. She raised an eyebrow at him.

“I’m already packed and ready to go,” said Harry with a grin when he noticed Hermione giving him a Look. “I’ve got the stone from the Room of Requirement in a bag with a couple of days worth of clothes.”

“Oh, alright! Let’s see what you’re reading then...” Hermione pounced on the bed to have a look, her bushy tail waving gleefully. “Hmmm... looking for ideas to spice up our fun this weekend, are you?” she giggled when she saw that Harry was reading the book of Asian Monsters.

“Erm... what?” Harry looked bewildered. “No! I just never finished reading this book--what are you on about?”

“That’s the page Luna was most interested in... the one which gave me the idea for using my furry tail like a sex toy...”

“What? This horrible creature?” Harry was utterly flummoxed now. “Why on earth would Luna be interested in Shokushu? ... She doesn’t really want a multi-tentacled monster to force itself on her does she?”

“Of course not, silly!” Hermione rolled her eyes. “It’s just a sexual fantasy--just the idea of it turns her on... You know how Luna likes mad things.”

Harry had a sudden flashback to early on in Third Year; an image of standing outside a greenhouse came to mind, listening to Luna tell Hermione that it was a bit much to expect a boy with only one penis and two hands to satisfy three girls at once. He remembered wondering just how much a metamorphmagus might be able to handle... The idea had seemed quite mad at the time, but it was true--Luna did like mad things.

“So...” Harry began slowly and tentatively, his brow furrowed in thought, “Were you just joking? Or do you really think I should... er... give this multi-tentacle-er-thingy a go, during... erm... you know... our get-together?”

“I can’t speak for everyone else, but I think Luna would be absolutely thrilled if you tried it for a bit...” Hermione peered at Harry, her furry ears twitching hopefully, “She’s been hoping you would
have a go at something like this ever since she found out you’re a metamorphmagus. And... and honestly, I have to confess, I think it would be exciting to try too... just for fun!”

Harry thought about it a bit more. He loved Luna as much as he loved every other member of the Coven. And if it made her happy, and made Hermione happy... Well, how could he say no? And he had to admit, the idea of experimenting a bit more with his metamorph abilities during sex was appealing.

“Hmmm... I think I could manage it,” he said finally, feeling a flutter of nerves in his midsection. “Maybe tomorrow then, while we’re making our own Room of Requirement...”
The weekend at Jennifer’s manor was off to a wet and windy start, but the Coven paid the dismal weather little heed, irrelevant as it was to their plans. Sleep had been elusive Friday night; excitement had kept them awake late, but eventually, slumber had taken them all, one by one.

Luna yawned sleepily when Parvati’s furry tail tickled her cheek.

“Come on sleepyhead,” said Parvati, “We’ll have to make our shower quick—the others are already heading downstairs for breakfast.”

“Without us?” Luna’s furry ears twitched as she frowned questioningly.

“Not if we hurry,” Parvati replied, giving Luna a steamy ‘good morning’ kiss.

“Mmm... Yummy! You taste nice,” said Luna as their lips wetly parted. “Who needs breakfast? I could just eat you all up right now.”

“After our shower,” Parvati giggled.

“Or maybe during...” Luna retorted as she followed Parvati out of bed.

Luna was as good as her word. Parvati purred and meowed with delight as the steam rose around the pair of young cat-witches. The spray of hot water massaged and caressed Parvati’s supple skin as Luna’s skillful tongue roamed through the warm and sopping vale between Parvati’s thighs.

After being brought to completion, Parvati returned the favour with her fingers, all in the name of cleanliness. The bathroom echoed with Luna’s purrs and squeals of pleasure.

Shower finished, Luna shook off her fluffy white tail while she dried herself. She peered around the bathroom, looking in vain for her dressing-gown. Not seeing Parvati’s bathrobe either, she gave Parvati a puzzled look.

“That’s funny,” said Luna, “I didn’t know Jennifer’s house had Nargles. They seem to have taken our clothes.”

Parvati’s eyes widened.

“That is odd,” she said a bit squeakily.

Luna peered at Parvati strangely, then smirked.

“Well, we’re at home today anyway—who needs clothes?” said Luna breezily.

“Erm... right!” Parvati quickly agreed, flicking her sleek black tail. Luna kept giving Parvati little looks as the pair of them padded through the halls of the manor utterly naked.

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“There’s really no need to be nervous Parvati,” giggled Luna. “Everyone’s seen us without clothes on before.”

“That’s true,” squeaked Parvati, grimacing.

“But it is odd that there’s no-one else here...” Luna peered around the kitchen, perplexed. Even Dobby seemed to be scarce. Parvati’s furtive expression finally piqued Luna’s wit—obviously
something was up.

“Alright Parvati--spill!” said Luna eagerly. “It’s not Nargles, is it!? Everyone must be waiting for us in the barn--are we having the orgy now?”

“I’m not... It... erm... it’s supposed to be a surprise for you!” Parvati blurted out apologetically. “I’m sorry Luna!”

“Don’t be sorry. I love surprises--especially sexy ones!”

Luna grabbed Parvati’s hand and excitedly led her to the front door. Paying no notice to the roiling black clouds, or the bitter gale and the icy downpour, the naked young witches stepped outside onto the grounds of the estate. They dashed along the pathway, through the sweeping sheets of cold rain, the trees and hedgerows swaying ominously in the wind.

“We could’ve saved some time and just showered outside,” giggled Luna as she pulled Parvati towards the red brick barn. “But I suppose that would have spoiled the surprise.”

Parvati nodded, sodden strands of her hair blowing across her cheeks.

Luna gave the heavy oak side-door a push and it creaked open slowly. She stood under the gushing eaves with Parvati, nipples hardening, her burgeoning clitoris visibly peeking from its hiding place. The sight of the rest of the Coven whispering and giggling, fully clothed, was puzzling but exciting to Luna. Parvati blushed under their frankly aroused gaze.

The two naked girls shivered in the doorway, the chilly wind whipping between their thighs, goosebumps rising.

Come in and shut the door, sillies,” said Daphne. “It’s cold.”

Parvati didn’t need to be told twice. She shut the door quickly, grateful that someone had thought to set a Warming Charm on the barn.

Luna peered around, grinning. Her eye came to rest on the stone--the piece of the original Room of Requirement--which had replaced at least a half dozen of the bricks in the wall. She counted the members of the Coven--one was missing.

“Wait--where’s Harry?” asked Luna.

“Oh... he’s around,” giggled Hermione. Dora was trying her best to keep a straight face. Daphne looked a bit nervous, but Jennifer and Fleur couldn’t hide their smirks.

Luna’s curiosity and anticipation had reached a crescendo, and she was already purring in delighted wonderment when her eyes caught something writhing in the shadows. Her big round eyes turned into saucers when the tendrils slithered out of the darkness. Two of the fleshy long appendages wrapped around Luna’s ankles and snaked up her legs, entwining around them like vines. Luna gasped, beaming at Hermione when it suddenly hit her. She knew exactly what her surprise was.

“Shokushu!” Luna squealed happily. Hermione nodded and returned Luna’s grin.

Somewhere in the darkness, Hermione could sense Harry breathing a huge sigh of relief, and feeling more than a hint of amusement. Hermione had been most concerned about Jennifer’s reaction, but Jennifer had taken the plan in stride.

Of all of the Coven, Daphne had been the most anxious, but Hermione could sense her relaxing as
well, seeing how much Luna was enjoying herself. Parvati had been more than game—and eager to join in when Hermione had told her the plan last night—having long known of her fiancée’s mad desires.

Luna’s fluffy white tail vibrated ecstatically as more fleshy tentacles approached her and Parvati from the shadows. The rest of the Coven felt little tingles as their panties dampened, when Luna and Parvati appeared to be ensnared in a web of fleshy cables.

The tentacles pulled apart Luna and Parvati’s legs, spreading them wide; smaller tendrils encircled their breasts, the tips nudging their rock hard nipples. Throes of bliss had already taken Luna when the first serpentine tentacle spiraled into her dripping vulva. Another unfurling and well lubricated appendage delved into her rear entrance.

Luna’s purrs and meows of rapturous joy were suddenly muffled when a third undulating appendage plunged into her throat. Parvati was delightedly squirming, similarly subjected to the intrusion of three long, waving tentacles.

Hermione purred loudly, her fingers pressing her skirt into the moistening region between her thighs. Harry—still hidden in darkness and shadow—almost missed his cue, distracted as he was by the delicious sensation of having multiple penises ensconced in warm inviting sheaths. He was barely holding on, but Harry was determined that the pleasure of his wife and companions would come first today.

Harry still couldn’t quite believe how simple the basic process was for growing numerous extra extensions of his penis. He’d woken up early and practiced for an hour before Hermione had told him it was time to set everything up and get ready for Luna.

Feeling Luna’s and Parvati’s tightnesses gripping his many shafts as they climaxed, and hearing his wife’s purrs of pleasure reminded Harry that it was time. With a wave of his wand, Hermione’s clothes tore themselves to shreds as they flew from her body. Hermione giggled when Daphne squeaked, startled by Hermione’s sudden nudity. In no time at all, Hermione herself was as entrapped and impaled by the wriggling tentacles as the other two cat-witches.

No longer content to be mere spectators, Dora and Fleur couldn’t take it any more. Quickly they stripped off each other’s clothing and began fondling one another. Jennifer raised her eyebrows at Daphne and grinned.

“Ready?” asked Jennifer.

“...as I’ll ever be!” panted Daphne, fluttering her eyelashes coquettishly.

The last two clothed members of the Coven removed their garments in a trice. Soon the entire Coven was moaning and writhing, pleasuring and devouring each other with fingers and hungry mouths while Harry’s tentacles eventually found their way to each and every one of them.

In the darkness, beads of sweat rolled down Harry’s face as he tried to hang on, but giddiness finally began to overcome him. He honestly had no idea how he’d managed to keep himself together so long. Harry could feel himself deep inside each and every member of the Coven: Hermione, Parvati and Luna, Dora, Fleur, and Daphne and Jennifer—all connected as one—connected as never before in an endless circle of bliss.

Squalls of Euphoria began to sweep through the entire Coven. Cascading tremors of ecstasy rippled through them again and again as the whirling Vortex of Magic grew larger and larger.
Finally it was too much, and Harry convulsed, swept away by the tsunami. He exploded, releasing himself in wave after wave—erupting like a geyser—injecting a flood of his sticky essence into the entire Coven’s depths. As the passionate fervor of the Coven fed back in on itself, Harry found himself as awash in uncontrollable multiple cascading climaxes as the others.

The Magic arced like bolts of lightning as the moans and meows of the Coven echoed throughout. The Barn lit up, bathed in the pulsating silvery luminescence emanating from the Coven, brighter than any moment to date.

Filaments of Magic—all colours of the rainbow—branched from the major crackling arcs bursting from the Coven and began crawling across the walls, ceiling, and floor of the barn. The stone from the Room of Requirement glowed intensely.

