### Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

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**Summary**

This is the story of Hermione’s great quest. The secret to the elves slavery has been uncovered, and Hermione is determined to end their servitude. The first stone sat in her study for years after it was found at Grimmauld, but now a second has been discovered. Follow Hermione, Rose, and all the Sisters of the Moon as they scour the world in their search.
This story takes place in my Sisters of the Moon story line. To fully understand the characterizations in this story it will be helpful to have read at least Sisters of the Moon, Tidy Time, and The Good Wolf. If you feel compelled, read the entire series up to this story’s point in the story arc. The stories in chronological order are…

Sisters of the Moon
Girl Talk
Primal *
Pixie Dust *
Anniversary
Tidy Time
All in a Mouse’s Night *
Season of the Wolf
Reading is Fundamental *
I Believed in Father Christmas
Running Up That Hill *
The Good Wolf
A Night at the Pub
Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones – Part One Down Under (Australia)
(* M Rated)

Prologue

“A trí déag”

“Thirteen,” Seamus said.

“Thirteen!” Hermione slumped in the chair of her study.

Seamus nodded. “Aye, that’s what it says. ‘Merthin labhair, a trí déag chruthódh sé.’ Merlin spoke, thirteen would he create.”

Her hands went to the side of her head and her elbows hit hard against the top of her desk. “Thirteen,” she whispered. “I’d hoped at most it would have been seven left. Damn it!” her fist hit the top of her desk. “Walpurga’s going to be very angry; she thought here were only nine. Damn it!”

Seamus smirked at her outburst and flipped back a few pages in the old book. “I shall bind them to our service, I shall give them purpose, I shall make them whole, I shall redeem them.” He looked up from the book at his friend. “You sure?”

Hermione stood and walked to the glass fronted cabinet on the wall of her study. On the top shelf sat
two small statues about a foot tall. She placed her hand on the glass, bowed her head, and a single tear slid down her cheek. “They’ve been slaves for thousands of years, it’s time they were free. We certainly don’t need them as servants, as much as some may complain we do.” She turned and faced him. “I should have taken up this quest years ago, when we found the first one in the attic at Grimmauld, I should have started right then.”

“Yeah, Luna… Luna and Dean, they told me.” Seamus said. The Irishman hung his head and growled in frustration.

“Seamus, it was Dean’s decision, Hobson’s choice, really. He had to take care of his Mum, and we’re getting off point.” She looked at the statue on the left. “I can’t believe this other one was sitting right there in the British Museum the whole time.” She shook her head. “If Lavender and I hadn’t taken the kids on that excursion last week I’d have never known.”

Seamus laughed dryly. “Aye, she thought it quite funny, your reaction. She says to me, she says, ‘there’s Hermione walking through the Greek section, and she stops dead in front of one of the cases’.” He looked at her. “Did you really say ‘what the fuck?’ out loud?”

“Yes.” She blushed. “And with vigor, too. Luckily, apart from Lavender, only James and Fred heard. I told them I had several rather nasty curses for them if they went telling tales.”

He nodded. “Well, that’ll shut them up, for a while at least.” He walked across the room and stood next to her. “Lav and I’ll be seeing a lot more of your brood, I’m thinking.”

“I have to, Seamus, I have to.” She looked at him and the fire Seamus had seem in the common room all those years ago still burned as bright as ever. “The elves cannot remain slaves. It’s immoral.”

Seamus hugged his friend to his side. “I’ve know you for better than twenty years, believe me this is no surprise. Lav knew it too when she came home with the book three days ago. We’re ready.”

“So the book tells of Merlin making the stones but it doesn’t give and clue as to where he put them?” she asked, looking back up at the two stone elves.

“Not really, read it cover to cover, I did. It’s just those two passages mention the stones at all. It talks about his travels a bit, a lot actually.”

“He probably hid them everywhere he went,” she sighed. “As it’s my only clue, can you make me a list of the places the book says he went?”

“Aye, It’ll take a few days.” He looked at her with raise eyebrows. “Surprised you don’t know Gaelic.”

“Never was important to learn it. We touched on it in Ancient Runes, but that was just briefly.” She laid her hand on his arm. “Thank you, Seamus. I know most people don’t get why I’m so adamant about elf rights, but you have always supported me in this.”

He shrugged. “They’re smart, helpful, loyal little guys. Doesn’t seem right.” he went back to the book. “Any idea where to start?”

“Well that this one was here in England,” she said, looking at the small figurine on the right. “And that one was in Greece two hundred years ago, means they’re probably scattered all over the world.” She shook her head. “It’s the Horcrux hunt all over again.”

This time Seamus really laughed. “Not at all, me dear. This time there’ll be no hiding in a tent for months, I’ll wager. You’ll be in hotels, libraries, and probably museums most of the time.” He
looked at her, and all humor left him. Seamus Finnigan was an Auror, and a very good one. “However, Madam Department Head, If you are leaving the safety of one of those places and heading into the wild, especially if it’s to a place you think there’s one of these hidden, **you will use your galleon**, and you will contact Lav and me. Am I clear?”

“But..”

He stopped her mid sentence. “There’ll be no ‘buts’. This is not a discussion, Hermione. If you don’t agree to this, willingly and truthfully, I will send an Auror with you.” He smiled. “Artis, I think.”

“Artis smells,”

“That curse’ll wear off eventually,” he said. “I’m serious, no muckin’ about on your own. Lav and I are proud to be the Weasley and Potter children’s security, and part of protecting them is protecting you. Kingsley knew it’d come to this eventually, that’s why you’re my superior in the Ministry building and nowhere else.”

“He really didn’t have to do that,” she said petulantly.

“Yes he did, and you know it. Do I have to cite examples?”

She sighed, defeated. “No.”

“Good, so you’ll be keeping in touch from day to day, coming home often, letting us know where you are and where you’re headed.” It wasn’t even close to a question.

“Yes.”

“Aye, that’s a good girl.” he said.

Hermione glared at him. “I am not Rose!”

“Aye, she’s a fair bit sneakier than you are.” He winked.

Hermione looked at him from under her eyebrows. “Fuck you, Finnigan.”

He laughed loudly. “Ah, your husband is bad influence on you, he is. Pretty soon you’ll be putting galleons in the swear jar too.”

Hermione frowned. “He’s not going to be happy.”

Seamus looked at her sideways. “Take him with you.”

“He’d be so bored,” she said. “You’re right, I’ll be in research mode most of the time, and that makes him a little crazy.”

“Only cause it makes you a lot crazy,” he said, smiling. She looked at him with the sly smirk again. “I know, Fuck you, Finnigan,” he said, and laughed. Seamus put his arm around her. “You want Lav to come help you pack?”

“No, I need to do that alone, and I need to have these few lasts night with Ron, Rose and Hugo.”

“Aye, alright, Lav and I’ll move our stuff into our room then.” At her look he put his arm around her. “You’re not abandoning them.”

“They’re seven and nine, how could I not be?”
“It’s important. Probably the most important thing you’ll do. You’ll come home a lot.” He smiled. “And maybe take Rosie with you some times. She’s her mother’s daughter you know.”

She smiled. “That’s a good idea. She’d be helpful and get to see some sights, but what about Hugo? If I take her he’d want to come too.”

“Quidditch season is coming up. Ron and I’ll take him to Harpies practices and Cannons games. He’ll think it’s a treat. I’ll get James and Al in on it too.”

“You’re the best, Shay.” She smiled at him with affection. “I’ve no idea how we’d have managed without you and Lavender.”

He bowed. “It’s our pleasure, Hermione.” A flick of his wand brought the book to his outstretched hand. “I’ll have your list by Saturday. Even without it I’m betting you’ll have a few places in mind.”

“I already have several. Like you said, there are the great museums of the world for one. That this one was sitting in a case in central London tells me that I might find another in a similar situation. And then there are the libraries. That book is a good case in point. With that breakthrough last year that allowed us to shield electronics from magic we’ve been able to scan and cross reference the whole of the libraries at Hogwarts, the Ministry, and dozens of private collections. I’d never have found that book without Marietta’s work.”

“She’s worked hard on it, she has. It’s helped us too. So much of Muggle society is carried out on the internet now we need to be able to monitor it. Did you see her at the award ceremony? Though she was going to die from embarrassment, I did.” He laughed, and then looked in her eyes. “We’ll all be here to help, Hermione. You’re not alone.”

“I know.”

Seamus put his hand on her shoulder. “Lav and I will see you Saturday.” He stepped back, turned on his heel, and was gone.

Thirteen she thought.
Chapter Notes

A/N And so we begin. This is going to be a long one, several parts, and many chapters each. It all began with Tidy Time. When they found the stone this entire story formed in my mind. I’ve got it roughed in excel so I don’t make too many continuity errors. Everyone plays a part in his tale, so you will see all of your favorite characters at some point. Tell me what you think.

Hold your fire,
Keep it burning bright
Hold the flame ’til the dream ignites
A spirit with a vision is a dream
With a mission

Neil Peart

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down Under

Chapter 1

“The daughter of case Seven-hundred-twenty-three is showing the signs.”

“As we suspected she might. Assign her a number.”

“Nine-hundred-ninety-nine, auspicious.”

“It’s just a number, they mean nothing.”

“And a case worker?”
“She’s starting at Hogwarts, no need.”

“As you wish.”

Seven years passed.

“Case nine, nine, nine, survived and is thriving.”

“Have there been further signs?”

“A hint, a suspicion, however she is quite closed in her dealings with anyone but her very close circle of friends, and we have no sources inside that group.”

“Very well, keep her under watch, but do not move on her until we are sure.”

“As you wish.”

Seven more years passed.

“Have you read the book?”

“Yes, disturbing.”

“What they did…”

“Could only have been accomplished…”

“If she has ascended.”

“We have no proof.”

“So we continue to watch?”

“Yes.”

“As you wish.”

Chapter 1
Hermione Grainger Weasley walked across the kitchen in the Burrow and set her tea on the table. Molly Weasley, matriarch, and soon to become Grandmother for the eighth time, smiled at her favorite daughter in law. “Ron has told me all about it, Hermione dear. You have to do this; I think you might actually go mad if you didn’t.” She laughed. “He also told me how worried you are about Rose and Hugo, don’t be, they’ll be fine. You won’t be able to stop Rose from coming with you if you’re going somewhere even the slightest bit interesting, and Hugo is at the age where sleepovers with granddad are the best thing ever.” With the practiced skill of someone who has soothed a thousand worried brows, Molly stroked Hermione’s hand. “And I don’t think you’ll be away from home nearly as much as you think you will, you’ve found two without really trying.”

Hermione smiled at her. “I’d rather not trust blind luck, Molly.” She hung her head. “It’s just so daunting. I mean I have to keep it secret from almost everyone. Can you imagine what the Wizengamot would say?”

Molly chuckled and shook her head. “They’d argue about it for the next three hundred years.”

“Exactly! And I won’t have that delay.” Hermione said firmly, and sipped her tea. “So I have to do this without drawing Alan’s attention to what I’m doing; I have to preserve my relationship with my husband and children, I have to find eleven more stones that I have the barest hint of a clue where to find, and then I have to undo a great magical work by FREAKING MERLIN.” Looking quite deranged, she stared into the distance. “No pressure there.”

Molly was silently laughing in her chair. “I love you so, Hermione dear, but you do know you suffer quite badly from obsession, don’t you?”

Hermione smirked. “It’s been pointed out before, yes.”

Molly summoned the kettle from the stove with a flick of her wand. It floated to the table and gracefully poured more steaming water into the teapot.

“Healer Alistone said you should be walking more and summoning less, I believe.”

Molly pointed her wand at the kettle and sent it back to the stove. “Hermione dear, what colour is that kettle?”

She looked puzzled. “Black.”

“I rest my case.” She smiled, sat back, and stirred her tea. “So, where are you going to look first?

Hermione shook her head at her mother in law, recognizing she’d been bested yet again by the seemingly innocuous woman. “Seamus made me a list from Merlin’s book. I think the first place I’ll go is Australia, make it look like I’m taking Rose and Hugo back to show them around where I hid Mum and Dad.”

“Seamus and Lavender accompanying you?”

“Yeah, for this one at least.” She took a biscuit from the tray. “It’d look odd to the Minister if they didn’t. If it goes longer than two weeks I’ll send Ron, Hugo, and Seamus home.”

“And when Minister Wheaton starts asking questions what are we to say?”

“Luna and I think we have the perfect cover story,” said Hermione. “I’m going to tell Allan that working on the international treaty for the treatment of magical creatures requires digging into the history of the elves as part of the research. It also happens to be true.”
“He’s very perceptive, Hermione. Kingsley chose him as his assistant because of his intellect, not his charm, though he does have a fair bit of both. Now that he’s minister, he’ll have access to a great deal of information. I wouldn’t count on your search being a secret for very long.”

Hermione shrugged. “I’ll deal with that when it comes; right now I’ve got to figure out how to locate a one foot tall stone in the vastness of Australia.”

Molly leaned forward. “I assume you’ve brought this up in your little circle of friends?”

“Oh yes, they have some ideas,” said Hermione, and then she sighed. “But it will take a lot of work. Luna thinks if the conditions are right she might be able to sense a stone near her, Angelina is working on a spell with Katie and Cho to use one stone to find another, and Cho is also getting Dudley to use his computer to search for hints in the Muggle world.”

Molly smiled and asked, “How is Mrs. Dursley?”

“Thirty-two weeks, god I remember that,” said Hermione with a happy shake of the head. “Best few weeks of pregnancy. You can still get about and you really feel the baby.” She laughed. “Don’t know if Dudley is ready for her to have another baby yet, but ready or not he’s only got a month and a half left.”

Molly Weasley had seen quite a few expectant fathers in her life. “He’ll be fine. Cho is a strong one, and even though she had a rough last three months with Anna, this time it’s going normally. I don’t think she’ll have so much trouble.” She looked across the table at Hermione. “Padma and Parvati both work at the Ministry, are you including them in your search?”

“Of course, they’re my Sisters too. Padma is looking through the Auror library for me, and Parv is keeping an eye on Allan and Harry.”

Molly looked a bit confused. “Why Harry?”

Hermione smirked. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed this, Molly, but Harry tends to be a bit overprotective where people he cares about are concerned.”

They both laughed. “Too true, Hermione, too true. But he does know what you’re up to?”

“In a broad sense, yes. He knows I’m going after the stones, I didn’t tell him that I intend to break the enchantment though.”

Molly nodded. “He’ll put it together, you know that.”

“Yes, but I hope to have most or all of the stones by then.” Her fierce look was back. “I will do this, Molly. I have to, and I won’t let anyone stop me.”

Molly Weasley knew Hermione better than Hermione knew herself in many ways, and she smiled at her. “Oh, of that I have no doubt. Just be careful, you never know what you’ll dig up. These stones have been hidden for a long time. To stay that way they’ve had to have powerful protections placed around them.”

“I figured that out fairly quickly myself. I’ll be careful. It’s interesting that the one from Greece was in the Museum though. If the Muggles got through its protections they may be so old that they’re failing, but I haven’t found any information on where or how it was found. The placard said it was from Kyersys but there wasn’t much more.”

“Humm, interesting. When do you leave for Australia?”
“Thursday next.” Hermione sat back and smiled, looking into the distance.

“How pleasant memories?” Molly asked.

She nodded. “Very. When Ron and I went to find Mum and Dad after all we’d been through it was like a whole different life. The Australian ministry treated us like royalty, and they helped me find my parents easily. Ron and I hardly had to search at all. They even helped Mum and Dad sort out the transfer of their practice, all Ron and I had to do for the last two weeks was to see some of the sights and sit on the beach.” *And snog each other senseless.*

“As I recall Daniel and Jean weren’t particularly pleased when you undid the memory charm.”

Hermione tried to hide her blush at the memories. “No, Dad was furious and Mum was hurt, but after a bit of yelling, mostly by your youngest son and my dad, they came round.”

Molly smiled. “Daniel told me that was the moment he knew he approved of Ron for you. He said Ron handed you his wand and stood toe to toe with him, is that true?”

Hermione grinned broadly at that memory too. “Yes.”

Molly glowed with pride. “He’s his father’s son.”

Hermione nodded. “He certainly is.”

Rose Weasley walked into the kitchen with an open book in front of her. Feeling with her feet she found a chair and slid into it. “Morning, Gram. Morning, Mum,” she said, eyes never leaving the book.

Hermione looked over at her nine, no ten! year old, so like her at that age. “What’s the reading for today, Rosie?”

Rose held the book up a little higher so her mother could see the title; it was Hermione’s own intermediate transfiguration text.

Hermione smiled as she spread some jam on a piece of toast for her daughter. “I see, a little light reading for a summer day, hmm dear?”

“It’s not so hard, Mum. I get what he’s on about; I just wish I had a wand to do it with,” Rose said as she took the toast from her mother.

“One very short year away dear and you’ll have your own,” Molly told her.

“James gets his next month,” Rose grumbled and took a bite.

“He’s also firmly eleven and not just barely ten, Rosie,” Hermione said. “Patience, my little wonder, please, patience.”

“We can still practice with a stick and the like, right?”

“Yes, yes,” Hermione said. “But still and all, no unforgivable curses ever, and no dueling either. Even without a wand you can still produce magic.”

The door to the kitchen opened and Lavender Finnigan stepped through. “Good morning all,” she said as she went to the cupboard and retrieved her mug. Hermione handed her the tray with the milk and sugar while Lavender poured her tea. “I see Rose is ready. Where’s your lay about brother?”
“Laying about,” Rose said with a smirk, finishing her toast.

“Well unstick your nose from that book and get him up and ready. We’ve got to meet up with James, Al, and Lilly in half an hour.”

Rose rolled her eyes and set the book on the table. “Yes, Aunt Lavender,” she said melodramatically. The three women chuckled as Rose went up the stairs to find her brother.

“She’s brilliant, Hermione,” Lavender said suddenly serious. “You know that, right?”

“Oh yes, I know she’s very smart.”

Lavender smiled at her friend. She was still occasionally amazed at how close she and Hermione had become. “No, Hermione, ‘very smart’ is an understatement of enormous proportions. She’s every bit as intelligent as you are and maybe even more so. I’ve given this a fair bit of thought, and I think you should start talking to the Headmistress soon about advanced classes for her.”

Hermione looked puzzled. “You really think so?”

“If you just stick her in the normal classes she’ll be bored in short order, and a bored Rose Weasley is a bad thing. You know that as well as I do.”

Hermione closed her eyes and nodded. “Yes, I do, very well.” She leaned against the table. “Let’s talk more about this later.” Their eyes met. “Thanks, Lav. I know we’ve told you before, but Ginny and I… I just don’t know how we’d have managed without you and Shay.”

“And you’ve had us say it’s been our honor and pleasure often enough I hope.” Lavender smiled warmly at her friend.

A thunder of footsteps preceded a ruffled looking, freckle faced boy darting into the kitchen and directly to the stove. He snatched two sausages from the pan and shoved one in his mouth. Lavender assumed her nanny role immediately.

“Hugo Remus Weasley!”

Hugo jumped and whirled around wide eyed to face his nanny. “Murng an Lavnd,” he said through a mouthful of sausage.

“Morning, Aunt Lavender,” she huffed, and took a plate from the cupboard and shoved it into his hand. “Plates! They actually work well, you see?” She plucked a napkin from the holder. “And these do marvels for keeping greasy fingers from staining newly laundered clothes.”

Over Hugo’s head she could see Molly shaking with a silent laugh.

“Now sit! And eat like a human instead of an animal.” She pushed him bodily into a chair.

“Yes, Aunt Lavender.”

Lavender smiled and kissed the top of his head. “Good boy.”

“Are you excited about your outing today?” Molly asked her grandson while she buttered some toast for him.

“Yeah, I guess. It’s really Rose and Lilly’s thing though.”
Hermione tried in vain to smooth his hair. “I think you’ll find this part of the history of wizarding England very interesting. I was amazed when I found out the real story behind Stonehenge and Avebury. Plus I understand your going to Queerditch, that you should love.”

“As long as James, Al, and Hugo here behave it’ll be the after lunch stop. There’s the Quidditch museum, the original pitch, broom rides, and if you’re really good I’ve arranged a surprise,” Lavender told him as Rose came back into the kitchen.

Rose, as avid a Quidditch fan as any Weasley, perked up. “You didn’t say anything about that.” Lavender smiled sweetly at her. “No, I suppose I didn’t.”

You are the best, the absolute best. Hermione thought. “Well I must be off to the Ministry.” She knelt between her son and daughter and hugged them to her. “Be good, and have a wonderful day, my special boy and my wonder girl. I’ll want a full report when I get home.”

She rose and hugged Lavender then her mother in law. “Have fun, Lav, and I’ll see you Sunday, Mum. Thanks for letting us stay while Ron was away.”

“Any time, dear,” Molly said, and hugged her again.

With a smile for them all Hermione closed the door behind her and Disapparated.

The Ministry, as always, was a hub of activity. As she walked through the atrium past the fountain she stopped and let the fire for her work rekindle. After the war was over the hideous effigy that had been placed there by Thickness and Umbridge had been replaced by a renewed image of magical beings, but that task, being not of the highest priority, had been handed off to the first volunteer, Hermione. She laughed to herself as she often did at that memory. She hadn’t really thought of it as subversive until Katie had pointed it out. Every visitor to the ministry walked past that fountain, it was the first thing they saw, it was their first impression of the Ministry, and it spoke of an entirely different relationship between the peoples of the magical world.

There were significant changes. A wizard and witch still stood at the center of the plinth, but instead of an elf staring adoringly up at them, Kreacher stood proudly by their side, the locket of Regulus Black on his chest and a cleaver in his hand. On their other side stood Firenze, a bow in his left hand and his right hand on the witches shoulder. In front of these four stood a goblin looking stern and proud. Behind them all stood the hippogriff, Buckbeak, with a thestral at his side, and looming over all of them was a dragon with broken shackles hanging from his legs. It was a true picture of friendship and shared struggle and triumph. She was very happy with the design and goblins had been pleased to make it for the Ministry.

Hermione looked at the image of her friend Keacher, so damaged by the servitude he had been forced to bear. He hadn’t worn that tea towel toga since Harry had freed him. Hermione’s mental image of the elf now had him dressed in the morning suit he wore as Harry’s butler. It had taken a while to convince him to let Harry set him free, but once he had his freedom he embraced it. He still worked at Grimmauld Place, first for Harry, Ginny, Ron, and Hermione, and now for Teddy, but instead of being a slave he was paid, and he had his own little house out in the garden. The best part though was that the aged elf had become her dear friend.

Looking into the eyes of the statue of her friend a lone tear streaked her face. “All of you,” she said in a fierce whisper. “All of you.”
A rush of air preceded the appearance of the grassy field under their feet. Hermione dropped lightly to the ground while Ron helped Hugo and Rose to their feet.

“You’ll get used to it.” She heard Ron say. “Took me eight or ten portkeys before I learned how to land on my feet.”

Two people walked up to them from across the field. “Welcome to Australia!” Seamus said as he and Lavender hugged first Rose and Hugo then Ron and Hermione. “You’re all checked in at the hotel, and Lav has a room at the national archives reserved for you starting tomorrow, Hermione.” He turned to the children. “And, while your mam is locked away researching, we have tickets to the Walaroo verses Sydney Quidditch match.”

The two nearly toppled Seamus over with their tackle of thanks. “Aye, you’re welcome,” he said laughing. “There’s one for you too, Ron.”

“Thanks, Shay,” said Ron as he turned to his wife. “Not that I don’t love spending time with you, my love, but a…”

“It’s a Quidditch match,” Hermione said rolling her eyes. “As if I’d want to keep you from it.”

“I love you,” Ron said and kissed her.

“Alright, break it up you two,” Lavender said chuckling. “There are children present.”
“Really? Good for them,” Ron said and kissed Hermione again.

“Come on, then,” Seamus said as he grabbed Rose’s hand. “They’ll catch up.”

Lavender took Hugo’s hand and pointed a row of eucalyptus bordering the field. “A Muggle taxi is waiting just over there beyond those trees.”

Hugo’s face lit even more, he loved riding in cars. “Excellent!” he exclaimed.

Rose shook her head. “Miniature granddad,” she muttered.

Seamus chuckled at her, and led them across the field and through a gap in the trees. A very large vehicle sat by the side of the road bordering the row of trees.

“What the bloody hell is that?” Ron asked Seamus as he and Hermione caught up to the group.

“Aye, I know,” said Seamus with a laugh. We needed something that would hold the six of us and that’s all they had. It’s called a ‘Hummer’. Damn funny name if you ask me.”

Ron shook his head. “Muggles,” he said, and smiled at the confounded driver who opened the door for him.

“Here you go boy,” said Seamus, and he hefted Hugo up into the giant vehicle. Lavender helped Rose up to the first step on the little stairway that the driver had folded out beneath the rear door. The children crawled into the very back of the car and sat in the jump seats they found there. Lavender, Seamus, and Hermione took the middle row, and Ron sat in the front passenger seat.

“Everyone all secured?” the driver asked as he started the engine.

Lavender turned in her seat and checked that the children had fastened their seatbelts. “Yes, all secured, Charles.”

“Right, well, Hotel Realm then?” he asked Ron.

Seamus answered from behind him. “Aye, Charles, but take that nice drive we talked about.”

The driver nodded and put the enormous vehicle in gear. “Right you are, Mr. Finnigan.”

They toured the area surrounding the city of Canberra for the next hour and a half. Hugo and Rose saw their first kangaroo, and Lavender pointed out a flock of cockatoo flying overhead at one point. The countryside they passed through was less lush than England, but teeming with wildlife. Now and again they passed large fields dotted with sheep. “More sheep ‘n people in Australia, especially here in Capitol,” the driver told them. Soon they entered the suburbs of Canberra and in a short time after they were in the city’s downtown core.

“Hotel Realm, right up by the Capitol mall,” Charles announced.

Hermione had been in many cities, and Canberra was similar to most of them. Crowds of suited and fashionably dressed Muggle men and women made their way to and from the large office buildings that dominated the center of the city. There were a few nice hotels scattered among the office blocks, but the driver continued out of the business district and to a grand circle avenue that ringed the capitol complex. Their hotel faced the Australian parliament, and as the driver opened her door Hermione could smell a variety of different foods as she stepped out of the huge machine that had brought them.
“This is a Muggle hotel, so be on your best behavior, and no mention of magic,” Lavender instructed the children. “This goes for the two of you as well,” she said to Ron and Seamus as an afterthought.

The two men spluttered and tried for a retort but all that they managed were inarticulate syllables. Hermione smiled at her friend. “Come on, Lav, let’s get this mess sorted. I’m hungry,” she said cocking her head toward their husbands and her children. “And I’m sure they are too.”

“May I help you with your luggage?” the bellman asked from behind Seamus.

“Ah, no, me lad,” said Seamus with a wink at Hermione. “Their bags are already up in their rooms, but thanks all the same.”

Hermione smirked and patted her coat pocket. All of their luggage and everything else she thought she might need on this excursion was safely there in her faithful beaded bag. The Hotel Realm sported a glass enclosed lift in the atrium and Hugo demanded that they ride up to their floor in it. Ron was not a fan of lifts, especially glass ones, so he chose four flights of stairs instead. His Auror training a distant memory, he was bit out of breath when he made it to their suite. Two bedrooms lay off a large common area. The room was huge compared to most of the rooms Ron had been in on assignment, or the ones he and Hermione had been in when they traveled before Rose. The children went to the floor to ceiling windows and gaped out at the Australian Capitol.

The park that sat across from the hotel was not what the children were used to seeing. The grass was browning in the sun and the trees were sparsely leaved. “What’s wrong with the grass, Mum?” Hugo asked.

“Water is not easy to come by here as it is in England, dear.” His mother told him. “I’m sure they just let the rain water the plants.” That is a rather dismal park, she thought to herself. More like a vacant lot.

She turned to her children. “Alright, back home it’s well past dinner time, but here it’s just barely ten AM. We’ll have a meal and then see some sights. I want you to stay awake as long as you can. By tomorrow night you should be used to the time change.”

After unpacking and spreading out in the suite they made their way back to the lobby of the hotel. Seamus had a quick conversation with the concierge who directed them to a restaurant a few blocks away. They chose to walk. They passed the national museum on their way to the restaurant, and Hermione complemented Seamus and Lavender on their choice of hotel.

The restaurant turned out a very fine lunch for them. Hugo ate like a starving man, much to his mother’s embarrassment and his father’s amusement. Lavender laughed, leaned in to Hermione, and said, “Just like his dad, must be in the genes.” Rose ate daintily while she read Hermione’s third year charms book. With full stomachs and heavy eyes they made their way back to the hotel and the concierge arranged for them to go out for the afternoon on a “Hop on, hop off” bus pass.

The tour guide at the front of the bus handed them earpieces that Seamus and Hermione had to explain to the rest of their little group how to use. Rose and Hugo chose to sit on the open top level of the double decked bus and Lavender accompanied them. Seamus, Ron and Hermione chose the shade of the lower level. Ron retrieved his children and their nanny at the stop for the national museum.

Hermione inspected every case.

The children were awed by the sheer volume of artifacts from Australia’s past. Starting with displays of prehistoric life though the conquest of the continent by the British, the displays and dioramas were
extensive and very informative. “They really didn’t treat the natives very well at first,” Hermione said to Seamus quietly as they gazed at a bounty notice. It proclaimed a two pound payment for every dead aboriginal male, one pound for each female, and fifty pence per child.

“Did nearly the same in Ireland for a bit,” he said bitterly. “There’s a reason for the troubles, even if I do think they all feckin’ idjits.”

“Well at least we don’t hunt the elves,” said Hermione with a small amount of pride in her voice. Seamus looked at her with a stony expression. “Seamus?”

He cleared his throat, started to speak, stopped, drew a breath, and started again. “When I was in the Auror camps I heard one of the guys talking about a mission he went on as a trainee.”

Hermione’s face became hard. “They didn’t.”

“Seamus shook his head. “No, not the Aurors, but the ones they were after. They did, for sport.”

Hermione seethed for almost half an hour. Her fury burned in her. I will stop all of this! She thought. There were times in her life she marveled at the depths that humans, Wizard and Muggle alike, could sink to, this was one. She looked at painting by a native artist of a particularly brutal slaughter, and though, never again, for anyone, never again!

The sun was sinking below the horizon when they got back to their hotel. Hugo was a walking zombie, Rose was in a trance, and Ron’s eyes were drooping. Seamus let them into their room and Lavender helped the children out of their cloths and into their pajamas. They were asleep in moments.

“That’s fucking enough!” Ron shouted in her father’s face. “She’s a hero! And she’s said she’s sorry. When she said there was no other way, believe her. There wasn’t!”

“Ron,” she said.

“No, you didn’t tell all of it, love.” Ron had sat patiently for almost three and a half hours while Hermione had told her parents all the things that had happened to her in the preceding three years that they had been kept blissfully ignorant of. He only spoke when Hermione had asked him to fill in a part of the story. When she had finally got to the end of their tale he had slid next to her and wrapped his arm around her shoulder as she cried. Her father had become angry, and Ron had handed Hermione his wand and stood to face Daniel Granger. He turned back to her father. “She doesn’t want you to know this, but you have to. They came. We checked. They would have done anything, everything, and believe me and especially your daughter, when we say everything it’s…”

Her father’s widened in shock at Ron’s haunted expression, and Ron saw it.

“I failed her,” Ron said dejectedly. “She, she didn’t tell you the bad stuff, what happened the night we were caught.”

“Ron you couldn’t have,” Hermione said.

“I could have known how to protect you if I’d paid as much attention to you as I should have.” He turned back to her and she stood. “I could have…” He hadn’t really cried, he hadn’t really done anything for himself since his return to them in the Forest of Dean. His sole focus had been her.
Helping Harry had been secondary; it had only taken two days to figure that out. She was still angry though, and his constant repentance and honest sorrow at leaving had only just started to melt her fury when they had been caught, and her whole world changed.

Her parents forgotten, she had cupped his cheek. “You always pay attention to me, I see it. You just sometimes miss what I say. She would have done the same to you. I’m glad it was me. I’m glad it was me and not you or Harry. You didn’t fail me, you saved me.” A tear slid down her face. “I heard you.” It was the first time she had spoken about the time they were apart. “When she withdrew the curse, I could hear you. I knew then, I knew.” and she was right back there, in the drawing room, writhing on the floor. In her mind’s eye Bellatrix stood over her laughing and screaming. “I could hear love, in your voice, I could hear it. Luna said that’s what saved me, and I’m sure she’s right. Your love fought the curse. You saved me, Ron, then and when you fought them in the drawing room and rescued me …”

He choked. “I couldn’t get out, we could hear you, screaming, dying, and I couldn’t get out, and then Dobby came, and Wormtail, and we were fighting, and then she had you and… and time stopped. I thought… I thought.” Tears were flowing down his face. He hyperventilated and swallowed hard. “And then we were fighting again, and all I could think of was getting you out of there.”

“And you did, Ron.” She hugged him and rested her head on his chest. “I would be dead if you hadn’t risked your life over and over. Not only then. You saved me a dozen times in the battle, you always stood in front of me whenever we were in danger, yes I noticed, and you are the most loyal and brave man I know.”

“I wasn’t brave, I was terrified.”

She smiles and recites Professor McGonagall’s speech to the first years. “Courage isn’t lack of fear; courage is doing what’s right despite your fear. You will be frightened many times in your life, but you are Gryffindor.”

He smiles sadly. “Yeah, I suppose you’re right, as always.”

And suddenly Ron is in Jean Granger’s arms, and she’s weeping and clutching him with all her might. And Hermione’s father is a sobbing mess in his daughter’s arms, and he’s saying he’s sorry over and over.

Ron jerked awake. The sun was just starting to lighten the sky. He looked to his right and found his wife watching him with a small, knowing smile. “Haven’t had one of those in a while,” she said and kissed him.

“Yeah, I guess being here brought it all back.” He sighed and looked at the ceiling. “Well I’m up now, suppose I should see about breakfast for Miracle Boy and Wonder Girl.” He heard the crunching of a mint being ground between his wife’s teeth and smiled. Her arm snaked around him and slid the top of his pajamas up so she could feel his still hardened muscles.

“Let them sleep,” she said and put a mint in his mouth.
Hermione was humming to herself in post coital bliss while she basted the eggs when Rose, Hugo and Lavender joined her in the kitchen area of the suite. Her blonde friend smirked and rolled her eyes as she got her charges seated, her heightened senses informing her of their mother and father’s early romp. “Pleasant morning,” she asked with a snicker.

Hermione smiled back, nonplussed. “Lovely, and yours?”

Lavender winked slyly. “The same, apparently,” she said. Lavender sat and put a few sugar cubes in her cup then a splash of milk. Hermione filled the cup a moment later. Their eyes meet. “Aren’t the sheets lovely? They feel so nice against every part of your body.”

Hermione smiled coyly. “Seven hundred count Egyptian cotton. Yes, I wish we had them at home,” she said with a slight whine. She handed a plate of bacon to her youngest, and then a plate of toast to Lavender. “Quidditch for you, National archives for me today is it?”

Lavender chuckled. “Yes, Seamus was quite full of himself. He got seats in the VIP box for us all. That’s what he and Ron are off doing now.”

“We’re in the VIP box?” Rose asked excitedly. “That’s great, Aunt Lavender. I love being close up.”

“As long as it’s not full of people wanting pictures,” Hugo added with an eye roll.

“We’re not in England, dear,” Hermione said as she bushed her hand down the back of his head and sat his eggs in front of him. “There’ll be people that know you by your name, but I don’t think you’ll have any trouble out in the crowd.” She laughed. “And besides you know how well your aunt and uncle Finnigan handle overly enthusiastic admirers.”

Hugo laughed. He’d been out many times with Lavender or Seamus, and they were adept at deflecting people that were a little too interested in the Potter or Weasley children. “One growl from Aunt Lavender usually does it,” Rose chuckled, and she took some of the bacon from the plate Hugo had sat on the table.

“I do not Growl,” Lavender said with a smirk. “I speak lowly and firmly, it just sounds like a
growl.” Her head tilted sideways. “Ah, this’ll be Ron and Seamus.”

A few seconds later there was a sound at the door, and the two men entered the suite. “Seriously, Shay, the Sidney Spiders?” Ron said incredulous.

“I though’ you was over that,” Seamus said and smiled over Ron’s shoulder just for the people in the kitchen to see.

“Well yeah, well, mostly, but being surrounded by people with spiders on their heads is going to be a bit weird.” Rose and Hugo couldn’t contain their laughter another second. Hugo cracked first and guffawed in his seat, and then Rose followed him. “Yeah, all very funny to you two, you’ve never had a three ton spider tell his kids to eat you.” This only made the children laugh more and the other adults snicker.

Seamus put his hand on Ron’s shoulder. “You’ll be fine. The spider hats only move when they score, and Sidney is just about as good as Chudley, so I think you’re safe.”

“They move?”

Seamus looked at the floor and shrugged. “A little.”

“Greaaaaat.”

~(:)~

“You’re alright then?” the archivist asked. “We don’t get researchers from Oxford here all that often, and we want you to have everything you need.”

Hermione smiled back at the young woman. Clarice was being very helpful without being too cloying, a trait Hermione valued in her own staff. “You’ve been splendid, Clarice. My investigations are producing some startling results. There are tales of little people everywhere, from the stories of elves and fairies in Europe, to what they’re calling the “hobbits” of Indonesia. There has to be a common thread.”

“Well, good luck with your search,” Clarice said with a happy wave, and she left for her office in the upper floors of the massive complex. The research rooms were utilitarian but nicely appointed. A computer residing on the archive network provided access to the entirety of the Australian National Document Archive, the complete catalogue of items in the National Trust Museum inventory, and a constantly updated feed from various archaeological sites around the vast country. With a satisfied sigh she began her search.

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“And just like that Sidney scores again!” The crowd erupted in cheers and two foot wide spiders on the heads of half the crowd did a twisted version of an Irish jig. “This is the best game Sidney has had in the last thirty years, you fans are lucky to be here,” Colin McElroy’s voice said though the large horns hanging from the graceful arches spanning the stadium seating. The arches were the
supports for the sail like shades that protected the crowd from the ever-present Australian sun, a sun
that mercilessly baked the players in the forty degree heat.

“Yeah, really lucky,” Ron said snidely at Seamus.

The Irishman had the good manners to look away before he chuckled. The Sidney mascot wasn’t
just any spider, the Sydney mascot was the Australian Funnel Web Spider. Terrifying in its own
right, the funnel web is five inches across with two inch fangs. Their venom is lethal, and the males
are very aggressive at certain times of the year. All things considered they were Ron’s worst
nightmare from his childhood. The ones on the fans hats were very lifelike and, unfortunately for
Ron, ten times as big as their living counterparts.

The dancing didn’t bother him nearly as much as the hissing. Whenever Wallaroo made points the
hat spiders stood on their hind legs and hissed at the opposing team. Apparently the funnel web
spider does this when angered, but Ron found that when five thousand giant spiders did it at once it
made him want to run as far and as fast as he could. Other than that he was having a grand time.

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Beginning in 1931 and continuing to May 1934 Miss Cohn carved fairies, dwarfs, gnomes, a
jackass, koalas, flying foxes and a host of other Australian animals and birds into the tree. She
incorporated the knots and curves to transform the tree trunk into an enduring work of art.

The tree's plaque bares the inscription:

"I have carved in a tree in the Fitzroy Gardens for you, and the fairies, but mostly for the fairies and
those who believe in them, for they will understand how necessary it is to have a fairy sanctuary - a
place that is sacred and safe as a home should be to all living creatures."

Hermione placed the printed page and photo of the carving neatly in her growing file. Fitzroy
Gardens and Miss Cohn’s surviving relatives were numbers fifteen and sixteen on her list so far. The
first place she wanted to search was an archaeological site in Cape Melville National Park. The
reports from the dig were very interesting, and the Muggles doing the dig had reported effects that to
Hermione had sounded like a failing ward.

The Carisbrook stone arrangement was next, then several other lesser known circles and cairns, and
after those she was thinking a trip to Uluru would be in order, but first she wanted to find some
Aboriginal wizarding families to speak with. She was sure there would be some lingering remnants
of Merlyn’s travels in their myths.

She glanced at the clock in the little research room. Three in the afternoon it told her. Five hours had
resulted in a significant number of leads, and she was looking forward to her excursion into
wizarding Australia in the morning. She kept finding references to a character the first white settlers
had found in the aboriginal oral tradition. “Merry Mac” was a white skinned traveler in some very
old legends, and she was sure that there was a lead in the tales. She just needed someone to tell her
the stories.

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“We are Sydney, Fa La La,”
“The Spiders catch the win, Tra La La,”

“You’re caught in our web, Mwa ha ha!”

“And we’ll bite you in the end, Tra, la la.”

The children’s voices preceded their entrance to the suit. The door flew open and Hermione’s family and guardians entered the sitting area in a chaos of conversation, shouts, and laughter.

“I take it Sydney won?” Hermione asked.

Hugo began talking and didn’t seem to take a breath for a full minute. “Mum, Mum, it was the coolest match I’ve ever been to. First, in the opening ceremony, they had a native shaman bless the pitch. Rosie thought that was really neat. And then they brought out the players and they threw favors to the crowd.” He looked at his sister “Rosie got a little bundle that transfigured into a Sydney hat, and I got a Wallaroo pennant that shot fireworks when they scored. I traded with Uncle Finnigan at the half and got his hat so Rosie and I matched.” He and his sister traded smiles. “Sydney had their best game in a long time. We got to see all sorts of really incredible plays, and every time they scored the spider hats danced. It was so neat.”

“Charlie Johnson, Sidney’s star chaser? He found us after and chatted us up. I asked about this one play he made.”

“Stephenson corner dive,” Seamus said, and Hermione gave him the “I have no idea” look.

“Yeah he said it was the first time he successfully did it. Last few tries he would up in hospital. He banked round the left side hoop of the Sydney goal, did a Taylor spiral between the Wallaroo beaters, and then a back inside loop down at the chaser with the Quaffle. He snatched it and pulled up just before he would have plowed. No one but the keeper was at the Wallaroo end, so he was able to fly down and score easily. Mum, it was so cool!”

His eyes were lit with excitement. “Even when Wallaroo scored it was cool. The spiders on the hats would rear up and hiss; it was louder than the Hogwarts express was when we saw Ted and Vic off, and then the fireworks!”

“Rear up and hiss?” she asked with barely concealed humor looking into Ron’s eyes.

“Yeah,” he said sarcastically.

She had the good sense to hide her smile behind her hand, but she couldn’t stop the shake of her shoulders.

“Ha, Ha, I’m going to the loo,” Ron said. He kissed her cheek as he passed, and whispered, “We hide the hats when we get home,” in her ear.

“Mm hmm,” she managed, desperately holding in her laughter.

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“Welcome aboard the Brindabella,” the man in the tuxedo said. “Your reservation is under?”

Hermione followed Hugo’s gaze to the tray of deserts being levitated across the dining room. “Eat what you ask for at dinner and you'll have your choice,” she said, and patted his head.

He nodded and looked up at her with a smile. *How long?* She asked herself. *How long will you be this perfect little boy?* She smoothed his hair and let the moment of reverie pass. Ginny was only mildly jealous. Rose and Hugo were next to ideal children, as opposed to James and a slightly less devious Albus. Fortunately Lilly looked to Rose as a role model, something Ginny thanked Hermione for at every opportunity. Angelina had offered, occasionally, to give Fred to any member of the family crazy enough to take him. Hermione thought herself extremely lucky.

“If you will follow me, your table is ready,” the Matre’d of the exclusive wizarding restaurant announced.

As the troop marched across the restaurant, Hermione herd the whispers start. “Damn,” she swore quietly.

“What?” Ron asked from her side.

“We’ve been noticed,” she said, slightly annoyed.

Ron smiled. “Yeah, think we’ll get the show?”

Hermione chuckled. “Oh, I hope not. Lav and Shay need a holiday as much as we do.”

‘The Show’ was what they called the speech that Lavender and Seamus delivered the admiring when they were recognized in a public place. Usually it was Lavender doing the talking while Seamus looked stern over her shoulder. Because of her wolfish nature she tended to coerce without having to resort to full on intimidation, which she was also adept at delivering.

After being sat at a large table next to a window they found that the whispers had died and been replaced by stolen glances and embarrassed smiles. As their water and menus were delivered by a smiling young blonde woman, a girl of perhaps thirteen approached them.

“I’m sorry to disturb you,” she said politely. “Are you Hermione Granger?” she asked in a voice filled with awe.

Hermione smiled at her and held out her hand. “Weasley now, and you are?”

“Mary Collins,” the girl said as the breath whooshed out of her. “I did a paper on the war in Great Britain last term. Almost everything I used came from your writings, you and Mrs. Scamander.”

Hermione laughed along with Lavender. “Well, Luna is as good a source as I am, and I’m happy I helped.”

“Thank you, thank you so much,” Mary said. “The more I read what you all endured…”

Hermione took her hand. “Thank my husband here,” she said smiling at Ron. “And thank my friends Seamus and Lavend…” she winced “I mean Selene and Frank.”

Mary had caught the slip. Her eyes opened very wide. She looked at Lavender and mouthed “Lavender Brown.”

Lavender leaned across Hermione and took the girls hand. “Yes,” she said in a whisper. “But that’s a secret. Can you help us keep it?”
Mary nodded with an expression of wonder on her face. Among children Lavender was far more famous than any of the rest of Dumbledore’s Army, including Harry, a fact that made him smile with glee. “The Good Wolf”, Hermione’s children’s book about Lavender’s life, was the single largest selling book in the wizarding world, and it sat on almost every wizarding child’s nightstand.

“Thank you, Mary,” Lavender said, and leaned back. “Before you leave, come back, I have something for you.”

Hermione nodded at her friend as Mary walked back to her parent’s table, and then she caught Mary’s parent’s eyes mouthed “Good girl.”

A man began to rise from a table nearby but Seamus got the man’s attention and shook his head. The man looked chagrined, smiled, and resumed his seat. That seemed to be everyone that was compelled to speak to them. The rest of the guests glanced now and again at them with the occasional smile and nod, perfectly acceptable in Hermione’s experience. In Great Britain every Weasley and every Potter were major celebrities among the wizarding population, and the years hadn’t dimmed their fame. Going out in public was an odyssey.

Lake Burley Griffin, the artificial lake in the middle of the capitol, drifted by as they ate a wonder meal from the land and the waters around Australia. Hugo was obscured by the mountain of crab in front of him. Rose patiently and daintily, for a Weasley, made her way through her lobster. Ron had two tails and a medium steak in front of him for a bit, and Hermione had opted to try some of the more exotic fare available. Her grilled kangaroo with mushrooms, onions, and a black pepper sauce was delicious, and the baked emu in cream sauce, that Seamus had and shared a bit with her, was glorious. Lavender, of course, had them run a steak through a warm room. Everyone at their table had long ago gotten over the sight of the beautiful blonde woman eating a hunk of rare to the point of blue meat.

Just after the waitress had taken their desert orders Mary and her parents appeared. “Thanks for indulging Mary,” her father said. “She recognized you straight away.” He laughed.

“It’s fine, really. It’s much worse for us in England. She was no trouble at all.” Hermione told him and then turned to Mary’s mother. “She scored well on the paper?”

Ron chuckled and said, “That would be your major concern.” He shook his head.

“Yes, Very well,” Mary’s mother said. “She got a couple of marks off for grammar, but the content was perfect.”

Hermione looked at Mary. “Excellent, Mary, you keep up your good work and I’m certain we’ll meet again.”

Mary beamed at her, and then Lavender handed her a small blue book. “You did well not revealing what you know, this is your reward.”

Mary’s hands trembled. “My copy’s so old it’s in tatters.”

Lavender smiled. “It’s good you have a new one then. Go ahead and open it.”

Mary looked down at the cover of the book she knew so well. “The Good Wolf by Hermione Weasley, art by Dean Thomas” was emblazoned across the top, and the cover illustration showed Lavender in full wolf with an infant Rose in her arms and a toddler James hanging on to her clawed hand. She opened the book, and on the front piece Lavender had written, “To Mary, my little secret keeper. Do continue to be loyal, courageous, and honest. Your friend, Lavender Brown.” Beneath
the inscription was part of a huge paw print that covered the rest of the page.

Mary was speechless. Her mother took Lavender’s hand. “Thank you so much,” she said as she looked at Lavender, then Hermione, Ron, and Seamus. “I never expected to meet you. We never expect to get the chance to say thank you. Thank you Mrs. Weasley, Mr. Weasley,” she lowered her voice to a whisper. “Miss Brown,”

“Finnigan,” Lavender said with a smile.

“Mrs. Finnigan,” Mary’s mother continued with a smile of her own. “Mr. Finnigan. Thank you, for everything, thank you all so much.” She looked down at her still mute daughter. “Is it possible for Mary to write to thank you too?”

“Of course,” Hermione said. “Send it to ‘The Burrow, Ottery St. Catchpole, Surry, UK.’ We’ll get it.”

Mary’s father chuckled. “Let’s be off and let these folks have desert,” He announced and then looked to Ron. His expression became very serious. “Thank you,” he said and looked at Hermione. “And thank Potter for us all.” He gathered his family, and with smiles they bade farewell.

“That was easier than usual,” Seamus said.

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“Mmm, love you,” Ron said in her ear as they cuddled.

“Love you too,” Hermione replied. She curled into his side and laid her arm over him. They had slept this way since the morning after the battle. She found early on that if he wasn’t in the bed next to her she had brutal nightmares. Sometimes they featured Bellatrix and her knife, but most times it was Tom Riddle tormenting her in her sleep.

“You and Lav have a plan for tomorrow?” Ron asked.

She nodded against his chest. “Yes, we thought we’d go up to Cape Melville National Park and look around the dig, then well go to Fitzroy gardens and have a look at the tree. Lavender thinks that finding spell Padma and Blaize developed will allow us to locate Carola Cohn’s descendants, if she has any. My research doesn’t suggest she ever married nor had children.”

“She could have been a witch,” Ron said. “If someone looks you up in the muggle records it won’t show you as married either.”

“I was thinking just that,” she said. “We have to go into wizarding Australia, much as I loathe the idea.”

“It wasn’t so bad this evening,” he said and hugged her close. “Besides, Shay and Lav.”

“I know,” she sighed. “I’d just like to not be famous for a day.”

“I’d like for my hair to quit leaving me like a bowtruckle running from a fire!” he said and chuckled. “Life’s hard, my love.”

“You’re an arse,” she said with a smile in her voice.
“You’ve know that for a while, love.”

She nodded again. “Yes, I have, but you’re my arse,” she said and hugged him.

“No,” he said low and husky. He cupped her bum and squeezed. This is your arse, and it’s still great.” The kiss went on longer than she thought it would, and she smiled into it as her rolled her onto her back.

“Even after this morning?” she asked as he vanished her night shirt that happened to be one of his old Cannons shirts.

“We’re on holiday.”

She vanished his pajama bottoms. “Yes, in fact we are.”
Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down under

Chapter 4

The snap of apparition in the suite announced Hermione and Lavender returning from their exploratory trip to the Carisbrook site.

“Well?” Ron asked.

“Well then, we off to the dig?” Seamus asked.

“Yes, I think so.” She turned to her children. “Carisbrook was near here, but Cape Melville is on the northeastern end of the country, so it’ll be rather a lot hotter. Best change into shorts and thin shirts.”

While Lavender helped Rose and Hugo into lighter clothing Hermione went to the kitchen area and began packing lunch for a mob. Half a dozen bacon and egg sandwiches for Ron and Hugo, Rose preferred cheese and mustard on hers, two egg salads for Seamus, The rarest roast beef in Canberra laid over a few slices of Rose’s cheese for Lavender, and a chicken salad for her graced the rest of the loaf of bread. Crisps, a bag of fruits, a dozen large bottles of water, and half a dozen prepackaged fruit pies went into the beaded bag.

When Lavender returned to the living area of the suite, Hugo and Rose were in not quite matching sets of blue and gold shirts and cargo shorts and trainers. She was wearing a light dress and sturdy sandals. “I’ve got an outfit for you too, Hermione,” she said. “It’s laid out on your bed.”

“Thanks, Lav,” Hermione told her with a smile.

“It was no problem,” Lavender said, and then she smirked. “Since we’re the same size, ish, I just got the same dress in your colors and, well, shrunk the bust a bit.” She chuckled.

Hermione smiled and glared at the same time, then she gave Lavender the two fingered salute. Lavender’s laughter followed her as she walked into her bedroom to find a light aqua gauzy dress on the bed and the same sandals at the foot. *I do love that you shop well, sister mine,* she thought, and changed out of the jeans and shirt she was wearing.

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The heat, and especially the humidity, hit them in a full body blow as they Apparated into the clearing. Lavender immediately sat Rose and Hugo down and gave them some water to drink while Hermione cast the anti-nausea charm.

“Wow!” Ron exclaimed. “Bloody effing hot here!”

“Aye,” Seamus said as he wiped his brow. “Should ‘ave gone on that boat trip with Harry, Gin, James, Albus, and Lilly.”

“It’s a week at sea, Shay,” Lavender said. “They’re on a luxury yacht in the middle of the Mediterranean.” She chuckled to herself. “And Luna’s with them. They’re safe.”

“Luna and her cousins,” Ron said, shaking his head. “How many she got?”

Seamus laughed. “Well none on the Lovegood side. Xeno was an only child, but her mum, Pandora? She was a Clooney, and there’s a million o’ them.”

“Yes, well this particular Clooney is special,” Hermione said laughing.

“This is that actor, yes?” Lavender asked.

Hermione nodded and laughed. “Yes, and he’s a very famous, not to mention rich, one.”

“Got the exemption from the ministry, does he?” Seamus asked.

Hermione nodded. “He was one of Luna’s mum’s closest cousins. She got the exemption for him when she moved from the states to Surrey after the first war.” Hermione smiled. “He’s always taken an interest in Luna, especially after her mum died, helped support Xeno through the early hard times, made sure Luna was looked after, checked in on them, he’s a good man.”

“Well, hope they’re having the same swell time we’re having,” Ron said as he wiped his head with a handkerchief and it came away soaked.

Hermione shook her head and laughed. “Just make sure your sun screen charm is in good order, I don’t fancy having to dittany your whole body like I did the first time we were here.” She blushed at the memory.

“Oh my god, I’m a lobster,” Ron had said.

She looked at him, standing in their room in just his swimming shorts. “Lobster” was not the first thought she had.

_Her joy at finding her parents and the subsequent discovery of Ron’s ferociously protective side had stoked a fire that had been smoldering for quite some time. The morning after the battle she would have given herself to him, willingly, and with great enthusiasm, but Ron, noble Ron, had said “I don’t want to take advantage, or be a selfish git, or any of the hundred other ways I could fuck this up. With you I want to be the best, I have to be the best. I won’t fuck up again, I won’t. Hermione, you’ve been tortured, you’ve been on the run for most of the last year, you’ve just been in the worst battle possible, seen… seen, and done… we should wait.” He said, shaking and clutching her to him in his dorm bed. “I’ve talked with Harry, and he agrees. Gin was ready to shag him into next week,” and he laughed for the first time since his brother’s death. “She’s a bit hacked at me just now.”_
Still, as she had rubbed the dittany over him, she had taken her time on his chest, and thighs... and bum.

Lavender shook her head. “Earth to Hermione?” she said.

“Hmm,” Hermione said, shaking from her reminiscence and looking at her.

“Pleasant memory?”

Hermione smiled coyly and said. “Come on everyone, it’s this way about half a mile.”

They walked down a foot path for around a hundred yards, and then came to a two track dirt road. Following that towards the sound of the sea brought them to a fork in the road. Taking the right hand track they walked on another seventy yards and emerged from the low scrub of eucalypt onto a knob of rock jutting from an escarpment. They could see the Pacific rolling in across the Great Barrier Reef, they could see the salt marshes that abutted the ocean, and they could see the people kneeling and lying around a hole in the center of the knob. One of those people noticed them.

“You must be Mrs. Underhill, Didn’t hear the heli?” the jovial man in the safari hat that rose and strode up to them said.

“Harriet Underhill, yes. They dropped us off over the hill a bit, probably didn’t hear it over the wind.” She laughed a little. “And you did have your head stuck in a hole.”

The man laughed.

“This is my husband, Ron, and our children, Rose and Hugo.” She indicated Seamus and Lavender. These two are our nanny and her husband, Selene and Frank Wolfe,”

“I’m Donald Lynch, and over there with their head in the sand is my wife, Margery, and our assistants Dale and Leon. Welcome to Merry Mac’s lighthouse.”

Hermione perked immediately. “Merry Mac? What makes you say that?”

“She’s stuck,” Ron said. “Let’s go see what they’ve found.”

As everyone but Hermione walked to the dig, she questioned Mr. Lynch. “Really, why Merry Mac?”

Donald looked out over the Pacific. “The tales are some of the oldest we’ve cataloged. Only the stories of the Dreaming are older. He was white, we know that, and he was real. He had to be. The stories are of a white man of great power. Speaking with the animals, calling the rain, setting stars in the sky, moving large stones...”

That focused Hermione’s attention. “Moving large stones?” she asked.

“Oh yeah, the myths say he was a great master of cairn and stone arrangement making.” Lynch said. “Made a lot of them round here, and then the great circle down Ballina way. It’s gone though, pity.”

“What makes you think this site is associated?” Hermione asked.

Lynch pointed to four large rocks at each compass point. “See those?” he asked. They’re basalt, this is a granite outcrop. The nearest basalt is thirty kilometers west. Don’t know how they moved them here, but the black fellas had some kind of technology they lost over the millennia.”

Ron and the rest of the group approached the three people that were lying around a square hole in the
center of the stone arrangement. The pit was perfectly geometric, ten feet on a side, and three deep. The sifting frame and collection station sat just outside the south east edge of the circle.

“Do you feel it?” Rose asked Lavender in a soft voice. “It’s… humming.”

Lavender closed her eyes in concentration. After a moment she looked down at Rose and smiled. “You felt that straight away?”

Rose looked up at her and nodded. Lavender looked at her and shook her head in mild amazement. Once again Rose had shown just how remarkable she could be.

“I feel it too,” Hugo said quietly from Rose’s side. He leaned into Lavender and Rose. “They’re digging in the wrong place,” he whispered.

Lavender gave him her “go on” look.

“It’s over here,” Hugo said quietly and walked to the north stone. He scuffed the ground about three feet from the stone. “Right here,” he said nodding.

Meanwhile Ron and Seamus were talking to the excavation crew. “So, what you found so far?” Seamus asked the woman, Margie, as he approached the pit.

She looked up and smiled. “Margie Lynch,” the woman said.

“Frank Wolfe, and this is me friend, Ron Underhill.”

Margie laughed. “Like Bilbo in the Hobbit? That’s great.” She puffed a breath. “Well, so far we’ve got some points and the remains of hundreds of fires.”

“What were they up to here?” Ron asked.

“Lighting the way for the fishing boats we think,” Margie said.

Ron nodded. He looked out over the ocean about a mile from where he stood. There was a large mangrove shaded beach and a smaller inland lagoon. “Nice beach. Should take the kids down before we leave.”

“Bad idea,” one of the men in the pit said. “Biggest crocs I’ve ever seen down on that beach. They caught the record holder not far from here.”

Ron nodded, eyes wide. “OOOkay, good tip.”

The man laughed and went back to digging the pit. “We went down looking for evidence of the boats,” he said. “Margie here was ten feet from eaten at one point. Big bull jumped out the water and nearly had her.”

Lavender, Rose and Hugo appeared at Seamus’ side. “Pardon me,” Lavender said to Margie. “Have you considered digging near the stones?”

Margie looked up at her. “We did, but we did some ground imaging here and it looked more promising.”

Lavender nodded. “Well, I don’t know if you believe this type of thing, but the children are very sensitive. They believe what you are looking for is over by the north stone.”

Margie smiled. “Is that so?” She nodded to herself. “Tell you what, we’ll show you everything it
takes to set up a dig, and do a small bit,” she shrugged. “Who knows, got a fella I worked with back in Perth uses a dowsing rod to find where to dig, and it’s remarkable what he’s found.”

Margie climbed out of the pit and walked with Hugo and Rose the north stone. “Think we should dig here, do you?”

The two looked up at her and nodded. “Right here,” Hugo said, indicating with his foot.

Margie smiled. “Alright, would you like to help?”

She laughed at the smiles and excited ‘Yeses’ from the children. Twenty minutes later, after locating the spot within the grid of the site and marking off a two foot by two foot square around the spot Hugo and Rose had chosen, Dale, the man who had warned Ron of the crocs, began to dig. He had made about a foot into the ground, carefully digging through the packed sandy soil with a square headed shovel, when Hugo stopped him. “You’re getting close,” he told Dale. Dale looked at him skeptically, but still he took up a small hand spade, laid next to the hole and began gently scraping the dirt. He had just measured the depth of the hole at 18 inches when he hit something hard.

There was a flurry of excitement and stunned looks at the children. Margie joined Dale at the hole and used small tools and dental picks to clear the earth from around what was being reveled as a white carved stone figure. They quickly widened the upper part of the hole to provide better access and in about ten minutes a white statue of a man stood in the bottom of the now three foot deep hole. The archeologists were stunned into silence.

It was Merlyn.

Carved in the aboriginal style, it was a mostly conical piece of the native chalk. He had a long staff in his right hand, the top of which lay against the side of his head as he leaned upon it. He was clearly dressed in robes, his beard reached to his waist, and his hat bore scattered stars. What intrigued them the most was the smile. He was beaming at them.

“This is the most important find in the history of Australia!” Donald Lynch said. The archeologists were in mid celebration when the spell hit them. Seamus and Ron pocked their wands and looked over the four unconscious people.

“Pity they can’t know,” Lavender said.

“They’ll be okay?’ Hugo asked with concern in his voice.

Hermione knelt and comforted her son. Hugo was a very compassionate person, just like his mother. “Oh yes, Hugo, but they can’t know about this. The root of the magical world is laid out right here in front of them, and they are smart enough to put it together.” She looked at both Hugo and Rose with a serious expression. “You remember, before we came, I told you I might have to charm some people?”

They nodded.

“Well this is one of those times.” She drew her wand and performed the memory charm. “They won’t remember us or the statue.” Hermione drew herself up and let her power flow. “Revelio!” she cried, and swept the circle with her wand. The stones and statue glowed blue for a moment, but nothing else happened. “That’s everything with a trace of magic for at least a hundred feet,” She said.

Hermione levitated the statue into her bag, and then Seamus refilled the hole the statue had come from and disguised it. The floor of the circle looked the same as it had upon their arrival. Lavender
levitated the unconscious people into the shade of the tarp stretched over the sift and sort area. Ron used an old Auror trick of his and vanished their footprints, while Hermione gathered their children and prepared them to Apparate away.

“Off to Fitzroy Gardens and Miss Cohn’s work?” Seamus asked.

Hermione nodded. “Yes, we’re done here.” She turned to Lavender. “You take Hugo and Rose.” She smiled. “I’ll take these two lunk heads.”

“Hey,” Ron had time to say before Hermione had seized his and Seamus’ hands and Apparated.

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They re-appeared in a small grove of trees. Hermione led Ron and Seamus out of the grove and they heard the arrival of Lavender and the children. A few moments later they were all looking across a manicured lawn. Hermione pulled a folded piece of slick paper from her bag. “The map says it’s just this way,” she told the group, and they started down a lane between two rows of trees.

It was one of the nicest formal gardens Hermione had ever seen, and she’d seen a few. Her father was an avid gardener when not fixing teeth, and he had taken Hermione to see all the famous and not so famous gardens in England. From Stourhead on the Salisbury Plain to the Plantation Garden in Norwich, she had walked innumerable gravel and tarmac paths. As opposed to many in England, this was not a former gravel or stone pit. It was a purposefully designed garden from the beginning. Gentle rolling slopes enclosed serene vistas of great trees and carefully manicured plantings of flowers and shrubs.

Statuary and buildings dotted the landscape and they came to a round stone pavilion. “The ‘Temple of the Winds’ it says,” Hermione read from the map. “It was built in eighteen seventy three, not long after they started on the gardens.”

The children ran into the temple and played around the columns as the adults walked slowly on. Lavender called them to her before they continued on to the small recreation of a Tudor village cast in cement, and their ultimate destination, the Fairies Tree.

They just stared.

Ola Cohn had put wings on everyone, but to the magical eye it was plain. Elves crowded the carving. They wore the traditional cap from ages gone, and the plaque called them sprites, but they were obviously elves cavorting and played with the native animals. The fairies, the three main figures, were witches, and not just any witches.

“Mum, that’s you,” Rose said in whisper of wonder, staring at the figure in the center of the tree. “And that’s Aunt Luna,” she said as she pointed to the figure on the right. Then she nodded to the one on the left. “And that’s Aunt Ginny. How did she know?”

The resemblance was fuzzy but undeniable. The woman gazing out from the center of the tree had Hermione’s hair, her bearing, and her intense expression. The woman on the right was doubtlessly Luna. She was smiling as she charmed a butterfly and other creatures. The third figure of the three green clothed women could be no one else but Ginny Potter. Her left arm held her wand high over her head, and her body spoke of power ready to be released. Hermione had seen this pose in real life many times, and it was never good for whoever was on the receiving end.

But what drew Hermione’s attention were the two figures immediately below her figure’s right hand.
They were, besides her, Ginny and Luna, the only figures without caps. One was a small boy and one was an older girl. It hit her like a thunderbolt; they were Hugo and Rose. It wasn’t lost on their escorts.

“You said you had her living relative’s information,” Seamus asked, and Hermione heard the change to the no nonsense Auror in his voice.

“Yes,” she answered, and opened her bag to get out her notebook.

“Lav and I will be going first,” he said, and nodded to his equally grim faced wife. “Ron, you’re security.”

While Lavender gave Hugo and Rose her standard “while your nanny is away, obey your parents” speech, Seamus reviewed the map of Melbourne, did the finding charm, and located Miss Cohn’s niece’s home. “We’ll go do a survey,” Seamus told Ron. “You all have lunch, and we’ll be back before you finish… well, before Hermione finishes,” he said with a laugh, and then he and Lavender wandered into the trees and Apparated.

The Weasley family, minus their almost ever present security detail, found a bench in a grassy clearing a few hundred feet from the Fairies Tree, and there they set up their little picnic. The small restaurant in the park was doing mad business for a Tuesday afternoon, and they laughed at the people rushing about. At one point there was even an entire cricket team attempting to get lunch between practice times at the Melbourne Cricket Ground a few blocks away.

“Dad, what are the rules of cricket again?” Rose asked with George’s grin on her face. It was an almost constant joke in the Granger, and now Weasley, family that anyone who could give the rules of cricket, in under a hundred words, would get the hundred pound note Daniel Granger kept for just that purpose. He’d had the note safely in his study for almost thirty years.

A busker set up near the Fairies Tree and began playing sea chanties on his violin. The children and Ron had finished their sandwiches and wandered over to the man while Hermione finished hers. She compartmentalized her wonder at the carvings on the tree, and then she took a moment to appreciate her husband.

The boy with the dirty nose had become the man she knew he would. Was he perfect? She laughed at the notion. Was he perfect for her? Oh yes. Many of their friends had marveled that the two, so different in so many ways, were so alike where it counted. They were fiercely loyal, not only to each other, but to their family and closest friends. They may disagree occasionally, alright, daily, she thought and chuckled, but that really was just good natured bickering. It never escalated to arguing anymore, and they were a united front to the rest of the world. Their children had no chance, and even Ginny and Harry had once tried, on a bet, to get them to disagree and support two different positions during one of their couple’s nights out. They had failed spectacularly.

As Ron hoisted Hugo onto his shoulders and started back to where she sat her heart fluttered. That he could still do that to her filled her with joy. He was her perfect match. Her parents had found that out here, when they had come to retrieve them, but she had known for years. The sound of Seamus and Lavender returning back from their scouting mission shook her out of her reverie. She turned and smiled at her friends walking across the grass toward her, the other Gryffindor ninety eight couple.

“The house is in the hands of her grandnephew, Martin Williams,” Seamus said without preamble. “He told us Ola’s niece, Carla, is in a pensioner’s home run by the Freemasons.”

“We have the address,” Lavender said. “I’m just not sure about taking Rose and Hugo.”
Hermione smiled. “They’ll be fine. You’ve seen them with my gram.”

Lavender nodded. “Alright,” she said, and turned to the children. “Be nice, be polite, and be gentle. Old people hurt easy, so be especially careful with shoes and elbows, alright?”

“Yes, aunt Lavender,” they replied.

Rose turned to her brother. “Just like when we visit nana Caldwell.”

Hermione took a moment to glow with pride at her ‘wonder girl’. “So, where are we going?’ she asked Lavender.

Chapter End Notes
Seamus Apparated to the facility first, and then located the least visible arrival point. When he returned he told Lavender where they were Apparating to. As had become their habit, Lavender took the children, and Seamus took Ron and Hermione. Moments later they were walking up the front path to the Royal Freemasons Monash Gardens Village.

Hermione knew the feel of the place. Her grandmother on her mother’s side lived in just such a home. When it became apparent that she could no longer care for herself fully, and that her memory was failing, her mother and uncle had worked with NHS and got her placed. It was an elder care facility much like the one they were entering. The woman at the reception desk smiled pleasantly as they approached.

“Welcome to Monash Gardens, how can I help you?” she asked.

“I’m Harriet Underhill,” Hermione said, while Lavender silently confirmed the woman. “As it says in your notes I’m here to see Mrs. Williams.”

“Oh…Oh, yes, I see,” The woman said in a faraway voice. “Room three twelve, in the memory care unit. Down the hall to your left, there’s a security door. The combo’s four one two one.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said with a smile. She and Lavender ushered the small mob down the hall and through the security door. The memory care unit had its own desk with a nurse at a monitoring station. She looked up from the screens that displayed views throughout the ward and smiled at Hermione and then positively beamed at the children.

“Hello, can I help you?” she asked.

“We’re here to see Carla Williams. I understand she’s in room three twelve,” Hermione said. “We’re distant relatives, and I’m researching our grand aunt, Orla.”

“Oh! Oh how wonderful!” the woman said. “Carla has so few visitors, and I’m so happy you brought your children. The residents love it when there’re kids around.” She looked at her screens. “Let’s see, I saw her out and about … ah, there she is.” She looked up. “Through the common area of the ward just down the hall, and then out into the garden. We have a fenced area that our residents can enjoy but not get out of. She’s at a table under one of the gum trees. Do you need me to show you?”

Lavender smiled. “I think we’ll find her just fine, thanks.”
“It smells just like the place where nana Caldwell is.” Hugo observed quietly as they walked through the common area of the memory care unit. Hermione nodded. She and her mother had visited many in their search for the best facility for her grandmother, and they all smelled the same, disinfectant and age.

The outer garden area was very nice. Red paving bricks were arranged in a spiral pattern forming a large patio fifty feet in diameter. Tables, chairs, and benches were scattered around the patio and under the trees bordering it. On one bench a woman sat and scattered seeds for the birds at her feet. She did every movement exactly the same way, dip her hand in the paper bag in her lap, bring her arm across her body, and then sweep it out in a long arc. Again and again she repeated the motion. She stopped as Hermione and the rest approached.

“Mrs. Williams?” Hermione asked.

She just stared for a moment, and then she looked at Hugo and smiled. “What a lovely young man. What’s your name?”

“Hugo,” he said.

“My husband has a friend named Hugo, he should…” she looked around with a slightly distressed expression. “He was just here… I…” Then she started to cry.

Hermione and Lavender were on either side of her on the bench in an instant. “What’s the matter, Carla, we didn’t mean to upset you,” Hermione said, concerned.

“Oh, I’m just such an old idiot. Can’t remember anything,” she said through her tears. “Charles has been gone… years. I don’t even know how many.” She hung her head and tears fell on Hermione’s hand.

Hermione looked up into her husband’s eyes, pleading. Ron nodded and turned to Seamus. “It’s been a while, do you mind?”

While lavender stood and surveyed the patio and windows surrounding it Seamus looked in his friend’s face and nodded back. He swiftly drew his wand, and as he quickly swept tip around Mrs. Williams head he said, “Cognis Maxima,” and then his wand was gone again.

“I know what you are,” Mrs. Williams said in a clear voice, staring at Seamus.

“What do you think we are, Carla?’ Hermione asked.

“You’re like Aunt Orla,” she said, and then she laughed. “Old bird never thought anyone knew, but I caught her out when I was ten. Saw her with a stick like yours.” She looked at Seamus and then back to Hermione. “She did things, things no one else could do. From then on I’d sneak up on her when I visited. Saw her make the laundry hang itself, the beds make themselves, spoons stirring pots, and she could talk to snakes too.”

That got everyone’s attention. “She was a parsleymouth,” Lavender whispered.

“My uncle used to be able to do that,” Hugo said.

“Did he,” she said with a smile, and then she tuned back to Seamus. “How long will it last?” she asked near tears again.

“A few hours,” he said. “Hermione here has a few, well more ’n a few questions about your aunt.”
She smiled and took his hand. “Thank you, thank you so much,” she said and turned to Hermione. “What do you want to know?”

“Well we were going to try to slyly find a way to ask you if she was a witch,” Hermione said with a chuckle.

“Is that what she was?” Carla said in a tone of understanding. She looked at Rose. “Practically radiates off you little girl. All of you witches then?”

“I’m a wizard,” Hugo said.

“Ahh girls are witches, boys are wizards is it?” she smiled at Hugo. “In my lap, boy. Haven’t had a sprog in my lap for a long time. You sit here and let your mam ask me what she wants.”

As Hugo carefully climbed into Carla’s lap Hermione sat in a chair that Ron moved from one of the nearby tables for her, and then he and Seamus got chairs for themselves and Rose while Lavender stood guard. They all clustered around Carla as Hermione began. “We’re here to ask about the Fairies Tree,” she said, and then paused and struggled to ask the question she really wanted to. Fortunately Carla beat her to it.

“You’re her, you’re the Fairy Queen.” She nodded to herself. “You are, and the rest of you?” Carla asked, and looked around at her audience. “Where’s the redhead, and you’re not the blonde, are you?’ she asked Lavender.

She chuckled. “No, that would be our friend, Luna.” Lavender took Carla’s hand. “The redhead is our friend, and Ron here’s sister, Ginny.”

“Huh, suppose I should tell you the story, then,” Carla said, and she snuggled Hugo deeper in her lap.

Donna Marquises looked out of her office window. A whole family of strangers was clustered around Carla Williams. As director of the facility it was her job to know every resident and look out for them. The woman, who was obviously the leader of the little group, asked Carla a question and the elderly woman had hung her head to cry. Donna was about to rise from her seat and investigate when the blonde woman accompanying the odd little group turned from them and swept her eyes around the yard and building. Donna felt a wave of dizziness pass through her and when she looked back out her window Carla was smiling and speaking animatedly with her visitors. She shook off her confusion and went back to her paperwork.

Carla Williams took a deep contented breath. She hadn’t told her aunt’s story of the tree for years, mostly because she would forget where in the story she was in mid telling. One last time, she thought.

“Long ago, when the earth was young, Merry Mac came to ‘Stralia. He sang the stones across the plains, he charmed the animals to be his friends, and he left us the dingoes and the gnomes. Merry Mac was a traveler, always looking at the horizon, always looking for the next great adventure. He travelled north, south, east, and west. He walked the whole of the land from Top End to The Blue Mountains, from The Darling Downs to Gingin. Three centuries he walked the land and still he was restless, so from Uluru he left for parts unknown.”
“But before he left he told The Dreamers that they would see the coming of the fairies, for the Fairy Queen would be on a mission to save the gnomes. ‘She will be strong, powerful, and kind,’ he told them. ‘And you will know the one to free the gnomes by her hair that is the color of the mud of the Murrumbidgee and as twisted as the path of the great snake, Myndie.’ Merry Mac went on to describe her sisters. ‘On her right hand the queen will have her fire sister, who will be known by her red hair, on her left she will have her animal sister, who will be known by her yellow hair. The three will lead the nine, all being talented in dadirri, and they will, with their six sisters, break the bonds.”

“Merry Mac departed from Uluru, and he left the gnomes to serve the Koori Dreamers saying, ‘care for them, hold them dear and teach them right from wrong, for they are ignorant and need guidance.’ And so Merry Mac left the land and The Dreamers waited. They cared for the gnomes and taught them they ways of the bush. In the fullness of time the gnomes became fast friends of the people, though the people never knew, for the Dreamers kept them secret. Homes and hunting grounds were kept safe from the fires and the winds, fishing boats were returned from the sea amid the tempest, and herds kept safe from the dingo by their hand.”

Carla opened her eyes and looked at Hermione. “Aunt Orla told me that story a hundred times at least. I always thought it was just a tale, but now… She said other things too. She said the Fairy queen would have children, a boy and a girl.” She looked at Rose and Hugo. “That would be you two, wouldn’t it?” She didn’t wait for an answer. “I always thought she was a bit tetchy, but she knew… She said you’d have one sister that could talk to the dingoes, and one that would be, well, very hard on anyone stupid enough to challenge you.”

Hermione looked at Lavender. “You and Cho.” She looked back at Carla. “I’m going to tell you some rather important things that I really shouldn’t but I’m certain you’ll keep them secret.”

“Won’t have a choice, will I,” Carla said with a sarcastic laugh. “Three hours and I won’t remember you were here.”

Ron took her hand. “The charm actually never fully wears off as strong as Shay here casts it. You’ll remember us, and you’ll remember more about everything else, but like Hermione said, you’ll keep our secret, I know you will.” He chuckled. “Because no one would believe you anyway, and they’d probably think you were really losing it!”

Carla laughed as well. “True.” She looked at Lavender. “Talk to the pups, do you?”

“I’m a werewolf, Mrs. Williams, it’s part of the package,” Lavender told her.

Carla nodded. “You’re on the tree too, you know.”

Hermione and Lavender looked at her puzzled.

“Twice, the face at the bottom isn’t a bear,” she said. “Don’t have bears here. Aunt Orla always called her the dingo queen. We never knew why. Then there’s the mother in the roots. That’s you too.”

Seamus chuckled. “Aye, well she’s right. Dogs do obey you, me love.”

“Woof,” Lavender said snidely, and Carla laughed.

“There’s a story about every figure on the tree,” Carla said. “Bet you’d like to know them.”

“As much as you want to tell us,” Hermione said.

Carla smiled at Rose. “The gnome, Elias, was lost in the bush,” she began. “For many days he had
wandered, looking for a dreamer, but none lived in that area of the outback. Only the people lived there, and he, as all the gnomes are, was forbidden from going among them. He was hungry and alone, but Merry Mac had left the gnomes friends among the creatures of the bush.

“The great queen of the eagles, Kiah, was hunting when she saw Elias weeping at the banks of the Myponga. She swooped from out of the sky and perched on a fallen boo’kerrkin.”

“‘Child of the earth, why are you sad,’ she asked.”

“Elais looked up from his tears in the river and saw Kiah, and he knew she was good. ‘My dreamer has entered the full dreaming,’ he said. ‘I went with her into the bush, and when she passed into the Big Dream I laid hier spent shell on the pyre as she wished, but now I am alone and have no dreamer to serve.’”

“Kiah looked upon Elias and felt sad for him. ‘I will bear you to wherever you wish, good gnome. It will be my honor to help one so faithful to his dreamer,’ Kiah said.

“Elais saw her and knew hope. ‘I thank you, but I know not where to go,’ he told Kiah.”

“Kiah looked at him kindly. ‘I have traveled far over the land, and I have seen many villages with many dreamers. Come, good gnome, and we shall find you another dreamer.’ And so Kiah took Elias in her talons and gently carried him into the sky. Seven days they traveled until at last Kiah came to a village she knew held dreamers. ‘Here I shall leave you, good gnome, but should you ever find yourself lost again, you have but to tell the bush and the bush will tell me.’”

“Thus was formed the strong bond between the gnomes and the eagles. For even to this day they will aid the gnomes, and the gnomes for their part will faithfully aid the eagles should they find one in need.”

Carla turned to Rose. “Ya like that one?” she asked, and Rose nodded, smiling. “Kiah and Elias are the eagle and the gnome at the top of the tree.”

She looked down at Hugo. “Here’s one for you, sonny boy. There was a time when the Ngarradan, the bats, forgot how to fly. They had been among lords of the sky, and as graceful as any bird. One day it came to pass that Albo and his dreamer were on a walkabout, and they came to a great cave. When they entered they found it populated with Ngarradan but none flew. Albo’s dreamer spoke with the Ngarradan and found that they had taken to walking as the fruit of the trees fell in abundance in their forest home.”

“‘You have forgotten your true selves,’ Albo’s dreamer told the Ngarradan, and he performed a great magik upon Albo, granting him wings. ‘Teach these to fly again, my faithful one,’ Albo’s dreamer told him.”

“And so Albo took to the sky, but he was new to wings, and he flew dips and weaves, fliting and diving. The Ngarradan followed him and learned his way of flight, and so this why, to this day, the Ngarradan fly so unlike birds.”

Carla turned to Lavender. “The Dingo Queen was once a dreamer like the rest, but her destiny was formed in the mists of the past. For on the Great Island That Was the Dingo Queen was born those many long years ago, and through her numerous lives she was tempered. The Dingo Queen’s highest duty is to the children of the Fairy Queen and her sisters.” She looked at the child in her lap and the girl sitting next to her. “There’re others besides these two?”

Lavender nodded. “Three more.”
Carla smiled and chuckled. “Of course there are. The Dingo Queen can be woman or not as she chooses, and woe will befall any who willfully inspire her to anger. For, though she is the kindest of aunts, she is the fiercest defender of her charges. And so she looks out from the base of the tree, guarding against danger, and she cuddles three of her charges with their owls in the niche.”

“Orla was a seer,” Lavender said. “I have some experience with that.” She looked into the distance. “Wonder what she meant by all that Great Island That Was business?”

“Got no idea,” Carla said and closed her eyes. “One more. The owl and the kookaburra had never met before Merry Mac came to the land. He brought to the land three Ngugug. The white faced the Brown and the Red and from those three arose all the Ngugug of the land. One night, Ulca, king of the Ngugug, was hunting when he heard the cries of lord Gugubarra, for whom his family was named. Olca alit on the branch of a Koombahla, and he asked Gugubarra ‘why are you sad, my brother?’”

“Gugubarra looked at Olca and was afraid, for the Ngugug are, but for the eagles, masters of the sky. ‘Forgive me, great Ngugug, I did not mean to disturb you with my troubles.”

“And Olca answered, ‘I am not disturbed but concerned for my sky fellow. What is troubling you, friend Gugubarra?’

“Gugubarra looked to Olca and answered, ‘My family is lost, and I have no way to find them. I call but they do not answer.”

“Ohca understood Gugabarca’s trouble, and told his new friend, ‘I, lord of the Ngugug, make you this promise; we will find your family and bring you together.’ Then lord Olca called to his brethren in the night. ‘Seek the family of Gugabarca,’ he told them. ‘Make their place known to me.’”

“For three nights Gugabarca slept in Olca’s tree and for three days Gugabarca kept watch while Olca slept. On the forth evening a whiteface appeared. ‘Gugabarca’s family has been found, ’the whiteface told them, and Gugabarca and Olca took wing to follow the whiteface.”

“On the banks of the Wallongong Gugabarca and his family were reunited. Gugabarca pledged his undying loyalty to Olca, and Olca said to him, ‘Make a home in my tree. There you will be safe from harm in the night as I will be safe in the day. We will be friends and more, Gugabarca.’”

“From then on the Ngugug shared their trees with Gugabarca’s family and, they have been fast friends since.”

