SOMETHINGS ARE MEANT TO BE

For Hermione, a change of relationship leads to a change of career and a change in her living arrangements when she re-acquaints herself with Severus Snape. For Severus, who survived the Second Wizarding War, when Hermione Granger turns his life upside down and falls in love with him, it is nothing short of miraculous.

While The Ministry of Magic presses forward with reforms, Severus and Hermione confront many of the challenges that all relationships face. Such as, can I trust you? Do you really love me? Why is the top always off the toothpaste? As Hermione learns her magical powers may well be limitless, Severus learns that women like to dance and don’t always have a need for underwear.

Gradually, as old adversaries become friends, Gryffindors and Slytherins must work together in a changing world.

Meanwhile, in the background, the quiet hand of evil is slowly creeping over the world once again. Will our friends be prepared for another confrontation when it occurs and will they be...
victorious this time?

Notes

* All characters remain the property of J. K. Rowling. I have no claim on them, except to populate my stories. No harm is intended and no money changes hands. *

This is my first foray into the HP fandom/universe – I have read many superb HP fics on AO3, with pairings that range from the popular to the ‘no way!’ – this pairing struck me as an interesting one and what started out as a ‘one-off’ drabble has taken on a life of its own.

The inspiration for this fic comes from ‘Better Than Life’ by anoesis – (http://archiveofourown.org/collections/sshg_newbies). So my grateful thanks to anoesis for allowing me to take an idea from the story, to develop it for my own twisted means and then run with it. Both anoesis’ stories on the ss/hg_newbies site are well worth reading as they very fine fics.

I have changed the remit of the Department of Mysteries – it is now more of a clandestine department, not just a collection of chambers located in the bowels of the Ministry of Magic.

Chapter one is beta-ed by the wonderful Beckymonster – big hugs darlin’ – so any remaining mistakes are mine.

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To everyone who has left comments and Kudos! a BIG thank you - it is very much appreciated.

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I am raising my wand today and lighting the path for his journey towards the Great Unknown. An inspiration for so many, not just in fandom - his passing has left a void; but I will continue to write in the spirit of Severus Snape.

Adieu, Alan Rickman - I loved everything you did; but mostly, I loved your voice. And your smile. And your eyes. And your skill as an actor.

A bereft RiverWoman: January 14th 2016.

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Comfort and Joy

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<<H it works :) gr8 2 b in touch. much news. I am gud. Got new job I think. PS alive n well. more l8tr. H>>

<<Took me ages 2 work out what PS meant. Don’t b leve u. how? H>>

<<H PS n me living 2gther. I’m in luv!!! Best thing 2 hapn 2 me. PS unspkable. Me 2. Let’s meet OK?>>

<<2 much 4 me 2 take in. yeah lets meet. H>>

<<midday next Tuesday @ kenwood house? Can’t wait 2 c u. PS sends regards. >>

<<Gr8. But make it 1 pm am working :o(( >>

<<C u then H.>>

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‘Haarrryyyyy!’

Hermione jumped up and down waving her arms in greeting as she spotted Harry coming towards her. He broke into a run and they fell into a bear of a hug as he lifted her off her feet and spun her around. Two old friends.

He pulled away and held her at arm’s length. ‘You look … different,’ he said, deciding to ignore the punch to his arm.

‘Good or bad different?’ she asked.

‘Good, yeah, definitely good.’

She threw her arms around him again. ‘It’s great to see you, Harry. I’ve missed you.’

‘I’ve missed you too, ‘Mione,’ and he hugged her back. ‘So, where to, coffee or a walk?’

‘Oh, let’s walk and talk, Harry. It’s a glorious day, let’s make to most of it.’

She linked her arm through his and they set off. They walked in companionable silence, she squeezed Harry’s arm now and then, as if re-establishing their friendship.

‘Severus will join us for coffee at about two o’clock,’ she broke the silence.

‘How is he?’
'Very good considering,' she replied.

They passed the ornamental lake of Kenwood House and entered the wooded area.

'When you told me he was alive … I …'

She squeezed his arm. 'I know Harry. I know. Anyway, woods or Heath?'

'Heath, I think,' Harry said.

They left the grounds and walked out onto Hampstead Heath.

'How is everyone … Ron …?' She left the sentence hanging.

'Managing would be the best description. Molly of course thinks you are the ‘Wickedest Witch in all Wizardom’ for leaving Ron like that.'

'And Ginny …?'

'I won’t lie and say everything has been fine, but we are both working through it and trying to ignore Molly and Ron. So yeah, I think Ginny and I are doing OK.'

The day was warm and because it was a weekday, there were not the crowds that usually congregated on Hampstead Heath. So they walked, arm in arm, comfortable with each other. Hampstead Ponds came into view, there were swimmers in the Men’s Pond and so they stopped and watched.

'It was Severus’s idea, the mobile phones I mean. Muggles use them all the time and they are more anonymous than owls. Getting you to buy one and then being able to speak to you was great Harry, just great,' she laughed.

'I was beginning to worry about you ‘Mione, not hearing from you for months. So yeah, it’s a brilliant idea,’ Harry said.

'I know they don’t work where there are charms or magic, but I thought, sometimes, when you leave the Ministry each day, instead of going straight back to the Burrow, you could call and we could catch up. I’m sorry if I shocked you that first time, but I really did need to bring you up to date quickly.'

'Well, I nearly did fall over when you told me about Snape,' Harry laughed.

'Which part? Him being alive or me and him …?'

'Him being alive. I actually did fall over when I read the second part.'

She laughed her unmistakable laugh.

'Sooo, … this Unspeakable thing,’ Harry finally said.

She was silent for many minutes. ‘It was how he survived,’ she said at last. ‘I mean, after we left him in the Shrieking Shack. He had a Watcher.’

‘Watcher?’

‘I’m fine Harry. How about you?’ She managed to keep her face straight for all of five seconds and then she exploded with laughter again. ‘Oh … your face Harry! Sorry, sorry, I couldn’t resist.’
‘Terrible woman,’ was all he said as he pulled her into a playful hug.

‘Seriously though, the Department assigned a Protector to him during the last year.’

‘By Department I assume you mean the Department of Mysteries?’

She nodded. ‘A Protector watches, hence ‘Watcher’, but they prefer to be called Protectors. They keep a very close watch on their subject. They have strange… powers. You can never detect them unless one has been assigned to you. I don’t think that even Death Eaters would be aware of them.

Harry looked around as if expecting to spot a shadowy figure lurking in the trees.

‘No silly. I don’t have one and even if I did, you wouldn’t know it was there.’

‘So Snape’s Protector was there that day?’

‘Yeah, after we left, it came straight in and apperated him back to the Department, the Department got him to St Mungo’s. It saved his life.’

Harry looked her incredulously. ‘It?’

‘Well, yes. Severus still isn’t sure if his Protector was male or female. As I said, they have strange powers.’

‘But I thought it was Aurors that protected people, who watched them, make sure crimes against Muggles are followed up, catch Dark wizards and witches, locate the Dark objects left over from the War, all that kind of thing. It’s what me and Ron do.’

‘I think it’s more like, ‘who watches the watchers’. But, you have to remember, an Unspeakable is just that. No-one knows who they are or what they really do.’ Hermione was warming to the subject.

‘It’s how they do what they have to do, within the Department and outside of it. Most Unspeakables are very good at mixing with Muggles and blending in with them. It’s how they live outside of the Department and how many of them survived during the War. You know how open the Ministry is now Harry, Shacklebolt is changing things for the better and so people are coming and going all the time; the Daily Prophet has access to most of the Ministry and the Minister. The Department is the only really secure area of the Ministry.’

They walked on in silence again, heading up towards Parliament Hill.

‘You’ve been in the Chambers, Harry. You know what is kept in them.’

‘Yeah, however all I really remember is being chased through the Chambers, fighting and then Sirius falling … they weren’t very secure that day …’

She slipped her arm around his waist and squeezed him. He nodded his thanks for the gesture.

‘Times have changed. Something like that would not happen again. I’m not sure, but I think that the Ministry has been … well, blocked from direct influence in the Department. From what Severus tells me, the Department is now independent of the Ministry with its own Chief. So if there was a … shall we say … an unauthorised, sudden change in the Ministry, the Department would be secure and therefore able to … fight back.’

‘How many people know he’s alive?’ He asked.

‘Well, the Chief of the Department of course, Kingsley Shacklebolt. Me, now you … that’s it.’ She
smiled weakly at him.  

Harry let out a breath.  ‘Thanks for telling me ‘Mione, it puts me under no pressure whatsoever, but, why the Minister?’

‘Apparently Shacklebolt knew all along – he and Dumbledore came up with the plan to protect Severus should it ever be needed. Once Shacklebolt became Minister during the War, he arranged for a Protector to be with Severus every minute of every day, thank Merlin.’

‘It’s still a responsibility for me,’ he said.

‘Yes it is. But we are grown up now and we have to take responsibility. Severus bore his alone for all those years.’

They reached the top of the Hill and looked down over London.

‘He’s looking forward to seeing you.’

‘I’m not sure if I’m looking forward to seeing him,’ Harry said. ‘So much happened between us, you don’t know the half of it, Hermione. Words were said; I tried to curse him on a few occasions; he made my life miserable at Hogwarts and then believing he had … murdered Dumbledore … I was pretty shitty towards him.’

‘He has changed, Harry. He doesn’t say much about you and him, but I think that he feels pretty shitty about the way he treated you … had to treat you, remember that. He had to maintain the pretence of being your most hated enemy. I don’t think he enjoyed it. Sometimes...’ Her voice drifted away.

They stood in silence, each seemingly lost in their own thoughts.

‘Hermione …?’

‘It’s all right Harry. You can ask.’

‘Yeah, right. OK.’ He turned to her. ‘Are you sure about this? I mean … about Snape?’

She smiled at him. ‘Never surer.’ She paused, as if searching for the right words. ‘I … I did love Ron and he will always be my friend, if he wants that. But my decision to leave him had nothing to do with Severus.’

‘So you hadn’t … already … y’know … met Snape and fallen for him and then thought of leaving Ron?’

She looked at him, shocked. ‘Oh no, Harry, nothing like that.’ She grabbed his arm and turned him to face her. ‘Does anyone know about me and Severus? I mean, the Weasleys … anyone?’

‘What? No, no, as far as I know no-one in the wizarding world knows,’ he paused, ‘except me of course. Oh bloody hell! Thanks again Hermione. I suppose it’s something else I have to keep to myself?’

She laughed. ‘Well, you are Harry Potter, Boy Wonder. You’ll manage. C’mon, let’s head back.’

She caught his hand and held it as they set off down the Hill, back towards Kenwood. The sun was shining and from far away, the sound of children’s laughter drifted towards them.

Harry studied at her as they walked. Yes, she had a ready laugh and she was genuinely pleased to
see him. But something was off, he sensed it. He hadn’t spent nearly a year in her company without knowing when she was worried about something or worse, keeping something from him. Right now, he couldn’t work out which it was.

She broke into his thoughts. ‘Harry? About Ron and me … I don’t think it would have lasted anyway.’

‘You don’t know that.’

‘Yeah, but I do. We wanted different things from life.’

They re-entered the wood and took a path that took them deeper into the woodland.

‘Ron was ready to settle down,’ she continued. ‘Get married, have kids. He loves his job at the Ministry. I hated mine and I am just not ready for domestic bliss.’

Two joggers and a mum with an all-terrain buggy complete with wailing baby passed them, otherwise they were alone.

‘I enjoyed it y’know,’ she said.

‘What?’

‘The whole war thing, searching for Horcruxes, being on the run, the fighting.’ She dropped his hand and turned to face him, walking backwards as she did. ‘I liked it and that scared Ron.’

‘Miss Granger, are you seriously telling me that you miss being hunted? Miss dodging the spells and curses, the Death Eaters, the destruction?’

She nodded. ‘Yes, Harry. I enjoyed it. I was challenged and I know that’s what I need in my life, at least for a time.’

Harry pulled her to him and hugged her. ‘And I always thought I was the reckless one.’

They left the woodland and took a path that would lead them back up to the house.

‘How long have you and Snape … been … er, together?’

‘His name is Severus, Harry. Please use it, at least in front of me, OK? Four months with Severus and six weeks with the Department, just like becoming an Auror, you have to do lots of training. I’ve got at least another two months before I can do … well whatever I’m asked to do.’

Harry remained silent.

‘That means … that means you have been with Sna … Severus since you left the Burrow … Hermione … you just said that you didn’t leave Ron for him … but you must have .. the timing …’

‘No. Honestly,’ she said firmly. ‘I did not. It’s a long story for another time … but you must believe me, I didn’t leave Ron for Severus. It just happened that way.’ Her voice trembled, as if on the verge of tears, which was not like Hermione at all.

Harry ran his hand through his hair and sighed, ‘OK ‘Mione. I believe you,’ he said

They reached the upper path that would take them back to the house and the café.

‘What time is it?’ She asked.
'Five past two.'

‘OK. Let’s go and meet Severus but …’ she pulled him to a stop. ‘Before we do that Harry, you haven’t asked the other important question.’

‘Which is?’

‘Why I’ve been recruited as an Unspeakable.’

Harry looked at her blankly. ‘You mean … you get … headhunted, you don’t just join?’

Hermione nodded. ‘You have to have some special skill and be able to use very advanced magic.’

‘Yeah, I can understand that and you always were very advanced in magic.’ He paused, thinking. ‘So what’s your special skill?’

Hermione looked around conspiratorially. When she was certain there was no unseen observer, not even a Muggle around, she took a deep breath and dropped her voice to a whisper. ‘Harry. I don’t have to use a wand.’

‘What!? That’s … very, very difficult and … so bloody you, Hermione.’

She grabbed his arm. ‘Ssshhh. Not so loud and no it’s not and it works. For me at least. And I only have to think about a spell, I don’t have to use the command to cast one.’ She moved to leave; Harry remained on the spot, stunned. He had to run to catch up. He pulled her to a stop again.

‘And I suppose I have to keep this to myself as well?’

She leaned in and kissed his cheek. ‘You catch on very quickly. So yes, it would be best.’

‘You really are the most exceptional and shitty witch of our generation,’ he said.

She punched his arm. ‘C’mon, let’s not keep Severus waiting too long.’

‘What’s Severus’s special gift,’ he asked.

‘He’s dead,’ was all she said.

They linked arms again and walked to the café. They took the steps down to the seating area and saw Severus sitting at an outside table, sipping an espresso. Hermione waved. Severus saw them and stood as they approached. Hermione gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

‘Sorry we’re late … lost track of time talking.’

Harry stood before Severus Snape, for so many years his nemesis; the one person at Hogwarts who had made his life really miserable. But who was the bravest wizard that he, Harry Potter, had ever had the privilege to know. He held out his hand. Severus took it.

‘Professor … I can’t tell you how pleased I am, really pleased.’

‘Thank you Harry, it’s good to see you as well.’

Hermione smiled at them both. ‘OK, I need to visit the Ladies and then I’ll get us a couple of cappuccinos, Harry. Would you like a refill Severus?’

‘I’m fine, Hermione, thank you.’
She turned and headed inside. Harry noticed how Snape watched her until she disappeared.

‘So Harry, how have you been?’

‘Very good sir, I didn’t go back to Hogwarts to take the whole of my last year like Hermione, I got very good grades in my OWLS, except in potions, but I think that was to be expected. I took my NEWTS in transfiguration and got a good grade, good enough to become an Auror. I got an interview at the Ministry so I went along for that and was offered the job along with Ron. I’ve spent some time helping Professor McGonagall with the rebuilding of the school. She asked me if I would like to stay on and teach. But I like being an Auror and have been with the Ministry for the last two years. I’ve been living with the Weasley’s for most of that time although I do sometimes stay in Grimmauld Place, Ginny and I are still together and I think I’m babbling, sir.’

‘Well, that brings me right up to date, thank you,’ Snape said and took a sip of his coffee. ‘Tell me Harry, how is Hermione?’

Harry blinked at Snape, who raised an eyebrow at him.

‘Clearly you did not understand the question. Let me rephrase it. How does Hermione seem? It’s just that she has been a bit distracted the last couple of weeks, quieter than usual, which is not like her. I just thought perhaps, she may have mentioned something to you.’

‘Me sir? Oh no. We talked about, well … Ron and the Weasley’s, about her new work and her … erm ..gift.’ Harry felt himself blush.

‘So nothing about any worry or concern she may have?’

‘About what in particular sir?’

‘If I knew that Potter, I wouldn’t be asking you’ Severus snapped. Then more gently, ‘I apologise for that, Harry, it was uncalled for. I .. I’m worried and I thought she may have mentioned something to you.’

Snape’s crestfallen look said it all. There was a brief silence before Harry decided to take a risk. After all, he wasn’t the Boy Who Lived for nothing.

‘Severus?’ he said, expecting a rebuff for using Snape’s given name. When none came, he pressed ahead. ‘I’m not sure what you mean exactly but … when Hermione talks about you, she … she…’ Harry felt the dark eyes piercing him.

‘She what …?’ Came the softly spoken question.

‘She glows and sort of … melts at the same time. Look, I know that doesn’t make any sense, but when she was with Ron or even now when she talks about him it’s like ‘oh yeah, Ron’ as if it doesn’t matter if Ron was in her life or not.’ Harry paused once again, expecting some pithy retort, but again, none came.

He carried on. ‘When she speaks your name, her eyes light up and her body language becomes much softer. It’s as if … you and she are one and the same.’

There was another silence between the two men. Severus kept his eyes cast down, away from Harry’s.

‘Like we were one unit, joined?’ Snape said at last.
‘Not exactly. I mean, look, Hermione is her own woman. She will always be independent, annoying and utterly brilliant. The last thing she needs is someone who would smother that. She needs someone in her life who can match her, quality for quality.’

‘So I’m independent and annoying am I?’ Snape said with a small smile that threatened to spread across his lips.

‘And utterly brilliant of course,’ Harry responded and was surprised by Snape’s laugh, which was rich and warm.

‘You think she needs a partner?’ Snape asked.

‘No.’ Harry was emphatic. ‘She needs something much deeper, much more … stronger.’

He stopped. He had no idea where all this was coming from, or if Snape even wanted to hear any of it. But Hermione was worried about something, that much he did know. Perhaps it was something to do with her relationship with Snape. Perhaps he was not willing to commit to her and this upset her.

<< ‘OK, Harry,’ he thought, ‘now you are a matchmaker, it was becoming obvious that Snape had it bad for Hermione, maybe a little push?’ >>

‘I think she needs a soul mate,’ he continued. ‘Ron wasn’t it. Ron loves … loved her for all the wrong reasons. I know Ron … and I love him as my best mate. But at the end of the day he would have wanted her to be like …’ he stopped, leaving the rest of the sentence unsaid.

‘Molly?’ Snape finished for him. Harry nodded and Snape sighed.

‘What’s keeping her?’ he said as he looked around. ‘Don’t underestimate Molly Weasley; she is after all the witch who reduced Bellatrix Lastrange to dust.’

‘Don’t get me wrong Professor. I love Molly, she has always been a mother to me, but her life is not the life Hermione would choose.’

Snape eyed him. ‘Since when did you become the expert on the needs of Miss Granger?’

‘Because I’ve known her for a long time and I lived with her every day for a year through some pretty rough stuff. I’ve seen her hunted, tortured and dodge some nasty curses and hexes. I also saw her fight and sometimes fight dirty. I have seen her laugh, held her when she cried and danced with her when everything seemed hopeless. She is fiercely loyal to her friends. So yeah, I know her.’

Harry saw the frown again. Severus Snape may be alive and well, looking very dapper in his dark sweater that could well be cashmere and expensive jeans. But he was also conflicted and very unsure of himself where Hermione was concerned.

‘You said she was tortured. She’s not mentioned anything about that to me. What happened?’

‘I’m not sure if I should say anything, I really think you should hear it from Hermione.’

‘If you could just tell me something, anything … please.’

Harry nodded. ‘We were captured by Snatchers and taken to Malfoy Manor. Bellatrix was there. Ron and I were placed in a cellar, which was more like a dungeon. I mean, who has a bloody dungeon in their house?’ When he got no response from Snape he shook his head and continued. ‘Anyway, Bellatrix wanted to know why we had the Sword of Gryffindor as it should have been in her vault at Gringotts. She used the cruciatus on Hermione and … carved the word ‘mudblood’ on
her arm. If Dobby hadn’t saved us, Bellatrix would have killed her.’

Severus’s gaze was stone hard and for one fleeting moment, Harry thought he saw a blaze of flame in the dark eyes.

‘Thank you, Harry. I didn’t know. Now I can … ah, here she comes,’ Snape’s relief was obvious.

‘Sorry about that, boys,’ she said and Harry caught the smile on Snape’s face. ‘Had to queue for the Ladies and then for the coffee.’ She handed Harry his cappuccino and placed a plate of cakes in the middle of the table. ‘I got you a refill as well, Severus, hope that’s alright?’

‘You read my mind … again,’ and this time he made no attempt to conceal his smile. He smiled at Hermione not only with his lips, but with his eyes and Harry felt his stomach flip. The look was unadulterated love. Not puppy love or wistful romantic love. But a deep, adult love filled with adult desire.

‘So what did you two find to talk about while I was away?’ Hermione said as she reached for an obscenely large coffee éclair with fresh cream.

Harry noticed at once that her mood had changed. She was now lighter and seemed more playful.

‘Oooh yeah, this is lovely,’ she said, breaking off a piece and feeding it to Severus. He rolled his eyes in mock ecstasy then took a deep slug of espresso.

‘Much better when washed down with a strong Italian brew,’ he said.

Hermione giggled. ‘He doesn’t really like cream, except when it’s placed strategically on my body.’

‘Hermione!’ Both men exclaimed together.

‘… And to answer your question,’ Harry said, diplomatically changing the subject to spare Snape more blushes, ‘we were catching up.’

‘Good,’ she replied. ‘I would have hated the thought of my two favourite men sitting in stony silence glaring at each other.’ She reached for another cake. ‘Anyone want to share this strawberry tart? No? OK.’ and she bit into it without waiting for an answer.

‘Oh? Upset that we were not organising duelling wands at dawn over you?’ Severus quipped.

‘Of course. A girl loves to know that she is worth fighting over. And I don’t mean just for sex either.’

‘Hermione!’ both men answered together again and were rewarded with Hermione collapsing in another fit of giggles. Snape rolled his eyes at Harry and mouthed ‘women.’ But he took her hand and kissed it all the same. Harry decided he was beginning to like this new Professor Snape.

‘When’s the wedding?’ Hermione asked once she had regained her composure.

‘Wedding?’ Harry yelped.

‘Of course. You are going to make an honest witch of Ginny aren’t you?

‘Oh, yeah. Course I am. We just haven’t decided yet, but I think sooner rather than later. You’ll both get an invitation of course.’

‘Hmm, I think Molly and Arthur would hope that particular owl got lost in transit,’ Hermione said.
Harry’s face dropped. ‘But I would want you two at my wedding.’ He slumped into his chair. ‘Oh hell, I think you might be right.’

Hermione covered his hand with hers. ‘Don’t worry Harry; we’ll work it out when the time comes.’

‘Yes Harry. We will,’ Snape added.

The rest of their time together was spent in pleasant friendship. Because he had been so severely injured, after his treatment at St Mungo’s, Severus had been sent to recover at a secret location; so he knew nothing about what happened after Voldemort had left him for dead. Hermione and Harry told him of the demise of the Dark One and the immediate aftermath of the Last Battle and the destruction of Hogwarts. Those who had given their lives in the War were toasted and those who lived to tell the tale were also toasted. And throughout it all, Harry could only be amazed at the change in Severus Snape. He laughed, he joked, and he took Hermione’s ribbing in his stride. And once or twice Harry had caught Snape looking at him with sad eyes.

Then it was time to leave.

They walked together down the path and back into the woodland. Hermione walked between her two men, arms linked. She chatted to both of them, making them laugh until they arrived at a quiet spot, deep in the woods.

‘I’ll apparate from here,’ Harry said.

Hermione pulled him into a hug. ‘Don’t forget, if you want to meet up or make contact, use the mobile, no owls, alright?’ She flicked an imaginary piece of fluff from his jacket. ‘It’s been wonderful seeing you Harry. You take care of yourself. And Harry, can you tell Ron …?’

‘No, Hermione, I’m not going to be a go between. You have something to say to Ron, you have to tell him yourself, OK?’

She nodded.

‘Professor … Severus,’ Harry held out his hand. ‘It’s wonderful to know you are alive and well.’ Snape took the proffered hand. ‘Take care of her,’ Harry whispered.

‘Thank you Harry. And I will, with my life.’

They all looked around to see if anyone was close by and with no-one in sight, Harry apparated. As soon as he was gone, Hermione flung herself into Severus’s arms.

‘Let’s go home,’ she said, planting a kiss on his lips.

He held her tightly as they disappeared into the black swirling void.

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Harry arrived at the front door of the Burrow. He went in and found Ron waiting for him.

‘Well?’

‘Well what, Ron?’
'Did she say anything about me? Did she give you any message?'

'No Ron. I told her exactly the same as I told you. I will not be a go between. You are going to have to work this out between the two of you.'

Ron was obviously not happy with this answer.

'Is she … y’know, seeing anyone?'

Harry paused briefly and then sighed. ‘No Ron, she’s not.’

‘Well, that’s something, isn’t it Harry?’

He placed his hand on Ron’s shoulder. ‘Yeah, Ron, that’s something.’

Ron smiled at him. ‘Ginny’s upstairs,’ he said.

Harry gave his best friend’s shoulder a final squeeze and went upstairs to find Ginny.

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Hermione climbed onto the bed and knelt before Severus.

When they decided to move in together, they had started off in his small bedsit. But it soon became clear that it was far too small for two adults and all of Hermione’s stuff. They couldn’t decide on the best place to live, so she had suggested her parent’s house, at least until they found somewhere they both liked. It was working out better than either of them expected. She had used a transformation spell to turn her single bed into a lovely king size bed in her room and she purchased a TV with money from her bank account, so they could lie in bed and watch Muggle programmes, something Severus had started to enjoy. There was plenty of room in the rest of the house for all their things and Severus had taken over the smallest bedroom as his potions room.

He was sat up in bed, reading.

‘I started my period today,’ she said.

‘Oh, would you like me to get you a ….?’ He stopped mid-sentence and stared at her. She looked divine in her usual bed attire of sexy vest and shorts. She had showered and washed her hair which was drying in a halo around her face. ‘So that’s what all this has been about this last couple of weeks?’ he pulled her gently into him. ‘You thought you were pregnant?’

‘Yes,’ her voice was small.

‘Oh my love,’ he kissed her hair. He could smell coconut and orange. ‘Are you sorry you’re not?’

‘No.’ she looked up at him. ‘Not yet anyway. I mean, I do want babies and I would like them with you, but … just not now.’ And she buried her head in the crook of his neck.

‘I should have been more careful with the contraceptive charm. Do you have any idea when it happened?’

‘Yes. And it’s not your fault; I could have used it just as easily. It was after my first interview with
the Department. I was so excited they were even considering me. I was excited that I could be working with you. Merlin, but I felt sexy.’

He laughed softly. ‘I remember I was working that day.’

‘Oh yeah, and I came home and you weren’t here. So I waited, I had some wine and when you finally arrived …’

‘I was wearing my robes …’

‘Oh yes, your frock coat, the white shirt, you were sooo hot.’

‘You jumped on me as soon as I removed my cloak.

‘I didn’t let you remove anything else, except to open the important part of your trousers.’

‘You ravished me.’

‘It was the hottest sex. I should have remembered the charm, but I forgot. I just wanted you.’

‘And you have spent … what? The last …’

‘…Two weeks worrying. Silly I know. But I wasn’t sure … y’know whether I wanted a baby. And then I thought well, it’s your baby and then I became very conflicted.’ She leaned up and kissed him soundly on the lips. ‘I love you Severus Snape. I love our life together and I know I am going to love the job we do.’

‘I could mix a potion so that you wouldn’t have to worry every month.’

She placed her fingers on his lips. ‘No. No potion. I like to know when I have my period and if I took a potion, I would have to wait for it to wear off before becoming pregnant. And I don’t want that. I want us to decide when we have a baby, not some potion. And yes, I know you are the most brilliant potions master of any age in any time and in any existence and that you could reverse the effects in a snap. But I don’t want that. But I do want your baby one day.’ She snuggled down into him again.

‘Just not today,’ he said.

She nodded. ‘Is that very selfish of me Severus, to want to keep you to myself for now? Not to share you with anyone for a time?’

He took her hand and kissed it. ‘No, Hermione, it is not selfish. I feel the same way. I would like children, one day.’

She knelt up and kissed him again. ‘Do you know what I adore about you Professor Snape?’

‘No, Miss Granger, please enlighten me.’

‘You take me as I am, as a woman, with all my womanly bits and pieces.’

‘I happen to like your womanly bits and pieces.’

‘And when I get stroppy or have cramps with my period, you cuddle me or rub my tummy.’

‘I am a saint.’
‘The other boys didn’t,’ she added.

He frowned. ‘Other … boys?’ his voice dropped a register.

‘Yeah, at Hogwarts. They didn’t understand what it was that I really needed, they …’

‘Wait! There were others boys besides Victor and Ron?’

She sat back on her heels and ran her hand through her hair, pulling out the tangles. ‘Oh yes, loads. They all fancied me like mad,’ her face had a faraway look on it.

‘Who? Who were these other boys?’ He demanded.

‘I can’t remember them all, silly. But, there was … Liam.’ She started counting on her fingers. ‘Draco naturally, he was really into me. Who else, oh yes, Neville.’

‘Neville Longbottom?’ he spluttered.

She looked at him as if he was mad. ‘Yeah, why not? Then, well Crabbe and Goyle, they tried, but I was having none of it. Victor you know about and then the other boys from Durmstrang.’

 Severus was shaking his head in disbelief. ‘You mean to tell me that the whole of Durmstrang …?’

‘Why yes,’ she said keeping her face completely neutral. ‘Then there was the Quidditch teams, well the boys anyway, I’m not into girl action.’

‘Quidditch teams?’

‘Of course. Why not?’

‘But … but …’ he looked at her, at the faint smile that threatened to break out on her lips, the way she tilted her head, just so. ‘Wait! Oh no … oh no you don’t! I’m not falling into that particular hole again. Oh no!’ And he grabbed her and wrestled her to the bed and kissed her.

‘Nearly got you that time, didn’t I?’

‘Yes you did, wicked witch.’

‘What gave it away?’

‘Durmstrang visitors.’

‘Oh, I thought it would have been Neville.’

He gathered her into his arms. ‘No, not Neville, sweetheart, Neville is a nice boy.’

‘Why Durmstrang?’ she asked.

‘Because my little sex kitten, if you had said half of the Durmstrang boys I would now be apoplectic and throwing all sorts of curses around the room because I would have believed you.’

‘But why?’

‘Because half of the Durmstrang boys are into girls, the other half … are not.’

‘You mean …?’
'Oh yes my darling. Including Victor,’ he smiled at her. She stared at him, wide eyed, her mouth slightly agape. ‘Victor … no no no no waay,’ she shook her head. ‘Why not? Did you sleep with him?’ ‘Of course bloody not. I’ve only ever slept with you and Ron.’ ‘And for that I am eternally grateful,’ he said. ‘Wait a minute. How do you know about the Durmstrang boys, eh?’ she accused, pointing a finger at him. ‘Because I know Igor Karkaroff.’ She shook her head again. ‘He’s, he’s … gay?’ ‘You may think that my beautiful darling, I couldn’t possibly comment.’ He reached out and tucked her hair behind one ear and kissed the exposed neck. She didn’t seem to notice. She opened her mouth to say something, but shut it again. She stared hard at him. He smiled and lifted her chin with a gentle finger. ‘Hermione?’ ‘Yes?’ She replied, a sullen edge to her voice. ‘Gotcha!’ She lunged at him. ‘Severus Snape you are a total git,’ she said as they fell laughing and rolling on the bed. ‘But, as I love you, you are forgiven.’ And she planted a chaste kiss on his forehead. He pulled her into bed and once under the covers, gathered her into his body. ‘Do you want to watch telly?’ He asked. ‘There’s a film on about a couple who fall in love on a train station.’ ‘No. I want to make love to you.’ ‘You have your period.’ ‘Yes I do. But there is absolutely nothing wrong with my mouth or my tongue.’ And she proceeded to prove it.
Chapter Summary

How could she love him? Were they not enjoying a relationship based on sex and no strings? Now those strings were curling around him. In the early days of their relationship he didn’t want anything more than her company, her body and her laughter.

Chapter Notes

* All characters remain the property of J. K. Rowling. I have no claim on them, except to populate my stories. No harm is intended and no money changes hands. *

He had to admit, this last year had been the most interesting and enjoyable of his life and apart from his role in the War, the most dangerous. And it was all the fault of a slip of a woman who, with her simple weapons of friendship, food and humour, had stripped away his barriers. These things had made his life interesting and enjoyable.

The danger had come with love. Love was something he was unsure of, something he thought would never touch his life again. She gave of herself wholeheartedly; she held certain things back of course, that was only natural, he did the same. It was her capacity to love him that he found overwhelming. The fact that he had been her Potions Master for so many years at Hogwarts seemed to have slipped her mind. Just as it seemed she had forgotten that on many, many occasions, he had been vile to her and more than once had reduced her to tears. Perhaps this was her revenge on him. She was going to kill him with love, passion and Chilli con Carne.

Passion.

He always knew that deep down he had the potential for passion. Events though, meant he had had to keep that side of himself buried. So he became the cold, humourless and calculating Potions Master that most pupils at Hogwarts hated or despised, sometimes both at the same time. She has never buried her passion and oh Merlin! she is passionate. Simply by looking at him with her soft, intelligent eyes she had awakened that part of him he had fought for so long to keep hidden. He had tried to keep it buried of course, but had quickly given up and allowed himself the pleasure that comes with passion and, from being passionate.

He had bought up the subject of Hogwarts only once in those first months. She had listened to him quietly, intently and had then told him that the War had changed her. Now she wanted to live for the present, to look forward and not look back. The past is gone, she said, and unless we wish to live our lives with a time-turner, we can change nothing about the past. The present is the only chance we have to change anything. The future remains hidden. He thought it was all very philosophical, but somehow, it made perfect sense. She had then reached out and placed her hand over his heart, resting
it there. She had said his heart is opening once again and then she had smiled. What in all Hades did that mean?

For the last year now he had been waiting for the day, hour, minute or second when she told him that she was moving on; that she had come to her senses and that they were too different, the age gap too large and he, too set in his ways to change. So far, it had not happened. But it remains his biggest fear. She had awakened him to all of life’s easy, simple pleasures. To lose her would send him spiralling back down into his old persona, someone he hated.

She tells him daily how much she loves him. The first time she had spoken those words he felt himself suffocating under the weight of them. How could she love him? Were they not enjoying a relationship based on sex and no strings? Now those strings were curling around him. In the early days of their relationship he didn’t want anything more than her company, her body and her laughter. And what was there to love about him anyway? He was not handsome. He was tall and lean, his body all sharp angles; his face was hard and careworn. He was acerbic and ungentle. And yet.

She was changing him. He had learnt gentleness from her, how to be tender and caring. She considered him not only handsome, but beautiful. She had made him smile first and then, laugh. His face had softened and his eyes became bright and loving. She fed him love, loyalty, passion and home-cooked food. His tiny bedsit had become too small for them both and all of her things. His narrow single bed too small and too unstable for the amount of sex they enjoyed. She had spent more time with him as the weeks progressed, until one day, he realised that she had lived with him for two weeks and had not returned to her parent’s house once. How had that happened and they not notice? When he had mentioned this fact to her, she had suggested they find somewhere bigger to live. She had said she liked living with him and saw no reason why they shouldn’t. He was not convinced. But they had gone through the process of trying to find somewhere more suitable for two people. Of course, him being officially dead meant they could not look in any of the wizarding villages or parts of town. After several fruitless days of searching, she had suggested moving into her parent’s house. It was big enough for the two of them; had a big kitchen and even space for a potions room. He had thought it a terrible idea and had told her so. A week later they were settling into her family home and he found himself liking it.

And there was indeed, space for a potions room. He missed potion making. But again, being dead meant he couldn’t easily go shopping in Diagon Alley for supplies. Instead, she had offered to go for him. So armed with a list, she had gone and bought everything he needed without causing a riot. Now, when he wasn’t working, he could make potions. She would cook and sometimes they would sit and read together. She loved books. Early in their relationship he had insisted they sit separately when reading, it didn’t last long and now, more often than not, they would curl up together, a book in one hand and the other hand resting on a part of the other’s body. She had also introduced him to TV and some nights they would sit in bed and watch a programme or a film. He had started to enjoy that. When he had told her, she laughed and said ‘Oh horror – am I bringing out your inner Muggle?’

Then there was the time he had arrived back to a house blaring with music. She loved music. She was in the kitchen, cooking, with the radio blaring. She was also singing into a wooden spoon while dancing around the kitchen. He had watched her for a full minute before she saw him and instead of being embarrassed, she had put down the spoon, grabbed him and danced him into the sitting room. She was laughing. Then, for some reason he would never be able to explain, he pulled her into him and took the lead. He danced her around the room, guiding her smoothly through the steps of a Hogwarts Waltz; he twirled her and as the music slowed to a stop, he bent her back and leaned in to kiss her. The music changed to a slow song. Instead of parting, she pulled him into her and they slow
danced. With a wave of her hand she dimmed the lights and they moved slowly together, almost on the same spot. Her hand entwined with his, one hand around his neck, she had leaned up on tiptoe and kissed him. She told him it was called smooching; when there was close physical contact, kissing and groping, but nothing else. He found smooching intoxicating. Erotic. Arousing.

A year on there was still the problem of Harry Potter. He had seen Lily’s son four times since that first meeting in Kenwood. They were desperately polite to each other each time, yet each man knew that there needed to be a conversation. As she had pointed out, the past cannot be changed, things said in the past, need to remain in the past. Why then was it crucial that Harry and he speak of things past? Because, for him to live in the present, he needed to make amends for his past actions, especially where Harry was concerned. He wanted to try and make the other man understand that what he did, he did of necessity, to protect both Harry and himself. Perhaps there would never be anything but an uneasy truce between them, but he wanted to try, for her sake.

Her. Wonderful her. She was powerful and her skills were growing quickly, as if something had been released within her. For instance, she made hardly a sound when she apperated; her senses were sharp and getting sharper; she could read people, not their body language, but their skill level, their power and their threat. Then there was the fact that she didn’t have to use a wand or verbalise the command when casting a spell or charm, she was beginning to do it by thought alone. Only the most skilled and powerful witch or wizard had that capability, yet she seemed oblivious and unconcerned about her growing power. It concerned him though. How was it that a Muggle born, with no family history of wizard or witch craft had such power? And how was it that her powers were growing?

She was also clever in her use of magic. How else could she keep that mark concealed from him? After Harry had told the tale of their capture and her torture, he had looked at her arm many, many times, but could see nothing. Even when she was asleep and he had looked, examined and used a reveal to see the word, nothing appeared. She was either much better at magic than he, or the wound had healed, which he did not believe for one moment. The curses and hexes of Dark magic do not heal, you either die or they remain with you for ever, that is the nature of the Dark arts. Only once he thought he had seen the shimmer of a glamour on her arm, but that could just as well have been sunlight and shadow.

He had kept much of his own power hidden from her. He remained deeply ashamed by his use of the Dark magic and the obsession of his young self with the Dark Arts. Yet … yet it was the Dark that had given him his powerful abilities. Now though, he uses his abilities for the Light. She is all of the Light, but he is wise enough to know that where there is Light, there has to be Shadow. Her Shadow will present itself sooner or later and when it did, he would recognise it even if she didn’t and he would help her deal with it.

Light and Dark. It was partly his idea. The way to move the wizarding world forward; the way to prevent the Dark taking control as it had done so completely during the two Wars. By pairing Light and Dark you ensure that there is balance. It meant that only those who were the most vicious and corrupt of the Dark Ones and Death Eaters were sent to Azkaban. For those who had murdered or tortured their own kind or Muggles, there was no hope, but for those who were willing to renounce the Dark Arts, there was hope and they were given a partner, one of the Light. It was a simple solution and one condemned by Kingsley Shacklebolt as unworkable, only it wasn’t failing. So far, partnerships had been successful and soon it would be time to move up another level, to those who were in the Inner Circle and under Voldemort’s direct influence. Many of these were already in Azkaban, never to be released. But there were some, like the Malfoys, who had escaped punishment, because in the end, they had turned against the Dark One. Attitudes needed changing because the outside World was changing and the Wizarding world needed to change with it.
So what of her, and him? That evening, when the music had stopped, she still moved in the slow dance, lost in the moment. She was the first to speak and when she did, he thought it didn’t make sense. She had asked if he knew what she would like. He had replied that he didn’t and what would she like?

She had said, ‘I would like you to dance me to the end of love.’

He had smiled at that and told her, not for the first time, ‘I hope you aren’t falling in love with me.’ She had pulled away and walked back into the kitchen. He followed. She was stirring the pot.

She looked at him, her eyes filled with tears. ‘Too late,’ was all she said.

Those words hit him and in that perfect moment, he knew she was right, it was too late. For almost a year he had been saying to himself, ‘I hope I don’t fall in love with her.’

Too late.

He moved to her, took the spoon and tasted the contents of the pot. It was delicious. Just as she was.

And it was altogether hopeless.

With his finger, he wiped away the tears from her cheeks. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Too late. I think I have fallen in love with you’.

Her face remained serious. ‘When?’ she asked.

‘A year ago, two months ago, last week, it doesn’t matter. And yes, I would like to.’

‘What?’

‘Dance you to the end of love.’

It makes perfect sense.
And where was Severus? It wasn’t like him to digress from an agreed plan. It was why they were successful, once a plan was agreed between them, it didn’t change. She had improvised once and only once. His anger that she had placed both of them in jeopardy was enough for her to never try anything like it again.

She opens her eyes, momentarily disorientated. The soft breathing beside her reassures her she is in bed. She turns and faces him. His face is relaxed in sleep, his lips parted slightly as he breathes in and out. She reaches out and gently sweeps the raven dark hair from his face. His scars are fading, the worse ones on his neck now mere lines of pale tissue. The serpent on his forearm is also fading; its eyes are closed now, no longer watching. Merlin, but she loves him.

She remembers three nights ago.

She awoke that night with her body humming with need and she knew that if she touched herself, her orgasm would be immediate. But she needed more. Desire.

She turned to him and had run her fingertip over the length of him and when he twitched to life, she smiled. Gently, quietly, she slid down the bed and with her tongue, flicked at his awakening sex. She ran her tongue, once, twice along his length and was rewarded with growing interest. She took him into her mouth and laved it, moving up and down with generous wet rhythm. He moaned softly. She tasted him and found herself becoming more aroused, so much so that the bud between her legs seemed to have grown and was now throbbing painfully. Wordlessly, she wove her contraceptive charm.

She rolled him gently onto his back. He was naked, as he usually slept and already small gasps were issuing from his lips. His eyes were still closed, but beneath the lids she could just see the eyes moving rapidly. She continued arousing him, licking and sucking in equal measure, taking as much of his length into her mouth as she could. Then, the soft blowing of her breath onto him, making him quiver, her tongue lapping ever downwards to his taut sacs, over and around and then back up to take his swollen glans into her mouth again.
When he was fully engorged, she had ceased her ministrations to remove her scanty night clothes. Once naked, she had straddled his hips. Taking his erection in her hand, she had guided him into her. She leaned slightly forward, allowing her body to take all of him inside her. He moaned in the back of his throat and opened his eyes.

‘Hermione,’ it was a gasp rather than a name.

She moved herself on him, allowing him to fill her on each downward motion. Her skin glistened with sweat and there was a heat that burned into her very core. He moved his hand towards her throbbing bud, about to touch it. She batted it away, if he had touched her there, it would have tipped her over the edge.

‘Not yet,’ she heard a voice that was not her own.

She had found her rhythm and with her knees supporting her body, she brought her hands up to her hair and threw her head back and released a low growl in her wantonness. She could feel it. The power building within her like a fire being stoked to burn ever hotter, brighter. He had reached up and cupped her breasts in his hands, his thumbs rubbed her nipples and she moaned as the swift thread of electricity hurtled down to her sex. His hands fell to her hips, supporting her as she moved upon him. Leaning forward she had placed her hands on either side of his neck, as she did so, her clitoris hit his pubic bone and the first jolt of pleasure ripped through her. She rubbed herself against him, sending more ripples through her body. She then leaned in and kissed him, long and hard. His lips were welcoming, warm and soft. The dance of tongues around the soft, erogenous tissue of the mouth had them both groaning and grinding against each other.

‘Use me,’ he had muttered as they pulled away, just as lost in the act as her. He bucked under her, matching his rhythm to hers.

She moaned as she pushed herself fully onto him again, quickening the pace of her thrusts now. He filled her senses and her body with his masculinity; she melted into his power and magic. She was utterly lost. When the crisis point came, she grabbed his hand and led him back to her, where one stroke from his sensitive fingers broke the dam. Her orgasm flooded through her with colour, light and heat. Power surged through her from her hot throbbing sex to her exploding brain. Her body expanded outwards and she was aware of everything in those moments. She may have called out, but it could just as well have been him. Time was meaningless as the world disappeared and became silent during her ecstasy.

It lessened gradually, letting her down and bringing her back into her body and the present. At some point he had ejaculated and lay with an arm thrown over his eyes, panting heavily. She slumped forward onto his chest, suddenly boneless, spent. The sob caught in her throat before she could stop it. He had slipped out of her, leaving her empty and devoid of his strength. She had rolled into his embrace, sobbing in juddery gulps.

‘Hermione, what is it?’ he asked, softly stroking her back.

How could she tell him of the beauty of it? Tell of the slowly burning fire. Tell him of the power? How could she explain something she did not understand herself?

Desire.

Now, this night, she had awoken again, only this night she watched him in the pale light of the bedroom. As if aware he was observed, his eyes flicked open, he smiled. She ran a finger across his lips.
'You know me, you know about my life, my family.' she whispered. 'I open myself to you, I make myself vulnerable.' He blinked at her. 'I know that you are dark, powerful and possibly dangerous, but I have no fear of that part of you. The serpent on your arm no longer scares me. I am aware of your demons and I am not afraid of them.' She cupped his face in her hands. 'Yet you keep this one thing from me. What is that you fear so much you dare not share it with me?'

'Hermione …'

'Sshhh. Not now, not tonight. Go back to sleep my love.' She kissed his warm lips and turned over. He spooned himself against her, his arm protectively around her, his breath upon her hair. She covered his hand with hers. She would tell him, as soon as she was certain.

Running was always the worst part. Her heart raced with the exertion and the stitch in her side made her gasp. But she must keep running until the last possible moment, leading them into the waiting path of Severus and …

‘Fuck!’ she muttered as a curse hit a tree just feet to her right, splinters of shattered wood flying in all directions. She could apperate, but then the pursuit would stop and this was the best chance they had to catch this group of Dark Ones. ‘Fuck fuck fuck,’ as she dodged two more bursts of power. She leapt over a fallen log, fell and rolled. She jumped up immediately and realised she had lost precious yards.

‘That most definitely wasn’t meant to happen,’ she said to no-one but herself. Ahead she saw the lightning tree, the rendezvous with Severus. She raced towards it, the Dark Ones gaining rapidly. ‘C’mon, Severus, where are you?’ she called while at the same time turning to let go of a couple of powerful blasts at her pursuers, just to keep them worried. She reached the tree and ran on passed it. This was the point when Severus was meant to appear, stop the Dark Ones in their tracks just by being alive. It was then simple to Stupefy them all, Severus would then make himself scarce and she would call the Aurors.

But this time … this time something was wrong. She turned to see them approaching the lightning tree cautiously, no longer chasing her, wands extended as though … as though expecting a trap.

‘Oh fuck,’ she said again and apperated. She landed about thirty yards behind the Dark Ones and using a Mutus spell, she moved forward. One of them turned and looked in her direction; she ducked behind a large beech tree. They looked pleased for some reason, quickly, she moved in closer. They seemed to be waiting … for what? And where was Severus? It wasn’t like him to digress from an agreed plan. It was why they were successful, once a plan was agreed between them, it didn’t change. She had improvised once and only once. His anger that she had placed both of them in jeopardy was enough for her to never try anything like it again.

The set up to catch this gang of Dark Ones had been especially complicated. Two Aurors had already been injured trying to apprehend them. That was when the Department had been called in. She and Severus had been tracking the gang for two weeks across the UK into France and back. Well, officially only she had been tracking them, because with Severus being dead, he couldn’t do much of anything. It was tiring and frustrating work, always hiding; arriving at a known location only to find they had missed the gang by minutes; using Transfiguration in an attempt to get close and overhear plans. That was how they knew the gang would be the area and why she was chased through the New Forest by four Dark Wizards. She was the bait and every time, the bait had been
taken. Except this time, it hadn’t worked and Severus had not appeared.

Her musing was interrupted by the familiar shimmering of a charm being released. Two figures appeared. Oh shit. Severus was held in the firm grip of the leader of this gang, Bertimius Branch. She recognised him from the file she had studied, a very nasty piece of work with sociopathic tendencies and one sentence in Azkaban. He was one of the many prisoners that Voldemort had released during the last War. Branch had his wand aimed at Severus’s neck. She inched closer, Branch was a powerful Necromancer and one false move from her could mean … but she refused to allow her mind to go there.

‘I know you are here Miss Granger,’ Branch called out. ‘Show yourself or the good Professor will have to die all over again.’

She shook her head, something was not right. *Think, Hermione, think*, she scolded herself. Severus was too powerful a wizard to be caught off guard, more than a match for Branch. What had gone wrong, why was he captive? No! Why had he *allowed* himself to be caught? This was not part of the plan and now he was improvising? It didn’t make sense.

There were five of them. Not good odds, but not terrible either. Quickly, she ran through her options, none were fool-proof and one was downright loony. But sometimes …. Taking her wand from her pocket she looked closely at him. ‘Well, Severus, if you are improvising, then so can I,’ she muttered.

‘I’m waiting …’ and Severus let out a yelp of pain. ‘I’m not a patient man, Miss Granger.’ Severus’s knees buckled as Branch jabbed him the neck with his wand.

She smiled and apperated. Her chosen landing spot was to the side of the four gang members, but directly in front of Bertimius Branch.

‘Branch!’ she cried, extending her wand to attack.

‘Well, well, the famous Miss Granger,’ Branch said. ‘Look everyone; I think she’s come to rescue the dead professor.’ His gang laughed, not because it was funny, but because he laughed, in much the same way Voldemort’s cronies did.

‘Release Professor Snape at once,’ there was a slight tremour in her voice as she thrust her wand towards Branch.

‘Oh I don’t think so Miss Granger. No, I think we shall leave here with the good Professor. I know some people in very high places who will pay handsomely for delivering the traitor to them.’ He jabbed Severus’s neck with his wand. ‘Then with him and you … disposed of, we can carry on, business as usual.’

Hermione lifted her wand as if to strike, but with a word from Branch, it went flying out of her hand.

‘Oh tut tut, Miss Granger, surely you didn’t think I was going to allow you to use your wand, did you?’ Hermione gasped and knew she was defeated. She let her head fall. ‘Don’t worry my lovely,’ Branch continued, ‘once I have delivered your boyfriend to my clients, I’m sure they will make certain he dies a nice painful death, or perhaps they’ll just drive him mad with a Cruciatu.’

The gang laughed again. Hermione looked at Severus; he closed his eyes and shook his head slightly.

‘Move! Traitor,’ Branch commanded as he pushed Severus further into the clearing.
‘Right. Midge?’ He pointed at one of his gang. ‘Miss Granger is yours; you can do what you like with her and if she ends up dead …’ he shrugged, ‘well, accidents happen all the time; the rest of you, back to HQ with me and our … guest.’ Midge, who was about as ugly a thing as you would care to meet, grinned at Hermione, showing his discoloured, sharp teeth.

‘I can’t allow you to do that,’ her voice had changed. Now it was strong and confident. Branch turned to her, still holding his wand to Severus’s neck. The rest of the gang started to close in on her. ‘I don’t know,’ she continued, ‘maybe I’m just pissed off at being chased through a fucking forest and having curses thrown at me when I could be sipping a cappuccino in a café.’

The gang looked at each other, confused.

‘Oh my! Language, Miss Granger, language. I don’t want my little gang being corrupted now.’ This time the laughter from the gang was genuine.

She sighed deeply. ‘I’ll ask you once and once only. Release Professor Snape and then I’ll take you back to the Ministry and they can deal with you from there, OK?’

The gang laughed again and Severus groaned and shook his head.

‘Let me think,’ Branch said. ‘Hmm. No.’ He made to move and Hermione took her chance. She disappearated behind Branch and whispered ‘Stupefy’. The gang couldn’t quite see her behind Branch and Severus, but were obviously confused as to where she could have gone.

‘She’s gone boss, what do we do?’

‘Can you move Severus?’ she whispered. He nodded. ‘Do it.’

In a fluid movement, Severus moved out of the Branch’s grasp and rolled. Branch was left standing, wand raised, pointing at nothing. The gang realised what was going on and started to move.

Severus waved his hand and all four froze on the spot before falling over. Hermione let go of Branch who fell forward heavily.

‘Ow, that’s got to hurt,’ she said. She then ran to Severus who had started collecting wands.

‘Severus?’

He turned to her. ‘I’m fine, embarrassed, but fine.’

‘Did you hear what Branch said?’

‘Yes …’

‘We’ve been made; our cover is blown to all hell.’

He nodded. ‘Let’s get the Aurors here; they can deal with this lot.’

‘You go somewhere safe; I’ll go back to the house. Whoever knows and whoever ratted us out may have the house watched.’

‘No Hermione, we go back to the house together. I’ll not leave you alone and exposed. Together we have a better chance is anything goes wrong.’

She was about to protest, but knew he was right. She nodded. ‘OK. I’ll call the Aurors, you get out of here and we’ll meet at the car park on the edge of the forest, remember the one?’
‘Of course,’ he said, and was gone.

She found her wand in a bush several yards away from where she had been standing. Carefully wiping it down, she put it back in her pocket. She then walked to where Bertimius Branch was lying. Lifting his left arm she pulled back the sleeve, the serpent was still clearly visible, although this one’s eyes were also closed. She went to the wands that Severus had collected and picked up the one that was used by Branch. She held it carefully; ten and three quarter inches, Vine with a dragon’s heartstring, fairly pliable. It all but purred in her hand and she smiled. She went back to Branch.

‘Excio!’ she muttered. Branch blinked and shook his head, he turned towards her. ‘Hello, remember me?’ She said.

He sat up slowly and looked at his gang, prone on the forest floor.

‘Yes, it’s amazing how stupid gangs can be, isn’t it? No, don’t bother getting up, there’s no point really.’

‘Wha …?’

‘Oh, shut up you little prick,’ she snapped. ‘I’m going to ask you two questions, answer them truthfully and I will leave you alone.’

‘I’ll not tell you anything, filthy mudblood,’ he spat.

She laughed, that was actually funny. ‘Is that really the best you can do? I’ve been called much worse by far scarier wizards than you,’ and she waggled her fingers in front of him. As she did so, she noticed something about his face, it wasn’t quite right. Branch folded his arms and stared into space.

‘Right. First of all, where did you get this wand? It’s not yours. Secondly, who told you that Professor Snape was my boyfriend?’ Bertimius Branch shrugged his shoulders. ‘Oh, by the way,’ she added, ‘I haven’t sent for the Aurors yet.’

‘You have to,’ he protested.

‘Do I?’ She folded her arms and looked down at him. ‘Have you any idea of the amount of pain I can inflict on you before I call them?’

Branch screamed; his back arched as he fell backwards and his eyes bulged in terror.
Trust Is Not An Easy Thing (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

‘Did you use the Cruciatus on him?’
‘A little,’ she admitted.
His mouth became a thin line. ‘We are not allowed …’
‘I know exactly what we can and can’t do,’ she cut him off. ‘But sometimes not playing by the rules gets better results. And don’t lecture me.’

‘You can’t do this,’ he cried.
‘Says who?’

He screamed again, longer and louder this time.
‘I’ll tell I’ll tell! Please stop. Please.’ He slumped back.
‘Good. Now talk.’

‘I don’t know. I was given the wand; mine was destroyed in the war.’
‘Who gave it to you? Quickly!’

‘From the Ministry … I don’t know his name.’

‘Who is spreading rumours about Snape and me?’

‘The Ministry.’

‘Who.’

‘I don’t know. I swear it.’

She believed him; cowards like him didn’t like pain. She wove the comunicado spell and sent it. She knelt in front of him. ‘Obliviate.’ Branch smiled at her, she placed her hand on his shoulder in a
She walked away from him and waited for the Aurors to arrive. Something was niggling at the back of her mind, but it just wouldn’t form itself into a solid thought. It remained just out of reach. Was it that Severus wasn’t really worried about being a captive of a notorious necromancer? Was it that Bertimius Branch wasn’t who he said he was, or … thought he was? The glamour he was wearing was very good, yet she was able to discern the edges shimmering against the real face. She sighed heavily, what in the name of all gods was going on? What was it? She kicked a stick in her frustration. She had used the Cruciatius, very gently admittedly, but still against the rules and she had gained nothing useful, he didn’t know anything. She could try with another member of the gang and was about to choose a candidate when the familiar ‘crack’ of apperation made her look back.

Her heart sank, it was Harry and Ron.

She had seen Ron regularly since their break-up, mainly around the Ministry of Magic and if they had to speak to each other, they were civil. Most recently she had bumped into him in Diagon Alley; unfortunately Molly and Arthur were with him. Arthur had been quite chatty, until Molly had come along, given her a hard stare and dragged Arthur and Ron away from the Wicked Witch. When she had got back to the house, she had rushed upstairs into the bathroom, stripped and examined her whole body for warts or boils … or worse. Molly had a fearsome reputation for holding a grudge.

‘Hermione,’ Harry called to her.

‘Harry, Ron.’ Ron nodded at her. ‘Right, what we have here are the gang that the Aurors have been after for the best part of a month. That is Bertimius Branch and the rest of his gang. Here are their wands.’ She handed Harry the wands.

‘There are only four wands here, Hermione. You know the rules, we have to take all the wands in,’ Harry said.

Ron was staring at her curiously. ‘Not this time, Harry. This one is not his,’ she nodded at Branch. ‘I’m taking it back to the Department; it could be restored to the original owner.’

‘That’s the Ministry’s responsibility,’ Harry argued. ‘It’s not policy.’

‘Something wrong, Ron?’ She asked.

‘What are you wearing?’ Ron said. ‘It looks like something Snape would have worn, all black and creepy.’

‘Oh really? Well, all I can say is that it is very practical.’ she replied brightly and stepped away from the two of them. ‘By the way Harry. He’s not Bertimius Branch.’

‘Who is he then? Ron asked.

‘No idea. Take care boys.’ And she was gone.

Ron and Harry stood for a few moments.

‘Blimey, Harry, she’s even scarier now.’

‘Yeah Ron, you could be right there. C’mon, let’s get this lot back to the Ministry.’
Severus was waiting for her in the trees by the car park. She didn’t go to him as she usually would have to enjoy a hug; instead she tilted her head questioningly.

‘I’m alright, Hermione, really.’

‘What happened?’

‘I’m not sure, but he knew where I was going to be and he apperated right by me.’

‘Let’s get out of here, Severus.’

‘Where?’

‘Back to the house, let’s see if we’ve been compromised there first of all.’

He held out his hand and together they went home.

They stood in the back garden of Hermione’s house. The wards and protections were all in place at the back.

‘I’ll check the front,’ she disapperated and was back within seconds. ‘I think some have been tampered with, but I could just be paranoid.’

Severus nodded, disappeared and was back just as quickly. ‘Hmm, I’m not sure either; everything seems in place but …’

‘Yeah, but …’ she sounded concerned.

‘I don’t think we should risk going inside, just in case alarms have been set. If there are any we will need time to work around them but now … I am tired. We need somewhere safe, just for tonight.’

‘Agreed. But where do we go?’

He stood quietly for many minutes, his face furrowed, deep in thought.

‘Spinners End,’ he said at last.

She let out a breath; this was a huge decision for him and big surprise for her. They had been together over a year and not once had he suggested they visit his family home.

‘Are you sure?’ she said.

He nodded, grabbed her and they disappeared.

They were in the side alley to the Snape family home. He walked her quickly to the front door, pulled a set of keys from his inside pocket, opened the door and gestured her in. The hallway was long, narrow and dark. He led her down the corridor and as she passed the first door, to a front room, she felt the distinct prickle of energy that came from a protection charm.
‘In here,’ he said and ushered her into the back room. It was a sitting room with a couple of easy chairs, a dining table and a fireplace, with no fire. Severus removed his cloak and draped it over an armchair.

‘Master Severus I wasn’t expecting you. Who is this?’ A house elf appeared in the middle of the room and was staring closely at Hermione.

‘This is Miss Granger and she is with me,’ Severus replied.

‘Pleased to meet you … er …?’

‘Moaner,’ Severus said.

‘Mona, nice name,’ and she shook hands with the elf. Severus gave her an odd look.

‘No, it’s Moaner, M-o-a-n-e-r, not Mona as in … Lisa,’ he added.

‘Oh, sorry … Moaner.’

‘I suppose you’ll want some tea?’ The elf asked.

‘No thank …’

‘Yes please, Moaner. A lovely cup of tea would be great.’ The elf disappeared. ‘So this is your family home?’ Hermione turned around, taking in all of the room as Severus lowered his long frame into an armchair.

‘Yes. What happened back in the forest?’

‘What? Oh yes.’

‘It was very risky and I absolutely forbid you to do something that dangerous again.’ His face was stern, more like Professor Snape, Potions Master at Hogwarts than Severus Snape, her lover and partner.

She frowned. ‘I don’t think you can do that Severus, I mean it is risky work and sometimes …’

‘Hermione …’ he snapped, deadly serious.

She crossed the room to him and went to sit on his lap, something he always welcomed, this time, he stood up quickly.

‘While we are here I think we should maintain a certain degree of … decorum.’

She stared at him, gobsmacked. ‘I see,’ she said very quietly. ‘I only wanted to sit on your lap, Severus, not seduce you.’

She saw a fleeting look of horror cross his face, but it was very quickly replaced by the stern mask.

‘Tea for two,’ Moaner appeared with a tray of tea.

‘Do you have any cake or biscuits, Moaner?’ She asked. Moaner tutted and disappeared but was back seconds later with a plate of Digestives. ‘Hmm, better than nothing,’ and she poured tea for them both.

‘Hermione …’
‘Look … Severus … let me have a cup of tea and a biscuit or two and then I’ll feel better. I do need to tell you a couple of things about the job.’

He nodded and sat down again. He took the offered cup of tea but declined a biscuit.

Hermione nibbled a Digestive. So, she thought, was this is it, the thing that he wants or needs to keep hidden. But why? He sits sipping his tea from a cup that belonged to his family, looking everywhere but at her. And there is a protection charm on the front room door, but not to this room; are the other doors in the house also protected? But why does he need charms on the internal doors? She finished her first cup of tea and poured another. It was a good cup of tea, better than she expected. He didn’t need charms to keep Moaner out of the rooms, house elves were immune to all but the most powerful charms or spells. So? She nibbled another biscuit. So it must mean that he didn’t want her wandering around the house. But they had only just arrived. Another puzzle.

‘Refill?’ She asked. He nodded and she poured the brew into his cup then added the milk. She took her tea the other way around, milk first, then tea.

She continued with her thinking and nibbling. So it can only mean that Severus knew he would bring her here at some point and therefore … and therefore he had placed the charms beforehand.

She put her cup down. ‘That is so much better,’ she smiled at him. He forced a smile back, which meant he was nervous. He couldn’t smile naturally when he was nervous. But, nervous about what?

‘That wasn’t Bertimius Branch,’ she said.

He raised an eyebrow. ‘How do you know that?’

She shrugged. ‘According to the file, Bertimius Branch is a what? … level three necromancer, a Death Eater, a Dark One? Whoever that was, he was barely a level three wizard, a Snatcher maybe.’

He was staring at her. ‘How could you know that?’

‘He had no strong defences and he was wearing a glamour to make him look like Branch.’

Severus remained silent for many minutes. ‘What did you do to him?’ He finally asked.

‘Nothing really.’

‘Did you use the Cruciatus on him?’

‘A little,’ she admitted.

His mouth became a thin line. ‘We are not allowed …’

‘I know exactly what we can and can’t do,’ she cut him off. ‘But sometimes not playing by the rules gets better results. And don’t lecture me.’

He blinked in surprise at her vehemence. ‘What did you learn?’

‘Nothing, nothing at all. Only that someone in the Ministry knows about you … and us … he didn’t tell me who because he genuinely didn’t know. And this …’ she reached into her bag and brought out the wand. ‘…This is not his wand; he claimed he was given this by someone from the Ministry because his was destroyed in the War.’

She handed the wand to Severus, who held it for a minute before handing it back.
‘Vine with Dragon heartstring, ten and a half inches,’ she said. ‘And I know who it belongs to.’

‘How can you possibly know that?’ he snapped at her.

‘I know and we both know that the Ministry takes any wands collected from the Dark Ones and decommissions them, unless the owner is still alive and of the Light or has renounced the Dark.’

Severus remained silent.

‘Why would he have a wand that should be safely stored in the secure vault at the Ministry when the owner is still alive?’

He steepled his fingers as he always did when working through a puzzle or working out a solution, his face impassive. ‘Whose is it?’ he asked.

‘Mine. It was taken from me during the War. Now, why would a little shit like that have my wand? Where’s the loo?’ she asked.

‘What? Oh, top of the stairs, on the right,’ he sounded preoccupied.

She went into the hall and met Moaner. ‘Lovely cup of tea Moaner,’ she said as she climbed the stairs.

There were four doors on the landing, two straight ahead, one on the left and one on the right, the bathroom. All of the doors except the bathroom had warding and protection charms around them. The door to the left had a particularly strong exclusion charm on it. She guessed it must be the door to Severus’s room. She went into the bathroom where Moaner was waiting for her.

‘You are Hermione Granger who was a friend of Dobby?’

‘Yes Moaner, I was very proud to have been Dobby’s friend.’

‘Miss Granger and Harry Potter are very famous amongst house elves.’

‘Oh, well, thank you Moaner, erm … but I do need to use …’ and she nodded at the toilet.

‘Very well,’ and the elf disappeared.

Hermione blew the air out of her lungs and went and sat on the toilet. She didn’t need to go; she just wanted to see how far Severus trusted her and it looked like he didn’t trust her at all, what with the elf following her every move. She pulled the chain, washed her hands and opened the bathroom door to find Moaner waiting for her. She ignored the elf and went downstairs.

‘Will we be staying the night?’ she asked as she entered the sitting room. Severus was still sitting in the chair, both hands resting on the arms and looking terribly stern, his face set in almost frozen neutrality.

‘Why?’

‘Well, I’m hungry and if we are staying the night I think we should discuss sleeping arrangements, seeing as how we have to maintain a certain decorum,’ she replied.

‘You shall have the spare room, I will sleep on the couch,’ and he nodded to an old battered sofa at the far end of the room.

She nodded. ‘Have you come up with any … explanations?’ she said, changing the subject.
‘He was probably lying; most do when the Cruciatus is used. They will say anything to make the pain stop. So he may not have been given your wand by the Ministry; Voldemort may have given it to him at some point before the end of the War.’

‘Yes, quite plausible, but he told me clearly that someone at the Ministry had given him my wand.’

‘He could not have known it was your wand.’

‘Again, I agree. Is there a fish and chip shop in the area?’ she asked.

‘What?’ he was obviously confused by her grasshopper approach to discussing the events of the afternoon. ‘Yes, in the next street.’

‘But you knew he was a Death Eater, didn’t you?’ she continued, picking up the remaining Digestive.

‘Why do you ask?’

‘I really am hungry. Moaner? Moaner?’ She called and the elf appeared. ‘Ah, Moaner, can you rustle up something to eat please, or shall Master Severus and I get fish and chips?’

The elf looked at Severus, who gave a curt nod of his head. ‘Yes, Moaner can prepare food for Master and Miss Granger.’

Hermione beamed. ‘Thank you Moaner, that would be wonderful,’ She turned back to Severus, ‘because you were not in any danger and you could have dealt with Branch or whoever he is and the others without any help from me.’

He remained silent.

‘I think I will have a nice long bath while Moaner is preparing food.’ She went over to where he sat, leaned in and brushed her lips against his. ‘See you soon.’ She collected her bag. ‘Oh, by the way. Harry and Ron were the Aurors who picked up that gang. Ron said that the way I was dressed made me look like you. I thought it was a very nice compliment.’ She smiled brightly at him and went upstairs.

Closing the bathroom door she immediately filled the bath with steaming, hot water and added the fragrance of lavender bath salts. The she then cast a spell to create the sound of running water, as if a bath was being filled. She opened the door and stepped onto the landing. Moaner was not there. She moved to the first door, the prickle of energy was fairly strong. She studied the charm for a few second then she began.

Unlocking a charm is not easy, unlike spells, hexes and curses that are instant, charms have to be woven, sometimes building up to several layers. The key was to find either the starting point or the end or anchor point of the charm. Holding her hand over the door she felt the energetic signature of the charm. It was Severus, yet not him. She found the start point, then began unwinding and lacerating the energy as she went along. She was careful, as traps and alarms are often woven into charms. She reached the anchor point and the charm dissipated with a crackle. Quickly, she went back into the bathroom and stopped the running water, then started it again, as if adding cold to a hot bath. She pulled the chain on the toilet for good measure.

Opening the door again she peered out. Still no Moaner. She thought she heard Severus moving about downstairs, so she quickly went to the second door. The charm on this door was almost exactly the same as the first and this time, she found the anchor point, unwound the charm and lacerated it. She nodded in satisfaction. Going back into the bathroom she stopped the spell and the
running water was silenced. She undressed and slid into the hot comfort of the deep bath.

As she soaked, she thought about the last door and its protection charm. It was much stronger than the other two, so she was sure that it must be the door to Severus’s old bedroom. She was intrigued as to why he would have such a strong charm on his room. What was he keeping her away from? And what was going on with the whole Bertimius Branch thing? None of it made sense and that bothered her. Severus was being very reticent about the whole incident. Usually, after a successful job, they would celebrate; she would cook a meal, they would share a bottle of wine and discuss what they could have done better, or if something worked well, making a note to use it again. But this last job, either something had gone terribly wrong, something that Severus had not anticipated or … something else entirely was going on. But what? What was making him act like a complete arse?

Thinking she had spent enough time on her ablutions, she washed herself and stepped out of the bath and emptied the tub.

‘Siccabia,’ she commanded and was instantly dry. Rummaging through her bag she found clean knickers, bra, deodorant and a clean blouse. She dressed in her black trousers, but as she put the black jacket back on, the one that made her look like Severus according to Ron, she cast a Changio spell and the jacket changed colour to a bright Fuchsia pink. She smoothed the jacket down and turned towards the door to find Moaner standing there.

‘Food will be ready soon,’ the elf said.

‘Thank you Moaner, oh … and sorry … but …’ the elf looked at her. … ‘You have something on your shoulder, here let me …’ Just as the elf looked, Hermione placed her finger on the elf and Moaner fell over, stupefied. ‘Sorry, so sorry Moaner, but I can’t have you telling tales.’ She placed a towel over the prone figure and patted the elf gently.

She stepped out onto the landing again. ‘I’ll be down in a few minutes, Severus,’ she called down the stairs.

‘Very well,’ he called back, ‘supper will be ready by then.’

She moved quickly to the last door. Holding out her hand she scanned the charm. It was a three level warding and protection charm, which meant that each level would get progressively more difficult, with a trap or an alarm contained somewhere within it. She found the anchor point of the first level easily enough, unwound it and lacerated it. The second layer, as she thought, was more complicated, but she found the start point and was unwinding it when her senses tingled, she stopped immediately. She could see a change in the colour of the charm, it could be an alarm. She reached into her pocket and brought out her wand, her wand, not Bellatrix’s wand that didn’t really want to work for her. She pointed the tip at the alarm and immediately it sparkled, about to go off. ‘Reducio,’ was the first spell that popped into her head and was surprised that it worked; the trap shrank and dissolved into nothing. She let out her breath. She now needed to work quickly, Severus did not like to be kept waiting and he would soon want to know where Moaner was.

She took a deep breath, placed her wand back in her pocket and held her hand over the last layer of the charm. She could feel the energy, but was puzzled, there didn’t seem to be a start or anchor point. Frustrated, she tried again, found a strand and followed it to a dead end. She closed her eyes and visualised the charm, looking for clues as to where the start or anchor point could be. There had to be one, didn’t there? What if …? Oh very clever Severus, very clever, she smiled. Quickly, she wove her own charm over the entire surface of the door, making a copy of the one that was already in place. ‘Dispercio’ and the charm dissolved. She grinned, Severus does love his tricks, but, she had a few tricks of her own. With her wand she cast a spell, turned, picked up her bag and went downstairs. She stopped outside the front room door, felt the energy, unwound and lacerated it. She
went into the sitting room, the table was set for two and Severus was sitting reading. He looked up and seemed startled by her jacket.

She twirled. ‘Do you like it?’

‘Very … colourful,’ he replied.

She went over to him and leaned in to kiss him. He pulled his head back.

She sighed. ‘Severus, something is going on here, with the job, with you and for some reason, you don’t trust me. So, when you are ready to talk about it, you’ll find me at home. Moaner is upstairs. I only lightly stupefied it.’

‘Hermi …’

But she had gone.
Chapter Summary

The empty frame was then filled with the smiling form of Albus Dumbledore.

‘Severus, you are looking exceedingly well.’

‘Exceedingly disturbed would be the better observation, Albus.’

‘I take it that Miss Granger performed admirably?’

‘Oh yes, beyond our wildest expectations.’

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Trust Is Not An Easy Thing (Part 2)

As soon as she had gone, he rushed upstairs and found Moaner lying on the bathroom floor with a towel tucked neatly around her. He bought her out of the stupor.

‘Hermione Granger is very good,’ the little elf said, straightening the dish cloth that served as a dress, ‘and very cunning. Moaner didn’t know what she was going to do because Hermione Granger didn’t use any command. Just touched Moaner, Moaner is sorry Master. ’ She hung her head in shame.

‘You did very well, Moaner. And yes, she is good. You may go.’ Moaner did as she was told.

He went to the upstairs doors and examined them. She hadn’t simply lacerated the charms; she had in effect, uncharmed them. He moved to the door of his old room, he had spent a long time thinking about this charm. It was triple layered, the first a simple warding charm which could have been lacerated easily; the second layer had an alarm, bells would have started ringing if she had tripped it. He felt the residual energy; she had come close to tripping the alarm, but had stopped just in time. The final layer was all trickery; it had no anchor point, no start point. It was in fact a continual loop of energy that could only be dissipated by following a maze of energetic strings. Which she had obviously done, laying her own energetic charm on top of it, effectively neutralising it. Very logical and very clever. He smiled and felt inordinately proud of her.

As he turned to leave, he noticed a small pinprick of golden light hovering by the door handle. Taking no chances, he drew his wand and pointed it, ‘Reveal’. The golden pinprick grew until it was the size of a Golden Snitch. He took a cautious step back. The Snitch exploded in a show of fireworks, leaving behind a golden otter, which promptly wrote, in glowing letters –

HG WOz HERE
before dissolving. He shook his head, at any other time he would have roared with laughter at her audacity, but this was positive confirmation that she knew something was wrong about the whole day’s events, possibly the last two weeks. He needed to discuss this latest development with the others, but first, he needed to make sure that the gang captured earlier in the day were being dealt with by the Ministry.

He landed quietly on the roof on the Ministry of Magic. Roofs are amazing really, all kinds of protections and anti-jinxes are in place all around the Ministry, but there always seemed to be a gap somewhere on the roof. It needed sorting of course, but for now, he needed access to Kingsley Shacklebolt without the rest of the Ministry knowing. He sent his patronus to find the Minister, who appeared within minutes.

‘Severus,’ the Minister greeted him.

‘Has everything been taken care of, Kingsley?’

‘Everything is in hand; the gang have been Oblivated, apart from Grippe of course, Miss Granger had already dealt with him. But now all of them have new memories in place.’

‘And what of the Aurors and Head of the Office?’

The Minister spread his arms smiling his politician’s smile. “What can I say? An administrative mix up, terribly sorry, but it happens you know”. The gang have all been sent on their way to Azkaban and the Aurors, Potter and Weasley suitably commended. All is well, Severus. Now, how did it go?’

Severus shook his head. ‘Terrible. And she knows.’

‘That is going to be tricky conversation, my friend,’ Shacklebolt grinned. ‘Are you going to consult with the others?’

‘My next stop. You are sure about the gang?’

‘Stop worrying,’ he clapped Severus on the shoulder, ‘I set the new memories myself.’

‘I will be in touch.’

‘Have you told her about … your other news??’

Severus looked at him and sighed heavily. ‘No.’

Shacklebolt roared with laughter.

‘I don’t see what’s so funny.’

‘Well, I shall make sure that your old bed at St Mungo’s is reserved for you, just in case.’ Still laughing, the Minister for Magic left.

Severus sighed again. Shacklebolt was right; no doubt she will be flinging all kinds of hexes at him when he explains it all to her. He apperated to his next destination.

He landed gracefully in the Astronomy Tower at Hogwarts’ School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. One of the perks of being the Head of the school, even a former Head, was the ability to create a window in the anti-disapperation jinx that surrounded the entire building. He made his way down the stairs. It was late in the evening, but there was still plenty of activity from the students, so he would have to be careful not to be seen. With stealth that came from years of practice of sneaking up on
pupils, he made his way along the corridors. At last he came to the wall that was his destination.

‘Asylum Indigere,’ and a wooden door appeared; he opened the door and entered his room of requirement.

It was a comfortable room, filled with many items from his old quarters at the school. Large chairs, an even larger sofa, an ornate bed at one end of the room, a bathroom, a very large desk and several bookcases filled to overflowing with books and most importantly, a separate potions room. A fire burned merrily in the fireplace.

This is where he had come after being discharged from St Mungo’s. Although his body had largely healed, he still needed a long period of convalescence and the wizarding world needed to think that he was dead. It had been Kingsley Shacklebolt who had approached Professor McGonagall, now Headmistress, with the idea of hiding him at Hogwarts, possibly the last place anyone would look for him. So apart from Minister Shacklebolt; Headmistress McGonagall; Mr Filch, because he needed to move around the school; Madam Pomeroy because he still needed nursing care and the portrait of Albus Dumbledore, his presence at Hogwarts was unknown to wizarding world and all had agreed to the use of the Fidelius charm with Headmistress McGonagall as the principle Secret Keeper. It was also agreed by all those in the know, that allowing Horace Slughorn in on the secret was perhaps, one person too many.

His potions room, an exact replica of the potions room at Hogwarts, was necessary because he needed to make the potions that would restore his strength, his health and his magic. Severe illness or injury left the body unable to process magic effectively, personal magic became weaker or diluted until the body regained all of its former strength. Therefore, long periods of convalescence were generally needed after serious or a near fatal injury.

‘Moaner,’ he called and the elf appeared. ‘Could I have a pot of tea and some hot buttered toast, please?’ The elf was gone. While he waited he approached one of the two portraits that hung on the wall. One was currently empty and the other held the portrait of Tomás Formegasso, a Spanish alchemist and potions master of high repute. ‘Would you kindly inform the Headmaster that I require his presence?’ Tomás inclined his head and walked back into his portrait.

Tomás Formegasso was not a talker; in fact, he had had his tongue removed in 1482 in Seville during an Auto da Fé. It was perhaps the only time the Inquisition had been correct in assuming that an alchemist was in fact, a wizard. Thankfully, Tomás had escaped and eventually found his way to England and Hogwarts, where, because of his towering reputation in Spain, he became the Potions Master. However, to be a successful teacher, one needs a good speaking voice to pass along the pearls of wisdom and of course, to shout at unruly pupils.

Undeterred by his lack of oral capability, Tomás quickly devised a system of describing and demonstrating the preparation of potions by the use of various hand signals and body movements; this system he used in conjunction with his written recipes. Sadly, because he wrote only Spanish and bad Spanish at that, his recipes were often mistranslated or misinterpreted, sometimes both, with several fatal and many near fatal consequences. It soon became clear to the Headmistress at the time, Edessa Sakndenberg, that Tomás’s teaching methods were absolutely rubbish for potion making and so Tomás was sacked after just one term, before anyone else died and scandal ensued.

After Hogwart’s, Tomás went first into the performing arts as an itinerant actor but then turned his talents to inventing and was eventually credited with inventing that hilarious family game, ‘Charades’. Hogwarts loss therefore, became every boring family gathering’s saviour. So it was in honour of his inventing reputation, rather than his potion making that Tomás’s portrait was hung on the wall at Hogwarts.
Tomás’s lack of speaking voice served Severus’s purposes perfectly, for not only was Tomás rubbish as a potions master, he was equally rubbish at Charades, so none of the other portraits ever guessed that Severus Snape was a guest at Hogwarts no matter how hard Tomás tried to tell them. Severus was also amused by the fact that when Hogwart’s was under imminent attack, Tomás’s mime for ‘Death Eaters Coming’ was successfully guessed by several other portraits as ‘Deaf Feeters Combing’. That the Battle of Hogwarts had been over for several days by the time this guess was made was neither here nor there, as it was the first time that anyone had got remotely close to a correct answer to a Tomás Formegasso charade. It was for this reason Severus was very fond of the portrait.

Moaner reappeared with a large tray laden with hot toast, a jar of marmalade, a pot of tea and a cup and saucer. Severus was spreading marmalade on his second slice of toast when Tomás returned. The empty frame was then filled with the smiling form of Albus Dumbledore.

‘Severus, you are looking exceedingly well.’

‘Exceedingly disturbed would be the better observation, Albus.’

‘I take it that Miss Granger performed admirably?’

‘Oh yes, beyond our wildest expectations.’ He continued to tell his old friend about the two weeks spent chasing the bogus gang; Hermione’s rescue of him; her ability to apperate silently and arrive at a spot a few feet away without losing any body parts. How easily she dealt with his charms, including the complicated, triple layer alarmed protection charm. How she stupefied a house elf and demanded to know how someone, supposed to be Bertimius Branch notorious necromancer, was in fact, no more than a Snatcher, had her wand, taken from her during the War.

‘She knows it’s a set-up, she left me a message, written by her patronus. It read, “HG WOZ HERE”, she spelt ‘was’ as W.O.Z. She is mocking me.’ He sipped his tea while Dumbledore roared with laughter.

‘It’s no laughing matter, Albus. She used the Cruciatius on Bertimius Branch.’

Dumbledore was immediately serious. ‘Ah. Did she seem in any way remorseful?’

‘Yes, she said she only used it gently. But she also said that it was necessary to obtain the information she needed. Of course there was no information to be gleaned from him because he knew nothing.’

Both men were silent for a long time.

‘Severus …?’

‘I know, Albus, I’m thinking the same. She has somehow become tainted by Dark magic.’

Quietness fell upon the room. Only the splutter of the burning logs disturbed the peace. Severus sighed, sat back in his chair and allowed his thoughts free rein. He liked this room. Moaner had taken care of him during his convalescence; he had made potions, read books, talked to Albus and Minerva and during the holidays, he was able to wander freely around the school grounds. Albus was the first person he told about his relationship with Hermione. The Headmaster had been inordinately pleased with the news, as was Minerva. When he had told her, she had patted his arm and said he deserved nothing less.

He hadn’t told Hermione about his visits to Hogwarts, not yet. He knew that the longer things were left, the less trust there would be between them. And he didn’t want that. But he needed these visits
as being dead had serious disadvantages, having no one to discuss things with was one of them. In many ways he was still healing from his physical injuries and Hogwarts provided the perfect refuge to continue that process.

He and Albus had many conversations about Hermione’s growing powers. Both of them had researched thoroughly both the spear and distaff sides of Hermione’s family and no-one on either side had any witchcraft or wizardry. Albus could only suggest that the link with magic was so ancient it pre-dated any written records. Druidry would fit, but it was a tenuous link at best.

It was six months ago that Severus began to think that she was showing signs of being touch by Dark magic. Her sexual appetite was slowly increasing, not that she had ever been shy about showing him her love through sex. An increase in libido was a side effect of growing magical power and he didn’t mind that in the least, indeed, she matched his need for sexual intimacy. It was how she was using the other aspects of her power that concerned him. She used magic almost casually, as if it simply happened and there was no price to pay. As with anything, there was always a price; with magic the price was simple, do no harm, look after yourself and keep your store of magic replenished. It was one of the reasons the wizarding world tended to eat so well, food provided much of the energy needed to perform magic.

Then there was her intent, it was precise and accurate, she was supremely confident in her abilities. There was no surer sign that she was obtaining at least some of her power from Dark magic than confidence. Unfortunately, confidence from Dark magic soon gave way to arrogance. So along with Albus, Minerva and Kingsley, he had discussed the idea of a test for Hermione. A test that she wasn’t aware of, because if she knew that she was to be tested, Hermione Granger would have worried and studied as she had done during her years at Hogwarts.

Movement across the room the room broke into his reverie. ‘Severus,’ Headmistress McGonagall came towards him. He stood and greeted her. She leaned in and kissed his cheek. ‘Apologies for not coming sooner, there was a problem in the Gryffindor common room.’

Severus smiled, ‘Oh how I don’t miss the whole Head of House responsibility thing.’

‘Aye, well, I will say that Slytherin is being particularly well behaved this term. I don’t trust it at all.’

‘As well you shouldn’t,’ Severus replied.

‘So, where are we?’ she asked, producing a cup and saucer and helping herself to Severus’s tea. She took a sip and let out a long ‘aahhh’. ‘Your house elf makes the best cup of tea,’ and she quickly finished the cup and poured another.

‘So Hermione keeps telling her,’ Severus said before bringing her up to date.

‘Sounds bad,’ she said as she finished her second cup.

‘I think time is running out for Miss Granger,’ Albus added.

Minerva put her cup down. ‘Severus, has Miss Granger been in prolonged contact with Dark magic?’

‘Other than searching for and destroying Horcruxes; fighting Voldemort and a dozen other things she has achieved in her young life?’ Albus said.

Severus was thinking, and as he did so he tapped the arm of his chair. His finger stopped in mid-air.

‘What is it?’ Minerva asked.
He let out a deep sigh. ‘I am stupid, so very stupid.’ He stood up and paced. ‘When I first met Harry after the War, he told me that the three of them had been captured by Snatchers and taken to Malfoy Manor. Bellatrix was there and she … tortured Hermione … and carved ‘mudblood’ onto her arm …’

‘And you have not spoken to her about it?’ Minerva asked sharply.

‘No. There is so much we haven’t spoken about yet. Things are happening so quickly,’ he shook his head, ‘just as she has never questioned me about my history with the Dark Arts, so I have not asked her about her capture.’ He slumped back into his chair. Minerva squeezed his arm gently.

It was Albus who broke the ensuing silence. ‘It has to be removed Severus, and soon.’

Severus nodded. ‘I know ... I also know that I cannot do it.’

‘If not you, who then?’ Albus asked.

‘There is only one wizard I trust who is capable of doing such a thing,’ Severus said.

Minerva looked from Albus to Severus; her hand flew up to her mouth to cover her look of horror. ‘No! Surely not …’

But Severus was already on his feet and walking towards the door.

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‘Hermione, forgive me, but everything that has happened over the last two weeks was a test. I needed to see just how powerful you are.’

‘You … tested me? You mean the whole Bertimius Branch thing, the charms, all a test?’ He nodded. ‘Oh bloody hell Severus, I used the Cruciatus on the man yesterday. And what about … Moaner?’ Her head fell to her knees, ‘I stupefied Moaner.’

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Back home, frustration nigged at her. She didn’t know what was going on with Severus, he seemed so detached and cold, no doubt at some point he would come home and explain things to her, at least, that’s what she hoped.

Going into the kitchen, she pulled a box of frozen chips from the freezer and popped them into the microwave. While they were cooking, she opened a new bottle of wine and poured herself a large glass. She found her dirty clothes in the bottom of her bag and put them into the washing machine. The microwave pinged and she removed the chips, then cut herself two large slices of bread, slathered them with butter and made herself a chip butty with lashings of brown sauce. She took a bite, enjoying the satisfying rush of carbohydrates. She sipped her wine and began to feel better, less hungry, more grounded.

Carrying her butty and wine upstairs, she went into their bedroom. His presence was everywhere in the room, from the aura of sexual frissón, to his clothes, some folded neatly on chairs, others, like robes and shirts, hanging in the wardrobe. He was by nature a tidy and precise man, which balanced her untidiness as far as clothes were concerned. With a wave of her hand she made the bed then changed into her pyjamas and warm, fleecy dressing gown. After finding her comfy slippers under the bed, she went back downstairs into the lounge and switched on the T.V. on. She finished her butty in two large bites, licked her fingers of the last drop of brown sauce and drained her glass, then refilled it. Dragging the blanket from the back of the sofa, she lay down and watched an omnibus edition of a soap she knew nothing about while sipping her wine.

When she opened her eyes, Severus was sitting in the armchair opposite her.

‘Hello,’ she said, yawned and put her head back down onto the cushion and observed him. He didn’t look angry, but then it was sometimes difficult to know with Severus.

‘How did you do it?’ he asked softly.

‘It was easy,’ was all she said and yawned again.
'Why did you do it?'

'Take your clothes off, come and lie down with me and I will tell you.'

He didn’t move for a long time, then wordlessly, he stood, undressed and when she lifted the blanket, he climbed into its warmth with her. She pulled him into her.

Desire.

'Trust,' she said. He gave her a puzzled look. 'You had gone to Spinner End at some point and placed those charms on the doors because you thought at some time in the future, we would have to go there.'

'But …'

'You don’t trust me. I think your last barrier is Spinners End and you don’t trust me not to go wandering around on my own, prying into your life. So I removed the charms and I didn’t go into any of the rooms because I didn’t have your permission. And I would not have done, ever.'

'Trust is a two way street Hermione.'

'What do you mean?'

'You don’t trust me either.'

'Not true …'

He placed his fingers over her lips, stopping the words. ‘Things have happened to you over the last months, things that you have not shared with me, things that you have not trusted me with. Do you have any idea how difficult it is to cast a charm or spell with thought alone and without a wand?’

She lowered her eyes. It was true, she hadn’t said anything to him about her increasing powers or skill. ‘I … I didn’t know if it was permanent or not. I’ve lost my powers before; when I was little it happened a lot and it has happened at least once since I left Hogwarts. So, I didn’t know if this new stuff would last or simply disappear … or get stronger. It seems to be getting stronger,’ she admitted.

'Yes, I know.'

Her eyes flew open. ‘What?’

She felt his hand rest on her hip, a jolt went through her.

'My darling, powerful witch, I have noticed all of this and I needed to know just how far your new power extended.'

'I don’t understand, Severus. I know I’ve had half a bottle of wine and I’m sleepy, but I don’t understand.'

'Take that dressing gown off and I will tell you.'

She left the warmth of his body, stood and removed her comfortable dressing gown. ‘Wait just a minute!’ she cried, before rushing upstairs to clean her teeth quickly. She was shivering by the time she came back and was under the blanket with him. She wanted to kiss him, kiss him properly, with tongues.

Desire.
His hand fell to her hip again. He then told her of all the changes he had noticed over at least six months. It was a spell here, a charm there. But always she was getting more powerful and she was finding things easy. He explained he was worried because sometimes, when magical power increased and the witch or wizard didn’t know how to use that increased power properly, there could be a power back-lash that would have put her in St Mungo’s for several weeks and then she may not have regained any of her power.

While he had been talking, her hand had been caressing his chest. ‘I would like you to kiss me before you say anything else. You haven’t kissed me all day.’

He smiled, leaned in and kissed her. He tasted of tea and marmalade, she of fresh-mint with extra whitening and protection against gum disease.

Their tongues found each other, his hands were all over her body, and she was on fire. Of her three boyfriends, only Severus could arouse her with a simple kiss. Victor and Ron were boys and could never compete with the sheer masculinity that Severus exuded. He lit fires within her that she loved and feared. Now he was making her burn for him with a flame that kept growing.

Desire.

He pulled out of the kiss.

She leant her head back. ‘Wow,’ as all she said.

‘It’s a fire, isn’t it?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘It comes with increased magical power.’

‘Do you feel it as well?’ she asked him.

‘Yes,’ he whispered, ‘oh yes.’

‘Finish what you wanted to tell me,’ she said. But it was too late. The fire was ignited in both of them and would not be extinguished. They kissed again, more urgently this time.

‘Naked,’ he said against her lips and they quickly shed their few remaining clothes.

She pulled him on top her. He entered her almost immediately. The fire that flowed between them burned slowly at first, rising and falling with the rhythm of their bodies. The flames rose and engulfed them both and at their mutual climax they knew each other completely.

They were motionless, panting gently. He lay on top of her, her legs still wrapped around his waist and his weight pressed into her and she loved it. He moved his hands and pushed himself up to face her, she could see his face through her half closed eyes. He smiled as he thrust once again and she moaned, he then moved his hand to where their bodies joined and pressed his fingers against her clitoris and she jerked. Her eyes flew open as he swiftly brought her orgasm again. She moaned long and deep as she came and then went limp under him.

He kissed her gently, softly and they fell asleep, still joined.

She opened her eyes and was disorientated, at some point he must have carried her upstairs to bed. He was lying next to her, watching.
'Hello.'

'Hello,' he replied.

'What time is it?'

'Early in the morning,' he reached out and touched her face.

She stretched. 'Hmmm, would you like to make us a cup of tea? Then we can finish what we started last night.'

'By Merlin woman, you are insatiable,' he said seriously.

She swatted him. 'You know exactly what I mean.'

He slipped out of bed and went down to the kitchen. She loved his physical form and thought him quite beautiful. His was not the body of a dedicated athlete, in many ways he was scrawny, yet there was strength about his liseness that she adored. Yawning, she got out of bed and went into the bathroom for a pee. By the time she had finished, washed her hands and climbed back into the warm bed, he was back with two mugs of tea. He got back into bed with her.

'Severus…?'

'Yes … I know love, we both missed it. I will make you a potion later if you like.'

'Please,' she said and took a long gulp of tea, 'and would you like to finish what you started telling me last night?'

'Very well, but please allow me to finish and then give me a running start before doing anything … rash.'

'Like what?'

'Hexing me for example,' he was deadly serious. Then he repeated how he had noticed her growing powers and of his increasing concern and also the concern of Albus and Minerva. He paused and didn't have long to wait.

'Albus and Minerva? Do you visit Hogwarts then?' She seemed excited.

'Yes. It is the secret location where I was taken to recover.'

She put her mug down and turned to him. 'So you had friends around as you recovered? Oh Severus! I’m so pleased. I had visions of you in a remote hut somewhere with only goats for company.'

He laughed. 'No goats, only old friends. I go back from time to time … it helps me.'

She sat back, ready to hear more.

He continued. 'Have you stopped to consider why it is that your powers are increasing and so quickly?'

She shook her head. 'No, I thought it was normal.'

'It’s not and that concerns me. Think about it, until you, your family has no history of magic of any kind. I have gone through all the written records and there is nothing, even Albus is stumped.'
She was listening intently now.

‘Hermione, forgive me, but everything that has happened over the last two weeks was a test. I needed to see just how powerful you are.’

‘You … tested me? You mean the whole Bertimius Branch thing, the charms, all a test?’ He nodded. ‘Oh bloody hell Severus, I used the Cruciatus on the man yesterday. And what about … Moaner?’ Her head fell to her knees, ‘I stupefied Moaner.’

He reached out and squeezed her arm. ‘It’s alright, Moaner was part of the test and she is fine and you did use the Cruciatus very gently.’

‘Oh bloody hell.’

He told her about Bertimius Branch, real name Grippe. That he was indeed a Death Eater, albeit a minor one. That he was a criminal and that he did some terrible things to Muggles during the War and that he and the rest of that gang are now serving time in Azkaban.

Her head flew up. ‘What about Harry and Ron … do they know?’

‘No. They removed Grippe and the others to the Ministry were there was … shall we say, an administrative error, thanks to Minster Shacklebolt. Harry and Ron were commended; the gang were obliviated, except for Grippe of course, you had already done a good job on him.’

‘Yes I did, didn’t I?’ she smiled sheepishly.

‘And you knew that I wasn’t in any danger, didn’t you?’

‘Hmm, but I couldn’t work out why.’

‘It was a very nice rescue, thank you,’ and he leaned across and kissed her, ‘your apperating skills are excellent. Not many can be so precise and accurate about location.’

She was silent for many minutes. ‘And the charms on your doors?’

Now it was he who looked sheepish. ‘I really do apologise for my behaviour at Spinners End yesterday.’

She jumped on him and kissed him. ‘Apology accepted.’ She then settled down in his arms, her head on his shoulder.

‘Explain to me how you did it.’

So she told him about her ability to feel the energy of charms or spells … anything that had a magical energy really; how it made her skin prickle or the hairs to rise on her neck. How hexes, curses and jinxes felt rotten or bad and made her shudder. She said it seemed instinctive to unwind the charms, to un-weave them and then lacerate them.

‘It’s ingenious, Hermione, not traditional of course. As you know, the usual way to remove a charm or spell is to counter it.’

‘Yes, I know, but it was as if I had a diagram in my head showing me what to do.’

‘How long did it take to undo those charms,’ he asked.

‘Well, I didn’t have much time, a couple of minutes on the first two. The last one, on your door, took
a bit longer as the last layer tricked me.’

He leaned up and stared at her. ‘What? What is it Severus?’

He lay back down and sighed. ‘To quote the philosopher Weasley, you really are bloody scary. It took me longer to cast those charms \textit{and} the alarm would have been missed by most. Yet, here you are one hundred per cent Muggle born and you are using magic instinctively, powerfully. Don’t you think that is exceptional?’

She was silent, confused and just a little bit scared by what he seemed to be saying.

‘Are you saying that I’m not using my power in the … correct way?’

He squeezed her as if to reassure. ‘Not at all, if it works for you, good. But, think about this, where do you think your power and ability comes from?’ He stroked her hair and ran his fingers along her arm.

‘I don’t know,’ she said at last, ‘I thought it was … well, me. Y’know, Hermione Granger being exceptional as usual. I mean, there must be others like me, isn’t there?’

‘A few.’

‘Who?’ she asked leaning up and looking at him. ‘Are you included in the few? Because if you’re not, you should be.’

‘Sadly my love, I am very, very good, but not that good. No, the latest person to have all of your quite considerable talents was Albus Dumbledore.’

‘But he was a half-blood, I’m not even that.’

‘Indeed, and Albus was the greatest wizard of his generation or any generation for a long time, greater even than Voldemort.’

She laid her head back on his shoulder, deep in thought and they were quiet for a long time.

‘Severus?’ she said at last.

‘Hmm?’

‘What are you \textit{not} telling me?’

He turned so he was facing her. He brushed her wild hair away from her face and kissed her eyes first, then her nose and finally, her lips.

‘Two things I need to tell you. One is very important … the other not so much.’

‘So … tell me.’ She watched him as he gathered his thoughts.

‘I have asked you at least twice where you think your power is coming from. Each time you have said you thought it was just you. Hermione, my darling, my love, it is not … \textit{just} you.’

She frowned. ‘I don’t understand, where else would it be coming from?’

He closed his eyes.

‘C’mon, Severus, you can tell me.’
He pulled out of her embrace and sat up. ‘Show me your arm.’

‘There’s nothing on my arm … look,’ she held up her right arm for him to see.

‘Your left arm.’

She dropped her gaze but still felt his eyes on her, slowly, she raised her left arm. ‘See, nothing on this one either.’

‘Show it to me.’

‘What? There’s nothing to show.’

He sighed. ‘Harry told me about you being captured and Bellatrix …’

She sat up quickly, agitated. ‘That bloody git, he had no right …’ she was about to get out of bed, but he held her back.

‘It is important Hermione, very important. Please, allow me to see it, that’s all.’

She stared at him defiantly, her eyes flashed and then she released the breath she’d been holding and moved her fingers over her forearm. The glamour dissolved and revealed **mudblood** still as clear and fresh as the day it was carved there.

‘Oh Hermione, my dearest love, how can you … this is a *Cutis Sempiterum*, an everlasting cut, it is a curse made never to heal, to always give pain …’ She quickly covered the vile word with another glamour. ‘It is … Dark Magic. Albus and I thought you may be touched by Dark Magic, but I couldn’t work out how. Then I remembered what Harry had told me.’ He gathered her up into his strong embrace, holding her tightly as if to protect her. ‘It is what is making you powerful, the more power you take from the Dark the more powerful you become and the more the Dark takes you.’

‘Oh gods, does this mean I am becoming …?’

‘Only if you choose to use the Dark Arts … like I did.’

‘I … I …’ she started to sob, ‘I don’t want to be consumed by Dark Magic. I thought it was just me. Oh Severus, how could I have been so … so arrogant?’

‘I think deep down you may have known, after all, you have had more experience of Dark Magic than most. You just didn’t want to accept that it could be influencing you.’

‘But how … how did you control it?’

He kissed her hair. ‘That is a long conversation for another time, but I will say this, without the trust of Albus Dumbledore and my love for Lily, it could all have been very different.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ she sniffed, ‘what do I need to do?’

‘It needs to be removed, then you’ll be fine.’

‘Anything, … I’ll do whatever you suggest.’

He pulled her under the covers and they snuggled down together, arms wrapped around each other and he held her until her sobs died away and they drifted off to sleep.

It was full daylight the next time they awoke.
‘Severus?’

‘Yes, HG?’ He kept his eyes closed.

She swatted him, ‘Git,’ and they laughed. ‘I want to ask you a question.’

‘I’m here, ask away,’ he said in a voice still languid with sleep.

‘Well, you know how witches and wizards live longer than Muggles?’

‘Hmm.’

‘Do you think I will? I mean, I’m a full blood Muggle born, so I may not …’

‘You will.’

‘How can you be so sure?’ she persisted.

‘Because, HG, anyone who can stupefy a house elf will live a very long time.’

‘You’re not going to let me forget that little spell, are you?’ she giggled.

‘Not a chance. Not for a long time.’

‘Severus?’

‘Yes, HG?’

‘Please don’t ever leave me. I would be totally lost without you.’

He opened his eyes then and smiled at her. ‘And I thought you only wanted me for my body.’

‘That as well,’ and she kissed him.

‘I have to make arrangements to deal with that … curse, then I would very much like to take you back to Spinners End. There is something there I want to share with you.’

She had been making lazy circles with her palm over his nipples while he spoke and they were now nicely erect. ‘I would like that,’ she said, ‘when would you like to go, before or after you give me an orgasm or three?’

His laugh was wicked as he tumbled her onto her back.

‘Temptress.’
Beyond Good And Evil - (Part 1)

Chapter Summary

‘You mentioned something this morning, two important things, one very important the other not so much? What is the not so important thing?’ The question was clearly rhetorical, so he finished his tea and poured himself another; he thought that when she worked it out, she really would hex him this time. She opened her mouth to say something but thought better of it. ‘You bloody git … it’s you!’ she exploded.

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Beyond Good And Evil

Part 1

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Hermione had left for the Department and to spend time in the Hall of Prophesies; they had agreed to meet later so he could take her Spinners End. He felt that their conversation earlier had gone well as she was willing to have the curse removed. His first job now was to meet with the wizard he would be asking to remove the curse.

He called Moaner. ‘I want you to take a message to Lucius Malfoy at Malfoy Manor. Tell him to expect a visitor, an old friend, but do not tell him who. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, master,’ Moaner replied and she disappeared. She returned soon after. ‘Master Lucius said he doesn’t want any visitors, all his old friends are in Azkaban and he doesn’t want any new ones. Master Lucius also asked which family Moaner served.’

‘Did you tell him?’

Moaner hung her head. He knew that if asked a direct question about their family, a house elf was bound to tell.

‘Moaner told him she served the Prince family.’

He supposed it was better than telling Lucius she served Severus Snape. ‘Very well. Thank you, you may go.’ He would now have to go to Malfoy Manor and hope that the security conscious Lucius had not changed all the passwords that allowed access to the house, otherwise it would be a very short and fruitless visit.

He apperated to the great gates of the Manor, took out his wand and walked towards them. ‘Dobert!’ he commanded and couldn’t believe his luck as he shadowed through the gates. Because the Malfoy lineage had its roots in the Languedoc, that part of modern France filled with ancient caves, castles, a place that remembers the Old Ways, many of the passwords used in the Malfoy home were in Occitan, the original language of that part of France. He knew for instance, that the deepest rooms within Malfoy Manor, where Lucius had kept all of his Dark Magic artefacts, could only be accessed by knowing the password in Occitan. Failure to use that language resulted in death.
He approached the large doors to the house, if he had been expected the doors would have opened to admit him. So he was not expected and therefore, he would have to ring the bell. He waited. After sometime, the door swung open and Lucius Malfoy stared at him. Severus would be the first to admit that he enjoyed watching the reaction of those who thought him dead. Usually they paled, their eyes bulged and they became quite panic stricken. Lucius did none of those things.

‘Well, you certainly took your time in paying me a visit. You had better come in in case anyone sees you.’

He was ushered into the large hall then he followed Lucius into the kitchen.

‘I’m making tea, would you like a cup?’

‘Yes, thank you. How did you …?’

‘Your mother was a Prince … that and the fact that you always had the devil’s own luck when it came to surviving. And … no-one ever saw your dead body, there was no funeral, no memorial, so, I guessed rightly of course, that you still lived. Sugar?’

He shook his head and took the offered cup. A large hound padded into the kitchen, sniffed at him then lay down by his feet.

‘Didn’t you have two hounds?’

‘Yes, this is Rupert. I’m afraid his brother Norman was one of the many casualties of my house guest’s vile temper.’

Severus nodded. When Voldemort was peeved he was apt to lash out at the thing you loved or liked the most. He counted himself fortunate that at that time, he had no-one and nothing that mattered to him. Except Harry of course.

‘So, what have you been doing these last few years?’ Lucius sat opposite him at the kitchen table, he was obviously in the mood for conversation.

‘Recovering mostly. But I am not here to relive any aspect of my life or yours through idle chit chat. I have a request, a favour to ask of you.’

Lucius raised his eyebrows. ‘Do many know you are still alive?’

‘A trusted few and many who wished they didn’t.’ He sipped his tea, it tasted strange. It wasn’t tainted by any potion; it just wasn’t a good cup of tea. He had become spoilt by Hermione who made a good cup of tea and even better coffee and of course Moaner was a skilled tea maker. He also noted that Lucius didn’t offer him a biscuit or piece of cake, something Narcissa would never have allowed, manners were all.

‘So, this favour …?’ Lucius prompted.