There was one last blinding flash of light... and it was over. The Coven fell into Oblivion.

When Harriet came to—several hours later—in the midst of a very sticky pile of glowing, luminous witches, she gave Hermione a puzzled look. Giggling, Hermione found her wand and conjured up a towel to wipe away the excess semen from her face and hair before answering Harriet’s unspoken question.

“I’m really not certain Harriet, but if I had to guess, I’d say that either the Coven Magic—or, more likely—you yourself unconsciously forced the change after you’d spent yourself. You’ve just been the ultimate expression of maleness... and I think a big part of you just needed to be a girl again after all of that!”

Harriet peered in amazement at all of the girls around her—drenched in Shokushu-Harry’s semen—and couldn’t help a laugh escaping. She clapped her hand to her mouth immediately, a guilty expression on her face.

“Yeah,” she muttered, “I see what you mean...”

“Mmm but it was fun Harriet,” said Luna dreamily.

“Please... don’t feel guilty, Harriet...” said Daphne

“.And we all enjoyed it very much. I hope we do eet again sometime,” added Fleur. Jennifer and Parvati nodded, beaming at Harriet.

“They’re right, Harriet,” agreed Dora. “That ‘as to be the kinkiest thing I’ve ever done, and I loved every minute of it.”

“Blimey... I’m bloody knackered after all of that,” Harriet chortled. “Next time, maybe you should give the Shokushu thing a go, Dora! You’re the only other metamorphmagus in the Coven after all.”

Dora turned crimson and grinned shyly back at Harriet.

“Hmm... maybe I will.” said Dora quietly. “But I’ve only ever tried bein’ a boy cosmetically—never functionally... I wouldn’t know where to begin.”

“Erm... well I suppose I could help with that a bit,” said Harriet. “Though Hermione is really the one who understands best how all of the plumbing works.”

“Well, all you need is the diagrams really...” Hermione reddened. “Speaking of transformations, look at the barn.”
“Wow! You’re right!” exclaimed Jennifer. “That’s amazing. It looks like the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts--like a castle made out of stone I mean... instead of bricks...”

“Let’s test it out,” said Daphne eagerly.

“I’m so worn out, I can’t even think about training...” groaned Harriet, “And I’m the one who wanted it the most.”

“Well, never mind Harriet,” chimed in Hermione. “We’re just supposed to be relaxing on weekends anyway--Pomfrey’s orders.”

“Yeah,” said Jennifer, “Just think of something fun, Harriet.”

“Er... well given the dreadful weather outside--maybe it’ll make some place sunny for us?” began Harriet. “But why don’t you guys chose!?"

“Oooh, I know just ze place,” cooed Fleur.

Fleur grinned and closed her eyes. A few moments later, the Coven found themselves on a bright sandy beach, the blue-green waters of the sea sparkling in the sunlight and lapping at the shore.

“Oh! The Côte d’Azur!” squeaked Hermione joyfully. “It’s gorgeous...”

“Oui!” Fleur nodded and beamed radiantly. “Zis is famous nude beach--but here, ees only for us.”

“Bloody brilliant Fleur!” grinned Dora, conjuring up a pair of sunglasses.

~o0o~

“Madam Lestrange,” Percy bowed stiffly as he took a seat across the table from the notorious Dark witch. He had to admit, that despite having grown accustomed to the necessity of working with such people, that she still made him feel a bit uncomfortable... Or maybe it was the way that she was looking at him, almost hungrily.

“Well, aren’t you scrumptious!? Come now my dear boy,” purred Bellatrix Lestrange. “Why so formal? You and I are almost old friends now. Perhaps if Dolores would allow, we could spend some time to get to know one another... more intimately.”

Percy couldn’t help eyeballing Bellatrix’s cleavage as she thrust her breasts towards him and battèd her long Dark lashes. He blushed furiously and gulped, surprised to find himself growing warm.

Dolores Umbridge chuckled and inclined her head slightly.

“Well, as long as you leave Percy in one piece, my deputy is free to fraternise with anyone who supports our mutual agenda,” Dolores offered sweetly. “It is entirely up to him...”

“Erm...” Percy swallowed nervously again.

Lestrange was oddly compelling, though Percy had never supposed that he might fancy an older woman of Dark proclivities. But it had been a long time since he’d had a bit of fun after all. Percy supposed that under the circumstances, it was only natural that he would find Bellatrix alluring--especially given the extremely low cut of the black dress she was wearing.

Bellatrix seemed almost able to read Percy’s mind.

“Perhaps later then... after the meeting?” she said with a smirk.
“Anyway, you know why we’re here, Bellatrix,” Dolores began. “My contact on the Committee for Statutory Violations informs me that the vote on Monday in the ICW is likely to go Dumbledore’s way.

“If that is indeed the case, then my ability to travel abroad will be seriously curtailed. However, Percy and I have a plan to draw out Dumbledore and Potter which will require your expertise. And if our plan is effective, then it matters little how the vote at the ICW goes... Eventually--should all go as planned--our friends overseas will see their own opening to taking back Power for the Pure of Blood in their own nations...”
Shrieking happily, ice crunching underfoot as they ran through the pelting hail, the Coven was even more appreciative of their replica of the Room of Requirement. Heralding the approach of winter, the hailstorm had raged while they had been lounging in the stunningly realistic simulation of the French Riviera under summer skies.

But as cold as it was outside, the biting chill of the mid-Autumn storm didn’t phase the Luminous Coven one bit. They were all the more thankful though, for the numerous showers and bathtubs in the manor when they washed away the sand from their more sensitive regions.

Feeling relaxed, and in a celebratory mood, Harriet, Hermione, and the rest of the Coven made up for missing breakfast and lunch with an early dinner. Dobby outdid himself, providing a magnificent feast which rivaled any served at Hogwarts.

Dinner was followed by an evening watching films on the television, and browsing the internet. Many giggles were had when Jennifer googled Shokushu. Harriet groaned and palmed her blazing red face when Jennifer found several animated cartoons from Japan featuring the lusty tentacle monsters.

“How do muggles seem to know so much about them?” asked Daphne, biting her lip and frowning in puzzlement. “I thought wizards kept monsters and magical beings a secret.”

“I expect that Shokushu are like Dragons, or even Yeti and Kappa,” Hermione replied. “Most muggles have heard of them through stories--myths, legends, and anecdotes--but don’t really believe they’re real.

“That’s what I reckoned. I was wondering if they might be related to Cthulhu,” Jennifer pondered aloud. “That’s really why I googled them, not really to tease Harriet.”

“Cthulhu?” Hermione’s furry ears pricked questioningly. The term seemed vaguely familiar, but she was perplexed that she couldn’t recall a source for it.

“Yeah,” said Jennifer. “Cthulhu was a creature with tentacles in a story by HP Lovecraft. He wrote weird creepy horror stories--another one of my dad’s favourite authors.”

“Oh... I’ve heard of Lovecraft, but never read him,” Hermione admitted, looking slightly embarrassed. “But I remember reading about Cthulhu now in a book about literary monsters. In any case, who knows? Lovecraft may have been aware of the Japanese myths and legends, or maybe he just made Cthulhu up altogether...”

Harriet breathed a sigh of relief when talk of Shokushu and Cthulhu came to an end, and the Coven moved onto watching some of the latest music videos. The Coven fell asleep snuggled together in front of the television, and Harry found he’d reverted back to being a boy the following morning.

The rest of the weekend was spent relaxing and engaging in hobbies. On Sunday, Hermione engrossed herself in a book of HP Lovecraft’s short stories while Fleur and Daphne browsed Jennifer’s library. Harry had another go at painting with Jennifer. Dora, Parvati, and Luna spent much of the day in the music room. They all felt well rested when they woke early Monday morning and stepped through Aphrodite’s portrait at Jennifer’s, and emerged on the other side of the wall in their corridor at Hogwarts.

Harry had been perfectly happy to get back to work, but he couldn’t help feeling relieved when
“Harry dear,” she said with a smile, addressing him with warm familiarity. “Professor Dumbledore would like a word with you in his office—all of you that is. I think it might be some good news...”

Harry perked up. “Really? What’s going on then? Does this have something t’do with the Minister?”

“I think the headmaster is in a better position to answer your questions dear. Hurry along now...”

Hestia turned to Jennifer. She gave her a hug and whispered in her ear. A flicker of puzzlement crossed Jennifer’s features, but she nodded before joining the others.

“What was that about?” asked Harry as they made their way to Dumbledore’s office.

“I... I’m not sure,” Jennifer replied, biting her lip pensively. “Hestia just said that there was someone we were going to meet, and that we might be able to help them.”

“That’s odd. I wonder who it could be...” said Hermione, furry ears twitching with curiosity. “Oh well,” she continued after a moment of thought, “I suppose we’ll find out soon enough.”

When the Coven crowded into the headmaster’s office, Dumbledore was waiting with twinnkles in his eyes, though nobody else but Fawkes seemed to be there with him. Harry supposed that whoever else they were meeting was waiting in another room. As usual, Dumbledore offered everyone comfy chairs and cups of tea. Once everyone was seated the headmaster began.

“Thank you all for coming today,” Dumbledore beamed. “I have some welcome news that concerns us all, though that is not the only reason why I have asked you all to join me...”

“Hestia told me that someone wants to meet us,” Jennifer interjected.

“Indeed,” Dumbledore agreed, “And momentarily you shall. But to begin, the news which brings us together is that the International Confederation of Wizards met early this morning in Brussels. They issued a ruling based largely on the evidence gathered by you during the raid on the Ministry compound in Wales, and also during the rescue of Arthur Weasley.

“The Committee for the Investigation of Statutory Violations has spent several weeks sorting through the evidence, and suffice it to say that they found it all credible. Thus, when they made their recommendation to the general assembly of the ICW today, a resolution was passed to issue an International Arrest Warrant for Minister Umbridge.”

Jaws dropped, and gasps of amazement issued from the Coven, the tails of the cat-witches quivering with excitement. The portraits on the wall burst into applause. Harry’s eyes widened.

“That’s excellent sir!” he exclaimed. “Does that mean that they’re sending help?”

“Alas, that is beyond the purview of the ICW,” the headmaster answered. “The matter is still regarded as an internal conflict, and foreign forces would only be dispatched if this conflict threatened to spill across international boundaries.”

“I suppose that makes sense,” Harry sighed, “It might be too interfering otherwise.” Hermione nodded in agreement.

“Indeed! However,” Dumbledore continued, “it does mean that our cause is legitimised, and that Minister Umbridge is more or less trapped in Britain. It will be very difficult for her to find safe
harbour, should she choose to flee when we close in on her.”

“About that sir,” said Harry, “How’s it going finding the rest of the internment centres?”

Dumbledore let out a sigh. “Ah... Unfortunately Harry, I believe that after your raid on the Welsh Compound, the others were more carefully hidden. We are still looking, of course, but our forces are still stretched somewhat thin—despite an upsurge in recruitment—especially as we now have a sizable contingent protecting Puddleby from suffering further retaliatory measures.”