Carla opened her eyes and looked at Hermione. “Did that help?” she asked.

Hermione smiled. “Immensely,” she said, and took the old woman’s hand. “Did she have any friends, acquaintances that we might find relatives of?” she asked.

“Only a few blackfellas that I ever saw, aunt Orla was a loaner. Never married, I never even saw her with a man. She’d go into Alice Springs now and again, but she lived in her shack in the bush her whole life.”

“And where might that be, if you don’t mind?” Seamus asked.

“I’d have to take you there,” Carla said. “Couldn’t show you on a map to save me.” She looked a little sad. “They’d never let me out though.”

Hermione smiled and Lavender chuckled. “Mrs. Williams,” Lavender said. “Perhaps you may have underestimated our abilities. Let me help you get into some traveling clothes.”
Chapter End Notes
Chapter 7

It was the strangest experience in Carla’s life. The lovely blonde woman Lavender, she remembered, had helped her back to her room and into her traveling togs. The way her boots had walked over to her, slid on her feet, and then tied themselves had her giggling like a school girl. These were truly wonderful people. Then they had simply walked out of the facility like they owned the place. In the park adjoining the facility Lavender asked her to think about her aunt. She told Carla to pick a memory when she had travelled to her aunt’s house.

Her world vanished and she was in the memory, and Lavender was there with her, by her side.

“I’m right here, Carla,” she said, comfortably. “This is the Legilimency charm combined with Memoria Vigarosa. It’s not real.”

Carla looked out onto the dusty dirt road that led away from Alice Springs and into the never ending desert. A battered truck raced by and suddenly they were flying along next to it. Inside an eight year old Carla sat beside a laughing woman.

“D’ ya see the look on old Arnie’s face when I told him he’d be havin’ twins! That’s one for the pensieve,” Orla said and dissolved into laughter again.

“How do you know, Aunt Orla?” the young Carla asked.

“I just do, comes with it.” The older woman looked longingly at the girl in the seat beside her. “Thought for a while you’d have it too, little girl.” She shook her head. “Ah well, alone is fine. So, Carla, what’s the next turn?”

“To double tree, turn right, to sand pile, turn right, to canyon road, turn left, and on to Aunt Orla,” Carla recited.

“Very good, Carla,” Orla said and patted the girl’s head. “You keep up those marks in school and you’ll give them men a run for their money. Don’t you ever take anything from a man you can’t give back, you hear me?”

“I heard you,” Carla said softly as her younger self nodded

“Lived it, did you?” Lavender asked.

“That I did.”
The memory skipped forward to the truck arriving at Orla’s house. Chickens and a few dogs scattered as the rusted red pickup slid sideways t a stop in front of a small dun colored wooden house among a cluster of trees at the base of a sandstone hill.

“Glad they stopped looking for gold over there in Simpson’s Gap,” Orla said as she opened the door of the truck. “Bloody Muggles were getting to be a nuisance!” She turned to Carla. “Get the sack of flour, and I’ll get the rest.”

The young Carla got out of the passenger side of the truck and walked around to the back. Her aunt placed the sack of flour over Carla’s shoulder and pointed her at the house. As the young Carla looked around at the countryside it became more focused in the memory, and Lavender was able to see the local landmarks and get her directions from the sun.

“Which way is this ‘Simpson’s Gap’,?” Lavender asked Carla.

The older woman pointed north east. “Just up there, see those peaks over the top of that hill? That’s it.”

Lavender took one last look at the surroundings and looked at Carla. “We’re going to back out now, are you ready?”

“In a moment,” Carla said, and walked over to the younger version of herself. She spoke softly. “You done good, girl. Married a good man, didn’t settle, had good children.” She turned back to Lavender. “I’m ready.”

A blue fog preceded the reappearance of the park. Carla looked across the small table at Lavender who still held tightly to her hands. The blonde woman opened her eyes and shook her head. “That takes some effort,” she said to the group. “Let’s look at the map.”

Hermione opened her bag and reached into its depths. Carla sniggered at the sight of Hermione’s arm disappearing to the shoulder in the small bag. “Amazing. How much will it hold?”

Hermione chuckled as she pulled the map from the bag. “Far too much, there was a point when I had a whole tent, a small library, clothes for me and two boys, a large framed picture, and a sword in there.” she laughed. “Had almost as much this time with everyone coming.” She handed the map to Lavender. “Here you are.”

Lavender located Alice Springs and then Simpson’s Gap nearby. “I’ll go and get a firm location on Orla’s house, be right back,” she said, walked into a nearby cluster of trees, and Apparated.

“I’m… getting a bit fuzzy,” Carla said, looking at Seamus.

“Been almost four hours, you hung onto it a wee bit longer than I thought you would.” He drew his wand. “Close your eyes.”

Carla did as she was aske and she heard Seamus utter those strange words again. He mind cleared immediately. “Thank you so much,” she said. “I don’t want to go back to…” she looked lost.

“Aye, I know,” Seamus said. “We’ll do what we can afore we leave. Got an idea I want to run bye madam leader.”

“And that would be?” Hermione asked.

Seamus grinned at her. “Wonder if they got Jobberknoll feathers at the local wizarding apothecary?” he mused.
Hermione looked at her friend, impressed. “Seamus, why weren’t you this astute whilst we were in school?”

“Ah, had other things on me mind,” he said, and they both laughed.

“The memory potion?” Rose asked from her mother’s side.

Hermione turned to her daughter. “Just how far ahead have you read?”

Rose looked at her feet and shuffled them. “Um… actually I’ve read all your school books, even your NEWT books.”

Seamus chuckled and nodded at Hermione’s gape. “I believe Lavender covered this in a conversation a few weeks ago, Hermione.”

“Yeah,” Hugo said from the bench next to Carla, who had her arm around him again. “You’d be surprised at what she can do. I’ve seen her…”

He was halted by a sidelong look from his sister.

“Um, teach James and Fred things, and they’re already at Hogwarts, Vic and Ted even ask her about stuff.” Hugo finished after a pause.

Hermione chuckled. There was more to that story, she was certain, but it was a conversation for another time. She looked at her daughter. “Yes dear, the memory potion. Perhaps…” she was interrupted by the sound of Lavender returning.

“Found it,” Lavender said without preamble. She turned to her husband. “Shay, let’s go see if she left any wards or traps behind before we take this lot.”

He nodded and took her hand. They were gone with a snap.

“That shouldn’t take long,” Hermione told Carla. “Let’s get ready.” She turned to her husband. “Do you think we should get some dinner takeout?”

“I'll pop off and get some if we need it once we’re there,” he said, and then turned to his children. “How we holdin’ up? You two okay to keep going, or should I take you back to the hotel?”

“I want to stay with Carla,” Hugo said, and got a hug from the old woman.

“I fine, Dad,” Rose told him.

He smiled and hugged his daughter to his side. “Alright, Hugo you and Carla go with Rose and Lavender, your mom and I will go with Seamus.”

The pop of Seamus and Lavender returning sounded from the trees, and they walked out of the small grove toward Hermione. “All clear,” Seamus said as he approached. “They were a couple of anti Muggle charms and a very old ward. They’re down now.” He looked at Carla. “You really didn’t know she was a witch?”

“Yeah,” Carla answered. “I remember odd things at her house, but I was young.”

Lavender laughed. “Well it’ll be pretty obvious now.” She held out her hand. “Shall we?”
They reappeared in the middle of an old, disused dirt track. In front of them a house of rough sawn wood stood against a hillside. Trees surrounded the small collection of rooms, and the sandstone slope rose dramatically behind it. It appeared untouched by the wildlife, and there was no evidence that people had been there for a very long time.

“When did your aunt leave this place,” Hermione asked after casting the anti-nausea charm.

“Fifty Four, I was twenty six, she was seventy eight. We came out to Alice Springs and collected her. She lived with my older brother for almost ten years,” Carla said and smiled. “John was a very good man, that he was.”

“Well, can you show us around?” Hermione asked.

“Oh yes, come in, come in.” Carla said and excitedly walked as fast as she dared to the front door. Dust and sand were everywhere. Seamus’ foot prints were the only evidence that anyone had been there recently. “Orla was not the best housekeeper, but this is a little worse than usual,” Carla said with a laugh.

Hermione looked sideways at Lavender and they both nodded. “We can help with that,” Hermione said to Carla. She drew her wand and cleared the grime from the chairs and couch in what passed for Orla’s sitting room, and then she told Carla to have a seat. The two women set about cleaning the house of the obvious dirt and litter. As they cleaned the home of an accomplished witch emerged from the dust. They found a well-stocked cabinet of long out of use magical herbs for potion making, a shelf full of books that Rose started looking through after asking Carla if it was okay, and in a back room behind the kitchen they found a small well magically drawing water from deep underground. It was cool and sweet, and everyone had a log draw from the ladle hung over the basin at the base of the spout.

The house had three small bedrooms, the sitting room, a loo, a well laid out kitchen with a wood fired cooker, the well room, and a pantry area just off the kitchen. Behind the house, between the back door and the hillside, were several small out buildings and a chicken coop.

“I think you may want to look at this,” Carla said, emerging from her Aunt’s bedroom. “It’s her photo album.”

Hermione opened the book and immediately sensed the charm that kept the pictures from moving. After cancelling the charm with a finite’ she sat down with Carla and started looking through the pictures. Orla and her extended family were spread across the pages. Carla was delighted by the now moving pictures of her grandparents, aunt, uncles and mother. Toward the end of the book Carla found herself, and on the last page she waved at the camera in her wedding dress.

“She had the camera with her from time to time,” Carla said. “Didn’t know it did this.”

“Mum, I think you should look at this one,” Rose said from behind a particularly large book.

As Hermione took the book from Rose, Carla nodded to Seamus and Ron, and then she tilted her head toward a door. The two men smiled and accompanied her to the kitchen.

“Your girls are going to be busy for the next little while, I’m betting,” she said with a grin. “I’m making a list for you here,” she said as she found a pencil and paper. While she scribbled on the page she said, “In Alice springs there’s a market, or there was, that has pretty much everything. Arnold’s it was called, probably still there. It’s right down town, can’t miss it.” She handed the note to Seamus. “You lads toddle off and get this for me, would you? I’ll get the rest started, so be quick.”
“Yes mam,” Seamus said with a laugh.

When Hermione looked up from the book of aboriginal legends she noticed the smell of something wonderful coming from the kitchen area. She also noticed it was dark. Rose was still a pile of red curly hair emerging from the top of yet another book. The laughter from the kitchen drew her from her chair, and she nudged Rose as she passed. “Let’s see what they’re on about,” she said.

As she and Rose entered the kitchen there was another burst of laughter. “So there I am chasing a naked little boy down the street with a hole burnt in me trouser seat,” Seamus said, and Ron, Hugo, and Carla roared again.

“Ah the tale of young Fred’s first prank,” Lavender said as she entered the room from an outside door. “Smells marvelous, Carla!” she said, and hugged the old woman.

“Just a meat pie, but we make ‘um better than anywhere in the world,” Carla said with pride.

“Got back just in time then,” Lavender said, and set a parcel on the side board.

“Where did you go, Aunt Lavender?” Rose asked.

Lavender smirked and looked at Hermione. “Beatrice’s Wizarding Apothecary and Herbs back in Canberra.”

Hermione nodded with a smile.

The pie rivaled Molly Weasley’s, and that was certainly high praise from her youngest son. Carla had prepared two large square pans, and the seven hungry people made short work of them. With full stomachs and drooping eyes they all made their way back into the sitting room. Rose took up the book she had been reading and continued on where she had left off. Seamus lit his father’s pipe and made magical smoke figures to entertain Hugo and Carla, Hermione and Lavender sat and chatted for a few moments, and then they went back to the kitchen, while Ron fell asleep on the couch.

“Rose? Could you come here for a moment,” Hermione called from the kitchen.

When Rose entered the kitchen she found Orla’s cauldron hanging from a small tripod on the table. It was warming over her mother’s magical blue flames that were contained in a bowl.

“We’ve just started,” Hermione said as she spread Orla’s copy of Practical Potioning on the table before Rose. “What’s next?”

“The Memory Potion,” Rose stated as she read the title. “In a warm cauldron place two ounces of clear water,” she said and looked up.

Hermione handed her a glass with a small amount of water in it. “Here you are,” she said with a smile.

Rose grinned from ear to ear. “You’re going to let me do it?”

Hermione ran her hand down her daughter’s hair. “Your aunt Lavender tells me you’ve got the knowledge already, let’s make that into skills.” She turned Rose back to the table. “What’s next?”

“With five clockwise stirs add fourteen pixie wings,” she said, and Lavender handed the bag containing the wings to her.
Hermione stopped her before Rose could drop them in the water. “What they don’t tell you here is that you need to crush the wings to powder before you add them,” she said.

Rose pulled a quill from her pocket and made a note next to the paragraph in the book. Then she took the offer mortar and pestle and crushed the wings. Hermione drew her wand and handed it to her prodigy daughter. Rose smiled broadly at her mother, and then she carefully added the wing powder to the water while she stirred five times clockwise.

Hermione shook her head in mild amazement as Rose had performed the stirring spell nonverbally. “Next add one owl feather,” Rose read from the book.

Lavender produced the owl feather from the parcel on the side board. “This will get strained out, so in it goes,” she told Rose.

Hermione smiled as Rose read on. “Four drops of dragon blood with three counterclockwise stirs, followed by four clockwise stirs, and then two counterclockwise stirs.” Hermione handed her the small bottle with a dropper cap. Rose carefully put the dragon blood in the brew while she stirred. “Lastly five jobberknoll feathers,” she read and Lavender pulled the beautiful blue spotted feathers from the bag.

When the feathers hit the potion they dissolved, and a small puff of sweet smelling smoke drifted up from the cauldron.

“Perfect,” Hermione said. Lavender just smiled knowingly and kissed the top of Rose’s head.

Lavender reached into her pocket and brought out an antique looking phial on a chain, and then she went to the cupboard to retrieve a funnel. After magically sizing it to fit the small opening of the phial Hermione waved her wand at the liquid in the cauldron. In a graceful arc the potion floated out of the cauldron, leaving the owl feather behind, and then it filled the phial.

“I cast the extension charm on it already,” Lavender told Rose. “But we’ll need all three of us for everfull.”

Hermione looked down at her daughter. “The charm is…”

“Aeternae plena,” Rose said, and Lavender laughed.

She looked in Hermione’s surprised eyes, and sniggering said, “Exactly, Rose, I wouldn’t expect anything less from you.”

“Alright then,” Hermione said with a smile. She placed her hand over Rose’s on the wand, and Lavender placed her hand atop both of them. They pointed the wand at the phial. “One, two three.”

“AETERNAE PLENA!” they said, and a bright orange glow formed around the phial. It shimmered for a moment and vanished.

“Very well done, Rose,” Lavender said, while Hermione glowed with pride.

They entered the sitting room to find Ron asleep on the couch, Seamus pondering the fire he had made in the hearth, and Hugo in Carla’s lap with a book laying in his lap. He looked up at his mother.

“She just sort of stopped and started staring a bit ago,” he said. “Like when we found her.” A small tear tracked down his cheek.
“Didn’t want to redo the charm,” Seamus said grimly. “Too many and she’d get a headache, plus you want to know how well the potion’s going to work.”

Hermione nodded. “Carla? Carla?” she said and shook her gently by the shoulder.

“What, oh, yes,” she said looking at Hermione with wide eyes.

Hermione smiled softly. “Do you remember me?”

“Yes, yes, you’re… um… yes, Hugo’s mum! Yes, yes, such a good boy he is.”

“We have something for you, Carla,” Hermione said and draped the chain with the little glass bottle hung from it around Carla’s neck. “It has a special medicine in it to help you remember. Take a sip.”

Carla lifted the bottle to her lips and took a small mouthful. The effect was immediate.

“That really works!” Carla said with astonishment. “Almost like magic,” she continued and started to laugh.

“Hate to be a killjoy,” Seamus said. “But we’ve been fairly free with Carla here. International secrecy council ’d be hacked as hell if they knew.”

Hermione smiled confidently. “I’m an officer of the court, and an entitled investigator, Auror Finnigan. What have you to say to that?”

“Well the council would ask what value there is in giving her that little gift,” he said with raised eyebrows.

Hermione looked at him seriously. “Compassion, Shay. It’s a lesson I want my children to learn well.”

Seamus smiled at his friend warmly and then looked at his wife. “You win.”

“Win what?” Hermione asked, puzzled.

“Ah just a little wager tween Lav and me,” Seamus said. “Lav’s got an idea about all this.”

“And that is?” Hermine said turning to her friend and nanny.

Lavender smiled at her and said, “I don’t like the idea of taking Carla back to the pensioner’s home. Now that we know the potion is going to work for her I think she should have a say, and I think I have a suggestion for her and us.”

You are so much smarter than you let on, Hermione thought, and she showed Lavender her “please continue” expression.

“I sent a patronus to Luna, she should be here soon. You remember three full moons ago when she was talking about outposts for the foundation?” Lavender asked.

Hermione smiled broadly. “That’s brilliant!”

“So let us all in on this ’brilliant plan’,“ Ron said, revealing he had woken.

Lavender turned to the old woman. “Do you want to go back?” she asked flatly.

“Well it is a very nice place. I like the grounds, but, well, it’s full of old people”
Everyone chuckled.

“We have a very good friend,” Lavender continued. “She runs a printing business, and her husband is head of an international wildlife research foundation. They are both avid naturalists, and the foundation has been looking at permanent outposts on every continent.”

“Here?” Carla said with the beginnings of a smile.

Lavender nodded. “Yes, here, and you could stay. I saw how much you loved this place straight off, and I thought that if we could arrange it …”

Carla put Hugo off her lap and rose quickly from her chair. She crossed to Lavender, hugging her fiercely. “If I could stay here… I can stay?” she said, pulling back, nodding, eyes filling with tears.

*Yes, I think that would be a fine thing,* Luna’s voice said in everyone’s head.
Chapter 8

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down under

Chapter 7

“Aunt Luna!” Hugo and Rose cried as they ran to the door.

Lavender smirked. “They don’t get that excited for me,” she said in a sneer.

Ron laughed. “They don’t get that excited for me!”

The door was yanked open by Rose, and she and Hugo ran out into the night as Ron pulled himself from his chair. The sound of their excited voices and laughter filtered into the sitting room through the open door, and then Luna Scamander stepped into the room with the two youngsters hanging off her. Hermione reflected for a moment on how little her friend had changed, physically, from the girl she met all those years ago. She was perhaps a little fuller in the hips and breast, and her eyes had small crow’s feet from constant mirth, but in their depths Hermione could still see the ageless wisdom they had all recognized early on.

She noticed Lavender shake her head at Luna’s outfit. Where Lavender had a posh and developed sense of style thanks to frequent outings with Parvati to the fine shops of Paris, Luna assembled her garb on a purely functional and magical basis. Today she was wearing a bright red t shirt proclaiming “Free them from the cage” with a line drawing of a rabbit below the text, a pair of cargo shorts, argyle socks, and workman’s boots. Her hat was made from woven straw and had “Sicily” emblazoned on the front.

“Hello everyone,” Luna said, and doffed her hat. “My, what a lovely home you have here, Mrs. Williams.” She walked to Carla’s chair and took her hand. “My name is Luna Scamander.”

“Carla Williams,” the old woman replied and smiled. “So, you’re the one Hugo was telling me about.”

“Am I?” Luna said and looked at Hugo. He smiled; she nodded and turned her head to the side questioningly, he laughed and nodded again. She turned back to Carla. “Yes, that’s me.” Still holding Carla’s hand Luna looked into the old woman’s eyes. “May I ask you a few questions?”

“Certainly.”

The world vanished and Carla was floating in a blue white void. She felt rather than saw a presence with her. *I am a very powerful Legilimens, Carla. It’s far easier for us to communicate this way and learn what we both need to know. Lavender intimated that you would prefer to stay here rather than return to the pensioner’s home they found you in, is that true?*

“Yes,” Carla said. She felt a wave of happiness flow through her.

*That, I think, can be arranged,* Luna sent in the link they were sharing. *As Lavender told you my*
husband leads an international magical wildlife research organization, and we have been looking for places to establish outposts on every continent. We have found places in South America, Africa, and Europe, but we have yet to find a suitable location in North America, Asia, and here in Australia. Antarctica has proven to be even more challenging. If you agree, I believe we can arrange for you to spend the rest of your life here. Is that your desire?

“Oh, it is,” Carla said earnestly.

“I will arrange it then,” Luna said as she opened her eyes, and Carla’s world faded back into focus from out of the blue fog.

“Remarkable!” Carla said. “I wish Aunt Orla would have shown me all this, what you people can do…”

“Has remained secret for more than three centuries,” Hermione finished. “It’s important that it stay that way for the time being. I felt secure in revealing ourselves to you, partly because you already knew some of what we are through your early experiences with Orla, and at the time we didn’t know if you would react favorably to the memory enhancement potion. Now that we do know there are only a few options, take you back, or bring you fully into the magical world. You do seem to be taking all this quite well.” She sniggered

Carla shrugged. “Always thought there was more to this world than we knew.”

“Too right by half,” Seamus said with a chuckle.

Carla looked at him and tilted her head toward Luna. “She’s the blonde, isn’t she?”

“Aye, it’s a safe wager,” he said still chortling.

“How is everyone?” Luna asked. “Have you found the stone?”

Hermione shook her head. “We’ve only been seriously looking for a day and a half.” She smiled. “But we have found something, actually a few somethings” She opened her bag and pointed her wand into its depths. The statue of Merlyn floated out of it and landed on the small table before the couch.

Luna looked at it in wonder. She ran her hand down the side of the statue and shivered. “So old,” she said in a whisper, eyes closed. “He… he touched this, like the others. This is important.” She opened her eyes and looked at Hermione then Lavender. “My sisters, we need to discuss this.”

“I thought so too,” Hermione said. “All of us, or just we three.”

“The three of us will do,” Luna said authoritatively. “That can wait, though. I sense that you are all tired.”

“I’m not,” Hugo said and yawned.

Lavender laughed and turned to Hermione. “Here or back in Canberra?”

“Oh, I think we can empty the rooms,” Hermione said with a smile. “I’ll come with you.” She turned to her children. “Feel like staying here for the rest of the trip?”

“Yes!” they chorused.

“It’s so much like the Burrow,” Rose observed. Hermione nodded. She had the same feeling.
“It’ll be more like it tomorrow,” Ron muttered. “You sprogs’ll need to camp out here on the floor tonight. Your Uncle Shay and I will add a room tomorrow while, I assume, you’ll be out with your mum and aunts.”

“That will be helpful, Ronald,” Luna told him. “The more rooms that are available, the better it will be for the foundation.”

Lavender knelt beside Carla’s chair. “I’ll go to the facility and gather your belongings. They’re just in the one room?”

“Yes, they don’t like us spreading out, plus you wind up not knowing whose things are whose.”

Lavender smirked and nodded. “We won’t be long.” She and Hermione stepped out the door and apparated. They were back less than an hour later.

While they were gone Luna had helped Carla settle in to her aunt’s old room. The bedding had been cleaned and fluffed, the walls had been cleaned, the pictures straightened, and the lamps refilled with oil. For her part Carla had started the cinnamon bread for the morning. It sat in a bowl covered by a towel, rising. Seamus and Ron had also been busy. The two other rooms had been scoured, the beds enlarged, the pillows punched into shape, and a glass of water sat on the night stand by the right side of each bed. Both Hermione and Lavender took the right side, and their men knew them well.

Hugo and his sister were fading fast. They both lay on either side of their father on the couch. He had an arm around each of them, their heads against his shoulders, and he was telling them the story of the troll in the bathroom, again.

“You’re mum was quite hacked when she found out it was us locked her in with that thing,” Ron said.

“Yes, well you didn’t know at the time I was in there,” Hermione said with a laugh. “You’re forgiven,” she said, and kissed the top of his head. She shook her youngest who was on the verge of passing out. “Hugo, Hugo, get up, son.” He looked at her in a daze. “Here’s your pajamas.” She handed him a bundle. “Go on,” she said as she helped him toward one of the bedrooms. Rose had already got her pajamas from Lavender and was heading into Carla’s room. Twenty minutes later the two children were asleep in the sitting room on beds made from the couch cushions, Carla had retired to her room, and with Lavender’s help had settled her possessions into place. After unloading Hermione’s bag, and sorting their things, Ron and Hermione had bid goodnight to their security detail.

“Oi, this was a day,” Ron said, as he and Hermione lay cuddled in their room.

“I’ll say,” Hermione said with a snort. “So, you’re staying here tomorrow?”

“Yeah. Thought you Luna and Lav could take Rose with you, and Shay and I could stay here with Hugo. We’ve got some ideas about the house, and Hugo can help.”

She smiled against his chest. “I’m glad we did it.”

Ron nodded and she could feel it. “She’s a character alright,” he said. “Love the way the kids took to her.”

“You and Shay seem to be happy about it too.”

He sniggered. “She’s a better than fair cook, and she reminds both of us of our mums. What’s not to love?”
She hugged him. “Yes, I just wish the potion worked that well on Gram Caldwell.”

“’M sorry about that, love,” Ron said and kissed the top of her head. “Those little micro strokes are something nobody can fix. I know you’ve tried.”

She nodded. “What are you thinking of doing tomorrow?”

“Oh, just a few little things Dad taught us over the years, you’ll see,” he said and she could hear the smile in his voice. “And you?”

“Not certain yet, Luna wants to talk about Merlyn, and then we’ll go from there.”

He chuckled and said, “ Noticed you keep planning on going into wizarding society and then finding a reason not to.”

“Can you blame me?”

He hugged her closer. “No.”

“Maybe with Lav and Luna it’ll be less…”


“All of the above,” she answered and hugged him back.

Ron leaned over her and kissed her. “My magnificently brilliant wife can handle anything, haven’t I told you ‘bout her? Hero during the war, saved me and my best friends arse constantly, rose through the Ministry faster than anyone ever has, head of her department, on track to be Minister? Yeah, a few inquisitive folks ‘ll be no problem for her. I know I told you what she did to the reporters that tried to infiltrate Harry and Ginny’s wedding.”

Hermione looked up at him with her haughty “Department Head” expression.

“It only took Skeeter’s hair two months to start to grow back. Her photographer got the brunt of the curse.” She laughed. “You must admit, when hair started sprouting from his tongue it was quite funny. George certainly thought so.”

“Well, as he invented that curse,” Ron said, and shook in silent laughter.

“Luna sent her patronus to the home office, her executive assistant should be here tomorrow afternoon,” she told him.

“Carla’s gonna love Marcy,” he said a smiled.

“Yes, she will. We did well today,” she declared.

“Yes we did,” He said and kissed her good night. “Let see what tomorrow brings.”

Hermione woke the next morning to the smell of baking cinnamon bread. Mixed in with the sweet yeasty aroma was the scent of bacon and sausage. She nudged her husband. “You awake?” she asked.

“I am now,” he said, rolled onto his back and stretched. “Morning.”
“Morning,” she said and kissed him before slipping from the bed and donning her dress from the day before. “I’ll make sure Shay and Hugo don’t eat all the bacon.”

“Mmm, thanks,” he said and closed his eyes.

“Wake up, Ronald!” she said trying not to laugh at the memory.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll be along,” he said. “Go on. Get the kids fed.”

When Hermione entered the kitchen she found that Lavender had Hugo and Rose already dressed and sat at the table. Carla was just finishing their eggs and laying them on their plates.

“Good morning, Hermione,” Carla said, and sat Hugo and Rose’s plates in front of them. “What can I make ya?”

“Thanks, Carla, but you don’t have to cook for us all,” Hermione said as she took a mug from the open fronted shelves of the kitchen and filled it from the coffee pot on the cooker.

Carla nodded. “Oh, yes I do. Now, what’ll it be?”

“Don’t argue, Hermione, I already tried,” Lavender said with a smile.

“Two please,” Hermione said, and kissed the side of Carla’s head. “Where’s Shay?”

“He’s still in bed,” Lavender said. “Ron too?”

“I’m up,” Ron said as he entered the kitchen.

“Aye, me too,” Seamus said behind him.

“Where’s Luna?” Ron asked.

Lavender chuckled. “She set up her tent out in the yard then went out searching for… wallywimbles or something like that. Anyhow, she’s napping. She was a few hours behind us body clock wise.”

“She don’t get out much in the real world, does she?” Carla asked with a smile.

“Actually, most Muggles ignore her,” Lavender said. “She’s strange and unusual, Muggles tend to shy away from, and intentionally not notice, the strange and unusual.”

“I’m a bit nervous with James, Al, and Lilly not havin’ one o’ us around,” Seamus said to his wife.

Lavender nodded. “Luna called in Katie before she left them.” She laughed. “When Katie found out just who Luna’s Muggle cousin was she hot footed it to Sicily.”

“I’ll bet,” Hermione said and laughed herself.

“Who is he?” Carla asked.

“George Clooney,” Hermione told her.

“The actor? Really?” Carla said surprised.

“Yeah,” Ron said. “We’ve met him what.”-He looked at Hermione-“three or four times. He’s a good bloke.”

“Four,” Hermione said. “Luna’s wedding, that time we went to America with her, the time we met
them in Bali, and Christmas four years ago.”

“He knows?” Carla asked.

“Yes,” Lavender said. “He has what we call the ‘Muggle exemption’. It’s the same thing we’ll be getting for you.”

Hermione turned to her children. “Your father and I talked last night. Hugo, you’ll be staying here with Seamus and your father to help with building.”

“That’s brilliant, dad!” Hugo said excitedly.

Hermione smiled. “Rose, you will be coming with Luna, Lavender, and me.”

Rose nodded. “Where are we going?”

“Don’t know yet,” Hermione said, and looked at Lavender. “We’ll be discussing that.”

The sound of a commotion came from the front of the house, and Seamus and Lavender were on alert in an instant. Hermione smirked at their wands that had suddenly appeared in their hands. In her opinion they were second only to Harry in speed on the draw, and Harry insisted that Lavender was faster and Seamus was equal to him. They, as a group, went to the front door and Seamus opened it. A few yards away a young brunette woman was on her knees and retching.

“Marcy!” Lavender said, exasperated. She flicked her wand at the woman and silently cast the anti-nausea charm.

“Thanks, Mrs. Finnigan,” the woman said as she got to her feet. “Two portkeys and four apparitions, Ugh!”

“Welcome to Australia, Carla Williams,” Carla said, and held out her hand.

“Marcia Bates, a pleasure Mrs. Williams,” Marcy said, taking her hand and looking around. “Where’s Mrs. Scamander?”

“Aye, Luna’s catching a kip out in the back,” Seamus said.

“Ah, good,” Marcy said, and turned back to face Carla. “If I understood Mrs. Scamander’s patronus correctly, I am to procure a Muggle exemption from the Australian Ministry for you. Is that your understanding also, Mrs. Williams?”

Carla nodded. “Yes. Will it be difficult? I’ve not had many pleasant conversations with government employees.”

Ron barked out a laugh and Seamus sniggered. “Bureaucrats are the same the world round, eh Carla?” the Irishman said. “Lucky for you, you’ve fallen in with some rather important folks. Luna and Hermione’ll get it done if it requires, but Marcy here is a tenacious as they come.” He chuckled again. “Knows all their tricks and tells too. Don’t think the folks back in Canberra are ready for her.”

“Thanks, Mr. Finnigan,” Marcy said. “I took the liberty and got the appropriate papers from the Australian representatives at the Ministry back home. If there’s someplace we can sit, I need some signatures.”

“Come in, come in,” Carla said. “We’re just doing up breakfast.”

“None for me thanks,” Marcy said.
Lavender patted her back as they went back in the house. “Still a bit queasy?” she asked.

“Yes, a little,” Marcy said. “It’ll pass.”

The children resumed their places at the table in the kitchen while Carla went back to the frying pan on the cooker to finish Hermione and Lavender’s eggs. Marci sat one chair while Hermione took another. Lavender, Ron, and Seamus looked at each other, and Seamus ushered his wife and his friend into the two of the remaining chairs, saving the one next to Marci for Carla. “We’ll be fixing this today too,” Seamus said with a smile. “Hope you like company, Carla. You’ll be havin’ plenty.”

“Oh, I’ll be fine,” she said and laughed. “Haven’t had to feed a crew in a while.” She smiled in reminiscence. “Just after the second World War, when I was in my late teens, I did volunteer work at the kitchens for the refugees from China. That was an adventure!”

“I read about that,” Hermione said.

“Course you did,” Ron said with a smirk and an eye roll.

Hermione looked at him sideways. “Just because it doesn’t involve Quidditch doesn’t mean it’s not important history, Ronald.”

“Just because it’s history doesn’t make it important, Hermione,” Ron replied with a sparkle in his eyes.

“Oh good, a bicker,” Lavender whispered in Carla’s ear. “Best thing about having them as friends.”

“I understand that facts and numbers can be boring,” Hermione said. “But when it’s the story of a people’s struggles, or their achievements, or their failures it’s fascinating and inspiring and…”

“Not nearly as exciting as actually doing it,” Ron said.

“That’s as may be, but I seem to recall that ‘doing it’ resulted in more than a few injuries on your part, and more than a few worried nights at Saint Mungo’s for me.” Hermione said primly.

“M glad I did what I did with the Aurors,” He said. “Much rather it was me than someone else.”

Hermione smiled at him. “And people will be reading about what you did in history texts from now on, living your adventures.” She said with a note of triumph.

“At least they’ll only have to read about crazy arse former Death Eaters setting their giant pigs on me and not live it! That, I could have done without.”

Hermione laughed. “Molly did make the most wonderful Christmas ham from it though.”

“That hog fed half the department,” Lavender said and smiled at Seamus. “We’d just started training.”

Carla laughed at the look Lavender gave Seamus. “And you give these two grief about mooning over each other,” she said, indicating Ron and Hermione. “The pair of you are just as bad.”

After a round of laughter Carla served up Lavender and Hermione’s plates. She asked Seamus and Ron their egg preferences and set to cooking them. While she fried the men’s eggs, Marcy set out her papers and ink well.
Marcy assumed her professional demeanor. “There are three documents the Australian Ministry requires. Your personal information packet that they will keep on file, your employment agreement with The Scamander Foundation, and most importantly your secrecy contract.”

“Doesn’t sound all that complicated,” Carla said as she handed Ron and Seamus their plates.

“It’s not,” Hermione said. “There’s just a resistance in the magical community’s governments to letting many Muggles know.”

“They’re afraid,” Rose said. “It’s obvious from reading A History of Magic, they’re afraid of letting the muggle world know about us because they think the Muggles will try to eliminate us or use us for their own purposes.”

“She always this smart?” Carla asked Hermione.

“No,” Lavender said with a smirk. “It’s early, give her to this afternoon and she’ll be smarter yet.”

“Hugo too?” Carla asked while she basted her own eggs.

“Yes,” Rose answered. “When I do classes with Hugo and my cousins he’s always at the top.”

“You’re a pair, you are,” Carla said, and she sat next to Marci. “Alright, Miss Bates, what do you need?”
Chapter 9

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down under

Chapter 8

Deep in the Australian outback the town of Alice Springs rises from the dust. Fifteen miles to the west an old house sits alone at the base of a sandstone hill. Uninhabited for fifty years, this former home of a talented witch sat in a sort of stasis, waiting. Now magic fills it again. A small pillar of smoke drifts up from the kitchen chimney, the smell of cooking bacon and cinnamon fills the air, and the sounds of laughter, joy, and love echo off the hillside. In the kitchen of this solitary home a group of people sit at the table and share in the delight of its simple comforts.

A mile away an old man leans on his spear and contemplates the house. “Come at last, have ya?” he says to himself, and then he disappears into the bush.

~(*)~

After Carla had signed the papers Marcy had brought with her, the younger woman apparated away.

“Convenient,” she said to Hermione, still looking at the empty space where Marcy had been.

“Yes, but it can be dangerous. Too many in succession and you get sick or disoriented. That can lead to what we call splinching. It’s leaving a bit behind.” She cast a guilty look at her husband.

He hugged her to his side. “We were young, running for our lives, and you did what you had to do in that moment.” He said and smirked. “And I got this cool spiral scar that they all ask about.”

Carla nodded. “I’ll have to say it’s not the most comfortable way I’ve travelled, but the speed more than makes up for it.”

“Aye, but we’ll be needing the brooms today,” Seamus said. “Hermione, if you would.”

Hermione opened her bag, pointed her wand into its depths, and said, “Accio Brooms!”

One by one, four brooms floated up out of the little beaded bag. First was Ron’s pride and joy, his bright red Italian sport broom. Then Lavender and Seamus’ Nimbus 1000s emerged followed by Hermione’s Cleansweep.

Carla chuckled. “You actually ride these?”

Seamus smirked. “We three ride, Hermione hangs on in terror.”

“Ha, ha,” Hermione said, giving her friend a scathing look. “I’ve accepted there are things that I’m not as skilled at as others, but I manage. I’m just not talented enough to play Quidditch.”

“Rosie ‘ll make up for that,” Seamus sniggered. “And Hugo? He’s another Harry, born to ride.”
“What do you need the brooms for, Uncle Seamus?” Hugo asked.

Seamus smiled at his young charge. “Your da and I going into Alice Springs to gather some materials for our little construction project. It’s easier to bring it back on the brooms.”

“You wait here with Carla,” Ron told his son. “We’ll be back in an hour or two. While you wait you can help with dishes, okay?”

Hugo smiled and nodded. “Okay, dad,” he said and walked to Carla’s side. The old woman beamed as Hugo took her hand.

“Good morning, everyone, is there any cinnamon bread left?” Luna said as she entered the kitchen from the outside door.

Carla ushered Luna to the seat she had been in. “Of course, my dear. I made certain I had some for you. Bacon?” she asked.

Luna smiled at her. “I’m a vegetarian, Mrs. Williams, but I don’t mind if you have some,” she said.

“Aye, well we’ve all eaten,” Seamus said. He and Ron took their brooms and made their way into the yard.

“I’m going to say goodbye to Ron,” Hermione said. “We’ll be gone by the time he gets back.”

“I’m coming too,” Lavender said as she rose.

In the yard the two women kissed their husbands goodbye for the day. “Take care, love,” Ron said and kissed her again. “Don’t you three get too cocky and rash.”

Hermione gave him her most innocent look. “Us? Why we are the image of respectability and decorum. How could you doubt our capability?”

Ron looked at her, smirking. “Mostly because I’ve known the three of you for better than twenty years.”

Hermione smiled. “Point, but we’ll be careful,” she huffed. “If there’s anything to be careful about.”

Seamus leaned in and kissed his wife. “Keep her from getting carried away, aye?”

“Of course,” Lavender answered. “You stay attached to all your parts, I have designs on some of them later.”

Seamus kissed her and turned to his friends. “Let’s be off. I don’t fancy doing much flying in the middle of the day. Feckin hot here!”

With a quick swish of their wands they cast the *disillusion* charm over themselves and took to the air.

“Where did you have in mind for us today?” Lavender asked Hermione.

“First I want to take Luna to the tree,” she answered. “Then we need to find a Dreamer. I want to talk to someone that knows the original legends. I want to hear their stories of Merry Mac.”

“Back to Canberra then?”

“I’m afraid so,” Hermione said with a sigh. “Like Ron said, maybe with you and Luna along it won’t be so bad.”
“Hermione,” Lavender said sternly. “Do you really think I’d let someone accost you?”

“No, but I don’t want you to have to… body guard me!”

Lavender laughed. “As if I need to, however, I will be running interference. All part of the job, you know.”

Hermione hugged her. “Thanks, let’s see if Luna is done with breakfast.”

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Hermione, Lavender, Luna, and Rose emerged from the shadows of the trees and walked to the Fairies Tree. After staring at it in silence for a few moments Luna shook her head. “The likenesses are remarkable. That is clearly you, Hermione,” Luna said, pointing at the figure in the center of the carvings. Then she looked at the red haired fairy. “This one can be no one but Ginny, and I suppose that makes the blonde one me.”

“Carla says I’m here,” Lavender said indicating the wolf face at the bottom of the tree. “And here.” She knelt and showed Luna the small niche in the roots where her human form figure cuddled three children.

“James, Albus, and Lilly,” Luna observed. She looked at the two figures under Hermione’s. “Because those are definitely Hugo and Rose.”

“Shay and I thought so too,” Lavender said. “It’s what lead to us meeting Carla.”

Luna smiled. Hermione, Rose, and Lavender couldn’t help but feel the joy she radiated. “The universe works in strange and remarkable ways if we get out of its way and let it,” she said. “Carla is a treasure that I intend to cherish for as long as she allows.”

Hermione hugged her friend to her side. “Thank you, I… we couldn’t leave her as we found her. It would have been cruel.”

“Your compassion is your greatest strength, Hermione,” Luna said. “Never lose that.” Luna looked back at the tree. “Carla and Rose related to me the stories surrounding the figures whilst you were away gathering everyone’s possessions last night. Do you think any of them are related to the stones?”

Hermione looked thoughtful. “Only in a broad sense. They indicate that the original peoples of this continent had a well-developed society and that Merlyn stayed here a rather long time.”

Luna nodded and turned to their youngest member. “What do you think, Rose?”

She looked momentarily surprised to be included in their musings, and then she shrugged. “I think Orla had the sight, like Aunt Lavender sometimes does. I think she saw us coming.”

Luna smiled and nodded. “What else?”

Rose looked up at her. “She wanted us to find her house, I could feel it a bit when we got there, but Hugo, he knew.”

“Where should we go next, then?” Luna asked Hermione.

“We found everything there was at the light house, I think,” Hermione said. “It’s Ballina where the old circle was, or into Canberra and Oloogongo Avenue.”
Lavender put her hand on her friend’s shoulder. “Come on, you deal with ministry wanks all day. Let’s just go and get it over with.”

Hermione heaved a sigh. “Alright.”

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Oloogongo Avenue was a bustling hub of activity. From their previous visits Hermione and Lavender knew the entrance was through a tea shop on Fawkner Street. The Australians had an actual guard sitting at a desk next to the arced doorway that lead from the tea shop to the avenue. “Wands, he said in a bored voice. The three witches produced their wands for him to inspect. “Names.”

“Selene Wolfe,” Lavender said.

“Luna Scamander,” Luna said her light easy way, and the guard froze.

“Hermione Weasley,” Hermione said in her department head voice. “And this is my daughter, Rose.”

“Mrs. Weasley,” he said in awe as he looked up, seeing her for the first time.

Lavender put her hand on his. “We’d rather not be mobbed.”

He smiled at her. “My parents are both POMEs,” he said with a laugh. “Dad was Ravenclaw, Mum was Hufflepuff. Thank you, and I won’t be announcing you. Off you go.”

“The buildings are all new,” Rose observed as they walked down the avenue.

Hermione bushed her hand down her daughter’s hair. “They’ve only been building here for less than two hundred years. Compared to home everything is new, but some of these shops have been her for a century or more.”

“We should try the apothecary first, I think,” Luna said. “It’s the most likely place to find a broad variety of peoples. Everyone needs the apothecary.”

Lavender looked at her charge. “I think Rose and I could use a cold drink before we start.”

Hermione noticed a small sweets shop that also seemed to be serving Ice cream. “Let’s go there,” she said pointing across the street.

The little bell over the door rang as they entered, and the young woman behind the counter looked up and greeted them. “Welcome to Carmella’s, what would you like?”

“We’d like something to drink,” Lavender told her.

“Ah, from U.K. I hear. No wonder you’re thirsty,” the woman replied. “We’ve got lemonade, tea, iced tea, water, and a special drink we make ourselves from pineapple, passion fruit and mango.”

“Oh, I’ll have that,” Luna said brightly.

“Make it two and a water, tap please,” Lavender said.

“What would you like, Rose,” Hermione asked her daughter.

Rose was inspecting the ice cream flavors. “I fancy trying the pineapple macadamia ice cream,” she
Hermione smiled and turned to the server. “A small bowl please, another of your special drinks, and two lemonades.”

Refreshed, and carrying two quarts of ice cream, one chocolate and another of the pineapple macadamia in her bag under a cooling charm, Hermione ushered her entourage from the shop. Lavender knew the directions to the apothecary from her previous visit. They bade goodbye to Lidia, their new friend at Carmella’s Ice Cream shop, and made the three blocks to their destination unnoticed. Their luck didn’t hold when they entered the store.

It was, at one time, a Chinese herb store. The entire room was lined with small drawers, floor to ceiling. A few customers wandered along the walls, and an old man sat on a stool behind the lone counter. When they came through the door he recognized Hermione immediately. “By Merlyn!” he exclaimed.

Lavender put a finger across her lips and gave the man a pointed look. He closed his mouth and nodded. She smiled back at him and gave him a nod as well. “Friends of Miss Wolfe, welcome! How can I help you?”

Hermione strode up to the counter, Rose in tow, while Luna and Lavender surveyed the rest of the shop. “I’m doing some important research, and I need to talk to some of the Indigenous Australians, the Dreamers specifically.”

The man chuckled mirthlessly. “Good luck with that, haven’t seen a Dreamer around here in maybe five years.”

Hermione looked at him, bemused. “Why’s that?”

He shook his head. “Well, a good many are still mad as a cut snake we stole a continent from them.” He smirked. “Hard to argue.”

“How about other towns?” Hermione asked. “Are there villages we might look for?”

“Well you could try around Alice Springs,” he said, causing Rose to snort.

Hermione shook her head. “Seriously?” she said, amused.

The man nodded. “Well, yeah, about a third of the Norther Territories folks are aboriginal or part. Don’t use the Abo word though, they don’t care for it. Use indigenous or, better yet, find out what group they are. In Northern Territories it’ll probably be Anangu.” He turned to Lavender. “The memory potion work out well?”

“Very well, thank you,” Lavender replied with a smile.

He turned back to Hermione. “Callahan’s, the book shop just down the ave, has a fair aboriginal section. You might try there.”

“Oh god, no, not a book shop” Lavender said dramatically, and then laughed. “But, speaking of books, I need to run off to Carla’s nephew for a few moments at some point today.”

Rose took her mother’s hand. “Let’s go to the book shop. You and Aunt Luna can shop while Aunt Lavender does her errand.”
Hermione smiled at her. “Alright,” she said. “Stay close to me and you can have three of your own.”

Rose beamed at her mother.

“You have an excellent selection,” Luna said as she perused the labels on the drawers. “I shall have to return someday soon.”

“Please,” the man said. “Any friend of Miss Wolfe is welcome here.” He looked back at Hermione. “Good luck, and thank you,” he whispered.

Hermione smiled and took his hand. “You’re welcome.”

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Orla Cohn’s home had changed dramatically while they were away. As Hermione walked up to the old hitch post she couldn’t help but gawk.

“Lev, E, OH, Sa,” Ron said to Hugo. “You’ve got the feel of it okay, but it really helps to pronounce it correctly. Go on, again.”

They stood in front of the house next to a few piles of wood and shingles. “Wingardium Leviosa!” Hugo intoned, pointing his father’s wand at a large pile of siding that promptly floated up off the ground.

Ron knelt next to his son. “Good, now just direct it up to Shay.”

As Rose walked up to him and stood by his side, Hugo carefully guided the stack up to the roof rafters of the third floor, a floor that wasn’t there when Hermione left. The house now had a second and third floor, a wing off the kitchen, and a large covered awning off the rear.

“Welcome to Cohn Manor!” Carla cried as she emerged from the kitchen door. “Yer men have been busy!”

Hermione, still looking like a carp gasped out, “I’ll say.”

A shirtless Seamus waved his wand at the stack of siding and his hammer. The siding floated into place and the hammer nailed it down to the wall he was assembling. The framework was already fully built, and at the pace the siding was applying itself Hermione guessed they would be setting the roofing in short order.

Lavender sidled up to Hermione and looked at her bare chested husband. “Oh, I do love it when he sweats himself up. They are at their most handsome this way, don’t you think?” she asked in a voice Hermione rarely heard. In a rush a flood of memories ran through her. Lavender and Parvati gossiping about boys in the dorm, Lavender going on about Ron while in the throes of her crush, and then Lavender telling Hermione about her trip to Seamus’ family home the first time. Hermione knew at that moment, just from the sound of her voice, the Lavender was in love.

Hermione smiled at her friend. “Well, we must reward them tonight then, deal?”

Lavender took her hand and shook. “Deal,” she said with her wicked grin.

“They deserve it,” Carla said as she walked up to them.

“You weren’t supposed to hear that,” Hermione said, blushing.

Carla laughed. “Ah, I see. Hugo and Rose just ‘magically’ appeared, did they?” she laughed more.
“Come on in; let me show you what they done.”

The ground floor sported a new set of rooms off the kitchen, which was now substantially larger. The same work tops and cooker were present, but the room itself was twice its previous size and the table could now seat twenty. Out the back door a new roof, supported by the old trees that grew between the house and the hill, shaded a large area of packed earth. Rough made tables and benches were arranged in a circle under the shade of the awning. The sitting room was the same but for the addition of a lift next to the fireplace.

Carla laid her hand on Hermione’s shoulder. “Ronald says they were tearing down the old Pioneer Hotel. Pity. But he said that’s how his father got most of the materials to build the house he grew up in. Said he and Shay just walked up to the foreman and asked if they could take from the refuse. Foreman was happy to let them, so they got everything they needed there. The lift was a surprise though. Ronald said his father has wanted one for years now to put in for his mother, and Shay said he didn’t want me going up and down stairs. He said it’s hard on his mum, said he’s looking out for me.”

“Oh, you are in for it tonight,” Lavender muttered, low and husky, to herself. Hermione sniggered. Ron was in the same fix.

Carla laughed. “There’re stairs outside, but let’s take the lift.”

They giggled as they forced themselves into the small space meant for two. Carla closed the gates and said, “Two!”

The lift rose smoothly to the second floor. The walls were bare but complete, as was the floor. The ceiling was open beamed, but the thick floorboards of the third story deadened the sound of Seamus’s hammer effectively. Five bedrooms sat off the main hallway that the lift let out into, and a sixth door lead to the stairs.

“They’re putting in three more on the top floor,” Carla told them as they marveled at their husband’s work. “The new wing off the kitchen has six rooms and a bathroom with three showers, three loos, and it’s all under the old roof from the house. Ronald certainly paid attention to his father, I love frugality.” She beamed at Hermione.

Hermione shook her head in wonder. “I knew Arthur could make something out of nothing, but I never imagined…”

“And they did all this in a day!” Lavender said proudly.

“Aye,” Seamus said as he came through the stairway door. “But we won’ be done till tomorrow. Got the frame and walls up, have the roof on soon too, but paint’ll be tomorrow.” He made to hug his wife.

“Stay back, you filthy man,” she said laughing. “You need to use that new shower you built before you get near me.”

He chuckled. “Aye. Well, got to get back up there anyway,” he said looking at the ceiling. “Hugo’s itching to levitate the roofing. Just wanted come down and say hello. Oh and Marcy’s back. Just Apparated into the front yard.”

Lavender cupped his cheek. “Good, finish and shower. Carla and I will make dinner.”

Seamus nodded. “Great, should be done with the roof in two shakes,” he said and went back up the stairs.
Carla touched Lavender’s shoulder. “Did Martin have my books?” she asked.

“Yes, they were still in the kitchen. He gave them to me for you, they’re in Hermione’s bag,” Lavender said with a smile. “He misses you.”

Carla nodded. “He’s a good son. I know he didn’t come see me much, but he came as often as he could.”

“I told him you were moved to an experimental program, and that he should expect letters,” Lavender said. “Maybe even a visit.”

Carla hugged her blonde friend. “Thank you, Lavender,” she said near tears, and then she wiped her face and grinned. “Got my cookbooks then? Good! Let’s get down to the kitchen.”

~(*)~

High in the night sky the Seven Sisters fled from their pursuers, and in the east the great canoe, Djulipan, carried the three brothers up into the vault of the heavens. Jarra Oongan looked down from the stars, leaned on his spear, and dreamed. In his friend Orla’s house, a few miles away, he sensed the bright sparks of the people there. Two children, four women, and two men shown in the dream. They were joyous and loving; the sensation flooded through him, and then suddenly one of the women grasped his connection and gently but inexorably pushed her way into his mind.

*My name is Luna. Please come and join us, Jarra. You are welcome and wanted here, and we have great need of your knowledge. Please, come.*
Chapter 10

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down under

Chapter 9

“Oh, Hermione, it was just amazing how Shay and Ronald got all that back here,” Carla said from her chair. “These piles just kept popping up in the yard.” She chuckled. “Then the lift appeared with all its bits.”

Hermione patted her husband’s hand. “That was brilliant,” she said low and husky. His smile in return was filled with love, and more than a bit of smugness.

“Aye,” Seamus said. “Ron walks up to the foreman and says, ‘we’re here helping a friend, would you mind if we took from the refuse?’ and the foreman, he says, ‘just don’t make a mess and take what you want.’ So Ron, he says, ‘no worries, we’ll leave it cleaner than we found it,’ and that we did.”

Ron laughed. “Even got enough for a proper shed out in the back,” he said. “Gonna start with one of the old ones and enlarge it.

Hermione smiled. “A man has to have a shed,” she said.

Seamus chuckled. “Aye, he does, and the fact that most of the hotel pub is in the back yard ‘ll help some too. Beautiful bar and back, the rail and stools, a few tables to boot. It should all fit inside what we have in mind. Looks like it’ll be really nice when we get it all back together.”

After Carla served them her special spiced and herbed chicken, baked with onions and peppers, and accompanied by small herbed spouts, they had attacked the ice cream Hermione had brought back from Canberra. Bowls with spoons and dregs were scattered arounds the table. Hermione drew her wand and sent them to the basin. Then she set the scrubber on them.

Carla chuckled. “Nice to have you around,” she said. “The boys were busy, so Hugo and I had to hand wash lunch.”

“I help Gram Grainger all the time when we visit,” Hugo said proudly, and the old woman hugged him.

Marcy looked up at the framed Muggle exemption certificate on the wall near the door and smiled. “That wasn’t as hard as it could have been,” she said and smiled contentedly. “How did your investigations go today, Mrs. Scamander?”

“The tree was very interesting and enlightening, Marcy,” Luna said. “However the most significant thing we learned was that we are in the heart of the largest population of indigenous Australians right here.”
“Could have told you that,” Carla said. “Like I said, they’d stop by now and again when I’d come out to visit Orla.”

Hermione sat forward. “What would they do? What did your aunt and the Dreamers talk about?”

Carla shrugged. “It was a long time ago, and I was little. Don’t rightly remember.” she chuckled. “And yes, I did remember my potion this morning.” She turned to Lavender. “You could do that memory charm, like you did in the park?”

Lavender smiled at her. “Oh, I think we can do better than that.” She turned to her blonde friend. “Luna?”

Luna rose from her chair, walked around the table and took the seat next to Carla. “Would you like my help remembering?”

Carla nodded. “You’re good at this then, better than Lavender?” she asked.

Luna looked at Hermione and Lavender, and the two women looked back at their friend with an expression of admiration that took Carla’s breath away. The young woman that from all outwardly appearance looked to be a refugee from a late nineteen-sixty’s commune suddenly was a focused, powerful, and imposing presence. “Yes,” was all she said.

“Mrs., Scamander?” Marcy asked.

“Yes, Marcy?”

“If you don’t mind I’d like to pop down to Alice Springs for a moment,” Marcy said. “I left in such a rush I forgot a few… sundries.”

Luna looked at her and smiled. “You’ve been more than helpful today, Marcy. Of course, do what you need.”

Marcy nodded. “I’ll be back shortly,” she said and Disaparated.

Luna turned back to Carla. “Shall we go to the sitting room? It’s more comfortable and conducive.”

“Yeah, alright,” Carla said. She was beginning to get comfortable with the idea that Luna was very different than the other women in the house. They sat opposite each other, Carla in the large stuffed chair that had become hers, and Luna on the couch facing her.

“Lavender did the memory charm with you yesterday?” Luna asked.

“Yes,” Carla answered. “It was like being there.” she smiled. “I could almost smell the dust.”

Luna smiled back. “That’s very good. It means I won’t have to force anything. Close your eyes.”

From the kitchen door Hermione watched first Carla, and then Luna, close their eyes and lean back to rest their head. She loved to watch great magic being performed, and Luna did nothing but great magic.

“Memoria Vigarosa! Legilimens!” Luna said, and a soft, light green glow enveloped both women.

~(*)~

A dark shape stood on the horizon. “Aunt Orla!” Carla called from the front of the house. “Got a black fella coming.”
The door opened and Orla Cohn stepped out onto her porch. Shading her eyes with her hand she peered into the bright desert. She closed her eyes in concentration for a moment and then laughed. “It’s Tamo, Carla. Get out another place setting for lunch.”

The memory shifted and Carla was in the back of the house under the trees when another black man appeared. “Should ya be playin’ alone?” he asked with a smile.

“I get on fine,” Carla answered. “Got lots of friends back in Darlington Point. I like it out here alone.”

“Mind if I join ya?” the man said squatting next to her.

“Nah,” she said and smiled at him. “I was making a bridge for my truck.”

On the ground in front of the young girl were two mounds of earth and some sticks laying between their peaks. She took up her toy truck and drove it over the twigs. They separated and the wheels fell between them.

“I think I can help with that,” The black man said, and picked up the bundle of sticks. “Where’s Orla?” he asked.

“She’s down at the rail station picking up this year’s piglets and calf,” Carla answered.

The black man placed the sticks back on Carla’s dirt mounds. They were stuck together, side by side, and made a perfectly flat bridge for her toy truck. “That’ll work better,” he said. “Ma name’s Jarra.”

Carla drove her truck back and forth across her little bridge and track, and then looked up at the man and smiled. “I’m Carla.”

The memory blurred and shifted again, Carla was a young teen and she stood on the porch, Orla by her side. “The Muggles are at war again, Orla,” the black man in the yard said. “The dreamers are worried this time. What they see…”

“I’ll take a long look tonight then, try and see what they’re planning.” She looked at the man with a serious express on her face. “If they come, I’ll stand with ya, ya know that.”

Carla looked at her aunt as Orla Cohn closed her eyes and let her power flow. She’s using it here, isn’t she? Carla thought.

Yes, I believe your aunt was very much like me, Luna replied.

“They are not coming yet, Onno.” She smiled down at her niece. “Carla can hold the fort for an evening. “ She turned back to Onno. “Tell the council to set a fire for tomorrow night.”

Once more the memory faded and was replaced. It was night, and Carla was watching her aunt through the rear door. “ith ca sha month cothaawww,” she said to the large fierce snake. Carla was continually amazed that her aunt could get so close to the deadly snakes. “Go my friend. Tell the others.”

Can you do that? Carla thought to Luna.

No. It is a very rare and closely guarded gift for those that have it. She could sense as I can, and I believe she could read as I do.

Sense?
Like this, Carla felt humor and joy from Luna, then she partially felt and partially saw a landscape of bright points around her. Small bright points were the animals in the yard and hill slope behind the house. Larger glows were the people. She could feel each of them, and she could feel through Luna which spark belonged to who, then Luna’s attention was drawn by a very bright glow a small distance away. They flew to it in an instant, and Luna embraced the light. Carla knew this particular light.

*His name is Jarra,* she thought.

~(*)~

In the kitchen Lavender and Hermione were just putting the bowls back on their shelf when Luna’s presence spoke in the minds of the adults. *We have a visitor. His name is Jarra, and he is a friend of Orla’s. Please, welcome him.*

~(*)~

In the sitting room Carla and Luna sat, still in a trance. *This is why your aunt lived out here in the wilderness so far from everyone else, Carla. She had to, as I have to. You see I don’t always listen, but I can’t help hearing. It’s a constant drone, a buzzing in the background of everything. The farther I get from large groups of people the dimmer it gets. This is one of the quietest places I have been. I understand why she loved it so. It isn’t a problem when I’m with people I love. They have, for the most part, pleasant thoughts.*

*Out in the world, especially among the Muggles, it’s very unpleasant. They are so unhappy and obsessed; it’s like bees crawling in my head. Here I just get the pleasant background of the love that Ron and Hermione, and Seamus and Lavender have, and the unjaded thoughts of the children. Yours are also very kind and happy. Let me show you.*

Carla felt the world recede a little farther, and then she could see through Luna’s eyes as she opened them. She saw herself from Luna’s perspective, sitting on the chair in a trance. And then she felt what Luna was talking about. It wasn’t a noise, it was something else. A constant murmur of barely decipherable thoughts swirled in her mind. Love and lust came from the adults in the kitchen causing Carla to chuckle.

*No secrets from you, are there?*

Luna’s presence bubbled with humor. *It can be a challenge not to listen, I choose to ignore much. For instance Rose has a secret, and I have chosen not to look. Like this.* Their focus shifted to the two children. Rose was reading Transfiguration Today and Carla could feel her enjoyment of the article she was reading, but in the background of her emotions was a guarded place that held something she wished to keep safe and unknown. *You see?*

*Yes*

*I could easily break through and discover what it is that Rose is so protective of, but it is her secret to share when she decides, not mine to divulge because I can.* Another bright glow entered the kitchen. 

*Ah, your friend, Jarra is here.*

~(*)~

*Please, welcome him.*
Lavender looked at her husband. “I’ll go,” he said.

Ron rose from the table with a groan. “Damn, haven’t been this sore since training.”

Seamus laughed at him. “Robards ‘d be makin’ ya run your fool legs off.” He laughed again and impersonated their old Auror training master. “You’re getting soft, Weasley!”

Ron gave him the two finger salute and said, “We’ll be on the porch.”

Seamus laughed again and disapparated.

~(*)~

A snap sounded about fifty feet away, and Jarra opened his eyes. A man stood in the desert with his wand tip illuminated and pointing at the ground. Jarra could see the man smiling in the glow. “Me name’s Seamus Finnigan. You’d be Mr. Jarra?” The man said. His voice carried in the still quiet of the outback. “Luna says you’re a friend, so why not come on down and join us for a drink?”

Jarra walked up to the man and held out his hand. “Jarra Oongan,” he said.

Seamus took his hand. “Seamus Finnigan. You’re a friend of Orla’s then?”

Jarra nodded. “Yeah, knew her from when I was a tike. Heard she passed a good while back, sad about that. Who’s in the house?”

Seamus and Jarra started back toward the house. “Her niece,” Seamus said.

“Carla?” Jarra asked in a delighted voice. “Beauty.”

“Aye,” Seamus said. “We found her in a pensioner’s home.” He shook his head. “She could hardly remember her name. We fixed her up and brought her out here. She’s got her Muggle exemption now, so you can talk freely with her.”

Jarra looked at him with an appraising smile. “Ya did all that for a stranger?”

For a moment Jarra saw into the past and the eleven year old Seamus that was instantly sorted into Gryffindor house. “Well, yeah. Wouldn’t have been right, to leave her there. Besides, when you meet Madam Leader you’ll see. The thought would never occur to her, to leave Carla there.” Seamus looked mildly offended at just the thought.

Jarra smiled. “That was good of ya,” he said. These truly were proper successors to Orla. As they approached the house Jarra could see a group of people sitting on the porch and leaning on its rails. A blonde woman left the porch and walked up to them as they entered the yard area. Jarra could sense it from ten feet away.

“You’re a wild one, aren’t ya?” he asked.

“On occasion, Lavender Finnigan,” she said, and she held out her hand.

“Jarra Oongan,” he said again, and looked at Seamus. “You two?”

Seamus laughed. “Aye, took a fair bit o’ patience on my part.”

Jarra chuckled at the look Seamus’ wife gave him, and Seamus motioned at the rest, indicating the kitchen door.
“House has changed!” Jarra exclaimed as he noticed the second and third floors.

“You’re going to have company from time to time out here,” Seamus said. “Me friend, Luna, hired Carla as house matron, and she’s renting the place for her foundation. They do research into magical creatures you see.”

As they mounted the porch near the kitchen door Jarra said, “My dad was here when Carla found this matjgul. Helped her build the house, dig the well.” he nodded to himself. “I was just an ankle biter at the time.” His eyes widened at the new wing and much larger kitchen he entered. “How many ya expecting?”

Ron laughed. “If my family comes calling, we’ll fill the place. Ron Weasley,” he said and held out his hand.

Jarra took them in, feeling them in the dream. “Good to meet you all,” he said.

“Jarra!” Carla exclaimed as she came through the door from the sitting room.

“Carla Cohn,” the old man said and hugged her. “Ya look good, Carla. Years been good to ya then?”

“No as good as you,” she said in wonder. “How old are ya now?”

He chuckled. “One hundred four next month.”

The old woman hugged him again. “So good to see you, let me introduce you to ma friends.” She indicated Hermione. “This here is Hermione Weasley, her husband Ronald, and their kids, Rose and Hugo. Ya met Lavender and Seamus.” She turned to Luna. “And this is Luna. She’s a bit like Orla, yeah?”

Jarra was stunned the moment he turned his attention to her. She radiated lurrutj-ja, and he could feel in his bones the power she shone with. “Orla was good, very good, yeah? You, you’re a whooper, aren’t ya?”

“I have some ability,” Luna said with no false modesty. “Come, Jarra. Let sit and talk.”

“I’ll make tea,” Hermione said.

“Ah, let me,” Jarra said. “Haven’t had Orla’s blend in a lot of years.” He sat at the table and let out a calming breath. To the others in the room it appeared that he just stared at the table top. Then the old cast iron tea kettle floated across the room to the tap. It filled itself and then came to rest on the cooker. A fire blazed to life under it, and a crockery jar from the top shelf glided down to sit on the worktop next to the cooker. The lid of the kettle opened and the top of the jar spun off. Then a bundle of herbs rose from the jar and deposited themselves in the kettle. The top of the jar twisted back on and it flew back to its spot on the high shelf.

“How did you do that?” Rose asked excitedly. “I didn’t see you use your wand.”

“Don’t use a wand,” Jarra said. “Got one somewhere. They gave it to me when they tried to suck the bush from us.”

Hermione nodded. “They tried to eradicate the aboriginal culture inside wizarding society as well, didn’t they?” she said sadly.

“Yeah,” Jarra said, and then chuckled. “Didn’t work. Partly because of people like Orla that thought
it was a stupid crime.”

“But how did you do what you just did without a wand?” Rose asked.

Jarra Onogan looked at Rose and smiled. “Wands are good for some things, fine control, precise intent, but we, we approach magic differently. Ya see we live in the dream, the waking and the slumbering dream. It’s all the same little Sheela. So what you do is dream what you want to happen. Very simple really.”

Luna smiled and nodded. “Magic at its purest,” she said.

“So it’s like the accidental magic we did when we were young?” Hermione asked.

Jarra nodded once. “Yeah, just like that. Kids, they get it ya see.” He looked at the adults with something like sadness. “You white people, you ‘civilized’ folks, well you’ve civilized the pure magic right out of ya, haven’t ya? When you walk in the dream, when you know, it’s all just intent.”

Rose looked at him, and in her mother’s inquisitive voice asked, “So you just… imagine what you want done?”

Jarra smiled at the young girl. “It’s a bit more than just that, but that’s the nut of it, yeah.” He looked back at Hermione. “Well, it’s wonderful what ya’ve done for Carla, but what brings you POME’s out in the middle of the bush?”

Trust him completely, Luna’s voice said in Hermione’s mind.

Hermione drew a calming breath, summoned tea cups and mugs for everyone, and began pouring. As she filled cups she spoke to Jarra. “I intend to free the elves from their slavery,” she simply stated. “There are… artifacts that I need to find, statues of the elves. We’ve found two already, and I believe that there is one on each continent. Merlyn left them there.”

“And by her compassion you will know her,” Jarra said in wonder. “Thought he was a myth, like Merry Mac, and apparently you.”

The round of laughter surprised Jarra. “Not a myth,” Carla said.

Hermione drew her wand. “Accio, she said and pointed her wand at the door to the sitting room. Unseen by the occupants of the kitchen, the statue of Merry Mac floated up off the mantel piece and sailed across the room. The door opened and the one and a half foot tall carved rock settled on the table. Jarra stared at it, stunned.

“Where the bleedin’ hell?” he said in a whisper.

“Merry Mac’s lighthouse,” Lavender said softly.

“You have any idea how long we Dreamers been looking for this?” He asked not really looking for an answer.

“Well, from readin’ Merlyn’s book I figure around five and a half thousand years, yeah?” Seamus said with a smile.

“Bout that, ya,” Jarra replied. “And it was at the lighthouse all along.”

Hermione sat back in her chair. “The statues we are looking for are called the Binding Stones. They are figures of elves, much like this one. Have you heard anything about them?” she asked.
Jarra shook his head. “Nah, just the tales of the gnomes Orla gathered. Had dozens in that book of hers.”

“What book?” Hermione, Rose, and Lavender said at the same time.

He looked at them bemused. “Orla’s book of the dreams. She gathered as many of the Dreamers stories as she could before the Ministry trotted us all off to their schools.” He chuckled. “What a waste of time that was. Got a Uni education out of them, that was good, but they tried and tried to drive the bush from us. Told us we were backwards, and all along we could do more than them by just dreaming.”

Seamus shook his head. “Nineteenth century Englishmen were some of the most arrogant fecks the world has ever known.”

“I think I know which book you mean,” Rose said. “I’ve been reading Orla’s charms and transfiguration books but there are lots of others on her shelf. May I go in your room Carla?”

Carla smiled. “Of course Rose,” she said.

Rose left the kitchen and Jarra watched her. “Seems to be a bright one,” he said.

“Aye she is,” Seamus said, and then put his hand on Hugo’s shoulder. “But it was this one here found your Merry Mac.”

“I could feel it,” Hugo said proudly.

“Could ya, little lad?” Jarra chuckled. “In all the times I been there I never did, none of the other Dreamers either.”

“Here it is,” Rose said as she re-entered the kitchen, a medium sized book in her hands.

It was leather bound and had no markings on the spine or the cover. Rose opened it and read the title page. “The Wizarding Legends of the Australian People, Compiled by Orla Cohn.” She looked up. “The other one we were reading was all the legends the Muggles gathered. I saw this one last night but I was so worn out…”

“That’s okay, Rose,” Hermione said. “Why didn’t she publish this?” she asked Jarra.

“Would have been illegal until forty-eight, then I suppose she just never got round to it,” he said.

“All the stories I told ya should be in there,” Carla said. “I remember her havin’ this, but I never read it.” Her face lit with a particular memory. “Yeah, there was this older back woman, Kimma? Killa?”

“Kirra,” Jarra said.

“Yeah, that’s it. Kirra,” she said, patted Jarra’s hand, and looked far away. “Orla sat at the table with her, right here, and wrote in this book. I was maybe ten at the time.” Her smile was radiant as she remembered.

“And by her compassion will you know her,” Jarra said again. He looked at Hermione. “The Dreamers and the Anangu will help you. You’re her, got to be, because she,” he said, looking at Luna. “Is obviously your animal sister, and she,” he said, looking at Lavender. “Is the Dingo Queen without a doubt. Then there’s the two kids, right age and all.” He stood and took Hermione’s hand. “Get the redhead here, and I’ll call a fire for the night after tomorrow.” He turned to Carla. “I’ll be seein’ you quite a bit from now on I guess. Makes me happy.” He kissed the old woman on the
cheek, bade goodbye to Seamus, Lavender, Rose, and Hugo. Then he took Luna’s hand.

“Please, gather your sisters and come. We dearly miss what we and Orla could do together, and I know we can help in your search.” With that he took up his spear, strode from the kitchen, and disappeared into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Well, we’re getting to the point. Another few chapters (alright, eight) and we will be back in England. Sorry about the spotty updates, but, as always, real life…

matigul A group of trees.

lurrutj-ja Magical power

POME Prisoner Of Mother England

Arnangu Native Australians (non magical)
Chapter 11

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down under

Chapter 10

Not long after Jarra left, Marcy returned from Alice Springs. As she entered the kitchen Luna greeted her.

“Welcome back, Marcy,” she said. “I have another task for you.”

Marcy laughed. “That was quick.”

Luna smiled. “We had a visitor while you were away, one of the Dreamers, and we need to get Mrs. Potter here in the next day and a half.”

Marcy nodded. “I think I can make that happen.”

Luna took her hand. “I’m certain you can. Rest and start on it in the morning. Oh, they’re now on Crete with Cousin George.”

Marcy smiled. “Are they? Well, that’s nice. I like your cousin George quiet a lot.”

Luna laughed, and said, “Many women do for some reason.”

“Not that hard to figure out,” Carla muttered, and the rest of the adults laughed.

Rose looked at her mother. “What are we doing tomorrow, Mum?” she asked.

Hermione smiled at her daughter. “Well, since we’re waiting on your Aunt Ginny, and we found Jarra, I thought we’d have a day off from searching. We’re just on the border of one of Australia’s national parks. The whole of the area north of us is a nature reserve, and this Simpson’s Gap is famous for its rock formations.”

“It’s very pretty,” Carla said. “Especially in early spring. There’ll be water in the river, bloomin’ flowers, grass, it’s lovely.”

“Sounds like a picnic is in order,” Lavender said.

Seamus and Ron looked at each other and smiled. “Good idea,” Ron said, and looked at Hermione. “Why don’t you and Lav take the kids and Carla? Shay and have a bit more to do here.”

Hermione looked at her husband lovingly. “I don’t want you to spend your holiday working.”

Ron took her hand and kissed it. “Just one more day,” he said, and chuckled. “Besides, Shay and I are havin’ fun.”

Hermione looked unsure. “Okay, if that’s what you want,” she said.
“Ah, take off and have a good day,” Seamus said. “Ron and I’ll have the whole place done when you get back.”

“I’d like to explore with you,” Luna said. “Walwibulus Meblinas are said to reside in the desert waters of Australia.”

Lavender considered at her friend and smiled. “And what, precisely, are Walwibulus Meblinas?”

Luna looked Lavender. “They are much like the Grindilows, a bit smaller and, as with almost everything here, venomous.”

Seamus laughed. “Ah, that’ll be good fun.”

“May I have the book for the night, Hermione?” Luna asked, indicating Orla’s book of the legends of the Dreamers.

Hermione looked puzzled for a moment, and then shrugged her shoulders. “Yes, certainly.” She said, and handed Luna the book.

Luna nodded thanks. “I’m interested in what she has to say about the magical creatures that live here.”

“I’m hittin’ the shower again,” Seamus announced. “Gonna let the hot water do some work on me shoulders.”

Ron looked at his friend. “Good idea, I’ll take the one next to you.”

Carla laid her hand on Seamus’ shoulder. “All that pluming ya did today is paying off for ya,” she said. “Got yourselves a pair here, ladies.” She winked at Lavender and Hermione. “Best hang on to em.”

Lavender gave Carla her confident wolf look. “We intend to.”

~(*)~

Luna sat on a rock a few miles from “Cohn Manor” as the stars did their eternal dance over her head. She recast the warming charm on her robes against the cold desert night, and then replaced her wand, propping behind her right ear. Its tip glowed softly with the *Lumos* charm, illuminating the last pages of the book in her lap. She’d finished Orla’s book and was contemplating what she had read.

Hermione would find the clues hidden there just as she had. Merlyn’s hand was evident in many of the stories, and she had a feeling she knew the general location of where he left the stone for them, and Hermione would find that same clue too. But what occupied her mind the most was the message. That one touch, that one moment of contact with the statue of Merry Mac, had told her volumes. He knew, when he made it, he knew they would come.

And he had left a message just for Luna. It echoed in the vibrations of the statue. *Let her find them, my child. Do not interfere.* The message was firm but wrapped in a sort of kindness.

She smiled to herself. They would do it, of that she was now certain, and she would be standing next to Hermione when they did. Merlyn had set the whole chain of events in motion six thousand years
in the past, and his plan was finally coming to fruition. Luna rose from her seat and prepared to Apparate back to the house. She had given Lavender and Seamus, and Ron and Hermione enough time to make love, and now she could get some sleep without the erotic dreams that otherwise would have plagued her.

~(*)~

Morning came with a cool fog. As Hermione sat at the table, Carla set a mug of coffee in front of her. “It’s about an hour’s drive from here to Simpsons Gap,” the older woman said. Her eyes lit with humor. “Don’t suppose it’ll take us that long, eh?”

“You’re really starting to enjoy this, aren’t you?” Seamus said, as he too entered the kitchen.

Carla looked out at the white fog and her expression became reflective. “I’ve had a life, that’s for certain,” she said. “What with summers here with Orla, workin’ the refugee camps at the end of the war, goin’ to uni and learning accounting, winding up runnin’ a freight forwarding company, and now this; Orla’s last gift.”

Hermione stood and hugged the old woman, and then she wiped a tear from her own face. “I’m so happy we found you.”

“Pleased about that myself,” Carla said with a wet laugh, and hugged her new friend. “Fog’ll lift in an hour or so.” She turned back the cooker and pulled a platter stacked with slices of fried battered bread from the oven. “It’s French toast this mornin’”

The room filled over the next few minutes, and the pile of French toast on the platter shrank with alarming speed. Carla was just rising to fix another batch when Marcy came in through the outside door. “I’m back, Carla,” she announced.

“Where’d you get off to so early,” Seamus asked.

“Carla sent me in to Alice Springs to get the supplies for their picnic,” she answered. “And for you and Mr. Weasley I found a takeaway curry establishment that was making breakfasts and lunches.”

Hermione touched Luna’s arm and leaned in to her. “If you ever let her go I want her,” she whispered.

Luna laughed. “I wouldn’t be waiting if I were you,” she said.

Marcy turned to her boss. “I’ll be on my way now, Mrs. Scamander.”

Luna nodded to her. “Thank you, Marcy. We’ll see you soon,” she said.

“I’ll walk you out,” Ron said and rose from his chair. “Got something you can help with.”

Hermione gave him a questioning look. He gave her the ‘it’s nothing important’ look they had perfected over their long relationship.

Lavender looked at Hermione and asked, “Apparate or brooms?”

Hermione grinned and looked at Carla. “I think brooms.”

~(*)~

Carla’s initial trepidation at hurtling through the air on a stick with twigs sticking out the back had turned to absolute rapture. Behind their disillusion charms, invisible to the people on the ground, she
hugged Lavender’s back as they flew in and around the canyons of West MacDonnell National Park. After seeing the crowds at Simpson’s Gap they decided to fly west to a less populous spot for their outing. Several deep cuts and steep chasms ran through the folded hills of the park. The scenery was dramatic, and from the air it was even more so.

The hot weather they’d had for the last two days had given way to the more seasonal moderate temperatures of early spring and Carla was glad for the cloak that Lavender had loaned her for the flight. Up ahead, Luna with Rose sitting in front of her, and Hermione with Hugo wound their way into a canyon and landed in the shade of a magnificent escarpment of quartzite.

Luna dismounted next to Hermione and looked around. “Spectacular,” she said, and strode off toward the small spring fed pond they had seen from the air.

“Nice it’s cooled off,” Carla said, as she and Lavender alit next to Hermione, Rose, and Hugo. “Last week was a scorcher for late August!”

“Almost like home,” Hermione said, taking in the lifting fog and broken clouds. A flock of noisy ring necked parrots took flight from a nearby tree as Hugo and Rose ran around its trunk playing a game of tag. She smirked. “Almost.”

“I’m taking Rose and Hugo on a little walk up the canyon,” Lavender said. “You remember my brother, Rowan? He loves geology, and he’d kick my arse if I didn’t bring him some rocks from Australia.

Hermione chuckled. “Lavender, my dear sweet sister, there isn’t a person on the planet that could kick your arse.”

Lavender looked at her with a grin of superior knowledge. “You haven’t met Master Po,” she chuckled, and turned to the children. “Come on, you two, class is in session.”

“Got yourself a treasure there,” Carla said, as Lavender, Rose, and Hugo wandered up the mostly dry riverbed at the bottom of the canyon.

“You have no idea,” Hermione said.

Carla nodded at Hermione’s tone. “Gettin’ one,” she said, and chuckled herself. “Let’s set out lunch.”

~(*)~

The house was painted; that was the first thing she noticed as they touched down. The sides were yellow white, the trim light green, and the new metal roofing that Ron and Seamus had somehow acquired gleamed white in the sunshine. Light blue curtains ruffled in the open windows, and the smell of baking apple pie wafted from the kitchen. The biggest surprise, though, came in the form of Molly Weasley stepping from the open door of the kitchen and beckoning them to join her.

“Grandmum!!!” Rose and Hugo cried and rushed to her. Molly hugged and kissed them, and then led the two into the kitchen. Hermione, Lavender, Luna and Carla followed at a somewhat slower pace.

“Molly, I’m surprised. Ron didn’t say he was sending for you.” Hermione said as she entered the kitchen. “This is Carla Williams. Carla, my mother in-law Molly Weasley.”

“So good to meet you,” Molly said as she took Carla’s hand. “Ron told me they rescued you from a pensioner’s home, and then drug you out here in the middle of nowhere.”
Carla laughed. “Rather be here than there.”

Malloy beamed at her. “That’s wonderful. I couldn’t be prouder of my children.” She looked at Hermione, Lavender, and Luna. “All of my children.” She turned back to Carla. “Ron knew Ginny’d bring the whole Potter crew, and he didn’t want you to have to take care of everyone by yourself. Took the liberty of making a few pies, but I waited for you to start dinner.”

“Ronald has told me I’ve passed the food test,” Carla said and laughed. “How many we cookin’ for today?”

Molly considered for a moment. “Well we’ve got Ron’s four, you, me, and Arthur,” she said.

“Granddad is here too!” Hugo said.

“Out the back with your cousins,” Molly said and chuckled as Rose and Hugo tore from the room. “So, Ron’s four, we three, Luna, Lavender, Marcy, and Seamus, the five Potters, and Luna’s cousin George. I think that’s seventeen.”

Carla looked momentarily surprised, and then she laughed. “Ron said if his family came you’d fill the place.”

“Ah, we got at least one bed left,” Ron said, as he came through the door followed by Seamus and Luna’s cousin George, all of them covered in paint. “Carla, this is Luna’s cousin George.”

Carla appraised the devastatingly hansom man before her. “Recognized ya, Carla Williams,” she said and took his hand.

“George Clooney,” he replied.

“How’d they talk you into coming way out here and gettin’ all messy?” she asked with a laugh.

George smiled. “Best thing about my wizarding relatives and their friends is that they don’t give a hoot about my profession. I get to be a normal guy without all that acting baggage.”

Seamus slapped him on the back, and said, “Aye, well at least you can act like a good painter.”

George looked at him sidelong. “Geebag,” he said, and they both broke up laughing. “We just finished the rec room,” George continued. “That was the last of it, right Ron?”

“Yeah, it’s shower time,” Ron said, and headed to the dorm addition.

“Aye,” Seamus said. “We’re all done.” He winked at his wife. “You should take a look around.”

As Seamus headed out the door to the dorm building and George made to follow him, Carla caught his attention. “Need any help washin’ up?” she asked with a twinkle in her eye.

He looked shocked for a moment, and then he smiled. “I think I can handle it,” he said, took her hand, kissed it, and then laughing he followed Seamus.

Looking at the bemused faces around her she said,” What? ‘M old, not dead.”

~(“)~
Ron, Seamus, Harry, Arthur, and George had outdone themselves. The old bedframes that Seamus and Ron had rescued from the refuse pile at the Pioneer Hotel demolition had been restored and repainted. All of the new rooms had been painted a light peach colour, and the doors painted white with a large number on the upper half. Rooms one through five were on the second floor, Six seven and eight on the top floor, and nine to fourteen in the addition.

Seamus had rescued enough of the scruffy furniture from the hotel to outfit each room with a dresser and chair in addition to the bed. George had hidden behind a glamour while they shopped at the local Muggle Kmart, and he had paid for new oil lamps for each room. He, Ron, and Seamus had also stopped at the local purveyor and acquired a keg of Guinness for the rec room. The accommodations were simple, very old, functional, and perfect.

