"Spectators" is a look at the fourth Harry Potter book from the perspectives of other characters in the series, particularly Bill and Charlie Weasley, Tonks, Remus Lupin, Fleur Delacour, and Megan Jones.
The Homecoming of William Weasley

Bill had been the first to leave; so he supposed it was fitting that he was the last to come home that day.

He'd left for Egypt soon after Hogwarts to help with what was only ever intended to be a six-month project. It would help him get further ahead, they said - whether at Gringotts or somewhere else, if he so desired. But then they wanted him to stay another six months. Towards the end of the 12th month, Bill realized his Arabic had improved, he was moonlighting as a tour guide (for wizards and muggles alike) and enjoying every minute of it, and he'd even made a few friends. Good friends he knew he'd miss almost as much as he missed the ones back home.

The responses had been... considerably mixed.

"But you told me you were coming HOME!" Ginny had sobbed when Bill told them through Floo.

"Is this late teenage rebellion?" Molly had asked.

"Of course not. I just like Egypt. Besides, I'll visit all the time."

"No, you won't!" Ginny shrieked. She ran from the room, and Ron scrambled after her.

"You've broken your sister's heart," Molly snapped.

"He's an adult now," Arthur told her. "He can do what he wants."

Bill's friends were more encouraging, but he could still tell they were sad, especially as Charlie had just left for Romania. Tonks made a joke about it, which told him she was very sad, though he thought perhaps something else was bothering her. Bill reassured them that he'd visit, as he had with his own family.

But in that time, he'd only managed to visit once, and it was when Ginny had been posessed by You-Know-Who. He'd literally dropped everything when he heard and rushed home. A few weeks later, he'd received word that his family had won money, and would be using it to visit him.

Now, it was his turn.

Wizards could travel home many ways. If they only intended to stay a number of days, they could apparate or fly, although both required stops - apparation meant finding certain points, flying meant having to find a place to rest at least once if it was a particularly long journey. But if they were staying longer than a week, they were required to travel through the Ministry and register as long-term guests. Bill was planning on staying for a month. And anyway, it wasn't exactly safe to fly over the Middle East. Apparating could cause even more problems.

When Bill arrived at the Department of International Cooperation Office, he was surprised to be greeted by Percy.

"What're you doing here?" He asked.

"I work here now," Percy replied. "Thought that I would surprise you." He held up a clipboard. "Are you William Weasley?"

"You know who I-"
"-sir, I asked you a question."

Bill realized this was more for Percy's amusement than his own. "Yes. I am traveling from Cairo with the intent to visit until the first of September, nineteen-hundred and ninety-four."

Percy asked a few more standard questions.

"I'm sorry," he said after a minute. "You've been refused entry."

"Excuse me?"

Percy cracked a grin.

"Oh." Bill laughed. "Very funny." He couldn't remember the last time Percy had made a joke. Probably when he was still sleeping in a cot.

"Charlie thought so, too."

Percy took Bill through the department, which was very busy today. They stopped by a small kitchen area, and Percy put a mug under a grinder, which immediately began brewing coffee.

"You'll have to meet my boss," he said. "Mr. Crouch."

"Are you his assistant?"

"I'm more of a junior executive assistant."

Bill eyed Percy's hand as it grabbed the coffee. "I see."

Crouch's office was small; on his desk was a picture of a woman, a small boy, and a man who could have passed for a younger version of Crouch. Bill realized with a start that it was Barty Crouch Jr.

"Thank you, Weatherby," Crouch said, not looking up from his parchment.

Weatherby?

"This is my brother, Bill," Percy told him. "He's visiting for the World Cup."

Crouch grunted something unintelligible.

"Anyway," Percy continued, "I'm going to take him home, where we will have a brief lunch. I will be back as soon as time allows."

"Very well."

"It was nice meeting you," Bill told the distracted man. He made no indication that Bill had spoken at all.

As soon as Percy and Bill apparated onto the path of the Burrow, a somewhat shorter person attacked him.

"Hi, Ginny," he laughed as his sister hugged him tightly.

When Ginny pulled away, Bill was surprised to see she was somewhat taller. She was wearing makeup - not a lot, but Bill had never known her to really wear any. Part of her hair was pulled back into a braid.
"I can't believe you're home!" Ginny said excitedly as she lead him towards the Burrow. "Oh, I've got so much to tell you - you have an earring now? How was the Floo trip? Did Percy torture you like he tortured Charlie? He didn't, didn't he? Percy!"

"Bill!"

The doors to the house had opened, and an army of red heads emerged from it. Bill hugged them, and gave Charlie a playful punch on the arm, which made Molly roll her eyes.

Then they moved to his head. "Your hair's so long... you've got an earring?"

Charlie, meanwhile, was staring at Bill's boots.

"Are those dragon skin?"

He was home.
I had already established a background where Remus and Tonks were flatmates prior to the fifth book when JK Rowling wrote, in her Remus backstory, that they met in OoTP. I chose to keep my established backstory, hence the slight inconsistency.

A Leaky Reunion

The "reunion" was to be held at The Leaky Cauldron.

Charlie was looking forward to seeing his and Bill's Hogwarts friends again. Not all of them would be able to make it, but Charlie figured there was time.

"Over here!"

Tonks had stood up from inside a booth, and was excitedly motioning them over. Her hair was red today, like his and Bill's. Across from her was Hestia Jones.

"How are you?" Tonks asked Bill as she hugged him. "You have an earring now!"

"Is that all anybody notices?"

"If t makes you feel better, it makes you even more attractive. You're going to break someone's heart this World Cup. If I weren't a married woman-"

"-since when are you married?" Charlie asked quickly.

"She's not, it's her new catchphrase," Hestia explained as she hugged Charlie.

"Right." Charlie smiled.

"Don't I get a hug, too?" Tonks demanded.

Charlie hugged her. "It's great to see you."

"So," Tonks said as they sat, "Adam and Deidre will be here, but they're running late... Adam can't stay long either, Bagman's been making him work overtime with the Cup and the Twizard Tournament, not to mention with Bertha Jorkins gone."

"-Dad mentioned that," Charlie said suddenly. "Why isn't the Auror office looking into it?"

Tonks rolled her eyes. "Because they're a load of wankers. Kingsley told Scrimgeour that maybe we ought to go behind them, that's what Moody would do, but Scrimgeour said Moody's a nutter rightfully forced into retirement." Tonks growled under her breath; apparently she didn't see it that way. "Really, I think Scrimgeour's just worried it'd kill any chance of him becoming Minister for Magic someday."

Charlie had no idea who any of these people were, although the name "Moody" sounded familiar, so
"If you all know what you want, I'll get drinks," Hestia offered.

"I'll go with you," Bill said.

They left Tonks and Charlie, causing a strained silence. They hadn't been alone together since he'd moved. Even when Tonks visited Romania, they'd managed to surround themselves with others, though it helped that Charlie had still had to work a bit.

"You look -" Charlie stopped. "You look like me."

Tonks had begun to smile, but his addition made her freeze. After a minute, she arched an eyebrow. "Well, clearly that was intentional. I gave myself a Weasley look, didn't I? Red hair, freckles..."

"You did," Charlie agreed with a nervous laugh.

Although he knew it was a bit of a taboo subject, there was something he'd been wondering about, and he didn't think he could possibly make things more awkward.

"Have you heard anything about him?" Charlie asked quietly. He was referring to, of course, Sirius Black.

In the background, Charlie could hear Bill and Hestia joking about something as they waited for drinks. Tonks looked in their direction, then back at Charlie. Her head tilted, and for a minute, Charlie thought she was going to reveal some sort of news. Instead, Tonks leaned back into the booth and blew out a breath of air.

"Not a word," she said softly. "He's elusive, that one."

Charlie was keenly aware of the fact that Tonks, along with her parents, had always believed there was more to Sirius's story. They were not sure what, exactly - clearly Sirius had killed people, among some other horror Tonks had never elaborated on. This was not up for debate. Nonetheless, they stood firmly by their belief that Sirius had been part of a plan - or perhaps worked alone in a plan - that went horribly, horribly wrong.

"How's your Mum holding up?"

"Well, it's not in the papers as much now that we have the World Cup, so it's easier to take her mind off of it. I do think she hopes-"

But they were interrupted by Bill and Hestia, who had returned with the drinks.

Hestia grinned. "I would like to propose a toast - but I'll wait until Adam and Deidre get here. In the meantime - to good health, good friends, good drinks!"

Everyone laughed as they clinked their glasses together.

**Talk About Boys**

"There we go," Megan said as she and Hestia set up their tent.

Hestia realized as she looked at her much younger sister that Megan was almost her height now. When had that happened?

Their parents had not been able to get tickets for all four of them, so after much deliberating, they'd
given them to their daughters and went on a muggle cruise with Ted and Andromeda Tonks. Considering everyone's lack of knowledge about the muggle world except Ted, Hestia looked very forward to hearing how it went. Tonks was camping with them as well, although she was currently in search of water.

"This is going to be fun," Megan said. "But I'm not sure who I'm rooting for! Are you still rooting for Ireland?"

"Of course," Hestia said.

"Hi Megan."

Megan stared at the boy who Hestia recognized, after a minute, as Cedric Diggory. Their families had met a few times.

"Ced...ric," Megan returned slowly. She giggled nervously just loud enough for Hestia to hear. Someone has a crush... Hestia thought with a knowing smile.

"Looking forward to the Tournament?" Cedric asked.

Megan nodded. "I'm rooting for Denmark."

Cedric looked confused. "I thought it was Bulgaria and Ireland?"

"Denmark's also the name of a town in Ireland," Megan lied quickly.

"Ah," Cedric didn't seem to know what to say to that. "Well, quite a few Hufflepuffs are here actually, you should sit with us at the game."

"I'm allergic to quaffles," Megan spat.

Her face was pink now.

"Right. Well, I'll see you around, then," Cedric said.

As he walked away, Megan buried her face in her hands. Hestia put her arm around her sister's shoulders.

"Let's not worry about boys anymore today," she said.

"Thank you."

"But after today, I'm never letting you hear the end of it."

A Mark of Childhood

Hestia would never be able to recall how she'd gone from laughing about the game with Tonks and Megan to running.

She'd told Megan to stay with the Bones family, who were all sharing a tent nearby. She'd run with Tonks, and they had soon been joined by Adam Gudgeon, Bill and Percy. No one was sure where Charlie or Arthur had gone.
Wherever the troublemakers ran, the muggles in the air were forced to follow, spinning all the while. Hestia's stomach was queasy.

"Let them go!" Bill yelled.

"MORMORDRE!"

Hestia heard it from a distance, but didn't think much of it - until the Mark appeared.

It was a skull in the sky, the skull she'd grown up dreading. She wasn't allowed to go out by herself much, but she was told if she ever did, and she saw that above the house, she must absolutely not go inside the house. There was an abandoned mansion with a loose floorboard she could hide in; Phyllis Jones and shown Hestia how. A designated list of people were permitted to look for her, but she must only go with them if they called her "Vesta Johns." And if this happened, she must always remember that Mummy and Daddy loved her very much.

Phyllis would always say the last part with tears in her eyes. Hestia remembered that, too.

Bill, Percy and Tonks all had the same expression on their faces; Hestia knew they all had a memory along the same lines as her. Run away, hide, don't even trust someone you love unless they remember the secret code. Mummy and Daddy love you very much.

But they couldn't hide; not now. They were the grown ups, even though they had never felt younger.

As the Dust Settles

Tonks had wanted to go home as soon as they'd straightened everything out, but that wasn't going to happen.