“What about countering the Minister’s plans?” asked Hermione. “Do we have any idea yet what she’s planning next.”

“Not at the moment,” Dumbledore responded with another sigh. “However, I am considering several of the most likely scenarios—one of which is that she may make an attempt on Hogsmeade to draw myself and Harry out—and I am formulating a number of plans to counter each and every one of them.

“When I have some further information regarding her movements, I shall be certain to inform you. And then together, we shall choose the best option—one which shall hopefully lead to the end of this war. Now, if there are any more questions, please feel free to ask.”

When nobody seemed to have anything else to ask, Dumbledore nodded.

“Well then, perhaps it is time to meet our guests.” He waved his wand and a tall bookcase slid to the side, revealing a hidden mahogany door. Harry wondered if it led to Dumbledore’s quarters. The door swung open, and two people stepped into the room.

Harry flushed in recognition. The shy little girl reddened as well and hid behind her mother. A hot cauldron of emotions stirred inside Harry as he recalled the state in which he’d last seen the girl. A surge of savage fury flooded his veins, remembering what the guards at the Welsh compound had done to her.

For a brief moment, Harry felt like blowing something up, or burning another building to the ground. Hermione quickly took Harry’s hand and gave it a comforting squeeze; he closed his eyes and breathed deeply, feeling himself calm again.

Jennifer swallowed, suddenly realising why Hestia had given her the heads up. She glanced at Harry and saw the same distress written all over his face. She knew that if Harry was too upset to say anything, that it might be up to her.

“Introductions hardly seem necessary,” said Dumbledore softly. “But I would like to say that the testimony of Ms Andrea Mason and her daughter was crucial in swaying the Committee to press for the arrest of Minister Umbridge...”

“And I wanted to thank you all for that opportunity, and... and I really didn’t get a chance to thank you properly when you rescued us,” Andrea interjected. “Words really aren’t enough—but thank you...” Tears began to trickle as she attempted a smile.

“Thank you especially for saving my daughter, Samantha--she means the world to me--she’s the only family I have left. I... I could have died happy knowing that she was safe, but... you saved us both--gave us both a chance to live--to be a family again... Thank you so much!”

“Th...thank you! ...from me too!” squeaked a scared little voice from behind Andrea Mason. Samantha peeked her head around her mother.
Harry suddenly found himself with tears streaming down his cheeks. The little girl looked even younger to his eyes than he or Hermione had at her age, the year they had started Hogwarts. But she had already suffered a lifetime’s worth—as Jennifer had—under the brutal onslaught of those such as Dolohov and Rowle. Harry instinctively knew that she still had to be suffering. Nobody could have survived such a traumatic ordeal without nightmares and panic attacks... she might for years to come.

“Hi!” Harry barely managed to croak. “You’re welcome...” He glanced at Jennifer, catching the rest of the Coven’s glistening eyes as he did so, and then peered questioningly at Hermione.

Hermione could feel it. She knew what Harry wanted to say—what he wanted to ask if he had a voice.

“All right!” said Hermione as she smiled, her own eyes teary. “I’m glad we were there--that we were able to save you, Samantha... to save both of you...” Hermione peered earnestly at Samantha’s mother. “We... we’d like to help you some more if you’ll let us... if Professor Dumbledore will let us...”

“I... I don’t understand,” Andrea Mason looked puzzled. “You’ve already done so much for us. How can you help us more than you already have?”

All eyes turned to Dumbledore. The headmaster peered back at his students over the top of his half-moon spectacles, feeling the same ache in his heart as they all gazed at him beseechingly.

Dumbledore had to concede that their unspoken request wasn’t entirely unexpected. He had considered the idea himself, but had decided to leave well enough alone unless a member of the Coven brought it up. But now the burden had been thrust right back in his lap. Dumbledore’s clear blue eyes finally came to rest on Jennifer, and he knew that in the end, there there was only one correct choice for this circumstance, and that he had to be the one to make the offer.

“Ms Mason, Samantha...” he began, “What my students are offering is nothing short of a miracle—a miraculous healing. What might normally be accomplished only after many months—if not years—of counseling and recovery for victims of Trauma, can be accomplished in the space of minutes... thanks to a special talent of those who sit before you.

“My students—the Potters and their friends—are the only ones to have seen a certain spell through to its fullest potential—a spell which drives away Darkness and Death—a spell which restores the Spirit. They are truly the Masters of this Life affirming spell as are no others in the wizard world.

“With this spell—in their hands—Samantha’s nightmares can be put to rest and her terrors dispelled... if you would allow my students to perform this Charm upon her.

“There is only one possible side-effect of which you must be aware. If Samantha has a certain recessive gene—and there is a good chance that she does—then this spell could activate this gene. If this should occur, Samantha... your daughter... she would gain the ability to control Magic—in short, she may possibly become a witch.”

“You’re joking!” gasped Andrea Mason.

The headmaster shook his head. “Not at all. If Samantha does indeed gain magical abilities, she would need training of course. And she is of the right age to begin such training here at Hogwarts. Normally, Hogwarts operates as a boarding school, but under the current circumstances, I could see fit to allow you to stay with her here for the time-being. The choice is yours.”

“Erm... I... I don’t know. This... this is quite unbelievable...” Andrea Mason trailed off, a shocked
expression on her face, and glanced at her daughter uncertainly, whose eyes had gone all wide and pleading.

“Mummy? Please...?” squeaked Samantha.

~o0o~

Garrick Ollivander tapped his steepled fingers against each other while he waited in Dumbledore’s office with a trunk full of wands. He peered curiously at the woman in the armchair next to his, and at the headmaster. Dumbledore had sent for him nearly twenty minutes ago with a cryptic request. Ollivander was extremely grateful for the Order’s protection in one of their safehouses, so of course he had come at once.

A number of Dumbledore’s delicate silver and gold instruments appeared to be whirring and spinning with great intensity as Fawkes eyed them warily. Not more than ten minutes later the door burst open and a giddy little girl ran in squealing loudly, a radiant smile on her face.

“Mummy!” she shouted gleefully. “I can do Magic... I’m a witch now!”
As the weeks passed, another page on the calendar turned and the first snows began to fall. The Coven had settled into their routine of school during the week, and home on the weekends. But the feeling that something imminent was about to happen never left them.

In that time, Samantha Mason gradually got used to being a witch, and used to being around children her own age again. She and her mother were taken under Hestia Jones’ wing, in whose quarters they were both staying.

Daphne couldn’t help but feel a sense of kinship, seeing her own younger sister whenever she looked at the girl. Likewise, Jennifer, despite feeling a bit discomforted by the reminder of the similarity of her experiences to Samantha’s, made herself available any time Samantha just wanted to talk about things.

Indeed, the entire Coven went out of their way to make Samantha feel welcome. Luna and Parvati introduced her to wizarding games. Fleur chatted to the girl in French. Dora began teaching Samantha self-defence techniques, and Harry and Hermione joined in whatever was going on at every opportunity.

Late one evening, the Potters lay awake in bed by themselves in their private chambers. Hermione purred as she gently kneaded Harry’s chest while he stroked her furry ears.

“Hermione,” said Harry after they had been laying in silence for a few moments, “I’ve been thinking...”

“Yes Harry?” The furry ear which Harry was stroking flicked.

“Well... I’ve been wondering, what if we could turn more muggles into wizards? D’you think we should?”

Hermione frowned pensively. “I’m not sure Harry. I know it seems like it might be a good thing, but there’s so much to consider. For one thing, not everyone might want to be a wizard--lots of people are frightened of magic or don’t understand it. And not everyone would use magic for Good. We need to be very careful about who we consider turning.

“Yeah,” responded Harry, nodding in agreement, “I was sort of thinking the same thing now. At first I thought it would be great to give everyone magic, but then I started to have second thoughts. I was thinking about Puddleby--what if our Patronuses accidentally turned a few muggles into wizards?”

“Well, I don’t think we ought to worry about that too much. I doubt very many people came into contact with our Patronuses, and any who do start showing signs of magic could be trained to use it properly. It would only be a problem if too many people became wizards all at once... There aren’t enough wizards qualified to train everybody.”

“Are you sure?” Harry looked troubled. “It’s just... I don’t want to cause more problems for Dumbledore. The Ministry is already blaming him for giving muggles wands and teaching them how to be wizards.”

“That’s true,” Hermione admitted ruefully. “But it’s all a fraud Harry. We already know that the Pureblood Supremacists in the Department of Mysteries are just making things up to go after Dumbledore and you. They’re just using a statistical analysis of the increase in muggleborn wizards as a basis for their false claims. Whatever happens in Puddleby won’t make a whit of difference one
“Okay!” Harry sighed with relief. “Thanks Hermione, that’s a load off my mind...”

The scruffy bewhiskered old bartender in the pub which smelled vaguely of goats pointed his wand at the dying embers in the hearth. Fresh logs appeared and the fire sparked to life, orange flames crackling merrily. The three unkempt wizards nursing firewhiskeys and ales at a table near the fireplace nodded in gratitude. Aberforth Dumbledore grunted and shuffled back to the bar.

At that moment, another wizard in a thick blue cloak and a long woolen scarf wrapped many times round his neck burst through the rickety front door, letting in a flurry of snow. The wizard slammed the door shut and brushed the dusting of snow off his shoulders, glancing around the pub, his eyes wild.

“What’ll it be?” asked Aberforth, paying little heed to the panicked state of the new arrival. The other wizard stared at Aberforth for a moment.

“Aberforth,” gasped the potential customer.


“No... I mean Headmaster Dumbledore!” the other wizard interjected. “We need him... NOW!”

Aberforth scowled and turned away. “Hmmph! Albus... it’s always about him, isn’t it!? Anyone’d think ‘e’s the only Dumbledore. Dunno why I even bother to...”

“Blast it man! You’re his brother aren’t you? You must have a way to contact him. We need his help right now--there’s a horde of Inferi bearing down on Hogsmeade as we speak...”

Classes had let out for the day and Harry and Hermione were packing a few things into their bags for their weekend at home when Professor McGonagall’s crisp voice emanated from Harry’s mirror.

“Thank Goodness!” McGonagall exclaimed when she saw Harry’s face in the mirror. “No time to explain Mr Potter... The headmaster needs to see you--all of you, the Unaffiliated--in his office immediately.”

“Er... of course. We’ll be there right away,” said Harry, feeling a sense of trepidation at McGonagall’s tone. Hurriedly, Harry and Hermione gathered the rest of the Coven and made their way to Dumbledore’s office.

“So what’s this all about?” asked Parvati, the question which was on everyone’s mind.

“No idea...” Harry replied.

“But it seems really urgent,” Hermione added.

“And we’ll know soon enough,” Luna told Parvati.