He replaced the cup on its saucer. He would have to be cautious as Lucius’s hatred of Muggles would extend to Hermione, perhaps more so as she regularly bettered Draco in everything, except potions. Then of course, there was the punching incident.

‘I have a friend who needs a curse removing, a Dark curse. I am still not strong enough to undertake such a thing. I was hoping I could persuade you to … help.’ He met Lucius’s eyes and raised all of his Occulmens barriers, although not a strong Ligilimens, Lucius knew he was shut out. Severus thought he saw a faint smile cross the other man’s lips.
‘Who is this … friend?’

‘I would rather not say at this point, you will find out if you agree to help,’ Severus replied keeping his face perfectly neutral.

‘Ah …’ was all Lucius said, and continued to sip his tea.

They sat staring at each other, one trying to penetrate the mind of the other, one maintaining his strong barriers. Lucius was the first to look away.

Severus liked Lucius Malfoy for all his faults, which were many. Lucius had welcomed the strange, unkempt and unloved boy into Slytherin and taken him under his wing. He was pleased when the young Severus has showed an enthusiastic interest in the Dark Arts and had supported and encouraged him while he was still at Hogwarts. Of course, if Lucius had known of his half-blood status when he was at Hogwarts, it would have been a different matter, as Slytherin was still dominated by the pure-blood families. However, Lucius had not found out and so continued to champion the younger man throughout his career. Lucius had also never discovered his subterfuge, always believing that his allegiance was entirely for the Dark and Voldemort.

He also admired Lucius for the deep and abiding love he felt for his wife and son. They were devoted to each other as a family, unlike so many of the pure-bloods and Dark wizarding families. Bellatrix for instance, would not have thought twice about killing any member of her family if she thought it would benefit her in some way. Narcissa was perhaps the only member of her family that Bellatrix would not have murdered.

‘Very well,’ Lucius said at last, ‘I will help, even though you give me no information about who or what or why. What do you require?’

‘That you attend at Spinners End tomorrow evening, say 6 pm?’

‘I shall be there,’ Lucius said as he sipped his tea and pulled a face, ‘I haven’t quite got the knack of tea making.’

Severus rose to leave. ‘Perhaps if you used freshly boiled water, then allowed the tea to brew for several minutes, it might make a difference.’ Lucius gave him an odd look.

The two walked to the front door, accompanied by Rupert.

‘I shall see you tomorrow and, thank you Lucius.’ He held out his hand and Lucius took it.

‘You can apperate into the grounds should you wish to make a return visit, I shall set the enchantments to allow safe entry. The enchantments on the gates change every few days. You were very lucky.’

‘Not taking any chances?’

‘Not any more, Severus.’

He nodded to Lucius, took a few steps into the grounds and went back to the house.
They had met at her house as arranged; she had come back from the Department after spending time in the Hall of Prophecy. She was disappointed at not having found any clues as to her own prophecy; she had wanted to find something, anything.

The Hall held a prophecy for everyone, sometimes more than one and if you searched and your intention was find your prophecy, then it would reveal itself to you. He had found his own prophecy when he had first become an Unspeakable, as now, only Unspeakables were allowed access to the Hall of Prophecy accept in special circumstances, otherwise the place would be crowded with witches and wizards looking for their own prophecy. And after what had happened during the War, when whole shelves of prophecies had been lost during the running battle between the Death Eaters and Harry and his friends, it was decided to limit access. It is essential for an Unspeakable to know his or her own prophecy as the work they undertake hinges very much on what they know of their own past or future. When he had found and heard his own prophecy he had not completely understood it. The first part “The half of one will join one. Out of the ancient land to bring change. Where change did not exist. Until then.”, made no sense whatsoever, but the second part, it now made perfect sense “To live and not be known. To love and know everything.” The prophesy was dated 8 January 1900, and was given by Ariadne Wolfdottir, Seer and Sybil, York. It would seem that this was Ariadne’s one and only prophesy as she died soon after.

He removed the charms and unlocked the door to Spinners End and let her into his house. He watched her as she stood in the hall, arms slightly extended to her side, feeling the difference in the magic, sensing the change and he was excited by the prospect of inviting her to live with him in his family house. She may decline of course, but he hoped that she wouldn’t, that she would feel comfortable here and agree to make it her home with him.

‘When I was here yesterday,’ she said, ‘I felt the prickle of the charms. The more complicated the charm, the stronger the prickle.’ She smiled at him. ‘I can tell from your look that’s not the traditional way to do it.’

‘No it’s not. But if it works for you …’ he shrugged.

Moaner appeared in the hallway. ‘Master Severus, Hermione Granger,’ she said.

Hermione knelt down before the elf. ‘Oh Moaner, I am sorry I stupefied you. I didn’t know you see.’ She held out her hand and the elf took it. ‘And you do make the best cup of tea.’

‘Moaner understands, Master Severus explained. Moaner thanks Hermione Granger for her apology. Would you like a cup of tea now?’

‘No thank …’ Severus began, then looked at Hermione.

‘Yes please, and some biscuits if you have them.’

Severus rolled his eyes, shook his head but still smiled affectionately. He opened the first door. ‘This is my library,’ she went in first and started to look at the book laden shelves.

‘Severus, this is fantastic, there are books here …’ she paused …‘I could have used during the War.’

‘I know,’ he said sadly. He knew that his library could have been a source of great help to Dumbledore’s Army, but …

‘Can I look at some of them?’

He gathered her into his arms and hugged her. ‘Hermione, you have complete access to this and any other room in this house, but I think you will find this one especially useful.’
‘Tea in the other room,’ Moaner said, making them both jump. ‘Master Severus is in love with Hermione Granger?’ The small elf sounded wistful and she had clenched her hands in front of her heart.

They both looked at the elf. ‘Yes Moaner, Master Severus is in love with Hermione Granger and you are under the same obligation not to tell anyone as you are about me being alive, do you agree?’

‘Moaner agrees, Master Severus. Moaner keeps silent, keeps family oath.’

‘Good. Thank you.’ He leaned in and kissed Hermione, a quick brushing of lips, but enough. ‘Let’s have tea.’

‘Can I take a book?’

‘It would be foolish of me to try and stop you. Choose away.’

‘Already have,’ and she went and reached for a small, leather bound book. She showed him the title: *By Thought Alone; or, Is Thought Alone Enough? – A study in non-verbal spell and charm casting; by Ozwald Grimshingle.*

‘Fascinating title,’ he said, keeping his face absolutely straight.

She poked her tongue out at him as she followed him into the sitting room. Moaner had prepared and lit the fire and tea was set on the table. They sat down and Hermione was mother.

‘I was thinking about what we talked about this morning,’ she said while helping herself to a biscuit. ‘I think I should tell the Head of the Department that I used the Cruciatus.’

He looked at her. ‘Why?’

‘Because it is illegal and I don’t want to become …’ she didn’t finish the sentence.

‘So you think that by confessing to the Head of the Department and accepting the punishment the court may mete out to you a sensible use of your skills?’

‘When you put it like that …’

‘You used the Cruciatus on a criminal, someone who did far worse things to Muggles and besides, you were very remorseful and … you have already told the Head of the Department and he has decided not to act upon that information.’

She was about to take a bite of her second biscuit, but she stopped. ‘No I haven’t, yes I was at the Department today, but the Head wasn’t in, so … I don’t understand.’ She put the biscuit down, frowned slightly as she did when she was thinking something through.

He sipped his tea while he waited. When she looked at him, her beautiful eyes flashed. She had worked it out and oh how he loved her.

‘You mentioned something this morning, two important things, one very important, the other not so much? What is the not so important thing?’ The question was clearly rhetorical, so he finished his tea and poured himself another; he thought that when she worked it out, she really would hex him this time. She opened her mouth to say something but thought better of it. ‘You bloody git … it’s you!’ She exploded then stood up and started to pace up and down. ‘Hermione Granger you are an idiot, you get the job of your dreams, working with the man of your dreams not because you are skilful or a great witch but because … you are sleeping with the boss.’
He stood then and faced her. ‘None of that is true … well, the bit about sleeping with the boss and working with the man of your dreams and having the job of your dreams, that is true. But I most certainly did not offer you the job because we were having sex. You are a very skilful and quite exceptional witch and you are a real asset to the Department.’

She walked passed him and punched him on the arm. ‘Git.’

‘Wait!’ he said, ‘man of your dreams?’

She stopped and turned to him, arms akimbo. ‘Am I really an asset?’

‘Yes. Man of your dreams? Hermione, this is me … Professor Snape.’

‘Alright … wizard of my dreams, that better?’ She looked at him, pierced him again with her brown eyes. ‘I like tall men,’ she said softly as she stepped forward and embraced him. ‘I’m not really angry with you, though Merlin knows I should be. It’s just that suddenly, in the space of a day, things have changed. First, this bloody curse, now I find out you are my boss,’ she pulled away from him, ‘I feel as if things are speeding up and are likely to get out of control and you know how much I would hate that.’

‘Yes, I do know.’

‘Who knows that you are the Head of the Department?’

‘Only Kingsley, it was his idea… and now you.’

They sat down and continued with their tea. ‘How have you managed that, I mean you have been in the Department and I’ve been in the Department when you have been there and who the bloody hell was it who interviewed me?’

He smiled. ‘Someone who has absolutely no recollection of you, or the interview.’

‘Anything else you like to share with me, eh? Might as well make a clean sweep of it.’

He laughed and took her hand. ‘I love you Hermione and no, I don’t think there is anything else. But, … I do need to ask you a serious question.’ She nodded. ‘Does that curse hurt at all?’

‘Not really, the glamour seems to work fine.’

‘Show me again.’

This time she revealed the cut without any hesitation. He took her arm and peered at it, he smelt it. ‘Thank you,’ he said, as she replaced the glamour, ‘I don’t understand why it is not painful. So I am going to be thankful that it is not. Now, would you like the grand tour?’

‘Two Sickles or one Galleon?’

‘Oh the one Galleon of course, come along.’ He took her hand and led her back into the hall. ‘You’ve seen the library and the front room, this is the kitchen.’ He opened the one remaining door and she stepped passed him.
He observed her taking it all in, how she noticed the small things, like the very old jug in the middle of the table which held a bunch of cornflowers, no doubt Moaner’s idea.

‘I love this kitchen, it has real character and with the fire going in the range, it would be cosy and welcoming,’ she turned to him, ‘but I get the sense that it was not used much.’

‘My mother used to cook, but … after a time I think she just … gave up. Moaner would cook, but my father didn’t hold with house elves. I learnt very early on how to make toast and boil an egg.’ He spoke so softly and with such hurt in his voice that she turned and flung herself into his arms and hugged him. It was so like her to be upset for him; she, who had had an almost idyllic childhood, cared more about how he had been treated than anyone else, including Lily. He kissed her hair and held her close. Merlin, he was lucky.

He led her upstairs and into the large front bedroom. It still contained a brass bedstead and a huge wardrobe. It was a room devoid of any emotion.

‘This is …’ she stopped.

‘Sad,’ he finished the sentence, ‘yes, I know.’

The spare room was next, not as large but a good size and it was empty. She looked at him, puzzled.

‘I thought,’ he hesitated, ‘… I thought this could be our room.’ He felt her squeeze his hand.

‘Perfect, it overlooks the back.’

The door to the last room, his childhood bedroom, was closed. He went to open it but she put her hand on his, stopping him from turning the knob.

‘Are you sure?’ she asked.

‘Yes.’ And he pushed the door open. She didn’t step in immediately, but waited for him to invite her in and then he watched her closely. She stood in the centre of the room and looked around. She nodded from time to time as if something was just as she had expected. She closed her eyes and turned slowly, hands outstretched. She opened her eyes after completing a full circle.

‘You had some happy times in this room,’ she said.

‘Yes, some.’

‘Show me.’

‘What?’

‘What you are so frightened of showing me, Lily’s remembrances.’

He crossed the room to a chest of drawers and opened the top one. He pulled out a collection of
objects and went and sat on the small bed, holding them in his lap. She sat next to him. Wordlessly, he passed her a small book. She took gently.

‘The Three Musketeers by Alexandre Dumas,’ she read the title.

‘It was Lily’s favourite book. She thought I might enjoy reading it.’ His voice sounded flat.

‘It’s one of my favourites too,’ she said while flipping through the pages. She came to a pressed flower, a small wild violet. He reached out his finger and touched it.

‘These grew at the far end of the recreation ground, near the stream. One spring, the whole place was covered with them. Lily picked this one and gave it to me.’

She turned to the fly page and found an inscription: “To my dear Severus, you are my d’Artagnan. With my love, Lily.” ‘That is such a nice thing to say,’ she said.

‘I have never read the book, so I don’t understand the reference.’

‘Well, d’Artagnan is the young hero; he is dashing, handsome and a brilliant swordsman. He wants to join the Musketeers and helped them fight against the forces of the evil Cardinal Richelieu. It’s a story of loyalty, friendship and overcoming an adversary against all the odds. The four friends, Athos, Aramis, Porthos and d’Artagnan lived by the motto “All for One and One for All”! She thought for a moment, ‘I think Lily is saying that you are dashing and handsome and that you helped her overcome her adversaries, which at the time would have been her family. She is also saying that friendship is important.’

‘I always thought she was helping me, it never occurred to me …’ He handed her a battered photo. It was a faded colour snap of the kind much favoured by Muggles. It was Lily as a teenager, sitting in a garden chair, reading. She looked ethereal as the sun caught her hair, the camera had snapped just as she was looking up.

‘Harry’s eyes,’ was all she said. Severus nodded.

The next item he handed her was a wooden stick.

‘This was from candy floss. A fair came to the reccy every summer. We must have been about ten. I saved money from various places, I ended up with enough so we could both ride the carousel and have a candy floss each. It was a magical day. This is her candy floss stick.’

She laid the stick with the photo and book. The last items he handed her were a bundle of letters, only five or six, secured with a gold ribbon, which looked new. She took them and then gave them straight back.

‘These are yours and they are private, they are for you to treasure.’

He took them back and held them. Each one a beloved memory and each memory was still so strong, he could almost feel her presence, hear her laugh. Then he felt Hermione remove the treasures from his hands and then she was close to him, her shoulder against his arm.

‘You love her very much, I know and understand that. There is room for both of us within that great heart of yours.’

They sat in silence on his small bed.

‘Sometimes,’ she said at last, ‘saying something out loud helps.’
‘Say what?’

‘What you are holding so tightly inside you.’

‘I’m not sure I can.’

‘Try.’

His head fell to his chest, she didn’t hold him or try to comfort him, yet she was there for him. He knew that. He took a deep, shuddering breath, ‘I am in love with Lily Evans and always will be,’ he paused, ‘I cannot take back … those words … spoken in my anger, but I will regret them for the rest of my life. I failed her and should have listened to her. She was good and so … beautiful.’ It was then that she pulled him down onto the bed with her; she cradled him against her and held him while his tears flowed. It was only the third time in his life that he had wept. The first time was when he found Lily that terrible night.

‘Say the rest … it really will help.’

Muffled against her breast, he finally spoke words that he had only ever dared to give thought to. ‘Harry should have been my son.’ He drowned in her strength. She was strong, soft, wise, powerful, funny and utterly adorable. He knew that Lily would always be a part of his life, but Hermione Jean Granger is his life now.

She was stroking his hair, running her fingers through it. ‘Do you know what Violet means in the language of flowers?’ He shook his head. ‘It means faithfulness.’

She held him for a long time, until the light began to fade and the sun set.

‘Hermione?’

‘Yes, Severus?’

‘Would you consider living here with me?’

She squeezed him. ‘I would be delighted, but only if you are sure.’

‘Never surer.’

‘We don’t have a bed,’

‘Ah, but I do have magic,’ he left her arms and stood up. ‘You go downstairs and get Moaner to make some more tea. I shall be down in a little while.’ He turned to leave, stopped and went back to her. ‘Thank you,’ was all he said and he left the room.

She smiled, stretched and went downstairs. The fire was still burning brightly and Moaner had cleared away the remnants of their last cup of tea. She called the house elf and asked if Moaner would please make some sandwiches and more tea for them.

‘Can I ask you a question, Moaner?’ The elf nodded and waited. ‘Why does Sev … er, Master Severus have a house elf?’

‘Moaner’s family have been with the Prince family for a very long time. Prince family very old pure blood family, Moaner served Mistress Eileen, now Moaner serves Master Severus,’ she paused, ‘and Moaner will serve Hermione Granger as well.’ And she disappeared.

She settled at the table and didn’t have long to wait before Moaner came back with a tray laden with
teas, sandwiches and cake. She still couldn’t understand why house elves were so loyal to their families, after all they were effectively servants and unpaid at that. Yet Moaner seemed very happy serving Severus. She shrugged and poured herself a cup of tea. From upstairs came the odd thump or thud as if furniture was being moving around. She smiled and felt at home, much more so than in her parents’ house. Perhaps it was the magic. This house retained its magic, with her parents’ house it was as if the magic simply forgot what it was doing and slipped into the earth so she had to reinforce the enchantments almost every day.

Severus appeared sat down and she poured his tea as he helped himself to a sandwich.

‘Moaner must like you.’

‘Why do you say that?’

‘The tea, the chocolate biscuits, now sandwiches and cake. She doesn’t take to many people.’

She eyed him over the rim of her cup. ‘So, as Head of the Department, just how important and powerful are you exactly?’

He picked up a slice of cake, broke off a piece and fed it to her. ‘Very.’

‘Merlin, but I do love powerful wizards,’ she said through a mothful of cake.

‘I thought you liked them tall.’

‘Hmm, that as well.’

‘Good, now can I show you our bedroom?’

‘Oh, have you done it?’ she asked innocently.

‘Not in that room … yet.’ Her laughter filled the room, right into the corners, dispelling any shadows and bad memories that lingered.

He took her hand and led her upstairs. ‘Your boudoir, Miss Granger.’ He pushed open the door and she stood on the threshold and … just stared.

‘You did this … for me?’

‘All for you.’

She stepped into the room that was no longer a room, but a perfect Bedouin tent. Cushions, silks, brocades, filigree lamps, copper trays, soft Berber rugs. The air was fragranced with frankincense, patchouli and something else she didn’t recognise. On the floor, a large bed was strewn with cushions, the most exquisite cotton sheets and covers of rich wool. At the far end of the room, a tent flap gave the impression of an oasis beyond and from somewhere, came the sound of softly played instruments and magically, a fresh desert breeze blew in through the tent flap.

‘I … simply love this,’ was all she said as she turned to him. ‘Thank you, it’s perfect.’

‘You are most welcome, now, come and see the bathroom.’

‘There’s more?’ She followed after him to the bathroom.

‘It was very … ancient,’ he said.
She clapped her hands in delight. Gone was the antiquated bath, sink and toilet, replaced by a large
shower, big enough for two; a tub in the Japanese style so two could sit in deep water; a new sink
and toilet completed the look. The decoration was pure Zen, relaxing, beautiful and thoughtful. In the
time they had been together he had obviously taken careful note of all her likes and her taste, it was
all perfect.

‘Not bad, not bad at all,’ she said with a frown.

‘What? What’s wrong? Tell me,’ he was panic stricken.

‘Well, first of all, you have all your clothes on. And secondly, so do I.’
Beyond Good And Evil -(Part 2)

Chapter Summary

‘That went well,’ Lucius said as he sat down again and finished his tea, ‘and I have to echo what the delightful Miss Granger said, if you think I am going to spend one minute with a’ … he saw the look Severus was giving him ‘… her apperating skills are faultless mind you. And thank you for standing between us, would you really have taken the curse for me?’

Severus turned to him. ‘I didn’t do it to save you, I did it to save her.’

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Chapter Notes

Thank you to those readers who have left kudos - it is much appreciated.

Beyond Good And Evil

Part 2

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It was turning out to be a busy day. They had spent the morning going backwards and forwards between houses, collecting the things they wanted to have at Spinners End. Severus had reactivated the floo system in the house so they didn’t have to apperate all the time and with her enchanted bottomless bag, they had been able to bring a lot of things back each trip. Books were the heaviest things, both of them loved books and during the time they had lived at Hermione’s they had collected enough to fill several more shelves in the library.

They had stopped for a quick sandwich lunch, provided by Moaner, before starting the task of deciding where to store everything. Their bedroom had hidden chests of drawers and a large wardrobe, so clothing was not a problem. The problem was a potions room for Severus. After much discussion, they thought turning the small bedroom into a potions room would be best solution and with the use of magic, he could expand the room as much as he liked. He decided to leave moving all his ingredients, cauldrons, bottles, jars and tubs from Hermione’s until another day. She told him using his old bedroom as a potions room was a full circle thing, a room that had less than happy memories for the boy would now be a room for the man who was not only powerful, handsome and as sexy as all hell, but who had achieved happiness. At least, she hoped he was happy. He had given her withering look and told her not to be so ridiculously romantic. His still kissed her though.

She had started to take the general state of the house in hand as well. She asked Moaner to clean windows, inside cupboards and all the carpets, while she spent a satisfying hour bringing the kitchen up to date and adding some homely soft furnishings to the sofa’s and armchairs. She also changed all the curtains, immediately lifting the sadness that pervaded the house. She had thought about painting
all the walls, but decided that may be a step too far for Severus in just one day. He had not stopped her doing anything to improve the house, but she knew when it was judicious to stop. After all, she hoped that they would be living in Spinners End for many years. He had given her another withering look and told her she would be lucky if he hadn’t thrown her out before the end of the month. She had gleefully thrown her arms around him and kissed him.

Eventually, with the house looking better than it had since it was built and everything given a home, they stopped and smiled at each other and she had batted her eyelids, at which point Severus gathered her up in his arms and carried her to their bed, where they spent another very pleasant hour getting to know more about each other. The night before they had christened the bathroom and also taken their bed for its first test drive, they had loved, laughed and talked well into the early hours until finally falling asleep, bodies wrapped around each other.

It was late afternoon when she realised that they no food in the house, so with a quick kiss she had told him that she was off to Diagon Alley to buy provisions. She went to Gringotts first, to check her vault and was gratified to see that working for the Department had its financial benefits. She also withdrew some Galleons for the shopping. Diagon Alley was busy as she made her way along the street, popping into the shops she needed, knowing that anything she couldn’t obtain, she could always get at the Muggle supermarket near her parents’ house.

She was about to leave when she saw the evening edition of the Daily Prophet, the headlines read: - **SEVERUS SNAPE LIVES! – One of the unsung heroes of the War is alive and well…** She bought a copy and quickly read the first page. The photo of Severus was terrible, gods knew where the Prophet had dug it up, but it showed him at Hogwarts, all scowl and frown. The article said he had sustained near fatal injuries during the Battle of Hogwarts and that he had been taken away to a secret location to recover from his terrible and debilitating injuries, but now he was fully recovered and had been offered a job by the Minister for Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, as the Head of the Department of Mysteries:- …

…‘Severus Snape will be a valuable asset to the Department of Mysteries. There is no-one better qualified to help implement the reforms that are taking place at the Ministry of Magic. These are exciting times for the wizarding world and we need heroes like Severus Snape to help guide and shape the future;’…

… was the quote from the Minister. She scanned the rest of the article looking for any reference to her, but there was nothing, just as there was nothing quoted from the newly appointed Head of the Department himself, only a résumé of his time at Hogwarts. She felt a small twist of panic in the pit of her stomach, does Severus know about this, she wondered. She decided to get back to Spinners End and find out.

 Lucius was as good as his word and knocked on the door of Spinners End at precisely six o’clock. Severus let him in and showed him into the sitting room. Moaner had just served tea when they heard her voice coming from the hallway.

‘Severus? Are you home?’ she called.

‘In the sitting room,’ he answered.

‘I’ll just put the shopping in the kitchen then I will be in, have you seen today’s Prophet?’ They heard her walking down the corridor going into the kitchen and putting shopping bags on the table.

‘I know that voice,’ Lucius said as he stood up, ‘and there is no way …’
The door opened and Hermione came in, saw Lucius and stopped dead. Severus acted quickly, ‘You know Lucius, he has agreed …’ he looked at her, she was shaking and her fists were clenched.

‘How dare you bring him here without asking me?’

‘… to remove the Cutis,’ he could not understand her anger.

‘If you think I am ever going to spend one minute with that piece of dog turd, let alone allow him to touch me you are demented.’ Her voice bordered on the hysterical, her eyes flashed dangerously and she was bringing her hand up, ‘Ava…’

‘DON’T … YOU … DARE!’ Severus roared as he placed himself in front of Lucius. The effect was devastating. Her hand stopped in mid-air, her face contorted and her eyes widened in horror as she realised what she about to do and, more importantly, what he was doing by protecting Lucius. But the power that had built up within her to cast the killing curse needed to go somewhere, so she did the only thing she could do without hurting him, she absorbed it back into herself.

She stood in front of him, shaking with the effort of controlling herself. ‘Go to hell, both of you,’ she screamed, took a step back and disappeared.

‘That went well,’ Lucius said as he sat down again and finished his tea, ‘and I have to echo what the delightful Miss Granger said, if you think I am going to spend one minute with a’ … he saw the look Severus was giving him ‘ … her apperating skills are faultless mind you. And thank you for standing between us, would you really have taken the curse for me?’

Severus turned to him. ‘I didn’t do it to save you, I did it to save her.’

‘Severus, she hates me, I hate her and her kind’, Lucius stood, picked up his cloak and turned to leave, ‘and I find it incredible that you of all people would allow yourself to become involved with a mu … Muggle born. We were on the same side, believed in the same things …’

Severus cut him off, his voice low and threatening, ‘ I was never on the same side as you, never on the side of Voldemort. I worked against you all. The only person I worked for was Albus Dumbledore and everything I did was to protect Harry Potter.’

Lucius stared in disbelief. ‘You worked against … him?’

‘Every step of the way. Now, I think you should leave.’

Lucius swept by him and headed for the front door. As soon as he heard it close he called Moaner.

‘Moaner, Moaner, quickly,’ the elf appeared, ‘help me find Miss Granger. I shall go to her house, you go to Hogwarts and Grimmauld Place, come back as quickly as you can.’ They both disappeared.

Hermione’s house was quiet. He ran through the rooms calling her name, he flung open the bedroom door hoping against hope that she would be on the bed, sobbing her eyes out. But the room was dark and empty. He apperated back to Spinners End where Moaner was waiting for him.

‘Miss Granger not anywhere,’ she said.

‘Can you go to the Weasley’s at the Burrow without being seen?’ Moaner smiled and was back in a blink.

‘No Miss Granger at the Burrow.’
‘Sod it, Hermione, where are you?’ He felt the cold creeping of despair. Would she come back or would she stay away? He felt helpless and guilty, she was right of course, he should have told her and at least given her option of having Lucius remove the curse. All he knew was that he couldn’t do it. Balls! He was so useless when it came to important interpersonal things. She had done the right thing by taking the curse back into herself, which was admirable, but she would be feeling the after effect of such action. Dark power would be coursing through her body twisting her emotions and mind. He had to find her quickly and he needed to think clearly, where would she go?

Think, think.

Where does she know? Where has she spoken of and what places does she have memories of? He paced up and down, there were so many. She, Harry and Ron had moved nearly every day during that year. Wait! What had Harry said about the Sword? They were snatched somewhere near Malfoy Manor, somewhere she knew, that she had visited as a child … of course The Forest of Dean! At the very least it was a starting point.

He apperated to the spot by the pool and look around, oh Merlin, he was wrong, she was not here. ‘Hermione,’ he whispered. He ran up the low bank looking this way and that. He ran in every direction and still there was no sign of her. In despair, he took out his wand and asked his patronus to find her. The doe set off while he stayed rooted to the spot. He then saw the doe fifty yards away, standing still. He sprinted towards the spot and saw her. She was sitting with her back to a tree, her head buried in her knees, her body shaking. He called the doe back into his wand as he approached her.

‘Hermione, love …’

She looked up at him, tears streaming down her face, her eyes red and swollen. ‘Go … go away … I don’t want … to see you,’ she yelled even as she sobbed and gulped.

But he didn’t go away. Instead he knelt by her side and wrapped his arms around her and held her to him. She punched him, kicked him and lashed out in every physical way she could. She punched his chest with clenched fists, sobbing and swearing in equal measure.

‘I have you, my darling, I have you, sshhh,’ he rocked her and suffered more punches. She tried to pull free of his arms and howled like a banshee when he held her fast. Then she fell against him, still and quiet, gulping down sobs from time to time. He didn’t speak, to do so would have broken the moment. She needed to be in his arms, no explanations and no reasons, just to know that she was safe and that he still loved her.

It was fully dark before she finally spoke. ‘You can be a right fucking git sometimes.’

‘Guilty as charged,’ he spoke against her hair. ‘I thought I had lost you, I thought you had removed yourself from my life. I am so sorry, I didn’t know you would react to Lucius like that.’

She sniffed and cuffed her nose. ‘He was there.’

‘Where?’

‘When … that cow Bellatrix used the Cruciatus on me. He was there, watching, with Draco and Narcissa. I can’t bear to be anywhere near him Severus.’

‘When Harry told me something about it, I … I didn’t know …’

‘I thought she was going to kill me. Malfoy was about to call Voldemort, if he had we would all have been dead. He hates me. He hates all mudbloods. He really, really hates me,’ and she wept.
against him.

‘Sshhh, I have you, I will keep you safe, always.’

‘I know you will,’ she whispered, ‘and that’s why I am so scared Severus, I wanted to use the killing curse on him, what if you hadn’t stopped me and I had … I would have murdered you.’ She broke down again, sobbing heavily against him. ‘Could you have blocked it if I … if it had been too late to stop me?’ she asked very quietly.

‘I would have tried and even if I could have blocked it, you would now be beyond my help and you would be lost to me. That was the Dark working on you; if you were a lesser, weaker witch it would have possessed you completely because of that one curse. But you stopped when you realised what you were doing. I saw the Light in your eyes. You are much stronger than the Dark.’

She was still now, her breathing soft and regular. He held her tightly as if afraid she would slip away from him. ‘Would you like me to take you home?’ She nodded. ‘And a nice hot bath and a cup of tea, hmm?’

She punched him again, but gently this time. ‘Git.’

He smiled as he stood up with her in his arms, he kissed her cheek, ‘I love you Hermione,’ and they were back in Spinners End.

‘I know you do.’

Moaner appeared. ‘Miss Granger …?’

‘… Is going to be fine, Moaner. Now, lovely hot tea and toast, you can bring it to the bedroom.’ Moaner vanished. ‘And you get to be carried upstairs. I will make a hot bath for you, then supper in bed I think.’

She nodded and rested her head against his shoulder as he carried her upstairs. In the bathroom he filled the bath with a wave of his hand, he then undressed her and helped her climb in.

‘Aren’t you joining me?’ she asked.

‘No. Not this time.’

He found a flannel and washed her. He was worried as her eyes were slipping in and out of focus and he didn’t want her going into shock. He grabbed a large towel from the rail, helped her out of the bath then wrapped her in its warm softness and carried her back into their bedroom. He lit the lamps just as Moaner appeared with a tray of tea and hot buttered toast. She approached Hermione and patted her hand, then she left. Severus made her comfortable on the bed, propped up with pillows and cushions. He removed his shoes and carried the tray to her. She started to shiver uncontrollably, so he apperioed a small bottle of his anti-shock potion that he always kept in his jacket pocket.

He knelt in front of her. ‘Open,’ and as she complied, he placed four drops onto her tongue. ‘Swallow,’ and she did. He watched closely and breathed a sigh of relief when her eyes re-focused on him and the shivering died away. Now he needed to feed her and keep her warm.

‘Severus?’

‘Sshhh, don’t move for a moment …,’ he pulled one of the large cashmere blankets off the bed. Quickly, he replaced the towel with the blanket which he wrapped around her and positioned her so
that she was between his legs, her back resting against him. With a silent command the tea tray settled next to him. He poured her a cup of tea, added the milk and two sugars.

‘Wrong way round and you know I don’t take sugar.’

‘It is the correct way round and you will take sugar today.’

‘Oh, Professors orders?’

‘No. Your lover’s orders. He outranks the Professor.’ He held the cup to her lips and she took a sip, followed by gulp.

‘Hmmm, good’, she said and leaned back into him.

He then fed her small morsels of toast, which she ate slowly. After a whole slice she leaned into him again.

‘Severus?’

‘You don’t have to say anything, Hermione.’

‘I know, but I should take my own advice and I think it might help.’

‘Very well, but first, now that you have eaten and had something hot and sweet, I need to make sure you are comfortable and warm. You went into shock just now and I don’t want that to happen again.’ He undid the buttons of his shirt, removed it, helped her into it and wrapped the blanket around her again. ‘The warmth from my body will help, now let’s get comfortable.’ She wriggled so that she was sitting across his lap, her head on his shoulder and his arms holding her securely.

‘Comfortable?’ he asked.

‘Always with you,’ she replied.

He waited. It was important that she took her time, that he not rush her.

‘I always thought the hardest thing I did during the War was Obliviate my parents. I had to remove myself from their existence you see, just in case a Death Eater came to the house,’ her voice was small and sad, ‘but I was wrong, the worst thing was when I thought I was going to die in Malfoy Manor. It wasn’t so much the Cruciatius, but the form it took. She enjoyed it, it gave her pleasure and that pleasure was contained in the curse. At Hogwarts every single one of the professors, including you, drummed into us ‘intent’. What was our intent? To transfigure into a cat or a flea? To mix the potion so it would give pleasant dreams or night terrors? To grow plants and flowers that produced the best essential oils or ones that are bitter and poisonous? Intent is all.’ She sighed and shuddered.

‘Bellatrix’s intent was pain?’ he asked gently.

‘No, her intent was pleasure. I could feel it. Even as she was cutting the letters onto my arm I could discern the pleasure it gave her. It was sexual … and feral. And he stood and watched. They all did. I saw Draco’s face, he was terrified, it was as if … he knew that it could so easily be him being tortured by her. I didn’t want to die … not in enemy territory, knowing my friends were in danger,’ she laughed, a flat cheerless sound, ‘I mean, how would they manage without Hermione, without her brilliant mind and bottomless bag?’

He gave her a gentle squeeze and kissed her hair. He wanted to help her, help rid her of the Darkness that would slowly but certainly, possess her. ‘I will try to remove it if you want me to, but I will not be able to use Dark Magic, I could not inflict that amount of pain on you.’
‘Would you if I asked?’

‘Please don’t ask. I will try to lift the Cutis using more … conventional methods. But I will need to go to your house very quickly, to get a salve I think will help.’

She nodded, and when he rose to leave the bed, she fell back into the warm space he had occupied. He slipped on another shirt and his cloak as the momentary trip through the void was cold and he apparated. He came back holding a ceramic pot and throwing his cloak to the floor, he went to her.

‘Give me your arm and remove the glamour.’ She did as he asked and without touching the word, he smeared a dollop of the balm onto it. ‘Prae remedium, cutis percuro, salutis integro.’ The first application sank straight into the skin; he applied a second layer, repeating the incantation. This layer was also absorbed straight into the skin. He applied a third layer, and repeated the incantation; this layer remained on her skin. ‘It is a balm of Fire Branch, Angelica, Gilead and spider’s web, all very useful for cuts.’ He sat back on his heels, watching her arm. ‘Hermione, I have no idea if it’s going to work, how does it feel?’

‘It tingles a little,’ she said.

‘That will be the Fire Branch,’ he watched in disbelief as the third layer slowly sunk into her skin and he swore under his breath. ‘Dammit! It’s not working properly; it should form a film over the cut, a protective layer.’ He watched as the cut began to colour, turning from merely red, to red and inflamed. ‘The Sempiterum needs to be broken.’

‘Severus, it is really beginning to hurt, it’s beginning to burn,’ her voice had risen in her panic.

‘Debilitare Sempiterum!’ he commanded and was rewarding by a shriek from Hermione. She was holding onto her arm, her eyes filled with pain. ‘I have made a terrible miscalculation, I am so sorry. How could I have been so stupid? It would seem that while nothing interfered with the curse, it would remain as it was, painless but always a reminder of that day. By trying to remove it, I have changed the curse and … the Dark has awoken.’

‘It hurts like all fucking hell Severus; we have to do something because I am not going to have my life ruined by that bitch.’

‘We can deal with it, but you are not going to like it.’

‘Try me.’

‘Lucius. I can’t do it because I love you too much. He will do it because he hates you. But it will be taken away and you will not be taken by the Dark.’

‘Fuck,’ she spat, ‘it would have to be him wouldn’t it. Fuck.’ She nodded, ‘let’s do it before I change my mind.’

Quickly, found clothes for her and helped her dress. He put on his cloak and called Moaner. ‘Go to Malfoy Manor and tell Master Lucius that I will be arriving shortly.’ Moaner turned to Hermione, her face twisted in concern and then she left.

‘Severus!’ she yelled. He pulled up the sleeve of his shirt and saw the cutis oozing, bloody and raw, the edges turning black. ‘It really, really hurts now.’

He took her arm and used a reducto adflictatio to ease the pain. Her face softened as the charm began to work. ‘That’s as strong as I can make it, but it won’t last long, so I think we should go.’
She nodded and he picked her up just as Moaner arrived back.

‘Master Lucius is expecting you.’

‘Ready?’ he asked, she buried her head in his chest and they were outside the front portico of Malfoy Manor.

‘I feel sick,’ she said, ‘I don’t think I can do this.’

‘Yes you can. You must.’ The door swung open and Lucius was stood before them. Severus didn’t wait; he pushed past him and went into the house. ‘Need your help, Lucius.’

‘So it would seem,’ as the door closed on them.

Severus took her into a large sitting room, a log fire burned brightly and candles and lamps were lit. Tonight it looked homely, warm … and welcoming. He placed her in a comfortable chair by the fire and pulled up the sleeve and showed him the Cutis. Lucius took a step back.

‘Severus, you can’t expect me to … she will not survive it.’

‘I am asking you, Lucius. I can’t do it, but you can.’

Lucius gently held her arm. ‘Miss Granger, as you know, this is a Cutis Sempiterum, it is deep and has been there for …’

‘… Five years, two months, nine days and several fucking minutes. Can you break the curse, Malfoy?’ she asked through gritted teeth.

‘Of course. However, it will be painful, very painful I’m afraid Miss Granger. Bellatrix’s curses are multi-layered and devious.’

‘A bit like you then,’ she said with another yelp of pain. ‘Why is it so painful? It’s like it has suddenly come to life.’

Lucius looked at Severus, who nodded. ‘It is painful because your boyfriend tried to help you with some trite traditional incantation. And yes, Dark Magic is alive. It hurts now because it knows what is going to happen.’ He sighed. ‘Very well, Severus, the potion will be needed for afterwards and the frigus balm is in my still room. You know where everything is.’ He turned to Hermione, ‘Miss Granger, you may think you are in pain now. However, it is nothing compared to what is to come. Are you sure about this?’

She nodded and Severus squeezed her arm and left the room closing the door behind him.

‘Good. Now Miss Granger, I can guarantee that you will not enjoy this, on the other hand ….’ He removed his robe and rolled up his sleeves, exposing the serpent on his left forearm.

‘Am I allowed to scream or is that against the Dark Arts code?’

Lucius was holding his hand over the serpent. ‘Scream as much as you like, no-one will hear you. It is just you … and me.’

She was suddenly afraid. ‘Severus …’

‘… is locked out of this room. Indeed …’ he turned in a slow circle, casting an enchantment … ‘nothing can now get in … or out. Shall we proceed?’ He smiled his devilishly handsome smile.
She swallowed, her mouth was dry, she wanted to run, but she wanted to have rid of the curse more. She nodded.

‘Good. Now, rule number one, you must not fight me. No counter spells or hexes. Rule number two, I cannot allow you any type of pain relief, Dark Magic demands a price and yours … will be rather a high one. Rule number three …’ he paused, she was staring at him.

‘Get on with it Malfoy, there is no third rule. I think you are making it up as you go along.’

He shook his head. ‘If you say so … give me your arm.’ She offered her arm to him, he held it and carefully pushed the sleeve up as far as it would go and he placed it on the arm of the chair. ‘Constricto!’ and she was frozen in place, she could not move. ‘Can’t have you pulling away at the critical point now, can we?’

‘Priv …’

‘No, Miss Granger. Rule number one must be followed. Do you understand?’

‘Yes,’ as she winced in pain.

He nodded. ‘Excellent, I shall begin.’ He moved his fingers over and across the carved word. He wove the counter curse using an incantation that was arcane, precise and brutal. The cuts deepened, oozed blood and it then began to burn.

She threw her head back, gurgling in her throat. ‘Fucking damn bollocks shit, it hurts.’

‘Of course it does, that is the whole point of Dark Magic.’ His eyes never left the wound and his fingers never stopped moving.

She didn’t know how she was going to withstand the increasing pain. ‘Mary had a little lamb,’ she intoned, ‘its fleece was white as snow, … arrrggggh! and everywhere that Mary … went … the fucking lamb went to.’ She tried squirming away from the agony her arm had become.

‘You can scream, he can’t hear you.’

‘I won’t give you that pleasure, Malfoy,’ she said through gritted teeth. She looked at him, his eyes were glazed in concentration, beads of sweat were forming on his forehead and his face was twisted … in pain.

‘Excrutio!’ and he pulled his hand away suddenly.

Agony like nothing else she had experience ripped through her. She screamed then, long and loud. She looked at her arm; the burning had changed into living flames that lapped ever higher. She watched him reach into the fire and remove a piece of flaming wood and then he turned to her.
Beyond Good And Evil - (Part 3)

Chapter Summary

She caught sight of herself in the mirror. Merlin’s beard! She looked dreadful; she stuck out her tongue, which was white and furry. Just what was in that potion? She looked at her arm and realised that all the pain had gone and the word was fading. She felt grateful to Lucius, he had no reason to help her, yet he did. Could it be … he was changing? Was it even possible?

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Beyond Good And Evil

Part 3

‘You cannot be serious, Malfoy,’ she screamed as he approached her with the fiery brand. She was now screaming on a different level, one of sheer desperation, ‘please don’t do this. Please … don’t. Pleeeese Lucius … no no no no,’ and she fought against the Constricto in a frenzied attempt to move away from yet more pain. She tried kicking out with her feet, but he simply moved out of her way.

Ignoring her pleas and screams, he incanted again as he passed the brand over his serpent before placing it onto her already burning arm.

She was so petrified now that she could no longer scream. Her eyes bulged in terror as he kept the brand on her arm. The flame from the brand joined with the ones on her arm and still he incanted, his words growing louder and more forceful. The flames changed into fiery serpents, burning ever higher. She could only watch in horror as her scorched and blackened skin melted in the heat and the pain was beyond what her conscious mind could comprehend, so it let go, switching itself off and she slumped forward, lifeless. The fire serpents grew larger and as they did so, Lucius caught them with his bare hands and consigned them into the fire, where they burned brightly for a second, then withered and died.

‘Severus!’ he yelled before falling to his knees, gasping in pain.

Severus burst into the room carrying a portable cauldron and a small stoppered bottle both of which he placed on the table. He checked Hermione, her pulse was strong, she had only fainted; the Constricto spell had kept her from falling to the floor. Feeling around in the pocket of his robe, he found a small bottle, un-stoppered it and held it under her nose. She took a deep breath and moaned; she coughed and brought her head up to look at him. He watched as her eyes slowly focused on him.

‘Good, can you hold on while I see to Lucius?’ she nodded weakly.

He went to Lucius. ‘Show me’, he said and Lucius lifted his hands. ‘Hmm, nasty,’ and he gently examined the burnt and blistered palms.
‘Why are his hands burnt?’ she asked.

‘Dark Magic has its price, Miss Granger,’ Lucius said, ‘for both victim and defensor.’

Severus placed the bottle against Lucius’s lips and allowed him to drink the contents, ‘not too much,’ he said, then helped him into a chair opposite Hermione. He slathered Lucius’s hands with balm. ‘Frigus!’

‘Ow, that’s cold.’

‘It’s meant to be, now sit still while I check Hermione.’ She hadn’t moved, so he released the Constricto, ‘You can move now.’

‘I don’t think I can,’ she replied.

‘Try,’ he encouraged, ‘and drink this.’ He pressed the bottle to her lips and she took a long swig.

She coughed and spluttered. ‘What the bloody hell is that?’

‘Firewhiskey plus,’ he said.

‘Plus what?’

‘Plus you really don’t want to know,’ he said examining her arm, ‘look it’s disappearing.’ He spread balm over the wound. ‘Frigus!’

‘Ow, that’s cold,’ she complained.

He tutted. ‘The pair of you …’

‘Sever …’ she managed to say before falling to the floor.

‘Not used to your extra ingredient, Severus.’

He picked her up.

‘Take her upstairs, any room you like, there are plenty to choose from,’ Lucius said.

He nodded his thanks and carried her upstairs. He chose a door nearest to the stairs and went in. ‘Lumos reducto!’ and a soft light filled the room. He crossed to the large bed, pulled back the covers, removed her shoes and laid her gently down.

‘Severus …’

He covered her. ‘It’s alright; it is normal reaction to the removal of a Dark curse … and the … plus in the Firewhiskey. Go to sleep now, you will feel much better when you wake up.’

She nodded, closed her eyes and was immediately asleep. He lifted her arm and examined it. Lucius had done a fine job; her skin was red and pink, with no sign of the blackening, the word was already fading and would disappear completely in time. He kissed her hand and tucked it under the bedcovers.

Downstairs Lucius was standing by the fire, a goblet of Firewhiskey in his already healing hands. He poured another and offered it to Severus.

‘Slytherin,’ they toasted and Severus took a long pull of the amber liquid, enjoying the feeling of the
small flames of fire running down his throat.

‘She’s very brave for a Muggle born,’ Lucius said, offering a refill.

‘She is very brave for a Muggle born, witch or wizard,’ Severus replied, sitting himself down in one of the fireside chairs, stretching his long frame towards the warmth.

‘Never thought you would settle down, Severus. It suits you.’

He kept his face neutral. ‘Yes, so it would seem. Where is Narcissa?’

Lucius eyed him warily. ‘She and Draco are away … in Europe actually.’

He made no comment, simply held his goblet out for a refill. ‘Thank you for doing that. I know the personal cost to you,’ he saluted Lucius with his goblet.

‘Think of it as repayment for saving me from the killing curse and I wouldn’t have done it for anyone else, you know that, don’t you?’

‘I do, which is why you have my deep and abiding gratitude.’

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The need to pee woke her up. Flinging back the covers, she swung her legs over the side of the bed and stood up. Well, she tried to stand, but her legs gave way and she sat down on the edge of the bed. She tried again and found her equilibrium.

‘Lumos reducto!’ The soft lights showed her to be in a large, comfortable bedroom. There was no other door, so she would have to scout out a bathroom. She yawned and made her slightly wobbly way to the door. Out on the landing it was a fifty fifty chance of which way she should turn, either right, towards the stairs or left, further into the house. She chose left. There were doors on either side, she tried one at random, another bedroom. She tried another, this time on the opposite side, another bedroom. Which must mean, by reason of deduction, the next door she tried had to be a bathroom. She was rewarded and stepped into a bathroom. ‘Lumos reducto!’ There was just enough light to see by. Sitting on the loo, she looked around. It was a very nice bathroom, in fact, it was a lovely bathroom. It was ornamental and very … French, which didn’t really fit with Lucius Malfoy. Or did it? She yawned again, flushed and washed her hands. She noticed that the hand towels were monogrammed LM/NM which she thought was very sweet.

She caught sight of herself in the mirror. Merlin’s beard! She looked dreadful; she stuck out her tongue, which was white and furry. Just what was in that potion? She looked at her arm and realised that all the pain had gone and the word was fading. She felt grateful to Lucius, he had no reason to help her, yet he did. Could it be … he was changing? Was it even possible? She opened the door, ‘Off’ she said without thinking and was very surprised that the light went out to a command in English. She made her way back to the bedroom, but voices drifted up from downstairs, male voices talking, no not talking … gossiping.

She was intrigued. She had not known Severus to exchange chit chat with anyone but her, Harry, Minerva and Albus. She crept silently to the top of the stairs, stepped down one and then sat.

‘Draco was a very good student Lucius; you should not be so harsh on him.’
‘Yes, but he was always beaten by Miss Granger. I simply couldn’t bear the thought of a Muggle born being better than my own son.’

‘Well Miss Granger is quite exceptional.’

‘Oh? How so?’ Lucius sounded interested.

‘In ways you wouldn’t understand.’

‘Ah! Refill?’

It became clear to her that what she was hearing was two men getting soundly drunk and talking about the universal subjects that all men talk about when in their cups, politics, family, magic and sex. For Muggle men, replace magic with football.

‘And just what is ah! supposed to mean?’

Lucius laughed, ‘whatever you wish it to mean, Severus.’

She heard Severus tut, which made Lucius laugh again. She though he had a nice laugh, it was warm and fruity. Whoa there Hermione, you think … she shook her head. It must be the potion.

‘I know you don’t believe it, but I am happy for you Severus. She must be exceptional; else you would not have given her a second glance. And I know she has to be good in bed.’

Hermione almost fell of her step. How DARE he? How DARE Severus allow …?

‘Oh yes, very exceptional.’

‘Good to hear it, last thing you want in a woman is one who is only interested in breeding.’

She felt her blood begin to boil, her cheeks flush, he was discussing …

‘No, no, you can’t have that in a woman. Unless you want them for breeding of course,’ Severus said.

‘Of course, then you don’t want them to have any interest in sex for non-breeding purposes.’

‘Naturally.’

She was almost apoplectic and on the point of rushing downstairs to challenge the ignorant brutes. But then, another thought came to her. The whole conversation was wrong. Severus was very private about intimate things, why then would he be sitting gossiping with Lucius Malfoy … unless. She smiled, they knew she was listening of course and were trying to goad her, that was it! She felt hot breath on her neck. She turned quickly; a large dog was standing behind her.

‘Hello,’ she whispered, ‘are you real or animagus?’ the dog responded by licking her neck. ‘Animagus then,’ and she giggled. The dog came and sat by her, she pressed a finger to her lips, ‘sshh’.

The dog was all ears.

‘Is she as rampantly sexual as all Muggle women are reported to be, especially with wizards?’

‘More so than most,’ although Severus’s voice was deadpan, he was managing to sound enthusiastic.
She clapped her hands over her mouth to suppress the giggles.

‘Ah, so you have experience with Muggle women, other than Miss Granger?’

‘Of course, the way they throw themselves at you once they realise you are a wizard, I’ve had to beat them off before now. What about you Lucius?’

‘I’m a married man. Narcissa would hex me if I tried anything like that.’

‘Being single does have its advantages; not being tied down to one woman makes life much more enjoyable. Another refill I think, Lucius.’

She was now shaking so much from laughing she had to stuff both her hands into her mouth to suppress the sound. She took a deep breath to get herself under control. ‘You are going to help me, dog,’ she whispered. The dog gave her a look and she could have sworn … she shook her head as she caught it by the collar and held her hand to its throat. ‘Flexibilis commutatus Hermione, “Lucius, be a total darling and make me a cup of tea would you?”’ The dog’s mouth fell open and she gave it push downstairs. She grinned as she went back to the bedroom, she heard Severus’s roar of laughter as she climbed back into bed. His footfalls came running up the stairs and he was still chuckling as he came into the room.

‘Your tea is on its way,’ he sat on the bed and started laughing again. ‘You should have seen Lucius’s face when his hound spoke; I nearly choked on my Firewhiskey. How did you know?’

‘Severus, when was the last time you sat talking to anyone about me … and sex?’ He frowned as he thought, went to say something but stopped. ‘Exactly,’ she said, ‘although I will admit to being angry when I first heard what you were saying.’

‘Then you thought things through in true Hermione fashion and realised …’ There was a tap at the door, ‘come in,’ Severus called.

‘Your tea, as requested Miss Granger,’ Lucius’s eyes were everywhere accept on her, which she couldn’t understand as she was wearing Severus’s shirt and trousers in bed. The dog bounded into the room and jumped straight onto the bed where he settled down. ‘I trust you are feeling better?’

‘Yes, much better, thank you,’ she took the offered cup and drank it down in one go, ‘that really hit the spot.’ There was a drop left in the bottom of the cup, she held it towards the dog, who lapped it up with noisy relish.

‘It would seem you have made friends with Rupert. He is supposed to be a guard dog, y’know.’

She scratched Rupert’s ears. ‘Oh, are you sure he’s not …?’ but she stopped as both men were looking at her and Rupert had decided to curl up and go to sleep. She placed the cup on the bedside table.

‘Come down when you are ready,’ Severus said. Both men left the room, but Rupert remained on the bed.

‘Enjoy your tea, Rupert?’ she asked him, his ears twitched but he did not respond. She got out of bed, smoothed herself down and ran her fingers through her tangled hair. ‘I think I must get a haircut. What do you think Rupert?’ But Rupert was already asleep, no doubt dreaming of sitting in a café and ordering a large mug of sweet tea.

When she went into the sitting room, the men were standing in front of the fire, waiting for her. She looked from one to the other. Lucius, tall, aristocratic with long, blonde white hair; Severus, tall,
distinguished, with raven dark hair and dark, passionate eyes.

‘Lucius and I were talking before you came down and he has offered to help with some of your advanced training,’ Severus said, ‘that is … if the offer is acceptable to you.’

‘Oh, like what?’ she was surprised; she thought that Lucius would want her out of his life as soon as possible.

‘Advanced duelling and very advanced spell work,’ Severus replied.

‘I thought you would teach me the advanced duelling stuff. You are very good after all.’

‘Who do you think taught me? Lucius is one of the finest duellist, in this country at least. Besides, I don’t think you would enjoy hurting me,’ he smiled.

‘Depends on my mood,’ she countered. ‘Of course, Mr Malfoy and I have crossed wands before,’ she liked the way Lucius squirmed at that, ‘but I think it would be useful to learn some of the duelling techniques he used in the Hall of Prophesies the last time we … met.’

‘Touché, Miss Granger. I shall do my best not to disappoint,’ Lucius said. ‘Send your house elf with a message when you wish to attend for a lesson.’

‘But why would you want to help me?’ she asked, ‘after all, I am still Muggle born and you are still a pure blooded, arrogant, Death Eater.’

‘Which will make for very interesting duelling, don’t you think?’ Lucius replied. ‘Severus asked and as we are friends, I said I would help. After all, now it is common knowledge he is alive, his time will not be his own and from what Severus has told me, I understand you need to keep learning and practising.’

‘Oh! Friends?’ she gave the word an emphasis that could only have one meaning.

Severus gave her a long, hard stare. ‘Get your mind out of the gutter, Miss Granger. Anyway, Lucius is not my type.’

She laughed at that and at the look Lucius threw him. Severus decided it was time to leave. ‘Thank you once again, Lucius. I do appreciate what you did,’ he bowed slightly.

Hermione was conflicted, what should she do? The man had saved her from descent into the Dark; he had done so at a personal cost to himself, the pain he suffered was no less than she had endured. She took a pragmatic approach and held out her hand, then realised that was stupid as his hands were blistered and burnt. ‘Thank you Mr Malfoy, for everything, including the tea.’

She was even more confused when he lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it in the most gallant fashion. ‘Glad to have been of help. I shall set the enchantments to allow you access to the house, Miss Granger.’

They walked to the front door, she turned to Lucius. ‘Is Draco around, Mr Malfoy?’ she asked.

‘No, he is in Europe with his mother, why do you ask?’

‘Oh, nothing, it was just … if he was around, I would have asked you to say hello to him.’

After more goodbyes, the door closed and they went back to Spinners End.
He took her upstairs into their bedroom, where he undressed and she didn’t, preferring to keep his shirt on, they padded into the bathroom.

‘How are you feeling?’ he asked, brushing his teeth.

‘Different,’ she replied. She saw his questioning look. ‘I can’t describe it really, but earlier today, when I went to curse Lucius I felt dirty, angry and … like … sticky tar and all I saw was red. Now I feel clean and … healthy and the world seems bright again. Does any of that make sense?’ she started to brush her teeth.

‘I’m not sure,’ he said thoughtfully, ‘the Dark doesn’t usually make you feel anything except powerful, arrogant and … disdainful of others.’

‘Is Lucius changing?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘When I saw him today I hated him and wanted to kill him, after he removed the Cutis, I … saw him … differently. Oh I don’t know, maybe it’s the after effects of that disgusting potion.’

They climbed into bed, arranging pillows and cushions so they were sitting up in comfort.

‘What would you like to watch?’ he asked.

‘Surprise me,’ she said as the top of the tent disappeared and became a starry sky. ‘Southern hemisphere?’ she asked.

‘People do change, Hermione,’ he said, deciding to change the sky so the Aurora Borealis shimmering above them.

‘Perfect,’ she said snuggling down into him. ‘I know, Severus. I feel I changed today because a Death Eater, who is friends with another Death Eater, helped me. Lucius didn’t have to help me, unless you had threatened to kill him, which I don’t think you did. So … he did it simply because it was the right thing to do.’

‘How do you know I didn’t threaten him?’

‘Because, when one wizard threatens another with death, they don’t usually end up sitting around a cosy fire drinking and gossiping. You are friends with him, I like that.’

He smiled at her logic. ‘That was all effect for you.’

‘Maybe. If that’s what you want me to believe, that’s fine,’ she yawned. ‘Can I ask you a difficult question?’

‘If you want to know the proportion of ingredients to make up a batch of ‘Less Frizz more Kurl’ I will tell you again, I have no idea.’

She poked him in the ribs. ‘No, not that, this is serious. When you were doing what you had to do … and when you were a Death Eater, did you feel arrogant, powerful and disdainful of people?’

‘Because that is how I acted at Hogwarts?’ She nodded. ‘Honestly? Yes. Although it was necessary
because of what I was doing, but, when you act in a certain way for a very long time, you find that in the end, it is not an act.’

‘But you are not like that now.’

‘Not with you. However, now that the wizarding world knows I am alive, it is how I will be perceived again.’

They watched the Northern Lights dance around the limitless sky, filling it with green, blue, yellow and purple light.

‘When did you let Minister Shacklebolt know that now would be a good time to announce your sudden return to the land of the living?’

‘That would have been yesterday and I am going to give a formal statement to the Prophet later today at the Ministry.’

‘Get them to use a better photo of you, the one yesterday was terrible.’

‘If you are expecting me smile, forget it, after all I have a reputation to uphold,’ and she felt his chest rise and fall as he laughed quietly.

‘Severus? Thank you for everything today, I think that many things did change today only … if you hadn’t been there, that change would have been for the worst.’

‘Yes, you would now be enjoying the facilities of Azkaban,’ he leaned in and kissed her, ‘and I would not be in bed with you watching the Aurora.’

They watched the display above them, engrossed in the beauty of the phenomenon.

‘What was the plus ingredient in that dreadful potion tonight?’

‘Trade secret. I swore an oath on the Sacred Book of Potions for Beginners, first edition …hey!’

She had jumped on him, wrestled him onto the bed and was sitting astride his chest, pinning his arms above his head.

‘Tell me Professor, or I shall use a little jinx of my own devising.’ He looked at her, unsure of what she was going to do. ‘I call it Titillarum and believe me, it has nothing to do with my breasts.’

‘You wouldn’t! That’s … that’s not very nice.’ She cocked her head and gave him a wicked grin. He sighed in defeat. ‘You drive a very hard bargain, Miss Granger.’

‘Tell me,’ she persisted, raising a threatening hand.

She found herself flipped over and now he was pinning her down. ‘Very well, but remember, you asked.’ He leaned in and whispered in her ear.

Her shriek of disbelief was heard throughout Spinners End.
Prophecy And The Prophet

Chapter Summary

She followed the shelving down; on one side of her was the old wall, on the other, the shelves. On and on it went, still no references, still no labels; some of the pots had cracked or broken and had released any prophecy it contained and some had crumbled into dust altogether. And still she walked on, following the line of shelves. It was getting colder, almost as if she was walking into the past.

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Chapter Notes

Grateful thanks to my dear friend, the lovely Caoimhe Dálaigh, for correcting my Irish. Caoimhe, this beautiful language that for me is but a dim memory, you speak each day. Thank you for your patience and for bringing my attention back to Tuatha Dé Danann.

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Prophecy And The Prophet

Hermione arrived in the Atrium of the Ministry and headed towards the lifts that would take her down to level nine and the Department. She felt lucky today, so had decided to spend some time in the Hall of Prophesies for who knows? Today could be the day. The Atrium was busier than usual, mainly because the recently back from the dead Professor Severus Snape, would be giving an interview to the Daily Prophet at some point during the day and people wanted a grandstand view. She didn’t know when that interview was to take place as Severus had been vague about the precise time, but hopefully, she would be in and out of the Hall before it started.

She was waiting for her lift when she heard a familiar voice call her.

‘Hermione!’

She turned and saw Harry walking towards her, he gave her a hug.

‘How you doing?’ he asked.

‘I’m really good, Harry, and you?’ A lift arrived but she let it go.

‘I’m … not sure. The other day was pretty weird, y’know with that gang. We got them back here, but then they somehow got lost in the paperwork. Can’t think that’s ever happened before. Know anything it about it?’
It was the way he looked at her, as if he knew that she knew. It was unsettling. ‘Only what I told you, that it wasn’t Bertimius Branch. Did you find out who he really was?’

‘Yeah, someone called Grippe. So me and Ron bring them in, next thing we know they have been Obliviated and sent on their way to Azkaban, no paper work, no trail … no nothing. The Head of Office seemed to be as confused as us and then we get a commendation. What’s going on Hermione?’ He eyed her suspiciously.

‘I have no idea Harry. If the Head of Office doesn’t know, why would I?’ She knew she sounded evasive and he would pick up on it. Another lift arrived, ‘sorry, but I’m due to be in the Hall. Can we talk about this another time?’ She gave him a peck on the cheek and with a pathetic little wave, got into the lift, ‘see you soon.’ He just stared at her as she disappeared. She let the air out of lungs, she hated being less than honest with him, so she promised herself that she would tell him at the first opportunity. But for now, she had to concentrate on her search.

She stepped out into the main corridor of level nine, only the Wizengamot was deeper underground. Taking out her wand, she held it in front of her as she moved forward. A security barrier was now in place that responded to the wizard or witch and their wand. If you tried to enter the Department with someone else’s wand, the alarms would sound. Severus and Kingsley didn’t want a repeat of what happened during the War, so if you worked here or had business in the Department you were allowed in. If not … well, no-one was sure what would happen, but as the Minister had set the security himself, the consequences would most certainly be messy.

She passed through the barrier and stood before the doors to the Chambers. They rotated and changed position continually, so you had to be ready to walk through your chosen door when it presented itself. The doors were all identical; at least, that is what they were made to look like. In fact, there were subtle differences in the colours on the doors, which is why training to become an Unspeakable takes longer than most other training within the Ministry. You had to be able to recognise the door you required without taking half a day entering and exiting the Chambers you did not require. One of the doors was also the office of the Head of the Department, and although easier to recognise than the others – if you looked closely there was in fact, a small sign with ‘Head of Department’ printed upon it – but such was the reputation of the current Head of the Department, this door was only ever used by those who had business with him.

She missed the door to the Hall of Prophesies the first time it came round, but she was prepared the second time. She opened the door and stepped into the cool interior of the vast chamber. The lighting was dim and as far as the eye could see were shelves upon shelves of the orbs that held a prophecy. You also never entered at the same point each time, which was good if you had to search, but not so great if you knew an exact location, then you had walk the aisles looking for the number shelf you needed. Nor were dates necessarily chronological. The Hall of Prophesies was designed to confuse and confound, if you needed to find a prophesy, you would, if you were simply browsing, then your chances of finding anything useful were practically nil. The Hall was not a place to spend an idle hour during a lunch time.

The first thing she had to do was find this location and see if she had been in this section before. Each shelf had a number, which was the basic reference; on closer inspection each shelf also had a more detailed set of numbers, giving a precise location within the Hall. Again, this reference recognition formed part of the training, so she looked at the inscription - 14W x 4110E x 102N x 2001E; September 29th 1941, Melody Harmony. Reaching into her bag she brought out her ‘Instant-Locata’, (Get Lost! Not With The Instant-Locata! 20 Galleons from Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes Inc, Diagon Alley Branch and so far, it had not let her down.) ‘Reveal!’ and it showed her the last locations she had searched. None of which were anywhere near where she was now. Good, she thought, a new section. She read the location into the Instant-Locata and put it back into her bag.
When she finally exited the Hall she would put that location in as well, thus giving her a complete record of all the sections she had searched.

Slowly she walked down the first aisle. Names and dates were given for the prophecy; however, she found that some whispered as she moved past them. Some glowed brightly, some were duller and some were dark, these were the very old ones. She needed to look at all the labels for even a very old prophecy may not yet have come to pass. That both Severus and Albus could not find any records for her family she found unsettling. There had to be a connection to magic somewhere in her family history, otherwise, how come she was a witch? All the research she had undertaken, some of it here in the Ministry’s vast library, seemed to suggest that all wizards and witches had a least some connection to magic somewhere in their history. Not to have a modicum of magic anywhere in your family was unheard of.

She peered at the labels as she progressed down the aisle. XXV II MDCCX; February 6th 1928; 16th December 1990; VI XII MCCCVIII, oh, that one was really old and it still glowed, alas it did not have her name on it. All the time she could hear the faint indistinct whispers, like rustling leaves. Time meant nothing in the Hall, when you thought you had been searching all day it could be merely minutes, likewise when you left after what you thought mere minutes you could find that you had been searching for ten hours or more. Nor did you need to get lost in the Hall, simply asking for an exit made the door appear.

She took a right turn and followed the line of shelves. She passed another Unspeakable walking along another row, but neither acknowledged the other. None of the Chambers in the Department of Mysteries were places for idle chit chat. Still nothing. She came to an abrupt junction with a choice of three ways to go. Taking out her Instant-Locata she checked all the previous locations she had searched and again, it revealed that she had not been in this part of the Hall before. Good, she chose to continue straight on, it was a new section so she still scanned the shelves. It was like speed reading, you relied on your brain to pick out any relevant detail, so she was able to move steadily along without the need to keep stopping. An old brick wall did make her stop though, she looked around, it was one of the far walls of the Hall, something like this had not happened to her before. She looked at the references on the end shelves and entered them into her Instant-Locata.

She now had only two choices, left or right. As her last choice had been a right turn, she chose to turn left. So she carried on along the aisle, only this felt different, it was much cooler than the rest of the Hall and the air was mustier and stale, as if it had been shut off of centuries. The shelves were different here as well, no longer the ornate metal or wooden shelving most usually seen in the Hall, these shelves were lower and made of stone, she touched one, no, not stone, it was marble or alabaster, smooth and cold to the touch. The shelves and their contents also had a thin coating of dust on them. The lighting was dimmer, ‘Lumos,’ she commanded and there was more light, but not much. She looked closely at the shelves; none had the familiar references on them and little clay pots now replaced glass orbs. She followed the shelving down; on one side of her was the old wall, on the other, the shelves. On and on it went, still no references, still no labels; some of the pots had cracked or broken and had released any prophecy it contained and some had crumbled into dust altogether. And still she walked on, following the line of shelves. It was getting colder, almost as if she was walking into the past.

She was paying more attention to the pots now, something, some whisper was telling her to keep alert. She came to the end of the aisle and before her was another wall, which she thought strange, as this wall should be much further away and it was a dead-end. There was no way forward, no left or right turn, so with a sigh of frustration, she turned and retraced her steps. She walked as quickly as she dared to get back to the junction she had just come from. But something was wrong. It was taking longer to get back than it should, and the shelves had changed again, they were much lower,
none higher than two tiers and they were now made of stone, very old stone.

She stopped every few feet, her skin was prickling, alive with magic and the whispers were becoming louder, more distinct. She walked on, slowly now. Apple; oak; hawthorn; holly; the names of sacred trees echoed in her ears. Heather; buckthorn; alder; mistletoe, the names were whispered in a language she couldn’t possibly understand, yet she did. She stopped and allowed her body to relax; without knowing why or how, she opened her mind and watched the lines of energy flow from her body, twisting and curling back and forth, questing. Part of her logical, rational self knew she should be concerned, yet it all seemed so natural, so intuitive. She moved forward, reaching out her arms as she did so, feeling the exchange of energy.

Herne the Hunter; Ceredhwen; Rhiannon; Morghwen; Beltane; Imbolc; Llugnasad; Epona. Names, places, sights and sounds flooded her mind and body and all in this strange language she understood. Blackbird; hare; frog; seal; otter; wolf; raven; wren. Images flashed before her eyes. Symbols; shapes; the sacred, the profane; music, dance, birth and death. Mugwort; juniper; pine; rosemary; rue, smells and fragrances filled her olfactory senses. Mead; wine; water; sacred water, filled her mouth and she tasted them. She spread her arms fully to allow it all in. She laughed out loud and that laughter echoed throughout the Hall, long, joyous laughter as she realised she was not allowing it in. She was remembering.

‘Cad a fheiceann tú?’ (Where are you?) She heard the question clearly.

‘I am on a boat, I see the beach, and beyond, the Sacred Grove.’ She replied. She entered the Sacred Grove, the offerings were given; she was speaking to the old Ancient ones, asking for help. Gold and silver she saw, and her staff. There was the crystal and all around, there was magic.

‘Anois tá cad a athrú?’ (What has changed ?) The voice asked.

‘Now I am heading west, I am going home, that is what has changed.’ She felt the wind in her long red hair, heading west across the water into the burning, orange red sky. Now she was walking the ceremonial pathway to the mound, passed the Sacred Grove and Dolman that led to the entrance. Passed The Gatekeeper, into the Dark, into the Light, The Goddess, Earth Mother, freedom, pain and death. Then she turned and her eyes focused on four jars sitting upon the stone shelf, side by side, alone and removed from all others. The jars each had an inscription in neat Latin: Albion; Hibernia; Caledonia; Cambria. Underneath, written in Ogham she saw Alba; Scotia; Erin; Combrogi, of the four, Erin alone sang to her. The song was as old as the rolling green hills of her home; as lilting as the babbling brook as it rushes and tumbles over smooth stones; as soft and fragrant as the heather strewn peat underfoot; as beautiful as a setting sun that turns the vast, empty ocean to fire and as well-known to her as her own family. She lifted the jar carefully from the shelf. Was this her prophecy?

‘Do not break the seal,’ the same voice said, ‘for to do so will mean the loss of the Ancient Knowledge.’ The voice was directly behind her and she could feel the presence, and she was not afraid.

‘Why are they kept here?’ she asked.

‘As a reminder of how things were, what they became and what they have yet to become.’ She knew that voice, she half turned. ‘Do not turn; you and I are not destined to meet again … just yet.’

‘I know you,’ she exclaimed.

‘Of course you do, High One.’
'I know that name.'

'Of course you do,' the voice replied with a merry chuckle.

Gently, she replaced the jar back on the shelf in the exact position, so it looked that it had not been disturbed at all. 'What do I do now?'

'As always you pose a good question. What you seek is not here, it was never here.'

'If not here, where then?'

'You held it in your hands.'

'But I must not break the seal.'

Again, the soft chuckle, 'Not the jar, the place you held in your hands.'

'In Éirinn.' (Ireland).

'Is ea, do theach.' (Yes, your home).

'Mo bhaile.' (My home).

'Ard hAon.' (High One).

'Múinteoir.' (Teacher) and she laughed with joy to be speaking again with her Teacher, friend, mentor and magician.

'No doubt you have a question for me, High One.'

'Don’t I always? … Am I reborn?'

'Yes, and you are doing very well. Keep it up, I am very proud of you,' and he laughed softly, 'you are keeping them on their toes and you can bring about great change is you so wish. And now High One, Keeper of Memories, Keeper of the Sacred Cauldron, High Born of the Sacred Grove, Mother of Erin, until we meet again.'

She smiled at that, she had long ago forgotten her titles. ‘Until then, Dagda; Teacher of the Secrets, Keeper of the Sword of Light, High Born of the Sacred Grove and High Magician of Tuatha Dé Danann.’

The light grew brighter, almost blinding her and when she opened her eyes and shook her head, she was standing before a high set of shelves, the orb in front of her read; 15th May 1962, Peckham, Derek Trotter, the name seemed vaguely familiar. Closing her eyes again, she sorted through everything she had heard, seen, smelled, spoken and experienced. She then placed it in a corner of her mind and closed the door. Satisfied, she let out a long breath, at least now there was an explanation as to why there was no prophecy for her here. Did Severus have one she wondered? He had not mentioned anything.

'Door,’ she walked out into the corridor and back to the lift. As she was riding up to the Atrium of the Ministry, she realised she had forgotten to put the last location into her Instant-Locata.
Severus smoothed his robes again; he had dressed once already today. After the first time, Hermione had told that he had a white mark on the back of his frock coat. She had commenced to undo all the buttons, slowly; she removed his coat and then started to undo the buttons of his freshly laundered shirt. The Knut dropped at that point, that not only did he not have any kind of mark on his clothing, but she was in the process undressing him. When he had mentioned to her that he would be late for his interview with the Daily Prophet, she had replied that as it was his interview, they were not going to start without him. Not being able to find any fault in her logic, he had succumbed to her kisses.

After a most enjoyable interlude, they had showered again and she got herself ready and left before him. They had decided that it would be best if the wizarding world and the Daily Prophet in particular, didn’t know about their relationship for now. Just getting used to the idea that he was alive would be enough for most people. She had also said that Ron was not ready for that revelation either.

Before she left, she had hugged him long and hard, something she always did when they did anything separately, which was nearly every day. He had asked her about it once and she admitted that she always thought that while they were apart, he would have second thoughts; that she was just too much of a bother and he would be better off without her. This revelation that the oh so confident Miss Granger was insecure about his feelings and regard for her, humbled him. He had reassured her that if he was going to leave her, she would receive as much notice as he could muster, possibly via a letter, written on parchment and delivered by owl. That had made her laugh. He loved her laugh, her sense of humour and her wicked sense of fun. The fact was that it was he who would be devastated if she decided to end their relationship. After all, who else would have him? He was Professor Snape, potions master, Death Eater, murderer of Albus Dumbledore (as witnessed by Harry Potter and reported by Rita Skeeter), acolyte of Voldemort; the list could go on, but he stopped, that was enough baggage for anyone. He knew that next few weeks if not months would be a difficult time for them both. When he had told her wizarding world was changing, he meant it. It was changing in ways that some didn’t understand, some wouldn’t understand and some, himself included, understood only too well.

‘Moaner,’ he called. The little elf appeared. ‘I am going to work, if Miss Granger gets home before me and requires anything, you will assist her.’

‘Of course Master Severus, Moaner likes to help Hermione Granger.’

He smiled. ‘You like her don’t you?’ The elf nodded and disappeared. Moaner was still quite young, her family had served the Prince family for generations and despite her name, she was very amenable. Moaner had also hated his father and in return, his father had forbidden his mother to use the elf to keep the small house neat and clean. His mother would try and use her magic to keep things tidy, but his father’s all too frequent violent outbursts meant that she did less and less about keeping her house and son, clean and tidy. Hermione had not asked any searching questions about his family life … yet. But she would. At the moment, she was respecting his privacy regarding his young life, but if she asked, and if he decided to tell her, it would be a terrible revelation to her. She would be upset for him, she would angry with his father, she would no doubt cry. She was fiercely loyal and protective of him in ways that most people would not understand. He called it the Gryffindor effect.

Merlin, how he loved her.

Smoothing his robes one last time he stepped into the floo. ‘Atrium,’ he said as he threw the floo powder onto the fire. He exited in a corridor of the Atrium of the Ministry of Magic. However, this corridor led nowhere; it was a dead end in both directions and was therefore, secret. He walked to one end and ‘Patifacio!’ he commanded as he approached the wall, a door revealed itself. Stepping through the door he descended down the long, stone stairs to level nine. The door he had just come through had already disappeared. He reached the bottom of the stairs and ‘Adaperio!’ he commanded
again and another doorway presented itself. He stepped into his office in the Department of Mysteries, as he did so, a simple ‘Occultis,’ and the door shimmered and became a wall once again. To some it would seem overly cautious, but it added to the mystery of his position. Hermione knew of his secret way in and out of the Department of course, it was how they maintain their separation when at work; she always arrives in the Department in the conventional way via the Atrium lift. It also means that by not arriving together, even the reticent Unspeakables have not picked up on their true relationship. He opened the outside door to his office; it was quiet in the corridor, which was a good sign.

The lift chimed and Kingsley Shacklebolt stepped out, held his wand before him and walked through the barrier. ‘Good day to you Severus,’ he shook hands with the Minister. He still could not work out how the Minister for Magic knew when he was in the Department.

‘Minister, do come in,’ and he guided Shacklebolt into his office and into a comfortable chair while he prepared a pot of mint tea, the Minister’s favourite.

‘So, my friend, are you ready for the vultures?’ he asked as Severus poured them both tiny cups of tea.

‘Not really, but I shall be my usual cold, cynical self and all will be well,’ he saluted the Minister with his cup. He liked Kingsley Shacklebolt, always had. Like himself, Shacklebolt had to play the double agent game while the Dark Lord had control of the Ministry. During the War, the newly appointed Minister for Magic always knew where his allegiance lay and would keep things moving in the wrong direction with as much disinformation as he could safely get away with. That he was a powerful wizard helped, at least a level two necromancer, the same as himself, Shacklebolt proved himself a worthy adversary against Voldemort and his army during the Last Battle. The Minister was also the catalyst for the re-organising of the Ministry of Magic. Although, some would say revolutionising rather than re-organising and while most would say the reforms were for the better, there were a few who would say it was for the worst.

‘I assume you are not going to mention Miss Granger at this point,’ the Minister helped himself to more mint tea.

‘Correct. I think one surprise every few years is enough for the wizarding community, especially where I am concerned.’

The Minister put his cup down. ‘Good. Well, gird your loins Severus and let us go and meet the press. I invited other publications as well; I thought that giving The Prophet exclusivity could lead to some serious misquotes.’

Severus stood, smoothed his robes once again and followed Kingsley Shacklebolt to the lifts. He felt the spectre of impending doom, especially if Rita Skeeter was in attendance. For a reason he could not understand, she unsettled him, her infamous and untrue biography of him ruined his character when he was nearly dead. Minerva had provided him with a copy while he was still recovering, he had ended up watching it burn with great satisfaction. While riding the lift to the Atrium, he composed his face into its usual mask of arrogance with a soupçon of distain. By now there was a large crowd gathered around the fountain, the designated place for the interview. A bevy of reporters milled around and as soon as he was spotted, there was a rush forward and the camera’s stared to flash. Kingsley guided him to a podium and lectern. The Minister stepped up to the lectern first.

‘Ladies and gentlemen of the press, thank you for attending here today. Please keep your questions to the point and away from any personal issues. Severus Snape will not be making any kind of statement today; however he is here to answer your general questions. So without further ado … Head of the Department of Mysteries, Severus Snape.’
He took a deep breath, stepped to the lectern and glared at the assembly. Camera’s flashed again and quills were poised on notepads.

A question was fired at him immediately. ‘Professor Snape, Morris Miggins, The Daily Prophet. Where exactly did your remarkable recovery take place?’

‘At a secret location.’

‘And where would that have been?’ Morris was obviously not a consummate professional.

‘It’s a secret location, otherwise I would have given you the address.’

‘And what have you been doing since the War?’ Another insightful question from the Prophet’s ace reporter.

‘Recovering. Yes, at the back?’ He pointed to a small witch with her hand raised.

‘Emphysema Prewitt, Witch? Consumer Monthly. Professor Snape, do you feel that the reforms taking place within the Ministry go far enough in providing the necessary equal opportunities for today’s modern witch? And do you have any thoughts on the reliability of the latest version of the Tub-O-Matic, Laundry Solutions for the modern family?’

‘Yes … and no.’ He had a sudden desire to pinch the bridge of his nose. ‘Yes?’ he pointed to a tall reporter at the back. At least Rita Skeeter was keeping her mouth shut, although she was eyeing him up and down in a not so innocent way.

‘Diogenes Grope, The Quibbler. Mr Snape, it has been rumoured that Collapsible Grannipommet berries were used to speed you recovery. Is there any truth in this?’

Severus paused before answering; the man has used Mr instead of the usual Professor. ‘No truth what so ever,’ he paused again, ‘however, I can confirm that Wartletoad juice mixed with Aquaversible Squisher pods proved very efficacious when given to me as a tonic.’ The correspondent from the Quibbler was writing his reply down, as was Miss Skeeter’s quill, although it had stopped writing and was tapping the page, obviously working out a spelling. ‘I think you will find there is no PH in efficacious, Miss Skeeter.’ The quill shot him a look before recommenced its writing. ‘Yes, you there,’ and he pointed to the next questioner.

‘Jezza Clarkenwall, Top Broomstick, Mr Snape, our readers would be interested to know what make and model your current broomstick is and would you be prepared to test drive a mid-range family broomstick for our readers?’

If he was prone to them, Severus thought he would by now, have a raging headache. ‘Since my brush with death and my recovery I have not upgraded my broomstick. Currently my broomstick is the old, yet Classic, Firebolt 250 Gti, with no embellishments or enhancements; chrome alloy foot rests and goes from 0 to 60 in six seconds and … no.’ An audible oh! of disappointment went around the gathered audience.

‘I have a follow up question, Professor Snape,’ Morris Miggins raised his hand. Severus stared down at him. ‘Are you in favour of the reforms that the Ministry is putting into place and do you have similar plans for the Department of Mysteries?’

‘The Ministry has my full support, and yes.’

‘So you believe that the wizarding world is changing?’
‘Yes. And the Ministry of Magic needs to be at the forefront of those changes.’

Quills were scribbling and Rita Skeeter had still not asked a question. He breathed a sigh of relief as the Minister stepped forward to conclude the interview. It was at that point that she raised her hand.

‘Rita Skeeter, journalist. Did you get married while you were recovering at this secret location, Professor Snape?’

Severus gathered his black robe around him as he folded his arms and scowled at Miss Skeeter. Several members of the gathered press and audience took a voluntary step back. Kingsley Shacklebolt took a step forward and whispered to Severus that Miss Skeeter was fishing. The audience waited with bated breath for Professor Snape’s response.

‘No.’

‘So the young woman who works in the Department of Mysteries is of no romantic interest to you?’ she smiled her gleaming smile, her quill had not stopped writing.

‘I have no idea whom you are referring to. All operatives with the Department of Mysteries are Unspeakables – that’s a capital U, Miss Skeeter – so it follows I would not know her name.’

‘So … the name Hermione Granger means nothing to you?’

If he had liked her, Severus would have admired her tenacity, but he didn’t, so he couldn’t. ‘She was one of my students at Hogwarts …’

‘Until she fell in love with Harry Potter during the Tri-Wizard Tournament and subsequently bore his love child,’ Miss Skeeter’s smile was one of unadulterated triumph, ‘before you stole her away from the dashing young hero of The War!’

He was now confused and had no idea of the relevance of her questions. ‘If that is who you say she is,’ then as an afterthought he added, ‘although, I heard it was … three love children with Harry Potter.’ He had no idea why he said that.

Miss Skeeter’s quill however was fairly burning up the parchment in an effort to get his words down. ‘One last question,’ she smiled sweetly, ‘this one is for the Minister.’ She turned her steely gaze upon Kingsley Shacklebolt. ‘Minister Shacklebolt, do you think that giving a position of power to a Death Eater and known murderer a positive move towards reforming the Ministry of Magic?’

The gathered crowd took a collective breath in and several steps back, in the hope things would get ugly.

Minister Shacklebolt stepped forward and drew himself up to his full height and using his most commanding and authoritative voice, he glared at Rita Skeeter. ‘Severus Snape is a trusted wizard within the Ministry of Magic. I trust him, the Ministry of Magic trusts him and despite what you may think and have written in the past Miss Skeeter, Albus Dumbledore, the greatest wizard of all time, trusted him. And nothing you may write in your scurrilous column or books will change those truths. I think you’ll find there is no K in scurrilous.’

There was a murmur of agreement around the audience and some of dissent. Rita Skeeter was about to ask another question when something quite extraordinary happened. Arthur Weasley, who had been in the audience, came up on the podium, held out his hand to Severus, who took it without thinking, before turning to the press.

‘Arthur Weasley, Office for the Detection and Confiscation of Counterfeit Defensive Spells and
Protective Objects. The ODCCDSPO as we prefer to call ourselves. I would like to shake this wizard’s hand and say that the Ministry needs more like him, more witches and wizards who are prepared to step up and fight the forces of evil, no matter what the cost. I am proud to know this man and excellent wizard who like me, is a member of The Order of the Phoenix. I know that with Minister Shacklebolt at the helm of this great ship and Severus Snape watching over our journey sailing forward, the wizarding world is in safe hands.’

People burst into spontaneous applause, there were some calls of ‘well said,’ and ‘bravo, Arthur,’ as camera’s flashed and reporters ran off to file their story for the next edition. Rita Skeeter took her notepad and quill, turned on her heel and with her nose in the air, scuttled away. Severus just stood staring at Arthur Weasley. ‘Well done, Severus. Great interview, should give those vultures something to chew over.’ He pumped Severus’s hand a couple more times, nodded to Kingsley and walked off.

Kingsley Shacklebolt looked at Severus, clapped him on the shoulder and smiled, ‘I think I owe Arthur a promotion.’ Severus could only nod, he was still too stunned by what he had said to Rita Skeeter; he was more stunned however, by the images that were flashing through his mind of Hermione once she had read that quote, taking his precious male bits, skewering them, roasting them slowly, before serving them up to him on a platter. Still in a daze, he followed the Minister.

From his vantage point at the back of the Atrium, Ron Weasley stared in disbelief as his dad shook the hand of Severus Snape, the slimy Slytherin, the murderer, the tormentor of Harry Potter and the only teacher at Hogwarts to cuff him around the head with a book. He watched as Snape strode down the Atrium - his black robes billowing out behind him, just as they used to do at Hogwarts - before turning away in disgust and heading back to the Office of the Aurors to find Harry.
It had been a long time since he had had time to himself; really to himself and in a hot bath. So to sink into a deep tub was a treat. He lowered himself until he was submerged and stayed underwater until his lungs demanded oxygen. He emerged spluttering and laughing, then leaned back and closed his eyes.

Harry was pacing the length of the sitting room of the Burrow when Ron came hurtling in through the front door.

‘Harry! Harry, I saw him.’

Harry turned to Ron but didn’t stop pacing. ‘Saw who Ron?’

‘Snape of course! I was there during his interview. He’s still the same arrogant git that he always was. Are you listening to me, mate? He’s back and I don’t trust him.’

But Harry was in no mood to listen to Ron’s rant about Severus, so he continued to pace.

‘Worst thing was my dad got up there and shook his hand and made a speech. I couldn’t believe it. I tried to get a copy of The Prophet, but it has sold out everywhere. Hopefully dad will have one. Oh yeah, you should know that Snape told Rita Skeeter that you and Hermione had three love children.’

Harry stopped mid pace, ‘what?’ He was confused, why would Severus say such a thing?

‘You alright Harry? I went back to the Office but you must have already left.’

‘No Ron, I’m not alright. I keep thinking about the other day and that gang. Hermione knows something, I know she does,’ he ran his hand through his hair, ‘none of it makes any sense. Three love children?’ he flopped into the sofa.

‘Yeah, three. He seems to have forgotten that I was her boyfriend, not you. Anyway, I’m going to have words with dad when he gets in.’ He looked at Harry, ‘you listening?’ Harry didn’t reply. With a deep sigh, Ron sat down next to his best mate. ‘Forget about it Harry.’

‘I can’t. It’s not right, Ron, none of it is. Branch or Grippe, whatever his real name is, disappearing like that, being Obliviated and sent to Azkaban. It doesn’t make any sense. It’s not Office procedure and it’s not right.’
‘C’mon mate, let’s get ready for the match, that will take your mind off work,’ with that, Ron got up and went upstairs.

Harry flung himself back into the sofa. The last thing he wanted was to go to the Quidditch match and watch Ginny play. Everything was wrong. He was wrong, his job was wrong, he and Ginny were wrong. And quite frankly, living at the Burrow was driving him bats. ‘Oh, bloody hell,’ he stood up, rushed outside and apperated. He was standing in the kitchen of 12 Grimmauld Place. It was quiet and it was shabby, but he felt more at home here than anywhere else, except for Hogwarts. Kreature had died, so there was no house elf to keep the place clean, not that Kreature ever did much cleaning. He put the kettle on and made himself a pot of tea, used a Produci! spell for a jug of milk, which actually smelt and tasted like milk, poured himself a cup and sat down to think.

Truth was, he and Ginny had grown apart over the last couple of years, starting with Hermione leaving Ron, then in the last year she had made the Holyhead Harpies team, so she was either practicing or playing and then in the off season there were the goodwill tours. Three times they had set a wedding date and three times it had been cancelled. The last time he suggested they didn’t set another date until the end of this season. Ginny had jumped at the chance. Hmm.

He poured a second cup. Another truth was he missed Hermione and he was jealous of her working in the Department and of her relationship with Severus. He couldn’t remember feeling this disgruntled ever before. When he was growing up with the Dursley’s he had nothing to compare his life with. He was just Harry and he lived under the stairs. End of. Now, Ron was happy in his job and was thinking about asking his old flame, Lavender Brown out on a date. Neville was studying hard to take his professorship in Herbology and he and Luna were weeks away from their wedding. He had heard on the grapevine that Draco was having some success as a potions master or apothecary, depending on which version you heard, on the continent. Everyone seemed to be moving forward, well Ron wasn’t exactly moving forward, but he was enjoying the place he was at right now.

Yet another truth. Hermione was right when she had said she had enjoyed the last year and the Final Battle. Oh yeah, it was as scary as all Hades, but it made you feel useful and alive. And so back to Ginny. What was going on there? She was so into the whole training and playing thing that when they went to bed she was either too tired to want to do anything or she said she needed to conserve her energy to keep her focused on the match. What the hell did that mean anyway? So yeah, sex was definitely very low down on her agenda. He put his cup down and drummed his fingers on the table top. He felt his jean’s pocket for the familiar weight of the mobile phone. He would have to go out into the Muggle world to send a text or to call her, but he could take the opportunity to pop to the local shop and pick up some essentials.

He found one of his old jackets on the hall stand and after a bit of rummaging around, he found some Muggle money in various pockets and he left the house. Crossing the road he walked into the small park and towards the shops. He stopped at a bench, sat down and dialled Hermione’s phone. It went straight to voice mail.

‘Mione, it’s me. Call or text when you get this, I really need to see you. Oh, it’s Harry. Bye.’

Frustrated he carried on to the shops. In the small supermarket he had enough money to buy bread, a can of beans and fresh milk. He paid and walked back, wishing all the time for the phone to ring. It remained stubbornly silent. It was Friday night and apart from going to watch Ginny play there was really nothing to do. He would have liked to have watched telly at Hermione’s, but he didn’t want to disturb anything she and Severus may have planned.

Back in the house he spent all of thirty seconds putting his shopping on the table and for the want of something to do he went for a wander around the house. It was large and very empty. He realised it
was also very dusty and that made him sad for some reason. One more truth, he didn’t have a home of his own, everything he owned fitted into two drawers and half a wardrobe at the Burrow. Maybe he should make Grimmauld Place his home. He could use magic to clean it up and modernise the place; he could go to Diagon Alley and by new things, after all he had a vault full of Galleons and gold bars.

This made him feel better. It was the start of a plan, the beginning of him taking control of his life, of his future. He felt like at least part of a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. There were still questions of course; the whole thing with that gang and Hermione was odd; could he leave the Ministry and his job? What would he do? Teach? That was always a possibility. Professor McGonagall regularly asked him if would care to join the teaching staff at Hogwarts. It was tempting; after all, Hogwarts was the one place he really felt at home. But was it right?

It had been over an hour since he had left the message so he decided to go across to the park again and see if she had replied. In the park, he left it a couple of minutes before checking the screen. Nothing. He dialled her number again and again it went straight to voicemail. ‘Me again. Look, I need your help and advice. Could you come to Grimmauld place for a talk? Thanks.’

He slowly made his way back, giving the phone time to ring. It didn’t. Back in the house he was beginning to feel guilty about the way he had up and left the Burrow without a word. The Weasley’s would be going to the match as a player’s family always had reserved seating. Tonight’s match was a friendly against the Totnes Terrors. This was a first team match, she had been promoted to the first team this season, once she had been playing at first team level for another season, she would be experienced enough to be picked up by any of the international clubs. This would be yet another problem for their relationship. The match was due to start at seven o’clock; he could floo it straight to the stadium, see the Weasleys, make his apologies and get back to Grimmauld Place, by which time Hermione may have called.

He went into the large front room, picked up the floo powder and stood in the grate. Then in a slow, clear voice he said, ‘Totnes Terrors Quidditch stadium, main concourse,’ and he threw the powder. The green flash still terrified him, but he found himself inside the stadium. He stepped out just as another spectator arrived. It was busy, so after an initial look around for the Weasleys, who weren’t in the area, he made his way to the Family and Friends seating. He found the seats marked Weasley. He was the first to arrive. Just then he heard Molly’s familiar voice.

‘Harry! Harry! You were right Ron, he is here. Harry, are you alright? You left rather suddenly.’ She wiped floo soot from his cheek.

‘Yeah, sorry about that Molly, Arthur. I’ve just had a rotten week at work and I need to clear my head. Look, I’m not going to stay; I just didn’t want you to worry. I’ll see you back at the Burrow, next week; I’m going to stay at Grimmauld Place this weekend. I really am OK …’ he started to back away from them … ‘when you see Ginny, tell her hello from me.’

‘Harry …’ Arthur started, but Harry didn’t turn back, he just bolted to the nearest open space and apperated. Not done in polite circles really, but he didn’t care. He landed in the sitting room of Grimmauld Place, took out the mobile phone and headed out into the park. Still no message from Hermione, so he dialled again, knowing he would sound pathetic, but once again, he found he didn’t care.

‘Mione, me again. I really do need to talk. Can you just come to Grimmauld Place as soon as you can? I’ll be here all weekend. Thanks.’

Now thoroughly dejected, he went back into the house. It was still fairly early, so he made himself some beans on toast and more tea. He took his time eating and clearing away. He thought about
getting into bed and reading. So he found a suitable book, ‘A History of Castle Remaude,’ by Charles Augustinian, and made his way up to the bedroom he used. He then realised that he had no change of clothes, any toothbrush or toothpaste, no shaving kit, but he didn’t want to go back to the Burrow to collect stuff. Clothes proved easy, he found a wardrobe full of Sirius’s shirts, suits and jackets. A drawer produced some old fashioned underwear, but it was clean, as were the socks. So neat and clean were the clothes in both the wardrobe and drawers, it was almost as if Sirius had known Harry might need them. His search for something like a toothbrush or toothpaste proved fruitless. So he used a ‘Producio!’ again and made a toothbrush and toothpaste. He sniffed the toothpaste suspiciously, but this smelt like toothpaste and hmm, it tasted minty. Now feeling more pleased with himself, he decided on a long hot bath. He ran a bath from plumbing that squealed and banged but which produced lovely hot water, and adding some bath salts he found in the bathroom cupboard, Geranium and Soapweed, he undressed, put his glasses on the side and slipped into the water and enjoyed a long, hot soak.

It had been a long time since he had had time to himself; really to himself and in a hot bath. Usually there was someone banging on the door wanting the bath or toilet; or sometimes Ginny would come in and sit on the edge of the bath and tell him about the latest practice or next match or that she was off on a goodwill tour of Australia. So to sink into a deep tub was a treat. He lowered himself until he was submerged and stayed underwater until his lungs demanded oxygen. He emerged spluttering and laughing, then leaned back and closed his eyes.

Hermione stepped out of the lift in the Atrium and was surprised at how empty the place was. She looked at the clock suspended above the ground and was shocked to see that it was late, much, much later than she thought. She had been in the Hall for over eight hours. How was that possible? She had missed the interview that was clear, but what of Severus? Was he downstairs? She didn’t even think of checking his office, or had he gone back to Spinners End? Cursing herself, she went back to level nine and entered his office. It was empty. So he must have gone home. She made her way back up to the Atrium, but she wasn’t sure if she wanted to go straight home. She was just a little disconcerted that she had spent so much time in the Hall and she really needed some fresh air, she could then apperate to Spinners End from a quiet street.

So she climbed into one of the lifts that was a red phone box and asked to be taken up to street level. As her head appeared at street level, she saw that it was late, it was very nearly dark. Stepping out of the phone box, she had only walked a few feet when her mobile phone beeped. Taking it out she saw she had voicemail, and when she listened, all of them were from a very distraught Harry asking for help. She sighed, clearing her head would just have to wait. She turned around; walked back passed the phone box into the narrow alley-way and apperated.

She opened the door to Spinners End and called out to Severus. He was in the sitting room and when she went in, he was sitting in his chair by the fire, with a look of complete horror on his face.

‘What’s wrong?’ she asked, going and kneeling in front of him and leaning up to kiss his cheek.
‘You look like the world is about the end.’

‘It just might be,’ he said with deadly seriousness.

She was alarmed. ‘Severus, tell me what’s wrong.’
He simply nodded to the Daily Prophet lying on the table. She stood and picking it up began to read. ‘… Severus Snape … supports Ministry … Minister Shacklebolt said …’ she muttered through the article then … ‘what?’ she shouted. ‘Severus Snape claimed that he had stolen Miss Granger away from her long-time lover and father of her THREE children, Harry Potter. Sources close to Professor Snape and Miss Hermione Granger say the couple married in secret sometime after his miraculous recovery and spent an enjoyable honeymoon in an undisclosed location. It would seem that by Professor Snape’s own admission that the former Miss Granger is mother to his own TWO children.’ … ‘SEVERUS! What is all this? Who would write such drivel?’ She stopped and threw the paper back onto the table. ‘Oh, don’t tell me, Rita Skeeter?’

He nodded. ‘I don’t know what made me say it … but she intimidates me … I panicked.’

She started to laugh and she went and kissed him long and thoroughly on the lips. ‘Gosh, it’s a wonder I have had time to pursue any sort of career what with all those pregnancies and kids hanging around.’ And she burst out laughing again. ‘And Ron will have kittens when he reads it.’

‘You’re not angry with me?’ He was genuinely relieved.

‘Severus, it’s Rita Skeeter, I know what she’s like. It’s all lies. Did you really say all those things?’ That started her off again; she leaned into him, using him as support as she laughed.

‘Of course not … except the part about you and Harry having three love children.’

She was laughing so hard now that she was in danger of getting hiccups. ‘Oh I wish I had been there.’

‘Good job you weren’t. But she did imply that she knows about us.’

‘Don’t worry about it; no one believes anything that she writes. We will choose the time and place to tell the world about us,’ she gathered herself together and stood up, ‘in the meantime, I have had several desperate messages from the father of three of my children. He wants me to go and see him at Grimmauld Place.’

‘Then you should go and see him. But before you do, how did it go in the Hall and have you eaten?’

‘No I haven’t eaten, and the Hall was very, very interesting. A quick snack and then I shall go to Harry. Do you want to come with me?’

‘No, he may need to speak to you alone and not with his potions master tagging along,’ he said, following her into the kitchen where she prepared a quick cheese and pickle sandwich for them. As they sat and ate, she told him about what had happened in the Hall. He listened carefully without interrupting her.

‘So it would seem that there isn’t a prophecy for me in this country, if it’s anywhere it’s in Ireland.’

‘And you think the connection is a Druidic one?’

She nodded as she finished her sandwich. ‘I have it all stored away as a memory, so we can look at it at any time. Right now, I’m off. I’ll see you later.’ She hugged and kissed him, ‘and don’t worry, I really am not angry with you. Can I take The Prophet for Harry?’

He nodded as she picked it up and left the room.
'Harry? Harry, you home?'

He opened his eyes.

‘Harry?’ The voice was coming upstairs.

He blinked and called out, ‘I’m in the bath, Hermione, be down soon, OK?’

‘Oh! OK, I’ll be in the kitchen.’

He heard her retreating footsteps. The water had cooled, so washing himself quickly, he got out of the bath, grabbed a towel and wrapping it around his waist, he went into the bedroom. He dried himself, put on the borrowed underwear and searched through Sirius’s wardrobe. He found a shirt and waistcoat, pulling on his jeans he put on the shirt, a lovely deep wine colour with the waistcoat on top. Socks followed, and then he ran his hands through his hair before going downstairs.

Hermione was sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of tea. ‘That is a very different look for you, Harry,’ she said as she got up and hugged him.

‘Do you like it?’

‘Yeah,’ she scrutinised him, ‘yeah, I do. It suits you.’ He hugged her again, enjoying the contact. ‘You sounded upset in the messages and sorry for getting here sooner; I was in the Hall of Prophecy and lost all track of time.’

‘Severus not with you?’

‘No, he thought you may want to speak to me, you know, privately,’ and she winked at him.

‘Oh, OK,’ he didn’t keep the disappointment out of his voice.

‘Do you want him here? I can go and get him; he’s only at Spinners End.’

He thought for a moment. ‘Yeah, I think I would like him here. I would like his advice as well as yours. Spinners End? Isn’t that his old family home?’

‘Yes, and we will tell you all about it, but right now, let me go and fetch him.’ She was gone.

He poured two more cups of tea and they were back. He hadn’t seen Severus for a couple of months and his former potions master seemed changed, yet again. ‘Severus, thanks for coming,’ he held out his hand but was surprised when he was pulled into a genuine warm hug.

‘Raiding Sirius’s wardrobe I see?’ Severus smiled.

‘It was a last minute thing, leaving the Burrow. I didn’t bring anything with me.’ He passed Severus a cup of tea. The three sat down.

‘Isn’t Ginny playing tonight?’ She asked.

‘Yeah, but I didn’t want to go.’ He ran his hand through his hair again, ‘It’s complicated.’ He gulped some tea before continuing. ‘I need to talk to you both and ask your advice, there’s no-one else I can
ask you see and …’

‘Harry, thank you for trusting us,’ Severus interrupted, ‘I will help in any way I can.’

Harry nodded, finished his tea and launched into his story. It felt good to be able to unload his thoughts and fears to someone else. He told them everything, from being unhappy at work, to his failing relationship with Ginny and feeling trapped at the Burrow. How he missed the adrenalin rush of the War and how it seemed he had no control over his life. It sounded like an endless list.

‘Last but not least, I don’t have a home. Hogwarts was the nearest thing to a home I had. The Burrows is not my own space and I don’t think the cupboard under the stairs counts as a home.’ He slumped back into his chair.

Severus’s face had darkened. ‘I don’t understand, Harry, the cupboard under the stairs? Surely … you didn’t live … in a cupboard?’

‘Until he came to Hogwarts he did,’ she said. ‘I thought all the staff knew, all the pupils seemed to know.’

‘I didn’t,’ Severus said threateningly, ‘and if I had, I would have had words with the Dursley’s for keeping Lily’s son in a cupboard.”

‘Well, it’s a good job you didn’t know then, isn’t it?’ she patted his hand, ‘who knows what kind of war that would have started.’ She and Harry laughed.

‘Have you any ideas about what you would like to do?’ Severus asked.

‘I want to leave the Office for a start; I don’t enjoy being an Auror anymore. Professor McGonagall keeps asking me to teach at Hogwarts, but I don’t know what I would teach. Professor Slughorn has got a few years left in him yet and I was rubbish at potions anyway.’

‘I remember,’ Severus said with a soft smile, ‘except when you got your hands on my text book.’

Harry groaned but smiled. ‘My transformation is not bad. Herbology is OK. Spells and charms I’m good at,’ he shrugged. ‘I was also thinking about, you know, becoming an Unspeakable.’ There, he had said it.

Severus steepled his fingers as he thought while Hermione poured more tea. ‘Are you serious about not wanting to be an Auror any longer?’ he asked.

Harry nodded. ‘Come and see me the next time you are in the Ministry, I will set the barrier to accept you and your wand.’

Hermione saw Harry’s puzzled frown. ‘You haven’t been down to Level nine recently have you? There’s a barrier in place now, you have to have business in the Department or work there, otherwise you get frizzled in the security barrier.’ Severus shot her a look, she laughed, ‘as no-one knows what will happen if you don’t have an appointment or the correct wand, frizzled is as good a word as any!’ Severus rolled his eyes.

‘I am going to tell you something Harry that may come as a surprise to you,’ he waited a beat before continuing. ‘I have been Head of the Department for two years now. I have been operating in secret helping Minister Shacklebolt with the reforms that he is undertaking. I have also been out on missions as you know, and yesterday Minister Shacklebolt made my existence known to the wizarding world. Now, as publicly announced and appointed Head of the Department, I no longer have to skulk around, I can and will help change the Ministry. I am also in a position to help you.’
Harry sat stunned. He had no idea that all this was going on around him, he was all but blinded by being an Auror. He looked from Severus to Hermione and thought that this is the time to ask the question.

‘Look, one of the things that has been really bothering me is the whole Bertimius Branch thing. What really went on there?’

‘I will apologise to you as I did with Hermione,’ Severus said. He then went on to explain to Harry about Hermione’s increasing powers and how he, Albus and Kingsley Shacklebolt were worried, as they could not find any records of her family being connected with or to magic in any way. So over the past months, tests have been devised for her, to see just how far and how quickly her powers were developing. And the last test had been with the Branch gang. He apologised for not being able to share the plan with Harry or anybody else, but Hermione was very quick to catch on to such things so all the tests were designed to be real, using real criminals and Dark Ones.

‘So your family have no connection to magic at all?’ Harry asked.

‘Well, until today I would have said none, but my search in the Hall today proved successful,’ she said. ‘I found out that I do have a connection to magic, but it is very ancient, right back to the beginning really. But, Harry, we can talk about this another time. Tonight is for you. Let’s talk about what you need.’

‘So you are in a fairly powerful position?’ Harry asked Severus.

Severus nodded. ‘A Death Eater and known murderer according to Miss Skeeter, in a very powerful position within the Ministry. She is not a fan.’

Hermione handed Harry the paper. Harry took it and read the front page. ‘Nice photo of you and … Arnold Weasley, they never could get his name right. But why do you look so … stunned?’

‘Ah, I had just made a comment to Miss Skeeter about …’

‘… Three love children!’ Harry finished. ‘Yeah, Ron told me. He was very miffed that you had forgotten that he was Hermione’s boyfriend and not me,’ he laughed as he continued reading … ‘and now you have two more children! How do you find the time, ‘Mione?’

They both broke down in fits of giggles, Severus merely shook his head.

‘Ron was dead upset that his dad shook your hand, said he was going to have words with him,’ Harry said as he folded the paper up and placed it on the table.

‘I am quaking in my boots at Mr Weasley Junior and his upsetness,’ Severus said, his face completely deadpan, which for some reason made Hermione and Harry laugh again.

‘Right, Harry,’ she brought the conversation back on track, ‘somewhere to live. I have moved to Spinners End with Severus. If I behave myself, he says he won’t throw me out, at least not until the end of the month. That means, my parent’s house is empty and it’s yours if you want to use it, until you find somewhere more … permanent.’