Marcy had brought back with her new mattresses, shrunken to fit in her bag, new bed clothes, a mountain of pillows, and enough blue gingham material for two complete rounds of curtains for the whole of the new manor. After questioning her, and marveling at the speed at which she had assembled the people and materials she had, Hermione again offered to take Marcy of Luna’s hands.

“It wasn’t that hard, really,” Marcy said from her chair in the rec room. The plush leather chairs sported numerous patches that Ginny had applied while the men reconstructed the bar and back. She rubbed a bit of cow hide that still had fur attached and continued. “Went in to Canberra and got the portkeys I needed there. Took one to Crete and handed off the second to Mr. and Mrs. Potter. I made arrangements to meet them in Alice Springs at noon, took the third portkey to Surry, and gathered up Mr. And Mrs. Weasley. We apparated in to Camden town to get the bedding, curtain material, and linens as Mr. Weasley requested of me, and then we took the portkey to Alice Springs. I had everyone here by half past noon.”

“Do you have a sister?” Hermione asked, and Luna laughed.

Marcy smiled, and she motioned to George to pour her a sip of the firewhiskey. Luna stopped her.

“Do you have a sister?” Hermione asked, and Luna laughed.

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“Do you have a sister?” Hermione asked.

Marcy looked at her boss, surprised. “You have something else you need done?” She asked a note of worry in her voice.

Luna smiled broadly and patted her hand. “No, you’ve done marvelously today. I couldn’t ask for better. No, no,” she smirked. “It’s just that pregnant women shouldn’t drink.”

Marcy looked very puzzled for a few seconds, and then her eyes flew wide.

Luna stood and hugged her as she flew into her arms. “You and Jason have been trying for close to three years now, correct?”

“Yes,” Marcy said in tears. “We, we were starting to think…”

“It was the same for me,” Hermione said. “Rose is a gift and Hugo a miracle. We kept it out of the press, but I had a very hard time conceiving with Rose, and I developed pre-eclampsia with Hugo. I won’t be having another child.” She took Marcy’s hand. “It can be challenging, but it’s the best thing you’ll ever do.”

Luna put her hand on Marcy’s shoulder. “Take out your wand,” she said. When Marcy had her wand in her hand Luna continued. “The charm is Conceptus Revelio, go on.”

“Conceptus Revelio!” Marcy said with a quick swish over her belly. The wand shot blue sparks.

“A boy,” Luna said.
They were in mid celebration when a cheer went up from across the room. Ron, Harry, Seamus, and Arthur were playing games of shuffleboard on the table that Seamus has rescued from the hotel. He and George had cleaned and refinished it, and its wood glowed golden brown in the lamp light.

“That’s three in a row, Shay,” George said from his stool behind the bar. “You’re a bit of a shark at this.”

“Aye,” Seamus said. “They got one at the pub down the road from Lav an’ me’s house. You should try her.”

“I think it’s the girls turn anyway,” Lavender said, as she walked up and nudged her husband’s hip. “Like I told Carla, you boy’s didn’t build a ‘rec room’, you built yourselves a bloody pub!”

Seamus smiled adoringly at his wife, shrugged his shoulders, and said, “Eh, you say potato.”

Half an hour later James Potter came in through the door of the converted outbuilding. He and the other four children had been conscripted by their mother and grandmother to help with making dinner for the mob that had descended on Carla. “Mum says dinner in ten minutes,” he announced.

The men had gathered around the bar. George had taken the back when they came in, and he had been tending since. “Last orders!” he called and laughed.

“Pull me a Guinness for the road, would you George?” Seamus said.

George laughed. “Good thing that’s what we got, eh?” he said as he pulled the first half of the pint. “We’ll have to work on this keg before we leave, don’t want it to go to waste.”

“Then pull me one too,” Carla said as she entered. “And one for Molly as well.” She shook her head at the changes to the former pig barn. “Lav’s right, you boys built yourselves a pub.”

Ron draped his arm around her. “I can tell you’re heartbroken,” he said and laughed.

She poked him in the ribs with her elbow. “Spent more ‘n a few hours in this room when it was in the Pioneer. You did a good thing savin’ it,” she said.

Seamus brought a pint for her along with his own. “They were just takin’ it down when we got there.” he said. “Ron got the men that were taking it out the building to be careful. The paneling and shuffleboard were in fair shape, and they were happy we were takin the bar. Stools and chairs were awful, but Ginny did good, yeah?”

Carla took a draw from her beer. “Always hated that cow hide on the wall in what was my bedroom then. Glad it got a better use.” She looked at the men before her and smiled. “Give me Molly’s pint and wash up, boys.”

The night descended and the lamps were lit. After a dinner of roasted chicken, herbed potatoes, candied carrots, and fresh baked bread, the entire crew minus James and Molly made their way to the rear courtyard. Molly was taking the opportunity to teach James some very useful housekeeping charms, such as dishwashing, much to his dismay.

The Chinese paper lanterns hanging in the trees had been charmed to glow by Hermione, and they shed an inviting light on the packed earth, benches, and tables. The roof reflected the light and
helped keep in the vanishing heat from the day.

Harry walked out of the gloom with a stack of firewood in his arms and dumped it in the rough circle of stones in the middle of the courtyard. A five foot in diameter hole in the roof was directly over it. He drew his wand and did the *Incendio* charm. Rose, Lilly, Hugo and Albus gathered around the fire and Harry began passing out the graham crackers and chocolate bars.

“*Elongo!*” Harry said, pointing his wand at five forks on a table. The forks stretched until they were almost a foot and half long. “That good?” he asked George.

“Great, Harry,” George said as he sat next to Hugo. “So, this is an old American thing. Invented by the girl scouts I think.” He set the bag of marshmallows he had on a stone in front of him, opened it and pulled one from the bag. “Put your marshmallow on the end of the fork like this, and then hold it near but not in the fire. Like this.”

He twirled the marshmallow in front of the fire and they all watched the outside become golden brown. “Don’t burn it, just get it this colour and then make the sandwich.” He laid the molten marshmallow on one half of a graham cracker, placed a piece of a chocolate bar on top of it and then placed the other half of the graham cracker on the top and pressed. “And then you eat it,” he said, and he did.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

A/N Sorry for the lateness of this chapter but it’s long, needed LOTS of research to get right, and I have a compulsion for accuracy. Now, put Diesel and Dust on and dive in…

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down under

Chapter 11

“Case nine nine nine is in a remote area of Australia.”

“Are her friends with her?”

Two, and their pet.”

“Assemble a team. You know what precautions to take, the animal is dangerous.”

“We do what we must.”

“For the preservation of all.”

~(*)~

“Good morning Alice Springs, this is Sun 969 radio and it’s six in the A.M. Today’s weather is cool and foggy. A large bank has settled from the lowlands all the way into West MacDonnell National Park. Traffic is light currently with no troubles to report. Your listening to J.B’s Jump start in the morning, and here’s a little ditty to bring your day to life. This is Midnight Oil with Bullroarer.”

Carla was gently bobbing to the beat as she gathered the pans for breakfast when Molly entered the kitchen. She couldn’t help but grin at her new friend. She was humming the tune in time with the radio with a small satisfied grin on her face and a sense of purpose to her walk. It all spoke of a woman with a renewed passion for life, a renewed drive. “Morning, Carla,” she said as she pulled the mushrooms and tomatoes from the cooling cabinet. “We’re doing a full breakfast today?”

“I thought so,” Carla said, and grinned at Molly. “Shouldn’t be a problem with the two of us.”

Molly smirked at the rock and roll tune coming from the wireless and Carla’s obvious familiarity with it. “Bit of a modern song for a woman of our age,” she said with a chuckle.
Carla smiled. “A national treasure, the Oils are, and their singer, Peter Garrett, he went into politics. Had the pleasure of votin’ for him twice.” She set two large fry pans on the cooker. “Got ourselves a mob, yeah?”

“It’s good I sent Ginny into town yesterday for provisions.” Molloy laughed. “I stopped being surprised at the amount my family can eat decades ago.”

Carla set a two quart pot of the cooker. “That’ll be for the beans,” she said and turned to Molly. “Three pounds of bacon, Ya think?”

Molly laughed. “With all the men and boys we got, make it five.” She waved her wand at the fire box of the cooker, and the flames leapt to life. “Two loaves of toast and a few dozen eggs should do it.”

Carla huggger her new friend to her side. “Aces, let’s get to it.”

~(*)~

The kitchen slowly filled with Weasleys, Potters, Finnigans, one Lovegood, one Clooney, and one Bates. Carla was once again impressed by Lavender as she managed the three boys and two girls with a practiced ease.

“James,” Lavender said from her chair. “Just because you got your wand a week and a half ago doesn’t mean it can be used willy-nilly at the table. Put it away please. Albus, napkin.” She looked at Hugo. “And you, too,” she said. “Lilly and Rose are nearly done,” she announced to the table. “When these three finish,” –she indicated the boys- “send them out back to the courtyard.”

Rose looked at her nanny. “What are we doing, Aunt Lavender?”

“Maths,” she said, and the children groaned. “And Quidditch.” That was met with cheers.

Lavender and the girls left the kitchen after hugs from Ginny and Hermione, who was otherwise a pile of hair behind Orla’s book of the Aboriginal Legends. She nibbled her toast as she read. “He was based right round here,” she said to no one. “Uluru figures prominently, but what does he mean by the ‘thirty sisters’?”

“Kata Joota, the Olgas,” Carla said. “They’re part of the same formation, ‘bout fifteen miles east of Uluru.”

“We need to go there,” Hermione said.

Luna smiled at her brilliant friend; she had come to the same conclusion. “Yes, I agree,” she said. “He spent a good deal of time within walking distance of both areas, don’t you think?”

“Yes,” Hermione said thoughtfully. “There’s a good chance the stone is there, somewhere.” She shook her head. “Being close just makes it worse.”

Molly stroked her hand down Hermione’s hair. “Patience, Hermione, isn’t that what you told your daughter?”

Ginny guffawed. “Yeah, Mum, but Hermione used up all her patience on my brother.”

That comment brought on a spirited exchange between the two youngest of Molly’s children, much to the two older women’s amusement. “They always like this?” Carla asked.
Molly considered for a moment. “Yeah, pretty much,” she said and laughed.

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Quidditch was brilliant, and Carla couldn’t get enough of it. Even with short teams and no snitch it was exciting and sometimes hard to follow. Molly’s husband, Arthur, tried his best to call the game for her in between explaining the rules. Seamus, Lavender, Harry, Rose and Hugo made up one team. Ron, Ginny, Albus, James, and Lilly, made up the other. In the desert in front of the house Hermione had transfigured two trees into hoops. Then she performed the scorekeeping charm on them and went back to her place of the porch. Molly brought a pitcher of lemonade out of the kitchen and set it on the table George had moved from the back courtyard. He, Molly, Arthur, Hermione, Luna, Marcy, and Carla took their seats, sipped their drinks, and watched the match.

“In backyard Quidditch we usually play to five goals,” Arthur said as Ginny sped down the pitch toward her husband. “Harry’s playing keeper, as I said. He’s good, but he usually seeks, and Ginny played professionally for seven years before James. Ah, watch this.”

Ginny shot straight up and then reversed directions, swooping down at Harry and his hoop from his weak side. She pitched the Quaffle at the hoop and was about to celebrate a goal when Harry just barely brushed it aside and it hit the outside of the hoop. “Nice save!” she shouted. “Wish Gialyn could have done that more often.”

“You forget, I watched every game you played,” Harry yelled back. “Know all your tricks,” he pitched the Quaffle to his nephew. “Go score on your dad,” he said with a grin.

The air was cool but not cold, and it made the game a pleasure. Even so, by the time Ginny scored the winning goal everyone that played was sweating and thirsty. Molly was just pouring them all glasses of lemonade when Jarra appeared out of the desert.

“Haven’t seen Quidditch in years,” he said. “Ya bunch are good, yeah?”

Hermione stepped forward. “Welcome back, Jarra,” she said. “This is my sister in law, Ginny, her husband, Harry, and their children James, Albus, and Lilly. You didn’t meet Marcy when you were here last as she was in Alice Springs at the time. And this is Luna’s cousin, George.”

Jarra smiled at them all as Hermione introduced them. “The Dreamers are on their way, Hermione. I’m the first to arrive, but they’ll be coming soon. I told em ya found Merry Mac, so expect a horde.” He laughed.

Hermione looked at him and asked, “Who do we give it to?”

“Elma,” Jarra said. “She’s elder of the Kori. They’ll be the keepers.” He took on an inquisitive expression. “Which one of ya found him?”

“Hugo,” Rose said. “He walked right over to where it was hidden and told the Muggles to dig there.”

Jarra looked at Hermione. “He should be the one to present it then.” Then he looked at Luna. “Need to talk with ya a bit.”

About? Luna’s voice said in his head.

What we will do tonight, what we would ask you to do, Jarra thought.

Luna nodded. “Let’s go for a walk, Jarra.”
“Yeah, good idea,” Jarra said. “It’s…” Luna stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“They’re here,” she said.

A few hundred feet away people started to fade into reality. They simply walked out of nothing, appearing as faint shadows in the fog, then more distinct shapes, until at last they were human forms striding toward the house. About thirty appeared over the course of five minutes, and Jarra introduced them.

They were the elders of the Dreamers. Each group had sent their wisest and most powerful to celebrate the return of Merry Mac. They knew the tales, having told and sung them countless times over the long years. They were there to celebrate his return, and help Hermione in her quest if they were able.

Hermione noticed that they all treated one woman with a special deference. Elma, the woman Jarra had mentioned, reminded Hermione of her beloved Minerva McGonagall rather a lot.

She walked straight up to Hermione, who was flanked by Luna, Ginny, and Lavender. “You’re her?”

“It appears that way,” Hermione said.

“Been watchin ya,” Elma said. “From a distance, mind. Read the stories from yar war, how ya, yar husband and yar friends defeated the Dark Man.”

“Dark is an understatement,” Luna said simply.

Elma took Luna in and grinned, “Jarra’s right. Firecracker, you are.” Her smile faded, and she nodded. “Ya met him, the Dark Man, didn’t ya?”

“Twice.”

Elma nodded, and then looked at Ginny and Lavender. “The Fire Sister and the Dingo Queen,” she said, and then looked back at Hermione and Luna. “The Animal Sister and the Fairy Queen.” She smiled. “And it happens in my life. We’ll set a fire over that hill,” Elma said in a commanding way. “Ya four and the boy meet us there at moonrise.” She started to walk away and then turned back. “Ya’ll hear us start up soon but don’t come early. We got dances, stories, songs and ways that are our own. It’s not that yar not welcome here,” she smirked. “but for these things, yar not.”

Hermione chuckled, and Luna said, “We understand completely. Expect us at moonrise and no earlier.”

The five women shared a look between them; a recognition, each to the other, that they were all women of power. Elma smiled at them, turned, and walked away into the bush. With smiles and waves the rest of the dreamers except Jarra followed.

“Jarra and I are going for a walk,” Luna announced. “We’ll be back for lunch.”

Molly looked at Luna and Jarra. “Well don’t be long; Carla and I are getting quite efficient in the kitchen.” She chuckled. “Soup and sandwiches, be back in half an hour or you’ll be hungry,” she said, and laughed.

~(*)~
The sound of the bullroarer preceded the rhythmic clicks, and then the digeridoo chorus started. From over the hill they could hear the ritual begin, but it was echoed and distorted. Voices rose and fell in odd harmonies and occasionally it was completely silent.

Carla smiled with a faraway look on her face. Sat in her chair with the window slightly open she could hear the distant gathering well. “Remember this,” she said. “Bout every two or three months they’d come by, and Orla’d gather with them. I always wondered what they were up to out there in the bush.”

“If we’re allowed, I’ll ask to bring you,” Lavender said.

“I wonder if we should be Sky Clad?” Luna observed. “I failed to ask what attire we should be wearing.”

Seamus silently laughed. “Not positive, but ‘m fairly sure they don’t want you naked.”


“Yes,” Hermione said. “He knows this isn’t a party. I’m sure Jarra will let us know what part he will play in the ritual.”

“He told me some,” Luna said. “Hugo will be honored, praised as the finder, and a new song will be made to tell his story.”

“Hey, that’s great,” Harry said from the couch. “Be nice to have someone else besides Ron, Hermione, and me with songs written about them.”

Ron threw a biscuit at Harry’s head and said, “Well at least the Weird Sisters asked you! Bloody Warbeck just went off and wrote ‘The Love Song of Hermione and Ronald’ without a word.”

“It’s a lovely song,” Molly said from the kitchen door, causing Ron to roll his eyes.

“You don’t have people singing it at you.”

Seamus’ guffaw started everyone.

~(*)~

Jarra and a woman, whose name was Oma, appeared shortly before sundown. Jarra smiled and told them, “We’re ready. Grounds been blessed, sprits called and dispelled, and the songs have been sung. It’s time for ya.”

Lavender touched Jarra’s arm. “May Carla come?” she asked.

Jarra considered for a moment, and then he smiled. “Yeah… yeah that’ll be good actually. Oh, and they’d like the girl to come too.”

Hermione looked at him bemused. “Rose?”

“Yeah,” Jarra siad. “She’s important.” He turned and bent top talk to Rose. “Helped find it, didn’t ya?”
Rose looked at him with a thoughtful expression. “I felt the circle… humming, but Hugo knew where the statue was.”

Hugo walked to his sister’s side. “Without you noticing it I wouldn’t have really tried feeling the place, and all the extra stuff we’ve learned with your reading ahead helped.”

“Elma want’s the two of ‘em,” Oma said. “Best bring ‘er.” She smiled and chuckled.

“How should we dress?” Luna asked, as Lavender emerged from the house with Carla in tow.

Jarra snickered. “Ah, however ya want. We’ll be paintin’ the boy’s chest and back though.”

Hugo looked ecstatic, Hermione looked resigned, Rose sniggered and said, “I’m sure it won’t be like when we got in gram Grainger’s make up.”

“Please, no,” Lavender said with a haunted look.

Hermione sniggered. “I suppose we’re ready then,” she said, and then turned to Ron. “I don’t know how long we’ll be.”

Ron hugged her. “Mum’ll make dinner and we’ll save some for you lot. Have fun, love. I know you will.”

Seamus emerged from the house carrying a large wooden box. “Took the liberty o’ making this for your Merry Mac,” he said. The box was of the dark native wood. A handle of leather was across the top, and one large door hinged open on the front. “Charmed it to keep him safe, I did, and the featherlight charm makes it easy to carry.” He handed off the box to Lavender. “He’s in there now.”

Jarra shook his head in wonder, they were just like Orla. They didn’t look down on his people, they didn’t regard them as “noble savages”, they just treated them as equals, true equals, and that was a fairly unique experience for Jarra. “Thank you,” he said in a slightly choked voice. “It means more than ya will ever know, that ya’ve all done this for us.”

Hermione looked genuinely puzzled. “We’ve done nothing special.”

Jarra laughed so hard he had to bend and rest his hand on his knee. “Nothing special?” he said. “Nothing special? Well, let’s just start with Carla here. Ya saved her from a lingering death and worse. Ya gave her her life back and brought me an old friend I’d thought never to see again. Ya’ve built her a mansion out here in the bush, and many of us thought the dream was myth. I did. But then your boy finds him and our whole world, our whole purpose becomes clear. Most of all though, ya’re her, it’s so obvious. Ya didn’t think twice about keeping him, ya only thought about what was the right thing to do. ‘And by her compassion will ya know her’. That’s what he said all those years ago. Heh.” He stopped and just smiled fondly at the people before him.

Hermione shrugged. “I don’t know why it should be unusual for people to be… human.”

“Yeah, well it is,” Jarra said, and he noticed Lavender nodding. “Have some experience with that, do ya?” he asked her.

“I had to hide what I am,” she said flatly. “Until Hermione wrote the book hardly anyone knew. The only reason they don’t hate and fear me still is because of Hermione.” Lavender looked at her friend with love clearly written on her face. “These women, whom I’m pleased to call my best friends, are special in so many ways. Hermione personally saved my life, and then with the help of Ginny, Luna
and our other five sisters she saved me again.”

Jarra nodded and chuckled. “We’ll take Carla now. You lot follow along.” He took Carla’s hand and, along with Oma, they walked into the gathering gloom and disappeared.

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As Hermione, Lavender, Ginny, Luna, Rose, and Hugo approached the fire, Jarra stood from his place opposite Elma and walked to them. “Welcome friends,” he said, and bent to talk with the youngest. “Hugo it is, yeah?”

Hugo nodded, and said, “Yes, Mr. Jarra.”

The old man laughed. “Just Jarra,” he said, and then he stood and turned to Hermione. “You and your friends go to the women’s side; I’ll take Hugo and get him ready. Oma ‘ll take the girl and prepare her.” he looked at Lavender’s stern face. “You can trust us.”

Lavender let a small smile. “It’s a hard thing for me to do in this area,” she said. “I’m a bit protective.”


She looked down at the box. “Where does this go?’ she asked.

“I’ll take it for now. The kids ‘ll be giving it to Elma later,” he said, and took Hugo’s hand. “Come on, lad.”

Hugo went with Jarra into the bush with a few of the other men. Hermione, Rose, Lavender, and Luna went to a waving Oma who sat on a log beside Elma. The older woman was very obviously leading the ceremony. They were dressed in the native skirt, and above that they wore only elaborate necklaces of large bone and stone beads. Their breasts were painted as were their faces. White stripes and ocher patches with dots and other patterns played in varied and interesting ways across the happy faces that greeted them. Hermione sniggered as she realized Carla was sitting next to Oma, dressed and painted like everyone else.

“Welcome, welcome,” Elma said. “Thanks for bringin’ the girl, Oma ’ll take good care a her. Needed her for the balance.” She looked at Rose. “Seen ya and yar brother comin’ I did.” Taking Rose’s hand she looked deep in her hazel eyes. “Ya see us comin’?”

Rose looked at Lavender. “That’s really Aunt Lavender and Aunt Parvati’s area.”

Lavender chuckled at the look Elma gave her. “As brilliant as Hermione is, and Rose is even more so I think, the Sight doesn’t run in their family.”

Elma nodded. “Yeah, that’s the way of things.” She looked at Lavender. “How ‘bout ya?”

Lavender smiled. “My sight mostly concerns my family and my own doings. I don’t see much outside that.” She looked into the distance contemplatively. “Parv, on the other hand…”

“Got a vision keeper in yar little group?” Elma asked, and Lavender nodded.

Luna had already banished her top into the pocket of her shorts and sat beside Carla. “Would you
“Like to help decorate me?” she asked the old woman. Pots of paint were passed along the row of women and Carla gathered them in front of her on the sand.

“When in Rome,” Hermione said and banished her top. She was followed, hesitantly, by Ginny, who then turned to Lavender.

“You don’t have to, you know that.” the redhead said.

Lavender put her hand on Ginny’s shoulder. “It’s okay. Master Ping and I took care of body image issues before the kids were born. You’ve seen that in my memories.”

“I know, but being exposed in front of us is one thing.” Ginny looked around at the fifty or more people in the desert. “This is quite different.”

Luna felt both Ginny and Hermione’s pride in their friend as Lavender silently banished her top. There was a small gasp from Carla but that was all.

Elma turned to Oma. “Take the girl and get her ready.” As Oma stood and took Rose’s hand, Elma looked at Lavender with an expression of admiration. “The man that made ya what ya are, he’s dead?”

“Hermione’s husband and one of our dearest friends made certain,” Lavender replied with a grim smile.

Elma stood and put her hand on Lavender’s shoulder. “No need to paint you, we need the Queen’s presence. Show her to us if ya will.”

Lavender nodded, a small smirk on her face, and then she stepped back. Looking past Elma she could see the confident smiles of her friends, and Luna spoke in her mind. I think the wolf magic is important, and these people, they can know.

Lavender nodded once and banished the remainder of her clothes. She looked at Carla and winked, then her face hardened in concentration.

The shock Carla had barely covered when Lavender revealed the damage to her chest and side was completely overtaken by her amazement at the transformation. The beautiful blonde shot upward, gaining more than a foot in height. Her face stretched and swelled into a fearsome visage that was just barely recognizable as Lavender’s face behind the wolfen mask. Fur spouted in profusion over her body, and in less than a minute this woman that Carla had grown to love had morphed into a terrible and frightening monster, a monster that bent and gently brushed a stray strand of hair from the old woman’s face.

“I’m the only one, Carla,” Lavender said. “I’m the only werewolf that stays sane, stays human. Hermione, Luna, Ginny, and our friends saved me. I owe them everything.”

Hermione rose and hugged the now massive friend. “I think we’re even by now,” she said.

Elma then had the chance to really look at her guests. Hermione had a dark spot directly over her heart. Fine blue scars radiated from it in an eight inch circle. Another scar ran across the left side of her neck, the red headed woman had numerous small marks all over her body. It looked as if she had fallen in a pile of broken glass at some point, but Elma knew better. The other blonde had several scars herself, but Elma suspected her worst scars were less visible and far deeper than the others.

“Yar warriors, that’s what ya are,” she said, and shook her head in wonder. “Here, let me help.” Elma took up a pot of red paint and began highlighting the marks on her guests that testified to their
bravery and strength. As she did, the women told her how they came to have them.

“This was from a battle in our ministry building,” Hermione said as Elma, with Carla’s help, turned the radiating scar into a sun. “And this was given to me by the foulest woman to have ever lived,” she said, brushing her fingers over the scar on her neck.

“The same woman gave me these,” Luna said, indicating the numerous small lines on her arms and legs. “This was from an Acromantula.”- she indicated a round scar on her arm, and then turned to show a long thing burn scar on her back.- “And this is from the _Incendio_ that Seamus used to blast it from me.”

Ginny looked directly into Elma’s eyes. “Mine are all from professors.”

Four women stood before Elma, three dotted, and painted, the forth covered in fur, and all of them radiating. They burned brightly in her senses, fairly glowing within the Dream. “The Fairy Queen has come!” she said, turning on the spot to address everyone. “The Dingo Queen has come!” She looked at Ginny and Luna. “The sisters of the animals and of the fire have come!” Then she began speaking in her native language.

_She is telling them that Merry Mac has been found_ Luna told Hermione, Ginny, and Lavender. _Now she is telling the men to make the new song of the Finding of Merry Mac._

The chorus of didgeridoos started again, and then the click sticks joined them. A few yards away a man spun the bullroarer. Then Jarra stepped out of the gloom and began to sing. It was a song without the kinds of harmonies that Hermione was used to. It was more like a long undulating series of spoken tones, barely words, but Luna could divine their intent from Jarra’s emotions and surface thoughts.

_He is telling of our arrival, of where we came from. Now he is describing Hugo and Rose._

A shape took form in the gathering twilight, it resolved into the two children carrying the box between them. Jarra continued.

_Now he is speaking of the place where you found him. Apparently it was a place of high import in their ancient world. Many spirits dwell there, he says, and thence it was kept safe._

Hugo, wearing only a loin cloth with his chest and face painted, and Rose, wearing a simple frock and a painted face, stopped a few feet from Elma. She spoke to them in her native language. Luna translated Elma’s thoughts and sent their meaning to the two children and to her sisters.

_She says thank you. She says you are the culmination of thousands of years of waiting and searching. Now she is asking for you to bring him forth._

Rose and Hugo stepped forward, Hugo on the left side with his right hand holding the handle of the box, and his sister on the right, mirroring him. They set the box on a stump that was serving as an altar. Hugo rotated it to face the gathered elders of the Dreamers, and then he spoke the incantation Seamus had taught him. The door opened, and then the top flipped back. The box continued to fold and collapse until it was just a stand that the statue sat upon.

There in the great expanse of the Australian desert, sat on a timeworn stump, Merlyn looked back at his old friends for the first time in millennia.

_Jarra continued the song with the addition of joyous shouts and more than a few tears from the onlookers._
He sings that now, with Merry Mac among them again, they can begin their great task

“What’s that?” Hermione asked in a whisper.

No idea Luna sent.

There were tears and hugs, music and dancing, and as they celebrated a great field of magic swelled around the statue and the people, with Hugo and Rose at its center. Hermione sniggered at Luna. Her wonderful friend was completely immersed in the experience, dancing and laughing with the women. Luna grabbed Lavender’s hand and dragged her into the swirl of the dance and, as they passed Hermione and Ginny, Lavender pulled them in too.

Jarra took Hugo to the men’s side and showed him how to use the click sticks. Hermione felt her pride in her son swell as he joined the circle of musicians, and ecstatic look on his face. Oma had taken Rose by the hand and they were now prancing around the fire with the rest of the women. A separate group of men danced by the statue, pounding the ground with the butt ends of their spears as they chanted.

From all around the animals of the desert began to appear, drawn to the magic like moths. First the birds alit in the trees. Owls, finches, the odd visitor from the south or the north, a kookaburra, and then an eagle all came to witness the ceremony. Then the fur bearers came, closely followed by their reptilian counterparts. Bats filled the air until they too found purchase in the surrounding bush. The rabbits, the mice and then lastly, the dingoes came.

The dogs stayed far back from the people and the fire, but it seemed to Hermione that perhaps a hundred ringed the camp. Lavender left the dance and went to them. They swarmed around her. “Hello, my children,” she said, as they licked her hands and she stroked them. “Thank you for coming to me.” she looked out at the gathered humans. “And thank you for watching over my friends.”

I never tire of this Luna’s happy presence said. Hermione’s entire coven, The Sisters of the Moon, held a not so secret jealousy of Lavender. They loved her as much as any Sister, and they all felt equal in power, but Lavender had two things, unquestioned beauty, even with the scars, and the ability to communicate with, and in a way command, the canines. Lavender would say that the dogs, wolves, coyotes, and dingoes all did it because they loved her. Hermione thought it went deeper. She was convinced that there was more at work in her blonde friend’s gift than either knew. Lavender would also say that gaining the talent was not worth the cost.

Lavender looked down at her pack. “Stay here and commune with us if you wish,” she said to them. They immediately began sitting and laying where they stood. Lavender smiled and returned to her place with the women.

“Impressive,” Elma said when Lavender reached her, and then she turned to the elders. “The Dingo Queen has come!”

They gave a great cheer.

“We thank our new friends,” she said, and turned to Hermione. “Ya are now and forever welcome among us, and we pledge our aid to ya whenever ya have need.”

This is the moment Hermione thought.

Yes, it is, came from Luna.

“My quest is to free the elves,” Hermione said. “Merlyn, Merry Mac, bound them to our service at
the same time he made this.” She indicated the statue. “To teach them, that was his purpose. They have learned all they need from us, they have lived as slaves for too long, they are beings straining to be free, and I intend to end their servitude!” She was panting, nearly shouting at the end.

Elma smiled. “If there ever was a doubt, there is none now.” she turned to the host around her. “The Fairy Queen has come!” looking back at Hermione she asked. “What would ya know?”

“We have learned that he chose to live near here,” Hermione told the gathered Dreamers. “From Orla’s book we have divined many things, but perhaps you know more.”

Elma shook her head. “Told Orla everything back then, all the stories, all the legends.” She chuckled at Hermione’s expression. “Yeah, it was me told her most of them, Jarra some, his father more, but I think what you want is to talk with a gnome.” She winked at Hugo and Rose who were intently following the conversation. “It’s what we call em’.” He looked back at Hermione. “We don’t keep them slaves like the white fellas do. They come, they help, they leave, and that’s just fine with us. Some will attach themselves to a Dreamer in their age, but when the Dreamer dies they move on.”

“One of the stories indicates that,” Hermione said. “Carla told us that one, and then I read it in the book too.”


Luna stood from her place and walked to Hermione’s side. “She is seeking a statue much like this one,” She told Elma. “We believe he hid it near here, perhaps at Uluru or… what did you call it, Carla?”

“Kata Joota,” Carla answered, and Elma nodded.

“Makes sense,” Elma said. “I’ll send Jarra and Oma to with ya. They know the place.” She turned to Luna. “Jarra told ya a little of what we did when Orla would commune with us?”

“Yes,” Luna said. “I believe she was a gifted Legilimens, just as I am. What she did was a kind of joining I am very familiar with.” Luna smiled at her sisters. “We’ve perfected it.”

Elma looked at her in admiration. “Have ya then?” she smiled. “Orla would help us see, when she would join us we could see very far, yeah very far. The Dream is clearer that way.”

A silent conversation took place between the Sisters, and then Luna spoke. “Gather around us and lay your hands on us or one who has,” she said in her High Priestess voice. She, Hermione, Ginny, and Lavender joined hands in a small circle. Hugo laid his hand on the joining of his mother’s and Luna’s, Rose laid her hand on her mother’s and Lavender’s joined hands. Carla put her hand on Lavender’s furry shoulder and gradually all the Dreamers put a hand out to touch the women or one who was.

“Prepare yourselves,” Luna said and closed her eyes in concentration. All around her she could feel the Dreamers building the magic. It was unfocused but very powerful, and at that moment Luna had an epiphany. She was the lens that would focus this tremendous power.

“SIMBIOS!”

Hermione had done a huge amount of research early in the coven’s history. Refining and polishing the spell that would allow the deep joining they all desired. The Simbios charm was the result. It allowed Luna to fully realize her power, and it allowed the Sisters to combine their efforts much more efficiently and too much greater effect.
The world fell away and the landscape of the dream took form in all their minds. The world was filled with sparks of life. Everywhere in the desert around them bright points stood out. The people were brighter still and glowed in various colours.

*This is a whole different level than what Orla did* Elma’s presence said in the cloud of thoughts. *Can we look out into the world as we used to?*

Luna smiled. *Like this?* Their perception expanded. They could now feel/see the inhabitants of Alice Springs. Many thousands of illuminated points stood out in a mini galaxy. *Or this.* It expanded again. From the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, they could see it all, feel it all. The bustling cities of the coasts teamed with life force and emotion. Light and sound, images and impressions of thoughts flew like snowflakes around them. Luna perceived a group of Dreamers near the Indian Ocean coast, and she directed the groups focus there. Similar to the way a camera zooms to single out a flower in a filed she narrowed their vision until one spark stood out.

The energy of this spark was old and wise. The years hadn’t dimmed its glow, and it sparkled in the Dream. *Shall we try something?* Luna asked in the link, and she felt their affirmative.

*Hello, Dreamer,* Rano Unan heard in his head. He looked around his small hut for the source of the voice. *We are far away, near Uluru,* Luna told him. *We are celebrating the return of the statue of Merry Mac to your people, spread the news.* Luna pulled them back and widened their field until it encompassed the whole of the earth. Life abounded everywhere. From pole to pole, from the highest peaks to the deepest abyss, life shown in the Dream.

*Orla never did this!* Elma and Jarra chorused.

And then Luna directed their attention to the heavens.

All across the firmament life and lives shown. Nearby, on Mars, it flickered and barely hung on, but life is tenacious and once it has purchase it gives no ground easily. Further, around Jupiter, two moons teamed with it, and further on, one moon of Saturn glowed softly. Then they looked to the stars.

It was everywhere. But for the heart of the galaxy they could look in any direction and find it easily. Some areas shown with intelligence and magic, and Luna was forming the thought to try to communicate with one of those sparks when a bright glow of malevolence appeared very nearby.

With astonishing speed they returned to the camp and to their own bodies and thoughts. Luna, still linked with Lavender, Hermione, and Ginny concentrated on the sensed malic. It was very different from the usual impressions she and they had when looking at people in this way. These people were muted, their thoughts hidden. They only thing that the Sisters felt from what they could now tell was ten was intent to harm, with a bit of fear mixed in. Luna drew back a bit to locate them and found they were in Alice Springs.

The gathered Dreamers were still watching through the link as the four women used their power in a practiced and elegant way. The ten points vanished from Alice Springs and reappeared very close by.

They were at Cohn Manor.
Molly Weasley set her cup down and smiled at her grandchildren, she was blessed. The two boys in front of her reminded her of her brothers rather a lot, only slightly less mischievous, and the quiet and studious girl beside them was a treasure just like her cousin. She was considering hot cocoa for them all when Luna’s voice yelled “Danger” in her head. She looked at Harry and Ron sitting across from her and saw they had heard it too.

Lavender ripped her hand from Hermione and Ginny and ran into the desert, “Stay with yours. I’m taking the pack and heading for the Ginny’s,” echoing behind her, Ginny and Luna Apparated moments later. Hermione looked at where her friends had been and, with a grim expression, grabbed her children’s hands and Apparated.

Hermione, Rose, and Hugo appeared a few hundred feet from the house on the far side of the hill it backed up onto. She swished her wand up her body and the bra and shirt reappeared. “Stay behind me. Come on,” she said and hurried toward the house. Suddenly the sound and shimmer of spells filled the air. As they rounded the hill they found themselves dashing into a flourishing battle. Seamus, Ron, and Arthur were spread across the front of the house on the porch, and Marcy was at the kitchen door constantly casting and recasting the protective enchantments. The rest were confronting the ten people that were attacking them and trying to bring down the wards that Marcy continually reinforced. Every time the shield faltered the three on the porch redoubled their efforts.

Rose pointed to Luna and Ginny on the other side of the house and Hermione apparated herself and the children to them. *Harry and Molly have James, Albus, and Lily in the rec room, Luna sent as Hermione and her children appeared next to her. Marcy is holding them off, but it’s taking a toll.*

“There she is!” a man cried.

Five of the attackers turned to Hermione, Ginny, and Luna, and they charged toward them, bombarding them with curses and hexes. Hermione shielded herself, her friends, and the children while Luna and Ginny showed the fools what two members of Dumbledore’s army could do in a fight. With three successive *Reductos* delivered at astonishing speed Ginny collapsed the shield charm one woman was casting to protect the group charging them. The woman had enough time to realize her predicament before a fourth *Reducto* opened a hole the size of a cannon ball in her chest. A man grabbed her as she fell and apparated away.
Down to eight Luna sent with grim satisfaction.

The remaining three barely had time to erect their shield charms before Luna’s lightening curse impacted them. She kept up a steady crackling stream for close to twenty seconds, and then a howl of unimaginable volume rent the air. It stopped everyone in their tracks. Three of the attackers were gathered in a circle casting a shield charm of their own, and they started chanting a spell Hermione had never heard.

“Shield crew have it handled,” one of the men that had attacked Hermione, Luna, and Ginny said, and they resumed pounding at Marcy’s wards and deflecting the constant stream of curses coming from Ron, Arthur, Seamus, and now Luna, and Ginny, while Hermione kept up her shields.

From out of the dim moonlit desert a vision of terror bore down on the attackers. “The Werewolf!” Hermione heard a woman shout. And the three shield casters moved their wands in a complicated series of arcs.

Lavender slammed against an impenetrable invisible wall and tumbled backward. With a roar of fury she leapt to her feet, drew her wand from her holster, and began pounding the shield with her own curses.

“We prepared for you, you filthy animal,” the same woman’s voice yelled out. “Once we deal with…” she stopped when she saw Lavender smirk and back away from the shield. The pack had arrived. The dingoes swarmed around her, gathering in a tight cluster facing the attackers. Lavender casually deflected a few curses and smiled her toothy grin at her adversaries. While most of the attackers were distracted by the arrival of the pack, Hermione, her children, Luna, and Ginny raced toward the house.

Let us in, Marcy, Luna sent, Marcy opened a hole in the shield that allowed them to pass, and then she resealed it.

We’re in Luna sent to Lavender

Now in a position of relative tactical superiority, Lavender addressed the interlopers. “I don’t know who you are, and I don’t care,” she said in a loud growl. “If you leave now you get to live. That’s the only warning you get.”

I can’t get through, Luna’s voice said in her head. They are blocking me somehow. If I could just get through I’d end this now. Lavender, Hermione, and Ginny knew what Luna meant. Their blonde friend could crush the minds of their enemies if she so desired.

I’ve got this, Lavender thought and Luna relayed it to the rest. She waved her wand over the pack, and a light rain of golden sparks fell on the canids. Then she smiled at her opponents. “Take them,” she said, and the pack charged.

Terror flared in the eyes of the man closest to Lavender, they had made a critical, fatal error. The charm within the shield they had erected was specifically designed to repel werewolves; it didn’t even slow the dingoes down. He barely had time to raise his wand before he fell, overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

“Fuck, its Potter!” another woman in the group yelled.

Harry had stepped through the door of the house and joined his family. With a swish of his wand he unleashed the golden flames. They slammed into the shield charm the attackers were sustaining, and it rang like a bell.
“Withdraw! Withdraw!” the woman shouted again. Unfortunately for her she was facing the house, and she didn’t see the dingoes tearing toward her. They swarmed her to the ground and ripped her to pieces in seconds. At the same moment the three generating the attackers shield lost their focus, distracted by the dingoes, and Ginny seized her opportunity.

_The ‘sister of fire’ eh?_ she thought, and Luna grinned. “**INCEDIO!**” Ginny cried, and a column of blue white fire smashed through the wavering shield and consumed the three men that were maintaining it.

Down to four from their original ten three managed to Apparate away, and the third was knocked to the ground by a stunner that Molly deftly cast. He was trying to get to his feet when Lavender arrived at his side and pinned him to the ground.

“Leave him,” she told the dingoes, and they backed away. Lavender ripped his wand from his hand, fisted his robe front, and then one handed him into the air as she stood. His feet dangled a foot of the ground. “Who the fuck are you?” she asked in a vicious growl. “Answer me!” The hood of his robe fell back, and his eyes flew wide in terror. The man clenched his jaw, and there was a small crunching sound. He went limp in Lavenders grasp.

**Seamus had just reached them. “What you got, love?”**

“A dead man,” she answered and pitched the corpse twenty yards away in her fury. She looked at the people gathered on the porch. “I need to have a word with Hermione.”

“Calm down, Lav,” Seamus said. “Come on, love.”

“She brought the children into a battle!”

“**She,**” Seamus started.

“She should have stayed where she fucking was!”

Seamus nodded. “Yeah, she should have, but she didn’t.” He took her by the shoulders. “Look, I know, alright. I know how you feel, but we’re all here, and we’re all fine, so let it go. We’ll talk about it later. Okay?”

“Aurors Finnigan, what do we have here,” Harry said as he stopped next to them.

“A pissed off werewolf and a dead man,” Seamus said, and then smirked. “Well, the dead bloke’s over there.”

“Hmm, shall we search him?” Harry asked in false joviality.

Seamus nodded. “Yeah, just keeping your sister in law alive is all. Let’s go.”

While the Aurors searched the dead man the Dreamers began to emerge from the desert. First to walk out of the bush were Elma and Jarra with Carla in tow. They strode up to the gathering on the porch. Luna was helping an exhausted Marcy into one of the chairs, and the rest were experiencing the post battle adrenaline sag.

“We were watchin’,” Elma said. “Would have helped if ya needed, but these galahs never had a chance, yeah?” she said to Ginny.
“Not my favorite thing,” Ginny said. “But, yeah. I don’t think they were expecting what they found.” She smiled. “Harry certainly was a surprise for them.”

~(*)~

Behind the house, Hermione dashed into the rec room followed by Rose and Hugo. “Molly, kids!” she yelled.

“Yeah, we’re here,” George said and stood from behind the bar. James, Albus and Lilly ran from behind the back and hugged their cousins.

Molly stepped from behind the door and hugged Hermione. “I’m going to check on Arthur,” she said as she left. Ron came through the door a moment later and swept Hermione into an embrace.

“You’re all painted up!” Lilly said to Rose with a smile.

At the same time Albus asked, “What happened?”

James hugged Rose again. “You alright?” he asked.

Rose nodded. “Yeah everyone is fine. I think your mum killed four, and another died when Aunt Lavender tried to question him. The rest scarpered.”

While the children chattered about what happened, Ron and Hermione separated from a sudden and passionate kiss. “Hope one day I have a love like that,” George said with a smile. “Luna told me you guys have enemies. Glad you can handle them.”

“It’s why Seamus an… oh shit,” Hermione said.

Ron sniggered. “What brings profanity to otherwise proper wife’s mouth?”

“I messed up,” Hermione said looking at the children.

Ron let a heavy sigh. “She left you in charge, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

He closed his eyes. “And you brought them here.”

“Yeah.”

He looked pained, shook his head, and let out a groan. “You’re in trouble.”

Hermione looked down at the floor. “Deservedly so. I should have stayed at the camp.”

Ron looked at his wife sternly. “Yeah, you should have,” he said, and then hugged her. “She’s gonna bollock you good for this.” He smiled at her. “Love the new makeup by the way.”

“Oh, yeah,” she said. “forgot in all the action. Could you get Hugo and Rose cleaned up? I’ve got to find Lav.”

Ron kissed her again. “Good luck my love, hope I see you again.” He turned to the children. “Hugo, Rosie, let’s go to the bathroom and get you sorted.”

~(*)~
Molly appeared from out of the house and waved her wand at Carla, conjuring a shirt onto her bare chest. “Weren’t you getting a bit cold?” she said, smirking.

Carla chuckled. “Sort of slipped my mind with all this brouhaha.” She waved her hand at the carnage in her front yard.

Molly smiled and took Carla’s hand. “Let’s get you to your bathroom, and I’ll help you wash up,” she said, and wiped a finger down the side of Carla’s face. It came away covered in red and white. “My daughters can fend for themselves.” She shook her head at Ginny and Luna then led Carla inside.

~(*)~

On the porch, Hermione bade goodbye to the few Dreamers that had come to them, and who were now leaving. Then she found her friend standing in the yard staring into the bush as the last of the dingoes departed. She knew Lavender had heard her approach. “I’m sorry, Lav, I messed up,” she said.

“Yes, you did,” Lavender said without turning. Still in her wolf form she was nearly growling. “Hermione, if I pass the kids off to you, and I say stay, you FUCKING stay! Am I perfectly fucking clear?”

“Yes, very,” Hermione said, chagrined. “I am really sorry, Lav. I know… I know what they mean to you. You love them as much as Ginny and I do, and you have to know I wouldn’t … I wouldn’t…”

“But you did,” Lavender said. “You didn’t think, you just acted, and that’s Harry’s thing. You’re supposed to be the smart thoughtful one.”

Hermione shook her head. “Ron was here, the kids, Harry, Molly, Arthur, You, Seamus, I… I…”

Lavender nodded, closed her eyes, and said, “I know. Think next time, that’s your thing.” She drew several calm breaths and began to revert to her human form. The fur disappeared back into her skin, she shrunk from towering over Hermione, her face unmorphed out of the wolf, and lastly her eyes faded from gold back to her natural green. Naked, she turned and hugged Hermione. “You’re forgiven, don’t do it again.”

Hermione summoned Lavender’s clothes from her friend’s bag and charmed them back in place. “I won’t,” she said.

Lavender showed a small smile. She could tell Hermione was quite contrite. “Good, because my sweet and I were hacked off, very badly, and I wouldn’t want us to take it out on you.” She looked up at the stars. “They knew about me.”

Hermione nodded. “Yeah, I caught that too.” She snorted a laugh. “It’s a secret, but not the best kept one. A lot of people know.”

“But they wanted one of you three,” Lavender continued.

“Probably me,” Hermione said. “I have a habit of collecting enemies.”

Lavender snickered. “Join the club,” she said, and then she looked thoughtful again. “They’ll have another go at it, but not here.”

“Did you find anything?” Hermione asked.
“He was wearing a shield cloak,” she answered. “That’s why Luna couldn’t get into their heads. He killed himself with a poison tooth. Bit on it while I was questioning him.”

“He was American by the accent,” Hermione said. “And one of the men sounded Russian.”

Lavender smirked. “Ukrainian, it’s slightly different,” she said. “Multinational, hmm.”

Hermione watched as Lavender’s mind whirled. All those idiots back at school that thought Lavender was a gormless bimbo, and Hermione felt a wave of embarrassment because she had been one of them a few times, had no idea what lay behind the beautiful face. While not as quick as Luna or Hermione, Lavender had the ability to sift and sort in her mind, an ability with clues and hints that defied logic at times. Her “wolf sense” she called it.

Lavender smirked. “Might not have been you.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow at her friend. “You think?”

Lavender nodded. “You generate enemies inside the Ministry mostly, England a bit, outside that you haven’t really offended many. Luna, nobody knows much about, and she’s just too nice, can’t imagine someone after her.” She smiled to herself. “Ginny, on the other hand, has cost a lot of people a lot of money.”

Hermione looked puzzled. “How so?” she asked.

“Illegal betting,” Lavender said. “It’s huge, and when she was in her last season the Harpies just kept beating all these teams that were supposed to beat them.”

“Twelve years is a long time to hold a grudge,” Hermione observed.

Lavender looked at her sideways. “Is it?”

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Three people appeared in the front yard of the Manor. Two men and one very beautiful, dark haired woman strode up to the porch, eyeing the draw wands pointed at them.

The lead man slowly produced a badge from his robes. “Ian McEnery, John Fortsmith, Australian Auror corps, and this is Amal Alamuddin, legal auditor for the International M.L.E. Prosecutors Office,” he said by way of introduction. “We detected a lot of activity and a few deaths, what happened here?”

Harry stepped off the porch and extended his hand. “Harry Potter, Head Auror, U.K.” he said, and the man’s eyes opened wide.

“Crikey,” he said in awe. “Really you, eh?” He eyed Harry’s scar. “Yeah, alright. What happened?”

“Somebody doesn’t like us,” Harry said with a chuckle. “Well, actually a lot of people don’t like us, but this particular lot went through a good bit of effort to find us out here.”

The two other new arrivals took notes while Harry explained what had happened from his point of view. As he did, Molly Arthur, and George emerged from the house and took seats at the table on the porch. Ron came out a few moments later with the tea tray in his hands. The four sipped their tea while they watched and listened to Harry retell the story of The Battle at Cohn Manor.

He deftly sidestepped Lavender’s transition to her wolf form, and explained that she charmed the
dingoes to swarm the attackers. “So the dingoes took down two, my wife took at least three and maybe four, and one died under questioning from a poison tooth.”

Ian McEnery chuckled himself. “Picked the wrong bloody house, didn’t they?”

Lavender and Seamus levitated the dead man’s body out of the bush and laid it next to the charred remains of his fellows. Then they joined Harry and the Australian Aurors.

“Frank Wolfe, this is me wife, Selene,” Seamus said. “Were the Auror guard for the family.”

Lavender set the cloak, the man’s wand, the crushed tooth, and the contents of his pockets on the table. “We’d like to keep these if you don’t mind,” Lavender said.

“Have you done Priori?” Miss Alamuddin asked.

Lavender looked at her, impressed. “No,” she said, and looked at the wand. “Please, go ahead.”

Miss Alamuddin drew herself up and pulled her wand from her robes. “Priori Incantatem!” she intoned, as she did a complicated swish over the man’s wand.

Puffs and sparkles in various colors began to emerge from the tip of the man’s wand. “Stunners, shields, Auguamenti, an apparition, that’s it for the last day.” Miss Alamuddin said. “Auror McEnrey, would you mind if I interviewed Mr. Potter’s relatives while you conduct your investigation?” she turned and noticed Hermione taking a seat with her in-laws and George. Her jaw dropped. “Hermione Granger?”

Hermione smiled at her. “Yes,” she said. “How can I help you?”

“All I did was be me,” Hermione said. “What would you like to know?”

Miss Alamuddin pulled a note pad from her bag. “I usually work in the human rights division, but for now I’m auditing the procedures of the various Auror departments worldwide. The international committee is trying to establish some common procedures and rules of evidence gathering and securement.”

Hermione grinned and nodded back. “Well, as you may know, I work in M.L.E. prosecution in England, we’ve been very diligent in bringing our methods into this century.”

Miss Alamuddin nodded. “Yes, I’ve read. How was the evidence collected here?”

“Harry, Selene, Frank, and my husband searched in teams,” Hermione said. “When a piece of evidence was found they followed the same procedure we always do. An image is made of the item in situ, an isolation filed charm is formed around the item, it’s cataloged and named, and then placed in secure storage.”

“Very good,” Miss Alamuddin said and jotted in her note book. “Did you participate in the actual fighting that just occurred?”

“I was primarily concerned with protecting my children and friends,” Hermione replied. “I cast Impervio Relentus, Protego Maxima, Salvio Hexa, and several others but I wasn’t in a position to counterattack.”
“Have the Aurors done *Priori* on your wand yet?” the dark haired woman asked.

“Not yet, but they will,” Hermione said with a smile. “I wrote those protocols.” She chuckled. “Believe me; Selene and Frank are the best. They’ll be thorough.”

“All right,” Miss Alamuddin said, and then turned to the others around the table.

Hermione took up the introductions. “Miss Alamuddin, this is my Mother in law, Molly Weasley, my father in law Arthur Weasley, my husband Ron, and our friend, George.”

“Good to meet you,” Miss Alamuddin said as she shook everyone’s hands. She looked at George with curiosity written on her face. “You look familiar.”

He laughed. “Yeah I get that a lot.”

Ron laughed with him. “Yeah, can’t take him anywhere.”

Miss Alamuddin looked confused: she was missing something. “Did all of you participate in the fighting?” she asked.

“I was in the rec room with the children and George here,” Molly said. “Harry came out after he was satisfied the children were safe.”

Miss Alamuddin turned to face Molly and Arthur. “I just want to say what an honor it is to meet you all,” she said and took Molly’s hand. “Most particularly, you Mrs. Weasley. When I read your daughter in law’s account, and then Mrs. Scamander’s of the war in England and the final battle I found that you were my personal hero in the tale.”

Molly blushed as she always did at the praise. “Oh, I was a minor player in the grand scheme, it was Harry, Hermione and my boy, Ron, here got it done.”

“And modest,” Miss Alamuddin said. “What spells did you use?”

Molly looked out into the bush. “Rather a lot of them,” she said. *Reducto, Incendio, Petrificus Totalus, Bombarda Maxima,* maybe some others.

Miss Alamuddin nodded and turned to George. “You were with Mrs. Weasley and Mr. Potter, did you cast any protections?”

George laughed and Ron silently chortled. “Wish I could have,” he said. “Muggle.”

She looked surprised. “You have the exemption?”

“On file in England and the U.S.” he said.

“Friend of the Potters and Weasleys has its perks?” she asked with a smile.

He shook his head. “Nah, it’s from my cousin, Luna.”

Miss Alamuddin’s head whipped around. “Luna Scamander is here too!”

Ron laughed. “And this is why we take holidays far away from the wizarding world.”

~(*)~

Hermione let her head sag against the cowhide on the back of the chair; it had been an exhausting
day.

“What can I get you, love,” Ron asked.

“Wine,” she said, “All the wine.”

Laughing, Ron went to the bar. “Give me a bucket of red,” he said to George. His friend chuckled himself as he opened a bottle and poured a third of it into a large Bordeaux glass.

“Hermione had herself a day, eh?” he said as he handed Ron the glass.

“Yeah, we all did,” Ron replied. “Thanks for backin’ the bar again. Lookin’ for a job?”

“No,” he said with a grin. And then his gaze settled on Amal Alamuddin as she played shuffleboard with the children. “She ask about me?”

Ron looked at her too. “Hasn’t asked me anything, I’d check with Mum, she sort of attached herself to Mum.” He smiled and turned to George. “Interested?”

“You may have noticed it’s hard for me to go without being recognized, and women are the worst about that. I’ve tried other actresses, some professionals, but Muggle women are just overwhelmed by all the… everything.”

“George, I think I’ve got it!” Arthur called from across the room. Next to him an old heavily worn juke box came to life, and The Glen Miller Orchestra started into “In The Mood”

George winked at Ron, walked around the bar, and offered Amal Alamuddin his hand. “Care to dance,” he asked.

Chapter End Notes

A/N Yes Amal and George are married by this time in real life, but this is fiction, mostly.

Galah: fool, silly person. Named after the bird of the same name because of its antics and the noise it makes.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

A/N I write what is commonly called Kata Tjuta as Katajuta. I have an Anangu friend, and she tells me they pronounce it that way and as a single word.

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 1

Down under

Chapter 13

“‘The cleansing ended in disaster, we met heavy resistance.’”

“How many did we loose?”

“Six, possibly seven, Bernice is in the dungeon infirmary now fighting to stay alive.”

“What did we learn?”

“The shield cloaks worked, but her friends are more powerful than we anticipated.”

“And numerous.”

“Yes. One of them was Potter.”

“Unsurprising given their long association.”

“What will our next move be?”

“We wait. We watch. Opportunity will come.”

~(*)~

Cohn Manor was full, every bed taken, and Luna smiled in the desert. Marcy was tucked away, sleeping off the effects of holding the shields against the attackers, the Australian Aurors had elected to stay the night and continue their investigations in the morning, and Miss Alamuddin had decided to stay and observe. Luna giggled; observe Cousin George would be more accurate, she thought. Lavender and Hermione had made amends, and their bond was a strong as ever. The children were safely tucked in and sleeping, and that had led to her hasty exit from the house. The combined post battle sexual tension from the four married couples had had her shivering, and she had smiled knowingly at Hermione, Lavender, and Ginny before she strolled off into the bush.

Now she sat on her log a mile from the house and contemplated the events of the day.
The Dreamers, they were her new friends, her new partners, and together they could do things Luna
had only dreamt of herself. She had an almost all consuming desire to link with them again, and to
reach for the stars, but there were other, more pressing matters. Someone, several someones, wanted
to kill Hermione, Ginny, or perhaps even her, and that was unacceptable.

That they knew of Lavender was troubling, that they had worn shieldware that blocked her ability
was even more so. Still, whoever they were they had underestimated the resistance they would
encounter by a large and fatal margin. Seamus, Lavender, Harry and the Australian Aurors had
determined that the man who died in Lavender’s hands had landed in Alice Springs via an
unregistered portkey. He, and presumably the rest, had apparated to the manor and immediately
encountered the wards Lavender, Hermione, Ron, and Seamus had erected early in the
reconstruction effort. Hence the *Aguamenti* they found via the first *Priori*.

The more thorough *Priori* revealed that the man had Apparated four times within a few minutes.
First he had attempted to come in from behind the manor and had encountered Hermione’s fire ward.
After he extinguished himself he had Apparated to the front of the manor. A few offensive spells
later he apparated to their staging point at Alice Springs, and then back to the manor again. They
reasoned out that he had been the one to take the injured woman out of the battle, and no one had
noticed his return until they had started counting up the casualties.

The Australian Aurors determined that there had been two port key usages at the small park in Alice
Springs, an arrival and twelve minutes later a departure. A trace executed by the Australian Ministry
revealed the portkey had originated and terminated in New Delhi. Luna smirked. These people had no
clue how badly they had erred. The entirety of Dumbledore’s Army was as tightly knit a group of
friends as ever, and they were accustomed to powerful enemies. Luna had learned early and
painfully not to poke a hornet’s nest, these people were going to lean the same lesson.

Chuckling with grim humor, Luna rose from her seat and prepared to Apparate back to the manor.
Perhaps Amal and George were still dancing in the rec room.

~(*)~

Hermione entered the kitchen to find only Molly, up and making tea. “Morning Mum,” she said and
kissed her mother in law’s temple. “We’re the first?”

“Yes,” Molly said. “I’m letting Carla lay in a bit, you lot have been working her pretty hard for an
eighty eight year old.”

Hermione smiled. “It’s hard to stop her, she loves it so.” She grinned at Molly. “Same with you, and,
well she’s only got a decade and a half on you.”

“True enough,” Moly said crisply and then smiled at her daughter in law. “So why don’t you help
me with breakfast this morning.”

By the time Carla, still yawning, entered the kitchen Hermione and Molly had the bacon, sausages,
toast, beans and hot cakes done. “We waited on the eggs, you do those best,” Hermione told her as
she hugged her.

“Less exciting day today?” Carla asked.

Molly chuckled. “We’re hoping.”

The older woman nodded, and with a shrewd expression said, “Elma, Jarra and I were watching
from the hilltop. They was worried for a moment before they saw what ya could do.” She looked at
Hermione. “You and your friends, ya impressed them, a lot. There was a whole group around us at the end. Did you hear the applause?”

Lavender laughed as she entered the kitchen. “Is that what that was? Wondered.” She nudged Hermione lightly with her shoulder. “I was a little preoccupied.”

“I love you too,” Hermione said, and hugged her friend.

Smiling, they separated and Lavender asked Hermione, “What do you have in mind today?”

“Uluru,” Hermione said. “Ginny, Harry, and theirs will be heading home tomorrow, and I thought they should at least see Uluru before they go.”

Lavender smirked. “And you could poke around a bit.”

Hermione smiled. “Well, yes, there’s that too.”

“Morning Mum,” Ginny said, yawning as she entered the kitchen. “What’s Uluru?” she asked.

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Pictures didn’t do it justice in any way. The sheer wall of dull red sandstone rose from the desert almost vertically in places. Deep groves ran parallel to each other all along it with an occasional pit or hole. It was stately, majestic.

And it was enormous.

Set in an almost flat, featureless plain, Uluru dominated the landscape. Around its margins small oasis formed in shadowed clefts and depressions where water could collect. It was in one of these shaded enclaves that they setup for their family picnic.

Molly, Carla and Ginny bustled around the table Hermione had conjured for them, while Hermione, Lavender, and Luna explored the area with the children.

“This is one single stone,” Rose said, reading from her book on Uluru. “They don’t even know how big it actually is. It could be just a knob of an even larger stone that’s buried beneath us. They’ve done seismic soundings, but they’re inconclusive.”

Luna looked at Rose and asked, “What’s a seismic sounding?”

“Oh, it’s like the Revelio spell. They make a sound with an explosion or a pop of air and listen to the return echoes. Like when you do Revelio and feel the vibrations in you wand as the reflections come back.”

Luna smiled.

“This one hums too,” Hugo said, and the other children nodded.

Luna looked at them. “The Dreamers have used Uluru as a sacred site and ritual area for millennia,” she said. “It’s little wonder we can feel the vibrations of their past magical work.”

“It’s different than at the lighthouse,” Hugo said. “It’s… newer.”

Rose and Lilly agreed. “They come here a lot,” Lilly said and closed her eyes. She put her hand on the rock wall next to her. “It’s like a bell they keep striking. It’s ringing.”
Luna smiled at Hermione and Lavender. “Very good, Lilly,” she said. “Awareness can’t be taught, but it can be enhanced. Remember this feeling, practice reaching out. The more you do it the better you will become at it.”

“Can we climb it?” James asked.

“There’s a cable and chain arrangement at one spot,” Hermione told him. “But the indigenous Australians, whom this place is sacred to, would prefer we didn’t, so we won’t.”

Lavender caught the smirk and downcast eyes. “Don’t even think about it,” she growled softly to James.

~(*)~

The animals around Uluru had become accustomed to humans and human children, and as a consequence they were quite standoffish.

Except to Lilly.

The young redheaded girl knelt on the sand and beckoned a large lizard to come to her. From twenty feet away Lavender, Luna, Hermione and the rest of the children watched.

“She does this all the time,” Albus said quietly. “There isn’t a mouse, or a mole, or fox, or anything at home or the Burrow she hasn’t made friends with.”

Slowly, looking at the others every few moments, the lizard crept forward. “It’s okay,” Lilly told it. “They won’t hurt you. We’re friends.” When it reached her she gently stroked a finger down its back. The lizard arched into the caress and then crawled into her lap.

“Gowana, they call these,” Rose said as she sat beside her cousin. “He’s pretty.”

“She,” Lilly corrected.

Luna smiled. “How do you know, Lilly?”

“She feels like a girl,” she said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. Then her face fell. “She’s afraid, all the time. The people that come here, they chase her, and the other children try to catch her. Oh, oh no, her mate died on the road.” She, with the greatest care, hugged it to her. “We can take you someplace safe if you want.”

Rose reached out and stroked its back. “The Manor will be much safer. You can be mascot.”

Lilly smiled. “She’d like that.”

Luna chuckled and nodded. “You’ve been a very good student, Lilly,” she said. “You have the touch. Keep developing it and you’ll be better at this than I am.”

Lilly smiled and looked up. “Thanks, Aunt Luna.”

~(*)~

The carnage at the manor had been cleaned away. Arthur, George, Ron, Seamus, Marcy, and Amal sat on the porch sipping lemonade when Carla, Hermione, and the rest of the Weasleys and Potters arrived in the front yard.
“Welcome back,” Ron called. “Did you all have a good time?”

Hugo ran to his father and hugged him. “It was so cool, Dad. The rock hummed like the lighthouse did, only different.’

Ron looked at Hermione, and she mouthed, “I’ll explain later.”

“And then we explored all around it,” Hugo continued. “Oh, and Lilly made friends with a goanna.”

“Not just any goanna,” Carla said. “She’s tamed a Perentie, that’s a first. I had a few tamed goannas when I was a kid, but nobody I ever knew had a pet Perentie.”

Ron looked at the five foot long lizard draped around his niece’s neck and shook his head. “Long as your mother and Harry don’t mind… whatever,” he said.

“Her name is Mola,” Lilly said. “I told her she could live here.”

“Let’s let her down so she can explore,” Luna said. She slowly approached Lilly and looked the animal in the eyes. *I'm going to take you down now so that you can find a home here,* she sent to Mola. She knew the lizard couldn’t understand the words, but she would understand the images and emotion that came with the message.

With great care and gentleness Luna hefted Mola from Lilly’s shoulders and placed her on the ground in front of the house. Mola tasted the air, and then at a relaxed pace scooted under the porch.

“She’ll be happy down there,” Carla said. She chuckled. “Won’t have a mice problem either.”

Luna turned to Lilly. “You did so well, Lilly,” she said. “Over the winter we’ll do more work to develop this talent of yours.”

“Molly and I are starting dinner,” Carla announced. She turned to her friend. “Here, I’ll teach you how to make a passable roo kabab.”

Molly looked amused. “Okay,” she said and followed Carla into the kitchen.

~(*)~

Roo kababs were pretty good Hermione had to admit to herself. Amal had even commented that they were as tasty as some her mother had made of lamb and beef. The younger woman had also taught Molly and Carla a yogurt sauce recipe that complemented the kababs perfectly. As Rose and Albus cleared the dishes from the table, Ron poured all the adults an after dinner coffee.

“You still want to do the Unplottable?” he asked Hermione and Luna.

His wife nodded while Luna answered, “Yes, I think its best considering yesterday.”

Harry stood from his chair and stretched. “Kreacher taught me the charms and wards that are present at Grimmauld. That and unplottable should secure the Manor well.”

“I’ve picked out the boundary stones,” Luna told him. “There’s two at the top of the hill behind the house, one at the bottom of the slope on the south side, and one near the tree Hermione used for the north hoop.”

Hermione turned to Carla. “In making the house unplottable no one will be able to find it unless the person designated ‘secret keeper’ tells them its location. Everyone inside the house when the spell is cast will know how to return but they won’t be able to tell anyone. I would like you to be secret
keeper.”

Carla looked surprised. “Don’t you want someone a little younger?”

Hermione smiled. “If anything happens to you the spell will seek out the original casters and make them temporary keepers until a new keeper is designated.”

Carla shrugged. “Alright, what do I do?”

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As the last rays of the already set sun turned the sky to fire, Luna, Hermione, Ginny, and Lavender stood in a circle around Carla. Their wands moved in perfect synchronization, tracing odd and complex patterns in the air. A shimmer appeared high over their heads, and it gradually metamorphosised into a lacy shield of golden light. Intricate designs and spirals came and went in the ever changing weave of light. The shield came down to the ground and attached itself to the boundary stones. A bright blue flare of magic arose around Carla and all along the boundary where it met the ground, and then the light faded.

“I feel all tingly,” Carla said smiling.

Hermione smiled back. “That means it worked,” she said.

Luna took Carla’s hand. “Let’s go beyond the boundary and call Jarra.” She led the older woman out onto the road. JARRA! she cried in her head.

A few moments later Jarra walked out of the bush. “Herd that with my bad ear,” he said laughing, and then he looked surprised. “Where’s the house?”

Luna nodded. “Excellent,” she said. “We’ve done the Unplottable charm,” she told Jarra. “Carla is secret keeper.”

Smiling, Carla turned to her old friend. “My home is at the base of this hill, and at the end of this road,” she said, and she felt the magic flow through her. It was amazing.

For Jarra the house simply faded into existence in front of him. “Perfect,” he said. “That’s some serious magic.” He shook his head in admiration. “You lot are something special, dead set that is.” He sniggered. “Good thing ya called me. Elma wants to see ya.”

“What about?” Hermione asked, as she, Lavender, and Ginny walked up to them.

“Ya said ya wanted to talk to a gnome,” Jarra said with a grin. “She’s found Obo for ya.”

“He won’t even notice the wards,” Lavender said with a chuckle.

Hermione closed her eyes and nodded. “Does Elma want to come here or…”

“OBO!” Jarra said loudly, and there was the snap of elf apparition.

“Master Oongan,” a positively ancient voice croaked. “What can Obo do for such an accomplished Dreamer?”

Standing before Hermione and her friends was the oldest elf she had ever seen. Kreacher was old, very old, but he was almost a child compared to the prehistoric being standing next to Jarra.

Jarra bent to look the old elf in the eyes. He took his hand and said, “These people are the ones that
Elma spoke to you about. Would you mind goin’ and gettin’ her. They have questions, and Elma and I would like to hear the answers too. And please, call me Jarra, Obo.”

“Of course, Master Jarra. Obo will return shortly,” he said, and he was gone.

“So that’s a gnome,” Carla said. “Odd little guy.”

Lavender chuckled. “They all are,” she said.

Luna looked at Hermione. “I think the sitting room will be more comfortable,” she said. “This will be rather a long conversation, yes?”

“Very likely,” Hermione answered. “I’ll wait with Carla and Jarra, We’ll meet you in the house.”

Elma and Obo appeared a few minutes later. After Carla revealed the house to her they all made their way inside. Carla took up her chair. Hermione insisted Elma and Jarra take the couch while she, Ginny, Lavender, and Luna sat in chairs borrowed from the kitchen. Lilly and Rose joined them, sitting on the floor, and Ron summoned a stool from the rec room for Obo.

“Amal and George are taking Hugo, Al, and James on a little evening stroll,” Ron told Hermione quietly. “Shay’s with them.”

“Good,” Hermione said, and turned to Obo. “I don’t know where to start, Obo.”

The old elf smiled. “Mistress Elma has told Obo some. She tells Obo you are the Fairy Queen.”

“I may be,” Hermione said. “I seem to fit all the parameters of the legend.”

“Then how can Obo help the Fairy Queen,” he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Do you know what the Binding Stones are?” she asked.

He nodded. “All elves know of the Binding Stones, Mistress.”

“I’m looking for them,” she said with a grim expression. “I have two already.”

Obo tilted his head and looked at her with a smug curiosity written on his face. “To what end, Mistress?”

“I intend to break the enchantment and free you all,” she answered flatly.

“And by her compassion will you know her,” Obo said happily. “We do not know the whereabouts of the stones, if that is what you want to know.”

“Damn,” Hermione said, and then looked guiltily at Rose and Lilly.

Lavender chuckled. “Perhaps we can approach it like Aurors.” She said, and looked at Obo. “Is there anywhere you are forbidden to go?”

“When Merry Mac was here we were kept from Uluru and Katajuta, the lighthouse after he built it, the great observatory at Wurdi Youang, and of course Mullumbimby. He wanted those places to be only for the people. Our presence changes the Tha in the magic, and it affects the ability of the Dreamers to coalesce.”

“And in the time he has been gone?” Lavender asked.
“Mullumbimby has been raised,” Obo said sadly. “I have been there, and there is no real trace of the pure Tha left in the great circle.” He looked at Elma. “Mistress Elma has been to Wurdi Youang many times. I have not, but I do not believe the binding stone would be there, it was not the observatory’s purpose.”

“That leaves Uluru and Katajuta,” Hermione said.

“You will be called to help, and yet unable,” Obo said. “He told us that too.” Then he let a small laugh. “But fear not! The Fairy Queen and her company are more than strong enough.”

“Katajuta,” Luna said. “It keeps coming down to that.”

“What happens at Katajuta,” Rose asked Elma.

Elma patted her head. “The Anangu do many different ceremonies there,” she turned to her friend. “Jarra?”

“The Anangu people perform coming of age rituals for our children. I know where the men’s ritual takes place but, of course, got no clue where the women do theirs,” he answered. “The Anangu Dreamers, well we gather there to do our ‘seeing’ sometimes, some other things.” He smiled. “Oma and I will take you there; wait till you feel the place.”

“We could feel it at Uluru,” Lilly said.

Elma patted her head. “Could ya then? “She looked at Ginny and smiled. “Ya coming back?”

“I can see a few family holidays here, yes,” Ginny said with a smile of her own.

Elma nodded. “Good. All yar women and girls are coming to my women’s gathering next time ya visit.” It wasn’t even close to a question.

Ginny sniggered. “Of course. We’ll be honored.”

“Who cares for Mistress Orla’s home?” Obo asked.

“Did you know Orla?” Hermione asked.

“Mistress Orla was so kind to everyone,” Obo said fondly. “She would heal the animals, help the people, and she was our friend. “He turned and spoke to Carla. “We saw you many times here, but Mistress Orla said we were not to show ourselves to you. We watched and kept you safe while she was away though.”

Carla smiled at the strange creature. “Thank you, I wish I’d have known.”

“Carla cares for the home now, Obo,” Luna said to him.

The old elf smiled. “May Obo and his friends help?”

“Only if it is your desire,” Hermione said firmly. “We are intent on freeing you, but I know you have an innate desire to help and serve, and we never want to take advantage of that.”

“Obo and his friends would be happy to help Mistress Carla, and Obo has been free since Merry Mac gave him his glove.”

There was a full minute of silence. They all just stared at the old elf.
Elma laughed softly at first, and then she said, “Knew ya was old, but crikey!”

“You knew Merlyn?” Hermione said in an awestruck voice. “How old are you?”

“Obo does not know, Mistress,” he said. “Obo was alive when Merry Mac came, and Obo was alive when he left.”

“That was five and a half thousand years ago,” Hermione said in a near whisper. “I had no idea elves were that long lived.”

“Obo has tended the Dreamers well. The time passed quickly,” he said.

“Topic for another day,” Lavender whispered to Hermione.

“Uh huh,” Hermione said in a state of shock. Shaking off her amazement, she continued. “May we go tomorrow?” she asked Jarra.

“Yeah, I’ll get Oma and meet you here in the morning,” he said.

Obo climbed down off his stool and walked to Carla. “Would you accept Obo’s help?”

Carla smiled at the old elf. “Why not, but like Hermione said, you’re not a servant.”

“Nor are you, Mistress Cohn,” he said.

“Call me Carla.”

Obo smiled. “As you wish, Mistress Carla.”

~(*)~

Harry, Molly and Arthur were in the rec room having a pint when Hermione entered. She went to the back of the bar, poured herself a large glass of red wine, and joined them. It was later in the evening, and the children were already in their beds. Probably not asleep yet, she thought and sniggered.

“Wha’s so funny,” Ron said as he sat beside her.

She leaned her head on his shoulder. “Just thinking it’ll be a while before the kids are asleep. They’ve had a couple of big days.”

Harry chuckled. “Lily and Rose’ll be up chatting about the lizard and Obo.” He looked at Hermione. “Thanks for letting Lilly share Rose’s room with her.”

Ron patted his best friend on the back. “No problem, mate,” he said. “Rosie loves having Lilly with her.”

“Hugo is bunking with the boys tonight,” Ginny said as she sat. She took a long draw from her pint and set it on the table. “Anyone seen George and Amal lately? They dropped the kids off and disappeared.”

“Yeah,” Ron said. “Our bar tender’s shirkin’ here.”

Luna laughed from her chair near the juke box. “They are over at Simpsons Gap enjoying the moonrise. Cousin George seems unconcerned with tending bar at the moment,” she said and laughed again. After pushing a few buttons on the juke box it came to life.
Ron started at the first few chords and turned toward Luna. “You didn’t,” he said with a scowl.

Luna smiled at him. “No, your mother did.”

Harry began to laugh, and Ron cuffed him on the back of the head.

From the juke box Madam Celestina Warbeck warbled,

“This is a song of love that will never die,

Listen carefully,

attend to me.

For this is the love song

of Ronald and Hermione.”
Hermione snuggled into Ron’s side as his breathing slowed. “Harry, Ginny and theirs are going home tomorrow. Be strange not having a house full.”

Ron chuckled. “And Marcy, George and Amal don’t forget. Mum and dad are staying on for a few more days,” he said. “Dad says the dry is good for both of them, and even with Carla saying it’s chilly in the morning it’s still nice and warm by mid-day.”

Hermione smiled. “I’m so happy Molly and Carla hit it off so well.”

“Yeah,” Ron said and smiled himself. “Dad says they’ll be coming back here a lot. It’ll be good for all of them.”

Hermione laughed. “If Luna brings that hoard of trainee naturalists next month she was talking about tonight, Carla will need all the help she can get.”

Ron hugged her. “With Obo here she’ll be fine, and Carla can crack the whip if need be. She’s having the time of her life.” He rolled to face her. “You going to Kata whatever tomorrow?”

She nodded. “Yes, Luna and I both suspect that stone is there.”

“I’ll tag along this time,” Ron said, and hugged her. “Just in case.”

“In case of what?”

“Exactly.”

~(*)~

Lavender lay down on Seamus’s chest. “Take care of them,” she said.

“Aye, I will,” Seamus said. “It’s not like we haven’t had to go separate ways before.”

She smiled against his chest. “We’re actually pretty lucky there,” She said. “Hermione, Ron, Harry, and Ginny spend so much time together, or close by, we hardly every have to do this.”

“You just stick to Rose and Hugo,” he said. “Hermione can take care o’ herself.”

Lavender giggled. “With James off to Hogwarts days after tomorrow you should have an easier job of it. Albus follows his lead, and without James thinking up mischief he’ll be less of a problem.”

“Lillywhite wants to stay here with Rose,” Seamus told her.
“Does she? Unlikely,” Lavender said.

“Yeah, Ginny already put he stop to that.”

Lavender rubbed his chin. “Ginny hates that nickname, by the way,” she said.

“My daughter is not a sports shop!” he said in a remarkable imitation of his female friend, and he laughed. “I’ve apologized, but it’s stuck in me head. She was just so white when she was a minute old. Name jumped in me head and hasn’t left.”

Lavender kissed him. “I know,” she said. “I think it too, I just don’t say it.”

“Watch out for yourself too, Aye?” he said seriously. “Whoever these people are, they’ll be back.”

“I agree, but they won’t come back here,” she said. “They were foolish, not stupid, they’ll learn.”

“You told Hermione you thought they were after Ginny.”

“Yeah.”

“Not what you really think, is it?” he asked.

“It was an early suspicion. Could still be right,” she said and stared at nothing on the wall. “But, Hermione.”

“Woman has no shortage of enemies, that’s true.”

“Mm hmm.”

“Harry and I have talked a bit too,” he said. “He’s tasking Cho and Blaise with the investigation we he gets back in the office.”

Lavender smiled. “People are afraid of me, and justifiably, but Cho?” she laughed. “They should be shaking in their shoes.”

“Mrs. Dursley can be a ruthless bitch, Aye?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

“Ask Delores Umbridge.”

“I’ll pass.”

~(*)~

“Harry? Harry!” Ginny said.

“Hmm, what?”

She put her hands on her hips. “You’re staring.”

“You’re standing there naked in the moonlight.”

Ginny laughed at her husband. “Yes, well after three children…”

“You’re even more beautiful and sexy than the day I married you,” He finished.

Harry watched her sashay across the third floor bedroom to him. “You pushing for round two, Potter?”
He pulled her down onto the bed. “Holliday!”

~(*)~

“I love you my Mollywobbles,” Arthur said as she snuggled into his side. “Two nights in a row is a bit of a record for us recently.”

“You deserve it, we deserve it,” she said. “Besides, you saw the way they were looking at each other.”

“That I did, love. That I did.”

“Ginny can get James off to Hogwarts without us?” she asked.

Arthur brushed his hand down her hair and kissed her softly. “Of course she can. Let them have this one, Molly. We’ll go with the rest, but they should see their first off without an audience.”

Molly snorted and Arthur laughed. “You’re thinking the press?”

“Yes.”

He laughed again. “I have two words for you, Seamus Finnigan.”

She sniggered. “I have two more, Dumbledore’s Army. There’ll be what, eight or ten more of them there seeing theirs off? We should go just to watch.”

He hugged her to him. “Shay will give us a full report, with sound effects, don’t worry.”

“I love you, Arthur. Did you know?”

“I’d surmised.”

~(*)~

“Mornin’ Molly,” Carla said and hugged her friend.

The table was set and piled with food. Hotcakes, toast, sausages, bacon, mushrooms, beans, eggs, and fried potatoes were heaped on the serving platters. “Obo,” Carla said at Molly’s incredulous look. “Right helpful he is.” She laughed. “I made sure he didn’t overdo it, he’s old too.”

“Between the two of us we are more than up to the task,” the old elf croaked as he came through the door to the addition. A pounding of footsteps followed him, and all five children entered the kitchen in a flurry of chatter and red hair.

“Good morning Grandmum, good morning Carla,” Lilly said as she took her seat.

“Mornin’, Lilly,” Carla said. She picked up Lilly’s plate. “What’ll ya have?”

While she fixed Lilly’s plate for her Carla took a moment to appraise the children. James, the oldest, was the ring leader to be sure, but the brains of the outfit were the girls. Rose, studios and driven,
was backed up by Lilly, who idolized her cousin, and the two of them wouldn’t let the boys get to far out on a limb. Albus and Hugo could have been brothers but for Hugo’s slightly curlier dark red hair. Lilly’s was the lightest, a strawberry color that cascaded down her back in perfect straight sheet. James sported the darkest and messiest hair of the lot, but it still shown red in the sunlight. Rose’s was the same color as her fathers and the same texture as her mothers, the best of both, Carla thought. Rose held exactly the opposite opinion.

Siblings in everything but parentage, they loved and fought, chatted and sulked, played and teased, and did everything as a unit when together. They were very fortunate, Carla thought. As she set Lilly’s plate in front of her Carla bent and whispered, “Don’t forget to give your gram Carla a hug before you go.”

~(*)~

“Here you are,” Marcy said as she dumped the contents of a bag onto the table on the porch. An old goblet, a newspaper from the previous day, and a child’s toy sand bucket, gaily painted in red and white, tumbled out of the bag and onto the table top. “The newspaper is for Mr. and Mrs. Weasley… oh, I forgot, there are two of you. It’s for your parents,” she said, looking at Ron. “It activates when you open it, and it will decant in the field outside the Burrow’s wards. The sand bucket is for Mr. Potter and his family. It will decant at Weasley’s Wizard Weazes in the office. Mr. Weasley knows you’re coming so the space is clear.”

“That’s what he told you” Ginny said.

Marcy smirked. “And the goblet is for George, Amal, and me.”

Ginny looked at Marcy sideways. “Where are you going with George?”

“He offered to show us his boat.”

Laughing, George stepped onto the porch from inside the house. “Don’t say ‘boat’ around Carl, my captain, say yacht.”

James grinned wickedly. “Yeah, he lectured me for twenty minutes on the difference.” he adopted a pompous pose and Scottish voice. “That’s Captain McConnell to you lad, and it’s a yacht! One hundred thirty five feet is no booaat!”

Amal appeared next to a laughing George and slid her hand in his. “One hundred thirty five feet?” she asked.

He smiled. “There are bigger.”

“True,” Harry said. “That other guy we met on Corfu? What was his name?” he asked.

George chuckled. “Paul Allen, second richest man in the world.”

“Yeah, okay,” Harry said with a smile. “Well, his is bigger, a lot bigger.”