The Auror Department was already bombarded with Howlers.

"WHY WEREN'T THERE MORE AURORS?" One howler cried; another complained that they'd lost a significant amount of money due to damaged property.

"Because that's what counts," Tonks muttered to Kingsley.

Kingsley snorted. "You know how people are. And Rita Skeeter's article has only made things worse. You saw my Mum."

Kingsley's mother had indeed shown up two hours ago, having read The Daily Prophet and being convinced her son was dead; when Kingsley pointed out he hadn't even attended the Cup, she'd been unabashed.

"I love your Mum," Tonks said with a wry grin.

She yawned. "Kingsley, I've been here twenty-four hours..."

"Go home. I can take care of this."

When Tonks entered her flat, her flatmate hurried towards her, still holding half a piece of toast.

"Are you okay?"

"Oh God, you didn't believe that article, did you?" Tonks asked Remus.
Remus Lupin had come into Tonks's life rather suddenly; he'd told her family the truth about Sirius, and in turn, she'd offered him room and board. He didn't have any rent money, but what he'd given her was payment enough. Besides, he was helping her try and track down Peter. Although Tonks had found him a little odd at first, if friendly, he was growing on her.

"Not at first, but when you didn't come home... I was beginning to worry."

"I'm fine. A few sore ribs, but that's normal with my job." Tonks cringed as she rubbed her shoulder.

"Do you need ice?"

"No, I'm okay."

Remus smiled wryly. "No, you're not. I know a brave face when I see one. Have a lie down; I'll get ice."

Tonks laid on the couch and listened to Remus collecting ice out of the box. He came back with some wrapped in a towel.

"Thanks," Tonks told him as she took it.

She closed her eyes, but only fell asleep when she convinced herself that the Dark Mark was just someone's sick sense of humour, and even if it was something more, she was no longer a helpless little girl.

In fact, even in her youth, she was far from helpless. Andromeda Black Tonks would never have permitted it.
Matters of Urgency

An Unwanted Return

Although Tonks knew it was about Harry, not her, when she read the letter she wished she hadn't told Sirius what the tournament reminded her of.

Dear Tonks-

This isn't the only news I've received, and none of it is good. Harry also wrote me a very concerning letter. I'm coming back straight away.

Tell Remus and Andromeda not to have kittens. I know what I'm doing. I'd write them too, but the fewer people I contact, the better.

Sirius

P.S. I keep forgetting you're Tonks now. Good for you; I always wondered why your Mum named you Nymphadora.

"On a scale of saliva-flavoured Bertie Botts and an itch on the nose, how bad is this?" Tonks asked her flat-mate with a nervous laugh.

Remus sighed. "I never thought he'd really stay far for long. He didn't escape Azkaban to bathe in the sun, Tonks, he escaped Azkaban to help Harry. And apparently... Harry needs it."

Tonks didn't want to say it, but she knew she had to say it. "Does this mean... someone's trying to cause trouble again?"

Remus didn't respond. Tonks wished he would.

Belle et Intelligente

Fleur had never gotten along with other girls after puberty.

As a young child, girls loved her, "because you look like a princess." The problem was, once her looks were able to woo boys, she became a threat. It didn't help that she refused to be modest, despite her mother's best efforts. What was the point? She was more beautiful than most people. Of course, there were other things that came with it - people tended to assume you didn't have brains, for instance. Fleur knew she was smart. She knew she was capable. So did Madame Maxime, whose secret only Fleur and her family knew.

She had thought she might make a friend at Hogwarts - an actual friend, not a giggling tag-along with a permanently purple nose from a botched magical modification spell - but things were so strange here, so different from Beauxbatons. Not to mention some of the pestering with silly questions, mostly centering around her apparent home city of Paris that was to her what London was to most of them.

Still, Fleur had the tournament. She was confident that she would be chosen, and sure enough, her name was called.
Fleur ignored the petty sobs of her Beauxbatons classmates and proudly made her way to the Headmasters. She would prove that she was a beautiful, awe-striking, smart young lady.

From *Lille*.

**We Are Hufflepuffs**

Megan could feel the heat in the common room as everyone waited for Cedric with folded arms. No one spoke a word until Cedric returned.

"Well?" Bronson, another seventh year, demanded. "Is Potter still entering?"

"Yes," Cedric said.

"No!" A sixth year exclaimed. "That can't be! He's not old enough!"

"He has no choice now," Justin pointed out.

Megan rolled her eyes. "And he knew it."

"Well," Cedric began, "he says he didn't know anything about -"

"-oh, come off of it!" Ernie interrupted. "He knows about everything!"

"We've been wrong about him before," Susan said softly.

Megan wanted to agree with Susan, because she had a very good point. In fact, at the time Megan hadn't been so sure that Harry really attacked Justin. But Ernie was right; Harry and his friends did seem to know about everything. Every time there was a catastrophe, they were involved somehow. And they were so secretive; even people in their own House didn't seem to really know them. Was it really so hard to believe that they'd jinxed the Goblet? Harry, at the very least?

Megan was also angry that Hufflepuff had lost their moment. Hufflepuffs were the underdogs; everybody knew that. Cedric was the best of them, and Megan's chest had swelled with pride when his name had been called. Not just because she fantasized that a troll would abduct her and he would come to her rescue, but because she knew he would win. The Hufflepuff House would be given respect. But what chance did they have now?

"He didn't look like he wanted it," Susan was saying.

Ernie snorted. "He just realized how much trouble he'd gotten himself into."

Megan nodded in agreement, along with most of the Common Room.
Brother to Brother

Charlie had agreed to meet the twins, Ron and Ginny in the library. They didn't know why he was there - but they would soon enough. In the meantime, he enjoyed listening to them talk about their school year.

"So how's Harry holding up?" Charlie asked Ron.

Ron shrugged noncommittally; Ginny, Fred and George all exchanged looks.

"He's... he's okay," Ginny said. "Some people insist he put his name in, though."

She glared pointedly at Ron.

"I've got a lot of homework to do," Ron said. "I'd better go."

Charlie knew something was horribly wrong now, so he followed his brother.

"I'm okay," Ron said when Charlie pulled him aside.

"Are you sure about that?"

Ron hesitated. "He put his name in, Charlie."

"D'you know that?"

Ron nodded, but he wasn't meeting Charlie's eyes.

"Listen," he said, "I don't know what happened between you, but... it wasn't that long ago I got a letter from you asking if I'd help smuggle a dragon to the reserve for your friend."

"That was Hagrid -"

"-whom you told me you were introduced to through Harry. And you know it doesn't end there. Ask yourself if throwing all that away over a stupid goblet is really worth it."

"Charlie."

Charlie turned; Tomas, their trainee, was waiting impatiently.

"You're needed," he said sharply.

"Right. Take care, Ron. Think about what I said."

Charlie wondered how much convincing his stubborn brother would need if he knew what Charlie had brought to the school.

The Unknowable

Tonks ran into The Three Broomsticks, her heart pounding. How had she lost track of time?
"So, so sorry," she panted as she greeted Charlie and Hestia. "Got held up at - at work..."

"You told me you weren't working today," Hestia said with a frown.

"I got called in," Tonks lied.

She hadn't even seen Hestia in about a month and a half, unless you counted brief run-ins at the Ministry; there'd been too much to do. Tracking down Peter, further investigation into the events at the Cup, research on magical goblets and whether or not they had any possible connection to You-Know-Who, practically spying on Kingsley to figure out if he was anywhere close to knowing where Sirius was (and hating herself a little for it, as he'd actually become a good friend)...

"Are you okay?" Hestia looked concerned.

"Sorry," Tonks said quickly. "So - why are you here, Charlie?"

"If you come to the first game, you'll know," Charlie said with a grin.

Tonks rolled her eyes. "Let me guess... dragons?"

"Maybe."

"They're not going to hurt anyone?" Hestia asked.

"I'm more worried they'll accidentally hurt one of the dragon's eggs," Charlie said.

Hestia raised her eyebrows.

"What? Dragons can't help what they are. People can."

"So what about you?" Hestia asked Tonks. "What's your secret?"

"I can't talk about work."

"Are you sure it's about work? Not a man or something?"

Tonks looked at Charlie and Hestia.

Could she tell them? Part of her wanted to; no. Every part of her wanted to. There were only so many people Tonks had ever opened up to completely, and they were among those very few. Besides, if things got bad, and Tonks was scared they would... well, they'd have to know then, wouldn't they? Maybe it would be better to warn them now.

But what if they didn't believe her? Or even if they did, someone else worked it out of them? Too much was at stake.

"It's a side project," Tonks lied.

Charlie and Hestia nodded in understanding, and Charlie quickly changed the subject. Tonks almost wished they'd called her a liar and left. That would've been easier.

Here Be Dragons

When Fleur was summoned to Madame Maxime's temporary office - which appeared to have once
been a classroom - she was nervous that she had, perhaps, done something wrong.

"Yes," Fleur admitted in French when Madame Maxime closed the door. "I did call Audrey Buggleswab stupid. I know you wanted us to be nice to our hosts, but -"

"-this isn't about your classmates. I have urgent news I am not supposed to tell you... but your Maman and Papa would never forgive me if you weren't warned."

Warned...?

"About what?" Fleur asked.

"The first task."

Ah. This had less to do with her parents, Fleur thought, and more to do with Madame Maxime not wanting her to lose. "I see. What is the first task?"

"You will have to steal an egg from a dragon."

Fleur's eyes widened.

Were they out of their minds?

"How am I supposed to-"

"-that's for you to figure out. I am just the messenger."

Madame Maxime put her hand on Fleur's shoulder. "But you will manage it. I know you will."

"I wish I were more of a Veela, like Maman," Fleur said bitterly. "Then I could change my face and scare it."

"You don't wish you were only part human," Madame Maxime said sharply.

"You shouldn't be so ashamed," Fleur told her softly. "You and I are not so different..."

"I think that's enough for now," Madame Maxime interrupted. "Study and practice hard. You will need it."
Three Shifters Shifting

Author's Note: This was originally a one-shot, which I decided to add to this collection. Additionally, as I said before, I wrote "Three Shifters Shifting" prior to Remus's biography, so how he and Tonks came to know one another differs slightly from what JKR wrote on Pottermore.

Thank you, as always, to my betas vix_spes and aggiebell90. Further constructive criticism is welcome!

He was staring at her from all angles.

On the right border of the cubicle, he was on his motorbike. Tonks had to wonder if that wasn't given to Kingsley out of shock --"look, a Death Eater and even he acts like a Muggle." Maybe the person who handed it over even believed it was a sign that anyone who liked Muggle things that much had something to hide. After all, why would anyone want to associate themselves with them? The hypocrisy might have escaped this person entirely. Of course, if it were her parents who had handed it over, or Remus, they wouldn't have thought such a thing.

Or would they have? For all Mum loved Dad and his family, Tonks sometimes felt a touch of her family's teachings lurked inside. It couldn't be helped - for years, Andromeda had hardly questioned the things she was taught along with walking and talking. It was only thanks to her friends that she really became open-minded. Then she fell in love with Ted, and that was the end of it. Except for those reservations. Ted was a Muggleborn; his family comprised of Muggles. Even to Death Eaters who were half-bloods, there was a difference. Why wouldn't a nasty part of Andromeda have the same logic? It wouldn't make her any different from most witches and wizards. Obliviators who Tonks otherwise enjoyed associating herself with would gloat about the silly Muggle whose memory they'd "had" to wipe, not even taking into account how confused the man or woman must have been.

