Sing To Me Your Insanity

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Sing To Me Your Insanity

by ClumsyDreamer

Summary

Hermione Granger had many secrets. Some were smaller than others. But the biggest one was something only her parents knew about.

She wasn’t just a muggleborn witch, but a siren as well.

She wasn’t ashamed of what she was, but being a muggleborn AND a magical creature wasn’t something she wanted getting around an already prejudice school. For years she kept the secret to herself; singing down by the lake at night to ensure no one heard. She had been so careful too, but she knew that one day someone was bound to find out about her. Luckily for her, the one who hears her on that fateful night just so happens to be her mate.

Unfortunately for her, that mate also happens to be the completely insane and surprisingly not dead, Bellatrix Lestrange.
If only she knew what her abilities would someday bring, Hermione would've sworn back then to never sing again.

Bellatrix knows what power she holds over Hermione and she plans to use it in any way necessary to make the girl hers in every way possible. Because filthy blood or not, she belonged to her now and no castle walls, filthy blood traitors, or magic barrier would keep the girl from her. And she would very much like to see them try...
Chapter 1: Song of Sorrow

After the war, a lot things changed for one Hermione Granger. Long gone were the days of adventuring and laughing with her two best friends Ron and Harry. The two of them decided to not return to Hogwarts after the battle; both choosing to instead go straight into the auror program under the guidance of the new minister of magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt. While Hermione wasn’t surprised that the two decided to join the aurors straight away, she was still disappointed that they hadn’t even taken her into consideration before leaving. By no means was she angry at the two for leaving her behind, but the fact that she hadn’t heard from either of them in months hurt her deeply.

Their absence made her realize just how lonely she truly was.

Sure she still had other friends, like Luna and Ginny, but her relationship with them wasn’t nearly as strong as the one she shared with Harry and Ron. They’d been through so much together that it was hard to move on in her life without them by her side. Hermione would never say it to their faces, but the dangerous and crazy adventures they had over the years was what she lived for. Of course when they were younger, she had been advent on them playing by the rules and just avoiding trouble altogether, but after she grew up and became more mature, Hermione found herself craving the danger. And it was a good thing too or else Voldemort never would’ve been defeated.

Because Hermione knew that without her, Ron and Harry never would’ve found the other horcruxes. Without her, they would’ve never gotten into Gringotts, or learned of the Deathly Hollows, or escaped the Ministry. She wasn’t saying that the two of them alone couldn’t have figured it all out by themselves, but Hermione knew that she had played a key part in ending the war. Even if no one else really acknowledged it.

After all, even if she played a huge role in stopping the Dark Lord, she was still just a muggleborn girl who just so happened to have had connections with the right people.

Harry was the Chosen One, the Boy-Who-Lived, the Savior of the wizarding world. Children read stories about him growing up; adults basically worshipped the ground he walked on. He unlocked the Chamber of secrets, won the Tri-Wizard Tournament, defeated Voldemort as a baby and then again when he was an adult. Not to mention he was the last living descendent of the Potter family and one of the greatest Quidditch players Hogwarts had ever seen. The feats he had under his belt would mark him down in history for ages to come without a doubt.

Ron too would most likely have songs sung about him as well. The Weasleys weren’t the most well-known family in the world, but they were known. As a pureblood family, even if they weren’t rich and were considered to be blood traitors, the Weasleys were technically still a noble house. While Ron used to be outshined by most of his family, his adventures with her and Harry boosted him up higher in the world. He was Harry’s best friend, he was on the Quidditch team, he was a pureblood, and he was one of the best strategist of their generation. Hermione often got frustrated with Ron over the fact that he was so rubbish at his school work, but even she couldn’t deny that when it came to thinking up battle plans and strategies, Ron had her beat by a mile. His skills got them out of more than one sticky situation during the war, something he loved to brag about whenever they were asked to retell their adventures during the trials for the remaining Voldemort supporters.

The fact that he and Harry were now aurors on top of everything else just made them even more popular amongst the public.
Hermione knew that standing beside them with her list of feats, she never stood a chance.

She was not a pureblood nor was she wealthy in any way.

She wasn’t a great strategist or an amazing Quidditch player at all.

And she certainly didn’t defeat any Dark Lords.

All she had was her wits and her book smarts.

For her, there would be no songs to honor her. There would be no books to tell her tale and no fans to scream her name. Not that she wanted any of that anyways; she was fine with Harry and Ron getting all the glory.

Or so she thought.

At first it wasn’t a problem when people came up to her and wanted stories of the trios’ time on the run. She was thrilled to be given the privilege of spreading the word of their adventures.

Until that was all people wanted to hear about.

Day after day, she found herself repeating the same story over and over again; and day after day she grew more and more frustrated with everyone. A month went by of her constantly preaching the gospel of Ron and Harry before she finally had enough and began actively avoiding everyone.

People didn’t find it unusual for her to spend most of her time studying- she didn’t become known as the brightest witch of her time by lazing about- but it seemed that now all of her time was spent studying. If she wasn’t in class frantically taking notes and racking up points for Gryffindor, she was in the library drowning herself in knowledge and silence. Whenever someone approached her with the intent to hear more about her stories- or more like Harry and Ron’s sides of the story- she easily persuaded them to leave her alone under the guise of being too busy studying. Hermione soon found that she was spending so much time in the library that she had read every book on the first seven rows, front to back, in under two weeks. For most that would be impossible, but for her it was no problem seeing as she was reading from dusk ‘til dawn anyways.

The less people saw of her, the better, which is why she no longer ate with the others either. She took her meals to her dorm or down by the lake now; the Great Hall containing too many people and reminding her too much of all the mornings she spent with her two best friends.

She went to class alone, she ate alone, she studied alone; that was her life now. By no means was it the life she imagined for herself, but too often people never ended up with the life they imagined for themselves in the past. Life was just funny like that. Throwing curveballs at people when they’re at their lowest point.

Like her newfound hatred for insomnia.

Sleep didn’t come to her often anymore; not that lack of sleep was uncommon amongst the other survivors of the battle. She had never had that problem growing up, but so much had changed since her carefree times as a normal Hogwarts student. Now, Hermione found her nights plagued by the horrors of the war and the ghosts of her fallen friends, and no amount of sleep potions or natural remedies seemed to help her. She was exhausted most of the time now, the horribly dark bags under her eyes proof of how haggard she really was. Many just assumed she was running herself into the ground with all her studying and so she managed to avoid all the awkward questions that would’ve come had they known the truth for her sorry state.
She had never truly understood what Harry had gone through with his visions about Voldemort until her dreams started, and when they did, the witch found her admiration for her friends’ strength increased tenfold.

But if that wasn’t bad enough, when her nights weren’t being haunted by the deceased, her days were being troubled by the living.

She knew that eventually her friends would begin to catch onto her unhealthy lifestyle, and sure enough they did.

Ginny was the first to approach her about it.

She had caught up with her just as she was taking her food from the Great Hall to go eat elsewhere. The redhead cut her off halfway down the corridor, a strained smile making its way across her face as she called out to her.

“Hey Hermione, wait up!” She yelled, lightly jogging to catch up to her. Hermione knew from the look on the other Gryffindor’s face where this conversation was going, but she put on a smile for the younger girl anyways.

“Hey Ginny. How’ve you been doing?” She asked.

“Good. I’ve been good. Got Quidditch practice with the team in about an hour or so. How’ve you been? I haven’t seen you lately.” She asked, her tone seemingly light good natured.

Hermione knew it was a front right off the bat, but she played along anyways.

“I’ve been doing fine, just studying, trying to make up for the time I lost before the battle started.” She replied. She knew by the way Ginny’s face morphed into a disappointed frown that the girl wasn’t believing a word coming from her mouth.

“Yeah, I’ve noticed. You spend so much time in the library now.” Her voice wasn’t accusing, but Hermione could tell that Ginny was trying to breach the subject without upsetting her. She wanted nothing more right then and there but to run out of the corridor, not even caring about the scene she would undoubtedly cause. “Don’t you think you should be taking it a bit easier? I mean the castle is still being rebuilt and our exams won’t be here for another couple of months. You look exhausted.”

“Honestly I’m fine Ginny.” She tried to stress to the girl. Apparently that was the wrong thing to say because the next thing she knew the red head was grabbing her by the shoulders and shaking them; roughly, but careful enough not to make her drop the food she was carrying.

“No you’re not Hermione. You can hide it from everyone else, but you can’t hide it from me.” She whispered fiercely. Hermione was startled by the amount of fire she could see blazing behind the youngest Weasley’s eyes as she spoke. She was in so much trouble. “Ever since Ron and Harry left to be aurors you haven’t been the same. You don’t eat with us anymore, you spend all your time in the library, and I know you haven’t been up to the dorms to sleep in about a week.” She said.

“Look Ginny, it’s really nothing,” She tried. “I’ve just been in a bit of a slump lately. I’m fine, I just need some time by myself.”

“Hermione, this is more than just ‘time by yourself’. This is you isolating yourself from everyone who cares about you. What you’re doing right now is unhealthy. You and I both know that.” Ginny growled back.

She did know that, but Hermione found that she didn’t really care. Everyone only wanted to hear
about the war she was trying so desperately to forget. Everyone only wanted to hear about her two best friends who had left her behind. She was tired of thinking about it and if isolating herself from everyone was the only way for her to forget, then she was going to continue doing it until she did.

“I eat and I sleep just fine. I’m still taking care of my body Ginny.” She said.

“Bullshit Hermione! Have you seen yourself in a mirror lately? You have bags the size of grapefruit under your eyes, your hair is a tangled mess, and you’re skinny enough to be a skeleton!” She yelled. So struck by the other girl’s fury, Hermione found she was unable to look Ginny in the eyes, afraid that doing so would reveal all of her lies in an instant. Instead she chose the coward’s way out and tried placating the girl so she could runaway to hide for the rest of the day.

“Oh okay so maybe I’m not in the best of shape, but I’m still fine Ginny,” She said, keeping her voice calm and steady to settle her nerves. “If you want me to eat more I will. If you want me to sleep more, I will. Just let me sort myself out and I’ll be right as rain.”

Ginny sighed. “I know what you’re doing and it’s not going to work. I’m the queen of empty words. You won’t get rid of me that easily. I know for a fact that you’re just saying that to get away from me, and let me tell you, that’s not going to work. You’re wasting away Hermione. More than just physically, but here,” She placed one hand over Hermione’s heart. “As well. You isolating yourself and off on your own is literally killing you. You know I’m right.” She moved her hand back to the girl’s shoulders, her smile growing sadder. “Look, I know what you’re going through. I’m still not over Fred’s death. After we lost him, all I wanted to do was hide away and be by myself to grieve. But that’s not what he would’ve wanted. He’d have wanted me to keep my head up, keep smiling. And so that’s what I’m doing.” She rubbed her hands up and down Hermione’s arms. “And that’s what you need to do too. I can’t say I know exactly what’s wrong with you, and this might be deeper than just Ron and Harry not being here, but you can come and talk to me anytime Hermione. That goes for everyone in Gryffindor. We all miss you. So please come back to us, okay?” She pleaded, her voice trembling as if holding back unwanted tears.

Seeing the girl on the verge of having a breakdown sent a shockwave of guilt up Hermione’s spine. Here she was feeling sorry for herself because she was lonely while her friends had to sit back and watch as she spiraled down into a sea of depression. How could she stand there and not hate herself when she was worrying her friends who had it far worse off than her? Hermione didn’t lose Ron and Harry; they simply weren’t there by her side. And her parents were still obliviated, but they too were very much still alive.

But Dobby?

Fred.

Remus and Tonks.

Snape.

They weren’t. And they all had to live with that.

Harry had to go on without the last connections he had to his parents.

Ginny and Ron and the rest of Weasley’s had to live knowing that the hand on the clock for Fred will never move again.

She found it was getting hard to breathe. Tears threatened to spring from her eyes and she knew that if she didn’t leave now, she was going to have a complete meltdown right there in the middle of the
“Merlin Ginny, I’m so sorry.” She pulled the youngest Weasley into a hug. “I wasn’t trying to make you guys worry about me. I’m not…I’m not in a good place right now. Just…just give me some more time alright? I need to sort some things out. Please?” She said, releasing the hold she had on the other girl.

If one thing could be said about Ginevra Weasley, it’s that she wasn’t an idiot.

Ginny knew the moment she first approached Hermione that her friend wanted to be anywhere else in the world right now than with her having this conversation. Even so, she was determined to make the older girl stand there and listen. Hermione needed to hear what she had to say and realize that she was being selfish and her friends missed her something fierce. All of them were hurt in some way or another, but Ginny knew firsthand that dealing with it alone was the worst thing one could possibly do. It only led to endless days of self-loathing and tears; something she didn’t want happening to one of her closest friends.

Honestly, Hermione’s problems were unknown to her.

She wasn’t there when she, Ron and Harry were searching for horcruxes. She didn’t know the things she did or the horrors she had seen. She didn’t know if those thoughts had followed her back to Hogwarts or if she was creating new thoughts that were three times as worse. What she did know was that her friend was not coping well and without the support of Harry and her brother, she would end of going down the same road she had when she found out about Fred.

And no way in hell was she about to let that happen.

Even if she had to drag the girl kicking and screaming, Hermione didn’t get to hide anymore.

Now that the first step of talking to the older girl was over and done with, her plan to get Hermione back on her feet was underway. It would no doubt be a long and torturous process with someone as stubborn and hard-headed as Hermione, but Ginny’s own determination and stubbornness would soon win out in the end. By the way Hermione was standing there- silent and uncomfortable- she felt like her job was done for the day and decided it was best to back off for the time being.

“Alright Hermione. But only until Monday! Take this weekend to get a hold of yourself. I’m your friend, and I’ll always be there for you, but I’m sick of worrying about you. I’m not above holding you down and forcing you to take care of yourself you know.” She said.

Hermione smiled and Ginny gave a low groan as she was pulled into a rather painful hug. She returned it, although more gently, before she found herself watching Hermione pull away and take off sprinting down the corridor. “Thanks Ginny! I promise that I’ll come see you later!” She yelled over her shoulder.

“Remember, by Monday!” Ginny yelled back. She just barely heard Hermione’s ‘I promise!’ before the girl disappeared completely from her sight. Shaking her head, she made her way to her room to grab her gear for practice, hoping that the other girl would keep to her word when the weekend was through.

When Hermione reached the secluded area of the lake where she often came to eat her meals, she fell to the ground in exhaustion, her breakfast nearly escaping the wrapping and tumbling to the ground. She didn’t mean to run off like she did, but the things Ginny was saying were becoming too much for her to handle. Hermione knew that everything the girl said was the truth, but she couldn’t find it in herself to want to change any of that.
She was lonely.

Everyone only wanted to hear about what Ron and Harry had done, while her only wish was to know what they were doing. A letter, a firecall, a visit; anything to say that they hadn’t forgotten about her. She knew that she was being childish and selfish, but she couldn’t help it. Harry and Ron had been her very first friends and to just up and leave without so much as a ‘see you later’ was really affecting her. There was a hole in her heart that she knew her other friends in Gryffindor could never fill and as much as the others tried, they didn’t understand her like Ron or Harry did.

They didn’t care that her favorite color was yellow or that she hated tomatoes with a burning passion. They didn’t know that she loved reading cheesy romance novels or that she cried at night from missing her parents. Hermione had many secrets and she had trusted them to no one but her two best friends. If she had a secret, then they knew about it because there was nothing she couldn’t talk to them about. With them gone, who did she have? Ginny was one of her closest friends now, but even her bright smile and cheery personality was enough to fill the whole in her heart.

Merlin what she wouldn’t do to be at home with her parents right now.

Her sweet mother and caring father who had been the strongest pillars in her life. The only two people in the world who she could just be herself with. What she wouldn’t do to go back to the old days. Days where she and her parents would sit in the living room telling stories and playing games. Days where her mom and dad sat on the couch as Hermione did the one thing she loved the most, embracing the one secret only her parents knew about.

Singing.

Hermione loved to sing. She did it all the time at home. Sad songs, happy songs, silly songs; she loved them all. When she sang for her parents, it was always the happiest moments of her childhood. She took pride in her singing and she was good at it too! It was a wonder she kept it a secret honestly.

Except the singing part wasn’t the real secret.

The real secret was how she had gotten so good.

And the answer to that was that it was literally in her blood.

For you see, Hermione Granger was a siren.

Looking at her, no one would ever know it. Unlike the sirens they encountered in their Care of Magical Creatures class, whatever species she was, wasn’t identifiable by their looks. Their appearance was every which way human, but the real difference was their voices.

Hermione didn’t know much about her kind, but she knew that their voices were very powerful. Much like mermaids, sirens were well known for luring men and women into the sea with their songs. Sirens however, didn’t need to be underwater to sing. Land or sea, their voices could be heard, and they could do so much more than lure people to their dooms, as Hermione found out when she was little.

The first time Hermione found out she was a siren, she was only six years old. She was at home, playing with her parents out in their backyard. Her father was playing tag with her as her mother watched from the porch. While running, Hermione fell and cut her knee pretty badly on a piece of broken glass. Her mother was at her side even before the first wail left her throat. She tried her best to stop her from crying while her father ran into the house to get the first aid kit, but the older woman
was finding nothing she did was able to console the crying child.

And so she tried something different.

“Hermione sweetie, I know it hurts, but everything is going to be fine honey. Here,” She pulled the small child into her lap and kissed her on the forehead. “You know what’ll make it feel better?”

Hermione sniffed and tried wiping the tears from her eyes. She gazed up at her mother. “What mommy?” She whimpered.

“How about we sing a song?” She whispered excitedly.

“How about we sing a song? Why?” Hermione asked, her whimpering beginning to lessen the more she focused her attention on her mother.

“Yes, a song to make the pain go away. Can you do that for me?”

Hermione gave her a small nod. Mrs. Granger could tell by the look on Hermione’s tear streaked face that she wasn’t buying what was going on here, but she was still determined to try and make her anyways. She began by gently rocking the girl in her arms before she began singing.

“Okay sweetheart, repeat after me.” She said before thinking of a little song on the spot.

‘Leave me pain, yes leave me be
Heal my wounds, however deep
Dry my tears, let no one see
Heall my wounds, so I don’t weep’

Hermione sniffed and tried repeating her mother’s song. She sang softly at first, but it was clear to her mother that Hermione was still focusing on her injury. She encouraged her to sing louder. The young girl grew more confident and sang a bit louder, a smile slowly blooming on her tear stained cheeks. Her mother latched on to the good sign and carefully rose to her feet, Hermione still laying in her arms as she swayed the girl slightly faster, causing her to giggle and squirm excitedly.

“That’s it sweetie! Now sing as loud as you can! Show me you’re my strong little girl!” She exclaimed.

Behind the pair, Hermione’s father was exiting the house, first aid kit in hand and clearly out of breath, but smiling all the same at the sight before him.

Seeing her father and swinging about in the comfort of her mother’s arms, Hermione was suddenly struck with the indescribable urge to sing at the top of her lungs.

And so she did.

‘Leave me pain, yes leave me be
Heal my wounds, however deep

Dry my tears, let no one see

Heal all my wounds, so I don’t weep’

Again and again Hermione sang unaware of anything happening around her.

Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Granger stared at their daughter in both shock and awe.

They knew since Hermione was a toddler that she was…special. Toys being found in the infants’ crib even though both knew it had previously been in another room. The way that no matter how many times they turned the lights off in her room, they would mysteriously turn back on when the girl was having a nightmare. It was never anything major and the two of them loved their daughter too much to do anything about it. They accepted their special little girl and learned to hide the little incidents when family or friends showed up at the house. As Hermione got older, they noticed that the incidents were happening less and less and both of them wondered for a long time if it was all in their heads after all.

Until now that is.

The moment Hermione opened her mouth and began singing as loud as she could, there was a noticeable shift in the air. They had heard the girl sing before, but never like this. It was like being in a trance. The song washed over them in a wave, echoing all around them until it was the only sound that they could hear. They had never heard such an enchanting sound and the effect it had on them was unheard of. Mr. Granger’s chronic back pain wasn’t bothering him for the first time in years. Mrs. Granger’s panic for her daughter drifted away from her leaving her feeling light headed and giddy. She had stopped swinging the girl and was now just staring off in the distance as Hermione’s voice flowed through her ears, the most euphoric look on her face. Neither parent moved an inch until the echoing melody had come to a halt and the shift in the air that they had felt before was no more.

Only then did the two return to their senses.

Mr. Granger snapped out of it first. When he realized how wonderful his back was feeling, he found himself both relieved and confused. The doctors had said that there was nothing that they could do for it and that he would just have to take medication for the rest of his life to deal with it. To have it disappear in an instant, just from the strange singing of his sweet daughter was like a gift from above! He knew at that moment that there was nothing he wouldn’t do for his daughter and judging by the look on his wife’s face, she felt the same as well. Mr. Granger finally moved, approaching mother and child, to look over his wife’s shoulder at his smiling daughter.

“Hermione,” He said cautiously, resting his arm on his wifes’. “Do you…do you know what that was?” He asked. Hermione beamed at her father.

“Uh huh! It was mommy’s healing song!” She exclaimed, smiling so hard that her face was no doubt ready to split in half. “She said if I sing it, it will make my knee better. And it did!”

“What?!” Mrs. Granger exclaimed. Looking down at her child’s injured knee, she gasped. “Wendell, look!” She whispered breathily to her husband. Mr. Granger followed his wife’s gaze and he couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

Where there was once an ugly, bloody gash across his daughters’ leg, there was now nothing but
smooth, pale flesh. There was no sign that an injury had been there at all except the dry blood that had begun to slowly leak down the child’s leg. Just to make sure he wasn’t just seeing things, he ran his hand not carrying the first aid kit over the injury to see if it was real.

It was.

Wendell looked over at Monica and the two shared a look. They knew that Hermione was no ordinary child, but they didn’t know just how unordinary she really was. Was the singing a one-time thing like the other times Hermione made strange things happen, or was it permanent? She’d sung before, but nothing like this had ever happened. Perhaps whatever was causing Hermione’s other strange powers knew she was injured and decided to manifest itself to help her. All of it was hard to wrap their heads around, but looking at the happy, innocent expression on their daughter’s face and feeling the effects her singing had on them, they knew one thing.

They would act like this was all normal. At least while at home. The two of them were pretty open minded about things that were abnormal, especially when it concerned their child, however, they knew that the rest of the world was less forgiving. People would say that Hermione was ‘a devil’ or ‘a witch’ and would seek to harm her if they found out about her powers.

They also knew that asking Hermione to never do it again would no doubt end up badly for all of them. Both of them had begun diving deeper into learning about the supernatural after Hermione’s powers first appeared and had seen the negative effects that suppressing one’s abilities could have on a person. No, they would not watch their daughter spiral down a dark path because she thought that she was some kind of freak. She could sing if she wanted to, but only at home, and only in front of the two of them. And if her other powers came back, they would deal with them too.

Hermione remembered that after her parents got over their shock that day, the three of them went inside and watched a movie together and fell asleep on the couch. From that day on, Hermione was allowed to sing all she wanted so long as she was in the safety of their home. Sometimes she sang when she was having a rough day at school. Other times she would just sing to her parents as they sat together at dinner. She didn’t know how she knew some of the songs she sang, she just knew it felt right to just go with her gut. Sometimes her songs had words; sometimes they didn’t, but her parents did notice that the shift in the air was always present when she sang now. They could hear it as clear as day though strangely enough, Hermione hadn’t felt it in the slightest. That incident in the backyard had awoken something in her, something that laid dormant inside of her until she needed it. They found singing put Hermione in a good mood and aside from the hazy, dreamlike state they were often pulled into, her songs had never actually impacted their lives negatively. So they encouraged her to do it more and more as she grew up, hoping they had made the right decision in doing so.

Of course they still kept it a secret between the three of them though. Even when Hermione turned eleven and Professor McGonagall came to explain away all the other strange happenings were because Hermione actually was a witch, they still kept the singing a secret. From what the professor was saying when she breached the topic of magical creatures; they found that Hermione’s singing was similar to that of mermaids and those creatures were often feared by the wizarding and muggle world alike. They found it best to keep quiet about her gift; the last thing they wanted was for Hermione to be singled out so soon after discovering others who were supposedly just like her.

Looking back, Hermione was grateful that her parents had encouraged her to never express her abilities to others. Magical creatures in the wizarding world were indeed treated like dirt by everyone, even those who were not purebloods. It was already bad enough that she was a muggleborn, but to be a magical creature too?
Slytherin house would’ve been out for her head on day one.

That’s why she never told anyone, not even Harry and Ron about it. The less people that knew, the less likely that anyone would find out.

And now that her parents were still obliviated, she was literally the only person on the planet that knew that she was a siren.

And she was going to make sure to keep it that way too. She found the older she got, the more she felt the urge to sing. She didn’t understand why that was, but she did know that going too long without doing so left her tense and unusually high strung. That’s why she came so far away from the school to the other side of the lake at least twice a week. No one came out there and she was so far away that no one would hear her. Those who did would most likely assume it was just the mermaids’ doing and pass it off as nothing.

It was a lonely existence, especially now that she didn’t even have the joy of singing to her mom and dad any longer, but she knew that it was the only thing she could now if she didn’t want to go completely insane.

Out here, she could truly just relax and let go. She could eat her meal and sing to her hearts content until all her worries and fears just echoed out and faded away into the distance.

And with the day she was having, she had a lot to get off her chest.

Snapping back from her memories of her childhood, Hermione unwrapped her sad excuse for a sandwich and devoured it with vigor. It was late afternoon and the sun would be setting soon, giving her the extra cover of night to hide her from any late night rule breakers. As an eighth year student and technically a war hero, she was given more leeway in cutting curfew, but she found that even so, being out by the lake too late at night would not bode well for her. She would go until a little after sunset and then head back to the dorms.

She rose to her feet and stuffed the empty wrapper in the pockets of her school robes. Removing her socks and shoes, she carefully waded into the water, making sure that the bottoms of her robes weren’t touching the water.

“Ah, that feels amazing.” She said to no one but herself. The cool, crisp water washing over her feet was one of the things Hermione loved most about coming down to the lake. Whenever she placed her feet under, she could feel herself drifting away into a state of absolute serenity. She figured it must be a side effect from being a siren, with their relation to mermaids and all, but she wasn’t sure seeing as she never delved too deep into the lore behind her species. With the sun setting above her and the wind at her back, she closed her eyes and waited for the siren in her to lead her into a song.

She didn’t have to wait for long.

Soon she was swaying side to side in the shallow waters, opening her mouth wide and allowing a echoing melody spread out across the lake.

‘Alone with my sorrows, my struggles and plights

My long tired days breed long sleepless nights

I wither and worry, I bleed and I cry
For a life that is worthy for a soul such as mine

Alone with my sorrows, my fears and my woes
A heart with no fire and a body with no soul
I dwell in my torment as I drown in my lies
Watch me weep for an ending to this hell I call life

Alone with my sorrows, no love and no hope
I long for the one who can fix what is broke
Both haggard and battered, no strength to go on
I long for the siren with the same siren song…

Over and over she sang the same song. This one, a melody that she didn’t know. Hearing her own words, she knew that the siren in her was just as sad about everything happening in her life as she was. The projection of her inner self was being laid out before her and it was more than Hermione could take. After the second and third round of singing, Hermione finally could take no more and broke down in tears. She didn’t know why the creature within her chose this song in particular, but she hated it with all her heart for making her feel this miserable.

She didn’t want to be sad any longer.

She missed Harry and Ron.

She missed her parents.

She missed life before the war.

If only she knew how to be happy again. If only she had someone to show her that there was still something in this world worth living for.

With her head in her hands and her shoulders violently shaking from the force of her sobbing, Hermione stood there in the water wishing for her old life back. Wishing for someone to come and save her from the downward spiral she was sending herself into…
And then, from across the lake, she heard it.

The answer to her prayers.

It started off as a low echoing hum. Hermione stopped her sobbing and listened.

The humming grew louder and she found herself reeling back in shock and horror.

She recognized the song.

It was the one she was just singing.

Now she raised her head completely. Looking around she didn’t see any mermaids around. The melody was coming from the forest on the other side of the lake.

On land, which meant that it couldn't possibly be a mermaid.

Someone else was here.

And they had heard her singing.

Her face was now frozen in fear that someone had found out her secret. Panicked, she tried searching up and down the opposite shore for whoever was humming, but there was no one in sight. The sun had set a while ago and the light of the moon high up in the sky wasn’t nearly bright enough to make out a figure from so far away. Hermione began to back out of the water, making a mad scramble to get her socks and shoes back on her feet. She hoped that since she couldn’t see anyone in the cover of night, the opposite was true for her mystery person. As she tied her laces up, Hermione could still hear her own melody being hummed back at her. From what she was hearing, she knew a few things about the stranger on the other side.

The first was that they were obviously female. Whoever she was, Hermione found her voice too feminine to be a male and too deep and too sultry to be someone around her age. An older woman
then. Maybe one of the professors? Merlin she hoped not. The last thing she wanted was to reveal to one of her professors that she was not only a siren, but sometimes she skipped curfew to come down to the lake at night to vent her problems out to no one.

Another thing she noticed was that the other woman was most likely a witch because there was no way someone could hum that loudly or clearly across the lake without the use of a sonarus charm. It was the only logical explanation she could come up with and solidified that perhaps it truly was a teacher across the lake.

She needed to leave.

Hermione turned from the lake and made her way back towards the tree line leading towards the castle. If she was lucky, whatever professor that had heard her at the lake wouldn’t make it back fast enough to catch her out of bed.

She hadn’t made it five feet into the forest before the humming behind her stopped. She assumed that it was because the woman knew she was leaving and had given up on whatever she was trying to do.

Which is why she wasn’t prepared for what happened next.

‘Sweet sorrow, sweet sorrow of a heart pure as gold
Weep not for your losses, weep not for your soul
Cry not for your struggles, your woes or your plights
And sleep through your troubles, sleep deep through the night

When the first lines of song hit her, Hermione froze completely, her body refusing to move on its own. The siren in her was losing its mind. She was suddenly hit with the desire to jump in the water and swim across the lake into the arms of the woman on the other side.

Whoever the mystery woman was, she was a siren as well.

She felt herself going into a full blown panic attack.
Hermione had never met another siren before and she was never affected by the power of her own voice. But now, as she felt the older woman’s song wash over her, she finally understood that feeling her parents always felt under the thrall of her voice. Her head was filled with the haunting echoes of the other siren’s song and the feeling it brought her nearly made her legs collapse from underneath her.

_Sweet sorrow, sweet sorrow of a soul white as snow_

_May your fears and your worries break away from your hold_

_Away with your burdens and lay them to me_

_And a life that’s worth living, I shall lay on to thee_

By the next lines, Hermione found herself bracing her body against the nearest tree. Her nails were digging deeply into the bark; the only thing stopping her from turning around and searching out the other woman. As much as her instincts were screaming at her to go to the enchanting voice, her mind was telling her that doing so was a bad idea. She knew now that this was no professor, nor was this a student. This was someone much more intimate than that. No teacher or student she knew would be so far out of their mind to offer what was clearly being offered to her right now. Especially this late at night near the forbidden forest of all places. And there was something about the other woman’s song that made her feel things that she hadn’t felt in a long time.

Safe. Warm. Wanted.

The siren who was singing to her now was the one she knew she would one day go searching for. The one who could make the creature inside of her lose its mind while simultaneously soothe her own.

This woman was her mate.

The one person who she was destined for. The one person whose song could literally almost bring her to her knees. It was both overwhelming and frightening all at the same time. On the one hand, she now knew that there was someone out there like her who would love her and protect her unconditionally. On the other hand, this person was a stranger. A stranger on school property who wasn’t a part of the staff or students. A stranger who managed to find Hermione here of all places right as she had just been at her lowest and unknowingly calling out to them.

The situation was suddenly becoming more and more dangerous.

Luckily, her mind was stronger than her instincts at the moment and she was able to pull herself
deeper into the forest towards the school. The further she got, the less hazy her mind felt and she was soon running towards the castle in fear as her mind cleared and reality set in.

She wasn’t fast enough however to miss her mate’s final words.

'Sweet sorrow, sweet sorrow of a mind bright and bold
You may run from me now, but you can’t run from me long
You sung to me sweetly, now I answer in kind
I will come for you one day, for the heart that is MINE!’

Hermione had never run faster than she did at that last part. It was no longer the sweet and comforting melody that had almost lured her into swimming across a lake and into the loving arms of her mate.

It was the possessive and angry growl of a predator pissed at having her prey flee from her. The way the mystery woman had said the word ‘mine’ was in no way friendly or loving in the least. It was angry and greedy and was enough to send a shiver of fear down her spine.

By the time she reached her dorm, sweating and completely out of breath, she couldn’t tell where her fear began and her arousal ended. All she knew was that when she fell asleep that night, her dreams were not haunted by ghosts and regrets, but by the melody of a woman who would come to either be her savior or her complete and utter annihilation.
Chapter 2 - An Eventful Night

When Hermione awoke the next morning she was still reeling from the night before. Memories of the encounter flashed through her mind and though it all seemed like a very strange dream, she knew that it wasn’t. She could still hear the echoes of her mate’s singing flowing through her ears, trying to lure her in with sweet promises and honeyed words. Oh, how much she wanted to go to them, even if it was just the siren’s desires, there was something about the other siren that Hermione felt was familiar. She couldn’t pinpoint what it was, but there was something there beyond that voice that drew her in. Something beautiful and yet dangerous at the same time. The more she laid there thinking about it, the more she wanted to return to the forest and find out who the other was. She shot up from her bed and ran to the bathroom.

“No, no, no! Bad idea Hermione!” She scolded herself.

Even if she wanted to, Hermione knew going to meet the other siren face to face would be a very bad idea. They were a stranger, someone that could possibly do her harm. It was no secret that many of the death eaters had escaped after the battle. For all she knew, that could’ve been a trap last night. Someone imitating a siren’s call in an elaborate plot to lure her away before killing her off under the cover of night, never to be seen again.

‘Unlikely.’ She told herself, splashing water on her face and washing away the grime and sweat that she had accumulated overnight. She looked up at herself in the mirror, her mind working on overtime.

It was easy to think that the whole thing was a trap, but deep down she knew that it couldn’t have been. She hadn’t read much about sirens, but she knew that imitating sirens was nearly impossible to do, let alone still have the effect on her as it did. Whoever she heard last night may well be dangerous, but she couldn’t deny that they were the real deal.

‘Which is even more reason not to go back down there. At least no time soon.’ She dried her face and left the bathroom. ‘At least not until I do some research.’
Thinking about it now, Hermione found it strange that she’d never done research on what she was before. She spent so much time in the library, reading and researching, and yet never before did it cross her mind to do so. Then again, with everything going on with her adventures with Ron and Harry, helping them took precedent over learning about the creature blood flowing through her veins. No one but her parents knew about her and so long as no one heard her singing, there was no way to tell she was a magical creature anyways. If she was caught reading books about sirens when they weren’t covered in any of their courses, it would no doubt raise questions from her peers that she really didn’t feel like answering. The best thing to do was to keep it under wraps and learn by doing. Hermione was perfectly fine doing so for as long as possible too, but with the arrival of possibly her mate, she needed to prepare herself.

She was almost taken last night.

Had she stayed any longer or had a little less restraint and common sense, she would’ve swam across that lake, ignoring the cold and her own safety to find the source of that hauntingly attractive voice. A chill went down her spine.

Knowing some stranger had that type of control over her was unnerving to say the least and got her moving towards the library at an even faster pace.

Down the stairs and through the corridors, the bushy haired Gryffindor walked swiftly through the halls, greeting some of the professors who were also early risers. In the mornings, it was best to be the first student in and the first student out. Breakfast wasn’t served like dinner was. Food and drinks could be seen laying out on the tables long before the students made it downstairs, heating and cooling charms keeping everything at the perfect temperatures. Everyone’s morning was different and so some people came earlier than others, unlike at dinner when all classes were over and done with. It made it easy for her to grab her food and go without getting pulled into unwanted conversations, something she had been doing since a month into the school year.

Hermione grabbed a bowl and filled it with fruits and a piece of toast. She reached over for a glass of water and with her breakfast secured in steady arms, she made her way out of the door and towards the library.

Hermione entered the room with a wide smile and a soft greeting to Madame Pince, the older woman barely glancing in her direction from where she was filing books on the shelves in front of her.

One of the benefits from basically spending her life in the library was that the old woman trusted her more than any other student there. Many disliked Madame Pince for her stern demeanor and harsh reprimands, but Hermione found the woman absolutely delightful. The old librarian knew of Hermione’s unquenchable thirst for knowledge and the high regards she held for her books and so she was a lot more lenient with her than the others. She trusted that the girl wasn’t going to cause trouble or ruin any of her books, which is why Hermione was allowed to bring her food into the library whenever she wished.

The two of them shared a silent friendship between them that neither acknowledged out loud, but both knew existed.

When Hermione was bored sometimes after finishing her work, she would help the other woman organize books and hold polite conversations as she helped her move the tables and chairs back into their proper places. Madame Pince never thanked her out loud for her help, but if Hermione found herself covered by a blanket after passing out some nights or mysteriously brought a tray of sweets by an elf when she hadn’t eaten, then she knew the gratitude was implied. A part of her knew that when she left Hogwarts for good, the old librarian would be one of the few people in her life that she
would miss the most.

Hermione found a seat at the back of the library and placed her food on the empty table. She turned around and began looking through the rows and rows of books. ‘Now where should I look?’ She wondered, searching in the ‘s’ section of the magical creatures’ aisle. Up and down the shelves she looked for what she needed. There were plenty of books on sirens, but they were more about famous sirens than the actual creature itself. ‘Uh this is impossible!’ She thought, putting yet another useless book back on the shelf.

An hour goes by before she finally finds what she’s looking for. There, deep in the back of the room on the bottom row sat the tome she was looking for.

The cover of ‘Sirens: The Seers of Song’ was worn and dusty as she pulled it from its hiding place and brought it back to her table. It wasn’t exactly a big book, but Hermione hoped that it was enough to help her out with her dilemma. If there was a way to break or nullify whatever power her mate had over her, then she could go about her life without worrying about it ever again.

**But is that what you really want?**

She didn’t know.

On the one hand, a mate was supposed to be the one you were destined to be with; a perfect match. She would have someone to match her wit, to challenge her mind. Someone she could sing with and not have to hide it from them in fear of ridicule.

On the other hand, what if her mate hated her? What if she tried to use her powers to get one up over her?

She’d be devastated.

Hermione opened the book, a new determination in her eyes. Scanning the first couple of pages, Hermione came across the index and skimmed through the different sections. She had no idea that there were so many different types of sirens. Some were as beautiful as the Veela, with glowing silver eyes and small petite bodies. Some were as hideous as the mermaids that lived in the lake, equipped with sharp talons and the insatiable need to devour human flesh. She shuddered at the thought, glad that she wasn’t a cannibal herself.

Popping a couple of strawberries into her mouth, Hermione searched the book until she came across what she was looking for. As she looked down at the already thin book, she was about ready to tear her hair out about how little info there was about her particular species of siren; the Cor-Echo Siren. It was strange to have an actual name to the creature that was always present at the back of her mind. Never before did she think she was anything else but a plain old siren, but as her eyes flew across the four pages of texts, she knew that she was anything but.

She began reading the book softly to herself.

**What is a Cor-Echo Siren?**

Cor-Echo Sirens (Echo Heart Sirens) are a species of siren with exceptional abilities in the manipulation of emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations of other individuals and oneself. They are a rarer breed of siren that occur once in every 30 generations of a family. Cor-Echoes do not differ in appearance like many other sirens tend to do, instead utilizing most of their powers in the form of their singing and voices. Unlike their other counterparts, and their close cousins the mermaids, Cor-Echo Sirens’ have the ability to utilize not only their singing to manipulate another’s
mind or magic, but wizards and witches can also imbue their spellwork with their siren abilities to enhance it in extraordinary ways.

**Characteristics and History of Cor-Echo Sirens**

Cor-Echo Sirens are a rarer species of siren that are born to families of all blood status. Unless verbally engaged by these sirens, it would be impossible to tell the difference between them and a normal human, one of their greatest assets to surviving. Most tend to be docile in nature; choosing to sing and dance through the open meadows than lure men and woman to a watery doom. It is said that Cor-Echoes are unable to hear their own voices in the same way a second party would, but those sirens who have been studied have mentioned that they feel comforted when they sing to themselves. The Cor-Echo siren reportedly has the loudest singing voice out of all its relatives, only coming second to the Banshees. Another special quality of this rare siren species is that their need to sing isn’t only about instincts, but it is also a stabilizing habit as well. With their close relationship to feelings and emotions, the need to keep oneself grounded is important to keeping these sirens from succumbing to various mental illnesses. While there aren’t many cases where this has been a major problem in the Cor-Echo species, there have been reports of sirens experiencing bouts of irritability, aggression, and mental instability from prolonged times without singing or utilizing one’s siren abilities.

It is not known how or where the origins of the Cor-Echoes came from, but the earliest documentation of the breed dates back to the early 1600s. Their appearance throughout history has been scarce due to the generation gaps that occur between each siren born into a family. Morrison L. Anderson; a scholarly wizard and high ranking official in the Department of Magical Creatures; studied the lives of dozens of Cor-Echo Sirens over the course of his lifespan in order to get a grasp of how their lives differed from that of not only other sirens, but humans as well. In one of the many journals Anderson left behind before his passing, he explained what it was like living with some of the sirens.

_Honestly, there wasn’t much difference between living with the sirens and living with your average, everyday flat mate. No wild transformations on the full moon or being lured into the ocean and drowned. It was like staying with a friend most of the time. I was fed, and clothed, and taken care of like any visitor would be. Nothing out of the ordinary happened living with the Cor-Echoes; at least until they started singing. That’s where they began to differ. You see, the Cor-Echoes are sensitive to emotions. They live and breathe off of feelings and it shows in their singing. When they’re sad, or happy, or angry, they take that raw emotion and channel it into something- excuse the pun- magical! As a wizard, it was sometimes difficult being around them when they were experiencing bouts of high emotions._

_One time I got into an intense argument with a young Cor-Echo from Germany. It started as a simple miscommunication, but it soon escalated and by the end of it, I found myself on the cold floor, writing in pain and ears bleeding profusely as he began screaming at me! My ears were never really the same after that, even when he tried to heal them his self. As it turns out, he wasn’t really good at it. I’ll admit it was a traumatizing experience, but it did lead to a crucial discovery in my research! Cor-Echoes have a certain affinity in their being much like witches and wizards do for light and dark magic. While some were better at healing and comforting, others were more proficient at manipulation and luring. I remember another siren who was actually…_

Hermione skimmed over the next exerts, not really caring about Anderson’s experiences with others of her kind.

_She was here to find a solution to her problem._
And it was on the final page that she found it.

Or what was left of it.

**Mating Habits and Abilities**

Much like hundreds of other magical creatures, Cor-Echoes are also known for having a mate; an individual tailored to balance one another out and complement each other’s personalities and powers. While some species have multiple potential mates, Cor-Echoes are special in that they have only one. Not much is known about the mates of Cor-Echoes, but from Official Anderson’s notes on the matter, the mating habits and conditions that come with this particular species are both beautiful and deadly.

In all my years of studying the Cor-Echoes, I had only come across twelve mated pairings. Something people need to understand about the Cor-Echoes is that finding one’s mate is not only as rare as the species their selves due to the generation gaps, but it comes with conditions that don’t always lead to a healthy relationship. While gender doesn’t seem to be an issue with these sirens, it is a dominant and submissive style bonding. As I’ve seen, in each pairing, one partner’s singing abilities affects the other more intensively in a different manner. The dominant has a certain luring quality to their voice that only their mate can hear and be affected by. With one of the couples I stayed with, Joseph and Alice Stacy, this was often a problem since Joseph was beyond possessive and often lorded that power over Alice.

That doesn’t really make the submissive defenseless however. A submissive can be just as powerful, if not stronger than their counterpart when struck with intense bouts of emotions. While dominants can lure their mates, if a mate becomes too aggressive or the submissive is frightened, the submissive can deflect their mate with a frequency of singing that I’ve seen drive even the most hardened Cor-Echo to their knees. I was shown just how powerful this frequency is when during a particularly bad argument between the two, Alice began singing with such violent aggression that poor Joseph was rendered unconscious for the following two days. I had to leave the house early on, only coming back later in the night when everything had calmed down.

The relationship between mates can definitely be a dangerous affair where both parties can harm one another, but it can also be a very beautiful thing.

Anthony and Winston Sunderland, an older couple of Cor-Echoes I stayed with; were a grand example of how strong the bond between the species’ mates can be.

I had arrived to their home in the country side during the week of their 87th anniversary. For an entire week, the house was filled with a steady melody of singing that bounced back between the two of them with such ease that it almost took my breath away. The night of their anniversary, the two went out to the nearby lake and shared in a duet that could be heard from miles and miles. It was so wild and intense and emotional that it was no surprise that every woodland creature and occupant of the lake came forth from their hiding places to witness the event. My head was spinning the entire time and I didn’t even realize that my ears were healed and I was the healthiest I had ever been in years until the next morning.

By the time I was done with my research of the Cor-Echoes, I had seen both the horror and beauty that mates could provide one another. Seeing the strength of such a bonding, I began researching if there was even a way to break it…

Hermione perked up at this point.

And there isn’t.
‘Dammit! Are you serious?’ She said, internally screaming as she kept reading.

To the best of my knowledge, the bond between two Cor-Echo mates is unbreakable. They are made for each other in every sense of the word; mind, body, soul, and magic. Not even death seems to be able to separate the two entities either. Many of these sirens parish with the death of their mates; majority of the time it is due to heartbreak, but suicide amongst the species isn’t uncommon either. I suppose it’s like a marriage in that it is literally ‘Til death do us part’.

While it is inconvenient that these sirens do not have the ability to choose or even escape their mate once they are found, from all of my travels and interactions between the twelve mated couples I stayed with, I don’t believe any would want to break it anyways. Despite the fights and arguments, the screaming and screeching they’ve all had at some point in their relationship, I have never seen anyone happier than the mated Cor-Echoes. There was something in the unmated sirens that seemed to be missing and I believe I know what it is now. Unconditional love; one of the strongest emotions one can feel for another person. There is power in love and of all the siren species, the Cor-Echoes are the only ones I’ve come across that can take that power and imbue it with their abilities to enhance their strength to newer heights.

From the perspective of an outsider, one who will never know the joys of having someone tailored to complete my soul, I can honestly say that any siren who is lucky enough to find their mate and experience the joy of such a powerful bond, should hold onto it for dear life and never let go no matter what...

Hermione sat back in her chair, eyes glazed over in thought. Shit. There was no way to break the bond, even if she wanted to. Her mysterious mate was hers from now until the end of her life.

Hermione wasn’t an idiot. She heard the possessiveness in the other’s voice when she went to flee last night. They knew. Hermione had unintentionally called out to them and the they latched onto her slip up like a leech, trying to suck her in with their hauntingly beautiful voice. There was no way that she could get away from the other now.

Though now that she had read the exerts from Anderson’s journals, she wasn’t sure she wanted to anymore.

Yes, she was scared of her mate, but she was also terribly lonely as well. Without Ron and Harry, and her parents still in the wind, there weren’t a lot a people in her life that she trusted to be there for her. Ginny, Neville, and Luna were here, but they had their own lives to live and she wasn’t nearly as close to them as she wished she was.

Her mate was a wildcard.

They were made for her and vice versa. Someone to share all her fears with knowing that they would never abandon her. ‘Merlin, I hope they’re not a menace.’

Hermione went back to the book, eager to learn a bit more about some of the abilities she and her mate might have, but when she turned the page she was surprised to find the page missing. Ripped out.

“What? Why rip the page out of this book in particular? Someone must’ve been trying to hide something they didn’t want anyone else to find out.” The book was closed and placed under her arm as she went back to the shelf in the back, her mind running a mile a minute. “Could there have been another? Another Cor-Echo who went here once? It’s possible.” She said, returning the book to its rightful place.
Hermione learned a lot today, even without the final page, but now her curiosity was killing her. Who tore the page out and why? She desperately wanted to go up to Madam Pince and ask if she knew about the book, but she wasn’t trying to draw attention to the situation at the moment. Should something come up with her abilities somewhere down the line, she would come back and question her, but until then, she would leave it alone.

A clock to her left told her that it was nearly noon. It hadn’t felt like that much time had passed, but the amount of books she went through to find what she was looking for did take longer than she expected. Luckily for her it was Saturday, meaning that there wasn’t much she had to do today aside from prepare for Ginny’s Quidditch match later on at two.

With nearly 2 hours to kill, Hermione found herself in the romance section, and choosing a cheesy romance novel, she settled back into her seat at the back of the room and began reading, pushing her previous problems and her mate to the back of her mind for a later date.

As it would turn out, a later date meant a week from that day. As she had promised Ginny, Hermione spent the week eating in the Great Hall once again and sleeping in her dorm. The whole time she had Ginny breathing down her neck, but instead of being irritated about the younger girl’s mother hen nature, Hermione found herself grateful for it. The ginger was quick to deflect anyone she didn’t want near her which meant she wasn’t bothered by those looking to hear about the war again. It was nice to have the other girl’s attention solely on her for a while. Perhaps it wasn’t the type of attention she wanted at the moment, but to have someone care about her safety and health again did cause her eyes to tear up.

Of course Luna and Neville came around often too and that only made her guilt from avoiding them for so long all the harsher. They had been supportive of her all year, even when she was off trying to hide away from the rest of the world. Seeing them try their best to befriend her despite her being a jerk to them was one of the reasons why she was especially engaged when they got in their little study groups and during the times they were hanging out outside classes. Hermione knew that it wouldn’t be enough to make up for her absence, nor would it help fill the loneliness she felt inside, but it was definitely a good start.

Overall, the time she spent with her friends was both needed and enjoyable to say the least.

But then the following Saturday came along and everything starting going wrong.

When she’d eventually look back on this day, she would realize that this was the catalyst for everything to come later on in her life.

It started at Hogsmeade.

The four of them had gone into the little village for some butterbeer and a nice afternoon away from the daily reconstruction of the school. They grabbed a seat near the window and placed their orders, patiently waiting for their drinks as they chatted about each other’s day.

“If Malfoy runs into me again on the pitch one more time, I’m sending him the most powerful batboogey hex I can muster!” Ginny said, her eyes ablaze as she recalled what happened during their last Quidditch match. “Honestly, the whole bloody pitch and he keeps finding his way in my path! He’s doing it on purpose, I just know it.”

“Come on Ginny, do you think Madam Hooch would just let Malfoy of all people do that without knocking him on his arse?” Neville asked.

“No, but that doesn’t mean she’ll do it either.” She pouted. Luna smiled and patted the girl’s hand.
that was laid out in a fist across the table.

“I’m sure Draco didn’t mean it. He’s had nargles around his head for a while now. They make it very hard to concentrate if you let them linger too long.” She said, her voice light and airy as always.

Hermione and Neville smiled at the blonde Ravenclaw in fondness as Ginny sighed at her antics. They were used to Luna’s strange ways by now, not really minding the things that sometimes came out of the girl’s mouth, even when they couldn’t make heads or tails of what she meant.

It was just the way she was and that was just fine with them.

The waiter came over with their drinks. Setting them on the table with a wide smile, the young woman left them to attend to the table behind them. They clanked their glasses together, a loud ‘Cheers!’ was shouted as they applauded one another’s work on the castle today.

That’s how they spent most of the afternoon and early into the evening. The group shared many laughs and kept having a good time as the butterbeer kept flowing. Hermione was glad to have been undisturbed for the night by the various witches and wizards in the pub, but she knew it was only a matter of time before her peace would be inevitably shattered by someone’s need to butt into her life.

Enter Rita Skeeter.

Had Hermione saw her earlier, she would’ve made a run for it before the eccentric woman could make the door. Unfortunately, she didn’t and before she could flee, their eyes met from across the room and the older woman made a B-line straight for her, magical pen already out and ready.

“Merlin, I can’t deal with this right now.” She hissed at the others when they noticed her demeanor change out of nowhere. Ginny’s face scrunched up as the woman approached their table.

“Oh great. This should be interesting.” She said. The reporter reached their table in record time. “Can we help you with something Miss Skeeter?” She droned, not in the least amused at the devious little smirk on the other woman’s face.

“Well I just so happened to have been visiting this quiet little pub to meet with an associate and I saw some of the war’s key players, including you Miss Granger.” She said, her pen working a mile a minute. “Would you mind if I got an exclusive interview? I’m sure the Prophet readers would just love to know what our world’s heroes have been up to since the battle.”

“Sorry Miss Skeeter, but we’re having a private celebration right now and don’t wish to give an interview at the moment.” Hermione said. She was having such a good time too. Her hope was that seeing how reluctant they were at the moment, Rita would be discouraged and leave them be, but the woman was nothing if not persistent.

“It will be quick, I promise. Just a few words for the readers eager to hear from their saviors.” She said. Hermione felt her hands clenching as the woman began to grate on her nerves.

“And I said, we don’t want to give an interview. Now will you please- “

“How having you been fairing Miss Granger since the battle of Hogwarts?” The reporter interrupted. “My sources say that Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley have recently joined the aurors; have you heard anything from them? Can we get a statement on what you’ll be doing after graduation from Hogwarts?”

Hermione lost it.
“No Skeeter, you may not know anything of the sorts from any of us.” She rose from her seat. “None of us agreed to your insipid meddling and I would appreciate you not violating our privacy with your rather intrusive questions into my friends and I’s personal lives!” She yelled, making the woman stumble back with shock from the brunette’s aggression.

The pub was quiet at this point, everyone watching the proceedings with curiosity and hunger, eager to see how this played out. ‘Dammit, I didn’t mean to flip out like that. It’s gotta be from not having time to go down to the lake this week.’ She pondered as she got up from her seat and headed for the door; her three friends following close behind into the chilly evening air. Skeeter didn’t follow them out, but she could hear the waiter who had served them earlier giving the woman a piece of her mind through the wooden doors. ‘Serves her right.’ She said, a pleased smile on her face at the other woman’s pain.

Hermione was silent as they made their way back to the school. Behind her she could hear Neville and Ginny talking softly to one another, Luna staying quiet the whole time. While on the outside she appeared to be calm and collected, on the inside, Hermione was livid. Who did that harpy think she was? Coming in and asking so many personal questions as if she was entitled to any answers. The Gryffindor knew that she was not just pissed at Skeeter for her impromptu interrogation, but she was also mad because she didn’t have answers to any of her questions.

She didn’t know how she was feeling. One moment she was all smiles and laughter and the next moment she was tears and long, sleepless nights. She had no idea how Ron and Harry were doing, seeing as they haven’t contacted her in what seemed like forever.

And as for what she was going to do after graduation…

She hadn’t a clue.

Working for the department of Magical Creatures had always been a dream of hers during her earlier years at Hogwarts, but that had begun to change as she grew older and saw the injustices magical creatures had to go through. During the war, most of the magical creatures had sided with Voldemort because they knew the ministry didn’t care about them. They were shunned and persecuted and treated like second class citizens by the government that was supposed to protect them and their rights. She doubted Voldemort thought any different, but from what she heard about Tom Riddle in his youth, the man had charisma and power that could sway anyone to his side, even if they wouldn’t under normal situations. Between the blatantly prejudice ministry and the secretly prejudice Dark Lord, many took their chances with the madman.

Hermione had been approached several times by the ministry to join them in the department after the war, but the chance of them finding out about her being a siren was too much of a risk. While she saw it as an advantage- having someone who was a magical creature come out and speak for them in a position of power-the ministry wouldn’t see it that way. The system was bigoted, stuck in their ways since the olden days on their views of those who were not human or of pureblood status being in any kind of position where they can make an impact in the world. The moment she was found out, any chances she had at being a ministry worker would be dashed.

And then where did that leave her?

She wasn’t sure.

Hermione suddenly couldn’t feel herself thinking clearly. A sensation of being lost was overtaking her and the siren inside of her was becoming restless. She needed to let loose.
‘But they’re still out there.’

The ‘they’ being her mate.

It worried her that the other siren was still out there somewhere, but her instincts were begging her to ignore that and go to them. She was having trouble trying to not agree with the notion. Maybe she was over thinking it all. Maybe her mate wasn’t as dangerous as she was making them out to be. As she kept walking towards the castle, her brain took a left and shifted her thoughts from her encounter with Rita to her mate.

‘Are they waiting for me? Do they want to meet me? I don’t even know what she looks like… Wait…’ She stopped walking, Ginny nearly running into her back.

“Hermione? Are you alright? Why are you stopping in the middle of the road?” The red head asked, coming around her to look at her, watching the color drain from her face as she went ghostly pale.

“I’ve just remembered something I need to do. You guys go on ahead.” She broke off to the left and started off in the opposite direction of the castle. Her body was moving on autopilot as it began leading her towards the lake. Behind her, frantic footsteps struggled to keep up with her.

“Woah, Hermione, slow down a minute!” A hand grabbed her shoulder. Neville. “Where are you going this late at night? This is really sudden. Is it because of Skeeter? Merlin Hermione, you can’t let her get to you like that. You know- “

“It’s not that!” She said, freeing herself from the other boy’s gentle hold. “I just remembered that Hagrid told me to stop by his hut today; said it was pretty important.” She lied.

“I’m sure he’ll understand why you didn’t come today if you tell him what happened.” Ginny said from her position behind Neville. Luna had yet to say anything.

“It’ll be quick. I’m an adult now guys, I’m perfectly fine being out here by myself. I’ll be back before you know it.” She told her three friends in the hopes that they would let up.

“Fine, but we’re coming with you.” Ginny said, crossing her arms across her chest to let her know that she wasn’t taking no for an answer.

‘Really, why did I have to have such stubborn friends?’ She sighed. She tried to think of a way to get them off her back when a third voice piped in.

“Hermione will be fine going by herself, though I’ll be happy to go with her while you two go back.” Luna said, a serene look on her face the entire time.

“I don’t know Luna,” Neville whispered. “I don’t like the idea of you and Hermione being out here by yourselves.”

“We’ll be fine. We are both capable witches and Hagrid’s’ hut isn’t that far from here anyways. Once Hermione goes to speak with Hagrid, we’ll come straight back.” She said, laying a hand on Neville’s shoulder. Hermione watched the boy’s reserves crumble away as a blush burned up the back of his neck.

‘Like a love sick puppy.’ She giggled to herself.

“Well…I guess. Just come straight back afterwards alright?” He conceded.

“And no detours either!” Ginny chimed in. She wasn’t the least bit happy with the arrangement, but
she knew that Hermione was as stubborn as she was. They’d be arguing all night. The only reason
she was even letting her go was because Luna had volunteered to go with. She didn’t want to admit
that she was dead tired, but secretly she was relieved to be getting back to her dorm so she could get
some much needed rest.

“No detours, scouts honor!” Hermione said, turning to head for Hagrid’s house with Luna hot on her
heels. Behind her, she heard the other two yell a quick ‘Be careful!’ before their footsteps and quiet
chatter could no longer be heard.

‘Now how do I get rid of Luna.’ She thought to herself as she observed the young woman walking
beside her. She knew that unlike Ginny, Luna wasn’t nearly as stubborn when it came to Hermione
and her wishes. Sure she did care about her and was concerned for her just as much as the others, but
the blonde wasn’t one to start an argument or confrontation over it. Hermione was confident that if
she simply asked the girl to allow her to go on by herself, she would let her.

And that’s exactly what she did.

“Luna,” She started. The two of them stopped walking, Hagrid’s house could be seen off in the
distance, the light in his window glistening like a beacon in the night. “I know you promised to come
with me to make sure I’m safe, but I really need to speak with Hagrid—”

“Alone. I know.” She smiled. Hermione raised an eyebrow at her.

“You do?” She asked, trying to keep the suspicion out of her voice.

“You wanted to speak with Hagrid alone. That’s why I said I’d come with you. Ginny and Neville
would’ve never left if I hadn’t.” She said, the smile still present on her face as if she wasn’t saying
anything out of the ordinary.

“Oh. Well thanks Luna. I really appreciate it. Not that I don’t enjoy you guy’s company, I just…
think I should go see him by myself.” She said, reaching out and clasping the other girl’s hands in
her own. Luna patted her hands, Hermione soaking in the warmth from them as the girl spoke again.

“It’s good you’re going to see him. You’ve had those pesky nargles around your head for a while
now. They’re making you think funny.” She let go of Hermione’s hands and turned the girl around,
pushing her towards the direction of the hut. “Luckily the whispears I’ve been growing in my room
told me being out here tonight will make them go away.”

Hermione was beyond confused at this point.

Understanding Luna was like trying to solve a puzzle with half the bits missing; you can tell what it’s
supposed to be, but you’ll never see the whole picture when you’re finished. She didn’t quite know
what the other girl was saying, but so long as she let her carry on without being followed, she was
fine with being left in the dark.

“Thanks Luna! You’re the best!” She took off down the path. “I owe you one!”

“Just tell her I said hello for me!” She heard Luna yell back.

And with that, the two parted ways, one heading back to the castle, and the other towards a
completely different destination than what was mentioned.

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Hermione kept moving until she was sure that the other woman could no longer see her. The
moment she felt she was a good distance away, she changed directions and headed to her spot on the lake. The sky was dark tonight, the quarter moon shining brightly above her head, peeking through the thick clouds every so often to bathe her in its light. With fall now upon them and winter fast approaching, the water was becoming way too cold for her to dip her feet into without her catching cold. The wind picked up and she pulled her robes around her more closely, thankful she decided to wear them today of all nights.

‘I’m sorry guys. But you just wouldn’t understand otherwise.’ She thought to herself, thinking about all the lies she told her friends tonight.

Her mind was spinning in circles from everything that happened. She didn’t think her conversation with Skeeter was enough to put her so on edge, but it actually had. When she left the school this afternoon, she wasn’t planning to question her whole life up until this point. She took a seat on a nearby boulder, grabbing a fist full of her frizzy, brunette hair as she let out a low groan at her other oversight.

Not only did she realize that she didn’t know what she was doing in her life, but she also came to a startling realization that she hadn’t let sink in up until this point.

“Merlin, my mate’s a woman!” She moaned in clear distress. “How is that not clicking until now?! I’m such an idiot! I didn’t even think about that. I’m not a lesbian! I’ve never liked anyone in my life except for Ron, and even then that was just a crush!”

Hermione had never been so alarmed at her own obliviousness in her life. It was almost like she was blind to it until now, the siren keeping her eyes cloudy with the thoughts of ‘mate’ and ‘made for each other’, while simultaneously dimming down the whispers of ‘female’ all the while.

‘I’ve never been attracted to woman before. Ever…but…can I say that I never could? I haven’t met her so I can’t say whether I’d fancy her or not.’ She blushed, shifting uncomfortably atop her perch on the boulder.

The first night, she had realized that her mate was a woman, but the moment she had started singing to her, her mind had gone to mush. A part of her wondered what she was more bothered about; the fact her mate was a female and she didn’t register it until now; or the fact that her mate was female and she somehow was so enchanted by her voice that she didn’t really care?

Perhaps it was a little bit of both.

Hermione gazed out over the water to look across the lake. It was too dark to see the other side and she didn’t hear anything, but something told her that the other woman was somewhere in the forest. Waiting.

For her.

The thought sent a bit of fear and excitement up her spine. The siren in her hummed in pleasure, happy to see her giving attention to its other half.

Hermione closed her eyes. Her siren’s sudden happiness at her made her feel giddy inside. Even if her day had ended kind of crappy, being out here on the lake, alone to be herself after a week of silence, was enough to awaken the siren inside of her. Her mind was telling her that singing would undoubtedly attract the other woman, but that was exactly what her instincts were telling her to do. She felt a song bubbling up in her throat, one not nearly as sad as the one she sang the week before. She didn’t know what brought it about, but it felt right, and when she began singing, the melody
came out light hearted and fast paced; a representation of her current feelings.

*I danced across the ocean, as you waltzed across the sea*

*We sang and caught the echoes, at the place where we would meet*

*I smiled at you, you smiled at me, or at least that’s how it’s told*

*The tale of me, the maiden lass, and you, my great unknown*

*Now the maiden lass was bold and brave, her heart so pure and gold*

*A sly and quick and cunning thing, yes that was the great unknown*

*I searched for you, you found me too and swept me off my feet*

*To a place so far from where we are, to a place where we would sleep*

*And in our home, from where you roamed, we’d sleep and dance and play*

*We’d sing at night and take to flights as we waited for the day*

*And when the sun came shining, lighting you and lighting me*

*We’d walk back to the ocean and we’d sink into the deep*

*And~*

**From the depths we rose again, both stronger than before**

Hermione froze.

Her singing came to abrupt halt, but there, coming from across the lake, she listened in shock as the song kept going, though the voice sounding nothing like her own.

**And hand in hand, we walked the lands upon the evening shore**

She shot to her feet, her eyes desperately looking into the darkness ahead of her.

And as if the heavens themselves heard her silent plea; the clouds parted and she could just barely make out a figure hiding in the shadows. Had the paleness of her hands not been so stark against the woman’s all black attire, Hermione would’ve never noticed her.

She watched as the other siren appear to be stretching her arms out to her. The action made her step forward without her volition.

**And Miss Bravery and her Cunning Queen knew they were not alone**

The darkly alluring sound was making her head go fuzzy again and she took another step as the other kept on singing.
They formed a bond so new, yet strong, much more than they were shown

Hermione nearly fell off the rock she was so close to the edge.

Her siren was keening and borderline bashing her brain against her skull with how strongly it tried to pull her towards her mate. Hermione found she was having a much harder time resisting the lure than last time. Luckily, before she was completely lost to the fogginess surrounding her mind, the woman finished the song, lifting the spell she had over her.

Which soon begun the tale of fun, of the lass and her great unknown …

The voiced trailed off and the forest was silent once more, the only sound being the rustling of the trees and the sounds of the giant squid splashing in the water off in the distance.

She fell to her knees, wincing as they collided with the hard stone.

‘Merlin, she needs to stop that.’ She said, her face burning with embarrassment at the slight arousal she was feeling from her mate’s influence. ‘I don’t think I can’t take much more of that.’ She whined, shutting her eyes as she tried to compose herself.

Hermione didn’t know what to do now. She knew the other knew she was there and vice versa. She wanted to call out to her. Beg her to come to her so they could finally meet instead of engage in this star-crossed lovers situation they were having from opposite sides of the lake.

It was then a humming sound filled the air.

She listened as it echoed over to her ears, trying to pull her into a trance once more. She shook her head at the feeling and jumped down from the rock. ‘No. I don’t think I can do this.’ She told herself. Hermione looked back towards the castle, feeling that it would be best to leave right now before she got herself killed.

When she turned and started walking however, the humming stopped. She paused. ‘Does she know I’m leaving?’

She looked over her shoulder…

And saw no one.

‘Where did she go?’ She said with a frown. She stopped and listened some more, thinking that the woman had simply decided to walk away on he own.

And then she heard it from the left of her.

A loud crack that could only be the sound of someone apparating right next to her.

Hermione did the only thing that made sense at that moment.

She ran for her life.

But her mate wasn’t having any of that today.

And thus the chase began.

She took off ahead of the woman without any hesitation to look back. Seconds passed before the sound of heavy boots stomping against the ground had her heart racing and her speed increasing drastically. ‘Shit! She’s so fast!’ She screamed in her head. Her lungs were burning from the exertion
she was putting on them, her body twisting and bending as she bobbed and weaved through the treacherous forest; her mate hot on her trail.

The castle was in sight now. She was going to make it. As fast as the other woman was, in the end, Hermione had a head start and most likely a lighter build than the other woman. The war taught her many things, and being light on her feet was one of them. She was grateful now for it too, because any slower and the other woman would have her in her grasp.

The edge of the forest came in sight and she nearly screamed for joy as she broke through and sprinted back to the castle grounds. The footsteps grew quieter and quieter the further she got, until she could no longer hear them at all.

Hermione didn’t stop running until she was at the gates. Bracing her body against them, she turned around, her eyes searching into the darkness. ‘There!’

Behind a tree at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, she could see her mate standing there, face hidden in the shadows and her fists clenched at her sides. Hermione could feel something dangerous in the air.

She was angry. No. Livid.

For the second time, Hermione had fled from her and into the safety of the castle. She remembered what happened last time.

Her mate wanted her.

But as she was coming to learn with the fierce and aggressive way she just chased her through the forest, Hermione was one hundred percent sure that getting caught would be a terrible idea. The siren within her didn’t seem to think so however. It hovered at the back of her mind, telling her to go back. That she’d be fine with her mate.

Hermione didn’t believe it for a second.

Instead she fought against the siren’s wishes and turned to enter the castle, covering her ears with her hands in an attempt to avoid getting lured again. Lot of good it would do her, but at least she could say she tried.

When she made it inside the castle without any more attempts and pulling her back, the brunette released the breath she didn’t know she was holding. ‘Going to the lake was becoming far too risky.’ She told herself as she trudged up the stairs to Gryffindor tower. She made it up to her room that night and immediately fell into her bed, Ginny in the bed next to her equally passed out.

Hermione wouldn’t say she did if asked, afraid to sound like a madwoman, but that night she swore she heard echoing screams of frustration off in the distance, ones that carried on late into the night, loud and angry, even after she had close her eyes and entered into a fitful sleep as usual.
Chapter 3: Stalker

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for the wait guys! My summer has been a bunch of ups and downs for me both physically and emotionally for the past few weeks. But fear not, i'm feeling better now and i'm back at writing. I promise to not abandon this story so you don't have to worry about that! I'm already working on the next chapter so that should be up by the end of the week! Thanks to all of you who have commented or left kudos, you're amazing and i'm glad you're enjoying the story! Please enjoy chapter 3 of Sing to me Your Insanity!

Chapter 3: Stalker

The following three days for Hermione were absolutely nerve wrecking.

After the last encounter with her mate, it was almost as if she had flipped a switch with the older woman, because she went from being persistent in her luring, to relentless. Every night, Hermione could hear her singing from the edge of the forest; her songs echoing across the castle grounds to flow through her window; threatening to yank her from her bed at any moment.

And they weren’t the sweet honeyed words anymore like the first night they had met. Her mate was angry, and she was making sure that Hermione knew it. Her ears were burning by the time the other was done cursing her out, all the while simultaneously urging her to return to the forest. Hermione was afraid of what the other residents of the castle thought about the singing at night, but strangely enough, no one mentioned it at all. In fact, even when she asked Ginny on the second night what she thought about the singing, the red head told her that she hadn’t heard anything at all.

‘She’s older than me, or at least she sounds as much. She probably knows more about sirens than I do too. Maybe she knows how to hide it from others.’ She scowled. ‘Everyone except me that is.’

Hermione grew more and more frustrated with the constant game of tug of war she was having between her mate and her inner self. It had gotten to the point that by the fourth night, she was being reduced to tying her arms to the bed after finding herself halfway down the stairs, still in her pajamas, and heading for the Fat Lady’s portrait.

She soon found that the insomnia that she was slowly getting over had come back full force. She could feel herself grow weaker and weaker everyday as she not only couldn’t get to sleep, but had to fight down the urge to sing in order to ground herself once more. The only saving grace she had was that she didn’t have nearly as many classes as she once did in the past, and so sneaking a nap in between was just enough to get her through the day.

But even with her naps, Hermione was exhausted. She needed to get normal sleep, but the singing was driving her insane. A part of her wanted to just go to the woman and give her a piece of her mind, but the more rational part of her told her that it would be a rather foolish idea. So rather than go and find her unbearably persistent mate out in the forbidden forest, Hermione chose a less dangerous route and decided to go visit Hagrid today.
Hermione was bundled up tightly in her fall robes, November weather finally rolling around, marking the final weeks before winter break. The young woman had just finished working on the castle for the day when she noticed that she hadn’t visited the half-giant in a while, outside of classes. It was not from the lack of wanting to, it was just that up until now, she didn’t have the motivation to get up and go see the groundkeeper; his house too much of a reminder of her time with Ron and Harry. However, with everything going on, she felt like seeing the man would get her mind somewhere else and help her focus on happier thoughts. Her next period, Transfiguration, wasn’t until later in the afternoon, and so she had plenty of time to go down and share a cup of tea with Hagrid before she needed to return to the castle.

When she arrived at Hagrid’s, she was met at the door by an overjoyed Fang; the old dog still alive and kicking after all these years.

“Hello there, Fang,” She patted his head, laughing as he basked in the attention she was sending his way. “Is Hagrid in?”

The door opened. Hagrid’s head poked out sheepishly from behind the door. His hands were covered in thick mittens and his beard was still smoking, most likely from being on fire minutes before. Hermione was suddenly reminded of a similar scene from years ago, one that involved a little dragon the man had gotten from a man in a bar. She crossed her arms over her chest and hit the man with a suspicious glare.

“Hagrid, please tell me you’ve haven’t gotten yourself another dragon in there?” Hermione glared. She nearly jumped out of her skin at the bark of laughter that erupted deep from within the man’s chest.

“Blimey, Hermione! Now why on earth would I go and do a thing like that again?” He laughed, pulling the door open all the way. “While it might not be a dragon, cooking for ye self for the first time can be just as dangerous.”

Sure enough, when she looked past the greying man, Hermione could see the charred remains of what was once more than likely his dinner.

“How did you manage that?” She asked with a smile. Hagrid gestured for her to come inside, closing the door once both her and Fang had found seats at the table.

“Well, I always took my meals in the Great Hall with everyone else. Sometimes I’d have the house elves bring me my food as well. Helpful lot they are.” He bustled around the kitchen, cleaning up the mess he had created and placing a tea kettle on the stove in its place. “Though with the school under construction, the elves have been busy helping out, and it’d be rude of me to ask em to bring me dinner when I’m a perfectly capable adult.”

Hermione laughed again. “So you tried cooking for yourself.”

“Aye,” He said. “Though making anything besides soups and teas seems too far out of my range of expertise.” He sighed.

“It simply takes practice Hagrid. You’ll be a fine cook in no time.” Hermione said, trying to cheer the man up from his obvious disappointment. Fang barked, his tail slapping heavily against the floor as he too tried to make his owner feel better.

“Thank ye, Hermione. I think I needed to hear that.” The kettle whistled loudly, alerting the occupants of the room that the tea was done. “Now enough about me and my cottage adventures. How’ve ye been Hermione? Feels like forever since we last spoke.”
Hermione took the cup of tea with a small thanks and addressed the man as he took a seat across from her.

“I’ve been…” She hesitated, looking down sheepishly into her steaming cup. “Fine…for the most part.” She finished.

A sigh came from in front of her.

“How long have I known you and the boys?” Hagrid asked.

“Since we were first years.” She answered.

Aye, back when ye three were wee little menaces; serving detentions every other week and driving the professors mad with yer wild adventures.” Hermione glanced up to meet his eyes. “Many of which I’ve witness and have been involved with myself.”

“What are you getting at Hagrid?” She asked.

“I’m getting at the point that I’ve been involved in ye three’s lives long enough to know when yer lying to my face.” He watched her wince, knowing that she had been caught out in her fibbing. “Now how have ye really been?”

Hermione didn’t know what to say. ‘Oh I’ve been fantastic lately. Ron and Harry abandoned me the first chance they got, my parents are still missing, and I have a possibly violent, dominant mate waiting out in the forest ready to snatch me away to Merlin knows where. Oh and I’m a siren. Surprise!’ Even saying it to herself, Hermione knew that telling the truth would only end poorly for her. But lying was also out seeing as Hagrid could see right through her.

And so she went with half-truths.

“I’m tired Hagrid,” She started. “Ever since the battle, everything has been so different. I miss Ron and Harry. I miss my parents. I can’t sleep at night. I can’t focus during the day. It’s been a nightmare.” She told him, eyes tearing up slightly at her admission. It was strange confiding in Hagrid, but knowing that the man was at least trust worthy and cared for her safety— even when she hadn’t been around in so long— was enough to make her eyes water. It hurt that she couldn’t tell him the full truth, but she had to look out for herself too at the end of the day.

“I figured as much,” He sighed. Hagrid suddenly looked much older as he slumped a bit lower into his chair. “Merlin you were all just children. Still children at that! You had no business going after a dark lord of all things. You should’ve been playing games with ye friends and getting cuffed on the ears for yer shenanigans. Not fighting wars and going on the run.”

Hermione gave the man a sad smile. Hagrid had always been a gentle soul. Plants, animals, children; he treated them with such tender care that the thought that anyone would be willing to hurt them cut him deeper than any knife could. She remembered all the times he had come to see her, Ron and Harry in the hospital wing after each of their adventures had turned sour. The man would come in with the best flowers he could find and a box of sweets; blubbering and sobbing about how glad he was to see them alive. She can still recall the moment he showed up at the battle with Harry in his arms, supposedly killed by Voldemort himself. He was devastated. He cherished all the students there at Hogwarts, but the three of them held a special place in his heart, of this she was sure. She didn’t know what she did to deserve him as a friend, but she was happy to have the half-giant in her life all the same.

Hermione placed her cup of tea on the table and walked over to Hagrid, embracing him fiercely. A
large arm wrapped around her back as the man’s other hand came to pat the top of her hair. She felt overwhelmed with emotions at that point. The tiredness and stress she had been feeling over the last few weeks, coupled with the warmth of the hug she was in was enough to send her over the edge. Hot tears rolled down her face and she soon found herself sobbing into the other man’s coat, constricting her voice from coming through and revealing her siren status.

Which only made her cry even harder.

Hagrid was lost, his eyes bulging widely as Hermione went from calm to hysterical in a heartbeat. He knew that the girl had been suffering for a while now, he just didn’t know how badly. He wasn’t a bloody fool. He saw how the girl avoided eating in the Great Hall for months and watched as her once vibrant brown eyes grew dimmer and dimmer as the days stretched on. It was only a matter of time before the girl had a complete meltdown and Hagrid found that he was glad that he was with her as she did.

“There, there Hermione. Let it all out.” He soothed, slowly rubbing the girl’s back as she cried deeply into his coat. 

Hermione tried mumbling something to him, but with her face pressed into him so tightly, he could barely make out the words.

“What was that ye said Hermione?” He asked. Hermione lifted her head from his shoulder.

“I said that I can’t do this anymore Hagrid.” She sobbed. “I’m just so tired. This isn’t anything like I thought my life would be.” Hermione tried wiping her face but the tears refused to stop.

Hagrid pulled away from the girl and steadied her worn-out frame by grabbing her shoulders with his much larger hands.

“Hermione, I don’t think any of us thought our lives would be like this. But it is. And for the sake of those who didn’t make it home, we have to move on.” He lifted the girl’s chin so that he was looking into her eyes. “No matter how hard things may seem now, it’ll get better. Just give it a little more time.”

Shaking hands rose to wipe the tears from her face as Hermione soaked in Hagrid’s words of comfort. It helped a little bit, but there was still a crushing feeling hovering over her that didn’t quite believe what Hagrid was saying. Even so, Hermione knew that letting the other man know that she wasn’t quite convinced that things would change would only keep her there longer and cause him to worry more. When she came over today, she was expecting to have a nice chat over a hot cup of tea, but instead, here she was, balling her eyes out and leaving disgusting, dark stains from her snot and tears on Hagrid’s lovely fall coat.

She didn’t want to be there anymore.

Before the conversation could start anew, Hermione told Hagrid that she had to meet Ginny and the others for a study session and needed to go. The look on his face told her that he didn’t believe her in the least, but instead of pushing the situation, Hagrid pulled her into one final hug and released her with the promise that he would bake her something the next time she came to visit.

Hermione smiled at his thoughtfulness. “I’ll look forward to it then. Until next time Hagrid.” She turned to exit the hut. A bark came from underneath Hagrid’s table. She chuckled lightly and walked back, reaching underneath to give the old dog a pat on his large head. “And goodbye to you as well Fang.”
She left the hut and began her trek back to the castle, her heart and mind a lot heavier than when she arrived.

The rest of her day was pretty normal after that. She didn’t meet with Ginny like she told Hagrid, but she had seen the girl later on after her Quidditch practice. The two of them spent the day together without much fuss. Hermione found it difficult to keep her emotions under control as the day slowly descended into night. It would be another night of her staring restlessly at the ceiling, tied to her bed as she was once more bombarded with threats and dark promises from a woman she’s never met.

The young Gryffindor honestly didn’t know how much more she could take of it.

Hermione didn’t follow Ginny up to their dorms when dinner was over. Instead she excused herself from the other girl and headed for the owlery. She knew that no one would be up there at this hour and the soft cooing of all the birds always seemed to relax her, even if only a little bit.

However, when Hermione entered the owlery, she found that she wasn’t the only one there.

There, by the wide open window, long blonde hair flowing gently in the breeze, sat a very serene looking Luna Lovegood. Shocked to see the girl up here at such a late hour, Hermione approached her. Luna didn’t seem to notice her until she was standing right beside her, but instead of surprise, Hermione was greeted with a gentle smile.

“Hello Hermione. Lovely evening isn’t it?” She asked in that wispy voice of hers.

Hermione smiled. “It is quite lovely,” She approached the window to stand next to her. “Luna?” She asked.

“Yes?” The girl replied, never once taking her eyes off the scenery in front of them.

“Why are you up here this late?” Hermione asked.

“The same reason you’re up here,” She glanced at Hermione from the corner of her eyes. “The nargles were swimming about my head since this morning. I saw them around you as well. Then the whispears in my room said you’d be up here and I thought you’d like some company.” She told the older girl.

“Oh, okay. Thanks I guess.” Hermione didn’t bother to try and decipher what the other girl was talking about, knowing that trying to figure it out would leave her even more confused than she already was. It was just typical Luna. Many thought she was a bit…touched in the head, but Hermione knew that was the farthest from the truth. Luna was a Ravenclaw for a reason. There wasn’t a single riddle that the blonde couldn’t solve and while the way she got her answers were very roundabout, she somehow always seemed to come up with the right answer in the end. Not to mention that even though no one knew what ‘nargles’ or ‘whispears’ were, Luna always knew when someone needed her; like right now. Hermione found she was grateful for that, even if she didn’t quite understand it. Hoping that talking to Luna would go better than her talk with Hagrid, she decided to ask the girl something that sounded even a bit strange to her.

“Luna, did…did your whispears, was it? Did they say anything else by any chance?” She asked.

Luna smiled brightly, her entire face lighting up at the question. “Oh yes! They said that you need to go back to Hagrid’s tonight. That’s the only way you can begin to get rid of the nargles for good.” She told her.
Hermione froze.

‘Oh merlin. Does she know?’ She stared at Luna’s face for confirmation that she knew about Hermione’s secret, but the girl just kept smiling all the same.

“What do you mean Luna? Why do I need to go to see Hagrid this late at night? You remember how against it Neville and Ginny were last time.” She remembered her mate’s increasingly persistent luring and shuddered at the thought of going out there again. “Besides, last time I was at Hagrid’s, things didn’t exactly go the way I thought they would.”

“Don’t worry Hermione, you’ll be okay. You were fine coming back last time, right?” Hermione nodded, not wanting to give herself away if the other really didn’t have a clue about her. “Then it’s perfectly fine this time as well! You need to go see him. Tonight.” She insisted.

Hermione was torn. On the one hand, she wanted nothing to do with Hagrid’s house, the lake, or being anywhere near the Forbidden Forest. But she also knew that Luna wouldn’t put her in danger, even when she was being all vague and mysterious. There were times in the past where she followed the other girl’s strange advice and not once had she been placed into a horrible situation. Maybe the girl knew more than she let on. Would going to Hagrid’s somehow help her with her current mate problem? Was that what the other girl was hinting at?

Hermione stared out the window towards the forest. She hadn’t heard the singing so far tonight. By this time, she would’ve already been tied to her bed trying desperately to block out that beautiful, yet dangerous singing; the siren in her screaming to be set free. Would she not be appearing tonight? Between this strange break in the pattern and Luna’s insistence to go there, Hermione felt herself turning for the stairs, her goal set firmly in her mind.

“Are you leaving already, Hermione?” Luna piped up from behind her.

“I am. I’ll go see Hagrid like you said and then I will come straight back.” She waved goodbye to blonde, a strained smile on her face. “I really hope your right about this Luna.”

The room fell into silence. Hermione turned to look back at Luna. The girl was staring at her with a level of intensity that she had never seen before on the Ravenclaw’s face. Luna said nothing to her, instead turning her gaze up at the bright, full moon high up in the sky. Hermione assumed that meant their conversation was over and done with and left her friend there; the quietly watching owls her only company now.

Like the many nights before the first incident, Hermione made her way swiftly down towards the lake and Hagrid’s hut. It was a bit chilly out, and windy beyond believe, the wind whipping her wild frizzy hair all over the place. She huddled up deeper into her warm robes, eventually casting a warming charm on herself when the bite of the cold winds proved to be too much for her.

As the Gryffindor trekked down the path she had come to know so well over the years, she was hit with a sense of paranoia that she for some reason couldn’t shake. She found that her eyes would not stop scanning the area around her; her wand clutched so tightly in her hands that she was afraid that it might snap in two.

Someone was watching her.

She didn’t know where they were or who it was, but she knew that something was wrong. And the closer and closer she got to Hagrid’s, the more and more the feeling grew.
At that point she should’ve turned back then and there.

But she didn’t.

And it cost her dearly.

Hermione had reached Hagrid’s house, but when she saw the lights out in his hut, she sighed and cursed softly.

‘Dammit Luna. What were you thinking? He’s not even awake.’ Irritated and paranoid, she whipped around and began storming back to the castle. ‘This was a bad idea. I shouldn’t’ve come out here.’ She groused as she stomped back the way she came.

_Help me._

She immediately stopped.

‘What was that?’ Hermione turned back towards the forest past Hagrid’s house. She could’ve sworn she heard…

_Help me! Please! I’m so scared!_

‘There! Who is that? It sounds like child.’ She approached the area she was hearing the voice come from. ‘Is there a first year out here?’ She asked.

The voice cried out again.

_Someone help me! I got lost! Please help me!_

Hermione started sprinting, her heart racing in fear for the child. The forest was far too dangerous for her, let alone a first year. She needed to act now. Going back to get help, or even waking Hagrid came to mind, but as someone who had gone through a war, Hermione knew that those few precious minutes it would take to get a professor could mean life or death for the lost student.

Through the forest, over fallen trees and browning leaves, Hermione ran as fast as her legs would carry her. She hadn’t seen the child yet and fearing that they didn’t know she was coming for them, she called out.

“Hello?” She yelled into the darkness. “Where are you?” She cried out.

_Please help me! I’m scared!_

‘To the right!’ She veered off further from where she entered. Hermione winced as the lower hanging branches of the surrounding trees began hitting her face, giving her cuts that burned terribly as they were assaulted by the cold winds of the coming winters.

But even with her pain, Hermione never stopped running.

_Where are you! Where are you!_

“I’m getting closer!” She gasped. “Hang on! I’m coming!”

_Where Are You! Help ME!_

And then, as if yanked back by an incredible force, Hermione came to a dead halt.
‘You idiot!’ She screamed to herself, her wand up and at the ready, wide eyes scanning the surrounding area.

The once frightened cries of a young child were becoming distorted and distinctly more feminine. And when the voice called out again-

**Where are you!?**

The words no longer held fear, but were now full of burning anger.

The words ‘where are you’ were not meant for her in the sense that she thought they did. She wasn’t being called to find someone, she was being called to be *found*.

And Hermione, in her Gryffindor induced panic, had fallen straight into the trap like some kind of amateur.

She had to leave *right now*!

Hermione whipped around back towards the direction she came, ready to bolt before it was too late-

But she wasn’t quick enough.

Everything happened in a flash.

She heard the thundering of heavy boots before she heard the crack of the whip. Hermione didn’t even have time to brace herself as the thin strip of leather whipped past her head, only to double back and coiling around her neck like a snake. There was a high pitched laugh from behind her and the next thing she knew, she was falling on her back, gasping violently in an attempt to get even a little bit of air. She laid there suffocating on the forest ground, black spots appearing in her eyes as she began her descent towards unconsciousness. Desperate, she clawed even harder at her neck, pleading with her attacker to allow her to breathe, but to no avail. Growing weaker and weaker, Hermione was seconds from giving up and accepting her fate, when she felt the whip slacken just enough to allow air to her lungs.

She sucked in air faster than her lungs could handle, causing her to cough and sputter as she tried to regain her normal breathing pattern. Her eyesight was still adjusting as she stared up into the darkened sky, the clouds hiding the moon from her sights. Still recovering, Hermione didn’t notice the approaching footsteps until they had stopped right by her head. She opened her eyes.

Someone was leaning over her.

With the moon still hidden away, she couldn’t quite get a good look at her, but she knew exactly who this was, the one who had been calling for her these many nights. Terrified, she stared up into the darkness, waiting for the woman to say something, anything that wasn’t this uncomfortable silence that had blossomed between them.

She didn’t have to wait long.

The woman circled her, her form seeming to glide across the forest floor like a ghost. Hermione tracked her with her eyes, never once taking them off the obviously dangerous woman. She stopped at her feet and then without warning, yanked the whip still around her neck, causing her to cry out as she was yanked into a sitting position. A hand came up and painfully grabbed a hold of her hair, nearly ripping it from her scalp. Hermione was about to start screaming when finally, she heard her mate speak for the first time.
“If you scream muddy, I’ll give you something far worse to scream about.”

And at that moment Hermione’s heart sank in her chest. Tears poured from her eyes in both fear and realization.

She knew that voice. It sounded nothing like the beautiful singing she had been hearing over the past few weeks.

And she also knew that word. *Muddy*. A more childish, but no less derogatory way of calling her a mudblood.

There was only one other person who had ever called her something so hurtful, and as she recalled, that person was supposed to be long dead; blown to bits by Mrs. Weasley herself.

Hermione cursed the siren within her. Cursed it for existing. Cursed it for not resisting hard enough. Cursed it for not hearing beyond that hauntingly beautiful singing to see the monster behind it. The same monster who held her and her friends captive during the war. The same monster who taunted and tortured her; who branded her arm like some kind of animal with the one word she hated more than anything in the world.

But there was no denying it.

Now, unhidden by sweet melodies and sweeter promises, the voice she heard could only belong to one woman.

And when the clouds parted in the sky, illuminating the clearing they were in, Hermione could only whimper in despair as she stared up into the smirking face of Bellatrix Lestrange.

Right hand to the late Lord Voldemort.

Darkest witch of their time period.

And most importantly…

One and only mate to Hermione Jean Granger, the wizarding world’s most famous muggleborn witch.

The look on the other woman’s face was enough to tell Hermione that she wouldn’t be leaving this forest unscathed; if she even left it at all.
Chapter 4 - The Cat and her Mouse

Chapter Notes

Ahhh! I'm so sorry for the wait everyone! Life and health issues got in the way, but we're back now! Now this Chapter is from Bellatrix's POV, there won't be many chapters like this, but there are some situations where I wanted to show Bellatrix's side of it. That being said, the next Chapter will 100% have the two officially interacting and beginning more of the plot. So please enjoy Chapter 4 of Sing to Me Your Insanity! Thanks for sticking around!

Chapter 4: The Cat and her Mouse (Bellatrix’s POV)

When Bellatrix Lestrange awoke after the battle at Hogwarts the first thing she did was laugh. It wasn’t one of joy nor was it one of sorrow. The laugh that tore from her throat that day was full of something far worse.

Rage.

An anger burning so hot within her that she wondered if she would ignite from within from her own lividity.

The death eaters had been defeated.

Her lord was dead.

And here she was, laying on the cold hard ground in the forbidden forest after her run in with that disgusting little ginger and her filthy offspring.

When she stormed the castle with her comrades, Bellatrix felt a high that she hadn’t felt since she had escaped from Azkaban. The thrill of fighting; of killing. The way she waved her wand in wide arches, striking down her lord’s enemies with the deadliest, most painful curses she knew. The look of utter terror on their faces as she screamed and taunted the little fools, all the while casting _crucios_ left and right. She was in the best mood she’d ever been in a very long time.

Until her rampage was stopped by that traitorous sow, Molly Weasley.

Bellatrix seethed as she recalled how she ended up where she was now.

She had run into the youngest of those horrid gingers as the battle lead her to the Great Hall. She engaged the girl in a duel, taunting and screaming at her, knowing she could never stand a chance at defeating someone of her skill level. She was seconds from striking the child down when the Weasley mother came charging in to save her only girl. While fighting both of them still didn’t prove much of a challenge for her, curses were flying at her from all directions. Playing offense and defense at the same time was tricky, but not impossible. Spell after spell, she deflected their assaults, all the while guarding her own back as well.

Everything was going fine. That was until a part of the castle ceiling fell from a wayward spell, barreling down to crush her to death. She glanced up when she saw the spell strike the stones above her, but that was apparently exactly the opening the blood traitor was waiting for. Bellatrix watched
as the woman twirled her wand, the spell she was preparing to cast was a familiar one. If hit with it, she’d be blown apart in an instant. It would be a nasty way to go and she couldn’t stop the falling stones and such a powerful curse at the same time.

But she also had no plans of dying today either.

Before the stones could crush her, she began to apperate out of the castle grounds. She felt the tug and watched as the world began to spin, but before she was fully gone, the Weasley vermin had cast her spell and sent it her way. Fearing she would be struck, she cast a protego horibilis over herself and in the next moment, she was gone, the stones destroying the area where she once stood.

When she landed, she knew immediately she had splinched herself when she blocked that final spell. The pain in her side was great. She glanced down at the tear in her corset, watching in morbid fascination as blood oozed out slowly from her open wound. Had she been anyone else, the wound wouldn’t be healed in time and she would’ve bled out by nightfall.

But she was not just anyone else.

She was Bellatrix Lestrange, highest ranking lieutenant in the Dark Lord’s army, and the most powerful witch of their current generation.


The dark witch cast healing spells and stitched her wounds. Once closed, she bandaged them and rose to her feet to look around where she had landed.

She was outside the castle grounds, but she could still hear the cries of battle off in the distance. The area was dark and murky, the surrounding trees so tall and wide that sunlight could barely pierce to the forest floor. All around were the sounds of wildlife, some fairly harmless and some that even she knew to steer clear of. There was only one place close enough that fit that description.

The Forbidden Forest; her second home during her time at Hogwarts.

It was the only other place outside of the library that she ever visited in her younger years. Out here in the deep dark woods where not even the professors dared to tread. She remembered all the times her and her fellow death eaters had come out here to plot and scheme, unseen by the ever watchful eyes of their foolish headmaster. Some days they would stay out there all weekend. They had come to know the best places to find food and the warmest places to shelter themselves on the rainier days. Bellatrix knew of several nearby caves that she could hide out in until she could heal and return to her lord.

She cursed as she walked the uneven floors of the forests, all the while clutching her aching side. The spells had healed the wound, but the pain was still there all the same. Not only that, but between battling multiple enemies, being splinched while apparating, and then healing her wounds, Bellatrix knew that her magical core had taken a beating. If she returned to the battle field now, she would be as good as dead. She had neither the physical nor magical strength to defeat the order and their followers. But she had faith in her lord. Faith that they would prevail without her.

And when she was strong enough; when she was back at her full strength; she would rain hell down upon her enemies, bringing a storm with her that would be talked about for generations to come…

But that moment would never come.

Bellatrix reached that cave in record time. She settled down on the damp floor and leaned against the wall, wand clutched tightly in her hands as she closed her eyes. She needed rest if she was ever to
heal.

No sooner than she closed her eyes, they shot open in agony as her arm felt like it was on fire. She did not scream, but blood dripped from her lip as she bit it to ride out the pain.

Time stretched on. Seconds turned to minutes and before she knew it an hour had passed before the pain finally subsided. The witch sat there, stiff as a board as she stared blankly at the wall ahead. Her mind was running a mile a minute. She didn’t let it show on her face, but on the inside, she was screaming.

‘No, no, no! It cannot be! It’s impossible! He…he couldn’t have been defeated. Not by Potter. Not by anyone! My lord was immortal! He couldn’t have died! It’s impossible! Lies…lies…LIES! ALL LIES!’ She screamed to herself. She refused to believe it. Couldn’t believe it.

Her lord was defeated once before, but he came back.

He promised that he would always come back.

He’d never lie to her.

Never make promises that he couldn’t keep.

Her lord was defeated, but he wasn’t dead. And she had proof. Had proof right there branded on her arm beneath her dress’ sleeves. The pain she felt was familiar. Just as when her lord was defeated long ago, her arm burned hotter than any torch and when she gazed down at her mark, it was faded to a dull grey.

She hated that color. Such a color was not enough to represent her lord; he who was the darkest and most powerful man to walk this earth. He whose dark mark had always given her pride, brought her honor, and kept her sane whilst in Azkaban; her proof that he would come back for her one day. So long as she had her mark, her lord lived on.

Even if not at this moment.

It was fine. She was free now, not like the first time when she was rotting away in Azkaban. This time she was free from that place and could go find him. Search him out and bring him back to his former glory; though doing a far better job at it than that fool Wormtail. All she had to do was find him again. The mark would lead her right to him. She raised her arm and rolled back her sleeve…

To meet nothing but smooth flawless skin.

‘Impossible. Impossible. IMPOSSIBLE! WHERE IS IT!?!’

Bellatrix felt the skin, looking at her arm like she was seeing it for the first time.

Feeling became rubbing.

And then rubbing became scratching.

She scratched and she scratched until her arm was red and bleeding, all the while she repeated the same question over and over under her breath.

“Where is it? Where is it?” She muttered. The woman didn’t realize she was rocking back and forth as she scratched at her arm. A morbid belief in her mind that the mark had sunken beneath her skin; out of reach but still there all the same.
Bellatrix kept scratching until her arm dripped with blood and the familiar smell of tangy cooper filled her nostrils, snapping her out of her trance. Her arm was in ruins.

And beneath that ruin she could still she no mark.

Not even the horrid dull grey she had come to know during her time in chains.

He was gone.

Forever this time.

She knew this in her heart. Her lord was gone now. He had lied to her. His promises were nothing but broken words that now meant nothing. Her cause, her purpose, her everything; gone. So soon after she had just gotten it back.

Bellatrix didn’t know how long she screamed after that realization, but at some point she had exhausted herself straight into unconsciousness. It was only when she woke again, deep into the night that she started laughing.

The laugh not of sorrow or joy, but of unadulterated rage.

She had nothing now.

Was nothing now.

Her magic was too weak to apperate to a safer place and there was no way of contacting her sister without draining the last of her magic and leaving her vulnerable. Bellatrix was essentially trapped for the moment. The cave would act as her temporary home she decided. Just until she got back on her feet.

And then she could storm the castle.

Oh yes, she wasn’t through. Her lord may have lost, but she still craved the blood of his enemies. The ones who stole everything from her.

She would wait for the perfect moment to strike.

The castle was weakened; the wards that once protected it from invaders were destroyed and its defenses were left up to the remaining professors and aurors until they were restored. Silly Potter and all his goody two-shoe friends would more than likely stay back to help with said restorations too. No doubt they believed her dead; crushed by the rocks from the fallen ceiling. No one would expect to see her coming and as such they would be ripe for the slaughter.

Laughter echoed out in the forest, but with the world distracted with burying their dead and making arrests, there was no one around to hear.

Perhaps if they had, they could’ve avoided all the events that had yet to come…

Getting herself to a full recovery took Bellatrix a lot longer than she was expecting it to. The first few weeks were agonizing. Her wounds had healed, but they were still tender and there was a one hundred percent chance that her once flawless torso would be scarred for the rest of her life. Her magic had returned, but she was still in no condition to apperate. Instead, she hunted, stealing what little joy she could from slaughtering deer and rabbits who strayed too close to her home. She learned how to survive out here in her younger years and so life in the wild was no trouble for her.
That didn’t mean she was safe from trouble though.

There were dangerous plants and magical creatures in these forests. Threstrals and Hippogriffs were known to hang around near the stream she was frequenting and she had almost fallen into a pit of Devil’s Snare whilst chasing last night’s dinner through the woods. Not only that, but the local centaur were on the prowl every night, looking for intruders in their home. Bellatrix knew that she had no chance at taking on a full herd of centaurs, so it was best to remain unseen by them until she could ward up her cave.

And when she wasn’t hunting or healing, Bellatrix found herself watching the castle during the dead of night. Every night, she came to just the edge of the forest to observe the progress of the castle. The restorations were slow; many of the fools who fought for the light died during the battle or simply never returned to the castle. She spotted a few of the so called saviors as they waddled about, removing rubble and fixing the once powerful wards that surrounded the castle.

The son of her most famous victims was there, along with the airheaded little blonde she held in her dungeons at Malfoy Manor. She spotted her dear nephew skulking about like the little coward he was, though he had only one of his idiotic lackeys at his side instead of two. No doubt the other moron got himself killed during the battle. She wouldn’t be surprised if he did; like father, like son she guessed.

Several other familiar faces came and went during her time watching the castle, but the ones she wanted the most were never seen.

All except her.

The little mudblood she had the pleasure of meeting at the manor.

Hermione Granger.

Oh how she wished to wrap her hands around that tiny little neck and strangle her.

The dirty little rat was right up there with Potter in terms of wanting them dead. The girl had the audacity to not only break into her vault, but she also had the nerve to impersonate her while doing so! A mudblood had gone into Gringotts; took her wand, wore her face, and stole the two most important items her lord had ever charged her to take care of.

The sword of Gryffindor and a cup from one of the four founders.

When she found out, she was livid. There was no way she could call her master there until she found those two items. She remembered how valiantly the girl tried not to scream; watching in glee as the girl nearly bit through her lip in order to stay silent. She didn’t get to hear the beautiful screams she knew the girl could give her, but she enjoyed watching her cause herself physical harm just as much. Bellatrix would never forget the look on the brown haired girl’s face as she laid atop her; carving into her arm the one thing the girl would ever be in this world.

A dirty little mudblood.

It served her right. Her actions not only humiliated her, but they cost her greatly too.

Bellatrix rubbed at her neck. The area was still rubbed raw; a reminder of what her lord had done to her for losing his precious treasures.

She’d never forget what happened in that manor once her lord had arrived. The indescribable pain she went through as her lord both freed and doomed her from her greatest secret with just a flick of
his wand.

And she had the mudblood to thank for that as well.

She couldn’t wait to get her hands on her.

And she didn’t have to wait for long either.

It all started a few months after the battle.

Bellatrix’s wounds were long healed and her magic was back to its full capacity. She needed a plan before she went and attacked the castle. She had no fear of death anymore. During the battle she saved herself in the hopes of still being of more use to her lord. With him gone, there was little else to truly fight for. Even so, if she was to go down, she wanted to go down in a blaze of glory. Take down as many of the traitors as she could before she perished and met her lord in the afterlife. And to do that she needed to scope out the area and find the best way to plan for an attack.

She soon found herself patrolling further and further from her cave each night; fighting off wild animals and avoiding the centaurs all the while.

One night, Bellatrix found herself the closest she had been to the lake in a very long time. The moon was above her, full and shining brightly in the sky. She skulked in between the trees, keeping a careful eye out for danger, but so far it had been a quiet night.

And that’s when she heard it.

As she stood there in the shadows, she heard the softest, most beautiful voice she had ever heard.

‘Alone with my sorrows, my struggles and plights

My long tired days breed long sleepless nights

I wither and worry, I bleed and I cry

For a life that is worthy for a soul such as mine

She listened to the words in a trance. Bellatrix didn’t realize it, but as she listened to the soft melody flowing out across the lake, her hands had come up to wrap around her throat; threatening to choke her in lieu of her horrible secret that once was wrapped around it long ago.

Alone with my sorrows, my fears and my woes

A heart with no fire and a body with no soul

I dwell in my torment as I drown in my lies

Watch me weep for an ending to this hell I call life

The hurt in the other’s voice was suffocating her. She didn’t know why it was affecting her so, the last time she felt like this being a very, very long time ago. The woman singing right now both
fascinated her and enraged her at the same time. She wanted to go across the lake to silence her completely just as much as she wanted to encourage her to sing louder.

\begin{center}
\textit{Alone with my sorrows, no love and no hope}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{I long for the one who can fix what is broke}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{Both haggard and battered, no strength to go on}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{I long for the siren with the same siren song…’}
\end{center}

Hearing the last lines of the woman’s song, something in her snapped. She could feel it bubbling up in her chest; a feeling that begged her to call out to the other and bring her back to her. She walked closer to the forest’s edge, careful to remain unseen as she searched across to the other side.

And that’s when she saw her.

From her position, she couldn’t see the other’s face but she was sure of a few things.

She could see hair, the color unknown, but the volume alone was enough to tell her that this was no boy.

Though that much was obvious already.

The other siren was young, much younger than her. Her voice was light and youthful; her build seemingly much more petite than her own, but she couldn’t be certain this far away.

She briefly wondered what a student- because she was quite certain she was one- was doing out here so late at night.

Her hand rubbed at her neck again as she knew the reason already.

The lake was perfect. The mermaids were known for singing late into the night and so anyone passing by or listening in would never guess it was a siren instead. The movements of the giant squid and the swooshing of the waters would no doubt drown out the rest.

The other siren was smart.

Though apparently not smart enough to factor in other sirens.

Bellatrix could hear her loud and clear. She could hear every infliction in the other’s voice as she continued singing her song over and over. Hear as she cried out for another, most likely not even noticing that she was doing it. The girl was foolish to be out here so late; crying out so sweetly her fears and desires for anyone to hear.

Someone like her.

The witch chuckled as a plan came to mind.

She could use this girl.

More than just a powerful witch, she was shamefully a powerful siren as well. The much younger,
more unexperienced siren would never be able to ignore her song. She cursed her ancestors for tainting her with such filth, but in this case, she would make it work to her advantage. She would lure her back to her cave and place her under the imperious curse; turning her into her good little spy in order to take the castle from the inside out.

It was perfect.

The girl was still singing when she prepared to join her, but before she could even open her mouth, the singing stopped and was soon replaced with loud, ugly sobbing.

Bellatrix was finding it hard to breathe.

She loved hearing others suffer. Nothing brought her more joy in this world then seeing another suffer from their own inner torment.

But hearing this stranger cry…

Listening to that heartbreaking singing…

It was enough to drive her mad.

Shaking hands clutched at her head, trying desperately to cover her ears in an attempt to drown out that sound. The voices that have haunted her since she was a little girl were screaming out in unison; threatening to make her head explode from their ferocious yelling.

But there was one voice she noticed above the others; one that she hadn’t heard in many years.

It screamed above the rest, guiding her mind somewhere the other voices couldn’t reach her. She focused on that one only. Listened closely as it rose louder and louder above the others.

*Sing. Lure her. Sing to her. Bring her. Grab her. NOW! GET HER NOW!*  

Her mind was such a mass of voices and confusion that when she started humming, she barely even noticed she was replaying the same song she had just heard.

Until she noticed the sobbing had stopped, along with the voices.

Relief filled her and spurred her to hum even louder.

She watched as the figure began moving, hair swishing wildly as they appeared to be searching for her standing in the darkness. She didn’t come forth, knowing that her face was a familiar one, even if she was believed to be dead. She needed the girl to some closer.

She kept going, knowing that soon the girl would come to her side, unable to resist the lure of the much more experienced siren…

That was until she turned around and waded out of the water onto the shore, never once looking back.

Bellatrix stopped humming and snapped out of the trance she unknowingly found herself in.

She had resisted the pull.

Some young, unexperienced, filthy little harlot had dared to resist her call!

A rage began to build up inside of her and she smiled.
‘If you can’t lure them with candy, then use something sweeter I supposed.’ She thought to herself. She switched up her tactics. Humming, for a siren, was a strength in itself; but singing was much stronger. The girl had more restraint than she was expecting, but she would still be no match for her.

Bellatrix felt words crawl up inside her of her chest; the voice in the back of her mind gifting her the perfect words she would need to bring the other to her side.

‘Sweet sorrow, sweet sorrow of a heart pure as gold
Weep not for your losses, weep not for your soul
Cry not for your struggles, your woes or your plights
And sleep through your troubles, sleep deep through the night

She watched the girl stumble and then freeze. It was working, but the girl was stubborn. So she kept going.

Sweet sorrow, sweet sorrow of a soul white as snow
May your fears and your worries break away from your hold
Away with your burdens and lay them to me
And a life that’s worth living, I shall lay on to thee

She almost laughed when the girl had to brace herself against a tree, her body slumping against the bark like it was the only thing keeping her from falling to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

It felt good to feel like this again. To feel such power over another and knowing they could do nothing to stop it. A fire that she thought was long extinguished ignited within her; brought back to life by the foolish girl too naïve to sense danger when it was literally on her doorstep.

The voice at the back of her mind, the siren she hadn’t heard from in so long because of the other voices was ecstatic. It wanted the girl more than anything. It needed her, and therefore so did Bellatrix. Perhaps not for the same reasons, but she cared little for that right now. Now she had to bring the girl to her completely. One last tug at the girl’s oh so broken heart and she would be hers.

The girl took off in a dead sprint into the forest, not turning around even once.

‘What...WHAT?! That filth! I’ll kill her!’ She screamed to herself, staring at the place where the other siren had once been. ‘She couldn’t have broken away after that. Unless...No...it’s impossible.’

Bellatrix felt her head was spinning, her breathes becoming erratic as she slowly came to the realization of something terrible. She wanted nothing more than to deny it, to fight it and just turn around and pretend this whole thing never happened, but she knew in her mind that was no longer an option.

The mind numbingly loud screaming of the newest voice was enough to confirm her suspicions. Suspicions she once read about in a book from long ago. Ones that told of a being from her own species that could resist her pull, no matter how little experience or power they wielded themselves.
That told of a being who was born for her, made for her, and whose presence would bring her power and joy like she’d never known before.

Her mate.

She had finally met her mate, even after all these years of believing she never had one.

And she had just run from her.

She began cackling at the thought.

Her lord was gone now, and with him went her purpose in life. Revenge was supposed to be her end game, but with this new development, Bellatrix knew that getting inside that castle was now her top priority.

There was something that belonged to her in there and she was going to stop at nothing to get to it.

And before her new prize could get too far away, Bellatrix let her voice cry out as loud as she could to let her know that as well.

*Sweet sorrow, sweet sorrow of a mind bright and bold
You may run from me now, but you can’t run from me long
You sung to me sweetly, now I answer in kind
I will come for you one day, for the heart that is MINE!’*

Bellatrix laughed again as she turned away from the lake to return to her cave, her thoughts racing as she began brainstorming her plans for the next couple of days.

A week passed before Bellatrix caught sight of her so called ‘mate’ again. She had come to the lake every evening since; hoping that she would catch the girl off guard, but not once did she show in that timeframe.

This didn’t please her in the least.

Still, she waited.

The girl was young, a child compared to her. That should’ve bothered her on some level, but she’d been a death eater her entire life; there was little in this world that could phase her now. That being said, if she remembered anything from her own time at Hogwarts, it’s that young girls are such curious things. And the only thing that could sate that curiosity was answers. She would return, all Bellatrix had to do was wait her out.

And sure enough, her patience paid off.

Bellatrix was already at the lake before her mate could get there. Behind the cover of darkness, she scanned the lake in anticipation, hoping that tonight would be the night she saw her again.

‘There you are little rat.’ She thought with a sadistic grin.

On the other side of the lake, her mate emerged. Unlike the last time she saw her, the girl didn’t wade into the water, instead taking a seat on top of a nearby boulder. Bellatrix watched silently as the girl
proceeded to have a breakdown as she dropped her head and began pulling at her hair. Bellatrix was irritated that she couldn’t see her face clearly from her position, but knew that if she was any closer, the girl would be gone in an instance. The first thing the professors and aurors had done before fixing the castle was repair the anti-apparation wards around the castle grounds. Unfortunately, that meant around the lake as well. Even so, the wards were still damaged with the school still in such disarray. She could probably get one apparition in before she was drained of her magic once more, so she needed to make it count.

Bellatrix kept her eyes pinned firmly on the silhouette across the lake and wondered if the girl would be singing tonight or simply came to mope. Her mind was again assaulted by voices, the newest crying out louder than the others just like before. She felt her irritation grow more and more the longer she waited for something to happen. A week of waiting was enough for her and now that she had the girl before her again, she wanted to go over there and snatch her away.

As if the other knew that her patience was wearing thin, a soft humming filled the air and a melody began flowing over to her ears, and filling her with a strange feeling.

_I danced across the ocean, as you waltzed across the sea_  
_We sang and caught the echoes, at the place where we would meet_  
_I smiled at you, you smiled at me, or at least that's how it's told_  
_The tale of me, the maiden lass, and you, my great unknown_  

_Now the maiden lass was bold and brave, her heart so pure and gold_  
_A sly and quick and cunning thing, yes that was the great unknown_  
_I searched for you, you found me too and swept me off my feet_  
_To a place so far from where we are, to a place where we would sleep_  

The more Bellatrix listened to the siren’s words, the more she began to connect the dots.

“She knows I’m here already. And yet she still came, singing such a disgustingly _cheerful_ song,” She hissed, her blood beginning to boil. “A bloody Gryffindor! Only a fool would knowingly do something so reckless as this.”

Had her mate been a Slytherin, she would’ve been ecstatic. Even Ravenclaw was passable in her eyes. She could never accept a goody two-shoed Hufflepuff, of that she was certain.

But a Gryffindor?

She would kill her on the spot.

A part of her knew that she wouldn’t, but that didn’t mean that the other girl would remained unharmed. Even before she had become a death eater, she hated Gryffindors with a burning passion. Always so brave and righteous and _light_. They made her sick to her stomach. The three so called saviors who defeated her lord were also bloody Gryffindors! Oh yes, when she got her hands on the other, she would make sure her ire of being from such a distasteful house would be known. But until then…
And in our home, from where you roamed, we’d sleep and dance and play
We’d sing at night and take to flights as we waited for the day
And when the sun came shining, lighting you and lighting me
We’d walk back to the ocean and we’d sink into the deep

And~

From the depths we rose again, both stronger than before
‘What?’

And hand in hand, we walked the lands upon the evening shore
‘I can’t stop.’ Bellatrix thought in a panic. Across the lake, the singing had stopped and her mate shot up to stand atop the boulder. The clouds parted above Bellatrix, illuminating the area in front of her. Her mate looked ready to bolt. Fearing that she might flee, she raised her arms out as if to beckon the other girl closer. She almost missed her taking a step forward. Seeing that she had somehow ensnared the girl for now, she kept singing, not fully remembering when she started.

And Miss Bravery and her Cunning Queen knew they were not alone
Her honey words seemed to be working as the girl too yet another step forward. Feeling one more push would have her, Bellatrix poured more power into her voice.

Which soon begun the tale of fun, of the lass and her great unknown …
She trailed off, the last of her melody sweeping out as a haunting echo.
Her mate fell to her knees, no longer strong enough to stand on her own.

Seeing this, arousal that she had not felt in so long surged through her body. She felt powerful again. Being in the forest with nothing but filthy creatures and foolish prey grew boring after a while. There was no challenge, no thrill of the hunt. Not until her mate had appeared. Watching the other girl struggle and run from her was enough to get her blood flowing. She was stubborn, Bellatrix knew this since the very first day. She would be the type to fight her, argue with her, run from her.
And Bellatrix would let her try until she, grew bored and broke her; making her into the perfect little pet. Her plans to use the girl to get inside the castle were momentarily forgotten.

A feeling of bliss came over her at such dark thoughts and she began humming to herself at the prospects of gaining such a gift for herself.
Her glee soon turned sour as the girl apparently found her bearings and hopped down from the boulder and started walking towards the tree line.
But Bellatrix wasn’t going to let her off easy this time.

Gathering her magic, she had been building up in preparation for this, she began to apperate herself as close to the other girl as possible.

She disappeared with a crack and reappeared on the opposite side of the lake.
And landed to the left of the young siren.

She thought it would be easy to simply reach out and grab her, but the other was smarter than she looked. Before Bellatrix could even react, the girl was already sprinting away from her like a bat out of hell. The sight kindled something fierce within her and she began pounding after her in an instance.

The chase was hard but amusing to no end. Bellatrix was slightly impressed with how Agile and honed in the other girl was. Never once did she slow, nor did she trip as Bellatrix pursued her. Bellatrix kept up with her just as easy. She was running on pure instincts and adrenaline now; her body taut and focused on her target like a cat chasing a mouse through the underbrush. It was wild and animalistic and brought to her a feeling that she only got when she had some poor fool under the might of her cruciatus curse.

They kept running and running, until the edge of the forest came into view. Her mate broke through to the castle grounds and kept on going, not looking back even once. Bellatrix stopped before she got too far away from the forest. Getting too close now without weakening the wards would alert someone to her presence before she was ready to make her move. And if she was caught near the school and was discovered, she would have no way to apperate away. Instead, she watched as her frizzy haired little prize made it to the gate in one piece.

Bellatrix came down from her adrenaline and instinct driven state not long after.

And the moment she did, pure rage began to fill her once more. Eyes narrowed at the figure in the distance as they stood motionless against one of the castle doors.

In her chase, not once did she stop and realize that she was a bloody witch, one with a wand just nestled there between her breast. She could’ve stunned the girl. Roped her, tripped her, tortured her until she could never walk again! Bellatrix had been so close to her and instead of thinking rationally and catching the girl then and there, she was overcome by something as ridiculous as creature instincts!

The girl had made a fool of her!

Bellatrix was beyond mad now. She had lost the girl again and wasted her magic while doing so. The voices in her head were just as angry. They screamed and clawed at mind as they’ve done for decades now. She has long since learned to ignore them, but there was one that she could no longer quiet.

Failure. You’ve failed again. We NEED her. Next time. Next time. Her siren whispered to her. Again and again, it reminded her and there was no way to silence it.

When she began screaming in anger and frustration, she didn’t care who heard her.

Next time she would have her mate and nothing was going to stop her this time around.

With that, Bellatrix stomped her way back into the darkness of the forest. When she fell asleep that night, she would dream of dark, frizzy hair and wonder where she had seen such a mane before…

Over the course of the next three days, Bellatrix would grill her mate relentlessly. Further off in the forest, she had been stirring up trouble with the wildlife in order to draw the centaurs away from the castle grounds. With them out of the way, she strayed closer and closer to the forest’s edge in order to torment her mate from afar. Her words were no longer catering to lure the other siren in.

She was far past that.
It was obvious that those tactics wouldn’t work anymore. No, she would have to try something else if she wanted to get the girl to come to her.

Until she came up with such a plan however, she decided to have a little fun with her while she waited.

She was definitely weary of Bellatrix, but she wasn’t quite afraid yet. She wanted the other girl to know she was dangerous. That just because she had evaded her twice and was protected by the castle, she wouldn’t be safe for long. So she sang to her every night, casting a special spell that would ensure that only the girl would hear her call. She laughed as she realized that the girl probably didn’t even know that such a spell even existed.

Then again, it didn’t until she had created one.

It was true that there was no way to muffle the sound of their voices, but directing it solely at one person was different. It took a considerate amount of concentration and skill, but it was not impossible to do. She hoped that it was driving her mate crazy. The thought of the other girl trying to desperately explain what was happening and not being able to figure it out herself gave her some pleasure, but not as much as the thought of her singing keeping the girl up at night.

‘It’d serve her right.’ She thought to herself.

For four days she did this hoping to finally drag the little rat out of her hole. The girl never came once, no doubt scared out of her wits to dare return to the lake after all her taunting. And Bellatrix counted on this when she began her little game. Each night she began at the same time, and each night she ended at the same time. The girl would know her patterns by now. Which is why Bellatrix could now break it. Tonight there would be no singing. She would lay low and wait until the girl comes to the lake out of a false sense of security.

Unknowing that she would be walking straight into her trap.

Day soon turned to night and the moon was once more hung high up in the sky.

Deep in the darkness of the forest, Bellatrix laid in waiting. Proximity charms would alert her if the other girl was coming and various other spells were cast to warn her if the patrolling centaurs strayed too close.

It felt like an eternity before she felt the first of her alarms trip.

The proximity charm near the oaf’s hut across the lake.

A sadistic grinned pulled across her lips as she made her way towards it.

‘Let the games begin, little rat. You won’t be getting away this time.’ The woman thought.

Like the predator she knew she was, Bellatrix arrived at the edge of the forbidden forest and hid behind a large tree. Peeking around, she saw her target a little way away.

She stood there in her fall robes, wild hair whipping around and making it even messier than it already was. Her mate wasn’t facing her, instead she was staring back at the castle as if she was about to return there.

‘Not this time, little brat.’

Bellatrix whipped out her wand and pointed towards her throat.
She cast the spells easily and then called out in a voice nothing like her real one.

Help me.

The girl whipped around towards her, sending her hair flying with it.

Help me! Please! I’m so scared!

She cried out again. She cast a muffling charm and began running in the opposite direction, luring the other further into the darkness.

Someone help me! I got lost! Please help me!

Where are you! Where are you!

Behind her she could hear the other girl running through the woods trying to find the poor, lost little child. She kept moving deeper and deeper into the forest, luring the girl further and further from the safety of the castle grounds. Off in the distance behind her, she vaguely heard the other siren cry out.

“Hello?” She heard her yell. “Where are you?”

Bellatrix snickered at her obvious distress. She veered off her path and decided to play it up even more.

Please help me! I’m scared!

Where are you! Where are you!

Bellatrix cried out, this time stopping now that she felt she was far enough away from the castle grounds. She was done playing anyways. She could hear the pounding of footsteps grow closer and closer as she took a hidden position behind a tree. She heard the approaching steps and the voice cry out, much clearer than before.

“I’m getting closer!” She gasped. “Hang on! I’m coming!”

Bellatrix froze.

She knew that voice.

She hadn’t heard it in a while, but there was no doubt who that young and disgustingly courageous voice belonged to.

Hermione Granger; the mudblood scum who helped kill her lord.

And apparently, her supposed mate.

This whole time she had been right there in front of her. The girl’s singing was nothing like her real voice, something Bellatrix knew could happen first hand. Her siren side had blinded her from realizing it, but now that her head was clear from the realization, everything began falling into place.

She had seen that head of hair before, albeit it was a lot straighter and tamed back then.

It also explained why the girl kept coming out to the lake knowing someone dangerous was out there. She was one of the light’s so called saviors, and a Gryffindor on top of that. They were known
for doing all sorts of stupid and reckless things. It drove her mad just thinking how those three buffoons somehow managed to bring down the greatest movement the wizarding world had seen in decades in only a year or so. Bellatrix’s blood was boiling the more and more she thought about it. So much so that the next time she called out to the girl, the spells on her voice began to weaken as she started losing her temper.

*Where Are You! Help ME!*

When the pounding steps could no longer be heard approaching her, she walked out from behind her hiding place near the tree and started stalking back through the forest. Logic was thrown out the window and she didn’t care if she was seen now or not. There was no more need to lure and play the slow game. All thoughts of stealing her mate away and returning to attack the castle were now thrown out since she could now kill two birds with one stone.

Bellatrix’s mind was hardly her own as she came upon the other girl. She must’ve known she was in danger too with the way she whipped around to flee for the third time.

But Bellatrix was done playing games.

She transfigured her wand into her whip and uncoiled it in a flash. Running forward, she drew her arm back, and with deadly accuracy, she launched the whip forward with a crack and watched it coil around the other girl’s neck like a snake. She laughed loudly as the girl began to panic and before she could even gather her bearings, Bellatrix yanked back on the whip and brought the girl to the ground where she proceeded to flail about like a dying carp. Bellatrix watched in sick fascination as the girl clawed and scratched at the whip, unable to get even the tiniest breath of air. She wanted nothing more than to watch the girl perish right here and now at her feet, but a piercing sound at the back of her mind was making itself known.

Because while Bellatrix was more than happy to watch her mate perish and die right here on the dirty forest floor like the filth that she was, the siren within her wasn’t ready to let that happen.

Bellatrix was no stranger to pain. She’d been subjected to it almost all of her life, whether it was from her family, her time in Azkaban, or even at the hands of her own lord. But the pain she felt at that moment was unreal. The mudblood may have been the one being choked out on the ground, but it was *her* who felt like she was dying.

*RELEASE HER! SHE’S DYING!* Her inner siren screeched.

Caring more for her own life than that of the filth before her, Bellatrix willed the whip to loosen but not release the girl from its clutches.

Bellatrix sauntered up to the girl as she began to slowly breathe normally again. Leaning over her, she finally got a proper look at her victim, a part of her hoping that she was wrong about her identity. She wasn’t.

She knew that face well; she had been up and personal with it long ago in her sister’s manor. A round soft face, delicate lips, and bright- albeit a bit teary- brown colored eyes.

There was no doubt in her mind that this was the one and only Hermione Granger.

Oh it was looking to be a very *interesting* night indeed.

Bellatrix circled the girl and watched as she tracked her with her eyes. When she stood next to the girl’s feet, she pulled back on the whip and brought the girl to a sitting position. She dug her hand
into the mudblood’s frizzy little locks and grimaced as they became lost in its depths. She yanked hard on the girl’s scalp and when it looked like she was ready to cry out, she spoke to her.

“If you scream muddy, I’ll give you something far worse to scream about.” She hissed menacingly.

The girl didn’t scream, although Bellatrix wanted to hear that more than anything, having missed out on it back at the manor. Instead she was treated to the girl’s tears as she too came to the same realization that she herself had just moments before. The clouds above parted and she lifted her head to make sure the girl had gotten a good look at her face.

She didn’t think anyone could look so utterly defeated.

It made her want to laugh again.

And so she did.

Bellatrix cackled and howled with laughter. She laughed at the younger girl’s tears, at her misery, and most of all, at her situation.

Because whether either of them liked it or not, they were mates. Destined from the very beginning to belong to one another for the rest of their lives. No doubt the girl had thought of her mate as someone who would love and cherish her like her songs desperately tried to convey.

But instead she got Bellatrix.

Big, mean, old Bellatrix who had tortured her, marked her, and told her what she really was; a filthy, weak, little mudblood.

And now she would take away the last thing she most likely held dear; her potential at a happy ending.

No, there would be no happy ending for Hermione Granger. Not while Bellatrix Lestrange still walked this world. The other two traitors could wait for now; she had plenty of time to deal with them later. Her mind was on one thing and one thing only.

And that was to have another chat with Miss Granger again.

Girl to girl…
Chapter 5 – A Change of Plans

Hermione could only stare in horror at the woman standing before her.

Bellatrix Lestrange; there and in the flesh.

When Hermione had heard that Mrs. Weasley had witnessed the dark witch’s death personally, Hermione broke down in tears. Not of sadness, but of ultimate joy. The woman who had tortured and humiliated her was dead. She wouldn’t have to live her day to day life in fear anymore that she was out there among the other escaped death eaters. It was true that she would be branded like some cattle for the rest of her life, but she took this as a victory all the same.

And then she heard that laugh and all the sleepless nights and nightmares from the days preceding her torture at the hands of the older witch came flooding back. Hermione was trembling as Bellatrix still held onto her hair; the whip still uncomfortably tight around her neck. She was in pain, but there was no pain worse than what was going on in her heart.

_Bellatrix Lestrange was her mate._

Her perfect person who was supposed to be her everything in this world. Her last hope at happiness since the fighting between the light and Voldemort had begun. Hermione was so hopeful when she had first heard the other siren’s voice from across the lake. So seductive and harmonious to her ears that she wanted to do anything in her power to be closer to it.

It was nothing at all like the sickly, high pitched cackle emanating from the monster before her.

And it was because of how contrasting it was, that Hermione tried to fight it still. Tried with all her being to deny that they were fated to be together. This was simply a trick. A cruel joke that was being played on her and any second now, someone would come out from behind the trees and make it all end.

But no one showed.

Instead, Hermione had her head violently yanked upwards until she was staring directly into her
captor’s eyes. Bellatrix had stopped laughing at this point, but the sadistic smirk she had come to know long ago was still present on her face. Despite the fear she felt in her heart, Hermione sneered at the woman, letting her know just how much her unwelcomed presence really was. As she thought, the dark look did nothing but amuse the psychopath, as she crouched on the balls of her feet in front of her; whip and Hermione’s hair still clutched tightly in her hands. A flash of admiration at the other woman’s perfect balance went through Hermione’s mind, but it was quickly washed away as the she finally spoke to her.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t my favorite dirty, little mudblood. All alone in the big scary forest.” She said in a mocking voice. “I wonder why that is. Care to enlighten me, muddy?”

Hermione didn’t give into the mockery, knowing that a response was exactly what the woman was looking for. Bellatrix must’ve known this too, because the mocking smirk quickly turned into an angry scowl and Hermione gasped in agony as the witch’s nails dug deeper into her scalp.

“I asked you a question filth!” She spat, yanking Hermione closer. “What are you doing out here?”

“You already know why I’m out here. You lured me here.” She hissed back, her Gryffindor nature fighting hard to keeping her strong willed.

“Lured you here? I didn’t lure you here. Well, not you specifically, but I can’t say I’m dissatisfied with the results.” She replied.

“I can’t say I feel the same you sadistic, horrible, little- “Hermione was cut off as Bellatrix removed her hand from her hair to strike her across the face. She would’ve fallen back from her position on her knees, but the whip around her neck quickly reeled her back in; causing her to choke and claw at it in desperation.

“How dare you speak to me like that rat! Filth! Disgusting, little, mudblood sluts have no business speaking to their betters in such a way!” Bellatrix screamed.

Hermione was scrambling to breathe again. Fear overtook her as she thought that this would be the end of her, the siren in her screaming in agony as it felt both of their lives slipping away. She watched Bellatrix, silently begging with her eyes to be released. Hermione knew that pleading with the woman would never work and as more black dots began swimming before her eyes, her more rational side began shutting down, making room for instinct to take over.

Without warning, Hermione gathered her remaining strength and surged forward, slamming her body into the bigger woman’s torso. Unprepared for the move and already balanced unsteadily, Bellatrix fell back into the dirt as Hermione pounced. The surprised attack loosened the grip she had on her whip and Hermione was able to remove the leather menace from her throat and toss it away. She was seconds from reaching her own wand from her coat pocket when Bellatrix regained her footings and flung the girl off of her. She charged at Hermione and before she could grab her wand, the older woman was on her, hands scrambling to get at her throat to choke the life out of her. Terrified, Hermione began wailing on the other woman, scratching and bucking with all of her strength to get the other woman off of her.

Bellatrix warded off most of Hermione’s frantic flailing, but she couldn’t dodge all of the girls’ hits. The Gryffindor had fire, she gave her that, but Bellatrix wasn’t focused on that right now. It was taking more than necessary to keep the girl pinned- and with both her hands occupied with keeping the girl in check- there was no way to reach her wand at the moment. The brat kept swinging wildly at her, more than likely running on nothing but pure adrenaline. Bellatrix was amused at the animalistic fear in her eyes, but when one of the balled up fists came too close to striking her face, she decided that enough was enough.
“Strike me with those filthy hands muddy and I’ll make sure you don’t leave this forest alive!” She yelled. The strikes kept coming. Fed up, Bellatrix eventually managed to get the swinging hands and pinned them to the ground. It stopped the flailing, but now the frizzy haired girl began putting all of her efforts into bucking her off. Bellatrix growled deeply before finally, she felt something build up in her chest and she practically screeched at the top of her lungs, “Enough!”

Silence rang out throughout the forest.

The rustling of leaves and the whistling of the wind were the only sounds that could be heard by either of them. Even the creatures of the forest were quiet. It was as if her words had stopped all movements around the two of them.

Including the ones of the girl beneath her.

Until they started up again.

But it wasn’t bucking or flailing like before.

Confusion washed over her as the body she was straddling began shaking. Violent tremors jostling her as her victim began reacting. She glanced down.

Hermione, who had up to this point been fighting tooth and nail to escape from the other woman’s grasp, laid under Bellatrix in horror.

Through their whole altercation, she thought that she was getting the upper hand; that all of her attempts at striking the women were finally enough to give her an escape window. But then the one thing she had been fearing all night had happened.

“Enough!”

One word.

One word and Hermione’s body locked up on her like the time she had been petrified. It didn’t last long, and she soon felt her body was her own again, but that didn’t change the fact that Bellatrix not only was without a doubt her mate, but by the way she was staring down at Hermione, she now knew she held power over her as well. Tears sprung from her eyes as thoughts of what the women would do to her now that she knew what she could do to her. At this, laughter filled her ears and the grip pinning her arms to the ground grew even tighter.

“Oh now this is something I can get used to! Look at you, all obedient and submissive;” She mocked. Bellatrix leaned in closer to her face and Hermione whipped her head to the side to keep the witch from seeing her frightened expression. “You and I both know what that means, don’t we little rat?”

“It means nothing,” Hermione whispered fiercely.

Bellatrix chuckled darkly and used her other hand to move Hermione’s gaze back towards her face. Hermione winced as her black painted nails dug into the skin of her cheeks; her previous wounds from running through the forest and the whipping of the wind did nothing to soothe her already aching body.

“Come now, I heard you were smart muddy. You know what you are. What we are,” She said with glee. “Say it. Tell me what we are.”

“We are nothing! And we will always be nothing. I will end myself before I let you have control over
me, Lestrange!” Hermione yelled.

A part of her should’ve been worried that she had actually meant to go through with it as well, but then she remembers what the witch in front of her was capable of and realizes that death would be a much better option than being Bellatrix’s plaything. She didn’t want to imagine what her friends would think if she did, but at least her parents were still obliviated. They wouldn’t even care if she was gone because to their knowledge they never even had a daughter. A morbid relief, but a relief nonetheless. She would die before she let Bellatrix have her.

But Bellatrix, it seemed, had other ideas.

“Oh, no, no, no! That simply won’t do, muddy. What kind of mate would I be if I just let you die like that?” She asked with an almost innocent smile. It quickly turned dark. “You, who dared to sully my name by breaking into my vault and stealing my lord’s most precious treasures.” Slender fingers traced over her face, almost lovingly, as Bellatrix’s expression began dipping further and further into insanity. “You who made my lord angry with me. Punishing me for failing to keep someone as weak, and foolish as you and your two idiot companions from foiling his plans!” A scream rang out as she struck Hermione with the back of her hand. “You humiliated me in front of my lord and then you killed him! You murdered my lord, and you dare to still breathe in my presence!?” Another strike had Hermione’s face turning from a pinkish hue from the cold to a painful, stinging red. Copper filled her mouth as the backhand caused her to bite down hard on her tongue.

She was in pain, but more than that, she was both angry and terrified at her situation. Bellatrix scared her. She was a dangerous woman, and an unstable one at that. Hermione knew that all the things she did as Bellatrix under the polyjuice potion could one day come back to haunt her just for that reason, but the thought alone of Bellatrix falling out with her lord was enough to say it was worth it. Feeling a tad bit daring at the thought, she did a foolish thing and decided to poke a sleeping dragon.

“Good. I’m glad he punished you. You deserved everything you got for what you did to me.” She said, looking dead into Bellatrix’s eyes. She was already braced for the next backhand, turning to spit out the blood pooling in her mouth, less she started to choke on it.

Hermione was starting to get under her skin. She was being reckless; she knew that. But why stop now? The woman was going to torture her anyways, whether she was cooperative or not. No reason to sit there quietly and take it in silence. As much as she was currently mad at Ron and Harry, she hoped that they would be proud of her for letting her inner lioness out to play.

But then she glanced up at Bellatrix and was immediately confused.

