Divergence

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Summary

In an effort to escape her captors, Hermione Granger attempts to go back in time two hours. However, she ends up in 1977, confused and alone. How will she navigate the past when she knows the future? Can she sit idly by and watch those she begins to consider friends succumb to their horrible fates? Timelines are tricky things. EWE.

*First Place - Best Werewolf (Non-Canon) for Mischief Managed Awards 2018
*Nominated - Best Must Read for Mischief Managed Awards 2017
*Nominated - Best Werewolf for Mischief Managed Awards 2017
*Nominated - Best Romance for Marauder Medals 2016

Notes

So I am absolute trash, and I am starting a Remione when I already have a Cedmione to finish, and 30k written of another Remione…. but the 30k fic is probably going to be a 100k+ monster, and the Cedmione is a sequel and requires a lot more thought and attention to detail (continuity), so please don't hurt me for this.
"Get back here, mudblood!"

Hermione's chest ached with each breath, and she tried to ignore the sharp pain that was like a knife in her side.

*Just a little further*, she thought to herself, *just a bit more, that's it.*

She broke free of the bushes, fresh scrapes marring her face, and went to turn on the spot. She saw the infuriated face of her pursuers before her apparition took her to a place of complete contrast.

The moon was full, round and glowing right above her. Its light shone on her new surroundings, illuminating them in an almost ethereal glow.

The black market was thriving, as it did every night. She weaved in and out of the crowd, bumping into all manner of people; mothers with their children, elderly wizards seeking help in their retirement, solo travellers wishing for a safer journey. There was no one running, like she was. There was no one with that slight edge of panic, like she had. The crowds parted for her somewhat, sensing her urgency, hearing her ragged breath.

Finally, Hermione reached her.

"Give it to me," Hermione rasped out, almost throwing a bag of gold at Verdandi, who looked shocked at the sudden interruption. Hermione had knocked the customer Verdandi was speaking to out of the way.

When Hermione received no response other than a wide-eyed look, she lost her patience.

"Give it to me!" She shrieked, grabbing the merchant's lapels in her fists and bringing her face close to her own.

Verdandi still looked shocked, but a glimmer of understanding was now in her eyes. Hermione let her go, and the older woman reached behind her for a small wooden box. The crowd bustled behind them amidst the glow of the full moon. The middle-aged woman Verdandi had previously been talking to had moved on, unimpressed. There was much else to be seen in the market, Hermione knew. Since the uprising, she had been perusing it for many months in the hopes of finding anything to help.

"Remember what I said when we first met," Verdandi whispered in her ear, shoving the box into Hermione's clammy hands. Her side felt ripped open with every breath, and she only nodded in response before turning quickly on her heel and leaving Verdandi behind.

The crowds thinned the closer Hermione got to the edges of the market, sticking to the shadows created by the moonlight hitting the roofs above her. Her heart pounded in her chest, beating an unusual rhythm that resonated through her blood, which began to sing an ominous tune as if sensing the reality of her situation.

Ducking into an alley that had seen better days, Hermione tried to ignore the rise in volume about twenty metres away from her, the indignant exclamations for someone to watch where they were going, and why did they have blood on them?

With trembling hands, she picked up the box, ornate in its design but irrelevant. She flipped open the
lid, and saw inside her means of escape.

The gold glistened in the moonlight, slightly off colour to what she remembered. With no time to think at all, the shouts getting louder and closer, she yanked the necklace over her head and flipped the knob on the right side twice.

Two hours.

As she felt the old but familiar pull at her chest, where the time turner now sat quite comfortably, Hermione closed her eyes against the dizzy sensation likely to take a hold of her. She had learned, through much practice, that witnessing the present reverse itself did not sit well with her stomach. Especially amongst crowds.

Despite this, the sounds she heard rushed by her as if she was on an especially fast rollercoaster, the roar of the wind echoing in her ears painfully. She clasped her hands over them, wincing against the rushing sound of water, like her inner ear was struggling to keep up with the time change.

Suddenly, it stopped. Looking around, hoping to find shrubs or bushes to take cover behind, Hermione pulled up short. This was not the forest she had been in two hours ago. In fact, Hermione did not recognise the place she was standing in, just as she could not rectify having left at night but suddenly being blinded by daylight, however waning.

Pulling out her wand, which had been stashed in her robes before her run for freedom, Hermione eyed her surroundings warily. By all appearances, this was a Muggle neighbourhood – but she knew better than to trust things by their appearance. Death Eaters did not take offense at hiding behind Muggle facades, these days. Hermione knew all too well.

The road was relatively empty despite what, Hermione might've guessed, should be rush hour traffic. After all, it was dusk and despite seeming like a relatively warm day this was still winter. She seemed to be standing next to a large tree, an unusual sight in the London she was used to. In fact, looking around her she noticed the houses looked a lot less like her London and lot more like the London in her parents' pictures, the London of the 70's that they had lived in the outskirts of.

Mind whirring with any and every possibility, she stayed by the tree to stay upright. She lifted a hand to her left side, which now throbbed in a dull ache as if it were a few days old instead of a few hours. Wincing, she leant her shoulder against the tree, and cast a Disillusionment charm. It would not do well to be seen, regardless of her new location.

"Henry, you can't possibly expect me to entertain your parents at such short notice!" Hermione heard from inside the house next to her position. The voice was a woman's, young, probably newly married by the sounds of it. Hermione listened, keen to figure out where she was.

"It's nothing, Ruth, honestly! They just want to come around and see how we're doing."

Hermione frowned deeply. "How you're doing, you mean."

"How you're doing, you mean." Ruth said crossly, and Hermione knew exactly how she would be holding herself – arms crossed, fire in her eyes. The stance would not have changed in twenty years. "We've been together for over a year, and they still don't like me."

Hermione's heart, having relaxed after her escape, sped up again at an incredible pace.

"You know that's just because they don't know you well enough yet-" Hermione felt like her lungs had been wrenched out of her chest for all to see, gasping for air that wasn't there. The wound on her side started up its sinister rhythm once more, and Hermione let out a cry as she fell to her knees, her
charm failing in her weakness.

"-about time they- what… what was that?"

Muffled voices. Hermione's vision swam as she only caught half of what was being said.

"Ruth, she's struggling to stand-"

"-quickly, now, Henry-"

"-knew we should've looked at that place closer to-"

"-honey, she doesn't look dangerous, I'm su-"

"-are you- are you all right? Do you need water?"

Her eyes felt weighted down as they fluttered open, heavy and tired in the face of this new world.

This new time, Hermione corrected herself groggily, calculations and arithmetic and timelines swirling around in her head.

As the faces above her came into focus, Hermione's tired mind could do nothing more than nod feebly. Lifting her right hand to her head, she came away with blood.

"Don't worry about that," a deep voice came from her right. Turning her head, Hermione saw a young Henry Granger gently pull her wrist from the cut. "It's small, likely just a flesh wound. Head ones tend to bleed a bit," He smiled, and it was only because Hermione knew him so well that she recognised the worry in his eyes.

"Here you go," Ruth – her mother – interrupted, pushing a small glass of water into her field of vision. Hermione, struggling against the pain in her side, pushed herself up into a sitting position.

"Thank you," she rasped, forgetting to clear her throat. It seemed like hours since she'd last spoken. She could only really remember screaming. She took a sip.

There was silence for a few moments as Hermione tried to process what had happened. Her parents – Merlin, her parents – seemed equally as stumped, but obviously not for the same reasons.

"You know," her father started jovially, trying to lighten the mood, "it's not every day we have a beautiful girl faint outside our house,"

Hermione, helpless in the presence of her father's embarrassing humour, gave a huff of laughter before wincing hard at the pain in her side.

"I don't suppose," she began, pressing gently at the wound in the hopes she wasn't bleeding all over their new, albeit second-hand, couch, "you have any bandages?"

Ruth gave Hermione's father a look before he went to retrieve what Hermione presumed to be a first aid kit.

"We're dentists, I'm afraid," Ruth started, "Not doctors." Hermione couldn't fathom calling them her parents right then. They were so young, so different. And yet, the same.

"That's alright," Hermione said quietly, "I'm rather adept at cleaning myself up when I have the strength. It's just-"
"You don't." Ruth finished, smiling wryly at her own daughter, although she didn't know it.

There was silence again between them, broken only by the clanging and muffled swearing from what Hermione presumed was the bathroom. She had never lived in this house. When her parents had fallen pregnant with her, they'd moved to somewhere a little more permanent.

"Do you want me to call the police?" Ruth asked, looking at Hermione gently like she did when Hermione had told her about the mean things people said in the hallways of Hogwarts about Muggleborns.

Hermione shook her head.

"It's not like that," she said, and continued on in the face of Ruth's sceptical expression, "I swear. I ran into…. ran into a stray dog, of all things."

"You've had your rabies shot?" Her mother asked immediately, and Hermione smiled.

"Yes, yes, I'm fine."

It's not rabies I've got to worry about.

"Sorry, sorry," Henry apologised, coming back into the living room with a medium sized tin in his hands. "I thought you'd put it somewhere else." He explained, looking to Ruth who rolled her eyes.

"Alright," he proclaimed, "Let's see it then."

Taking a deep breath and biting her lip to hold in any profanities she wasn't sure she'd be able to say in front of her parents without feeling extremely displaced, Hermione moved her robes to the side and slowly lifted up her shirt, which was stained with blood and as dirty as Hermione had ever seen it.

Her parents shared a look. Hermione knew what they were thinking, especially her mother.

It was definitely not a dog that had bitten her.

The wound was far too large in size for it to have been a regularly sized dog, at any rate. Hermione knew, for her story to pass, it had to have been a dog nearly double the size it should be, with a type of aggression not many would see in their lifetime from a supposedly tame pet.

It was not like Hermione could tell them it had been a werewolf, instead.

"It- it looks worse than it is," Hermione said, hoping they wouldn't be able to detect the tremble in her voice as the bite twinged painfully. "It just needs a clean, and some bandages."

Despite Hermione losing the tremble in her voice, Henry and Ruth Granger looked anything but convinced.

"It's fine," Hermione said, clenching her jaw in stubbornness, "I'll be fine. Please."

It was with that, that they managed to jump into action.

"This is going to hurt." Ruth said, holding a bottle of water near her bite. Hermione nodded quickly, letting Ruth know she could start.

She hissed through her teeth as the liquid poured over her side, getting inside the wound and dislodging some of the dirt. Werewolves weren't that clean to begin with, especially not--
"You really should go to a hospital," Henry remarked, dabbing at her to remove the excess moisture. Ruth was unravelling a bandage, ready to have Hermione standing for better application.

"I'll be fine," Hermione insisted, squeezing her eyes shut as Ruth tightly wound the bandage around her midsection.

"Do you need anything to eat? Clothes?" Henry asked, looking at her ripped robes once Ruth was done taping the bandage in place, finishing with a wipe of Hermione's brow and a band-aid. His hands were slightly pink with her diluted blood, and Hermione looked away to stop herself from remembering the sight too vividly.

"No, no… I just need the date."

He frowned.

"It's August 31st, a Wednesday." He stated, waiting for an explanation. Hermione stared him down, willing him to continue so she wouldn't have to ask. There was a pause.

"Nineteen… seventy-seven…" He said slowly, sharing a bewildered look with Ruth.

"Right," Hermione said jerkily, pulling her shirt back down carefully over the bandages, "Of course." Moving cautiously toward the front door, she ignored the stunned looks of her parents as they followed her to the exit.

"Are you sure you don't want us to call the police?" Ruth asked again, eyes imploring. Hermione turned, door open behind her, and looked between her parents. Her mother, the brown hair Hermione had inherited looking straight and sleek. Her eyes, brown and nervous. She looked at her father – short, thick hair a dark brown, eyes nearly black in their darkness.

They were so young.

"I'm sure," Hermione concluded, smiling as politely as she could with a werewolf bite on her abdomen, "Thank you for your help." And she left them at the door, hobbling down the street in the near night, looking for a side street to Apparate from.

Welcome to 1977, Hermione Granger.

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Putting aside all ideas about how and why this was happening, Hermione figured out her first port of call: shelter.

It was night time, in summer, and she had nowhere to go. She couldn't have stayed with her parents much longer. In fact, she shouldn't have interacted with them at all, but it had been beyond her control. What was done was done, and Hermione would have to return to Obliviate them later when she had the strength and the means. For now… they would surely forget in time and that would have to be good enough.

She was again in a Muggle neighbourhood, something more familiar. That made things a little easier. She could transfigure money, despite the churn the thought left in her gut, and she could steal food more easily. This on-the-run life was not foreign to her, but she did not miss it.
But desperate thoughts remained: how was she twenty some years in the past after using just a time turner? How was she even alive? It would explain why she had appeared before her parents – the closest vestiges of her DNA left in this time – but travelling to before your birth was impossible, even if you were hours old and in possession of a time turner to do so. This was unheard of, and Hermione did not like it.

And what was she to do, if she wanted to return? Did she want to return? There was little for her there but a life of running, separated from her best friends and struggling with her new disease every month for the rest of her life until she died, old and alone, or at the end of a Death Eater's wand. At the thought of Harry and Ron, her heart gave a pang. They weren't even born yet. They were not missing her. The future did not exist, and she knew, despite the voice screaming denial in her head, that you could not return to a place that did not exist.

Pushing the thoughts out of her head, Hermione realised there was only really one place she could go, despite her misgivings. Living as a Muggle could not possibly work given what she now was – monster, whispered a vicious voice inside her head – and she could not live in the Wizarding World without a proper back story, especially not in this time of increasing deaths and disappearances. And there were only so many people in the world who could get away with providing limited information but still call on favours.

Clear your mind, Hermione remembered, closing her eyes and gripping her wand tightly, you are impenetrable. Your mind is a fortress only you can enter.

She appeared outside the Hog's Head, still a little breathless from the Apparation. It was dark out now, the waning moon her only natural light. Hogsmeade was not as bright as it forced itself to be after Voldemort's death, but it held some warmth in the light from the windows. The Hog's Head didn't look nearly as dodgy as it tended to be, and Hermione supposed this was because its usual clientele tended to linger more dubiously on the weekends. It was a Wednesday. The school year at Hogwarts started tomorrow, and Hermione knew that time was of the essence, no matter how ironic it was that she had twenty extra years of it.

Entering, Hermione searched the faces around her, not too interested in her ripped robes and patched up appearance, for the owner. He was, Hermione realised, behind the bar in a rare act of socialisation.

Wasting no time, Hermione strode as confidently as she could to stand in front of the tall man who, like his brother, seemed eternally in his seventies.

"Dumbledore,"

He raised an eyebrow, and Hermione realised that these days, most people referred to his brother as such. Regardless, she continued on.

"I need to speak with your brother."

His face darkened, and Hermione again had to remind herself that he did not know her, and that his pain was twenty years fresher than it was in her time, despite still being decades old.

He gestured for her to follow him out back. This did not surprise Hermione, as she knew Aberforth preferred to air his dirty laundry in the presence of very few.

"What do you want?" He demanded gruffly, pulling out his wand and pointing it right in her face. She tried to hide her surprise. The wound at her side seemed to be spitting angrily, for all it was
saying that you know of, Hermione finished silently. But it wasn’t in her interests to play her best cards too early. Secret passageways would have to remain just that – secret.

Aberforth said nothing, and Hermione let slip something she wasn’t entirely sure was true, but would do the job.

"I do not trust him," Hermione began tentatively, and saw Aberforth relax a little, "But I need his help."

Hermione waited for the older man to come to a decision, thinking rapidly about how she was going to present her case.

"Name?" He grunted in a bad attempt at asking, and Hermione held back a smile at her victory.

"Hermione," She blurted out, knowing that she would have a lot of trouble answering to any other name, "Hermione Huxley." Her mother’s maiden name would have to do.

Nodding, Aberforth swished his wand and a wispy, silver form appeared. Hermione realised, having only seen it once before, that it was a goat. Aberforth’s patronus.

"It's not often that I contact my brother," He said, eyeing her up suspiciously, "He will listen to you. You're officially invited. Don't come back here."

With a nod, Hermione exited the back room and then the pub entirely, only looking back once to see a thoughtful look on Aberforth’s face.

One night, twenty-two years ago… he would not remember.

As she walked up to the castle, the summer night's air on her face a warm change from the frigid winter she had left behind, Hermione realised this was a lot more complicated than she had originally thought. All these little instances, they would all add up. So far it was two. Upon seeing Dumbledore, it would be three. She could not Obliviate them all. She could only hope, with time, that memory would fade and hopefully insignificant people like Hermione Huxley would disappear from existence. She relaxed at the thought that most of the people she would encounter would be dead by the time she became an adult. If they did recognise her, they had said and done nothing. There had been no time to reminisce amongst old friends. If she returned, it would not be hard to convince them they had misremembered. There were so few to contribute to collective memory, and so she would be safe.

As she approached the gates of Hogwarts, a figure stood tall and intimidating in the shadows. It was only once they stepped forward and announced themselves that Hermione understood her unease.

"Miss Huxley," the Headmaster said, "My brother sent word of you. Quite unusual, as you might know." His eyes seemed kind, but Hermione did not mistake his geniality as anything but pretence.

"Yes," Hermione replied, refusing to expand upon useless conversation, "I require your assistance in
matters… time sensitive." The play on words would have amused her friends had they been there with her.

"If that is the case, then let us discuss such matters somewhere more private. Please," He swept his arm behind him, as if asking her to lead him. Hermione sent him a perplexed look, but knew that the Headmaster was likely testing her. He chuckled, as if he had forgotten.

"Of course, I forget you have not been through Hogwarts as a student. So few people have not, when they are British."

Hermione chose not to reply, following the Headmaster up a few staircases and down the Gargoyle corridor in silence. Her time turner, concealed under her robes but still around her neck, sat heavily against her breastbone. It felt clunky and unnatural. Kind of like Hermione.

"Ice Mice," Dumbledore announced, before the largest gargoyle in the corridor calmly stepped aside to let them up the spiral staircase. Despite his assumed age, Dumbledore was light on his feet and not at all out of breath by the time they entered the office.

"Please, have a seat." Fawkes, younger than Hermione remembered, squawked from his perch. "And forgive Fawkes, he does not take kindly to unfamiliar faces."

Hermione perched herself on the edge of her seat, nervous for the first time in 1977. Every other obstacle had seemed easily overcome, or within her abilities to alter if need be. Dumbledore would not simply be obliviated, though. She must tread carefully, for Hermione knew now that Dumbledore would use whatever he could to defeat Voldemort. An old man tempted by powerful magic and regret, he would not be able to leave a time turner with the ability to go back decades alone.

"I find myself in need of refuge," Hermione began, making sure her mind was clear and steady. She attempted to look past the Headmaster at his familiar, so she would not experience the probing force upon her thoughts. "I have heard a great many things about Hogwarts and its willingness to help those in need. With the escalating war upon us, I feel it is no longer safe to confront it alone."

"I see," Dumbledore mused, looking at her over the top of his half-moon spectacles. His beard was only slightly shorter than she remembered, and perhaps his eyes were not so tired, but apart from those miniscule differences, not much had changed. "It is such a late hour that I cannot help but wonder whether you found yourself lost unexpectedly."

"You could say that, sir," Hermione said, finally feeling calm enough to look Dumbledore in the eyes. She felt no unwanted presence waiting in the wings, and her shoulders relaxed slightly. Her bite, still aching, throbbed as if to remind her of its presence.

"And you are not a student?" Dumbledore enquired, shifting forward as if interested.

"No, Headmaster. I am years from that."

"Ah yes," Dumbledore smiled, crinkles appearing around his eyes, "Years in mind or in body, I wonder?" The curious tone stopped Hermione from explaining. Instead, she waited.

"I'm sure you've heard, of course, of the trouble I have finding Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers," His hands steepled together, as if he were concocting up a great plan. Hermione only nodded, knowing that, by now, the curse upon the position was well underway. "Hogwarts may keep you safe, here, but I am afraid it would be best if your presence not be questioned. Whilst I admire Professor Nettle's enthusiasm for the position, she is not entirely practised in, shall we say… combat. She would benefit, I think, from someone attempting to, as you said, confront the war."
Hermione did not say anything, noting curiously that he did not make an assumption either way about which side she was on. Hermione knew Dumbledore was well versed in the phrase keep your friends close but your enemies closer. She surmised that Dumbledore was only letting her stay at Hogwarts to keep a close eye on her. Especially if she had approached Aberforth first. This wouldn't be a problem, as Hermione intended to keep her head low until a solution could be figured out.

"I hope you will accept my offer of teaching assistant, Miss Huxley?"

"Sir, I think it's important you know…" Hermione held her breath, trying to swallow the fear inside her chest. This was the first time she would ever tell anybody, and despite knowing that Dumbledore would not judge her for it – something she was thankful for despite her difficulty in trusting him – Hermione could not help but hesitate. "I don't come to you unblemished."

Dumbledore simply looked at her, and Hermione almost thought he knew. But the idea was preposterous, and she pushed it aside.

"I am a werewolf," She declared, holding her neck high.

"The offer still stands, Miss Huxley. We do not discriminate here at Hogwarts." His voice was suddenly gentle, as if talking to an upset child.

There was a moment of silence before Hermione, with nothing else to say and nowhere else to go, nodded.

"Excellent!" Dumbledore clapped his hands together in triumph, and Fawkes gave a victory squawk. "There will be quarters available to you, of course, and meals in the Great Hall are part of your wages. Seventy-five galleons a week excluding these should be about right, I think, for a junior position with us here at Hogwarts. Your holidays fall in line with the school's terms, and we start tomorrow on September 1st. You shall be here to assist Professor Nettle with whatever she needs for as long as she stays. You will uphold the same duties as all other Professors, and act accordingly to the moral standards set forth by the school. Do you accept this contract as it has been read to you?"

Hermione was surprised by the use of verbal contract, and not written as was custom. Especially, she knew, in a time when Polyjuice was sure to be used deceitfully. *Unless, Hermione thought, they haven't even considered it yet. After all, Barty Jr got away with it for a whole year in 1995.*

"I accept." Hermione recited, and the slight tingle in her tongue told her that the magic had been activated.

"I believe that is all, Miss Huxley. The Great Feast is tomorrow night, as all the students will be arriving by train that evening. Please arrive promptly, so that I may introduce you to both staff and students. Fawkes will show you to your rooms. As for me, an old man needs his sleep. Goodnight, Miss Huxley."

"Please, sir," Hermione started as Fawkes flew to land on her right shoulder. She gave a small smile, "Call me Hermione."

And the two of them burned out of the room.
Hermione had not been so nervous when she'd been a First Year awaiting her own sorting. After finding spare clothes in her closet, no doubt placed there by eager house elves, she had showered the grime and the blood off of herself. Noting her reflection in the mirror, she realised she had been foolish to think Dumbledore would not suspect something. Dirty and with a Muggle band-aid on her hairline, Hermione looked suspicious to someone who did not know her.

Her hypothesis seemed correct, then. Dumbledore intended to watch her closely.

Replacing the bandages that her parents had given her with conjured ones of her own, Hermione settled in for a long night. Tired and exhausted, it would not matter – the first sleep as a newly-turned werewolf would not be comfortable. The infected saliva would be circulating throughout her body, changing every cell within her so that she would be a fully-fledged werewolf in time for the next full moon.

It was with these thoughts swirling around her head, that Hermione had fallen into a fitful sleep.

She had supposed, the next day, that living in the Wizarding World might actually be easier, in many ways. Wands were the primary form of identification, and although Voldemort was a threat, he was not as imminent as he would be in the early 80's. And so, an unknown wand on a young woman was not entirely suspicious. Besides, Gringotts would remain neutral throughout both wars. She had a wand, and that was good enough to begin with.

She had opened an account, giving her details to Dumbledore for her pay. She would have to put up with the assortment of clothes Hogwarts had provided in the coming week before she received her first pay slip. Then she could purchase as many unfashionable clothes as her wages would allow, to her endless amusement.

Her robes had been mended and cleaned by the morning, and so with great care she had changed into them for the Welcoming Feast. They were plain, and the style would transcend into 1970's fashion. All up, she had been lucky.

Despite all this, the nerves grated on her. Her stomach felt like it was doing somersaults, and her mouth was so dry it was like she had a mouthful of sand. She had been receiving weird looks from the students Second Year and up since they had entered. She was seated at the staff table, next to a friendly but timid Professor Nettle who had chosen to give her a small hello and nothing more.

It was like First Year all over again, but worse.

The Hat's song and its subsequent sorting was a blur. There was the odd name Hermione recognised, simply by virtue of knowing a lot of the Ministry's employees in the future, but apart from that it had been wholly uneventful. Which was unusual for a Great Feast in the life of Hermione Granger.

"-and so, it is with great enthusiasm that I introduce to you Professor Emilia Nettle, our new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, and her assistant, Miss Hermione Huxley." Upon hearing their names, they both stood politely. "May their time at Hogwarts be both entertaining and instructive."

Hermione froze at that, and looked to Dumbledore. Eyes twinkling, it seemed nothing was amiss. But Hermione had not forgotten the coupling of those words, and would not for a very long time.

Scooping steak and kidney pie along with some mashed potatoes and gravy onto her plate, Hermione endured the well-meaning but monotonous talk of Emilia Nettle.

"I'll need you to help me catch some of the creatures Dumbledore wants me to have the students facing. He's been very persuasive, I must say. Boggarts for Third Years! They're only young, they
don't need to be introduced to such beasts until much later. I can't remember the last time I even faced a boggart!" Nettle was laughing nervously, picking at her roast beef. Hermione gave a friendly chuckle, somewhat eager to be helping out considering boggarts were child's play in comparison to what these kids would be facing in the next few years. It seemed she had a lot of work ahead of her. "But alas, he is the Headmaster, and so boggarts it is-"

Her small voice was interrupted by a very loud bang, and the heads of everyone in the Great Hall swivelled toward the commotion.

"Oi!" A young man shouted. He must have been a Seventh Year, by the look of him, "What are you playing at, James?"

The bespectacled youth sitting across the table from him laughed joyously.

"Me? Why would you ever think I'd jinx your hand to your-"

And it was then that Hermione saw the first student's hand struggling to unstick itself from his own groin area.

The older staff members, having seen the perpetrators, were chuckling light-heartedly and continuing with their meals. Most of the students, Hermione also noticed, were doing the same thing.

"Ha ha," the first student said sarcastically, flicking his stylishly long black hair out of his face, "Very funny. But I'm starving, and you've spilt pumpkin juice everywhere."

The man with glasses was grinning.

"I've spilt pumpkin juice everywhere? Oh, Sirius, use-"

They had been so loud that their conversation had carried across the hall, and Hermione had stopped short at that name.

\textbf{No,} Hermione thought with horror, \textit{it can't be.} But it was 1977, and Hermione wasn't so lucky.

"Remus, did you see me spill pumpkin juice?" The second man said – \textit{James,} whispered a small voice in Hermione's head – to the man sitting next to him, sandy-haired and scarred.

"Nope," Remus said, smiling.

"Me neither, James," said a rounder boy through his boisterous laughter.

Sirius Black grumbled unhappily and sat back down, left hand still stuck to his groin and right hand angrily stabbing his meat with a fork.

"I'll get you back, Potter, just you wait," he said loudly, but Hermione saw the slight smirk on his face.

The Marauders, alive and well and seventeen years old. It was an amusing performance she'd witnessed.

Hermione watched them laugh together, flinging food at each other. And it was with growing dread that she realised the real performance had only just begun.

Suddenly, she'd lost her appetite.
Advanced Lessons

Chapter Notes

So, annoyingly, I was going off of the HP wiki in terms of dates, but the Lexicon says the Marauders graduated in 1977, not 1978. So here I am, telling you all, they are graduating in 1978 in this story. Hermione has conveniently arrived at the beginning of their seventh year (this has a reason, I promise, it's not just me being lazy). Shit's about to go down.

I spent like two hours creating schedules for all houses, as well as Hermione's teaching schedule. That shit is harder than it seems. But it's done. If anyone's interested in having a look, let me know and I'll hook you up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The door to Hermione Huxley's quarters burst open, banging against the wall as a blur of robes and bushy hair ran to the bathroom and slammed the door.

Adrenaline pumping through her veins, Hermione wiped her mouth of the vomit she'd just expelled, leaning her head heavily against the clean toilet seat, shivering. She may as well have not eaten at the Great Feast.

Her breathes came in big gulps, as if so thirsty for air she forgot it came so freely.

*How could this happen?* She thought frantically, *The odds alone…*

Shaking her head clear of the pounding thoughts, she shakily flushed the toilet, pushing herself up to wash her face in the basin.

This was too much to deal with. *Too much, too much…*

Her sobs broke out in the bathroom, echoing off the tiles. She held her head in her hands, leaning heavily against the sink as if it was the only thing that could hold her up.

She cried for her friends, who she knows will end up facing a similar fate to herself. Threatened, chased, attacked, lost to everyone but themselves… She cried for the Marauders, so happy and so alive, but so near the end of anything good for them. She cried for herself, now a werewolf destined to a life of isolation and social pariah. She cried for herself, never able to see her friends again as a young woman, never able to be the same kind of friend. She cried and cried and cried.

But if she was good at one thing, it was compartmentalising.

This was her time, now. The future could not be returned to, because the future did not exist. It was her duty, now, to make sure things went as scheduled. It was her duty, to watch everything fall apart.

She was Hermione Granger, time traveller, and she would witness history.
The first day of classes fell on a Friday, which seemed to help everyone acclimatise to being back in a learning environment. Having received Nettle's lesson plans overnight, Hermione had briefly brushed up on the first, second, and seventh year assigned texts that morning in her free period, all of them heavy on theory and lacking the edge Hermione preferred in her personal reading. But she was not the professor, she had to keep reminding herself, she was the assistant. And so assist she would.

She was just thankful she didn't have the Gryffindor seventh years until the following Thursday. Nearly a whole week to prepare herself, that would have to be sufficient.

Hermione wasn't expecting Severus Snape.

Monday was her only fully scheduled day in the week, and so she did not realise until lunch that seventh year Hufflepuffs and Slytherins awaited her after dinner.

Both lessons after lunch – fifth and sixth years respectively – flew by too fast and dragged on too slowly. Hermione felt like she was walking to the gallows, anticipating the piercing eyes of her former professor, and the man who had given his life and his death for Lily Evans.

Hermione stood by her smaller desk, shifting around papers to avoid looking at the curious faces of the seventh years who entered around eight o'clock, obviously tired from a long day of unfamiliar study. Their lives seemed so simple in comparison, Hermione almost envied them.

"It seems like everyone's here – good! Welcome to your final year of Defence Against the Dark Arts! This is the second lesson for our Hufflepuffs in attendance, so we'll be repeating part of their first lesson and moving on to more interesting material. I've been told this year's Slytherins could keep up, so we should be on even footing by the end."

Although the two houses did not seem to have any outright animosity with one another – at least not like Hermione expected given the relationship between them back in the 90's – they were clearly separated down the room, with the Hufflepuffs on the right and the Slytherins on the left. It was thanks to this that Hermione, studiously avoiding the left hand side in a very unprofessional manner, did not glimpse the former Head of Slytherin House until the second half of the lesson.

"Miss?"

Hermione froze, closing her eyes in barely contained fright before plastering on a blank expression and turning. She had been pacing the middle aisle, hoping to be called on by a Hufflepuff in the corner.

Seventeen year old Severus Snape looked up at her, his heavy brow fixed in a frown and his hands covered in smudged ink. His nose, larger than it should have been, dominated his face. But he was as she expected, if a little less hostile.

"Yes?"

"Professor Nettle told us that when facing our opponent, we should always make the first move to establish strength..." Hermione waited for him to continue, "But wouldn't it be more strategic to wait on them? Then you could get a feel for the kind of dueller they are, and immediately you have the tactical advantage."

It was a simple deduction, but none of the other students had picked up on it.

"Twenty points to Slytherin." Hermione said softly, and saw the first genuine smile she'd ever seen
grow on Severus Snape's face.

The following two days rushed by, only stopping to say hello briefly in meals and the changing of bandages. When Thursday hit, Hermione was wholly not ready.

Almost four hours of Gryffindors that afternoon. From two thirty 'til five, she'd be facing them, with another hour after dinner. It was almost as if Dumbledore had known, and decided to torture her.

She'd almost prefer the Crucius to four hours of smiling, dead faces.

"Take your seats, take your seats. Quickly now, we've got a lot to get through!" Nettle shepherded a few stragglers to their seats before grinning brightly at them. Hermione noticed a few of the students look slightly disturbed, and supposed their usual Defence teachers imposed more of an intimidating air than a friendly one. For all her uncertainty, Hermione appreciated a smiling face in such dark times.

"Now, it's important for all of you to know that the third class of Defence on your schedules is entirely deliberate, I assure you! Dumbledore insisted his seventh years get a bit of extra training in for their NEWTS," There was some muttering, and Hermione was sorely tempted to correct Nettle. Dumbledore had emphasised the extra lesson be about facing the world outside of school. But she was an assistant, nothing more. It was not her place.

"We've got a loaded course this year. Miss Huxley and I are going to be picking up the slack from some of your former teachers. Unfortunately, this means nothing quite as fun as my usual sort of lessons, but we'll get through them with a smile and hopefully a lot of Outstandings by the end!"

Half the class were murmuring amongst themselves by now, Nettle obviously not passing the test they probably put through each new teacher yearly. Hermione understood – it got easier to tell which teachers knew their stuff and which didn't by the time you were thinking about NEWTs. Despite this, Hermione found herself disgruntled – she liked Emilia Nettle, regardless of her rather meek approach to Defence. She was certainly better than the likes of Quirrell, or Lockhart – both of which hadn't even been able to articulate the course work properly, for differing reasons.

Although half the class were distracted, it was a certain group that had caught Hermione's eye – not for their familiarly, although there was that, but for their blatant disregard of Nettle entirely. In fact, one sentence in and they'd all but decided she wasn't worth listening to.

The Marauders were laughing at the back of the class. She saw an unsure Remus nudge Sirius to listen, but his friend waved him off. Professor Nettle was losing steam, her small voice slowly being drowned out by the raucous laughter of the Seventh Year Gryffindors, and the unwilling audience they always attracted. Sirius seemed to be demonstrating a particularly impressive Quidditch move when Hermione decided she'd had enough.

As quick as she could muster, which was far quicker than the students could fathom, she'd sent a silent Incarcerous toward the back of the classroom. As ropes surrounded Sirius, gagging him and tying him to his own chair, Hermione spoke.

"I suppose you think reciting Quidditch moves to a Death Eater will save your life, Mr. Black," she said conversationally, meandering forward as if she were walking along the beach with a friend, "And I suppose your friends will watch and laugh, too, when he kills you."

The room was suddenly deathly silent, and Hermione could feel the stares of every single one of her peers – for that was what they were, given the age difference – land on her.
Professor Nettle did not make a peep from behind her, and Hermione guessed she'd be getting a bit of a talking to after this. But this was a chance to assert her authority and teach them a lesson at the same time. She caught Remus's eye, and couldn't help but feel a little ashamed at the flabbergasted look she'd put on his face. He'd always been her favourite professor, and she was sure he wouldn't approve of a manoeuvre such as the one she was currently pulling.

Sirius had stopped struggling against the ropes now, and instead glared at her with a fierceness she rather admired, despite the lack of respect it implied.

"I'm not sure what your other classmates told you about Defence this year. But Professor Nettle and I have been tasked to prepare you to go forth into the Wizarding World and protect yourselves." Hermione looked around her at all the rapt faces, glimpsing Peter Pettigrew trying to no avail to break Sirius free of his incarceration, and the dark red hair of one Lily Evans, who was studiously listening to every word that came out of Hermione's mouth. Hermione looked away quickly, her stomach rolling at the thought of a student dead in under five years. "Protection requires a wide knowledge of spells, and the ability to anticipate," Hermione turned back to look at Sirius, "your opponent's attack."

"Yes," Nettle continued, and Hermione took that as her cue to release Sirius from her spell. The ropes fell, vanishing, and she was left with an irate Sirius shrugging off the concerns of his friends, his grey eyes boring dangerously into her own. "Miss Huxley is right. I expect better reflexes, if you want an Acceptable in our class!" She chuckled nervously, and Hermione frowned before taking her place back beside the desk. She realised she'd have to work a lot harder at getting Nettle to think about this as a self-defence class, and not a NEWT-level lesson. Dumbledore had told them the extra lesson for the seventh years was to enforce the probability of danger outside of Hogwarts. That was important to remember.

The lesson continued, but Hermione noticed a sudden lack of background chatter than was previous, and smiled to herself, satisfied.

"Alright," Nettle concluded with a big smile. Hermione had tuned out the rest of her speech, "Split up into pairs, and I want to see your best disarming spells! Off you go!" Hermione tried not to roll her eyes. Disarming spells were mastered in the earlier years of Hogwarts. At least, in Hermione's time.

"Expelliarmus? We learnt that in second year!" she overheard a Ravenclaw with dark, long hair whisper to her friend as they set themselves up.

But Hermione, although reluctant to start with such a simple spell but bound to follow Nettle's curriculum, realised that the friendly professor had been right to get them to practice. All students could perform the spell, but nowhere near fast enough or silently enough to warrant moving on to the next part of the lesson. Hermione was astonished.

Sirius was lazily disarming Peter without a second glance, but Peter, too shy to offend his friend, wasn't much of a challenge. Hermione sensed a recurring theme.

"What, are you going to tie me up again? Like it a bit rough, do we, Miss?" Sirius drawled, looking her up and down as she approached them.

Hermione did actually roll her eyes this time.

"Since you asked so nicely," Hermione said, before she turned to the rest of the class and gave a loud whistle. Almost everyone halted, bar one pair that finished with the Gryffindor girl on her back, and her Ravenclaw friend laughing as she helped her up.
"This is a second year spell, yes," Hermione began. The room was silent once more, and she thanked her earlier initiative in getting them to shut up enough so she could talk. Fear was a good motivator, if done in small doses. "But none of you seem to have mastered it, let alone silently."

There was murmuring amongst the group, and Hermione saw the Ravenclaws particularly irate expressions.

"Mr. Black, to the front, please." Sirius narrowed his eyes at her before following orders, standing near Professor Nettle, who seemed content to let things play out.

"Now," she announced as she also reached the front, turning to her students, "What does a silent spell provide you with?"

There was a smattering of hands around the room, and Hermione studiously ignored the redhead nearest to her.

"Yes, you there, with the blonde hair,"

A tall Ravenclaw boy gave his name and an answer straight out of a text book, and Hermione smiled in remembrance.

"Phillip Joyce. Casting a spell silently gives you a distinct advantage in a duel as your opponent won't know what sort of spell you're sending his way."

"Perfect, ten points to Ravenclaw."

Joyce smiled, receiving congratulations from his friends.

"But won't they be able to identify the spell by its colour?" Another Ravenclaw said, flushing slightly when he realised he'd spoken out of turn.

"Correct again, ten points to Ravenclaw." Hermione awarded, and she noticed the previously timid expressions on the students' faces were perking up at the continued house points she was giving out.

Bribery works every time, Hermione mused with amusement.

"But there are plenty of spells that share the same colour. By casting silently, you aren't giving yourself away fully. All of you, as seventh years, should be casting your spells silently out of habit. I'm disappointed to see that this is not the case."

A couple of the seemingly more studious students looked down in embarrassment, but Hermione noticed Lily Evans frowning.

"But Miss Huxley," Hermione could not help but turn, and she met green eyes with her own brown. Lily Evans's hand was up, as Hermione expected, "Aren't silently cast spells weaker than spoken ones?"

Hermione could not answer for a moment given the pure shock that she was feeling. Had they not learnt...? What sort of education had they been receiving? Hermione suddenly remembered Dumbledore's words, about how they needed someone more fit to confront the impending war.

I'm going to have to be more conspicuous than I planned.

"No, Miss Evans," Hermione replied in a tone that brooked no argument. Even Nettle was frowning, "I don't know what sort of education you have all been receiving, but silent spells are just as strong
as spoken spells, the only difference being you do not speak them."

There was murmuring amongst the students.

"Mr. Black and I will now demonstrate. Sirius," Hermione nodded at him, encouraging him to start.

He turned on his side, legs wide apart, a concentrated expression on his face.

Red shot out of his wand, and Hermione produced a silent Protego in answer, which deflected the spell, hitting a nearby student. Her wand fell limply onto the ground.

Hermione walked toward Sirius, who was frowning.

"Good stance," She announced to the class, putting both her hands on his shoulders, "Relaxed wand arm, wide legs, and side-on. This is how you cast a spell." Sirius looked pleased with himself, and Hermione almost felt bad for what she was about to do.

"Good stance… but weak spell." Sirius's mouth fell open in indignation.

"An Expelliarmus should propel your opponent's wand out of their hand and into your own, regardless of whether or not it's been deflected. Let me show you," she announced to the class, turning around and walking back to her original position.

When she turned back, Sirius looked slightly nervous, if only because he probably didn't want to be tied up again as a spectacle.

Expelliarmus!

The red spell shot out of her wand with ferociousness, her aim true, and hit Sirius in the chest so hard he stumbled back a step. His wand flew up out of his hand at a great height, and arced right into her waiting palm.

The room was silent once more. Hermione smiled.

"Try again."

The students turned to each other at once, fierce expressions on their faces, the room absent of voices as each of them refused to take the easy way out. She even saw Pettigrew concentrating hard on disarming James.

"I must say, Hermione," Nettle muttered when Hermione made her way back over to her, observing the students, "That was a very strong disarmer you cast there."

"Thanks," Hermione replied, as a certain kind of warmth spread through her chest as she watched Lily Evans disarm perfectly on the first try, triumphant smile on her face, "I had a good teacher."

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It wasn't long before word got around about Miss Huxley tying up Sirius Black in Thursday's Defence class. After that, it seemed she'd earned a modicum of respect for shutting up the infamous prankster.
But being an assistant to Professor Nettle wasn't very challenging, physically or mentally. Nettle had the students taking notes half the class, and practising basic wandwork for the simplest of spells at their level each lesson. Hermione found herself bored and, most worryingly, restless.

It was now mid-September. Hermione knew it would be like this every time, worse as the full moon got even closer, but she could not believe Remus Lupin hid it so well.

Hermione had made a point not to speak so much in lessons after her outburst with the seventh years. Defence was not her class, and it was rude and unprofessional to constantly talk over and interrupt Nettle, no matter how much she wanted to. This didn't mean she couldn't observe, though.

Remus was an old soul, that much was obvious. His smiles were tired but genuine, his eyes often drooping as if fighting sleep, and his arms were very obviously scarred even though he tried to hide them under long sleeves.

However, this could all be attributed to stress, or sickness, as well as past trauma. If Hermione had not known, she would have never guessed. Remus did better at hiding at seventeen than he did when he was in his thirties. Though, Hermione supposed, he was probably too tired to even fathom pretending back in her time.

Still, Hermione couldn't help the tiny sliver of admiration that blossomed. She stoutly ignored it, instead giving him approving nods at impressive spellcasting and marking his papers while steadfastly refusing to recognise the slightly messier handwriting of her former professor.

It came to a head on the third Tuesday of term, the twentieth. Exactly one week from Hermione's first full moon.

"Miss Huxley," she heard as she strode down the corridor in newly bought robes, a little shaggy but practical enough for her job. She'd been on her way to her rooms, hoping to relax with a book away from the prying and curious eyes of her students, who seemed to think that because she was younger, they could ask every sort of personal question that came to their mind. The first years were especially bad.

It was Professor McGonagall who had called her name from down the corridor, and Hermione pasted on a plain smile in response. She'd been trying not to be alone with the older professor, but she supposed it was only a matter of time before she'd be cornered. Dumbledore had not expanded upon to the staff Hermione's own explanation to him of her situation, and so McGonagall always seemed to look at Hermione with a little pity. Frankly, it was embarrassing and a little too close to home.

"The Headmaster informed me of your… condition." McGonagall pursed her lips, and Hermione straightened automatically in response. She supposed the staff knew about Remus, so they had to have known about her. She'd been resolutely not thinking about her impending transformation, but the reality of it was beginning to set in. She'd had to find somewhere to do it, foremost, before she could address any of the other multitude of problems that awaited her.

"I'm not sure if anyone else told you," McGonagall continued, hesitating only for a moment before barrelling on like a true Gryffindor, "but Remus Lupin, of seventh year Gryffindor, shares your affliction." Hermione tried to look surprised, "Unfortunately, we did not anticipate any more than one of you with us, and so the Headmaster has advised that we keep our methods the same."

Hermione wasn't entirely sure what she meant, and it must have shown on her face, for McGonagall made it plainly clear.
"Come the evening of the 27th, you and Mr. Lupin will both reside in the Shrieking Shack for the night until you… resume yourselves once more."

Thoughts ran rampant through Hermione's head, but the most glaringly obnoxious of all was the one that kept repeating itself over and over.

Do not be noticed do not be noticed do not be noticed do not be noticed-

"That sounds… acceptable, Professor. Thank you for accommodating for me." She added on hastily. It was strange to think that the transformation she always sympathised about would soon be hers to experience. She couldn't quite wrap her head around it.

"I'll leave it up to you to let Mr. Lupin know. I believe he has a free period now, also." And with a terse smile, McGonagall continued down the corridor, leaving Hermione a pale mess behind her.

Walking numbly to the library, Hermione thought of what she could possibly say. In any other circumstance, she would take Remus aside in her office, and let him know plainly that they would be sharing full moons together but she was still his teacher. Well, teaching assistant. It was for convenience, for lack of anything else put in place.

However, this was not any other circumstance. Hermione had never been insanely good at lying. She was sure Dumbledore knew something was amiss, at least. She'd be getting by on half-truths for the most part – yes, she was a Muggleborn; no, her parents were dead; yes, she'd been in combat; no, she hadn't faced Voldemort; no, she preferred not to talk about it.

But Hermione found the thought of outright lying to Remus Lupin's face difficult. He had never lied to her.

Taking a deep breath, Hermione entered the library. If she knew Remus, and she did, this was where he would be.

It didn't take long to find him.

He was not alone, as she had hoped. Peter Pettigrew sat with him, and Hermione's muscles clenched in warning.

He's not a Death Eater yet. She thought to herself, approaching cautiously, Not yet.

"Mr. Lupin," Hermione greeted stiffly, "Pettigrew," The latter nodded politely at her.

"How can we help?" His mossy green eyes were bright and focused, and Hermione nearly fidgeted under the scrutiny.

She glanced at Pettigrew before deciding it was a bit too much to handle, speaking to them both.

"I need to speak to you in my office, Lupin." Remus blinked, incomprehending. Peter had paused momentarily before continuing with his work, "Follow me, please."

She turned on her heel, refusing to see whether he was following her. She heard a few mumbles, and the sound of books being shoved hastily into a bag and so had to presume he was.

Entering Professor Nettle's office five minutes later didn't help her relax at all. If anything, the bits and pieces of her colleague's life scattered around the room were stifling, and an uncomfortable reminder of Hermione's own situation.
There was an awkward silence after they were both seated. Remus had chosen not to comment on the fact this wasn't exactly her office, before Hermione cleared her throat.

Remus looked at her expectantly, and Hermione didn't know what came over her. She reasoned later that it was the familiar gaze and more recent face that caused it.

She deflated considerably.

"I honestly don't know how to tell you this. It's… it's a bit ridiculous, really," She laughed without humour, picking at her fingernails nervously. Remus subtly dropped his book bag on the floor, scooting closer.

"It's – ahh… well, Professor McGonagall told me about–"

But it didn't seem like she needed to say any more. Remus knew, if his suddenly closed off face and tense posture was anything to go by. Hermione frowned, confused.

"It's nothing to worry about, Professor. I've got it under control." Stumped, Hermione chose to address his reference to her later and jumped on the most pressing issue.

"Under contr– ? Remus, no. That's not what I meant at all. This is… very difficult for me."

Hermione added at Remus's befuddled look. "I – look, there's no easy way to say this, so: I'm a werewolf."

Remus's expression did not change, and Hermione wasn't entirely sure he has grasped her meaning.

"That is to say, I will be joining you in the Shrieking Shack next full moon."

His expression cleared, and Hermione thought the most apt description she could use for him at that moment was shocked. It didn't seem to fit, though.

"Oh."

There was another moment of silence, and Hermione tried not to laugh at the absurdity of it all. Here she was, confessing to the person she'd known for five years, that she was a werewolf. If he were any older, he probably would have smelt it on her. But Remus had not been in the presence of many other werewolves at this point in his life. He still had that innocence left.

"Yes, well…" Hermione fiddled with the photograph in front of her, tilting it this way and that to the silent objections of its occupants. Nettle's brother, it seemed, was especially annoyed.

She rose from her seat. The silence was becoming unbearable, and it would be easier to end the conversation now.

She moved swiftly to the door, and opened it wide. Remus had risen, too, picking up his book bag. He still seemed at a loss as to what to say, so Hermione simply smiled at him.

"I'll see you in class, Mr. Lupin."

He brushed past her slowly, as if he couldn't even process the act of walking properly now that she'd shocked him so.

"Oh, and by the way?" Hermione halted him. He turned his head, eyes wide. "I'm not your professor, Remus. Miss Huxley works just fine."

She shut the door. Resting her head against it, Hermione closed her eyes and released a breath she
didn't know she was holding.

It seemed like if she could do that, she could do anything.

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She was wrong. She could not do anything.

"I'm sorry, Hermione. I'm just not up to it. This damn wizard flu has reared its ugly head." If Hermione had been feeling particularly grouchy, she would have given Nettle the guilt trip. But Emilia's red and splotchy face, watering eyes, and clogged sinuses were too pathetic to do that to. So she accepted her fate and waved away the professor.

"It's fine, Emilia. I'll take your seventh years after lunch. Boggarts, was it?"

Nettle nodded miserably from her quarters' doorway. She'd taught the fourth years that morning, but it seemed she could not go on. Maybe the Slytherins had been too much for her.

And so it was with the banging of the bell to signify the end of lunch that Hermione, having scoffed down a sandwich just in time, made her way to the Defence classroom on the first floor.

As the students ambled in, only a few not quite so dumbed down by the hot food in their bellies noticed Nettle's absence, and this almost made her job easier. The less questions, the less interaction, and Hermione could end her Thursday at nine o'clock with a mug of butterbeer and a novel in bed.

At around five past the hour, all the students were seated. Hermione noticed with approval that the Gryffindors and Ravenclaws had no qualms about sitting amongst one another.

*Good. They need all the unity they can get.*

The boggart rattled inside its wardrobe, effectively bringing the class to attention.

"Hello, everyone. Professor Nettle is too sick to teach today, so I'll be taking on the lesson myself." Hermione eyed a latecomer, but only glanced at them as they took a seat at the back.

"Who can tell me what is inside of here?" She gestured to the large wardrobe, which rocked with sudden movement as if Hermione had practised the precise timing before class.

"With all due respect, Miss Huxley," A small, blonde girl spoke up from the front. She was sitting next to Lily, and Hermione wasn't surprised to see the same frown on her face. "Boggarts are a third year creature. Shouldn't we be learning about something a little more… advanced?"

The rest of the class piped up in approval, and Hermione tried not to show she was in total agreement.

"Professor Nettle has deemed this the subject for today, so—"

"Yeah, but you know more stuff!" called out a rebellious Ravenclaw, and similar exclamations sounded throughout the classroom.

Hermione didn't know what to say.
"Snape told me you gave him points for a completely contradi-"

"Snape?!!" came a voice from the back, disgusted.

"Alright, that's enough!" Hermione called out, trying not to smile. The boggart banged about again.

_I wonder…._

"I'll make a deal with you." Hermione started, and saw interest on most of their faces. "If I give a… more advanced lesson, you're going to have to do the theory outside of class. We won't have time for it here. Deal?"

Hermione saw nods all round, none of them even hesitating.

_If they actually do the theory, I'll sell my wand_, she thought with amusement.

"Alright. The question still stands. Who can tell me what's inside this wardrobe?"

Nearly twenty hands, the whole class, shot up.

Hermione pointed to the blonde girl who'd spoken out before.

"Mary McDonald. It's a boggart."

"Yes it is, five points to Gryffindor." Mary smiled to herself, "And what does a boggart do, Mary?"

"It takes the shape of whatever you fear the most."

"Right again, another five points."

"She gives the Gryffindors the easy questions," Hermione heard a Ravenclaw mutter as she paced in front of the room, a small smile on her lips.

"And you," Hermione pointed to the same Ravenclaw, "What do you fear the most?"

The Ravenclaw paused for a second, as if unsure.

"Snakes, Miss."

"Snakes, alright." Hermione repeated, nodding in thought, "And what would you do if you saw a snake?"

The student scoffed, as if the question itself was asinine.

"I'd run."

There were a few chuckles around the room, cutting through some of the tension.

"Yes, I suppose that would be smart," Hermione replied in a considering tone, "But what if you couldn't run?"

"Well— … what do you mean?"

"I mean, what if the snake was right in front of you and you couldn't run? Because if you run, you turn your back on the snake and it kills you."

The room was quiet.
"Ah, I see you understand what I mean." Hermione said, making her way slowly down the aisle between the two sides of the classroom.

"Despite what Professor Nettle has told you previously, the extra Defence class in your schedules is not in anticipation of NEWTs. There is a real threat out there, a threat that no amount of bravado will allow you to escape from unscathed. I consider it my job to help you better protect yourself, and your friends. Family, as well, for those of us who are unique among them." Hermione looked to Lily, who had a particularly serious look on her face.

"Boggarts are a fake manifestation of your deepest fear, and are considered silly creatures you can magic away with a simple Riddikulus. But real life is not so easy. Outside these walls is where you will face real fears, fears harder to beat than a snake, or a spider, or a banshee. Fears that will chase you when you run."

Hermione swallowed thickly, pushing thoughts of hot, wet breath at her feet from her mind.

"When Professor Nettle asks, this is what I taught you about boggarts today."

The class relaxed, chuckling now that the tension seemed to have been broken entirely.

"And, unfortunately, I'll have to get you to write a foot-long paper on the boggart and how it manages to detect your worst fear. I'm sorry," Hermione added at the groans throughout the room. "But that's the theory, and we had a deal. Let's take a break. Ten minutes, everyone."

Hermione strode back to her desk, sitting down and sighing heavily.

*I can't believe Emilia thought boggarts would take up the whole double. I... I can't leave them to the curriculum the whole year.*

She looked up at their faces, more animated than she'd seen them so far this term.

*I've got to do something.*

"Alright, let's get back to it." Hermione announced, and the students moseyed back to their allocated desks.

Hermione didn't really want to do it, but it didn't seem like she had a choice. Emilia's next topic was the Grindylow and somehow, Hermione didn't think they'd be encountering any of them in Voldemort's Death Eater ranks.

"I was looking over your previous years recently and something became apparent to me quite early on. There's been almost no mention of werewolves."

She refused to look at the back left, where she knew a certain werewolf was probably watching, surrounded by his Animagus friends. "Apart from one question on your OWLs, they've basically been ignored. So let's talk about them. What can anyone tell me about werewolves?"

A hand came up at the back, allowing Hermione to ignore Lily once more. She'd have to call on her eventually, but the more she thought about looking her in the eyes, the more nervous she got.

"Yes, Mr. Potter?"

"Normal people become werewolves through a bite." It was the first time she'd heard James speak in anything but a joking tone, and the similarity to Harry shocked her.
It's not him.

"Very good, five points."

No one else seemed to offer up any other information, and it was a sad representation of their previously inept teachers. One good teacher couldn't make up for years of bad ones. Hermione knew that first hand.

She sighed.

"Miss Evans?"

"A werewolf turns with each full moon. They aren't in control of themselves and can't remember each transformation. They hunt for humans, unknowingly. That's why people get bitten, and that's why people are afraid of them."

"Very succinct. Five points."

"I think it's important to understand, Miss Huxley, that it's not the werewolf that's scary. It's the person inside them." Hermione turned to the voice, and saw little Peter Pettigrew fidget at the attention. His round cheeks flushed a bright red, and he mumbled an apology.

"No, go on." Hermione urged, perching herself on Nettle's desk. Her weeks-old wound was bugging her today more than usual.

One week.

"Well, I mean… if the werewolf is a good person, they're going to try and stop themselves from being able to bite people, aren't they? And if they're bad…"

The rest was left unsaid.

"But Evans just said, they can't control–"

"I'd like to see what you'd say if you were bitten by a werewolf, Joyce–"

Suddenly, there was pandemonium.

"Is that a threat, Black?"

"-that's not what I meant, Phillip. The control–"

"Please, will you stop it!" cried Mary.

"Patty, it's okay, the full moon's not for another week–"

"-didn't mean to start anything–"

"We know, Pete–"

"Enough!" Hermione raised her voice above the others, but it was barely a shout.

"I think we've all raised some good points, here," she started, still avoiding Remus's gaze, "But it's important to remember this should be an academic discussion, and not one littered with threats and subtle bigotry."
Joyce had the grace to look slightly chastened.

"You-Know-Who utilises werewolves for his own agenda. Write me a foot-long paper on why, and you get an immediate Exceeds Expectations for your boggart piece, completed or not." Hermione grinned at their incredulous faces.

"I'll see you all after dinner. Ravenclaws are welcome. You're dismissed."

Retiring to her desk, Hermione waited for the last student to disappear through the doorway before she rested her head in her hands.

She was completely in over her head.

She was not a teacher. It had taken everything in her to pretend she was objective, to retain the authoritative air McGonagall lived and breathed. Even Harry, in all his informal teaching, seemed like a natural. Every word out of her mouth felt forced, and pretentious, and--

"—rius, no! It's fine, come on. Let's just go to the common room."

"Padfoot is right, Moony, we have to say something."

The door swung open, and Hermione lifted her head wearily, abruptly faced with an angry Sirius.

"What are you playing at?" He demanded angrily, face fixed into a furious expression. Hermione glanced behind him to see an equally angry James Potter, and an embarrassed Remus Lupin. Peter still stood near the door, looking nervously outside as if a Professor would bust them for speaking with a teacher's assistant.

"I'm sorry?" Hermione asked, genuinely confused.

"All that stuff about werewolves!" Sirius raged, and James pushed past him to deliver the nail in the coffin.

"Are you trying to expose him? We won't let you!"

Hermione was taken aback. This… this was not what she would have thought seventeen year old James Potter to be. By all accounts he was arrogant, lazy, no-good…

Hermione peered around the two bodyguards and looked at Remus, eyebrows raised.

"You didn't tell them?"

He looked even more embarrassed, shuffling closer and picking at the strap of his book bag nervously.

"It didn't seem right."

Hermione swallowed back the warmth she could feel emanating from her chest.

"Tell us what? What the bloody hell are you on about, Moony?" Sirius pushed, looking back and forth between them like he was watching a tennis game.

"Pettigrew, please come in and shut the door."

Peter did as he was told quicker than she thought possible.
"Now that we've all calmed down--"

"Calmed down? Wh--"

"Merlin, Sirius, shut up!"

The four boys looked at her in astonishment.

She huffed, frustrated.

"Look, I understand Remus is your friend--" She silenced James's impending interruption with a hard look, "And I'm sure he appreciates you defending him. But the precise reason why he didn't need defending is exactly what he did not tell you. What I say here does not leave this room," Hermione looked at them all intensely, "Do you hear me?"

"Yes," said Sirius sullenly, and he seemed to answer for all of them.

"I'm a werewolf, you idiots. That's why Remus has nothing to worry about."

Sirius looked gobsmacked.

"This never gets any easier, does it?" she directed her question to the sandy-haired boy at the back, and he smiled with relief.

"No. Not really."

Chapter End Notes

As always, reviews are most welcome! :)}
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait. Life has been work, work, and more work. Then I wrote for some of my other stories. On we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Well," James announced loudly, looking a lot less angry after her admission, "I certainly wasn't expecting that."

Sirius's face was still frozen in shock, his dropped jaw holding much amusement to Hermione.

"I'm sorry," Remus grumbled, looking a lot less nervous now that the metaphorical wolf was out of the bag. Peter hovered in the background, eyebrows raised but otherwise unaffected. Hermione presumed he hadn't been the one with the idea to confront her. This stank of Sirius Black. "They're a bit protective."

"Yes," Hermione smiled, thinking of her freckled, and spectacled best friends, "Just a bit."

There was an awkward moment of silence before James chuckled nervously, clapping a hand on his shocked friend's shoulder.

"We'll just get out of your hair, then."

James steered Sirius away, mumbling under his breath to his longer-haired friend. Peter joined them as they passed, patting Sirius on the shoulder consolingly. Remus went to turn around, before she stopped him.

"Just a minute, Remus. You three go on," She added when they halted their exit.

As the door shut behind the teenage boys – for that's what they were, and Hermione needed to remember that – she looked to Remus.

"I know we've still got a few days, but I thought I'd let you know in advance," Remus still looked a bit perplexed, and Hermione forgave him his slow thinking given what had just happened, and so quickly. "I'll be meeting you at the doors out to the grounds, not McGonagall. They've seen it fit for us to go without an escort now that I'm here."

Hermione didn't want to think about the fact she was only a year or so older than Remus at this point. She was surprised the students weren't more rebellious, given she was basically their equal in a lot of ways.

Not all ways, Hermione thought as green light and evil soul objects flashed through her mind.

Remus cleared his throat, and Hermione realised she'd been lost in thought and missed his response.

"That's fine, Miss Huxley," He seemed to repeat. Up close, Hermione saw how pale he was. His excuse of sickness was more believable when he was younger and not so haggard. The scars were a dead giveaway, in Hermione's future. But the lack of them on his young face saw Hermione
worrying more about his health than about the fact he might attack her, as she had done when she
was only fourteen.

These days, it wouldn't make a difference.

"Good," Hermione concluded, smiling slightly. Remus had never mentioned a teaching assistant
sharing his full moons, but Hermione supposed he had merely pointed out that things got easier with
company. Hermione had assumed his friends at the time, after finding out they were Animaguses.
Then again, Remus had spent full moons with other werewolves before, but not at Hogwarts.
Besides, being part of a pack had never suited him. He hadn't wanted that life, and never had. He
would rather have been an outcast amongst his own kind and more accepted in the wizarding world,
than belong completely in a werewolf pack. After facing such a pack herself, Hermione couldn't
blame him.

Remus shifted back and forth on his feet, before Hermione took pity and dismissed him.

"Enjoy dinner, Remus. I'll see you after."

---

Hermione supposed, after she had stuffed her face with shepherd's pie and been shocked at her
never-ending hunger by the unsatisfied rumbles still going on in her stomach, that Dumbledore had
not seen it imperative to encourage inter-house unity between the Gryffindors and Slytherins in this
first war against Voldemort. He'd learnt his lesson, it seemed, after Voldemort had been defeated
(presumed forever) and it turned out that the majority of his captured Death Eaters had belonged to
Slytherin.

Of course, Hermione knew all too well that just because someone was a Slytherin didn't mean they
longed to be a Death Eater. Life was a lot more complicated than that. She was sure Draco Malfoy
could attest.

So when the Gryffindor and Slytherin seventh years of 1977 had class together, it was with a
pounding headache that Hermione realised they were even more explosive than her own classes with
Slytherin would be in the future. For the first time ever, Hermione was thankful for all those hours
spent with Slytherin house in Potions. Despite Snape's obvious favouritism, it had left her with a lot
more patience and the ability to pick her battles wisely. She's not sure she could say the same for her
friends, but at least Dumbledore's theory had worked on someone.

The lack of exposure to one another meant that when these students of two different houses did
finally interact in 1977, it was with venom Hermione was surprised to see in people so young.

"What's wrong, Travers? Your dad leave again? Shame, that. I mean, your mother is so
welcoming--"

"Shut your trap about my mother, Potter--!"

"--touch me, mudblood."

"You know, one day you're going to regret calling me that."

"Surely you've had enough to eat, Pettigrew? I mean, honestly--"
"–him alone!"

"Standing up for him, MacDonald? A little tart like you could find a better cock to suck. In fact, my own–"

"I'll get you for that one, Mulciber, mark my words."

"Black, you're all bark and no bite–"

"Would you all shut up?" A grumpy Ravenclaw at the front shouted angrily, turning around to everyone behind him, "I would actually like to learn something this lesson."

"Thank you, Patil." His eyes reminded her of Padma, dark and discerning.

Hermione pursed her lips, looking around at the room. The Ravenclaws who had decided to come back for her evening lesson were, thankfully, interspersed around the room. Hermione realised it must be simply Gryffindors and Slytherins who held a feud.

That would change.

"I don't appreciate the insults being exchanged. If you can't treat each other with respect, I want you out of this class. Of course, that means a T on your Defence NEWT, which I'm sure none of you want."

There were a few grumbles around the room, and some glares shared between Remus and, Hermione noted with surprise, Snape.

But they seemed to accept her ultimatum for now. In replacement of their stinging jabs, there was deadly silence. Hermione instructed them on, to their grumbling, how to stun properly. Much the same as her previous classes, they expressed incredulity (particularly the Slytherins) at the relevance, but got more involved when Hermione mentioned they'd get to stun each other as practice. She could see James eyeing up Travers with relish.

Not sure whether she was doing the right thing, Hermione spent the rest of the practical portion of the lesson putting herself between the two sides of the room. She cast her shield charm every now and then to protect students from 'accidental' stunners flying their way, and sent them off to their dorms without any homework. It was Thursday, she was tired. She wouldn't be in a state to mark any homework she could give out soon enough, anyway.

After that, Tuesday crept up on her too quickly. The anxious waiting to teach familiar faces was no longer, as she had faced them and miraculously survived intact. Now, it seemed, her complete denial that the full moon was so close meant that it seemed like she'd travelled forward in time to Tuesday instead of back in time to 1977.

Hermione's now ashen face told her otherwise.

Luckily Tuesday meant that she only had three classes that day and was done once the third year Gryffindor and Slytherins left the classroom, probably off to separate lessons before they'd be trudging to the Great Hall for dinner. The weather outside was mild – overcast, but no rain. Its uncertainty represented the uncertainty in Hermione's gut, which felt like it was calm one minute and then swirling the next. Her hands, as pale as her face, could not stop trembling. She had been shaking them out in irregular intervals in the hopes the trembling would stop, but to no avail. She felt unbearably hot, wiping at sweat on her brow, and her pulse seemed to thud in her ears, like her blood was desperate to escape the confines of her body.
Overall, not a very pleasant experience.

In a way, once her early dinner was over and she was waiting at the doors around seven o'clock, it made sense that all she could feel was relief.

Remus emerged from the Great Hall, the mighty doors closing behind him. He looked slightly better than she felt, but that wasn't saying much. Despite the rushed dinner he'd most likely scoffed down, his steps were lethargic as he made his way over to her. On a clear night such as the one they were having, the doors to the grounds stayed open to let in the autumn air.

He was dressed lightly, as was she, for they both knew they'd be stripped soon enough. It wouldn't do to wreck her new clothes, Hermione had concluded. She only had so much money in her vault.

"Ready?" Hermione asked, clearing her throat after to remove the rasp from her voice.

Remus nodded, seemingly unable to do much else.

Hermione prodded the knot at the base of the Whomping Willow easily enough, after a five minute walk. She fought back a tired smile, remembering that McGonagall had shown her how to calm the angry tree earlier that day. It was strange, having her favourite teacher treat her like the stranger she wasn't.

After stumbling through the passageway clumsily, they finally entered into the Shrieking Shack.

"It's funny that this is the most haunted house in Britain," Hermione commented blandly, taking off her robe once they ascended the stairs and throwing it into the corner of the room. Her arms came up with goosebumps, despite the fact she wasn't feeling the cold.

She really hoped her wolf self didn't ruin her clothes.

Remus did the same, and they both stood in shorts and t-shirts, plain and old.

"Yeah," Remus agreed dryly, "I suppose it's haunted by werewolves, though, not ghosts."

"All the same," Hermione continued, taking her hair out of its neat bun. They weren't undressing yet, it seemed. Years ago, Hermione might have had some modesty – but after running through the English countryside with two of her best friends, both male, she'd lost a lot of her embarrassment over naked bodies.

Eyes flicking to her watch, lying on her crumpled robe, Hermione saw that it was just ten past seven. The sky was nearly completely black outside, a faint light coming through the clouds. It was down to minutes, and then the transformation would begin.

"I'm sorry," Remus apologised, and Hermione turned her head from the window to regard him with confusion. She ignored the sick feeling in her gut, vowing not to expel her recent dinner.

"For what?" Hermione asked, her muscles suddenly tensing. Remus looked just as rigid.

"For what I'll do to you," He gritted out, before both of them fell to their knees. At this point, they were aware enough to start taking off the last items of clothing, and flinging them to their respective corners. Hermione looked down at her hands as tremors wracked her body. Beneath her, the floor was marked up with hundreds of scratches. How many times, Hermione wondered, had Remus been in this shack on nights such as this?

The pain, a backdrop until now, intensified quickly. Hermione could see the moonlight come
through the window. It probably wasn't yet seven thirty. The students were still at dinner, laughing with their friends.

Hermione cried out, and her aching bones suddenly gave out from under her. Distantly, she thought she heard ominous cracking, but tried not to think about it. Her chest was heaving with her breaths, and she was sure she looked like a huddled, shivering mess on the floor.

She was almost too overcome with pain to realise Remus was grunting, low and shallow. His hands were white against the floor, and he was much more still than she.

At first, she attributed this to his experience with full moons. But as the pain went on – and Merlin, was this transformation taking much longer than expected or was she mad? – she realised it wasn't that he had more control over his body. No, he was fighting it.

"Remus," she gasped out, her garbled voice deeper than before. Another shudder took her over, and Hermione noticed her skin suddenly darkening. She was growing fur.

"Don't–" Another grunt, more snapping, "Don't fight it." She looked up, feeling a foreign clunkiness in her mouth. Groaning, she dropped her head back down. Remus was shuddering and shuddering, and his transformation seemed to be taking even longer than hers.

"Let go," Hermione growled out, and her hands were lengthening, becoming thinner.

Like paws.

Her vision was hazy, and black spots were appearing in the corners of it.

"Let–!"

But Hermione was gone.

---

When she woke, it was not with the confusion she had anticipated she would feel. Instead, in one moment she was asleep and in the next she was completely awake.

Snapping open her eyes, Hermione groaned at the aches in her limbs. She was naked, of course. And positioned near the door out to the passageway. She'd have to go upstairs to find her clothes. Ignoring the groaning body a metre away from her, Hermione stood up slowly, stretching out her legs and limping up the stairs. Absently, she noted a bite on her ankle.

Don't think about that now.

She efficiently pulled on her clothes, reciting the recipe for Polyjuice to distract herself. It was a shame she couldn't remember the Wolfsbane recipe. Not everything was that easy.

Grabbing Remus's things, she went back downstairs and threw them in his direction, looking away. Having one of your teachers glimpse you naked would be mortifying, even if they were almost your age.

They were silent as they exited the Shack, making their way through the passageway and out of the Willow, once again immobilised by Hermione's prodding of the knot at the base of the tree.
The sun was just peeking up over the horizon, ready to greet all the other students to a new day. Hermione guessed, without looking at her clock, that it was just after seven.

Dumbledore awaited them at the doors to the Entrance Hall, and Hermione held back her surprise. She had not spoken to him since her first night here. He had relayed his messages through McGonagall, and Hermione felt the less time she spent in the presence of a talented Legilimens, the better.

Remus looked relieved.

"Good morning, Remus," Dumbledore said cheerfully, and Hermione wisely kept her mouth shut. She so very much wanted to make a comment about how good could a morning be, waking up after having been a werewolf the whole night.

Clear your mind.

"Hermione," Dumbledore's eyes twinkled, as if he knew exactly what she was thinking.

"Breakfast awaits you in the Great Hall. Don't strain yourself too hard today, Remus." Dumbledore added before Remus went to gorge himself. Hermione felt ravenous, and was sure her old professor was the same. "Your friends are worried about you."

And with that, the Headmaster nodded at them both and turned to go back to, Hermione presumed, his office.

"Remus, wait!" Hermione called after his back. He was trying to make a quick escape, and she was confused as to why. Surely, if anything, they were closer now. Shared experiences and all.

Once she caught up to him, they were inside the Great Hall. Given only the smattering of students and their bleary-eyed expressions, Hermione concluded that she was right. It was probably closer to seven than it was to nine o'clock, when the bell would toll for classes to begin.

Good. I need some time to go over the fifth year syllabus.

Shaking herself out of her own thoughts, Hermione returned Remus's gaze.

"You shouldn't fight it so much," She blurted out, unsure how to proceed. It was what she'd wanted to say, but finding tact in such a situation was proving difficult. She bit her lip nervously.

Tentatively, she placed a hand on his shoulder. His eyes were stuck on it, before flicking back to her face. She couldn't read his expression, given how closed off it now seemed. The sheepish Remus from not even twenty-four hours ago was miles away.

He shrugged off her hand.

"I'm fine, Professor."

He turned around and stalked off, and Hermione noticed that the Marauders were waiting for him, silent but understanding.

Of course, she realised, her presence meant that they could not have helped Remus through his transformation.

Suddenly, she felt incredibly sad. Gulping quietly, she turned around, deciding to forgo breakfast. She'd grab something after her first class.
Limping up to her rooms, Hermione tiredly grabbed her wand from her bedside (where she'd left it last night, so she wouldn't be able to snap it after the moon became full) and sat down. Cringing in pain, she removed her right shoe and pulled her sock down over her wound. The garment was red and wet, and Hermione mourned the fact she'd probably have to throw the pair out. Not even the house elves could wash out that much red.

She examined the bite abstractly, as if looking at another person's ankle and not her own. It wasn't as painful as it looked, and she wasn't entirely sure why. She might have to ask Remus, if he didn't seem so hostile on Thursday.

A werewolf bite was cursed, though, and so it was with a great sigh that she didn't even bother trying to heal it by magical means. Instead, she cleaned it away with a wave of her hand and wrapped some conjured bandages tightly, hoping she wouldn't have to replace them until she retired to her rooms that evening.

Sitting at her desk, lesson plans and student essays piled up on it, and looking around her barren and impersonal room, Hermione finally let herself feel what she'd been avoiding all this time.

Anguish swept over her.

She had thought, miserably but with hope, that Remus would be her friend in all this. She had thought, despite the bad hand both of them had been dealt, they could deal with it together.

His distance, therefore, made everything worse.

She missed her home. Yes, it was an ugly home, with violence and fear and a small likelihood of survival – but it was hers, completely. These rooms, sparse, only sought to remind her of what she was missing. Empty like her life here, going day by day and trying not to focus too hard on one thing for fear of the cold hard truth rearing its ugly head.

She was alone, and not even her friends of the future could help her.

It had been no small feat, facing James Potter and Lily Evans every week. She had steadfastly avoided them, particularly Lily. Although James reminded her most fiercely of Harry in appearance, it was Lily that left her hard of breath and struggling to remember that she couldn't say anything, couldn't save them. The piercing green eyes, so determined, were Harry in every way.

The hair, although a different texture and shade, reminded her undoubtedly of Ron.

These empty places in her chest reflected the empty places in her life, and Hermione mourned.

She sat, nineteen years old and alone, and cried.

---

The staff meeting later that day only made her feel worse.

"Something must be done," Pomona said, shaking her head sadly. The sister of a third year had died that morning, an ominous skull with a snake protruding from its mouth hanging over her home. Hermione had almost forgotten about Voldemort in the midst of all her personal drama.
It was easy, sometimes, to forget about people you thought to be dead.

"The proper authorities were notified."

"And Jane?" Slughorn asked, looking appropriately sympathetic. Hermione wondered whether Jane was particularly good at potions.

"Her friends are looking after her." Dumbledore answered, looking grim. It seemed even he couldn't seem cheerful all the time.

Hermione needed to remember that. It seemed he was optimistic when he knew something others didn't.

"This cannot go on, Albus," McGonagall said, looking torn, "They are only children. They should not be facing this war."

"They won't be children much longer, Minerva," Hermione piped up, her throat still sore from, she presumed, all the screaming from the previous night. "As much as I agree with you, maybe we should be warning the students."

"Warn them?" Professor Sinistra asked, aghast, "And what good would that do?"

There were murmurs amongst them, and Hermione didn't exactly feel like she had the strength to point out that maybe with warning, students could grieve better. If they prepared for the worst, they could deal with the worst. Instead of receiving letters from the Ministry about how sorry they were to inform them that–

"Hermione makes a valid point," Emilia said from Hermione's right, and Hermione was shocked. It seemed like the wizard flu had given the Defence professor clarity, finally.

McGonagall pursed her lips, and Hermione's tired mind tried not to laugh. This was all so absurd, for her.

"The disappearances are rising." Dumbledore announced, looking solemn, "I am afraid the time for blissful ignorance has passed."

Kettleburn, with a few more limbs than Hermione remembered from the future, shook his head in disapproval. All the other professors, save for Slughorn, seemed to be more on board with Dumbledore's implications.

"Emilia, we must make your curriculum more rigorous."

The professor in question looked taken aback but, with a glance at Hermione, nodded her head.

"As for the other students," Dumbledore said, and a quiet settled in the staff room. Hermione was rarely present, trying not to associate with the professors for fear of recognition in the future. Despite everything that had happened, she needed to keep a low profile.

Which was getting harder and harder to do.

"I will make an announcement at dinner. As for now, we do the only thing we can: we go on."

Hermione and Nettle left for their classes with the sixth and second years morose, and Nettle was firmer in her teaching than she ever had been.

As they were packing up the classroom for the day, Nettle spoke up.
"I'm sorry," She said, and Hermione looked up from organising their papers to see her look quite upset, "For not making things harder."

"Emilia--" Hermione began, stopping at Nettle's sharp look.

"No, Hermione, you've given me too much leeway. I heard about what happened when you took over the seventh years. I hear things," Nettle added with a wry smile at the shocked look Hermione couldn't wipe off her face quickly enough.

"Don't beat yourself up too much," Hermione consoled, a little uncomfortable. Nettle was at least ten years her senior. She wasn't used to comforting people she considered superiors. "You were only doing what you thought you should."

"It wasn't enough," Nettle said, shaking her head with a sigh.

"But it will be, we'll make them work harder." Hermione smiled timidly, "They'll be okay, Emilia."

Nettle nodded, looking less upset but still not back to her bubbly self.

Hermione held back a sigh of her own.

So much for a low profile.

"How do you know all this?" Emilia asked incredulously after Hermione detailed ways to throw off the Imperius curse. Dinner had been intense after Dumbledore's proclamation that everyone needed to maintain their close friendships in times of hardship. That it was important to be honest with one another, and protect each other. Hermione, with a sense of dread, had avoided looking at the Marauders. They would learn that lesson all too well.

"Bad luck," Hermione replied absentmindedly, rewriting the lesson plans. She'd shoved the rest of the year's work into a month, removing things altogether that wouldn't be helpful and that the students could learn through memorisation just before exams.

"So you're thinking the fourth years and up need to learn about the Unforgivables?" Emilia prodded, frowning down at the list of things they would be teaching.

"Yes," Hermione replied, looking up and sweeping some of her messy hair away from her face, "They'll be faced with them soon enough. We also need to cover dark creatures somewhat – Voldemort won't hesitate to set them upon those who resist his cause." Hermione ignored the flinch at Voldemort's name, frowning in thought.

"I suppose we're going to be teaching some of them." Emilia commented, her tone flat. She looked troubled.

"Some of who?" Hermione asked, still frowning. She jotted something down on the seventh year lesson plan – *house elves* – as Emilia spoke again.

"Some of his followers." Emilia answered, and Hermione stopped her writing.

Emilia was right. Hermione… she hadn't exactly thought of it. Yes, she'd talked to Snape. She'd even glimpsed Dolohov, of all people, at the back of her class, barely listening. Lucius Malfoy was already out in the world, building his Ministry connections, Mulciber had implied vicious things to Mary MacDonald, Travers received the ire of James… they were all Death Eaters, in the future.

And of course, there was Peter Pettigrew.
"You can't think like that," Hermione told her, and also told herself, thinking of the chill that came over her every time she locked eyes with a certain chubby Gryffindor, "We can't think like that, Emilia. If we do, we'll be seeing them not for the people they are, but the people we're predicting them to be. In a way, we'll be condemning them before they even leave Hogwarts."

Hermione kept this in mind during Thursday's lesson, trying to encourage Peter to actually engage with Sirius instead of being Sirius's guinea pig.

By the end of the lesson, it seemed like the ropes conjured around Sirius were strong enough to hold him, given the red rings he was soothing around his wrists. Peter had looked pleased.

Hermione had shoved away thoughts of a silver hand, and strangulation.

She was collecting the essays that Nettle had set a few days ago on ways to creatively use *Incarcerous* to tie up multiple opponents at once. She wasn't sure marking them would be the most hopeful experience, but she'd do it.

"Thanks, Joyce. I hope you remembered to back up your assumptions a little better, this time." She smiled at the Ravenclaw, who rolled his eyes. His last essay had been full of assumptions, albeit correct ones, about the effects of stunning spells that lasted too long. Hermione had to point out that he hadn't quoted any sources, even if what he said had been correct. Needless to say, the Ravenclaw hadn't reacted favourably.

He had, she thought, been the last one. But when she looked up from placing the essays in her bag to grade later, there was one more person in front of her. But he wasn't a Ravenclaw.

"Remus," Hermione said, surprised. She pasted a polite smile on her face, still feeling a little stung about Tuesday. "What can I do for you?"

For all that she felt offended, Remus looked equally as lost.

"I'm--" He took a deep breath, and Hermione noted the slight flush on his cheeks. Such a contrast to the pallor he had two days ago. Hermione wondered what she looked like to him, so soon after the full moon. "I'm sorry," he finished jerkily.

Hermione smiled sadly.

"It's alright, Remus, I understand."

"No," Remus stressed, looking determined. His eyes flashed, and Hermione saw in him the bravery she knew made him a Gryffindor. Also the obstinateness. "No, you *don't* understand. I was completely unfair to you. I've just, I've gotten used to-- things."

Hermione stayed quiet. She didn't know what to say.

"And, and well, I realised after what Dumbledore said--"

"Ah.

"--that it's stupid, to be angry about something like that, when people are *dying*--" He stopped himself, breathing heavily. Hermione was confident in saying this was probably the most emotion she'd ever seen in him.

"And how are you so calm about this?" Remus asked incredulously, gesturing wildly.
"Because… because--" Hermione started, floundering at the sudden question, "Because I have to be!"

Remus looked taken aback, and Hermione realised she was standing now. Figuring she may as well, she made her way around the desk.

"Look," Hermione began, but paused. Like someone had cast a sleeping spell on her, she suddenly felt exhausted. Dropping heavily onto her desk, she held her head in her hands. "There's no other way for me to be," Hermione mumbled through her fingers. Her eyes burned suspiciously, but Hermione willed it away. "It's fine, I'm fine. Everything's as I expected."

She wasn't sure she was making sense, but she was fine. She was. Everything was alright. Well, not alright, but as good as can be--

"What, do you know another werewolf or something?" Remus asked, and Hermione bristled at his hard tone. His mood was swinging wildly, and if it were anyone else, Hermione would be scolding them for their confusing behaviour. But this was Remus, and Hermione relished in the emotion from him. So many people seemed to tiptoe around her, this was refreshing.

Besides, it had been a hard few days. For both of them.

Hermione picked her head up, looking at the boy in front of her.

But he isn't really a boy, is he?

No, Hermione supposed, he wasn't. Turned into a werewolf as a child, Remus had not been a boy for a long time. Something in between, for a while. And now, seventeen, he was a man in every way except for the most obvious.

Age was a matter of circumstance. Hermione knew that first hand. How many things had she seen, by eighteen? More than a lot of people twice her age, that was for sure.

"I used to," Hermione said quietly, trying not to look him in the eyes. The eyes were the things most unchanged. She wasn't certain she could tell him he was dead if she looked into his eyes. "He's… he's not around, anymore."

She didn't need to make it plainer, if the sympathetic look that crossed Remus's face was anything to go by.

"It was a while ago," Hermione explained, breathing shakily. And to think Dolohov was probably in class somewhere at that moment, oblivious to the fact that he would murder Remus Lupin in twenty-one years. "You remind me of him, sometimes."

Well, it wasn't a lie.

Remus's warm hand on her arm, rubbing back and forth, was the closest Hermione felt he'd come to his future self in her mind.

"I'm sorry," he said gently.

After a few moments he sighed, removing his hand.

"Let's start over." He announced, and Hermione straightened up, glancing at his extended palm. "Friends?"
Pausing, Hermione looked him over. Soft expression, hopeful eyes, shabby robes, messy hair, loose tie, and scarred arms.

She smiled.

"Friends." She confirmed, and took his hand.

Chapter End Notes

I probably could have gone on, but I felt this was a nice end. Next chapter I've got exciting things in mind! Keen to hear your thoughts :)
The first day of October dawned cold and rainy. It was but a light rain, however, and so the students milled about like they usually did on a Saturday, willing enough to brave the wet before it got truly too cold to even consider going outside. As Hermione stared outside the window of her living room, she contemplated whether she could even bother leaving her sanctuary on that day.

It was on Saturdays that, despite not having classes, Hermione had her fondest memories of Hogwarts. In the future, that is. Harry and Ron, excited by the prospect of no work even though she would nag them to finish it before the inevitable Sunday night panic, would go outside on the grounds and soak up the little sun of Scotland in the early days of term. On days like the one she was currently having, however, they would stay inside the common room, the two of them too tired to even think of dealing with the likes of Malfoy and the other Slytherins to venture outside of it. They would sit by the fire and play Exploding Snap, or think up ways they could make Snape have an 'unfortunate accident'. Hermione pretended to disapprove, sending them glowers every now and then as she scribbled away at her latest essay, but she would let loose a small smile when they weren't looking. She loved her friends.

And so it was on days like this one that she missed them the most. The keen ache of their absence settled into her bones like a long lost friend, ironically enough. She remembered laughing with Ron about Harry's treacle tart obsession, which was indulged by Dobby. Her dark-haired friend would flush with embarrassment, and always bring up the posters of the Holyhead Harpies player Gwenog Jones that Ron had up in his room at the Burrow. Hermione would tease him about his penchant for burly Beaters, causing Harry to erupt into fits of laughter and proclaim that maybe the similarities between Gwenog and Hermione's appearances meant something. Which, in turn, would make Hermione blush profusely and turn back to her own homework, scowling at them for distracting her.

That was, of course, when she and Ron had liked each other.

These memories made her both happy and absolutely miserable. Harry and Ron were not here to tease her, or distract her, today. She was alone, staring out at the misty rain like it held answers, or would produce a time turner if she simply looked long enough.

It was, of course, not that easy.

Her ankle twinged, as if wanting to remind her of exactly how it wasn't easy. Even days later, it still hurt. Of course, her increased healing (only slightly better, but it still made a difference) meant that it would probably look worse if she weren't a werewolf. She supposed the powers that be might be expecting a thanks but, having gone through only one painful transformation and still scratching at the healing and itchy claw marks on her body, Hermione had no thanks to give.

Sighing, she stood from her comfortable armchair. It was mid-morning and, despite the dark clouds
suggesting otherwise, Hermione probably should expend some energy. She'd read, with a sense of foreboding, that being more energetic throughout the month would abate some of the symptoms of her condition.

The muscles in her legs clenched sporadically as if in anticipation of possible activity. Quickly getting out of her pyjamas, she changed into some amusingly fashionable shorts (entirely too short) and a t-shirt. Luckily, the latter had not changed terribly from those that would be made twenty years later – they might be slightly more form-fitting, but they would do the job. Her t-shirt was bland and a slightly off-yellow, a popular colour of this time period.

Hermione, for the most part, had been sticking to monochrome tones to avoid laughing at her own appearance. Her hair, bushy as it was, could remain the same in style. Robes in the wizarding world did not always fall in line with Muggle fashion but Hermione could never escape her Muggleborn roots, nor would she want to. She had kept to wearing Muggle clothes on the weekends, with a plain black robe thrown hastily on top.