~(*)~

“Thanks for coming,” Hermione said as she hugged her sister in law. “Sorry you got pulled into a fight.”
“Glad I could help,” Ginny said with a smile. She punched Hermione softly on the shoulder. “Now go find the stone.”

Hermione looked at Harry. “Take care of him; don’t let him get to carried away trying to figure out who they were.”

“Been handling that for eighteen years, don’t worry,” Ginny told her.

Rose and Hugo hugged their cousins and bade them goodbye. A short distance away Seamus and Lavender separated from their goodbye kiss. “Let me know how it goes,” he said, and then bent and whispered in her ear, “stay alert, too. I know you think they won’t come back, but be on guard anyway. Okay love?”

She nodded and kissed him again. “Same with you,” she said. “I want everyone healthy when we get home.”

Seamus and the Potter family took hold of the pail, and with a final wave Harry activated the portkey. He and his family plus one floated off the ground, and in a flash of blue, disappeared.

“We’re next,” Marcy said. “Do you have any last minute things, Mrs. Scamander?” she asked Luna.

“Just enjoy yourself, Marcy,” Luna said to her. “And when you get home take the week. You and your husband need to celebrate and plan.”

Marcy uncharacteristically hugged her boss. “Thank you, Mrs. Scamander,” she said in a choked voice.

“You’re more than welcome, Marcy,” Luna said, and whispered, “I’ll expect a full report on Cousin George and Miss Alamuddin when I return to England,” in her ear.

~(*)~

It was bigger than Uluru, a lot bigger. Ron, Hermione, Lavender, Luna, and the children stood and gaped at Mt. Olga.

“Bloody hell that’s huge!” Ron said.

“It is a very large group of stones,” Luna agreed.

They stood on a small dome of rock just south of the formation. On their left Mt. Olga, several huge domes of light red rock, thrust itself almost two thousand feet above the surrounding plain. Directly in front of them a well-worn and poorly maintained path led into a gorge. On their right several more huge domes of rock emerged from the sand and rubble. They weren’t lined in vertical groves like Uluru was. The sandstone layers of Kata Juta were still parallel to the ground some fifteen miles from Uluru. Whatever the geologic event was that had thrust Uluru and Kata Juta from the ground, it had left the Kata Juta conglomeration unmolested, while tilting Uluru nearly on its side.

Lavender turned to Hermione. “This could take a while,” she said with a resigned smirk. “Good thing we dressed for it. Told you the hiking shoes were important.”

“And the hats,” Ron said with a grin. “Sunshield charms,” he told his children, and he cast the charm on everyone present.

“Where to start,” Hermione said in a low, stunned voice.
“Come on, let’s go, Dad. They’ll catch up” Hugo said, and grabbed his father’s hand. He drug Ron down the path while excitedly pointing out things they had seen at Uluru.

“I guess we follow,” Lavender chuckled and took Roses hand. When she tried to walk away Rose stopped her. She was rooted to the ground, staring at Mt. Olga.

“It’s here,” she said quietly.

Luna knelt in front of her. “What are you feeling, Rose?”

Rose took a deep calming breath and closed her eyes. Luna smiled at her, “Very good, Rose,” she said. “Focus, let it find you.”

“It’s, it’s close,” she said after several moments. “Follow Hugo and Dad, they’re going the right direction.”

_Ron, stop_, Luna sent. _We need to catch up._ “Okay, Ron and Hugo will be waiting for us,” she said.

“I go first,” Lavender said, and started down the path. Hermione, Luna, and Rose followed. A few minutes later they came upon Ron and Hugo. Lavender again took the lead. “Luna behind me,” she ordered. “Rose, you’re next. You tell Luna where we need to go. Hugo, you’re in the middle, Hermione behind Hugo, and Ron, you’re rear guard. Understood?” They nodded. Over the years they had all learned that when Lavender spoke in her Auror voice it was best to do what she said.

“Keep going that way,” Rose said, indicating the crude path they were on.

Lavender set a modest pace, scanning with _Revellio_ every few hundred feet. They followed the dry river bed at the bottom of the gorge until they were even with the first large canyon cutting through Mt. Olga. It was almost a flat bottomed grotto in the rock a quarter of a mile long, straight as an arrow, and hundreds of feet deep. The walls of the canyon were nearly vertical and made of the same stuff as Uluru.

The path that came through the canyon joined the one they were travelling, and they came upon a few more hikers. “G’day,” the man in the lead said as they met. He looked them up and down and sniggered at Luna’s multicolored frock. “Where are you lot from?” he asked.


“Martin Alcott,” The man said and took hers. “These are my mates Brian, Dale, and Steve.”

“Good to meet you,” Lavender told them. “This is Luna Scamander, Rose, Hugo, Hermione, and Ron Underhill.”

“Pleasure to meet you all,” Martin’s friend, Brian said. “What brings a bunch of pomes to Kata Tjuta?”

Hermione stepped forward. “We’ve been to Uluru,” she said. “But this is much more spectacular and loads less crowded.”

Their new friends laughed. “To right you are!” the man named Steve said. “Just can’t go there anymore. The crowds are awful and the tourists are worse,” he smirked. “No offence.”

Hermione smiled at him. “None taken,” she said.

“We’re on our way to the Canyon of the Winds,” Martin said. “Want to join us?”
“Which way is it?” Lavender asked.

“Up this trail about a mile and a half,” Steve said.

Lavender looked at Rose who nodded. “We’ll follow, but we may stop to look at the formations and animals,” Lavender to the men.

“No worries,” Martin said. “Let’s go.”

Their newly acquired guides pointed out many of the interesting features of Kata Juta as they walked the path. They shared their vast knowledge of the place, and as it turned out they were all professors for the University Of Australia. Occasionally one of them would pluck a bit of refuse from the ground and put it in a trash bag they carried.

“Some of the tourists are less neat than others,” Martin said in a disgusted voice. “You won’t see an Aussie litterin’, that’s for sure.”

“You should be proud of your country,” Luna said. “It’s very beautiful and the creatures are wonderful.”

Steve, the biologist, laughed. “You’ve never met a fierce snake.”

~(*)~

After passing two more gorges that cut through the mountain they came to another large gap, and followed the trail up and into Mt. Olga.

Rose was nearly bouncing on her toes. “We’re heading right for it,” she whispered loudly to Luna and Lavender. Turning to Hugo she asked, “You can’t feel that?”

He shook his head. “No,” he replied. “It’s got the same kind of feel as the lighthouse but I’m not feeling what I felt when the statue called to me.”

Rose nodded. “That’s what it’s doing, calling to me.”

After climbing the steady slope of sand and rubble at the bottom of the canyon they came to another small valley in the rock, this one cutting right across the one they were in. It ran perpendicular to the other valleys and was filled with plants and few trees.

“This is the valley of the winds,” Steve said.

“Do you come here a lot?” Luna asked.

Dale turned to her. “Like we told ya, we’re adjunct researchers for U of A. We’re trying to find the earliest records of the indigenous peoples,” he said. “We’ve found some things, really interesting stuff up in Queensland, but the oldest surviving rock carvings and paintings are our here in the desert. So we come here and look around quite a bit, yeah.”

“What’s that way?” Rose asked, pointing into the up slope end of the valley of the winds.

“Well if you’re looking for a place to lunch, it’s quite nice,” Martin told them.

“It’s kind of a dead end,” Steve said. “Wind doesn’t blow as hard there.”

“That’s the way we should go,” Rose said to Lavender.
“Well, we’re heading down, so I suppose this is goodbye,” Martin said. “Pleasure walking with ya.”

Rose was practically vibrating. “Thanks,” she said. “We have to go this way.” Without another word she started off, Lavender hurrying to catch up.

“Slow down, Rosie,” Lavender told her young charge.

Rose slowed but still drug her nanny along by the hand. “We’re so close!”

Hermione, Luna, Hugo, and Ron hurried up behind them. The terrain was rough, and they scrambled over the scree covered, uneven ground until Rose came to a very narrow section between two large domes of the pushed up rock. Single file, with Lavender leading Rose, they made their way through the narrow chasm until a ten foot in diameter boulder blocked their way.

Using the hopping charm, Lavender jumped to the top of the boulder and levitated Rose and Hugo over it. “You lot can fend for yourselves,” she told the other adults with a grin.

Just beyond the boulder they came to a kind of crossroads in the mountain. The rift they were in continued another one hundred feet and ended in a dry waterfall. To their left one of the narrow valleys they had passed on their way to the valley of the winds led back out of the mountain. To their right a curved wall of stone surrounded a small gorge about fifty feet long. Rose charged down the gorge, dragging her nanny along.

“It’s right here, right here,” she repeated as she felt along the wall. “Come on, there’s got to be a way in.”

Hermione and Luna walked up next to Lavender and Rose. “Calm, Rose. Focus,” Luna said. Lavender let go of Rose’s hand as she sat on a smaller rock. “Reach out,” Luna continued. “Where is it strongest?”

Rose closed her eyes and turned from side to side. Suddenly she stood and walked toward the blank wall of stone thirty feet from where they stood. She turned, grinning from ear to ear, “His door is right here,” she said, turned, and walked straight through the solid rock wall.

“Rose!” Hermione shouted and ran to the wall. All she was met with was the unyielding stone.
“Rose!” Hermione shouted. “Rosie!”

“Get! Back!” An immensely strong hand grabbed her shoulder, lifted her off the ground, and threw her backwards. She was suddenly airborne and flying over the rough ground. Ron caught her as she impacted his chest.

“Fuck, Lav!” He yelled.

Standing in front of the wall, Lavender drew her wand. “Reducto!” she shouted, and bright red ball of energy blasted the wall before her. Reducto! Reducto! Reducto! Bombarda! Defodio! Curse after curse impacted the wall. The only effect was a shimmer of blue as the curses dissipated.

“Rosie!” Hugo shouted, and ran to his mother and father’s side as his nanny hammered the wall.

Ron hugged his son and wife, standing tall, and trying to appear confident.

Luna sagged to the ground clutching her head. “Stop it, all of you!” she shouted. A calm, almost sleepy feeling swept over Lavender and the Weasley family, and then Luna stood. “Ah, that’s better. Calm yourselves. The only one of you not panicking here is Rose,” Luna said, shook her head, and walked to Lavender. “It’s not going to succumb to brute force, Lavender. Rose is fine.”

~(*~

As Rose stepped through the arced entrance in the side of the mountain, that only she saw, a wall of rock appeared behind her, plunging the corridor into darkness. One year, six days, and three hours from that moment, Minerva McGonagall would discover that Rose Hermione Weasley possessed an eidetic memory. She could recall nearly everything, read, seen, spoken, or experienced, all of it, with astonishing clarity.

In the utter blackness of the corridor she reviewed in her mind what she had glimpsed before the darkness descended. The corridor led straight into the mountain. On her right was a pillar of stone about waist high with a flat top, and on that pillar sat a bowl. Lining the right hand side of the corridor were other, taller pillars. She took one step to the side and felt for the pillar. Her hand brushed the top and found the bowl.

A sound like thunder repeatedly rumbled through the rock around her, and Rose smirked. Hello, Aunt Lavender, she thought. In the bowl were dozens of small smooth pebbles. Rose mentally leafed
through Goshawk level five.

Tools:

The wand is the primary tool of magic in the advanced age we find ourselves in; however that was not always the case. It must be assumed that someone made the first wand, and that before the invention of the wand other tools were used. This author has experimented with a variety of tools for magical purposes. Many common objects can substitute, with varying degrees of effectiveness, for the wand.

She could keep her secret.

Rose plucked a pebble from the bowl, held it tightly in her hand, and whispered, *Lumos*. The stone lit with a soft glow that illuminated her surroundings. The alabaster bowl was filled with the small river polished stones, and just a few feet away one of the taller pillars stood. It looked as if it too was made of alabaster. It stood around five feet tall with a deep vase-like vessel in the top. Rose nodded to herself and, standing on her toes, dropped the stone into the top of the pillar.

The entire pillar began to glow, and the light spread out into the corridor illuminating the nearest twenty feet. She turned to the wall behind her and felt it. As she suspected it was very solid. Another pillar stood about fifteen feet further up the hallway, and Rose had just dropped a lit pebble in it when Luna’s voice sounded in her head.

Well, Rosie, you’ve put your foot in it this time. Are you alright?

Yes, Aunt Luna, I’m fine. There is a bowl of stones and pillars of alabaster here. I’m using *Lumos* on the pebbles and dropping them in the alabaster pillars. It makes the whole pillar glow. I’m certain that’s what they are here for.

Can you get out?

It doesn’t appear that way, I tried, Rose replied as she dropped another pebble in the next pillar. *The stone is here. I’m going for it.*

Of course you are. Luna sent. Rose could feel the humor her aunt felt at the irony of their situation. I’ll keep your family and Lavender informed, you tell me everything you’re doing.

Yes, Aunt Luna.

Outside, in the shade of the mountainside, Luna gradually lifted the calming energy she was generating and relayed what she knew. “She’s using *Lumos* to light small stones and placing them in lamps built for it.” Luna smiled at the distressed faces. “She was expected, you must realize this.”

“Don’t care,” Ron said. “Tell her to get back out here.”

Luna shook her head. “She can’t, Ron.” She looked at the dawning realization in Hermione’s eyes.

“He set the charm for her,” Hermione said in an awed, frightened voice. There was a very long pause. “*She* has to retrieve the stone.”

Luna nodded. “Yes.” *Let me show you.* They were back in the kitchen, Carla sat across from her, and Luna reached out to touch the statue of Merlyn. A sensation of joy washed through her, and a message firmly presented itself in her mind. *Let her find them, my child. Do not interfere.*

Hermione looked into Luna’s eyes and said. “He meant Rose.”
“Yes,” Luna said nodding. “I thought it was you, but now…”

“I hate this,” Lavender said. She was stalking back and forth in front of the smooth wall Rose had disappeared behind. She turned to her blonde friend. “Can you show us what she’s seeing?”

“If she lets us, yes,” Luna said.

*Rose, may I observe through you?* Rose heard in her head. She dropped the fifth stone in its lamp and continued up the corridor.

*Yes, Aunt Luna.* Rose smiled to herself. *Mum and Aunt Lavender a bit concerned?*

Luna laughed. ”She certainly is your daughter,” she said, looking at Ron.

Rose wasn’t even breaking stride now as she pulled pebble after pebble from the bowl. *Lumos* was a nonverbal afterthought as she dropped them in the lamps with a hop. She felt a small wave of dizziness, and Luna was in her head again.

*We are seeing what you see now.*

*Okay,* she thought. The corridor was gradually ascending, leading her higher and deeper into the Mountain. She came to an intersection. Her path continued, the corridor on her right went down steeply, and the one on her left seemed level. *The stone is straight ahead,* she thought. *I’m going that way.* Fifty feet later she came to the first obstacle.

The hole in the floor was rectangular, wall to wall, twenty feet wide, and bottomless.

*Your parents and Lavender say to turn around,* Luna said in her mind.

*He knew I would come, Aunt Luna. I can feel it. He wouldn’t put this here unless he knew I could get past it. I can sus this.*

Luna chuckled. “Stubborn, wonder where she got that,” she said, and smiled. *Let me show you something* she sent to the Weasleys and Lavender.

*May we watch your mind work, Rose? I’d like your mother to know what I know,* Luna asked.

“Yeah, okay,” Rose said out loud. She was already working on the problem. She sat on the edge of the pit. *Not an illusion, no hand holds,* she thought. She lit a pebble and threw it in the pit to join the first one she had dropped in. She watched as it gradually faded from sight. *What did you expect me to do… Fly?* Rose smiled broadly.

Hermione gasped as Roses mind went into hyper drive, and she was back in the kitchen of Cohn Manor. The memory was absolutely clear.

*Wands are good for some things, fine control, precise intent, but we, we approach magic differently. Ya see we live in the dream, the waking and the slumbering dream. It’s all the same little Sheela. So what you do is dream what you want to happen. Very simple really.*

Rose remembered the feeling from the ritual. The Dream was there, in her memory, waiting.

*Rose?* Luna’s presence said, with a touch of wonder and a little fear.

Deep in the heart of Mount Olga Rose stood, closed her eyes, and remembered the Dream. She slid into it, embracing it, living it. In the Dream she saw herself floating over the pit. She felt it. She knew it. Her feet touched down lightly, and she opened her eyes. The pit was no longer before her. She
turned and found she was several feet beyond it.

*Well done!* Luna sent. *Your parents are very proud, and really quite impressed.*

“Told you,” Lavender said to a still ginning Hermione.

And Hermione was proud and impressed. She knew the feeling, when her mind was spinning and fitting pieces of a puzzle together so quickly and accurately that she herself was amazed. What she had seen in her daughter was a level of analytical thought that she had only achieved in her late twenties, and a small tear of parental pride traced down her cheek.

Luna drew back so that they were only watching again.

Rose hurried up the hall, dropping lit pebbles in the lamps as she went. Seven lamps and a hundred feet from the pit she came to the second obstacle. A simple portcullis blocked the entire passageway. She carefully examined the walls, looking for a hidden handle or lever to operate the gate with. Nothing was obvious, or even slightly hidden. The portcullis had more than twenty vertical bars, and they were so closely spaced the she couldn’t fit between them. Five horizontal rows of bars held the verticals in place. She sat on the floor and contemplated the gate.

*Lavender asks if there is something you can use as a lever.*

*I could go back down the passage and look in the others,* Rose sent. *But I think he wants me to do it myself.*

She stared for a long time at her obstacle. It was obviously too heavy for her to lift, she couldn’t squeeze through. *If I could just… I’ve got it!*

Rose stood, picked up the bowl, and walked to the portcullis. Grasping a bar she re-entered the Dream. As her power filled her, she saw the portcullis vanish, she saw it rematerialize outside in the canyon, and she saw herself walking through the empty space that it had occupied.

Outside, in the little box canyon that held her family, Luna and, Lavender, the portcullis materialized in midair and crashed to the ground fifty feet from them.

*Careful,* Luna sent. *It missed, but that was a little scary.*

Rose chuckled. *I knew where it would land.*

Seven more lamps and Rose stood at the edge of a wide chasm. The passage ended as just a square opening in the side of a sheer face. The enormous crack in the rock disappeared into the darkness on either side. It descended as deep as the pit before had, and continued over head into the inky blackness. Three lamp pillars stood on either side of the opening, and Rose lit six stones, dropping one in each lamp. The light bloomed in the darkness, and Rose could see much farther. Sixty feet away, exactly opposite the opening of the passage, a small niche was carved in the smooth rock face.

And in that niche sat a small statue of an elf.

Outside, in the shade of the cliff, Hermione burst into tears. They had found it. Her daughter had found it. They were one step closer.

Rose set the bowl on the floor and studied the gap before her. She wasn’t keen on attempting to fly over it as she had with the pit. Simply levitating herself over the pit had been one thing. Here she would have to levitate herself, get the stone somehow, and then levitate back to the passage. Not something she wanted to try in a do or die situation.
Her palms were almost itching for the stone, he whole being desired it, and she grinned. She had the answer. With a deep calming breath she re-entered the Dream.

Luna smiled broadly, and she gently edged a little deeper into Rose’s thoughts, sharing them with her friends.

In the dream Rose saw the stone, and she reached out with both hands, willing the stone to come to her. She felt the sensation building and smiled with glee. Then it faded, slipping away like sand through her fingers. She growled and stomped her foot in frustration. Rose had one major fault, she hated to fail. It was almost obsessive.

Again, Rose, Luna said in her mind, and Rose sniggered. How many times had she heard that from her mentor? And you will hear it many more times in your life. Again, Rose.

A scowl of concentration formed on her face and she entered the dream again. Once more she stretched her arms out. Once more she felt the magic building, but this time she kept her focus on the stone, and not her own sense of satisfaction at achievement. She smiled. In the dream she saw the stone gently float out of the niche and sailed toward her. She withdrew her left hand and turned her right hand palm up. With the lightest of touches the stone landed in her hand, and she hugged it to her.

~(*)~

In the kitchen of Cohn manor Obo sat on a high stool. He sipped his Guinness and chatted with Carla and the elder Weasleys, the remains of their lunch scattered across the table. A wave of magical joy washed over him and he nearly wept at the sensation. “They have it,” he said to his new friends. “Please excuse Obo, he has a duty to perform.” He smiled and Disaparated.

In the bush a few miles from Uluru Obo reappeared in the shade of a tree. He sat and pulled a small pouch from a pocket in his frock. Opening the pouch he pulled an ancient glove from it. Only magic kept it from turning to powder. With great care he set it on the ground before him, laid both of his hands on it, and entered the Dream. She has found it.

Half a world away, deep in his own dream, an old man smiled in the dark.

~(*)~

The moment Rose touched the stone a loud, deep, bell like toll sounded throughout Kata Juta. About fifty people were scattered through the park, and they all looked around for the source. As the echoes died they muttered to each other about the strangeness of the place.

~(*)~

Rose turned and hurried back down the passage. She had a face cracking grin on and was practically running. As she approached the pit Luna sent, I know you’re happy, but concentrate. Remember the Dream. Be careful.

Rose nodded to herself and closed her eyes. For the final time that day she entered the Dream. A soft glow of magic formed around her, and she floated off the ground. Seconds later she touched down on the opposite side of the pit. Now she really was running, because she could see daylight at the end of the corridor.

Hermione turned toward the face of the cliff that Rose had disappeared into and knelt as her daughter
ran straight out of the solid rock and into her arms.

Chapter End Notes
Hermione sat on the porch and sipped her tea. It was well past two in the morning, and she still couldn’t sleep. She was trilled beyond words to have the stone safely sat on the mantle of the Manor, but every time she closed her eyes she saw Rose disappearing into a solid wall of red rock. The adrenaline rush of fear didn’t stop the smile of pride that accompanied thoughts of her daughter though.

Rose had done so well, accomplishing feats of magic the vast majority of adults were completely incapable of, and she had done them without second thought. More though, Rose had displayed a phenomenal intellect. As Hermione had told Lavender and Luna, she knew Rose was a very bright and intelligent girl, but Hermione herself had been biased. She had been judging Rose’s accomplishments based on her own adult abilities. Now, viewed from the perspective that she was an adult and Rose was a ten year old child, she understood just how advancer her little girl was.

“Knut for you thoughts,” a woman’s voice said, and Hermione jumped in her chair.

“You know, Lav, I’ve asked you to *try* to make a little noise when you walk. Christ, you scare the piss out of me sometimes.”

Lavender snickered. “Do I need to do the cleansing charm on you?” she asked as she sat.

Hermione smiled. “While you were an island of serenity as I recall,” she said snidely.

“I am really sorry about that, Hermione,” Lavender said. “How’s your shoulder? Are you okay?”

“Molly healed the bruise,” Hermione said with a smirk. “I think we all, you included, forget how strong you actually are. As I was flying through the air, amid the shock, I was quite impressed.”

Lavender nodded and sighed. “I am really sorry about that. I don’t often lose control, but *my sweet* was in quite a state.”

Hermione laid her hand on her friends. “It’s fine, really. Just another reminder of the many reasons
“Well I’m happy we had Luna,” Lavender said. “Can you imagine what we’d have gone through if she hadn’t been there?”

“Yes,” Hermione said with conviction. “That’s another slice of my insomnia.”

“And mine.”

Hermione look at her friend. “I hate it, Lav. I hate it that she went in there by herself,” she said. “Cut off from us, no wand, in the dark… alone.”

“She wasn’t alone.”

Hermione nodded. “I know, but I... it was supposed to be me.”

Lavender smirked. “Jealous?”

“No,” Hermione said, shaking her head. “Well, maybe a little, but I should be the one taking the risks, the one in danger, not her. I take the hits in this outfit.”

“No all of them, as I recall.”

Hermione looked at her friend. “True, but you, Shay, Ron, Harry, Cho, Pad, you’re all trained and proficient at protecting yourselves, and even then I worry, but the kids, Rose…” She looked at her hands and then back up at Lavender. “Do you think we should stop? I’ll stop if you...”

Lavender chuckled. “No you wouldn’t, and neither would Rose. You saw the look on her face, pride, joy, determination; we’re going to have trouble slowing her down.” She took Hermione’s hand. “Luna and I talked, well she talked I listened, and she convinced me that, when it comes to the places where the stones are, like Kata Juta, I’m going to have to give up a bit of security and control.”

Hermione looked out into the night. “I’m not loving that part of it.”

Lavender nodded. “What do you think, Molly?”

“Can’t a woman eavesdrop on her children anymore?” Molly said, stepping from the shadowy doorway of the sitting room and taking a seat in one of the remaining chairs. “As to what I think, I think you both just got a taste of what real fear is.” She looked at Lavender “I should think Sylvia showed it to you when you came home from Hogwarts after the battle.”

Lavender nodded. “Yeah, she did. Mum cried for a week. Wouldn’t leave me, she was a mess.”

The older woman looked at them and nodded. They saw the trials of parenthood, volumes of it, written on her face as she spoke. “Fear for your child makes fear for your own safety a laugh. Bill never frightened me like that. He was always such a well behave and thoughtful boy. Charlie,”—she chuckled—“Charlie was my first hint that some children are very different than others. He brought home every poisonous creature from the nearest five miles. We had jars and tanks stacked to the rafters in his room for a bit.”

“Percy was easier, wasn’t he?” Hermione asked.

“Yes and no,” Molly said with a sad smile. “He was so mannered and reserved. He loved Charlie and Bill, looked up to them, but his nature made him a target.” She shook her head. “Not from
Charlie or Bill, but from the twins.” She looked at Hermione. “Almost from the day they were born I worried. Even as infants they pranked and teased, and it only got worse as they grew. Percy was their primary target.”

“Ron was Bill and Percy and Charlie, with just a dash of the twins, all rolled up in one perfect package,” Molly said with a smile, and then it fell. “But the twins were merciless, and I didn’t see it. They all doted on Ginny though. The twins tried pranking her early on, but I think it was Charlie put a stop to it. Then, one by one, they were all off at school.”

“I worried less with them there, but only marginally. Bill did very well, Charlie too, Percy fit in and loved school, and then two years later the letters began.” She shook her head. “First day I get one from Minerva, ‘What the bloody hell, Molly,’ she opened with, and I knew it would be seven years of agony. After the first three weeks she started combining them into a weekly summary. It had been two or three a day, and the school owls were getting tired of the trip to Surrey.”

Hermione and Lavender were sniggering.

“Yes, very funny for you, but Minerva was in a state. And then Ron gets on the train.” She laid her hand on Hermione’s. “In his first letter he offhandedly mentions he’s now friends with Harry Potter, and then he writes three full paragraphs on this girl he and Harry have somehow befriended.” Smiling at her daughter in law she said, “I suspected then, four years later I knew.”

“Lastly, Ginny rides off to Hogwarts, and Arthur and I are alone in the house for the first time in twenty eight years,” she said, and blushed. “It was like we were newlyweds again.” Molly looked into the night. “But then Ginny’s letters changed. Bill, Charlie, the twins, even Ron landed in hospital under Poppy, but none of them scared me as thoroughly as Ginny did with the decaying sanity in her letters, and after Harry saved her I thought I’d never sleep again.”

Molly looked at the other two women. “She ever tell you that I stayed in a chair in her room while she slept most of that summer?”

“No,” said in chorus.

“Well I did.” She said, and shuddered. “That thing you felt this afternoon? It was a thousand times that.” A tear leaked from her eye. “That monster tortured my girl! From the inside, and I didn’t know, I couldn’t help, I was useless, and that was the worst thing, feeling helpless while your child is in danger or suffering.” She looked at Hermione and a smile curled her lips. “And then my adopted son and daughter go off with my youngest son and try to get themselves killed, repeatedly. The worst bit was when Percy wasn’t speaking to us. I was so afraid something would happen and we’d never get to fix it.” Molly sat back and tapped her wand on her tea, reheating it. “And then, of course, there was the war year. So yes, that thing you two felt this afternoon? I know it well.”

“So what do you do?” Hermione asked.

Molly smiled. “You trust them. You trust that you’ve set a good example, that you’ve taught them care and caution, that they are strong and smart and can handle danger themselves,” she said, then she chuckled. “And I bake.”

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The following day they stayed close by the manor. Ron made a small excursion into Alice Springs for some supplies Carla and his mother needed from the market, but the rest of the day the Weasleys, Luna, Lavender, and Carla were content to mind Hugo and Rose, watch the sun gradually desiccate the land, and allow Obo to fuss over them.
The old elf was enjoying himself immensely. He hadn’t had a family to care for in this way in almost a century, and was having a wonderful time cleaning the Manor and helping Carla and Molly cook. They did notice that, every time he passed the stone on the mantel piece, he bowed his head.

“So now you’ve found it what ya doin’ next?” Carla asked from her chair on the porch.

Hermione took a sip of her lemonade, looked at Lavender sitting next to her, and then contemplated the bush. “We still have most of a week here for holiday, then I suppose it’s back to the usual. I was planning on North and South America next, but I think I’ll need to do a lot more preparatory research.”

“And I have to train Rose,” Lavender said.

“Train?” Carla asked.

“Hermione and I talked a lot last night.” Lavender chuckled at Carla’s inquisitive look. “Sleep wasn’t going to happen for us,” she said. “We decided that if Rose is going to find herself in that situation again, and as much as I detest it, it seems likely, she’s going to be prepared.”

“From the sound of it our little flower did pretty well by herself,” Carla said with a smirk.

Lavender grinned at her. “I’m not the type to trust luck, Carla.”


“ Mostly physical,” Lavender said. “We’ll practice the wandless magic, she’s got a better handle on that than anyone I know, but mostly I want to be certain she can overcome any physical obstacles he sets for her. I’ve always made time in their schedules for outside play, and I made certain Rose got out of her chair and participated, but she needs to be in better condition. She was huffing a bit after running out of the cave.”

“Won’t hurt me either,” Hermione said. She looked at Carla. “I’ve got a desk job, usually, and I’ve noticed that I’m putting on a few. Ron doesn’t mind, but I do, so Rosie and I are going to start doing the morning run that Shay and Lav do.”

Lavender laughed softly. “I’ll take it easy on you for a bit,” she said. “I don’t think you’d fancy trying to run the five miles we do right off.”

“Not sure I’d stay conscious,” Hermione said. Carla and Lavender laughed.

“Where are they?” Carla asked.

Hermione smiled. “Rose is re-enacting her adventure for her brother, father, and grandparents out back in the courtyard. She was lighting pebbles when I left.”

“Neat trick, that one,” Carla said. “She showed it to me last night.”

“Yeah,” Hermione nodded in agreement. “But the levitating and banishing are well beyond that. I didn’t know it could be done wandlessly at that level.”

“Hello, my sisters,” Luna said as she appeared from the side of the house. The goanna, Mola, draped around her neck. “Mola and I have been out for a walk. Here you go,” She said, and gently lifted the lizard from her shoulders to placed her on the ground. Mola tasted the air and then scooted under the porch. “Such a beautiful creature,” Luna commented as she took the remaining chair. “We’re discussing Rose and how to proceed, are we?”
“And then I came to this,” Rose said and brushed her hand over the portcullis propped against the wall of the rec room. Ron had sent it to the bush in front of the house before they left Kata Juta. Now the gate, polished by Obo until the dark native wood it was made of shone, occupied a place of prominence next to the juke box in the rec room. “I used the Dream Magic again and banished it outside.”

Molly was smiling broadly while Arthur shook his head in amazement.

“Thought I was gonna wet myself,” Ron said from behind the bar. “That thing just popped out of nothing twenty feet up. Made a hell of crash when it hit.”

“Sorry, Dad,” Rose said. “So I walked on, still lighting the lamps, and came to cliff in the dark. When I walked up to it, it looked like it was just a big square black hole. Then I noticed three pillars on each side, and I lit pebbles for them. That made a lot of light, and that’s when I saw the stone across the crevasse in the niche.”

“Mum cried,” Hugo said.

“Yeah,” Ron said, “Happy tears.” He turned to the shelf behind him and looked at the decorations that they had rescued from the Pioneer Hotel. Choosing a fifteen inch tall aboriginal wooden carving from the shelf, he turned and placed it on the bar top. “We were watching through Luna. The stone was at least fifty feet away. Took her a practice try, but show ‘em what you did, Rosie Posey.”

Rose blushed at her baby name. Then she closed her eyes and let the Dream Magic flow through her. Once again she could see in the Dream, once again the magic poured out of her and toward the carving on the bar. It was easier this time. She extended her right hand, and the statue gracefully floated across the room to land in her outstretched palm.

“Bloody hell,” Arthur said, and he was immediately shushed by his wife.

“Mistress Rose is becoming an accomplished Dreamer,” Obo said as he entered the rec room.

Rose opened her eyes and rejoined the waking world. She looked down fondly at the carving in her hands, seeing the stone in her mind. “I couldn’t believe it. It was actually sitting right there in my hand,” she said. “I turned and made for the door.”

“Aunt Lavender told Aunt Luna to slow you down,” Hugo said with a grin.

“I wouldn’t have run into the pit,” Rose said, a bit peeved.

“I like your aunt Lavender just the way she is,” Molly said. “Overprotective works very well for me.”

“I want to go back,” Rose said.

“I don’t think so,” Ron said. “You scared us, badly, and I’m not watching you walk through that wall again, especially alone.”

“I think if you were holding my hand it would work,” Rose said. “And the wards may have broken when I got the stone. We just rushed home. We didn’t check to see if you could get in.”

Arthur Weasley was suddenly serious. “Rose is right, we have to go back.” Ron and his mother looked at him puzzled. “If the wards are now broken we have to make sure the Muggles can’t get
Ron shook his head. “I should have thought of that.”

Arthur laid his hand on his son’s shoulder. “You were concerned about your daughter,” he said. “You’re to be forgiven for not thinking clearly.”

“Now?” Rose said excitedly, and started for the door.

“Stop,” Ron said with a laugh. “Tomorrow, okay Rosie?’

She looked a little disappointed but rallied. “Okay, Dad,” she said.

“Mistress Luna is helping Obo and Mistress Carla with dinner preparations tonight,” Obo told them. “She is teaching Obo some vegetarian recipes he did not know.”

Ron looked a bit concerned. “I’ve tasted Lovegood cookery once, be certain it’s edible, Obo.”

“Mistress Scamander is very knowledgeable on many topics,” Obo said. “But Obo will definitely test the taste for Master Ron.” He laughed. “We will have dinner prepared at five.”

~(*)~

“I’ll have another of these,” Ron said as he finished the crusted and fried patty on his plate. “Who knew ground up beans and rice could taste so good?”

Luna looked at him and smiled cheekily. “I did,” she said.

“Ha, ha,” Ron said, “Have to admit, I was skeptical.”

“I understand,” Luna said. “I became vegan after… after Dean, and I took my time. Going full stop on meat usually leads to disaster and failure for first timers, so I took it slower. First I eliminated the big slabs of dead animal from my plate. After a few months of that I worked my way around the plate, trading butter for olive oil and margarine and other things of that nature, but I found the hardest things to eliminate were eggs and dairy.”

“Oh, cheese,” Ron said with a moan. “I just couldn’t give that up, and Mum’s cakes.”

“Then don’t, Ron,” Luna said. “There are no rules. The vegan Aurors aren’t going to bash down your door and haul you off.” She laughed. “Just do what you can to lighten the load you place on the earth. I certainly don’t begrudge your mother her baking. Besides, you don’t have a rooster at the burrow, so all the eggs are infertile. Morally you’re in the clear.”

“Like you have any ‘Moral struggles?’” Ron said.

“Bacon,” Luna said simply. “We haven’t managed to grow a bacon tree yet. I suspect we’d have a lot more vegans if we did.”

Ron laughed. “Well, I tell you what, some arse sets his giant pig on me again, it’ll be self-defense, and you can help me eat it, how’s that?”

~(*)~

“So, back to Kata Juta tomorrow?” Ron asked as Hermione snuggled into his side.

“I suppose so,” Hermione said. “She doesn’t go in alone,” she continued, un-necessarily in Ron’s
“Yeah, like Lav will let that happen again.”

“Thanks for catching me,” Hermione said with a smirk.

Ron chuckled. “You know I hardly ever think about it, about her being… you know.”

“A sentient werewolf schooled in every martial art known to mankind?” She smiled and shook her head. “It’s okay. It’s not an insult, it’s what she is, and she’s embraced it.”

He nodded. “Yeah, I know. It all just becomes so real when she casually pitches you thirty feet through the air.”

“She did apologize for that.” Hermione chuckled. “Was a little startling, wasn’t it.”

Ron laughed with her. “Yeah,” he said. “I suppose we do have the best nanny in the history nannies.”

“Yes we do.” She cupped his cheek. “Arthur mentioned Quidditch.”

“Mum’s idea actually,” Ron said. “Says we should take Carla to a professional match, let her see what it’s really like.”

“That’s a lovely idea,” she said snuggling back into him. “We should make a day of it.”

Ron nodded. “Right, done then. Dad and I will head off to Sidney when we get back from Kata Juta. There a Sidney Perth match I think on Saturday.”

“Are you ready to face the hats again?”

“Oh, oh yeah, oh shit!”

~(*)~

Lavender, Ron, Jarra and Arthur appeared with a snap in the little canyon, and they hurried to the entrance of “Merlyn’s Lair” as they had begun calling it.

“Crikey!” Jarra exclaimed. “Can ya feel that?”

“Can now,” Ron said. “We were in a bit of a state when we left.”

“So, it’s right there then?” Arthur asked, pointing at the blank wall in front of them.

“Yeah, Dad,” Ron said. “She walked straight through it, scared me shitless.”

Jarra stepped up to the red wall and ran his hand over it. “So old,” he said. “Like at the observatory. It’s his echo.”

The wall was still solid to the touch, but they could feel the outline of the archway in the ringing of the magic around it. Ron pushed against the wall, his father attempted Alohomora, and Lavender tried several of the Auror’s techniques, but nothing allowed them to pass the barrier. After an hour they were puzzled, sweating, and frustrated.

Ron leaned against the wall were the doorway was, his back to it as he drank from a water bottle. “Well it’s still secure, that’s certain,” he said.
“Yeah, still I’d love to see it,” Jarra said. “Merry Macs lair!”

Ron chuckled, leaned fully against the wall, stretched his back, and said, “Merlyn, your Merry Mac, wooooh!” His exclamation accompanied his backward staggering fall through the archway. Ron landed on his arse next to the short pillar that had held the bowl of pebbles. “I think I’ve found how to get in,” he yelled.

~(*)~

They crowded behind Rose at the edge of the cliff. The lamp pillars still glowed brightly, illuminating the vast gap and the far wall with the empty niche. “So, it sat there for almost six thousand years, did it” Carla asked.

“Apparently. Let’s back up,” Lavender said, and pulled Rose bodily from the edge of the precipice. Rose, as opposed to her mother, had exactly zero fear of heights.

Rose picked up the bowl of stones and turned to face them. “Okay, you’ve seen where I was, let’s go look down the other passages.” She started off back down the corridor. Lavender levitated her, Hugo, and Carla over the pit trap, and joined them on the opposite side by using the hopping charm. As he had on their way to the chasm, Jarra Dreamt himself across just as Rose had on her first trip through the lair. Hermione, Ron, his parents, and Luna all joined them, and they halted at the intersection of the passages.

“Down or level?” Ron asked.

Luna and Lavender both reached out with their enhanced senses. Luna said, “I think…”

“This way.” Rose said brightly, and started down the level path, lighting stones, hopping, and dropping them in the lamps.

Luna laughed. “Yes, that way.”

On and on the corridor led. After twenty lamp pillars they came to a simple wooden door. Lavender stepped to the front of their group and ordered Ron to take her back. Together they opened the door.

It was his home.

Merlyn was a simple man, they determined that right off. As Rose lit stones and popped them in the lamps that ringed the chamber, a humble dwelling appeared out of the gloom. There was a plain bed frame, made from the native woods of Australia, sat against one curved wall of the large oval chamber. A few chests, a table, three chairs, all simply and sturdily made, were the extent of the furniture. Lastly a pile of ancient wood sat near a crude fireplace abutting a natural fissure in the rock that acted as a chimney.

“There’s something here,” Rose said.

Luna knelt next to her. “Close your eyes,” she said quietly. “Focus. Where?”

Rose walked to the table and they noticed a small box sitting on it. Made of the same wood, it blended in and was barely noticeable. When she opened the box, she found it held a small pendant on a gold chain. She was about to pick it up when Hermione stopped her.

“No touching strange objects.” Hermione chuckled. “Especially necklaces.”

“He left it for me, Mum,” Rose said plainly.
“Perhaps he did,” Hermione said. “But we are being very careful from now on.”

Lavender closed the box and put the whole thing in her satchel. At the same time Ron and Arthur sent the two chests back to Cohn Manor. Luna wandered around the chamber with a large grin, while Molly and Carla ambled over to the fireplace and conversed quietly.

“Truly amazing, Moll,” Carla said. “Thanks for letting me tag along.”

“Happy you came,” Molly said. They sat in the two chairs by the fireplace. Molly levitated a few pieces of wood into it and set them alight. “That’s better, old bones need the chill taken off.”

“Yup,” Carla said and looked down. “Here, what’s this?” she picked up an old pottery goblet amid the kindling.

“Well, well, well,” Molly said. “Not quite the Holy Grail, but Merlyn’s cup would be a priceless artifact back home.” She laughed. “Let’s put it on the mantel piece at the Manor. It’ll be safe there.” she tucked the cup into a pocket.

“I’d like to find out what’s down the other passage,” Rose called after they had searched the large room.

“Alright,” Hermione said. “But, first we ought to try the experiment. Carla?”

“Okay,” Carla said as she stood. “I just say his name?”

“Yes,” Molly told her. ”As if you were calling to him from a distance.”

Carla shrugged, and loudly said, “Obo!”

The ancient elf appeared with a snap. “Katom Iska,” he said with a smile. “Thank you, Mistress Carla for summoning me, it’s good to see its halls again.”

“You’ve been here before?” Hermione asked.

“It was Obo’s delight to serve the Great Master for a time,” he said, and once again Hermione marveled at Obo’s true age.

“So he did live here,” Ron said.

“The Great Master Merry Mac occasionally stayed here, yes, but he preferred his caravan.”

“Caravan?” Hermione asked.

Obo smiled. “His Caravan was a kind of sled,” He told them. “It was pulled by a dozen roos he had trained. Obo set the tent from it many times.”

“What’d he do here?” Carla asked.

“Katom Iska means ‘one hundred waters’ in the high speech of the Great Master’s people,” Obo said, and smiled. “The Dreamers and the people could never pronounce it correctly. This was his bath. Come, Obo will show you.” He turned to Rose. “May Obo have the lamp stone bowl?”

Rose smiled and handed the bowl to Obo. “I used a few already,” she told him.

“As they are meant to be,” Obo said. “The stones return to the bowl when the Lumos charm is cancelled or wears off. Obo will help Mistress Carla and our aged friends to the bath. The path is
long and better suited to the young.” He laughed, and levitated himself, Carla, Molly and Arthur out of Merlyn’s chamber. They sat in midair as they floated to the intersection of the passages, and then down the long, descending hall, Obo lighting pillar lamps as they went. It ended at a large wooden door similar to the one that closed off the bed chamber. With a snap of his fingers, Obo opened the door, and they entered a large natural gallery in the rock. It was much warmer and more humid than the passage, and the sound of running water could be heard from a variety of directions.

‘Lumos maxima!’ Hermione intoned, and she sent a brilliant ball of light out into the middle of the gallery’s ceiling. A large underground lake revealed itself.

To their left stood a statue of a man, to their right a statue of a woman, both finely and realistically carved from alabaster. Luna began looking them over. ‘Interesting style,’” she observed.

“They are from Merry Mac’s birthplace,” Obo said.

“And where would that be?” Carla asked.

“Obo was never told; it made the Great Master sad. He only referred to it as ‘my home that isn’t there any more’.”

“Can we swim, Mum?” Hugo asked. Pointing at a stairway carved into the rock that lead into the lake.


Obo smiled. “Obo recommends it,” he said. “Merry Mac made this place because of the natural warm springs that feed this end of the lake.” Obo smiled in reminiscence. “I can see him as clearly as if it were yesterday, laying there in the soaking pool.” He gestured to a shallow, ten foot in diameter, rock walled area nearby. One of the many rivulets of water that fed the lake poured into it.

Hermione noticed Lavender looking longingly at the pool. “Obo, you can return here now, is that correct?”

“Yes, mistress,” he said.” Now that Mistress Carla has summoned Obo the ward is broken, and Obo can come and go as he wishes.”

Hermione caressed his cheek. “My friend, would you do me the favor of returning to the Manor and collecting our swimming clothes?”

The old elf smiled. “Obo will be but a moment.”

~(*)~

Deep in the heart of Kata Juta a natural warm spring fed lake sees people for the first time in many millennia. Two red headed children frolic in the lake while their mother looks on. The children’s aunts, grandparents, adopted grandmother, and an impossibly old elf, enjoy a smaller, even warmer pool. Laughter echoes around the huge chamber carved by an ancient flood, and as wine, the warm weightlessness, and refuge gradually ease the stress from worn and weary bodies, they give themselves over to the ever present healing magic of water.

Ancient Celtic.

kantom hundred
*isk ā water
Hermione woke to Lavender standing at the foot of her bed squeezing her toe. Her blonde friend smiled and laid a stack of clothing at her feet, and then, just a silently as she had entered, she left. Ron didn’t even stir.

The stack contained a running suit made of a stretchy, dark blue, breathable fabric. She put it on and frowned at how prominent arse and thighs looked in the trousers. The top also displayed the small tummy bump she hated. When she entered the kitchen she found Carla, Molly, Obo, Lavender, and Rose in mid breakfast.

“You look aces in that tracky,” Carla said. “Colour suits you.”

“Thanks,” Hermione said. “But my arse looks huge.”

Lavender laughed. “It’s just perspective. Everybody thinks that. Besides,” she said, smiling. “It’ll be a lot smaller in a few months. Have some oatmeal and we’ll start.”

~(*)~

“Today we walk,” Lavender said as she, Hermione, and Rose strode from the Manor front yard and into the bush. “Tomorrow too, then we start running home from a mile out.”

Rose looked up at her. “You do this every day?” she asked.

Lavender smiled. “Most days,” she said. “Five miles seems a lot, but after you get used to it, it only takes about an hour and a half including showing after.”

“Why mornings?” Hermine asked.

“You’ll find that it’s cooler,” Lavender said. “Less people are about. In fact most of the other folks up and about in the morning are fellow runners. It also helps your mind function better throughout the day.” She smirked at her companions. “As if the two of you need that.”

Hermione wanted to respond, but the pace Lavender set had her breathing heavily after a few minutes. The cool air of the morning didn’t stop her from sweating profusely. The exertion of struggling through the sand was more than she had anticipated as, even though it was typically only a few centimeters deep, it sucked at her feet with every step. Lavender stopped under a tree after they had made two miles. She pulled three water bottles from the pack she carried.

“Always have water with you or available on your path,” she said as she handed Hermione and Rose their water. “You can Augumenti if you’re somewhere safe to use magic, but it’s easier to just carry a bottle.”
Rose wiped her forehead with her sleeve. “I don’t sweat this much Chasing!”

Lavender patted her head. “Wait till you’re on the Gryffindor Quidditch team,” she said with a laugh. “Nev makes sure you’re all in peak condition, he tells me their captain, Albo McMillion, he’s brutal about fitness.”

Hermione smirked as she leaned against the tree. “I know why.”

“Well?” Lavender said.

“A few months ago, at our weekly lunch meeting, Pansy told me that she and Nev have a bet every Slytherin Gryffindor match,” Hermione said.

Rose laughed. “I know dad doesn’t like Madam Parkinson,” she said. “But I think she’s cool.”

Lavender smiled, and Hermione said, “Pansy is not the person she was, and I still, even after all this time, have trouble making Ron see that.” She rolled her eyes. “It’s much worse with Draco.”

“Draco Malfoy is a stinking turd,” Lavender said flatly. “He may be doing a bunch of lovely things for Hogwarts, but I still think the way he treated Pan was shit. Sorry Rose.”

Hermione chuckled. “The swear jar is at home, you’re safe,” she said to Lavender. “Yeah, I’m still not totally convinced he’s not acting, but Narcissa made it plain to Luna that Lucius was to blame for the mess with Pansy. He forced Draco into marrying Greengrass.” She shook her head. “Draco should have fought for her. He should have turned on his heal, walked out of Lucius’s cell, and never looked back, but he didn’t. Astoria is very pretty, and nice enough I suppose, but she’s brainless compared to Pansy.”

“Dad always says Madam Parkinson is stupid,” Rose observed.

Lavender chuckled. “He does have an ongoing problem there, but he’s wrong. The standings in our year at year 6 were; your mother, Anthony Goldstein, Blaise Zabini, Padma, Me, Pansy, Parv, and then Harry. Draco was twelve I think.”

“Thirteen,” Hermione corrected. “Ron was very pleased to be ten.”

Rose looked at her nanny. “Well I like Madam Parkinson, and she dresses as well as you do.”

Lavender sniggered, and said, “Pansy dresses far better than I do, she’s rich.” She looked up at Hermione. “Okay, you’re not the colour of Uluru any more, let’s go.”

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“We’re going back to Kata Juta tonight!” Hermione said as she collapsed into her chair in the kitchen. “The hot pool is calling my name.”

Carla chuckled. “Lav wore you down some?”

“I can’t move my legs,” Hermione said.

“It’ll pass,” Lavender said in a chuckle. “Tomorrow will be worse, then it’ll get better.”

Hermione closed her eyes and laid her head on the back of the chair. “Terrific,” she said.

“Hey, you volunteered to come along,” Lavender told Hermione, and she rubbed her friend’s shoulders. “It really will get better,” she said kindly.
“Where’s Rosie?” Carla asked.

“I sent her to the shower,” Lavender said. “She needs to get used to showering after.”

“I’ll do that when I can move again,” Hermione said. “I can’t believe it took that much out of me! I mean I walk that much at the ministry every day.”

Lavender sat and took her hand. “You walk on smooth floors and throughout the day, we just walked miles through the sand and all at once. Give yourself some credit; you did well for the first time out.”

Carla handed them both tall glasses of lemonade. “Salted the rim for ya,” she said.

She laughed at the bemused expressions from the two women. “Don’t spend much time in the desert do ya?” she said with a grin. “Go on, you’ll see.”

Hermione took a sip. The taste was odd, the salt mixing in with the sweet lemonade, but she could feel her body rejoicing at the combination. She took a long draw.

“Have to remember this,” Lavender said.

“Kinda common out here in the bush,” Carla said. “Oh, while you were out Ron and Arthur headed off the Perth to get tickets.”

Hermione nodded weakly. “Good,” she said. “I’m not much of a player, but it’s fun to watch.”

“Luna says that when she brings that group here next month they’ll have enough for two full teams” Carla said. “She was talking with the boy’s this morning about building a… pitch is it?”

Hermione nodded. “Yeah, pitch. Where?”

“Oh, just out the front where you lot played,” Carla said.

“The beds are made and Mistress Rose is dressing,” Obo said as he entered the kitchen with a smile.

“Having a good time, Obo?” Lavender asked as she kissed the top of his head.

“Obo is as happy as he has ever been, Mistress Lavender, thank you.”

Hermione smiled and let the joy fill her. Obo was the perfect example of why she was on the quest. He wanted to serve, he wanted to be needed, and he didn’t need to be forced. He needed to be appreciated, he needed to be loved. He also needed to be paid in her opinion, but that was a hard sell to most elves. When all the elves were free she was certain they would still wish to serve and be near people, but the people shouldn’t be able to make them slaves, and they wouldn’t be able to when she was finished.

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It was just past lunch when Lavender pulled the small wooden box from her satchel, set it on the table in the sitting room, and carefully opened it. Inside, attached to a length of fine gold chain, a small golden teardrop shaped pendant lay at the bottom. “Do you know anything about this, Obo?” she asked.

Obo smiled. “Obo was told by the Great Master that, when The Fairy Queen and her daughter found the key, Obo could reveal certain things to them. This is a gift for Mistress Rose, this is her key.”
Everyone at the manor was gathered in the sitting room to ascertain whether the gift was dangerous or not. “Key?” Ron asked. “Key to what?”

Obo laughed. “Obo was told to answer that question with ‘adventure’.”

“Oh, that explains everything,” Ron said drolly.

“The Great Master enjoyed a joke.”

“You’re certain it’s for Rose?” Molly asked.

Obo waved his hand at the box. The necklace floated up out of it and slowly rotated in midair. The pendant looked like a perfectly smooth teardrop, but for one side. A tight pattern was impressed in the gold. It appeared to be a knot work pattern at first glance, but on closer inspection it revealed its true form. It was a rose.

“How did he know?” Hugo said.

“The Great Master remembered the future well, Master Hugo,” Obo said. He turned to Hermione. “May Obo place it on Mistress Rose’s neck?”

“Lavender and I scanned it a few minutes ago. There’s a magic on it we can’t identify,” Luna said. “Do you know what that is, Obo?”

Obo nodded. “The Great Master placed several magics upon the key, Mistress. None of them harmful to Mistress Rose.” He walked to where Rose sat on the ottoman, the pendant following him. The aged elf gently grasped the chain and draped it around Rose’s neck. “The key is yours, Mistress Rose, use it well.”

“I should keep it in my jewelry box so it doesn’t get damaged or lost,” she said as she studied the engraving on the pendant.

Obo smiled at her. “Some of the enchantments the Great Master placed upon the key are to prevent that,” Obo said. “It will not come from your body unless you wish it. The chain is unbreakable, the key un-damageable, and should someone try to take the key from you it will,”—he chuckled and winked—“resist.”

Luna knelt next to him and Rose. “What more can you tell us of Merlyn, Obo.”

Obo smiled at her. “Mistress Luna is much like the Great Master, kind and wise,” he said, and looked at the rest. “Obo is free of his promise, and can tell you all he knows now. The Great Master came to the land on a boat the likes of which the people had never seen. The white settler’s boats that arrived so much later were ugly by comparison. Obo met the Great Master in the bush many years after his arrival. He had already placed the stone and performed the binding magic, but he gave Obo his glove the moment he met Obo.”

“The Great Master travelled far over the land, meeting with the people and the Dreamers. Obo travelled with him for many of those years. Twice the great master asked Obo to care for an aged Dreamer as they made their way to the next life, and it was Obo’s honor to serve them. When the Great Master left the land, Obo, the Dreamers, and the people were sad, but he told us that he would return, and that the children of the people and the Dreamers would see him again.”

“The years passed, many of them, and the generations of the people and Dreamers became multitude. Then one day, not long after the dwellers of Honshu first visited on their boats, the Great Master Merry Mac returned. He was escorting his bride, taking her to the places he had been on his
explorations. Obo again travelled with the Great Master and Madam Nimue."

Luna smiled and nodded. “There is truth in the legend, is there?”

“What does your legend say?” Obo asked.

“Our legend says that Merlyn courted Nimue for a long time. That she eventually gave herself to him, that she loved him for a time, but then grew fearful of his power. She learned much of his great magic, and then she used it to trap him forever in a hawthorn tree.”

Obo nodded. “There could be truth to it. Obo is uncertain.”

“What’d he look like,” Carla asked.

Obo smiled and closed his eyes, remembering. “The Great Master was taller than any of the people or the Dreamers. He often chose the form of an old man, but the Great Master does not age. In aspect he was much like Master Ron, but for the hair and the nose. The Great Master’s nose was smaller, and his hair was the same colour as Mistress Lavender’s.”

Ron sniggered. “Most people’s noses ‘re smaller than mine. When was the last time you saw him?”

“The Great Master and Madam Nimue left from the Light House long ago. Obo does not know how long.”

“Does about a thousand years ago sound right?” Luna asked.

Obo turned to her. “It could be, Mistress Luna,” he said. “Obo loses count of the years.”

Hermione leaned toward the old elf. “You say it’s a key, and he only wanted you to give that cryptic answer. Can you tell us anything more?”

“That is as much as Obo knows. The Great Master was Obo’s friend, and Obo loved him, but Obo does not pretend to know his mind. When the Great Master told Obo you would come, and he told Obo what to say in answer to your questions, he also said this, ‘lastly, my dear friend, when you have told them everything I have asked, and they ask you, ‘why her?’ tell them that I have seen, and that I know, and tell my precious flower never to retreat, and tell the Fairy Queen that she was chosen long ago to gather them, and it is her task to bring them to the great circle’.” He smiled. “That is all Obo knows and can say.”

Hermione hugged him from her chair next to Rose. “Thank you, Obo.”

“Bring them to the Great Circle?” Ron said.

Hermione shrugged. “Stonehenge, has to be.”


Hermione nodded. “I suppose I have to learn Gaelic,” she said. “Shay read the book for me, but I think I need to read it now.”

“And me,” Rose said as she stood. “I’m getting your bag.”

“Bring the atlas on the side table,” Hermione said to Rose’s back as she left the sitting room.

Carla laughed. She’d seen enough of Hermione and Rose to know what would be going on for the next few hours. “Come on, everyone,” she said. “Hermione and Rosie ’ll be deep in it till dinner.”
She turned to her friend in the chair next to her. “What we makin’ this afternoon, Moll?”

“OOOHH,” Hermione groaned as she eased into the hot water. “I’ve been looking forward to this all day.”

“Here you are,” Ron said, and handed her a large goblet two thirds full of a lovely Australian red.

She took a long sip, leaned back into Ron’s embrace, and closed her eyes. They were back in the bath at Kata Juta, and she was in heaven. The warm water drained the ache of over stressed muscles as the wine seeped into her and added to the relaxing effect.

“I remember the first few weeks of Auror training,” he said, sniggering. “Wish we’d have had a pool like this then.”

Ron chuckled again, and Hermione didn’t need him to tell her why, she remembered too. The first weekend he had free had been very instructive for them. Hermione had prepared a romantic dinner, worn his favorite blue dress, and under it a special set of lingerie. He had apparated to their living room Friday evening, and they had shared an intense welcome home snog until his stomach reminded them of food. Harry had thoughtfully taken Ginny on a holiday in France, so they had Grimmauld and Kreature all to themselves. After dinner, with Hermione held tightly in his arms, exhaustion overcame him, and he had fallen soundly asleep on the couch. The following morning found them still there with their clothing scattered across the floor, a testament to Ron waking at three am.

Hermione looked across the pool to the lake where Lavender, Rose, and Hugo were enjoying a swim, and she smiled. It was good that they were just being children at play. Rose and Hugo often found themselves in situations where they couldn’t be the children that they were, so when Hermione and Lavender found time for them to play they encouraged it.

“A girl could get used to this,” Carla said from Molly’s side on the opposite side of the pool.

“My back and knees are certainly happier,” Molly said, and Arthur nodded.

Out in the lake Luna surfaced and dispelled the bubble head charm. “I’ve explored the floor of the lake. There’s nothing dangerous here, and the rock formations are very pretty,” she called.

Carla shook her head at Luna’s attire. The one piece suit resembled bright green fish scales, and the mermaid tail she had charmed on herself added to effect. “I’d say she was a mermaid if they were real.”

Molly laughed and hugged her. “They are real, but they don’t look like that. Merpeople have… fishier features.”

Carla chuckled. “Okay then.”

“And that puts Perth up forty to ten!” the announcer said, and the spider hats hissed.

Ron, his charmed sunglasses and ear muffs on, smiled blissfully. “Thanks, love,” he said and hugged his wife.

“My pleasure,” she said, and smiled back. On her right Rose and Hugo flanked an enthralled Carla.
Lavender sat behind Rose, with Luna at her left and Molly and Arthur on her right. The Australian Minister had made special arrangements for them when he found out who it was asking to get last minute tickets to his home town Quidditch team’s final match of the season. He sat on Ron’s opposite side, and the two men had hit it off immediately.

Hermione snickered to herself. Her children were growing up just a bit spoiled, though she tried to keep it to a minimum. They were treated, because of who their parents were, as celebrities, and as a consequence they were sat once again in the VIP box at a Quidditch match. It had taken the other guests a few moments to register who the additions were, and then the questions had begun. Lavender, bless her, had deflected anyone approaching the children with a simple shake of the head.

The Australian Minister turned out to be a polite and funny man. He and Ron were fast friends in moments, and his wife, pregnant with their first child, was peppering Hermione with questions about parenting until the match had begun. The best part of the day for Hermione, though, was that everyone loved Carla.

Being a Muggle, and a guest of one of the most famous couples in the wizarding world, made her a minor celebrity herself. Troy Mason, a retired chaser for the Woollongong Warriors, had changed his seat so that he was just in front of Carla. He seemed to be spending most of the match sat side saddle in his chair as he explained Quidditch and its intricacies to her. The smile never left his face.

Hermione sighed as she felt the Analgiesius charm once again sparkle through her. She looked at Lavender who winked and pocketed her wand. Hermione knew she would be nearly immobile if her friend hadn’t been refreshing the charm every hour. Their walk this morning had been almost a death march at the end, Hermione and Rose puffing and gasping as they made the steps of the Manor. Lavender was amused, Hermione was not.

The match turned into a real barn burner. Sydney, who needed a one hundred eighty point win to make the finals, went on a scoring run with seven straight unanswered goals. Perth rallied and responded with five of their own. Sydney scored again and suddenly the seekers were racing around the pitch at breakneck speeds.

“Oh, there we are, Carla,” Troy Mason said. “You see the Perth seeker there could have caught the snitch just now, but they’d lose their place in the finals if he did, so he’s blocking the Sydney seeker and hoping Perth will score again. Here they come!”

The snitch flashed past them and then the two seekers passed a few feet over their heads at full speed. Carla whooped along with the rest of the crowd.

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“We are Sydney, Fa La La,”

“The Spiders catch the win, Tra La La,”

“You’re caught in our web, Mwa ha ha!”

“And we’ll bite you in the end, Tra, la la.”

“Ya gonna take Martin up on his offer?” Carla asked as the children marched around the yard of Cohn manor singing the Sydney fight song. The Sydney manager, Martin Broadcloak, had dashed into the VIP box after the match and offered to bring the Weasley family back to Australia for the finals in three weeks. He was a profoundly superstitious man, and they had been present for the two most important wins of the season, so he wanted them as good luck charms.
“No, but you should go,” Hermione told Carla. She smiled and winked at her friend. “You’re fitting into wizarding society better than my parents did.”

Carla set her lemonade on the porch table and took Hermione’s hand. “Can’t thank ya enough, Hermione,” she said. A lone tear streaked her face. “Ya saved me, and ya gave me a brand new life.” She chuckled. “Life I should have had, according to Orla.”

Hermione squeezed Carl’s hand. “Finding the stone was our mission here, Carla, but you, you and Obo were why we came,” she said, and looked into the bush. “I was very skeptical in my youth, but I’ve learned. There are many forces at work in the universe, some science can reveal, some are explained by magic, and some are just the way the universe solves its problems. I’ve felt ‘hidden hands’ helping and guiding us the whole time we’ve been here.” She laughed. “Luna’s corrupted me.”

“Be sorry to see ya go tomorrow.”

Hermione looked her in the eyes. “We’ll be back, often,” she said, and then smiled wide. “And I think you’ll have a little trouble getting shot of my in-laws, and then keeping them away.”

“Bah, Moll and Arthur could retire here if they want. I’d have them,” Carla said. “Luna sent for her husband, she’s stayin’ on for a while too,” Carla smiled. “Want’s to join with the Dreamers again, and I’d sure like to be there when she does.”

“I understand,” Hermione said. “Carla, what Luna can do is very special, even among us, so we keep that a heavily guarded secret. I know we’ve mentioned it, but I want to be certain you know why.” Her visage became hard. “People would fear her, some would accept, some would want to imprison her, but more would want to use her for their own purposes, and that is something we would never allow.”

“We?”

“Ginny, Luna, and I formed a group of witches after the Battle of Hogwarts we told you about,” Hermione said. “Lavender had been badly hurt by the werewolf, and she was not thinking well. I worked most of the week that followed the battle on how to help her. I discovered some old potions, and I invented a new one. That, and Luna’s gift, helped us save Lavender, helped us help her to tame the wolf.”

“Luna’s somethin’ all right,” Carla said.

“Yes she is, but she’s not the only one,” Hermione said. “Lav’s best friend is Parvati Goldstein, she’s our seer. Her sister is Padma Zabini, and she’s one of our marshals, like Lavender. Cho Dursley is Ginny’s cousin in law and brilliant. She’s also an Auror, like Harry and the two men from the Australian Ministry that came to investigate the attack. She’s our third marshal. The forth one is Katie Bell. She’s and old friend and an absolutely incredible Quidditch player. When we all come to visit I’ll have her go to a match with you, she’ll love it. Our potion master is my sister in law Angelina, another brilliant one.”

“So, nine of you then?” Carla asked and she could almost feel the pride swell in Hermione.

“Nine of the finest women England has produced,” Hermione said firmly. “You’ll see.”
“Alright, Potter, what have you found?” Allan Wheaton asked. The Minister, as was his habit, lit a cigarette and paced back and forth behind the desk in his office.

“No a damn thing, Allen,” Harry said with disgust. “We contacted Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the MACUSA, but they could find no records of this man. His wand was not traceable, and his papers were forged.” Harry threw the dead man’s packet of information down on the minister’s desk. “They attacked my family, Allen.” His fury was thinly veiled.

“I understand, Harry,” The minister said, took off his reading glasses, and polished them. “They attacked some very good friends and four prized employees of mine. I’m displeased with them as well.” He put his glasses back on. "Take his wand down to Mysteries, see what they can divine."

“Cho is on that now,” Harry said.

“And the others? I understand that there isn’t much left of them or their effects.”

“Ginny roasted three of them pretty well, and the two that went down under the dingoes…” Harry shook his head. “Their wands were just as uninformative as the other guy’s.”

“The Finnigans earned their pay again, didn’t they?” Allan asked with a grim smile as he sat behind his desk.

Harry nodded. “These people knew about Lav and prepared for her, but they weren’t expecting me.” He smirked. “And Lav had that big furry surprise for them.”

Allan snorted and looked up at him. “So I read. Love that girl. In your report you said they targeted Hermione, your wife, and Mrs. Scamander. If they didn’t know you were there it’s probable they weren’t after Ginny, Mrs. Scamander is odd I’ll give you, but the most likely target is Hermione.”

“Yeah,” Harry said with a note of anger and acceptance.

“Kingsley knew,” Allan said, and took another drag. “He knew you’d be targets your whole life. It’s part of why he wanted you and Ron so badly in the Auror corps.”

Harry looked back at him. “And why we have Shay and Lav.”

“I imagine Mr. Finnigan has tightened security a bit around yours.”

Harry chuckled. “’S a good thing James is off to Hogwarts for his first year, he’d chafe a bit under Shay’s new rules. Al and Lilly are fine though. They’re at the Burrow, the wards there are older and
stronger than at our place.”

Allan smiled. “Good, When Molly and Arthur return from Australia are you still staying at the Burrow?”

Harry shook his head. “No, we’ll go back home.” He walked to the window and looked out over the Thames. “Ginny will be home most of the time, and with Shay and Lav both there I’m not worried.”

“Handy you and Ron bought adjoining houses,” Allan said with a snicker.

Harry looked at him askance. “You don’t believe any of that Witch Weekly business?”

“That the four of you have wild drunken orgies?” Allan laughed. “You and Ginny I could see if you were smashed to the point of incoherence, but there isn’t enough alcohol on the planet to get Hermione that drunk, and Ron would kill anyone that touched her, including you. So, no, I don’t.”

Harry chuckled. “Thanks, Allan. I needed a laugh.”

All the humor left the Minister and he was suddenly the commanding Auror that Kingsley had cultivated for successor. “Find them, Harry. Take the Zabinis, Dursley, and involve the Finnigans. Make this your only case.”

“What about…”

“Hand everything off to that bulldog assistant of yours, Fallow. She’ll sort it.”

Harry chuckled again. “Bulldog, eh? ‘Spose that’s better than Cyclops.”

Allan looked at him sideways. “My understanding is that the last person that called her ‘Cyclops’ spent two weeks in Mungo’s”

Harry smiled. “Megan can be a bit sensitive about that on occasion, but that arsehole was a serial rapist. He’s very lucky she left him… complete.”

Allan nodded. “Agreed. So, tell the one eyed wonder Auror that she’s top of my list. She finishes your case load and I’m approving your recommendation to make her squad lead.”

“She’ll be happy to hear that, sir.”

“Go and find them, Harry.”

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“Who’s at the door, Wanda?” Martin Williams asked his wife. It was a sunny Saturday in Melbourne, and Martin had just lit the fire in the barbeque.

His wife went to the door and called back, “It’s that woman that came from the facility Carla is in.”

She opened the door and Lavender smiled.

“How are you today, Mrs. Williams?” she asked.

Lavender smiled slyly, and asked, “Is your husband home?”

“Yes, Martin!” she called over her shoulder. He appeared moments later.

“Good afternoon, Ms. Wolfe,” he said. “What can we do for you?”

Lavender grinned and stepped to the side, revealing Carla standing behind her.

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Hermione leaned back into Ron’s chest. They were floating naked in the warm pool at Kata Juta. “One of your better ideas,” He said, catching his breath. “Now I’m really gonna miss this place.”

“You’ve done marvelously, Ron.” Hermione said and hugged his arms to her. “I just want you to know, I wanted to show you.”

He kissed the top of her head. “‘M okay with that,” he said and chuckled. “Not certain we should share this little part of it with Harry and Gin though.”

She laughed. “Ginny’ll know as soon as she and Lavender talk.”

“S’ppose you’re right,” He said with a snort. “Have to keep a sock to put on the door.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

Ron laughed and shook his head at her puzzled look. “You led such a sheltered life.”

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“Your son was happy to see you?” Luna asked as she hugged Carla.

The old woman’s eye sparkled with joyful tears. “He was, and he was even happier that I could carry on a conversation.”

Luna smiled. “We’ll make certain you visit often then,” she said. “Obo will take you whenever you want.”

“Yeah, he told me,” Carla said. She took Luna’s hand. “We’re losin’ Lav, Hermione, Ron and the kids today, when does your husband arrive?”

“He should be here before they leave,” Luna told her.

“’M interested to meet the man that caught ya,” Carla said with a grin.

Luna looked into the distance with a happy expression. “He waited rather a long time for me.”

Carla could tell there was a story behind that statement. “Well?” she asked.

Luna sat at the table on the porch and Carla joined her. “During the war I was taken prisoner and
held in a basement dungeon.” Luna said in a voice devoid of emotion. “The same evil woman that tortured Hermione tortured me, repeatedly. Fortunately I had an older and much wiser companion there to help me. And he helped me greatly when… when Voldemort tortured me.” She looked into the bush for several minutes.

“You don’t…”

Luna smiled. “It’s all in the past, Carla. You should know about us. After that night the lady of the house, who has since become a good friend, protected me. You see the physical torture that Voldemort inflicted on me was meant to break the people that were my hosts, and it worked. He lost any fealty Narcissa had to him that night.”

“She was the lady of the house?” Carla asked.

“Yes,” Luna answered. “A few weeks later Hermione, Ron, and Harry were captured and brought to the dungeon. With them was a goblin, and my friend, Dean Thomas.” She couldn’t help the smile that came with remembering her first love. “After we were rescued we stayed at Ron’s brother’s house of the western coast, and we fell in love there. Dean was the first man to truly love me, the first to make love to me, the first to make me whole. His love healed me. It was a kind of heaven, but they never last.”

“What happened?”

“His mother developed Alzheimer’s. He had to assume full time care for her, and because of my abilities he felt that it would have broken me to be around her as she slowly deteriorated.”

“He was right,” Carla said grimly. “I can see it hurt ya, but I’ve seen what he went through up close. He was right.”

“I’ve come to accept that,” Luna said. “It took a very long time.”

“And your Rolf, he waited for ya, did he?”

Luna smiled again. “Yes, yes he did.”

“Ya ladies have done well. Arthur, Harry, Ron, and Shay, they’re princes, they are, and if your Rolf is anything like ‘em, ya done well.”

“Rolf can be a bit of the tall silent type, but of course I’ve seen his heart.”

Carla nodded. “Ya never forgot this Dean, though, did ya.”

A single tear traced down Luna’s cheek. “No.”

Carla patted Luna’s hand, and a small tear of her own leaked from her eye. “Neither did I; his name was David, and he was a soldier…”

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“Welcome to Cohn Manor, my home is at the base of this hill,” Carla said, and the Manor reveled itself.

“It is perfect, my Luna, perfect,” Rolf said as he surveyed the front of the Manor and the surrounding desert.

He was one of the tallest men Carla had ever met, a full foot and a half taller than Luna. “’M happy
you like it, Carla Williams,” she said and extended her hand.

He took it. “Rolf Scamander,” He replied back. His accent was pronounced but not thick. “On behalf of the foundation I’d like to thank you greatly, and welcome you to our family.”

“Carla’s been family for a while already, my love,” Luna said, pulled his face down to her level and kissed his cheek. “Come, let me show you around.”

An hour later everyone was in the rec room. Lavender was crushing Rolf at shuffleboard while Luna and Hermione watched and laughed. Ron was having a pre portkey beer with his father, and Rose and Hugo were spending time with Carla.

“Got themselves another grandmum, Molly,” Arthur said, and Ron nodded. “You okay with that?” her husband asked, already knowing the answer.

“More than,” She replied. “Carla’s an old friend I never met, and Hermione,”—she shook her head—“she just can’t not help. Gryffindor to the bone that one.”

“Yes, she is. Hmm, we should bring Jean and Dan next time,” Arthur said as he looked at Rose and Hugo. “They’d have all the grandparents at once to spoil them.”

“Good idea, Arthur,” Molly said. “I’ll see if Jean can make a hole in their practice schedule for it.”

“Well, they’d love it here too,” Ron said and smiled in remembrance. “They took us on holiday to Africa once, just after we got married.”

“I remember that,” Arthur said. “You had fun.”

“Oh yeah, we did,” Ron said. “But the hotels and such were a bit primitive. Jean and Dan loved ‘em. They did a fair amount of travel with no money between finishing dental school and Hermione. They had a great time there, this is five star compared to most of ‘em.”

A new game began at the shuffle board, and Luna with Rolf in tow wandered over to the juke box. After a few moments Peter Garrett and the Oils started into “Beds are Burning”.

Rose hugged her grandmother. “Take care of Carla for us,” she said near tears.

Hugo was in tears as he hugged Carla. “It’s okay, Hugo,” she said, choking back tears of her own. “Your parents, grandparents and I talked. Moll and Arthur will be coming back fairly often, and you and Rosie can come along with ‘em.” She chuckled. “Hotter than blazes here in February I told em, so they want to see it. ‘M expectin’ them every few months.”

Hugo nodded, unable to speak.

“So ya be my little man, alright?” Carla said, and then just for Hugo she whispered. “And ya keep our Rosie grounded, ya hear me? She needs ya, so ya keep her from gettin’ carried away with herself, understand. This is an important job, a big one, Hugo.”

Hugo looked up at her. She dabbed his eyes and wiped his nose, and he nodded.
“Okay, then,” Carla said as she put Hugo off her lap and stood.

Luna, with the goanna, Mola, draped around her shoulders, walked up next to Carla. “Have a safe journey home,” she called to the group assembling in the front yard of the Manor.

“We’re going the opposite way this time and laying over in Hawaii and then New York for a day each.” Hermione said. “It’s easier to get used to the time change letting the sun chase you.”

“One minute,” Ron called, and they gathered around the old trainer he held in his hand. “Take care Mum, Dad.”

“Watch out for Luna’s students,” Hermione told Carla with a wink. “They can be less than alert when they’re in hyper focus on an interest.”

“Elmer only walked into that wall because the Wibilus distracted him,” Luna said, smiling.

Everyone laughed, and Hermione nodded, looked at Carla, and winked. “Yeah, sure he did.”

Jarra Oonagan stood next to his old friend and waved at “the Finders” as they were being referred among his people. “Come back soon,” he said. “Please.”

Hermione nodded. “We will,” she said.

“Here we go,” Ron said.

Carla watched the Weasley family and their nanny, gripping the trainer, float off the ground and vanish in a flash of blue light.

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A fire blazed in the desert night.

Around that fire were gathered the eldest and strongest of the Dreamers, along with Luna, Rolf, Arthur, Molly, and Carla. Together they looked out into the cosmos.

The points of life, magic, and intelligence sparkled once more in the heavens, and Luna chose one. As a single entity the traversed the interstellar gulf in an instant. The sensation of a world filled with life surrounded them. They chose a spark, and they peered out at different planet through alien eyes. This world was at once familiar and completely different.

There were trees, large boles with multiple trunks spreading great branches above them, but they moved on roots that resembled tentacles. The animals that crawled, hopped, ran, and flew in the midst of the wandering trees exploded in a profusion of color and form that defied categorization. Hoppers shared the same wing structure as their aerial counterparts, but with entirely different body plans. The burrowers were almost all some variation of twelve legs and three eyes, yet the common eye plan among everything else seemed to be six.

And it was through one of those six eyed creatures that they spied on this world. Luna had thought to converse with their host, but the Dreamers, being experienced, convinced her that caution was the best approach. So it was decided that they would simply observe until they could determine if there was a danger to revealing themselves.

A hand with four digits appeared in their view and pulled a net from the basket carried in another hand. Three more hands joined the first and threw the hand net into the air. It acted very differently than if it were thrown on earth. It spun out into a hexagon with a stone at each point. The hexagonal
net twirled in midair, floating for a moment before dropping slowly out of the canopy, bringing several winged flyers with it. Three hands grasped the net while the other three busied themselves with carefully extracting the six legged, eight winged flyers.

The flyers resembled very large ants with wings that looked remarkably like the leaves of the trees. Two purple nodules were attached to the flyers back. One hand plucked the two egg shaped nodules from the flyer, and then they released it. The hand dropped the nodules into a sack and another flyer was extracted from the net.

*I wish they would look into something reflective,* Luna thought to the group.

*They appear to have little in the way of machines,* Rolf thought.

The attention of their host was draw by a loud shriek, and they all felt the thrill of fear course through them. Their host threw the net to the ground, and raised all six hands toward the unseen source of the noise.

On earth it would be a walking nightmare. An enormous creature, with what appeared to be the body of a squid with the head of a frog rammed on its top, smashed through the undergrowth. It was dozens of times larger than their host.

And then they felt HER use her power.

Their host, that they now knew was female, began building a magic, and they could feel the Tha swelling around her. *Marvelous,* Elma sent. *She is a Dreamer too.*

A tentacle reached out at their host, and then the giant tree squid screamed as it flew up off the ground and sailed backwards into the forest. A small bush crawled by as their host went to investigate her attacker. It had landed on its back and could not re-wright itself. Pity flared in their hearts, and the six hands extended again. The tree squid floated up off the ground but slower and gentler. She carefully lowered it upright to the turf and backed away. Thanks, respect, and remorse flowed out of the gigantic creature toward their avatar, and she felt pleased.

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The dark woman sat at her desk and scowled. She could feel the magic changing, and she was powerless to stop it. He was testing her again somehow. *Arsehole.* Somewhere out in the world someone was re-arranging the foundations of magic, and she was loath to see anything change. She’d had her own way for so long.

“Penn!” she shouted.

“Yes, my lady,” A tall young man said as he entered her drawing room.


“As you wish,” he said, smiled, and left. Moments later a young, red headed woman appeared with the wine.

“Sent you, did he, Finn?”

“I please my lady more,” the young woman said as she set the tray with the wine and glass on the side table.
“Marginally,” the dark woman said contemptuously. “You can you feel it, can’t you?”

“Yes, my lady.”

The dark woman looked at Finn. “Where, where is it coming from? What’s happening?”

“My sight is blocked, my lady,” Finn said. “As, apparently is yours.” There was no smirk on her face but her tone was merry.

“Get out!” the dark woman shouted.

Finn smiled. “As my lady wishes.”

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“Our agent at MACUSA intercepted their request and sent the false information along.”

“Good, and at the British Ministry?”

“Terrance is keeping an eye on Potter. He’ll handle it if they get to close. Nine nine nine is still a priority?”

“More than ever. We can’t allow her to continue.”

“The shield lab has some new wear. That should help.”

“Agreed. Assemble another team. A soon as we have a location we move again.”

“I’ll make Conner lead this time.”

“Excellent, and a related candidate came to the attention of the watchers last month.”

“Do they have a number and a name?”

“Ten seventeen, Rose Hermione Weasley.”

End of part one
Slap, slap, slap, slap.

The rhythm of her feet hitting the tarmac on the narrow road was now a familiar beat to the music in her head. Sometimes her favorite songs would run through her mind as the path passed under the soles of her running shoes, but today she wasn’t so lucky. The Macarena was stuck there, playing in a continuous loop.

Rose beside her and Lavender a few paces in front made the run much more pleasant, and another big plus was the scenery. It was spectacular. The gentle hills of Devon rose around them, quilted with fields and farms, and the morning dew brought the scents of the earth out in force. Hermione could smell the grass beside them and the sea a few miles away, she could smell the smoke from coal and wood fires heating the older houses in Feniton, but the current overpowering smell was from the cattle barn at Sherwood Farm. She chuckled at Lavender’s wince, pulled her wand and quickly cast the air freshening charm in a bubble around them.

“Thanks,” Lavender said between breaths.

“Welcome,” Hermione panted.

This was rout three of their running routine. From their little enclave they ran to the intersection where Larkbeare Services had their equipment yard. Turning to the right they ran the half mile to Colestocks, turned right again, ran the mile and a half to Feniton, then turned for home. This rout, according to her pedometer, was three point two miles. It now typically took them a little more than half an hour.

It was working, and it was working well. Hermione had lost half a stone in two months. More importantly though, she’d had to go knickers shopping, because all of her old ones were now to loose. Ron was not complaining. Rose, as with everything, had taken the challenge head on. The running, paired with the martial arts lessons with Lavender and her brother Roland, were making Rose a ten and a half year old ball of hardened steel. She could now easily pick Hugo up off the ground and walk away with him, as she had demonstrated a few times.

The huge old elm tree at the edge of town was one of their landmarks, it dominated the side of the road. When they had first arrived home from Australia they would stop here and catch their breath. It was unnecessary now. Hermione was thankful for that, as it was starting to rain. Being Muggleborn
had its advantages. The cold weather running suits she had acquired for them were light, breathable, and most importantly for coastal England, waterproof.

The tree passed on their left, and soon they were in town and crossing the rail line. “Welcome to Feniton” the rail station sign declared, and Hermione snickered. Her parents had laughed as they had got off the train the first time. Feniton was small even by Devon standards. The ‘station’ was a modest green shack with an attached automated ticket kiosk and a raised platform. BritRail had only recently finished the new passenger shelter the residents had been requesting for years. The small, well stocked, market that stood next to the Pizza shop, with the hardware shop, the bicycle repair shop, and two pubs completed the bustling commercial core of Feniton.

Just across from the rail station they turned for home. Most of the older houses in the town center had been raised in the fifties, and new, more modern brick single floor homes lined the road. There was a small cluster of very old and much larger buildings a mile from town that contained the Potter/Weasley compound.

Hermione had fallen in love with the huge red brick house immediately, and Ginny was just as enamored of the stately, somewhat larger manor next door. The purchases had been smooth and less costly than Ron and Harry had planned, so they had done some additions. An enclosed hallway now connected the two houses, and there was a common garden in the back. Their six neighbors were all magical so there was no problem with errant spells being seen. That also allowed them a communal Quidditch pitch in the field behind the garden.

Rose sprinted ahead and ran up the small set of steps and walkway to their house, while Hermione stopped at the post box cluster just outside the wards to collect their Muggle mail.