Again he was stunned. ‘Hermione, that’s … that’s very generous of you. I don’t know what to say.’

‘Say yes. Then I know it will remain in safe hands. It’s in a Muggle street …’

‘… I’m used to that,’ he said, ‘thanks, ‘Mione, if you are really sure.’ He beamed at the two people before him, his best friend for twelve years and his oldest adversary, barring Voldemort, who was
becoming his newest best friend. Earlier, he had been lost and thought everything was hopeless. Now, life looked brighter and he was taking the first steps to take back control of his life. He felt liberated.

‘Of course, you will still have to deal with Ginny … and Molly and Arthur … to say nothing of Ron. They will want an explanation of why you have left Ginny and why you are living at my house.’

He sighed, ‘I know. But if I don’t do anything about my life now, it will happen by default and I will never have control over who I am, what I do or what I want to be.’

The kitchen was quiet for many minutes. It was Severus’s soft voice that broke the silence. ‘And what do you want to be, Harry?’

‘I want to be more than The Boy Who Lived. I want to forge my own destiny, whatever that may be.’ He hung his head, seemingly embarrassed by the forcefulness of his words. ‘I had a destiny, one not of my making. Now I need to make my own choices, make my own mistakes and make my own life.’

‘Harry …’ Severus said as he stood up. ‘Harry …’ He looked up as Professor Snape pulled him to his feet and embraced him.

‘I’m going to the bathroom,’ Hermione said, gently touching both their arms as she passed.

Harry pulled away; Severus’s face was soft with emotion. Something he had only seen before when Severus looked at or spoke of Hermione.

‘I need to say something to you, Harry … but I don’t … want you to think that …’

‘I’m sorry Severus; I don’t understand what you are trying to say,’ Severus’s dark eyes held his own.

‘You could have gone the way of James, but you chose not to. You are as clever and as powerful as your father, yet you are Lily’s child more than James’s. You carry her spirit in you, Harry, her sense of decency, her compassion and her loyalty. ‘

Harry sat down; he was at a loss as how to respond to what he was being told. ‘Professor …’

‘No Harry, please let me finish. The time has come for us two to begin to know and understand each other. Enough time has passed so that old animosities no longer impinge on our daily lives.’ Severus took a deep breath, but his eyes never left Harry’s. ‘You know I loved Lily … you may be surprised to learn that she loved me. I failed her because of my love of the Dark Arts. I made a choice. I could not let go of the Dark Arts, so I let go of Lily. The worst decision of my life. Yet, by letting go of Lily and embracing the Dark Arts and becoming a Death Eater, I was ultimately able to help in the destruction of Voldemort and to protect her son.’ Now he dropped his gaze.

‘Professor, Severus, I know I’m being my usual thick self, but I really don’t understand what you are saying …’

‘I think what I am trying to say Harry … ‘he stopped, obviously having difficulty with the words. ‘…if you want it, I would like to be … a friend at the very least.’

‘And what would be not the very least?’

‘I think you could tell him, Severus,’ Hermione’s soft voice came from the doorway. She went to him and lifted his hands and kissed them. ‘Yes, you could be rejected, but at least then, you would know,’ and she nodded her encouragement.
Harry was nearly beside himself wondering what the last exchange meant. Tell him what?

‘Harry, I would consider it a great honour if you could bring yourself to … to …’ he stopped and took another deep breath; he looked to Hermione for support … ‘to consider me as a father figure.’

There was total silence in the kitchen. Harry was stunned, dumbstruck, his mouth fell open. Thoughts flooded his mind all at once. How could he even think of calling this man, who had made his life miserable for years; who had fought on the Dark side; who had, who had … He looked at Severus, Hermione was standing in front of him speaking very quietly so Harry couldn’t catch the words. Her hand was over his heart and Severus had his eyes closed, but nodded now and then, listening to what she was saying. …this man who had loved his mother so much that he had risked his life every day for years to protect her son; this man whom Professor Dumbledore, who had been a father figure to him, trusted completely with his life. This man, who Hermione Granger, the most brilliant witch of her generation and the most logical and level headed person he had ever known, loved with a passion and whom she trusted. This man …

‘Professor, what is your Patronus? He asked.

Severus opened his eyes and looked at him. ‘A doe, the same as your mother’s.’

Harry’s eyes flew open in surprise. ‘It was a doe that showed me where the Sword of Godric Gryffindor lay submerged in a pool.’

Severus sat down now. ‘It was part of the Dumbledore’s plan. I gave a copy of the Sword to Bellatrix who placed in her vault thinking it was the original. Then through various clandestine channels, Dumbledore was able to discover where you were camped. He instructed me to leave the Sword for you, so I placed it in that pool and left my Patronus to guide you to it. It was in the hope that you would find your way to it … somehow. But you were never to know it was me, just in case you were captured and Voldemort used Legilimency on you.’

‘So even then you were helping me …us?’

‘From the very beginning Harry …’

‘So you chose your Patronus because it was my mum’s,’ Harry said, a statement, not a question.

‘No. My Patronus has always been a doe. I have been able to produce my Patronus since I was twelve. I taught Lily how to produce her Patronus and it was a doe.’

‘Professor? What do you mean … from the very beginning?’

Severus sighed deeply. ‘I was fulfilling my promise to Lily, to keep you safe.’

‘To mum? How? She was already … dead. Sirius then came and took me to Dumbledore.’ He stared at Severus who could not meet his gaze. ‘What are you not telling me?’ He felt the rage building, ‘tell me Severus.’

‘I was the first to find her after Voldemort … as soon as he left, I went into the house. She was still alive …’

‘NO!’ Harry and Hermione shouted together.

‘… Barely alive. She asked me to protect you Harry, she made me promise. So I did. We didn’t need any Unbreakable Oath, Lily and I. She knew I would keep any promise I made to her. I told her that I loved her, always had and always would. I asked her forgiveness. She died in my arms before she
could answer.’ He fell back into the chair. ‘I wept as I held her and I knew in that moment what I had to do. Then I saw you, crying in your cot. You held out your arms to me and I picked you up and I held you for the merest second. Then I left, to get back to Voldemort in the hope I had not been missed. The next time I saw you it was your first day at Hogwarts.’

‘And that first potions lesson you were a real git to me.’

‘Yeah and to me,’ Hermione added.

Severus leaned his head into his hands. ‘I had to make it appear that I hated you. I was Head of Slytherin, there were spies everywhere. I do apologise for those years. You have no idea how difficult it was for me … when I had held you in my arms as a baby.’

Harry looked from Severus to Hermione who was as obviously stunned as him. ‘Er … apology accepted, Professor.’

‘Hey, what about me?’

Severus looked up at her. ‘You Miss Granger were an insufferable know it all …’ he looked at her with soft, loving eyes … ‘you still are and that is what makes you so exceptional and what makes me love you so much.’

‘Oh,’ was all she could say.

Now Harry was just as conflicted as before, perhaps more so. He knew he should hate Professor Snape, but his resolve was faltering. He had planned revenge upon his potions master for years. Now it would seem that Professor Snape was his protector in all those years. He had been with his mother when she died, so she had not died alone and she died knowing her son would be safe with Severus Snape. Protected by Severus Snape. Harry closed his eyes and tried to make sense of everything he had heard.

When he spoke at last, it was with feeling. ‘Severus? I … I’m conflicted. Part of me wants to hate and despise you; I think that is my father. The larger part of me, my mother’s part of me, would like to be your friend, good friend. And perhaps in time, to be … something more, but I think I am going to need time to sort it all out, y’know, in my head.’

Severus nodded. ‘Thank you Harry, it is more than I expected.’ He reached into his pocket and brought out his wand and summoned his Patronus. Harry did the same and summoned the stag. They both turned to Hermione who was trying to produce her Patronus without her wand.

‘Do stop showing off my love and use your wand,’ Severus said.

She blushed and reaching into her bag, removed her wand. ‘Expecto Patronus!’ she commanded and nothing happened. ‘Expecto Patronus,’ she tried again, this time the end of her wand glowed. ‘I’ve always had problems with my Patronus,’ she said glumly.

‘Remember, it is your happiest memories,’ Harry offered encouragement.

She concentrated, ‘Expecto Patronus!’ and her Patronus didn’t simply appear, it exploded from her wand. Her mouth hung open.

‘Er … Hermione? Isn’t your Patronus an otter?’ Harry asked. She nodded.

‘And just what was your happiest memory?’ Severus added.
‘Can’t tell you in front of Harry,’ she replied blushing. Harry noticed that Severus blushed as well. In the meantime the three Patronus’s were leaping and running around the room, one doe, one stag and one giant otter. They stopped as they faced each other, rose up on their hind legs and streamed back into their respective wands. The kitchen was suddenly empty. Hermione stood examining the end of her wand very carefully; she then went and put the kettle on for more tea.

Harry approached Severus. ‘Thank you for your help and for telling me what you have tonight and thank you for loving Hermione, I can’t tell you how happy that makes me.’

‘Harry, please know you are not alone, I will always be there for you. I admit I never liked your father or Sirius, but I did like Remus because Lily was friends with us both.’

Harry nodded his understanding. ‘I will be in your office on Monday.’

‘Alright, stop with the mutual admiration society and could one of you please tell me why my Patronus has changed?’ Hermione had put a fresh pot of tea on the table and was standing with arms akimbo.

‘It is a giant otter,’ he said.

‘But why and why me?’

‘I’m not sure but I will be happy to find out for you. Of course, you could always spend several hours in my library, see if any of the books come up with something useful.’

Her face broke into a huge smile. ‘Professor Snape, you really know the way to a witch’s heart.’

Later that night as they lay together in their tent, with the copper lamps flickering and the air fragrant with frankincense, she snuggled into Severus’s arms, her hand resting gently on his chest. They had left Harry in much better spirits and with a plan that was going to help move him forward with his life. She had also told him about Lucius and the removal of the Cutis. His first reaction was shock that she had even contemplated allowing Lucius Malfoy anyway near her, let alone remove a Dark curse, … and with Severus out of the room. But when he had calmed down and she explained how the curse had woken up and was beginning to hurt and how Severus would not have been able to place her under so much pain, Lucius was the only choice, there was no-one else who was capable of removing a Dark curse. And anyway, Lucius had been perfectly nice to her, and people can change and maybe what the Malfoy’s had gone through during the War had made them realise that they had to change their attitudes. She also told him that she was going to go to Lucius for advanced spell and duelling lessons. Harry had looked at Severus and asked him if it was such a good idea. Severus had told him that Hermione was quite capable of taking care of Lucius is she so wished. Harry, although not happy, had accepted her decision.

Severus had been very thoughtful since their arrival back at Spinners End. ‘Sickle for your thoughts?’ she asked.

‘Did I do the right thing with Harry?’

‘I’m not sure if there would ever be a right time or place to tell Harry what you did tonight. But, was
it right? Yes, absolutely. I believe it has started the healing between the two of you, no more tippy toeing around each other. You now have a strong base to establish a proper relationship.

‘Hermione?’

‘Yes, my love?’

‘I didn’t tell him everything.’

She leaned up and kissed him; his lips were soft and warm. ‘Now, why am I not surprised?’

‘It was the most important thing, for me at least.’ She said nothing, simply waited. ‘Aren’t you going to ask me what it was?’

She rolled herself on top of him, loving the way their bodies fitted together so nicely; the feel of his male body against hers. She sighed a deep contented sigh. ‘I expect it has something to do with Lily and what she said to you. I expect it was something along the lines of … that she always loved you … but she was in love with James.’ She looked in his eyes. ‘I am so sorry.’

‘Don’t be. It is enough.’

She laid her head on his chest and listened to his heartbeat, it was strong and regular.

‘Hermione?’

‘Hmmm?’

‘Why do you love me?’

She didn’t say anything for ten heartbeats. ‘I don’t,’ she said. His heart rate increased.

‘What do you mean?’ he said in a voice that was pure Professor Snape.

Again she waited, longer this time. ‘It’s a Muggle thing.’ His body tensed under her and his heart rate increased again.

‘What does that mean exactly?’

She lifted her head and smiled at him. ‘It means you bloody, great idiot that I’m in love with you. I love Harry, but I am not in love with him. It’s chemistry Severus. Not magic, not spells or charms or potions, but good old Muggle chemistry.’ He frowned at her. ‘Look, we don’t choose who we fall in love with, we choose who we love. Lily chose to love you. When we fall in love, we have no choice. Well, that’s not entirely true,’ she wriggled to get herself more comfortable, ‘we can choose to do nothing, or we can choose to jump in feet first and sod the consequences.’

‘And that is Muggle logic?’

‘No, there is nothing logical about falling in love. When Cupid’s arrow hits the heart we become befuddled, tongue tied, clumsy and altogether sloppy.’

He laughed, ‘I have no idea what you are talking about or who Cupid is and why an arrow has to hit your heart, but you make it sound wonderful.’

She flipped herself onto her back and took him with her. ‘Oh it is wonderful Severus, truly wonderful.’
It was quiet in the Burrow. Ginny was home and had gone to bed, the match had been a draw, but as it was a friendly, the scores didn’t really matter. She hadn’t seemed that upset that Harry wasn’t at the match; she had shrugged and said she was going for a beer with her team mates. Ron had received an owl from Lavender Brown and it looked like they had a date for Sunday afternoon. He had gone to bed happy.

Molly was fussing with the counterpane. ‘I’m not happy, Arthur. Not happy at all. Why would Harry want to go off like that? I only hope that he isn’t thinking of dumping Ginny like Hermione did to Ron. I don’t think I could cope.’

She lay down, staring at the ceiling. Arthur climbed in beside her. ‘They’re young, Molly. They’ve know each other a long time.’

‘We were young and we knew each other at Hogwarts as well,’ she countered. ‘Should I go and have a chat with him, what do you think?’

‘No Molly. I think it best if I go and have a chat with him, man to man, wizard to wizard. I’ll go in the morning, how about that?’

She leaned across and kissed his cheek. ‘I think that is a good idea, you talk some sense into him. Then once he’s back, we can talk about planning for the wedding …’ She wriggled her comfortable, ‘what about Severus then? I pleased he’s alive but not so sure about him being involved with the Ministry. And why would he say that Harry and Hermione had three children? It doesn’t make sense.’

‘It’s that Rita Skeeter. She can’t write anything unless it’s all complete and utter lies. She twists anything you say, like Severus and Hermione being married. Whatever next, eh?’

She laughed. ‘You’re right Arthur. You know I have a soft spot for him, but he is so … so cold and humourless, who would want to marry Severus? Hermione is so full of fun she would never give him a second thought. Anyway, he’ll never get over Lily.’

‘You’re probably right there Molly, but you never know. That’s settled then, tomorrow I’ll talk some sense into Harry,’ he leaned across and kissed her. ‘Night night, Mollywobbles.’

‘Night night Arthur dear. Sleep tight.’

He was still sleeping when she woke in the morning. He had his back to her; she smiled as she clambered over him.

‘Hello, Hermione. I see you are awake,’ he kept his eyes closed.
‘Why do you love me, Severus?’

He opened his eyes and blinked at her. ‘Who said I love you? I’m merely here for the sex.’

‘Good answer, but no cigar.’

He smiled at her, how could she be so enthusiastic first thing in the morning? He took a deep breath. ‘My darling, lovely woman, do you remember the first time we had sex?’ she nodded. ‘It was good, yes?’ She nodded again. ‘No it wasn’t.’

Her eyes widened in surprise. ‘But … but …’

‘You thought you were going to have a little sexual adventure with a pirate, courtesy of Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes. I wanted … sex. It was clumsy, we were tongue tied, befuddled and soppy,’ he paused as he ran his finger down her cheek, ‘when I left you at your house the next morning, I was immediately lonely, empty and cold.’

‘But … but …’

He shushed her. ‘The second time we made love and it was the most glorious experience of my life. Hermione Jean Granger, you complete me. You are the colour to my darkness, the laughter to my sombreness, the magic to my magic and I am utterly and completely yours. You have allowed me in, you nurture me, and you drive me mad. How many other ways are there to say I love you, that I am in love with you?’

She looked down and smiled softly. ‘How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach when feeling out of sight for the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.’

‘What was that?’

‘A poem by a Muggle poet.’

‘Is there any more?’

‘Yes, but I can’t remember it,’ and she buried her head in his shoulder.

‘Why have I never heard this before?’

‘How much Muggle poetry have you read?’

‘Ah, yes. Fair point.’ He hugged her to him. ‘I am going into the Ministry later; you don’t have to come with me.’

‘Good,’ she yawned, ‘I thought I might send Moaner to Lucius and start the duelling lessons. I could also pop along and see how Harry is doing.’

‘Hmm, good plans. And we don’t have to get up just yet.’

She giggled and swatted him, ‘got something in mind?’

‘One thing, yes.’
Harry opened his eyes as daylight filtered through the tattered curtains of Sirius’s room. He yawned, stretched and reached for his glasses. He felt rested and calm for the first time in weeks. Seeing Hermione and Severus yesterday had helped him and Hermione’s offer of the Granger house was something he was not expecting, even from his best friend. As for Severus, he didn’t still fully understand what was happening between them, but the offer of becoming an Unspeakable was again, generous.

He slipped out of bed and into the bathroom. Severus had changed, hadn’t he? Hermione was totally bonkers over him, madly in love and Severus was as deeply smitten with her. He flushed the toilet and washed his hands. It was difficult though to push passed the dislike, no, hatred that he carried for the man. A few hugs and a frank discussion weren’t really going to make things better.

He decided on another long soak before breakfast and ran himself a bath. He found more of Sirius’s clothes and put them on the bed for afterwards. He would have to go back to the Burrow of course, he had all his work clothes there and he owed Molly and Arthur an explanation. As for Ginny, he had the feeling that she would welcome the break. He padded back into the bathroom. The taps had turned themselves off when the water was nicely deep and the correct temperature. He added more bath salts and slipping his underpants off, he climbed into the tub. Hot water up to the chin, bliss! He lay back and allowed his body to relax in the steamy water.

What Severus had said about his mother being barely alive after the attack had shocked him. He had seen Severus holding his mother and weeping from the pensieve, but he had not seen him pick baby Harry up and hold him; doesn’t mean it didn’t happen as Severus had said though. But, maybe it was time to move on, to allow Professor Severus Snape to be the better person he wanted to be. Hermione was changing as well; he could almost touch the power that emanated from her and when she apparated there was barely a small crackle, not the loud pop that most people made. Severus had the same ability; did he teach her how to do that? And the lessons with Lucius, that was just plain daft. A Death Eater giving her duelling lessons and advanced spell work? Did she understand just how dangerous Lucius was? He wouldn’t trust Lucius Malfoy or Draco for that matter, as far as he could throw them, which wasn’t far. Yet … perhaps Severus and Minister Shacklebolt were right, things needed to change, were changing in the wizarding world. Maybe this was the time for everyone to let go of what was and concentrate on the future.

He sighed as he washed; being in a new environment at Hermione’s house would help sort his mind out. Being in a new job would be a challenge and he needed a challenge right now, something he could really get his teeth into. He rubbed himself down with a towel, wrapped it around his waist and left the bathroom. On the landing he could have sworn he smelt a cooked breakfast wafting up from the kitchen. Nah, it was his imagination because he was hungry. He dressed, dark shirt with dark waistcoat today, and went downstairs. The smell of cooking was getting stronger. He opened the kitchen door.

‘Ah, Harry, weekend breakfast, sausages, bacon, tomatoes, fried slice? Nice cup of tea and a chat.’ Arthur said as he dished up huge plates of wonderful grub. ‘Raiding Sirius’s wardrobe I see, it suits you.’

Harry wanted the breakfast but not the chat. He knew that Arthur had been sent by Molly to get him back to the Burrow and patch things up with Ginny.

‘Thanks Arthur, just the thing, I’m famished.’
‘Dig in then; let us feed the inner wizard before we get down to the man to man, eh?’

So they sat and Harry tucked into one of Arthur’s famous cooked breakfasts. They made small talk, Arthur filling him in on the match, it was a draw and not the most exciting match Ginny had played in, Ron being enthusiastic about dating Lavender. Harry told him about Hermione’s visit and her offer of her house as she was living elsewhere. He didn’t mention that she and Severus were together. Nor did he mention Severus’s offer.

‘Moved in with Severus has she?’ Arthur said, spearing a sausage and taking a bite.

Harry almost choked on a piece of bacon. ‘Why would you think she was living with Professor Snape?’

Arthur gave him a hard look. ‘Because I know they have been lovers for two years,’ and he finished off the sausage.

Harry was suddenly aware that he didn’t really know Arthur Weasley at all. If Arthur had known all this time, how was it that he hadn’t let it slip at some point?

‘It’s alright Harry,’ he said smiling, ‘not much gets passed Arthur Weasley. Thought you would have realised that by now. And I’m happy for both of them. She was out of Ron’s league, a woman like that needs … well, shall we say firm handling?’

‘But you have kept it to yourself all this time?’

‘Of course, just like you. Seconds?’

Harry accepted another sausage and fried slice and looked again at the man who everyone thought was … well, too nice. There was obviously much more to Arthur than anyone knew. He mopped his plate with the fried slice and sat back with a satisfied sigh. He drained his tea in one go and Arthur gave him a refill.

‘Nothing like a good weekend breakfast to set you up, eh?’ Arthur smiled at him. ‘Now, let’s talk about you and Ginny.’

‘Arthur, I don’t think there’s much to say, I …’

‘Just listen to me please, Harry.’ The young man nodded. ‘Molly thinks you should come back to the Burrow, carry on as normal. Discuss wedding plans. I, on the other hand, think that you have made the right choice.’

Harry stared at him, speechless.

‘Harry, I understand what’s going on here. You and Ginny have known each other for so long, starting at Hogwarts, spending holidays with us, now you live in her home. Neither of you have had time or space to explore other … possibilities.’ He drank his tea and poured another for himself.

‘Molly and me, well … we separated for a whole year.’

‘I didn’t know that,’ Harry said.

‘No not many do and Molly seems to have forgotten as well. Just like you and Ginny we started courting at Hogwarts. We got married to young and too quickly. We agreed on a year’s separation and to see what happened. Turns out that we did love each other and got back together at the end of the year. But not before trying different things, living our own lives, on our own. It’s what you and Ginny need to do. More tea?’
Harry shook his head. ‘Don’t get me wrong Arthur, I do love Ginny, but right now I feel hemmed in on all sides, like I can’t breathe …’

‘… Which is why you need time apart. Ginny is a strong character, she had to be with six brothers, so she tends to treat all young men the same way she treats her brothers, like naughty boys who need keeping in check. Not the best trait in a girlfriend. So, go for it Harry, live at Hermione’s, change jobs. I’m sure Severus will look out for you. Time apart can be the best tonic for an ailing relationship.’

‘Molly will go mad,’ Harry said. ‘And Ginny will be furious.’

‘Yes, I dare say Molly will be mad for quite some time. But you leave her to me, and Ginny? Well, maybe with some space, the pair of you will have time to talk to each other and work things out, eh?’

He sat deep in thought. Suddenly everything he thought he knew was being challenged. Severus, Hermione and now Arthur, all changed or changing. ‘Arthur, Hermione is going to take duelling lessons from Lucius Malfoy, as well as advanced spells. Do you think she will be safe?’

‘Lucius eh? None better at duelling except maybe Professor Flitwick, so that would be a good choice. Advanced spells? Severus could do that, but my guess is that she would always see him as her boyfriend rather than teacher, so Lucius is another good choice.’

‘But Dark magic …’

‘Who said it would be Dark magic? Severus would never allow that. He would kill Lucius stoney dead if he tried to teach his Hermione any of that. Anyway, I think if she was going to learn any Dark magic, then Severus would be the best choice there, so you don’t have to worry.’

‘You make it sound as if Lucius was safe, a reformed character,’ Harry argued, ‘he’s a Malfoy and you can’t trust them.’

Arthur raised an eyebrow. ‘Well that is a pretty sweeping statement Harry and you would not find yourself alone in that opinion. But it is not the opinion of Kingsley, Severus, myself and others within the Ministry.’ He sighed, ‘Harry, if we are not going to go through another war like the previous two, there has to be changes and one of those changes is to make those who you perceive as your enemies, your friends.’

He was now totally dumbfounded. The changes the Ministry was implementing were going to turn wizarding society on its head. But already, the Pure Blooded Lucius Malfoy had helped Hermione Granger, a Muggle born; he could have refused and allowed her to descend into some kind of madness through pain. But he didn’t. ‘Arthur, there’s more isn’t there?’

Arthur nodded and beamed at him. ‘Oh yes, Harry much more. Changes are coming whether the wizarding world wants them or not. Kingsley Shacklebolt is a visionary and we need that vision if we are to keep the wizarding world … and Muggles, safe in the future. Now, let’s get cleared up and let’s talk about getting you moved in to Hermione’s house.’
Chapter Summary

She moved even closer and was almost in his lap. She reached out and tucked a strand of his long, blonde hair behind his ear. ‘Tell me Lucius, have you ever … kissed a Muggle woman?’ He shook his head and swallowed, she noticed he was hardly daring to breathe. Their lips were close, almost touching. ‘Would you … like to?’ He nodded. She placed her finger on his lips.

Everything Has Changed

Hermione stood in the front drive of Malfoy Manor, she was apprehensive and her heart pounded. This was her first meeting with Lucius Malfoy on her own; Severus seemed to think that she could handle Lucius if it came to it, only she couldn’t for the life of her work out what ‘it’ could be.

Yesterday, she had gone to Grimmauld Place to see how Harry was doing, thinking she would then come for a spot of duelling. She had arrived to find Arthur with him and after a chat and a cup of tea she had stayed to help Harry move into her parent’s house. Arthur left to start the explanations to Molly and Ginny and they had gone to her house and spent the rest of the day cleaning up and moving his things in. They went to the supermarket to shop and once he had his supplies put away, they had a celebratory glass of wine, which led to another glass and soon they were laughing and reliving the memories of Hogwarts and the War. The floo chimed and to her surprise, Ginny stepped out. They were polite to each other, but she had left soon after, just to give them a bit of space. Then Severus had thought it a good idea if she wasn’t around the Ministry for a little while, just to let the whole Rita Skeeter story die down. So today, was her first duelling lesson with Lucius.

Taking a deep breath, she walked up the drive to the front door. The setting for the house was rural, all green countryside and tall trees; the house itself was very imposing, it screamed money but it also screamed wards and charms. Malfoy Manor was the most heavily warded place she had visited and as such, her body hummed with magic and she understood why apperating inside Malfoy Manor would be foolhardy. At the front door she couldn’t decide if she should simply open the door or if she should ring the bell. She opted for ringing the bell which would perhaps give Lucius time to remove any internal wards that may be in place.

The door swung open. ‘Come in Miss Granger,’ a disembodied voice called from within the house. She went in and the door slammed shut behind her. All very dramatic, she thought. Rupert came bounding up to her and nuzzled her hand, she scratched behind his ears and he followed her as she made her way deeper into the house. She passed the sitting room where Lucius had removed the Cutis. ‘I’m in the kitchen,’ the voice called.

She looked at Rupert. ‘Show me the way?’ He turned and led her through a doorway and into the great hall of Malfoy Manor. At one end was the cellar or dungeon, she couldn’t decide which, where
her friends had been kept prisoner. The chandelier that Dobby had released saving her life had been replaced. The room felt different now, but she still shivered at the memory. Rupert was sitting outside a door; she patted his head and went in. It was the kitchen and Lucius was at the stove cooking.

‘Ah, there you are. I’m trying a new recipe for later. Have you eaten?’

‘Only breakfast. I thought if we were going to practice anything that required me running very fast, I would be better with an empty stomach.’

‘Good thinking.’

‘Erm … what are you making?’

‘The recipe calls it Chilli con Carne, whatever that is. Narcissa is a very good cook, but as she and Draco are away and Harry Potter freed our house elf, well, I’m trying to fend for myself.’

She looked at the recipe and then at the concoction in the pan. ‘What meat are you using?’

‘Minced oxen, why?’

‘Says here, best minced beef.’

‘Didn’t have any beef at the butcher’s in Diagon Alley. Oxen was the nearest to beef. That or camel,’ he continued to stir the mix.

She looked at him, really looked at him with what she now called her inner sight. He was immaculately dressed on the outside, but on the inside, he was trembling and despondent. He also looked under nourished as if he hadn’t had a decent meal in ages. ‘How are your hands today?’ she asked.

‘All healed,’ he showed her his hands and all signs of blistering, burnt flesh had vanished. ‘And how is your arm?’ She pulled up her sleeve and showed him. The skin was normal and pink; the word had all but disappeared. ‘Ah, yes, healing very nicely.’

‘Severus told me what the ‘plus’ ingredient in the potion was. I’m not sure if I honestly believe him.’

He raised an eyebrow and smiled. ‘It is true and it is one of the best remedies for shock or trauma. The Firewhiskey gives you courage but also takes away some of the … taste.’ So saying he tasted his food and pulled a face.

‘You took away all of the pain,’ she said taking his spoon and tasting the chilli. ‘I would have liked some of the pain to remain, to remind me.’

‘Remind you of what?’

‘… Of what happened that day and to remind me that I could never be turned to the Dark Arts.’ He stood before her and said nothing. ‘This chilli is disgusting. Tell you what, if you don’t kill me today, I will make you a chilli that will knock your socks off. Deal?’

Lucius looked at her as if she had gone mad, ‘Deal,’ and he put the stove out.

‘Right, where do we do this inside or outside?’ she asked.

‘Most duelling takes place inside, unless you have been challenged, then it can be anywhere. But I think we shall start indoors and progress to outdoors and at some point when you are proficient, to
duelling while flying,’ he smiled, ‘we shall use the great hall today and as this real duelling, by your own request, anything goes.’

She followed him into the great hall, Rupert followed her. ‘You may want to make yourself scarce, Rupert,’ and the hound turned tail and fled.

Lucius was making great play of removing his long robe and patting down his pockets. ‘I think I may have left my wand … upstairs.’

She nodded and while he ran upstairs, she moved into the shadows of the hall, took out her wand and waited. She didn’t have long to wait before he reappeared, he had used a Muto! so she didn’t hear his approach but as he wasn’t expecting her be hiding, she saw him just as he re-entered the hall, she let fly without a spoken command. He was quick, lacerated the spell and countered immediately. She ducked and countered, but she had to get away from the shadows as he now had pinned her down and was using full force spells. He ducked her counter spell and she rolled herself into more open space and sent a Scorpens, five snakes rearing towards him, he countered easily.

‘I’m a Slytherin Miss Granger. You must do better than that.’

So commenced the game of cat and mouse that was wand duelling. It was not about standing and countering your opponents spell, though of course that could be construed as the early, formal training. No, real duelling was one of movement and surprise, keeping your opponent guessing as to where and what you were going to do next. Lucius was an expert and as the afternoon wore on, Hermione appreciated just how good he was.

She was enjoying herself as she darted away from him again. He sent a Draconis towards her which she countered with a Grypis. ‘And I’ve matched Draco many times, Mr Malfoy, like father …’ she didn’t get a chance to finish as he threw a pure power curse towards her, she dodged it with a small shout and it hit a rather nice ornate chair, smashing it into several pieces. ‘Git,’ she called.

Lucius laughed. She stood up and apperated to the other side of the room and sent a flash bolt as she appeared, but it hit the wall, Lucius was not in the spot she had last seen him, a crackle of the apperate made her duck and roll and not a moment too soon. He apperated behind her and sent an Expelliarmus! sending her wand flying. How had he done that? How had he guessed where she would appear?

‘Very nicely done, Miss Granger, but not good enough. You must always expect the unexpected when duelling.’ He was walking towards her, wand extended.

‘Oh, you mean like this?’ She appeared behind him and as he turned, as if he was expecting her to do just that thing, she sent her own Expelliarmus! and his wand went flying. Lucius stopped and looked at her. He smiled a very evil smile as he held out his hand and his wand returned to him. They were very close and he sent another power curse towards her, she deflected it with her hand. It stung, but it lacerated. She then legged it into the hallway and hid behind a large pillar, their duelling had already spilled over into other parts of the house. He was a heartbeat behind her. She had seen his face as she used her hand, he was shocked. She saw him just as she apperated back into the great hall to retrieve her wand. But it wasn’t there.

‘Looking for this?’ he drawled, holding up her wand.

‘Give it back, Malfoy,’ she hoped she sounded more courageous than she felt.

‘Oh, I don’t think so Miss Granger. I think will be far more entertaining to conduct the rest of this session without the use of your wand.’
'Don’t threaten me; just give it back, OK?’ She was rattled, so he had seen and understood she could work without a wand. Did he want to see how good she was without it? She had not even tested that herself. He stood ten feet away, holding up her wand, his own wand poised to strike. She sighed, ‘Pretty please Mr Malfoy, may I have my wand back?’ She threw her hair back with a flick of her hand and batted her eyes at him coquettishly. He looked confused for a split second, but it was enough. She lifted her hand and her wand flew to her as she apperated back to the hallway and darted into the alcove of the sitting room door. She tried it, it was locked, no, it was protected. OK, a good lesson to learn when you are duelling, it’s advantageous to have hiding places and to have escape routes blocked. Lucius appeared before her and they pointed their wands at each other, ‘Expelliarmus!’ Their spells met and imploded on each other. The backwash of having used the same spell hit them both at such close quarters. ‘Ow, oh shit,’ she cried, falling back onto the solid wooden door. Lucius was on the floor, knocked over by the force of the backwash.

The crackling of energy dispersed and she looked down at him, he looked up at her and started to laugh. He pointed to her and laughed harder.

‘What so funny?’

He could only point at her and laugh. He stood up and brushed himself down, still laughing.

‘Oh for goodness sake! What are you laughing at?’

He grabbed her hand and pulled her across the hallway to the bottom of the stairs and stood her in front of a large mirror. The backwash had acted in the same way as an electrical charge and her hair was standing up on end. She stared in horror. Reaching up to feel it, it was hard and crackling. Lucius was sitting on the stairs, still chuckling. She made a face at herself and began to laugh. She went and sat on the stairs with him, still laughing and trying to pat the wayward hair into place.

‘I do apologise, Miss Granger, but you have to admit, that is very wild hair.’ They sat together until they had laughed themselves out.

‘What did I do wrong?’ she asked at last.

‘Everything, but nothing that guidance and practice cannot put right.’

‘I enjoyed that, can we do it again?’

‘Indeed, I am instructed by Severus to teach and train you.’

They sat in silence as she patted her hair until it obeyed her.

‘Why are you reluctant to show how you work without your wand?’ he asked.

‘It doesn’t always work for me.’

‘Not a convincing answer, but if it is what you want me to believe …’

She sat in silence while she thought about his words. ‘Alright. I will answer truthfully on the condition that you answer my question truthfully.’

‘What question?’

‘How long ago did Narcissa leave you?’

He looked at her with panic stricken eyes. ‘Oh no, as I said, she and Draco are on holiday in
She shrugged. ‘OK. It doesn’t always work for me.’

She looked at him and suddenly felt sorry for him, she sighed. ‘Outwardly, you look well taken care of, clothes neat and clean, personal appearance good. But on the inside … on the inside you are weeping. You are desperately unhappy and you are terrified she is never coming back.

He stood up quickly without a word and ran upstairs. She blew air out of her lungs and followed him. He had left the door open and she stood on the threshold. ‘It is very obvious that you love her deeply …’

‘Miss Granger …’ he snapped at her.

‘Oh stop being such a pig-headed, arrogant tight arse. All you have to do is admit she left you and if you truly love her and want her back do something about it.’ He was sat on the edge of a large ornate bed, slumped forward, head in hands. ‘I’m going to collect what I need for a chilli, then I’ll come back to cook it. I’ll invite Severus as well. You organise some nice wine. See you later.’ She went downstairs and found Rupert waiting at the bottom. ‘Keep an eye on him and don’t let him do anything daft, OK?’ Rupert nudged her with his head and padded upstairs. As soon as she was outside, she went to Spinners End.

‘Moaner,’ she called as soon as she was through the door. The elf appeared, ‘is Master Severus home?’

‘Not yet Hermione Granger.’

‘I’m going to cook supper for Master Malfoy tonight, but first I’m going to have a bath.’

‘Would you like a cup of tea?’

‘That would be lovely, thank you.’ She kicked off her shoes and ran upstairs. Their bedroom was fast becoming an oasis of calm for her; the illusion of a tent was perfect in every way. She loved it and told Severus often that she did. He would simply smile. She shed her working clothes, the ones that according to Ron made her look like Severus and walked around in her underwear gathering the clothes she would wear later.

Moaner appeared with a tray set for two, ‘Master Severus has just come home,’ and she disappeared. The door, or rather, tent flap opened and Severus walked in. ‘Still alive, always a good sign and not wearing any clothes, a much better sign.’ He crossed to her and gathered her into his arms and kissed her.

She held him close, enjoying the press of his body against hers. ‘I was going to have a bath, care to join me?’

‘I don’t think so, I’m very tired and don’t …’

‘Big git,’ and she punched him. ‘I’m cooking supper for Lucius tonight as part of the duelling deal. You are invited of course; do you think Harry might want to come?’

‘What are you making?’ he was undressing and her eyes devoured him.

‘Chilli and rice, salad, cheese and grapes; it’s what we would have been eating tonight anyway. Lucius is providing the wine.’
He left the bedroom and she heard him in the bathroom as she poured tea for them both. ‘Bath’s ready,’ he called to her. She carried the cups into the bathroom placed them on the small table, took off her bra and panties and he helped her into the tub before climbing in himself. She sat between his legs and leaned back into him, it was an immediate reconnection for them both. His arm came around her and he kissed her hair. ‘How can I resist your chilli?’

‘I think I would do Lucius good to have some company. Did you see Harry today?’

He told her of his day. Of the long discussion he had with Harry about becoming an Unspeakable and how he thought Harry would be perfect for the role. He was used to being in the Muggle world and things like public transport held no fear for him. Then he told her of the time it took to smooth ruffled feathers. First, Belladonna Green, current head of the Auror Office, didn’t take kindly to what she perceived as direct poaching by the Department. Then Kingsley Shacklebolt needed his feathers smoothed because he was planning that Harry would become head of the Office of Aurors in a few years’ time and why hadn’t Severus consulted with him? He told her Harry would start his training tomorrow and if he did well, would be out in the field fairly quickly, his training as an Auror would stand him in good stead. He had also run into Ronald twice over the day and each time the young man had shot daggers at him. Arthur shook his hand again, ‘I think the Weasley’s are becoming unhinged.’ She laughed softly. ‘So,’ he said, ‘tell me about your day.’

She picked up her tea and sipped it as she told him about her training with Lucius. How he was very skilled and really kept her on her toes; that he was using real power, none of the holding back that happened at Hogwarts and she felt she was going to learn a lot from him. She told him how she had made every mistake in the book, but Lucius thought that with training, she would become competent. She put her cup down and allowed the hot water to soak away the cricks and twists of her muscles.

He lifted her arm, ‘It is healing beautifully,’ he said, ‘and he is very skilled. He’s an apothecary, did you know that?’

‘No, but why …’

‘… Does he practice Dark Arts? Because the Dark Arts give you great power and if power is something that you crave … well, you know the outcome.’

She finished her tea as she processed this new information. ‘Draco was good at potions, wasn’t he?’

‘Better than good,’ he replied, reaching his hand up and very lightly brushing her nipple.

She knocked his hand away. ‘You can have your wicked way with me later. But now, I have a meal to cook. Did you know Narcissa has left him?’

‘So that would explain it.’

‘What?’ She turned to face him, wrapping her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck.

‘His wanting to engage in conversation the other night, usually he would be asking guests to leave as soon as he could.’ She was nipping the side of his neck and ear as her hand explored below his waist. ‘I thought I was to have my wicked way with you later?’

‘You can. However, I didn’t say anything about me having my wicked way with you now.’ She caught his lips in a deep and satisfying kiss and the bath water was suddenly hot again.
She stood at the front door of Malfoy Manor holding two baskets of ingredients. She rang the bell and the door opened. The house was quiet, ‘Hello? It’s only me,’ she called. Rupert came bounding up to her from the direction of the great hall. The door to the sitting room was open so she peeked in, a cheerful fire burned in the grate. She made her way to the kitchen and Rupert followed. ‘Is he alright?’ she asked the hound.

‘He really is only a dog, Miss Granger,’ Lucius stood in the doorway, ‘you’ll not get any information out of him.’

‘Shame, as a Muggle born I do so like obtaining information from dogs.’

He smiled at her, ‘do you require any help?’

‘Well, you can open a bottle of wine and pour us a couple of goblets. Severus will be along later.’

The kitchen was how it had been left earlier in the day. She looked at the chaos Lucius has created and with a wave of her hand, it disappeared, leaving the counter tops clean and shining. She nodded in satisfaction.

‘Bravo! I knew you had it in you,’ and he handed her a large goblet of deep, red wine.

She sniffed and sipped. ‘Hmmm, very nice. Now, you can either make yourself scarce and go and have a chat with Rupert or, you can sit here and talk to me while I cook.’

He sat at the kitchen table; she emptied her baskets onto the counter top and sorted things out.

‘What’s on the menu?’ he asked.

‘Severus asked the same thing,’ she smiled, ‘Chilli con Carne, with best minced beef, not oxen; steamed rice, salad, cheese and grapes for dessert.’

‘No wonder he’s filling out.’

She laughed, ‘I dare you to say that to him!’ He toasted her and sipped his wine.

She set about preparing the meal. Rupert sat next to Lucius, watching her every move. She looked at the recipe book Lucius had been using and was surprised to see it was a Muggle cookbook and very well used. It seemed that Narcissa didn’t mind using Muggle recipes. She closed the book and started to chop the onions and garlic. She was using her mother’s tried and tested recipe for chilli.

‘Do you enjoy cooking, Miss Granger?’

She poured oil into a large saucepan, lit the stove and waited for it to heat before adding the onions and garlic. ‘Yes, mum taught me from when I was fairly young. I didn’t really take to it until she started calling it chemistry, then I got interested.’

They chatted while she cooked and without either of them realising it, they were discussing family and friends as well as cooking and wine. Lucius refilled her goblet as she set the chilli to simmer.

‘You were right earlier,’ he said, ‘she has left and I do want her back. It’s just …’

‘… A male pride thing,’ she finished. ‘When will men ever learn that women like to be pursued?’
How long has she been gone?'

‘About a year.’

She was washing the rice but stopped to stare at him in disbelief. ‘And you thought what? That she would come to her senses and come running back to you asking for forgiveness?’ His look said it all. ‘Bloody idiot! You are in the wrong, it is you who should be crawling on your hands and knees begging her for forgiveness.’

‘Really?’ he frowned and didn’t sound convinced.

She filled another saucepan with water and put it on to boil and then she went and sat with him. ‘Look, I know I’m a Mudblood,’ he winced, ‘but I am a woman and that gives me an advantage over you. I have a pretty good idea of how the female mind works and it doesn’t matter if its Witch or Muggle, it will be the same.’

‘This is fascinating; you make it sound very scientific.’

The water was boiling nicely, looking around for a tea-towel and not finding one, she produced one and wrapped the lid in it and placed it on the pan. She then removed the pan from the stove. ‘No, it’s anything but scientific and the answer is very simple.’ She picked up her goblet and sipped the wine which really was very good, and watched him. When he said nothing, she prepared a salad.

‘Are you going to tell me the answer or not?’ he demanded.

Taking a lump of chocolate from her supplies, she dropped it into the chilli and stirred to melt it; she tasted and adjusted the seasoning. ‘Not unless you tell me why she left.’

Lucius stared at her, his mouth set in a thin line. ‘You drive a very hard bargain, Miss Granger. But, very well.’

He went on to tell her that the problem started when Voldemort arrived back on the scene. It seemed like a golden opportunity to take back the power, to purge the wizarding world of half-bloods, blood traitors and of course Mud …Muggles. However, when it became clear that Voldemort wanted Draco to become a Death Eater, Narcissa had put her foot down. Draco was precious to them both and to watch him be corrupted by Voldemort and Bellatrix, well Narcissa wouldn’t take it. Draco did become a Death Eater of course, but his mother hated it. And naturally, Voldemort wasn’t going to share power with anyone or reward his most faithful followers, except by a sometimes painful death. At the Battle of Hogwarts, they had found Draco and walked away with him, but she had not forgiven him. They had tried to patch things up of course, but in the end she had left with Draco. They were in France, where he thought Draco may be following the family trade of an apothecary.

Hermione listened to what he was saying and she heard the hurt and sadness in his voice. She leaned down and gave Rupert a scratch behind the ear.

‘So, what is this simple answer,’ he asked.

‘Go and get her.’

‘That’s it!’ he seemed appalled that the solution was not more complicated.

She nodded. ‘Of course you will have to make a peace offering, agree to all her terms and conditions and make her feel wanted, needed, desirable and utterly indispensable.’

‘I knew there would be a catch,’ he said glumly.
’It’s your choice, Lucius. A life empty of family or a life fulfilled with those you love and who mean most to you.’ She checked the chilli again, adjusted the seasoning and washed the grapes, then placed the cheese on a large plate.

’I suppose when you put it like that …’

’If you’re serious about wanting Narcissa back, I’ll help you.’

’Why would you help me? You know I despise all Muggles.’

She laughed, ’No you don’t. Anyway, I think you’ve changed, wars can do that you know and then, we tend to look at things differently.’ She sat down again and accepted a refill. ’This is excellent wine.’

’And you Miss Granger are quite … excellent as well.’

She eyed him over the rim of her goblet. He was observing her, no! he was giving her the once over, breasts, waist, lower, face. He smiled at her. She cleared her throat, ’in what way am I excellent Lucius?’ she used her sultry, come hither voice and moved ever so slightly closer to him.

’Um … you are … very attractive …’

She moved even closer and was almost in his lap. She reached out and tucked a strand of his long, blonde hair behind his ear. ’Tell me Lucius, have you ever … kissed a Muggle woman?’ He shook his head and swallowed, she noticed he was hardly daring to breathe. Their lips were close, almost touching. ’Would you … like to?’ He nodded. She placed her finger on his lips. ’Well then, the next time I come across a Muggle woman who wants to make out with a wizard, I shall pass your name on.’ She went and checked on the chilli. ’Narcissa really needs to be back here and have rampant sex with you. You almost broke that Pure Blood code of yours.’

’That was unkind,’ he protested.

’No. That was a point made. Now, what does Narcissa like, clothes, jewellery, shoes?’

’Jewellery,’ he replied.

’Excellent. I shall help you choose something spectacular and then we shall plan the return of Narcissa Malfoy into the arms of loving, but sex starved husband. And bring Draco home of course.’

’That would be very agreeable.’

’Agreeable? Are you raving mad? It would be romantic, fantastic, memorable, remarkable and very, very satisfying. Although you will want to send Draco out for the satisfying bits,’ and she laughed.

’How does Severus manage you?’ he asked her.

’I manage her by allowing her to do whatever she desires. That gives me complete control over her. How are you today, Lucius?’ Severus kissed her cheek. ’I’ve bought another guest.’

Harry came slowly into the kitchen. ’Harry!’ she shouted and rushed to give him a hug.

’Severus persuaded me, although I’m still not sure if I would be welcome. How are you Mr Malfoy?’ and he held out his hand.

There was complete silence in the kitchen as Lucius stood up and seemed about to reach into his robe for his wand, or run, Hermione couldn’t decide which. Instead, he held out his hand.
‘I am well Mr Potter, thank you.’

She gave Severus a squeeze. ‘Right boys, set the table and I shall make final preparations.’

Lucius found the crockery and cutlery, Harry and Severus set the table while she searched for, and found, serving dishes. Rupert left the room as soon the food was on the table.

‘Right,’ she called in a loud voice, ‘Draco? If you would care to join us you are more than welcome.’ Three men turned to stare at her, she shrugged, ‘Lucius, more wine if you please and let’s eat.’

They helped themselves and the conversation went from stilted between Harry and Lucius, to free flowing and wide reaching.

‘This chilli is sensational Miss Granger. Do I detect chocolate?’

‘Yes, it gives it a certain je ne sais quoi, but I don’t know what,’ which made everyone laugh, including Draco as he walked into the kitchen. ‘So you decided to join us after all.’

‘It does smell delicious, I couldn’t resist,’ Draco replied as Lucius simply stared at his son.

‘But … how long …?’

‘I’ve been coming for some months now, just to keep an eye on you,’ Draco said, ‘hello Professor, good to know you are not dead. Hello Potter, still alive I see. Granger’s known all along and before you ask, no, mother doesn’t know I come here.’

A place was set for him and a wine glass filled and he helped himself to food.

‘Got a licence, Draco?’ she asked.

‘Not yet, I’ve not been doing it for that long.’

Lucius poured more wine for everyone, ‘Slytherin,’ three said, ‘Gryffindor,’ two said and five goblets toasted each other.

During the meal, Harry brought Lucius and Draco up to date with his life. Then Draco told everyone that he and his mother were living in Carcassonne, he had opened an apothecary shop and she was having some small success at interior designing and decorating.

‘She misses you like mad father and Granger is right, you really have to make up with her and get her home, then I can come home and bring Astoria with me.’

Four pairs of eyes turned to him. ‘Astoria?’ Lucius asked.

‘Astoria Greengrass, my fiancé,’ Draco looked smug. ‘Lovely chilli, Granger,’ he told her with a smile.

‘You have a … fiancé?’ Lucius said and Draco nodded, ‘a fiancé!’ Lucius repeated. He beamed and clapped his son on the back. A large bottle of Unicorn Champagne appeared on the table followed by five Champagne flutes. ‘It’s not every day that we get to celebrate,’ Lucius poured the Champagne. ‘To my son, Draco. Congratulations, I am very, very happy for you. To Draco.’ The toast was made and Draco blushed to the roots of his blonde hair. ‘So, Greengrass? Pure Blood?’ and everyone including Draco groaned. Lucius simply laughed, ‘I’m afraid old habits are going to die hard.’
‘We want the wedding here at Malfoy Manor next year. So you really have to let Granger help you. If you don’t, mother will never consider coming back.’

‘Don’t worry Draco,’ Hermione said, ‘I have a plan that will have your mum and dad reunited before long.’

‘Just as long as you tell me so I can make myself scarce for the satisfying reunion,’ Draco smiled at his father and raised his eyebrows. Now it was Malfoy senior who blushed.

The rest of the meal was spent exchanging news and discussions on the future of the wizarding world. Severus said that while he had had no direct death threats since his appointment was made public, there was information filtering through about a group of Death Eaters out there who were less than happy with his change of allegiance.

‘And what about you and Ginny? Draco asked Harry.

‘Not sure how to answer that. She is now playing professionally with the Holyhead Harpies, so there is a lot of practise and travelling for exhibition matches. I’ve moved out of the Burrow, which I think will help.’

‘Pretty good answer,’ Draco said, keeping a perfectly straight face.

‘And how did you know it was me?’ he asked Hermione.

‘Oh that was easy. Rupert has got hound’s eyes and you have Draco Malfoy’s eyes. Did that make sense? I think I may be ever so slightly drunk,’ and she beamed at everyone.

‘Ron went mad when it was revealed that Severus was still alive,’ Harry said, ‘Arthur didn’t though. When he came to see me at Grimmauld Place he told me he has known all along, he also knows about you and Hermione.’

‘That wouldn’t surprise me at all,’ Lucius said, ‘still waters run deep as the saying goes and Arthur is very deep water.’

‘That could explains why he keeps shaking my hand. He’s a good man and an excellent wizard,’ Severus raised his glass in toast to the absent Arthur Weasley.

‘Right, who wants tea or coffee?’ Hermione asked as she started to clear the table.

‘Espresso for me,’ Severus said.

Draco and Lucius exchanged looks. ‘I drink coffee in France,’ Draco said as he watched Hermione pull an espresso machine out of her beaded bag. ‘So I’ll have an espresso as well.’

Harry wanted a cappuccino, Lucius remained silent. She had a jar of ground Milanese coffee and found a jug to steam Harry’s milk, the only thing she didn’t have were espresso cups.

‘Severus? Can you produce the espresso cups, I’m afraid if I try, I will produce an express train.’ So taking three tea cups, he changed them into three espresso cups as she filled the machine with water and the filter with coffee. With a wave of her hand, she heated the water until it was steaming and soon the aroma of fresh brewed coffee filled the kitchen. She gave Severus and Draco their espresso’s and found a tea cup large enough for Harry’s cappuccino and she steamed the milk to thick foam. After a bit of rummaging in her bag, she found a small shaker of chocolate and sprinkled the top. She turned to Lucius who pointed to Harry’s cappuccino. So she made Lucius his first cappuccino and an espresso for herself.
‘Why can’t I do that?’ Harry complained.

‘You buy the machine first, then …’

‘No, wandless magic.’

‘I can’t do it either Harry,’ Draco said, ‘Father can do it effortlessly, but mother and I have to use wands.’

Hermione shrugged. ‘I always thought I could, even at Hogwarts, but I never tried it.’

‘Good job too,’ Severus added, ‘it would have caused you all kinds of problems.’

Conversation then turned to magic and its use. Techniques and spells were discussed and demonstrated. Hermione nudged her chair closer to Severus and took his hand. She felt comfortable sitting here with her best friend and three former Death Eaters. She observed Lucius who was downing his cappuccino with real relish. He was a very interesting man once you got passed his vain and arrogant exterior. Draco seemed to have changed beyond all recognition; calmer, thoughtful and … very mature. It seemed to her that everyone was growing up.

Lucius finished his cappuccino and asked for another. ‘Could I produce one?’ He asked Hermione.

‘You could, but …’ she didn’t finish as Lucius used a Producio! and before him now sat a cappuccino. It looked like the real thing and they all watched him take a sip.

‘That is … disgusting!’ And he sent the offending coffee away.

Hermione was making him a fresh cup, ‘It’s all about fresh ingredients,’ she said placing the cup in front of him. ‘Of course, you are aware of the effects of caffeine?’

He looked at her alarmed, ‘It contains caffeine?’ he took a sip, ‘yes it does. Excellent!’

It was late by the time they came to leave. ‘I have left you enough chilli and rice for tomorrow, Lucius. There’s also some cheese left.’ She cleaned the espresso machine and placed it back in her bag catching Lucius’s covetous look as she did so. ‘Get your own,’ she told him, then laughed when he looked sad. ‘I shall meet you Diagon Alley tomorrow, we shall buy something stunning and expensive for Narcissa, then you can buy me lunch.’

‘What time?’ he asked.

‘Lunchtime,’ she replied then giggled, which started Harry off.

‘Midday or one o’clock?’ Lucius tried to get some sense out of her, but she and Harry were hanging on to each other in fits of giggles.

Severus rolled his eyes. ‘Say what you like about Gryffindors, but one thing is true. They can’t hold their liquor. I will take these two drunks home, Lucius.’ He held out his hand and Lucius shook it. ‘Draco, I am very happy for you and look forward to meeting Miss Greengrass,’ and he shook Draco’s hand.

Harry and Hermione pulled themselves together. She gave Lucius a hug, ‘I will see you tomorrow for shopping and lunch, somewhere very expensive. I’ll send Moaner in the morning for a time,’ she then completely surprised everyone by kissing him the French style on each cheek.

Draco held out his hand to her. ‘Good to see you again, Granger,’ and he smiled as she pulled him
into a hug.

‘Likewise Malfoy and do get a license, congrats on the engagement.’

‘Draco,’ Harry held out his hand, ‘congratulations and it is somehow … good to see you again.’

Draco shook the offered hand. ‘Thank you Harry, perhaps we could get together …’

‘Yeah, that would be great,’ Harry said and then went to Lucius, ‘thank you for a very nice evening Mr Malfoy. I have enjoyed myself,’ he held out his hand. Lucius hesitated for a split second and then shook it.

‘Thank you Harry, it could not have been easy for you coming here. You are welcome to come back any time,’ and he smiled at Harry for the first time since meeting him all those years ago.

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She was waiting outside Paragon and Carat (Jewellers of Renown, Est. 1597) for Lucius. She only had a mild hangover that morning and a few drops of Severus’s hangover potion was all it took to get her back to her usual self. Severus had made Harry use the floo system from Spinners End as he was convinced that the young man would end up on the other side of the world. She spotted Lucius walking down the street with a jaunty air, nodding to those he knew and he smiled broadly when he saw her.

He took her hand and kissed it. ‘How are you, Miss Granger?’

‘Very well, Lucius, thank you. Now, let’s get the important business done first, then a spot of lunch at Le Maison du Chat Noir, I think.’

He feigned horror, ‘I was thinking more of a sandwich at the Leaky Cauldron.’

She gave him a friendly punch on the arm. ‘Not a chance.’

He shrugged as if in defeat and opened the door for her. They entered the hallowed domain of the Jewellers of Renown. The first thing she noticed was that nothing was priced, she gulped and hoped Lucius wouldn’t hex her for suggesting buying Narcissa’s peace offering here. But Lucius seemed unconcerned as he was already looking in various cabinets and display cases; an assistant sidled up to him and offered his help. The assistant opened a case and Lucius took out a piece and held it up for her to see. It looked like an emerald choker in a gold setting. She shook her head.

‘Looks tacky. What does she prefer, rings, bracelets, necklaces or something else?’

‘Bracelets and necklaces really, rings she has by the dozen.’

‘Good. Now, her favourite colour?’

Lucius thought for a moment. ‘Red and green and before you ask she likes all the expensive metals, gold, platinum and white gold.’ Lucius waved the assistant and the emerald choker away. The assistant seemed upset that Mr Malfoy was no longer interested in the trinket.

‘We would like to see what you have in rubies and real emeralds, bracelets and necklaces please,’
The assistant scuttled away and spoke to a very distinguished looking man. This man nodded and approached them. ‘I am the manager; I understand you wish to see our more … precious items?’ Hermione nodded. ‘Please Mr Malfoy … Miss … follow me.’ He had said Miss as though Hermione was Lucius’s young amore. Lucius looked at her and she giggled. They were led into a large room at the back of the shop with counters, display cases and cabinets containing some of the most beautiful jewellery Hermione had ever seen. Everything was protected by multi-layered wards. ‘Please feel free to browse and if there is anything you would like a closer inspection of, just ask,’ and he stepped back allowing them full access to the jewellery.

They started at opposite ends of the room, every now and then Lucius would ask her opinion of a piece he liked, she quickly realised that his taste ran from tacky to gaudy. Then she saw it. Sitting in a display case at the back of the room was an emerald and diamond cuff. She took a closer look, it was elegant, sophisticated and was surely expensive. It was perfect. When she pointed it out to Lucius he wasn’t so sure and insisted on showing her a ruby necklace with filigree gold embellishments.

‘No,’ she said firmly, ‘it looks like something a courtesan would wear, but this … can we look at this please?’ she asked the manager. He came over, waved his wand to remove the wards, lifted the lid and removed the cuff which he handed to Hermione. Close up it was even more beautiful; twenty four perfect lozenge cut emeralds with twenty four equally perfect lozenge cut diamonds.

‘What is the mount?’ she asked.

‘Platinum and white gold,’ the manager replied.

She then asked him the weight of the gems and he told her while she made great play of examining the cuff.

‘Hmm. Can we look at this in daylight please?’

‘Daylight?’ he yelped, obviously shocked. ‘I’m afraid that is quite out of the question Miss, we cannot allow a piece of this nature out of the shop.’

‘Oh, why is that? Not Leprechaun gold and Fairy stones are they?’ she tilted her head slightly in accusation.

‘Certainly not Miss …’

‘Then come with Mr Malfoy and myself into the daylight. You have my permission to hex Mr Malfoy should he decide to run away with it. Or … we can always look elsewhere …’

The manager saw his sale slipping away. ‘Very well, follow me,’ and although he was not happy, he led them to the front door of the shop; he opened it and stepped outside with them.

She took the cuff and held it up to the daylight, the colour and tone of the emeralds was superb and the diamonds were flawless. ‘What is its provenance?’ she asked as they went back inside.

‘Spanish, late eighteenth century, I’m afraid I cannot divulge the name of the family,’ and he gave a slight bow of apology.

‘Wizard or Muggle?’ she demanded.

It was at this point the manager understood that he was not going to get away with anything with this
particular customer. ‘Muggle.’ She looked at him sternly. ‘Muggle, definitely Muggle, there are no charms, enchantments or hexes on the piece.’

She ran her hand over the cuff and indeed, could not feel one scrap of magic contained within it. ‘Good, now what’s your best price?’

‘There is only one price for a piece of this quality Miss, and that is the full price.’

She smiled and shook her head. ‘No. This piece was obviously obtained from a Muggle family. It could have been obtained under spell or even a curse. So, sir, what is the best price for this cuff?’

The manager was almost hopping from one foot to the other. ‘Ten thousand Galleons,’ he blurted out.

She gave him a withering look and put the cuff back in its case. ‘Come along Lucius; let’s not play these games anymore.’

‘But … but …’ Lucius tried to protest as she led him towards the door.

‘Six thousand, that’s as low as I can go,’ the manager called to them while wiping his forehead with a handkerchief.

She turned back to him, ‘It’s Spanish you say?’ The manager nodded. ‘Very well, throw in the Jet and Peridot Mantilla comb and we have a deal at six thousand Galleons.’ She walked back to the display case, picked up the cuff and gave it to Lucius. The manager was muttering to himself about difficult customers, but he lifted the lid on an adjacent case and removed a beautiful Mantilla comb and handed it to her. Again, she held her hand over it and found nothing. ‘Box them up please, good boxes mind and there’s no need to wrap them.’

The manager did as he was told, the cuff went into a box with green silk lining and the Mantilla had black silk lining. ‘That will be six thousand Galleons, Mr Malfoy, your wand please.’

Lucius placed his wand in the recognition box and the transaction was complete. With both pieces in a lovely Paragon and Carat carrier, they left the shop. Once outside, Lucius asked if he could see his purchases again. She held the carrier open for him and he removed the larger box and opened it, smiling broadly.

‘Put it on; let’s see what it looks like.’ She held out her wrist and he snapped it in place. She moved it back and forth as it caught the light. ‘It is truly wonderful,’ and he leaned in and pecked her cheek, ‘she will adore it. But why the comb as well?’ he removed the cuff and placed it back in its box.

‘Phase two. The cuff is what you present to her when you are in France. The comb is for when she is home. C’mon, take me to lunch and we’ll discuss the plan.’ He placed his hand in the small of her back as he guided her through the crowd to the restaurant. They we shown to a table in the window and they ordered. It was an expensive establishment and although she had requested an expensive lunch, she ordered lightly and as cheaply as the menu would allow. Lucius added a bottle of crisp white wine.

‘How did you know what to do back there? I am very impressed.’

She blushed. ‘Thank you, my uncle is a jeweller, he lives in South Africa. I remember him coming to stay with us when I was growing up. There was nothing he didn’t know about gems and precious metals and as he talked about nothing else, I must have listened and it must have soaked in.’ Their food arrived, a rather good fish dish with vegetables. ‘That cuff is a beauty and well worth ten thousand Galleons. Narcissa will love it.’
‘So, tell me the plan while I get you drunk,’ he smiled so sweetly at her that she giggled.

She outlined the grand plan for the return of Narcissa Malfoy. First of all, Lucius will travel to France; he will then set about courting her again. Their first meeting will be short and sweet, mainly to gauge her response. Then, an invitation from him to her to a lovely meal in a great restaurant, there has to be plenty in the area and anyway, he can ask Draco for guidance. This meal will be low key, he will place a single red rose on her plate and order champagne. Then afterwards, a night stroll before escorting her back home. A swift peck on the cheek and he will leave. Their plates were cleared and dessert appeared, strawberries with chocolate sauce.

Lucius shook his head. ‘She will know what I am doing and will storm off.’

She rapped his hand with her spoon. ‘Hello! Of course she will know and she will enjoy the game.’

Lucius rubbed his hand and sighed. ‘When do I give her the cuff?’

‘Ah! That will be the first time she invites you stay overnight. So I suggest that you carry the box with you as you will not know when that night will happen. After … ‘ she rolled her hand and mouthed ‘sex’ … ‘you tell her how much you love her, how much you miss her, the house is empty, about her about coming home … all the things she wants to hear from you. You will be docile, not arrogant and after more …’ she rolled her hand again … ‘you present the cuff to her, ask her to think about what you have said, then you leave and come home.’

‘Come with me for support?’

She shook her head. ‘Oh no, you have to do this by yourself. Anyway, do you really think Severus would let me go gallivanting off to France with you?’

He saluted her with his glass, ‘I had to try. Now this comb …’

This, she explained, was phase two when Narcissa tells him that she is coming home. He will clean Malfoy Manor from top to bottom; it will sparkle, it will gleam and it will be filled with her favourite flowers. Their first night of reunion in Malfoy Manor, he will present her with the comb. He will place it in her hair and tell her how lovely she is. After more … he will talk about the future; changes to be made, both to him and Malfoy Manor, perhaps she would like to use her designing skills? Most importantly, he has to be gentle, loving and her complete slave for as long as it takes to re-establish their relationship.

Lucius called for the bill and paid. ‘But what happens is she refuses to come home and rejects me and everything?’ There was an edge of panic in his voice as he led her outside.

‘Then you have spent six thousand Galleons for nothing and you most definitely will not be fu… laid.’

He cocked his head and sighed, ‘it’s not going to be easy, is it?

‘If it was easy it would mean nothing. You can do this, Lucius. I have complete faith in you and when Narcissa is home and after the first flush of romance has passed, invite us to dinner.’

He took her hand and kissed it; she leaned up and kissed his cheek. He walked off in one direction; she walked up to the Leaky Cauldron.

It was several days later as she was walking through the Atrium of the Ministry; Severus came up to her and asked her to come see him in his office, when a shout went up.
‘Hey! Granger.’

Severus looked across the Atrium, ‘Ronald Weasley heading this way,’ he said quietly to her.

Ron came up to her, caught her arm and spun her around to face him. ‘How could you?’ he all but shouted.

She was genuinely surprised, ‘Ron, I have no idea …’

‘…How could you go with him? Leaving me for him. Bloody hell, Hermione, how could you?’ He was glaring at her, unaware that a crowd was gathering to eavesdrop on this exchange between two of the Golden Three. The wizarding world loves gossip, romance and a good spat as much as any Muggle.

She closed her eyes and counted to ten, slowly. ‘Ron, I have no idea what you are talking about …’

‘…Him! How could he be your boyfriend?’ Ron had worked himself up and was now shouting.

‘Who ?’ She looked around … ‘Mr Snape?’


She was now exasperated by his misguided anger. ‘Sorry Ron, but you’ve lost me.’

‘I saw you in Diagon Alley the other day, outside that swanky jewellers. He gave you a gift. Then he took you to that high class place, the Chat Noir or something. I walked passed and you were very pally with him. How could you?’

It was at this point that Severus excused himself and hurried back towards the lifts. Everyone else turned their eyes to Hermione. She folded her arms and glared back at Ron. ‘Now listen to me Ronald Bilious Weasley, I am not seeing Lucius Ma …’

‘You kissed him, I saw it!’ Ron played his ace card and now everyone nodded as if he had well and truly caught her out.

‘You … you spied one me? How dare you!’ She was now as angry as he was and their audience loved every second of the exchange. ‘I will date anyone I choose and it will be none of your bloody business. Understand?’ Before he could reply she turned on her heel and walked to the lifts, she was red with anger and shaking. She headed straight for Severus’s office, flew through the door, stood in the middle of the room and let out a ‘bloody Weasley!’ She calmed herself and turned to Severus, who was sitting at his desk, forehead resting on his blotter, he was shaking. She rushed to him, ‘Severus! Severus what’s the matter? Speak to me.’

He lifted his head and she realised he was shaking with laughter. He held his sides while he laughed and she waited patiently until his mirth subsided. At last he took a deep breath, and started over.

‘Severus what’s so funny?’

‘Ronald thinks you and Lucius …’ was as far as he got before laughter overcame him again … ‘it’s perfect …’

‘Pull yourself together and talk to me, I don’t see how it’s perfect.’

Finally, he stopped, although a laugh threatened to break through. ‘I thought the jig was up and he
was talking about you and me. When I realised he was referring to Lucius … sorry … it really is the
funniest thing …’ and he was off again.

‘But Lucius is going to reclaim the heart of his beloved Narcissa …’ she stopped … ‘and he has
dumped me. I am broken hearted. In steps my boss to console me, as he has always liked me though
he would never have said anything to anyone …’ she laughed now … ‘it’s brilliant!’

‘Only until Lucius gets wind of it and he will know soon enough with the number of people who
heard Ronald accuse you of being his girlfriend.’

‘It depends when he goes off to France. Anyway, changing the subject and if you have composed
yourself, you wanted to see me?’

He was serious again. ‘Yes. I need you to go undercover for a job. You will be partnered with
another Unspeakable, someone who can also operate faultlessly in the Muggle world. You will be
undercover for as long as it takes – I don’t want to ask you to do this, but you are the natural choice.’

‘Of course I will do it, isn’t this what I have trained for and what I have been working towards?’

He left his desk and went to her, gathered her into his arms and held her. Not really what the Head of
the Department should do with an operative, but he didn’t care.

‘It will be dangerous, but more often than not, tedious and boring. You will not be able to
communicate with me or anyone else, you have to submerge yourself in Muggle society and I have
no idea how long it will take and I hate having to send you out there and I hate that I won’t be with
you.’ He held her tightly.

‘Severus, I am an Unspeakable, this is what I do.’

‘I know, I know.’ He sighed, ‘you and your partner will be briefed tomorrow by Kingsley, myself
and Belladonna Green. Now, I suggest you go home and I will be back as early as I can.’ He kissed
her and pushed her towards the door.

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Take This Job and Shove It

Chapter Summary

‘You’re sacking me! I’m no longer an Unspeakable,’ she was shaking her head in disbelief. ‘I know my cover has been blown, but … but … to sack me?’ She was shaking, but not with anger. Anger would have had crocks and pans flying around the kitchen. ‘Bloody men! Get everything you want, but when a woman comes along and challenges the order of things or is better at something. What do you do? What you have always done, you sack her, get rid of her, make sure she knows her place. Well thanks for all the support Severus, and thanks for the welcome home.’

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Take This Job and Shove It

- Eight weeks. Eight bloody lonely, celibate weeks. She was going slowly mad, she knew it. If she wasn’t, why did the small room she now lived in seem like home? Five paces wide by seven paces long shower and toilet in one corner, the kitchen was in a cupboard. Thank Merlin the bed was a single, otherwise she would be able to cook and wash her hair while she was in bed. There was no room for a table except a tiny bedside one that held a clock, one chair, a chest of drawers and another cupboard as a wardrobe. That was it. Home for the last eight weeks.

Severus had been so right when he had told her that surveillance and apprehension undercover work was 90 per cent mundane and ten per cent excitement, which always came at the end. He knew of course, because he had undertaken exactly the same kind of work before he met her, when he was dead.

The night before she had her briefing with him, Minister Shacklebolt and Belladonna Green, he had given her several valuable tips and lots of good advice. She was also aware that he was concerned about sending her out on an assignment without him, but it was testament to how far their relationship had come and how much he trusted her abilities. He had come home early that night and they had spent their time together doing normal things; she cooked for them, they ate, they opened a bottle of wine, they talked and laughed. They had gone to bed and spent time being intimate together, touching, caressing and kissing; they had made love, aware that they didn’t know when they would be together again, whether it was going to be days, weeks or even months. So they enjoyed each other, delighting in their mutual desire and passion.

In the quiet aftermath of love making, he explained to her some of the rules of deep cover; there could be no contact with him or the Ministry; she would not meet her Partner Unspeakable until the first rendezvous, when they would begin the process of tracking, observing and eventually, apprehending their subject. She would live alone and they would take shifts in watching and
following the subject, a known Death Eater and Muggle killer. She and her Partner would meet once a week and always at a different location, never the same one twice. At this meeting they would exchange and compile knowledge about the subject until they knew her every daily and nightly movement in detail. Once they had this knowledge, and only then, would they join forces to move in and apprehend. She would never ask the name of her Partner; never ask for any details of her life. The only time they would speak to each other was at the weekly meeting. He told her that her Partner had been chosen because she also had the ability to disappear into the Muggle world, just as their subject was doing. She had listened intently to all he said and committed it to memory, and as the pale dawn broke, they had held each other and whispered their love.

Her briefing later in the day had been short and sweet. She was given the last known address of the subject and her name, Selena Stockman. She was given more Muggle money than she had seen to enable her to rent somewhere to live and for her living expenses going forward. Finally, she was given the first rendezvous. That was it, she was wished good hunting and with only her enchanted bag which contained her clothes and other personal items, she went up to street level and made her way to West London, were the subject was currently residing. She had found the tiny bedsit, laughingly called an apartment by the agent who had showed it to her. However, being on the Cromwell Road, it was central; it was also alarmingly expensive. She had paid cash for six months rental, which would include all her outgoings and moved in the same day.

At the first rendezvous she had met her Partner, a woman older than she; they had greeted each other and after ordering coffee, had got straight down to business. They formulated a surveillance rota; each one would take one whole day and night alternatively, giving the other a day’s rest. The changeover would be at night at a given time. They would follow Selena for a week and at the next meeting, they would exchange information and fine tune their surveillance. The only personal information Her Partner gave her was that she lived in a flat in the Shepards Bush area.

A pattern was established during that first week. Selena Stockman did not break cover at all; she kept herself as deeply submerged in the Muggle world as her trackers. There was not one hint of her apparating or contacting anyone in the wizarding world, she went to work (as a receptionist for a doctor’s surgery in Hammersmith), she had lunch (always alone), she went back to work, she left work (four nights a week, one late night, Thursday) sometimes she went shopping for food, mostly she went home and stayed in every night. At the weekend she went into Oxford Street to shop, bought more food and went home and did not go out at all for the rest of the weekend. Then it was back to Monday and she left for work. Once it became clear that Selena led a boring Muggle life, at the next meeting they adjusted their technique, and they would stalk her turn and turn about.

So here she was, eight weeks into the assignment and as Severus had said, most of it was boring. She had bought herself a cheap CD player and a couple of CD’s just to have something to listen to when she was in her bedsit. She was now lying on her bed with a cup of tea and listening to songs from Les Miserables, a show her parents had taken her to see for her thirteenth birthday. She missed him, missed his voice, his soft laugh, but most of all, she missed his touch. She had been taking care of business herself when her body needed release, but it was no substitute for Severus. She wondered how he was managing.

She pulled her thoughts away from him and back to today’s meeting with her Partner. Progress at last. While her partner was on watch at the end of last month, Selena had left her flat in the early hours of the morning. She made her way to a small strip of waste land between an office block and a terrace of houses and she had apparated. It was the first time in four weeks she had broken her Muggle habit. She reappeared just before dawn. They had spent the ensuing weeks watching each night and trying to work out the significance of the date she had chosen to apparate. It was her Partner who had suggested it could be to do with dates, perhaps Selena had apparated on a certain date. They had each worked separately to try and work out the significance of the date. Again, it was
her Partner who had worked out that it was connected to moon phases. Hermione had since bought a calendar that showed all the phases of the moon, and it confirmed that Selena’s disappearance last month was on the first night of the dark of the moon. There were four nights of no moon this month and earlier at their meeting, they had agreed that both of them would keep watch on each night. The net was closing in.

The first night of the dark of the moon, Selena was a no show. Disappointed, her Partner went back to her flat to get some sleep while she continued with the daytime stalking of Selena Stockman. Her Partner took over towards the end of the afternoon and she was able to go back and grab some sleep before meeting up for another night of watching and waiting. This was the second night of the dark of the moon and they were prepared for a long wait. Once again it was in the early hours of the morning that Selena made her appearance, she made for the wasteland again, they followed and arrived in time to see her disappear. It was now a waiting game, they had already agreed to stupefy her as she re-appeared, then they would call the Aurors and their job would be done.

The hours and minutes passed slowly, they didn’t talk to each other, they were Unspeakables and that was part of their job. They paced every now and then, just to keep their circulation and minds active. It was during one of these pacing’s that Selena reappeared and she was not alone. It was the crack of apparition that alerted them, Hermione was at one end of the small piece of wasteland, her Partner much closer to the subject. Without thinking Hermione sprinted towards the two felons. Selena saw her and sent the Aver Kadaava at her, she apperated before it connected, so the curse dissipated harmlessly. She appeared mere feet from Selena and raising her hand she stupefied her. She turned just in time to see Selena’s companion about to bite into the throat of her Partner, who was in wolf form without the full moon. She screamed nooooo! and ran towards the werewolf. Startled, the wolf missed the neck but bit into her Partner’s shoulder and it howled as it did so. A red mist came over her eyes and she lifted her hand. The wolf jumped at her as she sent the Crucio at it, it fell writhing and screaming in agony as it turned back into human form.

She ran to her Partner, beside herself with worry. She needed to her to St Mungo’s but she also needed to call the Aurors. Taking out her wand she sent the Communicado! Spell, the only spell she could not command wandless, then she checked her Partner. She was breathing rapidly and a faint foam was forming on her lips. She dashed over to the motionless Selena, grabbed her wand then checked her forearm; the Dark Mark was there and its eyes were open and looking at her. The werewolf man was still screaming in pain and rolling in the dirt. ‘C’mon, damn you,’ she called out loud. She went back to her Partner, removed her jacket and placed it around the woman’s shoulders; she talked to her, keeping her focused and conscious. Blood was oozing from the wound and time was running out.

Two Aurors appeared, she called them over. ‘Here is that one’s wand,’ she pointed to Selena, ‘my Partner had been bitten and I need to get her to St Mungo’s now.’

‘He’s under the Crucio,’ one said.

‘He’s a werewolf and had bitten my Partner,’ she explained, laying her Partner gently down and standing up. The Auror stared at her. She sighed and with her wand, removed the curse. The man slumped to the ground and lay still. She went over to him and kicked him in the ribs. ‘I should have used the killing curse,’ he snarled at her and tried to jump up. With a pure pain bolt she rendered him unconscious.

‘You can’t do that,’ the Auror protested.

Using a Leviosa, she lifted her Partner. ‘So sue me,’ she said as she left for St Mungo’s.
She was sitting outside the Dai Llewellyn ward with her head in her hands. Her Partner was inside being treated for a werewolf bite. She heard the doors at the end of the corridor open and the sound of many feet approaching, she looked up. Striding towards her was Severus, his black robes billowing behind him. Her heart skipped a beat as she stood to greet him. But as he got closer she saw his face, it was stern with an expression that would curdle milk. There were four others with him who she recognised as Magical Law Enforcement officers.

He stopped before her. ‘Miss Granger, these officers are here to arrest you for the use of the Crucius Curse; use of wandless magic in a Muggle area; for leaving the scene of an apprehension without following the proper reporting procedures and lastly, for inappropriate use of an energy spell as a form of torture. You will go with these officers to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to appear before the Wizengamot to answer all charges.’ He stepped aside and two of the four stepped forward.

‘But … she had been bitten … I had …’

But he had already turned away and was going onto the ward. She stared at the Law Enforcement Officers and was strangely comforted by the fact that the Ministry thought her dangerous enough to warrant four officers to arrest her.

‘Your wand, Miss Granger.’ She took her wand from her pocket and handed it over; it was placed in a lined wand safe. ‘Take my arm,’ he said.

‘And if I refuse?’

‘We have orders to bring you in and use whatever means necessary.’

She sighed, took his arm and as soon as they were in the Atrium she was led to a secure lift and taken to the second floor, but not before there was a flash from a camera. On the second floor she was placed in a small room.

‘No need to try anything,’ one of the officers said, ‘it’s completely secure.’ They left her alone.

There was a table with a chair either side; one of the chairs had shackles on the arms and front legs. She slid down the wall and onto the floor, wrapped her arms around her body. She wanted to weep, this was all so stupid, apart from the Crucius she had done nothing wrong, her Partner was attacked and bitten by a werewolf which could justify the use of the Crucius. What was she supposed to do? ‘Excuse me Mr Werewolf sir, but could you please step away from the human and surrender?’ No, the Crucius had changed him back into human form and he was in pain, so freaking what? He could be one of Fenrir Greyback’s pack, after all he was in wolf form without there being a full moon and that made him very, very dangerous. As for the other charges, they were just plain stupid.

The door opened and Belladonna Green, Head of Auror Office walked in, Hermione didn’t stand.

‘Come and sit at the table Miss Granger.’

‘No thanks. I’m comfortable here.’

Belladonna frowned at her. ‘Please cooperate Miss Granger, let’s get this sorted out quickly,’ and she gestured to the chair with shackles.
‘I’m not sitting in that thing like a condemned Death Eater or mad common criminal. Talk to me here or not at all,’ she lowered her head onto her chest.

‘You are being uncooperative Miss Granger; a note will go on your file and that could go against you at your trial.’

‘Do I look like I care?’ she shot back.

Belladonna Green picked up her files and left without a word.

Hermione rolled onto the floor and closed her eyes. She wanted Severus. Why wasn’t he here with her? Why wasn’t he banging on the door demanding her release? And she needed to pee. She fell into a fitful sleep, her dreams filled with images of Azkaban, chains and wild seas. The door opening again brought her out of her slumber. Her eyes were scratchy and swollen, she ached from lying on the floor, she was cold and she really, really needed a pee now. She sat up to find Minister Shacklebolt sitting on the edge of the table.

‘Hello Hermione,’ he said.

‘Hello Minister, how are you?’

He gave a little laugh. ‘More to the point, how are you?’

She stood up and wiggled to get the kinks out of her muscles. ‘I need a pee and a cup of tea would be nice.’

He nodded and the door opened. ‘It’s opposite,’ he said.

She walked slowly to the Ladies across the hall. After, as she washed her hands, she caught sight of herself in the mirror, yet again, she looked terrible. Back in the room, Minister Shacklebolt had organised a cup of tea for her, but she still wouldn’t sit on either chair, she also checked the tea for any enchantments and as there weren’t any, she drank it gratefully. ‘How is my Partner?’ she asked.

‘Infected, but the Healers say they can minimise the effects as she received treatment quickly. Miss Green is not happy with you.’

‘I’m not happy with Miss Green, so that makes us quits,’ she shrugged. ‘How is Mr Snape taking my arrest and detention?’

‘Mr Snape is concerned. Severus however, is beside himself.’

‘Is this retaliation for the Department recruiting Harry?’

‘No. You used the Cruciatuas.’

‘In self-defence, he attacked my Partner then he attacked me. Professor Lupin taught us that the Cruciatuas can be useful in changing the wolf back to the man and then you can deal with the man.’

‘However, you only removed the curse when the Auror reminded you. Then you kicked the man and used an energy spell to knock him out,’ Minister Shacklebolt was being reasonable.

But she had had enough, she took a step towards the Minister for Magic, he did not move. ‘I knocked him out to stop him changing back to wolf. Again, Professor Lupin explained that if the wolf starts to take over, then a Stupefy or any other Totalis spell will not work on the animal, it has to be rendered unconscious to make it harmless.’
‘All very plausible explanations. I hope the Wizengamot believes them.’

‘When?’

‘Now. Come along.’

She blew the air from her lungs and had no choice but to follow him. They took another secure lift down to level nine, then the stairs down to the Court. She was confronted by tier upon tier of the Wizengamot as Minister Shacklebolt took his place in the Warlock’s Chair.

The Scribe to the Court stood. ‘The prisoner will state her name for the Court.’

‘Hermione Jean Granger and I am not a prisoner. But I will sit, better than a cold floor or being shackled to an interrogation chair.’ She smiled widely at the Wizengamot. While the charges were read out by the Scribe she took the opportunity to look around. She was surprised to see Minerva with Harry and Arthur. Lucius, Draco and Narcissa were there as well. Severus sat alone.

‘Miss Granger, are you paying attention? I asked you how you plead.’ The Scribe was getting impatient.

‘What are the choices?’

‘Guilty, not guilty or no case to answer.’

‘Yeah, that one.’

‘Which one?’ the exasperated Scribe asked.

‘No case to answer. Because there is no case, merely someone with a grudge.’

The Scribe coughed, obviously clearing his throat. ‘Let it be entered that the prisoner …’

‘… I am not a prisoner.’

‘…enters a plea of no case to answer,’ he sat down with a relieved sigh.

There was a muttering amongst the Wizengamot. ‘Miss Granger,’ Minister Shacklebolt said, ‘you must take these proceedings seriously as these are all serious charges.’

She stared straight at him, defiance in her eyes. ‘I take seriously those things that are serious. I take my job seriously. I take being made an example of seriously and I also take very seriously the fact that once again the Ministry is being drawn into a game of divide and conquer. I thought you had stamped that out, Minister.’

There was uproar on the Wizengamot benches. She took the opportunity to stand. ‘I want to see my accusers,’ she said, ‘or is the long hand of Voldemort reaching out from beyond whatever hell hole he is in?’

Now it was near riot, Minister Shacklebolt banged his gavel. ‘Miss Granger …’

But she had the bit between her teeth and wasn’t going to stop. She approached the Minister and his High Bench. ‘This has all the hallmarks of trumped up charges, the same thing that happened to Harry Potter after he was attacked by the Dementors and to Professor Dumbledore to get him away from Hogwarts. Now, unless I see my accusers face to face, and unless you can prove I was not doing my job, that I was not apprehending a known Death Eater and Muggle murderer, that I had not been working undercover for the Department, on your orders Minister Shacklebolt; if you prove that
I did not save the life of my Partner after she had been bitten by a werewolf, unless you can prove all of these things now, this very minute, well, I’m going home.’ She stood with her arms akimbo glaring at the Wizengamot. She turned to go back to her seat, but decided against it, she faced them again. ‘Oh, and by bringing this false accusation against me, arresting me, parading me through the Atrium where the Daily Prophet was waiting to take my photo, you have rendered me useless as an Unspeakable. Of course, that may have been someone’s plan all along.’

This time she did return to her seat and sat down, much to the relief of the Wizengamot.

‘And another thing …’ she started to say.

‘Miss Granger, it is quite clear that you are not intimidated either by me or the Wizengamot, but can you please shut up while we deliberate?’ Minister Shacklebolt glared at her before turning to confer with the rest of the Bench.

She turned to see Harry smiling broadly and Arthur gave her the thumbs up. The Malfoys were nodding at her warmly and Minerva winked. Only Severus was stony faced.

Minister Shacklebolt turned back to her. ‘Please stand Miss Granger,’ she stood. ‘It is the finding of this session of the Wizengamot that in the case of Hermione Jean Granger, there is no case to answer. However,’ he paused for dramatic effect, ‘any future use of the Forbidden Curses in whatsoever circumstances will lead to your immediate incarceration in Azkaban …’

‘… What? Even if my life is threatened? Or the lives of any children I may have or any family or friends? C’mon, that’s a pretty stupid ruling,’ she almost laughed but thought better of it. Again there was a flurry of intense discussion among the Wizengamot. It was many minutes before Minister Shacklebolt turned to her and cleared his throat.

‘It is the decision of this session of the Wizengamot that any future use of any of the Forbidden Curses by Hermione Jean Granger, unless used in a life or death situation, or if any children she may (someone at the back mumbled ‘pity the poor chump who ends up with her’) have in the future, or any family members are threatened with certain death, if she uses said Curses without good cause or reason, may result in her detention in Azkaban.’ There were several murmurs of ‘good ruling’ and many sighs of relief. ‘Do you have anything else you wish to brow beat this session with, Miss Granger?’

The Wizengamot leaned forward, each one wishing her to remain silent. ‘Yes,’ she said and a groan went up from the Wizengamot. ‘Can I have my wand back please? And can I go home now?’

Minister Shacklebolt looked down upon her. ‘Your wand will be made available to you from the Head of the Department of Mysteries … and yes.’

The Scribe jumped up. ‘This session of the Wizengamot is now adjourned,’ he called before anyone else could say anything. The entire session sat back, relieved that one of the most difficult cases they had ever heard was over.

She stood up as Harry came running over and pulled her into a hug.

‘What are you doing here?’ she asked as everyone gather around.

‘Character witnesses,’ Harry said, ‘not that you needed us, you were magnificent, ‘Mione.’

Arthur, the Malfoys and Minerva all came across to hug and kiss her.

‘Miss Granger …’ Severus’s voice carried across the chamber. ‘You will come to my office
immediately,’ and with that he turned and stalked out of the chamber.

‘Oh, he seems upset,’ she said in a small voice. ‘I had better go.’ She turned to Lucius and Narcissa, ‘I see you were successful Lucius. I do hope we will meet properly, Mrs Malfoy, Lucius talked about you so much.’ She turned to leave with a small wave to everyone. She climbed the stairs to level nine, not feeling so confident now. Something was up and Severus was angry, but about what? What has she done wrong? She stood outside his door and the urge to flee was strong, but she took a deep breath and pushed the door open. He was standing, waiting for her.

‘Hello,’ she said. He remained silent but was shaking and this time it was not with laughter. ‘Am I in trouble?’ she asked, ‘because I don’t think I can handle that right now. Tomorrow maybe … but not now.’ She tried to smile but her lips wouldn’t move.

‘What do you think you are doing to this Department and to me?’ he bellowed.

It was not what she expected, not from him, not now, not after everything that had happened in the last hours. ‘Do what?’ she demanded, ‘do my job? Not get killed? Help my Partner? Not use the bloody Cruciatus? You have to be more specific Mr Snape.’ She felt the tears welling up.

‘Hermione …’

‘Don’t you bloody well Hermione me, not after eight bloody weeks, not after that bloody fiasco.’ She was angry now, after everything that had happened, he was about to tell her off like a naughty little girl. ‘They are still out there,’ she shouted at him, ‘still trying to spread their evil. It is still here, in this precious Ministry that is supposed to be reforming. And if this is all the bloody thanks I get for doing my job and getting a bloody result, YOU CAN STICK THE BLOODY JOB WHERE THE SUN DOESN’T SHINE.’

She turned on her heel and walked out, through the barrier and into the lift. How dare he treat her like this? Out in the Atrium she pushed passed the crowds and went straight to the ‘out’ floo, then changed her mind. Instead she went and rode the telephone box up to street level, once on the street, she apperated to her little bedsit. Exhaustion flooded her body, fatigue and emotion got the better of her. She stripped off her clothes, stepped into the tiny shower and let the hot water wash away her tears. She dried herself, put on her comfy top and soft leggings, made a cup of tea and climbed into her small bed. The tea made her feel better; she then snuggled down and cried herself to sleep.

The clock on the tiny bedside table said ten past six; she had slept for eight hours. As she stretched, it all came back to her. Would Severus know where she was? She had rented this place herself, but would he have somehow found her? The thought of him filling the tiny space with his anger frightened her. A very angry Severus Snape would stop even a Norwegian Ridgeback in its tracks, right before it fried him to a crisp of course. The image made her smile. Hunger got her out of bed; the kitchen revealed cheese, bread and two eggs, but she needed more sustenance. She dressed and taking her bag and keys, she went to the local curry house on the corner. She was greeted like a long lost friend although it had only been four days since her last visit. She ordered Lamb Rogan Josh, rice and a Peshwari naan. She sat and nibbled the complimentary poppadoms as she waited. Outside the restaurant a light rain was falling so she ran the fifty yards back to her room. Once inside, she dished herself up half of the Rogan and rice, if Severus didn’t show up she could finish the rest. There was a single bottle of beer in the small fridge, she opened it and ate her feast. He still hadn’t shown up by the time she had cleared her plate.

‘This is your last chance Severus,’ she said out loud, ‘if you don’t arrive now, I’m going to finish it off. No? OK then,’ she served herself the rest of the curry. Feeling much better, she changed the CD in the player, this one was titled ‘Great Female Songsters’ and the room was filled the sad strains of Tracey Chapman. She sat on the unmade bed and finished her beer. While having a full belly, a beer
and good music is very satisfying, it didn’t beat a house, a tent, a big bathroom and someone to share
it all with. She missed him like mad. But, there was no way she was going to be shouted at like that.
She drained the bottle, cleared away her plate and washed everything up; she tidied the room and
made the bed. With a satisfied nod, she apperated to Spinners End to face whatever music was
awaiting her.

Severus was sitting at his desk when Moaner appeared by his chair.

‘Hermione Granger is home,’ she said and disappeared. He looked at Kingsley Shacklebolt who was
sitting opposite him.

‘You have to take her in hand, Severus. She is not intimidated by me or the Wizengamot.’

‘She happened to be right in everything she said.’

‘Be that as it may. She needs to learn control before she harms someone who is not a criminal or
werewolf.’

Severus leaned back in his chair and stared at the Minister. ‘How do you suggest I take her in hand?
Remove some of her powers? Obliviate part of her memory? Clip her wings? I shall do none of those
things.’

‘However you do it, rein her in,’ Shacklebolt said, ‘I mean it Severus, before she hurts someone.’

Severus sighed, ‘She is a Gryffindor. Fiercely loyal, brave and reckless, this is why she worked well
with her Partner, a Ravenclaw. How can we suppress such characteristics without damaging the
character? Tell me that Kingsley. This is all part of the reforms, to cultivate and teach the next
generation; without the likes of Hermione, Harry, Ronald, Draco and all those others who fought and
survived the war, nothing will be achieved. It will all remain as it was.’

Shacklebolt stood. ‘I don’t disagree with you Severus, but as she is now, she is a liability to the
Ministry. ‘

‘She was right,’ Severus repeated, ‘everything she said in the chamber was right. She sees it, others
don’t. That is a talent and one we need.’

‘Go home and talk to her. You know what is needed,’ and Shacklebolt left.

He remained in his chair. He was not looking forward to this reunion. How could he tell that his
shouting at her was all bluff? All he wanted to do was to catch her up and swing her round and tell
her proud he was of her. She was superb the way she handled herself in the trial, how she had stood
up to the Wizengamot, told the truth. Shacklebolt was on her side, but he still had to convince half of
the Wizengamot that she was correct in her arguments. No, this was not going to be the celebratory
reunion either of them wanted. Eight weeks apart, Merlin, it had seemed like eight years. She had
performed her assignment perfectly, she was a first class Unspeakable but now that was about to
change, but to what? He had no idea. He left by his personal route and went straight to Spinners
End.
She was not in the kitchen, or sitting room nor the library. His heart sank; it meant she was either in the bath or bedroom; if he went upstairs he was done for because he would not be able to resist her. So he went into the kitchen and put the kettle on, making enough noise so she would know he was home. He removed his robes and unbuttoned his jacket and loosened his collar. Then did everything up again, he knew her reaction to him in an open jacket and open neck shirt. She couldn’t resist. He smiled as he put his robes back on. Much safer. He heard her coming down the stairs and put out another cup and saucer.

She stopped at the door. ‘Tea?’ he asked? She nodded and slipped into a chair at the table. She had bathed and washed her hair, which was already drying into wild curls. She was wearing loose trousers and a long flowery top. She looked divine. He placed the cup in front of her and took a chair opposite, he sipped his tea, she didn’t look at him.

‘Er … I apologise for shouting at you in your office, it was wrong of me and unprofessional,’ she took a sip of her tea. He waited for the qualification, the “you made me angry” or “the whole thing is stupid” but nothing came. He saw as she picked up her cup again that she trembled. Was she afraid of him, or what he would say? ‘What’s the penalty?’ she asked.

‘Penalty?’

‘Yes, my punishment for making the Wizengamot look foolish, for calling the bluff on the Office of Aurors, for doing my job. What have you been ordered to do?’ She raised her eyes to him, eyes which held a glint of defiance, but mainly held sadness.

‘Hermione, you can’t fly in the face of the Ministry and the Minister.’

‘I know.’

‘So why …’

She cut him off, ‘Was I wrong Severus? Was anything I did wrong?’ He said nothing. ‘So you believe I was wrong?’

‘No. I know you were right, but you cannot use the Forbidden Curses instead of other restraining or stunning hexes you have available to you. This time you deliberately used it at almost full strength. What next?’

Her eyes flashed. ‘As I told Minister Shacklebolt, Remus the only decent DADA professor we ever had, taught us how to deal with werewolves. Who better than he? He explained to us the Cruciatus is the best way to change the animal back to man. Then you need to render the man unconscious to stop him changing again. Perhaps the next time I will ask it politely to stop biting people.’

He took a deep breath. ‘I doubt there will be a next time,’ he kept his face neutral.

‘I don’t understand, you doubt there will be a next time? I could come face to face with another werewolf at any time.’ She looked at him and he saw her working out what he said.

‘Hermione …’

She stood up, she knew. ‘You’re sacking me! I’m no longer an Unspeakable,’ she was shaking her head in disbelief. ‘I know my cover has been blown, but … but … to sack me?’ She was shaking, but not with anger. Anger would have had crocks and pans flying around the kitchen. ‘Bloody men! Get everything you want, but when a woman comes along and challenges the order of things or is better at something. What do you do? What you have always done, you sack her, get rid of her, make sure she knows her place. Well thanks for all the support Severus, and thanks for the welcome
home.’ She left the kitchen and slammed the door shut with a wave of her hand, the front door slammed as well.

He released the breath he was holding, he knew where she was going and would give her a few minutes and then he would follow her. He finished his tea before apperating to the Cromwell Road. The light was on in the first floor window that was her room. He decided not to ring the front door bell, as she would slam it in his face, he couldn’t apperate into the room as he had no idea of the layout. So he waited for someone to go in or come out. He had come here several times over the eight weeks, just to be close to where she was helped with his loneliness. He had followed her one night after she been on surveillance outside the subject’s flat. He knew the address of course and had given in to the temptation of seeing her after two weeks. She was good, she didn’t go straight home, but walked part of the way, doubling back at certain points and always she was tracking for followers or anything unusual. When she jumped on an early morning bus he thought he would lose her, but she got off at the next stop, crossed the road and caught a bus going in the opposite direction. He broke several rules about operating in the Muggle world that day, the least of which was apperating to follow the bus, luckily it was early morning and he was sure that no one really noticed his appearance and disappearance. She had left the bus and walked back the way the bus had just come, crossed the road and walked into the Cromwell Road. She had stopped to buy fresh milk and bread then had come here.

The front door opened and as it was swinging shut, he slipped inside. He climbed the stairs to the first floor and knocked. She opened the door, looked at him and turned away, he followed her. He was surprised at how small it was, smaller than the bedsit he lived in when they first met. He closed the door and placed a privacy charm on the room.

She sat crossed legged on the single bed. ‘Anyway, you can’t sack me, I resigned in your office earlier.’

He smiled for the first time. ‘Yes, I remember.’

‘And I bloody well hope it hurt when you stuffed it up your arse.’

There was nowhere to sit except the bed and floor. He chose the floor and arranged his robes around him.

‘I need you to listen to me Hermione and please don’t interrupt. I am very proud of you, how you handled yourself during the whole job and your loyalty to your Partner. The results are even better than the Ministry hoped; names and meeting places have been obtained from both subjects, which will mean more Dark Ones will be apprehended. No, I said don’t interrupt … you dominated the Wizengamot because you were right, in everything you said you were right and they could not argue against that. However, accusing Minister Shacklebolt of running the Ministry like Voldemort, that was wrong. Using the Forbidden Curse was very wrong,’… he paused and looked at her, she was listening intently, her head bowed, ‘… it is why there are laws in place to protect …’ he held up his hand to stop her interruption … ‘I know I overlooked it once, but you were restrained in your use that time. This time you used more power. What of the next time? The Killing Curse? You almost used that on Lucius and instead you would have killed me.’

He stopped again; her face had crumpled in shame. ‘You are so gifted, talented and extremely powerful. We know that it is no longer Dark Magic that has a hold on you. Yet … you are wild and there is an uncontrollable element to your nature. Perhaps it has something to do with your Ancient roots, I don’t know. But now, this very minute, I can no longer permit you to work as an Unspeakable. Hermione, eight weeks apart from you was unbearable. I don’t think I could survive a lifetime without you if you were sent to Azkaban.’
They sat in silence. She fiddled with the cover on the bed; he picked at a loose thread on his robe.

‘What do I do then?’ she finally asked.

‘I don’t know … yet.’ She nodded, ‘perhaps we will look at what you found in the Hall of Prophecy. You will also practice controlling your desire to use inappropriate force, I will help you with that and I am sure Lucius will help as well. Learning self-control is what you need to do … if not …’

‘What? If not … what?’

‘Kingsley would have no choice …’

‘No! … he … wouldn’t.’

‘Hermione, there would be no choice. If you become uncontrollable, even if you are of the Light, which you are, it would make you as dangerous as Voldemort.’ Her head fell to her chest and he knew she was sobbing; she dashed her hand across her eyes. ‘So the second order of the day is teaching you self-control over your powers.’

She sniffed, ‘What is the first order of the day?’

‘Come here,’ and held his arms open. She didn’t move at first, but then she slipped slowly off the bed, as if afraid to approach him. It was only three steps from the bed to his arms, but it seemed to take her forever to reach him. She knelt before him, still unsure. Tenderly, he pulled her into him and he held her trembling body to his. Gradually her arms came around him and she buried her head in his neck.

‘I am so, so sorry,’ she whispered, ‘I don’t mean to be so much trouble to you.’

He held her; he had forgotten the feel of her body against him and how it felt soft and feminine, his and his alone. He felt the press of her breasts against his chest and eight weeks of being without her, of denial, of lonely nights and empty days, engulfed him. ‘Shall I take you home?’ His voice was thick with passion.

‘No. Here,’ she breathed.

He lifted her effortlessly onto the narrow bed and lay down next to her. She still clung to him, not moving.

‘Just be with me,’ she muttered.

So he held her, stroked her hair, her back, along her leg. He wanted her, but she needed this more. ‘I can take some time off if you like, what would you like to do?’

‘Nothing. Just be with you,’ she replied, ‘hold me closer.’

And he did, held her tightly against him, pouring his love into the embrace.

She pulled away from him and sat up. ‘Take your robes off,’ and she stood up, undressed then slipped into bed in her underwear, she held the covers open for him. He climbed him beside her. ‘Like old times,’ she said.

‘Only this bed is even smaller than my one,’ he replied just as she caught his mouth and kissed him. Tongues and teeth clashed and she tasted of curry, he reached around and unclasped her bra, releasing her breasts. His mouth fell to a nipple and she groaned deep in her throat. Sliding his hand,
he pushed her knickers down. ‘Hermione,’ he breathed as he claimed her lips again.

‘Don’t talk, just do,’ she said.

It was fierce, urgent and over very quickly. He lay on top of her, his arms supporting his weight, her legs still wrapped around his waist. She kissed him again and again as they rolled so they faced each other. Her hands were all over his body, exploring every inch of him.

‘I love you,’ she said, running her hands through his hair.

‘Oh, Hermione, you have no idea how much I love you. I really do,’ and he returned her hot kisses and pulled her leg over his hip, bringing them closer still. ‘You also have no idea how much I have missed you.’

‘You have had eight weeks without any problems, without having to deal with me. It should have been perfect.’

He laughed, ‘I have been without for eight weeks and that was a problem. No doubt you took care of yourself?’

‘Hmm, but it’s not the same as having you and your spectacular talent in bed with me.’

‘Don’t think my talent has been called spectacular before.’ Of all the many aspects of having Hermione Jean Granger in his life, this was one of the best, the afterglow of making love. It may have been over very quickly, but they had loved for all that, and this was just as wonderful, lying together, being together completed the act and fulfilled him.

‘So you didn’t sneak down to Knockturne Alley to buy satisfaction?’ She nipped his neck.

‘Now why would I do that? I have no need for anyone else. I waited, I worked, very hard I might add, I slept and dreamt of you and sometimes …’

She giggled. ‘So you are normal after all, Mr Snape.’

‘Perfectly normal,’ he smiled, ‘you had curry.’

‘I was starved; I hadn’t eaten since yesterday afternoon.’

When they had first lived together in his bedsit, she had introduced him to Indian cuisine, he had loved it and it became a regular feature of their week.

‘Is it as good as the Taj?’

‘Yes, great Rogan, Korma and samosas. Why, are you hungry?’

‘Yes! Let’s get one.’

She left the bed, got dressed, picked up her bag and keys, ‘I have the money, do you want a beer as well?’

He nodded. ‘And the usual,’ he said as she closed the door.

Fifteen minutes later she was back and the aroma of curry made his mouth water. She placed a tray in the middle of the floor as a makeshift table and put the containers out.

‘This is for you, poppadums and samosas for me.’
He opened the beers and served himself Chicken Madras and pilau rice; she broke up the poppadums and nibbled. It was ambrosia to him. He may not be entirely comfortable in the Muggle world, but he would freely admit that he missed curries, cannelloni and sweet and sour chicken.

‘Hermione …’

‘No Severus, can we just talk about friends and us and leave the job until tomorrow?’

So they talked as they ate. She asked about Lucius and he told her that her standing with Lucius was through the roof, she was a genius as far as he was concerned. Her plan had worked beautifully and Narcissa was back home within three weeks. She is still making changes to Malfoy Manor and sometimes Lucius looks panic stricken, but he is much better. Draco was home as well and Astoria will be joining him soon. He told her Harry, as he thought, was proving to be an excellent Unspeakable. He had spent time in all of the chambers and had been on one field job with a Partner. He thought Harry and Ginny were working through things with their relationship and Harry living in her parent’s house was proving very successful.

He fed her the last morsels of his curry and rice and swiped a samosa in exchange. ‘That was good,’ he said. ‘Did you mean what you said earlier?’

‘What? About you sticking the job up your arse?’

‘I know you meant that. No, what you said about if a woman excels at something, men see it as a threat and get rid of her?’

She stood up and started to clear away. ‘I was tired and emotional. This has all come as a shock to me, and it … I don’t know, it all seems so unfair.’ She turned the CD on as she passed.

He helped with the clearing away, she washed he dried, she lit an incense stick and soon the aroma of curry was replaced with patchouli. She was quiet and sighed often. Roberta Flack started to sing ‘The First Time Ever I saw Your Face,’ he took her hand and they slow danced in the tiny space.

‘I don’t have anything useful to do anymore,’ she spoke softly, her voice full of emotion. ‘It makes me sad.’ The song finished and he led her to the bed. ‘What will happen? I mean, do you have to … y’know, sack me officially.’

‘Yes,’ he sighed heavily, ‘it will be official.’

‘But I did nothing wrong,’ she protested.

‘I know. But you used the Cruciatus even though it was in self-defence and the defence of your Partner, that still has to be punished, I wish it didn’t and I thought you didn’t want to talk about this tonight?’

‘I’m only going to worry all night.’

‘Not if I can take your mind of it you won’t. We will get through this, Hermione. You are strong and resilient and I’m going to help you.’

She leaned into him and gave a sudden yelp as a patronus came in through the window.

‘From Minister Shacklebolt, Granger and Snape, Ministry, ten a.m. tomorrow. Good night.’ It dissolved.

‘I would love to know how he always knows where I am,’ Severus said.
‘Maybe he has a tracker on you?’

‘No, I check regularly.’ She shot him a look of surprise. ‘Really, I do. Now … how can I take your mind off things? Oh yes, I know …’ he lunged at her and rolled her on the bed.

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Chapter End Notes

The title of this chapter is from the song of the same name by Dead Kennedys.