She left the robe behind this time, however, giving the empty dishes from breakfast an apologetic look before setting foot outside her quarters once she'd tied on some joggers. Tucking her wand into the waistline of her shorts and underneath her t-shirt, and then bundling up her hair into a bun to keep it off her neck, Hermione started on her way to the Entrance Hall, keen to get outside. It was as if the energy she had read about had suddenly gripped her in its trembling grasp, furious at the fact she had been ignoring it.

Slipping through the Hall's doors, which were charmed to be as light as a feather, Hermione felt the extremely cold wind hit her bare thighs. Shivering, she pulled up her enormous socks up past her knees in the hopes of fending off the bite of the breeze. Luckily, as if on cue, the air decided to remain still and she then only had the rain to worry her.

She braved it. The pounding of her feet against the soft, squishy grass soon took her toward the lake, where the rain didn't even seem to be touching it it was so light. It felt like a soft caress on her hot skin, and Hermione savoured it the further she got into her run. Her sweat began to mix with the coating of moisture on her skin, but she didn't notice.

It was only when she felt sufficiently out of breath that Hermione looped her way back to the doors to the castle. As she slipped inside, she grabbed her wand from its snug position against the elastic waistband and cast a charm to wipe up all the water she was dripping onto the floors.

"You're probably better off just using a drying charm," A female voice said, causing Hermione to look up from her frowning consideration of the puddles on the floor.

"Professor?" Lily Evans prompted after a moment, forehead creased as if in concern.

"Oh," Hermione said roughly, clearing her throat, and mentally snapping herself out of it, "Yes, you're probably right."

After looking up from her drying charm – one that still left her slightly damp (magic wasn't perfect, no matter how often she'd tried to fool herself of that fact in first year) – Hermione noticed that Lily was wearing an outfit akin to her own.

"Going out?" Hermione asked, looking at the bright colours of the Gryffindor's ABBA t-shirt.

Lily looked down at her own top as if to figure out why Hermione was staring so persistently, but instead looked up with a quirked eyebrow upon finding nothing amiss.
"Yes," Lily started, moving her head in a way that made her ponytail swing, the dark red of it making her particularly mesmerising. Hermione could see now why James was so besotted. "I can't quite keep the Muggle out of me, it seems," She gestured to her t-shirt in an off-hand way, as if she knew that's what was bothering Hermione but refused to let it get to her.

"I know the feeling," Hermione said blandly, still not looking Lily straight in the eyes.

"Are you alright, Professor?" Lily asked, and Hermione thought she might have glimpsed worry in her eyes. But her own gaze flitted away just as quickly, and she had little time to ponder it before Lily spoke again, "You are bleeding."

Hermione frowned deeply, looking to Lily whose hand was gesturing towards Hermione's feet. Peering down at her dirty, old, second-hand trainers, Hermione saw what she had forgotten about. Her ankle – which was giving a persistent throb now that she remembered it existed – was covered by her high, white sock. Her sock just happened to have turned red. She'd bled through her bandages, it seemed.

"I'm fine," Hermione answered, a beat too late by the look on Lily's face. The younger woman had just opened her mouth to ask a question, no doubt one that Hermione would have to fib her way through, before she was interrupted.

"You surely can't be thinking of going outside into that?"

They both turned at the aghast voice, and Hermione noted with satisfaction that Severus Snape shut his mouth rather abruptly upon seeing who she was. He was wearing black robes, and Hermione had the wayward thought that maybe he didn't own clothes of any other colour. He looked sufficiently embarrassed that he'd spoken rudely to a teacher, and Hermione had to hold back her smile. Things were so different here, and yet the same.

"He's right," Hermione added, trying to seem like an authority figure despite their close ages. Sometimes she thought she really was fooling herself trying to be one, "You could get sick."

"With all due respect, Professor, that didn't stop you." Lily said, not unkindly. Hermione had to admit, she had a point. But she couldn't very well tell Harry's mother that she was a werewolf, and it would take a lot more than light October rain to make her ill.

"And I don't see what it is to you, Severus," Lily said coolly, and Hermione saw she had lost her smile in place of a blank expression. "See you, Professor." This was obviously to Hermione who nodded, still with an eye on Snape. Lily slipped through the doors to the grounds outside, and Hermione could glimpse the misty rain still.

The air quickly turned awkward and stale, and Snape fidgeted in discomfort.

"I'll see you on Monday." Hermione farewelled, and carefully stepped around him. She ignored the curious look on his face as she briskly walked away, his eyes caught on her bloody ankle.

She would have to deal with him at some stage, she supposed. For now, a shower was in order.
"We're getting in the first Hogsmeade weekend before the Quidditch frenzy begins," McGonagall announced to the staff room on Monday with pursed lips, despite the animated expression on her face at the thought of Quidditch. The rest of Hermione's weekend had been uneventful – she had spent her time divided between the library, researching time turners that went back years; and her quarters, where she sat and remembered everything she was missing. At this rate, being chased by rogue Death Eaters in the future might have been preferable to the suffocating loneliness she was currently experiencing in the past.

"Such short notice, Minerva?" Professor Slughorn asked, looking slightly intrigued. His jewelled hands sat on his protruding belly. Hermione had yet to have an at-length conversation with him, and was trying to avoid it. After she'd hexed Sirius in class, he'd been trying to corner her.

McGonagall's lips seemed to purse further, her excited expression waning in the face of mild discomfort.

"Yes, well, with everything that's happened–" No one needed to mention the death of Jane's sister, "– it seemed to fall by the way side. The ninth, this Saturday – it's decided."

There were disapproving murmurs around the room, no doubt at the prospect of having to rearrange their homework plans and possibly advance orders on any products they might need for class.

"I don't suppose I can ask any of you to supervise?" At McGonagall's query, the staff room became awfully silent. Hermione saw several professors, most notably Kettleburn, avoid the Transfiguration professor's eyes in the hopes that she would not call upon them. With nothing else to do, and little to look forward to, Hermione raised her hand.

"I can supervise, Minerva." McGonagall, despite looking thankful, seemed reluctant.

"I'm not sure, as a professor's assistant…" She trailed off. If Hermione didn't know better, she would have described the look on her face as uncertain.

"Believe me, she's more than capable," Nettle said from next to her. Hermione would have to thank her later, even if she'd probably only said it so she herself wouldn't have to supervise the Hogsmeade weekend. Having been a student herself, Hermione was no stranger to the stress that could come from the outing. She couldn't imagine it being at all better from the staff's perspective.

"Well that's settled, then," Slughorn said, clapping his meaty hands together happily, "Huxley will supervise. But next time, Minerva," he added as the rest of the staff began to move about, ready to leave for their next class – the staff meeting had taken half of lunch, and they were all too eager to leave it as soon as possible, "Maybe it would be best to give us a little more warning?" And with that he swerved around, humming contentedly to himself as he left the staff room behind the others. Hermione wasn't sure she had remembered Slughorn correctly – had he always been so fat? She supposed, after years of no candied pineapple from manipulative students, he had to be a little thinner in her time.

McGonagall, for all her brave façade, looked incredibly tired. Hermione had been about to make her usual getaway – familiar faces meant trying harder than ever to keep herself in check – when she saw the defeated look on the professor's face. Unused to such a mood from the older woman, she hesitantly approached.

"Minerva?" She prodded quietly, smiling as politely and unfamiliarly as she could, "Is everything alright?"

"Oh!" McGonagall jumped, surprised at Hermione's presence, "Oh, yes, I'm fine, Hermione.
Nothing to worry about. You best be off to class, now."

Hermione ignored her dismissal.

"It's not going to get better," Hermione admitted, going for straight forward. She had always admired that about McGonagall when she'd been a student.

"I beg your pardon?" asked McGonagall, looking confused.

"This war," Hermione extrapolated, "These deaths. I know the Prophet is telling everyone there's nothing to worry about, that the Ministry will catch him soon enough. But you're smarter than that," She added at McGonagall's affronted face. "You know he's not going away, not until he's stopped. All we can do for the students is prepare them the best we can so that hopefully they come out the other side alive."

McGonagall looked like she didn't know what to say.

"I don't know what to say, Hermione." McGonagall admitted, frowning, "You seem to know a lot about this."

"Unfortunately," Hermione said, picking up her bag. The bell for classes tolled in the distance, "I have a fair amount of experience. We'll talk later, Minerva."

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The week flew by in an unusual act of kindness. She was, strangely enough, looking forward to the Hogsmeade weekend. Although Remus had only shared amused looks with her in class over his friend's antics even though he'd announced them friends – and so she would unlikely be invited to join them – she had always associated the nearby village with being social. The association would not break, and so it was with a sense of nervous excitement that she waited near the doors to the grounds for the students to bustle into the Entrance Hall. She'd be taking the third years' permission slips, and marking off names of everybody before walking to the village herself.

Ignoring the whoops of the Marauders after she checked their names and they ran past her, she quickly marked off the rest of the seventh years, and then moved down the year groups until she'd received the last third year's permission slip, a one Patrick Xiao.

"You don't mind if I walk with you, do you, Professor?" Patrick asked, his eyes squinting up at her through the surprising sun. She was taller than him by at least a foot, which made her want to laugh. He obviously hadn't hit his growth spurt yet.

"Of course not, Patrick," Hermione replied warmly, smiling until she felt her eyes crinkle. "Tell me about your classes. How are you enjoying your electives?"

The Slytherin spent the rest of the walk to the village chatting away, a glaringly obvious difference to the usual behaviour endorsed by Slytherin.

_Sometimes, Hermione thought, they really do sort too young._

When they parted at the entrance to the village Hermione noted he went off alone, no friends in sight. She held back a sigh. That would have been her in another life, with no Harry or Ron.
No, Hermione thought viciously, her face hardening, *You came here to stop thinking about them* so stop thinking about them, *Hermione.*

She didn't know why she thought coming to Hogsmeade would take her mind off her loneliness. Everywhere she looked she could imagine her and her friends going there, talking about the latest drama in their lives. The laughing students didn't help much either, and they were in abundance – the unusually warm weather saw them putting away scarves and hats and rolling up the sleeves of their clothes, which seemed to lighten both their clothing and their spirits.

Hermione herself had donned only a pair of flared corduroys and a collared shirt, a simple white to go with her black robes on top. A pair of different but just as dirty and just as old and just as second-hand shoes adorned her feet. They were white, but would probably be classed as grey now.

No one would accuse her of not fitting into the fashion, that was for sure.

Walking around the village got old after a while. Finding the students more well-behaved than they were in her time, she figured a quick dalliance into a few shops couldn't hurt.

First she popped into Scrivenshaft's Quill Shop, a place she usually loved to linger in. Instead, she looked forlornly at the more expensive quills for a few minutes before leaving, resigning herself to little to no luxuries in this time. Her wages were barely covering the necessities as it was, and she didn't want to splurge on needless things when she might have to leave Hogwarts at any moment to escape Voldemort or even, she thought wryly, Dumbledore.

After that she decided that she would indulge in one thing, and that was chocolate. Entering Honeydukes was like the first time, every time. It was truly a shop of wonder: different coloured candies stocked against every wall, some moving in their jars and others bursting out of packaging unexpectedly. Always a sucker for a Chocolate Frog, Hermione bought a couple of them quickly before moving on, sad to leave advertisements for Never-ending Lollipops and Fizzing Whizbees behind her.

It was when she got to Zonko's Joke Shop that her loneliness reared its ugly head.

She'd never spent much time in the shop before, always preferring to skip it and head to The Three Broomsticks to meet her two friends there. But it reminded her of a different shop entirely, one that wouldn't exist for nearly two decades and one that would cease to exist only a few short years after *that.*

Jokes didn't sell well, to a world frightened of avenging Death Eaters.

"Huxley!" Came a booming voice from right in front of her, breaking her out of her reminiscing. When the figure came into focus, Hermione didn't know why she thought it could be anyone else.

"Sirius," Hermione greeted warmly, her tone conveying surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"What am I doing here?" He said incredulously, wide grin negating his wild tone. He grabbed a fistful of something, dragging it toward him. "What are we doing here, she says, Moony. Outrageous!"

Hermione smiled at Remus, cold thoughts long forgotten.

"Hi, Miss Huxley."

"Hermione," she said softly, "It's Hermione."
Remus looked pleased, but rolled his eyes as Sirius's arm around his shoulder roughly tugged him closer.

"First name basis, eh, Moony? You'll have to tell me how--" But what exactly Remus would have to tell him she wouldn't know, for at that moment a high-pitched scream sounded from outside. The shop, previously buzzing with noise, quieted immediately. The students looked shocked, and some of the younger ones seemed frightened.

Sirius's mouth was open in a comical gape, and Remus's wide eyes were searching out the window as if hoping to find the source.

"Hold this." Hermione ordered, shoving her Honeydukes bag into Remus's hands, "And keep the students inside. Don't let anyone in or out, do you hear me?" Neither of them said anything, and so she repeated, "Do you hear me?"

"Yeah, yes, keep them inside." Remus said seriously, and she shot him a grateful look before exiting the store as quickly as possible.

"Wait, we want to help!" Came Sirius from behind her. He'd followed her out, the idiot. Seeing the panicked bustling of other students and gesturing frantically for them to get inside, she whirled around to give him an earful only to see Remus trailing behind, his hands void of her bags.

"Remus, what did I say?" She asked him through gritted teeth.

"I know what you said," He told her fiercely, "But we want to help." Sirius nodded, looking grim.

"I don't care if you want to help," Hermione seethed, stalking towards them. To their credit, neither of them took a step back. "You. Are. Students." She grabbed their arms and pushed them forcefully back toward the sweet shop. "Get inside. I will not have your deaths on my hands."

She left them to finish the trudge back, and went in the direction of the scream. All this delay and she would be too late.

Not again.

She swept the village, searching every alleyway and abandoned nook she knew of and a few she hadn't, her wand out and ready for battle.

After twenty minutes of searching, she had found nothing.

"It's me!" She called quietly through the Honeydukes door, and it opened so quickly a breeze ran through her hair. Remus stood on the other side, wand out.

"What did you do to Sirius when you first met him?" He asked her. As far as questions went, it wasn't the greatest. But then again, she supposed he didn't have a wealth of knowledge of her, and they hadn't spent enough time together to warrant another one. Well, at least, enough time together outside of werewolf tendencies he would not want leaked to the general public of Hogsmeade.

"Nice one, Moony!" Sirius said from behind him, watching carefully.

"I tied him up," Hermione answered, stepping forward into Remus's lowering wand, "Because he was being a prat."

Sirius managed to look mildly offended, but seemed to decide to let it go in favour of asking her a question.
"Anything?" He looked genuinely concerned, and it was with a dropping stomach that Hermione remembered his family, so different to him.

"No. I suspect they've cleared out. No b--" She'd been about to say there hadn't been any bodies, but the terrified look in a nearby third year's face made her change her tact. "No one's hurt, I don't think. But none of us should stay here. You two corral up everyone here and walk them back to the castle. If you come across any other seventh years, tell them to find other, younger students and do the same. I'll meet you there in half an hour. I'll have to count them all." She went to leave, but hesitated. "It'll be alright, everyone," She said softly, "We'll find out what happened."

Scouring Hogsmeade one last time, going into all the shops and letting students know to find a seventh year and stick together as they trudge back up to the castle, Hermione finally took a chance to breathe properly since that scream.

This did not bode well, not at all. Death Eaters? Hermione didn't remember them being particularly active in 1977, but even she could admit her memory might be faulty. Before she had been sent to the past, it had been a long time since she'd read a history book.

Either way, whether it was Death Eaters or students playing a joke in bad taste, or even someone thinking they saw a Death Eater... it spoke of tough times ahead, and a climate of fear that would only grow to murder everything these people loved.

Hermione would be a mere spectator.

The thought made her heart shrivel up, and so it was with an unknown strength that she pushed it aside as she strode up to the castle. All the students were waiting anxiously in the Entrance Hall; McGonagall, Nettle, and a few of the other teachers lingering also.

"What happened?" McGonagall demanded once she saw her, "The students have been counted and thankfully, no one is missing." Although she seemed to have faltered slightly earlier in the week, the Transfiguration professor was all business today.

"There was a scream on the other side of the village, near the Hog's Head," McGonagall looked displeased, "I told everyone to get inside and stay there, and went to investigate. Nothing and no one."

McGonagall pursed her lips, looking severely unhappy. Having known her for years, Hermione could recognise it was not her she was unhappy with, but the situation. Hogsmeade, being so close to Hogwarts, always seemed so safe. Even the professors had thought that, with only one adult to escort over one hundred students. Hermione should have said something, should have insisted on more protection.

"Prongs!" Hermione heard behind her as groups of students started to separate and go their own ways, "You alright?"

Hermione turned to see James rush over to his friends, clapping them on the back. Peter trailed behind him, and was greeted similarly.

"Yeah, we're fine. You heard McGonagall," He brushed them off, "Where were you two when everything went down?"

"In Zonko's," Remus explained, "Hermione was with us when we heard the scream and she left us
"Tried to help, mind," Sirius commented, and she looked away quickly when he glanced at her, "But was told to sod off, basically."

Remus shoved his friend with a frown.

"What about you?" Sirius responded, rubbing his arm gingerly. Hermione suspected he was faking.

"With Evans!" Peter piped up, a pleased expression on his pudgy face. If Hermione didn't know he would betray and murder two of his friends, she would almost find him endearing.

"Lily was with you?" Remus asked, eyebrows raised.

"It wasn't like that," James said, rolling his eyes, "We just both happened to be in the Broomsticks, is all. As Head Boy and Girl we had a duty to protect the other students. It's not a big deal," He waved a hand about, as if telling them everything was in the past.

Well, it is, Hermione thought with amusement.

"Tell us how she looked at you, Prongs," Sirius teased as they walked off toward, Hermione presumed, Gryffindor Tower, "Tell us how her eyes lit up like firelight hitting emeralds…"

Hermione snorted, but quickly composed herself at McGonagall's sharp look.

"Professor Dumbledore will want to hear about this," The older woman said sternly, as if ordering Hermione to do it herself. When all she received was silence, she nodded in resignation. "I will tell him now. I just hope the Prophet doesn't get wind of this. Nothing good will come of it."

She was right, of course. When the Daily Prophet posted an article the following day about Hogsmeade's lack of security and the still unidentified screamer, the Great Hall was rampant with hushed whispers and rumours.

It was only after dinner on Sunday as she retreated back to her quarters that Hermione heard anything even remotely enlightening.

"–don't lie to me, Sev. It was his Death Eaters, wasn't it? What are you and your friends doing?"

"Lily, please–" Snape stopped short when he glimpsed Hermione, now stopped behind Lily and looking awfully curious.

"Something you'd like to share, Mr. Snape?" Hermione prompted, looking at him levelly.

Snape said nothing as Lily whirled around, quickly unfastening her hand from Snape's robes and taking it from his shoulder.

"It's nearing curfew," She pointed out, "You best get to bed, both of you."

She didn't move and after a moment, they separated; Snape avoiding Lily's hard gaze.

Hermione watched them until they were both specks in her vision, before continuing on her way.

The next two weeks carried on as usual. It was only the subtle tightening of security that was anything of note; more patrols, a few extra wards, the Prefects expected to take head counts before bed. During classes, Hermione'd had to rebuff students' questions about the incident and, instead, impress upon them even more the importance of learning defensive spells just to get them to keep
their mouths shut. Teaching the sixth years how to break through Silencios had also helped.

And so it was with a heavy heart that, on the Tuesday before the next full moon Hermione realised it was just that: the Tuesday before the next full moon. She'd only spoken outside of class to Remus when he'd returned her Honeydukes chocolates, a little worse for wear.

"Sorry about that," He'd said with a grin, and Hermione hadn't been sure whether he was sorry at all. "I also may have eaten one. I'll pay you back, I swear." He'd added at her indignant look.

He had yet to do so.

She was tired now, the moon’s increasing shape pulling on her energy reserves. Unusual, considering she'd been exercising as often as she could spare in the hopes of reducing some of the more bothersome symptoms. Her ankle panged painfully, as if laughing meanly at her.

*It's too much to hope, I suppose.*

Thankfully, the scratches from the last full moon had all healed. Although they were from a fellow werewolf and therefore cursed wounds, they had left no scars. Peculiar, but not impossible. She was grateful, all the same – the less scars she would accumulate over the years as a werewolf, the better off she'd be. Thoughts of finding a job after all of this started up a throbbing in her temple and so she dutifully ignored them. She was getting good at doing that.

As the full moon fell on a Thursday, her evening class with Gryffindors and Slytherins would be cancelled. Nettle found the combination of houses too volatile to deal with on her own, and Hermione didn't much fancy hearing the next day about a fight that would most likely break out if the lesson were to take place, when she was tired and irritable. No, it was easier to cancel. She could prepare a crash-course lesson the next week as a result.

As the sun was setting earlier and earlier the more winter crept up on them, it was at four-thirty that Hermione stood by the Hall doors, awaiting Remus so that they could make the journey to the Shack like they had the month previous.

The thought that his friends could no longer join him weighed on her mind. Although, she supposed, they could. But how would she explain knowing about their Animagus forms? The only way it seemed feasible would be if she discovered them 'accidentally', which would take planning and Hermione did not have time to plan for such a thing. She spent her free time reading up on time travel, as best she could. Although a little voice at the back of her head liked to remind her of the inevitably of failure, Hermione didn't want to admit defeat so soon. So the future didn't yet exist, big deal. Maybe there was a way she could stay in stasis for twenty years, only to awake in 1999? There was sure to be some way to return, if not by time travel to the future. She had to believe there was.

She was interrupted by the morose form of Remus emerging from near the Hufflepuff dorms; Hermione supposed he had nabbed a sandwich or two from the kitchen to act as dinner. She had, instead, gorged at lunch.

"Ready?" She asked as cheerfully as she could. Considering the grimace on the young werewolf's face, she must have come off more manic than happy.

"Sure," was the dry reply, and they were on their way.

Despite all the thoughts swirling around her head, begging to be let out and analysed by someone else, Hermione had no idea what to say to Remus most of the time. She felt inexplicably fond of him, in a way that made her worry for her emotional well-being. It would not do well to get too attached,
"After you," She intoned as they reached the now inmobile Whomping Willow. Remus gave her a
tired smile, entering into the passageway gracefully, the action so familiar it looked effortless.

As they shed their clothes upstairs, ready and waiting for the moonlight to hit them, Hermione had
one last thought before the pain became too much to bear:

*Please don't fight it, Remus.*

And then there was black.

---

Transfiguration was easily the *worst*, James mused. This essay about invertebrate-vertebrate cross-
transfiguration was slowly killing him. Did McGonagall want them all to shrivel up and die from
brain over-use? Because that's what it felt like.

Sighing again as he crossed out a sentence that made absolutely no sense, James thought of Remus.
The moon was well full by now and Remus, though not alone, would be howling for his missing
pack.

Just as he was about to slam his text book shut in frustration and call it a night, Sirius came bursting
through the portrait hole, Invisibility cloak fluttering madly behind him. Peter followed seconds later,
considerably more out of breath.

A witty observation on his tongue, James sobered once he saw the panicked look on both of their
faces.

"What's wrong?" He demanded as he stood up, Transfiguration forgotten.

"James," panted Peter, his eyes almost as wide as his face.

"It's Remus," Sirius continued, looking awfully pale, "I told Snape to go to the Willow, and--"

James didn't bother hearing the rest of it at that moment. Grabbing his wand from the table, he
pushed past his friends and ran out of the common room. He heard their hurried footsteps behind
him.

"What were you *thinking?"* James growled over his shoulder as he rushed down a staircase so fast
his legs felt independent of his body, his heart pumping wildly. If Snape saw – if Snape got *hurt* –
Remus would never be the same, would never forgive them.

"I wasn't, exactly." Sirius grunted out after a sharp turn.

A few minutes later, thanks to the adrenaline flooding through their veins, they all managed to
stumble outside onto the grounds, sprinting toward the silhouette of the Whomping Willow in the
distance.

"If Snape dies, Sirius, I *will* kill you!" James shouted, not caring if someone like Hagrid, the
groundskeeper, heard.
"Trust me," Sirius replied as they skidded to a stop in front of the moving tree, "I'll do it for you."

"Immobulus!" Peter whispered, and the tree abruptly halted its violent movements.

James was the first one to the passageway and so the first one inside. He saw a shadowed figure at the end, right near the entrance to the Shack.

"Hey!" He shouted, "Snape! Get away from there!" Peter and Sirius climbed in behind him, but he was already pushing his way toward Snape.

He could hear them – how was Snape not hearing them? The low growls, the continuous panting, the scratching of paws on wooden floorboards. James even heard a jaw snap, as if anticipation of a human-sized meal.

"I said, get away!" On the last word, James managed to grab a hold of Snape's cloak, pulling him back and flinging him behind towards his friends. Just as he did that, the door separating them and two bloodthirsty werewolves gave an ominous creak and then a large crack, before splitting in two in a display of dust and splinters.

"TAKE HIM!" James shouted, before he transformed mid-leap. His antlers crashed into something hard and violent, thrashing about as it was. The growls sounded as if they were in his ears now, breathing down his neck. He felt claws swipe at him, and heard the echo of a dog's vicious bark before he swung his head and hit something that emitted a high-pitched yelp, and he managed to gain some ground.

This is going to be a long night, he thought wistfully, just as he gave his antlers another ruthless swing.

---

She had never felt so groggy in her life. Not even after being tortured by Bellatrix Lestrange and passing out had she felt so lethargic.

Her head rested on a soft pillow, she could feel. Considering this was the case, she was absolutely not in the Shrieking Shack anymore. Which meant someone other than Remus or herself had found them.

Blinking open her eyes against the bright light of the Hospital Wing, Hermione was utterly confused.

"What–?" She mumbled, pushing herself up into a sitting position.

Her limbs felt shaky, for some reason. Was this a symptom of her second transformation? Maybe the recovery got longer each time? None of the books or even Remus himself had mentioned that.

"Oh, good. You're awake," said a soft voice, and Hermione turned her head to her right to see Remus sat up in a bed also, a pillow cushioning his back and fresh scratches marring his handsome face. They continued all the way down his neck and under his hospital gown.

"What happened? Why aren't we in the Shack?" Hermione asked, her foggy brain thudding against her skull painfully.
"Bit of a complication," Remus said. If she hadn't known he was the only other person in the room, she might have thought it someone else's voice, with how bitter it sounded.

"I'm sorry, Moony," came a miserable groan. Huh. It seemed there were other people in the room.

Off to the side just out of view unless she peered around Remus's bed sat Sirius, whose haggard face only exacerbated the dark circles decorating his eyes. He looked positively exhausted, like how Hermione was sure she might look if she had a mirror.

"Sorry isn't good enough this time, Sirius," Remus said softly. This was probably for her benefit as her brain struck up an even more powerful and persistent rhythm against her skull.

The black-haired man grumbled unhappily, his shoulders hunched into himself as if he were ashamed to be there but couldn't bear to leave.

"What happened?" she asked, still confused. Her tired mind couldn't connect the dots like it was usually famous for.

"Sirius decided it would be a funny joke," At this, the man in question flinched, "To send Severus Snape off after us."

And all of a sudden, the dots were connected. Of course, Harry had told her about this – about how, sometime during their years at Hogwarts, the Marauders (specifically James) had saved Severus Snape from near death by werewolf mauling.

She just hadn't realised she had been one of the werewolves involved in said mauling. After all, they had only mentioned one and he was in the bed next to hers.

Hermione gave Sirius a sharp, angry look.

"I didn't think he'd actually go there!" Sirius whined, sitting up and gesturing wildly.

"You are not endearing yourself to me, Sirius." Hermione scolded him, gritting her teeth against the pain.

"Moony!" called a relieved voice from the entrance to the Hospital Wing, and Hermione turned her head. James and Peter were rushing forward to stand between their beds, colour returning to their faces in their relief. "You're awake! How are you feeling? Sorry, we've been talking things over with Dumbledore."

"I'm alright," Remus answered mildly, and Hermione noticed he began the nervous habit of running his hand through his hair. It was darker now than Hermione had ever seen it as a child – no flecks of grey, and holding natural streaks blond instead of a full head of it.

"And you, Professor," Peter said worriedly, turning to her with a concerned look, "How are you?"

Hermione, for all that she had been telling herself Peter was not yet a Death Eater and that there were sure to be reasons he even had friends, found herself speechless.

She cleared her throat after an awkward moment and shot Sirius a dirty look.

"I've been better." Sirius looked even more guilty than before, if that were possible. "How did you three fight us off? I'm presuming we managed to escape by the concerned looks on your faces, and that you were there by the scratches you're sporting." Of course, Hermione knew exactly how they had helped Snape but, she realised, this was the opportunity she had been waiting for. They would
have no choice but to tell her now.

James quickly held up a hand to the scratch on his left cheek, wincing as he touched it. The four of them shared a look, one Hermione had trouble identifying in her exhausted state.

"You don't remember?" Remus prodded hesitantly, and Hermione turned more fully to him to show she was listening. "I mean, I never recall everything but throughout the following days I always get flashes, impressions…"

That was new, Hermione thought. Her raised eyebrows showed her surprise. Remus had never mentioned remembering full moons without the Wolfsbane potion before. The fact that he might have remembered chasing thirteen and fourteen year old Harry and Hermione in the future unsettled her.

"I bit you," Remus explained, looking apologetic. The others were also listening intently, and Hermione realised then that their werewolf friend had yet to tell them this. "That first night. And you swiped at me, right in the chest. Didn't you see the gash?" He looked at her expectantly.

"I– I didn't notice…" Hermione stuttered, bewildered. She reached a hand up to pull at her wild hair nervously.

"Last night, I woke up with vivid memories… highly unusual, but… you were protecting Snape." Remus said, and at the constipated face of Sirius she could confirm he wasn't lying, "I don't know why, but I was pushing for the door and you were… you were guarding it. I don't know whether it was because you wanted Snape for yourself or what, but if you hadn't been there…" He trailed off with a hitched breath, looking suddenly panicked, "I would be expelled, for sure."

"No, you wouldn't, Moony," Peter assured his friend, patting him on the ankle as he stood by the foot of the bed, "Dumbledore loves you, mate."

Remus looked doubtful.

"But how could I fight you off?" Hermione insisted, trying to pry the truth out of them. They were well-versed in lying about this particular fact, however. "You've been a werewolf for much longer than me."

"Don't you realise?" Remus asked. His messy hair emphasised his shocked look – it was almost like he'd been electrocuted, "You're…. you're dominant, over me."

"Didn't you know you were into that, Moony." Sirius joked weakly, looking up from between his fingers.

"Shut up, Sirius." She said harshly, and when Remus smiled brightly at her she realised he'd also admonished his friend. "What do you mean, 'dominant'?" Hermione continued, frowning. She had not read about anything like this in all her years. There were perks, she mused, to living with a werewolf.

"I mean, we're a pack and you're… you're higher up than me." Remus said quietly, but Hermione saw no reason to be so cautious – they were the only ones here, and Madam Pomfrey would have to know about this eventually to heal them properly in the near future.

"But there's only two of us…" Hermione trailed off at the look on Remus's face, slightly embarrassed but also a little lost himself.

"Don't ask me to explain it because I don't know, I've never–" He broke off, taking a deep breath,
"I've never met another werewolf before, let alone transformed with one."

There was an uneasy silence as they all processed that information.

"What about Snape?" Hermione enquired, suddenly remembering the Slytherin. This would not bode well, she was sure. The last time Snape and Remus had been at the same school, Snape had 'accidentally' let slip that the latter was a werewolf, resulting in Remus's resignation.

"James," Remus shot the man in question a thankful look, "managed to pull him away in time."

"And how, pray tell," Hermione started, "Were you able to escape unscathed?"

How no one had ever found out their secret whilst in Hogwarts, Hermione did not know. The blind panic on their faces betrayed their fear at exposure. Anyone with half a brain would know they were hiding something.

"I was-- I was patrolling the grounds, saw Snape head over. Sirius and Peter, they weren't there," the over-the-top innocent expressions would need work, "So I followed him and... well, I'm sure the rest is self-explanatory." James said, scratching at his hairline. It was a tell if Hermione ever saw one, and she raised a sceptical eyebrow in retaliation.

"That's a good cover story," She told him, and wanted to laugh at their caught-out expressions, "I hope that's what you told Dumbledore. But don't lie to me. The truth, please."

They exchanged looks once more and, after a hesitant moment, Remus gave a slight nod.

"We can all transform into animals. Animagus," Peter clarified, as if she wouldn't know.

"Huh," Hermione intoned, feigning surprise and a little bit of an impressed air.

"Please don't tell Dumbledore," Remus pleaded quietly, looking desperate. "I can't– I don't want to leave Hogwarts."

"Dumbledore wouldn't expel you all for this," Hermione told them, trying not to squirm under Remus's intense gaze, "But you would have to register with the Ministry."

This seemed to make them even more regretful that they'd said anything.

"I won't tell anyone," she promised after a moment, ignoring their grateful faces, "Unregistered Animagus abilities will be useful to you after Hogwarts."

She refused to look at Peter's face, alight with gratitude.

*Useful, indeed.*

There was a comfortable silence, as they all attempted to regain their composure.

"Ah, Miss Huxley, Mr Lupin," Dumbledore interrupted, gliding into the Hospital Wing with McGonagall trailing behind him. They stopped between the two occupied beds, and Dumbledore looked far too cheerful for someone who nearly lost a student under their headmastership. "You are both awake. Excellent. Boys," he turned toward the rest of the Marauders, a genuine smile on his face, "I think it's time you head back to class. Lunch is almost finished."

*Lunch?!*

"Lunch?" Hermione echoed her own thoughts, as the uninjured Gryffindors made their way out of
the Hospital Wing with interested glances back inside, "But, my classes–"

Dumbledore held up an old, frail-looking hand. Of course, it was anything but frail.

"Professor Nettle is well-equipped currently to deal with the younger years. The seventh years will understand that you are not feeling well, and will behave accordingly I am sure." His eyes looked far too twinkly.

"And what of Snape?" Hermione prodded, looking between the two professors. Remus was suspiciously quiet.

"Severus has been properly disciplined, and has promised to keep both of your secrets." McGonagall announced, looking sympathetic. "In exchange, Remus and his friends will not engage him in any manner whatsoever."

Remus looked down at his bedspread, ashamed. Hermione would have to talk to him about that later.

"Now that that's settled, I hope to see you both bright and early Monday morning for classes. Enjoy your weekend," Dumbledore said, and whisked himself away with McGonagall reluctantly in tow.

"Is he always that cavalier?" Hermione asked as she watched him leave, humming merrily, knowing full well the answer.

Remus huffed out a laugh.

"I'm afraid so." He chuckled, and Hermione saw him grin warmly at her from the corner of her eyes. "It's refreshing, in a way."

"Hmm." Hermione hummed, neither agreeing or disagreeing with him. They sat comfortably for a few moments as Hermione's exhaustion caught up to her, her eyes drifting closed.

"I was hoping," Remus started tentatively, and she opened her lids once more, "That maybe – and it's alright if you don't want them to, I understand – but maybe my friends could join us next month?" Remus rushed through the rest of his request, and Hermione looked over to see him pulling at his blankets nervously. The windows of the Hospital Wing rattled in their frames, the wind picking up outside.

"Of course, Remus," Hermione answered softly, catching his eyes as they looked up hopefully. He grinned at her again, and the warmth that spread through her chest left her content and sleepy as she relaxed into her pillow, sliding down so she was no longer sitting up.

She would talk to Remus later.

Her eyelids drifted closed, and her mind off to sleep as the rain suddenly began pelting against the windows outside.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this was enough excitement for some of you! Now we're talking, right? Hermione's in the thick of it now!

Would really love to get some reviews – helps me figure out if I'm doing the characters
justice or not.
Some Things Change, Some Stay The Same

Chapter Notes

Howdy! I should be working less over the next two months so hopefully this leaves more time for writing.

See the end of chapter for warning about an event.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The slap of the Prophet down onto the table in the staff room effectively silenced all of them. McGonagall did not look pleased. If Hermione didn't know any better, she'd say the aging witch looked scared.

"Moira Beltz has been declared missing."

Murmurs circulated the room, and Hermione herself inhaled a little too sharply. So it was starting.

"Are we to presume this was the person who screamed bloody murder at Hogsmeade three weeks ago? And it's taken them this long?" Professor Vector looked simply disappointed instead of worried, like Hermione was. And she knew exactly what was going to happen – the other teachers had only vague worries and every disappearance or murder was shrouded in mystery. Voldemort had decided he'd be making himself known outside of whispers in Knockturn Alley and more unsavoury everyday conversations.

McGonagall pursed her lips.

"Yes, they have concluded she was abducted then."

"No family?" Hermione interjected softly, frowning. After all, surely the Ministry would have heard about her disappearance weeks ago if she'd had one.

"No," McGonagall sighed, "That's why she's only just been reported. This is worse than I feared."

"And what did you fear, Minerva?" Sinistra asked, her voice trembling slightly.

"I had hoped that Miss Flores's situation was simply a singular event," Hermione thought of Jane Flores's face, strained and wan at breakfast even now, "I feared it would not be."

"You're saying that Yo– … he is the cause of this?" Sinistra prompted.

"It is what we suspected, Aurora," Dumbledore's voice came from near the door. He had appeared, his robes a navy blue and twinkling with stars and constellations. It had taken Hermione a while to realise that Dumbledore looked now like he had when he'd died – but this was twenty-odd years ago and so it seemed he had aged inexplicably terribly in the seventies and barely at all in the eighties, like his mind was playing catch up to his body. It didn't take an Arithmancy genius to figure out why: Voldemort was a strain on them all.

"Voldemort--" Like a bad television show, there were deep intakes of breath and hisses and flinches all around. Hermione had trouble fighting back a smile, because the greatest dark wizard of her time
still didn't seem real. The last she had seen him he had toppled over like any other person would on the receiving end of an *Avada Kedavra*, "–is restless. Security must be of utmost priority."

Hermione looked down to pick at her fingernails, suddenly sensing the turning head of the Headmaster in her direction.

"Professors, I hope you will continue to emphasise the importance of safety in your Defence classes," At his addressing of her, she had to look up. Dumbledore looked serious, but not the grimmest she had ever seen him. No, he had probably looked the unhappiest after Cedric Diggory's death. She hadn't really been around to witness him after Sirius, too caught up in her own cursed injury and thinking about how she would explain the scar to her parents.

"Of course, Headmaster," Nettle assured him, and Hermione wanted to be proud of the way she seemed so determined. Suddenly, the knowledge of everything Hermione knew was weighing her down. She could only nod, still inspecting her hand.

She had been avoiding her memories since she figured out she'd have to live through everything she had simply read about, the horrors she had been thankful she hadn't been alive for. Maybe it was fate's way of biting her in the arse, but living through them and knowing what was going to happen? Well, it was a lot worse than simply just *living through them*. She couldn't help, some days, thinking that maybe this was punishment for some unknown terrible deed. Maybe she had killed someone during war that was on their side, a stray hex or curse hitting an innocent person. Surely one individual did not deserve such feelings of helplessness pushing at them from every direction?

It was hard enough staring her dead friends in the face. It was hard enough knowing that her best friend would be an orphan partly because of her.

But knowing that other people's lives, people she didn't even know, could be saved if she didn't know better left her screaming awake at night. Although she hadn't known Jane's sister, her blurry face haunted her dreams. Whispers of disappointment, of sadness and fury – living through this was the hardest thing she'd ever done.

The staff meeting carried on after that, the melancholic air of earlier refusing to dissipate even in the face of Slughorn's unfortunate pant-ripping incident. Hermione was the first to hurry out, eager to escape the curious eyes of the Headmaster.

She had almost forgotten about last week's events, the aches and agony of her time as a wolf seeming far away and distant, until later in the day when Severus Snape entered Nettle's classroom late – a highly unusual occurrence.

"Mr. Snape," Hermione said quietly upon approach. He had sequestered himself to a seat in the back corner, studiously avoiding answering any questions the whole lesson despite the fact it seemed to be his favourite subject – at least when the Marauders weren't around to make his life miserable. Hermione frowned disapprovingly at the thought. "May I ask why you were late today?"

Having previously had a cordial albeit distant relationship with Snape as his teacher, the cold sneer he sent her way left her feeling bereft.

He didn't answer for a moment, still too busy curling his lips into a disgusted expression to do so. The class mingled on behind them, chatting as they completed the assigned questions written on the board in her own hand.

"Do not talk to me." He spat, also quiet, and Hermione raised her eyebrows in shock.
"Excuse me?"

"I said, do not talk to me." Somehow, he seemed to insert even more venom into his tone.

Hermione hovered for a moment, unsure. But, she realised, Snape had nearly died by her hand only a few days previous. He had been humiliated, scared... he had a right to be angry, and Hermione didn't have it in her after the events of the staff meeting to scold him for speaking so rudely to a supposed teacher. Sighing, she turned around and continued her pacing of the class, answering any questions they had wearily. If anyone noticed her change in demeanour, they failed to point it out.

"Snape," She called out at the end of class before he could run out, farewelling the rest of her students with genuine smiles, "A moment, please."

He lingered behind, glaring resolutely at the stone floor beneath him. Nettle sent her a brief look before she retreated to her office, probably to mark the work they had assigned during class. The other seventh years did not bother to involve themselves – Hermione had banked on this, knowing that Snape was a loner in school. It made things easier for her, but all the more harder for him. No one, she thought with sadness, had cared that he'd almost died last week.

Both of them were silent. Snape was standing in front of the desk she had sat herself behind, and he was avoiding her piercing gaze for favour of looking at the pile of papers precariously stacked near her. Hermione had to give him credit – his patience was enviable.

"I wanted to apologise," She started, losing her steam when his head snapped up and his eyes locked onto hers, "To apologise," she repeated hesitantly, "For the other night. I'm sorry you had to... witness that. And I'm sorry that you have to keep my secret for me."

Snape looked gobsmacked. Although her initial intention had not been to apologise – despite the fact it was probably the right thing to do – she was surprised that he seemed so taken aback. Hadn't Sirius apologised to him yet?

"It's--" He took a deep breath, as if the mere thought of what he was going to say pained him, "It's not your fault."

The smooth timbre of his voice made her want to shudder. It was oily and unpleasant, but he could not help it and so her thoughts moved on.

"Even still," She insisted, leaning forward. Snape's shoulders looked a lot less tense now, and Hermione was thankful that the threat of a full-out duel seemed to lessen, "I've been in that position before, keeping other people's secrets. It's not desirable."

"It is nothing," He suddenly announced, standing up a little straighter, "I have no one to tell it to, so it is nothing."

An uncomfortable silence hung in the air. There was so much Hermione wanted to say, so much she wanted to berate him for, to thank him for. Thank you for keeping us safe.

Knowing that it would be futile, but also knowing that she was supposed to be new and unknowledgeable about student friendships, Hermione deliberately put her foot in her mouth.

"If you wanted to talk to Remus--"

"No," Snape interrupted firmly, his dark eyes boring into her own, "Lupin and I are not friends, nor will we ever be."
"Alright," said Hermione hastily, playing up her discomfort, "I understand. If you need to talk to me about it, though… well, you know where to find me." She gave a small smile.

There was silence once more. Snape fidgeted, and Hermione wanted to chuckle at the fact that he'd been a much better actor when she had first known him. Spying would do that to you, she supposed.

"Can I go?" He blurted out. Hermione nodded, and he darted out of the classroom like he was being chased by a particularly ferocious Hungarian Horntail.

Snape's treatment of her went back to normal after that. She didn't see him much – she kept away from the dungeons for obvious reasons, and he was the kind of person that would not be easily found if he did not want to be. He was probably avoiding Lily as well, if the conversation Hermione had stumbled across weeks ago was any indication as to the nature of their friendship.

It was no secret to her that Snape was in love with Lily Evans, who hadn't been his friend for nearly two years now. But she had presumed they'd avoided each other after the fifth year incident, as she liked to call it.

In a way, she understood. Lily was staunch in her beliefs and not ashamed of her parentage; to have one of her best friends betray her like that surely would have been awful. Hermione couldn't help but think, though, that maybe Lily would be more forgiving if she knew what Snape would do for her son in the future, if she knew that she herself wouldn't even be alive enough to hate Snape in three or so years time.

Shaking herself of such thoughts – for all his good deeds, Snape had still bullied Harry, and Neville in particular, during their whole schooling; he was not a saint, and Hermione would do well to remember that – she settled into her reprieve from all this: the problems of Lizzy Bennet seemed so trivial compared to her own.

It was Halloween, and Hermione refused to acknowledge its significance.

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Hermione received an owl on Friday morning, which nearly shocked her out of her chair.

_Huxley,_

_I have assigned Sirius Black to detention with you this evening. I'm sorry to ruin your Friday night, but I seem to remember you've managed to tie him up quite successfully in the past and I have my hands full with other matters. My personal suggestion is to have him sit still for an hour – he can hardly manage it, and it is highly amusing._

_Good luck,_

_Minerva_

Hermione looked up from her parchment, and glanced at the Gryffindor table. Sirius was eyeing her warily, and Hermione held back a grin.

It wasn't like she had anything else to do, alone and in the past as she was.
When Sirius knocked on the Defence classroom's door after dinner that day, she'd decided she'd be a bit nicer to him than Minerva seemed to be in her detentions. After having witnessed him crawling the walls of Grimmauld Place when he was unable to go outside, she felt making him sit still was a little cruel. Of course, McGonagall hadn't seen him in such a way and so she had no idea.

"Nothing too bad, Sirius," Hermione assured him upon glimpsing his hopeless expression as the door swung open. She tucked her wand into the front pocket of her coat. "Here," She threw the coat she'd previously conjured for him his way, "You'll need this. It's not raining, but it's freezing."

She cast a few warming charms on both of them before they braced the icy cold outside. It was rather mild for November, the October rains having passed and the December snow yet to fall.

"Professor Slughorn needs replenishing of a few ingredients." She informed him as they made their way toward the edge of the Forbidden Forest. "That's where we come in. Normally I do it alone, but company is always nice."

"Is this how you usually spend your Friday nights?" Sirius inquired, and Hermione knew he'd be raising an eyebrow in his scepticism. He was trailing along behind her, however, and so she did not have a view to be able to confirm.

"Usually," Hermione commented mildly. It was accurate enough – she'd maybe acquired ingredients for the Potions professor only once or twice previously, but her Friday nights were definitely not spectacular by any means. After all, she had no friends and no family. Weekends by the warm fire in her own rooms were common.

"Grim." Hermione heard him mutter under his breath, and she snorted in amusement.

It was only about an hour into scouting around for some aconite (with thick gloves, of course) that it became apparent to Hermione that she didn't even know why Sirius was serving this particular detention. She'd thought, maybe, it had to do with the Whomping Willow the week previous, but surely he'd be serving it with stricter instructions on McGonagall's part?

"How did you land detention, anyway?" She prompted casually, her Lumos ed wand held in front of her.

Sirius sighed, but a satisfied grin appeared on his face as if he were remembering a particularly nice dream.

"Snuck out," He explained, shaking his head in a show of faux ruefulness. "Got caught coming back."

"So that's why you weren't in class on Thursday night." His absence had been noted, but she'd simply reported it to Nettle and moved on. "But none of you were in class." She continued thoughtfully.

"That's right," Sirius confirmed smugly, "But we have a system. It was my turn to take one for the team this time around." His expression turned serious, "Remus's loophole work wasn't up to his usual standard, which… well, it's to be expected."

A considered silence fell upon them.

"Have you apologised?" Hermione asked, digging around the asphodel she'd stumbled across. It was no aconite, but the roots would be needed for the Draught of Living Death, if she remembered correctly. Sitting in Potions class seemed decades away in her memory.
"Of course! I haven't stopped apologising since it happened. I mean—" He trailed off, slightly embarrassed, "You've heard me. But Remus won't accept it, still won't talk to me—"

"No," Hermione interrupted, finally grasping at the root and pulling. An array of dust, dirt, and plant flew about. She cleaned the roots with a wave of her wand, and placed it gently into her bag. "I meant Snape. Have you apologised to Snape?"

"Snape?!!" Sirius said loudly, and Hermione shushed him. They were in the Forest – it wouldn't do to let any harmful beasts in on their location. Sirius's voice lowered to a furious whisper. "Of course I haven't apologised to Snape. If I let him get close enough, the git is sure to hex me."

"So?"

"So?" Sirius barked out, and Hermione shushed him again, "So? I don't fancy being compelled to eat my own hand, thank you very much!"

Hermione rolled her eyes. Sirius, always so dramatic.

Huffing, Hermione turned around and faced the Gryffindor for the first time that night. He looked stressed, to put it mildly. He was pale, the limited moonlight and the illumination of her wand casting him in an unflattering light. His hair was lank and tangled. He had dirt smudged on his face, and his uniform was very unkempt. All in all, he didn't look like his usual self.

"Look, Sirius, I'm going to be honest with you," He looked apprehensive, "What you did was— … that's inexcusable." Sirius had the sense to look ashamed, "If Remus never spoke to you again, he would be well within his rights. If Snape decided he was going to make your life a living hell—"

"Like he doesn't already." Hermione ignored him.

"—he would be well within his rights. You nearly killed him, Sirius. And Remus and I would have ended up in Azkaban—"

"No, you wouldn't've!" Sirius said fiercely, his eyes blazing as he looked down at her on the ground, "I would have taken the fall! It was my fault, not yours, and I would have gone straight—"

He cut himself off, breathing heavily.

So this was the Sirius Black who'd gone after Peter Pettigrew in 1981. This was the Sirius Black who'd come out the other side of Azkaban sane.

Well… relatively.

Hermione tried not to show him how sad he was making her.

"Would haves aren't apologies," Hermione told him. She straightened up, stepping forward. Stretching out an arm, she placed a hand on his shoulder. "You need to tell Snape you're sorry. And," Hermione added as he opened his mouth to protest, "You need to leave him alone."

Hermione squeezed his shoulder, trying to comfort. Sirius just looked heartbroken.

"Give Remus time," Hermione continued softly, catching his gaze, "He'll forgive you in the end."

"How come you don't hate me?" Sirius asked miserably, and Hermione retreated back to the forest floor to search for more asphodel.

"Because, unfortunately, I have been through worse. It was easy to forgive you for this, Sirius," She,
of course, did not mention that the sight of him falling through the veil seemed permanently stuck behind her eyelids every time she glimpsed his laughing face. "It's easy to forgive people when you realise how quickly you might lose them."

She shouldn't have said anything, if the pity pouring out of Sirius was anything to go by.

"Are you nearly done?" She asked, swiftly changing the subject. Sirius looked confused before she gestured to the dittany he'd been trying to carefully prune.

"Oh! Yeah, I've got enough."

"Brilliant," she said, straightening up. She hoped he wouldn't notice that she'd basically bobbed up and down in the last minute. "I think we're about finished. Consider this an early mark."

Sirius didn't look especially elated, but she figured Remus's lack of forgiveness was still weighing on his mind.

"What did you sneak out for, anyway?" Hermione asked as they reached the doors to the Entrance Hall.

Sirius looked pleased with himself.

"The lads and I went to see Elton John."

Hermione stopped, and Sirius took a few steps before stopping himself.

"You're not serious?" Hermione asked, eyes wide as a reluctant grin grew on her face.

"You know better than to ask that question." Sirius responded, grinning madly.

It took her a second to realise her error before Hermione groaned.

Sirius seemed to let it go, for he continued to explain.

"Remus bought tickets months ago during the summer – he's more in tune with that Muggle stuff than the rest of us – and, well, the concert happened to be last night, so…" He shrugged, nonchalant.

"You know, if I wasn't a teacher I dare say I'd be impressed."

"Come on," Sirius needled her, grinning, "You're a little impressed. Don't deny it."

"Maybe a little." Hermione admitted, in awe of the nerve of Sirius Black. These were dark times, but from what Hermione had heard – and it seemed to be accurate – Sirius had never let it get to him.

It was when they reached the stairs up to Gryffindor Tower that Hermione left Sirius, shaking her head with a smile. Her quarters were nearer to Ravenclaw Tower than Gryffindor, but she figured she had better walk him back so he wouldn't get detention again for being out past curfew.

It was as she entered her rooms that she realised she didn't know how exactly Dumbledore had punished Sirius for the full moon. Frowning, she decided she'd ask Remus.
In all of the drama of the past week, Hermione had forgotten about Quidditch.

"Gryffindor versus Slytherin today – any bets on the match, Hermione?" Nettle asked her as she sat down at breakfast the next morning. Hermione paused, before resuming to chew her sausages. Swallowing quickly, she gave the uniformed players a scornful look.

"Quidditch is not something I tend to follow."

"No?" Nettle asked, surprised. She took a sip of her pumpkin juice before continuing, "I'd think you'd encourage anything that improved people's flying skills."

Hermione mumbled a non-reply, stuffing some scrambled eggs into her mouth.

Quidditch reminded her too much of home, too much of her friends who hadn't been born yet, too much of the old Hogwarts and her parents and Oliver Wood's victorious screaming and all those things she'd taken for granted as a student. It wasn't healthy to avoid everything that reminded her of her old life – for that's what it was: something separate from now, like a dream that faded quickly once you woke up. Her heart panged painfully, and Hermione was suddenly on the brink of tears. Blinking them away fiercely, she swallowed against the lump in her throat.

She forewent the match.

The castle was eerily quiet with only a few students milling about and Hermione thought she'd seen Professor Vector in the library as she'd passed the doors.

It wasn't much better than what Hermione imagined the match to be like. The silence was unnerving, just as the game would have been. The ringing of her ears in Nettle's office mimicked the ringing that would have surely plagued her amongst the other teachers in the stands. The only difference was that here, alone, she didn't have to pretend.

And that was everything, wasn't it? That was what left her exhausted at the end of each day, but still wishing for the ever-elusive sleep. She was pretending. With everything. Hermione wasn't a teacher – she was barely older than her oldest students. She had seen more, yes, but they all looked at her and saw a peer. She had their respect, but some of them called her Hermione and others joked around with her and made fun of her. She wasn't a professor at all.

Then she was lying – to everyone, about everything. Her name, even. Her past. Her friends. Any question was swiftly put down, any probing about her life ignored and the subject changed. She was pretending like none of it mattered, that she was okay and fine and all those things but she wasn't--

"Hermione?"

Her head whipped up to stare at him. A quill sat loosely in her hand, red ink dripping onto the second year essay in front of her.

"Remus," Hermione greeted, trying to hide the surprise in her voice considering she hadn't heard him come in. She didn't think she was very successful. "You're not at the match?"

"The match is over," Remus told her, tilting his head in amusement.

Oh.

Well time flew by when you were trying to keep it together, she supposed.

"Oh," Hermione said, placing her quill down beside the parchment she had been marking, "Well,
what can I do for you?"

She folded her hands together, smiling pleasantly as the memories of Antonin Dolohov in the Department of Mysteries screamed at her from where she'd shoved them into the deep recesses of her mind.

Remus didn't even seem to know why he'd chosen to visit her, if the briefly befuddled look on his face was anything to go by.

"I just thought I'd see why you weren't at the match," He explained, shuffling a little closer to her desk but avoiding her eyes.

If Hermione was a meaner person she might have called him on the lie, but she was tired and honestly if Remus wanted to visit her when she was so melancholy, who was she to stop him?

"Marking," Hermione gestured to the pile of essays beside her on the desk, "And Quidditch isn't really my cup of tea."

"It isn't?" Remus asked her, gingerly placing himself down onto the seat in front of her desk. Hermione frowned at his carefulness, but brushed it off. Hermione still felt some aches and pains and re-opened scratches from the full moon, so Remus was sure to as well.

"Why does everyone keep asking me that?" Hermione asked with a weak chuckle, "It's hardly surprising, I don't think."

"Flying's a useful skill," Remus rebutted.

"There's a huge difference between flying for fun and flying for necessity." Hermione pointed out, looking back down at the essay in front of her. Very, very poor spelling.

They sat in comfortable silence for a minute or two before Hermione remembered.

"What is Sirius's punishment, by the way?" She asked casually, still frowning down at the paper in front of her. Maybe if she didn't put emphasis on the question, he wouldn't become upset.

"Nothing." The clipped answer dispelled that idea, but the answer itself was a whole other deal.

"What?" Hermione asked, looking at him. He was staring out the window behind her.

"If he attempts to hurt Snape or another student again, he's expelled without warning. But that's it."

"Remus--"

"It's fine," He interrupted her, "I mean, it's not like someone almost died."

Hermione sighed, pushing her parchment and quill away. This deserved her full attention. It was beginning to feel like she was the Marauders' therapist, though. Soon enough, James would be confiding in her about Lily and Peter would be showing her remorse about selling out his best friends to the Death Eaters.

"Remus," She started again, and paused until he locked eyes with her, "I know it's upsetting but--" It almost killed her to say it, "--I'm sure Dumbledore had his reasons."

"Sirius should have been expelled," He continued darkly after a moment, "Maybe then he'd finally learn."
"Sirius has learnt, Remus," Hermione said, standing and making her way around to crouch down beside Remus. "We talked about it last night. He feels awful, but he just doesn't know how to express it."

Remus snorted, looking away from her to stare moodily out the window again.

She wasn't sure what compelled her to do it, when she thought back to this moment later. Months from now she would determine that this is where it all began, with this simple exchange in Nettle's office as the students returned from the Quidditch match and bustled outside in the corridors.

Hermione took his hand gently, sweeping her thumb back and forth over the top of it. He clenched his jaw but slowly turned his head to hers.

"I'm glad you haven't forgiven him, but don't hate him. Dumbledore mentioned it weeks ago but it still stands – your friends are important, and ostracising one of them now when things are only going to get worse is unwise. The other professors tell me the four of you are inseparable,"

Remus smiled slightly at this, as if in remembrance.

"I would hate to see you fall out over this." Hermione pushed away silent whispers of greater betrayal, "Everyone's alive and very much not in Azkaban."

He snorted again, seeming a little uplifted.

"But maybe make him suffer a little longer?" Hermione suggested playfully, her hand still warm against his.

"Yeah," Remus chuckled, "Maybe."

"Good." Hermione concluded as Remus's hand shifted slightly under hers as if to–

"I–"

"Hermione?" Nettle's voice came from the classroom, and Hermione straightened quickly, fighting a strange flush in her cheeks.

"In here!" She called out. Remus had sat up, and his face seemed blank. He was, now that Hermione thought about it, good at hiding his feelings.

Nettle's face, alight with excitement, popped into view followed by her bundled up body. She was in the process of taking off her scarf as she spoke.

"The game was brilliant! I can't believe you missed– oh, Mr Lupin," Nettle stopped short at the Gryffindor, her excited tone dampening into a friendly one, something a bit more professional.

"Remus and I were just discussing his latest assignment." Why she lied, she had no idea. She'd tell herself later that it was because telling Nettle that she was giving him friendship advice was too tangled up in the werewolf business to make much sense.

Even if the Defence professor knew she was a werewolf… she tried not to think about it.

Remus stood, his chair screeching as it moved back. Hermione wanted to wince but kept her smile on her face. Remus was taller than her now, which she'd only really just noticed. She raised a hand to hover awkwardly as his shoulder, herding him towards the door into the classroom in the hopes of convincing him to leave.
"If you have any more questions, Remus," Hermione said, as if she was continuing on from a previous thought that Nettle had interrupted, "Feel free to drop by any other time."

"Alright." He agreed, seeming to catch on. Well, he wasn't a Marauder for nothing, "Thanks, Hermione."

"'Hermione'?' Nettle repeated when Remus had left the classroom – they'd both watched him leave.

"You know some of the students call me by my first name," Hermione provided, settling back down into her chair and pulling the abandoned essay to her to continue marking.

"Sure they do," Nettle agreed, and Hermione ignored her tone, "You just don't seem to have one on ones with them."

Hermione swallowed thickly, and looked up.

"Just what are you suggesting, Emilia?" She asked her fellow professor – there really was no denying it, she was a professor even if it felt wrong to accept the title.

Nettle's lips quirked as she fought a smile.

"Lighten up, Hermione. You're practically their age. No harm in… preferring… some over others."

Hermione huffed.

She tried not to think about it as Nettle's laughter echoed throughout the office and classroom alike.

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Hermione had been avoiding the Daily Prophet since her time in 1977. It was easier to ignore the people she was letting die when their deaths weren't in her face in large black and white print. Not everyone else seemed to feel the same, though. Breakfast at the beginning of the week was filled with quiet murmurs and not much laughter. Slughorn had decided to tell her why.

"Muggles," He muttered next to her, sliding over the Prophet. Nettle was in conversation with Kettleburn seated beside her. "Family of six murdered in their home, no explanation. We know better, of course, but the Ministry were called in to perform the necessary memory charms."

Hermione's stomach clenched, her nerves making it churn uncomfortably.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Hermione responded quietly with a glance at the newspaper, picking at her bacon. She saw Slughorn frown out of the corner of her eye before he took his Prophet back and went back to his breakfast, silent and contemplative.

There wasn't much else Hermione could say, really. Letting herself feel sadness and grief over those muggles would leave her out of commission for the day – if she felt bad for every person who was at the wrong end of a Death Eater's wand, Hermione would have nothing left to feel. Even if she could change the timeline of events, there would have been nothing to do for those poor people – she hadn't known they were targeted, and it was an unprovoked attack. Saving them, even if she had felt she could, would have been an enormously difficult task.

She told herself this for the rest of the day, all through her two third year classes, and even
throughout her seventh year Slytherins and Hufflepuffs which was an incredible feat considering it felt like Snape's dark eyes were boring into her head the whole time.

Having the last period free was a God send in the most torturous way.

She'd taken to spending her frees either sleeping in (as two of them were first periods), or heading to the library. Madam Pince did not have the slightest problem with her in this time, probably because Hermione didn't have two best friends barging in and accosting her with sensitive information every time she opened a book in the room. Instead, Pince nodded politely at her and left her be. Hermione was familiar enough with the layout of the library that she rarely asked for the librarian's help, which seemed to suit Pince just fine.

Grabbing a few books from the Restricted Section that she hadn't got to on her last visit, Hermione made her way to the secluded alcove she'd been a fan of as a student. It was along the wall, and a large window with a beautiful view of the grounds provided her with the open space she desired. Yes, Hermione liked the library – but the claustrophobic feeling she got at a lot of the tables left a lot to be desired. The window helped her feel like she wasn't wasting her days away inside.

Her thoughts on it being a mild November were for naught, for on that day a light sprinkling of snow covered the grounds, like icing sugar on a fruit cake. From the warmth of the library, the snow looked delicate and magical. Hermione knew, however, that she would likely be cursing it if she'd ventured outside. It looked like an icy breeze was present and Hermione didn't fancy freezing her fingers off, even if the spell to bring them back to life wasn't particularly difficult, by her own standards.

*Time Travel Tragedies* sat at the bottom of her book pile – despite warnings to herself, she was least looking forward to being proved right by the book. Sighing, she carefully opened up the tome that sat on the very top – *Potent Mind-Altering Potions* – and buckled down to read for a few hours.

She wasn't sure how long it had been in minutes, but she had barely finished the first chapter when she was interrupted by a polite cough across from her. Finishing her sentence and marking her place, Hermione looked up curiously.

"I'm sorry, Miss Huxley, I don't mean to interrupt…"

Peter Pettigrew looked for all the world like he would rather be anywhere else than in front of her in that moment. Hermione wasn't sure she could blame him – after all, she knew she could come across as an intimidating figure in her study element, let alone when she was doing so and acting as a Hogwarts teacher. Peter always seemed a little afraid of teachers – not that they would yell at him or give him bad grades, but that they wouldn't care about him at all. His dependence on others for his own self worth had been obvious to Hermione from the beginning. It had, miserably enough, provided an explanation as to the possible reasons for his future, inevitable betrayal.

Hermione hadn't taken the chance to properly look at Peter until now. She'd been studiously avoiding him outside of class, and barely gave him cursory glances as she lectured. His large, innocent eyes unsettled her. He was a little plump, like he had yet to grow out of his baby fat despite the fact he was probably seventeen if not eighteen. Hermione supposed he was handsome in his own way, but was surely overshadowed by the attractiveness of his friends who had all seemed to gravitate toward each other like most attractive people do. Hermione wondered how Peter fit in, plump boy and rat animagus like he was. Hermione suspected he might be good at stealth, for all his assumed clumsiness.

"Did you want something?" Hermione prompted after a minute or two of silence. Peter jumped into action, embarrassed.
"Remus and I–" At this, he gestured behind him to where the other Gryffindor was seated at a table. Remus waved with a smile, "We're studying, you see. And I – that is, we – figured that you might want to help– I mean, join us?"

His stuttered request seemed wholly out of place for a Marauder, but a part of Hermione wondered whether that wasn't the plan all along when, after agreeing, Peter's nerves had flown straight out the window next to her head.

"I hardly think the two of you need help with anything," Hermione said upon sitting herself down with a huff at their table. They were both smiling at her. "Remus, your marks in defence are some of the best in the class. Peter, you can always improve but you're hardly average."

"We're not studying Defence," Remus said, smirking a little, "Didn't Peter tell you?"

Hermione shot the latter an exasperated look, who simply smiled brightly at her in response.

"No, he failed to mention that. Surely your–" Hermione glimpsed down at the textbook open across the table, "Charms professor would be more than happy to aid you? I know from first-hand experience that Professor Flitwick is more than willing to answer questions outside of allocated class time."

"And surely Professor Slughorn would be willing to answer any of your questions in the staff room?" Peter replied, raising an eyebrow and flicking his eyes pointedly down to her book.

Hermione didn't have to follow his gaze to know her fingers were now white from grasping at her book so hard.

Remus chuckled, and Hermione had to remember that Peter didn't start spying for Voldemort until after they left Hogwarts. He was just teasing, like a Marauder was wont to do. It didn't mean anything.

"What are you looking for, anyway?" Remus asked her, jotting down some notes from the Charms textbook in front of him.

"Who's to say I'm looking for something?" Hermione said loftily, opening up the Potions book hesitantly and beginning to skim over some of the less interesting parts. She had to get to the specifics.

"You're not taking any notes, and your eyes are darting across the pages too quickly for you to be simply reading for enjoyment."

Hermione pursed her lips, displeased.

"Neither of you would happen to know about potions that leave you in a coma, do you?"

The boys looked at each other, frowning. Hermione's small dash of hope diminished. It was a long shot, but she felt she had to try.

"The only potion I can think of that reaches anything similar is the Draught of Living Death…" Remus suggested, looking troubled at the need for such a potion. After all, people tended to use it in life or death situations. Or if they needed to hide somewhere – faking your own death proved there was no one to look for anymore. In the wrong hands, it could likely kill you; you needed someone to provide you with the cure when you were asleep, and that level of trust would be hard to come by in many.

"No, I need suspension… the body needs to be in stasis," She added at their confused looks.
"What, like it doesn't age?" Peter asked, his books and half-written essay forgotten. Hermione did not envy whoever had to mark it; his writing seemed messier than ever on that particular parchment.

"Exactly. I need something that leaves the taker unmoved, as if they've been frozen, only to be reawakened later and their body unchanged."

"I'm not sure that's possible," Remus commented, looking even more troubled, "And if it were, I guarantee the Ministry would've kept it quiet. Something like that in the hands of…"

He didn't need to finish his thought.

He was right. Hermione hadn't been thinking clearly about this – she hadn't really been thinking at all. She'd been so overwhelmed at the thought of witnessing the deaths of countless people that she hadn't really thought about the plausibility of an everyday witch or wizard being able to suspend themselves in time for twenty years. And besides, where would she go? How could she guarantee her safety during that time? Everyone she trusted was either dead or not yet born. It was hopeless.

Heaving a great sigh, she closed the book with a thump and pinched the centre of her brow in frustration, closing her eyes tiredly.

"Besides, if a potion like that did exist, the cure for it would be even more difficult to obtain." Remus reasoned, turning back to his own notes.

"Yes, you're right." Hermione agreed, taking a different book from her pile. It was back to the drawing board.

"I may be right about that," Remus said after a moment, "But I'm definitely not right about this – I can't seem to wrap my head around the Avis charm."

Hermione smiled in remembrance before setting aside her research altogether and helping the two boys.

Some things didn't change, even with time.

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The days and weeks leading up to Hermione's next full moon seemed to both drag and fly by. The usual runnings of the school left Hermione in a comfortable rhythm, her routine relatively unchanged. This meant that some days she'd be having dinner and wondering when she'd managed to fit lunch in between that and breakfast. She'd even managed to forget about and subsequently miss the second Hogsmeade weekend! Other days, like the one she was currently having, left her feeling slow and lethargic by only ten o'clock in the morning. It was a disorienting pattern and Hermione found herself grumpy at the thought.

Wednesdays were one of her favourite days on her timetable – fifth years in the morning (Ravenclaws and Slytherins so virtually no drama), a break, then second years from the same two houses after lunch, and finally the happy Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw combination of sixth years for her last class. Wednesdays were her peaceful time, her happy time. Rare it was on Wednesdays that Hermione would even think of a Gryffindor she knew, let alone run into one. Wednesday night she would prepare for the hell of Thursday, but she still went to bed feeling good about her time here, pacified that things were working out.
This Wednesday, though. This Wednesday she was currently having seemed to be begging for her to hate every Wednesday from then on in.

First, she had slept in. A rare happenstance, but no big deal on a normal day. Two days before the full moon, however, and Hermione wanted to scratch the eyes out of anything that got in her way before she had breakfast. So missing breakfast because she slept in? Not the best thing to happen.

Then her fifth years had all seemed to have a breakdown over their O.W.L.S., as if the mere thought of taking them eclipsed the many horrors that lived outside the school's walls. Her second years had been diligently quiet, which had given her a slight reprieve. However, in contrast to the year below them, her sixth years didn't seem to want to focus at all, too busy playing with their new quills from Hogsmeade, or Zonko's latest joke. After nearly breathing fire due to harmless Hiccup Sweets and therefore confiscating them, Hermione was on a war path. Despite gobbling down anything put in front of her at lunch and then later at dinner, Hermione snapped at anyone who asked her a question; so much so that by the end of her meal, the teachers were speaking quietly to one another but refusing to engage her for fear of becoming a victim on the wrong end of a Bat-Bogey. And to think she had to patrol later than night.

It was because of her day that Hermione didn't fully register what she was witnessing until at least a few seconds after stumbling across the pair. It had seemed preposterous, when her eyes had first conjured up the image. The idea that this happened anywhere was horrifying, but the idea that it could happen in her beloved school to someone she knew was something Hermione had not come to terms with – at least during her own time as a student at Hogwarts.

Mary MacDonald was crying.

"There we go," Mulciber breathed, the garish rings on his right hand reflecting the firelight of the pillar light nearby. They were in the fifth floor corridor, near the statue of Boris the Bewildered. Hermione was familiar – this was a shortcut to Gryffindor Tower, if the staircases were being agreeable.

The sound of Mulciber's belt jangling broke Hermione out of her assessment of their location.

"What are you doing?" Hermione asked coldly, feeling as if her hair was firing off sparks in her fury. She realised late that she'd procured her wand, and it was pointing at Mulciber with intent.

The Slytherin stepped away from Mary smoothly, doing up his belt calmly and raising an eyebrow at her raised wand.

"Don't make me ask you again," Hermione threatened, taking a few steps closer so the two students were only two or three metres away now, as opposed to a glaring four.

"I should think it were obvious," Mulciber drawled. Hermione narrowed her eyes at him. She moved her gaze over to Mary, who was pressed up against the wall of the corridor, breathing heavily. Silent tears were making their way down her face as she looked down at the floor.

"Fifty points from Slytherin. Get back to your common room. Now." She ordered fiercely. Mulciber, in all his nerve, simply shrugged.

"Here you go, MacDonald," He said, and Hermione saw him throw Mary's own wand at her. It clattered noisily onto the floor when she refused to catch it, and came to a stop at Mary's feet. She didn't move.

He swept away casually, as if Hermione had simply asked him politely to retreat to his dorm given
the late hour. She didn't lower her wand until she saw his robes swish down the nearest staircase and he was completely out of sight.

"Mary," Hermione said worriedly, quickly moving over to the still-silent seventh year, "Are you alright?"

For all that Mary seemed to be crying, Hermione thought she might hear ragged breaths and hiccups. Suddenly, it dawned on her.

*Finite Incantatem.*

Abruptly, the hiccups were all too clear.

"Mary," Hermione repeated, and she stowed away her wand before placing both her hands on Mary's arms, avoiding her flinch. "It's okay, he's gone."

Finally, the blonde girl looked up. Her eyes were swimming with unshed tears, her cheeks were clammy from shed tears, and Hermione saw her bite her lip to stop it from trembling.

"You're okay," Hermione assured her, smiling the best she could given the circumstances. She pushed some of Mary's unkempt hair behind her ear gently.

"Here," She said, bending down to pick up Mary's abandoned wand. She offered it to the crying girl, who took it mutely and pocketed it.

For all the multitude of feelings swirling around inside her, Hermione didn't know what to say. What could she say, to make any of this better?

"Did he--?"

"No," Mary whispered, interrupting Hermione before she could go on. Hermione was thankful: she hadn't wanted to finish that sentence.

"Come on," Hermione said, moving to Mary's side and putting an arm around her shoulder. "I'll walk you back to your common room."

The walk to Gryffindor Tower seemed to take days, for all that Hermione was lost in her thoughts. Mulciber had been about to… he'd been about to *assault* Mary. Right in the middle of the fifth floor corridor after curfew. Hermione was shocked about the act itself but the *gall* of Mulciber to try that at Hogwarts, which was meant to be safe. The nerve he had to shrug her off and act like the crime he'd been about to commit was about as serious as forgetting to write to your parents that week. Hermione was outraged that he thought himself above everything Hogwarts stood for, that the law stood for. She was disgusted that he had even tried it. And she was incredibly thankful that she had been patrolling the fifth floor corridor on a *whim*, despite it being nowhere near any common rooms or hotspots like the kitchens. Later, she would realise that was precisely why Mulciber had been lurking there.

"Gillyweed." Mary mumbled through her hiccups to the Fat Lady, who looked at them both with what Hermione would assume was her own version of worry – the Lady hadn't exactly been the most thoughtful portrait through Hermione's years at Hogwarts, too narcissistic to think much of the trouble of students. So the fact that she was showing any concern at all was remarkable. The both of them must have looked frightful.

Hermione didn't even bother trying to pretend she wasn't going to follow Mary into the Gryffindor
common room. She had to make sure she got in okay, and wasn't accosted by any nosey younger years before heading up to her dorm.

"Hermione?" She heard, and looked to the voice. Remus and his friends were by the fire, looking shocked at her entrance. Remus had stood while the rest had remained seating. The frown on his face deepened at the girl under Hermione's arm.

"Mary?" Another voice exclaimed, and Hermione turned her head again. Lily was at the bottom of the stairs up to the dorms, and she looked stricken. "Mary?! Merlin, are you alright?"

The redhead rushed over, giving Hermione a quick glance before giving her full attention to her friend once more.

Mary nodded, solemn. Her tears had eased up, but the evidence on them on her face and her dishevelled appearance told another story.

"What happened?" Lily asked softly. Hermione removed her arm from Mary's shoulder, and Lily's comforting hand replaced it.

"Thanks, Professor," Mary said quietly, and Hermione nodded before the girls went up the staircase. Mary was in good hands, Hermione was sure.

Hermione sighed, squeezing her eyes shut and bringing up a hand to cover them.

How was she going to tell people about this? She had to tell the staff. If Hermione were Headmistress, Mulciber would be expelled faster than he could say 'Voldemort'. But she wasn't stupid… for all that Hermione may forget at times, this was the seventies. It was still illegal, but the punishment for attempted sexual assault would not be as severe. Not to mention the fact that Dumbledore liked to keep an eye on prospective Death Eaters by having them as close to him as possible when they thought they had him fooled. Rage like nothing else filled her heart, and Hermione squeezed her eyes shut tighter to rid herself of the intense feeling.

She would be obliged to tell Slughorn, for all the good it would do. She'd also notify Minerva in the hopes of increased patrolling and instructions to all professors to be strict about attacks on other students. And, despite every cell in her body urging her not to, Hermione resolved that she would have to speak to Dumbledore. This was not acceptable, and he had to know that his manipulative planning was having an adverse affect on the student body. She wouldn't, of course, tell him in so many words for risk of blowing her story wide open, but he would understand. She would make him.

"–rmione? Is everything okay?"

The light touch of a hand on her elbow brought her back to the present.

Or should I say the past?

She didn't chuckle even at her own joke.

"Oh," Hermione started, opening her eyes and blinking against the seemingly bright lights of the common room. It was spinning red, like a particularly violent carousel ride. "Remus?"

"And friends!" Sirius piped up, and Remus went out of focus as Hermione's eyes slid from him to the three boys behind him, all looking extremely concerned.

"You're all up late," Hermione noted. It had to be nearing midnight by now – her patrols were well
finished, and the exhaustion that should have plagued her all day reared its ugly head in that moment. Her feet felt horribly heavy, and her lids were now drooping slightly.

"Forget about us," James insisted, stepping forward. Hermione tried not to look at him too hard for fear of tiredly mistaking him for his son. "Is Mary alright?"

"Mary will be fine," Hermione said tiredly, rubbing her eyes, "It's up to her whether she wants to tell you what happened."

Sirius looked a bit offended before Peter elbowed him in the gut sharply.

"And you?" Remus asked. Hermione realised belatedly that he was still touching her elbow gently, its light caress soothing her anger.

"I'm fine," answered Hermione, "You should all go to bed. Five hours of Defence tomorrow – I want you sharp." She smiled feebly in an attempt to lighten the mood, but it seemed to fall flat.

"Just," Hermione blurted out when it seemed like they were turning away back to their chairs, "Be careful, yeah? I've– … take care of each other."

This seemed to worry them more, yet Hermione waved off their concerns before wishing them goodnight and exiting the common room. The sight of Remus's face, brow creased with his anxiety, stayed with her until she got into bed soon after. He'd held that look the majority of time she'd known him. It was disconcerting to see it seemingly etched so permanently onto his younger face. She hadn't realised she hadn't expected to ever to see it again, which was preposterous given the fact she would most definitely see it again.

And sooner than I would like, she thought. Memories of Harry telling her Remus used to spy on werewolf packs crossed her mind.

Much sooner than I would like.

She fell asleep only to dream of Remus and herself, spying together.

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"You are unbelievable," Hermione said the next day, shaking her head in horrified awe, "Detention for a week? He could have–!"

"Yes, he could have. But he did not." Dumbledore said calmly from behind his desk, seated quite comfortably considering she was pacing in front of him.

"Only because I stopped him!" Hermione screeched, wanting to tear her hair out. She had such respect for Remus, who had been living with the erratic mood swings of werewolfdom since he was five years old and yet seemed so unflappable as an adult.

"I am thankful you did." The Headmaster said simply.

"I don't want that filth in my classroom any longer." She declared, spitting out 'filth' like it left a bad taste in her mouth.

"Unfortunately, Miss Huxley, it is not your classroom – it is Emilia's. As it stands, she is
disappointed by what has happened but has not refused Mr Mulciber his education."

If Hermione could froth at the mouth like she was sure she could in her wolf form, she would be.

"I hope you don't expect me to take his detentions," Hermione gritted out as she was about to leave.

"No," Dumbledore said with a smile, "Minerva has specifically requested she be the one to oversee Mr Mulciber's punishment. I assure you, I do not know her to be lenient."

Hermione gave a sneer before slamming the door to the Headmaster's office behind her.

Dumbledore would blame her sour mood on the upcoming full moon, but Hermione would've told him otherwise.

Nonetheless, Friday night saw her seething still, unable to stand motionless as she waited for Remus in the Entrance Hall at three thirty. She'd cut her appearance in class short – the sun would set just before four, and she needed to lock herself away before then. The short winter days were not ideal, as a werewolf.

"You alright?" Remus asked her upon approach. He looked a bit peaky himself, dark circles deep and dark underneath his eyes. He had none of the anger that was begging to burst from inside her.

"Fine," Hermione snapped, "Let's go."

Remus had the state of mind to cast warming charms on them both as they left the heat of the castle. There seemed no need to bundle up in winter cloaks and coats and scarves when they would find themselves naked and freezing soon enough, and so they only wore the most basic of winter attire.

Hermione's anger was fuelling the fire within her, and her cheeks were flushed red with warmth despite the biting air outside. Snow began to fall around them slowly, as if drowsy. She ignored it.

As if sensing that she was too angry to do anything, Remus grabbed a long stick from near the formidable tree and poked the knot at its base. It stilled immediately in a false welcome, and Remus led them inside.

The Shack was warmer than outside, but only just. Hermione shivered upon removing her jumper. She glimpsed goosebumps littering Remus's bare forearms.

By the time they were both naked – clothes pushed to one side – they were both shivering violently, the warming charms mild in the face of exposed skin.

"You've g-g-got t-to calm dow-down." Remus stuttered. Hermione refused to look at him, instead staring out the window at the quickly darkening sky. The sun was nearly completely set, and then–

"No," Remus barked, and Hermione turned to him in shocked anger. If she weren't shivering, she'd be trembling with rage. It was bubbling up inside her, unchecked and unspoken for. "Calm down."

"You d-don't think I-I'm t-trying?" Hermione hissed, clenching her fists tight enough to almost lose feeling.

"Not hard enough." Remus said aggressively, taking steps toward her.

"Get away!" Hermione screeched. The sky was almost there, soon the moonlight would hit them and–

"Stop it." Remus spat, and Hermione realised she was backing away from him, bumping into chairs
and tables behind her. They were marked up, scratched beyond belief. With a sick sort of derision, Hermione thought she’d probably peed on them all at some point during the last two visits.

"Don't touch me!" She screeched again, batting away his hands harshly as he got close enough to grab her.

"Calm down!" Remus shouted, finally managing to seize her left arm tightly. His eyes were a little crazed, his sandy hair messy and the ends curling with sweat despite the low temperature, "You'll only make it worse!"

Hermione had the distant, stray thought that the village of Hogsmeade would have much to say about the ghosts that haunted the Shrieking Shack come morning.

The thought was rushed from her mind as the transformation began. The nails of Remus's right hand grew, digging sharply into her upper arm. She cried out in pain and Remus's hand dropped away. Her own nail beds were stinging sharply, the sound of her bones snapping and crunching seeming far away despite the all-consuming pain. She was on the floor now, Remus close enough to touch as they both breathed heavily through the torture. Her rage, simmering inside her, seemed to be set loose with the lack of control of her body. Her mind clouded over, pain and fury and Remus the only things she saw.

Abstractly, she realised she'd bitten her lip clean through.

The cold was nothing now as fur began to sprout all over her body. She gave a piercing scream when a snout began to grow on her face, her vision obscured and her teeth sinking ever more deeply into her cut lip. Her hand – paw – stumbled onto Remus's and she heard his pained shout turn into an ominous growl. Her claws had dug in, desperate for relief, desperate to release the anger that was turning her vision stark and red.

Then everything was lost.

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE NOTE: attempted sexual assault happens in this chapter, but is stopped before anything extremely untoward is done.

I hate using sexual assault as a plot device, but it's actually canon that Mulciber attacked Mary MacDonald. It's not specified how but I speculate that sexual assault might have been treated less severely than use of Dark Magic in seventies Hogwarts, and Mulciber wasn't expelled for attacking her according to HP wiki.

As always, any constructive input is welcome.
Night Terrors

Chapter Notes

I should be writing my other stories as one desperately needs finishing with one more chapter to go and another is a sequel, but I find myself unable to stop with this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was Christmas Eve, and James Potter walked down one of the corridors of Hogwarts – he thought it might've been the third floor corridor but he wasn't paying much attention, it being Christmas Eve and all. In fact, his thoughts were elsewhere altogether, on a certain redheaded witch who'd headed home for the holidays. James would've usually done the same, but it was his last year at Hogwarts and he'd gone home every other Christmas, almost. Not to mention the full moon was tomorrow, and after last month's catastrophe and the month before's, James was reluctant not to join his best friend throughout his transformation. The others had agreed, and they were all in the castle over the holidays. Some things, though very few, were more important than family. Although, James supposed, his friends were his family. At least, Remus and Peter were. Sirius had been a git last month and James wasn't entirely sure he'd forgiven him even still, despite the spirit of the season.

"–reckon it's going to be a right laugh when term starts up again." A voice announced. James frowned. That sounded an awful lot like a gleeful Travers, which was never a good thing. He ducked into a shadowed alcove. The snow falling against the windows outside cast an eerie lightness upon the corridor, and so James disillusioned himself as well for good measure.

"Yeah, upstart mudblood like her needs to be taken down a peg." A different voice agreed, and James identified that as Rabastan Lestrange, the younger brother of Rodolphus who had, unfortunately for the Slytherin, married Sirius's cousin Bellatrix a few years back. James shuddered at the thought. They walked past at a slow pace, obviously relishing in whatever person they had decided wasn't good enough based on the magical abilities of their parents.

"Evans gave me a detention last month for being out after curfew. It was barely past ten, and she gives me detention! Merlin, I wanted to Crucio her. Serves her right, what the Dark Lord is doing." Travers griped as they passed James in his alcove, hidden. James was breathing slowly, trying to curb the growing desire to hex Travers for talking about Lily like that, for wanting to do that to her. Lily, who only saw the best in people, who was simply doing her duty as Head Girl. Lily, who wouldn't hurt anyone–

Breathe, Potter. You've got this.

"Yeah, maybe without her parents around she won't be so bloody annoying." Lestrange predicted.

"Haven't you heard?" Travers asked mildly, "The Dark Lord is paying them all a visit before Christmas."

Travers seemed to be waiting for Lestrange to respond. When he didn't, he sighed in annoyance.

"That means he's going to kill her whole family, you dumb shit," Travers said, exasperated, "Her included."
"Oh!" Lestrange exhaled, and then gave a chuckle. "I guess the Dark Lord is feeling particularly generous this Christmas." And they laughed their way down the rest of the corridor and out of sight.

It took James a few moments to get his breathing started up again. And then a few more to completely compute what had just been said.

_Lily._

He didn't really think, at least not long enough to concoct a foolproof plan. He thought of Lily, of Death Eaters and Voldemort and Christmas and he just ran, forgetting about patrols, forgetting about docking points from Travers and Lestrange, his Disillusionment charm long gone.

"Professor!" He burst through the door, not really taking in the shocked, pale faces of Huxley and Remus, the latter of which had a hand clutching suspiciously close to the professor's chest. "It's Lily!"

"Lily?" Huxley questioned, a frown marring her wan face.

"James, what's going on?" Remus asked, forgetting the professor and taking a few steps toward him.

"It's Lily, Travers and— she's in danger! We have to save her, she's— Voldemort—"

It took only a second, if that, for Professor Huxley's face to be wiped of all confusion, and to look determined instead. She pushed past Remus with purpose and stopped in front of James to look him straight in the eyes.

"Have you told the Headmaster?" She asked him, and James wanted to hit himself. Of course, Dumbledore! He should've gone there first!

"No, I came straight here, overheard them talking in the hallways, Voldemort's planning to do it before Christmas, I—"

Remus looked incredibly worried from behind Huxley, and James dimly registered that he almost looked worse now than he had upon waking in the Hospital Wing after last month's full moon, which was a ridiculous thought.

"Alright," Huxley's voice made his eyes snap back to her. He was still breathing heavily, unable to stop the thoughts running through his head, the images of Lily's green eyes lifeless and staring up at him, her beautiful red hair strewn carelessly around her. James fought against the excruciating pain throbbing in his chest; whether it was at the thought of Lily dead, or the fact he was still catching his breath from running all the way to the Defence classroom on the first floor, he didn't know. "This is what we're going to do. I'm going to let Dumbledore know. He will alert the other staff members, and we'll go to Lily's house. You two will go back to the common room and wait there."

"But—"

"No," Huxley enforced fiercely and James, all of a sudden, understood the fire in her eyes. He felt it too, beneath his sternum and travelling upward quickly, igniting in his veins and clouding red in his eyes. "You are both students, you need to stay here. This is too big, even for you."

He wasn't sure what he was meant to say to that, and so just nodded dumbly.