The witch was staring in her direction, but Hermione knew from the blank stare that she wasn’t really seeing her. Her lips moved ever so slightly, but from what Hermione could see, Bellatrix wasn’t actually saying any words. It looked as if a trance had overtaken her, but as soon as it started, onyx eyes snapped up and an unsettling grin pulled across the older siren’s face.

“Did I really?” She asked calmly.

Hermione frowned. “Did you what?” She asked cautiously.

“Did I deserve my punishment? Did I deserve the unimaginable pain my lord put me through for your actions?” She asked.

“Of course you do!” Hermione yelled. She couldn’t believe the woman would think she’d say
anything else. “You tortured me! You’re a murderer! You deserve what you got and more!”

“Good.” Bellatrix said. “I’m glad you feel that way mudblood.”

Now Hermione was lost. This didn’t seem like something Bellatrix would say, it was too calm, too quiet of a reaction. And that put her on edge more than any of the women’s insults or curses.

As it would turn out, she was right to be suspicious.

Hermione’s arms were suddenly free and the weight of the other witch on her stomach was lifted. It was only the briefest of moments to recuperate, but she took it all the same. Hermione scrambled to her feet and whipped out her wand that she had stashed away earlier whilst running through the forest. Not even given a chance to prepare herself, she immediately had to start casting protego as Bellatrix had gone back to retrieve her own wand not too far away. The woman starting casting spells left and right, never once stopping to give Hermione a chance to go on the offense.

The look on her face was one of complete loathing.

Hermione knew that her little jibes would get under the other woman’s skin, but not like this!

Hermione ducked behind a tree when Bellatrix started pelting her with even stronger spells. The bark of the tree she was hiding behind was thick, but it was no match for the other woman’s strength.

Splinters and large pieces of barks went flying left and right and Hermione knew that it wouldn’t hold out for long. Taking a risk, she rolled out from behind the tree and cast a bombarda in her target’s direction, which was quickly batted to the side like it was nothing. In the time it took Bellatrix to deflect the spell, Hermione had made her way behind another tree, the previous one crashing to the ground with an ominous boom.

With any luck, it was loud enough for someone to hear and come investigate.

Hermione peeked out from her hiding spot. Bellatrix was staring at the tree she had just destroyed with a look of annoyance. She must’ve been thinking the same thing as her. Her temper had caused her to potentially give away their position; not doubt at least the centaurs would come to investigate.

Which means that they’re little game would have to come to an end.

Bellatrix cast another dark curse at Hermione, causing her to once more play the defense. However, with her protego protecting her front, it left her back completely exposed, something Bellatrix took advantage of.

Using the technique her lord had taught only his closest death eaters, the dark witch twirled on the spot and into a flying mass of darkness. Fast as lighting, she flew around the tree and reformed behind the girl’s back catching her by surprise. One arm wrapped around the girl’s waist and arms as the second came to wrap around her throat and tilted her head back onto the older siren’s shoulder. Bellatrix smirked at seeing the girl’s terrified expression, but even though she wanted to turn it into something far more frightened, she knew that her time was running out. The proximity alarms were tripped as soon as she made the mistake of felling the tree. There was no secure enough location to keep the girl either. For now, anyways. Flying could work, but she’d be shot out of the air not long after while carrying a second person.

No, she needed to prepare. It irritated her that her siren side was stopping her from outright killing the girl, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t make her yearn for death instead.

She’d fall back for now.
But not before messing with her mate’s mind one last time.

“Looks like our playtime will be coming to an end soon muddy,” She said directly into Hermione’s ear. Bellatrix laughed loudly as she watched the tips turn a violently bright red color. “But make no mistake, this isn’t the last time we’ll see each other.” She lowered her voice to a dark whisper. “After all, I can’t let anything bad happen to my mate, now can I.”

“We are not mates!” Hermione yelled, facing burning from both anger and embarrassment.

“Oh but we are! How else could I have such control over you with my voice alone?” She danced her long fingers across Hermione’s cheeks. “Or how you’ve been able to resist me this long?”

“If what you say is true, then why didn’t you say anything at the mansion?” Hermione asked, genuinely curious at the answer. “I was right there beneath you and not once did you say anything.”

Bellatrix stopped lightly dancing her fingers against her mate’s cheeks and instead dug her darkly painted nails into one of the gashes along her face; watching in glee as she hissed at the pain, ruby red blood sluggishly running down her hand.

“Don’t overstep your place little rat. That’s a question I’m not obligated to answer,” Hermione felt the other woman smile against the lobe of her ear. “But I’m feeling generous tonight. So I’ll tell you this.”

Hermione was spun around in the other woman’s arms, her body slammed against the tree and she groaned in agony as the force of it caused her wand to fall from her hand. The older witch pressed her wand into Hermione’s throat; the other coming to rest on her chin, smearing it with her own blood.

“You caused this.” Bellatrix told her in a surprisingly calm voice. “The moment you and that Gryffindor scum you brought with, broke into my vault and stole my lord’s possessions, was the moment you sealed both of our fates.” She hissed at the end.

“You’re crazy! What did me and my friends have to do with this?” Hermione gasped in disbelief. “I was a siren long before that day.”

“And so was I.” She replied. “Yet somehow I was still my lord’s second in command, his most trusted. I heard that you’re supposed to be the brightest witch of your age. So tell me, how is it that I’ve survived this long as a magical creature under the most powerful wizard in the world?”

That made Hermione’s eyes widen considerably.

She had been able to hide it from the rest of the world because down by the lake, she had a rather good cover. She had never let anyone know about her heritage and no one bothered to dig too far into it seeing as she was just a muggleborn witch.

But Bellatrix?

She was from the darkest pureblood family in history. The Blacks would’ve executed her as soon as they realized that their family line was sullied by creature blood. And yet here she was, very much still alive. There was also no mention of Bellatrix’s siren status in the papers, in any books, or even from the Malfoy’s. Not to mention a monster like Voldemort would never let someone with creature blood be his right hand. Unless…

They simply didn’t know.
Somehow Bellatrix managed to hide it from her lord and the rest of the world without anyone’s knowledge. But then Harry, Ron, and her came along and broke into her vault. And it angered Voldemort to the point that he went after Bellatrix and whatever she did to suppress her siren side came undone.

But what came undone? There was no way to suppress their creature side, isn’t that what the book she read said?

‘But what about the missing pages?’ She asked herself.

How did she know that the missing pages didn’t explain that, or that the info inside was even accurate? She didn’t know how Bellatrix was able to sing to her in Gryffindor tower without anyone else hearing her, and yet she did.

Something wasn’t right. There was something more going on here than what the older witch was letting on.

And Hermione found herself wanting to find out exactly what that was.

But she wouldn’t be getting her answers tonight.

“Hermione!”

She snapped her head to the side.

Someone was calling her name off in the distance. The voice seemed familiar to her.

“Hermione Granger! Where are you?” A different voice cried out. This one was also familiar, but she hadn’t heard it in many years, so she wasn’t sure.

Then came the distant sound of thundering hooves, growing ever closer. And she quickly matched the voice to a face.

‘Firenze! The centaurs!’ She gasped, breathing a mental sigh of relief.

No doubt the tree falling over was enough to alert them of something amiss in the forest. Hermione felt tears well up in her eyes. Help was coming for her. She had begun to lose hope. She was lucky that Bellatrix hadn’t outright killed her yet, but she still wasn’t leaving the forest unscathed. Her face was covered in cuts and bruises. Her neck was sore from being nearly strangled earlier, and she had no doubts that her throat was now covered in ugly, dark bruises. Her injuries weren’t major, especially knowing that they came from someone like Bellatrix, but the pain and exhaustion she felt from trying to fight the bigger woman off was enough to make up for that.

“Miss Granger! Where are you child!”

Now that was a voice she knew.

“McGonagall.” Bellatrix snarled. “Of course she would come looking for one of her missing lions. Always coming to save those in need.” She mocked in a childish voice. She turned Hermione’s head towards her and smirked at her hope filled expression. “Oh, but you knew that already didn’t you, muddy? That you could hold out long enough with me that someone would have time to come and save you. Well, guess what…” She lowered herself to a whisper in Hermione’s ear. “She didn’t save you. You’ll escape tonight, only because I’m allowing it. Because I have plans for you that need to be prepared, one’s I can’t do behind bars. You’ll never be free again. You belong to me now little siren.”
Hermione cried out when the witch yanked her arm and gripped it tightly in her hands. “This mark here on your arm is proof of that. Proof of the filth that you are. Proof that you are owned. And no castle walls; no filthy blood traitors; no magic barrier will keep you from me.” She threw Hermione to the ground, the girl barely catching herself before bashing her head against the cold ground.

The sound of thundering hooves grew ever closer, the sound of people calling out Hermione’s name growing ever louder. Bellatrix stood over Hermione with an air of arrogance that spoke only terrible things for the girl in the times to come.

“I’ll be back for you soon muddy. But before I depart, I’d like to leave you with a little…gift.” Hermione’s face fell at the insane look that slid across the woman’s face. “Don’t look so unhappy. This spell is one that I will only ever use on my very precious mate. Imago Ardentes!”

Hermione’s body began convulsing as she tried to escape the burning pain overtaking her being. Pain like no other surged through her and she nearly bit through her lip from the pain. Her body felt like it was on fire, but she knew that she wasn’t.

After the war, she could recognize the smell of burning flesh from a mile away.

The spell the older siren had used was one she hadn’t heard before and so there was no way she could break the curse even if she could reach her wand. But to her credit, despite the searing pain she was in, Hermione did not scream. She wouldn’t give Bellatrix the joy of hearing her siren side screaming out in agony, even if she could hear its suffering at the back of her mind. She wouldn’t. Just like at the mansion, she’d rather hurt in silence. Above her she heard cackling.

“Oh we’re going to have so much fun together muddy. I can already tell.” Hermione watched her turned and begin walking away. “Until next time muddy!” She yelled over her shoulder, a sickening laugh ringing out through the darkness of the forbidden forest.

The spell didn’t break, even after she lost sight of Bellatrix. Her body was still on fire and her vision was beginning to fade out into nothingness.

The sound of rapidly approaching footsteps grew louder and she turned to the left. There were people coming. She could make out the pointy hat that McGonagall always wore, along with the four-legged body that could only belong to a centaur.

But there was a third person as well.

“Oh, god! Hermione!” They cried out. Hermione watched as the newcomer ran over to her convulsing body, sliding to a dead stop at her side. Red hair filled her failing vision, a shade that could only belong to those of the Weasley family.

Ginny.

She had never been so glad to see her friend than she was at that moment, as her body could finally take no more.

Hermione was glad she passed out when she did.

She had never been in so much pain.

All she wanted right now was to get out of the cold, dark embrace of the forbidden forest and feel the warmth of the castle walls on her bruised and bloody skin. Try to pretend that tonight had never happened. Because tomorrow would be a very long day.
They would see the bruises on her neck and the blood around her chapped lips.

They would see the last spells she cast on her wand; most of them being offensive ones.

Her clothes were a mess and her hair was undoubtedly more tousled and tangled than she usually kept it.

There would be no way to deny that she had been attacked tonight.

Questions will be asked and chances of her lying her way through this would not be possible, not with her current appearance.

Yes, Hermione was quite relieved when her vision finally faded to black, the darkness allowing her to escape the pain she was feeling in the waking world.

And when she next awoke, Hermione wanted to believe that her life couldn’t get any worse than it already was, but she knew from her days with Ron and Harry that she was literally asking for the impossible…
Chapter 6 - Spilling the Beans

Chapter Notes

Annnndd we're back! Only a day later than I wanted, but school just started back up so it's to be expected. Thanks everyone for your patience, your kudos and bookmarks and reviews! They all help me out so much and let me know that you're enjoying the story so far! Now for those waiting for more Bellatrix, rest easy she shall return in the next couple chapters, depending on how I split them up. My poor chapter guide I had in the beginning is in shambles from all the changes and rearrangements coming into play. But that what's happens when I go back and make sense of the babbles I wrote to prepare for write each new Chapter. But anywho! On to Chapter 6 of Sing to Me Your Insanity. Enjoy!

Chapter 6 – Spilling the Beans

When Hermione next awoke, the feeling of being engulfed in flames was gone, but she was in enough agony to wish she was still unconscious. Whatever spell Bellatrix had cast on her was a nasty piece of work. She had thought being under the _cruciatus_ curse was bad, but then she remembered what kind of woman Bellatrix was and found that it was no surprise that she was capable of conjuring up things that were far worse.

‘And to think that I could... _am_, mates with a monster like that. If this is a joke, I’m not finding it hilarious in the least.’ She told herself, letting out a soft groan as she tried to sit up from her resting position. Looking around, she was relieved to see that she was in the infirmary. And in her favorite bed by the window as well. No doubt the work of Madam Pomphrey who was no stranger to seeing her and her friends in her domain.

Speaking of the medi-witch, Hermione nearly jumped out of her skin when the infirmary doors burst open with a loud crash. She got nervous when she saw the intense stride of the woman heading towards her spot at the edge of the room, but she was ready to bolt when she saw the two woman accompanying her.

Hermione was used to the look crossing the headmistress’ face- one might even say she had grown immune to its effects- but the anger emanating from her red headed best friend was enough to make her want to run and hide. The last time she had seen it on the other girl’s face was when she, Ron, and Harry had returned to the castle ruins after the battle. Harry and Ron definitely got the brunt of her rage, but she hadn’t gotten off easy either.

And from the way the girl easily brushed past the two older witches to reach her side, she knew that she was going to be in for it.

Hermione raised her hands as if they were enough to stop the girl from having a go at her. “Ginny. Before you do this, I can explain-.”

“Explain what Hermione Jean Granger?!” She hissed, completely cutting the girl off before she could continue. “Explain why I woke in the middle of the night to find you _missing_. How I looked everywhere for you and finding that you were no where to be found?” She took a step forward. “Or explain why when we found you, you were in the _forbidden forest_ of all places covered in bruises
and convulsing on the ground in pain!” She yelled.

“Miss Weasley! I must ask that you lower your voice! This is a place of healing, not the Quidditch pitch.” Madam Pomphrey scolded the ginger haired girl. Ginny at least had the decency to look sheepishly at the woman as she stepped forward to look over Hermione.

“I’m sorry Madam Pomphrey.” She said. “I think I’m just a little bit high strung right now.”

“Understandable dear, I assure you. I know it must be tough seeing your friend like this, but you still need to keep your manners. Besides,” She looked Hermione dead in her eyes. “With repeat offenders like Miss Granger here you learn that there is very little that can keep her and those two boys down for long.”

“Though they shouldn’t be in these situations in the first place,” McGonagall piped in from her place next to Ginny. “And yet every time I turn my back, another one of my lions find themselves in one of these blasted beds.”

Hermione laughed weakly. “I assure you headmistress that we don’t go looking for danger.”

“And yet it always seems to find you.” McGonagall’s face becomes stern as she approaches the bed. “Miss Granger, what on earth were you doing out in the forest last night? If it wasn’t for Miss Weasley, we never would’ve found you.”

“How did you find me Ginny?” Hermione asked.

“With this,” Hermione watches as the girl pulls out a familiar piece of parchment. “Harry gave it to me before he left. Said that I could put it to better use than he could working as an auror. I guess he was right. When I saw you were nowhere in the castle I immediately went and found the headmistress.”

“We searched the grounds for you and when we still couldn’t find you, we came to the forest. That’s when we ran into the centaur patrols. They said that some of the forest residents had been in an uproar about seeing someone running through the forest earlier.” McGonagall chimed in. “Now Miss Granger, if we’re quite through with changing the subject, I ask you again: what were you doing in the forbidden forest last evening?”

Hermione was at a loss.

On the one hand, she could continue to lie. She’d been doing it for years, and so far, no one had caught onto her rouse.

But then again, back then, she didn’t have a psychotic mate threatening to do Merlin knows what to her if she doesn’t get help. It was already hard growing up in Hogwarts as a muggleborn witch. If she was outed as a magical creature, even one as rare as the Cor-Echo sirens, it would be like her first year at school all over again. She didn’t want to get treated like Remus did.

As a teacher, no one ever talked about him to his face, but she heard the whispers. Heard the nasty rumors going on about the werewolf. How they taunted and sneered at the man, even though he was one of the most controlled werewolves she’d ever known. How he only found a good job because of Dumbledore’s pull in the affairs of the school. Even Tonks as a metamorphagi working in the ministry had to work twice as hard as the other normal witches and wizards because of her abilities.

She didn’t even want to think about what poor Teddy would be going through when he got older.

Even though she didn’t want to go through that, she also didn’t want to deal with Bellatrix alone.
The witch couldn’t be allowed to just roam around when she was supposed to be dead. She was a murderer, a monster, and the most dangerous woman she knew. And now knowing that she too was a siren made her all the more dangerous. Just the way her body had betrayed her when the other woman exerted her powers on her was enough to make her skin crawl. She wouldn’t be able to live under that woman’s hands again after their first meeting. Nor would she let anyone else suffer after finally living a life free of Voldemort and his death eaters.

She’d die before she’d let that happen.

But Hermione knew that death was the last thing that she wanted; now, or even any time in the near future.

And Bellatrix Lestrange brought death and destruction wherever she goes.

This wasn’t about Hermione’s wishes anymore. This was about innocent people being unaware of a danger thought to be long vanquished. One that had no problems with mowing down any man, woman, or child in her way. She couldn’t in good conscious let Bellatrix go free. Hermione didn’t want to admit it aloud, but spending so many years around Harry eventually lead to his savior complex rubbing off on her. He sacrificed so much to save the wizarding world; they all had. And while many of them could rest easy knowing that they were at peace for now, that peace would be ruined if she let Bellatrix go as she hid from her in order to preserve her own secrets.

So she didn’t.

Hermione looked up into the eyes of the three woman surrounding her bed and sighed. This was a conversation she was hoping to never have, or at least not this soon in her life.

“Headmistress, if you would be so kind, I would like for you to make sure that no one can overhear this conversation.” She said.

“Of course Miss Granger.” The elderly witch whipped out her wand and began warding the area in order to give them some privacy. “It is done. Please, continue.”

Hermione shifted nervously on the bed. Twirling her hand through some of her curls; a habit she hadn’t done since she was a little girl. “There’s no easy way to say this, but…I’m not a normal muggleborn witch. I’m also a magical creature. A siren.”

“What! Are you kidding me?” Ginny yelled, her eyes wide from her best friends’ admission. “How did that happen?”

“It didn’t just happen, Ginny,” Hermione laughed weakly. “I was born a siren. Though I didn’t quite know until I was six when I had an accident while playing with my parents.”

“What the hell Hermione! I think that’s something you should tell your friends at least!” Ginny pouted, no doubt upset of having been lied to for so long.

Hermione knew that the girl had every right to be upset with her for hiding this. She and Ginny had grown close over the years. They told each other secrets all the time; secrets that she hadn’t even told Harry and Ron. Though its only been more recently, Ginny was there for her when Ron and Harry weren’t. Don’t get her wrong; she still trusted Ron and Harry with her life, but at this current point and time in her life, it was Ginny- and occasionally Luna and Neville- who she turned to for help. She trusted the Ginny a great deal, which she hoped she was able to convey to the girl by allowing her to stay as she told her secret to Madam Pomphrey and Professor McGonagall.

Speaking of the other two witches, neither one of them seemed the least bit fazed by her
announcement. Which only meant one thing...

“I’m guessing that from your lack of reaction, that you two have already known.” She said.

“Of course dear. Did you really think you could hide that from me of all people,” Madam Pomphrey said. “It showed up on your records during your first examination when you enrolled as a first year. As a professional medi-witch, all personal records remain private between me and my patients.”

That made sense, now that she thought about it. Madam Pomphrey had everyone’s medical records and so she more than likely knew exactly what each of her patients were genetically in order to properly treat them in times of need. Hermione turned to McGonagall next.

“Honestly child, do you believe I wouldn’t have found out about your nightly excursions? Many students have walked through Hogwarts doors as more than just witches and wizards. And it was the duty of the heads of houses to ensure that the needs of our students were adequately met. Though I do have to wonder how you were sneaking out all those times.” She said, her tone hinting that she actually wanted an answer for that.

“I had help. From one of the ghosts who inhabit the castle. The Grey lady.” She said.

“The Grey Lady?”

“Yes. I ran into her one night as a first year. I was feeling stressed from being away from my parents for the first time. She caught me in the halls and offered to help me. We talked. She saw how bright I was and told me how honored she would’ve been to have me in her house. She wanted to help me out after that and suggested somewhere I could go to be alone.” She shifted her body to sit a bit straighter. “As it would turn out, it was one of the abandoned classrooms near the dungeons. I found a secret entrance behind a bookcase while exploring. That’s how I escaped the castle when I needed to sing.”

McGonagall nodded, throwing Ginny a sharp look when the girl mentioned how cool Hermione was for being able to sneak out right under the professor’s nose. “Well that explains one mystery. As for how I knew; a student leaving the castle past curfew will trip the wards and notify either me or the headmaster. I followed you the first time and discovered your status as a siren.”

“So why didn’t you stop me?” Hermione asked.

“Because it’s my job to ensure the needs of all my students met; whether they are normal witches and wizards or ones that have a creature inheritance. As you well know, there are those who can be born as werewolves and vampires naturally; not just by turning.” She walked closer to the bed and took a seat near the girl’s feet. “They are provided with wolfs bane, and blood substitutes, and glamours to ensure their private affairs are kept away from others who would do them harm. While sirens are not nearly as common as other magical creatures, I was aware of how irritable sirens can become when they’ve gone to long without singing. While I’m on the subject; I would like to congratulate you on utilizing the environment of the lake to keep your secret.”

“Thank you Professor McGonagall.” Hermione smiled.

“Though I wish you would have simply told me, rather than leaving the castle at night. One of the most dangerous things you can do at this school, might I add.” She continued.

“…sorry Professor McGonagall.” Hermione said, her smile becoming more sheepish as she realized how foolish she had been in her youth.

“It’s quite alright child. The fact of the matter is that I did know. Which is why I knew that the lake
was no place for a child. Not alone at least. I asked the centaurs to protect you and follow you there each night. As you grew older and more skilled at defending yourself magically, I had them give you space as you no doubt grew stronger in your inheritance. You fought along students and adults alike in the battle and came out of it relatively unscathed. I used that word loosely.” She said, looking at her student over her glasses. “I believed you to be capable of dealing with venturing out alone now.” She grimaced. “But I see that I may have been too hasty in my decision.”

Hermione shook her head. “You weren’t. I was never bothered when I was down by the lake. Occasionally I would be met by the mermaids in the lake, but those times were rare. I didn’t need to sing as much as a child. Maybe once a week at most or when I was stressed. I didn’t even know I was being followed.”

She had wondered why she had never run into danger in the forest, but now it all made sense. Hermione was a bit embarrassed that she wasn’t being as sneaky as she thought she was, but it was good to know that her secret was still kept within a trustworthy group of people. As much as she wanted to have told Ron and Harry, she knew that it would never have been kept by them.

Ron was a talker.

He loved to get carried away into conversations, especially in arguments. If he knew, then it would slip out in a fit of rage, even if the ginger haired boy didn’t mean it to.

No, telling Ron wouldn’t have been the best thing to do.

And Harry?

Harry could’ve kept it.

The boy knew what it was like to have secrets that you couldn’t tell to anyone; even those closest to them. Many times she had to find out things about Harry from Ron when the boy caught him during one of his nightmares or his visions.

And those visions were exactly why she hadn’t told Harry either.

Voldemort had been in his mind more times than he could count. Rifling through his memories and tormenting the one place he thought he was safe. Harry often told them of how he was able to take his memories and use them against him.

That was how Sirius died.

If Voldemort had seen the memory of her secret, he would’ve used it against Harry and could’ve gotten both of them killed. Therefore, just like with Ron, her creature status would get out unintentionally and do more harm than good.

That’s why she kept from telling them.

Now with the war over and her being almost out of school, it was better that such responsible people were the ones to know. Though now she was wondering just how many people really knew about her.

“Well that was the point, child,” McGonagall said, breaking her from her thoughts. “We wanted you to believe you were unseen so that you didn’t try even riskier things to try and hide yourself away. Which brings us back to why you were seen sprinting through the forbidden forest when you have always stayed near the lake.”
Hermione’s hands had unconsciously came to rest upon her sore throat. “Someone saw me. Another siren like me.” She whispered.

“Another siren? That’s who did this to you?” Ginny said, gesturing at the girl’s neck and face. Hermione nodded.

“Merlin, Hermione what did you do to piss them off enough to do this!” She asked.

A scowl broke out across the older girl’s face.

“She attacked me first!” Hermione hissed. “She’d been watching me for weeks now while I was at the lake. One night she sang back to me and nearly lured me away. These past few days had been the worst!” Hermione knew she was beginning to work herself up, but she found that she didn’t care. “She’s stronger than me. She knew how to sing to me without anyone else hearing her.”

“That’s why you asked me that night if I could hear the singing.” Ginny gasped.

Hermione nodded. “She was singing to me. Saying horrible things to me. Trying to get me back to the lake after I had escaped her twice before. Last night I thought she had given up. So I was going to go and visit Hagrid.” She left out the part about Luna; leaving that for the next time she saw the girl in person. “He seemed to be asleep and so I was going to head back to the castle when I heard a child calling out for help. That’s why I took off into the forest in the first place.” She shook her head, bowing her head in shame. “I should’ve known it was a trap.”

“What I am failing to see Miss Granger, is what another siren would want from you that would make them go to such lengths as this to get you to return to them.” Madam Pomphrey said, passing the girl a glass of water when she saw how frazzled Hermione was becoming.

She paused. This was the part she was dreading. But instead of stalling any longer, she just came out with it.

“It’s because…it’s because I’m her mate.” She finally admitted.

“Your mate!?” Ginny gasped, covering her mouth with her hands. She honestly didn’t know which part of the admission shocked her more; the fact that her mate was a female, or the fact that it was her mate who had put her in the infirmary in the first place.

“Miss Granger, if what you say is true, then this woman couldn’t possibly be your mate.” McGonagall said, resting a reassuring hand on the girl’s blanket covered calf. “Never in all my years of teaching here at Hogwarts have I seen a mate attack their other half as viciously as this.”

Hermione shook her head.

“She did. This was all her work, though running through the forest and smacking into every branch in my path didn’t help either. I assure you headmistress; if I could somehow prove that we’re not mates, I would. But we are.” She said as she met the older witches’ eyes.

“Are you sure, dear?” Madam Pomphrey asked.

“She gave me all the proof I needed. She…she used her voice on me.” Hermione said, her voice beginning to shake. “I was fighting her. She was on top of me and I was trying to get her off. And she got mad. Then she did it. All she said was ‘enough’, and I…I…” She couldn’t fight the tears any longer.
The three women panicked, not used to seeing the usually strong and fearless lion so distraught. Ginny came to rest at Hermione’s side, pulling her close as she broke down.

“Miss Granger, I need to know what happened.” McGonagall told her softly.

“I… I froze. Not figuratively either. My body wouldn’t move. All I could do was lie there paralyzed as she was on top of me with that disgusting expression on her face!” She screamed, her emotions getting the better of her.

Hermione knew immediately after screaming that her siren side must have come out because, not only did the three women flinch away from her, she saw several heads in the nearby beds turn their way even though the wards were firmly still intact. She had slipped up again, something she was finding she did more and more the further this whole situation progressed. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to do that. It’s just… one word. One word was all it took and she had complete control over me. My body wasn’t my own in that moment. It was hers. She could’ve done anything she wanted to do to me… again.” She trailed off.

Although she said it quietly enough that Madam Pomphrey and the headmistress hadn’t heard the last word, Ginny did.

Again.

Hermione said that she had escaped from the other siren twice before; so it was only now on the third time that they had actually met face to face. Therefore, she couldn’t have had done this to Hermione already in order for this to be the second time.

And then Ginny saw it.

A tiny little movement out of the corner of her eye.

Hermione was scratching at her mudblood scar; something she had only seen the girl do when she had awoken from a nightmare about the one who had gave it to her in the first place.

She prayed her suspicions weren’t correct.

“Hermione,” She whispered. “You know who did this to you don’t you.”

At first she thought she imagined the nod, but the others had saw it as well.

“We need a name Miss Granger. Tell us who did this.” The medi-witch demanded.

Hermione shook her head. A whimper escaped her lips.

“Miss Granger, this is extremely important. We need to know who did this so-.”

“It’s alright headmistress; I know who did this now.” Ginny said with a blank face.

“Miss Weasley?” McGonagall inquired.

“There’s only one other person I know who has done this to Hermione before. Only one person whose capable of harming their own mate without a shred of remorse.” She looked McGonagall dead in the eye and hissed the name with as much venom as she could muster. “Bellatrix Lestrange.”

“Impossible! We saw her die; your own mother confirmed it.” Madam Pomphrey said.

“No, I was there, right next to my mother. I saw what happened and…” She took a shuddery breath.
“I don’t think we did kill her. When my mother cast her spell, another spell had gone wayward and collapsed the ceiling. We assumed the boulders took her out and we returned to the battle. She could’ve survived somehow.” She explained.

“Miss Granger, is this true? Is Lestrange really still alive?” McGonagall asked the silently crying girl.

There was silence and then. “Yes.”

McGonagall shot up from the bed.

“Poppy, go and alert the aurors. Tell them it’s a matter of life and death.” The medi-witch broke into a sprint to the nearest fireplace to contact the ministry. “Miss Weasley, you stay with Miss Granger while I go and speak to the authorities. Make sure that she stays put.” She addressed Hermione. “I shall keep your siren status out of this for now, but they will need to know about Lestrange.”

“Professor,” Hermione whispered brokenly. “She told me she had plans. She said that there was no where I could hide where she couldn’t find me.” She peered up at the woman with tear soaked eyes. “Please…please don’t let her take me.” She begged.

“I won’t Miss Granger. She’ll have to go through me first.” She told the girl, head held high in the air like the proud big cat her house was known for. “She will come for you. Of this I’m sure if I know Lestrange as well as I think I do. She will fight, and claw, and scream her way into this castle and she will fail at every entrance. Of this I promise you.” She swore.

Hermione gave her a weak smile. “Thank you professor.” She said sincerely.

“Always, sweet child.” The elder woman said. And with that, Hermione and Ginny watched the woman twirl on the spot and begin marching with purpose towards her office to no doubt speak with the aurors about what had occurred.

When the clicking of the woman’s heels could no longer be heard, Ginny looked down at the girl in her arms and ran a hand through the tangled mess that was her hair. It did wonders to calm Hermione’s frazzled nerves, but she was still feeling raw and open from spilling her secret to three people and having to recall her encounter with the dark witch in the forest. McGonagall’s promise to protect her made her feel immensely better however.

She was a brave woman; or at least Hermione thought she was. Her armor was tough from years of harassment for being the school know it all and a muggleborn witch in a prejudice society. She could spar with the best of them both mentally and magically, but…

The war weakened that armor she had spent years building more than she wanted to admit.

Her obliterated parents; off living Merlin knows where. If they were still alive.

Her deceased friends and fellow classmates cut down before their time.

Her torture at the hands of a mad woman that left her branded and humiliated.

The sleepless nights, the haunting nightmares…

Ron and Harry…

All of it took shots at her armor and it was beginning to quickly break down. And with the situation now, she was drawing closer and closer to the edge of that breaking point.
But then she looked up at Ginny’s worried expression.

Remembered the looks on the headmistress and Madam Pomphrey’s faces and reminded herself that she had to keep herself together.

Stay strong not only for herself, but for them as well. Her friends and mentors who knew that she was capable of getting through this. Hermione needed to believe that Bellatrix would be caught before she got her hands on her.

Otherwise…well she didn’t want to think about that right now.

Exhaustion crept up on Hermione quicker than she expected and she found that she was leaning heavily on her friend as it made itself known. Instead of removing the girl from her shoulder, Ginny swung her legs up onto the bed and made herself comfortable; one hand still running through Hermione’s tresses as the other laid across her lap.

“Oh Hermione. Why is it always you?” She heard the girl whisper.

Hermione didn’t have an answer for that.

A part of her believed that she had was being punished from something she did in a past lifetime.

Another part believed she was simply an unlucky soul who drew the short straw somewhere down the line.

Only a tiny part believed it was fate.

She didn’t’ really have a solid answer.

What she did know was that if this was the life she was destined to live, then as long as her mate continued to walk free, it would not be a life worth living.

She hoped tomorrow would bring her better luck than today.
Chapter 7 - The Aurors

By the next day, the entirety of Hogwarts knew about what was happening.

Or at least that something was happening.

Aurors showed up in large groups and began spreading out across the castle grounds. Students and staff alike watched as they scoured around the lake and the forbidden forest in search of...well no one really knew that either, but whatever it was, it was clear that the situation was dire. They never stated the exact reason they were here, only that the castle grounds were no longer safe and that all students were told to stay indoors until told otherwise.

McGonagall kept going back and forth between visiting Hermione in the infirmary and finding a solution to their problem with Bellatrix. She had seen the woman and several other professors strengthening the wards faster than what they had originally been doing since they now had the help of the ministry. Hermione thought it was a noble effort, but she knew from years of exploring Hogwarts that they couldn’t seal and ward every single secret entrance to the castle. She was quite sure that there were entrances that even the Marauders hadn’t discovered.

When she wasn’t going back and forth between her office and the castle grounds, McGonagall came to visit Hermione in the hospital. The girl woke several times between her visits, creating small talk and letting the elder witch know that she was alright. Her body was still in a great amount of pain, but between the potions Madam Pomfrey shoved down her throat every couple of hours, and Ginny’s constant nursing, she was healing up quite nicely. By tonight, she would be mostly healed and cleared to go back to her dorm and sleep in her own bed.

Though Hermione hated the whole situation that led to her being in the hospital bed, she couldn’t help but feel relaxed with being left relatively alone.

Everything was going fine in fact, until things took a turn again.

On this particular day, Ginny had left her side in order to go check on things back in Gryffindor tower. Hermione was both exasperated and amused with how many questions the girl had asked throughout her visits about being a siren.
'What does your voice sound like when you sing?'

'Have you ever seduced someone?'

'Is it like a mermaid’s voice? Like when Harry brought that egg in from the tournament?'

'Can I hear you sing sometime? Could you make a song for me! That would be wicked. It could be a ballad about my amazing Quidditch skills. We could sing it during my matches!'

She laughed at that last one seeing as the chances of her singing in front of that many people were slim to none.

The questions kept coming after that and Hermione did her best to answer them with the best of her abilities.

After all, Ginny was taking her status as a siren a lot easier than Hermione was expecting her to.

She knew that the girl wouldn’t have minded it anyways with the way Molly raised her children, but that still didn’t keep her from having doubts. Then again, Hermione didn’t know a single Weasley who had a cruel bone in their body.

Hot headedness?

Absolutely.

But cruelty?

Never.

As she kept talking to her, Hermione thought that she would grow tired of Ginny’s rapid fire questions, but in all actuality, she was relieved. Hermione thought that she was completely fine with keeping her secret all to herself. It’s not like she knew any sirens to share like experiences with anyways. However, when Ginny showed such genuine interest in her, she found that it made the siren within her keen in happiness. It was almost like a boulder had been lifted off her shoulder from having someone who she could talk to so openly.

It was an overall good day if she did say so herself, but she knew it would eventually have to come to an end.

Hermione had just finished one of her healing potions and was reclining in the bed with a book in hand courtesy of her favorite red headed roommate. She had been truly getting into the story when she heard the heavy doors of the infirmary creak open. At first she assumed that it was the medi-witch returning to check on the other patients and so she didn’t lift her head to greet the woman she had been talking to all morning.

But then the chair next to her scrapped against the stone floor and a figure sat down next to her bed. A large bouquet of flowers was thrust in front of her face. Bright, yellow sunflowers wrapped with a blue and bronze ribbon. She glanced up to see who was her visitor. Brown eyes met silvery-blue and as much as she wanted to be happy at the appearance of one Luna Lovegood, a scowl was all she could manage at the sight of the other girl. Luna noticed the expression and brought the flowers back to her chest. A sad smile pulled across her face.

“You’re angry.” She said; her voice was as wispy as usual, but Hermione could hear a hint of guilt beneath her tone.
“I am.” She stated blandly. “Did you know?” Hermione asked her, slamming her book close as she fought to keep her anger in check.

“No…and yes…I knew she would be there, but I didn’t know who she was or what she would do to you.” Luna replied.

“Luna, I need you to be honest with me; what the hell is going on here? Did you know about me being a siren this whole time?” The Gryffindor whispered desperately.

Luna shook her head. “I don’t really know how to answer that Hermione. I knew you were a siren. I’ve always known. But I can’t tell you what’s going on because I don’t really know that either.”

Hermione was so lost. It hurt and confused her that Luna would suggest she go out there last night, especially when she didn’t even know what was going to happen if she did.

But more than that; she wanted to know how she knew these things anyways. Something about the girl never sat right with her, but after all of the years she’s known Luna, there were two things she was sure of.

One, Luna wasn’t a bad person. If she said that she didn’t know about Bellatrix; then she didn’t. She was a sweet, if a bit weird, girl who would never hurt a fly.

And two, if Luna said something that sounded like a warning or even something that was completely out of the blue, then it was just best to listen to her. They learned that bit during the war. Sometimes Hermione wondered if she was a seer. The way she acted was reminiscent of Professor Trelawney, but was completely different. Trelawney always went into a random trance when she had a vision. She didn’t act like her normal self at all.

Luna on the other hand had no trances at all.

The things she said were mixed in with her every day speech and if it had anything to do with her personality, it was impossible to tell the difference. It was easy to notice a seer when they had a vision, so Luna couldn’t possibly be one.

Though the question of how she knew about certain things was still left out on the table.

Her head was beginning to hurt.

“Hermione,” Luna chimed at her. She looked over at the girl. “I’m sorry about this. I wish I knew about what was going to happen but…well…it’s a bit complicated. I will tell you someday why this is so, but unfortunately, that won’t be for quite some time.”

Hermione was puzzled. “Why not? Why can’t you tell me now?”

“Because it won’t make sense if I did. And do you more harm than good. I’m sorry, but you just have to trust me.” She smiled sadly.

“I do Luna. Really I do. But after last night? I just don’t know anymore. Things have gotten so crazy over these last weeks.” She ran a hand through her curls. “It’s been a bloody nightmare. And I have this strange feeling it’s only going to get worse.” Hermione told the girl lowly. Luna nodded and then rose to transfigure the empty glass on the table next to her bed into a vase for the flowers.

“Oh yes, you’ve gotten yourself into quite a mess right now,” She noted. “Which is also why I came here.” The switch from cheer to nervousness made Hermione sit up a bit straighter.
“I came to warn you that they won’t find her. Your mate that is. She’s gone.” The Ravenclaw said with the most serious face Hermione had seen the girl use yet.

“I know.”

“And she’s going to come back. For you.” She continued.

“I know.”

“And…she’s going to get you.” She finished.

“…I know.” Hermione said even softer, her voice littler more than a gasp.

The things Luna was saying wasn’t surprising in the least. Bellatrix was coming back for her. And even if she wanted to believe she was safe, she knew that she was doomed. The woman had too many reasons to come after her. And with Voldemort gone, there was no one giving the woman orders or a purpose in life. She was literally a loose cannon. At least under Voldemort, the woman was given orders and structure. Now? Her plans were known by no one but herself. It was a truly scary thought. She hoped that the castle would be enough to keep her away, but she knew it was wishful thinking.

Hermione wanted to cry again, but she reframed knowing that doing so would do her no good. Instead, she slumped down in her hospital bed. She took the paperback book she had been clutching, opened it, and stuck her face between the pages. Hermione took a deep inhale of its pages and she immediately felt her nerves settle. It was a strange habit she knew, but the smell of an old book was one of the few things she could do aside from singing that could calm her. Feeling slightly better, Hermione looked back over at her friend, but when something caught her attention out of the corner of her eye, she looked down at the girl’s clothing.

And immediately broke into a fit of giggles.

“Luna, what in Merlin’s name are you wearing!” She said, barely able to keep her laughter from echoing throughout the room.

“I saw this in Hogsmeade on sale. Neville bought it for me! Do you like it?” Luna asked; completely overjoyed with the girl’s reaction to seeing her wardrobe. She stood up and twirled to show off her attire.

Said attire was something Hermione could only imagine the late professor Dumbledore wearing.

Blond hair was pulled into two low ponytails on either side of the girl’s face; both held together with ribbons with little pumpkins on the ends. She noted that they were animated to swing back and forth and change expressions periodically. There were also matching earrings. The skirt she wore was a plain black color, but Hermione noted that Luna was wearing knee high, orange and red stockings with little lights twinkling all around them. Her shoes were black as well with tuffs of yellow fur around the tops. She was also wearing the brightest yellow, red, and orange wool sweater she had ever seen.

But that’s not what had Hermione in tears of laughter.

There was also a turkey in a witches’ hat and a cane dancing across the entirety of the sweater. Hermione watched as it circled clockwise around to the back and out of sight, only to reappear on the opposite side; a new dance each time it made a circuit. It was such a strange sight, but at the same time, it was such a Luna thing to wear that it was really hard to take the girl seriously when she came bearing such horrible news. Hermione knew that if she hadn’t been focusing solely on the girl’s face
earlier, that it might’ve been hard to concentrate on the situation at hand.

“It’s wonderful Luna. A bit…loud, but it suits you very well. I’m glad that Neville bought it for you.” Hermione complimented. Luna smiled and did a twirl again as she began showing off her clothing even more and Hermione could only lay there and smile at her antics.

The two spent the next half hour just talking about casual things when the doors of the infirmary were opened once more. The headmistress was gliding across the floor with a sense of both anxiousness and worry as she approached the two of them at the opposite end of the room. Hermione sat up straighter as she stopped at their side; her face a grim frown.

“Let me guess’ she’s nowhere to be found.” Hermione stated. McGonagall nodded and sighed deeply.

“Nothing, not even a trace of her magical signature. Though I can’t say it’s a surprise. That woman has always been able to disappear at the drop of a knut.” She said. “The aurors are still sweeping the forest but I don’t really expect them to find much.”

Hermione was done with being surprised that Bellatrix couldn’t be found. She would turn up again.

“Worry not, Miss Granger, I have found a rather temporary solution for our problem that I’m hoping to speak to you about.” She said.

That got Hermione’s attention.

“Really?” She gasped in excitement.

The older witch nodded.

“Yes, I believe that it will work out. At least until Lestrange has been found.” McGonagall smiled.

“Well what is it?” Hermione asked.

McGonagall took a seat next to the bed ad began rattling off her plan.

When she was finished, Luna and Hermione looked at each other with joy on their faces.

Things were definitely looking up now; this was going to work out just fine.

Or at least they hoped it did; for their sake and Hermione’s.

Far away from the castle, in a place uncharted on any map, Bellatrix Lestrange was making plans.

She had made her escape long before the aurors could even notice she was there. The witch still couldn’t believe the mudblood had gotten her so cross that she made a mistake and fell the tree knowing that it would no doubt attract attention. The thought of that brat getting her so worked up to that point was enough to drive her mad.

The fact that she wasn’t all there as is was remained irrelevant.

But that was fine.

Their last meeting would be the final one where she would be letting the girl go free.

Her magic was sufficient now and so apparating to one of her many hideouts was a breeze once she was far enough away from the wards of the Hogwarts grounds.
This particular hideout that she found herself in was large, but fairly old. There was no one still living who knew of its location seeing as her lord was the last one to ever enter its gates.

The moment she walked through the front doors, she was greeted by the two-house elves who were left in charge. She brushed past them, not even caring she knocked one of them over on her way to her old bedroom. Up the stairs and down the halls, she walked with purpose; a laugh threatening to spill from her lips as the plan swirling through her mind took root.

Bellatrix burst into her bedroom with a crash and barely recognized the place.

Everything was in ruins.

Books laid scattered across the floors; pages and binders ripped to shreds like an animal had come through and trashed the place. The four foster bed was broken into pieces with the pillows de-fluffed of their expensive feathers. Her wardrobe was overturned and her dresses and other clothes spilled out in piles and piles of black fabric.

It wasn’t like she wore any other color anyhow.

Bellatrix’s room was both dark and cold; and if that wasn’t bad enough, the smell coming from the room was almost unbearable. She had smelled worse. The room hadn’t been used much in her youth anyways. It served as both a hideaway when she wanted to escape her parents and also as a prison. Just not for her.

And not by her doing either.

At the back of the room was a door, a door that she never could open as a child no matter how hard she tried. Her mother made sure of that. It was so heavily warded that she at one point feared that it could never be opened again.

But then her lord came and oh the spells he had taught her.

Bellatrix whipped out her wand and spelled the wardrobe to the side so she could reach the door hidden behind it. Long nails traced along the wall in a rare moment of fondness. There was nothing there except a small scorch mark in the form of a wing in the place where the doorknob would’ve been. She remembered the night she did it. Right after her mother had gone, she pulled her wand out and burned the mahogany walls as fast as she could; placing the wardrobe in its place to cover up what she did. It wasn’t out of anger at her mother that she did this.

No, she did something far worse to express how…displeased she had been with her.

The mark was to remember.

Remember that the door was there and that what lied inside was very much real.

Because Bellatrix was no fool. She’d heard it all before from the papers, her fellow inmates at Azkaban, and even her own family.

Bellatrix was unstable.

Bellatrix was insane.

Bellatrix was a monster.

And they were right.
She was all those things and more. She had to be if she was ever to rule at her lord’s side. Bellatrix knew that she wasn’t all there, nor that her mind was always sound. She was not immune to forgetfulness. This was something she knew even as a child; hence the mark on the wall. It wasn’t something she did often to remember something; only for things she deemed important.

And what lied behind that door proved to be immensely important now that she had plans for a special little mudblood with frizzy hair.

She smirked and took a step back, wand at the ready.

The next few minutes was full of high pitched laughs and the loud shaking of her house as she ripped through the wards like paper. The high she got for getting one up over her deceased mother was enough to send her into a fit of insane giggles and dark mutterings at her achievement. Hearing the terrified whimpers of the two house elves standing by at the door only made her all the more giddy.

It didn’t take long for the wards to break. She sneered at how weak they truly were. If Hogwarts had wards as flimsy as these, then she could’ve apparated out of there with her prize with ease.

That was in the past now.

Aurors surrounded the castle; no doubt working overtime to rebuild the wards to keep her away from their precious little children. A smart move on their part, but it wouldn’t be enough.

When the wards fell, her mark melted away into the wood as the door began to emerge. It was heavy and ornate as it practically oozed with dark magic.

The familiarity made her skin crawl in an absolutely delicious way.

She opened the door.

Darkness filled the chamber and the smell of decay and a heavy musk was all she could detect coming from within.

“Lumos.” She purred, holding her wand out in front of her to light the way.

The room was an empty, silent place; one that she had only got a glimpse of as her mother sealed it away forever. There was one thing in the room however, sitting there at the very back corner of the room. The sharp clicks of her boots echoed loudly on the old wooden floors as she strode towards her goal. She stopped when she was a few feet away from it.

The ‘it’ being a large black and silver cage, sitting on a pedestal of gleaming marble. Despite the ages doing nothing to spare the surrounding room of rot and decay; the cage stayed as pristine and luxurious as when she first bought it as a teenager. She approached it slowly, almost as if moving too fast would cause it to disappear like a forgotten memory.

Bellatrix ran her painted nails on the outside of the cage, pinging off each slim bar to create a beautiful chiming sound. It was a test to see if she was wasting her time or not.

When nothing happened, she did it again, this time with the tip of her wand; her Lumos spell highlighting the creature within as it swept over its prison.

This time there was a stirring. It was so small that she nearly didn’t hear it had it not been for the unnatural silence of the room. Bellatrix leaned in and whispered to the sole occupant-
“I have returned to you, my oldest friend. It is time to serve me once more. Brace yourself as I free you from your prison.”

From the light of her wand, Bellatrix watched as the creature within slowly shifted its large body and tucked itself into a ball. Once the movement ceased, the witch shot her *Lumos* into the air in order to cast another spell.

“*Desolati!*” She hissed, pushing the tip of her now fire red wand against the bars of the cage. Sparks flew every which way, though Bellatrix didn’t flinch even once. Inside the cage, the creature remained still as the burning hot sparks bounced harmlessly off of its body.

The front of the cage melted into a puddle of molten metal at her feet. When the entirety of the front was gone, she ceased her spell, prompting the creature to unfurl itself; stretching its cramped body beyond the bounds of its prison for the first time in years. Fearlessly, Bellatrix reached the arm not holding her wand out into the melted enclosure to beckon the creature closer.

Two long, taloned feet latched onto the arm, digging in so it wouldn’t fall off of its new perch. Bellatrix’s arm only struggled a bit at lifting it higher from its cage, unused to its weight now that her familiar was fully grown. Bellatrix lifted her opposite hand and ran it down the creature’s grey chest as she observed the subtle changes in her familiar’s physique.

A sharp beak came to nip gently at the hand running down its chest; glowing yellow eyes sunken into a black abyss stared at her with an intelligence that she knew matched her own. It shook its horned head at her in greeting; the black crest of fur atop it’s skull moved with it and flared out in a beautiful, proud display.

Bellatrix gave her familiar a nasty grin as she turned back towards her bedroom.

“Welcome back. I have a job for you, my sweet. A very important one. Are you up for it?” She practically cooed at the beast.

A low croaking sound was her response.

“Good. Too long we’ve been locked away my friend. Our lord is gone but this is not where we end; locked away in a prison as these muggle lovers and blood traitors still breathe.” She raised her arm and watched her familiar spread its dark wings to stabilize itself. “We will turn this world on its head. And if we are to fall, we go down in a blaze of glory like our lord would’ve wanted.”

This time, the low croak grew into a piercing screech that echoed throughout the mansion.

Bellatrix laughed and screeched along; her siren side slipping in to blend with that of her familiar and created a melody of chaos that the world would tremble to hear when the time came.

And that time would not be far off if Bellatrix had her way.

But first, she needed to take a trip to Knockturn alley…

Unaware of Bellatrix’s plans happening in a place far away from them, Hermione and McGonagall—accompanied by Ginny, Neville, and Luna—were making their way to the room of requirement. When the Headmistress mentioned the room as a safe place to use her siren abilities, Hermione almost slammed her head against the wall.

Sure, they hadn’t discovered the room until their fifth year, but even then, she didn’t think to ask the room for somewhere she could sing. It was mostly because they were always using the room for DA meetings, but also with Harry constantly checking the map—even at odd hours of the night— it would
raise too many questions to see her sneaking to the seventh floor and suddenly disappearing. Now that he and Ron were gone, the DA was disbanded, and Ginny had control of the Marauder’s Map; there was very little to worry about. Professor McGonagall even put a restriction on the seventh floor similar to the third floor in their first year at Hogwarts to keep away curious students.

The aurors patrolling the school would only make the remaining students even more wary of trying to enter the room of requirement in the belief that whatever was happening had something to do with the seventh floor.

By far, it was a better cover than her one at the lake where she was out in the open.

And the whole reason she was in this predicament in the first place.

With the room of requirement, only someone who knew exactly what Hermione had specifically asked for would be able to find her; and all who would know were right there beside her.

She felt far more sure about this plan than trying to reframe from singing at all. She hated how irritable she became from trying to resist the urge; she didn’t want to think about how she’d be if she couldn’t do it at all.

The thought alone made her shudder in fear.

The seventh floor, when they reached it, was just as ruined as the rest of the castle, though not nearly as much as the lower areas. It was one of the areas that they had yet to work on seeing as they hardly held classes up there anyways. The five of them had no trouble maneuvering around the rubble and reaching the tapestry of Barnasbus, the Barmy. It had definitely seen better days.

The fire from destroying the horcrux hitting it didn’t help its appearance in the least either.

McGonagall moved the tapestry from the wall and beckoned Hermione to step forward.

“Now Miss Granger, please state what you need. Only the four of us will know where to find you if we require you or are in need of locating you within the castle.” The older witch stated, her wand held loosely between her fingertips.

Hermione nodded and paced in front of the door three times. On the third pass, she stood before the door and in a clear voice, told it what she needed.

“I need a place to sing where Bellatrix can’t find me.” She said.

The door appeared before them slowly and then swung open to reveal what Hermione had asked of it. She gasped when she took a step inside.

The ceiling was turned into a night sky, even though it was still the middle of the day. Stars twinkled brightly above her as clouds swirled through the air to hide them from her sight. Around her was a clearing with thick trees that encircled the area and trailed off into darkness. At the center of the small clearing was a koi pond that was filled with several of the brightly colored fish jumping up and down in the water, displacing the lily pads that floated on the water’s surface. Square stones and tall grass surrounded the pond and to the far right of the pond sat a large boulder similar to the one she often sat on down by the lake. All of it was brightly lit by the false moon that hung directly above the pond.

Even the atmosphere was familiar. Hearing the wind rustle the trees and feeling it roll across her skin as a gentle caress reminded her greatly of some of her better nights. The ones before the nightmares and sleepless nights.
Before Bellatrix.

The room reminded her so much of the lake-despite its much smaller size- that she felt all the stress of the past weeks melt away in an instant.

It was *perfect*.

“Whoa! This is pretty sweet Hermione!” Ginny gasped excitedly as she moved further into the room.

“Yeah, this looks great.” Neville said, sending a small smile in the girl’s direction.

Hermione was glad that Neville didn’t flip out about her being a siren like she thought he would. Growing up with the boy, she knew that he had skittish tendencies, even when he was trying to be brave. However, not long after Luna and McGonagall came to tell her about the plans for the room of requirement, Neville found out from Ginny about her being in the infirmary and came running.

The hug she received when he charged towards her bed at the end of the room was one of the warmest she had been given in a while; right after Hagrid’s that is.

Knowing that Neville was one of the few people she could trust no matter what, she explained everything that happened.

She had never seen someone cycle through so many emotions in one conversation.

Surprise at hearing she had been a siren all of this time.

Anger that she had been attacked by her own mate; the one who sent her to the infirmary in the first place.

And finally, absolute *rage* at hearing it was Bellatrix, followed by immediate fear when she told him the part where Bellatrix was nowhere to be found.

Neville was all over the place emotionally, but at the end of it, he swept the girl up in another hug and reassured her that everything would be alright and that her being a siren didn’t change anything between them. A quiet keen escaped her throat at that moment, causing her to blush madly and advert her eyes knowing that he more than likely heard that loud and clear.

It was at times like these that she was glad to have such a solid group of friends to support her.

“Hermione? Yoo-hoo? Earth to Hermione!” She heard Ginny call, breaking her from her thoughts.

“Huh? Sorry, I was a bit sidetracked.” She said sheepishly. The red head laughed before walking over and climbing on top of one of the boulders.

“When aren’t you?” She laughed. “*But,* now that you’ve come back to us, I want to hear it!”

Hermione frowned in confusion. “Hear what exactly?”

“You sing, of course! You promised you’d sing me a song when we were in the infirmary.” The younger girl explained.

“I don’t think I made a promise about that Ginny.” She laughed, knowing the girl wouldn’t care whether she did or not. She was just stubborn like that.

“Maybe you didn’t say it like that, but you totally promised. Besides, what better way to test the room than like this?” She asked, making herself even more comfortable on the large rock.
“You know she’s right Hermione,” Luna chimed in, thanking Neville as he helped her up onto the boulder to sit next to Ginny. “I would very much like to hear you sing as well.”

“Me too!” Neville added.

Hermione turned to the headmistress. The woman snapped her fingers twice and a scrawny, but well-dressed house elf popped into the room.

“How can Mumpty be helping the Headmistress today?” The little creature asked. Hermione, while still not okay with the idea of owning house elves was slightly placated at how healthy and enthusiastic Mumpty appeared to be; despite being a servant.

“Mumpty, I need you to keep everything you’ve seen or heard in this room an utmost secret from everyone that isn’t already present. Do I make myself clear?” She sternly told the wide-eyed elf.

“Oh yes! Yes, Headmistress! Mumpty take it to his grave. He swears it on his magic! Mumpty will die before telling anyone’s!” The overzealous creature promised.

“There’s no need to speak of death so easily, Mumpty.” McGonagall sighed; already used to the antics of one of the most loyal elves in Hogwarts. “Just keep this between the six of us and everything will be okay.”

“Whatvers the Headmistress be wishing!” He said, bowing low to his mistress. “What can Mumpty be helping with?”

“Exit this room and guard the door. We need to test if Miss Granger’s voice stays within or not. I shall call you back in when she’s finished.” She ordered.

“Of course! Mumpty be going now!” He popped away to appear outside of the door. They watched the little elf close it with a resounding thud and then melt away into the wall.

Neville pulled himself up on the rock next to his girlfriend, wrapping a warm arm around her waist as she leaned against his shoulder. McGonagall, who was no longer a spring chicken, didn’t join the three students on the boulder. Instead she easily transfigured a stone into a plush, red and gold rocking chair and took a seat facing the koi pond.

Hermione walked towards the pond and removed her socks and shoes; dipping her feet into the cool water, minding her step as to not step on the fish swimming around her in circles. She gazed up at the sky and breathed in the earth smell of the false forest. Within her, she could feel her siren side pulling itself from the depths of her mind; lured by the overwhelming positive emotions pouring from Hermione’s being.

Her eyes closed and she began swaying to an imaginary tune. She started out with a low hum that echoed and filled the room with a soft and steady melody. She vaguely heard a surprised gasp coming from one of the other occupants, but she was delving too far into her creature side to pay it any mind. Humming soon turned to words and before long, Hermione had been pulled completely into her song.

Far, Far~

So far away~

Can you all hear~

Hear what I say? ~
When the moon comes to rise~
And the sun fades away~
Will you join me out here~?
Where the sirens do play? ~

The beginning was slow and drown out, but Hermione began moving as she picked up the pace of the song. Her friends and headmistress only watched on in awe at how different the girl seemed now that she was in her element.

Deep in the forest, in a place we all know
Where creatures of song come together for show
With their bells and their whistles
Their flutes and their drums
They come dance in the willows
As the rest sing along~

The feeling that washed over the group was nothing like they had ever felt before. Ginny was absolutely giddy; clapping along with Hermione’s song as her legs swung back and forth to the beat. Luna’s eyes were glassy as she followed Ginny’s lead; completely lost in her own world, but not once missing a beat. Neville had wrapped an arm around Luna’s shoulders and he was quietly humming along to the echoes in the air.

The headmistress simply watched with a serene smile; the deep lines of her face smoothing out as the older witch seemed to finally relax from her usual tense state.

The shift in the atmosphere caused by Hermione’s voice was felt by everyone in the room. Even the koi fish were jumping and circling Hermione more intensely than previously. She was over the moon. All the built-up stress and physical pain she had been felt like they were drifting away the more and more she voiced herself.

And she was here to test the room. If there was ever a time for her to truly let go, then that time was now.

So, that’s what she did.

Far, Far~
So far away~
Where darkness can’t reach
And her voice dares to stray
We’re safe from our sorrows
And when the sun shines tomorrow
The time that we’ve borrowed
Will be given again~

She sped up, twirling wildly in the koi pond she was standing in. Her siren side was egging her on. The two of them were having the time of their lives. The soreness and wounds she had received from her attack from Bellatrix had long since healed and she felt better than she had felt in a long time. She felt safe and happy in her room. At the back of her mind she could feel the presence of her siren float forward and caress her mind and feeding off the positive emotions of everyone in the room.

Sing louder…Sing so the world can hear our song…

She belted.

I’ll sing high like rafters

Til the world burns to ashes

And no one can silence my voice~

Hermione stopped twirling, but the water continued to ripple beneath her feet as the note drifted from a crescendo to no more than a whisper. She looked at her audience, her eyes watery from the overload of emotions.

Far, Far~

So far away~

Can you all hear~

Hear what I say? ~

When the moon comes to rise~

And the sun fades away~

Will you stay with me always~?

Where the sirens do play~…

The room was delved in silence after that. Hermione came down from her high slowly, body and mind more clear than it had been in a very long time.

The silence didn’t last long after that. A soft clapping sound filled the room, immediately after followed by more clapping and a high-pitched whistle from her red headed friend.

“Hermione that was bloody brilliant!” The girl praised, nearly vibrating in her seat from the performance.

“Yeah Hermione, that was great. Never heard anything like it before.” Neville said. Luna shot the other girl a thumb’s up from her position near her boyfriend.

“I must say Miss Granger, in all my years of knowing you, this was by far the most animated I’ve ever seen you be. It was certainly a riveting performance.” Came the headmistress from her transfigured chair.

It had been so long since she heard such praise and encouragement that Hermione found her face
burning from both pride and embarrassment. The only other time she had sung for someone was back when she still had her parents around.

She also sang to Bellatrix, but she wanted to forget that ever happened in the first place.

Hermione gave a playful bow to her audience and then carefully made her way out of the pond; the fish making it more difficult than necessary to maneuver to the water’s edge.

As she exited the water, the headmistress snapped her fingers and Mumpty appeared with a pop.

“Mumpty, did you hear anything from out there.” She asked the little elf.

“Mumpty heard nothing at all, headmistress.” An odd look crossed his features. “Mumpty didn’t hear anything, but Mumpty did feel...a bit strange.”

“Strange how?” The elderly witch asked him.

At first Mumpty looked as if he was struggling to remember a puzzling riddle, but when he recalled whatever it was he tried to remember, the little house elf jumped up and down in excitement.

“Happy! Yes, yes! That is what Mumpty felt.” That made everyone in the room give the small creature a look; all of them knowing that the life of a house elf was very rarely a good one. Mumpty caught onto their expressions and waved his hands frantically. “No, no! Mumpty didn’t mean he wasn’t happy! Mumpty is very happy to work here! Please don’t fire Mumpty! Mumpty just meant that this happiness was different; like a warm blanket or a master presenting Mumpty with clothes.”

“Security. Freedom. That’s what you were feeling.” Hermione told the little elf. “That might be my doing. My parents used to say they always felt different right after I sang to them. So, the room stops people from hearing, but not feeling. That might be a problem.”

“It’ll be no problem at all. While there is a restriction on this floor, I shall also be adding wards to keep people away altogether. I know for a fact that a mere restriction will not be enough to stop some of my more…inquisitive students from meddling.” McGonagall smiled.

The group at least had the decency to look embarrassed as the comment was no doubt directed at them and their past adventures.

It didn’t take long for her students to delve into conversation with one another, and so Professor McGonagall left the room of requirement with Mumpty at her side. The two of them erected stronger wards around the floor to prevent students from trying to access it while Hermione was there. Though not many of them were still around, there were still those from the D.A. group the students created who knew about the secret room. There were also many curious couples about who went looking for the room with no clue how to open it, but even so, the headmistress believed that it was better to be safe than sorry. She spent too many years hiding Hermione’s secrets- and that of many other students- to have her exposed because she was not being careful.

Though with everything going on, she wasn’t sure that Hermione’s secret would stay that way for much longer.

Word was spreading through the ministry about Bellatrix’s sudden appearance on castle grounds. While she did not divulge the reason the woman had been spotted, she had no doubt that someone would notice that the night she was seen, a student who had fought against the woman before was sent to the infirmary that same day. They would put two and two together and questions would come flooding through those doors faster than she could say ‘Quidditch.’ At this point, it wasn’t a matter of if, but when.
McGonagall sighed deeply and headed back to her office, a headache being brought on from the future she knew could possibly be in store for one of her most promising students. They needed Bellatrix in custody before she came up with a plan of attack to take back what she no doubt believed was hers.

If not, then she feared that her promise to keep Hermione safe would be all for naught. And after seeing the potential that the young lioness held as a magical creature with little to no experience; her heart was filled with dread at the thought of what would happen if she fell underneath the wrath of the far more skilled Bellatrix.

No, that was something that she couldn’t allow to happen, under any circumstances. The headmistress didn’t care if she had to take some drastic actions to ensure the protection of her school and her students…

Bellatrix Lestrange was not getting into this school; let alone getting her filthy hands on Hermione Granger.

Which is why it would later become a shame that they didn’t catch the mad woman sooner. For unknown to everyone but the dark witch herself, a plan had already been set in motion.

And was making its way to the castle at this very moment with no one else the wiser.
Chapter 8: Fallout

The room of requirement soon became Hermione’s new home as the hunt for the dark witch continued. Most of the time she was alone when she visited, but it wasn’t uncommon for one or all of her three friends to join her whilst she squirreled away on the highest floor in Hogwarts. Of course she still attended her classes and went to see the elderly librarian from time to time; but for the most part, Hermione kept to herself. There were times when some of her fellow classmates would ask questions about her time in the infirmary; each time she made excuses and quickly changed the subject before things grew too close to the truth. It was exhausting work, but the young siren knew that the truth would only bring her more problems on top of the ones she already had.

It meant very little however since, as she was coming to find—if she didn’t actively seek out problems—they would end up finding her anyways on their own.

And as November began nearing its end, that’s exactly what ended up happening.

Hermione was relaxing in the back of the library in her favorite bean bag chair; cheesy novel in hand and a bowl of fruit sitting in her lap. Curled at her side was Crookshanks who was content to lounge against her warm body and enjoy the quiet atmosphere.

The two of them spent much of the day after classes like that when off in the distance, the duo heard the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps. As they grew closer and closer, Hermione placed a bookmark within the folds of her book and glanced up just in time to see Ginny come barreling around the corner.

“Hermione!” The girl shouted, then seemingly realizing where she was, she lowered her voice and quickly looked around as if Madam Pince was about to appear behind her and box her ears. When she didn’t, she approached Hermione with a look of excitement on her face. “Hermione we’ve been called to the headmistress’ office! You have to come see who’s here!” She exclaimed.

Hermione was puzzled. “Who is it Gin?” She asked. Crookshanks leapt from her lap as she rose to her feet, choosing to rub against Ginny who was one of the few people the grumpy cat could stand being around. She bent to pick him up and he purred in pleasure from the attention.

“Not telling; it’s a surprise. Just come on.” Was all she said before turning and heading for the exit.

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“Not telling; it’s a surprise. Just come on.” Was all she said before turning and heading for the exit.
‘Should’ve just stayed in the library.’ Was the first thing that came to her mind as the familiar voices within reached her ears for the first time in months. They sounded just as she remembered them—if not just a bit more worn out then normal— but there was no mistaking who would be standing there behind the heavy doors before her.

She pulled the handle and entered the room.

“Hermione!” Two voices yelled as she crossed the threshold with Ginny and Crookshanks at her side.

“Harry. Ron. What are you guys doing here?” She said with a smile, rushing over to pull the two boys into a fierce hug; one that was returned with just as much enthusiasm.

“We heard what happened and came by to speak with you and Professor McGonagall on behalf of the ministry.” Harry said, pulling away first from the group hug.

“How many times must I tell you two that I am no longer your professor. I would think as aurors and working adults that you two would be overjoyed at no longer calling me as such.” McGonagall called from her desk where she was magically sorting through paperwork.

“We may no longer be students, but you’ll always be our professor, professor.” Ron replied with a goofy grin as he went over to greet his sister by the door.

“Be that as it may, I’ll still continue to insist that you not call me as such,” She glanced up at the trio from over her thin wire-framed glasses. “But since it will no doubt be a useless endeavor, I’ll leave it for now so that we can get down to business.”

“Good idea, professor.” Ron replied before taking a seat on the opposite side of where the elderly witch was sitting. Harry took to leaning against the polished piece of furniture rather than sitting; this gave Ginny the perfect moment to saddle up to his side and soak in the warmth of his body. And Hermione…

Well she didn’t move, at least not at first.

While everything seemed normal with her on the outside—inside— Hermione was throwing a fit.

Don’t get her wrong; she was absolutely ecstatic to see her two best friends again, but a part of her felt that the feeling wasn’t mutual. The two of them seemed happy to see her, but the reunion felt more like auror business— which it technically was—than her two childhood friends coming to check up on her well-being. It was just pulling something wrong within her. They both knew about her history with Bellatrix; knew about the things the woman did to her that night in Malfoy manor. If it was her; finding out someone like Bellatrix was still alive and kicking would send her running to their side. She’d be wrought with worry, and work be damned, she was coming to make sure that everyone was alright.

Yet it seemed that the same couldn’t be said to be true for Ron and Harry. Hermione knew the aurors have known about Bellatrix for weeks now. She knew Ron and Harry were both pretty high up in the auror program, so even if they had been busy, there was no way that they didn’t know what was happening. So why didn’t they contact her? A floo call; a post in the mail; a missive from the ministry— anything to let her know that they still gave a damn about her while she was going through this would’ve been enough for her. She didn’t want to seem like she was bitter at them— being an auror was time consuming— but the benefit of doubt only went so far. Before she lost her cool with the two, she wanted to hear their side of the story and get a better understanding of the whole situation.
Then if she didn’t like what they had to say, she’d give the two of them a piece of her mind.

She sat down next to Ron and listened to their report.

“As you’ve probably already realized, we’ve had no luck with catching Bellatrix since the alert went out on her a while back. The ministry is doing their best to keep this from the public as much as possible, but people are already beginning to talk,” Harry began, his face growing more weary by the moment. “Some of our more seedier sources have said they’ve seen her skulking around Diagon Alley, but when we went to raid the place, she was nowhere to be found.”

“It’s like we’re chasing a bloody ghost with that one.” Ron hissed. “When I get my hands on that horrid bi-!”

“Mr. Weasley! That is not appropriate language someone in your professional position should be using. Especially in front of your sister no less!” Professor McGonagall said with an appalled expression.

“I assure you Headmistress; the talk in the girl’s locker room during Quidditch is far worse than anything my brother can spew out with that big mouth of his.” Ginny grinned. Hermione couldn’t help but giggle behind her hands; her mind recalling all the locker-room stories the red head girl told her about the goings on when the brooms and bludgers were being tucked away for the day.

“Regardless, if Mr. Weasley ever wants to set a good example to those of equal or higher standing within the Ministry, that type of talk needs to stay within the locker-room- or better yet- not at all.” She said. Her tone was the one she often used with the first years who were caught breaking the rules and Ron was bowing his head to hide the blush working its way up his neck.

Even sitting directly next to him, Hermione barely heard the mumbled apology and it took all she had to hold her laughter in as best she could.

The older Weasley in the room soon regained his composure. “Back to what Harry was saying. With no luck finding where she had gone, we’ve been given orders to investigate where she might be going.”

“Which is why we’re here, ‘Mione.” Harry said, addressing her directly. “There was talk going around that she had come after you and that’s how you ended up in the infirmary.”

“She was. I was in the forbidden forest when she found me and I was attacked. I only got out because Ginny realized I was missing and went to get help.” She told him.

“Blimey, Hermione! What were you thinking going out there all by yourself late at night? You could’ve been killed.” Ron said, giving her a troubled frown. Something about his tone was making her teeth grind, but she let it slide for now.

“I may not be an auror like you and Harry, Ronald, but I am still very much capable of taking care of myself.” She stared down at her hands folded in her lap. “Besides I didn’t know she would show up that night. I thought I was alone. That’s when I fell into her stupid trap.”

“Wait…what do you mean ‘that’ night. Did you know about her before the night of the attack, ‘Mione?!” Harry gasped.

Hermione felt her eyes widen in horror at her blunder. ‘Curse you Harry for catching onto that! Since when did you become so perceptive?’ She couldn’t even make up her round of excuses before Ron was rounding on her.
“You knew about this and didn’t say anything? How could you be so reckless, ‘Mione? You should’ve came to one of us immediately!” He yelled at her; his voice oozing with anger.

Hermione was on her feet in a instance. “Excuse me?! Are you kidding! Of course I didn’t know it was her! Do you think I’m an idiot?” She nearly growled at him.

“You said you didn’t know it was her, but you knew it was a possibility that someone could’ve showed up, right?” Harry asked, no longer leaning against the old wooden desk. “That was still a really dangerous thing to do, ‘Mione. Why were you out there?” He asked again.

She was going to answer them truthfully- honestly she was- but the next words that came from Ron’s mouth stopped her in her tracks.

“Doesn’t matter why she was out there Harry! If she knew someone dangerous was lurking about, she should’ve called someone.” He said as he rose from his seat as well.

And that’s all it took to send her into a rage.

“Doesn’t matter? Doesn’t matter! How dare you Ronald Weasley! You have no idea how hypocritical that statement is coming from you!” She yelled at him, careful to keep the stirring creature within her at bay.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He asked.

“What’s the point of calling on you two if I knew that I’d never get an answer? How many days do you think I sent you two letters? How many nights did I sit around waiting for a note, or a firecall, or even a bloody howler from either of you?” She spat at the duo. The siren within was awake and agitated with the slew of emotions circulating through the room.

Harry jumped in; his voice as low and non-condescending as possible in order to try and diffuse the building tension in the room. “We’re really sorry ‘Mione! Being a auror has been a lot of work and with all the paperwork and death eaters still unaccounted for we-,”

“Couldn’t find five minutes in the day to check up on a friend? Supposedly one of your best friends at that?” The young woman interrupted.

Neither of them could look her in the eye at that. She scoffed at them with disdain. This was not how she hoped seeing them again would be like. It was quite clear now that the two of them were too wrapped up in their own lives to cared what happened in hers. The only reason she was even speaking to them right now was because of Bellatrix threatening her life; and if that wasn’t the saddest excuse to see their supposed best friend, then she wasn’t sure what was. Her mind was spiraling into saddest once more as she began questioning the authenticity of their years of friendship. It was a fleeting thought really and had she been thinking clearly, she would’ve realized that she may have been overthinking things- just a bit.

But she wasn’t.

Hermione was hurt, and her instincts grabbed hold of her long before rationality could.

So when the long keen of distress flowed from her pursed lips, she knew that there was nothing she could’ve done to stop it.

Silence filled the room.

Hermione looked up to see that everyone was staring at her.
Ginny and the headmistress both knew of her secret so their jaws weren’t nearly touching the floor like Ron and Harry’s were.

“Hermione…” Harry said quietly. “What was that.?”

Despite knowing that the jig was up- yet again- Hermione tried to play dumb anyways. “I don’t know what you’re talking about Harry.”

“I think he’s asking about you sounding like a bloody cat stuck out in a storm just then.” Ron said, his eyes wide and confused as if he was seeing her for the very first time.

“Crookshanks hasn’t had his dinner yet. He tends to do that when he hasn’t been fed.” She tried, only feeling slightly guilty about throwing the prowling feline into the line of fire to save her own skin.

They weren’t buying it for a second.

Hermione knew that the two of them were done with her excuses. The whole situation was spiraling out of hand faster than her actual life was.

And to think she was supposed to be the level headed one of the group.

Instead of chalking it up to her own uncontrollable emotions, Hermione decided to blame everything on Bellatrix. Had that vile woman just stayed dead and gone like she was supposed to, she could’ve lived the rest of her life in bliss. But no, she just had to come and ruin everything.

How she wished the ground would open and swallow her up whole. It would be ten times better than having the conversation she knew was coming.

The one where she came clean to Ron and Harry after years of lying to their faces.

She only hoped it wouldn’t be a complete disaster.

“Okay, look, guys, whatever you do, don’t freak out.” She asked them.

“Yeah, because saying that is gonna help us do just that, ‘Mione!” Ron scoffed at her.

“Just don’t okay!” She took a deep breath. “I don’t really know how to say this…it’s just that…I mean this whole time…Merlin. I’m…I’m not exactly…human.” She finished quietly.

Ron and Harry were staring at her with wide eyes.

“What do you mean not human? Since when?!” Ron yelled.

“I mean that I have creature blood running through my veins. And since when…well since I was born I guess.” The girl replied, her hands coming to twirl through her hair as her nervousness built up.

“And you didn’t think to tell us this?! Us! Your two best friends!” Ron exploded at her. “Don’t you think this is something that the two of us should’ve known about?”

Hermione’s nervousness began ebb away as anger rose to take its place. “Oh, and I suppose that neither you and Harry have ever hidden anything big from me before?”

Ron didn’t back down. “Yeah, we have, but nothing ever this big! Bloody hell Hermione, don’t you think we had a right to know at least? What are you even?”
“Ron!” Harry yelled with all the authority of a proper auror. “Enough! It doesn’t matter what Hermione is; she’s our friend—whether she’s human or not. And don’t give me that look; you know just as well as I that what she said is true. We’re no saints when it comes to the truth department. And I’m sure she didn’t hide it to spite us.”

Thanks Harry. Hermione said to herself; eyes growing moist as the dark-haired man came to her aide. I knew I could always count on you.

“I didn’t.” She confirmed. “I just couldn’t tell you guys. I didn’t tell anyone. Only my parents knew.” She looked at the headmistress. “And Professor McGonagall.”

“You knew Professor?” Harry asked.

The woman nodded. “Of course, I did. It was I who made sure that no one else did, after all. Albus and I knew about all the magical creatures in the school.” She returned to her paper work. “We looked after their needs in secret and didn’t approach them unless they asked for help or posed a danger to themselves or the students.”

Ron threw his hands up in anger. “That still doesn’t explain why you kept it from us, Hermione.”

“Well, what was I supposed to say?! You two didn’t even like me when we first met. I was already getting crap for being a muggleborn. If they found out I was a siren too, it would’ve been over for me. IF it got out from you two- even by accident- my life would’ve been over.” She hissed back.

“Oh, so now you don’t trust us!” Ron shouted back at her. “Really Hermione, I thought we were all closer than that! If anything, it’s you who can’t be trusted!”

And that was the last straw for her.

The room froze over as a rolling growl rose from Hermione’s chest. Professor McGonagall and Ginny were used to the effects of Hermione’s creature magic by now, but it was the first time that Ron and Harry were subjected to it.

And they hated everything about it.

This was nothing like the uplifting and soothing melodies that the girl shared with them in the room of requirement. This was something darker. Something primal that wasn’t completely the Hermione they knew and loved. The air felt suffocating; their limbs feeling stiff and heavy from the tension. None of them had seen the young lioness like this and to be honest—even to an experienced professor like McGonagall who’d seen her fair share of magical creatures— it was a scary thing to behold.

There were only two in the room who didn’t seem to be fazed by the rising tension.

The first being Crookshanks who had stopped prowling around the room to come and wind between his owner’s legs as a form of comfort.

The second being Hermione herself who had no clue just how much control she had let slip as her anger reached its boiling point.

She knew that Ron was a bit thick in the head, but this was ridiculous. If anyone had the right to be mad it was her. She wanted to tell Ron and Harry. She wanted to do it years ago, honestly, but she couldn’t. Every time she thought about it, something would always hold her back. The way Ron acted during their fourth year during the tournament and then again when that whole thing with Lavender happened; she knew that Ron was way too hot headed to keep her secret to himself. If it got out from him, she knew that it would be an accident- Ron just wasn’t that type of cruel person-
but accident or not, she’d be exposed to the world. The last thing she ever wanted.

And Harry?

Harry could’ve kept her secret; of that she had no doubt.

Someone who could survive and hide having Voldemort-and later Snape-rolling around in his head was someone who could be trusted. Not only that, had he not already been uncovered, she knew that Harry would’ve never told a soul about Remus either; even if he had almost killed them that night in their third year. But it’s because Harry had people like Voldemort and Snape in his mind that she couldn’t tell him. The target on her back during the war would’ve been even bigger than it already was had Voldemort found out whilst looking through Harry’s mind.

Not to mention if he sent Bellatrix of all people after her. She shuddered at the thought.

No, as much as she hated to admit it Ron was right; she didn’t trust them.

Just not for the reason he’s thinking.

It wasn’t their fault; it was hers. She was trying to look out for herself. Hiding it from everyone; going to the lake at night; nearly biting through her tongue when she was being tortured at Malfoy Manor; all of it was for her own protection. They should’ve understood that much at least, but it seemed that Ron was taking it more as a personal attack instead and that did nothing to soothe her already frayed emotions.

Before she knew what was happening; the growling in her chest grew louder until the windows in the room began shaking at the building pressure.

That was about the time that Professor McGonagall stepped in.

“That’s quite enough of that Miss Granger!” She yelled, snapping Hermione out of the trance she and fallen into. There was an audible sigh of relief as the crushing atmosphere that had once been surrounding them began to subside.

Hermione shook her head as the fog that clouded over her mind cleared away. She glanced up at the others in the room.

Ginny had her hands on her knees, breathing loudly as she struggled to catch her breath; all the while Harry was bracing himself against the desk. Ron had fallen back into his chair and his expression was one of abject horror; no doubt at seeing exactly the kinds of things Hermione was capable of. Even the headmistress looked a bit winded as she stared down at her with disappointment over her glasses.

A sick feeling began filling her stomach at what she had done and suddenly it felt like the world was spinning.

‘Oh Merlin…what have I done.’ She gasped.

Not caring that she was once more running away- her Gryffindor pride be damned- Hermione turned and fled the headmistress’ office; Crookshanks hot on her heels.

The young siren hated that she had essentially left Ginny and McGonagall to clean up her mess, but it still wasn’t enough to make her turn around. If Ron and Harry wanted to hear the rest of the story, she was sure that her two companions could fill them in. Her destination was already set and she wasn’t stopping to turn around for anything.
By the time she reached the room of requirement, she didn’t have the strength to sing. Her body was emotionally drained at this point and the only thing she wanted to do was sleep.

The grass was soft against her skin as she laid there in silence; the only sounds being the ripples of the koi pond and the rustling of the leaves. A smushed, furry face came into view from above her and she reached out to pet her loyal pet as he purred from the much-needed attention.

She didn’t know when she fell asleep, but she was glad for the rest regardless in the hopes that when she next awoke things would be resolved.

With her luck however, she knew that she was asking for far too much.
Chapter 9 – Twisted Love Letter

When Hermione awoke later on in the evening, she was greeted by Luna and Neville at her side. Neither said anything to her until she sat up to face them. It was then Hermione was treated to their bright smiles and a plate of her favorite foods. With eager hands, the hungry Gryffindor took the offering and thanked them kindly as she dove into the food with vigor.

“See! I told you she’d be starving Nev.” Luna smiled at her sleepy-eyed boyfriend. To his credit, Neville still smiled brightly at the blonde-haired girl despite his obvious tiredness.

“How long have I been here?” Hermione mumbled, stretching her body out as her half-kneazle mirrored her from his position on her lap.

“Oh, not too long really. It’s only eleven. We came here after dinner to see you. Ginny said you hadn’t been back to the dorms when you left.” Luna said. “She was quite worried about you.”

Hermione felt bad at hearing that she’d caused the youngest Weasley to worry about her. Again.

She made a promise to make it up to her later.

“I’ll apologize the next time I see her.” She said between bites. “Did she tell you what happened by any chance?”

Luna nodded. “Only briefly. We know that Ron and Harry were here to see you about what happened between you and Bellatrix. She said that you’ll need to go see the headmistress first thing in the morning.”

“Fantastic. Just what I wanted to hear.” Hermione sighed, knowing full well that the elderly woman would not simply allow her to run away from her problems anymore.

“I’m sure she’s not gonna yell at you Hermione,” Neville chimed in. “Seems like things were going south anyways if even someone as level headed as you walked away.”

“You know how Ron gets when he’s left out of the loop. I knew this would happen. That doesn’t mean I was prepared for it.” She said quietly. Her meal was gone now and the plate disappeared the
moment she set it upon the ground. A part of her wondered if that was the room’s doing or the work of the resident house elves.

“That’s quite alright Hermione. Knowing about something and knowing what to do about something is quite difficult in itself,” A far off look came across Luna’s face as the Ravenclaw placed a warm palm on her shoulder. “It’s like opening a box of Bertie Botts. You can always prepare for a bad one, but you’ll still be surprised the fourth and fifth time when you eat vomit instead of popcorn. At least I am anyways.”

Hermione stared at her for a full minute before she burst into uncontrollable laughter.

“Only you Luna can come up with such a strange analogy.” She said, wiping a tear from her eye. “Never stop being yourself.”

“I’m not sure how I could be two people at once, but I’ll make sure not to do it if it makes you happy.” The blond girl told her, causing Neville to chuckle and shake his head at his strange and beautiful girlfriend.

The trio of friends sat around talking for another hour before Neville fell over into the pond as his fatigue snuck up on him. As soon as the young man came up sputtering with embarrassment and wide eyes, they all called it quits and headed back to their respective dorms.

Hermione bid everyone a good night and went up into the girl’s side of Gryffindor tower. She felt like a hormonal teenager sneaking in from a late-night snog with how careful she was being not to wake Ginny.

Her feline companion had no such reservations.

Hermione winced when he jumped on the sleeping red-head’s bed to snuggle up by her side. She was aware that he did this quite often already, but she wanted to throttle the cat with her bare hands that he chose this particular night to do such a thing regardless.

Thankfully, luck was on her side, and instead of waking, Ginny only shifted lightly beneath her covers and resumed snoring as normal.

Hermione sighed in relief and cautiously prepared herself for bed. Once nice and settled, she fell into a deep but fitful sleep; her mind a swirl of emotions as she thought about what tomorrow would bring…

As it would turn out, the tomorrow that plagued her most of the night would bring her nothing but more problems the next day.

It started when she awoke to see Ginny hovering over her bed with a scowl and a box of her favorite sweets.

Before Hermione could even get a word out, Ginny was on her case. She could only sit and watch with wide eyes as the girl ripped into her about leaving both her and the headmistress to deal with Ron and Harry by themselves. Knowing she had done just that, she chose not to interrupt the angry young lioness until she was completely finished with her tirade.

As quickly as the whole thing started, however, it was over and Ginny was finished yelling at her long enough for her to apologize and pull the girl into a friendly hug. Above her head, she heard the girl sigh in exasperation and then pull away, only to thrust the box of colorful sweets into her unprepared hands.
She asked the ginger why she was giving it to her and Ginny merely shook her head, gave her a sad smile, and said, “I know how Ron and Harry can be; especially Ron. If it had been me, I would’ve boxed his ears if he ever talked to me the way he did to you. You’ve earned that, hands down. Just don’t go eating it all in one go, you hear!”

Hermione was touched beyond belief.

Anyone else would’ve seen this as an insignificant gesture between friends, but it meant more to Hermione than her friend would ever know. Ginny was still so supportive of her -even after the thorough tongue-lashing she got earlier- and it made something within her swell with joy.

That feeling followed her all the way to the headmistress’ office where it proceeded to die out.

“Miss Granger.” The older woman said from her right. Hermione saw her standing beside a penseive; it’s previous owner’s portrait hanging above, seeming to be in a deep slumber. She approached with hesitation.

“Good morning, professor,” She quietly greeted. “About yesterday, I would like to-.”

“There’ll be no need for that my child.” The bespectacled witch interrupted. “I know more than anyone how trying these last weeks have been fairing for you. That’s precisely why I didn’t keep you from leaving when you did. Clearly you were in no mindset to be talking about such a delicate subject quite yet.”

McGonagall looked down at the woman before her with a sad frown.

Seeing the bags beneath her eyes and the glassy look in the girl’s gaze, it was clear that even if she was doing her best to be strong, Hermione was cracking. Piece by piece, she could only watch in distress as parts of the girl were chipped away by the events happening in her life. Recollection of how tall and proud the girl once stood in her younger years flooded her mind; it hurt to see how much her student was suffering.

And yet, a part of knew that this was still just the beginning.

Until that vile woman was caught and dealt with, there would be no end to her Hermione’s torment. All she could do for her now was try and calm some of her worries; even if it meant something small like standing in for the girl as her friends tore through her emotions with reckless abandon.

With luck, after this whole debacle was over and done with, the trio would be as thick as thieves once more. She never thought she’d end up wishing for their young and irresponsible selves back, but she was finding their older versions were far more worrisome to deal with.

At this rate, the way they were giving her heart attacks, she’d be lucky to reach her 90s without a trip to St. Mungo’s.

McGonagall stopped herself from getting swept further into thoughts of the past; that wasn’t what she needed to be doing right now. She ushered the nervous girl over to the penseive and whipped out her wand. Pressing the piece of wood to her temple, she pulled the memories from last night out in a sliver of light and allowed it to float into the pool of magical liquid before them. Her wand was then returned to her robes and she turned to face her young lioness once more.

“I figured that you’d might want to see what occurred after you left.” Was all she said before resuming her place at her desk, leaving Hermione to delve into the memories at her own pace.

A part of her didn’t want to look. While not a fan of the whole ‘ignorance is bliss’ ideologoy, she
knew that what she would see would no doubt ruin the good morning she as having, but it was better to get it over with and move on before things got even worse.

At least this way, won’t have to interact at all seeing as this was already in the past.

With a heavy sigh, Hermione braced herself on the edge of the bowl and plunged her head into the basin, getting sucked immediately into the memories of yesterday.

_Hermione stood quietly as she watched herself flee from the room in a rush. The moment she was gone, the room became quiet. Then, she watched as the headmistress slowly rose from her seat and rounded the desk…_

Where she promptly swatted both aurors upside the head like a couple of unruly teenagers.

_Hermione burst into laughter._

_Two hands flew up in shock as Harry and Ron could only stare at the woman as if she had gone mad. Their old professor didn’t back down. She rounded on them with a disappointing gaze._

“They never, in all my years, have I seen such a shameful display! Have you two gone and lost your minds! Treating Miss Granger in such a way. Shame on you both!” She shouted. “Do either of you realize what’ve you done?”

Harry didn’t say anything, which meant that Ron was the one to speak up first. “What we’ve done? We just came to check on Hermione and she’s acting like a completely different person!” He said in grumpy voice.

“Miss Granger was acting just as she always has. It is you boys who appear to be strangers. Had either of you paid more attention, you’d know her actions tonight were brought on by weeks and weeks of built up stress.” The elderly witch replied.

_Harry spoke up. “We get that professor. This whole thing with Bellatrix has been-.”_

“Just the icing on the cake,” She said before he could finish. “Yes, Bellatrix has made things far, far worse for Miss Granger, but it is not the only thing weighing on the girl’s shoulders.”

_Hermione could see the wheels turning in both boy’s heads, but it was clear that neither of them were catching on. Luckily, Ginny was there to save the day._

“She hadn’t been eating- or sleeping for that matter- long before this mess with Bellatrix. I wouldn’t see her for days on end for how much time she was spending in the library.” The ginger said from her place beside Harry. Her brother looked at her in confusion.

“Then what’s wrong with her?” He asked.

_Apparently, it was the wrong thing to ask as it set Ginny off into one of her tirades._

“What’s wrong?! More like what’s right! And the answer is nothing, by the way. Ever since the war started and ended, Hermione’s been in shambles. Think about it; what does she have left?” Ginny began listing things off with her fingers. “Many of her friends- OUR friends- died in the fighting; her parents are still obliviated in some far-off country; YOU two haven’t been around to help her; the secret she spent her whole life hiding has gotten out in only a matter of days; and to top it off, the woman who tortured her- BRANDED her- is still alive and out for her blood.” She took a deep breath. “The night brings nightmares and the day makes the nightmares real. So, what do you think is wrong with her?” She ended.
Both boys stood silently and took everything in as Hermione looked at her friend in a new light. Honestly, she thought that she was hiding her troubles better than she let on. Then again, much like her mother, Ginny had a way of seeing through people’s masks with ease.

She didn’t know if she was grateful or frightened by that realization.

The budding look of dismay as comprehension set in across Harry and Ron’s faces decided for her.

“Oh Merlin, has it really been that bad?” Ron whispered.

Yep, definitely grateful.

Ginny nodded. “It has; maybe even worse. You know Hermione’s too stubborn to ask for help unless it’s a dire situation.”

“Well, what do we do? Hell, will freeze over before she’ll speak to us again after earlier.” Ron cried out. “Oh Merlin! She’ll never talk to us again! What do we do, professor?!” He panicked.

“Calm down Mr. Weasley,” Professor McGonagall softly told him. “I assure you; Miss Granger won’t be throwing your years of friendship away over a petty squabble such as this.”

“But she’s gotta be absolutely furious with us right now. Especially with that…whatever that thing she did earlier with the growling.” Harry said. Hermione almost felt sorry after seeing the sad puppy dog look the boy was giving their professor.

Almost.

“You are correct; she is angry and rightfully so. However, I believe more than angry, she is hurt and scared right now.” The older witch told them. “And I believe her exerting her abilities over us is proof of that.”

“What is she professor?” Ron asked. Hermione noted that this time he sounded genuinely curious rather than accusing when he asked about her creature status. “I heard her mention a something about a siren, but she doesn’t seem like any of the sirens we learned about in the auror program.”

“You boys might want to take a seat for this. What I’m about to tell you will be a lot to take in.” McGonagall said, once more taking her place at her desk.

The two aurors took a spot in the soft, cushy chairs on the opposite side of the desk as Ginny chose a seat on the armrest of Harry’s. The woman laced her fingers together and a stern appeared on her weathered face as she began speaking about their friend’s strange biological inheritance.

“There are quite a few magical creatures that enter Hogwarts’s doors that very few people know of. While I was the deputy to the headmaster, it was my job to learn about and properly assist some of our more…unique students. Hermione was one of them.” She sighed. “Hermione was what is known as a Cor-Echo siren; a rare breed of siren that appears once in every few generations. Not much is known about them and as you could already tell, there is nothing unusual about them in appearance to distinguish them from your everyday student.”

“So how did you find out professor?” Harry asked.

“A few weeks into your first year here, one of the centaurs summoned me to the forbidden forest. He told me of a first-year student who was coming down by the lake after hours to sing. As you recall, all students were warned of the dangers of being out after hours; not to mention the resulting expulsion. I pieced together that whomever was doing so must have had a good reason for this
hazardous behavior. So, I followed her at a distance one night and discovered her secret.” The
wrinkles that were a test of her age deepened. “Our policy has always been to assist from a distance
until the student approached on their own or they were in danger. I instructed a patrol of centaurs to
follow her movements from the moment she left the castle to the moment she returned. I still wish to
this day she had come to me so I could have arranged something a bit less precarious.”

“Why didn’t you just tell her to stop then? Hermione was never a rulebreaker back then. If you
cought her red-handed, she would’ve just stopped going.” Ron said.

At that, Hermione threw her friend a dirty look at the rulebreaker comment, but it wasn’t far from
the truth back then, so she’d let it go for now.

McGonagall shook her head. “No, she would not, nor would I allow her to. It would’ve driven her
mad, quite literally I might add.”

“What!” Ron and Harry yelled.

“I went to research Hermione’s species when I realized she wasn’t a normal siren or mermaid. Not
much resided in the sole book that I found; there was even a page missing as I recall.” Hermione
knew that she was referring to the same book she had found only a few weeks back. “And I found
that the singing is a crucial part of keeping those of Hermione’s kind from spiraling into madness.
Telling her to stop would’ve done more harm than good. The lake also provided adequate cover
since back then I wasn’t made aware of the room of requirement’s existence.”

“Okay, I guess that makes sense,” Ron said. “But what I don’t get is why this is a problem now.
Hermione’s secret was fine up until recently. What happened?”

McGonagall felt a headache coming on. “Bellatrix happened. With the wards in disarray and many
of the centaurs perishing in the battles, our defenses were weakened. I believed Miss Granger to be
of an age and battle experience where she could adequately defend herself from the dangers of the
forest.” She felt her eyes begin to water. “If I had only known what was skulking about in the
shadows aside from spiders and Threstrals.”

“You didn’t know professor.” Hermione thought to herself as Harry proceeded to tell her the same
thing.

“You couldn’t have known she was alive, professor. We all thought she was killed in the battle,” He
said. “But that doesn’t explain how Hermione didn’t realize immediately. She knows what Bellatrix
looks and sounds like.”

“And I’m sure Bellatrix knew that as well; which is why she didn’t reveal herself at first. However,
with Hermione singing in such close proximity to her, it was only a matter of time before she gave
in. Cor-echoes are not normal sirens, you see. Their species has rules that instincts can’t override no
matter what… Unfortunately, one such rule is that each siren has one person in their lives whose
voice is nearly impossible to fight against.” The old witch explained.

“Why don’t I like where this is heading?” Ron whimpered in anguish. Harry’s head fell into his
hands; most likely catching on to what their professor was trying to say.

“And let me guess; the only person Hermione’s siren side can’t fight against…” He drifted off.

“…Is Bellatrix, yes. The two of them- in some cruel twist of fate- are mates.” McGonagall
confirmed.

“Mates? You mean like friends, right?” Ron’s voice cracked.
The headmistress shook her head in sadness. “No Mr. Weasley, it is far worse than that. It’s not uncommon for magical creatures to have what is known as a mate. They are each other’s missing half; a perfect match for one another that can’t be replaced by any other bond.”

Ron jumped to his feet at that.

“But she can just ignore it, right?! We can just break it and be done with it!” He shouted.

Again, he received a shake of the head.

“There is no breaking a bond for Cor-echoes. It is truly death do us part for them. As for ignoring the connection; Hermione can fight it. But it may not be enough; not now when Bellatrix knows what power she holds over her.”

“Power?” Harry asked.

“Cor-Echoes have a dominant and submissive relationship. One where the dominant one holds more control over the submissive one.” She said.

“And I’m guessing that Bellatrix’s not the submissive type.” Ron growled.

‘If only.’ Hermione wished. ‘Then at least I would have something to hold over that vile beast of a woman.’

“You’d be right. While Hermione is not completely at the mercy of that woman, Bellatrix has experience and knowledge about their abilities. One’s that prove very dangerous for young Miss Granger.” McGonagall told the two aurors.

“Dangerous how?” Ron wanted to know.

“One word,” Everyone turned to Ginny who hadn’t spoken up since earlier. “Hermione said Bellatrix said one word with her siren abilities and she couldn’t move her body.”

“Blimey.” Was the only thing that came out of her brother’s mouth. There wasn’t much else he could say to that.

“Indeed. Had we not gotten there when we did, Merlin knows what that woman would’ve done to Hermione. Or what she will do.” The headmistress slowly rose to her feet now. “Because mark my words boys; if we do not catch her before she is ready to make her move, she’ll be coming back for Miss Granger. I’ve Bellatrix since back in our school days. She’s a greedy, vindictive, and uncomfortably intelligent woman when she’s not being completely barmy. Once she sets her eyes on something, there is very little she’s above from doing to get it.” She warned them.

Harry rose to stand by his auror partner, his face holding a level of seriousness that Hermione had only seen him make when talking about the dark lord.

“We’ll alert the ministry at once. I’m not sure if we’ll be able to keep Hermione’s secret to ourselves, but we’ll do our best. Perhaps Kingsley can help us work around that.”

Ron nodded as well.

“I’ll look into making sure the security around the school is top notch. So long as Hermione doesn’t leave the castle, there’s no way Bellatrix is going to lay her filthy death eater hands on her.” He promised. Hearing the things one of his best friends had been going through, Ron knew that this was one of the few ways he could make it up to the girl and keep her safe.
“I trust you both to do your very best for our Miss Granger. The last thing I want is for Bellatrix to hurt her more than she already has.” She said in a low and sorrowful voice.

“She didn’t need this. Things would be so much differently if they weren’t mates on top of everything else.” Ginny groaned at her friend’s plights.

Harry nodded and reached out to comfort his troubled girlfriend. “I know Ginny. I know. Hermione’s our friend. Our best friend. And we’re gonna protect her. It’s what she would’ve done for any of us after all.”

“Harry’s right. ‘Mione deserves better than this. Honestly she deserves better than us…” Ron announced with sadness saturating his voice.

“Oh Ron, you know that’s not true, right?” Hermione said, despite knowing that none of them could even hear her. Guilt built up in side of her at seeing how much they were heartbroken because of her.

“We owe it to her to catch Bellatrix before she gets to her. She deserves that bit of peace at least.” He continued.

McGonagall smiled down at the two men before her with pride in her eyes. “I’m sure, Mr. Weasley, that you are exactly what Miss Granger deserves right now. Never in all my years have I seen such a friendship as strong as the one you all share. I can imagine no one better to help her find happiness than you boys.”

“Neither can I.” Hermione whispered as her eyes filled with moisture. “Neither can I.”

The memory went on until Harry and Ron begged Ginny to apologize on their behalf. She watched the girl tell them firmly to do it themselves the next time they saw her. After that, Hermione found herself spiraling out of the memory and back into Professor McGonagall’s office; her heart much lighter than she expected it to be when she first entered.

Young lungs cried out in joy as Hermione took a soothing breath of fresh air the moment she was back in the headmistress’ office. She turned to see the other occupant of the room writing once more at her desk. The young woman was fixated at the activity occurring above the other witches’ head. Long parchments of paper were folding themselves into neat little envelopes and being stamped by a hovering wax seal bearing the Hogwarts logo. She watched as the flying letters then floated down to the edge of the large wooden desk into neat little piles.

Not once did the focused professor look up from what she was working on.

Hermione didn’t know whether she knew she had an audience or not. Before she could grab her attention however, a voice sounded from the wall behind her.

“Ah, Miss Granger. It’s been quite some time. Having a peek at the past, are we now?” The cheerful and familiar voice asked.

She looks back to see the late headmaster staring down at her with a grandfatherly smile. She grinned up at him in delight.

“Hello headmaster. It’s good to see you again.” She said with a great deal of joy. Seeing the man in his portrait- smiling and sitting comfortably; a side table with a bowl of lemon drops at his side- almost made her forget that he had passed away some time ago. She could almost picture him sitting there at his desk acting the same way he was doing now. She did notice one difference between the portrait and the late headmaster that she knew and love.
There was an aura of serenity to him now that she hadn’t seen him with at all during her time there at Hogwarts. Of course, she knew that this was not truly the headmaster, but it was the closest the deceased could come aside from being a ghost. She hoped that the real Dumbledore looked as happy and at peace as his painted counterpart.

“Likewise, Miss Granger. I’ve been hearing from Minerva over there that you’ve once more found yourself in a spot of trouble. I find myself wondering how these things seem to gravitate to you and your companions like ducks to a pond, even after all these years.” He said before looking at her over the top of his half-moon glasses. “It’s quite curious indeed, wouldn’t you say?”

“I assure you headmaster, if there was a way for me to avoid trouble altogether, I would do it in a heartbeat. It’s not like I go looking for it on purpose.” She answered.

Professor Dumbledore chuckled and popped a lemon drop into his mouth. “That may be true my dear child, but as I’ve come to find; you always seem to find things once you stop looking for them.” He said with a secretive smile.

“That’s quite enough Albus.” Minerva called from across the room. “No need to rile Miss Granger up with your ‘wise words of wisdom’ right before classes. The last thing she needs to be worried about is deciphering your life lessons during one of Professor Binn’s lectures.”

“Why Minerva! During one of Professor Binn’s lectures is the perfect time to ponder the wonders and mysteries of life. I’m sure he of all people won’t mind. He never did when I attended his classes.” He said giving Hermione a sly wink that had her coughing to cover her laughter.

“Albus!” McGonagall shouted, scandalized at hearing of the older man’s mischievousness. “That is not the type of example you should be setting for young Miss Granger here.”

Even saying that however, Hermione could see amusement in the headmistress’ eyes.

“Yes, I believe you’re quite right my dear.” He turned back to Hermione. “Run along now Miss Granger. It would be sad to see you late to an otherwise invigorating lecture with Professor Binn.”

“Albus!” The woman at the desk yelled again, this time not bothering to hide the amusement and disdain in her voice.

Hermione laughed and bid both witch and wizard a heartfelt farewell, before heading out to gather her books for history with their ghostly professor.

And if the long dead instructor didn’t notice her nodding off during his tenth time covering the goblin wars since her enrollment at Hogwarts, there was no one else awake to tell her off for it.

Classes went by in a flash. That afternoon, there was a match between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff that she attended in support of Ginny and the rest of the team. The dorm that night was filled with loud cheers and celebration as everyone gathered around the newly won trophy. While not much of a fan of the festivities after a hard-fought game of Quidditch, Hermione didn’t have it in her to just up and leave as usual. The loudness and overall joy circulating the room was very much needed if she as being honest with herself. Even if it was just her sitting back and watching it everything from a safe distance, being in the room with all her fellow Gryffindors was more than enough for her.

The party would’ve gone on deep into the morning had it not been for the headmistress coming in to usher them all to bed. The younger ones were much more reluctant to sleep just yet, but a stern look from the elderly head of house was enough to send them running for the hills.

Hermione and the others in her year were the last ones to head up; sticking behind to clean up and
make sure that any stragglers were sent on their way. When everything was back in order and the fire was put out, she headed up to bed, chatting with Ginny the entire way up.

They parted to their own sides of the room and bid each other a goodnight. Instead of going over to his second choice, Crookshanks took residence at her side, his soothing purrs helping to send her off to dreamland…

But her dreams did not remain dreams for long.
Her mind began to wander to darker thoughts.

Of a man and woman who no longer knew they had a daughter.
Of a graveyard filled with tombstones of all her closest friends; living and dead.
Of a beautiful voice calling her towards a dangerous, yet just as beautiful woman.
Of that woman putting her under the cruciatus curse again and again and again…

She woke up screaming.

That ear-piercing howl awoke everyone in the room, but it was Ginny who was the first to jump into action. She sprung from her bed and ran to the screaming woman’s side as she thrashed about wildly. Crookshanks had jumped to the foot of the bed and was yowling noisily as if he too could feel the pain his owner was suffering from.

“Hermione! Hermione it’s just a nightmare!” She shouted at the flailing girl. “Please Hermione! Wake up! It’s not real! Hermione!” She tried, shaking the girl when her words didn’t seem to reach her.

Brown eyes met blue as Hermione awoke with a strangled gasp and tears in her eyes.

Seeing that she was finally wake, Ginny pulled the sobbing girl into her arms and rocked her gently as she soothed her with gentle words. She could see the other girls looking over at the two of them and she sent them a glare that had them all pulling their curtains close to give them some privacy.

Neither of them said anything for a while; Hermione too shaken to speak and Ginny too concerned to ask why. Instead, she guided the girl to her feet and pushed a robe into her arms and summoned a pair of slippers for her feet. She then led her to the door.

“I think you need to go let yourself go. Go upstairs and sing until you make yourself feel better.” She told Hermione as they walked down the stairs together. “If anyone asks, I’ll tell them you’re taking a walk around the corridors and they should leave you be.”

“Thanks Ginny.” She rasped, her throat still a bit horse from the screaming.

“Anytime.” Her friend said with a smile.

The portrait of the Fat Lady swung open and once she saw who it was exiting the dorms, she simply closed her eyes and went back to sleep.

The corridors were quiet and cold as she made her way to the seventh floor. Not even the fires burning from the torches lighting the many walls of the castle were enough to warm her. With a shiver, she realized that she had left her wand back in her room, but seeing as she was already halfway there, Hermione saw no point in turning around to go get it.
As she reached the last floor in the castle, a feeling of foreboding washed over her and sent a chill running up her spine that she knew had nothing to do with the cold.

It felt like something was watching her.

She stopped and looked around.

There was nothing but shadow and the occasional whistling of wind there to occupy the hallway.

Not wanting to stick around the corridor any longer, she ran towards the wall where the door for the room of requirement was hidden. She quickly paced back and forth in front of it and waited for it to appear. Once it did, she swung the door open and froze as she felt something soft as a breeze brush against the back of her head.

She whipped around in fright.

Nothing.

The hall was empty and there were no evidence that anyone was ever there.

She went inside and closed the door.

As soon as she laid eyes on the familiar and calm setting of her preferred sanctuary, it felt like a weight was lifted off her back. The room was at a warm temperature and the sounds of the forest occupied the silence that had once filled the air outside the room.

Being here felt like coming home.

The only thing that would complete the image would be if her parents were there by her side.

Thinking of her parents caused her to remember the nightmares that plagued her.

Haunting images of a man and woman who no longer knew her. Who have forgotten about hearing her songs and encouraging her when she was at her lowest. Her mother who struggled to tame her hair every morning before she headed off to school. Her father who made sure her teeth were perfect every day in order to preserve her winning smile. It hurt seeing her image fade away in the photo albums that littered her childhood home. Watching in anguish as her childish scrawls and her entire bedroom faded away into non-existence. It was one thing to feel like nothing in your parent’s eyes.

It was an entirely different story to be nothing quite literally.

She collapsed in the soft grass and began sobbing anew.

Merlin how she was getting tired of crying.

It seemed that ever since meeting Bellatrix that’s all she’s been doing. She knew that it partly was because of the older siren, but it unfortunately wasn’t all of her doing; even if she wanted to place the blame all on her.

Because in reality, Hermione didn’t have to obliterate her parents.

She could’ve just sent them into hiding and been done with it. But she knew that would’ve only been a temporary solution. Her parents were muggle dentist, and against a group of well-trained death eaters, they didn’t stand a chance. Eventually, they would’ve been found and used against her.

And she honestly couldn’t tell if it would’ve worked or not.
Could she really betray her friends- the wizarding world- to save her parents?

She didn’t know for sure.

And that alone terrified her.

No, as much as she loathed what she did- hated that she no longer had anyone to return to- she would do it over and over again if it meant they were safe. Because even if their memories of her were gone, her memories of them would never be forgotten. All the songs, all the life lessons, all the laughs and family outings- those things she would keep and cherish forever. She’d go on living for her family even if they didn’t know she was doing so.

The siren within her was stirring to the forefront of her mind as she went searching for something deep within her to bring forth more positive memories of her missing parents.

And then she thought of something; one of the songs she sang for her parents on her birthday when she was seven. The three of them had spent the day at the amusement park for the first time and she remembered how excited and inquisitive she had been when they got home that night. Her parents had taken their usual seats in the living room as she danced and sang about the magnificent day she had.

It took her a minute to remember how it went exactly, but her instincts soon came forth and helped her out. She began whistling an upbeat tune that she began clapping to in rhythm. The whistling stopped soon after as she began singing happily to the clapping of her hands.

**Around and around in a Ferris wheel**

*If we fell to the ground what would we feel?*

*Mom said the wind*

*And dad said the sun*

*But which one was right*

*It was neither one*

**Up and then down in a rocking ship**

*If we fell to the sea, how did we slip?*

*Mom said the tide*

*And dad said the rum*

*But which one was right*

*It was neither one*

**Stuck on a coaster at the very top**

*We sped to the earth, what made us stop?*
Mom said the brakes
And dad said the fun
But which one was right
It was neither one

The song abruptly grew slower.

But if neither one had told me the truth
And I asked these things, what would I do?

And just as quickly, the tempo rose again and then even faster.

I would do all the things that us children do
And I’d tell everyone that they both were true!

If we fell from the wheel in the sky so high
The wind and the sun would be by our sides
If we fell to the sea from our rocking ship
The rum and the tide is what made us trip

But stuck on a coaster at the very top
When we sped to the earth the brakes made us stop
So, mom may be right, but it was dad who won
Cause the ride may have stopped
But never did the fun! ~

She finished with a flail of her hands and then fell back into the grass with uncontrollable laughter.
Oh, how childish she had been back then.
She still remembers the look on both of her parents’ faces when she mentioned rum as if it was
common knowledge to all seven-year-olds. She even recalled what her response had been.

‘Everyone knows that ships are run by pirates. And pirates only like two things; treasure and rum. I read it in one of my books!’

They almost banned her from the library after that in an effort to save what was left of her childhood naivety.

In the end, they couldn’t bear to do it knowing how much she would’ve fought to get the ban lifted.

Despite knowing how silly the song truly was now that she was an adult, it was by far one of her fonder ones that she shared with her family. More than that, it also did wonders to help soothe her mind. The lingering sadness was still present in the back of her head, but it was more of a dull roar rather than a howling nightmare. She closed her eyes as peace finally found her long enough to allow her to fall asleep…

And then she heard it.

It was so quiet that she nearly didn’t notice, but something had landed on the grass above her head. She didn’t want to open her eyes.

Heaven knows she really didn’t.

This place was supposed to be her sanctuary, one of the only places in the world she could finally feel safe.

But Hermione was not going to play dumb.

The reality is that she hadn’t heard the door open once since she entered. And aside from the koi in the pond, there were no other living creatures within the room.

Which means there was an intruder.

Thankfully, it was not Bellatrix; of this she was certain. She would’ve known right away if it was her. That, and since she hadn’t been physically attacked yet, she figured that it wasn’t her wayward ‘mate’ this time around.

So, against her better judgement, Hermione opened her eyes, wondering what new horror would await her this time around.

The moment she looked up, for the second time that night, she found herself screaming. The unprepared siren threw herself back and scrambled away on hands and knees as the creature that had been staring down at her with piercing yellow watched her with indifference. As the false moon shined down on it facing her way, she try to determine if she had ever seen anything like it before and found she was coming up short.

It was a truly beautiful and yet terrifying beast to behold.

A bird was the only thing that closely resembled it. Its body was a greyish color and pressed against its back was a pair of completely black wings. They appeared to be more fur like than feather however, and she wondered how it was able to fly with such things. Atop it’s head was a crest of long black strands that was large and wild in appearance, giving the bird-thing what seemed to look like a mohawk. Two horns sprouted from its head and swooped backwards into distorted v’s; both
the same color as its body, but not particularly sharp at the ends. Its beak was narrow and sharp, perfect for tearing meat apart rather than picking fruits from trees. The thing’s tail was unusually long for a bird and appeared to be wispy and smoke like rather than strong and sturdy.

But despite all of that, there were two things about the bird that drew her attention the most. The first one was its height. She had never seen a bird so large! Its legs were fairly long and the talons at the end looked as sharp as a razor. They almost looked as if they would not support the bird, but she knew right away from it’s confident stance that that was anything but true. The last thing she noticed about the creature, were its eyes. They actually unnerved her more than its beak or sharp talons. The sclera were oceans of darkness that narrowed at her darkly as it’s yellow pupils honed in on her every movement. Hermione could tell right away that there was a level of intelligence behind its eyes that made her realize it was smarter than an average bird.

She never wished she had her wand in her hand more than she did right now. After this was over, she swore that she would never let the piece of wood leave her side again.

The two sole occupants of the room stared at each other; one with indifference and the other with apprehension. Then the creature moved. Like a silent specter, it spread its black wings and leapt over to her position sprawled across the grass and landed before her.
Its wings didn’t make a single noise.

Thinking back, she knew now how the creature had gotten in.

The way it moved, as lightly and quiet as a ghost, it simply flew over her head when she entered the room without her any the wiser. The strange feeling of something brushing against the back of her head must’ve been its tail.

She hated to admit it was a clever move seeing as she hadn’t been expected anything to be above her of all things. That didn’t mean she hated herself any less for letting the creature get one up on her in the end.

Hermione didn’t move as the thing grew closer and closer until it finally stood at her side.

And that’s when it lunged.

She yelled again as she was now flat on the grass, the monster of a bird standing on her chest with sharp talons digging into the fabric of her robe. She raised her hands in order to try to push the unnaturally heavy bird off of her, but her efforts were thwarted with a sharp beak pecking at her every move.

After several attempts to free herself, she stopped and threw her hands to the side with a sour look upon her face.

The look she got for her failure made her fear melt away into anger at its clearly amused expression.

“Get off of me, you smug, creepy bastard!” She yelled, hoping the loudness would scare the bird away.

It did the opposite.

The creature leaned more towards her face and allowed a deep, croaky sound to expel from its beak in rapid bursts.

The equivalent of laughter.

Hermione blushed in both anger and embarrassment, secretly thankful no one was around to catch her getting schooled by a bird of all things.

“Stop laughing at me you blasted chicken!” She hissed.

Said ‘chicken’ didn’t take kindly to be called as such and dug its claws deeper into her robe until they dug into the top of her breasts.

“Ow! Stop it you jerk! I wouldn’t be calling you names if you’d get off of me!” Hermione cried out, grabbing the thing’s thin legs to try and dislodge it.

To her surprise, they didn’t move an inch. As thin as they appeared, its legs were like a pair of black rebar, ones that didn’t budge with her attempts at removal.

She huffed in anger and tried a different approach.

“What will it take to get you off of me then?” She asked, feeling silly for talking to an animal for only a few moments.
It seemed to have been the right thing to do however, as the creature lifted up one of its taloned feet to her face.

That’s when she noticed that there was something clutched in its grasp.

A letter.

It wanted her to take it.

At least she thinks it did.

Unsure if she was just reading too far into things or not, Hermione reached up to grab the message from its leg. When she didn’t get a jab from its beak for her efforts, she snatched the note from it and sighed in relief as it leapt off of her to walk off towards the pond behind her.

Now free to move, Hermione sat up and looked at the note in her hands with apprehension. It seemed innocent enough now, but since she had a hunch who it was from, it would’ve been better to just drop it and run while she still could.

Her Gryffindor nature however would not allow that to happen.

She opened it and knew her assumption was right as she read the first line.

*My dearest mudblood filth,*

“Yep. It has to be her alright.” She groaned in despair.

Behind her, she could hear the bird- Bellatrix’s bird- start laughing at her once again.

She wanted to drown it in the pond, but chose to keep reading instead.

*My dearest mudblood filth,*

*I do so hope you’re enjoying your final days hiding behind your filthy blood traitor friends. I for one think we’ve been apart for far too long, don’t you agree? Well fear not, my darling little mate.*

*I’m coming for you.*

*And if you’re reading this letter, then my familiar has found you and it’s already too late to stop me.*

*Oh, the things I’m going to do to you muddy.*

*You who DARED to make a fool of me that night in the forest!*

*Just for that, I’ll make sure to make your stay with me as painless as possible.*

*For me of course.*

*You on the other hand?*

*I’ll make you scream in ways you’ve never done before until I break your mind into a million tiny pieces.*

*I wonder what your friends will think once they see the mess I make of you.*

*Or what’s left of you anyways.*
We’ll soon find out I guess.

I’ll be seeing you, muddy.

Your loving mate, Bellatrix Lestrange

‘Shit.’

Honestly, that’s all she could say at this point.

Somehow, someway, even hidden hear in the room of requirement, Bellatrix had found her. There really was nowhere that she could hide. She glanced over at the bird standing near the pond behind her.

In some twisted sort of way, it didn’t surprise her that it was viciously devouring all the koi that had once occupied her sanctuary with not even a shred of mercy.

She flopped back onto the grass, the note still gripped loosely in her hand.

A tear slid from the corner of her eye as she realized that her days were numbered.

Her only hope was that Harry and Ron would catch the woman in the next few days and this whole nightmare would be over.

A croaky laugh sounded behind her and she knew at once her wish would not be granted, now or any time in the distant future either.

Chapter End Notes

I'll leave a link for my deviantart down here. Any future artwork will most likely end up there as well. I'm still pretty new to the whole digital art thing, but I would love to practice drawing some things for certain scenes in order to improve myself, so there's something to look forward to at least! Thanks for reading!

deviantart link - http://clumsy-dreamer.deviantart.com/
Chapter 10: Christmas

Ahoy there! And we're back with a new chapter! Think this one is longer than some of the others, but I couldn't find a nice place where I wanted to break it. With that being said, this chapter marks the start of all the Bellatrix and Hermione interactions and angstyness that you're all probably here for! Poor Hermione can't catch a break! XD Took me a minute to write and edit it, but I think I'm happy with the results and hope that all of you reading enjoy it as well. I do read all the comments you leave and I love hearing what you have to say! Thank you so much! I'm really glad I'm able to write something that people enjoy reading and is fun to write as well. I won't keep you any longer though, so please enjoy Chapter 10 of Sing to Me Your Insanity!

Chapter 10: Christmas

As November passed by and slowly crept into December, Hermione could feel nothing but anxiousness and worry. Bellatrix had made no new movements aside for sending that infernal bird of hers to torment her every waking moment.

Hermione wasn't an idiot, she knew that she could no longer handle Bellatrix alone and so the moment she stopped lying around crying, she ran from the room and pounded on the headmistress’ door in a panic. When the door opened and the older witch stepped out- still in her sleeping robes- Hermione flung herself at the woman and began frantically retelling what had just happened.

The aging witch didn't catch every word she had said, but she discerned enough to realize that something had happened with the room of requirement and it had all to do with Bellatrix. She didn't waste time in alerting the ministry and having them come to the room of requirement in order to ensure that the school had not been compromised. Of course, nothing turned up; the bird not even leaving a single feather as proof of its appearance.

Using a reverse point-me spell on the letter Bellatrix wrote lead them to a dead end.

Hermione wanted to scream from frustration.

They were getting nowhere and it seemed the longer they took, the closer Bellatrix came to making her move.

She hadn't seen or spoken to Ron and Harry since their fight in the office and it seemed like they had no plans of coming to see her no time soon either. Ginny, Neville, and Luna were trying their best to support her though and she was grateful for the three of them attempting to keep her from going insane. Instead of watching her spiral into madness, they tried occupying her mind on the upcoming holiday with ideas for gifts and celebration. They had decided to do a secret Santa amongst themselves and the other people in the Gryffindor towers. While they waited to see who would all participate, they spent their remaining time decorating the dorms and playing various Christmas themed games. It was nice to get her mind focused on something more positive, so Hermione decided to not go into the festivities halfhearted. She was dressed in a green and red sweater that Molly had given her a few years back and baked frosted sugar cookies with the help of Mumpty and the other house elves working in the kitchens. She passed them out to everyone in the dorms and
soon was getting requests left and right for more of the delicious and sugary treats.

The Friday night before Christmas break led Hermione to doing something that she never thought she would get involved in.

She played exploding snap for the very first time.

Hermione had never been a very big fan of the game- what with her focusing on her studies and what not- but this year she didn’t want to do that. It was her final year and so her classes were a cakewalk for her which meant that she didn’t need to study nearly as hard as the years before. A single weekend of mindless fun would not ruin her nearly perfect grades even if she did nothing else for the rest of the week.

That and she secretly wanted to destroy everyone with her knowledge of the game she learned over years of watching from the sidelines.

By the third round, the tips of her hair had been singed from her not being quick enough with her reflexes.

She was out completely within the next two turns.

Despite the loss however, Hermione had fun and quickly realized that she had been missing out on so much all this time. Ginny, who ended up winning the whole thing in the end was the first to let her know that she should’ve been joining in on the action a long time ago.

“I mean come on Hermione, you love the adrenaline. When it’s not life threatening that is. A few more years of practice and you could’ve been the queen of exploding snap!” The red head told her as they put the cards away that night.

Hermione laughed and told her that she had been busy. This sent Ginny into an absolute laughing fit. Hermione had made it seem like her school year adventures were equivalent to menial chores rather than the life changing events that they actually were. A part of her wished they had been, but she didn’t want to go further down the rabbit hole with those thoughts in case it ruined her good night.

The weekend came and went before she knew it. Everyone would be leaving that Monday afternoon. Before that however, everyone gathered around the huge Christmas tree in the Gryffindor common room and both gave and collected their presents from their secret Santa’s. Hermione had gotten a young first year as her person and she only hoped the lion themed woolen hat would live up to the young girl’s expectations. She hadn’t been able to go to Diagon Alley herself, but Ginny offered to go in her stead. When the youngest Weasley went down the list of things George carried in his shop and mentioned the magically altered hats, she knew she couldn’t pass one up. The hat’s ears swiveled and turned in relation to the wearers’ emotions which she thought was quite an adorable sight indeed.

The young first year was already ecstatic to receive a gift from one of the wizarding world’s saviors, but it was the hat that had the girl hurling herself at Hermione’s middle in thanks and excitement. It made her heart swell to see the child go around the room showing off the hat to her year mates; the enchanted ears swiveling and perking up with her enthusiasm.

While watching the girl, and socializing with her fellow lions before they left for the train station, there came a knock at the portrait.

One of the prefects opened it to reveal Luna Lovegood carrying a brightly wrapped gold and red present.
The boy allowed her to pass seeing as the Ravenclaw was already a common sight amongst the rest of the house.

The blond made her way over to the seats where they had been discussing their plans for break; a large smile plastered on her face as she approached.

“Good morning everyone!” She greeted.

“Morning Luna!” Ginny returned. “Come to give your gift?”

Luna nodded. “Yes. I wasn’t quite sure when I should have come and so I figured I would consult my whispers. They said I should’ve been here an hour ago apparently.”

“Most everybody has their gifts already. But seeing as a certain someone is still sitting here empty handed, I’m guessing Hermione here is your secret Santa?” She asked the Ravenclaw.

Luna smiled. “You’d be correct!” She almost glided over to Hermione from the amount of excitement she was experiencing. “Happy Christmas Hermione!”

Hermione took the brightly colored box from her hands.

“Thanks Luna! Happy Christmas to you as well!” She said.

Carefully and without ripping all of Luna’s hard work to shreds, Hermione opened the gift. She was met with a black, velvety, rectangular box. The Gryffindor knew from the packaging that she would be finding jewelry inside, but the precious item she pulled from the box wasn’t anything she had been expecting to receive from her secret Santa, let alone Luna.

Said item was a beautiful gold and ruby bracelet. The bulk of the bracelet was gold with two otters twined around each other from their tails to clasp hands on the other side. Their eyes were made of two bright and shiny rubies and all down their backs was a trail of tiny diamonds that gave the bracelet even more shine. The bracelet was clearly brand new and more than that, most likely expensive as all get out. Having never been one for jewelry herself, Hermione felt that the gift was far too much, but looking up at the pure joy on Luna’s face, she knew that she couldn’t dream of giving it back. Instead, she reached her hand out to the other girl and asked if she would help her put it on.

“Certainly!” She said, moving over to lend a hand. Once the bracelet was securely in place, Luna kept her hands in her own and asked. “Do you like it?”

“I love it Luna. You didn’t have to do all this for me. I would’ve been happy with anything you got me.” Hermione told her.

Luna’s face pulled up into that strangely knowing smile she did sometimes. “I know, but I saw this and I just knew that it would be perfect for you. My father and I went traveling a while back and I saw this in a jewelry stall and it just called to me. I’d been keeping it for a while now and this seem like the perfect time to give it to you. Or so I’ve been told.”

“And this has nothing to do with the fact that my patronus just so happens to be an otter would it?” The frizzy haired witch questioned with a raised eyebrow.

“Nope! Just a convenient happenstance as it turns out.” The girl said. “The vender did say that it had a few charms on it for protection, but otherwise, it just really reminded me of you for some reason.

“Well, that vender definitely has good taste then. Thanks again Luna.” Hermione said, pulling the
girl into a tight hug that was easily returned.

The group of friends spent most of the morning talking and saying their final goodbyes before heading out to the train.

For Hermione, the day went by way too quickly for her liking. Her time with her friends was there and then gone in a flash. Afternoon had rolled around and Hagrid came in to usher everyone to the boats so that they can board the Hogwarts Express for the holidays. Hermione watched as everyone left and felt a welling bout of loneliness fill up inside of her as she left the dorms to head to the owlery where she knew Crookshanks liked to hang out.

How she desperately wanted to spend the holidays with the Weasleys as Ginny had offered, but with Bellatrix still after her, she was well aware that the family would not be safe.

Hermione wouldn’t be able to live with herself if anything happened to her second family because of her.

So, she made the executive decision to stay at Hogwarts with the other professors and students alongside her familiar. It would not only be the first time she stayed at the castle, but it would be the first Christmas that she would be without her parents. Of course, they weren’t with her last year either, but she still had Harry who she already considered a brother.

Now she didn’t even have that much seeing how they had fallen out and the other Gryffindor was out with Ron hunting down her so called ‘mate’.

When did her life become this miserable, she wondered as she marched up the stairs to the owlery.

The moment she pushed open the two heavy wooden doors before, Hermione was assaulted by the sound of cooing and hoots from the various avian messengers roosting about the room. It didn’t take her long to locate Crookshanks as the big orange feline was sitting in the center of the room peering up into a dark corner of the room with an intensity she had only seen him do when Pettigrew was around masquerading as a rat. Hermione paid it no mind at first, but when the half-kneazle didn’t so much as acknowledge his owner standing right beside him, she tensed up and tried to see what was causing her familiar so much distress.

She was greeted by only darkness.

“Crooks? What on earth are you staring at? There’s nothing there.” She told him. The cat looked up at her for only a moment before returning to the dark corner high above them. Again she saw nothing, yet even so, her guard didn’t lower in the slightest. Instead of straining her eyes, or better yet continuing to stare into the nothingness before her, Hermione whipped out her wand and pointed it at the ceiling.

“Lumos.” She said as a bright ball of light flared to life and floated up to the rafters. She watched as it reached the top and a gasped escaped her lips as she took a frightened step backwards.

Seeing her reaction to its presence, the strange creature that had given her the note in the room of requirement unfurled itself from its crouching position and began letting out the unpleasant croaking sound that she was coming to hate very much.

Then, without warning, the beast stood to its full height upon the rafters, leapt into the air and dived at her with talons at the ready.

Hermione screamed as it silently flew towards her. Her scream had sent the other birds into a flurry and all the noise and her attacker coming straight at her had her ready to bolt. However, before she
could even flee, Crookshanks hissed fiercely and sprung from his arched position; bunting the bird off course to land sprawled across the ground beside them. The creature seemed shocked at being attacked and rolled to its feet to stare down fiercely at the brave little feline before it.

Hermione, while grateful for her familiar’s help, was now fearing for his life. The familiar belonged to Bellatrix and she knew from just looking at its livid expression and sharp appendages that if the two were to get into a scuffle, Crookshanks would not even stand a chance. She was apparently the only one out of the two of them who thought so however, seeing as the orange half-kneazle was standing unmoved in front of her with a deep growl rumbling from his chest.

Hermione didn’t know how long the standoff lasted. It seemed that time almost stood still as she waited to see if she had enough time to get herself and Crookshanks out of the way before either one of them got hurt.

Then as soon as it began, something in the air shifted and the two of them seemed to calm down. The bird kept it’s sharp yellow gaze still trained on her and her cat, but the attacking stance that it had held up to this point had all but disappeared. Crookshanks also seemed to come to his senses once he saw that his opponent was no longer attacking his owner.

The tension in the room dissipated, and only the sounds of the other owls in the room could be heard. In an act of both comfort and weariness for his safety, Hermione scooped Crookshanks into her arms and took a step towards the door once more, although she was still hesitant to leave just yet. She was terrified that the infernal creature kept getting into various parts of the castle but she knew that letting it out of her site wouldn’t bode well for her either. Just as the last time when they found no trace of it, the young siren knew that it would be gone without a trace until Bellatrix sent it to her again.

It was best to keep her eye on it for now.

And that’s when she noticed something.

Unlike the last time, she noted that there was no note attached to its leg and nothing that gave a hint as to why it had come. But there was something around its neck. From where she was standing, it looked like a necklace of a door. It was a gaudy looking thing with intricate details and looked heavier than it probably was.

Of all things to have a necklace of, a door was definitely strange.

Hermione wanted to get a closer look at it seeing as it was strange to see the familiar carrying it around for no reason. To anyone else, it seemed to be just an ordinary necklace, but Hermione knew something about it wasn’t right. At least she was safe in knowing it wasn’t a portkey seeing as those would burn to a crisp against the school’s newly prepared wards.

She would store that little tidbit for later, but decided to let it go for now. Hermione promised to tell the headmistress about it in the morning or later on at dinner. Wanting to at least try and figure out why the bird had come to her once more, Hermione spoke to it. Knowing that it was at least intelligent enough to understand her- though she was unsure about how intelligent- she decided to try her luck and ask it.

“I know you belong to Bellatrix. She sent you, didn’t she?” She asked hesitantly.

The bird simply tilted its head as if it was trying to process her words.

It was almost cute had she not known of the bird’s true nature.

Her koi pond seems oddly lonely now without the tiny fish swimming around her feet when she
sang.

Hermione ran her hand down Crookshanks back and glared at the bird who had the gall to try and act innocent- as if she had suddenly forgot that it tried to dive bomb her not even five minutes before.

“I don’t know how you keep getting in here, but I’m watching you. The headmistress knows about you too. It’ll be a cold day in hell before she lets your master get into this castle.” She told it. Hermione hoped that she sound threatening enough to show that she meant business.

Judging by the croaking laugh she got, she had no such luck.

Angry at the nonchalant attitude of her mate’s familiar, Hermione stood and walked over to one of the lower windows to stare out at the lake as the sun began setting over the horizon. It was a peaceful sight, and as much as she loved her little space in the room of requirement, a part of her still longed for her place along the lakeside.

Because as of lately, the castle was beginning to feel not only like a safe place, but a prison as well.

*Of course,* she knew of the reasoning why she dared not leave for the holidays and all; but that still didn’t take away from the fact that she was essentially cooped up in here until something changed in the manhunt. A sense of helplessness came over her and a sad keen welled up in her chest and flowed through the room with a wave of sadness. Several of the owls closest to her gave her strange looks and Crookshanks’ tail came up to bat at her face, his way of comforting her when she got like this.

She was no longer surprised at this. Animals, were especially in tuned with her voice and they reacted to it in different ways. Some of them ran away from her, some of them overcame their natural instincts and tried to get as close to her as possible. It was both a gift and a curse really, especially now that her encounters with Bellatrix have made her abilities go completely haywire. How she wished that vile beast of a woman would’ve just stayed dead! Just thinking about her and how she was ruining her life without even being there was enough for a unruly growl to well up within her chest.

Her heart almost skipped a beat when a deeper, croaker growl matched hers from her side.

Hermione whipped her head to look down at the floor.

The creepy familiar of her mate was staring at her with a strange, unmoving gaze. It was nothing like the evil look she was given the first time they met, nor was it anything like the one it showed when it attacked earlier.

If anything, the creature looked *delighted.*

Curiosity came over her and she allowed her siren side to show through; releasing a soft but long note from deep within her diaphragm.

Again, the bird copied her, it’s response much more gritty, but still beautiful in a way.

Hermione hated herself for smiling.

Had she not known who the creature belonged to, she would’ve assumed it was just her siren that the thing was reacting to. Now however, a part of her knew that more than likely it was recognizing that Hermione was similar to its master- and that at some point Bellatrix must’ve sang to it or around it enough for it to know that.
The thought of Bellatrix singing to a bird of all things was funny in and of itself. She knew that with that woman’s personality, trying to appease anything of a lesser species than herself was way below her. Still the image wouldn’t get out of her head, and before long, Hermione felt her guard drop just a hair at being in the creature’s presence.

The Gryffindor girl jolted when the bells to signify the beginning of dinner rang off in the distance and she was startled to realized just how long she had spent standing there in the owlery.

A wave of hunger overtook her as she remembered that she had yet to eat since this morning. Hermione turned to leave the room; Crookshanks curled up in her arms with a light purr. As she was preparing to leave however, she noted that there was a pair of narrow, yellow eyes tracking her every movement, but the creature they belonged to did not follow.

And this was where Hermione ran into a problem.

The beast kept getting into the castle. McGonagall already knew about this and the school was still warded, so there was nothing else they could do now to keep it away if they didn’t even know how it got in. She could run and get McGonagall now, or even send a patronus, however she had no doubt that by the time the message got to the headmistress, her feathered fiend would already be long gone.

Hermione thought about using a spell to either immobilize it or capture it until someone came to get it, but she didn’t know anything about its species to just start hurling spells at it all willy-nilly. If she cast something that would have no effect or only caused it to be agitated, who knew what it would be capable of doing to her. Her research yielded no results when she went to the library and Hagrid did his best to look into as well, but he too was left with no answers to what the bird actually was.

She hated this, not knowing things. It was the third worse feeling in her opinion; loneliness coming in first with worthlessness at a close second. Knowledge and rationality were the two things she excelled at and when one of them didn’t work, she relied on the other to make up for it.

Therefore, she would do the only thing she could right now and leave it be, for her own safety-and to a lesser extent- her sanity.

With a look that was neither malevolent nor polite, she addressed the creature that’d been patiently watching her from its place by the open window.