It's exactly how Hermione feels.
Harry stared at him, got up to leave but turned back instead. ‘I used the Cruciatus during the War, as did a lot of us.’

‘That was during the War, this is different circumstances.’

‘Is it? The enemy is still out there Severus, you know that. It can’t be swept under the carpet; it can’t be ‘managed’. Sometimes we have to fight fire with fire and we have to fight dirty. That was a lesson we learnt during the War. So let’s stop pretending that Hermione has done anything wrong here, OK? She did exactly as she had been taught at Hogwarts, exactly what DADA required her to do.’

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He woke early and nudged her. ‘We need to go back to Spinners End to get ready.’

She yawned, ‘I think I’ll stay here,’ and closed her eyes again.

He got out of bed, dressed quickly then threw his robes over her before picking her up and leaving for Spinners End.

‘That wasn’t nice,’ she muttered as he carried her upstairs to the bedroom where he dropped her on the bed, ‘and that wasn’t nice either.’ She caught his hand.

‘No. Not this time.’ He shed his clothes and went to shower. Standing under the hot spray he knew it was going to be a difficult day for both of them. He had no idea how she was going to react; she had acting oddly to everything since yesterday, swinging between bold and weepy and now not wanting to get up, it was not like her. But however she felt or how oddly she acted, the wizarding world would be expecting the Ministry to deal with her, they expected some form of punishment for her, she may not be going to Azkaban, but the Ministry has to mete out a suitable penalty, losing her position as an Unspeakable may do it, it may not. If not … he refused to go there. At some point they would explore what she had learned in the Hall of Prophesy, maybe that was the key and maybe, just maybe, it also held the answer.

Back in the bedroom she had crawled under the covers. ‘Hermione, you can’t stay in bed all day, I’m going to the Ministry now.’ She grunted in response. ‘If you are not in my office by ten o’clock, I
will have to come and get you … are you listening to me?’

‘Yes.’

He dressed in clean clothes and robes then knelt beside the bed, ‘My darling, it is going to be hard today, for both of us. I don’t want to do what I have to do, but I have to be seen to be in control of my own Department and my own operatives.’ She rose and put her arms around him, ‘I love you Hermione and I care for you deeply, remember that please.’

She nodded and kissed him. ‘See you at ten o’clock in your office, boss,’ and she lay down again.

Downstairs he called for Moaner. ‘If Miss Granger is not out of bed and ready by nine thirty, please come and get me.’

‘Moaner understands, master.’

He stepped into the floo, but instead of the Ministry, he decided to go to St Mungo’s. Once there, he headed straight to the Dai Llewellyn ward to see how Hermione’s Partner was recovering. He entered the ward and saw her sitting up in bed having breakfast. After asking about how she felt and how she was recovering, he asked if she felt up to a debriefing, she agreed and he spent the next thirty minutes going through in detail all aspects of the assignment. She gave precise and clear responses to all his questions, leaving nothing out. Satisfied that there was no more information to be gleaned, she asked him if she would still be an Unspeakable. He reassured her that once the Healers knew what form her infection would take, he saw no reason why she couldn’t return to the Department, in fact, her unique abilities may well benefit the Department. She then asked about Hermione; she told him she remembered her from Hogwarts. She was in her last year when Hermione was sorted into Gryffindor. He told her the truth about the situation and that Hermione would no longer be an Unspeakable. As he got up to leave, she told him something that, although not a surprise to him would perhaps comfort Hermione.

It was still early when he arrived in the Atrium. As he made his way to the lifts he passed a news stand and picked up a copy of The Daily Prophet, the banner headline read “NOT SO GOLDEN GRANGER” … with a photograph of Hermione being escorted through the Atrium by four Enforcers. The article said how Hermione Granger … “heroine of the War, one of the Golden Three, has been arrested for using one of The Unforgivable Curses on another wizard and had already appeared in the Wizengamot and is due to be sentenced at some point.” He threw the paper down in disgust; the only saving grace was that the article hadn’t been penned by Rita Skeeter.

He entered his office to find Harry waiting for him.

‘What’s going on Severus? What’s going to happen to her?’ He demanded.

‘Good morning, Harry. I am well, how are you?’ His tone was necessarily formal; he could not allow himself to become embroiled in any emotional exchange with her best friend, Merlin, wasn’t the day was going to be difficult enough?

Harry looked sheepishly at him, ‘Oh, yeah, sorry. I’m good, thank you. But what …’

‘… Miss Granger is to reprimanded, be thankful she is not on her way to Azkaban.’

‘It’s not right Severus. She used the Cruciatus for a reason, I know she did, she wouldn’t use it just to cause pain.’ Harry was pacing, something Severus had learned he did when he was agitated.

‘How is Ginevra?’
‘Fine, she’s going on a tour of Europe at the end of the season. So what is the reprimand? Not allowed out on an assignment for a month?’ Severus said nothing. ‘What? Six months?’ Harry smiled jokingly. Still no response. ‘Longer?’ He still didn’t say a word, simply stared at Harry. ‘No! … no no no, you can’t do that!’ Harry stood on the other side of his desk, leaning in towards him. ‘You can’t take that away from her,’ he ran his hand through his hair, ‘no no. How can you do that to her. You love her!’

‘Mr Potter, I am the Head of this Department, please remember that. My relationship with Miss Granger cannot impinge on any decision to safeguard this Department, this Ministry or British Wizardry.’ He used his cold Professor Snape voice as he glared at Harry causing the young man to take a step back from the desk. ‘Tell me Harry, did Professor Lupin teach you anything about werewolves in his DADA classes?’

‘Yeah, as a matter of fact he did. He was the only one who ever taught us anything about defence against the Dark Arts.’

‘Tell … me.’

Harry took a chair and sat down. ‘First thing he told us was that man and wolf are not the same. You needed different magic for the wolf, he suggested the Cruciatus was best as the beast was dangerous and to try anything less powerful may not work. He told us that Cruciatus would change the wolf back to man, then … you needed something to prevent it changing again, he used a form of words, yeah, … something to render it unconscious, that was it. It can’t change to wolf when it’s unconscious.’

‘Thank you Harry, that is very useful.’

Harry sat thinking for a moment. ‘The Prophet got it wrong, didn’t they Severus? It wasn’t a wizard, it was … a werewolf! Severus …’

‘You may go Harry.’

Harry stared at him, got up to leave but turned back instead. ‘I used the Cruciatus during the War, as did a lot of us.’

‘That was during the War, this is different circumstances.’

‘Is it? The enemy is still out there Severus, you know that. It can’t be swept under the carpet; it can’t be ‘managed’. Sometimes we have to fight fire with fire and we have to fight dirty. That was a lesson we learnt during the War. So let’s stop pretending that Hermione has done anything wrong here, OK? She did exactly as she had been taught at Hogwarts, exactly what DADA required her to do.’

‘Harry, we can’t have the Unforgiveable Curses being used by everybody who thinks they are doing the right thing. There has to be sanctions, otherwise chaos would ensue and the Wizarding World would become lawless and dangerous. Think on that.’ Harry left without another word and Severus was sure that if his door had been capable of it, Harry would have slammed it.

An internal memo flew in just as the door was closing. It was from Kingsley, he would be joining Severus at ten o’clock for the meeting. He sighed, Minister Shacklebolt seemed determined that he did his job and she was not let off her transgression and after this conversation with Harry, he was having serious doubts about the need for any punishment for her at all. Harry was right; she was using information that had been taught to her by someone who had first-hand knowledge of being a werewolf. It was a valuable lesson in dealing with the Dark Arts. And how many on both sides had used the Cruciatus or the Killing Curse during the War? Yes, there are other ways of despatching an
enemy; Molly Weasley had done just that. But, Bellatrix was not a werewolf. He pinched the bridge of his nose, was his relationship with Hermione affecting his decision making?

He picked up a pile of reports and passed the time reading and responding to them. The clock on the wall showed nine forty five, Moaner had not appeared so Hermione must be up and ready. He decided to go to the Atrium and wait for her, then escort her down. Not strictly necessary, but he needed to it. He took the lift to the Atrium and walked along the concourse to the arrival floo’s. With his black robes flowing behind, people moved aside for him. He saw her stepping out a floo. She was not wearing her work clothes but jeans, blouse and jacket, her hair was caught in a tie in the nape of her neck. There was a sudden flurry of people around her, several shook her hand and she looked confused by all the fuss.

‘Miss Granger,’ he didn’t have to raise his voice, it carried enough authority to be heard, ‘I believe you have an appointment in my office.’ She blushed and walked towards him; he turned and led her back to the lifts. Neither spoke, nor did she look at him and although she looked determine, she trembled slightly. Merlin, all he wanted to do was … ‘Stay close,’ he said as they headed for the barrier.

‘I bet it doesn’t really do anything anyway,’ she tried to sound flippant and failed.

Minster Shacklebolt was waiting for them, Severus sat at his desk, Minister Shacklebolt took a chair, Hermione chose to stand.

‘Miss Granger,’ Severus was formal, ‘you know why you are here and you are also aware of what your penalty is to be. To make it clear and for the record, until you have complete control over your powers, you are no longer an Unspeakable. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, I understand,’ her voice was flat.

‘Do you also understand that if this were under any other circumstances, you would be sent to Azkaban for a life sentence?’ Shacklebolt added.

She paled. ‘Yes, I understand,’ she repeated. ‘Can I ask a question?’ Severus nodded although he was dreading what she was going to ask. ‘How is my Partner today, has anyone been to see how she is?’

‘I went this morning and she is recovering very well because of your swift action.’

‘Do the Healers know what form her infection will take?’

‘Not yet,’ he paused, ‘she told me something this morning that may interest you. She was in her final year at Hogwarts when you were Sorted. When you first met, she recognised you and said she knew she would be entirely safe with you. That … you would not run away from a fight and you would have her back in a tight situation. She remembers you being Sorted into Gryffindor and that is what Gryffindors do. She is a Ravenclaw.’

She nodded, ‘She was brilliant at working the puzzles out. She worked out that it was moon phases that could be the clue for Selena’s travels.’

‘Very well. Now, before you leave, I am afraid I need to de-brief you. Please, if you need to sit …’ he nodded to a chair. She sat and in true Hermione Granger fashion, she gave a complete account of the eight weeks. She answered all of his questions calmly and in detail. The events of Selena’s and her companion’s capture were covered in every minute detail, which he recorded. She sat quietly when they had finished while Severus completed writing his report. He put down his quill. ‘Your
version of the events of the last eight weeks matches precisely with that of your Partner. You both achieved an outstanding result and this Department and Ministry, thanks you. Do you wish to say anything?’

She shook her head. He opened a drawer, took out her wand and returned it to her. ‘The Enforcers of course, had no idea that you are capable of wandless and non-verbal magic,’ he said and was gratified by Minister Shacklebolt’s look of surprise. ‘I am truly sorry to have to do this Hermione, but it is for the safety of others … and your freedom.’

She stood. ‘I do understand, really I do.’ She turned to Minister Shacklebolt, ‘I do have a last question for the Minister, what is going to happen to my accusers?’

‘That is for the Head of Office and me to decide,’ Minister Shacklebolt replied. ‘It is none of your concern.’

Severus took a sharp intake of breath and willed her not to say anything else; he recognised the look on her face as she had turned to face the Minister. ‘Oh, but I think it is my concern, Minister. I have been called a liar, accused of using an Unforgivable curse to save my own life and the life of my Partner from a werewolf. I think I have every right to know what punishment if any, is to be meted out to those who bought these false claims against me.’

Severus closed his eyes, she was pushing the Minister, something Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minister of Magic, Warlock, Second Level Necromancer, would not tolerate.

“That is enough Miss Granger,’ Minster Shacklebolt replied sharply, ‘you are no longer employed by this Ministry and therefore you have no right to know the outcome of any investigations this Ministry undertakes.’

Severus opened his eyes and was relieved to find she was still in human form; she glared at Minister Shacklebolt as she headed for the door. ‘As I am no longer employed by this Ministry, then I am free to say that all of this is total rubbish and it is exactly how Cornelius Fudge ran this place. So, keep up the good work, Minister.’ She turned to Severus, ‘I assume the barrier will allow me through, if not, you shall have to make your own supper tonight. Gentlemen.’ She left and no doubt, she too would have liked to have slammed the door.

Two Second Level Necromancers let out a collective breath.

‘That went better than I anticipated,’ Minister Shacklebolt said. ‘Take some time Severus, be with her and help her through this.’ He stood up, ‘I could feel her power y’know. Do you know exactly how powerful she is?’

‘No, and I have no intention of finding out the hard way. I am extraordinarily proud of what she has done, Kingsley, don’t for one minute think that I am not. I may not be able to show her support as her boss, but as her lover, she has my full approval and support.’

Kingsley Shacklebolt beamed at him, ‘I wouldn’t expect anything less from you, Severus. Now, go and spend some time with the very lovely and exceptional Miss Granger. I shall keep you apprised of events as they unfold,’ and he left the office.

Severus sighed and rose to leave. The next few days would be a further test of their relationship and he wondered … when had it all become so difficult?
She arrived back at Spinners End without having stopped to speak to anyone. As she left his office she felt tearful and low despite her show of defiance, and only wanted to get back home. She climbed the stairs slowly, suddenly exhausted. In their bedroom she undressed, put on her heavy pyjamas and climbed into bed thinking that the last few days had now caught up with her and all she really needed to do was sleep. She pulled the covers over her and for the first time in many years she felt frightened inside; frightened about her future, frightened that Severus would at last see her for the troublesome girl she felt she was at this moment. She curled into a foetal position and shivered; she was cold and her brain didn’t want to work anymore, so she let it wander without reining it in as she usually would; so she closed her eyes and slept.

She dreamed of fields, the blue green sea and white clouds in a deep blue sky. She was cold in her dream and she shivered. Her dream was filled with his voice, soft caring words he spoke to her; she couldn’t hear them clearly but was reassured by them. She was in a dark place without light then colours flashed before her eyes and she was falling falling all the way down into the deep blue green sea and she took a breath and found she couldn’t breathe as water filled her lungs as she drifted to the bottom of the sea and tried to swim but always the current swept her back it was a long way up to the surface and she did try to float upwards but something was pulling her down a hand around one ankle pulling her ever downwards she fought and thrashed to try to release herself and with one last mighty kick she set herself free and floated up to the surface where she saw the beach the cliffs and the fields that ran down to the shore as she coughed and spluttered and drew air into her complaining lungs as she floated in moonlight and in the dark stars in the arms of her mother who was a crone who held her against her breasts and sang to her as she turned and floated away into black nothingness.

She blinked her eyes into focus, the room was in soft shadow, she closed them quickly. Her brain told her something was wrong, this was not their room. She fell asleep again and this time, there were no dreams.

The next time she opened her eyes it was brighter. She heard voices speaking softly. Was this a dream and if so, why could she not awaken? The birds were singing as she drifted off to sleep again and now her dreams were terrible, dark nightmares that made her scream, only no sound came out of her mouth. She couldn’t move, not a finger, not a toe, she was frozen in place as imps and demons ran at her all gnashing teeth and claws. Time and again she tried to scream, tried to move and couldn’t. Darkness took her and she heard sobbing, someone was crying. She needed to comfort them, she looked around for the crying and she saw a small child, crouched down and weeping. She picked the child up and offered it comfort and soft words. She felt tears streaming down her face as the demons came charging at her and this time she did scream and when she looked again, her arms were empty.

She opened her eyes and this time, they stayed open. She blinked several times to focus them and realised she was lying on her side staring at heavily curtained windows. This was not Spinners End. She moved slowly, her joints and muscles ached and her head hurt, she didn’t recognise this room at all. She tried to sit up, but didn’t have the strength. How strange, what was going on? Where was she and where was Severus? She was suddenly frightened, she was alone in a strange bed and she sobbed uncontrollably as she tried to move again. She had gone to sleep in Spinners End, where was she now? A door opened and a voice she recognised was speaking to her with soft reassuring words. A cool drink filled her mouth, she swallowed and a gentle hand wiped her chin and spoke more words but she couldn’t understand what was being said. Slowly her eyes closed and the same gentle hand soothed her brow as she fell into a deep, deep dreamless sleep.
She stretched and opened her eyes, sunlight flooded the room. She lay still for a moment, taking in her surroundings, she still didn’t know where she was, but it felt familiar.

‘Good morning,’ said a voice she recognised.

She turned towards it and saw Lucius sitting in a chair by her bedside, book in hand.

‘Don’t tell me we have broken the Pure Blood code,’ she croaked.

‘Sadly, no. Please don’t try to move on your own, you are very weak,’ she dropped her head back onto the pillow. ‘Here, take my arm,’ she held his arm as he skilfully pulled her up and placed more pillows behind her so she was sitting upright. ‘Now, do you feel up to a cup of tea?’

She nodded. ‘Yes please, with sugar I think. Where’s Severus?’

‘Sleeping.’

‘I don’t understand. I was at Spinners End; I climbed into bed and fell asleep. Now I’m here … Lucius, what happened?’

‘You have been very sick, but you are safe now,’

Her mind was obviously still befuddled. ‘Safe? I don’t understand.’

He patted her hand. ‘Let me get your tea, you will feel better, then we shall talk.’ He left the room leaving the door ajar and Rupert came padding in, jumped on the bed and stared at her.

She looked into his eyes, ‘Hello Rupert.’ He snuffled her, settled down and went to sleep. She felt her eyelids droop, she was so very tired, but hadn’t she been sleeping all day and night? The door flew open and Severus rushed to her.

‘Thank Merlin,’ he held her very tenderly and kissed her forehead, ‘I thought you were lost to me.’

She put her arms around him and tried to squeeze him in return, but she was too weak. She looked at him and saw the dark circles, the haggard, tired look to his face and he seemed very thin.

‘Severus, what has happened to you?’ Lucius came in with her tea; Severus sat on the side of the bed and helped her drink. It was the best thing she had ever tasted, hot and sweet, it was so good. He took the cup from her, she smiled at both of them and went back to sleep. The next time she woke up she felt the solid form of Severus next to her. It was dark; she turned to him and put her arm around his waist. He opened his eyes.

‘Hello you,’ she said.

‘Hello, how are you feeling?’

‘Better, strange and confused.’

He reached to her and touched her cheek, ‘Do you want anything?’

‘A pee, a bath and food. I’m starving.’ He pulled her into him and she was shocked as he wept into her hair. She brushed away his tears, ‘Severus, my darling, my love, tell me, what is going on?’

He kissed her on the cheek. ‘You need to get some food inside you first, build your strength up. Shall I take you to the bathroom?’ She nodded and tried to get out of bed herself, but couldn’t, she was much too weak. He picked her up and carried her into the adjoining bathroom.
‘Are we in Malfoy Manor?’ she asked. He nodded as he put her down in the bathroom, ‘I can take it from here,’ she smiled at him.

‘I will be just outside …’

Pulling herself up with the help of the sink she washed her hands and called to him. He lifted her up and lay her gently back in the bed. He had plumped the pillows so she could sit up again.

‘What would you like?’ he asked

‘Something filling, well-seasoned and tasty.’

‘I think you may be on the mend,’ he smiled, ‘… a boiled egg it is then.’

He left her with Rupert for company and it wasn’t too long before he was back with tray bearing a boiled egg and toasty Aurors. He helped her eat; she only managed half the egg and one toasty Auror, but it was enough. She drank all of the tea however.

‘That was good,’ she said, ‘sorry I couldn’t eat any more, I thought I was hungrier.’

‘That is excellent for your first solid food,’ he replied.

‘Why do you look so terrible and what is going on?’ She took his hand.

Just then there was a soft knock on the door and Lucius and Narcissa came in. ‘We thought we heard movement,’ Lucius said, ‘how are you feeling Miss Granger?’

‘I would feel a lot better if someone would tell me what is going on and why you are all acting like you are so relieved to see me.’ Lucius and Narcissa took chairs on the opposite side of the bed to Severus. They were both in their night attire.

‘Hermione,’ Severus said, taking her hand and holding it. ‘You have been very sick.’

‘Don’t be daft! I went home after getting officially sacked, I felt miserable, upset and exhausted and I got into bed and went to sleep. That was yesterday.’

‘No my love, that was two weeks ago.’ She looked at him in confusion. ‘You were poisoned.’

She shook her head. ‘No, no … how? Two weeks ago?’ she closed her eyes. ‘I do remember very strange dreams, I wanted to scream but couldn’t, then I could. I think I was pulled underwater and I couldn’t breathe, then I was floating.’ She opened her eyes and turned to him. ‘Tell me …’

He told her the full sequences of events. He had arrived back at Spinners End to find her in bed, but she was already running a fever and was becoming delirious. He gave her a strong potion that contained Feverfew to reduce her fever; after an hour it became clear to him that this was not a fever, it was something far more serious. He took her to St Mungo’s where he was told that her Partner had shown the same symptoms earlier that morning. The Healers agreed that Hermione and her Partner had been poisoned, but they had no idea what the poison was, or the delivery method. He sent a message to Lucius to come to St Mungo’s and while Severus stayed with her, Lucius and a Healer looked for an entry wound on her Partner. Her Partner's tongue turned black and she died within the hour. It had become a race against time.

‘Why didn’t … I … die?’ She whispered.

‘Once we knew how the poison would run its course and what symptoms it caused, we could start to
eliminate entire groups of poisons.’

‘But you tried a Bezoar?’

‘Yes, first thing the Healers did. It had a limited success; your tongue did not turn black, which could only mean that one of the components parts of the poison was Arsenic. You had difficulty breathing and you were sporadically paralysed.’

‘… not being able to breath or move …’ she said. She was tired again and her eyes were closing, but she wanted to hear the entire story, so she forced them open.

‘It was a rare poison, found only in the jungles of South America. It enters by a puncture wound and you need only the smallest amount. Do you remember you shook hands with several people when you arrived at the Ministry?’

She nodded, ‘I thought I felt something … but as it wasn’t … magic …,’ her eyes closed and she fell asleep.

Soft voices brought her out of her slumber. She had not dreamt this time and felt more rested as she opened her eyes. Draco was sitting by the bed with a very beautiful young woman.

‘Ah, Granger, awake again.’

‘Why do I keep falling asleep Malfoy?’ she asked, trying to sit up, this time she managed to get halfway before her strength left her. Draco helped her up the rest of the way and the young woman arranged her pillows.

‘It’s the antidote that is making you sleepy, you will have to keep taking it until Father is sure all the poison is out of your system. This is Astoria, by the way.’

Hermione held out her hand. ‘I’m pleased to meet you, Astoria.’

‘Thank you, Draco has told me lots about you.’

She groaned. ‘Oh no! Not Hogwarts, anything but Hogwarts.’

Draco laughed, ‘Yes, I have told her all the rotten things you and Harry did to me. And all the rotten things I did to you both. Now, do you want anything?’

‘A cup of tea would be lovely and some toast, with jam. And is Severus around?’

‘He and father are in the still room making another batch of antidote, you can only make it in small amounts. We’ll go and organise tea and toast, will you be alright on your own?’

She looked at the bed and the sleeping hound. ‘I have Rupert, so I think I will be fine.’

They left her; she stretched her body, wiggled her feet and decided she would try to get out of bed on her own. Pushing the covers back, she slowly swung her legs over the edge of the bed. It all took so much effort she thought it may not be worth it. But she placed her feet on the floor and pushed herself up. She stood upright, lost her balance and sat straight down. She tried once more and was rewarded by not swaying as she stood, now, … if she make it to the chair. She took one unsteady step, then another, the final step took her the chair and she fell into it, exhausted.

‘You really should stay in bed,’ Severus said from his position by the door, ‘but you always were a stubborn woman, so, well done.’ He came over and kissed her, ‘how do you feel?’
‘More awake then I have done in the last day,’ she held his hand. ‘Draco and Astoria are fetching me tea and toast. I’m hungry,’ and as if to make a point, her stomach growled. ‘I also want to hear more of what happened, are you able to tell me or do you need to be in the still room?’

He shook his head, ‘No, we have made another batch of the antidote and it is now decocting. So I have time. Are you comfortable or do you want to get back into bed?’

‘Carry me to the bathroom, then back to bed,’ she held her arms open and he swept her up. She put her arms around his neck and held him. It felt so good. He waited for her, then carried her back into bed, sitting her upright, he pulled the chair close to the bed and she held his hand. She thought he looked slightly better, more rested and the dark circles under his eyes were not as pronounced. Astoria came in with a tray; she pushed Rupert of the bed and he padded out of the room; she placed the tray beside Hermione. She thanked the young woman who nodded, smiled at Severus and left. There was tea for him as well. This time she was able to feed herself and hold a cup without fear of dropping it. Severus stretched his long frame out.

‘I think I like Astoria,’ she said between bites of hot toast and jam. ‘Draco should consider himself very lucky to have found an incredibly beautiful woman, who I bet is very intelligent as well. Though what she sees in him I have no idea.’ Severus looked shocked at what she was saying, but then she smiled at him and nodded her head in the direction of Rupert who had come back into the room. ‘Malfoy, you really must get a license.’ The hound turned tail and left.

She finished her toast and tea just as Lucius and Narcissa knocked and came in. Lucius agreed she looked much better this time and if she could keep awake for longer, he would decrease the timings of the antidote.

‘Why does the antidote make me so sleepy?’

‘Because it is as lethal as the poison that was in your body, by sleeping, you relax all the major organs, so they don’t overwork and succumb to the antidote,’ Lucius explained. ‘We had Draco flying all over Britain to find the ingredients for the antidote.’

‘Lucius had to source all the ingredients; I had to create the potion. What do you remember about Golpalotts Third Law?’ Severus asked her.

‘Something about having to find the single ingredient that when added to the whole counteracts the entire poison?’ She replied.

‘Excellent, so you did listen in Professor Slughorn’s Advanced Potion Making classes,’ he smiled wryly at her, ‘he told me you were hopeless.’

‘Turns out the single ingredient is another equally potent poison, once we knew that, it was a simple question of making and dosing,’ Lucius added.

She squeezed Severus’s hand, ‘Thank you, both.’ Lucius nodded. ‘Now I feel wide awake, can you continue with the rest of the story?’

Severus made himself comfortable and picked up from where he had left off. He told her that he had seen the activity around her and those who had shaken her hand. Kingsley had come to St Mungo’s when he learned that she and her Partner had been the victims of an assassination attempt. While he was there, he had asked Kingsley to use Legilimency to access his memory of her arrival at the Ministry. Kingsley was able to see exactly who had approached her and who had shaken her hand, the most likely means of administering the poison. With this information he issued a statement to the Daily Prophet saying that an attempt had been made on her life, but it had failed and she was
recovering in St Mungo’s and was expected to be released later that day, she will then help the Ministry identify the culprits.

‘You set me up?’

‘No, not you, an Unspeakable who was made to look like you.’

He continued with the story. Harry and Arthur would be on hand to apprehend whoever turned up to finish what they had started. Two Death Eaters had arrived later that evening and had come onto the ward. As they approached the bed, Harry and Arthur, who had been concealed under Harry’s invisibility cloak, sprang into action and apprehended them.

‘Oh, not you? I thought you would have been leading the troops.’

His face darkened and he shook his head. ‘Lucius and I had been fighting for your life all day. The poison was attacking your lungs, you … couldn’t breathe.’

‘I thought I had dreamt that. I struggled against being pulled down into the water; then I was floating up to the surface.’

‘Yes, you fought us all, kicking and thrashing about, but we had to keep you breathing.’

‘The Healers took it in turns to keep you breathing while Lucius worked out what type of poison we were dealing with, then we had to formulate the antidote. You were in terrible pain and your limbs would convulse before they became paralysed. The Healers kept you alive for two days before we had enough antidote to start dosing you. You then fell into a catatonic state, slipping in and out of consciousness for the next four days.’

He took her hand again and kissed it, she saw Narcissa grab Lucius’s hand and hold it tightly. Something was wrong; they were all acting as if something …

‘What? What are you not telling me? I know my Partner is dead, so … what else?’
The symptoms Hermione displays are based on real poisons.

Arsenic is well known and does turn the tongue black. The poison from the Black Legged Dart Frog of South America causes fever, excruciating pain, seizures and eventual death by respiratory and muscular paralysis. In our world there is no known antidote. Fortunately, Hermione lives in a world of magic, potioneers, apothecaries and seriously skilled Healers.
'Hermione!' She turned at the call of her name and saw Minister Shacklebolt coming towards her. ‘How are you?’ He asked, grasping her hand and patting it, ‘it’s good to see you back in the Ministry, Severus taken my advice and given you your job back, eh?’

She was shocked. ‘No, Minister, he hasn’t mentioned anything to me about it yet. Keeping it as a surprise I expect.’

‘Well, act surprised when he does. Are you here to see him?’

‘Yes, but I didn’t think it through and I have no idea of how to get through the barrier,’ she smiled her best smile at him.

‘But he’s not in today; I thought you would have known. He sent a message to let me know,’ he looked at her, ‘is everything alright between the two of you?’

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Chapter Notes

To those readers who have left Kudos! for this story, many, many thanks. I do appreciate it.

- Everybody Hurts

Part 2

‘What are you not telling me?’ she repeated.

There was silence in the room as she looked from one to the other. ‘Hermione, did you know you were pregnant?’ Severus asked gently.

‘Pregnant? No of course not, you know me, not regular at all, I didn’t even think about … what are you not telling me?’ Her voice rose in fear and panic.

‘On the sixth day … you lost … you miscarried …’ he couldn’t continue, ‘I’m so sorry.’

She closed her eyes as numbness crept over her body. ‘In my dream there was a child, I … had to pick it up to … protect it … but it vanished from my arms.’ She broke down and howled at the world, ‘It’s not fair!’ She buried her face in her hands and wept. She wept for her loss, for Severus’s loss, for the sheer unfairness of life. Lucius moved to a side table and poured water into a small glass;
he added three drops of a potion and handed it to Severus.

‘It’s Pacificum,’ he said.

Severus guided it to her lips. ‘Drink this, it will help,’ and he held the glass while she drank.

She felt herself begin to float away, her mind and body relaxed and she fell asleep. It was later in the day when she woke again, for a split second she was calm, then it came flooding back. She needed him, needed to be held by him to be reassured by his voice and his presence, he had lost a child as well. She turned onto her back; she was alone except for Rupert, who was lying next to her, she asked the hound to go and find Severus. Rupert jumped off the bed and disappeared. A minute later, Severus came into the room.

‘I need you close for a little while, I know it is pathetic, but I need to feel you close to me, please?’ He removed his boots and lay on the bed next to her and gathered her into his arms. ‘I am so, so sorry,’ she gulped, ‘I didn’t know, really I didn’t.’

‘None of this is your fault my darling,’ he soothed, ‘you nearly died. If I had not come home when I did … I would have lost you forever.’

She wrapped herself around him. ‘Can we go home?’

‘Not yet,’ he said, kissing her hair. ‘We have to be guided by Lucius; he needs to be sure that all the poison is gone from your body.’

‘Why here? Why not keep me in St Mungo’s?’

‘Because you needed to take the antidote every two hours day and night, four of us took it in turns and but we still needed to eat, sleep and make the antidote. So it was much easier here. The Healers agreed that you would be well cared for by me and Lucius.’

‘I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be so much trouble,’ she started to cry again, ‘it was our baby Severus.’

‘Yes, it was. But you are here and alive and we can have more babies.’

‘I love you,’ she simply said.

‘I know. Are you hungry?’ She nodded. ‘That’s a good sign, what would you like to eat?’

‘Roast chicken, potatoes and carrots.’

‘Hmm. Broth it is then. I shall be as quick as I can, I’m sure Narcissa will have something cooking.’

She nodded again and fell asleep.

It was another two days before she could keep awake longer than ten minutes. It was another day before she was allowed to walk to the bathroom unaided and joy of joys, she had a bath. Severus washed her hair and in a clean nightdress, courtesy of Narcissa, she began to feel better and even human again.

Gradually, the full story of her attempted murder was told. The culprits were part of the same Death Eater group as Selena and the werewolf; it was pure revenge and nothing else. That they were partially successful she found distressing, but the capture of the assassins by Harry and Arthur made up for that. They had been found guilty of murder and attempted murder and for their crimes were sentenced to Azkaban and the Dementor’s kiss.
Narcissa sat with her for a time each day to keep her company while Severus slept, ate or worked in the still room. It was Narcissa who told her it was only because of Severus’s skill as a Master Potioneer that the antidote was able to be decocted in a strength that wouldn’t kill her and it was Lucius’s apothecary skills that sourced and prepared the ingredients for use. The two together had kept her alive. She thanked Hermione for encouraging Lucius to court her again. They were making good progress with their relationship and of course, they were looking forward to Draco’s and Astoria’s wedding next winter. However, Narcissa was not so happy with the rumour that Lucius and Hermione had an affair, even though Lucius was of the opinion that it did wonders for his credibility, whatever that meant. Hermione had giggled at that and told the older woman that it was Ron Weasley who had come to the mistaken conclusion about her and Lucius, which is how the rumour first got started.

A day later she had a surprise visit from Harry. She was up and about, walking around the upstairs of the house, stairs being thought too strenuous, at least for the time being. He came bounding up the stairs calling her name and had lifted her up in a huge hug. They held each other, laughing and crying at the same time.

‘I thought you were a goner, ‘Mione, you were so close to death, I was so frightened,’ and he hugged her again.

‘Well, I’m getting stronger each day, Harry and it so good to see you,’ she took his hand and led him back into the bedroom. ‘Now, bring me up to date with you.’

He told her how much he was enjoying his work as an Unspeakable. He and Ginny were building bridges and their relationship was much better than it had been for years. She was off on a goodwill tour of Europe. He said that Arthur had volunteered to help capture the assassins and he was brilliant, calm, level headed and cool under pressure, the perfect partner. Hermione had asked if Arthur was thinking of becoming an Unspeakable and Harry thought that he would be perfect, although there was a rumour going around that he was going to get a promotion of some kind, possibly to do with Muggles. She thanked him for capturing the assassins and he had told her just how close to death she had been which is why everyone was so worried. Severus had worn himself ragged preparing the antidote as it was very complicated, Draco was flying around the country collecting ingredients from different places, including Hogwarts; he thought that old Slughorn’s store room was ransacked and interestingly, Slughorn had most of the rare and illegal ingredients needed. He also told her that he and Draco had been out for a beer at the Leaky Cauldron and they both agreed it was good to grow up.

It was three days later that Lucius confirmed that the poison was completely removed from her body and she was deemed well enough to go home to the gentle care of Severus and Moaner. When it came, she found it more difficult to leave than she thought. She owed Lucius her life and Narcissa, Draco and Astoria had nursed her back to health, but once back at Spinners End, in their own bed, with Moaner making a fuss of her, she felt content.

After Severus and Moaner had made two trips back and forth to Malfoy Manor, bringing back all the necessary ingredients needed for the antidote and all of his other paraphernalia to be stored in the potions room, he undressed and climbed into bed with her, something she had missed at the Malfoys.

‘Lucius wants you moving around as much as possible, but if you feel tired, you must stop and rest. Don’t push yourself.’

She stoked his cheek. ‘And what of you my love? You must also recover.’

‘I will now I know you are out of danger. I can sleep, eat and enjoy your company again,’ he squeezed her. ‘The poison was insidious and you have lost much of your body weight, so my love,
you can eat to your heart’s content.’

‘And potions?’

He laughed, ‘Of course potions, you know how much I enjoy plying you with potions. So, you will take one to build your strength up and another to help with your recovery from the miscarriage.’

‘Was I in St Mungo’s when it happened?’ she gripped his hand hard.

‘Yes. The Healers were very good. Lucius had gone home to sleep, I was about to leave when they called me back into your room.’

‘Was I screaming?’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought I had dreamed that.’ He kissed her hair and stroked her arm as they lay together. ‘Is Minister Shacklebolt still upset by what I said to him?’

‘I think he has recovered from that.’

She felt warm and safe again nestled in his arms and blanketed by his love. ‘Severus? There’s always going to be a threat, isn’t there?’

‘Yes, my love, I’m afraid so.’

Her eyes felt heavy and she closed them. ‘It’s a good job we have Harry and Arthur. And … Lucius …’ she drifted off into a calm peaceful sleep.

He slid down the bed with her still in his arms, reluctant to let go of her. ‘It’s a good job we have all of you,’ he whispered.

Over the following three weeks she steadily recovered her strength. Severus spent the whole of the first week with her and in that time they had re-established their relationship. Although they did not make love, he thought it still too early for that, they were intimate in other ways. Moaner took her duties as cook and housekeeper very seriously and enjoyed the responsibility of providing good, wholesome meals for them both. In the second week, when Severus returned to the Ministry, she sat with Hermione and chatted to keep her company or followed her around the house, making sure she didn’t over exert herself.

Towards the end of the second week, Lucius paid her a visit. He told her that he would be coming each day to help her with controlling her murderous powers. So a routine was established, during the morning, Lucius arrived and he would take through various exercises that gave her increasing control over her powers. He also apperated her to Malfoy Manor, just to see how she reacted, it would seem that there were no detrimental or lasting ill effects from the poison. Each afternoon, Moaner would spend time with her until Severus arrived home. He would then continue what Lucius had started. It became clear very quickly that she was in complete control of her powers and her emotions.
‘Why then are you letting Lucius and me teach you control?’

She had laughed, reached up and kissed him. ‘Two reasons, the first is because it was part of the original sanction and the second reason, I needed you to see and be sure that I was in control of my power, which I am … totally.’

By the third week she was strong enough to apperate by herself and Severus spent longer at the Ministry. She occupied herself with jobs around the house, improving things, changing things, but it still left her feeling useless. It was coming up to their second anniversary and she had come up with an idea for his gift. She tested herself by apperating to Diagon Alley to organise his gift and to do some shopping. Several people came up to her to congratulate her on her role in apprehending the original criminals and on her recovery. She did not shake anyone by the hand however.

They made love for the first time since her poisoning that week. It started out as a kiss and developed into something much more satisfying. She kept reassuring him that she was not going to break and he didn’t have to be so gentle and tentative. He took her at her word and they were soon being as adventurous as they always were. It reawakened within her the need for his touch, for his love and for his body. After all, they had a lot of time to make up for.

It was in the fourth week of her recovery when he didn’t go into the Ministry. He wanted to look at her memory of the Hall of Prophecy. She told him she was strong enough to allow that and so in the afternoon, they made themselves comfortable on the bed.

‘You know what you are looking for, don’t you?’ she asked. ‘This is not going to be a fishing expedition is it?’

‘I know what I am looking for and you are quite safe with me. I will try not to pry into your more … intimate memories.’

‘Alright. Let’s do it. But first, can I ask you a question?’ He nodded. ‘Do you have a Prophecy?’

‘Two actually. The first one now makes perfect sense, the second is nonsensical and I don’t understand it.’

‘Are you able to tell me?’

‘Of course. The first is, “To live and not be known, to love and know everything.” I lived most of my life in secret, as another person and I was unknown. Until I met you and you became my lover, partner, friend, I didn’t know myself, now with you, I know myself and I like me.’

‘And the second one?’

‘“The half of one will join one. Out of the ancient land to bring change. Where change did not exist. Until then.” It doesn’t make any sense.’

She frowned as she thought, held her hand up to stop him saying anything. ‘I think who ever gave the Prophecy was saying it incorrectly. If you change the flow and say “The half of one will join one out of the ancient land. To bring change where change did not exist until then.” It’s only two sentences and not four, now it makes sense.’ She smiled triumphantly at him.

‘But what does it mean?’

‘Right, … the half of one … that’s you, a half blood, will join one out of the ancient land … that’s me, a full blood Muggle born and the ancient land is Ireland, together we are going to bring about change where change did not exist until we two were joined.’
‘What change?’

‘Ah, not sure about that. It may be a work in progress or … something,’ she shrugged.

‘Well, it’s the best interpretation I have heard, thank you. Thank you very much,’ he smiled at her, then was all business again, ‘we need to maintain eye contact,’ he said.

‘I have no problem doing that,’ she batted her eyelids at him and he laughed.

‘Behave yourself. Now … empty your mind of all emotion and other … stuff. Look at me.’ He lifted his hand to her face to steady her head. ‘Ligilimens!’ He fell into her brown eyes and then into her mind. It was a perfectly calm and organised mind and he had no problem sifting through the layers. It was all there, the recent memories, their life together and far too many memories of their love making; memories of the War, some filled with such heart break he quickly moved on.

‘Find it yet? It’s a separate layer, a memory cupboard if you like. I …’

He pulled away breaking the connection. ‘What are you doing?’ he demanded.

‘Speaking to you. Oh sorry! I’m not meant to disturb your concentration. Sorry,’ she hung her head.

‘Hermione, you spoke into my mind.’

‘Yes. Is that a problem, can’t everyone do it?’

‘No. We’ll discuss it after. Now … once again, empty your mind and look into my eyes. Ligilimens!’

This time he fell much faster, being able to by-pass those memories already seen. The first time she and Ron had kissed, as well as the first time they had sex, he quickly skipped over that. There were some childhood memories that jumped out at him; her parents, laughter, hugs and songs. Her mother dancing her around the room to a song; her standing on her father’s feet as he walked her around the house; birthdays, outings, books. Then a layer he could not penetrate, no! a layer that was blocked. That puzzled him. Then he found it, a cupboard as she described and when he opened the door he was transported back to the Halls of Prophecy and her encounter with the Ancient past of Magic. He looked and listened and saw that indeed, she came from a very long line of powerful Wise Women. But who did that voice belong to? And what language did they speak? They obviously knew each other very well, he could feel the warmth, love and respect they held for each other. He also felt the power, the calmness and the age of her. She was reincarnated. She had lived many, many times before and she held great knowledge. He pulled away gently.

‘That … was very … interesting,’ he looked at her with renewed interest. ‘Hermione, I think you … I think you are one of the original magicians … may I look again?’

‘May I kiss you first?’ and without waiting for an answer, she kissed his lips. ‘Now you can look again.’

‘Ligilimens!’ As he searched for the door, he came across the barrier, he couldn’t resist and he pushed against it. It held firm.

‘There’s nothing in there, only Hogwarts stuff,’ he heard her voice in his mind. Why was she blocking Hogwarts memories? ‘There are some things I would like to remain … mine. They are not for sharing,’ her voice said. But his curiosity got the better of him and with another, more powerful push which she was not expecting, he was through the barrier and his mind was flooded with the memories. Her brilliance in class, Professor McGonagall praising her, helping her; the other staff, all singing her praises, all encouraging the Muggle born girl with so much potential. He saw her punch
Draco and enjoy it; tea with Hagrid, laughing with Harry and Ron, the adventures, all there. Why then did she not want him to …?

It changed suddenly, she was sitting in the fourth form girl’s toilet making Polyjuice potion. He saw the concentration on her face, she was a second year making a potion, potion – potion – potions and then it hit him. Her enthusiasm and knowledge in his class. ‘Anyone besides Granger? He heard his own drawl. Ten points from Gryffindor for being a know all; 20 points from Gryffindor for thinking you know better; don’t bother raising your hand Granger, I don’t want to hear it; ten points from Gryffindor and ten points to Slytherin for being right … again, Granger. Your calculation of worm’s blood to belladonna is incorrect, when will you ever learn Miss Granger? Why do I bother trying to teach such blockheads? Twenty points to Draco. But he copied from me, Professor. Twenty points from Gryffindor for allowing him to copy from you in the first place, Miss Granger. That recipe is correct Professor, I double checked. Well check again Miss Granger because it is wrong and ten points from Gryffindor for arguing with your Potions Master. Who do you think you are? How dare you argue with me?’ The tears, the heartbreak. Her being pushed around by other Gryffindors in the first year because she had lost the House more points in that single year than anyone before. He felt her pain each time he verbally accused her or made her look small or embarrassed in class. As she progressed through the school her potions books became more filled with her own calculations, her workings and measurements, all neatly laid out in the margins. So like himself, so like his own potions book. Her homework, neatly laid out with diagrams and precise quantities, fully documented outcomes, extra research, all crossed through or marked down. Her eyes when she looked at him either in class or outside held no hatred, only confusion as to why he didn’t like her, of what she could do to gain his recognition. He watched as she tore up parchments; weeping into her pillow. ‘I bloody well hate him, I’m not a know all, he is.’ The images came so fast he was overwhelmed. He pulled his mind away from hers so quickly and forcefully that they both fell back onto the bed. He lay there, panting, his head thumping.

‘Why did you do that? I asked you not to go there,’ she whispered.

He stared at her with eyes full of pain; he stood up, left the room and was gone.

‘I asked you not to go there, Severus. Severus?’ There was no response. ‘SEVERUS!’ she screamed and she fell back onto the bed, pounding her fists into the mattress and cried herself hoarse.

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She must have fallen asleep as it was dark when she opened her eyes. She felt thoroughly wretched, empty and alone. But why had he wanted to see those memories? She had put the barrier on them so that exactly this thing would not happen; she knew he would be devastated if he ever saw those memories. It had hurt him and that was the very thing she had always wanted to protect him from. She never meant to hurt him, if only she had made the barrier stronger. She got up slowly, sluggishly. Moaner was waiting for her on the landing, the little house elf was twisting her tea-towel dress in her hands.

‘Hello Moaner, do you know where Master Severus is?’

Moaner hung her head. ‘Master Severus gave Moaner strict order not to tell Hermione Granger. Moaner must obey Master Severus.’
She knelt down and touched the elf on the shoulder. ‘I understand Moaner. I will have to find Master Severus by myself. Is he alright, is he safe?’

The elf nodded. ‘Safe, yes and thank you for understanding, Hermione Granger,’ then she disappeared.

Moaner had said he was safe, but had not mentioned that he was alright. She needed to find him and apologise to make things better. She sighed heavily, where would he go? Hogwarts would be the obvious choice, but she felt that was too obvious or maybe not; with the Astronomy Tower fixed in her mind’s eyes, she apperated to Hogwarts. No alarms sounded as she landed and headed straight down the stairs to the Headmistress’s office. The doorway was open so she ran straight up and knocked on the door and waited. Headmistress McGonagall called come in, as she opened the door and stepped inside, out of the corner of her eye, she was sure she saw Albus leave his portrait.

‘Hermione! Oh my dear, how good to see you. Quite recovered I see,’ she came around her desk and hugged Hermione. ‘That was a terrible business; thank Merlin for Severus and Lucius, although Horace was not best pleased about having his storeroom plundered.’

‘Thank you, Headmistress and yes, Lucius and Severus were incredible and that’s why I’m here, I seem to have lost Severus. Is he here by any chance?’ She kept her voice level and a smile on her lips.

‘No, my dear, we haven’t seen him here in a little while. Now, would you like a cup of tea?’

She nodded and before long they were chatting about life in school and outside. Hermione kept looking at Albus’s portrait, but he didn’t return. After a polite amount of time, she made her goodbyes and left from the Astronomy Tower.

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‘She’s here, Severus,’ Albus said.

Severus looked up from the book he was trying to read and failing, ‘Hogwarts is the logical starting place,’ he replied.

‘You can’t do this to her, you know how in love with you she is.’

‘Albus, how can she be in love with me after everything I saw, everything I put her through when I was teaching her?’

‘Then you know less about Gryffindors and even less about Hermione that I thought,’ Albus snapped. ‘She will not give you up, not without good reason and not without a fight. Don’t put her or yourself through this, not after everything the two of you have been through recently.’

‘I’m ashamed, Albus. Deeply ashamed of my conduct towards her, how can she …’ he stopped. ‘No, it will be better this way.’

‘Don’t you love her anymore?’

‘I love her too much, that’s why I can’t face her. Why I have to end it.’
Albus sighed and said nothing. Severus leaned back in the chair, lost in thought.

‘Well, that was not one of my finest moments,’ Minerva McGonagall said as she bustled into his room of requirement. ‘She’s putting on a very brave face, Severus, saying she seems to have lost you, as though you were a key. What she is saying of course is that she has lost you.’

‘Thank you Minerva, I am not proud of having to ask you to lie to her for my sake. I will leave in a couple of days.’

‘And if she comes back, which she will, what then?’

‘I will leave that entirely up to you, you have done enough and I am very grateful.’ He slipped back into thoughtfulness. ‘She gave me an interpretation of my second prophecy. She worked out that it was only two sentences and that it had been said and misheard for years as four.’

‘Well, are ye going to tell us or not?’ Minerva asked.

‘“The half of one will join one out of the ancient land. To bring change where change did not exist until then.” I am the half, the half-blood, she is the one, a full-blood Muggle, the ancient land is Ireland, but what the change is, I have no idea.’ He slumped back.

‘Tell me what you saw in the Hall of Prophecy,’ Albus said.

So in a flat monotone, he repeated all that he had seen and understood of her experience. Albus and Minerva were silent when he finished.

‘I agree,’ Albus said at last, ‘it would seem our Hermione is from the long line of Priestesses, Magicians and Wise Women of the ancient lineage of Ireland and Elemental Earth magic is incredibly powerful, it is raw energy, drawn up from the Earth herself, to wield it, you must have years of training. Our own magic is a much refined version of the original.’ He paused again, thinking, … ‘as for bringing about change, you have already started that process yourself, bringing those of the Dark into partnership with the Light. And from what you have told us, she is bringing about as much change as you and the Ministry, only she is doing it through friendship. Who would have thought ten years ago that Draco Malfoy would be flying around the country in a bid to save the life of Hermione Granger, eh, and Lucius, doing the same? Don’t you see, Severus, the two of you are bringing about change were none existed before?’

‘Aye, Albus is right and the one thing ye never do is mess with a Prophecy. We all know what happens when you do. And I think it is all one sentence … “The half of one will join one out of the ancient land to bring change where change did not exist until then.” Now it makes perfect sense.’

The three sat in gloomy silence.

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Back at Spinners End there was still no sign of Severus, which saddened her further. She missed him so much already. Looking at the time, she realised it was too late to try anywhere else and with nothing more she could do, she went upstairs to the empty bed.

Her head was throbbing the next morning; she didn’t want to get up, she called Moaner, but when
the elf did not appear, she dragged herself up and went downstairs to make tea. She racked her brains as to where he would have gone, Malfoy Manor? No, he would not want Lucius to know that there was a problem between him and her. Would he go to work? That would be her first stop today, if she could see him at the Ministry … it was the best she could come up with for now, maybe later she would try her parent’s house. She went to shower and dress and with her head still throbbing, she floo-ed it to the Ministry. But of course, once she stepped out in the Atrium, she had the problem of getting to his office, security was all very well, but not when you needed to find your boyfriend.

‘Hermione!’ She turned at the call of her name and saw Minister Shacklebolt coming towards her. ‘How are you?’ He asked, grasping her hand and patting it, ‘it’s good to see you back in the Ministry, Severus taken my advice and given you your job back, eh?’

She was shocked. ‘No, Minister, he hasn’t mentioned anything to me about it yet. Keeping it as a surprise I expect.’

‘Well, act surprised when he does. Are you here to see him?’

‘Yes, but I didn’t think it through and I have no idea of how to get through the barrier,’ she smiled her best smile at him.

‘But he’s not in today; I thought you would have known. He sent a message to let me know,’ he looked at her, ‘is everything alright between the two of you?’

‘We seem to keep missing each other somehow, oh well. I bet he’s back home already.’ She paused ‘… Minister Shacklebolt? … I just want to say thank you for helping to catch the assassins, it was a brilliant plan.’ He stood and waited. ‘I also apologise for comparing you to Cornelius Fudge, you are nothing like him.’

‘Apology accepted Hermione, I expect the poison was already entering you system.’ She nodded. ‘Was there anything else you wished to say?’

‘Yes … I’m not going to apologise for what I said in the Wizengamot, I think I was right,’ She kept her gaze level with his.

‘Yes, I agree. We have to keep our eyes peeled and our ears to the ground, as the Muggle saying goes. So, off you go to find Severus and remember … act surprised!’ He turned and walked away.

Well that was an interesting and informative conversation, she thought, making her way back to the floo’s. Why hadn’t Severus said anything about reinstating her and that something was going on in the Ministry? At Spinners End the house was still empty, she made a cup of tea and sat in the kitchen to drink it. Which brought her thoughts back to where he was? She couldn’t quite believe that Minerva would lie outright to her, but … it may be a possibility. She felt the creeping canker of depression begin its slow march over her mind. She wouldn’t give up, not yet, and if it was over between them, well he was jolly well going to have to tell her himself. She nodded her determination, pushing her sadness and growing fear down into her shoes, she stamped her feet to keep it there. Right, she stood up all positive and business like, she went into the library to see if there was anything there that would give a clue as to his whereabouts. She liked his library, not only did it contain some rare and wonderful books, it was also very masculine and she found that comforting. She sat in one of the reading chairs and looked around. Nothing jumped out at her as a clue. She sighed, maybe Harry would know. She had no idea of Harry’s working pattern, but doing something was better than sitting around and doing nothing.

She stepped into the floo and went to her house. ‘Harry, you home?’ she called. There was no reply so going into the kitchen, she put the kettle on. The house was in pretty good condition, considering
Harry didn’t have a reputation for tidiness. The kitchen was clean, the carpets weren’t too bad and there was only the faintest sheen of dust on the surfaces. She made her tea and sat drinking it. She was sipping her second cup when the front door opened, putting down her mug she ran into the hall to meet him.

‘Harry, oh Harry!’ she flung herself into his arms. ‘It’s terrible …’

‘Say hi to Ron and Lavender,’ he interrupted.

‘What?’ She looked behind Harry to see Ron and Lavender Brown staring at her. ‘Oh, right, hi Ron, hello Lavender, how are you?’

‘I’m fine Hermione, thanks for asking. Ron and I are dating.’

‘Oh. Great.’

‘What’s wrong, Hermione?’ Harry asked.

‘Yes … I think I … left my bag here … upstairs, you know … my special one.’

‘The one you used during the Lost Year?’ Ron said. ‘The beaded one?’

‘That’s the one,’ she smiled weakly at Ron.

‘You’re holding it,’ Ron nodded to her bag and eyed her suspiciously.

‘No, not this one … this is a new one … it’s … the old one … Could I go upstairs and have a look for it, Harry?’ She hoped she didn’t sound too desperate.

‘It’s your house ‘Mione, help yourself,’ Harry said.

‘Would you come and … help?’ she gestured upstairs with her eyes.

‘Um … er … yeah … fine. C’mom then.’ They ran upstairs and into her old bedroom. ‘What’s going on? You looked terrible,’ he said as soon as they were inside. In a low whisper she quickly told him what had happened and that Severus had left her. ‘I haven’t seen him for a couple of days,’ he said, ‘and that was at work. He seemed fine.’

‘I just thought he may have come here to talk to you,’ she said.

‘We should be getting downstairs … Ron and Lavender … y’know.’

‘Lavender Brown?’ she almost laughed.

‘He’s moving on, so let it go, OK?’

‘No Harry, he’s not moving on, he’s moving back, but at least she likes to snog,’ she squeezed his arm. They went downstairs and into the kitchen.

‘Did you find it?’ Lavender asked.

‘No, I think I have either lost it or put it somewhere safe, anyway, good to see you again, Lavender, Ron.’

Harry went to the front door with her. ‘Harry …’
‘Yeah, if I see him or hear anything … I’ll let you know,’ he hugged her and stepped away as she stepped outside and apperated without a sound.

Back in the kitchen Ron and Lavender were talking. ‘She’s getting worse Harry, I know she was almost murdered and she’s been fired, but blimey, I think she has finally cracked,’ Ron said.

‘She’s been through a lot recently Ron, and she has a lot on her mind. Who’s for pizza and a film?’

‘Well I think she should get herself a boyfriend, it can’t have been nice being dumped by Lucius Malfoy. She should get out there, find herself a new boyfriend and get on with her life. I think she might still be just a little bit in love with you Ronny Won,’ and she leaned in to kiss him.

Harry rolled his eyes as he lifted three pizzas from the freezer. ‘Pepperoni, pepperoni and … oh yeah, pepperoni?’

‘Have you got a Margarita?’ Lavender asked.

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Spinners End was still empty when she arrived back. She went into the kitchen and Moaner was waiting for her.

‘Master Severus has not returned,’ she said and vanished.

‘Thanks for nothing, I could have told you that,’ she said to the empty room. She was hungry, but didn’t feel like eating, there was half a bottle of wine on the side, so she poured herself a large goblet, took it into the library and sat down to think again. Where are you Severus? And why does Moaner keep appearing? Are you sending her to keep an eye on me, to make sure I’m not going to do anything daft? She drank her wine in several large mouthfuls; maybe alcohol will loosen up the grey matter.

She had a crick in her neck and her arm had gone to sleep when she opened her eyes. Her mouth was furry and her mind was addled. The wine had sent her to sleep instead of perking her up. Going upstairs to the bathroom, she looked into their bedroom, it was messy and with a flick of her hand, the bed was smoothed and pillows plumped. The clock on the wall told her it was the early hours of the morning; she had slept for eight hours. In the bathroom, she cleaned her teeth and used mouthwash to get rid of the taste of stale wine; she looked at herself in the mirror. Yuk! ‘Mione, you need a cup of tea.’

‘Moaner will make Hermione Granger a cup of tea and a nice slice of cake,’ the little elf had made her jump when she appeared.

‘Just tea please, no cake.’ Moaner disappeared.

She went downstairs. Why was Moaner here? She half expected to see Severus sitting at the kitchen table, book in hand sipping an espresso, a beverage he had grown to love. Moaner, who seemed full of life for the early hours of the morning, placed a fresh pot of tea on the table, with a jug of milk. Hermione poured herself a cup. ‘Would you like a cup of tea, Moaner?’

Moaner stared wide eyed at her. ‘Yes please, Hermione Granger, Moaner has never been offered a
cup of tea before.’ The elf jumped onto a chair and a delicate porcelain teacup and saucer appeared before her.

‘Milk and sugar?’

‘Oh yes. Milk and lots of sugar,’ Hermione poured and Moaner called stop at four sugars. They sat together and drank their tea. Moaner accepted a refill, obviously enjoying the experience.

Hermione put her cup down. ‘Moaner? You know how Master Severus instructed you not to tell me where he was?’ Moaner nodded. ‘Weeell, could you give me clue without telling me? I mean,’ she added quickly, ‘if you don’t say a word, then you’re not telling me are you? Master Severus didn’t say anything about showing me, did he?’ She picked up her cup and finished her tea. She knew that if Moaner disappeared all would be lost as she may well report to Severus.

Moaner sat very quietly, drawing small shapes on the table top with her finger nail. She glanced at Hermione now and then. ‘Very well,’ the elf said and vanished.

‘No Moaner … shit.’

A second later Moaner reappeared. ‘In the library,’ and she was gone again.
Chapter Summary

Another deep breath, she was just about keeping her emotions in check. ‘I’m sure he appreciates your loyalty Minerva. But I am here to see him and he should have the common decency to face me himself and not hide behind his friends. Now, please tell me where I can find him, I’m not leaving until I have seen him.’ She felt a sob building up in her throat, but she swallowed it down. She was tired, hungry and emotional; all she wanted was to see him and speak to him, why was that so difficult?

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She went into the library, at first glance it seemed that nothing had changed and nothing was different, but she looked closely and then she spotted it, a gap on one of the shelves. Severus kept his books in an alpha beta title order, so he always knew where a book was, it was a trait they shared. She looked along the shelf, ‘Hexes and Tricks’ by Milord Gangrel; ‘Hel and Beyond’ by Anonymous; then a gap followed by ‘Incantations for Imbolc’ by Taverel. What came between Hel and Imb? She ran through the alphabet, H is for … hall, had, hard, … that’s bloody hopeless. H is for … heal, heart, heat, … that’s no good either. H is for … high, hind, hire … she screamed in her throat. Deep breath Hermione, OK now, H is for … aeiou … o … so, hob, hog, hole, hoot, hot … arrgghhh! H is for … aeiou … u … hub, hug, hum, … wait wait wait … H is for hog … Hogwarts … oh bloody, shitty, hell! She went back to the gap, ‘Hogwarts a History’ was missing. ‘Moaner, you are a genius,’ she said out loud. But her elation was short lived, she had been to Hogwarts and … oh gawd, Minerva lied to protect him.

It was only a few hours to daybreak; she planned to get some sleep and then go back and tackle Minerva. As she settled down to try and sleep, she wondered if Moaner had reported her transgression to Severus, if the elf had, then Severus would know she was on her way. As she closed her eyes, she realised it didn’t matter and she didn’t care, she was going to see him and apologise to him and, if he wanted to end their relationship, he would have to tell her to her face.

She arrived near the loch this time; the Astronomy Tower could well have alarms set since she was last here. The sun had risen and the Scottish skies were ablaze with pink, orange and red, it was going to be a glorious day, weather wise. She walked up the path towards the school, there was no-one in the grounds this early in the morning, so she hoped to get to her destination without being spotted. She entered the school by the main doors and was immediately transported back to her days as a pupil. The familiar smells, sounds and surroundings assaulted her senses. The damage from the Battle was now largely repaired and it was difficult to see what was old and what was new. She stood for a moment to soak up all that was familiar about the place, realising it felt good to be back.

She set off for Minerva’s office, fully aware that any of the portraits could warn the Headmistress of her approach. She walked up the main staircase and it started to swing in the wrong direction. She
told it very firmly to behave and take her back to the correct landing; the staircase did as it was told slowly, as if reluctant to obey. She ran down the familiar corridor, turned right, down to the end, turned left and found herself facing the two Guardians. The password! She didn’t know the password, damn and blast … how stupid was she? Apperating into the office was not an option, too many protections; she could lose an arm or leg if she tried. How many goes would she be allowed before the door locked? She cleared her throat, ‘Hermione Granger, Gryffindor, to see the Headmistress.’ Nothing happened. ‘Loch Ness Monster.’ Nothing. ‘Barley Sugar Twists.’ Still nothing. She guessed she may have one last chance before she was locked out. ‘Butter Shortbread.’ There came a loud click, damn, she was locked out. She would now have to wait for Minerva to come down, or wait for someone to go up.

She went and sat down on the floor behind the stairwell, her tummy growled in hunger as the aroma of breakfast came drifting up from the Great Hall; bustling pupils were now coming and going along the corridors on their way down to breakfast. Breakfast, she almost drooled at the thought. Footsteps approached the stairwell, so she made herself as small as possible against the wall.

‘Hoots Mon,’ a young voice said and there came the familiar grinding of stone upon stone as the Guardians parted and the stairs were revealed. She waited for the messenger to leave before approaching the door again and as the footsteps ran down the corridor she left her hiding place and stood before the Guardians. ‘Hoots Mon,’ and was rewarded with the doors sliding open. ‘Thank you,’ she said out of habit. The door to the office was closed, taking a deep breath she knocked.

‘Come in,’ Headmistress McGonagall called. She turned the handle and went in. ‘Ah, Hermione, I’ve been expecting you,’ she said getting up from her desk and coming to greet her former pupil with a hug.

‘I’m here to see Severus, Minerva,’ she had given some thought as how best to address her former Professor, she had chosen Minerva over Headmistress simply because it put them on a more equal footing, that she was no longer Hermione Granger the pupil, but Hermione Granger, a grown woman.

‘I know, and I am so sorry Hermione, but he doesn’t want to see you,’ her voice was soft with concern as she placed a hand on Hermione’s shoulder.

Hermione took a deep, calming breath. ‘And I’m sorry Minerva, but he is going to have to tell me himself.’

Minerva McGonagall pulled herself up to her full height. ‘He was very definite, I’m afraid he has made up his mind,’ her voice was sterner now.

Another deep breath, she was just about keeping her emotions in check. ‘I’m sure he appreciates your loyalty Minerva. But I am here to see him and he should have the common decency to face me himself and not hide behind his friends. Now, please tell me where I can find him, I’m not leaving until I have seen him.’ She felt a sob building up in her throat, but she swallowed it down. She was tired, hungry and emotional; all she wanted was to see him and speak to him, why was that so difficult?

‘I’m so sorry Hermione, but he left yesterday, he knew you would be back. I don’t know where he has gone.’

Hermione stood riveted to the spot. What was going on? Had Moaner lied to her? Was Minerva lying as well? ‘If … you know where he is … please tell me … I’m frantic with worry … please …,’ she begged, all fight and determination gone from her.
‘My dear, what would you do if you found him, what would you say?’

‘I’d apologise for hurting him, it was never my intention to hurt him. I asked him not to look, but he did and I know it upset him, but … but …’

‘And if he felt he could no longer continue a relationship with you, what would you do then?’

‘If he told me to my face … then I would have to accept that it was over. My heart would break, but I would have heard the words from him.’

Minerva sighed. ‘And ye would be willing to take that risk?’

‘I don’t have any choice do I? If that’s the way he wants it … I will take the risk and I would walk away.’

Minerva turned away from her. ‘I thought I was stronger than I obviously am, but … he is here and yes, I have been protecting him, but I cannot bear the thought of you not seeing him and it breaking your heart. If ye can find him in the castle, then I have not broken my word.’

Hermione spontaneously hugged Minerva and without a word, ran down the stairs.

‘Do you think he will go through with it?’ She said to Albus who had just appeared back in his portrait.

‘We will just have to see. They love each other so much, it is quite wonderful.’

‘Aye, it is Albus. Some things are just meant to be.’

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She hit the bottom step and kept running. Where could he be? The castle was vast, think logically Hermione, Slytherin! She all but skidded to a halt and changed direction to head to the Viaduct corridor and the stairs that led down to the Dungeons. She ran down the tightly spiralling stairs and stopped. The common room was straight ahead, would he be in there? It was doubtful, it was too obvious. She passed a potions classroom and put her head around the door, it was empty. What about his old study, would Professor Slughorn be there? She approached the door, knocked and waited.

‘Ah Miss Granger, what a lovely surprise, coming to say thanks no doubt,’ Horace Slughorn came out of another classroom. ‘I have to say that young Malfoy took all my supply of Golden Poison Frog venom, he said he would replace it, but as yet …’ He beamed at Hermione.

‘Yes, Professor, thank you so much for all your assistance, I don’t think Professor Snape would have been able to prepare the antidote without your supply.’

‘Well, thanks duly accepted. Now if you happen to see young Malfoy, do remind him about replacing what he took, would you? I can’t go gallivanting around the jungle looking for a fresh supply, not with all these pupils to teach.’ He held out his hand and Hermione shook it. ‘Give my best to Severus should you see him at the Ministry, such a loss to the art of Potions, but … never mind. Ah, here come the second years now, hopeless bunch, absolutely hopeless. Well, good bye
Deirdre, good to see you looking so well.’

She stood to let the second years file into the classroom then she made her way back up to ground level. Where was he? She ran to the Great Hall and had a look in, most of the pupils had left, only a few fifth and sixth formers were still sitting and chatting over a late breakfast, there were no teachers on the High Table. Of course, if he had a Room of Requirement, she was done for; there would be no way of ever finding him short of following him and overhearing the password. She clenched her fists in frustration. What about in the grounds? Hagrid! She dashed through the main doors and headed towards Hagrid’s house and ran straight into him.

‘Hermione!’ and he picked her up and hugged her. ‘Bless me if I weren’t so worried about yer, but just look at yer, all bloomin’ and healthy.’

She hugged him back as best she could and he put her down. ‘Thanks Hagrid, it’s good to see you. How are you?’

‘I’m fair to middlin’, thank you very much. But what am I thinking? I ‘spect you’ll want to be seeing Professor Snape,’ he winked at her, ‘and here’s me keepin’ you, well off you go, he’s down by the Headmaster’s tomb, and don’t be a stranger, eh?’

She turned and blew him a kiss as she ran to the tomb. The sun was sparkling on the loch and the birds were singing, it was an idyllic spot and she could see why Albus would choose to have his tomb here. She couldn’t see him; maybe he was on the other side, facing the water. She walked around the tomb and there he was, sitting on a tartan blanket, his back against the cool of the marble, reading. She stood quite still. ‘Hello,’ she said.

He looked up at her. ‘Hello,’ he placed a bookmark in his page and closed the book. ‘Did Minerva tell you I was here?’

‘No, she only told me that you were somewhere in the castle, so she kept her word. It was Hagrid; he obviously doesn’t know you are hiding from me.’ She moved closer to him, kneeling down in front of him. He didn’t say a word, nor did he move. He was wearing his long jacket with a white shirt beneath. The jacket and shirt were open at the neck and she had to resist the urge to lean in and kiss the scars on this neck. His hair gleamed in the morning sunlight and he looked altogether gorgeous, handsome and drop dead sexy. She swallowed, her mouth suddenly dry. ‘I need to apologise to you,’ she kept her eyes down, ‘I know you must feel … well, terrible about you saw. It was never my intention for you to see those memories …’

‘… Hermione …’

Her heart lurched into her throat. ‘… Please Severus, let me finish. Minerva only told me you were here after I agreed to leave if you told me too, and I will, I won’t make any trouble.’ She took a deep breath. ‘I would never hurt you … you know it is something I would never do. But …’ she gulped down a sob, ‘… I never wanted you to see those memories. There was no need, it’s in the past and I have moved on from those days. I … I never hated you … never, not once. I may have said it a few times but that was the idiotic schoolgirl talking.’ She paused and tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear. ‘I just didn’t understand why you hated me so much. I couldn’t work out what I needed to do to get recognition or praise from you; it seemed that nothing I did pleased you. You were the only one, the only teacher I could not impress. I had so much knowledge, I was learning so much yet I couldn’t get you to smile at me, to give me one lousy house point.’ Hot tears were now rolling down her cheek; she dashed them away with her hand. ‘So I apologise from the depth of my heart for the embarrassment I caused you.’

The birds sang and a gentle breeze blew across the loch, rippling the surface and rustling the leaves
on the trees. She dared not raise her eyes to look at him, to do so would open the flood gates and she didn’t need him to feel sorry for her.

‘I admit I was wrong to probe, but you must understand that what I saw shames me and yes, embarrasses me. How can you love me … make love to me knowing what I did? How can you expect me to … be with you when I said those things?’

She closed her eyes, listening to the words, to his voice, the same voice that whispered endearments into her ear while making love. She heard the crack of her breaking heart and she wondered if he heard it too. ‘I’m sorry Hermione, but I don’t think we …’

‘Please Severus, don’t say anymore. Don’t say the words, I’ll leave, just … don’t say the words,’ she stood up and rummaged in her beaded bag. ‘As I won’t be seeing you again, it’s best if you have this now,’ she pulled a large, beautifully wrapped box out of the bag. She smiled weakly, ‘My bottomless bag, the one place you never look so I knew it would be safe.’ She handed him the box. ‘It would have been our two year anniversary … you should have it … I … it’s for you.’ He took the box and she held out her hand. ‘Goodbye, Severus,’ he stood, shook her hand, but said nothing. She looked into his eyes for the first time, so dark, so loving and so, so deep. She turned on her heel, ran a few yards and disappeared.

She ran up the stairs and into their bedroom. She stood in the middle of the beautiful space he had created for her; it had become their sanctuary, a place of peace and calm, of love and laughter, a shared space. Now though, she was exhausted from emotion, half a bottle of wine and tiredness, she just wanted to sleep and bawl her eyes out. She had been hanging on to the tears since her arrival at Hogwarts, now she just needed them to flow. Kicking off her shoes, she slipped out of her jeans and blouse and went over to the bed, just a couple of hours rest, then she would pack her things and leave. Folded neatly on a low stool was one of his shirts, she put it on. It still carried the scent of him, his body, his soap, the spicy fragrance he used because he knew she loved it. Slipping under the covers, she curled into a ball and thought how appropriate it was that the shirt was black as she already felt dead inside, with that, she closed her eyes.

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He was unaware he was crying until a large tear splashed on the package he was holding. The grounds, the castle were now empty without her presence, the world somehow smaller and colours faded. He looked down at the gift she had left him, so beautifully wrapped and so like her to remember. Earlier in the year, on his birthday she had given him a copy of the poetry of John Keats, a Muggle poet. It was an old leather bound edition she had found in a junk shop in Diagon Alley that sold mainly Muggle things. She had had the fly leaf inscribed, it read, “Severus, my love, my heart, my joy – Happy Birthday – Hermione XX”. The inscription could only be read when the moon was full and he treasured it.

He tore away the paper to reveal a box. It was highly polished and had the entwined Coats of Arms of Gryffindor and Slytherin engraved on the lid. He opened it and a burst of fireworks formed themselves in the words – HAPPY 2ND ANNIVERSARY!! HG WOZ HERE XXX – the inside of the lid had a monogram in gold SS/LE, Severus Snape and Lily Evans. The box was lined in deep, rich green and red velvet and contained the photo of Lily, only now it was a living photograph so every time Lily lifted her head, she smiled at him. The violet also had its own frame, it looked as fresh as
the day it was given to him and the delicate scent of violet pervaded his senses. The Three Musketeers had not been altered, nor had the small pack of letters, but they now rested in a pouch made of the softest leather and the pouch was also monogrammed; the candy floss stick was nestled in a cunningly crafted ledge on one side of the box. At the bottom of the box was a hand written note: “My darling, forgive my intrusion into your privacy, but I thought that these precious things needed a suitable home. Happy 2\textsuperscript{nd} Anniversary – I am now working on your gift for our 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, 5\textsuperscript{th}, … 90\textsuperscript{th}, 100\textsuperscript{th}! You make me so happy and I love you. HG xx”

His legs gave way and he fell to his knees, he gently placed the box before him, closed the lid and leaned back against the cool marble of Albus’s tomb. Overhead the sun inched across the sky, the breeze dropped and still he sat, deep in thought. Then the time for thinking was over, he knew what he must do. Picking up the box he sprinted and apperated into the Headmistress’s office.

‘Severus, you really must stop taking advantage of your Headmaster’s privileges as you are no longer Headmaster,’ Minerva chided.

‘What have you decided?’ Albus asked.

‘Nothing, as there is nothing to decide, it is all about doing, not deciding. I am leaving; I am going to her before I make the biggest mistake of my mistake making life.’

‘What are you going to do?’ Minerva asked.

‘What I should have done earlier when I understood what the Prophecy meant.’

‘Aye, and what would that be?’

‘Join with her. I am going to marry her, if she will have me, that’s what the Prophecy means. We have to join together in wedlock.’

‘Well, off you go then … and use …’ But it was too late, he had already vanished. Minerva tutted goodnaturedly and went back to the report she was reading.

The house was quiet. It could only be two hours or so since she had left him, quickly he looked in the downstairs rooms, they were empty. He bounded upstairs, his heart racing, had he missed her? Had she left him so soon? Flinging open the door to their bedroom he saw everything was neat and tidy, the bed was made; there were no books by the bedside, no hair ties on the floor or various pieces of underwear scattered around like delicate petals and when he checked, her personal toiletries were gone. Only his black shirt remained, neatly folded on her pillow. He picked it up and knew immediately she had worn it, it still carried the scent of her body, the lotion she used to keep her skin soft and the floral perfume she wore because she knew he loved it.

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She stepped out of the floo into the sitting room of her parent’s house. She had not really slept and the tears had not flowed, she just felt hollow and empty. So she had got up, showered and tidied the bedroom, packed a few things into her bag, the rest she would collect another time.

The sitting room was untidy, probably from the night before. ‘Harry!’ She called out, ‘you home?’
When she got no reply she went into the kitchen, the remains of pizza and empty beer bottles littered the draining board, which she found sadly depressing. There was movement upstairs and then the clatter of footsteps on the stairs. Harry burst into the kitchen, he had dressed hurriedly, jeans, tee-shirt, no socks and he looked particularly dishevelled and rumpled.

‘Hermione! What are you doing here?’ He seemed almost upset that she was in the kitchen of her house.

‘I’m … I’m going to have to move back here, Harry,’ she caught his alarmed look, ‘no, you don’t have to leave … it’ just … over … finished and I need somewhere to live.’

‘Hermione, what’s happened, has he …?’ It was then that the dam burst and she fell into his arms and sobbed her broken heart out. He held her, patting her back for comfort.

‘What’s going on Harry?’ Ginny was standing in the doorway, a light robe over her naked form.

‘Hermione’s very upset, Gin, give us a minute, OK?’

‘She seems more than just upset.’ Hermione lifted her head, looked at Ginny and left Harry’s arms to sit at the kitchen table. ‘Hello Hermione,’ Ginny said without a smile.

She couldn’t respond to her ex best friend, she could only bury her head in her hands and cry. Harry handed her kitchen roll to wipe her eyes, she dabbed the wetness away and blew her nose. ‘Sorry, you two, I didn’t know.’

‘It’s alright, ‘Mione. Since I left The Burrow, Ginny and I have been working things out and she stays over as often as she can, she’s off on a tour of Europe later today … so we …y’know…”

She dissolved into tears again, how could she move back in, Harry and Ginny needed this space, needed time to … she sniffed.

‘Can you tell me what happened?’ Harry asked as he put the kettle on.

‘I … I can’t tell you everything just now … to fresh … too much hurt. It’s over that’s all, finished. Harry, I think I heard my heart break, it was awful,’ and she started to sob again.

Harry made a pot of tea and Ginny washed the mugs, he poured the tea, added sugar and gave it to her. ‘Drink this,’ he ordered. She did as she was told, pulled a face at the sweetness, but took several sips. ‘I don’t what to say, ‘Mione. I kill him the next time I see him … I …’

‘Don’t say that Harry,’ she said fiercely, raising her voice, ‘it’s my fault, not his – I’m to blame.’

‘No you’re not, it’s my fault.’

They turned to see Severus standing in the doorway. Ginny looked from Severus to Hermione and back again.

‘Hello Ginevra, you are looking well.’

‘You mean … you mean HE is your boyfriend? You’re breaking your heart over HIM?’ Severus closed his eyes, stung by Ginny’s words.

Harry got up and went to him. ‘Why? What’s going on Severus? Why have you broken her heart?’

‘Why are you even talking to him Harry? He’s a Slytherin and a Death Eater; talk about bad taste, first Malfoy and now HIM?’
‘HOW DARE YOU?’ Hermione flew towards Ginny. ‘Bloody Weasley’s and their ignorant attitudes…’

Ginny took a step back. ‘Hermione, c’mon be reasonable, how could you even think about …?’

‘You would never understand Ginny Weasley, your brain can’t see beyond your next match …’

Harry stepped in at that point, putting himself between the two women before hexes were exchanged. ‘Ginny, go upstairs and wait, OK?’

‘But Harry! …’

‘Just fucking do it Ginny. For once in your life don’t argue with me, just do as I ask, please.’

Ginny looked sheepishly at Harry. ‘Alright, I’ll be upstairs,’ she walked into the hall, ‘but you have a lot of explaining to do Harry Potter,’ she called back.

‘She always gets the last word in,’ he half smiled. Hermione was still standing, her eyes fixed on him. She dare not turn to face Severus, although she could feel his gaze upon her.

‘Harry, would you mind giving us …?’ Severus asked.

‘Oh … yeah, sure. I’ll … just be next door if you need me ‘Mione, wand at the ready.’

‘That was very brave, Harry,’ Severus said and squeezed his shoulder as he passed. She didn’t move, nor did he. The clock on the kitchen wall ticked away the seconds. ‘I went to Spinners End … you had gone,’ his voice was soft. ‘I came straight from Hogwarts but I was too late, the house was so empty and cold without you … Hermione, look at me.’

She shook her head. ‘If I look at you I’ll ….‘

‘Please … look at me,’ he pleaded.

‘Severus …’ but she turned and faced him. His eyes met hers and she tried to gulp down a sob, but it didn’t work.

‘It’s my fault, all my fault Hermione. I am stupid … none stupider. I have pushed you when there was no need to; I invaded your privacy when I knew I shouldn’t. I am the one who is sorry.’ He took a step towards her, she didn’t move. ‘I forget that you are not just another witch, you are unique and precious and I lose sight of that.’ He took another step, closing the gap between them.

Her heart was beating wildly, her mind refusing to work as he was moved closer to her, filling her senses with his familiar presence.

‘Your gift … it overwhelms me … your generosity towards me concerning Lily … I don’t deserve …’

Another step, this time from her. ‘Take me home please,’ she whispered. He nodded and held out his hand, she took it and he led her back into the sitting room.

‘You may tell Ginevra as much or as little as you choose, Harry,’ Severus said, ‘I will leave it entirely up to you.’

‘Hermione?’ Harry approached her; she smiled at him and gave him a quick hug. ‘See you soon, OK?’
Severus still had hold of her hand as they stepped into the floo. ‘Spinners End,’ he said clearly and threw the powder.

When he went into the bedroom, Ginny was sitting up in bed, the sheet pulled up around her.

‘Right, care to tell me what is going on?’ She demanded. Harry told her the whole story and she listened intently. ‘So she never was dating Malfoy?’

‘No, that was Ron getting hold of the wrong end of the stick.’

‘Wow, wait till I tell mum, she will be shocked.’

‘No Ginny.’

She looked at him, puzzled. ‘What do you mean … no?’

‘I mean no, you will not tell your mum, or anyone else for that matter,’ his tone was firm.

‘But Harry …’

‘No buts Gin. You run and tell your mum everything; you tell her about us, what I do and don’t do and I would like it to stop.’

‘Don’t tell me who …’ She got out of bed and put her robe back on.

‘… And stop treating me like one of your brothers as well. I am your fiancé, please treat me as your future husband, it’s not much to ask.’ He ran his hand through his hair. ‘I love you Gin, want to marry you and spend my life with you. But I can’t do that if you don’t care about me, if you run and tell your mum when things go wrong, when you treat me like I was just another Weasley brother.’

‘I didn’t know you felt like that, Harry,’ she came and sat next to him on the bed.

‘You also need to know that I like Severus, I also like Draco and his mum and dad,’ he held his hand up to stop her interruption, ‘things are changing Gin, and we need to do the same. Severus loves and cares for Hermione so much and because she’s made friends with the Malfoys, Lucius and Draco were prepared to help save her life. We need to move forward, make plans for our future because I do want a future with you, I want us to have kids and I want us to be as happy as possible. But I have to know that you care about me and that you can respect me as your friend, fiancé and husband.’

They sat in silence. He felt Ginny’s hand take his hand then her arm came around his shoulder.

‘I do care about you Harry Potter and I do love you. And … I know you are right … it’s just difficult for me … I’m used to telling mum everything and getting her advice …but I understand what you are saying and … we do have to work things out for ourselves … but she is my mum …’

He pulled her into him. ‘Yes, she is your mum and I would never ask you to stop talking to her … I wish that I could have talked to my mum and dad … but if we are to be partners, then maybe we should talk to each other first … and your mum second … unless it’s to do with girl stuff then I don’t
want to know!’

She swatted him and he pulled her onto the bed. ‘What about dad? Would you to talk to him?’ she asked.

‘Every time. Your dad is great and I would trust him with anything.’

‘Like what?’ she was nipping at his neck.

‘Your dad … well, he knows a lot, doesn’t miss anything, unlike you, you’ve missed a spot … right here.’

She wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him into her; he pushed the top of her robe down and they kissed as if they weren’t going to see each other for at least four weeks.

He still had hold of her hand as they stepped out of the floo at Spinners End. They stood together for a moment, then he led her to the sofa and they sat down, next to each other. They sat like this, just being near, with a light touch, or a shy smile, they allowed themselves to just be with one another. They were gentle with each other, gentle and kind.

Then they talked. She started by asking about her job. He had smiled wryly and explained that it was to be part of her anniversary gift from him. He had thought about taking her away somewhere, somewhere romantic then presenting her with a box in which would have been her job. He admitted it was a daft idea and nowhere near as thoughtful as her gift to him, but he knew how much the job meant to her. She had thrown her arms around his neck and thanked him. They shared kisses, tears and food; then she talked to him about her memories he had seen and how he should not be fearful of them. She asked if he would like to see them again, to remove any lasting fears he may have. He declined and said if she can live with them and still love him, then, that was good enough. Gradually, over the day, they shared their thoughts, feelings and fears and for the first time in two years, they truly understood each other.

Much later in the day she asked him if he would like to see her much older, ancient memories, which were worse that her recent memories of Hogwarts, memories she carried with her and always would. He didn’t want to see them, but he did ask what she remembered. So she told him of the children she had lost to murder, through tribal wars and to invading Romans; of entire tribes being led off into slavery. The sacrifices she had to make, sometimes of her own children, or other children or chosen ones and in two of her lives, she had to sacrifice herself. She did this to bring balance back to the World. When he asked if it had worked, she replied it had, mostly. He asked where she had been during the centuries when there were no records of her existence. She had smiled shyly, taken his face in her hands, and shown him. When she gently released him, he looked at her with wonder in his eyes. It was why death held no fear for her, she said, because it was where she would be. He turned away from her and sat, deep in thought.

‘I know what you are thinking, Severus and I do not know the answer. I do not know what will happen to us beyond the Veil.’

He turned back to her and gathered her in his arms. ‘So we will have to make every moment we are
“Now that sounds like a brilliant plan. I have one as well.”

“Oh, what?”

“That you take me to bed.”

Taking her hand, he led her upstairs. They climbed into bed and he leaned up on his elbow, looking at her. It was dark in their tent, a single brass lamp flickered in the gentle breeze that wafted in from the desert and the air was fragrant with juniper and desert sage.

“Marry me,” he said, caressing her face.

“No,” she replied.

He fell onto his back. “Why not?” he snapped.

Now it was Hermione who leaned up on her elbow and looked down at him. “Because we can’t simply go from zero to marriage, we have to do it in stages.”

He groaned. “But I want to marry you now,” and she laughed at his petulance, “but I also know you are right, we need to take it a step at a time. But it is part of my Prophecy, to join with you in marriage.”

“That would make sense. But first, we need rumours.”

“What rumours?”

“Well, you did look after me when I was poisoned, everybody knows that … so, what if I started to like you and you me during that time?”

“Hmm, it has merits. The Ministry Midsummer Ball is in three weeks, it would be the perfect time and place to show people that we are attracted to each other, that will set tongues wagging.”

She rolled onto her back. “Perfect! I’ll ask Harry to start dropping hints; by the time of the Ball we will be able to take it to the next level.”

“You can be very devious when you try,” he turned to her, “you would have done well in Slytherin.”

“I am taking that as a compliment,” she said as she kissed him.

“So you are not averse to marrying your Potions Master?”

“Not at all. Next year will be perfect.”

“I am not waiting until next year,” he protested.

“Sorry, my love, but you are going to have to. It has to be done in the correct way, besides, next year is a year of weddings, Draco and Astoria, Harry and Ginny, me and you.”

“Harry and Ginevra?”

“Hmm, only they don’t know it yet.”

“And you know this because …?”
‘Call it feminine intuition.’

‘That is very, I believe the expression is … lame. There is no such thing as feminine intuition, if there was … then you would know what I will be doing next year besides marrying you.’

‘Very true, but my feminine intuition does know what you are going to do right now.’

‘And just what would that be, pray?’ he said, with the slightest hint of derision.

She took his hand and placed it between her legs, then smiled at him.

‘You are so wrong.’

‘My mistake, here then,’ and she placed his hand on her breast.

‘Not even close,’ he got out of bed.

‘Where are you going?’

‘To make us a cup of tea, talking is thirsty work.’

They sat drinking their tea, which she had to admit was lovely and exactly what they needed. Once finished, they slid down the bed together.

‘You were right of course,’ he said, kissing her tip of her nose.

‘About what?’ she returned the kiss.

‘My hand, the first time,’ and he started to laugh.

‘Total git,’ and she rolled on top of him, ‘now … for sweet revenge.’
Chapter Summary

He caught up with her at the floo system; she had just collected her cloak from the attendant.

‘Miss Granger?’ She turned to him. ‘I do hope you were not leaving without saying goodbye properly.’

‘Mr Snape, of course not, I do apologise, but I couldn’t see you in the ballroom,’ and with that, she put her arms around his neck and kissed him very nicely.

‘Erm … I have a bottle of Firewhiskey in my office, would you care to …?’

‘… Would love to.’

He was making small talk with Minister Shacklebolt, trying to keep his mind focused on the night ahead. This was his first Ministry Midsummer Ball, the previous ones he could have attended he didn’t, it’s not good form to be seen at a party when you are dead, unless you are a ghost.

If she was to walk through the door now, what would he do? He had not seen her for two days; she had gone to stay with Harry until tonight, the night of the Ball. She had been into London to buy a dress for the occasion; he knew that much from Harry. He missed her; two days away from her were lost days and empty nights. She had recovered well from her ordeal and was now glowing with health once again. She had replaced nearly all the weight she had lost; she had filled out again and gone was the bony outline the poison had left her with. She had taken his potions without any resistance and these had played a major part in her recovery. He had also persuaded her to take a contraceptive potion, freeing them for the need to worry about her becoming pregnant. They were still coming to terms with the loss of a child and after a long heart to heart, had agreed that while they wanted children, it was best if the risk of pregnancy was removed for the time being. He promised her that once she stopped taking it, her body would be ready to conceive quickly.

She had come back to work in the Department and had excelled on the two assignments he had given her; they were not particularly dangerous as he had decided he would not place her in direct danger again, despite her protests. The one man rumour mill that was Harry Potter had also excelled in planting the seeds of a blossoming romantic involvement between himself and the lovely Miss Granger. They had played their part by being seen in the Atrium and being coyly polite with each other. So tonight he was getting some very knowing looks and when other guests came to chat with him or shake his hand, there was always a little nod or wink when they left. He had arrived by himself as planned; Hermione would be arriving with Harry as Ginevra was away in Europe with the Holyhead Harpies.

He made the odd comment to Kingsley, trying to keep track of what was being discussed. Kingsley was being very patient with him and his wandering mind. He sipped his Firewhiskey and glanced
around the large room. Lucius and Narcissa were in deep conversation with Belladonna Green, Draco and the very lovely Astoria were either dancing or standing close, engrossed in each other. On another side of the room, Molly and Arthur were chatting to Ron and Lavender; Percy had just come in from the ballroom with a rather attractive young lady and was plying her with drink. Arthur had already broken ranks with Molly and had spent time chatting to him, and more importantly, Lucius and Narcissa. Arthur was inclusive with those he regarded as friends. He sipped his drink again, as nervous as at any time in his life, he trembled slightly at the thought of seeing her, of having to court her over the night in front of strangers. He had missed her within thirty minutes of her leaving to stay with Harry.

It could all go wrong of course, in fact, he knew it would go wrong, it had too; it was a bold, impractical plan. Would it work? The plan had been revealed to him by Harry and Lucius earlier in the week; it was at that point that his nerves had decided to make an appearance. He wanted to talk the whole thing over with her, but she remained incommunicado for the two days she was away, not even turning up at the Ministry.

His musing was interrupted by an appreciative murmur from the guests in the room. He turned and almost dropped his goblet. Walking into the room was Harry and the most beautiful, exquisite woman he had ever seen. Harry was in party robes along with all the other men at the Ball, but the woman! She was sheathed in a long red dress that clung to her every curve; the neckline was not low, but the soft material scooped across her breasts and accentuated her perfect neck. They stopped to greet various guests, but it was when they turned to greet the Malfoys that the impact of the dress hit him and why the men in the room had their tongues on the floor and the women sharpening their wands. The dress had no back. Two string thin straps crossed from each shoulder down to the small of her back where the material mirrored the neckline in a soft scoop. Each thin strap was embedded with small clear gems that sparkled when they caught the light. He took a very long slug of Firewhiskey as the couple walked towards him.

‘Minister Shacklebolt’ Harry said, shaking hands with the Minister.

‘Good to see you Harry, Hermione you look stunning,’ and he kissed her hand.

She smiled at Kingsley then turned to Severus. ‘Hello, Mr Snape, nice to see you,’ she held out her hand, he took it and kissed it even as his legs turned to jelly. ‘How are our children?’

‘I’m sorry I … oh, quite. The article in The Prophet … I apologise for that and can only hope that in the future, they will employ a better class of reporter. Harry, good to see you,’ he shook Harry’s hand.

‘Good to see you as well, Boss,’ Harry replied, ‘Mione, would you like to dance?’

‘Would love to Harry, I shall leave a space on my card for you as well … Boss,’ she gave him a cheeky grin and with Harry’s arm around her waist, they walked into the ballroom.

He followed her with his eyes; his heart was beating so fast and so loudly that everyone in the room must be able to hear it.

‘She certainly scrubs up nicely,’ Kingsley laughed as he clapped him on the back. ‘You are going to have your work cut out for you if you want to make it convincing, half of the wizards here are ogling her at the moment and the other half are mentally undressing her.’

Severus downed the rest of his drink, handed the goblet to Kingsley and sauntered into the ballroom to watch the dancing. She was being twirled around by Harry in a lively two step and looked relaxed and comfortable. She had had her hair cut earlier in the week, gone were the wild curls and although
not short, the cut now framed her face, rather than hide it. She had been worried he would not approve, he admitted it was a shock, but he loved it as much as she did. She had confessed that she felt more grown up, more her own woman with her new style. He had wholeheartedly agreed.

Draco cut in and danced with her while Harry partnered Astoria. He enjoyed watching Harry and Draco’s friendship grow, that they had lain to rest their stormy and some would say, murderous, past and found mutual ground on which to be friends. Harry was also on easy speaking terms with Lucius and Narcissa. He leant against one of the great columns and allowed a faint smile to cross his face as he thought how well the Plan seemed to be working. The music stopped but dancers remained on the dance floor and he soon understood why. All the young graduates of Hogwarts, Harry, Hermione, Neville, Luna, Draco, Ron and Lavender had begun a Hogwarts’ Stampa. It was a challenge dance as old as Wizardry. At its basic level you stamped your feet, but in the hands of an expert, the steps became increasingly difficult. It wasn’t long before everyone had taken up the challenge. The tempo increased and the clapping and twirling commenced. Soon the room was a mass of twirling, clapping stamping colour. What he knew that most others did not, was that Neville Longbottom and his fiancée, Luna Lovegood, where experts and Hogwarts’ Champions.

Soon dancers were dropping out, exhausted. Harry was still twirling Hermione, while Neville and Luna were keeping perfect tempo with each other. They increased the tempo yet again, Harry and Hermione knew they were beaten and laughing, left the dance floor. Harry left Hermione standing by him as he went to fetch cool drinks.

‘You look ravishing,’ his voice was low, but the smile said they were exchanging pleasantries.

‘Play your cards right and you could be taking me home,’ she smiled back.

‘Tell me, are you wearing anything under that … confection?’

Harry arrived back at that point and handed her a tall glass with lemon and ice. She finished it in one go just as a cheer went up for Neville and Luna, who were the last couple on the dance floor. She handed him her empty glass.

‘Maybe,’ she said as Harry led her away. It was suddenly very warm in the room.

‘Good to see you Professor,’ Neville held out his hand.

He shook Neville’s hand. ‘And congratulations to you, Professor Longbottom. Do you have any plans on where you would like to teach?’ Luna came up and held out her hand to him and he kissed the back of it.

‘Well, I am thinking of spending a couple of terms teaching at the School for Advanced Herbology in Oslo, I’ve been offered a place if I want it. After that, I’m open to suggestions.’

‘Oslo is a very fine School,’ he noticed that Luna was smiling up at him.

‘It is a very good plan, Professor. But I think you may have to make a move soon. You see, you are not the only man who thinks she is attractive. Come along Neville, I need a drink.’ He smiled at them both as they left. Luna would make an excellent Divination teacher and the Oslo school was a good choice for Neville. It would give him the experience he would need to take on the post of Professor of Herbology at Hogwarts. Yes, the Plan was beginning to take shape.

He went back into the main room and saw Hermione sitting in a group of people that included Harry, Ron and Percy Weasley. He gave the empty glass to a passing Ministry elf and approached the group, it was now or never and it was a large enough group so that gossip would ensue and anyway,
Ron and Percy disliked him.

‘Excuse me, Miss Granger?’ She looked up at him. ‘Would you care to dance?’ His panicked at that precise moment. What if she said no? Or laughed at him? She did none of those things.

‘I would be delighted,’ she said, despite a yelp of protest from Ron. She stood and accepted his hand and he led her back into the ballroom. The small band were playing a reasonably slow dance, he guided her onto the floor, placed his hands in the correct position and lead her around the dance floor. Other dancers nudged each other and some stared, but they remained the accepted distance apart as they glided around.

‘You are mine for the rest of the night,’ he said to her.

‘Really? I’m here with Harry and as a single girl I have my choice of partners for the night. And beyond, if I so choose.’ She smiled at him. The music stopped and she inclined her head in a dismissive gesture and left him on the dance floor. He was devastated; with all the dignity he could muster he followed her and caught up to her.

‘I apologise if I have offended you in any way, Miss Granger.’ Several guests inched closer to better hear the exchange.

‘If you had offended me, Mr Snape, you can be certain I would let you know and just because you are my Boss doesn’t allow you to take … liberties,’ she scowled at him, ‘now, if you will excuse me.’ She stalked away, leaving him speechless. He went and found another drink.

Lucius came and stood by him. ‘You seem to be losing your touch,’ he said, saluting Severus with his goblet.

‘Don’t start, Lucius, this is difficult enough for me.’

Lucius laughed. ‘Come and join us when you are ready, Arthur is telling some of his outlandish stories.’ He nodded and sipped his drink as Lucius walked across to a group of guests sitting in a loose circle.

And so it went for the rest of the night. He danced with Narcissa, Astoria, Luna and surprisingly, once with Molly who waltzed like a professional. Belladonna Green asked him to dance and had spent the whole time asking him questions about Hermione and Harry. He responded in monosyllables as best he could and as the dance progressed she held him closer, which he found odd and uncomfortable. He chatted to various other members of the Ministry, to Neville and Luna; he was told by them that they had received an invitation to the Ball directly from Minister Shacklebolt, which they found very thoughtful. But no matter whom he was with or what he was doing, he followed the movements of Miss Granger with his eyes; it seemed as if every man in at the Ball asked her for a dance at some point over the night.

In the small hours of the morning, he was sitting with Lucius, Arthur and a group of Senior Ministers, Arthur was once again telling a shaggy Hippogryph story, which he would have to admit, was rather funny. Talk was mainly about the changes the Ministry was making and families and children. There was a sudden lull in the conversation and all eyes turned to him, or more accurately, to the side of him. He looked around and saw Hermione walking towards the group. Arthur raised his glass to him.

‘Excuse me gentlemen,’ she said, ‘but … Mr Snape, I was rude to you earlier. It was uncalled for and churlish of me. You have been very kind to me, giving me my job back and more importantly, saving my life. So to make amends for my earlier rudeness, please accept my apology … and would
you care to dance?’ Smiles, nudges and nods were exchanged among the gathered wizards. He didn’t know quite how to respond.

‘Are you going to sit there or are you going to accept a dance from the second most beautiful woman at the Ball?’ Lucius said as he removed the goblet from Severus’s hand.

He stood up. ‘Apology accepted and I would be honoured,’ he offered his hand to Miss Granger and led her into the ballroom. The candlelight had been dimmed to a nicely atmospheric level and couples were dancing cheek to cheek. He led her onto the dance floor and took her in his arms and they moved slowly around the floor. Lucius and Narcissa glided by and they both smiled at them. Then Harry and Molly danced by, Harry beamed at them, Hermione laughed and buried her head in Severus’s shoulder. One tune was replaced by another, even slower dance. This time she did not leave. He held her close; in heels, she was tall enough so they could dance cheek to cheek and he felt her soft breath against his skin, just below his ear.

‘I see you are wearing the pendant,’ he said against her hair. It was a green jade disc with coral inlay, her real anniversary gift.

‘Red and green go together rather well don’t you think?’ she replied. ‘I chose a red dress to compliment the green of your party robes. Ron tried to talk me out of it y’know.’

‘What? The dress? Does he realise how dangerous I am when it comes to you?’

‘No, great idiot! Not the dress, he tried to talk me out of asking you for a dance.’

‘I’m so glad he didn’t,’ her body was pressed against him and it felt so good.

‘Severus,’ she whispered, ‘do you think it’s working?’

He moved her smoothly across the dance floor; her arm had now firmly around his waist. ‘No idea, and right now, I don’t care, this is perfect … do you think we could find a dark corner and have frenzied sex in the best traditions of Ministry parties?’

She was shaking with laughter. ‘Well, it would certainly give everyone something to talk about.’

‘Dare I risk kissing you on the dance floor?’ He pulled her even closer into him.

‘I would prefer a kiss to my lips and no, we have to break our relationship in gently, close dancing has already got everyone hot, bothered and curious, a kiss would be a step too far and believe me, I want to do more to you than simply kiss,’ her voice was breathy and she gasped as he pushed himself into her.

‘A dark corner it is then,’ and as the music changed again, he gripped her hands and led her into a deeply sensuous tango, a dance that was all legs between legs, bump and grind and ended with Hermione leaning backwards over his arm. Other couples on the dance floor simply stopped and watched the display of pure sexual tension that left them with plenty to talk about. By the time the music stopped, he wanted her so badly, it was painful. This time however, he led her back into the other room and found her a long cool drink. The lighting in this room was also subdued and in the soft glow of candlelight she looked ethereal. Harry came over and offered her his hand; she smiled brightly at him and allowed him to lead her back into the ball room. Severus scowled as he followed them with his eyes; he picked up a drink from a passing ministry elf. Arthur came and stood by him.

‘Hogwarts!’ Arthur toasted.

‘Hogwarts!’ he responded.
‘Great party Severus,’ Arthur said conversationally. ‘I suggest you both leave soon, individually of course, but the fact that you have both left will cement the idea in people’s minds, especially after your last dance.’ Severus gave him an alarmed look, Arthur just smiled at him. ‘Don’t worry, I’ll smooth the way with Molly and Ron.’

‘How long have you known?’ Severus asked as the two men walked across the room towards the dancing. They stood and watched as Harry and Hermione moved around the dance floor, holding each other close.

‘From the beginning,’ he smiled broadly and thumped Severus on his back to stop him choking. ‘I like you Severus, always have. You played an impeccable game with …’ and he looked around … ‘Voldemort, that makes you top wizard in my books.’

‘I really don’t know what to say Arthur, except … thank you, from me and … Hermione.’

‘Lovely girl … woman I should say. Completely wrong for our Ron of course, but he’s getting over it and moving on. Never seen you look happier Severus and that’s the way it should be when you meet the right one.’

Severus raised his glass to the enigmatic Arthur and both of them turned to watch the dancers. Hermione was now being swung around by Lucius, who was smiling broadly as he danced and talked, Hermione was laughing out loud, although she kept moving one of his hands back to her waist from her rear, he smiled as he watched the Pure Blood dance the Muggle born around the room, both of them obviously enjoying every minute.

Harry came and stood between him and Arthur. ‘It’s working,’ he grinned broadly and put his arms around both men’s shoulders.

‘Are you drunk, Harry?’

‘Yeah Severus, I think I am. It’s great,’ and he hugged the two men to him.

Lucius escorted Hermione to them, she was flushed and smiling. ‘I suggest Miss Granger slips away and you follow, a minute should be a sensible interval. Once you have both disappeared I am sure the room with erupt in wild speculation.’ He turned to Hermione, lifted her hand and kissed it. He then turned to Harry who was smiling at him. ‘Are you drunk Mr Potter?’

‘Yeah … want to go outside for a duel, Mr Malfoy?’

Lucius grinned. ‘Oh to be young and reckless. Now Miss Granger, make your very noticeable exit, Arthur and I will send Severus after you.’

She kissed Arthur on the cheek; Severus kissed the back of her hand and said something about having enjoyed her company. Harry held her around the waist and walked her back into the other room to say her goodbyes. Lucius and Arthur guided him into the room but stopped him reaching for another drink. He made great play of watching her say her goodbyes and Arthur and Lucius made great play of bringing his attention back to their conversation. He noticed that Kingsley was loathed to let go of her hand after kissing it.

‘Do you think she is wearing any underwear?’ Lucius asked and received a cuff from Narcissa who had just joined them.

‘I saw you Malfoy’, she accused.

‘Looking is expected, my love.’
‘Not the looking, the handling. I saw you.’ She smiled as Lucius blushed.

‘Right Severus,’ Arthur said, ‘off you go.’

He shook hands with the two men and kissed Narcissa on the cheeks and then he rushed out of the room. As soon as he stepped out through the doorway, the room erupted and the gossip started.

Harry joined the group. ‘A great plan, very well executed if I may say so,’ and he saluted the group with his goblet, which Arthur removed from his hand.

‘No more for you, my lad,’ he said with great authority, Harry simply beamed at him.

He caught up with her at the floo system; she had just collected her cloak from the attendant.

‘Miss Granger?’ She turned to him. ‘I do hope you were not leaving without saying goodbye properly.’

‘Mr Snape, of course not, I do apologise, but I couldn’t see you in the ball room,’ and with that, she put her arms around his neck and kissed him very nicely.

‘Erm … I have a bottle of Firewhiskey in my office, would you care to …?’

‘… Would love to.’

He pressed for a lift, running his hand up and down her back as they waited. The lift arrived and he allowed her in first, his hand accidently slipping to her derrière as he guided her in. ‘Level nine,’ he said, loud enough for the cloak attendant to hear. Once the lift was moving, he caught hold of her, pushed against the side and plundered her mouth. He pressed into her, she ground herself against him. She moaned as he slid his hand under her dress and all the way up to the firm roundness of cheeks, he couldn’t find any evidence of underwear as she brought a leg up and curled it around his leg. Her cloak lay in a crumpled heap on the floor.

By the time the lift announced, “Level nine, Department of Mysteries,” she had his jacket and shirt undone and was kissing his chest, her hands exploring his back. He brought her lips back to his and locked in a kiss they managed to negotiate their way out of the lift. He broke away long enough to Apperio! his wand. ‘Stay close,’ he said as they approached the barrier.’

‘Any closer and you’ll be inside me,’ she panted.

‘Ah, so you have guessed my plan?’ he replied as they passed through the barrier. Their mouths found each other again and they somehow found the door to his office. With one hand holding her, he pushed the door open with the other then swung her round so that she went in first; she wriggled her bottom against him. ‘By Merlin, woman …’ he didn’t get a chance to finish the sentence as she had pushed him roughly against the door and tried to sit in his lap. With her legs around his waist, he kissed her and walked with her across to his desk. The only light in the office was the same pale green shimmer of Slytherin common room. He sat her on the edge of his desk as with a wave of his hand, he sealed the door. His eyes were hooded with desire, she was leaning back on her hands, her dress already hitched above her knees, she kicked off her heels and placed on foot on his hip, the
other she brought up between his legs, he gasped as her foot brushed against his erection. Slowly, carefully, he slipped the straps off her shoulders, revealing her breasts. He reached and cupped one before lowering his head to suck the nipple. She threw back her head and purred as his tongue licked and his teeth gently nipped.

She pushed him away with her feet and he protested, only to have the protest die on his lips as her hands fell to the buttons on his trousers. She held his gaze as one by one, the buttons were opened and her hand slid inside to release her prize. He pushed her back onto the desk, ignoring the clatter of ink pots, quills and parchments that fell to the floor, she was under him and she arched her back to meet him. He smiled, changed his mind and pulled her up and turned her around so she was bent over the desk. He kissed down the length of her back while his hands drew her dress up around her waist. He saw it then, the thin delicate string above her hips; with a satisfied grunt he tore the flimsy piece of lace from her and dropped it to the floor. She gasped and pushed herself into him.