"Now," Huxley said, redirecting him. "Where does Lily live?"
Hermione could get used to waking up in the Hospital Wing on the morning after a full moon. It was more comfortable, even if her injuries seemed a whole lot worse – that would explain the hospital visit.

Groaning, she went to lift herself up but crumbled under her own weight immediately, crying out weakly at the sharp pain that rocketed up through her hands and up her arms. Madam Pomfrey came bustling in, tsking under her breath in disapproval.

"You won't be moving for quite some time, Hermione," said Pomfrey, waving her wand over Hermione's lying form. Hermione squinted at her, trying to figure out why everything hurt so much more. "You did a number on yourself and poor Mr Lupin."

Hermione perked up at that, her heart starting up a frantic pace at the Gryffindor's name. What had she done? Last she could remember… she'd sunk her claws into him, furious and frothing. Her stomach sank, heavy and cold at the bottom of her abdomen.

"Is he alright? What happened? Why are we in the Hospital Wing again? I–"

Pomfrey looked vaguely smug, and it was only when Hermione realised she was still talking but no sound was coming out that it became apparent the Mediwitch had silenced her. Hermione narrowed her eyes.

"You'll be doing more damage than anything else if you continue with your persistent questioning." Pomfrey admonished, and Hermione had the abstract feeling that this was where Professor Snape had adopted his curt tone from, which nearly made her laugh.

Her stomach suddenly stung as her muscles clenched in silent mirth, and she winced against the pain, her laughter ceasing immediately.

"Yes," Pomfrey said, looking even more smug, "Serves you right. Mr Lupin is well enough. Your… form rendered him incapable of standing this morning, but we're well on the way to having him at one hundred percent– well, I suppose as good as he can be after a transformation."

Hermione finally took a moment to look around her, searching for that familiar sandy head. She was in the bed beside the great, tall stained glass windows, which were currently preventing sheets of rain from drenching them all. In contrast, despite the aches and pains of her body Hermione felt warm and cozy, wrapped up tightly in bandages and bed sheets. To her left, Remus lay asleep. He looked… he looked terrible.

His face was paler than it had been before the moon reached its complete fullness, his face surprisingly void of any new scratches. But it wasn't his face that had taken the brunt of Hermione's rage – no, Remus was shirtless and Hermione could see that his torso was covered in bandages. Some of them looked brand new and others, slightly pink with seeped through blood, looked ready to be vanished away and replaced. Hermione could barely see any exposed skin from the neck down; although, with a heavy heart, Hermione was able to take a peek at his wide, calloused hands – the cuts were newly healed over, looking like red and raw scars, travelling up his arms underneath the white fabric of his bandages. She saw the deeper pricks, evidence of her growing claws from the night before, and swallowed down the uncomfortable feeling in her throat. They were scabbed over – obviously too deep to heal completely in under twenty-four hours. His sheets stopped her perusal of his injuries, covering anything from the waist-down.
Hermione looked away, staring up at the ornate ceiling and counting the lines in its pattern to control her frantic breathing. She had done that, and there was no denying it; it hadn't been someone else, or something else. No, Hermione had done those things to Remus, and he would forever remember them. Those scars were cursed, and likely to accompany him until his last breath.

Tears caused her vision to go blurry, and she lost count of the delicate lines and shapes above her, etched into the ceiling like a criss-cross of sculpture, permanent and intricate.

*Like Remus.*

"I didn't mean--" Hermione didn't even realise Pomfrey had removed the silencing charm, too caught up in her guilt to take note. Pomfrey shushed her, her smug expression long gone and one of pity taking its place.

"I know," she said, moving closer to pat Hermione's right hand consolingly, the stained glass windows behind surrounding her in an ethereal glow, bright colours reflecting beautifully off of her white uniform. "Remus knows, too. He forgives you."

Hermione was gasping with the effort it took to restrain her sobs, choked breaths fighting to break free of her own control. Pomfrey was shushing her, gently wiping away the tears sliding down from the corners of her eyes.

"Here," Pomfrey offered gently, and Hermione gulped down the potion greedily from the goblet placed in front of her mouth, "That's a good girl. Get some rest."

When Hermione woke again, she was in just as much pain. From the looks of it out the window, it was nearer to evening than it was to morning. With a little effort, she managed to sit up. Her hands were still throbbing, but the sting had dissipated from her wounds and so she'd grit her teeth through the pain to get upright. There was a white divider around her bed, which stopped her from being able to check on Remus even though she saw many silhouettes around his bed. There was obviously a silencing charm around it, too, for she only heard the sound of her own breathing, heavy and rattling a bit. She coughed, trying to clear out the rattle. This left her clutching her chest, eyes scrunched up with the pain. Her lungs were struggling; she wanted to take deep inhalations, but the stinging of what she guessed were cuts on her torso meant that any deep breath was met with agony.

Suddenly, the divider was pushed aside.

"Hermione, what did I tell you?" In her frustration, Pomfrey had forgotten to push the divider back into place, and so the silencing charm broke. Suddenly, Hermione was awash with voices.

"–separate the both of you from now on, you can't keep enduring this, Remus." Sirius was shaking his head, a hand hovering over Remus's shoulder. He obviously wanted to provide the comfort, but was scared of hurting his friend further. Remus, now that he was awake, had a bit more colour to him. Still, he looked positively exhausted and, Hermione noted with concern, the bandages hadn't lessened any. James and Peter stood around his bed also, Peter looking over his own shoulder worriedly at Hermione, and James refusing to give her the decency of a glance. This couldn't be good, for any of them. She'd hurt Remus, and now she had the Marauders hating her.

Their voices quietened down, and Hermione couldn't hear them from her position in the bed. Remus wasn't looking at her.

Hermione wanted to burst into tears again, despite the relatively fresh tear tracks that she felt on her face, making it feel stiff and a little sticky.
"Don't worry about it, dear," Pomfrey assured her, most likely glimpsing the heartbroken look on Hermione's face, "They'll come 'round once Remus gives them a talking to."

But Pomfrey didn't know, she didn't see the way Remus was steadfastly avoiding Hermione's eyes, the way his head had been turned away from her in obvious disgust. Peter's look of worry – which, she realised now looked more scared than worried – mimicked all of their feelings, for sure. The Marauders banded together, always, and they were afraid of her. War. They wouldn't let her anywhere near Remus if they could help it – Hermione could hardly imagine what Sirius might say. Her heart did a complicated flip, beating erratically. They'd been the closest Hermione'd had to friends in this timeline, as laughable as it was. And now… now she had no one. She couldn't even enjoy their hijinks in her classes as they were sure to instead stare resolutely at her in a strange play of intimidation.

Hermione would be intimidated. She'd seen the looks on Remus and Sirius's faces in the future, faced with the friend who had betrayed them more than a decade ago – they had been strident, unforgiving, resentful… all these things Hermione deserved, too. To think that was a pain years old, and Hermione had only committed her heinous act. She would be eviscerated on the spot, emotionally. She had no doubt they wouldn't hesitate to do the same physically but, with a strange sort of regret, realised that one of the staff members would likely stop them before they could do so.

How could she forget, though, throughout all this – her friends, her true friends from decades into the future, would be so disappointed. Hermione Granger had nearly mauled Remus Lupin to death, and she highly doubted Harry and Ron would have been totally understanding of it if they were here with her. That pain hurt her the most, left her gasping, unable to bring in any air to her screaming lungs.

Pomfrey shoved a goblet in front of her face, and Hermione swallowed the potion down heavily. When she woke again, it was definitely in the middle of the night. The divider was gone, and a silencing charm would not have been needed as the dark surrounds and echo of rain against the windows made the Hospital Wing, for once, quite peaceful. If Hermione weren't gripped with pain and guilt upon waking, she was sure she would have drifted right back off to sleep. But, alas.

Overall, the pain was much better. Looking to her bedside, Hermione concluded this was a result of the number of potions she must have consumed in the last day – an array of goblets stood proudly on her bedside table, and a rather sad looking bouquet of flowers sat in a vase to her left. Looking past it, Remus lay morbidly still. It took Hermione a fearful moment of watching him before she saw his chest expand slowly. He was alive.

Without thinking about it – but sure she would have done it anyway had she thought about it – Hermione gently eased the sheets off of her legs, flipping the material back. The Hospital Wing was warm, but not stifling. The loose night clothes Pomfrey must have dressed her in were not of the warmest material, but that was okay. They were soft and comfortable, even if the feel of them rubbing against her bandages was peculiar.

Turning so her feet touched the bared stone floor, Hermione shivered at the temperature difference. There was a warming charm on the floor, but it still wasn't what Hermione would call warm. She felt goosebumps go up her arms, and cringed at the way they made her more aware of her own injuries. Her right arm was bandaged neatly; her left was bare. Her torso felt tight with the bandages around it, and Hermione spared a quick thought for the months old werewolf bite that had started this whole thing. It twinged, as if sensing her thoughts, and Hermione shook herself of them quickly after that.

Pushing through the throb of her hands which, upon inspecting, Hermione realised were red raw – newly healed, tender – Hermione shakily got to her feet. Wincing at the aches in her joints, and
hobbling inelegantly due to the brace around her right knee, Hermione made her way to Remus's bed.

She was panting by the time she covered the three or so metres between the beds, leaning heavily against the bed to recover. Her hand accidentally grazed Remus's, and a flash of gnarling teeth came and went, too quick for her to make sense of it. She grasped helplessly at his right hand again, but no flash accompanied the contact this time. Sighing, she shakily lowered herself to perch on the side of his bed, twisting awkwardly in a way that the cuts on her chest did not favour. She ignored them.

Looking at his face, slack with sleep, Hermione felt the simmering guilt boil over abruptly. How could she even have the nerve to touch him, after what she'd done? And yet, she couldn't seem to pry her own fingers from his wrist where they rested, gentle. Her eyes slid over his form, the bandages on his chest a warm cream colour in the firelight. His chest rose and fell slowly, as if he were in a deep sleep.

"Hey," a soft murmur came from near Remus's head. Hermione wasn't sure how long she had sat there staring at his covered wounds and, now that she saw the wet evidence of her tears on his sheets, crying silently. "Hey, hey, it's okay,"

He moved slowly to sit up, wincing at his own chest injuries before a wrapped hand came up to wipe the tears from her cheeks. She was sure she must've looked a wreck – tears running freely, bandaged all over, sure to be pale, sure that her hair was a frizzy mess, probably blood caked somewhere on her person.

"Why're you crying?" asked Remus, his voice low. It wasn't quite a whisper, but it was quiet. He was mindful of the tranquillity of the Hospital Wing as it was, not wanting to disturb it.

Or Pomfrey, Hermione thought abstractly as she screwed up her face in distress.

"I'm sorry," she croaked out, holding back even more tears, struggling through her speech. Her voice sounded horribly wet, "I'm so sorry, Remus,"

"For what?" Remus said, still wiping away some of her tears with his thumb. She flinched away, shaking her head as she brought up her own hand to push his away.

"Don't," She gritted out, "Don't pretend like I didn't hurt you."

Remus smiled wide, and he looked a whole lot more alive with the expression. His eyes reflected the firelight of the room with much enthusiasm, glittering beautifully. The mossy green of them seemed even softer in this light.

"Alright, I won't pretend. But I forgive you."

There was a moment of silence, Hermione's wet hiccups the only sound to be heard.

"You're too quick to forgive," Hermione started, before Remus interrupted her with a softer smile, his expression morphing into something she could have easily mistaken as pity, if she thought Remus might feel pity for a werewolf. No, he was looking at her with a look akin to how one might look at a friend making a fool of themselves; fond and amused.

"You're too quick to assume," Remus said lightly, still quiet, "that people hate you. I just want to know who made you think that way."

Hermione didn't speak, too afraid of her own voice and what might come blurring out of her mouth if she let it.
"Madam Pomfrey said you couldn't walk." Hermione changed the subject, looking down at his legs mournfully.

"Temporary," Remus commented, still looking at her tenderly. Hermione tried to ignore it. His hair looked too soft, too mussed in the early hours of the morning. She didn't want to familiarise herself with the sight, afraid she might come to miss it in the coming weeks. "One of my calf muscles was almost torn through, couldn't hold myself up."

Hermione shut her eyes tightly, a fresh wave of guilt overcoming her.

"I hurt you, too." Remus said, and Hermione opened her eyes blearily to see him place a kind hand on her shoulder. She looked down and saw the bandages wrapped around her left shoulder, thicker than anywhere else on her body.

"You can't be comparing my measly injuries to yours," Hermione said with shock, shaking her head, "you couldn't walk, Madam Pomfrey mentioned you had seventeen lacerations on your chest alone, I can't--" She stopped, unable to go on.

"Hermione," Remus soothed her, "It is the way of things. You didn't have control over yourself, and I was the only thing in the Shack worth fighting against that night. It's not your fault."

At that, the thought suddenly occurred to her.

"The others?" She gasped, new images of nearly dead Marauders running through her head, despite the fact she had glimpsed them earlier. "Are they alright?"

"They're fine," Remus assured her, another hand coming up so both laid on her shoulders. She shuffled closer, trying to avoid the look of discomfort that had briefly crossed his face at the action. "A little bruised, a lot angry, but fine."

The pattering of the rain against the windows, much lighter than previous, was soothing to Hermione's now tired mind. Her tears had drained the energy out of her, and she found herself wanting to curl up next to Remus and sleep the next week away.

Deciding to address those urges at a later date, Hermione shakily made her way into a standing position, swaying precariously after Remus's hands fell from her arms.

"We'll talk more tomorrow, alright?" Remus proposed, shifting down his bed to lie down. Hermione nodded, shuffling back over to her bed.

Although its warmth was gone, Hermione found herself too tired to be affected by it. As soon as her head hit the pillow, all thoughts left her head. She heard Remus quietly murmur her name before she fell, wholly and irrevocably, into sleep.

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"Pretty gnarly scar, right?" James was telling her the next day, his t-shirt pulled down to show off the four jagged lines on his left collarbone. They were red, recently healed, but otherwise looked completely painless. Hermione wanted to be sick.

"James--" She started, only for his hand to rise up and stop her.
"You don't need to apologise. I've always understood the risks involved, and we should've known better than to stick so close when you were like that, anyway."

Hermione's head dropped in shame, her hair falling over her shoulders to obscure her face from view. It felt rough and scratchy against her cheeks, and she realised she desperately needed a shower in her quarters to straighten herself out and remove the layer of sweat the Hospital Wing had inspired her to produce. Late nights and painful writhing were not conducive to staying clean.

It was Sunday, and Hermione could hardly believe that nearly her whole weekend was gone due the events of Friday night. Remus was smiling pleasantly in his bed, accepting Pomfrey's potions with grace and unusual familiarity, despite the fact this Remus had yet to travel with rogue werewolf packs for Dumbledore's sake.

It had taken much convincing for her to accept that James wasn't mad at her. Wary, yes, but not mad. He understood, the best he could considering he wasn't a werewolf himself. It was more than Hermione could've asked for, and so she didn't question him further than the initial disbelief.

"Alright, Miss Huxley," Madam Pomfrey announced, "You're free to go. I've sent some potions to your rooms, the usual: Dreamless Sleep, Girding, Star Grass Salve… use the Dreamless Sleep tonight and maybe the next, but try to avoid it after that. Girding should get you through classes tomorrow, I've given you enough just for that. Rub the salve on the more tender cuts to ease the pain. But I'm afraid the rest is up to your body; cursed wounds like yours don't fade easily. It's likely you'll have them for a long while, Miss Huxley, before they begin to fade. They might not fade at all."

Hermione, of course, was familiar with cursed wounds. The long one across her torso from years ago was still visible, if nowhere near as gnarled as it was when she first received it. Some things faded, and cursed wounds weren't one of them. Hermione supposed the extensive research conducted by 1999 had yet to be completed in 1977 – Pomfrey was giving her false hope, although she didn't know it. Maybe that's why Remus hadn't been serious enough about his own fresh scars.

"I expected as much," Hermione replied grimly, adjusting her robes again. They felt scratchy and uncomfortable against her bandages, and she couldn't wait to retreat to her quarters and be free of them.

"I'll be in classes by tomorrow morning," Remus assured her as she was about to leave. James looked confident about it, and so she was wary of pointing out how Remus still seemed unable to hold himself too steady on his feet. "Don't worry, I'm fine. We'll talk on Tuesday."

It seemed he was familiar enough with her timetable to remember that she had a free period on Tuesday afternoons – although, Hermione surmised, this was probably helped by the fact he shared that free period with her. She felt shy, all of a sudden, of what he might say to her on Tuesday.

The rest of her Sunday was passed by resting in her bed, wishing she had Crookshanks to curl up to in an attempt to abate her loneliness. She'd been released just before lunch, and so had called for one of the house elves to deliver some food to her rooms. She'd sat down in her comfiest armchair, a blanket over her shoulders as she ate in her pyjamas, reading simultaneously. Her fireplace was alight, and the soft crackles it emitted calmed her racing mind. But only twenty minutes after her lunch, she had felt her gashes sting sharply, unused to the minimal movement she had put them through that day. She'd retreated to bed, book forgotten, to rub the salve over them. They looked raw, but had healed over well. There was some scabbing on the deeper ones but, overall, she thought she had fared okay. She'd been lucky, terribly lucky, that Remus had only been defending himself. She hadn't remembered the full moon, of course, but her wounds spoke louder than words. They were defensive wounds, centred around her hands and arms, with a few on her legs, and on her chest to accompany Dolohov's gift.
It was funny, that she was more scarred than most and yet felt strangely detached from it all. There was no worry over how she might look, about who would judge her for the marks underneath her robes. Hermione had never been overly concerned with looking beautiful, at first something she thought was unattainable and then, later on, something she had associated with childhood. On the run with Harry and Ron, she had never given her appearance much thought unless she was trying to hide it, afraid of being recognised. After the final battle, after kissing Ron, she hadn't thought of it past simply having a shower and getting clean. Even then, after she was finally clean, she simply thought; Ron and she were together, and so why should she have to impress him like that?

But as the months wore on, they both realised that it was effortless being together – in fact, their relationship hadn't changed much except for the fact they kissed every now and then, too busy recovering from it all to go further. It was a stark contrast to Harry and Ginny, who were seen in lip-lock whenever they had a moment alone, and sometimes not even then. It was Ron who'd told her at first, who'd pointed out that maybe they were too used to being friends to pursue much more. He'd said it with regret, like he'd acknowledged the fact but hated it.

It had taken a few more weeks for it to sink in after he'd told her, but she realised he'd been right – they were friends who kissed because it seemed like the thing to do. The passion a result of the war had left them just as the war had – bereft, cold, tired. It was better that they end it and remain friends.

After that, she hadn't thought of dating. She was young, why push herself? She could just enjoy, and that didn't require any particular level of beauty. Besides, there was so much to do to help, she hardly had time to maintain her appearance to a high standard.

Then, of course, the rogue Death Eaters had made themselves known, and quickly. It had been before the New Year that they'd shown their ugly faces, and she'd been bitten after months of fear, of the return to running.

So the scars? They didn't mean much. She was the only person to have seen herself naked, and it wasn't likely to change for a long time. How could she ever be intimate with someone when they would know, as soon as she undressed, that she was a werewolf? How could she guarantee their discretion, their understanding? It was too much to think about in such close proximity to those she knew, to the people she could possibly have an effect on in the future with her presence. It was better to think about it in a few years, she decided, when the scars were a little older and she wasn't surrounded by familiar faces. She might try dating in the Muggle world, explain away her body with a wild animal attack that had happened whilst she was camping. A fake story, but convincing to a Muggle who scoffed at the idea of magic existing at all, let alone werewolves.

Comforted, she took her first dose of Dreamless Sleep.

She was sure that if she had dreamt, memories of Crookshanks chasing a rat missing a toe might feature.

Monday, despite the Girding Potion, was exhausting. Whilst the potion gave her better endurance, it definitely didn't stave off the headache pounding in her skull. Her body was working so hard to heal itself, it seemed to be pushing into overdrive. All her senses were on alert, and she'd even thought she might've smelt lunch a full hour before the bell tolled for it, despite the distance between the Defence classroom and the kitchens.

Nettle seemed to sense Hermione's irritability and inability to maintain her usual teaching standard and so had, respectably, tackled all the classes with minimal help. Considering her experience wasn't extensive, and that the numbers in 1977 classes were bigger than in Hermione's time, she performed admirably.
Hermione had felt relieved upon seeing the blank faces of her pupils. They weren't suspicious at all. She supposed the lack of scratches on her face would've dispelled any theories. She thought, with a pang of guilt, that Remus could only look more suspicious.

Either way, it was probably best to scatter a few sick days throughout each month to throw any student off of the 'Miss Huxley is a werewolf' scent.

Like always, Hermione had forgotten about Severus Snape.

"Looking a little peaky, Professor?" He commented upon entering the classroom. She was greeting the seventh years at the door, a tired smile on her face. Dinner had perked her up some, but the Girding Potion was wearing off quicker than she had hoped.

"Not at all, Mr Snape," Hermione replied blandly, gesturing him to the front of the room. He quirked a dark eyebrow, amused, before seating himself next to a quiet Hufflepuff in the third row. His Slytherin friends eyed her with distaste as they entered behind him.

Thankfully, he seemed to have taken pity on her, not bothering to comment on anything else about her tired appearance. It was about as much as she could deal with that day, thankful that she hadn't glimpsed Remus at meals – she had devoured her food with relish, not looking up from it enough to notice anything or anyone else.

She was slightly nervous at the thought of speaking to Remus when she woke up the next day, the third year Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs her first class. In fact, she'd been preparing herself for his questions with every spare thought. She supposed it was too good to be true, to feel like things could be fixed with a talk.

"I don't suppose Remus knows you're talking to me?" Hermione asked, a note of something in her voice. She wasn't entirely sure how to recognise it herself, but it wasn't a pleasant tone.

"Remus doesn't know what's good for him," Sirius said, the dark look on his face intending to be menacing but only leaving her sad. Sirius had looked just as mad once, at the thought of Harry being left in the dark about people wanting to kill him. Hermione didn't want to remember.

"He has a soft spot for you," Peter piped up from next to Sirius. He was only an inch or so shorter than his friend, but in the face of Sirius's effortless beauty and his stormy, furious eyes, he seemed so much smaller. His chubby face was indignant, however, as if she had wronged him personally. Hermione felt a flicker of rage at Peter's defence of his friend now, when in a few years he'd sell them all out for a tattoo and a feeling of faux importance.

"Merlin knows why," Sirius sneered, looking her up and down like her appearance was cause for Remus's kind behaviour. She frowned, incensed. "Stay away from him."

"And if I don't?" Hermione took a step closer to the duo, her eyes darting angrily between them. Although she was shorter than both of them by at least half a foot, it felt too to see the caution in their eyes – she was Hermione Granger and, whether it was 1999 or not, she could still incite fear into the hearts of little boys.

"Then you'll have us to answer to." Sirius assured her, his eyes narrowing. "And you know I can do worse than send a Slytherin to the Whomping Willow. Come on, Pete." And they stormed away and out of the Defence classroom. Hermione had been on her way to the library, the unofficial meeting place of her and Remus for their talk.

Well, she wouldn't be going now. Sirius Black didn't scare her, but Hermione didn't want Remus to
lose the only friends he had now, when he would inevitably lose them in only a few years, in the worst possible way.  

*Let him have this*, she told herself, and went to grab some papers in the office in the hopes of grading them in her quarters. Remus wouldn't be able to find her there; he didn't know where they were.

She graded in silence, feeling more than ever the rift between her and the Marauders.

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Avoiding Remus was a lot harder than she had originally thought it would be. His forlorn looks at her were quickly chased away by Sirius's loud storytelling, jokes flying awry. Remus would laugh, his expression clearing and a weak twinkle back in his eyes. She fled every meal quickly, and didn't call on him in class. He'd taken to lingering outside the Defence classroom for her after his own lesson, and she'd taken to leaving them early every time, knowing that one of the things he could not do was follow her out without permission. Although by the increasing looks of frustration on his face, Hermione wouldn't put it past him to do just that.

She wanted to skip Quidditch again but knew if she did, he would seek her out in the solitude of the castle. And so on the third she begrudgingly donned the warmest clothes she could, her woollen robes, and a dark red scarf. A warm, pointy hat finished off the ensemble, and she made polite chit chat with Emilia on the way to the stands, hurrying along her fellow Defence professor, wary of a sandy head ambushing her at any time. In the stands she was safe, the teachers' section void of students.

The match was, despite everything within her protesting at the idea, enjoyable. After years of watching Harry, though, she couldn't help but be critical of just how long it took the Seekers to glimpse the Snitch, and even longer to catch it. Hufflepuff finally came out on top of Ravenclaw by the end, and Hermione left just as the Snitch was caught to avoid any eager seventh years and their probing questions. She thought she might have heard her name called on the path up to the castle, but refused to turn around.

The rest of the month passed similarly, Hermione leaving early in anticipation of Remus's attempts to corner her. She spent a lot of her time in her rooms, as it was truly the only place she felt she could relax, no longer constantly on the lookout for Remus's mossy green eyes or shabby Gryffindor scarf, repaired one too many times.

Sirius sent her glares whenever possible, and Hermione ignored them. Despite his previous disapproval, Peter was simply ignoring her. James, for all that he had told her she was forgiven, seemed to not want to get involved. He looked a bit embarrassed on her behalf, which she was affronted by. Even Lily was shooting suspicious looks between Remus and her.

It was Snape, of all people, who was the only student to say a friendly word to her all month by the time the Hogsmeade weekend came about on the seventeenth. Most students were in the village finishing up their Christmas shopping, three professors accompanying them for safety. Ever since the first weekend Hermione had, thankfully, not been asked to supervise. She suspected McGonagall had had something to do with it, for she seemed to simply allocate the patrols and supervisors without bothering to ask for volunteers anymore. Dumbledore had been suspiciously absent from the recent staff meetings, but that suited Hermione just fine.
"You look troubled." He stated plainly, flipping through a book as if bored. She was in the library, up the back and around a corner. Remus would be hard-pressed to find her here, but she had it on good authority that he was in Hogsmeade – apparently, the Marauders never missed Hogsmeade.

She looked up, surprised at his presence. A first year – hopefully not Patrick, Hermione hoped with a hint of sadness – sat far away from her. Snape was a few tables away, alone.

"Do I?" Hermione asked, distracting herself again with her book. *Time Travel Tragedies* proved to be just as morbid as she had predicted, evidenced by the fact she turned the page to an illustration of a man *Avada*ing himself with a faint feeling of disgust.

"I don't suppose this has anything to do with the way Black has been staring at you on Thursdays, does it? I promise you, he's all bark and no bite." Hermione would have laughed if it wouldn't have given her away. Sirius was definitely of the barking and biting persuasion, she thought with delight.

"No," Hermione answered, pursing her lips in an attempt to hold back her grin, "Sirius does not scare me in the slightest," It comforted her that she was telling the truth. She'd seen and done more than Sirius ever had, even if he had lived in a house full of dark magic books for most of his life. The likelihood he'd actually read them was slim, and so she held the advantage.

"Lupin's sad puppy gazes aren't the cause, are they?" At her silence, Snape scoffed. She looked up, annoyed. His black eyes were mirthful, and he had a strange expression on his face. It took her a moment, long into his next sentence, to realise he was smiling. It was small, but it was there.

"Honestly, Lupin needs to acquire some courage." His smile morphed into a derisive sneer, "He's hardly a Gryffindor."

Hermione felt her feathers ruffle instinctively, ready to leap to Remus's defence. After one glance at Snape's expectant expression, however, she changed her mind. It wasn't worth it, trying to defend Remus against this man. He had hated the werewolf for so long that getting him to see the great, brave man Remus was would be a feat she wasn't entirely up to today.

Hermione thought of Dolohov and his tendency to cast fatal spells, and her heart squeezed painfully. She closed her book with a thump, gathering up the others around her and sweeping out of the library without a word. Snape didn't seem surprised at her departure, and Hermione had the vague notion that maybe that had been his intention all along.

*Slytherins and their mind games.*

She had initially thought the departure of the students on the eighteenth would mean she welcomed sweet relief. However, she saw the scribbled names of the Marauders on the list of Gryffindors staying over the Christmas break, and felt her heart fall. Avoiding them in a largely empty castle with the Marauder's Map–

*The map!*

How could Hermione have forgotten? In fact – she frowned at the thought – how had the Marauder's not confronted her about her name yet? For, surely, it would read *Hermione Granger* and not the assumed *Hermione Huxley*.

Naturally, there was no way she could find out. She had no access to the map and hinting that she knew about it would be dangerous. Unfortunately, as much as it worried her, it was up to the Marauders to approach her and ask. But they wouldn't – for that would require admitting they *had* the map in the first place. Knowing Harry, who was James's son, Hermione knew they would not
think the map dangerous, would not think it as a weapon in the hands of others.

She didn't remember a Death Eater breaking into Hogwarts, and she was sure she would have… so she relaxed. It was a weapon to others in the future, but not now.

Either way, avoiding them over the break would be difficult. She should prepare herself for the inevitable clash, and hope to come out the other side with her secrets intact.

*I can't avoid him forever,* she thought. *After all, we have the full moon.*

And that brought her up short every time she thought about it, for the full moon in December was on Christmas Day this year. At first she had been upset – Christmas was her favourite holiday. She loved the foods, eating a hearty Christmas lunch or dinner with family and friends. But then, the inexorable truth became apparent – she had no family or friends here. She'd be eating alone, or with colleagues. All the things she loved about Christmas – the closeness, the gift-giving, the cheesy Christmas carols, the glorious food, the warmth inside in contrast to the cold outside; it would all be for nought and would all be nothing if she had no one to celebrate it with.

So when Christmas Eve rolled around and she had somehow managed to successfully steer clear of Remus for the past week, the materialisation of him at the Defence classroom's door after dinner left her weak. She was lonely, and it was Christmas. Surely, talking to him wouldn't be so bad? She could beg Sirius to stay friends with Remus – she'd had a moment of fragility in the spirit of the holidays; don't punish Remus for that, she'd whine at him.

"Remus," She said, unsuccessfully hiding the tremble in her voice. Her werewolf bite twinged as she locked eyes with him, like it sensed he was such a beast as well. She looked back down quickly. "Surely you'd rather be with your friends on Christmas Eve?"

She was met with silence, and only looked back up from fiddling with one of Nettle's paperweights when it went on too long. Remus looked deeply affected by something. His eyes were a little wild, his hair was mussed (although now that Hermione looked back on it, this wasn't unusual), and he was breathing heavily. He was pale, as was usual on the night before the full moon.

Hermione's stomach squirmed uncomfortably at the thought of undressing in front of him on Christmas, letting him see the claw marks that marred her body and becoming privy to the ones that marred his.

"No," He said roughly, abruptly stalking forward. Hermione was frozen at the desk, was sure her eyes were wide and her hair an uncontrollable halo around her head, like she'd been electrocuted. "I would *not.*"

He enveloped her. There was an awkward pause before she realised they were hugging.

It was what she desperately needed. Her body sagged into his, her arms coming up to pull him closer to her. The touch of his cheek against her forehead, one of his palms against her neck… it was pure unadulterated relief that ran through her, her tired bones singing in some sort of weird triumph.

He pulled away slowly, the hug having gone on much longer than your average. Hermione looked up at him, fighting the glistening of her eyes with unshed tears. His right hand slid from the side of her neck to her shoulder, resting firmly as if to stop her from escaping. She was powerless against it, against his heady gaze.
"Didn't I tell you we would talk?" He croaked out, and the tone meant Hermione was helpless to take detailed note of his appearance for the first time in a month.

His face was pale, but his cheeks were flushed as if he'd just run a mile. He had bags under his green eyes, his lids heavy and his lashes looking all the longer for it. He struggled to maintain his wide-eyed look. Her eyes travelled down, over his unshaven jaw, flickering past his strong neck, and down into the exposed vee of his sweater. He was wearing casual clothes, as the students were wont to do over the holidays. She herself was wearing comfortable jeans, not quite as flared as the usual style, and a baggy sweater that had reminded her of Mrs Weasley when she saw it in the shop. The navy of Remus's own sweater made him look thinner than he should, but the veined, muscled forearms exposed by his rolled sleeves disabused that idea. His grip was sure, and although for all intents and purposes he should have been feeble in his movements, Hermione had never felt a stronger presence before in her life.

"Yes, I–" She couldn't finish, unable to conjure up an excuse under his penetrating stare.

"Peter let slip what Sirius said," He told her, and Hermione bitterly noted that Peter had failed to mention his own attempts at intimidating her, "He didn't mean it."

"Yes, he did." Hermione insisted, biting her lip hesitantly.

"Okay," Remus conceded, still looking at her intently, "So he meant it. But he's wrong. I know what's good for me, and you're good for me." He seemed to realise what that implied a second too late, scrambling to fix it. "I mean, we're the same, you and I. You're the first person I've met who knows what I'm going through. The others, they try, but they won't ever fully understand."

Hermione's eyes were flicking back and forth between his searching for something, she didn't know.

"We're both marked," His right hand moved down, hovering over where she knew one of her newer scars sat, glaringly obvious in everything but a high-necked top. "It doesn't matter."

She was breathless, the look in his eyes making her feel like they were the only two people in the castle. The gap between them seemed minute, and Hermione felt like the wisps of hairs around her face were moving with his every exhale.

"Professor!"

James Potter burst through the door, frantic. His hair looked especially dishevelled. "It's Lily!"

"Lily?" Hermione questioned, frowning. Her and Remus were still entwined in the strange way they were, but James's appearance confused her. What could Harry's mother have to do with her and Remus?

"James, what's going on?" Remus asked, dropping his hand from her and taking a few steps toward his friend.

"It's Lily, Travers and– she's in danger! We have to save her, she's– Voldemort–"

Suddenly, it made sense. Lily was in danger, Voldemort was planning to pay her a visit. Hermione pushed past Remus, determined, stopping in front of James and looking at him head on.

"Have you told the Headmaster?" asked Hermione. Dumbledore would have to be notified, they'd have to go to Lily's aid. But would they be quick enough?

"No, I came straight here, overheard them talking in the hallways, Voldemort's planning to do it
before Christmas, I—" James looked lost, unable to go on. And they weren't even together yet! Hermione didn't want to wonder how he'd look finding out Lily was in danger when they were married.

"Alright," Hermione started, "This is what we're going to do. I'm going to let Dumbledore know. He will alert the other staff members, and we'll go to Lily's house. You two will go back to the common room and wait there."

"But—"

"No," Hermione interrupted, willing James to listen. She was tempted to grab a hold of him and shake. "You are both students, you need to stay here. This is too big, even for you."

James couldn't die now. If Hermione had her way, he wouldn't die at all, but she was helpless to the demands of time and so she simply had to keep him alive until Halloween 1981. That was her duty.

James nodded, stumped.

"Now," Hermione said, focused now. "Where does Lily live?"

"Cokeworth," James blurted out, "Near Spinner's End, I think I've heard her mention a Gatworth Place—"

*Expecto Patronum!*

Her otter materialised from her wand, looking at her expectantly. She ignored the gobsmacked looks on the boys faces.

"Lily Evans is under attack at Gatworth Place, Cokeworth. Meet me there as soon as possible." She told the otter, who nodded and bounded away at her thought of Dumbledore, much faster than any real otter would travel.

Luckily, there was a fireplace in the Defence office, and Hermione whirled around and headed toward the office door.

"Where are you going?!" Remus exclaimed, and she felt both of the Gryffindors on her tail.

"Lily's house isn't connected to the Floo Network, she's Muggle-born." James said, confused. Hermione was moving the instruments around the inactive fireplace away from it. Remus and James were hovering behind her, curious.

"I know," Hermione huffed, straightening. She turned around, rummaging through the desk drawers before coming upon a fabric pouch, holding it aloft. "But Severus Snape's is."

She saw them share a look before she threw the Floo power in the fireplace, shouting.

"Severus Snape's house!"

A hand grasped onto her arm and she gasped, proceeding to cough as the green flames swirled around her.

The three of them tumbled out of a particularly ashy fireplace, the room before them dark in the night, strangely quiet.

"You idiots!" Hermione hissed, hitting them both where she could reach. She heard muffled 'ow!'s, feeling not at all satisfied about them, "You're going to get yourself killed!"
"And you're not?" James started to exclaim, his voice turning hushed as a shout came from another room.

Hermione snapped her head to it, listening for footsteps. When there were none, she hauled herself up from the musty carpet, grabbing a hold of Remus and James's collars roughly and pulling them up to join her. She dragged them out of Snape's house, thankful that they'd avoided Tobias Snape and his notorious temper.

They burst out of the depressing house. Hermione didn't even notice the carols coming from neighbouring homes, the dodgy Christmas lights of the worse neighbourhood. Grabbing a hold of the two men, she Apparated on the footpath, hoping the Ministry wouldn't have to place any memory charms on Muggles who may have been peeking out their windows on Christmas Eve.

"Wands out," Hermione whispered, the Evans's house eerily dark from outside. The curtains were drawn, and so a glimpse of what might be taking place was impossible. "Whatever you do, stay behind me. Don't engage him."

"Who?"

*Alohamora.*

Surprisingly, it worked. Hermione turned the knob on the front door, indicating for the two to be quiet. As soon as they crossed the threshold, they were met with an eerie silence, not what Hermione was expecting.

The lights were on in the living room, the first on the right from the hallway.

"Hello?" Hermione called out, wand in front of her.

A clock was ticking, and Hermione saw that it read nine fifty-five.

"Miss Huxley?" Hermione heard to her left, swinging herself around to face the voice.

Lily's confused face appeared at the end of her wand, worried at the sight of the three of them so alert.

"What's happening?"

"Lily!" James cried, rushing forward to hug Lily briefly. "I was so worried! Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine," Lily replied, James's relieved tone making her more confused. She hadn't returned his hug. "What's the matter?"

"We heard Death Eaters might be coming to… well, we heard they might be coming." Hermione explained, her wand lowering enough that Lily wouldn't've thought Hermione might be about to hex her. "Where are your parents?"

"They're in the dining room. We always have a round of cards and biscuits on Christmas Eve."

"Get them and your sister upstairs." Hermione ordered.

"Hermione--" Remus started, but she gave him a stern look and he backed down.

"Just because they're not here now doesn't mean they won't be."

As if she'd summoned the bad news herself, they heard pops outside.
"Go!" Hermione urged, turning around to face the front door. She backed up, pulling Remus behind her, her wand held aloft once more. James turned around just as the door creaked open.

*Stupefy!*

A hooded figure crumpled, and the ones behind it stumbled in, taken unawares.

"Expelliarmus!" James's disarming spell missed the third figure, and the duels began.

"Confringo!" cried the tallest Death Eater in a deep voice, the combustion spell narrowly missing Hermione's head as she ducked. They were slowly being corralled into the living room, she realised. She began to panic – why were they cornering? Death Eaters weren't usually this strategic, which meant they had other plans for them…

"Obscuro!" cried Remus, and a shot of cloth flew out of his wand, heading straight for the shortest but most skilled of all the Death Eaters. As the blindfold wrapped around their head, Hermione heard an enraged shriek, barely missing an Explosion charm when it whizzed by her shoulders. A quick glance showed that the Death Eater had managed to remove the blindfold as well as their hood in the process. The hair was unmistakable, as was the furious expression on the Death Eater's face.

"Defodio!" Bellatrix's gouging spell was headed straight for Remus's eyes. Hermione threw a quick *Protego* on him, before attempting to stun the witch, who dodged it. James was throwing spells left and right at the other two Death Eaters, hoping to distract them with the pure quantity of the spells being fired.

Suddenly, James was thrown back through the open doorway to crash into the staircase and Lily's cry of "James!" ruined any stealth she might have been envisioning for herself as she raced down the stairs.

Now that Bellatrix's identity had been revealed, Hermione manoeuvred herself to be closest to the door and so in the witch's line of sight, Remus catching on quickly to switch positions with her. Just as she was about to shoot another stunner Bellatrix's way, the front door was blown off its hinges, wood chips and dust flying everywhere. Hermione shielded her eyes, turning her head away on instinct.

When she turned it back, there he stood.

It had been a while since she'd seen him, with everything that had happened. His robes were of a deep black, ominous not in their colour but in who was wearing them.

For Voldemort stood, more human than she had ever seen him, in the doorway of Lily Evans's childhood home.

His aristocratic looking face, all sharp angles and white skin, left her breathless. He was, strangely enough, attractive. The observation made him want to burst into laughter, but she found her lungs too frozen to do so, her whole body coiled in anticipation of pain. She had only ever seen Voldemort from a distance, fighting others around him. He had always been so focused on Harry that Hermione had been able to fall by the wayside, not worth his attention. She had been extremely thankful for it. Then Voldemort had died and the only thing she'd associated him with was the destruction left to recover from. Facing him now, Hermione's heart was in her throat. She would die tonight.

All of them were stunned silent, including the Death Eaters.

"A little more than we were expecting, Bella," He commented blandly, as if on the weather. His red eyes roamed over the four of them, James sprawled on the floor clutching his side painfully. Bellatrix
dropped her head in deference to him, seemingly chastised.

It seemed not even Voldemort's full head of hair could stop him from being so evil, for the killing curse sent Hermione's way was only just avoided by a sharp yank of her left shoulder backwards.

Suddenly, spells were a flurry. Hermione could not think, for in the moments it took to think, Voldemort would strike like a deadly viper. Every spell was intended for a different part of her person, and Hermione's tired body was contorting in ways it did not like. Her breath was escaping her in heavy pants, pushed from her with every turn and unnatural manipulation of a limb.

Her body gave up in the end, like all good things do.

She saw the red of his Crucio before she felt it, her wand dropping inelegantly onto the floor along with her body. He held it for only a moment, torture not his true intention. Of course, he didn't know that she had been held under it before, and for much longer. Bellatrix, if she were old enough, would have been able to tell him that.

Gasping, she grabbed her wand from the floor and rolled, narrowly avoiding bowling over Lily who, it seemed, was now fighting alongside James.

Taking her chances, and not sure why she did it in the first place, Hermione shouted her first verbal spell of the night from the carpeted floor.

"Avada Kedavra!"

Voldemort's enraged scream filled the house.

"You dare cast that at me?" He raged, his features twisted into something even uglier than his resting face. Hermione scrambled upright, taking a stumbling step back as Voldemort took one forward.

Stupefy!

It was dodged with a flick of his wand, almost lazily. His eyes were devouring her hungrily, as if torture was now on the list of things he wanted to do to her.

"You think you can defeat the great Lord Voldemort?" roared Voldemort, a spell she would not come back from on his lips before more pops could be heard outside.

"Master, it is Dumbledore!" Bellatrix screeched, "He has come to help them!"

Surely not wanting to risk it despite his rage, Voldemort gave a snarl and Disapparated without a sound, his Death Eaters following hastily.

For all his power, Dumbledore strode through the obliterated doorway calmly, his wand out and ready but held loosely by his side.

"Ah," The Headmaster hummed, looking around at the destruction of the Evans's living room. McGonagall, Nettle and Flitwick were behind him, their faces white with fear. "He has left?"

Hermione nodded numbly, still in shock at how quickly she had managed to evade certain death.

She looked around her. The living room was in disarray. Lamps had fallen off of side tables, the couch had a smoking hole in the back of it. Hermione wasn't sure where the television had gone, but it was certainly missing. Scorch marks littered the wallpapered walls, and the coffee table was upturned and broken in two.
Lily had a cut on her forehead, which was bleeding into her right eye. James was hunched over, breathing heavily, but seemed otherwise alright. Remus was clutching his left shoulder awkwardly, and Hermione realised it must have somehow been dislocated.

And Hermione… well, the pain she had endured bore no evidence.

"Is everyone alright?" Dumbledore inquired sedately. McGonagall rushed past him to worry over her Gryffindors, her face alight with concern.

Everyone responded in the affirmative. Hermione wiped her sweaty brow with her sleeve, leaning heavily against the doorjamb of the living room – it was a wide doorjamb, double doors wide open.

"What happened?" Nettle asked urgently, appearing instantly at Hermione's side. She saw Flitwick hovering nervously beside Dumbledore, the height difference laughable if Hermione had the energy.

"Death Eaters arrived, we managed to fight them off. Voldemort appeared, and I was able to delay him before Dumbledore showed up and he Disapparated." Hermione was avoiding looking at Nettle's distraught face, instead finding a strange sort of calm in Dumbledore's impassivity, though it was not an unkind one.

"Voldemort believes in the irrational idea that I am the only one who can defeat him," Dumbledore commented mildly, moving into the living room to look over his students. Hermione knew he was searching for fatal injuries. He had done the same with Harry, once upon a time. "He is, of course, mistaken. Anyone can defeat him." His eyes locked onto Hermione's then, who was quick to look away for fear of the old wizard prying into places he should not be, especially when she was in such a weak state.

The fatigue of the upcoming full moon overtook her abruptly, and she had to seize Nettle's arm to hold herself up properly. Nettle, ever so kind, placed an arm around Hermione's hip, keeping her upright.

"Filius, if you would perhaps find Miss Evans's family upstairs. I believe Hogwarts shall house them tonight. Alternative living arrangements shall be made in the morning."

"Of course, Headmaster," Flitwick agreed, rushing up the stairs to seek out Lily's family.

It was only now, safely free from the danger and having reported everything to Dumbledore, that Hermione saw the stricken looks on the other's faces.

"I understand he can be quite a shock, to those of us not expecting his appearance." Dumbledore said.

Ah, Hermione realised, they were expecting him to look human.

"He's, he's—" James stuttered, his face white. His bravado had left him. Lily was trembling slightly, although not enough to be obvious. Hermione saw her pocket her wand and keep her hand there to hide the shaking.

"Not whole, yes." Dumbledore finished for the Gryffindor, looking sombre. Hermione supposed he didn't understand the extent to which Voldemort was tarnishing his soul, becoming an incomplete person. He probably thought it was just the dark magic causing it in his enemy.

"And you—" It was Remus this time, whirling around, his wide eyes now looking upon her with terror, "You're not surprised." There was a pause as the other two students took this in, "You've seen him before." Remus's voice was laced with sudden realisation, and Hermione avoided his eyes. She
was unsure what he might find there – her past, his future, a man with a soul split seven ways and even more inhuman looking. It was best not to risk it.

"Don't worry about me." Hermione said from Nettle's side, trying to sound unmoved by his concern.

"There was a reason I hired Miss Huxley, Remus," Dumbledore interfered, and Hermione wanted to snort at that.

*Yes, a reason that you won't articulate to anyone but yourself.*

Thankfully, it saved her from having to explain further – although, by the look on Remus's face, there would be a *for now* tacked on the end of that sentence.

"I am sorry this has happened, Lily," Dumbledore apologised, looking sincerely regretful. His eyes now bore into the redhead's. "I hope you can forgive me for not realising the threat sooner."

"Professor," Lily said, startled at the apology, "An apology isn't needed. You couldn't have known. It's actually—"

"It's my fault, Professor."

"James!"

"No, Lily," James insisted, looking grave, "I didn't tell you, I didn't even tell my friends—" At this he glanced quickly at Remus, "—but V—" A deep breath, a determined expression, "Voldemort tried to recruit me, said he needed purer blood in his ranks. I sent back his letter with a carefully worded response and a dungbump."

Hermione snorted, which earned her a glare from the Gryffindor.

"I thought it was funny at the time, but if I had known— it's no secret that I'm in love with you, Lily. If I'd known he was going to do this, I would've just thrown the damn thing out—"

Lily's face was a whirlwind of emotions. She seemed part amused, part terrified, part tired, part pleased, and part aghast. Those were only the emotions Hermione had caught, Merlin knew what Lily was actually feeling.

"Admirable, James." Dumbledore said, an amused smile on his face. He seemed a whole lot less grim now.

"Well then it's both of our faults, then," Lily concluded, her face settling on tired, "Because I also happened to get a recruitment letter about overlooking my dirty blood and aspiring for greater things, and responded similarly. *Without* the dungbump, though." Lily confirmed at James's awed look. That didn't seem to dampen his appreciation, resulting in a light blush gracing Lily's cheeks.

*Young love*, Hermione thought with warmth. One day, she'd tell Harry about this.

The spirits of the room lightened, and so when Lily's parents and Petunia came down the stairs hesitantly, it was to tired smiles and expressions of relief.

"Humbug! Are you alright? Oh, your head – we've got a first aid kit in the bathroom—"

"Mum, it's fine, honestly. James can fix it up for me."

"Too right I can. *Episkey.*"
"Oh, well, I always forget about magic."

Petunia looked distinctly uncomfortable but, for the first time in Hermione's limited experience with her, did not look like she was smelling something particularly off-putting.

"I'm glad you're alright, Lils." She said quietly, embarrassed. Remus was staring at her with fascination, and she averted her eyes.

Lily smiled, the corners of her eyes crinkling.

"I am, too, Tuney." The sisters smiled at each other.

"We'll all be going back to Hogwarts," Dumbledore announced. "The Ministry will be notified and perform the appropriate charms on your neighbours. Until then, safety is key. Professors," Dumbledore seemed to be addressing all of them but her. She couldn't decide whether she was offended or not. "If you could Apparate our friends here back to the castle, I will head on to the Ministry." Okay, she wasn't offended.

"Alright, Hermione?" Nettle asked her, hoisting her up a bit more firmly.

"Yeah, Emilia," Hermione answered tiredly as Lily, James and McGonagall popped out of sight, "I'm alright."

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After getting checked over by Pomfrey – who praised James's healing work, efficiently set Remus's shoulder back into place, gave Hermione an anti-cramping potion for her soon to be occurring muscle spasms, and healed James's cracked ribs – they retreated to their respective quarters. Although Hermione insisted she accompany them all to Gryffindor Tower first, as the Evans's were to be staying in the girl's dorms there for the night.

"It's very big," Mr Evans commented as they walked through the corridors. He looked around in wonder, the moving portraits of special interest to him.

"It's a castle, Dad." Lily said, as if she had indeed told him it was big before.

"I know, I know," He smiled, "I guess I just didn't take you seriously."

Lily rolled her eyes, turning back to her sister. Petunia looked, dare Hermione say it, intrigued by the conversation.

James was up front with her and Remus, a firm grip on her upper arm a great help in allowing her to walk at all.

"You can't seriously be thinking of walking back to your quarters by yourself, can you?" Remus had said incredulously, frowning, when she'd attempted to say her goodbyes at the Fat Lady. "Come on, one night in Gryffindor Tower won't kill you."

No, Hermione thought wryly, But you might.

Her thoughts were unfounded however when, the next morning, she awoke in the girl's dorm alive and whole and realised it was, of all days, Christmas.
"The presents!" Lily exclaimed in the common room as Hermione descended the stairs. She was seated amongst her family, "They'll be ruined!"

"There'll be presents next year, Lily," Mrs Evans assured her daughter, rolling her eyes, "It's fine."

Lily still looked crestfallen, a childish pout on her lips.

How easily they all forgot the night before. How easy it was to forget such things when your family and friends came out live and well at the end of it.

The Marauders came down the stairs then, Sirius holding up the rear looking a little shaken. He saw Hermione, standing alone in the middle of the common room, and balked.

A hard push from one of his other friends – likely Remus or James as Peter was also heading her way – sent him in her direction.

"Look, I--"

"You're sorry," Hermione interrupted, smiling weakly, "You shouldn't ever had said those things, and you're thankful I was there to save your friend's butts last night."

Peter's mouth was open in shock, and Sirius looked extremely taken aback.

"Well, yeah." He mumbled, embarrassed.

"Don't worry about it, you two. You're forgiven." For Hermione didn't have the energy in her to do much else at that moment. Sirius had been within his rights to be angry, but Hermione was simply too tired to argue with him, too tired to tell Remus to shove off and leave her alone to mope.

So she went down to breakfast, ate in moderate peace, and headed to the Hospital Wing for some help from Poppy. Her muscles were still aching a little, the Cruciatus curse a short but effective one. Considering the caster, it wasn't surprising.

When it came time to meet Remus in the Entrance Hall at three-thirty, she was glad McGonagall had seen fit to accompany them. She cast warming charms on them all before they set out, the walk to the Whomping Willow was pleasant despite the snow fall. Bidding the Transfiguration professor farewell at its entrance, the two of them travelled through the passage and into the usual room they started in. Too tired to talk, Hermione stripped efficiently. She started on the floor this time, her aching bones not ready for the impact of the wooden floorboards when she would inevitably drop to them in agony. This was easier.

When the moon breached through the clouds, its light illuminating the derelict shack, Hermione lost herself to the transformation.

She was too tired to do anything but let the pain wash over her, greeting her like an old friend.

Chapter End Notes

Fudge, this was a long one! I was originally going to write up until New Year's, but felt any longer and all of you would get exhausted.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter and constructive feedback is, as always, welcome.
A helpful reviewer pointed out my lack of reference to Hermione's mudblood scar which, in a strange fit of tiredness, I actually forgot about. Forgive me. I will now create a plot point to explain this away, haha. Chapter title is in reference to a Nine Inch Nails song.

The window was dirty. That was the first thing she noticed. An older woman, probably in her forties, looked at her. She was wearing the more modern clothes that Hermione was familiar with, the loose tops she missed dearly. Hermione frowned.

The woman was frowning at her, her eyes confused. Hermione thought maybe she was lost.

"Are–"

The woman had also opened her mouth to speak, and so Hermione shut hers. It seemed her acquaintance had the same idea – she looked a little embarrassed to have interrupted Hermione. Hermione gave her a smile, which the woman returned.

She thought it might be easier if she opened the window, so that they could interact better. Hermione grabbed onto the bottom ledge of the window, attempting to push it up. It wouldn't budge, and Hermione huffed in frustration. She looked behind her, but the room was empty.

Why was the woman also in an empty room? Why was she also looking frustrated?

Determined now, Hermione brought up her left arm to try sliding the window open – she couldn't see a latch anywhere so she thought she may as well try.

But upon doing so, the woman's arm also came up, as if to stop her. Her arm was thin but strong, and a mark was etched into the skin of her forearm as if newly created.

Mudblood.

Hermione looked up, horrified. The woman before her mirrored her expression, and it was then that Hermione discerned – this was a mirror, not a window. She was looking at herself.

Snatching her hand back as if burnt, Hermione breathed heavily.

Why was she so… so old? The similarities, now that she took note, were obvious. The same hair colour – a dark brown – although it was tamer than her own hair at twenty, which was the age she'd thought she was… her brown eyes were big in her face, wide set, and her neat nose seemed a little longer with age. There were faint wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, and a few around her mouth. She looked good, for a forty-something. But she wasn't one.

Hermione glanced down at her hands, perplexed. The same nails, closely cut. But they seemed more calloused, more aged. How could this be happening?
Looking back up, she jumped in surprise. Behind her were Harry, and Ron. Her friends! Oh, she missed them dearly! She smiled, her reflection following suit.

She looked a little younger, when she smiled. But Harry and Ron, they still looked younger still. They looked the same as when she’d left them to go out for some food, the same as back in 1999…

They were smiling, though, as if still friends.

How was any of this possible?

Ron's arm came up, and at the barest touch of his hand on her shoulder, Hermione–

Woke up.

Shivers overtook her. What a horrid dream. Her mind was playing awful tricks on her.

She felt sweat at her hairline, and rubbed it away haphazardly. Her chest stung with every breath, and Hermione looked around blearily, wide awake from her dream but still feeling remnants of its confusion.

The sun was peeking through the window of the shack. Hermione was on her side, her legs exposed to the cool sunlight. She shivered again.

She was naked. Teeth chattering, Hermione sat herself up, leaning on her right hand to stop the room spinning upon making herself upright.

"You move a lot in your sleep."

The voice made her jump despite its low volume. Hermione felt too worn out to be self-conscious about her nudity, instead choosing the easy option of covering up the most exposing bits and turning around slowly.

Remus sat, a cloak over his lap. He looked exhausted, the dark circles beneath his eyes making him look decades older despite his youthful, muscled body. His chest was scarred all over, Hermione's own gifts glaring at her in accusation. He was smiling pleasantly, though, and only frowned when she shifted her left arm to push more comfortably against her chest in an inelegant attempt to cover her nipples.

He can see everything else, what's the point? A little voice murmured at the back of her mind, but she cast it aside. She'd try to retain some of her dignity, at least.

"Your scar… I've never got a good look at it before. Only glimpses." Remus said softly, his eyes imploring. Hermione looked away, trying not to fidget.

"It says— …"

"I know what it says, Remus," Hermione said quietly, looking back at her ex-professor. "I've known for a while."

Remus looked pained, like she'd just kicked him in the balls without remorse. Winded, was a good way to describe him.

"But why?" He stressed, and the metre or so between them suddenly seemed a lot closer at the deeply concerned look on his face.

"Because it's a part of who I am, and it's what someone chooses to see me as."
"I'm sorry," Remus said, moving a little closer but keeping a hand on the cloak so it wouldn't fall out of place, "I'm sorry someone did that to you."

Hermione didn't say anything, simply looked at him. What was there to say, anymore? Bellatrix Lestrange had branded her in the best way she knew how: with blood and pain. There was something sadistic about carving a slur into someone's arm as you were torturing them for information. The memories were bad enough, but now she had a daily reminder of it. She kept it hidden, of course, from others. Long-sleeved tops, roomy robes, and a glamour charm all saw to it that Hermione only remembered the damned thing in the mornings when her pyjamas would slide up in the night. A charm would always wear off, and Hermione would often wake up to the sight of the ghastly handwriting, red and ominous. If it wasn't on her body, Hermione might have once called the spiky script beautiful, unique.

But it was on her body, and she hated it.

"How are you feeling?" Hermione asked after a minute, feeling the etched 'mudblood' press against her breasts, the feel of it imprinting itself onto her ribcage, burning through to her heart.

"Better," Remus replied, sensing her sadness, "At least, considering what we've been through the past few days."

She had not forgotten, and she would not forget anytime soon. The hair on Voldemort's head, thick and a dark brown like her own, had left its mark upon her mind. He was closer to human than he was to inhuman, and it frightened her. She had always assumed that Voldemort's evil came from a place of inhuman rage, inhuman lust for power, inhuman abilities. She hadn't wanted to think that he was human once, like her. That he'd been a student, or even a child. His visage had always helped her in avoiding these facts, but the Voldemort of this time wasn't as far gone yet.

Hermione knew, suddenly, why Dumbledore looked so tired in her time, though he tried to hide it. To see the complete disintegration of a human being would leave anyone too weary to hope for that person's redemption.

She shared his tiredness now. She had such a long road ahead of her.

At that thought her dream floated, sinister, through her head.

Her life had been far too busy, far too stressful, far too eventful, to warrant her future much thought. But it seemed, at the sight of a different Voldemort (although in many ways, very much the same), her brain wanted her to remember that she would age here. This was her life; this was her time now, and she would be waiting years for the birth of her friends, and decades before they would become the people she missed so much.

It was for the best, she thought as she gazed upon Remus's spent face, concentrating too hard on doing up the button of his jeans, that she make friends where she could. After all, everything had already happened, hadn't it?

When Remus offered her his arm as they emerged from the end of the tunnel under the willow, Hermione gave him the warmest smile she could muster, taking it gingerly.

The walk back up to the castle seemed quicker than usual, and instead of going their separate ways, Hermione and Remus made their way into the Great Hall together. Breakfast, for the first time in a long time, smelt as heavenly to her as it was sure to taste.

She sat down at the Gryffindor table, ignoring the pleasantly surprised looks of the Marauders.
Boxing Day had passed by in a blur of food and conversation. She'd spent the majority of the day with Remus, sharing in his exhaustion and relishing in the energy of his friends. Lily, who spent the day with her family enjoying a second Christmas, would look over every now and then in the common room and smile. Whenever James noticed, he would blush a deep red, his hands fluttering about in indecision. His friends took pity on him and didn't point it out, though they shared amused looks.

It was getting closer and closer to ten in the evening, though, and Hermione didn't want to have to walk down to her quarters. She felt like her butt was engraved into the couch, having already sat there for hours talking, and eventually playing a game of Exploding Snap with James after much pestering. The way in which the boys could talk about everything but also nothing at all never ceased to amaze her.

The warm arm resting behind her on the couch, courtesy of Remus, was also difficult to depart from. The events of the days previous were catching up to those involved, however, and the three of them were yawning frequently enough to have Sirius and Peter poking fun at first, and eventually whining like children.

"But it's the holidays!" Sirius complained as James suggested he might go up to bed, "Live a little!"

James rolled his eyes, and sent Sirius a witty rejoinder about living and almost dying a little several times in the past few days enough to leave him well satisfied. He shot Remus and Hermione a sly look, the latter waving a hand at him in admonishment, causing the others to chuckle.

"What's one more night?" Remus asked her quietly around ten, his mouth close enough to her ear for his exhales to be felt. The look on her face must have been indecisive enough for him to guess at the reason for her delayed departure from the common room. The backs of his fingers were running lightly across her shoulder. Hermione was thankful she was still wearing multiple layers, afraid of the goosebumps he would have felt if his hand had been touching bare skin.

She edged away, suddenly realising just how close he was to her person.

"I better get going," She announced to the group, ignoring the frown on Remus's face.

The night flew by, her dreams quickly forgotten upon waking. She stared at the worded scar that marred the flesh of her forearm for a long moment, the pillow strangely scratchy against her cheek, before shooting up out of bed. She got ready on autopilot, scrubbing away the grime of sleep sweat and preparing herself for another day.

Remus was… a problem.

She meant that in the best possible way, of course. His piercing eyes, his gentle hands, his deep but soft voice… Hermione found herself thinking of him at the most inopportune times – as she scooped her scrambled eggs onto her plate in the morning, as she was marking a third year essay, as Nettle and her practised duelling one another, as she glimpsed him at the Gryffindor table during dinner, when she was changing to get into bed, as she lay in bed, her hand travelling down over her
It had been so long since she'd felt comfortable enough to do such a thing, longer still since she'd felt she had any time to herself to do it. She felt vague, far away stirrings of guilt in her belly in the aftermath, but her limbs were too limp and her eyelids too heavy to feel them more fully.

First and foremost, despite how she thought of him and despite what she indulged in some nights, Hermione was his professor. Like he had been to her, many years ago (or from now? That still confused her). That meant she had to put a stop to the unreadable looks on his face (readable, but she refused to identify the emotions they held), the subtle touches, the way he seemed to be everywhere and nowhere all at once; the same mussed hair present in a sixth year, a slightly bluer green shade of eyes in a fourth year, the way he spoke sometimes reflected in another seventh year. It was the holidays, so she dreaded what other parts of him she might glimpse in other students upon their full return in January. She had to put a stop to it.

It follows, however, that these things have a way of falling by the wayside when faced with actual problems.

"Four children dead." McGonagall said to her on the morning of the 28th, sombre and hard-faced. "Near the Cokeworth area. The muggles are saying it's a house fire, but--"

Hermione put down her fork, the bacon swinging off it to land sticky onto the staff table in the Great Hall. The echoes of laughter just then from the Gryffindors suddenly seemed grating and intrusive.

"A warning." Hermione stated, her stomach like lead sinking to the bottom of a swimming pool, "He's angry."

"I assume so," Minerva said, looking for all the world as if she wanted to go right back to bed and sleep the news away. The blankness of her expression, ironically, told Hermione everything she could possibly want to know.

Minerva was scared. Hermione supposed Voldemort had not been such a prevalent threat before the events of Christmas Eve. He'd always been an absent figure, someone to blame for the ever-increasing terrors and wrongdoings of the wizarding world, but not entirely real.

He was very real now. At least, for everybody else.

Hermione had, for all her previous musings, always known he was all too real. It was just that she hadn't accounted for the changes of time.

"Excuse me, Minerva." Hermione stood up, her chair scraping harshly against the stone floor as it moved backwards. She ignored the sharp looks from the skeletal student body and fled the hall, her denim-blue robes billowing behind given her determined stride.

"Hermione!" Remus called, and she heard hurried footsteps behind her, "Hermione!"

She ignored him.

The wind was icy as she exited the Entrance Hall. She cast a warming charm over herself quickly, walking through the thin covering of snow on the ground. In the distance, she saw the giant silhouette of Hagrid, chopping wood near his cabin. She should get to know him, probably. Although he couldn't keep a secret to save his life, and her life was nothing but secrets these days.

She reached the gates quickly enough, her heart still pumping aggressively with purpose. As she passed the wards, she felt the tingle of her magic recognise its familiar freedom. She turned on the
spot, glimpsing a running figure about a hundred metres away. Before she could make out the familiar face, she was gone with a *pop*.

Hermione appeared in an alleyway, an alleyway she had visited only once before.

She knew her clothing choices – decidedly wizard – would be glaringly obvious. But London was not yet fully awake, only the faint stirrings of life obvious in this particular suburban area. She removed her warming charm, England not nearly as cold as the Scotland she'd just departed.

Within minutes, she found the street. Another minute, and she was outside. She grazed her hand over the tree, her fingers sinking into the indents in the bark. It was large, just like she remembered. A little more gnarled, as if the winter had been unkind to it. She supposed it had. The whole neighbourhood looked a little worse for wear. It wasn't snowing, or even raining, but everything seemed to be dulled down, like a semi-transparent sheet of grey had fallen over the houses.

As her left hand rested gently on the tree, she glimpsed figures in the house nearest to it.

Her mother stood near the couch, looking down at something. A smile was fighting to break free on her face, and her hands rested on her hips. She didn't look angry, though. She looked amused. Suddenly, her head swung back, and Hermione heard a laugh faintly through the closed window. It must have been open the last time she was here.

Her father sat up quickly, grabbing her mother and swinging her. They were both off work – the New Year's period meant that no dentist's practice would be trading – and they seemed to be enjoying their time off. Relaxing, playing. Dancing.

Her father was now behind Ruth, his nose tickling her neck. Their hands settled on her abdomen, and the soft smile playing on her mother's face accompanied her slight blush.

Hermione looked away.

It was enough to know they were alive, and happy. She didn't need to see anything more.

Apparating back to the castle was, of course, a quick affair. She had probably not been gone for more than fifteen minutes total, and yet she felt like she'd been awake for hours. Her robes weighed her down. She cast another warming charm as the wind howled and trudged back up to the castle, morose.

It was better, honestly, to think of them as different people. Those people back in London, they weren't her parents. Her parents were older, lived in Australia, and didn't remember her.

Well, at least they all had one thing in common.

Sighing, Hermione returned to her quarters. Her previous thoughts of a day spent explaining to Remus that nothing could happen between them seemed entirely too presumptuous. Remus was just being affectionate. They were pack, in the loosest definition of the word. She was dominant over him, and he was probably trying to make their full moons easier. The last one had not been violent, the both of them too tired to act on any aggressive tendencies. But that didn't mean the same for the rest of their full moons together. In a way, Hermione would be thankful when the school year ended and she could find a job elsewhere. Or maybe she'd be dead. Either way, she wouldn't have to worry about hurting Remus anymore.

The teachers held a New Year's party in the staff room, of all places. Normally, Slughorn explained (he was awfully chatty with her after Christmas, Merlin knows why), they had drinks down at Hogsmeade, but with the recent attacks it was best to keep the school as protected as possible.
Besides, wasn't it better when they didn't have to worry about the long, cold, sobering walk back up to the castle? Slughorn's logic seemed reasonable, and it was then that Hermione concluded she'd had too much firewhisky.

Hermione made her excuses around eleven, talking about full moons and tiredness and the drink affecting her too much. Besides, she didn't want to end up kissing Slughorn, who had not left her side all night. No, she told Emilia with a sloppy smile, she'd kiss her books in the New Year and then turn in.

Ignoring the boos from other more inebriated professors and the twinkling eyes of Dumbledore, Hermione left the raucous staff room (who knew her former teachers were all so fond of Ogden's?) in high spirits. They weren't dashed, surprisingly, upon rounding the corner of the third floor? Fourth? She'd lost count, but she'd recognise the statue of Wanda the Wild and know to turn left towards her rooms. That's what mattered.

Regardless, bumping into Remus did not dampen her mood. Firewhisky tended to do that.

"Hermione," He said, faux shocked. She could see right through him – despite having to fib for almost all his life, Remus Lupin was a terrible liar. She supposed he'd used the map to find her. A voice was screaming in her head that this was an important point, but she waved it away impatiently.

"That's me." Hermione replied a beat too late, "Remus." She said, trying to focus on his face. He was all swirly. "That's you."

"Yes." Hermione detected amusement in his tone and scoffed, annoyed.

"Well, what do you want?" She said shortly, trying to examine her fingernails like she didn't care why he wanted her. Considering she almost smacked herself in the face trying to bring up her arm, Hermione wasn't sure she'd pulled off the look.

"Are you alright, Professor?" His four eyes were looking at her with concern.

"Yes," Hermione said, an answer to both questions, "I'm your professor, Remus."

"Well, technically you're a professor's assistant," Remus countered, and Hermione's mouth fell open in indignation.

"I may as well be a professor, for all the teaching that I do!" Hermione exclaimed shrilly, forgetting that she was trying to project an aura of calm and gesturing wildly.

"Yes," Remus agreed, and he was close now, too close, "I suppose you should."

"Stop moving," Hermione grumbled, taking his face into both her hands. His cheeks were warm. She held him still, but he was still shaking about, "How are you moving?"

Remus's lips turned up in a smile, and crinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes.

"I'm not moving at all," He said softly, and all of his eyes flickered between hers too quickly. She couldn't keep track of them, the rapid movement making her dizzier than she was already.

"Yes, you are." Hermione said petulantly. An exaggerated frown was on her face. The drink, the drink was doing this to her. "You're always moving. Skulking about, looking at me, smiling at me."

He grinned.
"Yes! That!" Hermione said, removing her right hand from his face to point accusingly at him, eyes narrowed, "Always doing that!"

"I'm sorry," He said, not at all sincere. He was still smiling, after all. Those eye crinkles glared at her.

"No, you're not." Hermione groused. "But that's okay, 'cause I forgive you."

"Good." whispered Remus. Wait, how did he get so close? Why wasn't he looking at her? Why was he looking down, but his face still level.

Her head hurt with all these swirling thoughts.

"Anyway," Hermione said loudly, patting his cheek sloppily and taking a step back. "Have you seen Wanda around?"

"Who?" Remus asked, frowning. He looked a bit put out, but Hermione didn't really take notice.

"Wanda. Y'know, only performed wandless magic and lived in a forest for ages?"

"You mean Wanda the Wild?"

"Yes, I mean Wanda the Wild," Hermione confirmed dryly, giving him a look. He laughed.

"She's down one. You're on the fourth floor."

"Damn," Hermione muttered, reaching out a hand for the nearby bannister. "Alright, down I go."

"Do you need any help?" Remus offered, and Hermione saw him extend an arm.

"See you tomorrow, Remus!" Hermione called loudly, and proceeded to carefully step down the stairs.

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They say how you spend New Year's is how you spend the rest of the next year. If Hermione was going to spend all of 1978 drunk and then horridly hungover, she wanted a do-over.

Stupid Slughorn, Hermione griped to herself as she held a hand over her eyes in bed, plying me with drink so I would laugh at his stupid stories.

As the cool water hit her face in the shower, Hermione's thoughts became a little more coherent.

What was I thinking? Merlin, imagine if I'd gone spouting off about Harry and Ron. What would I have done then? Silly, silly girl.

"Alright, Professor?" Sirius called out to her as she passed between the Gryffindor and Ravenclaw tables down the centre of the hall. She scowled, ignoring his snickers. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Remus grinning, too, and scowled again for good measure. Stupid Marauders.

Thankfully, she was hardly the worst looking at the staff table during breakfast.

"Last night was a mistake," She heard Sinistra mumble to herself, "A big, big mistake."
It would've been hilarious in the future. Now, with no one to grin at in a shared joke, she just felt a little miserable.

"Cheer up, Hermione," Nettle nudged her, spearing an oozing egg, "It's 1978. A new beginning, and all that."

Hermione grunted, not willing to point out she knew a lot of what would happen that year, even if she couldn't currently remember specifics.

"So glad you accepted my invitation last night, Hermione," Slughorn said too cheerfully just as she was about to get up from the table, her food well and truly devoured. She looked past Nettle to the Potions master – he'd somehow managed to switch seats with Kettleburn, and his smug smile said it all.

"Your invitation?" Hermione repeated dumbly.

"My invitation to one of my fabulous get togethers! After hearing about your stunt at Christmas from Filius, I daresay I have some people I'd like you to meet. Expect my owl." He told her, and Hermione's horrified face must have not registered with him for he beamed at her before departing himself, speaking of currently simmering potions that needed checking up on.

Hermione retreated to her rooms for the day once more, ignoring the sly looks of James and Peter as she passed by the Gryffindor seventh years again. She couldn't be certain, but she might have glimpsed Lily smacking James upside the head just as she passed through the doors into the Entrance Hall.

The next day brought troubling news. Hermione was beginning to seriously dislike 1978, considering the way it had started.

**TIME TRAVEL MADE POSSIBLE, MINISTRY RELUCTANT TO DISCLOSE DETAILS**

Sources close to the writer confirm that the ministry has developed magic that enables the caster to travel back in time. How long they can travel is undetermined as of yet, but sources say the Department of Mysteries is being extremely careful about how it is handling this new magic.

"Obviously, this kind of thing in the hands of the wrong person could be catastrophic," My source explained, "And with the way things are at the moment, no one is too enthusiastic to lose something this important to… any unknown entities."

They are, of course, referring to the continuing rise of You-Know-Who, a wizard so disastrous that not even this defiant newspaper is willing to publish his name.

Hermione put down the *Prophet*, not bothering to read the rest. Was anyone even remotely intelligent in the seventies? Talk of not wanting to point Voldemort in the direction of time turners but then publishing a whole article on their creation?

As always, Hermione considered the *Daily Prophet* complete and utter tripe.

Carefully, Hermione refused to comment on the article, feigning mild interest when anyone spoke of it. It thankfully passed into obscurity without much fuss. Hermione breathed a sigh of relief.

The students were due to return to the castle on the eighth, and Hermione felt like her break had been entirely too short. Of course, she had spent a good few days hospitalised, and avoiding Remus was really a very good time waster… she had nothing and no one to blame but herself.
In avoiding Remus, however, she had been spending an awful lot of time in her rooms. In doing so, Hermione had managed to work her way through all her books loaned from the library. It was time for some new material.

Which is how she'd found herself cornered.

"What brings a girl like you to a place like this?" drawled Sirius, casually plopping himself down next to her in the library. His newly taken chair was awfully close to hers, and Hermione moved her own chair away without taking her eyes off the page.

"Ignoring someone is very rude, you know." Sirius commented, and Hermione rolled her eyes before looking up at him. A dark eyebrow was raised, and a hint of a grin rested on his face.

"What do you want, Sirius?" Hermione sighed, shutting her book in frustration and giving him her full attention. Best to get him out of her hair as soon as possible. As much as she might have fond feelings for the boy, their personalities were too different for her to be able to stand him for more than an hour, at most. Hermione sincerely hoped she wouldn't have to endure him for longer than that, ever. Although, she thought with a pang, if it meant he wouldn't fall through the veil, she could be negotiated with.

"Straight to the point, I like it!" He exclaimed, earning them both an angry glare from Madam Pince. Sirius held up his hands in surrender, chuckling when the librarian eyed them suspiciously and then turned away.

"You're ruining my good reputation with Madam Pince, so this better be good." said Hermione, turning more fully toward him. Their knees were touching, and Hermione wanted to kick his legs away, but she was going to be nice if her life depended on it – Sirius disliking her was not ideal, she had learned. Best to stay on his good side. He was, in a lot of ways, like his crazy cousin.

Bet he'd love to hear that, Hermione thought to herself, holding back a snort.

"I need help." He proclaimed. It was Hermione's dark eyebrow that rose this time.

"Oh?"

"Don't look at me like that," Sirius rolled his eyes, looking a little contrite after the action. At her lack of reprimand, however, he ploughed on. "Look, you're the best dueller six ways to Sunday. Or so James and Lily tell me."

"Remus?" Hermione interrupted, a little hurt at the absence of his name. Sirius rolled his eyes again, not looking at all contrite this time.

"Remus?" Hermione interrupted, a little hurt at the absence of his name. Sirius rolled his eyes again, not looking at all contrite this time.

"Remus has been telling me you're an amazing professor since day one, I don't need him rubbing this in my face."

"And what exactly is 'this'?" Hermione prodded, ignoring the funny feeling in her chest, especially as it travelled up her neck and into her cheeks.

"I need you to teach me how to duel properly. And I don't mean formal duelling!" He added quickly as Hermione opened her mouth to respond, frown etched into her brow. "I mean real life, hard-core duelling where you're not sure you're going to come out the other side alive."

"Sirius," Hermione started, her tone reminiscent of a warning – the only way she could describe it, "Why do you want to learn how to duel like this?" Although Hermione agreed the students could use all the help they could get, she wasn't sure one on one tutelage of Sirius was possible from her
perspective. She'd be spending more than an hour with him every week on a regular basis. It almost made her white with dread.

Sirius had a determined look on his face.

"Truth is; I want to be an Auror. Can't do that if I'm shit at surviving, can I?" Sirius said. Hermione gave him a short glare at the language, but otherwise let it go. She couldn't really fault him. Hermione found her care for such things had become very lacking since her arrival in this time. She tried, though, to hold onto old Hermione-isms. Just to maintain her sanity.

"Besides," Sirius said, a playful glint in his eyes, "I can make it worth your while." And a warm hand rested on her knee.

Hermione looked down, gobsmacked. She simply stared at the appendage, shocked.

Before she snapped out of it, and glared at him fiercely.

"I'm a teacher, Sirius, as you just previously mentioned," Hermione reminded him, dismayed by the still gleeful look in his eyes, "I'd like you to remove your hand."

Sirius gave a bark of laughter, his hand sliding off of her knee in the process.

"Your face!" He crowed, and they received another sharp glower from Pince, "I knew there was a way to get to you, and I've found it! Wait 'til James hears about this!"

Hermione added her own scowl to Pince's, and proceeded to shove Sirius off of his seat. He flailed comically before staring up at her in awe.

"You know," He said upon righting himself, winking at her. "It's a shame we didn't become friends earlier."

There was a pause, where Hermione was sure Sirius expected her to roll her eyes or say something demeaning, but she couldn't help it – instead, Hermione gave him a remorseful look and replied, full of sadness.

"Yeah, Sirius," she said, and his face sobered into a faded facsimile of a grin, "It is."

He cleared his throat after a moment, awkward as he sat back down. It was too hard to leave on such a heavy note, and Hermione seized the opportunity to ask a question that had been burning at the back of her mind for weeks.

"How're things with you and Remus?" she asked, "Has he forgiven you yet?"

Sirius brightened, beaming.

"Yes, thank Merlin! That boy can hold grudges forever."

"I don't know…" Hermione trailed off uncertainly, thinking of the mild-mannered Remus of the nineties. She'd never really seen him fired up, like Sirius had when he mentioned Remus hating Umbridge. Apart from that, he was always the epitome of calm, someone that emotions just bounced off of.

"Believe me," Sirius said intensely, giving her a wide-eyed look, "Remus has a temper to rival that of my mother, he just doesn't have as many triggers. You'll find out soon enough," Sirius ended mysteriously. "So!" He changed tack brightly, "When are we having these duelling lessons?"
When she looked back on it, Hermione really ought to have punched Sirius before he said such a thing. Because it seemed, in a weird twist of fate and misunderstandings, she was at the bad end of Remus's anger as soon as term began. She hadn't seen him at all in the lead up since her talk with Sirius – duelling lessons once a week for a few hours in the Room of Requirement on a Tuesday night (spoiling her Tuesdays, but Sirius refused to meet on Fridays) – and had felt grateful at the time to escape his intuitive scrutiny.

Classes returned with little fuss – although Slughorn's invite arrived in the morning post, citing the 21st as the date to be booked in – and her duelling lessons didn't start until the second week, but it was on the twelfth that Hermione was left totally and utterly confused.

Remus had always been an active participant in class; at least, after everyone had warmed up to her a bit. So the fact that he was staring resolutely ahead and not participating at all was irregular. The fact he was doing this only during Hermione's portion of the class was highly suspicious.

In a rare act of laziness, however, Hermione didn't really have the energy to deal with Remus that Thursday. Emilia and her had taught until after dinner, and she was exhausted from that, so exhausted that she just up and left without giving homework, keen to get into bed and berate herself for ever thinking the Christmas break had been a little boring.

When Remus didn't bump into her, or find her, or talk to her throughout the whole next week, however – even when she'd deliberately stayed behind during the Ravenclaw versus Slytherin match in the hopes he would seek her out – she figured something was wrong. It wasn't as if she was hard to find – in fact, Hermione had abandoned all her usual avoidance tactics by the third day of this nonsense, her curiosity getting the better of her. Just what was his problem?

"Professor," Lily Evans asked hesitantly during the second week of term, thwarting any of Hermione's efforts to catch Remus's eye and ask him to stay back after class.

"Yes, Miss Evans?" Hermione said, avoiding those green eyes and sorting absentmindedly through some papers on the desk in the Defence classroom. Mary seemed to be hanging back with her friend, standing awkward a few metres behind her.

"I was… well, that is, we were wondering – and you don't have to agree, I would understand if you didn't want to; of course, you're busy, so you'll probably say no, but--"

"Lily," Hermione interrupted softly, looking somewhere around Lily's left cheek, "Get to the point."

"Right," Lily agreed with determination, "I want to start a duelling club."

That left Hermione surprised, although she couldn't fathom why.

"You do?" Hermione asked, perching herself on the edge of the desk facing the two girls. It made sense. Lily had just faced Voldemort, anyone would want to improve their chances of survival after that. "Alright. Do you need me to sign an approval slip?"

Lily and Mary looked at her as if she'd lost her own head.

"We want you to lead it, Professor." Mary said, coming forward. Hermione looked at her. It was
much easier to look at Mary, whose eyes were a beautiful hazel.

"Oh." Hermione said faintly, bringing a hand up to tug at her hair. She'd worn it out in a rare display of feminine care, and had been tugging at it all day for something to do with her hands.

The thought of not having to teach Sirius alone made her perk up, all of a sudden enthused. And, she realised, she needed to reinstate some sort of authority with the students. She was getting by fine with the younger years, but the fifth years and up – especially the Slytherins – saw her more as an equal than a professor… which meant some of them weren't listening to her in class, or handing in their essays on time.

"Well, yes." Hermione answered jerkily, brightening up as the girls stood taller in satisfaction, sharing excited looks, "I would love to. It'll have to be Tuesday evenings, though, I'm afraid."

The two Gryffindors shared another look, although this one was a little nervous.

"Well, the thing is, Professor, that Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs have Astronomy on Tuesday nights." Lily explained, adjusting her book bag on her shoulder.

"The only other day available with my timetable is Friday, girls." Hermione said, frowning in thought, "And somehow I don't think the students will want to be in duelling club on a Friday."

"We sort of knew this, already," Mary admitted, looking a little sheepish, "And so we composed a list. We got the prefects to hang these up in every common room, thanks to Lily. Here's everyone who'd be willing to join a duelling club held on Friday nights."

Lily passed her sheets of paper – Hermione only just realised she was holding some, having tried to only look around her ears or her cheeks or her hairline to avoid the green eyes.

Hermione took the papers, looking down at them in wonder.

A page for each house of almost every student fifth years and up.

"Are you sure you told them Friday?" Hermione asked, shuffling through the sheets, eyes wide.
"Are you absolutely sure?"

"I mean, it's expected not everyone will turn up every week. People just expressed interest and, well, I think the lists speak for themselves." Lily said.

"Well, I'm sufficiently shocked… but if Friday works, then I'll be there. I suppose we'll have to have it somewhere big…" Hermione didn't fancy telling everyone about the Room of Requirement, lest everyone start using it and she be left out in the cold when she actually needed it, "I suppose we might be able to temporarily remove the tables from the Great Hall." Thoughts of fourth year and the Yule Ball hit her. Yes, that would have to do.

"And you, Professor?" Mary asked as Lily took back the lists and put them in her bag, "Wouldn't you rather be doing something else on a Friday night?"

Hermione should've been angry at the insinuation that she should have better things to do than teach duelling on such a night, but she heard it for what it was – an honest inquiry.

"No," Hermione answered, smiling, "Duelling club will be… fun." She hesitated to use the word, but she didn't want to let them know that having an excuse not to be alone with Sirius Black was worth anything.
By lunch time the next day, the news was out. Hermione conferred with McGonagall about the organisation needed to rearrange the house tables by the following Friday. Apparently, the house elves would be more than willing to help them. Hermione couldn't help feel a little offended on their behalf at the thought, but didn't particularly want to get on the bad side of the elves in this timeline; not when they delivered her favourite sweets to her rooms the day after the full moon. Sometimes you had to concede.

After that, Hermione spent her day teaching and, to her vexation, thinking about Slughorn's party, which was the next day. Why he was having it on a Hogsmeade weekend, Hermione didn't bother to figure out – Slughorn worked in mysterious ways, mostly focused on making connections with as many well-connected people as he could.

As much as she wanted to, Hermione couldn't really rescind her appearance at the party – she had agreed, after all, even if she had been intoxicated at the time and couldn't remember anything the next day – but that didn't mean she was looking forward to the event. And, as much as she loathed to spend her money on anything unnecessary, Hermione accepted that she would have to buy dress robes for the occasion. And so she would go to Hogsmeade that afternoon in search of something, and hope not to run into any surly Gryffindors along the way.

She might have to put a bit more effort into her face, as well, considering the full moon was only days away – were the interim periods between each full moon getting quicker, or was she going crazy? – and she would likely look terrible. No use adding fuel to the rumour flames. Hermione was sure there was probably a smart third year out there who knew her secret. After all, she had figured it out at that age. Although, she took care not to assign any werewolf essays around the full moon. She wasn't Professor Snape.

Although no snow was falling, it was still cold. January didn't mean better weather in Scotland, not even close. So Hermione donned a woollen cloak after her last lesson of the day – first year Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws – and made the trip to the wizarding village.

Gladenrs was, thankfully, busy enough to be open on an early Friday evening. Hermione entered, grateful to be out of the cold. She went straight to the second-hand section, perusing through the robes for something that looked decent enough, and didn't smell.

After at least ten minutes of searching – the racks were stacked full – it seemed fruitless. The robes were either too fancy, or too casual. She was a professor, and therefore had a certain image to maintain. She would err on the side of fancy if it came to it, preferring to look overdressed than underdressed; you could still impress if you were overdressed, it just drew attention. Despite the fact she didn't want attention, it was better that than be the laughing stock of the whole school.

With a longing glance at the aforementioned section, Hermione turned her back on it and went to the sale racks, the next tier up in robes.

It was busy enough that, thankfully, the cashier didn't have time to personally assist her. This sat just fine with Hermione, who always ended up arguing with the assistants over something and offending them, receiving cold looks the rest of her visits to these kind of shops. Alone was better in this instance.
Sighing, Hermione selected a few of the cheaper robes – none of the styles particularly appealed to her, the seventies an era of fashion that she felt rather embarrassed of – and proceeded to the changing room.

The first was a deep red; it was the colour that had drawn her. However, whilst the colour was magnificent, the plunging neckline that she hadn't noticed before was too inappropriate. She considered, though, that it would be the kind of dress she would’ve chosen in the future – an adult now, she’d wanted everyone to know it. After the war, where clothes were considered valuable if they were practical, Hermione had bought a few dress robes that contradicted her usual style – conservative, but still flattering.

The second dress didn't suit her – the violet colour was garish, and the shape of the dress made her look frumpy. Hermione had put on a few pounds in her months at Hogwarts. This was understandable, and she wasn't critical of herself – but the dress just did not suit her curvier body shape.

The third dress didn't even fit, and so Hermione mournfully placed it back on its hanger after her failed attempt.