“If I go get help, you’ll be gone without a trace won’t you,” It cocked its head to the left. “Don’t. You’re not fooling anyone, with trying to act all innocent, as if you didn’t attack me earlier.” She huffed, giving it a look that clearly said she wasn’t falling for its tricks any longer. “Someone will be coming up here soon. They usually check at curfew time. You best be gone by then.” And then she turned and left the owlery.

Hermione made her way down the stairs. She had to convince herself that telling the creature about the curfew patrol was to ensure that it left the school early and not that she was giving it a heads up. Because she wasn’t.

And if anyone asked, she would tell them the same thing.

So why did she feel like she had done something terribly wrong?

It was too late now anyways, with any luck, it would leave and that’s what she wanted in the first place. With that behind her, Hermione could now enjoy her dinner with the few people still left in the castle, in peace. Today marked the first day of winter break and she was planning to make the most
of it within the safety of the castle- Bellatrix and her bird be damned! She had no plans to sit around moping as she had been doing for so many weeks now. This was no way to live. The castle had always been her home; not her prison, and it was about time that she stopped being a captive in her own home.

With that thought in her mind, Hermione could already feel her spirits lifting. Things were finally starting to look up for her.

Until those happy thoughts came crashing down only a few weeks later…

Just as Hermione had declared the day she left the owlery- she was done with feeling trapped and moping about. The school was nearly empty, aside from the professors, the few students who stayed behind, and the other inhuman occupants of the castle. Instead of hiding away inside the library as she seemed to always do, Hermione ventured out of her comfort zone and socialized with anyone who was willing to listen.

Of course, the Gryffindors were happy to have her around, but she found that the Ravenclaws enjoyed her company just as much, if not more, than those of her own house. Luna would’ve no doubt spoken about her to her dormmates and Hermione wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or bad thing, now that she began to think about it. Either way, the ravens were all for intellectual conversations, and she enjoyed the time she spent hanging with them and solving riddles in the main hall when dinner time rolled around.

The remaining Hufflepuffs were nice as well, but they seemed skittish around her and decided that holding conversations were not in their interest. Some of them did approach her with questions about classes and the like, but not many of them stayed long afterwards, not that she minded it much.

The Slytherins were a mix of good and bad.

Most didn’t even give her the time of day. The ones that did only did so in hopes to somehow make her slip up and spill what had been going on around the school with the aurors. Hermione hated talking to them the most since she then had to wiggle her way out of the conversation in a way that was not only unsuspicious, but quickly as well. Because while Slytherins did have a strong aversion to the house of lions- especially to one of the defeaters of their lord Voldemort- they were curious and cunning by nature; a deadly combination against someone who was trying to hide secrets such as herself.

Not all of the snakes were impolite however.

Just like during the war, there were people of all houses fighting for both sides; the same went for the Slytherins. While majority of them supported the dark lord, there were still quite a few who did not. Hermione ran into a few of them in passing, but as she would come to find, the brief encounters they shared were more valuable to her than few other things in this world.

It was both shocking and heartwarming when a Slytherin would approach her while she was sitting about reading and begin to thank her for helping save them. Thanking her! Her of all people! Not Harry or Ron- though it was clear that they were grateful to them as well- but Hermione Granger. They weren’t particular profound or borderline worship thank you’s either.

Many simply said one word and left. It was so quick that anyone watching would think that it was insincere.

But not Hermione.
She didn’t know if it was her siren side or her own intuition, but she could tell that every snake that approached her with thanks was nothing but sincere in their words.

Opposite of that, sometimes they didn’t just give her single worded responses.

One seventh year student said nothing at all.

Instead, he looked her dead in her eyes and then bent himself at the waist in a bow so deep she was afraid he was about to tip over. Then he left without a word. Now whenever they met eyes in the hallways, he tipped his head at her and she returned his gratitude with a smile, but the two never spoke.

They didn’t need to.

The various little moments like these she experienced over the following days had her glowing both inside and out. It was nearly impossible to keep a smile from her face now. Hermione’s siren side was practically vibrating with joy at the back of her mind from the slew of positive emotions the two of them were experiencing. She found that she felt the best when the both of them were happy; something that didn’t happen to them often.

Hermione, at times like these, felt misery for her other half.

Emotions, especially strong ones, were essentially the life blood of sirens like hers’. The two of them had been sharing emotions between one another since Hermione first started showing as a young girl, but up until recently, most of those times were filled with pleasant feelings. Now it seemed like every few days she was having breakdowns and random bouts of self-loathing due to the various misfortunes happening in her life. If it was this taxing on her, she couldn’t even imagine what it was doing to the creature within her. That was why Hermione was currently doing anything she could to uplift their mood. She didn’t want to be like this. All Hermione wanted was for things to go back to the way they were before.

She wanted Ron and Harry to hang out with her again.

She wanted to hold her parents close and sing to them in their living room at home.

She wanted Bellatrix dead.

If she could have those things again, then her life could finally be happy once more. Hermione wasn’t so naïve to think that she could wave her wand and make everything perfect, but with time and effort, she could achieve all that she desired.

She just needed to be patient.

Hermione opted to continue doing the little things she enjoyed until such time; like reading cheesy romance novels and mentally critiquing their flaws with disdain and a dash of humor.

The halls were empty as the grave, just as they had been for many days now as she headed to the library. The bottom of her boots clacked loudly as she walked briskly through the halls. Occasionally she stopped to greet the various pictures aligned along the castle walls, but otherwise she kept her stride with a purpose.

That was until a familiar, and unwelcomed croon came from somewhere high above her.

Hermione stopped and sighed, before glaring up at where the sound had come from.
“Back again? Why are you following me?” She murmured to herself, not really caring whether or not Bellatrix’s familiar could hear her or not. At this point she was prepared to just ignore the thing altogether and keep on moving.

As it would turn out, the day she encountered the animal in the owlery was not to be the last time she would see it. Every day since that night, she had caught the bird following her around from the shadows. Some days she would notice immediately. Other days, like today, she wouldn’t notice until she heard it from wherever it was choosing to hide at that moment.

It was becoming unnerving. The way it never came closer, nor did it seemed to be carrying any more obscure messages from its master. Still had that weird necklace though. It would simply watch her until she went somewhere more crowded where it never dared to follow.

The worst part was that it no longer just appeared in the dead of night.

It was currently early in the afternoon and yet there it was, sitting up in one of the higher windows, unseen unless someone wanted to strain their neck looking up that far. The sun was beaming down on its back and cascading through its wings as the wind blew it’s crest back and forth from the draft that was always present within the castle halls.

Hermione hated that she thought the scenery to be beautiful in a dark, and ethereal kind of way.

‘As if something that belongs to Bellatrix could ever be beautiful.’ She thought as she turned her back and continued on her way down the corridors.

In the back of her mind, she could faintly hear her siren side prodding her to remember how lovely they thought Bellatrix had sounded that very first night in the forest. She forced herself to fight off the imagery with a fierce stubbornness, hating herself more and more because she secretly had to agree with it.

Aside from the bird’s unwelcomed visit, the rest of her journey was unhindered and she reached the library in no time at all. Madam Pince was sitting at the front desk sorting through a stack of parchments and placing books onto carts that sat at her side. She approached the woman and offered to help her with her duties, overjoyed when the older witch gave her a grateful smile and sent her off to work.

Happy to have something to do during a rather dull afternoon, Hermione set about returning books to their proper places with enthusiasm. The task was a mundane one, but there was something about the mindless work that soothed her rather frayed nerves. All around her were the things she loved most, in a place where she felt safe. Her usually tense muscles relaxed for the first time that day and the atmosphere combined with the momentarily simplistic actions of the sorting were enough for a soft hum to flow from her lips. Hermione was careful to be quiet as to not alert Madam Pince who was still unaware of what she was. Although she knew that the librarian would have no problems with her magical creature status, Hermione still felt weird about revealing herself to other people- whether they were close to her or not.

Everything was going great.

After so many nights where she sometimes didn’t get a wink of sleep, tonight, would be the Christmas eve dinner. Everyone from all the houses were going to get together afterwards and celebrate once midnight approached which meant that by the end of the night, she would be dead tired and sleep would come to her so much easier.

Hermione was getting excited.
She hadn’t ever stayed at Hogwarts during the holidays, but from what Harry and Ron had always said, the party tonight would be filled with music, laughter, and magic all around. Hermione could imagine it now. Everyone eating and playing exploding snap together. The older kids playing riveting games of wizard’s chess as the professors stood watch over them and talked amongst themselves as the festivities carried on into the early morning.

‘What am I going to wear? Needs to be something nice. Maybe flatten my hair again?’ She began debating to herself as she placed a rather heavy tomb on one of the lower shelves. A careful hand rose to rake through thick, curly locks. ‘No, no, that won’t do. This is a lost cause without magic and I’ve no clue what any of those spells were from fourth year. Merlin knows, I’d no hope of doing it by hand either.’

The rest of the afternoon went by with Hermione debating back and forth between hairstyles and attire, and she wished with all her heart that Ginny was with her right now to give her input. The whole walk up to her dorm was spent contemplating these things, and she wished she could bounce her ideas back and forth with another person.

The only other around to give their opinion on her thoughts was the young gentlemen sitting at the foot of her bed.

Hermione whipped around and held up two different shirts; one black and one red.

“Okay, be honest with me; which one do you like better?” She asked. “The red one is pretty dressy, but the black one is more casual and less likely to be missed if I mess it up after dinner.”

Crookshanks stared at her blankly.

“Well you’re no help at all Crooks!” She laughed, placing the red shirt back in her trunk.

A nice pair of jeans and her favorite black boots were pulled out of the trunk as well to be placed alongside the rest of her outfit. She changed swiftly and once dressed, pulled a black scrunchie from the depths of her trunk. With great effort, Hermione was quite proud that she managed to wrangle her hair up into a high ponytail the looked pretty nice in her opinion.

This was new for her - the lack of knowledge for styling hair keeping the mass atop her head in a single style a majority of her life - but she felt pretty confident at what she achieved by herself.

The Gryffindor girl didn’t bother with any makeup and the only jewelry she wore was her bracelet that she got from Luna. Instead of wearing her winter robes, she decided on a nice, grey, wool sweater that she left open and came down to rest around her knees. Once her wand was placed in the back of her jeans and her boots were on her feet, the young woman turned to her cat and gestured him towards the door.

“Let’s go Crooks before we’re late.”

The round ball of fur leapt from the bed and joined his master’s side and together they exited the portrait of Gryffindor tower.

To immediately stop at the sight before them.

Standing in a tight nit circle at the bottom of the steps was the headmistress and a group of aurors that included Ron and Harry. She could tell from their worried expressions and harsh whispers that something had happened.

Still, she approached them, a frown pulling across her face.
“What’s going on? What happened?” The young witch asked and McGonagall whirled around and rushed to her side, placing comforting hands around her shoulders.

“Oh Hermione dear, I have terrible news.” She said.

Her blood ran cold.

“It’s her isn’t it?” She whispered.

McGonagall nodded solemnly. “We just got a Patronus from a team of aurors in Diagon alley.”

“A few hours ago, there was an attack.” Harry cut in. “They’re saying a woman fitting Bellatrix’s description was seen blasting random dark spells at innocent bystanders and shops. She’s been apparing around the town and so no one can get a solid hold on her position.”

“We’re heading there now to help make the arrest,” Ron steeped forward to say. “This is the first time that she’s making a public move and we need to nail her before she disappears again.”

“Miss Granger, I must insist that you return to the room of requirement where it is safest. The rest of the professors are keeping the other students in their rooms.” The headmistress said as she began guiding the young girl to the seventh floor. “I will come and contact you once we can confirm that Bellatrix has been dealt with. Don’t- under any circumstance- open the room for anyone unless it is I or Mumpty.”

“How will I know it’s you?” Hermione said, trying her best to stay calm even though her heart was racing a mile a minute.

“The only person who knows the conversation that occurred at your home the day you got your Hogwarts acceptance letter is myself. That’ll be how you’ll know.” The older woman said as she ushered the younger witch up the stairs leading to the long seventh floor corridor.

Behind them Hermione could hear Ron and Harry whispering harshly back and forth with one another, no doubt the two of them worried to bits about her safety. The animosity that she had been holding onto since their altercation in the headmistress’ office had all but dissipated at this point. After weeks to stew over it, she would rather stop and talk with her two best friends than argue with them.

She had hoped that she would be able to do just that the next that she saw them, but it looked like that just wasn’t meant to be. A part of her should’ve known that the little happiness she had started to accumulate wasn’t destined to last long.

Tears prickled at the corner of her eyes and she was suddenly grateful that she had forgone the makeup after all.

The group reached the room of requirement in no time at all and after Hermione opened the door, she was ushered inside alongside her agitated familiar. Ron, Harry and the headmistress stood outside the door.

It was clear that she was to be left by herself.

“There’ll be guards posted outside this rooms in a short while. I will be going into town with Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley to apprehend Bellatrix. You have my word that she will not be allowed to torment you any longer Miss Granger.” The headmistress said with a fierceness that Hermione hadn’t seen on the woman’s face since the war.
McGonagall spun around and began waltzing down the hall, leaving the two aurors standing there at the threshold. Harry spoke up first.

“I’m sorry ‘Mione. It must suck being held in the castle like this.” He said softly, his normally luminous green eyes looking at her in the center of the room with noticeably less life.

“We’ll deal with this and then we’ll be back in no time.” Ron said. A ran raised to scratch at the back of his head as he suddenly seemed to be nervous about something. At first Hermione thought he wasn’t going to say whatever was on his mind, but then he must of got the courage in the end and asked her. “And then maybe we all could…hang out sometime? Me and Harry have a few vacation days saved up and it would be nice to see you again while we’re not working.” He managed to say, his voice only cracking once in the whole sentence.

Hermione felt the tears actually fall this time but even through her tears she was able to nod her head and rush over to pull both boys into a hug which they readily returned.

“I’d like that. I’d like that a lot actually.” She sobbed.

It was the one thing she needed to hear right now, to hear that they still cared about her outside of their obligations to the auror program. She was upset of course that Bellatrix chose tonight- a day before Christmas of all times- to ruin what little hope she had at a fun filled day, but the thought of being able to reunite with Harry and Ron was enough to make up for it. In a way, it was a curse and a blessing.

She just hoped that it was less of a curse than she was beginning to feel it was.

Reluctantly, the young siren detangled herself from the two boys and rubbed the tears away from her eyes; not even caring that her face was no doubt red and blotchy from her spontaneous breakdown.

“You two should go catch up with the headmistress.” She told them.

“Will you be alright here by yourself?” Harry asked hesitantly.

She nodded.

“I’ll be fine. You two and McGonagall are the only ones who know I’m here right now.” She stepped back into the room. “Go. I’ll be here when you get back.” She promised.

The two boys nodded and then took off down the hall in a sprint. Hermione was seconds from closing the door when she heard Ron call out to her suddenly. Curious, she poked her body out the door to see he had stopped several feet from the stairs and was cupping his hands around his mouth.

“By the way, you look really good with your hair up like that!” He yelled, before disappearing down the stairs to follow after Harry.

Hermione found herself laughing at her friend’s antics. “Thanks Ron.” She whispered softly, and then moved to reenter the room and close the door.

Or at least that was the plan, until she found herself bowled over by a large mass of darkness.

With a cry, Hermione winced as two sharp talons dug into the tops of her shoulders and sent her sprawling to the ground. She flailed wildly, trying her best to strike down the bird standing atop her, but the flapping of its own feathers and stomping feet were making it difficult. Luckily, she didn’t have to fight it off for long because the wretched beast was thrown from her body as her own familiar came to her rescue.
Crookshanks looked like a warrior rather than a housecat with the way he fought back against the clearly bigger familiar. Claws and fangs and fur were flying around as the two hissed and growled at one another in hopes to gain the upper hand.

Fearing for her best friend’s life, Hermione wrangled her wand from her back pocket and sent a stunning spell at the creature.

And as she feared, it bounced harmlessly off its wings.

A stronger spell was thrown this time, and although it didn’t do as much damaged as she hoped, it was enough to dislodge the creature and send it soaring up into the fake sky of the room. Hermione took the chance to send a spell at the door to close and lock it. She could handle the bird somehow, but if Bellatrix came strolling through the door right now, she was quite sure that it would be the end of her.

The room was sealed and Hermione didn’t feel safer by even a little bit.

Bellatrix’s familiar was circling above them like a bird of prey waiting to go in for the kill. Around its neck, she could see the mysterious necklace dangling loosely and gleaming brightly under the light of the false moon. Around and around the creature flew until seeming to grow tired of its circling, landed on the opposite side of the koi pond to stare at her with devilish yellow eyes. Seeing the look in it’s somehow smug like expression, anger flared through her body and she found herself growling deeply at the bird with her wand at the ready. At her feet, Crookshanks prowled to stand by her side, his body low and a hiss passing his lips as he scowled ferally at their attacker.

To any onlooker, the two of them must’ve looked like a force to be reckoned with.

To the bird however, they must’ve looked like a joke since it had begun its croaky laugh that she had heard it do so many times before.

“What’s so funny?!” Hermione yelled, her anger beginning to boil over. “You’re trapped in here, two against one. And your master can’t pass the wards. You shouldn’t really be the one laughing.”

Of course, the creature didn’t answer her and neither did its ‘laughter’ did die down.

Enraged that she was being showed up by a ruddy bird of all things, Hermione sent a reducto flying it’s way. Surprisingly, instead of allowing to bounce off its wings, she watched as it merely jumped out of the way as if it was nothing.

Sending another one yielded the same results and Hermione was seconds away from losing what little rationality she had left and going over to punch the infernal creature with her bare hands.

It seemed that it had realized that as well, because it had stopped its taunting and was now holding completely still.

Something was about to happen, she could just feel it. So she raised her wand at it and braced herself for whatever it had in store.

If only she had known that it actually was storing something.

Slowly and carefully, the bird stood on a single long leg and flared it’s wings out for balance. With the second leg, it used its sharp talons and broke the chain around its neck to release the necklace. Once it was in its grasp, it took to the sky once more and once it reached the ceiling it did something unexpected.
It dropped it.

Hermione was confused at first as it began spiraling towards the ground…

Then confusion melted away into abject horror as the necklace grew bigger and bigger until it crashed into the koi pond with a bang. The ground shook around them, but even after the now enlarged door was settled, Hermione found that the world was still shaking.

As it would turn out, it was not the *world* that was shaking, but *her*.

Because now that she got a good look at the piece of furniture before her, she realized that it was far too thick to be an actual door. And the way it was balanced on four legs- even if one of them seemed to be broken from the fall- she knew immediately that this was no door.

It was a wardrobe.

That was around the time that she scooped up her familiar and bolted for the door.

Harry told her long ago about how the Death Eaters had gotten into the school before through the room of requirement.

How Draco Malfoy had spent most of year repairing a wardrobe that remained undetected and unaffected by the wards of Hogwarts.

Hermione figured that the old one was destroyed by the *fiednyyre* when they destroyed Voldemort’s horcrux, but she doubted something so valuable would’ve been left here by Malfoy after the death eaters took over the school.

The second wardrobe that was connected to it was never found.

She now knew why that was.

If Draco had taken one, and Bellatrix- the one who lead everyone through the first time- knew the location of the other, it would be a piece of cake to get her hands on both. All she had to do was get one into the school- something she couldn’t do herself- and then Hermione would be over and done with.

But they *had* made sure that she could never get in.

Just not her *familiar*.

Apparation, portkeys, and the flew network, would’ve never worked, but an animal had other ways of getting around than wizarding methods. Once the bird got in, all it had to do was watch. Hermione had a hunch that was what the bird had been doing the past few weeks on it’s strange visits. Watching her. Waiting until she was vulnerable and her guard had weakened. Hermione, on no occasion was however. The headmistress never left the castle and the aurors were there patrolling at all hours of the day. None had any reason to leave unless Bellatrix decided to finally show her face.

Then today of all days, Bellatrix was in town causing terror and destroying things…

It was clearly distracting everyone for a much quieter assault.

They had been tricked. And she had no one to blame because Hermione herself had come to the same conclusion as everyone else must’ve.

If the woman ever came for her, she would come in with an onslaught of spells and her insane
laughter filling the air with fear and power.

She had been wrong.

They *all* were.

Everyone assumed they knew what the woman was going to do next, but seemed to forget that Bellatrix was like a dice. You can know all the numbers on a dice, but you will never know what side it would land on once it stops rolling.

Hermione rolled the wrong number and it has now costed her greatly.

Her heart soared as she reached the door.

Then plummeted when the moment she opened it, the one behind her opened at exactly the same time.

She tried to run.

*Merlin* she tried to run, but her body was frozen to the spot.

At first, she thought it was fear keeping her immobile, but then she realized that there was a rolling melody filling the room with pressure and the longer it continued, the weaker her body began feeling.

‘Nonononono, Merlin please, no! Not again, please!’ She began chanting in her head as she tried with all her might to shake the grip Bellatrix had over her body.

Sensing her turmoil, Crookshanks dug his claws into her arms and the sharp pain was able to break her from the trance for a moment to take a few more steps forwards. If she could just get away from the room- away from the singing- she could call for help!

A splash came from behind that was soon followed by a shift in the song. There were words now, and Hermione didn’t care how beautiful that woman’s voice sounded to her and her siren side, the intent behind them was ugly and cruel.

Yet with each passing line, she grew weaker and weaker.

*How long can you run?*

*How long can you flee?*

*My sweet little mudblood, return her to me*

*How long were you gone?*

*How long were you free?*

*My scared little mudblood, return her to me*
Hermione could no longer feel her legs and they collapsed beneath her in a rush. As her knees met the ground, she managed to keep hold of her familiar and shield him away from harm.

The singing grew louder and closer.

This castle’s your prison
This home is your cell
I’ve come to release you,
And free you from hell

No wand and no worries
My home becomes yours
My fierce little mudblood
My new favorite toy~

She hit the ground hard and a wail of agony from her helplessness was wrenched from her pale lips. With what strength, she had left, Hermione tore across grass and then stone with one hand out into the hallway. She managed to get a majority of her upper body out of the door before her strength gave out completely.

She started screaming in desperation.

“Help! Please someone help me!” She cried. “She’s in the castle! It’s Bellatrix!”

But no one came.

A hand wrapped around her ankle and began slowly pulling her backwards.

You fight, you claw
You scream for your friends
Too bad, they’re gone
You’re alone in the end

Hermione was flipped onto her back as she was pulled through the shallow koi pond. She still clung to Crookshanks with all that she had left, but her body could do nothing else to aide her struggle. Above her she could see Bellatrix smirking down at her like a cat that just caught the canary. The look in her eye was of an unhinged woman who was teetering between insanity and unbridled delight.
She wanted to throw up.

Hermione watched as Bellatrix’s familiar flew over and past them into the wardrobe. She thought she saw a flash of her wand as it past them, but her vision was already beginning to fade.

She cried out as the older witch dragged her body over the threshold of the wardrobe, not even caring the slightest of the pain she was causing her. Hermione’s eyes were blurred with tears as the dark blue and moon lit sky of the room of requirement became darkness as the rest of her body was pulled inside.

Before the door closed and she lost consciousness altogether, she heard something that literally broke her heart.

Pounding footsteps. Dozens of footsteps and shouts of her name.

Bellatrix must’ve heard them too, because she could literally hear the smile in her voice as she hit Hermione with one last jab.

_Give up, farewell_

_Say bye to your life_

_My weak little mudblood_

_You lost and you’re mine …_

The song ended with a dark whisper and the wardrobe closing with a slam.

Unheard by the aurors and headmistress desperately trying to break into the locked wardrobe, Hermione wailed in sorrow as she was dragged into the darkness that she knew was to become her life.

She passed out the same way she would wake up the next morning...

With a scream.
Chapter 11 – What Ends and What Begins?

“Crucio!”

Those were the first words that Hermione hears as she is jerked from unconsciousness and into the living world. She cried out in pain; back arching off the ground in agony.

Then as soon as the spell started, it had stopped.

“Wakey, wakey little mudblood!” A repulsively sweet voice called from somewhere behind her.

Hermione dared not open her eyes. The first reason being the immense pain that she was in; the second reason was so that she could continue to pretend.

She feared that if she opened her eyes and saw Bellatrix pointing her wand at her that she could no longer pretend that this was just all inside of her head.

A madness brought on by paranoia and anxiety.

It was a nice idea at first, until she realized just who it was she was trying to ignore.

Relief filled her heart as the spell was no longer being cast, but then the metallic sound of a key entering a lock echoed throughout the room. She heard a door swing open with a whooshing sound. Boots clacked rapidly against the hard surface of whatever ground she was laying on, giving her only seconds to prepare herself. Hermione was yanked from her fetal position by the roots of her hair. Unable to try and play pretend any longer, she reached up and tried to free herself from the painful hold on her frizzy locks. She had no such luck, but that didn’t stop her from fighting.

Another mistake.

Bellatrix was looking for a reaction and seeing that she wasn’t getting what she wanted, the older siren dropped the girl to the ground and sent a painful kick into her abdomen, causing her to cry out in pain. Hermione balled up as best she could then, trying desperately to protect her stomach from the
onslaught of blows. As she was trying to pull her left leg in however, she noted a clinking sound that halted her movements.

Her eyes shot open to discover that she was chained to a wall. Then when she really looked around, she felt her heart sink even further.

Bellatrix hadn’t just chained her to a wall; she was inside of a cage. A large cage, but a cage none the less. Cold stone floors with no furniture to be seen anywhere made up her dwelling. The only lights that she could see were the ones streaming in from outside the bars of her prison. Bitterness filled her heart even further when she noticed the luscious and warm colored room that the cage rested in was the things dreams were made of. Hermione had very little doubt that the older witch did that on purpose. Giving her a glimpse of extravagance and comfort that she knew Hermione would never have again.

Her anger at the woman’s actions led to her feeling unnaturally reckless, which in turn made her glare up towards her mate and sneer at the smug expression reflected on her face.

“You have another thing coming if you think you’re gonna keep me locked up like some kind of animal.” She growled.

Bellatrix laughed and twirled her wand through the strands of black hair hanging loosely around her face. “My you are smart! Look how bright the filth is.” She said sweetly. “You’re right. I don’t keep prisoners locked upstairs, they go in the dungeons downstairs.”

“Then why am I up here?” The young Gryffindor boldly asked.

“Because I always like to keep my favorite toys out on display.” The woman laughed and then threw her hands out to the side, a manic look pulling across her face. “Why put you in the dungeons where I can’t hear your pretty little screams?”

“You’re sick.” Hermione whispered, not even caring whether she was heard or not. “I won’t play into your twisted games Bellatrix. I’ll die before I let you play with me as you see fit.”

That got her another laugh from her supposed mate and then the woman stepped forward and crouched down to stare directly into her eyes.

Seeing the power play for what it was, Hermione didn’t dare look away.

At first, Bellatrix said nothing. She simply stared at Hermione, looking over her body from head to toe. It sent chills down her spine. The woman was observing her every movement; sizing her up and breaking her down with her gaze all at the same time.

She hated it.

She hated feeling like she was less of a human and yet she knew in Bellatrix’s eyes that she was exactly that.

An animal.

A mudblood.

The dirt beneath her neatly laced boots.

All the things she knew she wasn’t.
Because she was worth more, she deserved more, but life had dealt her a terrible hand.

Already, the chances of her being found were slim to begin with and she wasn’t sure that after what her mate would no doubt do to her that she would even want to be found. Barely hours into the first day of captivity and she was already losing hope. It was pathetic and Hermione was hating herself more and more she lied there feeling sorry for herself.

So she stopped.

‘No. I’m a Gryffindor for Merlin’s sake!’ She told herself harshly. ‘We don’t sit around like helpless sheep when faced with danger. We stand tall and fight until the very end, no matter what.’

She happily ignored the fact that she couldn’t even truly stand tall given the cage she was in, but that didn’t deter her from facing her mate down with fierce bravery.

It was at this point that she should’ve known that nothing good could come from her foolhardy courage.

Bellatrix took one look at her face and rose to her feet once more with a slowness that set Hermione’s nerves on fire. The gnarled and crooked wand within the woman’s grasp was once more pointed in her direction.

“Now I know that look. So many times I’ve seen that same look on their faces,” She crept closer. “The Longbottoms; that filthy mutt, Sirius; the countless mudblood filth I cut down in my lord’s name- they all had that infernal look in their eyes. Such determination, such fearless courage as they stood before me. Just like you. But you know what?”

The calm façade that had overtaken her face was now washed over with lunacy.

“That’s the look I crave most of all. You seem surprised muddy; you thought I would be angry didn’t you? That seeing you stare me down as if I was the one chained to the wall would send me into a fit of all things!!” She threw her head back and laughed. “Not even close! So long as you have that look in your eyes, that means you want to live. That means you still want to fight me tooth and nail to escape. But most of all…that means I can do this.” Bellatrix pressed the tip of her wand against the tip of Hermione’s middle finger. “Flecte!”

Hermione bit deeply into her tongue as the middle finger on her left hand bent backwards at an unnatural angle. Blood dripped from her chapped lips as Bellatrix prodded at her now broken finger with sadistic glee.

“The longer you hold out, the longer I get to play with you.” The wand was moved over to her thumb on the opposite hand. “The longer I get to play with you, the less bored I’ll be while I plan what to do about your little friends. Flecte.”

The younger siren once more muffled her screams, not ready to give Bellatrix the satisfaction she so desperately craved. Tears poured down her face now in rivers, but she had been under the older witches’ torture several times before; she could do this.

At least that was what she had to keep telling herself.

Unfortunately, Bellatrix was as patient as Hermione was brave.

“Nothing? I’m impressed muddy; you might actually make this fun. So I’ll make you a deal; a little reward if you will,” Hermione felt the end of her captor’s wand slide across her throat; a silent threat if she ever saw one. “Beg. Beg me to let you go and I’ll leave you alone.”
Hermione scoffed. “Do you really expect me to believe anything that comes out of your mouth? I’m not an idiot, and I’m not giving you the pleasure.”

A laughed echoed throughout the room and the next thing Hermione knew, her head was colliding painfully against the concrete ground, the kick from the witch’s hardened boots rattling her already clenched teeth. She wasn’t sure if the warm feeling against her skull was from the blow itself or fresh blood making its way down the side of her face.

“You make it sound like I was asking.” She felt the wand slide down her back, over the curve of her thighs, and then come to rest along the back of her leg. Hermione cringed as she felt the second hand walk its way up her neck and into her hair, the seemingly gentle movement tainted by nothing but ill intent. “But since it’s only our first day together, I’ll let you know this now.” A warm puff of air tickled the tip of her ear. “I’m the only one of us who gives and who takes. So when I tell you to beg, you will beg. Imago Ardentes!” She hissed.

And Hermione’s body was lit on fire from the inside.

Writhing in pain, she flailed about on the ground as her mate cackled with glee above her. It felt just as it did that first night. Pain. Agony. Everything that she knew was to be her future. Bellatrix held the spell, never once breaking the contact and the longer it kept going, the more and more Hermione felt herself beginning to cave. Her nerves may have literally been on fire, but it was a different fire that began to bubble up within her.

Rage.

An anger that could numb even the burning sensation boiling up beneath her skin washed over her. Yet Hermione knew that it was not her own. She herself was afraid. Fear and anxiety and pain were her only thoughts, but beneath the mindset of her own consciousness she could feel her inner creature come forth.

And it was enraged.

It knew its mate, knew that the woman before her was supposed to be her other half. The one made to make her happy and complete her, and yet here she was, causing them nothing but pain.

Why…? Why does she hurt us so? What have we done to her?

Hermione wanted to say that they’d done nothing, that it was just the sadistic nature of their fated partner, but she found that she didn’t have the heart. Because she felt the exact same way.

What had they done?

What had she done in this lifetime that warranted this kind of punishment from the one person who was supposed to love her more than everything? Who she would love in return? The answer she knew was simple.

Nothing.

She had done nothing.

Hermione was born and gifted with the power of a siren and it just so happened to have been during a timeframe in which Bellatrix had also been born as one. It was chance. A hand dealt to her by fate and yet she was expected to live with it.

Except she wasn’t ready to play by fate’s hands.
She saw what fate had done to Harry, how he too was placed in its diabolical clutches and yet she knew he found a way around it. And if Harry could find a way to change his fate, so could she.

She didn’t want to live as a victim and she knew that staying here with Bellatrix that there was very little chance that she would be any more than that. Therefore, she would have to fight back with everything she had and if that got her killed in the end...

Then perhaps that was to be for the best.

Bellatrix crouched over her with her wand pointed intimately against her body, her eyes never leaving her as she laid writhing beneath her.

Good. She wanted to look directly in her eyes when she attempted to do something incredibly foolish.

“Enough.” She whispered between frantic breaths of pain. It didn’t seem like it did anything to phase her assailant. “Enough!” She managed to say a bit louder.

This time Bellatrix took notice.

“What was that Muddy? Are you ready to beg?” She asked in a sickeningly sweet voice.

*She mocks us. She hurts us. You must make her stop. Maker her stop. She must stop.*

Hermione had never felt the strength of her siren’s presence as strong as she had at that moment. She could practically hear it as if it was there whispering in her ear, instead of a muffled voice at the back of her mind.

“*Enough!*” She said a bit louder, the burning feeling of Bellatrix’s spell feeling just a little bit more bearable.

“That doesn’t sound like begging worm. Beg. You *will* beg before I stop.” The older woman hissed menacingly.

“No I won’t. I won’t beg, not now, and not ever. I said, *enough!*” Hermione managed to squeezed out, the pain in her body intensifying as Bellatrix’s anger increased.

*She will stop. She must stop. Tell her. Maker her. We are whole now. Make her as she makes you.*

Her siren side purred in her ears. A new wave of...well Hermione wasn’t quite sure as to how to describe it, but a feeling came over her that had her fighting back against the curse upon her body and sitting up from her fetal position. It was a strange sensation, something she had never felt before, but it gave her the strength that she knew she needed. The strength she so desperately craved as she felt so weak against the assault brought upon her by her malicious mate. Her chest filled with air and electricity all at once and it filled her body with something unnatural. It was similar to the moment right before she began a song, but different somehow.

Stronger. More primal.

It was raw emotion, an amalgamation of fear for her own life and anger for a future she never asked for. Unseen by her mate, it grew within her, boiling and rumbling through her body until she felt that she could no longer contain it within her vessel.

And then she unleashed it without hesitation.
“I said **ENOUGH!!**” She screamed at the older woman. A shockwave from the force of her powers rocked the room; sending the woman flying into the metal bars of her prison, simultaneously canceling the spell.

Hermione gasped like a fish out of water as she was released from the torture of being burned from the inside out. She could feel her siren side cooing at her sweetly from a place farther away in her mind, rejoicing in her for standing up for herself, while also mourning for hurting their mate.

It was a truly bittersweet feeling.

But bittersweet was nothing compared to the absolute jubilation she felt at seeing Bellatrix slumped precariously against the bars of her prison. It was clear that the impact had rendered the other woman stunned, but she knew that she was still fully conscious.

And that wasn’t just because of the blazing eyes staring her down from across the room.

No, there was something else in the air, something tangent that Hermione hadn’t felt before, but still managed to send a chill down her spine.

And that’s when she heard it.

A deep and sinister rumbling sound that made her press her back deeply into the back corner of her cell and stare at the woman across from her with terrified eyes.

The slow scrapping of boots echoed through the room as the rumbling purr from Bellatrix grew even louder. Hermione watched as she slumped forward, almost like a broken doll without her strings; her large bushy hair moving to cover her face.

"**Muddy**…” The woman hissed in a low, sing song tone. "**Muddy~**…” She said a little bit louder.

Hermione didn’t breathe, let alone try and answer the woman.

“**Why am I on the floor, little mudblood?**” She asked the younger siren. With all the grace of a ferocious panther, the dark haired witch slid forward and began prowling on all fours over to where Hermione sat upon the ground. Unable to escape, Hermione could only shake in fear as Bellatrix grew ever closer, not even bothering to pick up her wand.

“**Stay away from me.**” She whimpered. A part of her hoped that having the woman see she wasn’t as defenseless as she appeared to be would be enough to make her back off, but just from the way Bellatrix was acting, she knew that was now a lost cause.

“**Stay away she says? As if she was the boss of me. As if she were somehow stronger because she got a little loud with her betters.**” The death eater muttered to herself. It was almost as if she wasn’t even talking to Hermione, but rather to someone else that only she could see. “**She thinks that she can talk back and get away with it.**”

Hermione screamed as sharp nails dug into her legs and pulled her towards her mate. Instinctually, she tried to kick out, but between the vice grip on her legs and the chain keeping her from going too far, it was virtually useless.

Her upper body was still very much free however.

A burst of courage ran through her and she swung at the woman with all her might, catching the woman on the side of her head. The blow connected like she wanted, but a shockwave of pain ran through her as she was reminded of her mangled fingers.
Further to her horror, Bellatrix took the blow without even flinching.

And instead decided to return the favor.

The first strike took her by surprise.

The second one had her spitting blood out on the floor beside her.

By the third one she was smart enough to try and block her face from the onslaught before the woman could do even further damage. Though her arms weren’t fairing much better either. Bellatrix was in a frenzy, bashing against her arms with a fury that was not only violent, but surprising muggle.

She didn’t know which shook her more; the fact that the woman had abandoned her wand to attack her or the fact she had enraged her to the point that she’d attack using muggle means.

As the pain in her arms grew, she found that she really didn’t care.

And it appeared that Bellatrix was also done playing games with her.

The hits stopped coming, but Hermione now found that her arms were being pinned to her chest by the bigger woman’s body. Unable to use her last line of defense, Hermione felt herself panicking. The same overwhelming feeling of helplessness came over her and she could feel the presence of her siren rear its head once more. A small keen was the only thing she could get out before there were hands upon her throat, stealing her breath away in an instant.

“The same trick won’t work twice little girl. Such a tiny little neck. So thin and frail beneath my fingertips.” She squeezed even harder and a twisted grin spilled across her face. “I may not be able to kill you yet, but I think crushing your windpipe will hardly do you harm. Now hold still.” She snarled.

“No…stop…” Hermione gasped, tears leaking from her eyes at the thought of what Bellatrix was threatening to do to her. She needed her voice. She knew what would happen if she couldn’t sing.

It would drive her mad; the last thing she ever wanted to happen to her.

Hermione struggled to open her mouth, desperate to get anything to come out in order to get Bellatrix to release her. Small squeaks and choking sounds were all she could manage, and soon her eyes were growing hazy as she began losing oxygen. She needed an opening, not a large one, but just enough to take one breath, to speak one word.

It was at this moment, she thought of her parents. Her missing mother and father who she was desperate to see again.

She thought of Harry and Ron who were no doubt searching every nook and cranny they could to find her and bring her home safely.

She thought of Ginny, Neville, and Luna who she wanted to sing to again in the room of requirement; the headmistress sitting beside them watching on with a peaceful expression.

She wanted to return to the life she had.

She wanted to be happy again.

A shock of renewed energy surged through her body. Magic thumped within her frantic chest as she
willed her siren side to come closer to the surface of her mind. Suddenly the world was more in focus; her breath a bit easier to catch despite her still being choked. Hermione met Bellatrix’s eyes, looking into them with a sight that felt almost otherworldly in nature. A voice whispered at the forefront of her mind.

*Look at her. See her. Look at what our mate claims to be.*

She obeyed.

Hermione didn’t quite know how, but when she gazed into the eyes of the other siren, it was like looking through a sheet of glass. At that moment, the Gryffindor had never felt so little like herself. This sight, this surge of energy was not her own magic, but that of the creature she shared this body with.

And with it she could see right through Bellatrix.

It made her physically ill at what she saw.

Everything was *dark.*

There was nothing in her gaze that spoke of a woman who was said to have been the smartest and most powerful witch of her time. Bellatrix, to her newfound sight, was a vessel for obscurity. One that had become so full of it that she could hold nothing else within her heart but evil and the desire to hurt.

She didn’t want to feel it.

*Merlin* she didn’t want to feel that damned emotion.

But now that she could glance into Bellatrix’s eyes- into her very *soul* - she felt pity for her supposed mate.

Did Azkaban make her this way.

Or was she like this long before.

She couldn’t tell.

Where the darkness started and where the witch began was so intertwined that there was no way to find out and unexpectedly Hermione became filled with grief. The surge of strength that had silently been building up in her was enough for her to jerk her body upwards with a straining grunt. It was just enough so that Bellatrix’s hands were momentarily dislodged from her neck.

That was all she needed.

The pity she felt from gazing into Bellatrix’s being rang out from her throat as a sorrowful wail.

Precious air filled her chest cavity as Bellatrix jumped away from her, reeling back as if she had been physically burned.

Not once did Hermione stop the steadily growing whine pouring from her mouth, nor did she break eye contact with the other woman.

She was glad that she didn’t too, or else she would’ve missed the utterly *terrified* look upon the older siren’s face.
‘Wait…what?’ She vaguely thought to herself.

But no, she had in fact not gone insane.

Bellatrix actually looked terrified.

It was surreal how quickly the anger had washed away to reveal genuine fear; something she wasn’t sure she had ever seen- or thought she ever would see upon the other’s face.

Yet there she was; gifting Hermione with a look that she would remember for as long as she lived.

Then, as quickly as it started, the spell Bellatrix had been under broke and she scrambled to try and cover her ears; her eyes glaring back at her with revived ferocity.

“Shut the hell up, muddy!” She screamed at Hermione, but she didn’t falter in her voice even once. Bellatrix tried lunging at her, but Hermione began getting even louder, sending her crashing to her knees; her hands now violently clawing at her ears. “Shut up, shut up, shut up!” She began screeching.

Hermione could see how taught the other woman’s body had become, her body arched in a clearly painful position on the floor. She looked like she was in physical pain.

A part of her wondered if she was, or it was all in her head.

Not that it would make her stop either way.

Because Hermione knew that this pain was deserved.

If given the chance, Bellatrix would do the same. Continue to torture and hurt her.

And in the end break her.

Without her knowledge, Hermione’s thoughts took a darker turn, simultaneously changing her voice to match her unstable emotions.

Why should she not do the same? Why was it only her who was supposed to suffer?

‘Look at her,’ She told herself. ‘You can hurt her. You can torment her like she did to you. This is what you wanted.’

Hermione couldn’t hear her own voice at that moment, but had she been able to, she would be appalled at how twisted it had become. Long gone was the pitying wails that had overtaken her when she gazed into her mate’s eyes a while ago. The sound coming out of her mouth was dark and distorted, a sound that was not quite unlike that of Bellatrix when they had met in the forest. It wasn’t meant to express pity for the monster that sat before her anymore; Hermione didn’t want to pity her mate anymore.

She didn’t deserve it.

No, she wanted to hate Bellatrix. Wanted to crush the woman just like she wanted to do to her.

‘And you can do it now. Do you feel it? Look at what we’re doing. Look at what we can do.’ She voiced to herself and then expressed to the voice within that was helping to render her mate motionless on the ground…

Motionless.
Hermione’s voice cut out like a broken speaker.

Bellatrix wasn’t *moving*.

Shaking hands covered her mouth as she screamed into them. She shoved her siren side as far back from her mind as she possibly good, and once it’s presence was gone, it was like a fog was lifted away from her eyes and she could see the world with a different kind of clarity.

“What have I done?” She gasped, looking at Bellatrix through her tears.

The older witch wasn’t moving, the only sign that she was even alive was the slow and erratic rise and fall of her chest. Her onyx eyes stared at Hermione blankly, wide open and staring at her with an empty gaze. No fear. No anger. Just a glazed over look that showed that the lights were one, but there was nobody home.

Unconsciously, Hermione prepared herself.

The woman could be faking it, she wouldn’t put it past her. Any moment now she would be jumping up from her place on the ground and begin to attack her again.

Any moment now…

Nothing.

“I killed her.” She whimpered as the woman didn’t so much as twitch. Hermione could see that she actually *hadn’t*, but she was also quite aware that what was happening right now was not normal. The woman was too still, too naturally restrained that it was obvious that Hermione had dealt her some serious damage.

Panic filled her heart, but for a very different reason.

Perhaps she hadn’t killed Bellatrix *physically*, but she feared that she might’ve done something worse. That she had actually killed the other siren’s *mind*.

‘But she was ready to do the very same to you.’ Some part of her whispered. ‘*Look at her... You can hurt her. You can torture her like she did to you. This is what you wanted. Remember?’*

She did remember. She remembered herself saying those words. Remembered wanting to hurt the woman more than anything. Hermione clutched her head in pain the more the weight of what she’d done had begun to settle in.

She *did* say those things. She *meant* those things…

‘No...no I didn’t.’ She cried quietly to herself. ‘I didn’t want this! I just...I just wanted her to stop.’

That was all she wanted.

She just wanted her to *stop*.

Becoming like the woman she was so desperate to escape was the last thing she desired.

‘That wasn’t me. That wasn’t *me*.’ She began chanting to herself.

But even with her desperate pleas, that didn’t change what she did, nor did it cause Bellatrix to start moving again.
So why could she see movement happening just out of the corner of her eye?

Her gaze shifted away from her mate laying prone upon the ground to the entrance of the cage that laid slightly further back.

There, her eyes met with that of the sinister gaze of Bellatrix’s familiar.

Hermione couldn’t feel her limbs as she was pinned against the wall from its unwavering gaze. Even though she knew it was an animal and couldn’t facially express it’s emotion, it didn’t take a rocket scientist to see that it was angered. Its furry plume was puffed up like a wild cockatoo and it’s long, straw like legs were dancing impatiently against the stone floor.

Everything about its posture screamed danger, and yet in the end, Hermione was not attacked.

Instead, she watched as the bird whirled around and flew out of the opened door with a speed and agility that she didn’t expect from a bird of its size in such a small space. Confusion wracked her body as she was once more left alone in the room with the prone form of Bellatrix lying a few feet away from her body.

Then as quickly as it left, the bird returned and perched on a pedestal near the door that she had yet to notice up until now. Its croaking voice that she had come to know from the previous weeks sounded out around them, filling the void of the once silent room.

The next sound that caught her attention was the sound of rapidly clicking heels against a stone floor.

Someone was coming.

She braced herself for the worse.

Click, clack. Click, clack.

The heels of a rapidly approaching figure grew louder, and then the newcomer came barreling into the doorway, causing the bird to quiet itself at her entrance.

Looking at Narcissa Malfoy now in comparison to when they last met during the battle of Hogwarts, Hermione had to say that the woman actually looked worse than she previously had. Her hair was brittle and pale now; any dark strands that once graced her head were now completely gone. Her figure was gaunt and unhealthy; something she could clearly see even from where she was huddled at the back of the cage. Her once regal and full face was now lacking in the beauty that it once held and it was clear from the bags under eyes than she was very much lacking in the sleep department.

Tired or not, the woman still moved with a quickness as she spotted her sister lying there horizontal upon the ground.

“Bella!” She gasped, reaching the woman’s side in a heartbeat. Narcissa crouched down next to her and felt for her pulse, seeming to be relieved and worried at the same time at finding one. She waved a spindly hand in front of her sister’s eyes, and when she didn’t respond, her worry only seemed to grow. “Bella? Bella, wake up!” She cried out.

Hermione should’ve stayed quiet.

She knew she should’ve stayed quiet, especially when it was obvious to her that the woman had yet to notice her chained up at the back of her prison.

But she didn’t.
She pulled her leg closer to her body, rattling her chain in the process and garnering the attention of the younger Malfoy.

Quick as a flash, the woman had her wand pointed in her direction, the tip silently alight with a bright ball of light.

Hermione knew the exact moment that the woman recognized who she was because the spell at the tip of her wand wavered along with the instability of her hand.

“You.” Ended up being the only thing she said when their eyes met.

Hermione couldn’t tell if the woman was shocked or angered at the discovery of their home’s newest prisoner. Whichever it was didn’t seem to matter as she glanced back and forth between her and her immobile sister; her mind seeming to bounce back and forth between what she wanted to do.

A look of resignation came over her. Slowly, the woman rose to her feet and pointed her wand at Hermione carefully.

“What did you do to Bellatrix, Miss Granger?” She asked with a coldness that only a Malfoy could pull off so flawlessly.

She didn’t know what to tell her.

Because honestly she didn’t know. During the whole thing, she felt like herself and like a stranger in her own body all at the same time. Her whole mind had been thrown into chaos the moment Bellatrix had brought her to this infernal prison.

So with a look that she hoped came off just as it truly was, she told the woman the truth.

“I don’t know.”

There was silence once more. Then she heard the woman speak in a voice so low that she almost didn’t catch what she had said.

“That’s what I was afraid of.” She remarked, her eyes looking at her with a grotesque amount of pity.

Hermione didn’t have a chance to wonder what the woman meant before she heard the word Stupefy, and her body met with the cold stone floor of her new home.

Thankfully or not, she would awake alone in her cage, the next morning bringing her no more joy than the previous one…
Chapter 12 - Morning of Mourning

Chapter Notes

Oh...my...goodness. I am so sorry everyone! o.o' Things have been pretty hectic in my life recently. Health has been all over the place; i'm on my last semester of college (whoop whoop), its 18 credit hours and I have art projects due left and right. It's been crazy. But! Alas we are back! Believe me when I say, i'm not abandoning this. Just a little slower. I'm gonna try and do my once a thing week for a while, but I can't make any promises. However, enough of that now, what I really want to say is thank you, thank you, thank you! All of you who have left comments and kudos and whatnot have been super supportive and I'm glad you all are enjoying this story so much! Thank you for sticking this out with me and I will do my best to take you guys to the end of wherever this story is heading. So without further ado, here's the first chapter of the day.

Chapter 12 – Morning of Mourning

Pain was the first thing Hemione awoke to the next morning, but unlike the day before, Bellatrix was not there to cause it. No, today, her pain was only residual, but that in no means meant it hurt any less than if she was still beneath the mercy of her mate’s wand.

Shifting carefully, Hermione opened her eyes and was met with darkness as she observed the room outside of the cage. None of the lights appeared to be on and thick heavy curtains prevented any sunlight from peeking through the window on the right. The large canopy bed against the wall on the left was still made and seemed to have never been slept in. In fact, it looked as if nothing in the room was touched or even gave the appearance that it had even been in use.

She wouldn’t be surprised if it hadn’t.

The room itself, while clearly belonging to someone of wealth, wasn’t extraordinarily remarkable in any way. A tall wardrobe in the corner with a closed door next to it was on the right side of the bed and a beautiful golden cage on the left; no doubt for Bellatrix’s familiar. At the center of the room, there was a table with a green cloth covering it; atop it, a vase with various flowers sticking out in every direction. They didn’t seem well taken care of. Overall, none of it was much to look at. She wondered if this was Bellatrix’s doing or the room belonged to someone else.

Speaking of Bellatrix, Hermione found herself wondering what had happened after Narcissa knocked her out. Neither the older women nor the familiar were in the room and the door was firmly closed from where she could barely make it out from across the room. While grateful she had woken up alone, Hermione found that it didn’t soothe her nerves in the least.

She was on the fence about the Malfoy matriarch.

The blonde-haired witch was a wildcard all around. Hermione could still recall how fiercely Narcissa had protected Draco during the battle. How the woman had gone against her supposed master and saved Harry in order to keep her child safe. Even with Lucius, the woman did everything to keep her husband in his right mind and out of the dark hellhole that was Azkaban. Her dedication to her
family was enough to convince Hermione that she wasn’t _completely_ like her sister, but she knew that she was also far from innocent. The Malfoy’s were still a prideful, pureblood family and even if the woman wasn’t overtly cruel, Hermione knew that she was still fully capable of getting her hands dirty.

She would still take her over her sister any day.

Her devotion to her family had Hermione wondering whether or not the woman saw Bellatrix as such. She’d like to think that her mate wasn’t as cold with her family as she was with the rest of the world, but then she remembered what the woman had done to Sirius and her niece Tonks. Family didn’t seem like something the woman cherished, but Narcissa clearly did. The way she ran to her side last night, how scared she was to see Bellatrix unresponsive; how relieved she was to see her breathing. Those weren’t the actions of someone who hated their sibling. No, it was clear that the woman still cared for her older sister, but the extent of their actual relationship remained a mystery to her even now.

Regardless of their bond, whatever sense of sibling duty between them was enough for Narcissa to come to her sister’s aide and disregard the fact that the woman had someone chained up in the corner of her room.

Which sent Hermione’s mind into yet another direction.

It was clear from the way that the woman reacted to her last night that she had no clue that Hermione was even there. She didn’t know if her lack of knowing was from ignorance or Bellatrix had simply kept her from finding out. If it was the first, then there was now a tiny sliver of a chance for her to escape. The woman could free her. Persuade her in letting her go by reminding her why she was even free in the first place.

Because Harry wasn’t the only one who made sure that Narcissa and Draco stayed out of Azkaban.

At the trial, she _too_ had spoken on their behalf. She confirmed at the manor that Draco had lied about the identity of Harry despite the fact that he knew exactly who he was. She also let the ministry know that despite Narcissa’s presence during the event, not once did the woman actually attack them with malicious intent or cast any of the unforgivables. Yes, the woman had stood with her back to her when Bellatrix was carving the word ‘mudblood’ into her arm, but that was a mercy seeing as she could’ve easily joined in. By no means was Hermione pleased or even forgiving the woman by acting as a bystander, but in a time of war, she knew the types of things people would do to ensure their own safety.

Sometimes she had even done the same.

Narcissa owed her. Maybe not as much as she did Harry, but it was still enough to bring her a little hope.

Except that Hermione had _another_ problem.

Mainly the fact that she was well and truly chained to a stone wall with no wand and no idea where she was. She doubted that the other woman would come back to see her, let alone be _allowed_ to when her sister awoke. No, there was no way to see the woman whilst she was still stuck inside the cage. But how was she supposed to escape?

Hermione sat up, her body sore from the tips of her toes to the scalp of her head. The siren cried out with a hiss of pain as she accidently placed pressure on her hand. Looking down at her two broken fingers, she wanted to cry at the realization that the chances of them healing properly without...
treatment were slim to none. If left alone as they were, she would have the two crooked appendages for the rest of her life. Anger flooded her then. They would be yet another scar that would follow her for the rest of her life courtesy of Bellatrix.

Had her fingers still been intact, she would gladly break them again on the older woman’s face.

Sliding forth on the ground, Hermione pulled the chain around her foot as far as she could go. The furthest she could reach was around the middle of the cage which was a lot more forgiving than she thought. Still, even with the extra length, there was not a single object in sight that she could use to free herself.

Hermione groaned and placed her head against her bent knee in exasperation. She’d just awaken and yet she still felt like she hadn’t slept in days. Her injuries were definitely making it harder to move about freely, but her stomach growling just reminded her that she hadn’t even eaten since the party yesterday.

“Merlin what I wouldn’t do for even a bite more. Then again, I wasn’t expecting to get kidnapped, so there’s nothing I can do about it now.” She glanced around the room again. “What I need to worry about is getting out of here.”

She began weighing all her options. Even with the lack of light, Hermione was searching for something to help her. The wardrobe was too far and seemed to be shut tightly. Nothing there. The table at the center of the room didn’t seem to hold anything but the vase of flowers. Nada. The bed was neatly made and held nothing of use either. Maybe under it? Gingerly she laid down on the ground and peered into the darkness that was under the bed, her face pressed flush against the floor, her jaw still pained from yesterday.

She expected to see a sea of nothing under there. Maybe an article of clothing or a box or something. What Hermione wasn’t prepared to find, was two tiny pinpricks staring back at her like little, green fairy lights.

Hermione’s eyes widened, vaguely remembering that she hadn’t been alone in the room of requirement when she was taken.

“Crooks?” She whispered. “Crooks is that you?” She called out to the pair of eyes staring her down. “Meow.” Was her only response.

“Crooks!” She cried out in both hope and despair. “Come here! Come here love!” She said, reaching out to him with one hand.

The large orange cat shimmied out from his hiding place that barely allowed him to fit and with his ever-prideful stride, he made his way over to her. Hermione watched as he slid seamlessly through the bars of the cage and over into her arms. When he was in grabbing range, Hermione gently brought him to her side and held him to her chest. The cat purred loudly as he was given attention by his master, happy to see her moving after not responding to his calls the night before.

“I’m so glad to see you’re okay. You shouldn’t be here. You should’ve stayed behind. She’ll kill you if she finds you,” The girl said as she stroked his back. “I can’t lose you too.”

The feline couldn’t respond to his human, but sensing her distress, Crookshanks pawed at her face and swatted her with his large, puffy tail. Hermione managed only to produce a small laugh as the pain in her jaw continued to make itself known. One of the things she was glad for at that moment was the fact that there wasn’t a mirror around so that she could look at her face. She knew just from
looking down at her bruised arms that the rest of her body was very much the same. The young woman didn’t know if she would be able to handle seeing that right now. Instead of thinking of her no doubt battered appearance, she continued taking comfort in her own familiar.

Soon she found her eyes falling closed again, her arms feeling weaker as she kept giving her best friend her undivided attention.

That was until her attention was disrupted by the sounds of rapid footsteps speeding down a hallway.

Hermione nearly flung the cat from her arms in fear, feeling only a smidge of guilt as a more pressing feeling took over.

“Under the bed! Quickly, you need to hide! Go! Go!” She whispered desperately, her heart spilling over with fear.

Sensing that something was wrong, Crookshanks obeyed, dashing across the room with an agility that was unprecedented for a cat his size. When Hermione could see nothing but the two little pinpricks of Crookshanks eyes, she painfully pulled herself back into the corner and curled into a ball. Pretending to be sleep would do nothing to help her if Bellatrix really felt like hurting her, but at least she was bracing herself for whatever attack the woman would inflict upon her once she arrived.

Two clicks and the smash of the door was the only warning that Hermione received before her assailant entered the room and headed straight for her cage. She tensed up, ready for the first spell to be cast.

Except it didn’t come.

“Pretending to sleep isn’t fooling anyone Miss Granger.” The softer voice of the younger black sister came from behind her.

That had Hermione sitting up in a hurry.

It wasn’t Bellatrix standing there at the bars of her cell, but Narcissa Malfoy holding a tray of food in one hand and her wand in the other.

Hermione had never seen a more beautiful sight.

Narcissa opened the cage with a flick of her wand and entered the room with the swiftness. Walking forward, she strode towards Hermione with a purpose in her stride. Hermione noted how nervous the woman appeared to be despite the confidence she was exuding; the true definition of what the Malfoys were about.

The tray was placed on the ground beside her, but Hermione didn’t dare move in the fear that doing so would cause the woman to curse her. For all she knew, this was a trick from Bellatrix and the woman had been sent there to assassinate her with poisoned…was that oatmeal? *Merlin*, she hoped it was. Her stomach growled at the thought and she found herself blushing in embarrassment at her quiet eagerness.

“If you don’t eat it now, I doubt you’ll be eating anything else for a very long time.” The woman remarked, staring Hermione down with irritation in her eyes.

“And how am I to know that it’s not poisoned? Or a trick?” She asked, clearly not trusting that the woman was doing this out of the kindness of her heart.

“You don’t, nor would I tell you if it was,” She responded. “What would it matter in the end? The
poison would kill you faster and less painfully than my sister would. Why not save yourself the trouble?” She asked.

Hermione paled at seeing how dead serious the woman was.

“Because I don’t want to die!” She gasped.

Narcissa shook her head sadly. “Then perhaps you should’ve thought of that before letting yourself get taken.”

“You make it sound like I asked for this!” She yelled, wincing slightly as her jaw began to ache. “I assure you that I thought your sister was dead and out of my life forever.” Hermione nearly growled at the woman.

“As did I. And yet here we are.” The woman said, not even fazed by Hermione’s little outburst.

“Here we are.” She returned. Curious at the woman’s reason for being there, she decided to voice the question that had been on her mind since the elder woman entered the room. “Why are you here Narcissa?”

At first the woman didn’t say anything. There was a look of determination on her face, but Hermione could feel that there was something else on the woman’s mind than whatever reason she had come to see her for.

“Why indeed I wonder. A part of me wants to say that I owe you. Another part wants to say that I pity you. I’ve yet to understand which side is the truth.” She said, coming to sit down in front of Hermione on her knees; the poof of her black dress giving her the impression of a jellyfish.

“I would say owing me seems to be more accurate.” The young siren replied. Her answer seemed almost haughty in the way she just worded it, but at that moment, Hermione didn’t particularly care about decorum. It wasn’t like the woman was bothering to give her the same courtesy anyways.

A dainty laugh left the woman’s lips like a quiet whisper. “If that is what you wish to believe, then I shall endeavor to do the same.” She said with a withered smile.

“So, you’ll help me?” Hermione asked, sitting up from her resting position with a groan of pain.

“Your fingers appear to be broken.” She said, avoiding the question entirely. “Give me your hands.”

“Why?” The girl asked suspiciously.

Narcissa glared at her now.

“I hadn’t realized that you enjoyed having your fingers in such a state of disrepair.” The Malfoy sassed.

Catching the hint at what the woman was implying, Hermione held out both of her hands to the woman, barely managing to keep them steady. A larger, more weathered hand held onto her left one with a firm grip. The other raised with the woman’s wand as she resolutely called, “Episkey.”

“Dammit!” Hermione yelled as her finger snapped soundly back into place. She didn’t even have time to brace herself when Narcissa cast the spell on the opposite hand with just as much abrasive care as the first. “Merlin, can I get a little warning?!?” Hermione gasped as she flexed her newly healed fingers. Both were clearly fixed, but they were still incredibly sore. The young Gryffindor found that she didn’t care seeing as she no longer had to worry about having the injuries for the rest
of her life.

“My apologies.” Narcissa said.

She didn’t sound sorry in the least.

The wand was raised to her face this time and Hermione found herself flinching back instinctively.

“What would be the point in cursing someone that I’m trying to heal?” The elder Malfoy tsked, before casting the spell anyways, not caring that Hermione had once more hissed in pain from the sudden feeling of having her injuries abruptly restored.

“You haven’t exactly been Madam Pomphrey with your hospitality.” She told the woman, startled when she got a laugh from her comment.

“Indeed, I’m not, though did you really expect me to be?” She said, looking at Hermione with a look that clearly said that she was nothing like the kind mediwitch they all knew and loved.

“No.” Hermione said.

Narcissa nodded. “Good. I’ve healed the worst of it for now. The bruises will heal on their own.” She stood to her feet. “Eat. It may not be much, but it should give you strength to help you heal faster.”

Then she turned and headed for the door.

“Wait! Where are you going!?” Hermione squawked, clearly panicked at seeing the woman leaving her behind.

Narcissa turned to look at her over her shoulder.

“Home. Somewhere far away from here as possible.” She said.

“But you can’t leave me here,” Hermione cried, scrambling to reach the other woman’s side. When the chain stopped her short, she looked up at the woman in desperation. “You need to let me go. Please! You said you would help me.”

“And I have. I healed your wounds. I’ve brought you food. My debt has been paid.”

“What?!?” Hermione said breathlessly. “You’re gonna leave me here after healing me? You know what your sister will do to me right?” She yelled.

“And what do you think she’ll do to me if I let you go?” The woman hissed, turning to stomp back over to her. “You of all people know how my sister can get. I’m already risking my life healing you. That life’s forfeit if I free you.”

“I can get you protected! We can protect you from her if that’s what you’re worried about.” The siren tried to bargain.

“Like they protected you?” Narcissus sniffed.

Hermione couldn’t believe her ears.

Was this actually happening?

How could she just leave her here to die?
Because that was the only way that this was going to end— with her dead.

Hermione felt her heart shatter in that instance. Here Narcissa was; her only hope at getting away and she was abandoning her. In fury, Hermione swung out and tried to strike the woman. Of course, she didn’t get close, but having tried was enough for her.

“After all me and Harry did for you?! We’re the only reason your family is still alive and free!” She screeched, her anger pulling forth in a frenzy.

“And again, I will be forever grateful.” Narcissa said, not even fazed by Hermione’s temper. “But since the war, I’ve lost all of my respect, dignity, financial support, and power that the Malfoy family once held. Draco and Lucius are all I have left and I won’t see them hurt because of you.”

“So, you’re choosing to sacrifice me.” Hermione hissed.

“Yes.” Narcissa confirmed.

Hermione spat at her feet. “You disgust me. You’re just as bad as your sister.”

Smack!

Hermione’s head whipped to the side from the force of the older woman’s slap. She should’ve known that was not the best thing to say to the woman at that moment, but she was incredibly angry and wasn’t thinking as clearly as she usually would have.

Narcissa stood above, giving her a smirk that truly was reminiscence of her sister’s. A chill ran up her spine from the frosty gaze.

“As bad as my sister? Never. You see, if I was as bad as my sister, I would let you go.” She said.

Hermione was confused until she continued.

“If I was as bad as my sister, I’d unchain you from that wall and let you be free. Watch you walk out that front door and go about my day.” She crouched to look Hermione dead in her eyes. “And when I returned home to find my son and husband murdered in cold blood, I truly would become my sister for knowingly putting them at risk like that. It would be as if I had done the deed myself.”

The Gryffindor wanted to deny what the woman was saying, but in her heart, she knew that she had a point.

To Narcissa, she was nothing.

There was no benefit for letting her go even if she somehow felt that she owed Hermione a debt. And yet she had come to heal and feed her. Guilt welled up in her chest at her cruel words from earlier.

Narcissa wasn’t like her sister. The woman had something that her mate seemed to be lacking.

A heart.

Maybe the compassion Narcissa had was not for her, but Hermione could still understand the unwavering need to protect your family.

It was why she had obliviated her parents after all.

Her anger dimmed the more she thought about it, but sadness wasn’t far behind to take its place. She
hated herself at that moment. Hated that she could understand where the other woman was coming from. Hated that she could understand why she was being left to die when freedom was literally a few feet away. Tears welled up in her eyes and without meaning to, Hermione’s body broke down into ugly, heart wrenching sobs. She placed her head against her knees and wrapped her arms around her legs as a mixture of sadness and frustration overtook her mind.

She flinched when hands that weren’t her own were placed on either side of her head. Hermione found her face lifted to face the now kneeling blonde woman. Long, manicured fingers tried in vain to wipe the tears from her eyes as the witch softly shushed her weeping.

Hermione keened at the comfort.

It was a mother’s touch, something she hadn’t felt from her own mother in such a long time. Without meaning to, she smothered her face into the other woman’s touch. At first, she thought Narcissa was shifting to pull away from her, but then she found herself pulled into a hug against the older woman’s chest. Beneath the cloth of her elegant dress, Hermione could hear the pounding of the woman’s heart. Strong and healthy, the opposite of what the woman’s outer appearance was reflecting. Her tears began to lessen as she gave into the witch’s embrace.

They didn’t stay like that for very long, but to the young siren, it felt like forever. Not wanting it to end, she almost began sobbing again as the woman pulled away and held her at arm’s length.

Hermione’s eyes widened when she saw the streaks running down the other woman’s face.

Narcissa ran a hand over her curls and then spoke in a voice full of grief. “You may not believe me Hermione,” At hearing her Hermione’s eyes became the size of dinner plates. “But the last thing I want to do is leave you here. You and Mr. Potter helped my family start over. To be free and away from the fear of that madman. Because of you, we are finally safe. But not…not from- “

“-Bellatrix.” Hermione finished with a whisper.

Narcissa nodded.

“But not from Bella. I love my family Miss Granger. I’d do anything for them as you well know. That also includes my sister,” She shook her head slowly. “However, I’m not so disillusioned to believe that my sister shares the same values of family as I do. She would cut Lucius and Draco down without hesitation. Leaving me alive long enough to watch them suffer before she ends me as well. Then and only then will she proceed to hunt you down to the ends of the earth and bring you right back to where you are now.”

Hermione didn’t speak to let the woman continue with what she was trying to say.

“I lack the skill to take on my sister. Her power is way above mine and she has made that quite clear on several occasions. She was the Dark Lord’s second for a reason.” Narcissa grasped both sides of her face and gave her a firm shake. “And yet somehow you managed to incapacitate her with no wand and chained to a wall. You could only imagine my feelings when I came upon the scene.”

She remembered her expression quite clearly.

“You did something yesterday that I’d only dreamed of doing since I was a little girl. So, while it will no doubt haunt my nights that I left you here at her mercy, I know that you will not perish here.” She gave Hermione a fleeting smile. “I won’t lie to you Miss Granger; my sister terrifies me. Azkaban made her worse, but she wasn’t a nice woman long before she went in there. Even so, she’s still my sister and I want the best for her. And right now, I think the best thing for her…is you.”
“Me?!” Hermione gasped. “Have you seen the things she’s done to me? Have you any idea what
she’s planning to do to me? I’m the last thing that Bellatrix needs.”

“If that was true Miss Granger, then I don’t think you two would be mates in the first place.”
Narcissa said, giving her a knowing smile.

The young siren gasped.

“How long have you known?” Hermione whispered.

“Only since last night. I don’t know much about your kind, but I am aware of the power a mate can
have over their partner. And now you know it as well.” She said.

“But I can’t use it properly. I don’t know how. The only times I can use my powers against Bellatrix
is when things get really bad.” Hermione told the woman.

“In time you will learn. Trust your instincts and they will guide you.” Narcissa suddenly looked
worryingly towards the opening of the cage. “Or at least for your own sake, they will.”

Curious as to what had caught the woman’s attention, Hermione also looked to the doorway and
discovered the stoic form of Bellatrix’s familiar. It stared them down with intense scrutiny before
taking off somewhere down the hallway.

“I do believe my time is up.” Narcissa said, all traces of emotion erased from her face.

Hermione couldn’t help it. She grabbed at the woman and begged her one last time. “Please. Please
Narcissa. Don’t leave me here with her.”

Narcissa shook her head and pulled away from her grasp.

“I’m sorry, but you’re the only hope that either of us have against my sister. You aren’t as helpless as
you believe you are, Miss Granger.” She placed a hand on top of the younger girl’s head. “And once
you realize that for yourself, you won’t need my help to get you out of here.”

“She’ll kill me.” Hermione nearly sobbed.

“She’ll try.” The woman got to her feet. “And for the very first time, I do believe firmly in my heart
that she will fail. My one regret is that I won’t be around to see it when she realizes it as well.” The
elder Malfoy smiled widely, something Hermione had yet to see the woman do since their meeting.

It was the last expression she saw on the woman’s face before she turned on her heel and briskly left
the room, the door closing behind her with a soft click. With her exit went Hermione’s last hope of
freedom. The woman would no doubt go into hiding, taking Lucius and Draco with her as they lived
a peaceful life far, far away from the wizarding world.

She felt her stomach flip.

They were living the life that was only a distance dream for her now. With things how they were
going, she wouldn’t see Harry, or Ron, or her parents ever again. Instead, she was to stay here like
an obedient pet; beaten and starved until she died. In that moment, she wondered if Narcissa’s help
was a curse or a blessing. Was it crueler to give her a quick death? Slip her a poison or cast the
killing curse to spare her the suffering?

Or was she crueler to leave Hermione with her psychotic sister under the belief that she could fight
back against her?
She wasn’t sure.

But she couldn’t think about that right now. For the time being, she wasn’t in pain and there was food before her. Cold or not, just the sight of the oatmeal and fruit slices was enough to make her scramble over to the tray and dig into the food with a gusto. Spoonful after spoonful, Hermione dug into her meal with no hesitation, a combination of hunger and the fear that Bellatrix would return at any moment.

She was surprised that the woman hadn’t made an appearance yet. That got her wondering if she was even awake. The young siren still couldn’t get what it was she had done to the other, but whatever it was, it definitely seemed like it was painful. To render such a powerful witch to that state of helplessness, she knew that what she had done was not something to be done lightly.

‘Or willingly.’ She thought to herself, slowing down with her eating as she almost choked on an orange slice. ‘I just remember looking into her eyes and then it was like my body wasn’t my own. And yet it was still me.’

The feeling she had at that time was incredibly disorienting. The more she thought about it, the more she could feel her siren side swirl about at the back of her mind. She sat and concentrated on its presence, gasping lightly when she could feel it brush against her mind with a curious caress. Hermione wasn’t sure if it’s been because of having such close contact to Bellatrix or the results of her getting older, but it seemed that her creature side was becoming more active in her everyday life. Whether it be from singing with her friends in the room of requirement, or fighting back against Bellatrix’s assaults, more and more it felt that she was growing closer to the little voice that lurked about at the back of her head. She was both frightened and thrilled at the same time when she realized this. Maybe Narcissa was going somewhere when she said that she had a chance against Bellatrix. If she could connect more with her siren side, learn how to control her abilities, then maybe she could get out by herself.

‘But how?’ She asked herself. There were no books or spells that she could use here. Not that she knew what she would be looking for if there was. The only other Cor-Echo she knew was Bellatrix, so there was also no one around to teach her either.

She had reached an impasse.

Sighing in frustration, Hermione pushed the now empty tray away from her and moved back to the corner of her cage. The tray disappeared with a quiet pop.

Huddled up against the wall, she was grateful that she had chosen to wear her grey sweater as she could now use the battered garment as a blanket. She wished she could see how she was fairing with the rest of her clothing, but the dim light illuminating the room was slowly growing ever darker.

As she watched the sun begin to lower from the small gap in the curtains, Hermione tried her best to relax. She of course knew it wasn’t the ideal time or place to do so, but until Bellatrix showed her face again, she would take any comfort she could get. Her body was sore, but the pain from yesterday was gone and her belly was full with the meal that the younger Black sister had provided her.

Her eyes closed not long after that, the stress and exhaustion being enough to keep her under for many hours to come.
Chapter 13 – A Turning Point

A sharp crack of lightning is what awakes Hermione many hours later.

The witch jerked into the waking world with a violent start, heart beating a mile a minute as she momentarily forgot where she was. Darkness was the only thing she could see until the room was briefly illuminated by the storm raging outside.

And just like that she returned to reality.

There she was, rested and fed; the door of her cage firmly closed and the chain on her leg still decisively in place.

If she didn’t feel like a kept animal before, she definitely did now.

Gathering her bearings, the young siren sat up and stretched, her back popping in a delightful manner sending a wave of relaxation down her spine. Sleep didn’t come to her very often and sleep where she actually felt well rested was even rarer to come by. Neither were things she ever thought she would receive under Bellatrix’s watch, and yet here she was.

She didn’t know if she should be worried or not.

On the one hand, the woman wasn’t here to torture her and give her grief. On the other hand, if the woman didn’t come back, chances were that both she and Crookshanks would starve to death before anyone found out where they were. Of course, maybe Narcissus might come back to check on her, but Hermione had the distinct feeling that she wouldn’t be seeing the woman again anytime soon.

Hermione thought of her imminent demise for only a few moments more before another clap of thunder shook the walls and lightning illuminated the room. From where she was, she could see the window rattle and rumble as it was being battered with the force of the wind.

Now Hermione herself wasn’t afraid of thunderstorms. Never really had a problem with them, even when she was a little girl. Often times she found comfort in them. The beautiful flashes of light dancing across the sky; the pitter patter of rain as it slid down her window. Both never failed to bring her comfort. It also proved to be excellent weather for singing she found later on when she was a third-year student.

No, storms had never been a problem for Hermione in the least.

The same couldn’t be said for Crookshanks.

From where she was kneeling, Hermione could barely just make out his frantic mewling as the force of the storm grew stronger. Normally she would be able to keep the little feline calm, but from where
he was underneath the bed, she had no way of reaching him. She desperately wanted to call out to
him, to pull him into her arms and let him know that everything was alright, but having the cat out of
his hiding place was not something she wanted to risk.

Another crack of thunder came rolling down from the heavens and Crookshanks could now be seen
creeping at just the edge of the bed, his bright luminous eyes staring at her in a desperate plea.

“No! No, Crooks go back!” She pleaded softly. The cat didn’t obey. Hermione was beginning to get
nervous. If something happened to Crookshanks, she didn’t know what she would do with herself.

Then, it was as if a lightbulb lit up in her head.

Moving as far as the chain would allow, she crawled forward and laid down on her stomach to stare
her familiar straight in his discomforted face.

Then she began humming.

It was a soft gentle sound, nothing like the sound that came from her mouth just the day before. Like
the many times before, her siren side was at the forefront of her mind, docile and calm at seeing that
there was no immediate threat to deal with. Hermione kept her humming steady and reassuring,
trying to convey to her companion that nothing was going to harm him.

And to her luck, it appeared to be working.

Crookshanks’ eyes were locked onto hers with an unwavering gaze; all traces of his previous distress
seemed to have been washed away. She could still see his tail swishing back and forth in agitation of
course, but it was still better than nothing. Hermione relaxed now that she had a better chance of
coaxing the cat to return to the cover of the bed.

That was until a particularly powerful gust of wind sent the windows blowing inwards with a
shattering crash.

The once muffled sounds of the storm now sounded like a symphony of natural disasters had come
barreling into the room. Heavy rains saturated the floor in seconds; the curtains whipping about like
angry dementors as the tempest continued to rage. Things were already pretty chaotic, but the
moment the wind sent the vase upon the table crashing to the floor, she knew her hold over
Crookshanks had been lost.

Her familiar was sent running from the bed with a frightened yowl as he flew into a panic. Around
the table, over the bed, beneath the curtains, the cat had been spooked into a frenzy. She tried
humming again to get him to calm down, but it was like he couldn’t hear a single thing.

“Crooks, please! Calm down! It’s just a storm!” She cried, hoping to reach the cat through her
words.

Nothing.

It was if she was talking to thin air.

She needed to try something different before things got worse.

But before she could even come up with a new plan of actions, everything went sideways.

While looking solely at her distressed familiar, Hermione failed to see the silent creature standing on
the open windowsill until it was too late.
Crookshanks continued running around in a panic until he was blindsided by Bellatrix’s familiar. It swooped down from its perch with a haunting croon and gave the feline a fierce kick to his side. She screamed as her friend was sent sprawling with a hiss as the gangly legged bird landed before him.

“No, Crookshanks!” She wailed. “Get away from him! Leave him alone!” She yelled, pulling fiercely at her binds.

The creature glanced her way and gave her one of its croaky laughs that she had come to know during their time in the castle. It didn’t seem to care about Hermione’s pleas one way or the other and instead starting advancing on the now infuriated feline.

Hermione didn’t know what to do. Though Crookshanks was no pushover, the bird was bigger with a sharp beak and sharper talons. She had no doubt that the two fighting would be a bloodshed and it would not end well for the smaller familiar.

She had to act fast.

Her fear for her friend is what ignited her instincts. Next thing Hermione knew an ugly screech had bellowed its way from her chest and directed straight at the intruding bird. Never having made a sound like it before, Hermione was definitely startled herself.

And apparently so was the bird.

Almost as if someone had set its tail on fire, the young siren watched as the creature jumped back away from her familiar; it’s wings puffed up like fluffy black clouds as it’s crest flared out in alarm. It was the most ruffled she had ever seen the bird since their meeting. A sense of pride at what she had done swelled within her. She allowed another piercing cry spill from her lips, this one even louder than the last. To her joy, the bird took another step back, his attention fully focused on her.

It was just the opening that her familiar needed. With the creature’s attention away from him, the cat turned tail and scurried under the bed to the farthest place he could reach. Hermione watched as the creature finally realized what had happened and let out its own ferocious shriek, before sprinting over to the bed on its spindly legs. Her heart pounded as she saw it try to fit its large body underneath, however, to her delight, it was far too bulky to reach.

Crookshanks was safe and the look on the bird’s face as it squawked and crooned in anger was enough to send her into a fit of laughter.

It would end up being her undoing.

Enraged at its prey escaping its claws, the bird took flight and landed on the windowsill. The wind and rain beating against its body with tenacity, but if it bothered the creature, it showed no signs of distress. Instead, she watched as it opened its beak and began screaming. Hermione cringed as a sound not unlike the caterwauling charm filled the air. She covered her ears and pulled into herself as the sound drove her mad. She should’ve expected retaliation from the clearly irate creature, but she honestly didn’t expect to essentially be having a screaming match between the two of them. One that would surely to have already reached the ears of the older siren.

And like clockwork; from somewhere off in the distance, the sound of shattering glass perforated the air and had her scrambling as a scream of frustration echoed in the distance.

“Shut your filthy moaning, muddy!” She heard the woman’s angered voice, livid and fierce as it cut through the sounds of rain and wind.
Bellatrix had woken up.

And thinks that she had woken her up.

“Oh Merlin, oh no, oh no!” She moaned to herself. “What have you done you ruddy bird?!” She yelled across the room.

Instead of acknowledging her, it kept wailing at the top of its lungs.

“I said, Shut. Up!” Came another angry yell.

Hermione couldn’t believe this was happening.

Another sound of crashing glass reached her ears, this one much closer than the last. Realizing that the woman was growing closer, the creature snapped its beak and gave her another crooked laugh, clearly knowing what it had just done.

Never in her life had she wanted to do harm to an animal as she wanted to at that moment. But she had a more pressing problem at hand.

She heard Bellatrix long before she saw her.

“Filthy, ignorant, wretched, little mudblood!” She heard the woman scream as she grew ever closer. Even with the door shut, she could hear the woman’s boots thundering down the corridor in her direction.

Hermione huddled herself as far into the corner of her prison as she could; curling up into herself to appear as small as possible. She knew in the long run it would mean nothing to protect her, but it was a little comfort nonetheless. Fearful eyes glanced out into the darkness of the room, unable to make out the figure she could hear moving rapidly towards her. A clinking sound could be heard briefly before the door to the room was blasted open.

Even bracing herself, Hermione still wasn’t prepared for the spell sent careening towards her and blasting her body back further against the wall. She hit the stone with a hard crack, her spine connecting painfully as she now laid slumped over upon the ground. A single groan was all she could manage before it morphed into a wail as her body was once more subjected to the cruciatus curse. The spell lasted shorter than she expected it to, but it still was enough to make her feel completely drained. Hermione rolled onto her back, glancing at the door to see the other siren standing there taking deep puffing breaths. From where she laid in the darkness, she couldn’t make out the other woman’s expression, but she knew she didn’t need to tell that she was pissed.

“I told you to shut your dirty mouth muddy.” She growled, moving over to the bars of the cell. Hermione could see the woman’s wand pointing at her with a light glow around the end. “If you wanted me to rip that filthy little tongue from your mouth, you only had to ask.”

Hermione paled. “It wasn’t me.” She said. In her mind it sounded much more confident, but she knew that she sounded nothing of the sort at that moment.

“Liar! Crucio!”

And again, Hermione’s body was drawn taut as the spell took hold of her. Still having not felt better from the previous curse, her pain felt like it was doubled.

She wanted it to stop.
This wasn’t Malfoy manor anymore. Her secret was already out to the woman and she knew no amount of pleading would get the woman to leave her alone. Therefore, there was no reason for her to silence herself.

Uncaring of the consequences, Hermione pulled forth her siren side and much like she had done earlier with the woman’s familiar, let loose a shriek that rattled the bars of her cage with ferocity. It was not laced with fear this time, but pain. The sound longer and far higher pitched than the one from earlier.

She took note of that for later.

Especially when she realized it’s effects.

At the sound, Bellatrix stumbled back and dropped her wand in pain. The woman shook her head from side to side as if to knock lose the few screws she had left in there. Hermione swore she heard the woman mumbling under her breath, but she was still too far away to tell.

She fixed that problem soon enough.

The cage opened with a snap and Bellatrix was soon approaching her. Panic set in and Hermione tried to scramble away, but she wasn’t fast enough. Bellatrix was on her in an instant. Grabbing Hermione by her throat, she slammed the younger siren against the ground and began speaking in a menacing tone.

“Pull that again girl, and I will be pulling your tongue through your teeth.” She hissed, slamming Hermione on the ground again as she clambered to get away from the woman atop her.

When she managed to far enough away to speak, she practically yelled at the woman, “It wasn’t me!”

That earned her a backhand across her cheek.

“Does it look like I care?! Open that dirty mouth again and I will give you something to scream about.” She hissed.

Hermione didn’t say anything. She desperately wanted to lash out again, show the older witch that she wasn’t afraid of her, but a part of her knew that making the woman any angrier right now would ensure that she would make good on her promise. That’s the last thing she needed at the moment. If Narcissa was right- and she hoped with all her heart that she was- playing her cards right could help her get an edge over the woman. She knew that her little trick with screeching at the woman wouldn’t last forever. And the moment the other found a way to fight against it, Hermione knew her days would be numbered.

So until she could figure out what she could do before that time came, she needed to keep her head down. Calling Bellatrix on her threat was a sure fire way to get killed. Therefore, she didn’t, choosing to merely keep the woman’s hands at bay until she grew bored of her.

It didn’t take as long as she thought it would. Not too long after the assault started, Hermione was kicked away as the older woman grew angry from the lack of reaction. She rolled over in pain at the sharp boot digging into one of her more sensitive areas, but it was a relief in and of itself as the woman backed off.

“Now now. What happened to all that bravado from earlier?” The woman cooed. “Don’t tell me it was all talk.”
Hermione didn’t answer her.

“Your superior is talking to you girl.” The woman hissed, no longer amused at Hermione’s silent warfare.

And how badly did Hermione want to answer. To snidely tell the other woman that she had just told her not to say anything. Her Gryffindor courage was desperate to shine through and express how she truly felt. But she resisted. Not like it mattered anyways. If she spoke; she would be beaten. If she stayed silent; she would be beaten. That was how Bellatrix worked.

As if to deliberately prove her point, the woman whipped her wand towards her and sent a nasty stinging hex into her ribs that had her curling over in agony. At that, Hermione felt too weak to speak or move, but it didn’t stop her from looking up at the older witch with loathing.

Bellatrix took one look at her and laughed.

“So, nothing to say now. Pity that really. Especially when I have so many questions for you to answer.” She cooed in a sickeningly high voice. Black boots clicked across the cell as Bellatrix crouched beside her. It took all her efforts not to flinch when the woman dragged the tip of her wand up the length of her stomach and down her arms; careful to make sure that her hands could not take the wand from her hands. “Like where all of those pretty little breaks went from yesterday.”

Even knowing that it would be impossible to sneak it by her, Hermione had hoped with all her heart that Bellatrix wouldn’t notice that little detail.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t see? Truly you are dumber than I thought. There is nothing in this house that I don’t know about. This,” She pointed at Hermione’s hands. “Was my traitorous sister’s doing. I’ll make sure to repay her for her…kindness soon enough.”

And if that didn’t make Hermione shudder in fear; not for herself, but for the woman who had placed herself at risk simply to relive her pain for a little while. It didn’t completely soothe the ire she had for the other woman, but it definitely made her feel sorry that she would now be the target of her own sister’s warped ideas of loyalty.

She hoped Narcissus had gotten far, far away from here.

“Now. What to do with you?” Bellatrix whispered to herself. Hermione watched as she twirled her wand between her fingers, a contemplative look upon her face. She felt her whole body tense as she prepared herself for whatever the woman had in store for her.

She didn’t have to wait long.

“Well why don’t we start with something simple.” She purred. “Crucio!”

And like so many times before, Hermione’s body was ignited with pain. Her body taught and arched upon the ground as the woman laughed at her misery.

Misery that Hermione was no longer going to tolerate.

Because at this point, she was well aware of her situation. Placid or fighting, Bellatrix did not care either way. Staying here as a prisoner would eventually break her. And by the time Harry and Ron came for her, would it even be worth it then? How long would it take for them to find her?

When she had long lost her mind?
When she no longer had the will to live?

When she was dead?

None of those were options she wanted. But she also knew that she could not keep going like this. Her body in constant pain, broken and bruised upon a stone floor. Letting the woman have her way with her as she took sick pleasure in seeing her suffer. No. She wouldn’t give her the satisfaction. She was a Gryffindor. A lioness who wanted to survive. To return to her life and to the family she still had left.

Bellatrix wouldn’t stop no matter how she begged or pleaded and that fact alone was enough for something dangerous to well within her chest.

Wand or no, the times for words was over.

If Bellatrix was going to play dirty, then it only seemed fair for Hermione to return the sentiment in kind.

Hermione opened her mouth as wide as she could, lungs expanding in preparation for what she was about to do. A smile threatened to split her face in half as she saw realization flit across the older siren’s face.

It was too late anyways.

Hermione expelled her lungs with a wail that had the room shaking from the ground up. The force of it alone was enough to break Bellatrix from her concentration and send the woman sprawling to the ground. The younger siren felt her body go lax as she was freed from the torment, her voice cutting off not long after so she could breathe normally once more.

Like so many times before, the room fell silent, the only sounds being the two of them breathing heavily from exertion.

And then she heard something strange.

Hermione remembered vividly every time Harry spoke parseltongue around her. How his voice was a mixture between human and reptile; words drawn out and almost wispy from how soft they were sometimes.

But if that was the sound a snake could make, then the hissing coming from Bellatrix could only be from something much more dangerous. She was fuming. Which didn’t surprise her in the least anymore. She always was.

But Hermione felt like she wasn’t playing with fire anymore; she was pouring water onto it with a smile.

And she didn’t care.

Hermione could be deaf, blind, and dumb, yet Bellatrix would still find some reason to attack her. Well now she had one and more.

Like the knowledge that Hermione was no longer playing her games.

Don’t get her wrong, she was still terrified of the woman. She didn’t know if she ever wouldn’t be, but in her actions just now, Hermione regained something she thought she almost lost.
Hope.

She hadn’t believed Narcissa when she said that she would be able to fight back against Bellatrix. Even earlier, she thought her ability to use her voice against the woman was just an instinct. That she would only be able to do it when she had no other choice. That her siren side would only save her when she couldn’t save herself.

But just now, she did it all by herself.

There wasn’t that innate need to pull the siren side of herself deep from the back of her mind. This time, it was her own resolve alone that saved her. Resolve that only grew stronger as she watched Bellatrix upon the ground next to her. Angry, but not immune to her powers. She shifted then, the next words from her mouth a combination of boldness and fear.

“Is this what you want Bellatrix?” She whispered. “Because this is what you can expect from me as long as you keep me here. I’m not gonna lay here and let you beat me whenever it pleases you. I’ll ask you again; let me go.”

There was nothing at first, the woman clearly lost in her mind as she hissed at her like a feral beast. Hermione watched as her eyes appeared glassed over; pupils moving back and forth rapidly as if the woman was watching something zoom back and forth between them. She grew nervous.

Angry Bellatrix was predictable.

Unstable Bellatrix was not.

She didn’t even want to know what a combination of the two was like.

Before long, there was a sudden change in the atmosphere. Bellatrix appeared to have regained some kind of semblance over herself and had snapped her head up to stare deeply into her eyes.

Hermione flinched at what she saw.

Bellatrix was completely unhinged. The way she gazed at Hermione made her skin feel oily and the hair on the back of her neck stand on end.

And the smile.

It twisted the woman’s admittedly good looks into something sinister. Warning signs fired throughout her body, yet even so, she could practically feel the siren side of her humming contently from the background.

There was something going on that she was obviously missing.

More movement and suddenly Hermione was the only one upon the ground. Even in the dark of the night, Hermione could tell that Bellatrix was shaky in her ability to stand up straight. She wasn’t sure if it was from her still being under the effects of her voice, or it was the woman’s rage silently boiling beneath the surface. It matter not either way, the woman’s expression didn’t change a single bit.

It felt like an eternity had passed before she finally spoke.

“Let you go…let you go she asks.” The woman sent herself into a fit of giggles. “And if I let you go, what happens then?”

Even if it didn’t seem like a rhetorical question, Hermione didn’t answer her regardless.
“I’ll _tell_ you what’ll happen. You’ll run home to your little _friends_ and live out your peaceful, _happy_ life like some fool in a fairytale. Of course, you would. But the question then is this,” The woman’s voice grew colder than ice. “What _in_ that insignificant little mind of yours thinks that I would allow it?”

Hermione jumped to her feet, nearly stumbling over herself in her fury. “Because you have no use for me! You can’t torture me forever. The aurors _will_ find us. I _will_ get out of here. And when I do, you’ll be dead or in prison. So just leave me alone! I am not _yours._” She screamed.

Bellatrix laughed deeply. “Oh, you silly little mudblood.” She heard the older witch whisper. “Did you really forget about our _special_ bond? Not mine? You were _born_ to belong to me.”

“There _is_ no bond! I belong to no one! I’m a person, not some prize to be won and kept. I am not your mate and you do not _own_ me!” Hermione spat, trying to desperately get her point across to the woman standing before her.

Her sickening grin never faded; if anything, it became wider. When she next spoke, her words were also accompanied by a throaty croak over by the window.

“I’ve always took you for an idiot girl, but now I see that naivety is yet another trait you’ve seen to have acquired. So maybe I should put this in a way that addled mind will understand.”

Hermione was ready for another round of torture. A kick to the stomach or even a smack across her already throbbing cheeks.

She received none of that.

She got something far worse in her opinion.

Bellatrix started to _sing._

_I did not ask for you_

_You are here by fate’s design_

_I wanted power, fear, and infamy_

_To be the greatest witch in time_

_I’m left to wonder what I’ve done_

_How did I earn you as a mate_

_When all I feel for you is loathing_

_Never love and only hate_

_How did this happen_

_We may never know_
But so long as you’re with me

This is how things will go~

She didn’t like the sound of that; the words alone had her feeling nauseous.

Because she knew that despite every word coming out of Bellatrix’s mouth, all of it was true. Neither of them asked for this. Neither of them would ever love one another.

Yet here they were.

Mates. Destined partners. Supposedly each other’s missing half.

She still didn’t want to believe it. She wouldn’t. Hermione promised herself that so long as her mind was her own, she would never see the woman before her as anything more than her enemy. Which was becoming harder and harder to do when her creature instincts were so keen on seeing her as such.

Hermione’s head was spinning and she felt her strength start to give out as she was being serenaded with hate. She tried to get back up on her feet, but only managed to fall to her knees; the spells from earlier still lingering in her bones.

Naturally, the black-haired witch noticed and only began to sing even louder.

I did not ask for you

But even so, you cannot leave

And no witch, nor beast, nor wizard

Will come and try to steal from me

You took my lord, took my life

Brought me shame and gave me hell

So until the days stop ticking

I’m your warden and your jail

You won’t escape me

Won’t forget me

I’ll brand my place into your heart

You can run and flee and fight me

But in the end, we'll never part~
A hand shot forward like a snake and tightened around her neck like a vice. Though now familiar with this occurrence, it was still incredibly hard to try and pry the elder’s hands away from her bruising throat.

In the end she couldn’t.

*It’s fate’s design that we’re together*

*Then by its hand, I’ll make you stay*

*And when your little friends come looking*

*I’ll rain down death and make them pay~*

Fingers danced down the length of her throat to then violently yank her forward. Hermione could feel every breath the woman took upon her lips as she gasped desperately for air.

The final words from the woman’s mouth were sung so softly that Hermione doubted she would’ve heard them had they not been mere inches apart.

*I did not ask for you*

*You can deny me if you please*

*But no matter how hard you fight me…*

She snapped Hermione’s head to the side, her lips upon her ear.

*I will never let you leave.*

Unconsciousness was quickly becoming a blessing in and of itself she realized as she began to quickly drift under. But with it always came the question that’s been slowly growing in the back of her mind.

On whether or not she wanted to stay that way.

*Permanently.*

She was afraid that the longer she stayed there, the closer and closer she came to discovering the answer.
Chapter 14 - A Taste of Something Lost

Chapter Notes

And here's the third chapter that I have finished for now. Hopefully by next week, 15 will be done. I'm already working on it now. I'm in between projects and tests so I have a little extra time to write more. So here you go! Please enjoy Chapter 14 of Sing to Me Your Insanity!

Chapter 14: A Taste of Something Lost

The next three days went much like the first ones.

Hermione would wait chained to the wall until Bellatrix decided to grace her with her presence. With little strength to do much else, the young woman would glare up at the woman in defiance as she began her anti-muggleborn, hate fueled rants. Bellatrix would insult and taunt her until she in turn gave into her occasional hotheadedness and gave her a response. In turn, it gave the woman exactly what the woman wanted and that’s when the spells would start flying.

Hermione found the whole routine growing old very quickly.

And apparently so did Bellatrix to her sheer delight.

Oh, make no mistake, the curses kept coming and Bellatrix was just as nasty as she had always been; but Hermione was gifted with something that she had been craving for a very long time.

Food.

She remembered how haughty the woman had been when she waltzed into the room with a dog bowl in hand; the smile on her face threatening to split it in half. Hermione winced as the bowl was practically thrown at her and it was only her paranoid reflexes that allowed her to catch it at all.

“Wouldn’t want my new favorite toy to starve to death, now would we?” The woman laughed as a second dog bowl filled with water was placed just within her reach. “Gotta keep you alive so we can continue to play.”

Hermione took one whiff of the bowl and gagged at the stench causing the older witch to snap her head back in amusement. Turning to leave, the woman told her, “You better eat up muddy. I may not be so generous next time around.”

“Generous,” Hermione sneered as the door slammed closed.

If this was what the woman called generous, Hermione was quite sure that she didn’t want to know what the woman would give her out of spite. Regardless of the disgusting brown mush before her, Hermione swallowed her pride and picked up some of the ‘food’ with her fingers.

The moment it touched her tongue, the young siren clapsed her hand over mouth as the mush threatened to come back up. The last thing she wanted was to spend what would probably be weeks laying in her own vomit. That and the fact that she hadn’t eaten in what felt like forever.
She would simply have to grin and bear it if she wanted to survive long enough to escape this place.

The food had been just the first new hurdle that Hermione suffered through that day. The next came after Bellatrix had gotten all of her daily jibes out of the way.

Hermione was leaning against the wall of her cell, feet wobbling as the woman stood before her with her wand twirling idly through the curls of her mane. She could practically see every gear turning in the woman’s mind as she no doubt thought of some new sick way to torment her. Eventually the woman must’ve came up with something as the wand was once more pointed in her direction.

“You’re really starting to smell muddy. Wouldn’t you like to clean up a bit?”

Hermione shook her head frantically. “No, no, I insist. How poor of a host I have been to not let you get clean,” Bellatrix’s eyes lit up with delight. “Scourgify Maxima!”

A scream tore through Hermione’s body as her flesh felt like it was being rubbed against sandpaper. Enraged and terrified at the sensation, a screech ripped from her throat that had the other siren stumbling back in shock.

The Gryffindor student fell to the ground shaking as every inch of her flesh was tingling and sensitive from the over powered cleaning spell. Even with it being held for not very long, Hermione was shaking from head to toe as the effects continued to linger. The shock wasn’t enough to miss how close Bellatrix was from losing it however.

“What did I tell you about doing that, girl?” She hissed, eyes crazed as her plans were once more thwarted by Hermione’s own siren abilities.

“What did I tell you about doing this, Bellatrix?” Hermione asked, equally as ticked off as the woman before her.

It was clear that neither one of them was ready to bend to the other’s will just yet.

“I don’t think you’re in a position to be speaking so boldly to me you filthy little mudblood!” She heard the witch growl dangerously. “It would be easy to kill you just like I’ve done to so many of your other little friends.”

“But you haven’t.” Was Hermione’s snappy reply.

Bellatrix chuckled. “No. I haven’t. Why do you think that is?”

Honestly, at this point, Hermione wasn’t sure any more. It was clear in the woman’s every action that she wanted her head on a silver platter. She had even told her so on numerous occasions. She supposed she was simply being kept around for the woman’s own sick entertainment, but Hermione knew that she was starting to become too much of a hassle for something as trivial as that.

There was something she was missing here.

She simply had no idea what it was.

So, she told the woman just that.

“I don’t know. You’ve made it clear that you want me dead. So why don’t you just do it?” Hermione practically pleaded.
“Because of *that* right there.” The woman said with a creepily soft smile. “Because you *want* me to. Because being alive and with me brings you more misery than even the thought of *death*.”

A tear slid down her face.

Half because she knew it was true.

Half because Bellatrix knew it as well.

She looked up at the woman with a blank expression as her will crumbled away yet again. “Then you know what risks I’m willing to take in order to get away.”

The woman came closer and bent at the waist to look her dead in the eye.

“I imagine the same ones I’ll take to bring you right back.” She whispered before once more turning and exiting the room; not even bothering to close the cell door behind her.

It wasn’t like she could reach it anyways. It was just another one of Bellatrix’s little mind games she liked to play with her. Giving her a little taste of freedom only to keep it just there out of her reach.

That night Hermione cried herself to sleep as her hate for her supposed mate grew ever stronger.

When Hermione awoke the next day, there was something noticeably different.

Between last night and now, something had changed.

For better or worse; now *that* was yet to be seen.

Still unsure of what it was, Hermione rose and quietly padded over to the water bowl that had only a small amount of the warm liquid left inside it.

It was only after she had finished off the water that she finally realized what was different.

Not once since she’d been in her cell had she ever been able to move about *quietly*.

The bowl fell from her grip and clattered against the stone floor as she dared to look down at her leg. An almost animalistic keen left her lips as she realized that she had been right in her assumption.

The chain keeping her locked within her cell was no longer attached. Not only that either. Both doors- the one to her cell and the one to the room- were left wide open and unguarded.

Had she the strength, she would’ve bolted immediately for an exit. As it was however, she simply didn’t, and instead opted to standing slowly and carefully.

The first few steps had her stumbling like a newborn deer. The next ones growing more stable as she regained her grounds. Despite knowing that she hadn’t been locked up for very long, Bellatrix had made sure to keep Hermione feeling as weak as possible.

Not like that was going to stop her from trying to escape.

Stepping closer to the cell gates, Hermione was hesitant the further and further out she got.

Naturally she was completely suspicious. This was clearly some kind of trick. There was no way that after everything that the woman had put her through just a few hours ago, she was simply going to let her get up and *leave*. 
And she was right.

Leaving the cell, Hermione’s first thought was not to go for the door. She went for the window instead. She doubted that the woman would have it as well guarded as the blatantly open door and even more so as the room was located several stories off of the ground.

That would be her first mistake.

Hermione slowly approached the window and reached out for the handle.

Immediately, a shock ran up her arm and then her entire body was sent flying across the room to slam into one of the bedposts. She groaned as her body impacted the hard wood and then slumped down painfully across the floor.

“I am going to murder that woman.” Hermione whimpered as she rubbed her hand down her aching spine.

The young Gryffindor laid there moaning upon the ground until she heard a small meow coming from somewhere behind her. Hermione gasped before rolling to lay flat on her stomach to peek beneath the bed.

“Crookshanks!” She cried softly, reaching out for the lounging feline.

As the large cat scooted over into her arms, Hermione felt tears fill her eyes, but for the first time, they were filled with joy. She could wholeheartedly admit that this was one of the most stressful things to think about while being held here in captivity. Crookshanks was her familiar and one of her best friends in the world. His life was incredibly precious to her and if something had happened to him...

Well she didn’t know what she would’ve done, but she knew that it wouldn’t be anything pleasant.

Holding him tight in her arms now, Hermione felt a moment of peace. His soft purring and brightly shining eyes something familiar and safe to hold onto. She didn’t want to let him go though she knew that he couldn’t come with.

At least until she could find a safe way out of here.

The quicker, the better.

With a warning to stay put, Hermione shoved the cat back into his hiding place and tried the door next. Knowing the kind of spell placed on the window, Hermione decided to play it a little more cautious. The young siren snatched a pillow from atop the bed and held it behind her back. In reality, it would do little to completely stop the impact should it come, but it was still better than nothing.

She took a deep breath and then stepped out of the doorway…

Nothing.

She took another step.

Again, she was still unharmed.

It should’ve gave her more confidence in her steps, but if anything, it only caused Hermione to feel even more nervous.

She stayed on guard just in case as she began observing her new environment.
The house, or more like mansion, was enormous. More rooms than she could count stretched down the wide hallway going in both directions. Everything was painted in dull and uninteresting colors, and many of the paintings seem to be unmoving or completely empty. Never having seen the way to the entrance, Hermione was unsure on which way she was supposed to go.

‘I’ll go left. If it’s wrong I can always turn back.’ She decided.

Decision made, Hermione carefully walked down the hallway; her pillow still serving as her only shield against any of Bellatrix’s potential attacks.

Again, it wasn’t much, but it was still better than nothing.

The walls were aligned with portraits of relatives and famous witches and wizards. She would’ve liked to stop and look at them, but she soon noticed that many of the frames were either sleeping or the occupants were facing the wrong way. A missed opportunity for sure, but Hermione was sure there would be another chance in the future to do so.

Preferably when she was a freed woman.

The end of the hall was now right in front of her. Pillow at the ready, she crept up to the edge of the wall and peeked around it, still weary of an ambush.

A sigh of relief.

The only thing standing before her was the flight of stairs leading downwards.

They seemed innocent enough, but she knew from many years at Hogwarts that stairs could never really be trusted in the wizarding world.

As she began descending however, Hermione was glad that these were in fact just ordinary stairs. At every two flights, Hermione came across a landing that lead off towards what appeared to be other hallways. It took six flights in total just to reach the bottom floor. The house she was in was truly massive.

‘If I get lost in here, I could be lost for hours.’ She thought as she skittered about the ground floor. It was at least easy to navigate the maze of a house with the many windows illuminating her way. Had it been dark, Hermione had doubts that her journey to freedom would’ve been as easy as it was.

Eventually, after what felt like hours of traveling, Hermione found herself at a foyer. The whole room just screamed expensive. From the marble columns supporting the roof to the luxurious curtains hanging down over the two massive side windows; all of it just screamed old money.

Though if this placed was owned by the Malfoys- and she was quite sure it was- then it wasn’t really a surprise. Wasting money on material items ran in that family’s blood and she had no uncertainties that it applied to the Black family as well.

Hermione herself never struggled financially, but they weren’t living in the lap of luxury either. Her parents had always encouraged her to value things on their use rather than their appearance.

Which is why as she stood there in the foyer, it was not the fancy draperies or columns that she found to be the most valuable.

It was the door at the other end of the room leading to the exit.

She had made it.
There it was, right in front of her.

A few feet more and she could go home.

Freedom was right there within her grasp.

She could end it all right now…

So why did she want nothing more than anything to turn tail and run back to her cell?

‘What’s going on?’ She asked as panic began building up within her.

Something was wrong.

Hermione bolted towards the door in desperation.

No more than a few feet from grabbing the handle, the young Gryffindor let out a cry of pain as she fell and slammed her face against the cold hardwood floors. Her heart was running a mile a minute and the world swam in circles as new thoughts started pouring into her head.

‘I need to go back. I need my cell. I want to go back. Not safe out here. I don’t want to leave.’

Over and Over these feelings whirled around her head, pushing any other thoughts of escaping far from the front of her mind.

‘What was she thinking? She couldn’t leave. She needed to stay here.’

Something still felt off about this, but she just couldn’t put her finger on it.

The siren reached out for the door, genuinely confused on why she was trying so hard in the first place when all she really wanted was to go back where she belonged.

‘Where do I belong?’ She asked through the fog cluttering her mind.

‘Here. In your lovely cell. Where you’re safe. Where you’re fed. Don’t you want to go back? Go back.’

Now that she thought of it, that did sound lovely.

Her cell was nice…wasn’t it?

She was also safe there…wasn’t she?

No!

The scream coming from the back of mind punched through the fog clogging her brain like a bullet. Hermione rolled and backpedaled away from the door. The further and further away she scrambled, the more the fog cleared and her thoughts began rearranging themselves.

‘I need to go. I need to go home. My real home. Not safe here. I want to leave.’

“What is going on?” She whimpered, staring at the door with newfound fear.

A slow clap rang out throughout the foyer.

“Now that was fun to watch.” A voice came from somewhere behind her. Hermione whipped around to see Bellatrix standing there leaning against the threshold. “It’s a wonder I didn’t try to do

“What have you done to me?” Hermione jumped to her feet. “Tell me, what did you do!” She screamed.

The speed at which the woman whipped out her wand almost gave her whiplash.

“Watch your tone muddy. You have no right to demand anything of me in your position. However,” The woman sauntered her way and Hermione moved to give her a wide berth. Bellatrix kept on walking until she reached the door and opened it. “I’m in a generous mood again. So as a reward, why don’t we take a little walk outside?” She gestured almost sweetly.

Looking past her kidnapper, Hermione could see the world outside her prison. The marble steps leading down to a cobblestone path were pristine and bright beneath the glare of the beaming sun. The fresh air blowing in was warm and soothing. It flowed over her skin with the gentleness of a flower petal. For a brief moment, Hermione forgot about her aches and pains to just stop and take in the scenery before her.

She wanted to run for it. Reach out with both of her shaking hands and feel the light of the sun warm her frigid skin. So, she did…

And was bombarded with an array of anxious and scrambled thoughts of wanting to stay.

This time, her instinct to jump away came much faster. She glanced up to see Bellatrix staring at her with mock confusion.

“Why muddy, whatever could be wrong? Don’t you want to come outside and play? I thought you wanted to leave oh so badly.” She cooed. Then with a shrug of her shoulders, she walked back in and slammed the door closed once more. “But I guess if you’re not feeling up to it today, we can always try again later.” She said, throwing her head back in laughter.

“What did you do to me Lestrange?!” Hermione yelled. “What did you do to me, you horrid woman!?”

Her rage only made the woman laugh harder. “That’s the fun of it all! I didn’t do anything to you.” Her eyes became alight with venom. “Now the house however…”

“You cursed your own house?” Hermione couldn’t believe the woman before her. “What is wrong with you?”

Hermione was going to tear her hair out. She thought her hatred for the other woman could grow no stronger. Yet here they were.

She didn’t know how much more of this she could take.

The more and more she stayed there, the more she felt like she was losing her mind. Like she was coming apart at the seams and was becoming less and less like herself. There were things she thought about doing now that the old her would have never dreamt of doing.

Like foolishly attacking a woman like Bellatrix with a pillow. The sound of it alone was ludicrous. The old Hermione would have laughed at the thought of it knowing that it would only lead to more torment on her own behalf.

The new Hermione- the one who had not eaten a hot meal in forever and who was slowly losing her mind- didn’t care.
With no warning nor words, Hermione charged Bellatrix, pillow at the ready and gave the other siren a solid whack across the face. She didn’t care what the woman was thinking of doing to her next; she needed this.

In that moment Hermione knew she was not thinking clearly. She could’ve struck the woman with her fists. Screamed at her with what little she knew about her siren abilities. Anything really. But no. Hermione Granger, brightest witch of her time, decided that a throw pillow was the best weapon choice against one of the wizarding world’s most dangerous witches.

Maybe she was going insane after all.

The way the other woman was staring at her- mouth agape and eyes wide with genuine shock- that thought may not have been far from the truth.

A hush fell over the room as the two women stared each other down. Hermione was nervous. Whenever the woman went quiet and stared at her, she usually was making up some new torture or thinking of ways to kill her slowly and painfully.

She wondered which one the woman was thinking of now.

Before either of them could speak, a throaty squawk came from behind her and she didn’t even have time to turn as the woman’s familiar glided silently past her. Its appearance snapped Bellatrix out of her trance long enough to raise her arm for the creature to land on it. Hermione couldn’t see from where she was standing what exactly was going on between them, but whatever was happening was important enough for the woman to leave her be.

“Looks like it’s your lucky day muddy. I have business to attend to.” She shooed the bird who took off back into the rest of the house. She gave Hermione one of her trademark smiles. “But don’t worry, when I return, I’ll make sure to make our time tonight extra special.” She then apparated away, leaving Hermione alone with her pillow and her slowly deteriorating mind.

Standing there, Hermione was left wondering what to do now. On the one hand, she was freed. On the other hand, though free, she was still one hundred percent a prisoner. The doors and windows obviously could not be trusted, but she also didn’t put it past the woman to have the rest of her house booby-trapped as well. It would be just her luck really. Even so, she knew that she couldn’t just sit around and do nothing either. She would find a way out. Or at least some way to get a message out to someone so she could be rescued.

That was really how she spent the rest of her day.

Avoiding the windows and doors, Hermione went through every open room she came across and explored. She searched for weapons or other means to escape, but often times her searches came up with nothing. Eventually her exploring lead her to the kitchen where she was both relieved and exasperated at her findings. There were knives and other sharp utensils everywhere. There they were just sitting out in the open, waiting to be taken.

Hermione wasn’t a fool though, and didn’t even spare them a second glance.

What she did however, was approach the refrigerator with all the caution of a handler approaching a wounded animal. Hermione had little hope that the appliance wasn’t cursed to open up and freeze her there on the spot, but she still needed to try anyways. She reached out and braced herself for the worst…

That never came.
She opened it.

Still nothing.

Hermione would’ve sworn the squeal she let out could be heard from every floor in the mansion. There before her was a goldmine of food and water. It looked too good to be true really. So good in fact that she was still hesitant to touch any of it. It would be just her luck that Bellatrix would try to pull another fast one over her. Curse the food itself instead. She wouldn’t put it past her. Hermione knew so many things could go wrong at that moment and yet it didn’t stop her from reaching out and grabbing a block of cheese sitting there on the top shelf. Nothing happened.

While growing resentful at how paranoid she was becoming, the moment she realized that the food was safe, all hesitation was gone.

The young witch grabbed whatever she could carry and began sprinting through the halls with one goal in mind. Hermione didn’t stop until she had returned to the room where the cage was, afraid of running into yet another one of Bellatrix’s tricks along the way.

The instant she burst into the room, she began taking the food and hiding it throughout the room. Beneath the table in the middle of the room; between the flowers of the vase on the table; beneath the bed where Crookshanks was hiding out; everywhere. If she ever escaped this place, it was best that she had some provisions in case she had no way of apparating away. Hermione found herself wishing that she had her enchanted purse with her. It would’ve been so much easier to store all these things if she did.

Feeling a bit better now that she at least had sustenance for herself and her companion, Hermione sat leaning against the bed contemplating what her next move should be. There was no way she was getting anywhere without her wand. No doubt Bellatrix was either hiding it somewhere or was keeping it on her person.

Despite being the more dangerous option, Hermione hoped it was the later. At least then she knew at some point she could grab it off of the older woman during one of their squabbles.

‘But what if she’s hidden it? I’ll never be able to find it in this mansion.’ She groaned, knowing full well if the wand was hidden somewhere in the house, chances of her finding it alone would be slim to none.

She kept brainstorming.

Every time she tried thinking of a new way to get away, a new way to be stopped came up and made her all the more discouraged. Being clever was handy in many situations, but against someone who was just as clever and also had a power advantage? Things got a little more complicated.

Even so, Hermione decided that even should all her plans end up failing, she needed to try them. What was the harm of trying? Hermione leaned back against the bed and pulled her familiar from beneath to settle him in her lap. She found herself absently petting him as she gazed up at the ceiling, weary of things would have to do in order to escape the hell she had found herself in.

“Nothing beats a failure but a try.” She glanced down at Crookshanks who stared back with a withered scowl. “If that’s the case, I think we have a lot of failures ahead of us Crooks.”

Crookshanks swatted her with his tail; his pushed in face mirroring hers in disdain for the days they both knew they had ahead of them.
Chapter 15 - The Snake in the Basement

Chapter Notes

*looks at calendar. 0.0'...meekly leaves chapter*

Sorry! XD If you guys couldn't tell, i'm actually hot garbo at keeping to a schedule. Alas! Here is chapter 15. Also as a note, my chapter guide is in absolute shambles right now. Just a mess. Between deleting, combining, editing, and filing in plot holes, it's been all over the place. That being said, as I went through it last time, i've realized that I don't like the pace at which this is going. So while I will not go completely left field, I definitely want to pick up the pace on the plot and the romance.

Just a smidge.

Promise! XD

Alrighty then, that's all from me! Until the next chapter, please enjoy!

Chapter 15 - The Snake in the Basement

Another week goes by before Hermione is able to move around again.

Just as she said she would, Bellatrix made good on her promise the day she attacked her with the pillow. Two days had passed before she was able to walk around again. Hermione didn’t want to say she was getting used to the abuse- because she wasn’t, not by a long shot- but she was coming to enjoy the time she spent unconscious.

Bellatrix didn’t want to play with prey that couldn’t scream.

However, that was beside the point now.

Today was a ‘generous’ day.

She was allowed those now. Days where Bellatrix let her out of her cage to roam around the house. Hermione knew that it wasn’t because of the kindness in her heart. No doubt the woman was just waiting for her to run into another trap and get sent flying somewhere again.

Or worse.

Either way, Hermione didn’t let her newfound freedom go to waste.

Bellatrix had been leaving the house more and more lately. Hermione didn’t know where she was going and she knew better than to ask too. Instead, she waited until she was sure the older witch was gone before she ventured out into the mansion.

Further and further she would go, looking for any way to escape. Each time, she came up empty handed. The doors were locked, the windows were cursed, and the apparition wards around the property were far too strong for her to overcome.
It was time for plan B.

She went looking for a library.

Hermione knew that there was no way that a dark family like the Blacks wouldn’t have a library somewhere in this house. She remembered how Draco had always bragged about how large his library at home was; teeming with dark tomes and cursed artifacts. If the blonde had been telling the truth, then the chances of the Blacks having an equally as impressive library was almost guaranteed.

And she was right.

It took nearly the entire morning, but in the end, she found what she was searching for.

There at the end of the hall on the third floor and to the left, was a door far larger than any of the others. It was surrounded with exotic plants and columns of marble that gleamed brightly from the light of the sun from the nearby window. Above the arched doorway was the word library and the Black family motto written in ornate gold letters.

Hermione pushed on the doors and was elated when they opened with ease.

The moment she saw the room, she gasped in awe.

She had entered nirvana.

It was the biggest library she had ever seen. Rows and rows of books stretched back into the enchanted room like an endless horizon. Down the center of the room, instead of having the ordinary shelves she was used to, the shelves were columns as well. Books and scrolls spiraled around the columns and kept going upwards into the darkness of the ceiling. Hermione suddenly wondered how she was supposed to reached the higher shelves without her magic.

She trusted the sturdiness of the bookcases.

She didn’t trust her climbing skills.

Walking further into the room, Hermione walked between the columns and briefly skimmed over titles, only picking up ones that managed to catch her interest. As expected, she found that many of the tomes were dark in nature. Proper pureblood etiquette, family trees, the deeds of famous dark wizards, anatomy- all of them were books that she knew were either banned or forbidden at Hogwarts for one reason or another. Going through a majority of the library at school- including the restricted section- Hermione was quite sure that no student would be coming across any of the books in front of her now.

Which only made her want to read them even more.

In her eyes, knowledge was not evil. A spell was only as bad as it’s caster. She knew plenty of light spells that could do just as much damage as a dark one. Bellatrix alone was a testament to that. Therefore, the idea of a light wizard learning dark magic was not something that seemed out of the ordinary for her.

Especially now when she was desperate for any type of way to get out of there.

Column after column the young siren went in search of what she needed. It seemed like an eternity had passed, but her searching eventually yielded results. With great care, she pulled a decrepit maroon colored book from the shelf.
‘Yes!’ She cried. This was exactly what she needed.

Hermione didn’t even bother to find a place to comfortably sit. She sat right there on the cold stone floor and began reading with a gusto. She didn’t know when Bellatrix would be coming back and the last thing she wanted was for the woman to catch on to what she was up to. It would literally be losing what little hope she had left. Wandless magic was not something easy to do. The only ones she knew who could do it were witches and wizards far powerful than herself.

‘No, don’t think like that Granger. You’ve faced tougher challenges than this.’ She had to tell herself. This was not the time to be doubting her abilities. If she ever wanted to see her friends again-see her parents again- then she needed to buckle down and get her act together.

Something that was slowly becoming harder and harder to do the longer she was held captive.

The speed at which she started reading grew tenfold as her will to persevere overcame her rising doubts.

Six chapters later, Hermione was not nearly as far as she wanted to get that day. She had barely scratched the surface of wandless magic and was nowhere close to being able to actually practicing it. It definitely was discouraging, but she also knew that lingering any longer would jeopardize everything if her jailer came back to see her.

Instead, Hermione put the book back exactly the way she found it and left the library. She didn’t hear the other’s sickeningly sweet voice calling her from somewhere in the distance and so she felt safe to assume that she had yet to return.

She took the time to explore more.

An exploration that would lead her towards her greatest asset yet.

Her curiosity soon led her to a door on the first floor that appeared to lead to another lower level. Peeking inside, Hermione was met by a dark corridor that lead down a flight of candle lit steps. A part of her was screaming to turn back around, but upon seeing that the way wasn’t cursed to send her flying, she kept moving forward.

Down and down she went in what felt like an endless spiral of stairs. By the time she reached the bottom, she had to stop and take a breather seeing as her latest injuries had still yet to heal.

The room she entered was a disaster zone.

In retrospect, she should’ve known that it wouldn’t be wise to place so many cursed objects out in the open upstairs. Raids by the ministry were random and often enough that it wouldn’t be the wisest idea. That’s even if they knew where this mansion was to begin with.

However, having them down here, literally lying all over each other didn’t seem like a good idea either.

And they were everywhere.

Swords, magic carpets, innocent looking household objects- the works. Some were placed on pedestals off to the sides, but the majority of the items were piled on top of one another in any old fashion. She was really getting vibes like the ones she got from the room of requirement.
Hermione walked further into the room and began to work her way around the mess. She knew better than to touch anything, but if there was something familiar—something that she could maybe use to get out of there—then it didn’t hurt to have a look.

In the end, the young siren never did find something that she could use.

But her search didn’t turn up empty either.

Way in the back, tucked behind a mound of stacked crates, she discovered a door. It was old and rusted shut. Cobwebs and an obscene amount of dust was layered over the top of it, making it clear that wherever the door led hadn’t been opened in a very long time.

It was far too tempting to leave alone.

Checking to see if it was safe, Hermione opened it and took a step inside.

It was practically empty. There was nothing there, or at least nothing worth keeping the room down there and out of sight. To her left was a desk situated against the wall, covered with books and other seemingly random objects. None of it looked as though it had been touched in years. In the center of the room was a large black and green rug that was stained and tattered beyond all recognition. In the other corner, a wilting plant leaned pathetically up against the wall; its dead leaves littering the ground around it.

Aside from those few sparse objects, there was only one other thing in the room.

A single lantern hanging above an empty portrait frame.

Hermione walked up to it, hoping to get a clue as to what made this one in particular so special. From what she could see, there was no plague or any other sign to tell her who was once there.

“Why would this be down here?” She asked out loud, turning to leave the room.

“That’s a question I would also like the answer to Miss Granger.”

Hermione squeaked in fear as a voice spoke from behind her. She whipped around to see that the portrait was no longer empty.

Her eyes widened at seeing its new occupant.

“Professor Snape?” She whispered.

“I’m sure you know by now Miss Granger that I am no longer your professor,” The potion master grimaced much like how he did when talking to one of his more petulant students. “Between you and Potter, I’m surprised that you both refuse to take advantage of that fact.”

Hermione found herself tearing up. “After the war, Harry shared your memories with me. Calling you anything else now feels like an insult.”

“Then perhaps I should’ve shown them earlier. I would’ve had so many years with less grey hairs.” The man harped. He made a gesture for the girl to come closer. “All jokes aside Miss Granger, I’m curious as to why you had this portrait of me made.”

“It’s not mine professor.” She answered. “We’re in Bellatrix’s mansion.”

“Forgive me if I’m lost.”
Hermione sighed. “I’ve been kidnapped, professor.”

“Kidnapped?” He gasped.

“It’s a long story.” She said sadly.

Snape nodded and Hermione watched him leave through the side of his portrait. He returned rather quickly with a large, comfy chair in tow.

“I am but a portrait now, Miss Granger. But if you insist on continuing to call me professor, it seems only fair that I try and assist you now as I did when I was alive.” He answered.

Hermione laughed, however it didn’t hide the tear that fell from the corner of her eye. She hurriedly tried to wipe it away but she knew the man saw it anyways.

“You would really help me, professor? After all me and the others have put you through?” She asked.

“Naturally. Getting you three out of trouble seems to be my life’s calling.” He gave her an exasperated smile, an expression she had never seen on his face in all the years she’d known him. “A calling that I had no doubt would somehow follow me to the grave as well. Now, you might as well have a seat Miss Granger. From your appearance alone, I can already tell this will be quite the tale.”

The young Gryffindor took a seat on the floor and did just that.

It took an hour for Hermione to finish explaining the situation. By the end of it the young girl was in tears and the older wizard was shaking his face into his open palms.

“So, what you’re telling me Miss Granger is that you are a rare magical creature who just so happens to be the mate of one of the wizarding worlds most deranged witches. Am I getting that correct?” He recapped.

Hermione nodded.

“What you are also telling me is that Bellatrix is not only still alive, but has taken you captive where no one knows where you are. And she has your wand.”

She nodded again.

Snape groaned. “Why is it, Miss Granger, that when you and your lot get into trouble, it’s never something less demanding?”

She chuckled and replied, “We’ve never been ones to do things halfway professor. I’m sure you know that by now.”

“Unfortunately.” He stated dryly. “Now that I’ve been brought up to speed on what’s happening, I’ll do my best to help you as much as I can.” He said.

“Thank you, professor. Is there some way that you can let someone at the castle know where we are? That’s where your other portrait is right?”

Her heart sank as he shook his head. “Without knowing where you are, it would be of no use. I can relay information back and forth, but that is about the extent of what I can do from the outside.”

“Dammit.” She hissed.
“Language Miss Granger.”

“Sorry Professor.” The girl murmured sheepishly. “It just seems like every time I think of a way to escape, something else comes up and I’m back to square one.”

He nodded. “Understandable. Though now is no time to lose our heads. Also,” He lowered his voice as though to tell her something top-secret. “You aren’t exactly back at square one. While I myself can’t help you escape, I can teach you how to.”

Hermione jumped to her feet in excitement. Frantically, she gripped the sides of the painting so hard that she nearly ripped it straight off of the wall.

“How?!” She yelped.

“You mentioned that there was a curse on the house to prevent you from leaving. Wandless magic was not my strongest suite, but as one of the dark lord’s followers, it was required to know. I can teach you.” He said.

And just like that, the little ball of hope that had been slowly dwindling away was lit anew.

This was it.

This was the break she was finally looking for.

Hermione collapsed into a heap on the ground as her entire being was filled with overwhelming joy.

Snape’s face was stern as he looked down at her from his portrait. “I hope you are aware that this won’t be easy Miss Granger.”

She smiled. “I wasn’t expecting it to be.”

He nodded. “Good. For now, go. We wouldn’t want Bellatrix to suspect you. Return to me the next time she leaves. I will return to my portrait at the castle and tell the headmistress that you still live. We begin our lessons next we meet.”

“Thank you, sir. Thank you. If…no. When I get out of here, you can best believe that the world will hear about what you did to help me.” She said, getting to her feet in order to return upstairs.

“There will be no need Miss Granger. As I must remind you once more, I am but a memory of a man long gone.” He said.

“Memory or not, your actions won’t go unnoticed any longer. Harry and many others- myself included- went through so much to get your named cleared. The real you will never know how the world praises what his sacrifices did for this world, but I at least want you to in his stead.” The young woman stated with her head held high with Gryffindor pride.

Seeing that trying to convince the stubborn lioness would be a lost cause, Severus shook his head and waved the girl off.

When Hermione closed the door behind herself, the lantern above his head went out and Severus groaned.

He should’ve known that he would somehow end up in this situation again. Nothing good has ever come from dealing with the Golden Trio. He knew what to expect from Potter and Weasley, but it would seem as though now it was Miss Granger’s time to shine in the trouble department.
Moving through the portraits to relay what he had learned to the headmistress, Snape was glad that he had at least one good thing going for him this time around.

Granger’s problems won’t get him killed since fortunately for him, he was already dead…
Chapter 16 – Taking Chances

Two weeks later, Hermione was a roller coaster of emotions.

Every day spent in the mansion brought new changes.

The biggest one was that Severus was able to contact Professor McGonagall and the ministry. The man managed to relay everything she had told him and kept them updated on what Bellatrix was up to. There was still an extensive hunt for their whereabouts, but so far, they had come up with nothing. The house was more than likely under the fidelus charm. Merlin knew who the secret keeper was, or if they were even still alive.

Or worse yet, if it was Bellatrix herself.

They worked with what they had.

When they weren’t discussing her captivity, Professor Snape conveyed all her friend’s messages and concerns too. Hearing Ginny’s heartfelt concerns for her safety; Luna and Neville’s kind encouragements; Ron and Harry’s promises of a swift rescue- it was exactly what she needed to keep hope alive. One of her biggest fears was that after being gone so long, they would think she was dead and would give up searching for her. To hear that they hadn’t gave her even more motivation to keep trying.
Everything seemed to be moving right along on the outside world, but on the inside, nothing much had changed.

Bellatrix was just as nasty as always, if not worse. Having free roam of the house was good and all, but more times than not, Bellatrix took joy in now being able to physically chase Hermione through the mansion rather than keeping her chained up. Hermione couldn’t see how the woman could still find enjoyment in her torment anymore. If she was being honest, she wasn’t much to chase with how constantly drained she was.

She said drained because she wasn’t being idle in her free time. When she wasn’t learning wandless magic from her late professor, whenever Bellatrix left the house, Hermione had taken to singing to heal some of her injuries. It got rid of the wounds themselves, but her own tiredness was not something she could fix. Her magic could do a lot for her, but between the lack of sleep and nutrition, combined with Bellatrix’s relentless bombardment of attacks, she didn’t have enough energy to do much else.

On a more positive note, Hermione’s lessons with Professor Snape were yielding results. The book she had found in the library had proved incredibly useful in that she now had a grasp on how to use her magic without a wand.

The focusing and meditation was the easy part.

The execution part however, was proving to be more difficult.

The first spell she had tried was *wingardium leviosa*; the very first spell she had mastered back when she was a first year. It should’ve been simple enough to do. The levitation charm was a first-year spell after all.

Right?

Wrong.

Hermione was practicing in the basement room under the careful eye of her professor. Though she knew she looked a bit silly, the young siren had chosen the dead plant in the corner of the room to practice on. Placing it in the center of her makeshift training area, she stood there in front of it with an arm outstretched and an intense look of concentration on her face.

Nothing was happening.

She tried concentrating harder, thinking that maybe her focus was the problem here.

The same results.

Hermione groaned and was preparing to return to the book when she heard the professor clear his throat.

“Miss Granger, might I ask what it is that you’re doing?” He asked.

“The levitating charm professor. I’m trying, but it doesn’t seem to be working. I think I’m doing something wrong here.” She told him, staring down at the wilted plant with irritation.

Snape sighed from his portrait. “I can tell just from the look on your face what you’re thinking and I can assure you that your concentration is not the problem here.”

“It isn’t?” Hermione murmured to herself as she pondered what else could she be doing wrong.
“You’re forgetting an important aspect of using wandless magic. It’s about more than just concentration. It still needs a focus and a direction.” He gestured at her hands. “You aren’t directing your magic anywhere at the moment. It’s gathering at your hand, but it has no objective. Nowhere to go from there. Try it again, but this time, use your hand just as you would use your wand.”

“Oh…” She gasped quietly. It was such a simple mistake and yet Hermione found herself blushing in embarrassment regardless. A blush that burned brighter as she saw the slight smirk on the potions professor’s face.

With just as much concentration as before, Hermione did as she was instructed. Quiet as a whisper, she said Wingardium Leviosa and moved her hand in a swish and flick motion.

It was shaky at first, but the plant began lifting up off the floor. The young woman squealed at her success and moved her hand in different directions, all the while making the plant follow her every move.

“I did it professor!” She gasped.

Professor Snape nodded and gave her a look of approval. “Indeed, you have. Well done Miss Granger. Though you might want to be careful.” He warned.

“Of what?” She asked with worry. That was when the plant she had been levitating so brilliantly came crashing to the ground in a pile of dead leaves and broken branches. It happened so quickly that Hermione squeaked from the sudden drop.

Snape chuffed so low that she almost didn’t hear it. “Be careful of that. There’s another component to wandless magic that I believe will prove to cause you the most problems in the future.”

“And that would be?” She asked, still a little put out at messing up her progress.

“Emotions. The smallest distraction, say becoming startled, will break your concentration and cancel the spellwork.” He stated with a smirk.

Hermione groaned, seconds away from bashing her head into the wall. That was the last thing she wanted to hear the professor say. Between her own siren abilities, the stress and pain she’s constantly under, and just her hormones in general; Hermione was constantly a mess of emotions at all times.

“So, what you’re trying to tell me is that this is basically impossible for me to master.” She moaned in dismay.

“Not necessarily. You simply must learn when to pick and choose your battles. When placed under certain circumstances, you’ll come to find that it will come to you naturally to remain calm.” He assured her.

“And how did you learn sir?”

“I was a spy working beneath the careful eye of the dark lord.” He said deadpan.

“Right.” She said. Hermione knew what kind of monster Voldemort was and so she could easily see how being unable to control oneself in his presence would be detrimental to one’s health. It was no secret that the potions master was skilled in the art of mind magic. Yet even so, the knowledge of knowing why made her admiration for Professor Snape grow even stronger.

“With that being said, you are doing well for someone at your age. So long as we keep working at it, you’ll be fine. Now try again.” He said, leaning back in his chair to oversee her progress.
By the time Bellatrix got back that night, she was able to do the spell with little difficulty. There wasn’t much she could do with it, but it would have to do for now.

Which was good considering she would be using it much sooner than she would’ve liked.

The next day found Hermione locked into a glaring contest with Bellatrix’s familiar.

Her small stockpile of food was getting too low for her comfort and so she had come down to the kitchen in order to replenish it. What she wasn’t expecting was to see the spindly legged bird sitting on top of the refrigerator, staring down at her with a nasty glare. Much like it’s master, the creature usually left when Bellatrix did. On this particular day however, it did not leave with her. Hermione knew she could take it now, but it would be a fight that would no doubt anger her captor when she’d eventually return.

Then her stomach growled angrily and the decision was made for her.

Hesitantly, the young siren reached out and grabbed the handle of the fridge. The bird merely stared at her. She pulled it open and grabbed a chunk of ham sitting there on the bottom shelf.

Still, the bird remained passive.

Hermione closed the door and began backing up. She didn’t like this. It was far too calm to just sit there and watch her essentially steal from its master and walk away. Something didn’t feel right.

And sure enough, her feeling was correct.

A throaty croak left the bird’s beak as it stared down from its perch in amusement.

“What are you laughing at you ruddy beast?” She hissed.

“Your sorry excuse at thievery more than likely, muddy.” An equally amused voice came from behind her.

Hermione spun so fast that the piece of meat was sent flying out of her hand due to Bellatrix’s silent entrance. The woman was standing in the doorway with a knowing grin; twirling her wand idly through her curls.

“Well, well. Isn’t this quite the surprise. I was wondering what those ruddy house elves were going on about with missing food. Seems we got ourselves a rat problem.” She hissed, pushing off the doorway to approach Hermione. “I didn’t think you had it in you to try and steal from me. Again. Or have you forgotten what happened the last time you took something that belonged to me.”

Unconsciously, her hand shifted to run over the carved words running up the length of her arm. She would never forget what happened at Malfoy manor.

Nor was she looking for a repeat of the incident.

Hermione began trekking backwards as the other witch entered the kitchen. The woman’s prowling was intimidating to say the least, but she wasn’t about to roll over and show her belly. Her training with wandless magic was coming along nicely. If the witch decided to come at Hermione as she usually did, now would be a good time as any to put her newly acquired skills to the test. Minimal as they were.

“Nothing to say? Then perhaps I should just give you your punishment right now and be done with it.” A gnarled wand was pointing limply in Hermione’s direction. “Now, just hold still.”
‘Not on your life.’ Hermione thought as she threw herself out of the way of the oncoming spell. She landed to crouch behind the island countertop centered in the middle of the kitchen. The young witch took a risk and popped her head out of cover to look at what the other woman was doing.