‘Merlin, Severus … inside me now,’ she groaned.

Gripping her hip with one hand and his erection with the other, he guided himself into her; he thrust and gasped as she pushed back onto him, taking him deeper. He snaked his hand around and found her wet sex, his fingers rubbing her, making her tighten around him. He felt her change the pace, felt the subtle shifting of energy that was bringing her to climax. His own release was building, he wouldn’t last much longer. With a breathy gasp of … ‘oh Severus, I’m com …’ from her he allowed himself one, two more thrusts before he released himself to the orgasm that engulfed them both. Panting against her hair, he held her close, taking his weight on one hand against the desk, not wanting to slip out of her until absolutely necessary. She was limp against him. When they drew apart, she turned and lay back on his great desk and pulled him to her.

‘That was so worth waiting for,’ she muttered. He said nothing, simply kissed her breasts. ‘The dress is ruined of course,’ she complained.

‘Ask your boss to buy you another,’ he said.

‘Don’t think I won’t,’ she pulled his face to her and kissed him, a deep kiss, all tongues, teeth and lust. His fingers glided gently over her nipples and he pushed his leg between hers. ‘Take me home Severus, I think I need you again, only … near a bed this time.’ They continued to kiss and caress until their desire was building again, then he rose from her and stood by the desk, re-buttoned his trousers, released the charm on the door, gathered her into his arms and left by his personal door.

Not long afterwards, Lucius and Arthur entered the office of the Head of the Department of Mysteries. They had slipped away from the ball, which was buzzing with the news that Severus Snape, cold hearted, tough as old dragon scales, had invited the lovely, brave, clever Miss Granger down to his office for a night cap, after they had kissed. And not just kissed; the cloak attendant was sure she had seen Mr Snape pressing Miss Granger against the side of the lift, his hand well and truly up her skirt, of course she could be wrong, as it all happened very quickly as the lift was disappearing. Arthur had to restrain Ron from rushing down to level nine to confront Severus; Ron contented himself with a rant of … how dare he? She’s too good for him, never did like him. Arthur had a serious urge to tell his youngest son to pull himself together as Severus and Hermione had been living together for two years. Deal with it. But he didn’t, he just glanced at Molly for support, she
nodded and put her arm around Ron, then she shot him a questioning glance, he had just shook his head in response. Lucius, Narcissa, Draco and Astoria where having a high old time along with Kingsley, as they listened to the increasingly exaggerated explanations that were circulating. The five of them kept silent on the matter.

‘Lumos!’ Lucius commanded.

‘Nice office,’ Arthur remarked as the office became illuminated. They stood and stared at the ruins of the desk that lay scattered on the floor. They looked at each other and smiled.

‘How did they leave without being spotted?’ Lucius asked, as he continued to scan the room.

‘Probably got a secret way in and out, same as Kingsley,’ Arthur replied.

Lucius raised his eyebrows, ‘I see I was incorrect in my assumption that Miss Granger was not wearing under garments.’ Arthur followed his gaze. ‘What is that?’ Lucius asked as he levitated the tiny triangle of red lace. ‘Don’t tell me she was actually wearing this.’

‘Molly hates them, says they are too uncomfortable, y’know … in the … crack’ and he gestured to his bottom.

‘It would seem that Miss Granger has no problem with … that.’ He allowed the lace to fall onto the desk; he then produced a small piece of lovely wrapping paper and skilfully wrapped it up, with a tiny red bow on the package. He opened a drawer and placed the package inside. ‘There, that should give him a surprise when he is next looking for a fresh bottle of ink.’

Arthur smiled broadly. ‘Right Lucius, I will leave her cloak on the chair then I think our work here is done, time to get back upstairs and go home.’ They left the office and made their way back to level two and the Ball, which was now breaking up. They shook hands and went off to find their families.

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At Spinners End, Severus had managed to remove his party robes before she jumped on him and made passionate love to him again. Her dress had ended up ripped this time and was now pooled in a red puddle by the side of their bed.

‘Glory, Mr Snape, but you one damn fine lover,’ she purred, as she kissed the scars on his neck then swept his hair away from his face to gently kiss his lips. ‘I am so very much in love with you Severus,’ she whispered in his ear.

‘Thank you,’ was all he was capable of saying.

‘I am looking forward to being your wife; I want to spend the rest of my life with you, snuggled next to you in bed.’

‘I don’t snuggle, you know that.’

She laughed. ‘Doing it in your office was incredibly sexy. Can we do it again?’

‘My reputation is already destroyed, so why not?’
She rolled off him and lay in the crook of his neck. ‘When shall set the wedding day?’

‘We shall give it some thought; I assume you will want to do things in the traditional way, High One?’

She thumped his leg. ‘Yes, I think so.’ Settled down with him, he put out the lamps and pulled the covers over them, enjoying the feel of her body against his; her soft breath against his skin and her hand resting ever so lightly over his penis. This was bliss beyond anything he could ever have dreamed of. He was drifting off to sleep when she sat bolt upright.

‘Severus! Did you pick up my underwear?’

‘No,’ he replied sleepily, ‘I left it for Lucius and Arthur to find.’

She started to laugh. ‘Nooo! That is so bad Professor Snape; it will drive both of them mad with envy.’

‘Precisely,’ he said, as she lay down and he snuggled into her.
Perfect Day

Chapter Summary

‘Knut for your thoughts?’ he asked.

‘I love this place, it reminds me of a life a long time ago, when I lived in a similar wild, beautiful place. The wind has the same taste, the grass is the same green and the mountains the same majesty. But I also know it was not here, in Scotland.’ She sighed, ‘I get glimpses now and then and a memory will surface, I will feel melancholy for a second, then like a wisp of smoke … it is gone.’ She leaned back into him, into his strong body, into his strong being, into his strong love.

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Perfect Day

Chapter 18

‘I hope for your sake you have good news,’ the words were heavy with threat.

‘Nothing has changed since my last report. It is now accepted that the Traitor and the Mudblood are in a relationship and there are rumours of a wedding. Potter and the Blood Traitor bitch are also planning a wedding; The Minister forges ahead with Reforms.’

‘And what of Lucius and his family? I hope I can depend on Lucius to be cooperative.’

‘Also making plans for a wedding.’

‘Good. Weddings are events were people gather, they are happy, they drink too much and become relaxed and unwary. Weddings are something we can work with. You will get yourself invited and you will keep me informed as to dates and place. We need a time when all the Traitors are in one place together and then we can strike. You are to get close to any who will be open and appreciative of our cause. But remember, if you are discovered, you are on your own. You will receive no help or support from me.’

‘I understand, sir. I will not fail you.’

‘Of course you won’t,’ he snapped back, ‘you know the consequences for failure. Now get out of my sight.’

Once the door was closed he sat back, rolling his wand in his hand. The waiting was driving him crazy, he was all for action, not sitting around planning and waiting. Yet the need for caution was great, the Ministry was no longer the corrupt place is once was back in the good old days. He was a wanted criminal now and a wrong move would see him sent to the Dementors, without the usual stay in Azkaban. No, he needed to heed all the lessons that his Lord had taught him, patience will always
be rewarded, do not be hasty and above all, choose the time and place for your battle that gives you all the advantages. He would have liked to have made his move this year, but next year will be just as good. Over the next year there will be more recruits, more youngsters being turned, and when the strike comes, everyone will be in the same place at the same time and they will all die.

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She opened her eyes slowly, sighed and stretched, then sought out his body. His side of the bed was empty, and then she remembered, he had another early meeting at the Ministry and no doubt was already showering and preparing for the day ahead. She didn’t have to go into the Ministry today; she was having a day off. She crawled over his side of the bed and stood up and headed for the bathroom.

Opening the door she heard the sound of the running shower, she stepped out of her shorts and vest, opened the door to the shower and stepped in.

‘Hello,’ she said.

‘Hello, you were sleeping so peacefully I didn’t want to wake you,’ he turned to her as she took the flannel from him and poured a blob of his shower potion onto it; she then took his left arm and started to wash him. Neither spoke as she did the same to his right arm. This was a ritual, not one that was performed every day when they were both rushing to get ready for work, but for times like today when, it was still early. She refreshed the flannel with more potion; it was his own blend of bespoke herbs and spices, it suited him perfectly and she loved it. She had first smelt the fragrance in the Chamber of Love when she was still a fledgling Unspeakable and they were living at her parent’s house. The fragrance had drawn her to the cauldron where she had stood transfixed, inhaling deeply. There was something else she detected, a subtle base note that she couldn’t identify; it was only after a year of living with him that she recognised that base note. It was love. She was surprised that love could have a fragrance, but when she had talked to him about it he had told her it made sense, why shouldn’t something as powerful as love have a fragrance, a sound or a flavour? That comment had taken the discussion in an entirely different direction.

She knelt down and he lifted one foot, then the other; she washed his legs, stood up and turned him around to wash his back, as she turned him yet again to wash his chest: she always made sure to kiss all the scars on his body and arms, as well as the ones on his neck; it was not an erotic act, merely one born of love. She chuckled to herself.

‘What’s amusing you?’ he asked.

‘Oh, I was remembering something from my childhood,’ she replied.

‘Tell me.’

‘When I was in the bath, mum would wash me. I would stand up in the water and she would wash down my upper body, then up my legs. It was always down and up. I asked her one day why she never did it the other way around.’ She was washing around his neck and shoulders now. ‘And she laughed and said, “always remember my little flower, you wash down as far as possible, wash up as far as possible, then”’ her eyes met his and her hand fell between his legs, “… then, you wash possible.”’ She washed him gently, again, it was not an erotic act, yet it was very, very intimate. She
pushed him under the spray to rinse off, then she handed him the flannel, ‘my turn.’

He followed the same pattern as her and she closed her eyes, lost in the sensation. He had brewed her own showering potion, it included rose and holly berry, it suited her perfectly, he called it Hollymione. When he had finished, they stood together under the spray, enjoying the feel of each other and the water splashing over them both.

She sat on the bed wrapped in a large towel, drying her hair with a smaller one, reading the last pages of a book. He came and knelt behind by her, took the towel and continued to rub her hair dry.

‘What time is your meeting?’ she asked.

‘Meeting? What meeting?’

She looked up from her page. ‘You had a meeting today with Kingsley and Belladonna Green.’

He groaned. ‘You are right, but it was cancelled, I thought I had told you. If I haven’t I do apologise’, he lifted her hair and kissed the nape of her neck.

‘Apology accepted as it was given so nicely,’ and she giggled. ‘Does this mean you still have to go into the Department?’

‘Why?’

‘I have a free day … and if you have a free day … we could do something … a picnic!’ She turned and looked at him.

‘Excellent idea. Where though?’

‘Somewhere remote, with a lake, somewhere we can be by ourselves and have time together. We have both been very busy lately, and … it is a glorious day.’

He sat and thought for a moment. ‘I know just the spot. Get dressed, unless you wish to remain naked, in which case you will get no protests from me.’

She was up and searching for clothes before he had finished. She chose a long, floaty cotton dress with buttons down the front. Sandals completed her outfit.

‘I’m ready,’ and she laughed at his look of sheer astonishment, usually he was waiting for her. He was dressing in casual Muggle wear of jeans and white shirt.

‘Take something warm for later, in case it gets chilly. Moaner?’ The house elf appeared. ‘Please prepare a picnic for us, sandwiches, coffee, cake, fruit and a bottle of wine.’ The elf was gone. ‘Will you be taking the famous bag?’

She held it up. ‘Have bag will travel,’ and she packed what she needed for later, books, cardigan, shawl; he gave her his cloak and a sweater. ‘So, where are we going?’

‘It will be a surprise,’ he said as they headed downstairs. Moaner was waiting in the kitchen with a rather large hamper, obviously under the impression they were going on an extended field trip and not a simple picnic. He reduced it and handed it to Hermione who placed in her bag. ‘How much can you get in that thing?’

‘I’ve never tested it to its capacity, but rather a lot I should imagine.’

‘Do you have a broomstick in there by any chance?’
'Erm ... no... why?'

'It's a lovely day; I thought it would be fun to fly.'

'Oh …’ she didn’t keep the nervousness out of her voice.'

'No matter, you can fly with me.’ He must have seen the look of panic on her face. ‘What is it?’

'Nothing … I’m … truth is Severus … I have always been rubbish at flying. It's why I tend to apperate,’ she gave him a weak smile, ‘I even have trouble with the ‘up.’ She bit her lip and his smile was a smug “so … I have learnt something new about the clever Miss Granger today” smile.

'What if you fly with me but we take a spare broomstick with us and I shall give you some guidance?’

‘You would do that?’ She threw her arms around him and hugged him. ‘That would be great.’

He led her out into the back yard, opened the door to an outside store and there, leaning against the wall were four broomsticks. She shot him a look. He simply shrugged, ‘I like broomsticks.’ He chose a beautifully crafted one, sturdy enough for two. She chose a smaller one and put it in her bag.

‘Ready?’ he asked. She nodded and swallowed her nervousness. His broomstick rose a few feet, he stepped astride it. ‘Here, come and sit in front, side saddle would be best.’ She approached cautiously, sat in front of him, clutched her bag and closed her eyes. His arm came around her. ‘Put one arm around me and hold on.’ She did as she was told as without any command, they rose quickly into the bright early morning sky and headed off.

She was terrified, but Severus was confident and was obviously enjoying himself. ‘Open your eyes, Hermione. You are quite safe; I would never let anything happen to you.’

She opened her eyes and of course, immediately looked down; she closed them quickly and held on tighter. He was bent slightly forward, allowing the air to flow over and around them so there was very little buffeting. She laid her head against his chest and slowly began to relax. They were travelling very fast when she chanced another look down. ‘Oh look, the Lake District,’ she said, but they sped on past the Lakes and into Scotland. They skirted a large city which he told her was Glasgow and headed North East up into the Highlands. She was now confident that Severus knew what he was doing and so began to enjoy the experience. Loch Tay came into view.

‘We’re heading towards Hogwarts,’ she said.

‘Near, but not Hogwarts.’

‘Severus?’

‘Yes Hermione?’

‘Do you think sex is possible on a broomstick?’

‘Why does it not surprise me that you would ask that question?’ he laughed. ‘I have no idea. Would you like to try?’

Now she laughed out loud. ‘No! I don’t think even I would dare try it!’ She hugged him as they flew lower and lower, slowed down and finally stopped. His feet were on the ground.

‘You can let go now,’ he said.
'I like it just fine here,’ she replied against his chest.

He grunted, swung a leg over the broomstick and lifted her off; the broomstick gently lowered itself to the ground. With her arm still around his waist, she looked at the surroundings. They were on the banks of a small loch high up in the Cairngorms. A valley stretched out below them, a stream and waterfall tumbled into the loch. To one side was a small copse, behind a hill and behind that, mountains. The loch sparkled like a diamond.

‘This is perfect, Mr Snape! How do you know about it?’ She started to unpack her bag.

‘I would come here when I was at Hogwarts; I found it for the first time in the fourth year and I needed to get away from … well … from things. Even in the winter it is beautiful.’

She looked up from what she was doing, realised what he had just said and went and hugged him. ‘Bloody Marauders,’ she said, ‘I would have knocked all their blocks off.’

‘I think you would have as well,’ he kissed her hair.

She had spread a large blanket on the grass, complete with four cushions she had found in the bag, left over from the Lost Year, their books were neatly piled up and the picnic basket was now back to its normal size. They sat down side by side, she put her arm around him again and he brought his around her.

‘Thank you for bringing me here … I really do love it.’

‘You are … welcome.’

She opened the basket, took out sandwiches and a Thermos, she opened the stopper and inhaled. ‘Coffee,’ she announced and poured them each a cup, Moaner had included a small bottle of milk for although Severus took his coffee black, she liked milk. They settled down to enjoy breakfast. The birds were in full song and from time to time she heard the distinctive ‘kee-ai, kee-ai’ of an eagle as it rode the thermals of the mountains.

‘So tell me about your week,’ she said.

It had been busy; sometimes she was in bed and asleep before he arrived home. He told her that the bout of meetings he had been attending were mostly concerned with implementing Laws and Regulations concerning Muggles. Kingsley wanted more protection, other Ministers and Head of Departments thought there was enough Muggle protection in place. Discussions had been fierce sometimes and not all of the new Regulations had been agreed. It was tiring, thankless work, but necessary. He was also getting reports from some of the Unspeakables of an increase in the kidnapping of Muggle children. Hard evidence was proving difficult to come by, but when several of your operatives report the same thing, then you have to take notice.

‘Do you think … it happened during the War, Muggle children were being taken by Fenrir Greyback to be raised as …’ she didn’t continue.

He nodded. ‘I think that assumption is correct. The Muggle police are baffled, but as the kidnappings are spread over the whole of the country, they can see no pattern or reason why these children have been taken.’

They sipped their coffee. She looked around and really started to appreciate the beauty of the area. He sat quietly, his face neutral.

‘There’s more, isn’t there?’ she sighed.
‘Hermione, I need to tell you something, please don’t get angry.’ She put her cup down and waited. ‘I am not sure why, but Belladonna Green has taken what can only be described as a shine to me,’ he held up his hand to stop her protest, ‘since the Ball she has been … seeking me out … dropping by my office … inviting me up to her office … it all seems innocent enough, but I am sensing something else …’ he lowered his head and raised his eyes to look at her.

‘Don’t tell me she is trying to get you away from the Muggle born?’

‘That is what I sense. She had not made any inappropriate gesture or suggestion, but I think it is only a matter of time before she does.’

‘I shall scratch her bloody eyes out,’ she said with enough venom to startle him. ‘At least you’re aware of what she is doing. Do you think it is still payback for Harry?’

He shook his head. ‘No, I really think she fancies me. And why not? Since the Ball my reputation as a virile lover has gone through the roof,’ he smiled at her.

‘A well-earned reputation, Mr Snape if I may say so,’ she finished her coffee, took his cup and put them back into the hamper, she then lay down and he lay next to her as they watched little powder puff clouds scuttle across the blue sky. ‘Thank you for telling me and for the record, I trust you completely, Severus. Anyway, you know what would happen should you forget that I am your one true love.’

He lifted her hand and kissed it. ‘So what have you been doing while I have been busy with protecting Muggles and searching for evidence of werewolf activity?’

As she had no real assignments over the week or so, she told him there was nothing too exciting going on. She had caught up on her reports, which she hoped he had at least glanced at. She had visited Harry to catch up on things generally, but now that Ginny was back, he was otherwise engaged in the evenings. The knowing looks and nudges had died away in the weeks since the Ball; their relationship was now old news. Lucius was pleased with her progress in duelling and she had more than once outwitted him, which Narcissa thought extremely funny. One thing had happened that was interesting, Ron had asked her if she would have lunch with him a couple of days ago, she had agreed and had met in the Ministry canteen.

‘And just what did Ronald want?’

‘He wanted to tell me that although he was angry at first, he can see that I am very happy with you. He wanted me to know that he is cool with our relationship now. Apparently Arthur had some serious words with him, and well, he understands.’

‘Understands what exactly?’

‘I have no idea,’ she laughed, ‘but he was very sincere and I think he is moving on. He is happy with Lavender and he thinks they have a future together, which is nice. He still thinks you are a git though and that I am mental for wanting to be with you, but he will learn to accept it.’

‘How kind of him,’ he said without a hint of amusement. ‘Book?’ He handed two books to her and picked one up himself.

‘You’re still jealous!’

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ he scoffed, turning to a page and beginning to read.

She turned over to face him. ‘I am in love with only one man, one wizard and one genius who can
‘read books upside down,’ she reached out and turned the book over. ‘Thank you.’

‘Whatever for?’

‘Being jealous, it’s quite romantic. Though if you challenge him to a duel, don’t turn him into anything slimy, he had a terrible experience with slugs once when a *Slugulus Eructo* backfired. Now he hates them, although not as much as spiders,’ she stopped, he was looking at her. ‘What?’

‘You really are mental,’ he said and smiled as he started to read his book, the correct way up this time.

‘And you are a … git,’ she thumped his leg with her book, then settled back to read.

They read and talked about what they were reading, she a detailed history of *The Magic of Tibetan Lamas*, he, *Very Advanced Antidotes* in the original Greek. She knew some Greek and knew a little about Tibetan Lamas so their discussions were lively and informative. She got up at one point to wander around the area, taking the bottle of wine with her she placed it under the running waterfall to cool for later. She followed the little burn down to the loch and then spent a wonderful time skimming stones across the still water. She turned and walked back up to the waterfall to follow a barely visible trail that led upwards to the brow of the hill. From the top she gazed out upon the glory of the Cairngorms stretching out before her and breathed in the wild beauty of the place. He came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her so that she nestled under his chin. She felt utterly safe and utterly loved by this man. She wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of her life with him.

‘Knut for your thoughts?’ he asked.

‘I love this place, it reminds me of a life a long time ago, when I lived in a similar wild, beautiful place. The wind has the same taste, the grass is the same green and the mountains the same majesty. But I also know it was not here, in Scotland.’ She sighed, ‘I get glimpses now and then and a memory will surface, I will feel melancholy for a second, then like a wisp of smoke … it is gone.’ She leaned back into him, into his strong body, into his strong being, into his strong love.

‘How can you taste the wind?’

‘I’m not sure, but it is something I could do. I think I may have lost the ability.’

Hand in hand they walked back down to the loch and she slipped off her sandals and paddled at the water’s edge. She encouraged him to roll his sleeves up and she undid the top buttons of his shirt, the she got him to slip off his shoes and socks and paddle with her. She lifted up her dress so it wouldn’t drag in the water and she felt his eyes on her legs. The sun rose to its zenith as they sat to enjoy their lunch. The wine was cool and crisp, afterwards they lay down, meaning to read but fell asleep instead. She awoke with a start, startled by a noise nearby, sitting up she was in time to see a deer disappear into the trees. He lay on his back, breathing softly, one arm behind his head and the collar of his shirt revealed his neck and the faint scars. It was so enticing she couldn’t stop herself leaning in and kissing those scars. She worked her way down and across his chest, undoing the remaining buttons as she went. She kissed across his belly button, pulled the shirt loose and kissed the exposed skin above his jean’s top. When she looked up, he was watching her with hooded eyes. Keeping her eyes fixed on his, she un buckled the serpent headed belt she had bought him for his last birthday, released the button and zip of his jeans and pushed them apart and continued to kiss his skin. She heard his gasp as her chin nudged his erection. She smiled. Even though they were quite alone, she cast a silent ‘no see us’ charm around them, just in case a troupe of hikers came around the corner.

He lifted his hips as she slid the jeans down far enough to allow her access to him. She kissed his hardness through his underwear, he gasped again. Then she pulled them down, releasing him and her
mouth fell upon his length. She licked and sucked and when the small pearl of liquid on the tip, she licked it and tasted him. Now he groaned. With her thumb and index finger she encircled the base of his erection, keeping it away from his body so she could lick along the length. She took as much as she could and sucked up and down, sometimes using her teeth to gently stimulate; with her tongue she licked around his glans and he went rigid and started to thrust into her mouth. Keeping hold of him, she followed his rhythm and with a sudden jerk, he ejaculated and she swallowed, sucking ever more gently as his thrusting diminished. With one last thrust, he lay still, she moved up to lie on him and he drew her to his and kissed her, he was still panting and his eyes were dilated in his passion.

‘Merlin, but you are so good at that!’ he said.

‘Practise makes perfect,’ she grinned.

‘And you do like to practise.’

They lay together for a long time in the afterglow of love making; he would kiss her from time to time, she would stroke his cheek and run her hands through his hair.

‘What can I do for you?’ he whispered.

‘Flying lessons,’ she answered.

‘Don’t you want …?’

‘We can sort me out later.’

He sat up, sorted his clothing out, zipped his jeans and buttoned his shirt. ‘Right. Let’s do some flying,’ he said, pulling her up, she pulled the broomstick from her bag. He held his hand out and his broomstick flew into it. He led her away from the trees and laid his broomstick on the ground.

‘Your first command signifies your intent and control. I suggest being verbal until you are proficient. Up!’ and his broom stick jumped into his hand again.

She nodded and set her face, held her hand out and … ‘up!’ … the broom stick stubbornly remained on the ground. ‘Up!’ she persisted, it moved a fraction. ‘Up! …Now,’ she commanded. It refused to budge. She looked at him; he had a slight smile on his lips. ‘Arrgghhh!’ she clenched her fist and shook it at the disobedient broomstick. He laughed out loud this time. ‘It’s not funny Severus; this is exactly what happened at Hogwarts. Everyone would be off flying around and I would be …’

‘You are trying too hard, my love. Now, clear your mind; look at your broomstick, and yes … this is your broomstick now … a gift from me to you … Merlin, but I spoil you.’ She air kissed him. ‘Let your intent travel down to the broomstick. With your mind, feel the wood, the embellishments; see if you determine the character of your broomstick. Does it feel defiant or is it merely confused? Or perhaps you have to be gentle with it.’

She listened intently to his voice and instructions; he was using his teaching voice, informative, precise and confident. She did as he asked; she cleared her mind and sent her intent to fly her broomstick. She let her mind travel down into the wood, she felt a faint prickle of enchantment, she looked at him wide eyed and he smiled and nodded his encouragement. She felt that it was a nice broomstick, it was … quite old and very experienced. With her mind she said ‘hello’ and the broomstick quivered in response. With her mind she commanded ‘up!’ And it rose into her hand. She could feel it waiting for the next command. Severus gave her a round of applause as a reward.

‘Madam Hooch didn’t mention that a broomstick is alive,’ she said.
‘Technically they are not. But you perceive things differently … you need an understanding. Now, sit astride your broomstick, like so …’ and he demonstrated. ‘Lean forward slightly and command what it is you wish to do, up, forward, back, down, roll, faster or slower.’ He lifted upwards. ‘Place your feet on the rests, find your equilibrium.’ He let his hands fall away from holding on; she gulped as he looked supremely confident. ‘Remember, unless you are jinxed, your broomstick will not let you fall,’ and to prove his point he went to throw himself off. She let out a loud shriek and covered her eyes; he was at least twenty feet off the ground. ‘Look at me,’ and she did. He was suspended upside down, he was not holding on and yet he should have fallen. His hair fell in dark cascades. Effortlessly, he righted himself. ‘Of course, if your broomstick doesn’t like you, it will throw you off. Now, your turn.’

She stepped astride her broomstick, holding on for dear life. ‘Ascend!’ nothing happened.

‘A simple ‘up’ is all that is required, don’t over complicate things.’

‘Up! … just a little,’ she commanded and she rose a few feet. She placed her feet against the rests. Leaned forward and … ‘up! … a little more,’ the broomstick did as it was bid.

Severus manoeuvred himself so he was facing her. ‘Look at me,’ she lifted her eyes so they meet his, ‘good, now follow me.’ He flew straight for a hundred yards until he was directly over the water.

‘Forward … slowly,’ she commanded. The broomstick did as it was told and as she reached him, he gave her a hard unkind stare.

‘Miss Granger, if you insist on being utterly incompetent and pathetic about this process, you can find yourself another teacher,’ he was pure Professor Snape and with a final fearsome stare, he shot off past her.

She really didn’t know what to do, she was suspended … she looked down … bloody hell, at least sixty feet above the loch … she was shaking with fear and Severus was nowhere around and anyway, he had been so unkind. Didn’t he realise she was terrified? She blinked back tears of humiliation and frustration. Why did she find this whole thing so difficult? A breeze caught her and she gave a shriek as she wobbled. She gulped down another sob. ‘Alright … you can do this Hermione … listen to me broomstick. You seem like a nice broomstick, you know I’m terrified, please help me. Can we find Severus, not too fast, OK?’ she gripped the handle for dear life as she moved off at a sedate pace. When she was over terra firma again, she relaxed slightly. She was pleased with herself, this wasn’t so bad. Unfortunately the side of the hill was looming before her; she had to rise above it or crash. Instinctively she thought up! and the broomstick obeyed, they gained height and flew over the hill. The views were incredible, but where was Severus? ‘A bit faster please,’ she said and they lurched forward. She still held on firmly, but her confidence was growing, not only in herself, but in her broomstick. She thought, ‘turn right’ and they turned. They dived back towards the loch, travelling much faster now, the wind was rushing through her hair and it was wonderful, she felt free and alive. Gradually, trusting in his words, she sat upright, let go with one hand, then as she approached the loch, let go with the other. ‘Woo hoo!’ she yelled taking the broomstick low over the loch, she let her feet drag in the water. ‘Yeah!’ she shouted again, ‘faster,’ and the broomstick obeyed. She flew high and fast over the mountains and along the valley, whooping her joy from time to time.

She looked up and saw something flying towards at great speed; it was also dropping like stone. She laughed as she realised it was him and she turned away from him, urging her broomstick to even greater speeds as he followed, giving chase. She changed direction and flew around him, he was laughing as he dodged her, she then dropped to his side and they flew back towards the loch in close formation. She darted in front again and arrived back first. ‘Down … gently,’ she commanded and
the broomstick inched towards the ground.

Severus simply jumped off as soon as he was close enough to the ground, ran to her, lifted her off and swung her around. ‘That was very well done,’ he said, placing her on the ground.

‘Thank you,’ she replied.

‘What for?’

‘For allowing me to be scared and allowing me to overcome my fear in my own time,’ he caught her in a long kiss.

‘But you have flown before,’ he said.

‘Yes, because it was necessary or to escape. Not for the sheer joy of flying. Anyway, where were you hiding?’

‘I wasn’t hiding, I was just in the one place I knew you wouldn’t be,’ she frowned and he looked skywards. ‘I was above you all the time.’

They sat on the blanket and as they drank reheated coffee, she took him through all of her emotions, using her arms to illustrate her assents and descents and skimming the water. He listened to her, smiling at her intense enjoyment of a simple pleasure. The afternoon was waning, the light was softening. They lay down, side by side; her leg over his as she kissed his face. He let his hand fall to her legs as he slowly, inch by inch, worked his hand upwards. She closed her eyes, her lips parted slightly and she writhed as his hand crept ever nearer to its destination. He leaned into her ear, nibbled at the lobe and said, ‘I would like to pleasure you.’ Her eyes opened, and she nodded.

He rolled her onto her back, lifted her dress up to her waist and knelt between her open legs. She watched as he pulled her sensible knickers down and dropped them beside her. Leaning down, his mouth fell against her hip and he kissed along her skin to the opposite one. She closed her eyes and allowed all of her mind and body fall to that area of ultimate pleasure. His hair fell over her exposed skin, making her gasp. His tongue was now working down from her mons towards her vagina in long, hot strokes. She felt the rigid heat as his tongue poked into her; she squirmed and placed a leg on his shoulder to give him better access. Her hands were in his hair, guiding him to the sweetest spots. The intense building of release was gathering in her, she moaned as he gently bit her clitoris before teasing it with his tongue again. Her mind was now blank except for the blinding colours of her growing climax. She arched her back and screamed his name as her orgasm overpowered her. She felt him enter her, he was above her, he thrust and she brought her legs around his waist, bringing him deeper into her. Still lost in the moment she felt the sudden hot rush of his ejaculation and heard her name on his lips. Their shouts mingled with each other. She felt his weight on her before he rolled over, taking her with him. She found his mouth and their tongues fought against each other, she tasted herself on his lips and found it was sweet. At last, bodies and tongues slowed and relaxed. When she opened her eyes, he was smiling up at her. She kissed his neck and then sucked at the delicate skin.

‘Not another love bite,’ he complained, but didn’t stop her.

‘There,’ she lifted her head, ‘you are marked as mine,’ she looked up to the sky, ‘ and I will fight, hand to hand combat or with wands – anyone - male or female who would dare try to win you away from me.’

‘That is very possessive,’ he said, ‘yet strangely reassuring.’
She giggled and rolled off him and lay on her back. ‘That … was … amazing, Severus. Thank you.’

He kissed the back of her hand. ‘You are very welcome and it was also … very pleasurable for me.’ He stood, rearranged his clothing and walk down to the loch edge. The sun was turning the surface to shades of orange and gold. She watched him for a while as he stared across the loch. She stretched, her body still tingling from their love; it just got better, the more they knew of each other, the longer and stronger the bond grew. She walked down to be with him, she stood behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head on his back. She felt the soft trickle of wetness down her legs, so she walked into the shallows, lifted her dress and splashed her legs with the cold water.

‘What are you doing,’ he asked.

‘Work it out Professor,’ she replied.

Then for no other reason than she felt a deep connection to the land, she pulled her dress over her head and naked, she lifted her arms to the elements and walked into the water. It was cold against her skin, yet to her it felt cleansing and sacred. She turned to face him; he was framed against the hill in the golden light when a stag emerged from the trees and stood directly behind him. ‘Undress and come to me, my love,’ she said. She watched as he stripped and waded to her. ‘Look,’ she turned him around to see the stag. ‘Herne the Hunter has honoured us and comes to watch his children play.’ The stag bellowed before ambling back into the trees.

‘I am in love with you, Severus Snape, and here, under the male female sky, with sun and moon united above us in the heavens, I pledge myself to you. Before my ancestors, I pledge my heart and soul to you. You complete me and I want you for my husband.’

His face was serious as he looked at her. ‘Hermione, my heart and joy, my love and lover, you have no idea how much I want you for my wife; when the time comes, I will pledge myself to you, heart body and soul, forever.’

‘Are you saying you will join with me in the Old Way?’

‘Yes, I am.’

She hugged him. ‘Then I accept you with all my heart.’ She lifted her head to the sky above. ‘Did you hear that? We are pledged in the Old Way; it will be done according to Tradition.’ A sudden breeze whipped across the surface of the loch and from somewhere deep in the trees, the stag called his acceptance.

‘Good,’ he said. ‘Can we now get out of here before my balls freeze and my chances of becoming a father are seriously diminished?’ Laughing, she pulled him out of the water and they dried themselves with towels she found in her bag. ‘Are you hungry?’ he asked once they were dressed.

‘Famished,’ she replied, ‘why? What are you thinking?’

‘Would you like to fly again?’

‘Yes, but I’m not sure I am confident enough to fly back to Spinners End.’

‘What about Hogwarts? There’s plenty of light left to fly there; we could drop in on Minerva and have supper. Then you can fly home with me.’

She grinned broadly. ‘Terrific plan,’ and she started to gather their things together and stowing them away in her bag. He handed her knickers to her; she put them on, ‘can’t be knickerless at Hogwarts,
think of the scandal.’ She handed him his sweater and put her cardigan on. When all was packed away and nothing left behind, she stood in front of him and lifted the collar of his shirt so that both love bite and scars were hidden. He nodded his thanks. She called her broomstick - it obeyed her first time - and they set off for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Landing gently just outside the barriers, they carried their broomsticks across the courtyard and left them outside the great doors of the main building. Once inside, the delicious aroma of a roast supper and the sweetness of pudding assaulted their noses, her tummy rumbled.

‘What shall we do?’ she asked in a whisper, ‘supper is still underway. Do we join in or go straight to Minerva’s office?’

Before he could reply, a small group of first formers came out of the Hall and started to walk down the stairs towards them. The young students saw them, stared wide eyes for a second then rushed back into the Hall.

‘I think that decision may just have been taken out of our hands,’ he said as a minute later, Minerva came out of the Hall and rushed down the stairs, arms outspread in welcome.

‘Hermione! Severus! how wonderful to see you,’ she embraced them both. ‘Supper is still in progress, come along and join in.’

‘Do you think that is wise?’ he asked. ‘After all, I am a former Death Eater; I would not want to corrupt the younger students.’

Minerva shot him a glance, and then laughed. ‘Nonsense, we’re having roast chicken.’ She walked in the middle of them, ‘what brings you to Hogwarts?’

‘We both had a day off and we thought we would spend it in the wilds of Scotland and as we were in the area …’ Hermione smiled.

They walked down the length of the Hall to the High Table. She noticed the nudges and whispers and at least three girls and as many boys stare moon eyed at Severus. She stole a quick look at his neck to see if the love bite was visible, she breathed a sigh of relief that it remained hidden. The teachers were upon them, shaking hands, clapping shoulders and hugging them. Space was made and two places set. Minerva stepped up to the lectern and clapped her hands, the silence was immediate.

‘Can I have your attention please? We are privileged to have two guests with us tonight who played a major part in the downfall and destruction of the Dark Lord, Voldemort.’ The buzz of conversation grew louder. ‘Professor Severus Snape, former Potions Master and Headmaster here at Hogwarts and Miss Hermione Granger, star pupil at this school and one of the Golden Three.’ She started to clap and soon all the pupils were clapping wildly, Severus and Hermione stood to accept the applause, she smiled and gave a small wave; he glowered and did not wave. As the clapping died away there came a commotion from the doorway.

‘I heard Ermione and Professor Snape woz ‘ere,’ the large figure of Rubeus Hagrid said as he moved down the central aisle. Hermione jumped from her seat and ran to hug her friend.

‘So good to see you again, Hagrid. How are you? What have you been up to, come and tell me everything,’ she held his hand and pulled him up to the High Table.

‘I’d best pay my respects to the Professor,’ he whispered. ‘Good evening, Professor Snape, I ‘ope you are well?’ He held out his hand to Severus.
‘Thank you Hagrid, I am quite well,’ and he shook the giant’s hand.

‘Come and sit by me, Hagrid, how’s Grawp?’ Hermione chatted on.

Hagrid told her Grawp was well and was even learning some sounds and manners. He lived in a convenient cave in the Forbidden Forest, and the Centaurs kept an eye on him. He didn’t wander as much either, which was all to the good. Hermione was asked about her health since her attempted murder and Professor Slughorn thanked her for reminding young Malfoy to replace his supply of rare ingredients. He still called her Deirdre, and when she reminded him that her name was Hermione, he smiled, apologised and said that he always had trouble with names, but from now on he would remember to called her Hermione; Hermione Danger. She giggled at that and didn’t bother to correct him, Severus shook his head and rolled his eyes. She blushed when mention was made of the article in the Daily Prophet about the Ministry Midsummer Ball and a certain Head of Department flirting with a certain Heroine of the War and they left the Ball together. Severus merely shook his head and rolled his eyes again, but took the ribbing in good part. Harry and Ron were asked about as were several others from her year. By the time all news had been exchanged, the students had left the Hall; the teachers began to drift away after saying their goodbyes.

Hagrid rose. ‘Well, I’d best be off. Your take care of yerself Ermione, an’ don’t leave it too long til we sees yer again.’

‘I won’t Hagrid,’ she said hugging him.

‘Professor,’ he nodded to Severus, ‘Professor,’ and he nodded to Minerva. ‘I’ll be off then, Fang will be wantin’ ‘is evenin’ walk.’ He turned and strode out of the hall.

‘Right, tea in my office, I think. I know Albus will want to have a chat.’ They followed Minerva to the Head’s corridor, the stairs were closed, ‘moonlicht nicht,’ she commanded and the Guardians opened the stairs for her. ‘Make yourselves comfortable; can one of you inform Albus that I have guests?’ she asked the portraits, two scuttled away. ‘Now, tea, coffee or something stronger?’

‘Tea, I think,’ Severus answered, ‘we are flying back to Spinners End tonight.’ Hermione nodded her agreement.

‘Would you mind then, Severus?’ Minerva smiled at him.

‘Moaner?’ he called and the elf appeared. ‘Tea for three please.’ Moaner disappeared.

‘She really does make the best tea,’ Minerva said. ‘So, what news from the Ministry?’

They sat and chatted about the various Reforms, Laws and Bills the Ministry was trying pass, including a more informed approached to the teaching of Muggle Studies, bringing it up to date. Moaner returned with tea just as an owl arrived for the Headmistress. She excused herself while she read the letter.

‘Well, that puts the dragons amongst the unicorns,’ she said when she returned. ‘I’ve just received word that Rufus Volovsky will be delayed in taking up the DADA post next term, something about he’s not allowed out of Bulgaria for a reason he does not expand upon. Damn and bother.’ She sat down, shaking her head.

‘What have I missed?’ Albus said from his portrait, ‘Ah, Hermione and Severus, wonderful to see you.’

‘I was just telling them we don’t have a DADA teacher for next term,’ Minerva said.
‘Still having problems with that post?’ Severus asked, pouring her a cup of tea.

‘Aye, although the last two did manage to stay longer than a year: Voldemort may be dead and gone, but his curse remains,’ she sipped her tea and a little smile crossed her face. ‘I will just have to see who else is out there. Unfortunately, Durmstrang recruited the other best candidate, Wilhelm Rheinish.’ She looked over the rim of her cup at Severus. ‘Severus …’

‘Don’t even ask Minerva, My teaching days are behind me, I have a Department to run and a Ministry to help.’

‘Aye, I know … it was just a thought,’ she patted his knee like a good mother would.

‘Volovsky in trouble is he?’ Albus laughed. ‘He always was a rogue.’

‘I may know of two good candidates,’ Severus said as three pairs of eyes, not counting the other portraits, turned to him.

‘Who, Severus, who?’ Minerva pressed.

‘They would have to be asked and they would have to agree to do it and you would not be able to force either one.’

‘Of course not! Wouldn’t dream of it,’ Minerva said. ‘So …?’ she prompted.

‘Hermione or Harry of course,’ he said,

Hermione choked on her tea and he thumped her back. ‘Severus! You could have thought about consulting me first,’ she said, ‘and Harry.’

‘I think either of them would be a capital choice,’ Albus grinned from his portrait.

‘You or Harry would be perfect, my darling,’ Severus put his cup down and took her hand.

‘… And it would only be for the first term, Rufus will be joining us after the Yule holidays,’ Minerva added enthusiastically.

Hermione threw herself back into the sofa. ‘Methinks there is a conspiracy afoot.’

‘Would you consider it?’ Minerva asked.

‘Of course I would! I would love to be given the chance, but let’s see what Harry has to say, after all, I think he may be the better choice.’ Severus squeezed her hand and smiled.

‘We shall speak with Harry and send Moaner with an answer,’ he said. ‘Now it is getting late and we should be making a move.’

Hermione went over to Albus; she pulled a stool to the portrait, stood on it and kissed his cheek. He blushed. She then hugged Minerva.

‘Come back whenever you like,’ she said as she gave Severus a hug.

When the door closed she turned to Albus. ‘I am so happy for them both, but for Severus especially. Did you see the way they look at each other?’

‘Yes I did. I think he loves her more than he loved Lily.’
‘Aye, you could be right there, Albus. Did you also see the size of that love bite on his neck?’

‘Indeed I did, Minerva, indeed I did. Lucky man,’ he sighed.

Outside they collected their broomsticks and walked into the grounds. Hermione stowed her broomstick into her bag, took out her shawl and wrapped it around her shoulders.

‘Could I have my cloak, please?’ she rummaged around and handed it to him. ‘It will be cold as we fly. Climb on.’ She did as before; he leaned into her, placing his arm around her to hold her tightly. She leaned her head into his chest, brought his cloak around her as they shot off into the night sky.

It was cold as they flew and they were both grateful for the warmth of his cloak. They talked mainly about her teaching at Hogwarts and she teased him about the number of girls and boys who fairly swooned when they saw him. He merely grunted his disbelief. She enjoyed the journey home, he was a skilful flyer and she felt completely safe with him. It was very late when they arrived back at Spinners End. They put their broomsticks back in their cupboard and went into the house.

‘My turn,’ she said, running upstairs. She went into his potions room and opened a drawer under the work top; she pulled out a small bag. She heard him in the bathroom as she slipped off her sandals and went into their bedroom. She placed a small piece of the sticky resin from the bag into the incense burner and lit it. She then lit two of the copper lamps so the tent looked cozy and inviting. She opened the flap at the far end of the large tent and charmed a soft breeze that wafted the incense around the tent. Finally, she wove a music charm and from outside came the soft thrum of a hand drum and the tinkling of zills as a Rebab played a haunting melody. Satisfied, she went to the bathroom; he had already showered and was standing in front of the mirror, a towel wrapped around his waist.

She slipped into the shower after giving him a quick hug.

He was sitting up in bed when she came back to the bedroom. ‘I’m trying to place the fragrance, it is intriguing. It’s not patchouli or frankincense; nor is it myrrh or frangipani.’

‘Give up?’

‘Not on your life, give me moment longer.’

She climbed into bed and with a wave, extinguished the lamps, leaving only the glow from the incense burner.

He snuggled into her. ‘I give up! Tell me.’

‘Copal,’ she was triumphant, it was the first time in ages she had won this little game. ‘I was in Mugwart and Smellie and they had some, only a small amount, so I bought it. Kept it in the potions room, you never look there.’

‘I love it, thank you.’

She felt his breath on her hair and his erection nudging against her bottom. ‘I’m going to sleep,’ she
muttered.

‘I keep thinking about you wandering around Hogwarts in your dress ... without any underwear.’

‘Scandalous,’ she giggled. ‘Severus?’

‘Yes, my darling?’

‘Thank you for today.’

‘Why?’

‘It was … just a perfect day.’ She yawned and lulled by the soft music of the desert, drifted off to sleep.
Chapter Summary

She was three weeks into the term and one thing was clear to her, she enjoyed teaching. She was by far the youngest teacher Hogwarts had ever had and she did have problems with some of the pupils, mainly the sixth formers who saw her as not much older than themselves. On the whole, she was keeping control of all her classes.

She had to prove herself of course; she didn’t have the gravitas or experience of Severus, Rufus Volovsky or Remus Lupin. On the other hand, she was no Gilderoy Lockehart; she had real power and a vast experience of the Dark Arts.

Yule Term at Hogwarts

Part 1

‘Good morning, class. My name is Professor Granger and for this term I am your Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Professor Volovsky will take up his post after the Yule break.’

She looked around the fresh faced first years; some looked interested, some scared and two looked bored. These will be the ones she has to win over. ‘Right, do you have your text books with you?’ Each pupil dutifully placed a copy of *The Essential Defence Against the Dark Arts* by Arsenius Jigger in front of them. ‘This is a very helpful text book and is the only one to be used as a reference source. Now put them away; this is a practical class and although I will ask you to read various chapters from time to time, it is not a study text.’ She waited until all the books had been put away. ‘In this first term we will be looking at such things as the Knockback Jinx, the *Lumos!* Charm and possibly Doxies, it depends how much time we have and how attentive you are. Right, wands at the ready, let’s begin with *Lumos!*’

My dearest Severus,

Can’t tell you how much I miss you, if you were here I could show you. End of week one – I am tired and could gladly hex some of the pupils, others show great promise. How ever did you manage? I want to know. I have had some very interesting questions asked this week. Examples – What is it like living with Professor Snape? [a fifth year, I think she is in love with you]; Where do you keep Harry Potter’s love children? [a third year, clearly demented]; my favourite has to be – Can you curse a
dog with Bogies? [first year – not sure which way round he wanted that; either the dog already has bogies or you want to give the dog bogies]: I honestly didn’t know the answer to that one, do you?

As we discussed, I am taking the practical approach to lessons, which the pupils seem to enjoy. There is one second year that is very bookish, always in the library and always the first to raise her hand. She reminds me of someone, but it has slipped my mind for now. Anyway, no real disasters so far, but it is early days.

Sixth years are an odd bunch. Some are very skilled – think Harry – some are hopeless – think whoever you like. All of them have raging hormones and if I don’t keep a careful eye on them they sneak into the shadowy corners of the Tower for a quick grope. Speaking of which … I miss you. There is no floo system in my room, did you know that, Headmaster? How are we to have clandestine meetings with no floo system? Or is it part of Minerva’s plan to keep me celibate this term?

Answers by owl please.

Staff room. You git! You told me it was a cosy room, all wood panelling, free flowing beverages and food; that it was an oasis of academic calm. You git! It is total chaos; lesson plans, cloaks, half empty cups of cold or stale tea everywhere and in the case of Horace, smelly potion bottles and boxes of Stink Beetles. I know you are laughing, don’t. Cut it out. Now. I was unprepared for the free for all that is the Hogwarts staff room. Give me Grawp and his cave any day. Hagrid sends his best, by the way.

Please arrange an official visit as soon as you can. I now have free access to the restricted area of the library and have a good selection of dirty books. Who would have thought some of the positions were possible without the help of a block and tackle, a pulley and a safety net. I still can’t work out what the feather is for though. Enlighten me.

I am off to watch the selection for the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

Think of me once or twice. Love you and miss your talent.

HG xx

HG,

You know how I managed – I was a cold, calculating bastard who did not suffer fools. Suggest you have the same approach. You are correct in your assumption that Minerva is trying to keep you celibate, it is all part of a new Ministry initiative for the non-corruption of pupils. And yes, I did know about the lack of floo system in the Tower – oops.

Have not stopped laughing re: the staff room, although when I think of how much I am missing you, I do. Good to know Harry returned all the books to the restricted area before leaving; otherwise the fines would be horrendous by now. No idea about the feather, I always preferred fur myself.

Nothing much going on here: ask for Moaner if you need her. Kingsley sends his regards.
Merlin! I miss you and my talent is under used.

S x

P.S. Am off to try out the Bogie curse on a dog (not Rupert) will advise of result.

‘Settle down please,’ she called and waited for the class of third years to settle themselves. ‘This morning you are going to call your Patronus.’ A murmur went around the class. She was three weeks into the term and one thing was clear to her, she enjoyed teaching. She was by far the youngest teacher Hogwarts had ever had and she did have problems with some of the pupils, mainly the sixth formers who saw her as not much older than themselves. On the whole, she was keeping control of all her classes. She had to prove herself of course; she didn’t have the gravitas or experience of Severus, Rufus Volovskey or Remus Lupin. On the other hand, she was no Gilderoy Lockhart; she had real power and a vast experience of the Dark Arts.

‘Find a space, not too close to anyone else; good. Can anyone already call their Patronus?’ she waited; no-one put their hand up. Perhaps they were shy and didn’t want to show off in front of classmates. ‘Very well. Does anyone know how to produce a Patronus?’ she took out her wand.

‘You have to think of your happiest memory,’ a young man offered.

‘Yes, well done Carl, exactly right. Anyone know the command?’

‘Expecto Patronus!’ Carl said.

‘Yes. Now observe. Expecto Patronus!’ she commanded with a flick of her wand and her otter, normal size this time, appeared and gambolled around the Tower. After the giant otter episode at Grimmauld Place, she had tempered her happiest memories; she no longer thought of Severus, but rather the smaller simple pleasures of tea with Hagrid, laughing with Ron and Harry or dancing with Harry during the Lost Year. She called her Patronus back. ‘Together now; concentrate on your happiest memories, the happier the memory the stronger your Patronus.’

She moved amongst them, quietly feeling the strength of their power. She encouraged as she went, telling one not to be so serious, another to smile. Soon there was six then seven Patronus’s skittering around the Tower. Still she moved between them, until arriving at one pupil who had simply given up and stood with a despondent frown. ‘No luck yet, Lucas?’ she asked. He shook his head.

Lucas Prewitt was a pure Blood, a distant relation to the Weasley’s and oddly enough, the Malfoy’s on his mother’s side. He was a bright lad; he had power that was for sure; she had seen his marks in his other classes. So why was he having difficulty with his Patronus?

‘Class! Please call your Patronus in. Anyone who is having problems, to me now. The rest of you, spread out some more and practice. You may need to call your Patronus quickly and you really don’t want to be frustrated because you are having difficulty.’ Five other pupils came over to her. She took the six of them aside. ‘Let’s try again, then if you still have difficulty, I’ll give each one of you help.’ She stood behind a girl. ‘Right, Cora, Let’s try again. Think of your very happiest memory. It can be anything at all; a joke, a big hug from your mum or dad. Your pet giving you a cuddle or a wet lick on your cheek …’
Cora held her wand, gave it a flick and *Expecto Patronus!* Nothing happened. *Expecto Patronus!* Nothing.

Hermione spotted what was happening. ‘Cora, what is your intent?’

‘To call my Patronus.’

‘What for?’

Silence. Cora shook her head.

‘To see what form your Patronus takes and to become familiar with it. Your intent is to meet your Patronus.’ She looked up from Cora. ‘Call your Patronus’s in please. Now form yourselves into small groups and discuss the circumstances in which you would want to call your Patronus and the circumstances when you should call your Patronus. And do it quietly.’ She turned back to the young witch. ‘Now with your intention firmly set and in your most commanding voice …’

*‘Expecto Patronus!’* and much to Cora’s astonishment, a hare jumped out of the end of her wand.

‘Well done. Go and practice, then join one of the groups.’ She progressed around the remaining five pupils; four had listened to her words about intent. A fox, a bird (type unknown) a horse and a dog introduced themselves to their young witch or wizard. Only Lucas was left. He seemed to be on the verge of tears. ‘Lucas, look at me,’ she said quietly, he raised his eyes to hers. ‘Intent: memory: command: try again.’

Lucas did as she asked. She could feel his power, his intent and command were strong, yet nothing appeared, not even the faintest glow at the end of his wand. ‘We will work on this together; I will ask Headmistress McGonagall if I can give you extra help.’

‘Thank you Professor,’ he said.

The bell in the Tower rang, indicating the end of the lesson. There was a scramble to gather their books and leave. ‘Listen to me,’ she called, ‘homework for next lesson …’ a groan went around the class, ‘… it’s good for you. I want a written list of the reasons you gave in your groups as the why, when and how you could and should, use your Patronus. Read chapter seven of your text book as we will be discussing the Patronus Charm in more depth. Finally, do not use your Patronus outside of this Tower. It is advanced magic, don’t waste it. Class dismissed.’

There was the customary rush for the door, the Defence Against the Dark Arts Tower was a long way up or down and lateness for another class was not tolerated. She turned back to young Lucas. ‘I will get a message to tell you when and the time for some extra help. In the meantime, don’t worry too much. You are doing very well in my class and in your other subjects. Off you go.’

‘Thank you Professor,’ he said as he scurried away.

She sighed. Something was not right with the young Slytherin; she would try to find out, although she had a pretty good idea of what the problem was.
Dear Malfoy and the lovely Astoria,

Thank you so much for the invitation to your wedding. I am delighted to accept, Severus on the other hand … and a winter wedding, trés romantique.

Four weeks into the term and I think I may have got the hang of ‘good morning’ at last. I was on night patrol last night and caught my first lovers in the Astronomy Tower. Fifth years, a boy and girl, Ravenclaw and Slytherin – is nothing sacred anymore? Did you know the teachers keep a tally of how many pupils they catch out of bed after lights out? I’m up to five. Severus remains Hogwarts Supreme Champion with forty five counts during our fourth year. Forty of them were – me, you, Harry, Ron, Crabbe, Goyle and interestingly, Luna. Harry of course comes top of the list for catchees [you only manage third, tut tut].

Give my regards to your mother and father and you can write back if you want.

All for now.

Granger.

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Dear Granger,

I’m outraged! Only third? I thought I did much better than that. Dare I guess who was second?

Mother and father send their best and Astoria sends her love.

Slytherin for the cup!

Malfoy.

*************************************************************************

She climbed the stairs to the Head’s office. Technically, she didn’t need Minerva’s consent to undertake extra tuition, but this was not a case of a lazy pupil who needed catch up.

‘How are you my dear?’ Minerva looked over her bi-focal’s.

‘Very well, I think Minerva. At least I am still in one piece and I haven’t lost any pupils to the Hinkypunks. Hello, Albus; portraits.’

‘You are doing splendidly, Hermione, don’t fret,’ Albus said kindly.

‘Minerva, I want to help a pupil, a third year, Lucas Prewitt. His class all have the practical hang of the Patronus Charm, except him.’

‘Aye, I know the lad. He is doing well in all his subjects.’
'In mine as well, but it’s not his power, he had plenty; or his intent, it’s firm …’ she paused …’I don’t think he has any happy memories.’

Minerva removed her specs. ‘I see. That could be a problem.’

‘Yes, I have suggested an extra lesson for him, today in fact. But … I know what the problem is and I can’t for the life of me work out how to address it.’

‘Professor Granger, I have every faith in your ability to guide this young lad. He is a Pure Blood and they raise their children differently to most, but, and I stress this, be very, very certain of your facts before you come to any conclusion. It may not be his family; he may be being bullied in his House, check with the House Prefects; talk with his other teachers and talk to him. Your decision will then be to inform me … or not.’

Hermione sat mulling over what had been said. It was not going to be simple. ‘Thank you Minerva’, she said, ‘as always, your advice is wise and helpful.’

Headmistress McGonagall replaced her specs. ‘Will you be at the match on Saturday, Gryffindor versus Slytherin?’

‘I’ll be there,’ she replied as she got up to leave.

‘Hermione?’ she turned back to face Minerva. ‘How are you … and Severus?’

She felt herself blush. ‘We miss each other,’ was all she said before making a dash for the stairs.

‘Keep the Astronomy Tower open for a few nights, Minerva,’ Albus said, ‘Severus may want to pay a visit.’

She tutted. ‘Aye, young love,’

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Hermione sat at her desk; quill in hand, parchment blank as she tried to compose a letter to Severus. Her timetable was light today, only two classes so she was taking the time to write to him.

Yesterday had been a successful day. The advice Minerva had given was helpful. Lucas arrived at the Tower at the appointed time and she had set about testing his magical ability. He was competent in charms, spells and the simple jinxes. He could transform a goblet into a rat and back again. She had spoken to Horace who told her that young Proveit was above average in potion making. So all in all, Lucas was where he should be at his age and in his year.

She had spoken to his other teachers about his demeanour in class and although he was quiet he listened well and would answer when asked. There didn’t seem to be any evidence of bullying in class. She then sought out two of the Slytherin House Perfects. They had been reluctant to speak to her at first, possibly because she was a Gryffindor, but with some cajoling they told her much the same as Lucas’s teachers; he was quiet, had a couple of friends in the House and a couple more in Ravenclaw. He was not a swot but nor was he sporty, in fact, when they thought about it, it was as if he wasn’t there most of the time.
Armed with this information, she had put him through his paces during the extra lesson. When she had asked him again to produce his Patronus, he tried gamely, but nothing happened. She opened her energetic body; just had she had done with Lucius, and probed very gently. It was quite broken and black; there was no rainbow of colours of a healthy energetic body and then there was this shadow that loomed over him. She gave a small start as the two white eyes opened and peered at her. The eyes blinked and didn’t seem all that unfriendly or dangerous. She tried smiling at the eyes, they closed and she saw that Lucas had tears streaming down his face. She led him to her desk and got him to sit down next to her.

‘It’s alright Lucas, I think I understand. Would you like a cup of tea?’ He nodded. ‘Moaner?’ the little elf appeared; Lucas stared wide eyed at her. ‘How are you, Moaner?’ She asked.

‘Moaner very well, Hermione Granger. Master Severus not so much,’ she gave a cheeky smile. Hermione guessed this meant Severus was back to his old self, growling and pacing.

‘Oh dear, I shall write to Master Severus as soon as I can. Could we have tea please? And any cake you happened to have.’ Moaner disappeared. ‘Do you have a house elf, Lucas?’

He nodded. ‘He’s very old now so mother and father don’t use him that much anymore,’ he didn’t expand on the subject, so they sat in silence until Moaner reappeared with tea for two and a plate of large slices of Cherry Genoa cake. Lucas took the offered tea and cake and sat happily munching and sipping. ‘Great cup of tea,’ he said at last.

‘Thank you. I shall pass that along to Moaner, she always likes to know she is appreciated,’ she drained her cup and poured a refill. ‘Lucas, do you have any happy memories at all?’ she asked, very gently.

He shook his head, ‘I don’t remember any.’

‘Would you care to tell me a little about your home and family?’

He told her he lived with his parents and two younger sisters. He was related to the Weasley’s on his father’s side and to the Malfoy’s on his mother’s side, but he had never met any of them. When she asked where he went to school before Hogwarts, he said he had been taught at home by a tutor as there was not a suitable school near where they lived. He spoke in a quiet, even voice. At home he didn’t remember playing with his sisters; his parents are very loving towards him and his sisters; they eat together as a family and they all go on holiday together, even the tutor comes along.

‘Do you like your tutor? He has done a good job in educating you,’ she looked at him over the rim of her cup and watched as the shadow fell over his face.

‘Yes.’

‘Does your tutor have a name?’

Lucas’s eyes opened wide in fright. ‘Yes … it’s … it’s Professor Aloysius Black,’ a tiny bead of sweat trickled down from his forehead. Talking about his tutor was distressing him that was clear.

‘Well, if I ever meet him I would want to thank him for doing such a fine job with you,’ she smiled and Lucas relaxed. ‘Do you have a happy memory about Hogwarts?’

‘Oh yes, coming here has been great.’

‘Good. If you’ve finished your tea, let’s have another try. This time, think about Hogwarts.’ They moved to the centre of the room and Lucas raised his wand.
‘Expecto Patronus!’ he commanded, the end of his wand glowed slightly.

‘Good, Lucas. Now expand on that memory; think how it made you feel. Think about Hogwarts, your mates, your House and your teachers.’

His wand continued to glow, brighter, stronger: then it died.

‘Lucas that was great! The best you have done.’

‘But it stopped and disappeared,’ he wailed.

‘As I told the others, this is advanced magic, so don’t worry, you will get there.’ She clasped his shoulder and felt him flinch under her touch. ‘Enough for today. The next lesson will be theory, but if you would like to come back and continue with what we have started … I will be here every Thursday, same time, alright?’

‘Thank you very much, Professor,’ he left the Tower and she thought he was in better spirits than when he arrived.

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My dearest love,

I miss you.

Let me tell you what I miss about you. I miss your soft lips and your tongue as it probes around the sensitive areas of my mouth. I miss your kisses as they work their way around my neck, to my ear lobes and back; I miss your hands in my hair, in my knickers and fondling my breasts. I miss the press of your body against mine; your weight upon me as you thrust into me. I miss how my hands cannot explore your divine body or squeeze your man cheeks as you rub yourself against me. I miss your words of love and lust whispered in my ear. I miss how, at the point of penetration you gasp, even as I gasp in passion. I miss the way you rock backwards and forwards when you are deep inside me and I miss …’

‘Severus, are you alright?’ Minister Shacklebolt asked.

Severus looked up from the parchment he had just received from Hermione. His blood was pumping through his veins, his heart rate was through the roof and it was a good job he was sitting behind his desk as his erection was about to break through his trousers. ‘Yes, Kingsley, quite alright,’ he said with as much control as he could muster. ‘It’s from Hermione; she’s just catching me up with events at Hogwarts.’

‘Ah, don’t let me stop you then, I shall finish my tea and wait, no rush,’ he smiled.

Severus’s eyes fell back to the parchment.

... miss that point when you are about to come, mingling our essences together [my darling, I do hope you are reading this in private!]

Yes, you have guessed. I dreamt about you last and I came like the Hogwarts’s Express.
Yours in desperate need.

HG xx

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‘Do you mind if I send a quick reply, Kingsley?’
‘No no. Give her my best while you’re at it.’

He took quill and parchment.

‘Tonight. Astronomy Classroom. Midnight.’

Kingsley sends his regards.
S x

He sealed the parchment, called the Hogwarts owl, opened the door and sent the bird on its way.

‘Now, where were we?’ he said to Kingsley.

‘I was discussing a promotion for Arthur. You were somewhere else entirely.’

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After receiving his reply the first thing she did was find out who had the ‘lights out’ sweep that night, it was Madam Hooch, who was more than pleased to do a swap with her. Lights out was ten o’clock for years one to four and ten thirty for years five and six. Most pupils were in bed and asleep long before the official light out, but there were always those who flaunted the rules, thus the last sweep of the day by a teacher. It gave her an hour and a half to complete the rounds.

She spent time preparing herself; a long bath, washed hair. She dressed in her prettiest bra, a long flowing skirt and skimpy, revealing top. She forgot her knickers. She cleaned her teeth thoroughly and dabbed perfume on all her pulse points, neck, cleavage, wrists and inner thighs. She pulled her Professor’s robe on and secured it, looked at the clock and seeing it was just about ten thirty, she set off.

Ten thirty usually gave pupils who insisted on roaming the school enough time to do whatever it was they did and get back to their dorm before either Mr Filch or the duty teacher caught them. Detention was the punishment, length of detention depended on the severity of the infraction of school rules. She smiled as she walked the corridors. How many times had she Harry and Ron been wandering the school after lights out during their time here? Many, many times. She arrived in the main entrance just as Mr Filch was locking the doors for the night. ‘Good night, Mr Filch,’ she called.
‘Gerrn,’ was his usual response.

She went into the Great Hall then down to the Viaduct Tower and the stairs that led down to the Dungeons. When she was a pupil, the Slytherin corridors scared her, now she felt comfortable walking along and checking all the potions rooms. She could see light coming from Horace’s rooms, but other than that, Slytherin was quiet. Gradually she worked her way around all of the corridors, through all of the bathrooms and toilets (boys and girls); all the classrooms; the kitchen (yes, pupils would try to cadge more food from the kitchens if they could). She by-passed the Infirmary, Madam Pomfrey would have things under control there. The staff room was empty (yes, some pupils took great delight in proving they could get through the ‘keep out’ charm), it was untidy but calm. The school elves would have it tidy by the morning. Working her way closer to the Astronomy Tower was a full circle from her starting point. Her pulse quickened as she thought about him and his touch and was becoming wet with anticipation. She was taking her contraceptive potion each day, so they would not have to worry about that …

‘Ah, Hermione,’ Minerva’s voice brought her back to the present. ‘Doing the rounds tonight? I thought Madam Hooch was on duty.’

‘We swopped, Minerva,’ she hoped she sounded convincing.

‘Well enough then. I’m off to find my bed. Have you been up to the Astronomy Tower yet?’

‘On my way there now.’

‘Aye, well … I think you may find it occupied. Detention if you do.’

‘Good night, Minerva.’

‘Have a pleasant night, Hermione,’ she smiled and walked back towards the stairs and the Head’s private quarters.

Damn and blast. Why of all nights does there have to be star gazers or lovers in the Tower? She climbed the stairs, quietly at first and she took out her wand, Lumos! and made more noise as she climbed the remaining stairs, passed the library and astronomy room. There was no-one here; and as the post of Astronomer remained vacant, the private rooms were currently unoccupied and protected, so it was unlikely that the students would be in there … which meant, they were up in the classroom. Damn and bother. She climbed the remaining stairs that led to the highest most classroom at Hogwarts. She extinguished the light before stepping out onto the parapet.

It was a clear night, there was a slight breeze blowing which made it chilly. There was no-one up here, what on earth was Minerva thinking? It was nearly midnight, was Severus downstairs in one of the other rooms? Had he been delayed at the Ministry? She paced back and forth as her mind whirled at all the possibilities of why he would not keep their assignation.

‘Have you really missed me?’ a familiar voice said from the shadow of the doorway. She turned to face him as he stepped towards her. ‘Come here,’ he whispered.

She flew into his arms and was caught, held and kissed. ‘Severus, Severus, Severus,’ she said between kisses.

There was a soft rumble of a laugh, ‘hmm, seems like you have.’

She pulled away, panting slightly. ‘No, not that much,’ and she took two steps back and allowed her robe to fall to the floor; she lowered her head then raised her eyes to him with a wicked smile.
He removed his coat, dropping it to the floor; undid several shirts buttons. Tonight he was not wearing his usual cravat, it would have been pointless. His eyes never left hers as his hand dropped to the buttons on his trousers, undoing each one with deliberate slowness. She stepped towards him, hands outstretched as she rested them upon the exposed skin of his chest. She caught the fragrance of his soap, of the spicy cologne he wore especially for her; he had also spent time in preparing for this meeting.

‘Hermione?’

‘Yes, Severus?’

‘I have missed you.’

‘Show me,’ she breathed.

Lying together on the soft comfort of his cloak on the floor of the classroom, with the clear autumn sky above them, they laughed and talked. He had brought some tidbits and fed her morsels of cake, grapes and chocolate.

‘Imagine my utter surprise to find you are knickerless in Hogwarts,’ he said, accepting half a violet cream.

‘Scandalous!’ and she laughed again. ‘But, on a more serious note, Minerva knows you are here.’

‘Of course she does,’ he rewarded her look of surprise with a kiss to the end of her nose. ‘You know of the infamous ‘Marauders Map’ of course?’ She nodded. ‘The Head of Hogwarts has the original, much larger and much more detailed.’

She thought for a moment. ‘But … wouldn’t that mean … when you were Headmaster … the Carrows would have had access to it and known …’

‘It would have … if I hadn’t hidden it somewhere very safe …’

She nodded her understanding of how yet again, even while he was being the Dark Lord’s puppet Headmaster of Hogwarts, he was doing all he could to protect the pupils.

‘Before I came up here I met her in the Head’s corridor, she told me the Tower was already occupied … so you must have been here early,’ she swatted him. ‘We could have had more time together.’ She groaned, ‘oh damn, she told me to have a pleasant night. She knew …’ and she buried her head in his chest, ‘I’m not going to be able to look her in the eyes tomorrow without blushing.’

‘So blush, smile knowingly and move on … and I should be moving on as well.’

‘I know, it’s very exciting meeting like this … but it must be late …’ she leaned in and kissed him before standing up and adjusting her clothes.

He joined her, returned his cloak to being a simple cloak, gathered up the remains of their little midnight feast; he handed the chocolates to her, and then pulled her into a fierce embrace.

‘Will you come to the match on Saturday?’ she asked.

‘I will be here. I shall bring the Malfoys for Slytherin and persuade Harry and Ginevra to come for Gryffindor. We can spend time together talking as well, I perceive you have something that needs discussing.’
'I do. But we can discuss that later.’ He frowned at her, not understanding. ‘I’m sorry Mr Snape, but Headmistress McGonagall gave me clear instructions. If anyone was up here after lights out, I have to give them detention. So be in my classroom at two o’clock for your punishment. And Mr Snape…?’

‘Yes, Professor Granger?’

‘… Button up,’ she nodded towards his trousers. He did as he was bid, kissed her again and took a step back.

‘Do I really have to come back later?’

‘If you do, I won’t give you detention.’

He laughed and vanished. She sighed and with one last look around to make sure there was nothing left behind, she popped a chocolate into her mouth and left for her room.

Dear Harry and Ginny,

Severus will be asking you to join him (and me) for the first Gryffindor/Slytherin match of the year.

Say yes! The youngest Seeker in the school’s history needs to be here.

Gryffindor for the cup.

Hermione. x

Dear ‘Mione,

Wouldn’t miss it for the world. I hear the Malfoys will be there. Great! I’ll be able to remind Draco of the number of times I beat him in a match.

Gryffindor for the cup.

Harry x
‘Go Gryffindor!’ the shout went up.

In the Gryffindor House stand, Harry, Hermione and Ginny were shouting themselves hoarse. The score was ninety points each and the Slytherin Keeper had just blocked a goal. It was the closest fought match that had been played in many years. Ginny was shouting tactics to the Gryffindor team and if Harry had a broomstick he would have joined in and gone after the Golden Snitch. They grabbed each other and yelled as a Gryffindor Chaser was streaking towards the Slytherin goal with a Quaffle. The roar of encouragement turned to a groan of disappointment as a Slytherin Beater scored a hit with a Bludger and as the Chaser swerved to avoid being hit, a Slytherin Chaser nicked the Quaffle and shot like an arrow towards the Gryffindor goal. They shot and scored.

‘Another ten points to Slytherin,’ the announcer shouted, ‘Slytherin now lead one hundred points to ninety.’

A huge roar went up as the Gryffindor Seeker was spotted in hot pursuit of the Golden snitch. Unfortunately the Slytherin Seeker has also spotted the Snitch and was making his own bid to capture it. Hermione looked across to the Slytherin House stand and saw everyone on their feet urging their Seeker on. She stood and added her voice to the Gryffindor House shout. It was a chase of daring, skill and speed. Madam Hooch was keeping a sharp eye on the match but failed to see the Slytherin Keeper race up behind the Gryffindor Seeker and give her broomstick a nudge before heading back to tend his goals.

‘Foul,’ Ginny shouted, ‘bloody foul, ref. Are you bloody blind?’ She was fuming as the nudge was just enough to unbalance the Gryffindor Seeker so she had to slow momentarily, and in doing so, allowed the Slytherin Seeker to take the advantage. The Snitch suddenly changed direction and headed straight up into the clouds. Both Seekers shot after it. In the meantime, Gryffindor had scored to bring the points level again. Ginny and Harry were furiously discussing tactics as the rest of the House were cheering themselves hoarse. It was then that Hermione spotted the Snitch hurtling towards the stands, closely followed by the two Seekers, who were travelling at great speed, straight down, neck and neck. Both Houses cheered their Seeker on. With one final burst of speed, the Slytherin Seeker stretched out his hand and caught the Snitch; he had to pull sharply up to avoid making contact with the ground. The match was over, Slytherin House were jubilant.

They made their way down to meet the others and once on the ground, Ginny was mobbed by autograph hunters. Hermione grinned to herself as she saw Harry’s obvious pride that Ginny had been recognised. Severus and the Malfoy’s came over.

‘Brilliant game,’ Draco said, ‘I don’t think we had such a close fought match, Harry.’

‘The Gryffindor tactics were all wrong,’ Harry complained and so started a long discussion of tactics, past and present with both former players gesturing how they would have gone about things.

‘Match tea in the Great Hall,’ Hermione said, ‘c’mon,’ and they moved off, leaving Harry and Draco absorbed in discussion and Ginny still signing Holyhead Harpies posters. She walked with Narcissa and Astoria as the men led the way to the castle.

‘Good afternoon, Professor,’ several pupils called as they rushed passed.

‘Good game, Slytherin,’ she called after them. A shout of Slytherin! went up; two of the voices she would have sworn were Severus and Lucius.

The Great Hall was buzzing with conversation about the match. ‘How shall we do this?’ Lucius asked. ‘It seems daft to separate into Houses.’
‘Then let us find eight places together and occupy them,’ Severus suggested. So they found places on the Hufflepuff table and sat down, ignoring the looks and puzzled stares from the rest of the table. The after match tea was sandwiches, toasted crumpets and muffins, cakes, tea or pumpkin juice. Harry, Draco and Ginny came in and Hermione waved them over. They all tucked into the spread and chatted about the match, the forth coming wedding and teaching. As they laughed and talked together, they were unaware that many eyes were turned on them, Slytherins and Gryffindors enjoying each other’s company.

When they had finished, Severus turned to her. ‘Do you need to speak to me alone or with the others?’

‘All of you I think. You may have differing ideas. C’mon, let’s go to the Tower.’

They left as a group and made their way to the DADA Tower. Once there, she placed privacy charms on the door, then without naming any names, she explained the problem. Everyone listened and when she had finished, she looked from on to the other.

‘Boggart,’ Harry said. They all looked at him. ‘If the pupil is being abused in some way, the Boggart could take the form of the abuser,’ he shrugged.

‘I have to agree,’ Severus said, ‘however, you must have a suitable Riddikulus prepared in case the pupil freezes, which is more than likely.’

‘Do you get any sense of Dark Magic around the pupil?’ Lucius asked, giving her a hard stare.

‘Yes. Only – it’s hard to explain. There is a shadow over the pupil, a dark shadow. It opened its eyes and looked at me.’

‘What?’ Lucius and Severus said together.

‘But I didn’t get any sense of danger or harm from it, it was more, curious as to what I was doing. I get the feeling that it may somehow be protecting the pupil, even though it is Dark Magic.’

‘Hermione, you need to be very careful. You know what happens when you awaken the Dark,’ Severus said.

She nodded. ‘I have been extremely careful, believe me.’ Severus nodded his relief. ‘Minerva has given me permission to find out what is happening to the pupil. She said I must be very certain of my facts before I make any report or accusation.’

‘Is the pupil safe here?’ Severus asked.

‘Yes, Hogwarts is the one place that has happy memories.’

‘May I suggest something?’ It was Draco who spoke. ‘What if Harry was to make a guest visit during the class? There would then be two of you, which are much better odds.’

‘It has merit,’ Lucius added, ‘but would Minerva go for it?’

‘Don’t tell her,’ Severus said. ‘After the event if you like, but not before, the fewer members of staff who know the better.’

Hermione sat deep in thought. Having Harry around would be good; the two of them should be able to deal with anything the Boggart or Dark Magic presented them with. ‘Harry, send me an owl when you are free and I will make that the Boggart lesson.’
'OK, ‘Mione. I’m involved in something right now, but in a couple of weeks – OK?’ She nodded.

‘We must be getting back,’ Lucius said.

‘Yeah, us as well,’ Ginny almost sniggered. Severus gave her a look that wiped the smile off her face. Hermione giggled and told him to stop teasing.

Goodbyes were made and six of the eight left. He then took her hand and led her down from the Tower and on a mysterious zig-zag along the corridors of the castle.

‘Where are you taking me?’

‘Somewhere you will not be found, at least for a few hours.’

Intrigued, she said nothing, simply walked by his side. Pupils greeted her as they passed; he then took a sudden turn and Asylum Indigere! He commanded and the door to his room of requirement was revealed. While he placed privacy charms on the door and turned the two empty portrait frames to the wall, she took the opportunity to look around.

‘Your room of requirement,’ she smiled and crossed the room to hug him. Another brick had just fallen away from the wall he had built up around himself over the years.

‘I want to make love to you in comfort,’ he said, removing his frock coat. ‘Come and sit with me.’ He led her to the fireside and they sat together on the large sofa, holding hands.

‘Thank you,’ she said.

‘For what?’

‘Bringing me here. This is your sanctuary, your place of healing.’

He kissed her hand. ‘You are wrong, Hermione. You are my sanctuary and healing. This is simply a room.’

‘It is still a lovely room with a rather large bed. Oh Merlin, Severus. Is that your bed from your room …?’

‘I believe it is. Would you care to see if it is as comfortable as it looks?’

‘Thought you would never ask.’

He was reading the latest letter from Hermione when there was a knock at the front door. As he wasn’t expecting anyone, he ignored it, whoever it was could just go away. He turned his attention back to the letter; there was another knock, louder this time. He growled, why didn’t they go away? It wasn’t Harry, Lucius or Kingsley; they would have used the floo system or apperated into the hallway. It had been two weeks since the glorious afternoon in his room of requirement. They had made love, bathed together, read to each other, laughed and talked. Moaner had supplied them with food and tea. It was a wonderful time and all he simply wanted now, was to read her letter, in peace. Another knock, this time the rata-ta-tat was more urgent. ‘Merlin’s beard, just go away,’ he muttered.
But he knew it was useless, whoever it was, they were persistent. With an angry sigh he went to the front door and flung it open.

‘Ah, Severus, I was afraid you weren’t in,’ Belladonna Green said.
Yule Term at Hogwarts Part 2

Chapter Summary

The door flew open and Harry stood there. ‘Upstairs … Atrium … Now!’ was all he said and left.

Severus ran from his office, Harry had already rang for the lift and two minutes later they were stepping out into the Atrium where a large crowd was gathered. He had a sinking feeling about the whole thing. They walked towards whatever it was that was creating so much interest; he glanced at Harry who was grinning. They arrived at the fountain and elbowed their way to the front of the laughing crowd. He saw what they were laughing at and groaned. Belladonna Green was sitting weeping into her hands with Hermione standing over her.

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Chapter Notes

Warning! This chapter contains a reference to child sexual abuse - there is nothing descriptive, it is merely alluded to - but I thought it needed a warning.

And a big 'thank you' to all those who have recently left kudos! - it is very much appreciated.

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‘Belladonna. What are you doing here?’ He didn’t even try to keep the annoyance out of his voice.

‘May I come in please?’ He stepped aside and ushered her into the library.

‘How can I help you?’ He didn’t offer her a seat or to take her cloak. He just wanted her gone.

‘This is a lovely room, and so many books.’

‘There are usually books in a library. Now, you are here because …?’
'Yes. I thought you should know that the Aurors have detained Sinistra Pike, who as you know has been near the top of our most wanted list for years.'

'And this information could not wait until I was in the Ministry?'

'You are a difficult man to get hold of, Severus; you are in and out of the Department like a demented Spring Leech. So … I thought I would track you down and give the news myself,’ she smiled at him.

'Well, you have tracked me down and given me the news. Thank you. I will read the full report when I am next at the Ministry. Please, allow me to show you out.’ He moved towards the door, but she was quicker and stood in front of him.

She was tall: perhaps only an inch or so shorter than he. Her hair was thick and lustrous and fell in soft dark waves to her shoulders. Her eyes were pale blue. She allowed her cloak to fall open to reveal a low cut gown, not her usual work attire. Her breasts were large with a cleavage a man could drown in.

'I’m sorry Belladonna, was there something else?’ He knew there was, this was the inappropriate action he had discussed with Hermione. Belladonna was obviously of the opinion that eight weeks on his own was the optimum time for his defences to be down and his libido up.

'Please call me Bella, Severus. And you know very well there is … something else.’ Her voice was sultry, not her normal speaking voice.

'Am I missing something, Bella?’ he whispered back, reaching out to move a stray strand of hair from her face. He had all his barriers up, yet she was still able to befuddle him. How was that?

'Severus,’ she allowed her cloak to fall to the floor as she stepped into his personal space, ‘you must know how I feel about you. Don’t deny you haven’t noticed it.’

He let his finger trace a line from her jaw down her neck, to her cleavage and back to her shoulder. She was intoxicating. ‘Yes, I have noticed, Bella. I would have to be blind not to notice.’ Her perfume filled his senses; it was exquisite, a heady mixture of Vertiver, Ambergris, and something … very subtle.

She leaned in closer. ‘You and me Severus, what a partnership that would be. You need a woman, a real woman, someone who can satisfy a powerful wizard and his appetites.’

'Miss Granger …’

‘… Is Muggle born and very nice I’m sure. But you deserve better, deserve more,’ and so saying, she placed her arms around his neck and closed the space so that she pressed against him. Which he thought quite wonderful, her body was soft and giving; her breasts pressed against his chest and she smelt divine. She brought her lips to his and they kissed. He felt her tongue enter his mouth and although part of his mind was revolted by the act, another part was telling his body to embrace the moment. Somehow his hand was on her breast and he wanted to pull away but found he couldn’t, no! he didn’t want to pull away … he wanted more. ‘She is a mere child compared to me. I can give you everything you need; everything you desire,’ she whispered in his ear, her voice thick with lust.

'Yes,’ he groaned and pushed her against the door as he sought her lips again, kissing them roughly; they were soft, sweet tasting lips. His mouth then fell to the rise of her cleavage, kissing and licking; she gave a low growl as her hand deftly released the laces to the front of her gown, fully exposing her breasts. He suckled her erect nipples, making them swell all the more. He lifted her gown and ran
a hand up her leg. She thrust against his hand even as it found its goal. It was at that point that the still coherent part of his brain recognised the subtle note of her perfume. It was … Hermione. Hermione. Hermione.

As if slapped, he pulled violently away, grabbed her hands from inside his trousers, she had somehow managed to undo the buttons on his trousers without him realising. She was panting heavily and her exposed skin flushed with desire.

‘Severus, whatever is the matter?’ She brought her eyes up to his.

‘Amortentia,’ he said in a voice of cold steel, ‘decocted to be worn as a perfume and not to be ingested as a love potion.’

‘What are you saying? I have done no such thing,’ her eyes flashed.

‘What you couldn’t know is that Amortentia would make me smell the one thing I truly desire, truly love.’

‘Severus … I … yes I used a love potion, I knew it would be the only way … for you to take any interest in me. I … have loved you from …’

‘Enough! Don’t say any more. If you leave now it will not go any further. But you will desist from seeking to see me alone, unless it is on official Ministry business.’

‘Yes, yes, of course,’ she bent down to pick up her discarded cloak. He led her to the front door then slammed it once she was gone. He placed a protective charm the door then went upstairs to take a long hot shower to wash away any residue from the perfume. Afterwards, dressed in fresh clothes, he burnt the clothes he had been wearing as they could easily have been impregnated with the deadly love potion.

To say he felt dreadful would have been an understatement. He came within an inch of being unfaithful to Hermione and even though it was from the effect of a love potion, it didn’t change the fact that he wanted sex with Belladonna Green. He would confess at the first opportunity and beg her forgiveness. How could he even have considered sullying his body with anyone else? If he had, he knew that the betrayal would break her heart, just before she reduced him dust. She was capable of that and would be quite justified.

In the sitting room he picked up her letter and continued reading.

... and so my darling, Harry is going to arrive tomorrow in time for the lesson. Together we should have enough experience for whatever happens.

As for the Riddikulus, I think I will once again call on the services of Grandmother Longbottom, Merlin bless her. She has made more Boggarts look silly than anything else [When I was at Hogwarts you would be surprised at the number of pupils whose Boggart was you, scary Potions Master! But I always thought you looked very fetching in a skirt and large hat]. My own Boggart was failure. There! You now you know something new about me.

Minerva, Albus, Hagrid and everyone else sends you their best. You know what I send you.

Only 4 weeks 'til Yule. I suggest you get started on a plentiful batch of Girding Potion. Believe me when I say, you are going to need it!

I love you deeply.
He held the parchment for many minutes as he let the tears roll down his cheeks: then he laughed. Only Hermione Jean Granger could make him weep and laugh at the same time. Girding Potion indeed. Still, it may come in handy to have a fresh batch. Just in case.

‘So today we are going to tackle another of the main Dark Art non-beings, the Boggart.’ She stood before the large portable wardrobe that shook and rumbled ominously. ‘Anyone want to tell me what a Boggart is?’ A hand shot up. ‘Yes, Irene?’

‘A boggart is a shape-shifting non-being representation of an individual’s worse fear or nightmare.’

‘Excellent description, 5 points to Gryffindor. And what is the best way of dealing with a Boggart?’ A hand shot up. ‘Anyone besides Irene?’ She couldn’t believe she had just uttered those words. ‘No? Very well, Irene?’

‘You change it and laughter is the best way coz that confuses it.’

‘Excellent, thank you. I would add that if possible, don’t try to tackle a Boggart on your own, get help, the more people, the more laughter, the more confused the Boggart. Now …’ She was interrupted by a knock at the door, it opened and Harry put his head around round.

‘I’m sorry Professor, I thought you didn’t have a class until later …’

‘Not at all Harry, come in. Class, this is my best friend, Harry Potter.’ A series of ooh’s and aahh’s went around the room and the girls were suddenly giggly. ‘Harry, we are trying out our Boggart skills today. Would you care to stay? I’m sure you would have a great deal to contribute.’

‘Thank you Professor Granger, it would be a pleasure.’

She turned back to the class. ‘The charm to deal with a Boggart is Riddikulus! Say it with me – Riddikulus! Once again intent is everything with a Boggart, if you don’t mean it the Boggart will just keep changing into anything you fear, so you must work through that fear. Now, wands at the ready – sweep – point – Riddikulus!’ She had them practice until she thought they were ready.

‘Very good. I will go first, to give you some idea of what to expect. Oh yes, always expect the unexpected with Boggarts. Boggarts are buggers like that.’ That got the class laughing and with a flick of her wand, she released the catch on the wardrobe. A Roman centurion in full armour came running towards her screaming with his sword raised, ready to kill. ‘Riddikulus!’ she commanded and the centurion changed into a Golden Snitch that fluttered away back into the wardrobe. The class laughed and clapped, including Harry.

‘Irene, you go first. Remember, intent. I’m here - just in case. Ready?’
Irene nodded, set her face and Hermione released the catch. A snarling, slobbering werewolf jumped at Irene, who gave a yelp but stood her ground and with a sweep of her wand ‘Riddikulus!’ the werewolf became a fluffy kitten that mewed plaintively. The class roared with laughter as Hermione sent the kitten back into the wardrobe.

‘Getting the idea?’ she asked. The whole class nodded. ‘Next. Ben, of you go.’

Ben stood licking his lips, wand poised. Hermione opened the wardrobe to release a fully formed vampire with blood running down his chin. It flew towards a terrified Ben, who suddenly swung into action. ‘Riddikulus!’ and the vampire was holding a china cup of tea and a digestive biscuit. He took a sip, dunked the Digestive then looked confused by the laugher. He finished his tea before Hermione consigned him back to the wardrobe.

‘Right, Lucas, come and give it a go.’ She nodded to Harry, who came and quietly stood by her side. ‘Remember, intent, sweep, Riddikulus!’

He looked terrified, especially as the wardrobe was now almost toppling over with the Boggart inside. She released the door and out stepped the creepiest looking man she had ever seen. His hair was black and lank, his fingernails were long and broken, he smelt; but worst of all he leered at Lucas in a way that made her blood run cold. Aloysius Black. Lucas stood frozen, his eyes wide in terror, he was shaking and although he was trying to say the word, nothing came out of mouth.

‘Riddikulus!’ she commanded and Black looked around, surprised by the laugher. He was now wearing a green skirt and jacket, old high heels, a huge hat complete with vulture attached and a moth-eaten cat stole, he also sported a large carpet bag. Harry roared as he recognised Neville’s grandma and the rest of the class was howling with laugher. Only Lucas remained silent. The Boggart, so confused now it was twisting in circles, didn’t resist as Hermione sent it back into the wardrobe. The laughter gradually subsided.

‘Don’t worry, Lucas. My Boggart was a Dementor, scary as hell; I fainted the first time it came out of the wardrobe.’ Harry said.

The rest of the class took a turn with their Boggart while Harry took Lucas to one side to chat with him. When she looked at them, she saw the shadow looking at Harry, it didn’t seem upset. ‘

‘That was a great session, class. You should all be very proud of yourselves, including those who didn’t manage the Riddikulus! You will the next time. Now, homework … one page of your thoughts as to why you have that Boggart and can you have more than one Boggart? Class dismiss,’ she turned to Lucas. ‘Lucas, would you stay a moment please? He looked terrified again. She and Harry took him to sit at her desk. ‘That was Aloysius Black, wasn’t it?’ she asked very gently.

Lucas nodded.

‘Do your parents know how scared you are of him?’ He shook his head. ‘Does he do other things to you, apart from tutoring …?’ Huge tears filled his eyes; he blinked them back and nodded. She reached out and took his hand. ‘You don’t have to say anything else, but I would like to have a look, that is, if your protector will allow me to?’ she looked above his head.

‘Hermione, what are you …?’ Harry stopped as two large white eyes turned to him. ‘Wow,’ was all he said.

The eyes turned back to her. ‘Hello,’ she said, ‘I am Hermione and this is Harry. We are Lucas’s friends. We would like to help him.’ The eyes looked from her to Harry and back again, she felt a probe in her mind. She didn’t block it; she simply showed her concern and friendship for Lucas. The
eyes blinked and in some way, she thought it smiled. ‘Thank you. I’m not going to hurt Lucas; I am just going to find out what Black has been doing to him. Is that alright?’ The eyes blinked again, which she took to mean ‘yes’. ‘Lucas, I’m going to gently use Ligilimens on you. It doesn’t hurt and you are quite safe with me, but I do need to see what kind of wizard Black is.’

Lucas nodded and Harry gently placed his hands on the lad’s shoulders for support.

‘Ligilimens!’ and she went into his memories.

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‘... So let me understand this,’ Lucius said as he sat with the group in Minerva’s office. ‘The shadow on young Lucas was Dark, but it allowed Harry to send it away? Extraordinary.’

Harry nodded. ‘After Hermione had scanned his memories, Lucas told us that Black had placed the shadow on him in an effort to keep him docile. But Black isn’t that good a wizard and what seems to have happened is that the shadow became confused. It didn’t know what it should be doing.’

‘In the end, it had become Lucas’s protector,’ Hermione added. ‘The more Lucas hated Black, the more protective the shadow became, but it couldn’t stop Black doing what he did to Lucas,’ she sighed. She had only scanned the surface of Lucas’s memories, and what she had seen upset her. The man was an evil predator who had used threats, promises and some Dark Magic to have his wicked way with Lucas.

The gathering of Minerva, Harry, Hermione, Severus, Lucius and Draco sipped their tea. Albus was enjoying his tea courtesy of the Tea Party portrait at the top of the second floor staircase.

‘Harry was brilliant,’ Hermione continued. ‘I was upset by what I had seen, so he asked the shadow if it would like to go back home and leave Lucas with his friends. The shadow agreed and no, don’t ask how we knew, but we did. Harry and I then opened a small vortex link to the other side.’

Everyone stared at her, Harry grinned.

‘It’s something from my Ancient teachings. I am able to tap into the energy of the below world as well as the above world; the shadow came from below. I explained to Harry what I was going to do and ... we did it.’

‘The shadow fairly jumped into the vortex. I got the distinct impression it was glad to be going home, ‘Harry said.

Minerva refilled cups. ‘And you are sure there is no residual Dark energy around the lad, Lucius?’

‘None, Minerva. Severus and I gave him a thorough check.’

‘And his energetic body is the correct colour now,’ Hermione added. Everyone looked at her again. She smiled and sighed, she would just have to keep explaining things until they understood the Ancient knowledge. ‘Our energetic bodies have different colours, a healthy body glows gold orange, even white if it is very healthy and spiritual. Black or dark sticky energy indicates a sick energy body or an invasion by the Dark.’
‘And this is another of your Ancient memories?’ Albus asked.

‘Umm, yes. It was always the first thing I learnt in my various lives. What has happened to Black? He tutored the sisters as well,’ Hermione asked.

‘Yes, quite true; Severus?’ Minerva turned to him.

‘Black was apprehended by an Unspeakable and he currently resides in the maximum security wing of Azkaban. There will be no trial, he will receive the Kiss for his crimes,’ his face was impassive as all eyes in the room turned to him. ‘Minister Shacklebolt and the Wizengamot have judged his crime to be so heinous the Kiss is the only punishment that is fitting.’ When Hermione looked at him, he could not meet her gaze.

‘The family were unaware of what had been going on under their noses. It would seem that Black used various ruses and lies to keep his crimes hidden,’ Minerva spat the word. ‘The Kiss is too good for him. Personally I think he should be whipped publically and his … male pride … cut off, then he can be given the Kiss,’ she took a sip of her tea in a most ladylike fashion. ‘But then, that’s just me.’

Hermione couldn’t help but notice that all four men crossed their legs at the Headmistress’s suggested punishment.

‘Now that he has spent time with the Healers and had the taint and memories removed, Lucas is beginning to shine in all his classes,’ Minerva continued, ‘he will be a very gifted wizard.’

‘And I have said I will keep an eye on him,’ Lucius added, ‘his mother is my third cousin, so he is family.’ Everyone nodded in agreement at Lucius’s offer of protection and friendship to Lucas and his family.

‘Well, Hermione,’ Albus said, ‘it’s almost the end of term, only a week to go. How have you found teaching?’

‘I’ve loved every minute of it, Albus. I haven’t lost a pupil yet, but there is still a week to go. I have to say though, that I think Harry is a natural for the DADA.’ She laughed at Harry’s astonished look. ‘He is. He knew exactly what Lucas needed and he understood very quickly what I wanted to do.’

Harry blushed. ‘Thanks ‘Mione, but you were brilliant …’

‘If I may interrupt before this slides into a mutual admiration society meeting,’ Minerva said, ‘You have caused quite a stir among the pupils, Gryffindors and Slytherins breaking bread together. So you are all invited to come back, anytime, and maybe we can start the process of bringing a modicum of trust between the two Houses.’ she beamed at everyone.

The meeting broke up. Goodbyes said and they left Minerva’s office. Down in the main entrance, hugs were given and received and when only Severus was left, she looked at him.

‘You look troubled, my love. Can I help?’

‘No, Hermione. I am just very busy at the Department and I am missing you, so I am extra grumpy,’ he forced a smile.

‘Well, only a week to go then I’m all yours. Rufus will be here for the new term,’ she stood on tip-toe to kiss his cheek. He responded with a tiny peck. He turned and walked into the snowy courtyard, out beyond the barriers and was gone.
Severus,

What’s wrong? Have I done something to upset you? I apologise if I haven’t written as frequently these last few weeks, but it has been hectic with Lucas and classes.

Please, please tell me if I have upset you.

I love you.

Your

Hermione. xx

No jokes, no fun and no laughter in her letter. She was hurting and it was his fault. He had tried many times to compose a letter explaining everything, but it was wrong to write instead of facing her. He realised that leaving it until the Yule holiday was also wrong, he was feeling more guilty and depressed by the day and now her letter, she thought she had upset him. Merlin’s balls! He could gladly hex Belladonna Green for the heartache she had, no … was causing. He placed her letter with the pile of similar parchments, all sent over the last term. He read each one every night before falling asleep, alone in their bed.

Would she understand? Would she be forgiving? He simply didn’t know.

‘As this is my last class of the term and the end of my tenure as DADA professor, I thought we would look at one of the most difficult aspects of magic; wandless magic.’ She looked around the class of sixth years, they were surprised. ‘Is there anyone in the class who has attempted wandless magic?’ No one raised a hand. ‘Is there anyone who has thought about wandless magic?’ Hands went up. ‘That’s better, by the sixth year you should all be wondering about wandless and non-verbal magic.’ She scanned the room again, at least six pupils had their heads lowered, so at least six have thought about it and maybe, even tired it. Good. ‘Professor Volovsky will continue with this subject no doubt, so today will be a little taster, a trial run.’ She waited for the inevitable question. It came from Hamish Campbell, a young wizard with good potential, if only he would ditch the arrogance.

‘Professor Granger, are you capable of wandless magic?’

All eyes turned to her. ‘It depends if you believe what The Daily Prophet prints,’ which made everyone laugh. ‘Seriously though, yes I am proficient and I always thought I would be, even while I was here.’

‘Can you demonstrate?’ Hamish asked innocently.
She apperated behind Hamish and his quill, parchment and text book rose into the air.

‘Wow,’ came the response. As she made her way back to the front of the class, normally this time, she thought her reputation was either shot, or had just gone through the roof.

‘Now, why would wandless magic be useful?’ With a wave of her hand, Mr Campbell’s effects gently returned to his desk. Examples came fast, with ‘surprise’ being the favourite. For the next thirty minutes she pushed them, cajoled them and encouraged them into using wandless magic. They worked through charms, simple spells and the more harmless hexes. Out of a class of thirty, two were good; the remaining twenty eight would always have to use wands. But there were two possible candidates for the Department should Severus need new recruits.

‘Yes, Mr Campbell?’

‘Professor, you used wandless and non-verbal magic before.’ She smiled; surely he couldn’t have been the only one to notice? ‘But isn’t that Dark Magic?’ There were many nodding heads around the class.

‘This is my last class, you are in your last year; you will go on to do many things in your lives. I will leave you with this thought. Magic is both Good and Bad; Light and Dark; Right and Wrong. Your aim in life is to be balanced. We are not all Good …’

‘But some are all Evil,’ a young witch chipped in.

‘… Yes, Miss Jones, some are all Evil.’

‘But do we then use all Good Magic or can we use Dark as well? But what if we like the Dark?’ With that comment the class broke into a heated discussion about Dark Magic and how it can corrupt and cause harm and it mustn’t be used under any circumstances unless you wanted to be turned to the Dark. The volume increased as the fear of Dark Magic increased.

She allowed it to rise for a short while, but as some of the girls in particular were getting near hysterical, she called ‘Stop’!

‘Listen to yourselves. While you fear Dark Magic and the Dark Arts, the Dark will find you a pliable witch or wizard.’ She stepped closer to them, expanding herself so she seemed to grow, filling the space. ‘How was Tom Riddle defeated?’ There came a horrified gasp. ‘Yes, Tom Riddle, let’s use his real name, not some made up name like … Voldemort.’ Again a gasp. ‘While you fear to use Voldemort’s name or Tom Riddle’s, you will always live and walk in fear.’ She could feel her voice resonate with power. ‘Tom Riddle was a little shit with delusions of grandeur. He came from nothing and returned to nothing. How was he defeated? And I don’t care if you have anyone in your family who was a Death Eater – I live with one – so feel free to answer’

‘Harry Potter defeated him by destroying the Horcruxes,’ someone shouted from the back.

She laughed. ‘Well, yes, and I played a small part in that. But that is not what destroyed Tom Riddle. He was destroyed by the one thing he could not control, the one thing he had never experienced. Unconditional Love.’ A murmur went around the room. ‘Harry did what he had to do out of love. He was and is, loved by his friends, his school and his family; remember his mother gave her own life to protect him, the ultimate act of unconditional love. Harry loved them right back. Tom Riddle had no defence against that, no matter how many times he split his evil soul. The Dark can always be defeated by the best of light and right; love rather than hate; acceptance rather than fear; education rather than ignorance.’
The silence was total as they hung on her every word.

‘Is there another Tom Riddle out there, waiting for the chance to destroy the Wizarding and Muggle worlds? Yes, you bet there is. There always will be. Our best defence against another Tom Riddle is to understand the Dark, not to fear it. It’s what I would be doing if I was here for longer, teaching every pupil the benefits of knowing and understanding the Dark Arts, so that when another Tom Riddle threatens, all of you would be able to use that knowledge. With knowledge comes courage, respect and co-operation. And if you have something or someone you love or if you have known love, then you will have a very powerful arsenal with which to fight any Dark forces that may threaten again. Of course, you will always have the choice on which side to fight. We made ours during the last War.’

‘You made a choice in deciding to love Severus Snape,’ another voice said, from the front this time.

She smiled. ‘Choice had nothing to do with it, Miss Turner. Mr Snape and I have had this very same conversation many times and the outcome is always the same. I win!’ There was laughter at that. ‘Seriously, we do not choose who we fall in love with; we choose who to love, there is a difference. So finally, to those of you I gave detentions to because I caught you after lights out with a boy or girlfriend, I gave you detentions because you broke a school rule; not because you had chosen to love, or indeed, because love had chosen you.’ She looked at the clock. ‘You all have the potential to become the very best you can be in whatever you choose to do. You have been a terrific class to teach. Thank you. Class dismiss.’ She beamed at them, suddenly sad.

They all stood and applauded her; she blushed, gave a small bow and wave. ‘Get along with you now.’ Each one of them came, shook her hand and thanked her. When the Tower was empty, she went into her room, closed the door and had a jolly good weep.

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Dear Lucius,

Two days until the Yule holiday.

You will be pleased to know that I had my Muggle backside well and truly kicked by Prof. Flitwick.

It had somehow become known that I had been taking duelling lesson from you. Minerva decided that an exhibition duel between me and Filius would be a good end of term treat for the pupils. For some reason I still can’t fathom, Filius and I agreed. So yesterday, in the Great Hall we squared up to each other. My bow was elegant and graceful. It was all downhill from there.

Merlin! But he is good. I did score several good hits and the Malfoy Manoeuvre proved very successful the first three or four times, he cottoned on after that. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed it, especially when we took the duel outside. I suggested to Minerva to re-establish the duelling club. She is thinking about it.

Still not sure what Severus and I will be doing over Yule. We have some catching up to do. I saw that! Don’t roll your eyes. Narcissa tells me exactly what you and she get up to [you do blush deliciously].

Would love the four of you to come to dinner one night when I’m back. Let me know what day would
suit and we’ll make a date.

Give my love to the family.

See you soon.

Love

Hermione Danger.

Dear Miss Danger,

Please do not ever put yourself down. I heard that you gave Filius a run for his money and that a score of 29/25 to Filius is quite remarkable. Well done, you have obviously been paying attention. I am proud of you {please don’t tell anyone though; I have a reputation to uphold}.

Is all well with Severus? I know he gets very grumpy when you are away, but lately he has taken grumpiness and sourpuss to whole new heights.

What can I say? Narcissa is smitten with me and I can deny her nothing.

Would be delighted to stop by for dinner one evening once you are back, we are available. Also not sure what we shall be doing over Yule either as wedding plans are hotting up.

Will see you soon.

Best.

Lucius.

P.S. As a Malfoy, I deny blushing.

The day before the end of term was the official Yule luncheon at Hogwarts. Decorations abounded, mistletoe appeared in the strangest of places and was used by all and sundry. A huge Yule log burned merrily in the fireplace in the Great Hall, the castle ghosts were in very festive spirits and pranked as many pupils as they could. Rules were relaxed and the atmosphere was one of joyful expectation.

Hermione was in her room packing, slowly. She had been crying again, not because she was sad at leaving Hogwarts, she was, but because Severus had not replied to her last letter sent over a week ago; he usually replied the same day. She went to her desk and flipped through the reports she had prepared for Professor Volovsky, giving details of what she had covered with each year and a brief
outline of the capabilities of each class. There was a knock at her door.

‘Come in,’ she called.

A sixth year Prefect came in. ‘Excuse me Professor Granger, the Headmistress would like to see you in her office before luncheon.’

‘Thank you Mr Connor and by the way, I haven’t had a chance to congratulate you on your win over Gryffindor the other week. You obviously studied the tactics of Oliver Wood.’

The young wizard smiled. ‘A Captain takes inspiration wherever it can be found. And I guessed Harry Potter would have recognised some of the plays.’

He left and she rolled up the parchments and sealed them. Then she made her way to Minerva’s office. The aroma of Yule luncheon cooking made her hungry. The stairway was open, she went up and knocked.

‘Enter,’ Minerva called out. In the office with Minerva were Lucas and two adults who could only be his parents. ‘Ah, Professor Granger, come in and meet Madam and Mr Prewitt.’

‘How do you do,’ she said shaking hands with both of them. ‘Hello Lucas, how are you?’

‘Doing very well, Professor,’ he replied with a grin.

‘Professor Granger,’ it was Mr Prewitt who addressed her. ‘We wish to thank you personally for helping Lucas, your behaviour was exemplary. Lucas told us how supported he felt by you over the whole term and that you always knew there was something wrong.’ He turned to his wife, ‘we feel betrayed by Black, someone we trusted and are also guilty that we didn’t realise what was going on.’ He squeezed his wife’s hand.

‘Our children are safe because of you and Harry Potter,’ Madam Prewitt added.

‘Black has been sentenced and has already received the Kiss,’ Minerva said.

‘Professor Granger, we owe you a debt of gratitude and if there is anything our family can do for you, we are at your service,’ he bowed slightly, took her hand and kissed it.

‘Er … thank you very much Madam and Mr Prewitt, but you do know I’m Muggle born?’

They smiled at her. ‘Of course, our cousin Lucius has been telling us all about you.’

‘Then I’m doomed!’ Hermione laughed.

The Prewitts made their goodbyes and after wishing her a very merry Yule, they left. As Hermione turned to leave Minerva held her back.

‘Do you have plans for Yule?’ she asked.

‘To tell the truth Minerva, I’m not sure … you see …’ she slumped down into a chair and covered her face with her hands. ‘I think I’ve somehow upset Severus, he hasn’t replied to my most recent letter and all our friends are saying he is acting very strangely. So I really don’t know.’

‘Oh my dear, you were so very happy at the match. Whatever has happened? Although I will say that he was more reticent than usual at the Lucas Prewitt meeting.’

‘He told he was very busy at work, but it just didn’t sound right,’ she slumped back again and threw
her head back to think. After several minutes she sat bolt upright. ‘Oh no! I think I know what it is,’ she jumped up, ‘how long until luncheon?’

‘It’s served at one o’clock, why?’

‘Minerva, can I apperate from here please?’