Tonks was no stranger to the hypocrisy of her world. The same people who envied her powers feared her for it; it was the reason, along with Sirius's escape, that she had been forced to remain in training one more year. Just in case, they'd said. Not that she hadn't had supporters. Kingsley and Moody had both been outraged. But it was Umbridge's word over theirs, and as someone right under Fudge, she had the final say.

Tonks's hands found their way to the filing cabinet, then to her wand. If she took the files, would Kingsley know? It was Christmas Eve - surely she'd have time to take them back by Boxing Day, and the day after that, who would know the difference?

"Tonks?"

Tonks jumped and nearly fell on her face, just managing to catch herself.

"Kingsley," she said with a nervous laugh.

Kingsley looked puzzled. "What are you doing?"

"I just wanted to make sure I hadn't left anything behind."

"Are you sure you're alright? You've been jumpy all week."

"I just can't wait for Christmas," Tonks said. "Look, I can make my hair look like Father Christmas's
"That's very impressive," Kingsley told her. "But I have a feeling there's something else."

"Nope," Tonks said with a grin. "Just wrapping up work and wrapping up presents for the hols."

"Why don't you take off? It's Christmas Eve."

"I know, I know... you should go too."

"I would love to, but I'm scheduled to work tonight."

"Still trying to find Sirius?" Tonks asked as innocently as possible.

"Among other things... is that what's bothering you?"

Tonks shrugged. "He's dead to me."

She hoped her face didn't show how much saying that hurt.

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When Tonks arrived at the end of their street, she was greeted by a black dog.

"Wotcher," she said. "I mean... hey, boy!" She added quickly as a family passed, scratching his ears.

They headed towards the flat she shared with Remus. It was strange, how that had happened; one minute he was telling her something she'd never dared let herself believe, the next they were flatmates. But it worked out well, what with them trying to find anything, anything they could to help Sirius. And pulling pranks on one another. And making fun of muggle vampire films.

"One of these days," Remus would always say, "they're going to make it sappy. A sappy, romantic, crying vampire."

"Or a werewolf," Tonks suggested.

"Sadly, they've got the same idea of werewolves that wizards do."

Which made hiding Sirius in their flat for two days and two nights a very dangerous idea.

Sirius had arrived the night before, anxiously but willingly. He didn't like being far from Harry, it seemed, but at the same time he wanted to see them. Eat real food and sleep in a real bed. Or rather, the couch, but it counted at this rate. Tomorrow he would Portkey to Tonks's parents' – Andromeda and Ted wanted Tonks there, but Tonks had declined. The fewer people involved at a time, the better.

Tonks knew this was risky, which was why she had a backup plan if they were caught, one Remus and Sirius didn't know about. They would never let her do it.

"I couldn't get the treat I was looking for," Tonks told him as they walked down the street. "I tried."

Sirius wagged his tail in understanding.

"But we're not going to worry about those things this afternoon anyway. It's Christmas Eve, yeah?" Sirius barked.
They entered the building and made their way up the stairs until they got to the flat.

The flat had once been a small office, which was quite evident; the living area and the kitchen area were within talking distance of one another, and a small bookcase just barely fit between the telly (they had wanted to blend in with their Muggle neighbors) and a lamp. The furniture comprised of a small dining table, an old couch that had been Remus's parents, a wooden chair, and a bean bag chair Ted's sister had owned in the 70s. A fireplace was at the center, one they had to conceal when the muggle landlord dropped in. Its use was intended for floo only.

"Are the walls still soundproof?" Tonks asked Remus, who was reading in the beanbag chair.

"Yes," he assured her, standing up.

Sirius transformed back. "I think I like strolls better as a dog."

"Don't get too used to it, once Remus and I figure out a way to link you to Peter, that's it."

"Let's not talk about him tonight," Remus said.

"Right. Sorry."

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Sirius watched Remus and Tonks preparing snacks from the chair. He'd offered to help, but they insisted he rest. Sirius couldn't help but be relieved.

Tonks had changed a little, he thought. She wasn't so different from himself at that age; fun, amusing, but with a few darker layers underneath. Remus was similar... really, they had all been like that. Especially James. Everyone said that Peter was their "innocent," but before life had gone to hell, Sirius had thought of James as the innocent. Maybe Lily, once she'd entered the group. Sirius had been the one with the sharpest edge. Even Peter had one - it was just that they hadn't realized just how far he would be willing to go. But he'd certainly taken Remus's side when Sirius had sent him Snape for dinner, and did not speak to him despite James's forgiving him quickly. It took much longer for Remus and Peter to come around.

Sirius looked at Remus. Was that why he had believed that he'd betrayed them? Or had he simply done what he did before, automatically take James's side even though James...

Well, of course James can't forgive you, he's dead, Sirius reminded himself. Still, it bothered him. Why hadn't Remus known from the beginning? Why hadn't he at least considered that there might have been a mistake? Perhaps he had, perhaps they'd just ignored him, but Remus hadn't said as much. Tonks, meanwhile, made it very clear that she and her parents had always felt there was more to it.

Then again, it wasn't as though Andromeda had done anything it.

Don't be bitter, James's voice reminded Sirius. They're sacrificing their Christmas and risking imprisonment for you right now.

Sirius thought about James. He could easily picture Christmas as it should have been: James and Lily
were silly dances in the kitchen as they cooked. Sirius was giving Harry man-to-man advice. Remus was sitting opposite of them with an attractive woman. He'd married late, but happily. Tonks, Andromeda and Ted bustled in late, covered in snow and armed with gifts. James emerged from the kitchen to hand Sirius a firewhisky, and the two men went outside to collect logs for the fire. Except the logs were fingers... that turned into rats...

"YOU!" Sirius roared, standing up straight, ready for a fight

Tonks looked quickly over her shoulder. "What's wrong?"

"I dozed off," Sirius lied.

He looked around, somehow wishing Lily and James would appear on the couch. Lily had spent Christmas at Hogwarts with him, once. It was when she also became one of his best friends, a sister he'd never had.

Move on, Lily's voice reprimanded him.

Remus and Tonks returned with drinks and nuts respectively.

"We're having a ham for dinner," Tonks told Sirius. "Mum's making a large proper meal for you tomorrow."

"Excellent," Sirius said.

Remus sat in the bean bag chair. "I love these. They never get old."

"Funny, you made fun of me for it," Tonks said.

"I told you I saw the error of my ways."

Tonks snorted.

"So, Moony," Sirius said, "where is she?"

"What?"

"Any girlfriends? Ex girlfriends? Ex wives?"

"A few ex... somethings," Remus replied.

Sirius shook his head. "What I'd give to have a love life again, and you don't have one after thirteen years."

"It's complicated. Bad experiences."

"Yeah, people get weird when they realize you don't look the same all the time," Tonks said. "Or when half your family's evil. Hey, Remus, how about this - if you don't have anyone in ten years, let's hitch."

"Works for me," Remus said

They clinked their glasses together, grinning; Sirius went to grab his own glass, but quickly remembered he wasn't part of this joke.

"I was with Emmaline Vance for a while," Remus continued. "But it wasn't... we were just both
"That reminds me," Tonks said suddenly. "Remus, Kingsley's having a New Years' Eve bash. He wants you to come, says it's about time he saw you again."

"Kingsley Shacklebolt?" Sirius interrupted.

"Yeah."

"Isn't he the one who's in charge of capturing me?"

Remus and Tonks exchanged a look.

"Kingsley's a good man," Tonks said. "He's just doing his job."

"Of course," Sirius grumbled. He knew that she was right, but he couldn't get the irony out of his head, the thought of sitting in a cave while they toasted to the new year with the man who wanted to send him back there. Or worse.

"As soon as I find enough evidence, he's the first one I'm talking to," Tonks added.

"That's a good idea," Sirius said sarcastically. "Look, if you love him so much, why don't you just marry him and feed me to the Dementors?"

"Sirius!" Remus exclaimed. "That's enough!"

"I'm stating the truth, and you know it!"

"No, you're not," Tonks said icily, her voice reminding Sirius uncomfortably of someone else.

"You don't know Kingsley at all. And if you think I would do such a thing after spending my entire life trying to convince certain people that maybe, just maybe, there was more to the story, you're wrong."

"If you and your Mummy were so convinced I was a good person, why didn't you ever do anything about it?!"

"For the exact reason we can't do anything about it now! And it's killing us!" Tonks cried. "I've spent the past five months lying to every single person I know! My friends, my colleagues, Kingsley, even my muggle relatives who think you're a serial killer on the loose! I haven't even seen them that much, because I've spent most of my free time trying to find Peter with Remus! In fact, sometimes I think Remus is the only friend I have left, because everyone else probably thinks I've moved to Greenland! So don't you DARE imply I'd gladly betray you."

"She's right," Remus said firmly.

Sirus drew in a breath. He'd never had a substantial amount of self-control; he couldn't have survived in his house with it. He had to know when to punch or duck, when to snap or be snapped, when to yell or be yelled at. Azkaban had taken most of the self-control he had away. Truth be told, the Dementors had wiped out most normal emotional capability out of him. He had horrific memories even without them around.

"Tonks," Sirius began, but Tonks had already begun to head out with her keys.

"I can't do this right now," she snapped, and the door slammed shut.
Tonks knew it was juvenile, storming off like that, but she needed to.

Truthfully, she was exhausted. Sirius couldn't seem to understand that all her life, she had wanted this. She'd told Hestia, Bill and Charlie when they were kids that she thought he might be innocent, and while they probably hadn't believed her, they'd listened. But this was different; what if they still didn't believe her? Worse yet, what if they didn't listen this time?

Of course, her parents knew, but Andromeda remained stoic about the matter. She didn't allow herself to get emotional, had never even spoken much about Sirius's escape. That left Remus - whom Tonks was more grateful for than words could explain.

Tonks also felt a great sense of disappointment. She had foolishly believed that she'd find Peter in a matter of weeks, and they could all be a family again. That she could get back on Sirius's motorbike and he'd let her wrap her arms around his waist as they flew. That he'd have his Godson back. But apparently it was not to be, and moreover, he seemed to be angry with her.

Was it the Dementors talking? Mostly, of course, Tonks was smart enough to know that. But there was the lingering "mostly."

Tonks collapsed at the only other place she'd felt comfortable lately - her work desk.

"Are you okay?"

Tonks looked over at Kingsley. "You're still here?"

"I am. There's a lot to do."

"I see."

Kingsley pulled up a chair and sat in it. "I think it's necessary that we have a talk. I want it to be clear, Tonks, that you can tell me anything."

"I... know."

"I also want you to realize I consider you not only a trainee, not only a colleague, but a friend."

"Of course."

"That being said, I also have to do my duty. I know you know something about Sirius Black."

Tonks froze.

"What makes you think that?" She asked, desperately trying to keep her voice level, trying not to listen to Sirius's voice telling her, "I told you so!"

"You've been avoiding my glances when we've spoken about Sirius lately. You also said he's dead to you."

"So?"

"So you haven't said that once the entire time I've known you. Didn't Moody tell you, when he was training you, that the first sign of a liar is someone who changes tone quickly?"

"People change their minds," Tonks said.
Kingsley shook his head. "That's not all. I know for a fact that you've used a soundproof charm on your flat. I noticed the other day when I stopped by - when I opened the door, I heard nothing, but when I walked in and shut it, the wireless was on."

Tonks shrugged. "I've been seeing someone, and reckoned I'd spare the neighbours." That's an office appropriate excuse, Tonks. Wizard Resources will have a field day.