She almost laughed at the affronted look on Bellatrix’s face. She actually thought that Hermione was going to stand there! She was more delusional than she first imagined if she believed Hermione was going to become an obedient little punching bag.

At heart, she would always be a Gryffindor. A proud lioness who couldn’t be culled by the actions of a madwoman.

Maybe she played it safe for a while, but that was just the waiting period. The time spent quietly searching for an opening. A chance to strike out and gain some upper hand.

It would seem that time was now.

She planned to go all out on the woman if need be. With the other witch being more confident in her siren abilities, Bellatrix could overpower Hermione easily. She knew that and had no doubt that Bellatrix knew it as well.

What she wouldn’t be expecting is for Hermione to blindside her with a spell of her own. In the time that she had the woman incapacitated, she could make a break for one of the entrances and try her luck at getting away.

It was going to be the riskiest thing she had done since being here. If she got away, then she could disapperate somewhere safe.

But if she couldn’t get past the curse keeping her in the house…

She didn’t want to imagine what the other woman was going to do to her.

Hermione returned her attention to a now slightly fuming Bellatrix.

“Looks like we’re feeling a bit spirited today. Careful now. I might take that as a threat.” The woman sneered.

Hermione scowled from her place behind the counter. “You and I both know that you’ll take it that way regardless.”

She yelped as a bright yellow spell went flying over her head.

“Don’t get smart with me girl!” The woman came further into the kitchen. “It’s clear now I’ve been far too lenient with you. Let’s rectify that.”

The woman’s wand was at the ready and it all kicked off from there.

Bellatrix began bombarding the countertop with spell after spell, uncaring that she was destroying her own kitchen in the process. The creature that had been quietly watching everything from the top of the fridge swooped down and fled the room before it could be hit by its master’s fury. Hermione stayed in cover up until the point that chunks of the counter began falling off onto the floor around her. She was losing cover and knew she needed to move. Fast.

There were two doors to exit out of; one to the right and one straight ahead. Bellatrix was blocking the one in front of her and so she needed to go right and make a break for it. She waited for an opening.
‘There!’ She thought to herself. The rapid clicking of heels came closer as Bellatrix made her way towards the left of the counter. Before she even saw the tip of the woman’s boot reach the corner, Hermione dove for the door. A vase shattered to dust as she slid and narrowly dodged yet another spell. The young woman jumped to her feet and from that point on, bolted through the halls like the devil was hot on her heels.

“She’s NOT coming out!” The older witch screamed, practically frothing at the mouth as she gave chase.

Hermione didn’t falter. Her legs pumped as hard as they could as she ran through the long corridors, all the while bobbing left and right to make it harder for the other woman to hit her. Spells of varying colors zoomed past her face as Bellatrix pounded after her.

Honestly, she didn’t know where she was going. The windows would send her flying and majority of the doors were locked or would do the same. She was essentially running the woman around in circles at this point. Her best bet was to try and tire the other woman out and find someplace to hide. Maybe somewhere in the library or even the basement.

A dark orange spell came whizzing from her left and a smoldering hole was burned into the wall next to her. Terrified, she changed directions and took a sharp right turn.

Straight into the last place she wanted to be.

The foyer.

The front door stood innocently before her at the opposite end of the room. She stopped immediately. If she got too close, the curse would prevent her from escaping and she would be rendered immobile. Hermione tried to go back the way she came.

Bellatrix rounded the corner and came to grinding halt. Her hair was wind whipped and draping the front of her face like a funeral veil. The force of the woman’s gaze peering through her curls was enough to stop Hermione in her tracks.

“You filthy, little rat! Scurrying through my house like the dirty little pest you are!” She smiled. “But the little rat’s gone and trapped herself in a corner now.”

Hermione scowled. “Did you think I was just going to stand there? Are you mad? Honestly, how long do you think you can keep this up. You won’t kill me…” Hermione stood a bit taller. “…or at the very least, you can’t. I’m not staying here to be your obedient little pet. So, let me go,” She flexed her fingers and shifted into a more defensive stance. “Or else.”

A hush fell over the room. The quiet was instantly shattered when Bellatrix threw her head back in mirth.

“Really?! You’re going to get into another fistfight with me? That’s your big plan?” She laughed once more. “Fine, if that’s how you want to play. Let’s play.”

Bellatrix cast the first spell. It went soaring towards Hermione but she didn’t move out of the way this time.

‘Protego!’ She said quietly, moving her hands to block the oncoming spell. A blue shield appeared and the yellow beam dissipated, leaving Hermione standing there unharmed.

She didn’t know which one of them was more shocked.
The pounding of her heart sounded almost deafening as a surge of hope filled her body. Up until she actually cast the spell, she’d been afraid. Afraid that she would stand before the other woman and freeze. Or worse yet, lose concentration and mess up altogether.

But she hadn’t.

Something in her chest practically purred at her accomplishment.

A sound that she didn’t even know she was making until a bombardment of yellow and red spells came flying her way all at once.

“I see you’ve been busy.” Bellatrix muttered. “Don’t think that just because the little mutt learned a new trick that she can try and bite her master’s hand!”

“You’re not my master!” Hermione screamed. The young Gryffindor dropped her shield long enough to throw a stunner the other woman’s way. They may have been first year spells, but they would have to do for now.

Naturally, Bellatrix swatted them away like they were nothing. “You’ve seemed to have forgotten who’s the stronger witch here girl.”

Hermione huffed. “You think that matters?” She decided to walk out on the already thin ice. “You think that just because you’re stronger that you get to control me?”

“Precisely.” Bellatrix said. “Power is the deciding factor in this world. The strong prevail and the weak bow down to us.” The woman smiled.

Hermione could see the gleam in the other woman’s eyes. Could see something else lurking there, something just beyond the woman’s crazed ramblings. Hermione didn’t claim to know Bellatrix’s scattered mind, but something was off about the way she worded that. It was like she was regurgitating someone else’s words.

A lightbulb went off in her head when she realized where she had heard that sort of sentiment from.

And again, she decided to walk further onto the ice.

“Then it’s no wonder the dark lord was defeated so easily.” She said slowly, yet confidently.

The next spell that struck her shield nearly shattered it.

“Watch that whore mouth of yours when you speak about my lord, mudblood!” The woman screeched. “You know nothing of his power!”

“I know that it wasn’t stronger than Harry’s.”

The next spell actually broke through.

Hermione cried out fearfully as her blue shield shattered into a thousand lights. She didn’t even have time to put up another before Bellatrix was on her.

“Crucio!”

Hermione fell to the ground in pain. But this time, she didn’t dare muffle her voice. She screamed at the other woman, allowing her siren abilities to come forth without hesitance.

Except Bellatrix refused to yield. She didn’t let up on her curse, trying to resist and hold it as long as
she could.

Then she saw it. Just like the times before, something wavered behind the woman’s eyes. Hermione didn’t quite fully understand her abilities, but she did understand this.

At the end of the day, no matter how much she tried to deny it.

How much she tried to run from it.

They were mates.

She would forever curse this day, as it would be the first time she would actively come to accept and be grateful of that fact.

They were mates, bound by instincts that neither one of them knew how to fully fight against.

Mates, that if she remembered the book correctly, couldn’t hold complete control over one another.

The woman could hurt her. Could do a lot of harm actually.

But the one thing she couldn’t do was kill her.

Wishing for death but never dying would be as close as the woman could get; though Hermione didn’t really want to test that theory.

If the older witch had her way, she would have finished Hermione off weeks ago. Bellatrix claimed to have been keeping her around to torture. To make the proud lioness her obedient little pet.

Hermione wasn’t stupid. She could see it all over Bellatrix’s face.

This was as far as her creature side would allow her to go.

The young witch knew that now and suddenly she felt like Narcissus words before she left made a lot more sense.

Or at least she hoped she was right.

Because right now, she was beginning to have her doubts.

Bellatrix was beyond reason. So much in fact that she could see her putting every last effort she had into not relenting. Through half-closed eyes she saw blood running from the corner of Bellatrix’s chapped lips. It was mortifying to witness. This was a true testament of how far gone the woman truly was; that she was willing to risk hurting herself if it meant hurting Hermione as well.

Rolling on the ground in agony, Hermione felt the woman push more magic into the curse. The resulting pain caused her to cry out even louder, which in turn set the woman off completely.

“Shut up! Shut up, shut up, shut up with that infernal howling!” She cried from bleeding lips.

Hermione cried louder, her throat beginning to hurt as every nerve in her body was lit on fire.

That became the woman’s breaking point.

With a horrible screech of outrage, Bellatrix lifted the spell. The younger siren’s voice went from pain-filled wails to soft, wounded moans.
She laid there trying to catch her breath; every bone in her body shivering in agony. No matter how many times it seemed she was under Bellatrix’s wand, it never really got easier.

As Hermione tried to gained her composer, a sharp whistle of shattering glass filled the room followed by many more. She dared to open her eyes.

Bellatrix had that look in her eyes again. The one where Hermione knew the lights were on but the woman was far off elsewhere. Spell after spell went sailing around the foyer as Bellatrix unleashed her unending rage. Shards of glass and debris fell around her, but it was a welcomed change over the suffering she had to endure just seconds ago.

“Wretched filth. Filthy blood. Dirty, miserable harlot.” She could hear Bellatrix cursing as she slipped further and further away into her mind. The woman kept muttering death threats and slurs beneath her breath. Hermione was terrified to move. Any attempt to stand up and flee would return the witches’ attention to her. Instead she remained perfectly still. Her magic reserves had dropped drastically from earlier. She needed to stop and replenish it. With luck, she could get off a lucky shot and make a break for it.

Where she was planning to go with the exits like they were, she didn’t know.

But she would figure it out.

She had to.

At this point, there was barely anything left whole within the room. Broken marble pillars littered the ground, chunks of the white stone now floating around her head in plumes of dust. The plants were shredded, mangled, and strewn about the equally trampled floor. All of the windows were missing, their pieces now surrounding her prone body. The door leading to the outside world was left untouched. The only other thing left was the chandelier hanging above. She was thankful for that seeing as rolling out of the way in any direction would roll her right into a bed of glass and stone.

The madwoman didn’t appear to care about all the damages. It was her house anyways. Bellatrix turned her focus from the destroyed are, back to Hermione. The older witch was staring down at like she was the one responsible for the destruction. Hermione could see her hand twitching sporadically; no doubt she was thinking of casting another spell.

Except she didn’t.

This was what she was hoping for. What she had been waiting for. Bellatrix knew that there was a limit. She could hurt her. Torture her. Starve and beat and belittle her. But at the end of the day, she could never kill her. They would be doing this little song and dance until something changed.

Looking back to this moment, she should’ve kept that to herself instead of going against common sense and poking an angry dragon.

“What is it going to take Bellatrix? What will convince you to see that this is pointless.” She gasped between shuddering breaths. She managed to painfully raise her body up to her hands and knees. “Just let me go.”

“No.” Bellatrix said. There wasn’t a drop of emotion in her voice.

It was such a simple response in hindsight, but considering all that she had gone through up until this point, that didn’t matter.

Hermine lost it.
“You miserable, horrid woman!” She screeched. “Tell me! Tell me what you gain from this! I know you feel it Bellatrix. I can see it as clear as day. You’re only hurting yourself by hurting me. Is it worth it? Is it? Have you truly gone that insane that you would risk your own life to ruin mines?”

“I’d watch what you say next mudblood.” Bellatrix rasped.

“Or what? You’ll torture me? Curse me? We’ve done this song and dance already Bellatrix. I’m done letting you do whatever you want with me.” She sat up taller from her position on the floor. “Besides, the ramblings of a madwoman are no concern of mine. You who was supposed to be the greatest witch of her generation.”

“Shut your grimy mouth!” A wand was pointed in her face once more. “How dare you try and speak of things you know nothing about!”

“I know enough.” She said, not even flinching when the twisted wand was staring her directly in the face. “You’re no longer worthy of that title. You’re just a loose cannon with no other rational thought except to hurt people.”

Looking back, this was the point where she should’ve came to her senses.

But instead, she let the next words fly out without a hint of regret.

“You may treat me like an animal all you want, but the true mindless beast here is you, Bellatrix Lestrange.”

A feather hitting the ground would’ve sounded like a gunshot from how silent the room became.

The two witches gazed at one another in mutual loathing. Hermione knew she was pushing ever button the other siren had, but when it came to Bellatrix, she felt that her words were not nearly as harsh as they could’ve been.

And it wasn’t nearly as bad as some of the things she had heard the other woman say to her throughout her time in captivity.

She didn’t have a shred of remorse.

“Well, well,” Hermione heard the woman begin. “Look at what we have here. The know it all doing what she does best. Speaking to her betters like she just has all the answers!”

The last part of her sentence was barely recognizable.

Hermione felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end.

“Oh, you’re right about one thing. I can’t kill you.” The younger witch began backpedaling, not even caring of the glass digging into the palms of her hands as Bellatrix began advancing on her. “I feel it as clear as day. Buzzing beneath my skin. Tearing at the back of my mind. No matter how much I want to, it won’t let me kill you.” She gave Hermione a far too sweet smile. “But I don’t need to. There are plenty of other ways to make you suffer.” She cooed.

A woozy feeling let Hermione know she needed to stop or risk getting too close to the front door.

Bellatrix took advantage of that fact.

Before Hermione could react, the black clad witch was on her. Grabbed by her ankle and pulled, the younger siren slid across the floor through glass and debris and into the other woman’s clutches.
There wasn’t even time to catch her breath before a heavy weight came crashing down onto her chest. A gasp escaped her as Bellatrix splayed her entire self over her body, legs spread out on either side of her torso as she leaned into Hermione’s personal space. Immediately, she tried bucking the other woman off, but it proved to be a fruitless endeavor. To make matters worse, the woman’s long nailed hands were digging harshly into her shoulders, pining her fully to the ground; sharp objects digging painfully into her back.

“You must feel so powerful now. Thinking you can open that mucky little mouth of yours and suddenly it’s you who’s in control here.” Bellatrix made it so that they were practically nose to nose. The heat of the woman’s chest against her own feeling almost too much to bare as it pressed her further into the ground. “You’ve seemed to have forgotten one thing muddy. You’re not the only one with a siren’s abilities between us.”

Hermione whimpered frightfully as the woman turned her head and brought her lips to her ear; the position reminiscent of what occurred at Malfoy Manor.

A gentle hum reverberated against her chest.

‘No. No, no, no!’ Her attempts to buck the other woman off began anew with twice the ferocity. ‘Please not again.’ She begged to no one in particular.

The soft, melodic purr coming from Bellatrix’s mouth made her want to scream, but the sound failed to escape her diaphragm. Instead, to her horror, a long, drawn out croon drifted from between her clenched teeth.

She tried to stop it to no avail.

The creature within her wanted this. More than Hermione wanted to fight it.

Up until this point, all Bellatrix had done was hurt them. Called them names. Starved and crushed them, and because of it, they both ended up suffering. At least they both could agree on that fact.

However, what was happening now was where their thought processes deviated.

Her siren side took this as a good thing. Bellatrix was humming so sweetly to them after giving them so much grief. The creature within was so entranced with the beauty emanating from Bellatrix that it failed to recognize this for what it was.

A dirty trick. Bellatrix was using her weakness to her advantage. She did it when they met face to face in the forest. The sounds emanating from that vulgar mouth were meant to show Hermione that she couldn’t fight Bellatrix on every front.

That some things were simply going to be out of her hand.

Hermione struggled with a fierceness that she didn’t think she was still capable of in her weakened state.

But Bellatrix wasn’t having it.

All too soon, the beautiful symphony of wordless humming turned to whispered singing.

“Stop it! Shut up!” Hermione choked, her breath borderline on hyperventilating. “Bellatrix get off of me!” Her voice cracked.
It was as if she was talking to thin air.

*If I let you leave this house*

*What place will you call home*

*If I let you through that door*

*How far can your heart go?*

*Even with your cage unlocked*

*Your place will always be*

*Back inside this open cell*

*With shackles chained to me*

*If I let you leave this house*

*What place will you call home*

*If I let you through that door*

*How far can your heart go?*

*I did not ask you for a mate*

*Yet to me, you are bound*

*And with me you will always be*

*In this house left unfound*

Hermione felt her heart drop. “What are you talking about?”

*If I let you leave this house*

*What place will you call home*

*If I let you through that door*

*How far can your heart go?*

*You can try and run from me*

*My voice will follow too*

*And when you try to stray too far*
It'll bring me right to you

If I let you leave this house
What place will you call home
If I let you through that door
How far can your heart go?
I could free you all I wish
And you would soon return
And once you come back to this place
My lesson will be learned

Her voice trailed off, but Hermione could still hear the song ringing loudly in her eardrums. “Do you get it now, girl?” Bellatrix whispered with delight. “You will never get away from me. The moment you called out to me in that forest, you doomed us both…and didn’t even realize it.” The woman leaned up off of her chest. “But it seems the little rat still doesn’t understand the situation she’s in. Fine then, have it your way. I’ll make your silly wish come true. I’ll let you go.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “What?” She gasped.

A wicked gleam washed over the older witch’s face. “I said…I’ll let you go. That’s what you wanted right? I’ll remove the curse on the door and let you walk…right…out of here.”

Hermione scoffed, but hated how her voice trembled with a tiny ray of hope. “How stupid do you think I am? You’ve tricked me so many times before. Why in Merlin’s name do you think I should trust you?”

Bellatrix chuckled darkly. “It’s more fun if you don’t. Now I get to see what the little know-it-all will do once she gets what she wants. So, let’s play a new game, muddy.”

It was like someone dumped her into an alternate dimension.

Bellatrix, who had been foaming at the mouth not even ten seconds ago, was now absolutely giddy.

It was downright unnerving.

She didn’t dwell on that though since the sudden shift in mood mad Bellatrix remove herself from her person.

Relief flooded her system. She hated their previous proximity. The way their chests were pressed flush against one another; how the older siren’s voice glided over every inch of her ear like a lover’s caress. It gave her goosebumps in all the wrong ways. Whether the other woman noticed how uncomfortable her closeness made her, she didn’t know, nor did it appear to matter. Bellatrix’s attention was elsewhere now.

The woman overstepped her, moving behind her head to stand before the door of the foyer. Wand in
hand, Hermione watched as she began waving and murmuring something under her breath. Confusion bled into realization when she saw a sickly purple color flare up around the entire doorway before fading away into nothingness. Bellatrix then walked right up to the door and opened it, allowing a strong breeze and more sunlight to come flooding into the room. Hermione craned her head to look at the wide-open door and the cheshire grin of the woman standing next to it.

“My little curse has been lifted. I wonder what she’ll do. Will she trust the words of a death eater? Or will her courage let her down? I don’t care either way. But you better decided quickly. Its only temporary. In a few minutes, the curse will activate again.” She grinned and leaned against the open doorframe. “Clock’s ticking.”

She hated this.

In her heart, she knew exactly what she wanted to do. Her mind however was telling her that maybe she should be a bit more skeptical. Neither option seemed to read good news.

On the one hand, say the witch was telling the truth. With the spell down, Hermione could make a break for it. Perhaps look around and find something that could, at the very least tell her where she was. There was no doubt in her mind that the woman had something waiting for her out there, but was the chance too good to pass up?

There was always option two.

She could stay where she was. Where she knew what was going on around her. Her magic was steadily returning. She could wait there and recuperate and then try and take Bellatrix by surprise with her wandless magic again. ‘Though who knows if taking her out would disable the curse.’ She pondered to herself.

“Time’s almost up.” Came the woman’s sing song voice.

She made up her mind.

Painfully and slowly, Hermione rolled to get herself up off the ground. The glass cutting her back and palms could be ignored for now, though not too long if she wanted to avoid getting an infection. Her legs wobbled as the effects of the cruciatus curse still swam through her entire body, but that too would have to wait.

She hesitated, still afraid that the woman was lying to her.

A purplish tint began ascended up the foot of the door at a speed that was enough to push her to action.

‘It’s now or never.’

Hermione reluctantly stepped forward…

And wasn’t immediately hit with the overwhelming need to stay.

She took another bigger step just to make sure.

Nothing.

That was all she needed.

The wounded witch mustered all the energy she had left in her body and sprinted full force at the
door. Dread washed over her as she feared that the woman was going to stop her before she could make the first step.

That didn’t happen either to her surprise. Hermione whipped past Bellatrix’s unbothered stance and through the threshold just as a bright purple light flared to life behind her.

Adrenaline high and the taste of freedom fueling her legs, Hermione didn’t stop once while she made her way down the pathway. She knew that the moment she did, all the strength that was keeping her going would run out and her gamble would’ve been for nothing.

The heavy gate in front of her seemed like it would be the barrier that would finally stop her grand escape, however, as she got closer, the rusted metal creaked open and allowed her to pass without problem. Stone to gravel, gravel to dirt; Hermione ran between trees and branches as the mansion began to fade from view.

She was outside.

Even if it was a trap. Even if something ahead of her was going to send all of this crashing back down on her, she didn’t care.

For just a little while, she was free. The sun warmed her from head to toe. The wind blew her hair around in every direction, getting the long strands caught on the branches hanging too low to the ground. She was tired. She was hungry. She was in pain beyond belief. Yet all that paled in comparison to the joy she felt fleeing from her worse nightmares.

Beneath the heat of the afternoon sun, on a day she couldn’t name, Hermione Granger’s laughter filled the air outside the Lestrange estate. It could be heard echoing off into the woods for all the inhabitants to hear, filling the sky with the sound of bells and unbridled delight.

A sound that was joined soon after by another laugh, though this one full of something foreboding. An equally beautiful sound that spoke of events that would no doubt prove harrowing for the fleeing lioness.
Chapter 17 – Into the Woods

Fear drove Hermione deep into the forest. It seemed like she’d been moving for an eternity, yet she continued until her body’s exhaustion was too great to ignore.

She reached her limits long after the mansion could no longer be seen over the tops of the trees. All around her was thick woodlands; vegetation that towered high above her head, looming with an ominous presence that sent a shiver up her spine. Bushes gnarled and filled with berries were peppering low along the moist ground. The sun of the afternoon could be seen peeking brightly through the leaves and warm air rolled across her skin, leaving a refreshing and invigorating feeling upon her bruised and battered body. Looking down at her clothes, she was saddened to see that they were ripped and dirty, looking nothing like the nice, casual outfit she had picked out for the party back at the castle. Her hair had long since fallen from her ponytail and was strewn about her head in thick and tangled waves.

It was the only thing that didn’t surprise her about her appearance.

Hermione slowed down to catch her breath. A hand reached up to touch the bird’s nest atop her head. She wanted nothing more at that moment than to comb the mess out and take a hot shower. Everything ached. From the burning on her feet to the stinging in her back, her whole being was filled with pain. She was far enough away for now so a break didn’t seem like such a bad idea. The forest didn’t look as if danger was lurking about every corner and she had no plans to stay there longer than she needed to.

The moment she gained her bearings, she would move on.

An overturned tree proved to be the perfect resting spot and with a heavy sigh, she flopped down onto the hard piece of wood. Her chest heaved up and down and Hermione sat there and began reflecting on everything that had happened so far.

Bellatrix let her go.

That shouldn’t’ve been something that set her on edge, but it did. The woman made it quite clear that the last thing she would ever do was allow Hermione to leave. Yet here she was. Unshackled and free.

So why did she feel like her chained hadn’t been removed, but rather extended?

Something was fishy. Bellatrix knew as much as she did that the bond between them wouldn’t allow them to kill one another. That was powerful magic. There were plenty of other magical creatures with mates but the ability to directly manipulate one’s mate was definitely rare. Some creatures felt uncomfortable or reluctant to harm their other half. It wouldn’t harm them to do so per say, but the
guilt alone usually made sure that it didn’t happen often. Some creatures like Veela had the uncontrollable urge to protect their mate; often times attacking friends and family if they felt that their significant other was in danger.

Then there were beings like the elves who, in her opinion, had it worse off than many other species.

The rare New Zealand natives were said to suffer from what was known as ‘the fading’ when they lost their mate. For them, the loss of a mate was akin to death and often times the remaining partner would ‘fade’ away soon after their passing; literally dying of a broken heart. It was a fate too tragic to think about and she was grateful that Cor Echo Sirens were not destined to share the same fate.

Or at least to her knowledge they didn’t.

There was still so much that she didn’t know about her species. That missing page in the book she found made her believe that there was a lot she was missing in all of this. What was worse, the more she thought about it, the more she realized that she may have had the answer to where the page might’ve gone. It wouldn’t be a far-reaching assumption to think that Bellatrix had stolen the page for herself back when she was a student. After all, the number of Cor Echo Sirens in the world were absolutely abysmal. If Bellatrix knew what she was back then, Hermione didn’t doubt she would go looking for all the information she could about it. Much like Hermione had. Bellatrix must’ve found the book and ripped the page once she found something of importance.

But what did she find? That question burned though her head on a nearly daily basis. Why take a single page and leave the rest? Hermione knew asking the woman would be pointless and going back to that hell hole was the last thing she wanted to do either.

She would have to save the missing page mystery for when she returned to the castle.

“If I can even get back there.” She murmured beneath her breath, taking in her surroundings with a worried eye. “I don’t even know where I am.”

Lifting off the stump, she wobbled towards the direction of the sun. She wished she had a compass or wand to guide her way, but without them, going away from where she came from would be a good start as any. Should luck be on her side, she could find shelter somewhere further ahead. A glimpse at the sky gave her enough confidence that it wouldn’t be raining any time soon, but she wasn’t looking to push her good fortune. The last storm that rolled through was horrible and being caught out in one would practically be signing her own death sentence.

Thinking of that night made her remember something upsetting.

Crookshanks.

In her desperation to leave that place, she had left her dearest companion there by his self. He wouldn’t have enough to eat if he couldn’t leave the room. And if he did get out? What if Bellatrix’s familiar found him.

What if Bellatrix did?

She had to go back for him. She had to.

Because to her, Crookshanks was more than just a cat.

He was one of the few things in her life that was still familiar. Safe. He’d been with her since the very start of her life as a witch. She’ll never forget the way his smashy face stared up at her in disinterest when her parents placed him in her arms. He’d been overlooked so many times by other
adopters. His grumpy disposition and pushed in features wasn’t something that many pet owners thought of as appealing. Hermione didn’t see it that way. There were so many other layers to her feline companion that only she really knew about and appreciated. Crooks was as much a Gryffindor as any of her fellow peers.

Chasing down Wormtail when he was posing at Scabbers.

Protecting her from that infernal bird back at the castle.

Crookshanks was always by her side, understanding her without ever needing to say a word. She couldn’t leave him. She didn’t know how, but she would return for him and the two of them would finally be able to go home. Together.

Her resolve was strong as she stomped a path through bushes and tall grass. Hermione was glad that there was life teeming around her. The chirping of birds and the skittering of little critters gave her a bit of reassurance that the place wasn’t packed with deadly predators. A silent forest was never a safe place to be in her experience.

Tiny scuttles and the crack of branches was soon drowned out by another sound. The whooshing of water hitting up against rocks. Her eyes widened. She jogged further down the path until she reached the edge of the tree line and had her confirmation.

A beach.

Expanding far as her eyes could see was a white sandy beach. Waves of crystalline blue crashed upon the shore as the sun shined down upon it with its bright, burning rays. Sand shifted underfoot, making it difficult to keep her balance. There was nothing out in the water aside from gentle waves and the occasional bird flying overhead. No islands or landmarks or anything of note was in sight. Along the coast were large boulders and plant life abundant, but there too was nothing of interest.

There was no indication as to where she was. It was clear now that she was on an island. She cursed beneath her breath. There were islands all over the world. She literally could be anywhere known to man.

This wasn’t even including the ones hidden by magical means.

Hermione was made aware of places like that curtesy of Malfoy of all people. In their younger years, the blonde often bragged about his father buying exotic islands hidden away from the muggle world. Elaborate pureblood resorts that could only be visited by the Malfoy family and others who ran in their societal circle. Chances of the Blacks having islands like that wasn’t even hard to imagine.

There was one way she could test that theory.

Gathering her magic, Hermione tried to disapperate.

Instead of being taken back to the outskirts of Hogwarts- the first place she knew she would be safe- her magic hit what was equivalent to a brick wall. It slammed into the wards and ended up knocking her flat on her back.

“This just gets better and better.” She hissed through clenched teeth.

Anti-apparition wards. After running into them at the ministry, she had developed a burning hatred for them. She knew the wards had been on the house early on, but she didn’t know if that extended to the outside as well. Apparently, they did. Frustration began to build within her and she smacked the hot sand beneath her legs in rage. Bellatrix had thought of everything it seemed. The woman
covered all her bases in ensuring Hermione couldn’t escape her. Without a broom or wand there would be no way for her to leave the island, which was probably why she let Hermione leave in the first place. This had all been another game from the very beginning. The young lioness was ready to rip her hair out. One step forward and two steps back. It was nerve-wrecking.

But Ron and Harry weren’t the only stubborn ones in their little trio.

Hermione could be just as persistent too. But more than that, she had patience, something her two hot headed boys seemed to lack. Escaping wouldn’t be happening now, but it would happen. Even if she had to build a raft from scratch and row into the sea, Hermione was leaving this place.

Plan B was going to have to do for now.

That plan being to make sure she didn’t die out here when night fell. The forest was bustling with life which was perfect for what she needed to do. Hunting was out of the question. With her current weakened state, chasing down food would only prove to tire her out and more than likely yield no reward. She needed to find food that was a bit more stationary.

Like plants.

Herbology was not the most sought-after discipline by most witches and wizards unless it came to potions and poisons. Spells and curses were usually the go to solutions when things got rough.

Hermione couldn’t quite understand that logic.

Disarming a wizard was one of the first things students learned in school. Without a wand, they were practically muggles. Except without any muggle survival skills. Like herbology. Why memorize which plants can heal you and which can kill you when there were spells that could do it in an instant?

Well for times like now, when the only things you had were the clothes on your back and your wits.

Herbology may have been one of her least favorite subjects, but that didn’t mean she neglected her studies. The skills to make simple salves and healing agents were ones that proved useful time and time again when her, Ron, and Harry went on the run the first time. Her boys were two of the most injured prone people that she knew. There was only one other worse than them and ironically, he was the one that taught her about all things plantlike.

Say what you would about him, but if Neville had been as proficient in potions as he was in herbology, Hermione had no doubt that the boy would’ve made even Professor Snape proud. Whether it was his gentle hands or his steadfast care for all things green, Neville was a plant prodigy. It still boggled her mind how he was able to do it so effortlessly and yet be so inept in all other subjects.

‘Plants help calm my nerves.’ He explained to her once while teaching her about the properties of lavender. But Hermione could tell that it was more than just that. There was something else hidden behind his reasoning, and one day she finally asked what that was, to which he replied: ‘My parents. I doubt they’ll ever be themselves again, but if there’s some way I can use plants to make things easier on them, I want to find it. They deserve that much at least.’

She recalled how she gave the young man the biggest hug after his admission, promising to also do her best in learning herbology so as to support him in his endeavors. She had never seen him smile so brightly.

The moment they shared that day led to Hermione making good with her promise, eventually using
her plant knowledge to make sure Ron and Harry didn’t keel over when they ran out of dittany. She already had everything else she needed; finding the actual plants would be the hard part. And as the sun began to dip lower over the horizon, she knew looking for them in the dark would be near impossible.

Still tired and weary, Hermione trekked back into the woods, searching with keen eyes for anything of use. With luck, she would find what she needed by nightfall.

She just hoped that nothing else went wrong until then.

Her wish was granted.

When the light of the sun was just a sliver over the skyline, Hermione squinted at it from the safety of a rocky outcrop near the tree line. Still rather open, but there was just enough foliage to make sure that she was safe from any wind or rain should the weather take a turn for the worse. The temperature had dropped since earlier; the cool wind coming from over the water only making it even colder. The grey sweater that she had been wearing until now was draped and stretched around her like a pathetic excuse for a blanket, only serving to block a little bit of the chill. All over her body were patches of green and brown from where she applied her make shift remedies. She wasn’t able to reach her back. No amount of bending or stretching was enough to get that far.

It would be fine for now.

At her side was a pile of edible plants, one’s like clover and burdock. The taste was enough to make her gag, but it was survival at this point and she was practically starving from all the running. She wished she found some nuts or some berries but all the ones she came across were poisonous for humans.

Just grin and bear it, she told herself.

Darkness crept up on her. The whimsical beauty of the forest turned sinister as the sun finally gave way for the moon. The waves seemed to have calmed now. The rustling of leaves high above her was as soft as a whisper. Paranoia grew stronger within the depths of her mind, every creak and moan of the world around her seemed to scream danger. She wanted to build a fire. Even just a small one to warm her freezing skin. She didn’t. Fear of Bellatrix seeing the smoke stayed her hand. Hermione curled further into herself, pressing against the back of the outcropping as much as her body would allow. Sleep was something that she dreaded, but the fight to stay awake was a lost cause.

A small nap couldn’t hurt.

Just rest her eyes for a little bit.

She’d always been a light sleeper. Mixed with the suspicion of the night’s inhabitants, chances were, even the slightest disturbance would wake her.

In the end, she lost the battle with the waking world. Dozing soon became a deep slumber, but mercy was on her side this night in that nothing came for her as she slept. Not even the nightmares that usually plagued her every waking moment were powerful enough to disturb her.

It would be the best sleep she’d gotten since getting captured.

Two days later, the sky was filled with fluffy, grey clouds and a bitter wind.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary on that particular day, but as it would turn out, that was just a
prelude to what was to come.

Hermione spent her time resting and surviving. She gathered more plants, both for eating and healing. Took small naps throughout the day.

And on the second day out, even made a rather bold move on her part.

Whilst traveling along the beach, Hermione ran across a small alcove where the water had gathered in a small pool between some large boulders. It was deep enough for her to bathe in while at the same time providing her with enough cover from prying eyes. By this point, she figured that her and Bellatrix were the only other humans on the island, however, it was better to be safe than sorry.

The water was relatively clean. She hissed and cursed when the salty liquid ended up washing into the wounds littering her back. Her clothes also got a much-needed wash. She lacked the materials needed to repair anything. The holes, rips, and tears would have to wait. At least she felt somewhat clean now.

That was how she spent the morning of the second day.

On the third day was when Hermione noticed something was…off.

The young woman first caught on whilst scouring the coastline for useful items. Up until that point, the water that crept up on the shore stayed relatively far from the tree line. Today, her feet were getting soaked as the waves splashed over them. That wouldn’t have been strange had she not been half way up the shore. Looking out over the water, Hermione could also see the tides rolling higher and faster than they ever had in her time out there. In the distance, dark clouds were forming and circling in at a worrying speed.

A storm.

A strong one too if the water’s speed was any indication.

If it touched down on land, the little haven beneath the rocks and foliage would be flooded in no time.

It was time to move to higher ground. She should head back to base, gather her supplies, and make her way closer to the center of the island. It would bring her closer to the mansion much to her dismay, but it would be better than getting washed away.

That was supposed to be the plan.

Everything was thrown out the window when she turned around and came face to face with a familiar bird on spindly legs.

Hermione jumped back in fright.

She hadn’t even heard it land.

The creature was staring her down with its sickly yellow eyes, head tilted to the side like a cat watching a little mouse seconds away from being devoured. It was balancing on only one leg; the other clutching a small piece of paper between its talons.

It extended its leg towards her, a clear sign for her to take the piece of paper.

“T’m not grabbing that.” She told it blankly, remembering what happened the last time the bird
approached her with a note. Anything coming from it, came from Bellatrix. She didn’t want to see the woman ever again if she could help it. The moment she got Crookshanks out and found a way off the island, she was going to make sure that her and Bellatrix never crossed paths again.

Her resolve apparently didn’t matter to the creature. It simply dropped the piece of paper where it stood and turned to leave. Large black wings opened wide and then with a silent leap, the dark beast took off into the direction she was headed, no doubt returning to its master’s side.

She watched it leave with trepidation. Her hands twitched as they thought about reading the note. It could’ve been cursed.

Maybe it was a portkey.

A trick to lead her back to her cell.

Her body shuddered as her mind ran through scenario after scenario of what would happen if she touched it. Thinking about being sent back to that prison was deterrent enough to make her want to pass it by and stick with her plan. Hermione didn’t want to go back to how things were. Eating and drinking out of a dog bowl while being chained to a wall like an animal. She’d never felt so degraded. Luckily, only Crookshanks was around to see her shame.

The possibilities of what the little piece of paper could do was enough to drive her mad. Which was more than likely what Bellatrix wanted to happen. Hermione hated to admit it, but the woman knew how to mess with her. She done it so many times before. Made her always feel on edge, teetering between wondering if every move she made would yield consequences. Just when she felt safe, the woman would pull the rug out from under her. Or she wouldn’t. And Hermione would just let her own paranoia do the work for her.

She wondered if this was another one of those times. It wouldn’t surprise her if Bellatrix was somewhere watching her right now; cackling in that high-pitched voice of hers. Sliding her eyes down Hermione’s frame as she stood out in the middle of nowhere staring at a tiny piece of paper on the beach like it was going to explode.

Anger filled her chest.

The thought of Bellatrix winning even if she wasn’t there to see it got her blood boiling.

Before she could stop to think about it anymore, her body was already moving to snatch the soggy piece of parchment up from the ground. She wasn’t immediately sent flying and she cursed the woman and her silly mind games. She unfolded it and read the words written in Bellatrix’s unique script.

*Little rat might want to return to its hole before it drowns. The tides get rather high around this time of the month.*

As if to solidify what she just read, cold water splashed over her feet and soaked the insides of her shoes.

She frowned. Tides usually grew higher as the day went on, but not to the point that they were now. Strange, yes, but again, that didn’t seem too worrying.

That was until she took a closer look over the water.

Long gone were the gentle waves of the early morning. They had now grown large and angry; some
clearly big enough to bowl her over. The storm hadn’t even reached its peak. Droplets of rain were coming down from above her and soon the light grey clouds grew dark. The once peaceful day was descending into an oncoming disaster. She gave it maybe ten minutes before things became really bad.

After that, if she hadn’t found somewhere safe, Bellatrix’s warning would become a reality.

She would use every minute she had to get as far away as she could.

She took off into a sprint. Hermione found that she had been doing that a lot lately. Resting and healing did wonders for her body, making the exercise a bit easier to manage. Shame that she was already exerting her strength so soon after recuperating.

The little outcropping was reached in what felt like no time at all. She gathered the plants she could and stuffed them into the pockets of her jeans. Her other items included a shiny clam shell she wanted to give to Crookshanks and a sharpened stick that she whittled down into a weapon. It wasn’t much, but in a pinch, it could come in handy. The long grey sweater that served as her blanket up until this point was pulled over her head; a futile effort to block the rain that was starting to come down even heavier than before.

Naturally it didn’t help much, and in the end, she just ended up looking ridiculous.

After gathering her things, Hermione began running through other plans in case she couldn’t get far enough away in time. Like sleeping in a tree. The problem there was that she wasn’t the best climber and all the trunks around her were thick with branches nowhere even close to the ground.

A startled gasp broke from her mouth as lightning set the sky ablaze with light. The boom of thunder that followed felt like a cannon went off in her chest.

When it settled, that’s when she heard it; a sound that sent her hauling arse straight for the mansion.

The sound of rushing water.

Coming at her, some few hundred yards back was the largest tidal wave she had ever seen. Stretching wider than her eyes could follow, the giant wall of water was heading in her direction at an alarming rate; kicking up debris and foliage along its destructive path.

Bellatrix couldn’t kill her. She was safe in that knowledge at least.

However, getting hit by that amount of water, no matter how resilient she was, would one hundred percent be her end.

Should she survive the initial impact, the force alone would send her tumbling through the woods; smacking into every rock and tree in the vicinity.

A messy end she had no interest in experiencing.

Her renewed strength carried her farther and faster than the day she ran away. The giant black gates leading to the mansion were upon her soon enough.

Unfortunately, unlike the first time, they failed to open at her approach. Hermione ended up slamming into them full force. She pushed and pulled the bars, using all her strength to pry them open, but they did not budge. Desperation took hold of her and soon she was pounding on the gates with fervor.
She could hear the water coming closer. She didn’t have long before it would crush her body against the gates.

“Let me in!” She tried yelling over the roar of the storm. She hated that she was doing this. Begging to be let in after fighting so hard to be freed. “Bellatrix, let me in!” The words burned her throat as tears pooled in the corner of her eyes.

Pride meant nothing in the face of death and she was not afraid to admit that.

The screaming continued and Hermione feared that the woman couldn’t hear her over the storm. The pop of apparition announced the woman’s appearance on the opposite side of the fence.

“Well look at this! The little pest returns to her master’s side!” Bellatrix cooed. She gripped the bars of the gate. “Did you miss me?” She laughed.

Hermione slammed her hands against the unyielding metal. “Enough! Just let me in!”

“Oh no. Not until you ask me nicely.” The woman’s face acquired a crazed appearance. “Beg me, muddy. Ask me to spare your life. Do it!” Came her hissing voice. “Beg!”

The words caught in her throat. Only for a second though as looking over her shoulder was enough to swallow what little pride she had left. “Please. I’m begging you.” She whispered.

“Sorry. Didn’t catch that.”

“Bellatrix! Okay! You win. I’m begging you, let me in!” Hermione yelled, making sure that the woman could see both her fury and determination at wanting to live.

Bellatrix looked her dead in her eyes, “No.”

“What! I did what you asked!” Hermione screeched, yanking at the bars as if her strength alone was enough to pull them down.

“You did. Lovely that really. See, this fixes everything. Don’t you see? I get to see you crushed and broken at my feet. And you…get to be free.” Her eyes were narrowed as she looked at Hermione in loathing. “Now we both get what we want.”

“You said you wouldn’t let me off that easily.” Hermione didn’t care she was basically begging the woman to continue abusing her. She wasn’t exactly in a position to pick and choose at the moment when she was literally stuck between a rock and a hard place.

“I did. But I’ve grown bored with you. You’re proving to be more trouble than you’re worth. If this infernal, wretched bond between us won’t allow me the pleasure of killing you myself…I’ll make an exception for other means.” The woman replied angrily.

Hermione knew she was dead serious too.

She should’ve known things were going too well. That all she had worked for to return to the life she once had would be for not. Narcissus was wrong. Her hold over Bellatrix was abysmal at best. Even if she begged the woman for her life, she wouldn’t yield. The hate that lay between them was simply too much. Her words would never reach her.

She was going to die here.

A chill wracked her body and no amount of clothing on her person was enough to warm her. She
leaned weakly against the gates, eyes shut tightly, wet with tears as the sweater atop her head weighed her down. She was ready to resign herself to her fate. Running now would do no good. The water was nearly upon her; the bars too slippery to clime. The fear of death became too much to bear.

As a last-ditch effort, in a move that happened purely unconsciously, a long heartbreaking keen came from her throat. Hermione remembered Hagrid raising a jobberknoll back in her third year. He’d been so happy to raise the little guy that when it died a few months later, listening to its death cry was one of the most pitiful things she had ever had to listen to. It was a hollow, horrid sound, much like the one she was making as she was now faced with the reality of her own death.

That was around the time that an equally distressed wail pieced the air and Hermione snapped her head up to witness Bellatrix stumbling away from the gates in obvious pain. Her hands clutched at her hair and she watched in morbid fascination as the woman began pulling strands out by the handful.

“Shut up, shut up! Make it stop! Stop wailing!” Bellatrix was shrieking to the heavens. The older witch fell to the ground as whatever was causing her pain appeared to grow worse. At first, she thought it was her voice that was doing it, but she had since stopped her own cry.

No. Whatever was going on with the other siren now wasn’t her doing. It was happening inside her own head. That became clear the more she heard the woman berate her invisible foe. “She asked for this! Let her die! I want her to die!”

She had only seconds now before she really would. Something was happening with Bellatrix. It happened before back when the woman had attacked her the night Narcissus appeared. Bellatrix did this back then too. Fighting with herself against a foe that Hermione could neither see nor hear.

A foe that for some reason didn’t want to see Hermione dead.

As her mate, Hermione now knew that this was Bellatrix’s inheritance showing itself. She never really thought about how the other woman dealt with her siren side.

If she was affected by instincts as much as Hermione was.

Looking at her now, Hermione could tell that the two were not on the same page despite sharing a single body. She knew from experience that their other half wasn’t necessarily an entity of its own. It was more of an extension of themselves. Hermione wasn’t quite sure that Bellatrix knew that. The way she fought against it made it appear as if they weren’t one in the same. Hermione was guilty of doing that as well. Until she grew to somewhat accept it. The blood flowing through her veins and the voice always hovering at the back of her mind was her; even if she tried to deny it. She only did it because it was hard to believe that a part of her actually wanted to hear Bellatrix sing to them. To comfort them, cherish them, treat them like a proper mate. If that was the thought that ran through her own head, she couldn’t possibly imagine what was happening in the older siren’s mind.

Bellatrix’s desire to see her dead and her siren’s desire to prevent their mate from dying were battling it out inside of her.

And clearly Bellatrix was losing.

That was fine with her. ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend.’ She thought to herself, watching the fight play out in front of her.

That statement would end up being her savior on this day and many more days to come.
‘Please. I need your help. Bellatrix will never listen to me, but she will listen to you. She has no choice. Please. We’ll die if you don’t.’ She begged the creature ever lurking within her mind.

A caress as soft as rose petals ran down her body and suddenly a sense of peace washed over her. She let her siren side take the reins without resisting.

Hermione felt her chest expand and release as she proceeded to scream the woman’s name at the top of her lungs. “*Bellatrix, let me in!*”

The reaction was instant.

Bellatrix rolled to her feet and produced her wand from her sleeve. Quick as a flash, she slashed it at the gates and sent black iron flying inwards with a groan. Hermione jumped through them and slammed the bars behind her. The wall of water came barreling full force towards them. Her heart almost leapt from her chest when a horrible crash rang out and the water was sent shooting upwards; a barrier of shimmering yellow magic stopping it right in its track. The world seemed muted after that.

She was alive.

Her legs turned to jelly and she folded like an omelet onto the wet ground.

Death was literally staring her in the face. A few seconds more and she would’ve been dead.

Harry and Ron would never see her again, wondering day after day what became of their missing friend.

Her parents would live the rest of their lives with the belief that they never had a daughter, eventually passing away long after their child; a parent’s greatest nightmare.

Ginny. Luna. Neville. Professor McGonagall. Even Professor Snape. All of them would’ve never seen her again.

It was a terrifying thought. All of it was too much. The stress that dealing with Bellatrix brought was driving her crazy and everyday felt like she was growing closer to losing her mind.

Hermione turned to look at Bellatrix as the idea of going insane crossed her thoughts.

The dark-haired witch was stock still behind her; wand in her hand, eyes piecing the wooden object like it had personally attacked her. Betrayal; the only way to describe the look upon Bellatrix’s face. Like she couldn’t believe the piece of wood had actually cast the spell that ultimately saved Hermione’s life.

The life she had so enthusiastically wanted snuffed out.

She didn’t know what she was expecting after that. A curse, a beating, maybe some derogatory name calling. The woman could open the gates and wash both of them away if she really wanted to.

Bellatrix didn’t do any of that. She simply turned away and stumbled towards the front door. She took each step meticulously and then the woman disappears into the darkness of the house. No words. No yelling. The whole time she could feel her creature side receding back to the comfy recesses of her mind, a sense of appeasement floating around her head.

It was quite proud of its actions. Proud of *Bellatrix’s* actions.
Little snippets like ‘good mate’ and ‘mate is learning’ were the only things she could make out before her mind went quiet again.

The rain poured down faster than before. The wall of water unmoving against the gates. Darker clouds rolled in and Hermine realized that the storm was only going to get worse from here on out.

She dreaded going inside knowing what lie ahead of her if she did. But the longer she stayed out there - clothes soaked to the bone, salve washing away like runny gruel, skin cold as ice- the higher chance she had of catching her death.

She didn’t just beg her greatest enemy to save her life only to lose it to a cold.

The tired woman dragged herself to her feet, walking up the steps of the porch to stop just before the open doorway. The curse that thwarted her before was still there. It was designed to keep her in; not out. If she passed it, chances were that she wouldn’t be able to leave again unless Bellatrix allowed her to.

Surviving one more night out wouldn’t be impossible. The porch was safe from most of the weather and her pockets were still filled with medicinal herbs. She could make it. All she had to do was hunker down and…

The sound of heels hitting tile echoed out from the darkness of the house. She couldn’t see anything.

Not that it mattered.

A bright red spell came rushing in her direction and she was sent crumpling to the ground; Bellatrix’s enraged glare illuminated by lightning being the last thing to grace her vision before the world turned to black.
Chapter 18 - Promises

Her body had been moved.

That was the first thing that came to Hermione’s mind when she opened her eyes next.

Sitting up slowly, body aching from the slightest movement, she observes the room. She had been dragged into the hallway that led to the foyer. The room appeared to have been repaired since she last saw it.

Bellatrix was nowhere to be found. She was expecting for the woman to be standing over her, waiting to pounce the moment she entered the waking world. Hermione wasn’t exactly complaining. The look in her eyes right before the stunner hit her was downright incensed.

The retaliation that would’ve followed such a sneer would undoubtedly be unpleasant.

Her train of thought was disrupted by a pop to her left.

She turned to see the most pathetic house elf she had ever laid her eyes upon.

The little creature had its two droopy ears clutched between shaky hands; gripping them like a child holding their favorite stuffed animal. It gazed down at Hermione with huge, watery, brown eyes. Its knobby knees knocked together with little clacks as it struggled to stand on its own. Hermione wasn’t sure what was causing the unfortunate being to quiver so much; though she imagined that the thin potato sack it was wearing and serving Bellatrix of all people wasn’t helping in the slightest.

It broke her heart watching it stare at her like she was about to strike it. She knew the older witch had a hatred for all things impure. After the incident with Dobby at Malfoy Manor, house elves might’ve topped the list of things the dark witch hated most. Hermione hadn’t seen anyone else in the house except her, Bellatrix, and their familiars. Why the little creature had appeared now of all times, she didn’t know, but she was glad anyways.
She’d always had a strange fondness for house elves.

It was definitely the eyes.

She gave it an innocuous smile, afraid anything else would send the little guy running. “Hello. Who are you?” She asked softly as if speaking to a frightened child.

Despite doing so, the house elf still flinched and answered her with hurried words.

“Nimmy’s name is Nimmy.” She heard it- him speak. “Nimmy’s master has asked Nimmy to fetch the mistress’ property from the foyer.”

She gasped. “I am not her property!” Her scandalized voice replied. In her anger, she forgot not to startle the little guy.

He looked like he was about to cry.

“Please do not be mad at Nimmy! Nimmy begs it! Mistress told Nimmy to call it so. Mistress said Nimmy would be punished if he didn’t.” Came his frightened plea.

She felt bad.

Hermione could see that he was pulling on his ears even harder now, more than likely a nervous habit he had developed. It wasn’t his fault what Bellatrix forced him to call her. House elves had no choice but to obey their masters- less they face the consequences for insubordination. What she was seeing now was exactly why S.P.E.W. was needed in the wizarding world. She shook her head.

Now was not the time for that. With hesitant hands, she slowly reached out and stopped him from his violent tugging. “Stop that, you’re going to tear your ears off. I don’t want you to get punished- or to punish yourself. However, I’m not Bellatrix’s property either.” She patted his hands to keep them folded in front of him. They were freezing. “My name is Hermione. Your mistress isn’t here now so its fine if you call me by my name.”

Nimmy seemed hesitant. He was wringing his hands together nervously, chocolate eyes looking around the room as if Bellatrix was going to suddenly appear through the wall any moment now. But the woman didn’t show and Nimmy seemed to let his guard down for just a bit.

“Miss Hermione then,” He said quietly. “You must come with Nimmy now. Mistress has called for you in the parlor.”

“Did she say why?” Bellatrix never called her. The woman either hunted her down or Hermione ran into her by accident.

Nimmy shook his head.

“Nimmy dare not question the orders of his Mistress. Nimmy was simply ordered to bring you. Please come with Nimmy. Nimmy does not wish to be punished by Mistress!” He said, now pulling at Hermione to stand and follow.

“Okay, okay, no need to pull. I’m coming.” She stood up and went to follow the elf out of the room. Despite the fact that she had been brought inside, her clothes had remained wet, leaving behind a puddle of murky water in her wake. Hermione became acutely aware of how cold she actually was. She wanted to ask Nimmy to cast a warming charm, but Hermione knew that if Bellatrix noticed, the two of them would both be on the receiving end of the woman’s wand. She would just deal with it for now.
Nimmy remained quiet as he guided her through the halls of the mansion. As they went, she noted that many of the portraits were sleeping and it was dark outside the windows they passed. The world was quiet aside from the little creature’s pitiful steps and Hermione’s much longer strides.

On they went until ascending a flight of stairs at the end of the hallway. Hermione saw a light pouring out from a doorway a few doors down from where they were. The crackling of a fire could be heard, followed closely by the sound of tinkling glass. Nimmy ran ahead of her to stand and bow at the entrance.

“Nimmy has brought Mistress’s property as she has asked of Nimmy.” He said with his entire body bent at a ninety-degree angle. She sucked her teeth as she was once more referred to as an object, but she let it slide. So long as he didn’t call her that when Bellatrix wasn’t around, it was fine. Hermione rounded the doorway to stand at the threshold and observe the scene before her.

The room oozed wealth and privilege. The doorways and windows were lined by dark brown wood that arched over and seemed to stretch towards the ceiling for miles. The floor was cover with a carpet of mosaic colors that was pristine and as ornate as the patterned beige wallpaper lining the walls. Across the room from the entrance was a large white fireplace that was roaring with a bright red and yellow fire. Atop it sat an overelaborate gold mirror that made the mantel piece seem all the larger. In the corner left of the fireplace was a table sitting with a single vase of orchids. Couches rested against the wall to her right with two large wooden bookcases framing it. Though the whole placed seem huge, the largest thing in the room was located near the giant windows adjacent the wall containing the fireplace.

Sleek and black, a closed grand piano sat gleamingly beneath the light of the full moon. Even closed, she could tell that the instrument more than likely was rarely used; a decorative piece more than something beloved.

That didn’t seem like a too far off guess seeing as Bellatrix was sitting atop it with crossed legs; a glass of amber liquid clutched between long, manicured hands. Hermione could hear the woman tapping on the glass in a rhythmic pattern. She only stopped the annoying sound to wave her hand apathetically at Nimmy, causing the elf to excuse himself with a pop and leaving the two of them alone.

It was just them for all of two seconds.

A brush to the back of her neck made Hermione yelp and jump further into the room from surprise. The arrival of the woman’s infernal bird was unwanted, but not unexpected. It landed beside its master, seeming to nuzzle up to the woman and pushing its angular face into the woman’s side. In response, Bellatrix ran her hand down it’s chest, eliciting a delighted croak from the beast.

It would seem her familiar was the only creature that could be in the woman’s presence without being punished or ridiculed.

Hermione noted that she had yet to say a single word to her. She decided to be the first to break the silence.

“Why did you call me here?” She asked.

“Because I can.” Bellatrix replied, never once gracing Hermione with a look.

This irritated her for some reason and so, in a show of insolence at her disregard, she turned to leave.
A fiercely yellow spell whizzed past her face to slam the door close, causing Hermione to freeze in her tracks.

“Did I say you could leave?”

She whipped back around. “You’ve given me no reason to do so before!” Hermione told the older woman. “What could you possibly want from me after you’ve taken everything else?”

“Your death would be a good start.” Came her nonchalant reply.

Hermione’s eyes narrowed sharply. “We both know that’s not gonna happen.”

“I’ll find a way then.”

“Merlin what is wrong with you?!” Hermione yelled, finally losing her patience with the way the woman could discuss her death as if reciting the weather.

The sound of shattering glass pierced the air, Bellatrix had thrown her glass to the ground and had hopped off the piano in a rage. Hermione moved to keep out of striking distance. She prepared to defend herself, but the assault never came. Instead, the woman stopped just a few inches away from her. Over her shoulder, she could see the woman’s familiar watching the stare down with an unnerving amount of attention. Bellatrix’s quiet voice drew her back.

“What is wrong with me, she asks…Like all of this is my fault. Are you as daft as you appear?” She growled.

“You think I started this? I never would’ve- “Her tirade stopped as the other woman struck her across her face.

“Shut. Up.”

The woman didn’t use her powers yet Hermione found herself growing quiet anyways. Having gotten her full attention, Bellatrix tilted her head and began speaking in a voice that was clearly trying to remain calm.

“This. All of this. Is your fault. Had you never stolen from my vault; had you never gone against the dark lord and died like you were supposed to… neither of us would be here now.” She rasped furiously.

Hermione was clearly still confused. Her lips twisted into a nasty smile.

“Oh. You don’t know do you?” Bellatrix began pacing back and forth, starting to laugh. “This is just getting better and better! That old hag is still playing the fool I see.” She gave Hermione a look, something strange gleaming behind her eyes. “I wonder.”

“I thought talking in riddles was a Ravenclaw thing.” Hermione griped.

“Slytherins enjoy riddles just as much as those goody-two shoes. It’s always entertaining to watch others struggle to solve even something as… simple as this.” She mocked. “Tell me something, muddy.” Bellatrix asked, walking back to her piano. She waved her wand at the mess on the floor and the glass shards flew back into place to reform the woman’s glass. With a snap of her fingers, Nimmy popped in to stand meekly at her side. Bellatrix wordlessly held her glass out to him, which he quickly refilled and popped away when the woman was topped off. “You’ve been in my library haven’t you.”
It wasn’t a question.

“It wasn’t a question. Of course, you have. Always got your dirty nose stuck in a book. Find anything interesting?” She swirled her glass, shrugging when Hermione refused to answer. “No? Didn’t think so. I looked too you know.”

“What are you trying to get at?” She questioned.

“Nothing really. The stupid look on your face is all the answer I needed.” She took another sip from her glass, returning to her previous task of stroking her feathered companion.

Hermione was across the room before she knew it. The influx of anxiety going through her system didn’t allow her to register the fact that she had come into striking distance of not only Bellatrix, but her familiar as well.

“I didn’t find anything here, you’re right about that. But I did find the book in the restricted section at Hogwarts. The one with the missing page. The page that you took!” She accused, just stopping short of attempting to point her fingers in the woman’s face.

She would rather like to keep those intact, thank you.

Bellatrix’s lips pursed tightly, expression going from smug to stormy in an instance. “I didn’t take it. I know exactly which one you’re talking about as well. That page was gone long before I found it.”

Hermione was shocked. She read what the book said about the rarity of their species. There couldn’t have been many of them. What was the chances that another of their kind had been searching for it as well? It was hard to believe. It had to have been Bellatrix.

Except her expression said it all.

She was telling the truth.

“If you didn’t take it, then who did?”

She got a bitter smile. “Why don’t you ask your precious headmistress?”

It would seem that Bellatrix still wasn’t done with the riddles. “What does she have to do with any of this?”

This time it was Bellatrix who did not reply.

She took her silence as confirmation. The woman knew more than she let on and was perfectly fine with lead Hermione about by the nose without ever answering her question.

“You’re not going to tell me. No matter how much I ask you to,” She took another step forward. “So, what? I’m supposed to just…wait around while you spin your riddles and torment me? Until when?”

“Until I find a way to kill you.”

She growled and pulled at her hair. “What if you can’t. You’ve seen it! If I can’t stop you, you’ll stop yourself. We could be doing this forever! Is that what you want?”
Bellatrix emptied her glass in one go. The sounds of her boots on the carpet seemed to echo throughout the room as they guided her towards the window. Bellatrix stared into the night, her reflection in the panes revealing to Hermione that she was deep in thought.

“No.” Bellatrix spoke after some time. “That’s what you expect me to say right? No? Idiot,” She slid between clenched teeth. “Maybe things are getting lost in translation here. Perhaps I haven’t made myself clear enough for your feeble mind to comprehend. So, I’ll say it plainly.”

Bellatrix slowly twisted her body to look at her from the side of her eye, the rising moon acting as a backlight to the woman’s silhouette. Her voice was distorted slightly as she spoke.

“I despise you, mudblood.” Her voice increased several octaves. “Fifteen years in Azkaban to return to my lord’s side…lost in a fraction of that time.” She produced her wand from her sleeve. It wasn’t aimed at her. Hermione watched in horror as the insane witch sliced her palm open, thick rivulets of blood spilling out onto the carpet. She didn’t flinch in the slightest. “This…this filth. Passed down from my mother’s lineage, flows through my veins. With it…I cannot avenge my lord. Because of you. You and your worthless band of half-wits! And you dare try to ask me for freedom?”

Her smile was as sharp as a razor.

“My time in Azkaban already felt like an eternity,” A bloody hand made its way to wrap around Hermione’s neck, not choking, but definitely the wrong side of comfortable. “If our filthy bond is what you fear so much- your idea of what that place is like- then I will strangle us with it.”

Hermione felt a tear slide down her face. “You’ll kill us both.”

Bellatrix’s were crazed as they met her own. “If I have to.” She whispered.

It mattered not what sound occurred at that moment. Hermione couldn’t hear a thing, her ears ringing with all she just heard. It felt like the pain and hunger that had accumulated in her body up until this point had drifted away, leaving behind a numbness that she didn’t know she desired.

“What do I need to do,” She murmured, not caring where she was heard or not. She stared Bellatrix dead in her eye. “What do I need to do to be free of you?”

Bellatrix smiled at her.

“Unless you go back to before you stole from my vault… nothing.”

Her neck was released, leaving behind a bloody handprint that ran wetly down her throat to soak into her tattered shirt. When the woman stepped back, she looked past her to see a shadow past by the window. A white and black speckled owl landed on the outside ledge, a note clutched between its beak. It began pecking at the window which then drew Bellatrix’s attention.

“I’ll deal with you later muddy. I have more important business to attend to.” She pushed past Hermione and marched to the exit, waving her wand to send the door swinging wide open. The woman glanced once more over her shoulder to hit her with a condescending look. “Oh. And do make yourself at home. You’re going to be here for a very long time! Bahahaha!” Her laughter echoed all the way out the door and down the hallway until it faded off into the distance.

Hermione finally let herself release her emotions . She closed her eyes, tears dropping onto the floor to mingle with the blood that was already starting to turn a deep brown color. She didn’t care who saw. Not Bellatrix or that blasted bird. They had seen them before quite often. Been the cause of them more times than not. Let them watch. It didn’t matter she thought, shuddering to herself as she was overcome with grief.
These tears didn’t belong to them.

They belonged to Hermione alone.

The sorrow racking her body was for every bad hand that she had been dealt in life. The ones that left her as she is now. Alone. In pain. Angry. Afraid. Defeated. Every attempt at returning to the life she knew had been thwarted. Her and Bellatrix were at a standstill. Strong enough to hurt but never enough to finish the job. More than that, the woman was hiding something, alluding at things that Hermione didn’t know nor understood.

That’s the worst part she thinks, holding her body as she cried upon the floor. Knowledge was assurance. You don’t’ fear what’s to come when you know what’s coming. Here in this house, with a loose cannon like Bellatrix; Hermione felt like she never knew what was coming. Her future was a blank canvas except there was a border surrounding it from every side. She could do whatever she wanted within it, but she would never be able to move onto a blank one.

Bellatrix was her borders and she had yet to find a way to break her down.

Now she wondered if she ever would.

She had to keep believing that Harry and Ron and the others were still looking for her. That they still hadn’t given up on her just yet. An outsider would more than likely be her only means of achieving freedom.

Bellatrix didn’t know about her conversations with Snape. Or at least she hoped she didn’t. She needed him. He was her only way at contacting the outside world. She had so many questions now. Some she knew she wouldn’t find an answer for, but there was in in particular that needed answering.

*Why don’t you ask your precious headmistress?*

That wasn’t a throw away comment. Hermione wasn’t quite sure what it meant either.

But she was going to find out.

Hermione left the room, the entire walk reminding herself that patience was not synonymous with cowardly. It would be foolish to seek Snape out now. She should bide her time and use her current freedom for something she was planning to do anyways.

When the door opened to what she reluctantly knew as ‘her room’ the sight of the cage at the other end made something in her want to scream. The food she had taken from the kitchen, uncaring of Bellatrix’s wrath only made the feeling intensify. She closed the door with her foot, collapsing on the floor as she finally decided to let herself relax. She wasn’t safe. Not by a longshot. Merlin, she wasn’t ever sure she would ever be again at this rate.

But when Crookshanks poked his mushy face out and pounced on her, purring with joy at her presence, for just a moment, she thought of home.

Home where they would share their food just like this; taking comfort in each other’s company. Crookshanks would bask in her affections and Hermione would read and immerse herself in a good novel.

Those were simpler times. It seemed like so long ago now. Like one day she would wake up and believe that all of it had been one very long dream.
Except the feeling of home that she felt right now wasn’t a dream; it was a memory. One that she had known and experienced every day at one point.

She promised that night that she would hold that feeling in her heart again someday.

Even if it took the rest of her life to do it.
Chapter 19: News From the Outside

Chapter Summary

*meekly appears holding chapters* I'm sorry guys! You know my updating schedule is wonky! But I have returned once more with three chapters. I won't hold you long in this message. Please enjoy the chapters.

Chapter 19: News from the Outside

Hermione didn’t end up making it to the bed after the previous night. Having her fill of food, she emptied her pockets of all the things she had gathered in the forest. The makeshift weapon and plants were stored away in a drawer; one that seemed like it had never been opened before in one of the side tables. She pulled the shell she had collected and presented it to Crookshanks who took an immediate shine to it. The large cat tossed and swatted the shell about, finding great amusement in something so simple. It was entertaining to watch and so Hermione settled down, pulling the comforter from the bed and cocooning herself on the floor to watch him play. Of course, she knew that staying down there was silly seeing as she was literally laying next to the bed, but she found that she had been sapped of all her strength. Now she was warm, fed, and away from Bellatrix and her mind games. That comfort alone was enough for her to finally relax and ultimately fall asleep right there on the floor.

Yet the floor was not where she had awakened the next day.

When Hermione open her eyes next, she was still wrapped in the blanket, but now she was on top of the bed, Crookshanks sleeping up against her back. Immediately she shot up, fearing that this was Bellatrix’s doing somehow.

Her sudden movement caused the feline to glare up at her in anger.

“Sorry.” She apologized, knowing the cat hated when he didn’t get his beauty sleep.

She gave him a scratch behind the ears and sat up. How she ended up in the bed, she didn’t know, but that could wait for the time being. Crookshanks needed to return to his hiding place before anyone discovered him.

“Good morning.” A timid voice squeaked from somewhere behind her.

She gasped, looking up to set her eyes on the doorway of her room.

Nimmy was standing there, knobby knees shaking and a tray of what appeared to be oatmeal and water floating carefully beside him. His ears were in his hands again, but he was simply holding them instead of tugging. The little elf entered the room and closed the door behind him. He kept looking around, almost as if his current actions were a crime.

If he was here for the reasons she was thinking, then in Bellatrix’s eyes, they were.

Sure enough, the tray was placed on the table closest to her side of the bed. He looked up at her with watery eyes.
“Hello again. Nimmy wishes you a good morning. Nimmy didn’t mean to startle you.” He said.

“You didn’t.” She lied. “But why are you here? I’m sure Bellatrix will be mad if she knows you’re here.” She said. While grateful for the little elf’s kindness, the last thing she wanted was for him to get hurt because of her.

Suddenly, the timid creature grew very still; the look of guilt behind his eyes. “Nimmy’s mistress told Nimmy to…” He drifted off at the end.

“To do what?” She asked suspiciously. Nimmy was hopping from foot to foot now and Hermione’s own nervousness grew. “Nimmy, what did she tell you to do?” She asked a bit more forcefully.

“Nimmy was told to…to take care of the property whilst Mistress runs an errand.” He tugged his ears over his eyes, hiding away in shame. “Nimmy was ordered to clean all of Mistress’s possessions like Nimmy always does.”

‘She wouldn’t.’ Hermione told herself.

Bellatrix couldn’t possibly be that juvenile.

She threw the covers off of herself. She screamed in frustration, scaring the life out of the poor elf who looked like he was about to pass out. Hermione couldn’t help it. The gall of that woman! She honestly didn’t know how to feel right now as she look down at her completely clean body.

The outfit she had been festering in for weeks now had been replaced by a new, clean outfit. Her attire was simple. She was now wearing a simple white blouse and a grey skirt that came down to just above her knees. She had thigh high black stockings and a pair of brown ankle boots that kept her feet warm and cozy. Pulling the top of her shirt out a bit, she could spot a plain white bra beneath the shirt. She didn’t dare check to see if she had on underwear- at least not in front of Nimmy- but after discreetly shifting about, she discovered that she thankfully wasn’t going commando.

She found that her clothing wasn’t the only thing that had been cleaned up.

Though the aches could still be felt bone deep, most of her injuries were healed and for the first time in a long time, she was free of blood and bruises. Hermione ran a hand through her hair. Still as frizzy as ever, but the curls weren’t cluttered with leaves and bramble anymore which was a win her book. She took a whiff of herself. Nothing distinct came to mind at all. At least she was saved the humiliation of having been washed by hand.

Just not the one where Bellatrix considered her a possession now.

She was infuriated. The woman was unbelievable. Even when Hermione thought the woman couldn’t possibly sink any lower, she always seems to prove her wrong. What’s worse was the thought that the witch probably thought she was doing Hermione a favor.

Upgrading her from house pet to property.

Like a couch.

Or a table.

Truly, she was honored.

Hermione sat on the bed stewing. Every second passed in her own thoughts left the poor elf standing at her bedside feeling more and more antsy.
Nimmy remembered what Hermione said about being called property and felt bad. Miss Hermione had been kind. But Nimmy was given orders, ones that he simply could not disobey. When his mistress left that morning, she left in a hurry. Usually, Nimmy was ordered not to tend to anyone else in the mansion, but mistress had exited in such a rage that she simply told Nimmy to care for the property.

Mistress had told him that Miss Hermione was property.

And so, he cared for her too.

Nimmy would be punished.

This he knew.

Even if he told Mistress that Nimmy was only doing as he was told, there would be no quelling her rage.

Nimmy only hoped that it would not be a harsh punishment.

He was the only house elf the Lestrange family had left. At the very least, he would not be killed, but Mistress had ways to make someone wish for death. It was the reason he was the only house elf left now after all.

Nimmy’s worry was starting to show on his face.

Hermione, who had settled down after her brief tirade, was now watching all the emotions glassing over the little elf’s eyes. Slowly, she swung her legs over the side of the bed and stood up. Crookshanks pounced from his cozy spot on the pillow and slinked off to his hiding place below.

“Nimmy,” She held her hands up defensively. “I’m not angry. At least not at you. If anything, I’m worried. You didn’t have to do this. Bellatrix will be angry when she finds out.”

He looked at her sadly, but his stance perked up just a bit. “Nimmy knows. Mistress will be very angry with Nimmy. But…Miss Hermione has been kind to Nimmy.” He gave her a timid smile. “Nimmy gets very little kindness, so Nimmy will never forget it.”

“Thank you Nimmy. You’ve helped me more than you know. But please, in the future, don’t worry about me. It’d break my heart if you got hurt because of me.” She said. “Now there’s something I need to know. Does Bellatrix know about Crookshanks? My cat.”

He shook his head. “No. Mistress doesn’t know about Miss Hermione’s cat. Nimmy was feeding Miss Hermione’s cat whilst she was away.”

“Thank you for that. I was afraid that Bellatrix might hurt him if she found out.” She admitted. “If you could keep this between us for now, I would be eternally grateful.”

“Nimmy will do his best.” The little creature promised.

Hermione nodded and that was the last thing the two of them talked about. Nimmy popped away after that, explaining that he needed to begin working on his chores before Bellatrix returned.

Hermione let him leave, deciding that she needed to do something as well. The first thing she did was finish the food that the elf had left behind for her. She was starving, not even last nights meal being enough to quell her hunger. Plants weren’t the most filling, nor were they the most tasteful. But they helped in a pinch. Every chance she had to eat, she would take it.
Bellatrix’s mood was unpredictable and cruel. The woman could let her roam free today and chain her up again tomorrow. No longer could she think that there was nothing else the woman could do to her. Cause there was. But right now, just for a little while, she didn’t want to fight. Didn’t want to scream and run and jump at every creak of a floorboard. What she wanted most right now was to recuperate. To rest and finally catch her breath and think of yet another way to get out of here.

In the end, she ended up practicing more of her wandless magic, utilizing the few items in the room as targets and props. Levitating things and casting stunners were coming easier than they had previously. Casting lumos and being able to hold it for more than a few minutes would be her big achievement for the day. A smile stretched across her face as the tiny ball of light twinkled brightly within the palms of her hands. Accio was a bit harder to deal with. Unlike the levitating charm, Accio needed near perfect concentration in terms of how much magic she put into it. Her results ranged from pathetic jumps towards her hands to dodging deadly fast projectiles aiming to take her head off. Experimenting with pillows was definitely a good choice, though even still, getting hit still took the breath out of her.

Hours passed with her training by herself. When her magic became too low for her comfort, she stopped and sat on the bed to take a break. The ceiling above her wasn’t interesting in the least, but for some reason, Hermione still found herself enraptured with it. High above her, she stared at nothingness, pondering about the direction of what her life had become.

The opening of the bedroom door had her sitting up in an instance.

In strolled Bellatrix, striding at her with the biggest grin on her face. She stopped when she noticed how fixed up Hermione appeared, but it seemed that it wasn’t enough to ruin her supposed good mood. A thick paper was flung in her direction. She caught it and looked down to see a section torn out of what appeared to be the Daily Prophet.

“I come bearing good news, girl.” Bellatrix said glowingly. “Read it.”

Hermione turned to the first page and began reading:

**Panic Shakes the Wizarding Community: Harry Potter’s Companion Still Missing**

_Greetings my fellow witches and wizards! Today, its with a heavy heart that I give my findings in follow up to yesterday’s story. As you may have read in my previous article, the Ministry of Magic has confirmed that our savior’s long-time companion- Hermione Jean Granger- is still missing. She was last seen Christmas day at a gathering with her fellow peers. The disappearance of Miss Granger is one that- I for one good readers- find to be not only troubling, but quite suspicious as well. While the ministry has not made any official comments, I went out and did some investigating for myself. The people deserve answers and I, Rita Skeeter, am always happy to provide them.

I interviewed several of her peers at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Though shaken by the incident, many were kind enough to provide information on the young woman’s behavior prior to her disappearance. One brave young man, Alexander Morres, a fifth year Gryffindor, said that Miss Granger seemed ‘off’ somehow. When I asked for clarification, the young man stated: ‘I’ve never really talked to Hermione, but we shared a lot of classes this year. She used to be really enthusiastic about them. Helped me out a ton too. But after the battle? She barely spoke. In class or to anyone else, for that matter.’

A young first year who received a gift from Miss Granger the day of her disappearance also gave a statement. ‘She seemed okay when she gave me this hat at the party. Like she was having fun. I hope she’s okay. I wanted to thank her again for the gift.’
Several other students made allusions that something was amiss with the young Gryffindor’s behavior stretching back months prior to this incident. When asked on their thoughts about these observations, Miss Ginny Weasley and Mister Neville Longbottom were reluctant to comment on the matter. My investigation loon led me to the ministry where I was able to corner the one and only Harry Potter for questioning. If anyone knew the whereabouts of longtime friend Miss Granger, it would be him. Still, I was not provided with a statement, but he did say the ministry was looking into the matter.

But the story doesn’t end there! There was yet another who spoke with Miss Granger and believe it or not Rita Readers, it was yours truly herself! A few weeks before her disappearance, I too asked to speak with Miss Granger in an exclusive, one on one interview. She was rather hostile with me and refused to answer any of my questions. Seeing the once composed young lady’s appearance though, I can’t say it was unexpected. Haggard my dears, would be the best way to describe her. Bags the size of grapefruit and hair as frail as straw; a far cry from the elegant beauty we witnessed during the ball at the Triwizard Tournament.

This leads me to wonder dear readers, if there is more to the story that we are not aware of. Aurors patrolling school grounds; the attack on Miss Granger that landed her in the Hogwarts Infirmary; the young woman’s unfriendly and hostile behavior prior to her disappearance. Something doesn’t smell Rita Readers and I want to get to the bottom of it!

Was this a kidnapping? A revenge plot devised by one of the many Death Eaters still at large; covered up by the ministry so as to save face before the upcoming elections?

Or are we looking at the beginnings of another soul changed too drastically by the war? A young woman whose behavior and hostility led her to run away from her beloved friends and family?

Those are the questions I leave you with today dear readers. In either situation, we here in the wizarding community are only hoping for her swift and safe return. I assure you my loyal fans, The Daily Prophet is the only wizarding news outlet where you can read these exclusive interviews and get day-to-day updates! We’ll be covering this story round the clock with me, Rita Skeeter, giving the people the truth and honesty befitting of a dedicated journalist.

For more exclusive interviews on the disappearance of Hermione Granger, turn to page 6. For more about Hermione Granger’s friendship with Harry Potter, turn to page 8. To see pictures taken at the Triwizard Ball, turn to page 9.

Hermione was shaking from how mad she was. Her eyes leaked with anger as line by line she was dragged through the mud by Rita Skeeter and her deceitful words. The rage exploded all at once, causing her to rip the paper to shreds and toss the bits up into the air. She was fuming, pacing back and forth as her mind kept going over what she just read. Behind her, Bellatrix was laughing, which was perfect in that she now had a place to focus her anger.

“Glad to see this amuses you.” She growled.

Bellatrix was unfazed. “Immensely. After all, they’re not far off on either account, are they?” She laughed. “Though I am curious. Did you get a bit snippy with good ole Rita? Caught yourself a tantrum because you couldn’t take a nap?”

“Snippy!? How dare you! I was snippy because of you! Keeping me up at all hours of the night, wailing in the woods.” She pointed at the shredded newspaper on the ground. “And that…that horrid woman’s meddling into my personal life was none of her business. Or yours!” Her feet stomped about, the new boots heavy on her feet as she tried to wear a hole in the floor from her pacing. “Wait until I get my hands on that little insect! I should’ve turned her over to the ministry
when I had the chance!”

Hermione kept muttering under her breath, cursing both women with every fiber of her being. The news was both good and bad. The good news was that the world now knew she was missing. With that out in the open, there would be more eyes out there looking for her. Harry and Ron were still searching. They hadn’t given up. She stopped pacing to let out a sigh of relief. Knowing was better than speculating after all. Yet speculation is what now had her wishing to wrap he hands around Skeeter’s silly little neck. She had always known the woman was an invasive pest. One who didn’t care how low she needed to sink in order to get the hottest scoop out to the public. During the Triwizard Tournament, the woman was unyielding in how much she grilled Harry and the rest of them. Only the threat of being exposed as an unregistered Animagus was enough to deter her. Though with Hermione now missing, no doubt Skeeter was drooling at the chance to drag her personal business into the spotlight. It was the perfect opportunity for her on so many fronts. A juicy story would get back at Hermione for threatening her career with the added bonus that the woman wasn’t even there to defend herself. Who knows what the world thought of her now.

Deep down, she knew that what the other students had said was true. Before Bellatrix had even stepped into the picture, she had been a mess.

She missed her parents.

Missed Ron and Harry.

Missed how things were before her world was literally flipped upside down.

And just when she was on the track to getting better, she found out about Bellatrix not only being alive, but her mate as well.

So, yeah. She was going to be a bit snippy. The nightmares that were actually memories. The loneliness and constant scrutiny by everyone wanting to dredge up the past. All of it grated on her. Anyone would start to feel the effects of life’s cruel hand weighing down on them. She was no exception, which is why for the woman to share that with the rest of the world was incredibly infuriating.

“Watch that tone muddy.” Bellatrix warned. “Especially after I was feeling generous enough to even let you see this.”

“You did it knowing I would be angry. Don’t play like you’re a saint when we both know you did this out of spite.” Hermione replied, not changing her tone at all. “And my name isn’t muddy.”

The older witch shrugged, giving Hermione a sly smirk. “I call you what I wish in my house.”

“Was there something else you wanted or did you come here to only mock me?” Hermione asked, not really in the mood for the other woman’s taunts.

“Mocking mostly,” she replied. “Though I am curious. Curious as to why you wanted to return to a world that doesn’t even care that you’re gone.”

“They care! They wouldn’’t be so concerned with finding me if they didn’t.”

“Is that what you believe?” Bellatrix laughed, shifting her weight to her opposite hip. “People go missing in the wizarding world on a near daily basis and it never makes the front pages. No one cares that you’re missing. They care that their precious savior’s companion is missing.”

Hermione knew she was being goaded. It was clear what the other woman was trying to insinuate
and yet that didn’t stop her from letting the other woman win. “There’s no difference there. You’re grasping at straws just to get a stab at me. Off your game today?”

“Oh, but there is as difference. And you know it too. Had you not been friends with the Potter brat, no one would blink twice at the disappearance of a lowborn witch such as yourself.” Her smile turned nasty. “You’re delusional if you think you matter more than an inconvenience to their hero.”

“You’re wrong!” Hermione snapped, hands balling up at her side. “There are plenty of people who care about me.”

“Still in denial.” The older witch tutted at her and shook her head like she was talking to a small child. “Well if you’re so sure about that muddy, might I remind you of something?”

Bellatrix circled her, a familiar hum coming from her red lips that had Hermione watching the woman with startled, wide eyes.

_Alone with my sorrows, no love and no hope_

_I long for the one who can fix what is broke_

_Both haggard and battered, no strength to go on_

_I long for the siren with the same siren song…_

The woman stopped walking as she stepped up to her left. Hermione was frozen in place. It felt like so long ago that those very worlds came from her mouth, calling to someone she didn’t know would eventually make her already hard life even worse.

“You know those words, don’t you? You sang them to me that night,” Bellatrix whispered in her ear. “That doesn’t sound like someone who’s feeling cared about.”

And she was right. Looking back, Hermione felt like that’s what really bothered her about what Skeeter had wrote.

She hadn’t been far off from the truth.

Not far at all.

She knew that and Bellatrix knew it as well. Hermione had a feeling that one day the woman would try to use her own words against her. It may have been her siren side who had say those words, but they were one in the same and so in reality, they were her words and worries too.

But that applied to Bellatrix as well.

If she wanted to play this game, then Hermione was happy to play along.

She met the woman head on, words as soft as silk flowing from her lips as she remembered them from that night.

_Sweet sorrow, sweet sorrow of a soul white as snow_
May your fears and your worries break away from your hold
Away with your burdens and lay them to me
And a life that’s worth living, I shall lay on to thee

Bellatrix’s eyes burned with irritation as she hissed, “That means nothing! They were the words of instinct and nothing more!”

“And so were mines,” She said smugly. “Which is how I also know that a part of you meant it.”

The woman approached her until they were standing only inches apart. Hermione flinched when she saw the woman’s wand slide slowly from her sleeve. She knew she was already pushing her luck, but if Bellatrix felt she could always win against her, she would always try. Hermione needed to stand her ground no matter what the other woman tried to do in retaliation to her disobedience. The older siren was an angry viper at all times; waiting day and night for an opening so as to attack the moment her guard was down.

She would lower it no more.

They had past that stage long ago.

“Let’s get one thing straight, girl.” The twisted wand slid across her forehead, moving several curls out of face. “This little game that you think you’re playing so well? You’ve already lost it. I can see it in your eyes even now. So cocky and confident!” The woman’s eyes gleamed darkly as she corralled Hermione further backwards.

At this point, the woman was far too close for her liking. If she wanted to avoid the woman making physical contact with the rest of her body, her only choice was to sit and backpedal onto the bed, which she did. To her horror, Bellatrix followed, straddling Hermione’s waist like it was the most natural thing to do. She wanted to shout at the woman for her boldness, but she kept on talking before she could even get in one word.

“How sweet. Trying to be daring now that you think you have me figured out. Sorry to break it to you, but I’m already several steps ahead. You see,” Hermione flinched violently when the other woman raised her hand as if to strike her. The blow never came. Instead, the woman’s hand softly came to rest on the side of her face. Her body didn’t release its tension. “I already have you right where I want you. There’s no need to continue our little ‘song and dance’ as you said. Your plan seems so much better! Learn your little spells; sing your little songs if you must. It doesn’t matter in the end. I want you to feel safe…and…sound.” She pats her cheek like a child, the woman getting off her and practically skipping to the door. Her wand returned to her sleeve as she continued talking on her way out of the door.

“And while you’re here making sure that your life is as happy as can be…” She twirled on the tips of her boot, giving Hermione a mocking bow. The smile she had when she raised her head again could cut through steel. “…I’ll make sure the rest of the world suffers in your place!”

“No!” Hermione screamed, jumping to her feet. “You can’t do that!” Came her panicked pleas.

Bellatrix gave her a chilling smile; the woman pulling something from her dress and tossing it in her direction.

“Too bad for you, I’ve already begun.”
The woman left after that, the door slamming in her wake.

Hermione looked down to see a copy of the Daily Prophet. This one dated from a week ago. She picked it up and opened to the front page.

Fat tears rolled down her face as she began to read.

**Attack in Diagon Alley: Hogwarts Staff Member Irma Pince Hospitalized**

The wizarding world was greeted with news of a tragic attack that occurred early yesterday morning in one of our most populated shopping centers. At approx. 10 am, Hogwarts staff member Irma Pince was seen walking alone carrying items from Flourish and Blotts. The woman was said to have been going about her normal routine of shopping at the store when witnesses recall the sound of multiple apparations. Before anyone could react, chaos broke out as the reported two cloaked wizards began casting dark spells around the alley; causing mass hysteria as pedestrians ran for cover.

Several stores opened their doors to get people behind safety charms and away from the danger. Aurors arrived quickly to detain the two suspects, but were unable to bring them in. One assailant was seen grabbing and apparating with Irma Pince at their side. The second unknown figure stayed behind to run distraction as their accomplice got away before disappearing as well.

Four witches and six wizards were taken to the hospital soon after the attack; aurors sticking around to question witnesses and secure the area in case of further attacks. Madam Pince was the only person taken that morning, but was later found unconscious, beaten, and bloody outside a building near Knockturn Alley. The woman was rushed to the hospital and treated for her injuries but has yet to awaken from her magically induced coma.

Diagnostics from the head mediwitch confirmed that the woman was subjected to several dark spells including the torture curse. The Ministry has yet to make an official statement on the attack, but auror Harry Potter has told the public that we may be looking at a potential death eater attack. No dark marks were seen at the crime scene and so far, there have been no further leads about this heinous attack. Aurors and the ministry are encouraging all to be on the lookout for anything suspicious and to alert the proper authorities if anyone has any information.

Our well wishes and condolences go out to Madam Irma Pince and her family. We here at the Daily Prophet are all hoping for her swift and speedy recovery.

Hermione hoped that the other woman could hear her shattering every glass object in the room. If the woman thought that Hermione was going to let her hurt those closest to her, then she had another thing coming.

She needed to speak with Snape as quickly as possible.

It was time she got some answers.
Chapter 20: Unanswered

Once Hermione had finally calmed down, she found that she was starving. The energy she used essentially tearing her room apart made her absolutely ravenous. Crookshanks had also come out from his hiding place, mewling and pawing at her legs as he begged to be fed. She hated that his feeding schedule had been thrown so far out of whack. Crookshanks was loyal and lazy by nature, but as with any animal – or human for that matter- hunger made him into a very irritable being. Nimmy hadn’t come back since that morning and so she decided to venture out on her own. With luck, she could go to the kitchen, grab some food, and leave.

It wasn’t meant to be.

When Hermione went downstairs, there was two things that caught her attention. The first was that the place had been cleaned up. Gone was the broken countertops and destroyed marble floors. Everything was in order like the place wasn’t practically a warzone just a few days before.

The second thing she noticed was Bellatrix, staring at her quietly from her position leaning against the refrigerator. She stopped at the threshold when the other woman gave her a too sweet smile.

Hermione wasn’t amused in the least.

“Lestrange.” She said hotly, crossing her arms as well.

“Muddy.” The woman replied unfazed. “Enjoy the paper? I do so know how much you love reading.”

“You’re a horrid woman. Madam Pince did nothing to you and you put her in the hospital. If I had my wand I’d hex you with every drop of magic I had.” She hissed, causing Bellatrix to laugh and move to rest her elbows on the island counter. The woman looked thoroughly pleased with Hermione’s anger.

“No, she didn’t,” She gave her a cheeky smirk. “But better her than you right?”

Hermione wanted to scream, but she settled for rounding on the woman and giving her a taste of her fury. “You’re unbelievable!”

“And you’re greedy.” Bellatrix said. The woman snapped her fingers. Nimmy appeared and gave the woman a bow. Hermione noted that the poor elf had several welts going up one of his legs. “You. Feed the greedy little rat. If she breaks any of my rules, you will tell me. Or next time, I’ll not be as merciful.” She gave a pointed look at his injured legs.

“Yes Mistress. Nimmy will not disobey again. Nimmy is grateful for Mistress’ mercy.” The little creature swore, never once raising his head to meet either woman’s gaze.

Hearing what Bellatrix asked of Nimmy, she realized that the woman was setting her up for punishment once again. “I’m guessing you’re not going to tell me what those rules are.”

She got a knowing smile. “It’s more fun if you find out for yourself.” Was all she said before leaving the kitchen. Hermione heard the sound of apparating and now it was only her and the little house elf in the kitchen.
Nimmy didn’t speak as he prepared food as he was told. Hermione couldn’t blame him. Both of them knew what would happen if Bellatrix found out about what he did. It still didn’t stop the house elf from doing it though.

No words could express how thankful she was to him, but regardless, when he was done and handed her the food- and providing a little extra for Crookshanks- she thanked him with all her heart and apologized for getting him in trouble. Nimmy nodded and meekly said, “It was Nimmy’s honor.” And then popped away, no doubt going to finish doing the rest of his chores.

Hermione returned to her room and fed Crookshanks, all the while thinking about what had just occurred in the kitchen. Bellatrix didn’t attack her. That should’ve put a smile on her face. Should’ve made her heart settle and a feeling of peace should’ve washed over her.

It did no such thing. In fact, it ended up doing the opposite.

Hermione was internally having a panic attack.

Here she was, sitting in the world’s most dangerous witch’s house; stuffing her face and living in the lap of luxury with her feline companion at her side. Meanwhile, on the outside, the rest of the world was going into chaos at the thought that the dark lord had returned once more.

He hadn’t of course, and Hermione knew that, but the rest of the world aside for a handful of people didn’t. She realized then what was really eating at her.

Guilt.

She felt an endless amount of guilt.

That by Bellatrix not attacking her, she had essentially given up the fight to getting back to them. A little voice kept whispering in her ear that she should be the one on the offense now. That she shouldn’t just sit back and let herself grow comfortable when this was the perfect opportunity for a counterattack.

To her horror, Hermione couldn’t find the courage to do so.

Time and time again Bellatrix had made it clear that the only way she would be free of her would be death. Whether it was hers or Hermione’s didn’t matter anymore. She didn’t dare call her bluff. If given the chance, the young Gryffindor knew that the other woman would gladly destroy herself in an effort to take her out as well. Patience she had to repeat in her head. There were plenty of things she could do aside from testing the waters with the older siren’s threats. Like finding her wand.

She knew that Bellatrix had it somewhere in the mansion; it was just a matter of where. Once she could get around some of the wards on the rooms here, she would begin her search for it. Wandless magic was fine and all, but just from how time consuming it was to master, she knew that having her wand back would benefit her more. The search was not the first thing on her agenda however.

First, she needed to go speak with the late professor.

Hermione could find no trace of Bellatrix or her ruddy bird when she next left her room later that afternoon. It wasn’t uncommon for the witch to spend the whole day gone, which was a good thing for her seeing as it left her free to roam about without worry. Although, now having a feeling as to where the woman was going made her absence seem like a bad thing instead.

Nevertheless, her worry didn’t hinder her mission, and before she knew it, she was standing before Snape’s portrait in no time. The man was sitting in his comfy chair as per usual, his face impassive as
she came in and closed the door behind her.

“Miss Granger.” He greeted. “I was afraid that something happened to you when you didn’t show up these last few days.”

Hermione nodded solemnly. “Something did happen professor. A lot of things actually.” She said.

“Tell me.”

She did.

Hermione went about replaying everything that had occurred within the last couple of days. From the discovering of being on an island surrounded by dangerous waters to the woman’s strange behavior from just earlier that morning. Snape listened with rapt attention, knowing that he would soon have to relay all he heard back to the headmistress and the outside world. Speaking of the headmistress, led her to the real reason she had come down there in the first place.

“Professor,” She began, her tone as serious as can be. “I have questions that need to be answered. Ones that I know I can only get from you and the headmistress.”

That threw Snape for a loop, but he nodded anyways, gesturing for the young witch to ask her questions.

“When I was talking to Bellatrix in the parlor, she said something to me that seemed…off. The book I told you about in the library was missing a page. Bellatrix must’ve asked the same questions I did about what we are and so it didn’t seem too farfetched that she was the one to take it. But she didn’t.” Hermione explained.

“And do you believe her?” He crossed his hands across his lap. “Did you question whether or not this was another one of her ploys to mess with your mind?”

The young woman shook her head. “She was telling the truth. It was written all over her face. Bellatrix doesn’t have it…but she believes she knows who might.”

“Who?”

“Professor McGonagall.” She said. “For some reason, she thinks that the headmistress knows something about what happened to it.” Hermione’s face grew stern. “Professor, I need to know whether she was lying or not.”

“I will inquire about what Minerva might know, but I can’t guarantee that she will provide me an answer.” He promised. Snape rose from his seat and was preparing to exit into his other portrait when Hermione stopped him. He rose his eyebrow in questioning. “Was there something else Miss Granger?”

“This portrait. You didn’t know Bellatrix had it made. And no doubt Bellatrix knew you were a spy after your death since it was plastered across every newspaper in the wizarding world.” Hermione began. “There’s no way that Bellatrix would’ve had this made after finding that out…which means she had this made before you died.”

She cursed herself from not noticing it sooner. Bellatrix had every reason in the world to hate Snape and none to ever have a portrait made of him. There had to have been another reason, one that only the two of them were in on.

From the way the Professor’s face harden, she feared that she may have not been far off from the
truth.

“I must confess, I was already expecting for you to come to me with this realization one day.” He said calmly.

“Then why didn’t you say anything?” She asked. “You know why Bellatrix has your portrait don’t you? Please, I need to know why.”

“I can’t answer that question.” He immediately replied.

Her eyes widened and Hermione was approaching his portrait hastily, irritation already beginning to bubble beneath the surface. “And why not? Professor please. This could help me escape from here!”

Snape shook his head, his composure steady as Hermione’s ire began to rise.

“And again, I cannot.” He sighed and then sat back down in his chair. Snape’s eyes looked haunted, as if whatever he was about to tell her was only going to lead to more trouble. “Miss Granger, let me assure you of one thing; I’m not saying this out of spite or stubborn pride.”

“Then why can’t you just say it? What harm could come to you when you’re already dead!” She asked him.

“I…I made a promise.” He admitted. “…to Bellatrix. An unbreakable vow.”

“The one you made with the Malfoys? That’s void now!” She knew that was true after the death eater trials. Narcissa admitted to making Snape take the vow, hence why he killed Professor Dumbledore in the first place. That vow was null and all parties no longer had to adhere to it. There was something else not right here too. She remembered watching the vow take place and not once did Bellatrix ever mention that Snape wasn’t allow to speak about it. She called him on it. “I was there at the trial. Bellatrix never said you couldn’t talk about the vow.”

Hermione noted that he was refusing to meet her eyes now.

“She did not…but that was only true for the second vow.” He whispered. There was fear in his eyes now and that alone was enough to set Hermione on edge. “My association with Bellatrix stems back many years Miss Granger. I knew her when we were young. When I was still foolish and looking to gain the dark lord’s favor.”

She was shocked at what she was hearing. There was a second vow. No one, not even Narcissa spoke about there being a second one. ‘More than likely she didn’t know.’ She told herself. If what Snape was saying was true, then there were only three people in the world who knew about it. One was Bellatrix, the other was Snape, and the third was whomever bound them together. Hermione’s brain was doing backflips. Every time she thought she was getting somewhere, there was always something new coming along to send her three steps back.

But she was tired of not getting answers.

“You’re dead Professor. The vow no longer applies.” She told him, to which he shook his head. “Why not?”

“Bellatrix was thorough in her wording. The word she used was never.”

“But you’re a portrait!” She yelled, finally losing her temper.

“And portraits are magical objects, you silly girl!” Snape snapped back just as harshly. “The moment
I try to tell you of what the vow entailed, I will be rendered into an ordinary photograph! Then who will help you escape from here? Hmm? *Think*, Miss Granger!” He reigned in his temper but the scowl adorning his face failed to lessen. “Do you believe me to be working alongside Lestrange? Have you suddenly grown reason to doubt my actions?” He asked.

Hermione didn’t speak, but she shook her head. No, she didn’t think the Professor was out to get her, but her frustration was palpable at this point. She snuffed as her eyes began tearing up. She covered her face with her hands in the hopes that the professor couldn’t see how much she was letting her emotions take hold of her.

“They need to trust me on this. The only one who can answer that question now is Bellatrix herself. Myself and the one who bound us together are both dead.” He told her. Snape got out of his chair again. “I’m sorry Miss Granger. As much as I can try and help you, I cannot help you on this.”

“Bellatrix will never tell me herself.” She looked up at him with watery eyes. “She only tells me things she knows will upset me.”

Snape gave her a strange then, a cross between a bitter smile and a grimace.

“Might I give you a piece of advice Miss Granger?” She nodded. What did she have to lose anyways.

His words grew quiet, causing Hermione to lean in to hear him better. “*Never*. Bellatrix Lestrange does not abide by that word. She may have bound me with it, but she would not allow that term to ever be used on herself. She’s proven to me twice before that there’s only one way that word apply to her.” He gave her a sad smile.

“*Never assume Bellatrix won’t break her own rules for what she wants.*”

Professor Snape left after that; gone to relay their conversation to the headmistress and the ministry, his last words ringing in her ears like a bell.

In the end, Hermione felt their whole talk was somewhat worthless. She didn’t get any of the answers she came searching for. Just more questions. The young siren buried her face into the palms of her hands and let out a short scream. She was getting a headache from the toxic mixture of stress and frustration swimming around her skull.

Hermione left the hidden room and returned to her soft bed upstairs. A bitter part of her hated how easy it was becoming to call this room hers. It wasn’t really, and she knew that, but there was no denying that she was comfortable. Having food in her stomach, clothes on her back, and her body not aching from a curse or a beating- there was no way that even she was fool enough not to take advantage of that. Hermione already knew how unpredictable Bellatrix could be. The moment that woman found some new way to torment her, she would be the first person to know about it.

The young siren just hoped that the time for that wouldn’t happen any time soon.
Chapter 21: The Cost of Idleness

Chapter Summary

I would say this is the prelude to all that delicious romance we are all looking forward to. Give a little salve to heal the slow-burn we are all going through. Including myself. Thank you all for sticking around whilst i try to get my life together outside of this story.

Chapter 21 – The Cost of Idleness

It would be another gloomy, rain filled afternoon when Hermione Granger would experience something unexpected.

She was growing restless.

Hermione never thought that was something she would be saying in her current predicament, and even now she was afraid to call it what it really was.

_Boredom._

A week passed by in the blink of any eye. Bellatrix was in and out of the house much more frequently than she had been in the past. Most of those days, she wouldn’t even spare Hermione a single glance. Where she was going and what she was doing; Hermione didn’t know, but she knew it was something bad. The woman refused to answer her when she asked and any other questions she had were met with a mocking attitude and jibes. Hermione was quite frustrated with the childish attitude, but in all actuality, that wasn’t what was bothering her most.

No, her biggest frustration was the fact that Professor Snape had yet to return to his portrait.

On the first day, she wasn’t really expecting him to. Hermione knew that his talk with the headmistress would more than likely be a lengthy one and therefore he wouldn’t be back until the next evening.

Except he hadn’t shown then either.

Or any of the days after that.

Hermione went down whenever Bellatrix left but no matter how much she called out to him, Professor Snape would not answer or appear before her.

She was starting to panic. Just a bit though.

He had never done this before. A tiny voice was creeping up and telling her that something bad had happened. There were so many scenarios running through her head. Everything from his castle portrait being destroyed to him actually working with Bellatrix to trick her somehow. Immediately she scolded herself for ever thinking that.

Severus Snape was many things, but a traitor he was not.

She did trust him and there was shame in her heart that she had dared to question his loyalty.
Still, trusting or not, there were too many reasons for Hermione to be on edge and so she started to try and soothe her fears through the few comforts she had access to. The library became her new hiding place. The young siren picked books of all types of genres from the shelves, skimming and delving into them at a rapid pace. Hermione knew she was reading out of stress rather than enjoyment. By the time she had blown through her twelfth book, she couldn’t even remember what the previous eleven were even about. Words skated pass her eyes and then flew off into the darkest parts of her mind. Her skin felt tight with tension; a feeling that was threatening to burst through at any minute now.

What made it worse was the voice humming away at the back of her mind.

All the stress and worrying had started driving her siren side up the wall. Hermione tried to suppress it as much as possible, tried to calm herself down before she lost hold of herself, but it was proving to be more and more difficult by the morning of the seventh day.

‘I don’t even know what day it is. How long have I been here? What month is it?’ She thought to herself as she rolled out of bed to prepare for the day. It seemed that time had lost most of its meaning now. Weeks had gone by and she had stopped counting the days soon after she was first kidnapped. The realization was enough to pull a distressed keen from the back of her throat, one that no amount of calming could stop.

She needed to find something to distract herself until she could get her emotions under control. Something that would stop her from thinking about Snape and Bellatrix and sirens and…

“I need to clean something.” She announced to no one, bolting from the room to head down to the kitchen.

It wasn’t something she did often, but in times like now- when her brain is going a mile a minute and reading cannot calm her- she cleaned. Didn’t matter what it was either. Floors, tables, dishes- Hermione just needed something to focus on. Her parents were both upset and pleased at this development when she was a little girl. On the one hand it meant that the house was going to get a much-needed washing at the end of the day.

On the other hand, if Hermione was cleaning like a madwoman, then that usually meant she was upset about something or was having trouble of some kind.

A win-lose situation.

Right now however, neither of her parents were there to comfort her or calm her anxieties. It was just her and her restless hands.

Hermione entered the kitchen and was overjoyed to see that no one was there. Bellatrix had popped away earlier that morning and Nimmy and that ruddy bird were no where to be seen. She had the whole place to herself. Unfortunately, that was where her luck had run out.

The room was already spotless.

It was clear that Nimmy had already given the place a once over before moving onto the rest of the household. Hermione wanted to pretend that she wasn’t upset, but she was. Until she thought of something that in hindsight was rather silly.

‘If there isn’t a mess to clean, I’ll just have to make one.’ And before anyone could stop her, she was already moving towards the various cabinets scattered about the room.

The place was stocked to the nine. Seasonings and cans of all types lined every shelf and the fridge
was bursting with fresh produce. She had a lot of material to work with for what she had in mind.

Baking.

Hermione didn’t cook much, if at all. Being at Hogwarts had spoiled her greatly. Food had never been lacking there and the kitchen staff made sure that everything was prepared and ready at every meal time. The only other times that she tried her hand at cooking of any type was at the Burrow with Miss Weasly and the small things made over a fire in the woods with Ron and Harry. Of course, she didn’t really consider the latter to be cooking but, it was something at least seeing as she didn’t cook when she was at home with her family.

As a child, her parents feared that she would hurt herself if she tried working around in the kitchen with them. Hermione couldn’t blame them. She was as curious now as she was back then and that was something she knew drove her parents up a wall. While she wasn’t much of a troublemaker-nothing like some of her other classmates when they were young- Hermione did get up to quite a few misadventures in her youth due to her curiosity. Nothing like what happened when she came to Hogwarts, but enough that her father definitely had a few grey hairs before he had even reached his mid-30s.

Her curiosity wasn’t always a bad thing though. It led to Hermione watching others do things rather than try them herself. It was the only reason she even knew what she was doing as she gathered ingredients to make scones. Her mother loved making scones and Hermione loved stuffing her face with them when they eventually popped out of the oven. Those times had been incredibly relaxing. Her mom would be humming away at the stove while her father read his dentist magazine subscriptions at the table. Sometimes Hermione would sit on his lap and he would read to her as if talking to one of his patients at work.

*If you’re going to eat all these sweets Hermione, you should know how to take care of your little chompers like your old man.*

He used to tell her that all the time. Of course, the younger her had took every word seriously, but as an adult, Hermione knew that her parents would throw a fit if they saw the state of her teeth now. Until she remembered that they were still obliviated living in Australia.

“No! Don’t think about that right now.” She began pounding her fists into the pile of dough before her. “You’ll see them again Hermione. You will.”

The young woman began preparing her other ingredients. Once she felt the dough was in a shape that she was satisfied with, she opened the fridge to grab some fruit for the filling. Hermione had just laid her hands on the bag of berries when a sharp croak from somewhere behind her made her jump and bash her head against the door behind her.

“Ow! For Merlin’s sake!” She hissed, exiting the cold box. When she turned to look behind her, there was Bellatrix’s familiar looking at her with amused, yellow eyes. When it started doing its weird chittering laugh, she snapped at it. “You ruddy beast! Must you sneak up on me all the time!”

The bird just continued to mock her. It was standing tall on the island countertop, far too close to her food for her liking. With the fruit in hand, she walked over and tried to shoo it away. “Get out of here! Can’t you see I’m in the middle of something? I don’t want you getting feathers and dirt in my scones!” She said, waving at it to move away. The bird didn’t hop away like she hoped but did take a few steps away from the food. Its proximity was still too close for her liking, yet she returned to her work anyways. Assembling her pastries was easy to do and the more she got lost in her preparations, the easier it was to ignore her unwanted guess.
Except it seemed that the bird didn’t’ appreciate her lack of attention. Before she could stop it, the creature was dipping a sharp beak into her bag of berries and gobbling them all up.

“Hey! I’m using those!” She shrieked and tried pulling the bag away from it. It pecked at her hand and then dived back into its thievery. “Argh! You’re just as bad as she is!” She yelled, this time succeeding when she reached for the bag again. “Ha! Now off with you! Don’t you have something else better to do?”

Yellow eyes narrowed with irritation. The creature rapped its sharp talons against the countertop, all the while looking at Hermione like a petulant child. She braced herself. If it was anything like Bellatrix, then it wasn’t too far off to expect retaliation for her actions. The avian had already attacked her in the past.

Multiple times actually.

It wasn’t out of the realm to think that it wasn’t above doing it again now.

She sighed.

All she wanted was to bake and take her mind away from her ever-building stress and she couldn’t even do that! Part of her wanted to just give in, clean up, and return to her room where she knew she could at least get a little bit of peace and quiet.

That would mean going back to being alone with her thoughts however and quite frankly, that was the last thing Hermione knew she needed right now.

She decided to reach for a middle ground.

The Gryffindor went over to the counter near the sink and pulled a medium sized black bowl from one of the cabinets. When she returned to the counter, she grabbed a few handfuls of the mixed berries and placed them inside before sliding it over to the bird. It looked at it as if to ask ‘what am I to do with this?’ to which Hermione answered the unspoken question by saying, “I don’t need all of them. If I give you those, will you stop eating my ingredients?”

For a moment, all it did was stare at her in silence. She thought that perhaps her peace offering didn’t work, but then something changed in the beast’s demeanor. It croaked at her once before folding its long, thin legs beneath it to sit upon the counter, wings pulled tight against its sides. The creature began pecking at the bowl, this time at a much slower pace. Hermione noted that the wispy tail it usually dragged behind it was dancing in the air like a ribbon as it ate its reward with content.

Hermione chuckled lowly to herself. Even with how vile and intelligent the bird was, it still shared the same weakness as most animals.

Food.

Hermione used that to her advantage as she went about her way. She kept prepping everything, stealing a berry or two for herself between tasks. When the black bowl was empty, she immediately refilled it, keeping her intruder full and sedated whilst she worked.

Things went smoothly from there on and Hermione had her scones in the oven baking away. The smell of sweet dough and berries filled the air, nearly bowling the siren over with a wave of nostalgia. She was reminded of days where the only things she had to worry about was school and making her parents proud of her. Unbidden, a trill of longing bubbled up from her throat and filled the air with a sorrowful sound.

She was quite startled when an answering warble came from in front of her.
Hermione looked up.

The bird was no longer eyeing her with the dark irritation from earlier. Now its gaze was more open, curious she would go so far to say. The fluffy black crest atop its head was fluffed out like a cockatoo, waving to and fro as it tilted its head to eye her down. For once, Hermione didn’t feel like it was looking for a fight. Crookshanks often got like this when she brought him new toys to play with. The feline would sit and watch her with bright luminescent eyes until he finally made up its mind and took whatever she had brought with hesitant paws. To see the same look on the creature’s face was strange and unexpected to say the least. She wondered why it was doing it now and recalled what she had just done.

Her voice.

Thinking back, she remembered that using her powers against it was just as effective as it was against Bellatrix. Hermione wondered what was going through its mind. Did the sound anger it? Please it? Or was it just curious? She couldn’t imagine Bellatrix singing to the creature like she did Crookshanks. Then again, the bird was probably the only one Bellatrix would sing in front of.

Hermione found herself wanting to test that.

Glancing over at the stove, the siren could see the timer reading ten more minutes before her scones would be ready. She had time for a small experiment.

She needed to practice using her powers more anyways.

Hermione prodded her siren side to fill her chest with a soft and light-hearted hum. To her surprise, the bird seemed to perk up at the sound. ‘Maybe I was wrong.’ She thought as she began humming a bit louder.

At first, the words simply would not come to her. She’d almost forgotten what it was like to sing for something other than healing or self-defense. Luckily her siren side was there to pick up the slack. Before they left her lips, Hermione could already hear the words swirling around at the forefront of her mind. A song that she sang when her parents went on one of their business trips for their job one winter. Hermione was around 12 then; an age where they felt more comfortable leaving her at home by herself. She remembered the first day she was left alone. The house she had grew up in never felt so large. It seemed that every breath she took echoed off the walls three times louder now that she was the only one there to fill the void. Hermione wished she had siblings then. Maybe then she wouldn’t have had to comfort herself until her parents returned later on that evening.

Her instincts were quite fond of pulling up her past in an effort to try and lift her spirits. She started singing the only song she sung for her parents when they weren’t around.

*Stoke the fire, light the house*

*Mother said don’t scream or shout*

*Close the windows, lock the doors*

*Father said to mind the floors*

*Witching hour, coming soon*

*Watch the sun become the moon*
They’ll return from whence they roam

Mother, Father, come back home

It was hard for Hermione to smile. Forgotten words came flooding back to her and filled her with the same sadness that she exuded when she sang it alone in her kitchen so many years ago.

In her trance-like state, she failed to notice the bird was bobbing its head along, its topaz eyes ignited with something inquisitive.

Midnight comes and midnight goes

Cars past through the winter snow

Footsteps covered by rain and hail

Blown away by winter’s gale

Go ride out the coming storm

Mother, father, please come home

It was strange seeing how her words as a child were still able to hold up as an adult. There did come a night where her childhood fears came to fruition and no matter how long Hermione stayed up waiting; her parents never did return to her.

The only difference was that it was because of what she had done.

She didn’t mean to get emotional. The reason she had come down here in the first place was to forget about her worries. Hermione was broken from her turmoil by the dinging of the timer.

She left the counter and went to the stove. Bending to remove the hot scones from the oven, she was wondering about the bird’s reaction to her singing. Clearly it was listening. Animals were affected by her voice just as much as other humans but it seemed that it hadn’t done anything out of the ordinary aside from bobbing its head along. It wasn’t even entranced like Crookshanks was afterwards. The creature was a conundrum. She wished she knew what kind of bird it was. Never in any of her books had she come across something like it. Hermione wanted to ask Bellatrix, yet she knew doing so wouldn’t be worth the trouble in the long run.

Hermione ignored it for now. She had better things to worry about like the delicious smelling treats before her. Of course, she would need to wait a bit for them to cool off, but it was a small price to pay for her hard work.

The siren had just set the scones down on the countertop when as quick as a whip, the black and grey bird snapped forward and gobbled down three of the piping hot pastries. Hermione shrieked in dismay and immediately picked the plate back up and away from the greedy creature.

“Are you mad! Those are burning hot!” She harped, scolding it like a dog owner to their misbehaving pet.
The bird gave her a mocking look and then let off a throaty laugh, clearly unphased by her ire.

It didn’t seem to have been bothered by the heat of the scones either.

“What even are you?” She asked aloud.

“None of your business muddy.” A voice came from her left.

Wide eyes turned to see Bellatrix appear in the doorway. The woman was smirking at her as she entered the room. At her appearance, the bird trained its attention on its master and began crooning at her. Bellatrix ignored Hermione completely as she walked over to run her pale hands down her familiar’s fluffy crest. What a sight the two made, Hermione said inside her head. Two, wild haired, black beasts whose only purpose in life was to torment her.

They were made for each other.

She would’ve said as much, but Hermione wasn’t looking for a fight today.

She just wanted to get her mind away from her growing frustrations and eat her scones. There was that brief bout of curiosity with the creature sitting across from her, but had she known her prying would attract Bellatrix’s attention, she would’ve left well enough alone.

Hermione wondered if it was too much to ask to leave the kitchen with her snacks without causing more troubles.

The way Bellatrix was looking at her told her not likely.

“Making a mess of my kitchen, girl?” The woman cooed.

“I was just about to clean up and leave.” She answered as neutrally as possible. Hermione turned around to the sink and began washing the utensils. She really wasn’t looking start anything with Bellatrix right now and she knew the longer she stayed in the other woman’s presence, then the chance of that happening grew more and more. Just to move it along a bit faster, Hermione used a bit of her magic to rinse and put the dishes away on the drying rack. This didn’t go unnoticed by Bellatrix.

“Now, now, what’s the rush? You didn’t seem to be in a hurry a few minutes ago.” Hermione could feel the woman’s eyes burning into the back of her neck, but she decided not to take the bait and kept washing. Hermione refused to turn away from the sink. She didn’t want the woman to see her burning cheeks from being caught singing to her familiar.

“I’m not rushing. This is just more efficient than doing them by hand.”

“Hardly,” Hermione could hear the smile in the woman’s voice now. “Though I’m sure that filthy little miscreant is bashing its skull in with a broom somewhere. With you having taken its job and all. See, that’s the fun with owning house elves. No need to punish them when they’re perfectly fine with doing that all on their own.” The woman threw her head back in laughter, her familiar joining in on it as well.

Hermione was going to hold her tongue. Honestly, she was. But hearing the woman take shots at innocent little Nimmy like that was enough to ignite a flame of anger in her belly. She was well aware of the self-destructive guilt that all house elves seemed to carry. It sickened her to no end. And the fact that Bellatrix could stand there and joke about it – encourage it – was enough for her to stop what she was doing and give her a piece of her mind.
“Must you always be such a horrible woman?” She hissed and turned to look at the older witch leaning casually against the island counter. “Must every word that comes from your mouth be as vile and wicked as you are?”

“Did I touch a nerve?” Bellatrix cooed mockingly.

“Hardly,” Hermione threw the woman’s earlier response back at her. “Unlike you, I just don’t find much enjoyment in tormenting others.”

“Isn’t this precious. The weak defending the weak.” The woman started twisting a finger through one of the long curls hanging over her shoulder; a habit Hermione knew the woman did when she was either amused or feeling especially vindictive. She wondered which territory she was stepping into now. “I’m sure the help will be ecstatic to know they have such a powerful savior looking after them now.”

“Easy to say to someone who’s had their wand stolen.” Hermione sniped, causing Bellatrix to chuckle at her angry expression.

“House elves don’t have wands and can still do more than you.” The older siren taunted.

Hermione doesn’t remember moving, but next thing she knew, she was standing directly across from Bellatrix, slamming her hands down on the counter. The woman didn’t even flinch from the show of aggression. If anything, it only made her amused smirk grow wider.

“You don’t know what I can do.” She said hotly.

In hindsight, probably not the best thing to say to a woman like Bellatrix. Hermione knew it the moment the dark witch’s eyes became alight with childish joy.

“Is that a challenge?” Bellatrix whispered.

No. “Yes.” Came Hermione’s immediate reply.

Idiot! She internally screamed at herself. It was times like these that she remembered why she didn’t get into Ravenclaw like she expected to when she first came to Hogwarts. Yes, she was all about scholarship and learning, but there was a level of courage and pride that Hermione possessed which was stronger than even that. She had always felt a need to prove herself; she just never wanted to admit that out loud. What good was her knowledge and books if she couldn’t take what she had learned and used it to her advantage? Hermione imagined she’d make a horrible witch if she was never able to cast the spells and charms she knew so much about.

With that being said, it was her need to prove herself that had also lead her into situations like this one. Times where her abilities were called into question and her friends were being mistreated; both things that her Gryffindor pride would not let slide without a fight. She had a feeling that Bellatrix knew that as well, hence calling Hermione out on it.

Well, she had already stuck her foot in her mouth; her only hope was that Bellatrix would go easy on her.

Behind her, the scones she had worked so hard on were left untouched.

“Fine then,” Bellatrix began after a small bout of silence. “Let’s have a duel.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow, bemused at the suggestion. “I imagine you’ll be giving me my wand back then?” She asked.
“No. Wands.” Bellatrix said, still twirling her fingers through her hair. “Wandless magic only.”

Now she had Hermione’s full attention. She wondered if this was a trick. That the moment she tried to attack the woman, she would whip out her wand and then Hermione would be left writhing on the floor as the older woman laughed above her. She brought it up. “And how do I know you’ll keep to your word?”

Narrowed eyes stared her down. “If you really think I need my wand to handle you muddy, then I think the captivity has finally gotten to your silly, little head.” She cooed.

Hermione hesitated for only a second before she agreed. “Fine. A witch’s duel. No wands; wandless magic only.” Suddenly another thought came to mind. “Winner gets a reward of their choice.”

“Interesting. I wonder what the little rat will ask for.” Bellatrix said. Hermione could hear the question all the same.

“I want my wand back.”

“Like that’s gonna happen. Don’t push it, girl.” Bellatrix hissed and Hermione could tell that she was treading on thin ice. She wasn’t really expecting the woman to agree anyways, but it was still worth a shot. She tried thinking of something else; something that could benefit her in the long run.

“Un-curse the house.” She said. This time, Bellatrix didn’t immediately deny her.

“And why would I do that? Not like you can leave this island even if I did.” She said.

“Then it shouldn’t be a problem, right?” Hermione said. She grew a smirk of her own. “Unless of course you think I can.” She was hoping that Bellatrix was as prideful as she was on this one.

“Alright then,” It seemed that she was. “Let’s go play.” Bellatrix stood up and lifted her arm out. Without a word between them, the bird rose to its feet and stepped onto it. It still amazed her how Bellatrix was able to carry such a large creature without so much as breaking a sweat. She figured it was lighter than it looked.

Regardless, Hermione followed the two out of the room to no doubt go somewhere more suited for a duel. As she walked far behind them, two things were bothering her to no end.

The first was that her precious scones were still sitting on the counter in the kitchen, more than likely destined to be cleaned up by the house elves.

The second was that Bellatrix never told her what she wanted from her should she win their little contest.

At the back of her mind she could feel her siren side crooning in happiness. One would think that would make her feel better, but considering the situation she was heading into now, she knew its random burst of happiness only spelled trouble for her.

Trouble that more than likely had everything to do with Bellatrix.

‘What have I gotten myself into?’ She groaned.

Her walk felt more and more like a death march the further into the house they went.
Chapter 22 - All Fun and Games

Chapter Notes

*Peeks in to see disgruntled readers* 0v0 Oh...so yeah. What's good? ^_^' Ah! I'm sorry for disappearing on you guys again! I'm such a bum scrub, I know! Trying to get my life together right now. Adulting sucks. I want a refund.

However, I've returned! Risen from the ashes like a phoenix albeit, one who can't seem to stay alive long enough for burning day. ^.^'

Again, if you're new, welcome! If you're a day one, welcome back! Thank you all for reading, dropping kudos, and reviewing. It never fails to lift my spirits and get to typing again for you guys and gals. Here's the three chapter update as usual! Please enjoy!

Chapter 22: All Fun and Games

The area Bellatrix led her to was a ballroom, or at least used to be one.

It was a lavish room that stretched nearly as wide as the Great hall. Vast windows lined the entirety of the right wall, allowing sunlight to bathe the room in rays of yellow and white. She looked down at the mosaic tiled floors and saw how the light bouncing off of its surface reminded her of looking beneath an ocean wave. The same columns she’d seen in other places around the house were here as well; perfectly aligned in two rows of three going down the length of the room. Above them, chandeliers swayed lightly back and forth from the displacement of opening the door. Hermione thought they would turn on automatically like all the others in the house but they remained dark. Because of this, the left side of the room was swallowed by shadow.

Other than those few things, there was nothing truly special about the ballroom. It was barren and dusty to boot. No tables or chairs or cabinets to be seen anywhere. There was a booming echo stirring every time they took a step. An ideal place for a duel; though she hated that the columns were the only place she would be able to duck for cover should things get serious.

Hermione stopped when she was between the first two sets of pillars. Bellatrix kept walking until she stopped between the second set quite a few yards away from where she stood. She twirled on the heel of her boots and struck Hermione with a nasty look.

Sensing the situation it was in, the bird hopped off the woman’s arm and flew up to perch on one of the chandeliers above. It swayed dangerously from the sudden added weight. Hermione feared it was going to come crashing down at any moment. It didn’t. The creature bent its legs and settled down; comfortable to watch the duel clear out of harm’s way.

The only sounds were that of a tree branch clacking against the outside of one of the windows. The noise reverberated off the walls, filling the room with an ambiance that made her anxious. Hermione had her full attention on Bellatrix, wondering which one of them was going to move first. Her stance turned defensive. She had a feeling that Bellatrix was going to hit her with a barrage of spells the second she saw a weak point.

She waited.
And waited.

Nothing.

Bellatrix hadn’t moved to attack in the slightest. She was looking at Hermione in disgust. She opened to ask the woman to get on with it but Bellatrix beat her to it.

“Your kind really have no sense of decorum.” She bellowed from across the room, her high-pitched screech only made louder by the vast, empty room.

“My kind?” Hermione wasn’t surprised by the woman’s sudden shift in mood. She was practically legendary for it at this point. Still, she had no idea what the other witch was going on about.

“Mudbloods!” The woman growled. “Your vulgarity disgusts me! You learn our magic, change our traditions, then cry to your precious ministry about how the big, mean purebloods are bullying us! Pathetic!”

“I am not a mudblood!” Hermione screamed. “Its muggleborn! You’re yelling at me and won’t even tell me why you’re yelling.”

It was true. Hermione had no idea what she had done since entering the room to set the other woman off.

“When dueling an opponent, you are to bow beforehand!” Bellatrix told her.

And suddenly Hermione was hit by a memory of something Harry had told her during their fourth year.

‘Before me and Voldemort battled at the graveyard, he forced me to bow. Told me not to forget my manners. Never thought I’d see the Dark Lord bow to anyone, let alone his greatest enemy.’

It made sense then, Bellatrix’s indignation. Purebloods, even the worse of the worse, were all about their traditions. Voldemort was ready to burn the world to the ground for them; despite being muggleborn himself. Hermione hadn’t been in any duels where she one; had reason to bow, seeing as most of her friends didn’t follow the old ways. And two; had time to do so when she was fighting for her life. It had never really crossed her mind seeing as in a real situation, there was no time for bowing. Survival over decorum.

With that being said, bowing in the presence of Bellatrix was the last thing she wanted to do anyways. It would be like presenting her neck to a predator. The moment she did, the older woman would have no trouble taking advantage of the situation. That was her underline reasoning, the one she would’ve used if someone asked her why she failed to follow proper dueling etiquette.

The real reason was much simpler to explain.

She neither respected nor liked Bellatrix.

There was nothing the woman had said or done to her to earn either of those things.

But this wasn’t about respect for the person; it was respect for the traditions of the duel. Voldemort, the darkest wizard of their time- the man whose sole purpose in life was to kill Harry Potter- wasn’t even above bowing to his mortal enemy.

By no means did she forgive Bellatrix for throwing that dirty word at her, but Hermione didn’t quite have the fire to be mad at the other woman’s actions. Especially since this time around, Hermione
knew where she was coming from and was not trying to start a real fight with the other woman.

She relaxed her stance and dropped slightly into a bow. It wasn’t very deep, but it seemed to please Bellatrix anyways, for she grabbed the sides of her black dress and gave her a curtsey in return.

“Looks like my pet can learn a new trick.” Bellatrix’s eyes ignited with frenzy. “Good.”

Bellatrix snapped her wrist in her directions and a yellow spell came flying towards her. Hermione shot out of the way knowing that there was no way she would be able to cast a proper protego to deflect it. When the next spell came her way however, she threw up the protection charm and blocked it.

The duel had officially begun.

Immediately, Bellatrix was on the offense while Hermione defended. She didn’t want to waste her magic on strictly blocking though; diving out of the way whenever possible to conserve her magic for when she could find an opening. Red, blue, yellow, orange- the woman was bombarding her with stunners and other incantations she couldn’t identify right off the back. Her hands were a flurry of precise and fluid movements. Hermione was grateful that the pillars were there in the room. They provided her with a small amount of protection for when she needed to take a breather from Bellatrix’s assault. She didn’t rely heavily on them however. Bellatrix wasn’t above obliterating her own house if she needed to. Best keep her from destroying her only barriers or else this duel would be over before it had even started.

“You can’t dream of defeating me while only on the offense, girl!” The woman laughed from across the room.

She was aware. Hermione just needed an opening to do something about it. She observed the other woman’s position and came up with a plan.

The young Gryffindor ducked behind the pillar towards the darker side of the room, hoping Bellatrix would fall into her trap.

To her luck, she did.

Having no way to properly see Hermione, Bellatrix had no choice but to change her angle, inadvertently moving in front of one of the columns.

Hermione struck.

Appearing around the opposite side, she sent a blasting charm straight at Bellatrix. Unsurprisingly, she batted it away. Hermione counted on that. The woman thought she was going on the offense; preparing to block any and all oncoming attacks. She cast two blasting spells next, only one headed towards Bellatrix; the second missing it’s mark completely. The older witched laughed at Hermione’s supposed poor aim.

Hermione smiled.

The second charm went exactly where she wanted it to- striking the column directly behind Bellatrix. Hermione smirked when a chunk of it came tumbling down.

Bellatrix looked up in shock before throwing both arms up to deflect the falling marble.

Hermione took the opportunity to cast stupefy and sent the now distracted Bellatrix careening across the mosaic floor. Watching the woman slide along the shimmering tiles was the most satisfying thing
she had seen in a long time. It was enough to even put a genuine smile on her face.

Bellatrix popped up, hair in utter disarray, glaring at Hermione from her sprawled position on her bottom. Above them, the bird was doing its throaty chuckle, sending Hermione into a giggle fit of her own.

She really wasn’t expecting to enjoy this as much as she was. Maybe it was because the woman wasn’t actively trying to kill her. Hermione felt a little more at ease knowing that if anything, as angry as Bellatrix got with her, she would still respect the rules of the duel. That knowledge was enough for her to let her guard down, if only a little bit.

“Something funny, muddy?!” Bellatrix hissed. “You’ve only won the first of three bouts. I won’t fall for that little trick a second time.” She blew a curl from in front of her face.

If Hermione didn’t know any better, she swore the woman was pouting. It was an amusing thought.

So much so that she accidently let too much of her emotions slip through her control. A delighted chitter escaped her throat before she could stop it. She yelped and slapped a hand over her mouth. Hermione ducked back behind the pillar and prayed the other woman hadn’t heard her.

A rattling growl began to permeate the air, letting her know that Bellatrix had heard her loud and clear.

Hermione cried out in shock as the sound of footsteps came speeding towards her direction. It seemed that Bellatrix was done playing games. The young siren danced out from her hiding spot and into the center of the room.

Only to see no one.

She started looking around but no matter where her eyes roamed, she couldn’t locate the other woman. Her eyes drifted to the far side of the room; the only place the woman would have a chance of hiding. It was bathed in darkness and the woman was dressed in all black. Wide eyes darted around trying to catch even a tiny glimpse of the woman’s pale skin.

Nothing.

It was during her frantic searching that she finally took notice that the darkness seemed a bit… unnatural.

Hermione couldn’t even see the door they came through earlier because it was so dark. It was still the middle of the day. She backed away towards the window, putting as much distance between herself and the opposite side of the room as possible.

This was clearly the work of a spell.

She heard Bellatrix laughing, the chilling noise echoing all around her. Her guard was completely up, ready for every and anything the woman may throw at her next.

She heard the birds before she saw them.

Springing from the darkness, a flock of black birds came charging straight at her. They dive bombed and Hermione had no choice but to start stunning them. She hissed at the irony; she had pulled a similar stunt on Ron not too long ago. She never thought it would come back to bite her one day. The pecking was more of a nuisance than painful luckily and they were rather weak, all things considered.
A blue spell came spiraling towards her. The bushy haired girl dodged with ease, causing it to slam into the window behind her. To her horror, the humongous window at her back blew inwards, raining glass down upon her in dangerously sharp sheets. She threw up a *protego* and ran perpendicular to the windows. Bellatrix obviously meant for her to be frightened and run towards where she was hiding on the opposite side of the room. She had no plans to play into her hands. She stopped running only for the woman to blow out another window. She couldn’t stop. Hermione kept sprinting, glad that the room provided ample space to get away.

In her focusing on the window though, she wasn’t prepared for Bellatrix’s next move.

One moment she was running, the next she heard the crack of a whip and something thin and strong wrapping around her middle. The girl yelped as with a surprising amount of force, she was yank straight off her feet. Her body hit the ground hard before being pulled at an alarming rate across the room and into the darkness. She opened her eyes as wide as possible; desperate to see even a *tiny* bit of anything around her. It was pointless. The artificial darkness was far too dense.

“*Lumos!*” She whispered, conjuring a tiny ball of light in her hands. She held it close to her chest and kept pumping magic into it in order to brighten the area. Around her waist, the black whip tightened. She juggled the spell to one hand and tried tugging on the whip as hard as she could. With luck, she could pinpoint Bellatrix’s position and-

There was a knife at her neck.

“I *win.*” A sultry voice whispered right next to her head.

The darkness cleared away like smoke drifting out a window. Hermione’s eyes burned from being exposed to the sudden rush of light.

Bellatrix was crouched above her head; one hand holding a whip, the other holding a knife to her neck. The look of smugness on her face was reminiscent of a cat catching a canary.

It made her blood boil.

“You cheated. I thought we said no wands.” She hissed.

Bellatrix laughed. “And I’m not using my wand.” To prove her point, the knife was taken from her throat and became a small bead that looked like it had come off of the woman’s black dress. Likewise, the whip unwound itself and became what appeared to be strands of the woman’s hair twisted together. She threw them both to the ground. “Do you *really* think the Dark Lord would have me as his right hand if I’d be as useless as you without my wand?”

Hermione cursed softly to herself. She refused to admit it, but the woman had a point.

Now by no means was Hermione defenseless without her wand. She could hold her own if need be…*but* she wasn’t so prideful to think that she could hold two transfiguration spells, a spell of darkness, *and* still be able to attack and defend at her current level.

Eventually? Yes, it was possible. She was confident of that much at least.

But not right now.

Bellatrix hadn’t cheated.

This round was hers.
Though that didn’t mean she had won.

“The next round decides it.” She told the woman.

Bellatrix danced away, practically skipping back to where they first started between the pillars. “Best then get on your feet muddy, I won’t go easy on you this time.” She yelled.

Hermione hopped to her feet and stomped over into position. “My name is not muddy!” She yelled back. Hermione didn’t notice it, but she was far more fired up than usual.

And it wasn’t just because of the name calling.

This was a first on many levels. Bellatrix was dueling her. Not torturing or fighting; but a proper duel. She never thought for one second in her life that the insane woman could ever interact with Hermione in a way that didn’t leave her scarred or a weeping mess. Yet here they were. Of course, the witch had no qualms about hurting her- or disrespecting her at every turn- but she didn’t cut her throat when she was on the ground, so Hermione was going to count that as a win.

It wasn’t just that either.

Aside from the name calling, Bellatrix seemed to be in a good mood. A genuine one. There was a playful quality to how she moved, how she spoke to Hermione now. She would go so far as to say she was enjoying this.

Unbeknownst to the older witch, Hermione was fighting an internal battle with her creature side.

Because she realized that so was she.

Hell would have to freeze over before she would ever let the woman know it, but Hermione was enjoying this. Dueling with Ron and Harry and some of the other’s who were apart of Dumbledore’s army was different. Back then, she was just trying to prepare herself and her friends for battle. The DA club allowed Hermione to show off her skills as a witch; something that never failed to lift her Gryffindor spirit. All she ever wanted to do was prove herself.

She was a muggleborn; there was no shame in that.

Not a single drop.

That didn’t mean she was oblivious to the fact that the wizarding world was going to be forever critical about that. Pursuing anything in her life- no matter her achievements- the title of muggleborn would be attached right before it. She heard it whispered by people in the club even if they meant no harm by it.

‘For a muggleborn, Hermione’s a great teacher’

‘Hermione’s so good in all her classes despite growing up with muggles’

There was always an asterisk next to anything she did in life. She hated it.

She was good in classes because she bust her arse studying day in and day out.

She was a great teacher because she wanted to show that effort for all the world to see. For someone to say her feats were somehow lesser because of her blood enraged her.

And if people find out about her creature status, she knew things would only worsen.
She would be labeled everything else before she could simply be Hermione Granger; brightest witch of her age.

That’s how she always felt when she dueled with her friends in the DA club.

She didn’t feel like that right now.

Right now, she was holding her own in the middle of a wandless duel with Bellatrix Lestrange. She imagined the other witch would hate her even if she was a pureblood. Bellatrix didn’t think she was weak because she was a muggleborn; she thought Hermione was weak in general.

And somehow…she was happy about that fact.

It made her feel like her efforts really meant something. She learned wandless magic mostly by herself. Snape had helped a decent amount, but she practiced on her own and learned new spells without his help once she knew where to begin.

Right now, in this duel, the young Gryffindor was reaping the fruits of her labor. Hermione may have lost the second round, but the first round was hers fair and square.

How many witches - muggleborn or otherwise - can say they’ve done that?

A burning desire to best Bellatrix ignited within her stomach. She needed to win this. Not because of the woman’s horrible treatment up until this point, or even because she wanted the curse lifted from the house. When they first started, yes, those were her goals.

No longer.

Her pride was on the line now.

Hermione needed to prove to the older witch that she wasn’t nearly as powerless as she believed she was. Bellatrix was right; a witch or wizard should be able to defend themselves without their wand as they are able to with it. This was her chance to prove that she was. She didn’t think the other woman would be in a non-murderous mood like this often, so Hermione was going to take advantage of it as much as she could.

Meanwhile, her siren side took advantage of her from its place hovering at the forefront of her mind.

Hermione finally noticed it’s presence as Bellatrix and she circled one another trying to keep the other in their line of sight. Crooning softly with anticipation, she felt its contentment. Hermione knew it wasn’t because of the duel. There was only one thing on its mind as always.