The Potters and the rest of the Coven bustled into Dumbledore’s office, surprised to find it packed with wizards and witches. Among them were Kingsley Shacklebolt, Madam Bones, Dawlish, and a number of others that they knew to be members of the Order of the Phoenix.
“Ah, Harry...” said Dumbledore, turning from his conversation with Madam Bones to greet the Coven, “Thank you and your companions for coming so quickly. Sirius, Remus, and Alastor should be joining us shortly as well.”

“Sir,” Harry began, “Professor McGonagall seemed a bit upset. Is there an Inferi attack?”

“Of a sort Harry,” replied the headmaster. “Hogsmeade is being invaded as we speak...”

The Coven gasped at Dumbledore’s pronouncement. The headmaster carried on before anyone had a chance to interrupt.

“...However, this was not entirely unexpected. I believe that the moment has arrived Harry. The Inferi incursion is unusual in that nobody in Hogsmeade has been killed as of yet...”

“Then we should deal with them before anyone does get killed, shouldn’t we sir?” said Harry, unable to help himself.

“In due time my dear boy, however, we should not respond with undue haste, before taking stock of the situation. I do not believe this to be a random attack, and I suspect that these are not contagious Inferi. The fact that the Inferi are menacing, but holding back, suggests that the Minister is baiting her trap for us...”

Harry’s eyes widened in understanding.

“It would appear that Minister Umbridge is loathe to wipe out Britain’s largest All-Wizard community,” Dumbledore continued, “lest she lose the support of some of her closest allies, and experience further erosion of whatever public relations advantage that she currently retains. No doubt Ministry forces are at the ready--to arrest us the moment we arrive to rescue Hogsmeade.”

“But you have a plan, don’t you?” said Hermione, furry tail twitching.

“Indeed I do Mrs Potter.” Dumbledore nodded. “Of course, trap or not, we must meet this challenge head on. I have called upon the rest of the Order to join us in this engagement. It is my contention that Minister Umbridge will have brought most of the Ministry’s forces to bear against us, seeking to end this conflict once and for all.”

Harry swallowed as he and Hermione shared a look with the rest of the Coven. This was it then--the moment had come which would determine the future of Britain, win or lose.

“Right! We’re ready sir,” said Harry resolutely. “So when are leaving for Hogsmeade?” Harry was surprised to see a twinkle in Dumbledore’s eyes.

“Actually Harry, you and your companions will not be entering the village,” the headmaster replied.

“What?” gasped Fleur. The entire Coven looked equally flabbergasted.

“But sir! ... You just said...” Dora blurted out.

Harry felt his blood rushing in his ears, unable to believe that Dumbledore was going to keep him out of things. This was what all the training had been for. And hadn’t he and the Coven proved more than once that they could handle themselves in battle?

“So, you’re not letting us fight then?” A hint of anger crept into Harry’s voice.

“Oh, indeed your skills shall certainly be put to the test,” Dumbledore retorted, almost cheerfully.
“Just not in Hogsmeade. No Harry... I am sending you and your companions to take the Ministry!”

“Wait... What?” Harry’s jaw dropped. He wasn’t certain that he’d heard correctly.

“You and your team shan’t be alone,” Dumbledore went on. “You will also be accompanied by certain Order members—those best positioned to take up their former positions of Authority: Madam Bones, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and John Dawlish. Sirius, Remus, and a number of others shall also be going along to back you up.

“While the Minister is distracted - her eyes on Hogsmeade - she will not be expecting an attack on the Ministry itself. I believe that she will be here personally to oversee our capture. It is also probable that she will return to the Ministry should her plans for us here fall awry. This is our best chance to capture the Minister, either in Hogsmeade or at the Ministry.”

“But what about the Inferi?” piped up Daphne. “Aren’t we needed to deal with them?”

“And won’t Minister Umbridge be expecting to see Harry in Hogsmeade?” asked Hermione.

“As to the Inferi, I have devised a new spell for dealing with them en masse,” Dumbledore responded, eyes twinkling. “Or rather... I have modified an existing spell. It is a variation on the Immolation Curse, applicable only to those who are already dead. It won’t be quite as powerful and effective as your special talent, but it should suffice. Groups of internally combusting Inferi will be halted in their tracks, immobile and unable to catch fire to their surroundings.

“And as to Harry, Mrs Potter, indeed the Minister will be expecting to see him in Hogsmeade. That is why I will be asking Harry to provide me with a few of his hairs...”

“Polyjuice potion!” Hermione gasped. “You’re going to polyjuice someone to look like Harry!”

“Very good Mrs Potter. You are quite correct,” Dumbledore agreed. “Several someones in fact.”

“Wait,” said Harry worriedly. “Are you sure that’s safe? Whoever looks like me is going to be a target...”

“That’s right Potter,” growled a voice that Harry recognised. Harry spun around to see Mad Eye Moody entering Dumbledore’s office with Sirius and Lupin.

“We’re all targets anyway,” the scarred ex-auror continued. “This isn’t the time for being noble Potter. We’ve all got jobs to do and we need to get a move on. The time for sitting around and jawin’ is over and done...”

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A murmur went up in the Great Hall, where Professor McGonagall had assembled all the students and given them the news that Hogsmeade was under siege by Inferi and the Ministry. A number of pupils had gathered at the Mingling Table to discuss the situation.

“So... what are we gonna do?” asked Ron. “I know Harry’s going to fight. We have t’do something too--we can’t just sit this one out.”

“Well said little brother!” Fred grinned, slapping Ron on the back.

“Hear, hear!” said George, nodding. Ginny beamed proudly at Ron.

“But you heard McGonagall,” said Padma anxiously. “Only students who are of age are allowed to
“So what?” Susan Bones frowned. “If the Inferi or the Ministry attacked Hogwarts too, we’d have to fight anyway. We don’t really have a choice if we want to stop what them from hurting people we care about. My auntie is going to fight them, and so am I. Isn’t this what we’ve been training for these past weeks?”

“Absolutely!” Neville exclaimed, his eyes burning with resolve. “All of our practice with fighting spells won’t mean anything if we don’t use it to help. We need to do our bit too.”

“Okay... You’re right!” Padma agreed. “Of course we have to help. I didn’t mean that we shouldn’t, I was just pointing out that McGonagall and the other professors might try to stop us...”

“They’ll be too busy for that,” said Fred dismissively.

“But how do we get to Hogsmeade and avoid the Inferi?” asked Seamus. “We haven’t learned how to apparate yet...”

“Brooms,” answered Viktor Krum. “I vos going to suggest zat for the younger students to begin with, but I think brooms is ze best anyvay. Ve vill fly to Hogsmeade and attack from the sky.”

“Of course...” Cedric’s eyes lit up, “Brilliant, Krum!” Cho smiled and nodded her agreement.

“Smashing! I’m in!” said Angelina.

“Count us in then.” Alicia Spinnet and Katie Bell both nodded as well.

“Me too,” Dean added.

“Alright... this could work! We’re all in too then,” said Blaise Zabini, glancing at Pansy Parkinson and Theodore Nott.

Theo flexed his prosthetic fingers and grinned at Blaise and Pansy. Over the past few months Theo had grown used to using a wand with his left hand. And upon his return to Hogwarts, Dumbledore had developed the prosthetic fingers for Theo. They would work well enough to hold a broom with his right hand.

Viktor nodded his approval and glanced at the rest. Hannah Abbott and Ernie MacMillan nodded back, and the other two Ravenclaws, Terry Boot and Anthony Goldstein, indicated their readiness as well.

“Very good!” said Viktor. “Ve shall slip away when McGonagall is busy. Just to keep in mind vhen fighting, zat Reductor spells are best for Inferi...”
Chapter 187

Minister Dolores Umbridge shivered slightly as the shadows of the mountains crept over Hogsmeade and the afternoon turned to dusk. She ignored the brief flicker of doubt and recast her warming charm, peering below at the town, searching for signs of Dumbledore and Potter. From their vantage point on the rooftop terrace of the Three Broomsticks, the Minister and her deputy, Senior Undersecretary Percy Weasley, could see most of the town.

Several hundred Inferi milled in the snowy streets, doing little else but lurching and groaning. Just out of sight in corners, alleyways, and shadows, the bulk of the Ministry of Magic’s forces--Unspeakables, Snatchers, and the few remaining Aurors who hadn’t resigned in protest--lay in wait for the expected Insurrectionists to arrive.

Deputy Minister Percy Weasley examined the strange device in his hand, marveling again at the new invention from the Department of Mysteries. It struck Percy as somewhat ironic that he was in possession of a piece of magical technology within which his father would be utterly fascinated. The magical communication device was based on a muggle technology--two way radios. It had been developed specifically for coordinating large scale operations such as the one they were engaged in that night--operations which required instant communication.

Minister Umbridge nodded at Percy, indicating that he should do a check. Percy pressed a button and cleared his throat.

“Calling all Units,” he began, hoping that his voice didn’t give away his nervousness, “any sign of Dumbledore or Potter?”

A voice crackled on the magical two-way radio. “Unit One responding--nothing here yet...”

“Nothing to report here either,” said a second voice.

“Wait...” said a third, “I think... something’s happening...”

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Warlock Crabbe cursed the cold, briskly rubbing his frozen hands together and wishing that something would just happen already. Warlock Goyle raised his eyes at his fidgeting companion. Several of the Unspeakables stationed with the two Death Eaters frowned.

“Keep quiet,” one of the Unspeakables hissed, “We don’t want to...”

The ringing sound of a number of loud apparition cracks in the street interrupted the disdainful Unspeakable. At the same time, the Deputy Minister’s youthful voice could be heard emanating from the newfangled contraption in the Unspeakable’s hand.

“Wait... I think... something’s happening,” the Unspeakable muttered in response.

Indeed, the street lit up and more cracks rang out as spells were cast by the half a dozen wizards who had just arrived. The previously listless Inferi lumbered into action and swarmed the wizards. Individually, the groaning reanimated corpses proved little match for the Reductor spells cast by the newcomers, but they made up for it with their greater numbers. In the flickering lights of the spells, two of the wizards were instantly recognisable; a tall wizard with a long silvery beard, and a young one with round glasses and a messy black moptop.
“It’s Dumbledore and Potter,” the Unspeakable barked into the magical two way.

“Take them now!” screeched Minister Umbridge’s voice from the device. “Use any means necessary.”

Crabbe and Goyle grinned at each other. Finally, their chance to avenge themselves and the Dark Lord was upon them.

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Minister Umbridge cackled gleefully as she peered over the balcony, looking in the direction from where the first sounds of fighting were coming. Suddenly, more apparition cracks echoed through the town, and soon the sound of pitched battle could be heard throughout Hogsmeade.

The Minister and her deputy knew that it must be the rest of the Order arriving to put down the Inferi, but they were relatively unconcerned. Dumbledore and Potter were the priority, and the Order was surely outnumbered by the Ministry’s forces and distracted by the Inferi.

“But why isn’t Potter using the Secret Weapon yet?” Percy muttered, frowning in puzzlement, as a flicker of uncertainty crossed his mind. “Something’s wrong!”