“Anything interesting?” Lavender asked.

“The Feniton Council still wants to raise money for the commons,” Hermione answered looking at one letter. “And there’s a pizza coupon.”

“I’ll take that,” Lavender said, snatching it from Hermione’s hand. “It’ll come in handy for student bribery.”

Hermione chuckled. Lavender used the local Muggle fast food restaurants, especially the pizza shop, as rewards for good behavior and lesson scores. “You’re welcome,” she said with a laugh.

Lilly, Albus, Hugo, and Ginny were at Hermione’s kitchen table when they entered the house.

“Morning,” Ginny called. “Breakfast when you’re showered.”

Rose was already in the children’s bathroom. Lavender and Hermione mounted the steps to the second floor and went to the master suite. Hermione striped and was in the shower in moments. A few minutes later she traded with Lavender. “You talk with Luna in the last few days?” Lavender asked from the shower.

“Yes, last night in fact.” Hermione laughed. “She’s actually enjoying morning sickness.”

“Certainly wasn’t your and Ginny’s favorite thing as I recall.”

With a wave of her wand the salmon blush and lip gloss Hermione favored lightly colored her face. “It was not,” Hermione said, and she giggled. “They conceived in the pool at Kata Juta, did you know?”

Lavender roared with laughter. “No, she hadn’t told me that yet.” She said as she stepped from the shower.
Hermione took a moment to appraise her friend, and it finally dawned on her what she had been seeing. “You haven’t changed at all,” she said in wonder.

“I change three times a month,” Lavender said snidely as she dried herself.

“Ha, ha,” Hermione replied. “What I mean is that you haven’t changed physically from when we were in school. You still look eighteen.”

Lavender glanced down the scars on her chest, abdomen, and thigh. Then she looked back at Hermione skeptically.

“I’m serious, Lav. All that aside you’re still astonishing.”

“Thanks,” Lavender said with a smile. “I do try.”

It was Hermione’s turn to look skeptical. “Well it seems to work,” she said, and handed Lavender her satchel. “And you deserve it.”

Lavender shrugged. “We’re doing seashore life today, what’s up at the hell hole?” she asked as she pulled her outfit from the bag.

“The Ministry is not a ‘hell hole’,” Hermione said. “More like a temporary stop at purgatory,” she muttered. Her dress smoothed, and Ministry outer robes donned, she appraised herself in the mirror.

Lavender sniggered as Hermione smiled at what she saw. “You’re doing very well, too. Go on, I’ll meet you downstairs,” she said.

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“I think we need to go to America next,” Rose said from her chair. She unconsciously twirled the key back and forth between the thumb and forefinger of her left hand. Ancient Artifacts of the American West was propped in front of her as she ate her Weetabix. “They have plenty of legends about Merlyn if you look at the closely, but I’ve not found any mention of elves in what I’ve read so far.”

“America is going to be a bit challenging,” Ginny said. “The magical community there is very secretive. A lot more than ours, and… well… they have more bigots.”

“I didn’t find that,” Hermione said.

“You didn’t play Quidditch,” Ginny said. “They don’t have the pure blood thing, but they have a racism problem, badly in some quarters. And they are paranoid about exposure, far more than the Ministry.”

“I read about the Scourers,” Rose said, and Lilly nodded. “They’re gone now, right?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, that was in the seventeenth and very early eighteenth centuries. I think you’ll find the Americans very pleasant,” she smirked. “If a little rough around the edges.”

“I like Aunt Luna’s cousin George,” Hugo said. “He’s American.”

Ginny snickered. “Everybody likes George, and apparently Amal likes him rather a lot,” she said and laughed.

Lavender chuckled along with her. “You saw that picture in the Daily Mail then?”
“They looked very cozy,” Ginny said and grinned.

“Well if you two are through playing yenta, I think it’s time for me to be off,” Hermione said, and stood from her chair.

“Shay will meet you there,” Lavender told her. “He’s working with Harry today.”

“Good, I’ll check in and see if they’ve found anything new,” Hermione said.

Ginny put her hand on her sister in law’s shoulder. “Maternity shopping with Luna this weekend, don’t forget.”

“I won’t, and we’re taking Rose and Lilly with us?”

“Not certain,” Lavender said. “I was thinking last night that this will be the three of you out in public.”

Ginny looked at Lavender. “You think they’ll try again?” she asked.

Lavender shrugged. “They might,” she said, and then looked at them slyly. “But they probably would if we let them know. It could be an opportunity.”

Hermione chuckled. “You’re thinking of using us as bait?”

Lavender blushed, a very rare occurrence. “It’s a stir whenever you show up as a group, I was thinking last night we might as well put it to use.” she said. “Shay’s talking to Harry about how we might structure an operation today, so they’ll catch you up when you get in.”

“I want to come,” Rose said flatly, Lilly nodding next to her.

“Unlikely,” Lavender said with a snort. “I’ve had enough heart palpitations where you’re concerned recently, thank you very much.”

Ginny looked at Hermione and nodded. “Rose won’t be alone in that. Everyone will want to be there,” she said. She looked back at Lavender. “Let us know tonight what your plan is. We’ll call a circle for Wednesday night.”

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Nine women of power stood on a rocky promontory overlooking the sea. An ancient stone circle surrounded them. Three of them stepped to its center, and then as one the nine raised their wands and spoke the ancient incantation.

“We conjure thee, great circle of power!”

“Guard our magic!”

“Protect our rites!”

“Bring us peace that we may share our souls!”

A shimmering translucent white hemisphere formed over the circle, muting the sounds and breeze from the outside world. Hermione, Luna, and Ginny stood in the center of the circle. Their coven mates Angelina, Lavender, Katie, Padma, Parvati and Cho ringed them. The Sisters of the Moon
were gathered once again. It happened every full moon, but this time they were a week and half early.

“Thank you for coming, my sisters,” Hermione said as she turned to look at each one. “As we discussed last month, one of us, Ginny, Luna, or me, is a target. Whoever they are, they tried very hard to kill us in Australia, and they knew of Lavender.” Hermione snickered. “They didn’t know enough though.” She turned to her friend. “Lavender wants to set a trap for them, and she would like all of you to be a part of her plan. Lavender?”

Lavender stepped forward. “We were all going shopping with Luna this coming weekend at the alley anyway. I propose we let a few people know, let it seep out that Luna, Ginny, and Hermione will be there. But we make it look like it will be just them. Inside the ministry we let it out that the only security is Ron, and Shay.”

Cho spoke up. “Our thinking is that I will be in the Apothecary when they arrive in the alley, Katie will follow them out of the Leaky, and Lavender will be under a glamor near the Apothecary. She’ll join Katie as Ginny, Hermione, and Luna pass.”

Lavender looked to her left. “Parv and Paddy will be in Fortescue’s at the table against the window, and Angie, we’d like you in Madam Malkin’s.”

“No problem,” Angelina said, and the others nodded. “We’ll be taking the kids to the Burrow for safe keeping?”

“That was my thought,” Ginny said. “If we can keep Hermione’s oldest from crashing our party we’ll be doing well.” The other women laughed.

“Blaise and Megan will be in the alley under a glamor like Lavender” Padma said. “They’re the only ones besides Shay, Allan, Harry, and Ron that know what we’re planning.”

Katie looked at her. “You suspect there are spies in the Ministry?”

Padma smirked. “There are always spies in the Ministry, I just hope the right one gets the message.”

Hermione chuckled. “And I’m having my lunch with Pansy tomorrow.” She said. “I’ll let her know we need her to pass the information around too.”

“Pan will demand to be there,” Lavender said. “She’s told me fairly often that she’s rather keen on fighting for the right side if she gets the chance.”

Cho smiled. “Well, she just might,” she said.

“Sounds like we have a plan,” Angelina said. “Are we agreed?”

Around the circle the nine women nodded and said, “Yes.”

Luna smiled and slowly turned to look at them all. “Is there peace on the circle?” she asked.

“There is peace,” They all replied quietly, and joined hands.

Luna closed her eyes and took a deep calming breath. “Symbios!”

The Sisters of the Moon had practiced the spell, the joining, for more than fifteen years. When their minds melded a tenth entity arose in the circle, their combined spirit, and they had a name for it, That Which is All. In that comforting and warm presence they let go of their worldly cares and let the Tha
work its will.

Sometimes it resulted in visions, sometimes in a connection to the life around them, and once it had led them to a lost child. This time *That Which is All* focused its attention outward, sensing malice toward its members. In the recent past they felt the echo of the ten that had found them in Australia, in the present they sensed an unfocused anger from the north, near the Scottish border, and then finally a hot point of hate from a hidden place in Western Europe glowed in the distance. Parvati came forward in the blend of thoughts and emotions, and she focused them on looking inward.

Visons unbidden formed, and they studied them. In the distant past and army of knights rode from a castle to face their foe. A single man stood on a hill top. He cast a spell the Sisters could not identify, and the whole of the attacking army simply dropped their weapons and returned to the castle. More recently two women and a man worked frantically on a woman with a huge hole in her chest. A young girl, *Rose!* Hermione’s presence announced, sat at her desk with an array of books propped around it and an array of objects scattered across its top. Lavender, in full wolf, charging across a field dodging spells. The back of a dark haired woman as she castigated a young woman and man before her. Stonehenge. The silhouette of a large, flat topped mountain. Carla Williams. An elderly native Tibetan man. A ruin in the jungle. An Egyptian temple. Lastly they stood on a mountaintop. Two men dressed in extravagant robes from an ancient time were there, one carrying an obviously wounded blonde girl. The taller man put his hand on the shoulder of the other man carrying the girl, and they nodded to each other.

The images faded, and the Sisters let *That Which is All* ruminate on what they had been shown. *The castle must be found* they determined. *The wounded woman was one of the attackers in Australia* came from Ginny. *Rose is central* they concluded, *and Lavender will have to fight at some point. Let them come* they felt from Lavender’s wolf side. *The places and people concern the stones* they reasoned. *We do not know who the two men were.*

Luna let them float in the unity and love for a few more moments, and then she dispelled the Symbios.

“Fascinating,” Luna and Hermione said at the same time. The others laughed.

“Did anyone recognize any of the landmarks?” Katie asked. “I think the Egyptian temple might be Karnack, I was there once, and it looked a lot like that.”

“The building in the jungle was South America,” Luna said. “The plants gave it away.”

“I think the group on the continent are our adversaries,” Parvati said. “I wonder why they hate us so?”

Angelina laughed. “Well Hermione can ruffle feathers with the best of them, Ginny has her fair share of people she’s pissed off, and who knows what Luna might have done to hack off the wrong person.” She chuckled again. “Seriously, we step on toes all the time.”

“Why Rose,” Hermione said with concern colouring her voice.

Ginny laid her hand on her sister’s shoulder. “Because she’s a Weasley, and we’re trouble magnets, or hadn’t you noticed?”

“Yes,” Hermione said with resignation. “I’m starting to understand your mother a bit more.”

“You want to understand her completely let me loan you Fred for a week,” Angelina said with a smirk.
Ginny chuckled. “You forget, we did have Fred for a week when you in hospital having Roxie,” she said. “Hermione and I set a nice little trap for him that he walked straight into.” She smiled at Angelina. “Fred’s easy. Rose or Lilly, or worse the two of them, ever put their minds to mischief and we’re screwed.”

“Well they’ll all be at the Burrow Saturday,” Lavender said. “I’ll arranged with Molly to have a grandkids stay over Friday night. I’ve talked with Percy already, and he and Audrey will be there to help if we need. It’ll be everyone but James, Vicky and Ted.”

“That’ll keep them occupied,” Katie said. “If they’re good I’ll get passes for the next game for all of you.”

Ginny nodded. “We’ll tell them that, it’ll help.”

“We gather at Lovegood tower,” Hermione said. “Let’s make it eight AM.”

The rest nodded their agreement.

“Is there peace on the circle?” Luna asked.

“There is peace,” they replied.

“Then the circle is opened,” Luna said, and she dispelled it.

“We are the magic! We are the power! We are the Sisters!” the shouted.

“And we’re coming for you,” Lavender growled.

~(*)~

“Good morning Madam Weasley,” Eli, Pansy’s elf butler said.

“Good morning, Eli. You’re feeling well?” Hermione replied as she stepped into the foyer of Parkinson Place.

“Eli always feels well now thanks to Madam Weasley.” He replied as he took her coat.

“Pansy freed you because she wanted to, not because of me.” Hermione said with a smile.

“Don’t underestimate your influence,” Pansy said from the top of the stairwell. “Good morning, Hermione.”

“Good morning, Pansy,” Hermione said. As she watched her old enemy, now friend, descend the grand stair at Parkinson Place she reflected on status. The Weasleys had been poor until after the war. Now, with the awards that they had all received for their service, the Weasleys were comfortable. Hermione’s parents had provided a modest upper middleclass upbringing for her. Lavender’s family was fairly well off too, the Malfoys were rich, but the Parkinsons were a dynasty. The display of old wealth that was Pansy’s home didn’t even enter the dark haired woman’s mind, it was simply the home she had grown up in. Priceless works by the masters of Europe lined the halls and walls, but they were just the decorations she had known since her youth, wallpaper. Hermione had been stunned the first time she saw the unknown Da Vinci that was the central focus of the entrance hall.

Hermione smiled and shook her head at Pansy’s outfit for the day. The knee length designer gown from Paris hugged her still marvelous figure and displayed her feminine wiles. “Nice dress,”
Hermione commented.

Pansy laughed as she reached the bottom of the stairwell, then she hugged Hermione and air kissed her cheek. “Dinner with an important donor for the charity, he’s male.”

“Oh, I see.” Hermione said with a smile. United Wizarding Charities, Pansy’s obsession, was her method of performing the penance she felt she had to after being rescued from her post war life of drugs, alcohol, and nameless sex by the Sisters.

“Eli has made high tea for us today,” Pansy told her as they walked toward the round, windowed room that sat at the base of the north turret. “How are you and your family?”

“We’re doing well,” Hermione replied with a smile. “Lavender and her running routine have shaped Rose and me up. Hugo, Al and Lilly will be joining us on the shorter runs soon.”

Pansy laughed. “It shows. Running is too much for me, I prefer swimming.”

“You have an indoor pool,” Hermione said with a smirk. “We have the pond at the Burrow, and this time of year it’s four degrees.”

“It was nice growing up in the water,” Pansy said, a reflective look on her face. “Great, great grandfather Alphonse had it installed in the conservatory in eighteen forty two. I spent the first ten years of my life in that pool.”

Hermione smiled. “Well, if you can handle the rustic accommodations, we have a little secret in Australia that you’ll love.”

“Do tell?”

Hermione smiled as they sat at the small table in the little parlor. “When we were searching we found a woman, a remarkable woman. She’s the niece of an amazing witch that lived in the last century, and she took us to her Aunt’s house in the deep desert. Near there is a place called Kata Juta. Merlyn had built a tunnel complex inside the mountain, and in addition to being a hiding place, it’s a wonderful bath. There’s an underground lake fed by warm springs.”

“You haven’t mentioned much about your little mission.” Pansy commented slyly while Eli poured their tea. He sat a tray of sandwiches on the small table between them and bowed as he exited.

Hermione nodded. “You know I trust you, Pan, but as I’ve told you, the fewer people that know anything at all about what I’m up to the better.”

“I understand, many of my donors cherish their anonymity,” Pansy said astutely. “It’s a similar thing.”

“Well, you do know more than most, and there’s one thing in particular that did happen, and I want to tell you about it,” Hermione said, and took a sip of her tea. “We were attacked.”

Hermione narrated the story, and the more she talked the quieter Pansy became. The stony expression on her face became a fuming mask of anger by the end, and Hermione smirked. She hadn’t intended to incite Pansy to rage, but she had, and it might come in handy.

“They attacked Luna?” Pansy said through gritted teeth.

Hermione chuckled. “And me and Ginny.”
“You two I’m not worried about,” Pansy said offhandedly. “They touch a hair on Luna’s head and I’ll rip their fucking testicles out through their throat!”

Hermione chuckled. “You’ll have to beat Lavender there.”

“Who were they?” Pansy asked in a growl.

“Don’t know,” Hermione answered. “We might have an opportunity to find out, though. The group was planning on maternity shopping for Luna…”

“LUNA’S PREGNANT!”

Hermione laughed. “Sorry, thought you knew.”

“Keep me in the loop, damn it,” Pansy said with a smile.

“Ah, well, she just told us two weeks ago,” Hermione blushed. “My apologies, it slipped my mind last week.”

“’S all right,” Pansy said. “So what’s this ‘opportunity’?”

~(*)~

“Terrance reports nine nine nine is going to be in Diagon Alley Saturday morning. It was corroborated through Falmonth’s contact, Parkinson.”

“Assemble the team.”

“The only security will be Weasley and Finnigan.”

“The animal?”

“No, it’s mate.”

“Do what needs to be done. If there are innocent casualties it’s simply part of the cost.”

“And her friends?”

“Do what needs to be done.”

~(*)~

Lavender sat at the little table outside the Apothecary, a small glamour colouring her hair grey and ageing her face. Pansy, next to her, had chosen to polyjuice herself into a Muggle man they had plucked a hair from on their way into the Leaky. Pansy’s feminine voice coming from the six and a half foot burly figure making Lavender smirk.

“Okay, five minutes,” Lavender said. “One more time, Pan. They shoot first!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Pansy said drolly. “You just remember we need one alive.”

“If they take the bait that might be your job,” Lavender said.

“I told the right people.” She chuckled. “Just how stupid are the Thompson girls?”

“Alice is dating Clem Falmonth,” Lavender chortled. “Dumb as rocks from empirical evidence.”
Pansy sniggered and they fell into silence and sipped their Muggle coffee drinks. Pansy had acquired the taste during her self-imposed banishment before her fateful meeting with Luna, Lavender, Ginny, and Cho all those years ago.

“Here they come,” Pansy said, and Lavender went into Full Auror Mode.

“One meter to my left, two behind,” Lavender said as she rose from her chair. *Luna?*

*Yes, Lavender.*

*Just checking.*

“Is that… is that Hermione Weasley?” An awed woman said as Lavender passed. “And Ginny Potter?”

“And Luna Scamander!” another voice said.

The whispers turned into open stares, and at last one young boy approached Ginny. “Mrs. Potter, may I get your autograph?” he asked shyly.

Ginny smiled and obliged the young man. It was happening as it always did, they just couldn’t stop themselves. “Thank you, we love you, give Harry a kiss for me, where are the kids?” from murmurs to shouts, the comments poured from the crowd gathering around the three women. Seamus stood in his ten meter position by the cauldron shop, nicely inconspicuous. Katie was exactly opposite him in front of the furniture shop.

“Oh my god, it’s Ron Weasley too,” a young feminine voice said, and Ron stepped into the middle of the crowd and hugged his wife.

“So, we’re here to do a little shopping, okay?” he said loudly. “If you meet us at Fortescue’s when were done we’ll sign for you, will that be good?”

The crowd murmured their assent. A man brushed past Lavender and she froze. Pansy stopped dead behind her.

*They're here,* Lavender sent at Luna.

Are they? Luna looked around casually and locked eyes with Lavender.

*The man in the mac,* Lavender sent. *He smells very wrong. My sweet hates him.*

Luna looked at the man in the yellow rain suit. His head was turned away and she couldn’t see his face. Reaching out she found a blank, an empty hole where he should have been. *Shield wear,* she sent.

*Tell everyone,* Lavender sent, and she started to shadow the man at three meters. Pansy noticed immediately and tightened to one meter behind Lavender.

*It worked, they are here. Lavender has one, and he’s dressed in shield wear like they were in Australia. I’m scanning for others.*

At the table in Fortescue’s Padma stood and threw off her outer robe onto the table, freeing her wand arm. Parvati was already opening the door, her outer robe draped across the back of her chair.

Cho stepped from the Apothecary and fell in behind Katie.

Megan Fallow, Harry’s prized assistant, her magical eye whirling in her head, missed nothing. “They’re alerting, Zabini,” she said to Blaise. “Get ready.” She and Blaise stepped from the
stationary store into the alley.

As Hermione, Luna, Ginny, and Ron approached, Angelina appeared in the doorway of Madam Malkin’s.

*Lavender reminds us that they are to make the first move.*

*See if they’ll let you get inside Madam Malkin’s, Lavender sent to Luna.*

*We are moving that way, almost there. I feel that there are at least seven more.*

*Mine isn’t tensing yet, so I think you’re safe for the moment, Lavender sent.*

On the opposite side of the alley Padma and Parvati shadowed three other men in rain gear as they crossed the alley to Madam Malkin’s. The men stopped in front of the window display. *Luna, these three? Parvati asked.*

Luna caught Padma’s eye and nodded. Padma and Parvati placed themselves between their approaching friends and the men.

*Four more coming from Knockturn.*

Hermione brushed past Parvati as Angelina pulled her into Madam Malkin’s. She was quickly followed by Luna and Ginny. Ron smiled and waved to their fans, and then he closed the door to the shop behind him.

*We’re in. Lavender says to set yourselves in secondary position. I’ll pick out some outfits, and then we’ll see what our friends want.*

*I don’t plan on being all that friendly,* Lavender sent, and Luna laughed.

Padma and Parvati continued to examine the window display of the robe shop. Cho stopped in front of Flourish and Blott’s to admire the new quills with Katie. Lavender and Pansy stopped in front of the sweet shop next door to Fortescue’s.

Megan Fallow saw it all. “Continue down to Gringotts,” she whispered to Blaise. “We’ll turn and come back.”

The four men that had walked out of Knockturn Alley met the man that Lavender was following and they shared a nod. Two more men, dressed as the others were, emerged from Gambol and Japes. Megan immediately noticed that they were wearing the same foul weather gear she had seen on the men that Lavender and the others were alerting on.

“These two in the macs,” she whispered to Blaise. “Let them pass and we’ll turn and tail them.” Megan and Blaise let the two men pass and then casually turned to pace them at twenty feet.

Seamus walked up behind Cho and Katie. “Got your back,” he whispered.

Megan’s grin became fierce. Everyone was converging on Madam Malkin’s.

Hermione looked out of the front window, and she saw the men congregating in two groups, one group of six and another of four. She caught Padma’s eyes and nodded, then she went back into the rear of the shop to talk with Luna and Ginny.

“They’re gathered in front of the shop,” Hermione said as she approached her Sisters. “They’re going to make their play as we exit I’m thinking.”
“I should leave first then,” Luna said. “If they are after you it would be better with me in the alley.”

“No, I’ll go first,” Ginny said. “Have the others ready, and if they go for me you two can back me up.”

“We discussed this,” Hermione said. “Luna you’re last. You’re pregnant, and we aren’t risking you.”

“My condition doesn’t hamper my abilities, Hermione,” Luna said.

Hermione smiled at her friend. “I know that, but we’re going to protect you, so get over it.”

Luna looked to Ginny who just nodded. “Alright, we leave together then.”

Ginny chuckled and Hermione rolled her eyes. “Fine,” she huffed. “But I’m first, and then Ginny second out the door.”

“Shall we buy something or just get this over with?” Luna asked with a smile.

“What does the crew outside want?” Ginny asked.

*Are you ready for us?*

Yes, came from Lavender. *Katie and I are in position, from Cho. Anytime, Pad and I are ready,* she heard from Parvati.

*Hermione will be first out the door, followed by Ginny, and then me. Angelina will have my back. Here we go.*

Megan saw all her allies set, and she drew her wand. Blaise followed a moment later. The two men in front of them never saw it.

The door to Madam Malkin’s opened and Ron stepped out. He had his wand palmed so that hilt was in his hand with the rest laying against his arm out of sight. He smiled and surveyed the crowd. Several people noticed him and began to move his direction, but he was most concerned with the ten men in the crowd in new yellow rain gear. *Matching outfits? That was fucking stupid,* he thought to himself, and then his wife came through the door.

He had the *Leviosa* ready, but they didn’t attack.

Ginny was next, and still the men held off. Then Luna appeared and several things happened at once.

*One of the group of six cast a broad stunning spell on everyone between them and the door of Madam Malkin’s. The other five sent the *Avada Kedavra* at Luna. Ron’s Auror years were behind him, but he never lost the skills. He had two rain barrels full of water ready under the *Leviosa* charm. They flew into the path of the spells, and the barrels exploded. Ron then turned his attention to the attackers and fired a round of curses at them. His spells ricocheted off of their coats.*

Ginny, Hermione, Angelina, Ron, and Luna seized the moment of panic in the crowd and cover from the spray of wood and water. They hurried down the walkway toward Quality Quidditch to draw the attackers away from the rapidly scattering mob.
Megan and Blaise shot a round of stunners at the men who were now clearly focused on Luna, and one turned to attack them. Their spells splashed against the man’s rain gear and shimmered away doing no damage. He shot a blaster at them and Blaise deflected it. A second man turned and fired into the crowd, but Megan was a step ahead and had cast a shield. There was a loud noise and woman’s voice saying something, but Megan was concentrating on keeping herself and Blaise alive. The first man shot another round, and one curse caught Blaise on the left foot taking part of it off. Megan shot a blaster at the man, and he was rocked back by the force of the spell, then a clawed fist holding his heart emerged from the man’s chest.

* Ron, Hermione, Luna, Ginny, and Angelina were joined by Seamus, Cho, and Katie in front of Quality Quidditch Supplies. The three high priestesses of the Sisters of the Moon coven joined hands. A pearlescent white bubble formed around them and the people on the walk with them. A third round of spells from their attackers hammered against the shield but it held firm. Then a roar of fury echoed in the alley, and Pansy’s voice boomed. *

The group of four began randomly stunning members of the crowd. Lavender and Pansy cast several spells in succession on the four but their curses simply bounced off the rain gear as Ron’s had.

Several people in the crowd sussed the situation and fired on the men in the rain gear, but their hexes and curses had no effect. Spells aren’t effective. These fucks are going to make me get naked in public, Luna heard from Lavender as she, Hermione, and Ginny joined hands. Ron levitated a piece of the walkway roof into the path of another round of killing curses aimed into the crowd.

“These four are yours, leave one alive,” Lavender said to Pansy, and with a howl of pure rage Lavender Finnigan started to change. She tossed her outer robe to the ground as her clothing shredded around her. Being angry made the change easy, and she was livid. Lavender didn’t morph into the wolf, she exploded into it. It took less the two seconds.

“Hold your fire, it’s Lavender Brown,” Pansy’s magically amplified voice announced.

A tawny blur streaked into the midst of Luna’s attackers, and Lavender became whirling death. She had been trained in every fighting style man had yet devised, and she excelled at all of them. A clawed hand passed completely through one man’s neck, his head flying off in a graceful arc. At the same time her other fist passed through one man’s back, shoving his heart out the front of his chest. She spun and grabbed a third man by the collar. Still rotating she smashed his head into a fourth man’s, killing them both. Luna’s attackers were down to two in a single moment.

Pansy was busy herself. In her borrowed and burly form of a Welsh miner she opted for brute force as Lavender had. “Hey, dumb fucks!” she yelled. As they turned her left fist buried halfway into one man’s face. He collapsed in a heap. While he fell Pansy transfigured her wand into a saber and demonstrated yet another of her talents. Pansy Parkinson came from a very long line of swordsmen and women. Every Parkinson since the late fourth century, when their name was Parkine, had studied swordplay. Pansy was outstanding at it.

She ran the second man through, and took the head of the third. The fourth man had just turned, and he raised his wand at her. She lopped his arm off at the elbow.

The two men that were left standing in front of Madam Malkin’s attempted to curse Lavender. One of them got out Avada before the piece of iron railing that Seamus had torn from the stairwell leading to the second floor of Flourish and Blott’s bashed in his skull. The last man looked down at his still
beating heart in Lavender’s hand before he collapsed and died.

Pansy had the sole survivor at sword point when Lavender stalked over to him. The man was wailing in pain and horror at the stump that was his right arm. Lavender pulled him upright and Incendioed the bleeding stump, cauterizing the wound. He screamed even louder until she forced his mouth open, rammed the index claw of her right hand through the man’s cheek and popped the poison tooth out of his jaw. She winced as the high pitched scream of pain assaulted her ears. “Be quite, fuckwad,” she said. He continued screaming while she bent, picked up his arm, and slapped him hard with the palm of his own hand. “I said, shut the fuck up, you cowardly piece of shit,” she yelled in his face.

Hoisting her prisoner off the ground by scruff of his raingear, she started back toward Madman Malkin’s, toward her friends, and that’s when the ovation started. All around her the bystanders where applauding. A small girl, perhaps seven or eight, disentangled herself from her mother and walked up to Lavender. She shoved her prisoner at Seamus and knelt down so that she was face to face with the child. The girl drew a handkerchief from her robes and wiped a smudge of blood from the fur on her cheek.

“Thanks” Lavender said

“I think we can do a bit better, don’t you, Alyssa?” said the girl’s mother as she walked up behind her daughter. She drew out her wand and began casting the cleansing charm on Lavenders blood soaked fur. “She’s always wanted to meet you.”

“Well I’m happy to meet you Alyssa.” She held out a now cleansed hand and clasped the girls. “But if you’ll excuse me I have work to do. I’m going to go have a little chat with that bad man, is that okay?” she asked.

“Okay.”

“Thank you,” she said to Alyssa, and to her mother she said. “Send a note to me at the Ministry with your address.”

“Thank you, Lavender,” Alyssa’s mother said. “You’re an inspiration.”

Lavender smiled at them, and then she turned away to do her Auror work. As she strode up to the walk she saw Seamus, Cho, and Megan had cast the crime scene charm while she had talked with Alyssa and her mother. Several yellow bands hung in the air about three feet from the ground. One surrounded the six bodies lying in the street, one the other three, and the last and formed a curving barrier around the area of the walk where Seamus was now preparing to question the surviving attacker.

The man, whose arm Pansy had so deftly removed, was lying in shock on the walk. When Lavender bent over him, her face inches from his, he recoiled in abject terror.

“Ahh, the animal,” he said as he recoiled in fear

“This is no animal, this is my very good friend, the Werewolf Lavender Brown.” Hermione said in her official voice. “She’s the only fully licensed M.L.E. Agent, Auror, and werewolf, and she has special dispensation from the Minister and the Wizengamot to use her abilities however she sees fit in the course of her duties. So, if you don’t want her to use those abilities… on you…again, you should answer Auror Finnegan’s questions.”

“I won’t, I can’t, the unbreakable vow, we’ve made sure.” He said defiantly. “I’ll die if I say
“Aye, well there’s a pretty good chance of that happening anyway,” Seamus said. “If you don’t figure a way around it then I’ll have to get a bit brutal. Why were you attacking Mrs. Scamander?”

“No, you don’t understand, they’re everywhere, they’ll do horrible things to my family!”

“WHO!” said Lavender her nose and inch from his face.

“I CAN’T” the man yelled. Fear and shame etched on his face.

“Allow me,” said high light voice from behind Hermione.

Lavender straightened up and moved to the side as Luna stepped forward.

“Luna, you don’t have to do this,” Lavender said.

“Actually I do. Their target, apparently, is me, and that put all of you in danger,” she said, and then turned her focus on the prisoner. “So, why don’t you tell Auror Finnegan what we want to know before I have to do something unpleasant for both of us?”

Real terror flared on the man’s face. “No, oh god, nine nine nine! Not the Legilimens, Don’t let her,” he was pleading with them.

Lavender grabbed the man’s collar, and one handed him into the air his feet dangling a foot off the ground. “How do you know that?” she said in a quiet growl tinged with mortal danger. “Nobody but us knows that.”

Panic was showing in his face, and despite her anger at this complete stranger knowing one of their most closely guarded secrets Lavender felt a grim satisfaction. He was about to spill. His eyes were darting from one to another of them, and finally landed on Luna’s.

“You will show me,” she said in a commanding voice “all that we want to know,” and her wand was in her hand. “Now. Legilimens!” she said, and she forced her way into his mind.

They screamed together, a wail of agony and despair. Luna collapsed into Hermione’s arms, and the man went limp in Lavenders grasp. The Sisters felt Luna seize a mental connection to them, and she drug herself back from the abys.

“He’s dead,” Lavender said as she dropped the body to the ground “Luna, are you okay?”

“No, not really,” she said shakily as Hermione helped her to stand. “He was under the unbreakable vow …I felt it take him…it wanted to take me, it tried to take me.”

“Luna,” Hermione pulled her into a fierce hug, “God damn it, don’t scare us like that.”

“Did you get anything?” Seamus asked as one of the few men who knew the full scope of Luna’s abilities.

“Just some images really, some faces I didn’t recognize, and… and a word.”

“What word?” Hermione asked.

Luna turned to face her. In awe and fear she said, “Rotfang”
A/N Most of this chapter has been written for four years. I’ve been waiting a long time to present it. So now you know who one group is.

More to come…
And we’re back. I had a Martian fic that was eating my brain, and I just had to write it. It’s called Mark and Mindy, and it’s apparently good, so check it out if you’re a Martian fan.
With my head cleared I’m freshly flushed and primed, so step this way, faithful one…

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Interlude 1

Autumn

Chapter 2

“I don't think you should be an Auror, Harry,” said Luna unexpectedly. Everybody looked at her. "The Aurors are part of the Rotfang Conspiracy, I thought everyone knew that. They're planning to bring down the Ministry of Magic from within using a combination of Dark Magic and gum disease."

Harry inhaled half his mead up his nose as he started to laugh. Really, it had been worth bringing Luna just for this.

HBP Chapter 15: The Unbreakable Vow

(*)

Twenty years later…

“You have got to be fucking kidding me!” Harry said, and he slumped in his chair. The memory from years in the past rushing forward in his mind. “Rotfang?”

“I was surprised as well,” Luna replied. “Daddy always said that The Rotfang Conspiracy was focused on political figures, but now that seems to be an erroneous conclusion given the current evidence.”

“What word from Mungo’s,” the Minister asked.

Seamus opened the file in his lap. “The remaining attacker is still unconscious,” he snickered. “Pansy hit him rather hard, she did, and the healers aren’t certain if he’ll wake up at all. There’s a good bit o’ damage to the front part of his brain. Says here they pulled the poison tooth anyway just in case he does wake up.”

The Minister nodded and took a drag from his cigarette. “Zabini,” he said to Cho. “Go down to records and have Weasley dig up everything we have on this ‘Rotfang’ group. That’ll keep Percy busy for a while. Then go to Mungo’s, and get an update on the prisoner. If they maintain he is hopeless have him transferred to Mysteries. I’ll have them extract his remaining memories.”

“Yes sir,” Cho said. She collected her bag and left the Minister’s office.

“Mrs. Scamander,” Allan said as he turned to Luna. “You said your father had some knowledge of this group?”

“He did,” Luna said. “He was investigating them at the time of my mother’s death. I have his notes
“What did he have to say, Luna?” Harry asked.

“Father started investigating them about a year before Mum died. One of his confidential informants came to him with this story about a meeting he overheard. It’s here in his notes,” Luna said, and she dug into her bag and retrieved a leather bound notebook that looked very old. Harry took it and opened it to the first page.

“I can’t read this,” Harry said.

“Father writes all his notes in Moylish,” Luna said. “You can’t read Moylish?”

“No,” Harry sighed, shaking his head. He closed his eyes, rubbed his forehead, and asked “What’s Moylish?”

“Oh, it’s the language of the Moyletites, the circumcised centaurs,” Luna said.

Ron snorted into his tea. “The what?” he said coughing, as he drew his wand and dried himself.

Luna smiled, and with a completely straight face said, “Oh yes, there was once a wizard Rabi that convinced a group of centaurs that they were the thirteenth tribe of the Hebrews. So they learned the Torah, started wearing yarmulkes and prayer shawls, and took up circumcision, everything. They even tried to learn Hebrew, but it morphed into this.

“How do you circumcise a centaur?” asked Ron, now able to speak.

“It’s not easy, believe me.” Luna said, and then she smirked. “Or, as father said, it takes a really big briss.”

“Alright, let’s move on, shall we?” Harry said chuckling. “Luna can you read this to us?”

“Certainly.” She took the notebook, and started flipping through the pages. “Ah! Here’re the notes from the first meeting.

She read from the book.

Confidential informant High Top reports that he overheard the following conversation.

Man 1 “We cannot allow this witch to realize her power.”

Man 2 “The society will be threatened if we do not act, I agree.”

Man 1 “How shall we proceed?”

Man 2 Whispering “Rotfang must decide. But if we follow tradition, she will die.”

Man 1 “It is a shame that some, especially the brightest, must die to protect us.”

Man 2 “Yes, sadly it has been the way of Rotfang since the beginning, but it is the only way to be sure.”

Man 1 “Do our Aurors know?”
Man 2 “Soon, the cleared have been marked with Dentia Randoma, but this one’s family is sheltered. She will be difficult.”

Luna looked up from the book.

“It says that the informant then was blocked from hearing the rest of the conversation.”

“Alright, what’s next?” asked Ron.

“Well, there’re some notes father took during his research on what Rotfang was. He looked through all the magical books he could, but found nothing. Then he started in the Muggle library. That’s when he found one of his best sources, a Muggle investigative newspaper called ‘The Weekly World News.’ They don’t quite get everything right, though. The MACUSA tends use extraterrestrials as the scapegoat for any magical mishaps or accidental interactions with magical beasts, as if the Greys would ever reveal themselves and not redact the memories of the Muggles involved.

Harry turned to her. “Wait, you’re saying there really are spacefaring extraterrestrials?” he asked.

Luna smiled. She knew Harry and Ron had talked with their wives about the exploration she had done with the Dreamers, but the boys didn’t know everything. “Oh yes, a broad assortment of beings are scattered throughout the cosmos. It would be rather silly to have all that space out there without someone to appreciate it. Most of their interactions are with the MACUSA though, they seem to like North America, so father really didn’t pursue their story.”

Harry looked puzzled. “If there’s a ‘broad assortment of beings’ why do they all look alike? I mean they’re always described as little grey guys with no eyelids, a little slit for a mouth, and no genitals.”

Luna shook her head. “It’s a space suit, Harry,” she said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. “Under the suit they’re as different as we are.”

Harry nodded. “And are there wizards among them too?”

“Of course,” Luna said. “How do you think they jump between the stars? It’s a kind of apparition.”

“But how do we hear about them if they do the memory charm on people?” Ron asked.

“Not all visits are official. Your twin brothers are not an anomaly among life kind, Ron,” Luna said. “Think about that.”

Harry shrugged, conceding. “Right, pranksters. Well, erm, back to Rotfang, what did he find in the Muggle press?”

“Yes, let’s see, ah here,”

*WWN reports an international conspiracy among dentists. Some are involved in a plot to take control of society, marking the innocent through the use of gum disease and misaligned teeth. When an important person visits one of the conspirators they seed them with the disease and they seem to perform that causes the persons teeth to jumble. This conspiracy has a long history, and is thought to have begun in GreatBrittan. It seems that one of the techniques they use to identify people is the Dentia Randoma, apparently this is the curse that causes the persons teeth to grow larger than the space allotted for them in the mouth, so consequently they are an obvious twisted mess.*

“That’s when dad became convinced that the conspiracy was real. All you have to do is look around an average English town and you can find loads of their victims.”
“No denying that,” Ron said laughing.

“I can feel your skepticism, Ron,” Luna said. “But the more father dug, the more he found. Here.”

While on a holiday with Pandora and Luna I found this in an Auror’s log at a Hungarian magical library. She read, and then said, “I remember that trip, I had just turned nine and father though I was old enough to accompany him and mum on these investigative sojourns.” She smiled at the memory. “It was nice.”

She read again.

Translated from the Hungarian: The group is Rotfang, a secret society whom it is rumored will stop at nothing to accomplish their goal. What that goal is remains elusive, however some engaged in combat with them and report that only Testiclia Engorgio seems to have any effect.

“Testiclia Engorgio?” Ron asked.

“Apparently it’s a curse that has its roots in Hungary. One can hazard a guess at its effects.” Luna said smirking.

Ron rolled his eyes. “Yeah.”

“Is that all you have?” Minister Wheaton asked.

“All that I can divine as pertinent, Minister,” Luna answered.

The Minister lit another cigarette, as was his habit when he was deep in thought. “Mrs. Scamander, I’d like you to lay low for a while. I think I’d be best if you took refuge in the Muggle world.”

“That would be difficult, Minister,” Luna said. “I’m somewhat familiar with the Muggle world, but not enough to be inconspicuous.”

The Minister nodded and looked at Ron. “Hermione is headed to North American on her elves research next?”

“Yes sir,” Ron replied.

The Minister walked across the room and opened his office door. “Parvati, get Hermione up here,” he said, closed the door, and turned to Luna. “Would you mind accompanying Hermione to America?”

Luna smiled. “Not at all, Minister Wheaton. Hermione and I are quiet close, and I feel I could help her greatly with her quest.”

The Minister smiled. “Quest is one way to put it I suppose. Getting the rest of the magical world to treat the elves as we do will be a challenge.”

Luna smiled and looked around the room at her friends. “I am consistently amazed at your underestimation of Hermione,” she said.

(*)

“Iche!” Lavender said loudly.

“Iche!” her charges replied as they punched the air in front of them with their right hands.
“Ni!” she said as she walked down the line of Potter and Weasley children.

“Ni,” they echoed, and they punched the air with their left fist.

“San!”

“San!” they echoed, and their right fists stabbed the air.

“Shi! Go! Roku! Shichi! Hachi! Kyu! Ju!” Lavender continued as her students alternated fists. “Very good, all of you,” she said.

“It’s hard work,” Albus observed.

Lavender chuckled. “Well, right now we’re doing Karate, but ‘hard work’ is the near literal translation of Kung Fu, and we’ll be get to Wu Shu eventually.” She stopped at the end of the line next to Lilly. “Side kicks next.”

As she counted through the first ten numbers in Japanese the children executed alternating side kicks. Lavender smiled, they were advancing well. Rose took to it as she did everything else, trying to master every nuance and learn every word and technique. Albus was having a great deal of fun and learning well himself. Lilly was copying Rose as she usually did, but the true prodigy was Hugo. He was excelling.

In the five weeks since she had started the program with the children Hugo had shown an incredible aptitude for the mental part of the art, and that was one of the hardest parts to master in Lavender’s experience. He was the calm, collected, observant type that could easily master the focus that the martial arts required.

“Elbow blocks,” She said. “Iche!”

Hermione and Luna appeared in the lane in front of the houses and walked up the steps, around the side path of the Potter house, and toward the back yard. As they rounded the corner they heard Lavender.

“Hachi! Kyu! Ju!” she said as the children completed series of backward facing elbow punches.

“How’s Weasley’s Army coming along?” Hermione asked, laughing.

“Mum! Aunt Luna!” the children cried and ran to them.

“That’s Finnigan’s army, thank you very much,” Lavender said as she hugged Hermione. “And they are doing extremely well, in fact my brother is coming next week for some additional training with them.”

“I adore your brother,” Luna said as she released Lilly from her hug. “How are his wife and children?”

“Rowan and Janice are good, and they have some great kids,” Lavender replied. “Shay’s mum has them over to the Grove rather a lot, so much so that we even connected their fireplace to the floo network. They love the groove and Margaret.”

“Understandable. Their youngest expressed?” Luna asked.

Lavender smirked. “My sisters, Jasmin and Artemisia, pointed out to Janice just after Rowan proposed that, even though they were both Muggle, the odds were one in four,” Lavender said and
sniggered. “Looks like it’s actually two out of three.”

“Theyir eldest is still at Hogwarts, yes?” Luna asked.

“Laurel is fifth year now,” Lavender said, nodding. “She’s prefect in Hufflepuff.”

“Are you staying for dinner, Aunt Luna?” Hugo asked.

She bent and hugged him. “Yes, and a bit longer,” she said. *Hermione and I will explain* she sent to Lavender at her curious look.

“Good,” Lavender said. “Shay and the boys will be home shortly, Ginny has dinner nearly done, and we’re finished for today,” she told her charges. “Go wash.”

The four children trundled of in a mass of laughter and conversation.

(*)

“So, America next then, yeah?” Ron asked.

Hermione, her mouth full of Ginny’s meat pie nodded. She took a drink of her pumpkin juice, and said, “I have a few clues. There’s the mounds in the Mississippi Valley, the Pueblos in the southwest, and several ancient sites on the eastern coast near Boston.”

“The northwest tribes had a thriving culture too,” Rose pointed out.

“True,” Hermione said, and she stroked her daughter’s hair. “But in all I’ve read they never mention anything like the stone or Merlyn. “East coast first, I think.”

Rose smiled. “We should go to Washington and the museums there right away,” she said.

Hermione smiled. She’d come to the same conclusion. Rose was turning into the best assistant she’d ever had. “The Smithsonian has one devoted to the Native Americans. We’ll make that top of our list.”

“Perhaps Cousin George will be useful,” Luna observed. “He has an apartment in New York in addition to the ranch in Idaho and the beach house in California.”

Hermione put her hand on Luna’s “I wouldn’t want to take advantage,” she said.

“Hermione,” Luna said. “George is very fond of all of you. He’d love to have you.” She smiled broadly. “And you brought Amal into his life. He owes you.”

“Alright,” Hermione said with a smile. “Ask what he’s willing to do, but don’t press.”

“I’d really like to come,” Lilly chimed in.

“Lilly, we talked about this,” Ginny said. “We don’t want to overload Hermione. She’ll…”

“Aunt Ginny,” Rose said. “Sorry to interrupt, but I think it’s a good idea. Lilly and I have been doing a lot of research for Mum already. We’ll have Aunt Luna with us now, so there’ll be three adults including Aunt Lavender. We should be safe and well minded, and I could use her help.” Rose smiled broadly. “And just think of how much she’ll learn.”

Lilly smiled at her cousin and then turned and showed a satisfied smirk to her mother.
Ginny looked at Hermione with a resigned grin. “Do us all a favor and go into law, Rose.”

(∗)

“So, you’re off tomorrow,” Ron said as Hermione snuggled into his side.

“Yes,” She replied. “You’ll be okay?”

She felt him nod. “Don’t be overly long.”

She hugged him to her, hard. “I hate being in a bed without you, don’t worry, we’ll be quick as we can.”

He chuckled. “All girls this time.”

“I was surprised at how easily Ginny caved to Lilly,” Hermione said. “She’s asked several times, and Ginny has always been firm about her being too young to traipse off with us.”

“Ah, well, that would be me,” Ron said, and she felt him chuckle. “Last time she asked I pulled Gin aside, and I reminded her what a ruddy pain in the arse she was at that age.” He laughed for a moment. “Refreshed her memory a bit. Reminded her of the stolen broom rides the twins covered for, the stolen wands…” at Hermione’s questioning look he elaborated. “She nicked our wands all the time, how’d ya think she got so good so quick? Anyway, she grumbled but admitted I was right. Still, I think it was Rosie put her over.”

Hermione shook her head. “Our little girl is growing up,” she said and Ron felt a tear on his chest.

She felt him nod again. “I know, I miss our little girl too, but she’s growing into a real powerhouse, confident, smart, and opinionated.” He hugged her. “Just like her mum.”

“Yes, she is,” she whispered. “That’s what scares me.”

Ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, shichi, hachi, kyu, ju!
The Gathering Chapter 1

(*)

“Looking out the window
I see the red dust clear
High upon the red rock
Stands a shadow with a spear

Drawn across the plain land
Too the place that is higher
    Drawn into the circle
          that dances round the fire
    We spit into our hand
And breathe across the palm
    Raising it on high
    Held open to the sun”

Peter Gabriel

(*)

“A seasoned witch could call you from the depths of your disgrace”

Jon Anderson

(*)
The New York arrival terminal was a circus. More than twenty arrival pads and attendants were scattered around the large chamber. The Port Key decanted them on one of the pads, and an attendant immediately came over to them.

“Welcome to New York, may I see your Passports when you’re ready?” she asked.

Hermione straightened and faced the woman, and then she let out a resigned breath as she saw the light of recognition in the woman’s eyes. Opening her bag she produced all five passports. “Here you are,” she said as she handed them to the attendant.

“Alright,” the woman said, and opened the little books to the picture page. The wizarding passports were nearly the same as their Muggle counterparts. The differences were that the pictures moved of course, and the book had been charmed to produce a green ring around the picture when held up to the owners face. The attendant held up each book in turn. “We have Selene Wolfe, Hermione Granger Weasley, Rose Hermione Granger Weasley, Lilly Luna… Potter, and L… Luna Scamander. Holy shit,” she finished in a whisper. “Um, Sorry. I… I just haven’t had someone of your stature through here before. I only started three weeks ago.”

Lavender patted her hand. “Not the first time for us, I’m Selene Wolfe, Security,” she said and took the woman’s hand.

The attendant looked at the two girls and then back to Lavender. “Welcome to America,” she said with a smile. “Please, enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you for not making a scene,” Hermione said. “We’d prefer to remain anonymous.”

“MRS. WEASLEY!” A man called across the room, and it became suddenly quiet.

“Or not,” Hermione huffed.

The tall olive skinned man strode across the room and took Hermione’s hand. “Amir Kassim,” he said. “Welcome to The United States, I’m you contact for the MACUSA, and I’ve been assigned the very pleasant task of making sure you’re well cared for.”

“Thank you, Amir,” said. “We quit capable of taking care of ourselves, you know.”

Amir laughed, a boisterous sound in the quieted hall. “Of that there is no doubt,” he said, smiling. “President Othery made plain to me that you are to be unencumbered but assisted.”

“Mrs. Weasley?” an English accented voice said. Hermione turned to find a middle aged woman and her daughter standing next to Luna. “We just want to say thank you.”

Hermione smiled and took the woman’s hand. “You’re very welcome,” she said. “Visiting?”
The younger woman nodded. “We’re here for the premier of the new play by Oscar Amabil, Wizards of the West, are you going?”

“We hadn’t planned on it,” Hermione said.

“This happen often?” Amir asked Lavender while Hermione chatted with the two women.

“Only all the time,” she answered flatly, and Amir chuckled. “Selene Wolfe,” Lavender said, and took his hand. “Security.” Another group of people started to approach, but Lavender caught their attention. A wolfish glare and a shake of the head was all she did, but it was more than sufficient to deter them. Amir saw it and looked at her impressed, then he turned to Hermione.

“I’m sure we could procure tickets, if you wish to go,” he told Hermione.

“Lovely to meet you,” Hermione told the two women as they parted. She turned back to Amir. “Perhaps, but first we should get to our hotel and rest from the trip.” She looked at Rose and Lilly. “The girls are still new to portkeys, and international travel is wearing.”

“I completely understand,” Amir said. “You’re staying at the Hilton Midtown?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes,” she said. “We prefer Muggle accommodations.” She looked around at all the faces staring back at them. “For obvious reasons.”

Amir let go his gusty laugh again. “So wonderful that the stories are true,” he said. “The car is waiting. This way, please.”

(*)

Fifty five floors from the ground the view of Manhattan was spectacular. The presidential suite was well appointed, comfortable, and quite large. One bedroom with a king size bed sat off the main area, and opposite it another door opened to the connected room with two more beds. Hermione nodded to herself. Kingsley had said the expense was no problem, but the glimpse of the day rate she got at check in nearly gave her a heart attack. Still, the Ministry was covering this particular outing, so she shrugged and set about unpacking for their stay.

Once more that famous beaded bag disgorged its contents. Rose’s and Lilly’s small cases were first from the bag, and then Luna’s duffle, Hermione’s case, and Lavender’s Auror travel bag. Lilly and Rose took the adjoining bedroom, Hermione and Luna took the main bedroom with the king size bed, and Lavender took the fold out couch in the living area. After arranging their rooms the two girls and three women set out to find a suitable meal. It wasn’t far.

Their hotel was a few blocks from the theater district and Times Square. Restaurants abounded. At the end of the block their hotel was on an Irish pub, The Irish Pub, sat at the corner. After perusing the menu they decided it was dinner time. Hermione chose to sample their steak and Guinness pie, both Lilly and Rose had hamburgers, Luna found a vegetarian colcannon and broccoli dish that came with beans and rice, and Lavender ordered very rare lamb chops. Three Guinness’s and two iced teas rounded out their order, and the waiter smiled congenially at them as he left.

“I like not being recognized,” Lilly said as he left.

Luna smiled and laughed. “Something I personally never thought I’d have to deal with,” she said, and looked at the youngest member of the group. “Shall we practice, Lilly?”

Lilly looked excitedly at her mentor. “Yes, please.”
Luna nodded and turned to the others. “Raise your *Occlumency* shield,” she told them. Then she turned back to Lilly. “Alright, Lilly, reach out, what are you feeling?”

Lilly Luna Potter closed her eyes and extended her senses. “Almost everyone here is happy,” she said with a smile.

“One isn’t,” Luna said. “In fact this person is very sad. Who?”

Lilly concentrated for a moment. “The man sat by the window,” she said, and then looked pointedly at a man in a grey suit. “That man.”

Luna nodded with a knowing smile. “Why?”

Eyes closed again, Lilly cocked her head to the side. “Someone is sick, his wife… she’s, she’s dying.” A tear traced her cheek. “Can we help?”

Hermione felt the pride swell in her chest. Lilly was the rightful heir to her name, compassion and empathy practically radiated from her. She looked at her two fellow members of Dumbledore’s Army, and she saw the same determination and unyielding sense of honor and duty reflected in their expressions. Harry had told them, long ago in the room of requirement, about a conversation he had had with Professor Dumbledore. “There is what is right, and there is what is easy,” he had said. Dumbledore’s Army did what was right, every time, even if it wasn’t technically legal. She leaned over too Lavender. “Trace charm,” she said quietly. Turning back to Lilly she said, “We’ll look into it. If we can, we will. You’d do your grandmother proud, Lilly.”

Luna placed her hand on Lilly’s. “Well done, Lilly,” she said. “You differentiated very well, and your directional sense is improving with every session. Let’s pull back now.”

“What’s it like,” Rose asked her cousin.

Luna looked at her student. She was curious to hear Lilly’s response too.

Lilly’s expression was contemplative, and then she said, “It’s like being at a party where everyone is talking at once. Only it’s feelings I hear. Aunt Luna gets words I think.”

Luna nodded.

Lilly looked back at Rose and said, “I just feel what they feel. It’s kind of itchy.”

Luna chuckled. “That’s one way to put it, I suppose,” she said. “Remember, Lilly, you must place your shield well. Here in a city, especially one like this, you’ll be bombarded with emotions.”

“We’ll try to stay out of populated areas after this,” Hermione said, looking in Luna’s eyes.

Luna smiled and nodded. “I can manage, but not having to would be nice.”

Their dinner arrived and Hermione chuckled at the gusto with which her daughter and niece attacked their food. “Traveling makes me hungry too,” she told them.

“It’s good,” Lilly said, “But Carla and Grandmum’s cooking is better.”

Lavender laughed silently. “You’re still on about those shrimp?”

Lilly looked at her with a longing on her face. “I could eat those forever.”

The others laughed and Hermione brushed her hand down Lilly’s hair. “They were quite good.”
As the plates emptied, and the frantic pace the girls set slowed, Hermione reflected on her mission. Tomorrow she would turn Lavender, Luna, and the girls loose on the city while she met with the President and leaders of MCUSA. She smirked. A new tactic had occurred to her while she and Rose had researched, and she was eager to make her play and see if it would work.

The sun was setting unseen beyond the concrete and steel canyons that made up the city as they made their way back to the hotel. “Training togs,” Lavender had instructed the girls when they entered the suite, and they dutifully set off to their room to change.

“How’s cyber whips coming?” Hermione asked with a smile.

“Rowan is taking the boys while I’m gone with you, and my brother is a bit of an arse at times,” Lavender said with a loving smile. “I’m certain he’ll be driving them hard trying to show me up, so Rose and Lilly are not getting to skive off. If anything we’ll be training harder.”

“The Brown family is quite competitive,” Luna said from the couch.

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One floor down from their suite was the concierge lounge and the gym area. Several machines and free weight systems lined two of the walls and the window wall. The fourth wall was a full length mirror from edge to edge with a ballet bar and mat below it. Lavender led the girls to that side of the room and began their training routine.

“We’ve just had a full meal so we’ll start slow,” she told them.

As they progressed from stretches to stances and side kicks, a man walked up to Lavender. “I’ve been watching you,” he said.

“I know,” Lavender replied with a sly smile.

He laughed. “My son takes martial arts,” he told her. “You’re good. Do you mind if I go get him?”

Lavender looked at the girls, and they nodded. She turned back to the man. “Selene Wolfe,” she said extending her hand. “Yes, I’ll work with your son.”

“David Bradley,” he said. “A pleasure. I’ll be right back.”

A few minutes later Mr. Bradley reappeared with a boy that looked Rose’s age dressed in workout pants a T shirt and trainers. They walked up to Lavender and the girls. “Ms. Wolfe, this is my son, River.”

The boy looked at the smiles coming from Lilly and Rose, and said, “My mom’s idea. My sister’s name is Meadow, so I guess I got lucky.”

“Rose,” Rose said and extended her hand. “And this is Lilly. We’re the flower girls, so…” she shrugged.

River looked at her and smiled. “Good to meet you both,” he said. “Dad says your teacher is good.”

“She’s the best,” Lilly said with a smile.

“Thank you, Lilly,” Lavender said, and then she reverted to instructor mode. “But now it’s back to work. River, stretch out if you would while Lilly and Rose do our core kata.”

River sat spread his legs and started alternately touching his toes. Lavender nodded and watched
Lilly and Rose get into position. Rose laid down on her back, put her hands flat on the mat under her lower back and, as Lilly held her shoulders down, she pushed her entire body up at an angle until her feet were two feet in the air and only her hands and shoulders were touching the floor. Lavender watched as Rose’s body quivered from the strain.

“Very good, Rose,” she said. “Hold, hold, okay.”

Rose lowered her lower half to the mat and traded with Lilly. While Lilly repeated the core kata, Lavender gave River a few stretching tips. Lavender noticed him watching the girls, especially Rose and she smiled. “How old are you, River?” she asked as he completed a back bend she had shown him.

“Ten,” he answered. “I’ll be eleven in June.”

Lavender nodded. “Rose will be eleven in February,” she said and giggled to herself as his eyes lit. “Lilly will be ten in April.”

“You’re very advanced,” River said to Rose. “My Si Fu does that kind of exercise, but I don’t know any of the students at the dojo that could.”

Rose smiled at him and showed Lavender a sly smirk. “Our nanny insists we be fit.”

“Nanny?” David said to Lavender.

“Nanny, teacher, security, a few other things,” she said.

“Ah, the problems of the wealthy,” David said. “When my ex lets me take my son and daughter overseas I hire a few security people myself.”

Lavender chuckled. “Lilly and Rose’s parents aren’t rich, per se,” she said. “But they have enemies, and they are very important to certain aspects of our government, hence me. Side kicks again,” she said to the children.

As the children demonstrated their side kicks Lavender went to River. “Not bad,” she said. “But bend your support knee a bit more.” She shoved him bodily down a few inches. “There, now you won’t feel so off balance.”

After a few kicks, river looked back up at her with a huge smile. “Thanks!” he said brightly.

Lavender smiled at him, and then she turned to Rose. “Demonstrate elbow blocks, please, Rose,” she said. As River and his father watched Rose, Lavender asked the boy, “Do you know this move?”

He looked up and shook his head.

Lavender looked at Rose. “Show him.”

“Set yourself like this,” Rose said, and she demonstrated the pose. As River tried to get himself into the correct position, Rose went to him, took hold of his arm, and moved it to the correct spot. River blushed mightily at the contact, but he smiled wide.

Lavender didn’t miss it.

“Now, watch me again,” Rose said, and both she and Lilly demonstrated the elbow block. The entire world could have exploded around them and River would not have noticed, he was so focused on Rose.
“She’s very pretty, they both are,” David whispered in Lavender’s ear.

Lavender nodded. “And they’re smarter than they are good looking,” she said with an air of confidence.

“We’re here for a week,” David said.

Lavender looked at the infatuated boy next to an oblivious Rose. “We’ll be here every afternoon before dinner from now on. Feel free to have River join us.”

“Thanks,” David said, and then his eyebrows rose. “Is there a Mr. Wolfe?”

Lavender chuckled. “Yes, for fourteen years.”

David nodded. “He’s a lucky man.”

Lavender smiled at him. “As am I,” she said.

(*)

Robin Anderson looked up from his seat in the family lobby as the elevator bell chimed, and the oddest woman he had ever seen stepped from it and looked directly at him. She smiled and he felt his sadness ease. Theresa was being washed by the nurse, and he had stepped out to allow them space in the small confines of the room on the hospice floor. Now this blonde refugee from some sort of sixties commune was staring at him with a compassionate smile, and he smiled back for the first time in months.

“My name is Luna Scamander, Robin,” she said as she sat next to him. “We’re here to help if we can.”

His face fell. “No one can help,” he said dejectedly. “I met her the first day of third grade…” and he dissolved into the ever present tears.

An arm wrapped around his shoulders and his whole body sagged. It felt as if someone had poured cool water on his hot emotional wounds. “I’m going to tell you some things, Robin, some very strange things, but they are all true.” I am a witch, her voice said in his mind, and he looked up at her with wide eyes. My friend and I are very skilled, and we may well may be able to help your wife, but no one can know. That’s why you won’t remember us when we leave.

“Why us?” he asked in wonder.

You caught our attention. My student is quite an empath, and you drew her to you like a magnet. We can’t help everyone, much as we’d like to, and so we pick. We picked you.

“There are witches?” he asked.

And many other magical beings you remain unaware of, Luna told him. We have chosen to remain hidden for many reasons, I’m certain you can understand why.

“Yeah,” he said.

Hermione is as talented and compassionate a witch as has even lived, Robin. If anyone can save your wife, it will be her. Here, let me help you.

The sensation that followed brought tears to his eyes again, but these were tears of relief. All his worry and despair evaporated, and he felt the weight that lived in his gut lessen and vanish. He
almost passed out from the release. “Thank you,” he said as his eye’s slipped closed. “How..”

“Shsh,” Luna said. “Relax.”

(*)

Robin woke on the family room couch. A blonde woman was helping an obviously exhausted woman with a huge mass of curly brown hair into the elevator, and it closed behind them.

“Mr. Anderson?” a voice said, and he turned to find a nurse standing in the hallway looking stunned. “I don’t know how it happened, I just turned around and, and…”

Robin leapt to his feet. “No, no! is, is she…”

The nurse smiled and grabbed his arms. “No, no not at all,” she said. “Theresa is awake and asking for you.” She smiled and shook her head. “It’s like magic.”
Don’t get appendicitis. That is all.

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 2

The Gathering

Chapter 2

“Good morning Mrs. Weasley,” President Othery said. He turned to the other people standing in his office. “This is Margery Mallote, Majority leader of the congress, Timothy Stern, Minority leader, Edgar Denton, Chief Justice, and of course you remember Amir.”

Hermione smiled at each one in turn. “A pleasure to meet you all,” She said as she shook their hands. “As all our time is precious, shall we begin?”

Margery Mallote chuckled. “Heard you were direct,” she said, and she shook her head as she sat in her chair.

Hermione smiled at the only other woman in the room and sat across from her. “I’ve found it serves me well.”

“I like her,” Marjory said to the president while he took his chair behind his desk, the Chief justice sat next to Hermione, and Mr. Stern eased into the remaining chair in the office.

“I hope it stays that way,” Hermione said. “I’ve met with resistance in the past concerning magical creature rights.”

“Securing sentient being status for the centaurs and the merpeople in England was a major feat,” Ms. Mallote said. “Who’s on your list today?”

“The elves,” Hermione told her. “They have been slaves for far too long.”

“And you think we’re just going to free them?” Mr. Stern said incredulously. “My constituents would never agree.”

“Given time, Mr. Stern, I think you will find that most people learn to abhor slavery,” Hermione said flatly.

“All people believe slavery is evil,” he said firing up. “But the elves are not slaves, we protect them, we feed them, and in return they serve.”

Hermione snorted at the idea of anyone having to ‘protect’ Obo. “I think you will find they are perfectly capable of taking care of themselves,” she said. “We have many free elves in England and around the world, and they are well behaved and useful members of our society. I count two of them, Kreature and Obo, among my dearest friends.”

“That’s as may be,” Mr. Stern said. “They serve a useful purpose here too. We need them, and the security risk is far too great. They are a major source of labor in our system, Mrs. Weasley. Can you
imagine all the housework the average witch would have to perform if we took their elves away?”

“And you say they are not slaves,” Hermione said as nicely as she could manage. She leveled her prosecutorial gaze at the man. “Yes, in fact I can imagine the kind of housework you are describing. My mother-in-law did it for seven children and a husband for twenty-five years, my sister-in-law does it for her husband and three children, and my husband does it for the four of us. People should rely on their own skills and not slaves… sir.”

Marjory Mallote roared with laughter. “I like her more,” she said, wiping her eyes. “Anyone that can put Tim in his place that fast has my vote.”

The Chief Justice had been observing the conversation. “You’re talking about undoing centuries, millennia of tradition, Mrs. Weasley,” he said. “I’m not sure it can be done.”

“It can,” Hermione said. “But I do understand the resistance to change you speak of. That is why I’m proposing a gradual approach. First we guarantee that they are treated as beings and not property. In England we have made it a crime to kill or abuse an elf, we have established basic work rules and healthcare standards. We have also begun work on a path to freedom for those elves that wish it.”

“Tough sell here, hun,” Marjory said quietly. “I read all about it when you went before the Wizengamot and got the legislation passed. We might get the work rules and healthcare through, but making abuse a crime and people giving up ownership would be difficult.”

“I understand that,” Hermione said. But I’ve got a way around it, she thought and smiled. “That’s why I’ve got a substitute for immediate emancipation.”

“Oh, and what might that be?” Timothy Stern asked snidely.

“It’s more a psychological addendum than a legal one,” Hermione said with a smile. “Most people I’ve talked about this with have agreed.” That was a blatant lie as she had only talked to her family and friends about her new tactic. “I propose that in the treaty we have a section that states if the enchantment that binds the elves to our service is ever broken it would be an international crime to reinstate it.” There, let’s see what they make of it.

“I like it,” Marjory said. “Doesn’t have any real impact, but gets people to feel good about the whole concept.”

“My side would agree to that,” Stern said. “Health requirements have been talked about for years.” He looked at his counterpart. “I think we could work something out on that front.”

“What about murder?” Hermione asked.

“Calling the killing of an elf murder is not going to fly,” Stern said plainly.

“I think I can convince them otherwise,” Hermione said. “Would you let me address the congress?”

“I’ll put you on the schedule for this afternoon,” Marjory said with a huge grin. “It’ll guarantee a full house, that’s for sure.”

“I’ll have the treaty ready, it’s really quite simple,” Hermione said. She, in reality, had a copy pre-signed by Minister Wheaton of exactly the treaty she had manipulated them into. “Thank you for your time.”

“No trouble at all,” The President said, and took Hermione’s hand as she rose from her chair. “Amir tells me you don’t desire his services.”
Hermione patted Amir’s hand. “I’m sorry if we gave you that impression,” she said to him. “Assistance is fine, in fact I’d like your help with some arrangements regarding the museums in Washington, but as you may know we members of Dumbledore’s Army are quite capable of taking care of ourselves, and we chafe a bit under protection.”

Amir laughed. “You see, sir, I wasn’t lying,” he said.

“Well,” the President began. “We read about a dust up in Australia, and we thought…”

“And did you hear what the outcome of that ‘dust up’ was?” Hermione asked with a grin.

Amir chuckled. “It caused a bit of a buzz in the Auror Office,” he said. At the curious looks from the other Americans he continued. “They got attacked somewhere in the Australian wilderness, and Potter happened to be with them.” He laughed. “Bet that caught whoever it was off guard, Potter, Weasley, and Granger all at once. Anyway, with Potters help they drove their attackers off. Killed what Four of them?”

“Six,” Hermione corrected. “That we know of. Again, we take our safety, and especially the safety of our children, very seriously.” She looked around the room. “You are all bound by your secrecy agreements?” she asked.

They nodded.

“The two women I am travelling with are Luna Scamander and Lavender Brown,” she told their shocked faces. “They were there too. We’ll be fine.”

“The Lavender Brown?” Amir asked in wonder.


“I assume Mrs. Scamander, Miss Brown, and your children are enjoying the sights?” Marjory asked.

“I believe they are at the Museum of Modern Art right now,” Hermine said looking amused.

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“Alright, Luna, this one’s just weird,” Lavender said as they contemplated a statue in the sculpture gallery.

Luna smiled at her friend. It’s very erotic, Lavender, she sent. Don’t you see it in these forms? From here it’s a very convincing mons and vulva, and here is a fine priapic shape.

“I see,” Lavender said. Luckily the girls haven’t any frame of reference for them, she thought.

Yes, but that is a temporary state, Luna sent back.

“Not too temporary, I hope,” Lavender said quietly, and Luna sniggered.

“This way, ladies,” Luna said, and strode off toward the portrait gallery.

“These are interesting pieces, Aunt Selene,” Rose said as they followed Luna. “But I’m not certain some of it’s art.”

Luna slowed and let them catch up to her side. “Art is in intent, Rose,” she said. “Most art is in some way commercial, but pure art for the artists enjoyment is what real art is. These may not be the classical paintings you are used to at some of the National Trust sites you have visited, but these
contain more emotion. The classical paintings were all commissioned, closely monitored by the royalty that commissioned them, and critiqued harshly if done poorly. These works are primarily for the artist to express an inner thought or emotion.”

“I understand, Aunt Luna,” Rose said. “But really, upside down urinals?”

Luna chuckled. “It has a certain political undertone you will grow to appreciate, Rose,” she said. “A few unpleasant experiences with men will enlighten you.”

“Speaking of experiences with men, we need to start thinking about heading back to the hotel,” Lavender said and smirked. “Wouldn’t want to keep River waiting.”

Luna smiled, Lavender chuckled, and Lilly turned away to hide her amused smile. Rose, unaware of any of it, said, “Oh, he’ll be fine. I don’t think he’ll be pacing the floor or anything. You worked him harder than he’s used to. You might have scared him off, Aunt Selene.”

Lilly looked up at the two grown women and rolled her eyes. “Oh, I wouldn’t worry about that, cousin,” she said. “He’ll be there.”

“I hope so,” Rose said. “He’s nice, and it’s lovely to not be ‘Rose Weasley the daughter of two thirds of the saviors of the wizarding world’ for once.” She shook her head and then said, “Ah, there’s the loo. I’ll be right back.” She turned to her cousin. “Lilly?”

“I’m okay, you go on,” the younger girl said.

As Rose walked off toward the restroom Lilly turned to Lavender. “I didn’t tell her, should I have?” she asked.

“No,” Luna said. “That’s part of the bargain we make with this talent. It’s not your truth to tell.”

“What you learn in confidence, you keep in confidence,” Lilly said, almost as a mantra.

Luna smiled and nodded at her student. “The first and most important lesson,” she said.

“It was very powerful,” Lilly said smiling. “And very different than the feelings Mum and Dad have for us.”

“What did he feel, Lilly?” Luna asked.

“He felt that Rose was pretty at first,” she said. “But when she started talking with him, and especially when she touched his arm, he…” she started to laugh.

“Well,” Lavender asked with raised eyebrows.

“He wanted to kiss her,” Lilly said and dissolved back into giggles.

Lavender shook her head. “And she remains unaware?”

Lilly regained her composure, looked at the two women, and rolled her eyes again. “Dense as a stone,” she said shaking her head.

“Just like her father,” Lavender muttered, and Luna laughed openly. “You can’t let on, Lilly,” Lavender said to her. “It’s very important that Rose learn these things herself, just as it will be for you.”

“I understand, Aunt Selene,” Lilly said, and then cracked a wide smile. “But it is very funny at
“Ladies and gentlemen of the Congress,” President Othery said. “Today we have a very special speaker here to talk to us about a treaty concerning magical creature rights. As you know, Hermione Granger Weasley, hero of Britain’s Second Wizarding war, has been a champion of rights for the non-human magical community. In Great Britain she has secured rights for the centaurs, merpeople, and elves. She comes before us today to speak on these issues. Ladies and gentlemen, Hermione Granger Weasley.”

The congress stood and applauded as Hermione entered the chamber and mounted the raised platform at the front of the huge room. She laid her notes on the podium and looked out at her audience. Most wore the smiles of fandom she had become accustomed to, some wore the scowl of hardened opinion, and she dismissed those as unreachable, and lastly some wore the contemplative look of the undecided. Those were her target.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the congress, thank you for your time. My name is Hermione Granger Weasley and I come to you today with a proposal.” She looked out at them, she didn’t need her notes for this. “Our society is based on a lie. The lie that all are free and treated equally.” She said. “The centaurs, the merpeople, the elves, and possibly the dragons, are sentient creatures and deserving of full protection under the law. As anyone who has had contact with the centaurs knows, they are a proud people with a long oral tradition. The merpeople are perhaps an older race than humanity, and there is some speculation they are our ancestors. The elves have been with us since the beginning and, at one time, were free. My research into their enslavement tells me that at a point around fifty-five hundred years ago a great enchantment was cast and the elves were bound to wizard kind.”

“No one knows who cast the enchantment or how it was accomplished.” She was getting good at this lying to a group thing. “But we do know that it enslaved an entire race.” She looked around at the congress. “To us. Many of you have elves in your home, and you know the depth of the love they have for us. You know that they are sentient beings with emotions, hopes, and ambitions. And in your heat of hearts, you know that enslaving them is wrong. The treaty I am proposing is very simple.”

She pulled the treaty from the middle of the pile of parchment on the podium and read.

“We, the undersigned, do herby make, establish, and adhere to this magical contract.

One. An elf is designated a sentient creature with rights to life and health.

Two. A witch or wizard with an elf or elves bound to their service will provide adequate health care for those elves in their service.

Three. A witch or wizard with an elf or elves bound to their service will be held accountable for violence done on the person of an elf in their service.

Four. The undersigned governments agree to pass laws and regulations concerning the health and welfare of the elves in that society’s service.

Five. Should the enchantment that binds the elves to the service of wizardkind, at some future date, be broken, all signatory parties to this treaty will be bound to never recast the enchantment or make any other legal or magical efforts to re-enslave the elvish race.”

“It’s really that simple,” Hermione said looking back out into the hall. “Are there questions?”
It seemed as if every hand in the hall raised.

(*)

“Hello, River,” Lavender said. “Fancy meeting you here,” Lavender said, and she started to chuckle.

“Where’s Rose… and, um, Lilly?” he asked.

“They’ll be along shortly,” Lavender said. “I wanted to talk to you for a moment.”

He looked worried. “Okay,” he said tentatively.

Lavender smiled. “Don’t worry, It’s not bad, River,” she told him and sniggered. “If fact it’s something I wish someone had talked to me about at your age.” She sat on a bench near the mirror wall. “Come, sit here with me.”

He took a seat on the bench and looked at Lavender expectantly.

“Rose, as you may have noticed, is very smart,” Lavender said. “That being the case, as many very smart individuals are, she’s a bit slow where actual people are concerned.”

He blushed and looked at the floor. “You know.”

Lavender smiled and hugged him to her side. “Oh, my dear boy, everybody but Rose knows.”

He slumped and looked as if he wanted to cry.

“Hey,” Lavender said. “River, don’t be embarrassed or ashamed of love, ever!” She had put so much emphasis on the word “ever” that looked up at her.

“No one is going to rat you out,” Lavender told him. “And if she comes to feel about you the same way in the next week, I’m all for it.” She smiled kindly at him. “But it will only be for this week, and then the odds are you will never see her again.”

“Yeah,” he said. “I thought so, too, but she’s just so…” his smile was almost awestruck.

“Yes, she is,” Lavender said. “And she’s even more exceptional than you think.” She grabbed his shoulders and turned him to face her. “So make the most of this very special moment in your life, you hear me?”

He nodded.

“Good, because you are treasure, River,” she told him. “I’ve seen a lot of children of divorce and they hardly ever are as well-adjusted as you are.”

He shrugged. “Meadow makes up for it,” he said. “She’s awful to dad most of the time.”

“She’ll come round,” Lavender said. “Really, there’s a father- daughter thing that’s incredibly hard to break.”

“She blames dad.”

“Was it his fault?”

“No, well maybe,” he said. “He travels a lot, and Mom though he was seeing someone else.”
“Was he?”

River shook his head. “No, but mom…”

“Found someone else?”

He nodded looking sour.

“Oh, ho, ho, ho, and you aren’t a fan I see,” Lavender said with a knowing smirk.

“I hate him,” River said with real vehemence.

Look at me, River,” Lavender said, seriously. As he did she locked eyes with him. “This man may or may not be a turd, but he didn’t break up your family. I can tell from the story you told what happened mostly. Your father was absent a lot, correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Very many people can’t do separation well. Your parents made, yes that’s right, both of them, made some bad mistakes, and you and your sister paid the price. I’ve seen it rather a lot.” She hugged him again. “But I can tell that they both love you and Meadow. Do they fight over you and your sister?”

“No, it’s about the only thing they don’t fight about.”

Lavender laughed. “Is that so,” she said with a grin of superior knowledge. “Let me let you in on a little grown up secret, a secret many grownups don’t know. You only fight like that with someone you love. Only love can wound that deep.”

“It doesn’t look like love.”

Lavender chuckled again. “Depends on the view, River. You should have seen some of the rows Rose’s parents have had.” She kissed the top of his head. “You’re a wonderful boy. Enjoy this week with Rose and Lilly.” She cocked her head to the side. “Ah, and here they come.”

River looked at her, puzzled. “I don’t hear anything?”

Lavender smiled, ruffled his hair, and stood. A few moment later the door opened and Rose and Lilly came in chatting about the museum.

(*)

“Oh, Merlyn,” Hermione said as she collapsed on the couch. “Can’t stand and deliver for three hours anymore.”

Luna handed her a large glass of wine. “This should help,” she said.

“Thank you,” Hermione said and took a long draw. “Hum, good.”

“California,” Lavender said. “They’re getting as good as France at this.” She held up her glass.

“Don’ say zat to Fleur,” Hermione said with a smirk.

Luna, Lavender and Hermione chuckled. “Well?” Lavender asked.

Hermione looked back at her sisters with a conspiratorial grin. “They fell for it.”
Luna smiled broadly. “Excellent, Hermione,” she said. “And they signed?”

“The President, the minority and majority leaders, and the five justices, all on behalf of the American Wizarding population,” she said, and almost cackled with glee.

Lavender shook her head. “Have to start calling you Pansy Granger,” she muttered. “And they were stupid enough to sign a contract prepared by you?” she asked.

Hermione grinned, nodded once, and took satisfied sip of her wine.

“What happens if they attempt to beak it?” Luna asked.

“You remember Marietta, yes?” Hermione asked. The other two gave her looks of understanding. “I was being nice.”
So, I didn’t mention it last time because, appendix, but READ THE CURSED CHILD.

JK played right into my hand. Other than Granger-Weasley everything I have written works with the continuation of cannon. I’ll be referencing the events on CC in about six chapters from now, so you’re warned.

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 2

The Gathering

Chapter 3

“It’s the same as Australia,” Rose said, holding back a sob. The diorama in front of them described an incident known as the ‘Trail of Tears’. Thousands of Cherokee had been forced marched from their homes in the forests of the southern states to a desolate reservation on the plains. Many had died on that trail, and many more died of starvation and exposure when they arrived in Oklahoma. To Rose’s horror it was only one small example of the atrocities done to the Native Americans. “How did they live with themselves?”

“They viewed the natives as non-human,” Lavender said flatly. “It’s easy to be horrible to someone you don’t believe is equal to you, at least for some people.”

Rose nodded. She’d seen enough of the bigotry directed toward Lavender to understand completely.

“The great myth is that this continent was empty of people when the Europeans arrived,” Luna said. “There were twenty millions already here, maybe even more, and they were nearly all victims of the genocide perpetrated upon them.”

“The history books don’t say much about that,” Rose said.

“History is written by the victors, dear,” Hermione said. “During the colonial era Europeans, British included, were quite arrogant in their views of anyone not European. The Americans carried that attitude on a lot longer than the Europeans did. As you know, human slavery didn’t end here until the late eighteen hundreds.”

“The native witches and wizards lived with the muggles,” Lilly said as she looked at a display of shamanic artifacts. “That’s a potion kit.”

“Yes, it is,” Hermione said. “Well spotted, Lilly.”

The Smithsonian Native American Museum was the newest and most technologically advanced of
the museums in Washington DC. As they wandered its halls and observed the displays it became apparent they would have to contact the Native American magical community as they had in Australia. While very informative and educational, the exhibits gave no clue as to the location of the stone or even Merlyn’s travels. A few artifacts hinted that a white man had once come to the eastern coast, and there was even more evidence from the Central American exhibit. He had obviously been there, but what he had done and where he had traveled was a mystery.

“Lunch and off to the Natural History Museum,” Hermione called to her entourage as they passed the last case.

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“That’s very similar to the mountain in the vision,” Luna said.

The Natural History Museum’s panoramic view of Monument Valley in Arizona and Utah showed several buttes the same shape as the shadowy outline they had seen in the vision the Sisters had been presented.

“I had thought the southwestern area was one we should visit,” Hermione said. “The culture of the native Peoples hung on the longest there.”

“I am attracted to them also,” Luna said. “There are some Apache and Navaho rituals I’d love to partake in.”

“Like we did with the Dreamers?” Rose asked with a smile.

Luna nodded. “Yes, as we did with the Dreamers.”

In a different section of the natural history museum the wandered among the dinosaurs. “These are very different than dragon skeletons,” Luna observed.

“How so?” Hermione asked.

“The dinosaurs where warm blooded as the dragons are, but the dinosaurs had solid bones,” Luna said. “There were some avian species that led to the dragons, though they were not technically dinosaurs. The pterosaurs had hollow bones and many had the quadrupedal, front leg wing plan that the quadrupedal dragons have.”

“I love Uncle Charlie’s dragons,” Lilly said. “They like me, they sing to me.”

“They know you’re not a threat,” Luna said with a smile. “Your uncle and his friends in Whales are changing the way we interact with the dragons. It’s time they got the respect they deserve too.”

Hermione nodded. The dragon she, Ron, and Harry had escaped from Gringotts on had been gently coaxed to Whales by Charlie and his friends. In his weakened state he had put up barely any resistance to the Dragon Keepers as they cut the chains and shackles from him and healed his old wounds. “I’m happy Atlas regained his health,” she said.

“As poorly as the goblins treated him, they still fed him well,” Luna said. “Though all that time underground affected his coloration. Have you been to the reserve?”

Hermione shook her head. “No. Lavender and the children have.”

“They like me too,” Lavender said, patting Lilly on her shoulder.
Luna smiled. “They recognize a fellow,” she said. “They are very smart.”

“Yes they are,” Lilly said. “Uncle Charlie’s favorite, Gwyneth? She’s a green, and she’s really friendly.”

Lavender huffed. “Yes, but walking into her pen was foolish, Lilly.” She shook her head. “Not to mention terrifying,” she muttered.

“I know it scared you, Aunt Lavender,” Lilly said. “But she wouldn’t hurt me, she wanted to play.”

Lavender suppressed a shudder. It had been the most frightening moment in her nanny career. Lilly was all of six at the time, and Lavender had only just turned around to discipline James. Rose gasped, and Lavender turned back to find Lilly calmly walking across the paddock toward the dragon. As the dragon had lowed its head toward the little red headed girl, Lavender had almost fainted. Lilly had time to stroke her hand down the dragon’s cheek before she flew backwards across the paddock as Lavender Accioed her.

Lavender smirked and looked down at her two brilliant girls. “You two are going to give me heart failure, you know that?”