Bellatrix.

Ever since the woman had stopped attacking them outright, there was a constant bombardment of keens and coos buzzing away in her thoughts when in the other siren’s presence. It was like no matter how much she tried to ignore Bellatrix, her siren side would guide their attentions back to every little thing the woman did; highlighting how they should feel about the other woman.

Pleasure that their mate wanted to spend time with them.

That she no longer wanted to hurt them.

She was becoming a proper mate.

She wanted us and-
Hermione knew at these thoughts were not her own and fought them at every turn.

Bellatrix had *not* changed. She saw that clear as day, but her instincts didn’t seem to care.

She knew this would happen.

Cor Echo sirens gained much of their power from emotions. The stronger the emotions, the more her siren side revealed itself. And being locked up here with Bellatrix was an endless rollercoaster of emotions. With the woman’s constant mind games, she was at constant war with herself. Her instincts craved their mate’s attention. Her mind tried to flee from it. Hermione feared that she wouldn’t be able to run for much longer. Even now, the excitement she felt at dueling Bellatrix was enough to invoke a genuine good feeling.

One that her siren side had nothing to do with.

Hermione prayed that she was rescued soon.

The Gryffindor had no more time for silent contemplation. Bellatrix was done waiting around for her to snap out of her internal monologue. The woman sent a stunner flying in her direction which she immediately dived out of the way of. Hermione rolled across the ground and hopped to her feet, casting her own stunner in retaliation.

Bellatrix batted them to the side like they were nothing and began taunting her.

“Is that the best you can do?! How *pathetic*, muddy!” She chuckled. “How’s the *hero* of house elves going to defend her filth if she can’t even beat a wandless witch?”

Hermione knew that stunners simply wouldn’t work if she was going to beat Bellatrix. She needed to try something else. Brown eyes darted around the room looking for something that could turn the tides.

‘There! That’s it!’ Hermione dodged Bellatrix’s next spell and waved her hand over towards the pile of rubble left behind from destroying the second pillar. ‘*Wingardium Leviosa*!’ She whispered to herself. When a rather large rock rose to an appropriate height, she swished her hand in the direction of the other woman and set the stone flying her way. Bellatrix saw the projectile just in time, throwing a shield up to turn the rock to dust. Hermione didn’t stop there. She lifted another rock and sent it flying, this time dropping it directly on top of Bellatrix. Her hope was that the woman couldn’t watch every angle and she could get in a lucky hit.

Rock after rock went flying, but still Bellatrix defended like a champion. The woman appeared to be amused more than intimidated by the dangerous stones hurtling towards her.

Unsurprisingly, this didn’t shock the younger witch.

Things weren’t going great if Hermione was being honest. Bellatrix wasn’t only good at offensive spells. The woman had a solid defense as well; making it all the more difficult for her to gain the upper hand. She could feel her magic draining rapidly. One thing Hermione knew for sure; she would never take her wand for granted ever again. *Wingardium Leviosa* was a first-year spell yet wandlessly, she might as well have been casting sixth year incantations instead. If she didn’t do something quick, she would lose this duel for sure.

And she had *no* plans of learning what the other woman wanted as her reward should that happen.

She ducked behind one of the pillars. Bellatrix’s laugh could be heard resonating throughout the room.
“If you think I’m going to let you keep running like that girl, you have another thing coming!” was all the warning Hermione had before her pillar too was blown to oblivion. But Bellatrix didn’t stop there. Before she could even think about running for the one parallel to her, Bellatrix took out the bottom part of it too. The young woman lunged out of the way just as a particularly large chunk of stone came falling from the ceiling. She was practically out in the open now, something that Bellatrix seemed immensely pleased about. The woman was casting more and more spells, not even appearing to be slowing down.

But Hermione had sharp eyes. Perhaps not as sharp as Harry and all his Quidditch practice, but she was good at noticing little details that could prove advantageous.

Which is how she noticed that Bellatrix was casting with her left hand now.

‘Idiot.’ She cursed herself quietly for not discerning it earlier.

Their entire fight, the woman had been attacking with her dominant right side. But now as she watched the woman throwing spell after spell at her, Hermione could see that Bellatrix had switched to only casting with her left side. She knew that most witches and wizards tried to be proficient when it came to which hand they used to cast. It didn’t make much sense to be only able to use one hand should something happen to the other. No doubt Bellatrix followed that practice as well. And the woman hadn’t pulled any punches up until now, so the only reason for the switch was if she had injured the witch somehow during their scuffle.

She could work with that.

But in order to do so, Hermione was going to have to do something risky.

From her position prone against the marble floor, spells flying overhead and kicking up dust and rubble, Hermione reigned in her resolve. She thought about what Ron and Harry would say if they knew what she was thinking about doing.

‘Harry would call me amazing. Ron would say that I was bloody mad.’ She laughed to herself.

It was the last thought going through her mind before she found herself rolling out from her cover and sprinting full force at Bellatrix. The woman appeared startled for a moment but quickly waved it off, casting more spells the younger witches’ way. Hermione dodged what she could and cast a protego where she could not. She held her own against Bellatrix as long as she could, but magically, she knew she didn’t stand a chance.

That fact alone was enough to make her to resort to such a reckless thing.

The moment she felt she was close enough, Hermione put all of her strength towards her legs and with a harsh grunt, launched herself at the other woman before she could cast another spell. Bellatrix had only a second to cry out in surprise before both women were thrown to the ground. Hermione didn’t hesitate though. She knew that just because she was able to knock the other woman down didn’t mean she had the upper hand just yet. The young siren grabbed the woman’s injured arm and yanked it to be pinned above her head. Hermione saw Bellatrix wince and was relieved to see that her hunch had been correct after all. Instead of going to pull the other woman’s hand up as well, she pulled one of the other siren’s moves and wrapped her other hand around Bellatrix’s throat.

“Yield. If this were a real battle, I could cut your throat right now.” She said, every word oozing with confidence of a proud lioness.

Initially, she thought that Bellatrix wasn’t going to comply. It wouldn’t surprise her much if the other
woman was the type to take that kind of risk. She had proven time and time again her carelessness in the face of death.

Hermione found herself holding her breath. And then…

“I yield.” Bellatrix snarled between clenched teeth. Onyx eyes stared at her with dark loathing and had she’d been anyone else, Hermione could honestly say she would’ve shrunk back in terror from it. She wasn’t anyone else and the looks were little more than a nuisance at this point.

Besides, she had a bigger problem to deal with.

The position she found herself in now was concerning in many ways.

Here she was, thighs on either side of the other woman’s torso. She had pinned one arm above her head and had the other wrapped around the woman’s neck. Now that the high of battle ebbed away, she was faced with the reality before her.

She was feeling *everything*. Like someone had switched on every nerve in her body all at once.

Bellatrix’s pulse was powerful beneath her hand. Beating away like a monotone lullaby that only she could hear. Every time the woman swallowed, she felt the throat beneath her grip ripple like a snake moving through the summer grass. The wind coming in from the broken window was tossing both of their hair to and fro. Hermione became vividly aware of how dark and vitalized the other woman kept her curls.

The heartbeat thudding between her thighs felt like the sweetest vibrations were coursing through every fiber of her being.

She could smell the woman’s sweat mingling in with her own from their rather movement intense duel and to her horror, it wasn’t nearly as repulsive as Ron or Harry’s after a game of Quidditch. And don’t’ get her started on the woman’s glazed eyes staring intently back at her own.

Her every sense was focused on Bellatrix like a trance; one in which it felt like nothing could tear her attentions away.

This feeling of dominance.

Of control.

It was *addictive*.

This is what she wanted more than anything. Having the other woman docile beneath her made her pulse race. They craved the physical contact to the point that any type- good or bad- was welcomed. Moments like these when the woman wasn’t actively trying to hurt them were rare and cherished beyond recognition.

In these moments, Bellatrix was the perfect mate.

*Our perfect mate.*

And just like that, Hermione found herself coming back to her senses.

Her eyes widened as the fog clouding her better judgement flooded away. Clarity of what was happening came rushing back to her.
The woman’s heartbeat was still thudding beneath her, but they were not what was causing the vibrations.

They were purring.

_They._

_Both_ of them.

She was unaware when it started, but now that the haze had cleared, she realized that the vibrations was a combined effort. She could sense how absolutely ecstatic her siren was. This was everything that it desired. Bellatrix had interacted with them like a proper mate should. And more than that, she too seemed pleased about their post-duel skin ship.

Really looking at Bellatrix however told her otherwise.

She hadn’t just imagined the woman’s glazed look earlier.

The woman was just as far gone as she was. If not further. The steady rumbling coming from the other woman could only be compared to the largest housecat she could imagine. There was no verbal translation of the sound coming from Bellatrix, yet Hermione could understand the woman loud and clear.

She was _pleased._

Pleased that Hermione had bested her.

That Hermione had initiated contact after trying for the longest to stay out of the other woman’s way.

Pleased that their mate seemed…happy.

Hermione knew then and there this was the woman’s siren side projecting onto her.

The real Bellatrix would be _seething_ right now.

Enraged that Hermione had beat her.

Displeased that Hermione had the audacity to lay her hands on her ‘betters’.

Infuriated that their ‘mate’ seemed…_happy._

Ultimately, the realization of the danger she was potentially in was what made her jump as far away from the woman as humanly possible.

Removing herself from her body was enough to make Bellatrix snap out of it as well. Gone was the pleasant purring that made her heart beat happily away in the base of her chest.

A growl deeper than any animal- magical or otherwise- took its place.

She could physically see the moment the other woman fully became herself again.

“Mudblood…”

The words came out so garbled and _angry_ that Hermione almost didn’t hear what the woman had said.
Not that it mattered.

Hermione made a mad dash from the room before Bellatrix even had a chance to recuperate. The armistice of the duel was over now. She didn’t have any magic left to fight the woman should her anger boil over like it had in the past. And even though she knew that the woman couldn’t kill her, she had no doubt that the older siren wouldn’t find a way to come as close as possible to do so.

She ran and hid in the first place she could find which was a closet on the second floor. She would wait there until either her magic returned or Bellatrix cooled down. She didn’t mind being hungry and cramped in the small room if it meant avoiding inevitable torture at the hands of her captor.

Hermione would then spend the evening in the closest; throughout the night, the sound of shattering glass and screaming echoed for the entire house to hear.

She didn’t sleep at all that night.

And to think she was actually enjoying herself earlier.

Hermione was disturbed to realize that her siren side had nothing to do with that little revelation.

She really hoped she was rescued soon…
Chapter 23 - The Crumbling Castle

Chapter Notes

Does anyone else write and only when you edit, you notice patterns? How many times have I destroyed that window? You'll know the one. XD Enjoy the chapter everyone!

Chapter 23 – The Crumbling Castle

Shockingly, Bellatrix didn’t immediately come charging after her the next day when she left the safety of the closet.

Mostly because the other woman wasn’t around.

Hermione thought it was a trick. That one wrong turn around any corner and there Bellatrix would be waiting to hex her to oblivion.

Yet on the entire journey back to her room, she went undisturbed.

That should’ve made her feel better, all it ended up doing was cause her anxiety levels to skyrocket.

A quiet Bellatrix was a scheming one. A scheming Bellatrix was a dangerous one.

Hermione didn’t think for one moment that the pseudo safety that she felt when they were dueling would carry over into what had now become her daily life. The peace was temporary from jump street. Now came the waiting period before Bellatrix came to get her revenge.

Hermione went about her day with her guard up and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

After two days of neither hearing or seeing Bellatrix, Hermione knew that something was wrong.

The fact that Professor Snape was still missing only made the feeling grow stronger.

She had tried asking Nimmy but he proved to be of little help.

‘Mistress told Nimmy that she would be away. Nimmy wasn’t told anything else but to do Nimmy’s job.’

That was all she was able to squeeze out of the little elf before he popped away to do his duties. Hermione couldn’t fathom what was going on. She had so many questions and no one was around to answer any of them. The only beings left in the house- to her knowledge- were Herself, Nimmy, Crookshanks-

“Would you cut that out, greedy bird.” She said to the creature nipping away at her breakfast.

And the bird.
In all actuality, the main reason Hermione figured something had changed was that Bellatrix left and failed to take her gangly legged familiar with her.

The day after their battle, she found the beast sitting on the windowsill in her room. Crookshanks was staring it down from the floor; his tail swishing rapidly back and forth in agitation. Surprisingly, neither familiar attacked one another. It was strange really, but the young woman wasn’t one to look a gift horse in the mouth. If all it wanted to do was sit there and stare, then that was fine with her.

That was the first day.

Over the next two days, the bird went from staring to following her around the house. Sometimes it trotting behind her like a small dog; it’s sharp talons clicking away at every step. Other times, it flew silently over her head until she reached wherever she was going; whatever she chose to do constantly followed by its occasional coos and creepy frog-like laughter.

She was uncomfortable with the knowledge that they had built a sort of comradery between them. Hermione wondered when it happened.

‘More than likely during or after our duel.’ She thought to herself as she once more shooed the beast away from the grilled chicken left on her plate.

Just as she did so, a pop could be heard from her left. She turned to see Nimmy staring at her with frightened eyes. She thought nothing of it seeing as the little elf always looked like someone was going to strike him at any moment until she saw what he was holding.

A newspaper.

“Mistress has returned. Mistress wanted Nimmy to bring this to Miss Hermione.” He said meekly, holding the paper out for her to grab.

Hermione took it and thanked the little creature. Nimmy nodded and then popped away, leaving the young siren alone with the feathered fiend. She didn’t want to read it. The last time she was handed a paper from the other woman, she found out about Madam Pince. Even so, Hermione knew she couldn’t just hide her head in the sand whilst Bellatrix was left to hurt the people she loved. She flipped to the front page.

**Solemn News From the Minister of Magic : The Search for Hermione Granger Discontinued**

*Greetings and well wishes my fellow witches and wizards. Today’s story from the wizarding world’s leading journalist is both somber and unfortunate. It is with a heavy heart my readers, that I -Rita Skeeter- was informed by the lead investigator on the Hermione Granger disappearance case that the hunt for the missing lioness will be discontinued.*

Hermione felt her heart grow cold. “What?” she gasped brokenly.

*Yes, you heard that correctly readers. In an official statement provided to me by our very own, Kingsley Shacklebolt- Head Auror and Minister of Magic- he was quoted on record as saying; “Miss Granger’s disappearance has been our top priority here at the Ministry of Magic for several*
weeks now. We have been attempting to locate her whereabouts alongside our top aurors day and night. However, even with our best efforts, we’ve regrettfully come up empty handed.

Intel has come about that the individuals responsible for the attack on Madam Pince a few weeks prior may be connected to her abduction. As such; by my authority as chief auror on this investigation and Minister of Magic, we at the ministry will cease looking for Miss Granger as an individual and focus on the culprits responsible for the attack in Diagon Alley.

I feel that under my jurisdiction, this is the best course of action to take in regards to the investigation…but as a friend of Miss Granger and two of my finest agents- Auror Potter and Auror Weasley- this is the hardest call I’ve had to make in regards to this case.

Regardless of our change in direction with this incident, our end goal of finding and returning Miss Granger home still stands. If anyone has any information that you believe can help solve this case; please contact myself or one of my senior aurors on anything useful you can provide. Thank you for your co-operation with all of us here at the Ministry of Magic.”

There you have it ladies and gentleman. Like a candle blown out the moment it was lit, it seems that our last chance to find one of our own has come to an end. Truly, the wizarding world is in shock at this risqué plan from the ministry. The statement from our minister is one that brings solemn news, but more importantly, a ton of questions as well.

For you see my dear readers, it would appear that our fears have been met after all. The mental instability of the young Gryffindor was not the cause for her sudden disappearing act, but it was a part of a bigger, dastardlier plan from Death Eaters; the very same individuals who put our beloved Hogwarts Librarian in the hospital.

I don’t know about you, my darling Rita Readers, but I fear that dark times are ahead of us once more. Just as we thought we were safe from the nightmares of the dark lord and his underlings, it would seem that evil is no longer content to lay at bay. Is this move by the ministry a way of letting the public down easy? Is this their way of saying that chances of finding Miss Granger alive and well is no longer feasible?

Truly this story has taken a turn that none of us here could ever imagine.

Regardless, we as a community must continue to put our faith and trust in the dedication and hard work of our aurors and ministry officials. I of course will be continuing to cover whatever I can about this investigation. As someone who shares a deep concern for Miss Hermione Granger- as many of you do- I feel that it is my obligation as a journalist to keep you updated with this situation. Should anyone wish to come forward with any news that could potentially help our aurors with this case, please contact me here at the Daily Prophet for an exclusive interview as I work alongside the aurors to get the word out about this ongoing investigation.

Hope is not lost my darlings! Have faith that we will return Miss Granger back to where she belongs- safe and sound. Until next time readers, this is Rita Skeeter bringing you your daily news straight from the Prophet.

For more about the childhood of Hermione Granger, turn to page 3. To learn more about how to contact the aurors about pertinent information regarding the case, see page 5.

The newspaper fluttered to the floor.
Heavy breathes filled the room as Hermione began to hyperventilate.


These emotions swirled around in her mind like a maelstrom.

They’d given up on her.

‘No! They haven’t given up!’ She automatically corrected her thoughts as she braced against the counter next to the refrigerator. ‘They’re still looking. Harry and Ron are still looking.’

Over and over again, she kept saying those words like a mantra.

In her mind she knew what she read wasn’t a death sentence. The ministry was still looking for her. In looking for the death eaters who attacked Diagon Alley, they would find her since she knew Bellatrix was the one responsible for the attack.

There was still hope.

That being said…

It still cut her deep.

Hermione didn’t know what would happen the longer she went unfound. What if they thought looking for the attackers would yield the same results? After all, they couldn’t find her and she was with Bellatrix. A surging wave of doubt came to her mind. She would spend the rest of her days in this place; a prisoner without a cell, forever to live alongside her mate in a toxic co-existence as the rest of the world went about with their lives.

The siren slid to the floor, a mournful keen warbling from her throat.

She made no efforts to conceal it.

Hermione didn’t know what to do. What to believe. She buried her head in the folds of her arms and tried to calm herself. There was nothing more she wanted to do right now but find a hole to crawl into and disappear for a little while. Hot tears rolled down her face as she began sinking more and more into her sense of hopelessness.

The woman didn’t get very far before a sound from above made her look up from her despair.

She thought it was Fawkes.

If Fawkes sounded like a cat who swallowed a frog.

On the counter, looking down at her sorry position upon the floor, was Bellatrix’s familiar. The beast was balancing on the edge of the counter with its head cocked to the side as it warbled at her in a steady stream. It’s luminescent topaz eyes stared with a level of intelligence that she already knew the creature possessed since long ago. Hermione didn’t know what to think. It’s ‘singing’ was like nothing she had ever heard a bird- magical or otherwise- make before. It was nowhere soothing like that of Fawkes’ phoenix song, yet she couldn’t help but be calmed by it.

She didn’t know if that was its goal or not, but it ended up working in the end.

Hermione wiped her tears and glanced over at the newspaper, thinking of its content a bit more rationally. In her heart she knew that she as overreacting a little bit.
That was happening a lot more lately. The siren couldn’t tell if it was because of her situation or her proximity to Bellatrix, but it was growing increasingly harder to keep herself under control. She found that the keens and warbles were becoming more and more frequent when before they were only reserved for levels of extreme distress.

There was also her need to sing.

When before she did it to heal herself or when she was alone, now the impulse was nearly constant. Even now she felt the desire to sing at the top of her lungs. There wasn’t even a reason to do it either.

She just needed to.

But she resisted. Bellatrix was home and the last thing she wanted was to attract the woman’s attention now when she was feeling the most vulnerable. Hermione knew that’s what the woman wanted when she ordered Nimmy to bring the paper. No doubt she wanted Hermione to fly into a fit and come seek her out only to be beaten down with the older woman’s harsh words and smug expression.

Hermione wouldn’t give her the pleasure.

Instead, she wiped her tears and inhaled as hard as could before letting it out in a huge sigh. She looked at the now silent bird as it watched her every mood.

“You know she’s not going to be happy when she finds out you’ve been hanging around me. And trying to cheer me up on top of that.” She told it.

In response, it’s head crest expanded upwards to its fullest and it let out a croaky trill that made the silverware on the counter vibrate and move about. She knew its laugh by now and took it as the bird letting her know it cared not what it’s mistress thought of its action.

“You’re definitely a strange one. What even are you?”

It was the burning question she knew the beast couldn’t answer. Maybe she would find out someday.

But until then, Hermione thought it best to go back for her room for the day. She suddenly wasn’t hungry anymore.

The young witch rose to her feet. In a move that looked to have shocked the creature more than it did herself, Hermione reached out ran the back of her finger down it’s dangerous looking beak. When she wasn’t immediately pecked for her forwardness, a smile came across her face and she parted from the bird with the words ‘thank you’ left unsaid as she exited the room.

Unlike the days previous, it didn’t follow, but Hermione could hear its croaky laugh follow her all the way to the stairs leading to the next floor.

The next morning found Hermione in a strange position.

She had fallen in love with the scenery in the giant ballroom where she and Bellatrix had their duel. The windows made reading easier with the amount of light streaming through and the ledges were wide enough for her to sit on without being uncomfortable or sliding off. Not long after she woke up, Hermione was in a reading mood and decided that it would be the perfect place for her to escape to.
She had a few spell books she had been meaning to get to and now seemed like the perfect time to finally get through them.

That wasn’t what made her position weird.

No, that would be her reading companion sitting on its folded legs down by her feet.

Yesterday must’ve been the tipping point in her once violent relationship she shared with Bellatrix’s familiar. Now, she would say they were on neutral grounds. After she had gotten comfortable with her books on the window ledge, the bird had come swooping into the room and fluttered to land down by her feet. There, it folded its inverted legs like a blind person’s walking cane and settled by her feet like a well-trained dog. It didn’t acknowledge her in the slightest, choosing to stare out the window at the forest that surrounded the house in silence.

Hermione left it be.

So long as it wasn’t causing trouble for her or Crookshanks, she didn’t particularly care what it did.

Hours must’ve passed like that. Just two of them sitting in each other’s presence doing their own things.

It was almost peaceful.

Which meant that it was time for Bellatrix to come along and ruin it.

She was halfway through some more material on wandless magic when she heard the groan of heavy wood and the doors swinging open as Bellatrix came strutting into the room. Both of the rooms occupants watched as the woman approached. When she was a few feet away, Bellatrix gave her familiar a strange look before focusing back on her.

“Well what do we have here?” She cooed. “What do you think you’re doing with my familiar?”

Hermione bookmarked her page. “More like, what is your familiar doing with me? It invited itself. If anything, I would think you sent it here to spy on me.” She said, not even phased by the other woman’s inquiry.

“Spy on you? Ha!” The older witch threw her head back and laughed. “Now why would I need him to spy on you when I already know everything that goes on in my house?” A dark smile pulled across ruby red lips. “But let me rephrase for the slow learners; what do you think you’re doing with my familiar…when you already have your own?”

Hermione tried to hide the panic in her eyes.

“My familiar isn’t here. I left him back at the castle.” She lied through her teeth.

That only made Bellatrix smile wider.

“Really? Strange that. Well then if that’s the case…” She snapped her fingers twice.

Nimmy popped into the room.

*Holding Crookshanks.*

Hermione bolted to her feet. “No!” She wailed.

“What’s wrong muddy? You seem upset. You know this pest?” Bellatrix taunted with a sickly grin.
“I found it prowling around my halls yesterday. I was planning to toss it in the ocean, but I knew I’d seen it somewhere before. Wonder where that could’ve been?”

“Let him go! He hasn’t done anything!” Hermione screamed. She got into a fighting stance, ready to tango with the woman to save her best friend’s life.

Bellatrix laughed and waved her off. “Now, now, what kind of woman do you take me for? Of course, I’ll leave the innocent whittle kitty alone…for a price.”

It was always something with this woman. She knew that Bellatrix didn’t do anything out of the kindness of her heart. Naturally it would cost her.

But what cost was what made Hermione nervous.

Looking at her familiar’s face as he hung limply in Nimmy’s arms was enough to push that feeling far to the back of her mind.

“Fine. What do you want?” She sighed, already resigning herself to more torment and torture.

As it was, Bellatrix wasn’t one to go by the script. She flicked her lanky fingers at Nimmy who let Crookshanks drop to the floor. The moment he was released, the cat made a mad dash to scramble up Hermione’s legs and into her arms. His content purrs were like music to her ears.

“I knew you’d see it my way,” She smiled brightly. Hermione could see how fake it was. “I’ll just take what was going to be rightfully mines if you hadn’t fought like the filthy mudblood you are during our duel.”

Hermione bristled at that comment. “The deal was to not use wands. I didn’t use my wand and so I won fair and square.”

Onyx eyes narrowed to slits. “No proper witch would ever result to such low bred tactics. Then again what can I expect from a lowborn such as yourself.”

“I won. Whether you deny it or not means nothing.” She told the woman with confidence. In hindsight, she shouldn’t be taunting the individual who she was now indebted to, but Hermione’s pride was on the line and it didn’t sit well that Bellatrix would deny her the win after she was so adamant on the rules of the duel. Hermione played by the rules and that was that. If that upset Bellatrix in some way, then so be it.

Not like her simply breathing wasn’t enough to send the other woman over the edge.

“Makes no difference to me what you think. Your reward now belongs to me.” Hermione could feel the magic flowing between them, making sure the tradeoff was official. “But enough about that. My curiosity is just aching to know what you thought about yesterday’s headlines.” The woman said snidely as she shifted her weight to her left hip.

Hermione didn’t take the bait.

“They haven’t given up on me. Now they’re looking for you and your accomplice. That means that more people know you’re alive by now, at least within the ministry. You’ll get caught because of your own violent tendencies, just you wait.” Came her fearless reply. Hermione kept her head held high as the woman’s expression fell towards irritation.

“You’re more naïve than I thought girl. But hold on to your silly little hopes. It’ll make it all the sweeter for me when they’re finally snuffed out.” The black clad witch laughed. “Now if you’ll
excuse me, me and my…accomplice have plans. Don’t worry about it now; you’ll be reading about it in the papers soon enough.” She made her way out of the room, casually throwing over her shoulder, “And look forward to my reward for sparing that fleabag’s life. I’m sure it’ll be lots of fun. For me.”

Hermione didn’t even have time to ask the woman what she meant by that when the witch left just as quickly as she came. She felt the magic of owing Bellatrix settle within her. There would be no escaping it now. Crookshanks was safe at least.

What she had exchanged for his life, she didn’t know.

All and all, it was a lackluster encounter if she was being honest. She expected yelling or some kind of confrontation for her blatant disrespect, but there was none. The curly haired witch knew to keep her guard at its highest; the shoe would have to drop at some point.

She just didn’t expect it to be later on that very evening.

When night fell that evening, Hermione awoke with a scream, sitting up ramrod straight in her bed. A boom reverberated against the window and caused the delicate glass to crack. Wide eyes watched as a hairline fracture ran down the entirety of the pane. She thought it was another storm, but the glass appeared bone dry.

Then another crash shook the house and the glass came blowing inward. The glass flew everywhere and wind came rushing into the room, filling it with a howling whistle. She was relieved to see that Crookshanks was as far away from the shards as possible.

“What in Merlin’s name is going on?” She wondered, swooping the covers off her body and tiptoeing her way over to the window in her slippers and nightgown.

Two things stood out immediately.

The first was the orange and red glow she could see somewhere below her eyesight. The second was the hot air. It was far too hot to be the heat of summer and the island never reached these temperatures before. And looking down from the broken window, she could see the culprit for the change in weather.

A raging inferno was spreading in the yard below, twisting and turning like an angry snake between the weeds.

Her eyes widened.

No. She really was seeing a snake!

It took her only seconds to realize that the fire burning was no ordinary one. She had seen this before during the battle of Hogwarts.

_Fiednfyre._

Taking the form of a ferocious viper, Hermione could only look on in terror as the fire serpent writhe and screeched, burning its way through the forest behind the house like wildfire. The air around her was causing her to sweat up a storm, her nightgown sticking to her in a grotesque and uncomfortable manner. She wanted nothing more than to get away from the window and return to her bed, but her
curiosity simply wouldn’t allow it.

A pop came from her left.

“Miss Hermione, please back away from the window! Nimmy must insist! You will be in danger!” Came Nimmy’s panicked voice as he herded her away from the opening.

“Nimmy what’s happening?” She gasped, trying gently get around his shoving hands.

Another explosion shook the house.

This time followed by a bellow that shook her to her core.

“Insolent filth! Dirty! Rotten! Pests! Lowborn, disgusting scum!”

Nimmy was practically in hysterics.

“Not good! Not good! Mistress is angry! Mistress is very, very angry!” He cried, yanking on his ears in vicious tugs.

“Nimmy stop that!” She grabbed his little hands to stop him from hurting himself further. “Tell me what’s going on. Why is Bellatrix so angry?”

A tree came crashing down as Bellatrix continued to rage below.

Nimmy could barely get his next words out. “Bad news. Very bad. Mistress is very angry when she comes back from her errand.”

“What news?” The irritation at his vague responses could be heard in her voice. Seeing as he clearly couldn’t compose himself to talk clearly, Nimmy popped out of the room, returning only a moment later with a ragged newspaper in his hands. He handed it to her and immediately Hermione knew what had set the other woman off.

There on the front page was another attack on a small town not too far from Hogsmeade. She watched the moving picture as the same two cloaked assailants from the attack on Madam Pince wreaked havoc on the people living there with no remorse.

Except things didn’t nearly go as smoothly as their first attack.

The ministry was on them only minutes after their arrival.

Hermione watched as the aurors battled the skilled dark wizards- one of them she knew to be Bellatrix herself- with a small degree of difficulty. Even outnumbered, the two of them worked in tandem and covered each other’s backs flawlessly. It seemed that there was no way that the two could be defeated, until Kingsley showed up with a team of high level officials. The two seemed to realize that the scales had tipped in the ministries’ favor and tried to get away. Reading the article alongside the scene, apparently the two had tried to apperate away; something the aurors had already taken care of. Then one of the figures turned into a mass of billowing black smoke and flew away like a bullet. The second went to follow but was shot down by Kingsley before they were able to escape.

Seeing as Bellatrix was currently outside destroying her own house again; the one captured must have been her accomplice.

That was confirmed as she got to the end of the article and saw the mugshot of the captured assailant.
Convicted Death Eater Apprehended: Rodolphus Lestrange Captured

In an incident taking place late this afternoon, Aurors were tipped off by an anonymous source about an attack planned on the town of Livesay just south of Hogsmeade.

The attack took place on schedule and the two assailants were met by aurors mere minutes after their arrival. Citizens were asked to evacuate the area as officials engaged the two suspected death eaters in wizarding combat. The battle remained in favor of the two assailants until the arrival of Auror Potter and Chief Auror Shacklebolt. Both criminals attempted to disapparate and were met by wards set up beforehand by ministry officials.

Unfortunately, one of the assailants was able to escape through dark magic only seen used by the dark lord and his followers. Thanks to the quick thinking and spellwork of the minister himself, the second wizard was shot down and immediately detained and immobilized.

The captured wizard- once subdued- was able to be identified as the missing death eater, Rodolphus Lestrange- husband of the deceased Bellatrix Lestrange and one of the wizards responsible for the heinous attack on Frank and Alice Longbottom some years ago.

It is not known who his accomplice could be.

Lestrange was taken into Auror custody and will be interrogated for the identity of his accomplice and the possible whereabouts of Hermione Granger who officials believe may be connected to this case. This will be the ministries’ first big break in the case since the young woman’s disappearance.

More information will be released to the public as the investigation continues.

Tears.

There were actual tears running down her face.

And for the first time in a long time, these were tears of pure elation.

They had captured Rodolphus Lestrange- Bellatrix’s husband. He must’ve been the one the woman had been seeing whenever she went out on her ‘errands’. She had wondered since the first time she read about the attack on Madam Pince who the woman’s accomplice had been. Most of those who served the dark lord were dead, captured, or in hiding. The ministry was stronger than ever and the public no longer held much fear for those who served the dark.

She imagined that having Harry with the aurors had something to do with that.

That being said, being a death eater- or even someone who practiced the dark arts- was just asking for a one-way trip to Azkaban. Someone would have to be absolutely insane to plan an attack on innocent people with the world as it was now.

Which it made perfect sense that Rodolphus ended up being Bellatrix’s partner in crime. It would take someone just as unhinged as her to be the woman’s husband.

Violently she beat down the little voice reminding her who the woman’s current mate was.

That wasn’t important right now.
What mattered was that Rodolphus was probably one of the few people in this world who Bellatrix would ever trust. The one person who she would let in on her sadistic little tendencies.

Like keeping Hermione locked up on this inescapable island. She could picture it now. The woman bragging about her treatment of her. How she tortured her. Belittled her. It would be too good to pass up if she didn’t

Rodolphus had to know about her.

And now that he was in custody, he would be interrogated and the aurors will have a lead to find her.

She would be rescued.

After all the pain and torment and horror she had gone through up to this point because of Bellatrix, it was ironically the woman’s hubris that lead to the attack that got her husband captured.

Hermione couldn’t help but smile through the stream of tears pouring down her face. She imagined that anyone who saw her now would think she was a madwoman.

She didn’t care.

Her chances of returning home had just skyrocketed.

She could see all her friends again.


Maybe even look for her parents.

She could finally have her life back.

That night, there was the strangest melody of sounds filling the night air. Two very different melodies swirling about in a symphony of emotions.

Outside, in a forest of ash and embers, Bellatrix’s screams of rage and frustration reverberated off the windows of the house like a hurricane.

And inside, on the second floor of the mansion- illuminated by Bellatrix’s fiednfyre-Hermione’s cries of joy and hopeful freedom chimed off the walls like the sweetest church bells.

Between the two, their voices unknowingly merged into one, creating a wordless song of loss and gain. Had either been in a stable mindset, they may have realized that their emotional duet complimented one another in a way akin to a pair of lovers.

Alas, by morning, neither will have noticed; each woman too wrapped up in their own selves to take heed of what they had unintentionally done.

The same couldn’t be said for their creature sides; always alert and yearning for one another as their other halves fought the bond between them.

A fight both sirens had come one step closer to losing once and for all.
Chapter 24: Rodolphus

67 days.

Two months and some days.

That was how long it had been since Hermione had been missing.

And the entire time, Ron Weasley and Harry Potter had been at their wits end trying to find their missing friend. Both knew that the moment they found out Bellatrix was still alive and well that it could only mean terrible things for Hermione. Memories of the other girl’s distress when the older witch had carved the words mudblood into her arm still haunted their every waking moment.

Ron and Harry knew that the encounter had never really left Hermione’s mind. Sometimes they noticed the way the other girl scratched at the crude carving with a distant look on her face. Whether she knew she was doing it or not, they didn’t know, but it was a habit that never really went away.

That was after just a few hours spent beneath the torment of the other woman.

Now she had been missing for months.

And unlike the rest of the world, they knew exactly who had their friend.

They simply didn’t know where.

Bellatrix wasn’t just dangerous- she was slippery. When they first got the call about the attack on Madam Pince a few weeks back, it was clear as day that one of the attackers was Bellatrix. The librarian wasn’t exactly a high-profile target amongst the death eater circles. But the two aurors could put together that she would be the closest person to Hermione outside of Professor McGonagall. Her love of knowledge was legendary at this point. The fact that Hermione often hid away in the library-especially after returning once the war ended- wasn’t a secret to anyone. Figuring it out would’ve been easy enough for someone like Bellatrix who had found a way into the school in the first place.

Hermione must’ve done something to piss the other witch off to make her come after the librarian in broad daylight.

Whatever it was; Harry and Ron were glad for it. Well, not for the fact that Pince was in the hospital, but that it made Bellatrix show her hand to the public. The attack brought attention back to the fact
that just because the dark lord was gone, didn’t mean his followers weren’t still around. The public
needed a reminder of that in their opinion.

And criminals too.

Aurors were out day and night on the hunt; asking questions in shady places and following pardoned
death eaters in the hopes that something would come up and help them track down Bellatrix and her
colleague. They stuck their noses in everyone’s business, leaving no stone or alley left unturned in
the hunt for Hermione.

Then one day, after months of nothing, they had a break in the case.

An anonymous tip from a former death eater in hiding came forth. The patronus of whomever they
were called it ‘a debt repaid’ after they relayed the information and left it at that. They tried tracing
the spell back to the caster, but it was no use.

Then again, with the information they received from the individual, they weren’t going to pry too
hard into their whereabouts. The tip was exactly what they’d been hoping for all this time. A location
and a time of an attack. They had maybe a day at least to set up a trap. Kingsley mobilized the proper
units and the group were out setting wards and undercover agents all over the town of Livesay so as
to maximize the success of the mission.

Ron drove Harry up a wall with his constant worries of the whole thing being a setup.

Are we really going to trust the words of a death eater about a death eater attack? He kept saying.

At one point, he had to remind the taller man that trap or not, if there was even the slightest chance
that the attackers could lead them to Hermione, it was a risk he was willing to take.

That made the red head go quiet.

Harry didn’t want to pull that card in particular, but he knew that he needed to be level headed if it
turned out that Ron was right. Ron’s concerns weren’t exactly unfounded; they just weren’t helpful
when the assault was mere hours away.

Then came the day of the attack.

Kingsley, Ron and he stayed at headquarters and watched the town on the monitoring charms set up
by other members within the department. They thought it best to have more eyes on the town so as to
spot the attackers as quickly as possible. There were plenty of aurors planted throughout the city, but
the three of them were prepared to apperate at a moments notice should things go south.

As it was, Harry’s quidditch trained eyes spotted the assailants first.

“There. Between the alley next to the bakery. Two magical signatures have tripped the wards.” He
announced to the room.

That was all he could get out before the shorter attacker launched a sickly yellow spell at one of the
shop windows, sending it blowing inwards.

From there, things went south quickly.

Multiple aurors engaged the duo in combat. One would think that with their numbers, the two of
them would have been overwhelmed in mere minutes. All around the room, he could hear other
aurors and their arrogant comments of having the upper hand with the odds.
Harry knew better.

The two weren’t just a couple of ragtag death eaters looking to cause trouble. They were skilled, deadly, and more than likely members of Voldemort’s inner circle. They worked well together; covering for one another as the other had their back towards an enemy. If they let this go on any longer, Harry was sure that there would be casualties. Five of their men were already down for the count.

He clasped Kingsley on the shoulder. “We need to back them up. These aren’t just our everyday dark wizards.” He warned.

The dark-skinned man nodded and singled for him, Ron, and several other members to gather around the portkey that would take them just outside the wards to prevent apperation.

Upon arrival the two decided to try and disappearate on the spot, realizing they were getting more than what they’d bargained for. Of course, they had already thought of that and he couldn’t stop the smirk from pulling across his face at seeing the duo stopped in their tracks.

It faded when the shorter wizard took off in cloud of thick, black smoke. He hadn’t seen that spell in use since the war. There weren’t many witches or wizards who could handle it. The ones who did were all a part of the inner circle or aurors- which confirmed his assumption that they were dealing with high level death eaters after all.

They couldn’t stop the first wizard, but due to Kingsley’s quick spellwork, the second was shot down before they could exit the wards. When they crashed into the ground, Harry disarmed them and bound their body in ropes until they were unable to move a single finger.

All in all, it was a victory in their book. Several of their aurors needed immediate medical attention, but the casualties were zero and they had one of the suspects in custody.

Kingsley levitated the individual who had yet to say anything. When they were upright, the chief auror addressed them with all the authority of a high ranking official.

“By order of the ministry for the attack on the town of Livesay and the previous attack in Diagon Alley; it is by my power as Chief Auror of the Ministry of Magic to place you under arrest.” He said.

The cloaked figure laughed.

“Is this the part where I smile and ask the goody two-shoe aurors to let me go?” They- he snarked; demeanor arrogant and rude as if he cared nothing for the situation he was in.

“Even as a criminal, you maintain the right to speak, though anything you say can and will be held against you in court.” The dark-skinned man said, not even blinking at the other man’s disrespect. “Now, I think we should properly meet face to face before taking you in for questioning.”

Everyone watched in bated breath as the man’s cloak was pulled down and revealed the face of someone everyone presumed to still be missing.

Rodolphus Lestrange.

One of the few members in the dark lord’s inner circle.

And more importantly, husband to the one and only Bellatrix Lestrange.

Ron and Harry locked eyes from behind Kingsley’s head.
If anyone knew where Hermione was, it would be this man. That should have made them feel better, but then they remembered the other assailant who got away which absolutely had to have been Bellatrix.

She had slipped through their fingers again.

That stung, but the pain of letting that madwoman slip away was soothed with the knowledge that they at least had a solid lead that could help them find their missing friend.

Kingsley rounded up the aurors and had them repair the town and inform the inhabitants on what had happened. Harry and Ron were glad that they didn’t have to run damage control.

They had a lot of questions for Rodolphus Lestrange and they would get the answers they needed by any means possible.

Nothing was more important than getting Hermione back.

If they thought interrogating Rodolphus was going to be easy, they were in for a rude awakening.

The first hurdle was the paperwork needed to get the man put under veritaserum. Despite what the public thought happened in the ministry, they couldn’t just shove potions down a criminal’s mouth and get their answers. There was paperwork and protocols that needed to be followed. Harry didn’t like doing paperwork much like everyone else in the department, but whenever he thought about how unfair Sirius’ trial had been, he powered through the work quickly and efficiently like he would’ve done for his beloved godfather had he been an auror back then.

It took him hours to finish. Not because of the amount of work, but because Ron was literally useless with helping him fill anything out. The other man was so focused on going into the interrogation chambers and laying into Rodolphus that trying to get the man to help out was an all-around lost cause. Harry didn’t mind really. Ron had been his partner since their training days. More times than not, Harry did the paperwork while the other man focused on having his back in the field.

Say what you will about Ron, but he was a bloody good auror. His prowess for strategy didn’t just pertain to the chessboard. Ron was a natural of scooping out sketchy situations and thinking on the fly when it came to hunting down dark wizards. Harry had no problem doing the paperwork so long as Ron kept up the good work whilst they were out on a mission. It was simply the way they worked best and Harry wasn’t one to try and fix something that wasn’t broken.

Alas, once all the paperwork was done, the hard part was over. With Rodolphus being such a high-profile target- and the wizarding world being in a relative time of peace- his processing was pushed to the very top of the list. They were given the green light by the time night rolled. Harry knew right off the back that he would be pulling an all-nighter with many of the others there at the department.

Ron met him by the stairwell leading to the interrogation room. He waved the processed papers at the other man in greeting.

“I got the paperwork done. We’re good to go.” He said.

Ron lifted his hands to reveal that he was carrying three Styrofoam cups. “I got us coffee. It’s gonna be a long night.”

“Yeah. You ready?” He asked.
As I’ll ever be. If he can lead us to Mione, I don’t care how long it takes. She’s been gone too long.” They started down the winding stone steps. “I don’t want to imagine what that woman has been doing to her.”

“Nothing good.” Harry hissed. “I wish she had just stayed dead like Voldemort.”

“Whoa Harry, that was pretty dark coming from you.” Ron commented, waving his badge at the security guard to allow them passage to the holding cells. The blonde woman nodded and waved her wand to allow them entrance. “Usually I got yelled at for saying stuff like that.”

“Well for one, the one usually yelling at you for stuff like that was Mione. And secondly; Bellatrix killed my godfather and kidnapped our childhood friend- she deserves worse.” The green eyed practically growled.

“Fair enough.” Ron said. Its not like he wasn’t thinking the same thing.

The cell holding Rodolphus was at the end of the hall. When the two reached the door, they could see two aurors standing outside with Kingsley pacing back and forth in front of them. He appeared to be agitated. The moment Harry and Ron were in hearing range, the man gave them a heavy sigh.

“I hope those papers say what I think they do.”

Harry nodded and handed him the folder. Kingsley looked inside and after confirming that they could proceed with the interrogation, he pulled a bottle of dark purple liquid from his pocket.

“Excellent work you two. Now let’s just hope this version of the potion works on our guest in there. Cause nothing else I tried got him talking.” He sighed, running his hand over his shiny, bald head.

“You’ve already been in there?” Harry asked.

Kingsley nodded. “Thought I might as well give it a shot. Don’t know why I bothered. He’s just like all the other captured death eaters; loyal to death and the dead. Couldn’t get him to say anything without him being obtuse or a general nuisance.”

“He did marry a psychopath.” Ron piped in.

“Which is why we needed this,” He shook the potion bottle. “More than ever. Let’s just hope it works.”

“Slughorn may have been a pain as a human being, but he’s a good potion master. And he had Professor Snape’s portrait helping him the entire time. It’ll definitely work.” Harry said with a wry smile.

The trio decided to end their conversation and get down to business. The guards let them enter the blindingly white room.

Rodolphus was sitting with his eyes closed, arms and legs shackled to a black chair in the center of the room. Three other chairs were set in a semi-circle around him for them to sit. Ron took the one to the far right while Harry took the one to the far left. Kingsley didn’t immediately sit, approaching the bound man with purpose.

“Rodolphus Lestrange.” He began. The other man didn’t open his eyes. “Lestrange, we have some questions for you. Now you can answer them of your own volition or we are authorized by the ministry to administer veritaserum should you fail to comply.”
The man opened a single eye and gave the man a devious smirk.

“How about no?” He laughed.

“That wasn’t one of the options.” The standing man said.

“Only because you didn’t offer. How rude.” He tutted. “And here I thought the ministry were supposed to be fair and just.”

“We are. To those who aren’t convicted criminals who attack innocent civilians and muggles. Now, we don’t have time for these games. Am I to take this as your refusal to comply?” He asked, finally fed up with the other man’s blasé demeanor.

“If you think I’m going to talk even under veritaserum, you’ll be sadly disappointed. Go on.” The man was so sure in his confidence that he even opened his mouth for Kingsley to administer the potion.

*Arrogant prick.* Kingsley thought to himself. He poured the drink down the other man’s throat. *Let’s see how smug you’ll be when you find out that wasn’t the standard ministry formula.*

When the last drop was gone, Kingsley sat down and began the questioning.

“What is your name?”

The man grumbled beneath his breath and seemed to be struggling against the effects of the potion. Then he finally answered, “Rodolphus Lestrange.”

“Why did you attack Madam Pince in Diagon Alley?” Kingsley asked.

Lestrange snarled as he was once more forced to answer. “My accomplice wanted us to.” He answered. The man swore and then glared at the man with venom in his eyes. “That wasn’t a regular veritaserum was it?” He hissed.

The three of them were shocked that the man had caught on so quickly. It was Harry who spoke up. “No. How did you know?”

“Do you really believe the dark lord would allow us to reveal his plans so easily should we endure capture? The dark lord had that traitor Snape brew the potion for us to be subjected to and then overcome.” He gave them a nasty smirk. “All inner circle members needed to fight the effects. Or else…”

“He would kill you.” Ron finished. “Are you telling me that you lot would be loyal to a madman who would *kill* you for failure? You’re insane.”

“Silence your mouth filth! To speak of our lord with such disrespect is an insult! You’ll be punished for your insolence.”

Ron looked like he was about to jump out of his seat, but Kingsley finally stepped in.

“Enough. Your training is irrelevant at this point. Tell us what we need to know and you’ll be promptly returned to your cell in Azkaban.” Kingsley’s voice echoed through the room.

Rodolphus smiled. “If you think that I’ll be returning to that cell, then you do not truly know the definition of insanity.”

That was the only warning any of them got before they watched the man try to literally bite his
tongue off…

Only to be stopped mid-way.

The death eater was stunned. No matter how much he tried to close his mouth, his jaw refused to move any further than resting his teeth lightly over the top of his tongue. Rodolphus looked up to see the smug look on all three aurors faces.

“Actually, we do know. Since the fall of the dark lord, we’ve captured many death eaters- including inner circle members.” A grim frown came across the minister’s face. “Unfortunately, we underestimated their loyalty and as such, more times than not we would return to an interrogation room with our detainee drowned in a pool of their own blood.”

“So, we had to make up a new formula.” Harry continued. “A version of veritaserum that was more potent and had a lock jaw enchantment working in tandem with the potion’s effects.”

“You can thank ‘that traitor Snape’ for helping us with that from beyond the grave.” Ron snickered.

“Now, are you going to continue to make this difficult or are you going to comply willingly and move this along for all of us?” Kingsley asked.

They had to wait for an answer.

Rodolphus Lestrange was fuming.

He had been bested.

If the dark lord could see him now. He could never show his face before his lord or else he would be met with a violent death, though that wasn’t what frightened him now.

No, the real danger he was in was with his wife.

Rodolphus would happily go back to Azkaban if it meant never seeing Bella after this. The dark lord would make his death quick. But husband or not, for failure like this, Bella would make him suffer. Perhaps in the past, she too would have granted him a swift end, but after meeting the woman again after her supposed death, the death eater knew that was out of the question.

Bella had always been…troubled.

Even during their school days, the woman had been unhinged. Sharp as a whip in tongue and mind- she stepped on anyone who would dare oppose her and used those around her like pawns on a chessboard.

He thought she was beautiful in the most dangerous of ways.

And though their marriage was arranged and they had at no point loved one another, they got along well. Or enough not to try and kill one another at any turn.

That being said, Rodolphus knew that the Bellatrix that found him after the battle was…different.

She still was the unpredictable, powerful woman she had always been, but her thoughts had shifted elsewhere. When once, she couldn’t talk or act on anything aside from what the dark lord wanted, now there was only one person on her mind.
The mudblood witch, *Hermione Granger*.

The very reason he was sitting in an interrogation room now.

Bella found him not long after moving into one of their many hideouts. This one in particular was meant to keep people *on* the island rather than off. When he asked her about her choice for that place in particular, he could still remember the woman’s toothy grin as she told him.

*I caught a new pet, Dolphy. It keeps trying to get away…and I have no plans of ever giving her back.*’ She whispered gleefully.

Normally, he would pay it no mind, this wouldn’t be the first time that the woman had captured another person to play with before disposing of them.

Until he discovered the new *pet* was Hermione Granger; one of the three responsible for the fall of their lord. Rodolphus couldn’t fathom why the woman was keeping the girl alive. She had been festering with rage after the girl stole her wand and went into their vault during the war. There was no way she would capture the girl to keep as a pet. At least not for as long as she had. Two weeks in and the girl was apparently still alive. Something else was going on.

And he made the mistake of asking about it.

Weeks after having the girl in captivity, Bella came with him and tossed his death eater robes at him. “Come.” She said, donning her own cloak and casting a spell to conceal her face.

“And where, pray tell, are we going?” He asked, all the while slipping the dark fabric over his white shirt and black pants.

“Diagon alley. I want to make a *present* for my little pet.” Bellatrix cooed.

“She’s still alive? That’s not like you Bella. To keep an enemy of our lord alive this long. Why not kill her and be done with it? Or give her to me if you think she’s too much of a hassle to deal with.” He said nonchalantly.

They say that you should never have your back to a predator unless you wanted to be seen as prey.

He should’ve remembered that when dealing with his wife. His hood had just come up over his head when he felt the press of a knife against his throat.

“What was that *Rodolphus*?” He noticed the drop in his pet name. “Are you questioning me? *Me!* The audacity! You’ve grown quite *bold* in my absence haven’t you? *Haven’t you*?!” She growled into his ear. Sharp nails gripped his cheeks and turned his face downwards. Their size difference had never mattered for Bella. Though shorter and less broad then himself, it was Rodolphus who often felt like the rat trapped beneath a panther’s claws. He didn’t dare move in case Bella was more far gone than he believed. “The girl will live until *I* want her to die. Her life is *mine*. Her fear is *mine*. Her body is *mine*. It’s all *mine*. Say something so blasé again, *dear husband*, and Frankie and Alice will be getting a *new* roommate at Saint Mungo’s.”

He was freed from her grip and pushed away. Rodolphus let out the breath he’d been holding.

Rarely did the woman lash out at *him* of all people. There was something else going on here, however, pressing that right now would be a death sentence.

In the end, he simply followed Bella out of their meeting place in silence.

From there, finding Madam Pince was easy.
The rest was history.

Every time he saw Bellatrix afterwards, the woman seemed to be slipping into something dangerous again.

*Obsession.*

She’d only done it with their lord. Hanging off his every word like he was a god. There was nothing she wouldn’t do for him.

Even after what happened when he found out about the sword of Gryffindor, her loyalty didn’t waver.

The Bellatrix of now barely spoke of their lord.

It was always about *Granger.*

The verbal fights they shared.

The chasing.

The escapes.

The tears.

Every time he met his wife, the only thing she spoke of was Granger. That wasn’t the problem. The problem was the look in her eyes when she did.

Pure *elation.*

Yes, Bella’s particular joy was sadistic in nature, but this was happiness at its core. The woman was enjoying tormenting the girl. She was even enlisting *his* help to go after her loved ones to get under the other’s skin. He was witnessing a new type of madness from his spouse.

Yet the peculiarities didn’t stop there.

There was one night in particular that he would never forget.

It was a night that he knew the storms that swept the island Bella was inhabiting were scheduled to come in. Normally the woman came to see him on those days seeing as there was no way for Granger to escape should she try to leave.

Except this particular time, Bella was late.

*Really* late.

He wasn’t worried, but it was strange for his wife to deviate from something out of the blue. Rodolphus waited for hours for her to arrive. Just when it seemed like she wouldn’t show, he heard a crack and his wards were tripped to signal the woman’s arrival.

The wizard didn’t have a chance to unlock the door to allow her entrance when a scream louder than any sound he’s ever heard tore through the air. Rodolphus was brought to his knees as it shattered the windows of his house and caused his ears to bleed.

Then it was over as quickly as it started.
The ringing in his ears was far worse than the pain. He stumbled to his feet.

Walking to the window was a shaky affair; his wonky hearing making his equilibrium lurch his body to the side before correcting itself. Mildly disoriented, by the time he reached the window, he had most of his senses back. He peeked outside.

There Bella was, standing in the center of the path leading to the house in the rain; motionless. Her head was tilted back to the sky as the water plastered her dark curls to her body. He was going to call out to her until he heard something.

Singing.

Bella was singing.

He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. Never in any of the years since they’ve known each other had he heard his wife sing. It wasn’t in her nature. And quite frankly, he didn’t think she would have the talent for it if she did.

He was wrong.

So very wrong.

Bella’s voice was a mixture of haunting and playful; her range going from seductively low to unnaturally high pitched without sounding like frog in pond.

Rodolphus was confused and enchanted all at the same time. He couldn’t fathom what had happened to make the woman do this.

Though listening to her words ended up giving him all the answers he needed.

_Drowning, drowning in a sea full of lies_

_The water my making, the tides built by I,_

_No pain and no power can I break her with now_

_The bond will grow stronger the more she’s around_

_And I know that I’m haunted by the curse of my time_

_How can I kill something, when the death would mean mines_

_Damn all the fates and the fools of this world_

_Who shackled and bound me to that mudblooded girl_

_Where hands come to choke her, they latch upon me_

_If waves came to take her, they’d drown me at sea_

_And I know that I’m haunted by the curse of my time_

_How can I kill something, when the death would mean mines_
She runs, I chase

Though the need is not truly my own

She sings,

And the sounds will not leave me alone

I know

Wherever she goes I can find

She knows

That it works just the same if it’s I–

And I know that I’m haunted by the curse of my time

How can I kill something, when the death would mean mine…

When she stopped singing, Rodolphus couldn’t say anything.

He didn’t speak when the woman approached him.

He didn’t speak when she brushed past and made her way into the house.

He couldn’t.

The man was dumbfounded.

All he could think was that there was something between the Granger girl and Bella that went beyond what the woman had told him. This obsession was more than just a pet project. It had come to take over every fiber of the woman’s being in a mere matter of weeks. And despite being the closest one to her, Rodolphus Lestrange didn’t have an answer for any of this.

Bringing his thoughts back to his current situation—chained up in an interrogation room, surrounded by the Minister of Magic and two of those responsible for the fall of his dark lord—drugged with veritaserum and bound to a chair—Rodolphus Lestrange made his decision.

“…I’ll talk.” He answered.

Cause he knew that if it came down to life in Azkaban and dealing with Bellatrix and how far he knew she would go for her new obsession—

His old cell in Azkaban was clearly the obvious choice.

“…I’ll talk.” The trio finally heard Rodolphus answer after what felt like an eternity of silence. The man appeared to be deep in his thoughts, but whatever was on his mind must’ve been settled as he
seemed to sag in his seat with resignation.

“Good. Who is your accomplice? The one who helped on these two attacks?” Kingsley began.

“My wife.” He answered.

It looked like Lestrange was planning to answer while being as vague as possible. “Bellatrix Lestrange? The one who’s supposed to have died?”

“Yes.”

“And where is Bellatrix now?” He asked.

“I don’t know.” Lestrange answered with a smug grin.

Ron hissed in irritation. “He’s lying.”

“He can’t lie.” Harry replied. “He really doesn’t know. Though that’s not the right question we should be asking. Where has Bellatrix Lestrange been hiding until now?” He asked instead.

Rodolphus sneered at the Potter brat. “A family manor owned by the Blacks.” He answered, rattling off the coordinates that Harry quickly jotted down.

“And how do we find it?” Kingsley asked.

“Only a member of the family has access to the manor and they must willingly allow you onto the island to get past its defenses.” He smirked. “Good luck with that one. Can’t help you there.” He laughed.

Kingsley and the Weasley scum seemed put off by the information, but Potter had a look of optimism on his face. “We can manage that. Is that house where Bellatrix is keeping Hermione?” He asked.

“…yes.”

It was like the biggest weight had been lifted off their shoulders. “Then that’s all we really need to know now. If we need to know more, we know where to find you. Weasley, Potter, let’s go. We don’t want Bellatrix to pack up shop and find a new hideout.” The three stood to leave.

“…she won’t.”

They stopped and turned to look at Rodolphus who was staring at them with an emotionless expression.

“What was that?” Ron asked.

“She won’t run, Bella.” He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair. “She was never really hiding. But being captured while she was in the middle of her game wasn’t what she wanted either.”

“And why does that matter?” Ron snarked. He really didn’t care what the other man had to say. They knew where Hermione was now. They couldn’t waste time like this.

Yet something about the other man’s demeanor made him stay and listen.

“I don’t know why yet, but the Granger girl is Bella’s new obsession. The main character in this little game my wife is playing. And you’re trying to stop her fun.” He said. “Did you even wonder why I fessed up so easily?” He asked.
“Cause of the potion obviously.”

Rodolphus laughed. “Partly, but no. The quicker you idiots leave, the quicker I can get back to my fellow loyal friends in Azkaban.”

“You’d rather be in Azkaban?” Harry asked.

“If it means not being here should you take away Bella’s favorite toy, then yes.” He answered quietly.

“Hermione is not anyone’s toy!” Ron shouted. Kingsley needed to hold the red head back from outright attacking the other man. “Especially for someone like Bellatrix!”

Rodolphus chuckled darkly. “You better hope you’re wrong, boy. My loving wife had a knife to my throat and threatened to put me in a bed next to the Longbottoms for even saying I wanted a piece of her new toy. You see, Bella doesn’t keep her toys for long before she gets rid of them. If the girl isn’t a toy,” He smiled. “Then she’s property now. And the one thing Bella hates most is people touching what belongs to her. Try and rescue the girl. You very well may succeed. But I do hate to be wasteful, so let me share something with you whilst this…potion is still in my system.”

Rodolphus Lestrange began laughing. A deep belly laughter that shook the man’s entire body from its strength. In this moment, it wasn’t hard to see how the man had married a woman like Bellatrix.

He was just as insane as she was.

“My wife was infatuated with our lord. Her obsession for him was unparallel…but after his defeat, Bella only obsessed over Granger.” He grinned. “If Bella willingly waited 15 years in Azkaban for our lord’s return…what lengths do you think she’ll go to get the girl back now that her infatuation has outmatched that of the dark lord?”

His word got the point across easily enough and they knew the man couldn’t lie with the potion in his system. The three aurors flew from the room like hell itself was on their heels; their coffee sloshing onto the floor as they ran. Down the hall, Rodolphus could hear Kingsley shouting orders to prepare for a raid on the mansion. The imprisoned man relaxed in his chair as the door to his room was closed and the guards resumed their positions.

“As much as I’d love to see your beautiful chaos one more time Bella, I am no fool. That girl has brought the best of you out again in the worse way.” He chuckled and closed his eyes to block out the annoying lights flooding his vision. “Azkaban, huh? It’s been so long my old friend. To think your walls that were once my barrier to keep her from me shall be the same that keep me from her. I do hope they aren’t fool enough to bring that girl here of all places.”

The guards outside the door didn’t like what they had just heard. Both men locked eyes with one another and knew exactly what the other was trying to convey.

‘We should’ve chosen different professions.’

How very right they were.
Chapter 25: Duet

Hermione didn’t leave her room the next morning.

When the embers died down and the screams of Bellatrix could no longer be heard, she returned to her bed and hid beneath the covers. Her head was poking out and she couldn’t help but stare at the cage at the other end of the room. The metal door was open and looming as she remembered her first days in the house.

When she had been chained up like an animal, fed out of a pet dish and tormented by Bellatrix on a nearly daily basis.

She remembered the curses and *crucios*.

She remembered the way the woman’s hands always seemed to find themselves around her neck.

How the other’s eyes sometimes bore into hers with such intensity that she felt like she was melting from the heat of her gaze. It was intoxicating.

…it wasn’t her.

Hermione groaned and pulled the blankets over her head entirely.

This was happening more and more. Moments where her siren side got the best of her and tried to paint Bellatrix in a better light. As if trying to make her…*like* the other woman.

She shuddered.

There was no way she would let that happen.

Bellatrix was cruel. All the woman knew was pain and destruction. She knew nothing of love, or friendship, or kindness. She couldn’t even call Hermione by her name!

But that was beside the point. There was nothing good about Bellatrix.

*She lies.*

The once somewhat inactive voice ever hovering at the back of her mind was speaking to her once again.
“I’m not lying. She’s a horrible woman.” She murmured. Crookshanks looked over at her like she was crazy.

*Our mate is strong. She can protect us.*

“And cruel. What’s the point in being strong to protect someone when you’re the one we need protecting from?”

*Our mate is smart. She is clever.*

“She’s manipulative more like it. And I can be clever too.”

*Our mate is beautiful.*

She blushed. “She’s not hideous, I’ll give her that.”

*Our mate was made for us. She sings only for us. We sing only for her. Beautiful singing.*

That made Hermione angry. “No matter how nice her voice sounds,” She hated that at least that part was true. “I didn’t ask for her. I wanted a mate. I’m not ashamed of that. The thought of having someone want me and to always be with was too good to pass up. I was lonely.” She sighed. “And the others did their best. Ginny, Luna, Neville; they stuck with me and tried to cheer me up. But…I always felt that there was something missing.”

She hated that about herself. Regardless of how much she hung out with her friends, there was always a hollow feeling in her chest. Like she was walking around with half a spirit. Like she was drifting in a hazy fog of sadness despite smiling in the face of those she cared about.

Then she heard Bellatrix down by the lake and it was like everything became so clear.

After finding out who the other woman was back then, she thought the feeling would return. It never did. The void within was filled at last.

And in its place sat the dark, all encompassing pit that was Bellatrix.

The one person who could stir up every emotion in Hermione all at once. Angry and sadness was easy. The woman knew how to push her buttons in all the right ways since the very beginning. She expected that.

What she wasn’t prepared for was the thrill and the challenge.

Bellatrix had never gone easy on her. She looked down on her, belittled her, called her weak. Yet not once had she pulled her punches with her. The woman had never thought to go easy on her be it mentally or physically.

Which meant she didn’t need to either.

If she was sad or angry, she could scream and vent knowing Bellatrix would always retaliate instead of trying to calm her down. Her actions would have consequences but the fact she could express herself without care was freeing in a way. With Ron or Harry, she feared that her anger would end their friendship. More so if they ever found out about her siren abilities. She was supposed to be the level headed one out of the three of them. And because of that, she had gain a reputation as such, so when she finally did show her true emotions, she was made out to be unstable.

Like living life with a permanent smile was the only way to live.
It was enough to drive her to madness.

The day she and Bellatrix had their duel was...exciting. Yes, they fought like always, but Hermione didn’t feel like her life was in danger. And to her credit, Bellatrix did keep her word. The woman was even going to give her the reward from her win despite having threatened it away from her later on. The thrill of battle and besting Bellatrix who she knew hadn’t held back on her was exhilarating. The feeling curled up in her chest like a content cat and she never wanted it to leave.

At her core, Hermione craved Bellatrix’s danger.

Not the pain and torture.

Not the constant belittlement and torment.

But placing her mind against someone more experienced than her. Who knew more than her. Who didn’t care how smart she was because she believed herself smarter. If Hermione overcame one her challenges, Bellatrix would always try twice as hard to outdo her latest attempt. And her Gryffindor pride wouldn’t let it go as easily as that. They would be in an endless loop of trying to one up the other.

Laying in bed that morning turned out to be the moment where Hermione finally realized it.

How her siren side could think her and Bellatrix were meant to be.

She almost saw it too.

And maybe in another life- where Bellatrix was anything but what she was now- they could’ve been proper mates.

Those were the thoughts swirling through Hermione’s head as she lounged about in her bed that morning, the will to move and start the day was practically nonexistent. After last night, she knew that leaving her room would spell nothing but trouble. It was best to not be seen by the other woman if she wanted to end the day in one piece. Even after Nimmy repaired the window, she could still see the smoke floating past her window from the fiednfyre. Honestly, she didn’t think the woman would be this upset over the capture of her husband.

Then again, Hermine believed it was because of what Rodolphus knew about Bellatrix’s plans and not out of the love of a wife.

Today, Hermione was content to stay tucked away with Crookshanks at her side and lazily watch the smoke drift past her window. There were a couple of books she wanted to read but that would mean going to the library. It would also be the perfect chance to see if Professor Snape had returned. If he had, maybe she could get more info about what the ministry was doing about Rodolphus.

‘Tonight. I’ll go tonight.’ She promised quietly to herself. Hopefully the older woman would be asleep or out of the mansion. Right now, she was far too content to move.

The young Gryffindor had drifted back to sleep without meaning to; not knowing her life was about to be turned on its head by the time she next awoke.

Night came quickly.
When chocolate brown eyes opened next, the first thing Hermione saw was black. She cursed how blurry her eyes got after initially waking up. As long as she didn’t need glasses like Harry, there wasn’t much to complain about really. Stiff hands rubbed sleepily at her eyes and opened once more. The darkness didn’t disappear.

But it did move.

“Ah!” She yelped, scrambling to the opposite side of her bed. Crookshanks hissed as he was nearly trampled by her frantic escape to safety.

An amused chuckle came from the person standing across from her in the dark. A sharp snap and the lights above her head came blazing to life, nearly blinding her in the process. She hissed at the abrupt flood of luminescence which only proved to tickle the unwanted guest further.

“Wakey wakey, muddy.” Bellatrix’s high-pitched voice taunted. “Today’s a very special day.”

Bellatrix was in a good mood.

This was unexpected.

She was ready for the woman to be outraged the next time they met. But looking at Bellatrix now, she could tell the woman was absolutely giddy.

Which only meant bad things for her.

“A special day?” She asked hesitantly. “Why?”

Bellatrix grinned brightly, eyes igniting with something playful and dangerous.

“Why muddy, today you’re going to be rescued.” The last word was purred so deeply that a shiver of something...unknown ran down her spine.

Then she processed what the other woman had said and suddenly she was on her feet and walking around to stand by the table in the middle of the floor. Her hands braced upon the cloth and nearly ripped it from beneath the vase that sat atop it. “…I’m being rescued?” She whispered quietly.

It was just loud enough for the other woman to hear her. Bellatrix sauntered until she stood directly across from Hermione. She too put her hands on the table. “Yes. They captured that idiot Rodolphus. No doubt they’ll get him to talk. I wouldn’t be surprised if they were already preparing to storm the island as we speak.” She said calmly.

Hermione was happy. She truly was. So much so that she could feel tears in her eyes; unable to fall but burning hotly at the corners of her sight. And yet…

“…then why are you smiling?” She gasped somberly.

She knew why of course.

“Because I’ve been waiting for this.” Bellatrix laughed. “Foolish girl, did you really think I’m an idiot?” I know everything that happens in this house.” The older siren’s smile was sweet and innocent in all the wrong ways. “The library holds more than books down there. Cursed objects. Tomes spanning back hundreds of years. Hidden rooms. This house is full of surprises thought they are no surprise to me.”

She knew.
“Ha! That stupid look on your face says it all. That traitor’s portrait was made by me, you silly child.” She told Hermione.

“Why? You hated Snape.” She asked.

Bellatrix’s lips curled into a snarl. “Of course, I did! That traitor is responsible for our lord’s fall just like you and those two other brats!” Hermione grew tense as the other woman’s mood shift rapidly towards madness again. “I should’ve killed him that day. Murdered him in this sleep when I had the chance. Filth. Dirty, little half-blood bastard had the audacity to strike a deal with me.”

“You made an unbreakable vow.” Hermione stated confidently. The confidence flitted away when onyx eyes slid up to lock with her own brown ones.

“One I continue to regret to this day.” She admitted. “If only my lord hadn’t gotten to him first; I would’ve had him killed for what he did.”

“What did he- “

Hermione couldn’t finish her sentence having been thrown off balance from an explosion coming from outside. Ignoring Bellatrix completely, she ran to the window.

All she could see before her was gold. The wards surrounding the gates had been revealed, something she knew only happened when they came under massive duress. She strained her eyes to see the source. Further into the tree line, she could just barely make out who was causing the commotion.

The light of the moon was the only reason she was able to pinpoint bright red hair out between the greens and browns of the forest.

Her friends had come to save her.

This time the tears did fall. Heavy sobs wracked her body as she leaned her hands against the window panes. After months away from home, she was going to be free. Hermione thought about the Gryffindor common rooms and her warm bed she had left behind in what felt like an eternity ago. There was so much she wanted to do. Sit by the toasty fire; book in hand and her feline companion at her side. Study herbology with Neville and Luna again. Cheer Ginny on during her Quidditch matches. She had to visit and apologize to Madam Pince of course and give Rita a piece of her mind while she was at it. Then there were her parents. She didn’t know how she was going to get them to remember her- or if she ever could- but Hermione knew she at least needed to try. Even if she had to live the rest of her life as their friend rather than their daughter, Hermione just needed to be in their life in some way, shape or form.

Her head raced with all the things she wanted to do once she was out in the real world again. A keen of happiness bubbled up within her chest then, uncontainable with the force of her joy.

Wrapped in her delight, she never saw Bellatrix move.

Two strong arms, clad in lace and heavy black fabric enfolded around her body and pinned her arms to her side. She felt the warm press of Bellatrix’s chest push up against her back as her personal space was thoroughly invaded. Breath, hot and heavy blew against the nape of her neck. Immediately, she tried to struggle away, but the older witches’ hold was unyielding. A chuckle rumbled at her back and she tensed at how pleasant the vibrations felt against her spine. Hermione saw the woman’s reflection in the glass; deep pools of black held her frightened gaze.

“Aren’t we getting a little ahead of ourselves, brat?” She cooed. “I don’t let other’s touch my things
without my permission after all.”

Bellatrix pressed closer to her back. Hermione felt incredibly uncomfortable at the closeness, yet she could feel her other half purring in delight at the proximity.

Bellatrix continued.

“You see, any moment now, the aurors will be knocking on the door looking for their precious lioness.” She could feel the smile against her ear. “I wonder what that’ll ask once they see her.”

She didn’t think anything of it at first, but there was something about what the woman just said that put her on edge. “What are you talking about? Harry and Ron are my friends. They’ll be happy to see me.”

“Yes, they will, won’t they? Although, don’t you think they’ll start asking questions? I mean look at you.” One of the other woman’s bony hands came to pull lightly at her curls. “All rested and relaxed. Hair, bright and bouncy! Fresh new clothes, well fed…not a scratch on you.” She chuckled darkly. “Almost like you weren’t in any danger at all.”

“They know you kidnapped me.” Hermione said.

Her head was snapped backwards to rest against the other woman’s shoulder. “And they know I would never allow it.” Bellatrix hissed in kind. “Your friends may know about me, but they don’t know about us, do they?”

The shorter woman’s silence said it all.

“I figured as much. Oh, what a joy it would’ve been to be there to see their reaction when they find out.” Bellatrix laughed in her ear. “Unfortunately, I have no plans to stick around for that.” She sighed like it was truly an inconvenience.

Another boom rang out from outside. The barrier began to waver.

Her jaw was set. “I won’t tell them.”

“You will. Cause I’m going to let you walk out of here just as you are. And since I know how bad of a liar you are, you’ll sing like a bird in no time. The big bad death eater is your mate.” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “Your friends will abandon you. Isn’t that what you fear most? What you fear even more than me?”

Hermione threw her head to the side as hard as she could. The force of the blow was enough to send Bellatrix stumbling away with an annoyed growl. When she recovered, Hermione was staring at her with her back to the window, eyes alight with raw fury as the moonlight illuminated her silhouette.

“Has this been your game this entire time? Turn my friends against me, so what? I come crawling back to you?” She yelled.

Bellatrix smirked at her angry expression. “If it was, why would I tell you?”

“Because you’re a vain and arrogant woman who finds joy in messing with me at every turn. Not this time. When I leave this place, it will be the last we ever see each other.” That was a promise. If Bellatrix was captured, Hermione knew that she wouldn’t want to see the other woman’s face even if it was sealed away behind bars.

Again, the woman laughed and invaded Hermione’s personal space. She thought of backing away,
but she changed her mind. She refused to reveal her discomfort when freedom was so tantalizingly close. The woman would pounce on the opportunity in a heartbeat.

Bellatrix’s head tilted as she looked Hermione up and down. “Even now, you try to defy me. It makes me want to strangle you.”

“You can’t.”

“I can. It may be painful on my end as well, but taking us both out right here, right now, would bring me ultimate pleasure in my final moments.” Bellatrix admitted. Then she sighed. “But that will ruin my fun and you’ll get exactly what you wanted; freedom from me. Forever. Like I’ll let that happen.”

A vibrant flash of blue illuminated the room before dying away. She could hear someone, more than likely Kingsley, shouting orders to surround the house. She imagined that Bellatrix had wards on the house as well, giving them only moments before the entire house was swarmed with aurors.

Even still, Bellatrix didn’t look bothered in the least.

Curiosity tickled at the forefront of her mind. Something wasn’t right. There was something she was missing and she just couldn’t figure out what it was. The one with all the answers stood before her. At this point, it didn’t matter if the other woman didn’t answer; there was no harm in asking the million-galleon question.

Her eyes narrowed at Bellatrix’s relaxed postured. “Why are you doing this? If you let me go, the ministry and my friends will do everything in their power to protect me. That’ll make it harder to play any fun you may have planned…so why?”

Bellatrix said nothing. Instead, she started pacing; her course circling around Hermione like a prowling predator. The air felt charged with tension and a somber hum pilled the air. She tried following the other siren with her eyes but locking onto the other’s gaze sent a buzz of something hot and sensual rolling down her spine. She didn’t like it one bit. The sounds of explosions and spells hitting the outside of the house was almost drown out now; all she could hear was Bellatrix. All she could see was Bellatrix. Hermione was falling into a trance. It hadn’t happened in a while. She didn’t know if it was because she had gotten used to being in the other sirens presence or her control over her own abilities was improving, but this lack of government over herself was familiar and unnerving as it had always been. She wasn’t completely lost yet. This was purposeful. Bellatrix wanted her undivided attention, something she was forced to give her without fully being overcome by instincts.

Humming turned to sweet melodies as Bellatrix sang to her in her annoyingly beautiful voice. She had no choice but cling to every word like a lifeline.

*Broken toys are thrown away by children once they're older*

*New ones come, like morning sun, to one day take their place*

*But favorites lie right by their sides, until their final days*

*With pieces whole, or filled with holes*

*They cannot be replaced*
Broken toys are thrown away by children once they're older

Torn by rules, devised by fools, who cannot play their games

Their favorite toys are thrown to void, like those of yesterday

And once retrieved, their soul they leave

Where fools led them astray

The woman stopped singing for only a moment, but that was only to stop and meet Hermione’s eyes.

Something in Hermione flipped like a switch.

Bellatrix’s words swam through her mind like a hurricane; giving her flashes and words of too fast for her to comprehend. She saw something in the other siren that she couldn’t describe, though she knew what she was seeing now.

It was the abyss. The dark void of Bellatrix’s mind that she saw only once before back on the first day she awoke in the cage not too far behind her. The day when her voice had become so strong it rendered the other woman immobile. It was staring back at her right now.

Yet something was different.

Before it was hard to tell where one part of the other woman ended and the rest began. Now everything was seamless. No edge, or barrier to anything. The darkness. The creature. Bellatrix herself. It looked as though it had all rolled into one now. It was nearly suffocating and Hermione could barely keep herself from getting sucked into…whatever it was she was seeing.

There was only one thing keeping her from getting pulled in.

Her siren side burst forth like a dam, and where Bellatrix had stopped singing, they instinctually filled in the words.

Broken toys are thrown away by children once they're older

Hollow minds are left behind, their freedom stripped away

You can’t replace what’s been erased

When your thoughts are torn a sundered

No one protects what can’t be fixed

The broken can’t be saved

Broken toys are thrown away by children once they're older

They soon regret the fools they met, who once led them away

Voices choked, beneath our throats
Their protection drags you under

A fool that’s kind, will steal your life

To try and keep you safe

Several floors below, the aurors broke through the wards. The pounding of boots on stone and carpet echoed throughout the hall. Neither woman noticed, wrapped up in a duet of words and warning that they simply couldn’t break. The two circled one another like they were floating in an endless whirlpool. Each step taken matched the other’s perfectly. It was a dance they’d never practice yet knew by heart and mind. The sirens were in sync with one another in a way they’d never been before, and for the first time since meeting as mates, Bellatrix and Hermione sang in tandem.

Broken toys are thrown away by children once they’re older

They can’t escape the claws of fate that guides their every way

Hermione vaguely heard Ron and Harry outside the door screaming her name.

She kept singing.

A bond that breaks is all it takes, for hearts to soon grow fonder

Mistakes of past that try to last, will hate what it creates

Spells were being cast to break the final wards on the bedroom.

She kept singing.

The siren side that we both fight, shall save you in the end

Us broken toys, lost to the void, will find our mate again

The buzz of magic layering over the room was thick and charged with emotion. The trance like state that washed over them slowly receded away; both sirens purring in contentment as they retreated to their usual nesting place. Bellatrix was the first to snap out of it, though Hermione was not far behind. The older of the two was ready to start on a tirade when the wooden door leading to the room burst open with a crash. A dozen wands were pointed in their direction as aurors poured in like a swarm of bees. Bellatrix advanced on Hermione, whipping out her wand from her sleeve and transfiguring it into a knife to hold at the other woman’s throat. Kingsley who was at the front of the group spoke first.
“Bellatrix Lestrange, by my order as the Minister of Magic and Chief Auror, I am placing you under arrest. Release Miss Granger and surrender yourself now!” He boomed.

Bellatrix leaned her face even closer to Hermione’s, a cheshire grin stretching across her features. “And what if I say no? Even if you take her, she belongs to me now.” She purred. Her other hand gently caressed the younger siren’s cheek, sensual and slow, causing Hermione to gasp quietly and tense up.

Ron broke rank and had his wand pointed at Bellatrix’s head.

“Get you hands off of her Lestrange!” He roared.

“Auror Weasley, do not fire your wand! One slip and Miss Granger could lose her life!” Kingsley hissed.

‘She wouldn’t kill me. She can’t.’ Hermione said to them in her head. Of course, they didn’t know that, but she did.

Then again, she didn’t want to test that theory. Bellatrix made it clear she had no problems with taking them both out if push came to shove.

“You heard him blood traitor,” Bellatrix said in her high-pitched voice, the one she usually used when mocking someone. “You’re making me jumpy. My hand might slip and slice open her silly, little neck.”

“Enough! Let her go Bellatrix. We have the place surrounded. Come quietly or we will resort to violence.” The minister announced. In response, the aurors at his back got into more offensive stances.

Ron made a strangled squawking sound when he witnessed Bellatrix lean Hermione’s ear against her mouth to whisper hotly in the other’s ear. “He seems more upset than the others, muddy. Is he your filthy little boyfriend?”

“No.” Hermione whispered just as quietly. She squirmed in the other woman’s hold. She hated how aware she was of the other woman’s body pressed against her own. “We’re just friends.” She answered, afraid that the woman might attack Ron personally if she said anything more than that.

It yielded the opposite results.

“Like I said earlier, you’re a terrible liar. Poor idiot. He doesn’t know that everything you have already is mine.” She cooed quietly.

Hermione titled her head slightly to snarl back, “I haven’t lied and I don’t belong to you.”

Bellatrix’s eyes very slowly rolled down towards her. There was a mischievous glimmer behind them. She looked Ron dead in his eyes and in a much louder voice said, “I do so love proving you wrong, mudblood.”

Suddenly and without warning, soft, warm lips were pressed aggressively against her own. Hermione’s eyes hurt from how wide they’d become from having the other woman’s lips imposed upon her so unexpectedly. The shock made her gasp; biggest mistake she could’ve made as Bellatrix took the opportunity to thoroughly explore her mouth with her tongue. All Hermione knew was the bland taste of saliva and breathlessness as she was literally unable to breathe. Neither of them had their eyes closed; Hermione’s wide with shock, Bellatrix’s narrowed in amused victory.
The kiss was absolutely filthy.

And over almost as quickly as it began.

No one could react fast enough when Bellatrix spun Hermione to the ground and dashed to the window. She morphed into her smoke form and broke through the glass, flying off into the night; her laugh echoing behind her like a villain from a children’s cartoon. Several aurors followed after her, but everyone knew it would be in vain. She disappeared into the night.

Still frozen upon the floor, Hermione’s brain was fried.

A woman just kissed her.

Bellatrix Lestrange, just kissed her.

She never had a fancy for either- not in the slightest- but that didn’t change what just happened. It wasn’t anything like the spur of the moment kiss she and Ron shared after destroying the diadem horcrux.

It was suffocating and greedy; charged by possessiveness that Hermione knew the woman had been building up since her coming to this place. She could still taste the other in her mouth and the look of satisfaction in the other’s eyes during was burning into her retina’s. Her head throbbed in agony as her siren side was absolutely over the moon about it all.

Everything was a blur from how quickly it transpired and Hermione had several emotions stirring at the forefront of her much. Confusion, fear, anger, and- horrifyingly enough- pleasure.

That wasn’t entirely her siren side talking.

‘Oh Merlin.’ She bemoaned to herself. ‘What is happening to me?’

“…Mione.”

She looked at the remaining aurors in the room.

There was a wide array of reactions present.

Many were shocked, staring at her like she had just grown a second head.

Others couldn’t bare to meet her eyes.

Kingsley was a blank slate.

Harry was horrified.

And Ron, who had just called her name…

“What in the bloody hell was that?”

Was infuriated.

In this moment, Hermione cursed Bellatrix to hell and back. She knew that there was no lie she could spin that would save her from the onslaught of questions everyone present no doubt had.

At least she was going home now; back to her friends and family where she would be safe, she told herself, hoping to savior even the smallest bit of joy from what had just occurred.
Somewhere near the back of her mind, she heard her siren side softly singing the song from earlier, it’s emotions screaming signs of dread and warning the entire time.

Looking back, she should’ve listened closer.

It would’ve saved her a lot of pain later on in the future.
Chapter Summary

Shoutout to LoonyLunaLovebad for being the real MVP and commenting about the mix up on timeline events. That clumsy is in my name for a reason. So I went back in and changed it to fit past events for anyone confused right now. Sorry about that! ToT

Chapter Notes

Free time isn't free people, so if you got it, drain it to the last drop!

Job hunting sucks, art is my love, but frustrating, family is stressful, and no one hates being healthier than my young old woman body. ToT

And when all of it piles up, I can always get lost in writing! instead of my usual trio of updates, I got five in this time and i'm really proud of that! We're going to finish this!

Now i'm thinking of all the people who are gonna Sherlock this story and all these chapter notes mean nothing cause all the chapters are going to be out. -n- Alas, until the next batch enjoy Chapter 26. We're coming up on a chapter that i'm really excited for and gave me a lot of inspiration for writing this story in the first place.

Chapter 26: Shiny New Shackles

The journey to the Ministry was tense.

Hermione, accompanied by Kingsley, Ron, and Harry arrived at the organization where they immediately took her to the medical wing. There, she was checked over thoroughly by a nurse who read the report off to the other occupants in the room.

“She is in surprisingly good shape. There’s several wounds that look like they’ll scar, but otherwise there’s no major injuries that I can find. My scan found traces of the cruciatus curse though.” The blonde worded like a question.

“She used it a lot.” Hermione spoke up. The glare she was getting from Ron made her usually confident voice grow meek. He hadn’t said anything to her since they’d arrive.

The woman nodded. “I’m not surprised. Consider yourself lucky, Miss Granger. Usually those who run into Lestrange don’t come to me all in one piece; be it in mind or body. And that’s after a single encounter. You’ve been with her a very long time.”

From her right, she heard Ron scoff ‘lucky?’ beneath his breath. It was followed by a pained grunt as Harry elbowed him in the side.

“Can she be cleared for questioning?” Kingsley asked, ignoring the two other aurors at his side.
The nurse waved him off. “She’s cleared. If she’s still feeling lingering effects from any curses or spells, I want her back in this infirmary immediately. I mean it Kingsley. She’s been through a lot, I won’t have you hounding her like one of your other detainees.” The nurse warned.

Kingsley at least at the decency to look embarrassed. “Will do, Anna. We just need to know what happened and then Miss Granger will be put under round the clock protection.” He turned to Hermione and held his hand out towards the entryway. “Miss Granger if you will please follow me.”

“Okay.” She said. Hermione hopped off the bed slowly, the slippers the nurse kindly transfigured for her upon noticing her bare feet when she arrived dragged across the floor with the heaviness of her body. Even though she was with friends, the young lioness felt like she was walking death row. trudging through the hallways of the ministry was even worse.

Everyone they passed stared and whispered with excitement in their voice. She walked between the three aurors like an animal on display. Times like these, she was happy that her thick curls could easily hide her face if she kept her head low.

Right foot, left foot. Right turn, straight.

Hermione didn’t dare raise her head. She followed behind the minister quietly and quickly, hoping that it would somehow speed up their journey.

It didn’t.

Kingsley’s office was like a mile away from the infirmary. She didn’t know why they simply didn’t apperate or take a floo. It would’ve saved them time and she wouldn’t have to be paraded about like she was now.

Eventually they did arrive at the top floor, the minister’s name and titles scrawled across a gold plagued next to the doorframe. Kingsley opened it and she was invited to the sight of a warm and brightly lit office. The man’s desk was large and littered with files, quills, and ink. Above their heads, papers were floating in waves; folding into birds of different shapes and sizes as they flew out the window and off to different departments. A couch was to her right with a small coffee table in front of it. Both sat across from a roaring fireplace that took up a good majority of the room. Occasionally, she watched a paper fly into the fire and disintegrate but only until she noticed the other person sitting in a grey armchair near it.

“Professor!” She cried in joy.

McGonagall turned around from where she sat looking sadly into the flames. Upon her title being called, she whipped her head up to see Hermione standing there.

“Oh Hermione, dear child!” The old woman said, tears pooling in her eyes. Faster than she’d ever seen the woman move, McGonagall swept her student up in a powerful hug. “Thank heavens they found you!” She wept.

“I’m so glad to see you.” Hermione cried into the other woman’s shoulder.

The three men also entered the room, Harry closing the door behind them. McGonagall guided Hermione over to the couch where they both sat down. Kingsley turned the armchair around to face them. Harry and Ron chose to stand. It was of course the minister who wanted to get straight down to business.

“Miss Granger…Hermione. It’s good to have you back.” He began.
She met his gaze and smiled. “It’s good to be back. Thank you. All of you. I was afraid no one would find me.”

“You didn’t look like you were trying to escape to me.” She heard Ron murmur.

“Ronald Weasley, watch your tongue!” McGonagall gasped. “I’m quite sure Hermione did all she could to return to us as soon as possible.”

“Another comment like that Auror Weasley, and I’m striking you for insubordination.” Kingsley warned. The red head had a sour look upon his face, but gave a firm ‘yes sir, sorry sir’ all the same.

“Now, Miss Granger, there’s a lot of questions we need answered. I suppose the most pressing would be what happened on Christmas day.”

They were going to start at the beginning. She could deal with that. “There was a party. I was heading there when I ran into Harry and Ron. That was the day that Bellatrix attacked the first town.” She frowned. “As you probably already know, it was a trap. A distraction to lead you away from the castle. She has a familiar. A bird I’ve never read about before. It started following me around. Sometimes attacking; other times giving me notes from Bellatrix.” She refused to elaborate about the notes contents and moved on. “That day it caught me off guard in the room of requirement. It had a chain around it’s neck with a door pendent on it.”

“A portkey?” Harry asked.

She shook her head. “A transfiguration. Even damaged, portkeys and apparation isn’t possible inside the castle walls. She knew that. Do you remember the wardrobe Malfoy fixed to let the death eaters in the first time?” He nodded. “We never found the second one and the first we thought destroyed. In reality, Bellatrix had them both. The bird released the enchantment and returned the wardrobe to normal size. That’s how she got in. I was knocked out. When I woke up, I was chained to a wall, my wand was gone, and Crookshanks had followed me through.”

“We saw the wardrobe right before it exploded into pieces. She made sure that we couldn’t follow after.” Kingsley said. “What happened after that?”

Hermione swallowed. “…She started torturing me. Spells at first, but she wasn’t above using her hands and feet. We were constantly fighting. I defended myself as best I could without a wand. It mostly just made her angrier.”

“You’re weren’t chained up when we found you.” Ron’s neutral voice chimed in. She winced at seeing how cold he’d become. Regardless, she answered.

“She let me out.”

“She let you out? That doesn’t sound like something she would do.” Kingsley said.

“Bellatrix liked to play games. She’s childish. When I didn’t give her the reactions she wanted, she would change the ‘game’ for her own amusement.” Her eyes drifted off. “She let me out. Naturally I tried to escape, but she had cursed the house. The windows would send me flying. The front door forced me to want to stay against my will.” She shuddered thinking about those earlier days. “She liked seeing me try and escape. She was confident that even if I somehow made it outside the curse, there’d be nowhere I could go.”

“I can see why. The wards hiding that place were nearly impossible to get past. If it wasn’t’ for Rodolphus and an anonymous tip, we would’ve never found it.” The man said, scratching the back of his bald head.
“Anonymous tip?” Hermione asked.

“Someone’s patronus of a cat came into the ministry. A former death eater. Somehow, they caught wind of the attack on the town and warned us beforehand. It was how we caught Rodolphus. They said it was a ‘debt repaid’?” Harry explained.

Everyone was startled when tears sprung from her eyes.

“Hermione? What on Earth is the matter?” McGonagall asked, rubbing her shoulders to comfort the quietly crying woman.

“Narcissus.” She managed to say.

“What does Malfoy’s mum have to do with this? We haven’t seen her, Lucius, or the ferret anywhere since their trial.” Ron asked.

Hermione accepted the tissue passed to her and wiped her eyes. “She’s in hiding. The second day I was caged up, she came to me with food and healed some of my wounds. That was the last I saw of her.”

“She helped you already. Why not free you?”

Hermione shook her head. “As much as she wanted to, she wouldn’t. Bellatrix would’ve hunted her down and killed her and her family. She was afraid. Though I think she knows her sister would still hunt her down for what little she did.”

“So much for family.” Ron muttered. “That whole family is nothing but cowards and criminals.”

Harry frowned at his friend. “Not all of them. Andromeda was the only reason we could even get to the island in the first place. They may have erased her from their history, but they can’t erase her blood. Also, Sirius and my godson Teddy are technically a part of their family too.”

“Oh. Right. Sorry Harry.” Ron apologized. The tips of his ears were practically glowing red.

“What did you do after she let you roam the house?” Kingsley continued investigating.

“Most days, she would leave the house. I think she was going to meet with Rodolphus. I started searching around and eventually I found a library.” She smiled when both her boys said ‘of course she did’. “I was looking for books on wandless magic. She’d taken my wand and still has it I think. But I wanted a way to defend myself when she attacked me again. During the search I stumbled across a hidden room. That’s where I found Professor Snape’s portrait.”

“That reminds me. I can finally get answers from both of them.” She said, quickly glancing over at the headmistress at her side.

“Yes, Professor Snape has been a huge help throughout this investigation. We even used his help in developing a more potent version of veritaserum that he had already been working on before his death. Between him and Slughorn, we were able to develop something that makes interrogating death eaters and other criminals that much easier. We needed him back at the castle to help finish the potion past a testing phase. It was a success, thank Merlin for that.” Kingsley sighed. “It’ll sure save me a lot of paperwork when things go south with some of the more fanatic criminals we get coming here.”

She was relieved to hear that instead of fearing the potion’s master had up and abandoned her. She should’ve never doubted him.
“Professor Snape helped me learn wandless magic. I’m not proficient at it, but it was enough to hold my own against her. She attacked me less after that.”

In truth, she stopped because of her siren abilities, but she didn’t want to go too in depth on that just yet. As long as she wasn’t outright lying, Hermione thought leaving certain things out involving her inheritance would be best.

“Do you know what sparked the attack on Madam Pince?” Harry asked.

“That was my fault. She did it to get back at me. Another one of her twisted games. She would have Nimmy bring me the newspaper just to get a rise out of me.”

“What in Merlin’s name is a Nimmy?” Ron laughed.

Her cheeks puffed out in irritation. “He’s a house elf. A very kind one. He risked his life to help me on several occasions. He even took care of Crookshanks. I owe him a lot.” She thought about him possibly being left behind at the house. With hope, Bellatrix would leave him alive. She doubted the woman would leave him at the house by himself for the aurors to find.

No one said anything about the woman’s familiar either. The only ones the aurors found at the house were her and Crookshanks who was safe and sound back at the castle.

“We noticed something while breaking through the wards. Burn marks. They appeared fresh.”

“Fiednfyre. She…wasn’t happy the night you captured Rodolphus.” That was putting it lightly.

“Funny. He seemed quite happy to be away from her. Said he would rather be in Azkaban than have the woman come after him for getting caught.” Kingsley said.

His next words shifted the entire atmosphere of the room.

“Which is why Hermione, I’m finding it quite hard to believe that she left you so…unscathed. You were gone for months and have but a few minor scars to show for it.” He pointed at her arm. “A few hours in her presence when you met in the past and she carves a permanent brand into your skin. Bellatrix Lestrange isn’t the type of witch to have a change of heart. A woman willing to kill her own sister and husband wouldn’t have let you leave that house alive. Even for a supposed game.”

Damn Kingsley.

Curse him, and curse Bellatrix for knowing this would happen. Professor McGonagall’s attendance wasn’t helping either. Had she not been, it would’ve been easier. She could omit certain things and maybe convince them it was all a part of the other woman’s unknown plans.

Except McGonagall knew.

And if Bellatrix hadn’t been lying; knew more than she let on.

She looked at her two best friends.

Harry looked like he wanted to give her a hug. His face spoke of both relief and tiredness. She imagined that he wanted this to be over as quick as possible so that they could talk to one another outside of auror and quarry.

She wanted the same.

Ron on was a different story.
Since the moment he saw Bellatrix placing her hands- and lips- all over her, he’d been at a ten. A red ball of fire fueled by anger that Bellatrix always had a way of bringing to life in people. Mostly because the woman was good at reading people.

Mostly.

Her and Ron had plans to become an item. In the past. But when he left for the auror program, and Hermione fell into her depression, those plans went up in smoke. There was always going to be a spark between them- at least on Ron’s end- but Hermione knew it would never grow into anything more than that.

Then again, after all of this, she would be surprised if Ron ever wanted to speak to her again.

She sighed.

“I know that Professor McGonagall already told you about the bond between me and Bellatrix. I saw the memories.” They both flinched, knowing they had said some less than pleasant things at the time when they occurred. “The reason I’m sitting here in one piece is because she wanted this to happen. She knew you would ask about my appearance. She wanted me to reveal that the reason was because we were mates so that you all would turn on me.” She gave a small smile. “She never considered the fact that Professor McGonagall already explained it to you long ago.”

She hoped the two would understand and this could all be over with. That since Hermione had come clean and everything was out in the open, she could finally be left alone.

That would’ve been the case too had Ron not put his foot in his mouth yet again. “So what, you just went along with it because you already knew her game? That doesn’t seem like the Hermione I knew.”

His voice was beginning to grow louder.

Hermione saw red, jumping to her feet at his callous questions. “Ronald Weasley, have you lost what little sense that you have left!” She yelled.

“Well what else am I supposed to think! Bellatrix Lestrange hates you, ‘Mione, and yet her hands and lips were all over you! Was that because you’re mates, too!” He bellowed.

That was her tipping point. A foul screech, like breaks on a speeding car broke the windows out from Kingsley’s office. The papers flying around them fell like dumbbells and the fire whimpered down to a few sparks before regaining momentum. Ron was knocked flat on his arse, and subsequently Harry and Kingsley met the same fate. McGonagall wasn’t hit with the full force of her rage as she was sitting beside her and not in front like the others.

Hermione saw red.

“Say one more thing Ronald and I’ll sock you like I did Malfoy.” She hissed. Rumbling anger could be heard audibly by all as it rattled around in her chest. She knew her siren side was agitated and alive within her, but Hermione had full reigns right now. The words she wanted to say needed to be all hers. “You have no idea what I went through when I was there. How many times she hit me. Belittled me. Burned me. Broke my fingers and my leg. I was nearly drowned in the forest and crushed against a metal fence. She choked me. Kicked me. Cast the cruciatus curse whenever possible. You think I allowed her to do all that?”

The coffee table was vibrating. Hermione didn’t know her magic was leaking out like a dripping faucet. She didn’t care either.

“I didn’t allow her to do anything. She stole that kiss! Just like she stole everything else! My dignity.
My wand. My freedom.” The witch walked around the table to stand over Ron who was still staring fearfully up at her from the floor. “If you failed to recall, there was a knife to my throat! I was surviving. That’s what I was doing the entire time!” She narrowed her eyes. “I heard you, when the nurse said I was lucky. And you were wrong. It was luck. Being mates is the only reason I’m alive right now because she would’ve killed me. The reason I haven’t wound up like Neville’s parents is because she physically can’t do it.”

It looked like Ron was about to say something. More than likely to call that a good thing, but she refused to let him speak until she was done.

“That doesn’t mean she didn’t come as close as she possibly could. Bellatrix had no problem hurting herself to hurt me. She told me she would gladly let herself die if it meant taking me with her.” The more she spoke, the more worked up she became. “Then she realized that she could hurt me in other ways. Us being mates saved my life, but in doing so, put everyone I love and care about in danger. Madam Pince was the first of what will be many. She went after her to get to me. And I could do nothing. Do you know how much that tore me inside? I felt so defenseless.” Tears of anger pooled in her eyes as she held up a single digit. “One, Ronald Weasley. That’s all it took.”

“One what?” His nervous voice asked.

“One word. One word said with her siren abilities and she can control me. I learned to stop her the hard way, but she’s still stronger than me, more experienced. When she used her powers against me, I didn’t hesitate to do the same. I never stopped fighting her, and don’t you ever suggest that I did! I did what I could with what I had just to make her stop.” Hermione was back on her feet and went to stand closer to the door. The others in the room could hear her trying to breathe normally. Tears dripped down her face as she was border lining on hysterical.

“Then one day she did. She stopped hurting me. I knew why, but the longer I stayed there- the more I felt like no one would find me- the less I found myself caring. It was safer that way. If I kept my head low and conserved my magic, then maybe one day I could get the upper hand on her.” Her whole body shuddered. “Except I got too comfortable. Which made my creature side start coming out more than ever before. I wasn’t like this before Bellatrix. This emotional wreck of a person. But now it’s like I can’t even think for myself anymore. Like I’m not myself. And since being around her, it like it’s getting stronger. Which means she’s getting stronger too. What’ll happen when she comes back for me? How do I know I’ll be able to fight her when she does? This feeling inside of me… it’s getting worse.” She whimpered.

The entire room was vibrating again.

“It’s getting worse.” She repeated.

“Hermione?” The headmistress asked. When the rumbling started knocking items off Kingsley’s desk and curious voices could be heard outside the door, everyone got to their feet.

“Mione’ I think you need to calm down now.” Harry cautiously said.

“Hermione I’m sorry! I was just angry. I’m an idiot. You know that, right? Just come have a seat okay?” Ron laughed nervously, also trying to quell the other’s distressed state.

The shaking continued.

“Miss Granger, I’m going to have to ask you to have a seat now. Auror Weasley won’t upset you anymore and you are posing a potential threat to the other’s in this room.” Kingsley said. He slowly pulled his wand from his holster, causing both Ron and Harry to tense up.
Hermione turned to look at them.

Her eyes were glassed over.

“...I can’t.”

She was going to boil over any moment and everybody saw it coming a mile away.

Surprising to all, it was McGonagall who reacted faster.

A potion was pulled from her pocket and she glided over to Hermione’s trembling form. There wasn’t time for niceties as she grabbed the young woman’s mouth and pried it open. The potion was poured in and the older witch covered it to make Hermione swallow. Blue elixir slid down her throat and it was as if someone shut off the power to her mind. The girl folded into herself as the calming drought started taking effect. All sounds ceased within the office aside from the crackle of the fireplace and everyone’s labored breathing.

Hermione’s eyes were still glassed over, but they were relaxed instead of terrified.

Ron, Harry, and Kingsley could only stare at the now docile Gryffindor in terror, awe, and confusion. None of them knew what had just happened, however, it was clear that they had just managed to avoid a potential disaster.

“Bloody hell. What was that about?” Ron gasped.

Professor turned towards the other men in the room, a grim look on her face.

“That, Mr. Weasley, is why I insisted I be here today.” She said.

Harry gave her a strange look. “Professor, are you saying you knew this would happen?”

“I knew that you would want to interrogate Hermione once she was safely return. Her species in particular gain most of their powers from emotion- positive or negative, remember.” She glared at Ron specifically. “For Hermione, getting riled up like that now could spell disaster for all of us in this room and in this facility. You nearly got us killed with your appalling behavior, Mr. Weasley.”

His eyes went wide. “But Hermione wouldn’t do that!” He yelled.

McGonagall glanced down at Hermione who was staring at the floor. She watched her flinch at Ron’s exclamation. She reached down to gently run her hand over the young girl’s hair. “She wouldn’t. Not on purpose at least. Now however...that is a very legitimate concern. We have Bellatrix to thank for that.”

“How do you know that?” Harry asked.

“Cor-Echo sirens are rare. The age gap like with these two is common. Expected. As such, if two mates find each other, a bond will start to form the longer they spend in one another’s company.” She was in full lecture mode. “Even using their abilities in one another’s general proximity will speed up the process.”

Alarm grew in all three of the men’s faces.

“And would singing together count as that?” Came Ron’s horrified question.

“For sirens, singing together is the most intimate act two mates can engage in. The effects it can have on a mated pair is stronger than even amormentia.” She told them.
“…we heard the two of them singing together right before we swarmed the room they were in.” Kingsley admitted. If what the other woman was saying was true, they were in a deeper situation than he first assumed.

The council was going to have to be notified.

“Then we may already be too late. Even now, Bellatrix will be able to find Hermione wherever she goes. What you just saw is just the beginning. Their siren sides act on instinct. Until they are together, and stay that way, Bellatrix will keep searching for her. The longer we keep Hermione safe and far away from her, the more desperate she’ll become.” The headmistress explained. “It’s a ‘death do you part’ situation they’ve entered gentlemen.”

“Then we kill her. Simple as that.” Ron said. “Her crimes alone already would get her thrown through the veil.”

“That won’t save Hermione.” She told the young auror. “Most mates die of heartbreak in the most literal sense. Other’s chose to follow their mate to the grave of their own volition. For some species, killing one could end up killing the other. All of these can happen to Cor-Echoes too. However, there is a fourth scenario that can happen. And in their case, because of the incomplete bond, the most likely scenario to occur. We must sever the bond they share before anything permanent can be done about Bellatrix.”

The mood of the room soured even further.

“Professor McGonagall.”

It was Hermione who spoke up.

She was staring at the other woman with hurt in her eyes.

“Some of that wasn’t in the book I found in the Hogwarts library. Bellatrix read the same one. There were pages missing…she said to ask you about them.”

The question went unsaid, but the headmistress knew what the other woman was implying. There was no reason to hide it any longer.

“If you’re asking if I took them, then the answer is yes.”

“But…why? You knew I must’ve been looking for them. And that Bellatrix would’ve looked as well. Didn’t we had a right to know about what we are!” Hermione begged.

“If either of you knew what was written there, then it would’ve spelled disaster for a lot of innocent people.” Her face was stern and unfeeling in this moment. “As headmistress, it is- and was- my job to protect my students from anything that may harm them…even if that thing one day became themselves.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” She asked.

“It means that as someone trying to protect you, I can’t tell you what that book said. I made an unbreakable vow when I became the Gryffindor head of house; just as all heads of staff did.” She looked over at Kingsley. “The same one all Ministers, heads of council, and Unspeakables must abide by as well. What happened today won’t go unnoticed by the rest of the ministry. It will spread. And once they find out, there will be only one option we can take.”
Kingsley slowly got up from his chair. A dark look upon his face.

“Minerva. You can’t even be *thinking* about doing that!” He boomed.

The golden trio had never seen the man so angry.

“Would you rather the public get hold of this? Or worse, Bellatrix. I hate the idea as much as you do, make no mistake about that. But the alternative is far worse. It’ll only be until that madwoman is taken into custody.” She replied.

Her composure was rock solid, but beneath the surface of a hardened woman, Kingsley could tell this was the last thing either of them wanted.

“We don’t know how long that’ll take! For Merlin sakes Minerva, she’s still a *child*!”

“And so were those before her!” She rebutted. “I’ve seen firsthand what happened to those kids because I chose to see them as such!” She walked over to the couch and took a seat. Everyone watched as a tear slipped from the corner of her eye.

“I lost…more of them than you know by not acting when I could. The war took even more. Hermione still attends Hogwarts. Which means she is still my *student*. I won’t let that *woman* take her back.” She voiced firmly.

“We could lose her.” He tried one last time.

“…but not her life.” Was the witches’ response.

For a long time, there was nothing. No one spoke as the tension in the room built up. Questions were answered only to give rise to more and more.

Ron and Harry couldn’t fathom what was going on; both were seeing a side of their boss and previous professor that they’d never thought they’d see before.

The two just wanted their friend back and out of danger, yet the trouble felt like it had only begun anew.

Kingsley set about repairing his office. Papers were sent back to his desk where they formed birds once more to fly off to their proper destinations. Glass shards flew back into place as the window became whole again. Ink returned to their bottles; quills slid back in their holders. When everything was settled, he plonked down in his desk chair and held his face in his hands as the took a moment to gather his bearings. No one disturbed him until he spoke again.

“…I’ll make the preparations and call the council. Hermione cannot leave the ministry until after the decision is finalized or rejected by a majority vote.” He spoke quietly. “Auror Weasley and Auror Potter will find her appropriate accommodations and stand guard until the meeting.”

McGonagall stood and approached the other man. She laid a hand over his own. “Thank you. Not for doing this; but understanding why we have to.”

He nodded weakly and closed his eyes.

The older woman looked over at Hermione and held out a hand to help her up off the floor. “Come Miss Granger. I’m sure this has been a harrowing day for you. I’m afraid I can’t tell you tomorrow will get any easier.”
Hermione took the hand and stood on her own two wobbly feet. She didn’t say anything to Kingsley as Ron and Harry escorted her and the headmistress out of the office.

So much had happened in the miniscule amount of time they’d been talking. Her head was still working off the effects of the calming drought; something her siren side wasn’t pleased about in the slightest.

In fact, her other half had been simmering in agitation since earlier. Flashes of anger and sadness flooded her thoughts sporadically. It was just like when she looked into Bellatrix’s eyes when they sung to one another.

More importantly, it was there again.

That feeling of existential dread.

Her siren side wanted her to run away.

Find somewhere safe to hide.

Hermione was fine with doing both of those things. It’s what she wanted to do for a very long time now. The only thing stopping her now was the fact that she didn’t understand her instincts rationale for wanting to hide.

Which was the fact that the one her siren side wished to get away from as quick as possible was walking right beside her…
Chapter 27: A Talk Amongst Friends

Chapter Notes

Now several things you may notice about this chapter.
1; It's Monday, not Sunday, i'm late like a total pleb. Ew
2; It's mad short in comparison to other chapters. That's because I broke it into two. Eww
3; What happened this chapter? Answer: Diddly squat, that's what! Ewwww

I couldn't in good conscious leave it here! So, ive spent the last 11 hours writing non-stop and it's 6 am. Chapter 28 is complete, but unedited. Once i'm done with everything, i promise to have it up this evening! It's legit fighting me so hard. Hope you guys don't mind it! TnT Please enjoy!

Chapter 27: A Talk Amongst Friends

“I need to contact the other heads of house. I will return tomorrow. Goodnight you three. Get some rest. I fear we will all have a long day ahead of us come the morning.”

Those were the headmistress’ final words before her departure. The door shut to the ministry grade guestroom. Ron, Harry and Hermione were alone together for the first time in months. In Harry’s hand was another bottle of purple liquid.

‘While I’m trusting you boys not to upset Miss Granger of your own volition, we can’t afford to have any more episodes like earlier.’

The black haired auror pocketed the potion. Harry looked up at Hermione who refused to meet his eyes. He imagined there was a lot of things the girl wanted to say, but for Harry, all of that could wait. He walked up to the downtrodden woman and pulled her into a bone-crushing hug. She melted into him within seconds, hands coming up to wrap around her shoulders.

“It’s good to have you back ‘Mione.” He murmured into her hair.

“I missed you guys so much.” She whispered in return. Harry pulled away first. He gave Ron a look over his shoulder and gestured for the other man to come over.

Ron looked like a frightened first-year with how meekly he approached her.

“I…what I mean to say is…I didn’t mean…I’m an idiot.” He finally said.

“You’re an idiot.” She agreed. That didn’t stop her for pulling him into a hug as well. “But I’m used to it. I’m sorry about lashing out back there. And for tossing you around.”

“That was bloody wicked by the way.” Ron said, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly. “Have you…always been able to do that?”

She shook her head. “No. At least I never tried before Bellatrix came along.”

“I see.” The room grew quiet. “Seems like a lot of things changed because of her.” He hissed.
Harry walked over to the kitchen area that came with all the ministry guest rooms and started a kettle of water. “What do you think McGonagall and Kingsley were talking about? What’s this thing about an unbreakable vow?”

That’s what Hermione was wondering as well. “I’m not the first magical creature to attend Hogwarts. Her and Professor Dumbledore handled the needs of magical creatures to make sure they were safe at school.”

“Except we haven’t heard about any other magical creatures at school aside for Remus. Hagrid’s class and the ones in the forbidden forest don’t really count.” Ron shuddered as he thought about the half-giant’s pet spider. “She said she lost kids. Don’t you think that would be all over papers if that was true?”

“Actually…no.” Hermione cut in. “They’d want to keep it under wraps as much as possible. Especially given the ministers we’ve had in the past.”

“And Umbridge.” Harry growled. He looked down at his hand where the words I must not tell lies could still be seen.

“Myrtle’s death almost got the school closed down. There aren’t many wizarding schools in the world. If Hogwarts closed, there’d be fewer places for children to go and learn.” She thought about her current situation. “And if there were children like me- muggleborns who couldn’t control either their magical powers or their creature inheritance- then the chances of our world being exposed to the muggles would grow exponentially.”

Ron plopped down on the sofa next to her. “Wow. I never thought about it like that.”

Harry came over carrying a tray of tea. “But if McGonagall’s got a plan up her sleeve already, then this must’ve happened before.” He past the cups out to his friends who thanked him. “Though she didn’t seem too thrilled about it.”

“That’s what I’m worried about.” Hermione said quietly.

Ron tried to comfort her.

“Professor McGonagall has never steered us wrong before ‘Mione.” He smiled. The taller boy lightly bumped shoulders with her.

Harry sat on her opposite side. “We just gotta trust she knows what she’s doing.”

Hermione fiddled with her cup. She stared into the dark brown liquid with trepidation.

“I want to. I really do you guys. I’ve always trusted her. But something…something’s not right.” She huffed in frustration. “I’m not sure explaining it will help or make things more complicated.

“You can always talk to us. Besides, who better to explain things to us than you? How do you think we ever passed any class ever?” Harry teased.

She couldn’t help but laugh. “I guess. Okay.” She sat up straighter. “As you probably can tell, I don’t really know everything about my powers. Or what I can do. So sometimes I can’t control it.”

“Bit of an understatement, dontcha think.” Ron piped in. She gave him a look which made him look away and take a large gulp of his tea.

She continued.
“As I was saying; sometimes, when my emotions run high or I’m singing, my instincts overwhelm me and act without my permission.” She set her empty cup on the table. “Usually it isn’t too intense, but there were two times when I felt truly…lost.”

“In what?” Ron asked.

“In Bellatrix.” She answered.

“Wait what!”

“For Merlin’s sake Ron, let her finish!” Harry scolded from the other side of the girl. “She’ll explain it once she bloody gets to it.”

“I’m getting there, Ron.” She patted him on the hand, aiming to keep calm in the face of his impatience. “The first time it happened, she was torturing me. It hurt so much. I just wanted her to stop. I then remembered what she had done to me in the forest. How she used her powers to control me. So, I decided to try it for myself…and it worked.” Thinking back on that day brought a smile to her face. It marked the beginning of her retaliation against the other woman’s abuse. “I got her to stop, but she started acting different. Talking to herself, twitching, growling. She went absolutely mental. I thought it was just her throwing a fit until I looked into her eyes.”

She tucked her arms close to her body. “I saw something then. A darkness. It was like I was looking inside her every state of being. And it was terrifying. The chaos. The cold. The rage. I couldn’t tell where her siren side ended and where she began.”

Harry and Ron could only stare in fascination at their friend. The Hermione they were used to wasn’t like this. The Hermione they knew was all about facts and logic. Even in the face of magic, Hermione understood and relied on theory to explain the unexplainable.

The woman sat between them now was talking about looking into the eyes of a madwoman and seeing her soul.

If the brunette hadn’t chewed them out earlier in the only way they knew Hermione could, they could’ve easily mistaken her for an imposter.

Neither would admit they wished that to be true.

“You said that was the first time. What about the second?” Harry leaned against the armrest of the couch; his cup sitting next to Hermione’s on the table.

“Both of you were there for the second time. When you came to rescue me. Bellatrix started singing to me. As you can imagine, she didn’t do it willingly. I don’t know how I knew this, but I could tell this time was different. This time she wanted me to pay attention.”

“Why?”

“She knew something. Bellatrix didn’t say what it was, but when I looked into her eyes I felt my siren side lunge at her thoughts. I saw…images. Memories; flashes of thoughts and feelings that went by too fast for me to even begin to comprehend.” Trying to bring anything coherent to the front of her mind was still impossible to do.

Ron scratched the back of his head, leaning back to rest it on the top of the burgundy couch. “But what’s any of this have to do with Professor McGonagall?”

Hermione clutched the fabric of the white blouse she was wearing between shaky hands. “My
instincts want me to get away from here. And I think it has to do with what Bellatrix tried to tell me. Urgh!” She growled in frustration. She missed Ron and Harry flinching from the abrupt sound. “That woman! Any other time she says whatever she pleases, and the *one* time I might actually need to know something, she tells me in the vaguest way possible.”

“It might not be anything ’Mione. You said it yourself; Bellatrix liked to play games.” Harry said, patting the girl on the shoulder.

She shook her head. “Not this time. I’ve gotten good at knowing when she’s being sincere. This was one of those times; I’m sure of it.” She admitted.

The room grew quiet.

Harry was worried.

This entire situation was turning into something that none of them were truly prepared for. He was expecting his life as an auror to be hectic and more importantly, dangerous. That’s what his life had always been. Danger and chaos became his norm and he had gotten used to it. He’d like to think that the same applied for Ron and Hermione. The two wouldn’t have stuck around as his friend if they hadn’t. But that was the thing. His friends were always the ones sucked into his problems; not the other way around.

To live on the opposite side of the situation was surreal if he was being honest.

Harry knew that his destiny always led to Voldemort. Since the moment the prophecy was made, their lives had been intertwined. Their bond through the horcrux made it more than apparent that one of them would have to die if the other was to live on. He was happy that in the end, it was him who won. But again, his destiny was foretold before he was even born.

There was no prophecy about Hermione and Bellatrix.

To his knowledge.

They weren’t destined to cross paths and Harry, at the core of it all, felt that this was somewhat his fault. Had he and Hermione never become friends, the brunette would’ve never hunted the horcruxes with him and hence, would have never ran into Bellatrix in the first place. The professor did mention their kind could sometimes go their entire lives without knowing who their mate was, so that path was always open for her. However, Harry- knowing how lonely Hermione may have been without her friends and family- wouldn’t wish that she never met her mate.

He just wished it wasn’t Bellatrix.

Anyone else would’ve been better.

*Anyone.*

It couldn’t be changed now; they could only move forward and figure out a plan to get rid of the other woman while keeping Hermione safe.

How they were going to do it, he didn’t know.

Harry looked over at Ron who was equally deep in thought.

Much like Harry, Ron was worried. Worried about Hermione and the situation she got herself into.
‘She didn’t get herself into anything, you idiot.’ He scolded himself. He knew that was the hardest thing he needed to admit. Hermione didn’t ask for any of this. He knew that because he knew her.

It was Hermione who always tried to talk them out of doing reckless things. Who always wanted to think about things clearly before acting. The woman would rather stay inside and study than try to go on some treacherous adventure where one of them could potentially get hurt.

Or worse.

This was no one’s doing. No one’s fault. It was fate’s design at play.

And that’s what frustrated him the most.

The reason for him lashing out at the other girl without meaning to. Frustration. A growing anger in not knowing what to do. There was no strategy to helping Hermione that he could think of right now. How does someone go about fighting fate? Everything about this siren business was nonsensical. It was instincts and emotions and powers that Ron knew absolutely nothing about. He could listen to Hermione and McGonagall explain it over and over again, but that didn’t provide him any solutions; only answers to questions he’d already asked.

He didn’t know what to do.

After everything with Voldemort; he thought things would go back to normal. He would join the auror program with Harry and Hermione would graduate and join the ministry as a department head. He’d always picture her in the Department of Magical Creatures given her passion for helping the house elves. Then it was revealed that she was a siren and that only gave the idea more fuel to become a reality. With luck, the three of them would be together again just like the good ole days.

Maybe she would even give him another chance at a relationship.

Their future was all laid out before them.

Until Bellatrix came along to burn it all to ashes.

The wretched woman who put her hands all over Hermione. Her lips. It made his blood boil. He wanted to kill her. Except now he couldn’t even have that! He rumbled angrily to himself. It was like every time normalcy was in their grasp, it was snatched away in an instance.

Ron looked over at his two best friends and frowned. He loved them both. Harry and Hermione were the best mates he could ever ask for. Yet for some reason they attracted danger to themselves like gnomes to his mum’s garden.

He just wanted them to be safe and not being able to keep them that way made him frustrated. He clasped a hand over Hermione’s who looked up to give him a weak smile, which he returned in kind.

Frustrated or not, Ron knew that he needed to get his act together. Hermione needed them now more than ever. He refused to let the girl feel like she had when he and Harry had first gone into training. If that meant sucking up his frustration and prideful nature, then he would do it in a heartbeat if it would somehow make it easier on all of them.

They deserved that after all they had been through up until this point.

The quiet between the three of them stretched on for a while. This was the first time in months where they could just be with one another in peace. There was no doubt on any of their minds that they would not get the same chance in the morning.
They kept it to small talk after that. Hermione’s jaw-breaking yawn was what finally made Ron and Harry decide to leave the girl be. Both men stood up and immediately put on their professional faces.

“You should probably get some rest ‘Mione. Me and Ron will be right outside the door, standing guard.” Harry announced. “The bedroom is that door to our left. There’s a bathroom connected inside. The door should be on the right side of the bed.”

“If you need anything, we’ll be right outside. Nothing’s gonna slip past us.” Ron supplied with confidence.

Hermione smiled. “Thanks guys. I trust you.”

They smiled and gave the girl one last hug before leaving the room.

When she was left on her own, Hermione let her body drop. She was exhausted in all forms. Physically, mentally, emotionally; everything was depleted. Knowing that a bed was right in the next room was fine and all, but what Hermione wanted most right now was a long, hot bath. Having free range in Bellatrix’s house aside, she never took a bath. It left her far too vulnerable should Bellatrix be in one of her moods and felt the need to attack her whilst she was bathing. A constant fear of hers. Showers were quick and to the point. She would already be on her feet and ready to defend herself should she have to. Now that she was in the ministry- Ron and Harry right outside her door- Hermione felt that she could finally release her tension.

She entered the bedroom. It was plain and mostly barren aside from the bed, wardrobe, and side table. The room was small and windowless, but it made Hermione feel safe in a way.

Much to her surprise, the wardrobe had clothes of all shapes and colors. Despite it being still early in the day, Hermione chose a pair of loose, grey shorts and a navy-blue t-shirt to wear for bed. Kingsley made it clear that she was stay put and since she had no reason to leave the room, Hermione decided she might as well settle in for the day.

The bathroom was as boring as the bedroom; stark white with hints of grey and black.

Hermione only cared that everything appeared to be clean and in working condition.

She started the hot water and placed her clothes on the countertop. Stripping down to nothing, she dipped a toe in the water and once it was the appropriate temperature, she settled into the steaming liquid with a sigh. Hermione felt like years of stress and stiffness were being washed away from her body.

The water was where Hermione had always felt at home. Perhaps that was a side effect of her creature side. It mattered not.

She was currently experiencing paradise in its simplest form. Even if just for a little while, Hermione didn’t want to do anything.

She refused to think about Bellatrix.

Forgot about what was to come tomorrow.

Ignored the fact that Ron and Harry were standing guard right outside her door.

Her siren side didn’t even get an ounce of her attentions.

Hermione and her bath; they were the only things she was to focus on. Everything else could wait
until tomorrow. The woman submerged her head underwater and came back up with a gasp. She folded her arms on the side of the tub and laid her head atop them. Her breast felt cold as they pressed against the sides of the cooling tub. She didn’t care. A soft hum that was all her own echoed out through the small bathroom. Bliss overtook her mind and she was ready to bask in it for as long as she possibly could.

When she didn’t answer the door after Ron and Harry knocked to check on her, the two boys asked one of the ministry house elves to wake her from where she’d fallen asleep against the edge of the tub. Embarrassed, she dressed and joined the two aurors for a quick meal together. She wished them a good night and returned to the bedroom where she snuggled beneath the covers and immediately fell asleep.

The guards outside her door rotated around the clock; each one checking in to make sure the young Gryffindor went undisturbed.

If any noticed the snores that sounded vaguely like purrs and soft hums, then none of them said a thing and simply returned to their duties.

Hermione had never slept so deeply in her life.
Chapter 28: Off The Records

The porridge was stale; the fruit, rotten; and the milk in her glass was sour to the point it burned her nostrils.

It wasn’t really, but that’s exactly how Hermione felt her breakfast tasted right now.

Sitting across from her, the headmistress was eating her food in silence. The woman appeared calm and relaxed; only greeting Hermione briefly before sitting with her at the small table in the living area. The older witch hadn’t said anything to her since. Part of her believed that it was out of politeness, but Hermione knew this was her fault as well.

When she awoke earlier, the first thing she did was get right back into the bathtub. She didn’t sit nearly as long as she wanted to, but it was enough to bring a smile to her face and calm her growing nerves. Any moment now, she knew the headmistress would be coming to take her to see the council. The young siren wanted to be happy that there was maybe a solution for her to be rid of Bellatrix once and for all, but her gut was twisting in knots from warning.

That’s when she heard the knock at the door.

She quickly slipped on a pair of blue jeans and a red and tan sweater, slipping out of the bathroom to greet the woman at the entrance. The headmistress was standing there with a tray of food floating beside her. McGonagall was smiling softly which made her return the expression with twice as much enthusiasm.

“Good morning, Professor.” She greeted, moving to the side to let the woman enter.

McGonagall gave her a nod. “Good morning, Miss Granger. I hope you slept well last night.” Innocently, the woman reached out to the younger witch and clasped her on the shoulder.

Hermione violently flinched away from the harmless touch, her siren side screaming at the back of her mind.

Run away. Run away.

She stumbled away, clutching her head in agony from the shrieking.

Naturally, McGonagall panicked, thinking it was something she had done. “Hermione! Dear child, what is wrong?” She exhaled, wanting to comfort the girl but fearing her touch was the reason for the episode.
Hermione shook her head and steadied herself. She urged her other side to calm itself, promising to keep a distance from the woman if it meant the screaming would stop. It settled down; the wailing nothing but a buzz situated little ways from her rational thoughts. Hermione tried to muster a smile, but she imagined it came off more like a grimace.

“I’m sorry. It wasn’t you. I…I didn’t sleep well last night at all.” She lied. “Nightmares.”

She hoped the woman bought it.

“I see. I’m sorry to hear that.” She pulled out her wand and directed the tray over to the small table behind them. “If you would join me; maybe some breakfast will help before the meeting.”

It seemed that she was in the clear, but ever since then, neither woman had spoken to one another. The whole thing was tense and uncomfortable; two things she never thought she would feel around one of the most important people in her life.

It made her sad.

She frowned deeply and picked at her food; Minerva noticed immediately.

It was clear that the young woman was lying earlier. The headmistress had already spoken to the guards before entering the room. Hermione had been fast asleep all night. Knowing this was the only reason she hadn’t called her student out on the blatant lie. She- more than anyone else- knew the dangers of causing the woman further distress than necessary. However, despite wanting to make Hermione as comfortable as possible, she knew the tension between them would only make things worse.

It didn’t stop her from trying.

She set her fork on the table. “Miss Grang-…Hermione.” The girl in question looked up. “If you’re worried about the meeting, I assure you it won’t be as bad as it seems. All those who will be present are aware of the situation and will handle everything with the utmost discreetness.”

Hermione’s frown deepened. “This happens often then?” She asked.

McGonagall nodded. “More than people are aware of.”

If that was supposed to set Hermione’s mind at ease, it failed miserably. She opened her mouth to ask something else, but another knock sounded at the door. They didn’t wait for either to get up and answer. It swung open to reveal Kingsley with Ron and Harry on his flank. The three men didn’t enter but Kingsley addressed them from the doorway.

“They’re ready for us now.” He said. “If you will both follow me, I would like to get this over with as quickly as possible.”

‘I guess time’s up.’ Hermione thought to herself. She grabbed the white trainers sitting next to the couch and slipped them on her feet.

Once she was ready, the five of them left the room.

Walking down the hall leading wherever they were going was just as uncomfortable as it was the first time. People stared at her with a variety of expressions; luckily, they leaned towards the more positive side of things. She figured they were going to take her to the interrogation chambers. The one where a lot of the witches and wizards who were on trial during the war were taken. Even now she could picture Umbridge sitting up on that pedestal; Voldemort’s horcrux wrapped around her
neck like it was some ordinary piece of jewelry.

Much to her delight, they walked right past it.

Further down the hallway stood a silver and red elevator. The group piled in and Kingsley removed his wand from his robes and inserted it into a hole next to the emergency stop button. They shot downwards at neck breaking speeds, passing what felt like a hundred floors before stopping at the very bottom of the ministry. The doors open with a swish and a cold air rushes into the elevator. Before them was another hallway; as long as it was wide. The five of them were easily able to walk shoulder to shoulder without bumping into each other. The stone floors and darkly painted walls gave her the chills. There wasn’t a single window in sight, the only light coming from the many floating candles above them. The echo of their footsteps just made the place seem even bigger.

Finally, they reached the end of the hall. A huge door made of gold stood before them. Kingsley swished his wand and the two doors swung inwards and revealed a smaller room than she was expecting.

The first thing she noticed was that it was bright and welcoming; nothing like the dreary and tense atmosphere of the hallway outside. The walls were lined with thin, white columns; in-between each, a window with a glimpse of what appeared to be fields outside. Knowing they were deep underground, it was clear that they were bewitched. The ceiling was low and a beautiful crystal chandelier tinkled gently in an imaginary breeze. The furniture in the room otherwise was nonexistent; the only pieces being a grouping of chairs occupied by different people.

She recognized a few of them.

The three heads of houses were there sitting in armchairs off to her left; an empty chair left open for McGonagall no doubt. Professors Flitwick, Sprout, and Slughorn all gave her a small head nod as she looked over at them.

To her right were four other chairs. These four individuals she didn’t recognize at all.

Directly across from her was an empty podium where Kingsley was more than likely supposed to stand and preside over them. Her seat resided directly in the center; right in the middle of the incomplete square. Hermione was glad that neither the room nor the group of people in it were too large. It eased her heart just a little bit.

She took her seat.

Kingsley went up to the podium and Harry and Ron took their places on either side of him. Everyone was in place and Kingsley became speaking.

“Thank you all for coming,” He began. “As everyone here is aware, we’ve gathered to discuss what is to be done about the situation between Hermione Granger and Bellatrix Lestrange. Jane,” He gestured to a middle aged blonde woman sitting closest to her. “Will act as our witness and memory holder as this discussion will have to be kept off the records.”

The blonde woman, now identified as Jane, stood up. “Under oath by Ministry and Magic, I, Jane Morrison, hereby swear to act as an unbiased witness to this meeting. I willingly consent for my memories of this meeting to be held as ministry property to be viewed by only those in this room.”

“And do you consent to the erasure of your memories should your mind be jeopardized by yourself or forces outside of your powers?” Kingsley followed up.

“I do.” The woman nodded. A swirl of gold magic circled around the woman’s head before
vanishing.

“Thank you for your cooperation, Mrs. Morrison. You may be seated.” He told her. “I will now introduce everyone in attendance today. To my left, in order, we have: the headmistress of Hogwarts, Minerva McGonagall, also acting head of Gryffindor house. Pomona Sprout, Head of Hufflepuff house; Filius Flitwick, Head of Ravenclaw house; and Horace Slughorn, Head of Slytherin house.” The four professors gave their own greetings as their names were called. “They will be speaking on behalf of Hogwarts as that is the school in which Miss Granger attends.”

He gestured to the group on his right. “Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Magic are: Sylvester Newson; head of the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes,” Sylvester was a middle aged, bespectacled man with a stern face and a somber demeanor. “David C. Hutches; head of The Department of Mysteries and the Unspeakables,” David was the oldest in the room, his soft brown eyes and timid smile was not what she was expecting from someone manning the most mysterious part of the ministry. “And Emily Havenheart; new head for the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures.” Emily appeared to be a little older than David was; her hair as dark as night which made her blue eyes seem all the brighter.

“I, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Head Auror and Minister of Magic will also be speaking on behalf of the Ministry. The two aurors beside me- Harry James Potter and Ronald Billius Weasley- have been selected as my two security officers by my personal recommendation and their relationship with Miss Granger.” He continued. “The moment all of you’ve entered this room, you were thereby placed under oath that- aside for Mrs. Morrison- what is spoken in this room cannot be relayed to anyone not in attendance henceforth. If you feel these terms go against your wishes in any way, please exit the room now. Otherwise, please confirm your consent.” He announced with his most authoritative voice.

No one moved to leave. A chorus of I’s circled around the room as everyone agreed to the ultimatum. The man sighed and seemed to fold into his self. “Good. We can now commence with this meeting. We are here to discuss the situation between Miss Granger and Bellatrix Lestrange. Their circumstances leave us with a multitude of problems.”

“The first being we cannot locate Bellatrix anywhere,” Sylvester spoke up. “The house she was residing in was vacant of all occupants. We did manage to recover several dark artifacts from the residence, but we still have no clues as to her current whereabouts.”

“That’s not surprising. Bellatrix was never one to let her guard down. Even during classes.” Slughorn commended from his seat.

Professor Sprout gave him a sour look. “Praise is the last thing that woman deserves right now, Horace.”

“I agree, though Horace has a point.” Kingsley said. “Bellatrix isn’t one to lower her guard. Not while knowing ours is at its highest. Which means that our focus should be on protecting Miss Granger until we have a way to capture the woman.”

“Why not simply let her stay here in the Ministry?” Slughorn asked. “Is it not the safest place for her to be?”

It was McGonagall who spoke up next. “That won’t work. The bond between them has already taken root.”

“Then separation should suffice well enough.” Emily replied. “I’ve studied many bonds in regards to magical creatures. Usually separation will cause the bond to weaken and eventually break.”
“That’s not an option either. If anything, I fear the separation will only begin to make things worse. The bond cannot be broken once established; only stretched.” She told the others.

“I imagine that there’s a limit to how far though.” Flitwick said.

She nodded. “You’re correct. The longer they stay like this, the more strained the bond becomes. Eventually, it will try to recoil and bring the two back together.” The headmistress grimaced. “The nature of their creature side is to lure and be lured like most sirens. Unfortunately, Hermione is the latter; otherwise we would be able to bring Bellatrix to us instead.”

An audible gasp came from Sprout and Slughorn.

“I see.” David finally chimed in. “I’m believe I’m understanding why the three of us are here then.”

Kingsley raised his voice so that all could hear him clearly. “Yes, this particular group council has been assembled so as to determine if a full suppression of Hermione Jean Granger’s inheritance is our only viable option.”

The room was instantly up in arms.

“Kingsley! Surely there’s another way!” Sprout cried out.

“Miss Granger has yet to have an incident requiring such treatment!” Flitwick agreed.

Emilya rose from her chair. “Minister, I’ve been through the procedures and read the reports on what you’re suggesting. The repercussions alone make me believe that your proposition may be a bit overboard.”

“I agree.” Sylvester announced from beside her. “Although there is danger to her powers, Miss Granger has not engaged in any activity that could lead to a catastrophe or public harm.”

David remained quiet.

Kingsley was about to settle the room when McGonagall beat him to it.

“Enough, all of you!” She bolted to her feet. “If you’d pay attention to the situation at hand, then you would see exactly why I suggested this in the first place.”

The room quiet. Nothing could be heard except their collective breathing and a steadily rising trill emanating from the center of the room. All eyes landed on the source.

Hermione couldn’t focus on anything the people around her were saying. The only thing repeating through her head was Kingsley and the headmistress’ idea.

Suppress her siren powers. Could they even do that? She pondered. Doing it to people’s magic wasn’t unheard of. If Azkaban wasn’t magic proof, then prisoners could’ve walked right out of there at any time they pleased.

But suppressing someone’s creature inheritance?

It was unheard of.

She glanced around the room. And suddenly a sense of dread settled over her.

Seeing everyone’s faces as they clearly knew the implication of what was being suggested.
The sketchy underground meeting and all the vows floating about.

It became quite clear to her.

The people before her were the *reason* it was unheard of.

She wasn’t just sitting in a meeting to stop Bellatrix.

She was sitting in the middle of a *cover-up*.

There was no stopping the distress building up inside of her now. Her throat rumbled with panic as a growing fear of those around her was starting to overpower her senses.