“Perhaps Potter requires his mate—the Halfbreed...” Dolores suggested. “The spell may require more than one to activate.”

“But where is she then?” Percy asked. The magical two-way crackled to life again, interrupting Percy’s pondering.

“I’ve got him,” said an excited voice. “Potter... I’ve just stunned Potter--outside Zonko’s.”

“That can’t be!” Dolores scowled. “He’s with Dumbledore outside the Post Office right now.”

“No he’s not,” said another voice belonging to a witch. “I’ve got Potter in my sights outside of Tomes and Scrolls.”

“They can’t all be Potter,” Percy fumed.

“POLYJUICE!” screamed Dolores. “But one of them has to be the real one. I don’t care how many Potters there are. Bring them all to me right now, and we’ll soon sort this out. But I need Dumbledore and the Potters alive--kill all the others if you have to.”

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Dumbledore whirled around gracefully, a jet of magic lancing from his wand. A score of Inferi halted in their tracks and shuddered; sparks and flame burst from their eyes and mouths as their flesh withered and blackened.

Spells shot out from the dark alley between the Post Office and the Grocery shop, exploding in the midst of the Order members who were fighting the Inferi. Cut off from the others by the smoke, and distracted by another group of the Undead bearing down on them, Dumbledore and the boy who looked like Harry Potter were quickly disarmed by expelliarmus spells.

Ropes conjured from thin air bound the headmaster and the boy. Warlocks Crabbe and Goyle chortled as each grabbed a prisoner and disapparated, marveling at how easy it had been to capture Dumbledore and Potter. Moments later they appeared on the rooftop terrace of the Three Broomsticks.
“What the Bloody Hell?” gasped Goyle.

Crabbe was equally flabbergasted to see a number of Unspeakables with three more Harry Potters in their clutches. Senior Undersecretary Weasley looked disconcerted to see so many Potters. Minister Umbridge’s features were livid.

“How many more?” she snarled at Dumbledore. “How many Potters did you make?”

Dumbledore regarded the Minister calmly. “Well now, surely you don’t expect me to make this easy for you, do you Minister Umbridge?”

“It was easy enough to capture you,” the Minister snapped. “And if you don’t tell me what I wish to know, some Veritaserum should loosen your tongue.”

“I expect so,” said Dumbledore cheerfully. “Unless of course, we have all imbibed the counter-potion to Veritaserum before embarking on our mission to rescue Hogsmeade.”

“Impossible!” The Minister looked briefly discomfited. “You would have had to know that we would be here to catch you...”

“Quite so,” Dumbledore interjected, his eyes twinkling.

“But the Ministry has been purged,” Percy asserted. “You can’t possibly have any moles left on the inside.”

“Perhaps,” Dumbledore replied. “Regardless, I did not need a mole to suspect that you would likely attempt to capture Harry and myself during our next encounter with the Inferi. In fact, you were all too predictable...”

“Ridiculous!” sputtered Minister Umbridge. “So you’re saying that you expect me to believe that you just waltzed in here knowingly and just... allowed yourself to be captured?”

“Indeed,” said Dumbledore.

Silence reigned on the snowy rooftop of the Three Broomsticks while the Minister tried to make sense of this turn of events. Dumbledore seemed all too pleased with himself, and Dolores didn’t like it one little bit. Percy was right, something was dreadfully wrong, but she couldn’t make heads or tails of the situation. Finally something inside of her snapped.

“Fine,” Umbridge growled. “If that’s the way you want to play it, I’ll just kill the Potters one by one while you watch, Dumbledore, and then I’ll finish you. Once you’re gone, it doesn’t matter if the real Potter is running around somewhere. I’ll find him and that little Halfbreed sooner or later, and when I do, you won’t be around to protect them anymore.”

Minister Umbridge glowered at Dumbledore and raised her wand, aiming it at one of the Potters.

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The squadron of brooms flew above the snow dusted treetops in the gathering dusk towards Hogsmeade. As they passed over the village, a battle could be seen raging below. Viktor Krum and Cedric Diggory each split off with a small group following them to aid the Order in the streets while the Weasleys and Neville circled above looking for Harry and the Unaffiliated.

“There... on the roof of the Three Broomsticks,” shouted Ginny. “Dumbledore and Harry--they’re in trouble.”
“But I don’t see Hermione and the others,” Neville yelled back.

“Blimey! There’s more than one Harry,” gasped Ron.

“Never mind that...” said Fred.

“...We’ll just have to save the lot of them,” George concluded.

The Weasleys and Neville swooped down towards the rooftop. Seeing the Minister aim her wand at one of the Harrys, Ginny was the first to react, casting a bombarda spell. Several things happened all at once when the explosive spell went off like a small grenade, hitting the terrace.

It wasn’t big enough to cause too much damage, but the force of the impact shook the roof, smoke billowed, and the surprise was enough to cause the Minister to shriek and prevent her from getting off a spell. Percy flung himself in front of the Minister as if to protect her.

The Unspeakables, and Crabbe and Goyle all dove for cover, releasing their grip on Dumbledore and the four Potters. Dumbledore took advantage of the confusion to perform wandless magic, slipping out of the ropes which bound him.

Freed from his bonds, Dumbledore pulled from his sleeve his hidden true wand, having used a spare during his fight with the Inferi. He quickly cast a releasing spell, freeing the Potters from their ropes. All four Potters seemed to have armed themselves with spare wands as well, having prepared with Dumbledore beforehand for the eventuality that they might need them.

Chaos erupted on the rooftop as the Minister, Percy, Crabbe, Goyle, and the Unspeakables all began to recover themselves and shoot spells at their attackers. Spell-fire flew everywhere as the Weasleys and Neville zoomed about on their brooms casting their own Stunning spells.

Warlock Goyle aimed a bolt of green lightning at Fred which barely missed him. George retaliated with an Expulsor. Goyle went flying off the roof, crashing to the street below. Meanwhile, a Stunning spell from Neville knocked Crabbe out cold. Dumbledore and the Potters were dueling handily and making short work of the Unspeakables,

Ron wheeled his broom around, easily dodging a stray Killing Curse. He fired a Stunning spell at the Minister, but Percy leapt in front of her again. The youngest Senior Undersecretary in history went out like a light, collapsing at the Minister’s feet.

Furious, Minister Umbridge realised that the situation on the rooftop was lost. She didn’t have Dumbledore or Potter, and nobody was left to protect her. She bolted inside the stairwell and slammed the door shut behind her. Dolores darted down the stairs and into the first room she saw, flinging green powder in the fireplace.

“The Ministry, Department of Mysteries, Operations Division,” she barked before jumping into the green flames and vanishing.

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The Ministry seemed unnaturally quiet with most of the workers gone home for the evening. Harry’s heart raced, his nerves on edge and his senses heightened. Despite the ease of their passage thus far, invisible as the Coven was while traveling through the paintings and portraits, Harry knew he couldn’t afford to let his guard down.

“It seems so empty,” Daphne murmured after leaving Shacklebolt, Madam Bones, Dawlish and Arthur Weasley, and Sirius and Lupin to secure the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. “I
suppose all the Aurors are in Hogsmeade?"

“Maybe, but we should still be careful,” Harry quietly warned the Coven. “I didn’t have time to paint any runes or Chinese symbols on us, so we’re vulnerable to physical attacks.”

“Of course Harry,” Hermione agreed with a flick of her bushy tail.

“We’ll be cautious Harry,” Dora whispered back. “I’d be surprised if there weren’t at the very least a skeleton crew of Unspeakables in the Department of Mysteries... and perhaps a bit of Security at the top level in the Atrium.”

“That’s what I expect too,” said Hermione. “But with any luck, dealing with whoever is left in the D.O.M. won’t be any worse than taking the Ministry compound in Wales...”

“Not to mention that we have Sirius and Lupin here to back us up if we need them,” Harry added.

“We’re nearly there, aren’t we?” asked Luna. “Isn’t the Department of Mysteries on Level Nine?”

“Yes,” Parvati answered. “I remember from before--just a few more paintings and portraits. We can enter the D.O.M. through the portrait of Prometheus.”

Jennifer swallowed nervously as she peered out of the landscape painting which the Coven was currently inhabiting. The corridor beyond the frame looked dark and forbidding. Dora gave her a comforting squeeze. Silently and invisibly, the Coven passed from one painting to the next until finally they reached the portrait of Prometheus.

Prometheus seemed quite pleased to meet Harry and Hermione again when they undid their Invisibility spells.

“There are at least a dozen Unspeakables here tonight,” he told the Coven after introductions had been made with Fleur, Luna, Daphne, and Jennifer. “They have not been alerted yet to your presence.”

“So we’ve still got the element of surprise,” whispered Harry. “Excellent!”

One by one, the Coven slipped out of the portrait and made their way down a hallway, past a chamber with an enormous working model of the solar system. The next door they passed appeared to be locked, but when it opened of its own accord in a beckoning manner, the Potters both recalled their previous visit.

It took all of their willpower not to enter the Chamber of Love--the massive luminous shimmering Orb seemed to be calling out to them again. Everyone felt it.

“Magnifique!” gasped Fleur, tears of joy trickling down her cheek.

“It’s beautiful,” said Jennifer.

“I think it’s making us glow again,” said Luna with a grin, her fluffy tail quivering with delight. That snapped Dora out of her trance.

“We’d better keep going--find the Unspeakables and take ‘em out before they discover us,” Dora muttered.

“Right... er... yeah!” Harry tore himself away. “Anyway, the Operations centre is this way,” he said, leading them on further down the corridor.
Hermione suddenly sniffed the cool subterranean air; she grabbed Harry’s arm, her furry tail bristling.

“Harry...wait!”

Two Unspeakables on patrol appeared as they rounded the corner at the end of the passage, spotting the Coven. Harry swore under his breath. The element of surprise was lost. The Coven began shooting Stunning spells from their wands, but the two Unspeakables dodged and hid behind the corners, returning fire.

“Bloody Hell!” yelled one of the Unspeakables. “Who are you lot?”

“That’s Potter and his halfbreed--and the rest of his little entourage from Hogwarts,” sneered the other. More shouts could be heard in the distance as the rest of the Unspeakables had been alerted by the sounds of battle.

“Quick, in here!” Dora flung open a door on the other side of the passage and the Coven darted inside, slamming the door and locking it behind them with a Colloportus spell. Banging and shouting could be heard coming from the other side.

“Zat won’t hold them long,” said Fleur nervously.

“It won’t have to,” said Harry, his face lighting up when he saw which room it was. “This is perfect...”

“What is this room?” asked Jennifer, peering around at the long rows and aisles of shelves holding what appeared to be thousands upon thousands of small glittering crystal orbs.

“The Hall of Prophecies,” Hermione replied. “We spotted it the last time we were here. The little globes all contain prophecies made by Seers over the centuries. According to Dumbledore, there’s a prophecy about Harry and Voldemort in here somewhere...”