"Let me say this," Kingsley continued. "I know some other things, things I've learned while investigating Black's actions. It seems that he entered the dormitory of five thirteen-year-old boys with a knife. When one of them woke up, he ran. Am I wrong?"

Tonks shook her head. "No, I remember that."

"Except it doesn't add up. Typical behavior would be to silence the boy, if you catch my meaning. Black did not do this. Instead, he fled. Moreover, why the bed of the boy he wasn't apparently after? It also doesn't make sense that he was in the company of three thirteen-year-olds, and not one of them was injured with more than a broken leg. Dumbledore has insisted I do not question them, that I have all the information I need."

Tonks didn't dare let herself feel hopeful, though she wanted to. Was this going where she thought it was?

"And then there's Sirius Black's personal history. As you know, he was quite vocal about Muggles not only being kept safe, but being respected more than our Ministry has... deemed necessary. Why, then, would he join You-Know-Who?"

"Indeed," Tonks said softly.

"I'm not saying I think he's a good man. There is no reason to believe the events that transpired that day didn't. But I think there's something we don't know, and I think you may have learned this information, but are not sharing it out of fear of his capture."

Tonks shrugged casually. "This is all very interesting, but it's what I've always thought."

"And yet he's still dead to you."

"Think that's a contradiction? You should meet Grandmother Black, she's right out of her mind. Thinks Bellatrix Lestrange is a saint but doesn’t care that Dad’s a Muggleborn. Well, anymore, when Mum first."

"-yes, but as you said, she's right out of her mind. You are not."

Tonks smiled despite herself. "Why, thank you. Is that all?"

"Tonks. I know you know where he is. And if my suspicions are correct, then I want to help him. If I find cause, I can't lie, I will apprehend him - but I will fight for the Kiss to not be administered, at the very least. If you don't work with me on this, I will have no choice but to bring this to Scrimgeour, who I can assure you will not be so accommodating. You and anyone else who knows about this will be arrested."

"Damned if I do, damned if I don't," Tonks said with a shaky laugh. Her heart was pounding, and her palms were sweating. Why had she come back here? Then again, would it really have made any difference? He’d known long ago, he would’ve confronted her about it sometime.

"I'll let you collect him. How soon do you think this can be done?"
"Give me fifteen minutes," Tonks said.

"Very well. Remember, if he flees, I will be forced to question you, as well as anyone I suspect may be involved."

Tonks closed her eyes. "I understand."

*

"Feeling better?" Remus asked as he sat back down next to Sirius.

He'd given Sirius space, because it was what they'd done before. Sirius's outburst had been quicker, it was true, but they'd happened many times prior to his arrest. The way Remus saw it, it really couldn't be helped any more than his transformations - once the big bad wolf was inside you, it was there to stay.

"D'you think Dora - Tonks - will speak to me again?"

"Of course. She asks questions about you all the time - you should have seen her face when I gave her the news. She just needs space."

Remus could remember telling Tonks clearly. They'd met at The Leaky Cauldron, because it was too busy for anyone to overhear there. She had cried a little, although she'd tried to pretend it was allergies, and then they'd hugged, and when Remus told Tonks he was living there, she'd demanded he live with her instead.

Although Remus didn't like to dwell, he couldn't deny that the past several years had not exactly been filled with friends and laughter. Sure, he'd had friends in his many travels and years - but they drifted in and out of his life like ghosts, including former Order members, who either pushed him away or were pushed away by Remus himself. Particularly Kingsley, who, being a very young man at the time, had seemed to want companionship; Remus simply wasn't eager to provide it.

Tonks was the only person that Remus felt the same connection he'd felt with his friends who had passed on. And even she was different, though he couldn't quite tell how. She was just... special.

"I'm glad she has you, you know," Sirius said.

"I have her, too."

The door burst open, and Tonks dashed inside. Her hair was all over the place, and she slammed the door so hard the walls shook.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"Okay, don't panic," Tonks began.

"Kind of late for that now," Sirius said dryly.

Tonks gave him a look. "And don't run, either. I think it's going to be okay."

"What? Do they know I'm here?"

"No, but... Kingsley figured out I know something."

Remus gripped the chair. "How?"
"That's not the point. The good news is, he knows things add up and that there's something no one knows, which could be very good for us."

"I have to get out," Sirius said, but Tonks grabbed his arm.

"If you leave, he'll be forced to get others involved. Including Harry." Sirius's arm relaxed, and his jaw twitched. "The fact that Kingsley isn't doing so now could get him into a lot of trouble. He's willing to listen to you."

"And what if he doesn't believe us?" Remus asked.

"Then I have a plan."

"Do you have a time turner too?"

Tonks shook her head. "No, but I have a story figured out."

"And that is?"

"That this was the plan. Sirius and I have been working together this whole time. At this point, Sirius, you do run. I'll tell him that Remus was here because I made him, threatening to hurt his father if he told. And Harry, Harry was his pupil after all, so there's that. It should be worth something. If I can, I'll get away and easily disguise myself. If I don't, well..."

"Well what?" Sirius demanded.

"You survived Azkaban, didn't you?"

"Dora! You're not doing that!" Remus exclaimed.

"So what, we'll all go to Azkaban? Or worse? Kingsley's going to try and overturn the Kiss sentence, but God only knows if that'll work, and Umbridge hates werewolves... then there's my parents. Harry. Dumbledore. Fudge would love a reason to be better than him. This is the only choice we've got."

"But how will we ever solve Sirius's case if they think you've been lying this whole time?"

Tonks laughed coldly. "We can't worry about that now, can we?"

"This is madness," Sirius said, and Remus could see he was shaking. "I'll just say I made you two hide me. If I don't get Kissed, well, I'll do what I did before, it won't make any difference, will it?"

There was a knock at the door.

"Don't be stupid, let me take responsibility," Remus snapped. "I'll say it was all my idea."

There was another knock.

"I'll get it," Tonks said, and Remus's heart sank as it opened.

Much to his relief, it was indeed just Kingsley, and not the thousands of wizards he'd imagined at that very moment.

"Hello," Kingsley said, and he lapsed into the typical Auror spiel, asking Sirius to sit down.

Feeling sick to his stomach, Remus watched as Kingsley led Sirius to the small table and sat across
from him. But he couldn't help notice the lack of hostility - Kingsley seemed collected and calm as ever, as though he were investigating the disappearance of a piece of toast.

"As Tonks may have told you, I want to understand what happened thirteen years ago and in the past year," Kingsley said in his usual calm voice. "I have reason to believe that we have been... significantly misinformed."

Sirius looked from Remus, to Tonks, to Kingsley.

"You have."

"Would you care to explain?"

As Sirius began to tell the entire story from the very beginning, it occurred to Remus that for the first time in thirteen years, he was telling an Auror his side of the story.

What a strangely wonderful Christmas present.
Ask Me Later

Megan wanted to ask Cedric to the Yule Ball in a creative way. She figured if she was too busy remembering what she'd planned on doing, she would act like a normal person. He would go with a normal person, right?

So Megan enchanted the two small figures to dance atop the fairy cake. She nervously made her way down to the Common Room, and over to where Cedric was studying. He would want to be asked while he was alone, after all.

But just as Megan approached Cedric, three of his friends appeared, seemingly out of nowhere.

"Hey, Ced," Bronson Phillips began, "You'll never believe what -"

Cedric and his friends noticed Megan, who thought her feet might have frozen to the floor.

"Megan!" Cedric smiled.

"I want to be the yule to your balls," Megan blurted nervously.

Cedric looked alarmed, and Megan realized, with a flash of horror, what she had said.

"Oh - no," Megan said quickly, shaking her head. "That came out wrong. What I'm trying to ask is, willy - will you-"

Cedric's friends were howling with laughing now.

"Put a sock in it," Cedric hissed at them. "Let's talk-"

But Megan wasn't listening; she had dropped the fairy cake on the floor and was running out of the Hufflepuff Common room as fast as she possibly could.

Trying

(Note: While I was reading the scene in GoF where Madame Maxime and Hagrid drop the giant bombshell, I realized Fleur and Roger were also present, if a little busy snogging in the bushes. I wondered how much they might have heard themselves...)

Fleur ushered Roger away from where Madame Maxime and Hagrid had been talking. They hurried towards the castle, both smoothing their robes.

"D'you think it's true?" Roger asked.

"What?"

"Is Madame Maxime really half-giant?"

Fleur searched his face. "Would it matter if she were?"

"Well.." Roger bit his lip. "She's half-giant."
"And I'm one-quarter veela."

"You are?" Roger grinned.

"Yes, I am. Do you know what people have said about me?"

"That you're beautiful?"

"Veelas have not always been better than giants. People who know... care what I am."

"It's just... blimey." Roger shook his head. "Last year we had a werewolf, and now-"

Fleur cut him off. "Did you not defend Hagrid earlier tonight when the Slytherins were making fun of his talk?"

"That's diff-"

"No, it's not."

To his credit, Roger seemed to be considering what she'd said.

"You're really something," he finally said with a smile.

Fleur smiled back. "I know."

He wasn't perfect; Fleur knew that. But he was trying, and given the looks on the faces of several girls they'd passed (including Padma Patil), that was more than she could say for the majority of the boys at Hogwarts.

**Home for Christmas**

It figured that the one year Bill did make it home for Christmas, intending to surprise his family, no one was around.

Percy was at Hogwarts filling in for Barty Crouch; Tonks and Hestia were busy with their families; Aunt Muriel had a new gentleman friend; at least Bill had known Charlie wouldn't be around. It was just him and his parents, watching the fire and drinking eggnog.

"Maybe you should surprise your brothers and Ginny at Hogwarts," Molly suggested to Bill.

"I wouldn't see next"

"He's right," Arthur agreed. "Think how we would have felt."

Bill watched his parents giving each other loving looks. He'd forgotten how in love they were, just like he'd forgotten how much Ginny was growing. He missed so much when he was away.

It didn't really bother Charlie; Bill could tell. But sometimes it bothered him, as much as he loved Egypt. Charlie had made Romania home; but Cairo wasn't home to Bill, and he wasn't sure it ever would be.

But everyone else had, as he could see, moved on. And anyway, he would be mad to give up a chance of a lifetime.

**One Last Dance**
Megan had left the Yule Ball early, then stayed up when almost everyone else went to bed. She wasn't
She'd gone with Ernie MacMillan, because Hannah Abbot was insistent on playing matchmaker.
"Are you in charge of his love life?" Megan had asked her.
Hannah nodded earnestly. "We're just friends, so we ought it to each other to find – well, not 'just
friends' for one another, don't we?
"Er - I guess?"
But as much as Megan liked Ernie, and wanted to make Hannah happy, she wasn't in the mood. She
couldn't stop watching Cedric with Cho Chang... of course he'd gone with her. Cho was gorgeous,
she was smart, who wouldn't want her?

Just as Megan had decided she really ought to go to bed, Cedric came into the Common Room.

*Oh, Merlin.*

"Oh, good, you're here," Cedric said.

"You were - looking for me?" Megan asked, trying not to sound too hopeful.

"Not right this minute, but I know you've been avoiding me. You've done a good job of it too, I must
say."

Megan couldn't help but laugh, and Cedric sat next to her.

"I promise I don't make a habit of asking weird questions," Megan told him.

To her immense relief, Cedric laughed. "I know. I'm sorry, my friends... I reckon they were hit in the
head with one too many bludgers."

"It's fine. You were going with Cho anyway, and you looked happy."

"I was. Cho's really-" Cedric hesitated. "You probably don't want to hear it."

"No. Go ahead. I'm glad one of us had a nice night."