(*)

“Iche! Ni! San! Shi!” Lavender called, as Rose, Lilly and River alternated fist punches. “You’re doing very well, River. Your Si Fu is going to be either impressed with you or angry with me.” She chuckled to herself. “Probably both.”

“I won’t be seeing him for another three weeks,” River said. “We’re going to Mazatlán on Saturday to pick up Meadow from mom, and then we’re off to Australia.” He looked puzzled as Lilly and Rose laughed. He blushed when Rose hugged him, she’d hugged him more in the last three days than his own sister had in the last three years.

“We were just there a few months ago,” she said. “Where are you going?”

“Um,” he stammered for a moment. “Well, dad’s been teaching us scuba, so were going to the Great Barrier Reef, then he mentioned some big rock…”

“Uluru,” Lilly said almost reverently. “It’s very special.”

Rose took his hand. “Uluru is spectacular and impressive, but convince him to take you to Kata Juta,” she said. “It’s just a few miles away, and then hike up to the Valley of the Winds.”

She was looking at him so earnestly that River decided that whatever he did in Australia, he, Meadow, and his father would absolutely go there, where ever it was. “Yeah, I will,” he said in a bit of a daze as he nodded.

She smiled and kissed his cheek. He barely heard what followed through the buzzing in his ears. “Good, Kata Juta is important to me.”

Lavender chuckled and shook her head. “Alright, back to work,” she said. “Round house! Set! Iche…”

(*)

“Mrs. Weasley?” the handsome man in the elevator asked.
“Yes,” she said warily, grasping her wand in her pocket. She was headed out for her morning research session in the basement offices of the New York Metropolitan Museum. “Have we met?”

“No,” the man said. “I just recognized you from how much Rose resembles you. David Bradley,” he said, and extended his hand. “I’m River’s dad.”

Hermione relaxed. “Oh, yes,” she said. “I hope where not occupying too much of his time.” She shook his hand.

“Quite the contrary,” David said. “He’s having the best time he’s had in a long while.” He smiled. “All thanks to you, Rose, Lilly, and Selene.” He laughed. “Well, mostly Rose.”

Hermione smiled. “They do seem to have hit it off. Thanks for letting him tag along to the Metropolitan Museum today and the other two tomorrow. I’ll be researching, but Selene and our friend Luna can manage the kids.”

“Thank you and Selene for allowing it, and yes, they have ‘hit it off’,” he looked at the floor of the little room. “Um, on that subject, River would like to ask Rose to accompany us to the theater.”

Hermione turned slowly to him and raised her eyebrows. “On a date?”

“Well, uh, not exactly.”

Hermione suppressed a snigger. MEN! “And just how, ‘not exactly’ is going to the theater with your son not a date?”

“I, um.” He struggled for words. “Well, I’d be there, and our security.” He brightened. “Plus Selene, if she wants.” He looked flustered for a moment. “Or, um, or you. If you want. Uh, both of you, all of you if…”

Hermione had started to laugh. It took her a few moments to recover. “David, David, it’s fine. Yes, River can ask Rose to go to the theater, and yes, Selene will want to come.”

He smiled broadly, and Hermione saw the man with the child in his eyes. “Great, terrific, I’ll get tickets for Friday, if that’s okay?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, that will be acceptable. Should we plan dinner for her and Selene?”

David smiled. “No, I have standing reservations at a few of the nicer spots,” he said. “Any special dietary things?”

“Her last name is Weasley,” Hermione said chuckling. “As long as it’s not corned beef she’ll be ready to tuck in.”

David laughed. “He’s been on an Asian binge recently, is that alright?”

Hermione shrugged. “Should be.”

“Nobu then,” David said with a smile. “He’ll ask her after practice this afternoon.”

(*)

Rose stopped dead in her tracks, and she grabbed Rivers hand. “Wait,” she said and turned. “Aunt Lav… Selene, come look at this.”

In a case full of small clay figurines one had caught Rose’s eye. In the upper left of the case, Merlyn
smiled happily back at them. The figure was about 4 inches tall and looked to be nearly identical to the statue they had found in Australia, though smaller, and done in the Pueblo people’s artistic style. Still, it was obviously him.

“Well done, Rose,” Lavender said quietly from over her shoulder. “Well done indeed. Here’s some money, why don’t you, River, Luna, and Lilly go get something to drink while I… study this.”

And now I suppose I’m going to add art thief to my list of occupations Lavender thought to herself.

Oh, not thief, borrower. Luna sent back. I’m certain Hermione will return it… someday.

Anybody watching? Lavender asked as she sniggered.

Luna closed her eyes. No, there’s a man that’s a bit too interested in the girls, but he’s harmless. There’s a woman that is battling her compulsion to destroy, she comes here every day. No one is interested in you or this case. “I saw a good humor man at the refreshment stand,” Luna said to the children.

“Ice cream in December?” Lavender asked.

Luna rubbed her belly. “They want ice cream,” she said. “Come, young ones, let’s be young.” And with that she led them off toward the gift shop and refreshment area.

Lavender turned back to the case. She surreptitiously drew her wand, looked around, and with a quick Duplio combined with a transfigure she turned her program into a replica of the little statue. She took another swift survey of her surroundings, and then she magically swapped her fake with the authentic statue in the case. Smiling to herself she tucked the figure in her bag and continued to examine the other cases in the Native Art Gallery.

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The bell chimed and the elevator door opened. “Is your father here to see you in?” Lavender asked.

“I have a key,” River said, and he pulled the card from exercise bag.

Lavender smiled and nodded, then she winked just for River. “Rose, why don’t you walk River down to his room and make certain he gets in safe.”

River beamed at Lavender. “Thanks for taking me to the museum and all the extra stuff I learned in practice today. Mrs. Wolfe.”

“Selene, River, Selene” Lavender said and hugged him to her side. “And you’re welcome. We’ll see you tomorrow for the Discovery museum and then Friday for others we’re going to. Come on, Lilly, Rose has this.”

“Yep,” Rose said, and she took River’s hand. “Show me your room.”

Oh god! Lavender thought as the ten year olds walked away. Don’t say that to a boy again for the next dozen years. Please!

(*)

Rose came through the suite door wide eyed and silent. “Something wrong, cousin?” Lilly asked, barely containing her grin.

Rose looked at her blankly for a moment, and the she shook her head as if to clear it. “Um…a…
River asked me to go to see a play… with him… like… like a date.”

“And you said?” Lilly asked, this time with a full grin on.

Rose’s eyes narrowed dangerously. “You knew!”

Lilly laughed. “Of course I knew!” she said. “You’d have to be blind, or, well, you not to see it.” The look Rose gave Lilly should have frozen the younger girl with fear, but Lilly knew, and instead she just laughed. “So you said yes, correct?”

“Uh huh,” Rose said nodding. “I said I’d need to check with Mum, but he said he’d done that already.” She looked at her mother sat at the table.

“He did,” Hermione said. “Well, his father did earlier today.” She smiled at her daughter. “I told him it was fine with me if River took you to a play.”

Lavender hugged Rose to her. “So, tomorrow afternoon is dress shopping. We both need appropriate attire for a night at the theater.”

(*)

When they returned from dinner at the Irish Pub Lavender retrieved the figurine from her bag. “This was what I was talking about.”

Hermione took it and looked at it with wonder and joy. Another clue. “Same robe, same hat, staff…” she said as she turned it over in her hands.

Luna straightened, and Hermione and Lavender noticed the change to instructor mode in an instant. “Lilly, Rose, psychometry,” she said

Rose shook her head. “I’ll go first, Lilly is much better at this,” she said, and took the little figure from her mother and closed her eyes. “It’s been in the presence of magic, a lot of magic.” She held it up to her ear as if to listen to it. “I think it’s a healer’s tool.”

“Very good, Rose,” Luna said. “Lilly?”

Lilly took the figure and held it to her heart, and then she looked at Luna, “It’s… vibrating,” she said, closed her eyes, and Luna gasped. A flood of visions poured from the figure into Lilly, and Luna saw all of them.

A group of native shamans sat around a man lying on a blanket, the figure of Merlyn laid on his chest. A prodigious field of magic built around them as they healed the gore wound from a wild pig the man had sustained.

Time had passed, and a different group, this time women, gathered around another woman in distressed child birth. The figure laid on her belly, and they cast the great healing magic. The swirl of power surrounded them, and they helped her deliver the child into the world.

An old man clutched the figure to his chest and muttered a native incantation. The congestion robbing him of breath cleared, and he smiled. Picking up his walking spear he slowly made his way into the desert. Today was a good day to die.

A young man franticly threw sacred sand over the sanctified ground, and he laid his betrothed in the center of the circle. He ran into the next room of the pueblo and took up the figure from the altar it sat on. Back in the ceremonial room he placed the figure on the sidewinder bite and spoke the
incantation. He nearly fainted from relief as her breathing slowed and her color returned.

A white man lay on the sand. Gathered around him were the tribal elders, and they were in a heated
discussion. A young man of perhaps twenty snatched the figure from the altar and healed the man
over the objections of many of the older men.

Lilly collapsed back on the couch, and the figure fell from her hand. Luna gathered the exhausted
girl in her arms and rocked her back and forth. “Excellent, Lilly,” she said as she rocked.
“Excellent.” Luna looked at Hermione. “He never touched this, but whoever made it knew him.”

“Arizona next then,” Rose said.

“Texas first,” Hermione said. “I found some evidence in my research today, and I want to look into
the Pueblo peoples of that area.”

“Rolf has an Apache friend from his early travels. He lives there,” Luna said. “I’d like to contact him
while we’re there. Perhaps we could attend a gathering of the native magical peoples.”

Hermione smiled at her friend. “That would be great, Luna,” she said. “I’d like to ask him some
questions if that’s okay.”

“I’m certain it will be,” she said and stood. “Lilly and I need a nap. Wake us in an hour please.
Come, Lilly. After that much exertion we need to rest.” She and Lilly went to the girl’s room and
closed the door.

(*)

There was knock at the suite door. Rose looked over at Lavender, and her nanny smiled and nodded.
Nervously Rose stood from her chair and smoothed out the satin and lace that made up her Aqua
colored evening dress. They had found it the previous day at one of the posh shops that lined Fifth
Avenue, and the tailor at Elie Tahari had done an outstanding job of fitting the designer dress to her
petite frame. Rose looked stunning in it. Lavender and Hermione had applied a modest amount of
makeup to Rose’s face. Just a touch of blush, eye liner, and light lips gloss to highlight her features.
Her hair had been tamed with an entire bottle of Sleakeazy, and Hermione had carefully styled it into
the same updo she had worn at Bill and Fleur’s wedding.

Her daughter was growing up.

Hermione had to take a long shaking breath as Rose opened the door on her first date. River, having
only seen Rose in casual clothes and her workout togs, stared open mouthed at her.

“Wow,” he said in a soft voice, and then he smiled. “You’re prettier than Meadow.”

Rose smiled and her nerves calmed. This was just her friend, River. She looked him up and down,
and nodded appreciatively at the pinstriped dark brown Italian silk suit he was in. “You look great
too,” she said.

“Well, let’s take some pictures,” David Bradley said from the hallway behind River.

“Yes, yes. Come in,” Hermione said, and ushered them into the suite.

“Look Dad, this is bigger than ours!” River said as they walked into the living area.

Hermione turned to Rivers father. “David, this is my great friend, Luna Lovegood,” she said,
indicating Luna. “Luna, this is River’s father, David Bradley.”
“Pleased,” David said, and he took Luna’s hand.

The moment their palms touched Luna gently examined David’s mind, and another parade of visions passed through her, all from David’s perspective.

A woman was yelling at him, accusing him, and he was filled with sadness and anger. He had never once been unfaithful.

He sat at the head of a long table with other men in expensive suits. They were deciding the price of a technology that would aid in water production in arid regions. One side was pushing for a huge profit margin, the other, David’s, was arguing fiercely for a much smaller profit per unit and a much larger distribution. He himself had lobbied for a program to distribute the well heads free of charge in certain areas.

He was running toward a burning car in the street. A woman was trapped behind the wheel as the flames erupted in the back seat. He and another man ripped open the driver’s door, and David pulled the woman from the car.

A girl not much older than Rose yelled at him, saying she hated him, and his heart crumpled.

River looked up at him smiling. “She’s amazing, Dad.”

Luna looked into his eyes and smiled. “You’re a very good man, David Bradley. Don’t worry, your daughter will realize it soon.”

Lavender sniggered at David’s shocked expression. “Luna is quite sensitive, if you believe in that kind of thing.” Lavender chuckled again. “And she’s direct, very direct.”

“Yes,” David said, a bit dazed. “Yes, a genuine treat it is to meet you, all of you. I just can’t thank you enough for taking River on your adventures, and especially you, Selene, for keeping up his training.”

“It was our pleasure,” Lavender said. She stood and smirked as David looked at her with the same awed expression his son had displayed a few moments earlier. “Yes, I do tidy up well.”

David laughed loudly. “Oh, let’s get some pictures, it’ll make Patty crazy.”

“’That’s not nice, Dad,” River said, but his attempt to hide the smile failed.

“The former Mrs. Bradley?” Hermione asked.

David’s smile fell, and nodded. “Yes, she was” he said and all three women in the room heard the love that still resided in those words.

Luna touched his hand, and he turned to her. “Never give up, David Bradley,” she said quietly.

Hermione cleared her throat, and said, “Over here by these plants should do. La… Selene, where’s the camera?”

“Got it!” Lilly called as she came out of the girl’s room, the wizarding camera in her hands.

“That’s a really old camera,” David said, looking at the ancient device once owned by Colin Creevey. Dennis had given it to Harry on the fifth anniversary of the battle, and Harry had taught each of his children in turn how to operate it and care for it.

“Yes, but it takes the best pictures,” Lilly said with a grin.
Hermione took David’s camera and Luna took up the magical camera. The resulting pictures had exactly the effect that both Hermione and David were hoping for. Patty Arbour fumed for close to a month after River showed her the pictures of the four of them. Only love can make them that angry playing in his head in Lavender’s voice. Every time she threw the dish towel at the sink or kicked a chair he smiled. The picture of just he and Rose had been framed, and it sat on his nightstand.

Ron had nearly collapsed.

“That’s not Rose, can’t be,” he said over and over. “Can’t be, not yet, not yet…”

(*)

The skyline of Manhattan was lit gloriously in the clear, cold air of December. Christmas decorations were in the shops, lobbies, and windows, and the music of the season was playing from practically every door and window. Almost forty floors above the street snatches of the melodies still could be heard in the rooftop garden of the Hilton. The heaters were lit, and they dispelled the deep cold but it was still chilly. Rose gathered her wrap a bit tighter and turned back to a smiling River. They had the entire garden to themselves.

“Thank you so much, River,” she said. “I never imagined a play could be so… cool.”

“I liked the flying parts,” River said, and Rose stifled a laugh. “Can you imagine flying of a broom?”

This time Rose really did laugh. “Oh, I think I can,” she said through her giggles, and she hugged him, kissing his cheek and laying her head on his shoulder. She felt his arms tentatively embrace her, and she pulled back and looked into his face. The two children on the cusp of adolescence smiled softly at each other. Rose nodded slowly, closed her eyes, and leaned into him.

When their lips met River found out what it was to be a witch’s first kiss. Behind his closed eyes his world exploded in flashes of light, and a tingled spread through his whole body. He felt weightless and dizzy, it was as if the world was slowly turning around him. Her lips were soft, her hair in his hand, how did it get there? was silky and amazing. Her body was warm against his, and her hands hot on his back as she tightened the embrace. He became aware of the floor beneath his feet, and he opened his eyes, drew back, and gazed awestruck at this wonderful, amazing, brilliant, magical girl.

“I love you, Rose.”

It just came out, like it had a will of its own.

Rose smiled and nodded. “I think we’re a little young for real love, but I understand,” she said. “I care for you too, River.” She leaned in and kissed him again.

(*)

Charlene Milton sipped her whiskey and looked out her window. The Sheraton was nice enough hotel, but she preferred the Hilton. As she looked over at the roof top garden two people emerged from the doorway. From a block away she couldn’t tell, but they seemed small for adults. The boy, she decided they were young and not short, looked at the girl as she tightened her shall against the cold. She turned and they said a few words, hugged, and then they kissed. A small swirl of multicolored sparkling motes enveloped the couple, and they floated up off the rooftop, slowly spinning in midair. A few moments passed and they gently floated back down to the roof.

Charlene staggered back away from her window and toward the rear of the room. “I need to give up drinking,” said to herself as she poured the remainder of her whiskey in the bathroom sink.
“Goodbye, River,” Rose said quietly, and she closed the door to the suite. She turned to the expectant faces of her family and friends. Smiling to herself she started humming ‘Defying Gravity’ and went to her room to wash her face and change into her pajamas.
Rose had been quite the whole morning. She hadn’t said more than ten words, and Hermione was becoming concerned. Rose hadn’t been sad really, just absorbed in her own thoughts. They’d checked out of the Hilton early in the morning and caught their portkey to Dallas Texas at seven thirty. From there it was a short hop to El Paso. The second portkey decanted them in a grove of trees lining a golf course, and Lavender apparated away to check on their accommodations. She was back in minutes.

“They’ll be ready for us in about three hours,” Lavender said. “It’s still early here, six forty five A.M.”

Luna looked at her. “I have already vomited this morning, so I would like to have breakfast,” she said.

Lavender chuckled. “I’d though as much,” she said. “There’s a lorry park a few miles from here, and they’re supposed to have the best breakfasts.”

Lilly perked up immediately. “Oh, Albus will be jealous,” she said. “He loves Muggle lorries, especially those big American ones.”

Hermione turned to her daughter. “You should be hungry by now,” she said.

Rose smiled wistfully. “Last night’s dinner was one of the best meals in my life,” she said. “I want to have that again.”

Lavender sniggered. “You and River certainly did enjoy the sushi courses,” she said through her mirth, and then turned to Hermione. “It was the finest sushi I’ve ever had, and the baked Ahi tuna in miso sauce was astounding.”

“You haven’t talked much about your evening,” Hermione said to Rose. “I assume you had a good time from all the smiles.”

Rose nodded serenely. “The best,” she said quietly. “The dinner was amazing, the play was even
more so, and River… River was…” she trailed off, and stared into the desert with a faraway look, the same smile, and a small sigh.

Hermione’s eye’s widened. *Oh! Oh, Okay, more happened up on the roof that just small talk. I understand now,* she thought. After hugging her daughter she nodded, and swallowed the lump in her throat. “Come on, let’s go get breakfast,” she said.

(*)

“Howdy y’all, I’m Betty Davenport,” the grey haired woman said from her doorway. “Welcome to the El Rio Bed and Breakfast. Sorry y’all had to wait.”

Hermione took her hand. “It was no problem,” she said. “We needed to eat anyway, and we were very early.”

Betty smiled and nodded. “Thanks all the same,” Betty said. “Don’t get many folks from England round these parts. What brings a bevy of beautiful British witches to El Paso?”

Hermione sniggered at the alliteration. “I’m researching the Native American interactions with the elves,” she said. “My Daughter, my niece, and my friends are assisting me.”

“Ah, interestin’,” Betty said. “Well that nice young man, Amir Kassim, from the President’s Office arranged your bill, so stay as long as you like.”

“Thanks,” Hermione said, “By the way, Hermione Granger Weasley.” She held out her hand and Betty took it.

“Knew that,” the older woman said. “This one’s your daughter, huh?” she asked looking at Rose.

“Yes,” Rose replied. “Rose Granger Weasley,” she said and took Bettys hand. “This is my cousin, Lilly Potter, our nanny, Selene Wolfe, and our Aunt, Luna Scamander.”

“Pleased to meet you all,” Betty said. “Mr. Kassim said you’d want tea, so there’s a kettle on the stove for you.” She looked down at Lilly. “Potter, eh? Your pa?”

“Yes,” Lilly said with a smile.

Betty chuckled. “Lucky you,” she said and turned from the door. “Come on in.”

It was nice to be back in a wizarding home, even if it was far from ‘home’. Hermione could see her family and friends relaxing as they crossed the threshold. Betty waved her wand at the kitchen door. A kettle, a tea tray, and six cups and saucers gracefully flew from the kitchen into the living room and came to rest on the coffee table. As Betty poured them tea she told them the daily schedule.

“Breakfast is seven thirty to nine, I’ll have lunch, if you’re around, at one, and for dinner you’re on your own,” she said. “There’s a swimming pool in the back, just let me know if ya need towels, and quiet time is ten.”

“Thank you, Betty,” Hermione said. “Have you lived here long?”

“Born in Amorello,” she said. “Move here with Clay in Seventy Eight, lot of changes in fifty years.”

“Clay is Mr. Davenport?” Lavender asked.

“Yep,” Betty said. “He’s over to the Williams right now. They’re friends of ours, and Clay’s mindin’ the horses while they’re in Florida.” She smiled at them. “He’ll be home directly.”
“Horses? Lilly said excitedly.

“Horse girl, are ya?” Betty asked with a smile.

“All animals, really,” Lavender said.

Betty chuckled. “I’m sure Clay’ll take ya over to meet the terrible trio if ya want,” she said.

“That would be wonderful,” Lavender said. “Lilly has a way with animals, and the more she practices, the better she gets.”

“I’d like to contact the Native community,” Hermione said. “How would you suggest I go about that?”

“Clay’s got him some friends in the Otcho Chi, they’re the magical tribe round here, he can probably point you in the right direction.”

Hermione nodded. “That would be very helpful,” she said.

“Ask him when he get home, he’ll do it,” Betty said. She looked at them seriously. “They don’t like strangers much, especially white ones.”

Hermione looked grim. “I more than understand,” she said. “We were in Australia recently. The aboriginal Australians were as badly treated as the Native Americans were.”

“Not possible,” Betty said. “Not from what Clay tells me, not from what I’ve read.”

“It was the same everywhere,” Luna said. “Here, Australia, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, all the native peoples were oppressed and enslaved by the Europeans of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth centuries.”

Betty looked at her guests. “Clay’s grand parents came over during the potato famine, they were a doctor and a nurse, but the English still didn’t want ‘em cause they were Irish. They took one look at New York, and all those other Irish folks in it, and decided to go west. Took up treatin’ the Indians on the reservations. The No Maj government gave ‘m smallpox as a thank you.”

“I saw a display about the ‘Manifest Destiny’ program that the Muggle government engaged in at the Native American Museum in Washington,” Rose said. “They really gave small pox infected blankets to the Natives?”

“A few times. We killed ten million or more over the years,” Betty said flatly. “Cavalry shot a fifty thousand or so officially, settlers killed thousands more… and we invented a hundred other way to kill off the Indians.” She shook her head. “Worst part was the relocations. They took these people that had been living in the forests for thousands of years and plunked them down in the middle of the plains with nothing. Left them to stave and waste away.” She shook her head. “Or drink themselves to death. Then they tried to kill their languages and ways of life. The congress made their religions illegal, and forced their kids into schools run by monsters. We Americans try to pretend that the country wasn’t stolen, that we didn’t murder our way into this land… but we did.”

Rose looked horrified, and Hermione took her hand. “And We are doing everything we can to rectify some of that,” she said.

Rose nodded grimly back, and she twirled the key between her fingers as had become her habit when agitated. “It can’t continue,” she said fiercely.
Lavender sniggered from her perch on the arm of a stuffed chair, and Hermione looked over at her. “She is your daughter, that’s certain,” her nanny and friend said.

Betty laughed. “Nice to see what I read about y’all was true,” she said.

“Your husband is here,” Lavender said, and Betty looked at her oddly. “He just drove up.”

“You heard the truck all the way over at the barn?” Betty looked amazed.

Lavender smiled and shrugged. A few moments later an older man came in the back door. “Tag, Ben, and Moriah are all set till evenin’,” he called as he hung his hat on a peg by the door. He turned and walked into the living area of the house. Taking in his guests he said, “Howdy, y’all, I’m Clay Davenport.”

After a round of introductions made by Betty, Hermione asked him, “Mr. Davenport, your wife has indicated that you could help us contact the native magical community here in El Paso, would you be willing to do that?”

He smiled. “Call me Clay,” he said, “And yeah, I’ll go over to ma friend Marcus’ place in a bit and ask if he’ll talk with ya.” He looked at the curiously. “What’s the topic?”

“The elves,” Hermione said. “And how the natives interacted with them.

“Never met one myself, elf that is,” Clay said. “Rare round these parts.”

“Still, I need to speak with the native magical community desperately,” Hermione said.

“Marcus’ll speak with ya,” Clay said. “He’s a good friend.”

“Perhaps he could help me also,” Luna said. “My husband has a friend among the Apache, a Mr. William Standing Bear, and…”

“Your husband is friends with William Standing Bear?” Clay asked with a shocked expression.

“I believe I said that, yes,” Luna said smiling. “Is that a problem?”

“Nope, exactly the opposite,” Clay said with a chuckle. “Marcus’ll be fit to be tied. William Standing Bear is chief of the Ananocha, the magical Apache, probably the biggest magical tribe left in the country. They’re based around Taos, but they’ve spread out over the years.” He laughed for a moment. “Marcus’ll be happy to have a reason to get hold of him.”

“Well, excellent,” Hermione said. “Is there a library or bookshop you could recommend. We’ll be looking into the history of the area, and what do you suggest we see while we’re here?”

Betty chuckled and Clay answered. “There’s three good bookshops in town, used to be more but the dang computers are changin’ that,” he said. “J.B. West’s is a good shop I’d say. It’s where I’d start. They sell ‘new and used, so the selection is huge’,” he said with a laugh reciting he shops slogan. “But the building is an old stock house, so it’s a bit musty sometimes.” He chuckled to himself. “And the library is three blocks away.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said. “We’ll settle in and then go there, but we’ll be ready to meet with the native community at any time.”

“Best be sure and keep an eye on your girls while you’re out,” Betty said. “There’s a No Maj troublemaker out there, and he has a thing for young girls.”
Hermione looked sideways at Luna and Lavender. “I don’t think we’ll have a problem.”

(*)

Oh, how she loved walking into a bookshop for the first time. Each one had its own scent, its own sounds. As the floor creaked under her she smiled. Every owner arranged the stacks differently, and Hermione loved getting glimpse into the mind of the shop owner from the way they arranged the books. Mrs. West was meticulous in categorizing and alphabetizing, and the selection of older books was almost overwhelming. J.B. West’s Bookshop occupied an entire block of the old part of town. The two story stock house had been converted more than a century earlier into shop space. First it had been a general store, the old metal sign still hung over the checkout stand proclaiming that the best dried buffalo jerky in the west could be had here. Then it had been a Sears and Roebucks store. Mr. and Mrs. West had apparently bought the building in the late nineteen eighties.

The lower floor had half the space devoted to more recent publications, software, audio books, and stationary. The other half had an espresso stand and several tables with signs on each one proclaiming free high speed Wifi. The second floor was floor to ceiling shelves stuffed to bursting with books. Hermione made her way to the Native Americans section and began there. Rose went to the local history section, and Lavender, Luna, and Lilly went to the Espresso stand to order drinks. After getting her hot chocolate, Lilly appropriated a table and sat down to wait for her cousin and aunts. Rose was back first with a pile in a small push cart.

“Here’s a good guide book on El Paso,” she said, and handed the tall narrow book to Lavender. “And here’s one for Albus and Granddad.” She set down a large book with a line drawn mechanical illustration of one of the giant trucks they had seen at the lorry park on the cover. “One for you,” Rose said to Lilly, and she set a book entitled “Animals of the High Desert” in front of her. “And these are for me.” The rest of the pile was nearly a foot high.

Luna chuckled and smiled at Lavender. *So like her mother* she sent to her friend.

There’s plenty of her father and a dash of her uncle George too, Lavender sent with a smile.

Hermione appeared a short while later. “I’ve found a few here that could be helpful,” she said, setting a pile half again as high as Rose’s down on the table. Lavender and Luna smirked at the four college textbooks at the bottom of the pile. They had both observed and commented to each other on Hermione’s propensity to collect textbooks. Hermione noticed their grins. “Yes, I know,” she said with an embarrassed smile.

“All part of your charm,” Lavender said and chuckled.

“All of them history, I see,” Luna said as she read the spines. “This one is quite old.” She held up a smaller book with an aged red cover. “‘Ancient legends of the Apache’. Do you mind if I read this first?”

“I’ve more than enough,” Hermione said with a grin of her own. “Please.”

Lavender looked at her two charges. “Drinks, loo, and snacks. Then we’re off to the library,” she told them.

(*)
As much as she loved bookshops she love libraries more. The El Paso Public Library was a full city block in the downtown core. Not as big as many she’d been in, but the staff took obvious pride in their work. Hermione transfigured a take away menu from the bookshop into a library card, and together with Rose she searched the stacks for information. The library yielded several books written early in the history of El Paso and the area, some anthropological works on the local Indian tribes, and a few more on the native’s mythology. Rose took an immediate liking to one on the Pueblo people’s myths.

After about an hour of Hermione and Rose searching the library and all of them reading what they found, Lavender called a break. “Alright, you’ve collected enough to keep you busy for a week. Let’s take the girls back to the El Rio and let them at the pool.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s a good idea,” Hermione sighed. “Can you do martial arts practice in the pool?” she asked with a laugh.

Lavender looked at her with a perfectly straight face. “Yes.”

(*)

“Y’all did fight in a war!” Betty said as she walked out onto the pool deck and observed her guests in their bathing costumes. Lavender wore a one piece, but still the scars on her leg and upper chest were clearly visible. Hermione and Luna wore bikinis and their scars were also on display.

“Yes, we did,” Luna said. “The three of us have fought and killed. Does that concern you?”

Betty shook her head. “Nah, just… it’s just strange to see it. We read, gosh did we read, but seein’ it…” she shook her head again. “And you were what? Eighteen?”

“I was seventeen,” Luna said. “Selene and Hermione were both eighteen.”

Betty looked at them with an understanding smile. She nodded, set the pile of towels she was levitating on the pool deck table, and went back in the house.

Their hosts had cast the warming charm in a large circle around the pool so that guests could enjoy the water without getting chilled by the December air. While the temperatures in the desert around El Paso achieved the mid-sixties in the daytime, they fell to the low forties at night.

Her otter baby loved the water. Hermione smiled to herself as she watched Rose and Lilly play tag and race around in the large pool. Rose had learned to swim in the pond at the burrow, as all the Weasley children did. Molly was insistent that every one of her children and grandchildren be proficient at swimming. During the First Wizarding War she and her brothers had escaped a mob of Death Eaters by the simple expediency of swimming across a river, and that lesson had stuck with her. Many wizarding children never learned to swim properly, Hermione had observed. Even Fleur depended on magic more than skill when she swam in the ocean cove abutting Shell Cottage, and so by the age of four Victorie, Dominique, Molly, Fred, James, Lucy, Roxanne, Lewis, Rose, Albus, Hugo, and Lilly had all learned to master the water.

Lavender cast the sunscreen charm on herself, Luna, and Hermione, and then laid back in her chaise to read her book on El Paso. Hermione smirked at her friend. As hard as she had tried in school to not let on, Lavender had a brain behind the beauty, and she had excelled in several disciplines. While she did horribly in history of magic, as did most of the students, and her scores in Transfiguration could have been better. She was third in Potions their fifth year, just behind Harry and then
Hermione, and she was in a constant battle with Justin to be second behind Hermione in Charms. Her highest score was in Defense Against the Dark Arts their fifth and sixth years. Harry had been very pleasantly surprised to find Lavender was quite skilled at wand work during their DA practices, and Professor Snape had grudgingly placed her name above Draco’s and Pansy’s in the scoring chart at the head of the classroom on the tenth of June the next year. It stayed there until the following September. You do play the blonde bimbo well, she thought, smiling at her friend. They look right at you and never see you. It’s a perfect disguise.

Luna drifted by on a floating chaise in the water. “This makes me long for Kata Juta,” She said, and smiled serenely.

Her other brilliant friend. Luna. There was so much Hermione thought of her ethereal blonde companion, from good, strange, and astonishing, to outright wonder. Luna had changed the way Hermione viewed the universe, and she had helped Luna see differently too. They were perfect foils for each other, challenging each other to think in ways they normally would not, and Hermione would not trade those revelations for anything.

She loved these women, and another.

“I was thinking of stopping at Cohn Manor on the way back home,” Hermione said. “I’d like to check in on Carla.”

“Marcy has been exchanging messages with Carla and Obo weekly,” Luna said. “They are doing well, but I’m certain they would welcome a visit.”

“Yes, please,” Rose said from the edge of the pool as Lilly swam up.

“Yes what?” Lilly asked.

“Mum wants to stop at Carla’s on the way back home,” Rose told her.

“YES!” Lilly said excitedly, and nodded.

Hermione laughed. “Well, I guess that’s settled then.”

(*)

“You little ladies wanna come help with the terrible trio?” Clay Davenport asked.

“Yes!” the two girls chorused from the shallow end of the pool, and they swam to the steps.

Lavender rose from her chaise and helped her charges into their towels. “Let’s get you into some jeans and stout shoes then.”

As Lavender lead the girls off to their room, Clay turned to Hermione. “Marcus got back to me,” he told her. “He got an owl off to William Standing Bear, and he’s arranged for you to chat with his tribal elders tomorrow night.”

Hermione stood and took his hand. “Thank you so much Mr. Davenport,” she said.

“It’s a pleasure,” Clay replied, and he tapped his chest. “Thunderbird. We don’t shirk from the call.”

Hermione nodded. Neither did she.
“Nine nine nine is in America.”

“Is she?”

“Farson saw her. She’s with the animal and Granger.”

“Is Granger’s daughter with them?”

“Unknown. We think so.”

“Organize. We might be able to take them both.”

“As Rotfang desires.”

“And, Jason.”

“Yes?”

“Kill the animal.”

“Absolutely.”

(*)

Marcus MacDonald had just finished his morning prayer. He sipped his coffee and looked out of the window of his mobile home on the reservation. Beyond the four others between him and the desert the desiccated land stretched off toward the horizon. His neighbors knew Marcus was a Medicine Man, and they knew he had friends in the white people’s medicine community, but they didn’t know everything. Far from it. Waves of change were rising in the flow of the Great Spirit’s will, and Marcus was quite excited, and also a little afraid. The bones had showed him who was coming to meet with him. He’d been shocked, and he had cast them four more times. Each time the answer was
the same, The Bilaga'ana that were promised and White Medicine Woman.

And so he had contacted William Standing Bear as his friend had requested.

The owl he had received in return confirmed his castings, William Standing Bear had got the very same answers. He would be coming in the next few days, and he had tasked Marcus with gathering as much information about their visitors as he could politely accomplish. Marcus had then met with the elders, and they had called a fire for this evening. His tribe would welcome them to the land, and his tribe, his elders of the Dine, would sanctify them. The legends said many things, and Marcus smirked at the thought that he would be alive to see what was true and what was story.

(*)

“Problem solved,” Lavender said as the hairs in the phial on the table turned to ash.

Hermione set her fork down and clasped her friend’s hand. Lavender could not stand by and let a child be hurt, it was beyond her control, and so she hadn’t. At breakfast, after their morning run in the desert around the El Rio, Hermione had reluctantly shown the article in the newspaper about the local serial killer to Lavender. The man had tortured and killed seven so far, and another young girl had been taken the previous afternoon. Hermione had shuddered as an ice cold wall of fury descended around Lavender.

Her friend had silently stalked from the dining room at the bed and breakfast, seething in her anger. Now she sat opposite Rose, answering her questions with a satisfied smile. The Muggles ‘problem’ was now history, and another life had been saved, changed for the better, by the Good Wolf.

“We meet with Mr. Davenport’s friends tonight, yes?” Lavender asked between bites of her steak.

Hermione nodded. “Yes, we’re still on,” she said. “Clay’s friend, Marcus told him the tribal elders are very interested, and Rolf’s friend will be coming in the next few days.

From behind Hermione’s copy of Advanced Potion Making Rose’s voice said, “Wonder if we get painted again?”

Lavender sniggered. “As long as that’s all that happens, I’m fine with it.”

Hermione smiled. “Luna and Lilly should be back from their wander in the desert soon,” she said. “They were very interested to see if they could find traces of the thunderbird Rolf’s grandfather released here in nineteen twenty three.”

“Fascinating man, Newt Scamander,” Rose said. “He was Hufflepuff, but he was as brave as any Gryffindor.” Her eyebrows scrunched together. “Aunt Fleur adds peppermint to her calming draft potion.”

Hermione sniggered at her daughter’s ability to have two very different thoughts at the same time. “Yes to both,” she said. “Newt Scamander was an early proponent of creature rights, and Rolf is just as driven. This is why, as you knew, he and Luna were major forces in the movement that got the elfish welfare laws passed. As to potions, Fleur was taught at Beauxbatons, and their potion making style is different from ours. So is Durmstrang’s.”

Rose grinned. “Will we be going to Romania?” she asked. “I like Mr. Krum and Anastasia.”

Lavender smirked. “You should like Anastasia, she’s just like your mother,” she muttered, and then laughed at Hermione’s incredulous expression. “Oh, please,” she said. “She has your hair only in black, your eyes, and nearly your brains. There’s a reason Ron calls her the Russian Hermione.”
Hermione rolled her eyes, conceding. “That’s as may be, but Victor loves her dearly, so I don’t think there’s any deep seated psychological implications to our similarities.”

Lavender smiled and nodded. *If it helps you sleep, just keep telling yourself that,* she thought.

(*)

“Ah, that’d be Marcus,” Mr. Davenport said in response to the chimes. He stood from his chair in the living room and went to the door. Hermione accompanied him.

Clay opened the door to reveal a tall, broad shouldered Navaho man. Marcus was in his mid sixties, and so his long black hair was shot with silver, but his eyes sparkled with youthful glee as he stepped through the door into the Davenport’s home.

“Good to see you again, Marcus,” Clay said, and the two men shook hands. “This here is Hermione Granger Weasley,” he continued, indicating Hermione. He stepped back and looked at the remainder of his guests. “That one with her nose in the book is her daughter, Rose. This one is her niece, Lilly Potter, this is Selene Wolfe, their nanny, and this is Luna Scamander.”

The power that radiated off the last woman he was introduced to nearly took Marcus’s breath away. He had expected Hermione to be the powerhouse, Luna was a complete surprise, and then it hit him. “Scamander?” he asked.

Luna smiled. “Yes, Newt was my grandfather in law,” she told him.

Marcus smiled broadly, the coincidences were piling up. “He brought us Non’ach’ika, he had named him Frank. We had thought the thunderbirds were extinct, but then he comes to us with him. My father was there with William Standing Bear when he opened his case. Toch’act’a, his mate, appeared some years later, drawn to him we think. Now there’s at least a dozen.

Luna nodded. “My student and I went into the desert looking for them today.”

Marcus shook his head. “They don’t live around here,” he said. “Couple hundred miles north and west, around Ch’inili.”

“We’d love to meet them,” Lilly said, and Marcus knelt to talk with her.

“They’re pretty big for a little lady like yourself,” he said with a grin.

Lilly smiled and Marcus’s heart melted. “I’m not afraid, Mr. Macdonald.”

He chuckled. “Fear don’t run in your family from what I read.”

Luna touched Marcus’s arm, and he looked up at her. “We have a way with the creatures of the earth, she and I,” she told him.

“As do the Dine,” he said. “You are welcome among my people,” he said as he stood. “Maybe tomorrow or the next day we’ll go up north and see if we can hunt ‘em up for you.”

Hermione nodded and smiled. “That would be wonderful, Mr. Macdonald,” she told him.

“Marcus, please,” he replied and took her hand. “My elders and I have set a fire at our sacred space, have you fire traveled?”

“We use the floo system in England all the time,” Hermione said.
Marcus nodded. “It’s similar,” he said, and he turned to Clay “Yi Ahidíltléé’, can we use your fire pit?”

Mr. Davenport smiled. “I’ll get her ready,” he said, and walked out of the room toward the back door.

(*)

It was nearly identical to floo travel. Clay threw a purple powder into the fire and the flames turned bright blue. Marcus said something in his native language, and Lavender stepped through first, then Hermione, Rose, Lilly, and Luna followed. Marcus and Clay stepped in a few moments later. The spinning disorientation was completely absent, it was more like taking a few steps down a hallway. They emerged from a fire at the top of a butte.

An old man and an even older woman sat on blankets a few yards from the fire. They were flanked by more than twenty others in a broad arc facing the fire.

“Ya'at eeh!,” the old woman said. “Please, sit with us and share.”

“It will be our honor,” Hermione said, and she sat on a blanket facing them. “I am Hermione Granger Weasley.”

“We have heard much, Hermione,” The old man said. “The Dine are proud to welcome you to the land.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said as Rose sat next to her, Luna, Lavender, and Lilly sitting on blankets behind them. She introduced them and then looked out at the spectacular landscape. Tall pillars of dull red rock jutted hundreds of feet above the surrounding desert forming flat topped buttes. They were ensconced on one of the larger ones. “Your sacred space is beautiful, much like ours.”

“The medicine people of the Dine have met here for as long as the Dine have been.” The old woman said. “Ellen Merry Dear. This is my son John.” Her gaze was piecing and Hermione smirked, another woman of power. “Marcus tells us you’re looking into the elves.”

“I am,” Hermione answered. She looked at Luna, and her blonde friend nodded back. “I intend to free them from the enchantment.”

It seemed everyone in the gathered Dine smiled at once, and a few laughed. “The Bilaga'ana medicine woman that was promised,” Ellen said.

“You have prophecies regarding Hermione?” Luna asked.

“Some, we think,” Marcus said. “The people of the earth were told, long ago, that she would come, and that she would be in the company of White Medicine Woman.”

“Met a few over the years,” John Merry Dear said. “Our ancestors in all the tribes kept watch. Looking. Listening. But until now we didn’t think she would be real.” He turned to Luna. But you can you wind talk, can’t you?

Luna smirked. I can wind talk to all of you if I wish, everyone on the mountain top heard in their head.

Lavender sniggered, as did Ellen, and the old woman turned to face her. “And so she is. That would make you their skin walker guardian.”
“Possibly,” Lavender said.

Ellen laughed and shook her head. “Skinwalkers! You’re all such enigmas.”

“I’m not an animagus,” Lavender said. “I’m a werewolf.”

“Eh, all the same,” Ellen said, and Lavender sniggered again. “We were told that a Bilaga’ana medicine woman would come, in her company would be White Medicine Woman and their skinwalker protector.”

Hermione looked into Ellen’s eyes. “Who told you?”

Ellen laughed. “I think you already know.” She turned and walked back to her place and then motioned five of the elders forward. “You are them, I can feel it, we all can. The Bilaga’ana that were promised so long ago.” She nodded to five women behind her guests. “We have gifts for you.”

A blanket was draped around Hermione’s shoulders, and the gathered Dine spoke as one in their native language. Luna’s thoughts drifted into their minds. They are chanting a welcome prayer and blessing for the medicine woman from over the great water. You were prophesied in much the same way as you were in Australia it seems, Hermione.

Another blanket was draped around Lavender’s shoulders and a different chant was sung. This one concerns a great woman warrior that comes to humanity when needed. You are thought to be a demigod, Lavender.

Lavender smirked and snorted. Hardly.

Then a blanket was placed on Luna’s shoulders. They sing of White Medicine Woman. Me, I suppose. Ahh, it’s not the color of my skin they sing of, it’s the color of my magic. White Medicine is the purest, the most in accordance with the Great Spirit’s will apparently. I shall try to live up to it.

At last two blankets were draped around Lilly and Rose. Even the children were prophesied. They call Rose “His Flower”, and Lilly “His Animal Singer”.

“Thank you for honoring us,” Hermione said. “I’m not certain we deserve it.”

“I am,” the oldest man present said. Ellen and John turned to the white haired man huddled on his blanket. It was obvious immediately that they all deferred to this eldest of the Dine Medicine Men. “Bring me the story sand.”

While one woman left the circle of firelight, Ellen turned to Hermione. “Come, sit with us. Face the fire and we’ll show you what we know.” She ushered Hermione and her family and friends to a spot near where she had been. She put Hermione next to the old man, and said, “Hermione, this is Leon Crow Feather, eldest of the medicine people of the Dine.”

“A genuine pleasure,” Hermione said as she sat. Rose sat next to her mother and snuggled close to hear the conversation.

Leon smiled at Rose, and said, “Well, little lady, I see the light of a thousand suns in your eyes. Smart… and driven, oh how driven you are.” He nodded. “Merlmak picked well.”

Rose laughed lightly. “Merlmak? Really?”

Leon looked at Rose with a questioning smile.
“The Dreamers of Australia called him ‘Merry Mac’,” she told him. “We called him Merlyn.”

“Been to see our cousins on the other side of the world, have you?” Leon said. The woman that had left returned with a small clay pot. She handed it to Leon. “What did you learn there, young one?” he asked Rose.

“I learned to Dream.”

The old man grinned. “To walk in The Dream is a skill not many possess,” he said nodding, and he turned to Hermione. “Your search here will require our help, and we are honored to give it. Tonight we will share our stories of Merlmak, when Willian comes we will share what we know of Merlmak’s travels.” He stood and cast off his blanket, then he took a handful of story powder, threw it in the fire, and stepped into the flames.

The fire bloomed around him, and he turned to face the gathered Dine and their friends. Leon raised his right arm and a shape formed in the flames with a molding motion of his hands the shape became recognizable as a great four winged bird. Another motion and the thunderbird was joined by a giant bear. He smiled and nodded to John.

John Merry Dear spoke. “The great Medicine Man, Merlmak, came from over the waters long ago. The mounds had yet to be built, the great cities in the south were still a dream, but the Dine were here, living the sacred ways.” Leon moved his hands up the flames, and they formed a scene, a moving three dimensional vista of a pueblo. People came and went from the multiple dwellings in the village set in the cliff. Then a man appeared. He was tall, but only slightly taller than the Dine people themselves. His features were thinner and sharper than the broader faces of the Dine, and his hair fell in great waves around his shoulders.

“Merlmak came among us then, teaching and learning,” John continued. “For many years he would wander the land visiting the peoples of the earth. The mound builders of the east, the fisherpeople of the northwest, the wanderers of the plains, and the dwellers of the great forest, all of them were visited by Merlmak.”

The figure of Merlyn came and went among the ever changing scene. The Pueblo grew, many layers of homes reaching up the side of the cliff. A wall around the area in front of the cliff face appeared. Inside the wall the people of the Dine kept boars and various birds in pens. Outside the wall crops sprung up.

“He taught us many of the earth’s secrets, how to charm the most from a barren land, and he taught us how to build walls and dwellings that would keep us safe from the dangers of the world and men. We in turn taught him to walk softly on the earth, and to care for his fellows. For Merlmak came to us a hard man, but he left us as a person, a human being, as we are.”

The scene in the fire changes to a vista of the shore of an ocean. Waves rolled up onto the beach, and a large group of people were gathered on the shore. Merlyn was among them.

“Merlmak left from the shore of the great waters of the west, sailing in his great canoe on the wind he had made.” The fire formed the shape of a beautifully made sailing ship. It was long and slender, with one large mast forward and one smaller mast rearward. An enormous sail billowed from the main mast and the ship sailed away over the horizon.

“For many generations the people of the earth lived and loved and told the tales of Merlmak, then one day he appeared again on the shores of the great western waters. This time he was in the company of his wife, and together they traveled the land and met with the people.”
The fire scene showed Merlyn and Nimue meeting with the Dine and other tribes. Hermione was impressed with the quality of the images Leon conjured from the flames he stood in, but she could see it was costing the old man terribly to do it. John saw the concern on her face.

“Don’t worry, Hermione,” he said. “Leon can do this for hours.” He chuckled. “Though he’ll probably sleep for the next three days.”

She nodded. “I have elderly family and friends,” she said. “I just don’t want him to overdo it.”

John smiled and continued. “Merlmak and his bride lived among the Dine for many years, and his wife, Nim, taught the women of the Dine as they taught her.”

The fire scene showed a large group of women gathered around a fire. A tall woman with fine, striking features stood and addressed the rest. Then it changed again to Nimue leading a group through the desert to a secluded spot. She stopped them at the base of a great cliff, and there they gathered and danced.

“Merlmak and Nim spoke of their adventures and the other peoples of the earth that they had found. They showed us the dances and rites of our long lost cousins, and they shared their medicine with us.”

The scene changed again. Merlyn stood before a large gathering of the people. It seemed many tribes were represented, some wore feathers in their hair, some wore clothing made of bark, some of deer skin, and some of buffalo.

“Finally, before Merlmak and Nim left the land, he told us a tale of the future.” Again the fire scene transformed. A woman with long curly hair walked across the desert, behind her two other woman followed. “Merlmak told us of a Bilaga'ana woman that would come. She would have powerful medicine, but more, she would have friends, friends of even greater power.”

“Chief among these were her sisters. One would be White Medicine Woman. Her power, he said, would rival his own. He told us that she would be a wind talker like no other, that she would have a special connection with the animals, and that she, as the Bilaga'ana woman that was promised, would be known by her compassion.”

_That phrase again_, Luna said in Hermione’s mind.

“Merlmak also told of the Skinwalker that would accompany them. He said he had known her many times over the long years, that his precious flower would be guarded by the fiercest of warriors, and that his brother daughter was a great champion of the people.”

_Yeah, yeah_, Lavender thought, and Luna grinned.

“And he spoke of his precious flower.” John looked down at Rose and Lilly. The women in the fire parted and to girls appeared behind them. “She will come to you as innocent as the rain, he told us, but with a soul as old as time. She will be fearless, and she will be as strong as her mother in her passion. Of her animal singer companion he told us little,” John said, looking at Lilly. “But this he did say. My precious flower will have her animal singer with her, be kind to her, and trust her.”

“When they come to you, it will be a sign. Gather the tribes. Help them in their hunt,” John said as he turned to the assembled Dine elders. “Let us rejoice! Our long wait is over.” Leon stepped out of the fire and was help back to his place by John and Luna.

Drums appeared in the hands a few, and some rose to dance in the rhythm of those drums and the flicker of the firelight. Others took up the chant, a song of celebration and joy. Gradually first Luna,
and then Hermione and Lavender were pulled into the dance. Finally, Leon leaned in to Rose and Lilly, and he said, “Go, celebrate and sing, learn and dance, be one with the earth as we are.”

(*)

Lavender set her wine glass on the table in the kitchen of the El Rio. “I. Am. Knackered,” she declared as her head fell back against the chair. “Gods, how long did we dance?”

“Several hours,” Luna said as she twirled around the kitchen, wine glass in hand, still caught up in the dance. “The Dine are every bit as joyful and pleased as the Dreamers were, they’re just a little more reserved.”

“You call what we just did ‘reserved’?” Hermione said, incredulously.

Luna just smiled. “I think I will cast a heating charm on the pool and go for a swim,” she said.

“Good on you,” Lavender said. “I’m joining Lilly and Rose.” With that she staggered off toward her room.

“So, what are your thoughts?” Hermione asked, suddenly wide awake and serious.

“I think he obviously was very gifted at divination, the stories are shockingly accurate,” Luna replied. “As to the Dine, I believe we can trust them just as we trusted the Dreamers. The aboriginal communities will be our connection to him, Hermione. He left us a clear trail through them.”

“I agree.”

“When William Standing Bear comes to tell his stories I intend to join with them,” Luna said flatly.

Hermione sniggered. “As I suspected you would,” she said.

“Yes, I know,” Luna said with a wink.

Hermione laughed. “No need to reach into my mind for that, eh?”

“You are an open book to those that love you, Hermione. It’s one of your greatest charms.”

Hermione rose stiffly from her chair. “Well, I think I’ll join you in the pool,” she said. “A little hot soak will do me some good.”

Luna smiled and took her hand. As she started toward the door to the pool deck Hermione stopped her. “I need to get my swimming kit on,” she said.

Luna tugged her thought the door. “What on earth for?” she said, laughing.
“Just like that, Lilly,” Luna said. “Yes, very well done.”

The giant golden bird closed its eyes and leaned into the young girl’s hand as she stroked its head.

“She’s a natural, Marcus,” his friend, Tarak Williams, said quietly.

Marcus nodded. They stood at the edge of a canyon. The great Thunderbird was perched on the canyon edge facing her gathered human friends. Lilly stood before her, communing with her. Luna and Lavender stood few paces back, Luna looking serene, and Lavender, wand in hand, watching every move the Thunderbird made.

“Toch’act’a won’t hurt her,” Luna said.

“Um hm,” Lavender muttered and changed nothing.

Luna chuckled. “What are you feeling, Lilly?” she asked.

“She’s happy,” Lilly said, eyes closed and a smile on her face. “She likes people, well some people, and that includes us. She has a special fondness for Mr. Williams.”

Tarak smiled. “I saved one of her chicks forty years ago,” he said. “They never forget.”

“I wish Mum was here,” Rose said.

“Hermione has a problem with large animals, I’ve noticed,” Luna observed. “She’s never liked horses, I first noticed it at Hogwarts. She had a problem with equines, and even Professor Firenze was difficult for her. I think it was a struggle for her to view the centaurs as the equals they are with the resemblance to horses that they have.” Luna smiled. “She overcame it, though.”

“She rode a thestral,” Rose pointed out. “Twice”

Luna laughed. “Not without complaint, at least the first time when I was there.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” Rose conceded. “She did point it out when she got me and Lilly riding lessons.”

“You could ride Toch’act’a if you asked, I bet,” Tarak said.
“Not in this lifetime,” Lavender growled as she glared at him.

Tarak snickered.

Luna smiled at her friend. “No, I agree. I don’t think Lilly should,” she said. “But I would like the opportunity.”

Luna stepped up to the giant bird and laid her hand on Toch’act’a’s neck. Both Luna and Lilly laughed at the same time, and then Lilly stepped away from Toch’act’a. The thunderbird lowered herself to the ground and Luna climbed onto her back between her front and rear wings. The rest of the humans present backed away, and Luna and Toch’act’a took to the sky.

(*)

The picture showed a desert valley. Suddenly an enormous bird flew into the scene with Luna, arms spread in ecstasy, riding her back.

“It was exhilarating,” Luna said from over Hermione’s shoulder.

“I’ll take your word for it,” Hermione muttered.

“She’s very friendly,” Lilly said. “And she’s gravid.”

“Yes, she is,” Luna agreed, nodding. “I’m pleased you caught that, Lilly, and thank you for remembering the camera.” She sipped her wine. “Toch’act’a is also quite intelligent. I’d say on the level of a six year old but with a far greater sense of self. She was happy to fly with me.”

Lavender put her hand on Hermione’s shoulder. “How far through that pile of books did you get?” she asked.

Hermione pulled off her reading glasses and rubbed her eyes, “I skimmed the history texts,” she said. “Read the legends and the local history books, and I’m just starting the western geography handbook.”

Lavender nodded. “I spoke with Betty,” she said. “There’s a local pizza shop that delivers. We’ve all had a busy day, so I thought we’d get carry out.”

Hermione nodded, putting her glasses back on and turning back to her book. “Good idea,” she said. “No anchovies, please.”

(*)

There were twice as many people around the fire, Hermione noticed as she stepped through.

“Ya’at eeh,” Ellen Merry Dear said. “Welcome once more.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said, walking up to Ellen and taking her hand. “We are happy to be among you again.” Lavender, Luna, Lilly, Rose, and Marcus followed Hermione through the fire, and they gathered behind her. “When last we met,” Hermione said in her High Priestess voice. “You gave us gifts, gifts we will treasure always. Tonight we return a thing to you that was taken.” From her bag she pulled a small, cloth wrapped object. With great care she unwrapped the figure of Merlyn, bent, and placed it in Ellen’s hands.

Ellen trembled, and tears streaked her stern face. “All doubt is now gone!” she said loudly. “The Bilaga’ana medicine woman that was promised is with us!”
A loud cheer went up from the crowd, and many shouted or howled in elation. Lavender smiled, threw back her head, balled her fists, and let loose a werewolf howl of her own. The people surrounding her laughed, and they joined in the howl. In her den a mother Coyote started at the sound, and she looked out across the valley. Her pack mates were roused from their afternoon slumber by the noise, and they gather in front of their dens. The howl from the distant humans rose again, and from their perch on a hill in the desert the coyotes answered.

The coyote’s song drifted back to them, and in the glow of the firelight Hermione saw that many of the people wore costumes from different tribes. There were deer skinned visitors from the east, finely adorned representatives of the plains tribes, fur draped members from the north, and seashell adorned friends from the south.

A man approached wearing a feathered head dress and elaborately beaded shirt and trousers. He took Hermione’s hand, and said, “Nea’êšemen.”

*He is Cheyanne,* Luna said in her mind. *He says, “thank you”*

“You are so very welcome,” Hermione said, and the man smiled.


As if moved by an inner force, they all stood from their blankets and surrounded their visitors. Hands rested on their shoulders as the gathered People of the Earth began to chant. *They are blessing us and themselves,* Luna sent. *They sing of your compassion, of Lavender’s strength, of my power, of Lilly’s gift, and of Rose’s purpose. As with the Dreamers, we seen are a sign, a portent of changes to come. They also see an ordained purpose to their lives, but as with us they are uncertain as to the actual particulars of the mission.* She grinned.

*Perhaps we can help. I may have an answer to your question,* Luna sent to the entire group. Those that hadn’t been at their first meeting gasped and looked at her in shock. *As we did with your cousins, the Dreamers, we can join with you, unify us all, if you desire.* Luna felt a wave of not just acceptance but eagerness.

She took her Sisters hands. *Keep your hands upon us,* she sent. *Prepare yourselves.*

*“Simbios!”* Luna, Lavender, and Hermione all said in unison.

The world fell away, and once more Luna Scamander led a group of minds into the landscape of the Dream. The people were bright sparks around her, and her sister’s presence glowed with her next to her own spark. She felt the people’s wonder, and she let her own giddy happiness flow out to them. *This is my gift. We can see farther than you can imagine, but first I would like to speak with our friends among the Dreamers.* Their view of the world of the Dream expanded. From the Pacific to the Atlantic they could see the masses of people and creatures living, striving, and hoping within their own Dream. She expanded their view again, now to encompass the whole of the earth. Luna felt the same awe and joy from the People of the Earth as she had from the Dreamers, and she directed their focus to an isolated home in the outback of Australia.

(*)

Carla Williams walked across the kitchen of Cohn Manor and placed Obo’s cup of tea in front of the aged elf, and then she handed the second cup to Jarra Oonagan. “Strange not havin’ a house full,” she said. “With the last batch gone and the new not comin’ till after Christmas, won’t know what to do with ourselves, eh, Obo?”
“Mistress Carla seems to find work without any help,” Obo said with a twinkle in his eye.

Jarra laughed. “He’s got ya there, Carla,” he said as he looked out the desert baking in the morning sun. “Scorcher today.”

The old woman smiled and sat in her chair. “Wonder when we’ll hear from Hermione and the rest?” she asked.

_Hello, Carla, Obo, Jarra, Luna’s presence said. I am joined with the peoples of North America, and I am introducing them to the community of Dreamers so that they may become as we are._

Carla barked out a laugh, Jarra smiled and shook his head, and Obo nodded with a broad smile of his own. _Welcome, my cousins, Jarra thought. He laughed again. I envy you the experiences to come, the traveling, and the seeing. I am eager to do it again, as you will be. Our purpose is at hand, is it not?_

(*)

_It is, Jarra_ , Luna sent into the mass consciousness that was the gathered people, the link, as the Sisters now thought of it. _We will explore further. When all the peoples of the earth that remember are touched, then we will see what we can really do. But for now…_ she drew away from Jarra, Carla, and Obo, and then she turned her attention to the sky.

There was another mutual gasp of wonder, and Luna chuckled as again life and magic glittered across the firmament.

(*)

_Reaching across the galaxy Luna grasped a magical spark among the stars, and then she secured her connection to the People of the Earth firmly. Get ready, she sent to them, this is a little frightening the first time. They traversed the unimaginable distance in a heartbeat._

And as with the Dreamers she, her new, and her old friends, looked out at another distant world through a set of alien eyes.

_O’k’a’orent Ta flew. That was her being, that was her life, and that was her joy. The eternal clouds around her, the triple suns above, and the sweet taste of the sulfur mist as she opened her mouth and filtered the wind. Five moons shown in the orange tinted sky, and the ring shadow off to her right fizzled with lightening in the depths of the bottomless atmosphere. T’arrent’ Ho trumpeted to her and she barrel rolled in happiness. He flew past her as his muscle, diamond shaped body pushed him through the clouds with powerful beats of his wings._

_They resemble mantas a mind in the peoples midst observed._

_O’k’a’orent’s mate was strong and gentle, and soon their littles would be clinging to her back as they learned the ancient ways of the soarers._

_Luna and the gathered people felt the Tha surge within their host, and O’k’a’orent Ta used her magic to funnel the nutritious mix of sulfur and carbon crystals that rained out of the clouds to her gaping mouth. In that moment she was one with the Tha, living as one with the whole of creation. She reveled in the peace that was the connection to the all, and Luna’s friends felt her joy mixed with their own._

(*)
Luna drew them back and opened her eyes. *I believe this is what he imagined I would do.* She sent to them. *There is more, I am certain, but for now is this not wonder enough?* There were mutterings of astonishment, some chuckles and a few tears of happiness.

“Merlmak saw you from afar,” and old man said. He looked to be an ancient face in a pile of blankets. John Merry Deer walked over to the old man and helped him to Luna. The rest fell silent as he approached Hermione, Luna, and Lavender. “I am William Standing Bear,” the old man said. He looked at Luna and smiled. “You are Rolf’s wife?”

“Yes, Mr. Standing Bear,” Luna said. “Rolf sends his compliments, and I am very happy to make your acquaintance.”

“Rolf Scamander is a good man, a true man,” William Standing Bear said. “I was a young boy when we stood on the cliff and Newt opened his case. Marcus’ father was with me that day, to see a wonder, my father had told us. He was right.” He took Luna’s hand and looked deeply into her eyes, into her soul. “White Medicine Woman, you have been looked for, sought after, and now I see you.”

“And I see you,” Luna replied, and she kissed his cheek. “We seek your help. As we have told the Dine, we search for a thing Merlmak made. He left them scattered over the earth, and we are gathering them to break the great enchantment the holds the elves in slavery.”

William smiled crookedly. “He did say you would be led by her,” he said looking at Hermione. “Injustice offends you, doesn’t it? Hurts you in your heart and causes you pain. Don’t tolerate it, do you?”

Hermione looked at him grimly. “No, sir. I don’t”


“Yes,” Marcus replied for him, and he ushered Leon forward. The two old men embraced, and then spoke in a Navaho/Apache mix for a moment.

William turned back to Hermione. “We will show you some of the stories of Merlmak we have kept,” he said and smirked. “Might answer a few of your questions.” William turned to the fire and sat while Leon threw a fist full of the story sand into it. The fire flared and Leon stepped in.

“Our friends from the east tell us that Merlmak arrived on their shores thousands of moons ago. He came to them broken and angry. His home and all his family and friends had been destroyed. He cared for his brother daughter for a time, but at last he left the shores of the far lands and journeyed to us aboard his great canoe.” The ship that Leon had made in the flames for them the last time appeared in the fire again. It sailed up to a forested shore, a long wooden bridge extended from its bow, and then Merlyn emerged from the rear and walked down the gang way to the shore. A group of natives met him.

“Merlmak needed to learn the ways of the Great Spirit,” William continued. “He first tried to rule the people, but they simply laughed and turned away. After a time his anger and hurt became small enough that he was able to learn. He traveled the land, learning from the people, and carrying stories of distant tribes to the corners of the earth.” The fire showed Merlyn, dressed in long robes and carrying his staff, walking in the forests, plains, and deserts, and meeting with the tribes. “At last he came to the Dine, and he settled with us for a time.” Again the fire showed the pueblo and its growth. “Merlmak taught us, and we taught him, for he had an anger that still burned. Coyote had destroyed his home for entertainment, and Merlmak had yet to understand Coyote’s purpose. The Great Spirit gave Coyote power. She gave Coyote the power so that he would stir the people. When the people become too comfortable, too complacent, then they lose that thing that makes us
interesting to the Great Spirit. We are her greatest expression here on the earth, and she desires our
growth as spirit people.” William looked at Hermione and smiled.

“Here Merlmak learned to be a human.”

The fire showed Merlyn gathered with the Dine. They surrounded him and placed their hands on his
shoulders, and Merlyn wept.

“And at last we were able to help him mourn the loss of his home,” William continued. “At last he
was able to speak of it to us. Merlmak told us of a great island, his home amid the waves. He told us
that his canoe was but a small example of his people’s art. He told of his brother in all but blood, and
of his brother daughter that he accompanied to the far lands, and how they were saved from the
destruction of their island. He loved his birthplace, and he was deeply saddened and angered by its
loss.”

The scene changed to Merlyn sitting by the fire and telling stories.

“And Merlmak knew of the future,” William said. “He told us of the coming of the Bilaga'ana like
himself, and that the trials of that time would be hard, but he said that we would see the Bilaga'ana
learn as he had, become human as he had, and then he said that a Bilaga'ana woman would come,
that she would have White Medicine Woman by her side, and his brother daughter at her back. And
he told us we would know her by her compassion.”

Luna smiled broadly. Yes, they certainly would, she sent just to Hermione.

“Merlmak loved his brother daughter. She is a fierce skinwalker warrior that returns to the people
again and again.” The fire showed a werewolf fighting a horde of fur clad warriors, then a werewolf
defending a small girl from a lion, and then it showed her charging into an oncoming crowd of men
dressed in armor. “He told us that his promised one would also be in the company of White Medicine
Woman, a person of great strength and wisdom, and of great power. Last he told us that his precious
flower, his seeker, holder of the key, would come among us with her animal sister, and that we were
to aid in her hunt.”

“Merlmak’s days were long on the earth. The people that had welcomed him grew old, their
grandchildren grew old, and their grandchildren’s grandchildren grew old, yet Merlmak remained.”
William looked across the gathered people to a man dressed in skins. The man had a long sharp nose
and finely chiseled features. “The Wampanoag were first to see him, and it was they who bid him
farewell when he journeyed to the other lands and met with our cousins. They tell this story of
Merlmak when he first came to us.”

Leon flared the fire around him, wiping away the image of Merlyn waving from the stern of his ship.

“As he wandered the forest Merlmak came upon a woman by a stream.” the scene in the fire
followed William’s narration. “‘What are you fishing for?’ he asked as she cast her net into the water.
‘The trout in this stream are fat and large,’ she told him. ‘Many meals can be made from just a few.’
Merlmak used his Orenda, and many fine trout flew from the water to the shore. The woman
gathered ten and began throwing the rest back into the river. ‘Why do you throw them back?’
Merlmak asked her. ‘We must take only what we need from the earth,’ she told him. ‘These will
become more in time, and my children will know their children.’ This was Merlmak’s first lesson, for
his people had taken without thought, and that was part of their undoing.”

William smiled at the Wampanoag man, then he turned to a woman. “The Natchez tell this story,”
He said. “One day Merlmak appeared on the banks of the great river. The people welcomed him and
told him of their great chief in the sky. Every morning the great chief would rise and walk across the
sky to his night lodge. Half of the days his wife, the moon, would join him and half the days she would shun him for the night. The people asked Merlmak what he knew of the great chief and his wife, and Merlmak told many stories to the people. He spoke of how the peoples of the earth made great temples to the sun and moon, of how feasts and ceremonies were made in their honor, and when he had finished the chief of the people asked Merlmak’s help in building proper sacred places to commune with the great chief of the sky.”

“Merlmak showed the medicine people of the great river how to raise the earth with their power,” William continued. “Together they marked the patterns of the stars and how to know the passing of the seasons by them. He showed how to set stones at the far ends of the sun’s journey so that they would know when winter was done and that summer had become autumn. And so the mounds were built with Merlmak’s help. Many thousands came every year to see the sun and stars mark their travels, and Merlmak was with them.”

The fire showed huge masses of people gathered on and around the mounds. The sun rose over a point of earth on one mound, and the people danced and sang their praise.

William looked at another man with a red painted face. “And perhaps most important, the Niimiipu tell this story. ‘Merlmak walked the sea of grass until he came to the Rocky Mountains’.”

In the fire Merlyn strode through head high grass. When he arrived at the mountains he was met by a group of extravagantly painted people.

“Merlmak had a love for mountains, and he dwelled there with the Niimiipu for a long time. In his company was an elf, No’oma, and she was kind and helpful to the people.”

Well, well, well, Luna sent to Hermione and Lavender.

“Merlmak and No’oma travelled to Matȟó Thípila, and there he made his home.”

The fire showed a tall flat topped spire of rock. Its sheer sides were lined with vertical groves and rubble was piled around its base.

“As time passed the people would come to Matȟó Thípila to seek him out, and No’onma would greet them. One day a man came to Matȟó Thípila seeking Merlmak. ‘I have come to speak with him,’ he told No’oma. ‘I have a gift for him and a question.’ No’oma took the man into the heart of Matȟó Thípila and there he met with Merlmak. ‘I bring you a gift of flint and obsidian’ the man said, and he laid many fine points at Merlmak’s feet.”

The man in the fire spread the offering before Merlyn, and he nodded to the man.

“Merlmak smiled at the generous gift, and he said, ‘I am pleased with your gifts and would ask what you want from me?’ The man bowed his head and said, ‘I have lost my family and tribe. A flood came in the night, and I was the only one to escape the water.’ He looked to Merlmak with sorrowful eyes. ‘I wish to forget.’ Merlmak bowed his head and a tear fell from his eye.”

Merlyn laid his hand on the man’s shoulder and the man looked up into his kind eyes.

“ ‘I understand your sorrow and I will help’ Merlmak said to the man. ‘But in return I ask from you your life. From this day you will be my warrior, protector of my home. Do this, and I will give you what you ask.’ The man agreed, and Merlmak performed a great ritual. He granted the man the forgetfulness and more, for he made the man into a bear, and the bear became legend.”

In the fire Merlyn raised a great magical force and directed it at the man. He bent and changed and grew into a giant bear.
“Those that sought Merlmak with a pure heart were hidden from the bear, but those that tried to find him with greed or anger in their hearts met the bear instead. To this day the bear still guards Matȟó Thípila.”

William looked at Hermione. “There are more tales, but I now sense you have questions.”

Hermione looked at him and smirked. “Two,” she said. “Where is Matȟó Thípila, and can you call No’oma for us?”

(NEA’ESHEMENO!) Thank you – Cheyenne

Matȟó Thípila Devils Tower, Wyoming

My great grandfather was Wampanoag

My wife’s grandmother was Cherokee.

I grew up among the Dine.

I’ve drawn similarities, but revealed nothing. The secrets are kept.

Well, it appears I got myself some critics. I’ve said this before to some reviewers, guess I should state it outright.

“attack of the Mary Sue’s.”

From Wiki: “A Mary Sue is an idealized and seemingly perfect fictional character, a young or low-rank person who saves the day through unrealistic abilities. Often this character is recognized as an author insert or wish-fulfillment.[1] Sometimes the name is reserved only for women, and male Sues are called "Gary Stus" or "Marty Stus"; but more often the name is used for both sexes.”

None of these women and girls are perfect. Hermione has, as evident in the books, some issues with self-control and confidence, she’s also devious in my take. Luna has issues that will be arising later in the saga, unrequited love for Dean, and her general ‘Lunaness’. Lavender has been through the fire. She has some independence issues (she chafes at being micromanaged), she has some control issues, and she has some deep seated insecurities that drive her perfectionism. Rose is a ten year old with all the issues that come with, she is a Weasley, and in addition she has all the crap that comes with being a genius. (Is there any doubt she
wouldn’t be?) They used that word for me in my youth, but I grew up friends with three over 180 IQ individuals that dwarfed my intellect. My characterization of Rose is based on the two that didn’t go insane.

“Lavender was terrible in school”

Nope. Hermione ragged off on her because of jealousy, but, per cannon…

From Potter Wiki: “Magical abilities and skills

**Divination**: Lavender shared a close relationship with Professor Trelawney. It was implied that she was good at Divination and most likely took the subject to N.E.W.T.-level.

**Transfiguration**: Lavender advanced to N.E.W.T.-level Transfiguration, showing aptitude in the subject. She must have achieved either an 'Exceeds Expectations' or an 'Outstanding' on her O.W.L. exam.

**Charms**: In 1996 Lavender along with Parvati was able to cast the Locomotion Charm in preparation for their upcoming O.W.L. exam. She was also able to produce a non-corporeal Patronus, an advanced piece of magic.”

No other examples are given so…

“Read the books!”

Kinda have, a few times, okay so maybe 10, or 15.

“Didn’t Pansy try to drug and rape Ron in original story? Here we have Hermione saying Pansy isn’t bad? Are these story not related and I’m just confused?”

Ah, this one. Yes, you are. Allow me to help. Pansy, in my take, has undergone an intervention (Sisters of the Moon) as you state she tried to drug Ron but was stopped by Ginny, Lavender, Luna, and Cho. During her intervention she had an epiphany, and that changed her life, as it does to people. From that point on Pansy dedicated her life to righting the wrongs her side did in the war, and making amends with Hermione as indicated in the last part of Sisters of the Moon. Hermione has also been through the fire, and she understands forgiveness, and she also understands having an important ally. Pansy is still Pansy Parkinson, though, so…
William Standing Bear laughed. “Mathó Thípila is what the white people call Devils Tower,” he said. “It is on the Cheyanne peoples lands. No’oma has been legend for so long I don’t know if she still lives.” He rested his hand on Hermione’s. “A few more stories may help.” He looked at Leon and nodded.

“When Merlmak had learned the ways of the people and accepted the Great Spirit’s will he boarded his great canoe and he left us for a time.” In the fire Merlyn walked back up the bridge to his ship and waved to the people as he sailed away. “Many more long years passed, and Merlmak became a legend among the people, and then one day he returned.” Merlyn’s ship sailed up to a shore bordering on a desert, and a crowd of happy people welcomed him as he joined them.

“The elf, No’oma was again in his company.” The fire showed Merlyn and an elf, both dressed in traveling outfits, meeting the Chumash as he had the Wampanoag when he first arrived. “Merlmak once more wandered the land, telling us of his journeys. His stay was again longer than a lifetime, many years, and then he left us for the far lands once more, leaving No’oma to help the people live and remember him.”

The fire flared, washing away the image of Merlyn waving from his ship. “No’oma remained, travelling the land and helping the people. She was particularly fond of the aged. Whenever No’oma came upon an aged person she felt was worthy, she would stay with them until the Great Spirit called them.” The fire showed No’oma serving an aged woman in furs, and then an aged man in woven blankets, and finally an old man walking with the help of his spear.

“One day No’oma appeared among the Muwekma, and she said, ‘The great master comes, No’oma has been told, and he comes to the grand harbor soon’. The Muwekma, the Chumash, and others gathered at the Grand Harbor and held a great feast. At the height of the feast Merlmak appeared on his great canoe, coming back to us in the grand harbor, but this time he was accompanied by his wife, Nim. She, as Merlmak, was young in appearance and old in spirit. Nim was curious about the people and the change she had seen in Merlmak, for she had known him when he lost his home.” The fire showed many people celebrating and welcoming Merlyn and Nimue as they walked down the gangway from his ship.
“Merlmak and Nim travelled the land as you have been told. Now humbled, Merlmak showed Nim that they and their people had, in their long history, never become humans. They had thought themselves the only medicine people of the Earth because they had yet to fully explore the world. Even though their great canoes travelled to every corner of the Earth they could reach, they seldom left them, and so they remained ignorant of the other medicine people, for as with all medicine people we keep to our own.”

Hermione nodded and looked at her companions. Luna sat with her typical thousand year old smile, Lavender was enraptured by William Standing Bear’s stories, Rose was as attentive as her Nanny, and Lilly was staring captivated at the images in fire.

William Standing Bear continued. “Merlmak and Nim eventually returned to the Muwekma and his great canoe. He spoke to them of the coming of the promised woman and her daughter whom he called his precious flower. He spoke of her animal singer sister, his brother daughter, and White Medicine Woman, and then he and Nim left our lands. No’oma remained, but even she has faded into legend.”

Marcus leaned in between William and Hermione. “I think Leon is worn out,” He said as he stood.

Leon stepped from the fire and collapsed into Marcus’ arms. “Been a while since I went that long,” he said as Marcus helped him to a blanket.

“Thank you very much,” Luna said to him. “You have shared much with us, and we are truly grateful.”

“You are most welcome,” William said. “We would dance with you now, tell the Great Spirit of your coming, and I would walk with his Flower.”

Rose smiled and stood while Lavender turned to William. “One of us goes with her, I hope you understand.”


(*)

Á tse A ts'oo'sí, the first slender one, stood high in the night sky as Rose, Lavender, and William Standing Bear strolled away from the firelight. The old man extended his senses, feeling the woman and the girl with him. From Lavender he felt a tremendous power, an animalistic force of unparalleled magnitude, but that force was calm and at peace. He could feel that the skinwalker protector had studied the ways of contemplation as the elders of the People of the Earth had and did. From the younger one he felt a burning, almost manic desire to complete the task Merlmak had set for her. He could also feel her mind working at a speed and depth he had never felt before.

“Tell me, skinwalker,” William asked. “Is she ready?”

Lavender chuckled. “More ready than I am,” she answered.

William smiled and nodded as they walked toward the edge of the butte. They were perhaps a hundred yards from the fire when William stopped. “We can council here,” he said. “This is are far enough.” He lowered himself to the stony ground and sat on a flat rock. Lavender and Rose sat on rocks of their own, close to him, forming a tight circle. “Tell me, Flower of Merlmak, what have you learned from the People so far?”

“One cannot be a human while one is consumed by anger, fear, or hostility,” Rose answered without pause.
William smiled and chuckled again. “He chose well,” he said. “Yes, the most important thing, but there is more, much more. Your friends, the Dreamers, they learned the Dream, and we know them from afar. We, the People of the Earth, we have learned to Spirit Walk.” From his pockets he produced a small clay pipe with a long stem and a leather pouch. “This we call the little smoke. It is a blend of herbs of the earth and herbs of the spirit. It frees the spirit to walk abroad in the world.”

Lavender eyed the pouch skeptically. “What’s in it? I don’t think her mother would approve of drugging her daughter.”

William nodded. “I would not suggest it for one so young either, but his Flower is very special.” He smiled and took Rose’s hand. “Do you trust us?”

Rose nodded. “Yes, Mr. Standing Bear, I do. You were placed here in our path.”

William laughed. “You have paid attention.” He turned back to Lavender. “The little smoke is not powerful, in fact it is subtle. A bit of the hemp flower to calm, a bit of the peyote to open the eye, a bit of laugash to help one hear, and a bit of the sacred mushroom to let the spirit free. It helps us step from of the body and walk in the spirit realm.” He opened the pouch and put a small pinch of the mixture in the pipe.

“I will show you.” He passed his hand over the pipe and twisted his fingers in an odd motion. The herbs kindled in the bowl of the pipe, and a small curly trail of smoke rose from it. William took a small puff, let it float from his mouth and then breathed the little cloud in. He handed the pipe to Lavender.

“I have partaken in ceremonies like this,” she said. “Is there a prayer?”

William smiled and spoke in Apache for a moment. “Now all is sacred,” he said and motioned for Lavender to smoke the pipe.

Lavender repeated the same ritual as William and discovered the little smoke was not harsh or hard on the lungs, and its effect was immediate and pleasant. She could feel her body relax and her perceptions expand. The stars were clearer, the sounds of the desert sharper, and the presence of Rose and William a soft glow of warmth near her. “One,” she said, and handed rose the pipe.

Rose repeated the exact same motions and breaths that Lavender and William had. She coughed a little when she let the smoke slide from her lips, and then she cuddled into Lavenders side, eyes closed and a small smile on her face. “I can feel them, at the fire, I can feel them all,” she said.

William nodded. “Take my hands.” Rose and Lavender each took hold of one of his hands and William dew in a powerful calming and centering breath. “No’o to cha ma,” he said quietly, and he pulled Rose and Lavender from their bodies.

(*)

The stars spun around them, an enormous whirlpool of light and color. Rose could feel, and in a way see, William and Lavender next to her. Lavender was huge half woman and half wolf shape made of light, and William appeared in the form of a much younger man, broad chested and tall.

*This is the spirit realm, always here yet apart from our perceived reality, William’s presence impressed upon their minds. Come.*

They walked among the stars, yet the earth was beneath their feet. There was a buzzing sound from everywhere. *The animals,* Lavenders presence said in Rose’s mind. She could feel Luna reach out and caress both her and Lavender. Her mentor’s mental touch kind and reassuring, *go and learn,*
Luna sent.

A mountain appeared before them, tall and flat topped with steep, deeply grooved sides. Matȟó Thípila, William’s presence told her. *Your goal is here perhaps. That the great spirit chooses to show it to us twice says much.*

They walked on in the landscape of mountains, valleys, plains and stars, and another mountain rose before them. This one was immense. Topped with eternal snow, it rose above its fellows. On its side a temple sat, and priests in orange robes came and went through the stone dragon guarded gates.

*I know this place well,* Lavender sent in the swirl of stars and thoughts. *My masters live here, Master Po, and Master Ping. I studied here.*

William’s presence glowed with pleasure. *I would very much like to meet your masters, skinwalker.*

*I begin to think that is a very good idea,* William. Lavender replied.

They walked on. Another presence rose in the distance, far from them, yet close enough to discern a shape. A black snake coiled in a cave, tense, its head darting from side to side as it searched for some unknown trouble. Near the snake two other presences glowed with golden light. Rose was suddenly aware of another, much darker and sharp manifestation of intelligence. This one was diffuse but focused, and they were focused on her.

*Flower of Merlmak,* William sent, *you have guardians you yet do not know. These that seek you and those that seek your teacher have powerful obstacles to overcome. Give them no thought. Follow the path and let nothing turn you aside.*

*Thank you, Mr. Standing Bear,* Rose sent. She turned her attention to the glowing figure of Lavender beside her. *And I have some powerful protection I do know.*

Lavender chuckled in the spirit world and stroked her charge with a wave of kindness and love. *Just don’t make me work too hard, okay?*

A jungle grew around them as they walked. The temple Lavender had first seen in the vision the Sisters shared appeared, and then it faded just as quickly. A sea bird flew over their heads and they found themselves on the shore of an island. A huge mountain topped with glistening white domes slowly rose to a great height as the waved crashed against a black, rocky shore. The sea faded away and became a vast plain. It stretched away in every direction, flat and featureless, all but in the west. There and enormous mountain rose from the plain. A single conical shape on the horizon.

*Mount Kilimanjaro* Rose sent. *There?*

*Probably,* Lavender sent back.

Then a castle appeared. *I know this place too,* Lavender sent. *It was in the vision.* She took careful stock of the surroundings, trying to find a clue as to its location, then she smiled in the spirit realm. A small sign stood at the crossroads before the castle. Rue De Lapel it said. Their enemy was in France.

They were back on the butte, standing next to their physical bodies.

*We have been shown what the Great Spirit desired to show us,* William sent. *And I am... tired.*

Lavender caught him and she opened her eyes and saw him start to topple from his seat on the rock. Rose was helping her a moment later. They carefully laid him down on the stony ground and watched him breath.
“I’m still alive,” he said, humor coloring his voice. “The spirit walk is not without cost.”

“Thank you, Mr. Standing Bear,” Rose said. “We learned a great deal.”

“Yes,” he said and started to sit up with Lavender and Rose’s help. “And now I think that I must go with you on your quest. I feel the Great Spirit calling me.” He smiled. “One last great adventure.”

“We will be honored,” Lavender said as she helped him to his feet.

(*)

At the fire Luna turned to Hermione. They have returned from their journey.