“Hermione, you need to remain calm.” She heard the headmistress say. The woman approached, but fear took over and had her jumping from her seat and backing away towards the door. She felt cornered and the approaching woman was only making it worse. She hissed at her and pressed herself against the door.

McGonagall gasped, taking a step back like she’d been physically struck. No one else dared to move as Hermione’s growing aggression set them on edge.

Kingsley tried to take control of the situation.

“Miss Granger, please calm yourself and return to your seat. No one here is trying to hurt you. You are in no danger from anyone in this room.” He firmly told her.

“I don’t believe you. What is everyone talking about? What are you trying to do to me?” She rushed, refusing to listen to the other man’s orders.

What she wouldn’t do for her wand right now.

“They wish to suppress your creature inheritance so as to prevent Bellatrix from following the bond back to you.” David answered. The man’s face was pulled upwards in a sympathetic smile. “It won’t stop Bellatrix from calling to you, but it *will* stop you from answering.”

“He’s correct.” The head of Gryffindor tried to tell her. “Your instincts are stronger than either of you know. The last thing we’d want is to physically restrain you should she come calling. This is the only way to protect you with the least harm to your person.”

Hermine shook her head. “If that was true, then I wouldn’t be here. If you could just stop people’s creature sides *safely*, then the public would know already.” Her eyes narrowed. “Which means there’s a catch.”

No one spoke.

“…If the public knew, there’d be pandemonium,” Sylvester explained. “As you’ve no doubt realized by now, the practice isn’t entirely safe. Its unpredictable; avoided if possible and utilized only if necessary. For the individual, its’ invasive, but could potentially save their lives and the lives of everyone around them.”

There was hurt in her eyes. “Wait. Does this mean you…you think I’m *dangerous*?”

Immediately McGonagall interrupted. “Hermione, child, that is not what this is about! Your powers have the potential to be dangerous, but you yourself are *not*. I implore you not to see this as some kind of punishment.”
“Then why me? If you’ve always known how to do this, why not make Bellatrix do it!” She cried.

Everyone aside from Ron, Harry, and Jane refused to meet her eyes.

“We did.” The woman admitted.

Two words was all it took and suddenly Hermione felt something inside her to click into place. Question after question rattled around in her head, every one leading her mind to different places. She didn’t know where to start, so she started with the one thing that worried her most.

“What did you do to her?” She asked.

‘And what are you trying to do to me.’ Went left unsaid.

The woman adjusted her glasses and looked her in the eyes.

“There was an incident that happened when Bellatrix was still very young and had no control over her abilities. Many people got hurt. Her mother brought her to the ministry in a rage. Horrid woman.” Minerva spat. “She demanded something be done or else she would handle it. Bellatrix was a student then and as such, myself and Albus knew that we couldn’t let anything bad happen to her.”

“But it did…didn’t it?” Harry cut it from the back of the room. Despite previous orders to not speak during the proceedings, the young man couldn’t help but speak up.

The older witch turned to him. “We were only trying to protect her. When I found out that there was no way to keep Bellatrix from singing of her own volition, we decided to suppress her abilities. The only other alternative was death. We had no choice if she was to live. It had been done many times before with success, even if the methods were less than favorable. We kept it secret; the public couldn’t catch wind of ‘dangerous creatures’ being let around their children.” Her look turned dark. “They weren’t dangerous- at least not on purpose. Even Bellatrix. But that wouldn’t matter to everyone. I’m sure you remember how Dolores viewed magical creatures.”

Who could forget.

“Well she was not alone in that sentiment. Even today, magical creatures do not have a high standing in society. Many of them are feared and hated. Laws can only protect people so much. There was also the matter of the dark lord. He and his many followers believed that anyone with impure blood was not worth living. No one was immune to their ideology’s consequences; not even children of dark families.” Hermione swore she heard Ron mutter something foul beneath his breath. “We brought Bellatrix here and with her mother’s permission, suppressed her abilities. And it worked. She could not sing, nor was she inflicted with the urge to do so. Up until meeting you, it was like she wasn’t a siren at all. She’d eventually grow to follow the dark lord but seeing as he did not kill her for her blood status, it was safe to say our plan held. The proper memories were wiped; oaths were made; and everything went back to normal.”

Hermione couldn’t believe what she was hearing and yet she knew deep down it was the truth. Things she heard Bellatrix say off handedly suddenly made more sense. The young woman finally felt like she was getting much needed answers.

The truth, however, did not set her free.

It made her angry.

Afraid.
Neither emotion was hers alone.

Her siren side was hissing in fury at the back of her mind; scratching at the walls in vengeance with only one question spilling from its lips. She asked it for the both of them.

“At what cost?” She demanded.

The older witch looked frazzled. “Pardon?”

“At what cost! My magic and my creature side aren’t one in the same. I can feel it. It’s a part of me. What’ll happen to me if you take that away? What happened to Bellatrix? How do you know what you did didn’t make her worse!” She asked.

David spoke before anyone else could. “In the best-case scenario, you will be fine. Essentially living a normal life as a witch until she is dealt with. Once that happens, since you have not had any major incidents and your status as a magical creature is not completely compromised- we can have the suppression removed.”

“And in the worst case?” Ron asked.

The man frowned and folded his arms across his lap. “We don’t know- or won’t until it’s over and done with. It varies creature to creature; person to person. Bellatrix is the only siren of your kind to have this happen and so we don’t have much to go on.”

“Why it’s clear as day what will happen!” Slughorn shouted. “Bellatrix is stark raving mad! If we do this, who’s to say the same won’t happen to Miss Granger!”

The girl in question felt her heart stop.

“Madness runs in the Black family. Bellatrix was as vicious as she was back then.” McGonagall assured. “We cannot assume there’s a correlation. Majority of the children live long and healthy lives without becoming like Bellatrix to this very day. Some even attend Hogwarts as we speak.”

“But what about the bond? It can’t be broken. You said so yourself.” Hermione mentioned.

“It cannot. This will only mute it on your end. That was the best way Bellatrix described it when she went through it as a child.” She said.

They were banking on a loophole.

Hermione wasn’t ready to risk her life around a loophole.

“No…I won’t do it.” Her hand started inching towards the door handle. “You don’t even know if it’ll work or not. It worked on Bellatrix, but she clearly has her powers now, so whatever you did will eventually fail. And we don’t know when. She can’t fight the entire ministry. I’ll stay here, if I have to.”

“That won’t do. She’ll be lead right here to you and she’ll do whatever’s necessary to get you back. Rodolphus chose to return to his cell in Azkaban if it meant not being here when that happened; which makes me believe the security of the Ministry alone might not be enough to keep you safe.” Kingsley countered.

She didn’t like how he was starting to sound like this was all a good idea.

“More importantly, you’re already starting to become…unstable.” Emily alleged. “The signs are
already beginning and while we don’t wish to go against your wishes, we cannot be sure you’re in the right mental state to make that decision for yourself.”

Hermione hissed at the woman. In hindsight, that wasn’t doing well for her defense. “Are you trying to say you fear I’m going mental?”

It was then that the sound of shuffling papers filled the air. McGonagall pulled a handful of folded parchment from her robes and gave them to her.

It was an incident report dating back to 1991.

“Hermione. I would’ve never suggested this if I believed there was another way. And in a time where the bond between you and Bellatrix didn’t exist, that would be true. That is no longer the case. Inheritances aren’t easy to control. Making the call is always difficult…but not doing so, has always been harder. This is proof of that.”

She read the report title.

**Tragedy Strikes Family of Three: Pandora Lovegood killed in Tragic Accident**

“Luna’s mother?” Her hands shook as she went over the details of the incident that Luna had already told her about long ago. “What does she have to do with this?”

“Pandora’s death was an accident; a preventable had I acted when I first saw the signs.” Minerva returned to her seat and addressed everyone in the room as one.

“She was a student of mine just like so many others. I wasn’t her head of house, but as Deputy headmaster, it was my job to care and know all my student’s needs. Myself and Albus were two of the few people who knew her status as a seer.” She sighed. “Seers are not all born the same. Trelawney is proof of that much; her gifts were learned. Pandora was born with the sight, manifesting it while she was at Hogwarts as a second year.”

The room was silent as the grave aside from her talking.

“The child never had problems really. Other children thought her strange when she spoke of the future, but otherwise, she was harmless. It wasn’t until her last year at Hogwarts that things changed. Pandora was always curious. A searcher of the strange and unknown. But her passion for searching ahead through time soon delved into obsession. She wouldn’t sleep or eat. She started muttering and talking to herself. It was worrying to say the least.”

“As her head of house, I too confronted Pandora about her increasingly unhealthy behavior,” Flitwick admitted. The man allowed a tear to fall from his eye. “She always told me not to worry. That everything was under control.”

“She hadn’t hurt anyone or caused any problems and so we did nothing. Pandora graduated and started a family with Xenophilus. A few years later, Luna was born…then came the accident. Seers can often be lost in their own minds. The further one glances into the future, the harder it is to come back in once piece.” Minerva had to wipe a tear from her eye before she could continue.

“Xenophilus told me after that Pandora had gone searching into Luna’s future. Any mother would want to know what would happen to their child after all. Except whatever she saw sent her over the edge. She began experimenting; creating something that she said would ‘save Luna from a lot of pain’. She kept going back and forth from present to future; hoping each time would yield a different outcome. One day, she believed she had the answer and brought Luna into her lab to test her experiment once and for all. It backfired, and in trying to change Luna’s future, she ended up
destroying her own.”


‘Poor Luna.’ Hermione thought. If her friend knew the real reason for her mother’s death, she was sure that the girl would be absolutely heartbroken.

“Indeed. Had I gone with my gut and brought her before the council at the time, then maybe Luna would still have her mother right now. I made the wrong call and now must live with that everyday of my life.” She held Hermione’s gaze. “Pandora was a bright young witch, but her instincts still held dominion over her in the end. They drove her to do things she might not have done otherwise. She believed she was fine when the rest of the world knew she was not. Much like you Hermione.” Her voice turned ice cold. “Can you assure me that the same will not happen to you? That it already hasn’t?”

It was a trick question and everyone in the room knew it. They had all just witness her growling at them like some kind of animal. Destroying Kingsley’s office and throwing her friends around yesterday wouldn’t be easily forgotten. She felt her last chance of convincing them in finding another way was dwindle away and she chose in that moment to try one last thing.

She decided to bolt.

But Ron and Harry were faster.

Her body was yanked back by a spell and slammed into her chair. Harry approached her and before she could scream, the man was already pouring the purple liquid he’d been carrying around since yesterday down her throat. He covered her mouth and she had no choice but to let it slide down her throat. Hermione looked up at him in betrayal; tears pooling at the corner of her eyes even as she couldn’t muster the strength to be angry due to the calming drought.

“I’m so sorry ’Mione.” He whispered to her. Harry returned to standing next to Kingsley. He wished they could just keep drugging her like this, but the addictive nature of potions and their detrimental effects on one’s health would only make things worse.

Hermione, even as the effects of the potion muddled her mind, was heartbroken.

Most of the room was staring at her with sad and weary eyes. She could read their thoughts as clear as day. They may have hated this more than anything, but each person knew the alternative could end up being far, far worse. She understood why they felt the need to do this, but she still didn’t want this.

Sound mind or not, she knew she didn’t want this.

Her siren side had nothing to do with that in any regards.

It mattered not. The men and woman before her had confidence that in trying to spare her from Bellatrix or death, she would come out of this okay. They were only trying to spare her in the only way they knew how. Protect her from the public and at the same time protect the public from her.

But Hermione knew better.

“There is no sparing her from anything.”

Every second we spend without coming to a conclusion leaves Hermione vulnerable. I have made my decision, but I will ask the seven of you present to cast your say on the matter.” Kingsley said.

There would be no sparing her from anything.
“I, Pomona Sprout, vote against suppression. Even if the chance that doing so may have no consequences, we are leaving it completely up to fate.”

She wasn’t spared from being a muggleborn.

“I, Filius Flitwick, vote in favor of suppression. I do not wish what happened to Pandora to happen to anyone else if it’s in my power to prevent it.”

She wasn’t spared from being a siren.

“I, Horace Slughorn, vote against suppression. Miss Granger may very well end up being like Bellatrix if we do this. That poses a danger for everyone, even herself.”

She wasn’t spared from meeting Bellatrix.

“I, Minerva McGonagall, vote in favor of suppression. As headmistress, I have a duty to my students and as much as it pains me to do this, I believe this is our best solution.”

She wasn’t spared from being her mate.

“I, Sylvester Newson, vote against suppression. Speaking on behave of my department, unlike Bellatrix, Miss Granger has not had any major incidents that have required the ministry’s interference. She should not have to suffer for what could be, instead of what is.”

She wasn’t spared from her instincts taking hold of her.

“I, Emily Havenheart, vote in favor of suppression. I’ve dealt with many incidents dealing with magical creatures even whilst not as acting head of the department. The repercussions if Miss Granger does have an incident- which if left alone, can happen any day now- could not only harm herself, but everyone around her as well. The public’s view on magical creatures cannot afford to take another hit.”

And she wasn’t spared from own emotions.

“I, David C. Hutches, vote in favor of suppression. I do not believe that Miss Granger poses a danger to anyone of her own volition. That being said, she is still a danger. This is a temporary solution to a long-term problem. Once Bellatrix is apprehended, as the woman has proven, we can remove the suppression at a later time.”

So why for a single second…

“I, Kingsley Shacklebolt, vote in favor of suppression. Bellatrix and Pandora are just two examples out of hundreds who’ve shown the consequences of both acting and not acting. After hearing from everyone here, it is by my power as Minister of Magic, and the vote at 5 to 3 in favor; that Hermione Jean Granger undergo creature suppression administered by the department of Mysteries. Effective immediately. So, mote it be.”

Did she think she would be spared from this…?

No amount of calming drought could stop the tears as her fate was sealed yet again without her consent.
Chapter 29 - Uproar

Despite the brightness of the room around them, the atmosphere had turned dark and oppressive.

Not a single soul was smiling.

Hermione sat there on the ground; mind still fuzzy from the potion Harry poured down her throat. There was no way for her to express anything other than an unwanted calmness. Then again, with the way she was feeling beneath the potion’s effect- it was probably for the best.

She was angry.

*Enraged*, actually.

She had ignored the warnings. Her siren side wanted her to run away and she turned a blind eye to its concern. Now look where she was. The girl looked up and cursed everyone before her. If the
potion wasn’t currently keeping her restrained, she would absolutely let loose on the lot of them.

She should’ve listened.

Should’ve listened to her guts.

To her instincts.

To their mate.

To…Bellatrix.

The woman- whether against her will or with full knowledge of what would happen- had warned her first.

Her rescue was always going to happen and Hermione believed that Bellatrix knew that as well. She had already made it clear that Hermione was never going to be free of her. That even if she somehow got off the island by herself, one day she would have to return there. Of course, that was impossible now since everyone knew the house’s location, but that didn’t seem to faze the older siren in the least. No, she wanted to let Hermione go so she could discover the truth firsthand; one last stab in her back on her way towards getting her wish.

Hermione wanted to strangle Bellatrix as much as she wanted to praise her attentiveness.

Because despite torturing her, starving her, beating her,- of all the things the woman had done to her- this is what hurt the most; having her friends and loved ones trying to fight her battles for her without her input on the matter.

She wanted to cry.

And the potion wouldn’t let her.

She wanted to lash out in frustration.

Only to realize she didn’t have the strength.

Hermione was stewing in a pit of emotions, ones that had no outlet in sight. She hated this- and with the way she was feeling- she had no qualms with telling the others that as well.

“No more potions. I don’t want to take anymore potions.” She said quietly.

From her position on the floor, she saw Kingsley give her a solemn nod.

“No more potions. We should head up to the Department of Mysteries. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner you can return to a normal life. No more potions. No more Bellatrix. As minister, that is my promise to you, Hermione.” He said. Kingsley walked over and reached a hand out to her.

She looked at it and reluctantly let the older man pull her to her feet. Hermione grimaced when she replied, “You shouldn’t make promises you don’t know you can keep.”

There was a collective gasp from the other occupants in the room. Many had never heard the young Gryffindor sound so impolite before; especially to someone with Kingsley’s standings.

The man in question didn’t seem to be put off in the least.

His mind remained somewhere else the entire time they lead the woman towards the Department of
The walk was silent and full of tension; everyone’s thoughts racing in different directions about what was to come next.

Especially Kingsley’s.

The dark-skinned man found himself looking over at Hermione in understanding and sadness—completely aware that beneath the façade of calm, she was a ball of burning anger ready to explode.

He knew that the young woman had every right to be.

But he also knew that in this moment, he couldn’t afford to care.

Since becoming both the Minister of Magic and head of the Auror program, the weary wizard had to make a slew of tough calls in the name of security. Friend and enemy alike could not be made immune to the law if there was to be any type of peace within the wizarding world.

He didn’t like it.

Never had.

However, if no one did what needed to be done, then the world they knew as a whole would be no more.

This wasn’t personal—this was politics.

A far nastier business in his opinion.

He glanced over at Hermione.

When he was just a high ranking Auror, his job required him to save the lives of thousands. He had no say in how he did it seeing as he wasn’t the boss. Most days were spent only hoping that his actions would allow him to sleep at night when it was all over.

That was when he was an Auror.

As minister, his job still required him to also save the lives of thousands.

Or…gave him the freedom to save just one.

Hermione could hate him now; it still didn’t sway his decision.

At least she would be alive to do so.

She needn’t know what he had done in order for this to be an option in the first place.

For what the woman didn’t know was that David, Emily, and Sylvester were outliers. Out of the twelve other department heads, those three were the only ones willing to see her position from both sides.

That’s why he had stretched his power as minister to represent them.

Had he invited the entire council—allowed a room full of bias, fear mongers make decisions as was
done in the past—then Hermione would’ve never left the room with her life. In all the chaos and aftermath of the war, Kingsley wasn’t able to do a full assessment of his fellow colleagues. He didn’t know their thoughts or motivations when it came to dealing with cases like Bellatrix and Hermione’s.

So to make sure he wasn’t potentially making the biggest mistake of his career, Kingsley held a vote much like he did today.

Including his vote, the odds between the sixteen of them were leaning in three directions.

Three were in favor of suppression.

One was against.

…twelve voted execution.

Kingsley felt his heart sink when he saw the results.

Then again, looking around, he realized how the odds had become so askew.

Sylvester was the one to speak against suppression. As department head for dealing with catastrophes and accidents—and having a young son who was a magical creature—it was him who was the most empathetic towards Hermione’s situation. He may not have known Hermione personally, but the man knew that the girl wasn’t a danger by her own volition.

Emily and David had sided with him in favor of suppression.

Emily was new to the department, but she had witness the unjust treatment of magical creatures long before she had the position. The woman would treat the case on an unbiased basis and ensure that Hermione received a fair chance.

David on the other hand, had been the Department of Mystery head for over sixty years. Dealing with dangerous artifacts and people was his job; a job he did very well. His intuition and decision making skills were ones that Kingsley trusted above all else. Whatever his choice, he knew that much like Emily and Sylvester, he would try to do what was best—even if was hard to do so.

That left the final twelve members. The ones who without speaking to Hermione or knowing the whole situation, voted for execution. He knew the reasoning of course.

Fear.

They weren’t empathetic like David; understanding like Emily; or had qualifiable judgment like David. These were the older generation of purebloods and cowards appointed by Fudge during his time as minister. They were witches and wizards who had no problem lumping the young Gryffindor in with Bellatrix as if they were one and the same. The hunt for the woman had come up empty handed time and time again. The longer she was left free, the more of a danger she posed.

Like the lazy, cowardly bastards Kingsley suspected they were—the lot of them were looking for a quick solution to their problem.

It wasn’t uncommon knowledge that some magical creatures had mates who’s death could potentially mean their own.

Knowing what corruption and fear could make a person do, he wouldn’t be surprised if they were fully prepared to test that theory with the two women with no hesitation.
Kingsley knew that once this was over, he would be having words with the full council. It was clearly time to clear house. There were still a couple of bad seeds in power he didn’t want growing into something toxic. The fact that they would condemn someone like Hermione to death- after praising her and the others as one of their saviors against the dark lord- spoke volumes of their characters.

Had anyone else been in power now aside from him, he feared that Hermione wouldn’t’ve stood a chance. But it wasn’t just her. If this could happen to someone as high profile as one of the wizarding world’s saviors, Merlin knows what kind of treatment other witches and wizards with creature inheritances were subjected to. What they’ve already been subjected to under people like Fudge.

He wasn’t going to let this go on any longer- not while he was in charge.

Exercising his power as minister to convince the others that Emily, Sylvester, David, and the Hogwarts staff were all the council necessary to deal with this- was without a doubt- underhanded.

He felt dirty doing so.

He was a hypocrite.

But on both a political and moral standpoint- he knew he did the best he could for an innocent woman just looking to live a normal life.

Hermione may never talk to him- or Ron, Harry, and Minerva- ever again.

However, if she lived long enough to someday find happiness elsewhere in this world without them in her life; then it would all be worth it.

And that thought alone was enough for him to continue on this path they all were walking.

Even still, looking at the young woman beside him- a tiny part of him inside was screaming that this was a mistake.

He prayed that he was wrong…

The Hall of Mysteries had as many rooms as an onion had layers, Hermione realized. She remembered the hall where all the prophecies were kept, how huge it was- but she knew now that it was but a small section of the ministry in comparison to everything else. Passing quickly through its halls, Hermione caught small glimpses into the different rooms; only getting a peek into the most mysterious parts of the ministry of magic.

It still amazed her what she saw.

The people walking past them were clearly the unspeakables. The witches and wizards neither spoke to or acknowledged them; walking back and forth from different rooms in a silent rush like the ghosts who resided back at the castle. They wore a cloak that covered them up from head to toe. Hermione noticed that all of them were wearing a blank mask; its only feature being a roman numeral in bold print across the front. Occasionally she caught flashes of skin or a length of hair peeking out from someone’s hood, but otherwise, the individuals around them were faceless people without identity.
It was a bit unnerving.

The rooms they past were bathed in secret too- the names printed above their door frames being their only identifiable feature.


On and on the doors went. The luxurious hall she found herself traversing was eye-catching despite it supposedly needing to be the least conspicuous.

Hermione wished she had the privilege to be here under different circumstances.

The things she could learn.

Her mind raced at all the possibilities of what was behind these closed doors. She was desperate to learn their secrets. This was where the impossible lived. How many discoveries were made right here in these halls? How many lives have been changed because of the work the unspeakables did? What problems did they solve? What new solutions have they developed? The one book in the restricted section of Hogwarts couldn’t’ve been the only one about her species. It just wasn’t reasonable to believe considering where she was now. The department of mysteries had the answers she sought, she just knew it.

And not for just her siren abilities.

For the first time in a long time, Hermione thought about her parents; living their lives out in the world with no knowledge that she even existed. Based on what she had been told, obliviation couldn’t be reversed.

Then again, as she was coming to find, what’s she’s been told hasn’t always been the truth.

If there was ever a chance to reverse the effects of what she had done, she would find it here. Hermione felt her hope grow. Even now, the young woman missed her mother and father. There was nothing in the world she wanted more than to have the two them at her side as she went through all of this. Naturally, they wouldn’t know the first thing about mates and magic and whatnot- but at least she would have their love and support all the same.

She would have to speak to Kingsley about this, even if she didn’t want to speak to the man ever again.

Their travel eventually led the small group to their final destination. The room they came to was like all the rest. A huge, black and silver door with a weathered plaque next to it indicating what was inside.

‘Chamber of Suppression.’ She read. There was an unspeakable standing in front of it. They held their hand out and David stepped up and handed them his wand. A swirl of silver engulfed the piece of wood and the unspeakable then tapped it against the door. It swung open slowly and David’s wand was returned to him. He turned to the group behind him.

“Please reframe from touching anything. The items in this room aren’t meant to be handled carelessly.” He warned before walking inside.

Everyone followed.

All except Hermione.
Her feet refused to move; she couldn’t bring herself to take the next step on her own. Being there made everything feel so **real**. That, and she could feel the effects of the calming draught wearing off. Desperate to be in control of her faculties, she tried to stay calm as to not have another one poured down her throat.

Then again, if she didn’t move, that might just happen anyways.

She just…couldn’t.

Neither she nor her siren side wanted to enter the room. She didn’t need instincts to tell her doing so would end up sealing her fate completely.

Two hands landed on her shoulders.

“’Mione.” Ron spoke to her left.

“It’s going to be alright.” Harry murmured from her right. “We’ll be with you the entire time.” He said softly.

The three of them were the only ones still standing at the entrance.

She didn’t realize she was shaking until she could clearly hear it in her voice. “I’m scared you guys.” She pleaded. There was a wetness pooling at the corners of her eyes. “Don’t make me do this.”

Both men felt their heart break at the admission.

Harry pulled her into a warm embrace; Ron following soon after. Both boys talked quietly so the unspeakable standing a few feet away from them couldn’t listen in.

“We’re under oath ‘Mione.” Ron whispered. “Me and Harry are against this. You **have** to believe that. We only agreed to it because of Kingsley.”

“He warned us that interfering would have us off the case completely if we didn’t swear not to bust you out of here. You know that’s the first thing the two of us thought to do of course.” Harry smiled embarrassingly. “He knew that too. As aurors, we still have vows we take. Kingsley’s hands are just as tied as ours. If he made exceptions for us, then he would be no better than Fudge and the others.”

“We figured, at least this way, we can be at your side. If the two of us didn’t agree; there’d be two Unspeakables taking our place instead.” Ron told her. “There’s no way in hell we were gonna let that happen. We weren’t with you when this all started, ’Mione; so even if it’s under these circumstances- please let us help you through this now.”

It was probably the softest the man had ever spoken to her.

She felt so conflicted.

Hermione’s heart and mind were in odds with one another. Anger and understanding fought for dominance inside of her. Instincts asked for vengeance while reasoning cried out for mercy. She wanted to push them away as much as she wanted to hold them closer. Paranoia told her that this could all go horribly wrong. Hope soothed her heart and promised she would be alright.

Who did she believe?

Who could she trust when she couldn’t even find trust in herself?

Her chest was rumbling as her panic began to build. From the corner of her eye, she saw the
unspeakable slowly turn their featureless mask in their direction. Ron saw it too and blocked her from their view. Each auror took one of her hands into their own.

It helped, but it didn’t stop the rumbling within her.

The last of the potion was starting to wear off.

She heard footsteps approaching.

“Hermione. I need you to join us now.” McGonagall asked quietly.

From over the woman’s shoulder, she could see the other council members looking at them.

Ron and Harry pulled away from her, but neither let go of her hand. When the girl still couldn’t muster the effort in moving on her own, they tugged her as gently as possible into the room. From behind, the door shut with a boom, causing her to flinch violently.

She observed the chamber in its entirety.

The room around them was lined with a slew of display cases. Inside of them, she could see the blurry silhouettes of items hovering within. A few were as tall as she was, while others were small enough to fit within the palms of her hand. Some floated above their heads, spiraling in different patterns of colors and sizes safely out of reach. The place was rather dark, though she chalked that up to the fact that the only source of light was emanating from a giant silver sphere. It was spinning far above them on heavy chains attached to the ceiling. She briefly wondered how it didn’t get caught within the chains. There were so many that it was hard to keep track of them all as they crisscrossed over one another in an intricate weave.

Her focus left from the décor of the room and drifted down to the man standing further ahead of her.

David stood across from them with one of the cases hovering at his side. The young witch could see something gold floating behind the blurry glass. The other professors and ministry staff were huddled around it in a circle. Her hands tightened around those of her two best friends. She really didn’t want them to let go. Her palms were sweating something fierce and she was afraid that if they asked her why, she wouldn’t be able to hold her composure any longer. On the outside, Hermione knew she appeared scared.

Which she was- but that was nothing compared to what was happening to her on the inside.

The potion meant to keep her calm had run its course. Her siren side that’d been pushed down to a low buzz was now a screeching animal clawing at the back of her mind. Not only that, but she was being bombarded with flashes of memories and images like what happened back at the mansion. They went by just as quickly as before, however there was one image that she could see clear as day now. An image similar to what she was seeing before her.

A case floating next to a much younger looking McGonagall and David; another woman beside them.

A woman who’s face was familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

She was far older than the woman she knew now, but between the head of thick, pitch black curls, disgusted sneer, and onyx eyes- there was no denying who this woman was.

Druella Rosier- Bellatrix’s mother.
Suddenly, the siren understood what she was seeing now. These were memories. Bellatrix’s from when she was younger.

Specifically the day much like this one; the day when her mother brought her to have her siren abilities taken away.

Now here she was, standing exactly where the death eater once stood.

Dread rippled through her body at what her other half was trying to get at by showing her these images.

‘Calm down. Calm down.’ She told herself. The mantra went over and over in her head until David began speaking to the group assembled before them.

“Welcome to the Chamber of Suppression. In this room, we have collected and created items that help in the suppression of a person’s magical inheritance. I’ve worked this room for the last sixty years and as such, I am the only individual in this ministry with the qualifications to proceed with this process.” He gestured to the case beside him. “Despite how scary this may all seem to you Miss Granger; the procedure is quick and painless. Once the device is on you, your connection with Bellatrix- at least on your end- will be silenced.”

She blinked. That sounded a little too easy; so, she mentioned that straight away. “I don’t believe it’s as simple as that.”

He shook his head. “I know you may find it hard to believe, but it truly is that simple. Your circumstances are special in that you are older than our usual cases. We usually deal with children who’ve had incidents that couldn’t be solved through careful teaching. The last thing we wanted was to frighten or harm them. That’s not what this is about.” He told her firmly. “The only time things went wrong was when despite our best efforts, the individual panicked and lashed out. That is why I can assure you that as long as you stay relaxed for just a few minutes; you’ll be just fine.”

It made sense what he was saying, it was just hard to trust him. She didn’t know David, but he hadn’t done anything malicious to her this entire time. None of them had. It was a really stressful position she found herself in. Hermione just wanted for it all to be over. And it could be. All she had to do was relax and get through this supposedly easy process.

That seemed simple enough.

She could resolve herself to do that…

Is what she tried to tell herself above the screaming.

Her head was throbbing in pain as her instincts fought against her wishes. It had gotten to the point where she could no longer hide her pain. She knew she must’ve looked like a madwoman as she ended up stumbling away from Harry and Ron to grip at the sides of her head. It was pure agony and no number of placation was enough to make it stop. All the while, the siren within was screeching at her.

Run away. We must flee. She will be angry. She will be angry. They will hurt us.

It was becoming too much to bare. Her eyes watered as she lifted them towards the floating case before her.

There it was; the solution that could end this suffering.
All she had to do was say yes.

It wouldn’t be forever.

Just for a little while.

Once Bellatrix was dealt with, she could go back to a normal life.

She could sing and read and regain control over her emotions and thoughts.

Right now, the only thing hurting her was herself. If she did this, then all the pain will finally stop.

The hurt of her body overtook the fear in her mind; drowning out the feeling long enough to utter a single word.

“Oh okay.”

An audible sigh of relief came from everyone present. David gave her a kind smile.

“Very well then. This will take but a few moments young lady. Please step forward and I’ll put it on you.” He said. The man blocked her view for a moment as he removed the item from its blurred display case.

Hermione approached him.

With his back still facing her, he continued talking. “Now in our many years of researching hundreds of magical creatures, we’ve found that in order to suppress one’s powers, we must stopper it at the source. Harpies, mermaids, and sirens are all related species.” He explained. “Your power comes from your voices; more specifically, the voice box. While we’d rather use a necklace, they hang a bit too low from the larynx. These work a great deal better. Some admitted it would be embarrassing to have out openly on display, so we created a semi-permanent glamour to hide it from curious eyes once it’s on. We can make any size adjustments afterwards for your own comfort.”

He turned around to present the item to her.

And to her credit, she didn’t make a single sound when the collar was revealed to her.

Mostly because her throat had closed up.

Between the man’s withered hands was a thin band of gold, no thicker than two of her fingers. Encircling it was a pattern of circles with lines going through them. They reminded her of the no entry signs she used to see around the construction zones near her house. The sleek and glimmering design was clearly well-made; not a speck of dust on it at all. Hermione imagined that some pureblood woman would swoon at the sight of it should it be presented to them like it was to her.

After all, it was nothing but a fancy piece of jewelry.

A beautiful one to boot.

Honestly, she was thankful for it, seeing as it could’ve looked far, far worse.

With that being said however…

Seeing the collar brought back memories.

Memories of the shackle that once chained her to the wall of a cage.
A couple of bowls on a stone floor to feed and drink from.

Bellatrix’s excited voice the day of their duel.

*Looks like my pet can learn a new trick.*

The collar brought it rushing back all at once, cutting open wounds she desperately tried to close shut.

It *hurt*.

It hurt a lot.

And Hermione Granger was *tired* of hurting.

Everyone there will later remember that she didn’t make any noise when the collar was revealed to her.

They *will* remember her silently sending them flying across the chamber.

Professor and ministry staff alike were sent sprawling in every which way as Hermione lashed out with her wandless magic.

She had finally snapped.

It was like the last strands of calm she had were striped away like a weathered bandage. She was done being calm. Done with listening to those around her make decisions for her without hearing what *she* wanted. These people were her *friends*- people who only wanted what was best for her; yet together they had supposedly decided all on their own to suppress her powers to keep Bellatrix from using it to find her.

They believed it would save her.

She knew it would not.

Taking her siren abilities from her would leave her defenseless. In trying to remove the homing beacon on her person; they were making her an easy target. Her powers was the only thing *protecting* her from Bellatrix. She’d already seen it for herself. With more practice using her voice, she could make herself stronger. Just like the woman was able to use her voice to stop her with a single word, Hermione knew that she would be able to do the same.

She remembered what the book said about the extent to which they could harm one another. Bellatrix will always try to kill her- so long as a chance presents itself- but she wouldn’t be able to go through with it. Not unless she wanted to die herself. Or so she believed.

And honestly, despite the woman making it clear that she had no qualms taking them both out…

Hermione didn’t believe she *would*.

Bellatrix had played her little games so long that Hermione had eventually learned the rules. It was a mistake on the older woman’s part, really. She may have been trying to get into her head, but in doing so, she let Hermione into hers as well. As insane as people thought Bellatrix to be, she was still a Slytherin.

Meaning, if she wanted something, she would do anything necessary to get it.
Before, what the woman wanted most was a place at the dark lord’s side. She had devoted her entire life to that madman; going so far as to happily spend fifteen years in Azkaban to prove her devotion. With Voldemort gone and most of the death eaters dead or captured; Bellatrix had no true purpose in life. She could cause chaos and death and misery, but now that she wasn’t doing it for someone else, it had lost the spark it once gave her.

Until Hermione came along.

Hermione Granger- the muggleborn witch who stole her wand; ransacked her vault; and one of the main one’s responsible for the downfall of her lord.

She just happened to also be her mate.

Nothing could possibly spark a bigger fire within her than that.

And Hermione- in fear of what suppressing her siren side would do to her- was now counting on that fact to be her saving grace.

Bellatrix was adamant that she owned her- mind, body and soul. What the ministry was doing now could potentially take all of that away.

It was time to see if Bellatrix was a woman of her words.

Hermione didn’t want to go back to the older witch. The things she did to her- wanted to do to her- was too much to forget or forgive. She just wanted to be happy. Live the simple life she thought she earned after the war. Doing this would rob her of that opportunity.

She was a clever girl. Always had been. She was sure there was another way to break the bond between the two of them. She just needed more time. More resources. More hope.

And she knew she would not get it here.

Bellatrix would come for her; it was now a matter of whether she could hold out long enough for that to happen. It was clear that her friends were not interested in listening to her pleas. Even if they did, they’d never let her go through with it. To them, the risk far outweighed the reward.

So, Hermione had to make a gamble with the only thing she had left.

Her life.

If that meant fighting her friends for it, then that was what she was willing to do.

‘I’m sorry,’ She thought to herself as she watched everyone regain their bearings. ‘But I need to do this my way.’

She got into a defensive stance. Hermione knew that fighting her professors, Ron, Harry, and the ministry officials would be a losing battle. She was at a huge disadvantage. For one, she didn’t have her wand. Two, she was going against elite individuals. Hermione didn’t fear for her life from the others, but she wasn’t fool enough to think they wouldn’t use force to stop her. If they got serious, she wouldn’t stand a chance. She would have to play this smart. Hermione looked around at what she had at her disposal; formulating a plan as she went.

Kingsley, who was the first to get to his feet had his wand pointed in her direction.
“Hermione, stop this at once!” He bellowed. “We’re not trying to hurt you!”

She was done staying quiet about how she really felt. “I’m sorry Kingsley. Everyone. But I’ve realized that I don’t want this after all. This won’t solve anything. It will only make things worse.”

Ron and Harry were helping the headmistress up off the floor. The woman was looking at her with disbelief and hurt. “Please, Hermione. Be reasonable. With the bond left as it is, Bellatrix-”

“Will be able to find me. I know.” She stood her ground. “I’m counting on it.”

“Have you lost your mind, dear girl!” Slughorn gasped from across the room. “I may not believe this to be the best option either, but to attack us? That’s crossing the line!”

“Because none of you have yet to listen to anything I’ve been trying to tell you!” The siren yelled back. She found herself backing up when she noticed that they were trying to flank her.

“Hermione, we understand you’re scared but-”

“Then listen to me when I tell you not to do this! I need my powers. They’re the only thing that’s protected me from Bellatrix so far! Can’t you see that? Taking them away will leave me defenseless against her.” She barked.

Professors’ Sprout and Flitwick were trying to get closer. Seeing them move in made her paranoid, which in this instance was a good thing. Her eyes were darting about, catching every movement the witches and wizards around her were making. It was the only reason she was able to throw a hand up and deflect the stunner heading her way by Emily. She wasn’t in the clear yet. The first spell cast was the signal for everyone else to advance. Hermione cast a protego and pressed her back against the giant silver and black door behind her. At least this way, she didn’t have to worry about any of them flanking her.

The group kept throwing spell after spell at her. The bombardment would eventually break through if she didn’t do something quick.

Something floating in the corner of her eyes gave her an idea.

It was gonna be risky though. She had a few seconds to act, but just a small moment was all she needed. Hermione thought back on her lessons with Snape.

‘It’s about more than just concentration. It still needs a focus and a direction.’ She remembered him saying. ‘Then let’s see what happens if we test that in a different way.’

Everyone was caught off guard when the young woman dropped her protego and sprinted towards one of the larger display cases to her left. Hermione ducked behind it and stuck her hand out from cover.

“Hope this works.” She whispered to herself, closing her eyes tightly. “Lumos Maxima!” She yelled.

A blinding ball of light shot from her hand and went hurtling towards the group. Upon hearing pained groans from the other side, Hermione squealed in delight as her theory worked.

When casting the spell, she didn’t focus on anything; instead putting all her magic into the direction she wanted it to go in.

In this case, that was everywhere.
It worked like a charm.

What should’ve been a concentrated ball of brightness had expanded into the size of a stadium light. There were screeches of pain as her friends were momentarily blinded. Hermione took the chance to throw two stunners out. One collided into Emily while the other hit the closest one to her, which was Slughorn.

Both were out like a light.

Hermione didn’t stop there. She raised both hands towards the ceiling.

“Accio!” She cried.

The largest glass cases came barreling towards her. She pulled them in close and dropped them towards the ground. There were eight in total. Hermione arranged them in a square around her and put a sticking charm on the bottom so they didn’t go flying away again. Surrounded on all sides, the girl now had a barrier of display cases between herself and everyone else.

Flitwick was about to cast another spell when David ordered him to stop.

“Don’t! These items are extremely volatile! One stray spell and we could seriously injure Miss Granger.” He said.

No more spells flew after that.

She had bought some time which allowed her to focus on the new problem at hand. The longer she stayed there behind her makeshift barrier, the more magic she was slowly draining away. If this kept up, just on sheer numbers alone she would be overwhelmed and this would’ve been all for nothing. She had to make a move. Quickly.

Protected from view by the display cases, she observed her options.

The door was the only entrance and exit to the room. She was confident that she could open it, but the number of Unspeakables on the other side would make a swift get away nearly impossible. Her wandless magic was alright, but in no way strong enough yet to take on so many people.

If she had her wand, then- and this sounded horrible even in her mind- she could take someone as a hostage until she got to the elevator.

They weren’t going to use excessive force and Hermione felt that in doing so, whomever she took wouldn’t be in any real danger. Enraged, yes, but unharmed. It would be a bluff more than anything. The young woman didn’t want to do this, but she didn’t want that collar around her neck even more. Clearly no one was listening to her which meant she was on her own now. Once escaping from there, she’d go into hiding. They’d done it before during the war so it wasn’t like she didn’t know what to do in order to remain incognito. Of course, there was the matter of Bellatrix finding her, but the more her friends tried to drill that into her head, Narcissa’s words came to mind and started drowning them out.

You did something yesterday that I’d only dreamed of doing since I was a little girl. So, while it will no doubt haunt my nights that I left you here at her mercy, I know that you will not perish here.

Those words were what ultimately made Hermione decide to change her mind about going through with this. As long as she had her powers; she was confident she could stop Bellatrix. For the first time since all this began, Hermione needed to put her full trust in her instincts. Up until now- though she didn’t agree with what it wanted- they hadn’t really steered her wrong before. Merlin, there were
so many times where they had warned her and she simply ignored them out of fear.

No more.

Hermione knew what she had to do now.

If her wandless magic wasn’t reliable and her wand wasn’t an option, then she would use the only weapon she had left.

Her voice.

The young woman took a deep breath and looked inside herself.

Since becoming more attuned to her powers, Hermione found it so much easier to feel out her siren side that was ever lurking in the back of her mind. When before it lingered like a quiet voice waiting for attention, now it was like a physical presence she could reach out and grab. Which was exactly what she did. Ignoring all the voices of her friends and professors, she called out to her other half with one goal in mind.

‘I need your help. We need to get out of here, but I don’t want to hurt them.’ She spoke to it. Hermione had only asked it directly for help a few times before, usually letting it act on its own without her interference. However, in a situation like this, she needed to be the one in control.

Letting her siren side free without her guidance was not the best thing to do. It didn’t have the logical reasoning to discern friend from foe when they got emotional. If they were angry, then that was the only thought flowing through their mind. It didn’t matter at who it was directed or why; they just needed to express their feelings in the only way they knew how. She believed that’s why even though she would never intentionally hurt her friends, she had still sent them flying across the room in Kingsley’s office.

In reality, she needed to start looking at her powers as she did wandless magic. She’d been allowing her powers to flow out like an ocean rather than the river leading to it. There was no concentration or direction at all. Just emotion. Professor Snape did say that she may never have a full grasp over wandless spells if she couldn’t keep her feelings in check.

She thought it time to prove him wrong.

Hermione felt the familiar feeling of power bubbling up in her chest. Beneath the sound of her constant thoughts she heard her siren side answer her call.

Sing. Sing and they will listen.

Hermione did just that.

No one could see Hermione from within her display case prison, but the moment a soothing hum starting resonating throughout the room, everyone jumped into action.

“Quickly! We need to stop her!” Kingsley told the others. “Negation spells only. She’s more than likely charmed those cases to stay in place. If we remove the spells, the lot of us will be more than enough to drag them away by hand. Filius, you stay with Emily and Horace; the rest of you- with me!”

Everyone jumped into action.

Kingsley and McGonagall made quick work of the sticking charms, causing the foremost case to start hovering again. They were only removing one so as to give the woman less of a chance to make
a run for it. Sylvester, Ron, and Harry converged on it, grabbing the sides and pulling it away from
the others. Thankfully, the charms making it float made the process easier than if they had been
stationary on the ground. With the opening made, they now had full access to Hermione inside.

If only they had acted sooner.

Those who were closest to see her face recognized the look she was serving.

Resolve.

In the time it took them to move- behind the cover of her makeshift barrier- the woman had come to a
silent conclusion. What it was, none of them knew, but what they did know was this-

She was not ready to go quietly.

Ron had just raised his wand to restrain his best friend, but Hermione was faster, her tender voice
sweeping over them like a tidal wave.

Words fly like whispers through ears left unheard

The cries of the fearful go lost in your world

If you’d care to listen, you’d hear my desires

For those who stay ignorant will grow to be tired

Much to her surprise, she watched the three men before her go weak in the knees and collapse in on
themselves. The others- aside for strangely enough, McGonagall- fell as well.

“Hermione what the bloody hell are you doing? Why can’t I move?” Ron’s high pitched voice
asked. He was clearly struggling to get to his feet.

‘What I think is best, Ronald.’ She failed to say aloud, not halting her singing in the least.

I can’t be reminded of the mistakes that I have made

The things that bind me to this path that I now take

Of those along the road ahead

Who guide with their directions

Who take my hand

String me along

And lead with no discretion

I know you mean the best, but know I mean it too
With every step I take, I now know something new

And though my words may seem absurd

Please trust the way I’m going

This life is mine, so *move aside*

If you hate the path it’s flowing

Wobbly legs came to life as her words washed over them. Their bodies moved on their own to make a way for her, the look on their faces actually causing her to stutter.

Everyone was staring at her in *horror*.

They had felt the girl’s powers before, but never like *this*. Hermione had described what it was like to have Bellatrix command things of her. How the woman’s words forced her to do things she didn’t want to. But to actually *feel* it- know it as intimately as they knew themselves- it was a terrifying experience. The imperious curse left the mind in a daze. Someone beneath it’s control wouldn’t even *realize* it until whatever deed was demanded of them was already over and done with.

They did not have that luxury here.

The group was fighting it with every fiber of their being; their minds intact while their bodies ignored their commands.

That loss of control made two things very clear to everyone in that room.

Hermione was as *dangerous* now as she was *desperate*.

They had pushed her to the point that she was willing to use what scared her most *against* them. It was a heartbreaking conclusion- especially knowing that none of them wished for this to happen. Things were never meant to go like this. In trying to protect her, they only succeeded in pushing her away. Ron and Harry felt especially hurt by this. The two of them had told her that she would be fine. Everything was going to be alright as long as she trusted in them.

But they forgot to trust in *her* and they were now paying the price for that.

Hermione wanted to stop and ask for forgiveness. The hurt in the faces was almost enough to make her hesitate. The gentle nudge from her siren side was enough to push her forward though. She took careful steps, afraid that moving too fast would break the hold she had on everyone around her.

No one moved.

She continued towards the door; all the while singing the words she wanted them to desperately understand.

*I can’t be reminded of the mistakes that I have made
The things that bind me to this path that I now take
Of those along the road ahead*
Who guide with their directions
Who take my hand
String me along
And lead with no discretion

Fear moves me forward
Your guilt ties you down
Your hope may be worth this
But I can’t stick around

If you see through my eyes be still and close your own
Believe in my judgement
And will to come back home

Hermione looked around.

An air of something unknown was clenching tightly in her chest. No longer could she see the look of betrayal in the other’s eyes. One by one, she watched their lids close. Some seemed to struggle like Kingsley, Sprout, Sylvester, and Flitwick. David, Ron, and Harry didn’t struggle at all.

She wanted to cry.

Her siren side was helping her in more ways than one. She knew she needed to go, but the guilt of her decision was weighing on her heavily. What Hermione needed most right now was reassurance. Something- even if small- to let her know that she was doing the right thing. That despite what she was doing, deep down her friends knew why she had to. And her siren side provided. Those that were no longer looking at her believed she still had a chance doing this her way. That even bound by rules and pure intentions, maybe Hermione could somehow pull this off by herself. She walked by them towards the door with tears pooling at the corners of her eyes; the feeling of betrayal ebbing away as she went.

It was a shame that her stride towards freedom did not last long; her path blocked by a single individual.

One that had not grown tired when the others had fallen.

Who hadn’t moved when the others cleared a path for her.

Whose eyes were still open and staring her down with piercing stubbornness.

The headmistress.

McGonagall seemed to be the only one left unaffected by her singing.
‘But why?’ She said, now weary that it was something that she had done on her part. Hermione didn’t have time to ask before the older woman had her wand facing in her direction.

“She can’t stand down, my child.” She commanded. “I cannot vow that those outside of this door won’t hurt you if you go any further. This is a temporary solution and once Bellatrix is in custody, I will remove the suppression personally. That is my promise to you, but Hermione, what you’re doing will only lead to more despair.”

She shook her head. “I can’t do that professor. I’ll stay here in the ministry if I have to, but I don’t want that thing near me.” Hermione could see the doubt pooling in the older woman’s eyes. She tried another approach. “I can stop her. I’ve done it before. But I need my powers to do that! Just give me a little more time to learn to control it! Please!”

A flicker of something went across McGonagall’s face, but it was gone as quickly as it had appeared.

“I’m afraid that we are all out of time. Every moment left as you are gives Bellatrix more time to act. Perhaps she already knows you’re here. She could strike long before you are ready and that’s a gamble that we simply can’t take.” She told the girl.

Rage and frustration bubbled up within her chest. Though she was fighting to maintain control over her emotions, she could feel her siren side gnawing at the seams of her restraint. She didn’t want things to escalate any further. The others seemed to still be under her siren song, but how long that would last, she couldn’t tell.

In this instance only, McGonagall was right.

They were out of time.

She stood ramrod straight and met the other woman’s unwavering gaze.

“If that’s what you believe…then you give me no choice. I’m sorry.” She opened her mouth to sing and make the woman see reason once and for all.

“…so am I.”

McGonagall didn’t hesitate with her next move. Her wand snapped out and pointed over Hermione’s shoulder.

“Accio collar!”

The young siren couldn’t turn fast enough.

Her body buckled as the sleek metal of the collar slammed into the back of her neck and sent her body tilting forward. Never had her hands moved so fast; scrambling desperately to keep it from sapping close. Hermione pulled and pulled, but the two ends were encroaching on her like the imposing maw of an alligator. Her eyes watered, her breath coming out in huge chest shaking pants. The entire back of her head throbbed in agony as her siren side began screeching and clawing in tandem with her. Red welts were forming from where her nails were doing everything in her power to remove the offending object.

At some point, she had collapsed on the ground, sending the headmistress into action.

“Hermione! Heavens child, stop! You’re going to seriously injure yourself!” Came her panicked cries. The woman tried to grab at Hermione’s hands but it was a useless endeavor.
Everything was becoming blurry.

She couldn’t breathe.

Couldn’t speak.

Couldn’t think.

The magic around the collar was already starting to take hold. She could feel it closing in on her other half.

They told her it was only going to mute her siren side.

This…this didn’t feel like that at all.

There was too much fear and panic.


“*It hurts!*” She managed to whimper. “*Take it off! Get this off of me!*” She began bellowing, the rate at which she was clawing increased. By now, the others had snapped out of their trance and were staring at McGonagall wrestling with her on the ground. The sound coming out of Hermione’s mouth was nothing like the soothing thrall that had taken them under her control mere moments ago.

These were the painful wails of someone in pain. The screeching and mournful cries of someone’s suffering. And the more Hermione struggled, the louder the sound was getting.

Seeing the situation escalating, everyone rushed to help.

Ron and Harry were the first to reach her, grabbing at her hands and pulling them away to prevent her from clawing at her throat any longer. McGonagall had moved her head into her lap and her hands were steadying Hermione’s face to look at her. The elderly woman was whispering soothing words and promises of everything being alright. They did nothing but panic her further. Her legs began kicking out, anything to somehow get everyone away from her. Kingsley and Sylvester stepped in and held them down. The voices around her blended into one. She could hear everyone talking to her all at once- every sense ignited with over stimulation.

Hermione was going to explode.

She needed to let go.

She needed to get away.

She opened her mouth as wide as she could, her back arching off of the ground as a wail shook every wall in the room.

“*Get AWAY!*” She cried.

The echo of her scream sent everyone flying. Glass shattered down around them as the display cases couldn’t withstand the force of her voice.

Her screams were no longer the only ones in the room.

The shrieks of her friends and associates joined in to bathe the room in an echoing chamber of agony and pain.
That was until the smallest ‘click’ forced the room into silence; with it went all of Hermione’s pain as her siren side cut out like a marionette with it’s strings cut.

The next scream from her had not an ounce of siren ability in it, yet everyone felt the woman’s raw and unhindered voice was far more painful in comparison.

They had succeeded, but it didn’t feel like a win.

Hermione’s eyes rolled into the back of her head as she succumbed to the darkness. The next time she awoke, nothing would ever be the same again…
Chapter 30 - Reasons Revealed

Chapter Summary

Aww you guys are amazing! I just got off work and finished the latest episode of Game of Thrones and just the day i had and coming home to see your comments just sparks a pit of joy in my heart. OvO Here's Chapter 30. I know in the last update I said that i would have art, but some of the plot has changed since then. Scenes and such deleted and rearranged. That being said, i'll be posting all the art and things i post into another work so look forward to that. Enjoy! XD

Chapter 30: Reasons Revealed

It was almost like no time passed at all when Hermione came to. Watery eyes opened slowly, the first thing they saw being the giant light sphere spinning above. The fallen woman watched it twist and turn in a lazy pattern as her senses slowly began to return. Voices, both strange and familiar, echoed around the room. Blonde filled her peripheral. She glanced over to see the worried and angered face of the nurse who saw to her when she first arrived.

“You’re awake. I won’t bother to ask if you’re alright my dear, I already know the answer to that.” She said. “Just tell me if anything hurts.”

Hermione tried to speak. It was a simple question to answer and yet she couldn’t even open her mouth to reply. The smallest bob of her throat made her acutely aware of the collar around it. Neither tight nor heavy; its prescience still rendered her utterly breathless. The more she felt awake, the more her previous panic started setting back in. Her hands were back at her throat, desperate to remove her binds. She couldn’t breathe. She was suffocating. She was going to die…

Hands gripped her mouth, bringing her back to reality.

“Open, Miss Granger.” Anna demanded.

She complied. Once her lips were parted, the familiar taste of a calming draught was poured down into her stomach. There was no fight this time around; the realization that the reason she couldn’t breathe was due to the oncoming panic attack and not the collar was enough to let her hands fall to her sides without a fuss. Weary eyes rolled upwards to look at Anna who stared down at her with a mix of pity and anger.

Though not necessarily directed at her.

“Foolish, the whole lot of them.” She hissed, waving her wand over the prone woman beside her. Anna began shouting anew. “I warned you Kingsley! I warned you not to go through this and look what has happened! Now I have eleven patients instead of one! Bloody fool!”

‘Eleven.’ Hermione’s mind supplied. ‘What did I do?’ She asked.

The girl mustered the strength to life her head and observe her surroundings.

Her eyes widened in shock.
Unspeakables were huddled together in groups of two and three around her friends and professors. From those she could see, it didn’t look good.

Sprout, Slughorn, Emily, David, and Flitwick appeared the least harmed; mostly scraped and bruised from the fallen glass around them.

The other five who had held her down weren’t so lucky.

Kingsley had a large gash on the side of his temple that two mediwiches were already tending to. He seemed disoriented, but he still heard Anna loud and clear if his shameful expression was any indicator.

Sylvester was cradling his left arm, an unspeakable pouring a dose of skelegrow down his throat, causing him to groan in pain as it took effect. His glasses were nowhere to be seen.

Ron was out cold, his leg bent at an odd angle from where he laid slumped against the wall.

Harry must’ve been the first person taken care of, as he was already sporting a bandage around his left hand and forehead. An unspeakable was in the process of repairing his glasses. He hadn’t taken them though; too busy fussing over the headmistress who was unmoving by his feet.

She couldn’t see the woman properly, but she knew from the frantic way the unspeakables were casting spell after spell that it was bad.

Looking around at everyone brought to reality a singular thought that shook her to the core.

This was her fault.

She did this.

The one thing she tried to avoid at all cost and it backfired on her anyways.

Hermione’s hands were shaking despite the potion coursing through her body.

“Hermione?”

Anna’s voice broke through her racing thoughts.

“You’re shaking. Are you in pain?”

She hesitated before saying a quiet, “No. I don’t think so.”

The older woman frowned. “You don’t think so?”

Was she in pain? Physically no.

But everything else?

There was no one word that could properly describe how she felt.

Her body had aches and pains of course, but physically she was completely fine. All except her head. Nevermind the overwhelming guilt eating away at her conscious, it felt like someone had grabbed a chunk of her hair from the back of her head and ripped it from her scalp. Of course when she reached back, everything was still intact, but the feeling that something had been taken from her still lingered.
Her throat bobbing against the ring of gold around her neck reminded her that something was taken. The tears wouldn’t come despite Hermione’s irresistible urge to cry. Her siren side almost felt nonexistent. For the first time since she was a little girl, it felt like Hermione was the only one in her body. The comforting feeling that she always carried around of never really being alone was all but gone. No matter how hard she called out to it, Hermione couldn’t get her other half to reply.

It had worked; just like everyone wanted.

And Hermione had never felt more alone because of it.

She needed to get out of there.

Moving to stand sent Anna into motion; the woman steadying her to sit up but keeping her from doing much more than that.

“You shouldn’t be moving yet.”

“I’m fine. I’m not in any pain. I…I just want to leave from here.” Hermione told the witch.

“I’m afraid that you’ll need to stay within the ministry Miss Granger.” Kingsley said. He groaned as he was helped to his feet, hobbling over to where the two witches were sitting. “This situation has garnered a lot of attention. I’ll need to file an incident report.”

Angry eyes narrowed at his words. “An incident report? There wouldn’t be an incident report if you lot would’ve just listened to me!”

“Hermione, enough!” He was using his no nonsense tone with her, only spurring her anger to rise. “What you just did could’ve happened at any time! What if you pulled a stunt like this outside of this room? With civilians about? You’d be sitting in a prison cell instead of a ministry guest room.” He toned back his voice a bit. “I’ve stretched my ministry influence as far as it can go. What’s done is done. You will stay here and file a report alongside everyone else. They’ll be a small hearing and then we will continue the hunt for Bellatrix so we can put all of this behind us. That is my final word on the matter. Anna, if you can take Miss Granger to the infirmary, that’ll be a great help. I need to speak with the others.”

Hermione was about to start again, but a hand on her shoulder from Anna stopped her. The woman shook her head.

“She won’t budge dear. Come with me and I can properly get you taken care of.” She told her softly.

She really didn’t want to leave Kingsley with the last word, however, causing more of a scene right now wouldn’t help in any way. The two women slowly exited the room, neither talking or acknowledging the other witches and wizards around them.

The walk was long and uncomfortable, far worse than when she made her way down their earlier that day. While the unspeakables had all but ignored them upon entering the department of mysteries, now she could feel every eye of their covered faces locked on her. Whispers, too quiet to hear were bouncing all around as Anna corralled her towards the elevator leading upstairs. Hermione had never felt so miserable. Her lips parted hesitantly; a keen meant to bring her a small bit of comfort ready to leave her chest.

Nothing came out.

The sound she made was nothing more than a shallow gasp. She tried again and was met with the
same results accompanied by a sharp pain emanating from the back of her head.

Suddenly, the gasps turned to panicked breaths and her hands reached up to claw at the collar around her neck.

Anna noticed immediately and grabbed her hands. The woman said nothing as she pulled Hermione even faster towards the elevator; all the while repeating soothing words into her ear.

They helped only slightly, and by the time the two had reached the elevator, Hermione was bent at the waist as her mind began spiraling downwards. Anna could only look on in sadness at what the young woman was going through. Suppression cases weren’t new for her. She had yet to meet a witch or wizard who came out of it the same as when they went in. It didn’t mean they always came out for the worse; just different.

Hermione clearly wasn’t one of the lucky ones. Her injuries were on the inside, in a place a nurse like her could never reach. The young woman’s wounds could not be mended by spell or potion; Anna would have to support Hermione the best she could with what she had.

When they arrived at the infirmary, the nurse bypassed the common area beds to go straight to her office. Luckily, her other patients were being seen to by her underlings and allowed her to focus all of her attention on Hermione. The woman’s siren abilities may no longer be a problem, but she wasn’t going to put her out with the others to be gawked and stared at like some kind of exhibit.

Was she playing favorites in doing this?

Yes.

And as head nurse in the ministry, it was under her authority to do so. Her heart bled for the girl staggering beside her. Bellatrix was a nightmare wrapped in dark fabric and hatred. She tormented and tortured without mercy; the amount of patients brought before her due to that woman’s life as a death eater were unheard of.

To be bound to a person like that in such an intimate way must’ve been incredibly difficult to stomach.

The hand dealt to Hermione was unfair to say the least, and if she could somehow tip the scales in the woman’s favor- even a little bit- she would do everything in her power to do so.

With that mindset, getting Hermione settled on her private couch was a sigh of relief- even if neither of them were relaxed in the slightest. The heavy breathing and attempts to scratch at her throat hadn’t stopped.

‘Poor child. Such a horrible thing to go through so young.’ She thought, once more removing the clawing hands from around her thin neck. Anna frowned, noticing something that worried her greatly.

“That calming drought shouldn’t have worn off this quickly. It’s far too soon to give you another as well.” She sighed, rubbing the brunette’s shaking palms with weathered hands. “I don’t want to restrain you sweet child, but if you continue scratching, I will do what is necessary.”

Hermione looked up at her with saddened eyes. “I want this off of me.” She whispered quietly.

“I know. I know you do, but we can’t do that. Not until this whole situation is taken care of. Is it uncomfortable? Too tight? Would it help if I conceal it now?”
She looked up at that. “Conceal it?”

Anna nodded. “It’s a spell that works like a semi-permanent glamour. You’ll still feel it there since it’s a physical presence, but at least this way no one will see it and start asking uncomfortable questions.”

“Please.” Came the immediate reply.

The nurse took out her wand and made four sharp flicking motions. “Tectum. There,” She handed the girl a small mirror. “Take a look for yourself.”

Hermione took it from her. As the woman had said, the pristine collar was no longer visible; only the pale skin of her neck on display. She raised her hand to feel. The cool metal beneath her fingers was disappointing to touch, though the spell remained firmly in place. Her heart sank even further. She thought that the idea of not having to see it around her neck in every reflection would soothe some of her pain, but if anything, it only served to make it worse.

Now it was far too fitting.

This illusion of freedom made real.

There was no chain to tie her feet. No cell to block her escape. No Bellatrix controlling her voice. But being here felt more like being a prisoner than being in that cage.

A sense of dread came over her and she decided to take a seat on the low couch behind her. The young woman curled up on her side and buried her face in her arms.

Anna was at a loss, but knew that she still had a job to do.

“Hermione, I need you to answer some questions for me. Nothing that leaves this room for now, but I have to evaluate your current mental state for my records. Do you think you can do that for me?” She asked softly.

The girl managed to give her a small nod.

Anna grabbed her wand and rolled her desk chair to sit beside her.

“To begin, how do you feel pain wise? Is anything hurting you physically?” She began.

She watched the girl hesitate before shifting to look at her with sad eyes.

“My…my head hurts.” Hermione told her.

“How badly? Is it a constant pain or come and go?”

“I’m not sure. I…I tried to use my siren abilities earlier. To calm myself. I used to do that when things got too much.” Her frown deepened. “I couldn’t hear it. But I can still feel it.”

The woman was writing frantically on a clipboard. “I see. Suppression doesn’t take away your other half; it’s still there beneath it all. If you’re having a headache, it’s more than likely because your instincts are trying to fight against what they see as a threat. This is actually a common thing I hear. The headaches should lessen with time and sleep.” She glanced at Hermione with a serious expression. “If they worsen, I want you to tell me immediately. We may need to adjust the suppression accordingly. I know it’s not comfortable, but please bear with us until Bellatrix is taken care of. Do you understand?”
"Yes." Was what she told the woman.

'No' is what she really meant to say.

Hermione knew that this may backfire on her sometime in the future, but she didn’t care that she had just lied to the one person trying to help her out. No offense to Anna- Hermione genuinely liked the older mediwitch- but she refused to tell her how she was really feeling. The guilt wasn’t even enough to sway her as her words had technically been half true.

Her head was hurting her.

But that was a bit of an understatement.

She was used to headaches and migraines; the nights she spent studying late into the evenings and early into the mornings did not come without consequences.

This was a different pain.

A pain that was being inflicted upon her out of a toxic mix of fear and anger.

It was like a wall was between her instincts and herself. Where once she could feel it’s soothing presence ever lurking at the back of her thoughts, now there was only a hissing, scratching mass of fury there. Hermione had to keep her face straight when talking to Anna so as not to let the pain she was feeling show. Her siren side was attacking the suppression like a mindless animal; something she had come to learn it was not.

All the while- despite not hearing it’s voice- she knew why she was suffering.

Anger.

It had tried to warn her. Multiple times. The irrational fear of McGonagall and the uneasiness of Bellatrix’s song the day she was rescued were being thrown at her like the sharpest of daggers.

She should’ve listened. Should’ve listened and ran while she still had the chance. And because she didn’t, they were now in this situation.

But worse than the anger, was the fear.

It feared for them both.

Without knowing when it truly began, Hermione realized that her magical creature inheritance was a bigger part of her than she truly imagined. When she was younger, singing was something that came natural. She didn’t always do it when she was feeling sad or hurt or angry.

She cooed when she came home with the best grades from school.

She found herself purring quietly to herself when she made a new friend or her parents came back from a particularly long conference.

When the war was over, she sang and poured her heart out down by the lake that even the mermaids that lurked beneath came up to sing with her.

It had all become so natural. So frequent. Being around Bellatrix only made it worse- or better- she couldn’t say for sure. The point is, Hermione was finally feeling like herself and her siren side were becoming a different type of ‘they’. The more she sung- the more she expressed her wide arrange of emotions- the more it stopped being Hermione and her siren side and just being Hermione.
And in a blink that was gone.

She had attacked her closest friends.

Lost her siren abilities.

And now felt like a prisoner in her own body.

She thought that was the icing on the cake until she realized that in a cruel twist of fate, she didn’t even have Bellatrix anymore.

She was now truly and utterly alone.

It stabbed her heart deep, that realization. The young woman had to turn away from Anna when the tears began to fall and she cried quietly to herself.

“I think I want to get some sleep now Anna.” She told the woman in a wobbly voice. Today was easily the most soul crushing day of her life.

Anna knew Hermione was crying. She was a nurse after all, it was kind of her job to know when a patient was trying to lie about their pain. In this instance however, she let it go. She knew what the girl was suffering from was an internal thing and could not be healed with wands or words from her end. The blonde woman stood and gave the Gryffindor a gentle pat on the back.

“Get some rest. If Kingsley comes, I’ll send him away. He’ll get his statement, but not today.” Anna went over to her desk and began filling out paperwork and medical records.

If Hermione’s quiet sobbing made her shed a tear of her own; the two of them were the only ones around to see it.

They went the rest of the day undisturbed.

The next day’s proceedings were awkward and tense on everyone’s end.

While Hermione was allowed to sleep the previous day away without interruption, Kingsley was at the door the very next morning with a stack of papers and an uncomfortable gaze in his eyes.

*I’d like to get this small hearing out of the way as quickly and quietly as possible. You can return to your room afterwards and will be permitted visitors if you so desire.*

Hermione said nothing when she got up to follow. Any morning energy she once had was all but gone. She was not used to this feeling of being left with her own thoughts. The stares of those around her upset her greatly, but there was nothing to comfort her as she trudged behind the minister with lowered eyes. In an attempt to rekindle even the tiniest bit of hope within herself, she tried pushing against the magic of the suppression only to be met with unyielding barriers. It did nothing but agitate the scratching, snarling creature on the opposite side. The brunette winced when her headache increased two-fold. Kingsley looked back to check if she was okay to which she immediately schooled her expression to that of neutral disinterest.

If that was awkward, then being in the room with Ron, Harry, McGonagall, and the others was almost unbearable.

Hermione took her seat and refused to look at anyone, keeping her head bent and her mass of curls
covering her eyes as much as possible. The room was set up much like the one deep in the basement, albeit not entirely encased in blinding white furniture. Kingsley took the podium and Harry and Ron stood on either side of him.

The case proceeded from there.

Everyone retold the events from the best of their abilities; Hermione only chiming in to provide confirmation for her own actions. There was no point in lying. Everyone knew the truth of what she had done.

She didn’t care.

The whole meeting was really just a blur of voices and ministry jargon for her. Her head was pounding, her throat felt far too tight, and the need to lash out at everything around her was starting to subtly build up within her.

Then as quickly as it had begun, it was over.

Given the circumstances and known risks of these types of situations, she was being confined to her ministry guest room until she had acclimated to the suppression.

A light sentence all things considered.

Everyone moved to leave. Kingsley and the other ministry officials returned to their offices; David being the only one to stay behind in order to give her the same spiel as Anna. That if the collar seemed to become a problem, come see him and he could make changes. She knew that ‘make changes’ wasn’t the same as ‘remove altogether’ so she thanked the man and let him leave without another word.

Flitwick and Sprout gave her apologies followed by condolences. The two assured her that the injuries they suffered were minor and despite the situation, they held no ill will towards her or her actions. They had at least earned an apology from her, though her heart wasn’t in it even the slightest.

Slughorn said nothing as he passed.

The fear in his eyes as he left said all she needed to know.

That left her two childhood friends and the headmistress.

The four of them stood in silence, none knowing what to say to one another or even if they should. Ron was on a crutch and Harry still had a bandage around his hand and forehead. The headmistress seemed to be lacking any obvious injuries, but she noticed the way the woman winced when she tried bending over too far down.

‘I did this.’ Came her torrent thoughts. ‘They’re injured because of me. Because I lost control.’

Her heart clenched. She prepared her mouth to at least apologize, but Harry beat her to it.

“Hermione.” She had never heard him say her name like that. “What happened in there? One moment you were fine and the next…”

“You turned into a raging lunatic.” Ron hissed.

“Mr. Weasley!” McGonagall gasped.
“No.” Hermione interjected. “Let him say what he really wants to say.”

“Hermione, I don’t think—”

“You never trusted us did you?” Ron began. “There wasn’t a single moment in that room where you thought we had your back was there! I thought we were friends Hermione!” He growled. His stance was fierce and tall despite leaning most of his weight on the crutch.

Ron was hurting. Not just physically, but emotionally too. She knew he wanted to let loose on her and let out his pent up frustration. The pounding pain in her head reminded her that lashing out wouldn’t lead to another incident so there was no point in having the red-head tip toe around her any longer. If he wanted to yell at her; let him.

She would have no qualms about returning the fury in kind now that she wasn’t ‘dangerous.’

“You could’ve killed someone you know! Or yourself! We weren’t trying to hurt you.” He continued. “So why? Why did you attack us like that?”

She strengthened her back and her resolve before addressing the man in the firmest way possible.

“Because I decided that I didn’t want to go through with it after all. And had everyone listened to me instead of trying to tell me what was best for me then I wouldn’t have freaked out like that!”

Hermione yelled back. It was strange. Despite the fact that she was clearly upset and was raising her voice to Ron, the only sign that her siren was still with her was a painful throbbing ebbing away in the background of her thoughts.

She would ignore it until Ron decided to back off or was taken away by one of the others.

Speaking of the others, McGonagall and Harry could only watch the exchange happening in silence; afraid that speaking out against either party would be misinterpreted as taking sides.

“We would’ve listened if what you said wasn’t absolutely mental! You essentially said that you’d rather risk going back to that woman than having your powers taken away!”

“That’s exactly what I meant!” She hissed. “My chances were better without the suppression and I’m an idiot for not realizing it sooner.”

He threw his hands up in the air in frustration. “Hermione, do you hear yourself! You said it yourself; she tortured you! Beat you! Look at your arm for Merlin’s sake!” He immediately knew his mistake as the girl’s eyes went cold as ice when he mentioned the scars. The red head took a deep breath and apologized. “Sorry. That was low. But ’Mione, really. I know this really sucks, but you don’t really mean that right? That you’d rather be with her. She could’ve killed you.”

“She can’t…or at least she couldn’t.” Hermione told him. “Bellatrix did do all those things, but as much as she wanted to get rid of me our instincts won’t let us. It’s probably- no, it is the only reason I’m alive right now.” She stood tall against his ire. “Now that I can’t use mine, if she does find me, nothing’s stopping her from killing me now.”

“There’s no way we’ll let that happen ’Mione.” Harry piped in. “You’re safe here in the ministry. Ron and I are going to search for her tonight. She can’t run forever, and when we catch her, you’ll never have to see her or that collar again.”

Reassurances and pretty words. That’s all she was hearing from her two best friends and yet they did nothing to comfort her. She had already accepted the reality of the situation before her. The ministry was about as safe as a bank with no locks. She had no illusions that Bellatrix let her go out of the
kindness of her heart. The woman knew this would happen, having apparently gone through the same thing when she was a young girl.

In the end, Bellatrix got the last laugh- departing with her shiny new toy with the full knowledge that Hermione should’ve been careful what she asked for.

And she was right.

But she would never let the other woman know that even when she inevitably came for her.

Cause unlike the others, she wasn’t under the notion that she wouldn’t, something she needed to let the trio know upfront.

“If you think Bellatrix is running, you’re wrong. She’s insane. Unstable. A murderous, horrible woman who delights in the torment of others.” Her hand began unconsciously rubbing over her arm. “But she’s more than all that. I tried to ignore it during my time in that place, but it got harder to push aside the truth of the matter.”

“Which is?” Ron asked.

“She’s smart. Obsessive. Manipulative. **Determined.** Bellatrix lives up to her name. She had to in order to serve the dark lord. But he’s gone now.” She gave them a hopeless look. “People like her **live** for others. She has no fear of death, but she won’t accept it if she still has someone to live for. With the dark lord gone, who do you think is her new reason to keep going?”

Everyone knew the answer to that question was standing in that very room.

“She will come for me. And when she does, its probably best for everyone if you just let me go. Otherwise she’ll kill you. I don’t want anyone else to die for me.”

“No way are we going to do that!” Ron yelled, limping over and shaking the girl’s stiff shoulders. “You really want us to just give up like that after **everything** we did to get you back! No way!”

She smacked his hands away. “You didn’t listen to me about this,” She hissed, yanking at the unseen collar around her neck. “So at least listen to me **now**. Without my powers, I’ve lost an advantage against Bellatrix. But…if I know her like I’m starting to, she won’t kill me. Not yet.”

“There’s no way you can know that.” McGonagall spoke softly.

“I do.” Came the immediate reply. “She’s not done with me. Rescuing me stopped her fun for a little while, but not forever.”

“Hermione, you’re just being paranoid. This is the ministry. There are **hundreds** of unspeakables and aurors here around the clock. She can’t get you here. And if she tries, she’ll just end up getting herself killed. It’d be a suicide mission.” Ron told her, arms folded across his chest with stern resolve.

Now, Hermione had always been a clever girl. Someone who knew when to walk away from a battle before things grew worse. Which is why she knew immediately if she said the next words like she wanted to, she would only succeed in making her already horrible situation even worse.

After all, saying that Bellatrix would find a way…and that a part of her **wanted** her to, was not something anyone needed to hear right now. Instead, she simply answered Ron by saying. “I hope you’re right about that.” And left it alone.

That wasn’t the end of the grilling she got from the red head. There were a lot of things he wanted to
air out about the situation at hand, but when almost a full ten minutes of the man ranting about what he was going to do to Bellatrix the next he saw her, McGonagall finally stepped in to save her.

“Mr. Weasley, as much as your ire is understandable, I don’t think this is what Hermione needs right now. If you two boys don’t mind, I would like to speak with her alone before I must return to the school.” Her soft voice chimed in.

Ron looked reluctant to listen. It was only by Harry’s insistence that they could talk with Hermione later that finally made him relent.

With a promise to come to her room later on, the two aurors said their goodbyes to the headmistress and then left the room where only Hermione and McGonagall were left standing in uncomfortable silence.

“May we sit. There’s some things I think need to be explained.”

It wasn’t a request. Hermione took the seat that was once Professor Sprout’s and McGonagall sat down beside her. It was hard not to notice the way the woman winced as she did. Despite being mad at the woman beside her, the guilt eating away at her was too much to bare without apologizing.

“Professor. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to-”

“Say no more Hermione.” The woman interrupted. “I will not hear of it.”

“But I-”

“I will not hear of it.” The look she got was enough to make her drop it. The older witch sighed and seemed to deflate as the weight of her thoughts began crushing her beneath its immense pressure. “You would have never done what you did had we not pushed the issue as we did. If anything, this is my fault and it is I who needs to apologize. In wanting to protect you and prevent a repeat of my pass failures; I ignored your pleas and refused to listen. And for that, I am sorry.”

She didn’t know if she could utter the words of forgiveness like she wanted to. Part of her wanted to. Wanted to assure the woman that she understood and that she understood what fear could drive a person to do.

But then the horrid pounding happening inside her mind was a quick reminder that being sorry wasn’t enough to take back the damage that had already been done. She opted to change the subject.

“You were right earlier. I do have questions for you. Ones that need answering.” She said.

The older witch nodded. “I will answer them to the best of my abilities.”

That was acceptable she supposed. “The book. The one me and Bellatrix found about our kind. Why did you steal those pages? What did they say?”

It had been something that had plagued her mind for quite some time now. She was afraid that the woman wasn’t going to answer her, but then McGonagall turned to her and a sheen of tears seemed to glass over her eyes.

“Hermione. Make no mistake- I have never lied to you. Nor do I plan to either. I do know what was on those pages…and I burned them soon after discovering what they entailed.”

“What!” Her startled gasped was loud even to herself. “Why! They were about my kind. Bellatrix’s kind. Don’t we have the right to know what it said before you decided for us!”
“No.” The headmistress’ voice was as cold as ice in this moment. “I agree that it was wrong for me to deny you two the chance to learn about your kind, but I do not regret my actions one bit.” She shifted her body to face her better. “As your professor and guardian- and as Bellatrix’s when she was still a student- it is and was my job to make sure that nothing ill should befall you if it is within my power to prevent it. In this case, destroying those pages was the right thing to do. Especially seeing as both you and her ended up finding it in the long run.”

“Why not hide it? Or destroy it altogether? Leaving the rest behind would surely make us look for answers.” Hermione told her.

“Undoubtedly. And perhaps that was a mistake on my part, but I cannot change the past. I didn’t want to rob either of you of answers to what you are in case something happened to me one day and I could not explain it myself.” Her eyes narrowed. “That being said. What I took was not for you, Bellatrix, or anyone else to know.”

“What was it?”

“…there were three things written. The first was a song. The words were once passed down generation to generation. Cor-Echo sirens didn’t always used to be so rare. But as witches and wizards began developing relationships with others outside of their family, the genes that determine whether a person has siren blood or not began to shrink. As such, the words had been lost until Anderson- the scholar who’s life’s work was to study Cor-Echo sirens- tracked down a Cor-Echo who still remembered the old words. That was the first thing I took.” The woman suddenly stopped talking a sad look in her eyes as she revealed the next part.

“The second was a revision added by Anderson. The same siren who told him the old words revealed what they did. Which is break the bond between mates and rid a person of their creature side altogether.” She said quietly.

That had Hermione jumping to her feet in a rage; her anger ready to boil over at the admission. Naturally, her throat wanted to rumble with growls and hisses of disdain, but instead of letting the sounds leave her throat, her head burst into a pain like she had yet to experience before. Hermione yelped as it was enough to make her stumble slightly off balance and nearly crash into the woman beside her.

McGonagall was on her feet in an instance to steady her. “Hermione, child, are you alright?” Withered eyes looked down at her with panic.

Hermione shook her head and gave her a weak smile. “It’s nothing. I’m just a bit…overwhelmed. Are you saying that you’ve known of a way to break this bond between me and Bellatrix and didn’t say anything?”

“It’s not as simple as you think.” She told the young Gryffindor. “The song is a part of a ritual- one that is far to complicated for someone of your level or Bellatrix’s back when she was still a student.” By now, Hermione had stumbled back into her chair. “That sensitive information was too much for either you or her to have. You must understand something; Druella was a horrid woman. If she or Bellatrix found that book, I’m afraid that Bellatrix would have been killed when she was still a little girl.” Her eyes took on a far off look. “No one, not even I knew what she would grow up to be. She was a problem child, yes, but still a child. She deserved the same chance to live like everyone else- something she wouldn’t have if I didn’t stay my hand.”

Hermione wanted to say that she would’ve let the woman die, but that simply wasn’t true. If they executed every child they thought could one day become a murderer, she knew that the world would be a much darker place. Just looking at what the muggles did during the Salem Witch trials was
proof of that.

McGonagall continued.

“I did not want Bellatrix- and now you- to try the ritual. The revision was not about the bond, but about your siren side all together. It wouldn’t have killed you and Bellatrix’s bond…it would’ve killed your creature side…and eventually, you with it.”

Her eyes went wide.

“Kill it…that’s impossible right? If something like that was possible, then we wouldn’t have vampires and werewolves. People like Remus would’ve jumped at the opportunity.” She said, mind still reeling at the revelation.

McGonagall shook her head. “To my knowledge, there is no cure to vampirism or lycanthropy. But they are also very different from sirens. Their creature side is more like an infection or virus. It can be passed to anyone and isn’t as intertwined to one’s magic and self as sirens or veela. You’re one of the few species who can intertwine your inheritance with your magic. They need one another to be truly great. And when trained properly, it can be incredibly versatile.” The elderly witch gave her a knowing look. “Or incredibly dangerous. To yourself and others. Which is why even if you beg it of me, I will not reveal anything about the ritual or what it entails.”

Hermione grew quiet before asking one last thing. “You said there was something else you took. Something beside the ritual and the song. What was it?”

A thick tension filled the room.

“The results. Anderson stayed with that siren couple who completed the ritual to the very end. He wrote down every harrowing detail. As you know, there are things worse than death in this world…and I truly believe what he described made that perfectly clear.” Her whispered voice relayed.

They didn’t say much after that.

Mostly because Hermione didn’t know how to feel about all of this.

On the one hand…the woman did have cause for her actions. Hermione’s first action would be to try out the ritual; researching and hunting down a way to somehow change the outcome to finally free herself of this bond she has with Bellatrix. It was a very real thing that could’ve happened and the headmistress knew this. If Bellatrix was as persistent as she is now, then it would be safe to say that the other siren would’ve done the same. McGonagall would’ve been a fool to leave that information behind for either of them to find.

That was her mind talking.

Her heart said otherwise.

While she understood why the woman did what she had to in order to protect her students, she wished that she knew. That she had even the slightest bit of warning before she had to find out like this. With it being so soon after having her powers taken away, it felt like she was getting robbed of all hope yet again.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this.

It was supposed to be get better after they rescued her.
The other siren would be thrown into the darkest hole in Azkaban.

She could return to school with her friends and finish out her final year of school.

Get a nice job.

Find her parents.

Maybe start a family.

Learn to hone her siren abilities.

And just overall lead a happy and healthy life like she wanted to.

Now none of that seemed possible.

Hermione wanted to yell. Scream. Shout to the world her growing frustrations and finally feel like she had a semblance of control over her life.

And when the urge to do just that felt like it was going to spring from her chest like an angry beast, the only reward she got was a searing pain in the back of her head and a hollowness festering behind her heart.

It was a breaking point for her.

“Professor I would like to go to my room now.” Her voice rasped.

It was all she could manage before she would inevitably burst into tears for what felt like the hundredth time that day.

To her relief, the headmistress took pity and rose to her feet.

“I think we could all use some rest. I will escort you there. Harry and Ronald will be standing guard as they did before if you are in need of anything.” They walked to the door, but seconds from opening it, the older witch stopped to say one final thing.

“I don’t expect forgiveness. I am well aware of what my actions have caused. Perhaps being around Albus for so long has lead to this. But even if it means nothing at all to you. I am sorry. For everything.”

The door was swung open and the greying witch strode down the busy ministry hallway with her head held high, her lips pressed firm, and her back ramrod straight.

To any bystander, she was the picture of grace.

To Hermione, she was anything but.

There were bandages beneath her clothes, pain behind pressed lips, and unshed tears concealed by her pristine reading glasses. Composed on the outside while the inside stood in absolute ruins.

It was a nice look.

One she copied as she followed behind the headmistress; the two, a picture of composure while sorrow raged through their mind, body and souls.

Much like most of her journeys now, the trip to Hermione’s room went without interruptions or
words from anyone- only lingering stares and rapid footsteps as the world around them kept moving forward.
Days can feel like years when one lives everyday in a nightmare.

That’s exactly how Hermione felt after the week she just had.

Living in the ministry was nothing like living in the Gryffindor dorms. She ate in her room. Read in her room. Slept in her room. It was small, and cramped, and most of all- lonely. She of course had Ron and Harry around when they weren’t out hunting down Bellatrix, but more times than not, talking to them made her feel worse than she already did.

Mostly because of what she had failed to tell them up until this point.

Which was the fact that by the third day of having her collar on, she was feeling the effects of the suppression really take hold of her.

At first, the headaches and occasional scratching was painful, but bearable. If she pretended that clumsiness and stress was why she occasionally looked like she was doubling over in pain, then usually people seemed to buy it.

Though not for long.

Soon the scratching turned to burning claws raking down the middle of her chest. The painful thumping at the back of her mind felt like someone was hitting her with a baseball bat.

Though that was the easy part.

The worst of it all was the whispers.

For the first time since the suppression, Hermione was able to hear her siren side talk to her again.

She could've cried from joy at how happy she was to hear it speak to her again.

Except…

It wasn’t like before.

Gone were the words of comfort and songs of affection and love.

In its place- anger; raw and unyielding from her other half.

Even now as she sat across the table eating with Ron and Harry, she could barely hear them as all her senses focused in on the hissing, spitting voice filling her thoughts with venom.

You did this. This is your fault. We have nothing. We are nothing. You did this.

“So then Howard said that I should’ve filed the report last week when Chris said he was going to handle it. It was mental! I swear the next time he blames me for Kingsley chewing him out I’ll- ‘Mione, are you all right?’” Ron asked in the middle of his rant.

Her eyes that had previously been looking off into nothingness snapped to him in panic.
“I’m fine. Just tired is all. I was listening.” She gave a weak smile.

Ron frowned, but let it go. “If you say so. But as I was saying- if Howard ever…”

The conversation continued with Ron ranting about work earlier that day as Harry chimed in every now and then to add his input. Hermione only watched on in silence, nodding to show that she was hearing him even though his words were muffled beneath the swirl of hatred brewing up within.

_We have no mate. We have no us. Betrayal. Betrayed. We are soundless. We are lifeless._

Her foot was tapping in discomfort as the words kept coming.

_You did this. We did not want this. Why? Why? Why? Why…_

“I don’t know.” She ended up whispering. Her hands had reached up to pull at the invisible collar around her neck, something the two aurors noticed immediately.


_Hurt? We already hurt. Always hurting. We hurt ourselves. Your fault. You did this._

“I didn’t want this either!” She pleaded, desperate fingers tugging at her shackle like it was suffocating her. “I told them I didn’t want this! What more did you want me to _do_?”

“’Mione who are you talking to? It’s just me and Harry.” Ron said. He was the first to move when the young woman seemed on the brink of a meltdown. His wand was at the ready to stop her before she ended up injuring herself.

_Hurt them._

She felt bile in her throat at the admission. “We already _did_!”

_More._

“No!” She cried, by now she was tugging at her throat again. “I don’t want to. I never wanted to. I just wanted things to go back to normal.”

Ron and Harry were on her in an instance. Harry grabbed her arms and pulled them down, clutching them in his own as he began saying comforting words to try and bring her back to reality. Ron had gone for a more drastic approach. From his robes, the man pulled a familiar purple bottle of liquid and held it out towards her. She flinched and the sight of it was enough to break both aurors heart. Though their love for their friend didn’t stay their hand.

“’Mione, I need you to drink this.” He opened it and moved it towards the girls muttering lips.

_Poison. He poisons us. Don’t drink it._

“It’s not poison.” She whispered. “They wouldn’t do that. It’s a calming drought. We’ve taken it before.”

“Woah, Hermione what the bloody hell are you talking about?” Ron’s shocked expression had a hint of hurt to it. “We’d never poison you! Who are you talking to? Merlin Harry she’s starting to sound like you did back in school.”

Hermione’s eyes shot up at that, a moment of clarity drowning out her siren side to hear what Ron
had just said. And to her horror, she realized that it wasn’t far off from the truth. Flashbacks to the way people treated Harry whenever he had Voldemort in his head made her scramble to take the potion from Ron and downing it in one go.

She didn’t know it was possible to feel calm and panicked at the same time until now. While the potion didn’t stop the pain her siren side was causing - much like its voice now- it was enough to dull her world until it was only her at the forefront.

As the potion started doing its work, her other half seemed to recede further behind the wall that was now keeping them at what felt like miles apart.

Though not without some final words of parting.

*She hates us. Hates us now. Hates us. Hates…*

Hermione turned from both of her friends so as to quickly wipe the single tear that she couldn’t keep from falling.

If either saw it, they said noting and simply asked her if she was alright, to which she replied, “I’m okay now. Thanks guys.”

An audible sigh left Harry’s lips and Ron slumped back into his seat. “Hermione, I know you don’t want to talk about it, but it’s kinda obvious you’re lying. If there’s something we can do, please tell us.” Harry said, looking the woman in the eyes with desperation and discomfort.

She said nothing. If they wouldn’t remove the collar and let her have her powers back, then there was literally nothing they could do. She wished she knew how to remove it, but David would not be doing that anytime soon. He was literally her only hope now.

*Bell…*

She blinked owlishly, having heard her siren side try and speak to her.

*Bell…atix…*

‘What about her?’ She had enough sense now to think what she wanted to say rather than say it aloud and cause the boys to panic again.

*Help…us…collar…gone…*

‘What do you-‘ Her eyes widened and she sprung to her feet. “Idiot!” She screamed, the exclamation had her two friends falling out of their chairs.

“Really Hermione! You’re acting like an absolute lunatic!” Ron yelled at the young witch who seemed to be hit with a sudden bout of insanity. “What’s up with you today?”

Hermione turned to the man and to both of their shock…

She smiled.

“Nothing. I’m okay now Ron. Just still not use to this collar.” There was a glint in her eye that the other two failed to see. “But I’ll be alright. I think I know a way to make this better.”

Harry was the first to recover. “That’s great ‘Mione! I know it seems bad now, but we knew you would find a way to make this work in your favor. And with me and Ron hunting Bellatrix down, this’ll be over sooner than you think.”
“You got nothing to worry about anymore.” Ron said. He had managed to return to his feet; stashing the empty bottle from earlier back into his robes.

Hermione was about to reply to their confident words when there was a knock on her door. All of them turned as it opened to allow Kingsley to peek his head in.

“We got a possible lead on Bellatrix. You two are needed downstairs.”

“Yes sir.” They both replied.

The two aurors wished Hermione the best of luck with whatever her new revelation was and bid her a good day. They left in a rush, promising that today would be the day they caught her slippery mate and return her life to normal…

Hermione found that she couldn’t wish them the same.

Not in good conscious.

Not when she was hoping for their failure.

Because as much as she didn’t want to admit it- as much as she didn’t want the other woman to be right-

Hermione needed to go back to Bellatrix.

It physically hurt her heart to say that, but it was clear now that the woman hadn’t said all those things in her songs to torment her. She needed the woman, though as it turned out, not for the reason she thought it would be.

Her greatest fear was that she would lose herself to her instincts; her every sense overtaken by nothing but Bellatrix in a dependency that she would never be able to break. The woman could control her every action like the world’s greatest puppet master; pulling all her strings to make her every waking moment a living hell. And of course the book had said she wouldn’t be defenseless to Bellatrix in the long run, but she was sure that it didn’t account for the collar. Over the few weeks she had been with the woman, her powers and her control over them were better. By no means was she on the same level as the death eater, but she was confident with enough time and effort she could be.

But in order to do so, there was something very important she needed to take care of.

And that was the shiny, gold monstrosity around her neck.

The ministry wouldn’t help her.

Her friends couldn’t.

But the revelations in the suppression room and her siren’s recent words revealed to her the one person who could.

Now that she was stuck and powerless in the middle of the ministry with what seemed like no way to escape, the only way she could leave was if she was miraculously rescued.

Or in this case, kidnapped.

Again.
Because Bellatrix was her savior and her condemnation all rolled into one.

There was a very high chance that the witch would show up at the doors of the ministry and kill her on sight because she couldn’t use her voice to defend herself.

But Hermione, as crazy as it sounded, didn’t feel like that would be the case.

Bellatrix had made it very clear that she was not done playing with her. The young woman remembered what the other had said to her in the midst of her captivity. A promise that still haunted her every waking moment.

*If our filthy bond is what you fear so much—your idea of what that place is like—then I will strangle us with it.*

She was riding on the hope that the woman would make good on that. Already, she could feel herself slipping closer and closer to madness. The calming droughts were a temporary solution at best. As long as the two of them were apart and the collar remained in place, the chances of herself remaining of sound mind dwindled ever further into the realm of impossible.

Which is where Bellatrix will be her savior.

Because now Hermione knew the truth. A truth that McGonagall and the ministry may have hoped she failed to notice. Whether to avoid acknowledging their own failures or from fear that Bellatrix knew something that they *didn’t*.

For as she sat there pondering her own thoughts, Hermione Granger was waiting for a storm to come. Waiting for the walking maelstrom that is Bellatrix to swoop in and kidnap her once more.

And then she will pry from her the newest mystery plaguing her every waking moment.

Of how on the day they had their duel, she could vividly remember feeling the other siren’s warm, pale flesh beneath her hands.

Of how she sang to her with a voice that could go from childishly high-pitched to so seductively low that the pit of her stomach did backflips when she heard it.

Of how the woman fought her siren tooth and nail to let her in when she was almost washed away during the island storm incident.

Of how Bellatrix Lestrange had done what the ministry and everyone said couldn’t be done and removed her suppression collar.

No, Hermione would not be wishing her friends the best of luck today, even if she wished for their safe return.

Not when freedom had just been presented to her in a neat little bow.

As Hermione went to lay down in her room— the effects of the draught already starting to wear off—she knew going back to that madwoman would not mean ultimate freedom.

Bellatrix would be angry.

Probably already is.

And when she came, she would be essentially trading an admittedly nicer cell for her horrible, old one.
‘Better the devil you know.’ Came her solemn thoughts, finally laying down and closing her eyes to sleep.

Had she held on a little bit longer, the young witch would’ve heard a sound she’d been desperately awaiting to hear for the past few days.

Alas, the sound of pleased crooning went unheard by all as the sun began it’s long descent below the horizon, brining way to the cover of night.

And a visitor…

Hermione awoke due to a painful sneeze rocking her chest and nearly sending her tumbling out of her bed.

When her eyes popped open, she saw the cause of her abrupt awakening.

A bouquet of fragrant sunflowers seemed to be floating in front of her face. It was only when they lowered that she realized they weren’t actually floating, but were bunched together in the arms of a familiar face.

It took only a few seconds before the flowers were sent tumbling to the ground; Luna Lovegood’s arms that were once filled with the bright yellow plants soon replaced with a sobbing Hermione. Luna was of course startled by the forwardness of her friend’s actions, but it didn’t stop her from smiling and patting the girl on the head.

“Hello Hermione.” Her soft voice came.

“Luna. I’ve missed you so much. It’s so good to see you.” The brunette managed to say between sobs. She tried wiping the tears from her eyes, but it was pointless as the waterworks just refused to stop.

Luna didn’t seem to mind. “I’ve missed you too. You’ve been gone for a long time. Ginny and Neville have been in a tizzy ever since. They wanted to see you today, but Ginny has a championship match today and Nev is helping Professor Sprout with her classes.” The blonde girl explained, still running her hands through thick, curly locks. “I heard what happened from the headmistress.”

That made her look up at her friend. “All of it?”

“Most of it. I could tell she was leaving things out. There were too many nargles around her head.” She said.

Hermione found herself laughing between cries. It was almost euphoric to have Luna there with her. The girl was just so much into her own world that it felt like all the negative things in her own life was drowned out in her presence. Strange as she was sometimes, Hermione knew that she would never grow tire of the younger girl’s company. She squeezed the Ravenclaw close to her and thought about how much she missed the feeling of warmth surrounding her body.

To her credit, Luna didn’t seem to be phased in the least at having the other woman throw herself at her.

“Well, this is quite the pleasant welcome. I brought you more sunflowers. They have a lot of lovely
meanings and keep nargles away at the same time. Very useful.”

Hermione laughed, finally pulling away from the blonde woman’s hold and pulling herself back to sit on her bed. “I don’t know what nargles are Luna, but if the flowers help, I’ll keep them with me at all times.” She said. Her lips pulled down in a frown despite her good mood. “Not that I’m unhappy to see you, but why are you here? I didn’t know I was allowed visitors.”

The blonde woman laughed. “You’re not a prisoner here. And I got special permission from the headmistress. She thought it would be good if I come and see you since I would be the best person to help.” She explained.

“Help me? How?” Hermione asked.

The Ravenclaw gave her a wilted smile, one that not even the brightly colored flowers next to them could bring back to life. She had never seen such a look on the other’s face before.

“The world is full of secrets Hermione. A lot of them, people can see as clear as day. But others,” The girl grabbed both of Hermione’s hands and pulled them upwards towards her face. “Are sometimes harder to spot.”

Hermione had no idea where this was going.

That was until the girl guided her hands towards her eyes. Hermione was about to shout for her to stop, fearing that she would end up poking the other girl in the eyes.

But that never happened.

For instead of her hands running into the younger woman’s eyes, she felt cool, sleek metal stopping her from doing so.

It took a moment for her brain to catch up. Looking at Luna, she knew that the Ravenclaw wasn’t wearing glasses, yet she could feel them there clear as day. When her brain finally pieced everything together, she found it hard to breathe.

“Luna... how long.” She whispered in despair.

Luna murmured something under her breath and Hermione watched as a pair of blue glasses appeared before her eyes. On the frames she could make out the same symbols that were on the collar around her neck.

They were beautiful.

And ugly; if only for knowing what they really were.

The realization that her friend had a suppression all of her own was all the more heartbreaking now that she knew of the effects firsthand.

Though Luna didn’t react as she thought the other girl would. She was neither sad nor angry about it, instead telling her, “A few years- before I started at Hogwarts actually. Seer blood runs in my family on my mother’s side. When my father found out I had developed the sight, he brought me here. Just like you.”

“What!” She exclaimed, not even being able to believe her ears. “How could he? Your father always seemed like a good man. Someone who would do anything for you. He even gave me and the others away to death eaters to save you. Why would he-”
"Fear." Luna interrupted, the smile never leaving her lips. "He was afraid. My father witnessed firsthand what happened to mother and the fear of me one day facing the same was too much to bear. He'd already lost his wife. To lose me too would break him." She patted the distraught girl’s hand. "So he brought me before the council and I had my seer abilities suppressed. You know, they were going to give me contacts, but I thought glasses would be better. The contacts made my eyes burn and I almost fell down the stairs. Twice.” She laughed.

It was strange that the other was able to joke about something so serious when Hermione couldn’t bring herself to even think to do the same.

Then again, if Luna had her powers suppressed all this time, then she had plenty of time to get used to it.

Hermione wondered if the same would happen to her over time and the thought that she would be feeling like this for possibly years was enough to bring tears to her eyes.

Luna saw this and tried to calm her, thinking her words was what upset her.

"There’s no need to be sad for me Hermione. I’m quite alright. My suppression doesn’t cause me many problems like some others do.” She said.

“Doesn’t?”

She shook her head. "No. Sometimes; suppression is necessary. Sirens like yourself are a danger to others. Seers like me are a danger to ourselves." She settled herself into a more comfortable position. "The problem with seer abilities is the addictive nature of looking towards the future. The longer we look, the more we want to see. Some seers get stuck, living out a future that has yet to come and forgetting the present that they live in.” Her eyes looked far off somewhere Hermione couldn’t see. “And while they watch the lives of the ones they love pass by; the ones they love watch them pass away.”

“That’s horrible.” Hermione whispered.

“It is. But it’s not the worst that can happen…my mother found that out the hard way.” She said. There was a seriousness in her eyes now. "Seers have one unspoken rule; do not change the future. Even if killing one person could save a thousand more, it’s not our right to change that. The sight is a gift; not a right. And if fate believes we are abusing it’s gift, it’s taken away.”

The brunette shook her head. “Your mom must’ve known that though. I don’t understand. Why would she do it if it meant she could lose her powers? Or her life?” Hermione asked. The frown on her face felt deep and permanent. Hearing the other woman’s story was breaking her heart. Merely the thought of Luna going through all of this alone and no one ever knowing was saddening. And lonely.

She tried to fight the tears as best she could as her friend continued her story.

“There’s one thing that is worth sacrificing everything for.” She smiled. “Love. My mother’s love for me was what drove her to such lengths. She saw my future and wanted to change it so that I wouldn’t have to suffer.”

And for the first time since meeting the young Ravenclaw, Hermione watched Luna cry.

Not an ounce of hesitation was there when she leaned forward to embrace her friend, patting her gently on top of her head as her shirt was soaked with tears.
“I miss my mother. I may not have had her for very long in my life, but she was still my mother.” Luna scrubbed at her eyes. “But in a horrible way… I’m glad she doesn’t have to see me now.”

“Why?”

The girl hiccupped harshly. “I looked into my future. I wanted to know the future my mother died to prevent.” She gestured to herself. “And you’re looking at it.”

Now that threw Hermione for a loop. If she understood what the other girl was saying, then the future Pandora was trying to prevent for Luna… wasn’t terrible at all. Yes Luna was a bit strange, but she was healthy, and happy, and alive. She had feared that the woman had seen something horrible happen to Luna. That the girl had died or Pandora had seen what happened when Bellatrix and the Malfoy’s had kidnapped the girl and held her captive at their manor.

The girl must’ve known what she was thinking because it showed all over her face and she went on to explain.

“Mother saw my suppression and how it affected my seer abilities. And like many others; she thought it made me mad. “Loony” Lovegood who claimed to see things no one else can; like the wrackspurts and the blibbering humdingers.” A far off look came across her face. “So she started experimenting; trying to find a way to get rid of my suppression so I could live a normal, happy life.”

“…and it backfired.” Hermione finished.

“And she died….which in turn put in motion the future she tried to prevent.” The girl revealed. “It’s quite ironic when you think about it. Father and Professor McGonagall- fearing that I too would meet the same fate as mother- had my abilities suppressed, causing the future that actually ended her life.”

Hermione was speechless. She felt like her entire world had been flipped upside down in a matter of minutes. Luna had more than likely been holding this in for a very long time. For her to be revealing this to her showed how much the girl trusted her. Part of her knew that the girl was sharing her story to bring Hermione some kind of comfort and relatability, but she couldn’t exactly say that it did the former. Her heart hurt for Luna, but not for her alone.

It hurt for Professor McGonagall too.

If the woman knew that trying to save Luna had been what killed her mother Pandora, it would absolutely destroy the aging witch.

She had no intentions of revealing what Luna had told her to anyone, let alone McGonagall- even if someone tried to drag it out of her by force. It would stay just between the two of them.

While Hermione was making her internal promises, Luna had stopped her tears and composed herself.

“Our abilities only let us see so far in the future. If mother had looked a little further, she would see the current me.” She patted Hermione’s leg. “She would see all the great friends I’ve made. All the adventures I’ve had and the creatures I’ve seen. Perhaps there are those who still call me Loony; but there are far more who just call me Luna.”

Hermione smiled. “I’m sure your mother is proud of all you’ve done.”

“When I pass away someday, I’ll make sure to ask her.” Luna said. “But I haven’t looked into my own future since I was a child so I may never know when that day will be. It’s best not to think on such morbid things after all. Which is why we should get to the real reason I’m here.”
“The real reason? Didn’t you come to check in on me?” Hermione questioned, sweeping a curl from in front of her face that had been blocking her from the other witch’s view.

“I did. But I also needed to give you something. One moment please.” The girl said.

Hermione waited as Luna stood up and began rummaging around in her pockets for something. It was then that she really looked at what the other girl was wearing.

A pair of tan overalls was laid over the girl’s blue and silver striped sweater. Her hair was tied back in long braid that swung over her left shoulder and had a small raven shaped clip tying the end of it together. Hermione thought the outfit was rather nice- and honestly pretty tame compared to some the girl’s other outfits- and then her eyes trailed down to her feet and she couldn’t keep her giggles to herself.

The pants legs of the overalls were rolled up to reveal the Ravenclaw’s knew length socks that had ravens flying in a night sky on them. They would’ve been fine too, had the birds not appeared to be getting dizzy from their circling and in turn were flying in the worse patterns she had ever seen a bird follow before.

Hermione found herself following them so long that she barely noticed that the other had no shoes on. She doubted the ministry would allow the girl to walk around the building in just her socks, so it was probable that she had simply left them at the door next to hers.

She kept to herself as Luna rummaged around in the pockets of her overalls, eventually letting out a delighted gasp at finding what she was looking for. Without warning or word, whatever Luna had found was taken and wrapped around her own wrist. Startled, she looked down to see what her friend had done.

Staring back up at her was a familiar piece of jewelry- the otter bracelet the girl had given her for Christmas.

“Luna, how did you get this?” She asked. “I had this on the entire-”

No she didn’t.

In fact, to her horror, Hermione realized two things wrong with this situation. The first was that the eyes of the otters seemed to be glowing brightly in the dim lighting of her bedroom. In all the time of having her bracelet, it had never done that.

The second and more important thing wrong with the bracelet was the most obvious.

It wasn’t hers.

Yes it was identical to hers in every sense of the word, but this wasn’t the one her friend gave her. It couldn’t be. The one she had been wearing the entire time during her captivity with Bellatrix went missing the day she went into the forest to leave the island. She’d been too wrapped up in turmoil and torment to notice, but now that she had time to analyze all that happened when she was there, Hermione found that the bracelet had been gone much longer than she than she originally thought.

Shame filled her heart.

She had lost Luna’s gift to her and hadn’t even noticed. And now the blonde was giving her the one she had kept for herself. Hermione felt terrible and moved to remove it and give it back, to which Luna immediately stopped her. She tried to explain what happened to hers.
“Luna I’m so sorry! I lost the bracelet you gave me when I was with Bellatrix. Here, take yours back. I’ll fell horrible if you don’t.” She pleaded, already unclasping the metal to remove it from her wrist.

Again, Luna was hearing none of it.

“It’s alright Hermione. This one is actually yours.” She smiled. “Sorry I’m so late giving it to you, but it’d be silly if you lost them both instead of just the one.”

Hermione froze, giving the other witch a bewildered look. That’s when she noticed the mysterious twinkle in the other’s gaze. Brown eyes widened as things began to click into place.

“You knew.” She accused, heart beating a mile a minute. “You knew I was going to lose your bracelet.” Luna nodded her head and her heart felt like it was going to leap out of her chest as she feared what the other girl would say if she asked her next question.

She asked it anyways.

“Luna did you…did you look into my future?” She whispered frightfully.

There was a long pause before her friend answered her.

“…yes.”

It was funny really. How wrong she had been about things lately. Like now, she thought there was nothing else anyone could say that would shock her and yet the single uttering of the word ‘yes’ was enough to send her entire world into a tizzy. The bracelet on her wrist now felt as heavy as the collar around her neck.

She didn’t know which one had her more worried.

Which lead to her next question.

“Why?”

She could’ve elaborated on which answer she was looking for right now, however, anything the girl said would end up frying her brain at this point.

Luckily, Luna took pity on her rapidly melting mind and explained.

“My suppression works a bit different from yours. It stops me from being consumed by the sight, but I am not blind to it. I simply see it in a different way. Like the wrackspurts.”

Luna said it like any of it made a lick of sense to her who was just finding out his friend was a seer after years of speculation.

“It took me a while, but I realized that different creatures would show me different things. Nargles steal your things and when you chase them, you end up in the most convenient of places. Or wrackspurts guide me to troubled people, dancing above their heads and showing me what troubles them.” She explained. “Many times I’ve followed the pesky creatures to you and Harry. They’re quite fond you two.”

“Um okay then. I believe you Luna…even if none of this really makes sense to me.” She rubbed at her neck. “Then again, nothing has made sense for a while now.”

Luna patted her hand. “It’s quite alright Hermione. I get confused sometimes too.” Her blue eyes
grew wide with wonder. “Can you even imagine it? I saw this moment months ago and now we’re living it out. It’s redundant to say it’s ‘like magic’, yet I’m still surprised myself.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “Wait, you’ve seen this? This? How far did you look?” Hermione practically demanded. If Luna saw this far, then she must know what happens to her.

If she could get the collar off.

And soon.

But Luna shook her head. “I’m afraid I can’t tell you.”


“Because it would change your future.” She said sadly. “Every moment after the present marks the future. Even saying one thing that deviates from what is set in stone could throw off everything. For both of us.”

Knowing what the other was saying had merit made Hermione’s heart break, but she understood.

Luna gave her sweet smile.

“Though I can’t tell you what your future holds, I can give you reassurance.” She leaned forward. “It won’t be easy. It won’t be painless. But you’ll be alright.”

Hermione looked at her with heavy eyes. “Can you promise that?”

The question wasn’t answered immediately.

“I can’t promise anything. My hand in your future is done now. The rest is all up to you.” She said mysteriously.

She didn’t like the way the other had worded that. Her eyes drifted down to her wrist where the otter bracelet stared up at her with it’s seemingly innocent red eyes.

“Luna, you never told me why you gave me this.” She said.

The Ravenclaw didn’t answer, instead, looking over at the closed door behind her. A hard knock rung out and she heard Ron’s voice on the other side.

“Luna, the headmistress said she would like to speak with you and return you to the castle.” He said. His boots echoed loudly on the other side as he exited the suite all together. Luna stood up and grabbed a sunflower from the bouquet; carefully tucking it behind Hermione’s left ear and pulling the girl into a powerful hug. When she pulled away, skipping to the door, choosing to answer Hermione’s question on the way out.

“It never had protection charms on it…it’s a tracking spell. Which in hindsight was silly. She was always going to find you. This just sped things up.” She gave Hermione a wide smile. “Life does the funniest things sometimes. Farewell Hermione; i’m sure you’ll have lots of things to tell me when we see each other again.” Came her final wispy words before she left the ministry apartment and closed the door behind her.

As the door closed, Hermione thought of chasing her friend down and demanding answers—consequences be damned.

Yet she could neither move from her place upon the bed, nor form her lips to shout the other’s name.
No, Hermione Granger sat there in the silence and tried to process everything that had just happened.

One of her closest friends revealed to her that she was a seer- something that Hermione had suspected for quite some time now and was probably the least shocked about.

But Luna was not only a seer- but had gone through the suppression just as she had and had been living with it for years without any of them noticing.

And she had seen her future.

Which involved giving her a bracelet with a tracking charm on it.

That Bellatrix now had the matching one to.

Hermione knew why Luna didn’t’ tell her what her future held. The girl claimed it was to prevent herself from changing the future, but Hermione knew better.

There simply was no need to.

Because she already knew.

She’s known since the very beginning.

They both did.

Not her and Luna- her and Bellatrix.

Perhaps neither expected Luna’s interference, but Bellatrix finding her was always going to be inevitable.

Though as Hermione laid down on her bed and closed her eyes, she thought of how things were going to play out and when.

The ministry and her friends wanted Bellatrix dead or captured- preferably the former. She had no doubt they would be doing everything in their power to prevent her from leaving with the woman.

It left a bitter taste in her mouth, but Hermione told herself that as crazy as it sounded- and by this point she already believed herself to be utterly mad- she couldn’t allow that to happen.

Bellatrix was a free woman in every sense of the word and there was nothing Hermione wanted more at this point than to have a taste of that for herself once again.

If that meant running into the arms of her tormentor once more, then so be it.

A life without song- a life without her other side to comfort her and drive away the lonely feeling clogging up her chest- was steadily becoming one she did not wish to live in.

Bellatrix would come.

“…and I will go.” She whispered to herself.

And from the angry hisses and whispers of traitors- for just a moment- Hermione felt her siren side settle into contentment.

Its air of excitement was tainted by her overwhelming anxiety of what was soon to happen.
Luckily, she didn’t have to deal with the feeling for very long.
Chapter 32 - A Shadow Above the Ministry

Chapter Notes

I kid you not- Chapters 29-35 were all one chapter. Between the length and where it was going and everything that was supposed to happen; it was giving me heartburn and I decided to break them all up and refine them. I didn't want to pass that eyesore onto you all. ToT Please enjoy!

Chapter 32: A Shadow Above the Ministry

Hermione kept to wearing long sweaters for the next several days. She didn’t think anyone would question where she got the bracelet from seeing as only a handful knew of the one she lost, but if she could avoid the questions all together, then she would.

Speaking of questions, Hermione feared that if her two best friends continued asking the same ones everyday as they have been, she was actually going to lose it.

How’s the collar? How are you feeling?

It wasn’t like in the entire time since the suppression the answers had changed.

It’s fine.

I’m fine.

By this point she was hissing the words at the two of them, not that the sound did anything like it once did when she was able to use her powers. That being said, it still caused them both to tip toe around her like they had done in the past. So much so in fact, that they had caved in and had returned Crookshanks to her side in an effort to calm her ever present rage. To there credit, she did feel better with the smushy faced feline by her side once more, but it was a small bandage over a still wide and festering wound.

For one, the collar was not fine and neither was she.

The day after Luna left must’ve switched a flip with her other side because it has been livid with her ever since.

Why?

She didn’t know.

It was like all Hermione had to do was breathe the wrong way and the angry hissing and pessimistic jibes given by her siren side would start up once more. When the others were around, she was quite good at playing it off as nothing, but as darkness fell, Hermione found herself alone in her bedroom-muttering and mumbling back to it; trying in vain to placate its anger so she may finally get some rest.

Needless to say, the bags that had once been present during those first months after the battle were
back to haunt her again.

Tired, grouchy, and wishing for even the smallest relief to her internal torment, Hermione had to wait three days before anything significant happened. Whilst sitting on the dull burgundy couch in the living room—Crookshanks and a small book taking over every inch of her lap—there came a knock at her door.

“Come in.” She called, never once looking up from her reading.

The wooden door creaked lightly as Kingsley stepped inside. Still not looking up to see him, the bald minister cleared his throat and waited.

Don’t get her wrong, Hermione wasn’t much for ignoring someone as high a position as Kingsley, but with everything going on inside of her, she was feeling a tad more mischievous than usual. It wasn’t until the man cleared his throat again that she sighed and finally gave him her undivided attention.

She wasn’t shocked to see the man, so much as she was more shocked to see who he brought with him.

“I’m sorry to interrupt your reading, but he was quite insistent that he needed to speak with you.” Kingsley said, gesturing to the two aurors behind him to put said person down on the table in front of her. A stand was provided to her new guest before all three men up and left the room.

Silence reigned for only a moment—Hermione thought it best that she made this particular meeting quick.

“You didn’t seem eager to speak with me before Professor; so why now?” Came her somewhat nonchalant question. She cared not if the man didn’t like her tone of voice seeing as she was still not over a couple of details the man had failed to mention in all of this.

Severus Snape was well prepared for her anger however.

He couldn’t be a teacher at Hogwarts if he didn’t know how to deal with a upset student or two. He didn’t give into the other’s ire and began speaking to the girl anyways.

“Miss Granger…” He stopped, looking at her pensively. “Hermione,” He corrected himself. “I’m well aware that you’re upset.” The look she gave him clearly said that was an understatement, but Hermione didn’t interrupt him like she wanted to. “But I could not tell you anything about the suppression or Bellatrix herself. Not while knowing that doing so would render my portrait useless.”

“So you chose yourself over me. Is that what you’re saying?” She said so low that he almost didn’t hear her.

The professor looked genuinely upset by the comment.

“No you silly child, that is the furthest thing from the truth, but if you insist on throwing a tantum like a spoiled first year, I am more than happy to return to the castle.” He snapped.

She didn’t know if it was the no nonsense tone the man had or her not yet destroyed faith in the late professor, but Hermione found herself mumbling an apology. The book she was reading was set on the table by the couch and she rose with Crookshanks in her arms to sit at the table the portrait was currently resting on.

She barely met his eyes as she said, “I’m sorry professor Snape. I know why you didn’t say
anything. But a part of me wishes you did. If you had then-“

“You would’ve run away and gotten yourself killed. Your ever curious mind would go looking for answers that myself and everyone else knew you would eventually find.” He gave her a stern gaze. “Whether from the pages Minerva had destroyed from the book or another source half way across the world, there was one thing all of us knew; Hermione Granger would find a way to free herself of Bellatrix. Even if it could potentially kill her. Were we wrong?”

She couldn’t answer that question. Not now and probably not ever.

Cause how could she tell the man how low she had sunk at points during her captivity.

How can she look the man in front of her right now- the one who’s done so much up until now to keep her alive- and tell him that she was prepared to join him in the afterlife if it meant the end of her suffering.

She couldn’t.

Which gave Snape all the confirmation he needed. The man sighed and rested his head in the palm of his hand on the armrest of his chair.

“I didn’t think so. The suppression seems cruel, but it is a mercy- to us and you. A siren’s song is a powerful thing. If she called to you- you would go and do anything in your power to do so. No matter who you hurt. Something we all know you’d never want.” She nodded at that, though it didn’t change her ire about how all of this had come about. “Suppressing your powers was one of the few ways we had to ensure you stayed safe until she is captured. Once that happens, it can be removed as if it was never there.” He assured her.

It was a sound plan.

One that would absolutely work without fail.

The ministry believed it.

Harry and Ron believed it.

Snape, McGonagall, Kingsley- everyone had the idea that it was as simple as capturing Bellatrix in order to release herself. That silencing her was the only sure fire way the woman couldn’t find her.

But it wasn’t as simple as that.

Not anymore.

Not when she could look Snape in his eyes now while silently waiting for Bellatrix to come for her.

Not when the entire time sitting there, her siren side was spitting furiously at what it perceived as a rambling of lies coming from the man before them.

Not when she felt she couldn’t trust her friends.

Not anymore.

She had trusted before when she knew nothing of the collar. Had tried to convince the others that it was something she didn’t want and look where that got her. No one listened to her. And if they knew what she was thinking now, not only would they not listen- they’d think she’d gone insane. What more could they do to her that hasn’t already been done? Hermione didn’t know.
Nor was she planning to find out.

So she did something that she swore to never do unless absolutely necessary.

She played dumb.

“I understand sir. I don’t like it.” She touched the invisible piece of jewelry around her neck. “It’s like suffocating while having all the air in the world. I just want it to end.”

“And it will.” A strange look of concern came over his face, something Hermione noticed immediately.

“Professor? Are you alright?” She asked.

There was a struggle within him on whether he wanted to say whatever was bothering him or not.

In the end, he opted to not keep her in the dark. “The ministry is the safest place you can be. Bellatrix may suspect you’re here, but she would have no way of finding you for sure. It'd be the first place she'd look. That being said...”

He stopped. Hermione urged him on. “That being said, what?”

“…we have reason to believe she may know.”

A shiver went up her spine.

She couldn’t tell if it was from fear or excitement.

“How?”

“We had a few aurors safe guarding the house we rescued you from with the belief that the woman would know it was being watched and would not return there.” Snape’s eyes seemed to grow dark with anger. “We were wrong. She did return. But by the time backup arrived, it was too late. Three of the seven aurors on duty were killed, two had serious wounds and the rest escaped unscathed. The house and surrounding area were burned to the ground.”

Her heart hurt from the news of the aurors and a strong feeling of guilt bubbled up within. Crookshanks sensing something wrong with his owner began rubbing his head under her chin, his only way of providing the woman with even the slightest bit of comfort.

“That’s not the only thing that has many of us concerned.”

Her head snapped to attention.

“Before my portrait went up in flames, Bellatrix summoned me to it. To send a warning.” He admitted.

“To the ministry?”

“…to you.”

Hermione felt her eyes widening. Inside, for just a brief moment, she felt her siren side give off a pleased rumble- the only positive sound she’s gotten from the creature in days. She already knew what her next question had to be.

“What did she say?”
“Only one sentence. ‘I did not ask for you.’ She said you would know what it means.”

She did.

How could she possibly forget?

The night of the storm when the woman sung to her so sweetly the words that would end up haunting her for many years to come. Who’s words rung like a funeral bell in her ears whenever she thought of her supposed mate and her cruelty.

No she did not forget the words of a song heard by none but the two of them and their familiars.

If she wanted Snape to remind her of that song specifically, then that meant only one thing.

“…she’s coming for me.” She whispered.

“We know that,” Hermione didn’t realize she had said that aloud. “Which is why we have prepared for this by upping security.” He rose from his seat. “And I was also instructed to inform you that you must go through an assessment.”

She frowned deeply. “Assessment? Of what, exactly?” She hissed.

Snape matched her expression in turn. “Of that. Your friends have brought your…temperament to the attention of the ministry and Kingsley wants to assure that the collar isn’t having a negative impact on your mental state without our knowledge.”

“…my temperament?” She rose to her feet slowly, dropping Crookshanks in the process. “My temperament! Is that what they think this is?”

“Hermione-“

“No! There’s no need to try and placate me because the two of us know that this is exactly what everyone is thinking. That I’m unstable. That I’m hiding how I truly feel from everyone. I’m sure everyone is thrilled now that me feeling upset over my entire world getting turned upside down isn’t going to send someone careening into a wall.” Her eyes started to sting but she ignored them to continue her tirade. “Well you know what? Fine. Do you want to know how I really feel? What’s truly going on in my head?”

Hermione approached the portrait of the man and looked him dead in his eyes, bearing herself to him in the most vulnerable way possible.

“I’m done professor. I’m tired. I’m hurting. I feel trapped and betrayed and weak to do anything about it. I need my other half. Everyone is treating it like another person when I feel like i just lost a huge part of me. This has become more than trying to keep Bellatrix away. This is about keeping me under control. And quite frankly…I just want it all to end.” She told him.

He asked only one question.

“How.”

She answered with only sentence.

“In any way possible.”

The room grew silent. Teacher and student stared at one another with their own separate resolves.
Snape looking to save the young woman.
And Hermione looking to save herself.
Both feared what they would do in order to reach the same goal.
Neither cared if it was Hermione who ended up suffering in the end.

Snape rose from his portrait chair and prepared to leave to the one back at the castle, but not before giving the girl his final parting words.

“When I return to the castle, I am going to tell Minerva you are not of sound mind. She’ll tell Kingsley and they’ll go through with the assessment.” He said.

“I know.”

“They’ll try to adjust the collar to try and ease your pain.” He continued.

She sat down, picking up Crookshanks in the process. “I know.”

“…it won’t work.”

She smiled.

“I know.”

He matched her sorrowful expression. “I’m sorry that things have come to this Miss Granger. It would seem that Mr. Potter’s tendency for ending up in unending peril has rubbed off on you as well.”

Hermione laughed despite her desolate mood. “At least this time you don’t have to worry about dying to save me.” Came her morbid reply.

He chuckled, the humor was not lost on him seeing as he said something similar not too long ago.

Snape left from the portrait frame, more than likely going to do as he said and inform the others of her less than stellar mental state.

She didn’t bother to stop him. There simply was no need.

Bellatrix’s message was short and to the point, but she heard the warning loud and clear.

A storm was coming- at the center of it, her salvation masquerading as her demise.

She would make sure the woman would not be the cause of the latter.

The young Gryffindor returned to her seat and cradled her familiar close to her chest, settling back in with her book until the others arrived to take her away…

And arrive they did.

By the time the heavy knock sounded at the door, Hermione had already drifted off to sleep. The sound awoke her with a shock and she leapt to her feet as Kingsley, Ron, Harry, and a few others she didn’t recognize entered her room. Naturally, Crookshanks wasn’t the least bit happy about the
abrupt departure of his resting place- yet somehow- she knew his raised furred and rolling growl was not directed at her.

Knowing why they were here left a bitter taste in her mouth as she said to them, “It won’t work you know. If anything, you’ll just end up making things worse.”

It was Kingsley that spoke first.

“We’re going to make sure that doesn’t happen. Something that should’ve been done better the first time.” He promised. The man gestured to the door. “Now please Miss Gra- Hermione. David says we may be able to fix this.”

Oh how desperately she wanted to fight. To see the look on their faces when they realized that she was done trusting them with matters like this.

If only Bellatrix hadn’t kept her wand. Wandless magic was great and all, but it would be much more efficient if she had her actual wand. The one that had been with her since the very beginning. That had seen her through thick and thin. The good times and the bad.

But she didn’t. And she was surrounded in a tiny room.

It was not the time to start a fight. Instead, she asked the group to allow her to get dressed in something a bit more fitting, a simple request that they granted immediately. Hermione returned to her tiny room, Crookshanks trotting behind her. She dug through what she had and was sad to see most of the clothes were unfamiliar to her. Like someone had tried to understand Hermione’s style choices and decided it wasn’t the least bit trendy. Most of the things in there were pricey and flashy- the clothes of a celebrity rather than someone like her. Dresses, skirts, piles of flowy tops and too high heels. Hermione scoffed and dug around for something similar to what she usually wore. Eventually she came across an outfit that would do.

There was a heavy, dark grey, wool sweater that was nearly buried beneath everything to the point she almost missed it. Hermione pulled it over her bra and was immediately comforted by the weight. She didn’t even mind that the sleeves were clearly too long and merely rolled them up as she picked up a pair of comfortable white capris. There were some white sneakers with red stripes going up the sides that she spotted and slipped onto her feet next. It was simple and comfortable- two things she knew she would be needing if whatever David had planned next went south like she knew it would. Dressed and ready, she headed to the door.

Don’t go.

She twitched as he siren side made its self known after being silent for most of the day.

“I have to.” She said, opening the door and seeing everyone waiting for her.


She didn’t care if they heard her since everyone knew what was really going on inside of her head. “And they’ll continue to do it. Be quiet.”

Ron looked visibly uncomfortable. “Mione?”

She gave him a dry look and shook her head. “Don’t worry about it. Let’s just get this over with.”

It was impossible to hide the wince of pain as her other half was enraged at her unwillingness to fight back. Something everyone present noticed.
Kingsley took control, parting the aurors who had lined up behind him and made way for Hermione to come through so they could head for the Department of Mysteries for a second time.

With Kingsley in front; Ron and Harry beside her; and a detail of aurors at her back, Hermione was once more paraded through the ministry like an animal. The ever watching eyes of the patrons was almost too much to bare and she was all the more grateful for the oversized sweater that hid her fidgeting hands and her fluffy hair concealing her burning ears.

She hated this.

For so long after the battle against the dark lord and his followers, all Hermione wanted was to be acknowledged. To be seen by the world as something more than ‘the-know-it-all’ or Harry and Ron’s childhood friend. In a way, she was proud of both titles- don’t get her wrong- but she knew she was so much more than that.

Wanted to be so much more than that.

But now, as she was escorted through the halls of the ministry like a wanted criminal, she had to wonder what she was now. Who she was in the judgmental eyes of everyone around her- what was it they were seeing?

A freak.

A monster.

A damaged soul.

A mad woman.

Whatever it was, it wasn’t who she was and it broke her heart that she didn’t know how to change any of that.

The fire of hope that had once burned so bright within her dimmed just a little more.

“I just don’t know what to do.” She whispered.

Unfortunately, not quietly enough since both Harry and Ron turned to her at the same time.

A hand found it’s way onto her left shoulder.

“You don’t have to do anything ‘Mione.” Harry said softly. “Taking everything onto yourself has never been what either of us wanted. Trust me, I know how that feels. And it may seem like it’s hopeless now, but everything will be fine.”

“Harry’s right Hermione. You know we’d never want to see you hurt. Not while we can help it. It’ll be alright.” Ron piped in.

Despite his words, Ron didn’t look at her even once.

She suspected that even he didn’t believe any of the things he had just told her.

And who could blame him.

How many times has she been told things would be alright? That they would catch Bellatrix. That she would be safe and happy and healthy?
How many times has that been a lie?

Apparently, enough times that even the most hopeful of them had lost that faith.

By this point, everyone was just waiting on a miracle; both involving Bellatrix coming out of hiding.

The two sides sought the woman for two different reasons, but today, faith decided to extend it’s hand and grant the wish of everyone present.

It all escalated so quickly.

They had reached the atrium of the ministry. She was relieved to see the grand fountain had since been replaced after having the previous one depicting muggles in their ‘rightful place’. People bustled back and forth, only stopping to greet the minister and Harry every now and then as they headed towards the elevator.

Several yards away from the fountain, one of the aurors escorting her broke rank, walking ahead of the group with a saunter of importance in their gait. It caused everyone to stop. Hermione peeked around Kingsley’s wide shoulders to peer at them. The auror was one of two women in the group. They appeared to have a few bandages wrapped around their throat and stomach area. Behind a head of red hair and bright green eyes, the woman was standing before them with a smile upon her face that put Hermione on edge.

Though what really sent the hairs on the back of her neck shooting upwards was a excited coo from her siren side.

One that she’d come to know it only did when one person was around.

Hermione whipped around to face Harry.

“Harry…who is that?” She whispered hurriedly.

The man frowned. “That’s Lena. She was apart of the group that was guarding Bellatrix’s house when she attacked it. We found her and Odrick unconscious in the backyard. They’re lucky to be alive, though Lena hasn’t said anything about what happened due to her injuries.” He said.

Looking at Lena, Hermione became sure of two things.

One…Lena was dead.

And two; the collar around her neck had failed to prevent the one thing it was designed to do.

Foolishly, Kingsley called out to Lena. “Auror Mason, why have you broken rank? I made it quite clear that no one is to leave Miss Granger’s side until we reach our destination.”

Lena said nothing, just continuing to smile silently at the group of people around her.

Then she reached up and began unwrapping the bandages around her neck.

“Lena?” Kingsley asked.

It was Hermione who spoke up next.

“Kingsley.” The man turned to her and saw the blank look upon her face. “That’s not Lena.”

A crooked laugh filled the air.
Everyone’s eyes were immediately on ‘Lena’ as the bandages fell to the ground.

Revealing a completely unscathed neck.

Harry acted first.

“It’s a trap! Everyone, be on guard, Bellatrix is in the ministry!” He yelled.

Everything tuned to chaos.

Ron and Harry were at her side pulling her behind the other aurors. The woman was clearly here for Hermione, so her protection was priority over everything else. Aurors flooded the atrium from every corner. The floo network was alight with green fire as people fled from the potentially catastrophic battle that was about to ensue.

Anyone foolish enough to believe a woman like Bellatrix Lestrange was going to go down without a fight was obviously new to the wizarding world. Honestly, Hermione believed that many of the aurors there were ready to follow them- given the chance.

She didn’t blame them.

Hermione- more than anyone else aside from the Longbottoms- knew exactly what the woman was capable of. What lengths she would go to in order to achieve her goals.

Like infiltrate the ministry of magic, in broad daylight, surrounded by some of the most powerful aurors this side of the country.

Only a fool would do such a thing.

‘Only Bellatrix would do it if she knew there was a chance to succeed.’ She thought to herself as Bellatrix- still disguised as Lena- kept laughing at the world like she’d heard the world’s funniest joke. Not even when she was surrounded on every side in front of the fountain, did she stop her maniacal cackle. Wands of every shape and size were pointed in her direction- Kingsley at the forefront of them all.

“Give it up Lestrange! You’re surrounded with no chance of escaping. Give yourself in by order of I, Kingsley Shacklebolt- Minister of Magic.” Came the dark-skinned man’s booming voice.

Hermione could hear the raw conviction in the man’s voice. She was sure that the other’s would sound much the same if they had spoken the same words. After all- this was their big break. After months and months of trying to hunt down Bellatrix- here she was- just waltzing into the ministry where everyone capable of stopping her resided. There couldn’t be anything luckier than this.

Except this was more than likely the unluckiest situation they could possibly find themselves in.

Bellatrix had a plan. She always did. Hermione was working on a plan herself for Merlin’s sake- one that she was more than ready to put in motion when she was taken down into the department of mysteries. That being said- as much as she hated to admit it- if she herself had a plan; then Bellatrix was already two steps ahead with her own.

That wasn’t the only thing that would end up backfiring on her friends this day.

Even with the aurors outnumbering Bellatrix. Even if they block off the floos, stopped apperation, and prevented everyone in that room from leaving- there was one thing that no one was probably taking into consideration.
And that was Hermione herself.

The Hermione that felt betrayed and hurt by those who promised to protect her.

The Hermione who was currently fighting against the searing pain in her mind from her siren’s excitement at seeing their tormentor.

The Hermione who knew that the day Bellatrix came for her would be the day she would let herself slide back into her shackles like a sheep craving the slaughterhouse.

It would be their downfall.

The announcement of being cornered did nothing to put Bellatrix on edge. If anything, it only amused her. Still wearing the face of Lena, the woman jumped on the edge of the fountain and gave Kingsley a bow.

“Now, now, why would I go and do a thing like that after all I did to get here?” She cooed. Her normal voice finally coming through- revealing that it was indeed Bellatrix beneath the façade of Lena.

“Because we have you surrounded with no way to run. Give yourself up and we’ll return you to your cell back in Azkaban.” Kingsley yelled.

Hermione’s keen eye saw the woman jerk slightly at the mention of Azkaban, but otherwise, she seemed unfazed by the threat.

Everyone watched as the face of Lena began melting away; revealing Bellatrix in all her black and pale glory. Down from her sleeve, the witch pulled out her wand. The squad of aurors were all on guard, ready to see who would cast the first spell.

Of course it was Bellatrix.

Just not in the way they planned.

“Protego.”

The bright blue protection spell washed over the woman completely from head to toe- a surprise to almost everyone there.

That was when the sound of frantic footsteps echoed throughout the atrium. Hermione turned around and saw a frazzled looking Arthur Weasley sprinting at them like the devil was hot on his tail.

The next words out of his mouth kicked everything into motion.

“A shadow! There’s a shadow over the ministry!” He screamed.

Crash!

Arthur’s panicked screams were drowned out by the sound of shattering glass and a roar like none of them had ever heard before.

A massive black creature broke through the atrium’s ceiling, raining glass down on Bellatrix who was already protected by her spell. It’s enormous wings were spread above its head in a truly menacing manner as the morning light beamed down on its immaculate feathers. Everyone was staring in awe at the being, though fear quickly snuffed that out when its massive crown of feathers bowed down so Bellatrix could run her hands over its shiny beak.
It would seem as though the two were working together.

A dragon. There was a fully grown dragon inside of the Ministry of Magic.

Hermione had never seen any dragon like this one before. She didn’t think anyone else had either given the silence surrounding the room. It seemed so calm at Bellatrix’s side which didn’t bode well either.

Then she figured out why.

Laughter filled the atrium. Not from any of the aurors or even Bellatrix herself. This one was haunting and deeper than the darkest parts of the ocean. It sounded like the unholy union of a frog and a hyena.

She had heard that sound before.

Hermione’s eyes met that of the creature.

Glowing topaz eyes stared her down with an uncomfortable intensity and she was now one hundred percent sure her hunch was right. This was without a doubt Bellatrix’s familiar- the same waist high bird that tormented her and Crookshanks for months on end.

Gone were its thin, spindly legs and wispy, long tail- replaced by thick muscles and a whip like appendage covered in glistening black fur.

Hermione had so many questions. Ones that she would no doubt have to have answered later.

Right now, she had to prepare herself for the ensuing battle.

Bellatrix had come to get her back as she promised and judging by the menacing darkness swirling in the other siren’s eyes- she would not be leaving this place without Hermione.

And Hermione wasn’t planning to stay.

Her only regret when everything was over was that she hadn’t warned her friends of that fact before she decided to take her life back into her own hands.