"Okay, well, I like her. She dances like a Seeker." Megan wasn't really sure what that meant, but
took his word for it. "And we have loads in common. We were always friends, I guess I never
realized..." now Cedric had flushed.

"I forgot you were friends," Megan said.

"That's how a lot of couples end up together. They become friends, then realize they might want
something more than that."

Megan shook her head. "Do your stupid friends know you're this sentimental?"

"Are you joking? They'd never let me hear the end of it. They're still teasing me over-" Cedric
stopped.
"Over my demonstration of boundary issues?" Megan asked sheepishly.

"Enough about them." Cedric stood up. "How about one last dance? As friends," he added quickly.

"There's no music."

"Professor Sprout left the wireless for us, remember?"

Cedric turned the wireless on, just loud enough for the two of them to hear.

"One last dance, Miss Jones?" He asked.

Megan rolled her eyes playfully and extended her hand. "Just one, if you insist, Mr. Diggory."
"It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are." Vibius Hagrid, Filius Flitwick and Fleur Delacour know this all too well.

Vibius and Fridwulfa

Vibius was a peculiar man. Even his parents had always been befuddled by his interest in magical creatures, beasts and beings, in his uncanny knack of seeing them as absolute equals. At Hogwarts, he wandered into the Forbidden Forest with the intention of meeting the Centaurs. It did not end as well as he had hoped, and he had to be rescued by several professors, who rebuked the Centaurs for attacking a student. Vibius was remorseful, however, because he'd clearly offended them. Besides, being tied upside down in a tree had been thrilling. It certainly made him popular with the girls in Gryffindor, who gasped every time he told the story.

Vibius's parents had been alarmed, and told their son that if he wanted a future, he had to stop living in a world of fanciful ambitions. It took a few years for their words to fully set in; when OWLS approached, he realized that his parents would never be proud of him if he did poorly. So he performed well, putting aside dreams of the forest in favour of more tangible ambitions. One was to work with dragons, but his parents forbade it, so when the Head of House suggested working with them, he shook his head.

Vibius obtained a position with the Department for Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, hoping that he could work with them in a capacity that would still please his parents. For almost two and a half decades he threw himself into his work, making reforms when he could, but mostly averting his eyes to the wrongs he knew his colleagues were committing. He never married and had few friends.

Then his parents were killed in an attempt to duplicate muggle airplanes with broomsticks. Upon their deaths, Vibius realized that they had pleased each other with their own fanciful dreams - which they would never admit to having - far more than he could ever please them. So he left his job at the age of forty-two and went on a trek to find whatever he could find.

On the trek he met Fridwulfa, a giant fifteen years younger than he was. She almost killed Vibius, but was soon mollified by his promises of goodwill. Vibius loved everything about her, and didn't care one bit that she was not human. Unfortunately, Vibius knew the wizarding world would - as they headed home, Fridwulfa now pregnant, he realized they would never accept her. But it was no matter; he was tired of pleasing everyone else. So he stayed mostly hidden, hoping that someday, at least, the wizarding world's views would change enough that he would be able to boast his wonderful family.

Unfortunately, Fridwulfa went back to the giants first. Vibius was left with a three year old who was almost his height. Knowing he couldn't take care of Rubeus alone, he returned fully into the open, evading questions about his son's large size but allowing people to believe it had been some strange magical occurrence, not heritage. Fortunately, most people were just as moved by Rubeus's charm, although some were concerned that he was naive and would endanger himself with his love of all
creatures.

But Vibius could only see goodness, and so he let his son be.

**Filius Flitwick**

It was his grandmother; everyone in Switzerland - for that was where her Goblin colony had been - knew of her. Flitwick's great grandfather all but ran the Gringotts there.

Goblin history in Switzerland was somewhat less hostile than in the United Kingdom, so the marriage between Eir and the strange Englishman Filius was not quite the scandal Filius knew it would be there. It was still frowned upon, but it was also allowed. The elder Filius still knew he could never take his family back to Scotland; the Goblins there, nor the humans, would ever accept them.

They had four children; the eldest, Fiona, was a remarkable and adventurous witch. She visited Edinburgh, Hogsmeade, London, Diagon Alley - wherever her journey took her. She met a wizard in Wales, and they soon fell in love.

But when Fiona told her husband of her true birth, he abandoned her, calling their son an abomination. Devastated, Fiona raise him with her father's name - Filius Flitwck. She refused to return home, not for lack of missing it, but because she could not let him win.

Filius never knew his father's name; he never cared to. The way he saw it, his father was the elderly man they would visit often, married to his tiny but feisty Goblin grandmother.

Once in a while, people would ask him if he had goblin blood; it was something of a joke. Filius would always smile coyly.

**Fleur**

As soon as Fleur saw Roger Davies in Charms, she rounded on him with anger she didn't even know she was capable of feeling.

"What did you do?" She cried, literally shoving the article in his face.

Roger looked bewildered. "I - I didn't do anything!"

"You told that Rita Skeeter!"

Roger shook his head. "No - someone else must have heard them..."

"No one else was there."

"How would we know? We were a little - ah - busy that night."

"Do not remind me," Fleur spat. "How could you?"

"Fleur, I swear, I didn't say anything. Why are you so upset? You don't even know Hagrid."

Fleur thought of her mother, who could turn into a bird. Fleur couldn't as easily; she'd only managed it once. Gabrielle could not at all. Apparently, it was common for those powers to weaken over
subsequent generations.

She remembered her grandmother, the magnificent woman whose singing could lull into a trance, particularly men. She had been beautiful; she had left her hair to her granddaughters, for them to use in their wands. Ziva had also been misunderstood. People liked veela, but did not see them as women, but rather, mysteries to behold. At best, she was often pestered about how a full veela was even biologically possible.

"Ah," Ziva would say with a smile. "That is the question, isn't it?"

What would Roger say if he met her?

"That is not the point," Fleur replied. "I think that Hagrid seems like a bit... what's the word... doofy. But - he does not deserve humiliation for who he is."

"We deserve the truth," Roger pointed out quietly.

Fleur stared at him, not quite believing what she was hearing.

"Have you ever considered that more people might be of so-called 'inferior birth' than you realize? People you know?"

"I don't consider you inferior."

Fleur laughed coldly. "Make no mistake - I know I can be arrogant. But I don't think it's all about me, and neither should you."

"Fleur..."

But Fleur was already storming out of Charms, not even caring that she was skiving off class. At the corner of her eye, she could've sworn she saw Flitwick smiling.
Fleur would never be sure how it happened that she ended up sitting at the same table with Viktor and Cedric one morning. Later, she would know it was meant to be.

They were all presumably studying for the second task, but too tired to concentrate. They looked up at one another with uncertainty, always having been cordial but nothing beyond that.

"I'm from Lille," Fleur said. Where had that come from?"

Cedric and Viktor laughed. Fleur didn't even know Viktor was capable of laughter.

"I'm from Sofia," Viktor said.

"So that's where Durmstrang is?" Cedric asked.

Viktor paused. "I am not allowed to tell you where it is. But no. The same way Hogwarts is not in England, even though many students are English. Although it is different here... same Ministry of Magic. Many parts of Eastern and Northern Europe have come to share things over the years, such as the dragon reserve in Romania and Durmstrang."

Cedric nodded in understanding. "Well, I'm from Devon."

There was another silence.

"You play Quidditch like Viktor, don't you?" Fleur asked. "You are very popular."

"I wouldn't say I play Quidditch like Viktor," Cedric said. "I couldn't pull off a Wronski Feint, for one thing."

"Oh, I am sure you could," Viktor said. "Have you thought of playing professionally?"

"Sometimes. Mostly it's for fun."

"I am a terrible player," Fleur admitted.

"I'm sure that's not true," Cedric told her.

"But it is true."

"Well," Viktor said, "you cannot be the only Champion who cannot play Quidditch."

"I had not thought of it that way until now," Fleur told him.

Viktor stood up quickly. "Enough book reading. Fleur, you will learn how to play Quidditch."
Cedric, you will pull off a Wronski Feint. Let's go."

It was not until that night that Fleur remembered she was supposed to compete against them, not play games with them.

On the bright side, she had finally made friends at Hogwarts.
February, 1995

"You do understand," Madame Maxime was saying, "that she will not really drown?"

Fleur shook her head frantically, trying to break free of the towel. She didn't understand... she hadn't been there, she hadn't seen Gabrielle's closed eyes...

"Let me go... please, she's my sister..."

And sisterhood meant something to Fleur. It was Fleur, not their parents, Gabrielle had woken up when she was small because of bad dreams. When Fleur went to Beauxbatons without Gabrielle, they had both been distraught. When Madame Maxime had permitted Fleur to let Gabrielle visit and watch the Second Task, Fleur had never dreamed...

"GABRIELLE!" Fleur gasped.

Then, to her immense relief, she saw her sister walking out of the water with Harry and his tall ginger friend. Fleur broke free and clutched Gabrielle to her.

"I'm never inviting you anywhere again," she whispered to her in French.

"But that was so much fun!" Gabrielle protested.

December, 1985

Hestia was shivering like mad, but she didn't care. They had to find Charlie.

Bill, Hestia and Tonks had been in the library just minutes ago when they heard two Slytherins talking about him. "Him" being Charlie.

"We've got that fool deep in the Forest, looking for dragons," one chortled.

The other laughed loudly. "I reckon he'll get frostbite. Or something will eat him."

Tonks had taken the opportunity to draw her wand as Bill pushed both boys against a shelf; she demanded they explain themselves. It was exactly how it had sounded: they'd tricked him into an actual wild dragon chase.

They didn't even bother throwing on coats, which Hestia now knew was a mistake; at least they'd all been wearing boots. They were headed for Hagrid's, because they knew he'd be able to help, and he liked Charlie, so they were sure they wouldn't get their friend in trouble.

"Even if he does still get into trouble," Bill pointed out as they ran, "detention's better than falling into a snowbank. If it were warmer and not getting dark I'd say let him search...."

"We've all snuck into the forest anyway," Hestia agreed. "But-

Bill raised his eyebrows. "I haven't."

Tonks rolled her eyes. "Because you want to be Head Boy. The rest of us have more interesting
goals...no sight of him, he's definitely in the forest now." The laughter was gone from her voice. "We'd better hurry to Hagrid's hut."

They wasted no time in rapping on the door.

"Mr. Hagrid, if you please!" Bill called.

Hestia and Tonks stared at him; Bill looked mildly abashed.

Hagrid opened the door.

"We need your help!" Tonks exclaimed. "Our friend Charlie, he's lost in the forest looking for dragons..."

"I'm all right," Charlie said from somewhere in the hut.

Hagrid stepped aside to show that Charlie was sitting in a chair drinking hot cocoa, his feet in a tub of warm water. Hagrid's dog Fang was chewing one of his boots.

"Well, I don' think yer friends think you're stupid," Hagrid told him.

"Oh, no, we do," Tonks contradicted.

Charlie's hopeful expression fell.

"But mostly," she added with a gentler smile, "we're just glad you're okay."

Charlie looked immensely relieved.

"Sit down," Hagrid said with a smile. "We've been talking abou' dragons."

"Real ones, this time," Charlie assured them.

**August, 1991**

Charlie's goodbye party had ended, but Tonks remained, stalling as best she could.

She didn't think he understood that she would have given anything for him to stay. At the same time, she was unwilling to go with him. That was her failure, not his.

They'd never told their friends that they were dating, and in hindsight, Tonks thought they really ought to have. It might have saved their relationship. They'd wanted to wait until they knew where they were headed. But this was where they were headed? Nowhere?