The fourth dress was the winner. It surprised her. Floor-length (it was winter, she wasn't crazy) and silver, it seemed to make her pale skin glow. It was an unusual velvet-type material, something that reminded her of the nineties. It was why she'd picked it from the racks, in a fit of sentimentality for the awkward fashion of her time. Weirdly enough, it worked. The neckline was a flattering v-cut, a little revealing but nothing disastrous. It was a halter, as was fashionable, and flared out slightly at the waist. Simple, elegant, flattering. She would've preferred something a little less attention seeking, but for the decent price it would have to do. She could probably use it with some black robes for the seventh years' graduation ceremony, too. At that thought, she quickly remembered shoes, grabbing a pair of clunky black heels in a popular style as she exited the change room.

Getting into the dress the next night, she suddenly doubted her choice.

She'd make-upped her face enough for it to lose its wan tone, applying some blush over the concealed dark circles and faint scratches. Light eyeliner and mascara with some classic shimmery eye shadow and she had even herself fooled – she didn't look ridiculously tired, just her usual tired. That was good enough. Her hair was up in a loose curl atop her head, with soft tendrils falling down the sides. Sticking charms were wonders.

But the dress, with the high heels and the simple silver pendant, seemed too glam.

*I guess that's the point,* Hermione surmised upon looking at herself in the mirror, *it's the seventies.*

Still, she felt awkward and clunky like she didn't know where to put her limbs, like they didn't know how to sit properly.

Sighing, Hermione tucked her wand into a thigh holster – a bit excessive, but she wasn't one to go out much without it these days – before letting her dress fall smoothly back down her legs.

Feeling somewhat naked – she didn't have a cloak or coat as the castle was very warm, and there was no need for a purse of any kind – Hermione left her quarters and made her way down to the dungeons.

She, of course, had no date. Professors didn't have dates, and besides who could she ask? Sirius? Hermione scoffed at the idea, amused, as she entered Slughorn's office at just after eight o'clock.
The office was, as with most of them, separate from the classroom. The Defence office, shared by herself and Emilia, was relocated to behind the classroom for this year. Slughorn, though still in the dungeons, had enlarged his office to fit all the guests inside – and there were many. The walls were draped with colourful cloth, as if Slughorn had wanted to display he was not biased toward any house. The colours were muted in that seventies way, however, so that they could blend well together. There was a great big chandelier in the middle of the room, crystal and sparkling. It seemed that was the main attraction, for it dwarfed the food and punch table it hovered over. Fairies seemed to be flitting about the outside of the room, sticking to the fabric hangings as if they held sweets inside them. The room's lighting was dim, matching the jazz and blues Hermione could hear coming from the furthest corner, at which a very short woman sat at a grand piano surrounded by a band. There were tables and chairs to sit at with a group all around, with a small clear area dedicated to a dance floor, where a few couples were milling about, too awkward to dance. Hermione covered her mouth with her hand, holding back a laugh.

"Hermione Huxley!" Slughorn boomed, causing everyone nearest to the door to look her way. Fighting the fire blooming in her cheeks, Hermione smiled as politely as she could.

"Horace," she greeted, kissing his chubby cheek to avoid a close hug, "This is… something you've got here." The beauty of talking to Slughorn was that you didn't have to do much of it. Simply start him off on something and he could do all the talking for you.

"Yes, yes, took me hours to do up, but I do enjoy it! Oh, I'm glad you've made it – there are so many people I'd like you to meet, come over here, this is Tilly Toke, I'm sure you've heard of her?"

Hermione went to say that yes, she did in fact know of Tilly as she was on the Chocolate Frog Cards of her childhood, when Slughorn interrupted her.

"Received an Order of Merlin for saving a beach of muggles from a dragon! Magnificent stuff. Hermione here helped out our own Miss Evans this Christmas…"

Hermione tuned out, simply nodding along with a wide smile. Tilly and her shared an amused look at Slughorn's enthusiasm, and Hermione decided she rather liked Tilly in that moment, especially when she went on to explain away her accomplishments when Slughorn went to get them a few drinks. It would take a while – he was stopping at almost everyone on the way there.

"My whole family was part of it, of course, I wasn't the only one. Can you imagine, battling a dragon myself? Next thing you know they'll be putting me on a Chocolate Frog Card!" Tilly was shaking her head in disgust, and Hermione bit her lip to keep back her laugh this time.

A familiar face walked past, and Hermione grabbed her arm before she could leave. Her date joined them as well, looking a little intimidated at the selection of women he was surrounded by. If Hermione remembered correctly, it was Theodore Kray, a sixth year Slytherin who didn't subscribe to the 'purebloods are superior' doctrine.

"Amelia! Please, do join us." Hermione stared her down, willing to disagree. Amelia's red hair was curled fabulously, framing her tanned face well. Her gold gown, a little more revealing than Hermione's, made her feel a little better about her own attire.

"Professor, of course." Amelia replied with a knowing grin. She was in sixth year, a Hufflepuff. Hermione, of course, remembered her in the future as well. Amelia Bones was hard to forget.

"Ah, Miss Bones! Fabulous! I'll leave you three to it for now, but I've more people to introduce to you yet, Hermione!" Slughorn said upon returning, gifting them with the sparkling berry punch and moving on to others, his voice easily heard over the chatter and music for its enthusiasm.
"As much as I do love these get togethers," Tilly said, gazing around, "They are a little stifling at times."

"Definitely," Amelia agreed, taking a sip of her punch, "Professor Slughorn means well, but I always end up arriving right on time and then leaving early. I'll be glad to be remiss of these when I graduate."

"Did I hear correctly – your last name is Bones?" Tilly asked, looking extremely interested in Amelia, "I love what your parents are doing in the Ministry, especially–"

Hermione spent a good amount of time with the group, talking to Theodore when Amelia and Tilly got into an especially zealous discussion about happenings at the Ministry. Theodore was quiet, but not because he was shy. He simply didn't like to talk too much, preferring to say more with less words. Hermione, seemingly constantly surrounded by people who liked to hear themselves talking, appreciated his company very much.

It was maybe an hour into Slughorn's party, all the guests apparently accounted for, before Hermione decided she was going to mingle a little more despite the pleasant company. Maybe that way she could avoid the next party invitation with minimal guilt.

The band were playing more familiar numbers now, a mix of dance numbers scarily similar to ABBA and more upbeat rock hits; surprisingly, a mix of both muggle and wizarding bands.

"Hello, darling," A voice purred in her ear, a matching hand coming to rest at her waist and squeezing with familiarity. Hermione shoved him off with a sharp elbow, hearing his grunt of pain. She smiled in victory.

"Oh, Sirius, I'm so sorry. I didn't realise that was you." Hermione said, acting innocent. Sirius's glare showed that he wasn't buying it, which was Hermione's intention all along.

"You've got pointy elbows." He muttered darkly, reaching around her to grab at some nibblies, quickly stuffing them into his mouth unattractively. Hermione screwed up her face in disgust.

"I can't say I'm surprised you've been invited, Noble House of Black and all," Hermione commented in an offhand manner, feeling a weird sort of relish at Sirius's dark look. He drank deeply from his newly procured punch, wiping at his mouth when he was done.

"Luckily that's all I share with them, a blasted name," Sirius said lowly, looking miserable.

"You're awfully dramatic, Sirius," Hermione observed, looking about the room mildly. She refused to admit she might be looking for someone in particular. "Your family aren't all bad eggs. What about Andromeda?"

"How do you know Andy?" Sirius asked, frowning.

"Oh, just heard about her is all. Caused quite the ruckus, marrying a Muggle-born. And Andy?"

"She hates it." Sirius grinned, mischievous, "It's become habit by now."

Hermione nodded.

"Well, Sirius, as lovely as this has been, I need to talk to people more on my skill level. Good night.” Walking away, she heard the barking laughter of the dark-haired prankster and smiled.

Weaving in and out of the crowd, trying not to spill anything on her new dress, Hermione managed
to reach the far corner of the room near the band, where a few unfamiliar faces were hanging about. Deciding to spread herself a little thinly – after all, a common face was a forgotten face – Hermione approached them. They were interesting enough; they had to be, to be invited; but they definitely weren't the sort of people Hermione would think to invite to a party.

Laughing a little forcefully at a terrible joke, Hermione picked up a cheese tart as a food platter floated past and took a sip of her fizzy punch. As it moved out of view, she saw him.

He was walking straight towards her in robes of a charcoal shade, his face calm but incredibly cool, like he was on the brink of flinging into the complete opposite – hot-headed and angry.

"Mr Lupin," Hermione greeted, trying to hide her nerves with a bright smile, "How nice of you to join us. Have you met–" Hermione turned to introduce the wizard next to her, a man who specialised in goblin negotiations, when Remus interrupted her.

"Oh, Mr Lupin now, is it?" He asked her, the picture of calm. His eyes, steady on her, were the only indicators of his intended tone.

"My friends," Hermione addressed the three wizards, who looked entirely uninterested by her drama, "Please excuse me."

Putting a gentle hand on Remus's upper back and leading him away, Hermione took a deep breath. They reached one of the stone pillars toward the outskirts of the room, hiding them partly from view. It was still a busy party, though, and Hermione found herself closer to Remus than she wanted just so he could hear her.

"What's the matter?"

"What's the matter?" Remus exclaimed, quietening down only at a few interested stares sent their way. Hermione glared at the nosy students, who hurriedly looked away, "Sirius is what's the matter." He seethed, looking mutinous.

Hermione frowned.

"I thought you'd forgiven him?" Hermione asked, genuinely stumped. Remus's chest was heaving, as if he was taking deep breaths to calm himself. Well, they definitely weren't working.

"I have forgiven him. But he's been all over you, and--" He cut himself off, too worked up to go on.

"Remus," Hermione said, affronted, "What are you talking about? I spoke to Sirius for five minutes, if that. And besides, who are--"

"He held you," Remus hissed, "Like this." And he grabbed her roughly, squeezing her waist exactly as Sirius had. Hermione glared at him.

"And I did this," She said, pushing away his hand with a strength unknown to her. "I would appreciate it if you didn't make assumptions about what other men can and can't do to me, Remus."

"What about the library?" He insisted doggedly. "His hand was on your knee."

Hermione didn't think she could roll her eyes harder.

Men.

"Sirius is an idiot. He was asking me for a favour and subsequently tried to have me on for a laugh.
Remus,

Hermione continued, a little softer at his name as she frowned at him in concern, "What's the real issue here?"

Remus stared at her, and then suddenly deflated. Suddenly, his imposing figure transformed to look lost and incredibly, incredibly tired.

"I haven't been sleeping. I– I can smell everything, and you're–" True to form, Remus couldn't finish his sentence.

Hermione heaved a great sigh, ignoring the way Remus's eyes flicked to her chest. It was close to the full moon; she would forgive him.

Hermione put her right hand on his shoulder, her thumb brushing the base of his neck. He swallowed thickly, staring at her acutely.

"Remus, you've got to stop fighting what you are." Hermione said, realising this was a conversation she shouldn't be having at Slughorn's party, but seeing no other way to have it safely and quickly. "Part of the reason why you're feeling these symptoms so intensely is because you're pushing them away for most of the month."

"It's what I always do," Remus countered, "And it's never been this bad."

Hermione pursed her lips.

"Trust me," Hermione insisted, squeezing his shoulder. He looked stricken. "It's probably because I'm around, and your full moons are different. Please, just… just let yourself be, for one month."

They stared at each other, the chatter and music in the background going by unnoticed, before Remus slowly nodded, looking down at his feet.

"As much as I hate to encourage this sort of behaviour, Sirius and I are not together in any sense of the word," Hermione confirmed, politely ignoring Remus's relieved expression. This possessive behaviour was deeply unflattering. Hermione didn't remember Remus being this way with anyone, not even a best friend who had been lost to him for twelve years only to return and prioritise his godson. "And even if we were, I can spend time with anyone I want. I'm your professor before I am your pack member, and it's important you remember that."

Remus's face hardened, impassive, before he gave a short nod.

"Where's your date?" That ought to get him a little more enthusiastic. He smiled mildly instead, looking off to her left. She followed his gaze.

"Flirting." Remus observed, and Hermione saw he was looking at Lily, red hair vibrant and artfully done in a bee hive style. Her white dress had elaborately detailed bell sleeves, the whole garment flowing to the floor in soft, layered chiffon. Hermione was impressed.

James was enamoured.

"You and Lily came together?" Hermione asked, intrigued. She realised Remus hadn't moved away from her despite their conversation returning to normal volume. She wasn't sure she could move back herself, the warmth of his breath tingling her cheek as she looked on.

"She invites me because all my other friends are invited by Slughorn himself."

"Peter?" Hermione asked, looking to Remus in surprise. His face was awfully close, his lips looking
soft and–

No.

She turned back to the future Mrs Potter, feeling warm.

"Peter hates Slughorn, so no. But my other idiot friends, yes."

"Well," Hermione began, a fire deep in her belly at the thought of Slughorn not seeing Remus as worthy for his pathetic gatherings, "I can assure you, being handpicked by Slughorn means nothing. He sees us as only pawns on his way to notoriety." She took a distracted sip of her abandoned punch, suddenly extremely thirsty.

"I'm not sure about that." replied Remus, and Hermione turned her head to see him staring at her, absorbed. Hermione blushed, and took a step back to get some air. In fact, that sounded like a good idea.

"I'm just going to get some air. I'll see you later, Remus."

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Leaving Slughorn's party early would have repercussions for the future, Hermione was sure. She dreaded the next party already; the relaxed atmosphere, the ease with which one might find themselves leaning in for a kiss…

Back in her quarters, scrubbed clean of makeup and hair unstuck from her head, Hermione lay in bed, staring at her newly exposed forearm with distaste. Sighing, she turned to blow out her bedside candle, cloaking the room in darkness. It was barely eleven, but Hermione was out like a softly worded *Nox*.

Her tiredness did not abate over the next few days, drawing a few worried looks from Nettle on Monday.

"If you can't stay awake, please don't teach," Emilia pleaded, sweeping her raven hair out of her eyes, brown and concerned.

"I'll be fine." Hermione reassured her through a yawn, and powered through the classes until after dinner that evening, collapsing onto her bed and straight into sleep just after kicking off her boots.

Waking up on Tuesday morning was an incredible feat. Her limbs had felt heavy, pulled down by invisible weights. She’d had to forgo a shower, too pressed for time to take one – it was important she eat, and so breakfast had taken precedence over cleanliness. She’d simply cast a hasty *Scourgify* knowing it would have to do, and changed.

Tuesdays were her favourite working days, as she finished early and had the rest of the afternoon to do what she wanted (although she was often resigned to a lot of marking). So it was a shame that it was a full moon, for her free period was cut short and she was waiting at the Entrance Hall doors at four o’clock. The sun would set in half an hour.

Remus joined her, as was usual, and they silently made their way to the Whomping Willow, as was also usual.
"McGonagall told me she cast a few warming charms on the Shack, considering the last time we woke up there." Hermione remembered awkward bodily reactions, and cleared her throat, "So it shouldn't be so bad."

Remus nodded grimly, taking off his scarf and cloak as they entered the top-most room of the decrepit building, its peeling wallpaper exposing dark wood underneath. The roof seemed to be dripping water in the corner, and it looked like it was sagging. Hermione suspected that the only thing that kept it upright was magic.

As Hermione carefully undid her bra and shimmied out of her knickers, she started at the touch of a hot hand on her right shoulder, quite close to the nape of her neck.

"Remus," Hermione breathed, turning around. This was much closer than he'd ever been right before the full moon. The sky looked dark grey, the sun keen to be lost behind the horizon. It would set fully, soon, and the moon would rise, engulfing them.

Remus looked a mess. He was paler than even she was, and the claw marks on his chest were a deep red under the smattering of hair there. If Hermione didn't know any better, she'd say they were newly done, only a day or two old. His hand on the side of her neck squeezed it painfully, although Hermione knew that wasn't Remus's intention as he used her to stay standing, hunching over and clutching a hand to his sternum with a loud groan.

"Remus? Remus, look at me." He groaned again, Hermione's frantic hands on his face tilting it up toward her. His body remained bent over, the pain too great to lengthen his muscles into standing. His eyes were pained, the mossy green looking less and less with every moment, his pupils widening.

Asking what was wrong was futile, but the sudden onset of the transformation symptoms, and so early at that, left her wondering. Her own symptoms were the usual – unease, restlessness, tiredness… she wasn't feeling any pain yet, although the unease was increasing ever so slightly with every breath.

"Just keep looking at me," Hermione urged him, voice low as she brought his forehead to hers, crouching to his level in the process. Nudity was the last thing on her mind, this moment completely devoid of sexuality.

Hermione bit her lip at the first wave of pain, trying to keep it together a little longer for Remus, although it would make things worse for her in the end. It was what she'd been trying to tell Remus during their first transformation together, after all – fighting it off was pointless as you couldn't will away the werewolf, no matter how desperate you might be to do just that. Letting it in was always the best course of action.

"Breathe through it," Hermione murmured, moving her thumbs back and forth across his cheekbones. He was panting heavily, breathless. "Just breathe."

Hermione took her own advice as another wave of pain came over her, this time remaining a steady assurance in the background. She was helpless to let out a groan of pain, her bent limbs shaking with the effort to keep herself at Remus's level.

They fell to the floor together, and Hermione's hand moved to grasp his, her knuckles white with how hard she was clenching.

Her bones were making the ominous sounds they always did and then Hermione blacked out; Remus's wide, bloodshot eyes the last things she saw.
The day was dark with dawn when Hermione woke, bleary eyed and famished.

Her back was warm and comfortable, and the floor beneath her was as well. However, her entire left side was cold, and she wished she had a blanket to pull over herself.

Sitting up, Hermione saw the rest of the room was as it had looked before the transformation. Considering she felt no new pains in her body, they must have been relatively tame last night. Maybe the Marauders had joined them later, after dinner. They couldn't be there for the transition from man into wolf, but they could be there throughout the night, leaving early the next morning so as not to draw suspicion.

Looking over her shoulder, Hermione gazed upon Remus, who lay next to her. His eyes were closed, and he looked peaceful. She knew, however, that upon waking he would be very sore, like her, and very tired. Especially, Hermione frowned, given last night. His exacerbated symptoms would be something she'd have to research. She knew werewolves experienced different levels of pain at different stages on the full moon, but she'd never heard the Remus of her future mention feeling it before the sun truly set – in fact, he'd seemed to be able to hold it for a fair few hours under the cloudy night sky that one evening in her third year.

*Maybe I should stop comparing them.*

Turning around more fully, Hermione faced him, ignoring her bare torso in light of Remus's closed eyes. Normally he woke earlier than her, or at least at the same time. Not to mention every Hospital Wing visit had him awake hours before.

"Remus?" Hermione croaked, and subsequently cleared her throat to rid herself of the scratchy feeling that resided there. Hermione shook his shoulder gently. "Remus?"

He groaned, long and low, bringing up an arm to block the muted sun that shone in his eyes. Sensitivity to light was common, both before and after the transformation.

"Hermione? What—?" He looked around, eyes half-lidded, a little confused at their surrounds. Abruptly his expression cleared. "Oh."

"Come on," Hermione said quietly, helping him sit up, "Let's get dressed. Breakfast has probably already started."

They dressed slowly but quietly, Hermione's own mind racing with thoughts of prolonged transformations and increased symptoms.

Breakfast had indeed started when Hermione entered the Great Hall, Remus set to follow a few minutes after. It felt, weirdly enough, like they'd just come back from a tryst in a broom closet, guilty of *something*.

Hermione pushed those traitorous thoughts aside.

Although she had fifth years in the morning, she had a free period after and no classes after dinner. It was a light day, everything considered.
"You missed our appointment last night, Huxley," Sirius commented as she went to leave dinner that night, thinking she might snag some werewolf tomes from the library for a bit of before bed reading. She had to pass by his group at the Gryffindor table to leave the Great Hall, and had been subsequently called out.

"Sirius," Hermione warned, and he smirked. "Haven't you heard, anyway?" She continued, her tone now light, "Our appointments are cancelled. Duelling club is on Friday night every week for the rest of term."

"Friday?" Sirius asked, swearing under his breath, "I better let Marlene know. See you later, Professor." And he shot up, making his way over to the Ravenclaw table.

Hermione smiled at the three boys left behind, although James's gaze was directed somewhere down the Gryffindor table. Hermione didn't have to guess about who he might be looking at. Remus and Peter both returned her smile, although the former looked a little worse for wear. She'd have to speak to him on Thursday about it. Her eyes flicked to Peter. She didn't really want to linger with him around, despite his friendly countenance in classes.

"Duelling club?" Hermione heard Peter ask as she walked away, "I'd hate to be on the wrong end of Huxley's wand."

Thursdays were always tiring, jam-packed as they were, and despite picking up books on werewolves the night before, she'd been too tired to focus on them properly. Her talk with Remus would have to wait until she knew a bit more.

Despite her talk of it on Wednesday, it wasn't until she finished up with the first years (her last lesson of the week) that Hermione remembered she'd have to lead the Duelling club after dinner.

"What do duelling clubs usually do?" Hermione asked Nettle as they were packing up from their lesson on disarming spells. Cushions littered the room.

"Ah, yes," Emilia said, smiling as she waved her wand and levitated a cushion into the large boxes they were packing them away into, "I'd heard about that."

All of a sudden, Hermione felt a little guilty. The Defence position was, after all, technically Nettle's. And yet the students had asked her, the assistant, to lead the club.

"I could use your help, you know," Hermione suggested casually, also levitating a pillow into a box, "The two of us work well together, and sometimes I find it hard to control the Slytherins. Which was a bit of an understatement. She and Mulciber tended to exchange sneers, and her ability to remain neutral when it came to Travers and Lestrange after what James had heard was wavering. A lot of the Slytherins were respectful, but it was hard to ignore those that wouldn't hesitate to hurt her if they saw the cursed scar on her left forearm.

"Really?" Emilia asked, raising her eyebrows. A small smile formed on her face, "I mean, I know the children didn't ask me, but--"

"Honestly," Hermione assured her, as she placed the last cushion into the box, "You'd be a great help. Besides, there's probably a law somewhere that says there needs to be more than one adult to supervise over twenty kids."

Emilia laughed and, after shoving the boxes to the side of the classroom, they both made their way to dinner. The roast lamb went down a treat with mint jelly, and Hermione felt full and satisfied as she hung around the Great Hall after. Dumbledore gave her a polite nod as he left for what she presumed
would be his office, and she returned it.

"I'm thinking you should discuss the differences between regular duelling and what you've experienced first," Emilia suggested as the house elves popped into existence and began vanishing away the tables – where they were sending them, Hermione had no idea, "After all, Lily Evans asked you, right? After the events of Christmas, I'm sure her intentions were to learn more about facing Death Eaters than they were to learn about official duels."

"Right," Hermione said, nodding. "I'm thinking we start with disarming spells and go from there. I don't want people getting ahead of themselves. Once we've got their body movements right, we can work on spell variety and the possibility of non-verbals."

"I think you're on the right track. Don't worry about it so much," Emilia added at Hermione's nervous face.

"I feel like I'm not going to live up to the expectation," Hermione said as the students chatted eagerly, shooting her excited looks.

The turn out was admirable. Hermione suspected people would drop off in the coming weeks, prioritising other school work over a voluntary club – but the rumours about Christmas were still running rampant, and a curious student body would not be stopped until they got some sort of answer. Hermione rather felt like a spectacle.

"I'd like to thank our Head Girl, Lily Evans, for organising this." Hermione announced, giving Lily a smile. There was a smattering of applause, the murmurs of the crowd still evident. Hermione would guess about a hundred students were milling about the Great Hall.

"This is a duelling club, but not your normal duelling club." Hermione thought of Lockhart and frowned, "We're not going to be conducting any formal duelling. Miss Evans and… others—"

Hermione saw Sirius perk up, nudging James as if to let him know she meant him, "–stipulated that they were interested in learning about combat they might actually partake in after they graduate. That is to say, combat an Auror might face, or someone particularly unlucky."

"So we're going to start off first with how you should be orienting yourselves. Then, as the weeks progress, we'll move onto divvying up your spells and the best ways to quickly incapacitate someone before moving on to the next person. If you've got any particular requests, please let me know at the end of today's meeting and I'll see whether I can incorporate it into the schedule," Which she would have to write up, now that she properly thought about. More work to do. "Any questions before we begin?"

The room was silent, before a particularly brave Gryffindor fifth year raised her hand.

"Is it true?" She asked, her straight blonde hair shining in the firelight, "That you fought You-Know-Who at Christmas?"

There was chatter around the room, soft murmurs of discussion at the bold question.

"If any of you have come here to have rumours either confirmed or denied, you should leave." Hermione announced, fighting the waver in her voice. She'd never been very good at speaking to such a large group. Where was Harry when you needed him?

"That being said, my hope with this club is that by the end of term, any one of you might be able to face off Voldemort—" Many flinches, some glares, and a gasp or two, "–and escape with your life. Now, disarming spells."
The meeting went on smoothly enough, Emilia and Hermione splitting the room in two and having the students face one another. Cushions were all over the floor, and they focused on how to position yourself to minimise your target, and to be flexible enough to dodge when required. Her seventh years were way ahead of the younger two year groups, having practised this in class. The most accomplished ones she set about the room, helping out the younger students.

The meeting was only an hour, and it flew by. Before she knew it, Hermione was bidding everyone goodnight and thanking them for coming, putting away the cushions and requesting the elves return the house tables to their normal spots.

"Thanks, Professor. This was great," Amelia Bones said as she left, her robes a little rumpled given the hits she'd taken. Hermione nodded in acknowledgement, shooting her a small smile.

"I was hoping for something we didn't learn in class," Sirius griped, stopped at the doorway into the Entrance Hall. Lily and James were talking a few metres away, and Hermione hid a smile. Remus was hovering by his black-haired friend, and Peter had already left to go back up to the common room. "I can't believe I cancelled on Marlene for this."

"Sirius," Hermione sighed, as if she was a disappointed mother, "We've got to get the other years up to scratch. Don't worry, next lesson you and I can have a go at one another." His answering grin was evidence enough of the fact that that was exactly what he'd been hoping for when he baited her like that. Hermione grumbled under her breath, annoyed at herself for falling for it.

"What are you doing this weekend?" Hermione directed her question to Remus, ignoring Sirius's faux offended expression, a dramatic hand on his chest.

"Not much," Remus answered, smiling at Sirius's aghast "Moony!".

"There's something I'd like to research with you, if you don't mind." Why not have Remus join her? Maybe that way she would have more of a goal to her reading instead of 'bad werewolf symptoms'. Besides, the air still felt a little stilted after Slughorn's party and, after having come to the conclusion that she would like to have some sort of connections in the wizarding world, even if a lot of them would be ripped away from her or her away from them, Hermione figured studying together would be a good start. "Library just after lunch?" She suggested, hopeful. Remus nodded, and they both ignored Sirius's huffing.

"One friend leaves me for a girl, another for a professor. Peter and I better get married or something." He muttered, not really angry but wanting them to think he was.

Hermione found herself smiling long after bidding them and Professor Nettle goodnight. It was good to feel useful again, she thought as she pulled the covers back on her double bed – even if she knew that all she was doing was fulfilling the timeline. Despite the morose voice at the back of her end saying otherwise, it really felt like she was making a difference.

Hermione blew out her bedside candle, warm and snug in bed.

February was looking promising.
Also, for anyone interested I made a Remione playlist on 8tracks AGES ago. [Here's the link.](#)

Check it out! I might make another one but specifically for this story, so watch this space. Thanks for reading, and I would love to hear what you think. Until next time!
"The problem is, I've never heard of anything like this before," Hermione explained, flipping through the pages of her book – Werewolf Maladies was proving very unhelpful.

"I don't exactly have much knowledge on the subject…" Remus trailed off, and Hermione lifted her head to see a frown on his face as he peered down at his own book.

"I'm surprised," Hermione said mildly, trying to forget the words 'werewolves are some of the most inapprehensible animals within the wizard's bestiary and should therefore be captured at any available opportunity' – some of these books were dreadfully old-fashioned. Hermione glimpsed the date – 1974… well, they were old-fashioned for her. "I figured you for someone to find out everything you could."

"One day, maybe," Remus said a little bitterly, casually turning the page on a gory depiction of werewolf anatomy, "It's hard to read about the monster when you know you are one."

Hermione frowned, ignoring the jibe at himself and, by proxy, her. She should've known better than to expect Remus to have accepted himself in any degree by now. He'd barely done so by the time she'd first met him. A wave of anguish overcame her, and she breathed deeply to recover. How could someone grow up – so loved by his friends – and still hate himself? If Hermione could, she would show him there was nothing to hate. Who he was under the full moon did not reflect who he was as a person. And, above all else, he was not a monster. If he were, that would mean Hermione herself was one. And you know what they say – you lie to yourself to survive. So she would.

That didn't mean she could sit idly by, though.

Heaving a great sigh, at which Remus looked up, Hermione closed her book softly.

"Remus, I know I've probably said this before, and I'm not entirely sure you'll listen to me even if I haven't, but you have to know that you're not a monster."

Remus pursed his lips as if to rebut.

"I don't mean what you turn into once a month," Hermione said quietly and quickly, hoping to cut him off before he could rebuff her harshly, "What we turn into. We are monsters then. But outside of that… we're just people."

"People who have to live with what the monster decides to do every month." Remus said darkly in low tones.

"Yes," agreed Hermione, "But you cannot hold yourself responsible for that. If you do, the guilt will eat away at you." She chose not to comment on her own hypocrisy in that moment – after all, the wounds she'd inflicted upon Remus had left her feeling guiltier than she had ever thought herself
capable. Even the thought of them now left twinges of the feeling in her chest.

"What about Greyback?" Remus was looking at her intently now, book forgotten on his lap. "Are you saying that those he bites on the full moon… that it's all an accident, that he's not to blame?"

"That's different," countered Hermione fiercely, "You know as well as I do that Greyback positions himself near potential victims in the hopes of biting them. He does nothing to contain the wolf, and that's a reflection on him as a person, not on werewolves in general." Hermione was breathing heavily. She hadn't realised how worked up she was getting. In fact, now that she noticed it – she was perched on the edge of her seat, and there was a strange ringing in her ears that waxed and waned in time with her own deafening heartbeat.

"If you say so." Remus responded moodily. "I've got nothing." His abrupt change of subject left Hermione reeling, but she soon recovered as he dumped his book onto the table, a look of disgust on his face.

"Yes, I'm at a dead end as well." Hermione admitted, the fire in her veins cooled at the thought of how disappointing the books at Hogwarts were. Hermione supposed the wizarding world as a whole was to blame – twenty years had passed, yes, but when Hermione had been a first year the tomes on the shelves had held infinite amounts of knowledge, carefully referenced and holding little bias. Then again, the mind of an eleven year old was a whole lot more easily impressed than the mind of a nineteen— wait, wasn't she twenty now? Technically, given September had come and gone, and… Hermione couldn't believe she'd forgotten her birthday.

*It's not like I would've had anyone to celebrate it with anyway,* Hermione mused with melancholy.

"There's not much here to figure out, is there?" Hermione asked, resigned. Remus nodded. "I suppose we'll have to leave it, as much as it pains me… you'll keep an eye out for anything else unusual, won't you? I don't want you suffering in silence."

Remus smiled grimly, and suddenly Hermione didn't entirely trust him to let her know when things got worse. She'd have to keep an eye out herself, or maybe get Sirius on the job.

"Sure," agreed Remus, gathering up the pile of books he'd been looking through, obviously intent on putting them away. Hermione restrained a smile – he, like her, was considerate of Madam Pince.

Remus paused a moment, half-way to to nearest aisle on magical creatures, Hermione following close behind him. He looked at her over his shoulder.

"You'll do the same, right?" At Hermione's confused look, he clarified, "You'll let me know if you're having trouble?"

Hermione smiled widely, unabashed, her cheeks aching a little at the force of it. She felt warmth travel to her cheeks, and her heart beat a little faster, trying to keep up with her rapid change in mood.

"Yes, Remus," Hermione answered, fighting down the fluttering in her chest, her books held against it to hide everything, "I will."
The first day of the month crept up on her like a forgotten exam. She started it with a strange sense of foreboding, although she shrugged it off as quick as it came. Hermione was no seer, if such a thing existed.

But when Lily confronted her on the first Thursday of February, her trepidation abruptly made sense – she'd obviously subconsciously predicted such a confrontation from the looks Lily had been sending her.

"Miss Evans," Hermione acknowledged the redhead. Nettle was answering some questions, a group of Slytherin girls surrounding her. Hermione had a pounding headache, courtesy of the long day. Three periods of seventh years often left her tired, but the moody silences of Remus and the compensating rowdiness of his friends had seen to her pained temples, which throbbed in time with a rather macabre rhythm, like a catchy song Hermione had forgotten the name of. "What can I do for you?"

Hermione kept her eyes trained on the papers in front of her, frowning at the lacking word count of the Gryffindor girl Patty, who seemed unable to write much about how the Unforgivables could be used without detection.

"I just wanted to… I didn't properly thank you. For Christmas, I mean," said Lily, her voice soft and grateful, "I'm not sure what would have happened—well actually, I am sure what would have happened. The point is, I wouldn't be here to say thanks if you hadn't been there, so… thanks."

"It's all right, Miss Evans," Hermione said, counting the essays the seventh years had handed in.

An awkward silence hung in the air, where Hermione continued to avoid Lily's eyes and hope she leave, and Lily lingered in front of the desk. Nettle's laugh carried across the classroom and pierced the air around them brashly, for the moment was anything but amusing.

"I wondered, Professor…" Lily started, a nervous hint to her voice, "I wondered why you might refuse to look at me?"

Despite the murmurs from Nettle's corner, Hermione was sure she could have heard a pin drop at that moment.

"I'm sorry?" Hermione said, raising her face slightly.

"It's just," said Lily, and Hermione glimpsed frustration in her face before she quickly looked away, "You never look me in the eyes. I thought maybe I had done something wrong, something to offend you. But then at Christmas… well, James told me you were planning on coming to my house alone to help me. He said you were willing to—"

She stopped herself, and the obvious continuation of the sentence hung in the air, ready and waiting to be said, or to be acknowledged.

Hermione's breath hitched. She thought she had been doing so well, avoiding Lily and James enough to keep them at a sufficient emotional distance but not completely isolate them. She had to look after them, and she couldn't do that when they weren't speaking.

Lily was the hardest. In all the ways that mattered, she was so much like Harry. Or, Hermione supposed, Harry was so much like her. Her intuition – Harry would laugh if she told him they shared it, but the proof was there. The way she could look at you and see through every wall you'd ever built. The emotional maturity – Harry hadn't always had it, of course, but after resigning yourself to die at seventeen for the whole world, after accepting you'd never have true happiness but then being
thrust into it… well, there were always side effects to these things. Lastly of course, Lily's eyes, with their emerald gleam and almond shape… it was no secret why Hermione struggled to look into them.

"I'm–" Hermione breathed in shakily, finally raising her gaze and locking eyes with the seventh year, "I owe you an apology, Miss Evans. I find it– difficult–" Hermione stopped to compose herself as her speech was getting a little jerky. With another great breath, she carried on, "You look a lot like a friend of mine."

"Oh?" Lily said, rubbing the strap of her book bag in between her fingers.

"Yes," Hermione admitted, sighing, "It's– it's been a while since I've seen him, and… it'll be even longer until I see him again. I'm afraid the likeness between you makes me feel… well, I'm sure you can imagine. As for Christmas; well, anyone worth their weight in gold would have done the same. In fact, two of your housemates did."

Lily coloured slightly, looking away. Nettle and the Slytherins had seemed to depart, for they were alone in the room.

"Thanks, all the same." Lily repeated, looking back at Hermione. Her eyes were painful to look at, but Hermione willed herself to. It wasn't fair, really, to inadvertently punish Lily for something she hadn't done. It had been Death Eaters who had taken her from her friends, and a blasted time turner that had confirmed the fact that she would be unlikely to see them again.

Hermione smiled. It was small and it was shaky, but the answering one made her feel ten times better. That was something Lily did not share with her son, but it abated the homesickness regardless.

"I know you accompany Remus on… thanks for that, too."

Hermione's mouth opened in surprise, and she felt the panic build up inside her. Did Lily know about her? As much as she'd tried to console herself that it didn't matter who knew, the idea of it spreading left her feeling bereft. How would she find work after Hogwarts if everyone knew? She would, in all likelihood – Hermione realised this with a growing sadness – be known as a werewolf sooner or later and, like Remus had, be seen only in shabby robes. Her intellect, for once, would not be able to save her there. She was destined to a life of destitution, unless she lied. For all she was doing so now, Hermione wasn't sure she could do that when it was only her own life on the line. There was something hard to acknowledge about lying just to help yourself, even if the absence of it would mean perpetual unhappiness.

"Does Remus know?" asked Hermione, pushing her depressing thoughts aside.

"No," Lily smiled sadly, "I'm not sure he'd let me be friends with him otherwise."

Hermione hummed in understanding.

"You should tell him," she said, "I think he needs to know that not everyone will run away screaming. His friends, for all their loyalty, don't always see that he still struggles."

There was silence, and Hermione wracked her brain for something to say.

"How are your family doing?"

"Oh!" Lily brightened up, her hair seeming even redder with the enthusiastic expression on her face, "They're really good. My parents are thinking they might even stay in the neighbourhood once the war is over; they love it so much."
"I'm glad," said Hermione, feeling a little relieved, "And your sister?"

"It's weird. I thought what happened might have made her hate me more, but… she's talking to me again. Properly talking, for the first time since I got my letter. It's unbelievable." Lily definitely sounded shocked, and her eyes were wide with disbelief. Hermione frowned – just what would happen to ruin the relationship between now and Halloween 1981?

Shaking herself of that inauspicious question, Hermione gave the Gryffindor a smile.

"I hope we can be friends, Professor," Lily said after a comfortably quiet moment, smiling, "And maybe one day I can meet the guy who looks so much like me."

Hermione gave a loud laugh, her heart breaking.

"Maybe. Goodnight, Miss Evans."

"Lily," she said, her eyes warm, "Lily."

"Goodnight, Lily." Hermione repeated, her heart breaking twice over.

The closing of the classroom door made her slump in her seat, her head in her hands.

"Professor?" Shooting up quickly, Hermione wiped at her eyes.

"Oh, Miss McKinnon," Hermione said, recovering the best she could. She plastered on a polite smile. "What brings you here so late? Dinner finished a long time ago."

"I know." Marlene said, moving to stand in front of the desk. Hermione longed desperately for some hot chocolate and her comfortable double bed, but instead mustered up the energy to give her attention to the Ravenclaw, hoping it would be a brief encounter. "I just wanted to ask you something."

"Go on." Hermione said, waving her ahead tiredly.

"You haven't mentioned in class – and I've been doing some reading – the… abilities… of Occlumency or Legilimency." Marlene said, looking at Hermione intently.

Hermione frowned.

"Why is she asking me about this?"

"No, we haven't spoken of it."

"Well, surely they would be useful? You're going on about wanting to prepare us, but what good will that do if Voldemort gets a hold of us and he manages to pry out of us where all our friends are?"

"Okay, hold on," Hermione said, much more alert now, "I understand what you're saying, but that kind of magic – mind magic – is very dangerous. And temperamental. Sometimes even the best wizards aren't capable of it."

"Shouldn't we have the chance to learn about it?" Marlene looked annoyed, like the carefully crafted convincing she'd rehearsed was not going to plan.

"Did you not just say you'd been doing some reading on your own?" Hermione asked, frowning. By this time next week, she'd have a permanent crease in her forehead. In fact, Hermione resolved to
look properly in the mirror when she got to her quarters; for it was sure to be permanent even now.

"Well, yes. But proper instruction couldn't go astray."

Hermione pursed her lips.

"Marlene – you're a Ravenclaw. Think about it. That kind of magic readily available to a certain kind of wizard."

"But you're teaching everything else!" Marlene exclaimed, throwing about her arms wildly.

Hermione noted that she was still in her uniform, the robes flinging about with her movements. "I don't see why you can't teach us this if you're teaching us about Unforgivables."

"Because _Unforgivables_ can be cast by even the most inept of witch or wizard," Hermione said fiercely, leaning forward, "Because Unforgivables will be a whole lot more familiar to you when you leave this school than Legilimency ever will. Besides," Hermione took a breath, composing herself, "There are other ways to circumvent Legilimency than Occlumency. Redirection, for one. False memories; even the _Protego_ charm will protect you from it if you're in trouble, although it only works when the attacker is caught off-guard." Hermione thought fondly of Harry and Snape, although the memory of Snape's that accompanied made her very uncomfortable.

Suddenly, Hermione felt as if she'd been pushed back into her chair roughly. She squeezed her eyes shut, the low aching of her temples previously forgotten now barging into the forefront of her mind and making her breath hitch in pain.

"You are familiar with the rules, yes?" asked the merchant, suddenly appearing before Hermione, who did not jump. She had trained herself to be used to surprises, even if her muscles coiled at the abrupt appearance of the dark-haired witch, whose dark blue eyes focused keenly on her.

"Yes," Hermione answered, peering at the adorned box, open, which revealed the gold trinket. "Very familiar."

The merchant hummed.

"Hermione." She whispered knowingly, and Hermione almost missed it given the sounds of the bustling witches and wizards around her. The black market was busy today. Hermione's head shot up, her eyes narrowing. Verdandi held up her hands, trying to show she meant no harm.

"A name for a name." Hermione demanded.

"My name is Verdandi. I merely trade in the unusual and the interesting. I mean you no harm."

Hermione slowly lowered her wand from the inside of her robe sleeve.

"This one is special." she said, gesturing to the box. "Use it wisely, only when necessary. There is no going back from it."

"There's no going back from any time turner." Hermione scoffed.

"No," Verdandi smiled, "There's not."

There was a loud roaring in her ears, the scene in front of her swirling, and Hermione was back at Hogwarts.

Of course, she had never left.
"I'm sorry, Professor," Marlene was quick to apologise, looking distraught, "I didn't mean to, I just thought I'd try–"

"Miss McKinnon," Hermione addressed her icily, giving the Ravenclaw the coldest stare she could muster when enduring such a persistent migraine. "Might I remind you that I am a teacher--"

"I know, I'm so sorry--"

"And as such, you have severely broken many school rules by doing what you just did."

Marlene looked ashamed, which was a stark contrast to her earlier look of unwavering determination. Her dirty blonde hair hung limply in front of her eyes, and she looked a little pale. Her blue and bronze tie was askew, and Hermione saw her wince, her hand coming up in an aborted movement to ease the pain that was sure to be in her temples. Hermione didn't suggest she go to the Hospital Wing.

*Serves her right.*

"Fifty points and one month's detention, with me. Fortunately for you, I only have two nights free a week so we'll be limited to that."

"A month?" Marlene exclaimed, outraged, her look of shame disappearing completely, "But--"

"A month. This is precisely why you are not learning these skills, Marlene." Hermione told her, glaring still, "In the hands of those 'just trying', privacies are invaded. In the hands of those with less of a moral compass, Legilimency is a weapon to humiliate and ruin."

Marlene clenched her jaw, presumably in response to the punishment, but she at least looked contrite, embarrassed by what she'd done.

"Now please," said Hermione, angry, "Leave."

The nerve of her! To… to try that on Hermione, of all people. Out of curiosity, just to try? Hermione was fuming, seething, her blood was boiling. Luckily, the memory that had popped into her head hadn't been especially damning. It would be innocuous to someone like Marlene McKinnon. Even still, the anger Hermione was feeling was only to cover up the spindles of fear pricking her at every angle, the anxiety at how close someone could come to discovering everything she'd tried so hard to hide.

She would have to try her hand at Occlumency herself, now. For all that Marlene had been incredibly stupid, she'd likely saved Hermione's life in the future as well.

*Bloody curious Ravenclaws.*

"Professor?"

Hermione closed her eyes, a furious calm settling over her.

"I thought I told you to leave."

"You did. But I just— that… the instrument, in your memory?" Hermione opened her eyes, and looked at Marlene, who hovered by the door. The seventh year was tentative, but also seemed determined to get something across. Her grey eyes were glittering in the firelight of the classroom, which was shadowy in the night. "I couldn't help— she said it was a time turner."
Thoughts of *Daily Prophet* articles and ruined lives popped into Hermione's head, and she froze.

"Well, it's not really a time turner, is it?" Marlene said, as if she was impatiently waiting for Hermione to understand her.

"I beg your pardon?"

"My mother, she works for the Department of Mysteries," Marlene bit her lip, as if she was worried she was saying too much, "I didn't mean to look, really,"

"You don't mean to do a lot of things." Hermione muttered under her breath, unheard.

"But time turners don't have two dials, do they? They have just the one, so you can turn the hourglass over and you go back an hour. There was a diagram, in her notes." Marlene added at Hermione's narrowed eyes, "The time turner you were looking at had two dials. One on each side."

Hermione thought back; the golden instrument, twinkling in the muted moonlight of the black market. An hourglass, filled with glittering gold sand, surrounded by a circle of metal. On one side of the circle, a small dial… more of a knob, really. But the magical object Verdandi had shoved into her hands, the one she'd used with the intent to go back two hours in time to shake loose those chasing her… that'd had two knobs. The other had been on the opposite side, making the time turner symmetrical. She hadn't noticed then, and she hadn't noticed it before now. She hadn't even thought about the time turner, really… she'd just accepted she was in this time, in the past, *for good*. All her focus had been on how to expedite the process so she'd not look as old as Harry's godfather by the time she encountered her friends at the proper ages again.

"So what are you saying, Marlene? That Verdandi wasn't selling a time turner?" Hermione asked. After all, Marlene didn't know Hermione had bought it and used it not even five minutes after her purchase.

"I'm *saying,*" The blonde said in a huff, "That it was definitely a time turner, in a way, but just not the usual kind. I'm surprised," Marlene frowned in thought, "Time turners only just got announced to the public – illegal though it may have been, her acquisition of not only a time turner, but a different variation suggests maybe a foreign ministry discovered the magic before Britain… I wonder…" She trailed off, still looking deep in thought.

Hermione held her tongue, afraid of spilling anything incriminating.

"Your mother," Hermione said instead, changing tack, "Is she also so nosy?"

Marlene had the grace to blush, a bright red that left her grey eyes looking more blue than their actual colour.

"I'll get out of your hair, Professor." Marlene said, glancing at Hermione's hair as if her statement was literal. She turned around swiftly and left through the door. Hermione threw a locking charm on it just in case any other students had any other ideas.

She tugged on a lock of the curly monstrosity on top of her head self-consciously.

What Marlene didn't know was that all the time turners were rendered useless after Hermione and her friends had run rampant through the Ministry in 1996. In an endless loop of falling, smashing, and then returning to their shelves; all the time turners and along with them the magic behind their invention had been lost.

So why did Hermione have one from 1999 sitting in her trunk that very minute, and why was it *not*
really a time turner?

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Unfortunately, thanks to Hermione's busy schedule (why was she always doomed to take on too much?), she didn't have time to think anything over the next day. Considering she also had Duelling Club, which required a little more planning than it had last week, she resigned herself to thinking about it over the weekend, much to her dismay.

"Up for our duel, Huxley?" Sirius shot at her, snarky, as he walked past her into the Great Hall that evening. It officially started at eight, and so the students were returning from their common rooms or from around the castle, sans bags and outer robes for the second meeting.

Hermione's stomach sank. She'd forgotten she'd promised a duel to Sirius, had hoped the weekend after that he'd forget and had promptly forgotten herself.

"Damnit." Hermione muttered under her breath, cursing her arrogance. The thought of duelling Sirius in front of – there were less this week, but still a lot – nearly sixty or so people left her breaking into a nervous sweat. She knew she could beat him, but she would be showing everyone just how much experience she *did* have in the process. Looking at some especially eager faces, Hermione had no doubt that a lot of them were there for just that.

"All of you did really well last week," Hermione announced, and a hush fell over the hall. The house elves had admirably vanished the tables again, and the sixty or so students and two professors littered the hall, congregated near the open doors. A few curious outsiders glanced in as they walked by, but the group were otherwise disturbed. "I'd like to thank those who came back. We've got something a little exciting this week to start us off, and then we'll get into groups of four – we'll do two on two duels, focusing on aiming at moving targets and *being* a moving target yourself. All clear?"

At the nods and murmurs of assent, Hermione continued.

"Mr Black of Gryffindor expressed dissatisfaction at last week's meeting, so he and I are going to duel for you." The students began to talk amongst themselves, loud enough for Hermione to hear a few of them.

"Black doesn't stand a chance."

"I don't know; Huxley hasn't really proved herself…"

"She tied him up the first week, remember? Black's a goner –"

"This is going to be the source of my dreams for weeks!" An excited fifth year Gryffindor said to his friend, blushing under her and Hermione's raised eyebrows.

Nettle waved her wand, and a dome encased the middle of the hall, pushing the students standing in it right out, all of them stumbling comically. The dome glimmered, transparent but occasionally glowing as if newly electrocuted.

"Love that spell." Nettle remarked, grinning.

Sirius, after bolstering shoves from his friends and shouts of encouragement from other students,
sauntered into the dome, looking very satisfied with himself. Hermione entered after, placing herself at the opposite end, and the dome dissolved to be invisible. It was circular in shape, allowing for movement but not letting either of them back out or to use other people as shields. Hermione would have to ask Nettle about it after – it looked like a handy thing to know.

"On the count of three, you will begin. One." Nettle announced, and the students quickly gathered around the dome, peering in as if the two of them were zoo animals.

"Two–"

Hermione released her first spell, thrusting her arm forward viciously, her robes billowing around her.

*Rictusempra!*

The silver spell shot out, and Sirius's eyes widened. He jumped to the side quickly, the spell flying right next to his head.

"Hey! That's cheating!" He cried, outraged. He was, cleverly, still in a fighting stance.

"Like I told everyone, this isn't regular duelling."

*Immobulus!*

Sirius flung up a faltering shield charm, which managed to withstand the freezing charm but failed quickly after. Hermione would have to get him to work on that. If this had been 1998, he would be dead by now.

"Anteoculatia!" Sirius shouted, and Hermione swerved easily to miss the spell that would replace her hair with antlers. There was a strange sort of irony, almost being hit by a Marauder with that particular spell.

"Aqua Eructo!" Hermione's shout was loud, reverberating off the walls of the Great Hall, the usual furniture not there to absorb it. She'd chosen to say the spell because there was nothing to hide – as soon as she'd cast it, a huge jet of water flew out of her wand. Hermione urged it towards Sirius, who looked panicked but not worried. Of course, he didn't know that you could drown by the spell – Hermione wasn't going to put him through that, but others might have.

It hit him full on, drenching him in seconds and causing the students around them to laugh. Hermione heard James cackling particularly loudly.

Turning his back to the constant stream of water, the pressure of it causing the liquid to spray off of him and onto the surrounding floor, Sirius grasped his wand hard in slippery hands and threw a wordless spell over his shoulder. In preparation to defend herself, Hermione let go of her spell and produced a near-perfect *Protego*. It had always been one of her favourites.

Sirius ducked to avoid the deflected spell, and fired another non-verbal at her legs. Hermione jumped over it, and it was absorbed by the dome.

"Stupefy!" Sirius cried, looking disgruntled at his wetness. Hermione let the spell come toward her, giving him a false sense of victory, before she spun away, firing a disarming charm, which hit Sirius right in the chest. He really needed to remember to cast side-on.

Hermione caught his wand in her outstretched hand, and smiled.
The dome disintegrated, causing a fair few students to stumble forward – they'd been leaning on the dome like they were at an aquarium. Although, Hermione supposed, it was highly doubtful that many of them had probably even been to one.

"You held your own, Sirius," Hermione commented, walking over. Remus was casting drying spells over his friend, whose hair was dripping in front of the dark look on his face. "But how many times do I have to tell you – side-on."

Sirius grunted in recognition. Hermione turned her back on him, still smiling, as she addressed the class.

"Who can tell me what Sirius did wrong?"

Her smile grew into a smirk as a few hands shot up eagerly, subsequently ignoring Sirius's glowers.

Serves him right.

---

Hermione woke up on Saturday mulling over what exactly she could do from here. There was no way she could research two-dialled time turners – the original one-dial kind weren't even documented in reputable books yet.

So her usual methods were out. Which meant Hermione might have to resort to the last resource she wanted to consider: Dumbledore.

She had, for obvious reasons, been avoiding the Headmaster during her time in the past. He had made it surprisingly easy, turning up only for meals (and even then, not always) and letting McGonagall relay his messages to her. Hermione would've suspected he was out looking for horcruxes if she didn't know better – but he'd only really started on that in the nineties, so that was unlikely. Hermione, thinking back on that cow Rita Skeeter's book, thought that maybe he was visiting his brother. But no, that couldn't be it – Aberforth had not been welcoming when she'd approached him and spoke of Dumbledore months ago. In fact, he'd told her to get lost and never come near him again – a promise she planned on keeping, considering the likelihood of her needing to enter the Hog's Head was almost zero percent.

Really, though; how much could Dumbledore possibly know? He was knowledgeable, yes, but time turners had only just been publicised, to Marlene's point. He had contacts within the Ministry, Hermione knew, but how solidified were they in this time, and how deep did they run? Asking him about it would only make him suspicious – worse, she might actually have to tell him about the fact she was a time traveller. Hermione desperately didn't want to do that – Dumbledore, for all his kindness and his power, was opportunistic. She did not want to think about the time turner – or whatever it was – in his hands. He could stuff everything up and she knew it, and then where would she be? At least now she had some idea of the events to come, and could plan accordingly.

No, Dumbledore was a definite last resort, and not one she desired to cash in on just yet.

Which left Marlene McKinnon's mother, whoever she was. It would be extremely difficult – those who worked in the Department of Mysteries were notoriously difficult to pin down, at least in her time. But Hermione could always use her daughter, who owed her after intruding into her mind like that.
Marlene will have to do. Hermione thought with a sigh as she sipped on her tea in her quarters, her robe pulled loosely around her. The fire crackled, even though it was only early afternoon.

By Tuesday night, Hermione had spent the whole weekend figuring out how to get Marlene helping her without having her become suspicious of Hermione's origins.

"I hope you didn't tell your mother about what you did," Hermione said as she made Marlene mark essays with her. It was a soft detention, something she suspected Marlene took immense joy in given the continuous rushed scratching of her quill on parchment. Hermione would have to think of something crueler for tomorrow. "After all, how would you explain peeking at her notes?"

"If you're wondering whether I'll snitch on your friend, don't worry. My lips are sealed." Marlene said, still crossing out something on the essay in front of her, frowning.

It went in Hermione's favour that Marlene didn't know Hermione had seen Verdandi only once more after the memory she'd witnessed.

"How is your mother?" Hermione inquired, resolutely staring at her parchment. She'd taken to writing down the events as they were to come, but it was glamoured to look like a textbook list to anyone but her.

"If you wanted to talk to her," Marlene said, rolling her eyes and setting down her quill, looking at Hermione with exasperation, "All you had to do was ask."

Bloody nosy Ravenclaws, Hermione thought, glaring at Marlene, but accepting her suggestion all the same.

"It'll have to be next week, though – she's out of the country at the moment and I'm not allowed to owl her."

Hermione spent the next week as usual; jotting down random facts she remembered that would occur in the next year, placing them chronologically on her crudely drawn timeline on parchment; teaching Defence the best she could with Nettle, trying to hammer it into Sirius's head to face his opponents side-on; smiling at Remus, fighting down the butterflies in her stomach when he smiled back, and then subsequently ignoring him for hours; sleeping, and moping.

When the next Hogsmeade weekend came around on the eleventh, Hermione had accepted she would have to go into the wizarding village to purchase a few more quills, Marlene having broken two of them in her fervent marking. On Tuesday, Hermione would have her scrubbing out the Grindylow tanks.

She felt, though, that she might've been a tad too harsh on the girl when the Ravenclaw pulled her aside after her lesson with Hermione on that Friday afternoon to tell her that her mother would be meeting Marlene tomorrow morning in the village.

"I figured you could come along, introduce yourself – she'll be interested to hear about your experience with Voldemort. Her sister nearly got herself killed by him a few months ago, and she's desperate for intel on him." Marlene said, disturbingly unconcerned considering she'd just told Hermione her aunt had nearly died.

Despite it, Hermione agreed. Meeting with Mrs McKinnon would solve the problem of the time turner, and then Hermione could happily go back to witnessing the people she knew dying one by one.

What joy, Hermione thought sarcastically, trudging her way into Hogsmeade, her mood spectacularly
bad despite the promise of her meeting. This was all getting so complicated. Where were the simple answers in books that she craved? Where were the all-knowing, selfless Headmasters who could send her back to her time unscathed? Where was her love interest, who would make it all worth it? Where were her friends, who would be able to comfort her in such a confusing time?

Hermione sighed, burrowing further into her dark brown coat – her most recent purchase at the village two weeks ago, a quick trip in as she'd been so focused on the dress-buying the last weekend she'd forgotten to buy it. It was delightfully warm despite its apparent thinness, unusual for the time as mostly everything seemed to be made of terrible materials, uncomfortable and not at all practical. It was funny, though, that she prefer the baggy clothes of the nineties – these ones were a lot more flattering on her.

As she entered the Three Broomsticks, she unfastened the buttons of her coat and unraveled her scarf from her neck. It was toasty in the establishment, and Hermione didn't want to sweat through her new coat. Pulling it off, she straightened her frumpy pink jumper over her flared jeans so that it didn't sit so high on her hips. It was to no avail, however, as it moved right back to sit atop them, stubborn as anything. Resigning herself to the fashion of the time, Hermione looked around the front room, searching for a blonde head (or two), her coat and scarf thrown over her arm.

"Miss Huxley!" A voice called, and Hermione turned to her right to see grey eyes peeking out through the geometric divider, which allowed the table Marlene was seated at some semblance of privacy despite its location nearest to the entrance.

Hermione made her way past the coat and hat racks, and took a sharp right to face the table, at which Marlene, nursing a half-finished butterbeer, and a woman who looked to be the older, spitting image of her, sat.

"Mrs McKinnon," Hermione greeted politely, shifting her coat and scarf to her left arm to extend her right for a handshake. "Thank you for meeting with me."

Mrs McKinnon, for all that she looked like her daughter, did not have the same aura about her. She was meaner – her eyes were keen and narrowed, as if she were inspecting Hermione for flaws. Her face was a little more pointed, now that Hermione got a good look at it, and her skin was slightly paler. The eyes and the hair were the same, though, despite the more put-together look of them – makeup, and hair perfectly swept into one of the more popular styles of the time. Hermione felt woefully inadequate; her shabby, mismatched outfit and frizzy, non-styled hair feeling glaringly out of place.

Hermione draped her clothes over the back of the empty chair, and promptly sat.

"Call me Ingrid." She told her as if she'd swiftly made a decision and deemed Hermione worthy of her company, her face losing its harshness and, as a result, causing Ingrid to look even more like her daughter. She pulled out her wand, and cast a spell on the table. Hermione presumed it was a silencing spell. She was sorely tempted to replace it with her own Muffliato, which was less conspicuous, but explaining how she knew of a spell not yet invented would be too troublesome. Severus Snape wouldn't want his efforts in spellwork spread around, Hermione was sure.

"Hermione." Hermione replied in kind, nodding with a small smile. "Marlene tells me you work for the Department of Mysteries?"

"It is well known." Ingrid acknowledged, taking a sip of what Hermione now realised was firewhisky. A bit strong for Hermione's tastes, but after remembering what she'd gone through in that particular department, she couldn't really blame Ingrid. Hermione held back a shudder at the memories.
"I was wondering what you knew about time turners."

"Merely curious?" Ingrid asked mildly, raising a blonde eyebrow. Hermione waited. "Time turners are dangerous things." Ingrid started after a moment of silence from the table, the laughter and talk around them seeming very far away. "They have much power, and in the wrong hands they could be catastrophic. I told Wilbur we shouldn't have given the Prophet anything, but he was insistent that trust in the people needed to be conveyed." Ingrid scoffed, taking another sip.

"But you don't trust people." Hermione surmised from Ingrid's expression, and she shook her head.

"No, I don't." Ingrid confirmed, frowning slightly. Marlene looked between them, curious. "If there's one thing I will take away from this job it's that people cannot be trusted. We are all too easily tempted by our own desires, or the desires of those we love. The most powerful of things should not be held in the hands of the weakest of creatures."

"I agree." Hermione thought of a particular blackened hand, and pursed her lips in distaste.

"So what do you want to know?" Ingrid asked her, in complete contradiction to her earlier words.

"Is there only one sort of time turner?"

Ingrid looked at her acutely. Hermione might have said she looked surprised, but any emotion was quickly removed from her face.

"Go on." Ingrid said, not answering her question. Hermione glanced quickly at Marlene, whose brows were raised in surprise herself.

"That is, is there a time turner that could send you back days, instead of hours? Months, maybe? Possibly years?" Hermione ignored Marlene's immediate wide-eyed look, and focused on Ingrid, whose mouth was quirking up at the corners into a slow smile.

"No." she said simply, and Hermione frowned in disappointment. Maybe a different angle?

"You said you don't trust people." Hermione repeated, "And I highly doubt the Department of Mysteries spilt all of its secrets with that article."

Ingrid continued to smile. She took another sip of her drink.

"So what other sort of time turner are they not telling people about?"

"Are you familiar," Ingrid started, ignoring Hermione's question again and leaning forward in her seat towards her, "with the Novikov self-consistency principle?"

"Yes," Hermione answered quickly, frowning, "It's the fixed time theory. You can't change the past because it's already happened – whatever you might do there is what led to the future that you're travelling fr…" Hermione trailed off, frown disappearing and a look of unease crossing her face. That theory with that particular name had not been proposed until the eighties, which meant–

Ingrid was smiling wider now, her eyes fascinated.

"Tell me," she began, ignoring the dumbfounded look on Marlene's face and the horrified look on Hermione's, "Where you come from, do people remember you as you are now? Have they ever said anything?"

Hermione gulped, an awful feeling at the back of her throat. She shook her head slowly, feeling
"Then you tell me what other sort of time turner the Department of Mysteries may be harbouring." Ingrid said smugly, sitting back in her chair like she'd just delivered an especially satisfying punchline to a fantastic joke.

The thought alone was terrible, the idea that she had not travelled back in time, but across.

"Dimensions." Marlene whispered, her butterbeer long forgotten. "Professor," she said, turning her head towards Hermione. She was still shocked, her lips just parted, her eyes wide and searching, "Have you travelled to our dimension?"

The awful feeling at the back of her throat surged up suddenly and Hermione bent over to her left, throwing up all over the floor.

Marlene's Scourgifies were helpful, but they could not get rid of the nausea in her belly or the acidic taste in her mouth. Wiping her face, Hermione righted herself again. She was pale, and sweat had formed at the back of her neck, dampening the hair at her nape.

A few of the other patrons looked at her in distaste, but the sight was not out of the ordinary – it was a Saturday, and there were sure to be many more drunkards coming through the doors of the Three Broomsticks.

"The time turner you speak of; it doesn't yet exist. We only started to think about it last week; drew up the basic plans of how we might go about manipulating the magic of the time turner to do such a thing," Ingrid continued, as if oblivious to Hermione's churning stomach, "We called it the Dimension Diverter."

Dimension diverter. Hermione swallowed back more bile, her eyes suspiciously wet.

"Professor..." Marlene said softly, and she placed her right hand gently over Hermione's left, rubbing on the back of it consolingly.

"You've experienced divergence, Miss Huxley." Ingrid stated, staring at her with a look akin to hunger, although the thought of such an emotion right now disturbed Hermione. "And I want you to tell me all about it."

---

Hermione made her way back up to the castle in a daze.

Ingrid had been a Slytherin, Hermione now knew. No one else could set up a conversation so well in their favour when the initial premise had been so lacklustre.

Her stomach was not at all settled, but she sat down to eat lunch anyway, her movements rote and her mouth desperately wanting any other taste than vomit. She ignored a lot of the students hoping to stop her for a chat, and went promptly to her rooms.

She changed without a thought, and collapsed into her bed. She was asleep within seconds.

When she woke a few hours later just before dinner, the initial shock had passed and her mind was shaky.
racing.

She finally allowed herself to feel everything that having travelled across dimensions meant.

Hermione sobbed, hard and unapologetic, into her bed covers. She curled up in a ball on her side, her nails biting into her palms with the force of her clenched fists. She screwed her eyes shut, tears leaking continuously out of their corners. Great gasps escaped her as she struggled to breathe through her tears.

*Harry,* Hermione wailed silently and miserably, *Ron.*

The only family she'd had left was lost to her, completely and utterly and forever. Her own presence in the past meant that nothing would be the same – nothing could produce the exact same Harry and Ron she had known and loved. She could make it so they were close… but small things would have changed.

She'd rather they be unrecognisable than slightly altered copies; body snatchers speaking with her friends' voices but not their words.

She spent the remainder of the weekend in her rooms, skipping meals and lying in bed. She ignored Marlene's knocks on her door, trying not to think about how she might've found her quarters.

Hermione told one of the house elves to let Nettle know she wouldn't be teaching on Monday. She hadn't had one sick day yet, so Hermione figured she was due. And finding out the world you belonged to was no longer known to you seemed like a good enough reason to skip teaching for the day.

When the *Prophet* landed on her bedside on the morning of Valentine's Day, Hermione was fully prepared to take another day off. In fact, Flummy's name was on the tip of her tongue before she glimpsed a small headline on the paper, inconsequential in terms of its placement.

*HELEN RYTKA, WITCH WHO LIVED AS MUGGLE, DIES*

Hermione frowned, her brain starting up and stuttering like an old engine, tired and rusty.

*RYTKA, 18, was discovered dead in her share house last month. Muggle authorities only notified the Ministry recently upon concluding her autopsy – no determined cause of death, despite many fatal wounds inflicted after her passing. Healers did a post-mortem evaluation of her body and concluded that Rytka was indeed murdered by the Killing Curse, the wounds a cover up for the Muggle world. Sources confirm that Rytka was a witch, but did not know it – she managed to avoid the lists of all wizarding schools due to her false Muggle papers. Rytka and her mother moved around continuously so as to evade Muggle deportation and possible imprisonment. At the time of her death, Rytka and her mother were estranged and Rytka was providing for herself. The Prophet is deeply saddened to hear that Rytka did not receive the education she deserved. Perhaps an investigation into the failed process of locating Muggleborn children for enrolment is needed.

There are no suspects at this time.*

Hermione put down the paper, her mind whirring.

She got dressed for classes. She ignored the concerned looks of her fellow professors as she ate breakfast, then dove headlong into teaching the third years with rambunctiousness. Nettle had a slightly baffled look on her face all lesson – to her, Hermione had been sick the day previous, and Hermione was sure she looked every bit as wan and terrible as she would if she were *actually* sick.
By the time her detention with the Ravenclaw came around, Hermione was positively buzzing, intent on discussing it with someone.

As soon as Marlene entered the classroom, Hermione cast the appropriate charms before manically gesturing her in.

"Professor?" Marlene inquired worriedly, trying to catch her eyes as she sat down at Hermione's desk. Hermione waved her off, already seated at Nettle's. It was the arrangement they'd taken last week, when they'd marked papers together.

"I'm fine, I'm fine." Hermione said, disregarding the sceptical look on her student's face. "I was so caught up," She continued with no preamble, scraping her chair loudly against the stone floor to face Marlene, "in what I was losing that I didn't think about what I was gaining!"

"And what is that?" Marlene prodded carefully, wary of Hermione's crazy eyes.

"Marlene," Hermione said, taking a deep breath and grinning with all her might. Her eyes were watery, but that was nothing. "I can change the future."

---

So the Dimension Diverter worked like so: every turn sent the user back to an instance in time where a big enough change had occurred to split a dimension – the user's current dimension – into two.

Not following?

Hermione had turned the dial twice. The usual dial of a time turner, that is – the second dial determined nothing special, it was there purely as a distinctive feature; for the ability of a dimension diverter to disguise itself was crucial. It was an even more dangerous object than a time turner, and Ingrid had guaranteed that it would not be easy to find, let alone identify.

With each turn of the dial Hermione had made, she had determined the amount of dimension splits she would skip.

Two times, meant Hermione had skipped one dimension split; the latest dimension split –she would never know when it had occurred – and then gone straight to the next one.

August 31st, 1977.

Something had occurred on that date, something that could have changed Hermione's own timeline drastically. Something that could be changed enough to rip the dimension in two and plop Hermione in the newly formed one, a copy of the original but now forever altered by both the occurrence and Hermione herself.

There was no going back. Even if Hermione kept herself in stasis of some kind, sleeping the years away only to awaken in 1999... well, it would all be different. At least, that's what she was presuming. The change in this dimension had yet to be identified, and so Hermione was left wondering how it would modify the unfolding of events as she knew them. But there was no doubt – it would modify them.

Hermione spent Wednesday's free period before lunch zealously writing a new list.
Peter Pettigrew was number one.

Peter, who had betrayed his friends to Voldemort. If Hermione somehow stopped him, she could give Harry his parents; a childhood.

But Hermione thought it might be better than to simply stop him – if she became close enough with the Marauders, a carefully timed suspicious comment about Peter's absences and loyalties could lead them away from him. They wouldn't even make him Secret Keeper. Crisis averted.

But, a tiny voice said at the back of her head, nearly forgotten, more than one innocent life may be spared.

That was the easy route, Hermione decided. The hardest one, the one with the most reward: keep Peter from becoming a Death Eater at all. After all, Halloween 1981 was years away at this point – if Hermione acted early enough, James and Lily might not even have to go into hiding. The prophecy might not even be made!

Hermione approached the following days with a weird sort of calm. Her first objective would be the hardest, but once she cracked him, she could focus on destabilising Voldemort himself.

She knew, without a doubt, that both Harry and Ron would have worked to rid the world of him once more if they had travelled across dimensions and back in time, just like she had. She knew, without a doubt, that she would have to approach Dumbledore. She could caution him now, warn him of the way in which the Hallows would tempt him. She could change so much.

It was overwhelming, the choices at her disposal.

That Friday, upon seeing Dumbledore at dinner for the first time in at least a week, Hermione made her decision.

She gave the password to the gargoyle, who jumped aside lazily as if the late hour made it sleepy. It was barely ten o'clock. As a teacher, Hermione could, of course, be out after curfew. She didn't want any nosy students overhearing anything, and so it was better not to take the chance.

She knocked, waiting impatiently.

"Come in." called the Headmaster, and Hermione opened the door.

Upon gazing at him behind his desk, looking at her over half-moon spectacles with a large book in his hand, Hermione's confidence fled her.

"Headmaster," she said quietly, "I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Not at all, Miss Huxley. I was simply engaging in some light reading." Hermione's lips quirked, amused at a private joke. Ron had always said her light reading to be awfully ambitious; it seemed the Headmaster shared such a quirk. "What can I do for you?"

"I've got something to tell you." Hermione blurted out. Well, it was better to get the ball rolling than stutter out soft explanations.

Dumbledore's face remained impassive throughout her tale, although the small smile was more of a ghostly impression than an actual thing. By the time she finished up her proclamations about changing the future, his fingers were steepled together in front of him and he looked to be in great thought.
"And you're certain?" He asked, eyes piercing into hers. "Do you have the Diverter with you, by any chance?"

"No," Hermione said quickly, thinking up a lie, "I destroyed it once I realised what it was capable of in the wrong hands."

"Ah." Dumbledore responded. "Pity."

"Professor, I really believe I can make things better." She ignored his remorse at the Diverter's supposed destruction, "Not just for my— for my friends in the future, but for everyone. Sir," Hermione said, staring at him imploringly as she paused for a moment. "I know how to defeat him."

Dumbledore, for once, seemed unable to say anything. His beard, still white but not as long as it had been in her time, seemed to twitch in surprise.

"Dumbledore, how much do you know about horcruxes?"

---

The next morning, Hermione felt better than she had in months. The fourth Quidditch match of the year was upon them – Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff – and Hermione was actually considering going for no other reason than to watch the game. That, of all things, was a sure sign of her improved attitude.

Dumbledore had indeed known about horcruxes, as she had suspected. He had not known about Voldemort's quest to use them, let alone make seven, however. His face had been awfully grim, grimmer even than when Cedric Diggory had died.

They'd laid out a hesitant plan, the bare bones of it.

"I've been away from school, Hermione, in the hopes of mustering up enough active resistance to Voldemort." He'd explained the night before when she'd expressed confusion over his absence, "I've called it the Order of the Phoenix. I presume, now, that you will join. Ingrid McKinnon's word is enough." His eyes had twinkled at that, and Hermione had pursed her lips. It had come as no surprise that Ingrid was in cahoots with Dumbledore. He hadn't known about her dimension travel, no, but the fact that Ingrid was in the Order was not surprising in the least. Marlene had, after all, said Ingrid's sister had nearly died by Voldemort's hand.

"Heading to the match, Hermione?" Nettle said as Hermione exited the staff room that morning. The meeting had been brief, and thankfully remiss of particulars.

"Yes, I think I might, actually," answered Hermione, smiling at Nettle. "Care to walk down to the pitch with me?"

"You're unusually perky today." Nettle observed as Hermione finished up her story of Patrick Xiao's progress, embellished a little for humour's sake.

"I've just got a good feeling," Hermione said, smiling once more, "Sometimes it feels like I'm powerless at this school, hearing about the happenings outside from the Prophet. But today, I feel like I can make a difference here."
"That's good, Hermione," Nettle said, sharing in her smile as her black hair whipped about in the wind. "I have to say, it perks me up to see you so optimistic."

For all of Hermione's previous talk of not particularly enjoying Quidditch, when the game was as nail-biting as it had been that day, she was helpless to enjoy herself. Gryffindor and Hufflepuff were the top teams this year; mostly in part to James Potter's apparently flawless captaining, and the overall skill of the Hufflepuffs, who excelled under any leadership in their current composition.

When Gryffindor won only by ten points, Hermione's throat was sore from shouting and her arms had received a work out of their own from all the waving and cheering she had done. As a professor, she wasn't supposed to take sides; but old habits die hard. She'd cheered for the Hufflepuffs as well, herself and Nettle surprising the other teachers with their vigour. But she had been a little relieved upon Gryffindor's win, if only because that meant the Marauders wouldn't be moping about the castle. They were sore losers, she was sure.

It was just as they began on the way back to her rooms that Hermione bumped into Peter. She'd invited Nettle along – the first time since her arrival. It was long overdue – they'd become friends, now that Hermione realised she could have any. Maybe Emilia could lighten up the décor a bit, help Hermione feel less like she was living out of a suitcase.

"What've you got there, Mr Pettigrew?" Emilia asked, coming to a slow stop. Peter's arms were full of an array of foods, from treacle tarts to an overabundance of muffins and Hermione thought she might have glimpsed a few large packets of Muggle crisps, of all things.

"There's a party, in the common room." He replied, trying to stop a pumpkin pie from falling. Hermione gave her wand a quick wave, levitating it for him. He shot her a grateful look.

"Ah, yes, to celebrate the win, I presume?" Emilia said, smiling pleasantly at Peter. Hermione still couldn't eradicate her unease, despite resolving to help the boy.

"Let us help you, Peter." Hermione said, trying to infuse some warmth into her voice. Peter's shocked face was evidence that she hadn't been entirely successful.

"I see you volunteered my own services, there," Emilia said with a laugh, waving her own wand and levitating half of Peter's stash. Hermione peered around the chubby seventh year, and saw a long line of bottles following him, clinking together impatiently as they all stood. Hermione gathered them all up in her arms, and urged Peter forward.

"It seems Peter's friends have left him to do all the work," Hermione said, feeling a little better about helping out now that she realised what she had to do, "It's only fair they receive a chewing out from two professors, is it not?"

Nettle laughed again as they retraced their steps, heading in the completely opposite direction. Hermione's rooms were closer, of course, to Ravenclaw Tower, which was on the west side of the castle. The Gryffindor common room was on the seventh floor on the east side.

"I haven't seen you much lately, Professor…" Peter began as they started ascending. The staircases were cooperating today, "Professor Huxley, I mean." He clarified at their confused looks.

"Oh, you haven't?" Hermione asked, knowing full well that she had been avoiding Peter for the majority of her time as a teacher.

"Moony is in a right state," Peter commented, huffing a little, out of breath, as they ascended up to the fifth floor now. The route had been quick due the amiable nature of the castle. Hermione knew
that most days it took more than double the amount of time to get so high up. "He didn't even come
to the game today."

Hermione frowned, sharing a glance with Nettle. For all her ribbing, Emilia liked Remus. He was
studious, but not obnoxious (like Hermione had been as a student), and he was always insightful.

"What do you mean?"

"He's been holed up in the dorm since Friday afternoon, sleeping."

They reached the Fat Lady, Peter providing the password – “Asphodel.” – and stepped inside. The
common room was packed with all the students, a rare sight to have them all in one place. There was
already a small amount of food on a table in the corner of the room, and their own additions had it
nearly toppling over. Peter inadvertently led them to his other friends but as he’d previously
mentioned, Remus was nowhere in sight.

James was looking humbled by the proclamations Sirius was making, saying how Potter would be
the next big name in professional Quidditch. Hermione rolled her eyes, and realised the redhead next
to James was doing the same. They shared a commiserating look.

"James!" Hermione exclaimed over Sirius's shouting, "Where's Remus?"

"He's in bed! I'm not sure you–"

But Hermione ignored his concerned face. Pushing past students, she made her way up the staircase
to the boys' dormitories, and entered the seventh year dorm. All the beds were empty bar one, which
had closed curtains. No sounds were coming from it.

Hermione stalked over, and pushed aside the curtains in one fell swoop. Groans filled the air.

"Silencing charm."

"Remus?" said Hermione, frowning as she perched herself on the side of his bed. His covers were
falling off the bed, and his sheets seemed damp, like he'd been sweating. "Remus?"

With another groan, Remus turned over, facing her. His expression was twisted into one of immense
discomfort, and Hermione's heart ached in sympathy. His cheeks were flushed, his bare chest
looking frail despite the strength implied by his toned muscles. "Remus, why didn't you say
anything?" She lifted her hand and pushed his damp hair out of his face.

At her touch, his expression eased. Hermione frowned more deeply.

Why was he so ill? Hermione hadn't remembered Remus mentioning why full moon symptoms got
worse or better. She'd read that the presence of pack, if anything, would soothe them. The fact that
Remus was reacting so adversely since she'd arrived, but was also comforted by her presence… it
just didn't add up.

After a minute or two, Hermione having moved her hand to pat Remus's arm consolingly, he opened
his eyes.

"Hermione?" he mumbled, a confused frown marring his flushed face, "What are you doing here?"
His voice was raspy with disuse.

"Why did you tell me you were… you were sick?" asked Hermione, feeling wretched.
"I was fine until Friday," Remus murmured, a weak cough escaping him. "Then it hit me and I've been in bed ever since. Sleeping… sleeping helps."

"It doesn't look like it's helping," Hermione observed, her eyes grazing over his flushed cheeks and sweaty hair. Remus flushed further, this time in embarrassment. "You didn't go to the Madam Pomfrey?"

"I didn't want to worry her." Remus mumbled, looking away. Hermione sighed.

"How are you feeling now?" she asked after a moment.

"Better, actually." Remus answered, frowning. If Hermione weren't worried she'd say he looked adorable. "Much better, in fact. How long have you been here?"

"Only a few minutes… you don't think I'm helping, do you?"

"You could be," Remus said, looking deep in thought, "I mean, this is the best I've felt since before it hit."

None of it made any sense. Hadn't the problems begun with her arrival? Remus mentioned that his usual methods weren't as effective, if at all, when she'd come along. And now her mere presence made him feel drastically better? Hermione was desperate to figure out what was going on. Add that to her pile of things to do, and Hermione was quickly running out of any semblance of free time. Now that she had the ability to spend it with people other than herself, it was in short supply.

Figures, she thought moodily.

"Your friends are worried about you. If you're up to it, you should join the party downstairs."

"We won?" His expression cleared, his eyes now alight with emotion.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes, only just."

She rose her eyebrows as he scrambled out of bed, his newfound energy surprising despite their conversation. Hermione looked away, heat in her cheeks, as Remus pulled on some jeans and a shirt. There were some things professors were not meant to see.

"Let's go! I hope Peter got pumpkin pie, he knows that's my favourite." Remus rambled, tugging at her robe sleeve so she was standing up with him.

"Remus," Hermione started worryingly, "Take it easy."

"I told you, I feel much better!" He exclaimed, spreading his arms wide with a smile on his face. He didn't look nearly so clammy, and the flush on his cheeks seemed healthy rather than feverish now.

"I'm thinking that maybe we should spend more time together, up until the full moon." Remus nodded, pulling her towards the door, "If this is the result, I mean."

"Sounds good." Remus agreed, barrelling down the stairs. Hermione was hot on his heels, ready to catch him at any moment. This complete turnaround was baffling.

"Everything alright?" Emilia asked, sidling up to her at the base of the stairs with a butterbeer in her hand. Remus had walked over to his friends, accepting their playful shoves and ruffling of his hair in good nature.

"Surprisingly, yes." she answered, gazing at her fellow werewolf in befuddlement.
"Are you going to tell me what all that—" She gestured at Remus's everything, "—was all about?"

Hermione didn't answer, and instead caught Lily's frowning eyes from across the room. The emerald green reflected exactly what Hermione herself was thinking.

What was up with Remus?

---

The next day was Sunday, of course, and it seemed the celebrations of Gryffindor had left them all lethargic by breakfast, an amusing sight given a first year accidentally poked herself in the eye with her spoonful of porridge.

Hermione had been about to leave the Defence office in search of Remus that afternoon, when he beat her to it.

Knocks sounded on the open door, and Hermione looked up from a second year essay on basilisks. The irony was not lost on her.

"Remus," Hermione greeted, putting down her quill with a warm smile. His sandy hair looked light and soft, and the grey checked collared shirt made him look extremely approachable. The jeans were a little tight, but Hermione supposed anything looked tight compared to the ninetines.

"Hermione," he returned, giving her a nod and a smile, "I know yesterday was a bit strange, but I think you were right. For some reason, being together helps." His eyes widened a touch, and he was quick to clarify, "I mean, spending time together."

"I knew what you meant." Hermione said, tamping down an amused grin.

"Right." Remus nodded again, looking around the room. Hermione leant back in her chair, assessing him. "I brought something.

"Oh?" inquired Hermione.

"Peter, he's great with electronics, you see," Remus began, pulling out a very old looking radio from his back, which she only just noticed hung from his shoulder. Hermione figured anything would look old, however, to someone who had witnessed the rise of the walkman. "He tweaks things all the time for his mother, just so she can have Muggle appliances in the house. She was a Muggleborn and she misses it, sometimes. Anyway," Remus placed the radio on the desk, moving closer. "I thought we could listen to it."

Turning on the radio produced a large amount of static, quickly remedied by the hasty way in which Remus turned the frequency dials, searching for a station. They must have stumbled across something, because the tune of something unfamiliar to Hermione started up, slightly crackly but relatively pleasant all the time.

"Do you listen to much music?" Remus asked, looking at her from under his hair. His shaggy head was in no style reminiscent of the time in which they were living – it looked as though someone simply cut it into whatever made it manageable. It seemed it hadn't been cut at least since the start of the school year with the way it was hanging into his eyes. Where Sirius's longish hair was intentional, it seemed Remus found it rather bothersome.
"Not these days, no." Hermione admitted, thinking of how any music she had listened to didn't yet exist. How would she ever explain The Spice Girls? Or Oasis? She was familiar, though, with a few older artists. "My mother loved Queen."

"Really?" Remus remarked, giving her an amused look, "My mother hates them. Says they're too grating."

"Maybe their older stuff. Their new stuff, I'm sure she'd like." Hermione tried not to think about the fact that a lot of her favourite songs of theirs had yet to be released.

"And what do you love?"

Hermione huffed out a laugh, looking down at the essay in front of her, her right hand fiddling with its corners.

"I'm fond of Fleetwood Mac." Hermione blurted out. She didn't love them, but they were a band she probably knew the most about.

Remus screwed up his face. Hermione laughed.

"Not a fan?" She asked lightly, still laughing.

"Not exactly." Remus replied, still looking slightly repulsed. A new song began to play, its singers distinctive. Remus brightened, coming around to hold out a hand to her. Hermione looked down at it, sceptical. "This is definitely more my style."

"Really?" Hermione held back her laughter this time, grinning instead, "Remus Lupin loves ABBA?"

"What? Is it a crime?"

"Not at all." Hermione commented, and she knew he could detect the mirth in her voice, "Perfectly reasonable."

"Well come on, then!" He urged her, shaking his outstretched hand impatiently.

"What, you want to dance?" Hermione asked, surprised. Remus rolled his eyes, choosing instead to grab her arm and pull her up out of her chair himself instead of wait for her.

"You have to dance to Dancing Queen," Remus insisted, swinging her arms wildly about in a weird definition of the word. Hermione let out a laugh, and realised she couldn't stop. Remus was grinning now, his good mood infectious. Hermione, for all her confusion the day previous, thought that if it showed her this side of Remus, she might just be willing to stay in the dark about the whole pack thing.

Remus twirled her and then pulled her close, swinging them back and forth as if they were dancing formally. The rhythm was all wrong, though, and instead it looked like they were locked in some sort of strange jig.

It was this memory – the both of them close together, laughing heartily and dancing like children – that sustained Hermione during the full moon that month. That memory and the ones following; Remus's breathless admiration of her uncoordinated moves, the way in which they'd read in the classroom the next day after dinner and until curfew, spending their free period together (although Peter had made an appearance), and ultimately enjoying one another's company in a way Hermione had not previously allowed herself to do.
So when the transformation came around on Thursday, the both of them having to miss Defence, it was a strangely welcome change. The transformation was, as always, painful – the two of them screaming and groaning as their bones snapped and fur grew violently out of their skin – but it was seamless. She blacked out one moment and was awake the next, feeling achy but not at all in the usual discomfort. Remus expressed the same surprise, running his hands over his skin to find no new scratches and very little pain. They looked at each other in wonder.

So it seemed, for now, that they'd solved the puzzle. The whys went unanswered, the but hows were resolved, and so Hermione felt like they'd at least accomplished something.

That was until the newspaper the next day. In an attempt to reduce panic, they'd relegated it to the third page. But the headline was stark, and it drew Hermione instantly at breakfast that morning. Her mind, the sharpest it had ever been on a day after the full moon, froze in horror.

GREYBACK ATTACKS FAMILY OPENLY OPPOSED TO YOU-KNOW-WHO

Fenrir Greyback, long suspected of being a follower of You-Know-Who, attacked a family of three on last night's full moon. The Abney family, consisting mostly of half-bloods, have had places within the Ministry for decades. Joel Abney, who worked in the Department of Magical Transportation, and his wife and young daughter were mauled by Greyback yesterday evening. Abney managed to defend his family against the werewolf, but not until after his own daughter, five years old, was bitten. The Abneys were vocal in their opposition of You-Know-Who, which suggests that the wizard is targeting those who oppose him in the cruellest ways.

How long will the Ministry allow this Dark wizard to terrorise us all? The emergence of his so-called "Death Eaters" troubles the DailyProphet, for their anti-Muggle propaganda and attacks leave the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy at risk of collapse. Muggles are expected to react unfavourably to our world, and it seems He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named plans to use this to his advantage. After the plethora of missing witches and wizards over the last few months, how can any of us feel safe? It seems that You-Know-Who is not afraid to use the most abhorrent of terror tactics – it is only a matter of time until we or the ones we love fall victim to his terrible schemes.

Hermione looked up from the paper, the owl next to her hooting impatiently as it waited for her payment. Her eyes caught Remus's, whose face was pale despite the positive start to the morning before the article.

Hermione glanced to her right, seeing the Headmaster's chair empty. Flinging a coin onto the table, ignoring the indignant squawk of the owl and Emilia's questions, Hermione made her way quickly out of the Great Hall. So quickly, in fact, that she almost ran into the Headmaster himself on her way to his office, just outside in the Gargoyle Corridor.

"Dumbledore!" Hermione gasped.

"Miss Huxley," He acknowledged, looking at her intently, "You seem to be in rather a hurry. I was just off to the Great Hall for breakfast myself."

"Have you seen the paper this morning, sir?" Hermione breathed out, trying to catch her breath.