‘Of course, but where are you going?’

‘To sort things out. I’ll be back in time for luncheon.’

Minerva took out her wand and after a few intricate flicks she turned to Hermione. ‘I’ll replace the jinx once you have gone, so you will have to come back the normal way.’

She nodded her understanding and disappeared.

‘Albus?’ Minerva called.

‘I’m here Minerva.’

‘There are going to be fireworks somewhere.’

Albus chuckled. ‘There is never a dull moment with Hermione Danger.’

Severus sat in his office pretending to go through reports. He shuffled them around but didn’t look at any of them. He was morose, grumpy, sour and nervous, all of which was playing havoc with his ability to focus on work. Kingsley had noticed, so had Harry; everyone else was giving him a very wide berth. He had seen Belladonna twice since her visit to Spinners End, both times had been in meetings with other Heads of Departments. She had not met his gaze. Hermione would be home tomorrow and he would then choose the best time to sit down with her and confess the whole thing to her, he would then throw himself on her mercy.

The door flew open and Harry stood there. ‘Upstairs … Atrium … Now!’ was all he said and left. Severus ran from his office, Harry had already rang for the lift and two minutes later they were stepping out into the Atrium where a large crowd was gathered. He had a sinking feeling about the whole thing. They walked towards whatever it was that was creating so much interest; he glanced at Harry who was grinning. They arrived at the fountain and elbowed their way to the front of the laughing crowd. He saw what they were laughing at and groaned. Belladonna Green was sitting weeping into her hands with Hermione standing over her. She turned and saw him.

‘Hello darling,’ she said loud enough for everyone to hear.

‘What have you done?’ he demanded.

‘What I said I would do that day in Scotland, remember?’ she smiled not just at him, but at the crowd as well, who were thoroughly enjoying yet another Granger/Snape encounter.

It was at that point Belladonna looked up at him. ‘Severus, how can you allow her to do such things?’ she wailed. He looked at her, there didn’t seem to be anything wrong with her. ‘I didn’t do
anything. You know I didn’t mean any harm,’ as she spoke the last words, **LIAR** appeared on her forehead, in large, red pimples.

‘Yep,’ Harry said, ‘the *Furnunculus*; always was one of her favourite jinxes,’ he laughed and nudged him.

‘Miss Granger, remove the jinx at once,’ he used his most dangerous Professor Snape drawl, the one that always instils fear in everyone who is on the receiving end of it.

‘No can do, Boss. It will break when she tells the truth.’

‘Hermione,’ he hissed, ‘remove it now.’

But she ignored him, turning to look at Belladonna instead. ‘I have no idea why you even thought of trying to take him away from me. We are bonded in the Old Way, you daft witch. I also pledged to the old Ancient Ones that I would deal with any who dared to lure him away from me. A love potion indeed,’ she scoffed and turned back to face the crowd. ‘Anyway, I must be off, I can’t be late for the Hogwarts Yule luncheon, it’s always very good,’ she smiled at the crowd and they agreed with mumbles of ‘oh yes, I remember,’ and ‘always a good spread.’

He was close to spluttering incoherence and Harry laughing was not helping. ‘Hermione, please,’ it was as close to begging he had ever come.

‘All she has to do is tell the truth and the jinx will break,’ she was adamant.

Taking a deep calming breath he asked the question. ‘Belladonna, was it your intention to lure me away from Miss Granger by using a love potion?’

‘Yes! Yes, I admit it. That was my intention,’ she cried.

There was an audible oh! as the word faded to nothing. He sighed in relief.

‘Ask her the next logical question,’ Hermione’s voice was dangerous and when he looked at her, her eyes flashed. All heads now turned to him in anticipation.

‘What logical question?’ he asked, keeping a rein on his temper. All heads turned to look at her.

‘The one about if luring you away from me was her only intention.’ Back to Severus.

‘I will not. She has admitted her wrong doing and you have punished her. It is over.’ Every head turned to her once again, she waited.

‘Are you certain about that?’ she said at last.

‘Completely,’ he answered and folded his arms.

She shrugged. ‘Very well. I shall see you tomorrow,’ she moved passed him and apperated.

‘Big mistake, Severus,’ Harry said mysteriously.

‘I doubt it. Come along Belladonna, it’s over, she has gone,’ he went to help her get up.

The crowd was dispersing, but quickly realised that perhaps there was an addendum to this little episode, so gathered again.

‘Get away from me,’ she snarled as she stood up. ‘Has it gone?’
He was shocked to hear Hermione addressed as ‘it’, but then, Belladonna was upset. ‘Yes, and I apologise for her behaviour. It was wrong.’

‘You can’t even control a Muggle born girl Severus, so you would never have been able to control me. I was wrong in thinking you were a strong and powerful wizard. You are weak and you and that … girl, deserve each other,’ with that she turned on her heel and stalked away.

The crowd moved away now, knowing it was all over for the time being, but having very much enjoyed another treat courtesy of the relationship between the feisty Miss Granger and the dour Head of the Department of Mysteries.

‘That went well,’ Harry said. ‘You know most people just want you to take her in your arms and snog the life out of her, don’t you?’

He pinched the bridge of his nose. ‘Don’t Harry, just don’t. And what exactly did you mean before, big mistake?’

They were walking back towards the lifts. ‘Well, Hermione is very thorough with her magic. So take the jinx for instance, there will be another level to it you can be sure of that, which is why she wanted you to ask the next question. You didn’t, so the jinx is still in place.’ They stepped into the lift that took them down to level nine. ‘Belladonna doesn’t know that of course, so whenever she is asked the next logical question, ‘LIAR’ will appear if she is not telling the truth. It’s utterly simple. But then, all the best magic is, isn’t it?’

They left the lift, Harry went to whatever Chamber he was working in and Severus made his way to his office. Tomorrow was going to a miserable day and what in all Hades did Harry mean?

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She hurried through the corridors to the teacher’s door that led into the Great Hall. She took her place as the last of the pupils filed in to take their places. Minerva walked to the lectern.

‘Well, we have arrived at the Yule holidays without any real mishaps,’ she smiled at them. ‘This term has proved exciting and exhilarating. You have all worked hard, so give yourselves a well-deserved round of applause.’ Thunderous applause echoed to the rafters as the pupils congratulated themselves. ‘Now, as usual, I will give the results of the Yule Term House Points Table. In first place with one hundred and two points … Ravenclaw.’ A cheer went up. ‘Second, on ninety four points … Slytherin,’ another cheer went up. ‘Third, on ninety two points … Hufflepuff,’ a great shout of joy issued from the Hufflepuff table. ‘Which leaves Gryffindor on ninety points,’ there was a disappointed ripple of applause from Gryffindor. ‘It has been a very close term House Point wise; there is everything to play for next term. And finally, today we say goodbye to Professor Granger,’ a sad moan went up from the pupils. ‘She has provided first class teaching to all of you this term and I am very grateful to her for stepping in at such short notice. Now, I think a rousing Hogwarts ‘thank you’ to Professor Danger, Granger.’ She shook her head at her mistake, but no-one seemed to care. The pupils were on their feet clapping and cheering Professor Danger to the rafters.

Hermione stood, blushed to the roots of her hair, bowed and gave a small wave. Minerva walked to the lectern.

‘Well, we have arrived at the Yule holidays without any real mishaps,’ she smiled at them. ‘This term has proved exciting and exhilarating. You have all worked hard, so give yourselves a well-deserved round of applause.’ Thunderous applause echoed to the rafters as the pupils congratulated themselves. ‘Now, as usual, I will give the results of the Yule Term House Points Table. In first place with one hundred and two points … Ravenclaw.’ A cheer went up. ‘Second, on ninety four points … Slytherin,’ another cheer went up. ‘Third, on ninety two points … Hufflepuff,’ a great shout of joy issued from the Hufflepuff table. ‘Which leaves Gryffindor on ninety points,’ there was a disappointed ripple of applause from Gryffindor. ‘It has been a very close term House Point wise; there is everything to play for next term. And finally, today we say goodbye to Professor Granger,’ a sad moan went up from the pupils. ‘She has provided first class teaching to all of you this term and I am very grateful to her for stepping in at such short notice. Now, I think a rousing Hogwarts ‘thank you’ to Professor Danger, Granger.’ She shook her head at her mistake, but no-one seemed to care. The pupils were on their feet clapping and cheering Professor Danger to the rafters.

Hermione stood, blushed to the roots of her hair, bowed and gave a small wave. Minerva waved her down to the lectern. The clapping subsided as she looked out over the school. ‘Thank you very much for that. I have enjoyed teaching every single one of you; yes, including you Albert Appletree,’ there
was good natured laughter and calls of agreement, Albert was the school’s current joker. ‘I hope that you will take what you have learned forward with Professor Volovsky. I will not say ‘goodbye’, but rather, ‘adieu’, as I’m sure I will be seeing most, if not all of you again. Thank you.’ She made as if to leave, but turned back to the lectern. ‘I just remembered … I forgot to set homework for the holidays.’ This last statement was greeted with cat calls and laughter, then more applause as she returned to her place.

After luncheon, she was packing her remaining bits and pieces when a knock came at the door. ‘Come in,’ she called.

Minerva came in. ‘I hope I am not disturbing you, my dear?’

‘Not at all, Minerva, in fact I’m glad you are here,’ she moved to her desk, ‘these are the class reports for Professor Volovsky. I give an outline of everything I have covered this term. There’s also a line or two about the classes, who needs help, that kind of thing.’

‘That’s very efficient of you, but then, I would not expect anything less,’ and she patted her arm, ‘and it is appreciated.’

‘Can I be frank, Minerva?’

‘Of course.’

‘We really need to get continuity with Defence Against the Dark Arts. There have been what … four teachers since I left? And it shows. Some pupils know all the theory but nothing practical and vice versa. I wish I knew how to break that bloody curse,’ she sat down in her chair.

‘I agree completely and the Minister needs to know as well. It’s all well and good reforming the Ministry and various laws but if you don’t address the problems at grass roots, and this school is grass roots, then we may as well simply teach what old Umbridge wanted us to teach and be done with it,’ Minerva shook herself, surprised by her own forcefulness on the subject. ‘Now, I want to say how very impressed I have been with you this term. Not just your teaching, but the way you have conducted yourself with the pupils and the staff. You should be very proud of yourself Hermione, I know am proud of you, and I hope that Severus is as well.’

‘Thank you Minerva, I have really enjoyed it and I am sad to be leaving, but I know I have other things to do …’ her voice trailed off wistfully.

‘Aye, well, you are welcome back any time, to teach or no. And I have to give you this,’ she reached into her pocket and brought out a small leather pouch which jingled very satisfyingly. ‘You and Horace came joint top in the number of pupils you caught after lights out; there is always a purse, so you get a share of two hundred Galleons. She dropped the pouch into Hermione’s hand, ‘one hundred Galleons, treat yourself. Now, are you leaving today or tomorrow?’

‘I’m going to see Hagrid, and then I thought I would go home, if that’s alright with you.’

Minerva pulled her into a hug. ‘Of course it is. Go home to your man and have a wonderful Yule.’

After Minerva had left she finished up her packing then went down to Hagrid’s to say goodbye and give him his Yule gift, a rather large pouch of the best red leather, which she had enchanted with her ‘bottomless bag’ charm. Hagrid always had a use for such things, whether for transporting orphan dragons or for his weekly trips to Knockturn Alley to stock up on the more unusual items for his larder.

She felt uneasy as she walked back up to the castle. How would it be at home? Would he understand
and forgive her yet another transgression? What she had done to Belladonna Green was not terrible, in fact she could have used something far worse, it just seemed the appropriate punishment for doing what she did. It had put her at odds with Severus again and that upset her. I could be long, cold Yule.

It was with no small amount of apprehension that she apparated to Spinners End. She called out as soon as she arrived, there was no response. She looked in the downstairs rooms, they were tidy and empty. The kitchen was also empty and when she looked in the pantry there was little or no food; no bread, milk, vegetables or fruit. What had he been living on? Had Moaner cooked for him? She threw her cloak over a chair, kicked off her shoes and went upstairs. Their bed was unmade but otherwise the tent was neat and tidy, as were the bathroom and his potions room. She wasn’t worried that he wasn’t home; after all, she was a day early. She took her time in unpacking and putting her clothes away and books back on shelves. She made the bed with clean linen and lit incense, Hollyberry as it was coming up to Yule.

She put her cloak and shoes on and went to Diagon Alley to shop for groceries and to see if there was anything that caught her eye for a Yule gift for Severus. There was a week until the Solstice, the main Yule celebration, so she did have time to look properly for gifts, but it was always good to have an idea. Diagon Alley was busy, really busy; she thought that every witch and wizard in the whole of Britain was out shopping. She did the food shopping first to get it out of the way, stocking up with what she thought they would need for the coming days. The Yule shopping she could leave until the following week. She turned her thoughts to gifts. Severus was difficult to buy for; he knew what he liked and disliked. Gifts he didn’t like were consigned to a cupboard, where, after a suitable length of time, they disappeared.

‘Hermione!’ she stood and looked around and saw Harry and Ginny coming towards her.

‘You’re back early,’ Harry said, ‘term doesn’t finish until tomorrow.’

‘Good job I am back today, there’s not a thing in the pantry,’ she joked.

‘Well, I’m glad you’re back, he’s been in a right old mood for a few weeks now.’ Harry looked at her. ‘Belladonna Green?’

She nodded. ‘He threw her out – eventually,’ her voice caught.

‘She told you? Can you believe her?’

‘I think so; I made her believe that I can control the jinx from a distance. I haven’t seen Severus yet to get his side of the whole affair … anyway, Yule at The Burrow?’ she neatly changed the subject.

‘Yes, mum wants a big family Yule, again. Bill and Fleur are coming over and mum’s hoping Percy will come this year,’ Ginny said.

‘So a nice quiet time, eh?’ she joked. ‘Well, I’m hoping to have a dinner party at Spinners End after Yule some time. You are invited; I’ll send an owl when I have a date.’

‘Would love to …’ Harry said as they hugged goodbye. ‘C’mon Ginny, you have my Yule gift to buy.’ They waved as they headed down the street.

She sagged, suddenly deflated. Severus was in a dark mood because of her. Making her way to a quiet spot, she went back to Spinners End, all thoughts of Yule shopping gone. He still wasn’t home. She lit the fires in the sitting room and library, fired up the range ready for cooking and generally made the house warm and cosy. She unpacked the groceries, went upstairs for a quick shower and change. Their bedroom now carried the fragrance of Yule; she dressed in jeans and tee-shirt,
something practical, not provocative, she pulled her hair into a scrunch. It had grown since the summer and was back to its normal, wild self. She would get it cut and styled again; she liked it shorter, it made her feel different, not like school girl Hermione, more grown up, her own woman.

In the kitchen she prepared supper, beef stroganoff with rice, fresh fruit for dessert and wine. She decided not to open a bottle and have a glass, she wanted to be clear headed when he arrived home, who knows what his mood would be.
‘I felt I had betrayed you,’ he said, ‘it was awful, I couldn’t live with myself and each time I wanted to tell you, I couldn’t. I have been terrified at what you would say and how you would react. I haven’t slept properly in weeks.’ He rested his head against her breast. ‘Can you ever forgive me?’

‘You should have told me earlier and saved yourself so much heartache, my love,’ she kissed the top of his head. ‘I told you once that I trusted you, you have not broken that trust. Now, tell me I was wrong to jinx Belladonna Green.’

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Chapter Notes

Sidhe: is pronounced - Shee.

The Sidhe are the Fey or Faery folk of Ireland and Scotland. They are considered to be "gods and not gods" somewhere between gods and humans. The Sidhe played an important part in the lives, myths and legends of Ireland and Scotland. And for some, still do.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

And Yule Came

Chapter 21

The offices occupied by the Minister for Magic were large and opulent. The outer office was the domain of Miss Catchpole, personal assistant to the Minister. A witch of indeterminate age, Miss Catchpole had been the personal assistant to four Ministers and had survived the take-over by Voldemort. Apparently, she knew where all the skeletons were buried and her encyclopaedic mind held information on nearly everyone. She was formidable, severe and utterly loyal to the office of Minister for Magic. No one knew her first name; legend had it that she didn’t have one and that she had been born in the office she now occupied.

Severus stood and waited, ignoring the looks Miss Catchpole shot at him now and then. Finally, the door to the Minister’s office opened and he entered the inner sanctum. Kingsley Shacklebolt’s office was a testament to his heritage, rich colours and textures were abundant; the walls were decorated
with a variety masks and lethal looking spears and throwing knives. The Minister stood looking out of the windows that overlooked Pall Mall; which was of course, an illusion. At least, most people assumed it was an illusion.

‘Severus, how is it that two of the very best of my employees can cause such … mayhem?’ He turned away from the window. ‘How is it that Miss Granger …’

‘… I apologise for her behaviour earlier. I had no idea she would attack Miss Green.’

Kingsley looked at him slightly puzzled. ‘No doubt Miss Green deserved what she got,’ he chuckled, ‘I must say I haven’t thought about using a Furnunculus in many, many years, so simple, yet so effective.’ He was serious once more, ‘do you know how good she is, Severus?’

‘I’m not sure I follow, Minister, good at what?’

Kingsley picked up a thick pile of parchments from his desk. ‘Do you know what these are?’

‘Reports, Minister?’

‘Exactly. Reports from Hogwarts, passed to me by the Undersecretary himself,’ he tapped the parchments, ‘All Hermione Granger, Professor, Defence Against the Dark Arts.’

Severus felt his stomach lurch. Surely she couldn’t have been so much trouble at Hogwarts and he not know about it? He steeled himself. ‘I would have thought Minerva more than capable of controlling Miss Granger. I didn’t realise she was causing so much … mayhem.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Kingsley snapped.

‘Er .. Miss Granger, the reports on her behaviour at Hogwarts …’ He was flustered, his usually calm demeanour was already in tatters from the events of earlier in the day, now it seemed that things were steadily going from bad to worse than bad.

‘Sit down, Severus,’ Kingsley said, more kindly. ‘Now listen carefully. These reports are not about her causing mayhem. No no no!’ He beamed at an increasingly bewildered Severus. ‘No, these reports are exemplary. The pupils thought her teaching methods, and I quote, “amazing; great; superb; really makes the subject interesting; learnt more this term than in my previous four years” and so on.’

Severus shook his head. ‘I don’t understand, Minister, how is this causing mayhem?’

Kingsley let out a long sigh. ‘Severus, esteemed friend and colleague, Hermione … your wonderful, precious Miss Granger is Albus with an added plus. Minerva kept a very close watch on her and reported back to me of course.’

Severus was now totally confused, he pinched the bridge of his nose. ‘But the mayhem?’

‘Yes, that would be the two of you … as a couple … working together. You cause more disruption to this Ministry than anyone else I can think of,’ he grinned at Severus’s obvious bewilderment. ‘While she has been at Hogwarts, you have become grumpier, more unapproachable than you usually are and the look on your face would sour milk. In fact, you are much worse this time than when she was out undercover. On the other hand, she causes more people to sit up and listen or laugh as much as Albus ever did. Together you should be a force majeure for the wizarding world.’

‘I’m sorry, Minister, I don’t follow.’
‘She arrives in the Atrium and instead of supporting her, what do you do, eh? You challenge her. I heard all about it, half my staff was there,’ he sighed. ‘You are much too severe with her; you may be her Boss, but you are also her lover. You have a tendency to turn on her …’ he held his hand up to stop the protest, ‘I’m sorry, but this needs to be said. Everyone knows you are a couple, everyone knows what happened at the Midsummer Ball and today, she announced to all and sundry that you were hers, in the Old Way. Pretty scary if you ask me …’

Severus was on his feet, outrage filled him, how dare anyone criticise his working relationship with her? He needed to keep his distance, keep it professional, needed it to be known that he was not …

‘Sit down and just listen …’ Kingsley ordered. Severus did as he was bid. ‘She simply adores you Severus, Merlin knows why. And you, well … you worship her and therefore you are conflicted. So it stops here, now, today. From now on you will give Miss Granger the respect and support she needs from her lover and as her Boss, feel free to treat her as a favourite. You may smile at her from time to time and even hold her hand in full view of everyone when you are in the Ministry. And yes, if you feel the need to sweep her into your arms and kiss her into unconsciousness and you happened to be in the Atrium, you have my permission to do it. Quite frankly, everyone would be relieved if you did just that, then perhaps there would be no need for Ministry employees to leave their desks and offices when they know that there is another Granger/Snape encounter in the offing,’ he folded his arms.

‘I do not wish to be seen as weak, that she could somehow … control her Boss,’

Minister Shacklebolt laughed his deep infectious laugh. ‘Severus, the one thing you are not is weak, in any sense of the word, despite what Miss Green may say.’

‘Everyone?’

‘Well, most everyone. Now, onto other matters … Miss Granger at Hogwarts.’

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It was dark outside and the stroganoff was simmering nicely; Dragon Brandy, the most important ingredient, filled the kitchen with its sweet, rich aroma. The rice was steaming and she had succumbed as she sat reading at the kitchen table, sipping from a goblet of the deep, red wine. She knew the moment he arrived, the hairs on her arms prickled with his power, the door opened.

‘Hello. I came home early, hope you don’t mind,’ she didn’t rise to greet him but rather allowed him to make whatever greeting he wanted.

‘Of course not. It’s a lovely surprise and something smells good.’

‘Supper. Would you like some wine?’

‘I’ll go and change first, I think,’ his smile was forced and he left rather quickly.

She sighed, got up and put the heat out on the stove, poured him some wine and went upstairs. She could hear him the bathroom, but made no attempt to go and join him as she usually would. Instead, she went into the bedroom. On the far side of the tent, she scattered large cushions on the floor rugs; opened the flap and charmed a fire into life outside, the sun was setting over the oasis. She settled
down to wait. It wasn’t long before he came into the room, a towel wrapped around his waist, hair wet. She watched him as he dried himself and dressed; black trousers, white shirt with a high collar and long cuffs, open at the neck. He came and sat down, not with her, but apart. She passed him the wine, he sipped and said nothing; he didn’t meet her eyes.

‘Is it snowing yet? It was threatening earlier,’ she asked.

‘Yes, quite heavily now,’ his reply came in a monotone.

She waited, but he remained silent. Taking a deep breath, she spoke. ‘I’m sorry I’m such a disappointment to you. I really don’t mean to be, but I always seem to end up with you angry or upset with me,’ there, she had said it.

‘I was thinking the same thing,’ he said quietly.

‘Oh,’ was all she could manage. So she really did disappoint him.

‘How do you manage it?’

‘I don’t mean to, honestly. It just seems to happen,’ she shrugged and sipped at her wine.

‘It just seems to happen? How in Merlin’s name does that work?’ He snapped.

She stared at him, why was he so … so upset? ‘It really does just happen and then this happens and I get confused and pissed off because I don’t mean to upset you and yet I always seem to,’ she snapped back at him. She shook her head now realising that starting on the wine had been a bad idea, it only muddled her brain. She felt his gaze on her and when she looked at him, he was staring at her with a very strange expression.

‘Hermione? What are you talking about?’

‘Upsetting you and being a disappointment. Why? What are you talking about?’

He groaned. ‘Upsetting you and being a disappointment to you.’

They stared at each other for a full minute. ‘But you’re not,’ they said in unison.

They put their goblets down and she went to him and sat across his lap. ‘Now kiss me hello and tell me what this is all about.’

He did just that and when they came up for air, he told her everything about that dreadful night. She listened without interruption to all he said.

‘I felt I had betrayed you,’ he said, ‘it was awful, I couldn’t live with myself and each time I wanted to tell you, I couldn’t. I have been terrified at what you would say and how you would react. I haven’t slept properly in weeks.’ He rested his head against her breast. ‘Can you ever forgive me?’

‘You should have told me earlier and saved yourself so much heartache, my love,’ she kissed the top of his head. ‘I told you once that I trusted you, you have not broken that trust. Now, tell me I was wrong to jinx Belladonna Green.’

‘You were not wrong and you could have done far worse to her. It is I who is in the wrong. I have been reprimanded by Kingsley for being too rigid with you at work. I have his permission to hold your hand in public; in fact, it was more like an order. He also said that should I wish to kiss you into unconsciousness in the Atrium, I can,’ he laughed. ‘I didn’t like to tell him that it would have ended
up as much more than a kiss.’

Her mouth fell open in disbelief. ‘Kingsley said that?’ she slipped off his lap, retrieved her wine and took a long swig. ‘I am very confused, Severus. Six months ago, Kingsley was prepared to curb my powers because he thought I was dangerous; now he wants us to be lovey dovey with each other … and in public? Which is fine with me, by the way, but …’ she shrugged.

He held out his hand too her and pulled her back into his lap. ‘I am going to make a suggestion,’ he said, ‘we have all of Yule to talk about work, what Kingsley said and other official things. Right now, I want to eat, talk to you about your term, then I want to take you to bed,’ he reached up and kissed her. ‘Of course we could always do everything in reverse order.’

She nodded in agreement.

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The morning of the twenty first of December, the first day of Yule, dawned cold, grey and snow filled. She woke first and slipped out of bed and went downstairs into the sitting room. They had lit the Yule log at dusk the night before and it still burned merrily in the fireplace. She set about decorating the room and tree; she had sneaked a tiny tree into the house in her bottomless bag, now with an *engorgio!* it grew until it almost hit the ceiling. Then she decorated the library; in the kitchen she set the stove to heat up for the day ahead. The downstairs looked and felt very festive with green holly and ivy swags everywhere; green, red and white Yule candles glowed softly, mistletoe hung in all the appropriate places (and some not so appropriate, there was a bunch hanging over the shower) and the deep red of Yule blossoms and holly berries added a splash of colour. The tree was a blaze of colour from tiny lamps that glowed and flickered in different colours. Satisfied with her handiwork, she went into the kitchen to prepare a jug of Champagne and orange juice, picking up two goblets, she returned to the bedroom.

It had been and interesting week since her return from Hogwarts. She had been into the Ministry on two occasions and on each, he had held her hand as they walked along the Atrium which had brought smiles and nods from many people. She was still telling him about her term at Hogwarts and he had told her how highly praised she had been by Minerva. She had taken time for a shopping expedition to buy his Yule gifts and not once had Belladonna Green been mentioned nor did they see her at the Ministry.

She pushed open the door and went to his side of the bed; she leaned in and kissed him awake. ‘Happy Yule, Severus,’ she said.

‘Happy Yule, Hermione, I see you have brought offerings.’

‘A cocktail, Champagne and orange juice.’ He sat up and took the offered goblet. ‘Here’s to us, to our happiness, to our future and to our friends and to the New Year,’ she said and they clinked goblets and drank.

‘Hmm, that’s good, any more?’ He held out his goblet for a refill.

‘Gifts now or later?’ she asked enthusiastically.

He groaned. ‘You know I haven’t had time to buy you anything.’
She swatted him. ‘C’mon, let’s go downstairs,’ she pulled at him but he remained in bed.

‘No seriously. I haven’t had time. I haven’t got you anything.’

She frowned, unsure. ‘Oh, well, I’ve got you something, it’s under the tree,’ she went to his chest of drawers and pulled out underwear and a tee-shirt. She tossed them to him and he dressed.

‘We have a tree?’

‘Of course,’ she smiled back.

Downstairs, she watched his face as he took in all the decorations and as they entered the sitting room, he gave an almost giddy laugh. ‘It’s spectacular; it brings the whole house alive.’

She pulled him to the sofa that was now placed in front of the fire so they could stretch out together on the long, cold winter nights. She motioned him to sit. ‘I hate to say this Hermione, but there is nothing under the tree.’

She looked at the tree and feigned surprise. ‘Oh dear, the Nargels must have taken them,’ she shrugged and ignored his withering look. Then she laughed and with a wave of her hand, his gifts were revealed, sitting neatly under the green boughs of the tree. ‘Go on then, dive in.’

She looked at him. His face was serious, but then it always was at Yule. This was their third Yule together. The first year had been very low key; they had celebrated in his small bedsit with two gifts each. She was still getting to know what he liked and disliked, so the black Cashmere sweater was accepted with genuine pleasure (he loved it and still wears it) the black socks of soft Italian lamb’s wool, he was less enthusiastic about. In fact, she was sure he never wore them. He had brought her a pair of silver earrings shaped like an otter and a new set of sleep wear.

Their second Yule was celebrated at her parent’s house. Two gifts again; for her a beautiful top that became a favourite and a bottle of bespoke perfume he had blended for her; the bottle was red hand-blown Bohemian glass and she treasured it. She had given him a leather bound book, *The History and Use of Fungi in Alchemy by Herodotus Maximus* in the original Latin. He had loved it and keeps it on his workbench in the potions room where he refers to it often. He also loved the long, black Cashmere scarf, it is soft and warm and he wears it all winter.

So this was their third Yule together and she hoped that he liked his gifts.

‘There are a lot of gifts here,’ he accused.

‘Don’t worry, not all of them are from me,’ she sipped her cocktail. ‘Choose one.’

He *accioed* a small gift, wrapped in brown paper, the label read; “*Merry Yule. Thought this would be useful.*” *Harry.* He pulled the paper off to reveal his old potions book, the inscription was still on the fly page. A small note fluttered out from between the pages.

*Dear Severus,*

*I liberated this from Hogwarts the last time I was there. Seems you left it behind during the War. I thought it would be useful; some of the recipes are very easy so they shouldn’t give you any trouble.*

*You were a total git sometimes.*

*But then, so was I.*
He looked at her, then back to the book. ‘Did you know?’ She shook her head. ‘I am overwhelmed,’ he managed to say. She squeezed him. Again, he accioed a slightly larger gift wrapped in tissue paper and adorned with holly. The label read; “Severus, you will need simple magic to reveal this one”. HG xx. He removed the paper to reveal a box; he opened the box and took out a tiny phonograph. ‘I don’t understand.’

She tutted. ‘You can be very thick sometimes. Simple magic,’ she cocked her head, waiting for the knot to drop. It didn’t. ‘It’s charmed to your command, so I can’t help you out.’

‘Reveal!’ he commanded. Nothing happened. ‘Show me,’ he tried. Still nothing.

‘Are you being deliberately obtuse?’ she groaned, ‘simple magic. Try saying engorgio.’

He was laughing by now. ‘Sorry, couldn’t help myself.’ She thumped his arm. He placed the phonograph on the floor. ‘Engorgio!’ he commanded and this time there was a small ‘pop’ and before him was a full size phonograph. The case was beautiful, with inlay of mother of pearl in a Greek key pattern. He opened the lid; the arm had a built in speaker and the turn-table had a mat of thick, black felt. There were spare needles in a compartment with a little lid. He looked up at her. ‘You remembered,’ he said.

‘Yes. I racked my brains for a gift, then I recalled a conversation we had when you said you always wanted one, but not one with a large trumpet. I found this one in Hogsmead. Do you like it?’

‘Take a very wild guess,’ and he leaned in and kissed her. His next gift said; “Goes with the other one. HG xx” Inside the box was a selection of records, everything from Cole Porter to George Gershwin, Classical symphonies to opera. He looked through them, ‘I don’t know many of these, but I think I’m going to enjoy getting to enjoy them. Thank you.’

She smiled, but inwardly she was unsure if he really liked the gifts, or if he was simply being polite.

Another gift was beautifully wrapped in green paper; the tie was the Slytherin Serpent. “Miss Danger mentioned you would enjoy this. Merry Yule – The Malfoy Family.” ‘The Malfoys are giving me a Yule gift?’ He was eyeing the package suspiciously and ran his hand over it to detect any hex, jinx or worse, a prank. Satisfied the gift was not about to explode, he opened it. Inside a neat box were two packets of ground coffee. His face lit up and he laughed. ‘Perfect. But this is from a Muggle shop, Lucius would not …’

‘… No, but Draco would.’

He now looked horrified. ‘Did I get the Malfoys a gift?’

‘No. But we did,’ she replied.

‘Italian Coffee House; Milano and Napoli;’ he read from the labels. ‘What did we get them?’

‘A coffee machine like ours. Lucius can have his fill of cappuccinos and Draco his espresso. I modified it for them.’
There was one remaining gift under the tree, he accioed it to him. It was a small flat box, he looked at her and she nodded. ‘Engorgio!’ and the box grew, still flat but larger. She was now panicking. This was the gift she was most unsure of. Would he love it or hate it? Would it end up in his wardrobe only to disappear? It was a risk; it was also the most expensive gift she had ever bought for him. It seemed that her gifts so far had hit a sour note with him, whereas Harry’s and the Malfoy’s gifts he genuinely liked. She took a long drink of her cocktail to hide her unease.

He removed the lid and pulled back the tissue paper. He stared at what was before him before lifting it out of the box. A brocade frock coat in the most exquisite shade of green; woven into the material were tiny vines, stylised flowers and entwined serpents. The lining was of a darker green satin. He examined it closely; felt the pockets that were deep enough for his wand or bottles of potions. The collar was high and would hold any neckerchief or cravat in place; and there were small cuffs on the sleeves.

She was hardly breathing while he scrutinised the coat. She had taken one of his favourite black frock coats to the tailor in Diagon Alley and had this Yule gift bespoke made for him. She thought the tailor had excelled himself as it was the most beautiful item of clothing she had seen.

He then spotted the other item in the box. He lifted out a formal robe, the same colour as the lining of the coat; perfectly plain, but finely made. It was a heavy satin that would float and billow out behind perfectly. It had secret pockets on the inside. The final item in the box was trousers, plain except for the button adornments he so loved and in the same colour as the coat.

‘It is too much,’ he whispered.

‘No. It’s not enough,’ she replied just as quietly.

‘Hermione … I …’ he placed everything back in the box.

‘You are going to look fabulous and incredibly sexy in it,’ she was determined to remain upbeat.

‘And I am going to insist to wear it today.’ She lifted the goblet to finish the cocktail, she trembled slightly.

He took her hand. ‘What’s the matter? Why are you trembling?’

‘You don’t like my gifts. I didn’t really have enough time to think about it properly what with being at Hogwarts and everything. Sorry,’ she shrugged.

His head fell to his chest. ‘Hermione Jean Danger, you could have given me a cracked cauldron, with a broken handle and accumulated debris in the bottom that was fetid from not being cleaned and I would treasure it. You have outdone yourself and you spoil me rotten. I am blessed with friends, but mainly, I am blessed by having you in my life. Thank you.’ He pulled her into him and kissed her. ‘How did you know?’

‘Know what?’ she said from the comfort of his chest.

‘That we have been invited to the Solstice Ball tonight. I was keeping it as a surprise.’

‘I didn’t know. I just wanted you to have something beautiful for Yule.’

‘Thank you so much,’ he kissed her again, and then tumbled her off him. ‘Now your gifts,’ he waved his hand ‘Reveal’ and a rather large and garish Yule stocking appeared hanging from the mantelpiece. He levitated it to her. ‘Merry Yule, Hermione, my love.’ She burst into tears and flung herself onto him again. ‘What? Did you really think I would not have any Yule gifts for you? You can be very thick sometimes.’
She laughed and dashed her tears with her hand. ‘Can I open them?’

‘No. I suggest throwing them straight out.’

She took a flat box, unwrapped but sealed. She broke the seal and opened it up. Inside was a Jet necklace, it was lovely. A small card said “An embellishment for your perfect neck. I couldn’t resist. S x” in his scrawl. She lifted it out of the box. ‘It’s … gorgeous … oh my,’ she held it to her heart. ‘Severus, thank you.’ He beamed at her. Carefully replacing it in the box she chose another box, deeper this time and expertly wrapped. She tore the paper away to reveal a box containing five potion phials; she pulled one out. “Girding Potion” was written on the label. She laughed out loud and hugged him. ‘I don’t think it will be enough.’

‘There are five more bottles in my potions room. You see, I am taking you at your word.’

She pulled another gift from within the stocking. It was flat and soft, beautifully wrapped in red paper with the Slytherin serpent as a tie. The label read: “We know you have Severus to keep you warm, but for when he is not available, this may help. MERRY YULE, MISS DANGER. Malfoy Family.” She opened the paper and took out a large shawl; it was softly woven in the pale shades of green, purple, red and orange of an Irish autumn. She threw its softness around her shoulders and it engulfed her in calm safety, just as when Severus has his arms around her. ‘It’s quite lovely and so thoughtful,’ she said. She folded it up and placed it with her other gifts.

Another small, flat and soft package came out next; she looked at the small label. ‘Oh, it’s from Harry,’ and she tore the paper away. It was a Gryffindor scarf. She examined it and there, neatly sewn onto it was her name label; Hermione Granger. A note said: “HG, you left this behind when we had to leave so suddenly in the Lost Year. Wear it at the next match. Gryffindor for the Cup! Your friend – HP” She looked at Severus with tears in her eyes, ‘how …?’ She held it to her face for many minutes, while Severus held her.

She wiped her eyes and removed the last gift from the stocking. It was a small, flat box.

‘Simple magic,’ he said.

‘Engorgio!’ she commanded and the box grew and grew. She lifted the lid. It was a gown, unlike any she had seen before. She lifted it out of the box and stood up with it pressed against her. It was deep red, the colour of wine. The full skirt would fall and move as she moved; the top was a low cut corset and the full length sleeves came to points over hand hands. Then she saw the underskirt. It was green and made of the finest net and satin and when she looked again at the dress, she saw it too was lined with the same colour satin. She picked up the card that lay in the box.

This goes with the necklace.

Have I told you recently, how much I love you?

Severus

Completely overwhelmed, she carefully put the dress down, sat on his lap and held him. ‘I don’t know what to say. It is the most beautiful dress I have ever seen. Thank you.’

‘Your Boss never did replace the red dress you wore at the Midsummer Ball, so I thought I better had.’

They held each other for a long time, whispering their thanks and their love to each other.

‘We can wear our new clothes at the Solstice Ball,’ he said, kissing her neck.
‘Solstice Ball?’ her eyes were closed, lost in the sensation of his kisses.

‘Yes, everyone will be there.’

‘Everyone?’

‘Terrible echo in the room today,’ he laughed. ‘This year I’m alive; so we can go.’

‘I may be otherwise engaged,’ she smirked, ‘we have ten phials of Girding Potion to get through.’

He rolled her onto the floor. ‘I have no need for Girding Potion,’ his mouth fell to her neck again.

‘Not now, but you will. You will.’

If the Ministry Midsummer Ball was the epitome of modern sophistication, the Solstice Ball celebrated the traditions of the Old Ways.

They arrived at the appointed time with the Ball getting underway. They left their cloaks in the cloakroom, with the same witch who had seen them at the Midsummer’s Ball. She smiled at them and blushed. Severus rolled his eyes.

If Severus looked very handsome and distinguished in his new robes, the woman on his arm was stunning. She had had her hair cut and styled on her return from Hogwarts and now, no longer wild, the soft curls framed her face. The Jet necklace sat perfectly on her neck. She gave a small gasp as they walked into the Ballroom. No longer the formal space of Midsummer, it had been transformed into a vast ancient woodland. The focal point was the Solstice bonfire that burned in the middle of a sacred ring of trees. The sky above was clear and stars twinkled in the winter night. Fresh snow was upon the ground and on the branches of the trees. Garlands of holly and ivy hung everywhere and mistletoe hung from Solstice balls that floated in mid-air. Huge wooden tables held food and drink and everyone wore their traditional Yule robes.

‘Severus, Hermione, you both look magnificent,’ Minister Shacklebolt said as he came to greet them. He was attired in his most colourful African robes of rich reds and golds. He kissed Hermione’s hand and shook Severus’s. ‘Now, enjoy yourselves, yes, take that as a direct order, and Hermione …?’ she looked at him … ‘no jinxes tonight, eh?’ she blushed and nodded. They found goblets of Champagne and looked around. Draco and Astoria came over to them.

‘C’mon, Danger Granger and … Mr Snape,’ Draco added quickly. ‘Let’s dance.’ He grabbed Hermione’s hand and Severus took Astoria’s as they made their way to the clearing where the dancing was underway. As this was Yule, the dances were more communal, with reels, jigs, tarantellas and contra dances much in evidence. The music on this occasion was provided by a band playing the traditional instruments of fiddle, penny whistle, harp, hand drum and English concertina. They waited until the dance in progress finished and as the lead-in chords sounded, they formed their square for a contra dance.

After, they greeted the Malfoy’s and the Weasley’s, thanking the Malfoys for their gifts.

‘He has not stopped drinking cappuccinos,’ Narcissa complained, then added sheepishly, ‘but I do
Harry came and hugged them both and they thanked him for his very thoughtful gifts. He blushed and thanked them for their gift, a coffee maker. Severus looked at Hermione and he blushed in turn, and he gave her a squeeze. Ginny gave her a hug and Severus kissed her hand. Arthur hugged them both and Molly shook hands with them. Even Ron and Lavender came over and shook hands. The strains of an old fashioned waltz drifted to them, and Lucius took her hand and led her to join the dance. She teased him mercilessly about his coffee addiction. The clearing was soon awash with swirling Yule colours as the dancers moved and turned to the music. They were then caught up in a frantic double jig. She glanced across to Severus who was partnering Molly. He smiled at her. She blushed again.

Lucius led her to the tables for a long glass of something cold and Severus joined them. They were chatting together when a hand gently tapped her shoulder.

‘Excuse us, Professor Granger,’ she turned to face Madam and Mr Prewitt. ‘Merry Yule and thank you again. Our girls have now seen the Healers and had the taint and memories removed. Thank Merlin they had not experienced as much as Lucas had. When we told them that Black had received the Kiss and would never see or bother them again, they burst into tears of relief.’

‘I am so very pleased for them,’ she replied, ‘and I know Lucas is going to thrive now.’ She turned to Severus and introduced him to the Prewitts.

‘Professor Granger is a fine teacher Mr Snape and a very attractive woman; you are a very lucky man.’ The Prewitts then turned to speak to their cousin, Lucius.

‘I want you to tell Kingsley your idea for Hogwarts,’ Severus said to her, ‘but first, they are playing a slow dance and I would like to press my body against yours.’ He took her hand and they found a space in shadow to slow dance to an old air “The Fairy King”, they barely moved from the spot. The music stopped but he still held her. ‘Dark corner?’ he muttered against her hair. She leaned her head against his shoulder and laughed.

A shout went up as the Hogwarts staff arrived. She was greeted like a long lost friend and soon there was a large crowd milling around each other laughing and exchanging news. Then someone mentioned the duelling contest and she and Professor Flitwick had to give a blow by blow account of the duel. Severus eventually pulled her away and took her to Kingsley who was free at that point.

‘So, tell me your idea, Hermione.’

She picked up a goblet and took a sip before telling the Minister of the fantasy she had had while teaching. She thought how wonderful it would be to have Draco as Potions Master, Neville as Herbologist, Luna as Divination Professor and Harry as Headmaster. That had led to an idea of cultivating future generations of teachers for Hogwarts. This in turn led to her thinking about an overhaul of the curriculum, especially in the Defence Against the Darks Arts where whoever was in post taught what they wanted, not was what needed.

‘At this moment, when a post is vacant, someone fills it. Wouldn’t it be much better if, as pupils progress through the school, their abilities are monitored? That way any skills they have can be nurtured and honed. This would eventually lead to having a pool of two or three or more candidates to choose from when a post became vacant,’ she took a long drink of the Champagne and looked from Kingsley to Severus, who had a grin on his face. ‘What?’ she demanded.

‘Kingsley was already thinking the exact same thing,’ he said.
‘And you have just confirmed my thoughts, Hermione,’ Kingsley added. ‘It will take time to implement the changes, but with you and your peers from the War years, I think it may just be possible.’

‘Me?’ she yelped. ‘What have I got to do with it?’

‘Why, everything,’ Kingsley smiled broadly at her. ‘You Miss Granger will be heading up things at Hogwarts.’

‘In Defence Against the Dark Arts?’

‘No. As Headmistress. Ah, Assistant Undersecretary, good to see you,’ Kingsley left them to speak to the Assistant Undersecretary and his wife.

‘Close your mouth my love,’ Severus guided her to a table and handed her a Dragon Brandy; she drank some and looked at him. ‘No, I think Harry would be a better choice for Head,’ she said.

‘Perhaps,’ was all he said.

Harry and Ginny came bounding over. ‘Dance with Danger and Mr Da … Snape,’ he laughed. They were pulled into a contra dance and soon they were Stripping the Willow.

She was sitting on a log stump enjoying the simple pleasure of observing the Ball. She had seen Belladonna Green several times over the evening, but she had avoided both her and Severus. Belladonna had however, spoken at great length to Lucius and Narcissa. In fact, Lucius was being sought out by many of the higher ranking Secretaries and Ministers; his status was obviously rising again. She was happy for him, he had fought alongside Voldemort, but in the end, his love for his family had won.

It was then she heard a voice raised in song. Part of the Solstice celebration was the singing of the traditional songs. Anyone could start a song and if you knew the words, you joined in. The voice was plaintive and sweet. She looked around to see where it was coming from, and there, on the other side of the Solstice fire, Luna was sitting singing a song. She walked over to her. Luna saw her and stood to give her hug, but she did not break off the song.

“With solstice here we’ll celebrate
This sacred time and have much cheer
We will bring warmth and we’ll bring light
Unto the darkest time of year

The mistletoe will be cut down
With sickle from the sacred tree
A kiss I’ll give to you my love
A pledge of friendship made to thee

For this is now our turning point
The shortest day, the longest night
We’ll look unto the months to come
When the sun will grow both strong and bright.”

The song faded and Luna smiled at her. ‘There is a last verse, but I don’t know it, do you?’

This came as a surprise to Hermione, but even as she about to say of course not, words were forming in her mind, and when she glanced through the flames of the fire, she thought she saw someone she
recognised. An old man, was smiling at her in encouragement.

‘Well, I think I might, but if I finish the song, we will have to circle dance around the fire.’ Now where had that come from, she thought.

‘Come on then,’ and Luna took her hand and they walked to the fire. ‘Here’s Neville,’ she said, ‘come along and join us.’ Neville gave Hermione a hug in greeting then stood by Luna and took her hand.

She was suddenly nervous, but she took a deep breath and sang.

"No longer the song of the winter,

Tis of the New Year we sing

As we dance around the Yule log

To greet the birth of the spring.


So all join hands in the circle,

A New Year hath begun,

And we sing the song of the Solstice

To greet the new born Sun."

With that, she started to move around the fire and before long, the circle grew as more and more people joined in. Soon everyone had joined hands and was dancing around the Sacred Solstice fire. She was sure the old man was on the other side of the circle, but as the circle moved around, she couldn’t see clearly. Kingsley had hold of her hand, and as the circle moved faster, he broke away and led the line of dancers around the woodland. In an out of glades they danced, singing all the way. And when everyone was laughing with exhaustion, Severus came and picked her up and twirled her around.

‘You have an amazing voice,’ he said. ‘I didn’t know you could sing like that.’

‘Well, nor did I really. I have no idea where it came from,’ and she took his hand and led him to Luna and Neville. ‘We need to say congratulations to you,’ she said, ‘I think you may have started a trend.’ She hugged them both and Severus kissed Luna’s hand and shook Neville’s as well as thumping him on the back.

‘Grandmother Longbottom didn’t take the news too well,’ Neville said, ‘said she wanted to be at the ceremony. We deliberately had the ceremony in Oslo so that she wouldn’t be there,’ and he laughed. They chatted together and Severus brought Champagne over to toast the couple. Hermione turned suddenly and saw the old man walk away into the trees. Without a word, she followed.

She entered the trees, there were footsteps in the snowy ground, but they simply stopped, he had gone. She sighed and as she turned to go back to the party, she caught sight of the Sidhe who were also celebrating the Solstice. She smiled at them and bowed her head; they returned the greeting and with a wave, invited her to join them. She stepped into their Sacred Grove. A crown of greenery
was placed upon her head and she sat with them while they danced and sang songs so old, the words are lost to modern times. She found herself humming along to some and when she was asked to join the dance by a tall, handsome Sidhe, she took his hand and danced a solemn, graceful dance so loved by Sidhe. Of food or drink she did not partake, for it is widely known that to accept such would lead to forgetting who you are and where you have come from and so you remained in the between realm of the Sidhe forever. Time stood still, she danced and sang with these people of the between realm, enjoying the memories that came flooding back to her of other times and places when she had enjoyed the hospitality of Faery folk.

She glanced up and saw Severus standing at the line of trees, watching her. She smiled and nodded at her host and he took her hand and led her back to her beloved. She saw Severus’s eyes widen in wonder as the tall Sidhe that accompanied her placed her hand in Severus’s and bowed to the wizard.

‘She is of the Tuatha De Danaans who are unfading; you would do well to remember that,’ with his hand upon his heart, he bowed most graciously to her before returning to the revels. The sight faded to nothing, leaving only snow laden trees.

‘Was that a threat?’ he asked her.

‘I have no idea,’ she replied, leaning up to kiss his cheek.

‘Who was that?’ he asked as they walked back towards the Ball.

‘That was Oberon; I think he may be a distant relative of mine. Anyway, he is King of the Sidhe Under the Hill and I have no idea why I saw them or why they should be here.’

‘You left suddenly; I was concerned so I followed. I hope I have not caused insult,’ he kissed her hand.

‘Not at all, I thought I saw an old friend wander into this wood, but I was mistaken, then I saw the Sidhe and they invited me to join them.’

‘Oh, your crown had disappeared,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she sighed, ‘that’s Fey magic,’ and she gave him an enigmatic smile.

As they emerged from the trees, Arthur whisked them up and they made a foursome for a set dance. Once again the room was filled with swirling colours and clapping and she danced the night away. Mr Prewitt, Horace, Hagrid and Ron partnered her in the various dances and when she couldn’t dance any longer, she found Severus, pulled him into one of the many bowers placed around the woodland and fell onto the seat. He very gallantly went and found plates of food for them and two large goblets of cold lemonade. They tucked into the food and then fed each other tiny grapes that burst into sweet wine when you bit into them. Then she stretched out on the bench with her head in his lap. He stroked her hair and every so often, his hand fell to caress her breast.

‘I would like to give Moaner a Yule gift,’ she said.

‘Not her freedom, she would hate that,’ he reached down and picked up his goblet.

‘I know. So I think a new dress and permission to marry if she wants to.’

He spluttered on his lemonade. ‘ Seriously? You think …’

‘She is young for a house elf and she is very romantic. So yes, I am serious.’
Before he could respond, they heard the distinctive tapping of crystal to gain attention. Kingsley was about to give his speech. They sat up, she climbed onto his lap and he kissed her.

‘Should pay attention,’ she said against his lips.

‘Rather kiss you,’ he replied.

‘Esteemed colleagues, guests, fellow witches and wizards,’ Kingsley called. ‘Thank you all for attending this year’s Solstice Ball. It has been a year of change and challenges and I think the Ministry has risen to all the challenges and met all the changes. None of which would have been possible without the support of the fine staff it is my great privilege to work alongside.’ The applause was rapturous. ‘Now, as usual at this time, I have promotions and one new appointment to announce.’ There was quiet anticipation. ‘Derek Smallpiece is promoted to a new post, Minster for Muggle Protection and Liaison.’ There was applause for Derek who gave a small bow and wave. ‘And every Minister needs a fine Deputy, so Arthur Weasley is promoted to Deputy Minister for Muggle Protection and Liaison.’ There was wild applause, hugs and kisses for Arthur. Molly swelled with pride. ‘Now the new appointment. Sometimes we need new and young blood in the Ministry ranks, to keep us on our toes,’ he smiled broadly, ‘therefore, it gives me great pleasure to announce a new appointment to the Wizengamot … Miss Hermione Granger.’

Everyone looked around for the newest member of the Wizengamot. It was Harry who found her nestled in Severus’s arms enjoying a prolonged kiss. He pulled her away.

‘C’mon, ‘Mione, this is you,’ and he dragged her out into the crowd.

‘Harry what on earth … oh’ she stopped mid-sentence as the whole room turned to look at her.

‘I had to wrestle her away from Severus … sorry,’ she punched him as the applause broke out and she was engulfed by well-wishers.

‘I resign!’ A shout went up from an elderly wizard. ‘I'll not have a young, wet behind the ears Muggle born girl on the Wizengamot. No not me.’ There was deafening silence. All eyes were turned to the old wizard, who was standing with arms folded. He glared pointedly at Hermione.

‘This young slip of a Muggle born girl fought Voldemort and his army while you were cowering behind your desk in the Wizengamot, hoping that he never turned his gaze upon you. This young slip of a Muggle born girl stayed with Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley for a year, finding and destroying Horcruxes in an attempt to weaken Voldemort. This young slip of a Muggle born girl was captured and tortured by Bellatrix Lastrange, but still she carried on the fight. And while you still cowered, this young, wet behind the ears Muggle born girl was fighting alongside her friends; she watched them die and she helped bury them. What did you do during the Second Wizarding War Mr Deputy Minister, hmm?’

Lucius Malfoy commanded the room, Tall, elegant and powerful, he was the epitome of a Pure Blood wizard. He looked stunning in his black robes with his long, white blonde hair falling over his shoulders. He held his cane slightly in front of him, his demeanour, haughty, arrogant and fierce.

‘Yes, that’s right Deputy Minister, Lucius Malfoy, Pure Blood and Muggle hater. Miss Granger is worth ten of you and she is just what this Ministry needs. I for one congratulate her and she has the full support of the House of Malfoy,’ with that he turned to Hermione, took her hand and kissed it. He also winked at her.

‘And I second exactly what Lucius said. Bernard Prewitt, Pure Blood. Professor Granger, in her short tenure at Hogwarts not only taught her subject as it should be taught, but also supported our son
in his time of need and helped him through a traumatic episode. Muggle born or not, she deserves a place on the Wizengamot. Our world will be better with someone like her in the Ministry.’ He also took her hand and kissed it.

By this time the murmurings were growing louder and Hermione was blushing deeper.

‘Arthur Weasley, Pure Blood. You all know how I feel about Hermione. I love this woman like a daughter. She has always made Molly and me very proud. She is brave, kind, funny, very, very intelligent and able and I know she will undertake her duties on the Wizengamot with the same determination and diligence that she gives to everything she turns her hand to. I would be very proud to have her as a Ministry colleague.’ He went to the now stunned Hermione and kissed her hand.

All eyes were now turned to Severus who had come to stand behind her. He placed his hand on her shoulder, she covered it with hers. ‘My pride in the achievements of this most exceptional woman is limitless. She has my full support in anything she wishes to undertake, just as I know I have hers. As Arthur has already said, she is brave; I would add that she is also fearless. She would have to be … she has agreed to marry me.’ His face remained impassive as he looked around at the crowd. ‘That went down well,’ he added. Hermione turned and flung her arms around his neck. The cheer went straight up to the sky.

Minister Shacklebolt held up his hand. ‘I can add nothing to what has already been said about the very embarrassed Miss Granger. So all I will say is … Deputy Minister, I accept your resignation and the resignation of anyone else who feels they cannot work alongside Miss Granger. Now, we still have a Solstice to celebrate.’

She kicked off her shoes in the hall and went into the kitchen to put the kettle on. While she waited for it to boil, she found a new tea-towel, bright yellow with pretty flowers, produced a length of blue ribbon and a slender piece of blue chord. Severus came in and nodded in approval. She folded everything neatly together and finally produced a small bunch of snowdrops. She added them to Moaner’s Yule gift. She made a pot of tea and set three cups and saucers, she cut up cake and they both sat down.

‘Moaner,’ Severus called. The house elf appeared, obviously surprised by the lateness of the summons. ‘Moaner, as it is Yule, would you care to join us for a cup of tea?’

‘Yes, please,’ she replied and jumped up onto the spare chair. Hermione was mum and poured three cups of tea; added four sugars to Moaner’s and offered the elf a slice of cake. Moaner accepted the tea and cake but didn’t touch either.

‘There is no need to worry, Moaner,’ Severus said very gently, ‘you are not in trouble and I am not going to release you from your obligations to the Prince family.’ Moaner looked from Severus to Hermione with wide eyes. ‘It is Yule and we would like you accept these Yule gifts. You are a good and loyal house elf and you have greatly helped me and Hermione Granger.’ Moaner was listening intently to all that was being said. ‘We want you to know that Hermione Granger and I have decided to marry. Hermione Granger will become Mrs Hermione Snape.’

The elf’s eyes widened even more and she smiled. ‘Moaner is very happy for Master and Mistress.’
‘Please accept these small Yule gifts as our thanks for your service,’ he handed Moaner the little bundle, ‘and as an extra gift in honour of our marriage, I give you permission to marry if you so wish, at any time. All I ask is that you tell us if and when it happens.’

Moaner let out a long wail and she started to cry. ‘Moaner is so happy. Moaner and her family will always serve the Prince and Granger family,’ she took a hankie from her pocket and blew her nose. Then she sat with them and they drank tea together.

It was dawn and they hadn’t yet been to sleep. Severus lay in bed, his head on her shoulder and her arms wrapped around him. They had made love passionately; it was the fault of the corset that was the top part of her dress. When she had dressed earlier, she had laced it up with a simple charm; tonight she had asked him to untie the laces. It wasn’t that complicated, but it was the way she pressed herself back into him while he was loosening the laces. Once loose, the dress had slipped like a whisper to the floor and left her standing in a pair of tiny, black lace panties and black stockings. She stepped out of the dress and had looked back at him, a slight smile playing on her lips.

Oh Merlin, but she knew exactly how to enflame him. Now they simply lay together; no words were necessary. He rested his head in the crook of her neck; she held him and kissed his head from time to time. He felt completely safe with her.

Everything was changing yet again and the New Year would bring new and different challenges for them. They had Draco and Astoria’s wedding to look forward to; Hermione’s appointment to the Wizengamot would be a personal challenge for her, but it was clear that she had the support from friends both within the Ministry and outside of it. Then they would have their own wedding to organise, which would bring its own challenges, but would also be exciting. The first thing they would have to do is decide on a date, but all that was for another day. Now, this Yule and this house were filled with love, Yule cheer and the dulcet tones of a Muggle singer called Bing Crosby singing ‘White Christmas.’ So with his body still tingling from making love, he lay in the arms of the woman he was in love with and who loved him unconditionally in return, safe, happy and content, feeling for the first time that this little house at Spinners End was a real home.

‘It’s a very nice song,’ he said.

‘Hmm, I remember it from my childhood,’ her voice was sleepy.

‘Does it turn itself off?’ he asked.

‘You only have to wave your hand and it will stop,’ she rolled to face him. ‘You see I think of everything,’ her eyes were closing.

He turned away so that she was spooned against his back, her arms still wrapped around him. ‘Did you think of your contraception potion?’

‘Yes. Did you think of your Girding Potion?’

‘Knew I would forget something,’ he muttered.

As he fell asleep wrapped in her love and deep snow wrapped the world outside in white quietness, elsewhere in the wizarding world, a creeping darkness was moving again.
Chapter End Notes

I am off on holiday for two weeks - I will be writing but not posting. Thanks for reading and leaving kudos! It is much appreciated.
Winter Wedding

Chapter Summary

There were the usual speeches, most of which were thankfully short. Then dancing commenced. Draco and Astoria took to the floor for the first dance, a slow, romantic waltz which brought many ooo’s and aahh’s from the guests. The bride’s parents joined them, followed by Lucius and Narcissa. Soon the guests were joining in and Severus led her onto the floor for their first dance together. They had just got back to their table when Lucius took her hand and led her in another waltz.

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Chapter Notes

Sidhe = Shee

Obatala = In the religion of the Yoruba, Obatala is the King of Kings - the creator of Human Beings. Oba means 'king'.

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Chapter 22

Winter Wedding

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Lucius & Narcissa Malfoy Take Great Pleasure

In Requesting Your Presence

At The Wedding of Their Son,

Draco Malfoy

To

Astoria Greengrass

Date: Imbolc

Time: Midday – Late

Place: Malfoy Manor
‘Have you received an invitation?’

‘Yes, the Malfoy’s have invited all high ranking Ministry personnel.’

‘And Lucius? Is he still stalling?’

‘Yes. He says that the wedding is taking up all of his free time.’

‘Keeping working on him. He could prove a valuable asset.’

‘The mudblood bitch has taken her place on the Wizengamot.’

‘Hmm. Watch her closely. We don’t want her kind getting too comfortable in the Ministry.’

‘It will be as you request. We are not doing anything at the wedding …?’

‘No. Now is not the time. When we have them all together in one place, then we shall strike. Now … get out.’

‘Of course.’

He watched the retreating figure until the door had closed. Soon: it would be soon, then his Lord’s bidding will be done and order restored.

Hermione listened and observed, learning the whole time. Today was her first day on the Wizengamot bench. She had spent her time since Yule going from Department to Department within Magical Law Enforcement, getting to know the work and the people in each Department. It was hard work and tiring; many times she would arrive home, have a bath and be asleep by the time Severus came in.

This was also her first time in the official red robes of the Wizengamot. Minister Shacklebolt had informed her that she would have to attend at least ten Wizengamot hearings before she would have a vote. So today she was sitting in the very back row taking down notes of interesting or important rules or rulings. There were five empty seats amongst the fifty that made up the full Wizengamot, vacated by those witches or wizards who could or would not bring themselves to work alongside a Muggle born.

Minister Shacklebolt was at the front in the Warlock’s Chair. The case before them was one of murder. A seemingly happily married couple had argued; the argument had become heated, then violent. The wife had then used an Unforgiveable Curse on her husband and killed him. She had given evidence, as had various family members. All had said the same thing; they were happily married and had been for years. No-one knew why this particular argument had ended so tragically.
The trial was short and the sentence issued. The prisoner was led away to await her departure to Azkaban.

There had been a short but heated debate on the reintroduction of the Dementors to Azkaban, thus recreating more of a deterrent; but Minister Shacklebolt held firm to his humane reforms. Life imprisonment was enough of a deterrent he argued, which did not mean that conditions in Azkaban were in any way softer or nicer than they had been. Conditions were still harsh and with the new safeguards in place, another breakout was unlikely as escape was impossible. He then invited any members of the Wizengamot who would like to visit the prison to see for themselves the conditions, to join him the next time he went. There were no takers, although if she had been a full member, Hermione thought she would have liked to have gone.

Members rose and stretched or turned to their neighbours for a quick chat before leaving the courtroom. She saw Belladonna Green leave with Minister Shacklebolt. Somehow, the two women had managed to avoid direct contact with each other, even when Hermione had spent four days in the Auror Office. After packing her notes away, she climbed the stairs to Level Nine and the lifts. She hadn’t seen Severus since breakfast that morning. So she approached the barrier, pointed her wand and stepped through it. She shook herself, pleased to have passed through unharmed and in one piece.

She went to his office and pushed open the door. It was empty. This surprised her as he had told her that he had a pile of reports to wade through. Indeed, the reports were on his desk, untouched. Ah well, she thought, he would be with Minister Shacklebolt or in one of the Chambers or perhaps out in the field. He had also told her of the increasing number of seemingly random attacks on Muggles and wizarding folk. He felt sure there was a pattern, but at present, that pattern remained hidden from him.

She stood in his office and allowed her body to open so she could feel his presence. His aura pervaded the room and she liked the feel of it. The reports stacked on his desk drew her attention. She crossed the room and sat in his chair; it felt strangely powerful. Was this what it felt like to be the Head of a Department? Running her hand over the reports she felt the prickle of enchantment; he had protected the reports. She noted that his desk was tidy. Very tidy. She was about to get up and leave when a slightly open drawer caught her eye. She looked around guiltily, looking in another’s desk was not done of course, but curiosity got the better of her. She pulled it open wider, fully expecting alarms to start ringing or the Hit Wizard Squad to come abseiling down from the ceiling; nothing happened. She pulled it wide open to reveal a small, beautifully wrapped package that had already been opened. She moved the two sides of the paper aside with her hand and gave a small squeal of surprise.

‘Serves you right for being nosey,’ his voice came from the doorway.

She looked at him and felt herself blush as red as her robes. ‘I couldn’t help it,’ she stammered, and then she laughed. ‘You kept them here all this time?’

‘A reminder,’ he said coming over to the desk. He gave a small cough.

‘Oh, yes. Sorry,’ and she vacated his chair.

‘It suits you,’ he said pulling her into his arms and seeking her lips. She did not resist. He held her close. ‘So, to what do I owe this honour?’

‘I just wanted to see you, say hello and have a snog.’

‘Thank you, it is much appreciated, but …’
‘I know, I know. Things to do.’ She pulled out of his arms. ‘Severus? Is everything alright? That is a huge pile of reports.’

‘Hmm. As well as other things, there is an increase in incidents with Dark Wizards. Nothing major, a theft here, a break in there and Muggle children are still disappearing. Not as many as last year, but still enough to make the Ministry take notice.’ He sighed and she hugged him.

‘I’m going to get home early tonight. I plan to cook and we can have a bottle of wine and spend the evening together. We haven’t done that for a while now.’

‘Sounds wonderful. I will do my best to be as early as I can. Now, I have reports to read so go away and stop distracting me.’

‘I’m going, I’m going,’ she walked to the door, turned and blew him a kiss.

She entered her tiny, cubby-hole of an office, took off her robes and sat behind her cluttered desk. This would not do, she thought. She needed room to work, read her own reports, write reports and do research. She leaned back in the uncomfortable wooden chair that came with the desk. What would happen if she made her office bigger? Is it even possible? She tapped her fingers on the desk.

Statistics. She needed to know statistics. She set off for the Auror Office and asked the admin assistant the best way to go about looking at case histories, trials and convictions? She was told that everything was catalogued and archived by year, month and day. She asked if she could have access to them as she wanted to get a better idea of how the Wizengamot process worked.

‘Give me the dates you want to look at and I’ll bring them to your office,’ the assistant gave a smirk as she put slight emphasis on ‘office’.

After leaving the dates with the assistant, she returned to her office. It wasn’t long before there came a knock at her door. The assistant entered followed by a line of several closed boxes.

‘Oh, I thought your office was much … smaller,’ she said, as the boxes arranged themselves into a neat stack by the large desk. ‘You can cross reference anything in these records with records held by the Wizengamot admin or Court Registries,’ she turned and left.

Hermione allowed herself a small smile as the door closed. It seemed there was no barrier regarding enlargements to office space in the Ministry. Her office was now big enough for a substantially larger desk, a long table down one wall now held all the reports she wanted to study, two large bookcases that would eventually be filled with any research books she needed so she wouldn’t have to keep running to the Ministry library. There were two chairs for visitors and a small table with a vase of fresh flowers, courtesy of Moaner.

She opened the top box and pulled out a report. She had asked for dates since the end of the War as she wanted to see how many Dark Ones had been apprehended and what punishments they had received. She would then cross reference with Court proceedings, this should give her a clear overall picture of time scales and the way the Wizengamot worked. She settled down to an enjoyable couple
of hour’s research.

She rubbed her eyes as her tummy rumbled. It was well into late afternoon, she had missed lunch and if she didn’t stop, she wouldn’t be home in time to cook and spend time with Severus. She rolled the parchment she was reading up and placed it back into its box and placed a protective enchantment on the boxes. Her notes she put in her bag. She was ready to leave when the door opened.

‘I thought you told me your office was more of a broom cupboard,’ Severus said as he looked around.

‘It was, but I changed it.’

‘I’m not sure if that is strictly allowed, however, I’m ready to go home. Are you?’

She took his arm. ‘I was on my way. Shall we leave together?’ He kissed her and escorted her, arms linked, to the Atrium. ‘Are you going to tell on me?’

‘Not if you make it worth my while.’

‘And your price?’ they stepped into the floo and out in the sitting room of Spinners End.

‘The usual.’

‘A cup of espresso?’ she smiled at him, ‘I accept your bribe,’ she kicked off her shoes and went into the kitchen. ‘Spaghetti Bolognaise?’ she called.

‘Perfect. And wine,’ he answered, already going upstairs.

She put the heat on the stove, so that it would be hot enough to cook on. She then made him an espresso and took it upstairs. He was in the bathroom, she went to the bedroom. It was changed. Gone was the Bedouin tent, replaced by an African safari tent. She had changed it as part of his birthday gift. Now the tent was filled with wicker chairs and tables, hurricane lamps; a huge wooden bedstead complete with mosquito net was against one wall. African fabrics and colours were much in evidence along with large animal print floor cushions. The flap opened onto the African Veldt where large animals wandered back and forth and the roar of large cats could be heard in the distance. At night, the gentle whirl of crickets lulled them to sleep.

She hadn’t told him she was changing it, so his shout of surprise when he went into their bedroom on his birthday was very gratifying. He had come rushing downstairs to find her grinning from ear to ear.

‘I love it!’ was all he said.

Now they could sit in their safari chairs or lounge on the cushions listening to his phonograph, read or simply watch the ever changing vista.

Another of his birthday gifts was a ring; and unknown to her, he had also brought her a ring. So on his birthday, they exchanged rings in an act of engagement.

He came into the bedroom, freshly showered. She had undressed and was padding about in her underwear. She handed him his espresso and he nodded to the opening as he took a sip. She turned in time to see a lion poke his head inside the tent. She glared at it; he got the message and slopped off. She slipped on a tee shirt and jeans and with a swift slap to his bum, she went to prepare supper.

Later, curled up in front of the fire, they discussed options for their wedding date. Beltane and Ostara
they decided were too close to Draco and Astoria’s wedding. Samhain seemed too far away.

‘That leaves Midsummer,’ Severus said, ‘which I think would be perfect. The High Day of the year, it gives us time to arrange things without it being too far in the future.’

‘We will need standing stones and a Druid,’ she added.

‘Five months should be long enough,’ he said against her hair.

‘Plenty of time,’ she wriggled herself so she had the length of herself pressed against him. She brushed his hair back and kissed his cheek.

‘I have been invited to the Groom’s night …’ he closed his eyes as she kissed them, ‘… in France.’

‘Then you should go,’ she ran her tongue along his ear lobe.

‘You don’t mind?’ He gasped as she nibbled his neck.

‘Just behave yourself,’ she said before finding his lips and all conversation ceased.

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It was Narcissa that really put the idea into her head. She had grown close to Madam Malfoy and was very fond of her, so much so that she began to regard the older woman as a mother figure.

So it was with mixed feelings she turned her thoughts to her parents. The War was long over yet she had made no real attempt to find them. She knew they were in Australia and had made a new life with new names. But with her marriage coming up, she began to wonder if she could find them. It would be wonderful to have her parents at her wedding: but how to go about it?

A week later she was no nearer to making a decision. She had however, made progress with her research on the Wizengamot proceedings and the prosecution of Death Eaters and other Dark Ones. She had been appalled at some of the crimes perpetrated by Dark Ones. Their blood lust and hatred of Muggles seemed to be limitless. In her usual analytical way she had chosen twelve cases that seemed most interesting and these were to be the ones she would cross-reference with other records. That way, she would have the full process from apprehension to sentence. She placed the final record on her ‘interesting’ pile and sighed. She had also been reading the Law books she had access to, so her working days were full and although there had been no further Wizengamot hearings, she felt she was really beginning to understand the workings of the judicial system.

She pushed back her chair and looked around her now even larger office. She had added another table, mainly for taking refreshments with visitors, a large squishy chair so she could sit and read in comfort. She had also charmed a window with a view over the River Thames towards the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. No one had uttered a word about her use of magic in the Ministry, just as no one had mentioned the size of her office; except Severus. He told her to be careful and not go too large; after all, she could not have an office that was larger than Minister Shacklebolt’s. She had heeded his words and was now content with what she had.

She stared out of her window and her thoughts turned yet again to her parents. How does she go about locating them? Should she? She went over and over the pros and cons. If she restored their
memories, would they thank her? Or would they be angry she interfered with their memories in the first place? Have they found a new life in Australia and do they enjoy it? Is it ever right or moral to interfere with their memories again? And what if they disapproved of Severus? He was some twenty years older than she; he had Dark history and yes, they knew how much he had upset her when she was at Hogwarts. She bounced the thoughts and ideas around until her head hurt. What she really needed was to talk to someone who was neutral about the whole thing. She ran through the list of possibilities and came to one name. She scribbled an internal memo and sent it on its way. She called Moaner and asked for tea while she waited for a reply.

A soft knock came to her door.

‘Come in,’ she called.

‘Ah, Hermione, good. I got your memo. How can I help?’ Minister for Magic Shacklebolt looked around the office. ‘It seems … larger than I remember, but I approve. Yes, it is very workable and I love the view.’

She blushed. ‘Cup of tea, Minister?’

‘Thank you, my usual please,’ he seated himself in one of the armchairs. ‘Now, tell me what it is you need.’

Moaner appeared with a pot of the Minister’s favourite mint tea and while he sipped, Hermione told him of her dilemma. He listened without interrupting, topping up his cup from time to time. Finally she sat back with sigh and refreshed her own cup.

‘So the only thing you know is that they are in Australia, they are still dentists and their new names?’ She nodded. ‘Have you spoken to Severus about this?’

‘I’m not sure how he would react or even if he would want my parents back in my life given his background.’

‘I understand. But you need to tell him, do not keep even one small thing from him. Your relationship is still very new, you both need to trust each other completely,’ he paused, ‘do you understand?’

‘I think so,’ she met his gaze. ‘Oh I see! You are not referring to my everyday life are you?’

‘I am not,’ he smiled at her. ‘What I can do is speak to my counterpart in that part of the world and see if they can locate your parents. If they do, well, then we shall speak again.’ He made no move to leave. ‘You have another thing you wish to ask me?’

‘Very advanced magic,’ she blurted. ‘Severus and Lucius were meant to give me some training. But with the wedding and the increase in incidents … they are both so busy,’ she spread her hands. ‘You are the only one I know with the skill level to give me guidance,’ she blushed again.

‘I thank you for your compliment and your confidence in me, but are you not sufficiently competent enough already?’

‘I …’ she hesitated … ‘may I speak freely?’ He nodded. ‘Ever since last year I have been very careful in my use of magic, but …’

‘… You need to know how far you can take it.’

‘…Without causing problems,’ she shrugged.
‘I will send an owl with my home address and a time and date. I would be honoured to discuss magic with you.’

She was stunned. She thought that maybe he would offer an hour or two in the secure vaults on Level Ten, not an invitation to his home. ‘I don’t know what to say, I didn’t expect …’

Minister Shacklebolt stood to leave. ‘You and I obtain our power from the same source. I am the only one who can help you.’ He walked to the door. ‘I would consider it a personal favour if you would not increase the size of your office any more. I’m afraid I can’t allow you to have a larger office than my own,’ he smiled at her and left.

She spoke to Severus about her parents the night before he was due to leave for the Groom’s Night. They were in bed, he listened carefully and said he understood her concerns, but at the end of the day, it was her decision. He thanked her though for sharing her concerns and discussing them with him. She told him of Kingsley’s offer to tutor her in very advanced magic. He was less than enthusiastic at first, but as they talked it through, he agreed that Kingsley was a good choice and as he and Lucius were engaged in other things, he gave his full support.

‘But remember, Kingsley Shacklebolt is a Necromancer, he sits in the Warlock Chair as just that. He is from a culture where magic is still an everyday part of life, for everyone. Magic is alive for him.’

‘I thought the Warlock Chair was simply a name given to differentiate it from other seats in the Wizengamost,’ she said.

‘No. It was always meant to be occupied by the most powerful, highest ranking Necromancer of the time …’

‘… And Albus was the last true Warlock apart from Kingsley?’

‘Yes. We don’t count Voldemort, he was usurper. You would do well to remember who and what Kingsley is. I would hate to marry you as a toad or a small but colourful lizard.’

‘What about a lion?’

‘You are already that,’ he said accepting her hug.

She went on to tell him about what Kingsley had said about the both of them obtaining their power from the same source.

‘Did he say what that source was?’

‘No. But I will ask when I see him.’ She lay with her head on the pillow close to him. She reached out and ran her hand through his hair. ‘Don’t go getting involved with any French women, Muggle or Witch.’

‘I wouldn’t dare,’ he laughed, turning to her. ‘And you don’t mind that you haven’t been invited to the Bride’s Night?’ He stroked her jaw with his thumb.

‘Not really. Narcissa was very apologetic, but as Astoria’s family were organising that part of things …’ she shrugged. ‘Anyway, it’s in Paris.’

‘Ah. The Groom’s Men are going to Marseilles,’ he leaned in and brushed her lips with his. She gave a small gasp.

‘I mean it Severus. Get rip roaring drunk, run naked along the docks, but do not be tempted by any
French siren,’ she ran her hand between his legs, found what she was seeking and pressed them ever so gently.

‘Merlin, you are very scary sometimes, but I think I get the point.’

‘Good,’ she climbed on top of him and started to nip at his neck. ‘Now … my wizard … my Necromancer … my very talented man, I am going to make love to you, just to give you something to think about at night … when you are in bed … alone,’ and she kissed him.

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It looked very ordinary. She was expecting something much more, well … exotic. Instead it looked like any other house in the village of Magdalene under Wychwood, a mixed Muggle Wizarding village in Dorset. Kingsley had given her very precise details, so she apperated to his house. It was a bitterly cold day and the snow on the path leading to the front door crunched under her boots. Kingsley’s invitation had arrived the day Severus had left for France, she rang the bell.

The door was opened by a tall, very handsome man. ‘Ah! Hermione Granger,’ he laughed, ‘come into the warm, come in and welcome.’ He took her coat, hat, scarf and gloves; she removed her boots and followed him into the house.

‘Hermione, right on time, excellent,’ Kingsley took her hand and kissed it, ‘this is Adam,’ he introduced the other man, who also kissed her hand. ‘Adam is my partner, my soul mate and my lover. Does this bother you?’ He cocked his head slightly as he asked the question.

She looked from one man to the other and smiled. ‘You have impeccable taste. Both of you.’

The two men laughed. ‘What did I tell you Adam? Is she not the most excellent witch you will ever meet?’

‘Indeed King, you told me. Now, Miss Granger, tea, coffee or something stronger?’

‘Tea would be lovely,’ she said.

While Adam went into the kitchen to prepare tea, Kingsley invited her to sit. The fire was roaring and its heat filled the room. The room itself had white walls and paintwork, but this was simply because the furnishings were a colourful mix of rich textures and hues.

‘Severus is still in France?’

‘Yes, two days now. He should be back tomorrow, but you never know, they may all be so drunk they can’t move and I bet they have lost the port key.’

‘I dare say Narcissa is keeping some kind of eye on them, keeping them out of trouble. Hopefully,’ he laughed.

Adam came in with a large tray of tea. ‘I shall be mother,’ he said as he poured tea for Hermione and himself, he gave Kingsley a small tea pot and bowl for his mint tea. ‘Milk and sugar Miss Granger?’

‘Milk, no sugar and please, call me Hermione,’ she took the cup and sipped her tea. ‘I love your
home, it is very vibrant, it's sunshine while there is snow outside.’

‘Many of the items are from King’s homeland,’ Adam said, ‘a reminder of that place, eh?’

‘True, true. But Hermione is not here to talk about soft furnishings and interior decorations. She is here for information and help, am I right Hermione?’

She nodded, not sure if the two men were mocking her in some way. She sent her energetic feelers out towards Adam, to gauge what his power level was.

‘Now, now Hermione,’ Kingsley said, ‘you need only ask here. None of this …’ and he waved her feelers away.

‘I apologise, I was just curious to see …’

‘…What power I have?’ Adam finished the sentence for her. ‘None. I am a Muggle. But I know and understand magic.’ He smiled gently at her.

‘This is why you have not seen Adam at any Ministry functions or other parties for that matter. He would be an easy target for those who would wish to … hurt me.’

‘Severus mentioned that magic is part of everyday life in your culture Minister.’

‘Severus is correct, as usual,’ Kingsley said, ‘we Yoruba are a very magical people. Like your people, Hermione.’

‘My people?’

‘Now she professes innocence, Adam. Come come, Hermione, let us put our cards on the table; let us reveal our true selves to each other.’ He stood and offered her his hand. She took it and he led her through the kitchen and out into the back garden. Snow covered the grass and the branches of trees drooped under its weight. With a wave of his hand, the snow disappeared leaving a large patch of green grass. ‘Remove you socks and step with me onto our Mother.’

She did as she was bid and saw that he was already barefoot. They stood facing each other. Her heart was racing, unsure of what was going to happen she was fearful, for already she could feel the power emanating from his body.

‘Tell me what you feel,’ he said.

She wriggled her toes and dug them into the earth. She shrugged. ‘Nothing but cold earth.

He sighed. ‘Do not be obtuse. Tell me what you feel, High One,’ his eyes penetrated her and she felt her barriers slip away. He saw her.

She lifted her arms to the sky and allowed the energy of Father Sky rush down through her body and connect to Mother Earth; then she returned that energy to the Universe. She felt the power; she felt powerful, limitless power filled her as it once did so many lifetimes ago and it felt good.

‘Good. Now tell me what you feel,’ he asked again.

She looked directly at him, penetrated his barriers. He smiled in acknowledgement. ‘The power of Earth and Sky are one and are mine to harness. It flows through me, feeds me. I am connected to all, Above, Between and Below.’ She lifted her arms again and felt the air around her; it was cold and tasted of mountains far to the north.
'When we stand barefoot on the Earth we are drawing our power. It is basic, elemental and very, very powerful. The power of the Wizarding world today is refined and sophisticated. Our power is raw, unrefined and limitless. You need only stand with your bare feet on the Earth and you have the source of your power. This is what I needed to remind you of. Do you understand?’ Kingsley was speaking to her as an equal, not as a student, nor as a witch.

‘I understand, shall I show you?’ He nodded and she sent him all she had been, all that she is, all that she could become. He received it all without a word. ‘Now, do you understand?’

‘I understand completely. Thank you,’ he bowed to her.

‘Did you invite the Sidhe to the Yule Ball?’

‘No. They invited themselves.’

‘You saw them?’

‘I did.’

She reached her hands towards him and his joined hers, palm to palm.

‘Well met, Obatala. You are a good man.’

‘Well met, High One. I thank you.’

They separated and stepped back, the earth was immediately covered with snow again. Back in the kitchen, Adam was waiting with towels so they could dry their feet. He handed her socks back to her and she went into the sitting and held them in front of the fire to warm them through. She was joined by the two men, Adam had made fresh tea and there was cake, she accepted both gratefully, suddenly hungry.

When they had finished their tea, Kingsley spoke. ‘I understand why you have been sent to us at this time. Hermione, you do not need me to teach you advanced magic, it is all within you should you require it.’

‘Obatala, how powerful do you suppose I am? I really have no idea.’

Kingsley was silent for many minutes and when he spoke he chose his words carefully. ‘Last year was a terrible year for you. I know that. I also had an idea of just how powerful you were then … but the last thing I wanted was to have you using that power … inappropriately. I now know that you didn’t. I know that you are in control of your power … but I had to make sure … to safeguard you and … others.’

‘Does Severus know how powerful I am?’

‘Yes he does. Do you know how powerful he is?’

‘Not really, but I think he must be fairly powerful, he is a Necromancer after all.’

Kingsley laughed, a deep rich laugh. ‘Yes he is and he is more than a match for me. He has superb control over his Dark side; he simply draws on it when he needs too. I would like him to follow me as Minister for Magic, but don’t tell him! Merlin no … he would run a mile,’ and he chuckled again.

She paused before asking the next question. ‘Obatala, do all Necromancers have …?’

‘… Dark power?’ She nodded. ‘Yes. Controlling it is the thing. You need to be very strong not to be
seduced by its power.’

She leaned back in her chair, deep in thought. Kingsley waited patiently for her next question. ‘Did Albus have Dark power?’

‘Indeed he did, but he controlled it, which is why he was better and much more powerful than Voldemort.’ Adam added more coal to the fire and it blazed up again. ‘You and Severus are a well-balanced pair and I assume you are going to be hand fasted in the Old Way?’

She nodded. ‘It’s what we would like, but if we have enough time to make all the preparations …’ she left the sentence hanging. ‘But you didn’t answer my initial question.’

‘Deadly,’ was all he said. The fire crackled and they drank more tea. ‘I have had information about your parents, would you like to hear it?’

She nodded and listened intently.

The wedding was two days away and Severus and the Groom’s party were still not back after five days. Hermione sat at her desk and let out a heavy sigh of frustration. Every surface was covered with parchments from the twelve cases she was studying; she was frustrated because try as she might she could not get any of the relevant dates to match. The admin assistant in the Auror Office had been less than truthful when she had confidently told her that all records could be cross referenced. It just wasn’t possible; the Wizengamot Admin had a different recording and filing system to the Auror Office and the Court Registry was a law unto itself as it matched neither. On top of that she had requested records from Azkaban, on who had been sentenced and when; those records were proving difficult to pry out of the prison Admin.

She was about to try another approach when Moaner popped in, making her jump. ‘Master Severus is home,’ she said and didn’t leave; she just stood looking at Hermione with a slight smile on her face. The house elf still wore her old dress and Hermione guessed that she was saving her new clothes for her wedding day, whenever that might be. She was however, wearing the new ribbon, tied in a neat bow at the side of her head.

‘That bad, eh?’ Hermione said. Moaner nodded. ‘I’ll come home.’ And the elf vanished. She tidied the parchments and gathered her notes into a neat pile and placed a secure protection charm over everything. She did the same to her office, she didn’t trust everyone and many of the reports and records contained some very incriminating information. Satisfied, she went down to the Atrium and to the floo system. Stepping out in Spinners End, the only evidence of Severus was is cloak draped over a chair. She went upstairs to the bedroom. He was lying fully clothed on the bed; his eyes were open but unfocused.

‘Looks like someone had a good time,’ she said as she plonked herself down next to him.

‘Do you have to shout?’

‘I’m not shouting, THIS IS SHOUTING!’ and she laughed as he winced.

‘I’m dying, please have some respect,’ he threw his arm over his eyes and moaned.
She went into his potions and room and found the bottle marked ‘Hangover Potion, Full Strength’. She took it into him. ‘How much do I give you?’

‘All of it.’

‘Don’t be daft; you’ll throw it all back,’ she helped him sit up, ‘open.’ He obeyed and she poured a small amount into his mouth, ‘swallow,’ he did as he was told. ‘There you go, good boy. Now, I’m going to make you some coffee and then I think a shower for you, Professor.’

‘Anything, as long as you do it quietly,’ he fell back onto the bed.

Downstairs she made him a strong double espresso and a glass of water. This was the first time she had seen him the worst for alcohol, he could hold his liquor extremely well; this was a whole new side of him. Back in the bedroom he hadn’t moved.

‘C’mon, sit up and drink your coffee,’ she put the coffee and glass on a table; he didn’t move. ‘Severus?’ she knelt beside him. ‘Severus, answer me … oh Merlin what …’ She shook him, and then shrieked as he grabbed her and rolled on top of her. ‘Bloody git!’ She punched his arm.

‘Ow, that hurt,’ he laughed, ‘did you miss me?’

‘No, not for a second. Were you really drunk?’

‘Not really and the hangover potion works very quickly. I just wanted to see how much sympathy I would get.’

‘None at all and did you have a good time?’ she kissed him and rolled him off her, she fetched his coffee and he drank it in one go.

‘Can’t remember. We were drunk by the end of the first day and stayed pretty much drunk for the other two days.’

‘Er … Severus?’

‘Yes?’

‘You’ve been away five days.’

He blinked and shook his head. ‘No … oh Merlin, I’ve lost four days.’ She couldn’t help it, she laughed and the more he frowned, the more she laughed. ‘Hermione, this is not funny, there are four day I have no memory of. This is terrible.’

‘Is the groom sober?’

‘No idea,’ and he went into the bathroom, turned on the shower, shed his clothes and stepped under the steaming spray. She picked up his clothes, she could smell alcohol of course, but also tobacco smoke. There was no obvious sweet smell of perfume and when she ran her hand over the clothes, she could not feel any residual female energy.

She handed him a towel as he stepped out of the shower. ‘Better?’

‘Much.’ He followed her into the bedroom. ‘How have you been? Tell me what you have been doing. Did you go to Kingsley’s?’

She sat crossed legged on the bed and told him of her visit to Kingsley as he dressed. ‘Did you know he lives with a man, a Muggle?’
'Yes. Does that make you uncomfortable?'

'Not in the least, and Adam is very handsome.' She went on to tell him about Earth energy and how she and Kingsley had met their former selves.

'I told you he was very powerful,' now fully dressed, he came and sat with her on the bed.

She looked at him sheepishly. ‘So am I.’ He nodded his understanding. Then, taking a deep breath, she told him the news about her parents. How Monica and Wendell Wilkins had been located living in Melbourne where they were dentists.

‘That is indeed wonderful news,’ he said, ‘but I sense there is something else …?’ He cocked his head to one side.

‘Right, yes,’ she took another deep breath. ‘They have adopted two children, a boy and a girl, brother and sister.’ They sat quietly for a long time. ‘Severus? I don’t think I have the right to change their memories again. They have a good life in Australia; they have a family. I know they are safe and happy. Do I have the right to change that? Would they thank me?’

He pulled her into him and held her; her arms snaked around his neck. ‘What is it that you want my darling?’

‘I want to be with you; I want to be your wife; I want to have your babies and I want my parents to be happy,’ she spoke softly against his neck.

‘Well then, I think that one way or another you will achieve all of that don’t you?’ She nodded. ‘You know where they are now … so if you ever change your mind … and you will have my support and advice, after all I am so much older and wiser than you.’ He laughed against her hair.

‘Severus?’

‘Yes my love?’

‘You didn’t really lose four days, did you?’

‘No of course not,’ he kissed her hair, ‘… it was only three days.’

She laughed against him. His touch was driving her wild, his closeness inflaming her.

‘Severus?’

‘Yes, Hermione?’

‘You really shouldn’t have bothered getting dressed. I may know what I want … but you know what I need.’

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The wedding day was perfect, cold and snowing. Malfoy Manor was resplendent in a covering of diamond dust. Everything from the trees, hedges, grass and the house sparkled and twinkled in a rainbow of colours. A marquee the size of the garden had been erected with huge braziers keeping
everything warm; light was provided by countless candles and lamps that bathed the interior of the marquee in a soft, wintry glow. There was a central dance floor of gleaming wood which created a deep note against the white, green and gold colour scheme of the marquee. Outside, life-size ice sculptures of magical creatures and mythical beings moved around the uncovered parts of the garden, providing conversation pieces as they walked, flew or ran around. There was an ice skating rink for guests to enjoy that would be illuminated once darkness fell.

The guest list was long. Astoria came from a noble pure-blood family who not only lived in Great Britain, but also in Europe and many had made the journey from France, Spain and Germany. Astoria had attended Beauxbatons, so many of her school friends had been invited. Conversations could be heard being carried out in French, Spanish and German. The Minister for Magic was in attendance along with every senior Ministry official. Draco’s friends from Hogwarts had been invited and some were in attendance. From Hogwarts itself, Minerva, Horace and Madam Hooch were present. Harry and Ginny had also been invited, but Harry arrived on his own; and in an act of pure generosity, the Weasley’s had been invited. Arthur was unaccompanied.

It was a very beautiful ceremony combining traditional and modern elements. The bride wore a winter white dress of heavy brocade, trimmed with ermine; the train was at least ten feet long. Draco wore his customary black with a crisp white shirt and a white waistcoat of the same brocade as the bride’s dress. Both bride and groom looked happy and relaxed.

Hermione and Severus were enjoying themselves. He had taken her ice-skating and after falling down three times, she got the hang of it and they skated around holding hands. Some guests enchanted their skates and so were able to pirouette, jump and twirl with the easy grace of a professional skater. They enjoyed the experience of being dive bombed by an ice Hippogryph before taking their places for the wedding breakfast. They were on the same table as Harry, Arthur, Minerva, Horace and Madam Hooch, which was also the same table as Belladonna Green and the Secretary for the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. There was one empty place with Ginny’s name on it. Harry was making light of Ginny not being with him, he told everyone that she was on a compulsory training day as she was in line to be picked by the English National Quidditch Team. His glum expression however, told a different story. Conversation was stilted at the table and when Hermione smiled very sweetly at Belladonna, she was rewarded by having her foot kicked by Severus.

There were the usual speeches, most of which were thankfully short. Then dancing commenced. Draco and Astoria took to the floor for the first dance, a slow, romantic waltz which brought many ooo’s and aahh’s from the guests. The bride’s parents joined them, followed by Lucius and Narcissa. Soon the guests were joining in and Severus led her onto the floor for their first dance together. They had just got back to their table when Lucius took her hand and led her in another waltz.

‘You are very mischievous, Mr Malfoy,’ She giggled at his surprised look. ‘Belladonna Green?’

‘Ah, yes. Not my twisted sense of humour this time. No, she asked to be seated at the same table as you and Severus. Are we going to have any additional entertainment?’ He twirled her around and pulled her back into him.

‘I nearly had some fun, but Severus kicked me. I am terribly bruised.’

‘Would you like me to hex him? Nothing major of course, then you could have some fun.’

She laughed. ‘Thanks for the offer, but I think not. Anyway, Draco and Astoria wouldn’t be best pleased.’

The music died away and he led her back to her table were Narcissa was standing talking to
Minerva. She turned to him and thumped his arm.

‘Ow! I haven’t done anything my love,’ he protested.

‘That’s just in case you do. Would you be a darling and get Champagne for us ladies?’ He bowed very gallantly to the women.

‘You are too hard on him Narcissa. You know he loves and adores you too much to do anything … naughty,’ and she giggled at Narcissa’s expression.

‘I shall tell him not to be naughty the next time we are alone, I want to see his face,’ and she laughed. ‘Anyway, it keeps him on his toes. Harry looks a bit lost. I hear Ginevra had a practise today.’

‘Ginny is still very influenced by her mother and Ron and she is still very reserved with Severus, which I think upsets him, given his closeness to Harry these days.’

Lucius arrived with a bottle of Champagne. He poured glasses for them all and they toasted the bride and groom.

Severus came over, took her hand and kissed it. ‘Go and dance with Harry,’ he said as he took her Champagne and drank it.

She found Harry sitting alone on a bench watching the skaters.

‘C’mon, Harry. Dance with me,’ and before he could protest, she had grabbed his hand and led him inside to the dance floor. The tempo changed as they took to the floor. They had a wonderful slow dance; she talked to him about the dance they had shared in the tent during The Lost Year. He perked up as they spoke about those days and months. She broached the subject of Ginny by asking if they had set a date for their wedding. Harry told her that they had indeed begun to have serious discussions about a wedding this year. Ginny was still adjusting to things, he said. She was still getting used to his relationship with Severus and to Draco being a friend and the Malfoy’s …. But he told her that if they didn’t marry this year, then maybe they should discuss splitting up. This shocked Hermione. She thought they were doing so well; very well in fact. Harry agreed that in many respects they were doing very well, but he wanted to get married, it seemed it was going to be a year of weddings and well, he wanted children.

‘Yeah, wouldn’t it be great if we could have our children at the same time? They could go to Hogwarts together.’ She said. The music changed again; their one dance had become three.

‘That would be great, and well … thanks for listening, ‘Mione. I feel better about things,’ he pulled her into a hug.

‘That will be quite enough, Mr Potter,’ Severus tapped him on the shoulder. ‘I’m cutting in; I want to dance with my fiancé.’

Harry handed Hermione to Severus with a bow. Severus pulled her in close. ‘So my darling, have you managed to cheer up Harry and are you enjoying yourself?’ He buried his head in her hair as he guided her around the floor.

‘Yes and yes. I’m having a lovely time,’ she sighed, ‘I love you Mr Snape. Don’t think I have told you today.

‘You have, but I never seem to tire of hearing you say it. You look ravishing in this dress, have I told you that?’
‘Yes, but tell me again,’ and she giggled as his grip tightened as he pulled even closer.

She had bought the dress when she had taken him to a classy Muggle restaurant as part of his birthday celebrations. It was something they had done in the early days of their relationship when they lived in London, although it was more likely to have been a pizzeria than a first class dining establishment. She had withdrawn some Galleons from Gringotts and had exchanged them for Muggle money. After a wonderful lunch, she had dragged him to Selfridges and had spent an hour trying on various dresses. He had been very patient and had given his verdict on everything she tried on. Terrible. Awful. Are you mental? Better. Superb. So she had bought the superb, knee length white dress with black lace overlay. It was strapless and had a flouncy skirt. As it was winter she added an elegant Cashmere shrug. The day had been a resounding success and Severus had shown his appreciation in bed that night.

The afternoon became evening and it seemed that every man at the wedding had danced with her. She was enjoying another slow dance with Severus when Draco tapped him on the shoulder.

‘Cutting in, Professor,’ he said as he removed Hermione form Severus’s arms. He danced her to the middle of the floor.

‘We’re leaving soon Granger and I just wanted to say thank you and goodbye.’

‘What! You’re not coming back?’

‘Of course we are. But with all of Astoria’s family, I may not get to see you before we leave.’

‘Fair enough. And the thank you?’

‘For being you. For helping father and mother; for being a friend to Astoria. They all like you y’know.’

‘I like them as well, Draco.’

‘I’m glad we are friends, I value that. Same with Harry; I have no idea why, but I like the git.’

She laughed and hugged him. ‘You have a wonderful honeymoon, Malfoy. See you when you get back, I’ll want to see photographs, well … some photographs,’ she blushed. ‘and look after Astoria.’

He swung her around, kissed her hand and left, just as Arthur took her waist and guided her into a quick step.

‘Will Molly come to my wedding Arthur? I mean, I will be inviting the Malfoys.’

‘If I have to drag her kicking and screaming, Hermione. I shall make sure all the Weasley’s attend. All right?’

She leaned in and pecked his cheek. ‘Thank you.’ He danced her to the edge of the floor and handed her to Severus with a flourish.

‘Quite the popular Muggle born, my love,’ he sounded peeved.

‘At least I haven’t fondled anything that wasn’t mine to fondle in the first place,’ she shot back at him.

‘Oh touché, my darling,’ his lips curled into an all too familiar sneer.

‘Don’t you speak to me in that tone,’ she snapped.
‘And what tone would that be?’ his drawl was pronounced.

‘Who the bloody hell do you think you are?’ She all but shouted back, arms akimbo. She stopped and looked at him. He was staring back in disbelief. ‘I think we should leave,’ she said quietly. He nodded. They made their goodbyes and excuses to the bride and groom, to Lucius and Narcissa and got some very knowing looks from both parties. He placed his cloak around himself then drew her into him. They walked to a quiet spot in the garden and apperated. In their own hallway, they hugged each other.

‘I am so sorry,’ his voice was filled with concern.

‘So I am. Did you feel it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Severus …?’

‘… The answer to that question is … I have no idea. But it was strong enough to set us against each other.’

She pulled away from him. ‘I’ll take the back,’ and she went into the back yard while he stepped outside the front door.

For the first time since the end of the Second Wizarding War, protective enchantments were placed over their small home in Spinners End.

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At last she was making some headway. The records had arrived from Azkaban so her twelve records were now stacked and matched with their partner record from the other admin offices. She took the top record from each pile and laid them out on her desk and starting with the Auror Office record she read along the line, ending with the arrival at Azkaban. Each record showed the name and age of the prisoner; then came the crime or crimes and the trial. Finally, date of arrival at prison and when sentence was carried out. It was brilliant.

The first record for Darko Gamp; Full Blood; 28 years; apprehended 19 May 1999; came to trial 28 September 1999 (which she thought rather a long interval); crimes against Muggles: murder of several Muggle and half-blood families; member of Voldemort’s army: murder of several (unnamed) students during the Last Battle: Sentenced to the Kiss (this was before Kingsley’s reforms passed into Law); Transported to Azkaban 29 September 1999; arrived at 2.30 pm that same day; cell number MCCXXVII: sentence carried out 30 September 1999.

She ticked his name of her list. The next two records followed the same format. There was a problem with the next record. Amentia Flint. The first three records followed the same format, her name was given and the details were there. She was sentenced on 24 March 2002; life imprisonment, maximum Security; no visitors, ever; Transported to Azkaban 25 March 2002. Then nothing. There was no entry for Amentia arriving at Azkaban. She groaned in frustration, bloody clerical errors. She placed Amentia’s record separately on the long table to go through again later. It would mean getting all the records for that date from Azkaban of course, just to see if entries for other arrivals were complete.
She called Moaner and asked for a nice cup of tea; she needed to sit and work out what other records she may need to cross reference with the missing one for Amentia. Moaner appeared with a tray of tea and a plate of her favourite Cherry Genoa cake.

‘Thanks, Moaner, how did you know I needed something comforting?’

‘Moaner knows when Hermione Granger, soon to be Madam Snape, needs help. Moaner will always help Hermione Granger. She need only ask,’ and with that, she was gone.

Hermione smiled. The house elf was enjoying the fact that she and Severus were going to be married. She hoped that Moaner was being courted; she was after all a very bright and loyal house elf. She sighed as she thought about their wedding. Severus had volunteered to do some research into the exact rites and customs of an Old Way Hand Fasting. He had made reams of notes, which depressed them both. The list of things required seemed endless and with both of them so busy, time was slipping away. She finished her tea, took a deep breath and went back to the pile of records.

By the end of the day there were seven more prisoners who had not arrived at Azkaban. The knot in her stomach twisted again. This was not a clerical error, she was sure of it.

This was something else entirely.

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The Druid's Blessing

Chapter Summary

He went and sat in his chair; he lifted his sleeve and looked at the Dark Mark. Although faint, he could feel the first stirrings of the Dark. He sighed. Not now, not at this time when he would need all of his strength for the coming months to deal with whatever was out there. Not now with his wedding approaching. ‘Damn it,’ he thumped his desk then leaned back and closed his eyes. ‘Damn it, damn it, why can’t you just go away and stay away?’ he whispered. The Dark Mark moved slightly and the first prickle of sharp pain shot up his arm.

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Chapter Notes

Grateful thanks once again to the lovely Caoimhe Dálaigh, (pronounced ‘Keva Daly) for the use of the Irish! Because I have been asked, (when I used Irish back in chapter 10) – I have tried to give as near a transliteration of the pronunciation as I can [thanks again, Caoimhe, it was fun :o)) ]

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Chapter 23

The Druid’s Blessing

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose in an effort to stave off the headache that threatened to launch itself in his temples. He patted his pockets in the hope that there would be a bottle of Headache potion rattling around somewhere. He was out of luck, although if he was to suffer a serious wound, the Wound Healing potion he did find, would be useful.

He sighed as he surveyed his desk. The daily reports coming in from the field were increasing. When he had first taken the position as Head of the Department of Mysteries, he could expect one or two reports a day, perhaps as many as eight in a week. Now he had upwards of ten a day, all serious, all different and all from Unspeakables in various parts of the country.

He was trying to find the pattern, so today he had collected every report from the last two months and collated them into date order, then incident and finally location; that there was marginally more
activity in the East of the country told him nothing. He sat back and was about to call Moaner for a
cup of tea when the elf appeared with a tray of tea and his favourite Victoria sponge cake.

‘How did you know?’ he asked gently.

‘Hermione Granger, soon to be Madam Snape, having same trouble as Master Severus; Moaner likes
to be useful, likes to help Master and Miss Granger. You need only ask,’ and with that she was gone.

‘Now I wonder what that means,’ he muttered to himself as he poured his tea. Sitting back, he
munched his cake and sipped his tea as he thought. Taking his cup, he stood in front of one of the
large empty walls of his office. Wordlessly, he wove a charm and a large map of the British Isles
filled the wall, complete with all the counties and major cities. He added large towns, small towns,
villages and then shared Muggle Wizarding villages. And because he felt the need to be a little bit
frivolous, he added rivers and national parks, all beautifully coloured. When he was happy that the
blues and greens were the correct hue, he stepped back and studied the map. He added Hogwarts,
Azkaban and the Ministry; then the wizarding primary schools, joint Muggle Wizarding schools and
the locations of all the wizarding homes he knew about. Satisfied, he refreshed his cup and called
Moaner.

‘I want you to find Harry Potter and ask him to come to my office please.’

‘Harry Potter,’ she said wistfully. Moaner was still in awe of Harry and she tended to blush and act
all girlish when he was around. ‘Moaner will find Harry Potter at once.’

He shook his head and smiled as he sat at his desk to wait. He doubted he would ever truly
understand females … of any species. He poured another cup of Moaner’s excellent tea and finished
another slice of cake. Take Hermione for example. Just when he thought he understood her, she
would do something that turned everything on its head and leave him reeling. Yes, life with
Hermione Danger was not predictable, but he wouldn’t have it any other way.

She had asked him recently if he had known other women or had other liaisons, apart from Lily. He
had answered her truthfully. Yes. He was not the cold hearted bastard most people thought he was;
he was a normal male with normal urges. She had smiled knowingly at him at that point. No, he
would not name names. She tilted her head, still smiling at him. No, no men either and his withering
look made her dissolve into fits of laughter. He desperately wanted to marry her, it would be the final
act that made them complete. The problems with Old Way Hand Fastings were … they were
intricate and followed rules that where so old he had had to go to the oldest books the Ministry
library held. Finding standing stones was a non-starter; they were all Muggle National Treasures and
therefore unusable. However, that was nothing compared to finding an authentic Druid to perform
the ceremony. When he made enquiries, they all seemed to be a bunch of delusional, quasi-pagan
fantasists who were no more Druidic that the average Flobberworm. In modern Great Britain in
either Muggle or Wizarding world, real Druids were rarer than hen’s teeth. He sighed. Perhaps he
should simply whisk her off to some Tibetan Lama and honeymoon in the Himalayas. His musings
were interrupted by Harry coming into his office.

‘You want to see me, Severus? Wow! Love the map, hey there’s Hogwarts and The Burrow,
brilliant.’

‘Thank you Harry, but I didn’t ask you here to admire my artistic efforts; although I am rather proud
of the perspective of elevation on the mountains.’

‘Oh yeah, now you’ve pointed it out to me, I can see it,’ he turned to face his Boss, ‘but it’s not a
decoration is?’ He nodded towards the pile of reports.
‘No, sadly not,’ he rose and stood by Harry. ‘I need all reports, every single one since I became
Head in two thousand.’

‘What! Every single one?’

‘Every single one. I’ve come to the conclusion that I am not spotting any pattern because I have only
been looking at the most recent incidents. Perhaps … with every single report, placed on the map by
location, a pattern will emerge.’

They stood in silence for a long time, looking at the map.

‘And you want me to arrange it?’ Harry said at last.

‘You are the only one I trust, Harry.’

Harry nodded. ‘I’d better get started then,’ he shot Severus a look of understanding and left without
another word.

After the Malfoy wedding, Harry had told him and Hermione that a couple of scuffles had broken
out and several arguments erupted. Someone had tried to start an argument with him, but he didn’t
rise to the bait, he and Arthur left. When he had then told Harry how he and Hermione had argued,
Harry had nodded knowingly. ‘It’s starting again, isn’t it?’ was all the hero of the Second Wizarding
War said.

By late afternoon Harry had every report held in the secure vaults of the Department. While Harry
had been undertaking his task, Severus has sat quietly, concentrating on an incantation for a spell that
would speed up the process of collating the information. When the last report was added to the three
thousand or so others, he was ready. He didn’t ask Harry to leave, he just warned him.