By any means necessary….
Chapter 33 - A Stubborn Standoff

Chapter Notes

Ope, fell asleep mid editing last night XD Got straight back to it this morning! A bit shorter than the others, but breaking it up from the others felt better than combining all of them together. Enjoy!

Chapter 33: A Stubborn Standoff

There was only one person smiling in the entire ministry.

Bellatrix.

“Aww why the silence minister?” She cooed. “You were oh so talkative just a minute ago.”

The dragon-like creature pushed it’s massive head against Bellatrix’s side- groaning deeply as its burning yellow eyes stayed locked in her direction.

Hermione refused to avert her gaze.

To Kingsley’s credit, the jibe was enough to snap him out of his stupor. He raised his wand and addressed the woman once more.

“Bellatrix Lestrange- you and the creature beside you are hereby ordered to stand down. You are under arrest.” He boomed.

“Under what charges?” She chuckled, knowing full well all the crimes she had done up until this point.

“Numerous attacks against the general public; the attack on Alice and Frank Longbottom as well as Madam Pince; being a confirmed death eater; breaking and entering; murder; robbery; torture, using the unforgiveable curses; and breaking out of Azkaban.” His eyes narrowed. “To name a few.”

The witch threw her head back and laughed.

“That’s all? Really Shacky- you’re forgetting the most important one! The reason I’m here now.” She crooned.

The other’s didn’t feel it, but even with the suppression collar, Hermione knew immediately that something had changed in the woman. She took an unconscious step back.

“Yeah, and just what would that be?” Ron roared, pointing his wand at the madwoman- his hands trembling.

And there it was.

That look Bellatrix had only shown her a handful of times.

The madness brewing behind her eyes whenever her mentality was teetering on the edge.
“Kidnapping.” She growled. The woman sauntered off the end of the fountain, wand out and steady. “You see- you lot seem to have taken something that belongs to me. And now I want it back.”

There was no longer a smile on her face.

Even from where she stood behind the minister, Hermione could see the woman coming apart at the seams.

She wasn’t gone from the other’s side that long, but given what Professor Snape said Bellatrix did at the mansion, Hermione had a feeling that the separation was more than the other was expecting. The woman, during her time imprisoned with her had never failed to remind her that if Hermione ever left her, she would eventually come back on her own.

The younger siren had a feeling that she wasn’t expecting to be the first one to break in the end.

Then again, neither did Hermione.

She feared what was going on in the other witch's head, but luckily enough she didn’t have to wait that long to find out.

It wasn’t good.

“Now I thought I was quite generous. It’s really not in my nature to share my favorite toys with others.” She said sweetly. “But I figured that I would get her back soon enough. Little song birds don’t like being cooped up for too long. Soon she would be wailing and weeping to return to her master.”

Her expression grew more sour.

“Yet I heard nothing,” Behind her, the huge black dragon began growling in agitation, no doubt feeling the same ire as the siren beside him. “Nothing but silence. And last I checked, my toy wasn’t broken when I gave it to you. So. What. Happened.”

‘She’s going to lose it.’ Hermione thought to herself.

That didn’t surprise her.

What did surprise her however, was the fact that Bellatrix didn’t know what they did to her.

She didn’t know about the suppression.

Hermione had been so sure that was the reason she had let them take her in the first place, but now she wasn’t so sure.

“Well, since none of you want to answer me, I’ll just ask her myself.”

Bellatrix gave a bone chilling smile.

“Oh muddy~.” Her sing song voice cried out.

Hermione cried out in pain, causing the others to look over at her in panic.

Ron placed a sweaty palm on her shoulder.

“‘Mione? You alright? Don’t listen to her! She can’t get to you here.” He promised solemnly.
It didn’t matter.

It wasn’t Bellatrix’s words causing her pain. It was her own siren side. Having Bellatrix so close again, hearing her voice calling out to her— it was driving her creature side to the brink of insanity.

*Mate! Mate has come to us. She calls to us and we cannot answer. Failure. We must go. We must answer her call.*

‘I can’t.’ Hermione whimpered to it, but it was like talking to a brick wall.

*She calls. Go. Go. Go.*

From across the atrium, Bellatrix beckoned to her again. “Muddy~. *Come* to me, pet.” She cooed once more.

**Agony.**

That was the only word good enough to describe the tug she was feeling. True to everyone’s words, the woman’s voice didn’t compel her like it once did without the suppression. She didn’t obey no matter how much the woman called her forward. If anything, it was her own inner self causing her to move. If the woman wanted her to go to her, she would have to use her siren abilities to their fullest. Had everyone forgotten that a siren’s abilities worked on regular people too?

Kingsley blocked her path and her view from Bellatrix and her familiar.

“All right! Your words have no hold over her anymore. Leave Hermione alone and turn yourself in at once!” he roared.

“…what did you say?” she hissed. The woman took a menacing step forward. “My words are the only ones holding that filth’s life. She comes when I call. *Come. Here. muggle!*” she screeched.

The a few people groaned as the woman’s voice seemed to finally effect them.

Still, Hermione did not come to her though she did take a few steps forward. It seemed that the collar was working. Without it, she was sure that her other side would have them trotting up to the woman immediately. That being said, the pull of a siren’s voice still made her want to go. Her body was still her own for the most part and her own will to stand her ground prevented her from giving in so easily.

Which only seemed to make Bellatrix even more enraged.

‘She really doesn’t know.’ Hermione thought to herself. She knew Bellatrix more than she liked to admit and so she’d come to recognize when the woman was genuinely confused.

It would seem that she was wrong about the woman after all and she realized something.

This had all been apart of the woman’s game the entire time.

How many times had she begged to be freed. How many times had the other given her opportunities with the confidence that she would always come back to her in the end.

Bellatrix had planned this just like all the other times.

The woman had every intentions of waltzing into wherever they planned on hiding Hermione and taking her back. After all, she had seen firsthand what her voice did to her. All she had to do was
open that chapped lip mouth, sing her poisoned honey words, and Hermione would come bounding up to her in front of all of her friends like a well trained poodle.

It would be embarrassing.

Humiliating to everyone present who had tried so hard to keep them apart.

Bellatrix would whisk her away and she would more than likely never see anyone she cared about again.

The perfect plan.

Except for one thing.

For once, Bellatrix underestimated the resolve of the people surrounding her now.

She refused to believe in what lengths they were willing to go through to protect her.

If the woman once had the collar that she now wore, then she knew of the effects. Knew what they did to someone’s mind. Bellatrix was well aware that Hermione- and the rest of the world for that matter- cherished her brilliance and thoughts over her own well-being. There wasn’t a chance in hell that they would suppress her powers and risk the one thing she cared about most.

They were the good guys- they wouldn’t do that to their golden girl.

Until they did.

And because the woman hadn’t factored it into her little game, she was now standing before them with slowly building rage as to where her plan had fallen through.

The room was tense and silent despite the amount of people and creatures within the atrium.

So much so, that when Hermione started laughing at the other woman’s slip up, it gained everyone’s attention with ease.

The siren couldn’t help it.

Hermione laughed and laughed though nothing about her situation was the least bit funny. She doubled over and clutched at her stomach as tears began falling from her eyes.

How could she ever have seen this coming?

Bellatrix Lestrange had her plans thwarted because she believed too much in how good people could be.

She couldn’t wait to rub it in the other’s face when all of this was over with.

Would the woman try to bring her as close to death as humanely possible for doing so?

Yes.

Without a doubt.

And Hermione found that at this point, it would be worth it.

From across the room, Bellatrix was a lot less amused.
“What’s so funny mudblood!” She yelled. From beside her, the siren’s familiar let a puff of smoke billow out from his beak- slightly more amused than its master.

Hermione stopped laughing and stepped out from behind the minister. She gave the woman a smug smile.

“You.” She said. “I’m laughing cause you planned for all of this but didn’t factor in how dangerous friendship can be.”

Bellatrix narrowed her eyes. “What are you on about?” she growled. The curly haired witch did not like looking like a fool in front of her enemies. Hermione’s taunts were only proving to push her further and further towards her breaking point. The thread was so thin at this point, the slightest nudge would send the woman into a rage.

Ron spoke up from beside her. “Mione, don’t say anything else. You’ll only provoke her.”

Oh she knew that.

That was *exactly* what she wanted.

Which is why she looked the woman dead in her eyes and reached up towards her neck. Channeling a bit of wandless magic, she murmured the spell needed to cancel the glamour on the collar around her throat.

The look on Bellatrix’s face was only amusing for a moment.

‘Maybe that was a bit much.’ She thought to herself.

Though it did end up getting the results she wanted.

There was a rumbling growl emanating from across the room. One that had everyone raising their wands for the pandemonium that was surely about to ensue. Hermione noticed the furrowed brows and wondering frowns of those who didn't quite know what was happening here.

She remembered briefly that not everyone present knew about Bellatrix being a siren.

It 've been a shock then that the inhuman sound echoing around them was coming from the witch by the fountain and not the huge dragon crouching next to her. No, the woman's secret had stayed hidden much longer than her own- but if the woman didn’t keep it together- that number was about to skyrocket.

“How dare you.” The woman hissed between clenched teeth. “How dare you insolent, wretched, *filth* ruin what is *mine!*”

Something jolted in Hermione’s chest when the other woman called her ‘mine’. Though feeling the excitement of her creature side wriggling away at the back of her mind, she found comfort in knowing those thoughts weren’t her own.

“How dare you.” The woman hissed between clenched teeth. “How dare you insolent, wretched, *filth* ruin what is *mine!*”

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“Hermione doesn’t belong to you or anyone else!” Ron shouted.

Bellatrix started laughing darkly. “I’m the *only* one she belongs to. And if you think for a moment that little act of desperation will keep her from me, then you lot are dumber than I first assumed.”

“Give it up Bellatrix! We know *what* you are.” Harry interjected. “What your powers can do. You have no control over her anymore. We made sure of that.”
Bellatrix paused and looked at Harry with a mixture of loathing and laughter. Everyone shifted when she gestured over to her familiar who brought it’s massive head down to her level. Bellatrix grabbed ahold of its horn and placed her heeled boots against the side of its beak. It lifted its head and the woman rose with the beast like she had done this a thousand times before. With her wand in her other hand, Bellatrix pointed it straight at Ron and Harry, smirking down at them from her winged perch. With a voice tainted by siren magic, she said the exact thing Hermione had been worried about since this entire situation started.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t find her? When one of you fools so *gratiously* left a little gift for me at my home?” To that, everyone watched as the woman rolled down her sleeve to reveal the otter bracelet. Hermione felt her heart jump in her throat, though there was no need for it. The move got no reaction out of the crowd around her. No one present had been there when Luna had given her the gift. Just in case though, she pulled her sleeve as far down as it would go over the matching bracelet around her wrist.

She would take her friend’s secret to the grave; if anyone knew what the other had done, it would spell disaster for the blonde seer.

“I didn’t even need our… *connection* in the end. You merely ruined a bit of my fun, though I’m sure muddy there is the one who got the worst of this in the end; much to my joy.” She gave a hearty laugh at that. “Locking her creature side away protects her and others from being controlled by it,” She locked eyes with Hermione. “But now there’s nothing protecting *her* from *me*.” She smiled. “And since none of you seem to know how to *treat* other people’s property- I’ll be taking her back… *now*.”

Kingsley warned the group of aurors just in time before things finally turned to chaos. “Everyone, get out of the way!” He yelled.

“Kill them!” Bellatrix screeched.

And just like that, the atrium was thrown into disarray.
Chapter 34 - The Frying Pan and the Fire

First off- how dare yall. There I am, having a crap day at work, I go on my lunch and open my email and BOOM! Such amazing comments and support from you all. Brightened my day right up! Thank you so much! Seeing how invested everyone is in this story has sparked a fire beneath my feet. Side note: Since it's been brought to my attention now, if you've done art or music or anything related to the story or Bellamione in general, slide it my way so i can see it.

My dry af tumblr: thatclumsydreamer
As always, thanks for reading and hope you enjoy!

Chapter 34 – The Frying Pan and the Fire

The black dragon rumbled and flared its wings up to the broken ceiling. It inhaled til it’s chest appeared to be on the brink of bursting. From behind Kingsley, Hermione could see many of the aurors throwing up water defenses in preparation to combat the incoming flames.

It proved to be a fatal mistake on their parts.

The dragon exhale with a mighty roar, but it wasn’t flames that flew from its beak. Lightning, a bright electric blue raced towards the group of aurors. Screams erupted throughout the atrium; Hermione watched in horror as several aurors who couldn’t cancel their charms in time were electrocuted on the spot- falling to the ground with charred expressions of terror forever imprinted on their faces. No one had time to mourn the loss. The creature opened to fire at them again. Knowing what they were up against now, the aurors switched their defenses to counteract the electricity. It ended up saving a lot of people’s lives, though too late for the unlucky few before them.

That didn’t deter either of the duo from continuing their assault. When the beast wasn’t spitting lighting at them, it was swinging its massive tail back and forth, trying to crush as many people as possible in the process. It proved to be only one part of the problem seeing as they also had to combat Bellatrix as well.

The woman was having the time of her life from the safety of her perch atop the dragon. She was a truly terrifying sight to behold as she blocked spell after spell- firing her own toxic green killing curse in between to keep the group on their toes. Hermione could only watch as a useless bystander as the aurors began dropping like flies. She was sure that many thought this would be a easy win. The two were out in the open and clearly outnumbered. They didn’t factor in that many of the spells hitting the dragon were bouncing off as if they were nothing. It was clear that they would have to use darker magic if they wanted any real results.

They were losing and Hermione knew she had to do something if they had any chance of winning.

The woman was doing this to get to her. If she left now, she could save a lot of people.

Because there was one thing she knew would happen today.

Either she would be leaving with Bellatrix or the woman was going to die.
And for a split second, she thought of letting the latter happen.

After all, if Bellatrix died, then she could go back to having a *normal* life.

She could be with her friends again.

Find her family.

*Start* a family of her own.

Everything would be so much better if Bellatrix died. All she had to do was stand back and watch as-

A new scream entered the fray amongst all the chaos, momentarily pausing the fight between the ministry and Bellatrix. Kingsley whipped around in fear that someone had snuck by to attack Hermione.

Except when he glanced back after deflecting a spell cast by Bellatrix, he saw no one. Hermione was just laying on the ground, writhing on the stone floor violently as she pulled at her hair. Her wails of agony rendered everyone speechless as no one had seen the girl be hit with a spell.

That being said, not everyone was frozen in place. Ron and Harry were quick to break rank in order to tend to their fallen friend.

“Hermione!” They yelled, running to her side as the screaming continued. Ron tried grabbing the girl’s hands while Harry aimed to stop her from slamming her head against the floor. It didn’t help, nor did calling to the woman to calm her down.

“Hermione please you have to stop! What’s going on?” Ron voice cracked.

She opened her mouth to answer, but between the pain and the tears bubbling up beneath her squeezed eyelids- Hermione could only give them a whimper. It was amazing that she even heard what the man asked over the screaming of the voice inside her head.

*Cannot die. Mate mustn’t die. Need her. Need her voice. Go to her. Mustn’t die!* 

The creature ever lurking in the depths of her head was on a tirade of hatred.

Not towards Bellatrix.

Towards her.

The thought of letting Bellatrix be killed was too much for it to take. It was a hissing, spitting ball of rage- clawing at the barrier between her powers with a viciousness she had never seen before. It wanted to go to Bellatrix. Wanted the collar off. Just like Hermione, her siren side wanted things to go back to being normal.

Except normal for it meant a life with Bellatrix.

The woman who has up until this point, done nothing but beat and belittled them. Even now, the woman was fighting to get her property back and nothing more.

And that wasn’t a life that Hermione wanted to live. Yes, she too, wanted the collar off- and so far, Bellatrix seemed to be the only one who knew how to do that- but that was all. After that, she didn’t care what happened to the woman.
Just as long as she was as far away from Hermione as possible.

Another slam against her mind had her screaming out again.

*Lies! You speak nothing but lies. We need her. Always need her. We can only be happy with her.*

She shook her head, much to the confusion of the others. “No we can’t. She’ll kill us the first chance she gets.”

*She cannot.*

“She will.” The girl whimpered.

“Hermione what are you talking about?” Harry asked, shaking the girl to get her attention as she seemed to be staring off into nothingness.

*She. Cannot. Mate will try, but mate will stop her. We must go.*

For a moment, Hermione stopped fighting and listened to what the other was saying. There was something in the way it addressed Bellatrix as mate that insinuated her other half wasn’t talking about the woman herself.

“She cannot.’ Hermione tumbled the words in her mouth for a moment. ‘If you can still hurt me this much sealed away…there’s no way Bellatrix can stop her siren side either. If she tries…’

*Mate will stop.*

That was a gamble in and of itself. She didn’t really have a chance to test that theory and with the way the woman was acting, she didn’t know if she was fully prepared to take that risk.

Then again, she had failed to listen to the other part of herself and it landed her in this situation in the first place didn’t it? Wasn’t she already at the end of her rope? The best thing she could do for herself and everyone else was to get up and run to the woman and hope the fighting ended there.

It was a decision she should’ve made a little faster.

Kingsley, who was still helping the aurors keep Bellatrix at bay turned to bark orders at Harry and Ron. “You two, get her out of here! We can’t risk her being taken again!”

The two acted immediately. Each auror grabbed an arm and tried pulling her away from the atrium- something neither of them were having. Her siren’s screeching and screaming was pounding away at her head like a jackhammer and both men were having a hard time keeping her standing because of it. Hermione struggled even harder.

“Let me go. Guys, please, you’re making it worse. I can’t leave.” She whimpered through shallow breaths.

“Not happening ‘Mione. Not this time.” Ron promised. The man was hellbent on getting her out of there- by any means necessary. Hermione was still out of it even as Ron picked her up, threw her over his shoulder, and began running for the floo network. She pounded on his back to be put down and was ignored for it. “I don’t know what’s going on in that big brain of yours Hermione, but I’m not losing you again. Not after we tried so hard to get you back!” He yelled.

“Ron.” She whispered with tears in her eyes.

The sweet moment between the two friends was ruined as the world was washed over with blue
lightning. Hermione peeked up from Ron’s shoulder to see Harry and Kingsley blocking the attack from Bellatrix’s familiar. It seemed the witch was becoming desperate. Using so much magic—both offensively and defensively must’ve been wearing the woman down by now, especially against so many enemies.

Hermione wondered why Bellatrix was stalling.

She said stalling because knowing Bellatrix and how she was—what she was—Hermione knew that Bellatrix could’ve ended this fight already.

All it would take is one word.

If the woman used her siren abilities she could stop the whole room and take Hermione away without any fight at all. She was clearly stalling; dragging the fight out and taking as many lives as she pleased til whatever she was waiting for occurred.

Hermione just didn’t know what that was.

Fortunately, her other half was always present to give her short, vague answers that always spelled disaster for her in the end.

Us.

Such a simple and obvious answer she thought to herself. And perhaps there was more to that than just trying to get at her, but she didn’t have time to think further on that. Hermione closed her eyes and sighed, pushing her face briefly into Ron’s shoulder. A weak laugh escaped her lips as she said, “She’s actually insane.” She lifted her head and spoke to the man still carrying her towards the floo. “Ron, put me down.”

He hissed at her. “Bloody hell Hermione, are you still talking nonsense! I’m getting you out of here.”

“Ron! Put me down! She’s not gonna stop until I go to her. I can stop this!” She began struggling and pushing at her friend to escape his grasp.

The man didn’t falter, quickly coming up on the floo. She struggled harder. “Ron!”

“No!” He yelled back.

It was clear that nothing she said would sway the man. Understandable. She didn’t want to go back to the woman either. Right now she was as vulnerable as she could possibly be around Bellatrix, her one trump card taken away in an effort to protect her. Telling Ron to let her go right now was essentially taking everything all her friends did up to now for granted.

They might as well have left her in that house.

But they didn’t.

Because they loved her. Loved her enough to even go against her wishes in order to protect her. And yes, it backfired in the end—no one counting on Luna’s interference in all of this—but it was the thought that counted. They loved her.

And Hermione loved them.

Yet the reality of the situation was that Bellatrix would not leave without her. Her attack would continue until all of her friends were dead or the woman herself perished. A violent snarl from her
siren side reminded her that she couldn’t let either of those things happen.

Which is why she gave Ron a small peck on the cheek, whispering softly in his ear, “I’m so sorry about this.” Before sinking her teeth into the junction between the man’s neck and shoulder. Ron screeched in pain and ended up dropping Hermione who jumped to her feet and began sprinting back towards the direction of Bellatrix and her familiar. She pushed past Kingsley and Harry easily, both men too occupied with tending to a fallen auror who seemed to still be clinging to life. That sight alone was enough to not look back when her friends began screaming for her to stop.

At seeing her fast approach, Hermione could see Bellatrix’s face light up with sadistic delight. It wasn’t surprising in the least. This was exactly what the woman wanted. Hermione was playing right into her hands as her friends watched on with horror and betrayal. It made her sick to her stomach. That being said, Hermione would not let the woman win. She was quite tired of being made a fool of. Being treated as a toy and a punching bag by the woman just because she felt like it.

No more.

This time, when she went with the woman, she will do everything in her power to gain the upper hand. It didn’t matter if she had to use what little wandless magic she knew or even coming at the woman with muggle tactics- she would.

Bellatrix knew how to remove her collar and Hermione wouldn’t rest until she forced the woman to remove hers too.

Her eyes burned with determination as she sneered up at the witch. Her resolve was met by the older woman’s toothy grin, followed by a cackle. Bellatrix began laughing anew as she sent a searing hot spell flying over Hermione’s head- too close for comfort yet clearly not meant to hit her.

Hermione didn’t even flinch.

The older woman couldn’t contain her excitement.

“Yes, that’s a good muddy. Come crawling back to your master like the filth you are!” Her manic voice shouted from atop the dragon.

‘Psychopath.’ She thought to herself. Hermione was nearly upon the woman and her beast when an explosion rocked the ministry. Hermione saw the red light of the stunner long before she saw who cast it. The spell came soaring in from somewhere behind her and struck the dragon in the chest. The bird like creature roared and reared back on its thick hind legs, but seemed to remain unharmed. Bellatrix tightened her grip on its horn as her boot slipped from it’s resting place against it’s beak. Hermione whipped around to see who had joined the fray.

The last group of people she wanted to see right now.

“Hermione.” The headmistress called. McGonagall’s face was as stern as stone whilst facing down her student. “You need to get away from her this instance.”

She couldn’t even if she wanted to. The headmistress’ appearance along with Neville, Ginny, and Luna’s rendered her absolutely motionless. The group had an array of emotions on their faces.

McGonagall was steadfast and determined- it was clear that she had no intentions of letting either her or Bellatrix waltz out of there without a fight.

Ginny was scared. The usually brave Gryffindor was standing tall and headstrong in the face of the dangerous pair before her. Anyone else would not have noticed the red head’s nervous tick of biting
her lip, but Hermione knew her better than anyone else. There was very little the two hadn’t shared with one another up til now. Hermione’s one regret right at this moment was the fact that she knew her friend’s fear was for her, rather than the death eater standing atop the dragon.

Luna was…smiling. It was a sad one, something that she rarely saw on the other’s face. Out of everyone else in the atrium, Luna was probably the only one rooting for things to go her way.

It only soothed her a little.

And Neville.

Neville’s expression of absolute loathing was the only thing making Hermione want to run the opposite way of where she was heading.

And she couldn’t blame him.

There she was, the woman who tortured and tormented his parents until they were nothing but husks of their former selves- destined to wither away until there was nothing left for them except the sweet embrace of death. A horrid way to live. Hermione wished she could do something for them- if only to someday wash away the look of absolute betrayal lurking about on the usually docile and bumbling man’s face.

The appearance of the four in the ministry had temporarily stopped the battle. Many of the aurors were being pulled back into the cover of safety. The group was soon joined by Kingsley, Harry, and a seething Ron who seemed to be clutching at his neck. Ginny noticed it immediately.

“Ron!” She rushed to him and began casting healing charms. “What happened to your neck? Are these teeth marks?”

The man didn’t bother looking at his baby sister- too preoccupied with glaring at her. “Hermione bit me.” Came his deadpan answer.

Her heart sank from hearing it.


“I had to.” Her voice came out as nothing more than a whisper. She shook her head and tried to reason with her friend despite knowing it would do no good. “Ginny I had to. I have to go.” She said as she took a step backwards.

Everyone’s wand was on her. McGonagall was the only one to speak. “We can’t allow that Hermione. Stop her!” A flurry of spells came hurtling in her direction. Even if she threw up a protection charm, there was no way that she would be able to stop all of them.

A wall of black clouded her vision. Hermione’s eyes focused in on the dragon’s tail taking the blunt of the attack. If he was phased, the creature didn’t show it, merely opening its mouth to release another blast of electricity in the auror’s direction.

“Ah, ah.” Bellatrix cooed. “Muddy will be returning with me.”

“Like hell she is!” Neville snarled, a sound none of them ever thought they would hear from the young man. He started rapidly casting spells at Bellatrix, many of which the woman deflected with ease. Or so she thought.

It was clear that the woman was tiring. Hermione knew Bellatrix had a decent reserve of magic
under her belt- probably more than the last time she saw her since she had time to recover- but it wasn’t infinite. It would only be a matter of time before the ministry would start firing off nastier spells. Dark ones. As righteous as they claimed to be, the Hermione knew that some of them were not above doing anything necessary to take Bellatrix down. She didn’t want to stay around long enough for that to happen.

Hermione saw the tail and knew that this was her chance.

With not an ounce of grace to be found, Hermione threw herself down on the plush appendage and held on for dear life. That was all the creature needed to make it’s next move. The beast’s wings were raised above its head, shrouding the crowd below in darkness. From her position, Hermione could see the beast flexing the muscles in it’s legs, preparing to take off into the sky. Two powerful beats and the creature was hovering off the ground. She screamed as her body went from horizontal to vertical with a violent snap. She clung to the fur with all her might, hoping the creature wasn’t going to fly off with her like this. Bellatrix was cackling above and her friends were yelling at her down below. She closed her eyes. Though she knew this is what she needed to do if she ever wanted to live a normal life, it still hurt a bit to know that she was betraying her friends. The ones who searched for her day and night- some of them even losing their lives to save hers.

A tear fell from the corner of her eye and her grip strengthened. ‘I’m sorry. I’m so sorry everyone.’ She thought to herself. ‘I’ll make this right, I promise.’ She vowed.

The air shifted drastically and she could feel it rush by as the dragon began to ascend. Her body was experiencing the worse bout of vertigo the higher they climbed. Through the lids of her eyes, she could vaguely see flashes of colors swishing by in a light show of desperation. Hermione tightened her legs around the tail and held on for dear life. They would be out of there soon enough.

Sunlight bathed her eyelids with warmth. It was almost like she was floating from how serene her body felt. To stay like this- even for just a little while- was heaven.

Until everything came crashing down in the blink of an eye.

Hermione didn’t see or hear who cast the spell that hit her, but she definitely felt it. The young siren’s eyes shot open in shock as her body became a limp noodle. The grip she had on the tail was broken and her body was suspended for all of a second before it started careening towards the ground. She screamed as the world was thrown into reverse and the sky grew further and further away. Arms and legs were left flailing about in every direction, her instincts telling her that she had to do something before her body ended up sprawled across the ground in a broken mess.

Dragon, bricks, stone- these things flashed before her eyes right before they were washed over in a sea of blue. The wind was knocked out of her from the impact of hitting the water in the fountain. It slowed her decent, but she still ended up smacking against the water rather painfully. Seeing as she was not unconscious from the impact, someone must’ve cast a cushion charm on the fountain before she hit the bottom. Hermione sat up, swimming to the surface and breaking through with a violent gasp of air. She clung to the edge of the fountain in fear, worried that she was too weak to get herself up if she dropped below the surface again. Her hair was all over now, clinging wetly to every corner of her face in a heavy curtain of curls. Hermione looked up between a few strands to see Ginny running over to her in a flurry of red strands and freckles. She didn’t waste time in grabbing the soaked girl by the torso and pulling her from the water. Hermione could only weakly push against her as she tried to figure out what happened.

“What…what did you do?” She whimpered as Ginny continued dragging her body.

“Saved your bloody life!” The ginger hissed. “Have you lost what little sense you have left!
Climbing on a dragon like that! You’re mental!"

Hermione chuckled weakly. “Wouldn’t be the first time.” Her voice was smug despite how weak she felt.

“This isn’t the time for jokes. We need to go before she comes back down here.” Ginny said as she continued carrying the girl as best she could. “The moment she notices that you’re gone, she’s going to come back.”

Hermione knew that better than anyone, hence why she used all of her strength to fling herself away from her friend. Naturally she ended up upon the ground in front of the fountain, wet and wounded whilst the world around her continued to spiral apart. The siren snapped her head up and gave Ginny a fierce glare.

“If you know that, then just let me go.” She told the woman.

“If we let you go, she’ll kill you!” Ginny screamed.

“And if I stay she’ll kill you all!” Hermione returned. “I couldn’t live with myself if that happened and you know it! You of all people should know that.”

Ginny wasn’t having it. Instead of doing as Hermione said, the younger woman approached her fallen friend and gave her one of her famous Weasley grins. “It’ll take more than a witch like Bellatrix to take us down.”

A chuckle sounded from above them.

It was all the warning either got before the rustle of clothes and heavy boots slamming onto the stone of the fountain came from behind Hermione’s head.

“Then it’s a good thing that I’m more then just a witch, blood traitor.” Bellatrix snarled.

Hermione wasn’t able to act fast enough to stop the woman from driving one of her boots into the middle of Ginny’s chest, sending the woman flying backwards onto the floor. Ron and Harry could be heard yelling in the background, though Hermione didn’t have time to think about that since her body was being lifted up once more—this time, by Bellatrix herself.

The familiar sharpness of the woman’s wand was not one that she missed.

Warm lips pressed against the shell of her ear. “Muddy,” Bellatrix whispered quietly. “Muddy, muddy, mudblood. Your filthy friends just don’t know when to stop do they. Even after I shared you so generously with them.”

Hermione bit the inside of her cheek. “Leave them alone. You already got what you wanted.”

There was a tsk as the woman sucked her teeth. “Oh no. No I didn’t. They.” The woman’s other hand came down to wrap around her neck in a move far too intimate for her liking. “Ruined my fun! Putting a muzzle on a pet that’s not theirs!”

“I am not yours either!” Hermione snarled, yanking her head out of the woman’s grip. The wand was dug further into the skin of her neck and Bellatrix yanked her neck back.

“Shut. Up.” The woman looked up at her friends with a dark glint in her eyes. “It seems I left you with them too long. You’ve gotten your bark back.” Her voice grew even quieter as she spoke the next world. “And too much…bite. We’ll have to fix that later won’t we.” She cooed.
“Bellatrix, let her go!” Kingsley boomed. A distorted roar from above revealed the dragon lowering its long neck and opening its beak in the minister’s direction. Blue lighting shot out quick as a wink, charging the air with burning static and causing the group of witches and wizards to defend themselves.

The older woman chuckled and ran the edge of her wand up and down the young woman’s face. “Not a chance Shaky. You had your chance. Besides, you already have my loving husband too, don’t get greedy.”

“Is that what you want? A trade. Rodolphus for Hermione?” He boomed once more.

The question sent Bellatrix into a fit of laughter. “Oh please! Toss him into the veil with Sirius for all I care,” The comment had her deflecting multiple spells courtesy of Harry. It amused her more than actually causing her to worry. Onyx eyes drifted down to stare intensely into Hermione’s chocolate ones. The woman didn’t like what she could feel brewing behind them. “This one is the true prize.”

Her skin sizzled in disgust at how the woman said the word ‘prize’. She was neither a pet nor a prize to be fought over with bloodshed and violence. If she had to beat that into the woman’s head with fist and feet, she would. Hopefully it wouldn’t come to that.

Hermione was broken from her thoughts as Bellatrix yanked her closer. She was still soaking wet and sore, but at least her legs weren’t ready to fold beneath her like an accordion. From where she stood, she could see nothing but wands and stern faces surrounding them. No one was firing spells anymore, more than likely afraid of hitting her during the crossfire. Bellatrix and her familiar didn’t have such hang-ups. If anyone so much as moved or looked to be trying to cast a spell, they were met with a violent beam of hot lightning curtesy of the dragon lingering over all of their heads.

The atrium was surprisingly quiet in spite of the amount of people present.

Footsteps broke the silence.

Harry had broken away from the crowd to stand in front, looking every bit the leader many knew him as.

“You’re going to great lengths to keep someone you hate Bellatrix.” Harry stepped forward, his knuckles white as bone from how hard they gripped his wand. “Why? What are you really after by keeping Hermione? Why not just kill her now and be done with it? What’s really stopping you?”

Horrified gasps fluttered up from an array of people. The man was met with wide eyes drenched with disbelief. Hermione imagined that many of them had never thought the man would ask such a brazen question.

She knew better.

Harry may not have been a genius, but he was smart. Smart enough to know that Bellatrix wanted Hermione alive- though not necessarily well. It was obvious from the few bodies that laid around them that the woman was still very much the killer she had always been. If anyone was to die today, Hermione would be at the top of the list right along his self and Ron. There was something the woman wasn’t saying and he knew it- now it was a matter of finding out what that was.

The death eater didn’t say anything for a while. Hermione couldn’t hear much from her at all, just steady breaths…that were slowly beginning to speed up. A sharp pain at the back of her mind made itself known after what felt like hours of silence.
Her creature side was putting pressure on the wall keeping it locked away. She could only liken it to how Crookshanks sometimes liked to throw his weight around and press his heavy body against her legs in affection.

It was a sweet gesture.

The sound rumbling in Bellatrix’s chest was anything but.

She hissed sharply as the wand was jammed a bit too hard against her neck, she grabbed the woman’s hand to relieve some of the pressure. It didn’t budge nor did the older siren’s attention towards Harry. Loathing oozed from every pore as the woman spoke.


Bellatrix didn’t pause in her speech to let anyone talk. “You who locked me away. You who silenced me. You who stole my everything! My freedom, my lord, my purpose!” She screeched. Hermione could see the woman was ripping apart at the seams. Up until now, she had yet to see the woman use her siren abilities, but it seemed that this was the tipping point.

She only prayed no one else got hurt when everything came pouring out in the woman’s inevitable fit of rage.

“You lot have taken everything! Everything! There is nothing in this world that is mine any longer. Nothing. Nothing…except this.” Hermione screamed in pain when the woman’s long fingernails dug into her scalp and lifted her head up towards her friends. “Nothing except this! This filthy mudblood who’s life I want nothing more but to grind into dust. I want to rip every curl from her head. Cut open her voice box til the only sound she can make is pathetic gasps as she takes her final breath. Make no mistake. This isn’t mercy. I want her dead more than you can ever know.”

The woman’s breath was erratic; hulking, frantic puffs of air that was making Hermione extremely uncomfortable due to their proximity.

But it was more than that. Being so close- literally pressed against the other woman- Hermione could hear the pain in the other’s voice as she listed all the things she wanted to do to her. It would seem- that much like her- the woman’s other half was not exactly keen on seeing her leave this world just yet.

Bellatrix stuck her nose up at Harry and the others, and despite standing on the same plain, Hermione could still feel that she was looking down on them all like they were nothing more than rats in the gutter. Her heart leapt in her throat when the woman leaned over Hermione’s shoulder, rasping words to the crowd that she knew would haunt her every waking nightmare.

“But she. Is. Mine. And if keeping her alive and with me brings you more suffering then even death; I will keep her til we are but dust and bones in this wretched earth.”

“No.” Hermione whimpered. It was so quiet that the only on to hear was Bellatrix. The woman only cooed in her ear at the frightened words.

“Yes.” Bellatrix said quietly. “Your time away from our happy little home has been…enlightening for me. We have so much to talk about.” The woman growled lowly, her hand coming to rest upon
the golden choker around her neck. “But this will have to go first.”

Hermione’s heart stuttered in her chest, her other side was practically doing summersaults of joy. “So you do know how to get rid of this.”

The woman chuckled. “Of course.” Hermione could feel the woman’s eyes burning into the side of her head as her sultry words fluttered through her ears and into the forefront of her thoughts. “How does it feel? That constant clawing and screaming ebbing away at the back of your mind? To have power vibrating beneath your skin; wriggling through every cell in your body looking for release and not being able to.” The woman’s breath shuddered. “It’s maddening isn’t it.”

“Hermione, don’t listen to her! Whatever she’s saying, it’s a lie!” Ginny yelled from the other side of the atrium.

“You hate this more than you hate me, don’t you?” She hissed excitedly.

Ginny threw a stunner in the two’s direction only to have it batted away like nothing by Bellatrix. The woman kept whispering in the other siren’s ears.

“So much that you are even willing to betray your friends to get rid of it.”

Hermione didn’t bother to answer the woman’s question. The shame of her answer was all over the room- whether from the way that Neville refused to meet her eyes or the way Ron was still clutching at his neck where she had bitten them. Bellatrix wasn’t necessarily wrong.

She hated the collar more than the woman- but she could never hate her friends. Nor would she betray them. The Gryffindor had to keep repeating the same words over and over in her head.

‘Mercy. This is a mercy.’

The quicker she left with the tapped woman and her beast of a dragon, the more lives she could end up saving.

“No. I’m not betraying them. I’m saving them because I know you.” Brown eyes stared defiantly up at the onxy ones over her shoulder. “You’ll kill for me- but you won’t die for me.”

Ginny was just close enough to hear that sentence and Hermione groaned in anguish at seeing the expression on her face- no doubt the woman took the seemingly intimate statement at face value.

She didn’t mean it like the woman cared about her.

Because she didn’t.

Bellatrix would- without a doubt- kill everyone in the building to steal Hermione away. And if the tides turned against her at any point, Bellatrix would not allow herself to lose.

She would kill for Hermione, but she wouldn’t die for her.

There was no way that Hermione would let someone die in her place if she could help it.

Which is why she stared defiantly up at the woman to make sure to make that very clear.

“Let’s get one thing straight Bellatrix. I belong to me. Not the ministry, or Ron, or Harry, and especially not you.” She hissed. Her hand lifted to touch the collar around her neck. “This is the only reason I’m going with you. Not because of instincts, or being mates, or because it was all apart of your twisted game. You lost. I’ll go with you, but make no mistake, it’s of my own free will.”
She was fierce in her statement, never once faltering in the presence of her tormentor. Not that it mattered of course. The young woman’s speech only served to amuse Bellatrix. The witch threw her head back in laughter and gripped the other girl’s arm, leaning into her personal space to whisper dangerously low in her ear. “We’ll see about that when we get home, muddy.”

Hermione jolted when the woman broke her grip to block a spell aimed at the two of them. Ginny was still at the forefront, practically seething after seeing the way the other siren had grabbed her friend.

“Hermione get away from her! See reason, I’m begging you! You can’t go with her!” The red head pleaded.

‘That’s just unfair, Ginny.’ The girl thought to herself. Seeing Ginny beg like this was painful in a way that made Bellatrix’s mind games feel like child’s play. But still, she didn’t yield. She couldn’t if she wanted to see her friends be safe. Hermione used all of her remaining resolve to make her demands to the taller witch beside her.

“I’ll go. But you leave them be. Kill anyone else and I’ll make sure it’s the last thing you do.” Her voice whispered fiercely.

A smirk came across Bellatrix’s face. “Bold words, girl. But I’ll play along if they do.” Nodding at the aurors. Bellatrix let out a piercing whistle that felt like a needle sliding through Hermione’s eardrum. Darkness fell over them as the dragon let it’s long flowing tail back down through the hole in the ceiling, spiraling it down til it formed a rather unsafe looking staircase.

Confusion of what they were supposed to do now ran through her. That was until an orange blur whizzed by the duo like a bullet. Hermione watched slack jawed as Crookshanks and his bulky body leapt up the fountain, onto the tail, and began running up the appendage with an agility she didn’t see often from the smooshy faced feline. He kept going til he reached the creatures awaiting back. Her familiar pranced up to the stand at the dragon’s shoulder, eying the huge creature down like he was the dragon in this situation. Watching Bellatrix’s familiar slowly roll its vibrant eyes down at her best friend was unnerving. A single snap of the beak and it would be over for him.

But it never came.

The horned beast snorted at Crookshanks, but left him alone to stand atop it’s shoulder. Now the two stared down with their luminescent eyes, waiting for her and Bellatrix to join them.

And like hitting the unpause button on a tv remote, the world was sent into motion once more.

Bellatrix made a break for the tail, running up it with ease. Hermione hadn’t expected that from a woman her age. The moment she saw Bellatrix kick it into gear, she followed behind her, never once looking back as the two of them began climbing higher and higher towards the exit.

That was around the time that the aurors continued their assault. She blocked what she could and dodged what she couldn’t; a challenge in and of itself given that- although sturdy and stable- running along the sleek fur in her current footwear was not easy. Hermione found herself slipping more often than she liked, the only thing keeping her from falling being her quick thinking and careful foot placement. She didn’t think she would get lucky a third time if she fell.

Up ahead, she could see Bellatrix deflecting much nastier spells than the ones being aimed at her. Hermione hated to be in awe at her skills. Evil she may be- but the one thing someone couldn’t say about Bellatrix was that she wasn’t talented. Or determined.
So focused on the other woman, she lost track of her own situation.

“Bombarda!” Neville screamed in the distance. The spell flew towards Bellatrix at a terrifying speed. A flick of the wrist and it was batted away like nothing. That wouldn’t have been a problem had the deflected spell not been sent hurtling down and hitting the creature’s tail. A roar sounded above them and it shook it’s appendage in anger, causing the whole thing to sway. Hermione screamed as her entire body tilted to the left and she began falling over the left side. A fall at this height would surely kill her.

‘For Merlin’s sake, not again!’ She panicked as her world began to tilt.

The sensation of falling didn’t last as long as she thought, which confused her greatly. She could’ve sworn they were much closer to the top than this.

Pain made itself know in her left shoulder.

Her eyes darted towards it. Hitting the ground at the speed she was going should’ve hurt more than just her one shoulder. Hermione hadn’t even cast a cushioning charm. The world came back into focus and her frantic mind finally caught up to the reason for her lack of full body pain.

Truly it was an unexpected sight.

Bellatrix had caught her arm and was in the midst of pulling her up to safety. The woman grunted as she dragged her upwards, cursing to herself as she kept her eyes focused on those down below. She was vulnerable right now and they both knew it. One spell and it would send both women careening towards the ground again. The younger siren didn’t think her body could take another fall like that. Hermione had already come this far, there was no way she was going to back down now. The moment she was in reach of the tail again, she grabbed hold and started working her way up too.

With a final heave, she was back on top, Bellatrix standing beside her with a look of rage upon her face. It was clear what the woman wanted to do to Neville and Hermione was quick to get back on her feet and pull the woman along the way.

“Don’t! You promised to let them go.” She hissed.

“If they played along too. Longbottom does that again and he’ll be laying in a bed next to his dear ole mummy and daddy.” Bellatrix snarled, moving to grip Hermione’s arm and pulling her along in lieu of being dragged herself.

There wasn’t a hint of playfulness in her voice.

The top came upon them quickly and before long, they had reached the creature’s torso. Hermione felt a strange bit of nostalgia being upon the dragon’s back, remembering doing something similar after stealing from Bellatrix’s vault.

It was somewhat poetic that the woman was now stealing her away in return.

Bellatrix grabbed one of the creature’s horns, prompting Hermione to grab the other. Crookshanks moved to lay crouch between her legs, digging his claws into the creature’s beneath as best he could.

“Corvus, back to the mansion.” The woman commanded.

The woman’s familiar- that she now learned was named Corvus- gave a croaky roar and leapt into the air; it’s tail spiraling up behind it like a chameleon’s tongue. Once in the air, Hermione had to exert every bit of energy she had left to hang on for dear life. Despite it’s massive size, the beast was
Hermione’s heart was beating a mile a minute as it piloted through the buildings and into the afternoon sky at alarming speeds.

Hermione could barely see with the wind and sun hindering her eyesight, but she was sure that the sight from up there was amazing. She wished the circumstances now were different. When she escaped on the white dragon with Harry and Ron during the war, the sky had been a grey and dreary scene— the mood brought even further down by the fact that Dobby’s death had still been fresh on their minds. It was rare that she got to see the world this high up and she would’ve loved to experience it in a better setting than the current one.

‘Another time.’ She promised herself. It would have to be when they arrived at whatever new hideout the woman had planned out for them. She doubted it was the old mansion she had come to know. To return to the scene of a crime for the third time was an absolutely ludicrous thing to consider. Bellatrix’s family no doubt had places hidden all over the world. Whether to simply live in away from the prying eyes of the ministry, or to conceal them when the dark lord came to visit— the place they were going was definitely going to be two things.

Hidden and dangerous.

At least her friends would be safe with the insane woman taking them back into hiding. She had a feeling the other didn’t want to come and do a kidnapping like this for a second time.

The group was weaving in and out of the clouds in relative peace before a voice cried out to them over the sound of rushing winds.

“Bellatrix, stop right now and release Miss Granger at once!” It called.

She snapped her head to look over her shoulder. “Oh you’ve got to be kidding me! Idiots!” She hissed, turning to see an unwelcomed sight.

Bellatrix gave her a nasty grin. “I warned you what would happen if they didn’t give up muddy.” She cooed over the rush of wind.

How could she forget? It was the reason why seeing a fleet of aurors gaining on them with brooms became such an unhappy sight. A few months ago she would’ve given anything to see such a thing.

But now?

This was the epidemic of out of the frying pan and into the fire and Hermione was a hundred percent sure that one side would not come out of this without getting burned.

Hermione had never been particularly religious, but the woman found herself praying that she was wrong on both accounts.
Hermione never liked war movies.

The way the planes weaved and twirled about the clouds; desperately dodging barrages of bullets and missiles in order to stay amongst the clouds. Yet despite being only in her twenties- and though it only lasted around a year- Hermione had seen war. Not every aspect of it mind you, but enough. The witch couldn’t count the amount of times her and the others had taken to the sky in order to fight. Or more like- how many times Ron and Harry had. For the most part, her battles had been fought on the ground. There was the Gringotts escape, and that time they had to rescue Harry from his house to get to the Weasleys; but other than those two times, Hermione had the luxury of seeing battle with her feet firmly placed upon the soil.

And she’d never been more grateful for the fact until right now.

The siren was going to *vomit*; poor Crookshanks looked even worse. She doubted the woman piloting cared about that one bit. She couldn’t blame her. Hermione was both impressed and fearful of how skillfully the woman guided the beast beneath their feet. Bellatrix was steering like she’d done this a thousand times before. One arm held onto the antler-like horns on the creature’s head while the other was pointed back at their pursuers. For the majority of the barrage, Bellatrix was doing well, but the woman was clearly getting tired- relying heavily on evasion rather than defense now. Before long, the four were spinning, rolling, jerking, and twirling between the clouds as the world around them became overrun by colorful spells of every nature. The whole ordeal was scrambling her innards. She wanted to help out- cast a few harmless spells her friend’s way to get them to stop, but the problem was- she couldn’t.

Oh her magic was fine, she could still feel a good bit of it ebbing away at the center of her core. That wasn’t the issue. To put it simply; she was tired. Bone dead *tired*. Throughout the day she had been tossed, pushed, carried, and all around manhandled by everyone she knew. Holding onto the horn of the dragon was taking up what little strength she had left. Any attempts to use her other hand went out the window when Crookshanks almost went tumbling off the creature’s head. Had it not been for her quick reflexes grabbing him by the scruff of his neck- he would’ve surely fallen by now. Hermione had to bend to grab him, and instead of returning to her feet, she stayed crouching where she was. Kneeling made it easier, but she felt incredibly vulnerable right now. The aurors weren’t letting up and she didn’t know how much further they could go on like this, a thought she felt the woman across from her needed to realize right away.

“We have to lose them!” She screamed over the rush of wind.
“Incredible! Had I known about your ingenious plan before, we wouldn’t be in this situation now would we!” Bellatrix snarled back sarcastically. She leaned forward on her heels, prompting their ride to dive down beneath the clouds. When they broke through, the fleeing witches were greeted to the sparkling waves of the ocean.

A red spell almost smacked Hermione right in the back of the head. Had she not been looking at the other witch and had seen the incoming spell coming from the corner of her eye, then she would’ve been hit and sent tumbling down into the sea below.

The chase was growing more dangerous by the minute. Something needed to be done and she knew exactly what that something was.

“Why aren’t you singing!” She yelled at the other woman. The woman growled at her menacingly.

“I don’t need to. We will lose these fools soon enough.” Was her reply, steering them closer and closer towards the water. Looking back, Hermione noticed Harry was beginning to gain on them. Given his talent for Quidditch, it really wasn’t a surprise that he was taking more risks than the others in order to catch up to them. She thought it best to inform Bellatrix of that seeing as the woman had clearly forgotten.

“It sure doesn’t look like it!” Hermione yelled. Bellatrix leaned her entire body to the left, causing the dragon to make a sharp turn in that direction and almost sending Hermione crashing into the water. She glared up at the woman in anger. “Careful!”

“Be careful. Hurry up,” Bellatrix mocked. “Make up your mind muddy.”

“I did make up my mind! Use your siren abilities!”

“No!” The woman snarled, jerking again to dodge a barrage of spells curtesy of Harry and Ginny who too was beginning to gain on them. At this rate, they wouldn’t be getting very far, and being in the middle of the ocean wasn’t helping their get away. As much as she loved her friends right now for trying so hard to save her- Hermione couldn’t afford to get caught now. Bellatrix was being stubborn. What the woman was trying to prove right now didn’t matter. If she had to sacrifice her own comfort and secrets and pride like she’s done over these last couple of months, there was no way in hell she was going to let Bellatrix keep hers.

They were in this together now- even if neither one of them want to admit or accept that fact. The witch would just have to learn the hard way like she did.

“Bellatrix if you don’t sing… I’m going to let go.” She told the other woman over the rush of wind.

Obsidian eyes whipped around towards where she was desperately clinging onto the dragon. She had gotten the woman’s attention; now Hermione needed to talk fast. As much as she wanted Bellatrix to take her seriously, having their driver be distracted would not end well for any of them. Of course the dragon- *Corvus*- was doing a great job so far, but the creature didn’t have eyes in the back of his head. *They* were the eyes. And the ears. And the offense and defense, and were basically playing too many roles for a party of four. This needed to end and there was only one sure fire way to do that.

Back Bellatrix in a corner and pray that she was right.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to do by not using your powers, but it’s going to get you killed and me captured. And I’m sure a certain part of both of us don’t want that to happen.”

As if knowing exactly who she was addressing, Hermione felt a particularly sharp jab from her siren
side. She didn’t know if Bellatrix felt the same thing, but given the way the woman jerked her head side to side like a possessed soul, she figured the older siren was getting the same treatment. A moment of silence past between them and she watched in fascination as the woman’s eyes began flitting about in every direction. Bellatrix was clearly having an internal fight with herself. A heated one if the speed at which her eyes were bouncing about was any indication.

She squeaked when they came to an abrupt halt and locked onto her own.

And the woman grinned like a cat with a canary.

“Fine.” She drawled. “But I get rid of them how I wish.”

“You can’t kill them.” Was Hermione’s immediate response. “You promised.”

Bellatrix laughed a flicked her hand in the other’s direction. “I made no promises to you. And even if I did, what power over me do you have to make me keep them?”

Hermione was going to say something dangerous just then. Something that would send the woman into a frenzy if she spoke them. So she kept her mouth shut and let the other believe what she wanted.

Naturally her silence amused the woman greatly. “I thought so. I hold all the power here,” Her dark eyes seemed to brighten as she looked over her shoulder at the aurors chasing them. “And being away from me this long has clearly made you forget that. So if you want me to remind you so badly…”

The woman let go of the horn and strutted shakily to stand at the center of the creature’s back. A flick of her wand and Hermione watched as the fur that laid beneath their feet began to rise. Strands of black whipped around like sentient tentacles, latching onto Bellatrix’s torso and legs, securing her firmly in place. To her horror, the same black strands rose to latch onto her as well. The only problem was that they didn’t treat her as kindly as they did Bellatrix.

Hermione’s legs were covered up to her stomach, a yelp escaping her throat as she was pulled flush against the horn she’d been clinging to. The young Gryffindor had to hold onto her familiar with both arms so as to make sure he didn’t go flying off too. The added restraints were uncomfortable, but secure. There was no way she was falling off and she didn’t know if she liked that fact without knowing what the woman’s plan was. Engrossed with her sudden manhandling, she almost missed Bellatrix finishing her sentence from earlier.

“…then I will make sure you never forget again. Corvus!”

The command went unspoken but Corvus must’ve understood none the less. The creature began trilling, a ragged and booming call that Hermione felt thrumming through the soles of her feet. Suddenly it was no longer a dragon beneath her feet, but a war drum. Bellatrix joined in soon after. The woman began humming deep in the bass of her chest, a sound so low that it was hard for even Hermione to hear it. Corvus stayed in sync with the dark rhythm. Hermione could only go along for the ride as the duo’s haunting tune began growing even louder and affecting the world around them. Once beautiful white clouds began swirling violently, their translucent ivory color becoming murky grey and then a dark obsidian. There was no openings in the sky anymore and Hermione found herself swimming over a sea of darkness.

The aurors and her other friends must’ve known something bad was about to happen. Harry and Ginny had since fallen back to regroup with the others. It was a smart move if they ended up having to go on the defense. But falling back didn’t mean they were giving up.
A boom shook her heart.

‘Thunder?’ She thought to herself.

A bolt of lightning broke from the sea of clouds above them.

Bellatrix stopped her humming to throw her head back in laughter.

“Hehehehe.” She chuckled gleefully. “Let’s see how well you follow with the storm at your backs. I wanna see you burn.”

“No!” Hermione bellowed.

But it was too late; Bellatrix had already begun her song.

*Ivory to ebony; the sky does cry*

*Ivory to ebony; the wind turns to knives*

*Ivory to ebony; the thunder booms on*

*Ivory to ebony; the sea storm song*

Hermione’s heart was doing summersaults in her chest. Their pursuers had stopped casting spells, instead, setting their wands alight with the *lumos* charm. Bolts of lightning occasionally shot down from above to set the sea ablaze with white light. Hermione could see them off in the distance, but the more the siren and her familiar continued their tribal like duet, the closer and closer the lightning seemed to come.

*Sea down below, crush the sky up high*

*Let the winds lift the water*

*Break the lands with the tide*

*Make the lightning kiss the ocean*

*Take their lives in the flood*

*May the water be their coffins*

*Bathe the sea with their blood*

“No!” Hermione screeched.

She heard the danger before she saw it.

Through the thunder claps and the drumming of the dragon’s chest, Hermione could hear the roar of the ocean begin to grow; the rush of water overcoming even that of the storm and nothing set her more on edge than that. The blackened clouds started swirling violently. For a moment, Corvus waivered under the new currents, but the beast remained strong and kept beating his wings to combat the gales.

The others weren’t so lucky.

Brooms were hearty, but not invincible. Hermione could only watch on in terrors and anxiety as her
friends struggled to keep up with them, their brooms and limbs flailing about in every direction in an
effort to stay in the air and on their tail. In order to avoid getting shot down or falling out of the sky,
many of them had abandoned their wands to their pockets and sleeves- both hands needed to be on
the broom if they wanted to survive.

Not that it was the wind they needed to worry about.

The impending danger came about subtly. First came the sound, then came the static. The nauseous
witch could only watch in wonder as her hair began lifting upwards. Strands of brown locks un-
plastered themselves from her face to hover about her like a head of snakes. The same thing could be
seen happening to Bellatrix’s hair and that of the aurors. Part of her wanted to laugh at how silly they
all probably looked but the humor was stripped from her throat as a light began to break through the
darkness of the world below them.

Her eyes squinted to try and make it out. ‘Wait. Is that a-’

The world exploded.

In colors, in light, in sound- the sea became as deadly as the skies overhead.

The thick floor of obsidian water cracked like a volcano and erupted upwards. Waves, far bigger
than the one that almost killed her back on the island, broke away from the surface. The water was
bad- the lightning thrumming through it made it worse. There was nowhere for shadows to hide
now. The screeching of the electricity on the water sounded like the death cries of a thousand birds.
Her ears were ringing; her eyes were stinging, and Hermione would’ve given anything to close both
of her senses if it meant even the tiniest bit of relief from the overstimulation going on inside of her.
Poor Crookshanks was yowling in agony. The only relief she could provide him was to pull the
creature against her soggy sweater and muffle as much of the world from him as she could.

The waves was hot on their heels. Through the waters, her heart shuddered in her chest from the
amount of dead sea creatures being swept along in the chaos. Their charred and electrified carcasses
looming over them all was horrifying to watch. More importantly, it shined a light on exactly what
Bellatrix’s intentions were. Hermione knew now why the fur was surrounding them. A creature that
breathed lightning would no doubt have some kind of defense against it as well.

The fur was grounding them from being roasted alive.

Bellatrix was ready to fry everyone and let their charred corpses fall into the sea.

And Hermione would have to watch all of it as a helpless bystander.

“No.” She gasped brokenly. “No, no,no,no- Bellatrix!” She screamed. “Bellatrix, please! Stop! You
promised! You promised to let them go!”

The woman pretended to not hear her and the water continued rushing towards her friends like a
shark out for blood. She couldn’t hear anyone talking, but Kingsley appeared to be yelling at the
others. What he was saying, she didn’t know, but it seemed to be along the lines of retreat. One by
one, she watched the aurors begin to fall back, tilting up and over the incoming danger and
disappearing from sight. The crowd began to thin.

Twenty became fourteen. Then ten. Then Seven.

Her heart decided this was a good time to stop as she kept her eyes on the few who remained.

Like a flock of avenging Valkyries, the group were the last to remain in pursuit. Kingsley was clearly still trying to convince the others fall back, but it was a lost cause.

‘Stop. Please just stop.’ She begged silently.

Her eyes weren’t just stinging because of the storm.

Hermione knew she had to do something. She began pulling at the fur with all her might; even enlisting the help of Crookshanks and his claws to tear away at the strands.

It didn’t budge.

Her heart was in her throat. What she wouldn’t give to have her powers right now. One word, and she could make all of this stop. One word to Bellatrix and the woman would listen to her pleas whether she wanted to or not. It would have been so easy.

And she couldn’t do it. Bellatrix was right with what she said earlier. She hated the collar more than she hated the woman. It deprived her of something that she’d been living with all her life- something she’d been slowly coming to accept and use like another limb. Her siren side was just there wilting away beneath the surface; her magic a somewhat unreliable tool without her wand.

Helpless. It was something she felt but knew she wasn’t and one look at the danger set before her proved enough to remind herself of that.

It would be dangerous and had the possibility of backfiring on her terribly, however, given her current situation, Hermione knew she didn’t really have a choice.

Determined and a fire lit within her belly- Hermione maneuvered her left hand to face outwards in front of her. She kept one arm firmly around Crookshanks who looked at her with wide eyes. ‘Don’t fall, don’t fall, don’t fall. Aim for Bellatrix.’ She hissed to herself. ‘Three, two, one!’

“Diffindo!” She cried out. Her hope was that the fur would fall away little butter, but it was clear now that the creature’s coat was a lot sturdier than she first realized. How else had it been able to block so many spells earlier. She didn’t give up. Hermione fought through her own tiredness and pain to cast the spell again. “Diffindo!”

One. Two. Three.

The fourth time proved to be the charm.

Unable to take the continued onslaught in a single spot-or perhaps irritated with the pain- Corvus gave out an angered bellow, the protective restraints falling away from her to assimilate back into the creature below. Freedom, but at a cost. You see; there was nothing grounding her and so the electricity surging through the air made itself known down to every nerve ending in her body. It wasn’t as painful as she feared it would be, but the change was noticeable. Not only that, but in freeing herself, there was nothing preventing her from hurtling off. With Corvus flying forward, and the wind pushing back, Hermione was sent tumbling down his spine.

Right to where she wanted to be.

Hermione crashed into Bellatrix’s back with a pain filled grunt, causing the woman to lurch forward from the force of it. The siren whipped around to see what had happened. Upon setting her wild gaze on Hermione, she began screeching at the top of her lungs, stopping her song and nearly drowning out the drum of the dragon beneath their feet.
“Idiot! What do you think you’re doing!” The siren hissed menacingly. It distracted the woman long enough that the wave began to slow.

“Stopping you! You’re going to kill them!” Hermione yelled back. The young witch was practically clinging to Bellatrix’s legs, pulling herself up with unsteadiness to cling to her back. She hated how close that put her to the woman, but at the moment, she really couldn’t be picky with clinging to the only thing keeping her from plummeting to her death. She and Crookshanks would surely be swept away and with what little strength she had left; the Gryffindor didn’t know if she would survive the currents. She continued pleading with the woman.

“You have to let them go. You can’t kill them. Please.” The last word left her lips, burning like acid dripped upon her tongue. Her hope was that the other would yield to seeing the younger siren beg. She couldn’t see the woman’s face with her own pressed into the back of her dress, but Hermione heard and felt every word the woman spoke all the same.

“I can do what I want, mudblood. Don’t presume to boss me again.” She growled so lowly that Hermione almost missed the next part. “You have nothing over me any longer.”

There was something weird with the way the other woman said that last part. Like there was something deeper there that she was missing. She would dig further into that later.

It was clear that the older witch had no care for her words. That wasn’t new. The other only responded to actions- usually drastic ones that ended up endangering her life. Fine. They had already come this far and she was already in the worse position she could possibly be in at this point.

What was risking her life one more time to get what she needed?

Nothing.

Not when there were seven others right now doing the exact same thing behind her.

There were a thousand things she could blame her ever growing madness on, but she figured that keeping Bellatrix at the top of that list wouldn’t be far from the truth.

So Hermione maneuvered around the fur and pulled at the other’s dress until she now stood face to face with her captor. Hermione looked into the depths of the other’s eyes and didn’t flinch as the other held her gaze.

“You’re right.” It felt strange now that it was her to whisper so closely in the other’s ear. In her mind she had to keep repeating that it was because of the storm raging around them. She continued. “I don’t have any power of you. That was taken from me.”

The woman smirked, but she didn’t stop there.

“I can’t use my wand. I’ve no strength left to give you the beating you rightfully deserve. The bond with my other half is nothing more than angry words and painful scratching at the back of my mind. You have all of that and more…but there’s one thing that you will never have completely. Something that will never truly be yours ever again.” Now it was time for her to smirk. “Control.”

Bellatrix’s expression went from smirking confidence to genuine confusion at what the other was getting at. “What does that have to do with me doing anything you say, girl?”

She gave the woman a sad smile. “I hate you Bellatrix. More than you can ever know. You can’t imagine the amount of times I wished you dead.”
“The feeling is mutual I assure you.” The other hissed.

“And yet you’re still alive.” She said lightly. “And am I. Now you can say this is all a part of your plan. That the only reason you came back for me is to torment my friends and I, but I know it’s a lie. You didn’t want to come back for me; you had to. It made you…and it’ll keep making you til you fix what they did.”

Bellatrix snarled and smashed the two of their foreheads together. Hermione flinched, but refused to back down. With gritted teeth, Bellatrix spoke to Hermione while balancing tepidly on the edge of her rage. “Don’t test me, girl.”

Hermione smiled. “All the power in the world means nothing if you don’t have power over yourself.”

There was no warning when she let go of the silky black dress before her.

Genuine shock reached the other siren’s eyes, Bellatrix scrambled to reach out and grab onto the front of her sweater; the witch’s single arm being the only thing keeping Hermione and Crookshanks from plunging to their deaths.

She wasn’t afraid though.

How could she when almost every aspect of her life up until now had terrified her.

This whole situation had caused so much death and destruction because of her. People had lost their lives trying to protect her. If she wasn’t ready to gamble her own in return- then she wasn’t half the Gryffindor people knew her to be.

At the worst- she would die. And that should’ve frightened her more, but it simply didn’t. What would happen to Bellatrix if she did die…well she didn’t know.

Neither of them did.

What she did know, was that whatever torture awaited them should the other die was bad enough to kick Bellatrix’s instincts into overdrive and save her.

Now here they were; two sirens and a cat on the back of a dragon getting pursued by the ministry as a wave of electricity nipped at their heels from afar.

What a life she’s living.

“No tests. No games.” Her voice was calm and almost serene. “This is just me trying to save the last thing I have left with what I have left. It may mean nothing to you, but it means something to the siren inside of you and that’s something the both of us are going to have to live with for the rest of our lives.”

Her words snapped the last thread keeping Bellatrix’s rage at bay. She felt it.

Bellatrix, in her anger, began to loosen her hands from Hermione- fully prepared to throw the younger woman into the sea. To both their shock however, the fingers stopped midway. Then Bellatrix tightened her grip on Hermione like her life depended on it. Emotions flashed across her face. Anger, confusion, frustration, shock- it was unnerving to watch the woman cycle through so many feelings in such quick succession. Those onyx eyes, illuminated by the lightning still raging behind Hermione’s back were rolling around in the woman’s sockets with reckless abandon. No words were shared between as the woman fought her internal battle. She’d seen the other do this
before. Bellatrix was in a war with her siren side, a losing one at that.

What she wouldn’t give to see what that was like.

The struggled lasted only a few moments. Finally, a sound left the other’s mouth.

*Screaming.*

A scream tore from that pale, skinny throat. It was a horrible, frustrated, unholy sound that rattled every bone in Hermione’s body. Bellatrix wasn’t saying anything through the frustrated tantrum, the only thing happening outside of her wails were the woman’s eyes bouncing frantically back and forth between her and her friends. Hermione looked down at her chest, a strange feeling centered there beginning to draw her attention. Wide eyes watched in morbid fascination as Bellatrix’s hand seemed to have gained a mind of its own, struggling between opening and closing around Hermione.

She was fighting.

Bellatrix was fighting so hard to betray her instincts.

Both her prizes lay before her and yet neither of them were achievable. It was literally tearing the woman apart inside.

In hindsight, she should’ve let the woman continue to suffer. She deserved it for all she’d done. It wasn’t like the witch could end up any worse than she already was. That’s what her heart wanted to do. Her mind was thinking more rationally. If she let Bellatrix fry her brain any more than this, then she wouldn’t get the collar off. The thundering headache her siren side had been causing up til now would continue for the rest of her life. That’s if something worse didn’t happen.

She should’ve. She *could’ve.*

She didn’t.

Because she saw it.

A tear. Just *one* mind you- but the implication of that was enough.

Bellatrix was *crying.*

And she didn’t know *why.* Something more was going on here. Something remained rattling around in the other’s mind and she didn’t know anything about it except one thing.

It was *enough.*

Her next move was a bold one and hopefully the right one.

Hermione grabbed a hold of the woman’s pointed chin and directed the swirling eyes down to hers. When they locked onto each other this time, she didn’t need her creature powers to peer into the other’s soul. She did that all on her own, the move being more symbolic than anything else. With an emotion she couldn’t quite put her finger on, she whispered words that she hoped reached whatever place Bellatrix’s mind had taken her.

“You can’t let me go any more than I can. So *choose.* Lose them,” She gestured over her shoulder to her struggling friends, “Or lose *everything.*”

The other’s eyes snapped into focus at the word everything. A look of haunting misted through those black orbs and she wondered what it meant.
Bellatrix didn’t speak immediately after. Instead, Hermione watched the blue begin to die away from the other’s eyes. She turned to look over her shoulder. The wave was no longer electrified, though that didn’t stop the water from coming.

And it didn’t look like it was slowing down at all.

Bellatrix didn’t turn from her gaze when she called to her familiar. “Corvus.”

The drumming of it’s chest stopped to croak at her in acknowledgement.

“Lose them.” Came her monotone voice.

The world shifted on it’s axis.

The creature lowered his tail into the water. Vibrations- strong enough to rattle her brain shook her skull. She had to grab a hold of Bellatrix to stabilize herself. There was a lot of confusion as to what was happening- right up until a shadow appeared over her head, droplets of water dripping down onto her head.

She looked up.

And wished she hadn’t.

The wave was now above them, following overhead like the hand of a great sea creature reaching out to grab them. She looked at Bellatrix who stared back with an expressionless mask of indifference.

“You haven’t lost nearly enough.” She spoke over the rush of wind. Neither of them had let go of one another. She was unnerved by how calm the other was being. That usually spelled something far worse than having the woman be angry at her. “Not yet. But you will. And that thought alone is the only reason your friend’s still live…if they can swim.”

There was no warning afterwards.

Corvus beat his wings to rise above the wave, the tip of its tail peeking out of the ocean surface. Then the great beast tucked in it’s wings and dived.

Her stomach was ready to fall out of her mouth. They descended at ungodly speeds- the water following them like an obedient pet from above. The Gryffindor only had a few moments to turn and see the others veer their brooms off to the left and right avoiding the incoming tide. She figured that the creature would do the same- the wave being a deterrent more than anything else.

She was wrong.

Bellatrix’s wand was in her hand before she even realized the woman had moved to pull it out. She waved it over the three of them in a familiar pattern; the bubble charm given the world a glimmering sheen as it engulfed their heads.

When Corvus hit the water the coolness of the ocean waves washed through her like a flood of healing salve.

The sea was as endless as it was dark.

Their ride’s dark fur had melded into the abyss around them, the strands slicking down with the weight of the water, giving the dragon an appearance closer to that of a giant manta ray than a
dragon. The sun- what little of it that had been left could not reach down here. The only remaining light was the ambient reflection of Bellatrix’s pale face staring back at her with not a trace of emotion.

Down and down they went, until her eyes could see nothing and the pressure on her chest was growing uncomfortable to bear. They drifted through the sea without saying a word to one another for quite some time.

Hermione couldn’t see Bellatrix looking at her, but she could feel it. A shiver went up her spine, one not related to the frigidness of the ocean. She closed her eyes so as not to be staring into the nothingness. Not like she was missing out on anything afterall.

This new sensation of weightlessness didn’t just take the unyielding tension off her body, but off her mind as well.

Today had probably been the hardest day of her life. She had given up so much in such a small amount of time. There would be no going back now. No chance of redemption from those she loved. Hermione’s thoughts floated further into pessimism while her body tried to numb itself from the exhaustion. It was her hope that if she let herself drift off into the waking void known as sleep- then perhaps for just a few hours- she could forget.

Forget about the ministry and those who had died to protect her. Forget about her friends who nearly lost their lives to save her. Forget about Bellatrix whose actions and words today made her feel every bit as insane as the woman herself.

Forget everything about today as if it never happened.

Holding onto Crookshanks as tightly as possible, Hermione let the current carry them under. Time past, how much of it couldn’t be known whether her eyes were closed or not. What she did know was that she was tired. Exhaustion exuded from every part of her body, the adrenaline that once coursed through her body had all but run out. Her legs caved in on themselves, yet she didn’t end up falling. The same black strands from earlier had swirled to grab hold of her and her feline companion. This time, Hermione had no intentions of fighting it. Without the threat of floating away, the siren was able to relax- something she knew she may not be able to do for a very long time now that she had returned to her tormentor. Hermione feared that as she started drifting off into the dream-world that Bellatrix would not let her sleep, but just like so many times before, the woman surprised her by leaving her alone.

Hermione was thankful for the ‘mercy’ even if the feeling left the taste of ash in her mouth.

With sleep- came the nightmares; brought about from seeing her best friends and mentors risk life and limb to stay together. In the dreams that now plagued her, there was no understanding from anyone. No love or forgiveness or anything else to somehow relieve the guilt of what she had done. In their eyes, Hermione did not trust them. They had given up everything for her to be happy and healthy and she threw it back in their faces because she thought she knew better.

Ungrateful traitor; that’s all she was to them now.

Even as she cried their in the depths of the ocean- her tears washed away before they ever left her eyes- Hermione knew she would come to crave these nightmares. She would gladly let them embed themselves into her every thought if it meant seeing the betrayed and worried looks on their faces once more.
After all; the nightmares would eventually serve as the last time she’d see any of her friend’s faces for many years to come…
Chapter 36 - Home

Chapter Notes

Oh hey there! It's me, your friendly neighborhood liar who said they'd update once a week. ovo' Mad sorry! My work schedule isn't consistent and my stress levels are on ten. Don't wanna bring that energy to the archive. That being said, the real reason this chapter is late is mostly because i've deleted it about ten times. 0v0 I may post the chapter guide differences at the very end of the chapter in another section just to show you how much we've deviated from what I started years ago. XD That being said, here's the chapter, ive already started writing the next and i'm more clear about where we're going. Cookies to whoever notices the big change i've made and hid in plain sight. >w< Please enjoy!

Chapter 36 – Home

Hermione woke up groggily.

She groaned, digging her palms into the lids of her eyes while adjusting to a more comfortable position. The young siren tried opening them only to slam them closed a moment later.

“Merlin that’s bright.” She hissed.

Hermione flipped over. She’d go blind if she tried that again, so instead, the fatigued woman decided that looking at whatever surface was beneath her would be a much better option.

She tried again, this time much slower in order to adjust to the stark change in lighting. Doing so allowed her to finally take stock of where she was.

The room was big and virtually empty. The tiles were a blend of browns, reds, and golds- the three colors arranged in a repeating pattern of geometric shapes across the entire expanse of the floor. Everything was dark aside from the single chandelier beaming down overhead. There were no windows. Or at least she couldn’t spot any. If their were, they must’ve been tiny or much higher up along the walls because Hermione couldn’t see anything outside the parameters of the single source shining down on her. Just darkness. She didn’t know what was with Bellatrix and these almost pitch black rooms, but it wouldn’t kill the woman to invest in some better lighting around her hideouts.

Hermione tried getting to her feet. It was slow going and she almost ended up falling back to the ground from how weak she was.

“My back is killing me.” She moaned. Once steady, she spun around to look for an exit. Nothing. Why was everything so dark? It didn’t matter. Hermione didn’t like not knowing where she was and so she figured that it would be best to just pick a direction and walk towards it. Eventually she’d hit a wall and could feel around it till she found a door.

Eventually she would learn to stop making plans that kept getting foiled.

Hermione veered off to the left of where she was; limping her way towards what she was hoping was an exit. The light grew dimmer until it faded out completely. She noticed that no matter how
close she grew to her desired destination, the darkness didn’t let up. *Lumos* wasn’t exactly an energy consuming spell, but having to lift her arms and carry it wasn’t something that sounded appealing to her at the moment. Then again, if Bellatrix wasn’t so stingy with the lightning in her mansion- and she was quite sure that’s where she was- then this wouldn’t be a problem in the first place.

One foot in front of the other. She didn’t think that doing something so mundane would be so difficult. The wounded woman promised to find a bath the moment she found the door.

“But where is it!” She yelled shuffling further and further into what felt like the void. “Does this room ever end!”

It did.

And she found that out in the most unexpected way possible.

By running into what was probably the softest wall she’d ever felt in her life.

Hermione blinked in confusion. She still couldn’t see two feet in front of her, but the way her face pressed against something soft and warm told her that there was something clearly blocking her path. One thing came to mind but she quickly discarded the thought. Bellatrix may have been mental but she doubted the other was going to live in a psych ward of all places. That was the only place she knew of that had padded rooms.

The siren was fully prepared to feel her way around for the door when a huge puff of hot air blew over the top of her head.

She froze.

Hermione peered into the darkness; her eyes widening to the point of being painful. She had a bad feeling about what was above her and getting as far away as possible was now her primary objective. Maybe she should just turn around and take off in the other direction and-

“Mrow.”

“Shit!” Hermione jumped violently, turning around to see Crookshanks sitting behind her under the light of the chandelier. Crookshanks stared up at his master calmly; his fluffy tail swishing back and forth against the marble floor. He stared up at her as if he hadn’t just scared the life out of her with his sudden appearance.

“Crooks, I’ve never thought about getting you a bell, but that’s about to change right *now*. Where did you come from?” She asked, knowing full well the feline wouldn’t be able to answer her. Hermione approached the creature and bent to pick him up.

A much stronger puff of hot air stopped her from doing so and sent her stumbling forward. She was about to scream at whatever it was to stop- fully prepared to jump down Bellatrix’s throat about whatever curse she had placed on the room- but one look at her familiar made her rethink her decision.

Crookshanks was no longer looking at her. Instead the cat was looking over his shoulder and up to the left. She followed his gaze.

And saw a huge pair of yellow eyes peering back down at her.

Her heart was trying to punch a hole through her sternum.
Seeing that the jig was up, Hermione watched the eyes crinkle and then float up and down in the darkness. Something soft brushed against her back and she whipped around to see a long black tail drag across the floor. The air shifted in every direction. From overhead, the chandelier swung wildly - the dragon who’d been secretly lurking around her continuing to shuffle about. So focused on him, she almost missed the reveal of a light from her right.

A window.

Moonlight streamed in from the frosted glass and illuminated the shifting creature as he coiled about in the darkness.

One, two, three, four- the number of windows being revealed to her was both reliving and unnerving. She hadn’t heard anything until the dragon had literally been breathing down on the top of her head. He blended in perfectly with the room and could’ve snapped her up without her ever knowing.

She found herself locking onto Corvus’ face, the creature now much more illuminated since unblocking the windows with his body. Seeing him out in the open sky was one thing. Gazing at the beast now was an entirely different experience.

His horns were practically scraping the roof; their magnificent curves serving to cast a wide array of intricate shadows upon the wall. Topaz orbs stared down at her with an intelligence that she already knew most dragons possessed. Of course she’d never been around one long enough to make that observation, but it was clear that no matter how much he changed in appearance - this was still that same spindly leg, croaky bird that had followed her around what felt like ages ago.

The two of them gawked at one another for an uncomfortable amount of time before the dragon decided to break the tension.

The creature’s tongue darted out to lick at its beak. Hermione saw a flicker of blue lightning flit about the inside of it’s mouth. She wondered if it worked like dragon fire or was the beast’s insides constantly alight with electricity.

It would have to be a question for another time.

Corvus extended his wings out and raised them to cover his head. In an impressive flurry of movement, the creature’s body began to shrink in on itself. His horns dissolved into dust, the black particles flying about and surrounding him entirely. The wind in the room picked up in spite of all the windows clearly being closed. Her hair lifted as electricity filled the air. Before long, Hermione found herself staring at a tornado of dust and lightning; the image absolutely mesmerizing in this low light setting. It died down eventfully, the dust flaring out and revealing the same spindly bird that she had come to familiarize herself with.

Looking at Corvus now was a lot less unnerving than when he was a huge - probably man eating - dragon. Still impressive of course, but his presence didn’t fill the room like it once did. Not just literally, but figurately as well.

In fact, he had now become the second most intimidating being in the room.

The title now belonged to Bellatrix, who’s sudden appearance made her jump harder than the scare Crookshanks had delivered just moments earlier.

‘How long has she been standing there?’ She wondered.

It had to have been a while. Her clothes, were nearly dry after that storm they’d gone through. The
woman was being too quiet. Far too quiet. She figured that the other would have a lot to say to her, all things considered. Whether it was gloating about what just happened with her friends or just generally being a nasty person- Hermione was expecting a lot more from Bellatrix at the moment than silence.

Bellatrix’s heels clicked along the marble floors; the echo like a clap of thunder in the empty room they occupied. Neither Corvus nor Crookshanks moved when she walked past them to stand before Hermione.

“Let’s go.” The woman demanded.

When she refused to move, the witch struck Hermione with a burning glare and spoke a bit louder. “That wasn’t a request muddy.”

“My name is Hermione.” She said.

Bellatrix lashed out; snatching up Hermione’s arm in a vice grip and pulling the shorter woman closer. She smiled- the first time Hermione seen the other do so since awakening.

“Do I look like I care?” Bellatrix crooned. “We have quite a few things we need to discuss, you and I. About our new…home situation.”

She hissed at the woman and tried snatching her arm away; a useless endeavor. “This isn’t my home. My home is back with my friends and family. This is my prison.”

Bellatrix gave her a sarcastic look of shock. “Prison? Do prisoners usually try and leave with their captors as…enthusiastically as you did?”

“I didn’t have a choice.” The younger witch shot back, hands reaching up to tug at the gold collar still visible around her neck.

“You always have a choice.”

Her response flew from her mouth faster than she could stop it. “Like you did?”

Bellatrix dug her sharp nails into her arm and pulled, nearly head butting Hermione in the process “Watch it. You need me, not the other way around.”

It was true, but that didn’t mean Hermione was going to walk around being a meek, obedient pet as the other wanted. Some might’ve done that if only to save themselves some pain, but she knew Bellatrix. The woman was going to hurt her regardless of what she did or say. It was just a matter of how much. Still, it wouldn’t do her good to antagonize the woman too much this early in the game. She would wait to give the other a piece of her mind once the collar was dealt with.

“Fine.” The Gryffindor relented. “Let’s just get this over with then.”

“Oh, about that.” Bellatrix tutted, removing her hands from her person. “We’ll be postponing your freedom for quite some time. Or did you think that I would let you off that easy.”

A fire ignited in the pit of Hermione’s stomach. “What?” She hissed.

Bellatrix’s face morphed into something much more sinister. “Being away has you thinking that it is you who is pulling the strings around here. But let me remind you of something.” She smiled. “You belong to me. Everything you own- from your wand to your voice- is mine to do with as I
please...that includes hoarding them to myself, should I choose to do so.”

“You can’t do that!” Hermione screamed.

“Yes I can!” Bellatrix screeched in return. “I will not have someone so far beneath my feet presume to tell me what I can and cannot do!”

“Well that’s not entirely up to you is it?” Hermione snarled, getting up and personal with the taller woman. “Or did you forget why you came back for me in the first place.”

Smack.

Bellatrix backhanded Hermione hard enough to send her sprawling to the ground. Crookshanks, seeing his master hurt was all ready to go bounding to her rescue, but Corvus was way ahead of him-swatting at the cat with his fur-like wings. A hissing match started up between them before Corvus took off running with Crookshanks hot on his heels.

Hermione couldn’t go to his rescue.

Three clicks and Bellatrix’s boots came into view. She didn’t have any time to prepare herself before the woman stood over her and plopped straight down on her chest. It was hard to breathe. Hermione started to scratch and beat at the woman who quickly took both her hands and pinned them over her head. Bellatrix’s hair cascaded down onto her face, the smell of the ocean now filling her senses.

It wasn’t the worst smell- if anything- the woman’s hot, heaving breathes were far worse in comparison. It was to be expected, given that the woman wouldn’t have had the chance to do anything about it for who knows how long.

The heat of the other’s body against hers made her unbearably uncomfortable. She just wished her siren side felt the same way instead of causing an unyielding pressure at the back of her mind in an attempt to get even closer to the woman above them.

While she was focused on observing the woman’s proximity, she missed one of the hands lowering to hook around the collar on her neck. Bellatrix’s eyes were fixated on it. Seeing an opportunity, Hermione pulled her own eyes down to the other witches’ neck. It was almost impossible to see in their current lighting, but Hermione saw a noticeable difference in coloration on Bellatrix’s throat.

It was true then.

A part of her still thought that there was an elaborate ruse going around about whether someone like Bellatrix had been suppressed after all.

Onyx eyes drifted up to her face and her captor whispered her next words with barely controlled rage.

“No. I suppose it isn’t. The control I have over myself has been…slipping as of late.” She sneered. “Even now- when all it would take is a little force to snap that skinny little neck of yours- it stays my hand.” Bellatrix let go of the collar and ran a dark nail down the length of her cheek; an unwanted tender gesture. “How safe you must feel right now.”

“I’m never safe around you.” Hermione replied, jerking her face away from the other’s hold. “But you can only hurt me so much. All your words, all your curses and hexes- they can only go so far. I’m not your toy any longer.”

Bellatrix easily grabbed her by the chin and returned her fiery gaze to her. She chuckled and
Hermione tensed up as those black orbs seemed to swirl with something crazed.

“You’re right.” The woman twitched strangely at the words but continued. “You’re always right, aren’t you? Little Miss Know-It-All with every answer written on the back of her hand! Well tell me then; how do you think I got my collar off?”

That… wasn’t what she was expecting the woman to ask. In fact, this entire conversation wasn’t what she was expecting from Bellatrix. She had expected the anger, the curses- even the backhand from earlier didn’t surprise her- and yet the woman was being unusually calm right now.

Calm was always worse than anger when it came to Bellatrix so she stayed on guard even when her lips began answering the woman’s question. “Magic.”

“Magic… Incredible! Truly no answer has ever been so- of course it was magic you idiot!” Bellatrix hissed, annoyed at how vaguely the other siren had answered her. “If it was put there by magic, then only magic can remove it.”

“You think I haven’t tried that?”

The woman’s lips curled up sinisterly. “I didn’t say your own magic can do it.”

That puzzled Hermione. “The collar won’t let me use my siren’s magic.”

Bellatrix rapped her knuckles against Hermione’s head like she was a petulant child. “I’m truly beginning to wonder if anything is even in there under all that hair!”

“You’re one to talk.” Hermione shot back immediately.

Her reward was narrowed eyes, but apparently Bellatrix was done getting sidetracked. “For someone supposedly so smart, you’ve seemed to have forgotten the most important thing about magic. It can be created, but it cannot be destroyed.”

“Only manipulated into something else.” Hermione finished. “I haven’t forgotten.”

“Then you should’ve already known your siren magic isn’t gone, you fool. It’s suppressed. Meaning it’s building up within you every time you try and open that filthy little mouth to sing.” She twirled a brown curl around her finger. “Waiting.”

That got her attention. “Waiting? Waiting for what?”

“Your limit.” The woman whispered.

Bellatrix got far closer into Hermione’s space. Their noses were practically bumping into one another as the other stared deeply into her eyes. She was afraid to blink. The woman’s warm breathe felt like hot lava against her lips and she wouldn’t be surprised if the woman could hear the drumming of her heart from how loudly it seemed to be pounding in her chest.

“Do you want to know how I got my collar off muddy? It’s a rather short tale. One that’s entirely your fault.” The woman brought a handful of her hair forward to shove into Hermione’s face; each word viciously hissed through clenched teeth. “You stole my hair to get into my vault and steal my lord’s precious item! He never told me what it was you know. He simply told me that I would suffer eternally if it were destroyed.” Her voice began to tremble. “A horcrux. My lord had given me a part of his soul… and you took it!” Bellatrix screamed in her face. Hermione was going to retort except Bellatrix was having none of that at the moment.
“Shut. Up. It’s storytime muddy and you’re going to listen.” She whispered before continuing. “As you can imagine, once the sword and the cup were taken, my lord was…angry. The goblins got what they deserved of course, but that wasn’t enough. It was me who had truly failed him.”

Hermione didn’t know if the other had noticed that she was pulling her own hair out with how hard she was gripping it. “He called me to his side, demanded to know what happened. And do you know what I had to tell him? Hmm? Do you!”

Hands darted out to grab hold of both of her shoulders. It was clear now that the woman had gone off into her own world again. She imagined Bellatrix- in her right mind- wouldn’t allow their foreheads to be pressed together like this otherwise.

“Harry Potter, his blood traitor friend, and the mudblood witch made off with the sword and the cup.” A crooked smile smeared itself across the other’s face. “The words had barely left my lips before the curses began. My lord’s followers knew pain; his inner circle knew it best. Creativity for torture had always been my strength, but my lord was innovative.” She sighed reverently.

“And you still served him.” Hermione interjected.

“Gladly.” Bellatrix replied. “I was prepared to die for him, for our cause. And that day I thought I would…until he stopped.” The woman had a far off look in her eyes. “And I wish he hadn’t.”

The way the woman said that just now struck something in Hermione. Never before had she’d seen the woman talk so…vulnerably. Crazed, angered, sadistically playful- Hermione had come to know Bellatrix as many things but a woman who could feel hurt was not one of them. Yet here they were. Parts of her wanted to taunt the woman. Kick her while she was down like the other had done to her so many times before. Yet the words she actually spoke did not reflect the dark desires swirling in her thoughts.

“Why? What could possibly be worse than torture?” She whispered.

“…failure.”

Hermione didn’t know if the other had meant to pour her siren magic into the word, but the younger witch never thought she could come to know someone so intimately by just one word. Her other half was desperately clawing at the suppression; its need to comfort Bellatrix cranked to the highest level. She couldn’t say that she felt the same, but that didn’t mean she felt nothing. Which is why she told the woman; “Everyone fails.”

The woman’s eyes glazed over with fury. “Not me.” She began laughing hysterically. “Not me! Never me! He trusted me more than anyone else. Gave me a piece of his soul. I was to be his champion! To stand directly at his side as we changed the course of history forever!” She could feel Bellatrix’s hands shaking on her shoulder. “And I failed him.”

There was a pause. Hermione noted the hands on her shoulders weren’t shaking anymore; mostly because they were no longer there. Bellatrix had moved them to cup her face, setting her cheeks on fire with a combination of fear and embarrassment.

The woman was being very…touchy lately and she didn’t know how she felt about that.

At this point, she should’ve moved away but Bellatrix had her completely ensnared right now. She knew it had nothing to do with magic or mates or anything else of the sort. Hermione was simply seeing something rare and unprecedented. There was no way she would interrupt and send the woman spiraling back into herself.
“Emotions.” The woman snarled. “That’s where our powers come from. Much like magic, it’s limitless. One only needs the right catalyst for it to finally boil over… I found it that day.” The thumbs over her cheeks began pressing harder into her face. “It wasn’t the torture of his spells that did it. It was his words. Words.” She became speaking rapidly, her voice growing more distraught as she went. “He told me that I failed our cause. That I had single handedly destroyed the new era he was trying to build. That my time in Azkaban was as pointless as his trust in me. He said… that I let him die.” Bellatrix’s right eye was twitching. “Those words. Those infernal words. They replayed in my head over and over again until I realized that everything he said was true.”

And just like that, the woman’s once tender caress turned sour and her nails were being firmly pressed into the delicate skin of her cheeks. She tried pulling the hands away with desperation as the woman continued boiling over.

“I was going to be the greatest witch the world had ever known!” Her voice sizzled with rage. “And instead… I lost everything.”

“And regained your voice.” Hermione finished.

The woman released her face. Still far too close to her face, Bellatrix took her dominant hand and reached for her wand and pressed the tip against her own cheek.

“My failure destroyed our cause. The cause I spent my whole life fighting for. What I suffered in Azkaban for. The break of the collar was painless. The break of the magic however? Well…” She stuck her tongue out. “Finite Incantatem.”

Hermione gasped at the sight before her which caused the older witch to chuckle darkly.

“Hideous isn’t it. You must be thrilled with my disfiguration.” The woman cooed.

No. Hermione wasn’t quite sure she was. She could understand why the woman would hide such a thing under a glamour.

The thing being her tongue.

There was nothing off about the front end of it- as pink and bumpy as anyone else’s. It was half way through that things went wrong. The fleshy pink color began to gradient into a nasty purple and than an insidious black. With how close she was, it was easy to see the teeth marks dotting across the surface.

She’d bitten clean through it.

“My lord was still in the building. I could still feel his magic thrumming through the walls. If I screamed, he would’ve found out. He would know about the filth in my blood. He would know that I lied to him. To our cause.” The woman ran her blackened tongue across her teeth. “I couldn’t let that happen. I couldn’t let the last shred of his faith in me be ripped away… so I bit down.”

Hermione’s voice was shaky. “You could’ve died.”

“Happily.” The woman’s eyes narrowed. “It would’ve served as my penance for my lord. But death would not take me that day… thanks to that traitorous bastard Snape.” Bellatrix snarled his name like the foulest of curses.
Hermione’s eyes widened. “He saved your life.”

“Repayment from a pervious debt. Nothing more.” Bellatrix’s tone suggested that she shouldn’t ask what that debt was. “I was freed, but that freedom restricted me tighter than anything the ministry could collar me with. It was a freedom I never wanted.”

“But I do.” Hermione said sternly. “I never wanted this- and even if you became content to hiding what you truly are- I’m not. I’m proud of my blood. I want it back.”

Bellatrix chuckled lowly and pushed Hermione’s face away from hers. She stood then, strutting back and forth across the titled floor.

“Pride and pain. You only think you know them muddy. But you don’t. Not really. Because if you did, this-” The woman stopped and poked her collar. “Wouldn’t be there.”

“You never said it had to be those feelings. That it only had to be enough to reach my limit.” Hermione pointed out.

The woman stopped her pacing. She tilted her head towards Hermione and smiled.

“And it’ll never be enough, Hermione.” The woman whispered sinisterly. “As much as you hate me- your collar remains. No matter how sad you’ve become- your collar remains.” She smirked darkly. “By being so brave and fearless, you’ve hardened your heart to the point it’s too hard to break.”

The younger siren froze, a sickening feeling sinking into the pit of her stomach and it wasn’t just because the woman had called her by her real name.

Bellatrix had started humming- a soft and somewhat cheery melody that didn’t quite fit the disgustingly sadistic look on the woman’s face.

Everything happened so fast after that.

The woman grabbed Hermione and pulled her to her feet; one arm around the younger woman’s waist and the other grabbing Hermione’s hand. She struggled against it, but it appeared that Bellatrix was having none of it. She started moving. The witch began twirling them around the marble floor; the only sounds being the other siren’s progressive humming and the click of her their respective shoes on the ground. It was a mockery of a waltz- the entire time- Bellatrix gracefully glided around the floor; Hermione dragged alongside like a mindless marionette.

Pressed against the other’s chest, Hermione felt Bellatrix’s siren magic caress at her eardrums as the woman’s ominous words began filling the air around them.

*A cage with no doors has always been more*

*When it comes to a dog who can’t bite*

*So a witch with no wand*

*A siren without song*

*Should quickly give up in this fight~*
Yet here she still stands, the world in her hands
Her head remains up in the clouds

But the brave should’ve known
When you fly for so long
You forget
Of your fear
Of the ground~

The woman dipped her so suddenly that Hermione yelped in fear and ended up clinging to the woman’s arms to remain balanced. Bellatrix gave a short chuckle before reeling her back in and continuing their one-sided waltz.

Now feet to the floor, your heart behind doors
My words will bite harder than fright
A kind, gentle hand, To you, I can lend
And still you won’t sing come the night~

My poor Griffindor
Who’s life I abhor
Your shackles aren’t made out of steel
Because though your heart’s in it
You won’t reach your limit
Cause it’s me, who won’t make you feel~

The woman twirled her away and Hermione took the opportunity to yank herself back from the other woman’s grasp. Bellatrix didn’t stop her smile, nor did she fail to advance on Hermione once the younger woman freed herself. A new dance begun then, one where with every step taken by Bellatrix, Hermione took two more further away from her.

Still, the woman kept singing; her movements growing more manic to the point Hermione was growing dizzy just watching Bellatrix circle around her.
A life without fear

A day without tears

I grant you these things, they’re yours

No yelling or screaming

No plotting or beatings

If this is you dreaming, its yours

A place to call home

The freedom to roam

If you want to own them, they’re yours

But don’t you regret

The table you’ve set

When my mercy hurts more than my scorn~

The woman stopped in front of her. The playfulness that had been oozing off the woman up until now was washed away; something much more rancid taking it’s place. Hermione’s heart was beating a mile a minute.

She’d seen this part of Bellatrix before.

The one hidden away in the depths of the other’s jumbled mind- appearing only in rare moments. Hermione wanted to nothing else right now except escape.

This was the version of Bellatrix that scared her the most.

She was quickly reminded as to why.

Bellatrix raised her arm and let our a sharp whistle. From the darkness over the woman’s shoulder, Corvus swooped in and landed on the woman’s arm. The massive bird was staring down at Bellatrix with an intensity that she’d only seen the creature direct towards her before.

He seemed thrilled.

Bellatrix approached Hermione and gripped her chin with her unoccupied hand. Through it, she could feel the dark purring building up in the middle of the woman’s chest. Before she could move or say anything to the other, Bellatrix sung to her in a voice so quiet and haunting that she physically felt the temperature in the room drop.
An end to our war
A cell without doors
If its home you adore
Its yours

The woman let her face go to reach into the corset of her dress. When the woman pulled out her wand of all things to hand to her, Hermione was too shocked to even take it. That didn’t seem to matter to Bellatrix however. She took the stick and delicately placed it into Hermione’s hair; right behind her ear.

If you stay a fighter
My job will be lighter
That collar grows tighter
Its yours

The siren smiled brightly.

The one who will break you
Is the same who forsake you
And the mind you’ll give thanks to
Is yours

Bellatrix turned her back on Hermione and began walking away. As her figure left the light of the chandelier and melted into the darkness, her final words echoed around her.

And I’ll remain singing
As this home starts screaming
And the voice that is ringing
Is yours…
A door slammed in the distance.

Bellatrix’s words swam about her head, each word playing over and over as the implications of what the other woman was trying to get at settled in. Once it did, Hermione felt her knees give out from beneath her. From the area Bellatrix and Corvus headed earlier, Crookshanks appeared from the darkness. The feline trotted up to his owner and placed his paws on her shaking hands; his sorrowful cries the only sound in the room.

Hermione barely heard it over the sound of her breaking heart.

The collar remained where it was.
Chapter 37 - Settling In

Hermione didn’t know how long she sat there. All she knew was that by the time she finally broke free of her daze, Crookshanks was sleep against the side of her leg.

Could she blame him?

Not really.

The feline had the right idea. She was exhausted as well. Everything within her was drained to the last drop. Hermione could go to sleep right there on the floor and would be perfectly content with that. However, given that she didn’t know where she was, the woman wanted nothing more than to leave this room and find someplace safer.

Well, safe wasn’t the word she was looking for really. So long as Bellatrix lives, safety would always remain a pipe dream for her.

She’d have to settle for second best and whatever that was- it wasn’t sitting out in the middle of a big open room with no cover in sight.

Hermione nudged Crookshanks. “Come on buddy.” She whispered. When the cat didn’t stir, she sighed and scooped him up. “Really Crooks? Fine. I’ll just carry both of us.”

Progress was slow going. Her aches were at the forefront of her thoughts now that the adrenaline from being so close and personal with Bellatrix had worn off. Hermione ended up dragging herself and her familiar all the way to the other side of the room where she’d seen the other siren exit earlier.

As she walked, Hermione took note of the moonlight from the windows. Her hope that a look outside would help her identify where she was, but the windows were those hideous, frosted glass blocks she remembered seeing in her grandmother’s basement growing up. Only light could get through them. If she wanted a glimpse at the outside world, then she would need to find another window or the front door.

A shiver of remembrance went up her spine.

‘Even if I find a door, it’s best not to touch it.’ She reminded herself.

It wasn’t easy to forget what had happened back at Bellatrix’s first hideout. Her body was at its limit when it came to pain. If she found a bed right now, Hermione was quite sure she could sleep for the rest of eternity.
When she got to the door, she stared at it. Instincts were telling to both check it with her wand and also that it was safe to touch. It didn’t feel like it was cursed. And perhaps it was the sleep depervation or simply a trust for her own intuition, but she ended up hesitantly reaching for the doorknob.

Nothing.

She sighed, pulling it towards herself and entering a dimly lit hallway. There was nothing out of the ordinary about it. In fact, the hallway she found herself in didn’t even look like it belonged to the same building as the room behind her.

While the empty ballroom- or at least she thought it was a ballroom- had extremely high ceilings and immaculate flooring; the hallway was mundane in comparison. The transfer from marble to grey carpet was almost startling. The wallpaper was silver and green; the colors faded out and dull beneath the ceiling lights above her. Unlike the mansion, there weren’t hundreds of pictures or décor lining the walls. Just a series of doors and a single window to the far end of the hall behind her. To her dismay, like the other windows she came across, that one too had frosted glass. Hermione turned her gaze to the opposite end of the corridor. Light was pouring in from around a corner on her right.

“Better than here.” She murmured quietly to herself.

The witch dragged her aching mortal shell down the hall; Crookshanks still conked out.

Hermione came upon a stair landing that spiraled down and to the left. Part of her wanted to turn back and try one of the other rooms, but she was curious as to where the other woman had brought her this time. A number of horrible places came to mind, but so far from what she’d seen, this place was just an ordinary house. A middle ground between mundane and overly wealthy.

With careful steps, she descended down the stairs. The light pouring in grew brighter and brighter until she reached the bottom and was met with an unexciting scene.

The light was coming from a huge lantern mounted in the ceiling over a rather ordinary looking white door. It seemed out of place in comparison with the rest of the house she’d seen thus far.

The witch stopped. She could hear frantic shuffling on the other side. Hermione never took Bellatrix as the frantic type. Manic was more her speed and so she figured it wasn’t her behind the door.

Her heart stopped when it opened all on its own. The little landing flooded with even more light, but that meant little to her at the moment. She was far more interested in who was now standing before her.

“Nimmy!” She yelled, startling Crookshanks awake. The irate feline leapt from her arms and onto the floor. He trotted over to the little house elf and rubbed against the creature’s knobby knees. The force almost knocked the creature over, but he remained standing.

Good.

It made it easier for her to wrap her arms around the watery eyed helper and pull him into a hug.

“I thought she would’ve killed you. Or you didn’t escape the house fire.” She told him with a wobbly voice. Hermione pulled away and he gave her a timid smile.

“Nimmy didn’t mean to worry Miss Hermione. Mistress was angry with Nimmy, but mistress also needed Nimmy alive to clean the house.” He wrung his hands together eagerly. “Mistress is very merciful with Nimmy!” He exclaimed.
She doubted that greatly, but it didn’t feel right to step on his feelings. Dodging the subject seemed a better route to take. “What were you doing on the other side of this door?”

“Oh!” He jumped up and down excitedly. “Nimmy was waiting for Miss Hermione to come downstairs. Nimmy must be showings you the house!” He grabbed hold of her much bigger hands with his own. “Come along, follow Nimmy!”

“Wait!” She tore her hand from his. The little creature turned to look at her, no doubt by the look of fear plastered on her face. “I’m not gonna be locked up again. I don’t care what Bellatrix told you. I won’t.” The witch said fiercely.

To her surprise, the house-elf looked offended. “No, no! No locks! Mistress said Miss Hermione didn’t need locks anymore.” He said happily.

She frowned. “And why not?”

Did she really just ask that? It wasn’t like she was complaining after all. Hermione was just unsure. Usually when things were too good to be true, they really were.

“Mistress said you have nowhere to go anyways. This is to be your home now!” He smiled.

‘Ah, and there it was.’ She scowled.

Of course she should’ve known this was another ploy by Bellatrix. Last time the woman freed her of her own volition, she had to deal with that accursed door. Hermione was one hundred percent sure the woman was ready to try something similar if she tried to escape again.

She wouldn’t give her the pleasure.

“This isn’t my home Nimmy,” A smile crept onto her face. “But I’d be honored if you showed me around.”

He squealed in joy, his little hops of excitement causing his floppy ears to bounce up and down wildly. Nimmy took her hand and began dragging her forward; Crookshanks following close behind them.

The tour ended up being rather short in her opinion. Her new ‘residence’ being more of a large house than a mansion. Nimmy didn’t take her back up the steps where the empty room was. The little creature said that many of the rooms up there were abandoned and filthy. When asked about the one she awoke in, Nimmy simply replied; “That is where Master Corvus sleeps.”

The bird had an entire ballroom sized room for himself. Somehow, that didn’t surprise her. The creature acted as haughty and extravagant as his master; there was no way he would be sleeping anywhere lesser.

There was only one other floor which was the main floor. What the house lacked in levels; it made up for with rooms. The stairs came right off into the kitchen; a rather homely and well managed place that had Hermione swooning. It was bright in comparison to what she was used to. The cabinets, shelves, trim, and ceilings were all a pristine white that she knew had to be the work of elf magic. The walls were surprisingly a pale yellow, something she didn’t expect from a Slytherin of all people. That being said, the room wasn’t lacking in the green department. The floors were huge checkers of green and brown- the same color scheme accented under the sink and by the stove. A massive island table took up most of the space. She ran her hands over the smooth, dark wood in wonder- absolutely enraptured by it’s simple yet sturdy design. A wide array of décor were sprinkled about the room. Yellow flowers next to the sink, a basket of vegetables on the table. It was all
incredibly homely and Hermione wanted nothing more than to stay in the room forever.

Nimmy apparently wasn’t having it. There was still much more to see.

Right off the kitchen was a long hallway with six rooms. The first to her right was a study. She wasn’t allowed to go in there seeing as Bellatrix hadn’t given her permission to do so. At least that was what Nimmy relayed to her when she asked to see inside.

She would be testing how long that rule lasted.

Next to it was apparently Bellatrix’s room. Again, off limits to Hermione. She had free range to the other four however. Next to Bellatrix’s room and at the end of the hall, was the bathroom. Hermione didn’t go inside, but she knew that if there was a bath inside, she was fully prepared to utilize it to the fullest.

The siren didn’t care if Bellatrix came down on her with the wrath of a thousand death eaters- she was getting in that tub and was going to stay there until her extremities shriveled up like a mandrake fresh from the ground.

Nimmy pulled her back down the hall to present the other three rooms.

The room across from the library wasn’t actually a door. Instead of the rather ordinary doors scattered about the place, the open archway led to a dining room. A glass table took up most of the space- the only other items being the seven chairs surrounding it, a couple of landscape paintings, and a few houseplants propped up in the corners. Peeking her head further into the room, Hermione could see that there was actually an eighth chair. This one was sat next to a huge window with it’s curtains drawn close. It was clear that someone had been sitting there, more than likely staring out at what laid beyond. A light situated over the table remained off; the only light present being a streak of blue coming from the bottom of the curtains and up the center where they were meant to part.

Other than those few things, there wasn’t a lot of interesting things to be found in the room. Nimmy noted that the archway at the opposite side of the room lead to the foyer and ultimately the front door and out to the garden. Before she could fix her mouth and ask the little creature to take her to see said garden, Nimmy pulled her out of the dining room and towards the next door.

“This is Nimmy’s room. Nimmy’s room also leads to the basement. Nimmy loves his room very much.” The house elf proclaimed proudly.

“Well at least someone does.” Hermione thought to herself. She didn’t have the heart to point out that the creature was practically sleeping in a cupboard. Nimmy’s room- if one could even consider it to be one- had only a small bed off to the left and a chest to the right. There was a clean looking blue rug on the floor and a lantern over the door that apparently lead down into the basement. It was tiny. Hermione had seen cells- had been in a cell bigger than this. No one deserved to live like this.

That’s what she really wanted to say, but Nimmy was over the moon about his small abode. She imagined any house elf would be. Though that didn’t make her feel better in the slightest. The creatures joy at such meager sleeping arrangements was exactly why she had created S.P.E.W in the first place. That being said, she let it go- if only not to upset the poor thing.

“It’s lovely Nimmy.” She said with an artificial smile.

He beamed up at her and grabbed her hand once more.

“Nimmy is glad Miss Hermione likes it. Nimmy hopes Miss Hermione enjoys her room even more. Nimmy made it for vous!” Nimmy said excitedly.
Something rattled about in her stomach at hearing that. Hermione was just praying that it wasn’t as bad as she was picturing it in her mind.

The last door was swung open and Hermione was actually surprised.

The room was surprisingly nice.

The walls were a dull cream color. A twin sized bed was situated to her left; the pillows and blankets in hues of blue and gold. The floor was a soft grey color and though she still had her boots on, Hermione could tell that the carpet was as soft as fresh wool. Adjacent to the bed was another wall with a dresser and a writing desk situated against it. Both were painted in a dull grey color and were otherwise uninteresting to look at. The same could be said about the chair situated beneath said desk.

It didn’t really matter in the end. Hermione’s gaze was otherwise occupied by the best feature of the bedroom.

On the far end- which wasn’t very far if she was being honest- was an alcove. On either side were bookcases that stretched from the floor all the way up to the ceiling of the room. Between them was a window bench in the same color scheme as the bed. She briefly wondered if Nimmy knew she was a Gryffindor and not a Ravenclaw. A window was above the settee; the blue curtains drawn close like all the others in the house.

All in all, the room was beautiful. Clean and calm and…

It made her sick to her stomach.

Because for just a second, in a fleeting moment of comfortability, a single word was uttered at the forefront of her mind. Her real feelings of how the room felt to her.

Like home.

Hermione felt her legs wobble for a moment and she stumbled over to the bed and sat down. Her eyes watered. It was sinfully soft. She covered her face with her hands- an attempt at sparing Nimmy from seeing the tears gathering in her eyes. An useless endeavor seeing as he was already frantically bouncing on the heels of his feet.

“Oh no! Nimmy is sorry! Nimmy is a horrible house elf! Nimmy has offended Miss Hermione!” He wailed. He turned and started bashing his head against the dresser across the room. “Bad, bad, bad!”

“Nimmy no!” Hermione groaned, jumping up to prevent him from injuring himself further. She sat back down on her…the bed. She kept the creature’s hands at bay by keeping them held firmly between her own. She looked him in the eyes, the words out her mouth slow and meaningful.

“Nimmy, the room is great. I love it. You did an excellent job.”

He looked confused. “Then why is Miss Hermione sad?”

Wasn’t that the million galleon question. Why was she sad? She should be grateful. She could be in a dungeon cell. Or chained to a dirty drain pipe. That’s what her mind was telling her anyways.

It could be worse.

But she could also be with Ron and Harry at one of Ginny’s Quidditch matches.

She could be helping Luna and Neville build their garden the two had been planning to start together.
She could be chatting with Madam Pince in the library at Hogwarts surrounded by her books and her favorite foods at her side.

She could be having a lovely dinner with her parents at their home.

It could be worse…but it could be better too and a part of her would always know that.

How she could explain that to the little elf before her, she didn’t know. But she tried anyways.

“It’s not your fault Nimmy. I…I just miss my home. And I know you’re trying to make me feel like this is supposed to be it, but its not.” Her eyes narrowed. “Bellatrix has made sure of that. No matter how comfortable I’m made to be here. How free I am- I’m still a prisoner.” She touched her collar. “Inside and out.”

The room grew quiet. Crookshanks who had since finished observing the new room for himself had taken up residence by the window on the bench. He appeared to be peering behind the curtains and whatever was on the other side had him absolutely entranced. Her attention was brought back to Nimmy who had gone quiet after her admission. He looked nervous, more so than usual. It was clear that something was on his mind and he wanted nothing more than to blurt it out. An array of emotions whizzed over his droopy features. She could practically hear the franticness in his voice as he debated internally with what was bothering him. Then, out of nowhere, he stopped.

Determination seemed to be what he settled on.

She let go of his hands when the creature waved at the bedroom door; shutting and locking it. The privacy must not have been enough though, for the little house elf beckoned her further down to his level to whisper quickly and quietly what was on his mind.

“Nimmy knows.” He said, and honestly, it seemed like such a cryptic statement coming from such an innocent creature. He elaborated. “Nimmy knows why Miss Hermione is sad. Nimmy has seen it before.”

She frowned. “Where?”

His eyes grew wide. “Mistress.” He whimpered.

Hermione couldn’t help it.

She laughed. It was more of a chuff than anything else, but she couldn’t help but let the sound leave her lips. The very idea of Bellatrix feeling anything like she did was laughable. Nimmy didn’t agree. The look on his face was serious. And somewhat haunted. She felt a bit bad about laughing now.


He looked at the carpet. “Nimmy understands. Mistress is…not nice. Nimmy always knew that. Mistress can be angry and mean and violent and—”

“I get it Nimmy.” She stopped him to say.

“Mistress is all of those things. But Mistress can be sad too. Nimmy knows it may not look like sad, but Nimmy could tell.” He nodded as if reassuring himself of the words coming out of his mouth.

“Mistress was sad.”

“When?”

“After Miss Hermione was gone.” He said solemnly. “Mistress was very sad. Mistress didn’t want to
leave the basement when Miss Hermione was gone. Nimmy could hear Mistress. Hear Mistress’ singing.”

That threw her for a loop. “I’m sorry Nimmy, but I just can’t see how she would be sad that I was gone when she’s the one who let me go in the first place.” Her frown deepened. “And she doesn’t exactly seemed thrilled to have me back now either.”

Nimmy began hopping up and down, a look of frustration coming over his face. “No no! Nimmy is sure of it! Mistress was sad! Mistress didn’t want to give Miss Hermione away. Nimmy heard it.” He tugged at his ears as he began getting more and more worked up. “Mistress locked herself in the basement. Told Nimmy not to let Mistress leave- no matter what mistress said. But Mistress made Nimmy open the door! Mistress sang to Nimmy to free her and Nimmy obeyed!” He stopped moving. “And Nimmy was afraid.”

Seeing the look on his face, Hermione rested a comforting hand on his shoulder and as softly as possible, asked him; “Afraid of what?”

He gazed up at her. “Miss Hermione must understand; Nimmy has known the Mistress all of his life. Seen many looks from Mistress. But when Nimmy freed Mistress, she looked through Nimmy. Didn’t hurt Nimmy for failing or anything.” He wrung his hands together. “Mistress began walking. Nimmy tried to stop mistress, but Nimmy failed and she left the house with Master Corvus. Then she returns with Miss Hermione and Master Crookshanks.”

Now that…that was weird. Hermione didn’t quite know what it all meant, but she was determined to get to the bottom of it.

A shame really, that the piercing ring of a bell echoed from somewhere beyond the bedroom door and interrupted their conversation.

“The mistress is calling! Nimmy must go at once!” He squeaked. The creature was seconds from swinging the door open and leaving when Hermione lashed out and stopped him.

“Wait! Please, did she say anything before she left? Anything at all?”

She had to know. Hearing Nimmy’s story just further proved what she already suspected. Bellatrix didn’t come for her of her own volition. Hermione knew the other was more than likely pleased with having her out of her hair. And yet here they were back at square one. Two unwilling participant in a game that she was sure neither of them really knew all the rules to. It was clear that their other halves were in on it too- the creature within both of them adding their own rules the further along they played.

She was just curious as to which rule Bellatrix broke to make her finally snap and come for her.

Nimmy’s response was both helpful and unnerving.

“Mistress didn’t talk to Nimmy as she left. Mistress was singing quietly to herself. The same words over and over again. Nimmy can’t sing, but Nimmy can recite what Mistress was saying. Nimmy has very good memory.” He looked at the door and then quickly ran to her side and pulled her in to speak the words in her ear.

Ungrateful of the things you have

Unforgiving from what you’ve lost

Given a gift that’s ours for taking
And away from us, we’ve tossed it
Your pride will make us suffer
But our greed can set us free
Return to us our all and everything
And happy we may soon be

The words hit Hermione like a freight truck. Nimmy didn’t have time to say anything else or even elaborate on what he’d just told her. The creature threw the door open and began hobbling down the hallway towards wherever Bellatrix had called her away to.

That left Hermione and Crookshanks by themselves. The cat had long since stopped gazing out of the curtains and was currently sleeping soundly on the seatee- his tail thrown over his eyes and a deep purr rumbling through his chest. She smiled. He looked peaceful.

Hermione leaned over and closed the door, locking it behind her. She knew that it wouldn’t keep the older woman out if she decided to come in, but it didn’t hurt to try. A yawn tore through her. She wanted to take a shower. Her clothes- though dry- were still filthy and torn in some places from their escape. Taking a hot shower right now would be heaven, but so would a nap.

In the end, she chose the latter.

The moment her head hit the pillow, it was like a spell was cast over her body. Her eyelids closed like a pair of bricks were weighing them down.

Hermione sighed.

She wasn’t happy.

She wasn’t safe.

She wasn’t at home in her own bed with her friends and family close by.

The list of things she wasn’t could stretch a mile long and still go on forever; yet her mind could only focus on one thing and one thing alone.

She was tired.

And so she would sleep until she wasn’t any longer.

Hermione didn’t awake until two days later…
Chapter 38 - What Lurks Behind the Curtains

Chapter Notes

Oh snap, I didn't lie. Trust me, i'm shocked too. 0v0 Just saying now, beware. Next chapter its gonna have to kick off for real, for real. Bella...that's...no. Just no. You had one job. Please don't kill me. Hopefully i'll have the next one up in a couple of days. As always, enjoy. XD

Chapter 38 – What Lurks Behind Closed Curtains

Screeching.

That was the sound Hermione made as a bucket of ice cold water was dumped over her surprisingly relaxed body. The woman sat up in a panic and whipped back and forth trying to figure out where said water had come from.

Chuckles came from her left.

Hermione flipped her soaking wet hair over her shoulder and scowled at the snickering Bellatrix sitting on the dresser across from her. Her angry expression spoke volumes of how she felt with the other woman’s presence.

“Wakey wakey, girl.” Bellatrix cooed. “I’d hate for you to waste away in bed when there’s so much fun to be had.”

“You don’t know the meaning of fun, Bellatrix.” She sneered.

The woman tilted her head and smirked down at her. “Oh I don’t know about that muddy. Making you jump like that always puts a smile on my face.”

“That makes one of us.” Hermione hissed back. She reached around for her wand. She took a glance over at Bellatrix to see if it would garner a reaction from the other woman.

It didn’t. Not surprising really. The woman’s cockiness was un-parallel after all. If she started a fight right now, it would only end badly for her. So instead of lashing out at the smug woman, Hermione retrieved her wand that had since gotten tangled in her hair from when Bellatrix had placed it behind her ear. Her cheeks burned when she struggled to free it from her untamed curls; something that sent Bellatrix into yet another fit of laughter.

Eventually, she got it free, and for the first time in what felt like forever, she cast a spell. Hermione never appreciated her wand more than when the drying charm washed over her and left her feeling warm and tingly. Having her wand back made her want to cry, but the knowledge that the one who took it in the first place was sitting right across from her kept the tears at bay. Her scowl remained as she addressed her tormentor. “What do you want Bellatrix?”

The woman smiled mysteriously. “Now why must I want something? Can’t I simply be checking in on my favorite houseguest?” She cooed.

“People don’t throw water on their favorite houseguests.” Hermione snarked back. “And the only
time you talk to me is when you’re up to no good.”

Bellatrix tried to go with an offended look, but it came off mocking more than anything. “Really muddy, and here I am trying to make peace.” She twisted a couple locks around a slender finger. “Though watching you starve in a house full of food could be entertaining as well.” Bellatrix said mostly to her herself, sighing like this whole ordeal was somehow taxing on her.

Hermione wasn’t buying it.

“So you want me to believe that you just came in here, what, to invite me to eat with you?” She laughed. “Like that’ll ever happen. You’ve probably poisoned it or something.”

Bellatrix turned to her then. Up until now, the woman was practically curled up in the corner of the room. Her back was against the wall as she sat on top of the dresser and let her legs hang over to drape over the writing desk. Hermione thought she looked far too casual in her presence give their relationship. The thought was solidified when the woman hopped to her feet and Hermione finally got a good look at what the other woman was wearing.

It was a lot less fabric than she was used to seeing on the other woman. The dress- to no one’s surprise- was black as night. From the top of the woman’s bust and down her sleeves was a sheer, black lace covered with what appeared to be tiny flowers. The shoulders were out, not that it mattered with the woman’s hair covering them anyways. The neckline was done up with a thin black ribbon- the corset style lace not doing much to cover up the discoloration where the other’s collar once was. There wasn’t anything else really special about the dress. No gaudy belts and buckles she had come to associate with the other witch. It wasn’t even down to the floor. Instead, it tapered down into a triangle point just slightly past her knees. It was the only reason she saw the woman’s polished ankle boots tapping against the carpet.

All and all, Bellatrix looked utterly relaxed and casual. Hermione wasn’t sure if it was some kind of ploy or if she really was as comfortable as she was trying to appear.

Either way, she wasn’t going to let her guard down.

When she refused to move after Bellatrix’s invitation, the woman shrugged, tilted her head and gave her one of her patinate smirks.

“Now now, have I’ve poisoned you before?” She cooed. Both of them knew the answer was no, but Hermione refused to say that out loud. Bellatrix chuckled. “The answer is no. And why start now?”

“Because you’re a sadistic, vile woman who lives to see me suffer.” Her deadpan voice chimed in.

Much to her surprise, Bellatrix threw her head back and laughed. When she recovered, her eyes were twinkling with mischief. “And yet you think I’d try and kill you with something as boring as poison. It makes no difference. Believe what you wish. Do as you wish. After all,” Her voice dropped a couple of octaves and she gestured to the room around them. “This is your home now too.”

Bellatrix snickered when Hermione threw a pillow and missed her just barely as she practically skipped out of the room.

“Horrid witch.” The Gryffindor said beneath her breath once she could no longer hear the older siren in the hallway.

Now alone, Hermione figured that she might as well get up. She stretched her every limb and practically moaned at how rested she felt. The soreness that’d been plaguing her for what felt like forever was all but gone. That being said, being rested didn’t stop the fact that she felt absolutely
disgusting. Her clothes were soiled, her hair was oily and tangled—there wasn’t a single spot on her person that felt clean despite the fact that they literally plunged themselves into the ocean during their escape.

She wanted a bath.

_Needed_ a bath.

Even when her stomach growled like a voracious lion, she ignored it in lieu of the desire to be clean.

The shoes she’d been wearing up till now were still on her feet. Usually she would’ve taken them off before going to sleep, but she’d been far too tired to do so this time around. Hermione kicked them off and left them next to the bed; her socks laid out on top of them. The moment her bare feet touched the carpet, she melted. It truly was as soft as she hoped it was. The young woman arose, approaching the dresser across from her. Hermione hoped that it wasn’t just there for show. As much as she knew Bellatrix didn’t like her, she figured that the woman—or at least Nimmy—would only be able to take her stench for so long.

“Thank you Merlin.” She gasped, seeing the dresser filled with clothes of all shapes and sizes. Hermione rifled through them. This was clearly the work of the little house elf—which she was grateful for. The siren wasn’t quite sure she wanted to know what Bellatrix would’ve filled the dresser with had it been up to her.

A shudder went up her spine.

It took quite some time for Hermione to pick out something to wear. It wasn’t that she was indecisive or anything. It was just that doing something like picking out an outfit for the day made her feel… nostalgic. It seemed like forever ago that she was back at the castle deciding what she wanted to wear to the Christmas party with Crookshanks. Speaking of her feline companion…

“Crookshanks?” She called. The cat wasn’t over on the windowsill where he was when she fell asleep. Her heart sank, a trickle of fear making itself known when she realized that Bellatrix had been in the room probably long before she had awakened.

“Crookshanks!” Hermione yelled with a bit more panic seeping into her voice.

Something touched her leg.

Hermione jumped and looked down, only to sigh in relief when she realized what it was. An orange paw was sticking out from underneath the cover hanging over the bed. She got down on her knees and lifted it to reveal Crookshanks in his entirety. She yanked him out and into her arms, giving him a warm kiss on the top of his head. “You just love making me worry, don’t you.” The witch said fondly.

Crookshanks rubbed his head under her chin with a heavy purr, making her laugh at the affectionate gesture. She let him go, reassured now that she knew that he was okay. The witch went back to what she was doing. Taking the pile of clothes in hand, she opened the bedroom door and walked into the hallway. Since the bathroom was right across from her, she didn’t have to go very far and risk running into Bellatrix. Hermione glanced down the hallway.

No one was there, but she could hear talking further ahead. The kitchen was in plain view from where she stood. A lovely aroma of cooked food was wafting her way from that direction. Perhaps Bellatrix hadn’t been lying earlier.
She didn’t know why that thought made her feel so uncomfortable.

It mattered not either way.

Hermione entered the bathroom and flicked on the light switch. The crystalline lights sparkled brightly and bathed the room in a warm, twinkling glow. Her bare feet slapped against the white granite tiles rather loudly. It was of course freezing too, which made her regret taking off her socks and shoes just a little bit. She didn’t go back for them though. The floors would warm once she started the bath. Hermione was just about to close the door when she saw Crookshanks trotting over. He stopped just outside the door and was staring down the hall. She tilted her head and spoke to the creature.

“You coming in Crooks?” She asked.

It wasn’t uncommon for the cat to join her in the bathroom. Usually he lounged in the sink or on top of her clothes, soaking in the warmth of her usually sweltering showers and letting the warmth and company soak into his body. That being said, it seemed that the cat had other things on his mind. Whatever had the little creature’s attention must’ve been interesting enough for him to make a B-line down the hall. She peeked around the corner to see what it was, but by the time she stuck her head out, the feline was already swishing his fluffy little tail towards the kitchen. A part of her wanted to follow. Just to make sure he was alright, but she didn’t. Crookshanks was smart; if he felt going that way would be dangerous, Hermione knew he was fully capable of tucking tail and running the opposite way. He would be fine.

She said that, even though in her mind, the siren was already thinking of taking a bath much shorter than the one she had planned.

Hermione set her clothes on the counter and walked over to the bath. The entire room just seemed out of place in comparison with the rest of the house. While everything else seemed mundane and almost homely, the bathroom carried an expensive appearance. What wasn’t granite was gold or a dark mahogany, polished thoroughly enough to look like shiny metal. The counter had double sinks; an array of perfumes, potions, and exotic looking decorations lined almost every surface of it. Even the toilet looked like it had never been used. Everything about the room was sinfully impressive, but the best thing about the entire room had to be the bath itself.

Only a Slytherin pureblood would have a bath like the one before her.

The tub was deep; the stairs wide and tiered so that she could sit on them and not drown if she wanted to relax and stay afloat. Knobs of all shapes and sizes- too many knobs for a bathtub of all things- lined the outer wall. They were situated beneath a window with curtains- that like all of the other curtains in the house- were drawn closed. Right next to the tub were two, huge white columns and wrapped around them were a pair of huge snake statues. Their black scales glittered under the light of the chandelier and the green emeralds in their eyes were absolutely mesmerizing. Hermione was in awe about the entire thing, even though there was a crucial part missing from it.

The faucet.

She couldn’t see one anywhere. The woman had a suspicion of why that might have been, but she would need to turn on the water to see if she was right. Despite all the seemingly unnecessary knobs, the woman could thankfully see the main two she needed the most. Hermione stepped into the empty tub and turned the knob labeled ‘hot’. Afraid that using only hot water would burn her, she went ahead and turn the one labeled ‘cold’ as well. With luck, she could get her bath water just as she liked it- two steps from scalding.
Nothing happened.

She turned them back to their starting positions and then back to where she turned them the first time.

Again, no sign of any water.

“Really?” She groaned, leaning against the edge of the tub. “I just want a bloody bath. Why is this so hard? It’s a bath!”

Hermione scowled and waltzed out of the tub. It would seem she would have to find Nimmy and get the little creature’s help with what should’ve been an extremely simple task.

Or so she thought.

The moment Hermione exited the bath, she heard the grinding of stone from somewhere above her. She looked up just in time to see something amazing.

The two stone snakes were moving. The siren watched in admiration as they uncoiled from their pillar positions and hung in the air over the tub; half their bodies still wrapped around the columns. For a moment, Hermione swore they were looking at her, but it lasted only a moment seeing as they clearly had a job to do.

With their bellies exposed, she watched as the scales there seemed to expand and push outwards. The sound of rushing water filled her ears. Hermione kept her eyes focused solely on them as their underbellies seemed to swell and push further and further outward. Eventually, the swelling began moving the plates aside and Hermione could see water pooling in the pit of their stomachs; swirling about like a raging whirlpool.

It kept coming. Hermione watched as it filled the statues up towards their necks, which prompted them to move again.

The statue to her right shifted, posing it’s curved body so that it’s head was facing the statue on the opposite side of the room; it’s mouth positioned right over the bath. It’s emerald eyes flashed once before bleeding into a vibrant ruby color. When the statue opened it’s mouth, Hermione gasped as the steaming water that’d been pooling in it’s gut began flowing over the sides of it’s maw and into the bathtub below. The water kept flowing until it’s stomach completely deflated, prompting the other statue to move next. Posed like it’s adjacent twin, the left snake opened its mouth and allowed the water inside to pour out into the tub as well. Unlike the one to her right, this snake’s eyes didn’t turn red, and were instead a beautiful sapphire color that Hermione found she liked far more in comparison.

Once it was done, the statues seemed to just…go about their business. The witch watched as they seemed to just linger about, their eyes returning to the same Slytherin emerald that they started with. Hermione walked up to the tub and touched the water. A hissed escaped her lips at finding that it was scalding.

“Ah! Too hot.” She said mostly to herself.

It wasn’t quiet enough apparently, because the snake to her left seemed to have heard her. The rushing of water sounded again and before long, cold water began spewing from it’s mouth. She let it go on for a minute or so before sticking her hand in the water again.

“That’s perfect!” She said with a smile.
The statue closed it’s mouth then, blue eyes returning to green. Hermione didn’t know what possessed her to do it, but as it went back to meandering about overhead, she thanked the statues for the bath water. Immediately, Hermione wanted to hit herself, knowing that they were just enchanted objects, but the impulse of politeness was too much to ignore. Her embarrassment didn’t last long seeing as they seemed to give her a small nod to at least acknowledge that they understood her appreciation.

‘I love magic.’ She smiled privately.

With the water good and ready to go, Hermione returned to the sink and rummaged around for supplies. Luckily a lot of it was labeled; the things that weren’t being left untouched. She didn’t trust Bellatrix enough to believe she didn’t place something dangerous in one of the potion bottles surrounding her.

Her gathered supplies now lined the edge of the tub. Hermione stripped; tossing her soiled and disgusting clothes next to the door and as far away from herself as possible.

She dipped her toe in the water, then her entire body once she deemed it safe enough. Submerged up to her neck with the soothing waters, the woman let out a sigh that seemed to stretch on for eternity. Her limbs went absolutely limp. The sleep she got had done wonders for her body, but this is what Hermione really needed. She grabbed a washcloth and one of the bottles to pour into the water. From there, she got to work.

Hermione scrubbed herself down from head to toe. Not a single inch of her body was left untouched as she basked in her own personal slice of heaven. Her hair took the longest to maintain. It’d been getting even more unruly as the days went by seeing that she didn’t have time to tame it up until now. Between the sea water, the electricity from Corvus and the general lack of upkeep- her locks had definitely taken a beating.

She didn’t even want to mention the smell.

The siren was grateful to have her wand back. With it, she was able to detangle and comb and wash it all back to it’s original soft and shiny state.

It felt like she was in there for hours. She just might have been if she was being honest. At some point during her bath, the statue to her right had lowered it’s massive head to rest over the edge of the tub. Since she was done actively washing herself, the woman took the time to simply count the seemingly infinite amount of scales lining the enchantments body. When the water started to cool, Hermione would ask it to add a bit more water, which it did lazily from it’s resting position beside her.

She wanted to stay there and never leave.

Which meant that it was about time for something to come along and ruin her peace and quiet. In all honesty, she should’ve known that Bellatrix would not leave her alone this long without consequences.

She just didn’t expect how the woman was going to go about it.

Her eyes had been closed- head resting on the tub’s edge- when she heard the familiar humming sound.

Hermione snapped to attention and turned towards the door. It was muffled, but she could definitely hear Bellatrix’s melodic voice coming from somewhere off in the distance. At the sound, she felt her
siren side perk up in excitement. It wasn’t until now that she realized that her creature half had been virtually docile the entire time they’d been in the house. Whether that was an act of mercy on its part or because of the proximity to their ‘mate’, she didn’t know.

She had more pressing things to worry about.

She drifts past me like a boat above the waves
Above my head
As I’m wading through the waters

Pray she swims to me instead

Cause the thought of being lonely
Takes my mind and breaks its home
And the voice that lives within me
Reminds my heart
We aren’t alone

The weight of a sledgehammer felt like it just collided with the back of her head. The woman had to brace herself up against the edge of the tub.

“Bloody hell!” She hissed between clenched teeth. “What’s going on?”

She calls to us.

It was the first time she heard her other side speak to her in what seemed like forever. The creature within her was adamant on making them get out of the tub and go to Bellatrix. Though she was afraid that it wasn’t the only one. She had felt it as well.

The pull.

Bellatrix wasn’t just singing.

She was luring.

Walk
Sing

Follow me

We both swim
In this house beneath the sea
Hermione had no control when the combination of Bellatrix’s voice and her other half’s painful eagerness had her standing up to leave the tub. She ended up getting only a couple of feet from the bath before she was able to regain control of her faculties. After realizing that she didn’t have nearly as much control over her body as she used to, the woman scrambled to grab a bath towel and wrap it around her naked body.

Join me as we watch the garden

Take a seat inside my home

Cause your presence in my presence

Reminds my heart

We aren’t alone

She ended up stumbling unwillingly towards the hall once more, this time getting close enough to touch the door handle. Hermione cursed and ended up running back to the sink where her clothes were. A blush hotter than the morning sun shot down the length of her body. Had she opened that door and kept going, she would’ve been practically streaking in front of Bellatrix. The thought had her scrambling for clothes; only just getting her bra and panties on when Bellatrix called to her again. Sounding a bit more angry than she did before.

She drifts past me like a notion

Thoughts too big inside her head

Left you to your own devices

And it’s I who’s left instead

No more waiting

Time is wasting

Come to me when I do call

Don’t deny what feels inside

Remind my heart

We aren’t alone

By now, she had left the bathroom. The witch ended up making it just before Bellatrix’s bedroom before she regained control once more. The siren was frantically hopping up and down, trying to
desperately get the black skinny jeans up and over her still wet thighs. She was really starting to regret her clothing choice. The grey and white plaid shirt she picked was still open since she felt that getting some pants over her exposed behind seemed more important. There was a grey sweater and a pair of black flats that were supposed to go along with what she was wearing, but she ended up leaving them behind in the bathroom. Hermione wanted to turn around and go back for them, but it seemed that Bellatrix wasn’t having it at all.

*Walk*

*Sing*

*Follow me*

*We both swim in this house beneath the sea*

Hermione did just that while sloppily buttoning up her long sleeve shirt. Like a puppet on a string, Hermione followed Bellatrix’s overly cheery voice all the way to the dining room. The bewitched witch rounded the corner to the most unusual sight.

Bellatrix was standing at the opposite side of the room against the doorway that lead to the foyer. Still wearing the same clothes from earlier, the woman was leaning against the door frame with a strange look on her face. Instead of appearing to be waiting on her like she figured the other was doing his entire time, Bellatrix was staring blankly at the ground. Not even when Hermione entered the room did the woman react. She simply kept singing.

*Grab a seat right by the table*

*Set your plate and set the tone*

*Cause your presence in my presence*

*Reminds my heart*

*We aren’t alone*

Hermione did just that. Sitting furthest from the still occupied woman, the Gryffindor could only watch as an innocent bystander while her body decided to betray her. At least Bellatrix seemed to be done singing. Having scrapped the chair along the floor when she sat, the other siren’s eyes snapped up and stared at her as if she was seeing Hermione for the very first time.

Like she hadn’t meant to call her.

And judging by the look on the other’s face, she might’ve been right about that.

“Just what I needed.” She sneered. “Come crawling for *scrap* muddy?”

Hermione didn’t know what possessed her, but she immediately snapped back at the woman. “Am I? You called *me*, not the other way around.”
Bellatrix pushed off the wall and sauntered towards the table. She walked to the left side of it, placed both hands atop it, and narrowed her eyes at Hermione as she clicked her tongue. “My invitation was null when you ignored it earlier, muddy.”

“Maybe I didn’t feel like eating while smelling like absolute rubbish. You’ve clearly washed up- I chose to do so as well.” Hermione matched the other’s heated gaze. “Before I was rudely interrupted by your bloody singing.”

She expected the woman to respond immediately. Spout some snippy comeback and keep the argument going.

She didn’t.

And had Hermione been looking anywhere else, she might’ve missed it. The woman gave a violent jerk, her left eye twitching like the fluttering wings of an insect. Then it stopped and Bellatrix growled lowly beneath her breath. Hermione jumped in her seat when the other witch pulled a chair out and plopped down into it. She then proceeded to lean back in it to slam her boots on the table. Hermione was impressed how effortlessly the woman appeared to be balanced like that, but something much more distracting took hold and had the back of her neck on fire.