Dumbledore's face fell minutely, enough for her to realise he had.

"Yes. I know Mr Abney. I will have to visit him and his family at St Mungo's."

"Sir, this is… this is how it started. He's attacking anyone who opposes him. It only gets worse. The Order has to begin thwarting him. And—"
"Go on." Dumbledore urged her slowly after she stopped herself.

"And you should start inducting James Potter and his friends. Marlene McKinnon, even." Hermione insisted, staring down the professor.

"Hermione, they are only children." Dumbledore told her, looking saddened. Hermione had been through this all before, however, and Dumbledore could not hold a candle to Molly Weasley in stubbornness.

"They won't be for much longer," Hermione assured him fiercely, "Voldemort will make sure of that."

The Headmaster was silent for a moment, assessing her.

"I will propose the idea to them. I hope you know what you are doing, Miss Huxley. I have a strong suspicion you are inviting the traitor into our midst by insisting on the Order's formation so soon."

His tone was hard, unforgiving, but Hermione was not put off.

"Believe me, Dumbledore," Hermione said, gritting her teeth, "I do."

That's what Hermione told herself over and over. That's what she told herself when she saw Peter Pettigrew manage to take another seventh year by surprise, stunning them in the back during Duelling Club that Friday.

I know what I'm doing.

Peter was congratulated by his friends, a shy smile on his face.

I definitely know what I'm doing.

Chapter End Notes

And so the other shoe drops! Thoughts; likes, dislikes?

Also, did you see that I did the thing? The thing being including the story title in the story. Hehe.
I've worked out the problem: I've read every good Remione around, completed and WIP, and so I can't get my fix any other way than to write this story. It's a hard life. And now the fun begins!

With the dawn of March came Hermione's realisation that she had only three months left of the school year, three months left to set Peter straight – it was her most imperative mission. After all, Voldemort's horcruxes would be around for a while yet. It was preferable, of course, to destroy them and as a result him as soon as possible, but beggars couldn't be choosers. Hermione would take her chances where she could but as of now, Peter was her focal point.

"Peter," Hermione called on the seventh year after the month's first Gryffindor Defence class, "Can I see you for a moment?"

The short, brown-haired boy looked nervous, visibly fidgeting despite the laidback response of his friends, who simply bade him farewell and left, laughing amongst themselves. Hermione frowned at their behaviour, making mental notes to address later.

"Professor?" Peter inquired apprehensively, shuffling on the spot. He stood in front of her desk, Nettle's own to his left. Hermione conjured up a comfortable chair and gestured for him to sit, which he proceeded to do with wariness.

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"Has Professor McGonagall spoken to you about your career choices, Peter? My understanding is that you were suitably consulted during your O.W.L. year." Hermione looked Peter right in the face, ignoring the squeamish feeling at the pit of her stomach to show him that he had her full attention.

"Uh… yeah. Yes, she has." Peter responded, fiddling with the hem of his robes, which were open. Beneath sat the usual haphazardly worn uniform – pants (in a slightly different cut than she was used to), white shirt, and grey jumper. Peter's shirt was untucked, the corners sticking out unfashionably. To add to his overall dishevelled appearance, his tie was hanging loosely outside of his jumper. Hermione wasn't sure whether he'd dressed in front of a mirror that morning. In a strange and completely roundabout sort of way, he reminded her vaguely of Ron.

"And?" Hermione prompted at the silence that followed. Peter jumped as if startled, and rushed to continue.

"Well, uh… well, Professor McGonagall just told me what I'm good at, I suppose. I chose my subjects from there and didn't really think about a career." His watery eyes looked concerned for himself, "I thought maybe an Auror."

Hermione held back her wince, but only just. There was no way Peter really wanted to be an Auror. A person who succumbed to Voldemort due to fear didn't want to join those who fought him every day.

"Peter," Hermione said patiently, leaning forward on her elbows, "What is it you really want to do?"
"I—..." He trailed off, frowning down at the desk, "No one's ever really asked me that before."

And therein lay the problem. Hermione was right. As easy as it would be to condemn Peter to his terrible life choices, she couldn't sit by and watch someone be tainted by the one thing that tainted them all – insecurity. Peter Pettigrew had no backbone, that was true. He was a coward, definitely. But a small part of Hermione, a very small part of her, felt the stirrings of pity in her heart at his forlorn frown. She nurtured this pity, fostering it into something a little greater: compassion.

"Have a think about it, Peter. You're not bad at Defence, but McGonagall tells me you're better than you think at Transfiguration. I've got some ideas for you, once you're ready to talk about them." McGonagall had not spoken to Hermione in a while outside of a staff meeting setting, but Peter didn't know that. The ideas Hermione spoke of? Minimal, but anyone who could become an Animagus during their Hogwarts years was sure to be good at Transfiguration as a whole. The average wizard would not be capable of such a thing.

Hermione felt a little better about the Peter situation after that. She would have to continuously work on him, mould him into someone who saw facing Voldemort as the easier option rather than the harder one. She'd have to remind him, constantly, of the danger of Voldemort's side, and the way in which the man respected no one but himself. And maybe his snake.

"No, he made Nagini a horcrux after he hid in Albania," Hermione commented absently, crossing out the snake on Dumbledore's very rough timeline. They were seated in his office, the day after Hermione's talk with Pettigrew. She'd finished up with Duelling Club and joined the Headmaster straight away.

*Friday nights are so thrilling,* she thought as she added labels to certain things, and attributed events to particular people.

Upon pausing to take in the sparse network of lines on parchment, Hermione heaved a great sigh.

"It's not enough." she declared, annoyed.

"We can hardly expect you to remember everything. Regardless, once we start to destroy them, this timeline will be completely incorrect." Dumbledore commented, his long fingers hovering over the words that Hermione remembered of the infamous prophecy.

Hermione frowned, considering a particular hastily written word.

"What year did Voldemort ask you for the Defence position?" asked Hermione, moving closer to the parchment, her hair falling down, hanging, to lightly brush it.

"I believe it was 1957. I had been appointed the year before, taking over from our dear Armando."

The Headmaster in question huffed in his portrait, and Hermione could imagine the look on his face, after having read much about him in her favourite *Hogwarts: A History*.

"I'd forgotten, I can't believe I'd forgotten," Hermione muttered, scratching her quill on the parchment feverishly. "This will be the first. It's by far the easiest." Hermione explained, leaning away from the desk so Dumbledore could see what she'd written.

"Tom hid the Diadem in the Come and Go Room?" He asked mildly, "Interesting."

"I don't suppose you have any bright ideas about how we might destroy them? Unfortunately, I don't have a basilisk venom-infused Sword of Gryffindor this time around." Hermione said wryly.

Dumbledore steepled his fingers in thought, looking pensively at the parchment in front of them. He
was seated at his desk, and she was standing to his right. It had been easier than sitting across from him and constantly turning the parchment so as to write something down, although being so close to Dumbledore left her slightly uneasy. She supposed she still didn't completely trust him. After all, disclosing the information of the prophecy had left him incredibly sombre, but with a strange sort of glint in his eye. Hermione was discomforted, to say the least. She didn't like the thought that he was already viewing Harry as a possible weapon if they failed. She'd neglected to tell him Harry had been a horcrux, of course – she wanted to avoid Harry's brave face off with Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest at all costs. No one should have to do that, let alone a seventeen year old orphaned boy.

"You mentioned Fiendfyre?" Dumbledore asked her.

"Yes, but you know as well as I do that it is hardly controllable."

"Hmm," Dumbledore hummed, "Maybe."

_of course, the Elder Wand!_

Hermione had neglected to tell Dumbledore of the Hallows. James had the Invisibility Cloak, and the Resurrection Stone was fitted within the Gaunt ring… to tell him of its location would leave him a victim of his own temptation once more. Hermione, for all her unease at his presence and her distrust, did not want Dumbledore to die. He was an immensely powerful wizard, someone who would be formidable to all ambitious Dark wizards in the future. Hermione wasn't really willing to sacrifice him for the cause, which she realised was incredibly ironic.

So she hadn't mentioned the Hallows, and he presumed she did not know. She planned to keep it that way. Dumbledore had given up his personal quest for the Hallows, she knew… and if anyone were to become the Master of Death, Dumbledore would probably be one of the better options.

"I don't particularly fancy facing down a basilisk." Hermione said.

"I'm afraid, Miss Huxley, that it may be our only option. It will have to be killed at some point, regardless."

"I suppose," Hermione said reluctantly, hesitating, "It seems a shame to kill such a rare animal."

"Your academic is showing, Miss Huxley." Dumbledore said with amusement, and Hermione turned to see him gazing upon her with warmth.

It was strange, to be a recipient of Dumbledore's fondness in this era.

"You can hardly debate this with me, Dumbledore," Hermione said with a huff, moving around to sit in the chair at the other side of his desk, "Basilisks have been outlawed for centuries, but maybe if we studied them– well, I'm sure you can imagine the possibilities."

"I believe I can," he answered, "However, I do not trust others to study them as ethically as you might. Though we digress!" He clapped his hands together as if concluding their meeting. "It is late. I believe we will continue this tomorrow evening at the same time, unless you are otherwise occupied?" Hermione ignored the twinkle in his eye and simply raised a sardonic eyebrow.

"Excellent! Oh, and before you go, Miss Huxley," He added as Hermione stood up, straightening her robes. She stopped herself, looking to the Headmaster in askance, "I extended my invitation to your friends. I have invited them to my office tomorrow night to introduce them to the idea, though I suspect we will be inducting them as well. After all, we still need to induct you."
Hermione glared at him, though it was hardly her best. Yes, she needed to be inducted, but in a rare fit of thoughtlessness she had presumed she would be inducted separately. A part of her still dreaded drawing attention, although her presence was not as dangerous now that she knew she was in a different dimension and not the past. Although, she still had knowledge of a possible future, and that was dangerous in its own way. Voldemort would benefit from her information, and Hermione didn't like the idea of drawing his notice.

"Goodnight, Headmaster."

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"Miss Huxley," James said with surprise, his brows rising beneath his glasses, "What are you doing here?"

"She's in the Order, you idiot," Sirius said, rolling his eyes, "Pretty obvious."

James shoved his friend whilst Lily rolled her own eyes, her patience obviously running thin.

"Not quite yet." Hermione said, giving them all a slightly brittle smile.

"Miss Huxley is here, as you are, to join the Order. Professor McGonagall is present as witness."

The older teacher gave all of them a nod, her face stern.

"Are there any questions you might have?" He looked around at them; the Marauders, Lily, Marlene and Hermione herself. The students looked a little nervous, and Hermione supposed that intent to protect themselves and their friends against Voldemort was all good in theory, but the actuality of it outside of the castle walls was probably quite daunting. Hermione wouldn't necessarily know – she'd been facing Voldemort inside the castle walls since she was eleven.

"I presume we won't be able to do much during school." Lily said, frowning.

"In a way," Dumbledore answered, smiling warmly at the Head Girl, "You will not be taking on the missions the rest of us will be, but you will be useful enough. After all, the Hogwarts grapevine is incredibly valuable."

"Sorry for being so plain, Professor, but why induct us at all? The debateable value of the rumour mill is hardly a solid reason." Marlene said, her arms folded stubbornly.

"It was upon Miss Huxley's request, Miss McKinnon." Dumbledore said, causing Hermione to glare at him. She realised she might be doing that a lot, now that she was to be inducted into the Order.

"You requested us?" James said, his voice laced with shock, "Us?"

Hermione pursed her lips. She was leaning against one of Dumbledore's spindly-legged tables, her hands gripping its edge with white knuckles.

"I believe you need to know what's going on. I know some of you expressed interest in becoming Aurors—" Hermione's eyes flickered to James and Sirius, who stood side by side, "—and we'll need all the knowledgeable witches and wizards we can get in the Ministry. Besides, you're all talented students."
Peter blushed, looking down at his feet.

"You will be notified of any meetings a week prior to their commencing date," Dumbledore notified them, "Miss Huxley has assured me she will provide a method of communication for the Order of the Phoenix." Her Protean charmed coins would be in circulation once more. "The Order is, first and foremost, a resistance group. If you would prefer to remain neutral or otherwise, you may leave now. Of course, I have cast a rather handy charm which prevents you from blabbing to any of your classmates. Alas, the choice is yours." None of them moved, although Hermione saw Peter glance quickly at his friends for confirmation. She frowned slightly. "Well then," Dumbledore clapped his hands together, looking pleased, "Shall we begin?"

The induction was short, and nothing at all how Hermione imagined one might be inducted into the Death Eaters, which was a good thing. Dumbledore simply asked them to vow – unofficially, of course – to work toward the defeat of Voldemort and his followers in every way they could. There were no spells. After all, how else would Peter Pettigrew have become a double agent so easily?

"Perfect. Miss Huxley, if you will." Hermione pulled out her fake galleons, having arrived slightly before the students and charming them appropriately.

"These are fake galleons. Whatever you do, please do not mix them up with real money. We don't want them getting into the wrong hands." She passed them out, Lily inspecting it thoroughly. Remus looked intrigued at the way the galleon seemed totally normal. "The time and date of our meetings will appear where the numerals are normally located. The coin will warm up upon changing. Please check it regularly."

"A rather clever invention." Dumbledore observed, beaming. Hermione wanted to roll her eyes, but decided against it. There was a limit to her rudeness, she decided.

"I had hoped we might be able to meet soon for a proper briefing, but I'm afraid some information has come to light that is rather… time sensitive. Alas, I am sure you have all been reading the Prophet, yes?"

"Yeah. Heard a family of goblins got murdered near Nottingham this morning. Was such a great start to my day." Sirius said sarcastically, a dark look on his face.

Dumbledore continued. "These disappearances, murders, and maulings are all by products of Voldemort's plans."

"What does he want?" James asked, a fierce expression on his face. Hermione noticed he shifted a little closer to Lily, and held back a smile.

Dumbledore looked contemplative.

"We are not certain, but we have our suspicions. He is attempting to spread fear throughout the wizarding world. It seems he is already successful, if the Daily Prophet will not publish the name he has fashioned for himself."

"Voldemort is building up his forces," Hermione said, ignoring the way all of the heads in the room swivelled towards her, "He's looking to dominate. He's probably already got his hands in the Ministry, although no one would like to acknowledge it. He'll be targeting anyone who could threaten his rise to power. Once he has the Ministry, he'll look to take over other symbolic strongholds…" At this, Hermione couldn't help but glance at Dumbledore.

"Hogwarts?!" Sirius blurted, outraged. The others looked similarly indignant, although Marlene kept
a carefully blank expression. "He can't take Hogwarts! What about the kids?"

"You-Know-Who doesn't care about children, Mr Black… Sirius." The Transfiguration professor corrected herself. They weren't in a classroom now.

"We are hoping, of course, that it will not come to that." Dumbledore said, looking at them over his half-moon spectacles. "In fact, we have good reason to believe it won't. But that, I'm afraid, is not for your ears."

"I thought we were in the Order." Remus said, a frown etched into his brow.

"There are some things, Remus, that are better left to those of us capable of facing them. As Lily has previously mentioned, you are all currently in school. If we are still facing him once you graduate, I am sure you will be privy to this knowledge if Hermione permits it."

Hermione glared at him again. Remus was looking at her, open-mouthed. The others looked even more offended that she knew, which was somewhat laughable. Although, she was only slightly older than them.

"On that note," Hermione said, "Sirius, I need you to talk to your brother."

Sirius looked appropriately disgusted.

"Regulus? What do you need with him? He's probably already got one of those tattoos on his arm." Sirius sneered.

Hermione pursed her lips in annoyance.

"That's precisely why we need him, Sirius. I know you think he is lost to you, but…" Hermione struggled with the right way to phrase it, "but he's not as lost as you might think. He's expressed…concerns… over his past choices. He'll help us, I know it."

"I'm not sure Regulus will talk to him, Hermione," Remus said, glancing at his friend worriedly. Sirius was staring moodily at the floor, arms crossed and jaw clenched. "They left things on pretty bad terms."

"Regulus is desperate for help," Hermione said, standing up straight for the first time. "He will talk to you. We'd like you to have a report by next week, Sirius. This is important." At Hermione's unwaveringly serious expression, Sirius seemed to deflate a little.

"I can't promise anything." He muttered.

"I know, but we just need you to try."

"I believe that's all for now," Dumbledore concluded after a long moment, "Your Head of House will escort you to your relative dormitories. Remember to check your galleons."

They turned to leave, murmuring amongst themselves about what they had just heard. Hermione fully suspected they would stay up late in the Gryffindor common room discussing everything. Marlene, fortunately or unfortunately Hermione didn't know, would not have anyone to discuss the happenings with.

"You aren't coming, Professor?" Lily inquired, looking back at her. The others halted, waiting for her answer.
Hermione plastered on a smile, the stress of the task ahead weighing her down.

"Professor Dumbledore and I have some things to discuss. I'll see you in class."

"Regulus Black?" Dumbledore prodded as the office door closed behind the seven of them, "You believe he will have taken the locket by now?"

"No," Hermione said, rubbing at her aching temples, "Regulus will die if he takes the locket. Voldemort, though, has likely used Kreacher to hide it already. That was Regulus's turning point, that is what we need to utilise. In my-- dimension--" She stumbled over the word, "Regulus died in the first half of 1979. It probably took him months to muster up the courage to defy Voldemort on his own. I'm hoping that, with some help, he'll be able to do it a little earlier."

"These are long stretches, Hermione," Dumbledore said soberly. Hermione might've said he looked concerned, if she knew how to read him better.

"I know," Hermione replied bitterly, "but it's all we've got."

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With plans to seize the diadem and destroy it on Monday, Hermione spent the rest of her weekend sleeping, eating, and trying to think up ways to strengthen Peter's ties to the Order. She didn't necessarily trust him with a mission, and he was still in school – but trusting him with something would show that she intended to keep him around, that she valued him.

Fawkes fired into her quarters on Monday night after her last class – seventh year Slytherins and Hufflepuffs, the hard-eyed Snape giving her no trouble – to deliver her to the front gates.

"The nights are getting warmer, aren't they?" Dumbledore commented, his tone friendly, when she burned into view. Hermione huffed, pulling her robes tighter around her.

"I wouldn't say 'warmer', exactly."

Dumbledore hummed, although whether in agreement Hermione didn't know.

"You said you knew a place?" Hermione inquired, gazing at Dumbledore's lined face. It was not nearly so old now, as she was used to it being. His eyes seemed more alert. Hermione supposed the thrill of finally getting one up on a rising Dark wizard had not yet been sullied for Dumbledore. His hands were still healthy and able.

"If you would." said Dumbledore, holding out his arm for her to take.

Hermione had almost forgotten what Apparating felt like since she had not done it in so long. It still wasn't pleasant.

Taking in deep breaths upon their arrival at-- well, it seemed like an open field. In the dark of the night, the stars up above glittered frantically. They were, however, the only signs of life for what seemed to be miles.

"I stumbled by this one night in my youth. I was rather inebriated, and instead of splinching anything, I found myself here. It is a beautiful place to think when one is overwhelmed, wouldn't you
Hermione didn't respond. She highly doubted Dumbledore had actually accidentally Apparated anywhere. He was, along with Voldemort, one of the only people to be able to Apparate silently. Hermione suspected he knew of the field some other way.

Dumbledore seemed to accept her silence for what it was, and pulled out a sparkly item from a pocket of his robes, which Hermione now took the time to realise were an uncharacteristic grey. Her own were similar, and she supposed they had both intended to blend in as much as possible.

It was the diadem, glittering in the low light of the moon. The grass beneath them was patchy, short in some areas and horribly long in others. Dumbledore placed the diadem on the ground in one of the shorter grassed areas so it was easily visible.

"Sir," Hermione started, suddenly very wary in the night, "I must warn you, horcruxes react... unfavourably to those who intend to destroy them. They'll do and say anything to survive."

"Interesting." Dumbledore murmured, looking at the horcrux, intrigued.

"How are you planning to control the fire, sir?" asked Hermione, falling back into old habits in this time of high stakes. The pressure was almost stifling.

"There is a neat little charm Emilia showed me a while ago now," Dumbledore said, "I believe you are familiar?"

"The dome?" Hermione questioned, looking away from the Headmaster down at the tiara. To think that Fiendfyre and a horcrux under duress would be contained within such a thing...

"An apt name, I suppose." He cast it, and it crackled over the tiara, lightning bolts illuminating a small circular dome over the object. "I think we might stand back a touch."

Hermione followed him in taking a few steps back, her own wand out in preparation for any catastrophe.

"Belua incendio!"

Upon his exclamation, a great rush of fire poured out of his wand – the Elder wand – and flew at the horcrux. It seemed never-ending until, with a forceful heave from Dumbledore, the fire ceased. It encompassed the space of the dome entirely, the lightning bolts still visible on the outside. Hermione heard distant screaming. The face of a young girl appeared in the fire, and Hermione recognised her instantly as Ariana Dumbledore. She was screaming, roaring, shouting, before she was consumed by a greater beast, serpentine in nature, its mouth gaping open in a horrific show of teeth-like shapes and fire.

With a final feminine squeal, and a strange, crescendo-ing sucking sound, the fire was swallowed by the horcrux, which died instantly. The diadem was charred, seemed slightly melted, and was smoking. It looked awfully frail.

The electrically charged dome structure was still in place, flickering. Dumbledore prodded a toe into the space, and encouraged her to do the same. It then fizzled out of place, and the older man moved away quickly. Hermione ignored his slightly paler face, and promptly crushed the brittle heirloom under her booted foot.

"It's a shame," Hermione said quietly, "That Voldemort must taint history with his quest for immortality."
"Yes," Dumbledore said, equally as low, "it is."

It had been rather anticlimactic, given Hermione's own experiences with destroying horcruxes. They vanished the remains of the horcrux and Apparated back to the front gates in silence. Fawkes met them there, and promptly deposited Hermione off in her quarters before disappearing with Dumbledore in a horrifying moment of bursting flame, a little too close to home in that moment.

The next day saw Hermione feeling strangely detached.

They had destroyed a horcrux, yes, but she didn't feel closer to the end of it all like she had in 1998. There was no sense of victory, no real sense of accomplishment. She supposed it might be because she was doing it alone, despite Dumbledore's help. She was presenting information to him on a silver platter and he simply had to digest it and come up with a workable solution, which wasn't so hard as Hermione and her friends had already done so in her world.

And that was the crux of it, wasn't it? Hermione didn't have Harry and Ron there with her, sharing in the adventure, sharing the burden of such an immense task. Harry was always the leader, and she'd followed first out of blind loyalty to one of her first friends, and then out of a want for justice in her new home amongst witches and wizards.

It was strange that even still, months after her arrival, Hermione was missing them dearly. She felt as if she was mourning them, which was an accurate description considering she'd never see her Harry and Ron again. But this didn't have the closure that mourning usually did. She could still remember Harry's parting hug, and Ron's parting shoulder pat, awkward in the face of simply being friends and nothing more. She thought the last thing she might've said to them was not to use all the hot water in the house, a Muggle home they were temporarily using whilst the owners were away.

*Hot water* of all things, she'd been worrying about. She thought of them now – for they still existed; what were they doing? She was gone, presumed dead most likely considering there would be no trace of her. It was likely Greyback and his friends had used it to their advantage, rubbing it in her friends' faces that she was gone. They'd say they'd killed her, mauled her, done unspeakable things.

Hermione felt fury burn within her, igniting a fire in her veins that would never be put out. She couldn't seek justice on behalf of the friends she'd left behind – they were in that dimension, stuck, living their lives as if she'd died. Her parents would never know her again.

Hermione inhaled shakily, clearing her throat to rid it of the lump that had formed there. It was best not to think about it now, not when she had so many important things to do, a Dark Lord to defeat.

"Professor?" Hermione jerked, caught unawares. She turned in her seat to see Peter standing behind her, his face tentative.

"Peter," Hermione addressed him, her voice coloured in surprise, "How are you?"

"I'm fine, Professor." He said, coming closer to occupy the empty seat to her right. The library was relatively empty considering it was her Tuesday free period. Remus usually joined her, but he was nowhere to be seen. At the thought of him, her bite gave a twinge as if in recognition. She frowned, perplexed.

"I just thought, after Saturday– well, here." He shoved something into her hands. Hermione looked down, and saw the Marauder's Map.

"Peter..." Hermione said slowly, in wonder. It was genuine, too, as she had not seen the map in a long time. She'd always thought it an impressive bit of magic.
"We call it the Marauder's Map. I just thought… well, it could be useful to the Order." He whispered the last bit, looking around them as if searching for eavesdroppers. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." At the tap of his wand, the map revealed itself under her fingers. She moved them aside, reading the familiar script, eyes roving over the lines depicting the many rooms and corridors of Hogwarts.

"Peter, this is incredible." Hermione said, playing up her awe. It was impressive magic, yes, but an old feeling to Hermione – she had been using it and seen it used since her third year. "How has Caretaker Filch not confiscated this?"

Peter snorted.

"Well, we haven't been using it that much recently, what with everything that's happened." It went unsaid that with their schoolwork, Remus's problems, the Snape debacle, and the upcoming war, the Marauders had found little time for pranks. "Flich would never be able to confiscate it, anyway. That's why we've got the password, see? Stops people from knowing what it is. Mischief managed." At the second tap of his wand, the ink faded away, and Hermione was left holding a seemingly innocuous piece of parchment.

The fact that Peter was sharing this with her was important, she knew. He was trusting her, and Hermione highly doubted he'd got his friends' permission to show her, let alone give it to her to use for the Order.

"You all made this?" Hermione said, running her hand over the blank parchment reverently.

"Yeah, the four of us. It's a map, shows where everyone is in the castle. There are the secret passageways, as well. I know it's unlikely Y-You-Know-Who is going to invade the castle whilst we're all here, but… well, better to be safe than sorry." He gave her a timid smile, which Hermione returned.

There may be hope just yet; for the map had been confiscated by Filch in her time, only for the Weasley twins to steal it when they got to Hogwarts. Things were already changing, no matter how minute. It was a comforting thought, despite the worry that nagged at her. How much could she help, if things became too different? She'd be like everyone else, fighting an unknown entity.

"Have you thought more about what you want to do after Hogwarts, Peter?" asked Hermione, tucking the map into the inside pocket of her robes.

"A little." confessed Peter, looking a little like a deer caught in headlights, which was ironic considering his choice of friends. Hermione tried not to snort balefully.

"You'll get there. It took me ages to figure out myself." Hermione said, smiling in remembrance. She'd had such grand plans, saving the house elves and all matter of disadvantaged persons and creatures. She'd had visions of storming into the Ministry and making a ruckus, stomping her feet until they changed for the better.

"Yeah?" Peter said, perking up, "When did you decide you wanted to teach?"

Hermione huffed out a laugh, her smile turning wry.

"I didn't."

"Oh." said Peter, looking as if he was feeling pity, of all things.

*Pity from Peter Pettigrew. I really am in a different dimension.*
"Professor?"

Hermione snapped out of her musings, looking at Peter questioningly.

"It's Remus's birthday on Friday. I, uh, thought you should know. He doesn't normally like to make a big fuss of it, but we always celebrate. He won't want to miss Duelling club, but if you're free after…?"

Remus's birthday. He'd be eighteen. Merlin, Hermione felt ancient all of a sudden. Remus had been nineteen years her senior back in the day. Third year felt like eons ago.

"Sure." agreed Hermione, a genuine smile on her face, "I'll be there."

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Friday arrived quicker than she could ever have imagined.

"Who invited Boo Radley?" Sirius snarked, grinning wildly upon her entrance into the common room. Hermione shot him a scowl, but quickly recovered.

"I didn't know you could read, Sirius." she countered, to which James guffawed as Sirius's mouth became agape. "That's a Muggle book, too. Have you been a Squib all this time?"

Sirius's answering scowl was definitely worth the initial insult, and Hermione smirked in triumph. They might never be best friends, but Hermione liked this sort of sniping friendship with Sirius.

"You came."

It was in complete contrast to Remus, who was gazing at her in a way that made her a little uncomfortable considering they were surrounded by all his friends. Lily and Mary were there, too. Hermione held back a blush.

"Of course." She said, and planned to give Sirius a Troll on his next essay for the quiet kissing noises he was making in the background. "Here." Hermione handed Remus a small rectangular package. "It was a bit short notice, but I hope you like it."

"Moony opened our presents this morning," Sirius said proudly, putting his arm around Remus, who completely ignored him in favour of shaking the box in anticipation, putting his ear to it as if to figure out its contents. "My year's worth of Honeydukes definitely took the cake."

"It wasn't a year's worth, Padfoot." James said, rolling his eyes. He and Lily were sitting suspiciously close together on one of the couches. Hermione watched them fondly, desperately wanting to ask but feeling helplessly out of place. "You got him a voucher he will go through in two months, at most."

"But old mate Ambrosius told me it'd last a year!" Sirius exclaimed, affronted.

"It's like you don't even know our Moony, Pads." Peter said, shaking his head in faux disappointment. Hermione bit her lip to keep back her grin.

"He hates you, Padfoot. Precisely because you call him old mate Ambrosius. To his face." James said, and Lily snorted loudly, covering her mouth. Mary's shoulders were shaking with barely contained mirth at Sirius's highly offended look.
"Thanks for this." Remus said, and held up the recently unwrapped box which housed a quill. Hermione didn't have much in the bank, for obvious reasons, but she'd managed to scrounge up enough spare funds to buy Remus a present.

"I charmed it to insult whoever you're writing to with every sentence." explained Hermione, a little embarrassed at her daring. "It'll wear off eventually, after which it'll become just a plain old quill."

It was not just a plain old quill by any means, however. It was black and gold – the base of the quill was black and gradually lightened into gold half-way up its feathers. The tips of the feathers seemed to glimmer in the firelight. Overall, Hermione had thought it a very elegant and attractive quill.

"I can't wait to write to you with this, Sirius." Remus said as they all took seats around the fireplace. Hermione grabbed a slowly melting Chocolate Frog, which had used its first jump to land forebodingly near the base of the fire.

"Yeah, yeah, laugh it up, Moony." Sirius said, waving him off as he lounged in one of the armchairs, looking wholly carefree.

A few of the younger students looked a little puzzled at Hermione's presence, but it was late enough that most of Gryffindors had gone to bed (or were out in the corridors past curfew, but Hermione found she didn't care too much when Lily rested her head on James's shoulder, at which he subsequently froze so as not to move and ruin the moment).

It was a refreshing night; the kind of night she'd not yet had in this world. They were usually spent reading to forget her troubles, or simply sinking straight into her pillow only to wake up the next morning groggy and irritable.

It was nice to laugh again, even if it wasn't as hard as it could be.

Hermione made her goodbyes roughly an hour after midnight, yawning up a storm. Her ability to forgo sleep had left her after the Final Battle, and so now she struggled past one o'clock in the morning.

"Wait a second!" Remus called out, jogging after her just as she was about to open and walk through the portrait hole. Hermione saw his friends packing up their mess, and was grateful that they weren't leaving it to the house elves to clean so late.

"Thanks for coming." Remus blurted out after an awkward moment that had her waiting for Remus to say something whilst he looked a little stunned by the fact he was talking to her. "I really appreciate it."

"Well, we're pack, after all." Hermione said quietly, giving him a small smile. "It would be remiss of me to miss your birthday."

Remus frowned.

"When's your birthday?" he asked.

"September nineteenth." Hermione said, shaking her head when Remus looked like he was going to say something. "I forgot my own birthday, so don't worry about it."

That didn't seem to make his disapproval fade away, but he looked like he was going to let it go.

"James has got Quidditch practice tomorrow afternoon. Sometimes we go, for fun. I was wondering – hoping – will you be there?" It all came out a little stilted, but Hermione got the general idea.
"I suppose I can make some time," she answered with a playful smile, "Although I haven't been following the season. Don't tell James, he'll be outraged." Hermione whispered, and Remus chuckled, shaking his head.

"I won't." He said warmly. The way he was looking at her set butterflies off in her belly. Hermione hadn't felt this way in a long time… but as much as she wanted to let things just happen, she was a teacher. Remus was her student. And then there was the little fact that she might not come out the other side of this war.

All she wanted was for Remus to be happy. He'd had so little of it in her world, and she felt she owed it to him to give him more this time around.

The temptation to include herself in that equation was immense, but Hermione pushed it aside. Now wasn't the time to think about it.

Or maybe it was, because all of a sudden Remus was hugging her.

They'd hugged once before, broken down and tired. This was a different experience – they fit just the same, comfortable and warm, but his lips grazed her ear, and her own were so close to his neck. She could kiss it if she wanted, and the idea sent tingles up her spine.

They separated, and Hermione gave him a shaky smile.

"Happy Birthday, Remus."

Exiting the common room, Hermione heard Peter's loud voice.

"I can't believe you hugged a professor, Moony."

"Professor's assistant, Wormtail. There's a very distinct difference." Sirius interjected, his voice teasing.

Before Hermione could hear more the portrait swung shut, effectively silencing them.

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Hermione made her way to the Quidditch pitch after a hearty lunch of rabbit and bacon pot pie with gravy and mash. It was no wonder she had put on a few kilos since her arrival. Hermione hadn't eaten this well in years, it felt like, and so was taking full advantage.

Stuffed full and content, Hermione tucked her chin into her scarf and made her way into the stands. She spotted the group of them quickly, although Lily and Mary were absent. Hermione suspected they might have better things to do than let James show off in front of them.

"Ah, the fair lady arrives!" announced Sirius, drawing the attention of the other two to her. Hermione thought she might have to invest in new eyes with how much she was rolling them – there was a danger they might just roll straight out of her head at this rate.

"Lily's not here?" Hermione asked Remus as she sat down next to him, their thighs touching through many layers of clothes. He felt beautifully warm.

"No," he answered, grinning, "She said, and I quote, 'Your head is big enough as it is, you don't
"I thought there might be something going on there." Hermione attempted to pry, feeling a little foolish. She was personally invested in their relationship, yes, but no one else knew that. She was coming off as a little pathetic, she was sure.

"Oh, there is. They're going to Hogsmeade together this month. But Lily likes to keep him on his toes. I'd disapprove, but he seems to get some sort of sick pleasure out of it, so who am I to get in the way of true lust— I mean, love?" Hermione snorted, elbowing Remus lightly in the side for his comment. "Lily pretends she's only humouring him, but we all know better. It's rather amusing, actually, witnessing her act like she's annoyed at him all the time. The jig has long been up."

Hermione laughed, feeling incredibly pleased that things were going to according to plan. It was nice to know that although she was trying to save them, not everything had changed. She liked the idea that Harry's parents were just as others had described them, and would likely fall in love just as quickly as everyone had said in her time. James, of course, was already there.

His chasing abilities transferred just as successfully onto the Quidditch pitch, Hermione could attest as she watched him swerve around one of the beaters in a manoeuvre aimed to confused the opposing team, throwing the quaffle to one of his teammates near the goal posts, who scored effortlessly.

The beaters were hitting the bludgers every which way, pretending to miss them only to fly around and shoot them in a direction unfavourable to the chasers.

The keeper was on the sidelines, attempting to fly in dangerously fast and collect the quaffle before it could go through any hoop, a trick play that would leave the crowds roaring.

"I haven't seen you at all the games." commented Remus, and Hermione glanced quickly to her right to see him watching James with pride.

"No," Hermione said, turning back to the Captain, "I come when I can, but I've been awfully busy." She bit her lip before plodding on. "My two best friends played Quidditch. Seeker and Keeper. I don't think I ever missed a game if I could help it."

"They don't write?" Remus asked, turning to her and frowning, "I don't see you get any letters."

"They died." Hermione said simply, for they were dead to her in all the ways that mattered. Her heart panged, shriveled up and cold as it was.

"I'm sorry." Remus said softly, and his hand came to rest in her own, which sat on her knee.

Hermione looked down at their joined hands. The gloves they were both wearing hindered any sort of physical reaction, but the symbolism was enough. Remus was there for her, and she was grateful.

"Peter," Hermione started, slowly slipping her hand out of Remus's. As comforting as it was, she was still a teacher, much to her dismay. "Any ideas yet?"

"Ideas?" Sirius interrupted, looking between them. Remus had taken her hand's retreat with grace, and now looked similarly interested.

Peter blushed, mumbling something incoherent. Hermione explained on his behalf.
"Wormtail, you never said!" Sirius exclaimed, aghast.

"And you never asked, Sirius." Hermione piped up, trying to make a point. Sirius looked a little ashamed, but quickly recovered.

"I haven't thought of anything yet." Peter interrupted them, obviously hoping to stop a fight.

"If you want to brainstorm, come by my office. I'll be happy to help." Hermione smiled at him, and he smiled nervously back.

"What, we don't get the same offer?" Sirius said, playfully indignant. She rolled her eyes, not bothering to dignify his question with an answer.

The practice went on in a similar manner; Peter his usual quiet self, although he would pipe up and join in on Hermione's insults to Sirius every now and then; and Remus seemed to be perpetually shaking his head in amusement at the three of them. Hermione could tell he had his own carefully worded snipes to share, but was choosing to let her have the floor. She'd have to commiserate with him over it later.

Sirius, true to his dramatic self, declared them all unfriended and went to leave in a huff by the time practice had finished. Suddenly remembering, Hermione raced after him, calling her goodbyes out over her shoulder to the others.

"Sirius!" Hermione said, out of breath as she ran toward him on the path up to the castle.

"I'm not actually mad," Sirius said, turning around and rolling his eyes at her wide eyed look, "I'm fine."

"No, no, it's not that." Hermione said, waving him off distractedly, "It's Regulus. Have you spoken with him?"

An especially dark look came over his face, and his good humour had completely disappeared. Hermione wasn't sure she really wanted to know how it went, but she had to ask.

"He's just as stubborn as before. Tells me everything's fine and that I shouldn't worry my pretty little blood traitor head." She saw Sirius's hands form fists, white-knuckled.

"Did you actually try, Sirius?" Hermione sighed, frustrated.

"Yes!" Sirius exploded, causing Hermione to take a step back in surprise, "Of course I bloody tried, but it's no use! He's one of them now!"

"Sirius, listen to me," Hermione said, "Regulus thinks he's saving his family from Voldemort's wrath by pretending to hate you. Imagine if word got back to his master that he'd been consorting with his blood traitor brother? He'll be killed, and his family – your parents – might be next."

"Good riddance." Sirius spat, sneering.

"No." Hermione insisted, taking a step forward and putting a hand on Sirius's shoulder, squeezing it painfully, "You don't have to like your family, Sirius, but we need Regulus. He's more important than you could possibly imagine. If we don't work with him, we may never defeat Voldemort."

"My brother isn't in his inner circle; he can't help us as much as you think." Sirius rebutted, frowning.

"Yes he can." emphasised Hermione, "Trust me on this." She looked back and forth between his
eyes, silently pleading.

There was a long moment where it seemed Sirius was considering her, before he nodded jerkily, still unhappy with the situation.

"Try again," Hermione said, squeezing his shoulder hard once more, "and be quick about it."

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Given the excitement of the first week, the next was hardly anything to write home about.

She spent her free time heaping on the homework and subsequently marking it for hours on end. The exams would be sooner than the students expected, and Hermione wanted them all to be as prepared as they could be, both for the tests and for the dangerous world out there that awaited them. She and Nettle continued to spend time outside of classes, chatting about this and that. It seemed Nettle hadn't really wanted the Defence position in the first place, and had agreed upon Dumbledore's insistence. She respected the older wizard. She felt more comfortable in a behind the scenes position, and spoke eagerly of working in the Ministry in the future. She was half-blood, her Muggle mother left to raise her when her wizard father died when she was a child. It was an awfully similar story, one Hermione had heard from Dean Thomas many, many years ago. They weren't related, of course; their skin colour an obvious difference. But Hermione suddenly missed Dean's ferocity for football and his talk of his many half-sisters back home in London. Hermione had always been interested in possibly meeting them.

When the eighteenth rolled around, however, back home seemed wholly undesirable due to a circumstance Hermione could not have predicted making her want to stay in the seventies.

"Miss Bones's cousin has gone missing." Dumbledore announced. It was another Saturday night, and he'd sent the word out via the coins to meet in his office after dinner. From there, they'd Flooed out to an undisclosed location. The house was old and creaky, and Hermione smelt salt in the air. She predicted somewhere by the sea, reminiscent of Shell Cottage. It was the Order's headquarters for now, apparently, and Hermione had met the others dedicated to bringing down Voldemort for the first time.

There were her recommended bunch, of course, along with Marlene's mother. There were also the members she remembered from looking at Harry's ill-timed gift from Moody; the Longbottoms, graduated a year ahead of the Marauders; the Prewett brothers, who spoke fondly of their older sister, enormously pregnant with twins; Emmeline Vance, soon to be murdered; Benjy Fenwick, who Hermione grimly knew would be blown to pieces; Caradoc Dearborn, who would go missing; Moody, looking at her suspiciously; Dorcas Meadowes, who would somehow earn the honour of being offed by Voldemort personally, although Hermione was reluctant to call it such a thing; Dedalus Diggle, and Sturgis Podmore. There were a lot of them cramped into the ancient cottage, and Hermione had to stand so she could fit into the room. She almost missed McGonagall's impeccable bun by the opposite corner. They really needed to invite more of the teachers into the Order. Although Hermione supposed Dumbledore didn't want the school compromised by a complete replacement of staff if it were to fall to Voldemort.

It was strangely comforting, all of these faces looking sombre around her.

"Disappearances only mean one thing." Moody grunted out. He had both of his eyes now, and both
legs. Hermione suspected he would lose one or both of them soon. She was glad his probing eye was not yet needed, though. It had always given her a bad feeling, too much of an invasion of privacy for her tastes, although she could not deny that it was handy for spotting stray Dark Marks in a crowd.

"Edgar is not here, for obvious reasons. The family are grieving." Dumbledore told them, looking sympathetic.

"Do we know why? She's not the only one – Moira Beltz was taken months ago, of course." McGonagall pointed out, her pointy hat under one arm. Her robes were a deep bottle green.

"The Bones' are pretty open about opposing him, though, aren't they?" Remus said, a thoughtful frown on his face. Hermione didn't miss the looks shared amongst some of the older members. The students weren't in their uniforms, but their youth was obvious. Hermione supposed it was only her war-hardened aura and teacher's robes that made them take her seriously. It had been a long time since she'd been considered too young for anything, she mused bitterly.

"Yes, the Bones family have not hidden their distaste for Voldemort's agenda. I believe we may have to send them into hiding soon." Dumbledore said, his eyes sorrowful. Hermione knew that wouldn't happen – the Bones family had been almost wiped out in the first war. Amelia and her sister were the only survivors, with Susan being Amelia's niece.

"There's no way Edgar would agree to that," Emmeline said, her eyes fiery, "He's not a coward."

"No one's calling anyone a coward, Emmeline," Alice Longbottom spoke up, shooting Emmeline a hard look, "It's not cowardly to be concerned for the safety of your family. Look at what happened to the Abneys."

There were murmurs of concern. The Abney girl, as young as Remus had been when he'd been bitten, was a werewolf because of Voldemort. If Joel Abney had known what was to come, he would have no doubt sent his family into hiding.

Hermione saw James take Lily's hand, gripping it tightly. Lily returned the gesture. They both looked hard-faced.

"Joel Abney was working on a damned good piece of magic when he was attacked," Moody said gruffly, looking disappointed, "Thought he could isolate the Dark Mark as a way to deny Death Eaters travel to and fro. I doubt anyone will want to continue that work now, after what's happened to him."

Hermione pursed her lips. That would have been a spectacular advance in tracking down Death Eaters, but Moody was right. No one at the Ministry would have the back bone to keep going in the research after such a threat was made.

"How are the Aurors going whilst Alastor is on assignment?" Dumbledore asked, looking at Frank Longbottom. Frank cleared his throat, before speaking more confidently than Hermione remembered Neville ever doing. Although, she couldn't think it with much confidence herself, as she hadn't seen Neville much after the final battle.

"We're following leads the best we can, but the new Death Eater recruits are hard to pin down – some of them are still in Hogwarts, after all, and others almost completely disappeared off the grid after they graduated. We think they're all hiding out somewhere. It's either that, or they all purchased places illegally that don't have a paper trail."

Dumbledore made a noise of acknowledgement, looking deep in thought. He was one of the few
sitting down, his canary yellow robes contrasting harshly with the mood of the room.

"Of course, the Ministry has yet to grant my request to use Unforgivables. I'm not too keen to use them myself, mind, but we'll have to soon enough." Moody told them, looking disgruntled.

"Dorcas," Dumbledore addressed the young witch, who jerked at the sound before nodding quickly, attentive, "I want you to keep trying with the vampires. Your progress has been very helpful."

Hermione looked at Dorcas more closely now, who was nodding, and saw the tell-tale signs of being recently fed upon; she was pale, her eyes were a little glassy, and Hermione thought she could glimpse the white scars of two pin-like pricks in her neck. It had always been a little weird that the vampires weren't at all involved in their war when werewolves and giants and the like were. It made sense that Dorcas was inviting them to remain neutral… Hermione didn't envy her job, and rubbed her own neck self-consciously at the thought of what Dorcas was doing to ensure neutrality.

All of these people were sacrificing something, whether it was their childhood, or their job, or their blood… it seemed they were all considering it worth the sacrifice to rid Voldemort of his power. Hermione was filled with renewed purpose. If she could make their sacrifices worthwhile before they could give the ultimate one – their lives – then she will have done what she was sent here to do, accidentally or not.

"Sirius is working on Regulus. Once we have him, we'll be ahead of him for sure." Hermione told Dumbledore, who nodded.

"The Black boy?" Benjy asked, looking confused, "Isn't he a Death Eater?"

"Yes, he is." Dumbledore said mildly, and the other members shared looks with one another.

"What are we doing talking to a Death Eater?" Benjy asked, not sensing the finality of Dumbledore's words.

"Regulus is sympathetic to our cause," Hermione said, looking into Benjy's brown eyes, "He has the potential to be extremely useful."

"He's also sympathetic to Voldemort." Alice pointed out, and there were murmurs amongst the group.

"He was pressured to join by his family. He wants to protect them." Hermione said fiercely, aware that she was clenching her fists tightly by her sides to stop herself from doing something rash.

"Huxley, I'll be the first one to say that Regulus worshipped Voldemort." Sirius said, finally speaking up. Hermione frowned and opened her mouth to speak before Sirius continued, interrupting her, "But he's… I don't think that's the case anymore. I spoke with him again this week. He's scared. He didn't realise the full extent of Voldemort's plan."

"This is how he ensnares them, Alice," Dumbledore said, looking at the pixie-faced witch, "A lot of the younger Death Eaters don't realise what Voldemort wants for them. They see it as an honour to work for him. He sees them as pawns."

"Is there anything I can do?" Remus burst out with, stepping forward past his friends. "With Greyback–"

"Remus, my dear boy, you are still a student. If there is anything I need a werewolf for, I would ask Miss Huxley."
The statement hung in the air, stagnant and stale.

"How do we know she isn't working for him? Show us your arm, Huxley." Moody said, a disgusted expression on his face.

"Alastor," Dumbledore warned him, "Miss Huxley has proven herself. Just because she is a werewolf does not mean she is one of Voldemort's followers."

"You know how werewolves work, Dumbledore," Dedalus Diggle spoke up from behind Frank, his voice timid, "Their packs are closer than some families. Who was she bitten by?"

"Greyback is not my family." snarled Hermione, taking a step toward Diggle, who looked momentarily frightened before he realised there was at least one person between him and the Defence professor.

Remus stepped forward too, and Hermione felt his reassuring hand on her left shoulder. She relaxed, not realising how tense she was.

"You are correct, Dedalus," Dumbledore said, gazing at them with a satisfied expression on his face, "Some packs are closer than families."

"I believe that is all for today," he added after a moment, "Look to the coins for our next meeting. Have a wonderful weekend."

The room burst into chatter and Hermione was left breathing heavily, still staring down Diggle. Diggle had the grace to look a little embarrassed, and quickly fled the room.

"Come on," Remus said softly, pulling on her arm to lead her toward the kitchen, where the fireplace would take them back to the castle.

"You'll get used to it." said Remus quietly. Their friends were in front of them, speaking in low voices as they waited for Dumbledore and McGonagall to finish up in the living room.

"I don't want to get used to it." Hermione spat, looking at the wooden floor in anger. "It infuriated me then and it infuriates me now. The Ministry spouts out garbage about us with no real proof. Greyback and his pack make everything worse. No wonder other werewolves are joining Voldemort, being treated the way we are by the general public."

Remus had a patient look on his face, although Hermione sensed he was also frustrated at the misunderstanding.

"Are all of you ready?" McGonagall asked them, and they nodded. Remus grabbed Hermione's hand and gave it a squeeze before letting go and proceeding to Floo himself back to the school.

Hermione had the feeling that things were about to get awfully complicated.

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After the Order meeting, Hermione and Remus spent more time together in the new monthly agreement to minimise the detrimental effects of the full moon, which was on the twenty fourth.

Spending more time with him was, in a way, more difficult than trying not to change the future had
been. Before, Hermione had been focused on maintaining a certain amount of distance between herself and Remus. At first because it had been too painful to do anything else, and then later out of necessity to maintain the timeline. After all, Remus needed to be doubted by his friends for Sirius to suggest the change to Peter as Secret Keeper and ensure that Harry become The Boy Who Lived.

But now that the timeline could be changed, and Hermione could, in essence, be friends with whomever she wanted, she found it difficult to approach each of her relationships in this time with anything other than carefully maintained emotional distance.

In short, she was so used to pushing away any traitorous and troublesome feelings that now when they *did* occur and she didn't *have* to push them away, Hermione was left feeling incredibly confused and horribly guilty.

It was needless to say, then, that Remus was a problem. Hermione found herself looking at him when she thought he wouldn't notice, cataloguing the way he bit his bottom lip in concentration as he read a particularly challenging passage in a book; or the way his cheeks bulged with food at the Gryffindor table, his eyes scrunched up in laughter as he struggled to keep his mouthfuls down. James seemed to think it was a game to make him spit everywhere, Lily rolling her eyes next to him with a grin. Mary placed slices of roast beef across Peter's face into a grotesque, meaty mask. Peter was, inevitably, the cause for Remus's comical spit-take, his face triumphant. Hermione would often keep her eyes on him as he stretched after a particularly lengthy studying session. His shoulders bunched underneath his jumper in a way that had her mesmerised. His sandy hair spilled over his forehead in messy, loose curls. The way it flopped over his eyes and he blew it out of his face was endearing, and Hermione was captivated.

To translate these feelings to words, though, was something else entirely. Remus seemed to give her ample opportunity, but every touch of his hand or his thigh against hers left her breathless with want and frozen in fear. The intimacy was a problem. She hadn't been properly intimate with anyone, and although she trusted Remus, she didn't necessarily trust herself.

She was his professor, as well, which she repeated as a mantra to herself every time his soft green eyes regarded her fondly, warm and intimate. Even if she wanted him, even if she wanted to pursue it and had the guts to take his cues, she couldn't. She wouldn't. She would have to wait until he was no longer her student, which was only a few months away now. She could hold out, she knew. Remus was just making it really difficult.

"Ready?" he asked, jolting her out of her thoughts. His left hand rested upon her right forearm, his thumb rubbing back and forth in a perfect rhythm. Hermione shook off his touch gently, and gave him a smile that felt all wrong around the edges.

They made their way from the library to Hermione's quarters, where she deposited her wand as Remus waited outside. Feeling slightly antsy at the thought of Remus knowing where she slept at night, Hermione led the way down the many staircases and out onto the grounds. It was a quick walk to the Whomping Willow with Hermione setting the pace.

The time spent together before the full moon had definitely helped. Where previously Hermione would have felt impossibly tired but also desperate to jump out of her skin in the days preceding the transformation, she now felt relaxed. Her muscles, usually coiled in anticipation of the pain to come, were not at all tense. Her limbs felt nimble and capable, and no headaches were in sight.

The churning in her belly had not gone away, but Hermione suspected there was a reason for this beneath it all, like instinct was letting her know she better lock herself away soon in preparation for a complete change of skin, a trade of human meekness for vicious fur.
Remus observed similar positive changes, and the flush in his cheeks said everything – gone were the days of a perpetually wan Remus Lupin.

When they woke the next morning, Hermione knew there was definitely something to this theory. The aches and pains of newly mended bones and muscle were there, but everything else that usually accompanied them was absent.

It was officially the start to the Easter holidays, as well, which left the morning after feeling more bright and hopeful than usual, when the reality of enduring another full moon was the furthest away it could possibly be. Students would be leaving soon on the train home, if they so wished. The Marauders, she had learned recently, had decided to stay over the holidays for the same reason they had at Christmas – it was their last year at Hogwarts, and they wanted to cherish it.

James's birthday fell on the first Monday of said holiday, and he was telling everyone about it. Lily had gone home for the break, wanting to spend some quality time with her sister in particular, hoping the time away hadn't reverted Petunia back to her hateful self. Hermione was doubtful. Petunia would end up marrying Vernon Dursley, after all.

Mary joined them, however, and Hermione took the time to ask after her that evening.

"I'm alright, Professor. Thanks for asking," the Gryffindor replied, smiling widely. "Mulciber is a prick. I'm glad you were there for me. Who knows what could've… well, I'm glad. He'll get what's coming to him, I'm sure. I always make sure I'm walking with someone now, though. The trials of being Muggleborn!" Mary laughed, but Hermione heard a hint of bitterness in it that she politely ignored.

They were both spectating in this weird and wonderful sport the Marauders had cooked up.

"James loves to get pranked on his birthday," Remus had said days previously, his mouth twitching in delight at the prospect. "So we thought the ultimate prank would be… not to prank him. He'll be waiting all day, literally jumping out of his seat at every moment. It's going to be great."

"I know you guys have something for me," James speculated, grinning madly as they all sat around the fire in the common room. His eyes were a little crazed, and she and Mary shared a look. "I know it. It's going to be fab. I can't wait."

One of his legs was bouncing up and down uncontrollably, and Peter grinned widely.

"Oh, it's brill, Prongs. Absolutely genius. It's going to blow your mind." Sirius said, deadpan, as he flipped through a motorcycle magazine, his legs hanging over an arm of his chair. Hermione wondered whether he'd started on charming his flying one yet.

Suddenly, a roar of sound accosted them. James squawked inelegantly, jumping right out of his seat and looking around wildly, searching for the origin of the noise. Sirius had fallen off his chair with a loud thump, and was groaning on the floor. Remus had snapped his head up, eyes wide. Peter, of all of them, looked the most composed. In contrast to her and Mary, who'd stood with wands out, he was still lounging across the couch and simply turned his head toward the noise.

"Fawkes?" asked Hermione, lowering her wand upon seeing the fiery animal. James was bent over, hyperventilating. Remus got up to comfort him, patting him on his back consolingly. Sirius was still groaning on the floor, and Peter picked up Sirius's discarded magazine and began reading it for himself.

A note was crumpled in one of the bird's claws, the other around the back of a chair beside a nearby
study table. Hermione tugged it gently away from his talons.

Please allow Fawkes to lead you. It's urgent. A.D.

Hermione frowned, pocketing the scrap of parchment.

"What's this, then?" Sirius asked, grumbling as he sat up and leaned against the couch, rubbing his knee.

"Dumbledore's asked for me. Sorry, James." The man in question lifted a hand in acknowledgement, still bent over and breathing heavily.

"Are you sure?" Remus rushed forward, grasping at her left arm to stop her from letting Fawkes fire them away.

"I think I know what it's about." Hermione said, giving Remus a confident smile, "Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. Stay here, celebrate with your friends." She patted his hand and he let go.

"Professor?" Hermione called out upon arriving in a very dark alcove. Fawkes chirped quietly, and started to clean his feathers. Hermione stepped out of the nook, looking around. It was a Muggle neighbourhood, of all things. The houses were further away than one might expect them to be from the abode closest to her. After looking at it, however, she could guess why – the house was more like a shack, decrepit and ugly. Moss was lathered on the outside walls, tendrils of nettle adorned them as well as if a weird decorating choice. The windows were boarded up, and dusty looking. The wooden front door looked grimy, and Hermione didn't want to venture inside.

"Hermione." She whirled around, her wand out.

"Dumbledore." she acknowledged, lowering her wand, "What's going on?"

"Ever since you told me about the ring, I've been waiting for an opportunity to destroy it." He said, taking a few steps closer. His robes were a dark, midnight blue, and he would have blended into the background well if it weren't for his stark white, long beard. "Tom has checked on the ring tonight. He will not be back for a while. I'm afraid this is our only chance."

Hermione let that sink in.

"He was here?" she asked, frowning as she looked around. The houses much further away looked friendly and warm, and Hermione felt anything but.

"I've had some of the Order members watching periodically, mostly in the evenings."

"Dumbledore." Hermione started warningly, cut off as he held up his hand.

"Lecture me on the dangers of our friends finding out later, Hermione. We must destroy it quickly lest we be seen."

They silently strode to the door of the Gaunt shack, and went in with wands out.

It was just as unattractive inside as it was out. Dirty, old papers littered the floor, empty bottles homes to all matter of insects. Hermione thought she saw a snake slither away in the darkness, but she couldn't be sure.

Dumbledore waved his wand, his face blank, and subsequently strode into the kitchen. There were definitely rats in this room, and they scuttled away quickly at her Lumos. Hermione was reminded of
Peter, as horrible as it was.

The older wizard opened a drawer near the sink, slowly and carefully.

And there it was. It was a garish thing, the stone much bigger than the clumsily forged gold that surrounded it. The band was thin, which exacerbated the size of the stone. Hermione felt a cold sweep over her, and shivered.

"I thought it would be more heavily protected." She observed, her hand slowly reaching out.

"My dear," Dumbledore said sharply, his wand hand snapping out to stop her own, his grip firm and on the wrong side of painful. Hermione realised what she had been about to do, and snatched her hand back, suddenly fearful.

The Resurrection Stone seemed to have some sort of draw. Hadn't Dumbledore done the same thing once, long ago? Or, a long way into the future? Harry hadn't felt such a draw, but maybe it only had such a hold on those with regrets regarding their lost loved ones. Hermione wasn't even sure she would see her friends and family if she turned the stone over three times. After all, she didn't think they were dead back in her world. They were just dead to her in this one.

"Tom is arrogant. He believes the curse is enough." Dumbledore smiled, amused. "It seems it would have been, without your knowledge of it."

He levitated the ring, and they exited the kitchen into the small backyard, overgrown but with slightly more privacy than the front grass area.

Dumbledore cast the dome once more. Hermione would have offered, but she felt the use of the Elder Wand was imperative. Better to be safe than sorry and end up dead. Who would defeat Voldemort then, when knowledge of his horcruxes died with them?

It seemed, this time, the horcrux had decided to target her.

"A witch with no past," It hissed, sibilant like a snake, as screams could be heard, "You dare destroy me! You are alone in this world, unloved and unworthy—!" It was cut off, the screams growing louder and louder until the suction-like sound started up familiarly in a high-pitched crescendo before it peaked and then was abruptly silenced. The gold of the ring was charred, and the stone was cracked. Upon reaching down to pick it up, the blackened chars fell away to ash at the touch of Hermione's fingers.

The stone remained, looking as it had in her time.

"Curious." Dumbledore murmured, gazing at the stone. "I wonder…”

He reached out a long-fingered hand to the stone, which sat in Hermione's palm. At the touch of his fingers on her palm, Hermione quickly covered the stone, flinching away.

"I see." Dumbledore said, as if it explained everything. Hermione stowed the stone away in her pocket, ignoring him.

"Be careful how you use such a thing, Hermione." Dumbledore said as they left the shack, the job done. "Regret can be a dangerous emotion."

Just before Fawkes fired her away, Hermione looked the Headmaster in the eyes.

"I'm sure you would know all about that, Dumbledore."
The rest of the Easter holidays continued on smoothly, the Resurrection Stone tucked away in a lone sock in Hermione's trunk. She hadn't touched it since that night, too deathly afraid of what it would tell her – if she saw them, they were dead. If she didn't, she would see no one. She couldn't decide which outcome was worse.

When classes returned at the beginning of the month, Hermione thought she'd have very little to deal with outside of them. With two horcruxes down, Hermione felt it would take a lot longer to destroy the others. After all, they were in much harder locations and more stringently protected.

She'd resigned herself to a quiet month of teaching and improving her relationships around the castle so she could be considered a kind, thoughtful werewolf once the secret got out. So when it was all upturned on its head, she was wholly unprepared.

She was bidding farewell to her sixth year Gryffindors and Slytherins when a lone figure hung back, his dark hair hanging over his face similarly to his brother not in what it said, but simply in its length. Regulus Black managed to make his hair seem moody, of all things.

"Regulus." Hermione greeted him nervously as he approached her desk.

"I want to help." He blurted out, looking around as if suspecting Voldemort might pop out and yell 'boo!'. He looked back at her, his eyes showing a great deal of hurt. "I… I don't think I'm going to survive if I don't."

Hermione appraised him for a moment. His uniform was neatly pressed, perfect by her own standards. His hair was a little mussed, but they'd just finished up with the last traditional period of the day, despite Hermione still having a class of seventh years after dinner. His face was slightly less handsome than his brother's, but she suspected this might be because he lacked the ease with which Sirius carried himself. Regulus's face seemed to be in a permanent frown, as if he were deeply worried about something. His eyes were the same grey as Sirius's, but his cheekbones were a little more prominent. He still had a vague haughty air about him, and Hermione supposed you couldn't necessarily stamp out the infamous Black arrogance even if Voldemort thought you were worth less than the dirt on his boots.

"I want you to do something for me, Regulus," Hermione said after casting silencing and locking charms on her classroom door. Nettle was hovering around, obviously listening. She would be inducted into the Order, anyway, Hermione had decided days ago. She deserved it.

"I want you to talk to your house elf." said Hermione, staring down the young Slytherin, "I want you to talk to Kreacher."

A few things:
1) I don't know whether you've noticed but I've chosen to go with the movie adaptation
version of the uniform. I don't like the idea of students being naked under robes, simply because it makes their outfits harder to describe when needed. Also, the uniforms were always something I felt the movies got right – they're different from the books, yes, but they're more practical.

2) I'm making my own presumptions about certain timings; e.g. Regulus died sometime in 1979. I'm saying it was in the first half so it fits into this story. I'm going as close to canon as I can, but obviously some things will change now. Unfortunately for me, it seems Voldemort was at the peak of his power in 1980/81, which means the shadier, more grotesque things he did, have yet to pass. Hence, I can only really allow for a few disturbing occurrences every now and then if I'm going with canon.

3) It's honestly no wonder Jo's later books got so big. There is SO much going on in my own story here that the word count is simply reflective of the amount of shit going down and not an indication of my wordiness, haha. I feel ya, Jo. I feel ya.

4) Spot the A Very Potter Musical reference? ;)

As always, please let me know your thoughts!
Guys, I'm honestly a hopeless case. I rewatched Deathly Hallows pt 2 the other night and wept at the end. In the epilogue! I didn't even like the epilogue! This book series has ruined my life.

"Kreacher won't talk to me." Regulus said, frowning. He was closer to her now, his book bag dumped on the floor, hitting her desk with a loud thump.

"He will," Hermione said, feeling as if she was experiencing déjà vu. "He's scared now, delirious as you know, but he will tell you what happened."

"Delirious? How do you know that?" Regulus's eyes were suddenly sharp and discerning. "I didn't even tell Sirius he was sick, he hates him."

Hermione froze, thinking quickly. How would she know Kreacher was sick? The short answer was she shouldn't know – no one in the Black family knew her, and Kreacher's loyalties were iron clad, unlike Dobby's had been back in her second year. To anybody else, she could brush off the comment. Anybody else probably wouldn't have picked it up so quickly, except for maybe someone like Snape.

"I can't tell you." Hermione sniped.

"If I'm risking my life for you lot of Gryffindor hotheads, I think I deserve to know where you're getting your information." Regulus said calmly, raising an eyebrow. The vulnerability of previous was gone, replaced with a mask Hermione was all too familiar with. Draco Malfoy had held one in place for a very long time.

Hermione stood, her frustration growing with every step she took toward the sixth year. She pulled out her wand, ignoring Regulus's wary eyeing of it, and shoved her left arm out, defiant. Her sleeve was pushed down in preparation.

Regulus's eyes locked onto her scar, visible, causing an instinctive cold to fall over her. The charm must have worn off. She couldn't decipher what was in his eyes before he locked them onto her own and they were mercifully blank.

"An Unbreakable Vow." announced Hermione, lifting her own eyebrow, "It is the only way we can proceed from here if you won't act blindly."

"Like hell I well," Regulus grunted, thrusting his own arm out and pulling down the sleeve. Their hands clasped, and Hermione refused to cringe at the strength with which he squeezed hers. "I've acted blindly enough up until now. It stops."

They both knelt on the cold, hard stone floor. Hermione lamented her knees, likely to ache. At least she had enhanced healing on her side – she felt pity for Regulus, who didn't look to be affected by the uncomfortable position, his expression composed but fierce.
Hermione touched her wand to their clasped hands, and murmured the incantation.

"Will you, Regulus, keep the secrets confided in you by the Order of the Phoenix, no matter what?"

"I will." Regulus said, eyes sparkling in curiosity at the naming of the Order.

"And will you, Regulus, do your utmost to uphold the vow of the Order?"

Regulus gave her a glare. She realised how unfair she was being, considering Regulus did not know what the vow of the Order was, but she needed his cooperation in bringing down Voldemort. She suspected there might be a limited amount of bravery within the boy.

No doubt she would pay for this at some point.

"I will. Will you," Regulus began, ignoring her open-mouthed shock – once a question was asked in a Vow, it would have to be accepted or the whole thing was null and void.

_Slytherins, _Hermione griped to herself angrily, secretly impressed at his daring.

"Hermione, protect me to the best of your ability, as I attempt to uphold the vow of the Order of the Phoenix?"

Hermione clenched her jaw.

"I will." she seethed. A tendril of flame twirled around their joined palms, encasing them with an ethereal red and golden glow. Her wand, no longer needed, clattered to the floor as the fiery tendrils split back into three, two becoming absorbed into Regulus's wrist with a grunt, a faint glow travelling up the veins of his arm and settling in his heart. There was only one tendril that absorbed into her wrist with a keen sting, illuminating the scar with an eerie glow that travelled up her arm and sunk deep into her own heart before it could no longer be seen, vanished into thin air as if the both of them had not just signed their lives away.

"That was sneaky." Hermione bit out, stretching out her left hand. His grip had been awfully tight, and she still felt like he was holding on despite the fact his own hand was now by his side.

"An unknown vow of the Order? _That _was sneaky." Regulus commented blandly, standing up.

She picked up her wand, disgruntled, before straightening up herself.

"I can't tell you how I know about Kreacher--" She held up a hand at his furious expression, mouth twisted and ready to reprimand her, "–Only one other person knows, and that is one person too many. To protect my source, they will have to remain a secret. I _can _tell you, however, why Kreacher is so important to us."

Hermione had carefully left out the McKinnons, knowing that Regulus would regard their knowledge of her past as proof that he should know. It was rather ironic, however, that she herself was the 'source' she spoke of.

_That was good, actually. I should use that in the future._

Hermione conjured up a chair, deliberately making it slightly uncomfortable, and gestured for him to sit as she took her own place behind her desk.

"Have you ever heard of a horcrux, Mr Black?" Hermione asked, steepling her own fingers in a gesture reminiscent of a certain old Headmaster. She was beginning to feel as manipulative as the
man as well, which left her uneasy.

"Bits and pieces," Regulus admitted, massaging his left hand with his right. Hermione smirked – maybe her own harsh hold had been too much for him as well. Hermione suspected it would be just as fun to rile him up as it was to rile up his brother. There was obviously something in the Black family genes that Hermione enjoyed verbally picking at. "A few books at home mentioned them, but I was never personally interested…" He trailed off, a look of understanding gracing his aristocratic features.

"Voldemort has successfully created horcruxes–"

"Horcuxes? You mean he has multiple?" Regulus interrupted, leaning forward with morbid enthusiasm.

"Like I was saying," emphasised Hermione, a stern expression on her face, "Voldemort has created horcruxes in an attempt to become immortal."

"I knew he was powerful," said Regulus, a wondrous look on his face, "But I…"

"Do not mistake his obsession for power," Hermione snapped, crossing her arms, "Voldemort is delusional. He will do everything he can to prolong his time here on Earth. He uses and abuses people, and would do away with you in a heartbeat if it meant he could get only one step further toward his goal."

Hermione saw Regulus clench his jaw, the muscles shifting beneath skin angrily.

"Dumbledore and I have located all but one of them. This is where you come in." Hermione said, losing her harsh tone for one a little softer, hoping to butter him up some.

"Kreacher?" Regulus asked, confused.

"Voldemort used your house elf to hide away one of his horcruxes." Hermione explained, peering into the Slytherin's face, "You– there was mention that he required a house elf for a task, and your mother gladly offered up her best, her most loyal – Kreacher. You know this already, Regulus, don't play dumb." Hermione chastised, and continued on despite the transformation of his confused expression into one of scepticism. "Kreacher returned, ill and hallucinating. Once he gets better, and he will, I want you to find out where Voldemort took him."

"Surely the Dark Lord will have sworn him to secrecy." rebutted Regulus.

"Your Dark Lord always forgets one thing – there is magic much greater and more powerful than any wizard's." At Regulus's prompting face, Hermione continued, "House elves are always underestimated, but they can perform magic that the average wizard cannot. It is all wandless, for one, and often breaches the laws of magic so meticulously taught to us at school. Kreacher can Apparate through the wards at your house, can he not?"

Regulus nodded.

"So Voldemort will have sworn him to secrecy," Hermione said with a triumphant grin, "But Voldemort is not his master. You are."
Regulus could not return to the House of Black until Friday at the latest or he would be looked upon with suspicion by his housemates. It was not unusual for purebloods to sneak out on the weekends, Hermione had been told, and so he would leave under the guise of forgetting something back at home and talk to Kreacher then.

The location of the cave – never disclosed to her by Harry or the future Dumbledore – weighed on her mind throughout the next few days until it was rudely shoved aside in favour of more pressing matters.

There was an emergency Order meeting on Wednesday. Towards the tail end of dinner Hermione felt her galleon warm on the inside of her right wrist, where she’d used a sticking charm to stick it to a piece of ribbon and tied it around. It was the easiest way to ensure she wouldn’t miss a meeting.

On her way to Dumbledore's office to use his Floo, she collected the Gryffindors – she had faith that Marlene would have paid attention to the galleon. The six of them met up with Marlene and Professor McGonagall outside of Dumbledore's office, both of whom gave polite nods upon their arrival.

"I could get used to this," Sirius said, brushing himself off haughtily as he stepped out of the fireplace and into the kitchen of headquarters. "Moony and I are missing out on Astronomy right now."

"Try to sound less like a student, Sirius." Lily sighed, stepping up from behind said boy and wiping some soot off of his chin. He batted her away good-naturedly. "Personally, I'm not fancying the catch up next week." Lily murmured out of the side of her mouth to Marlene, who snorted.

"Sasha Singh has been taken." Moody announced gravely once everyone had arrived and was settled, and there were some murmurs around. Lily looked tearful, which Hermione found surprising.

"Singh?" Hermione asked, looking around at their grim faces, "Where do I know that name from?"

"Sasha Singh is a Healer," Dumbledore explained, "She is best known for her efforts in the field of child birth. She solved the great infertility problem of 1970, at the ripe old age of twenty."

*Of course,* Hermione thought.

Sasha Singh had discovered that the influx of children after Grindelwald's defeat had caused the infertility problems within witches during the late sixties and early seventies – it had been magic, curtailing the amount of magical children born due to an overabundance of powers. It seemed that magic was sentient in some way, and to protect itself from Muggle exposure had attempted to control the population of witches and wizards. Singh had found all this out and subsequently advised the Ministry that either families must wait a few years to have children, or that witches and wizards ought to start procreating with Muggles. Magic would become less defensive and magical children would start being born again. She'd been right.

The fact that Voldemort had abducted her seemed entirely strange, unless he had his own impotence problems. The idea almost made Hermione laugh, if not for the terrifying and disgusting thought of Voldemort engaging in *that*.

"What's Voldemort want a Healer for?" Fabian Prewett piped up, a frown on his handsome face. Hermione definitely knew where Bill and Charlie got their looks from now.

"It's worse than that," Frank announced, looking concerned, "Sasha was pregnant."
Loud chatter started up at that. Hermione glimpsed Frank catch Alice's right hand, her left hovering suspiciously over her own abdomen. Hermione's eyes widened – were they–? But no, they couldn't be. Neville's birthday was one day before Harry's, and by her calculations that meant they'd both be conceived in October of the next year. Neville was more than a year early.

Which meant that it wasn't Neville that Alice was concerned about.

Hermione bit her lip as grief swept through her. Brave, defiant Neville; gone.

Although, Neville could be their second child, her mind provided helpfully, Even if Alice is early on in her pregnancy, she could still conceive Neville in 1979 and have him in 1980…

The thought left her happier, but her stomach could not settle after the realisation that Neville would no longer be the only child of Frank and Alice Longbottom, famous Aurors.

"Are you suggesting that Voldemort wants her baby?" Lily asked in a strange voice, gripping James's hand painfully (Hermione suspected, given his pinched expression).

"It is a possibility," replied Dumbledore, and Hermione shared a glance with him.

The Prophecy?

"Regardless, we must be careful. It seems he is on a mission of a different kind, and until we know more I urge you to act appropriately." He gave Alice a considering look, who blushed. No one else seemed to have noticed.

"Dumbledore," Hermione said quietly, her head close to the Headmaster's to avoid eavesdropping, the meeting having been called to an end but some of the other members still lingering, "You don't think–?"

"Miss Trelawney has not confided anything in me yet, Miss Huxley." Dumbledore said, his expression unreadable. "But perhaps she did not confide in me, this time?"

Hermione felt like gulping fearfully. This was out of the realm of her abilities – how could she defy Voldemort when she did not know the future? Things were all well and good when she knew all the components of the equation, just not the answer; but to be completely ignorant of both? Hermione wasn't sure she'd be much help – or, at least, no more help than simply one extra wand in a battle to the death.

And that's what it was looking more and more like – a battle to the death; her death.

"I will do what I can to confirm." Dumbledore told her, which meant he would have one of his contacts within the Ministry check the Prophecy Room. Her shoulders relaxed a bit – they would know if the prophecy had been made, then. If it had, they would have to expect that things were coming to a head much more quickly than they had the first time around. If it hadn't, then they still had ample time. Either way, however, Hermione felt comforted at the fact they'd done away with two of his horcruxes already. But the three more ahead of them (four, if you counted the dark wizard himself) suddenly seemed a whole lot more daunting now that there was a self-imposed deadline, inching closer and closer with every passing hour.

"You alright?" Remus asked her softly, cradling her elbow when she entered the kitchen in preparation to return to Hogwarts.

"I'm fine." Hermione told him distractedly, still frowning in thought. She missed the worried look Remus sent his friends, who were all staring at them.
"We know what Dumbledore said, Hermione," James said, stepping forward, "But if you need to tell us about… well, about what you're doing, then you can."

"No, I can't." Hermione told him firmly, ignoring their disappointed faces, "This is much bigger than even I thought."

"What could be bigger than Voldemort kidnapping people?" Sirius snorted, but sobered at the look on her face, white and blank.

The return to the castle was mostly silent, although Hermione felt the piercing stare of Marlene at the back of her head.

When Friday came around, she'd nearly forgotten about Regulus, so inundated with inconclusive thoughts about what Voldemort could possibly want with Sasha Singh. That was until, toward the end of the Duelling club, she saw the boy in question slip into the Great Hall.

Hermione and Nettle usually spent time at the end of each meeting discussing what they'd learn next week, and speaking to a few of the students about their essays or exams or sometimes, even, what they thought of particular career choices.

But Hermione called the club off early for the first time since its inception, sharing a significant look with Nettle, who nodded at her as Hermione walked past, glimpsing a certain Theo Kray waiting to speak with the other Defence professor.

"Regulus." Hermione murmured, grabbing his arm and pulling him away out of the room and into the Entrance Hall, ducking into a spacious alcove for some semblance of privacy.

"I came as soon as I could," Regulus breathed, and the haughty façade he'd showcased in the Defence classroom days previous was gone from sight, "Kreacher says he can take us."

"Us?" Hermione questioned, doubtful, "There is no us in this, Regulus. I won't put you in danger."

"Too bad," Regulus said, smirking, and Hermione realised she'd spoken too soon, "Kreacher says he'll only take you if I tag along. Looks like you're stuck with me, Professor."

Hermione glared at the boy, indignant.

Stuck, indeed.

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The thought of what she might have to do stayed with her throughout the week, and her doubts about involving Regulus at all would not leave her even though he was the only person who could have provided the information of the cave's location, the only person close enough to Kreacher that she could trust in any capacity. Hermione, always practical, also knew that she would need him to gain access to Tom Riddle's diary, which probably resided at Malfoy Manor, considering Lucius Malfoy had been the one to slip it into Ginny Weasley's cauldron in 1992. They had no Severus Snape, spy for the Order, this time around. If Hermione had her way, Voldemort would be dead before Snape could even join the Death Eaters; and even if he wasn't killed earlier, Hermione did not plan on sacrificing Lily to the cause, and so there would be no instigator for Snape's betrayal of Voldemort.
The past was a very delicate thing, and Hermione knew that every action had a catalyst. It was just a matter of figuring it out and making sure it didn't come to pass – or, in some cases, making sure it did.

She was helping Professor Sprout in the greenhouses of all places, on Thursday morning before break, when this all became apparent. Hermione had decent relationships with all of the professors, even if some of them (like Slughorn) overwhelmed her at times. Of course, she spent the most time with Nettle, but Pomona had been extremely welcoming, as the Hufflepuff Head of House was wont to do, and so Hermione had recently given her free time to aid Pomona in her Herbology endeavours. Now that Hermione didn't have to pay so much attention to how she was being noticed, she was happy to do it. After all, the Herbology professor had saved her life many years ago, even if she didn't yet know it.

But it was not Pomona that was the impetus for her thoughts on time and its fragility – no, it was Lily.

"Professors," the redhead greeted them both, surprised, as she entered the greenhouse extremely early – Pomona had notified Hermione that she had seventh year Gryffindors and Ravenclaws next, to which Hermione had agreed to make herself scarce. "I didn't expect the both of you to be here."

Hermione raised her eyebrows in question, sharing an amused glance with Pomona. If Lily didn't expect them there, then why was she so early?

"I just meant," Lily rushed to say, "that I thought Professor Sprout would be here alone."

Lily looked a little panicked, her red hair in disarray around her heart-shaped face, and her lips a very dark pink from being bitten so much. Her cheeks were flushed, and she was wringing the strap of her book bag with worry.

"Lily!" Pomona exclaimed, getting up off of the dirty ground with a huff, not looking much taller given her short and stout figure. Hermione remained near the Snargaluffs, patting one tentatively in an effort to gain its trust. She really wished Pomona would have told her that back in sixth year, when it had taken the three of them to acquire the deadly pods they produced in that particular class. Now that Hermione was a teacher herself, she supposed half the fun was watching the students figure things like that out. She'd watched only a few weeks ago as her third years struggled to trick Kappas into bowing, when the easiest way to do it was often just to ask. She and Emilia had laughed heartily when one brave Gryffindor had tried to charge at the kappa to send it off balance, only to look like a bull chasing a red cloth as the kappa simply bounced out of the way, cackling gleefully.

"How can we help you, my dear?" Pomona asked, taking off her gloves and brushing the dirt off of her olive green robes.

Lily's eyes flicked to Hermione, who was still gently stroking the Snargaluff. Hermione supposed it might look strange if the observer didn't know it was a Snargaluff; after all, they were simply wooden stumps to the unaware.

"I thought I might– ask– you know–" Lily's jerky speech was incomprehensible to Hermione, who simply gazed back down at the plant beneath her fingers warily. It was vibrating, as if it was particularly content and had decided to purr. Hermione was amazed – such a sentient plant was not rare, but the sentience capabilities of most were rather sinister. She remembered, with a vague sense of offence, that the Snargaluff back in sixth year had tried to attack her hair. It must have liked it – although that wasn't a comfort, coming from a block of wood. It probably looked too much like the dry bushes the plant liked to hide in, which made Hermione grumble under her breath.
"Oh, Lily," Pomona said, understanding and shooting Hermione a strange sort of look, "I've got to prepare for your class with the Ravenclaws. I'm sure Professor Huxley can sort you out."

"But--" protested Lily; it was too late, however, as Professor Sprout had shuffled away, humming under her breath as she got near the Acidic Acutangula. The fatal cucumbers of the plant were growing and expanding as if they were breathing. Hermione didn't envy Lily's class, who would have to cut open the things and extract the seeds, which served as an ingredient in a potion to combat cursed burns.

Hermione ceased her petting of the Snargaluff, and tried to ignore the whine that seemed to emit from the plant upon doing so – she had the disturbing notion that someone like Hagrid had probably had a Snargaluff as a pet once upon a time.

"What's wrong, Lily?" Hermione asked, taking off her own gloves and putting them aside, causing the Mandrakes to twitch in irritation next to her. She had, for obvious reasons, never been fond of the things.

Lily looked torn now, probably regretting arriving early at all given she was left with Hermione.

"It's-- it's James." Lily admitted, still looking nervous.

"Mr Potter?" Hermione asked with a frown, stepping closer, "Is he alright?"

"Yes," Lily sighed, "He's fine. He's too fine." Her tone had morphed into one of irritation, and Hermione's frown deepened.

"I'm afraid I'm not following."

"Look," started Lily, huffing and placing her hands on her hips as if in preparation of a lecture. Hermione wished Harry were here to witness this. "I don't want you to think I'm silly, or not concerned about the real world, or anything like that," Hermione jerked her head, taken aback, "And I normally speak to Professor Sprout about this because she doesn't judge me, and I make some potions for her sometimes when she asks," Hermione didn't know that, "But she's foisted me off to someone. My friends, they're lovely, but they don't understand."

Hermione had a sneaking suspicion she wouldn't understand, but let Lily go on.

Lily proceeded to sit down on one of the old, rickety benches in the greenhouse – designed for when the students had to reach different heights to access different plants – and signed dramatically. Hermione, for lack of anything else to do, followed her cue.

"I was with James last night – during Astronomy," Lily added at Hermione's wide-eyed look, "and he mentioned it only briefly. I'm sure he didn't mean it the way it sounded, and I'm sure he hasn't even thought about what it would mean– we're so young, and we've only just started going out, not to mention all this stuff with You-Know-Who. I knew he'd liked me for ages, but I didn't think--"

"Hold on a minute, Lily." Hermione interrupted, trying to follow but failing spectacularly. "What are you trying to say?"

"James mentioned having kids. Multiple kids. Together! We haven't even been dating a month!" Lily said shrilly, waving her arms about in exasperation, "It's like he's been imagining certain things; I don't know how to tell him we haven't even--" Lily blushed, suddenly and fiercely, and avoided Hermione's eyes.

Hermione chose to ignore her last outburst, her own stomach swooping, and tried to address the first
"Lily," said Hermione levelly, trying to catch her eyes, "You know James is a pureblood, right?"

"Well, yes–"

"And you know purebloods like to get a head start on these things?"

"I know, but–"

"Then you should realise he's only reciting what he's been told, what I'm sure his parents have been repeating to him since he was young enough to comprehend it."

Hermione could not honestly believe she was giving Harry's mother relationship advice, of all things. She hadn't really ever been in a relationship. Not to mention at this point, Hermione was technically not alive. She hadn't even been born yet.

Hermione thought she'd seen and heard it all, but it seemed she was wrong.

"I hate to burden you with this, Professor," Lily said quietly, looking at Hermione morosely, "It's just, my friends – they all think it's romantic. And Professor McGonagall–" Lily paled, wide-eyed, "She's a great teacher, but I can't imagine asking her about this. James is her favourite student."

"Is he really?" Hermione asked, astonished, before contritely shaking her head at Lily's deadpan expression, "Right, sorry, priorities."

Hermione sighed, trying to come up with a way to explain this that wouldn't offend Lily on behalf of James, and wouldn't make Hermione seem like an absolute spinster. Despite the appeal of spinsterhood, she knew the seventies weren't exactly kind to unmarried, career-driven women with a cat or two.

"It's hard sometimes, as a Muggleborn, to rectify wizarding tradition with what we've been taught." Hermione said, ignoring Lily's intrigued frown, "After all, you're a smart girl. I'm sure your parents wanted you to go to university before all this magic stuff happened." Lily snorted in amusement. "I guess what I'm trying to say is–" Hermione sincerely hoped she wasn't screwing this up – she didn't want Harry to be a second child, like Neville was going to be; but at the same time, she did want Harry to be born, even if he wasn't her best friend. "You've got to figure out how you feel. James knows what he wants, he's known for a long time," Lily snorted again, and Hermione held back a grin herself, "It can be daunting, being on the receiving end of that kind of devotion. But there's no use talking about should haves, or could haves, or even whether or not you're too young or too old for certain things. It took me a long time to realise it, and it's all well and good to plan for the future but sometimes… sometimes we just have to let things happen and not think too deeply about it."

Hermione smiled, remembering, "Which, if you knew me, is a completely out of character thing to say."

Lily laughed, cheered up by Hermione's admission.

"Have you ever been in love, Professor?" Lily looked embarrassed, as if only just realising the question, "I'm sorry, that was inappropriate."

The bell tolled, both of them having lost track of time, and Hermione stood up, grateful for the reprieve from such a personal question. Ravenclaws bustled into the greenhouse, shooting Hermione judging looks, no doubt disapproving of the fact she wasn't starting her own lesson.

"If you need to talk again, Lily…" Hermione wasn't sure how to finish the sentence, not wanting to
be rude but also not necessarily willing to endure such an awkward interaction again.

Lily simply nodded, picking up her book bag from where it had been dumped at their feet. Hermione turned away, intent on making a quiet entrance into the Defence classroom and apologising to Emilia later whilst their fourth year Slytherins and Hufflepuffs fought off the Confundus charm. They’d not received permission from the Ministry to teach them how to throw off the Imperius, and so Confundus would do at a stretch. They were, in many ways, similar spells.

It was this conversation that haunted Hermione until Saturday night, though, for she wasn’t sure whether she’d hindered the timeline or helped it along. Would Lily refuse James children for many years, now? Or would she realise the depth of her feelings for him – and they were definitely deep feelings if the brief mention of children so early on didn’t see her breaking up with him then and there – and marry him straight out of Hogwarts, like Hermione knew she had done? And would Harry follow relatively soon after, like he had in her world?

And then, of all the things to ask, Lily had almost sucker punched her by the end. Had Hermione ever been in love? Thoughts of a redhead, hot-headed Gryffindor came to mind, but the reality was no; she had never been in love, at least not the way Lily was implying.

It was difficult, when one was so young, to really know the difference between platonic love and romantic love. Hermione's life had been rich with platonic love; her best friends were the unusual kind; the kind that would stick with you through thick and thin (although thoughts of jealousy came up, but Hermione swept them aside), literally save your life over and over, spend weeks at a time living with you without too much complaint… they were the kind of best friends not many people got to experience. Hermione had always been thankful for that, even if she had felt so terribly alone before they'd saved her from the troll. Even if they'd said harmful things over the years, they'd always put their lives on the line to help her. And the way both of them fought so valiantly to defend her right to exist in the wizarding world… it was deeper than that, of course – it wasn't solely for her. But she couldn't help but feel cherished by them when they stood up for her so fiercely; the warm tingling of her heart when they got outraged at the little things she'd learned to let go over the years… they were unique friends, and Hermione missed them dearly.

She had heard, of course, that their love for her was the kind of love many associated with romance. Hermione knew better, however. The three of them had only had each other in the end. Harry'd had Ginny, of course, but the three of them would always be something untouchable and, ultimately, unbreakable.

So when Lily had asked that question, her two best friends had almost come to mind. Dashing thoughts of them away quickly, she had been stumped. Her life had had too much going on to really focus on romance. A stray kiss here and there, but nothing concrete. Nothing that told her 'this is for me, this person is forever'.