‘I will tap into my Dark power, Harry. If that upsets you, you are free to leave. But as we are dealing
with Dark Ones, a small amount of Dark magic will be useful.’

‘I’m fine Severus, but thanks for the head’s up.’

He lifted his left sleeve to reveal the Dark Mark. He passed his hand over it twice and began the
incantation that would cast the spell. He spoke the incantation as it was the first time of using it,
making sure the words were clear and precise. He wove the layers of the spell with his hands as he
spoke, then in one swift movement of his arms, the reports reduced themselves to the size of mere
pinpoints and flew towards the map. They landed in the exact location as mentioned in the report. He
and Harry then stood side by side and studied the result. This time, a pattern revealed itself. With
another wave of his hand, the exact numbers in each location was shown. The largest number of
incidents was in the greater Birmingham area, four hundred and seventy two incidents; then around
the Hereford area, three hundred and sixty four. The next largest was between Carlisle and Glasgow,
three hundred and forty eight. Of the remaining incidents, they were more or less equally spread
throughout the British Isles; interestingly enough, there were no reported incidents in the London
area.

‘So now we have locations for the greatest activity and we should be able to determine a central
point or at least, give a good guess as to where orders are coming from and where any headquarters
may be located,’ Severus said.

‘So we know where to deploy our resources,’ Harry added. ‘Do we inform the Minister or
Belladonna?’

Severus shook his head. ‘No. We’ll keep this just between the two of us, so if there is any leaking of
information … we can kill each other,’ with a flourish of his hand, the map and all its information disappeared and the wall became a wall again. ‘We will continue as normal, only we shall make sure that those three areas are more closely watched. We must not give anything away until we are certain we know where the headquarters are.’

‘I understand. You know you can trust me, Severus.’

Severus looked at the young man standing by his side. Yes, he could trust Harry and his heart gave a lurch as he realised that he could so easily reach out his arm and place it around those young shoulders, as if Harry were his … ‘I trust you implicitly Harry, thank you.’ Harry turned to go. ‘Harry? We have placed protections around Spinners End. I suggest you increase the protections around Hermione’s house, only … quietly.’ Harry nodded, gave a small wave and left.

He went and sat in his chair; he lifted his sleeve and looked at the Dark Mark. Although faint, he could feel the first stirrings of the Dark. He sighed. Not now, not at this time when he would need all of his strength in the coming months to deal with whatever was out there. Not now with his wedding approaching. ‘Damn it,’ he thumped his desk then leaned back and closed his eyes. ‘Damn it, damn it, why can’t you just go away and stay away?’ he whispered. The Dark Mark moved slightly and the first prickle of sharp pain shot up his arm.

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A place to hold the ceremony was found thanks to Minerva. She had been in the Ministry on Hogwarts’ business and had dropped in on Hermione who had then brought Minerva down to his office with the news. Hermione had mentioned in passing that they were having trouble finding any standing stones to hold the ceremony and Minerva had offered the stones on her family’s land. It was a very nice stone circle of nine upright stones with a central altar. They were welcome to use it and it was then only a short hop to Hogwarts for the wedding breakfast and reception. In the Great Hall of course, they were to consider it her wedding gift to them. Two birds with one spell was an outcome they could not refuse. Minerva was overcome with the hugs and kisses she received.

That left the Druid. In the end it was Hermione who took charge of finding a Druid. Exasperated by not being able to find one in the whole of Great Britain, she had suggested they go to Ireland, after all, it was where she was from and she knew they would find a suitable Druid there. So it was one fine day in March, with clear skies and a light breeze they set off to fly to the Emerald Isle. He followed her as she seemed to know where she was going. Once over Ireland, she turned south west, but then changed her mind and headed north, then west. She stopped once to get her bearings and he as he drew alongside, he asked her how she knew where to go. She had smiled and told him she was following the Dragon Lines. He couldn’t see lines of any kind on the land below, but he followed her onwards as she now flew lower towards the ocean. She dropped out of the sky to land in a meadow above a beautifully curving, empty beach. The meadow ended with a drop into the ocean and the only other thing in sight was a Dolmen. She seemed satisfied that this was the place.

He jumped off his broomstick and watched as she removed her shoes and socks and stood barefoot on the earth.

‘What are we doing here?’ he asked.

‘Waiting.’
‘For what exactly?’

‘I have no idea until it arrives.’

She was being enigmatic, but that was fine with him, just as long as it wasn’t a wild Snidget chase. He watched her walk to the edge of the meadow that overlooked the ocean. The wind caught her hair and blew it like a red brown veil around her face; for a brief moment he thought he saw her as … but when she turned to look at him, it was Hermione, her face was fresh, the roses in her cheeks glowed and she laughed.

‘What’s funny?’ he asked.

‘I love this place,’ she said. ‘Want a sandwich and some coffee?’ Before he could reply she pulled a blanket from her bag, set it down by the Dolmen then proceeded to lay out a picnic. He thought there seemed a lot of food for the two of them. He sat with her and they munched sandwiches and drank their coffee to the sound of the waves breaking on the shore below and a skylark singing its heart out above them.

‘Do we have much longer to wait?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she replied and stood up.

Coming up the path from the beach was an elderly gentleman. He was wearing green tweed trousers with a matching jacket. His waistcoat was bright blue tweed and his white shirt was collarless; he was wearing heavy, sensible brogues. He had a neatly clipped beard and his shoulder length hair blew in the wind. Both were pure white. He stopped before them.

‘Dia duí tú dhá,’ he greeted them. (Hello, you two.)

‘Fáilte, muinteoir,’ she replied. (Welcome, Teacher.) ‘Would you care to join us for a spot of lunch?’

‘Delighted,’ and he sat down, helped himself to a beef and mustard sandwich and accepted the cup of coffee that Hermione offered him. He ate without a word, but smiled broadly at Hermione from time to time and she smiled back with knowing lips and eyes. When he had eaten two more sandwiches and drunk another cup of coffee, he pulled a large white handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed his mouth. ‘Most enjoyable, thank you High One. So, this is himself,’ and he nodded to Severus.

‘It is Teacher.’

‘Well, come, come, stand up my lad and let me shake you by the hand.’

Severus scowled, not because he had been called lad, but because she thought it amusing. He stood however and held out his hand. ‘Severus Snape.’

‘I know who you are,’ the man dismissed, ‘I need to know what you are.’ And he took Severus’s hand and pierced his soul with his eyes. Severus tried to pull his hand away, but the old man had a grip of iron. Finally, he let go. ‘More a Prince than a Snape and he will do very nicely, High One. Oh yes, he is perfect for you. Good, good. Now, before we get to specifics …’ he turned his eyes to Severus again. ‘ … I know what it is you fear, my lad. But you are more than a match for it. I could cast the snake out, but you are going to need it. It will tell you when the time comes.’

Severus was now confused. Who was this strange, little man who spoke in riddles and seemed to know him only too well and was very familiar with Hermione? He cleared his throat.
‘Forgive me, but I didn’t catch your name,’ he said.

‘Why bless me, that’s because I didn’t give you my name. What do you think High One; will he be more comfortable if he knows?’

‘Severus, this is Finn Dagda. He is my Teacher, my mentor and my dear, dear friend. He will be officiating at our Hand Fasting.’

‘Oh! So he’s a Druid.’

‘No,’ she laughed, ‘he is The Druid.’

‘I don’t follow, Hermione. Am I being particularly dense?’

‘No my love. We have slipped between worlds, but you are quite safe with Finn and me; just don’t wander away from the Dolmen.’ She turned to Finn. ‘So, you think he is better than say … Colm of the Red Beard?’

‘Has he tried to murder you?’

‘Not as yet …’ they laughed as Severus frowned. ‘Colm of the Red Beard was one of my husbands; he tried to murder me on our wedding night,’ she explained.

‘What happened to him? Although … I’m not sure I want to know the answer,’ Severus said as he sat down again.

‘I had him bound and he was kept prisoner for a year. I made sure he was well fed, so that by the time of harvest home he was nice and fat.’

‘I don’t understand. Why keep him and feed him?’

‘Ah, well, after harvest home you traditionally offer a sacrifice to Earth Mother.’ Severus nodded his understanding. ‘Well then, I had him beheaded on the corner of a barley field, his blood went to fertilise the land and his fat body was chopped up and fed to the swine. So you see, by trying to murder me, Colm of the Red Beard provided food for the whole community during the winter cold and in the following year. The barley grew high that year.’

Severus shook his head, and then looked at them both. They were grinning widely. ‘Oh very funny,’ he said, ‘a nice story to frighten me with.’

‘If you say so,’ Finn said. ‘Now to the specifics of the Hand Fasting’. He made himself comfortable as Hermione sat by Severus’s side, took his hand and squeezed it. ‘Right so, my conditions are simple, High One. You have set the ceremony for Midsummer, which I approve of. Your gown will be white of course with all the usual embellishments. Your groom will be in black and I see there will be no problem on that count,’ and he winked at Severus, ‘you will live apart for one complete month, completely apart mind, none of this meeting in secret malarkey. I would have liked longer, but … time is short, so instead, you are strictly forbidden to see each other during this time, which means …’ he paused for effect, staring at them both … ‘no sexual congress at all. Do I make myself clear?’

Severus had a face like thunder but gave a slight nod. Hermione smiled at Finn.

‘Good. Now … no blood at the ceremony. So High One, after your next bleed, whenever that occurs before the ceremony, you will take the Sacred Mistletoe.’ He paused again as he poured himself another cup of coffee and drank it. He then patted his pockets and eventually found what he was
looking for inside his jacket; he passed the folded paper to Severus. ‘Here is the potion that is required for the High One. I have every confidence you will be able to manage it, none of your Prince shortcuts mind, strictly to the letter.’ Severus looked at the recipe and frowned, he was about to say something, but Finn got there first. ‘I know the location which is fine and very generous of Minerva, the ceremony shall commence at the usual time. I have one final question for you both. Do you fully understand the commitment you are making by choosing to do this in the Old Way?’

‘Yes, Teacher,’ Hermione said.

‘No, I don’t,’ Severus added.

‘Hmm, it is not so difficult,’ Finn answered, ‘by committing your body and soul to each other on Midsummer Night, you are also binding your Spirit to each other.’

‘Meaning?’ Severus’s voice had a dangerous edge to it.

‘Meaning, when one dies, so shall the other follow,’ Finn said, very matter of factly.

Severus turned to Hermione. ‘Are you sure?’

She brought his hand up to her lips and kissed it. ‘I will follow you to death and beyond and love you all the more.’

‘Then yes, I am sure and I understand.’

‘Excellent!’ Finn clapped his hands. ‘My payment is the usual one, agreed?’

‘And just what is the usual one?’ Severus asked. ‘Tell me and I will make sure you are in funds after the ceremony.’

‘The payment is not financial, my love,’ Hermione said.

‘No, no of course not; we can’t have money getting in the way of things. The usual payment is this … should you be blessed with children and one or more are girls, you will pledge one of them to the Goddess, to be taught the Old Ways and Traditions,’ Finn smiled at Severus.

‘I cannot agree to that,’ Severus said and folded his arms.

‘There is no harm, my love,’ Hermione spoke very gently to him, ‘all that is needed is for a girl child to be brought before Finn when she is seven. She will pledge to honour the Goddess and keep the Sacred Spirit alive.’

He stood up and paced backwards and forwards for many moments. ‘So there is no sacrifice, she will not be harmed in any way?’

She jumped up and stood before him. ‘No Severus. Do you think I would allow anything to happen to a child of ours? I know I have told you about what I had to do in the past. That was then; I did what I had to do. This is now, times have changed and I am here to do different things. All that would happen is that Finn will teach her the Secret and Sacred Ways. She will still be a witch, still attend Hogwarts, still grow up, marry and have her own children. But she will be the Keeper of Memories, just like me.’

‘I apologise for being so dense today, Hermione … but I still don’t understand.’

She kissed his hands again. ‘Severus, you have seen some of my memories; you saw what I am,
what I did. That is what our daughter would become.’

He held her gaze for many, many heartbeats; he nodded at last.

Finn let out his breath. ‘You will have one commitment you can exchange with the other; otherwise I will be doing all the talking. Now, once again, you will not share this commitment with anyone before the ceremony, do I make myself clear? It must be a genuine surprise to the other.’

‘Yes, Teacher,’ she said.

‘I understand,’ Severus said.

Finn stood and brushed himself down and looked around. ‘Right so, I will see you both at Midsummer. Now I must be off. Come, High One,’ and he pulled Hermione to him and placed his hands on her head, “bealtain an bheannoct ar an bandia a bheith go deo I do chroí,” (bealtain an van ocht ar on bandia a ver gu djole eh tor three) and he kissed her brow. He turned to Severus, who took a step back.

‘You need Finn’s blessing, my love.’

So Severus stepped towards the strange old man and Finn placed his hands on Severus’s head. ‘I will give you the blessing in the English. “May the Blessing of the Goddess be forever in your heart;”’ Severus tried to pull away but Finn held him still. ‘This I say to you and to you only; “may you prove a worthy partner to my dearest girl,”’ and he leaned up and kissed Severus’s brow. Severus met his eyes and smiled. He felt he had just been kissed by a feather or a warm breeze or a butterfly or … an Angel. Finn nodded, turned and walked across the meadow, over the stile and out of sight.

Hermione was gathering their things together and putting them in her bag; she put her broomstick in as well. ‘We shall fly home together,’ she said.

They stepped away from the Dolmen. ‘Hermione, it’s dark,’ he cried.

‘Well we did have rather a lot to get through,’ she smiled at him.

He called his broomstick to him, climbed on then helped her to sit. She immediately leaned into him and laid her head on his heart.

‘I am so in love with you, Severus Snape.’

He felt her love in that moment. It covered him like a soft blanket, tangible and all enveloping. ‘Home,’ he commanded and they lifted into the ink dark sky that shone with a million stars. It was a cold and cloudless night as they flew across the land. She was singing softly to herself, a song that had a tune he thought he recognised, but the words were the language of Finn Dagda and the High One. ‘What is it you are singing?’

‘A song about the ancient land of Erin; a lament of loss and change,’ she snuggled deeper into him, holding him tightly. ‘But also a song of love, one so old the words have changed with each passing generation.’ She began the song again, singing the words directly into his heart. He held her, his face buried in her hair and in his mind he saw the green rolling hills, the lush meadows, the clear rushing brooks and the heather that grows strong and wild upon the land. He saw the fights, battles and wars that had been fought throughout time upon the sacred land of Erin. But most of all he heard the music and song that filled the landscape with its haunting beauty. He heard the lilting language of poetry and story that no amount of subjugation could silence.

‘It is very beautiful,’ he said.
'And sad,' she replied. ‘So, my Prince, a month apart? That gives us about six weeks.’

‘Six weeks? What for?’

‘To make up for the month we shall be apart. A bit like … banking our love,’ she laughed.

‘You are terrible, but you have a point.’ He steadied the broomstick as it dipped through a sudden gust of wind. ‘Your Prince?’

‘Yes, I can’t be joining myself to just anybody you know, there has to be a certain amount of royalty.’

‘You are as mad as the maddest march hare, my darling,’ and he laughed.

‘You’re right. I’m not royalty,’ she had started to kiss his neck.

This was not good. If she made her way up to his lips there would be nothing for it but to land in some quiet spot; sex on a broomstick was dangerous, very dangerous as they had once found out. No use, her soft kisses were now working their way across his cheek to his ear where she nibbled the lobe. He heard the groan escape his lips.

‘Hermione …’ but the words were lost as she latched onto his mouth with a kiss that was all sweetness and passion. Her hand was making its way down … he pulled out of the kiss, panting. ‘You are also wicked beyond belief, but I am not attempting … remember what happened when we tried?’

‘I recall it added a certain amount of excitement to the proceedings.’

‘Hanging upside down a hundred feet in the air is not exciting, especially when certain items of clothing are … undone.’ She was laughing by now and hugged him.

‘Then you are either going to have to land somewhere so you can have your way with me …’

‘… Me? Me? This is all you my impassioned darling …’ he was laughing now.

‘… Or get us home very fast … otherwise …’ her hand fell to the front of his trousers again. He groaned, she was determined to kill him with love one way or another.

They were now over mainland Great Britain and the broomstick turned to head towards Spinners End. She was settled against him again, her hands making lazy circles over his chest. They were travelling over the heathland of the Lancashire hills when lights caught his eye.

‘Look there,’ he said.

She lifted her head and looked down. ‘Witch’s Lights,’ she said. ‘We must be somewhere near the Pendle Hills.’

‘I have flown over this place many times and not noticed them before,’ he said.

‘They look very pretty. Are we nearly home?’

‘Almost.’

A short time later he landed gently in the back yard of their little house. She checked the enchantments as he put his broomstick away. She nodded that all was clear and they entered the house.
‘Cup of tea?’ she asked, ‘I’m making one for myself.’

‘Would love one, bring it upstairs?’ He went upstairs and into his potions room; taking out Finn’s paper, he looked at the recipe. It wasn’t particularly complicated, it was that some of the ingredients were … interesting. He placed the paper on the work bench, securing it with the bottle that held her contraceptive potion. He had to smile at that; then he looked at the recipe again. It wasn’t that different to the one he prepared for her, only his ingredients were more refined, not straight from the plant or creature. He heard her go into the bedroom and followed. She was unbuttoning her jacket; the tea was on the table by the entrance. He helped remove the jacket, then guided her to the cushions, sat her down and handed her a cup tea. He sat by her and they drank their tea and listened to the night calls of the African beasts. A warm breeze wafted in from the entrance. Once she had finished, she lay her head in his lap and his hand caressed her face.

‘Does anything that was discussed today worry you?’ she asked.

‘I had my moments, I must confess, but … no. I am very comfortable with the arrangements,’ he shifted her so that he was lying next to her. ‘This is much better,’ he kissed her, ‘much safer.’ She leaned into his kiss and returned it with equal passion. Buttons were released and bodies explored. Clothes were removed so that heated skin could be next to heated skin. Kisses deep and light were given and received. Teeth nipped and tongues lapped. Eager hands and fingers explored soft yielding flesh and warm intimate areas. Words of love and lust were spoken softly or groaned during passion. And when neither could bear the separation any longer, she straddled him, sheathing herself completely upon him. He sat up then and she wrapped her legs around his waist. She leaned back and his hands supported her, as she rose and fell in frenzied ecstasy upon him. His panting was now interspersed with moans and groans that came from deep within him. He pulled her close and held her in place as his climax approached and then broke. They cried out in unison and he felt her muscles tighten around him, prolonging both their orgasms. They kissed, they sighed and when each was leaning against the other, bodies joined and tingling still from their desire, they fell onto the cushions and laughed for sheer joy.

He pushed her hair from her face and kissed her soft warm lips. Her eyes were closed and she whispered his name over and over. Her arms came around his neck, bringing him close. She covered his neck and face in light kisses and when she opened her eyes to look into his, he saw the deep love she had for him contained within them.

‘Hermione?’ he whispered, ‘we are going to be married,’ and he laughed again.

‘Yes, it’s really quite wonderful my darling man,’ her voice was breathy as she came down from her ecstasy and her eyes closed again. Still joined, he Apperioed a blanket from the bed to cover them. He slipped out of her, covered them both with the blanket and pulled her into him; as he drifted off to sleep, he heard the roar of a lion in the far distance.

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Lucius Malfoy was entertaining that evening. The Secretary and Under Secretary for Magical Law Enforcement had been invited to dine at Malfoy Manor. Now, with Narcissa having made her goodbyes and gone upstairs, the three men sat cradling goblets of Blishen’s Gold Label Firewhiskey.

‘Would you consider it at least, Lucius?’ Secretary Arlow Sproggins said before emptying his goblet
in one go. He held it out for a refill.

Lucius obliged and filled the goblet with the amber liquid. ‘I have to say your proposal is tempting, Secretary. It would be good to get back into the thick of things.’

‘Good man, Lucius. When can we expect a decision?’

‘I need to talk things over with Narcissa first, but I’m sure she will be all for it.’

‘Of course, of course, speak to her; persuade her of the benefits of having power again. Jolly fine Firewhiskey, by the way,’ and he downed his drink once again.

‘We will make it worth your while, Lucius,’ Under Secretary Malk Mullet said, sipping his drink, not particularly enjoying it. ‘We need you … and with five empty chairs on the Wizengamot …’ he let the sentence trail off.

‘As I said, let me speak with Narcissa and I will give you my answer; I think the time for the rise of the Malfoys is approaching again,’ he lifted his goblet and toasted the two men.

When he entered the bedroom after his guests had left, he found Narcissa sitting up in bed reading.

‘What did those two really want?’ she said without looking up.

‘A return of the Malfoys to their rightful place and station in the world,’ he said as he undressed.

‘Well I don’t trust them Lucius and nor should you,’ she looked at him. ‘And what is wrong with what we have now? Draco is married and happy, we have good friends and we have more than enough gold bars and Galleons to see us through the rest of our lives. What more is there?’

‘What we lack at the moment is prestige, my love. I am simply considering an offer that has been made to me,’ he climbed into bed and lay on his back.

‘Humph,’ Narcissa was clearly not impressed. ‘Remember what happened the last time?’

‘It’s nothing like last time, darling. Nothing at all. Now,’ he turned to her, ‘do you require my services or are you happy to read?’

She looked at him and smiled. ‘Your chat up line has not improved over the years Malfoy, but seeing as you are offering … how can a girl resist?’ she dropped her book to the floor and slid down the bed to face him. She kissed his lips, ‘Hmm, Blishen’s if I’m not mistaken. Lucius, please don’t do anything that will hurt this family again.’

‘I have no intention of doing anything of the sort, trust me,’ his hand slipped down to the rise of her breast.

Narcissa sighed. ‘And don’t for one minute think my love for you will stop me hexing you … if you deserve it,’ her hand was doing some exploring of its own.

‘I don’t doubt it. Now, shut up and kiss me … properly.’
‘It has nothing to do with Severus,’ Molly said as she put a mug of tea in front of Arthur. ‘You know I have always liked Severus, no, it’s that Malfoy,’ she took a sip of her tea.

‘Lucius has changed, Molly, he really has. He got a real fright with Draco becoming a Death Eater and then Narcissa leaving him. He has learnt his lesson,’ Arthur watched her over the rim of his mug. ‘You don’t even have to speak to him, just be there, for Hermione and Severus’s sake.’

‘We don’t even know when the ceremony is or where for that matter.’

‘I expect it will be in the summer sometime, Midsummer perhaps, always a good time for a Hand Fasting,’ Arthur nibbled a Ginger Nut.

‘In the Old Way?’

‘From what I’ve heard … in the Very Old Way,’ and he nodded knowingly.

Molly sat in silence for many minutes, sipping her tea. ‘They must really love each other to do that,’ she said at last. ‘All right, when we get the invitation we shall say that the Weasley’s will attend. But it is under the strict understanding that I will not speak to Lucius; I’m still not sure I trust him,’ she sighed.

‘Can’t ask for anything more, my dear,’ Arthur raised his mug to her. ‘Is it because he planted that book on Ginny in her first year?’

‘Yes … and no,’ she looked at him and blushed. ‘I’ve not told you this before Arthur, but I had a sort of crush on him when I was young. It was during the year we separated, you remember, to see if we … well …’

‘I remember,’ Arthur smiled gently at her.

‘… Well, I was at a party, one of the ones the Crouch family would throw now and then; they would invite all kinds of people. Anyway, I was invited so I went along and he was there; it was before he married Narcissa of course. I plucked up the courage and asked him if he would like to dance. He refused. I was devastated, I was wearing my best dress and had had my hair done …’

‘It was blue, floor length, made of this sheer floaty kind of material, it had straps on the shoulders and a belt that tied at the side like a flower … I thought you looked very lovely in it. You wore it when I took you dancing the first time after we got back together. I knew then that I was in love with this beautiful woman who was dancing with me,’ Arthur took her hand. ‘You would never have been happy with Lucius, I don’t think he goes in for big families,’ and he leaned over and kissed her.

Molly blushed furiously, ‘It was silly I know, but he was very handsome. But I am a few years older, that’s probably why he refused to dance with me. He did me a real favour.’

‘How so?’

‘Because if he had said yes to the dance, I would have fallen for him properly and allowed him to … you know …’ she lowered her head to hide her blushes.

‘Molly Prewett, are you telling me that you fancied Lucius Malfoy so much that would have slept with him, without being married?’ Arthur was shocked.

‘Well, I slept with you before we were married and I didn’t hear you complain,’ she laughed.

‘That’s different, that was me,’ and he laughed along with her. ‘We were very daring in those days,
‘Yes,’ she smiled. ‘It was your idea to have a quickie in the attic of my parent’s house, Merlin. Arthur, what if we had been caught?’ she took his hand as she laughed.

‘What are you two laughing about,’ Ron said as he came into the kitchen.

‘Old times …’ said Arthur.

‘And knitting …’ Molly added.

‘Oh, I’m off to bed then, night …’ and he went upstairs.

‘And I think I should take you up to bed as well,’ Arthur said.

‘Privacy charms?’ Molly asked as they put the downstairs lights out.

‘Oh I think so … hate to say it Molly, but I do like it when Ron stays over with Lavender and we have the house to ourselves,’ Arthur took her hand and led her upstairs. ‘Maybe we can encourage him to move in with her?’

‘Arthur! How can you say that?’

He led her into their bedroom, closed the door and placed the privacy charms around the room. ‘Because one day, we are going to forget the charms and if Ron is in the house … well, that’s going to be a lot worse than having your mum catch us in the attic.’

‘Oh, yes! You have a point,’ she kicked off her shoes. ‘Maybe we can help him find somewhere.’

He gathered Molly into his arms and kissed her before leading her to the bed.
Chapter Summary

Narcissa laughed as she patted Hermione’s back. ‘Don’t for one minute think you are the only Bride or Groom to have such thoughts. It happens to everyone.’ She then told Hermione how two days before her wedding to Lucius, he had gone missing. His uncle Darius had taken a search party and scoured the whole of Great Britain for him. They eventually found him hiding in the Three Broomsticks. He had changed his hair, used a glamour and taken a room using a false name.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for not posting sooner - real life! What can I say?

Thank you, thank you to all of you who have left Kudos! As always, it is very much appreciated.

Chapter 24

Take This Longing

Severus & Hermione

Take Great Pleasure In Inviting You

To Their

Hand Fasting Ceremony

DATE: MIDSUMMER’S NIGHT
‘You have been invited?’

‘Yes, although it is a much smaller gathering than the Malfoy wedding.’

‘A Hand Fasting?’

‘Yes. Very traditional with the reception at Hogwarts; they will all be there, Muggles, half bloods and blood traitors. Do we strike?’

He sat back, tapping the table with his fingers. ‘No,’ he said at last, ‘there are too many variables, it’s Midsummer, the power will be strong; and then Hogwarts … it will never be taken again. As tempting as it may be, we will hold. We will have the advantage of numbers, but they could have the power. We wait.’

‘As you wish.’

‘And what of Lucius? Is he an ally?’

‘Possibly. Madame Malfoy has a hold over him, but I think the appeal of power will still prove too strong for him to resist.’

‘Keep working on him. Report back after the ceremony, all information is useful.

‘It will be as you ask.’

He dismissed the other with a wave of his hand. Once alone, he lifted his left sleeve, the Dark Mark stared back. He hoped the bastard traitor Snape was worried; his Dark Mark would be stirring by now and he hoped that it was already hurting him beyond any pain he had ever experienced.

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The reports she had requested from Azkaban had, at last, arrived earlier in the week. She wasn’t sure
if the prison was simply disorganised or if it was because the reports had been requested by her. Not that she had had any time to do more than give them a cursory glance; there were a slew of court cases at the moment and she had attended every one. By the time of the seventh case in as many days she was confident of her understanding of the judicial process. Not that the cases were startling, if anything, they were petty crimes, mostly thefts and break-ins of Muggle homes or shops. All the crimes seemed stupid and pointless, but it meant that the Wizengamot had been in session every day. She also noticed that Kingsley was looking increasingly worried. She left the court and went back up to her office, removed her robes and sat at her desk. Picking up the first report from Azkaban she began to read.

After three hours and two cups of tea, she put the last record down and was seriously concerned. Of the eight names she had from her initial research, not one had arrived at Azkaban, although every other prisoner sentenced and sent to Azkaban on the same day arrived safe and sound. Whoever had organised the disappearance of the eight was either very powerful or worked at the Ministry; possibly both. She rubbed her eyes and sat back. She had to tell someone, but whom? The answer was bloody obvious, so she picked up her list of names and headed down to Level Nine. She stood outside his office, the door crackled with protection. She groaned, what was he doing in there and why? She couldn’t apperate inside, it would mean losing an arm or her life and he wouldn’t be having a clandestine liaison with anyone, it would mean he would lose his life; or something worse. She was frustrated but knew that whatever it was, it was important Department business and she would just have to wait. She turned and went back to her office.

The pressure of their coming wedding was building and beginning to show. It was a week until she and Severus separated for the month before the ceremony, yet they didn’t seem to be able to make time to be together. Late nights were not conducive to chats about the future, the ceremony or any of the other half dozen topics she needed his input and advice on. Take food for example. Minerva wanted to know if they would like something special for the wedding breakfast and for how many? She had no idea. Would he like something special, exotic or simple? As for numbers, they had sent one hundred invitations out, but apart from Harry, Molly and Arthur, Neville and Luna and the four Malfoys, she had not had any other acceptances. It could turn out to be a small and intimate ceremony. And take her dress. She had been for a fitting for a suitable dress, but when she had told the dressmaker that the only magic that could be used was to create the zigils and symbols, the dressmaker had thrown her hands up in horror. She had been able to persuade the dressmaker to hand-make the dress and they would just have to cross the bridge of magical embellishments when they arrived at it. Finding a suitable commitment was akin to drawing teeth; so she had placed that firmly on the back burner, to be revisited when she had more time to research. She was having her period as well, which was making her moody and with Severus working just as hard, he was coming home late, falling into bed and after a quick kiss, he fell asleep. He had already prepared the first batch of the Mistletoe Potion which she would begin to take when she stopped bleeding. And then there were the Bride’s Maids. So far only Astoria and Luna were signed up. She wanted Ginny, but as usual Ginny was being evasive about even being at the ceremony. She was going to stay with Harry and Ginny when she left Spinners End. It was her idea to stay with them; she hoped by spending time with Ginny she could start to heal the rift that now existed between the former best friends.

She rearranged the quill holder on her desk once more, picked up her list and headed out of her office. This time the door was not protected so she went straight in; as she entered, she was sure she caught a glimpse of something on his wall, but it disappeared as soon as she walked in. Harry was with Severus and both men looked like guilty schoolboys who had been caught doing something naughty. She opened her mouth to say something, but stopped as they stared at her.

‘Alright,’ she said at last, ‘if you were looking at dirty pictures in this month’s PlayWizard, that’s fine; it’s a male bonding thing and I don’t have a problem with it.’
Harry and Severus looked at each other. ‘I’m afraid she has discovered our little secret, Harry,’ Severus kept a straight face while Harry collapsed with laughter. ‘Hermione, this is the Department of Mysteries, so trawling through PlayWizard for criminals, although a delightful notion … is not a part of our remit,’ and he frowned at her.

‘Well, you both looked so guilty,’ she smiled sheepishly. ‘Anyway, I need your advice.’ She looked at Harry, who had recovered himself by now.

‘Apart from you … Harry is the only one I trust,’ Severus said.

With a nod of understanding, she explained what she had been doing over the last few months; that how the simple act of researching the Wizengamot process had thrown up a problem. She took the list from her pocket and placed it on his desk. ‘There are eight prisoners who have been sentenced, but never arrived at Azkaban.’

Severus and Harry leaned over and scrutinised the list.

‘Dear Merlin,’ Severus cried, ‘this is a list of some of the most dangerous criminals we caught after the War.’ He turned to look at her, his face filled with concern; he looked so weary she wanted to throw her arms around him and hold him close. But she also knew he would not appreciate it at this point when he needed to focus. ‘Have you told anyone … anyone at all about this?’

‘No, no one,’ she whispered.

With a sudden wave of his hand the door closed and the protections were in place. Another wave and the map was revealed, the markers now in a different pattern.

‘Wow,’ she said, stepping forward to get a closer look. ‘Love the greens and blues. Oh look, there’s us and … wow, how did you get that perspective on the mountains …?’ She turned to see both men smiling at her. ‘Sorry, what am I looking at?’

‘Not PlayWizard as you thought, but a map. The dots represent every report I have received since becoming Head. We looked at location first and thought we had a pattern, but if you arrange them by date you get a completely different pattern; then rearrange them by incident …’ he waved his hand and the markers rearranged themselves, ‘… and yet another pattern reveals itself.’ He sighed heavily. ‘We are no closer to finding a link. I have Unspeakables in the areas with most markers, but we are now stretched very thin.’

‘And have you informed Kingsley?’ she asked.

‘No, I decided not to include anyone else until Harry and I were certain … and as we are not …’ he spread his hands.

She looked at the list again, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear. ‘Of the eight, four are werewolves,’ she turned to him, ‘Selena came back with a werewolf … what if …’ she stopped; the memory of that time was still too painful.

‘The Auror Office would have the record of the interrogation,’ Harry said.
‘I was excluded from that interrogation,’ Severus added.

‘I could try and get access to it,’ Harry frowned, ‘I think if either of you tried it would arouse suspicion.’ Severus nodded and stared expectantly at Harry. ‘What! ... now?’ Severus nodded again, his lips twitched into a smile. ‘Bloody hell, how am I going to get them to release it to me?’

‘You’re a bright lad, you’ll think of something,’ Severus patted his shoulder.

Harry rolled his eyes and Hermione nudged him with her hip.

‘If this is ruse to get me out of your office so you two can … canoodle …’ he turned to leave. ‘Door, Severus.’ The door opened. ‘Thank you.’

They stood side by side looking at the map; she reached out and took his hand.

‘Canoodle?’ he said.

‘No idea what he means,’ she leaned into him. Gradually his arm came around her. She rested her head on his shoulder and her hand came up around his neck and she sighed. ‘Comes to something when we have to canoodle in your office,’ she said.

‘Oh shut up woman and ... kiss me.’

She laughed as she leaned up and they kissed, long and sweet. When they parted he was smiling at her; he brushed her hair behind her ear and kissed the exposed neck. She moaned.

‘I knew it! I turn my back for five minutes and you’re at it,’ Harry said rather smugly as he placed a parchment on the desk.

‘I see you were successful … and rather quick,’ Severus said.

‘Yeah, sorry to disappoint you both, but it seems my powers of persuasion still work,’ he unrolled the parchment and the three of them scanned the report.

‘Skynner,’ Severus said pointing to the name.

Hermione looked at her list. ‘Skynner, Worvil; werewolf; yep, he’s here.’

Severus read the report carefully then lifted his head and sighed. ‘He gave plenty of information; the Auror Office acted on most of it, and some they passed to me. It resulted in many arrests … mainly small fry, no one high up.’ He slammed his fist into the desk, making the other two jump. ‘Duped,’ he spat the word as an expletive. ‘He fed us just enough information to make it believable. No doubt the others who were arrested did the same,’ he slumped heavily into his chair and steepled his fingers.

‘Who would have had charge of the transports to Azkaban?’ she asked, although she was pretty certain of the answer.

‘Belladonna,’ Severus groaned.

‘A traitor?’ Harry said. ‘I don’t buy it, Belladonna may be a lot of things, but she is loyal to the Ministry and Kingsley; don’t forget she was my boss for many years, I know her.’

A grim silence fell over the office. ‘This does not go beyond this office and we three … understand?’ Harry and Hermione nodded. ‘It could prove dangerous for all of us.’ He looked across at the map and it vanished. ‘I need to think how best to proceed. Harry? Take the report back … and be
Harry picked up the report and rolled it, securing it with its tie once again. Hermione went and put her arms around Severus and kissed his careworn face. Harry simply placed his hand on Severus’s shoulder and squeezed. They left him in deep contemplation. They took the lift up and hugged before they went their different ways.

She had just entered her office when a soft tap came on the door. ‘Come in,’ she called.

Kingsley walked in. ‘Ah, Hermione, good. I’ve been looking for you.’

‘Sorry Minister, I’ve been down in the Department talking to Harry, you know I’m staying with him and Ginny before the ceremony.’ She motioned him to a chair, but he remained standing.

‘Yes, I heard and the ceremony is what I have come to talk to you about,’ he was clearly upset, but he took a deep breath. ‘Hermione, I would like to bring Adam to your wedding … but …’ he spread his hands in a gesture of defeat.

She looked at him and then took both his hands in hers. ‘Obatala, I would never allow any harm to come to my friends, not at my ceremony. Do you believe me?’

He looked into her eyes. ‘It is hard for me; Adam is … very precious to me and the thought of anything happening to him because he is my partner … ‘he sighed. ‘Stupid I know, but …’

‘Does Adam want to come?’

‘Of course, he likes you.’

‘Then I will be honoured to have you both at my wedding. I would like you both there; you are my friends … our friends. He will be safe … on that you have my word.’

He nodded slowly. ‘Thank you, High One,’ and gave a small bow, ‘it will be good to have him with me. I attend so many functions on my own,’ he said with a sad smile.

‘You are wise not to trust everyone, Obatala. But you can trust me … and mine. The ceremony will be quite safe.’

‘So … a month apart, eh? I am not looking forward to that. I think one you should not come into the Ministry during the month; I can only deal with one love sick and frustrated employee at a time.’

‘Well, I have so much to do, I think it may well be me,’ she laughed.

‘Good, good. I will leave you to get on then,’ and with a last smile he turned and left.

She sat at her desk. Two more acceptances, great, now there will be eleven guests. Quite the gathering.

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Severus sat on the bed reading. Not a report this time, but a book and not a book concerned with Hand Fastings, weddings, ceremonies or etiquette. It was the book of poems she had given him as his birthday gift the year before. He enjoyed the words; the way the poet put certain words or phrases
together so they worked to evoke a picture of what the writer was expressing. He found the idea of painting with words intriguing.

She came back into the room, knelt behind him and laid her head on his back. It was their last night together before their wedding. Earlier in the day she had walked into his office; she didn’t say a word, simply looked at him with eyes filled with yearning. He knew what was going through her mind, the same thought had occurred to him. He had risen from his desk, taken her hand and using his private access, took her home. Once at Spinners End, she had hugged him then gone to make tea. She came into the sitting room with a pot of tea, sandwiches and cake. She poured them a cup each.

‘How has your day been?’ she asked, conversationally.

He smiled. Normality; it was what she was creating. Their working lives had been anything but normal in the past weeks. He told her of his day and she did the same for her day. They chatted and laughed as they had their tea, touching hands often. She cleared away, then took his hand and led him upstairs; she ran a bath and they continued to enjoy each other’s company in the hot, fragrant water. It was then she spotted the Dark Mark, she had looked at him in silent enquiry.

He sighed. ‘It has been stirring for a while now,’ he said.

‘Will you be able to control it?’

‘Yes, I must … for as long as I am able,’ he whispered.

‘Severus?’

‘I don’t know; it is different this time. He is not controlling it, yet it feels … just as powerful.’

She had wrapped her body around him and held him. Her soft breasts pressed into his chest.

‘Does it hurt?’ she asked.

‘A little,’ he lied.

‘I will help in any way I can,’ she had whispered.

He found her lips and kissed her. Then, he lifted her out of the bath and dripping wet, had carried her into the bedroom. They had made love with a desperate, quiet passion that left them both breathless.

Now, she pressed herself against his back and it felt good.

‘Do you have any reservations about getting married?’ she asked.

‘None whatsoever,’ he put his book aside and turned to her.

‘Are you scared?’ she said.

‘A little … are you?’

‘Yes,’ she replied.

‘Don’t be.’

She smiled at him. ‘Don’t you go getting grouchy at work either.’

‘Me? I shall be all sweetness and light,’ he laughed as he pulled her off the bed. ‘Get dressed, I am
going to treat you to supper at the Chat Noir,’ he shooed her away to dress.

La Maison du Chat Noir was busy, but for Severus and Miss Granger, the Maitre’d removed a ‘Reserved’ sign from a cosy table for two. Severus ordered a bottle of wine while they perused the menu. The meal was superb and they were presented with a bottle of Champagne on the house in honour of their upcoming nuptials. They toasted each other and took the remaining Champagne home with them, which they finished off, sitting on the cushions watching the elephants make their way to the water-hole, before falling into the cushions in a tipsy haze.

‘I’m going to miss you,’ she said.

‘Not as much as I am going to miss you,’ he kissed her. ‘Remember to take the potion every day and ask Moaner when you need some more. I will send some to you.’

‘I will, don’t worry,’ she said with a yawn before curling into him and falling asleep.

He held her and listened to her soft, even breathing. The lion put his head around the tent opening again, looked at Severus and shook his huge mane before slopping off into the African night. The whirring of crickets lulled him to sleep. He woke once during the night, brought out of sleep by a dream, which once he opened eyes, disappeared. She still slept soundly and didn’t wake when he carried her into bed. He pulled her to him again and kissed her hair.

‘I will be strong for you, my darling,’ he said softly.

‘I know you will. Love you Severus,’ she muttered as she turned over.

He spooned himself against her and held her until the first rays of dawn were breaking over the African Veldt. He didn’t sleep; he wanted to be awake as he held her, to remember the feel of her body against his. The coming nights would be long and lonely.

**********

Narcissa Malfoy was sitting with several large design books on her lap. She was deciding on what further changes she could make to Malfoy Manor. She had already redecorated and moved things around, but now she thought it was time to tackle some of the bigger issues she had with the house. She had issues with Lucius as well. The man was being too damn cooperative. He was agreeing with all the changes she suggested without a quibble. This was not Lucius at all; he would normally question and discuss with her any and all changes to his beloved family home. No, he was up to something and she was determined to find out what.

‘Is he here?’ Hermione’s voice carried in from the hall.

‘No,’ Lucius’s voice replied, from the library it sounded like.

Narcissa got up and went into the hall to greet the young woman, Lucius had the same idea.

‘Lucius, I need your help,’ Hermione said. ‘Severus has sent this as my Bride gift, but I don’t know what it is or if it is expensive so I don’t know what I should get him.’

Narcissa noticed that the words tumbled from Hermione and that her voice held a sharp, almost hysterical note to it. Hermione handed Lucius a black and gold box, ‘Reveal!’ she commanded and
the box opened like a flower to reveal a gold filigree pot nestled in deep white satin. Hermione removed the pot and open the lid. The hallway was filled with a fragrance that made Narcissa inhale deeply and let her breath out with a long ‘aahhh’.

‘My dear Miss Granger, Severus must be very much in love with you. This is Oudh or Agarwood, it is usually a liquid, but Severus has commissioned it to be made into a paste,’ Lucius wafted the aroma to him before closing the lid.

‘So it’s perfume?’ she asked.

‘Yes … and no,’ Lucius explained. ‘Yes, you can use it as a perfume, but you could also place a drop in a bath or in an incense burner.’

‘Oh,’ Hermione frowned.

‘No, not oh, Hermione. This pot of Oudh is worth more than a wizard’s ransom, pure Oudh is extremely rare, and this is pure. Its other name is liquid gold. There is only one place I know where you can obtain such quality and that is a small apothecary shop in the Casbah in Istanbul. A Bride gift such as this … he could not have chosen a more extravagant gift,’ Lucius beamed at her as he handed the box back.

Narcissa watched the young woman’s face crumple. ‘But … but how do I now give him something of equal worth? It’s impossible.’ She was on the verge of tears.

Lucius gave Narcissa a look.

‘What?’ Hermione said, ‘what are you thinking?’

Narcissa took her arm. ‘Come and take a walk with me, my dear,’ and she led Hermione out into the garden. It was a hot afternoon; Narcissa put her arm around the young woman’s waist as they walked. She then told the Bride about the gift she could give to her Groom. ‘You will of course be wearing the traditional black underwear,’ she said and was rewarded with a look that told her Hermione didn’t have any idea what she was talking about. ‘Hermione, Lucius and I were married in the Old Way; it’s not common practice as you are beginning to understand. But it does mean that I know the ceremony and I know what happens afterwards … on the wedding night.’

‘I didn’t know about you and Lucius.’

‘And why should you?’ They were walking through the formal gardens that were a riot of summer colour. ‘Now, traditionally you wear a white dress, but under the dress it is also traditional to wear something that you know your husband will enjoy and that will … fire his enthusiasm,’ she smiled as she remembered her own wedding night.

‘So that will be my Groom gift?’ Hermione perked up.

‘No … that will be an added … bonus. Your Groom gift will be very … intimate; very, very satisfying for the two of you … and dangerous.’

Hermione’s eyes flew open. ‘I don’t understand what you mean, what do I have that could …?’

Narcissa stopped. ‘You have your magic,’ she gave the young woman a knowing look. ‘When we make love we do it because of mutual attraction and when you are in love … well that makes sex even better. Then … when you offer yourself, and your love, to your husband with magic … the outcome will move your world.’ They walked on while Hermione digested what she had been told.

They entered Lucius and Draco’s walled apothecary’s garden; the butterflies and bees darted
everywhere and the heady aroma of mint, thyme, feverfew and rose mixed with fragrance of the many exotic plants that grew alongside the native ones.

‘You said it was dangerous?’ Hermione said.

‘Yes. The use of sexual magic needs a very deep level of trust between the two. It is magic tinged with darkness, therefore … it is dangerous. You can injure or kill your partner if you cannot control the magic.’

‘And Severus will understand what it means?’

‘Oh I would think so. You are offering him something he cannot obtain anywhere else. It is therefore … priceless.’

They had stopped by the central fountain of the garden and were splashed with tiny droplets of water as it fell into its pool.

‘How does it work?’ Hermione asked.

‘That will be entirely up to you. You will be the one setting the boundaries, he will not overstep those boundaries … unless he loses control; in which case you will experience the greatest sexual thrill of your life … just before you die.’ Hermione’s eyes now opened in terror. ‘I see you are beginning to see the nature of your Groom gift,’ Narcissa laughed softly.

They walked on and out of the garden, back into an avenue of shady Rowan trees.

‘Did you and Lucius …?’

‘Of course! Why do you think I am telling you this? However, the choice is entirely yours, Hermione. You could simply buy him a nice Groom’s ring or a box to keep his wand in. It is up to you … and it is not what Lucius and I did … it is what we still do … on occasion,’ and she laughed out loud. ‘But remember, it can be very noisy, so silence enchantments are needed and all delicate furniture should be removed or don’t worry about it getting broken. And of course your underwear will be in shreds, so buy the most expensive set you can afford; it is another way of showing your love … and trust.’

They were now walking back towards the house. ‘Where is your gown being made?’

‘Problems. It’s not ready; mistakes keep being made because the dressmaker can’t use magic on it, only for the embellishments … so it keeps falling apart,’ Hermione gave a long heartfelt sigh.

‘Hermione, it is five days to your wedding and you don’t have your gown?’

Hermione shook her head … and burst into tears. ‘It’s all going wrong, Narcissa. I miss Severus so much and I’m as horny as all Hades and doing it for myself just isn’t the same. What with the dress and my commitment and then there is the food; Minerva is still badgering me about what kind of food we would like and I have no idea how many guests are going, we are up to fifteen at the last count which is not much of a wedding party and Ginny has decided she is playing that night and Harry is angry with her and they fight all the time and then they have make up sex and forget the privacy spells. It’s hopeless … I just want to crawl away and die.’

Narcissa gathered the young woman into her arms and allowed her to sob against her shoulder. ‘Oh my dear child, why didn’t you say something before? Let’s get this sorted out, come along,’ she took Hermione’s hand and led her back to the house. Lucius passed them on his way out.
‘Is everything alright? Why is Miss Granger crying?’

‘Stay out of it Lucius, just let me do what needs doing.’

Lucius didn’t say a word, merely raised his eyebrows. She took Hermione upstairs and into her and Lucius’s bedroom, went into her dressing room and appeared with a large box. She placed it on the bed and removed the lid. Hermione gave a gasp of delight.

‘Here we are,’ Narcissa said, pulling the gown out of its wrappings. ‘It is my own dress, only worn the once; I did offer it to Astoria, but she had her mother’s dress.’

‘But Narcissa, I’m Muggle born … not a Pure Blood … this is …’

‘I don’t have a daughter, so this beautiful, handmade in the Languedoc dress, made to a centuries old pattern will stay in a box in the back of my dressing room gathering dust. I would be honoured if you would consider wearing it at your wedding, Hermione. If you agree, I will make it my Bride gift to you, so if you have any daughters, you have something to pass onto them.’

And that set Hermione off again. Narcissa Produced! a handkerchief and handed it to her. ‘Thank you so much Narcissa, I would be delighted to wear it. Can I try it on?’

‘That’s better; come on, take those things off and we will see if it needs altering, I know a seamstress if it does. Now, remember, you will also need to try it with your new underwear, so how about you have a quick try on now and then we go to Lacie & Flounce to buy your bridal underwear? We could get tea out as well.’

Hermione flung her arms around the older woman’s neck. ‘Thank you again, it is … just like having my mum here to help me.’

The door opened and Lucius walked in. ‘Am I interrupting anything?’ he asked innocently.

‘Bugger off Lucius, Hermione is going to try on my wedding dress.’

Lucius stared at his wife and then broke into a wide smile. ‘Really? That’s very, very nice of you my dear. It should go to a good home. And why is Miss Granger crying again?’

‘It’s her wedding and she can cry if she wants to. We are also going to Lacie & Flounce and have a spot of tea out.’

‘Can I come along?’

‘You are very welcome to my darling, but it is women’s stuff and you will only get impatient,’ Narcissa said.

‘Perhaps I could join you for tea then?’

‘What do you say Hermione? Shall we allow Lucius to buy us tea?’

Hermione blew her nose and dried her eyes. ‘Only if it is an expensive tea,’ she smiled.

‘Good. Shall we say three o’clock at The Dainty Fairy Cake?’

‘I shall see both of you there,’ he bowed to the women and left.

‘It’s so easy to keep them happy,’ Narcissa laughed, ‘now, let’s get you into this dress.’
was serene and expensive. Narcissa acted as if she owned the place, but Madam Malfoy obviously knew what she was doing; when Hermione asked to see a selection of the most expensive wedding undergarments, the staff fell over themselves to help. Narcissa then shooed her into a changing room and waited. And waited. When she was just a little concerned, she knocked on the door and popped her head around. Hermione was standing in front of a full length mirror with tears streaming down her face. Narcissa went and hugged her. The words simply fell from Hermione. She was so frumpy. How could Severus ever say she was beautiful? What if he looked at someone else and found them more attractive? She wouldn’t blame him; was it a mistake to get married at all? Yes, they had lived together for three years but she wasn’t sure she could do this. She was going to call the wedding off.

Narcissa laughed as she patted Hermione’s back. ‘Don’t for one minute think you are the only Bride or Groom to have such thoughts. It happens to everyone.’ She then told Hermione how two days before her wedding to Lucius, he had gone missing. His uncle Darius had taken a search party and scoured the whole of Great Britain for him. They eventually found him hiding in the Three Broomsticks. He had changed his hair, used a glamour and taken a room using a false name.

‘But why did he get cold feet?’ Hermione sniffed, ‘surely he knew that you were the one for him?’

‘Of course he did, but … it really does happen to everyone. Ask Draco and Astoria, they each threw a spat and flew off to Merlin knows where … in opposite directions. They were back within a day and all lovey dovey again and I will guarantee that Severus is having similar doubts. Hopefully, his Groom's Men are keeping a close eye on him and won’t let him wander off. Now, this set is so not you. It makes you look like a Knockturn Alley prostitute.’

An hour and a half later, they walked out of Lacie & Flounce with their packages. Narcissa thought the two hundred Galleons Hermione had paid was a sound investment. ‘It's too early to meet Lucius, so two more stops. How’s your Gringotts account?’

They went to Peytoe & Heele (Makers of Fine Footwear since The Last Crusade) where Hermione bought herself not only a pair of black Manuela Broomstick’s with six inch heels, but a beautiful pair of pumps for everyday wear. Next stop was the exclusive Smoothe & Waxe Spa (Beauticians to the Court of Ptolemy) where Narcissa booked her in for the works on the day of her wedding; hair, face, nails, waxing, full body scrub and massage; after all, the ceremony was at night so she had plenty of time for a good pampering.

‘I should inform Madam that a party of five in the name of Malfoy are booked in at 3 o’clock on that day,’ the reception witch said.

‘That will be the Groom’s Men,’ Narcissa said. ‘You will be out by then so there shouldn’t be any problem. Anyway, they will be in the shed at the back.’

‘Er … Narcissa? If Severus’s Groom’s Men are having a spa day, shouldn’t my Handmaidens do the same?’

‘Who are they?’

‘Only Astoria and Luna. Ginny is playing that night, so she won’t be a Handmaiden as planned.’

Narcissa tutted. ‘Molly should know better, I shall have to have words … so only the two then?’

‘Unless you would like to be one,’ hope filled Hermione’s voice.

‘Oh Merlin bless you, but I’m afraid I’m too old.’
'Well … what about Mother of the Bride?'

Narcissa was momentarily stunned. Hermione was offering her a great compliment and a great honour. Never in her wildest dreams would she have ever thought that a Muggle born woman would be offering her such a thing. But then, Hermione Granger was no ordinary Muggle born. ‘Yes … yes, I can do that,’ she said at last. ‘Thank you Hermione, Mother of the Groom doesn’t have quite the same ring to it. That’s settled then, that will be four for the full bride’s package, name of Malfoy.’

‘No, no, I’ll pay I didn’t mean …’

Narcissa gave her a quick squeeze. ‘Of course you didn’t, but as Mother of the Bride, I will be paying, just as Lucius will be paying for the Groom’s Men.’

‘So I’m booking four full brides packages on Midsummer’s Day at …?’ the reception witch asked.

‘Nine o’clock in the morning, that gives us six hours, plenty of time,’ Narcissa replied.

With that booked, they made their way to *The Dainty Fairy Cake* and Lucius. He was already seated and waved them over. He kissed Narcissa and then surprised Hermione by kissing her cheek.

‘Successful?’ he asked as a waitress came over, ‘tea for three.’

‘Very,’ Narcissa smiled at her husband. ‘So, Mr Malfoy, on the Groom’s night, you will not get Severus roaring drunk, nor will you tie him naked to a Thestral and send him off to Scandinavia. Knockturn Alley is out of bounds as well.’

‘Would I do any of those things, my darling?’ Lucius spread his hands and looked the picture of complete innocence.

Their tea arrived and Narcissa poured. She looked lovingly at her husband and patted his hand. ‘Of course not, my love, especially not now … Hermione has asked me to be Mother of the Bride and I have accepted,’ she said with a gloriously wicked smile as she offered him a plate of pastries, ‘… fairy cake … or strawberry tart?’

Lucius’s look of sheer horror made Hermione laugh out loud for the first time in a month.

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Chapter Summary

He lifted his head when Harry approached. ‘I can’t do this Harry. Why would she want to marry me? I’m so much older than her; I’m miserable, acerbic, not handsome. What does she see in me?’ He let his head fall into his hands again.

It was two days to the wedding and although Severus had had a few wobbles over the last month, this looked like it could be the worst yet.

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Let Me Be Your One & Only

Chapter 25

‘You will not regret your decision, Lucius. From this moment on, the House of Malfoy will rise again to a position of power and respect; a place it so richly deserves.’ Lucius bowed slightly to Secretary Sproggins and sincerely hoped that Narcissa would understand the opportunity that was being offered to him. ‘We need wizards of your ilk,’ Secretary Sproggins continued, ‘your background and … skills will be most welcome amongst our ranks, most welcome.’

‘I will not disappoint, Secretary.’

‘Good Lucius, good. Now, I will inform high up of your decision, I am sure he will be most pleased.’

‘Thank you Secretary, no doubt you will send an owl with my further instructions?’

‘Count on it Lucius, count on it,’ Secretary Sproggins beamed.

Lucius turned and left the office of the Secretary for Magical Law Enforcement; he was pleased with his decision. Now it remained only to convince Narcissa that it was the right thing to do and that the name of Malfoy would once again be firmly at the top of the Pure Blood tree.

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Harry knocked on the front door of Spinners End, getting no reply he apperated inside. It was his turn to check on the Groom, who was not being very co-operative these days.

‘Severus?’ he called.
He knocked on all the downstairs doors before peering into the rooms. He liked what Hermione had done to the house; it was now bright and comfortable with a happy atmosphere. As there was no-one downstairs he decided to call Moaner before venturing upstairs.

‘Moaner?’ The house elf appeared. ‘Is Master Severus at home?’ he asked.

Moaner stood staring at Harry for many seconds before answering, twisting the hem of her dress as she did so and looked at Harry coyly from under her eyes. ‘Upstairs, in potions room, Harry Potter will help Master?’

‘Why, what’s wrong?’ Harry asked, suddenly worried.

‘Moaner doesn’t know, but Master Severus is hiding and shouts at Moaner a lot,’ she then vanished.

Harry tutted as he made his way upstairs. On his way to the potions room, he couldn’t resist a peek at their bedroom; he hadn’t seen it since Hermione had changed it for Severus’s birthday. He was staggered by the change; it was not what he expected at all. It was luxurious and somehow … very Severus, it was also very untidy. He tutted again, in the last month he had seen a different side to Severus. His former potions master was usually a neat and tidy man, very necessary when dealing with a classroom full of dangerous potions and dense pupils. But, when he was depressed he forgot to tidy up, or he simply didn’t notice the mess.

He knocked on the potion room door and getting no reply, he went in. The potions room was now an exact replica of the one at Hogwarts, complete with massive office and an additional library filled to bursting with books and parchments of all kinds on potions and antidotes, in several languages. The potions room was empty so he wandered into the office, and there was Severus, sitting at his desk, head in hands.

He lifted his head when Harry approached. ‘I can’t do this Harry. Why would she want to marry me? I’m so much older than her; I’m miserable, acerbic, not handsome. What does she see in me?’ He let his head fall into his hands again.

It was two days to the wedding and although Severus had had a few wobbles over the last month, this looked like it could be the worst yet.

‘Severus, you know Hermione adores you, loves you. You could be as ugly as a cave troll and she would still find you attractive,’ he ran his fingers through his hair, ‘sorry, that didn’t come out the way I meant.’ He sat opposite the Groom. ‘Look, age doesn’t matter either. Yeah, you may be old …’ Severus lifted his head and glared at him. ‘Sorry … what I mean to say is that being young, Hermione …’ he stopped. This was hopeless, he couldn’t think of anything sensible to say. He took a breath and tried again. ‘How long have you lived together? Three years? You’ve had one major argument in that time and yeah, it was a biggy and you walked out on her and broke her heart …’ Severus looked up again. ‘This … is not helping Harry,’ he hissed.

‘Yeah, I know, sorry,’ he sat quietly for a time while Severus now laid his head on his desk, obviously in despair.

‘She told me what happened that day; how you had gone into those memories she wanted to keep from you. She told me that she never wanted you to see them because she knew it would upset you and that your memories of that time must also be hurtful to you. She never wanted to hurt you. That’s who she is. She cares about you; she is also deeply in love with you, which is great. But she cares enough about you not to want to upset or hurt you … and to have someone who cares about you … is a gift. I also know you care about her and isn’t that a brilliant foundation on which to build a
marriage? She also trusts you, I mean … totally trusts you. She trusts your judgement, which is why she is able to see the Malfoys as friends, not enemies. I trust you as well because Hermione trusts you. Severus … I think she has been in love with you since she started Hogwarts.’

Severus lifted his head again. ‘Impossible Harry, she was a mere child … and I was …’

‘… A slimy git of a potions Professor who made her life miserable?’ Severus glared at him again. ‘You don’t get it do you?’

‘In case you hadn’t noticed … I have not been getting it for a month,’ Severus said through gritted teeth.

‘OK. So you made her life miserable at Hogwarts. So now she is going to marry you and not just marry you, but join to you, cleave to you for ever and beyond,’ Harry ran his hand through his hair again, pushed his specs up and wondered if Severus was being deliberately obtuse. ‘If she had hated you, do you think she would have lived with you; gone to bed with you; argued with you, read books with you, made you laugh and smile and make you act like a moonstruck ploughboy? She has never hated you Severus. Do you understand? Never! She has been in love with you since she first saw you.’ He paused, allowing the information to sink into the usually sharp but currently dense mind. ‘Now we know her origin, I think she was destined to love you; to marry and have babies with you. It’s how the Old Magic works, bringing two people together who will make changes to the world. You and Hermione have already started those changes.’

Severus sat quietly, obviously digesting what had just been said.

‘I’ve not told you this before,’ Harry continued, ‘but at Hogwarts, when Ron and I would be slagging you off and calling you all kinds of rotten names, she didn’t, not once,’ he paused again, ‘oh, and Hagrid was the same. He never said a bad word against you either,’ he smiled weakly at Severus.

‘I didn’t know that Harry, thank you,’ Severus said as he stood up. ‘It’s still a load of bollocks though. Now, I feel like getting indecently drunk. I think a trip to Knockturn Alley is in order.’

‘Er … Severus? Haven’t you heard the news?’

‘What news would that be?’

‘Narcissa is Mother of the Bride.’

Severus slumped back into his chair and held his head in his hands again. ‘I’m doomed,’ was all he said.

‘Not necessarily,’ Harry said, his face brightening as an idea hit him. ‘Do you still want to get drunk?’ Severus nodded. ‘Well, Narcissa may not want you in Knockturn Alley, but she said nothing about Hogsmead.’

Severus lifted his head and stared at him for a full minute and for the first time in nearly a month, he smiled.

‘Right,’ Harry stood up, ‘this calls for reinforcements.’
The day before Midsummer found Hermione at Malfoy Manor. She had quit her parent’s house earlier in the day when Harry and Ginny had another row about him coming back to the house roaring drunk with no memory of the previous day or night. When she had asked Harry about Severus, her best friend had smiled stupidly and said, ‘who’s Severus?’ This had elicited a shriek of frustration from her; that was when Ginny had then told her stop being so hormonal because she was getting married, at which point Harry had keeled over and gone to sleep on the sofa. She had rushed upstairs, got all of her trousseau together and apperated to Malfoy Manor to spend her remaining night as a single woman with the Malfoys.

Sadly, Lucius had fallen over in the hall and Narcissa had left him there. She stepped neatly over him as she greeted Hermione.

‘Draco is just as bad,’ Narcissa had said, ‘but they will all be fine by tomorrow, don’t worry.’

‘Shouldn’t they have taken some anti- drunkenness potion?’ Hermione asked.

‘But they wanted to get drunk; they can take hangover potion instead. Now, come along and let’s get you settled.’

‘But … Severus?’ Hermione cried.

‘I don’t think they lost him. I’m sure he is at Spinners End, passed out somewhere.’

Hermione had burst into tears again as Narcissa led her upstairs to a guest room. They unpacked all her things, her dress, shoes and new underwear. She had also bought a wide selection of clothes for the honeymoon, but as she had no idea where they were going, the selection included a bikini and a heavy woollen sweater, just in case.

Lucius had woken up by the afternoon and after dosing himself with extra strength hangover potion, a bath and change of clothes, he was his dapper self by suppertime. Draco and Astoria arrived in time for supper as they were also staying overnight at Malfoy Manor.

‘Who’s looking after Severus?’ Hermione asked as they sat at the table to tuck into Beef Bourguignon.

‘That would be Arthur and me,’ Lucius smiled.

‘Arthur?’

‘Of course, he is one of the Groom’s Men. Arthur is the sensible one; who do you think got us all home today?’

The front door opened and Rupert went bounding out to greet the newcomer.

‘Anyone home?’ Harry called. He walked into the dining room. ‘Ginny has thrown me out, could I stay here tonight?’

A place was set for him and he helped himself to food. It was a very pleasant meal, with much laughter and good natured telling off of the men. Hermione didn’t eat much and she excused herself as soon as was polite and went up to her room, followed by Rupert. She threw herself on the bed and Rupert jumped up next to her. She hugged him and he licked her hand. There was a soft knock at the door.
‘It’s open,’ she called and Lucius walked in.

‘I’m just off to Spinners End. I wanted to give you this.’ She stood up and went to him. ‘You already have something old and something new. This is something blue,’ he handed her a little box. ‘Open it,’ he encouraged, ‘it’s my Bride’s gift to you.’

She opened the box and nestled inside was a single Lapis Lazuli and a heavy silver chain. The Lapis was set in a mount of silver and had vines and leaves entwined around it, exquisite and delicate.

‘I would like to say that it was a family heirloom, but it’s not; I saw it and knew it was for you.’

She felt the hot tears welling up again. ‘It is so … beautiful, Lucius. Thank you so much,’ and she threw hers arms around him.

‘Thank you for making Narcissa happy. She couldn’t be so involved with Draco and Astoria, but your offer to her … well, I haven’t seen her this happy … for a long time and if she is happy, then I am overjoyed,’ he took her hand and kissed it. ‘And don’t worry; Severus will be there, washed, scrubbed and sober.’

‘I’ve never seen him really drunk,’ she said.

‘Not a pleasant sight. His belligerence got us thrown out of The Three Broomsticks and the Hog’s Head and to get thrown out of the Hog’s Head you have to really, really piss Aberforth off. And of course, throwing Hagrid out of any establishment is very hard; I’m still not sure how Aberforth managed it. We had great fun,’ he smiled fondly at the memory. ‘I shall see you tomorrow night,’ he turned and left.

She stood holding the beautiful pendant and burst into tears again. Rupert jumped off the bed and nudged her hand; she scratched his head, ‘Want a hug Rupert?’

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Midsummer Day dawned bright and fresh. Narcissa, Hermione and Astoria were up early and had a light breakfast and then it was off to Smoother & Waxe where they met up with Luna.

‘You are the only bridal party today, so we have put you in the Cleopatra Rooms,’ the receptionist witch said in greeting. They were shown through the doors and stepped into an indulgent paradise. A very handsome ‘assistant’ had a tray of Mimosa’s made with real flowers and Unicorn Champagne waiting for them. Then, two utterly gorgeous spa wizards came forward and took charge of the bride; the other women had to make do with one utterly gorgeous spa wizard each.

For the next five hours, they sipped Mimosa’s, were scrubbed, massaged and waxed. Facials were given, manicures and pedicures taken. Hair was washed, cut and styled then placed under a ‘keeping’ charm so that it would not ruffle or move until the counter charm was used, then hair would fall naturally into place. Finally, make-up was applied. The three women waited in the reception area for Hermione to appear. The doors opened and a vision of perfect loveliness walked out; the bride looked radiant and was smiling broadly. Her hair and make-up were faultless, both understated, accentuating her natural beauty. She was surrounded and hugged by her friends.

‘Don’t make me cry or I’ll end up with streaky make-up’, she said. ‘Thank you Narcissa, that was one of the best experiences of my life, I feel so … wonderful.’
‘And you look wonderful, Hermione,’ Narcissa gave her a squeeze. ‘Now, is everyone ready? I have a port key so we are going straight to the Stones. It also means we will be out of the way in good time.’

‘Good time for what?’ Luna asked.

‘Missing the Groom and his men,’ Narcissa replied.

‘But don’t we have to go back to Malfoy Manor to collect our things?’ Hermione asked.

‘All taken care of, so Bride, Handmaidens, are we ready?’ They all nodded and Narcissa took a compact from her pocket.

‘I been waxed to within an inch of my life,’ Hermione said, looking very smug.

‘Did you have the full Sphinx?’ Narcissa asked.

‘Yes!’ they chorused in unison.

Narcissa laughed. ‘Well, isn’t that going to surprise our men later on? Now, hold on.’ The four women grabbed the compact and vanished.

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‘Here we are,’ Lucius said; Severus, Draco and Harry stood by his side.

‘It’s a shed,’ Harry complained.

‘Obviously … it’s not,’ Severus replied, peering at the tiny sign on the door. ‘Say’s here, “Pharaoh’s Lounge – Wizards Only”, Lucius, what exactly is this place?’

‘Don’t worry, you’ll love it.’

‘Sorry I’m late everyone,’ Arthur bustled up to the door. ‘So, Lucius, Pharaoh’s Lounge, eh?’ He rubbed his hands together in eager anticipation. ‘Groom, Groom’s Men, let us proceed and make ourselves presentable for the ladies.’ He pushed open the door and they stepped into a huge atrium filled with fountains, palm trees, pyramids and a full size Sphinx.

‘I love magic!’ Harry laughed.

‘Malfoy party,’ Lucius said to the receptionist wizard.

‘Of course, sir. You are our only Groom’s party this afternoon, so you have the choice of Caesar’s Retreat or Pharaoh’s Paradise.’

The five wizards looked at each other. ‘Pharaoh’s Paradise,’ they said as one voice. Just then, a very nubile spa assistant came out and showed them to Pharaoh’s Paradise, which would be theirs for the next several hours.

‘Would you care for a cocktail?’ she asked.

‘Five Mount Vesuvius’s please,’ Arthur replied, he turned to the others, ‘you’ll love ‘em’.
For the next four hours they were steamed, sauna-ed, Jacuzzi-ed. Then scrubbed, massaged, manicured, pedicured and shaved. Finally, hair was washed, cut and dried. Where four hours earlier, five the worst for wear wizards entered the paradise that is Pharaoh’s, now emerged five perfectly groomed and relaxed wizards. Well, four out of the five were relaxed; Severus though very well groomed, was anything but relaxed.

‘I have a port key, so we can go straight to the Stones from here,’ Lucius said.

‘Don’t we have to go back to Spinners End to collect our stuff?’ Harry asked.

‘All taken care of, Harry,’ Lucius smiled.

Severus stared at Harry. ‘Is everything all right, Harry? You are squirming like a Flobberworm on a hook.’

‘Yeah, sorry. I got waxed and I’m not used to it, that’s all,’ he wiggled his hips and gave weak smile.

‘That is an image I’m not sure I’m altogether … comfortable with,’ Severus all but groaned.

‘Don’t worry, Harry, it will settled down in a couple of hours,’ Arthur said with a reassuring wink.

‘Or that one, Arthur,’ Severus added.

Lucius pulled a bottle of Girding potion from his pocket. ‘Are we all ready?’ Five hands grabbed the bottle and vanished.

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The Bride’s pavilion was very roomy. There was a separate dressing area for the Bride and one for her Handmaidens; a bathroom for any last minute nerves and adjustments and plenty of comfortable sofas and chairs. A table laden with nibbles and drinks of all kinds was set down one side. All their dresses were covered and hanging up, the Bride’s dress was already in her dressing room, so no-one would be tempted to have a peek before the Bride was wearing it. The women sat around chatting about this and that, except Hermione. She was pacing like a caged cat.

‘What if no-one turns up?’ she fretted.

‘My dad’s going to be here, so don’t worry,’ Luna soothed.

‘And if no-one turns up, what about all the food?’

‘I’m sure Minerva will put the food to good use, after all, Hogwarts is a big school,’ Narcissa said calmly.

‘How can you be so … calm?’ Hermione all but shrieked just as the flap of the pavilion opened.

‘Because it is not our wedding day and we are not as horny as all hell. I hope Severus has packed a good supply of Girding potion,’ Ginny said as she hugged the other women. Hermione simply stood rooted to the spot, her mouth open in surprise. ‘I nearly didn’t come, but Harry and dad can be very persuasive,’ Ginny said as she embraced her best friend.

Hermione still couldn’t believe it, Ginny was here. Not at a match. She grabbed Ginny hands, ‘Ginny? I’m getting married,’ and both women squealed with joy and jumped up and down. ‘Thank you, thank you; it means so much to me, I’ve really missed you,’ and she threw her arms around
Ginny and hugged her.

Ginny accepted a glass of Champagne from Luna and toasted Hermione.

‘Why didn’t you really want to come?’ Hermione asked gently.

Ginny sipped her Champagne before answering. She looked at Narcissa, then went on to explain that perhaps she listened to her mum and her brothers too much, and because the Malfoys were involved, who they still regarded with suspicion, she felt she couldn’t break ranks with them. Then her dad and Harry had told her to stop being so narrow minded; she told how Narcissa had paid her a visit and asked if she would be involved for the Bride’s sake. She was torn for a while between her mum and fiancé, then she realised that she also missed her best friend and her best friend was getting married and if Harry and her dad could be friends with the Malfoys, then she could be as well.

‘I’m also still intimidated by Severus,’ she admitted. ‘I just keep seeing him dressed all in black and striding down the corridors of Hogwarts or telling me off in a potions class. I’m sorry ‘Mione, I’m a real idiot.’

‘Ginny organised the moving of all our stuff and providing the food and drink,’ Narcissa said.

‘I’m so happy you’re here Gin, really, really happy.’

The light in pavilion changed. ‘Well, witches, I think it is time to dress,’ Narcissa announced, ‘Handmaidens that side and Bride, you come with me.’

Narcissa helped her dress; first in her new underwear, a black silk and lace corset top with suspenders and separate black, lacy panties that from the front looked like little shorts, but from behind, were invisible. The corset gave her instant cleavage. Narcissa removed the dress from its cover, Hermione lifted her arms and the dress floated over her body. The dress was white, raw silk and strapless. It had slight ruching around the bust and fell to the floor in a wide layered skirt. Narcissa tightened the laces at the back, pulling the dress into shape; it fitted the Bride perfectly.

Then the over-dress was fitted. It was gossamer light woven silk, as transparent and delicate as a butterfly wing. It fitted over the dress with wide straps on the shoulder; on one strap, diamonds were woven into the material and extended down the back and around her waist, to end above her hip and they shimmered and sparkled as the light caught them. Otherwise, the over-dress looked plain and unadorned.

‘Once in the moonlight, the Oghams, zigils and symbols will be revealed,’ Narcissa answered the unasked question, ‘the whole effect will be as if you were walking in star and moonlight. There are now only a few who have the skill to weave the silk into this fine gossamer; they also weave the symbols into it at the same time.’ She then fastened the Lapis pendant around Hermione’s neck where it became a focal point to the seemingly plain dress. Hermione then released the holding charm on her hair so that it fell in soft curls around her face and into a back-knot entwined with fresh summer flowers.

‘Would you like to see yourself?’ Narcissa asked.

She nodded and Narcissa revealed a full length mirror. She gasped at the unrecognisable woman staring back at her. Her hair shone with colour, her face was smooth and fresh, her figure curvaceous and the dress … the dress was simply stunning.

Narcissa sighed. ‘Hermione, if Severus does not fall to his knees and worship at your feet, he is not worthy of you. You are beyond beautiful; I am so happy for you,’ and she sniffed as she embraced
the young woman.

The Handmaidens were already waiting in the main part of the pavilion. They also gasped when Hermione revealed herself and she was surrounded by happy, giggling women.

‘Right, Mother of the Bride’s turn now,’ Narcissa announced and disappeared into the dressing area.

‘I have a small gift for all of you,’ Hermione said. She went to one of her bags and brought out four little silver pill-boxes. ‘They are “Never Empty” boxes. At the moment they each contain a small amount Oudh, which was my Bride Gift from Severus. But you could put anything in them and you would always have … anyway, I had your initials carved into the lid … y’know … as a thank you.’ Without needing any further encouragement, the Handmaidens dabbed the precious perfume onto their pulse point.

‘Why have I got one?’ Ginny asked, ‘I wasn’t even going to be here before yesterday.’

‘I would have given you one anyway,’ Hermione said. ‘I couldn’t leave my best friend out, even if she didn’t like me.’ At that moment Narcissa appeared, looking spectacular in her green and gold robes; she accepted her gift and also used the perfume.

‘Hermione will not be the only one seducing her wizard later,’ she laughed and the bride blushed.

‘Oh no!’ Hermione grabbed her ears, ‘I forgot to pack my earrings.’

‘Don’t worry, I have spare ones,’ Luna said and offered her a choice of either gold studs or silver pentangles with dangling green Leprechauns. She chose the dangling green Leprechauns.

‘Now I have something borrowed,’ she said with some relief.

And so they waited.

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In the Groom’s pavilion, Neville had just been thanked for arranging to get all the robes to the Stones and for the wonderful spread of food and drinks on the tables. He was now leaving to get a good spot from which to admire Luna.

The Groom and his men were ready, but Severus was having another bout of nerves. He looked wonderful in his new outfit; black high collared shirt with a black neckerchief, tightly fitted trousers and a knee length fitted frock coat. The coat had real silver thread woven into it, so although it looked quite severe and plain, when he moved in any light, the jacket shimmered and glinted. The Groom’s Men were similarly attired. Lucius was resplendent in a white shirt with white neckerchief, black trousers, a black and gold waistcoat and his frock coat was flecked with gold. Harry, Draco and Arthur wore the same, only their waistcoats were different colours; Harry’s was red and gold, Draco’s green and gold and Arthur’s blue and gold. Their frock coats were simply plain black, but they all looked terribly distinguished and very handsome. Severus had gifted them and Neville a small gold “Box of Requirement” engraved with their initials. Whatever they required, they would find it in the box. The gifts were very much appreciated as they were quite unique.

‘I can’t do this,’ Severus moaned again.

‘Stop being such a miserable git and smile,’ Harry scolded, ‘it’s your wedding, bloody well enjoy it.’
Lucius nodded his agreement. ‘No turning back now, Severus.’ Severus stood and paced, Lucius thought he did look genuinely worried. He approached him. ‘What’s wrong? Tell me.’

‘She didn’t send me a Groom’s Gift. Do you think she has just forgotten or she doesn’t know how significant it is?’

‘Stop fretting. She has got you a Groom’s gift, I know she has.’

‘Really … how?’ he looked suspiciously at Lucius.

Lucius tutted. ‘Oh for goodness sake, try and work it out for yourself.’

At that point, the pavilion flap opened and a small man in white robes entered.

‘Ah, there’s my man. Are you ready?’

‘Who are you?’ Lucius demanded.

‘I’m The Druid who will be officiating at this ceremony, Mr Malfoy.’

Lucius was momentarily stunned. ‘How …?’

‘… Do I know your name?’ Finn Dagda laughed. ‘I know all of you. Right, so, when you are ready, the time is approaching,’ with that he turned and left.

‘He reminds me of someone,’ Harry said.

‘Professor Dumbledore,’ Draco said. They all turned to him. ‘Well, he does,’ he insisted.

Lucius removed his wand from his cane. ‘Wizards, are you ready?’

‘Aye,’ came the reply.

‘Groom, are you ready?’

‘No, but let’s get it over with,’ Lucius’s stare could have frozen fire. Severus coughed apologetically, ‘Aye, I am ready,’ he gave the correct response.

‘Wands ready,’ Lucius commanded and all the wizards, including Severus, produced their Patronus. ‘Then let’s go to a Hand Fasting.’

With Lucius in the lead, the Groom’s Men and Groom left the pavilion. Harry and Draco stood each side of the Groom with Arthur behind. Their Patronus’s gambolled, ran or skipped around them and each Groom’s Man was producing lights and shooting stars from their wand in orchestrated unison. Unseen harps, lutes and tambours played a merry march. The guests clapped and cheered as the Groom made his slow way along the ceremonial pathway to the Sacred Altar.

Severus was aware only of his madly beating heart and the sun, moon and stars in the not quite dark sky. He thought he recognised many of the guests, but he wasn’t sure. His nerves were jangling and all he could think of was messing up his commitment. His Groom’s Men were becoming ever more adventurous in their display, each vying to produce the best effect, which brought oohhs and aahhs! from the guests. Then he was standing before The Druid. His mouth was dry and he felt like he was sweating. With a nod from Lucius, he and his Groom’s Men called their Patronus’s to them and then they stood behind the Groom … and waited.
The flap to the Bride’s pavilion opened and Finn walked in. He stopped in his tracks when he saw the Bride and her Handmaidens. ‘And don’t you make a sight for sore eyes, that’s my girl,’ he spoke very gently as he took Hermione’s hands in his. ‘Madam Malfoy … you have outdone yourself,’ and he turned and bowed to Narcissa.

‘Thank you, but have we met before?’ she asked.

Finn laughed as he let go of Hermione’s hands. ‘This is the first time we have met, but I know you all, yes indeed,’ and he beamed at them. ‘And hullo to you Luna. My, but your mammy would be proud of her beautiful daughter and married, so. And expecting soon, I’m sure.’

‘Hullo sir, and no, I’m not expecting, Luna blushed.

Finn shrugged. ‘Ah well, I have been known to be wrong. Now, High One, your man is ready so don’t keep him waiting too long; he has the look of a terrified stag about to bolt.’

‘How long do I wait?’

‘You will know,’ he answered as he left, leaving the flap open.

They all turned to Luna. ‘No, I’m really not pregnant, at least … not as far as I know. But then, The Druid does know a thing or two,’ and she smiled.

Now they stood, smoothing down dresses. The Handmaidens were each wearing the same style dress, but in varying colours; blue and gold, red and gold and purple and gold. They were all barefoot, the same as the Bride. The light outside changed from soft blue to pale silver.

‘It is time,’ the Bride announced.

‘Witches, are you ready?’ Narcissa asked.

‘Aye, Mother.’

‘Bride, are you ready?’

‘Aye, Mother,’ and she took a deep breath.

‘Wands ready.’

Each one raised their wand and produced their Patronus. Narcissa smoothed her gown one last time and smiled at them all. ‘Then Witches, let’s go to a Hand Fasting.’

She led them out of the pavilion and onto the ceremonial pathway. The Patronus’s ran, gambolled and flew in golden light, Narcissa was producing night blooms and as their bare feet trod upon them, their scent rose around them and wafted towards the guests. Above them, silver and gold stars shot out from their wands and fell as sparkling rain only to rise again and again. Narcissa led, and then came Ginny and Astoria, finally Luna walking in front of the Bride. The formation was such that it wasn’t until she passed that the Bride was visible to the guests. As the procession wove its way to the Standing Stones, the sun’s light mingled with that of the moon and the combined light hit the Bride’s dress just as she turned into the straight path that led to her Groom. An audible gasp came from the guests as they saw the Bride walking in sun and moonlight and the shimmering, living Oghams, zigils and runes reflected in the gossamer.
Hermione thought she recognised many of the faces, but she couldn’t be sure. Her heart was pounding at the prospect of seeing him again, of touching him and even … kissing him. Spontaneous applause broke out as her Handmaidens had stepped up their display several notches and were having great fun making the sky above them dance with the Aurora Borealis, complete with comets and shooting stars. She craned her head to see him, but he was hidden by his Groom’s Men. She did see Harry though and not only did he look very handsome, he also looked very pleased with himself. She also saw Neville standing at the front of a line of guests, but he only had eyes for Luna and he looked very proud.

Then they were there. They stopped and Narcissa came and stood on Hermione’s right hand side and took her hand. One at a time, the three Handmaidens moved and stood in front of the Bride, still hiding her from the Groom. Only then did Narcissa lead her to The Druid, she then took Hermione’s right hand and placed it into the right hand of the Groom.

Hermione then looked at Severus for the first time. His dark eyes smouldered as he gazed upon her and she could only smile shyly.

‘Merlin! But you are beautiful,’ he whispered.

‘Aye, that she is lad, that she is,’ The Druid said and he sniffed. ‘Now, we shall start.’ He stood up straight and seemed to grow taller and when he spoke, gone was the Irish lilt, in its place was a commanding voice, strong and powerful. ‘We are gathered here, on the High Day of the Year when sun and moon share the night sky. Here, we are held in the safety of these music covered mountains, gathered before these Sacred Stones in whom horizons sing, to witness the joining of two hearts and two souls … forever.’ He had the guests enraptured with his words. ‘I ask Bride and Groom … if they fully understand the commitment they are making to each other … or if they have had a change of mind.’

‘I have not changed my mind and I fully understand,’ Hermione replied.

Severus was silent for many, many heartbeats. She looked at him and he smiled at her. ‘I also fully understand nor have I changed my mind,’ he said at last. The guests let out a collective sigh of relief, as did Finn.

‘Good. Now you will make your commitment to each other. The Groom will go first,’ and he looked kindly at Severus.

Severus cleared his throat and to everyone’s surprise, he got down on bended knee. ‘Hermione, I won’t lie and say I spent days or weeks on my commitment … because I didn’t. Not because I didn’t know what to say, but because when I realised what I needed to say … it was easy. You recited part of a poem once, by a Muggle poet, but you knew only the first few lines. I found that poem and the rest of it says everything that my commitment needed.’ He paused and taking both her hands in his he spoke again. ‘My commitment to you, my darling Hermione, friend, lover, exceptional witch and quite exceptional woman is simply this.

I will love thee to the level of every day’s most quiet need, by sun and candlelight. I will love thee freely, as men strive for right. I will love thee purely, as they run from praise. I will love thee with a passion put to use in my old griefs and with childhood’s faith. I do love thee with a love I seem to loose with my lost saints. I will love thee with the breath, smiles and tears of all my life, and if the Goddess so chooses, I shall but love thee better after death. I also give pledge this night that should we be blessed with a daughter, she will pledge herself to the Goddess Eternal to be the Keeper of Memories and the Ancient Ways. I speak these words to thee from my heart’s centre and from the deep of my soul. May they be recorded in the memories of our Ancestors and of those yet to come.’ With that he kissed both her hands and stood up.
There was not dry eye at the ceremony, including the Bride who cheeks were wet with her tears.

Finn blew his nose on a spotted handkerchief and dabbed his eyes. ‘Right, I think another minute for the guests to compose themselves,’ he smiled. When all the guests were attentive again and all eyes dried, Finn turned to the Bride. ‘Well, my darlin’ girl, it is your turn, off you go.’

Hermione stood before Severus, her heart fluttering like a bird’s and took a deep breath, then all was calm and all she was aware of was his face, his eyes and his mouth.

‘My darling man, love of my life, my soul mate, lover, friend, I am in awe of your strength and power as a wizard; your love, not just for me, but others as well, overwhelms me. When I stopped agonising about my commitment to you, the words just fell into place. So, my commitment to you is this.

Severus, I love thee as certain dark things are to be loved, between the shadow and the soul. I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where. I will love you simply, without problems or pride. I will love in this way because I do not know any other way of loving you but this. There is no you or I; so intimate will be our love that your hand upon my breast is my hand; so intimate that when I fall asleep, your eyes close. I crave you and will always crave you. I crave your mouth,’ and she touched his lips, ‘your voice, your hair,’ and she ran her hand through his dark, glossy hair. ‘I hunger for your sleek laugh and I want to eat the sunbeams flowing from your gorgeous body. But mostly … I love your feet,’ she stooped and touched his boots. ‘I love your feet because they walked upon the earth and upon the wind and across the waters until they found me. Together we will feel the love of people whom we love and it will be a fire that will feed our lives. I speak these words to thee from my heart’s centre and from the deep of my soul. May they be recorded in the memories of our Ancestors and of those yet to come.’ She stood before him and wiped the tear from his cheek.

‘I love you so much,’ he whispered.

Finn was dabbing his eyes again and there was the blowing of noses and sniffs from the guests.

‘Now for the final part of this ceremony … join your hands in the Hand Fasting way,’ they crossed their hands and joined with each other. From the air, Finn produced four lengths of bindings; one gold, one silver, one red and one green. He bound their joined hands and placed his own hands over theirs. ‘Those who are now Hand Fasted, let nothing neither break nor sunder them … not even Death,’ his voice echoed across and around the mountains. The bindings disappeared into their hands. ‘You may now kiss your wife,’ he said to Severus, who leaned in and brushed her lips with his own. ‘Well, I’ve seen better,’ he said to the guests who were clapping and cheering. ‘Now, let’s eat!’ another great cheer went up.

He nodded to the Groom’s Men and Handmaidens; they called in their Patronus’s, leaving only Hermione’s otter (regular size) and Severus’s doe. Then the Groom’s Men surrounded the Bride and the Handmaidens surrounded the Groom and escorted them to another pavilion. Once inside, Severus was placed in a chair on one side and Hermione in one on the opposite side. They called their Patronus to them and back into their wands. Then Groom’s Men and Handmaidens were hugging and kissing each other on a job well done.

Hermione looked across at Severus and he nodded. Together they rose and made for the exit. They were just about to make good their escape when Neville blocked the doorway.

‘Going somewhere?’ he asked and with his wand, pointed Severus one way and Hermione, the other.

‘I want to sit over there, with my husband, in his lap,’ she demanded, which made everyone laugh as
if she had said something very silly.

‘Plenty of time for that,’ Lucius said, ‘now, while we wait, Unicorn Champagne anyone?’

‘Yes please,’ she called out and was ignored. Severus spread his hands and shrugged. She smiled and mimed to him to open his hand, as if holding a goblet. He nodded his understanding and she Apperio-ed! a goblet of Champagne into his hand and one for herself. He saluted her. The bubbles in the Champagne were tiny Unicorns that popped in your mouth. Everyone smiled when they drank Unicorn Champagne, but that could be simply because it was terribly expensive.

Severus glowered around the pavilion, then stood up and started to walk towards her. She stood and walked to him. They were perhaps three feet away from each other when Arthur stepped between them.

‘Refill?’ he offered.

‘No,’ Severus growled, putting as much of his displeasure into the word as he could; which was rather a lot. ‘Arthur, get out of my way …please.’

Arthur smiled benignly. ‘Sorry Severus, no can do. Now, go and sit back down, it won’t be long,’ and he pointed to the chair.

Severus sighed and half turned, then quickly side-stepped Arthur, grabbed his wife and sat in her chair with her on his lap.

‘I win, I think’ he said smugly and kissed her.

‘Alright, one kiss, now back over your side.’ Severus grinned as he sauntered back to his chair and Lucius handed Hermione a refill.

The flap opened by itself. ‘Ah, good. We can go to the feast,’ Lucius said. ‘Mr Longbottom, you have two port keys I believe?’ Neville pulled two Champagne corks from his pocket and gave one to Narcissa. ‘Groom’s Men with me and Neville, Handmaidens with Narcissa.’

‘I want to go with Severus,’ Hermione protested.

‘Fat chance,’ Harry laughed before the men disappeared.

‘Witches, Bride … hold on.’

Hermione placed her hand on top of Ginny’s, but released it at the last moment and found herself alone in the pavilion. Two seconds later, Severus reappeared. They fell into each other’s arms and kissed with a clash of teeth and tongues.

‘We have about thirty seconds,’ he breathed against her lips.

‘Don’t talk then,’ she said as hands wandered over bodies and things were getting heated.

‘Ahem,’ Lucius cleared his throat. ‘You have guests waiting, shall we go?’ They ignored him. ‘Now,’ he demanded. They laughed but grabbed the port-key and found themselves outside the Great Hall at Hogwarts. He walked ahead of them.

‘Please be upstanding for the Bride and Groom,’ then he stepped aside as the Bride and Groom joined hands and jumped the broomstick into the Hall, ‘Professor Severus and Madam Hermione Snape’. With the final part of the ceremony complete, Lucius then led them to their table to cheers
and applause.

The Great Hall was resplendent with tables and chairs bedecked in fine white linen with green and red bows tied to each chair. On one wall, the banners of Slytherin were hung, on the other, the banners of Gryffindor. And when Hermione looked around, she saw so many friends and colleagues smiling and clapping, she was overcome and she held onto Severus's arm and allowed the tears to flow.

The feast was one of the best Hogwarts had seen. The food was sumptuous and Champagne, wine and beer flowed freely. When they took to the floor for their first dance as a married couple, there were more than a few sighs and ahh’s of appreciation. Because she was still barefoot, she rested her feet on his boots, put her arms around his neck, her head on his shoulder and allowed him to slow waltz her around the floor. When the music stopped, Narcissa came and took her to change her dress. She had chosen the dress Severus had bought her for Draco and Astoria’s wedding to change into and with her new pumps (the heels were for much later, when they were alone) she ran back into the hall. The rhythmic beat of drums and guitars filled the hall and it seemed every young person was jumping up and down to the music.

She saw Severus talking to Minerva and ran to him, he caught her just in time as she jumped into his arms. ‘Floo Fighters! You got Floo Fighters,’ and she kissed him.

‘I have no idea who they are, it was Harry’s idea,’ he said, placing her firmly on the floor before his body could respond in an inappropriate way, ‘so go and dance.’

She ran into the melee and was engulfed by her friends from Hogwarts. She danced with all of them, boy or girl, it was just like old times. When she finally left to get a cold drink, she saw Kingsley and Adam standing with Arthur. She went over to them. Adam saw her approach and blushed as she hugged and kissed him, then she did the same to Kingsley.

‘I’m stealing him away,’ she said to Kingsley and she took Adam into the middle of the jumping, gyrating mass of young people and danced with him. And because the Bride was seen to dance with the young man, very soon he was dancing with other female guests. Hermione made her way to Severus, who was now sitting at a table with Hagrid, Horace and Lucius. She flung her arms around Hagrid as he congratulated her; excepted a brief kiss on the cheek from Horace, who was thrilled that Deidre Danger was now married to the best potioneer in the country. She sat on Severus’s lap, snaked her arms around his neck and people watched. He stroked her arm.

The music changed. Now there were fiddles, an accordion, penny whistles and a bodhran playing a lively reel.

Finn came up to her. ‘Would the Bride care to dance with an old fella?’ he smiled.

‘The Bride would be delighted,’ she replied, giving her Groom a kiss before going off with Finn. They joined a set with Molly, Arthur, Harry and Ginny and soon the room was a swirling mass of colours and whoops of joy. As the dance finished, she was grabbed by Severus and taken on a two-step. He danced her to the door of the Great Hall, then led her out into the corridor.

‘Where are we going?’ she asked.

‘Room of requirement. If I don’t get you alone soon, I will just have to find a quiet corner in which to have passionate sex with you. And as this is Hogwarts, it would cause a scandal.’ They rounded a corner, ‘Asylum Indigere!’ he commanded and the door to his room of requirement appeared. He pushed the door closed then pushed her against it and ravished her mouth. She wrapped a leg around his, pulling him closer. His mouth fell to her neck and his hand to her breast.
‘Ahem,’ the cough stopped them in their tracks. Slowly, they broke apart and Severus turned his head. Finn Dagda was standing by the portrait of Albus. ‘I would like to say that you are here because you got my message,’ Albus said without the least bit of embarrassment, ‘but it looks like you’re here for an entirely different reason.’

They looked at each other and she leaned into his shoulder, shaking with laughter.

Severus, who now had control of his body, turned fully to face the two men. ‘You are right of course, Albus,’ he said, ‘… we did not get any message.’ He pulled Hermione with him as he approached the portrait. Finn wagged his finger at her.

‘Anyway, I’m glad you are here, you have many years ahead of you for … passionate … stuff,’ Albus cleared his throat. ‘Finn and I were just talking about you, and I wanted to give my own personal felicitations to you both.’

‘And I have a gift for you both,’ Finn added.

‘How do you two know each other?’ Hermione asked.

‘We have only just now met,’ Finn replied, ‘but I feel that I have known Albus for years. Yes, indeed. I possibly have.’ He moved to Severus, ‘show me the serpent.’ Severus dutifully pulled his sleeves up. The eyes of the Mark were wide open and the forked tongue quivered as the body roiled slightly on his forearm. ‘You have great strength my lad, but it is getting worse, no?’ Severus nodded. ‘Well then, I gift you this,’ and he placed his hand over serpent, ‘it will sleep while you are on your honeymoon and not disturb you,’ he removed his hand and the serpent slept; there was no pain. ‘But, when it re-awakens, there will be pain. It will also speak to you in its own tongue. Do not listen! The information it gives will be false; depend only on your own instincts and allow your wife to help with the pain. She will know what to do.’

He then turned to Hermione. ‘My darlin’ girl, my gift to you is this. When the time comes, you will be able to bring your man with you. Not many have been granted this great boon, but for you on this, your wedded day, it is fitting,’ and he laid his hands on her head and whispered Ancient words, then he kissed her brow. ‘Right, so, say goodbye to Albus for now; there is a night of dancing ahead.’ He waited while they said their goodbyes, Hermione kissed Albus on the cheek.

‘Severus?’ Albus called him back. ‘I just want to say … I always valued your friendship … and I am extraordinarily happy that you have found such love … and with our Hermione … happy honeymooning.’ Severus smiled, gave a small bow and followed Hermione and Finn Dagda back to the Great Hall.

The rest of the night was filled with dancing of all kinds, from high-kicking hornpipes to slow Galway Slides. The Bride and Groom danced with every one of their guests and at some point during the wee hours, some of the sixth and seventh years turned up to join in the party. None of the staff had the heart send them back to bed. Toasts were given and photographs taken, but fortunately, speeches were forgotten. As the pink dawn rose over the lake and castle, so weary but happy guests took their leave. Only when the last had left were the Bride and Groom given their luggage and told to off on honeymoon. Minerva blushed crimson as they lavished thanks, kisses and hugs on her before leaving.

**********
The house overlooked a lake. The water sparkled and twinkled in the morning light. Beyond the lake, majestic mountains rose to dizzying heights. From the small balcony she could see other houses, but not many.

‘Lake Como,’ he said. ‘This house belongs to an old friend of the Prince family. It is a wizard's house, so is hidden from the Muggle world and it is ours for two weeks.’

‘I think it is beautiful,’ she said wandering back into the large bedroom. Their luggage was on the floor by the bed. ‘Let’s explore first,’ so together they went around the house and out into the garden. The house had a large living room, huge kitchen and two other bedrooms. From the garden, a path went down to the lake side. Although they moved in easy unison, there was an air of unease, as if neither really knew what to do next. The wedding had been wonderful, yet now, being on honeymoon, seemed in some way an anti-climax. Back in the bedroom, she took her overnight bag into the bathroom and closed the door. She took off her party dress to stand in her bridal underwear, now she needed to complete her Groom’s gift.

Unpacking the stockings and six inch heels, she cleaned her teeth, dabbed the precious Oudh on her pulse points and the top of her thighs. Slowly she slid the stockings on, securing each with the suspenders, stepped into the six inch heels; finally she took a full length black negligee from her bag and slipped it on, it fell in cool sexy drifts around her body. Standing before the mirror she shook her head, allowing the last of the keeping charm to fall away and her hair to cascade around her shoulders. She applied a deep red lipstick then stood and looked at herself. She liked what she saw. She wove a contraceptive charm, not knowing if Finn’s potion had somehow stopped working once she was married and then she walked, very carefully, back into the bedroom.

He was standing, leaning on the balcony rail, watching the lake. He had removed his Groom’s coat and now stood in his black shirt and trousers; his dark hair gleamed in the sunlight and she felt the low throb of desire awaken in her woman’s core. She stopped at the French doors and looked at him for a while.

‘I would like to give you your Groom’s gift,’ her voice trembled slightly.

He turned and looked at her. She felt his gaze as it burned into her.

‘Very … acceptable,’ he smiled as he approached her.

‘No. Not these … playthings,’ she blushed, ‘something … just for … you.’

He frowned, not understanding, and then tilted his head. ‘You cannot mean …?’ he ran a finger down her cheek and she leaned into it.

‘Yes …’ she whispered.

‘I … do you understand what you are offering to me?’

‘Yes … something priceless,’ she smiled shyly.

‘Hermione … I … cannot accept … I …’

‘Are you refusing my Groom’s gift?’ she felt her eyes flash and a small kernel of doubt crept into her mind.

He groaned. ‘No … but I don’t think you fully understand what you are offering to me … what it entails.’
She felt rejected, she should have given him a box for his wand and been done with it. He could be so thick sometimes. ‘I understand exactly what I am offering to you … but if you are not interested … fine …’ she turned on her six inch heel and started to walk back to the bathroom. She was stopped in mid step. He stood in front of her.

‘Do you trust me?’ he asked.

‘Yes. Do you trust me?’

‘Yes. You do realise we could both end up dead?’

She grinned. ‘Yes … but what a way to go.’

‘Privatio!’ and she was released. ‘Hermione …’

‘Mr Snape, I am your wife. Take me.’

‘I … will not be gentle,’ his breathing was already becoming shallow.

‘Good, then nor will I …’ she gasped as a lust filled thought entered her mind and trickled slowly down her whole body. ‘What about the furniture?’

‘We’ll replace it … now shut up and kiss me.’

She caught his head in her hands and brought his mouth to hers; with a clash of hungry tongues, she opened herself to him as he opened himself to her.

The battle commenced.

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Chapter End Notes

Hermione’s commitment is extracts from ‘100 Love Sonnets’ by the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. His poetry is remarkable and fitted what Hermione needed to say perfectly.

Severus’s commitment is, of course, the continuation of ‘How Do I Love Thee?’ from
“Poems from the Portuguese”, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, with a few twiddles of my own.

Apologies to the Spirits of both these great poets, no harm is intended.

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The Boys Are Back In Town

Chapter Summary

‘Oi! You lot … out now! I’ll not have any Groom’s Night shenanigans in here, this is a respectable establishment.’

‘Never fear, innkeep,’ Horace replied. ‘We are off to pastures new,’ and with that they trooped out of The Leaky Cauldron and turned towards London town.

‘Hang on’ Harry said as he stopped in his tracks, ‘I thought … Molly thinks we’re going to Knockturn Alley.’