"Dora?"

Birds were bidding adieu with their songs, and the sun was setting. Tonks had always loved how late the sun stayed up in the summer, but there was something foreboding about the pink and purple clouds now.

Charlie wasn't just her best friend; she had loved him. She still loved him. It had been hard enough saying goodbye to Bill, whose absence Tonks still felt - saying goodbye to Charlie was all the more painful.
"Are you okay?" Charlie asked.

Tonks looked at him, and he sighed. "You can still come, you know."

"No, I can't. I have to stay here, I told you that." Tonks had the sudden urge to kick something.

"Look on the bright side; you can date without me around to make you feel awkward and guilty."

"Don't do that."

"It was a joke."

"I'm not in the mood."

"You were the one who told me I had to do this. I offered to-"

"-I know," Tonks interrupted. "And I told you not to stay for our friends, for your family... we could never live with ourselves, holding you back like that. I could never live with myself. Besides," she added, "you're so happy, and I'm happy for you."

"You've never looked less happy," Charlie said.

Tonks looked away. "You're going to do well there. It's where you belong, I reckon."

And she walked away from him without another word.

When Tonks arrived home, it was dark. A great era had drawn to a close.

May, 1993

Bill had been the last to be reached. It didn't seem right; he was the oldest. He should have been the first to know. But he'd been deep underground fixing a charm gone wrong when Fatima finally reached him, looking grave.

"Fatima? What's wrong?"

"I received a Floo from Charlie," Fatima said. "He said you must go home right away."

"What? Why?"

"Maybe we should go back to the office first-"

"-no. Tell me here."

"We really should-"

"Fatima."

"I am so sorry, Bill." Fatima put her hand on his shoulder. "I think something bad happened to your young sister."

Bill had wasted no time in hurrying home. When he got there, his parents appeared to have just walked in the door. Charlie was in the hallway.

"It's okay," Molly told both of them, her face still blotchy. "She's alive."
"What happened? Is she - is she going to be okay?"

"She will, but it won't be easy," Molly said. "It's a long story... can it wait for the morning?"

"Where's Ginny now?" Bill demanded. He'd only just realized his heart was racing.

"The Hospital Wing at Hog-"

Without letting his Mum finish, Bill disapparated.

He ran towards the castle (why couldn't you apparate or disapparate straight there?) and into the Hospital Wing. There he saw a few unconscious students being given a potion - and his sister, who was pale and had dark lines under her eyes.

"Ginny!" Bill hugged her tightly, and when she began to cry, rocked her as though she was still a very small child.

Of course, in his mind, she always would be.
Standing

Sirius wrote to Tonks and Remus telling them only to meet him at the cave at once. The letter from Harry about Crouch's disappearance, coupled with Andromeda's account of her conversation with Narcissa had confirmed his worst fears.

"Wotcher," Tonks said as she got off her broom and hugged Sirius. But he could tell from her expression that she was concerned.

"We brought you food," Remus said, and Sirius took it gratefully.

"Thanks... don't have much of an appetite, though."

Sirius showed them the letter from Harry; they both looked concerned.

"We have to stop it," Tonks said at once.

"How?" Remus asked. He ran his fingers through his hair. "Clearly Fudge doesn't see the signs..."

"Alice and Frank Longbottom-"

"-are at St. Mungo's. You know that."

"Mum told me they were part of something before there even was a war."

"Which didn't do much good," Sirius pointed out. "The war had already started, it was more that we didn't know..."

"Maybe they know something that can help us. What if that's why they were attacked by Bellatrix Lestrange?"

Sirius and Remus exchanged a look.

"Dora," Remus began, "even if that's true... they can't tell you. They're insane."

"Wasn't Alice Longbottom your Godmother?" Sirius asked.

Tonks nodded, and Sirius was suddenly grateful that although he wasn't far from madness himself, he, at least, had been able to escape and help Harry the best he could. He remembered Alice and Frank; in their normal state, they would have been the first to help her. It was a little different, Tonks had parents, but even if James and Lily were alive - which Sirius wished more than anyone would ever understand - he would want to help Harry.

"They're why I became an Auror," Tonks was saying softly.
Remus was looking at her sadly, and Tonks forced a laugh. "Don't look so somber, I'm hardly the only person who knew - knows them. They were your friends, after all, weren't they? But that's why we ought to do something.

"She's right," Remus agreed. "We can talk to Alastor-

"you talk to him. I'm going to talk to Alice and Frank."

Sirius's heart sunk. "Nymphadora... listen to me. This isn't some mystery novel, where the insane hermit suddenly reveals he knows who killed the victim. Real insanity is-"

But Tonks had already disappeared.

"She's like us," Sirius told Remus.

Remus nodded. "Quite. It's worrisome."

"On the other hand, we're still standing."

"-just barely, Padfoot. Just barely."

**Defence**

Remus knocked on Alastor's door with some amount of trepidation. He hadn't seen the man in years, and wasn't quite sure what to expect. He looked over his shoulder, not wanting to be recognized by any of the students.

"Alastor," Remus said when the door opened.

Alastor paused. "Do I know you?"

Remus hadn't expected *that*. "Remus Lupin..."

"Oh. You were the Defence Professor."

"You also know a friend of mine," Remus said, hoping he'd at least remember Tonks. "Nymphadora Tonks."

"Yes, I know her. We spoke recently, actually. Very nice girl. What can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to know if there's been any developments on the search for Crouch..."

"No," Alastor said quickly. "There have not. I wasn't aware that you knew. I was under impression it was being kept under wraps, actually."

"Of course it is, but -"

"Potter wrote, did he?"

"Yes," Remus lied.

"I have to ask... what did you teach him, last year? It would be very useful."

Remus wasn't comfortable sharing Harry's struggle with Dementors, even with Alastor. "I sent you what they learned."
"Did he ever discuss the Dark Arts with you?"

"He was thirteen at the time, Alastor. The darkest thing we ever discussed was-" Remus winced - "the Dementor's Kiss. Why would he-"

"-he's the only person to have survived a death curse."

"I'm not here to talk about Harry, although he is a concern," Remus continued. "Have you heard anything about... trouble arising?"

"There's always trouble, Lupin," Alastor grumbled. "Always darkness in the shadows, waiting to strike when we least-"

"I mean something specific."

A dark look crossed Alastor's face.

"Oh, there's something, all right," Alastor said. "If I were you, I'd look at Snape. Aren't you two old friends?"

"I wouldn't use the phrase 'friends', but yes, we are acquainted. We were also colleagues for a year."

"He's a fishy fellow, isn't he? Now, our Albus won't hear it, bless the man, he sees the best in everyone."

"Trusting him's usually been the best route. You know that."

"I'm not so certain anymore, Lupin. But maybe you should pay him a visit, instead of bothering me."

"I actually needed to ask-"

"-I needed to do something an hour ago, and my time's almost up. So I am afraid I have to bid you adieu."

Before Remus realized it was happening, Alastor had pushed him out of his office.

Well, *that* was productive.

**Agatha Christie**

Tonks hadn't seen Alice and Frank since she was about nine years old. Andromeda hadn't shied away from Dora seeing; at least not until she had nightmares for a week and started talking about being an Auror to finish their work. One had stopped, another persisted.

Alice was mumbling as usual; Frank looked nervous, but did not speak.

"Alice," Tonks said. "Frank. It's me."

Tonks attempted small talk with them for some time; it didn't amount to much. Alice hummed and Frank just said something unintelligible. Finally, Tonks managed to help Alice sit next to Frank.

"I need to ask you two something," she said. "Do you two know why you are here?"

"I'm here," Frank said in a distant voice.
"I need to know if you remember what happened the day before you came here."

Alice giggled at something or someone she apparently thought was there.

"In February of 1982, the war with You-Know-Who was over, but I think you were still collecting information," Tonks told them. "Is that correct?"

"Hm..." Alice mumbled.

"Frank?" Tonks looked at Frank, trying not to remember him as a much younger man who used to try finding galleons behind her ears, because otherwise she might cry. "Frank... you remember the war."

After a moment, Frank spoke: "Darkness. Bad. Very bad. Gideon and Fabian Prewett... dead. Men come home, houses filled with bodies, try killing curse on themselves but you have to mean it."

Tonks shivered. "Do you remember fighting?"

Frank shook his head, but after a minute, he nodded slowly.

"Fought hard."

"Do you remember what you did after the war ended?"

"Never... ended..."

"It did, remember? This little boy," Tonks showed him an old Daily Prophet clipping. "stopped him. You knew his parents, James and Lily. The war ended, but... you were attacked."

"Attacked..."

"Yes. I need to know if you remember any details behind the attack. I think you might have known something about-"

Frank suddenly jumped up from his seat and pushed Tonks against the wall; his heads curled around her neck, and anger flashed through his eyes.

"Frank, no!" Tonks choked, struggling to breathe. Alice was screaming. She managed to push Frank away just in time for two Healers to rush in and sit him back on his bed.

"You'd better go," one of the Healers said. "I don't know what happened, he doesn't usually get this agitated."

"It's my fault," Tonks said miserably. "He was right. This isn't a mystery novel. This is real life."

It was time for tea, chocolate, and a good Agatha Christie novel. In those, the bad guys were always brought to justice in the end.
Preparations and Diversions

The Cheering Committee

The Hufflepuff Common room was dark. Everyone was sitting in silence.

"I hear them," someone whispered. Megan held her breath; sure enough, two feet had entered the common room.

The light turned on, and everyone jumped on cue.

"SURPRISE!" Megan screamed with everyone else.

Cedric stared around the room, which was decorated with balloons and streamers. Two girls in his year were placing a cake on a table they'd moved to the center of the room.

"I haven't won yet, y'know," he said with a grin.

"It's a good luck party," Bronson Phillips explained. "And we know you're going to win."

"Don't you have NEWTs?"

"I've been studying for NEWTs since my sixth year. I can put it off one night."

The room was abuzz with good luck wishes, with laughs, with excited chatter and bets as to how much the other Champions would lose to Cedric.

It took a while, but Megan finally managed to get him alone.

"You really are going to win," she told him. "I can feel it."

"I hope so. It'd make my parents proud. It'd make Hufflepuff proud."

"I hope you'd be a little proud yourself."

Cedric laughed. "Of course I would."

Megan laughed as well. She was glad he wasn't so intimidating anymore; he was even more fun to talk to than he was to gaze at dreamily.

Cho was so lucky.

Riddikulus

Remus hadn't planned on going, but as it happened, his father wanted him there.

"You've got to see what we have planned," Lyall wrote excitedly. "And you owe me a visit."

Remus knew Lyall was referring to the missed New Year's and Easter, although they had spent Christmas brunch together. Remus rarely visited his father without notice or invitation - they had a strange relationship that didn't allow for spontaneity.

Lyall met Remus at the foot of the maze. He was accompanied by a man Remus thought looked
"Amos, this is my son, Remus," Lyall said. "Amos has been instrumental in the variety of creatures."

"Did you bring them here?"

"Just the boggarts."

"Ah," Remus said. Well, Harry was set.

Amos was peering at Remus. "Your last name's Lupin?"

"Yes."

"You taught my son Cedric, then."

"Cedric Diggory? You're his father?" Remus remembered Cedric very well; he had been a smart and polite boy.

Amos beamed. "Never been prouder of it, either. I imagine he owes a lot to you... said you were one of the more competent professors."

Remus wondered if Amos knew he was a werewolf... perhaps he was more open minded. More likely talk of his son overshadowed everything else.