But then there had been inklings, sometimes. Hermione would be a fool to delude herself for much longer, despite the difficulties of her situation. She hadn't taken it seriously at first, simply convinced it would go away with time – after all, it had to go away; the timeline dictated it had to. Now, though, that she wasn't bound by time and morality; now that she had the choice… it terrified her. She'd been avoiding the thought almost stubbornly because it scared her so. The thought of it actually scared her more than the thought of her possible death at Voldemort's hands. Death had, at least, always been familiar, when you got right down to it. This, however, was unfamiliar and dangerous and wholly consuming.

Hermione did not dare name it; but it sat, dormant, waiting to be acknowledged in the recesses of her mind. It purred at his presence, content, and gave lamenting howls at his departure. It was ironic that
it felt like a wolf, of all things – at first glance it was vicious, savage and unrelenting… but upon
deeper inspection, it seemed to emulate only the best parts of her, the purest components that made
up the whole. It longed for freedom, for expression.

*You know what they say,* Hermione thought wryly, looking at the dot labelled Remus Lupin on the
map, stationary up in his dorm, *It makes fools of us all.*

The map was essential that night. Dumbledore was not going to be joining them. In fact, Hermione
had not updated the Headmaster on her plans to destroy the locket. She remembered Kreacher's
words.

*Kreacher drank, and as he drank he saw terrible things... Kreacher's insides burned... Kreacher
cried for Master Regulus to save him, he cried for his Mistress Black, but the Dark Lord only
laughed... he made Kreacher drink all the potion... he dropped a locket into the empty basin... he
filled it with more potion...*

What terrible things would she see? There were too many to count, too many horrors in her past that
were simply waiting for a moment of weakness to rear their heads and strike, like angry serpents.

Regardless of what she might relive, however horrible, Hermione did not want Dumbledore to bear
witness to her blabbering. Harry had described the way in which the old wizard himself had
succumbed to the unknown potion, desperate for the torture to cease, moaning about the guilt inside
him, begging the invisible presence to hurt him, kill him instead…

Hermione had no doubt she would act similarly, reduced to a victim of such a horrendous potion in
the face of Voldemort's cruelty. She did not want anyone to witness what she would say, the things
she would beg for, the way in which she would be left vulnerable; but she had no choice. Kreacher
would only take her to the cave if he could take Regulus as well, and considering Hermione was not
his master (she cringed at the descriptor), she could not order him to leave the Slytherin behind.
Regulus would not order him, either, as he was too curious for his own good.

She had to remember that they were entering the cave at least a whole year before Regulus had done
so in her world – which meant the fear, the disgust, that he held for his own master had not yet fully
matured. He was scared, but he still appreciated Voldemort's power. The reality that Voldemort had
horcruxes had not yet sunk in for Regulus.

She shuddered, trying not to think about the fact she would be writhing on the rocky ground of an
island soon enough, begging someone to kill her. All because of one of these aforementioned
horcruxes.

Looking down at the map, Hermione focused in on the Headmaster's office – Dumbledore was
inside, alone, and pacing. His dot meandered around where Hermione knew his desk to be, slowly
circling and circling. He was obviously in thought, and Hermione didn't want to know what about.
Sometimes it was best not to know everything, she had gradually learned: she didn't always like what
she uncovered.

Her eyes drifted toward her own dot – *Hermione Huxley* written in green cursive, a little cramped –
and frowned. Upon opening the map after Peter had gifted it to her, she had been expecting
'Hermione Granger'… or maybe even no name at all. But her false name written so clearly and
definitively underneath her own ink dot had been a surprise.

It seemed the map showed her as she was in this world. Hermione Granger had been left behind a
while ago; after she'd introduced herself as Huxley, the map had probably taken her own
proclamation on board as fact, for lack of any other information on her. There was no birth certificate
in this time, after all, proclaiming her real surname. Hermione supposed the map did its best, unable to cross dimensions to seek out her true name. She had a feeling the words above her dot might change, if she were to let them.

She tracked Regulus as he left the dungeons, stopping every now and then once he was faced with a patrolling prefect or two. It was after curfew, and Hermione could not be seen with him. Regulus was still a Death Eater, and if word got back to Voldemort it could mean the end of them both.

Once he was five minutes from the rendezvous point, Hermione left her own quarters. It was ten thirty, but tomorrow was Sunday and she could rest then. For now, she simply had to push aside her general exhaustion and fight on.

"How does he feel?" Hermione asked once she reached him just outside the doors to the Entrance Hall. "The mark?" She added at his confused look. That wiped Regulus's face clean of expression, and he did not answer.

They strode to the gates and the ends of the wards, breaking through them like a breath of fresh air, clean and uninhibited.

"Kreacher!" At Regulus's whisper, the elf popped into sight. He looked significantly younger than Hermione remembered — which would make sense, it being twenty or so years earlier. His great big ears stuck out comically, and his snout-like nose seemed smaller now. Hermione realised it would grow with age. His eyes, usually bloodshot, were white but cloudy, as if he were under the effects of something.

"You haven't got him under the Imperius, do you?" Hermione asked harshly. Regulus rolled his eyes.

"Kreacher does what Master Regulus says, Kreacher is good and loyal elf." Kreacher grouched, glaring at her. It seemed no matter what time period she was in the house elf was destined to hate her.

"It's alright, Kreacher. Hermione is a friend. She's going to help me."

Kreacher looked a lot more mollified after that.

"Master wants Kreacher to take him to the— the cave?" Kreacher's low, croaky voice stumbled over his words, and pity flooded her senses.

Voldemort, she thought with rage, almost spitting in its capacity, tortures any type and number of creature.

The fury inside her compelled her forward, steadfast in her mission now when before she had been bogged down by tiredness and too much idle thought.

"Yes, Kreacher," Regulus replied, gentle. No wonder Kreacher idolised him. "Onto the island, if you can."

Kreacher nodded, looking pale. He stepped forward and grabbed onto both of their hands, his tiny ones engulfed, and Hermione felt the familiar sensation of Apparation.

Once they'd all been squeezed through unbreathable tubes, Hermione opened her eyes to see almost complete blackness.

"Lumos." Regulus whispered — for it was like they were in a forbidden place, sneaking in uninvited and waiting to be caught. The feeling was astute.
With the illumination of his wand, the basin behind them started to glow green, eerie and sinister.

"Whatever you do," said Hermione, also lighting her wand, "Don't touch the water."

"Why?" asked Regulus, frowning in confusion.

"There are Inferi in the water, and they will attack if we penetrate the surface."

"Inferi?!" Regulus exclaimed, his voice echoing off the high cavern ceiling, invisible to their eyes through the velvety blackness of the cave. Hermione glared at him as Kreacher whimpered, huddling into Regulus's robes in fright.

"You didn't think it would be unprotected, did you?" asked Hermione, moving around him to walk toward the glowing basin.

"Well, no," admitted Regulus, following closely behind with Kreacher still hiding behind his robes, sniffling quietly. "But I thought perhaps it was simply for intimidation."

"Your Lord is dramatic, I'll give him that," Hermione acquiesced, gazing into the basin with trepidation. "But Voldemort does not intend whoever enters here to leave alive. Unless it's himself."

The green glow of the potion made Regulus's face much sharper, more angular. Hermione figured she probably looked similarly menacing given his alarmed look.

"Evanesco."

The potion remained, as still as the black lake surrounding them.

"No spell will work," Hermione told him, bring her hands up to grip the sides of the basin, her knuckles white with stress, "It has to be consumed."

"I refuse to drink this." Regulus said, although Hermione knew he had drunken it once upon a time.

"Don't worry. I'll be taking it." said Hermione, resolved. She conjured a plain and inconspicuous goblet. Before she dove it into the potion, she paused.

"Regulus," she said, and the boy turned to her. Kreacher was whimpering at their feet, and Hermione was sure he was now using both of their robes to hide himself from the scene before them. The standard issue black robes of a Hogwarts student and her own crimson work robes clutched in the desperate hands of a Black house elf seemed awfully symbolic in that moment. "Whatever you do, you must force me to keep drinking."

"Miss Huxley--"

"Promise me, Regulus." she insisted, staring him down with the goblet poised over the potion's glowing surface.

"I promise."

"Do you remember our lesson on the Inferi?" Hermione asked, staring into the potion again. It didn't look so bad, really. She could do this. She had to do this.

"Yes, but--" Regulus was frowning, staring at her.

"I will ask for water at some point. You won't be able to conjure any, no spell will work. You will have to take it from the lake. Do it quickly, give it to me quickly. Once I've had a sip, I'll be much
better. At that point you must grab the locket and Kreacher will have to get us out. Speed is *imperative*. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Professor."

Hermione's shoulders slumped a little.

"Good."

She plunged the goblet into the potion, scooping up as much as she could, some of it overflowing back into the basin. It was a soupy texture, although no potion was left on her hands in the aftermath of the spill, as if it repelled human skin.

There was an echo as something splashed faintly in the water.

"Ignore it." Hermione said, bringing the goblet to her lips. She gulped down as much as she could.

At the first touch of potion to tongue, it started.

_Liar._ A voice whispered, almost hissing. _Impostor. You'll kill them all._

Nothing she hadn't already told herself. Flinching, she gulped on, the goblet half-way done.

Too smart for your own good. It will be the end of you. Imagine it. At the last swallow, an image flashed across her vision, causing her to squeeze her eyes shut. She was trembling, she realised, the goblet clattering against the side of the basin as she held it, trying to stabilise herself.

The image was herself, her dead eyes staring up at the night sky. Voldemort stood over her. His followers in their white masks and black robes surrounded. He was laughing.

_A beast, loathed by many and pitted by the remaining._ The voice hissed, getting louder now. Hermione scooped up more potion, not even hearing Regulus's words of concern or Kreacher's whimpering, which was growing louder with every mouthful. _No one will love you._

A pain similar to that of her transformations started up her limbs. She clenched her leg muscles as if in anticipation of a sprint.

_Killer._ It murmured, confident. An image of Lavender Brown as Hermione had last seen her dominated her vision. She had been mauled. Blood gushed from a bite wound on her neck, and she looked incredibly sad.

"No," Hermione said, her voice trembling, "It wasn't me."

LIAR!

Memories of Remus spun into sight, his chest a chessboard of scars. The newest ones, red and raw, seventeen and counting, were bleeding.

_Torturer, failed leader._ The voice went on, determined, as it showed her Remus, white and pale, and struggling with his transformation. _You infected him._

"No!" Hermione cried, pushing away whatever was near her. "I didn't mean to!"

Look at all of them.

Harry and Ron. Neville. Ginny. The Twins, Parvati Patil, Dean Thomas, Seamus Finnigan. Mr and
Mrs Weasley, Fleur. Professor McGonagall. Her parents.

Gone. Erased from existence. Dead. Because of you.

"No, please!" Hermione screamed, and she felt something hit the back of her head. She felt dizzy for a moment, but the pain that had started in her legs travelled up her torso and into her arms, making her soon forget. She was shaking. Everything was shaking. "Leave them alone! Take me!"

She was unaware of the how many mouthfuls of the potion she'd swallowed. She definitely wasn't taking it herself, that was for sure. Her mouth felt sticky, her tongue lolling about as if fighting through molasses.

"Kill me! Fix everything! I'm sorry, I didn't mean to!" She continued to cry out, the tears running down her face as image after image ran through her head, dead body after tortured friend after comatose parent, "I've been stupid! I know! Please, just end it!"

The pain increased tenfold all of a sudden, and Hermione screamed, the echoes of it resonating in her head like an ominous tune to a horror film.

"RIP IT OUT OF ME!" she screamed, "IT DOESN'T BELONG! I'LL ONLY HURT HIM! PLEASE, SEND ME BACK!"

The voice laughed in her head, joined by others who began to mock her.

Poor Hermione Granger can't fend for herself without her pitiful friends. One of them joked snidely.

Mudblood is weak, another jeered. Mudblood will die. Mudblood will kill all of them. Nothing and no one can defeat the Dark Lord, least of all a mudblood.

Are you scared? Another asked in mock concern, laughing. Are you a scared, little girl?

"I CAN'T DO IT!" shouted Hermione, "I CAN'T CHANGE IT! KILL ME AND BE DONE! END THIS!"

Why don't you leave? The first voice whispered from all directions. It's not like you've tried very hard to. Do you really hate your friends that much?

"Please don't," she sobbed, shaking her head rapidly, "Please, leave them alone. Leave me alone. I can't--" She was stopped by something at her lips, and she gulped it down greedily.

She was incredibly thirsty, she realised.

"Please help," she whispered, exhausted, "So thirsty…"

"Just a few more, Professor," a hard voice told her, "Come on, I'll give you water soon."

When he finds out, Remus flashed across her sight, his face angry and disgusted like she had never seen it before, He will never forgive you. You've deprived him of a son.

"No!" Hermione sobbed, as a baby Teddy Lupin faded out of existence, "No!"

"One more, Professor! Last one!"

How could he love you? A mudblood, a monster, an impostor…

She could say no more, her body heaving with the force of her tears. She was gasping for breath, so
parched, desperate for relief. She was still trembling, her arms raised to fight off whoever was giving her this blasted drink.

*Maybe you'll kill him, too.*

Hermione screamed bloody murder, her throat aching in agony at its overuse. Remus's body was deathly still, pale. His robes were covered in blood, and Hermione reached out a hand to turn him over and--

The pain stopped and the voices subsided. Hermione was left breathing heavily, echoes of death and destruction in her mind. She was slumped against something she did not know. There was a great sobbing in the distance, a muttered mantra. A small hand clutched the robes at her shoulder, unrelenting.

"Water." she croaked, her mind focused on that one thing. Abruptly, an extreme thirst overtook her. "WATER!"

"Here!" A voice replied, rushed, "Take it!"

A goblet was shoved into her hands, and Hermione lifted it to her mouth, the liquid overflowing down her chin and onto her chest, cold and refreshing.

She came back in stages. She was still shaky, her body trembling from the immense pain. She felt like she was at the beginning of a transformation, her stomach set alight with nerves and her muscles achy.

"KREACHER!" a voice yelled far away in the distance. The hand on her shoulder was pulling at her, and Hermione tried to bat it away. "KREACHER, SNAP OUT OF IT!"

Then, as if a dam had broken, the noise flooded in.

Great splashes, and shouting from a few feet away. The hand at her shoulder and in her robes was Kreacher, who had the other against one of his bat-like ears. His eyes were screwed shut, and he was muttering under his breath.

"--not real, Master is okay, Master is at Hogwarts--"

Hermione turned her head blearily. It felt like a lead weight, but once it rested on her opposite shoulder to the elf, she saw through blurry eyes the source of all the loud sounds.

*Why is Regulus Black here? He's dead…*

Regulus was standing near the edge of the island, white hands grabbing at the bottom of his robes from the water. He was kicking them off. Faint bursts of fire were erupting from his wand – inconsistent and weak.

"KREACHER!" Regulus's mouth was moving, and Hermione realised he was the one shouting.

Then, everything made sense.

"Kreacher." Hermione croaked, bringing up a heavy arm to grasp at the elf's wrist tightly. He gasped, looking up at her fearfully with watery eyes. He'd stopped his muttering. "Listen."

"KREACHER, GET US OUT OF HERE NOW!" roared Regulus. Kreacher's eyes went wide, and he ran forward, pulling at Regulus's robes. Once he reached her, he grasped at her shoulder and then
Hermione couldn't breathe.

Then, there was quiet.

Regulus was panting. Kreacher was whimpering, patting at Regulus's bowed head in worry.

For her, the world had never been clearer.

"I thought you remembered our lesson?" Hermione panted out, clutching at her abdomen. The potion sat in there, thick and uncomfortable. She could feel it lashing against her stomach walls.

Regulus glowered at her, his dark brows fiercely furrowed.

"Did you get it?" she implored, suddenly frantic. She sat up, wincing at the sloshing of the potion inside her, "Did you get the locket?"

Regulus fumbled in his robes, producing one of the most relieving sights Hermione had ever seen.

There it hung, swaying slightly in the breeze of the night. Hermione shivered at the cold. The gold chain glittered in the moonlight, the green stones of the S rather dull in comparison.

"Pass me the locket." Hermione commanded, getting up on her knees. She had to take a break to breathe heavily.

Regulus frowned at her, still angry.

"Professor, I don't think–"

"Now, Regulus." urged Hermione and he quickly complied, depositing the necklace into her open palm with aplomb. Maybe he had been concerned, instead of angry.

Hermione tucked the piece of jewellery into her robes. She'd had visions of destroying it that night, but she was in no state. The horcrux would consume her, and she would be unable to do it properly; she would probably kill herself in the process. No, she would destroy the thing tomorrow.

"You've got to go to Madam Pomfrey." Regulus grunted, trying to hoist her up. Kreacher was helping the best he could, his little arms trembling in his attempts to push her legs into position.

"No." Hermione said as firmly as she could. She suspected it was simply weak, however. "Take me to my quarters."

It seemed Regulus's concern for her wellbeing had run out for he merely heaved her up and close to his side, dismissing Kreacher as they headed towards the gates and breached the school's wards. Hermione felt her skin tingle and sighed. They were safe.

"That was some protection." Regulus commented, panting with the effort of supporting Hermione. She wasn't that heavy, was she?

She didn't have the energy to respond to him and so didn't, instead choosing to time her breathing so the pains in her chest didn't throb so badly.

When they reached the doors to her rooms on her direction (third floor, left down the corridor of Wanda the Wild), Hermione muttered the password – "Pride and Prejudice."

They were both panting; Regulus from exhaustion and Hermione from pain. A stinging feeling was
No wonder Draco Malfoy had been able to disarm the Headmaster that night. Hermione had always wondered.

"Do you want to explain how you knew so much about what was going to happen?" Regulus asked, sitting down on the armchair near her occupied couch. "Or maybe why you were yelling about ripping a piece of you out? Sounds an awful lot like horcrux talk to me."

"Don't be stupid, Regulus." Hermione snapped, tired and sick and stressed. "How's the arm?"

He glared at her, not responding. So Voldemort hadn't felt anything. Yet, at least.

She opened her mouth to continue when there was a quiet knock at her door.

Sharing a look with Regulus, Hermione cringed as she sat up, propped up against the armrest of the couch. She pulled out her wand, which Regulus must have stowed in her robes after she'd inevitably dropped it. Regulus had his own wand out and was moving quietly toward the door. He closed his hand around the knob slowly.

Quickly, he opened it, wand in the face of her guest.

There was no one, until the Invisibility cloak had been whipped off and James and Sirius were looking at Regulus in disgust.

"Let us in, will you? Filch could be by any minute."

Regulus was powerless to stop the two men barging in as they pushed him up against the door to squeeze past. Hermione had lowered her wand, her already leaden stomach sinking further in her belly at the sight of the two boys.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Regulus hissed, shoving Sirius aggressively. The brothers glared at each other, scarily alike.

"Get lost, Reg," Sirius said, the nickname sounding anything but friendly given the sneer on his face, "We saw the two of you walk up to the castle."

He turned to look at Hermione, who was undoubtedly wan and slumped uncomfortably against her couch.

"What did you do to her?" Sirius rounded on his brother, furious. James stood by, frowning.

"Sirius," Hermione called out weakly. "Sirius!" She repeated when he didn't respond. He turned to her, his expression still fierce, his hair flinging wildly. It had grown some over the year and she vaguely registered that it suited him, although it made him look more like the mad Sirius Black of her third year. "I'm fine. Honestly."

"You don't look fine." James commented, coming closer. Hermione huffed, subsequently wincing at the stitch-like pain that pierced her ribs. Her legs jerked as if shocked. The stabbing pains were less frequent, but this seemed to make them more painful when they did hit.

"You two shouldn't be here." Hermione tried to discipline, too tired for it to come out as anything but weary and resigned.

"And he should?" Sirius said, jerking a thumb in his brother's direction. Regulus's lips curled in
disgust. Hermione did not envy their mother, no matter how bigoted she was.

"Regulus saved my life tonight, so yes." Hermione told them, brushing some hair out of her face with a shaking hand, "Maybe you should be a little nicer to him."

Regulus glared at her, and Hermione remembered she was dealing with a Slytherin. They fought their own battles.

"I still think you should go to Madam Pomfrey." Regulus said, and although Hermione's eyes were closed, she imagined pursed lips and crossed arms. It almost made her laugh, the weird hybrid of Regulus Black and Molly Weasley she'd conjured up in her head.

"Shut up, Regulus." Hermione said without bite.

There was a moment of pause.

"Professor?" James said, coming close enough to nudge her gently, "Are you alive?"

"Yes, I'm alive." Hermione snapped, opening her eyes quickly to shoot daggers at them all. "And I would appreciate it if all of you left so I could get some rest."

As if to prove she was indeed alive, Hermione hoisted herself up off the couch, trying to keep the agony off her face. She hobbled over to the door of her bedroom. Looking over her shoulder, she glared at them until they muttered their goodbyes and left the room.

"Mind sharing?" she heard Regulus ask, and she realised he was asking about the Invisibility cloak.

"Shove off, Regulus." Sirius said grumpily, and her door closed behind the three of them.

Sighing, Hermione opened her door, almost falling onto her bed. Grimacing, she peeled off her robe, and lay in her dark underclothes. Too tired to do much more, Hermione stared at the ceiling and willed herself to sleep.

When sleep did come, it was in fits and bursts – she often woke quickly, panting at the images that plagued her dreams, the cruel voices that whispered in her ear; bloodthirsty and unforgiving.

At daybreak, however, her body did not feel as bone-deep tired as the night previous, even if her mind was groggy and not entirely lucid. She took a hot shower, wincing as the water pounded against her aching muscles. It was almost as bad as her worst full moon. *Almost.*

Her body seemed to forgive her after her shower, leaving her only with entirely liveable aches and pains. The memories from the potion that weighed on her mind did not so easily fade away into non-existence.

They were made all the worse for the way she could not forget the burning presence of the horcrux in her trunk. Nested beside the Resurrection Stone in a lone sock, the temptation the two of them put forth was one Hermione was nearly unable to resist. They called to her, even as she had breakfast and ignored the concerned looks of the Marauders. Regulus, of course, was acting like nothing had happened.

Her lazy Sunday had turned into something different by lunch time, by which she was helpless to the draw of the two magical objects. Retreating to her quarters, Hermione pulled the patterned sock from the base of her trunk, the clinking of the two items filling her with a dire feeling.

She pushed her hand in, her fingers brushing the stone lightly before she clutched the locket instead,
pulling it out in a hurry. Flinging the balled up sock back into her trunk as quickly as she could, she slammed the lid hastily and leant against it, breathing heavily. She squeezed her eyes shut, ignoring the little voice that whispered undeniable truths.

*You'll never see them again. They're lost to you.*

"Peter," she addressed, the locket a dead weight in her robe pocket next to her wand. She'd entered the common room, knowing the Marauders would not have ventured outside the grounds today. The rain was belting down in sheets, unprecedented considering it was half-way through April and spring was meant to be well under way. "Can I speak with you for a minute?"

The boy in question appeared curious, looking to his friends briefly before standing up and walking over to her. She had sequestered herself into the opposite corner of the common room, shooing away some laughing second years with a mere glance.

"Have you thought much more about what you'll do after Hogwarts?" she inquired, trying to find a segue.

"A little." Peter said with a frown, "But I can't help but think that's not what you asked to speak to me about."

"No," Hermione huffed, chuckling slightly, "You're right. It's not. I was wondering– I'm willing to tell you about what Dumbledore and I have been doing."

Peter's mouth opened in surprise, and his watery eyes got much bigger.

"Professor, I--"

"You wouldn't be able to tell anyone, Peter." enforced Hermione, very serious, "Not your friends, not even your parents."

Peter frowned.

"Professor," He said slowly, considering, "I'm... I'm really grateful you're willing to tell me, but I'll be honest," He paused, searching for the right words, "I don't think I can hide something from my friends."

Hermione smiled, pleasantly surprised.

"You can't, or you won't?" Hermione asked, the terrible voices that had been whispering at her since last night finally fading in place of a seemingly foreign feeling – she realised that it was hope, singing inside her chest loud and clear.

"I guess I won't." said Peter, giving her a timid smile. Her heart soared.

"Well," she said, wanting to beam at the boy – no, the man – proudly. "I guess I'll see you in class, Peter."

She left him then, ducking out through the portrait hole with a grin on her face. She couldn't will it away no matter how hard she tried.

Peter had denied her. Ordinarily she might be offended, but Peter had denied her! Hermione wanted to tap dance, she wanted to shout and scream with glee, she wanted to sing from the rooftops.

Maybe everything wasn't lost, as the potion had promised her.
All the things Dumbledore had said to Harry in the future – they began to make sense, more sense than they ever had before. Love, hope, happiness… the positive emotions swelling inside her combated the swirling evil of the potion. It wasn't even a fair fight, the glee within her beating down the despair with every remembrance of Peter's denial of her offer. Dumbledore had been right – love was their greatest weapon.

And, Hermione realised, they just might win with it.

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Hermione felt less appreciative of Dumbledore the day before the full moon, her good mood of the week temporarily dampened by his disapproving expression.

"Miss Huxley," he intoned, "What you did was incredibly dangerous. If Mr Black hadn't–"

"But Mr Black did. He and Kreacher saved me." Hermione breathed, still smiling serenely at Dumbledore.

If Hermione could read the old Headmaster better, she might've said he was scowling. As it was, his mouth twitched downwards slightly before his face resumed a blank expression.

Pulling it out of her pocket proudly, Hermione's smiling mouth morphed into a grin as she plonked the locket down onto Dumbledore's desk triumphantly.

"You'll take care of it?" she said, glad to be free of the dark presence from her heart, "The full moon is tomorrow, and–"

"In the future, Miss Huxley, we need to discuss your approach to this. We are all much stronger when we work together–"

"But I wasn't alone, Professor," stated Hermione, taking his non-answer for an affirmative and opening the door to his office so as to leave, "I had Regulus."

Her good mood slowly faded into her normal demeanour over the course of the day as she thought back to their conversation, and by the time the full moon came around the next day – a Sunday, the first time it had ever been on a weekend – Hermione was pretty much back to normal. The success of Peter still lingered, and overall her stress levels were better; but there was something about being a werewolf on a full moon that could crush even the most persistent of good spirits.

Hermione collected Remus from the Gryffindor common room this time. Students lingered about, and so they had to huddle under James's invisibility cloak whilst the daylight still remained. The others would join them later under the cover of darkness and Disillusionment charms. She anticipated an uneventful full moon, and was incredibly grateful for it. Even if it turned out to be awful, the anticipation of terror was always worse than the terror itself.

"We haven't seen each other much." Remus commented mildly as they made their way down a staircase from the fourth to the third floor.

"I saw you on Thursday for hours, Remus," replied Hermione, smiling wide.

"That's different," Remus said quickly, almost petulantly, "Class is different."
"Okay," Hermione assured him, "A week ago, then."

"You spoke to Peter," Remus corrected her, his voice laced with impatience, "Not me."

"Remus Lupin," Hermione remarked in a whisper, unable to hold back her grin as they reached the more populated first floor, "Are you– are you jealous?"

"What?" Remus exclaimed, and a few of the students looked around in confusion. He quietened down, only replying once they were outside on the grounds, unlikely to be heard. "I'm not jealous." he whispered fervently and Hermione bit her lip, butterflies causing a stir inside her in an instant.

"It's alright, Remus." Hermione assured him as they whipped off the Invisibility cloak, safely inside the passage to the Shrieking Shack. Remus's hair looked windswept, and she was sure hers wasn't much better. Their clothes were old; Remus's were a little too small for him. Her eyes drifted over his strong shoulders appreciatively, very visible in that particular t-shirt, before Hermione snapped them away, whirling around with a certain heat in her cheeks to walk down the passage.

"Are you?" Remus asked her, and Hermione had almost forgotten their conversation now that they were in the creaking shack, the claw marks on the wooden floorboards beneath them an immediate mood killer.

"Am I what?" Hermione asked absently, attempting to unhook her bra but having difficulty.

"Jealous?" confirmed Remus, and she turned around in shock, completely forgetting that she was in her bra and underwear. Her hands were paused at her back, still unable to unhook the infernal breast-trapping device.

Remus was in boxer briefs, the awkward kind that looked like they'd seen better days. Hermione's eyes flicked down and away too quickly for him to notice, but the knowledge that he wore boxer briefs had never really stuck in her mind. It would definitely stick now.

Unlike all the other full moons – all of them experienced with Remus – this one had an unusual sort of energy to it. Every other month previous she'd been too worried or too tired or too scared to think of much else but the impending pain. But the churning in her stomach now was not the same as the unpleasant feeling last month, like her body had been warning her. No, this time the feeling left her uneasy, yes, and fidgety – all to be expected. But it also left her… excited. Playful.

"What–?"

"Remus." she breathed. He was closer now, and the distance between their two bodies seemed entirely too short. It felt like with every intake of breath, her covered breasts brushed his bare chest.

Her bra finally came undone, falling balefully to the floor with a soft thwup.

She wasn't breathing anymore, her body suspended in motion. Her eyes were wide, connecting to Remus's. He had not looked down, and was instead staring at her with an intensity she had not ever witnessed directed toward her.

It was like the temperature had been turned up a few degrees. Everything was hazy, but extremely distinct at the same time.

Her breath left her in a great whoosh, and Remus's eyes swept down to her bitten lips and back up again so quickly he almost gave Hermione whiplash.

And then the transformation was upon them. Groaning, Hermione let her head fall onto Remus's
muscular but somewhat lithe shoulder, her body trembling. It was still a little weak from her cave escapade, and it was like the transformation was targeting the most vulnerable parts of her body. Her legs in particular began pulsing in pain. Crumpling onto the floor, Remus grasped her shoulder painfully to keep himself upright. It was a losing battle, though, and he soon followed her, the both of them panting against the floorboards.

She gave one last mournful thought to her underwear, still seated on her hips, before her world went black.

Hermione woke slowly.

Blinking blearily, she turned her head. There were tatters of cloth all over the floor of the room. Hermione glanced down, and saw the top of Remus's head. His head was on her chest, his right cheek crushed up against her breast amusingly, covering her nipple. Hermione did not feel like laughing, however, as the position they were in suddenly became apparent to her. Remus's hairy leg was thrown over her own. He was lying half on her and half on the floor, face down. Hermione was on her back, her left arm resting lightly on Remus's shoulders. She jerked it back as if burned.

Their naked bodies were all over each other, and Hermione had the ridiculous thought that they hadn't even kissed yet.

Blushing furiously, she brought up her hands to cover her face. She groaned, forgetting about the man lying on top of her in her embarrassment.

Remus moved, and Hermione froze.

"Are you okay?" asked Remus, his voice rough and deep with sleep. He cleared his throat, and Hermione imagined she might see a confused look on his face. She could only imagine, considering her hands were still obscuring her vision.

His warm hands pried hers away, and Hermione was left staring at him in mortification.

Remus simply raised an eyebrow, his expression entertained, and his eyes travelled down. Hermione prepared to cover her chest modestly (although it was pointless, really), until Remus's gaze settled on her left shoulder guiltily. He brought up a hand, brushing his fingers lightly over the tender skin there.

"I hurt you." He frowned, his tone filled with remorse.

"Really?" Hermione asked, not feeling anything but tenderness – which was quite normal following a full moon. She tried to angle her head so she could see, but the bruise he seemed to be talking about (there was no blood, fresh or dried) was in too awkward of a position for her to glimpse without a mirror.

"Don't worry about it." she said, awkwardness and embarrassment temporarily forgotten as she brought up a hand to halt his.

They stared at one another for a moment, before Hermione cleared her throat and sat up, forcing Remus to do the same.

"Strange, isn't it?" Hermione asked him as she shouldered on her robes, a little appalled that she was essentially going commando back to the castle. She had to focus on not thinking about Remus doing the same. "That we barely spent time together and you're fine?"

"I've decided not to question it," Remus said decisively, pulling his t-shirt over his head, "But if you
wanted to spend more time together, I wouldn't be opposed."

It was easy to forget that for all of his kindness and thoughtfulness and studiousness, Remus was a Marauder.

Hermione fidgeted, and chose to ignore his comment.

The awkwardness of the Shack followed her into the next week. She chose to spend her Tuesday free period with Emilia instead of Remus, discussing the new innovations in potion-making of all things (many of which Hermione had not read about in potions journals, but in future textbooks). She avoided Remus's hurt looks in class on Thursday, too scared of what he might do if she were to keep him back to apologise.

A werewolf and a scarlet woman. She would never hear the end of it if it got out.

There was a voice at the back of her head, different to the harmful ones so far heard that month, that told her she was being silly. No one had figured out she was a werewolf just yet – bar Snape, but he didn't count considering Sirius had tipped him off – and so why would they figure out if she was kissing a student on the sly?

The fact that it would have to be on the sly is what bothered her, she soon realised. Because didn't she want to give Remus happiness? Wasn't that the whole point? How could he be happy living in secret, hiding another part of his life away from curious eyes? No. It was unfair of Hermione to place that on him. She was still a teacher, his teacher.

Coward.

She scowled at the voice petulantly. What did it know?

Hermione was pretty sure she needed to see some kind of magical therapist after all of this was over and done with. To quote her thirteen year old self – hearing voices, even in the wizarding world, wasn't a good sign.

So when the last Hogsmeade weekend of the year came around at the end of the month, Hermione had originally decided she wasn't going in the hopes that Remus wouldn't be able to find her. She had much thinking to do, about how she might tell Remus to wait. Anything she thought up simply came out desperate and begging, though, so she wasn't doing so well.

That was all until Minerva had cheerfully informed her she was to be supervising. It made sense, given that she had supervised the first and no more after that. She'd managed okay until Sunday, the last day of the month, by which time Quidditch had been had (Hufflepuff victorious over Slytherin) and she'd avoided the Marauders around Hogsmeade for the first day. She suspected Quidditch had much to do with it – it was rare that Hogsmeade and Quidditch fell on the same weekend, but McGonagall had muttered something about scheduling disputes and left it at that.

When Hermione was confronted on Sunday, however, it was not by the Marauders, but by Marlene McKinnon.

"Alright, Professor," she said, striding up to Hermione as she gazed longingly at some fancy quills from outside Scrivenshaft's Quill Shop, "Colour me intrigued. What's going on with you?"

Hermione blinked at the Ravenclaw, drawing blanks, her lips parted in stupefaction.

"I'm sorry?" Hermione said, looking behind her to check that Marlene wasn't talking to someone else. No, it was all on Hermione.
Marlene rolled her eyes, and dragged Hermione into the quill shop. She wanted to be mad and reprimand the seventh year for her manhandling of a teacher but got distracted by a rather pretty self-effacing quill.

"I'm meant to be patrolling, Marlene," Hermione said tiredly, but somehow knew by the determined look on Marlene's face that she wouldn't buy it, even if it were true.

"Voldemort can wait five minutes," she said, waving her hand as if waving away the Dark Lord himself. "Tell me what's happened. First you look as though you might collapse at a slight scare from Peeves you're so wound up, and then all of a sudden you're breathing as if someone's paying you to do just that, smiling at fifth year *Gryffindors* of all people – and everyone knows the fifth years are the worst. Then just this past week you've been ducking inside alcoves and taking back routes to all your meals, looking over your shoulder all the while. So tell me – *what is going on?*"

Hermione stared at Marlene, flabbergasted.

"I think," Hermione said slowly, realising a solution to one of her problems might just have been in front of her this whole time, "I might have something to tell you, Marlene."


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"You know, Moony, glaring at me is not going to help." Peter said absently, jotting something down from his Transfiguration textbook. They had an essay due on Wednesday, and Peter had a feeling he wouldn't get it done unless he finished it by the end of the day.

"I can't believe you gave her the map, Wormtail." sighed James, too happy to be too annoyed with Peter. He'd got back from his date only recently, after all.

"May I present to you," He'd announced upon returning to the three who'd been left behind at the castle, "The future Mrs Potter!" He'd gestured grandly at Lily, who'd rolled her eyes with a blush.

"You proposed?" Sirius had asked, excited.

"No, you idiot." Lily had said with a smile, "James is just being a prat."

She'd shoved her boyfriend playfully and headed up to the dorms.

So yeah, James was a little starry-eyed.

"It was a nice gesture. She seemed stressed." Peter shrugged, unruffled at Remus's continued glaring.

"If you're so desperate to talk to her, just follow her."

"Moony doesn't want to be committed to St Mungo's, Prongs," Sirius said with a snort, playing with his wand by the fireplace, lounging on the couch, "Or Azkaban."

"I just don't understand why –" Remus started, cutting himself off with a groan of frustration.

"You know," Peter started with a put upon sigh, like he dealt with their dramatics all the time. Peter would tell you did, he most certainly did. "She is a professor, Moony. Maybe she doesn't want to
lose her job."

"Give the man an award!" Sirius called out, and Peter rolled his eyes at his friend, smiling.

"Why don't you get detention?" Peter said, ignoring his friend, "Do something so bad she has to punish you in class, right then and there."

Sirius looked up from the sparks his wand was emitting, sitting up with sudden interest.

"You know, Wormtail," said Sirius, looking to his sandy-haired friend whose face was alight with the possibilities, "That's not such a bad idea."

Chapter End Notes

It's very rare that I'll go into a non-Hermione POV, but I just wanted to add on that little titbit as some kind of promise that Hermione can't just ignore Remus forever. Also, 700 words off of 100k? So close yet so far... I reckon this story will hit around 140k before it finishes, haha woops.

Really curious to hear how you guys felt about this chapter. Please review :)
The Breakdown Of Duplicities

Chapter Notes

I sincerely hope I don't stuff up the story from now on. All of your comments have been really encouraging and so full of praise. I'm so flattered. Hopefully I can do the rest of the story justice for all of you. Title of the chapter comes from The Cure song 'Disintegration', although it is a modified lyric.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With May upon them, the students went into a frenzy.

"Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests?" Muggleborn Rosita Ramos complained in class on the second of the month, "I should've just stayed in the Muggle world. University wouldn't be as awful as this. Joder!"

Hermione couldn't help but laugh at the Hufflepuff, who blushed when she realised Hermione had heard her.

When she and Nettle had put together the reviewed curriculum back in September, they'd allowed for a final month of rigorous revision in preparation for exams – the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s in particular.

It was in one of these revision lessons – they were going over healing spells and the way in which they could be adapted to different kinds of injuries – that the Marauders actually behaved like Hermione had thought they would upon her arrival – a consistent barrage of jokes and pranks designed to humiliate and create work for the students and professors alike. She hadn't been looking forward to it; but it had fallen by the wayside in all of her worries about timelines and such. She'd largely forgotten they were pranksters, really.

It went without saying that Hermione should have expected it, though. She'd gotten off lightly so far given the school year was due to end in a month or so.

She couldn't believe she'd forgotten – Fred and George had verbally admired them well enough back at Grimmauld Place, labelled them the inspiration for all of the joke candy they'd tested on first years. Hermione had been furious back then.

Just as she was now.

"What--"

But her exclamation was drowned out by the screeching of chairs and the loud groans of the student body. In an ironic twist of fate, the Slytherins were all vomiting… vomiting up rainbows of glitter.

"Feeling a little peaky, Travers?" James taunted at the boy, who was crouched over his chair and vomiting into his partner's lap – the vomiting was contagious, because as soon as Travers's glitter hit Mulciber, he too started puking his guts.

The Gryfffindors were all laughing now, the few Ravenclaws who liked to join the lesson looking put out at its disruption. They were however unable to hold back mirthful grins of their own. That was
until Snape, in an attempt to grab a hold of Sirius's robes and infect him in revenge, tripped right into Phillip Joyce. Who then started vomiting.

Hermione was stunned still. Nettle was trying to corral up the Slytherins into one area in a failed attempt at quarantine. She seemed to be unaffected by the piles and piles of glitter dusting her feet and the bottom of her black robes. At least there was some sort of mercy involved in this spectacle.

The Ravenclaws were also interspersed with the Gryffindors, and so the illness swept through the classroom. The Marauders – all four of them – did not look worried at this prospect, which left Hermione fuming. They had planned this. Despite the colourful display vomited right into Sirius's face, he merely laughed. His lengthy black hair glittered like a colourful galaxy, and Hermione realised they'd made themselves immune as well.

"COUNTER-SPELL!" Hermione shouted, feeling like her hair was standing on end, sparking in her anger, "NOW!"

Luckily, she was heard through the groans of everyone, and was of mind enough to see the casual way in which Remus lifted his wand and performed the counter-spell. The students immediately stopped, a few pawing at their mouth to rid them of the remaining glitter. Hermione suspected they'd be seeing the infernal craft for weeks, a weird residual haunting of the Marauders' final prank – for it would be their final one; Hermione would make sure of that.

"Mr Lupin," said Hermione, clipped and with narrowed eyes, for he was nearest, "Can you explain yourself?"

He shrugged, not looking at all worried.

A shrug? Hermione thought to herself, appalled, A SHRUG?! Oh, he is going to get it.

"Detention straight after class." she snapped, and she saw the way some of the other students backed away. Maybe her hair really was electrifying.

"The three of you," she rounded on the others, taking in their equally blasé appearances as they stood there. Sirius was twirling a glittered tendril of hair around his finger, looking bored. "Will also serve detention. All of you, separately. Mr Lupin tonight, Mr Black tomorrow night, Mr Potter on Saturday and Mr Pettigrew on Sunday."

Sirius looked briefly annoyed that he would be copping the Friday night detention, but she had no sympathy for him. James looked as if he might shrug at her, but upon glancing her furious face promptly sat down. Peter didn't seem bothered, and she supposed a Sunday night was not too horrible to give up. This didn't seem to involve him much, anyway. It stunk of Sirius.

---

"You know, it's not so bad." said Marlene.

"Did you not hear me?" Hermione asked as they walked down the main street of Hogsmeade, "I… I fancy a student." she whispered the last word as a group of raucous third years Hufflepuffs strode past.

"How old are you, twenty?" Marlene said, glancing at her shrewdly as they continued to walk, "It's
not like you're forty and he could be your son."

Hermione fought back thoughts of Remus technically being old enough to act her father. Now was not the time to think of the future she had left behind.

"And even then," Marlene continued, either oblivious to Hermione's plight or choosing to ignore it, "It's not like you've gone and snogged him yet."

*No, he's only seen me starkers.* Hermione thought, but knew she could not voice it. Marlene knew she was a werewolf, but Hermione didn't fancy letting her know about that. She had the feeling the girl might use it against her.

They pulled up to the Hog's Head, and Marlene led them inside.

"I thought I told you to piss off." They whirled around, and Hermione was faced with the disgruntled expression of Aberforth Dumbledore, his grey beard twitching in frustration at the sight of her.

So much for not remembering a night twenty or so years ago. If he hadn't forgotten it months later, there was much doubt in Hermione's mind that he would forget it permanently.

"My apologies, Aberforth," Hermione said, straightening up. "We'll leave."

"What was that about?" Marlene asked, looking back over her shoulder at the door to the pub.

"I might have abused Aberforth's hospitality a while back. He hasn't taken kindly to me since."

"No matter," Marlene said, offhand, "We'll go to the Three Broomsticks."

"No!" Hermione blurted out, thinking of a certain group of Gryffindor boys they would undoubtedly run into. "Not the Broomsticks."

"Merlin," Marlene huffed, rolling her eyes, "Alright then."

They entered Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop with grimaces on their faces. Hermione had never been there personally during her time at Hogwarts, but she'd of course heard about it from Harry, who'd visited with Cho and had an absolute disaster of a date.

Hermione looked around at all of the cuddling couples. The tables were pushed too close together, and the frills lining their edges were extremely tacky. The way the tea shop seemed loud but also intimate unnerved her, and she felt the pricks of unease at the thought of what Ron might've done had they ever gone on a proper date. Somehow, hunting horcruxes and attending Ministry celebrations together wasn't really standard date material. Merlin knew why!

Marlene must have glimpsed a certain kind of expression on her face.

"Not sure what it's like in the future," Marlene murmured to her out of the corner of her mouth, "But two women sitting together in an established date venue raises some eyebrows around here."
Hermione huffed out a laugh. Well, she supposed sometimes it was best to create a distraction people didn't necessarily want to look at (but would be helpless to think about) just to cover up something else entirely.

"Now, tell me what he said."

---

"What are you playing at, Mr Lupin?" Hermione huffed, frazzled. She shook her head in disbelief. It was after class, and Hermione had decided she was going to get Remus cleaning the Grindylow tank. The water demon in question was smirking at them through the glass. She'd run out of room to put the creature in the exam store room, and so it sat in her office, peering out at them ominously. Hermione remembered such a creature in Remus's own office in third year, and had the perverse thought that maybe he got his inspiration from her. Then she remembered she was in a different dimension and promptly stomped the thought out.

"Mr Lupin?" Remus asked, a grin gracing his friendly face. His green eyes glittered with amusement, which only served to make her more annoyed. "Sounds awfully fancy."

Hermione gave a weird sort of growl, unamused.

"I could ask you the same thing, you know." he said, pulling over the stool she'd conjured for him and standing on it, trying to wipe away the algae of the inside of the tank, his sleeves rolled up. The Grindylow was staring him down, but Hermione knew it would not attack. Its tank was too small to fully submerge the Gryffindor and drown him, as Grindylows were wont to do. Instead, it simply floated glumly, glaring at Remus and Hermione in a petulant rhythm.

"Oh?" Hermione said, coming around to sit on the edge of the desk. The office wasn't too small, but the distance between the two of them seemed entirely too short for comfort. Hermione didn't want to sit behind the desk, though, for fear of Remus cornering her in her chair. At least this way she could escape if need be, already on her feet. She really shouldn't have assigned him detention with her. But she'd made her bed and she had to lie in it, no matter how awkward or humiliating it might be.

"Yeah," Remus said, removing the sponge and dropping it into the bucket by his feet, stepping down from the stool. His right hand dripped murky water onto the floor, the tips of his sleeve wet. His forearm looked more muscular than she remembered, and Hermione had the stray thought that maybe his improved full moons meant he had the chance to actually get some meat on his bones, no longer perennially ill.

Remus sighed, as if suddenly tired.

"Look, I don't want to push you." He started, and an uncomfortable swirling erupted in Hermione's gut, "But I can't keep pretending there's nothing going on anymore."

He stepped closer to her, absentmindedly wiping his wet hand on his trousers. His robes were flung over one of the chairs, out of sight, and his tie had been loosened. His hair was mussed, as Hermione was realising that was its permanent state, and the faded scars on his face shone peculiarly. He was without his jumper that day, spring finally kicking in, and Hermione thought she could see the darker area of his nipples through his white shirt.
She shook herself mentally. It was a strangely erotic image, and she looked away to rid herself of it.

"Surely you feel it too," pleaded Remus, stepping ever closer. Hermione squeezed her eyes shut, her thighs clenched tight, and her neck feeling too hot to touch. Her arms were crossed in front of her chest, and she cursed the fact she'd changed from her glittery robes into a more casual mid-length pleated skirt and brown and white plaid short-sleeved top. The soft cotton brushed against her heaving chest, sending goosebumps down her arms. She longed desperately for the heavy material of a plain robe, which would hide her skin from view. Her legs, exposed from the knee-down, shivered as if in anticipation of something.

Her scar was, of course, charmed invisible. Remus knew it was there, though, and could see it with a carefully worded counter-charm if he so desired. Hermione swallowed thickly, trying not to think of the way his warm, slightly calloused hand might cradle her wrist; or the way his wand would rest lightly upon the skin of her underarm, a softly whispered incantation revealing her heritage like some grand, proud statement of being.

"Do you know how hard it is?" Remus asked, his voice low and slightly gravelly, and Hermione felt his shoed toes nudge her own, her sensible flats drawing back at the touch. Her eyes were still firmly closed, and she thought the lights crossing her vision might have been caused by the strength of her denial to look at him. She wasn't going to open them, she promised herself, not until he stepped away. "To look at you in class and know what's underneath those robes?"

Hermione broke her promise, flinging open her eyes to see him too close, entirely too close.

"Remus!" Hermione gasped, embarrassed at the way her cheeks flushed red. She pushed him away and strode past him and around her desk, trying to extend the distance. "That's– you're being entirely inappropriate."

Her hold on her propriety was slipping, and Hermione wasn't much sure she had the strength to grab onto it again once she let it go for the first time. It would be a slippery slope down, and she had no purchase.

"I'm trying to get you to see," said Remus, following her around so only the wooden, squat desk chair stood between them. Hermione had her hands on it, ready to push it into him at a moment's notice. She tried to ignore the agitated feeling in her bones, the need for action. It was remarkably like her battlefield instincts, in a way – she could not stand still, her feet shuffling in discontent; her arms longed to bring forth her wand from the waistline of her skirt – but what would she do? Threaten him away? Remus wouldn't buy her threats, and then she'd be back at the start. At least with her wand tucked away, unassuming, he might forget about it when she might need it. "Either way, you can't avoid me. The full moon is in a few weeks, and–"

"I'm perfectly aware of when the full moon is, Remus." snapped Hermione, realising she was reverting to the bossy tone of her childhood but unable to stop herself.

"Alright." Remus murmured, hands up in a kind of supplication.

The silence that followed was strained, Hermione desperately trying not to notice the movement of muscles under the skin of Remus's forearm, the light dusting of blonde hair glinting in the firelight. His hands were also clutched around the chair, the back of it facing him entirely.

"I'm–" started Hermione, willing the tremble in her voice to disappear, "I'm your teacher, Remus, I can't–"

"But you're not!" Remus blurted out, trying to move around the chair. Hermione scuttled back and
around, and found herself back where she'd started – they'd encircled the whole desk. "You're an assistant, you're not bound by the same rules."

"When I took this job," Hermione said, pushing herself further back into the desk as Remus followed her around, "I agreed to follow a certain kind of conduct–"

"With all due respect, Hermione," Remus said, stepping toward her. She'd have to touch him to get past again, and she didn't trust herself to do that and stop. "Fuck conduct. We're both adults. You're hardly older than me. You're not a professor, as we've established, and somehow I doubt 'don't fuck Remus Lupin' was in the conduct you were told to stand by upon accepting your position."

Hermione glared at him, incensed less by his language but more by the cavalier way in which he spoke of what she'd been agonising over for – she now realised – months.

"You don't know it now, Remus," Hermione seethed, low and angry, "But when you leave Hogwarts, finding a job will be especially challenging. Not just because you're a recent graduate, but because you're a werewolf. They don't know now, but they will find out." Hermione added at his frown. "Imagine adding 'I fucked my teaching assistant' to the list of reasons not to hire you? You'd never work a day in your life."

She spat out the swear word, infuriated by the energy inside her, begging for some kind of release. If she didn't know any better, she might liken it to the feeling before a full moon. Nevertheless, like she'd told Remus, she was well aware of the lunar cycle, and the full moon was weeks away.

"Then don't we deserve some kind of happiness?" Remus insisted, stepping so close that his feet slipped in between hers, and her subtle trembling would definitely become obvious to him. He grasped her wrist lightly, and the grip was everything Hermione had suspected it to be – nothing but gentle. The charge of it, though, the way it felt like he was injecting electricity right into her veins, was anything but gentle. "If we're doomed to live miserable and destitute lives, then why can't we live them together?"

Hermione glared at him, her brows furrowed in anger and frustration and longing. He made it sound so simple, so easy. However, Hermione knew it would be anything but. With both of them bogged down by their disease, how could they survive? And the reputation that would follow them even if their relationship didn't last, considering how it had started...? Well, this was the worst kind of bad idea. It was a bad idea that could and would ruin lives. Hermione thought of Teddy Lupin, his multi-coloured hair reduced to a mere memory in the face of such a decision.

And yet, Hermione lifted a shaking hand.

Her fingers brushed against his cheek, grazing over the slight ridges and bumps of old scars. Her palm cradled the left side of his face and Hermione gave Remus a small smile, pained and full of indecision.

"You're wonderful, Remus," Hermione breathed, despair overtaking her in a moment of weakness. She was depriving him of so much, it was sometimes difficult to remember what she was depriving even herself. "But you know better."

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"You're a fucking idiot," Marlene commented once Hermione was done, adding a "Professor." on
"That wasn't the problem with the sentence and you know it," grumbled Hermione.

Marlene raised a sceptical blonde eyebrow, her grey eyes challenging Hermione to comment further. Their tea had come and gone, the soothing qualities of the chamomile doing nothing to help Hermione's own nerves. Marlene's English Breakfast had seemed to do the job for, despite the incense surrounding them in a thick, all-consuming aroma, the Ravenclaw had perked up even more after the hot drink.

"You're telling me Remus has essentially given you every opportunity in the book to confess your feelings – or, bless him, simply snog him senseless – and you've rejected him at every turn?"

"It's not like I want to." hissed Hermione, looking around suspiciously and hoping no one had heard the aforementioned student's name, lest they understand their whole conversation and blab to Dumbledore, who'd no doubt have her fired.

"Oh no," Marlene said lightly, plucking off a piece of her carrot cake and swallowing it in one bite, "You want to. You've made up every excuse in the book to reject him, toting out age and experience and danger. So I reckon you just don't want him. Maybe I'll go for him," Marlene paused, smirking, "He's awfully nice."

Hermione glared mutinously at her student, outraged.

"That's what I thought," said Marlene with a smug smile, "You know, if you don't claim him, you're going to have to watch other witches – or wizards, I don't discriminate – have their go of him."

Hermione didn't say anything, her thoughts and feelings swirling around inside her in a confusing conglomeration of anger, loss, embarrassment, jealousy, and desire.

"I think you're scared," observed Marlene quietly, putting a hand up at Hermione's frown and open mouth, ready to retort, "Letting yourself be with Remus would be like accepting you're not going to be able to return to your dimension."

Hermione grit her teeth, refusing to admit anything.

"You know what I think?" the younger woman said, locking eyes with Hermione, "I think you need to start treating this like it's your world, your home. You can't go back," she said, placing a hand on top of Hermione's and giving it a comforting squeeze, "And from what you've told me, you shouldn't want to. It sounds awful. You were running for your life, for Merlin's sake, when you arrived here."

"You don't understand," Hermione whispered feverishly, pulling her hand away, "It was a horrible place, but it was my place. I knew how to live in it, I knew how it worked. I had friends who knew everything I knew; friends I didn't have to lie to… I haven't got any of that here."

"Yes, you do." Marlene insisted, her tone suddenly soft and pleading, her eyes begging Hermione to reconsider, "You've got me, for one. Then you've got my mother. There's Dumbledore, of course. And, if you let yourself, you can have Remus. We're all here, waiting for you to realise."

Hermione looked away, grimacing at the sight of another unwelcome tongue. She turned back, suddenly resolved.

"I'm probably not coming out the other side of this war," Hermione stated blandly, ignoring Marlene's surprised face, "I've accepted that. To let other people care about me only to leave them… I don't want to put them through that."
"Have you not just been saying that Remus already cares about you, that he's been hinting he wants something more?" Marlene asked her exasperatedly, desperate for some kind of revelation. "I care about you, Hermione!"

"I'm tired, Marlene," replied Hermione, her shoulders slumping, "I'm just tired."

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"You haven't finished the tank." she commented after a tense minute, jerking her head gently in its direction. The Grindylow glared at her fiercely, like it had wanted them to get together as well and was annoyed that it had been denied such a thing.

"So that's it?" Remus said, his tone hard and frustrated. Thoughts of an angry, yelling Remus figuring out she'd cost him a son crossed her mind, and she swallowed thickly, willing it away. "You're not even going to give me one kiss?"

Hermione wasn't sure what did it. Whether it was the challenge in his voice, or the way in which the memory of him hating her didn't seem to be able to dissipate from in front of her eyes. Maybe it was the way he was standing so close, or the fact that her right hand still rested lightly on his cheek, her thumb absentmindedly brushing back and forth over an old scratch. It could have been the feel of his hand on her wrist – she only just realised he'd reached up to cradle it near his face; or maybe it was the voice inside her head that was telling her she'd never have the chance to do it again. Regardless of what it was, Hermione felt herself move forward. It was like she wasn't in control of her body.

Their noses bumped, and Hermione's sharp intake of breath felt like it echoed in the room, entirely too loud. His warm lips grazed hers, causing her to push forward the final millimetre, desperate for some kind of physical sensation to validate the frantic beating of her heart.

She was warm all over, the softness of Remus's lips a contrast to the inexpert way he was moving them. Hermione's hand slid down to his jaw, guiding him into a more malleable rhythm. His cheeks were lightly stubbled, like he'd forgotten to shave that morning, and Hermione's blunt nails scratched lightly at them, mesmerised.

The groan he gave into her mouth set him off as he pushed harder, more passionately, into her. A hand had settled on her waist, large and firm, and tickled at her ribcage through her top. Hermione felt the brush of a tongue, curious, before she pulled back.

She removed all of his hands from her and hers from him – her left having distractedly travelled to the nape of his neck and playing with the short hairs there – and pushed herself into the desk, breathing heavily but silently.

Her shirt felt too thin, Remus's skin too close. Hermione had flashes of his bare skin, marred with her own viciousness, but ultimately strong and naked – and flushed, looking away.

Remus let out a small huff of breath that could've been labelled a sigh at a stretch, before he stepped back, seemingly appeased. Hermione looked down at the pile of marked essays next to her on the desk – her bum was perched on it, she must have leant it there when she kissed him – and tried not to think.

Remus picked up his book bag and his robe from the chair in front of the desk, and went to leave.
Hermione, still resolutely staring down at the essays – Patrick Xiao earning himself an Outstanding – heard him pause at the door.

"I'm not giving up," he said, confident, "But I realise now might not be the best time." There was a considering pause. "After graduation." His parting words were a promise, and the door to the office shut softly behind him, final and absolute.

Hermione slumped in defeat, looking away from the essays to cradle her head in her hands.

*What had she done?*

It was only as she blew out her beside candle later that night she realised, with a wry twist to her mouth, that Remus had never finished his detention.

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Her detentions with the rest of the Marauders did not, thankfully, go similarly. After Duelling club, she'd had Sirius finish up Remus's work, ignoring his searching looks, and then had him cleaning the Defence floor of glitter. It had taken him hours without magic, by which time it was early morning and Hermione dismissed him with a mere wave.

James was a lot humbler in his punishment, agreeing without any sly looks or comments to clear the exam room of all its tables and chairs – without magic, of course.

Peter helped her grade essays, and Hermione decided she'd talk to him so the time went by more quickly. He, like her, seemed to be a kind of victim in all of this.

At the staff meeting on Monday, Dumbledore seemed to get revenge on her for her locket stunt, his face an unreadable and calm mask. Hermione wasn't fooled.

"It has come to my attention, through a tale too long to repeat, that the Chamber of Secrets exists." The staff were suddenly talking a mile a minute; Nettle looked confused, for she probably didn't know what the Chamber was; Slughorn was pale, McGonagall looked shocked, Sinistra nearly fainted, and Kettleburn simply grunted in surprise. Flitwick gave a funny sort of squeak. The others expressed gasps of shock, frozen in place.

"It is unfortunate," Dumbledore continued, ignoring their reactions, "But the myth of a monster residing in the Chamber is not false."

"Headmaster," McGonagall said, "I must ask you how you came to know of this--"

He held up a wrinkled hand, smiling pleasantly.

"Fear not, Minerva, my source is legitimate." He did not look at her. "But the monster must be dealt with. It is a danger to students, and we cannot have that."

Dumbledore looked like he'd just told them a terrible joke, his smile plain and unassuming.

"The monster," Slughorn asked, his voice trembling, "What is it?"

"Ah, I believe Salazar Slytherin and his predilection for snakes might answer your question."
"A basilisk?" questioned Hermione, not wanting to draw this whole ordeal out further.

The professors all looked extremely worried, Sinistra staring at Hermione in disgust – although Hermione was sure it was not at her, so much as in response to what she'd said.

"It will be a fairly simple task to kill it," Dumbledore surmised, looking around at them all, "A rooster or two should do. I would like, however, for some of my professors to accompany me. I'm afraid I'd rather not risk it, despite the simplicity of the job."

"I'll come, Professor." Hermione announced, standing from her chair. He could hardly be surprised, but he looked at her with pleased approval anyway.

"Excellent, a Defence professor will be much appreciated."

"Me as well, Headmaster." Nettle piped up, also standing. Dumbledore beamed.

McGonagall and Slughorn offered themselves up, and it seemed to be a mutual agreement that no more would be needed. Dumbledore gave a loud clap, extremely satisfied with his brigade of willing professors.

"Is this Saturday morning agreeable to you all?" Dumbledore asked the five of them after the rest of the meeting had been completed, "Dawn will do, I think. After all, we want the roosters crowing."

There were murmurs of assent.

"Headmaster," Slughorn asked tentatively, "Just where is the entrance to the Chamber?"

"Ah." Dumbledore said, smiling, "Meet me outside the girl's bathroom on the second floor, if you will."

Unlike the other professors, Hermione was not plagued with curiosity. She knew exactly where the entrance was, how to get in, and what to expect. So the week, for her, went by entirely too quickly.

Remus had been acting completely normal, which was throwing her off – at least, normal if you were an average teacher. He answered questions every now and then in class, spoke to his friends, performed admirable magic… Hermione was just used to more, and so felt snubbed by his behaviour.

Isn't this what you wanted? a voice taunted her, but Hermione steadfastly ignored it.

Waking up before dawn left Hermione in a foul mood, and the thought of facing a basilisk left her feeling even more irate. By the time she got to the girl's bathroom, she was positively raging. She glared at Dumbledore's smiling face, his half-moon spectacles perched on his nose like he had just finished up reading. He looked too alert, too happy for this time of day.

"Good morning," He greeted them all, and they gave sleepy, murmured replies. Hagrid had turned up, providing the roosters with an unquestioning faith in the Headmaster. Hermione doubted the man had informed Hagrid of what he needed them for – then again, Hagrid had been expelled over the Chamber, so maybe…

McGonagall looked at Hagrid suspiciously, and Hermione remembered that the Chamber had of course been opened by Tom Riddle back in the forties. Professor McGonagall had not been teaching then, but she undoubtedly knew why Hagrid couldn't do magic.

"Thank you, Hagrid. You may go." Dumbledore told the half-giant as he passed off the roosters to
Slughorn, who seemed too curious for his own good. Hermione suspected that he was joining them only for the promise of how much part of a real basilisk might sell for, and what potions he could brew with the newly acquired ingredients.

"The girl's bathroom, Albus?" McGonagall asked, looking cynical as they entered, "It does not seem the place for Slytherin to place the entrance to his famed chamber."

"Hello, Myrtle." he said kindly, and Hermione saw a flash of eerie white before there was a loud bang and one of the toilets overflowed. Dumbledore smiled, amused.

"If I may ask, Dumbledore," Hermione interrupted, stepping forward to draw his attention, "But how are you going to open the chamber? Wasn't Slytherin a Parselmouth?"

"I have it on good authority that I need only know one word, Miss Huxley," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling as if they were in on the same hilarious joke.

With an unfavourable hissing sound, which looked incredibly strange and disturbing coming from the Headmaster's lips, the cluster of basins in the centre of the bathroom moved aside, revealing an opening.

"Albus!" McGonagall gasped, staring at the dark and cavernous entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.

Hermione didn't want to know how Dumbledore had managed to learn 'open' in Parseltongue. Ron's proclamation of hearing Harry open the locket with it made sense, but Hermione doubted Dumbledore was having conversations with anybody who could innately speak to snakes.

They dropped down into the Chamber one by one, the use of the slowed velocity charm doing wonders to avoid injury. They walked down the dimly lit corridor, Lumosed wands in front of them. Dumbledore led the charge – Hermione hung back, one of the last teachers to reach the large door, decorated with ornate serpentine engravings.

After opening the door with his repeated hissing, sending shivers up Hermione's spine unlike the comical imitation Ron had used to get them into the Chamber and destroy Hufflepuff's Cup, they continued on. Hermione noticed with some degree of surprise the lack of large rocks around, remembering only after they passed that particular passageway that it had yet to cave in. That would be in about fifteen years from now, although Hermione supposed it would never cave in – they were about to kill the beast, after all.

"Are the roosters, alright, Horace?" Dumbledore asked mildly. Slughorn jumped, surprised at being addressed.

"Oh, y-yes," he stuttered, "they're absolutely fine, Dumbledore." One of the roosters gave a small squawk from underneath one of the Potion Master's arms, as if in agreement.

They finally reached the long chamber, wet and dingy, with the trademark serpent statues lining the walls. Nettle looked concerned, keeping close to the group, whereas McGonagall had a look of distaste on her face.

"Dumbledore," started Hermione, suddenly remember, "The rumours say the basilisk will only answer to the Heir of Slytherin. I can't help but--"

"Quite right you are, Hermione," he said with another smile. They were grating on Hermione's already frayed nerves, given the early hour and the mess of her detentions the week prior, "However, I don't intend to summon the basilisk. I believe the rooster's crow will do that and, with nowhere to escape, the basilisk will perish. Horace," He added, turning to the professor in question, "Make sure
our friends can crow heartily."

Slughorn nodded, his big eyes bulging as he stared at the statue of Salazar Slytherin in front of them. Hermione muttered a soft *Nox*, keeping her wand aloft in case of danger. There didn't seem to be much she could do, considering the basilisk skin was like a dragon's and impenetrable by spells. It made her feel better, though, so she kept vigil.

Dumbledore waved his own wand, and a rooster's crow echoed around them, loud and uninhibited.

"To get the others started." he explained, smiling at them all.

The mouth of the statue opened, grotesque and dark, and a slithering beast emerged. Its head was narrow, but it was large and its teeth were menacing. All of them were avoiding its eyes carefully. The beast hissed, angry, before the two roosters Slughorn held in his hands began their welcome song.

Hermione saw the basilisk snap its head toward them out of the corner of her eyes, and it gave an inhuman sibilant screech. It darted forward, seemingly weak, to try to get at the roosters. One of them squawked loudly, its crow cut-off. Hermione threw a *Protego* over the Potions Professor as he jumped back, scared and startled with his eyes toward the ground. Hermione figured he probably thought he'd had the easy job, carrying the roosters.

McGonagall conjured up a rooster on the other side of the chamber – its crow would not kill the basilisk for it was conjured – in an attempt to distract the large snake, whose enormous head swung toward it. Nettle cast her own *Protegos* on the roosters themselves, whose screeches were piercing.

Dumbledore cast his spell again, his eyes closed, and the omnipresent crowing began once more. Slughorn was backing further away now, his legs shaking. The roosters started up again, and the basilisk, incredibly weak, sluggishly turned toward the two birds, hissing menacingly. Hermione shut her eyes, remembering the look of them in the mirror years ago.

With one last synchronised crow from both of the birds, Hermione opened her eyes to see the basilisk curl up, its face in pain, before its body seemed to slump, unmoving. Its eyes were closed, so it was safe for all of them to look around.

"Excellently done, my friends." Dumbledore praised them. "Keep a hold of the birds, Horace. We don't want them to get lost in here."

Hermione moved forward, her wand by her side, to stand next to the beast. Standing, she was about the same height as its head. She felt no breath and heard no sound, sighing in relief that one more task had been completed. She hadn't realised how much the Chamber had been weighing on her mind.

"You don't mind if I take some samples, Dumbledore?" Slughorn asked, following in Hermione's footsteps and moving toward the basilisk. Hermione refrained from rolling her eyes. "I believe we could use some in ambitious research."

*So predictable.*

"I believe I might want some for myself, Horace." Dumbledore said, striding forward. McGonagall stared at him, taken aback.

Hermione stepped back as the Headmaster did her duty for her, extracting a fair few of the basilisk's fangs with his wand, before stowing them away in the many pockets of his crimson robes, the red looking especially bloody in the green hue of the chamber.
Slughorn finished up – extracting some fangs himself, a fair amount of scales, and one of the beast's eyes – before they headed back up the way they came, Hermione grumbling silently to herself about Dumbledore's refusal to summon his phoenix, who could have made the trip a hell of a lot easier with a simple Apparation. Dumbledore himself could have Apparated them in and out but Hermione suspected he had, in an unusual show of modesty, shown them the way in so that they could leave if he were not to survive the encounter. It was the only reason other than sadism that she could think of.

Once Slughorn – sans roosters, who now sat in Nettle's capable hands – with his bag of basilisk parts had climbed out of the passageway, the entrance sealed itself.

Thankfully, Hermione realised, she would never have to go in there again.

"Professor," Hermione asked, hurriedly keeping up with Dumbledore's long strides. He'd bade the rest of the professors goodbye, expressing his need for a hearty breakfast in celebration. "Are you sure involving the others was wise?"

"It was, Miss Huxley," Dumbledore told her, smiling pleasantly as if killing basilisks was part of his daily routine, "There are no secrets, now. And the assuaging of harmful rumours and threats regarding the Chamber is, I think, worth the suspicion from my deputy head."

Hermione didn't comment, having seen McGonagall's looks at the man herself.

"Now if you don't mind," he said, stopping briefly in front of the Great Hall's doors. Hermione glanced at her watch – it was nearing seven o'clock, "I believe the house elves have prepared breakfast a little earlier this morning, and I am famished."

He opened the doors – and they remained so – to an empty Great Hall. It was a Saturday, after all. Not particularly fancying catching up over eggs on toast with Dumbledore, Hermione willed her hunger away for another hour, stalking through the corridors to distract herself from it.

Once it hit eight o'clock, the usual starting time for breakfast (although it ran for an extra hour on the weekends, finishing up at ten), Hermione made her way back to the Great Hall, sitting down next to Nettle with an impatient sigh, and began piling sausages onto her plate. She wrapped them in bacon, scooped up some roast tomatoes, and finished it all off with toast and a few poached eggs.

"Hungry, are you?" Nettle said with an amused grin, looking down at Hermione's plate. Nettle's own was slightly less packed with food, but Hermione suspected she'd already eaten some of it.

"I can't help but notice you weren't particularly surprised at everything that happened this morning," commented Emilia lightly, her raven hair pulled back into a sleek ponytail. The messy bun of the morning had been attended to, it seemed. Hermione's own hair was in a plait down her back, the unavoidable curly wisps tickling her cheeks as she chewed.

"You haven't heard of basilisks?" Hermione asked, trying not to come across panicked. When she wanted to be, Emilia was incredibly perceptive. Hermione had been trying to float underneath her radar for a while, running off excuses of meeting with a student or two, or talking to Dumbledore in his office, to explain away some of her more questionable behaviour. Luckily, her lies were really half-truths: she had been meeting with students, most of the time, just not in the way the other Defence professor was thinking.

"Oh, I've heard of basilisks." Nettle said, buttering another piece of toast and lathering it in marmalade, "But I can't say I've fought one with the calm you displayed this morning."

"Calm?" Hermione scoffed, her cheeks bulging. She swallowed quickly, trying not to choke. "What
about you? You didn't look too ruffled."

"I wouldn't say my first reaction would be to cast a *Protego*, though." Emilia said, eyeing her, "I was very close to running away, actually."

Hermione didn't reply, occupying herself with her meal. As if recognising she didn't want to talk about it anymore, her fellow professor dropped it, instead asking her over for a game of chess in her quarters the next day. Hermione agreed, unwilling to back down and draw unwanted attention to herself. It was best to play her part, sometimes.

*Merlin, I'm sounding like a true manipulator,* she thought, slightly distressed.

"I never asked," Hermione began once their game was well under way the next day, lunch hot in their stomachs, "You didn't go to Hogwarts, did you?"

Emilia gave her a genuine smile, taking one of Hermione's knights with a pawn, who looked very gleeful. Hermione frowned.

"No," she replied, waiting for Hermione to make her move. Nettle's quarters seemed more lived in than Hermione's own, the décor filled with dark blues. They were inviting, though, and Hermione was reminded of being encompassed by the summer night sky, comforting and warm. "I actually went to Beauxbatons, of all places."

"Beauxbatons?" Hermione looked up, entirely surprised. Her mouth was agape. "I would not have picked you for a Beauxbatons graduate."

"And I would not have picked you for anything but a Hogwarts graduate," Emilia commented. Hermione willed herself not to freeze, simply staring down at the board and her worried bishop in faux thought. "You know the castle awfully well."

"I've not had much else to do, I admit," Hermione said, moving her rook and cringing when one of Nettle's bishops came out of nowhere to take that, too, "And the castle is interesting."

"Hmm," Emilia hummed, "And how are things with your paramour?"

Hermione spluttered, knocking down one of her own pawns in her shock. It glared up at her, righting itself with indignation.

"Remus is fine," she replied, ignoring the smug look on Emilia's face, "Thanks for asking."

Emilia paid no heed to her sarcasm, instead laughing at what must have been an affronted look on her face.

"Funny," she said through chuckles, grinning, "I said nothing about Remus."

Hermione glared at her.

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The next week passed with little fanfare – Regulus had taken to pretending she didn't exist, even though she attempted to touch base with him so as to maintain an amiable relationship in the hopes he could help out with the diary later on. Feeling despondent over his behaviour but brushing it off
the best she could – it wasn't like they were friends, but if he was ignoring her then that threatened her plans for Voldemort's demise – Hermione started the weekend before the full moon with a wave of unease settling over her.

Classes were finishing on the twenty third, which was bad timing in Hermione's own opinion – the full moon was the day before, and she dreaded the last day. The school had one last day – no scheduled classes, but an open office day where the students could come and quiz the professors about any confusions over the coursework, or simply for reassurance. Hermione wasn't sure she'd be much help so soon after the full moon.

"This is our last meeting," Hermione announced on the Friday at Duelling club. The Marauders were huddled near the back, talking quietly amongst themselves. Lily stood by Mary at the front, and Hermione glimpsed Marlene talking to a few Slytherins by the door. "I want to thank all of you for making Duelling club such a success, and I hope future professors will continue our work here."

"You're not coming back?" A third year piped up, and the other students waited with bated breath for both of their answers. They shared a look, having discussed this over the weekend.

"Professor Huxley and I only signed on to teach for a year," Nettle announced, causing a few of the younger students to groan. Hermione held back a smile, secretly flattered. "We will, however, leave behind our lesson plans for the next professor to teach you in Defence, if they want help."

Hermione tried not to think what she might do for a living after Hogwarts. She hadn't wanted to sign on to teach indefinitely for fear of inciting the curse and meeting an unfortunate end, and to be truthful she hadn't expected to still be around. Whilst she'd acknowledged she couldn't return to the future, it hadn't been a reality until discovering she'd travelled across dimensions.

She didn't really want to teach, anyway. Her heart wasn't in it. At the moment, it was merely a means to an end.

She had some money saved up in her Gringotts account – not much, but enough to live off of over the summer if Dumbledore wouldn't allow her to stay in the castle – and she knew she could work at Scrivencraft's, or Flourish and Blott's, if she played her cards right. Nowhere that meant she had to work nights – faking illness for the full moon would be too difficult. She'd been lucky at Hogwarts, but that luck would not translate elsewhere, she knew, remembering Remus's shabby robes and overall bedraggled appearance. Money would not be an easy commodity to come by for the rest of her life. It was better to take things as they came, and try not to think too much.

Yeah, right, she thought, snorting at herself.

Hermione wasn't sure whether she was thankful or not when all of the Marauders showed up in the Entrance Hall on the night of the full moon – dinner had finished just over an hour ago, and the usual curfew (back in place after only a short time changed back in October) would not come into effect for another hour.

"Give us a break," Peter said, smiling at her sceptical expression, "Everyone's too tired to be out, or they're studying frantically for exams."

"And you three?" asked Hermione, trying not to look at Remus for too long.

"We figured we'd see Moony off in our traditional fashion for his last ever moon at Hogwarts." James said, clapping his friend on the back with a warm smile. "It's the last day of term – what can they do, expel him?"
"They can expel me until exam results come out." Remus said, but he was smiling good-naturedly.

"I'll just throw some money at them," Sirius said, waving a hand as if it was a moot point, "That'll shut them up. Alphard gave me his inheritance for a reason. Reckon mum will be right mad if she finds out I'm spending it on a werewolf."

She made her way to the Willow, the evening air only cool instead of cold, with the Marauders joking quietly behind. She was thankful that the tense atmosphere between her and Remus couldn't be addressed, but at the same time she didn't like that she was sharing this moment with them. They'd turned up in their Animagus forms plenty of times over the year, but it had always been when Hermione was already lost to the wolf; and, different from Remus, she never remembered a thing.

Unlike their usual schedule, Hermione decided that although nudity hadn't bothered her with Remus before, undressing in front of his three best friends was a different story. For all that Peter didn't seem to be on the path to betrayal, she didn't like the idea that he might see her so bare. It wasn't like she wanted James or Sirius to see her either, but if they accidentally glimpsed something she felt better equipped to live with that than if Peter did.

So she simply took off her robe and her light sweater, grateful she'd gone for knee-length shorts and a plain t-shirt. These fashions were never flattering, and so it was with little remorse that she accepted she'd be losing these clothes to the transformation.

Remus left his corduroy jeans on, a nice navy colour, but took off his belt and his own t-shirt. The others, Animagi, didn't need to undress. Hermione felt their eyes on her despite her clothed figure, and simply looked out of the window at the setting sun. Her watch had been tossed with her sweater and shoes in the corner, so she could only guess at the time – it looked to be a bit after nine. The moon was due to come up after nine thirty, so it wouldn't be long before she'd be screaming her lungs out.

"Is it always this grim?" Sirius joked. Hermione heard a thwack and a murmured complaint before it became silent again. The restlessness in her bones was becoming more and more obvious, pulled to the forefront of her mind with every second that passed that the sun became a little more obscured by the horizon.

Feeling wound tight, her muscles contracting spasmodically, Hermione decided the awkwardness had hit its peak – how could they go on with such a divide? She pushed away thoughts of Remus's promise to try again and turned around, catching his wide eyes. Sweat was forming at his hairline, and he looked a little ragged. Hermione felt her own hair – loose, as it needed to be lest the elastic snap painfully – become damp against her temples. She walked over on unsteady legs, willing the courage into herself, and grabbed Remus's hand. He looked down, shocked.

When the transformation came over them, Hermione didn't let go, both of their screams turning into roaring growls before she could remember no more.

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When Hermione woke, it was to the blaring sun. It rose earlier now, thanks to the season, which made it easier to make her classes on time. Someone had conjured a blanket and placed it over the both of them, preserving their modesty.
"Rise and shine," said a tired voice, and Hermione turned her head to see James on an armchair that looked like it might crumble beneath his weight. He nodded to Remus, who was as close as he could be to her without leaning on her chest. His arm was flung over her waist, and Hermione fought the pleased flutters of her heart at the sight. "Is he always the last to wake?"

"Yeah," Hermione answered hoarsely, clearing her throat quietly. "Where are the others?" Hermione asked, noticing the lack of Marauders in the Shack. James smiled, his glasses slightly crooked on his nose. His hair was uncontrollable, as Harry's always had been, and his hazel eyes gazed at her with warmth despite their exhaustion. She clutched the blanket closer to her chest, making sure it still covered Remus properly.

"I had to kick Sirius out so he didn't see anything," James explained, chuckling at her mortified expression. "Don't worry, I tried my best to avoid looking."

"I suppose I feel a little better knowing Sirius didn't see something he shouldn't have."

"It's more that Remus probably would have killed him. I've got Lily, so…" He trailed off, looking taken aback at Hermione's confused frown. "You didn't know? He's not exactly shy about it."

"Shy about what?" Hermione asked, looking down at said man warily.

"Remus likes you. He's liked you pretty much all year. If I didn't know better, I might say he's in love with you."

"Didn't know better?" Hermione squeaked as her stomach swooped and her heart felt suddenly full, bursting with warmth and the unnamed emotion.

"Well, Remus has the tendency to hold back," James explained, looking like he was wondering why he had to explain this to her, "He's probably convinced himself you could never love him, and so he's pretending it's the same for him. But that's not true, is it?" he added at Hermione's distraught face, "Because I'm not an expert, but not everyone would care about someone as much as you care about Remus, pack or not. His parents--" James cut himself off, looking away in thinly veiled frustration. "Well, I reckon you care about him, maybe even love him. Remus will get there when he realises it."

Hermione didn't say anything, simply looked at her covered knees, trying to fight down the embarrassed flush in her cheeks.

"I'll let you get dressed," announced James, standing. He made his way past them and to the door, his gait lethargic.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, turning around. Hermione pulled up the blanket again, frozen. James huffed out an embarrassed laugh. "Sorry. My parents," He started, smiling at her, "Dumbledore spoke to them, and they've invited you to come and stay with us. Just until the next school year."

"Dumbledore?" Hermione echoed, perplexed.

"Yeah," answered James, tilting his head like an animal trying to figure out what a human was saying. The thought that he'd been an animal not even an hour ago nearly made her snort. "He told us you haven't got any family, and the school will be closed over the summer…"

Hermione gave him a timid smile, thoughts running rampant through her head.

"Alright," she acquiesced, smiling wider at James's excited grin, "Tell your parents thank you."
"Tell them yourself," he said, "They'll be at the platform."

Before Hermione could tell the man that she'd rather not take the train to Potter manor, he disappeared through the doorway, closing the door behind him.

"Remus," Hermione murmured, pushing her thoughts away for further analysis later, "Remus…" She nudged him in the shoulder, the blanket shifting down his hips slightly as he moved, a sleepy frown marring his face.

He groaned, tired. Hermione clutched the blanket tighter, closing her eyes briefly at the graze of Remus's arm against her side, skin on skin a little too much for her in that moment.

"Where are the others?" He asked, looking around blearily.

"They left for breakfast."

"They left for breakfast." replied Hermione, taking the blanket with her as she turned her back on him, searching for her sweater and conjuring up a pair of shorts that looked suspiciously like something she might've worn in the nineties. The shorts would fall apart by the end of the day, but were handy in a tight spot such as now. Hermione kept her back to Remus before he announced he was decent and she turned around.

They made their way back across the grounds, Hermione's watch declaring it ten past seven as they both looked back at the Willow which sighed in the sun, content.

They had spent many nights here, the both of them. Remus had spent many more alone, screaming and crying and howling for human flesh. The scratches on the floor would forever remain, and the images in Remus's mind – a mind able to remember bits and pieces of his transformation – would never leave.

Hermione would remember the pain, first and foremost. It was hard, now, to associate the Shack with anything but. The Willow, of course, reminded her of the charmed Ford Angela, which lived in the forest back in her dimension.

Or maybe it was her original dimension now. Hermione looked to Remus, who was still staring at the tree as if in a trance.

She'd protested long enough, she thought. It was tiring, like she'd told Marlene – it was tiring to be on top of everything all the time, tiring to always do the right thing. It was tiring to miss her friends so keenly and so often, tiring to deny herself of any modicum of happiness, tiring to think she would die within the year. Hermione was tired. Couldn't she have just one last thing, one thing to keep her going until the end? Her lot in life had been okay – she'd been graced with brilliant friends and wonderful parents, a life literally full of magic… it had been everything she could have wanted and more, it had just been incredibly short.

She just wanted to send herself off with the sense she had something to live for apart from the greater good and ending the reign of a psychopathic and bigoted murderer. Who was Hermione Granger, when you stripped away all the moral cladding? What did it mean to live her life when Voldemort was removed from the equation?

She wanted the chance to answer those questions.

"Are you coming to the last Quidditch match on Saturday?" Remus asked her politely when they reached the Entrance Hall, where they usually parted ways. His detached, unfamiliar tone left her wanting.

"I suppose I might. It's the last one, after all." She replied, and simply stared after him when he
nodded and left for breakfast.

There was a study week prior to exams, something Hermione had not been gifted during her time at Hogwarts. She spent the day, therefore, telling their students that their office would be open for the whole week and so please, do not have a break down now when there was still time to study.

When Saturday rolled around, and she’d addressed concerns from the fourth years about whether her and Nettle had received permission to Imperio them on the exam – "No." – and would their practice with Confundus be enough? – "Yes." – as well as many other worried questions from her O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. students, Hermione felt she was definitely ready for a change of pace, even if it meant watching a Quidditch match.

Gryffindor were versing Ravenclaw, but it was not a nail-biting match in who would win. Ravenclaw were coming last on the ladder, Gryffindor coming second behind Hufflepuff. If Gryffindor won by more than 350 points, then the Quidditch Cup would be theirs. The badgers had absolutely annihilated both Ravenclaw and Slytherin, so their point-scoring would be tough to beat.

Hermione, unable to cheer for any other house this time, found herself screaming herself hoarse in her encouragement of Gryffindor. She was chanting "POTTER! POTTER! POTTER!" with the rest of her old house, drawing concerned glances from Kettleburn and Slughorn, but a proud look from McGonagall. It was a familiar name to chant, but it wasn't Harry she was thinking of – it was James.

He was, without a doubt, an extremely talented Chaser. His ducks and weaves, twists and turns – they weren't just for show; they were an artful manipulation of his broom that left his opponents reeling, and the Quaffle in his hands.

You're sounding like Ron always did, Hermione thought. She was too happy to care, though, as James scored another goal for his team.

Their team manoeuvres were impressive as well, Hermione had to concede – the two other Chasers, both sixth years, looked like they were synchronised as they passed the ball back and forth, their hands a blur and their red and gold robes flying behind them in the wind. It was a sunny day, dazzling, and Hermione was constantly losing sight of the Seekers. Ravenclaw's Seeker was by far their best player, and often tried to catch it as soon as possible to avoid any embarrassing walkovers. This was the tricky part of the game, however, as Gryffindors had to score at least 200 points before their Seeker caught the Snitch.

In the ninetieth minute, the two Seekers suddenly emerged from above to the screams and shouts of the crowd. They were racing toward the ground, head to head. Hermione, having flashbacks to Harry's own daring moves, had a moment of anxiety at the way they weren't taking note of how quickly the ground was flying toward them.

With Wronski Feints almost as good as Harry's, the both of them just pulled up short of the ground. The Ravenclaw Seeker's broom failed her, and it shuddered to an awkward stop, flinging her into the air and onto the ground. The Gryffindor seeker, a blur of bright blonde hair and red robes, continued her flight toward the Snitch, her hand outstretched–

"GRYFFINDOR WINS!"

But the house of lions was groaning and booing. In the time it had taken the Seekers to catch the Snitch, a Ravenclaw had scored against the distracted Gryffindor Keeper.

Gryffindor had won the match, but not the Cup – losing by only ten points.
James humbly shook the hands of the other players, but even Hermione could see he was disappointed.

Hermione spent the rest of the weekend hearing about James's surprisingly calm reaction, admitting defeat with some disappointment but none of his angry tantrums of past years when Gryffindor had lost by too close a margin or a player had been disqualified or suspended for some reason.

She herself had witnessed him laughing with his friends at the Gryffindor table on Sunday night, an affectionate arm around Lily's waist.

It seemed James Potter had finally grown up.

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When the exams came around, Hermione had to oversee all of the year groups bar the fifth and seventh years – both of their exams were conducted externally, even if they were held at Hogwarts.

She couldn't help but spy on some of the seventh years, however, the afternoon of the first exam day. They'd held first years that morning. Nettle was sitting in on all of her students, like the good professor she was. Hermione, though, was showing her soft spot for a few.

Alphabetically, Sirius was the first of her group of endeared students.

"Mr. Black, if you would please demonstrate the use of the *Incarcerous*." 

A doll appeared in front of him, and Sirius's brow furrowed in concentration, although Hermione saw his eyes flick to her as if in remembrance of their very first lesson together.

The ropes shot out of his wand like an intricate spider web, grabbing onto the doll and twisting around it, effectively tying it to the chair it was slumped in. Without the request, he'd performed the spell perfectly without speaking. A non-verbal interpretation of a request would earn him top marks, for sure. Hermione bit her lip, trying to hide her proud grin.

His stunner was still not as powerful as it could be even though he shouted it, and he still refused to cast his spells side-on, but all up Hermione would guess an Outstanding for his efforts, and gave him a congratulatory grin as he left the exam room. Hermione hung around through Siobhan Blevins and George Clare of Ravenclaw, as well as Cindy Carlylse of Hufflepuff, before her next choice entered the exam room.