Hermione smiled in the swirl of celebratory magic as Lilly danced by, hand in hand with the elders of the Dine. Her niece was just as amazing as her own children, and she wondered at how lucky she and Ginny were. James was his grandfather and Sirius reborn in one. Albus concerned her a bit as he lived in the shadow of his rather more boisterous older brother and his father’s overwhelming fame, but she was certain he had the Potter ability to muscle through and overcome. And then there was Lilly.

True heir to her name, Lilly Luna Potter was as sensitive as her aunt Luna, and as caring as her grandmother Lilly. An empath of incredible ability, she had an even more developed sense of injustice than Hermione had had at her age. Hogwarts was in deep trouble in two years when both Lilly and Rose would be there. Lilly would be Gryffindor without a doubt, but Rose could be put anywhere by the hat, even Slytherin.

Her daughter was as morally centered as Hermione herself was, but that led Hermione down a darker path in her thoughts. “There is what is right and what is easy,” Dumbledore had said. Rose Hermione Granger Weasley always did what was right in her own judgement, and with the intellect to back up her decisions, she usually made the best choice, but her choices hadn’t always been in concert with the rules. She would have to be an idiot not to recognize the Weasley ability at subterfuge that Rose had inherited, and Hermione was not an idiot.

She shook her head with a melancholy smile. Ten, her daughter was ten, soon to be eleven. Her own wand, her own life was on the horizon, and Hermione was torn. She had looked forward to her little girl becoming the young woman she knew she would be since she had first held the tiny, fragile wonder that was Rose in the bed at St. Mungo’s. Now that time had come, and Hermione wasn’t ready. She giggled to herself, Ron definitely wasn’t. He still occasionally prattled a bit about Rose’s date night, about how that grown up young woman in the pictures couldn’t be the mud speckled girl he had played with at the pond only a few years ago, but she was.

And danger came with being an adult Weasley. “We’re trouble magnets,” Ginny had so astutely observed, and she was right. Hermione let a small sigh of relief go. Seamus and Lavender had been a wall of iron between that trouble and her and Ginny’s children. She could not be more grateful. Now that Lavender had decided the children needed physical skills to back up their formidable magical ones, Hermione was somewhat reassured that they would be safe on their own. The next generation of Potters and Weasleys would be intimidating. Just don’t punch Malfoy the younger, okay, my wonder girl.

(*)

“Packin’ up?” Betty Davenport asked.

Luna turned to face her. “Yes, Betty,” she said. “We have a very good idea where we need to go,
and my cousin has a home near there.

“Well, It’s been a pleasure havin’ ya,” Betty said with a smile. “Got breakfast for ya before ya go.”

Hermione and Lavender entered the living room with their travelling clothes on, and Hermione held out her beaded bag for Luna to deposit her two small bags in. “Marcus and the rest will be watching your home for a few weeks,” Luna said.

At Betty’s puzzled look Lavender told her, “Rose, Mr. Standing Bear, and I went on a bit of a vison quest last night. We have enemies, powerful ones, and if we can see them they might be able to see us. I spoke with the elders of the Dine, and they agree.”

Betty’s face hardened. “Let ‘em come,” she said low and rough. “Clay and I are old, but we’re not helpless.” She nodded and gritted her teeth. “Let ‘em come.”

So, yeah some of the stories are slightly different than the tales Leon told. That is by design. Many of the myths I heard as a young boy were slightly different depending on the teller. The coyote tales varied greatly.
Harry Potter emerged from the grating in the entrance hall of the ministry and was immediately set upon by his assistant.

“Ah, there you are,” Parvati said. “Right. The Minister is in your office, waiting, Ron has something he wants to talk to you about, and I need your signature on a dozen orders. Oh, and Megan and Blaise want to see you when you have a moment.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Terrific,” he said and started toward the lifts.

“Morning, Mr. Potter,” The guard said. “Wand?”

Harry produced his wand for the security agent. A quick scan and he and Parvati were headed to the row of lifts. Harry looked at his treasured friend and smiled. “So, who’s first?” he asked.

“Me,” Parvati said. She conjured a small desktop about a foot on a side in front of Harry. It floated along with them as they entered the lift, and she pulled a parchment from her stack. “This is the final order making Megan a lead,” she said as she placed it on the desk.

Harry smiled broadly and signed it with a flourish.

“This is the latest requisition list from the academy,” Parvati said. “I looked it over. The only difference from last year is an increase in the muggle money budget. It’s warranted, those costs are soaring.”

“Yeah,” Harry said, and he smirked as he signed the parchment. “Hermione’s trip is costing a fortune, but fortunately MACUSA is covering a lot of her current expenses while she’s in America.”

Parvati chuckled as she exchanged the parchment for another. “Allen about shut himself when he saw some of the receipts from Australia. He was quite pleased when Hermione found that place to stay in the desert. This is the order releasing the prisoner from the Diagon Alley Battle to the Thickey ward.”

“He’s not going to wake up, is he?” Harry said with a shake of the head. “At least we got something from him, even if it was just his early life memories. It might help.”

Parvati chuckled. “You should see Pansy blush when we talk about that day. This one is Ethan’s recommendation of Gordon Ableman for Office lead in India.”

“You know, if you had told me Pansy would be in Hermione’s inner circle when we were in school I’d have sent you to the Thickey ward,” Harry said with a laugh as he signed.

“She’s different.” Parvati said with a shrug. “So is Blaise. Pan is still Pan, but she’s using her wiles
for good. Having a Slytherin on your side is a very good thing for us Gryffindors. My pay rise you promised me,” she said setting another parchment on the desk.

Harry laughed again. “With pleasure,” he said, and made a great show of signing the parchment.

(*)

“Ah, Harry, good,” Allan Wheaton, Minister for Magic said as Harry entered his office and tossed his outer robe at the coat rack. The ornately carved stand dipped and caught the robe before it hit the floor.

“Nice catch,” Harry said with a laugh, and the coat rack shook its finial haughtily at him. “So, what’s got you here first thing, Allan?”

“Her Majesty wants to see you,” he said with a smirk from the chair in front of Harry’s desk.

“What about?” Harry asked.

Allan snorted. “Don’t know,” he said. “You tell me, you’re her favorite.”

“That’s because I never bring her bad news,” Harry laughed. “You ministers are nothing but.”

“I try to be upbeat during my audiences,” Allan said. “But the business of governing is messy.”

Harry nodded. “When does Her Majesty require my presence?

“Soon as you’re able, she’s at Balmoral,” Allan told him.

Harry chuckled and drew his wand. “Expecto Patronum!” he incanted, and the stag leapt from his wand. Harry laid his wand against the silvery cheek of his patronus. “Your Majesty, I will be there shortly. I presume you would like to meet in your audience chamber, and I will meet you there. Your servant.” He smiled at the stag. “Go on now,” he said and the stage flew from the room.

“Good,” Allan said. “My contacts at MACUSA told me when Hermione moved on from New York to the American South West. She wrote me a short, for her, report on her activities. What more do you know?

Harry sat behind his desk. “Not much, she keeps me informed about Lilly and where they are, but not a lot else. I know she met with some of the members of the magical tribes, and she got some valuable information about her research.”

“Yes, she wrote me much the same in her report,” Allan said. He looked at Harry with a serious smile. “You know I’ve grown to know Hermione well. What’s she really up to, Harry?”

“She’s working on elf rights,” Harry said. “You know that’s one of her enduring passions.”

“Oh, I’m aware,” Allan said. “But there’s more, I’ll wager. I just want her to be careful and not step on too many toes. I’m retiring soon.”

Harry looked at his boss and friend. “I suppose it’s not secret who you want in your chair when you leave it.”

“None at all,” Allan said. “The Wizengamot has been receiving my reports and recommendations on her for two years. She’s next if she doesn’t throw sand in the works.”

Harry sniggered. “On that score I guarantee nothing,” he said through his mirth. “This is Hermione
we’re talking about. She does what she thinks is right.” Harry shrugged and rolled his eyes. “Occasionally that offends people, go figure.”

Allan smiled. “That’s why I want it to be her. We had all the hesitating, faltering, capitulating, simpering fools we can survive in that chair. Kingsley set us on course, and I intend for us to stay that course.” He stood and Harry stood too. “Keep her out of trouble, Harry. I need her, we all need her.” He shook Harry’s hand. “You and the rest of the DA have done more than your fair share, but that work is not going to end soon.”

As he turned to go he said over his shoulder, “This is the most important assignment I’ve ever given you, Harry. Keep what needs to be secret, secret, and if there’s something I don’t want to know, make sure I don’t.” he opened the door and looked at Parvati behind her desk. “You get all that?” he asked, and laughed at her offended expression as he walked away.

“Jerk!” Parvati laughingly whispered. She reached across her desk and deactivated the auto quill that had transcribed the entire conversation in Harry’s office.

(*)

“Have Megan and Blaise meet me for lunch in the caf,” Harry told Parvati as he prepared to flue to Balmoral. “Let Ron know I’ll see him at two here.” He appraised himself in the full length mirror he had conjured against the inside door of his office. “I look okay?”

Parvati smiled at her old and dear friend. “Devastatingly handsome as usual,” she said, bushing down his outer robe. “Good thing Anthony is even better looking than you are,” she said as she finished. “Taller too.”

Harry swept her into his arms and danced her around his office few a few beats. “But I took you to the ball,” He said as he dipped her.

Parvati laughed and kissed his cheek. “Go on, you charmer,” she said with a smile. “Your Queen awaits.”

Harry smiled back at her and took a fist full of powder from the candy dish on the mantle of his office fireplace. “Balmoral!” he shouted, and he stepped into the green flames. (*)

Queen Elizabeth the Second stared out at the snowy grounds of the Scottish countryside. Her mother loved this place and so did she, it helped her think. Her reign would be the longest in English history and she wanted it to be remembered as one of the best. She had gently stewarded her country from the ruins of a world war to the respected member of the international community it now was. Though not the richest or largest country on the earth, England was one of the most respected, primarily for its high standards, and that was largely due to her.

Her own children had not done as well as she had hoped, but her grandchildren more than made up for it. William would be a great King, of that she was certain. Harry, the girls, all of them were on track and doing well. She was content that her legacy would not be Elisabeth the last, as she had feared for a while. Her eldest had taken the scolding as well as she could have expected. He would not be King. She would, in time, hand the crown to William. Charles had squandered his birthright with his unseemly behavior, and that was one thing she had never forgiven him for. She should have had that woman removed from her life as MI5 had offered on occasion, but that was the past and she looked forward, to the future.
Part of that future was the young man coming to meet her. The royalty of Europe had long know of the wizarding world, and Elizabeth loved them every bit as much as the rest of her subjects. Sir Harry Potter, she smiled as she thought of the messy haired young man she had met all those years ago. Kingsley had emerged from the fireplace at Buckingham battered and bloody, but with a triumphant smile. “Your Majesty, we have prevailed,” He had told her. The story of what had transpired took the Minister two whole days to tell, and when he had finished she demanded Potter’s presence.

He was barely able to look at her he was so nervous, but she had taken his hand, thanked him, and knighted him on the spot. Since then they had met often and grown comfortable in each other’s presence. As she had got to know more of the story she had knighted his two friends. In their own community they were as famous and as loved as she was, but the broader world would never know the heroism that those three teenagers had shown. They made her so proud.

The fire behind her flared and Potter stepped out onto the hearth. Shaking the soot from his clothes he bowed. “Your Majesty,” he said politely.

“Sir Harry,” she replied.

“How may I help, Ma’am?” he asked as he walked to her side.

“Oh, I don’t need your insights today, Harry,” she said and placed her hand on his arm to steady herself. He took her hand and helped her to her chair. “I have some information you might need, or more properly Mrs. Weasley might need.”

“Hermione, Ma’am?” Harry said as he sat opposite her.

“Yes, Dame Hermione. She’s in danger,” The Queen replied.

“We’re aware,” Harry said. “How did you know, Ma’am?” he asked.

She smiled. “We do talk among ourselves, the remaining royalty of Europe,” she said with a laugh. “My family is Germanic in origin and we still have close ties to them. There is a group on the continent that is asking a lot of questions about Mrs. Granger Weasley. The Sûreté du Magie has intercepted a few communications and Francis informed me. They are very interested in Mrs. Weasley, her daughter, and Mrs. Scamander.”

“Rose?” Harry said in surprise. “Why Rose?”

“I was hoping you could tell me, Harry,” The Queen replied.

“We knew they were after Luna,’ He said, deep in thought. “Hermione is logical from there, but Rose?”

The Queen watched him think for a few moments. “I would very much like to chat with Mrs. Weasley and her daughter when it’s convenient,” she said as she picked up the tea pot on the serving table. She cupped the bottom of the pot. “Hmm, cold. Do you mind?”

“Not at all, Ma’am,” Harry said and heated the pot with a quick warming spell.

“Thank you,” she said.

“You’re welcome, Ma’am,” he said and smiled. “Also, Analgesia!”

A tingle flowed through the Queen and all the small aches and pains that came with age vanished.
“You don’t have to do that every time, Harry,” she said.

He smiled and placed his hand on hers, remembering a conversation with his mother in law about age and its flaws. “Yes, Ma’am, I do,” he said.

(*)

Ron was waiting for him when he stepped from the grate in his office. “They’ve moved on from El Paso,” he said without preamble. “Went to George’s place in Idaho.”

Harry nodded. “That it?”

Ron smiled. “Yeah, mostly. Gin’s got a roast in the oven for tonight. Turkey I think. Hugo and I will be over after he finishes with Rowan and washes up.”

“He’s driving them hard,” Harry said with a head shake. “Harder than Lav, and that’s saying a lot.”

“Have you met any of the Browns besides Rowan and Lavender?” Ron said with a laugh.

Harry shook his head. “Maybe, but I don’t remember doing it.”

“You’re oldest has catch up to do,” Ron said. “He was away at school, and he missed all the introduction to Kung Fu Lav did ‘fore she left. Rowan is determined to make up that gap.”

Harry looked thoughtful. “Albus is doing well, though.”

Ron looked at his friend, always blind where family was concerned. “He’s doing alright, but, Harry, you and James cast a long shadow. Be careful with Albus, he’s got a tender heart.” Ron smirked. “Kinda like me.”

“I know,” Harry said. “Part of why we love him so. Gin and I see you in him more than us.”

“He’s a good boy, and your son, it’s obvious from his character,” Ron said. “But he needs your attention, maybe more’n Lilly and James do.”

Harry sighed. “Sucks to be the middle child, eh?”

“More’n you can imagine,” Ron said seriously.


“See you at dinner.”

(*)

A man and a woman walked up to the door of 340 Wishing Sands Drive, and knocked. A tall, broad shouldered, older native man answered. “Welcome to the El Rio,” Marcus said. “What do you want?”

“Were here to see Mrs. Granger Weasley,” The woman said. She peered at the tall man in the doorway, his expression was unreadable.

“She expectin ya?”

“No,” the man said. “The MACUSA sent us.”
Marcus didn’t do anything but blink once.

“Look,” the woman said. “If you’ll just get her…”

“You people,” Marcus said low and deadly. “You walk in a world you know nothing of. You think you can deceive at will, you think know what’s best for everyone, don’t you?”

“What?” the man said in an offended voice. “Listen here, Chief…”

“I am not chief,” Marcus growled. “But you will meet him.”

(*)

Lavender looked out over the railing of the second floor balcony. *Nice house, George,* she thought. The view of the mountains was spectacular, the red light of sunset painting the tops of them with fire. The hair on the back of her hand prickled, her nose flared, and then she smiled. “Hello, William,” she said.

“Good evening, skinwalker,” William Standing Bear replied from the doorway behind her. “You were correct. They came, two scouts and a watcher.”

Lavender nodded. “What did you learn?” she asked, still staring at the mountains.

“Sadly nothing,” William said. “They are, as you said, fanatics. They were under the vow and… uncooperative.”

“Where are they now?” Lavender asked. After a long silence she turned and looked at William. He met her eyes and said nothing. She nodded again. “Good.”

“Betty and Clay are safe,” William told her. “If they send others we will be ready.”

Lavender sniggered. “I’m certain you will be, but I doubt they will send more,” she said. “Thanks for looking after Betty and Clay. You may have heard about the little club I belong to, Dumbledore’s Army?”

“I may have read an account or ten,” William said with a chuckle.

Lavender sniggered. “Well, we put people in danger,” she said with a shake of the head. “It’s not intentional, but still it happens, and I wanted to make certain they were well cared for.”

“His flower is ready?” William asked.

“Yes, Johnathan Soaring Eagle is taking us to Matȟó Thípila tomorrow,” she said. “Rose and Lilly had a long day today, went out with George’s hands and drove some cattle in from the hills.”

William smiled. “Hard work is good for the young. It builds spirit.”

“Agreed,” Lavender said.

“I have my pack and am ready to follow, skinwalker,” William said.

“We’re happy to have you along, William,” Lavender said. “Welcome to Dumbledore’s Army.”
The Gathering Chapter 9

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 2

The Gathering

Chapter 9

A rattle in the old man's sack - look at mountain top - keep climbing up
Way above us the desert snow - white wind blow

I hold the line - the line of strength that pulls me through the fear.

I hold the line.

Peter Gabriel

The sun rose on the winter solstice in the cold pure air of Idaho. Snow a foot deep surrounded the large secluded ranch house as the occupants roused themselves and prepared for the day. A curl of smoke appeared from the chimney and the smells of breakfast scented the air.

Two hundred miles away a man emerged from his lodge. He looked at the brightening sky and smiled. Épévatamáno'e, he thought. Gathering his ceremonial robe around him he took the rattle from his medicine bag and conjured the Cave of Passage. A black, oval hole in the universe bloomed before him, and he stepped into it. A loud crack sounded as the hole collapsed on itself and vanished.

Half a world away a woman stared at her wine glass and scowled. A fire crackled in the hearth, but she took no warmth from it. The Tha was moving rapidly, swirling in change. It was a change she could not see, could not control, and she clenched her teeth in frustration.

(*)

The man danced for ten minutes, chanting and weaving, before he turned to them. “The welcome is song done, and I have come to take you to Máthó Thípila,” Johnathan Soaring Eagle told Hermione. “But first we must sanctify your kâse’ééhe.” He took up his rattle and began the chant that would bless and purify the young woman before him. His new friend from the Apache joined him, chanting in the language of the south. William lit a charcoal in a small bowl he pulled from his robes and crumbled an herb mixture into it. Sweet smelling smoke rose from the bowl and he dipped and wove it in an intricate dance with Jonathan around Rose.

Johnathan smiled and waved his feather adorned rattle in a series of spirals drawing out and forming the smoke into patterns, complex and interlocking, around the young woman. The design in the smoke writhed and twisted as the two men chanted. As Johnathan finished the chant the pattern froze and glowed with a golden light for a moment before vanishing.

“Flower of Merlmak,” William said commandingly. “You have come to us, and we have seen you. We have prepared you with smoke and words of power. The Great Spirit calls, and you and we are
ready.”

Johnathan turned and drew a complicated pattern with his rattle. Once more the Cave of Passage formed.

(*)

The Bear awoke, shaken from his winter sleep by a huge pulse of magic.

Winter would begin today outside the den, and the sun shone as a blue light through the snow. *She comes at last,* No’oma, The Bear thought.

(*)

Reality stretched back into being. Hermione, Lavender, Luna, Lilly, Johnathan, and William looked at Rose as she smiled broadly and nodded. “It’s here,” she said softly, almost reverently. The sensation of yearning and impatience filled her, but she quashed those distracting emotions and concentrated on the last one, determination.

“Lead on, Flower of Merlmak,” Jonathan Soaring Eagle said.

Hermione watched her daughter snug her thick coat around her, adjust her satchel, turn, and start up a rough path amid the snow and rocks that jutted through it. *So poised, so mature,* she thought to herself. She wiped a tear of pride from her face and smiled at Lavender’s smirk.

When Rose slipped in the snow Johnathan stopped and called her to him. “We have words for this as well,” he said. He pulled an eagle feather from his bag and brushed it over Rose’s shoes as he chanted in Cheyanne. “The feather walk is an easier way.”

Rose giggled when she stepped on the snow again and didn’t sink into it. Her shoes barely made any incursion into the drift at all. Just enough to give her traction on the slippery surface. Johnathan repeated the charm on William’s, Luna’s, Lavender’s, Hermione’s, and Lilly’s shoes as well as his own, and they continued up the barely visible trail toward the side of the black rock pylon rising into the azure sky.

Lavender was the first to sense it, then Lilly and Luna. “It’s coming… there,” Lilly said and pointed up the path.

A gust of wind passed, and the blowing snow cleared. Two hundred feet up their trial a huge brown bear stood on all fours.


“My brother!” Johnathan called. “We bring the promised ones!”

The bear looked at them and shook its head from side to side, then it looked at Rose who was a bit ahead of the group. It stared at her for a long moment, turned, and walked back up the path.

“I’d say that message was obvious,” Luna said, and she pulled her blanket given by the Dine from her bag. “From here Rose must continue alone.”

Lavender tapped her foot in annoyance. “I still hate this,” she said.

“None of us like it, Lavender,” Luna said. “But it is as it must be.” She spread her blanket on a flat spot nearby. “I suggest we gather and join, then Rose can be on her way.”
Hermione knelt as Rose walked up to her, and all her carefully built self-defenses crumbled. It hit her like a full body blow. She hugged her daughter fiercely as sobs wracked her. “This is worse,” she said through her tears. “So much worse. Last time I didn’t know. How can I do this? How could I have thought I could do this? I… I can’t. I can’t.” She hugged Rose harder. “We’ll find another way. We have to find another way.”

“Medicine Woman… Hermione,” William said kindly. “He knew, he prepared her way” The old man nodded at Hermione as she looked at him. “She is ready. You know this.”

“I can do it, Mum,” Rose said, and she hugged her mother back just as hard. “And you… you all will be watching. I can do it.” She drew back and looked in Hermione’s tear stained face. “Let me, please.”

Hermione cried harder as she hugged Rose again, pulled back, and stood. Marshalling her emotions she wiped away the tears freezing to her face and looked at her daughter. “Gryffindor without a doubt,” she said tightly. “Alright. Let’s do it, Luna.”

Rose caught up with The Bear a few minutes after she left her companions sitting on their blankets. It was good, she thought, that it was winter and there were no tourists wandering the light forest around Matȟó Thípila. Coming upon the eclectic group of elaborately costumed Native Americans and their British friends, sitting hands joined and eyes closed inside the bubble of the warming charm, would be quite the shock.

Yes, it would, Luna’s presence in her mind said, and Rose sniggered at the humor she felt from her mentor.

The Bear grunted as she approached. He lowered his head and pushed his forehead against hers. Rose, with Lilly’s help, felt a wave of love and anticipation from The Bear, and then it drew back and turned to walk beside her. “What was your name, I wonder?” She said to The Bear as she reached up and laid her hand on its shoulder. “Do you even remember?”

The Bear looked at her for a moment as he walked, bumped her playfully with his shoulder, and turned his attention back to the path. They had hiked up the slope of huge broken and jumbled pieces of rock for perhaps ten minutes when they came to the sheer face of Matȟó Thípila. It was entirely compose of polygonal columns of grey-black rock, some inches on a side, some feet, all stacked and fitted by nature into one immense vertical pillar almost a thousand feet tall.

Rose could feel the call coming from above her, but the near vertical face of rock showed no opening. There were random ledges where some of the pillars ended, but there was no clear way to ascend. The door at Kata Juta was obvious to her, here it was hidden. The Bear nudged her shoulder with his head. “Yes?” Rose said looking in his eyes.

The Bear turned at her for a moment as he walked, bumped her playfully with his shoulder, and turned his attention back to the path. They had hiked up the slope of huge broken and jumbled pieces of rock for perhaps ten minutes when they came to the sheer face of Matȟó Thípila. It was entirely compose of polygonal columns of grey-black rock, some inches on a side, some feet, all stacked and fitted by nature into one immense vertical pillar almost a thousand feet tall.

The Bear turned and walked along the side of the cliff face. Rose followed. They went along the edge of the mountain little more than three hundred feet before the Bear stopped and looked up at the face Matȟó Thípila. Rose walked up beside The Bear, leaned against him, and looked up at the side of the mountain. “So, what are we looking at?” she asked him.

The Bear grunted and pointed his nose up at the cliff face. Rose looked again, studying the jumbled pattern of columns. It was a confusing and complicated geometric pattern made of rock. Here more of the columns stopped and left small flat ledges. Then she saw it.

Once seen the stairway was obvious. Directly in front of her a series of ledges ascended steeply to
her left before switching back and disappearing around the side of the mountain.

*Sit, Flower of Merlmak,* William’s presence said in her mind. *Take out your feather I gave you.*

Rose pushed the snow from a small chunk of the scree around the base of the mountain and sat. She opened her satchel and pulled a black crow feather from it.

*Bush the feather over the soles of your feet and speak these words,* Johnathan sent. *Estse No ho’o, Estse No ho’o, Estse No ho’o.*

Rose repeated the words as she swept the feather over her feet. When she stood she could feel her shoes sticking lightly to the rock beneath them. *Thanks, Mr. Soaring Eagle,* She thought. The first few steps were easy, then it became challenging. In places the ledges were perhaps two feet apart and the height difference ranged from a foot to almost three. *Really, Merlyn, if you knew I was coming you could have made this a bit easier!* she thought as she negotiated a particularly difficult step. Even through her gloves the cold rock chilled her hands painfully, but she was so focused on her ascent that she hardly felt it, hardly realized how far up she was climbing until she was well beyond the switchback. Looking down she saw The Bear carefully following her along the edge of the mountain, but he was now more than one hundred and fifty feet below her. Her mother’s wave of acrophobic fear made her chuckle.

*Glad I didn’t inherit that,* she thought.

Lavender snorted a laugh, and Lilly giggled.

*Ha, ha,* Hermione sarcastically sent in the link.

Rose smiled and continued up. After twenty more steps the stair became a path, mostly level, along the face of the cliff. She was getting closer, she could feel it, and then there it was. The opening was a gap where two of the larger columns in the face of the cliff stopped, left a vertical gap ten feet tall, and then continued up and out of sight. The first formed a ledge in front of the gap, the second left a kind of five sided room eight feet across in the rock.

*Don’t rush!* Lavender admonished as she felt Rose’s anticipation.

*Lavender is quite right,* Luna said in her mind. *Carefully, Rose. Cautiously, for you mother’s sake.*

*Yes, yes, I know,* Rose sent. She closed her eyes for a moment and centered herself as Lavender had been teaching her in their martial arts lessons. She felt her guardian’s pleased response. *Alright, here we go.*

Four more steps and she was standing in the hollow formed by the gap. A black wall of basalt faced her. *Well? This is it, I can feel it,* she thought. She pressed her hand against all five of the wall faces in the gap but nothing opened for her. “Hmm. Ah! Merlyn!” she said and pressed her hand to the back wall. Nothing. She repeated the same thing on the other four walls. “Merlmak?” she said and tried again. Still nothing. “Really?” she said, looking frustrated at the back wall of the little room. “What di…” she closed her eyes and chuckled as she shook her head. “Keeper of the key,” she whispered.

Rose opened her jacket and shivered at the blast of cold hitting her chest. She pocketed her gloves, drew the key from under her shirt, and grasped it in her right hand. She felt the magic flare, and she placed her left hand flat against the back wall. The column face slid down until it was level with the floor of the entry room. Beyond it, through a gap just like the one behind her, a passageway continued into the heart of Matȟó Thípila. An alabaster bowl filled with small stones sat on a pillar of black rock, and a row of alabaster lamp pillars lined the passage as it disappeared into the dark.
Rose smiled and stepped up to the bowl as the door pillar slid up behind her, plunging the passageway into darkness. “Lumos,” she said, and dropped a stone from the bowl into the first lamp. The call was like a magnet, dragging her forward until she came to a large room. She dropped two stones in each of the pillar lamps on either side of the door to the room and gasped. Two small stair steps down from the door the floor was completely covered in rattlesnakes.

Oooo, she felt from Lilly. They are so pretty!

To you! Rose sent. You’re not standing here! This is dead scary, mum. Rose wasn’t particularly phobic, but she hated, in order, flying stinging insects, spiders, and venomous snakes.

They are sleeping, William sent. You should be safe.

“Should?” Rose whispered.

Can you Dream yourself across? Lavender asked.

“I can’t see the other side,” Rose said quietly.

Sing to them, Lilly sent.

“What? How?” Rose said.

If I was there I could show you, Lilly sent.

“Yeah, Lil, but you’re not,” Rose said in the gloom. “I don’t think The Bear would let me come get you either.”

Conquer your fear, Flower of Merlmak, Johnathan sent wrapped in a proud confidence. We are familiar with this test.

The snake people are fearsome, William sent, but you are brave. Carefully, gently. Go now.

Rose again closed her eyes and calmed herself. Very slowly she descended the two steps and nudged one of the coiled snakes sideways with her right boot so that she could place that foot flat on the floor. “One,” she said in the gloom.

The counting helped. By the time she reached twenty eight she could see the opposite side of the room. This is completely unfair, Merlyn! She thought. At Thirty nine she was setting her foot down on the first step out of the snake filled chamber. She lit the two pillars on either side of the door and hurried down the next passage.

Well done! She felt from all of her watchers.

“Yeah, but I have to come back that way,” Rose said in a huff. She lit more stones and continued. Eighteen pillars down the winding corridor she came to a large opening. Lighting the three lamps on either side revealed a huge galley in the heart of the mountain, and Rose and her watchers gasped at the beauty before her. As the lava that formed Matȟó Thípila had risen from the earth’s mantle it had carried silicon and trace metals in their gaseous form. A bubble of the gas had pushed enough of the lava aside to leave a chamber nearly a hundred feet across feet across and fifty tall, and as it cooled the silica had precipitated out of the gas as crystals. The chamber was astonishing. Quartz, clear, smoky, and rose, lined the walls, and it was mingled with traces of gold. Rods feet long in places jutted into the chamber ending in glittering points. There was a floor, a path of sorts that had been made by shearing off the larger points and crushing the smaller ones into a gravel. It ran across the chamber in a meandering rout until it came to what looked very much like a throne hewn from the
rose quartz and amethyst.

Rose lit the lamps in the chamber as she approached. She sat the bowl on a flat topped crystal pillar, mounted the small steps before the chair of rock, and sat, the first person in a thousand years to do so. She dug in her satchel and brought out her water bottle. After a long drink she leaned back and contemplated. The call was coming from below and behind her. Still a fair bit away but closer, much closer.

“Okay,” she said. “What next, Merlyn?”

*The snakes and air have a way in,* Hermione sent. *Can you feel a draft?*

*No, not yet,* Rose thought. *Hmm.* She stood from the chair and began exploring the chamber. Two other less clear paths among the crystals revealed themselves. One path led away at a right angle from the main path and ended at a ten foot tall point of smoky quartz. Rose again grasped the key and laid her hand on the quartz point. It slid into the floor, and a tight passage in the rock lined with much smaller and more widely spaced crystals appeared in the gloom. A lamp pillar stood to her right. Rose trotted back to the Merlmak’s throne and retrieved the bowl of stones.

The passage turned abruptly and climbed steeply up for thirty feet before doubling back and ending at another crystal door. Key in hand Rose opened the door, and a second, smaller, crystal filled chamber was before her. This one was his living space. As at Kata Juta she could see he was at heart a simple man. A table and two seats had been carved from three large formations, a bed from another, and a hearth with the remains of his last fire was crafted into the wall next to his bed.

Rose looked around at the sparkling walls and shook her head. “You slept in here? Wow,” she said softly. He had left nothing in the room, and after a quick reconnaissance she returned to the audience chamber. The other hidden path ended in a blank wall of glittering rose quartz and gold veins. Once more she grasped the key and laid her hand on the wall.

The passage beyond was very like the one that accessed his living area, but this one went down steeply. She refreshed the sticking charm on her shoes, pocketed a handful of stones from the bowl, and clambered down the rough, steep passage. It flattened, turned, and ended in a dark opening. Rose smiled broadly. *We’re here.*

After lighting the two lamp pillars on each side of the opening she could see she was standing on a ledge in the side of a vertical shaft that disappeared into the darkness above and below. The lava tube had emptied when the magma receded from under Matȟó Thípila, and it had left a shaft thirty feet wide and bottomless. Rose dropped a lit stone down the shaft and watched it disappear into the darkness. Then she slowly lifted her eyes from the inky pit and gazed across the shaft.

And, as at Kata Juta, a small statue of an elf sat in a carved niche directly across from her.

And, just as before, tears streamed down her mother’s face.

Rose closed her eyes, drew her calming breaths, and entered the Dream. She had done this so many times now it was tempting to be overconfident, but the last thing she wanted was to drop the stone when they were so close. She focused herself, and she concentrated on the task at hand. Extending both arms she saw the stone in her mind float up from the niche, cross the short distance between them, and come to rest in her outstretched hands. She closed her fingers around it and hugged it to her.

Outside it was as if the entire mountain rang. A loud deep toll sounded, and her gathered watchers laughed. *To be here at this moment!* William sent in the link. *Thank you.*
Rose turned to go back up the passage. A crack sounded in the dark, and a small figure wrapped in furs and blankets appeared in front of her. Rose smiled, and looking down into the ancient face she said, “Hello, No’oma.”

The Cheyanne

kâse'ééhe, young woman

Épévamáno'e, It's good weather.

Estse shoes
Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 2

The Gathering

Chapter 10

In a glittering crystal cave a girl on the brink of womanhood looks down at an ancient being. Her smile is genuine, her joy radiant. The girl’s friends and family watch, unseen and from a distance, listening to the echo of the toll and reveling in her success. They see and hear, encourage and congratulate, through a special connection accomplished by their more than extraordinary friend.

(*)

Elsewhere, in a posh room, a woman hurls her hair brush at her attendant and screams in frustrated rage.

(*)


A mash of Middle and old English, Hermione sent. All that Chaucer we read when you were five is going to be useful.

In the cave Rose sniggered.

“Thou be yong,” No’oma observed. “The Gret Maister, Maugus a Mryathyn, say thee no sa yong.”

Rose looked curious. “That was his name?” she asked. “His real name, Maugus a Mryathyn?”

“In Engelond,” No’oma replied. “For he haden manye names in manye londs.” She reached out and lovingly caressed the key dangling from Rose’s neck. “Thou hast ta Katum Iska bee, ta Obo.”

Rose nodded. “Yes, Obo is our friend,” she said, and No’oma watched as Rose kneeled and gently stowed the Binding Stone in her satchel.

“Good tis,” No’oma said, and she looked again into Rose’s face with a happy smile. “Sa yong thou art.”

“So I’m told,” Rose said with a chuckle as she stood. “You are free, yes?”

“Yis,” No’oma replied. “Eteth thee? thirst?”
“No, I’m fine,” Rose said. “Do you live here?”

“No, I’m fine,” No’oma replied. “Fer to the soth, No’oma hath bee, but No’oma the call heard er thee opened Matȟó Thípila. Supposs eh, in tyme comende after this, maeihap. Thy mother wi thee be?”

“Yes,” Rose said. “The Bear only let me pass, though.”

No’oma nodded. “So that it myhte be, only thee maei pass fyst, Ta’etle was told this,” she said. “Come, opened Matȟó Thípila hath. No’oma maei take thee war thee maei.”

Rose kneeled down to the ancient elf. “I’d rather not go back through the snakes,” she said. “Would you mind taking me to my friends and family, please?”

No’oma nodded and took Rose’s hand. There was the sensation of apparition, and in an instant they were next to Hermione and the rest of their travelling companions. Rose was immediately smothered in an embrace by her mother.

“I don’t think I can take that again,” Hermione said, near tears, and pulling Rose to her feet. She hugged her daughter harder. “You did so well, so very well. Oh, Rosie…”

William Standing Bear laid his hand on Hermione’s shoulder. “She is your arrow, Hermione. You are the bow and the archer. As White Medicine Woman said, it is as it must be.”

Luna turned to No’oma while Hermione cuddled her daughter tightly and struggled to compose herself. “We are very pleased to meet you, No’oma,” she said. “These are our friends William Standing Bear and Johnathan Soaring Eagle. This is Rose’s cousin, Lilly, Her mother, Hermione, I am Luna, and lastly this is…”

“Lyra,” No’oma said. “War she blind, No’oma woulden know thee.”

“I don’t believe we’ve met,” Lavender said, a bit puzzled.

“In this lyfe, nay,” No’oma said. “Bot manye tofore.” She smiled and brushed her finger down the Lavender’s cheek. “O this face. Thou wilt knoweth one day.” She turned to Hermione who had released Rose into her cousin’s arms. “Thou hath come aforethen The Gret Maister’s werk he set for thee. No’oma maei halp thee a thee maei wont.”

“I would like to see the inside a Matȟó Thípila, please,” Lilly said brightly.

Hermione chuckled wetly as she hugged her daughter again. “It would be a bit warmer,” she said. “And more private.”

“Taken myn hand,” No’oma said. They gathered their blankets from the ground, and then they all grasped one of her hands. No’oma nodded, and the aged elf apparated them to the smaller crystal chamber. “Manye war the nightes ere No’oma serveth the Gret Maister er.” She smiled to herself. “No’oma will fetiche fyre.” She disaparated away and was back seconds later with an armload of firewood. No’oma laid a few large chunks in the hearth and lit them with a snap of her fingers. A cheery flame bloomed in the fireplace, and the smoke was gently sucked from the room through gaps in the crystals behind the mantle.

“A wonder,” William said as he sat in one of the chairs at the table. “Such a place of power.”

“Yis” No’oma said. “Ac the Gret Maister did parfourmen his teolung most myghtful ere the gret room. Er be his bedde chamber and room a thought.”
“May we go there?” Johnathan asked. “To the great room?”

No’oma smiled at the two native men. “Thee maei go war thee wisheth. Matȟó Thípila is fre to thee,”

“I thank you, No’oma,” William said, and Johnathan joined him as he left the chamber to explore.

“Just don’t go in the snake room,” Rose said with a smirk as they left. She laid back on the bed platform to marvel at the ceiling, and Lilly joined her.

No’oma laughed. “The **xamašěšenívotse** aslepid be,” she said to Rose. “Manye tymes out senden hem away No’oma hath trieny, yet hie return a remain. Fear hem no, ere springtyme hie will depart.”

Luna had wandered to the fireplace and sat on the cut off remains of a crystal pillar. She slumped a little, looking exhausted and warn. Lavender sat by her side and rubbed her back. “You’re overdoing it, Luna,” she said, kindly but seriously. “You’re in your second trimester now, and you should be getting more rest than you are, a lot more.”

Luna nodded. “It’s just so exciting and adventuresome,” she said, and she turned to her friend with a smile. “I understand, and I share your concern. I will try to limit myself.”

Lavender smirked and snorted. “Yeah, no you won’t, but I will,” she said. “So don’t get miffed when I make you sit down.”

Luna lovingly caressed Lavender’s face. “Our brave protector,” she said softly.

Lavender winked at her. “Don’t forget that,” she said lightly, and then a bit more seriously, “I never do.”

“No, that feels wonderful. You must teach this to Rolf.”

Lavender kissed the top of her friend’s head. “Anytime. Had five practice rounds with Hermione and Ginny,” she said, and she continued massaging Luna’s back.

Hermione looked on at her two friends with a tender face, and then her daughter and niece chatting and giggling on the bed platform. She breathed a sigh of relief and turned back to No’oma. “May I ask you some questions about the stones, No’oma?”

“What aught thou wish,” No’oma said. “There art wihten eh know no, bot eh will answer soth what eh maei.”

“Is there an elf for every stone?” Hermione asked.

No’oma shook her head, and said, “Nay, the elfward numbered fif. This half of the werld No’oma wacchen the north and the sothe, Obo the sothe ylonde, Bota the aerd of the launde and pyramids, Ka’ele’ the Isle a the great sae, bot sadly Ela has passed, her siyecraft faded. The holds a Urope, Engelond, and Kitia are awarde.”

“The European hold was in Greece, wasn’t it?” Hermione asked.

No’oma looked at her. “If thou menen Grece, alonde a white stones, eh atlien yea,” she said. “The warden anerly know certes.”

“I have the Greek stone already,” Hermione said. “And the one from England.”
“Thou hast done well,” No’oma said. “For thou now hast?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes,” she said and then looked sharply at No’oma. Realization lighting her face. “You know where the South American hold is!”

“True tis,” No’oma replied. “No’oma, aldest elfwarden be. “The Gret Maister No’oma knew as a childe, and wi him be as he set the stones ere the north and the sothe o this half o the werld.

“Will you take us there?” Hermione asked excitedly.

No’oma nodded and looked at Luna. “Yis, No’oma maei thee taken to pas that maei,” she said. “Bot thee friend with childe should rest irst, and thee also.”

Hermione smiled. “Yes, Christmas is a few days away, she said. We’ve done what we came to do, and I’m sure our families would like to have us home. We should start for England.”

“Abide here, No’oma will,” she said with a broad smile. “Come hither when ye maie.”

“We will return soon, you can be certain,” Hermione said. She looked around the chamber. “So beautiful.” She smirked. “Is there a bath here as well?” she asked.

No’oma looked at her. “To the Land a Stem and Stovys go, The Greet Maister would. He bathede ere.”

“Land of steam and vapors?” Hermione asked.

“Yellowstone,” Johnathan said, having reentered the chamber. “You must come down and feel the great room. Such power!” he had a look of amazement on his face. “William is sitting on the chair just soaking it in.”

“Thee and thy friend maei abide here wi No’oma ere thee wish,” No’oma said to him. “No’oma nao caren for a alder in manye yere.”

Johnathan laughed. “William, I think, will take that bargain,” he said, and then he looked at Hermione. “He still wants to go with you, though.”

Hermione chuckled. “I’m certain,” she said. “Shall we go down to the great room and plan?”

“I’ll stay here with Luna,” Lavender told her. “Whatever you decide we’ll be good with.”

Lilly looked at her cousin excitedly. “Will you take me to the snakes please?” she asked.

Rose looked at her with a resigned expression and then turned to her nanny. “At least ten feet away, and no touching,” Lavender said firmly. “Rose?” Lavender and Rose locked eyes and a look of understanding passed between them. Lavender nodded and the two girls left the chamber.

Hermione, No’oma, and Johnathan followed the two excited girls down the rough passage to the great room. Hermione stopped in the middle and just stared. William was right, the whole place vibrated with the echoes of great magic. “Amazing,” Hermione whispered. William, sat in the chair, looked to be in a deep trance. He smiled and opened his eyes.

“So many works,” he said. “So much power used and reflected here.”

Hermione looked at her new friend and smiled. “William,” she said. “We have the stone, and I’m certain my family would like us home for Christmas. You are welcome to join us, truly, but I suspect you would like to take No’oma up on an offer.”
William smiled. “And that would be?” he asked.

“Honoured alder,” No’oma said. “Thee art welcome to abide ere. No’oma, happy to serve thee would be.”

William chuckled. “To be cared for by No’oma? It will be my honor, not yours,” he said. “Yes, I would like that very much.”

“So mote it be,” No’oma said. “Thee maei come a go as thee might.”

William looked at Hermione. “Don’t forget me,” he said with a chuckle.

Hermione crossed the chamber and mounted the steps. She bent and hugged the old man. “We’ll be back shortly, don’t worry,” she said. “And Luna is of the same opinion, you should join us.”

“Go then,” William said. “Come back when you continue.”

Hermione hugged him again. “We will,” she said. “But we’re not leaving this moment.” She looked around in wonder. “No, not quite yet.”

(*)

“They are gorgeous!” Lilly said, two steps in front of Rose.

“Uh huh,” Rose said. “And, just like Lavender ordered, we stay back.” She had a fist full Lilly’s heavy coat, and she was not so gently pulling her backwards.

“Rose,” Lilly whinged.

“Lil,” Rose said sternly.

Lilly looked at Rose’s charm bracelet, and then up at her with George’s grin on her face. “We both know with you here I’m safe,” she said snidely.

“Not the time, Lil,” Rose said flatly.

“Okay,” the younger girl said, slightly defeated.

The two girls looked at the room full of hibernating snakes. “I wish River could see this,” Rose said with a faraway look.

“What, the snakes?” Lilly asked, puzzled.

Rose sniggered. “No, well yes, but all of it. Kata Joota, Matȟó Thípila…”

“You should send him a Christmas package,” Lilly told her cousin. “Something he can’t buy.”

Rose nodded as she twirled the key between her thumb and fingers. “Yeah,” she said, and nodded to herself. “Yeah, I’ll definitely do that.”

(*)

Ta’etle, the great bear, stood watch outside Matȟó Thípila. She had come, at last she had come. The Great Master had told him, those long years ago, that she would, and now she was there, in the
mountain. She and her family, finding the stone and freeing the elves. He knew the Great Master would never lie, but he had thought him mistaken. It had been so long. Ta’etle remembered being human, he remembered the speech and ways of people, but as the centuries had passed he had become more and more bear. Now, now everything was clear. The enchantment was falling away, and he could think more as a man would again. All the things that the Great Master had said would happen were coming to pass.

Ta’etle roared at the sky and casually shredded the bark of a nearby tree in happiness.

(*)

“Finn!” the dark woman shouted. “Finn!”

The other woman with the flowing red curls walked into the room. The fire in the hearth crackled and sent flickering light across the chamber to illuminate the scowling features of the dark woman.

“What does my mistress require?” Finn asked. Unseen by the other woman, Finn smirked. “More wine?”

“No,” the dark woman said, and turned to face Finn, who had composed her face into a flat emotionless mask. “Summon the Rotfang.”

Finn bowed. “As my mistress wishes,” she replied.

Sorry this one took a while, No’oma is hard to write, but I had her speaking Olde English from the start years ago. Also, life.

Had a multi paragraph explanation of my parenting style to respond to the critics. Boiled it down to this. Talked with my mid 20s daughter and told her the comments. She laughed, and said, “You let me wander around our forest alone at 5.” (She had her dog) At 10 she could do pretty much anything.

I also had a long “No’oma says,” section, instead, my faithful ones, I have faith in you.

More soon, and I revisited the entire work to correct some lingering grammar and continuity nits that were bothering me.

xamaėšé’šenovôtse Rattlesnakes
“An owl directly to you? From England?”

“Yes.”

“News from the Ministry?”

The man in the golden robes stared at the desktop in front of him, not seeing it. He was consumed by anxiety and a dread foreboding. “No, no. It’s…it’s her. She calls,” he said softly.

“Madam…”

“Don’t!” the man in the golden robes said forcefully. “Never say her name.”

The other man snorted “I thought that was just Riddle.”

“He was nothing. A fly, a gnat… compared to her.”

(*)

Johnathan Soaring Eagle watched as Hermione, Luna, Lavender, Rose, and Lilly grasped the umbrella in the Seattle international portkey terminal. “I’ll keep an eye on William and his friend,” he said. “Don’t be too long.”

Hermione took his hand. “Thank you, Jonathan,” she said. “We won’t be.” She smiled and let a small laugh go. “Rose won’t let us.”

“I think we can retrieve South America between Christmas and New Year’s Day,” Rose said. “She knows where it is.”

“We talked about this,” Lavender said flatly. “Luna is tired and pregnant. Slow down.”

“After the New Year, Rose,” Luna said. “When the older ones return to Hogwarts we will resume.”

“Okay,” Rose said with an acquiescent smile.

“One minute,” the portkey attendant said.
Across the terminal and man stared at the group on the departure pad as they bade goodbye to their large native friend. They were here, now. How the rest of Rotfang’s agents had lost them he couldn’t guess, but he now knew where nine nine nine and ten seventeen were, and he would alert the contingent. They were headed west, to Hawaii. That was all he could discover from the paperwork, but it was surely not their final destination.

“Jonathan,” Lavender said quietly and seriously. He turned, smiling, from Hermione to look at her. “The man, brown hair, mustache, by the door in the attendant kit, don’t look. He’s not a fan, but he’s watching intently.”

Jonathans face fell into an emotionless mask, and he nodded once. The smile reappeared and he waved goodbye as the umbrella began to glow. “See ya’ all soon,” he said as they vanished.

(*)

“Hey, boss,” Megan Fallow said as she flopped into the chair opposite the desk from Harry.

“Morning, Meg,” Harry said with a smile. “You wanted to see me?”

“Just updating you on the three majors,” she said, and pulled her magic eye from its socket. Huffing a breath on it, she polished it on her robes and popped it back in place. Looking back up she noticed her boss was a bit green. “Sorry, probably shouldn’t do that in front of people.”

Harry shook himself and then chuckled, “Ah, Moody did that kind of thing all the time. It’s just more shocking when a pretty woman does it.”

Megan smiled and flipped back her hair, revealing more of her scared face. “Pretty? Okay, I’ll take it,” she said. “Watch out though, Ernie is the jealous type.”

“Well then, why aren’t you Mrs. MacMillan,” Harry asked sarcastically.

“Oh, he’s asked,” she said smiling. “But it’s unnecessary, and it would be a legal problem with the family business if he married an Auror. They sell the department a fair bit of goods.”

Harry chuckled. “Just wondering why he hasn’t made an honest woman of you.”

Megan snorted a laugh. “Harrison has gone to ground somewhere in Scotland.” She said. “Shouldn’t be more than a few days and we’ll have him. Got his wand, so unless he steals one…”

Harry smiled. “Good. Next?”

“The illegal potion makers are being a bit more problematic,” Megan continued. “The opium potion they are distributing is spiced with Oblivismater.”

“Great,” Harry said, sarcasm flowing. “None of their customers remember them?”

Megan shook her head. “They just remember the addiction,” she said.

“They’re evil pieces of shit, Meg,” Harry said with not so concealed anger. “Find them. Stop them.”

Megan nodded grimly. “Adelson might be dead.”

Harry looked startled.

“Blaise and I followed his trail to the edge of the W.D.R.,” Megan told him. “Looked like the dumb arse walked right in.”
“What the hell was he doing at the dragon reserve?” Harry asked bemused.

“No clue,” Megan answered. “But I got your brother in law to do a sweep, and he wasn’t there, alive anyway.” At Harry curious look she grinned and continued. “Dragonologist Weasley will be monitoring the dung for the next few weeks.”

Harry looked both surprised and amused at the same time. “Oh. Okay, good. Well, that all?” he said while chortling.

“No,” Megan said, the one eye looking out the back of her head. “Clem Falmonth is your spy,” she said. “Come on in, Parv.”

“God damn it, Megan,” Parvati said as she entered the office.

Megan laughed as she stood, and she punched her old dorm mate’s arm softly. “Never gonna get to eavesdrop on me again. Thought you knew that by now.”

“Clem’s a spy, is he?” Parvati asked chuckling.

“Blaise and I have been researching your little problem in our spare time,” Megan told them, and she grinned at their shocked faces. “Please, keep a secret from me?” she laughed. “You all think you’re so good. Lavender and Scamander are the only ones capable.” She became serious. “Since the battle in Diagon Alley we’ve been looking for your spy. It’s him, and he’s communicating with someone on the continent. Blaise will be putting a trace on his owls, we’ll know soon enough.”

Parvati hugged her friend. “Thanks, Meg.”

“No problem,” she said and smiled. “Am I a member of the club now?”

Parvati smiled. “You always have been, Meg,” she said. “The only reason you’re not one of the Sisters is that you were in hospital when we formed. You know that.”

Megan smiled softly at Parvati. “Yeah,” she said. “I’ll let you know what we find.”

(*)

“Last time we were here we went through the main terminal on Oahu,” Hermione said. “It was far too crowded for my taste, this is the island of Hawaii, and we’re in a town called Honoka’a.” she looked around at the inside of the small facility and the one, nearly asleep attendant. “I gave us a few hours here before we move on to Jakarta.”

“Is there food nearby?” Luna asked. “The fruit here is spectacular.”

Hermione shrugged. “Honoka’a is very small, but I’m certain something is close by.” She looked over at the attendant. “We’ll return in a three hours to catch our key.”

The man nodded and waggled his fist at them with the thumb and pinky finger extended. “Aloha,” he said, and went back to reading his magazine and dozing.

The terminal turned out to be in the store room of a combination crystal shop and espresso bar. As they passed through the shop, Hermione asked the clerk if there was some place to eat nearby.

“No problem, sista,” the young woman behind the espresso bar said. “Just down the road there’s an Asian market, Kenji’s. Lunch, souvenirs, everything you want.”

Hermione smiled at her. “Thank you, we’ll be back soon.”
“Gonna ap down to da beach?” the barista asked.

“We have our swimming kits with us,” Lilly pointed out.

“Let’s get Luna fed first,” Hermione said. “Then we’ll consider.” She turned and opened the door. “Come on, Rose,” she said. Then she noticed Rose was silent and staring into nothingness. “Rose?”

“It’s…” she turned in a circle. “That way,” she said, pointing toward the west wall of the shop. Hermione looked at her daughter with a slight smile and wide eyes as Rose said, “It’s… far, almost too far, but it’s here. There’s one of them here.”

(*)

The old manor house showed just a few lit windows as Gabriel Marsters mounted the steps. He’d only been here twice. Once to receive the golden robes from her, and once to report on the fall of Riddle. He hadn’t enjoyed either of those visits. The Rotfang had chosen him as successor, and he in turn had chosen Donald. Two years, just two more short years and he could retire from the seat and take up residence in the “Formers Villa”. Marshalling his courage, he muttered a small prayer to a god he didn’t believe in and pulled the door chime.

The same man answered the door that had answered it the previous two times, and he was struck by how little the man had changed. He was still taller than Gabriel, trim and muscled, with not a trace of grey in his brown blonde hair. “She’s expecting you,” the man said. “In the study. Please, follow me.”

“Penn was it?” Gabriel asked.

“Yes, very good,” Penn replied. “Most of you are so... what’s a good word for it? Ah, yes, terrified. Most of you are so terrified by her that you forget us.”

Gabriel was missing something. “Most of us?”

Penn sniggered to himself. “Yes, most of us,” he said as they approached a large set of double doors. “Here we are.” Penn opened the door and announced, “Mistress, the Rotfang.”

Gabriel drew a calming breath that didn’t work, and he entered the room. Penn closed the door silently behind him. She was there, in a chair facing the fire, a glass of wine in her hand. “Come and sit, Rotfang,” she said.

Marshalling all the courage he could, Gabriel walked across the room and sat in the chair opposite the old woman. Her hair was gray white and thin, thin as she herself seemed to be. Her voice was old, her hands shaking, but as he looked in her dark eyes he saw a burning intellect. “How can I be of service, Madam?”

“You are failing,” she said, and a cold chill went down his spine. “Someone with great power is affecting the flow of the Tha. I and my predecessors formed and preserved Rotfang to prevent this, and as you know, there is a high price for not fulfilling your charge.”

“It must be nine nine nine,” he said in a rush. “We’ve had a lot of trouble trying to eliminate her.”

“I am unconcerned with your troubles, and excuses bore me,” she said. “I am only interested in results.”

“Yes, Madam.”
“The Rotfang has one purpose,” she said. “Fulfill it or be replaced.”

“Yes, Madam,” he said, his voice shaking.

“Both that held the seat of Rotfang before you paid the price of failure,” the dark woman said. “The first for missing Dumbledore, and the second for missing Riddle.” She looked at him with smile that held no comfort. “Do try not to let that be your fate.”

“Yes, Madam,” he whispered.

“Penn!” the dark woman said loudly. The door opened a moment later, and Penn stepped into the room. “Show the Rotfang out.”

“Yes, Mistress,” Penn replied with a little smile.

Gabriel did his best not to run from the room. Penn closed the door behind him and handed Gabriel a brandy snifter half filled with Scotch. “As I recall you prefer The Balvenie,” Penn said. Gabriel downed it in one go while Penn sniggered.

“How do you stand it?” Gabriel asked as they walked toward the front doors of the manor house.

“We have an agreement,” Finn said from a doorway in the entry hall. “We serve, and she ignores us.” She chuckled. “In large measure.”

“Who is being difficult?” Penn asked as they approached the door.

Gabriel looked at him suspiciously. “She shares our projects with you?” he asked.

Penn laughed and Finn snorted. “As Muggles she views us as incapable of interfering, so we know quite a bit, yes,” Finn replied.

“Nine nine nine and, well ten seventeen also,” Gabriel said.

“Names?” Penn asked. “We don’t know your case system.”

Gabriel nodded. “Oh, of course, yes, you wouldn’t,” he said. “They are Luna Lovegood Scamander, and Rose Hermione Granger Weasley.” At their looks of recognition, he said, “I see you understand our difficulties.”

(*)

Clem Falmonth had been in the post department of the Ministry for twenty two years. He had begun as a clerk and never advanced. He was satisfied with his situation though. Alice, a nice flat above Diagon Alley, and take away from the Leaky and the Muggle restaurants near the Leaky, were all he desired. Delivering the overseas packages, and mail too large for the paper airplane method in the labyrinthine halls of the Ministry, allowed him a certain anonymity. He was ignored, unseen, and that enabled him to gather information without being obvious.

His grand uncle had been a higher up in some organization on the continent. Clem had never been interested, or considered smart enough, to be let in on the secrets of that little club, but he had been useful to them, and they paid well. He learned early, during the war year, to be inconspicuous. He was new to the Ministry then, but he had kept his head down and never drawn attention, learning how to go unnoticed. After a time he had come to understand how to manipulate his magic to enhance the effect.
And so he wandered the offices, hallways, and work rooms of the Ministry, unseen and unheard. Given no more consideration than the mail he delivered. The people were amazingly free around him, not even for a moment considering how what they said could be valuable information to a certain group of fanatics. Clem typically had no idea what they wanted from him, they would give him a name, and he would listen. When he heard something he would send an owl. Working in the post department made that part easy.

Lately they had wanted everything they could get about Mrs. Scamander and Mrs. Granger Weasley’s daughter. Happily a letter had come into the mail room this very morning from a Muggle in Mexico. It was addressed to Mrs. Granger Weasley’s daughter care of Head Auror Potter. He’d quickly duplicated the letter and wrote a brief explanation before sending it off to France. Satisfied that he had fulfilled his duty, he dropped the original letter into the pile in his cart for Head Auror Potter, and set off for the upper floors.

In a back corner of the now empty mail room a Disillusion charm rippled out of existence. With a self-satisfied chuckle, Blaise Zabini casually strolled from the room.

(*)

Hermione’s grin turned to a smirk. “You knew.” Luna said, nodding to herself.

“I suspected,” Hermione replied. “No’oma mentioned that one of the elfward, Ka’ele, guarded the ‘Island of the great sea’. Ka’ele sounded Hawaiian to me, and we’d been through Oahu, so I thought we’d at least pass through here and see if Rose could sense it.”

“I can’t be this close and not go, mum,” Rose said pleadingly.

Hermione looked down at Rose. “I know, dear, but we have to take our time, and we don’t have enough of it just now,” she said, and she hugged Rose to her. “Patience, my wonder girl, patience. We know it’s here, and we’ll be back soon, right after South America.”

Rose stared into nothingness at the back wall of the shop. “Alright,” she said. “It’s hard, mum. It’s like it’s pulling me toward it. The more of them we find, the stronger the call gets.”

“Sup?” the barista asked. “What you looking for?”

Hermione turned to her, she’d forgotten she was there for a moment. “I’m a researcher, and we’re tracing some ancient artifacts,” she told the young woman. “Are you native Hawaiian?”

“Sure thing, sista,” the Barista said. “Leiani.” She extended her hand, and she faltered a bit as a wave of dizziness swept through her. “Whoa, little too much mai tai last night.”

She has a pure heart, Luna sent. You can trust her.

Hermione nodded. “I am Hermione Granger Weasley, this is my daughter, Rose, her cousin, Lilly, and our friends Luna and Selene.”

Leiani looked shocked. “Howzit!” she said, stunned. “Even out here in da middle of da ocean we heard about you.” She smiled. “My grandfada, he Kahuna Nui. He gonna shit.” She looked at the two girls. “Sorry.”

Hermione laughed. “Oh, don’t worry,” she said. “They’ve heard worse from my husband.”

“What you look for?” Leiani asked.
“More of a who,” Hermione replied. “Does the name, ‘Ka’ele mean anything to you?”

“No,” Leiani answered. “Not a common name. I only know it from the stories of the Menehune.”

“Those were the ancient Hawaiian little people, yes?” Rose asked.

Leiani smiled and nodded. “You got it, lil sista,” she said.

“Ka’ele is an elf,” Luna said. “She is real, and we believe she may be close by.”

Leiani looked surprised, “Never met an elf,” she said. “Some over Maui and Oahu way. I never seen one.”

“Not here?” Hermione asked curiously.

“We closer to da ancient ways here,” Leiani said. “Don’t need ‘em. Da ancestors didn’t use ‘em, so we don’t either. Some of da others did, Samoans, Maori. Don’t thing anyone else did.”

“Leiani,” Hermione began. “When we return could you arrange for us to meet with your elders. We have found that the original peoples have a trove of knowledge that we need.”

Leiani laughed. “You some smart Haoles,” she said. “Sure thing. Grandfada and Aunti Mona gonna be happy,” she said, and then she looked at Rose. “Dere’s sometin else though, dat thing you feel?”

Rose nodded. “Yes,” she said. “As my mother said, we’re looking into the elves’ history. There are artifacts that were placed around the world, and we are finding them to set a wrong to right.”

One of Leiani’s eyebrows rose, and she silently sniggered. “Yeah, Granfada gonna be really happy.”

(*)

“She didn’t dismiss you,” Donald said.

“No, not this time,” Gabriel replied in relief. “You’re not Rotfang yet, Don, but nine nine nine and ten seventeen have to be dealt with soon. She has no patience.”

Donald smiled at his superior. “Well, on that we may have some good news,” he said, and placed a small pile of parchment on the desk. “Falmouth passed us a letter that was sent to ten seventeen, and one our agents at the Seattle Port Key Terminal saw them both a few hours ago. They were headed to Hawaii.”

“Send a team after them now,” Gabriel said. “We have no more time for caution. Follow the trail, and if it comes to it, eliminate all of them.”
Leiani pulled the large shell from under the counter after Hermione and her entourage left the shop. She chanted an obscure native charm as she filed the shell with water. Then, holding the shell up to her face so that her breath made little ripples on the water, she said, “Tutu Kane.”

(*)

Rose’s leg bounced under the table relentlessly, and Hermione shook her head. She’d taken the chance that a stone was here on the Big Island of Hawaii, and now Rose was paying the price. Her daughter looked to the north-west every few moments and sighed. “Up in those hills,” Rose said quietly to herself.

Hermione put her hand on Rose’s leg, quieting it for a moment. “I know, Rose,” she said. “Let’s finish feeding Luna and go down to the beach as Leiani suggested. Maybe that will get your mind off it.”

“Yeah,” Lilly said. “And we could think about your present for River.”

Lavender and Luna turned their heads to look at Rose. “Present for River?” Lavender asked with a grin.

That did take Rose’s attention from the stone’s call. She blushed a little and looked away. “Um, well, Lilly and I were talking, and I thought I’d send River a Christmas present, if I could,” she said.

Hermione kissed the top of her daughter’s head as she hugged her to her side. “What did you have in mind?” she asked.

“Something he can’t buy for himself,” Lilly said. “Remember?”

“Yeah, I was thinking of maybe a picture of me without all the makeup and hair stuff,” Rose said, still not looking up.

“In a locket,” Luna said, as she watched two myna birds fight over a French fry on the boardwalk in front of Kenji’s. “That way he could always have it close by.”
Lavender ran her hand down the back of Rose’s head, and said, “Weave some of your hair into a cord to hang it from.”

Rose looked up at her. “You think he’d like that?” she asked. The three grown women at the table all shared a smile.

“Oh, yes,” Hermione told her. “Yes, he would.”

(*)

Harry looked up as Megan and Blaise barged through his door. “Hey, Boss,” Megan said as she dropped into the chair in front of his desk. Blaise stood behind her smiling and shaking his head. Behind both them, in the doorway, Parvati stood looking exasperated. “Come on in, Parv,” Megan told her. “This concerns you too.”

“Thanks for asking,” Parvati said in a huff. “You know, Meg, he does have people other than you in here from time to time. You should at least try knocking.”

Megan laughed, tapped the strap on the side of her head that held her magical eye in place, and said, “I knew he was alone. Close the door.”

“You find something?” Harry asked.

“After a fashion, sir,” Blaise said. “Falmonth copied the letter from the Muggle to your niece, and he sent it to France. I put a trace on the owl, and its flight terminated at a castle outside of Amiens.”

“Excellent!” Harry said. “Well done, Blaise.”

Blaise barely smiled, which Harry knew was a full on grin for the Slytherin, and said, “Thank you, sir.”

Harry’s shoulders drooped. “Harry, Blaise,” he said. “We’ve know each other far too bloody long for ‘sir’.”

“What, you are a knight,” Megan pointed out snidely.

Harry glared at his prized lead Auror. “And you’re a giant pain in my arse.”

Megan smiled like she had just won the lottery.

Harry shook his head and looked at Blaise. “Really, Blaise, great work. Get me all the details about this castle you can.”

“Yes, sir… Harry,” Blaise said, and Megan roared with laughter as she stood.

“Go on,” Harry said laughing himself. “Get out.”

“Absolutely, Sir Harry,” Megan said and curtsied. At Harry’s scowl she laughed again and followed Blaise out of the office.

(*)

On the northern end of the Big Island of Hawaii there are a series of valleys running up the eastern side. The most southerly is well known. Wiapio Valley was remarkable, Hermione thought, as she watched Lilly and Rose play in the surf. The beach was lovely, perfect soft sand a hundred feet wide led down to the crystal waters of the Pacific. Behind the beach was a brackish pond, and then the
spectacular tropical jungle filled valley. A small break of perhaps two feet lapped at the shore, and
the girls were having a marvelous time swimming and attempting to bodysurf the diminutive waves.

“Good decision,” Lavender said from Hermione’s side. “She was about to burst.”

Hermione looked at Rose with a little guilt on her face. “I really didn’t intend to use her like that,”
she said.

Lavender looked at her friend skeptically. “It’s alright, no real harm.”

Hermione nodded. “Don’t let me do it again.”

Lavender smiled. “Done.”

(*)

A quarter of the way around the world, two other women prepared breakfast.

“How many we got tonight, Moll?” Carla asked.

“The three of us,” Molly replied. “Rose, Lilly, Hermione, Lavender, and Luna. That’s eight. Ron
and Hugo should be here shortly, so ten. Is Jarra coming?”

“I think so,” Carla said. “He likes Luna a lot.”

“Who doesn’t?” Molly said with a laugh. “We’ll plan for twelve with Obo.”

“Obo has neatened the beds,” the old elf said as he entered the kitchen. “Will the mistresses be
needing Obo’s help with dinner?”

Carla smiled at her treasured friend and companion. How she had managed her first eighty years
without him she couldn’t fathom. “Always, Obo,” she said. “Always.”

(*)

As he sat in the Cairo Port Key Terminal with Hugo, Ron read her most recent letter again.

My Knight

She did it! Again. We have the North American one, and we will be home before Christmas. We also
met with another of the keepers. We now know there were five, but only four still live apparently.
This one knows of the South American location, so we will be returning shortly after the winter
holidays. All five of us are well, and we looking forward to stopping through Cohn Manor and
collecting your parents on our way home. I have so much to tell you, but that will have to wait until
we’ve said a proper hello.

Ron smiled. A “proper hello” was one of their code words. He was looking forward to a “proper
hello” himself.

As I wrote you previously, we have acquired a travelling companion. William will be joining us after
we return to the quest, but for now he is enjoying being pampered by the keeper of western holds.
She is just as special as the other keeper we have met, and the space she keeps is spectacular. I must
show it to you.

My companions say to tell their husbands that they will be home soon and to expect a warm reunion.

Ron sniggered. Rolf and Seamus were aware, and they just as eager to see their respective wives.

Tell your sister her daughter behaved perfectly.

Ron nodded. He had.

I love you more than words can convey.

Yours forever,

H.

Ron folded the parchment and put it back in his pocket. Hugo, sat next to him, was entranced by the parade of strange people that came and went in the terminal. Cairo was a central point in the port key system. They keys could drop a person or group off anywhere, but it had been determined, through hard experience, that most long distance travelers should come and go through specified points. The larger terminals had been constructed in the late nineteenth century, secured from the Muggle world, and it was through these that the wizarding population traveled until it was time to port to their final destination. The diversity of people was incredible here, and Ron had to admit the costumes were amazing.

A group of tall black men in brightly colored robes made up of layers of gauzy fabric strolled by. They conversed in a language Ron couldn’t even begin to grasp. Welsh was strange, but the clicks and pops that apparently made up part of this particular tongue were other worldly. A group from India walked by going the opposite direction from the men. Ron recognized their origin from the saris the women wore and the plain white attire of the men, it reminded him of the outfits Parvati and Padma’s family wore to Parvati and Anthony’s wedding.

In his pocket, his watch spoke up. “Five minutes,” it said.

“Right, time to get ready for the hop to Perth,” he told his son.

Hugo smiled as he stood. “Mum and Rosie still don’t know we’re coming?”

Ron grinned back. “Nope,” he said, taking his son’s hand and starting toward the departure pads. “They think we’re back at the Burrow setting up Christmas.” He laughed. “Harry, Ginny and theirs can get it sorted this year. We’ll be back in time for dinner, and Ginny’s got all mum’s recipes.”

Hugo smiled. “I can’t wait to see Rosie and Lilly again,” he said. “But I really can’t wait to see grandmum, granddad, and Carla.”

“I was quite surprised mum and dad took this week,” Ron said, looking bemused. “But autumn has been rough on your grandmum’s knees, and dad said the bath and Kata Juta helps with mum’s aches so much they just had to go.” He sniggered. “At least they know we’re all coming.”

The large chalk board over departure pad three had two names in front of theirs. Nakamura departed for New Deli, then Sanchez departed for Cape Town, and it was their turn. “Underhill!” the attendant called and Ron and Hugo stepped up to her. “Here you are,” The young woman said as she handed them a crumpled newspaper. “One, two, three.”

(*)
“You keiki like da ocean?” Leiani asked Lilly and Rose, as Hermione and her group reentered the shop.

Lilly ran to Leiani and hugged her around the middle. “Thanks,” she said. “It was brilliant.”

“Glad you had fun, lil sista,’ Leiani said, hugging Lilly back. “How bout you? Whoa!” Leiani exclaimed as she looked at Rose. “Your hair just like mine. Get it wet, it twice as long.”

Rose giggled and nodded. “Mum keeps it trimmed,” she said. “Otherwise I’d walk on it after a swim.”


“Nah,” Leiani said. “It’s great. We got shade wherever we go, yeah?”

Hermione chuckled. “That is a good way to look at it,” she said.

“Talked wid Granfada,” Leiani said to Hermione. “Just let us know when you wanna meet. He’ll be happy to.”

Hermione took her hand. “Thank you so much, Leiani,” she said. “I’m sad we’re in such a rush.”

“Make some time when you come back, yeah,” Leiani said with her never ending smile. “You be on island time ‘fore you know it.”

“Probably,” Lavender said. She looked at her travelling companions and tilted her head toward the terminal room door. “Go on, I’ll just be a moment.”

Leiani and Lavender watched the rest make their way into the store room terminal. “Sup?” Leiani asked.

“You say you know who Hermione is?” Lavender asked.

“Oh yeah,” Leiani replied. “Read all about it in magic history at school. You were dere wid her, yeah?”

Lavender nodded solemnly. “Yes, I was,” she said. “And you have probably read about me too. My real name is Lavender Brown.”

Leiani’s eyes flew wide. “Holy shit!” she said, and gaped at Lavender.

Lavender sniggered and took the other woman’s hand. “Keep that to yourself, please.” she said. “Leiani, trouble follows us. It’s currently actively trying to find us, and it may come looking here. You’re the only one that would have any information that the people who are currently angry with us would want. Be very careful if they come asking questions, they are extremely dangerous.”

Leiani’s face became hard, a sudden transformation that made Lavender proud of the young woman. She could see a hundred generations of Polynesian warriors reflected in pretty young woman’s face. “You want ‘em to disappear.” She asked flatly.

Lavender smiled. “No, we’ll handle them,” she said. “Just be careful and aware.”

“Don’ worry,” Leiani said, and she looked toward the back room. “Keole, my cousin in der? He may look like a lolo. He’s a bad ass.”

Lavender nodded. “Good,” she said. “But don’t depend on that. Just be safe, and if they come, play
the fool.”

Leiani smiled grimly. “No problem, Good Wolf,” she said.

(*)

Jakarta smelled like a flower shop drowning in fish, with a restaurant and an open sewer attached. It was overpowering.

“Ugh,” Lavender said, and she dabbed at her eyes.

“Wow,” Hermione agreed. She pulled her wand and cast the air freshening charm in a bubble around them.

The Jakarta Terminal was located west of the downtown area in an industrial park filled with metal buildings. Some were factories, some were warehouses, and some were fish processors apparently.

“We’re only here for twenty minutes,” Hermione said. “We’ll just have to muddle through.”

Luna looked across the busy terminal as they left the arrival area. “There appears to be a lounge area just there,” she said, pointing to a raised platform that had tables and chairs on it. They found an empty table and set about waiting for their next jump.

(*)

“Aloha,” Keole said to the group of people that appeared in the store room. “Manifest said the last group was it for today. Who you?”

A man in a business suit approached him. “Good day,” he said. “We are friends of a group that came earlier, three women and two girls, and we’re just trying to catch up with them.”

Keole looked at him for along moment, then he nodded. “You need go Fiji den.”

‘Fiji?’ The man said.

“Yeah, brah,” Keole said with a smile.

“Alright, can you make a key for my friends and me?” he asked.


The man turned to his friends and they huddled in conversation. Keole counted eight. More than he wanted to take on at the moment, even with Leiani disillusioned in the corner. The man turned back to Keole. “Where are we going?”

Keole pointed to a map and a picture on the wall. “Dat’s Oahu terminal. App der, dey take care a you.”

“Thank you very much,” the man said. His group studied the picture and map for a few moments and then they disaparated.

“Dey’ll be back,” Keole said. “An dey won’t be happy.”

Leiani cancelled the Disillusion, walked up to her giant of a cousin, and leaned against him. “Yeah, and we’ll be ready.”
They’d been traveling for close to ten hours since they left George’s Ranch in Idaho, racing the sun. It was climbing into the sky over the desert as Hermione and her four companions appeared under the shade of the trees in the small park. “Almost there,” Hermione said as she gave Lilly and Rose a bottle of water from her bag. Even in the mid-morning the heat was already starting to build in the outback. “It’s hot, but the air certainly is cleaner.


Lavender appeared in the yard with Rose and Lilly first, then seconds later Hermione and Luna snapped into existence on either side of them. Lilly closed her eyes for a moment, and then Mola the goanna shot from under the porch, running full on toward her.

“I’m happy to see you too,” Lily said as the lizard leapt from the ground into her arms.

Luna ran a finger down Mola’s forehead and back. “She has made her home here,” she said. “You did a good thing, Lilly.”

The door to Cohn manor opened and Carla emerged with a tray full of salt rimmed glasses of lemonade. She set them on the porch table and turned to her friends. “Obo said you just got here, have a seat,” she said. “We’ve started dinner, Lunch is ready when you are, Moll and Arthur are over at the bath, think that’s all. Yer caught up.”

Luna smiled, mounted the steps, and hugged Carla. “How were the two groups of students?” she asked.

Carla laughed. “Well, think I got myself a welcome speech,” she said while Hermione, Lavender and the girls approached. All of them save for Lilly hugged the old woman, and then sat at the porch table and took up their glasses. Lilly stood next to Carla, leaning against her and stroking Mola’s back while Carla wrapped an arm around her.

Lavender chuckled. “Got a speech, do you now,” she said, and she took a sip of the lemonade. “This is so good.”

Carla nodded. “The first group taught us a bit so the second one got this,” she said and cleared her throat. “Welcome to Cohn Manor,’ I said. ‘There’s a few rules we figured out. The first is Obo is our friend, not your servant. If you need something, you ask me first. Two, this here is Mola.”’ Carla stroked her finger down the lizards back and the goanna leaned into the caress. “She likes me, Obo, and anyone with the last name Potter, Weasley, or Scamander. If you don’t fit that don’t try to touch her, or you may pull back a stump. Three, quiet time is ten, including the rec room. Keep us up and you will regret it. Four, when I say it’s breakfast, lunch, or dinner time, it is. Eat or go hungry. And five, It’s hot here. Drink.”

The gathered women laughed. “The students behaved?” Luna asked after a few moments.

“Oh yeah,” Carla said. “The second group set up a temporary pen for a while out back in the courtyard. They were Apparating all over the country collecting creatures. They’d study them a bit and send them back where they came from.”

Lilly set Mola down on the porch and watched as the goanna dropped over the side and scooted
under the deck. She turned and hugged the old woman. “Bet you’ve seen a few things you didn’t know existed,” Lilly said.

Carla hugged Lilly back. “Sure have, Lil,” she replied. “Them too. We got ourselves a dwarf dragon species down in Tasmania they didn’t know about.”

“Oh, how intriguing,” Luna said. “Did they write a full report?”

“Yeah,” Carla said chuckling. “Your man, Hollister? He was giddy. Handled the kids like a cattle drover too. You best keep him.”

“You say Molly and Arthur are at Kata Juta?” Hermione asked.

Carla smiled fondly. “Arthur makes sure Moll goes at least twice a day,” she said. “I’ve been goin’ with ‘em in the evenings. It’s good for me, but it’s great for her. She’s movin’ better now than she has in years, she says.”

“Healer Allistone will be happy to hear that,” Hermione said. “I…”

There was a snap of apparition in the yard as Hugo and Ron appeared, and Hermione leapt out of her chair. “Ron!” she cried as she ran.

Ron let go of Hugo’s hand and caught his wife as she crashed into him, crushing him with a hug. “I missed you so much,” she said.

He spit some of her hair from his mouth, and said, “I’ve missed you too.”

She was kissing Ron again. However obsessed she was, whatever was occupying her mind, all the cares she carried with her, everything was swept away when she was in Ron’s arms. He responded with equal passion. They were lost in the reunion, not hearing Carla call Hugo to her, not hearing Luna’s sigh of joy at the love they radiated, and not hearing Lavender approach, sniggering the whole way.

“How long is this show going on for?” she asked.


“Seriously,” Lavender said. “There’s a room for you, you know.”

Ron disconnected himself slightly from his wife. “Wha?” he asked, somewhat dazed.

Lavender shook her head, picked up Hugo’s bag he had dropped, turned, and walked back toward the porch. “Come on,” she said to Hugo, Rose, and Lilly. “Let’s get you to your rooms.”
Hermione woke and stretched. Lavender had ordered Lilly, Rose, Hugo, and Luna to bed for a nap shortly after lunch. “The more sleep they get, the easier it’ll be to reset to our normal schedule,” she had told Hermione. “And Luna needs all the rest she can get.” Hermione had thought the plan brilliant, and she decided to have a kip herself. After the cold of Wyoming and Idaho the heat of central Australia was welcome, and once she had divested herself of her traveling clothes that warmth had lulled her to a restful sleep.

Her shed clothing was neatly stacked on the chair next to the bed, her sleep shirt and knickers the only thing on her at the moment. Humming to herself, she dressed quickly, made a quick stop at the loo, and joined the group around the table in the kitchen.

“Afternoon, luv,” Ron said as she entered the kitchen. “You’re first up.” He rose, hugged her and kissed her tenderly. “We were just about to wake the girls anyway.”

She looked around at the others gathered at the table. “Lavender went down with rest of us?” she asked, noticing that only Ron, Carla, and Molly were there.

“Yeah,” Ron said with a chuckle. “She likes to put on a show of being unfaltering, but after you all got settled in she nodded off right here. Carla shooed her off to bed.”

“You work the poor thing so hard,” Carla with fake concern and a laugh. “She’s human like the rest of us.” She smirked and laughed again. “Well, mostly. Lav needs rest too.”

“All my girls are driven women,” Molly said as she directed the knife to chop up some sprouts. “It’s hard to get them to relax, but this place seems to do it.”

Hermione looked at her mother in law. “It does,” she said. “I wish we didn’t have to rush back, but the children should be home for Christmas.” She smiled. “You look well, Molly. The bath working miracles?”

Molly smiled at her. “It really has,” she said. “Arthur intends for us to return after the holidays.”

Hermione smiled at the woman that had become her second mother. “Maybe you should winter here,” she said.

“Exactly my idea,” Arthur said as he entered from the courtyard door. “Not the whole winter, mind, but most of it. Winter holidays, Rose’s birthday, some other times we should be back at the Burrow, but yes, from November to March I think we’ll come here, if Carla will have us that is.” He smiled
fondly at her.

Carla laughed. “You two are welcome any time. Wouldn’t have offered if I didn’t mean it,” she said, and she looked to Hermione. “They’ll be a big help with the kids, too.”

“Those ‘kids’ are doing their post NEWT level research,” Molly said with a chuckle. “But however bright they may be, they do sometimes have trouble with basic tasks, Carla tells us.”

“Eh, none of ‘em been smarter than Rose,” Carla said offhandedly.

Hermione smiled with pride.

“Or nearly as good with the creatures as Lilly,” Carla continued. “She’d ‘av had that dragon following her around like a dog.” She sniggered to herself. “Big, fire spitting dog.”

Hermione chuckled too. She had no doubt that Lilly would have tried to tame the dragon, much to her nanny’s dismay. The two remarkable girls had proven themselves quite the team. Sisters in spirit, they had managed the previous two and a half weeks with a maturity that belied their age and a minimum of complaints. Their current obsession were the presents Rose was collecting to send to River, one of which was knitting itself in the chair next to her mother in law.

The yarn had been in the cupboards of the pantry room for many years according to Carla. Her aunt Orla had it around for mending, she had told them, but Orla hadn’t been a knitter. After hugs and kisses had been exchanged with their grandmother Lilly and Rose had explained Roses desire to send River a few gifts, and Molly had suggested the scarf.

There was the snap of apparition in the kitchen, and Obo appeared. “Master Jarra will be joining us soon,” He said.

“Thanks, Obo,” Carla said and hugged the old elf to her side. “You tell him we’re making crock tail?”

“He was pleased,” Obo said, nodding.

At Ron’s curious look his mother laughed. “We’ve eaten a lot of odd things while we’ve been here,” she told him. “Carla hasn’t driven us from the table yet. Don’t worry, you’ll like it.’

“Obo has acquired the makings for Mistress Luna’s meal as well,” He told Carla. “There are many roots and fruits of this land that she has not tasted.”

“Thank you, Obo,” Hermione said tenderly. And once more she was overwhelmed with the sensation of mission. Here, right here in front of her was the reason. Obo, No’oma, Kreature, Dilly, and countless others, but most of all for her friend and savior, Dobby. She had never forgotten his sacrifice. He had traded his life for hers, and for him she would free the elves, if for no other purpose than to honor his memory. She laid her hand on the ancient elf’s shoulder, and she smiled. There were hundreds of thousands of other reasons though. One for every elf alive.

(*)

“He lied to us!” the man in the business suit said as he stormed from the Fiji terminal.

One of his cohorts grabbed the man’s arm and turned him back to face his companions. “Damion,” the shorter man said to his well-dressed leader. “We will return to Hawai’i and question him.” He smirked. “You know how efficient our interrogation methods are.”
“I’m tired of fruitless hunting and lost battles,” Damion said. “You weren’t there, Charles.” He growled to himself. “Nine nine nine and her minions there in Australia, they… they wiped the floor with us. Bernice will never be the same. Then the animal came with minions of her own. Ella and I barely escaped with our lives.”

“The animal will be dealt with,” a stout woman among their ranks said. “For the memory of Diagon if nothing else.”