“Anyway,” Harry interjected forcefully, getting back on the topic of most immediate concern, “we can hide in these aisles and start picking off the Unspeakables when they break down the door. Dora--you, Jennifer, Fleur and Daphne--you take that side. Hermione, Parvati, Luna, and I will take this side. As soon as you see someone appearing, stun them and bind them with Incarcerous spells.

“Sounds like a plan Harry!” Dora nodded.

Quickly, everyone took their positions, and not a moment too soon as the door burst open. Bolts of magic flew and the first three Unspeakables through the door collapsed, out cold and bound in ropes. But the others were not so readily subdued.

Thick smoke poured from a wand poking through the doorway, obscuring the Coven’s view. Rapid footsteps informed the Coven that the other Unspeakables were entering the Hall of Prophecies under cover of the smoke.

The battle in the Hall of Prophecies was fierce. The Unspeakables were playing for keeps, firing off Killing Curses without hesitation. Harry grit his teeth as he and Hermione reluctantly resorted to Sectumsempra. A Killing Curse only just missed Luna, shattering a row of Prophecies. Parvati responded with a Reductor spell and the offending Unspeakable’s screams echoed as he disintegrated.

The fight was a running one, and the Potters soon found themselves split off from the others in the Brain Room with two Unspeakables hot on their trail. Harry and Hermione hurtled through the door
at the other end of the room, entering a chamber which they hadn’t seen before. Not knowing what to expect, they both lost their footing, tumbling end over end painfully down a series of stone steps. Finally they came to a stop at the bottom of a sunken pit, sprawled on a stone floor.

Harry’s head was throbbing and spinning when he came to, his mouth full of blood from a cut on his inner lip. His face paled when he heard a high pitched chuckle and saw a toad-like figure dressed in pink holding a still unconscious Hermione, both of them on top of a craggy dais near an ancient stone archway, within which hung a fluttering wispy veil.

“Well, well... Potter!” hissed the Minister. “The REAL one I presume. Too bad for you--your little coup attempt ends right here, right now... after you’ve said goodbye to your filthy little halfbreed abomination.”

“NO!” gasped Harry, spitting out blood.

“Oh yes, Mr Potter!” chortled the Minister. “I was quite surprised indeed to find you and your little entourage here causing mayhem when I arrived just moments ago. But I couldn’t be happier at this turn of events. Don’t dare hope that your little friends might save you, they are still quite busy, I can assure you. You are quite alone at the moment...”

The Minister pointed at the two Unspeakables looming above Harry and continued. “...Alone and outnumbered, not to mention, unarmed.”

Harry groaned, sending another stab of pain coursing through his head. The Minister was correct; his wand was lying on the floor several metres away from him. He supposed that it was unlikely that he could accio it and take both the Unspeakables and the Minister in time to save Hermione from whatever awful fate the Minister had planned for her. Dark thoughts of Doom flashed before Harry’s eyes. Was this really how it was all going to end?

Just as Harry was about to give up all hope, bolts of red lightning flashed and the two Unspeakables fell to the floor, unconscious. Harry’s heart leapt for joy when he spied Luna and Parvati at the top of the stone steps, their bristling tails wagging angrily. Clearly they had defeated the Unspeakables which they had been facing. Harry hoped the others were faring just as well.

“NOOOO!” screamed the Minister as her last hope of success floundered before her eyes. Her face purple with rage, Minister Umbridge dropped Hermione and aimed her wand at the other two cat-witches. “FILTHY ANIMALS! ABOMINATIONS!”

Harry summoned his wand; it skittered across the stone floor and he caught it deftly in his hand just as Minister Umbridge screeched, “AVADA KEDAVRA.”

Luna and Parvati both ducked and rolled out of the path of the Minister’s Killing Curse. Harry took aim and slashed his wand. The Minister howled as her wand hand separated from her wrist in a crimson spray of blood.

Shrieking madly in pain, her eyes boggling in shock, Minister Dolores Umbridge staggered backwards and tripped over Hermione. Time seemed to move in slow motion as Dolores tumbled through the veil and vanished, the only trace of her left, a bloody hand lying on the dais near Hermione, and the fading echoes of her screams in the Chamber of Death.

Harry instinctively knew that Umbridge was gone--passed over to the Other Side. He swallowed when he realised just how close Hermione had come to dying. Relief flooded Harry when he saw Hermione stirring—a flick of an ear, a twitch of her furry tail—and heard her groan in pain. He dragged himself to the stone dais and clutched her to his chest.
Hearing more footsteps in the Chamber, Harry glanced up to see that the others had arrived. Dora, Daphne, Fleur, and Jennifer had joined Luna and Parvati, followed by Sirius, Lupin, and Arthur Weasley, all of them looking concerned.

“Hermione’s safe, but Minister Umbridge--she’s gone...” Harry gasped. “The Minister--she fell through the veil and disappeared...”

“Then it’s all over,” said Dora, grinning. “It’s finished... we’ve dealt with the Unspeakables here and apparently Dumbledore and his lot are just mopping up in Hogsmeade...
“So much for our weekend at home,” sighed Hermione, sitting up in her hospital bed and giving Harry a wan smile. Harry grinned back at her from his own bed in the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts.

“It could have been worse. At least neither of us needed any Skelegro,” he responded wryly.

“At least neither of us are dead,” said Hermione, raising an eyebrow pointedly. “Concussions, a few cracked ribs, a fractured wrist, and a broken leg between the both of us was a small price to pay for ending Minister Umbridge’s reign of terror.”

“Yeah, I suppose so.” Harry winced as he shifted his sore leg.

Luckily his leg had only sustained a clean break in his fall down the stone steps in the Department of Mystery’s chamber of Death, and Madam Pomfrey had healed it with a wave of her wand, but a day and a half later it was still stiff. Pomfrey had healed his cracked ribs just as easily, but they were still sore as well.

“It still hurts to breathe too,” Harry continued.

“Tell me about it,” Hermione groaned. “I almost feel worse than I did after the Battle of Hogwarts when we fought Voldemort’s forces.”

Harry nodded and looked at Hermione thoughtfully as he recalled the fall which could have otherwise killed Hermione and Jennifer.

“Yeah... those Chinese symbols are really effective,” said Harry. “I wish I’d had time to paint them on us before we went to the Ministry. Maybe... perhaps I should put them on all of us permanently.”

Hermione shook her head. “I’m not sure I’d want permanent tattoos Harry. Everything is over now.”

“But is it?” Both of Harry’s eyebrows popped up and he peered at Hermione earnestly. “I know Umbridge is gone and that the Unspeakables and Snatchers were captured and that Madam Bones and Shacklebolt are cleaning up the Ministry, but is it really over?”

“A very good question Harry,” said a new voice in the ward. Harry and Hermione looked up to see Dumbledore smiling warmly at them.

“For now,” continued the Headmaster, “I would say so. Indeed, the Order and Monsieur Delacour’s forces did manage to capture most of the Minister’s forces with minimal fatalities on both sides, though sadly, a few deaths besides that of Minister Umbridge and Mr Goyle were unavoidable during the battle at Hogsmeade and the Ministry.

“And thanks to the other files recovered from the Department of Mysteries during your most recent incursion, the Order of the Phoenix was able to locate and shut down forever the other Internment Camps yesterday. The vast majority of those who followed the Minister have been captured and are being held to await trial... including Percy Weasley.”

“Good!” Harry scowled as he contemplated Percy’s role in the Minister’s administration. “I hope he goes to prison for a long, long time.”

“Ah, I daresay that he shall,” said Dumbledore. “You will have some say of course, as a member of the Wizengamot.”
“Oh... right!” Harry looked surprised at the idea. “I’d almost forgotten that I have a seat on the Wizengamot.”

“Indeed...” The Headmaster regarded Harry with twinkling eyes. “Admittedly, the Wizengamot will be a bit smaller than you recall, as a number of Warlocks with seats are themselves facing trial as active participants in Minister Umbridge’s regime.”

“What about Bellatrix Lestrange?” asked Hermione. “Whatever happened to her?”

“Alas, Bellatrix Lestrange has thus far evaded capture,” Dumbledore sighed. “She was not to be found in Hogsmeade, nor at any of the remaining Ministry facilities. Though I do have sources which indicate that she has departed Britain for the time-being. It is quite possible that she may one day be a thorn in our side again... but I have been assured that an international arrest warrant shall be issued for Bellatrix.”

“I suppose that’s something,” Harry grumbled.

“Quite!” Dumbledore agreed. “Madam Lestrange should not be underestimated of course, but without powerful allies or a government sponsor, her reach and her ability to do harm is greatly diminished. She is on the run and with a bit of luck on our side, one day she will slip up and be arrested.”

“And the muggle Prime Minister--what’s going to happen to him?” asked Hermione pointedly. “Is Harry going to be able to go out in public as himself anytime soon?”

“Ah, well... that is an interesting story,” Dumbledore replied, perking up as twinkles returned to his eyes. “I paid a visit to the Prime Minister this morning with Madam Bones, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and Dame Angelika Machschnell of the ICW.

“When we left the Prime Minister, he was in the custody of muggle Authorities. Apparently, they have discovered ample evidence that the Prime Minister was involved in numerous crimes, ranging from trafficking in human slaves, to stealing elections, conspiring with terrorist organisations, engaging in war-crimes overseas, and framing and assassinating political dissidents... just to name a few.

“So, not only does the Prime Minister face several lifetimes worth of prison, his government shall collapse within a matter of days, and new elections called for. No doubt the current party in power shall find itself unceremoniously expelled--its seats in parliament drastically reduced to a minimal number.

“As a result of these transpirings, the muggle arrest warrants for Harry and for Sirius will be rescinded within the next few days.”

“That’s wonderful!” Hermione beamed. Purring, she pounced on Harry and gave him a big hug, her bushy tail quivering happily. “You’ll be able to go out as yourself again, Harry.”

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“Shame, I’m going to miss going out with Harriet,” said Jennifer, when Harry and Hermione told the rest of the Coven the good news after Pomfrey let them leave the infirmary.

“Yeah... Me too,” Daphne added sadly.

“Says who?” Harry half-grinned and rolled his eyes. “Just because I don’t have to be someone else
in public anymore, doesn’t mean I don’t want to be Harriet occasionally. You’ll still get your chance to dress me up like a dolly.”

“Mmm, zat is good,” said Fleur with a smirk, “because I was thinking of getting you a lovely evening gown for Christmas.”

“Oooh! Excellent idea Fleur,” Parvati giggled, swishing her sleek tail mirthfully. “Maybe we can find Harriet some nice lingerie for Christmas too.”

Luna peered at Harry perceptively and smiled. “Maybe we should keep this to ourselves though,” she said quietly. “Harry might not be ready for everyone to know that he’s a metamorphmagus yet.”

“Yes...” Hermione murmured, glancing around the corridor nervously, “maybe we should talk about Christmas presents for Harriet later.”

“True, it’s still a secret,” said Dora, nodding.