"Miss Evans," the examiner addressed the redhead, his goatee twitching, "please demonstrate your proficient use of the *Incarcerous* spell."

Her spell was also non-verbal, and textbook excellent.

"*Protego* charm," the other examiner requested, stepping forward to test it herself with a Jelly-Legs Jinx. Hermione had a brief flashback to her fourth year, firing the same spell at the same pair of green eyes, before she shook herself of the memory.

Lily's protection charm was the strongest yet, the spell ricocheting off of her shield so forcefully that it flew straight into a nearby desk, which caused the legs of it to bend abnormally.
For the student who'd been sceptical of the strength of non-verbal spells, she used nothing but for her whole exam. Her stunner was as strong as Harry's had ever been, which almost brought irrational tears to Hermione's eyes, and she ended with an extremely powerful Revulsion Jinx, which sent the first examiner and his goatee fling across the room in a flash of purple.

Hermione was able to depart for a time to grab a late lunch from the kitchens, rushing back just in time to witness the person she'd been waiting out for all day.

He walked into the room, calm and collected but smiling warmly at the two examiners. He didn't look at her, and Hermione was thankful. She didn't want to be a distraction, and she was afraid that if he looked at her then she would do something stupid like try to run over and hug him, begging profusely for him to accept her apology. The last few days had sobered her up some on the issue.

His casting was flawless, his execution of non-verbals excellent, and his ability to think on the spot unparalleled. The examiners had cast unprecedented curses at all of the students to test reaction time, and Remus had thrown up a *Protego* before the spell could even come close to reaching him.

"*Very good*, Mr Lupin. Just one more! Our final request is that you produce a corporeal Patronus."

They'd covered Patronus charms more so in Duelling Club than in actual class. It was a hard spell, and Hermione knew they had not asked everyone to perform it. It seemed they were testing only the best, hoping to be impressed. Remus had probably already secured himself an Outstanding.

Remus nodded, closing his eyes in an attempt to source his happiest memory. There was a moment of silence as he did so, all of them waiting with bated breath.

When he opened them, he looked right at her.

"*Expecto Patronum!*" he exclaimed for the first time, the examiners' expressions evolving into ones of delight at the sight of the large wolf bursting forth from Remus's wand, howling silently at an absent moon and bounding around the examiners playfully.

"*Excellent, Mr Lupin!*" exclaimed the goatee man, beaming at the wolf. "Positively wonderful!"

Hermione couldn't pay them attention, however. Remus was still looking at her, and she was frozen in place by the door, her arms crossed and her neck rigid. His stare pierced her right through, and her heart was beating rapidly as if she'd just run a rigorous sprint. The hairs on her bare arms stood on end, and Hermione swallowed thickly, breaking his stare with a quick look to the others near them who were still gushing over Remus's Patronus.

He left the room without another glance to her, the echoes of the examiners' appreciative comments following him out the door.

"Incredibly bright Patronus, very detailed," commented the woman, her auburn hair swinging as she nodded enthusiastically, "We can expect great things from him."

Hermione plastered a polite smile on her face when they glanced her way.

Next up on her list was Marlene, who approached the whole exam with a particularly cold manner, efficient and powerful in everything she did. Although she only used non-verbal once or twice, Hermione was so impressed with the witch that she figured the examiners would let it fall by the wayside. Marlene had powered through the exam the quickest of all of the students.

Olivia Ockenden, a quiet Slytherin, came after Marlene. She performed admirably, her Protego faltering a little but her Expelliarmus disarming both examiners at once.
Lawrence Pedlingham followed, Roger Perkins proceeding with an Acceptable. When Peter stepped into the room, Hermione was surprised to see no trace of nerves, his face determined.

He performed well, stuttering only over his *Incarcerous* before reverting to mostly non-verbal spellwork. The effort was appreciated, she could see, and by the end Hermione suspected he'd be receiving an 'E' next to Defence Against the Dark Arts on his N.E.W.T. scores.

"Had a think about what you might do?" teased Hermione. He never had taken her up on her offer.

Peter grinned at her, leaving the room without answering.

Then, it was time for James.

"Wish me luck, Professor." He winked at her, striding in with all the confidence in the world.

"Good luck, Mr Potter." She said, pursing her lips to stop herself from smiling.

Like Lily, his stunner was very powerful. His Blasting Curse, smashing an unfortunate chair to smithereens, made even James cringe back in surprise.

"Sorry about that," He apologised with a grin, and proceeded to finish them off with a very convincing Disillusionment charm, the female examiner disappearing seamlessly into the wall behind her.

Hermione was pleased by what she'd seen. Most of them had their own particular strengths and weaknesses, but they'd all worked hard to come across as great students and even better Order members. They'd be a formidable crew once they received their graduation certificate, and Hermione felt better in their hands than she ever had, confident in their abilities to protect themselves without her help.

Hermione left the rest of her seventh years to complete their N.E.W.T.-level Defence exam. The examiners left just before dinner, congratulating her and Emilia on a job well done.

"We didn't fail them," Emilia said at the staff table at dinner, chomping down on some brussel sprouts, "That's good. I was worried for a while."

Hermione snorted, spraying masticated chicken everywhere, much to the amusement of a few students who sat nearby at their tables, laughing.

It was strange, Hermione was musing on her way out of the Great Hall, how quickly the month had seemed to pass. In fact, the year had flown by. Her years at Hogwarts had never felt that way, bogged down they were with all matter of test to take or essay to write – it was different being on the other side as a teacher. On top of that, her and her two friends were often trying to figure out the mystery of the year, with little to no success until an adult came along and helped them out, most of the time by accident.

She thought of what she might do now. Continue to hunt for and destroy horcruxes for one. Hermione wanted to keep one eye on Peter, just in case. She'd have to keep in touch with Regulus, as well, although how she would do that was going to be difficult.

The invitation put forth by the Potters popped into her thoughts, and Hermione frowned. Dumbledore had taken the time to sort out her summer for her? Hermione was highly suspicious. She theorised residing at the Potter Manor would mean she was easily tracked by the Headmaster. Although she appreciated his vigilance – and she was sure Moody had inspired him – it was entirely bothersome. She was an adult, and being watched like a child was incredibly disheartening.
"We weren't *that* bad, were we?" A voice piped up from behind, and Hermione whirled around, her hair flipping in her face as her hand hovered over the back pocket of her jeans, wand safely tucked away. Moody would have a fit.

"No," Hermione's lips twitched, butterflies starting up but a strange calm settling over her with one look into his kind eyes. "You were brilliant, Remus."

He chuckled, huffing out a laugh as he came to join her. Hermione was looking out at the grounds, standing on the edges of one of the gardens near where Harry had overheard Snape and Karkaroff discussing the Dark Mark. Everywhere reminded her of her old life.

Hermione was suddenly conscious of the fact she was wearing a thin, short-sleeved blouse in an ugly orange paisley, her high-waisted jeans not as flared as most, but emphasising her figure more plainly than she would ordinarily prefer.

It was an outfit she hadn't thought anything about wearing, but now seemed a little too *young* for Hermione Huxley, Defence professor. She felt horribly vulnerable in it, her arms bare for all to see. The scar remained hidden, but Hermione covered it with her right hand anyway.

"It's not graduation." noted Hermione, looking back out across the grassy grounds, the twinkling stars giving it a fantastical feel. There was no use beating around the proverbial bush, not when Hermione could feel the warmth of Remus emanating towards her, welcome and seductive.

"No," Remus agreed, his head turning to her. Hermione refused to turn hers in kind. "But you're not my professor anymore."

"Technically--"

"Will you stop?" Remus laughed, shaking his head in exasperation at her stubbornness, "You're not grading me anymore, ergo you are not my professor. Graduation is just a technicality."

Hermione stayed quiet, her eyes roving over the grassy inclines and the moving silhouette of the Willow in the distance, representative of so much both in this past and in her future. To think she'd been time travelling back when she'd had her first memorable moment with that tree. Everything felt like eons ago, like Hermione would have to strap herself into a spaceship and travel light years just to remember it.

"Have you got any plans for the summer?" asked Hermione.

"Hermione," Remus said lowly, a friendly warning in his tone, "Come on…"

His left arm grasped her right, his thumb gently caressing the inside of her elbow. He pulled her into a turn, and they were facing each other. Hermione's eyes swept greedily over his face, taking in every detail from the crinkles at the corners of his eyes; the way his lips seemed a little chapped, like he'd been biting them; to the darkening of promise in his eyes and how his hair flopped distractedly over his forehead, begging for her to push it back.

The scars on his face only added to his beauty, unlike the way in which many thought it dampened it. They were an undeniable part of him and, with a squeeze of her own arm, she knew they were an undeniable part of her.

The scars on the inside were the same – unwanted, sometimes untraceable, but most of all understandable. And isn't that what she'd done? Simply *understand* him?

*Why should I be punished for that?* Hermione thought, giving into the urge to push his hair off of his
face. He was a good head taller than her, but she managed it well enough.

"In the words of ABBA," Remus said, grinning at her unabashedly, her hands at the nape of his neck, as his own settled on her hips, "Will you take a chance on me?"

"Come on, give me a break, will you?" quoted Hermione, sharing in his grin.

"A girl after my own heart!" Remus exclaimed, and then he kissed her, swallowing her laughter.

Unlike their first kiss, which had been tense and scary and everything Hermione had been afraid of – this one was just as soft, but it felt warm and good and loving. His arms encased her, and her heart beat a steady rhythm against her ribs, as if reminding her "I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive!".

They couldn't kiss long, their smiles making it hard and full of teeth. Her cheeks hurt, aching with every puff of mirth.

"I can't believe you used ABBA on me." Hermione remarked, shaking her head in amusement. She straightened his collar, his dress shirt seeming awfully formal.

"Cliché works." Remus stated, smiling at her, his lips slightly pursed as if he was trying not to blind her with the force of his grin.

Hermione leaned forward, kissing him again and this time a little longer, forgetting all about horcruxes and Dark Lords and meddling Headmasters.

She was on her way to answering her own questions outside of time travel and traversing across dimensions, and it felt good.

Chapter End Notes

Was this terribly bad and awkward? Eek, I tried to make it tense but also somewhat satisfying… I hope I didn't make a fool of the characters. Natural is key to me. Let me know what you think!
Revelations

Chapter Notes

The last two chapters are part of a double-parter, and will take a bit longer to post up because of that. This story will definitely be finished by the end of March, though, don't you worry! I want to complete it before I go back to uni. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the week went by quickly for Hermione, who spent her time divided between helping Remus study (although she had to put a stop to it after the second time in which no actual studying got done) and overseeing the rest of her exams. Feeling a little guilty, Hermione sat in on some of the O.W.L. practicals, and congratulated her students on their efforts.

When exams finished on the eighth, it was to a huge sigh of relief from the student body. Hermione felt a modicum of relief herself knowing she wouldn't have to get up in front of eager and youthful faces and teach them survival skills in case they faced a Death Eater. She'd done a lot to help, she realised, remembering the lack of proficiency in defensive spells of the children back in September. It felt nice to have had value, and Hermione was proud of herself, even if a lot of it had felt messy and uncontrollable at the time.

On the ninth, the last Friday of term, the End of Year Feast was held, the students laughing raucously in the Great Hall amongst platters and platters of the best food Hogwarts had to offer – roasted meats, puddings and pies, casseroles, sandwiches, soups – swapping their favourite stories of the year and speculating about the next one. Hermione's End of Year feasts as a student had always been attended with a great sense of relief – another year finished, another evil adversary defeated by Gryffindor students.

Remus caught her eye from the Gryffindor table, smiling freely at her with crinkled eyes. Hermione returned the smile, her chest filling with a warmth she would never get tired of.

"What are your plans for the summer?" Emilia asked her as they finished up their meal with some treacle tart, Hermione fondly remembering a certain unborn Potter.

Hermione couldn’t exactly tell Nettle everything; she kept forgetting to get Dumbledore to induct her into the Order. But there was so much going on and so much to do that Emilia wasn’t really a priority. Hermione frowned at the thought – at this point, she would simply be an extra wand at the final confrontation. Her help would be appreciated, but it wasn’t vital. Hermione would have to remember to mention it to Dumbledore, but the idea that Nettle would just add numbers was unsettling. Is that who Hermione was becoming? Someone who saw people as numbers in a battle, possible casualties in a war?

"I suspect I’ll be trying to find another job," Hermione said, forcing out a sigh as if it was an incredible imposition to be leaving Hogwarts, when in actual fact it was saving her life and her sanity, "Will you try for something at the Ministry?"

"I think so." Nettle said, considering, but anything further was cut off at Dumbledore's final announcement.
"Another year at Hogwarts comes to an end!" He exclaimed, throwing his arms out amidst the chatter and faint clapping that occurred after his first sentence, "I am sure, then, that you have noticed the blue and bronze decorations adorning the walls of our Great Hall. Ravenclaw House wins the House Cup by one hundred points!"

The Ravenclaws cheered, patting each other on the back as the other houses clapped politely – there would be no booing, for everyone knew the house had deserved the award. After all, they had not been the victim nor the perpetrators of pranks or mischief, and had studiously focused on their school work to a point of obsession. Their points had been well-earned; it seemed in the seventies that the house of the eagle had a winning streak in place for many years now.

The Marauders didn't seem to mind, joking amongst themselves and laughing loudly. The rest of the feast, however little there was left, was spent having last minute conversations with friends from other houses. It was always hard to see them the next morning in the rush for the train back to London. Hermione knew that from experience, having known a few like-minded Ravenclaws back in her day that she'd share her parting words with the night before travelling back home.

Hermione herself said her goodbyes to the other professors, knowing they would all be too caught up in organising the students to see much of her the next day. She promised to keep in touch with Slughorn – for all of his faults, he would be a helpful ally when it came to finding a more permanent job… especially if her affliction got out. Hermione didn't suppose he'd be particularly sympathetic, but it was a possible option. Slughorn was, without a doubt, an opportunist. Even if he found out she was a werewolf, if helping her meant he could have her in his debt she was sure he would take advantage. Hermione was willing to be manipulated if it came to it.

"Don't be a stranger, Hermione," Emilia said, giving her a brief hug that night outside of her quarters – they'd shared a celebratory night cap on a year well done. "I mean it. Owl me, will you? I'd like to keep in the loop of things."

"Sure," Hermione said, trying to hide her surprise, "I'll borrow the Potters' owl and send you updates."

And that was the other thing that had Hermione's stomach in knots, once she pushed aside the inevitable questions about her future. She'd be meeting Harry's grandparents, which was a terrifying thought. Especially because she knew they died of Dragon Pox soon, and there was nothing she could do to change that. How could she pinpoint when they'd contracted it? It was virtually impossible.

The next day, she opted to supervise the children heading onto the train. She bade farewell to the more study-conscious of the younger years, shooting a beaming smile at the third year Patrick Xiao, who returned it, and waved as the train went to start. Hermione had pushed Remus away earlier, scolding him for showing any sort of romantic inclination in front of the first years, to his amused grin. He would be meeting her at the Potters' place, intending to spend the summer there so as to get through the full moon with his friends. Hermione hadn't asked about his own family, remembering the way James had seemed frustrated at the situation back in the Shack. It wasn't a priority now, but she'd find out sooner or later. Her curiosity would not let her forget.

Hermione caught a brief glimpse of lank, dark hair and furrowed brows, before she abruptly remembered she needed to speak to Regulus.

_Damn_, she thought, frowning, _I need to contact him somehow._ Hermione had no doubt that the Potters' owl would be recognised by Walburga and promptly returned, her letter unopened. James would have written to Sirius over the years, and Hermione doubted the Black matriarch would have allowed such a thing. She'd have to ask Sirius about his methods of contact from Grimmauld Place.
Hermione, true to her word, was not catching the train to London to be greeted by Mr and Mrs Potter. No, she'd had James set up a Floo connection between Dumbledore’s office and his own house that Hermione intended to use once she’d finished packing up all of her things. Once the train was out of sight, Hermione made her way back up to the castle with Sinistra, talking about what Hermione might do over the summer. It seemed to be the conversation of the week, and Hermione gave platitudes about searching for another job, trying to keep the conversation on the Astronomy professor.

Upon entering her quarters, Hermione looked around. The two armchairs by the fireplace held a few cushions, and one thin blanket that Hermione had a soft spot for. A few books were piled up on the table nearby, the empty cup of tea from that morning cleaned up by the house elves, even though Hermione had told them many times to leave her quarters alone. Shaking her head in exasperation, Hermione picked up the cushions and blanket, reducing them in size to better store them in her trunk. She strode into her bedroom, opening the plain, brown trunk with a flick of her wand. It thudded against the end of her double-bed, its contents jiggling comically. Hermione threw the shrunken objects in, knowing the spell would hold for a day at least. She quickly and methodically folded up her clothes and placed them into her trunk – she'd never fully unpacked, always conscious of her limited time and knowing that she couldn't leave certain things lying around for anyone to see. Her trunk had been heavily warded and locked, and Hermione thought of the patterned sock at the bottom of it, heavy with purpose, that glared at her whenever she glimpsed it. Some things were better left hidden.

Hermione fingered the collar of her white blouse absentmindedly, before shutting her trunk with determination and reapplying her charms. The locks clicked shut satisfactorily, and Hermione gave one final sweep of her rooms, having earlier spelled the items in her ensuite bathroom into her trunk, before she hovered the trunk behind her and left, not glancing behind.

She reached the Headmaster’s office quickly, the students absent and therefore the hallways much easier to navigate at a quicker pace. She gave the password – “Fizzing Whizzbees.” – before ascending the spiral staircase. Knocking on the door and waiting until his invitation to come in, Hermione entered the office, her trunk bumping into the doorframe behind her in its haste to follow.

"Ah," Dumbledore greeted, smiling warmly, "Miss Huxley."

"Dumbledore." acknowledged Hermione, giving a polite nod.

"The Floo has been connected. I was just speaking with Euphemia – she is most enthusiastic to meet you."

"I hope you haven’t mentioned our activities." Hermione said warily, her brows furrowing slightly.

"Both Euphemia and Fleamont know that you work for the Order. They are not members themselves; too old, they told me, but they are sympathetic to the cause. It is why I told them of your situation, after all."

Hermione hummed, wanting to end the conversation and leave as soon as possible. Whilst her relations with Dumbledore were a lot less strained these days than previous, his blue eyes always left her unsettled. She didn't like knowing he might peek into her mind any minute, or that he still seemed to have an air of knowledge about him even if Hermione technically knew more about the future than he did at this stage.

She moved toward the fireplace, stepping inside and grabbing onto the handle of her trunk, lightweight due to one of her charms.
"Hermione Huxley," Dumbledore called, drawing Hermione's attention before she cupped a handful of Floo Powder from the nearby pot. "I release you from your duties."

A warm tingling inside her mouth, like popping candy, indicated that her verbal contract of months previous had been fulfilled, and Hermione threw down the Floo Powder in a flourish, staring through the dust of it into Dumbledore's blue eyes, framed by his famous half-moon spectacles.

"Luxwood Place!"

Coughing, still not entirely used to that form of travel and often choosing an alternative method considering her history with it, Hermione stepped out of the fireplace, attempting to dust off the ash on her crimson robes.

"Hermione!" Remus exclaimed, stepping forward to hug her closely. Hermione dropped her trunk in surprise, bringing up an arm to weakly return his hug.

"What's wrong?" Remus asked, pulling back to frown down at her. Hermione gave him a shy smile, hoping he would ignore her blush.

"Nothing's wrong." Hermione appeased him, and his features relaxed, "Just something I've got to get used to, that's all." Remus grinned at her, infectious.

"Ah, the prodigal professor arrives!" announced James, striding confidently into the room with a grin on his face. Peter followed, grinning at the two of them.

Hermione rolled her eyes, but couldn't help the small smile on her face.

"Where are your parents? I have to thank them." said Hermione, her anxiety returning at the thought.

"Mum!" James called, turning back around to exit the room, gesturing for all of them to follow, "Hermione's here!"

As they walked through a few rooms, Hermione looked around. It was a lavish set up, something she had expected upon discovering Harry's cavalier attitude toward money back in her own Hogwarts days. The house was big, and Hermione glimpsed an even bigger lawn out the back through the windows. It was a manor style house, although completely different in style to Malfoy Manor. Instead of dark and steely, it seemed more like a country home. It could definitely be something a Muggle could own, and a small, forgotten part of Hermione rejoiced at the thought. She'd obviously arrived in the living room, the couches seeming expensive but looking incredibly inviting in shades of blue and cream. The fireplace she'd stepped out of had been large and ornate, carved iron framing the stone walls. They moved through a long hallway, moving portraits staring curiously at her, her hand firmly clasped in Remus's. An alarming amount of windows were in every room, giving her a view into the vast grounds beyond, the pool looking inviting in the glimmering summer sun of June. Hermione would have to buy a swimming costume to make the most of it.

They passed by a sun room, filled with moving plants and a table laden with books – something Hermione vowed to sit in later, basking in the uniqueness of it all – before entering the large kitchen. It was decorated traditionally, the English country style reminiscent of something Hermione might've seen in her childhood. Timeless and inviting, Hermione loved it immediately. It seemed the rest of them did, too, for James plopped himself down into a wooden chair at the table in the centre. The magazines that littered it, as well as the fruit bowl, reminded Hermione of her own mother's tendency to collect home and style magazines. Of course, these ones had ugly seventies fashions on the cover, the snotty green colours coupled with patterned splash backs making Hermione want to cringe in distaste. Peter grabbed a peach, biting into it with relish as a woman with long, curly white hair
turned around, her slim figure looking anything but frail.

"Hermione!" She exclaimed, her voice vibrant and warm, "Welcome! James, get your feet off the table." She added without looking, and James retracted his feet guiltily. James's mother came forward, and Remus let go of Hermione's hand with reluctance.

"I'm so glad you agreed to join us. James has told me all about you – the others, as well," She looked quickly behind Hermione, no doubt glancing at Remus and Peter, "And Dumbledore, of course, spoke highly of you. We have the room, and we heard you needed a place to stay."

"Thank you, Mrs Potter," Hermione said, smiling at the way her hazel eyes, lighter than her son's, were so kind, "I'm indebted to you."

"Oh, pish posh!" Mrs Potter said, waving a hand and rolling her eyes. Hermione couldn't believe this woman would be dead within the year. "And please, call me Euphemia. Remus Lupin," she added sternly with a glare behind Hermione, "You put that chocolate away this instant. Flo and I have made lunch." Hermione turned her head to see Remus pocket an open Honeydukes bar with a small grin, winking at Hermione.

"Where's Dad?" James asked from his chair, smiling lovingly at his mother. Hermione knew James was an only child and had suspected he would be doted upon, but she hadn't figured he would be just as affectionate with his parents as well. Hermione's heart suddenly ached, thinking of the love Harry had missed out on and the neglect that had taken its place.

"Flea's in the garden, meddling with those severing spells again. Peter, dear, will you help me with the turnips? You've got such an eye for it." Euphemia asked the chubby boy, who'd just finished up with his fruit and nodded, giving the older woman a charming smile. Euphemia tittered. Hermione watched the whole exchange with wide-eyed shock, unable to believe what she was seeing.

"Mum's had a bit of a crush on Pete for ages," James muttered, rolling his eyes as the three of them left the kitchen, "I think Wormtail indulges her just to annoy me."

"Of course he does," Remus agreed, raising a teasing eyebrow, "He loves the way you go beet red at the racier compliments."

"Where's Sirius?" Hermione interrupted, trying to distract James, who'd opened his mouth to rebut with a furious expression on his face.

"He's at his flat in London," Remus said, grabbing her hand again, "Told us he'd see us tomorrow. He comes around every Sunday for lunch," clarified Remus, squeezing her hand, "Why?"

"I've got to ask him about Regulus…" Hermione said slowly, trailing off at the sight of the yard before her.

It was vast, green and lush. The lawn itself was pristine, wildflowers and bushes popping up in clusters every now and then to disrupt the sameness of it all. The pool was sizeable, the sandstone surrounds a little ostentatious but somehow suiting the back exterior of the house, and the chairs looking extremely comfortable. The back of the house had vines crawling up it – a stark contrast to the Gaunt House, which was overgrown and dank – with small gaps to see past the vegetation and to the grey stone beneath, awarding the place with a natural air, as if the house had grown up from the ground instead of being purely man-made. The sun room, its walls all windows, jutted out to the side, clearly in view of the pool. Hermione felt the only thing missing was a long wooden table and chairs underneath the large oak just past the pool, a perfect place to dine outside for lunch and dinner during the warmer months. It was everything Hermione might have done had she had the money and
time to build her own place, and it gave her the feeling of home immediately. She suspected she might have trouble leaving at the end of her time here.

An old man, tall but a little chubby, was at the edge of the garden past the pool, his wand in his wrinkly hand. He turned around at James's greeting, smiling with too-white teeth. He had a full head of hair, a dark grey. He looked as if he had been muscular in his youth, the muscles turning into a soft padding in his old age. His broad shoulders reminded her of Harry, and the dimples in his cheeks reminded her of James.

"Jimmy!" Mr Potter exclaimed, coming forward to hug his son hard as they approached, much to James's protests.

"Dad, you saw me this morning." James said, a pleased flush travelling up his neck despite rolling his eyes.

"Yes, well," Mr Potter said, shrugging with a smile, "Remus, how are you?"

"I'm well, thanks, Monty," Remus said, shaking the man's hand as if he'd only just arrived himself.

"And you!" Mr Potter said, turning to Hermione and beaming. He muttered out of the corner of his mouth to James, so quietly Hermione struggled to catch it. "I haven't met her before, have I?"

"No, Dad." James muttered back.

"Call me Monty," Monty announced at normal volume, smiling widely at her.

"I'm Hermione," she said, accepting his kiss on the cheek with one of her own, "I taught at Hogwarts last year."

"Remus!" Monty said, aghast, looking at their entwined hands, "I must say, this beats everything the four of you have ever done!"

"It's not like that," Remus said, laughing, "Hermione's only a few years older than us," He frowned, turning to look down at her, "How old are you exactly?"

Hermione opened her mouth to reply.

"Lunch is ready, Jimsy," a small voice croaked, and they all looked down. The great big ears dwarfed the wrinkly face of the house elf, who looked extremely friendly despite the likeness to Kreacher, "Phemia insists."

"Alright, Flo," James said with a smile, "We'll be there in a second."

The introductions had been overwhelming, and Hermione found herself not saying much at lunch as a result. The roast beef sandwiches hit the spot, Flo's specialty of potato and bacon soup following up nicely. Hermione was overcome at the strangeness of it all, her thoughts swirling at the idea that this could have so easily been Harry's life despite its stark difference to his actual one. The thought that it would be this Harry's life comforted her, even if the memory of 'I must not tell lies' etched into her Harry's skin would not leave her.

She learned that Euphemia, despite the assumed role of housewife, had actually been in charge of the famous Sleekeezy's Hair Potion line. Fleamont, extremely proficient in potions, had no idea how to market his idea. He made the product, and Euphemia did everything else. As a result, James had actually seen his father more during his time at Hogwarts, as he'd been at home in his potion's lab over the holidays whilst Euphemia spent her time in the office. They'd retired some years ago, given
they'd had James late and money had not been an issue. Monty's memory was spotty, hence his question to James earlier, but he seemed in remarkably good spirits, making fun of himself whenever his mind failed him. Peter was close with Euphemia and they were in animated conversation for most of the meal.

"Flo's put your trunk in your room. Mum has you next to me," James said after lunch, the four of them sitting on the lawn out back, "I don't want to hear anything."

Hermione's cheeks went bright red as Remus spluttered, quickly changing the subject.

They said goodbye to Peter that evening, and Hermione woke the next morning with renewed purpose. It had been like something out of a dream, arriving at Luxwood Place and meeting Harry's grandparents. It had felt like any other summer holiday, spending time at a friend's house before term was to start up. But Hermione had to remember it was nothing of the sort – she was a guest in their home, certainly, but she still had a job to do. It was easy to forget, surrounded by such trusting and friendly people.

"James," Hermione asked the boy the next day at breakfast, "I was wondering whether I could borrow an owl. I need to send a letter."

She attached said letter to Figgy's outstretched leg, still chuckling under her breath at the way the bird only accepted figs as rewards for her behaviour, hence her name.

Regulus, the letter read,

*I'll be in Diagon Alley on the 14th. Meet me in Flourish and Blotts at nine o'clock in the morning, I've got to talk to you.*

H

"What do you want?" the boy in question snapped at her as she perused the 'X' section of the bookstore on Tuesday morning, having left Remus behind at Sugarplum's Sweets Shop.

"No need to be so rude," Hermione retorted, snapping the book she'd been reading shut quietly.

"I'm risking my neck meeting you like this," Regulus seethed, grabbing her arm and pulling her deeper into the stacks, "This had better be good."

"I need you to go to Malfoy Manor," requested Hermione, hushed, "I need you to find another one."

"You've got to be joking," responded Regulus, staring at her incredulously, "Do you have any idea what the Dark Lord is doing right now?" He hissed the name at her, venomous and quick.

"The Dark Lord won't be doing much for much longer if you get this for me," snapped Hermione, "Remember our Vow."

Regulus looked mutinous, but Hermione knew she had won.

"It'll be a diary," Hermione explained, even quieter than before. She cast a wordless *Muffliato* around them as a precaution, "It's black – small and thin – and it has the name T. M. Riddle written on the inside. I doubt it's under much protection, but it might be concealed from view. Malfoy definitely has it, Voldemort gave it to him."

"And, once more, how do you know this?"
Hermione was silent, staring him down.

"Fine," Regulus spat, plucking a book from one of the shelves at random as if he was going to buy it. "But don't expect it for a while."

And he strode out of the aisle with his book, going down the stairs toward the register without looking back at her.

Hermione left ten minutes later, allowing enough time for anyone suspicious to have left already.

She met up with Remus near Fortescue's, her hands empty of purchases.

"Remus!" Hermione exclaimed in surprise upon approach, looking at the cage in his arms. He turned, grinning at her.

"Happy Birthday." He said, allowing her to take the cage from him. The Horned Owl inside hooted happily, although it looked angry given its resting expression. "You borrowed James's, but I figured you'd need one yourself. Better late than never. He wouldn't stop screeching at me until I bought him." The black owl had menacing yellow eyes, but his petulant face made Hermione giggle.

"He looks like you before a moon, Remus," Hermione commented, and laughed at Remus's offended expression, "I think I'll call him Romulus."

It seemed Hermione would not need Romulus, however, as Regulus's promise of things taking time seemed to be an empty one. He'd sent an owl – unrecognisable, as Sirius said it wasn't Regulus's own – back with a time and place to meet within twenty-four hours of their initial meeting. It was a Muggle area, densely populated on the night he'd told her to see him.

"You'll be okay?" Remus asked, cradling her cheek just before she was to leave.

"I'll be fine, Remus, honestly," Hermione said, squeezing his wrist before turning away to collect up her wand from her bedside table. "It's just Regulus."

Remus didn't look convinced, but Hermione ignored him. She'd been keyed into the Potters' wards, and so gave Remus a quick kiss on the cheek before detaching herself from him and Apparating away.

She arrived in a side street of London, out of the street lights. Her worn shoes, mossy green pants, and belted white top made her seem innocuous, which hadn't necessarily been her intention but worked in her favour. There were no curious stares, and Hermione made her way swiftly through the crowds of Covent Garden to the agreed upon place. There must have been something on, and event of some sort, for tourists were everywhere. Hermione was weaving in and out of them hastily, hoping Regulus wouldn't leave if she were only a minute late. Apparating into Muggle spaces was fraught with trouble.

She saw him, and sidled up as nonchalantly as she could.

"You're terrible at this," He muttered, sighing. Hermione glared at him, her wand burning a hole in her pants pocket. "Here."

He slipped the diary into her hand, her arm crushed up against his in the crowd and making the move virtually unnoticeable.

"You're sure this is it?" Hermione asked, unable to check herself for fear of drawing attention.
"Yes. No protection, like you predicted. A simple Accio did the trick."

"And Malfoy?" inquired Hermione, concerned.

"None the wiser," Regulus replied, still looking straight ahead at the Muggle spectacle in front of them – a performance, filled with cheers and gasps alike. "Stupid prick was too busy gloating to his guests about his latest monetary gains."

"Guests?" Hermione couldn't help the turn of her head, but quickly whirled it back forward at Regulus's disapproving face.

"Yes," Regulus murmured, and Hermione leant a bit closer so she could hear him, "I was extended a last minute invite to one of his follower catch-ups. Seems I've gained the Dark Lord's favour enough to be considered worthy of one."

"Gained favour?" asked Hermione, feeling like a broken record.

"On my count, we have one more." Regulus ignored her question, his eyes narrowing in the sudden bright light of the performance, "I presume you'll need my help with it as well, but please allow me more time. Malfoy's arrogance won't fall in line with our plans so easily next time, I'm sure."

He paused for a moment before pushing away from her, the loss of his arm feeling cold and sudden. Hermione eyed him out of the corner of her eyes, following his lengthy black hair and black t-shirt through the crowd until he faded into the night. Clenching the diary in her left hand, feeling the ridges of its corners digging into her palm, Hermione ducked between two storefronts and Apparated with a soft crack.

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Hermione wanted to be rid of the diary as soon as possible, and so sent Dumbledore a letter along with Romulus the next morning, bright and early.

The Headmaster appeared just before lunch, Romulus on his arm. The bird flew away as soon as he could, squawking angrily at the fact the wizard had Apparated with him.

"Dumbledore!" James cried, standing up quickly in an attempt to be a perfect host, "We weren't expecting you!"

"Calm down, James," said Dumbledore, smiling warmly at the former Head Boy, "You're not in trouble."

"Sorry, sir," James said, looking embarrassed as he stood beside his chair near the pool, "Habit."

"That's quite alright," Dumbledore replied, "Although, it is my understanding that Remus is in charge of figuring out the loopholes." The man in question blushed, looking away in embarrassment. Hermione knew Remus admired the Headmaster, which was ironic considering she was wary of him.

"You couldn't have sent them?" Hermione asked, tired of pleasantries.

"After last time, I felt I should be here." Hermione pursed her lips, remembering Dumbledore's
"Last time? What's going on?" Sirius asked, standing up now. They'd all been sitting near the pool, although none of them had felt like going in. Lily had joined them that morning, James receiving all kind of ribbing from his friends at the long kiss he gave her upon her arrival. Lily had glared at Sirius especially hard, and he'd shut up quite hastily after that.

Dumbledore turned to her, his eyes inquisitive. He would leave it up to her to tell them, she knew. She'd been ruminating over it for days. The advantages were ten fold, but part of her was still convinced this was her knowledge, her fight. But if she didn't make it out, if Dumbledore succumbed to Voldemort's wand… well, it only made sense that more people should know.

Their intrigued faces said it all – once she told them, this would cease to be a happy summer, filled with friendship and romance before entering the big, bad world. The summer would turn into a time rife with worry, with scheming and planning and more questions. Hermione was reluctant to ruin it for them. A part of her recognised she was reluctant to ruin it for herself – after all, their carefree attitude was easily rubbing off on her, and she found herself thinking of Voldemort less and less. It was only at night, alone in the darkness of her temporary room, that her duty fell upon her again. She remembered everything she could, every move Voldemort would make leading up to 1981. She tried her best to think of how James and Lily might defy Voldemort twice more, about how she could stop that from happening so Voldemort would not fulfil the Prophecy himself and make it true by proxy.

Nights were the hardest, and Hermione found solace in her days spent with Remus, sharing brief kisses and talking about everything but the war.

Hermione was no fool, though, however much she might try to delude herself into becoming one. She was an adult, and she needed to act like it.

"You should bring Marlene over, Sirius," Hermione said, turning to the wizard in question, "She needs to see this, too."

Remus went to grab her hand, but Hermione shrugged him away. Sirius looked confused but complied. Apparating out and coming back with Marlene moments later, whose face was irate and mouth was open in fury.

"Sirius, I've told you– oh. Hermione. Is this your doing?" Marlene asked, her tone changing as she transferred her attentions. "Why didn't you just say that, Sirius?" Sirius rolled his eyes.

"Dumbledore," Lily said, glancing at Hermione with friendly concern before turning back to the professor, "What's going on?"

"I believe Miss Huxley will explain in just a moment, Lily."

Hermione gave them all a look, silently willing them to stay there, before she went to retrieve the diary from her room.

They were all muttering to each other when she returned, although Dumbledore was humming happily to himself on the sidelines.

"You all know I've been on a mission for the Order," Hermione said, "Dumbledore mentioned it at your induction."

"Yeah, but we figured that was intel back to him about the students," Peter said, frowning at her, "Or maybe convincing others to join."
"No," Hermione huffed, trying not to chuckle, "Nothing like that. Something very different, I'm afraid."

All of them waited for her to go on, and Hermione tried to convince herself she was a Gryffindor.

"Do any of you know what a horcrux is?"

All of their expressions remained confused, although there was a slight dawning realisation in Marlene's eyes.

"It's-- … I think I better start from the beginning. Voldemort's main goal is to achieve immortality."

"Immortality?" Sirius scoffed, and they all turned to him, "I thought he wanted to eradicate the world of Muggles."

"That, too," Hermione agreed, "But he can't do that if he dies, can he? And a wizard like him has enemies, as we well know."

She vaguely registered she was reverting into lecture mode, but pushed those thoughts aside. It was hardly important.

"Voldemort has attempted magic to make himself immortal," she explained. "And he has succeeded. It's called a horcrux. Essentially, you murder someone and perform a ritual to split your soul into two. You store one half of your soul in an object, and the other remains in you."

"Your soul?" Lily asked, disgusted, "But, that's what makes you human! It's what differentiates us between, say, a dog." Sirius looked mildly offended, and Hermione held back a hysterical laugh, "I mean, some people say vampires and werewolves have no souls," She glanced apologetically at Remus, "But that's just bigotry. They were human once, and so they have souls. Magical creatures are a little trickier to work out, but--" James grabbed her hand, and Lily silenced.

"It is magic of the darkest form, Lily," Dumbledore explained, saving Hermione the awkward task of reminding them that Voldemort was quite evil. "Voldemort has no reservations about such things."

"You said he's succeeded? So you're looking for his horcrux?" James asked, his face blank. Hermione saw a fierceness in his eyes she did not expect, "That way he can be defeated?"

Hermione pulled the diary from behind her back, showing it to them.

"This is a horcrux. Dumbledore and I intend to destroy it."

"It can't be that easy." Marlene said, and they all turned to her. She looked calculating, like she was figuring out a particularly difficult riddle, "Voldemort would have protections, fail safes…"

"Yes," agreed Hermione, smiling wryly, "He made multiple."

"Multiple horcruxes?" Peter choked out, looking pale, "But that would mean--"

"He split his soul multiple times." Remus finished for him, staring at Hermione disturbingly.

Lily and Marlene shared a look, almost frightened.

"Luckily, Hermione and I have destroyed most of them." Dumbledore intervened with a calm air, gazing at them all evenly.

"Just how many are there?" Sirius asked, eyes wide.
"Including this," Hermione waved the diary, "He created five."

"Five?!" James burst out, his expression twisting in revulsion. Hermione didn't want to know what he'd look like if she told him he'd made seven where she came from.

"He aspired for seven pieces of his soul." said Dumbledore.

"The most magical number." Peter finished, looking deep in thought.

"Yes." Dumbledore answered, staring Peter down. The boy blushed, looking away.

Hermione didn't know what else to say, and so instead shared a look with Dumbledore.

"Whatever it says, please ignore it," Hermione warned them, taking the proffered basilisk fang from the Headmaster, the others looking at it curiously, "It's a sentient piece of magic, and it attempts to defend itself when threatened." She was glad James's parents were out, for explaining this to them would have been terribly difficult.

The diary was placed on the grass, and the others took an instinctive step back. Dumbledore nodded at her, and Hermione readjusted her grip on the fang before plunging it into the diary with force, falling back on her arse as a great big light flew out of the diary, gone as quickly as it came, before torrents of ink flooded the grass beneath her, staining her red patterned jumpsuit forbiddingly. The diary flew open, screaming in its wake.

"MURDERER!" It screamed, and Hermione knew it was talking to her, baiting her, just as the potion had done last month, "LIAR! Travelled far to deceive them all, kill them all!" An inky projection appeared, and Hermione realised with horror that it was Harry.

"You left me, Hermione." It said miserably, the screeching of the diary sounding distant in the background, "You're not coming back and I'm going to die."

"No…" Hermione whispered, staring with wet eyes at the image in front of her.

"We never liked you," Another projection spat, and Hermione recognised Ron with a sinking heart, "We pitied you, that was it. You're not our friend. A friend wouldn't leave us to die."

"Stab it, Hermione." Hermione whipped her head around, staring at the unflappable Dumbledore through her tears. He nodded encouragingly at her.

With a shout, Hermione turned back around and threw herself at the diary, stabbing it again until the screams abruptly cut off, and it gave one last spurt of ink high in the air before it finally died.

Hermione was covered in the substance, breathing heavily as she stared at the object with hatred. It had possessed Ginny once, and the memory of Tom Riddle had almost killed Harry. She felt the sense of satisfaction her previous horcrux destructions had not awarded her, and gave a huge sigh of relief.

"Are you alright?" Remus rushed to her side, checking her over for injuries.

"I'm fine," Hermione said weakly, pushing his hands away but thankful for the concern, "It's okay."

"Is no one going to comment on the fact the horcrux showed me?" James asked after a moment of stunned silence. Hermione snapped her head to him, mind whirring.

"That wasn't you, James," Marlene said, gazing at Hermione with pity, knowingly, "You're lankier."
"I think it's time," Dumbledore started, and Hermione looked up at him from her position on the ground, Remus's arm around her shoulders. His expression was resigned. "They deserve to know."

Hermione swallowed thickly, turning to look at the sodden diary in front of her.

"I just want to apologise for not telling you," Hermione said, focusing on Remus before she began. They'd retreated to the living room, settling into the couches after some cleaning charms to her person. Dumbledore had taken the diary and left, and Hermione knew he would keep it. For what, she wasn't sure, but she didn't want to see it ever again. "My hands were tied, and if it got out--"

"Just tell us, Hermione," Remus insisted, his knee bumping hers in support. "It's fine."

Hermione inhaled deeply, gazing around at them all.

"I was born on September 19th, 1979."

"1979?" Sirius barked out a laugh, but quickly sobered up at her unmoving expression.

"I was born in 1979, to two Muggle dentists," Lily brightened up at this, and Hermione sent her a small smile, "My life was great, and then I got my Hogwarts letter at age eleven, in 1991."

Hermione refused to look at Remus's face, simply feeling the absence of his knee after its retreat.

"There, I met my two best friends. Ron Weasley, and Harry Potter," James's eyebrows shot up. "Voldemort was said to be dead, but every year we fought him in some way. Through his horcruxes, he attempted to return. When I was in my fourth year--" She felt skipping over Sirius's imprisonment was probably best, and realised she would have to give a censored version of events to avoid the whole 'Peter betrayed the Potters' point, "He actually returned, and by the time my sixth year was over he was the most powerful he had ever been. I didn't return for my seventh year. My friends and I were in hiding, for Voldemort saw us as targets. In 1998, Voldemort was defeated. Things were fine," Hermione explained, glimpsing Lily's distraught face, "More than fine, actually. We'd lost--" Hermione swallowed through her unshed tears, steadfastly not thinking of Remus, "We'd lost a lot of people, but everyone left was determined to rebuild. It was only a month or two later that Voldemort's remaining followers started an uprising."

"That's not possible," James said, frowning deeply, "Time turners – the Daily Prophet said they can only go back hours."

"Do you honestly think the Prophet reports everything accurately?" Marlene proposed, incredulous.
"I didn't use a time turner," Hermione said, shaking her head, "I thought it was a time turner, but I was mistaken. I'd had experience with time turners before, and hadn't taken the time to really study the object I was actually using."

"What object were you using, Hermione?" Peter asked her, and Hermione clenched her jaw.

"I found out I'd used a Dimension Diverter."

"What's a Dimension Diverter?" Sirius asked, looking around at all of them with a frown.

"Instead of taking the user back in time, like a time turner," Marlene explained, giving Hermione a sad smile, "It transports them to moments in time where their world could have gone one of two ways."

"You knew," Remus gasped, staring at Marlene, "You knew about this."

"My mother works in the Department of Mysteries, Remus," Marlene said tiredly, "She's the one who told Hermione about the Diverter."

"Needless to say," Hermione interrupted their glaring, "The men you saw in the horcrux – one of them was Harry Potter, and the other was Ron Weasley. Harry is your son, James." Hermione frowned, "Or, was. Will be. I'm not sure, I've already changed a lot so far."

"My son?" James looked winded, staring at her, "I--"

He couldn't seem to go on, his eyes still wide and his expression gobsmacked.

"What do you mean, you've changed a lot?" Peter asked, shuffling forward in interest, "Are you saying the war won't take so long?"

"I hope not," Hermione said with a weary chuckle, "I've been destroying his horcruxes since I found out I could. I'm hoping we can get rid of them as soon as possible, and then Dumbledore can do the final deed."

"This is a lot to take in." Sirius said, looking at his hands in thought. He paused, looking back up at her curiously, "What happened to us?"

Hermione hesitated, their intrigued faces making her uncomfortable.

"I'm not sure you want to know…" Saying it was almost as bad as saying the real thing, given the way all of their expressions dropped.

"So we're all dead." Marlene stated matter-of-factly, "Fantastic. I'm glad you're here, then."

"But Harry?" Lily asked, looking between her boyfriend and Hermione, "Who looked after him?"

Hermione bit her lip.

"Your sister, Lily."

"My sister? But…" Lily looked terribly confused, and Hermione didn't want to know what sort of doubts were running through her head.

"Lils," James consoled, seemingly snapping out of his shock, "As if you wouldn't be the mother of my child."
"No, it's not that," Lily said, waving him off. "It's just, Tuney only started speaking to me again after Hermione… saved… me…" Lily stared at her, aghast. "Did Petunia still hate me when I died?"

Hermione cringed, and Lily looked heartbroken.

"Getting upset over this is… it's counter-productive," Hermione announced, ignoring the question, glimpsing Remus's blank face in her periphery. "None of it has happened yet and it won't, if I can help it."

"I'm honestly still in disbelief," Sirius laughed, running a hand through his hair in frustration, "This all seems too neat, too precise. I mean, why did you come back to this point in time? And–" At this, he looked at her sharply, "Will you go back?"

That quieted the group, and Hermione shook her head quickly in response.

"No, that choice was taken from me. The Diverter doesn't work that way."

"We don't know that–" Marlene started, but was cut off.

"No, Marlene," Hermione said sharply, eyes narrowing. "I can't go back. I've accepted that."

The fact that the Diverter still sat in her trunk said otherwise, but Hermione pushed those thoughts away.

"Was he in love with you?" Remus blurted out suddenly, and Hermione turned to face him for the first time during the whole conversation. He was angry, his eyes burning with emotion, "The other me? Was he in love with you?"

"What?" questioned Hermione, befuddled, "No, Remus, I–"

"Were you in love with him?" Remus ploughed on, leaning forward and staring into her eyes intently, "Am I just a replacement?"

"Remus," Hermione pleaded, confused and miserable and tired, "Please, don't–"

"Do you even like me at all?" Remus asked her coldly and he stood up, leaving the room without waiting for an answer. Hermione stared after him, her bushy head falling into her hands as tears burned her eyes.

"He's just in shock," Peter explained, patting her shoulder for comfort, "He'll come around."

"This is why I didn't want to tell you," Hermione said miserably into her palms, shaking her head, "I mean, at first I couldn't." She looked up at them and took a deep breath, "But then it got too hard, and I thought–"

What she thought went unsaid, but Hermione knew they were remembering what the horcrux had screamed at her, just like she was remembering it. Vividly. Too vividly.

"I never expected this," James told her, "But you're trying to make things better. If it wasn't for you, I'd die sooner than I should. So I can't help but be grateful."

"Tell me," Sirius said, his tone light. Hermione turned to him, her heart heavy, "Do you remember who wins the Quidditch World Cup from here on in? Because that would be dead useful–" Lily whacked him, and Sirius grinned cheekily.

That seemed to ease the tension, and Hermione spent the next hour explaining other things to them,
all the while thinking about how she might rectify things with Remus.

Isn't this what the horcrux had predicted? she thought.

"He will never forgive you. You've deprived him of a son."

Hermione shuddered, excusing herself from their conversation. Sirius had bet she'd be a Ravenclaw back in first term, and so owed Peter a fair few galleons at the newly acquired knowledge that she had, in fact, been sorted into Gryffindor.

Remus was in his room across from her own upstairs, the door wide open. He sat on his bed, running a hand through his already mussed hair in consternation.

She entered quietly but making enough sound for him to know she was there. She waited for him to start talking, as patient as she could stand to be.

By the time she began to fidget, he seemed to take pity on her.

"Why am I jealous? Of myself?" His tone was tired, and exasperated. Hermione took hopeful steps forward, stopping to crouch in front of him and pull his hands away from his face.

"He didn't love me," Hermione reassured him, her voice soft and tender, "And I didn't know him well enough to love him."

Remus looked back and forth between her eyes, his face torn.

"I like you for you." She told him, placing a hand on his cheek lovingly, "I knew the other you, admired him... but I like you. Not the Remus Lupin I first met."

He huffed out a laugh, staring down at his hands again.

"Was I married?" He asked, the question slicing into her chest like Dolohov's deadly hex.

Hermione paused, considering lying but knowing it would only harm her in the end.

"Yes. You had a son. You were very happy," she said, rubbing her right thumb back and forth over his cheekbone. He looked up at her.

"He was an idiot," Remus said vehemently, his mouth dangerously close to hers. Hermione felt his hands come up to cradle her face, gentle but passionate, "You were right in front of him, and he didn't see you."

"Remus," sighed Hermione, trying not to get swept up in his declarations, her knees hurting against the wooden floor, "You were happy. You didn't need me."

"I don't need you now," Remus said, and his lips pushed into hers; desperately, longingly, "It's never been about need, and you know it."

He was right. She hadn't ever felt incomplete, or wanting in that kind of way. Her attraction to Remus, her desire to be near him and around him, all stemmed from want. It wasn't a need that drew her to him, although she made that excuse in her weaker moments. She wouldn't die without him. It had always been a choice. Remus had chosen to let her in, to allow her to lead him every full moon, to seek solace in the knowledge he wasn't alone. It had taken her a while, but Hermione had wanted Remus to be that person for her, had denied herself because she thought it was what she needed to do. In the end, despite her nerves and her inexperience, she'd chosen to be with him. Even though
she'd been a professor and he her student, even though between the two of them a steady income would be hard to come by... it had always been a choice. Living without him was possible, but painful. Hermione had chosen to love Remus, long after she'd fallen for him. That was the way of things.

She felt better, though, to know that Remus had chosen her – scars and all, affliction and all, bushy hair and all. He hadn't been coerced into being with her, or left with her as his only option. No, he'd liked her of his own free will and acted upon it that way, too.

That night, the group of them spent their time discussing the more light-hearted aspects of Hermione's knowledge of the future, Remus's hand resting comfortably in her own.

"So, really, you were born sometime in March, 1958." Lily said, grinning at her after Hermione told them how old she was and what that meant in terms of the months she'd skipped upon arrival in 1977. Hermione's face scrunched up in distaste.

"There's no way I'm picking my own birthday. September 19th, 1958 will do. Although it still feels strange."

"I'm pretty sure I beat you in that department; I'm dating someone who's, technically, not even born yet." Remus snarked and Hermione pushed his shoulder playfully as the others laughed.

The next day, an Order meeting was held, their coins burning gloomily. Thankfully, no more disappearances or murders had been reported matching the modus operandi of previous. Hermione breathed a sigh of relief as they left the meeting, the atmosphere still grim in the face of other events – the Imperius curse discovered in a few Ministry officials; the dead animal carcus found on Moody's doorstep, an obvious warning; and the escape of a few Death Eaters from the clutches of the Aurors, as reported by Alice, who didn't look any more pregnant. Hermione didn't want to ask.

That weekend, after only one day of relaxation in the sun room, the others got their N.E.W.T. results.

"Right on! O's in everything I need!" exclaimed James, scanning his parchment greedily. Marlene merely raised an eyebrow at her own before tucking it into her jeans pocket.

"Auror Academy here I come!" Sirius whooped, grabbing his bespectacled friend into a headlock. Peter ducked out of the way, clutching his own results to his chest as it to protect them. He looked happy, and Hermione didn't want to spoil it by asking him his results, if they might be worse than his friends'.

"Satisfied?" Hermione implored, trying to avoid the temptation to peer over and read Remus's parchment upside down. The werewolf grinned, banishing his own results away with a flick of his wand.

"They were passable," He said casually, but Hermione knew he would have been disappointed with passable. In all likelihood, he'd gotten all O's just like she had in her O.W.L.s (although Hermione chose to ignore her Defence mark, knowing that Umbridge was a toad of a teacher and Hermione could have performed better under the right instruction).

"Lils, you got all O's, right?" James asked, managing to extract himself from Sirius's grip to bound over to his girlfriend. "... Lily?"

Lily had her head in her hands, the parchment folded in her grip.

She mumbled, unheard through her fingers.
"What was that?" Remus asked, frowning.

"I said," Lily looked up, staring at them fearfully. "I'm too scared to look at them."

Hermione couldn't help but laugh, putting a hand over her mouth at Lily's glare. She hadn't known they were so alike.

"I'm sorry," Hermione apologised with an amused smile, "It's just, I was the same way."

Suddenly, the parchment was plucked out of her hands, James's triumphant grin widening as he announced his girlfriend's results.

"All O's, Lils. I knew it!"

"Mate," Sirius said, interrupting his friend solemnly. He was staring at Lily fearfully. Hermione turned, looking at the furious redhead and her quickly reddening face. "Run. I'll hold her off."

James glanced at his girlfriend in confusion, before widening his eyes in fright and throwing the parchment at her. He ran out through the back doors, his messy hair blowing in the wind outside as he made his way to the very back of the property.

"Come back here, James Potter!" Lily shouted, and Hermione winced at the loud sound. Sirius was clutching both of Lily's wrists in his hands, trying to stop her from running after James, but she was pushing with an almost unnatural force, "How dare you?! All O's? I'll show you what all O's can do to entitled boyfriends!"

James's panicked yells echoed throughout the grounds, and she shared a commiserating look with Remus.

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When Hermione woke up from the full moon on Tuesday morning, it was to the unusual feeling of normalcy.

It seemed that, finally, the full moons were a routine of her life. Whereas before they crept up on her like a movie villain, or left her dreading them the whole month without a moment of forgetfulness – now she accepted their occurrence with resigned planning, and the amusing feeling of excitement that she would get to see Remus semi-naked at the end of it. Now that they were dating, that prospect was filled with promise instead of embarrassment.

"Morning." Remus mumbled into her shoulder, and Hermione sleepily opened her eyes.

"You're up first," she observed, her stomach muscles contracting at Remus's open-mouthed kisses to her collarbone, "That's new."

"Mmm," he hummed, the vibrations of it reverberating through her bones, her core giving an impatient throb. Hermione rubbed her thighs together, the frustration building. The hard ground of the shed out back was dirty, but Hermione took no notice, too preoccupied with the way Remus's wide hand grasped her hip, the padding she'd accumulated over the past year bunching in his grip. It felt pleasantly hot, like her side had been pinched raw in the most exciting way.
He moved over her, his body now covering hers completely as his mouth continued its journey across her collarbone. His chest brushed her nipples, making them peak with a strange sting Hermione had never felt before. She'd never much paid attention to her breasts, neither of them eliciting anything particularly exciting in her own ventures.

His mouth moved down, his tongue sweeping out to leave a wet trail in its wake. Hermione shifted her hips, giving a quiet moan as her back arched off the floor with the movement, her chest coming into contact with his mouth.

"Hate to break it up," Marlene's voice came through the door after a few knocks, and Hermione's torso landed heavily back onto the ground in surprise. "But breakfast is ready, and none of us fancy eating to the sounds of your lovemaking."

Remus rested his forehead against her ribs in his own frustration, his warm breath tickling her stomach and doing nothing to abate her arousal.

When they cleaned themselves up with some hasty spells and joined their friends, flushed but dressed, it was to a leering look from Sirius.

"Well, well, well--" Peter whacked his friend over the head hard from beside him, ignoring Sirius's noise of complaint.

"Thanks, Wormtail." Remus said with a tired smile, which Peter returned.

The next week saw all of them, Lily and Marlene now regulars, relaxing in the sun and enjoying the most of their holiday before they had to think about getting jobs. Hermione took a day trip to Diagon Alley with Remus, her arms ladened with books to read upon return to the sun room, later pushing away Remus's exploring hands as she sat down with *The Magical Psyche: A Witch or Wizard's Guide to Magical Psychology*. She'd penned a letter to Emilia the next day, enquiring after her health and hoping to catch up soon, and sent it along with Romulus, who had grown very attached to her – so much so that when Remus's hands had started venturing underneath her clothes during her letter writing, the bird had snapped aggressively at him.

They'd finally braved the pool on the last Friday afternoon of June, Hermione's new swimmers – a boring salmon pink one-suit that had been on sale – making Remus stare at her uncomfortably long, even though he'd seen her in much less thanks to their propensity to grow fur and deadly sharp canines once a month.

Hermione had managed to push Sirius in, much to her own enjoyment, the mutinous expression on his face well worth the dunking she'd received later – she'd come up spluttering, Remus helpless in the face of her misery. He'd been remembering her shocked face and subsequently laughing ever since.

By the time the twenty-seventh rolled around, the hardness of Hermione's shoulders and the crick in her neck had all but disappeared. Which meant, of course, that they had to return somehow.

She was in the sun room, basking in the afternoon light and reading up on house elf history in one of her new books when Euphemia popped her head in, a pleasant smile on her gracefully aged face.

"Dumbledore's here, Hermione," she said, her white hair nearly blinding in the sunlight, "He's asked to speak with you."

Frowning, Hermione marked her place in her book, putting it down onto the table as she stood, stretching her arms above her head. Padding into the living room – the place where the Potters hosted
all their guests, Hermione had learned – Hermione was greeted with the sight of the old wizard in dazzling purple robes, twinkling as if he was part of a milky way that found itself in the Potters' living room.

"Lovely robes." Hermione commented, smiling. Her usual defenses were absent, the last week influencing her nicely.

"Thank you, Hermione," Dumbledore said, smiling genially at her, "They are my favourite."

"You wanted to speak with me?" inquired Hermione after a quiet minute, and Dumbledore nodded.

"Yes, forgive me. An old man like myself often finds himself lost in thought. Let us sit."

Hermione took her place, her olive cotton shorts bunching at the top her thighs, but her white tank flowing comfortably. Her hair was in a plait down her back; usually quite practical, but it itched the nape of her neck at that moment, irritating.

The boys were out today, no doubt spending time together pranking some poor oblivious people in Diagon Alley, and Hermione knew Lily was spending time with her sister.

"I've taken the liberty of pulling a few strings for you," He announced, pulling out a folded piece of parchment from the inside of his extravagant robes, "My contacts at the Ministry have managed to create a record for you of your schooling – private tutelage, of course, but your results have been put down. Emilia was kind enough to mention your O.W.L. scores to me when I asked – you had discussed them at some point, I believe? – and I guessed your N.E.W.T scores myself. Please don't be offended at your results, they are all admirable." He passed over the parchment, which Hermione received in incredulity. She opened it up, and read the results.

"All O's." she whispered, her brain whizzing.

"Admirable, like I said." chuckled Dumbledore. "I hope you know that we are all hoping for your future here."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, Hermione's eyes roving over the parchment greedily, as if she could take the N.E.W.T.s simply by staring at her fabricated results. It had always been a dream of hers, much to the amusement of her friends. The dream had faded into the background against more important matters, now more a nostalgic though than anything.

Although these results weren't necessarily hers, they eased a restless part of her.

"Thank you." said Hermione, folding up the parchment and tucking it into her pocket.

"Remus wrote to me last month," Dumbledore started after another contemplative moment, which surprised Hermione enough that she jerked her head back, "Asking for some advice on a problem the two of you had been having."

"Really?" enquired Hermione, her hackles slowly rising.

"It seems his behaviour around the full moon has been unpredictable. He said you are both at a loss as to the cause, which had me thinking – as I am wont to do." His eyes twinkled, but Hermione felt uneasy, wishing her relaxed air of minutes earlier would return, "That perhaps the three of us have been seeing this the wrong way. An understandable notion, of course."

"Sorry?" Hermione prodded, frowning in confusion.
"That is to say, perhaps it is not Remus who has been having the problem. Perhaps it is you."
Dumbledore said, looking at her over his half-moon glasses.

"But I've been fine, all things considered. Textbook symptoms."

"Ah, yes," Dumbledore started, as if she had stumbled upon something important, "But textbook for who? Or, more precisely, textbook for when?"

"Sir, with all due respect, I would appreciate it if you could make yourself perfectly clear."

"My apologies, Hermione, forgive a man his small pleasures." He smiled at her. "I believe that your symptoms are different from those werewolves normally experience. I've noticed you seem restless throughout the month – and if I'm not mistaken, you took to exercise to alleviate this symptom."

"Yes, but I hardly think–"

"In our world, Hermione, werewolves do not experience restlessness associated with the disease at any time other than right before the full moon. They grow wearier by the minute, exhausted until the day of the full moon at which point they become restless. Remus had some measurable success in pushing away the worst of his symptoms, until your first full moon together, a which point he lost this talent altogether." Dumbledore was not smiling, but he still seemed incredibly light-hearted for the conversation they were having.

"What are you saying?"

"I believe Remus bit you on that first full moon, did he not?" Hermione thought of the faint scar at her ankle, healed perfectly and forgotten quickly enough.

"Most people believe lycanthropy is a mar on the soul," Dumbledore redirected, almost giving Hermione whiplash, "But I have always been of the more unusual opinion that it is a disease, like any other. It is transferred through the blood and the saliva. Only in wolf form, which is a relief to many werewolves. Humans, too, I am sure."

Hermione was breathing heavily, the thoughts flying wildly through her head.

"Diseases, like anything, can change over time. They mutate, becoming either more deadly or more curable. Diseases from another world, however…"

"I did this to him," Hermione whispered, horrified, "I made things worse."

"Not at all, Hermione. I would say, actually, that you have made things better. Hermione frowned, looking to the Headmaster in askance. "Remus has always hated the werewolf inside him, not entirely realising that they are not, in fact, separate entities. Through your presence – and I must thank you most ardently – he has come to realise that he cannot hate the werewolf, for you are one. And he loves you."

"But I–" Hermione was reeling, so much information coming at her at once.

"Torturer, failed leader. You infected him."

"I infected him!" she exclaimed, distraught.

"Hermione," the bearded wizard said, studying her keenly, "How were you to know that you had a different strain of lycanthropy? You could not have known before he bit you, and after, it was too late. You have not infected him; his own disease has simply mutated to become yours."
"I did not tell you this to cause you unnecessary guilt," Dumbledore said sadly, shaking his head, "I told you so that the topic may be put to rest. I had rather hoped you would take it well."

Hermione stared at him incredulously.

"I realise now that I was mistaken, as I often am." His eyes glittered with amusement, which strangely relaxed her. "This does not get rid of a different problem, however."

Her shoulders tensed in anticipation, the true cause of her distress coming to the forefront. Hermione had, for a long time, suspected that Dumbledore was keeping her close so as to keep an eye on her. She had been fine with it, although slightly disgruntled at the idea that she needed babysitting. But it had kept him at arms length for the most part, which she could not be unhappy about. His Legilimancy skills had been largely untested on her, for which she was thankful.

"I am afraid that I have not been entirely truthful with you, Hermione." He said it with reluctance, if Hermione could have ever described the powerful wizard that way. His eyes shone with pity, and it was with a sense of detachment that Hermione realised he had, in his own way, grown to care for her. Care for her in the way a parent might care for a misfit child – hope that they don't fall into trouble, and feel responsible for them when they did. Their relationship was tumultuous, she knew all too well, but Dumbledore felt some sort of kinship with her. The fact that he was wary of telling her this secret meant that, to him, it seemed it might be in jeopardy.

Hermione's shoulders tensed and she clenched her fists in nervousness.

"Initially, I was going to show you my memory of the event," Dumbledore explained, his own shoulders lowering slightly – slumped was too strong a word, but the same effect was there. "But I find myself in need of a Pensieve. Alas – if you are a willing participant – I have an alternative; I can project the memory to you through Legilimancy."

She stiffened instinctively at the word, immediately unsure.

"I understand your hesitation," Dumbledore consoled her, his robes glittering magnificently in the afternoon sunlight, "Given your circumstances. But I implore you to trust me. You will want to know, and there is no easy way to explain this."

Hermione stared into the Headmaster's blue eyes, the skin around them thin with age.

"Alright," she agreed, inhaling sharply, "alright."

Dumbledore pulled out his wand.

"Leglimens."

Instead of her own memories flying by in a blur of colour and cacophony of sound to settle on one in particular, Hermione's vision was simply overcome by another – Dumbledore's, she realised, as she viewed the memory from his perspective. Hermione supposed this was how Marlene had seen things upon entering her mind.

"Is there anything else you wish to add, Sybill?" Dumbledore asked Trelawney, his voice sounding slightly different from this perspective, but still polite.

Trelawney floundered, looking desperate to impress upon Dumbledore something.

"My great-great grandmother had the Sight, you see." she said nervously, her great big earrings swaying with the small shake of her head. Her robes were shabbier than Hermione remembered,
despite their bright colours, and the dark circles underneath the Divination professor's eyes were stark. Hermione supposed, however, that Trelawney was not yet a professor.

Why has Dumbledore interviewed her already? This isn't meant to happen until 1980…

"Yes, you've mentioned." Hermione noted that Dumbledore's tone of voice seemed disappointed, as if he had expected more from the woman.

"And I– well, that is to say–" Suddenly, Trelawney cut herself off, her eyes going foggy and her voice raspy.

"The one with the knowledge to vanquish the Dark Lord appears…" she began ominously, and Hermione wanted to throw up. Distantly, she felt her stomach churning. She was so deep in the Legilimancy, however, that nothing came of it but a vague feeling of being unwell. "Born as the eighth month dies, born to those who exist in spite of him; a beast with no sire, a witch with no past…" Hermione would've blanched if she had the presence to do so; instead she watched on, helpless to react but wanting to scream endlessly. "And the Dark Lord will see her as his enemy, but she will have strength the Dark Lord knows not… and either must die at the hand of the other for in time neither can live while the other survives... the one with the knowledge to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the eighth month dies…"

There was silence in the memory, and Hermione saw a hand come up to adjust the half-moon glasses perched on Dumbledore's nose.

"Sybill?" He asked gently, and the witch started, staring at Dumbledore.

"What was I saying? Oh, yes – I can make a great many predictions…"

Suddenly, the Potters' regal living room appeared in front of her, and Dumbledore was looking especially regretful.

"Dumbledore," Hermione's voice was shaky, the churning of her stomach increasing with every panicked inhale, "When did Sybill Trelawney interview for the job?"

"She insisted I speak with her," Dumbledore said gravely, "She did not know the position had been filled by our dear Augustus Xenos, who had agreed to only one year, much like yourself. I had heard of her ancestry, however, and decided to give her the opportunity to interview so as to start the following year."

"Dumbledore," she snapped, her palms stinging as her nails dug into the flesh there, "When?"

"She predicted your arrival on the thirty-first of August, mere hours before my brother requested I invite you onto Hogwarts grounds."

Hermione's vision was swimming, her thoughts slow and weighed down as if they were tied to concrete blocks, sinking to the bottom of a deep and dark ocean.

"So you knew?"

"Yes, Hermione," Dumbledore told her, sighing, "I knew that if I were to put stock in such a temperamental branch of magic, that you were the woman the prophecy spoke of. When you told me you were a werewolf, it only confirmed my suspicions."

"You hired me," Hermione said, her mind whirring, "You knew and you hired me."
"I wasn't sure whether Voldemort knew of the prophecy, and had hoped I could protect you."

"Why didn't you say anything?" Hermione asked, suddenly outraged, turning her piercing eyes onto the Headmaster, "Why didn't you tell me? I could have prepared for this! I could have done...something!"

"You have done enough," Dumbledore said seriously, his eyes hard, "It was your actions that fulfilled the prophecy – Voldemort knows of it, I am certain, but the very first moment you chose to change the future was the first time the prophecy posed real danger."

"But all those abductions, the witches, they weren't–"

"I do not know how Voldemort heard of the prophecy. He set about finding the witch Sybill spoke of. He interpreted the prophecy in his own way – incorrectly, for he could not know you were from another dimension – and has been attempting to thwart it ever since."

"They were pregnant," she whispered, her heart squeezing painfully, "The women, they were all pregnant."

"It seems that way, yes." Dumbledore agreed with a sorrowful expression, "Minerva and I have been investigating the victims. It seems that was the common connection – they were also, however, all Muggleborn. Tom was correct in that aspect."

"Why give me N.E.W.T. scores, then?" demanded Hermione gruffly, "If I'm to die by Voldemort's hand?"

"Don't you see, Hermione?" Dumbledore said, suddenly smiling at her benignly.

Hermione frowned, stubborn and unrelenting.

"Voldemort doesn't know it is you that the prophecy speaks of."

Dumbledore's smile widened.

"We have the advantage."

Chapter End Notes

BAM! Twist number two. Thoughts?
"Hey, Hermione, there's one here for you, too." Peter told her as she entered the kitchen. The boys were all standing around the centre table, each reading a piece of parchment.

"Graduation notices," James explained in response to her frown, "Bit late, but Mum says Figgy hid them days ago. It's on the first."

"I've got something to tell you." she notified them, dismissing their words and missing the worried glance James gave Remus.

"A prophecy?" echoed Remus minutes later, his face extremely confused as he sat down on the white day bed in the sun room. "You didn't say anything about a prophecy in your timeline…"

Hermione pushed down the guilt.

"There was a prophecy made that spoke of a boy, a child," Hermione began, trying not to think about the fact she would have to repeat this to the others, "Voldemort would mark him as his equal. I never got the exact wording, but the gist was that a baby born at the end of July to parents who had thrice faced Voldemort would be able to defeat him. At least, that's what Voldemort thought. The prophecy only held weight because he believed so fervently in it."

"Who was the boy?" Sirius asked her, his face determined.

She hesitated.

"It was Harry."

"My son?" James asked her, and then reeled back, "That still sounds weird."

"It could have been Frank and Alice's son," continued Hermione, sighing, "But they were tortured to insanity by Bellatrix Lestrange and her husband, instead."

Getting into the whole Barty Crouch Jr business would be too confusing, and so Hermione opted not to mention him.

"So you see, prophecies only mean something if you let them mean something."

"The prophecy that involves you," Remus began, shifting closer to take her hand, "Does it mean something?"

She bit her lip.

"Unfortunately, yes. Dumbledore's of the mind that by electing to change this world's future, I began
to fulfil the prophecy. I'm inclined to agree with him."

"You can't blame yourself," comforted Remus, his thumb rubbing soothing circles on the back of her hand, "Any of us would have chosen to change the future. It sounded pretty bleak."

"Besides, the fact that Voldemort has been going around abducting pregnant women means he's been fulfilling the prophecy as well, hasn't he? It would have happened eventually." Peter reasoned, his eyes filled with sympathy. Hermione suddenly wished she'd spent more time with him at Hogwarts. He was intuitive in the same way Ron was, just slightly better at expressing it. She missed her old friends fiercely in that moment.

"What does this all mean?" James asked, looking around at them all, "Knowledge the Dark Lord knows not is easy – that's knowledge of the future."

"Born as the eighth month dies – you travelled back in the beginning of September, right?" concluded Sirius.

"August thirty-first." Hermione clarified, squeezing Remus's hand.

"Born to those who exist in spite of him?" James questioned, looking quizzical.

"I'm Muggleborn," Hermione explained, "Muggles exist despite Voldemort's hatred for them."

"Right," Peter responded, "A beast with no sire and a witch with no past? Your father wasn't a werewolf, though."

"That's not how the phrasing should be interpreted, Wormtail," Sirius said, frowning, "It's not further explaining those she was born to, but instead describing Hermione herself. I suppose that's what might have confused Voldemort – too many variables, too hard to pinpoint the exact person."

"It's why he's been kidnapping women with all manner of backgrounds. Some of them were more pregnant than others, and plenty of them if not all would have had parentage that Voldemort would have judged 'beastly'. He's floundering." Remus explained with a bitter look on his face.

Hermione looked around at them all, the pieces of the puzzle finally coming together into something resembling a horrific, screaming picture.

"He sees me as his enemy, because of the prophecy," continued Hermione, a little excited at all of these revelations. Suddenly, the excitement flew out of her as she remembered the final line, the most important of them all.

"Either must die at the hand of the other," quoted Remus, staring at her in alarm, "For neither can live while the other survives."

"It's what I've been trying to avoid all this time," Hermione murmured despondently, "Facing him at Christmas was bad enough."

"Why is it implying that you can't live at the same time?" Peter asked, frowning, "Is there something you're not telling us?"

"I can only guess," started Hermione slowly, "In my world, Harry was… Harry was the horcrux Voldemort never intended to make."

James looked sufficiently pale, his mouth agape.
"It's a long story," Hermione explained away, getting back to the point, "But that prophecy had a similar sentiment, if I remember correctly. Harry could not defeat Voldemort unless Harry died, and Voldemort could not reign unless he murdered Harry. I'm not a horcrux, though," added Hermione, utterly bewildered, "The circumstances of its creation have not occurred anywhere near me."

"It says 'in time', though, right?" Remus said in a rush, looking desperate, "I mean, 'in time neither can live'… maybe you can't exist in the past as you are if Voldemort's alive? Knowledge such as yours is too powerful to go unused."

"Maybe…" Hermione conceded, staring at her boyfriend curiously, "I mean, it's entirely possible."

The information weighed on all of them for days like a wet, sombre blanket. It covered their faces, suffocating them, leaving them walking corpses of worry and intrigue. Lily and Marlene had similar reactions later that first day, although Marlene didn't seem as concerned as the others.

"I think you're right," she'd said, contemplative, "My mother mentioned places in time and history: everyone has their place. By arriving in our world, you forged your own. These things have a price, though. I suspect if you don't kill Voldemort, you might be facing expulsion." Marlene eyed her keenly, then, curious, "You might return to your own world."

"Or I might die." Hermione countered wryly.

"Yes," agreed Marlene with a small smile, "Or that."

The graduation ceremony was what Hermione expected her own might have been, once upon a time, when they got there on the morning of the first. The grounds were glorious – shining brightly in the summer sun, the lake glittering like an expensive gem stone. Hermione found herself entranced, unable to believe the sight of such a noble school when a year ago she had seen it beaten down to a shell of its former self; broken.

Given she was still acting as a teacher, in many ways, Hermione spent the morning with the faculty.

"Good to see you again," Emilia greeted her, her dress robes a deep purple. Her black hair was back in a chignon, and Hermione felt completely barbaric next to her – her charcoal grey robes seemed shabby, and her loose, bushy hair felt unkempt. "Sorry I didn't reply to your letter. Your bird's a bit feisty."

Hermione laughed, thinking of Romulus's furious face.

"That he is. He loves corn flakes, though. Give him a few and he's your best friend."

Emilia smiled, bright and happy, "I'll do that. I've been meaning to talk to you about something, actually."

"Oh?" Hermione said, tearing her eyes away from Remus in his adorable pointy graduation hat and turning to her ex-colleague.

Emilia's voice went quiet, suddenly, and her expression morphed into something blank and most unlike her.

"I know you've been working for the Order," Hermione's brows shot up in surprise, "I've actually got some contacts for you."

"Contacts?" Hermione murmured as Slughorn walked past, gesturing wildly to Severus Snape, who looked utterly bored. She grabbed Emilia's elbow and pulled her aside, the vined pillars behind the
stage providing excellent cover.

"You never noticed," Emilia began, her eyes darting around, "But after we changed the curriculum last year, I started building up a rapport with the Slytherins. The men weren't that interested, but the women…"

Hermione stared at Nettle, her mouth parted in surprise.

"They're ready, if it comes down to it, to fight for us." Nettle explained, smiling triumphantly, "They don't want to be stuck making babies for future Death Eaters if Voldemort wins. I know they'll help us."

"Emilia," Hermione started, still in shock, "I don't know what to say."

"Thank you works," The ex-professor said, and Hermione grinned at her.

"Thanks. Truly."

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"We've received warning of an attack on the Bones's." Moody announced at the Order meeting called on the night of the fifth, Edgar Bones looking weary. Hermione knew the family had suffered huge losses in the first wizarding war, but the way the Death Eaters seemed determined to wipe them out felt cruel and unnecessarily unfair.

"When?" asked Dumbledore, ever the practical mind.

"Tomorrow night. Time uncertain." Alice established. The others looked worried, although Hermione saw Dorcas looking a little out of it. She'd been fed on again, most likely.

"And the Aurors?"

"The Minister doesn't believe it's a valid threat," Moody gruffed out, looking exasperated, "I don't have the power to over-ride his dismissal. Usually, I would've just done it anyway. But with the Order now in existence, that's thankfully out of my hands."

"We should assemble a team," McGonagall spoke up, her face stern as if disciplining some unruly students, "Counter their attack."

"My thoughts exactly, Minerva," Dumbledore agreed, surveying them. "I believe we might go on a voluntary basis."

"I'll go, Dumbledore." Hermione spoke up, itching to make a difference. Although the diary had been barely three weeks ago, getting to Hufflepuff's Cup would be tremendously difficult, and Hermione didn't even know where to begin. At least this way she could feel like she was making progress, however little.

"Me, as well." Remus piped up, stepping into place beside her. Hermione shot him an exasperated look, to which he merely smiled, his eyes crinkling.

"The two of us will go," Alice announced, tugging on Frank's hand, "I don't mind getting temporarily suspended at this point. We won't hold it against you, Moody." The older wizard nodded
at them, his jagged face grinning.

"We'll join up, too, Professor," Lily said, grabbing Marlene. James seemed to step forward reluctantly, a frown on his face.

"Ah, hell." Sirius said, stepping forward also, "Peter and I are there."

"A few more should do it," Dumbledore surmised with a cheerful expression. Edgar stepped forward, followed by Emmeline Vance.

"Excellent. All of you should stay behind to prepare."

"This isn't a game, you know." Vance said as they all huddled together, discussing tactics, "I hope you kids know what you're doing."

"Vance, you're only twenty-five. Don't act like you're Head of the Aurors." Sirius sniped, narrowing his eyes at her.

"Let's not argue," Lily intervened, holding out her hands, placating, "Dumbledore inducted us for a reason. Let's just leave it at that."

Hermione declined to comment that it was at her own urging that Dumbledore did such a thing. For some reason he seemed to trust her, if only a little. She had to give him the same courtesy if he was allowing the others to join her in this mission. That's what she was telling herself, anyway, to rid her stomach of its nervous butterflies.

"We'll start rounds at dusk and go on rotation." Vance declared, taking charge, "Two at a time. We'll trade Dumbledore's master coin with every switch. Watch them carefully – if the Death Eaters arrive when you're on duty, send a message. 'S.O.S.' should do."

"We'll pair up the more experienced with the less experienced." Frank put forth, looking around at them. "Sirius, you're with me. Edgar, go with Marlene. Alice, you'll be with Lily. James and Peter, you stick with Emmeline. Hermione, I'm sure you can stay with Remus."

Hermione was on at eleven; so after a rushed dinner she sat in the sun room, her coin still tied around her wrist, unable to settle properly. Her muscles felt perpetually coiled, waiting for a Death Eater to Apparate out of nowhere and curse her.

About twenty minutes before she and Remus were due to switch with Lily and Alice, her coin burned painfully.

S.O.S.

She threw her book down on the table, and grabbed her wand. Remus rushed into the room, grasping her hand just as she Apparated.

It was pandemonium.

Remus tugged her down harshly, a flash of red light whizzing over their heads.

"Where are the family?" Remus shouted over the wand fire and screaming of spells. Hermione shook her head, trying to get her bearings.

The Death Eaters were scattered, as if they'd approached the Bones house from all sides. The dark black of night was disturbed by the rapid spell firing, greens and purples and yellows and red
illuminating the night sky in a sick, twisted facsimile of fireworks.

"Sirius, get back here!" Frank yelled, and Hermione saw the long-haired man run after a cackling witch who was firing green after green.

"Sirius!" Hermione gasped, images of a fluttering veil flashing across her vision. Hermione ignored Remus's own shout, and sped after her friend.

Ducking and weaving to avoid the crossfire, Hermione came across the two cousins in a fierce battle, Sirius jumping out of the way more than he was casting his own spells, Bellatrix not even bothering with a hood. Her mask was in place, but the hair was unmistakable.

Hermione yanked the Gryffindor out of the line of a silent Killing Curse, and pushed him away behind her, causing him to stumble.

"Find Amelia!" She yelled at him, turning with her wand aloft to face off Bellatrix once more. This was becoming an awful, terrifying habit.

Hermione shielded against the *Crucio* that came towards her, and fired back a rapid *Incarcerous*.

Bellatrix made a low screeching noise.

"*You!*" She seethed, whipping her wand in an 'S' formation as yellow sparks flew out of it, coalescing into a ball that flew Hermione's way. The younger woman ducked, hearing a pained scream behind her and hoping it had been a Death Eater that had succumbed to the unknown spell, and not someone in the Order.

"Grab her!" Bellatrix screamed at someone behind Hermione and she ducked, causing the Death Eater to stumble and fall over her, falling into a pile of black robes at her feet. She threw a silent *Reducto* Bellatrix's way to distract the witch before stunning the struggling Death Eater, who went limp.

Bellatrix gave a frustrated scream, striding forward as she threw *Avada* after *Avada* at Hermione, who had to summon up rocks and other debris from the attacked house to act as shields.

"The Dark Lord wants her alive!" A Death Eater came into view, pushing Bellatrix's arm upwards so that her curses flew into the sky.

Bellatrix pushed away the young man, and started sending stunners Hermione's way instead. Hermione was backing up as fast as she could, unable to take her eyes off of Bellatrix for fear of being caught unawares, but couldn't see where she was going. She stumbled over something large and intrusive, falling back.

A pair of arms caught her, hard and unyielding, like steel bands underneath her breasts that were encircling her lungs and making it harder to breath.

Hermione kicked and wriggled and struggled the best she could, trying to elbow the Death Eater that had her in his clutches. He grunted at a particularly sharp jab, but kept a hold of her.

Bellatrix was stalking towards her, coming closer and closer. Hermione increased her struggling, her wand already knocked to the ground in the kafuffle. She felt her eyes widen, the fear evident on her face. If Bellatrix captured her and took her to Voldemort, she was a goner. And then Remus...

The deranged witch, although she'd never been to Azkaban yet, looked too gleeful.
"The Dark Lord will be happy," she announced, staring at Hermione from only a few steps away, her eyes glittering in triumph. "Very happy."

With a grunt, Hermione gave one final jab of her elbow. This did the trick, hitting the man behind her in the stomach and winding him effectively. He released her, hunching over and panting heavily. Hermione dropped to the ground quickly, feeling around for her wand. She felt it at the tips of her fingers, managing a roll and bringing it up in the same movement to avoid a hex, firing a Revulsion jinx Bellatrix's way. The witch flew back through the air, high and arching. Hermione breathed heavily, staring into the black to make sure no more spells came her way.

A large hand grabbed her right wrist, and she dropped her wand at the painful squeeze, crying out.

They yanked her onto her back by her wrist, her hair splaying around her head like a halo. Hermione stared up at her attacker, wide-eyed.

Hermione might not have recognised him otherwise, but he pulled up his white mask, his smile crooked and menacing.

Dolohov was breathing heavily, his left hand cradling his abdomen as it held his wand, his right hand still gripping her wrist painfully, before turning the weapon on her with a satisfied smile.

The fiery purple spell hit her, familiar and damning, and Hermione passed out.

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"Thank Merlin," Remus breathed as Hermione blinked opened her eyes, her chest twinging. "Thanks for not dying."

Hermione groaned, moving her right hand up to settle lightly over her aching chest.

"He hit you with a pretty dark spell," Lily said, and Hermione turned her head to see her friend seated by her bedside, worried smile on her face, "But Dumbledore sorted you out. It'll scar, though."

"That's fine," croaked Hermione, trying to sit up, "I've got plenty of them already. What happened?"

Lily shared an unidentifiable look with Remus, who spoke.

"The Bones' are okay. A few scratches but nothing lethal."

"The others?" enquired Hermione, glancing between them.

"They're all fine, although Sirius is angry at you for running after him. He wanted to take a piece out of Bellatrix after he found out what she had done to Alice and Frank in your time." Lily chuckled, "Admirable, but stupid."

"Dumbledore told us you'd been hit with that curse before," said Remus, frowning, "It's the only reason he was able to heal you – you told him what it was."

"Yes," Hermione gritted out, finally upright but her chest still aching, "It's a dark version of the Bludgeoning Curse."
"Dark version?" Lily questioned, her eyes troubled, "But the curse itself is already considered dark magic..."

"I'm not entirely sure what the curse is, but knowing that one of its symptoms is that your bones don't break but instead are bludgeoned... well, it helps with the healing process. I suspect my lycanthropy was a factor, too." Hermione added thoughtfully, thinking of how her silencing charm on the caster had inhibited the full capabilities of the evil spell the first time she'd experienced it.

"I could kill Dolohov." spat Remus, his eyes fiery.

"Don't engage him!" Hermione blurted out, snatching up Remus's nearest hand despairingly, remembering his still and peaceful body, "Let someone else handle him."

Remus eyed her cautiously, deflating. There was a brief pause.

"He knows," Hermione realised tiredly, thinking back to the fight, "Voldemort knows I'm the woman in the prophecy."

"Yes," agreed Lily, her face a little whiter, "Emmeline said Bellatrix almost had you, she mentioned Voldemort would be extremely happy."

Hermione closed her eyes fearfully, a resigned sort of responsibility settling into her tender chest.

She spent the next few days in bed, learning about how Peter had subdued a Death Eater with a well-placed *Expelliarmus*, causing a strange sensation to float through Hermione's veins.

She was proud.

"Well done, Peter," Hermione had congratulated him the next day, giving him a proud smile, "Duelling club served you well."

"Sirius," she said later, asking the man to stay back. He'd gotten over his anger quickly enough upon seeing her bedridden, even if Hermione thought she didn't look half as bad as she had when she was sixteen and a victim of the same spell. "I need you to use Romulus. Write to your brother."

"What?" Sirius asked her, confused, "Why?"

"Tell him we're ready when he is. Give him this." Hermione procured a sickle, "Explain how it works and he's to use it when the time comes. He'll know what I mean."

Sirius took the sickle from her, inspecting it briefly, before looking up again.

"What are you planning, Hermione?" he asked, suspicious.

It was coming up much quicker than she had anticipated. It was a relief, in a way, to start the final countdown. The anticipation, like during her exam periods at school, was always the most stressful time. In a strange way Hermione was almost looking forward to seeing his red eyes again, if only because she knew it would be the last time she would, no matter the outcome.

"The end." answered Hermione, her smile hopeful.
"Who's to say we can't destroy the Cup after?" Hermione said the next day in the kitchen, out of bed and determined, "It'll be under less protection."

"What if he's entrusted it to one of his followers?" James argued, frustrated, "It's not a guarantee."

"Voldemort is coming for me regardless. I don't want to run; not like I did last time. We have to meet him before he decides to meet us. The element of surprise is all we've got. As far as we know, he doesn't know we've destroyed his other horcruxes." Hermione looked around at them all, "He still thinks he's immortal."

"Good morning," a kind voice greeted them from the doorway, and Hermione turned around to see Dumbledore beaming at them. "And what a fine morning it is."

"Dumbledore." Hermione greeted in return.

"I'm afraid I must ask something of you," He said, his expression dampening into something more serious. Peter shuffled his feet in discomfort, "Voldemort knows you are the woman of the prophecy. He is hunting for you. Now that you have shown yourself, he will undoubtedly be more enthusiastic in his attempts to capture you." Dumbledore looked over all of them, his gaze regretful, "We must hide you, for your own safety."