In reclining like she was, the woman’s dress had slid upwards, revealing to Hermione a perfect side view of Bellatrix’s milky white thighs. Bellatrix didn’t even care it seemed. She was too busy pouting.

From her sleeve, she pulled her wand out and rapped it several times against the table. The sound of running could be heard from the hallway and she turned to see Nimmy sprinting into the room.

“Mistress calls Nimmy? How may Nimmy serve her?” He gushed, practically touching his head to the floor in a backbreaking bow.

“Food.” Bellatrix barked.

The little creature stood up and took off running. “Right away Mistress!” He said…happily?

Hermione wasn’t sure. You never could tell with house elves.

Neither of them spoke to one another while Nimmy prepared their food. It was tense. Hermione wanted nothing more than to get up and walk out of the room, but she didn’t know if that was such a good idea. Despite not wanting her to join after turning down the first invite, Hermione had a feeling Bellatrix would not be asking a third time. She had just gotten clean and rested and recovered—poking an already angry bear was the last thing on her mind right now. Though she really, really wanted to.

Something about the other woman’s actions lately was….off. Hermione couldn’t quite put her finger on what it was, but Bellatrix was acting incredibly weird. Like she was holding something back. And that twitching episode from earlier? That was definitely a siren thing. Hermione had been told she had episodes like that when she was speaking to her other side as well. Curiosity burned within her at what Bellatrix’s other half was telling her to make her act so jumpy.

Probably something that would end up backfiring on her- much like everything else having to do with her siren side lately.

Perhaps sensing the internal attack, the creature lurking behind the power of her collar decided to slam viciously against the suppression.
“Ow.” She ended up saying aloud. Now it was Bellatrix who was staring at her strangely. She opened her mouth to say something just as Nimmy came barreling into the room; a trail of floating plates following behind him.

“Nimmy has brought your breakfast Mistress.” He crooned. The little elf raised his hands and the plates began setting themselves on the table. Utensils and glasses glided to settle down in front of the both of them. Water and orange juice poured from hovering pitchers and food began jumping carefully onto each of their plates in an impressive display of magic. She should’ve expected nothing less of a house elf who had to serve Bellatrix. Hermione knew that many house elves simply popped the food onto the table and left to do other things. That didn’t seemed to be the case with Nimmy. He was flashy with it, displaying an incredible amount of control of his magic from making sure not a single crumb hit the pristine table they sat at. There would be no denying he served a pureblood family with a display like this.

She was proud of him.

When Nimmy had served them both, he turned to Bellatrix. “Does mistress need anything else of Nimmy?” He practically begged.

Bellatrix waved him off, already sticking her fork into a pile of hash browns stacked up on her plate. “Leave us.”

He bowed again, turning to leave.

Hermione simmered.

Since Bellatrix was still being her same rude self, she decided to do the obvious.


Nimmy’s knees were knocking together, his little body shaking with joy at having been praised for his hard work. The poor creature looked like he wanted to cry. Instead of having the breakdown Hermione knew he so desperately wanted, he bowed and left the room.

Later, when she went to sleep that evening, if her bed was unnaturally softer than it was that morning, then she knew who to blame for that.

Once Nimmy left, Hermione stared down at the food before her. It all looked mouthwatering. She knew that it was Nimmy that had prepared it, but he’d done so on Bellatrix’s orders. There was no way the woman-

A spoon was levitating off the table.

Her brow furrowed as she followed it’s movements. Hermione watched it wobble over to her oatmeal and scoop a decent amount onto itself. Steadying its movement, it teetered back to face level. And shot straight towards her face.

She yelped, and had her attention not been so acutely focused on the utensil, she might’ve not caught it in time. Her hands shook as she lowered it back towards her plate, only for it to jerk back up towards her lips. Frustrated, she tried wrestling with it all in vain.

‘Fine! I get it!’ Her internal thoughts hissed before shoving the spoon into her mouth. When she didn’t immediately kill over she sighed. Hoping to be left alone now, she moved to shovel more
oatmeal into her starving stomach- the spoon losing whatever hold had taken over it.

There was a clatter of something wooden hitting glass.

She glanced up to see Bellatrix tossing her wand onto the table with a heated glare, her eye twitching all the while. The witch said nothing and kept on eating.

And so did Hermione.

The rest of the meal went like that. Neither of them speaking to one another though both clearly had things they wanted to say. Hermione was fine with it for now. The silence- though awkward and tense- was more than she could ever ask for while in the woman’s presence. Not that it lasted for long. When the food ran out, and Hermione was full and sleepy, she couldn’t help but break the silence.

“So, this apart of the game too?” She asked.

Bellatrix didn’t even look at her. Her eyes were closed and with the leaned back position she was still in, Hermione could’ve easily thought she was sleeping. The younger woman knew she wasn’t since the other had been humming to herself for a couple of minutes now.

Hermione wasn’t sure she knew she was doing it.

“What are you on about?” Bellatrix murmured.

“This. Feeding me. Sitting here at the table like a happy married couple. Like you haven’t’ tried to make every moment of my life until now a living nightmare.” Came her angry reply.

“Aww, muddy. If you wanted to go back to old times, all you had to do was ask.” The reclining woman cooed.

“The fact that I have to ask is why I’m asking.” Hermione frowned. “There’s something you’re not saying…and I know what it is.”

“Do you now?”

Hermione nodded despite knowing the woman couldn’t see it. “Yes. It’s your siren side, isn’t it. It’s been talking to you.”

Bellatrix cracked a single eye open. “It’s always talking. Or has that collar finally cut off blood circulation to that frizzy little head of yours?” She closed her eye again.

Hermione didn’t get riled up from the rudeness being thrown her way. “But not like this. It’s different now. You’ve been trying to hide it but your eye keeps twitching.” Came her smug remark.

Bellatrix folded her arms across her chest and opened her eyes to stare blankly at Hermione. “And what if it is? Hmm?”

“Why are you listening to it? Why now?” She asked. “The entire time you’ve been fighting your instincts tooth and nail only to give in now. Something changed.”

The chair beneath Bellatrix scraped harshly against the wooden floors. The woman marched over to Hermione and grabbed her chin to force her to look up at her.

There was that twitch again.
“So many questions. Question after question- is this the wicked fate I’m to be saddled with? Shut. Up.” The woman hissed.

“See. You haven’t changed at all. So why even bother pretending?” Hermione asked.

Now Hermione knew she should’ve stopped. Knew that long before she even started really. But something was going on and the only way she was going to find out what that was, was by forcing Bellatrix’s hand.

And surprisingly….it worked.

Bellatrix leaned down.

And rubbed her nose against Hermione’s.

Frozen on the spot, the Hermione was rendered speechless at what the other one was doing. Until Bellatrix purred.

That’s right. The woman purred and the sound rumbled from the middle of her chest to the very tips her toes. Warmth pooled in her belly and when the feeling began making her feel more than uncomfortable, Hermione threw herself from the chair and onto the floor.

“Ack!” She ended up screeching. Hermione was in pain. Not from the fall mind you- but from her other half. Who was over the moon at the affection thrown their way and less than thrilled with Hermione putting a stop to it. It’s frantic screeching locked behind the suppression was giving her a wicked headache.

*Mate. She calls us. Soothes us. Wants us. We must answer. Mate…*

The tips of her ears were on fire. Hermione glanced up to see the smug look on Bellatrix’s face.

Only to see the witch hunched over in pain as well. Murmuring- too quiet for her to hear- was spilling from her mouth at a rapid pace. Bellatrix started pacing back and worth and it was clear to see that the rage within her was beginning to spill over. And just when Hermione thought the other was going to explode, she stopped. A snarl came from between clenched teeth as she began speaking.

“That. Is. Why.” She hissed. “This…greedy, filthy, animalistic blood of mine won’t leave me be. Always screeching and clawing for something that is already ours.” Her eyes took on a crazed look. “You.”

Hermione scrambled backwards. “But I’m not yours.” She practically whispered, resisting the groan of pain as her siren side protested.

Bellatrix smiled. “Oh, but you are. In all the ways that I want…”

‘…but not what it wants.’ Hermione finished in her head. Feeling her own siren side trying desperately to get them as close to Bellatrix as humanly possible, she knew exactly what the other woman was trying to hint it.

And knew that her time here was about to get a whole lot worse.

Bellatrix turned from her and walked over to the curtains guarding the giant window to their left. She ran her hands over them with a slow reverence that seemed uncanny for the other woman.
“Imagine it muddy. Having gotten rid of you only to find myself searching for you day and night.” She gripped the curtain in her hand. “Imagine walking beneath the pressure of what’s beyond these curtains like a mindless fool for miles.” She gazed at Hermione through the veil of her hair. “You ask me why I don’t lock you up? Why I feed you? Why I’m playing nice.”

Bellatrix grabbed her wand from the table and waved it at Hermione. A yelp escaped her throat as she was on her feet and floated over towards the awaiting witch. Bellatrix pulled her in close and flicked her wand at the curtains, throwing them open with an almost booming clap from the amount of fabric being moved.

Brown eyes were washed over with blue as Hermione finally got to see what lurked behind all the closed curtains in the house.

She expected another forest. Another island paradise with lush green trees and high metal gates that loomed over like the claws of a demon.

What she didn’t expect to see…was the ocean.

No, not the ocean as the beachfront.

The ocean, as in a school of fish were swimming directly outside the window.

The ocean, as in there was a couple of seas tars suckered up against the glass as stalks of seaweed tickled at their backs.

They were deep down. Deep enough that the house was completely submerged, but not so much that the rays from the sun couldn’t sparkle down through the rolling waves to shimmer off the shell of a lazily swimming sea turtle.

It really hit Hermione then.

They were living in a house beneath the sea.

Never in her life did she think she would see anything more beautiful than this.

Hot puffs of air tickled her ears. Bellatrix moved the hair back to set her lips right up against the shell of it. “Beautiful isn’t it. Quite the scenery. One that I know all too well…look at the ground.” She whispered.

Puzzled, she did just that.

Something sank in her stomach.

There were footprints in the sand.

Between the shells and ocean coral, there was a trail of footsteps leading from the house and into the seaweed forest ahead.

*Imagine walking beneath the pressure of what’s beyond these curtains like a mindless fool for miles.*

She could feel Bellatrix’s lips smiling against her ear.

“It’s not *me* playing nice. You’re right; I haven’t changed. But then again; it’s not just me in this body is it.” The question sounded more like a statement than a question. Nevertheless, Bellatrix turned her face to look Hermione dead in the eyes. They were blown wider than she’d ever seen them before. “There’s so much you still don’t know about our kind muddy. And so much that I’m
forced to learn now.”

“Such as?” Hermione whispered.

“…I’m more trapped without my collar than I ever was with it. And now we both have to live with that.”

Hermione’s heart cracked. The next words barely audible. “Until when?”

She would remember this moment as the one and only time she’d hear Bellatrix sound as solemn as herself.

“Until it’s enough…for one of us.”

Hermione fled the room before the other could see her tears of frustration.

…and before she could see Bellatrix shed her own.
Chapter 39 - Wager

Things after that were…well Hermione didn’t know how to describe things.

 Mostly because everything had turned upside down in just over two weeks.

Bellatrix hadn’t lied about her personality change. Though Hermione wouldn’t call the woman’s current personality ‘nice’ either. The other witch still called her muddy and threw insults her way just about every chance she got, but other than that, Bellatrix was being noticeably less violent than before.

Or more like noticeably being held back.

After confronting the woman before about her strange behavior, Bellatrix must’ve figured there was no point hiding it any longer. It was terrifying really. There’d be times where the two of them would be having an argument and Hermione’s mouth would get ahead of her brain and say something smart. Naturally, it set Bellatrix off. The woman jumped at her with her hands out ready to wrap them around her neck when she would simply fall to the ground clutching her head. Hermione couldn’t tell what her siren was saying, but whatever it was made the woman enraged. The first time it happened, Bellatrix cursed up a storm and left the room.

When it happened the second time, the woman took her anger out on a nearby vase.

By the seventh argument, the woman began fleeing to the basement. Hermione didn’t know what she did when she went down there, but from the shouting of spells and angry curses, she didn’t have to guess what the other was doing.

It had been quite the experience watching the woman lose control over herself these last two weeks, but Hermione couldn’t exactly feel overjoyed about it.

Cause she wasn’t faring too well either.

Currently, Hermione was sitting curled up in the nook by the window. A random book was sitting across her lap as she stared out at the world outside her window.

The day she found out the house was underwater, Hermione had returned to her room and threw the massive curtains open with a snap. A jellyfish was floating leisurely through the bed of seaweed spiraling up from the sand a few feet out. Fish of all shapes and sizes were swimming about in every which way, some even stopping at the window to look in at her with curiosity. Somehow, with the vastness of the ocean, it was like she was the one in an aquarium.
There wasn’t a single night where she went to bed with the curtains closed from that day forth.

On this particular day, Hermione had taken refuge at her favorite spot at the window because the headache eating away at the back of her mind was causing an indescribable amount of pain; the one responsible not caring in the slightest about her obvious discomfort.

*Free us.*

‘Not again.’ She groaned, kicking the pillow across from her in frustration. ‘I already told you, I don’t know *how.*’

*Free us. Go to her. She can free us.*

“And say what? The same thing that I’ve said a *thousand* times already? She won’t do it. Doesn’t matter if I ask or demand or *beg.* So unless you have *another* idea, we are stuck like this.” She scowled at the crab trotting along the seabed, jealous at how carefree its life was.

A hiss rattled the bones of her spine.

*Mate will free us. We can make them.*


Silence.

*Not everything.*

She closed her eyes and leaned her head back on the bookshelf behind her. The book in her lap—apparently an anthology of great witches in the 1700s—slipped from her grip and fell onto the floor. The distraught witch curled up in her spot and scowled at the open ocean.

A little part of her wished that looking far enough into the nothingness would somehow make her other half drift away as well.

No such luck.

*Mate will free us when she wants to.*

She sighed.

“Great. That means *never.* Bellatrix doesn’t want anything from me but to fight and argue.” Hermione told her other half.

*Then we fight and argue.*

“Um, what do you think we’ve been doing up until now?”

*Not like this.*

“What does that even- you know what, forget it. I just want to be left alone.” She leaned over to grab the book on the floor-

And promptly fell on her ass when her other half slammed viciously against the suppression with it’s voice.

*Now! Go to mate. Now!*
Hermione yelped in pain as the siren within went on a rampage, throwing itself painfully at her mind as an all encompassing rage seemed to pass through it. The woman was writhing on the ground in agony as the onslaught didn’t let up. Hermione began crawling towards the door, internally begging her other half to stop.

It refused.

The witch made it to the door and flung it open, flopping down into the hallway when she no longer had anything to prop her up. That was fine; her hands were free now which meant she could put them to use and pull at her hair. The pain was intense. Her body curled into itself. She was nothing but a tight little ball huddled up in the middle of the floor.

“Bell-,” Her voice got stuck in her throat. “B-Bella-trix!”

The scream came out more like a sad whisper, one she knew the other woman couldn’t hear from her room. If she was even in there.

She tried calling out again.

“Bellatrix!” Hermione managed to yell. No one responded. She tried again. “Bellatrix!”

Desperation seeped into her voice. She both cursed and cried out for her siren side. It had never done this before. Of course there were signs. Being in such close proximity to Bellatrix within the house drove it absolutely insane. A feeling that grew worse the few times the older woman sung from the safety of her bedroom.

Speaking of said bedroom, Bellatrix swung her door open with such ferocity that the walls shook upon impacting with it. The woman stuck her head out, hair wild and untamed as if she’d just awoken from a nap.

Though given her attire, she had a feeling the woman had been awake.

“What! Why are you squawking my name muddy?” She hissed between clenched teeth. Bellatrix’s expression became pensive as she finally noticed the position the other witch was in. “Rolling in the muck as well? Can you be anymore pathetic?” The woman mocked.

Hermione tried scowling up at the other, but her other half was not going for it. A scream of pain tore from her throat.

Now Hermione knew that her powers would not work for her- she’d already tried to see if even a little bit of it could slip threw the suppression and was disappointed every time. That being said, her pain still spoke volumes.

And Bellatrix’s siren side was listening loud and clear.

There was that eye twitch again before Bellatrix’s expression went from mild annoyance to anger.


Hermione didn’t quite know who she was talking to.

Before she could even ask though, Bellatrix turned back to her room and slammed the door closed.

Her eyes were wide with shock. ‘Did…did she just?’ Her thoughts tried to reason what she’d just seen. A sharp pain in her head made her start crawling to the other’s door again. Her stomach was
hurting. The headache was giving her nausea something fierce and Hermione felt the urge to vomit all over the hallway.

The thought of doing so right in front of Bellatrix’s door crossed her mind, but then it was quickly followed up with a reminder of how angry the other would be for doing so.

She held it together.

Hermione started banging on the door with all her strength. “Bellatrix! Get back out here!” She cried, still reeling from her inner torment. When the other didn’t answer, she began calling out to her again. “Bellatrix!” Accompanied by more door banging. Hermione knew she had no choice.

The witch had just pulled her wand out from her back pants pocket when she heard the sound of shattering glass and screaming.

She didn’t need to see the damage to tell that Bellatrix was going absolutely mental on the other side of the door. Hermione couldn’t quite make out what the other was saying—partly because she was clearly having a one sided conversation; partly because of how garbled the other’s voice had become.

At some point Hermione resumed the fetal position. Her eyes misted over with pain as she tried her best to drown out the world around her. She wanted to claw her brains out. The siren wanted to scream and shout and fight and release all the pain and building frustration in a wild fit of emotion. Which emotion didn’t matter; she just needed everything to stop. The earlier conversation with her siren side came back to mind. Hermione gathered her bearings long enough to start pounding on the door once more, trying to garner Bellatrix’s attention.

After a few moments, the destruction stopped. The sound of pounding footsteps reached her ears before the door was flung open once more. Hermione looked up and met the crazed look of Bellatrix’s face with her own look of frustration.

She didn’t give the woman the chance to flee again before she made her demands.

“Duel me.” Hermione hissed. She was shocked to hear how much she sounded like the other siren in that moment.

Bellatrix’s eyes broke from crazed to confused. “What?”

“Duel me. Right now.” She demanded. Her other side seemed to quiet down at her interaction with the other woman. It’s anger was still present, but it was more of an inconvenience rather than debilitating. With it retreating, Hermione took a chance to breathe. When she finally got herself in check, the woman went ahead and tried to stand. She ended up wobbling about, her legs practically jelly beneath her. Once on her feet, she glared at Bellatrix and kept talking. “Get this collar off me or duel. That’s your only options right now.”

Bellatrix sneered and approached like a predator stalking it’s prey. She was all in Hermione’s personal space when she said, “And who are you to be demanding anything of me, mudblood.”

It wasn’t a question.

And neither was Hermione’s inquiry.

In a rare moment of boldness, the younger witch took her wand and placed the tip against the jugular of the violent woman looking down on her.
She didn’t know which one of them was more shocked.

It was probably Hermione. In all honesty, she didn’t know what had come over her. She was just… angry. Irrationally angry. And the more she started thinking about it, she couldn’t quite pinpoint why or when it started. Because this didn’t just start right now after the fight she just had with her siren side. This was a festering anger, one that couldn’t be quelled by a good book or something of the like. Hermione needed to let out her suppressed emotions. And she couldn’t do it with her siren abilities, so she’d have to settle for the next best thing.

Picking a fight with the only other human in the house who could potentially wipe the floor with her.

“My name is Hermione, and I’m demanding that you fight me since this is all your fault.” She paused. “Unless you’re afraid now that I have my wand back.”

Some part of her should’ve been weirded out about how well she knew Bellatrix. How she knew attacking the other woman’s pride was a sure fire way to get the other woman to fall into her trap.

And how it never seemed to fail.

Bellatrix lowered her chin, purposely digging Hermione’s wand into her throat. The twitch was back in the other’s eye, but instead of frowning, Bellatrix gave her a wicked grin.

“Cocky brat. I gave your little wand back because you pose no threat to me with or without it.” She backed up. “But since you’re so eager for another lesson, who am I to deny you.”

The woman flicked her wand and closed her bedroom door behind her. She pushed past Hermione and open the door that lead to Nimmy’s room and the subsequent basement. A squeak sounded as the witch opened the door; Nimmy flying out to bow to his mistress. Bellatrix paid him no mind, pushing past towards her actual goal.

“Don’t stand there gawking muddy.” The Slytherin yelled, as she descended the stairs.

Hermione moved to follow, greeting Nimmy as she passed him by.

The stairs spiraled downwards for a much shorter time than she was used to. Hermione could see Bellatrix waiting at the bottom at another ordinary looking door. She stopped just behind her and watched while the older woman flicked her wand in a series of complicated wand work. A flare of yellow wavered over the entirety of it before dying out. Bellatrix pulled it open and waltzed into the open area with a swagger Hermione could only dream of matching.

Not that she could even if she wanted to seeing as she had stopped not even a foot into the threshold to really take in the room around them.

The house above was on the seabed; she could see that just by looking out of the many windows in the house. With that in mind, she wondered how the house even had a basement in the first place. She had her answer now.

Round instead of square, the dueling area was large and open. The walls weren’t made of wood or panels, but rather sand. She reached over to the wall closest to the door. The texture was definitely sand, compacted and smoothed to the point that it looked like polished stone. The same could be said about the ground. Unlike the last room they dueled in, there were no columns, or furniture or cover to hide behind.

Hermione wasn’t sure she liked that.
Then again, it was made up for with what lay at the other end of the room.

An underwater cavern was carved into the wall. Bioluminescent plants were lining the rocks and walls on almost every surface, providing the room with lights in shades of blues, purples, and greens. From the ceiling, water rushed down over several jagged rocks to pool into a pond below it. The ground of the room melded into it seamlessly and Hermione was absolutely enchanted by the ambiance it created. The sudden urge to step into that water and get her feet wet almost made her forget why she came down there in the first place.

She turned to look at Bellatrix.

The woman was tapping her boot against the hard sand, hand on her hip as she gazed upon Hermione with irritation. “Are you done now? One would think you’ve never seen a room like this before.”

Hermione snorted. “I haven’t. You know, not all of us are rich purebloods who can buy underwater houses.”

The woman smirked. “This house wasn’t bought. It was built.”

“By your rich, pureblood family.”

“By me.” Bellatrix corrected. She lifted both hands to gesture at everything around them. “This house was made by me over the course of many years. No one alive or dead knows about it.”

“Except me.” Hermione said.

Bellatrix gave a dark chuckle. “And you’ll never tell a soul where it is either.” She gave the younger siren a mocking gasp. “Although, it’s not like you have any friends left to tell anymore, now do you? Such a pity.”

Anger.

It clouded Hermione’s vision and before she even knew what she was doing, the witch had whipped her wand out and cast a hex at Bellatrix. Only the other’s quick reflexes saved her from getting hit with it. Bellatrix scowled.

“Have we already forgotten the rules of the duel mudblood.” She snarled.

Hermione had a flashback to their first duel and how seriously the other took it. Yes, she was angry at the older siren’s jab, but surprisingly—especially to herself—Hermione wasn’t looking for that kind of fight and told Bellatrix that personally.

“That wasn’t a part of the duel. That was for being rude.” Hermione moved to the left side of the room across from Bellatrix. She bowed and posed her wand in front of her face; her other hand behind her back. “The next move will be.”

Bellatrix threw her head back in laughter. “Alright then.” The woman pulled her wand out from where it was hidden beneath her hair. It was the only place the woman could put it seeing as she wasn’t wearing her usual long-sleeved dress. Hermione wasn’t trying to look too intensely at the other’s wardrobe seeing as it was rather…revealing in comparison to what Bellatrix usually wore. It clearing wasn’t made for dueling, that’s for sure. Sleeveless and coming down only slightly past her knees, the black dress was both simple and impractical for their current situation. That and the fact that the woman’s ample chest was on full display; a thin strip of black fabric being the only thing keeping both sides of the woman’s dress from slipping off her shoulders.
Bellatrix kicked the heels on her feet off to the side, not even blinking as they splashed into the pond. Hermione watched as she pulled a couple of strands from her head again, tapping them with her wand and murmuring a spell too quiet for her to hear. The strands came to life, multiplying and intertwining with one another until the woman had a shiny pair of dueling gloves to put on. Hermione allowed the woman time to slip them on and speak.

“Let’s,” The woman stopped to bow, righting herself to reflect the same dueling stance as Hermione. She smiled. “Begin.”

Everything kicked off from there.

“Stupefy!” Hermione struck first, casting three of the fiery red spells in rapid succession. Bellatrix merely batted them away.

“Relashio.” The woman said calmly.

Hermione jumped out of the way spell, throwing the same back at the other. Bellatrix didn’t move. She threw up a protego and laughed at Hermione.

“You’re going to have to do better that girl. If you don’t,” Hermione wasn’t quick enough to block the wicked fast diffindo the other threw her way. It grazed her arm and she was suddenly regretting her clothing choice for the day. Had she known she’d be in a duel with Bellatrix, the woman wouldn’t have worn the sleeveless white blouse. “You’re going to lose.”

She bared her teeth at the older siren. “As if I would lose to you.”

Something twinkled in Bellatrix’s eye just then. “Is that a bet?”

She should’ve said no.

Merlin she should’ve said no.

But she was angry and irritable and the feeling she was getting from her surprisingly content siren side made her speak before she could stop herself.

“It is.” Hermione declared.

Bellatrix threw her head back in laughter. “Alright then. If I win…then I break your wand. You were doing just fine without it before after all.” The Slytherin cooed.

Hermione felt her blood freeze in her veins. If she lost, there goes the last defense she had against the woman outside of her still unsteady wandless magic.

Though it just wasn’t about protecting herself.

Her wand was her wand. Unlike everything else she owned, her wand was specifically made for her. She could replace every book and quill and cauldron she’d ever owned, but never her wand. When she used Bellatrix’s wand- or anyone else’s for that matter- it just felt wrong. Like something was missing. Having it back now felt like she regained a part of herself again. By no means was she whole seeing as her siren side was still locked away from her, but she felt more like her old self again.

If she lost to Bellatrix, she could lose that.

Forever.
Because if there was one thing she knew, it was that the other woman took wizard dueling seriously. Any pureblood worth their magic did. Which meant that Bellatrix was serious when she said that she would break it. It was high stakes on Hermione’s side. So she should make it high stakes for Bellatrix as well.

So if she won…

If she won…

“…free me.” She ended up whispering.

Bellatrix frowned and threw another *diffindo* that Hermione batted away. “Speak up muddy!”

Hermione looked the other dead in her eye, the playfulness that had been slowly building up in her heart was suddenly gone. It was no longer a duel to help her vent her unfound anger. This was her chance to get the one thing she wanted most of all.

“Free me.” She said louder, the words echoing in the underground cavern like a gunshot. “If I win Bellatrix, you have to get this collar *off* of me.”

Something sinister overtook the older siren’s face. Her stance that was once loose and laidback became hardened. “As if I’d agree to that.”

“Afraid that you’ll lose.” Hermione fired back.

“Of course not,” Bellatrix snarled. “But I’m also not *foolish* enough to agree to something so *risky*.”

“You won’t have to worry about that if you don’t *lose*, so why not just accept my terms?”

“Because you *foolish* girl, *should* your infuriating Gryffindor dumb *lucky* beat me, then it is *I* who’ll end up losing my magic.” The witch threw two hexes at Hermione that the other barely blocked. “Typical mudblood filth! Do you truly know *nothing* of wagers made amidst a *true* wizarding duel? It’s *binding.*”

Anger flared within her. “That’s why I said it in the first place. I *know* you Bellatrix. No amount of begging or asking will make you do it.” Then again, she had no idea she would be getting into a high stakes duel with Bellatrix when she left her bedroom that morning. She changed her defensive stance to a more offensive one. “What’s its like…what I’m willing to do to make it *stop*.”

A twitch. She had hit a nerve.

Bellatrix didn’t say anything at first. Her eyes darted around wildly in their sockets and Hermione knew that the other woman was having another internal battle with herself. She’d have attacked the other already but she needed the older siren to agree to the terms first.

Cause Hermione wasn’t quite sure what she would do if she didn’t.

A snarl broke from her thoughts and Hermione jumped from being startled. There was venom in Bellatrix’s eyes. And then…

“…fine.”

Hermione opened her mouth to speak but Bellatrix interrupted her with a low and raspy demand.

“But I make no *promises*.” She pointed her wand at Hermione. “If I win, I break your wand.”
“Take it.” Hermione added. “If I lose…you can take it forever, but don’t…don’t break it.” She hoped she didn’t sound as pathetic as she felt.

Bellatrix smirked. “Fine. And if you win, I’ll attempt to remove your collar.”

“Will.”

“Attempt.” Bellatrix snarled nastily, eyes widening with rage. Some of the woman’s siren powers seeped into the word, causing Hermione to flinch.

She suddenly remembered what the other had told her about removing the collar.

Until it’s enough…for one of us.

The way the woman was vehemently trying to honor the wizarding duel and not suffer the consequences should she not keep up her end of the bargain, spoke volumes to Hermione.

The woman was agreeing to try but she was making no promises. Knowing that the woman knew exactly how to free her meant only one thing.

What worked for her wouldn’t work for Hermione.

It wouldn’t be enough.

But the chance to at least get the woman to try, absolutely was.

“Attempt.” Hermione corrected.

Bellatrix chuckled darkly. “So mote it be.”

“So mote it be.” Hermione parroted.

A pale blue light danced between their wands before dying down.

The deal was sealed.

“I won’t break your wand muddy…but accidents do happen.” Bellatrix crooned with a crooked smile.

Instead of rising to the bait, Hermione gave a low huff and matched the other’s stance. “You’ll never touch my wand again. And when I’m free, the first song I sing will be about your defeat.”

A wild spark ignited behind Bellatrix’s eyes. “Then let’s dance, Granger.”

They didn’t speak to one another after that. As the spells and curses flew, neither woman spoke with the casual coldness they had built between them. There was far too much on the line to get distracted. Far too much to lose.

But someone did lose.

And as the woman got on top of the other- a glint of something once thought lost in their eyes once more- they were able to utter the words that would end up changing both their futures forever.

Yield…
Chapter 40 – The First of Many

Bellatrix moved first.

“Incendio.”

Fire flickered out towards Hermione’s feet. She danced away and pointed at the pool of water next to them.

“Aquamenti!” She shouted. The water shot up and doused the flames, but Hermione wasn’t done yet. The young siren jerked her wand in Bellatrix’s direction and watched as the wave of liquid went flying towards her at terrifying speeds.

A slash of red cut through the water and Hermione lost control of it, allowing the raging liquid to splash harmlessly onto the sandstone floor.

“Expelliamus!” Hermione flicked her wand in rapid succession, sending Harry’s favorite spell at the other woman with deadly accuracy. If she could just get the woman’s wand away from her, she would at least have a fighting chance at winning this.

Because Hermione was many things, but a fool wasn’t one of them.

She knew that Bellatrix wasn’t just a better dueler than her, but she had her beat in stamina as well. The witch could very well wait Hermione out until she completely depleted her magic; then it would be like shooting fish in a barrel. This wasn’t a battle that she could draw out. The moment she saw an opening in the other’s defenses, she would go in for the win.

There was just one problem.

Bellatrix wasn’t just a master at offense.

“Protego.” The Slytherin cooed, throwing the spell up almost lazily and watching Hermione’s spells bounce away with a laugh dancing away on her pale lips. The moment Hermione stopped her bombardment, Bellatrix switched on a dime. “Bombarda.”
Hermione screamed as the floor beneath her feet exploded, knocking her to the ground and giving Bellatrix the chance to move in. Seeing the woman run at her with her, bare feet slapping harshly against the floor, Hermione knew that she couldn’t let the other get too close.

“Avis!” She cried. A flock of little grey and blue birds fluttered out from her wand and swarmed Bellatrix. It stopped her in her tracks, but the girl on the ground realized that it was only a temporary distraction. Bellatrix was already cutting through the little creatures like butter. In her heart, she knew that the creatures were merely a summon, but seeing how viciously the other was mowing them down made something in her stomach begin to churn. That being said, she didn’t let their sacrifice be in vain. The young woman rolled to her feet and pointed at her opponents feet. She was about to use a bombarda much like the other did earlier, but that spell was a bit costly to use. And she needed to get Bellatrix away- not kill her. While the birds still had the woman occupied, she flicked her wand and cast her spell twice, “Flippendo!”

With all her attention on the birds, Bellatrix never saw it coming.

One moment, the siren had her feet planted firmly on the ground and the next the witch was sailing towards the other side of the room. Having cast the spell twice, the first hit sent Bellatrix flying- the second giving her momentum.

Too much momentum.

Hermione could only watch in horror as the other witch was sent careening into the wall opposite her. The impact sounded nasty and knowing the denseness of sand stone had her well aware of the fact that the woman was without a doubt in pain.

Now on the floor, Bellatrix’s hair was flung wildly about her head. Hermione ran towards her, ready to immobilize her.

But she was far too slow.

The older siren snapped back to focus. Her eyes were misted over with a deadly concoction of pain and rage. She got up on her knees and hissed her next spell. “Tremo!”

Hermione yelped as the floor beneath her feet began to shake violently. She ended up stumbling about and lost her footing, giving Bellatrix the chance to catch her off guard again. The older witch pointed upwards at the ceiling. “Animari!”

Of all the things Hermione was prepared for, the one thing she didn’t expect was an attack from above. From the ceiling, glowing plants came to life and starting growing rapidly; peeling away from the walls and coming to wrap around her hands and feet. She fought them off with the cutting curse, trying her best to both remain unbound while simultaneously keeping her eye on Bellatrix. If she took her eyes off the other woman, she would without a doubt lose this battle.

And there was far too much at stake right now for her to let that happen.

Determination seeped into her every pore as she began to think of ways to end this battle.

“Finite Incantatem!”

The plants lost their enchantments and fell to the ground in piles of leaves and petals; their once beautiful glow snuffed out.

They were both back on their feet again. Hermione’s breath was coming out in painful, uneven huffs, but the young siren was relieved to see that the other woman wasn’t faring to well either. She
imagined Bellatrix was still recuperation from being tossed about and not from magical exhaustion. That was fine. If Hermione had to take the other witch out physically instead of magically, then she was fully prepared to do just that. That being said, it was going to be quite the challenge. Bellatrix must’ve noticed that she was taking this battle much more serious than the one they had before at the mansion.

And in turn, starting to do the same.

“Mordeo!” The witch snarled.

A nasty dark green spell came flying her way. Hermione had never heard it before, but she threw up a *protego* regardless. It would seem that Bellatrix knew she would and instead of switching it up, the woman began bombarding her, casting the same spell at her over and over again, each one growing a bit stronger than the last.

Hermione began backing up, still on the defensive. At some point Bellatrix had begun cackling and moving towards her. If she kept retreating, then Hermione was going to find herself with her back against the wall. She had to do something and couldn’t because the other duelist wasn’t giving her an opening.

Until one presented itself.

Just not for *her*.

So focused on blocking the dark green spell the other woman had been casting during the onslaught, she missed the blue one aimed at her feet.

It was her undoing.

The ground beneath her feet exploded upwards and suddenly Hermione felt the world spin as her body was tossed into the air. No longer upright, she couldn’t dodge or block the curse the woman had been trying to hit her with.

She didn’t miss.

Hermione howled in pain as the spell struck her arm. The limb erupted in agony and a spray of blood shot up. Adrenaline must have been coursing through her now because when she looked down at the wound, the young siren knew that there was no way that she wouldn’t be feeling that pain. Where her once soft, pale skin once laid, there was a huge bite mark now marring her delicate flesh. Red dripped from it slowly, staining her white shirt and the sandstone floor.

“Episkey.” She hissed, closing the wound with a pained grunt. Bellatrix was on the other side of the room laughing at her again. Hermione watched as the witch began drawing closer, her bare feet delicately stepping on the ground and yet echoing throughout the entirety of the chamber. She didn’t know what to do. The other witch was amazing. She didn’t have to like the woman to respect that she was good at dueling. Tears crept up in the corner of her eyes. She *couldn’t* lose. This was her chance- probably her only chance to force the other’s hand to help her. Even now, she could feel her siren side creeping behind the suppression, desperate for her to win. Desperate to be free. Yet the longer the fight dragged on, the more Hermione felt hopeless.

‘I can’t do this.’ She whispered to herself. Her inner monologue of self-loathing was interrupted when she had to throw another *protego* up to block another of Bellatrix’s spells. ‘She’s too strong. I can’t do this. I’m going to fail. Then I’ll never-’

*Get up.*
Her heart froze as her siren side spoke to her, the first time speaking since attacking her earlier that afternoon. Hearing its voice got her attention, but she couldn’t move to obey.

*Get up. Free us.*

Bellatrix grew ever closer. Hermione had her Protego planted firmly in front of her. It would slowly drain her to maintain it, but it was all she could do right now. At this point, she was only stalling and both of them knew it. The Gryffindor could see it in the other’s eyes. Excitement. Glee. *Pride.* Bellatrix knew she was going to win this one and Hermione felt helpless to do anything about it.

*Get. Up!*

The pain was overbearing and the young woman felt her eyes roll in the back of her head as her siren boomed through her thoughts like a raging beast. It’s words were so harsh that Hermione felt them like the suppression wasn’t even there. This time, the tears did fall. She was letting it down. Letting them down. She wasn’t strong enough. Wasn’t fast enough.

*We don’t have to be. Get up. We still have something left.*

She stared at Bellatrix who was now standing directly on the other side of her protection spell. At this point, the woman had decided to be her usual nasty self. A part of Hermione wished that the woman would just cast her spell and defuse her *Protego.* It would have been kinder- a quick and easy defeat so that she could flee from here and go wallow in her self-pity.

No, that was far too kind; and Bellatrix was many things, but *kind* wasn’t one of them. That’s exactly why she drove her wand into Hermione’s shield and began slowly dragging it down like a knife through butter. Sparks were flying every which way as the older witch sawed through her protection; her maw twisted into an absolutely frightening smile.

It was over. It had to be. She didn’t know what her other side was talking about. What could they possibly have left to win this?

*Desperation.*

The word was spoken with the slightest whisper.

At first she didn’t know how to react to that. What a pathetic thing to say. Desperation had never helped her before. Hermione had been fighting with everything she had against Bellatrix way before this duel had even begun.

‘Desperate.’ She tasted the word on her tongue, swirled the meaning of what her other half was getting at. Which was around the time she really looked at Bellatrix.

Really looked at her.

She didn’t look any different than she had before this battle begun.

Or so she thought.

Upon closer inspection, Hermione noticed the little things that spoke a different tale. The woman’s arms were scratched up, a cut on her upper left shoulder bleeding sluggishly with red liquid. Bellatrix feet also had wounds running up the side of them and Hermione was sure that if she lifted them, there would be plenty more on the bottoms. No doubt the results of standing so firmly on the solid sandstone floors and stepping on the plants from her attack earlier. Unwittingly, her eyes drifted to the other’s practically exposed chest. Bellatrix wasn’t just breathing heavily. There was a raspy
quality about her breaths that lead Hermione to believe that she was having trouble getting air to her lungs. Suddenly, Hermione realized that perhaps the older witch hit the wall a lot harder than she initially thought when she sent her flying earlier. It was hard to believe seeing how well the other was at masking her pain.

‘Wait. *No. That’s not it.*’ She said to herself with slowly widenly eyes. ‘I just didn’t want to see it. And it’s been right there in front of me the whole time.’

The epithany hit her like a ton of bricks. It wasn’t just her pain that Bellatrix was good at masking. It was *everything.*

The woman before her was someone to be envied. Coming from the highly regarded Black family and being second in command to the dark lord; Bellatrix couldn’t afford to be anything else but exceptional. Emotions like fear or joy or- now that her eyes have been opened, *desperation-* were not something she could freely show like Hermione.

But she *did* have those emotions. Hermione highly doubted that with their species of siren that she didn’t. To hide them would have to become her first nature if she wanted to survive down the dark path she had created for herself. And for the most part, she succeeded.

Bellatrix Lestrange was a sadistic, cruel, unfeeling monster who didn’t know true human emotions.

That was the façade she had created for the world. The truth she tried to peddle.

And the lie Hermione now knew.

Because the world knew Bellatrix only from what the woman showed. What she was willing to offer in order to keep up the appearance that she was unbreakable.

Until Hermione came along at least.

Hermione who probably now knew Bellatrix better than anyone else.

Hermione who saw the woman’s anger and rage and known it for other things. She’d seen Bellatrix show curiosity when she didn’t quite understand Hermione’s intentions. Seen her shock when her plans failed through.

Her mischievousness when she ki-kissed her back at the mansion.

Her heartache at having failed the dark lord.

Bellatrix wasn’t just all anger and sadism. She felt just as much as anyone else.

Which is why, now, as Hermione gazed into the other’s eyes as she sliced through her spell- she knew that it wasn’t crazed victory in her eyes.

It was *desperation.*

As the hot sparks of their colliding spells sizzled against both of their cheeks, Hermione could see the almost frantic need in Bellatrix’s heart to defeat her. This wasn’t just about winning over the chance to break Hermione’s wand and humiliate her.

It was so much more than that.

Should Hermione win, the woman would have to help free her. Give back her voice.
They both knew the moment that happened, Hermione would no longer have to coward in fear of the woman. She would have back her powers. Have back the one advantage over the woman that even her *wand* couldn’t defeat.

In her heart—right there before her eyes—Hermione could see what that thought did to Bellatrix.

It *scared* her.

And she would be a complete liar if she said it didn’t scare her too.

Their bond, even with the suppression on her was still powerful. Without it, who knew what would happen between them. She wasn’t going to pretend that she hadn’t felt the urge. Back before the collar. How her throat used to swell with the overwhelming desire to call out to Bellatrix. How it wanted to draw the woman in with their powers—impress her, grab her attention and have her think about nothing else but them.

Their bond scared her.

Partly because it was Bellatrix.

Partly because a small part of her wanted to see where it would lead.

Cause in the end…wasn’t this always going to happen? The way her siren side had acted earlier—the way Bellatrix had been trying to hide how hard she’d been fighting back her own—how long could they keep it up before one of them finally got to where they are now?

They…were mates.

It was the first time that Hermione said that without venom in her heart.

Only truth.

She could drain every drop of blood in her body and she’d still be a siren.

She could use every last drop of her magic and when the last of it left her core, her heritage would still remain.

Hermione Granger would die as a siren no matter what she did.

So wasn’t it time that she lived as one again?

‘Yes.’ She resolved to herself.

*Yes.*

Her other half purred with glee.

And for the first time in what felt like forever—they were one, once again. With the collar and without their powers, they were one once more.

With one goal in mind.

*Winning.*

Bellatrix pulled back then, wand raised above her head ready to slice down and shatter her barrier completely.
Hermione moved with instincts alone guiding her hands.

She dropped the shield and knowing that she needed every ounce of magic for what she was about to do, the young woman threw her palm out and shoved the woman dead in the middle of her chest. It was impossible to tell which one of them looked more shocked.

Bellatrix who wasn’t expecting to get shoved off balanced.

Or Hermione who could still feel the soft warmth of the other’s breasts beneath the palm of her hand.

Still, she didn’t take time to dwell on that. Bellatrix tilting off her feet was her chance to strike. The woman was a master with her wand. Any spell she cast at her now would be deflected without a second thought.

So Hermione had to do something that she should’ve done earlier.

Bellatrix out of battle was unpredictable and wild, but in it- she was a sharp and focused machine. Her stance was strong and her wandwork couldn’t be matched no matter how much Hermione tried to do the same.

Which meant she’d have to throw the woman off completely. Her thoughts trailed back to what her other half had said earlier.

‘Desperation. Yeah. I do have that don’t I?’

She pointed her wand at the pond.

‘But you’re wrong.’ She thought to herself, her inner grin reflecting on her actual face, much to Bellatrix’s confusion. ‘It’s not desperation that we share. It’s different. Bellatrix is fighting to keep something that isn’t hers.’

It was something she thought she had been lost so long ago. Something she didn’t think she had anymore given how powerless she felt.

‘And I’m fighting to take back what’s mine. This isn’t desperation….’

She could feel her other half coo with pride.

‘…its determination.’

“Charybdis.” Her voice broke from the silence.

Hermione could be obliviated by Lockhart himself and she still wouldn’t forget the look on the other woman’s face as her spell took hold.

Aquamenti was a powerful spell. To control an element like water, it had to be. Charybdis wasn’t anything like that. If Aquamenti was about control, then Charybdis was bout the lack of it. Hermione wasn’t looking for control. She was looking to make Bellatrix feel exactly what she was feeling inside.

She was out of control.

Out of her mind with every thought and emotion that’d been coursing through her since the moment the collar became the shackles to her life.

And as the whirlpool of water grew larger and larger, Hermione took at deep breath and let it crash
down upon both of them.

The woman were both pulled under. The room was filled from floor to ceiling with the violent waves. It threw them about in every which direction, the current having no purpose other than to cause ruin and chaos.

Hermione could barely see under the power of the water, but the moment she could, the young woman locked eyes onto Bellatrix like a hawk spotting it’s prey.

It was strange being the predator for once.

Bellatrix was practically upside-down in the water spinning them around like a carousel. Unlike Hermione who made sure to take a breath before being submerged, Bellatrix didn’t appear to be so lucky. The woman didn’t seem to be holding onto her wand anymore; both hands wrapped around her throat as if she was drowning-

Mate is drowning!

Her other side’s frantic screech broke her from her stationary state.

With all her strength, she kicked against the current and propelled herself towards Bellatrix. Hermione could see her peering at her through half-closed eyes and that was the only thing she needed to know that the woman was still on this side of the light.

She crashed into the other’s body and sliced her wand through the heavy water around them.

‘Finite Incantatem!’ She thought.

The whirlpool stopped, for a moment, the two of them remained suspended in the still water like marionettes on a string.

Then it crashed down and brought both of them with.

Everything happened in a rush.

The room began to empty, drawing all the water back into the waterfall like a vacuum cleaner in a swimming pool. The broken plants from the ceiling washed away as well. With nothing to hold them up, both woman slammed against the soggy sandstone with matching pained groans.

She was disoriented. Dizzy. And most of all, tired.

A tiredness that felt like it placed a couple kilos of weight on her chest.

‘Oh.’ She thought as she opened her eyes.

Her statement- an exaggeration meant to be taken figuratively- would appear to be literal.

Because there was actually a couple of kilos sitting on her chest in the form of a very wet, and very angry looking Bellatrix Lestrange.

In the aftermath of her rather risqué spell, Hermione had grabbed hold of the other woman which lead to having Bellatrix on top of her.

She thought that the room seemed much darker. As it turned out, it was simply the woman’s raven locks cascading down her head like a funeral veil. If she looked over, Hermione was sure she would see the onxy strands mingling with her own chocolate brown ones; splaying over one another in an
intimacy that could only be akin to the position they were currently in.

Neither of them moved.

Neither of them spoke.

Yet only one could do either.

For you see, Hermione couldn’t move with the older woman pinning her to the floor.

…and Bellatrix couldn’t speak with Hermione’s wand jammed into the bottom of her jaw hard enough to turn the surrounding skin an angry, blood red.

“Yield.”

The word was no more than a whisper.

It wasn’t cause she wanted it to be, but simply put Hermione was literally *breathless*.

Between using so much magic, getting tossed about every which way, and having a literal person crushing her lungs with her full body weight; there was no room to *breathe*. All she could do was look into Bellatrix’s eyes that gazed upon her own with silent loathing.

She said nothing.

Merlin, Hermione never wanted to hear the woman say anything more than she did right now. She needed to hear the other speak. Needed the witch to listen to her for once in her life.

She had to.

She needed to.

Because Hermione was sure what she would do if she didn’t. The position they were in was dangerous. There was so much the other woman could do, even without her wand. She could lose this right here and now and all her efforts would be for nothing. Water pulled up in the corner of her eyes and Bellatrix narrowed her own. Hermione could see the woman forming a word.

“Nev-“

“Please,” Hermione interrupted with the most heartbroken plea she could muster.

The woman actually stopped. Hermione took the moment to look into the other woman’s very soul.

“Bellatrix….we can’t keep doing this. This isn’t *living.*” She told her quietly. “We’ll fight and fight and *fight* until both of us are nothing but dust and bones upon the ground. Never satisfied. Never *happy.*”

“I don’t need *happy.*” The woman sneered, her voice choking off at the end.

It set something off in the younger siren.

“How do you know that!” Hermione yelled. “How do you know you don’t need something you’ve never *had!*”

Silence.
Hot air blew over her already chapped lips. The witch’s breath was starting to build like the woman was about to explode into a tirade, but Hermione wasn’t having it. She hardened her heart and jabbed the wand deeper into the other’s jugular.

“No.” She growled. “Not this time Bellatrix. You do this every time you don’t want to face something. You just lash out with anger and hatred and pain until you get your way. Well guess what.” She kept her voice steady and stern. “That’s not going to work on me anymore. You want to argue? We will. You want to fight? Fine.”

In a rather bold move on her behalf, Hermione twisted her wand, no doubt pinching the other’s skin in the process.

“I’m trapped here. Trapped with you. There’s no chain between us but we can’t lose one another even if we wanted to…” She inhaled deeply.

“…but not being able to lose you, doesn’t mean I have to lose to you.- so I’ll say it one more time; yield, Bellatrix Lestrange.”

The older siren sucked air through her teeth a deep rumbling beginning to vibrate against the base of her chest.

She wanted to keep fighting, Hermione could see that as clear as day. But something flickered in the other woman’s gaze. A look that wasn’t cruel or angry or any of the Slytherin’s usual emotions.

It was thoughtful, like she was having an internal debate with herself. One that- judging by the jerking with her eyes- had everything to do with her siren side. A double rarity that couldn’t be beat by the last bombshell Bellatrix decided to drop on her.

“…I yield.”

The words struck Hermione like a blow to the face. She almost didn’t believe Bellatrix even said them until a soft blue light twirled it’s way up her wand, turning green before disappearing.

She dropped the stick like it’d been dipped in lava. That was apparently all her body needed to release the tension built up over the course of the duel. Her arms fell out to her sides and she closed her eyes.

Well done.

‘We did it.’ She told her other half. ‘We actually did it.’

Laughter bubbled up in her gut and Hermione had no intentions on holding it inside.

Her chest filled with a joy she’d hadn’t felt in a very long time. Hands reached up to scrub at the tears in her eyes, though the thrilled sound leaving her throat never wavered.

She won.

Bellatrix had to help her, even if the woman didn’t know how, she at least had to try. If she failed, at least Hermione was smart enough to take her failures and fix things herself.

Not only that, Bellatrix admitted defeat even though Hermione knew that the woman had plenty of ways to-

Her laughter stopped.
The inner thoughts playing through her mind worried her greatly. She didn’t remove the hands over her eyes as she spoke.

“…you could’ve used your voice.” She whispered. “You could’ve used wandless magic or even punched me if you wanted to.”

Silence.

“But you didn’t.” Hermione continued. “You…you let me win. With everything on the line- you let me win.”

Silence.

She removed her hands.

Bellatrix’s smile was sharp enough to cut glass.

Her voice came out a bit shuddery when she next spoke. “What have you done?”

A hand came up from her left to run down her left cheek.

“…you win, but I won.” She cooed. “Perhaps not in the way I wanted, but a little voice has been whispering.” Her voice began oozing with that patinate mischievousness the woman was well known for. “And oh the things it has told me. The prize that is now in my grasp.”

A leg shifted upwards between her own and Hermione yelped, trying to nudge the offending appendage away. It only made her position far worse and the fear of rubbing herself so intimately against the others practically bare leg caused her to freeze. The hand that’d been hovering over her face trailed down her neck to hook around her collar and yanked.

“Gak!” Hermione choked.

“Fine. You want my help girl? It’s yours. But you should’ve been more careful of what you asked for.” The witch chuckled softly and her eyes widened with glee. “So where shall we begin, muddy?”

Hermione frowned. “What?”

“Tsk. What,” She mocked in her high pitched voice. “Does she think I can snap my fingers and the collar will just pop off?”

“No I didn’t, but you said that I have to reach some point of feeling enough for that to happen.” Hermione’s eyebrow furrow. “How am I supposed to do that if you don’t tell me?”

Oh she really didn’t like the smile pulling across those lips.

“Why, by showing you of course.”

“Show me wha- gak!” Hermione’s words were cut off by her broken gasp.

There was a mouth on hers now. A familiar one from what felt like eons ago. Her brain short circuited, completely cutting out as Bellatrix kept her pinned to the floor from every angle. She moved to push the other off of her, but her arm was caught and pinned against the floor by their heads. Bellatrix’s eyes seared into her own as she danced her tongue at the seal of her lips, looking to gain entrance to the last place Hermione wanted them. Turning her head away was her next move, except it turned out to make things worse. The older siren chased her with her mouth, not giving her any leeway to escape the other’s ministrations. The leg between her own hiked higher and she
squeaked, allowing Bellatrix to plunge in with her tongue and steal Hermione’s breath away like a thief in the night.

The world was spinning.

Or maybe that was the results of her body frying itself from the inside out from her blushing. She should’ve tried harder. Should’ve pulled away a little stronger, but Hermione literally couldn’t think right now.

And just when she thought the woman could do no more to heighten her embarrassment, she did something downright sinful.

She *purred*.

And the vibrations touched every part of Hermione that had never known pleasure before, a great inferno pooling at the bottom of her stomach like a fire pit ready to explode.

She couldn’t help it.

Hermione straight up *bit* her.

Hard.

Bellatrix shot away from her and suddenly the world returned to normal.

Her eyes couldn’t possibly go any wider than they were now, staring up at Bellatrix who was staring back in amusement.

She could barely speak loud enough over the pounding of her heart. “Wha-! What is *wrong* with you!”

Bellatrix tilted her head and frowned. “Huh, I was *sure* that would work.” She murmured.

“*What* would work!” She howled.

“You asked for my help. Well this is *it.*” She explained. “I can’t tell you how to feel emotions muddy…but I *can* show you.”

When the woman’s tongue shot out, it was red with blood from where she bit her. She didn’t seem to be in pain, something that was made clear when she swiped said tongue over her lips to stain them red.

“And since *shock* didn’t seem to work, *well,* we’ll just have to try *another* one.”

The woman leaned down and spoke directly into her ear.

“And we’ll just go through *all* of them until my debt is paid off and I get my *prize.*” She glanced at Hermione from the corner of her eye. “We’re gonna have *lots* of fun here muddy. Don’t forget to get on you knees and thank me later for my *kindness.*”

There was a pressure on her right cheek and then Bellatrix got off of her, waltzing around the room to collect her wand and her shoes before exiting the room with a skip in her step.

Hermione didn’t follow. She was still laying on the floor in a reeling mess of…something. Her body was still soaking wet from earlier, yet the warmth from where the other had been laying on her still lingered as well.
She was definitely in shock if that was what the woman was going for.

But the collar still lingered.

“What have I done?” Hermione asked the empty room.

*Good.*

Her siren side replied with palpable glee, retreating to the back of her thoughts with satisfaction from having Bellatrix’s attentions. She closed her eyes and laid there trying to figure out what she was going to do now that she’d given Bellatrix something new to do to torment her.

That was how Nimmy found her hours later; sprawled out on the ground with nothing but the last shreds of her dignity and the weight of her new problems keeping her nailed to the floor.

And being the good little house elf he was, the ever helpful creature didn’t mention the bloody kiss mark left on her face by his mistress beloved.

Miss Hermione was red enough already.
Chapter 41 – Selfish

Nimmy didn’t say much when he guided Hermione out of the basement. The little house elf figured that the witch wouldn’t be much for conversation anyways with the lost look lingering about on her face. Instead, he waved his hand and dried the woman’s soaking wet clothes and hair. She gave a small ‘thanks’ but didn’t say much else.

When they broke off and the woman wandered back into her room, all the small creature could do was sigh. It was a shame that Mistress and Miss Hermione didn’t know how to get along. Nimmy was sure that if the two of them could finally get along, they’d be very happy together.

Something brushed against his hip.

He glanced down to see Miss Hermione’s familiar staring up at him with wide, knowing eyes. Nimmy smile and gave the feline a firm pat on the head.

“Fear not Master Crookshanks, Nimmy is sure things will get better for the Mistress and her mate. Nimmy just knows it.” He nodded.

Crookshanks yowled and gave a hearty stretch, flicking his tail beneath the house-elf’s chin as he went the opposite way of Hermione’s room, trotting back into the kitchen from whence he came. Seeing the cat pawing at the closed door leading upstairs, Nimmy snapped his fingers and let him enter. As the creature prepared to make lunch for the household, he couldn’t help but smile that at least someone was getting along without fighting anymore.

No one came to the table that afternoon. Nimmy ended up hand delivering his hard work to everyone’s individual’s room. He hoped that dinner went a bit smoother.

…it didn’t.

Hermione didn’t want to see anyone for the rest of the day. The witch was perfectly content to just lay in her bed under her covers and hide away from the waking world. There was just so much swirling about through her head.

She won.

That fact was clear as day even as she clutched her wand to her chest beneath the duvet.

So why did she feel like she lost?
Maybe because Bellatrix was more excited over her win than she was.

Inadvertently, she blushed just thinking about the other woman and what she had done. The way the other’s soft, pale breast felt beneath her hands. How heavy the other’s body felt laid atop her own on the cold, sandstone floor. How Bellatrix chased her lips and claimed them with a passionate ferocity that she’d never felt before.

The fire pooling at the pit of her belly made it’s appearance known again and that was too much.

Hermione turned her face into her pillow and screamed.

“What is wrong with her?” She groaned miserably. “Of all the things she could’ve done, she just… just..urgh!” Her frustration grew more and more each time she thought about it.

Yes, frustration. That’s what she was going to call it because there was no way that she had the nerve to call the aching feeling within herself anything else.

Why not?

She popped up at hearing her siren side speak to her.

“Because it wasn’t anything else.” Came her careful response.

Why are you lying?

“I’m not!”

You are. I know. I can see you. Inside of you.

Hermione threw the blankets from her person and scowled at the innocent sea life swimming past her window. She really wasn’t in the mood for her other half’s irrational need to make her like Bellatrix. In her heart she knew that the creature just wanted to be close with Bellatrix’s siren, but what it seemed to forget- and what she was realizing more and more each day- they didn’t think the same. Didn’t want the same things even though they were sharing the same body. It was maddening. Why couldn’t she just separate it from herself and give it to Bellatrix. Or Bellatrix could give hers up and leave Hermione alone.

Her siren bashed itself against the suppression.

Selfish. So selfish.

“Selfish!” She gasped. Hermione almost got to her feet to look her other half in the face, momentarily forgetting that the creature was but a voice lingering at the back of her mind. “I’m the only one of us being reasonable. She’s an absolute menace and what she did in that basement was nothing more than her playing her twisted mind games again.” Hermione hissed at the creature within.

Merlin she was glad no one was around to hear her talking to herself like a madwoman. As if she wasn’t embarrassed enough.

An argument wasn’t in the cards apparently, because just as Hermione had geared up to continue, the creature retreated to curl up solemnly in the depths of her thoughts. She didn’t need to hear it speak to know what it thought of her still.

Selfish. That word rung in her ears like a church bell and she couldn’t get it out of her mind no matter how hard she tried to think of something else. She needed a distraction. To do something to occupy
not only her time, but her thoughts too. Reading didn’t sound all that fun right now and there was absolutely no way she’d be returning to the basement with her current memories of the place so fresh in her head. A bath sounded nice, but she wanted to save that for when she went to sleep. That didn’t really leave her with many options, but she did have one that didn’t sound too terrible.

The woman got out of bed and slipped on her house shoes. The burgundy turtleneck and black jeans kept her warm as she entered the hallway and made her way towards the kitchen.

That was something she noticed earlier in the week about the house. It got rather chilly the closer it got to night, even more so than most places she’s lived in before. Hermione figured it had something to do with the fact that they were literally underneath the ocean. Bellatrix sure didn’t dress like she noticed the temperature difference. However, now that she thought about it, the woman was most likely used to it; having made this house and the fact that the Slytherin common rooms were located under the lake. The cold was probably second nature by now.

It wasn’t for Hermione though, so she pulled her sleeves down til they were practically over the tips of her fingers and make the rather short trek into the kitchen. The room was empty, much to her delight. Peace and quiet was all she wanted to have to deal with until she found herself tired out once more and craving the sweet embrace of sleep.

Opening up the fridge located directly next to the entrance, Hermione began pulling out an array of ingredients and placing them on the white counter next to the long island table. She didn’t quite know what she was going to make, but whatever it was, she knew she wanted it to remind her of home. Something that her mother or father used to make when she was a little girl.

Seeing raisins in her pile of supplies, she couldn’t stop the laugh as a memory from her childhood appeared from the depths of her thoughts.

“Mommy, what is that!” A much younger Hermione squeaked fearfully as her parents presented her with a plate of strange pastries. It was Halloween, and the little six-year old dressed up as- fittingly enough- a little witch was staring at it in horror- much to her parent’s amusement.

“It’s called flies graveyard. Whooooo!” Her father said in the scariest voice he could muster, which in hindsight came off more playful than scary. He gave the child a tickle and picked one of the pastries up off the plate. When he started moving it towards his mouth, Hermione went into a panic.

“No, no Daddy! Don’t eat flies!” She screeched. Her parents laughed and Hermione had to watch in horror as the man took a huge bite of it, patting his stomach with glee. Given his frog costume, it was fitting, but it still made the little girl’s stomach churn all the same. She hopped up and down, trying to desperately get her father to spit the disgusting creatures out, but the man simply laughed and ate another.

Hermione’s mother was having an absolute fit watching the scene, making sure to snap plenty of photos before deciding to kill the charade.

“Hermione, pumpkin, they aren’t real flies. See,” The older woman kneeled down, making sure not to dirty her princess costume. “They’re berries and raisins.”

Hermione stopped harassing her father long enough to run to her mother and see if she was telling the truth. Weary, the child got really close to the creepy pastry and saw that they were in fact not flies. She poked the sauce keeping the dried fruits together and gave it a taste. Her eyes went alight as she took a full one from the platter and sunk her teeth into it with glee.

“These are yummy, mommy!” She yelled happily.
Monica gave her daughter a pat on the head and shooed the little witch away when her greedy hands went reaching for another.

“Don’t eat all of them Hermione. These are for the trick or treaters. You can have some later.” The woman scolded gently, returning to the kitchen with the goodies in tow.

“Ah man.” Hermione pouted sadly. There’d be none of them left by the time the night was through. “Can’t I have just one more?”

And like a beacon from above, Hermione gasped with joy as a hand holding another treat appeared just above the brim of her witch’s hat. She stretched out to grab it, but it was yanked just out of reach. She lifted her hat to see her father grinning down at her.

“Daddy! Can I have it? Please~!” She begged.

Wendell pretended to think about it, tapping his foot atop the dead autumn grass.

“I don’t know. You did use a spell to turn me into a frog.” He said slyly.

“Well mommy is a princess, so if you kiss her, you won’t be a frog anymore!” Hermione reasoned. “Everyone knows that!”

Wendell laughed and crouched down to meet his daughter’s eyes. “You strike a hard bargain little witch. Tell you what- if you sing me a song about how good these are, Ill give it to you. Deal?” He asked.

There was no hesitation before Hermione agreed and did just that.

By the end of it, Monica ended up running out of the kitchen, to stop her rascally husband, but by the time she reached them, Hermione’s cheeks were stuffed with raisins and sweet dough.

The girl could only stand with stomach shaking giggles as her father proceeded to chase her mother for his princely kiss, the rest of the night spent laughing and playing with her favorite people in the world. It was the best Halloween she’d ever had...

When Hermione pulled herself from the memory of her childhood, she found herself wiping a tear from the corner of her eye. The nostalgia had touched something in her heart and now more than ever she wished that her parents were here to comfort her. It didn’t matter how old she was; her parents were there for her majority of her life. Unlike some other muggleborn parents she knew of, they hadn’t feared her powers. And even magical families had their thoughts and opinions about creature inheritances.

Her parents never blinked an eye.

They loved her magic. Loved her songs.

They loved her, and the knowledge of that kept the fire of hope in her heart burning.

Pulling herself together, Hermione started preparing the dough; mixing the butter, water, and flour together just as she remembered her mother showing her how to do. She could’ve used her wand to mix it all together, but it felt better to take some of her frustrations out on the mixture, and so she simply did it by hand. That being said, she did use a spell she learned from Dobby a few years back to chill it. There was another she learned to make bread rise faster as well. Seemingly useless spells in hindsight, but in the kitchen- when tasked to feed hundreds of hungry students everyday- they were invaluable to house elves.
Or lazy witches who didn’t want to wait hours or even days for the yeast to do its work.

Hermione divided her dough in two, rolling it out on the floured countertop and lining the baking pans she prepped with them.

It was time to make the filling.

She went to the stove and lit the burner. When it reached an appropriate temperature, she turned to the island and grabbed the butter, sugar, and spices. Once melted, she added the fresh currants and placed the remaining ones back on the counter behind her. Since she found raisins during her raid, she figure why not add them as well. After a while, the mixture was the consistency she wanted and she took it off the fire to spread over one half of her pastry. The second half was laid out on top and she sealed it together with a fork, stabbing a few holes inside so the air could escape and all her hard work didn’t up and explode on her.

The oven was already set and so she sprinkled a bit of sugar on top, popped it inside, and set a timer. It’d probably take an hour to be done and so Hermione leaned her back against the counter and watched the egg timer begin to slowly tick down, minute by minute.


The silence drove her *mad.*

“Should’ve chosen something with a shorter baking time.” She murmured beneath her breath.

Hermione knew she could’ve, but the moment the smell of baking fruit tickled her nostrils, she knew that she wouldn’t change a thing. It just brought back so many good memories. It wasn’t Halloween—honestly Hermione had stopped keeping track of the months with everything going on—but between the chill of the house, the sweet and spicy smell of her baking, and remembering her family; Hermione felt her heart flood with warm emotion.

It made her want to dance.

To laugh.

To…*sing.*

Except when she opened her mouth and urged the words she sang as a child to come forth, her mind went absolutely blank and her overwhelming happiness came crashing down around her. Hermione stumbled forward and placed both hands over her lips in shock.

“I…I can’t remember the words.” She whispered brokenly. “I can’t *remember.*”

Not a single thing. Even as the memories of her doing so as a child came to mind, when she remembered herself clearly singing to her father, it was as if the words were *muted.* Hermione couldn’t hear herself even though the sounds of her father’s laughter stretched across their lawn and into her ears like the sweetest sound she’d ever heard. She tugged at the collar viciously, like her own brute strength and frustration could remove it just like that.

This could only be the work of the supression, now that she stopped to think about it. Hermione was good with words and knew many, many of them, but stringing them together to make a song was not something she had the talent for alone. When she sang, the only thing she brought to the table was her emotions and how she wanted to direct them. It was her siren side that provided the words. Who acted as her wordsmith in the times where she herself couldn’t quite put words to what she was feeling.
Her powers spoke for her when she was rendered speechless.

They’ve always have.

And when they were taken away from her, they had inadvertently taken a tiny bit of her memories with them. How could she have not noticed? It was a small amount, given that she could still remember that she did sing, but it still hurt all the same. She wanted to remember the words that lit up her father’s face with joy as she made her pleas for another pastry.

The song she sang when they’d come home late from work and she was alone.

The song she sang when she injured herself.

They were there. Right there in front of her and she couldn’t reach them.

A sob wracked her chest then. Hermione crouched down next to the counter and rested her head on her knees to try and calm herself down. She needed to breathe before she sent herself spiraling down into her thoughts. They tell you to latch onto something to watch your breathing to when you’re having a panic attack. Luckily for her, she had the ticking egg timer to help her out.

She focused in on it and tried to match her breathing with it’s steady, repetitive pattern.


Hermione lifted her head.

Last she checked, clocks only ticked and tocked.

They didn’t clack.

Or scrape.

“Or croak.” She hissed. The witch stood up and turned to look at the counter. “I should’ve known the berry bandit would make his return.” The woman address the other occupant standing on the table in front of her.

To his credit, Corvus didn’t even acknowledge the fact that he’d been caught in the act of thieving. The lanky bird was balancing on one of his limbs and Hermione could now see where the sounds she heard earlier were coming from.

The avian was using his long talons to skewer the currants on the tips and shovel them into his awaiting beak. Corvus apparently wasn’t picky of what he ate, because he didn’t leave the raisins untouched either. Being too small to skewer though, the bird had taken to using all his claws like a shovel and pouring the dried fruit into his beak as well. A few were falling back onto the table, but he didn’t seem to care and was perfectly content to scoop them up on the next round of feeding.

Hermione assumed he was quite pleased with himself given that the crest on his head was going mental the more he stuffed his face.

And surprisingly, Hermione didn’t feel like stopping him. Her pastries were already in the oven and unless she wanted to make another batch later, she had no use for the remaining ingredients now. That and she was sure that Nimmy would be more than happy to pick up anything she ran out of should she ask him.

So she let him eat in peace.
“You know, you could’ve asked instead of literally waiting until my back was turned.” She said mostly to herself.

Corvus heard her though and stopped his eating to give her one of his laughing croaks before resuming.

Hermione leaned against the countertop with her head laying on her arms. She just watched the creature in silence. If he wasn’t looking for a fight, who was she to try and start one unnecessarily.

Everything was fine for a while, until she started drifting back into her thoughts, the world around her beginning to fade away again as she began thinking about-

There was a currant on her nose.

The witch jolted out of her thoughts as the cold fruit sat pressed against her face. She actually ended up crossing her eyes to see what was going on. A clawed foot was clutching it and the owner of said foot was staring down at her with vibrant yellow eyes. Corvus didn’t move it, even as she locked eyes with him. Annoyed, she plucked it from his foot and just held it in her hand. He continued staring.

And staring.

“What?” She asked.

He looked to the berry then back up at her.

She’d seen Crooks do this when he brought her one of his ‘gifts’.

He wanted her to eat it.

Hermione looked at the peace offering and raised an eyebrow.

“How do I know your feet are clean?” She asked.

Offended, Corvus jerked back and gave her an angry croak, extending one of his furry wings to swat at her. Hermione laughed at his irritation. “Okay I’m sorry! Here.” She went over to the sink and ran the berry under the water before popping it into her mouth. “Happy?”

Much to her surprise, the creature nodded and went back to eating the goodies for himself.

“ Weird bird.” She murmured, gathering a few in her hand for herself. When she wasn’t pecked for reaching into Corvus’ space, the two spent the rest of the countdown for her pastries eating at the ingredients. She didn’t speak to him and he left her alone as well. They were simply sharing each other’s…company.

It was strange, she thought, using her wand to remove the hot pan from the oven when the timer dinged. If someone said that she and Corvus would be as cordial to one another as they are now, she would’ve laughed. Back at the castle- and even Bellatrix’s mansion- the creature had been downright creepy. Rude, and most of all aggressive. Now, he seemed much more docile, which she was grateful for.

Now if only Bellatrix would do the same.

When she looked over her shoulder, she could see Corvus at full attention. He was gazing at the pastries like a starved beast. Like he hadn’t polished off almost every raisin and currant leftover from
the ingredients. She waved her wand over them twice; one to cool them, two to cut them. Pulling a piece upwards, she watched as it oozed brown chunks and looked just as gross as she remembered as a child. Hermione tasted it and nearly melted. It tasted fine, not like her mother’s, but the memories made it taste sweeter than any amount of sugar she could think to add to it. The witch picked up another and offered it to Corvus. His claws tapped happily against the tabletop and he reached out with one of his talons to take it from her. Balancing on one foot, he began nibbling away at the pastry as a happy purr rumbled in the base of his chest. She couldn’t help but smile.

“Guess it’s good.” She took another bite and resumed leaning on the counter.

This was nice.

“Well, well, what do we have here?”

Which meant it was time for Bellatrix to make her appearance.

With her back still to the island counter, she refused to face the older witch- something she knew Bellatrix hated more than anything. Boots clicking over the tile floor sounded to her left.

“The little mouse finally comes out of her hidey hole.” She cooed. “What’s wrong, didn’t want to see me? And here I thought we were having so much fun earlier.”

The way the woman hissed the word ‘fun’ sent a shiver rocketing up her spine. Still, she didn’t take the bait. Having Bellatrix bring up what occurred between them earlier, made a burning blush present itself at the nape of her neck.

More footsteps and then before she knew what was happening, there was a warm hand gripping her chin. She glared at the onyx eyes staring down at her with irritation.

“What do you want Bellatrix?” Hermione sighed, knowing full well that there was no way to get her to leave her be now that she’d caught the other’s attention. Why she seemed to always forget that the woman became more inclined to bother her when she didn’t want to be bother, she couldn’t tell you.

“What? I can’t come and speak with my favorite house guest?” She gasped.

“I’m your only house guest. And since when did you start ‘speaking’ to me?” Hermione griped.

The grip on her chin tightened.

“Since a sniveling like brat got too big for her britches and begged me to help her during a wizarding duel.” The raven haired woman snarled nastily. “And you’re not the only nuisance I have to deal with about this- or have you forgotten?”

Hermione smirked. “Other half giving you a headache?”

“And as much as yours is.” She matched the younger woman’s smirk. “Though, if you keep with this little attitude, I won’t help you, and a headache will be the least of your problems.”

Her eyes darted up in fear. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Bellatrix hopped away and practically glided around to the other side of the counter. Corvus perked up as his master approached and scratched beneath his beak.

“Oh, do you hear that Corvus? Now I have her attention. Here I am, trying to play nice with little Miss Goody-Two Shoes and what do I get for it?” She wailed sarcastically. “Attitude! Accusations!
Attention only when it pertains to her. Really, how selfish can she be?”

Selfish.

There that word was again.

It branded itself on her skin and in her thoughts like a hot iron. She couldn’t escape it, no matter what she did.

Of course Bellatrix can’t see inside her head. Didn’t know about the argument that she and her siren side had gotten into just a few hours before about this very thing. Which meant she couldn’t have predicted that such a offhand comment would send the younger woman into a rage.

“I’m selfish! Why, huh? Tell me!” She hissed, pushing away from the counter to stand directly in front of Bellatrix. “Because I don’t- no- I can’t believe a single word coming from your mouth? Because I don’t know if when you approach me you’re gonna hex me, or…or,” She stuttered to get the next part out.

Bellatrix laughed. “Kiss you?” The woman was all teeth. “My, my. Is that what has you all flustered. What’s wrong Granger? Am I the only one to have gotten you all red under the robes?” She cooed.

Merlin why did she have to move right in front of her like this. There was no way that Bellatrix couldn’t see the scarlet of her cheeks. And even if she did and doubted any denials Hermione may have had planned, Hermione proceeded to dig herself further in the hole.

“Ahawak?”

By tripping over her tongue.

To which she then watched as the woman’s eyes started moving quickly back and forth, only to stop and hone in on her frighten gaze. Her lips curled into something absolutely sinful.

“Oh…now that’s an interesting thought.”

She didn’t specify whether she was talking to Hermione or her other half, but she spoke her next words like she hadn’t even heard what Hermione had just failed to say.

“And what was the point you were trying- and failing- to get at earlier?” Came her nonchalant question.

Hermione growled. “My point is that I’m not being selfish. Or stubborn. Or anything else!”

“So what do you call this little tantrum?”

“I’m not having a damn tantrum Bellatrix Lestrange!” Oh she was boiling inside. “I’m rightfully angry. Rightfully frustrated. And rightfully done with your mind games. You wanna know why I’m not trying to play nice. Why I can’t believe a word coming out of your mouth?” She waltzed up to the taller woman and raised her arm to roll down her sleeve, revealing her mudblood scar to the older siren. “Because of things like this. Because I haven’t forgotten, nor have I forgiven you. You’ve scarred me, beat me, belittled me, and have done everything in your power to make me miserable. So no, I’m not feeling exactly happy to go along with this little façade you’re trying to pull.”

A pin could drop from the second floor and she’d hear it like gunshot from how eerily quiet the room became. Bellatrix’s face was a blank mask rather than the cheek tearing grin she wore only moments before. She figured Bellatrix was going to retaliate against her essentially screaming in her face, but
that never happened.

“…do you think I want any of that?” Bellatrix practically whispered.

Hermione frowned. “Do I think you want wha-,”

“Forget. and for my actions to be forgotten. Because if you do; then it seems that I need to be a bit clearer about something.”

She turned to Corvus. With one of her nails, she wrapped against the countertop. Six taps, a pause, and then eight more in a different pattern. The bird gave a short croak before mimicking the pattern with his talons. He kept it going without missing a beat as Bellatrix turned to her with a haughty look and starting prowling towards her, making Hermione quickly begin to back away.

It made Bellatrix crack a smile.

*When a panther stalks into a room
What’s the first thing that you see?
It’s tail
It’s claws
It’s gaping maw
Or that violent yellow gleam*

Hermione didn’t like the look in the other’s eyes and when she kept advancing towards her, it made her backpedal even faster.

*Be careful what you’re looking for
You’ll always find what which you seek
But in keeping your eyes on panthers
You forgot to watch your feet*

Bellatrix jumped at her. She didn’t do more than that- the woman didn’t even have her wand out- yet she was still unnerved enough by the woman’s action that she tripped over her houseshoes and hit the tile floors. The young woman hissed in pain and kept her eyes focused on the very amused Bellatrix.

*No biting or growls or scratches
Befell your person
Yet still, you fell*
You’ll always end up burning bridges
When you choose to build them in hell
You can blame me for the torment
I’ll wear the credit for making you bleed
But the one thing that you cannot pin
Are the two things I don’t need

Her eyes went darker as she crouched down next to Hermione on the floor. An elbow was resting on her knee as she rested her chin on the back of her hand. With her free hand she curled a couple of loose locs around her finger tips.

Forgiveness
Forgotten
These things I do not know
You don’t forgive what you don’t regret
Don’t forget what you want known
If you ask me to provide them
I can’t give what’s not owed
Cause the things I do, aren’t meant for you
They’re meant to soothe my soul

She stood up with a smirk. Reaching over to the table, she picked up one of the currants still left in the container on the counter. Bending at the waist, she grabbed Hermione’s cheeks and squeezed til the girl opened her mouth and gave the woman room to pop the berry inside.

Cause the things I do, aren’t meant for you
They’re meant to soothe my soul

With an air of flair about her, Bellatrix turned around and marched out of the kitchen, the skirts of her usual black dress hiked up in her hands as she entered her bedroom and closed the door.

The Gryffindor thought that was the last she was going to see of the woman, except she opened the door and stuck her head out to say one last thing.

“Oh, and you’ll get no help from me today, girl. Or any other day until you persuade me otherwise. I’m sure that’ll teach you word your bargains better during a wizarding duel.” Then slammed the door closed again.
Hermione didn’t know what she was supposed to take away from that.

Actually, now that she was alone to think about it, she realized she did.

And the implications were not good.

So without any other desire to be free with her swimming thoughts, she got to her feet, and sauntered down the hall to her room wherein she closed the door and locked it.

Nimmy entered the kitchen not long after the two woman had left, having listened to everything from the safety of the living room. He knew not to interrupt them at times like these. It was a shame that the two were still fighting, but he could feel it in his bones that something was about to change.

He just knew it.

For now though, he would return to his duties until that time came at last.

As he cleaned the kitchen, Nimmy was grateful that the other two hadn’t lingered about. The house elf didn’t want anyone to see how hard of a time he was having over at the sink and it’s new occupant. Corvus who was passed out in the basin- fat and content after gorging himself on the leftover pastries Miss Hermione had left unguarded- was not a creature to move about recklessly when sleeping. He’s learned that the hard way many a time before, and quite frankly, Nimmy wasn’t in the mood for such a dangerous task at the moment.

He would come back in a few hours.

It wasn’t like he needed to rush and make food when he knew no one would be in the mood to eat it.
Chapter 42 – Murky Waters

Apologize.

That was the new word her other half decided to torment her with come the next morning. Hermione didn’t know which one was worse. At least with the creature not fully understanding why she acted so angry at the other siren, she had justification. But hearing the creature’s constant bombardment of pleas to apologize to Bellatrix, she found that her reason not to was a bit…flimsy.

She deserved the right to not forgive her- of that she was certain. But the longer Hermione thought about how she lashed out at the other witch in the kitchen, the more she realized that she may have gotten a bit emotional. After all, the woman had to help her. The bet she’d ‘won’ ensured that. Not only that, but having the woman lose on purpose- for whatever unnerving reason she chose to do so- there was no way that Bellatrix would do something like that with her magic on the line.

Which means that when the woman said she wasn’t trying to trick her into another one of her mind games…she had meant it.

And Hermione had essentially thrown that back in the woman’s face and called her a liar on top of it all.

Apologize.

“Shut up.” She murmured absently.

By this point, Hermione was rifling through her drawer for something to wear. A hot bath was all she wanted right now.

Apologize. Now.

She gritted her teeth and had started throwing things from the dresser onto the floor the more her siren side decided to nag her. Not one to be ignored though, the creature snarled and starting throwing itself against the suppression again; causing her to cry out in agony as the pain in her head increased.

“Stop it! What are you doing!” Hermione hissed, pulling her hair and kicking the dresser with her foot out of frustration. “What is wrong with you?” She finally yelled.

Apologize! We have angered mate! Mate wants to help! To Free!

“I know that!” The woman admitted, slamming her hand on the dresser. She tried to calm herself down. “I know.”

Then apologize. Go to mate.
Hermione didn’t want to. Merlin knows she didn’t want to…

But she would have to.

Because if she didn’t, things were going to get worse. They were already getting worse.

It wasn’t like Hermione hadn’t noticed the change in her other half. The creature had been angry because of the suppression. The headaches it’d caused her over the weeks wasn’t something she could ignore easily. But lately, things had grown even worse. The creature was becoming downright vicious. What was once a tolerable anger from their predicament was slowly warping into genuine hatred.

For her.

It didn’t care about what Bellatrix had done. What the woman could do. It wanted her. Period. When they didn’t have the collar, the creature was disappointed in Bellatrix’s abuse, but it was confident that the woman wouldn’t take things too far because of their relationship. And for a while, Hermione believed that as well.

Now however, that confidence that she could stop Bellatrix’s siren abilities was all but gone. The only thing staying her hand from simply telling Hermione to slit her throat was the fact that her own siren side wouldn’t allow it. Hermione refused to admit how much that kept her on edge at every waking moment. How vulnerable that made her feel. She missed her powers. As much as she despised how her instincts got the best of her some days, the negative aspects of being a siren were far outweighed by the benefits. And with the growing tension between herself and her other half, Hermione felt that she was ready to have that feeling back. There wasn’t much she had in this world anymore. If she could at least feel like herself again- feel whole again- than she would do whatever it took to achieve that goal.

Even…make peace with Bellatrix.

Her other half was delirious with joy at her decision, finally getting what its wanted this entire time. The woman scowled at the clothes set before her, seeing as she couldn’t exactly direct it at her intended target.

“This is only until we figure out how to get this collar off. Then after that, we’re leaving.” She announced.

We will not leave. We cannot.

“Yeah and why not?”

Mate needs us.

“Well guess what, we don’t need mat- Bellatrix!” She huffed, barely avoiding the slip-up. “One day you will know what I mean.”

And you will know as well.

There were so many things that Hermione wanted to retort back with but she reframed.

This time.

Slowly, she stepped into the hallway and went across to the bathroom, but upon entering, confusion clouded her thoughts.
Something didn’t seem right.

The door was wide open, giving her a full view of the otherwise unoccupied room. The confusion was that despite no one being in there aside from herself- the two enchanted serpents were awake and moving about overhead. The bath was full to the brim, steaming and full of foamy soap that wafted the sweet scent of hibiscus throughout the room. She stepped back into the hall and set her gaze down the hall. Bellatrix’s door was closed and Nimmy was meandering in the kitchen.

Had he started the bath for her? She usually took her bath a bit earlier than this, the reason for today’s lateness lurking about at the back of her mind as always.

In the end she took what she was given. Hermione closed the door, set her clothes on the counter and began stripping. If the bath was meant for her, than she was grateful and would make sure to thank the house elf later. If it was meant for Bellatrix, than the woman should’ve come earlier to claim her spot. She would simply have to wait until she was done now.

Bare feet slapped across the cold floor as she sauntered up to the bath and stepped into the tub. She hissed as she descended into the water and the heat began seeping into her sore muscles. Hermione rested against the edge of the tub and splashed some water on her face and shoulders. Movement from her left caught her eye. One of the serpent statues had come down to greet her; its gemstone eyes sparkling under the light of the chandelier. She ran her hand over the smoothness of its maw and smiled.

“Good morning.” She greeted. Of course the woman knew that it was just an enchantment she was speaking to, but as she’d come to learn- some enchantments begin to take on a life of their own the longer they remained in effect. It was kind of like the griffin statue that lead to the headmistress’s office. The damn thing was a menace some days. Sometimes it acted just as intended; a silent guardian that only let certain people through with the designated password. Other times the thing could be found sleeping deeply in front of the door and no amount of yelling or shoving would get it to move. She’d seen students and teachers alike have to either cast a spell or physically climb over it in order to press onwards. Naturally, it amused the late headmaster to no end- but for people like Hermione or even the first years who didn’t know spells advanced enough to make it budge- that griffin was more trouble than it was worth.

With that being said, the two serpents were actually pretty tame in comparison. When they weren’t spewing water from their respective mouths, the duo meandered about like any other living snake. Occasionally they would nap beside her during the duration of her bath, resting their massive heads on the edge of the tub carefully to relax and just bask in the presence of her own peacefulness. It was nice. She wondered what the two did when Bellatrix was in here. It was surprising in and of itself that the woman had the enchantments in the first place. She didn’t seem the type, but then again, she was slowly coming to realize that she didn’t know the woman as well as she thought she did.

Now wasn’t the time to dwell on that though.

Hermione didn’t want to think about the other woman until she left the bathroom. She had no idea what the other witch would do when she tried to confront her about what happened yesterday. That wildcard of a deviant could have any variety of responses and it hurt her head just thinking about how difficult the other would make the whole ordeal if she so chose.

Hermione sunk further into the water letting all of the oils soak into her soft, pale skin. A smile broke out across her face. This was the life. Alone in the tub with no one to bother her, Hermione was at peace with herself. It would be a bit of a lie to say that she was happy per say, but at least she could say she was content. A lock of hair fell in front of her face. She was hit with the sudden urge to dunk her head under the soapy water and get the sweat out of her frizzy curls. It could use a good wash.
Hermione inhaled deeply and submerged herself under the water. Brown strands unstuck themselves from her face and floated about her weightlessly like the seaweed outside her bedroom window. Everything felt wonderful…

Until it didn’t.

Hermione stretched her legs out, fully intending to use every inch of the massive tub for herself. But the moment she extended her foot out as far as it would go, it ran into something… squishy.

Her brows furled. ‘There shouldn’t be anything squishy in here.’ She told herself. Her eyes were closed and so she couldn’t even get a glimpse of what it was without burning her retinas with bath soap and hot water. Hermione wished she had her wand with her. At least then she could cast a bubble head charm and be alright. A promise was made to herself to practice that spell wand-less so that she wouldn’t get caught literally with her pants down like this again. Unharmed but weary of what her foot was pressed against, she flexed her toes, digging them harshly into whatever the soft object was.

And ended up regretting it immediately.

The girl screamed, causing water to fill her lungs as she was yanked forward beneath the water of the tub and across to the other side. She struggled violently, kicking and clawing at the thing—no… hands—wrapped tightly around her ankles. They let go of her and Hermione got her feet beneath herself to push off the bottom of the tub and propel herself to the surface. She broke through with a panicked gasp and scrambled away to get out.

She never made it.

The siren was spun around by rough hands and slammed against the edge of the tub. The wind was knocked out of her bare chest and for a moment the woman started seeing stars. With her head tilted back, she was left to look up at the twin serpents who apparently were looking down at the whole ordeal with curiosity in their crystal gazes. She broke from them to peer at the pale arms keeping her pinned in place. It was unnerving to see them sticking out of the water with no body attached to them. The suds prevented her from seeing anything at all. Hermione shimmied, trying her best to free herself and get out of the bath as quickly as humanly possible.

Something broke the surface of the water.

A pool of black.

Sleek and shiny to the point that she could almost see the light reflected off the surface of it. Like polished obsidian. It rose higher and higher and Hermione watched in horror as she slowly started to realize what she was looking at.

Hair.

Very familiar black hair.

‘Oh Merlin, no.’ Came her horrified thoughts. ‘No. nononono…’

Mate.

A scene from a horror movie was being played out right before her eyes as the being stood up and removed her hands from Hermione’s person; suds and water dripping off her nude body far too
sensually for Hermione’s liking. She couldn’t see the look on Bellatrix’s and she was praying this 
*was* Bellatrix - face seeing as her hair was covering it up completely.

And her breasts.

And her hips…

Had her hair always been this *long*? Hermione really took at a look at the woman in front of her. Much like herself, Bellatrix’s hair was an untamed mess that - even soaking wet - still held that distinctive curl to it.

There wasn’t a curl to be found here. Instead, it draped over the length of her body like a satin sheet, sinfully straight and silky. Not only that, but Hermione hadn’t been hallucinating earlier about the length of it. Whereas Bellatrix’s hair usually went a little past her shoulders, it had seemingly pulled a Rapunzel overnight and extended down into the water.

The change had her both confused and mesmerized.

But both feelings were overshadowed by a burning embarrassment that had her cheeks hot and uncomfortable. The young siren sunk down into the water up to her neck, praying on her magic that the woman hadn’t seen her naked from where she was creepily hiding.

“Wha- what is your *problem!*” She hissed, stuttering all the while. “How long have you been down there?”

The older woman sucked air through her teeth. And if Hermione thought Bellatrix standing there like a horror movie ghost was creepy enough, a shiver went up her spine when the woman’s hands rose from the water sporting pitch black skin that stretched up a bit past her elbows. How did she miss that?

The skin was strange, but less unnerving than the wickedly long claws at the end of them. In a move that made something odd burn at the pit of her stomach, Bellatrix ran her fingers through the hair covering her face and moved it over her left shoulder, revealing two other things changed about the other’s appearance.

Gills, red and angry looking were opening and closing on both sides of the woman’s neck. Each inhale that she took made them shudder like leaves on a windy day. Hermione wondered if they were supposed to look as red as they were or if something else was at play here. She didn’t feel like asking; there were far more pressing questions swirling about her thoughts that took precedent. The hair, the claws, the creeping…

And most of all, those *eyes*.

Hermione didn’t care that it was Bellatrix she was talking about. Not one bit.

Not when the siren’s eyes bewitched her more than any spell their owner could ever cast upon her person.

Admittedly, the fact that the woman’s sclera were pitch black made her flinch. They created an emptiness in the woman’s gaze that made her want to turn away or risk getting lost within the void of them. But not everything was a part of that abyss. For in the center of that darkness was the light of her irises. They were *glowing*. Hermione had always associated the other woman’s eyes with darkness. If there was ever a place where light could never touch, it was Bellatrix’s eyes. But now, that unspoken rule had been broken and her face was bathed in a sweet honey, orange glow. Even with the woman glaring down at her as she was, Hermione couldn’t help but bask in the warmth from her luminescent gaze.
“A better question is why are you in my bath.” Bellatrix fired back.

Immediately, Hermione took note that the woman sounded a bit strange. There was an echo about the way she was speaking. Like the words coming from her mouth were coming at her from every direction.

“I- uh- you!” She stuttered.

Bellatrix’s eyes crinkled and she sank back into the water up until just her eyes could be seen over the lip of the edge of it.

“Does that Gryffindor boldness often have you climbing into other women’s baths? Not so innocent after all are we?” She cooed.

Despite the fact that the bottom half of the woman’s face was submerged under water, she heard her loud and clear. Strange.

“How are you doing that?” Hermione asked.

“Doing what?”

“This!” She gesturing wildly at all of her. “The eyes, the voice, the hair!” She yelled.

Bellatrix ran her dangerous looking claws against the side of her face. “Oh. Finally something you don’t know. Shocker. No point in me spoiling the surprise then.” She laughed.

Hermione’s eyes narrowed. She didn’t know where the sudden burst of irritation was coming from but it set her nerves on edge. All she asked was a simple question. The younger witch didn’t know what she was expecting the other to do once she asked, but a part of her was hoping that the other wasn’t in the mood to be difficult.

Too much to hope for it seems.

So instead of acting rationally and remaining calm about the situation, Hermione did what she always seemed to do around Bellatrix.

She lashed out.

“Fine! Don’t say anything. I’m leaving.” She used one arm to cover her chest and the other to conceal her lower half as she rose from the water. “To think I was going to apologize to you.” She hissed.

Hermione twirled around and begun to exit the bath. From above, the two serpents were looking away from them, as if watching their fight was an invasion of the two witch’s privacy. Hermione didn’t care. Her bath had been ruined and all she wanted to do now was return to her bedroom. The woman had her feet halfway out the tub when there was a rattling hiss coming from behind her.

Before she could turn to see what it was, there were hands wrapped around her naked stomach and the next thing she knew, a scream was tearing from her throat as her world tilted backwards and she was pulled down into the water. Black flood her vision as the light was eaten up by darkness of the water.

No.

It wasn’t the water.
As Hermione scrambled to find the surface, swiping through the darkness and getting more entangled it. Last she checked, that wasn’t how darkness worked.

But hair did, and since entering the bathtub, Bellatrix had acquired a ton of it.

Speaking of said siren, Hermione could still feel the woman’s hands around her waist, digging into her flesh without quite breaking the skin. Instead of trying to pry them away from her, Hermione was flailing about in a panic to strike the woman and cause her to release her from her hold.

She couldn’t breathe. The siren had struck from behind so suddenly that she didn’t have the chance to hold her breath.

Her lungs were getting tight now which had her kicking out as well.

It yielded results at the very least.

Hermione broke through the darkness and was greeted by glowing orange orbs and wickedly sharp teeth. Bellatrix looked absolutely delighted. But there was something off in her gaze as well. Like she wasn’t all there. Testing the theory, Hermione- now in the woman’s line of sight- started clawing at her throat. It was symbolic mostly, seeing as the collar prevented her from doing it anyways, but it got the point across.

The woman’s eyes lost their otherworldly glow. The manic smile dropped and was replaced by open shock. Bellatrix let her go and Hermione immediately broke to the surface.

Air had never tasted so sweet.

Hermione panted harshly as she clung to the edge of the tub, looking very much like a drowned cat. The statue tasked with dispensing the cold water lowered its head from its perch; it’s blue eyes almost seeming to ask if she was alright. In honesty, she wasn’t, but once the startled witch was able to regain her bearings, she reassured the statue that she was alright.

“I’m fine. Thank you.” She told it. The kind look she gave the enchantment was wiped away as she turned a now furious gaze behind her at the pool.

And was met with only dwindling suds and still waters.

Bellatrix didn’t resurface after releasing her. She was still in the bath though. Hermione could feel the siren’s hair tickling against her naked thighs. Why the woman wasn’t coming up, she didn’t know, but she was hellbent on finding out after nearly being drowned by the older witch.

“Bellatrix!” She slapped the water, pushing away suds and revealing the dark waters beneath. “Get up here right now!”

Nothing.

‘Oh no. You don’t get to hide now.’

Hermione plunged her hands beneath the water and felt around. When there were two handfuls of black in her grip, the woman yanked.

The screech that followed was ungodly.

Like the dementors they fought in their third year, Bellatrix stood from the water like a black specter; fire in her burning orange eyes and a shuddering, angry hiss upon her lips. She was terrifying.
Beautiful.

‘…’

She didn’t correct her other half.

“Don’t you ever pull my hair again muddy.” The siren snarled.

“Then don’t try and drown me, you absolute madwoman!” Hermione returned. “What even was that! I was leaving! I thought that’s what you wanted!”

Hermione watched as Bellatrix was about to say something. There was clearly an angry retort on the other’s lips, however, before she could say anything, she was stopped. The woman’s eyes began darting about rapidly, something she knew the siren only did when having one of her internal conversations. Hermione let it play out to see what the other would say once it was over.

Turns out she didn’t say anything.

The woman sank back beneath the water.

“Hey!” Hermione yelled. She was about to yank the woman back up when a clawed hand pointed at her dangerously.

“Do it, and I’ll kill you.” She heard the other speak. Bubbles wobbled up to the surface as the other spoke. The hand retreated back into the water.

“Then answer my question! Why did you try to drown me? That’s not exactly helping or did you forget your promise.” Hermione bellowed.

“…instincts.”

The word was practically a whisper. And was Hermione hearing…embarrassment? She needed to hear more.

“What about them?” She asked.

“Must I explain everything!” Bellatrix snapped. “Think, you nitwit. Did you learn nothing from that lumbering oaf of a half-giant about creatures and their territories!”

Hermione was going to reprimand the former death-eater about talking about Hagrid that way, but now that the woman was talking and being somewhat cooperative, she didn’t want Bellatrix to backpedal. Instead, she thought back to what she learned from Hagrid’s lesson.

Most magical creatures- like animals- were dangerously territorial. There are tales of many a death caused by an angry dragon from someone getting far too close to their nests. Whether the person was trespassing on purpose or accidently, rarely mattered. Instincts dictated that they must defend their home no matter what. If Bellatrix was bringing this up, then the woman was clearly implying that something Hermione had done had set her territorial instincts. She just didn’t know what. It wasn’t like the two of them hadn’t been living together all this time. Yes the woman had attacked her before, but never like this. Then again, the woman had never looked like this either. Clearly the two were connected and Hermione was fully prepared to figure out how.

“I came into your ‘territory’. Is that what you’re saying?” She gestured to the door behind her. “If you forgot, my room is right across the hall and you’ve never acted like this. Does this have something to do with why you look like…this.” She gestured at the woman’s hair floating up near
the water’s surface.

Bellatrix poked her head out of the water to direct her burning eyes in her direction. “It has everything to do with it. This is what your betters are capable of. What you can never experience with that pretty little collar around your neck.” She chuckled darkly. “The true visage of a powerful Cor-echo siren.”

Hermione could see the witch was teeming with pride at her own words. She had to use all her restraint to beat down the jealousy festering just beneath the surface of her skin. The feeling made her feel gross, so the young Gryffindor decided that she would rather run away from her problems than face them head on. She moved to get out of tub.

Immediately, Bellatrix’s eyes ignited and she started that rattling hiss again. Hermione froze. “What is it no-”

“Stop. Moving.” The woman growled menacingly.

She didn’t know why, but Hermione obeyed. Bellatrix seemed to relax again, but before she could settle back into her usual grumpy expressions, Hermione saw what she thought she’d witnessed earlier.

Embarrassment; easily visible now that the woman was not hiding beneath the cover of the water. Hermione watched the red in the other’s cheeks like it was a vision from Merlin himself. It was such a rare sight.

And she had no idea what was causing it.

“Okay. What’s going on here? Why can’t I leave?” She asked the frustrated woman before her.

“This form is a heightened state girl. Instinct often tramples rationality and you’re blatant ignorance is the cause of all of this.” She said.

“How?”

Bellatrix slapped the water and sent the cooling liquid into Hermione’s face, causing her to sputter. “Imbecile! Sirens are predators. We hunt things that wander into our territory. So imagine- if you will- that a vulnerable prey such as your self wanders into my water and you turn that skinny, little back away from me.” She flexed her claws. “It makes me want to sink my teeth into you and drag you under.”

“That’s sick.”

Bellatrix smirked. “Nature often is. And you’re just like me so don’t be too disgusted.”

She flinched, knowing full well the other woman was right. “So how do I leave without you trying to drown me again.”

Bellatrix rolled her eyes. “I suppose I’d have to stop using my abilities.”

Silence.

“…well?”

“Well what?” Bellatrix said, tilting her head to the side.

“Stop using your powers and let me go!” Hermione yelled.
The siren laughed and then dipped back into the water. She reappeared on the far side of the tub, arms outstretched along the edge of it. Thank heavens her hair was keeping her from flashing the already frazzled Gryffindor.

“And ruin all our fun? Besides, I never got my apology.” She cooed ‘sadly’. “And I was so looking forward to that.”

Wasn’t that the whole point of her bathing in the first place? To calm herself enough to face the woman and do as she just said.

Yes it was. And it failed spectacularly.

She was not calm.

She was not relaxed.

And she did not want to be facing Bellatrix and her childish mocking whist standing in front of her absolutely cheeks to the wind.

Which meant she felt like she has every other day she’s been here.

‘Just do it. Do it before you chicken out.’ She told herself.

The words wouldn’t leave her lips.

Do it.

Her other side snarled at her. Hermione’s hesitation was putting it on edge, afraid that they would miss their chance to make peace with their hot-headed mate. She yielded.

“I’m sorry.” Hermione mumbled.

“Sorry, can’t hear you from all the way over here.” Bellatrix called, placing one hand behind her ear as if to hear her better.

“I’m sorry.” She said a bit louder.

“Nope, still nothing.” Bellatrix cooed sweetly.

“I said-”

Bellatrix was gone in an instance, sliding beneath the water and reappearing in front of her in mere seconds.

‘So fast!’ She screeched internally.

There were claws gripping her jaw. Bellatrix’s eyes were aglow again. Hermione gulped when the other ran her tongue over sharpened teeth; never once breaking eye contact.

“I heard you the first time. But I will not hear it again.” She whispered darkly. Her voice was echoing all around them. “You want my help; then do not overstep yourself. I won’t be as forgiving the next time. Promise be damned. Do I make myself clear?”

The heat of the woman’s breath upon her lips had her frozen, yet the narrowing of those orange orbs gave her strength to nod.
Bellatrix smiled and released her grip. “Good. Now we can get back to the task at hand.” She yanked Hermione’s collar that she hadn’t borrowed to hide as of late. “What to do about this.”

“You still don’t know?” Hermione asked.

“If it was simple, it would be done.” She said with a raised brow. “It’s your own idiotic Gryffindor traits keeping you this way after all.”

“Then as a Slytherin, you should have no problems finding a way around them.” Hermione fired back.

Bellatrix paused at that. Then, without warning, she grabbed hold of Hermione and pulled her towards the center of the giant bath. She let her go, but instead of staying in one place, Bellatrix dipped below the surface for the umpteenth time. From how long they’d been in the tub, the suds had all but disappeared. Meaning there was nothing more to hide her from the other’s sights.

Or hide Bellatrix from hers.

In a mesmerizing display of grace, Hermione watched as Bellatrix circled her like the sharks she used to see at the aquarium when she was a little girl. Her hair trailed behind her in long loose waves, entrapping her and making sure she couldn’t escape the circle Bellatrix was weaving around her. The woman’s orange eyes peered up at her with an accompanying Cheshire grin. Hermione was unnerved that the other was watching her so intently from down there, and she tried to cover herself as best she could.

Although, she had a sinking feeling in her gut that the woman had seen everything already.

A blush, ten times hotter than the water she was standing in, shot up her spine and made her toes curl.

Bellatrix twirled in the water gracefully, her movements fluid and streamline like the creature her own Patronus took the form of. The siren was just circling her calmly, occasionally flipping and tumbling under the water. It reminded her of a dance.

Her eyes widened. “What are you-”

Bellatrix did a flip and tangled herself into her hair until Hermione could no longer see her face. The water in the bath began to swirl rapidly for a moment, converging into a black whirlpool that began to grow smaller and smaller. She watched wide eyed as Bellatrix’s hair started going back to it’s normal length and her wet curls began to reform. The water settled and this time, when Bellatrix popped her head up, she was back to how the woman normally looked.

She smirked at Hermione. “You said you wanted to leave. Best go before I change my mind. I’d very much like enjoy the rest of my bath in peace.”

“Didn’t take you for one to hog the bath like a teenage girl.” Hermione said.

“My, my, Granger. If you wanted to stay so badly, all you had to do was ask.” Bellatrix suddenly stood up. “I do so paint a lasting image.”

An image that would burn itself into her retinas like the rays of the sun.

Because without the woman’s Rapunzel like hair, there was absolutely nothing to shield Bellatrix’s body from her full unbridled gaze. She now had a view of the body she’d only had pressed against her on several other occasions. From the woman’s rounded breast, down to the perfectly shaped v
dusted with fine hairs beneath her navel- Hermione was witnessing Bellatrix in her full glory. The womanly curves of her waist were the beautifully sculpted results of the corsets the other was famous for wearing. A scar, no bigger than the length of her finger ran sideways above the woman’s belly button and Hermione had the sudden urge to trace it with her eyes like lines in a novel. Bellatrix was older than her. A lot older and it didn’t show at all. She was mesmerizing to behold and Hermione couldn’t take her eyes off her. It bothered her that no matter how mad she got at the other woman, there was no way she could avoid getting tripped up by her beauty.

So tripped up in fact, that Hermione ended up ass in the air from falling in her attempt to scramble out of the bathtub. There would’ve been no need for the serpents to heat the water back up had she stayed in the tub; the flush stretching from ears to toes was enough to reignite a dying sun.

No thoughts crossed her fried mind as she hopped to her feet a practically skittered out of the room, tail tucked between her legs as she ran away. Though a tail would’ve been a godsend with the knowledge that Bellatrix could see her naked behind the entire time she fled the room.

One thing did come of the ordeal. Whether it was good or bad, she didn’t quite know yet.

As Hermione made her not so grand escape, Bellatrix’s laugh was the most genuine one she’d heard coming from the woman. Her mishap had the woman hollering long after she had made it to the safety of her room to slam the door. She threw the first set of clothes she could find on her body, not even caring that she was still soaking wet. Right now, she just didn’t want to feel any air on her bare skin anywhere. Defeated, the witch dived under the covers and buried her head into her pillow to scream at the top of her lungs. It was her hope that venting would make her current thoughts fly away if she was loud enough.

They didn’t.

Instead, all Hermione could think about when she closed her eyes was Bellatrix’s slender, wet body and her laugh that made her world lose all sense of gravity.

Poor Nimmy was standing in the kitchen with Crookshanks and Corvus laying about in their favorite lounging spot when he heard the commotion. He knew not to pry into his mistress’ affairs, but the sounds coming from down the hall had him on edge with anxiety.

Anxiety that was washed away at the sound of his mistress’ long forgotten laugh filling the otherwise quiet house. The house elf turned to the two creatures laying in the sink.

“It would seem the mistress’s are getting along nicely! Just as Nimmy said!” He said, glowing with pride. He returned to preparing their next meal.

Crookshanks gave a wide yawn and hunkered back down with his head resting on his paws. Corvus covered his head with his wings, giving a final croak before following his sink companion into the land of dreams. The house was finally at peace.

If one was to ignore the two woman having very different fits at the end of the hall, that is…
Always slow on the draw this one, but I think yall know this by now. ToT Not gonna lie, I really struggled on this chapter for like 45 different reasons and in the end i'm still not crazy about it, but I hope you all enjoy it anyways. As always, enjoy the chapter and thanks for reading!

“...you watched the elf make this. And if I wanted to kill you, poison would be my last choice. Eat.” Bellatrix called across the dining room table.

The scene happening right now was...strange to say the least. Or Hermione thought it was; hence why she was just staring at the meal set before her rather than eating it as was demanded of her.

It started when Bellatrix literally came to kick her door in about ten minutes earlier…

Hermione was sitting by her bedroom window, gazing out at the water. Pillars of sunlight from above shot down through the ocean waves and illuminated all manners of creatures meandering about on the sandy bottom. It was slow entertainment watching the sea life scuttle about, but it was beautiful, so she didn’t complain.

The slamming of her door hitting the wall jolted her out of her peaceful observing.

“Well today’s the day. Get up and come to the dining room.” Bellatrix said from the doorway. The woman spun on her heels and walked away.

Hermione didn’t move; still in shock at the other woman’s rather abrupt entry.

Boots stormed back down the hall and Bellatrix’s wand was in her hand the next time she appeared at her threshold.

“I wasn’t asking. Get up before I make you.” The woman hissed at her.

Hermione’s eyes hadn’t even been freed of crust from the previous night’s sleep before she was riffling through the cupboard looking for something to wear. Crookshanks was of course being no help. The feline was sat on top of the dresser, pawing at her every time she pulled something out. Naturally that lead to her swatting back at him, which lead to her taking even longer than before to get to the dining room and join Bellatrix.

When she eventually did get dressed, Hermione hopped across to the bathroom to at least wash her face. Her hair was a tangled mess, something that she quickly fixed with a spell she learned during their fourth year at Hogwarts. It saved her life on many an occasion, including during the Triwizard ball. Thinking of the ball had her remembering her time with Victor. As much of a gentleman as he was, the Drumstum student was far from her type. Her type ran more so along the lines of-
“Muddy!” Bellatrix yelled from down the hall at the top of her lungs.

“Can I even wash my face!” She hollered back. The witch flew around the corner and stormed down the hall with her familiar hot on her heels. She briefly glanced Nimmy frantically darting back and forth in the kitchen before turning the corner and gazing at Bellatrix leaning back in her chair; legs kicked up on the table. She was about to say something when she froze upon noticing what the other woman was wearing.

The staring wasn’t appreciated as it turns out. “See something you like Granger? Do close your mouth before something flies in.”

“You’re wearing pants.” It came out so lamely and the siren wished she could take it back immediately.

“An astute observation. I am also wearing a shirt if that excites you.” Bellatrix cooed mockingly.

Not in the mood to start a fight, Hermione simply glared at the woman and sat at the head of the table furthest away from the older witch. “I didn’t think you owned any. You’ve only worn dresses up until now.” She murmured.

“Pants are stifling.” The woman said after a minute of silence. Never once did she look up from where she sat picking her nails.

Hermione didn’t think she heard her and as such, wasn’t expecting an actual answer. Though the one she got was…normal all things considered. She could get where the woman was coming from even if she was the total opposite. Hermione loved pants; especially a well fitting pair of jeans. The comfort from the fabric hugging her legs never failed to put a smile on her face and a spring in her step. The same couldn’t be said about her feelings on skirts and dresses. By no means was she a prude or anything, but they weren’t nearly as comfortable and she always felt like she was on display for the whole world.

She imagined that Bellatrix didn’t care about something so trivial.

Something nipped her chin.

Hermione glanced down to look at Crookshanks who was gazing up at her; seeking affection. Hermione started rubbing his smushy face and cooing softly as he purred back.

From further down the table, Bellatrix sucked her teeth. “You’d think he was your child.”

“As if you don’t treat Corvus the same.” Hermione threw back. “You treat him better than any human, at least.”

Bellatrix chuffed. “Because he’s proven to be better than most humans. Isn’t that right, my darling?” She said endearingly.

At first Hermione didn’t know who she was talking to, but then she heard Corvus’ telltale croak coming from over behind the curtains. They were pulled back to let the light of the sea in, but silhouetted behind the bunched up drapes, Hermione could just make out Corvus sitting on the window ledge.

“Mistress’s! Nimmy has brought your breakfast.” Came the call of their enthusiastic house elf. Nimmy trotted into the room with his dishes floating behind him in a neat line. One by one, he began setting the table and serving the two women seated. When he finished, the little elf walked to the side of the room and simply watched them quietly as a silent bystander. His quiet staring from behind her
head unnerved Hermione, which ultimately lead her to where they were now…

Hermione didn’t touch the food, staring down at it as her hands rested idly on Crookshanks fluffy head.

“…you watched the elf make this. And if I wanted to kill you, poison would be my last choice. Eat..” Bellatrix called across the dining room table.

She frowned. “I know that.”

Bellatrix picked up her fork and stabbed it into her eggs. “Then what?”

She decided to speak her mind. “I don’t like that Nimmy is just standing there staring at us eat.” Hermione said, glancing over at the creature who was doing just that.

“Is that all? Hate people watching you stuff your face that much? Really,” She waved her hand at Nimmy. “Leave, elf.”

He started running out of the room. “Yes mistress! Nimmy is sorry for intruding!” He wailed, tears pooling at the corner of his eyes.

Hermione jumped to her feet. Doing so caused Crookshanks to be dislodged and with a hiss he jumped from her lap. His owner gave him a quick apology, but didn’t stop from reaching out and grabbing Nimmy’s little hand before the elf could fully leave the room. Confusion was written all across his face.

“Miss Hermione?”

She gave him a small smile. “I didn’t mean that you standing there was making me uncomfortable, I just meant that you shouldn’t have to.”

“And where exactly should he stand?” Bellatrix called from behind. The scraping of metal against ceramic made it clear that the woman hadn’t stopped eating despite Hermione leaving the table to stop Nimmy.

“He should be sitting at the table like everyone else.” The Gryffindor said fiercely.

Two things happened. The first was Nimmy having an absolute fit at Hermione, yelling that the dinner table was no place for a house elf. The second was Bellatrix throwing her silverware down at the table and growling deeply. Hermione turned to face her and her fire infused glare; countering it with her own filled with determination and resolve. She wasn’t about to back down on this one.

“What did you just suggest?” Bellatrix said darkly.

“Nimmy has every right to sit at this table just like you and me.” She said.

“And what in Merlin’s name gave you such an idiotic idea such as that?”

The comment had Hermione fired up in an instance. “Perhaps the fact that you’re still alive to even enjoy the food that he worked so hard on. Why should he not be able to sit and enjoy it?”

“As if that creature had the spine to poison me. House elves live to serve and submit; something you apparently need to learn as well.” She snarled.
Hermione stood her ground. “And yet it was a very brave house elf who stole your wand. Who went beyond his nature to defy his old master and help his friends.” She stuck her nose up at Bellatrix like she’d seen the woman do so many times before to others and herself. “And what would you say of someone like that?”

“Nothing.” A nasty smile came across her face then. “It’s not nice to speak ill of the dead after all.”

Hermione came across the table to strike the woman. Probably would have if Nimmy hadn’t tugged on her arm to get her attention. She looked down at him. His smile was watery, but grateful.

“Miss Hermione is very kind. Nimmy is very grateful to have such kindness for himself. But Nimmy is quite happy not to sit at the table.”

His sincere smile broke her heart. She turned to glare at Bellatrix who only shrugged her shoulders. “He said it, not me. Let him sit on the floor and be done with it.” The older witch returned to eating.

“Nimmy is very grateful for Mistress’ kindness!” He wailed happily, plopping down at Hermione’s feet like a well trained puppy. Nimmy’s eyes were teary once more, but it was clear that there was joy behind them instead of the negativity that sparked his earlier crying fest.

“See, it’s fine.” Bellatrix replied offhandedly.

No. It wasn’t fine. Not in the least, Hermione snarled to herself. This was why she fought so hard for house elves to have their rights. Watching the creature before her be so genuinely happy after being treated like a lesser being was sickening. It churned her stomach in the worst way. Mostly cause she knew that it was just fundamentally wrong to take advantage of people.

But there was another part of her that screamed out for her to do something to fix this. To rebel. And that was the part of her that knew what it was like to be Nimmy. Maybe not exactly, but much like the creature before her- she too was subjective to Bellatrix and her whims. She remembered how it was in the beginning of her captivity back at the mansion. When she felt so defenseless and afraid of the other woman and what she would do to her at any given moment. How badly she wanted to stand up for herself and fight back. To feel powerful against her tormentor. Much to her dismay, she didn’t think that revenge or rebellion were things that Nimmy- or most other house elves for that matter- were interested in. They’ve been raised to do just as Bellatrix said- serve and submit. It was all they knew. And if servitude is all a house-elf knows, than can she really be mad when they didn’t fight for their own freedom?

No. She couldn’t. But that didn’t mean she would stop fighting for them for the simple fact that she knew they could.

Dobby had taught her that.

The little creature was a completely different being once he’d been freed of the Malfoys. He spoke differently- more confident and sassy when speaking to other witches and wizards whereas before he would’ve remained meek and subservient in the face of his ‘betters’. He had tasted freedom and was able to do what he wished. Serve who he wished. Dobby died- and that broke all of their hearts- but he died free and happy knowing he was able to protect Harry and his friends.

Hermione knew the addictive taste of freedom. Knew what it was like to have it and then have it snatched away too. Not a day goes by that she doesn’t think about clawing the collar off with her bare hands and sinking it to the deepest depths of this ocean. When she had her voice back- and she was getting it back- it would be the last time she’d ever lose it again. She would not slip back into a life without freedom; not when she knew the person she could become when it was within her grasp.
once more. Hermione was fully prepared to claw and fight her way back to true happiness and her
Gryffindor spirit was strong enough and fully determined to drag as many people up with her on the
way.

Apparently, starting with Nimmy.

So no, it wasn’t fine and Hermione was fully prepared to challenge Bellatrix on every step of the
way.

Immediately, she felt her other side flare up.

_Mate will be angry. Don’t._

‘This has nothing to do with you. And she’ll live. If anything, she’ll be happy.’ She interrupted.

There wasn’t a rebuttal.

Good.

Hermione began filling plates up with food. She didn’t glance at Bellatrix even once despite the fact
that she could feel the woman practically burning a hole in the side of her head. Satisfied with her
haul, a childish urge overcame her as she stuck her tongue out at the woman across from her. The
shock of the move was all over Bellatrix’s face, but she only saw it briefly once she took a seat.

Right on the floor next to Nimmy.

She slid a plate over to him. “Eat. You made it after all.” Hermione smiled, finally digging into her
own food.

The house elf didn’t touch it. Something slammed behind her, but she refused to turn around. Instead
she kept gobbling up her meal with a pleased hum on her lips. Out of her peripheral, an orange paw
crept around her leg to get at her bacon. She let Crookshanks have a strip which had him purring
loudly. She laughed and turned towards Nimmy. “Crooks seems to like your cooking a lot.”

Hermione moved to grab the second strip left on her plate, only to find it gone. “Hey!” She yelled.

Hermione was about to turn and scold her greedy familiar, but ended up almost jumping out of her
skin when a throaty laugh came from the opposite side of her. She turned to see Corvus standing
with the strip in his mouth, yellow eyes shimmering with mischief at his thievery. When did he leave
the windowsill? For such a relatively large bird, he was unnervingly quiet. Still, she didn’t get mad
seeing as her own familiar did the same thing just moments before. “You have your own owner to
feed you.” Came her response, which the creature answered by simply tossing the strip in the air and
swallowing it whole once it came back down. She was both impressed and worried about it’s eating
habits. “Will you be joining out little floor party?” The siren asked.

Corvus chuffed at her and reached towards her plate again. Too bold a move for Crookshanks who
was doing the same on the opposite side of her. A small battle began over her plate and before she knew it,
Hermione was caught in between the two trying to keep them from spilling everything onto the floor.
When the hissing and claws flew too close for comfort, she swatted both creatures on the nose and
pushed them apart. “Okay, enough. This is _my_ plate, you want your own, I’ll make one for you both
so knock it off.”

Both stared at her with eager eyes and she laughed. “I figured that would get your attention. Hold
on.” She saw that Nimmy had started slowly nibbling on some apple slices. The creature kept
glancing about as if he was expecting an attack for every bite he took. ‘At least he’s eating.’ She
thought, getting to her knees to stand up and serve the other two beings joining her on the floor.
Except the moment her head came up to look at the house’s owner, she was rendered frozen in place.

Bellatrix was staring back at her.

With eyes of honey and black.

Her breath caught in her lungs. ‘That probably isn’t good.’ Bellatrix’s lips pulled into an ear-splitting grin. ‘No, that’s really not good.’

Mate.

Her other half was cooing, leaning against the suppression and cause a pressure to build at the back of her mind. It was irrationally pleased with the sight before them. Hermione on the other hand was anything but.

“My precious mate.”

Immediately, she knew what was wrong.

“…you’re not Bellatrix.” She deadpanned.

The witch- no, the siren- smiled, her sharpened teeth glinting like pointed daggers. It put Hermione on edge, but surprisingly the fear she usually felt when Bellatrix smiled at her like this was absent. Unlike the woman’s sneers and upturned lips, the smile before her was almost…fond.

That was strange.

“No. I’m not.” The creature spoke. Hermione watched as the siren started looking less like Bellatrix and more like the being she had met in the bath just the night before. Bellatrix’s hair fell, the curls whisked away to lay against her body in those seamless black sheets. Pale hands blackened and lengthened into the wicked talons of a predator. Before long, the woman had returned to her siren form- only this time, it wasn’t Bellatrix she was speaking to. “Sweet Bella was starting to get angry. So I took her place.” They laughed.

The siren rose fluidly from their seat, sauntering around the table over to where Hermione was. The younger witch stood up at the approach; standing face to face with the being. She didn’t know what was happening right now. Or how this was happening, so of course, when the other’s hand reached out to her, she couldn’t help but flinch away.

Which surprisingly…displeased the other siren greatly.

“This won’t do.” She heard the creature’s ethereal voice echo around her. “Look how she flinches from us Bella. No, this won’t do at all.”

Hermione didn’t know what to say to that. Or if she should say anything at all. The creature reached for her again, this time slower and clearly in her line of sight. Figuring that she shouldn’t really try her luck here, the younger siren did her best not to jerk away. The blackened hands reached her face, soft thumbs pressing over her cheeks and running over her eyes with a gentleness that she didn’t know they could do. She allowed it, and it pleased the creature greatly.
“Yes, isn’t this better. So sweet and obedient. This is what we could have.” A frown marred their beautiful features. “But this is only but a taste. Not everything she can give us.”

“Wait, wait, wait.” Hermione said, shaking her head and taking a step back away from the siren looming over her. “Give you what exactly?” She asked it.

“What’ve we’ve always wanted.” Honey eyes flashed with gold as the older siren’s grin stretched a mile long. “To be happy.”

Hermione gave a bitter laugh. “I’m sorry, but I find that hard to believe. The things Bellatrix did to me- does to me- doesn’t exactly make me ‘happy.’” She said.

To that, the creature snarled darkly. “No. Perhaps not. But we will change that.”

There was something about the way the siren said that sentence that made Hermione ask the question dancing at the tip of her tongue. “Why?” She began. “You’ve been watching. Bellatrix hates me. We fight and argue all the time. We’re mates by default, not by choice. So why are you forcing something that was never meant to be?”

Hermione wondered if Bellatrix was listening in on what she was saying. The words coming from her mouth were ones that she wasn’t sure she could ask the other witch face to face. They seemed so… personal. And quite frankly, with the relationship she currently had with the woman, she didn’t know if she could handle the answer if she got it from Bellatrix herself.

Was she being cowardly by doing it this way? Maybe. But being brave every minute of every day was exhausting. Right now, she didn’t want to be brave.

She wanted answers.

And she got them.

“Bella asks the same thing you know.” Came their shocking response. “Why? Why didn’t we stay with our husband. Why didn’t we kill you when we had the chance. Why not someone else.” It’s voice dropped to a whisper, though the echo from it barely made it sound as such. “Why. I will tell you the same thing that I tell her.”

Hermione held her breath as the creature leaned down and pressed their foreheads together. With the woman standing over her, their hair cascaded from over Bellatrix’s shoulders and fell over the sides of her face; mingling in with her own and dropping her view into darkness. Her sight would’ve been pitch black if it wasn’t for the siren’s glowing honey eyes lighting what little gap lay between their faces. Hermione felt the other’s breath on her lips, the air like lava in such a tight proximity. It was almost too much to bare, but she held back her urge to pull away with everything she had.

Until she spoke.

“Beneath the suppression- in Azkaban- I became nothing more than a banshee; screaming beneath the sound of other voices much louder than myself.” The siren growled lowly. “When the dark lord freed us from that collar, I could finally be heard. A screeching mess that Bella thought of as nothing more than the others who plagued her thoughts during our imprisonment.”

There was a hand around her chin, running over bottom lip. “Until you came along.” They cooed. “I sensed it when we had you beneath us at Malfoy manor, but I could say nothing to Bella that she would listen to.” The hand on her chin ran down to her arm. “I never screamed louder then when she carved this into you. Our own mate, though she didn’t know it then.”
Hermione felt her heart clench at the admission. She knew what her other side was like whenever she tried to hurt Bellatrix of her own volition. Collar off or on; it’s rage wasn’t something to ignore. Yet Bellatrix still managed to ignore her siren side and carve these filthy words into her arm. How far gone had she been then?

How far gone was she still?

The hand on her arm began dancing up over her shoulder and down to her neck where the siren’s fingers danced along the sensitive flesh just above her collar. “There was nothing I could say to her that she would listen to until that night you sung to us. In that moment, you were all she could hear, all she could focus on. And when your voice left us, you left us in silence.” Hermione didn’t need to see the creature’s grin, for she heard it in the other’s voice come their next sentence. “And I filled that silence with what lead us to where we are now. Where we were always meant to go.”

Her heart stuttered in her chest at what the other was implying. “What did you do?”

“…I told her the truth.” They crooned. “That it didn’t matter who you were. Didn’t matter what she thought about our blood or what the dark lord taught her; they were meaningless thoughts. Only one thing mattered.”

The fire Hermione felt from the other’s breath on her lips was replaced with electricity when they descended upon her own. It was brief, and so soft that Hermione almost thought it was a figment of her imagination.

“You are ours and we are yours. Always were…and always will be.” There were hands on her ribs now, the creature dug her claws into the woman’s sides possessively. “The dark lord’s promises were false. He was a veil; warping our gaze away from the real prize that lies in front us now. And though she still tries to fight against his lies, sweet Bella will soon see the truth of what we have. What you are.”

“And what is that?” Hermione barely mustered. There was so much going on in her head right now. She was flustered as much as she was confused. So many things were being said to her and between that and her current position, she could literally feel her brain frying. “What am I to you? To her? What exactly is it that you’re trying to force me to be?”

Silence. And then…

“Our chance to have everything we’ve ever wanted.”

A howl of pain shook the room following those words, but it didn’t come from Hermione surprisingly.

The siren above her had snapped her head back in what appeared to be agony. The wail had shocked her and she was going to asked what the problem was when the creature started to laugh.

“So greedy Bella. You always get to play with our sweet little mate without my interference.” Honey eyes danced between amusement and pain as the siren continued to apparently taunt the irate Bellatrix. “But if you wish to see her so badly; who am I to stop you? But,” The siren stood up to her full height. “Not before I have a taste for myself.”

Hermione should’ve developed a sense by now. A little alarm inside her head that warned her of when she was in danger. Like now.

The siren pulled out the chair closest to them and sat down. It would’ve been fine and they not grabbed her on the way down in the process. Hermione ended up firmly in the other’s lap. Frantic
hands had nowhere to go at this point, but the way she was sitting was precarious enough as is, so she ended up placing both of them on the other’s shoulders. The grin on the woman’s face was absolute filth. A grin that only grew nastier when the possessed witch grabbed ahold of Hermione’s shirt and pulled her down into a searing kiss.

A moan escaped her unwillingly as the other explored her mouth with wicked tongue and careful teeth. Her mind was a haze of thoughts running in every which way, all of which did nothing to take away from what was currently happening. A tiny voice told her to pull away, but it went unheard as a much louder one urged her to never let go. Hermione could only catch her breath in the few seconds she had when the other’s lips left her own, which wasn’t very often at all.

And if she thought the kissing left her breathless, she wasn’t prepared for the wandering hands to nearly stop her heart.

No, she wouldn’t call them that.

Bellatrix had wandering hands; the witch got quite the enjoyment out of watching her squirm as her hands teased toward going to places they clearly shouldn’t.

Her siren, however, didn’t have wandering hands.

They did not get lost even once upon her body.

They knew exactly where they wanted to be.

They were sneaky things; slipping beneath her shirt like a thief in the night to grope at the flesh inches beneath her bra. They didn’t stay in place for long. Those slender hands crawled up her ribs to dip beneath the soft fabric protecting her modesty. At first, she figured the boldness would only go so far, but she’d been wrong before and she was definitely wrong now. Her gasp was sharp when her breasts were taken fully in hand. The feeling was new, and she wished she could say it was unpleasant, but curse Merlin and all his disciples— it wasn’t. Their touch was firm and explorative, fondling Hermione carefully so as not to cut her with those wicked long nails. It was a dangerous dance that she hoped the creature she was straddling knew all the moves to.

They did, and they were damn good at it too.

The first time the other pinched her nipple, Hermione yelped and practically snapped her spine from how hard she arched into the feeling. The younger witch broke free of the heated kiss and tried to twist around in the other’s lap.

She regretted it immediately.

Teeth latched onto the junction between her neck and shoulder, the warning growl that accompanied the move rendered her motionless. A hot tongue swiped up the side of her neck as the siren whispered into her ear. “We warned you about trying to turn your back to us.” They purred, tightening their grip on her chest briefly before returning to massaging the soft flesh between their hands.

Her breath was hot and heavy at the warning, face igniting at the insinuations of what the other would do should she not heed it. The older siren trailed soft kisses up and down her neck, letting a purr rumble in their chest that made Hermione want to melt right there on the spot.

“That’s better. So sweet for us. Aren’t you?”

The word yes was dancing at the tip of her tongue. She couldn’t say it though, the word being stolen
from her mouth in another breathtaking kiss. Not once did Bellatrix’s siren stop their ministrations of her body, only switching directions the more they pulled Hermione into their hold. Those hands danced away from her breast down her ribs and glided over her stomach. It was the last stop before they dipped down to her hips. They wrapped around her like the panties that lied beneath her pants and held on like hungry leeches in the water. She dealt with it quietly, actually pulling one arm away from the other’s shoulder to cover her mouth for fear of the sounds that threatened to spill from her panting lips.

It didn’t matter.

She could taste the smile on the other’s mouth when heavy thumbs from both sides hovered over the top of her pelvis.

And pressed down.

“He! Ah~!” She moaned behind her hand. Chocolate eyes widened at the sound and she took a look at the other woman with the hope that the other hadn’t heard it.

Only a thin slit of honey was left from how much their pupils had dilated.

The thumbs pressed down on that sensitive spot again and again, massaging deeply to places untouched. The pressure was firm and relentless; making Hermione curl into herself as arousal burned hot in the pit of her stomach. The pressure kept building until she could no longer hold still in the unyielding hold grounding her in place. Movement would not be her savour. It became her doom, as her squirming had lead to her grinding her more sensitive parts into Bellatrix’s thigh.

Into her pants.

That did things to her. Things she didn’t know would have her practically shaking in the woman’s lap. The mere thought that the wetness between her thighs was seeping into the fabric of what was probably one of the rare pair of pants Bellatrix owned made her spine tingle and the grip on her mouth tighten viciously.

She could’ve stopped this at any time. There were plenty of opportunities after all. Her magic worked just fine; her wand still well within her reach. Her hands weren’t restrained. She could’ve run away. There was nothing truly holding her where she was.

And yet she stayed.

What little weariness keeping herself from falling too far beneath Bellatrix’s teasing had died, protected by thoughts that tried to twist themselves in a way to defend her reason for being strung along.

How easy would it be to say that it was because the being before her technically wasn’t Bellatrix? That it was somehow easier to stay in the witch’s arms because it wasn’t the same person. That the hands massaging so deliciously into her most sensitive area weren’t the same that have choked her and beat her time and time again.

It was the only thought that could ease her mind. That she was enjoying being touched by Bellatrix now because it wasn’t her.

Except it was.

It always was.
The creature had already hinted that Bellatrix had been listening. That she knows what’s going on. She was there. There was no suppression keeping the two entities separate.

When the siren kissed her lips; it was Bellatrix.

When the siren fondled her chest and whispered those hot words against her earlobes; it was Bellatrix.

And when Hermione sat in the siren’s lap, wet heat between her legs dirtying the other’s clothes with her arousal; it was still Bellatrix.

There could be no denying it. No trying to twist this in a way that made her out to being tricked in some way. She knew where she was. Knew who she was with. And most importantly, knew how she was feeling.

*Good.*

Absolutely *amazing.*

The witch was practically sitting on cloud nine with the feeling thrumming through her body. Cause although she was strung tighter than a string on a violin; arousal wasn’t the dominant feeling flooding her system.

It was *hope.*

It had returned to her. Not in a way that she ever expected, but it was here in front of her now. Because though it wasn’t Bellatrix at the forefront, these actions were still hers. The woman could get control back if she wanted to. Could have flipped the switch and humiliated Hermione right then and there if she wanted. Yet she didn’t. Which lead to this moment; where- in what was probably her most dangerous state- Hermione had remained *unharmed* by Bellatrix on all accounts.

Those dagger-like teeth met her flesh, but they never drew blood.

Razer-sharp claws had wandered to areas she never wanted sharp objects *near,* and yet there wasn’t a scratch on her.

Bellatrix’s mouth had spoken to her for who knows how long at this point and not once had she been belittled or yelled at.

She was embarrassed. Oh, *beyond* it at this point. But other than that…she was *fine.*

And nothing scared her more. Because Hermione never thought it would happen. She’d been expecting worse. That the moment she left her friends behind, she had condemned herself to a life of misery beneath the sea. She’d prepared for it even on days where she fought against it tooth and nail.

Until the fighting began to stop.

Until the word ‘*mudblood*’ was uttered on only the rarest of occasions and she found her name- even if it was just a sneered ‘*Granger*’- falling from Bellatrix’s pale lips more and more in it’s absence.

Until she found herself leaning into the woman’s touch more than she found herself flinching away from it.

Hermione thought she would spend the rest of her life fighting Bellatrix.

Hell, weren’t they doing just that *yesterday?*
On several occasions, the woman said she was prepared to spend the rest of her life fighting her. That she would die for it. Hermione was supposed to never laugh again. Never smile again. Never hope for anything but the misery her new life was sure to saddle her with.

Then things changed.

Slowly, the little things started added up. Hermione could be in the other woman’s company and not come out of it in pain. Hold a conversation without being angry or hurt by said woman every time she opened her mouth.

And now, she was writhing in the other’s lap, leaning into a pleasure she’d only experienced in the dead of night when she slept.

It was Bellatrix’s siren that stuck around for a taste as they had said.

Yet it was Hermione who wanted to sink her teeth into what they were leading up to. She wasn’t looking for a taste any longer. Not when her thoughts had her salivating at the things she could have if she just reached out and took them for herself.

It wasn’t just the physical pleasure she wanted. Bellatrix had proven she could do that while still being mean and nasty about it. Could still get Hermione hot and bothered while thinking of her as nothing more than the scum beneath her feet.

No.

Hermione wanted this.

She wanted to feel pleasure that was meant to be just that. To be catered to and doted on and worshipped like a proper mate should be. Hermione wanted to hear her name come from Bellatrix’s lips in a way that made her shudder in pleasure instead of fear. And if the Slytherin’s hands wanted to discover the depths of her being from the heat of desire and not hatred; then Hermione was prepared to let the woman drown in her.

She heard of those who believed in the phrase ‘you don’t know what you got until it’s gone’. That wasn’t an adequate quote for her situation. It would insinuate that she had something to lose to begin with. What she wants now isn’t something she had before.

But it was something she would not lose now that she knew she could have it.

You don’t know what you want until it’s yours. And this is ours.

Hermione hadn’t said that…

But she would claim those words nonetheless for it would always remember of this day where everything came to a head. The day that Hermione stopped running away from what she feared and started chasing after what she wanted.

A chase that led her lips back to Bellatrix’s long after those hands had stopped their persistent fondling.

A chase that lingered long enough for that bone straight hair to regain its curls and honey eyes to bleed back to that abyssal onyx black.

A chase…
That wouldn’t end until she ended up right back to the place she was running from.

Neither woman would know this as the moment Hermione cut the last string holding them back from their future.

And all the wonders and horrors it would bring…

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