Somber heads nodded, and Damion looked toward them. “We return to Hawaii,” he said. “And then we get some answers.” He growled to himself. “And maybe some satisfaction.”

(*)

“Should put up something like this at home,” Ron said as they lounged in the warm soothing water. “I’ll talk to Harry about it.”

They floated in the warm pool, and looked out across the underground lake as they let the water ease away the stress and worries they carried. Arthur and Molly had left for the Manor an hour ago, and Lavender had ushered the girls back shortly after. Hermione hadn’t been able to pull herself from the pool just yet, so she and Ron had stayed. The smug, knowing look Lavender had shown her had been met with a satisfied smile and a shrug.

Hermione turned in his arms and clasped her hands behind his neck. “Perhaps,” she said. “Having a reason to come back here is good though.”

Ron looked at his wife. He’d hardly ever seen her this relaxed and tranquil in the last few years, though in the last few months he’d seen it more often, mostly right here in the pool at Kata Juta. He knew she’d be made Minister soon. Alan was tired, and he was looking forward to a well-earned retirement. He’d been grooming her for years to take his place, and she had taken the opportunity head on, but that had had its own cost. Politics was something that had taken Hermione a few years to master. She wasn’t a natural liar, and it took a lot of flexing of the truth to navigate the world of ministry intrigue. Fortunately most knew not to press her too far. She’d tell them what they wanted to hear until the words became distasteful. At that point she would end any charade, and her unfortunate opponent would get the full unvarnished truth from her, at length.

“What are you smiling about?” she asked.

“You,” he said.

She smiled softly at the love of her life, banished their swimming togs to the shore, rose on her knees, and slowly embraced him completely. Sighing in bliss she looked in his eyes. “Hello,” she said.

(*)

Eight agents of Rotfang appeared in the Honoka’a store room. An old native man rose from his chair, smiled at them, and began chanting in Hawaiian as he walked around them scattering volcanic ash on the floor.

“Pele eh kauoha ha`allele!”
Damion from Rotfang was unimpressed. “Where’s the man who was here,” he asked the old man gruffly.

Leiani’s grandfather smiled and continued.

At the end of the verse there was a loud bang, as if a dozen hard objects hammered against the wooden floor of the large room. Damion jumped, and all eight of Rotfang’s agents drew their wands.

The Kuhuna Nui of the Island of Hawaii chuckled, and he moved his hand in a small spiral. The ash swirled up and formed a hazy barrier between the Rotfangs and him.

Damion tried to walk through the ash, but it was solid as stone, and then they all tried to break through the barrier with magic. Nothing they attempted had any effect on the translucent grey barrier. The old man smiled, shook his head, and continued.

This time two loud bangs sounded in the room, and they were accompanied by the appearance of
fourteen large Hawaiian men lining the walls. They were dressed in skirts of long flat leaves. Each one held a very lethal looking spear, and each one bore a visage of anger. A beautiful young woman stepped forward from among them. “Ho`okano haoles,” she spat.

Leiani Kapului‘i was a direct descendant of kings and shamans, and both royal and magical blood ran through her. A priestess in her own right, she glowed in righteous anger for her people and lands. “You come to our island with hate in your heart,” she said. “You presume, you walk in arrogance, you walk in ignorance, and you offend the gods and the Amakua.” She noticed the leader of the group looking the men behind her with wide eyes.

“My cousins,” she said, tilting her head toward the warriors. “And our grandfather.” She smiled at the old man and then turned back to the Rotfangs. “The ohana you’re hunting asked us to let you live,” she growled, all trace of the island girl accent and Pidgin were gone. “And so we will.” She looked Damion in the eyes. ‘For this minute, but all the ones after it belong to us. Tutu Kane finds you funny.’ She smiled at her grandfather, and then she turned back to Damion. “We do not. He has woven a powerful kilokilo on you. You may not return, if you do you will die, if you remain you will die. Hawaii is closed to you from now until the ocean claims it. Leave, and never come back.”

The warriors punctuated the end of her speech by pounding the butt ends of their spears on the wooden floor three times. “HELE!” they shouted. The ash closed in on the Rotfang agents, and they disappeared in a flash of blue.

(*)

Hermione looked out across the desert as her family and friends took hold of the old canoe oar. She really was falling in love with this place and its inhabitants.

“Yer back in two weeks?” Carla asked Molly.

Molly hugged her friend. “Arthur insists.”

Carla sniggered. “Don’t see you objecting, Moll,” she said, and hugged her back.

Molly gave her a firm squeeze. “Figures we’d have to wait most of our lives to find our best friend,” she whispered in Carla’s ear.

“The next group will be here Eighteen January,” Luna said as Carla and Molly stepped apart and dabbed at their eyes. “I received a communique from Marcie. She has them organized into groups of ten, and is scheduling them for a two week stay with a two week break between groups as you requested, Carla.”

Carla smiled. “Aces, that’ll give us time to straighten up and resupply,” she said. “They can eat, they can, and they do have a taste for that Butter Beer.” She shrugged. “Bit sweet for me.”

“Perth, New Deli, Cairo, London,” Lavender said, reading the itinerary Luna had received with the letter from Marcie. “Looks like we’re home in a little better than five hours.”

“You see there, Molly,” Arthur said. “Plenty of time. It’s only the twenty third, so you’ll have all the time you need for cooking Christmas dinner.”

“Ginny’ll have a good bit done already,” Ron said. “She was looking forward to it.”

Hermione looked down at her daughter and niece. “In your own beds tonight,” she said with a smile, and the oar began to glow.
Eight people unceremoniously dropped on to a rocky beach. The ocean broke in crashing waves on the shoreline as Damion got to his feet and looked around. On the bluff above the shore cars sped by on a two lane road, and he could just make out the small white sign that said, “US HWY 1”

“A report from Damion.”

“And?”

“They lost them.”

Gabriel sighed and looked up from his desk to his assistant. He nodded. “It was a vain hope, but we had to try.”

“What next?”

“Janine has an idea. I think it might work.”

“What’s the idea?”

“Draw out Granger Weasley and her daughter. If we can take ten seventeen we can bring nine nine nine to us.”

“That sounds profoundly dangerous.”

Gabriel nodded. “Yes, but if we succeed we’ll have ten seventeen as a watcher, and we’ll have solved the nine nine nine problem.”

“Her friends…”

“Can’t touch us here.” Gabriel straightened in his chair. “Confer with Janine, set the pieces in place and prepare for them. We’ll set the trap early next month. Ten seventeen turns eleven in two, and we don’t want to have to deal with her having a wand of her own.”

“As Rotfang commands.”

Harry hugged his wife from behind as she scrubbed the sprouts in The Burrows kitchen sink. “You’re enjoying this,” he said, and kissed her neck.

“Don’t tell Mum,” she said, a smile in her voice, leaning in to his embrace.

Harry chuckled. “I think she already knows,” he said.

“Where are the boys?” Ginny asked looking sideways at him.

Harry smiled fondly. “Getting the tree decorations down from the attic.”

Ginny’s heart did that little flip it always did when she saw Harry fully enjoying Christmas and his family. Until he had met the Weasleys he hadn’t had a Christmas. She had nearly fainted at Ron’s
first letter telling her who it was she had met while seeing him off. That first real Christmas, in nineteen-ninety-one, she had made the fudge that her mother packed. Ginny had personally wrapped that box, along with the green jumper Molly had made, and sent it to Hogwarts for him. The nice boy from the train platform had turned out to be the most famous person in the wizarding world, and he hadn’t even known it at the time. The second Christmas she had been there at Hogwarts, but by that time... she shuddered.

“Cold?” Harry asked.

Ginny turned in his arms and kissed him. “Memories,” she said, and she hugged him firmly, soaking in the love and security.

He nodded. “Yeah.”

He knew, more than anyone else, he knew. They had talked a lot about Riddle and the trace, the scar left behind by his invasion of them. Harrys was obvious on the outside, but, like Ginny, the worst damage couldn’t be seen. They were the only ones that could understand each other, the only ones who knew the whole truth, because no one else had been violated the way they had. Even Hermione, whose torture still haunted her from time to time, couldn’t fully grasp the real horror of possession.

Harry drew back and looked into her face, his smile was sympathetic and filled with love. “We’ve had seventeen years of great Christmases since,” he said.

She nodded. “We have,” she said, and then she smiled to herself and dried her hands. Taking Harrys, she led him to the stairwell. “Boys! Bring the decorations down,” she shouted. There was a rumbling and a thunder of footsteps as the three can bounding down the stairs. James had a large box overflowing with garland and baubles. Hugo had a red cloth bag nearly as big as he was over his shoulder, and Albus was very carefully carrying the box with the ceramic star that topped the tree.

Ginny turned to Harry. “The tree is in the stand?” He nodded, and she turned back to the boys. “Boys, put the garland on and the wooden ornaments, carefully. After that bring in some firewood. We’re going to have a quick nap before everyone else gets home, so stay off the stairs.”

They were all smiles as the hurried off to the sitting room.

“Nap?” Harry said with a smirk.

She chuckled, took his hand, and led him up the stairs to her room.

And we’re back. I’m still at it, faithful ones.

Hawaii is a second home to me. I know its people, lands, and spirit well.

Amakua, Ancestors

Kilokilo, Magical work
HELE,   Go (technically, travel, but Hele also means go)
Kuhuna Nui,   (there’s not really a direct translation. “Most honored priest’ is close)
Ho`okano haoles,   Arrogant white people
“Pele eh kauoha ha`allele!”,   Pele commands you to leave

Pele is in Hawai‘i
She is dancing at Maukele
She rumbles and mutters
As she consumes Puna.
Flashing in the heavens, on and on
O Pele, Pele.

The Beautiful One is at Paliuli
Rising over the cliffs
She is at the borders of Maui
Land of the chief Kaululā'au
Flashing in the heavens, on and on
O Pele, Pele.

Where will we find peace?
On the great billows we love
Blazing above, blazing below, hitching along
Pele is the woman from Kahiki
Flashing in the heavens, on and on
O Pele, Pele.

This is the end of my song
Pele is in Hawai‘i
Tell again the refrain
In honor of Hi‘iaka
Flashing in the heavens, on and on
O Pele, Pele
The Gathering Chapter 14

Hermione Granger and the Quest for the Binding Stones

Part 2

The Gathering

Chapter 14

The Burrow. Hermione was always happy to see the listing structure again. It was different from the first time she had seen it all those years ago, and it was the same. The damage that had been done during the war had been repaired, but there were the inevitable scars. A replaced section of wall told of a giant hole blasted in the side of the house, newer windows had replaced the old ones that had been smashed by the Death Eaters in their rage, the entire porch had been rebuilt, the kitchen restored after the fire the Death Eaters had set was smothered by Molly’s fire extinguishing ward, and the attic roof still looked new eighteen years later.

She chuckled to herself. None of them had known what a fully roused ghoul was capable of, but the Death Eaters had found out. When Arthur, Bill, Charlie, Percy, George, Harry, and Ron had come to take down the wards and curses they were certain the Death Eaters had left behind Bill had found him calmly sitting in the kitchen surrounded by candy wrappers. Then Percy had found two of the death Eaters impaled on branches of the treehouse tree, having been ejected from the house, thrown wholesale through the roof by the ghoul.

Hermione remembered coming here two weeks after the battle. Those first weeks had been so rushed and occupied with Lavender’s healing that she hadn’t had time to reflect on what had happened. That following week it had hit her. She’d been numb, sleepwalking through a dimly lit reality of grief and sorrow. There was one bright spot in all of that, and he had saved her. Ron, her knight, had shown his true valor. He was her rock during that time, hers and everyone else’s, and she was certain he was responsible for her preserved sanity. It had all come down as a single weight on that first night.

She and Ron had been sharing a bed since the night of the battle, but they had feared his mother’s reaction when they arrived at his home, and so they had attempted to sleep apart. It had been a horrible idea. She had awoken on the cot in Ginny’s room shrieking, clawing at anyone and anything that came near. Only when Ron had burst through the door and enveloped her in his arms had she quieted. He still had three small scars on his neck where she had scratched him, but he hadn’t even flinched.

Without a backward glance he had carried her up the stairs to his room, and that had been that. Molly
hadn’t said word one since. Harry and Ginny were furious when it turned out that they were not to be extended the same privilege.

And then Ron had outdone himself. With help from his father, Madam Maxime, Hagrid, and the Minister he had arranged for him and Hermione to travel to Australia, in the Beauxbatons Carriage, to retrieve her parents. She had done such a thorough job of hiding them she wasn’t certain if they could be found, but he knew. He knew they could because she was with him, and his confidence in her was far greater than her own. Harry and Ginny had forgiven everything when they learned Ron had made arrangements for them to tag along. Bill and Fleur had come with them as chaperones, but they had hardly seen them.

The Carriage had a small hotel’s worth of rooms, and Bill and Fleur had made certain Harry and Ginny had separate ones, but they had never checked how those rooms were being used. It didn’t matter, they had all held to the pact they had made. They would wait. It was too soon, Ron was right, it was too soon, and making that leap would have caused more stress in their lives. Stress they didn’t need on top of everything else.

She was shaken from her reverie when the door flew open, and her nephews stormed from the house to run to their cousins and sister. The gang of five was together again. She was amazed at how well they got on. James thought he was the leader, but everyone knew the actual leader was Rose. Her brilliant girl kept them upright and in a minimum of trouble given their nature.

James got to Rose first. “Did it again, did you?” he said as he hugged her.

“Yes,” she said as she released him and drew Albus into her arms.

“Missed you, cous,” Albus said, emotion roughing his voice.

“Bout time you got yourselves home,” Seamus said as he stepped from the kitchen door. “We’ve been doing all the work while you’ve been galivantin round the world.” He was met with laughter that turned to shouts of joy from Hugo and Rose as Jean and Daniel Granger appeared behind Seamus.

“Grandmum! Ganddad!” they shouted as they ran to Hermione’s parents.

Hermione had to momentarily choke back her burst of emotion. Every time she was away from her parent for more than a few weeks she got an enormous rush of dejavu when she saw them again. The memory of the overwhelming relief and joy she had felt when they opened the door to their tiny cottage was right there in a little box in her heart. They had been confused at the appearance of a weeping girl and her boyfriend on their doorstep. Luckily Bill and Fleur had been there to smooth things and help Hermione remove the layers of charms she had laid on Jean and Daniel. When Fleur had seen the light of recognition in Jean’s eyes she and taken Bill’s hand and apparated them back to the carriage on the beach.

The ensuing eighteen Christmases had all been here. Molly and Arthur would not hear any objection, Jean and Daniel would be staying the holidays in Bill’s old room and that was the end of it. It had taken them a few months to fully embrace Floo travel, but they were old hands at it now. Hermione smiled at the memory of all the times she had entered the kitchen of her own home to find her mother making breakfast, or opened the Burrow door to find both her mothers laughing at some antic of their grandchildren.

“How was Australia?” Jean asked Molly.

“Wonderful,” Molly told her as she hugged her. “You and Daniel must come with us soon. You’ll
love the place,” she smiled. “And Carla.”

“She must be an amazing woman,” Jean said with a smile. “Hugo and Rose certainly do love her.”

“You’ll see,” Molly said as she and Jean made their way into the house.

“Ah, me beautiful wife,” Seamus said as he drew Lavender into his arms. “Good to have you back,” He said in a low husky voice.

“It’s good to be back,” she said and kissed him.

“We’ll see you all tomorrow,” Seamus called, and he apparated away with his smiling wife.

Ron chuckled and took Hermione’s hand. “Come on,” he said. “Let’s see how Ginny’s got on.”

(*)

“They are back in England.”

“Yes, and now we know where thanks to that Falmouth.”

“We move?”

“Soon, soon.”

(*)

Hermione stood next to her mother in the Burrow kitchen, both of them sipping their tea. They were essentially an audience watching a well running machine. Ginny and Molly bustled around the kitchen, chatting and preparing the elements of the next few meals. The old cast iron and enamelware pots, trenchers, and Dutch ovens were filled to the brim with cheesy potatoes, vegetables in garlic sauce, stuffing, and a host of other side dishes. The roast beef and goose were waiting their turn for the oven in the cooling cabinet. Hermione and her mother occasionally handed Molly or Ginny a pot or serving dish, but other than that they were just watching.

Jean Granger looked to her right at her brilliant daughter, as Hermione watched her sister in law finish the decoration on the plum pudding. “Rose and Hugo are doing well,” she said. “Seamus tells us Rosie is accomplishing amazing feats of magic.”

“She is,” Hermione answered. “She’s also scaring me witless.”

Jean chuckled. “Is she now?”

Hermione turned to her. “It’s so hard, Mum,” she said. “Watching her walk away alone into some unknown place full of danger.”

Jean looked at her with a slight smirk. “I wouldn’t know anything about how that feels,” she deadpanned at her daughter.

“Ha, ha,” Hermione said. “Seriously, Mum, I don’t know if I can do it again.”

“Rose told us all about the keep in Australia,” Jean said. “Even demonstrated the technique she used to retrieve the stone. This ‘Dreaming’ magic she learned there is a very interesting skill. Very much different from what you were taught.”

“It is,” Hermione said. “But it’s still rooted in the same thing.”
“What did she have to do this time?”

“Climb up a hundred meter cliff,” Hermione said and shivered. “And pass through a room full of rattlesnakes,” she added offhandedly.

Jean smiled and brushed her hand down Hermione’s hair. “Still a little touchy about heights, are we?”

“Yes,” Hermione replied. “Not as much, but still… It’s good she’s not.”

“And you know where the next one is?” Jean asked.

“Two, maybe three actually,” Hermione replied. “There’s one in South America that No’Oma can lead us to we hope, there’s one on the island of Hawaii, and I’m more and more convinced there is one at Kilimanjaro in Africa.”

“And four in your study already,” Jean said with a smile. “You were so worried you couldn’t do it in your lifetime.”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, but even if they are there that’s still only half of them,” she said. “There’ll be one, maybe two in Asia, but after that I haven’t a clue where to go next.”

“How much do you remember of your great grandmother Whitaker?” Jean asked.

“Some,” Hermione said. “I remember being five. Sitting on her lap.” She closed her eyes and smiled at the memory. “She was the best.”

“Ellen is where you got it from, we think,” Jean said. “She had… insight. She believed in ‘helping hands’.” Jean smiled herself. “She always said Dan and I were put together just to have you. It’ll come, Hermione, when you need it, help will come.”

“I hope so, Mum,” Hermione said and contemplated her tea. “I wish I had more faith.”

Jean chuckled. “Don’t worry, dear,” she said. “We all have enough faith to make up for it, and ours is in you.”

(*)

Rose watched from the stool as her grandfathers fiddled with the various broken and disassembled appliances and devices in Arthur’s shed. None of the boys seemed to have inherited Arthur’s love of Muggle objects, but Rose had. She had spent so many weekends and holidays with her Muggle grandparents that she knew what most of the things in Arthur’s shed did, and more importantly, how they did it. Jean and Daniel had made a point of answering any question she had with as thorough explanation of the mechanics, math, and science involved as they could manage. They had even bought several texts on mechanics, math and physics for Rose and Hugo, plus being university graduated dentists, they had more than a little background in the subjects themselves.

“How’s the practice going, Dan?” Arthur asked.

“It’s doing well,” Daniel Granger replied. “We’ve been half time for over a year now, and our partners have picked up the extra very well.”

“Ready to join Molly and me as pensioners?” Arthur asked.

“Nearly,” Daniel said. “You and Molly had a bit of a head start.”
Arthur nodded. “We did, but you’ve earned it.”

Daniel nodded to himself. “Thanks for having us again.”

“Molly wouldn’t have it any other way,” Arthur said. “Neither would Hugo and Rosie here.”

“James, Al, and Lilly feel the same,” Rose said. “James has called you ‘Pa Pa Grainger’ his whole life.”

Daniel smiled fondly and stroked his granddaughter’s hair. “Thought he was going to be the substitute grandchild for a while, Jean and I spoiled him just a bit before you came along.

Rose nodded. “Yeah, I know.”

Hermione had told her everything. Over the course of her life, as she had matured, her mother revealed more and more of what had happened before Rose had been born. She was called “Hermione’s Wonder Girl” not for her intellect, but for her very existence. Ten times, ten times she had been held under the Cruciatus by one of the most effective casters ever, and it had left damage behind. Hermione had miscarried three times before Ginny had carefully, with wary eyes, told Hermione she was pregnant. Rose remembered the way her mother had smiled sadly recounting that day.

“She took me aside in the Burrow kitchen,” Hermione had told her. “Ginny is so direct and to the point, but that day she stammered. ‘I… I um… I need to tell you something. You’ll be the first.’ I suspected right then. ‘Harry and I… we… Oh god. Hermione, I’m pregnant.’ She looked at me like I was so fragile, like I would shatter at the news. I won’t lie and say it didn’t hurt, but I told her the truth. I was happy, really very happy, and a little sad for your dad and me, and a little angry, not at Ginny but at the world.” Then she had hugged Rose fiercely. “But then not a year later I got to corner her in the kitchen.”

Daniel saw that look in his granddaughter’s eyes. He’d seen it so often in his own little girl’s, that faraway look that said she was revisiting an important memory. He gathered Rose in his arms and hugged her powerfully. “I was never so happy to spoil anyone as I was you,” he said and kissed the top of her head.

“Now you spoil all five of them,” Arthur laughed.

“Granddad!” Daniel said proudly. “Comes with the title.”

("*)

Hermione looked up at the ceiling. The outline of the Cannons poster was still there, but the poster itself was on the back of their closet door in Feniton. Ron hugged her in his sleep and she smiled. Her knight. He’d gained a little weight after leaving the Aurors, but she still found him as handsome and attractive as ever. Snuggled in his old bed under the same blankets that had always been there, she was reminiscing about all the events that had led her here. The meeting on the train, the years of adventure that gradually turned to horror, the actual horror, the cost, the recovery, and the new reality that she was helping to shape. She was coming to grips with what everyone had been saying for the past few years. Allen was going to hand the gavel to her.

She was ready. Hermione knew the players, and she knew the game, but they weren’t ready for her yet. Allen knew that too. He knew that Hermione, principled, disciplined, forthright, and incorruptible, was going to be a difficult fit for some in the Wizengamot. He’d laughed when they had discussed it recently. “Some of them are coming to me worried,” he’d told her. “They think you,
Potter and the rest of the D.A. are intent on remaking the world, and they like it how it is, and even better how it was.”

“We are going to remake the world, Allen,” She’d told him flatly, and then she smiled. “But don’t worry, we’ll go about it gently.”

*Well, maybe not so gently* she thought to herself. If she succeeded in the quest she’d change the world dramatically in a single night. First, though there was the small matter of nine more stones. All four of them that they had now sat in the case in her study, and three more would join them soon she hoped, but that left six. One or two in Asia, she had told her mother, and she hoped that was true. Rose had suggested the horrible idea that there could be one at each of the poles. Frighteningly that fit with the magical theory she was working on as to how the stones accomplished the binding. They would go to the poles if that’s what was required, but she desperately hoped they wouldn’t have to.

Her mind went to Rose, as it always did now when she contemplated the mission. Her heart sped up and she flushed as her breathing became rapid. Nine more times she’d have to watch her daughter walk away into the unknown. She was angry at Merlyn for that. Why her, why her little girl? *Well, not so little anymore,* she thought. She was seeing the unmistakable signs that her daughter was on the verge of becoming a young woman, and that scared her too. They’d talked about the biology of being female, and Rose understood it well, but the emotional big dipper that was puberty was something that could only be experienced.

And in nine months she and Ron would put Rose on the train.

Hermione had looked forward to that day with joy and trepidation for almost eleven years. Rose and Albus would board the train and head off to seven years of adventure. Hermione prayed that they would be a bit less adventurous than her seven years, but the last name Weasley came with a lot of expectations, and adding a hyphenated Grainger doubled it. James was already a minor celebrity at the school, so much so that Albus, always in his brother’s shadow, stammered and looked away when Hogwarts was mentioned.

She worried more about Albus than any of the rest of them. He was the sensitive one, the one that wore his heart on his sleeve, just like his uncle in the bed next to her. Hermione had spoken with Harry at length about it, and Harry had understood as much as he was able, but Harry had blinders when it came to family. Hermione held no illusions, she knew how cruel children could be. Harry and Ron had hurt her deeply in those early weeks before their friendship was forged, but those long ago slights had been made up for a forgiven a thousand times. Still, she was very concerned for her nephew. She decided she would speak to Rose about it.

All that was in the more distant future though, and she was concerned with the next few weeks. Tomorrow would be Christmas, then Boxing Day, and Rose was insistent that they retrieve William and leave for Hawaii and South America immediately after the New Year. She’d already been making plans for what to pack. Seamus and Lavender were trading places, and he would accompany them on this leg of the quest. She wasn’t certain if Ginny would allow Lilly to join them again, but Hermione hoped she would. Lilly had proven a valuable asset, much more so than Hermione had expected, although as she thought about it, she should not have been surprised.

And then there was Luna.

How could she drag her pregnant, endangered friend across the world on this uncertain adventure? It was obvious they needed her, and keeping Luna from coming was out of the question, but keeping her safe was a constant concern for Hermione. She wasn’t worried that Lavender wouldn’t be with them, Seamus was even more lethal if that was possible, and he loved Luna as much as any of them. No, it was being in uncharted waters, places they had never been, with people they didn’t know.
Almost everyone they had met on the quest had been more than helpful, and several had become fast friends. She smiled to herself and one is now part of the family, but there were other people interested in them, and Luna in particular.

Harry had said they had some good leads on her attackers, on Rotfang, but he was closed mouthed about the particulars. It didn’t matter, Parvati would fill her, Luna, and Lavender in on the details mid-week when the Sisters met. Hermione also had an idea or two on that front, and she needed to have a chat with Pansy again. The Ravens, Pansy’s coven, where somewhat less constrained than the Sisters, and that less constrained attitude could be very useful if it came to a fight. She smirked in the dark. Over the years she had come to admire her dark haired friend in ways that she wouldn’t have imagined when they were teenagers. Yes, she would have a chat with her Slytherin friend.

She sighed, sleep wasn’t coming easy tonight. Shrugging to herself she reached over Ron, laying on his chest, and shoved her hand into her bag. After a few moments, as Ron’s eyes fluttered open, she drew out the little tin of breath mints.
“Hi, Lil,” Rose said as her cousin entered her bedroom. “You’re early, Aunt Lavender isn’t even here yet.” Rose saw the frown, and she patted the bed next to her. “What’s wrong?”

“Mum doesn’t want to let me come this time,” Lilly said as she sat.

“Yeah, I know,” Rose said with a sigh. “My mum told me.”

“She doesn’t understand,” Lilly said petulantly. “I want to come, Rosie. You need me.” She was almost in tears.

Rose hugged her cousin. “You’re her baby, Lil,” Rose told her plainly. “And you scared her when you were born, a lot. She’s always been more protective of you than anyone else.” Rose smirked. “I was actually surprised when she let you go with us to America.”

“I just don’t understand,” Lilly said, burying her face in Rose’s shoulder.

“I think I do,” Rose told her. “Rotfang.”

“But they’re after Aunt Luna,” Lily said, looking up into her cousin’s face.

“Um hum, and we’ll be with her.”

Lilly looked in Rose’s eyes, and she saw the same fire that glowed in Ginny’s when family was threatened. “Let them come, you and me together and they’ll find out how wrong they can be.”

Rose smirked. “We’re good, Lil,” Rose said. “But we’re not that good… yet.”

Lilly nodded against Rose’s chest. “I wanna come, Rosie,” she said. “Talk to my mum.” She looked up into Rose’s eyes. “Please.”

“Okay,” Rose said. “Come on, let’s get your running togs on.”

(*)

“Rose? They’re asking about Rose?” Hermione sat back, stunned.


“Why Rose?” Hermione whispered to herself for the hundredth time. She stood and walked to the glass fronted case with the four stones on the top two shelves.

“Dunno,” Harry replied. “I’m a bit curious myself, but Lav’s gonna be looking into it while you’re away.”
Hermione shook her head. “We’ll wait, stay here in Feniton where it’s safe,” she said turning back to him.

“I think you’re safer out there, actually,” Harry said grimly. “We know they have one spy in the Ministry, but they could have several. As long as they don’t know where you are, or where you’re going, they can’t find you. My concern is having the three of you together. If Luna would just... ah, what am I thinking? Trying to convince her not to go with you, or go hide someplace, would be like talking to a wall.” He snorted a laugh. “A really clever wall.”

Hermione smirked at her friend’s comment. “She’s as committed as Rose is to the quest.”

Harry looked at her. “The quest?”

Hermione looked at him slyly. “You daughter’s words,” she said. “But it fits.”

“You’re really going to do it, aren’t you?” he stated more than asked.

“What?” Hermione asked.

Harry looked at her. “Free the elves,” he said.

“No, I figured it out,” he said. “She just confirmed it. I’m not an idiot, Hermione.”

Hermione smirked and shrugged. “That’s debatable,” she said.

Harry glared at her and shook his head. “Allen told me to make certain you don’t cock up the works,” he said. “He’s right, we need you.”

“Harry…”

He smiled sadly. “I know,” he said. “Come on, Hermione. I’ve known you most of my life. You don’t think I could figure out where this is going? Look at me”

She did.

“Don’t muck it up,” he stated plainly. “You are our best, our brightest, and we need you.”

“They need me more, Harry,” she said, and Harry heard the same conviction in her voice that had always been there. She turned back to the case. “More than five and half thousand years they’ve been slaves. It ends, now.”

“It can’t be obvious it was you,” he said sternly. “Can you at least make certain of that?”

She nodded. “I’ve got Katie going to the various congresses of the countries she’s visiting on the Harpies world tour,” she said. “And I’m going to get Pansy to cover the rest that I don’t get to. With the Wizengamot and the MCUSA already on board it should be easier to get the treaty signed.”

Harry smiled. “You are going to be the greatest Minister ever,” he said and sniggered. “They have no idea.” he gathered her in his arms, hugging her tightly. “I love you, my sister, my best friend. Be careful, you’re walking a tightrope, and it’s a long way down.”

(*)

“Good morning, Eli,” Hermione said to the smiling elf.
“A very pleasant morning to you, mistress Hermione,” Eli replied. “Mistress Pansy is in the ballroom. If you would follow me.” The old elf led Hermione through the house to the large double doors that let into the music room. The chamber was two floors tall and could hold nearly a hundred people in its ballroom configuration. Currently it was set more as a nightclub would be. The piano sat on a small stage, and round tables were scattered around the room with four chairs to each one. Pansy was sat at a table near the piano she had charmed to play a section of her smooth jazz favorites.

“Should have brought Lavender with me,” Hermione said as she approached her friend. “This is just her style.”

Pansy stood and hugged Hermione. “She and Seamus have been here on a few occasions,” she said. “I’m certain you’re aware they love to dance.”

Hermione smiled and nodded. “Oh yes,” she said. “How are you, Pansy?”

“Well,” Pansy said as they sat. “You may bring the tea now, Eli.”

“With pleasure, Mistress,” he said and apparated away.

“Well, you’ve been toddling around America,” Pansy said with a smile. “Any new adventures I should be aware of?”

“Yes,” Hermione said in a grim voice.

“Oh, serious Hermione,” Pansy said with a raised eyebrow. “To what do I owe her presence?”

Just then the door opened and Eli entered levitating the tea tray in front of him. “Deviled egg, Prosciutto and cheese, and cucumber sandwiches, Scones with clotted cream, Raspberry tarts, and fresh strawberries, mistresses,” he said as the tray touched down lightly on the table.

“Thank you, Eli,” Pansy said and laid a hand on his shoulder. “You made a tray for yourself?”

“Yes, Mistress,” he said, “As you have instructed.”

“Good,” Pansy said and smiled. “Go and have your own lunch, we’ll be fine.”

“As you wish, mistress,” he said and was gone with a pop.

“They are so much better as friends than slaves,” Pansy said mostly to herself, staring at the space where he had been. Then she looked up at Hermione and saw the huge grin on her face. “Oh, stop being so damn smug.”

Hermione laughed. “Not smug, just very pleased,” she said, and then she became serious. “Pan, you’ve asked me what I’m up to, I’m going to tell you now, but you have to keep this a secret, always.”

Pansy looked her in the eyes. “You know I will,” she said.

Hermione nodded once and began the tale. “After the war when Harry moved into Grimmauld, and while we’re tidying up, we found an artifact…”

It took almost two hours to tell the entire story. Finding the second stone in the British Museum, putting together the clues, Australia, Obo, America, No’oma, Hawaii, and the full extent of the threat from Rotfang.
“So, they are after your daughter too, hmm,” Pansy said.

“What?” Hermione asked. She could see the wheels turning in Pansy’s head.

“You say Rotfang has been around for centuries,” Pansy said. “So they’ve been at this for a good bit. Doesn’t seem to me your quest has anything to do with their interest. Their agent in the ally knew about Luna’s ability, and everybody knows about Lavender, but he didn’t seem to know anything else. You he barely recognized. That means they are on about something else, hmm.” Hermione stayed quiet, letting Pansy’s mind work the problem. “Special,” she said at last.

Hermione cocked her head. “Special?”

Pansy nodded. “Yes, Special,” Pansy said. “Luna is, well, Luna, and Rose is obviously very special too.” She looked at Hermione with a serious expression. “They’ve tried to kill Luna twice now, they’re not going to stop, and if they are interested in Rose they will make a try for her too.”

Hermione shivered. “What am I going to do, Pan?”

For the first time since they had met all those years ago Pansy saw genuine fear in Hermione’s eyes. She reached across the table, took her hand, and said, “You are going to rely on your very capable and dedicated friends to keep you, Luna, and Rose safe. You say Lavender is staying on here to investigate?”

“Yes.”

Pansy smiled and nodded. “Good,” she said. “I’ll owl her when we’re done. We should coordinate.”

(*)

Penn lay back in the bed next to Finn. “What are you seeing, my love?” he asked, looking over at his wife.

Her eyes closed she looked serene, almost asleep. “They are proceeding well, gathering the stones and allies,” she said, and then she sniggered to herself. “They are much farther along than they think they are.”

“Does she know?” he asked.

“Blind as ever,” Finn said with a smile. “The binding magic is still strong.”

“And Rotfang?”

She giggled. “They are about to have a problem.”

“It’s going to happen, isn’t it?” He really wasn’t asking a question.

Finn nodded. “As we have always known it would,” she said, rolled to her side, and kissed him. “You doubted him?”

Penn laughed. “I have never doubted him.”

(*)

Ginny set a tray piled with biscuits and tarts on the table in her kitchen. Harry had called together Ron, Hermione, Luna, Pansy, Lavender, Seamus, Molly, and Arthur to plan out what they would do
next. “Thanks for coming everyone, let’s get started,” he said. “Arthur, I’d like you and Molly to go back to Carla as you had planned.” He turned to his wife. “I think Ron, Hugo, you, me, and ours should move to the Burrow while they’re away. The wards are older and stronger there, and Hugo, Al and Lilly will have more room to roam.”

“We’ll stay if you need, Harry,” Arthur said, and Molly nodded.

“Actually I think it’s best if you go to Australia,” Harry said. “We’ll be routing Hermione and her crew through Cohn Manor as often as we can.”

“I’m still not certain we should go, Harry,” Hermione said.

“Harry is correct,” Luna said as she nibbled biscuit. “We are much harder to find while we’re in motion.”

“Motion is going to start being a problem for you in another month or two,” Lavender said with a smirk.

“We will deal with that as the situation arises,” Luna said calmly.

Harry shook his head and turned back to Hermione. “With you, Shay, and Luna I think you’ll be able to take care of anything,” he said. “And your friend William sounds like he’s a formidable ally too.”

Hermione smiled. “He is, but he’s very old,” she said. “I don’t want to overburden him, and I especially don’t want to get him into a fight.”

“Don’t be worrying, Hermione,” Seamus said. “I’m certain the old fella and I will find our way. Lav tells me he’s very powerful.”

Hermione nodded. “He is,” she said. “Still…”

Lavender pulled an odd looking sheet of paper from her bag. “I’ve been in contact with William and No’oma, but more importantly I received this letter from Leiani Kapulu’i yesterday,” she said, and then looked at Hermione. “They came.”

“Is she alright?” Hermione said worriedly.

Lavender chuckled. “Oh yes, Leiani and her people are fine,” she said. “The Rotfang that came are less fine.” She laughed. “Leiani’s cousin sent them to Fiji as a diversion. They didn’t take that well, and they returned to Honoka’a. That’s when Leiani’s grandfather laid a curse on them, and then his grandchildren banished them to California. Those particular Rotfang can never return to Hawaii if they want to keep breathing.”


Hermione smiled. They were collecting a potent cadre of friends.

“Seamus is handling the travel arrangements this time,” Harry said. “Percy and the Department of Mysteries have pulled the Portus trace from his wand so he can make portkeys without anyone knowing. You’ll be routing through Auror safe houses and Scamander Foundation outposts instead of the Portkey terminals.”

Seamus nodded. “Aye, Rolf and I have gone over the locations o’ all the outposts.” He said. “And
where ya don’ have ‘em we can use those old Auror hideouts. They’re not very comfortable, but we won’t be staying at them.”

“Hermione?” Molly said. “Could Jean and Dan make arrangements for accommodations at Muggle establishments for you? Rotfang would have even more trouble finding you if you avoid the wizarding establishments and the Ministry has no idea where you are.”

Harry smiled at his mother in law. “Brilliant, Mum,” he said, and Molly blushed as she did every time he slipped and called her ‘Mum’. “I even have their old Wendell and Monica Wilkins identification and bank records, we’ll use those. Really outstanding idea, Molly.”

“Yes, excellent,” Pansy said. “That will save some effort on my part as well, and it will let me have more time to work with Lavender.”

Lavender nodded and rested her hand on Pansy’s shoulder. “Pan and I have begun already,” she said. “Megan and Blaise have confirmed that Clem Falmonth’s owls are coming and going from France, but they originate and stop at different places. They did great work, but we’re going to try an extended trace next time, and Pan and I will follow the owl.”

Harry looked at Lavender directly “If you find them do not engage them, am I clear?”

Lavender looked back stoically. “Yes, Head Auror.”

His voice softened. “Lav,” he said. “No heroics, okay?”

Lavender smiled and nodded. “Alright, Harry,” she said.

“Good,” he said. “So, Monday Shay’ll set up a Portkey for him, Luna, Hermione, and Rose to get to America…”

“Canada,” Seamus corrected. “Got some Muggle rels on dad’s side. They’ve got a cabin and a bit o’ land in Newfoundland. We’ll be passing through there on the way to George’s place in Idaho.”

Harry nodded. “Yeah, good,” he said. “I was thinking that you’d just not send us any letters, but now I think you can let us know what’s happening through your parents. You know, send it to them in Winterbourne through the Muggle post.”

Hermione smiled for the first time that evening. “Good idea,” she said. “But what about when they go to Australia in March?”

“We’ll figure it out,” Harry said. “That’s two months away, we’re good for a bit.”

Hermione turned to Ginny. “I understand why you don’t want Lilly to come this time, but…”

“Good,” Ginny said primly.

Hermione sighed. “Ginny, Rose has been…”

“Yes, me too,” Ginny said.

“No then?”

Ginny shook her head. “No, Hermione,” she said. “Not while Rotfang is in play.”

“They won’t be happy,” Hermione said. Ginny just looked at her and shrugged.
“Lav’ll keep Lillywhite busy,” Seamus said, and Ginny glared at Him for using the nickname she hated. He laughed. “Well, she will.”

“We’ve got some lessons to catch up on,” Lavender said. “And Rowan can keep up with his instruction when Pan and I are called away to do investigation.” She looked at her husband. “Don’t let Rose fall behind.”

Seamus chuckled. “Ah, I won’t, me love,” he said.

Molly laid her hand against Lavender’s back. “Your brother has been a fairly constant presence at the Burrow of late,” she said. “The boys have been grousing some about the pace he’s been setting.”

Lavender laughed. “Excellent,” she said. “But I think Lilly will surprise him.”

Hermione smiled. “It’ll be good for Hugo and Al to have her around too,” she said. “I’ve missed him, he’s grown just in the time we were away.”

Ginny looked at her sister. “I’ve missed my girl.”

“Me too,” Harry said from behind Ginny’s chair.

Hermione looked at her brother and sister-in-law, two of the people she cared most for. “I completely understand,” she said. “It’s a pity, though. Rose and Lilly make a great team.”

Molly reached across the table and grasped both Hermione and Ginny’s hands. “Two short years and they’ll both be at Hogwarts,” she said. “Cherish this time.”

“On that,” Lavender said. “You’ll need to be back here for Rose’s birthday, February nine, as we’ll need to do a Diagon Alley shopping expedition.”

Hermione sniggered, she knew what Lavender was on about. “I suppose Rose will be wanting her wand the second she turns eleven,” she said.

“Aye,” Seamus said. “That’ll keep her from nickin’ someone else’s every chance she gets.”

“What?” Hermione and Ron said in unison.

Seamus sniggered. “Both Lav an’ me have spied on Rose teachin’ the rest,” he said. “Sometimes she’s got James and his wand, sometimes not, but now and again she’s got somebody else’s wand. Never been close enough to sus who’s she’s getting’.”

“Shame patience didn’t come with all her other gifts,” Molly said nearly laughing.

Ron looked at his wife with a smile. “Wonder where she got that from?”

“Ha, ha,” Hermione said, and kissed his cheek.

Ron laughed. “Actually I think she got the nicking other folks wands from my sister,” he said, looking at Ginny.

Trying, and failing, to look innocent, Ginny said, “Whatever do you mean?”

“You stole my wand every chance you got, Fred and George’s too,” Ron said.

Ginny chuckled. “Well, if you three hadn’t left them lying about.”
“Lying about?” Ron said amused. “Lying about in our nightstand drawers, or pockets, or…”

“Yes, that is very amusing,” Luna said. “But the point will be moot in two months.” She looked at Lavender. “William and No’oma know we are coming?”

Lavender nodded. “They expect us Monday afternoon.”

Luna stood. “I will return to the tower and prepare,” she said. “And I need to spend some time with Rolf before we leave again.”

Harry walked over to her and hugged his dear friend. “Be careful,” he said. “Let your friends protect you, okay?” He felt a wave of love from her pass through him. Then her calm confidence in herself and her friends washed over him.

“I will, Harry,” she said.

He squeezed her and stepped back. “Keep Rose and Hermione on a leash too, would you please?”

She smiled. “I will try, Harry,” she said. “But they are quite headstrong. I’ll see you all Monday morning.” And she was gone.

“I’ve told the Ravens that they might be needed,” Pansy said. “I haven’t told then why, may I?”

Hermione and Ginny nodded. “Yes,” Hermione said. “Don’t get too detailed, but you trust them so we do as well.”

Hermione could always tell when Pansy was genuinely pleased, she had an almost childlike smile. “Thanks,” The dark haired woman said to her. “I’ll get Marietta working on Rotfang too.”

“Yeah, that’ll be good,” Harry said. “Percy’s done some work for us down in Records, but Marietta’s been in the file stacks since Kingsley put her in charge of the cleanup after the war. It’ll be interesting to see what she finds.”

“Cho should be back full time next week,” Lavender said. “What did you have in mind for her, Harry?”

“I’ll be keeping her here,” Harry said. “I’m not sending all over the world when she has a new baby, she and Dudley would kill me next family dinner. Why don’t I put her with you and Pansy for a bit?”

Lavender smiled. “That works for me,” she said. “And Cho will love it too.”

Harry smiled, it was all working out well enough, not perfect, but well enough. “That’s all I had,” he said. “Anyone else?”

“I’ll tell Carla to expect Hermione and her crew from time to time,” Molly said. “She’ll be very pleased.”

“I’m looking forward to hearing about Jarra and William meeting,” Lavender said with a grin. “That will be something.”

Hermione smiled herself. “Yes, I hadn’t thought about that,” she said. “They are two of a kind.”

Lavender laid her hand on Hermione’s shoulder. “They are,” she said. “Come on, Shay, let’s go home. We only have the next two nights, and I’ve missed you.”
“Aye, me lovely lass,” he said as he stood. “I figured that out this last week.”

Chuckling to herself Lavender took his hand. “We’ll see you tomorrow,” she said, and they were gone.

Hermione turned to Ginny. “I’ll tell Rose,” she said, “But Lilly is all yours.”

Ginny looked sad for a moment. “I’ll make it up to her.”

“We both will,” Harry said.

Hermione watched as her family and Pansy said their goodbyes and left. Soon it was just her and Ron walking back through the hallway that joined the Potter and Weasley homes. “Back on the road again,” Ron said from her side with a sigh.

“I’m not happy about it, Ron,” she said a bit huffy.

He stopped her before she opened the door to their house. “I know,” he said firmly. “Hermione, I’m not that insecure boy anymore. I know you have to do this, it’d make you crazy if you didn’t, but I have a right not to be happy about it, and so do you.”

She turned and threw herself into his arms. “I hate being away now,” she said, biting back the tears. “I hate that Rose and Luna are in danger.”

“You too,” Ron said.

“That I’m not concerned about,” she said with her head against his chest. “But Rose is so young and Luna is… vulnerable just now.”

Ron hugged her. “She’ll have you and you’ll have her,” he said. “And Shay will have this William of yours. You’ll be well protected.”

He felt her nod. “But I won’t have you,” she said “I never feel truly safe unless you’re there.”

Ron tilted her face to his and kissed her slowly, with deep passion. “You have me for two more nights,” he said as their lips parted.
It was unusually sunny for an early January morning, and the grass crunched with frost under their feet. Seamus hugged his wife and kissed her firmly. “Be careful, luv,” he said. “Don’ be takin too many risks, don’ get to close, alright?”

“I’ll be careful, Shay,” she said and smiled. “Besides, Pan will be with me, and she’s not interested in us taking on Rotfang single handedly.”

He kissed her again. “Good, I like the idea o’ her cautious nature slowin’ you down a bit.”

Lavender looked over at Rose and Hermione saying goodbye to Hugo and Ron. “The hardest thing you’re going to do is watch Rose walk away without you,” she said. “Be prepared.”

“Aye,” he said. “And I’ll keep a leash on Hermione too.”

Lavender chuckled. “Oh, that shouldn’t be a problem,” she said, her voice dripping sarcasm.

He hugged her. “Well, ‘d be easier if you were there,” he said. “But you’re the best we have at ferretin’ these things out. Be careful, me beautiful lass. Don’ go rushin’ in.”

She nodded as she cupped his face in her hands. “You too.”

Hermione hugger her son. “We’ll be home before you know it,” she said, and choked back her tears.

Hugo hugger her back. “It’s okay, Mum,” he said, holding up much better than his mother. “I’ll have Lilly and Al, and Aunt Lavender and Dad.

“Have a night or two with your grandparents while you’re at it,” Hermione said.

Hugo nodded, and Ron put his hand on her shoulder. “I’ll get him round to Daniel and Jean, don’t worry,” he said.

Hermione hugged both of her boys. “Don’t go getting into trouble while we’re gone. I love you both,” she said, and kissed Hugo on the top of his head and Ron on his lips.

“Keep an eye on Luna,” Ron said in a quiet, serious voice. “I’m worried.”

Hermione nodded back silently. She kissed him again as Seamus said, “One minute.”

Ron bent and hugged his daughter. “And you look out for both of them, okay?” he said, and he felt her hug him very hard.

“I will, Dad,” she said, whispering in his ear.
He ran his hand down her hair and stepped back with Hugo. “Go get ’em,” he said with a proud smile.

Seamus and Luna already had the old garden spade in their hand as Hermione and Rose walked up to them and took hold of the handle.

“What write us from George’s,” Lavender said as the spade began to glow.

(*)&

It was insanely cold in Newfoundland. They had landed outside the cabin and hurriedly rushed inside as the bitter cold and biting wind lashed at their exposed faces and hands.

“I think it’s colder in here!” Seamus said as he Incendioed the fire in the old cast iron stove to life. “Christ!”

The four of them huddled around the fire for a few minutes until the one room of the cabin warmed from cold storage locker to a mere freezing. “How long are we here for?” Luna asked.

“Just half an hour,” Seamus told her. “Wanted to give us a few minutes afore we ported again. Didn’t want to be chuckin’ all over George’s carpet when we got there.”

“Well, even with the cold it’s better than Jakarta,” Hermione observed now that she could talk without her teeth chattering and her back seizing from the chill.

“We’re lucky, we are,” Seamus said. “Been here before when it’s ten feet deep out there.” He chuckled. “Makes it a wee bit harder to get in.” He pulled a flask from his jacket, and then his wand from another pocket. With a swish four cups flew from the shelves by the wood stove and landed on the table under one of the three windows. “Brought some tea to warm up with,” he said and poured them each a cup.

“It must be hard on the Sasquatch,” Luna observed. “Even with their fur, it would still be very cold for them. I wonder how they manage?”

Seamus sniggered. “Well, when you’re not luggin’ around an extra pair why don’ ya come back and ask them,” he said.

Luna smiled excitedly. “Excellent idea, Seamus,” she said. “I shall speak to Rolf about it when we return.”

Seamus rolled his eyes and said, “I was joking,” to Hermione in a low voice without moving his lips.

“I wasn’t,” Luna said with a smile from across the room.

Hermione’s heart swelled at the playful banter between her friends. Occasionally she was overwhelmed with joy at her good fortune. She had more truly deep friendships than she ever thought possible as the gawky, know it all, young girl she had been on the train that first year. But the seven years that had followed had delivered a group of people she had come to love as dear as her own family, and the years after that had given her a few more. She felt blessed.

She looked over at Rose. Her little genius was sitting in a chair next to the stove with a book about the ancient Hawaiians in her hands. Rose had been learning as much as she could about the culture and traditions of the Hawaiian and native South American peoples while on their Christmas break, now she was preparing for her next trials with the same focus and dedication as she approached almost everything. Hermione smiled to herself, remembering the chat she and Lavender had with
Lavender had arranged the meeting with the Headmistress between Christmas and New Year’s Day, and it had been a grey, cold, snowy morning when Hagrid met them at the gates and welcomed them to the school. As always, it was a strange experience to walk the grounds and enter the castle where it had all happened. She and Hagrid had understood instantly when Lavender had stopped in the entrance hall and stared for a few moments at the place where her life had been permanently changed.

Hermione could see it in her mind too. The crumbled stairs, her friend in a bloody heap on the floor amid the rubble, the flash of grey fur. Then she saw another scene in her mind. Ron blasting half of Greyback’s face off, and then Neville eviscerating him with the business end of the sword. After Hermione had learned Lavender was alive but might not stay that way, she had personally levitated Greyback’s corpse out of the hall to the lawn, and then she had *Incendioed* it, over and over, crying, screaming, and pushing all her might into the curse in a catharsis of pain and rage. There was nothing of him left but scorched bare patch of earth when she was finally done, and Ron had nearly carried her back into the castle.

“Lemon Custard,” Hagrid said at the foot of the stairs that led to the Headmistresses office, and she and Lavender had rode the stairway up to the doorway. The portraits snoozed in their frames, but several, including Dumbledore had woken from their slumber to hail them as they entered.

“Welcome, Welcome,” Minerva said, and she stood from her chair behind her desk. Neat and carefully arranged parchments lay in two stacks on either side of the desk, and one was in her hand. She looked at it for a moment and placed it on the pile to her left. “I’m just now finishing up the Muggleborn list for visits during the summer break.” She smiled at Hermione. “These are the introductory letters telling them to expect a visit from me.”

Hermione smiled. She remembered that letter well, and she also remembered her beloved professor, standing in the doorway of her parent’s home in Winterbourne those many years ago, telling all of them that she could explain the strange things that seemed to be happening around Hermione at an ever accelerating pace.

“Lavender tells me that your daughter is in need of advanced classes,” Minerva said, and she laughed to herself. “Not surprising. Just how far ahead is she?” She motioned for Lavender and Hermione to take the chairs in front of the desk as she sat again.

Lavender sniggered herself. “I’m not certain,” she said as she and Hermione sat. “I think the best solution is to give her the final exams for each year in turn and see where her limit is.”

Hermione looked at Lavender. “You think she could pass the first year exam?”

Lavender laughed openly. “I think she could pass the third year exam.”

Minerva’s eyebrows rose. “Really?”

Lavender became serious. “Yes, Minerva, really,” she said. “Wait till you see what she can do *without* a wand.”

Minerva looked at her in surprise. “She has control of her accidental magic?”

Shaking her head, Hermione said, “She doesn’t have accidental magic, it’s all intentional.”
Minerva turned to Hermione. “What can she do, intentionally,” she asked.

Hermione shrugged. “Levitate herself and anything else she wants, summon, banish…” she looked at Lavender.

“Lumos,” Lavender added.

Minerva sat back, stunned. “You’re serious?”

Both of the women sat opposite her nodded.

“With a wand in her hand she can do a lot more,” Lavender said.

“You’ve taught her all of this?” Minerva asked them.

The two chuckled. “No,” Lavender said. ”It’s unnecessary. She’s entirely self-taught. She reads the material, nicks a wand, and practices until she’s mastered the spell. Then she teaches it to the rest of them.”

“That’s why your nephew is so skilled,” Minerva said with a note of realization in her voice, and looking at Hermione.

Hermione smiled with pride. “James is doing well?”

“Of course,” the older woman said. “He is his father’s son after all. Still, that explains a few things, and you say Rose is even more advanced?”

“Yes,” Lavender said, and she smiled. “Rather a lot more.”

Minerva sat back in her chair. “Well, this does present a problem,” she said, and then smiled. “But one I’ve actually been thinking about since before the two of you even came to the school.” She looked at one of the portraits. “Albus and I discussed it several times.” She smiled. “You and Anthony Goldstein were possibilities,” she said, looking at Hermione. “But we weren’t ready yet.”

“Candidates for what?” Hermione asked.

“The Muggles have a term for it,” Minerva replied. “Advanced placement. It’s a series of programs for gifted children. It has its issues, though. Placing younger children with older students has always been fraught with complications, sometimes maturity doesn’t come at that same rate as intelligence, the advanced child can become arrogant, they can be bullied by the older students, that sort of thing.”

“I’ve thought much the same,” Lavender said. “As to the complications,” she sniggered, “Rose can hold her own,” she said and started to laugh.

Minerva smiled. “With the two of you as examples I’m certain she can.”

“Don’t forget the Weasley side,” Hermione said, grinning. “Molly and Ginny are in the mix too.”

Hermione saw a look of real affection for her and Lavender on Minerva’s face, and she almost let a tear of happiness slide down her cheek. This woman before her was Hermione’s role model, and she always had been. From the first moment Hermione had met the prim and composed woman she had been enthralled, now she was a dear and cherished friend and mentor.

Minerva made a note on a piece of parchment she pulled from her desk. “I will arrange a meeting of the staff and discuss creation of the Advanced Placement program,” she said. “Your daughter will be our test case if that is acceptable to all.”
“Thank you,” Lavender said. “You won’t regret this.”

“I sincerely believe not,” Minerva said. “You are, of course, joining us for lunch.”

(*)

“Five minutes,” Seamus said, pulling Hermione from the memory.

“Excellent,” Luna said. “I’m getting a bit peckish again. It’s surprising how much I need to eat these days.”

Hermione laughed. “Second trimester food binge,” she said. “I could actually keep up with Ron there for a bit.”

Seamus sniggered as he helped Rose pack her satchel and snug her coat. “Remember that, I do,” he said. “With Rose and Al you and Ginny we’re keepin’ Ron and Harry hoppin’. Had them all over the U.K. gettin’ ice cream, chips from that place in Edinburgh ya like, cheese from Dorchester… what was that thing you sent Ron to Switzerland for?”

“Pastries,” Hermione said in fond remembrance. “There’s a shop in Bern.”

“Well,” Luna said. “I’m certain George’s chef, Tom has something for us. Shall we go find out what?”

Seamus nodded and pulled a crumpled copy of the Prophet from his bag. “Gab hold and let’s go.”

(*)

Hermione looked out over the snow covered hills of Idaho from the window of her room on the second floor of George’s house. The massive building had three wings, one with the kitchen and dining room that could hold fifty, another with an indoor swimming pool, theater, and ballroom, and the third with more than a dozen bedrooms and suites. Hermione, Rose, and Luna had one suite to themselves, and Seamus had been given a suite next to theirs.

Hermione smiled. Seamus and Rose were currently retrieving Seamus’s roommate.

(*)

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!” Seamus said as he stared up at Matȟó Thípila. “You climbed that?”

Rose blushed. “Yes,” she said. “About a quarter of the way to the top.”

“And yer mam let ya?” His accent got more pronounced when he was startled.

Rose snickered. “Well, not without comment,” she said.

Seamus looked back up at the shear rock wall. “I’ll just bet.”

Rose laughed quietly. “No’oma?” she asked the mountain.

The ancient elf appeared in an instant. “Returned to Matȟó Thípila thou hath,” she said. “Good tis. Maister William pleased will be.”

Rose turned to Seamus. “No’oma, this is my… guardian, Uncle Seamus.”

“Good tis thee to meet,” No’oma said. “The Gret Maister round his flower fiersom ones placed.” She
saw Rose shiver a little. “Come, to Maister William No’oma will take thee.”

Moments later they stood in the smaller bed chamber, and Seamus was struck dumb by the beauty of the place. A fire in the hearth warmed the room, and a few of the lamp pillars glowed making the crystal camber glitter and sparkle. “Maister William in the gret room be. Tell him thee to Mathó Thípila hath returned, No’oma will.”

“How you, No’oma,” Rose said. “We’ll wait here.” She smiled as No’oma tottered through the door and down the passage toward the huge chamber in the center of Mathó Thípila.

“Lav said this was an astounding and beautiful place, she did,” Seamus said. “But she was soft peddling it a bit.”

Rose leaned against him and hugged his side. Seamus Finnigan was as much her family as her other uncles with the Weasley and Potter names, and she loved him just the same. “I’m glad you got to see it,” she said. “The great room is even more so.”

“I’d like to see it then,” he said. “And the place where the stone was.”

Rose smiled up at him. “Not the snakes?”

He glowered amusedly at her, and Rose chuckled. They had long ago discovered their shared dislike of venomous animals. “I’ll pass, thanks all the same,” he said.

There was a rustling at the door and Seamus turned to see an old man wrapped in finely made, if a bit timeworn, native blankets. The first impression Seamus had of William was exactly what Lavender had told him. William could have been a hundred or a thousand years old, there was no telling. He exuded an air of ancient wisdom about him, but the smile of childlike glee on the old man’s face made him seem somehow young. Rose ran the few steps to him and wrapped his waist in her arms.

“I am happy to see you again too, precious flower,” William said, hugging her back.

“You’d be William Standing Bear, aye?” Seamus said, extending his hand.

“You are the skinwalker’s mate,” William said as he walked to Seamus and took his hand. “You must be a brave man.”

“That or foolish,” Seamus said. “Me friends haven’t decided yet. Seamus Finnigan.”

“Good to meet you, protector of His Flower,” William said. “Lavender told us in her letters you would be joining us on this part of the journey.”

Seamus nodded. “Aye,” he said. “Lav’s looking into the folks causing us trouble.”

William smiled crookedly. “I pity them,” he said, and then he looked down at Rose. “His Flower and I have been on the spirit trail with the skinwalker. She is a powerful presence.”

“Don’t I know it,” Seamus said, amused.

William nodded himself. “It is good that her light is so pure. One of her power possessed of a dark soul…” he trailed off shaking his head.

Rose hugged him again. “Are you ready to come with us, William?” she asked.

“I am ready, Rose,” he said. “Show your protector the wonders of Mathó Thípila while I gather my
He was astonished. As beautiful as the bed chamber was it was a mere shadow of the grandeur he was now beholding. The cavern they called the Great Room was huge, and everywhere he looked crystalline forms glittered and dazzled in a multitude of hues. And as every visitor to the room had commented, it rang with the echoes of ancient, powerful magic.

“Now I understand,” he said in awe. “She said Kata Juta was amazing, but this…”

Rose smiled as she watched him take in the spectacular beauty of the crystal lined gallery. “The snake room is that way,” she said, pointing to the archway opposite the raised dais with the carved chair. “The stone he kept this way.” She led him to the wall where the crystal wall blocked the passageway to the stones resting place, and she placed her hand on it. Once again it slid into the floor and they stepped through.

After scrabbling down the rough passage Seamus stood at the edge of the pit. “You say this is just like at Kata Juta,” he observed. “Think they’ll all be this way?”

“I do,” Rose replied. “But the tests will be different.”

“Tests?”

Rose sighed and nodded. “He’s testing me, making me overcome fears and obstacles,” she said. “He has to be certain I’m prepared.”


“I wish I knew,” Rose whispered in the dark.

Half a world away Katie Bell sat in her chair and watched the Chairman of the Indian Magical Council conduct business.

“Are there any against?” the Chairman asked the chamber.

Katie watched as a few members mumbled to each other, but no one raised an objection.

“Then by unanimous consent the treaty is adopted,” The Chairman announced. As the applause died he turned to Katie. “And now Miss Katherine Bell, representing Mrs. Granger Weasley, will address the council.”

The applause followed Katie to the dais. “Thank you,” she said. “Thank you so much for following your heart and soul in this momentous change for the betterment of wizarding society.” She smiled out at her audience. “India has long been at the front in promoting equality and fairness. For almost one hundred years the sub-continent has worked toward greater freedoms and opportunities for its peoples. This has not been a perfect progression, but over the last century India has become a leader in the fight for justice. My friend, Mrs. Granger Weasley, asked me to bring this treaty before you and to persuade you to join the community of wizarding governments in its adoption. I will be happy to report back to her that it required very little persuasion on my part.” She let the applause and laughter fade. “She and I thank you, and we welcome you to the just cause of magical creature rights.”
The owl that delivered the letters was snow white and huge. Hermione treated him and then distributed the envelopes to their respective recipients. One went to Seamus that smelled of Lavender’s perfume, two she gave to Rose from Hugo and River, and two were for her. The one from Ron she saved for bedtime, but the other she tore open immediately.

_Hermione,_

_India is done and signed. The next stop on the tour is Japan, and I have an appointment with the Prime Minister of Magic on Tuesday before the match. With any luck we will present the treaty the next day. Arabia, Pakistan, Madagascar, and India are in the bag. On to Japan!_

_Your friend and Sister_

_Katie_
Penn stepped up behind his wife as she stared out of a fourth floor window at the rain pounding down on the English countryside. “Are they well?”

She leaned back into him as he embraced her from behind, a sensation she had never tired of. “Yes,” she said. “And on the move again.”

“To the far island?”

“I think so,” she said, and she turned in his arms. “My lord is pleased?”

He snorted, and said, “I haven’t been a lord in a long time.”

Finn kissed him deeply, and said, “You have been, are, and will always be, my lord”

(*)

As she handed Seamus the letter from Lavender an old Apache man emerged from the second bedroom of the suite.

Hermione smiled at her friend. “Welcome back, William,” she said as she embraced the shaman of the Dine. “Are you ready for some tropical weather?”

He laughed. “No’oma has kept me warm this last moon,” he said. “But, yes, I would enjoy not being laden with so many blankets. How are you, Hermione?”

“I’m well,” she said. “Luna is resting, but I’m certain she’ll be happy as I am to see you again.”

“The skinwalker’s mate tells me we are bound for Hawaii,” William said. “I have never been so far from home.” He laughed again. “I suppose that is just the beginning of my new adventure.”

Hermione smiled and nodded. “Yes,” she said. “And I have some people to introduce you to. The Elders of the Dreamers.”

William looked happily surprised. “It will be my pleasure and honor to meet my far cousins,” he said.

“I’m certain they will be just as pleased,” Hermione said with a smile. “Seamus has set aside the larger bedroom in your suite for you I see.” She chuckled. “He travels quite light.”

“As do the People of the Earth,” William said. “And as I grow older I find the weight of possessions wearisome. He and I are brothers, it seems.”

Seamus smiled and chuckled.
Hermione’s eyes shown with joy. “I was hoping you and Shay would become friends,” she said, and looked at her protector and so much more. “He and Lavender are some of my oldest and dearest.”

William laid his hand on her shoulder. “I look forward to knowing all of you well,” he said. “Your medicine is strong and pure, and we have waited patiently for you. Now we fulfill our purpose.”

Hermione hugged him again.

(*)

They stood in Hermione and Luna’s suite. Seamus had a magazine with George and Amal’s face on the front cover. It proclaimed “Clooney Engaged!” above their smiling faces “Miss Kapului`i sent Lav a charmed stone from her home. I’ve made it a portkey to take us directly there,” Seamus said. “We’ll port from here to a relative o’ mine’s place in San Francisco then on to Hawaii.”

Luna patted his hand, and said. “You have become very organized, Seamus. Much more so than when Dean and I shared the flat with you in London.”

Seamus smiled at her and hugged her to his side. “One minute,” he said. “Grab hold.”

Hermione wrapped on arm around Luna and laid a finger on the magazine. Seamus did the same with William, as Rose, William and Luna each took hold of the magazine. Luna looked at Hermione’s arm around her waist and then back questioningly.

“You equilibrium is off,” Hermione said primly. “I’m not letting you fall.”

“Same here,” Seamus said to William. “Not gonna break ya just after takin’ ya on.”


The magazine began to glow. “Here we go,” Seamus said and they vanished in a flash of blue.

(*)

“Seamus Finnigan!” His cousin roared. “How the hell are ya?” The large, red headed man embraced his cousin with a rib cracking hug. “You still with that beauty you tricked into marring your scrawny ass?”

Seamus laughed and patted his cousins back. “Good to see ya again, Steve,” he said, turning to his friends. “This here is Hermione Grainger Weasley, her daughter Rose, Luna Scamander, and our friend William Standing Bear.”

“Good to meet you all,” Seamus’s cousin said. “I’m Steve Stapleton. My wife is out delivering the kids to school, but she left us some scones she made this morning, and I’ve got tea for you.” He motioned for them to follow. “Right this way.”

The Stapleton home was in the hills north of San Francisco, and as they sat at the table in the combined kitchen and dining room Hermione took in the impressive view through the wall of windows that faced the rolling hills of Marin and the San Francisco Bay just visible beyond them. “Spectacular,” she said as she sipped her tea.

Steve smiled. “It doesn’t get old, that’s for sure,” he said. “You’re a little early for the wildflowers though, and back before they built all those houses it was even better. Still, not bad, huh.”

“Your wife’s scones are excellent,” Luna observed, taking her second from the tray. “The next time I
bake I shall have to try them with raisins and cranberries in.”

“I’m certain Steve ’ll let us pack a few,” Seamus said.

“Take all you want,” Steve said. “Linda can make more.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said. “How long have you lived here?”

“All my life,” Steve said. “After I graduated from the Apothecary academy and married Linda, Mom and Dad decided this place was too big for them, so they sold it to me. Converted dad’s old wood shop into a potioning lab, and that was it.”

“Your wife is a Muggle?” Rose asked, looking at a wedding picture on the mantel.

“No Maj here in the states,” Steve replied. “Yeah. She and I met at a No Maj concert in ninety five. One of yours, David Bowie.”

Hermione chuckled. “I know all his songs,” she said “He’s one of my dad’s favorites.” She looked at some of the pictures Rose was examining. “Have any of your children expressed?”

“Darlene, the middle girl,” Steve said. “She’s a junior in High School. We’re letting her go to No Maj schools for as long as she wants. If she doesn’t do magic outside of the house the congress is okay with magical home schooling, and we didn’t want to send her off to Angeles Ascendant, Denver Dominion, or worse Illvimory.” He shook his head. “That’s way too far from here for Linda.”

“Yes,” Hermione said. “It was hard for my parents too.”

“Thanks for lettin’ us pass through, Steve,” Seamus told him. “We’re wantin’ to keep our travels private for a bit.”

“No problem,” Steve said with a smile. “How long before you port again?”

“I gave us half an hour,” Seamus said. “Didn’t want to outstay our welcome.”

“Ha!” Steve laughed. “Too late for that,” he said and softly punched Seamus’s shoulder. “How’s Aunt Margret and Uncle Frank?”

As Seamus and Steve talked about their large and extended family Hermione turned to their latest traveling companion. “Thank you again for joining us, William.” She said, and she laid a hand on his. “Our friend in Hawaii wrote us and said they have a place for us to stay when we get there. Leiani indicated they will want to have a kind of welcome feast for us. She and I thought we’d have a bit of rest when we arrive so we won’t fall asleep on them this evening.”

William smiled and nodded once. “Merlmak chose well,” he said. “I look forward to meeting them and sharing the spirit.”

“As do I,” Luna said. “I felt the same connection with Lieani as I felt with the Dreamers and the People of the Earth.”

Hermione looked over at her daughter nibbling on her scone and reading about the Native Hawaiian legends. Her little girl, who wasn’t so little anymore, was going to have to face another test, and Hermione was by turns immensely proud, terrified, and angry. She wanted to grab Merlyn by the collar and shake him. Why her?
Luna sniggered beside her. “An excellent question,” she said, and looked at her friend. “You’re thinking quiet loudly this morning. Perhaps we will know one day.” She tilted her head and shrugged. “Or perhaps not.”

William’s smile went all the way to his eyes. “White Medicine Woman named for the moon, you are unique among all I have met.”

Hermione chuckled. “Me as well, William,” she said. “Me as well”

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“Aloha!” Leiani exclaimed. “Welcome back to Hawaii.”

Hermione looked to her side to check on Luna and then back to their host. “Thank you, Leiani,” she said, and took in their surroundings. They had landed in Leiani’s back yard, and everywhere Hermione looked the island displayed its bounty. Several different citrus trees stood laden with blood oranges, limes, and grapefruit, banana plants put forth stalks of gradually ripening fruit of their own, and a garden patch held rows of vegetable plants. Leiani stood on the steps of her home framed by an archway made from a passion fruit vine on her left and a kiwi on her right.

Rose walked up to Leiana and hugged her. “Thank you for having us,” she said.

Leiani hugged her back. “No problem, little sista,” Leiani said with a smile. “Where’s you pardner?”

“My aunt didn’t want her to come with us while Rotfang is in the game,” she said. Rose turned to her companions. “Leiani, this is Lavender’s husband, Seamus Finnigan, and this is our friend, William Standing Bear, chief of the Annocha Apache, and elder shaman of the Dine.”

She looked at Seamus. “Lavender told us you be guardin’ da keiki dis time,” she said. “Aloha.” She turned to William. “And she told us of you, Kahuna Nui. Aloha, you are most welcome to our island.”

“Ya’at eeh, my daughter. It is I that am honored,” William said with a slight head bow.

Leiani’s eyes sparkled with delight. “Dey setin’ up for da luau tonight,” she said. “I got some rooms for you to have a nap in till den, yeah? Come on.”

Her home was a simple, single walled house with three bedrooms and an attached apartment that she called an Ohana. She explained that Hawaiian words tend to have several meanings depending on context. Aloha meant hello, goodbye, welcome, and love. All depending on the words surrounding it. Ohana meant family, but it could also refer to an attached small apartment for family to live in.

“My auntie Melvine moved in with grandfadda, and so she asked if I wanted to live here,” Leiani said as she set a large jug of mixed passion, orange, and guava fruit juice on the table. “She takes good care of my tutu, so I take good care a her house.”

“This is terrific,” Rose said after a long drink of the juice.

“Kinda popular here, little sista,” Leiani said with her constant smile. “I never got tired of it though.”

Hermione laid her hand on Leiani’s. “Thank you so much for having us,” she said. “We don’t want to impose…”

Leiani cut her off. “Oh, I’m happy to have you,” she said. “Got rid of my cruiser boyfriend a month ago, so it’s been too quiet here. Be nice to have people around. Got keiki, got tutu, got aunties and an
uncle, it’s great.”

Hermione smiled. “Well, we’ll try not to outstay our welcome,” she said.

Leiani laughed. “Be pretty hard,” she said, and she stood from her chair. “Help yourself to anything you want, I’m goin’ over to my tutu’s place. Your friend already asleep in my room, but der two more in da house, and one in da ohana. Dat couch has seen me a lot of mornings too.” She turned to William. “Rest up, Kahuna, My tutu an you be talkin’ through da night I think, yeah?”

William nodded as he stood. “I believe you are probably right, my sweet child,” he said. “I will rest now.” He smiled at Hermione, Rose, and Leiani, and then tottered of toward one of the bedrooms.

Seamus came in through the kitchen door. “Got yourself some old and strong wards, ya do,” he said to Leiani, and then he turned to Hermione. “Safe as houses.”

“Thanks, Shay,” She said with a smile for him. “I think Rose and I will take that nap now.”

“I be back round four,” Leiani said. “Kay?”

Hermione nodded, stood and hugged their friend. “Thank you so much, Leiani, for everything.”

Leiani smiled at her, and Hermione could see the deep recognition, of one priestess to another, of a shared purpose and destiny. “No problem, my sista,” Leiani said. “Any time.”

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“Aloha!” the line of native men shouted at their appearance, and then they pounded the butt ends of their spears against hard packed ground three times. Leiani let go of their hands, walked to one of her cousins, and took an armful of leis from her.

She walked back to William first. “Blessed Kahuna Nui,” she said as she draped a fragrant lei of pikake and plumeria blossoms around his neck. “Welcome to Hawaii, you sanctify us with your presence.”

“Thank you, my sweet daughter,” William said. “And now I see you and your people.” He looked at the gathering behind her. “Ya’at eeh.”

Leiani kissed his cheek and moved to Hermione. “Wahine warrior, you are welcome here,” she said as she draped on Hermione’s shoulders. “My people promise their help in finding the thing that was lost.”

Hermione looked around her at the gathered native magical people of the Big Island. “Thank you,” she said. “You honor us. We will try to be deserving of that honor.”

With a broad smile Leiani turned to Rose, and said, “Young wahine, you have shown great courage I am told. Welcome.” She placed a lei around Rose’s neck and kissed her cheek.

Rose hugged her in return, and Lieani stepped up to Luna. “Wahine of the moon,” she said. “Lavender tells me you are more special than we can know. Welcome.” She gently laid the lei behind Luna’s bowed head.

“Thank you, Leiani,” Luna said. “I am rested, and perhaps tonight I will show you what Lavender was speaking of.”

Leiani kissed Luna’s cheek and turned to Seamus. “Guardian, warrior, friend, uncle,” she said.
“Welcome. We will try to ease your cares while you are here.”

Seamus chuckled. “Well tha’d be grand. As long as I’m covered top to toe in the sunshield charm I’ll be alight, I will. Thank you.”

“Come,” Leiani said, and she led them to a log where her grandfather sat. “Please, sit with my Tutu.” She looked at her grandfather. “Tutu, these are the people I spoke of.” She turned back to Hermione and her group. “My friends, this is my grandfather, Keali‘i Kapilui.”

The Kahuna Nui of the island of Hawaii stood and took William’s hand. “It is good to meet a brother so far from his home. Welcome my fellow Kahuna,” he said in a gravely, age roughened voice. Keali‘i Kapilui leaned in and put his forehead against Williams. The two men closed their eyes and breathed as one. After a few moments they stepped back and opened their eyes.

William laid his right hand on Kealii’s left shoulder. “My brother,” he said.

Kealii smiled, turned to Hermione, and took her hand. “Wahine, you fill me with your presence. I see in you a purity of purpose, and I see the righteous path before you. You are most welcome here.” He smiled at Rose and drew her into a hug. “Keiki, my granddaughter tells me you are the spear. Her changeling friend has spoken of your power, your purpose, and your wisdom. Ask of us anything.” He took Seamus’s hand. “Warrior, you are among friends. Ease your cares, and let Hawaii fill you.” At last he turned to Luna and took her hand. “Wahine I have felt your power from afar, and now that we touch I know the full truth of it.”

And you will know more soon, venerable Kahuna, he heard her say in his mind.

Kealii Kapilui closed his eyes and shook with laughter for a moment, and then he straightened and drew himself to his full height. “Eh Aloha e, aloha e!” he called loudly.

The gathered men pounded their spears on the ground three times and repeated the call. “Eh Aloha e, aloha e!”

A woman with a large brown gourd began beating out a complicated rhythm with slaps on the side of the gourd and pounding on the ground. Another man echoed parts of the rhythm on a log drum. The Kahuna motioned for them to sit with him as he lowered himself gently to the log. Rose sat on his left with her mother next to her, and William sat on his right with Luna next to him and Seamus next to her. As they made themselves comfortable more musicians joined the log drum and ipu heke with ipu and drums of their own.

And then Leiani Kapilui threw off the long dress of thin material she was wearing and began to dance for them. She wore only a lei of small woven leaves and a skirt of long flat red and green leaves. She swayed and spun, with her knees deeply bent, and her feet doing intricate movement in on the rough grass. Her long, curly hair flying around her.

“The Hula is a gift,” Rose said quietly to her mother. “This is a tremendous present from them to us.”

The woman who had first started the rhythm began to chant.

“Onaona i ka hala me ka lehua,” She said in a wavering tenor. Leiani’s right hand touched her lips and then she extended her arm as her hand moved in a wave. Then both hands came to either side of her eyes. All the movements were crisp and precise.

“He hale lehua no ia na ka noe,” the Kumu Hula continued. Leiani’s arms spread wide in a welcoming gesture, and then she drew them in as if hugging an unseen guest.
“O kaʻu no ia e `anoʻi nei,” the chant continued, and Leiani danced on. It was faster and much more athletic than Hermione had imagined.

“E liaʻa nei hoʻi o ka hiki mai.” Her new friend twirled and dipped, her skirt of leaves spinning around her, her hands weaving a magic of their own as she embodied the words of the chant in her movements.

“A hiki mai no `oe,” the Kumu Hula chanted, and in that moment Hermione suddenly realized just how beautiful Leiani actually was. She had noticed Leiani was pretty, it was hard not to, but as she danced Hermione saw in her the personification of the ideal Hawaiian wahine. Her skin was the color of creamed coffee, her hair the color of the black lava rock of the island. She was strong and fit, yet curvy with full hips and breasts, and immersed in the dance she became her people.

“Hiki pu no me ke aloha. Aloha e, aloha e,” The Kumu Hula finished, and Leiani bowed with her arms outstretched toward the earth of Hawaii.

“Eh aloha e!” all of their hosts shouted at once.

Another of Leiani’s cousins stepped forward, dressed just as she was, and began a chant of her own.

_She is performing a welcome blessing and charm_ Luna sent to Hermione, Rose, William, and Seamus.

As the new dancer chanted, more of Leiani’s female relatives joined the line. When she had finished the chant there were twenty dancers in two rows standing with their arms extended in front of them, one hand atop the other, and one foot slightly ahead.

The lead dancer threw back her head and called, “Hula leʻa wale!”

The Kumu Hula repeated the call and began the chant as the wahine danced.

_This is the story of their coming to the islands Luna sent. They…oh how marvelous._

The jungle growth behind the dancers rippled and fluttered in the breeze and then faded into a blur as a scene from the past formed out of the patterns in the jumbled foliage. They could still see the dancers and the musicians but everything else morphed into the vision projected into their senses. They could see huge double hulled canoes plying the giant waves of the pacific, pulled through the water by large triangular sails made from woven palm fronds. An armada of the craft, large and small, approached a tropical island.

The Kumu Hula chanted on as the dancers wove their magic.

Above and behind the dancers figures of the Hawaiian gods formed in the foliage, transfiguring into hills, clouds, and waves in the vision, and those gods welcomed and blessed the arriving Polynesians. A village sprung up on the shore, and then another and another. The vision shifted and showed a panorama of the islands as the people spread throughout the chain. Mighty kings rose, and ruled, and battled for supremacy. Then a man arose to dominate the vision. Strength and purpose shown in his visage, and one by on the islands came under his rule.

_Kamehameha_ Rose thought, and Luna relayed it to the rest.

The great king of Hawaii oversaw the building of temples to the gods, strong safe harbors for the fishing canoes, and the constant war ceased as peace settled over the unified islands. The Kumu Hula finished the chant and the dancers dropped to one knee as the vista in the green wall behind them...
faded back into trees, bushes, and flowers.

Rose turned to their host on the log next to her. “Mahalo, Kahuna Nui, you and your people have privileged us with this precious gift,” she said. Keali‘i smiled and chuckled.

“My young friend,” he said. “You glow with purpose, and the gods direct us to help you. How can we refuse when it costs us nothing to be kind?”

Hermione smiled sadly at him. “You’ve already had to defend us,” she said. “We’ve already imposed too much. We brought trouble to your home, and I am so sorry for that.”

The old Hawaiian man chuckled again. “They brought themselves,” he said. “We have a long history of dealing with people that come to Hawaii with hate in their heart. Do not let it trouble you.” He looked back at Rose. “Leiani tells me you seek a thing that was lost, that it resides in Kohala.”

“We do,” Rose said, and she looked to her mother.

Hermione looked in Luna’s face, and her blond friend nodded. “We seek the stones that bind the elves to service,” she said. “I intend to break the enchantment and set them all free.”

“You see, Tutu,” Leiani said as she approached them. “What I tell you.”

“You spoke truth,” her grandfather replied, and he turned to William. “Kahuna, my friend, how did this come to be?”

William drew a small bag from his robes. He looked at Luna and said, “With help from White Medicine Woman I can show you.” He held up the bag and smiled. “I brought the story sand with me.”

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Hermione handed her empty wooden plate to Lieani. “Thank you,” she said. “The food was amazing.”

Leiani laughed as she collected Rose and William’s plates. “We can cook, yeah?” She took Luna’s and set it atop the pile in her left hand. “There enough vegetarian for you?” she asked Luna.

“Oh yes,” Luna said.

“Good,” Leiani said with a smile. “I been eating less fish and poi since I turn thirty. Gotta keep an eye on the figure, yeah?”

“You are not thirty!” Hermione said in shock, and Leiani laughed.

“Be thirty three in March,” she said and laughed. “Island livin’.”

“I am not just four years older than you,” Hermione said in a resigned voice. “You’re twenty two, not thirty two.”

“March tenth, nineteen eighty four,” Leiani said with a giggle. “Good genes, yeah?” she continued with a fond look at her grandfather. Then she turned and walked toward the large covered shed that was the outdoor kitchen.

“Leiani is my chosen,” Keali’i said as he watched her walk away. “She and Keole are the gatekeepers of Hawaii for a reason.”
“Gatekeepers?” Luna asked.

“Oahu is where most visitors go when they visit our islands,” Keali’i said. “This, our home, our first island, is sacred, and it is protected. We allow no one with magic and malice combined to abide here. Leiani can see into hearts, she can see the stain of evil on a person, and she is one with Pele. That is why she is on guard, why she is the one to allow them to pass, and Keole is our mightiest warrior.”

Keole huffed from across the table. “Don’ know abou dat, Tutu,” he said. “Ant over der,” he indicated another large cousin by the fire pit. “He good as me, I thing.” The big man laughed. “But Leiani, yeah, she strongest of us all.”

Rose looked at Keole. “Why do you say that?” she asked.

Keali’i chuckled. “While we let our food settle you should go for a walk on the beach with Leiani, she can show you,” he said and exchanged a meaningful look with his granddaughter. “We feel your mana, we see your heart. Leiani is free to reveal our truth to you.” He stroked her hair. “Go now and learn.”

The mele
Welcome

“Onaona i ka hala me ka lehua
He hale lehua no ia na ka noe

O ka`u no ia e `ano`i nei
E lia`a nei ho`i o ka hiki mai

A hiki mai no `oe
Hiki pu no me ke aloha

Aloha e, aloha e”

Fragrant with the breath of hala and lehua
This is the sight I long to see

Of this, my present desire
Your coming fills me with eagerness

Now that you have come
Loves comes with you

Greetings, greetings.

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