“Well, Dean already knows,” Harry sighed. “I probably can’t hide it forever. I’m not that fussed about it now that the Ministry isn’t after me anymore. Anyway... I’ve been thinking--what I really want for Christmas is to visit Godric’s Hollow. I think I’m finally ready...”

The rest of the Coven quieted and stopped teasing Harry about their plans for Harriet’s wardrobe. Hermione smiled sadly and slipped her hand into his, giving it a comforting squeeze.

“That’s a nice idea Harry,” she said. “If you want to go by yourself, we’ll understand...”

“No!” Harry interjected firmly. “I want you all to come with me. You’re all my family now. I’m going to bring the Ring of Peverell with me. I don’t know if it really does bring spirits back from the other side, but if it does, I want my parents to meet you all.”

“We’d like that Harry,” said Luna earnestly. “And they are real--I’m sure of that now more than ever. I heard the whispers beyond the veil in the Department of Mysteries.”

“Wait... you heard the voices too then?” asked Harry. “They weren’t just a figment of my imagination?”

He glanced at Hermione, who had been as close to the veil as anyone could possibly be without passing through it. Hermione looked briefly disconcerted.

“I... I thought I heard something too,” Hermione admitted. “I thought maybe it was just because I had been knocked on the head though. But Luna’s right Harry. With everything we’ve learned, we know that the spirits of people who’ve died continue on after death, and... and it seems that Peverell’s Ring is a real way to talk to them again--even if it can’t really bring them back to life.”

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Several more days passed as December wore on, and the snow began piling deeper around the castle. But Hermione still hadn’t been able to bring herself to call her mother on the mirror. It wasn’t until Harry told her that he was going to tell Dudley and Aunt Petunia that it was safe to return to Britain that Hermione finally resolved to make the call.

Hermione began with the good news about the end of Minister Umbridge, but when Jean saw her daughter’s blushing features and nervously twitching furry ears in Abby Brixton’s mirror, she knew that Hermione had something more to tell her. Jean listened patiently without interrupting as Hermione hesitantly began to explain the extent of her and Harry’s relationships with Luna and
Parvati, Fleur and Daphne, and Jennifer and Dora.

Jean only frowned once when Hermione told her about Dora’s part, clearly concerned about the age difference. But Jean pushed her concerns aside as she continued to listen.

“...We... we’re a Coven--a family--and we love each other very much,” said Hermione as she began her closing remarks. “It’s not just about sex--even though that’s part of it. And it’s not like we’re a harem all just about serving Harry’s needs... it’s not like that at all.

“I love them all as much as Harry does, and... and they all love us, and each other. I’m sorry--I know it’s hard to understand how we can all be in a relationship together all at once...”

Seeing her daughter on the verge of tears, Jean finally gave in to her urge to say something.

“Darling... Hermione, it’s alright... really! I promise. You’re right, it does seem a bit strange to me, but as long as you’re sure that you all love each other, that’s all that really matters. Please--you must believe me that I’ll get used to it.

“Anyway, your aunt and I will begin settling things here in Canada, and make arrangements to come home after the New Year. Oddly, we’ve both got used to living with Petunia and Dudley--we’re both quite fond of them, and we’ll be waiting for Dudley to just finish out this term at school. So I suppose I can at least understand the extended family aspect of your relationships.

“I remember Luna and Parvati, and Dora of course, and I recall meeting Daphne and Fleur once. You’ll have to introduce me to Jennifer. I look forward to seeing you and Harry and the rest of your companions when we return.”

“Oh, thanks Mum,” Hermione squeaked as she brushed aside a tear and smiled. “I just know you’ll love them all too! Really! They’re all so smart... and so brave... and kind...”

“Of course dear,” Hermione’s mother laughed. “They all sound delightful. Anyway, give Harry my love. I can’t wait to see you both again...”

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It was Christmas Day and Harry could hardly believe he was in the Burrow again. The last time he had seen it had been the summer before Second Year after Ron and the Twins had rescued him from the Dursleys in Mr Weasley’s flying Ford Anglia.

At the time, Mr Weasley had been the head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts office, though as Perkins had been the only other Ministry employee in that particular subdepartment of the DMLE, it hadn’t been the most prestigious position in the Ministry. In fact, it had been considered by many to be a very lowly position. Which had probably been one of the main reasons that had led to Percy Weasley’s utter disdain for his father.

But now, Arthur Weasley was the reluctant Minister of Magic. Kingsley Shacklebolt had been offered the job of Minister by the Wizengamot, but he had turned it down flat and nominated Mr Weasley instead. One of Harry’s first acts as a member of the Wizengamot had been to vote in favour of Kingsley’s recommendation.

Mr Weasley had been a bit reticent about accepting the post of Minister, but he had been persuaded by the argument that the Ministry needed a Minister who was strongly supportive of muggles and muggleborn wizards.

Mrs Weasley was very proud of her husband. And all things considered, Molly Weasley seemed
more cheerful than anyone had a right to expect, despite the fact that her son Percy was spending the rest of his life in prison for aiding and abetting Minister Umbridge’s many crimes. Molly had bustled about and provided a sumptuous Christmas Dinner for the numerous houseguests sharing Christmas with the Weasleys.

Harry supposed that Mrs Weasley was just pleased that all of her family were alive and had escaped the war unscathed. Though he felt more than a bit awkward, as Harry had been one of the many Wizengamot members to vote in favour of Percy’s conviction. Harry took some solace in the fact that the rest of the Weasleys rather felt that Percy deserved it.

It also helped that Sirius and Remus and the rest of the Coven had been invited to Christmas with the Weasleys as well. And despite Harry’s anxiety, it had actually been one of the nicest and most stress free Christmases that he could remember. Bill Weasley had introduced everyone to his muggle fiancée, Miriam—whom the Coven remembered meeting briefly at Halloween—and Parvati and Luna had announced an official date for their own wedding, which was to take place after the end of the school-year.

But as pleased as Harry was with all the joyful tidings and Christmas Cheer, he felt the need for a moment of quiet reflection. Hermione Potter glanced across the living room at her husband, having sensed his mood. Quietly, she made her way to Harry’s side and whispered in his ear.

“Do you want to go outside Harry?”

“Er... yeah,” Harry replied, nodding. “Just for a bit anyway.”

It was a cold, clear, moonlit night; snow crunched underfoot as the Potters made their way to the Weasleys’ orchard, arm in arm. Sitting on a log just on the other side of the orchard, they could see the lights of Ottery St Catchpole twinkling in the near distance. Hermione curled her bushy tail around Harry and lay her bushy head on his shoulder. They sat in silence for a short while. Finally, Harry spoke.

“You know Hermione, it’s funny--in a way, this is our real anniversary. Two years ago tonight, I realised how much you meant to me... how much I loved you--after your furry little problem started and you turned part cat--even though I didn’t quite understand it then. But it seems so much longer ago than that now--like a lifetime ago...”

“I know what you mean Harry,” Hermione responded. “So much has happened since then--and we’ve both grown up so much. Dumbledore is right, we’ve done as much as, if not more than, many adults have.”

“Yeah,” Harry continued, “And, it really finally hit me yesterday evening, while we were visiting my parents’ grave. Introducing my parents to you and the others: Luna, Parvati, Dora, Daphne, Fleur and Jennifer—I finally felt it in my bones like I never really did before... I finally really believed it.

“I know that my parents are really dead—that they’ll never come back... not really come back. But talking to their spirits with the Ring of Peverell made me realise that we really do go on to the ‘next great adventure,’ whatever that is. That quote on their headstone...”

“‘The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death’...” Hermione recited. “Yes Harry, I remember it.”

Harry nodded. “At first I thought it was like a Death Eater idea--like that whole Master of Death business—but it’s not, is it?”

“No Harry,” Hermione agreed, her furry ears twitching. “The Three Brothers created the Hallows,
and Voldemort had his Horcruxes... but none of them were really ‘Masters of Death’... It’s Love
Harry... Love is what truly transcends Death! To Love someone is to keep them alive in your heart,
even long after they’re gone. To pass on life from parent to child is an act of love... Love is Life itself
Harry...”

“...And that’s why Love is the greatest magic there is,” said Harry, finishing Hermione’s sentence.

They were silent again for a moment, Harry’s iridescent green eyes meeting Hermione’s golden
ones. Then their lips pressed together in an eternal kiss as they were bathed by the silvery light of the
moon and stars above. By the time their lips wetly parted, the silvery illumination was pulsing from
within, radiating from themselves, and they could no longer feel the cold.

All of a sudden Harry grinned, thinking what a surprise the two luminous Potters would be for the
Weasleys--except for Bill, who had witnessed the Coven glowing at Halloween.

“Right... I think I’m hungry for some Christmas Cake now,” said Harry impishly.

“Prat!” Hermione giggled and gave Harry another kiss as they both stood up to return to the Burrow.
7 Days Later:

Neville swallowed nervously. He wasn’t sure why Ginny had insisted on bringing him to St Mungo’s on New Year’s Day, and they were headed up the stairs towards a floor which he was uncomfortably familiar with.

“So... er... who are we going to visit again?” he asked Ginny as she dragged him by the hand past the sign on the landing of the fourth floor which read SPELL DAMAGE.

“Oh...er... just some friends...” Ginny replied vaguely, averting her eyes as she pushed through the double doors behind the sign.

Neville frowned. As far as he knew, all of their friends were perfectly fine, having seen them a week ago on Christmas Day at the Burrow. Harry and Hermione and the rest of their Coven had been there--and they had all looked the picture of health, as had all of the Weasleys and Seamus, and Lavender and Viktor.

And as Neville recalled, Angelina Johnson--seated between her two boyfriends, Fred and George--had been the recipient of a few suspicious looks from Mrs Weasley but had apparently survived the holiday encounter.

Maybe it was someone who had been injured a few weeks ago during the battle of Hogsmeade. Neville ran through everyone in his head. Susan, Hannah, and Ernie had seemed alright the last time he’d seen them on Christmas Eve. Neville supposed it might be Katie or Alicia--but that didn’t make sense unless they had been taken ill after they had gone home for the Christmas holidays.

Neville’s breath caught and his eyes widened when Ginny pulled him towards the Janus Thickey ward, the home of long-term residents with permanent spell-damage. He halted in his tracks, bringing Ginny up short. Ginny turned and peered at Neville gently.

“Neville?”

“Er... Erm... My parents...” he croaked, his eyes growing watery. “Usually... usually me and Gran visit at Christmas--we already came on Boxing Day...”

“It’ll be alright Neville,” Ginny murmured sympathetically, giving him a kiss on the cheek. “I’m here with you. Come on--let’s go in then.”

Neville closed his eyes and took several deep breaths to brace himself. He opened them again and nodded. Ginny pushed open the door.

Neville’s eyes nearly flew out of his head in astonishment. He gasped and fainted, collapsing in Ginny’s arms.

“Help,” Ginny squeaked, puffing as she tried to hold him up. “He’s a bit heavy for me...”