"Speaking of which," Amos continued, "my wife's waiting for me... we're meeting Cedric. It's a family day of sorts, see."

Amos hurried off.

"Are you staying?" Remus asked Lyall.

"Have to. Are you?"

"Maybe," Remus lied. The truth was, he had no intention of staying; he could tell Lyall knew it, but also knew better than to push the matter.

"Let me show you what we're setting up,' Lyall said with a resigned sigh.

It was truly impressive; by the time they got back to the opening, Remus was considering staying after all.

At the very least, there was one thing he should do.

It wouldn't be easy; their parting had been sudden. But if it really was family day... what family did Harry have? Remus had no doubt Sirius was close, but he certainly couldn't show himself. What if Harry was all alone? James wouldn't have wanted that, and they never let Sirius be subjected to that when they were at school.

So Remus made his way into the castle, and walked in the general direction of the families.

He finally saw Harry, and made to say hello; then he realized a woman with red hair and a tall man were walking with Harry. They must have been Ron's mother and an older brother.

Knowing Harry would be just fine, Remus turned and left.
The Man With the Fang Earring

As soon as Fleur's eyes laid on the man with the fang earring, it became her intention to talk to him. There was something about him... maybe it was a sign of good luck.

She managed to see him again on her way to the Great Hall.

"Hello," Fleur said with a smile.

The young man's eyes widened a little, the way they always did when they realized how beautiful she was; but to her relief, instead of turning into a babbling brook, he said in a normal voice: "Hello! Aren't you the Beauxbatons Champion?"

Fleur extended her hand. "Fleur Delacour, and oui. Who are you?" He looked a bit old to be a student...

"I'm Bill Weasley. My brother Ron's a student... my family's close with Harry. I suppose you know Harry?"

"Oh, yes. He saved my sister's life."

"Mine t- Harry does that sometimes," Bill said quickly.

Fleur wondered what the story behind the "mine too" was, for she hadn't missed it, but she decided it could wait.

"How do you like Hogwarts so far?" Bill asked.

"I hated it at first," Fleur admitted, "But it is not so bad. My English has improved... I may even come back, if I can find work."

Bill smiled. "They're hiring at Gringotts, you know. Tried to get me to come back here..."

"Where do you live now?" Fleur asked.

"Egypt," Bill replied. "I'm a Charm Breaker for Gringotts Cairo."

"I see," Fleur said, feeling disappointed. Why did he have to live so far away? They were having such a nice conversation, and he was so attractive....

"The feast is starting," one of Fleur's classmates reminded her as she passed.

"Right. Mum'll be wondering where I've gone," Bill said.

They walked in together, but quickly separated. Fleur saw Bill sinking into a sea of ginger. Did they all have red hair?

"Fleur! I'm talking to you!" Gabrielle poked her sister impatiently.

"I'm sorry, Gabrielle." Fleur smoothed her sister's hair. "What were you saying?"

Chatter resumed, but not without the occasional stolen glances at Bill. Fleur was sure he was stealing just as many glances at her.
And then it was time to go. Thoughts of giggling little sisters and handsome men had to be put on hold.

**The Job Comes First**

"We'll let you know if anything goes wrong," Tonks told Sirius. "But I'm sure it won't."

Sirius barked.

Tonks hoped nothing went wrong, because she'd been looking forward to this. She'd really hoped Hestia would be able to come, but Hestia had had family obligations. Or Hestia had forgotten who Tonks was; that wasn't entirely impossible, given how little time Tonks had spent with her lately. Every day seemed to either be Auror duty or "finding Peter/Bertha/Crouch" duty or, last but not least, sleep duty.

Or maybe those were just excuses. Tonks had made plenty of time to do things with Kingsley and Remus respectively - rarely together. Was it that they were in the know? Kingsley had caught onto the fact that Tonks was hiding something, so she had nervously admitted what was going on. Remus had been the one who told her. Maybe it was easier to surround herself with friends when she wasn't lying to their faces.

Remus said that was the real reason. He'd done that sort of thing himself, apparently, so he would know.

"But you need them," Remus had added. "You'll have no idea how much you need them until it's too late."

So Tonks had told Bill she'd meet him there. Of course it was also in case anything went wrong, but this worked too.

"I have to run," Tonks told Sirius. "I'll-

"-you shouldn't talk to dogs. It might give people the wrong idea."

Tonks turned to see Alastor eyeing her suspiciously.

"It's a dog, Mad Eye," Tonks said. "People talk to dogs all the time."

"Times are changing. I think we both know that."

A shiver ran down Tonks's spine, not because she wasn't used to Alastor's morbidity, but because it was in line with some of her worst fears.

"Anyway, hope you weren't here to enjoy the tournament," Alastor continued. "Scrimgeour just contacted me. There's been an emergency."

"What? What happened?"

"Wouldn't tell me - they don't trust me anymore. Just said to meet him in front of Cardiff Castle."

"Okay." Tonks sighed. "Tell Bill I'm not going to make it, then."

"Who's Bill?"
"He's-" Tonks stopped. "Nevermind, he'll figure it out for himself."

*The job comes first. The job comes first. The job comes first.*
The Maze

Crucio

Fleur didn't even have time to turn.

"CRUCIO!"

Her legs were contracting... she felt as though someone was trying to pull her limbs apart... she thought she saw Viktor running away, but no, it couldn't be...

And then it ended.

What had just happened? Who'd hexed her? Was it Viktor? But Viktor wouldn't do that to her. They were friends.

When Fleur realized she could still move, McGonagall was already rushing towards her.

Very Wrong

"Where are they?" Hermione asked, checking her watch.

"They'll be back soon," Ron said, but he didn't sound so sure.

Bill could see that even the judges were whispering in confusion. Something was wrong. Very wrong, he realized.

"I'm going to see if there's anything I can do," Bill told his mother.

He was halfway down the stairs when Harry and Cedric appeared on the ground.

Dreams

Cho was starting to get worried about Harry and Cedric; they all were. Bronson even suggested they go into the maze after them, but of course no one would have permitted it.

Then they appeared on the grounds; but it wasn't right. Cedric wasn't moving.

"What is he doing? Get up!" Cho hissed.

"My God - Diggory!" Fudge shouted. He said something else that Cho couldn't hear. She stood up with Bronson just in time to hear "Cedric Diggory - dead!"

What?

Bronson and Cho both froze; all of the Hufflepuffs were standing up now. Cho wished they would sit back down...

Cedric's parents were running to their son. They would put it right; Cho was sure of it. They'd see that he was fine...
As the stands emptied, people were screaming and crying and asking frantic questions. She could see Harry being whisked away by Mad Eye-Moody.

"Cho? We should go down," Bronson said. "See what's happened."

Cho shook her head. Doing so would make it true.

"Cho..."

Bronson held her hand, and after swallowing, Cho made her way down the stands with him onto the grass, passing person after person. Marietta called her name, and a few students looked at her with sad expressions. Why wouldn't they stop looking at her, calling after her like something was wrong? Nothing was wrong. Viktor had taught Cedric to feint, and that's all this was. He was feinting.

The Hufflepuffs were in a circle now... Professor Sprout was sobbing... in the middle were Cedric's parents with his b-

"CEDRIC, NO, NO, NO!" Cho wailed.

She flung herself at Cedric, shaking him until Mrs. Diggory pulled her into the hug she'd been sharing with her husband, and they stayed close, the only ones who shared each other's pain exactly.
Fog

Wild Dragon Chase

It had been one hell of a twelve hour period.

Tonks had waited for Scrimgeour, only for him to not show up. Finally she found him at the office.

"Oh," Scrimgeour had said. "Yes, false alarm, false alarm..."

"Rufus," Tonks had said firmly, "are you telling me that I just missed the Triwizard Tournament for no reason? That I wasted hours waiting for you, trying to find you, wondering what the urgency was?"

"I told Alastor to tell you not to come after all. Or I think I did..."

Tonks frowned. "Are you okay?"

"I think I need some rest." Scrimgeour stood. "Good night."

Confused but too exhausted to put much stock into it, Tonks had returned home as well.

"How was it?" Remus asked when she walked in the door.

"Didn't go. Work. I'm going to bed, I'll explain in the morning."

Something horrible began to stir in Tonks's mind, but sleep pushed it away.

Unimaginable

They'd spent the night in Madame Maxime's office, despite the protests of their families, who wanted them to stay in the special rooms designated for guests. But Fleur and Viktor needed to be together. Madame Maxime had given them sleeping bags, but they hadn't slept. Instead they just sat.

"I am sorry I cursed you," Viktor told her. "I wasn't myself."

"I know you weren't."

"I do not know where Karkaroff went," Viktor continued.

Something unimaginable occurred to Fleur - but what was unimaginable anymore? "Did he have something to do with this?"

"I doubt it, but I think he knew something was going to happen and ran."

"Cedric would never have run," Fleur said firmly.

"No," Viktor agreed.

Fleur put her head to her knees, and started to cry. Viktor paused, then put his arm around her so awkwardly it made her snort through her tears.
Brothers and Broomsticks

When Uncle Fabian and Uncle Gideon had died, none of the kids took it worse than Charlie. Of course, they were also all too young to really understand. Bill and Charlie understood perfectly well what it meant.

He'd screamed at their parents when given the news, his lungs as loud as they could go. Molly ran out of the room crying, and Bill had dragged Charlie outside and let his brother ruin a broomstick by hitting it against the shed over and over. Bill seldom left Charlie's side for months afterwards.

Before Bill went to Egypt, Charlie had thanked him for being there. But Bill didn't think he'd done anything out of the ordinary; it was just what good brothers did.

And now he had to be that person again.

He'd told Charlie over Floo, hoping it wasn't a bad idea.

"You're joking," Charlie said.

"I wish I were."

"But -"

"Don't think. Just come home. I'll have a broomstick ready for you by the shed."

Helga

The portrait of Helga was at the center of the hearth.

Helga watched the House that had been hers, the real her, who would have been able to emerge and comfort them.

Not a single Hufflepuff had gone back to their dormitory; they were unified, as always. Some were sleeping in chairs or on the sofa, but most were sitting with lost looks in their eyes. Cho Chang was there - normally someone from another House would not have been permitted, but exceptions could be made.

They were so lost, so desolate... the worst thing that could happen to anyone was to lose someone they cared about, but it especially hurt Hufflepuffs. They took unity and friendship so very seriously, and Helga suspected they had many dark days ahead.

The real Helga would have comforted them, taken them into her arms and let them cry or sleep or feel.

Her portrait could only watch helplessly.
Old Crowd, New Crowd

The Old Crowd

They stood in Dumbledore's office, some with more knowledge than others, none of them surprised.

Emmaline Vance was looking distrustfully at Sirius. She'd never been fond of him, especially not in school - he'd been James Potter's best friend, after all, and as Lily Evans's best friend, it was her moral obligation to dislike his gang of friends. She had felt sorry for him in the Order, though, and hugged him when she saw how shaken he was by the news of the prophecy. It took a lot for Emmaline to hug people; she normally thought hugs should be reserved for small children and funerals. When she learned what he'd done, she couldn't believe they'd ever trusted him. There'd always been something off about that man. Even being told she must trust him now, she couldn't bring herself to let her guard down.

Kingsley's hands were gripping the head of the chair he was standing in front of. He'd never really been in the Order properly, having joined just two months before the war's end. What had that counted for?

Besides, he'd had Alice and Frank to consult. He didn't even have them now.

Remus had thought after thought running through his mind.

Maybe I shouldn't have left Hogwarts.

I should have known Alastor would remember who I was.

I should've remembered to take Wolfsbane that night.