"No way," argued Peter, stepping forward toward the Headmaster, "Hermione was just saying – we have to meet him head on. Hiding won't do anything but make him angrier."

Hermione gazed at the old wizard thoughtfully, her eyes tracking his minute movements.

She hadn't wanted to go into hiding, that was correct. Dumbledore was suggesting it, which meant he thought it would result in the best chance of survival – whether that was her survival, or the Order's, she wasn't entirely sure.

Dumbledore didn't always know best, she now knew.

But…

"I suspect Voldemort will find out your location soon enough, and I don't want to put James's parents in unnecessary danger. It is in their best interests that all of you live at Headquarters." He sighed, suddenly weary as he stepped near the kitchen table, "There is not a single day that goes by that I don't wonder how we came to be here." Dumbledore said, idly touching one of the ornaments on the table. "However, this war is nearly over. We are very close."

His blue eyes pierced into hers, and Hermione swallowed thickly. The message was clear: don't stuff it up.

"Alright."

"What?!" Remus exclaimed, coming forward and tugging on her elbow, turning her roughly to see his outraged face, "You just said we had to fight! Why aren't we fighting?"

"We are fighting," reiterated Hermione, moving her head to see all of them, "But we can't do that if we're grieving, or dead. Dumbledore is right. We have to time this perfectly. I'm sorry, I've just been so… I've been worried about going on the run again, after what happened last time."

Remus's grip on her upper arm loosened, but his expression looked just as furious, though Hermione suspected it was no longer directed toward her.
They packed up some of their things – James insisted she leave her winter clothes here, adamant that they’d be back in time for autumn to hit. Hermione didn’t have the heart to tell him that she wasn’t sure she’d ever see her gifted room ever again.

She was standing in the doorway, duffle bag over her shoulder and her never-ending shoulder bag across her body. The room had been good to her, even if she had only been residing in it for a month. The double bed on the opposite wall had been one of the most comfortable she’d ever slept in, the plain white sheets grounding amidst the tacky, mustard-coloured seventies wallpaper Hermione was sure would be replaced within the year. The curtains were open, sunlight streaming through the window onto the bed. The desk sat beneath the window, bare for the first time bar a lone book Hermione had deigned unneeded. Romulus's cage was in her bag, and she hoped the bird would be able to find her at Headquarters on his way back from Grimmauld Place.

Would Harry and Ron do this? She couldn't help but ask herself the question, knowing that the habit would take years to fade, especially without them by her side. Normally, she would've simply asked them. Their absence had never been felt more deeply by her, however, than now. She was running into this conflict, her wand out and her feet flying out from under her. She'd nearly been taken by Bellatrix Lestrange, no doubt to be tortured for information. Again! Hermione was ashamed of herself, so easily caught and teased like a cat toying with its mousy meal.

Voldemort knew exactly who she was now. The pressure was increasing with every breath Hermione took, making her lungs scream against the push, her breaths coming in quicker and increasing the pressure. It was a vicious cycle, and only Remus's hand landing on the back of her neck, or squeezing her thigh, jolted her out of those moments with a relieved and thankful smile sent in his direction from Hermione.

The answer was probably that yes; Harry would do this. Ron would almost definitely, if his family were in danger.

She was asking all the wrong questions, though, wasn't she? Hadn't she wanted to find out who she was without Voldemort? Who was Hermione Granger, at the crux of it?

Well, I'm not Hermione Granger anymore, she thought fiercely, her blood bubbling, he took that away from me like he took everything else.

The answer was that Hermione Granger was nothing without Voldemort. Yet. Her potential had been stripped away from her with a measly bite because of him.

Nonetheless, she thought of the future; of being with Remus, surrounded by his friends; her friends – none of which had died, or gone to Azkaban, or betrayed everything they knew. There was a future here, if she let herself believe it. She didn't have to get caught up in descriptions of her character, or what war and killing had turned her into, and who she was without all of it. No, Hermione simply had a job to do.

Resolved, Hermione took a deep breath, staring down at her shaking palms.

I am Hermione Huxley, the silent proclamation was vicious, unforgiving, and Voldemort will die by my hand.

Her left hand grazed the cream door as she turned, leaving Luxwood Place behind.

When they arrived at the Headquarters, it was much like Grimmauld Place in that it needed a bit of cleaning before it could be comfortably habitable. Hermione put them to task.
"You three do the downstairs," Hermione told James, Sirius and Remus as they all dumped their bags in the sitting room, its dark green interiors pretty depressing, "Peter and I will tackle upstairs."

"How did I die?" Peter asked her uncertainly as they were finishing up the last room, spelling away the grime and beating out the thick carpet, dust flying.

Hermione paused before turning to her friend – and he was her friend now, after everything – and staring at him curiously.

"Why do you want to know?" questioned Hermione slowly, gradually lowering her wand from her attempts to clean the curtains by the bed. This was going to be her room, she expected.

Peter shrugged, trying to come off nonchalant but failing enough for Hermione to notice. She wasn't sure whether the others would, not used to thinking of Peter as a scared little boy like she had for most of the time she'd known him.

"I don't actually know," Hermione told him truthfully, turning back to the curtains with an assessing eye, "Harry and Ron, they saw it happen. I was–" Hermione choked on the words, trying to swallow them down, "I was in another room. Harry wouldn't talk about it, and I didn't ask after I saw the look on his face."

It was the truth, and it didn't incriminate him.

Peter nodded, looking resolved.

"I do know one thing. You helped them, right before you died. They wouldn't have gotten out if it weren't for you."

It was true, but Hermione knew Peter wouldn't imagine himself a Death Eater whose demise had allowed Harry and Ron the escape they needed.

"I should hope so," said Peter, smiling as he turned back to clearing out the bedside drawers, "One last good deed."

Hermione huffed out a laugh, grateful Peter hadn't picked up the way it was more of a sob than anything else.

The crisp sea air reminded her of Shell Cottage that first night, and it took Hermione a while to stop the trembling, memories of the continuous Cruciat us assaulting her in the dark.

Hermione fiddled with her fake Sickle the next morning at the breakfast table, the kitchen decked out in dusty wooden cladding, Daily Prophet scattered in front of her. She sipped at her orange juice in her pyjamas, staring at the way the Sickle glinted in the morning light beaming through the only window above the sink.

"Morning," Sirius greeted her, yawning wide before plonking himself into the seat opposite her. "You didn't make breakfast?" He teased her, and promptly raised his hands in surrender at her deadpan stare. "Just a joke. Don't worry about it. I'll start."

He lifted himself up, turning and walking over to the fridge, perusing its overflowing contents. Dumbledore had sent a Hogwarts house elf to stock it before they arrived; he'd obviously known she was going to accept his offer.

Remus walked through the door, and Hermione sent him a warm smile, her fingers itching to run through his bedhead hair. He kissed her cheek softly, lingering.
"Sirius Black cooking breakfast. This is certainly a sight to behold." Remus commented, his right hand settling on her thigh as he sat down next to her.

"Laugh it up, Moony," Sirius replied without malice, cracking some eggs into a heated pan, "But I have skills."

Remus hummed doubtfully and Hermione supressed a smile, finally reattaching the Sickle below her charmed Galleon, the former cold against her hot wrist.

They spent the day playing board games – Remus beat her by a landslide at chess – and discussing the things that had happened in Hermione's timeline. She avoided their own histories as much as possible, but when Sirius outright asked her, it was hard to stay discreet.

"You told Wormtail," Sirius reasoned, raising an eyebrow. Hermione turned to glare at Peter, who shrugged unapologetically. "So why can't you tell us?"

"Because," floundered Hermione, "Well, I didn't know a lot of what happened to Peter."

"Leave her alone, guys," Remus told their friends with a frown, rubbing Hermione's knee comfortingly. She was sitting cross-legged against the back of one of the old couches, the others sprawled on the floor with her boyfriend by her side, "We don't need to know."

"At least tell us what we were working as," James conceded, shoving her playfully, "I need to know if I'm any good."

Hermione's mouth twitched into a smile.

"You were an Auror," James whooped, pushing Sirius over in his excitement. "So was Sirius."

"Was I better than him?" Sirius rushed to ask, his eyes alight with mirth as James scowled next to him, "I bet I was better than him."

"I don't know," Hermione told him, grinning now, "You never said."

"What did I do?" Remus asked her, smiling.

Hermione hesitated, biting her lip.

"I don't know what you did prior, but in my third year you became the Defence Against The Dark Arts professor."

The other three guffawed, Remus's open mouth and wide eyes evidence of his shock.

"Oh, that's great, Moony." Sirius gasped out through barks of laughter, wiping at his eyes.

"You were very good," admired Hermione with a slight blush, "You never laughed at my boggart."

Remus's face morphed into a smile, his eyes twinkling.

"What was your boggart?"

Hermione rolled her eyes, her blush darkening.

"Professor McGonagall appeared and failed me in everything." The other three began laughing again, and Hermione glared at them, although her smile was still in place, "It was awful."
"Yes," Remus agreed, fighting down a full-blown grin, "I'm sure it was."

She shoved him, and he burst into laughter.

Belly full of ham and cheese sandwiches and teeth newly brushed, Hermione changed into her pyjamas that evening feeling unusually light-hearted considering the night previous. The sun had only just set, it being closer to ten than eleven. Hermione had bid the group goodnight early, the conversations throughout the day having tired her.

She had just pulled back the newly washed sheets on her queen-sized bed when there was a knock at the door.

"Remus," Hermione said, a note of surprise in her voice, "I thought you were staying downstairs with the others."

He waved her off, and Hermione noticed the way his t-shirt seemed tighter than it had at dinner. She realised, once he stepped a bit closer, that he'd changed it, although it was still black.

Hermione bit her lip, holding back her smile.

His light jeans were dirty – he'd chased Sirius around the garden with the other man in his Animagus form, the sea breeze blowing his hair every which way – and he didn't have any shoes on. The sight of his white socks made him look younger, somehow.

Hermione turned back to her bed, lying down on top of the turned over sheets, making room for her boyfriend.

Remus joined her after closing the door, and she settled her head against his chest, the up and down movement of it soothing.

"You're sure about this, right?" Remus asked her after a few minutes. Hermione opened her eyes again, tilting her head to look at the underneath of his chin.

"I'm sure," reassured Hermione, pushing herself up to look him in the eyes. The green was muted, not at all like Harry's but just as comforting. "We can end this, and Harry can live a normal life."

"I'm not sure how normal it would be with James as his father," commented Remus quietly, his eyes locked on her lips. Hermione wet them in anticipation, huffing out a laugh.

"I suppose not…"

When their lips met, Hermione wasn't exactly surprised. As amusing and adorable as Remus's attempts to accentuate his muscles had been, it had had a clear purpose.

The nervousness she had associated with the thought of doing what she was about to do was outweighed by her desire to remove Remus's clothes. In reality, she hadn't thought about much past mutual pleasure on her own, refusing to let her mind get away with her.

Remus dragged his mouth across her jaw and down her neck, shifting so he hovered over her, his jean-clad legs dirtying up her clean sheets and bracketing her hips.

His kisses started descending, quicker than they ever had previous. Hermione was gasping, her eyes closed as Remus pushed up her collared top – it was short-sleeved, but the touch of the night air against her newly bared skin once it was removed sent goosebumps down her arms.
Hermione moved her hips, the motion instinctual but in a circular rhythm, desperate for friction of some kind, the panties she was wearing only shifting every now and then, their movement not enough.

She brought up her hands – they'd been grazing Remus's arms absentmindedly – to clutch at his clean shaven face, and pulled him down for a long kiss, her tongue sweeping across his lips.

Remus groaned, long and low, before pulling back to whip off his t-shirt hurriedly, his chest heaving. He had a smattering of hair there, as if it hadn't quite finished growing. Hermione grazed her palms over it, the hitching of Remus's breath as he ducked down to kiss her sending a wave of arousal over her body.

Her hands moved down his chest, skating over the hair around his bellybutton before settling at the waistband of his jeans. She undid them, the zip sounding obnoxiously loud against the backdrop of their heavy breathing and the slight creaks of her bed. Remus broke away, helping her push the pants off of his hips and down his legs when she got distracted by his muscular thighs, where he kicked them away.

Hermione couldn't help her giggle, looking down at him.

"What?" Remus breathed, looking down as well before returning to stare at her. "Are you laughing at my underwear?"

The laughter that erupted was unexpected, and Hermione threw an arm over her face in embarrassment.

"I'm sorry," She said, biting her lip to stop grinning madly, "It's just, none of you realise how funny you look."

When Hermione peeked under her forearm, she saw Remus's puzzled expression.

"The fashion," She clarified, removing her arm and brushing a hand over the waistline of his navy blue briefs – Hermione would have described them as boxer briefs, but she knew the fashions of the time would not – "It's a bit ridiculous."

Remus chuckled, hanging his head.

He gazed back up at her as he spoke, his lips lightly brushing her abdomen, causing her to inhale sharply.

"I'm sorry we're so unfashionable." He bit down at her hipbone after the last word, and Hermione gasped.

"Please tell me," she breathed, her core throbbing, "you've cast a Silencing Charm."

"Just before I threw my pants on the floor." Remus murmured against her pyjama shorts, pulling them down slowly. The slide of them down her thighs was like a sweet torture, Remus taking his time in removing them from her body.

"Take off your socks," demanded Hermione with a smile, "You look absurd."

Remus pinched her side for the comment, and Hermione gave a small cry, dissolving into breathless laughter soon after. He bent down and pulled off his socks, the garments flying somewhere about the room.
Although they'd both seen and felt much more of each other than they were currently, Hermione couldn't help the embarrassed flush that rose to her cheeks at the sight of Remus's arousal pushing against his briefs, the navy blue slightly darker at the tip of the outline, like it was damp. She couldn't stop staring.

Hermione bit her lip to stop herself from making a particularly embarrassing noise as Remus lightly snapped the hem of her undies against her hip, the sting both satisfying and infuriating.

She pulled him down to kiss him, the slide of his tongue against the roof of her mouth causing her toes to curl slightly and her nipples to harden, as if in anticipation of receiving the same treatment.

It took them a while to get back on task, the pleasure of their kisses and caresses only serving to build the tension between them, but also to make them desperate for more. By the time Hermione remembered they weren't yet naked, she felt the dampness of her underwear keenly, and was distressingly wishing Remus would just rip them off already.

Her skin alive and longing for something more, Hermione pushed her own underwear down impatiently, the feel of Remus's hand on her left arse cheek causing shivers to run through her, although she was not cold. Upon the silent encouragement, even if Remus was unaware of what he was asking, Hermione spread her left leg out. His wandering hand travelled across her inner thigh, the backs of his fingers barely grazing the wetness at her centre before he moaned loudly, retreating to bring both hands up to the sides of her face, holding her head still as he pressed his mouth hard to hers, biting her lip in the process.

He broke away, resting his forehead to hers with his eyes squeezed shut, breathing heavily to restrain himself.

Her own breaths were harsh, like they'd been punched out of her, another wave of arousal flowing through her at the touch of his fingers. She wasn't sure she was going to survive this, and she wasn't entirely sure she wanted to.

After a tense minute, Remus's breaths slowing down into something less worked up, Hermione moved her hands down, pushing impatiently at his hem.

He helped her, pulling down the offensive material when she couldn't go any further.

Whilst Hermione could hide behind hair, Remus couldn't. There was hair at the base, as she'd known there would be, but the rest of him jutted out unapologetically. He brought up a hand, encircling it and giving it a squeeze, to which he gave a deep moan. Hermione, for all she knew what to expect, was entranced. A few drops of a white substance came from the tip, the name of which Hermione didn't want to acknowledge. It felt too intimate, in a way, knowing what it could do.

"Contraceptive Charms." Hermione gasped out, her eyes flying back up to Remus's flushed face. He leaned over, the heat between his legs grazing the inside of her right thigh. Her core throbbed, clenching and unclenching as if dissatisfied at its emptiness. Hermione bit her lip at the feeling, taking the proffered wand from Remus and casting the spells silently. She flung her wand away as soon as they were done, the cool sensation of the charms fading into her stomach and leaving her feeling even hotter than before, sweat forming at the back of her neck and behind her knees.

Remus's hand grasped at her right knee, the sweat making it a slightly slippery maouevre. He moved her other leg out so that she was left fully exposed, her hands grasping helplessly at the sheets below to give her some semblance of control.

He leaned down, his breath ghosting over her and causing her hips to twitch up, the arousal now
flowing in steady waves.

"Remus," breathed Hermione, staring up at the peeling ceiling in disbelief, "Rem–"

She moaned, loudly, at the first touch of his lips to her own, though she was still gasping breathlessly. Her hands left the sheets underneath them of their own accord, threading through his hair to keep his head in place.

Her chest heaved at every swipe of his tongue, and it was only a minute later that the need became too great, and her hands tugged on his hair, pulling his face up only about an inch so that his mouth settled just on top of her clit. Any direct simulation and she would be done for.

"Slow," she murmured, looking down at his mussed head. His eyes gazed up at her, and the sight of his wide pupils, flushed cheeks, and wet, red lips made her clench in desire. "Slow…"

He grinned, something mischievous, as he returned to her. Hermione arched her back at the first suck, digging her fingers deeper into his scalp, her hips rocking into him.

She lasted barely a minute before she had to pull him up, kissing him desperately and not caring about the taste on his tongue, though it wasn't unpleasant.

"Where did you learn to do that?" asked Hermione breathlessly, her nose brushing his, her eyes fluttering in pleasure.

"Books." Remus remarked, grinning.

"Books?" Hermione asked incredulous, huffing out an incredulous laugh, rubbing her thighs together at the thought. The night air once she parted them cooled the wetness there. "Merlin."

Feeling emboldened by that experience, Hermione lifted up a lazy hand, trailing it down the sensitive abdomen of her boyfriend. Remus's stomach muscles coiled at her touch, and she grabbed a hold of him firmly. He jerked, almost whacking her in the head with his own. Releasing him, realising the angle was all wrong, Hermione pushed him onto his back, moving over him to sit on the tops of his thighs. Remus groaned, and Hermione knew the cooling wetness that was on her thighs was now also on his. She shivered, her long hair brushing against her back sensually.

Hermione lifted a hand up, cupping her breast, unable to help herself. She pinched the hardened peak, gasping, before snatching her right hand away, and holding Remus firmly again to another answering groan.

He was leaking from the tip, slow drips wetting her fingers and easing the glide of her palm. Licking her lips, Hermione focused on her task, squeezing a little harder intermittently to pained moans, a smug smile forming on her face.

"Enough." Remus rasped after not long at all, prying her fingers from him and pulling her on top to kiss her senseless. Her ample breasts were crushed against his chest, his cock rubbing up against her temptingly. A hand flew into her hair, tugging lightly and causing her to moan herself.

Impatient, desire unabated, and loving every moment because it was with him, Hermione reached back to grasp at him, lifting herself up on her knees slightly to accommodate for her position.

"Are you– are you sure?" Remus panted, his pupils dark as he stared into her eyes. The hand that had been in her hair was pushing it away from her face lovingly.

"It's a bit late now, Remus," she responded, her breath hitching. "You're already inside."
Remus huffed out a laugh, though it quickly turned into a moan as he seated himself more firmly inside her with slow, edging thrusts. Hermione dropped her head to his chest, her nose squashed against it, breathing through the discomfort of the stretch.

There was a muted pain, persistent, though at the touch of a thumb to her clit, it ebbed away to the back of her mind, lingering only as she still acclimatised herself to him inside her.

Hermione was aroused enough to ignore it.

Once she began moving in earnest, her hips allowing for the slide of him inside her, everything went rather quickly. She had a hand hovering over her clit, ready to start rushing toward her climax at a moment's notice but not wanting to end things too quickly. Remus – who was unused to the tightness of her, the wetness of her, the panting breath of her against his cheek as she rose and fell – needed no help. He gave a grunt at her particularly hard landing a dozen or so thrusts in, before his hips were jerking, his rhythm out of sync and his thrusts erratic.

"Hermione…" he groaned.

Hermione, not wanting to be left behind, pushed down incessantly on her clit, dragging her fingers back and forth roughly before the multitude of sensations sent her over the edge, causing her to cry out weakly, overcome, and collapse against Remus to pant into his neck.

It took her a few minutes to calm her breathing, her skin oversensitive. She was shivering, Remus's hands rubbing her arms. She wanted to both wince away and push herself closer.

Drawing herself up, Hermione pressed her mouth to Remus's. He slid out of her – Hermione had barely registered he was still inside her – and swallowed her inhale at the foreign feeling.

Hermione cradled his jaw with her right hand, feeling it shift as they kissed, before she pulled away, dropping down onto the bed with a contented sigh, Remus's right bicep now the pillow for her head.

She felt sticky and sweaty and hot. But it had been worth it.

Waking up the next morning, she was doubting that.

"Merlin, Morgana, and Moses!" Sirius exclaimed, and Hermione lifted her head blearily at the sound, not fully comprehending his words. "Remus, that is a lot more of you than I need to see, mate!"

"Piss off, Sirius." Remus grumbled, pulling her closer into his chest. She was lying on top of him, her face tucked into his neck.

Sirius?

"Sirius!" squeaked Hermione, reaching down hastily to pull up the sheet, which had bunched at their knees, suddenly wide awake. Her cheeks burned, and she glimpsed the grin Sirius was sporting before looking to Remus, whose eyes were still closed as if he hoped to go back to sleep.

"Of all the charms, you forgot Colloportus?" Hermione exclaimed, pushing at his shoulder. He opened one eye, peeking at her. "I cannot believe you."

"I was a bit… preoccupied…" Remus explained, now looking intently at her as he sat up on his elbows.

Hermione felt another wave of heat ignite beneath her cheeks.
"I'll just leave you two alone then, shall I?" asked Sirius, cackling as Hermione threw a pillow at him. He caught it victoriously, before pulling a face and promptly dropping it at his feet.

"Breakfast is ready!" he sang on his way out, leaving the door wide open. Grumbling, Hermione fished up her wand from the bedside table, and cast it shut from the bed.

"So," sighed Remus, turning to her, "Breakfast?"

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It was a few days at least before Hermione could bear to make eye contact with the canine Animagus, who was using every sexual innuendo at his disposal to make both of them uncomfortable. When she finally did, she gave him a glare so fierce the grin faded from his face and he swallowed down his retort fearfully.

It was nice to know she could still incite fear in Sirius Black if she wanted to.

They spent their days planning, with not much left to do in a safe house bar the most obvious (and after Sirius barging in on them, Hermione was reluctant to dedicate too much time to the activity, even if with a Locking charm firmly in place). Hermione found herself relying on Peter the most, despite her initial misgivings.

"Contingency plans are Wormtail's specialty," James informed her, "If you want escape strategies, go to him. He'll have at least five up his sleeve."

Hermione supposed that being able to transform into a rat had its advantages.

When Lily and Marlene visited for the first time, Hermione let James and Lily have a few hours together before she brought everyone into the sitting room, ignoring Lily's unkempt hair and James's crooked glasses.

"It's Helga Hufflepuff's Cup," she explained, looking around at them all. She had a pencil and paper in front of her, and was drawing it to the best of her ability, and memory. "It's gold, shiny, with a badger engraving on the side. There are some jewels encircling the engraving. I want each and every one of you to commit this to memory. It's looking more and more likely that we'll have to destroy it at our first opportunity, any one of us."

"I'll send for Dumbledore this afternoon," Lily said, serious, "Distribute the basilisk fangs amongst the group."

"Good," Hermione said, putting down her pencil and relaxing back into the couch, Remus's arm falling onto her shoulders. "Now, how's everything in the outside world?"

As word from the outside became sparser, Hermione grew more nervous. Remus was jittery as well, the mutation of his lycanthropy in full swing and no doubt nearly complete now that Hermione was spending nearly every living moment with him.

"I want to check on my parents," Hermione told him a few days before the full moon, bristling at his frown, "Just the once."

"If you need it." Remus said, but she knew he disapproved. Regardless, he agreed to come with her,
insisting they go in the evening so that they'd have the cover of darkness.

Hermione double-checked her Sickle and Galleon were both still in place on her wrist that night before they left, walking so they were outside of the Fidelius Charm before Apparating. She appeared in the alley she had used to Disapparate in back in September, grabbing a hold of one of Remus's hands and dragging him out, counting down the houses until she reached the right one. The tree still stood outside, big and imposing. Hermione brushed a hand over its rough bark, remembering.

Pulling Remus with her, Hermione went up the steps, knocking on the door.

A woman appeared, a sniffling baby in her arms. Hermione was gobsmacked for moment before realising the woman was not her mother, and the baby was not her.

"How can I help?" The woman said, her accent a little rougher than Hermione's own. By the sparse furnishings inside, Hermione supposed she might be a single mother. There was no sign on anyone else around.

"I'm sorry," Hermione said, "I'm looking for Henry and Ruth Granger." Hermione peered around the hedge and through the window, "I thought they lived here."

"Granger?" said the woman, her strawberry blonde hair swishing as she shook her head, "No, they moved out a while ago. I'm here now."

"Moved out?" Hermione asked, frowning. Her parents had stayed here until they'd fallen pregnant with her at the beginning of 1979. That couldn't be right.

"Aye," The woman said, hoisting her baby up to sit more comfortably on her hip, "Gone."

"Oh," said Hermione. Remus squeezed her hand. "Do you know where they've gone?"

"'Fraid not."

"My apologies, then." she said blankly, "Have a good night."

The woman smiled at her and closed the door softly, her hushed assurances to her baby growing distant through the door as she retreated further into her house.

Hermione walked down the steps, unable to process what had just happened.

"I don't understand," She said, frowning at her boyfriend, "They didn't move until 1979, when Mum found out she was pregnant with me."

"What happened when you ran into them that first night?" Remus asked her. She'd told all of them about her arrival in 1977, back at Luxwood Place. "Did you do something to change that course of events?"

"No!" Hermione cried miserably. Remus pulled her into his arms, resting his chin on the top of her head.

Hermione pushed away gently after a few moments, wiping at her eyes.

"I just wanted to see them one more time, say goodbye…"

Remus gave her a sad smile, brushing away her remaining tears.
"Come on," he cajoled her softly, "Let's go home."

Hermione spent the next few days leading up to the full moon trying to figure out what had changed. If her parents had moved early, she definitely wasn't going to be born. How could she, when the circumstances of her conception were no longer possible? After all, her parents had gone to the belated New Year's party of neighbourhood friends; if they were no longer in the neighbourhood, they wouldn't be invited and Hermione wouldn't have the chance to exist.

But what was it that Marlene had said, inspired by her mother Ingrid?

"Everyone has their place. By arriving in our world, you forged your own."

Surely that meant she had replaced herself, did it not? There was no paradox, because this was a different world. It didn't matter so much if she wasn't born.

It still hurt, though, realising that her parents would never know her that way. She hadn't known she'd been holding onto the hope of reconciliation until the chances of it happening had been stripped from her.

There was a sense of closure she hadn't previously felt, though, and it was with that thought that Hermione pushed away her sad feelings. For now, she should be happy. History definitely wasn't repeating itself.

The day of the full moon dawned bright and early. Hermione jerked awake around five, Remus sleeping soundly next to her, as if he were catching up on the years of unrest he'd experienced at the hands of his lycanthropy.

Hermione stretched as she stood up, scratching absently at her stomach as she made her way to the bathroom to do her business.

Five minutes later, her mouth full of toothpaste as she brushed her teeth, Hermione felt a warm hand slip under the waistband of her undies, sliding down to cup her right butt cheek. Hermione leant down, spitting out the toothpaste and rinsing her mouth. The clatter of her toothbrush in its holster echoed in the bathroom.

She turned around and looked up at Remus, his hand still on her arse. His bedhead was outrageous, hair mussed every which way, but his sleepy grin was infectious. His erection pressed insistently against her hip through his underwear.

Hermione pushed herself closer, making him hiss, before patting him condescendingly on the cheek and removing his hand. She ducked away quickly, turning her back on his aghast expression as she picked up a lone pair of shorts hanging on the desk chair in Remus's room, stepping into them and walking out the door.

The rest of the day went similarly. The restlessness of the moon was at an all-time high, and Hermione found herself teasing Remus in ways she would probably blush at later.

She'd worn the shorts (very short) all day, changing her pyjama top for something a little cooler (and more revealing) after breakfast. Remus had stared at her as she'd happily eaten her eggs, and Hermione was thankful he couldn't see the way she was slowly rubbing her thighs together, frustrated.

By lunchtime, Remus was fighting back just as cunningly. He'd come back from the beach with Sirius, dripping wet and his outrageously tight seventies swim shorts extremely tight. Hermione had huffed at the sight of them, earning a confused glance from Sirius as she strode past them, elbowing
Remus in the stomach.

Hermione used all manner of erotic foods during the afternoon, Remus back from his shower and in clean clothes. She pretended to absently bite into a peach too forcefully, its juices running down her hand. She licked a trail up her arm, much to James's horror who fled the room as soon as she started her seductive routine.

Needless to say, by the time night was approaching, and the both of them were locked in one of the unused rooms together, taking their clothes off was all too easy.

"That blasted peach," Remus said through gritted teeth, nearly tearing her shorts off of her, "These shorts."

"I want to burn those swimmers." Hermione gasped out, her bare back slamming against the wall near the door, the sconce above rattling with the force of it. Remus was biting her neck, his hands gripping her waist firmly, almost painfully so, her skin pulled away from her body and leaving other areas taut.

Neither of them were thinking about the moon, so when it came – Remus down to his briefs and Hermione fully naked – they groaned in surprise, Remus's head falling onto Hermione's heaving shoulder.

She pushed him away, falling to the floor as she tried to make her way to the middle of the room. Remus stumbled after her, dropping to his knees as another wave of agony swept over them.

Hermione rolled onto her back, panting, as the full moon eclipsed them.

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Waking up from the full moon was the same as it had been last month, although this time they were not interrupted by Marlene.

As they dressed themselves late that morning, Remus dropping a kiss onto her forehead before they left the room, Hermione thought about that lingering sense of closure.

*It's not right,* she thought as she wolfed down some cereal, a thoughtful look on her face. *There's one last thing I have to do.*

Hermione put it off for the whole day, her nerves building with every hour that passed, too swiftly for her to appreciate the way time ebbed and flowed.

After dinner, she could put it off no longer. Leaving Remus to talk with their friends, Hermione made her way up to her room.

The trunk at the foot of her bed was a plain brown, unassuming. It felt like it was deceiving her, considering what was hidden inside of it.

Hermione opened it with a flick of her wand, still locking the damn thing even amongst friends. It wasn't that she didn't trust them, but she had a lot riding on her time here. It was better for all of them if she kept the right precautions.
Opening the heavy lid with both hands, her wand in between two of her fingers, Hermione reached her left hand in, feeling around for the fuzzy and firm object.

Aha!

Leaving the lid to fall against the foot of her bed, Hermione lifted the patterned sock out of her trunk.

Placing her wand by her side – she was still crouched – Hermione dug her hand in, seizing the two magical instruments in her hand and taking them out of their hiding place.

The gold of the Dimension Diverter glittered in the moonlight. The moon wasn't full, she well knew, but it was still large and imposing in the sky.

Next to it sat the inky black stone, cracked down the middle along the line representing the Elder Wand. Hermione placed the time piece next to her wand and stood, turning around to face the clear area of her room.

Closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, Hermione turned the stone over three times in her hands.

Nothing felt different, but she supposed why would it? Projections, spirits, whatever they were – they had no physical presence on Earth, and so they would not cause a physical disturbance.

At least, that was Hermione's theory – because, when she opened her eyes, there was no one.

Tears sprung up in her eyes, falling freely down her face faster than she could have ever imagined. Her heart was beating frantically fast, and her hands were trembling. An overwhelming, all-encompassing feeling of relief filled her, warming her bones and boiling her blood. Hermione wanted to collapse there and then, shout a big, fat 'I TOLD YOU SO!' at every doubt she'd ever had about the capabilities of her best friends. Hermione wanted to scream it into the night sky, make the Death Eaters from her original world cringe in fear at the pure happiness in her voice.

"They're alive," she whispered, crouching down to switch out the stone for the Diverter, her voice shaky, "They're alive."

Hermione held up the time piece by its golden chain, staring malevolently at the suspended sand within the hourglass.

"Reducto."

Hermione brushed the debris off of herself and wiped her cheeks, a peaceful smile on her face for the first time in a long while.

"What's gotten into you?" Remus murmured with amusement after she'd dragged him from the sitting room up to his bedroom, locking the door behind them.

Hermione didn't answer, instead pulling him towards the cramped bathroom. She undressed him and then herself, gently pushing away his wandering hands as they waited for the water to warm up.

The first splash of it on her tender back was heavenly, and Hermione moaned at the contact. Remus stepped in behind her, the flesh of him pressing into her tailbone. It wasn't urgent, though, or needy.

Hermione turned around, making sure they were far enough away from the spray that she could look up at him without obstruction.

His green eyes gazed down at her, the crinkles at their corners making him look the youthful eighteen he was. His sandy hair was matted down by the water, which was dripping off of his
slightly crooked nose in a steady stream. His face was clean shaven, and his jaw was strong, though she felt a faint scar on its ridge. His lips were neither too thin, or plentiful, and he was smiling down at her, a glimpse of his teeth showing.

"I love you," declared Hermione, bringing her hands up to frame his face as she stared into his eyes, her fingers slippery on his cheeks, "I'm in love with you, Remus Lupin."

His face broke into the biggest grin she had ever seen on him, and he leant down to kiss her — gently, softly, tenderly, like she or the love she held for him might break at the slightest push.

The water dripping off his nose fell onto her cheeks, replacing the damp tear tracks from earlier in a unique sort of baptism. Hermione felt renewed. She felt alive.

"I am very much in love with you, too, Hermione Huxley."

Coming from his lips like that; the ones that then brushed against her own a little more forcefully, his slippery hands sliding down underneath her thighs to hoist her up, allowing her to wrap her legs around his waist; the name – her name – finally felt like it fit.

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It was on Harry's future birth date that her Sickle finally burned around nine o'clock in the evening. Inhaling sharply, Hermione ripped it off her wrist, staring at the words that appeared where numbers should be.

*IT'S TIME. MALFOY MANOR.*

Romulus had never returned, so Hermione had not known whether or not Regulus had essentially agreed to orchestrate the confrontation between the Order and the Death Eaters.

Hermione looked up at her friends' waiting faces, all of them having retired to the sitting room after dinner.

"Sirius," she ordered, her lecture voice appearing, "Floo Dumbledore, tell him to assemble the Order at Headquarters. We're going to Malfoy Manor."

The man in question shot up, rushing toward the fireplace in the kitchen. Hermione ran to her bedroom, the others also running to theirs, to change into attire more combat ready.

She donned her stretchiest jeans, shoved her feet into some joggers, and pulled her most comfortable t-shirt over her head, the faded black an inconspicuous colour for battle. Tying her frizzy hair back in a tight bun at the base of her head, Hermione rushed back downstairs with her wand in her hand, to see witches and wizards alike entering through the Floo, some of them Apparating outside and entering through the open front door.

"Sirius," Hermione addressed her friend with wide eyes, pulling him aside, "This isn't the Order."

"No," he said, grinning, "It's more."

And so it was. Flitwick was there, standing on a chair and peering around as if looking for someone. Nettle and Sinistra were talking. Hagrid was outside, too tall for the small seaside cottage.
McGonagall had a hand on Lily's shoulder as they spoke. All of the Order members were there, even dreamy Dorcas – although she looked more alert now, and Hermione glimpsed scabs at her neck, old and healing. A deathly pale woman stood next to her, unmoving apart from her eyes, which seemed to be assessing everyone in the room.

"Does Dumbledore know? Malfoy Manor?" Sirius nodded, racing upstairs to no doubt change into something more appropriate himself.

Tilly Toke, who Hermione had not seen since January, was beaming brightly at Hermione from across the kitchen table.

"Tilly?" Hermione said in disbelief, squinting as if she didn't recognise her.

"Hermione," said the famous witch, a smirk on her face, "It's good to see you. Amelia let me know it was time, and I've brought my famous family with me."

Hermione bit her lip, trying not to smile at the way Tilly's brother – it had to be – punched her playfully in the arm.

"Professor!" A few of them turned around, but it was Hermione that Amelia was addressing, her straight red hair bouncing in its ponytail.

"Amelia–"

"He tried to kill my family," the Hufflepuff said, as if anticipating what Hermione might say, "I'm coming."

"I was going to say," started Hermione, "It's good to have you."

She beamed as a bulky man placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Theo." Hermione addressed him, surprised. He simply nodded at her in greeting.

It seemed they had more numbers than they had anticipated, and Hermione wondered how they were going to get all of them to Malfoy Manor discreetly.

"Listen up!" Moody grunted out, and all of them fell silent. Hermione saw Lily passing out basilisk fangs amongst their small group, her own innards erupting into dance at the thought that it was all coming to a head – right now. "Disillusion yourselves!"

Hermione tapped her wand on her head, the feeling of an egg being broken over it always uncomfortably. The room was a mass of shimmering bodies, blending into the room and each other, glinting against the candlelight of the room. They wouldn't be so noticeable outside at night, and Hermione was comforted by the thought.

"Hold on to each other now!" Moody called out as Fawkes burned into existence.

Of course, Hermione thought, immensely grateful, Phoenixes aren't restricted in Apparation like wizards are.

Hermione clutched Amelia's shoulder, leaning over the table to grab at Tilly's outstretched hand, glimmering. She glimpsed a shining hand reach out to touch Hagrid's beefy Disillusioned shoulder, which was half-inside.

Travelling via a phoenix was like nothing Hermione had ever experienced before, outside of dreams.
They were standing at Headquarters, the kitchen overflowing into the sitting room, when suddenly they were in the dark of night, Malfoy Manor's glimmering lamps the only light around apart from the house itself.

Everyone was silent, and Fawkes burned quickly out of the grounds, no doubt to perch sleepily on his post in Dumbledore's office. After all, either way they wouldn't need him to leave the Manor. If they were successful, the wards would have fallen and they would be able to Apparate out. If they failed… well, they didn't need to worry about leaving.

"I'm just taking a piss!" a hearty voice called out, "Malfoy's bathrooms are too fucking confusing! Go back inside!"

The group faded into the shrubs, and Hermione was left in front of the wrought iron gates alone, not daring to touch them for fear of a face materialising and demanding she state her purpose.

"Took you bloody long enough." The approaching figure hissed after a long few minutes, panting from his last minute run down the long drive. It was Regulus.

"Sorry. We had to notify everyone." Hermione paused, and then removed her Disillusionment. Regulus had been staring slightly to the left of her, and it was unnerving. "How do we get in?"

Regulus simply opened the gate from his side. It creaked as it was pulled back.

"The arrogance of the Malfoys, so easy to take advantage of." Regulus told her with a smirk, sweeping a hand back as if to invite them onto the grounds. Hermione looked behind her, nodding. The group slowly removed their own disguises. Hermione noted with detached amusement that Moody was the last to appear, looking suspicious.

Hermione turned around and entered, her nerves increasing exponentially with every step closer to the foreboding residence.

"Reg." greeted Sirius as he followed her through the gates first, nodding at his brother.

"Sirius." Regulus replied shortly, his smirk having vanished as the large group of them filed onto the property like determined ants.

"Why now?" Hermione asked quietly, scanning the grounds for the other Death Eater Regulus had been speaking to. The younger boy didn't seem worried. Hermione sometimes forgot he was still in school, only sixteen. His confident demeanour had her thinking he was her age.

"Malfoy's holding a celebratory ball. The dunce invited the Dark Lord, who actually turned up just before I sent you my message. He's in an incredibly sour mood, so I can't imagine this is going to be pretty."

Finding out Voldemort was angry sent a peculiar thrill through Hermione, and she realised belatedly that her muscles were tensed, her body ready and itching for a fight. Her survival instincts were in full swing.

"Game plan?" Regulus asked her in a low voice as they took a meandering path, shrouded by trees and shrubbery, towards the Manor.

"Destroy the cup, kill Voldemort." Regulus flinched at the name, but did not scold her for it like another Death Eater might have.

"Well, that's a shit plan. How about this…"
"This is utterly mad," Remus said, staring at Regulus as he tied up Hermione's wrists, tucking her wand into the waistband of her jeans. Hermione wished she'd worn a long-sleeved top. "Surely there's another way. Dumbledore?" Remus whirled around, shooting the Headmaster a pleading look.

"I'm afraid, Remus, that once Hermione has an idea in her head, it is hard to sway her."

Remus glared at the old man, and Hermione bit her lip to hinder her growing smile.

"I'll be fine, Remus. The ropes aren't tight, and I'll have my wand. Lily, will you come here?"

The witch in question approached, her bright blue denims and dark brown long-sleeved top emphasising the vibrancy of her curly hair.

"Surely one of us can do this, Dumbledore, not Huxley," one of the Prewett twins suggested, glancing at Hermione with concern.

"I'm afraid not, Gideon," answered Dumbledore.

"You need to roughen me up," Hermione explained to the redhead, "Voldemort needs to believe Regulus struggled to capture me. Throw some dirt on my clothes and a cutting hex at my lip."

Lily was obedient, starting with the dirt. Hermione coughed, squeezing her eyes shut to protect them. She felt a stinging pain on her bottom lip a minute later, and Lily's cool hands tugging at her bun, pulling out a few stray strands to emphasise the illusion of a struggle.

"Better do something similar to me, too." Regulus said reluctantly. Sirius stepped forward willingly, a grin on his face.

By the time he was done, Regulus had a darkening black eye, and Hermione a split lip. They were both dishevelled and dirty.

It wasn't one hundred percent believable – Regulus would have, surely, been crueller had he really wanted to capture her – but it would tide them over long enough for the others to enter without notice and surround the ballroom, at the back of which Voldemort sat on a throne-like chair, his black robes making his skin look especially pale and his eyes especially red, according to Regulus.

"I hate this part," Regulus muttered to her as everyone else Disillusioned themselves again, following behind at a safe distance. Remus, she knew, was at the forefront, ready to jump between her and a flying hex. Hermione wanted to roll her eyes, but couldn't help the warmth seeping into her bones at the thought of him.

"MASTER!" Regulus shouted, gripping her upper arm more tightly and dragging her behind him now, making her stumble. "MASTER! MY LORD! AN INTRUDER!"

Regulus burst into the ballroom, the nicely robed witches and wizards turning at his dramatic entrance.

"My lord," Regulus gasped, as if he'd really just been in a struggle with her, bending to bow and pulling her with him. Hermione's lower back gave a sharp ache at the awkward movement. "I found her trying to sneak into the Manor. It is her."

Voldemort stood, his robes billowing menacingly as he stalked forward, the others clearing a wide path for him, cowering. His red eyes glittered evilly, Hermione noted, but his brown hair was perfectly combed over. She wanted to laugh at the image of the Dark Lord brushing his hair in a
vanity mirror.

"She is the one? The one from the prophecy?" Voldemort hissed, "You are the one who heard it from Dumbledore, Regulus. *Tell me.*"

Hermione snapped her head to Regulus, glaring at him with all her might.

*He told Voldemort. Regulus told him. How did he overhear Dumbledore? That slimy git–*

"Yes, my lord," Regulus murmured, his head bowed in deference. Voldemort was close enough for Hermione to reach out and grab at his robes. Her lungs constricted painfully, and she had to breathe through her nose deeply to get rid of the sudden dizziness that accosted her. "I remember her from Hogwarts. She is the werewolf the prophecy speaks of."

The ballroom was silent, awaiting Voldemort's judgement.

"You have done well, Regulus. You will be suitably rewarded. Join your brothers and sisters." The imposing wizard ordered. Regulus let go of her roughly, walking over to Dolohov. Hermione rolled her left shoulder to regain some feeling, looking down at the ground, refusing to lock her eyes onto Voldemort's for fear of his Legilimency.

"This pitiful mudblood," Voldemort spat, and Hermione saw his legs turn to address the majority of the room, "was predicted to destroy me. *Me!* The most powerful wizard of all time!"

His followers laughed mockingly, and Hermione was reminded strongly of the cave, and a certain potion–

"Let's see how a mudblood fares," Voldemort seethed, turning back to her, "Against the great Lord Voldemort!"

Just as Voldemort procured his wand from the pocket of his robes, several things happened at once: Hermione slipped her hands out of their bindings, twisting away and grabbing her wand from her waistband in the same motion, firing a silent Stupefy into the fray.

The rest of the Order cancelled their Disillusionment charms, and materialised in the ball room, scattered throughout. Their mostly Muggle clothing, all casual, made them stand out like sore thumbs amongst the dress robes of the Death Eaters and their spouses.

Dumbledore stepped forward calmly, casting an *Expelliarmus* in Voldemort's direction.

Voldemort, not lying when he said he was great, cast the quickest *Protego* Hermione had ever seen. His nostrils – not slits just yet – were flaring, and a vein was bulging at his temple, his skin so white it seemed translucent. The stark veins added to his overall inhuman visage.

Hermione ran to the other side of the ballroom as duels broke out in abundance, feeling like her feet were sliding out from under her on the stone floor. It was like being back at the Final Battle, and Hermione half-expected to see Ron running by her side, throwing hexes over their shoulders at their pursuers.

"THE GIRL!" Voldemort screamed, and Hermione looked behind her. He was fighting off a wall of water from Dumbledore's wand. They were in total combat now, the spells flying back and forth too quick for most eyes to follow.

One of his followers ran forward, rugby tackling her to the ground in an attempt to subdue her amidst the chaos.
"GET THE CUP!" Hermione shouted at the nearby Lily, who nodded, before kneeling the Death Eater in the groin and making him double over. Hermione pushed him off of her, firing a stunner at the Death Eater that appeared right in front of her.

At her words, Voldemort let out an inhuman screech filled with rage, chilling Hermione to the bone. She turned her head to stare at him. His wavy brown hair was in absolute disarray, his red eyes dark and foreboding. With one final heave of his wand, he pushed Dumbledore back – the old wizard stumbled.

He turned his Phoenix feather wand to her, green flying out of it at breakneck speed, his strides long and purposeful as he walked toward her.

But Dumbledore recovered too quickly, firing spell after spell at Voldemort, successfully distracting him.

Hermione was yanked back by a small but impressive force, and found herself under one of the tables, looking at the quick feet from under the tablecloth, the shouts and screams a distant cacophony. She'd almost been hit.

She turned to her left, glancing at the small but impressive force.

"Patrick?" asked Hermione in disbelief.

"Professor, I'm so sorry! My parents, they–"

Hermione stared at the third year Slytherin – soon to be fourth year – incredulously as he ranted, rushing out an explanation.

"Patrick," Hermione tried to interrupt, "Patrick! Have you been here before?"

"Yes," Patrick answered, and Hermione ignored a nearby yell that sounded suspiciously like Hagrid, "I come here all the time, my parents–"

"Have you ever seen a cup?" Hermione insisted, clutching at the boy's shoulder painfully, "It's gold, engraved, small handles."

"Of course," Patrick said, a confused frown marring his young his face. "It's Hufflepuff's Cup."

---

"Lily! Lily!" Marlene called out, running after her friend, who was frantically entering every room she could and trying to Accio the horcrux.

"Lily," Marlene breathed out, roughly pulling her friend away from the next room by the arm. "I just spoke to some Slytherins, they said Malfoy wasn't letting anyone go into his study."

Lily looked at her blonde friend blankly, breathing heavily.

"It's on the second floor!" Marlene exclaimed, throwing up her arms in exasperation, "Come on!"

The two women raced back down the corridor, Lily throwing a hugely powerful stunner at the young Mulciber as they ran across the ballroom, which was in turmoil. The Death Eater flew back
into the air, breaking a table in two upon landing.

"THAT'S FOR MARY, YOU PRICK!" she screamed over her shoulder, sprinting to get to the other side of the ballroom. She skidded to a stop at the base of the ornate staircase, Marlene following closely behind, scrabbling up the steps.

She proceeded to do the same thing as the floor below, casting verbal *Accio* in every room.

Suddenly, one of the doors wouldn't open.

*Alohamora.*

Lily turned the knob, but it wouldn't budge. Unable to help herself, she rattled the door.

"We don't have time for this," Marlene huffed, pulling Lily back in line with the Ravenclaw with a hard tug. "*Expulso!*"

The Expulsion curse blew the door to pieces in a flash of blue light. Lily stepped through the opening, waving her arm to get rid of the floating dust.

There were people inside.

Lily stared at them.

There were three witches, all huddled with about ten children. The kids were silently crying, some of them toddlers. Lily's heart wrenched, her wand lowering.

"*Accio Cup!*" Marlene exclaimed, stepping forward, and a nondescript looking goblet shot into her hands. Marlene threw it away with a sneer, looking around the room. It was Lucius Malfoy's office, alright. The desk looked imperial and imposing, and Lily could definitely imagine him sitting behind it with a goblet of aged wine, feeling self-important.

"What are you looking for?" The oldest of the adult witches asked them, her voice steady. She had no wand in her hands, and threw them up in surrender at Marlene's raised one.

"It's a cup," Lily said softly, pushing down Marlene's wand arm slowly, "Gold, jewelled…"

The witch nodded, lowering her hands hesitantly before making her way to the bookcase on the opposite side of the room. She placed her hand over an inky black spine, muttering something in Latin. The book, wide and heavy-looking, shimmered away, leaving the desired cup in its wake.

The woman took a hold of it, turning to throw it at Marlene, who barely caught it.

"You'll speak of this?" she asked, as Marlene inspected the cup. "At the trial?"

"Trial?" Marlene echoed, looking up with a raised eyebrow, though she seemed satisfied with the validity of the horcrux.

"What's your name?" Lily asked softly, taking in the white hair of the woman, her calm blue eyes.

"Narcissa," she told them, glancing back quickly to the children in her care, "Narcissa Malfoy."
Hermione was trying to fight her way across the ballroom to Lucius Malfoy's study, avoiding the enraged screeches of Voldemort but trying to find Peter, James, Sirius or Remus, so she could take one of their basilisk fangs and destroy the blasted horcrux for good, one more step closer.

"That's for Frank!" Sirius exclaimed, firing an *Incendio* at the bottom of Bellatrix's robes. Hermione was inching her way past, trying to get his attention without killing him. "And *that's* for Alice!" He threw a Vine-Strangling spell at his cousin, missing the bemused look Alice sent his way from next to him.

"Albus!" McGonagall cried, and several of them – Order members and Death Eaters inclusive – turned toward the sound, seeing Dumbledore stumble to his knees. Hermione sent a Revulsion Jinx toward her opponent, quickly turning to intervene.

*He can't die on my behalf*, she thought fiercely, striding forward toward Voldemort, her stomach in knots, *Not when Remus–*

"You can never defeat me, Dumbledore." Voldemort hissed gleefully, stepping closer. Hermione's panic grew, remembering that the Headmaster currently held the Elder Wand in his weak hand.

*Stupefy!*

Voldemort's lingering shield deflected the stunning spell, and it flew wildly toward Fabian Prewett, who slumped onto the ground in a motionless heap.

"*You!*" seethed Voldemort, his crimson eyes narrowing. Dumbledore thankfully forgotten, Hermione stepped up to the Dark wizard, readjusting her wand in her grip, trying not to let it slip from her sweaty fingers.

Hermione saw Peter tackle Sirius to the ground out of the corner of her eye, the duels all of a sudden reanimating around her.

"Thanks, Pete." Sirius said from the floor, astounded.

"Side-on, you shit!" Peter yelled above the shouts of spells around them.

"You are no match for me," Voldemort spat, staring her up and down. Hermione was sure she was an intimidating sight to behold – her jeans were dirty, the blood from her lip and a cut on her arm having dripped onto them to join the dirt Lily had smudged in, and her shirt was torn around the collar, flapping open comically every time she moved. "*Knowledge* I know not? Let's see about that."

He sounded sceptical, and fired off an unknown spell at her. Hermione jumped into action, not getting a spell in edgewise against his relentless assault. She was twisting and turning, trying her best to escape from the flashes of light. How had Dumbledore managed, as old as he was? Hermione's side felt like it was ripped open, her stitch an agony as she ducked and swerved and hid behind tables and chairs.

Hermione managed to shoot off a *Confringo*, and the duel truly began. Voldemort's spells were extensive, and mostly unknown to her. He'd grazed her with a *Crucio* early on, but it had barely held, considering he had not focused on maintaining it, simply hitting her with *something*.

Hermione fought with common spells, but shot the occasional unusual one out of her wand viciously just to throw him off. One of her favourites, the Self-Strangling curse, nearly hit his left side. He'd
stepped away, his eyes narrowing into slits as Hermione panted, trying to regain her breath.

"Aqua Eructo!" Hermione shouted, flinging her wand out. The jet of water was countered by the fire that erupted from Voldemort's wand, turning her powerful spell rapidly into steam.

He began to pigeon-hole her again, pushing her further and further until Hermione's muscles were screaming, her lungs both full and empty, her wand feeling like it was slipping against her fingers with every spell cast.

"Remus!" Hermione heard Marlene shout, and turned her head slightly.

"HEY!" Remus shouted, "VOLDEMORT!"

The spell hit Hermione in slow-motion, slicing at the right side of her rib cage. As she'd turned her head, she'd been unable to fully dodge the hex.

She swung her head sharply, looking to Remus. He held his basilisk fang aloft and was glaring at Voldemort with a courage she had never seen in him. Hermione's eyes travelled down, and she saw the gold glint of Hufflepuff's Cup in the firelight.

Everything sped up.

Remus's arm sliced through the air, the fang piercing the horcrux. It screeched, water spitting forth from it in floods.

Hermione whipped her head to Voldemort. He was wide-eyed, and looked paler than he had before. His teeth were bared in preparation to scream.

He looked furious, enraged; inhuman.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" screamed Hermione, her wand arm thrusting into the air defiantly. The green light shot out of her wand, the great whooshing sound reaching a crescendo as it hit Voldemort in his unsuspecting chest. His face was frozen in shock, his mouth open in surprise.

He fell, black robes splayed haphazardly in death.

The ballroom was silent.

"Incarcerous!" Dumbledore cast at the nearest Death Eater, binding him tightly.

"Hermione!" Remus rushed over, the front of his t-shirt sopping wet, as the remaining Order members began to fight off the remaining Death Eaters with a renewed vigour, "Hermione, are you okay?"

Hermione held her wand hand to her side, pushing down at the piercing sting.

"Slicing… Hex…" Hermione grunted out, trying not to shift too much. She felt she might've torn the injury even more with her Killing Curse. Her shirt, though also sliced, was sticking to her with the blood.

"Here," said Remus, pushing her hand away. He pulled her shirt from her skin, and Hermione cried out in pain. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Remus muttered apologetically, inspecting the damage. His wand hovered over the long, vertical wound. Blood was dripping out of it quickly, as if desperate to escape her body. With an intense burning, Hermione saw the wound close up, though it remained red and raw. "You'll need to have it looked over properly," Her boyfriend said, frowning, "But it should stop
the bleeding for now."

Hermione slumped against Remus in relief, relying on him to help her stand up.

The duels were winding down – only a few stubborn Death Eaters refusing to surrender – and Hermione could finally see the evidence of the battle. Bodies were littered everywhere. A few seemed too still to be alive, and Hermione quickly looked away.

"Hermione!" Lily cried out, hurrying over to them and dragging James. She hugged them both, Lily's soon-to-be husband throwing his arms around all three of them.

Sirius threw himself at them, laughing exuberantly. Peter followed with a pleased smile.

"Oh, alright then." Hermione heard Marlene sigh, and felt the witch embrace them from behind.

Though her side ached like nothing else and Hermione felt she could sleep for a month straight, the laughter bubbled out of her unwillingly. It echoed throughout the ballroom, grateful and disbelieving. Her friends, still cocooning her, began to laugh as well. Their arms squeezed each other tightly in relief, and Hermione felt safe like she hadn't in a very long time.

They'd done it. They'd done it. 

Chapter End Notes 

I honestly don’t know what to say. It’s one thirty in the morning. I hope you liked it!
In Bloom (Epilogue)

Chapter Notes

Prepare for the cheese. Seriously, this has to be the corniest thing I've ever written but I don't even care. FEEL MY CHEESY WRATH!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

September 2nd, 1979: Mamma Mia

"This is hardly promising, Remus," Hermione laughed, the familiar tune of Mamma Mia starting up, "I don't know how you convinced me this song was going to be our first dance."

"You can't deny that it's fitting," Her new husband countered, his brow lifting in amusement, his eyes glittering with happiness. "Now please be quiet and dance with me. Everyone's staring."

Hermione looked around them, the guests smiling at them from around the empty dance floor, her and Remus the only occupants. Hermione took Remus's hand amidst boisterous cheering from one of their friends – a certain Gryffindor wearing a leather jacket with tailored pants instead of a suit. Her new husband swung her into an upbeat dance, causing her to laugh so hard her veil almost fell off of her head.

As the song neared the end of the first chorus, James dragged Lily onto the makeshift dance floor – in reality, just a large square patch of grass in the backyard of Luxwood Place, the wedding having taken place in the front yard, and the reception out the back.

Remus was singing the lyrics off-key, causing Hermione to muffle her laughter into his chest.

"My, my, how can I resist you?" he crooned.

Hermione bit his exposed neck playfully as a retort, and Remus yelped. A few of the guests looked at them curiously, but most were too busy dancing to give them much attention.

"Very fitting first dance, Hermione," Marlene sniped as she flew past, leading Sirius around the dance floor to the closing bars of the song.

Remus gave her a triumphant look, and Hermione rolled her eyes with a smile.

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"Say cheese!" The photographer exclaimed, the flash of the camera blinding her. Peter had her veil, and was wearing it with an arm wrapped around Mary MacDonald, who looked cute in a canary yellow dress. Lily's flaming red hair hung down her back in loose curls, and she was being snogged thoroughly by a messy-haired James. Sirius was down on one knee, faux proposing to an unimpressed Marlene. Hermione and Remus were both bunny-earing James and Lily, Hermione pressed close to her husband's chest.
"Are you sure these are okay?" The photographer asked her later, showing her the disastrous array of wedding photos uncertainly.

"Yes," Hermione answered with a grin, belly full of chocolate cake and red wine, as she gazed down at Sirius attempting to snog her passionately in one, "They're perfect."

"You know," started Remus, coming up behind her as Elton John echoed throughout the yard after the photographer left to take more photos of the guests, his arms wrapping around to rest on her stomach, "You told me your dress was horrid."

"It is horrid," Hermione said, chuckling, "These sleeves are terrible."

"I don't know," Remus replied, picking up one of her see-through lace bell sleeves and rubbing the fabric between his fingers, "There's something about you and lace."

"Are you saying you'd prefer this dress on me, rather than off?" Hermione teased him as one of his hands travelled up her torso to rest at her sternum, his thumb rubbing at the bare skin exposed by the deep vee of her dress.

"No," Remus murmured into her ear, his breath tickling her neck, "That's not what I'm saying at all."

"Alright, alright," Peter interrupted, pushing them apart with a shove as he and Sirius came over, "That's enough of that. James and Lily are bad enough."

"They just got back from their honeymoon, Wormtail." explained Remus slowly.

"Exactly! They should be well sexed out by now!" exclaimed Sirius, and Remus snorted inelegantly. His traditional black suit cut him into a dashing figure, and Hermione found herself staring at him at the most inopportune times. Like right now.

"Snap out of it!" Sirius barked, snapping his fingers in front of her face, "You'll get him naked soon enough!"

"Don't tell me when I can and cannot fantasise about my husband, Sirius Black," Hermione warned him dangerously, narrowing her eyes, "I urge you to remember the last time you attempted to distract me from him."

Sirius balked, holding up his hands in surrender. He didn't want another repeat of the March incident, when Hermione had been planning to celebrate Remus's birthday with a certain kind of gusto, only to have to take Sirius to St Mungo's when he'd accidentally enlarged… well, nothing Hermione wanted to think about ever again. Hermione had left him there to explain the predicament to the nurses himself, she was so furious with him. She hadn't been able to touch Remus for days with the image of Sirius in her head so recent and traumatising.

"Don't be so cruel, Hermione," Peter said, looking at Sirius pityingly, "Sirius is a prick. Take that away, and who is he?"

Sirius scowled at his friend as Remus burst into laughter, doubling over at Sirius's put out expression.

"I curse the day you grew balls, Peter." Sirius seethed, glaring, "Shame no lady is fondling them."

"Please stop talking about your male anatomy," Hermione cut in, stopping Peter's calm retort. His face had been unimpressed, mouth open and ready to deliver the final jibe to Sirius. "I only allow that from Remus."
"Merlin, don't." Sirius groaned, horrified, and Peter looked slightly revolted, "Seeing it was traumatising enough." He shuddered dramatically, and Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Lily," Hermione called out to her friend as the redhead came up for air metres away, her lips suitably bruised, "Save me from these men."

"Are they talking about their cocks again?" Lily sighed, empathetic as she came over. Hermione nodded miserably, and let her friend drag her away from Remus's spluttering.

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"Finally," Remus breathed, stumbling after her into the room they'd paid for that night. Her wedding dress felt stifling, the flowing chiffon suffocating skin that wanted to be bare. Remus's mouth attached itself to the back of her neck, his next words mumbled into it impatiently. "Get this infernal dress off."

"I thought you liked it." Hermione chuckled, gasping quietly at the sharp nip to her jaw.

"No, it's horrid. Terrible. You were absolutely right." Remus ranted, his hands coming up to unbutton the back of said dress, his calloused hands brushing against her back erotically.

Hermione's tinkling laugh echoed throughout the room as the dress fell to the ground, along with Remus's dress shirt.

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July 31st, 1980: Gimme Gimme Gimme (A Man After Midnight)

"Never again!" she screeched, her hair plastered to her forehead in sweaty ringlets, "We are never having sex again!"

"Okay, okay, whatever you want!" James pleaded, white as a sheet and his hand gripped tight in his wife's. "Can't you do anything?" He pleaded with the Healer, who gave him a deadpan stare. "Right, of course, sorry." He muttered, turning back to his wife.

"Please tell me you're not going to threaten no sex when we have kids." Remus commented, staring at Lily blankly.

Hermione patted the hand that was settled on her waist consolingly.

"Sorry, Remus."

Her husband sighed.

"Did I miss it?!" Sirius exclaimed, bursting into the room with Peter hot on his heels.

"Where the ruddy hell have you been?" James demanded roughly, his wife glaring furiously at the two new arrivals.
"Sorry, Prongs. We got caught up."

"If the two of you," Lily grunted out through gritted teeth, her face red and splotchy, "Have been
gallivanting around as Padfoot and Wormtail without your wands on you, I will rip you apart as soon
as Harry is out of me!" Lily promised darkly, and Peter and Sirius exchanged an uneasy glance.

"I wouldn't get any closer, if I were you," Remus advised his friend as Sirius went to approach,"Lily's left hand may be occupied, but her right is physically assaulting anyone who gets near."

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"He's so ugly."

"Shut the fuck up, Padfoot." Remus admonished his friend, smiling down at his adoptive nephew.

"Hermione told us he'd be right fit! Prongs, you've got a Flint on your hands."

"Shut up, Sirius." All of them chorused, and the man mimed zipping his lips shut, trying to hide his
proud smile.

Lily was exhausted, her eyes half-lidded as she gazed at Harry lovingly, his little head tucked into
James's chest.

"Can I hold him?" Hermione asked tentatively, her heart fluttering as James transferred her best
friend over to her arms.

"Sorry I couldn't come earlier!" Marlene announced as she entered the room in a flurry, blonde hair
loose from its ponytail, "Work was a bitch, and--"

"Shh," Sirius hushed her, "Baby is sleeping." He pointed over to Harry, and Marlene's grey eyes
took in the scene as she stepped closer.

"He's quite ugly." Marlene said, causing Sirius to cackle.

"Stop insulting my best friend." Hermione reprimanded the two with a glare, rocking Harry
absentmindedly, "He's the best man I've ever known."

"I thought I was the best man you ever knew?" Remus asked teasingly, and Hermione looked up to
see him gazing down at her, something unidentifiable in his eyes.

"You come in third. Harry and Ron take the cake. Sorry, Remus."

Remus sighed, resigned.

"Aren't you, Harry?" Hermione whispered down at the bundle in her arms, Harry's blue eyes
squinting sleepily at her. They would turn green soon enough, but the love Hermione felt for the
baby in her arms was endless despite the slight difference. "Best little man in the world."

"He won't like that descriptor so much when he hits puberty," Sirius muttered out of the corner of his
mouth, making Marlene snort and place a hand over her mouth to muffle the noise.

"Your uncle is daft," Hermione explained, letting Harry grab onto her pinky finger, his tiny hand
encasing it tightly, "Ignore him. He gives terrible advice, but he's fun to laugh at."

"Hey!" Sirius interrupted. James shoved him, glaring. He looked down to his wife, sleeping soundly against his side. He was perched on the edge of the bed, their hands entwined.

They were a peaceful few minutes of silence, before Peter broke it with wonder in his voice.

"Hey," he said, drawing their attention. Hermione's head came up to look at his chubby face, "It's been two years."

And so it had. Hermione looked back down at her best friend.

Two years since Voldemort had fallen dead, as human as any one of them. Two years since they'd all nearly died so Harry could live a life free of Dark Lords and cursed scars. Hermione's eyes roved eagerly over his clean forehead, and she brushed a gentle finger over it. Harry had small tufts of hair already, an indicator of the unruly mess he would soon grow. Hermione smiled fondly, her eyes becoming suspiciously wet.

"You'll be okay," Hermione whispered, watching Harry yawn, so incredibly cute – Sirius and Marlene were horrible people. "You're going to be just fine."

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It was long after midnight by the time Remus and Hermione returned to their flat, exhausted but undeniably happy. Hermione changed into her pyjamas on autopilot, too tired to shower away the grimy hospital feel of St Mungo's.

Remus joined her in bed ten minutes later after some hot chocolate and a brush of his teeth.

"Mmm," He hummed after a long kiss, resting his head in the nook between her shoulder and her neck, "Do you ever think about it?"

"Think about what?" Hermione repeated sleepily, losing track of the conversation before it even began, running a lazy hand through Remus's hair distractedly.

"Babies. Little Lupins."

Hermione smiled, thinking of a turquoise-haired Teddy.

"Yeah," she slurped, "I think about it."

She fell right to sleep, Remus following soon after.

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October 31st, 1981: Waterloo

The party was in full swing, as much as a Halloween party catered to one year olds could be in full
swing at Godric's Hollow.

"Neville is sleeping in his meal again," James told Frank, who swore colourfully before moving over to his son and pulling him upright, wiping away the half-masticated food on his face.

"Not what you imagined?" James asked her, and they both surveyed the room. Small families had been invited – their friends from the Order, as well as Hogwarts. James had a few colleagues from the Auror Academy, and Hermione had invited some of her single friends from the Ministry in the hopes of distracting Sirius from Marlene, who still hadn't forgiven him. They weren't dating, and so apparently birthday gifts were out of the question. Sirius had made the mistake of giving her one.

"Not exactly," Hermione answered, unable to stop smiling at the pure glee on Harry's face as he tried out his toy broomstick for the first time, Lily hovering close by worriedly. The cat, black and missing an ear, hissed when Harry's foot hit it by accident. Remus readjusted him properly on the toy, murmuring words of encouragement.

"The five of us had a bet, you know. Sorry, make that six – Mary wanted in the last time we saw her. Shame she couldn't come today." James frowned in thought.

"Really?" Hermione prompted distractedly, giggling at Ron's pouting baby face as he stared at Harry and his relatively new toy.

"We thought Remus would be clucking by now, but he seems okay."

"Clucking?" she echoed, laughing, the image of her husband sprouting feathers springing to mind thanks to Peter's favourite prank of last year.

"You know what I mean," James said with a grin, looking to his friend, "He couldn't stop thinking about it when Harry came along. It's been a year."

"Let me guess," Hermione said, turning to look at her friend, "You wagered we'd be pregnant by the end of the year."

"Please," James begged her, his eyes suddenly desperate, "I bet the new broom, and Lily will absolutely kill me if I tell her I promised it to Sirius if he got it right. Sirius doesn't even fly that much, but it's the promise of humiliation that pleases him."

Hermione tamped down a grin, biting her lip.

"Don't worry, James," Hermione said, her mouth twisting into a grin of its own accord, unstoppable, "You'll be fine."

"Good," the hazel-eyed man breathed a sigh of relief, before whipping his head back to her, eyes wide. "Wait, are you–?"

Hermione left him to ponder that, striding over to her friend.

"He's fine, Lily. Harry loves flying."

"Sometimes I hate the fact that you know more about my son than I do," Lily grumbled.

"I won't, soon enough. With you around, he'll be a different person." Lily didn't look comforted. "But just as wonderful, don't worry. And no doubt just as obtuse when it comes to girls."

Lily laughed. Hermione bent down to pick up her redheaded friend, his face blotchy with tears.
"Oh, Ron," Hermione sighed, pretending to be at wits ends with the boy, "What are we going to do with you, huh?"

Ron's face cleared, and he stared at her. A pudgy hand reached out, wrapping around a lock of her hair tightly but not tugging on it, for which Hermione was thankful.

"He loves that hair of yours, Mrs Lupin," Hermione turned around to face Molly Weasley, whose face looked a lot younger despite the chaos her twins were no doubt starting with Sirius by the corner, "He stares at it whenever you walk by."

Hermione laughed, only slightly uncomfortable.

"So do I," Remus said upon approach, wrapping an arm around Hermione's shoulders, gently extracting Ron's stubborn hand from her hair. Hermione passed over the infant to his mother, and he rested his little head against her chest tiredly. Hermione's heart squeezed with all of the emotion she was feeling, overcome. "It's brilliant, isn't it?"

Hermione rolled her eyes, but gave Remus a quick kiss anyway. He knew her hair had always been a sensitive spot, and made a point of admiring it at every opportunity.

"What are you playing at?" Hermione queried, turning to her husband after they finished speaking with Molly.

"Nothing." Remus said with a smile, kissing her longer and harder.

"Are you trying to distract me?" Hermione breathed against his lips, her arms settled on his waist and his cradling her face.

"Not at all," replied Remus softly, kissing her again. Hermione pulled away at Sirius's disgusted groan, and glared at the man over her husband's shoulder. "Ignore him."

"It's hard to," Hermione muttered, looking back up into Remus's green eyes, "He's so irritating."

Remus huffed out a laugh, kissing her again.

"Wait," Hermione began, pulling away from Remus's lips to squint up at him suspiciously, "Did you join in on the bet?"

"Bet?" asked Remus, his eyes a little panicked. He was grinning, though, unable to help himself. "What bet?"

Hermione glared at him.

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June 23rd, 1988: Knowing Me, Knowing You

"Jemima!" Natalie called out, tired and fed up, "Get back here right now!"

Jemima Abney sighed from her hiding place behind Hermione.

"Sorry, Hermione," Jemima apologised, stepping out from Hermione's shadow, her dark brown hair
straight and sleek. She was pale, and looked resigned. "Mum's waiting."

"It's alright, Jemima, we'll talk closer to the full moon."

The fifteen year old sighed, trudging over to her mother morosely, her black polka dot pants clashing terribly with her brightly coloured floral top. Hermione hated eighties fashion, even more than she had hated seventies fashion.

Hermione glared down at her own acid washed jeans balefully, huffing in annoyance.

"Lottie!" Remus called out impatiently, running after their newly six year old daughter. Her birthday party was winding down, and Charlotte refused to change out of her Donatello costume – skin painted green, a hulking bag on her back, a purple headband, and a straight staff held in her small hands. Hermione regretted ever introducing her daughter to the television.

"Can't you do anything right?" Hermione snapped at her husband, snatching up her runaway child swiftly and removing her headband with a stern look. Remus frowned.

"I think Dad's sad." Charlotte informed Hermione seriously later that night during her bath, blowing some foamy bubbles out of her mouth.

"Your dad is fine, Lottie." Hermione sighed, rubbing away more of the green. She quickly spelled the murky, disgusting water away, filling up the tub once more with a silent *Aguamenti*. The bathtub would need a good clean after she was done with her daughter.

"No he's not!" Charlotte cried out petulantly, cowering at Hermione's stern look. "He's not," Her daughter repeated, more quietly but no less forceful. "You were mean to him."

"I was frustrated." Hermione tried to explain, but knew that no matter how clever she knew her daughter to be, getting her to understand the intricacies of her situation with Remus at that time would be entirely too difficult for a six year old to comprehend.

"Well Dad always tells me that when I'm frustrated, I need to count to ten." Charlotte said matter-of-factly, and Hermione pursed her lips to stop her reluctant smile. "Did you count to ten?"

After Charlotte was safely tucked into bed after a brave story about a girl fighting off a troll with the help of her two best friends, Hermione guiltily made her way into their shared bedroom, nervous.

"Lottie's in bed." Hermione told him, changing into her softest pyjamas.

"What story was it this time?" Remus asked her as he turned a page of his book, his voice not hinting at any resentment for her previous behaviour.

"The troll." Hermione answered, pulling back the covers to slide in beside her husband.

"She loves that one," said Remus, his tone warm and content, "Little does she know her mum is that brave little girl."

"Hardly brave," Hermione snorted, "I cowered in the bathroom stalls."

Remus sighed, and Hermione felt the guilt overwhelm her, its presence shadowing her every word and making them come out bitter and angry.

"I'm sorry," apologised Hermione, sitting up to look Remus in the face properly. "I shouldn't have snapped at you earlier. It's just, with work the way it is," She lifted a hand to her temple, squeezing
her eyes shut, "and the party today, I–"

"Hey, it's alright," Remus consoled her, placing his book on his bedside table and reaching up to pull away her arm. "We're all tired." He pulled her close, and she rested her head on his chest with a sigh. "Did you have some fun, at least?"

"No." Hermione answered miserably.

"Hermione…” Remus said warningly, wary of the gloomy moods she sometimes got into.

"You're going to laugh at me," she said moodily, pushing herself up and away from him and crossing her arms.

"I promise," Remus vowed, locking eyes with her, "I promise I won't laugh."

"She was flirting with you. Again."

Remus rolled his eyes, sighing.

"Not this again. She's persistent, I'll give her that, but she's fifteen. I'd be locked up in Azkaban before I could even think about it."

"Oh?" Hermione started menacingly, glaring at him, "That's all that's stopping you, then?"

"Will you stop?" Remus huffed, exasperated, "How many times do I have to tell you? I love you, I will always love you, and I'm not interested in Nymphadora Tonks."

The silence was deafening.

Hermione deflated, defeated.

"I never told you," Hermione started, ignoring Remus's inquisitive glance, "I never told you who you married."

"What has that got to do… with…" Remus's eyes widened. "Really? Nymphadora?" He laughed, startled.

"You said you wouldn't laugh." Hermione said petulantly, trying not to give in to the smile that threatened to appear at the unattractive twist of Remus's face into a grimace.

"I can't believe Sirius let me marry a minor."

Hermione couldn't help it: she laughed.

"You didn't marry a minor, you idiot!" Hermione laughed, hitting him with her pillow, "She was twenty-four!"

Remus grinned at her, grabbing the pillow and throwing it over her to the floor on her side of the bed. He grabbed her flying wrist, moving to straddle her waist. Her other wrist was caught in his remaining hand, and he pushed both of them down onto the bed, the sheets in disarray.

"I remember when you were twenty-four," he began huskily once she'd stopped struggling, his stubble grazing the top of her breasts seductively. Hermione breathed in deeply, suddenly focused on his movements. Her core ached, and she realised they hadn't been intimate in over a week, the stress of organising Charlotte's party and the late hours at work making it too difficult. She was feeling it now. "Pregnant…"
"I wasn't pregnant at twenty-four." Hermione breathed out, squeezing her eyes shut as Remus's free hand slid her camisole up to her ribs, grazing the tops of her undies before it made its ascent.

"You can lie to everyone else, but you can't lie to me. Technically, you're already thirty."

It was like cold water was dumped over her, and the fog in Hermione's brain suddenly cleared.

"I am not thirty!" she hissed, trying to release her wrists.

Remus simply laughed, his free hand drifting down and sliding under the waistband of her underwear. Hermione stopped wriggling immediately, her breath catching as his hand drifted lower ever so slowly.

"Let's talk about this later." He murmured into her lips, and Hermione's assent was muffled by the fierce press of his lips to hers.

"Besides," Remus huffed out after as they lay side by side, spent. "You know Jem has a huge crush on Tonks, right?"

"What?!" Hermione exclaimed, whipping her head to stare at Remus incredulously.

"Yeah, she told me last month." Remus chuckled, and Hermione huffed indignantly.

"But she used to have a crush on me." she said pitifully, mourning the fact.

Remus rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, when she was ten."

"But I'm a catch!" Hermione tried to reason. Remus grinned at her, his sandy hair still incredibly mussed from their activities, and his cheeks slightly flushed.

"Yeah," he said, leaning in to kiss her, "You are."

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September 1st, 1991: Fernando

"Who's up for it, huh?" Sirius looked at them all excitedly, his eyes wild, "Another great Sirius Black Halloween party, finally free of these miscreants."

Charlotte punched her uncle in the arm, not truly offended but using any excuse to physically abuse him. She was much like her mother that way.

"Sirius, no." replied Lily, raising a dubious eyebrow, "The last time you hosted an adults-only Halloween party, two of us got pregnant."

"So? Maybe all of you need to up your contraception game."

"Can't we talk about this some other time?" Peter asked tiredly, "The amount of censoring needed to have this conversation in front of the kids is too much effort."
"It's not like I don't know what contraception is." Charlotte informed them. Everyone ignored her and she huffed, actually affronted now.

"Have the misfits left yet?" Marlene panted out, having run up to them as fast as she could once she'd breached the barrier onto the platform.

"The misfits are still here." Harry said, walking up to them with Ron in tow.

"Damn," Marlene said, snapping her fingers in feigned disappointment, "I was hoping to avoid the awkward goodbyes."

Harry hugged her fiercely, unashamed, Ron standing awkwardly behind him.

"Hi, Mrs Lupin," Ron said politely, and Hermione bit her lip to hide her smile.

"Hello, Ron."

Sirius sniggered, but Lily hit him upside the head and he stopped.

"Are you ready, Harry?" Lily asked her son, smiling down at him warmly.

"Yeah, mum. Is Aunt Petunia coming?"

"No, dear," Lily said, smiling sadly, "Tuney couldn't make it."

Hermione didn't like to think about the fact that some things couldn't always be changed. Lily and her sister were on friendly terms, and Dudley Dursley did not exist – but the jealousy would always linger, and seeing Lily's son off to Hogwarts would have been too much for the woman, Hermione was sure. It was better that she not come.

"You'll see her at Christmas, mate," James promised his younger clone, "She'll make your favourite."

"I know she means well," Harry muttered to his best friend. Hermione was the closest to them, and so overhead, "But Aunt Petunia can't cook at all."

"Let's get your trunks on the train, it's bound to leave soon." Peter said, lifting his wand to levitate the two trunks, one looking slightly more battered than the other. He strode away, the two boys following him obediently.

"Sirius, please stop talking," Marlene was saying, "Your incessant chatter bores me."

"Leney," Sirius replied with a whine, and Marline looked enraged, "What happened? We were so good together."

"You proposed, that's what happened. And don't tell me you were joking, you were most definitely not joking--"

Hermione tuned out the ages old argument, squeezing her daughter's hand reassuringly as they moved closer to the train in preparation to farewell her nephew and his best friend.

It had been a long time since Hermione had thought of them as her own best friends. At a stretch, she would say since the Resurrection Stone had not produced any projections. More realistically, however, it was the first time Harry had uttered the words 'Aunt Hermione'. It was hard to feel like you were best friends when one of you saw the other as a paternal figure.

Regardless, she held a soft spot for them that not many others experienced – she always saved them
the best desserts, was the first to let them off lightly despite her reputation as the disciplinarian, and promised not to ask them questions about girls, no matter how curious she was. Well, the last one was a promise she'd made herself – the two boys were only eleven, and so girls were a far off concept.

The Harry and Ron she'd left behind were still alive, she was sure of it. They were living their lives – they had, of course, beaten the Death Eater uprising – with families of their own. Hermione would've liked to have seen the children of Harry and Ginny, but it was not meant to be. At least, in her old world. This new one (although hardly new by this point) held the same potential, if the adoring way Ginny stared at Harry was anything to go by.

"You'll go in a few years, Lottie."

"It's Charlie, Dad," Her daughter corrected Remus, her tone entirely too familiar, "Charlie."

"Sorry, Charlie." The name sounded strange on his tongue, and Hermione knew the new nickname would never stick whilst they were at home.

"Mum, honestly, I'm fine. I told you, my friends are already on the train." A vaguely familiar voice said. Hermione turned around, searching for its owner.

"You said, Dita, but you didn't get any letters over the holidays." Hermione definitely recognised that voice. As if magnetised, her eyes snapped to the woman, fixated.

"Dad never asks me all these questions," The young girl grumbled, her dark brown hair a thick, curly mess. She was wearing jeans and a plain t-shirt, and looked to be around twelve or so.

"That's because your father thinks he's too good for friends." Ruth said. Hermione's mother was exactly as she remembered her, as Hermione knew her best.

"Ruth?" Hermione asked, incapable of stopping herself. Remus looked at her sharply, her own daughter frowning in confusion. Hermione let go of Charlotte's hand and moved forward.

Her mother turned around, locking eyes with Hermione.

"Oh!" It seemed she recognised her, but couldn't think of her name. Hermione realised a little belatedly that she had never given one all those years ago.

"Hermione," she introduced herself to her own mother, smiling widely, "Hermione Lupin."

"You're a witch?" Her mother asked her incredulously, her intelligent eyes flicking behind to see Hermione's own daughter and husband hanging back.

"Mum," Ruth's companion hissed, and Hermione looked to her. She had a smattering of freckles on her button nose, and she looked embarrassed. "That's Hermione Huxley."

Ruth's brows shot up, and she laughed awkwardly.

"My daughter, she's told me about you." Hermione felt like she was being lectured, which was a strange feeling after all these years of doing the lecturing, "You defeated that Dark wizard."

"With help," Hermione admitted, blushing slightly. "How are you? Your daughter… ?" Hermione trailed off, unsure whether she was looking at herself or not, though the rational part of her brain knew she couldn't have been born.
"Oh, yes, sorry. This is Perdita. She's just starting her second year." Perdita was blushing like mad, avoiding Hermione's eyes at all costs.

"Perdita?" Hermione repeated, laughing lightly, "Funny, isn't it?"

Perdita was, after all, the daughter of Hermione in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. The irony was not lost on her.

"What a coincidence!" Ruth exclaimed, looking perky. Hermione was simply thankful she hadn't just been introduced to herself.

In a way that nothing else had, the absence of her existence as a child in the nineties solidified her place in this world. Whether Hermione's arrival here had dictated the eradication of her initial birth, or whether she would have ever existed in this world at all, Hermione could only contemplate.

"Remus Lupin," Remus stepped forward, extending a hand out for Hermione's mother to shake. Ruth took it firmly. "Pleasure to meet you. I assume I have you to thank for helping out Hermione all those years ago?"

Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Remus, shut up." Hermione said, grinning in response to Ruth's surprised laugh.

Remus chuckled himself, shaking his head.

"Come on, Lottie, let's go say goodbye to your cousins."

"What house are you in, Perdita?" asked Hermione, addressing her would-be sister as Remus and Charlotte walked away.

"Ravenclaw." Perdita answered quietly, her eyes a little timid.

"A great house," Hermione declared with a kind smile, "I suspect Charlotte will be sorted there once she starts at Hogwarts. Do me a favour, will you? My nephew is starting this year. His name is Harry Potter. Keep on eye on him for me? He and his friend Ron Weasley are a bit thick, sometimes. A Ravenclaw might do them some good."

Perdita seemed a little intimidated, but agreed.

Ruth looked thankful, and Hermione gave her a friendly nod.

"Maybe I'll owl you, Ruth," Hermione informed her. "Talk soon."

"You never told me you knew Hermione Huxley!" said Perdita in a hushed voice as Hermione left them.

"I didn't realise!" Ruth exclaimed in wonder.

"Ready?" James asked his son, who rolled his eyes lightly at his parents.

"Yes, I'm ready. Can I go now?" Harry asked, and Lily glared at him. He sighed, holding out his arms. Lily hugged him tight, James following. Sirius gave Harry's hair a ruffle, and Remus patted him on the shoulder. Peter waved. Hermione crouched down to the boy's level, kissing his forehead.

"Be good. *Please*, be good. You too, Ron." She added, turning to the redhead.
"Okay!" Ron blurted out, and blushed bright red soon after.

They hopped onto the train, and Hermione saw Perdita step up onto the carriage up ahead, Ruth waving goodbye.

Regulus Black stood between her and her mother, his eyes piercing into hers. Hermione gave him a nod, which he returned. They would never be friends, his selfish double-crossing understandable, but not necessarily forgivable in Hermione's eyes. Hermione rubbed her chest in remembrance of their Vow, more than a decade old at this point.

"I can't wait until Lottie goes to Hogwarts," murmured Remus into her ear as the train faded into the distance. The girl in question was piggy-backing on Sirius.

"Why's that?" Hermione asked, already knowing the answer as she looked away from Sirius's brother to her husband.

"Wedding anniversary tomorrow," Remus reminded her, "Would be nice to have the day to ourselves."

"Remus," Hermione sighed, giving a quick kiss to appease him, but knowing it was more for herself than her husband, "You should know that's never going to happen."

"So, mind if I pop 'round to yours?" asked Sirius, jaunty grin on his lips as he sidled up to them, their daughter still hanging off of his shoulders, "The twins and I have been working on something spectacular."

Hermione gave Remus a smug smile, and he exhaled a suffering sigh.

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"Do you ever think about it?" Hermione asked Remus that night, their daughter in bed and both of them reading by the fireplace. Her feet were snug under his warm thighs, wiggling every now and then to make him laugh.

"Think about what?" He countered, continuing to read So You Think You Can Fly? A Parent's Guide To Teaching Their Children.

Hermione put her own book down on the floor, not bothering to mark her place. She prodded her husband with a toe until he turned to gaze at her.

"What might've happened, if I hadn't come here?"

Remus eyed her critically, deep in thought. After a minute, he quietly placed his book on the side table to the right of him and gently moved her feet out from under his thighs, pushing himself up to lean over her.

Hermione sank down into the couch, her heart starting up a hasty beat.

Remus's right hand came up to sweep her curly hair behind her ear, the tips of his fingers lightly grazing her cheek as if appreciating a very delicate, very old priceless piece of art.

"Now why would I do that," murmured Remus, his lips pressing up against hers, his slightly
chapped lips opening just enough so he could capture her bottom lip between them, nipping it playfully. He continued his thought upon releasing it, Hermione licking over the tender lip. "when what we have is so wonderful?"

"You make me want to puke," Hermione said, grinning as she shoved at his chest half-heartedly, "And please, for the love of Merlin, shave off that moustache. It wasn't cute in my third year, and it's not cute now."

Remus laughed loudly, dropping his head in his mirth.

"I told you," the werewolf said, shaking his head, "Peter and I have a bet going."

"I'll give you fifty galleons if you let me shave it off right now." offered Hermione, raising an eyebrow.

"Deal." Remus agreed immediately, lifting himself off of her abruptly and then offering her a hand once he was standing. "You get the razor and I'll get the shaving cream."

Hermione took the proffered hand, a grin on her face.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you've all enjoyed this story, such a short journey it was from start to finish (which was surprising!). I had a lot of fun writing it.

I write primarily for myself; I write the stories I wish I could read, and the pairings I wish got more attention. I've got at least one more Remione on my list to complete, so keep an eye out for any of my future projects. As for now, thank you all so much, and please let me know what you think. I actually want to be a professional writer – whether it's screenwriting or actually being an author – so every bit of constructive criticism and/or praise helps.

Thanks to the regular reviewers of this story – your running commentary often left me smiling. :) Happy reading!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!