“It’s alright. You can let go now Ginny. I’ve got him,” said Harry, grinning as he took Neville from her.
“Oh... poor Neville!” said Hermione, her bushy tail quivering with emotion as she helped Harry half-carry Neville to a chair near one of the occupied hospital beds. “The shock must have been too much for him!”

Hermione turned and gave Mr and Mrs Longbottom an apologetic look. “Maybe we shouldn’t have...”

“That’s alright dear!” Mrs Longbottom interjected, dabbing at her tears with a hanky. “I’m sure he’ll be as right as rain in a few moments.”

The motherly looking Healer who had been trying to keep the agitated furry faced woman at the other end of the ward calm anxiously looked up. The furry faced woman spotted Hermione again and started barking and growling once more.

“There, there, Agnes dear,” the Healer said soothingly, glancing worriedly at Neville, then at the dog-woman and the catgirl.

“It’s alright Healer Periwinkle,” said Hermione, catching on to the Healer’s quandary. “You stay with Agnes. Neville’s just come over a bit faint. He’ll be alright.”

The Healer smiled wanly at Hermione, fondly recalling the day she had first met Mrs Potter at Hogwarts—the day the Healer had broken her glasses when Hermione Granger had told her that Harry Potter was her boyfriend.

“I’m not surprised,” said Healer Periwinkle, her smile broadening as she shared a look with the two patients who had been in her ward the longest. “I almost fainted myself when I came in. I don’t know how you two managed it, Mr and Mrs Potter, but I couldn’t be more thrilled...”

“Nor we. I still can’t believe we’ve been out of things nearly fifteen years,” said Mr Longbottom with a grin. “Thanks again for giving us our lives back, Mr and Mrs Potter...”

“There’s my boy,” Mrs Longbottom interjected, gently stroking Neville's cheek. “He’s coming round dear,” she said to her husband before turning back to her son. “Oh, my sweet little Neville—I can’t believe how grown up you look...”

“M...Mum?” Neville croaked as his eyelids fluttered open, tears streaming down his cheeks. “Is... is it really you? Am I dreaming?”

“No darling! You’re wide awake, and so are we...”

Mrs Longbottom opened her arms wide and beamed as Neville flung himself on her, sobbing. Overcome with emotion, Ginny couldn’t help crying too. There wasn’t a dry eye in the ward when the door opened again and a dour looking elderly witch entered.

Augusta Longbottom’s jaw dropped.

“Frank!” she gasped. “Alice! When Dumbledore told me to come to St Mungo’s... I never imagined... I can’t believe it! How on earth...?” Madam Longbottom glanced at the Potters questioningly.

Harry wiped his own teary eyes on his sleeve and shared a look with Hermione, not sure what to say. It was very important that the unusual effects of their Patronuses remain a secret in as small a circle as possible.

The Potters hadn’t even been certain if their Patronuses would work. It had simply been Harry and
Hermione’s hope that they might, considering how they had helped Jennifer and Samantha Mason recover from their own ordeals, and cured Lupin’s lycanthropy.

If there had been too much brain damage from the repeated use of the Cruciatius Curse on the Longbottoms, the Patronuses might not have worked at all. Under the circumstances, the Longbottoms had been very fortunate that their mental incapacitation had been more due to the effects of residual Dark Magic still trapped in their nervous systems and the psychological trauma of extended torture.

Hermione’s furry tail and ears twitched apprehensively when she saw all eyes on her.

“I... I’m really sorry,” Hermione squeaked. “We really can’t say. It could be dangerous if too many people know what Harry and I can do.”

“Of course!” Mr Longbottom nodded, light dawning on him. Having been an Auror, he knew that what Mrs Potter said only made sense. “I expect you both have a target on your backs as it is. It wouldn’t do to give Dark wizards even more reason to seek you out...”

Harry and Hermione stayed a short while longer, watching the emotional Longbottom family reunion as Neville happily introduced them to his girlfriend Ginny. The Potters slipped quietly out of the Janus Thickey ward while nobody was looking, and returned to their London home in Grimmauld Place where they regaled the rest of the Coven with their success...

9 Months Later:

The witch with wild dark hair regarded the red-haired infant in the crib with a mix of emotions. She hadn’t counted on having a child at this point of her life, but foolishly, she had forgotten to use a Contraception Charm or Potion the night she had seduced the young wizard. She kicked herself again mentally.

She could hardly blame the wizard, as the youth had been too overwhelmed by the older and much more experienced witch’s wiles to have any sense. No, the fault was hers, and hers alone. And alone she was now--alone and incognito in a country far from the land of her birth.

Still, the witch supposed that things could have been far more disagreeable. He had been no Dark Lord, but at least the fresh-faced and red-haired young wizard who had fathered her child had been a Pureblood. She could have done worse than Percy Weasley.

And at least the small South American nation in which she was hiding had no extradition treaty with Britain. She could lay low for years, raising her child with a proper understanding of what it meant to be Pure of blood while making plans for the future.

Bellatrix Lestrange peered out of the window across the lake and sighed, watching the palms swaying in the humid breeze. She thanked her lucky stars that the Gringotts Goblins valued their clients’ privacy and cared little about the politics of wizards as long as it didn’t affect them adversely. As long as she could still access the wealth in her vaults through the local branch, she could continue to live the luxurious lifestyle she was accustomed to without raising any eyebrows.

Bellatrix returned her attention to her little girl who had woken up and started to cry.

“Bungo,” Bellatrix sharply called out to her new House-Elf, “Delphini requires sustenance and her nappy changed...”

15 years later:
Harry Potter glanced around the office of the Legal Aid and Private Auror firm looking for his wife, spying nobody, not even their new secretary or the manager of their adoptions and fosters department. Harry had just returned from Egypt after spending several days meeting with the head of their Auror Office and investigating a new case involving a stolen Obsidian Scarab.

Two of the wizard sentries guarding the chamber under the pyramid from which the artifact had been removed had been murdered in a manner which seemed all too familiar. Another such theft had occurred in India not more than six months ago. A Golden Amulet had gone missing from a temple dedicated to the ancient Dark Sorcerer known to the muggle world as the Hindu deity Kali, the thief leaving no clues, but several dead guards in the outer chamber.

A witch with short curly blonde hair and glasses stepped out from the firm’s lavatory and jumped.

“Oh, Mr Potter! You startled me.”

“Margaret, how many times have I told you to call me Harry?” he asked, his green eyes twinkling with mirth. The Potters’ secretary rolled her eyes.

“As many times as I’ve told you not at work, Mr Potter,” Margaret retorted. “It wouldn’t be proper.”

“You’ve been here three months Margaret,” Harry pleaded, shaking his head. “You know we don’t stand on formalities. Anyway, have you seen Hermione?”

“Mrs Potter told me to let you know that she’s working in the Department of Mysteries today, running an experiment and giving a lecture.”

“Ah, of course she is,” said Harry, grinning. “Thank you Margaret, I’ll pop by the Ministry then.”

Half an hour later, Harry found Hermione in a lab deep in the bowels of the Ministry, explaining and demonstrating the workings of a new magical telescope which she had invented, through which one could make out the details of the surface of the furthest planet in the solar system as if merely looking across the Thames to the other side.

One of the nicest features of the Magi-scope was the holographic projection which allowed everyone to see whatever the Magi-scope was looking at, not to mention that it could peer through dense layers of cloud-cover. At the moment, everyone was looking at a massive lava flow on the surface of Venus—everyone except several small children in the group of visitors who turned and gasped when they heard someone enter the Space Chamber.

“It’s Harry Potter,” squeaked a little boy excitedly.

“Ssh,” whispered his older sister, who had met the famous wizard on several occasions. “I’m trying to listen.”

Hermione’s sharp cat ears caught the whispers and turned around, grinning when she spotted Harry. When Hermione finished her lecture, the visitors filed out of the Space Chamber and continued their tour of the Department of Mysteries, and Harry signed several autographs for the children. Hermione smirked at Harry, her furry ears flicking in amusement.

“So, can’t get enough of your adoring fans, can you?” she giggled.

“Oh shut up!” Harry retorted, rolling his eyes. “I’m not Lockhart.”

“Just teasing Harry. How was your trip to Egypt? Would you like a cup of tea?”
“I’d love some! And it was perplexing--I’m sure it’s connected to the stolen amulet in India somehow.”

Hermione dimmed the lights while Harry made a pot of tea at the little unmanned concession stand at the side of the chamber. Taking a seat on one of the sofas to look at the three dimensional projections of the stars and the planets orbiting above them, the Potters shared a deep kiss.

Hermione curled her bushy tail around Harry as he took a sip of tea and began to relax. The case could wait for the time-being, there was more to life than work.

“How are the kids? Did they miss me?” asked Harry.

“Of course they did, silly,” said Hermione, giving her husband another kiss. “Fleur and Daphne are at home today with Lily-Rose and James. Of course, the kids are missing Lysander and Aurora as well...”

“Oh, are Dora and the others still on tour then?”

“Yes, they’re performing their last concert in Tokyo tonight. They’ll be back sometime tomorrow. And by the way, Ginny and Neville, and Viktor and Lavender will be joining us all for dinner tomorrow evening at the manor in Dorset. Fleur and Daphne have some sort of announcement for us...”

“Don’t tell me, they’re expecting,” said Harry, grinning.

Hermione swatted his shoulder. “It’s meant to be a surprise! You’re not supposed to guess!”

“Oh come on,” Harry chortled. “You told me there’s an announcement. What else could it be? They’re the last pair of the Coven to have a kid. Luna and Parvati have Lysander, and Dora and Jennifer have Aurora... And by the way, did I ever tell you how brilliant you are for inventing a way for Luna and Parvati to have their own baby?”

“Only about a million times Harry.” Hermione beamed and gave Harry another kiss. “And I spoke to Arthur earlier today. Things are going very well with negotiations for the loosening of the Secrecy Statutes--Dumbledore’s managed to talk some more delegates in the ICW into supporting his bill.

“So with a bit of luck, soon we’ll be able to share some of our magical technology with muggles, and gay and lesbian couples--muggles and wizards alike--will be able to have children of their own without having to rely on sperm donors or surrogate mothers.”

“That’s brilliant!” said Harry. “Right then! Let’s get home, I’ve brought some presents back from Egypt for the kids... and I could do with a nice hot bath.”

“Mmm... Sounds good! I think I’ll join you in the tub,” Hermione purred, giving her husband one more kiss for the road...

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know... it’s been over a year since I updated and you’re probably wondering why the hell it took me so long to get around to the epilogue.

Well, I had numerous drafts and they all sucked. Trying to wrap things up in a manner
which didn't just come across like an info-dump proved to be more difficult than I'd hoped, so I stepped back and moved on with my other major fic (which shares much of the same storyline from fourth year on).

Finally, I managed to work something out which I think resolves many of the key story points, while satirising the epilogue of the original series, and leaving room for an eventual sequel.

I want to thank all of the readers and fans and the many reviewers who made this even more worthwhile than I could have possibly imagined.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!