Tonks is so much like I was at her age, with Sirius's sense of humour. Maybe... no. Why am I thinking about that at a time like this? Why am I thinking about that at all?

What the hell is going to happen to us?

The image of his Godson being tortured kept repeating itself in Sirius's mind. He wished that he'd killed Peter from the start. What if Harry had been wrong that night? James wouldn't have wanted Sirius and Remus to be murderers, it was true, but surely he wouldn't have wanted this either.

All Alastor could do was wonder why he, of all people, had so easily fallen into a trap and become an accomplice to something so hellishly terrible, it hurt to hear Dumbledore speak of it.

The New Crowd

Bill's head was spinning. Part of her was still in disbelief that Tonks hadn't told them about Sirius. Ron, for that matter. Dumbledore still hadn't told them the whole story - that, apparently, could wait. It wasn't the point at hand. Bill wished it were. That was a much happier reality than the one they were facing.

Tonks was thinking about that night. Why hadn't she realized something was wrong? Why hadn't
she gone back to Hogwarts the very instant she saw Scrimgeour was nowhere to be found?
Irritation? Fatigue? Things that seemed important then suddenly seemed foolish and trivial now.

But she couldn't waver; she had to be strong. Her parents would be told after the meetings; Hestia,
too. Charlie knew already, he would be back from Romania soon; Tonks and Bill would fill him and
Hestia in from there. The four of them...

Tonks looked at Remus and Sirius, the remaining two of four. Where had they gone wrong? And
would the same thing happen to her friends?

Molly hadn't known about the Order until her brothers died. She'd been so angry at the time; now,
she understood. The Ministry hadn't lied about the war then, but Molly was sure they would never
have approved.

How could he be back? The man who'd caused her family so much grief? How dare he return!
Molly's hand gripped her wand. If they hurt any of her family again - and they wouldn't, because she
wouldn't allow it - they would pay dearly.

That, or Molly would lose her mind. She was feeling equal shades of strength and desperation right
now.
What the Ministry Doesn't Want You to Know

Flight from Death

Fleur felt hollow as the full impact of Dumbledore's words hit her.

Flight-From-Death. That was what his name meant in her language, and what they'd always called him. There was no "You Know Who." But then again, Voldemort had never reached French shores.

They were who had killed Cedric. And yet the Ministry dared deny it. How could they let someone as great as him die in vain?

Fleur looked over at Viktor; he sat miserably as several Slytherins jeered right in front of him. The nerve of that lot.

Fleur wondered whether she should really come back now. She knew what Maman and Papa would say - no; absolutely not. Gabrielle would be terrified.

But wouldn't turning away from something she wanted be playing into their hands? They'd love knowing a "half-breed" like her was afraid of them. Besides, maybe almost losing Gabrielle to the Grindylows had been a test. Perhaps she'd been meant to meet that handsome man with the earring, meant to be here now, and maybe she was meant to come back and do whatever it was she could.

Fleur would be back as soon as possible. Of that she had no doubt whatsoever.

Crushed

The Hufflepuffs had been communing in the Common Room ever since Cedric died. But now, they were divided.

"I just Floo'd my Mum from Sprout's office," Zacaharias announced. "She said he must be lying."

"Sprout let you in her office?" Megan asked.

Zacharias laughed. "Course not, I snuck in. But if she's lying to us too, and I think she might believe him-"

"-then he's right, because Sprout's never lied to us," Susan finished.

Zacharias's eyes narrowed. "So you believe him?"

Bronson laughed wryly, and so much rage filled Megan, she turned quickly and said angrily, "what's so funny?"

"Don't you just love that we've lost one of our best mates, and now Dumbledore's come up with some contrived way to make it worse than it already is?"

"It's an insult to his memory," Megan said firmly.

"You never really cared about him," Bronson retorted. "You had an idiot crush on him, even though you knew he never gave you the time of day."
A year ago, even six months ago, this would have silenced Megan straight away. But while tears weren't far off, she managed to look Bronson straight in the eye and smile.

"You're wrong," Megan told him. "I've learned who Cedric really is... was. He was everything Dumbledore said, and more. He danced with me the night of the Yule Ball – not to be disloyal to Cho, just because it was the right thing to do. He told us to be nice to the other Champions. He never acted proud of himself, only confident and determined. Because that's the kind of person he was. It wasn't just an idiot crush. He was my friend. Your friend. Our friend. So no, I'm not going to settle with the idea that he just dropped dead, no matter what the Ministry of Magic says."

Megan ignored several voices calling her name, only paying attention to the running feet she knew belonged to Susan. She let her friend put her arm around her, and together they walked back to the dormitories.
Hestia was home the night Megan came back from Hogwarts, of course. Normally the Tonkoses would've been too, but they'd claimed to have other plans. Really they were helping Sirius settle into Grimmauld Place. That, and positively cross with Phyllis and Glynn for not believing Dumbledore - but Hestia's parents didn't know that.

Hestia wasn't sure where Megan stood; she couldn't read her sister at all. She did notice that Megan was holding herself much differently - in September, Megan had been prone to giggling, and she'd hugged Hestia tightly. Now she walked with the gait of a young woman, did not giggle, and Megan's wide hug offering had been met with a surly half-hug in return.

As they ate, Hestia tried to diverge the conversation from the Ministry. But eventually, it came up.

"So is it true," Phyllis began, "that Dumbledore told you some... tall-tale?"

Hestia tried to read the expression on Megan's face, but it was impossible. Since when had it been impossible? They'd always been able to read each other.

"He told us You-Know-Who is back, if that's what you mean," Megan said flatly.

Glynn held her hand. "I hope you understand that Dumbledore... well, the Ministry's had their eye on him for a while now, apparently. He's not who he used to be. Fudge has promised us that You-Know-Who never returned."

Hestia bit her lip. Hard.

"Of course," Megan said. "I know a lie when I hear one."

Glynn and Phyllis both looked relieved. Hestia wasn't sure whether they should feel relieved, or if she was the one who ought to feel relieved.

"I forgot to tell you," Megan continued, "that I'm going away with Susan next week. She's visiting her Aunt Amelia for a month, see. You know Amelia Bones."

"I wish you'd asked your father and I first!" Phyllis said with a frown.

"Oh. I hadn't thought it might be a problem. I guess I can tell her no after all... I'd hate to turn down an invitation I already accepted, though."

"It's not a problem," Glynn said, but Hestia knew he'd probably had father-daughter time in mind. "Please ask us next time, okay?"

"Okay," Megan agreed. "Can I go unpack now?"

Without waiting for them to respond, Megan hopped from her chair and trotted out of the kitchen. Hestia hurried after her sister, not sure what that would accomplish, exactly.

"Meggie," Hestia said, shutting the door.

Megan turned. "Yes, Hestia?"
"I..."

The sisters locked eyes, and Hestia wondered if she should say it. What if Megan was merely upset about Cedric, and none of this had anything to do with You-Know-Who? What if she said something to their parents? The Ministry was clearly going lengths to cover this up, and they would want their daughters to be completely loyal to Fudge.

What if Megan was wondering the exact same thing about her?

"If you need to talk," Hestia began, "just... let me know. I'm still your big sister."

Megan cracked a smile. "I know you are. And... I'd be lying if I said I'm okay. I'm not. But I will be."

"I know. Me too."

Hestia made to leave, but Megan shook her head. "I'd rather you stay. Just as long as we don't have to talk about any of... that."

Someday soon, hopefully, they would be able to talk about things in earnest. For now, this would have to do.

**Gringotts**

"Beel!"

Bill had been on his way to lunch when he heard a familiar voice call his name in a French accent. To his surprise, the girl he'd met at Hogwarts - the Champion, no? - was walking towards him. Fleur Delacour.

"I 'ad 'oped I might bump into you," she said. "But I thought you were in Eegypt."

"You have quite the memory," Bill laughed. "No, with..." he stopped.

"'oo know 'oo?" Fleur whispered.

Bill looked around cautiously. "Yes. You want to be careful-"

"-I know."

"I'm sorry, you know," Bill said. "About Cedric."

Fleur nodded. "'e was too good for zat death."

"So what brings you here?" Bill couldn't imagine why anyone would come at time like this.

"Ze reasons you went to Eegypt. I didn't dare let zem stop me. And now zat you air 'ere, it is clear we were meant to meet again."

Bill was rather taken aback. "Were we?"

"Oh, yes, I zink so," Fleur smiled. "'ere we are, ze only ones 'oo know ze truth-"

"I wouldn't say the only ones-"

"-and we should not 'ave met again, but we did. Fate."
Fleur checked her watch. "I only work part time, and my shift is over. I was zinking of going for lunch. If you would like to join..."

Bill felt a tiny spark of hope, so he followed her.

Maybe there were some good things ahead.

**The Temporary Departure of Charles Weasley**

They were to meet at The Leaky Cauldron again. Just the "core lot" as he thought of them, maybe a few others from the Order. It was a celebration before Charlie returned to Romania.

He'd considered staying, but Dumbledore thought he might be of use there. Tonks had all but forced him to go back; she'd tried to get Bill to go back to Egypt, and Hestia to follow either Bill or Charlie. Both of them had refused. Charlie wanted to stay too, but he'd already made a commitment to Dumbledore, and he had to keep it.

Charlie secretly wished Tonks would come back with him. But that ship had sailed, particularly taking into account the laughing that was going on at the table. Remus and Tonks had arrived first, and were laughing loudly at some private joke.

"Hi Charlie," Remus said. "You just missed -" he snorted.

"This man, he was..." Tonks was wiping tears out of her eyes. "Oh, I think you'd had to have been there."

"You're having fun without me before I've left?" Charlie joked as he sat.

Tonks stuck out her tongue.

"I have to ask," Charlie said quietly, "how's Snuffles?"

Remus and Tonks exchanged a dark look.

"Don't ask," Tonks said. "I really wish they'd let him stay with Mum and Dad."

"You know what Dum - he said," Remus reminded her.

"What did who say?" Hestia asked as she sat next to Charlie.

"We were talking about Snuffles," Tonks explained.

"I see. Is he okay?"

"He's... Snuffles. How about you?"

Hestia sighed. "I don't know. Megan's still away, my parents are still..." she trailed off.

"Hello."

Bill had finally shown up; with him was a blonde woman Charlie thought he'd seen before. Hadn't she been the Beauxbatons Champion?

"This is Fleur," Bill said. "She's a new friend of mine."
Everyone greeted her politely, if not warmly; could they talk freely around her?

"I know 'oo you air," Fleur added. "I'm glad."

Charlie stood and extended his hand. "In that case... Charlie Weasley, Bill's brother."

"Ze one 'oo works with dragons!" Fleur eyed Tonks's pink hair. "And you would be ze quirky one."

"That's not exactly how I put it," Bill muttered.

But Tonks laughed. "No, that's my evil twin."

Fleur frowned, clearly not getting the joke. She'd learn soon enough.

It only then occurred to Charlie that no one else was actually in the pub, except for Tom and a hag a few tables away.

It was just as well. They didn't have to whisper. Not that there was much to whisper about; as the night went on, it felt much more like a gathering of friends than anything he was in much too good of a mood to worry about.

When it was time to leave, Charlie slipped a note under Bill's drink and made a quick exit while pretending to be headed for the men's room.

If anything bad happened, he didn't want to remember long faces and goodbyes. He wanted to remember his friends laughing like their lives hadn't changed drastically, new friends a natural blend in their little group.

Hopefully his departure was only temporary, and he would be back before that had to be the case.

But if not, he couldn't have had a happier memory.

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