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Chapter 26

The Boys Are Back In Town

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~Arthur & Molly Weasley~

Cordially Invite You To

Attend The Wedding Of Their

Daughter

Miss Ginevra Molly Weasley

To

Mr Harry James Potter

~~~~~~~~~~

Place: ~ The Burrow – Otterley St James

Date: ~ 31st October 2005

Time: ~ 6pm – 6am

Dress: ~ Samhain Formal

R.S.V.P
She wasn’t sure if she had dreamt the low moan or not, but when she forced her eyes open and instinctively reached for him, his side of the bed was cold. She closed her eyes again, she was tired and all she wanted was sleep … but there it was again. She blinked herself awake and sat up. Over on the cushions she could see his outline in the moonlight that entered the tent from the open flap. Groggily, she left the warm bed and went to him. He was lying in the foetal position, his arms wrapped tightly around his waist. She put her hand out, even as she yawned.

‘You took your bloody time,’ he snapped, ‘I’ve been lying here groaning for ages.’

Tired as she was, she smiled. ‘You could have just nudged me awake and saved yourself some pain. Where does it hurt?’

‘Remind me to do that next time; all over.’

With a wave of her hand she lit the hurricane lamps and lifted the tee-shirt he had taken to wearing at night. Nagini’s souvenirs where red and angry nowadays and were apt to leak blood and what they discovered was venom. Tonight, they were bad. The scars were livid and oozing. She glanced quickly at his face; it had a faint sheen of sweat on it, testament to the amount of pain he was in, despite all of his powerful charms and protections. Nights were becoming unbearable for him. During the day, controlling the pain and the voice that was in his mind was fairly easy, but once sleep took him, his defences dropped. Then the dream would come; the reliving of that dreadful day when Voldemort set his pet upon him.

She moved her hands over his body, setting her own pain enchantments so he could withdraw his own and rest.

He flinched as she touched a particularly tender scar. ‘Ow! That hurt.’

‘Stop being such a wimp – big strong wizard like you …’ she chided gently, trying to lift the tension that surrounded them.

‘I knew I should never have married you … all you do … is bloody nag,’ he sounded peevish, but already as his pain was diminished, his face relaxed. She yawned. ‘Keeping you up am I? Don’t mind me, I’ll just lay here and suffer.’

‘Oh shut up and let me work, I will be quicker without the distraction of your whining,’ he looked at her, his eyes pleading and full of soft anguish. Gradually, she bought him down and when his body
uncurled and relaxed, she stopped.

They had been back from their honeymoon for five or six weeks when he had mentioned an increase in the pain. Three months later and she doubted he would be able to attend Harry and Ginny’s wedding. The day after they arrived back from honeymoon, Ginny came to the Ministry to find her. She had been walking across the Atrium when Ginny came running up, flung her arms around her and jumped up and down with excitement. It seemed that after her wedding, Harry had proposed and Ginny had accepted. The date chosen was Samhain and of course she wanted Hermione to be a Handmaiden. They had gone to The Leaky Cauldron immediately for a celebratory drink. She had never seen Ginny so happy or carefree as she was in the ensuing weeks.

He reached a hand up and touched her gently. ‘I am so sorry,’ he whispered, ‘please don’t leave me.’

She lay down next to him, sweeping damp hair out of his eyes. ‘Now why would I leave you?’ she kissed his dry lips.

‘I am … becoming him again … I can’t help it. Forgive me.’

‘Severus, I am your wife and I am here, at your side, every step of the way, to help you and protect you. I am not going anywhere … and anyway, I love Professor Snape. So there.’ She kissed his eyes and then his lips again.

‘I am in control again, thank you,’ he sighed.

‘Nights are getting worse. Just say the word and I will take it all away.’

‘I know. But Finn is convinced that that somehow … the Mark is going to help.’

‘Finn is not infallible and he doesn’t have to watch you suffer. Cup of tea?’

He nodded and she left him to go and make them tea. She knew it appalled him that his old persona was surfacing again, but she also understood why it was. Just like he had taken to wearing his black buttoned waistcoat and buttoned coat. I helped him to remain in control; it held him in. She didn’t mind, in a way she enjoyed the acerbic comments and barbed jibes, as a grown woman and his equal, she found she could match him jibe for jibe if she so wished. But mostly she brushed them off with a kiss or a smile. They had also discussed the use of potions to dull the pain. But he had explained to her that most potions would work by not only dulling pain, but dulling other parts of the brain as well. So they accepted that they would deal with each episode as it occurred.

He was back in bed when she returned with tea for two. ‘I want to bear it for as long as I can,’ he said, ‘I would hate to think that I gave up when it could hold the key to what is going on the world. But I promise, if it does get to … much, I will ask.’

She finished her tea and laid her head on his shoulder, his arm came around her. She pressed her hand against the scars and whispered more healing words in an arcane language. The scars became visibly calmer and his breathing more even. He squeezed her in thanks.

‘Just a little extra,’ she said.

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‘Where have you been all night?’ Narcissa demanded of Lucius as he stepped out of the floo, she had her arms folded and was tapping her foot, ominously.
'As I have told you before, you don’t have to concern yourself.'

‘Oh, but I do Lucius. I think this concerns me greatly. For weeks now you have been sneaking off, day and night. Where do you go?’

‘To the Ministry, of course,’ he headed upstairs. She followed.

‘Sometimes … sometimes you go to the Ministry, but not all the time,’ she followed him into their bedroom and then the bathroom. He filled the bath and went back into the bedroom to undress. She followed him.

‘Can’t a man have any secrets,’ he snapped, undressing and dropping his clothes to the floor.

‘Not when our family could be placed in jeopardy … again,’ she replied. ‘I said right from the start that I didn’t trust those two from the Ministry and it looks like I was correct.’

Naked, he padded into the bathroom and climbed into the hot water. Narcissa stood in the doorway.

‘And why is your Dark Mark awake again?’

‘I have no idea.’

She bit her lip. ‘Is Draco’s awake as well?’

‘Again, my love, I have no idea … but … Severus’s is also awake.’

She turned back to the bedroom. ‘Rupert! Stop that at once,’ she shooed the hound out of the room. ‘And why is Rupert taking such an interest in your clothes all of a sudden?’ She went back into the bathroom. ‘And why do you always have a bath when you return from the Ministry?’

Lucius couldn’t meet her gaze.

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‘Is all in readiness?’ he demanded.

‘Everything. Everyone has been briefed and they know their role; there will be no mistakes.’

‘Good, very good. We strike after the ceremony.’

‘Are we wise to trust Malfoy? He seems very … eager.’

‘Lucius Malfoy is a greedy fool, he will do as he is told just as long as he regains the power and influence he lost after the War; his greed blinds him to anything else. Now, what of the traitor, Snape?’

‘He suffers,’ the voice held a note of glee. ‘Each day he seems to get worse; it is most gratifying.’

‘And his Mudblood bitch?’

‘Is looking more harassed each day; it is rumoured that his old personality is surfacing again,’ the laugh was evil, ‘he is rude, bitter and is insulting to everyone; she will not find living with that
peaceful … or very nice.’

‘Excellent. They deserve each other. Remind the others, the traitor and his bitch are mine, understand? They are not to be harmed … except by me.’

‘I understand completely, sir. I shall inform the others.’

‘Good. Now, let’s go over the plan again; I don’t want any mistakes.’

**********

They stood in his office staring at the map once again. The map was getting crowded and incomprehensible. Incidents were increasing week upon week, nothing nasty or major, simply stupid acts of petty crime against both Muggles and wizarding folk. The only good news was that the kidnapping of children had seemed to have stopped. The wizarding world was becoming nervous as Minister Shacklebolt spent more and more time reassuring the Muggle Prime Minister that the Ministry of Magic had everything under control. It did, up to a point, but the Auror Office and the Department of Magical Law Enforcement were fast becoming ineffectual. It was only Severus’s Unspeakables who were having any kind of success against the crime spree.

The more they stared, the less they saw. Any number of combinations had been used; incidents, again; date, again; moon phases, this had produced a possible pattern, especially if you combined it with werewolf activity, but again, there was nothing solid.

Harry had cornered her one day and asked about Severus; he was concerned that he was changing. She had told him the truth and wordlessly, he had hugged her. Narcissa had also told her that Lucius’s Dark Mark was awake but for the moment, Draco’s was still dormant. Narcissa was clearly worried. So Hermione had taken to observing Lucius when she saw him. He was spending more time in the Ministry and she had seen him the company of Secretary Sproggins, Under Secretary Malkin, Belladonna Green and sometimes, with Kingsley. There was also a rumour circulating that Lucius had been invited to join the Wizengamot. Narcissa had also told her Lucius had taken to disappearing recently and when she asked him about it, he got snappy and defensive. Hermione had noticed Lucius was spending a lot of time alone with Severus in his office. When she had asked him what was going on, he had pursed his lips in true Professor Snape style, glared at her and said … ‘nothing’. She sincerely hoped that the two former Death Eaters where not becoming embroiled in something they would later regret.

The three sighed, almost in unison.

‘It’s no use Severus,’ Harry said, ‘the more incidents, the less any pattern emerges. I just don’t understand it, there should be a pattern.’

‘Indeed, Mr Potter, you are correct; yet patently … there is no pattern.’ Severus growled, ‘I refuse to believe that there is … no correlation between … incident … and location.’ He folded his arms as he stared. ‘Ach! ,’ he snapped, ‘useless … completely useless,’ he waved his hand and the map disappeared.

‘What if … we have too much information now?’ Hermione ventured. The men stared at her. ‘What if we started to pare back … y’know, try things in reverse … remove incident or location and see if by having less information, a pattern emerges?’
‘That … was the problem in the beginning,’ Severus drawled, ‘not enough information. Now you suggest we have too much information … perfect,’ he went and threw himself into his chair.

‘Oh well, it was just a suggestion,’ she shrugged, Harry looked at her and she shook her head.

‘Stop that,’ Severus hissed, ‘I am not some pathetic imbecile who is rapidly losing more … of his mind.’

‘I know,’ Harry said calmly, ‘you’re a bad tempered bastard; so no change there then. Are you coming on my Groom’s Night?’

‘Of course … wouldn’t miss it for the world,’ his voice dripped with sarcasm.

‘Right, see you at The Leaky Cauldron tomorrow night then,’ he gave Hermione a hug and left.

‘Do you need help?’ she asked quietly. He nodded as his face creased in pain. She went to him, sat on the edge of his desk and took his hands. She let her eyes un-focus as she sought his scars. The Dark Mark saw her and roiled. She calmed it and made it close its eyes once again. His scars she soothed with healing words. Soon she would have to use her real power; something Finn had asked her to do only when it became unbearable for her man. Well, it was becoming unbearable, for her as well as her man, she could see that. When she determined that his pain was gone and he had control again, she opened her eyes and sat on his lap. She kissed him, with passion. ‘I am here for you, now and always,’ she said when they parted.

‘I don’t deserve you,’ he whispered.

‘You have always deserved me, Professor Snape, never doubt it … or me.’ She kissed him once again then left his office.

**********

The large serving dish, a Malfoy family heirloom, crashed against the kitchen wall and smashed into smithereens; it missed his head by a calculated whisker.

‘Narcissa! My love … what …?’

‘Don’t you my love me … you two timing economical with the truth idiot,’ and a rather heavy iron casserole headed towards him.

He swatted it away and it floated gently back to its hook above the stove. ‘How does my sitting on the Wizengamot make me an idiot? And two timing … where does that come from?’

‘You are not on the Wizengamot yet … I checked. Do you think I’m stupid?’ Lucius sensibly didn’t respond to that question. ‘And as you are not on the Wizengamot and you go off most nights … who is she … who the bloody hell is she? I love you Lucius, but it never ceases to amaze me how deep your idiocy runs,’ she was calmer now. ‘Just tell me the truth.’

He approached her, guard up and took her in his arms. ‘I can’t,’ he said, ‘not just yet … but soon. Soon all our troubles will be behind us and the reputation of the Malfoys will be restored,’ he kissed her cheek.
She held him tight. ‘Are you in over your head, Lucius?’ she whispered into his ear.

He stroked her hair. ‘About chin level, my darling, about chin level.’

**********

‘What time do you think you’ll be back?’ Severus asked as they finished getting ready to go out.

‘Not sure … it looks like every female member of every Quidditch team in the country will be there, so it could get very boisterous; if it does, I’ll just leave.’

‘You didn’t have a Bride’s Night, did you?’

She smiled at him and gently poked his chest. ‘No, I didn’t want one. Anyway, your Groom’s Night more than made up for my lack of one. Do you think you will ever be allowed back into The Three Broomsticks?’ She put her arms around him and hugged him.

‘Not in this lifetime, or beyond,’ he hugged her back.

She had spent a long time reducing his pain this evening, in fact, he was completely pain free now and the serpent slept. There was no voice whispering in his mind either. He guessed she had drawn on her ancient power to give him a pain free night of enjoyment. But she looked tired. Her eyes were heavy and had faint dark circles underneath them. She was working hard on the Wizengamot as well as helping him and Harry and of course, she was worried sick about him. She was also sleeping very lightly now; he only had to whimper or moan and she was there with a cool hand, soothing words and her magic. Sex was off the agenda as well. Recently, he had needed all his self-control simply to get through each day and with her help, through the nights.

They had attempted to make love a week ago. But as soon as he dropped some of his protections and barriers, the voice was hissing in his mind; nasty, filthy things that sickened him. He had stopped and pulled away from her; she had growled in her unsatisfied state and he had watched as she brought herself to orgasm with her very nimble fingers. If he had not been concentrating so much on keeping the voice and pain at bay, he would have appreciated it as the single most erotic thing he had seen her do. And after, when she had come down from her climax, she had turned to him and pulled him to her; she had then apologised. Merlin! he was the one who had spoilt everything for her yet she was the one apologising. He had kissed her and told her of his love for her. Strangely, that had shut the voice in his mind up.

He watched as she left the house by the floo system in her pretty dress and heels; her beaded bag contained all the essentials for any girl’s night out, lipstick, lip gloss, hand lotion, breath freshener, toothbrush, tampons, perfume, money and lastly, anti-vomiting potion. He knew this because he had seen her pack the bag. When he had asked why she needed all of those things, she had looked at him as though he was mad and said ‘just in case …’ as if it was perfectly clear why she carried it all in her bag. Her wand was in a secret pocket in her dress, although technically, she didn’t need it.

And it was nearly time for him to meet up with the Groom’s Men. Molly had given in and said they could go to Knockturn Alley for a few beers, just as long as the Groom was returned in a fit state to attend his wedding. The Groom’s Men had kept perfectly straight faces and agreed to keep Harry mostly sober. They also had their fingers crossed.

_The Leaky Cauldron_ was busy, but he saw the Groom’s Men in the back of the main room. They
had already started drinking.

‘Ah, Severus,’ Arthur greeted him, ‘we’re ahead by two tankards,’ and he thumped Severus on the back. He accepted the tankard of ale, not his favourite drink by any means, saluted the Groom and took a long swig. Actually, he didn’t. He had agreed with Hermione that alcohol could lessen the effects of the healing, so what he did was make it look like he took a long swig. What he really did was ‘disappear’ the drink. He smiled at the gathered company. Harry of course, Arthur, Ron, George and Percy for the Weasley’s, the other brothers and their families would be at the wedding; Neville, Seamus and Dean as school friends; Kingsley and Adam, who saluted him and smiled. Since their wedding, Kingsley was more inclined to include Adam in gatherings. A shout of greeting went up as Lucius and Draco appeared, closely followed by Hagrid, Filius and Horace, representing Hogwarts.

Tankards and goblets were charged. ‘To Harry on his last days as a single wizard,’ Arthur toasted. A cheer went up and they all drank. ‘Right, let the night begin,’ another cheer went up.

‘Oi! You lot … out now! I’ll not have any Groom’s Night shenanigans in here, this is a respectable establishment.’

‘Never fear, innkeep,’ Horace replied. ‘We are off to pastures new,’ and with that they trooped out of The Leaky Cauldron and turned towards London town.

‘Hang on’ Harry said as he stopped in his tracks, ‘I thought … Molly thinks we’re going to Knockturn Alley.’

‘Harry my boy,’ Arthur put a fatherly arm around Harry’s shoulder, ‘Knockturn Alley is too tame for a night roistering. Tonight we are going to sample the delights of several hostelries in Old London Town. Got the money, George?’

‘Went to Gringotts this morning dad, all accounted for,’ George said as he patted his jacket pocket.

‘But … we are not allowed into Muggle town for this sort of thing,’ Harry protested.

Arthur slapped his forehead. ‘Of course how stupid of me … now, who should we ask for permission to go and get drunk in Muggle pubs?’ Arthur looked thoughtful then snapped his finger, ‘Ah, got it.’ He turned to Kingsley, ‘Minister Shacklebolt, do we have the Ministry’s permission to take Harry into London for his Groom’s Night?’

‘Yes, of course Arthur, now … can we get on with it please?’

Without further ado, the group set off into the West End of London. It was four days before Halloween, so they didn’t get many odd stares; anyway, it was doubtful that anyone would have said anything to them, not with Hagrid in tow. They followed Arthur into Covent Garden and their first port of call, The Ship Inn (finest beers on tap, large sports screen). They entered and as it was still fairly early, they found several tables in the back; Arthur and George got the drinks in. Hagrid, who knows his ales and beers, deemed the Best Bitter drinkable but not a patch on Old Hairy Spider. After three pints in the Ship, with Severus keeping up his ruse of not drinking, they moved down the street to The King’s Head (real ales, a CAMRA pub, no big screen), where the cask matured Hobgoblin Pale Ale proved very popular; Hagrid’s verdict was that it was a refreshing and tasty brew; better by far than Stinkhorn’s Ale. It was also very strong. The effect was the desired one of making the party giddy enough to start telling jokes that they all roared at and ribald stories for the ears of men only. Copious bags of crisps were also consumed, BBQ Beef being a particular favourite.
They managed to pry Hagrid away from a cask of ale he had fallen in love with and moved on to *Mojo City*, a downstairs techno club where shots were £4 each. The noise was incredible, but the group didn’t mind and soon they were all dancing to the groove of Mista DJ Chrome. They danced as a group, although Lucius, Draco and Arthur had somehow pulled female partners. They consumed vast quantities of shots, vodka, gin, Malibu and rum. However, it was the flaming Sambuca that received the thumbs up from all the party. The fact that they were drinking it while it still flamed, impressed the ladies no end. Just like Firewhiskey they agreed, only stronger. By now, the night was growing old and food was on the agenda. They found their way back to Jubilee Market and a café with outside seating; they commandeered several tables with a good view of the street entertainment, which even at ten o’clock at night was still in full swing.

They enjoyed their food; fresh quarter pound burgers with fries and onion rings. Hagrid ordered five. Bottles of wine were ordered and consumed. Severus allowed himself a glass, he had been very good all night and not one drop of alcohol had passed his lips, although everyone thought that he was keeping up with them. One glass of red wine wouldn’t hurt. He sipped it with relish. During dessert, cheesecake, profiteroles, chocolate fudge brownie with hot fudge sauce (Hagrid had one of each), their attention turned to the performer who was now immediately in front of them. He had attracted a large crowd and the oohs! and aahh’s! he received as he rode a very tall unicycle while juggling five flaming torches, was loud and appreciative. The applause was thunderous and when he passed his hat around, it was soon jangling with coins.

’I could do that,’ Harry said. The party agreed that Harry certainly could, and he would no doubt, be much better. Then they laughed and joked about their own particular prowess and how they would impress a crowd easily with their tricks and magic. No one noticed when Harry got up and made his way into the square. He pushed his glasses up on his nose and produced six flaming torches, which for the moment, hung suspended in mid-air. He smiled as he took his wand from his pocket and made them fly around his head; then he would catch one and fling it high into the night sky where it tumbled and turned until it re-joined the others. The flames where all different colours, so it wasn’t long before the crowd began to gather again. He was applauded; this encouraged him to even greater efforts. The torches became little dragons flying around his head breathing red, blue and green fire as they jumped through magical hoops.

It was at this point that Arthur, returning to the table after a visit to the Gents, noticed that Harry was not with the party. But he didn’t worry about Harry, thinking he must have gone to the Gents via another route. He sat down and joined in the conversation, it had moved on to the various benefits of Muggle alcohol over wizarding alcohol, the general consensus was that Muggle alcohol was stronger (and therefore better) and came in more varieties (which was even better). It was Hagrid’s outburst that made them stop.

’By Merlin’s white beard! Is that ‘Arry?’ he cried, pointing to the square. The party turned to see what Hagrid was pointing at. What they saw was Harry now juggling an assortment of magical beasts, which would have been stupendous on its own; Harry however, was at least three foot off the ground.

’Oh bloody hell,’ Arthur swore, ’Lucius, pay the bill,’ and he handed Lucius a wad of notes, ‘we need to get him out of there.’ Lucius called for the bill and counted out twenty, twenty pound notes. The bill for two hundred and forty pounds, sixty seven pence meant the waitress earned the largest tip of her life from the party of very nice, but loud, circus gentlemen in her section.

Meanwhile, the others had pushed to the front of the crowd. Harry laughed as the magical creatures disappeared with a flash-bang of fireworks. His audience went wild. Lucius and Arthur were about to try and take Harry by the arms and march him out of the square when Filius, beaming at Harry, waved his wand in a large arc and twenty four doves appeared, singing in close harmony. Now it is a
universally known fact that London audiences are the hardest in the world to please, they being somewhat jaded through working too hard and watching East Enders. But, the two wizards were doing a bang up job of pleasing this audience. Harry nudged Filius and set a cat amongst the doves, who still singing, scattered with more loud bangs and flashes. Harry and Filius, who were still hovering above the ground, turned to the wildly applauding crowd and bowed. Kingsley and Adam were clapping and cheering along with everyone else.

‘Severus,’ Arthur turned to him, ‘do something,’ he said desperately.

Severus shrugged, produced a hat and took it around. It was almost full by the time he had finished. Arthur was speechless; it looked like more than he had given Lucius for the bill in the café. Draco and the younger men grabbed Harry and Hagrid picked up Filius and they retreated from the square, the crowd was still applauding and calling for an encore. They found the nearest pub and fell inside. The Moose Head, (Canadian beers on tap) was brimming with customers, but everyone moved out of the way for Hagrid, especially as he still had Filius tucked under his arm. They resumed their drinking. Hagrid proclaimed Canadian beer weak and not at all likely to get anyone drunk, not even Filius.

And so the night progressed and by dawn, fifteen worst the wear wizards, including the Minister for Magic, staggered onto the pavements of London. The club they emerged from was still blaring music and as they stood in a tipsy haze, the girls who had been dancing with them over the night, followed them out of the club. Two went to Lucius and draped themselves over him. Lucius grinned like a witch’s familiar as one of the girls let out a yelp.

‘Hey! Your pocket just bit me,’ she held up her hand and indeed, there were teeth marks on her fingers.

‘Anti-pickpocket hex,’ Lucius explained to everyone. They all nodded and agreed it was a very cunning idea. The two girls looked at each other and hurried away, empty handed. ‘Right, is anyone sober enough to get us back to The Leaky Cauldron?’ For some reason, Lucius found this funny and started to laugh, which set everyone else off, except Severus.

‘I know the way,’ he said and took the lead.

The rag-tag party headed through a nearly empty Covent Garden and down to the river. Harry was who was being supported by Draco and Seamus, was singing tunelessly to himself; a song popular with little wizarding children everywhere. “Ten green dragons sitting on the wall … and if one green dragon should accidently fall, there’ll be … 12345 …678 …9 … nine green dragons sitting on the wall.” Although from time to time, sitting gained an extra consonant which sent those around him into fits of giggles. They walked along the Embankment towards Westminster Bridge.

‘Everything alright, Severus?’ Arthur asked as they crossed the river.

‘Yes …’ he paused, tilted his head and looked at Arthur, ‘… alright … how much do you know?’ They crossed the road to the railway arches and then to the cut that led to The Leaky Cauldron.

‘Enough. We’re all with you Severus … just say the word. I take it you were using the old disappearing trick because of … you know …?’ Severus smiled. Arthur was the most ordinary of wizards on the outside, but it never failed to amaze him just how astute Arthur Weasley really was. His needle sharp mind missed nothing. In a selfish moment, he wanted him for an Unspeakable. ‘Is Harry still angry with me for not being Chief Groom’s Man?’

‘He was never angry with you, Severus. Oh no, he is angry that this whole thing is causing you so much pain and Hermione so much worry. He likes you, y’know … ah, here we are.’ Severus wanted
to know more about Harry liking him, but the moment was lost as they entered The Leaky Cauldron. They passed through the main room, ignoring the stares of the landlord and once in Diagon Alley, everyone agreed it had been a most successful Groom’s Night and were pleased that the whole evening had gone by without any mishap; they congratulated themselves on getting in and out of London Town like the Hit Wizard Squad (Stealth Section) and that they got away with Harry and Filius’s little display without any questions being asked or worse, getting arrested. Agreeing they would see each other at the wedding, goodbyes were made and they left for their separate homes. Arthur went with Harry, who was down to no green dragons.

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Severus apperated back to Spinners End went into the kitchen and put the kettle on. The pain and voice had not returned so he enjoyed his cup of tea as he sat at the table and read the previous day’s Daily Prophet. There was really nothing going on, no reports of any of the petty crimes that had been so prevalent recently; no mention of kidnappings, nothing, just the same old news. With a contented sigh he finished his tea and went upstairs to join Hermione.

She was curled up in their large bed, fast asleep. Her hair was spread across the pillow in deep, glorious colour. Her lips were parted slightly as she breathed in and out softly. He smiled at the thought of climbing into bed and wrapping himself around her body. Quietly, he undressed; undoing all the buttons on his coat, then his waistcoat, one at a time. He removed his boots and socks, unbuttoned his shirt and with a scream that filled the house, collapsed on the floor, blood streaming from his scars.

Hermione scrambled out of bed and went to him. Still half asleep, she touched him on the chest and her hand came away covered in blood.

‘Finn was right … it is happening,’ he managed to croak before another wave of agony surged through him.

She didn’t respond, she simply ripped his shirt off and placed her hands quickly over each scar to staunch the flow of blood. Once the loss of blood was under control, she went into his mind and found his pain; she very gently eased it. The serpent fairly launched itself from his arm at her it was so angry.

‘Please let me take it away … please Severus,’ she pleaded, tears rolling down her cheeks.

‘Soon. You can … soon,’ and with great effort, he lifted his hand and wiped her tears away.

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Addendum

Unknown to them all, in the social and entertainment section of the morning editions of the London newspapers, was a wonderful photograph of Harry and Filius floating above the square in Covent Garden, with twenty four doves, being chased by a cat, scattering in all directions. The newspapers had various headlines from: “LOOK MA! NO HANDS! to REAL MAGIC MOMENT IN COVENT GARDEN and MAGICIAN AND HIS YOUNG ASSISTANT WOW LONDON CROWDS.”
In the smaller, accompanying photo, in full glorious monochrome was Arthur grabbing hold of Harry’s leg to pull him down; Severus taking the hat around; Hagrid putting Filius under his arm; Minister for Magic Kingsley Shacklebolt laughing uncontrollably while hanging onto a very handsome young man; several nice looking, but obviously geeky, young men pointing upwards and laughing and a tall, distinguished Lucius, who had an attractive young lady at his side. The young lady was holding her hand up with a look of pained horror on her face. Lucius was smiling, smugly. Interestingly, Horace was the only one not in the photo.

By that same evening it was all over BEBO and YouTube had received a very nice video of the whole performance in full, glorious Technicolor.

Later in the week, during Prime Minister’s Questions, the P. M. was asked several leading questions, specifically - how a wandering circus troupe could put on a free performance in London and not pay for the privilege? (B. Leninn (Lab) Little Twittering); what about the Health & Safety Regulations, did they have a Performing Licence? (T. Browne-Windsor (Con) Upper Snoring); were the rights of small minorities infringed? (P. Dullard (Lib Dem) Upperton-under-Pymme); will the Government now finally admit that magic is alive and well in this land, wizards do roam our streets and that Magical Studies should be introduced immediately as part of the National Curriculum?(Lord Silly-Partridge Thinge (OMRLP*) Camden). The Rt. Hon. Gentleman for Camden was, of course, shouted down in no uncertain terms.

And for that, the Prime Minister was eternally grateful.

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*Official Monster Raving Loony Party.*
Chapter Summary

‘SEVERUS! She screamed and rushed to him. She fell on her knees at his side, he was under the Crucius and his scars were bleeding so much that blood ran over the collar of his shirt and down his arms and hands. His eyes fluttered closed as he screamed, then he fell silent.

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Chapter Notes

******WARNING******WARNING******WARNING******

Character Deaths.

Reference to child abuse.

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Iníon = Daughter

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 27

Everything Has Changed

Samhain night was cold and dark; a heavy mist hung over the reed bed by The Burrow, perfect for a wedding. The huge marquee in the garden was brilliant with light from jack o’ lanterns and candles of every description; the band was in full swing and the wedding guests were dancing the night away.

The ceremony earlier in the evening had been simple and beautiful. Bride and Groom looked lovingly at each other as they exchanged vows and a very deep, long kiss. Molly, Fleur and Lavender were weeping in the best tradition of weddings. Arthur was a proud father as he gave his only daughter away to Harry Potter. The guest list was big by anyone’s standards, bigger than even the Malfoys. Weasley’s and Prewitt’s made up a large number of the guests and because everyone liked him, all of Arthur’s Ministry colleagues were in attendance with their spouses or partners; all of
the Holyhead Harpies team (and Reserves) had been invited as had several international teams, all with a plus one; all Hogwart’s staff, the Malfoys, the Snapes, Teddy Tonks and all of the various in-laws of the older Weasley boys who were married complete with children. In fact, there were so many children Hermione thought that some may have just wandered in hoping for some good food and hot butter beer.

She was keeping a close eye on Severus, and Astoria. Astoria had been invited on Ginny’s Bride’s night, but had not drunk nor eaten anything and she had disappeared into the Ladies a couple of times. She guessed what was wrong.

Severus was suffering badly. Even a full strength healing had just about stopped the scars bleeding and oozing their venom; his Dark Mark was writhing and roiling on his arm and was hurting him terribly. Neither had really slept for the last three nights and both of them looked pale and haggard. She knew he was sad as well. Not being the Chief Groom’s Man upset him. Although he would never express it, she knew he loved Harry, enjoyed his company and yes, they still had issues they needed to work through, but their relationship was developing and not to be the Chief Grooms Man, a role usually fulfilled by the Groom’s father, hurt Severus deeply. She had explained all of this to Harry, the agony Severus was now in and that he was barely holding himself together; but he was holding himself together, because he wanted to be at Harry’s wedding. Harry had understood and made sure that he didn’t ignore Severus throughout the ceremony. He wasn’t dancing at all and was acting so much like Professor Snape that most people were giving him a wide berth. She was so very tired and had just about managed to fulfil her role as a Handmaiden, but all she wanted to do now was to rest and maybe sleep, for just an hour. People however, had other ideas, she was whisked off to dance as soon as the band had started playing; and so it had continued through the night.

She came over to him after dancing with Ron, who since her marriage had now accepted that she was with Severus for ever. He was sitting as straight as a board, not moving and his face was pinched. He grabbed her hand, ‘Miss Granger,’ he whispered, exercising so much control that he forgot she was his wife. ‘It is … happening,’ was all he managed to say. She nodded, not really understanding his meaning, but placed her hands on his, sending a wave of healing power through his pain wracked body. He gasped as the relief hit him. ‘Thank you … once again,’ he muttered. She saw Astoria rush into the house, no-one followed her, but the young woman was clearly distressed. Severus had seen Astoria as well. ‘Go to her,’ he said, ‘I will be … fine.’

‘I won’t be long.’ She said and kissed his cheek.

In the house, she filled a glass with water and headed upstairs, following the sound of retching. Astoria had her head over the toilet bowl. Hermione knelt by her side and rubbed her back. Astoria groaned and lifted her head. ‘I’m sorry … spoiling the party for you,’ she said taking the glass of water.

‘Don’t be daft. How far along are you?’

Astoria took a gulp of water, rinsed her mouth and spat into the toilet before flushing. ‘About fourteen weeks; I thought the sickness would pass, but it hasn’t. I feel rotten most of the time.’

Hermione helped her stand then hugged her. ‘Does Draco know?’

‘Not yet, but I think he has guessed. I wanted to make really sure before I said anything … I’ve already lost one baby …’ she splashed water on her face, ‘… and I hoped that this time …’ and she smiled wanly. ‘Thank you for coming after me…’

‘What’s going on?’ Draco demanded from the door.
Hermione watched as Astoria smiled shyly at her scowling husband.

‘I’m pregnant … definitely pregnant this time …’ for a full minute, Draco stood motionless; then he moved to his wife and caught her in a tight embrace and kissed her. ‘I wanted to be sure this time, darling …’ she added.

‘I am so happy and so proud of you,’ he said, kissing her again, ‘and thank you Granger, for looking after her.’

Hermione flung her arms around them both. ‘Are you kidding? This is wonderful, Malfoy. Congratulations to you both, but I insist on being the wee bairn’s godmother; after all, someone is going to have to keep its feet on the ground.’

It was a blast of spell power that made them run to the nearest window, power blasts lit up the sky. The crack of *apperation* was coming from all around. Black streaks filled the sky as intruders arrived and took up the fight.

‘You two stay here,’ she ordered and turned to head downstairs.

‘Hermione …?’ Draco started.

‘… *Munitum Totalis!* … Hermione spread her hands and seemed to place an invisible bubble around them. ‘ … Nothing, spell or hex can penetrate the *Munitum* around you … but please, keep your wife and baby safe, Draco. Do not come outside under any circumstances. If things look bad … go to Hogwarts … you can move inside the *Munitum* … don’t go back to Malfoy Manor, understand?’

‘But what’s going on?’ Draco insisted.

‘Something I think Severus had been expecting.’ She smiled at them both, ‘Remember … stay safe.’ And with that she ran downstairs and out into the fight.

It was like the last time; spell fires burned, the marquee was smouldering and running duels were taking place everywhere. Kicking off her shoes, she lifted her Handmaidens dress and dug her feet and toes into the earth, then apperated into the marquee. It was chaos. Tables, chairs, food, lanterns, were all scattered on the floor. Half of the roof had gone and one side of the marquee had been blasted away. There were bodies scattered around. She ignored them, concentrating instead on the group of guests at the far end being guarded by two Dark wizards. Children were crying, adults were protesting and crying, no doubt some of the casualties were relations. None of her friends were captive here, which was a good sign. She moved quietly up behind the wizards, who turned as she approached, without a sound they fell to the floor, stupefied. She stepped over them towards the guests; there was an enchantment around them. She touched the edge of the charm, felt it, then unwound it, it faded with a crackle.

‘Those of you who want to join the fight, stay … the rest of you, go to Hogwarts … NOW!’ Six stayed behind, the rest disappeared. ‘Wands ready, use any means at all … this is a killing raid … so lethal spells if you have too … the *cruciatus*! works on the werewolves … now MOVE!’ The six fled the marquee, wands at the ready; she stepped outside to observe the battle. Hexes and spells filled the air so that you could almost touch the magic. She saw Kingsley in front of the house, duelling with someone she vaguely recognised. She ran to him and with a wave of her hand, the antagonist fell to the ground.

‘Take your shoes off, Obatala, this is not a fair fight, we will need all of our power,’ she shouted to him.
He removed his shoes and dug his feet into the earth. ‘I should tell you I am not allowed to use my full power except in dire need.’ She gave him a long hard look. ‘Agreed, I think this counts as dire need … I will see how much I am allowed to do. Have you seen Adam?’ His voice now filled with concern.

She shook her head. ‘No, but I will find him … and I have no such restrictions’ she replied.

They stood side by side drawing their power up from the earth and filling themselves with it. They nodded to each other and set off in different directions. She noticed there seemed to a lot of young werewolves, some fighting, some snarling and some … some were cowering and howling in fright. Anger flooded her; so this is what had been happening to the kidnapped children. They had been taken to be turned into lethal, killing machines. She watched as an adult werewolf bit a youngster when it seemed reluctant to kill. The youngster had its throat ripped out and the adult howled in delight. She ran to the adult and threw the *Cruciatus* at it; it fell and changed into a man. It snapped at her even in its pain; she merely looked at it and in that second, he saw who she was and he fell silent, cringing in fear. She looked at the fallen youngster, who in death had changed back into a young teenager, no more than fourteen years old. The thin mist of red covered her eyes; she removed her wand from her pocket, leaned down and made a precise cut on the man's throat. There was a faint hiss as air escaped from the windpipe and the blood gurgled and foamed. His eyes filled with horror. ‘Did you think I would allow you die quickly?’ she snarled at him, ‘no, your life will ebb away slowly, second by second until your body is empty and there is nothing you can do to stop it.’ She stood and walked away.

More and more attackers were joining the fight. They outnumbered the guests two to one now. One raider ran towards her, she didn’t even look as at him as he dropped to the ground, stunned or dead, she didn’t care; she needed to find Severus, Adam and her friends. Then she saw Adam; he was with another group being contained in a huddle by two full grown werewolves. She ran across the garden to them. The werewolves already had blood on their fangs from several small bodies that lay on the ground and they were poised to strike again. ‘Avada Kedavra’ she commanded and the sudden greenness filled the space; the first fell to the ground, dead. She repeated the Curse as the remaining two charged her. The group was largely children and youngsters who could not apperate to safety. The werewolves were taking down the children first, knowing that any adults with them would not leave them unprotected. Indeed, there was a fourth werewolf lying on its side, its large tongue lolling out of its mouth as it panted. The adults had not used an Unforgivable Curse, but had merely weakened the animal by throwing stunning spells at it. She walked over to it and despatched it with a wave of her hand. A quick glance reassured her that no-one was hurt, most were merely shocked. Then she saw Percy Weasley, he was protecting three small children, who were crying and holding onto his legs.

‘You adults… get these youngsters to Hogwarts … Percy, you take Adam, he can’t apperate either … come back if you want to.’ She didn’t wait to see the outcome, now she apperated in and out of different parts of the garden and reed bed. The fighting was vicious; the night sky seemed to be alive with the green of the Killing Curse. There were casualties on both sides, but she couldn’t find any leaders, there didn’t seem to be anyone in command, overseeing the fighting or directing the battle. But she had seen Harry and Ginny duelling as a team, as were Molly and Ron. She allowed herself a smile, Ron was rather good. As she popped in and out, she saw her Hogwarts friends fighting, just as they had done back in the Last Battle. ‘Neville?’ she called to him as he stunned his opponent, he turned and looked at her, ‘is Luna safe?’ He nodded, gave her a quick smile and went back to the fight. She looked up; the Quidditch teams were duelling and harrying those attackers on broomsticks. She jumped quickly out of the way of a falling criminal; he landed with a satisfying crunch on the ground. She made sure he was dead before moving on; she needed to find Severus. She apperated closer to reed bed, the flames lapped ever higher as they burned. Then she saw the leader of the gang, it had to be, he seemed to be giving orders and directions to others even as he was pointing his
wand directly at Severus: who was on the ground, writhing in agony.

‘SEVERUS! She screamed and rushed to him. She fell on her knees at his side, he was under the 
Cruciatus and his scars were bleeding so much that blood ran over the collar of his shirt and down 
his arms and hands. His eyes fluttered closed as he screamed, then he fell silent.

‘Ah, Mrs Mudblood bitch, I knew I would get your attention eventually,’ the voice drawled.

Severus slumped as the Cruciatu stopped. She stood and turned to the leader. ‘Yaxley, not dead 
then?’ she said, her voice very calm.

‘Hardly, I have my Lord’s orders to carry out, Mrs Snape bitch.’

She looked down at Severus, ‘Munitum Totalis’, she muttered and the protective spell covered him. 
When she turned to look at Yaxley again, two others had joined him. The air was now filled with 
acrid smoke from the burning reeds along with the shouts and screams of the combatants. ‘So, Under 
Secretary Mullet, how nice to see you, but Lucius … what are you doing with these …’ words failed 
her. Her heart was heavy and a great sadness swept through her. Her friend, Lucius Malfoy whom 
she had gladly helped; who had gifted her a most beautiful Bride’s Gift; whose hospitality she had 
accepted, was a … turncoat. A traitor. It was a bitter pill to swallow. She moved towards the three 
men. Yaxley was grinning as if he had already won; he seemed relaxed, happy even. Beyond 
Yaxley, she caught sight of Kingsley. At some unspoken word, he turned to her, nodded, finished 
off his opponent then walked towards the group.

‘If you think I am going to allow you and your … yobs to harm any more of my family and friends, 
you are very much mistaken.’

Yaxley and Mullet laughed out loud, Lucius remind quiet. ‘What do you propose to do, Mudblood?’ 
Yaxley spread his arms, ‘look around, you have lost. We have won, just as we would have done last 
time if you and your bloody friends hadn’t interfered. But here, tonight, we claim victory in the name 
of Lord Voldemort … tonight the natural order is restored. It is death to all half-bloods, Mudbloods, 
blood traitors and especially,’ he turned to Severus … ‘traitors,’ he pointed his wand, ‘Crucio!’ 
Severus did not scream; Yaxley frowned but turned back to Hermione. ‘So there is nothing you can 
do except watch as your filthy traitor husband dies a most painful death and the rest of your friends 
will become food for my werewolves … oh they are so hungry tonight,’ he laughed.

Hermione narrowed her eyes as she dug her feet further into the earth and felt the energy fill her. 
‘You want to know what I propose to do about it. He knows what is going to happen,’ and she 
nodded to Kingsley.

Yaxley looked momentarily confused even as she drew herself up and threw her arms wide; across 
from her, Kingsley did the same.

Everything stopped; spells, hexes, people, fires stopped, frozen in place. ‘How long can you hold it, 
Obatala?’

‘As long as necessary,’ his voice was grim with determination.

‘Good. Moaner?’ she called and the house elf appeared. ‘Moaner, go quickly to Hogwarts, tell them 
we have things under control, then come back with any Hogwarts elf that will follow you,’ Moaner 
vanished. She ran to Severus, released the Munitum and fell to her knees, scrabbling to undo all the 
buttons of his coat and waistcoat. His once white shirt was now black with blood and venom. ‘Oh 
my darling, my darling,’ she cried as her hands worked swiftly to staunch the bleeding. Moaner 
arrived back with eight Hogwarts elves. ‘Moaner, go to Kingsley and as he releases each one of the
criminals, use your magic to stupefy it, then gather them all in a group and set your friends to guard
them. Use whatever force you need.’ Her hands never stopped their work even as she spoke.

‘What of the werewolves, Madam?’

‘Some of them are very young, do what you need to do … but only use deadly force on the adult
ones who will not surrender. Then if you can organise tea for everyone in the house …’

Moaner nodded and set about organising her troops.

Severus’s scars had stopped bleeding; he opened his eyes … ‘Hermione …’ he breathed.

‘Shh, shh my darling … don’t speak, save your strength,’ and she covered his face in kisses, he
closed his eyes again. Harry came running up to her, he grabbed her in a fierce hug before kneeling
beside Severus.

‘There’s so much blood … is he …?’ He touched Severus’s hand gently.

‘He’ll be fine; he’s lost a lot of blood and will be weak, but with rest and his horrid blood-making
potion, he will recover,’ she knelt on the other side of her husband and took Harry’s hand. ‘Some
wedding, eh? … Harry Potter gets all the excitement.’ Then Ginny and Neville came running over
and were hugging her. Then out of the smoke, Arthur, Molly and Ron came walking over.

‘Nothing like a good fight at a wedding,’ Arthur said with a wry smile. ‘How’s Severus?’

‘He’ll be fine a few days,’ she said, accepting hugs from all the Weasley’s. Moaner appeared in front
of her.

‘All prisoners secured in one place Madam and there is tea in the house.’

‘Good work, Moaner, thank you,’ Moaner swelled with pride at a job well done.

Now Kingsley came running over. ‘Adam …?

‘… Is safe at Hogwarts, Obatala. I thank you and my ancestors thank your ancestors for your help,’
she said and placed her hand on his shoulder. Something silent passed between them, he placed his
hand on her shoulder and they leaned in, forehead to forehead. ‘It is done,’ she said. ‘Now, we need
to know where they have been hiding all this time and just how many of them there are,’ she moved
to Yaxley, Lucius and Mullet and released them. Yaxley made to use his wand immediately, but
nothing happened. ‘Yes, I may be a Mudblood bitch, but I am not a stupid Mudblood bitch. Your
wands don’t work, nor will they ever again; your magic is gone. Now, you little gob shite, you will
tell us where your HQ is and how many of you there are.’

Yaxley grinned an evil grin and folded his arms. ‘I’ll not give you that information, nor will you gain
it from me. Lord Voldemort himself taught me Occulmency,’ his look was one of contempt, as if
Hermione was a mere insect or something nasty on the sole of his boot.

‘Oh dear, well that really does thwart us then. Good job I don’t need Legilimency,’ and she went up
to him, put her hand over his face and took the information. Yaxley gave a blood curdling scream
before falling to his knees; his eyes rolled back and he jabbered something incomprehensible. ‘I have
it …’ she twirled her wand around her temple and passed the information on to Harry, Arthur and
then Kingsley. ‘…oh bloody hell, the Pendle Hills …’ she sighed, and then turned to Lucius. ‘You
bastard … you utter, contemptible, stupid, arrogant bastard,’ she spat at him, ‘you would ruin your
life and that of your family for some vain glorious …’ she lifted her hand.
‘Hermione! … no’ Severus’s voice, though weak, stopped her. She turned to him. ‘Help me up,’ he said to Harry and Arthur; they gently helped him stand. By this time, Draco, Astoria and Narcissa arrived; they stopped in their tracks when they saw Lucius with a very angry Hermione standing in front of him, her Handmaiden’s dress smeared black, torn and spattered with blood. They went and stood by his side. ‘It was Lucius …’ Severus said.

‘I know it was Lucius, he’s a traitor,’ Hermione snapped.

‘No!’ Severus raised his voice, but the effort made him sag against Arthur. ‘Lucius was … working for me … double agent … has been for the last couple of months … it was … it was his information … that …’ he didn’t get any further, he fell to his knees.

Moaner appeared at that moment. ‘Moaner will take Master and look after him in the house,’ she took Severus’s hand, something that a house elf wouldn’t usually do, and disappeared.

Hermione turned to look at Lucius, she opened her mouth to say something, but no words came.

‘Apology accepted, Hermione,’ Lucius said with a sad smile.

Narcissa now turned to him, ‘Hello, my darling,’ she said just as she slapped him and then kissed him.

‘Well, now I really am confused,’ he said, but still held on to Narcissa.

‘Right, let’s go and have a nice cup of tea and plan the next stage,’ Arthur said, diffusing the tension that surrounded the group. He led them towards the house. There was a ‘crack’ as Percy and Adam appeared. Adam ran to Kingsley and they embraced each other fiercely and kissed ever so sweetly, which brought sighs from them all. Hermione followed the group into the house. Arthur and Moaner were marshalling everyone and handing out tea, sandwiches and cake. There was much relieved talk.

Ron handed her a cup of tea. ‘It’s got sugar, Moaner’s orders,’ he said.

‘Thanks,’ she drank it in one go. ‘I saw you and Molly … you make a great team. Where’s Lavender?’

‘Her parents took her home, didn’t want her fighting. You were brilliant … totally scary of course, but then you always were,’ he blushed as she kissed his cheek.

She went into the sitting room to find Severus lying comfortably on the sofa surrounded by well-wishers. He saw her and smiled weakly. She ran to him, fell to her knees then burst into tears as she lay her head on his shoulder, the one part of his body that wasn’t smeared with blood. He patted her back. The room cleared, giving them some privacy.

‘I apologise for not telling you, forgive me,’ he said, ‘I thought it safest if only Lucius and I knew. Lucius was very brave; please don’t be cross with him, Narcissa is going to give him a hard enough time,’ he kissed her hair.

‘I thought I had lost you,’ she whispered.

‘No. We old Slytherins are a hard lot to kill off,’ he sighed. ‘I take it Yaxley and Mullet will never recover?’

‘Never. They will be Squibs for the rest of their miserable lives.’

‘Give Lucius his power back,’ he looked at her and she nodded.
‘I need to apologise to him,’ she kissed him again and went back into the kitchen. She walked up to Lucius and held out her hand. The room fell silent and waited, expectantly. It was many minutes before Lucius took her hand; she pulled him closer and placed her other hand over his. ‘I apologise Lucius, from the bottom of my heart … you have my thanks … and all your power back,’ she released his hand and smiled shyly at him.

‘Can you remove your spell from us as well?’ Draco asked.

‘Oh I’m sorry … of course,’ and she waved her hand to remove the *Munitum* from them. ‘Well … this is another story you have to tell your grandchildren,’ she said to Lucius.

‘I don’t have any grandchildren …’ a puzzled Lucius replied.

‘Yes you do,’ she smiled and nodded at Astoria. She squeezed Draco’s arm as she passed him to go outside. She suddenly needed to be away from the milling crowd, she needed space.

Outside the clean-up operation was already underway. She walked around the garden. The gang members were corralled together, guarded by Hogwarts elves, who all looked very pleased with themselves. She saw one the gang shake his head and try to stand, coming around from being stupefied, only to have one of the elves stupefy him immediately.

The fires were out and now only smouldered and repairs were being made to the marquee. The destruction was terrible, but she knew that Molly and Arthur would have everything back to normal in no time. She went into the marquee; the dead of both sides were laid out opposite each other. She was shocked to see how many youngsters there were on the other side; all of them naked, evidence they had been werewolves. She recognised many of her Ministry colleagues, including Belladonna and Secretary Sproggins; both had had their throats ripped out. There were also members of the Quidditch teams; some dead from hexes or the Killing Curse, some from bites.

Then she stopped … and fell to her knees. ‘Moaner,’ she called and the elf appeared. ‘Please … go and fetch … Mr Ron Weasley.’ Moaner vanished and as the tears streamed down her face she gently lifted Lavender Brown’s hand and held it. Lavender, who had survived the Last Battle of Hogwarts, looked as if she was sleeping; as if she would open her eyes and smile any moment now. Ron came running into the marquee closely followed by Molly, Ginny, Arthur and Harry. Ron fell to his knees beside her and took Lavender’s hand from her. ‘Why did she come back?’ he whispered and burst into tears. Hermione reached to him and pulled him into her.

‘I’m so sorry, Ron,’ she said. But it didn’t seem enough. It was never enough. Molly came and took her youngest son into her arms and held him. She nodded to Hermione as if to say, this is Weasley business, we will take it from here. She rose and without looking at anybody, she went outside and ran into the reeds. Too many. It was always too many. She was crying uncontrollably as she walked in the reeds without regard as to where she was going. It was always the same; the sacrifices that were made; the lives that were lost. When would it ever be enough? When will it ever end? She sniffed and tried to dash away her tears, but she couldn’t stop. Images of all the death and destruction she had witnessed throughout her many lives would not go away.

‘Ach, don’t be fashing yerself,’ Finn Dagda said quietly to her. ‘Come here and let yer old Da give you his shoulder to cry upon and a hug to go with it.’

She turned and fell into his arms and allowed her tears to flow once more. ‘I … I nearly cursed Lucius again,’ she gulped.

‘But you didn’t,’ he soothed, stroking her hair. ‘Ach, my girl, my girl; you always did take it so hard; always felt bad for what needed to be done. There, there now,’ he pulled his large spotted
handkerchief from his pocket and gave it to her. ‘Blow yer nose and wipe away yer tears; there, that’s better so.’

She dabbed her eyes and wiped her nose. ‘It’s different this time isn’t it Da?’ she asked.

‘Aye, inión (inyon), it is. Yer man is something special; we never thought you would love him so deeply, nor he you. You are truly blessed to have found yer Anam Cara at long last.’

‘Will I ever have to do this again?’

‘That inión, I cannot say. Yer mammy and grandda keep those things from me; though I have no idea why,’ he shrugged.

She gulped down another sob. ‘Do you think Lucius will ever forgive me?’

‘Oh my darlin’ child … he already has. He knew what he was doing and what the consequences could be … but he did it anyway; brave man so he is.’

‘Things are changing again aren’t they?’

‘Yes, my darlin’ they are. They have to change to move forward; you know it was always so. Without change the world becomes static, rotten and bad,’ he tucked her hair behind her ear.

‘Will this be the last time I have to do something like this in this life?’

Finn chuckled. ‘Asking the same question another way will not give you a different answer, inión.’

‘It’s just … I’m so tired of the fighting and killing; I would just like to live with my husband quietly, in a nice house, drink tea and have a couple of children.’ She looked at his face and smiled, ‘but I know that is not the way it works; I can dream though, can’t I?’

‘Our dreams are what keep us sane. Remember Cormac MacCormac? Said he never dreamed and didn’t believe in them?’

‘And went as mad as a frog? Yes, I remember him, he was an idiot. I dream Da, I have some lovely dreams.’

‘Good girl, you keep those dreams alive. Now off you go, yer man is awaiting you,’ he kissed her forehead and embraced her once more. ‘You have no idea how proud I am of you, inión … always have been,’ his look and smile were filled with pride.

‘Will I see you again?’ she asked.

He sighed. ‘I think not; but in the next life… I will be waiting.’

‘Can I tell him you are my father?’

Finn Dagda cocked his head to one side as if listening to an unseen voice. ‘Yer mammy says yes, yer grandda says no,’ he shrugged, ‘one day those two will agree on something and the world will stop in surprise. It’s best if you don’t, child. Not yet anyway, maybe when … in the life to come. Now, away with you and give me lots of grandchildren.’ She turned to leave, holding onto his hand until the last possible minute. When she looked back to give him one final wave, he had gone.

She walked out of the reeds; Lucius was standing with Harry and Arthur in deep discussion. She waited until they had finished before approaching.
‘Ah, Hermione, there you are,’ Arthur said, ‘Severus is asking for you, he feels much better.’

‘Thanks Arthur. Lucius, may I have a word?’ Lucius frowned, but nodded. Harry and Arthur took the hint and left. ‘Lucius, I need to tell you how very sorry I am. I was angry, not so much with you, but with myself … I thought I had made a terrible error of judgement … not something I do very often,’ she stopped, his face was neutral and she felt she was just digging a bigger hole for herself.

‘Hermione, I knew the risks, it is something Severus and I talked about; he knew what your reaction would be. I am just grateful he was compus mentus enough to stop you,’ and this time he smiled his familiar arrogant smile.

‘It’s the second time he has saved you from me. I promise there will not be a third time.’

‘And that pleases me no end,’ he said, ‘now, Severus is waiting for you and I have to help with the clean-up operation. There is a HQ to find,’ he took her hand and kissed it.

‘Congratulations on becoming a grandfather.’

‘I am much too young to be a grandfather.’

‘It will ruin your reputation, she giggled.

‘My reputation was ruined years ago,’ he sighed.

‘Reputations can always be repaired, Lucius’ and she walked toward the house and her husband.

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The group sat quietly in Minister Shacklebolt’s office. It was two weeks since the attack, now known as The Second Battle of The Burrow. In those two weeks, the HQ of the gang had been found deep in the Pendle Hills, Lancashire; not too far from Spinners End. The place was called Sabden Fold, an area steeped in old magic. The HQ was a farmhouse, hidden in the lea of Pendle Hill, invisible to Muggle eyes. When the clean-up party, which included Arthur and Lucius, arrived at the location, they were met by the only wizarding family in the area, the Archer family of Bowland. Although they were unaware of Death Eaters in the area, they knew all about the werewolves. They informed Arthur that in only a few years, they had killed at least twenty of the fearsome creatures. When asked how they had done this without using an Unforgivable Curse, they had produced their magical bow and arrows; which like a silver bullet, killed werewolves. Arthur, Lucius and the clean-up party were very impressed.

The Archers of Bowland had a detailed knowledge of the area, so guided the team to a large stone farmhouse, with two large barns. A plan was devised and the farmhouse stormed and taken. There were only three adults in the farmhouse and they were quickly dealt with. The barns were a different story. The barns were effectively prisons containing ten children each. They were filthy, with bones and half eaten carcasses of cows, horses, dogs, cats … and what suspiciously looked like human remains, lying everywhere. The child/wolves had dirty and festering straw to sleep on and although they had attempted to keep the bedding clean of their soil, it had proved to be impossible. The children were in varying stages of being turned and all of them showed extreme fear of adults; it was decided to use a simple ‘Dormio!’ spell to put them gently to sleep so they could be moved without causing them any further trauma. With great care, the children were carried, one by one, out into the pale autumn day; Arthur didn’t know whether to cry or vent his anger on one of the adults. Lucius
seemed to understand his quandary and gave him a firm squeeze on the shoulder; it was difficult for all of them.

Of the twenty, fifteen were young enough to have the turning process reversed. These were taken to St Mungo’s for immediate treatment; they would then be given into the care of a specialist team from the Magical Creatures Department. Eventually, these children would be re-united with their wizarding or Muggle families; they would all have non-removable enchantments in place to stop them reverting back to werewolves. The remaining five were older. Of the youngsters captured at The Burrow, all were about the same age as the ones from the farmhouse; only, those that fought in the Second Battle had been forced into fighting and killing by adult werewolves. All of these older, teenage werewolves were fully or almost fully turned. They would need specialist care for the rest of their lives.

The Death Eaters, Dark Ones, werewolves and other sundry criminals who had joined Yaxley’s army, had already been tried and sent to Azkaban. The Wizengamot demanded the Kiss for all of them. Hermione had taken part in all of the trials and discussions about punishments and she agreed that the Kiss was the only suitable penalty for the crimes that had been committed. She also agreed with other Wizengamot members that the Kiss could act as a deterrent for any future gang or army who thought they could overturn the Ministry and the natural order of the wizarding community. Minister Shacklebolt had listened keenly to all the arguments for and, a few against, the re-instatement of the Kiss as the ultimate penalty. He had thought about it for two days before reluctantly agreeing with the re-instatement of the Kiss into the Magical Law Code, although he added a caveat of his own; that life imprisonment would remain as the first choice of punishment for criminals. The Dementors were re-called to Azkaban to carry out the sentences. Yaxley was spared the Kiss, as it was felt that Hermione rendering him a drooling, jibbering idiot was punishment enough.

‘Well, my friends,’ Kingsley closed the file he had been reading, ‘we have dealt with yet another attempt to overthrow the Ministry and change our world, for the worst. Once again, we have lost many good people and far too many friends. A consequence of this last Battle is that I am re-examining the reforms I wanted to put in place. Not that I am giving up on them … oh no … merely … reorganising my thoughts.’

The group nodded at his words. Minister Kingsley Shacklebolt was flexible when it came to change; he was not one to be entrenched in old, outdated, out-moded or unworkable laws. He was even willing to consider changing some of his newer reforms; this is what was making him one of the best Ministers for Magic the Ministry ever had. The group was sitting in loose semi-circle around his desk; present were, Arthur, Lucius, Severus, Hermione, Minerva and Draco. Harry was still on honeymoon in Sweden. Severus had fully recovered and was looking very well.

‘The deaths of our colleagues has left gaps in the Ministry, gaps I intend filling,’ He placed a parchment on his desk and unrolled it. ‘Magical Law Enforcement lost both Secretary and Under Secretary. I therefore propose to place Hermione in the post of Under Secretary, a job I know she will fulfil with her usual enthusiasm and eye for detail,’ he smiled at her; she blushed and Severus raised her hand and kissed it. ‘The post of Secretary I am still considering,’ he said no more on the subject. ‘Harry will move to Head of Auror Office,’ there was a general shifting of unease and mutterings. ‘Yes I know he is a damn fine Unspeakable, which is why he will be a fine Head Auror. I apologise now to the Head of the Department,’ he bowed his head slightly to Severus, ‘for filching an operative.’ Severus acknowledged the gesture.

‘Minister, I feel …’ Minerva started to say.

‘… I know it’s not what you want to hear, Minerva. But these young people must gain as much
experience in other roles before moving on to their appointed positions. We have agreed that wherever possible, we shall recruit former pupils to teach at Hogwarts; that will be the school’s greatest strength.’ He looked at each one in turn, and when no-one contradicted him, he continued, ‘you have few more years in you, Minerva,’ his eyes twinkled with mischief ‘and it looks like Rufus is working out very well and may be with you for a few years yet. So by the time he leaves and you are ready to retire, Harry and Hermione will be ready to take up the reins. Which brings me to you, Draco,’ his gaze fell upon Draco, who shifted uneasily in his chair. ‘I am well aware you have a thriving apothecary business, but when Horace retires, you will take his place. You are more than capable, none better I am informed; you come highly recommended by your former potions Professor.’

Draco shot a glance at Severus. ‘Erm … thank you Minister … I think,’ he said.

‘Professor Longbottom has already agreed to fill the post of Herbologist once Pomona retires. He is currently honing his skills at the Lucerne Academy for Magical Studies, a small but very fine school. Luna of course will become Hogwarts Divination teacher and Seer. She passes her best wishes onto you all and says her pregnancy is progressing well,’ he peered at another parchment, ‘and will be delivered of twins soon after Yule.’ He looked up at everyone and beamed, just as they were smiling and laughing at each other. ‘She also says that the Swiss have several kinds of ‘Vasisdass’, a close relation to Nargels, hmm,’ he looked momentarily puzzled, but it quickly passed. ‘Good, now Lucius,’ he moved on, ‘your help was invaluable. I fully understand why you both kept it secret, a good move in my opinion. So at the request of the Head of the Department of Mysteries, I am offering you the post of Deputy of the Department. Severus says he is overworked and he can delegate all of the rough stuff … including meetings with me … to you,’ Kingsley stared at Lucius, who looked slightly uncomfortable.

‘Are you sure, Minister … after all my reputation …’

‘…Is at an all-time high and furthermore, I am going to publically commend you and the part you played in saving us all.’

‘Then … I accept, thank you,’ and Lucius inclined his head in thanks.

‘Which leaves you, Arthur; I’m keeping you were you are; your relationship with the Muggle Prime Minister and his Cabinet is a good one. However, the skills you showed during the Battle and its aftermath have been noticed. Again, Severus has requested that he be allowed to use your services from time to time, is that acceptable?’

Arthur looked at Severus and smiled at him. ‘Perfectly acceptable, Minister.’

‘Excellent. That is all of today’s business finished, but before you leave, I wish to give my personal thanks to Hermione for removing Adam from a dangerous situation. It could have turned out very differently. So Hermione, my deep and grateful thanks; however, you used an unknown spell during the Battle, one of your own devising?’

‘Um … yes … it’s the first one I have woven myself … I have been working on it for a long time … I thought it would be useful to have something … y’know, to protect people.’

‘It was very effective … would you care to share it?’

Hermione sat quietly for a while. ‘No. It’s impenetrable and if the wrong hands got hold of it … it could be used against us. I would prefer to keep it to myself … I am the only one who can release it as well.’
‘Hmm, very well, but if you change your mind … now I have real work to do, so you can all leave … now,’ he smiled at them as he rolled up his parchment and reached for another.

The group rose as one and left Minister Shacklebolt’s office.

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The fire crackled and spluttered. They were sitting on the sofa, one each end, bare feet meeting in the middle. They were both reading; Hermione a pile of parchments containing information about her new position at the Ministry, he a new book. From time to time, she would touch his foot with hers, or run her foot up inside his trouser leg. He smiled behind his book; she loved touching him, even doing so unconsciously, like now. He loved it. He glanced at her now and again. Her look of concentration as she read through the Departmental Rules and Regulations, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear, or twisting it around her finger; or reaching for another parchment to cross reference a point and then the smile of understanding would light up her face. He moved his foot so it ran up her skirt; he was rewarded by a small wriggle of delight.

‘There are so many Laws and so much I don’t know,’ she sighed. ‘I don’t think I’m going to get my head around this any time soon.’

He turned his page. ‘Did you feel that?’ he asked.

‘What?’

‘The world grinding to a halt because you don’t know something. You have been in the job two days and you don’t know it all? Quite frankly … I’m shocked.’

‘What are you reading?’ she nimbly changed the subject.

‘Deadly Decoctions; I thought it would useful to have some ideas if I have to … you know … get rid of you quickly because you don’t know it all.’

She laughed and nudged his foot before going back to her parchments. He had discovered that since the summer, when his personality had changed, she enjoyed his acerbic taunts and jibes. Indeed, he found she could have just as sharp a tongue as he. He was relieved in a way and again, utterly surprised that she accepted and loved that aspect of his personality; he could be Professor Snape and it was not uncomfortable for her … or him. He moved his foot up her skirt again, all the way up … and stopped.

‘Mrs Snape,’ he looked at her over the top of his book, ‘am I correct in thinking you are not wearing … underwear?’

‘What? Oh yeah, sometimes I like to go into work without wearing any,’ she didn’t look at him, simply carried on reading.

He swallowed, his mouth suddenly dry, the room very warm. ‘Is that … wise?’

‘Oh yes. I mean, if you wanted to rush into my office and ravish me senseless, think how much easier it would be if I didn’t have to remove my knickers. You could throw me across the desk, lift up my skirt or dress and off we go … so much easier,’ again she didn’t look up. But she knew what she was doing. Oh Merlin, she knew exactly how to get his attention; and her foot was now resting
in the crease of his hip, rubbing him gently. He was definitely at attention now, and try as he might, he could not ignore her foot or the sensation that was rippling through his body.

He put his book down and grabbed her foot, pulling her down the sofa, the parchment she was reading fell to the floor. He lifted her foot, kissed along the sole to her toes then suckled each one in turn. His action was rewarded by a low gasp from her, then a growl from him; she was returning the favour as she sucked and gently bit his toes. Her skirt had ridden up nicely, exposing the top of her thighs and a glimpse of the small, tight curls that lay between her legs. With a fluid movement, she had pulled away and was lying against him, her tongue doing wonderful things to his mouth. She rolled them both onto the floor, and laughed as she landed on top him.

‘So kind of you to use me as your personal cushion,’ he managed to say before her hands ripped his shirt open, sending buttons flying. ‘Nooo, not another bloody shirt,’ he said against her lips as she continued her assault on his mouth. He flipped her over and pulled her blouse apart, sending buttons flying; she squealed in delight. ‘You really are the most deliciously wicked woman,’ he reached down and pulled her skirt off, ‘and you are all mine.’ His mouth fell to her cleavage where he kissed the scar Dolohov had given her. Then his tongue lapped at the exposed skin between her breasts and belly button, working ever lower. The tip of his tongue touched her mons and she bucked slightly; he continued down to her vagina, then up again. She was moist and slick; her hips rose to meet his mouth. He stopped and pulled away. Her eyes flew open and she frowned.

‘Don’t stop,’ she said in a voice husky with need.

‘You do it,’ he said.

She looked at him with hooded eyes. ‘Only if you do it as well,’ and she bit her bottom lip.

This was different. While they enjoyed a varied sex life and their honeymoon had broken through some other barriers, this request from her was new … daring and very, very arousing. His heart rate increased on the spot and his erection grew harder, it that was possible. He stood up and removed his trousers and underwear; she was already teasing the soft flesh between her legs. He knelt between her legs and she placed her feet on his thighs, his view was very satisfying. She looked at him, placed her fingers in her mouth, sucked on them to wet them and then slipped them between her labia. He gasped at the sheer eroticism of the act; she nodded to him and smiled wickedly.

‘Sauce for the goose and gander,’ she breathed.

Without thinking of what he was doing, his hand wrapped itself around his shaft; he heard himself give a low, throaty growl. It was too much, too arousing; he was not going to last long. She slipped a slender finger inside herself, moving it in and out, another finger joined the first and she gasped.

‘I … need to be inside … you,’ his words were barely audible.

Her eyes opened fully as her face twisted in her arousal; she was also very close. Giving the barest of nods, he moved between her and as she removed her fingers, he plunged in. He was home; she took all of his length, raising her hips to meet his thrusts. He knew this was how it should be, joined together, in union; love, bodies, hearts, minds and soul, linked together, now and forever. Placing his hands on either side of her head, he angled his thrusts upwards into her; in return, she brought one leg up and over his hip, taking him deeper. He was moaning now, holding himself back until that moment when he knew she was at tipping point; it was so close. She was muttering his name over and over, growling and grunting with wanton abandon. He kissed her roughly, teeth clashing; she sucked and bit his lower lip, running her tongue along the inside of his mouth. She tightened her vagina around him, placed her other leg around his hip and thrust wildly. His eyes closed as the explosion of his orgasm ripped through his mind and body. On and on it went, cascading through
every nerve, every muscle and every fibre of him.

She was muttering to herself in an ancient language as she bucked under him in the throes of her own orgasm. She was lost to it, utterly and totally. ‘Severus!’ she called. Then slowed and finally stilled. She pulled him to her and kissed him again. Her hips were still grinding against him so he slid his hand between them, found the nub of her clitoris and touched it, she stiffened and as he rubbed, her hand joined his and she climaxed again. He looked upon her beauty, her skin was flushed with passion; her lips were full and moist; her hair spread around her, longer now than she had had it for many months. The aroma of her sex filled his nose; musky and sweet. She opened her eyes, looked at him and smiled.

‘Hello again,’ he said. He was soft now and slid out of her, bringing a cry from each of them at the loss of intimate contact. He moved to her side, leaned in and kissed her.

‘Hmmm, hello,’ she threw one arm behind her head and lay languid and spent next to him.

‘What were you saying?’

‘When?’

‘As you orgasmed, I think I may have been Irish.’

‘Ah … was it … ‘Anam Cara?’ He nodded. ‘It means, Soul Friend.’

‘Say it again.’

‘Anam Cara,’ she turned to him. ‘Anam Cara, Anam Cara; because it is true.’

‘A nam Ca ra,’ he ventured.

‘Very good, Mr Snape. Ten points to Slytherin for effort,’ and she giggled. ‘Anam Cara,’ she spoke slowly. He listened carefully and repeated what she said. ‘I will have you speaking the Irish yet,’ and she touched his nose with her finger.

‘You could teach me,’ his hand fell to her breast.

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

She lay back down and he joined her, leaning up on his elbow and went back to fondling her breast through her bra. The fire glowed and the soft light from the lamps illuminated her.

‘It is from another time, another place. This is the here and now,’ she leaned up and cupped his face with a hand. ‘Do you know how long I have waited for this … for you?’ He shook his head. ‘All of my lives.’ She lay back down.

‘Hermione? Have your breasts got bigger?’

She laughed and swatted him. ‘I don’t think so, it must be your over active imagination.’ She cupped her breasts and thrust them upwards in her bra. ‘Why, would you like them bigger?’

‘There is no answer I can possibly give that will get me out of here alive, is there?’ He leaned in to kiss her and fondle her once more.

‘I do so enjoy being married to you,’ she purred and stretched, then began to collect their scattered
clothing. She held up his shirt and her blouse, both sans buttons. He grunted as he took his shirt. ‘I shall get Moaner to sew them on again,’ she accepted his hand to pull her up. ‘Take me upstairs, husband. Shower or bath?’

‘Shower and I love that.’

‘What?’ she held his hand as he led her upstairs.

‘The way you call me husband … I never imagined it would happen to me.’

She drew level with him on the stairs and hugged him. ‘I love you Severus Snape, for now and always.

‘Anam Cara.’

‘Better accent, but I know your game,’ she laughed, ‘you’re just after more house points for Slytherin.’

‘Tell me about Anam Cara,’ he said.

‘I will, later … in bed,’ she said as he led her into the bathroom and closed the door.

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They were sitting in the kitchen next morning enjoying tea and toast before leaving for the Ministry when Moaner appeared.

‘Good morning Master Severus, Madam Hermione,’ she said.

They looked at each other. This was something new; Moaner had never called her Hermione before, it had always been Hermione Granger or Madam Snape. Something was changing.

‘Good morning, Moaner, everything all right?’ Hermione asked.

‘Yes. Moaner wishes to inform Master and Madam that she is going to be married.’

Severus managed not to choke on his toast. He wiped his mouth on his napkin and stared at the elf. ‘And who is the intended groom?’ he asked.

‘Bix,’ she replied.

‘And where is he?’ Severus pressed.

Moaner cleared her throat and another elf appeared. He also seemed quite young and was wearing what appeared to be a bright yellow duster, with a smart belt of green and red tartan. Bix stood with his head bowed, twisting the end of his belt.

‘Whom do you serve?’ Severus asked.

‘Hogwarts,’ Bix answered softly.

‘And how long have you served Hogwarts?’
‘All my life, sir,’ Bix had a soft Highland lilt.

‘Hmm … and do you intend to take our house elf away from us once you are married?’

‘Oh no sir! Moaner will still serve the Prince family, as I will serve Hogwarts,’ Bix turned to look at Moaner with eyes filled with love.

‘Bix helped at The Burrow,’ Moaner added with just a tiny hint of defiance in her voice.

‘And is it your intention to take care and cherish Moaner as she deserves?’

Up until this point, Hermione thought that Severus was being very stern with both elves; now she realised that the questions were part of an age old ritual between house elf and the head of the family she or he, served.

‘With all my heart sir,’ Bix replied.

‘And what of your children … who will they serve?’

A silence filled the kitchen. It was Moaner who spoke. ‘If Moaner and Bix have children, they will serve whichever family Master and Madam say they must serve.’

‘Very well … I give my permission for Moaner and Bix to marry. Congratulations,’ he held out his hand; Moaner kissed it and Bix shook it.

‘Congratulations from me as well, I’m so happy for you Moaner,’ Hermione said as she dropped to her knees and gave Moaner a hug and kissed her cheek. Moaner blushed deeply, Bix shook her hand. ‘What would you like as a wedding gift?’ she asked.

‘As a rule, you don’t give your house elf a wedding gift …’ Severus began, but he caught Hermione’s hard stare ‘… on the other hand, rules are there to be bent … or broken,’ his lips curled into a slight smile.

Moaner and Bix put their heads together and spoke rapidly. Hermione noticed that Moaner held Bix’s hand while they spoke.

‘Material,’ Moaner said, ‘for new clothes and for … our home.’

‘Very well, I shall arrange it,’ Severus said, ‘you are a loyal and brave house elf, Moaner. You have served the Prince family well over the years. I wish you and Bix great happiness and many children.’

Both elves blushed and disappeared.

Hermione finished her tea. ‘That was a lovely way to start the day,’ she said, ‘big softie,’ she added taking the used breakfast things and putting them in the sink.

‘Me … soft? You over step the mark … woman, take … care.’

‘Oh, and if I don’t take care … what will you do?’ They went into the sitting room and the floo system. ‘Will you punish me?’ she batted her eyelids at him and her smile was pure innocence. She was also lifting her skirt to reveal her lack of underwear as she stepped into the floo.

‘Hermione! …’ but his protest and her laughter were lost in a flash of green.
Anam Cara refers to the Celtic spiritual belief of souls connecting and bonding.

In Celtic spiritual tradition, it is believed that the soul radiates all about the physical body; what some refer to as an aura. When you connect with another person and become completely open and trusting with that individual, your two souls begin to flow together. Should such a deep bond be formed, it is said you have found your Anam Cara or soul friend.

Your Anam Cara always accepts you as you truly are, holding you in beauty and light. In order to appreciate this relationship you must first recognise your own inner light and beauty.

With an Anam Cara, you are joined in an ancient and eternal union with another that transcends all barriers of time, convention, philosophy and definition. When you are blessed with an Anam Cara, the Irish believe you have arrived at that most Sacred place: home.
Glad Tidings

Chapter Summary

‘Ready?’ he asked as he wrapped her cloak around her shoulders.

‘Yes … but …’

‘But what?’

‘What if I get put next to Severus or Lucius?’

‘You make polite conversation and don’t mention potions … ever. Or my dad … or Sirius … or Death Eaters … or Belladonna … Hogwarts and Quidditch should be safe,’ Harry smiled at his wife.

‘But … what if they bring any of those things up?’

‘Change the subject. C’mon, let’s go.’

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Chapter Notes

After the last chapter, a more light-hearted one; I thought it would be nice to give the characters a bit of fun and laughter – Yule fitted the bill perfectly.

GLORY TO THE NEW BORN KING (sung to the tune of ‘Hark the Herald Angels sing)
MOTHER, MAIDEN, ANCIENT CRONE (sung to the tune of ‘We Three Kings’)
STILLE NACHT (needs no introduction)

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 28

Glad Tidings

Ginny was brushing her hair and putting the finishing touches to her make-up. Harry was putting on his Yule robes.

‘I’m nervous,’ she said.

‘Don’t be Gin, we’re going to have a great time and yes, it will be different, I mean, we’ve spent
every Yule at The Burrow for …’ he stopped, ‘… well, forever. Kingsley and Adam will be there,’ he put his frock coat on and smoothed everything down, ‘and you like Draco and Astoria, you said so yourself.’

She put her lipstick on and dropped the case into her clutch bag. This was her first Yule as a married woman and the first time she would not be at a Weasley family Yule. It had caused uproar with Molly, but she had held firm and told her mother that she had to think about her husband now, not her mum. Molly had been rendered speechless. It was her dad of course who poured oil on the troubled waters between mother and daughter; he told Molly that Ginny was right; her husband had to come first now. Then the second row erupted when Ginny had told Molly that they were having Yule dinner at Malfoy Manor. The air was only cleared when Ginny promised to spend St Stephen’s Day with them.

‘You look gorgeous, that gown really suits you,’ Harry said.

She blushed. Harry enjoyed her looking nice and the dress had been part of her Yule gift from him. It was a traditional Yule Day gown; a deep wine velvet, low cut with a full sweeping skirt and long sleeves that fell to reveal the contrasting white satin lining. The matching cloak also had a white satin lining and the hood was trimmed in traditional ermine. Harry was dressed in the traditional Wizard’s Yule wear of white shirt, a suit of any colour and a neckerchief. Harry’s suit of trousers and frock coat was in Gryffindor red, the waist coat was red with flecks of gold and his neckerchief was red. A long black cloak completed his outfit.

‘Ready?’ he asked as he wrapped her cloak around her shoulders.

‘Yes … but …’

‘But what?’

‘What if I get put next to Severus or Lucius?’

‘You make polite conversation and don’t mention potions … ever. Or my dad … or Sirius … or Death Eaters … or Belladonna … Hogwarts and Quidditch should be safe,’ he smiled at his wife.

‘But … what if they bring any of those things up?’

‘Change the subject. C’mon, let’s go.’

The walked out into the garden of their house in Godric’s Hollow; Harry wanted to live in the same village as his parents, to be close to them. So when the small cottage had become available, he had bought it and the two of them had spent all their spare time redecorating and furnishing their home, it was ready for Yule. As it was a glorious Yule Day morning they were going to fly to Malfoy Manor. They collected their broomsticks from the small outside shed and together, set off into the clear, cold sky.

Malfoy Manor was resplendent in its Yule finery. There was a tall tree in the hall and huge swags of holly and ivy hung everywhere. Mistletoe hung from every doorway; decorations of every description as well as candles and lanterns were hanging from every beam, mantle and ceiling lamp. In the Great Hall, the Yule Log burned merrily, and the scent of pine, Hollyberry and exotic frankincense filled the air. Harry and Ginny were welcomed to Malfoy Manor by Lucius and Narcissa and a goblet was placed in their hands as they went and joined the others. Hermione and Astoria gave her hugs as they did Harry. Draco also hugged her; she had grown to like Draco and Astoria a lot, mainly due to Harry and Draco’s developing friendship. Kingsley and Severus kissed her hand and Adam, who she didn’t know that well, shook her hand. Harry simply hugged
Ginny noticed the other women going in and out of the kitchen, so she went to offer her help. The kitchen was a hive of activity. The huge stove was working full blast; crockery and cutlery filled the kitchen table along with crystal goblets.

‘Good, another set of hands, welcome to the mad house Ginevra,’ Narcissa said, ‘now, if you and Astoria would take the plates and cutlery in, Hermione can organise the goblets.’ Narcissa was not dressed in her Yule finery yet; the preparation of the Yule dinner being far more important. The three young women moved in and out of the kitchen, setting the table, placing spare crocks and cutlery on the long sideboard, setting out the wine that would accompany the meal and generally making the table look spectacular. There was plenty of easy chatter amongst them and some shrieks of laughter as something went wrong or spilt. Lucius popped his head around the door once but was shooed away by Narcissa brandishing a tea towel. Within thirty minutes, the table was laid, the food almost ready and the four women opened their own bottle of Unicorn Champagne as a reward. After her second glass, Narcissa went upstairs to make herself presentable.

Ginny wandered back into the Great Hall and stood by Harry, who put his arm around her and gave her a squeeze. The other women joined their menfolk and they chatted while waiting for Narcissa. Lucius looked across to the stairs and a huge smile lit up his face. He moved to his wife as she swept into the Great Hall, took her hand and kissed it. She laughed and pulled him into a kiss. Ginny thought she would never live to see the day when Lucius Malfoy blushed, but he just did. Narcissa looked magnificent in black and silver, mirroring her husband; she wore a stunning black Mantilla in her hair and an expensive emerald and diamond cuff on her wrist.

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, Wizards and Witches, would you please take your seats at the table, Yule Dinner is to be served,’ she said and went back into the kitchen. Place names made sure there was no fighting over whom should sit where. Everyone stood behind their chair and waited. The kitchen door swung open and Narcissa came out followed by a serving platter on which sat the Yule goose and dishes of all kinds filled with traditional trimmings. The goose made it way to Lucius where it gently set itself on the table in front of him; the other dishes spread themselves out along the table. Narcissa took her place and then everyone sat, except Lucius, who picked up the carving set and preceded to carve the goose.

It was a very different Yule to any Ginny had experience before. There was no fighting over the best bits, no scrabbling to be seated in the best chair and definitely no throwing of food, which her brothers would sometimes indulge in, especially when Molly’s back was turned. Not that it was solemn affair. Far from it; there was talk, jokes and laughter in abundance around the table. Crackers, supplied by Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes, were pulled and everyone sported a suitable Yule crown. However, as all WWW products come with very small print, Severus was sporting a very fetching fez, which he wore at a rakish angle. Talk around the table ranged from Adam and his Muggle job (he was an architect) to the Holyhead Harpies; Ginny was quizzed closely about their current form and if they stood a chance of winning the league next year.

She was sitting between Lucius at the head of the table and Draco. Harry was opposite and would give her an encouraging smile every now and again. Lucius engaged her in conversation about how Yule was usually celebrated at The Burrow and she made him and everyone else laugh at some the antics her brothers would get up to, many of which would leave Molly saying there would not be a Yule dinner at The Burrow ever again.

‘And is Molly upset that you and Harry are not with the family this year?’ Lucius asked her.

‘Yes, she was upset at first, but I told her that I had to think of my husband now, and not my family...
all of the time. But we are spending St Stephen’s Day with them, so she was happy in the end,’ she took a sip of wine as she finished. Her statement started a whole new line of conversation about families. Hermione said that as her parents lived in Australia, they would be celebrating Yule in the summer although it was still December. It was while the conversation was in full swing that an owl flew in and deposited a parchment in front of Kingsley before flying off again. He picked it up and read it.

‘… It’s from Professor Longbottom in Lucerne; it says ... “Luna delivered of twins last night – mother and sons doing well. I have two sons!! Merry Yule. Neville.” Well, well, well, seems like the festive season has more to celebrate,’ Kingsley raised his goblet. ‘To Neville, Luna and their sons, health, peace and prosperity to the new family,’ and everyone drank to the new additions to the wizarding world.

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Narcissa rose from the table and all the used and dirty crockery, cutlery and goblets followed her into the kitchen. She came back and tapped Hermione on the shoulder. ‘Would you come and help me, Hermione?’ she stood and followed Narcissa back into the kitchen where Narcissa busied herself with preparing the Figgy Pudding.

‘When are you going to tell him?’ Narcissa said, warming Dragon Brandy on the stove.


‘Severus of course … that you’re pregnant.’

‘How do you know?’

‘My dear, you are glowing, your breasts are filling out as are your hips,’ she poured the hot Brandy over the pudding. ‘How far along?’

‘About thirteen weeks. I didn’t want to say anything … after losing the other baby … I just want to be certain this time.’

‘I lost three babies, which is why Draco was always so precious to us. It’s a Pure Blood thing … we either have difficulty conceiving or we miscarry; having Muggle blood somewhere in the ancestry prevents that … it somehow strengthens our child bearing potential.’ She placed a large sprig of Holly on top of the pudding, then taking her wand, Narcissa set fire to the Brandy. ‘Tell him today … we all deserve more good news. Now, take the plates and dim the lights as you go in.’ She piled the plates into Hermione’s hands.

Hermione went into the Great Hall and set the plates on the table. ‘Reducio!’ she commanded and all the candles dimmed. Narcissa came in with the flaming pudding; small dragons were fluttering above it. There was a loud ‘aahhh’ and spontaneous clapping broke out. She placed the pudding in front of Lucius and he did the honours. When seconds and in some cases, thirds had been consumed, everyone sat back in their chairs, replete. Lucius took the joke from his cracker and read it out.

‘What do you call a deaf wizard?’ When everyone had shaken their heads in consternation, he read the answer. ‘You can call him anything you like, he can’t hear you,’ which bought groans of disbelief from everyone.
‘I’ve got one,’ Harry called, ‘what do you call two robbers?’ Everyone stared at him blankly. ‘A pair of knickers,’ Once again there was a collective groan around the table; Adam was the only one who laughed. ‘Well they are Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes jokes,’ Harry said, as if it explained everything.

Draco then took the assortment of tiny musical instruments that came as tokens in the crackers and following the instructions, tried to make them play. The din was deafening. Then Ginny said she could make them play, after all, George was her brother. So she set them up, waved her wand and the din was even louder. By the time everyone had tried to make them play, they were all falling about laughing. Then Lucius tapped his goblet for quiet. He stood and the rest followed.

‘I want to thank you all for coming and making this the best Yule Malfoy Manor has enjoyed in a very long time. I especially welcome new friends,’ and he looked at Adam and Ginny. ‘I also want to thank Astoria for making Draco a very happy man and Narcissa and I … happy grandparents to be. Now, let us charge our goblets for the Yule toast.’ With a wave of his hand, everyone found their goblet filled with sweet, mulled cider. “To friends and to kin/Yule cheer do I bring /The old year is dead/The New Year ahead/So to friends old and new/A Wæs Hæl to you!”

‘Wæs Hæl’ everyone toasted and sat down, except for Hermione. All eyes turned to her and she blushed slightly. Her Yule gown of the deep green of Holly leaves with a purple silk lining and trim was a gift from Severus, as was the emerald necklace she was wearing at her throat. She looked beautiful.

‘Erm … I’m not used to making speeches …’

‘That … is not entirely true …’ Severus chimed in, raising his goblet to her, which brought laughter from the rest.

She ignored him ‘…and as this is not a speech …’ she poked her tongue out at her husband ‘… it’s more of an announcement really.’ She now had the attention of all around the table. ‘Although I have already given my dear husband his Yule gift, which he enjoyed immensely,’ she winked at Severus, who rolled his eyes and shook his head as everyone else laughed. ‘… I have an extra gift for him,’ she raised her goblet ‘I would like to toast Severus, my delightful husband and the most recent addition to that illustrious long line of … fathers,’ she took a sip of mulled cider and sat down.

There was a stunned silence around the table. Severus, who had his goblet raised to his lips, froze in mid sip. He shook his head, as if clearing his mind. ‘I’m sorry,’ he said, ‘what did you say?’ Everyone laughed at him and cheered. There was a flurry of well-wishers around him as he was kissed by the women, except Ginny and had his back thumped and hand pumped by the men. He was too stunned to stop any of it. ‘I’m sorry, I still don’t understand.’

Hermione groaned, she got up and went around the table to him. He looked at her, still not understanding. ‘It is really very simple my darling, now pay attention’ and she placed his hand on her belly, ‘this … baby … me mother … you father.’

‘Me? How?’

She cuffed him, ‘git’ and was rewarded by being pulled onto his lap and soundly kissed which made everyone cheer.

‘Right, congratulations to you both,’ Lucius said, all business like, ‘but, it is now time to clear everything away and prepare for Charades … so family, friends …’ he pushed his chair back and began to collect plates together.
Ginny helped to get things into the kitchen, which again, was organised chaos. She and Lucius placed all the dirty dishes on the draining board, ready for Narcissa to wash and dry them with the use of magic. She went back to the table and with Lucius, cleared the remaining items away. Back in the kitchen Narcissa had placed all the clean crockery and goblets on the kitchen table, Lucius picked them up and placed them on the dirty pile. This bought him an exasperated look and a punch on the arm from Narcissa. Ginny couldn’t help but smile; it was exactly the same thing that happened at The Burrow, Arthur would think he was being helpful, only to find out he was being anything but. She stood watching them for a minute, working around each other and using as much magic as was needed to get things cleared away quickly. She thought they worked well as a team and actually … she liked them. She cleared her throat and they both turned to her.

‘Excuse me,’ she went up to them, ‘my name is Ginevra Molly Potter, but my friends call me Ginny,’ and she held out her hand. Lucius and Narcissa looked at each other.

‘I am very pleased to meet you, Ginny,’ Narcissa took her offered hand and shook it, ‘please, call me Narcissa.’

Lucius looked at the former Ginevra Weasley, and smiled. ‘I am also delighted to know you, Ginny,’ he said as he took her hand and kissed it. ‘Lucius Malfoy of the House of Malfoy at your service, most people call me Mr Malfoy, but you may call me … Mr Malfoy,’ he said with a cheeky grin. Narcissa gave him another thump, ‘Of course, friends can call me Lucius,’ and with that comment, Ginny laughed and the ice was broken once and for all. With a big smile on her face and feeling very proud of herself, she left the kitchen and bumped into Harry. He hugged her.

‘I’m so proud of you Gin, and I love you very much,’ she pulled him over to the doorway and under the mistletoe, she kissed him soundly.

‘Right,’ she said, ‘one more.’ And she walked over to where Severus was talking to Kingsley and Adam. Once again she cleared her throat.

‘Excuse me, but might I have a word with Professor Snape?’

Severus raised an eyebrow but nodded. She walked over to a quiet corner of the room and Severus followed. Her heart was in her mouth as she turned to him.

‘Ginevra, how may I help you?’ His face was serious and stern and if it hadn’t been for the Fez he was still wearing that made him less fearsome, she would have turned and fled.

She took a deep breath. ‘I have said many things to you and about you in the past that I am not proud of. I wish to apologise to you for those things; in the past I have been childish and churlish. I cannot apologise for the rest of my family, but I will no longer defend them, nor support them when airing their opinions about Lucius and Narcissa … or Draco and Astoria. It would seem that people can change and it is up to my family to change as well … starting with me. So … my name is Ginevra Molly Potter, but my friends call me Ginny,’ and she held out her hand.

Severus took her offered hand, bought it up to his lips and kissed the back of it. ‘I am delighted to meet you at last, Ginny; my friends call me Severus.’ Ginny smiled at him and felt a huge weight lift from her shoulders, she was also very surprised when he pulled her into a hug.

Across the room, Harry and Hermione stood side by side and watched their spouses.

‘What do you think that is all about?’ Hermione said.

‘She’s grown up,’ Harry replied with a grin, ‘she’s made peace with Lucius and Narcissa. Now it
would seem that she has stopped being intimated by Severus.’

‘Hmm … either that or he’s just given her an A+ in Potions.’

‘Wouldn’t surprise me,’ Harry laughed, ‘he always was a git when it came to marking.’ They watched as Severus, with his arm around Ginny’s shoulder, walked back to Kingsley and Adam. He looked across at Hermione and gave a small smile. She sent a magical kiss to him which landed on his cheek. Harry put his arm around her waist and she leaned her head on his shoulder.

‘We’ve come a long way Harry Potter,’ she said.

‘Yes we have Hermione Snape.’

‘Did you ever think this is how it would turn out?’

‘Never! But then, some things are meant to be,’ and he gave her a squeeze.

Lucius and Narcissa came bustling back into the Great Hall. ‘Right,’ Lucius ordered, ‘two teams, wizards versus witches, a maximum of three misleading clues in any round and jokers are wild.’

There was a scramble for seats as the two teams organised themselves.

‘We are one short,’ Narcissa said, ‘and you have one extra.’ The wizards and Adam went into a huddle and muttered amongst themselves; eventually, Kingsley was nominated to join the opposing team. Narcissa gave him a hard stare as he came and sat with the witches, ‘no funny business, Kingsley,’ she threatened. Kingsley merely shrugged and smiled innocently.

‘Witches first,’ Ginny said and jumped up. She faced her team and started to mime. Guesses came thick and fast. Kissing? That got a yes. Ginny turned away and her team saw her arms come around her back and move up and down. Cuddling? Kissing and cuddling? That got a finger on the nose from Ginny. The arm movement to across the room left everyone puzzled. Kissing and cuddling over there? Came the suggestion. That was a no. Still the same gesture. Beyond? A waggle of the hand. Beyond kissing and cuddling? On the nose!

‘Sex!’ Astoria said and the women screamed in delight when she was right. Then the same arm movement. ‘Beyond sex?’ Astoria ventured.

‘More sex?’ Hermione added and they all laughed again. Kingsley was sitting very quietly, obviously out of his depth. More sex got a no, from Ginny.

‘Times nearly up,’ Lucius said.

‘You didn’t mention a time limit,’ Narcissa protested.

‘You didn’t ask,’ Lucius smirked.

‘It’s something beyond sex?’ Hermione said and got a definite yes from Ginny. The women sat quietly for a moment and then they all looked at each other, then at Ginny. As one they jumped up and squealed in delight as they hugged and kissed her.

‘Have you any idea what is going on?’ Severus asked.

‘None whatsoever,’ Lucius replied, ‘I’m at a loss as to why they are so excited by beyond sex; it’s not a real answer to anything.’

‘I think …’ Adam started saying and four men turned to him, ‘… I think Ginny has just told them
that ... she’s ... erm ... pregnant.'

Harry sat with a stupid smile on his face; then he stood and went to his wife. He pulled her into him and laughed. Then he cried; ‘I’m so happy,’ he managed to say at last.

‘You do realise that there is no way we can win now without resorting to low cunning and devious magic?’ Lucius sighed, as along with the other men he went to congratulate the newest parents to be.

Charades continued until everyone was too exhausted from laughing to carry on. The wizards insisted they had won. The witches said that was only because they had planted Kingsley in their team. Chairs and sofas were pulled up to the fire, more mulled wine and cider was brought out along with sandwiches and cake. The group sat around the Yule Log; it was Hermione who started the singing.

“Brothers, sisters, come to sing
Glory to the new-born King!
Gardens peaceful, forests wild
Celebrate the Winter Child!
Now the time of glowing starts!
Joyful hands and joyful hearts!
Cheer the Yule log as it burns!
For once again the Sun returns!

Brothers, sisters, come to sing
Glory to the new-born King!”

Then Draco sang another song in a voice that was mellow and beautiful.

“Maiden, Mother, Ancient Crone,
Queen of Heaven on your throne,
Praise we sing Thee, Love we bring Thee,
For all that you have shown.

Oh oh, Moon of Silver, Sun of Gold,
Gentle Lady, Lord so bold!
Guide us ever, failing never,
Lead us in ways of old.

Lord of Darkness, Lord of Light,
Gentle Brother, King of Might,
Praise we sing thee, Love we bring Thee
All upon this Solstice night.”

Everyone joined in the chorus and there were many appreciative nods as the song finished.

‘I know the tune, but the words are different,’ Adam said.

‘Yes, many things are similar in our world,’ Lucius said, ‘do you know any Yule songs Adam?’

‘Adam has a most lovely voice,’ Kingsley said, ‘sing the song from your childhood, my love.’

Adam blushed as they encouraged him to sing. ‘All right, but you have been warned. I learnt this version in the original language when I was at school.’ Adam made himself comfortable and started to sing.
“Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!”

‘Oh that’s lovely!’ Narcissa said, ‘is there any more?’ Adam nodded and continued. They all sat in the glow from the Yule Log listening to Adam sing the remaining verses of that most beautiful and traditional of carols. Adam bowed his head as he was applauded and he blushed when Kingsley gave him a hug.

‘The version we sing is called ‘Solstice Night’,’ Lucius said, ‘but that is simply beautiful. Thank you for sharing it with us, Adam.’

The evening gave way to night, with more games, food, wine and laughter. Couples kissed under the mistletoe whenever they could and at the end of the night Draco called everyone to the table. ‘I think I’ve worked it out,’ he said and pointed his wand at the miniature instruments that started to play a jaunty dance tune. Draco frowned, ‘well, it’s worked … but it’s not very Yule … more like … the music we heard on Harry’s Groom’s night in that lap dan …’

‘… Yes, I agree,’ Severus butted in quickly, ‘… very … jaunty. Well, I don’t know about you, but I am very tired,’ and he gave the worst fake yawn anyone had ever seen.

‘Harry, you and Ginny are very welcome to stay, Severus and Hermione are staying over,’ Narcissa said.

‘Thanks Mrs M, but we have an early start tomorrow and we have to work out how to stop Molly fainting when we tell her the news,’ Harry smiled at Narcissa, then blushed as he realised what he had called her.

‘Yes, I’m sure mum still thinks I’m a virgin,’ Ginny said, before blushing as deeply as her husband. Hermione, Draco and Astoria were holding on to each other as they laughed. Lucius was the first to gather his wits and brought their cloaks and after many hugs and kisses, Harry and Ginny flew home.

In bed that night Harry asked Ginny if she had enjoyed herself.

‘Very much, and I was going to tell you about the baby … do you mind that I told you in front everyone?’

‘No … I think it’s great. You do realise that the three of you will be having babies at about the same time and what with Luna’s two, I think in eleven years’ time, Hogwarts will have more friends starting than ever before. You will have to stop playing at some point as well.’

‘Yes, I know … something else will come along … I’m sure,’ she yawned. ‘Was that really Professor Snape today?’ she asked.

‘Yes. That was the real Professor Snape,’ he turned to cuddle her.

‘He and Hermione are very gentle with each other aren’t they? And the way they touch each other now and again and did you see his hand on her bum? Very sexy,’ Ginny said as she drifted off to sleep. ‘Is that your hand on my bum, Harry Potter?’

‘I bloody well hope so,’ Harry replied with a wicked chuckle.
Back at Malfoy Manor, Hermione and Severus were in their room and laughing at the day’s events. She turned away from him, ‘undo my necklace please, then you can unlace me,’ She lifted her hair so he could get to the clasp. As usual, Rupert the hound was sitting on the bed. Severus kissed the back of her neck as he slipped the necklace off. Then his hands fell to the laces of her gown and he loosened them, she caught it before it slipped to the floor. She turned and holding her dress to her with one hand, she undid the buttons of his shirt with the other; she then kissed his chest. He caught her in a deep kiss.

‘Seen enough?’ she muttered.

‘Of you? Never!’ he replied and nipped at her neck.

‘Not you …’ she pulled away, went to the door and opened it ‘you … alright Draco … out … and get a bloody licence.’ Rupert jumped down off the bed and with what could only be described as a smug hound like grin, left the room. Hermione closed the door and placed privacy charms around it.

‘How did you know?’ Severus asked as he helped her remove the gown, ‘we have had Rupert in this room many times.’

‘Ah yes, and that was Rupert and he always curls up and goes to sleep. Draco hound always sits and watches.’ He caught her and removed the rest of her clothes and tumbled her onto the bed.

‘There are going to be a lot of babies born next year,’ he said, laying his hand on her belly.

‘Yes, just think, in eleven years time they will all be starting at Hogwarts,’ she accepted his kisses then pushed him off and sat up, ‘Oh Merlin, in eleven years time I could be Headmistress.’

‘Not could be my darling … will be … if Kingsley has his way,’ he pulled the covers over them and they drifted off to sleep with his hand once again gently resting against the new life she carried within her.

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She was upstairs listening to music when she heard and felt the front door slam. She went downstairs into the kitchen; Severus was sitting at the table nursing a cup of tea and a pained expression.

‘Where’s Harry? She asked.

‘He has just left,’ he replied. ‘He …’

‘Oh you great oaf … who was it this time … James or Sirius?’ Severus remained silent. ‘Bloody hell Severus … not both? When are you going to learn that as far as Harry is concerned James and Sirius are saints and did no wrong? Why must you always push your point?’ Severus hung his head. She went and put her arms around him. ‘I know how hard it is for you to like those two,’ she kissed his cheek. ‘Do you want me to go and speak to him, to apologise?’ Severus nodded and with a great sigh, got up and went upstairs.

She went to Godric’s Hollow and saw Harry, who was still seething. She talked to him, calmed him down and apologised for Severus, who she said was at home with a hang hound expression because he knew he was in the wrong. Harry listened and finally admitted that he also goaded Severus each time the subject of The Marauders came up. He had been to see Severus to ask his advice about the
position at Hogwarts; he was having second thoughts about the whole thing and what with Ginny being pregnant.

‘What was Severus’s advice?’ she asked as they sat down for a cup of tea with Ginny.

‘He said it is the job I was born to do; that there was no one better qualified to do it. He also thought that my taking the position may break Voldemort’s Curse forever.’

‘So then, how did you get on to The Marauders?’ she asked taking a Ginger Nut and nibbling it; she and Ginny were getting the same cravings. Harry pushed his glasses up his nose and smiled sheepishly.

‘Well, that would have been me … I know, I know … it’s childish and silly but I keep thinking that one day he will turn round and say the dad and Sirius were OK,’ he shrugged.

‘But Harry, you know they weren’t to him … look, just promise me that for the duration of our pregnancies you will not goad him and I will make sure he doesn’t upset you, OK?’ Harry nodded and they changed the subject to working at Hogwarts. Harry was in much better spirits by the time she left. This was not the case with Severus. When she arrived home he was in his potions room and making great play of being very busy and he didn’t want to be disturbed. He hardly ate at supper time and when they went to bed, he turned over, away from her. She sighed, but knew that he was upset with himself and that when he got like this, it was best to give him some time. She kissed his back, turned over and went to sleep.

She opened her eyes and blinked and reached out to him. He was not in bed. Lazily, she turned over and saw his silhouette framed against the pale moonlight; he was sitting on the cushions. She got out of bed and pulled a blanket around her shoulders against the January chill. She sat down next to him; he didn’t acknowledge her, so she put the blanket around them both and waited; he would talk when he was ready. The African Veldt was quiet, a lone hyena called from somewhere far off, but that was the only sound, even the crickets were silent. She sighed, she was happy and content. They had celebrated his birthday a week ago quietly together; she had given him a new scarf and a first edition copy of *Culpeper’s Herbal* she had come across in the Muggle junk shop in Diagon Alley. Then she had cooked his favourite food, beef casserole with potatoes and veg and a fresh exotic fruit salad, courtesy of the Muggle supermarket close to her parent’s house.

She had felt the baby quicken two nights ago. She had taken his hand and placed it on her belly. When he felt the gentle flutter he pulled his hand away quickly, as if in disbelief. He replaced it, waiting for the next movement. He had looked at her in wonderment, she had kissed him and the love making that followed was soft and gentle. Afterwards, he had asked her if the baby minded. Minded what? She had asked. Its parents making love. She had laughed softly and told him that the operative word was love and she was certain the baby didn’t mind.

‘I can’t do it,’ his voice brought her back to the present.

‘Do what?’

‘Be a father.’

She was silent. This was a turnaround and there was a note of desperation in his voice.

‘Why not?’

‘What if …’ his head dropped … ‘what if I can’t be a father? I can’t even have a conversation with Harry without I upset him.’ He turned to her, ‘what if I don’t … love my child?’
Her alarm bells started to ring. This was not about Severus or even Harry … this was about … Tobias. Shit. It was the one remaining area of his life that he had not told her about. She knew that the pain and hurt ran very deep. Harry, who had caught the merest glimpse of his childhood, had told her how angry Severus had become because he had seen that memory.

‘You are not your father.’

‘Ah, but I am.’

‘You are also your mother.’

‘I look like my father … not my mother.’ He stared straight ahead now, not at her. She knew that if she tried to probe, all his quite formidable Occulmency barriers would be up. He was hiding.

‘Of everyone I know Severus Snape … you have the greatest capacity for love of them all.’

‘You don’t understand,’ he spat the words, ‘what if I don’t feel anything for my own child? What if I can’t love him?’

‘Or her,’ she said. He just shook his head dismissively.

This was not about his ability to love his child rather, it was Tobias’s inability to love his son. ‘I say again, you are not your father.’

‘But what if I am?’ he all but yelled. She sighed. It was stalemate. The conversation, such as it was, needed to shift. She sat for a time, to see if he said anything else or made any other comment. He didn’t, he just sat like a statue, as silent as the Sphinx, staring out of the tent.

‘Very well,’ she said and got up. She took the blanket with her and she wrapped it around herself as she left the bedroom and went into his potions room. With a Lumos! she lit the lamps and candles and started to look along the shelves and in drawers for what she needed. As she came across ingredients, she placed them on the work bench. She worked methodically around the room and when she had all that she needed, she placed them in separate groups.

‘What are you doing?’ he said from the door.

She stood by the workbench. ‘So, you are concerned that you will be unable to love your child … that you are your father, the man you hated and still hate.’ She held her hand up, stopping his interruption. ‘Very well, here we have the solution to your problem,’ and she swept her hand along the work bench. ‘Here we have Penny Royal, Hellebore and Juniper; they work most of the time and if they don’t … anyway. Here are Madder and Ergot, much more reliable, although of course the wrong dose and both die; now, my particular favourite … Worm Fern, almost one hundred percent successful and fairly safe.’

‘What … are you … doing?’ he cried, his eyes wide as he looked intently at the gathered ingredients.

‘Getting rid of your problem. Here we have Silphium, which when mixed with Skink urine, Dragon’s Blood and a drop of Hemlock is very effective, although too much Dragon’s Blood or Hemlock can have disastrous results.’

‘But … these are all …’

‘… Abortificum, yes … or Sacrificum … depends on which way you look at it. Which shall it be eh? And after, what then? Do we carry on as usual, pretend it didn’t happen? Pretend we didn’t create a life from our love?’
‘Hermione … I …’

She shrugged dismissively. ‘I have had to sacrifice my children before; one more will not make any difference. So let’s get to it … let’s get brewing. Your problem will be gone by tomorrow night. Of course, I might be gone as well, but that’s fine, because then … you’ll never have to face your father ever again.’ She picked up a small cauldron and placed it on the tripod. ‘It was usually a Druid or Priestess who made this for me, but I think I remember the measurements.’ She turned to him, ‘unless you want to brew it? No? Right, I think I’ll go with the Worm Fern as I know it best.’

She measured four fluid drachms of water into the cauldron then placed two scrupulums of the powered root of the plant into the water; she was about to light the flame under the cauldron when his hand stopped her.

‘Don’t …’ he said.

‘Do you think I want to do this Severus?’ she growled at him in frustration. ‘No one knows how to be a parent until it happens; I might be completely rubbish at being a mother to this child; but this tiny life I carry within me is ours … yours and mine … you simply do the best you can.’

‘Hermione …’

‘You … are not your feckin’ father,’ her words were forceful and spoken with an Irish lilt. ‘Severus, you never were and you never will be;’ she was gentle now, ‘if you were your father, you would not love me as much as you do, because as sure as an egg is an egg, Tobias did not love your mother.’ He moved to her and pulled her into him. ‘How can you doubt yourself so much?’ she whispered. He guided her back into the bedroom and onto the bed.

‘I do doubt … I don’t want to, but I do,’ he sat against the pillows and pulled his knees up and wrapped his arms around them. ‘I never thought I would ever be a husband, let alone a father. When you first told me, at Yule … I was so pleased, so happy. But then … when I felt it move … it became real; a real baby, a real child, our child … my child.’ She sat next to him, silent, but there for him should he need her.

‘My father didn’t love me. I don’t think he knew how to; he was cold, unbending, rigid in everything.’ He voice took on a dreamlike quality; it was far away yet … so close and hurting. ‘He worked in one of the mills that used to be everywhere around here. Cotton mills … you could walk down any street locally, Weavers Way, Mill Road or Stack Lane and hear the clickerty-clack of the looms, day or night. He was a foreman in the mill … he worked hard for little money. I still have no idea how he and my mother met, let alone marry. She never spoke of it. When I was growing up and began to understand the nature of love, mainly thanks to Lily, I couldn’t even think how I was conceived. I don’t remember them saying a loving or kind word to each other.’ She reached out and took his hand, holding it and giving him strength. ‘He reached out and took his hand, holding it and giving him strength. ‘He blamed her for … everything. But she wasn’t to blame for the mills closing or the rents going up or him losing his job and not able to get another one. She did her best … but it was never enough. He would sit in his chair by the fire and I would feel his cold eyes on me. Then he would go down the pub … he always had money for a drink … and when he came back …’”

‘What happened to him?’

‘I was in my fourth year at Hogwarts … Albus sent for me. He told me there had been an accident … my father … was dead. He had drowned in a mill run. The mills needed deep, fast flowing water to power the turbines. Each mill had a run and a weir that fed the water into the engine room. It was thought … he had fallen in and drowned. He was probably drunk.’ Severus sat immobile and quiet, he took a gulp of air before continuing, ‘Albus was very kind and concerned for me. He would never
know it was the best news I had ever received. It was he who bought this house for me … so I would have somewhere to live.’

‘… And what of your mum?’

He was silent for another long time; she watched his eyes close, as if shutting out the memory. ‘I watched him destroy her, bit by bit … break her spirit until she became a mere shadow. She simply gave up. I came home for Yule in my third year and she wasn’t here.’ He was shaking uncontrollably now; she pulled the covers over them both and drew him close to her. ‘I went straight back to Hogwarts, I wasn’t going to spend any time alone with him. I hated him so much by this time; I could easily have hexed him … who would have cared or known? Albus wanted to know why I had come back and I told him. I didn’t know where she had gone, she just wasn’t here. A few days later, Albus told me that she had been seen at the Ministry going down to Level Nine … she had … gone into the Veil.’

He clung to her shaking and she stroked his hair and soothed him.

‘He never once touched me gently … or held me … or praised me,’ she felt his tears against her shoulder. She held him for the rest of the night until he had wept all the hate, fear, anger and hurt out; wept all the tears for the boy who had wanted to be loved by a father who couldn’t love; until finally, he fell asleep.

It was the fluttering of butterflies inside her that woke her up. Severus still slept in her arms. She took his hand and placed it on the small swell of her belly. He opened his eyes.

‘Your daughter wants her mum to have some breakfast,’ she smiled at him. She waited for his response; what he did now would tell her if the doubt was gone … if the family ghosts that haunted him were finally laid to rest.

He moved down the bed until his head was over her belly, he leaned in and kissed the skin below her belly button. ‘Hello, baby … this is your daddy. How about I get your mum breakfast in bed?’ her skin rippled ever so lightly. He grinned, ‘I will take that as a yes,’ he scooted back up the bed and kissed his wife. ‘Daughter?’

‘Fifty - fifty chance,’ she laughed.

‘Then I think I love both mother … and daughter,’ and he lay his hand over the new life he had helped create.

He left to organise her breakfast and she lay back with satisfied sigh. ‘I think your daddy is going to like your names,’ she said to the life inside her. She was looking forward to breakfast and the first cup of tea of the day. Yes, all in all, Severus was going to be a wonderful father. She closed her eyes while she waited and wondered how many children he would like.

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The items mentioned have all been used historically to induce and bring about the termination of a pregnancy. They are all very dangerous and most only had limited success, often killing the mother in the process. And yes, some of them were used in certain Celtic rituals were a high status woman would sacrifice a child she carried for the benefit of the Tribe or to appease the Deities.

There is nothing in canon about Tobias and Eileen Snape after about 1971 – so their demise is all my own idea.
Hermione sat behind the large desk in the Headmistress’s office at Hogwarts. It was four weeks until the end of term and it was hot; the heat was making everyone short-tempered and fractious. This was made worse by the fact that all students were sitting for exams or revising for them. She shuffled papers around, her mind not really on the reports she was meant to be reading. She was tired, hot and as snappy as a Hungarian Horntail that needed feeding. She had spent this last term at Hogwarts familiarising herself with being Headmistress before taking up the position from the start of the new
school year and getting to grips with the vast amount of administrative paperwork that went with the post. It didn’t help that she was eight months pregnant and that this pregnancy was the worst of the lot. She had sailed through her previous four pregnancies, working right up to the day of confinement. This pregnancy had been difficult from the first. She sighed heavily.

It was her own fault, she had become broody when her youngest was three years old; and then, when Severus had surprised her with a romantic getaway for just the two of them for their twelfth wedding anniversary, she had jumped at the chance. If she had been sensible, she would have said to him to delay the romantic getaway. But she wasn’t being particularly sensible, especially as Minerva, Albus and even Harry encouraged her to take the trip, as it could be the last chance before taking up her new post. So after leaving the children with the Malfoy’s, as Malfoy Manor was a second home for them, Severus had whisked her off to rural Switzerland for a week of doing nothing in particular. The traditional chalet was set beside a pristine Alpine lake in a pristine Alpine meadow and although it was late in the year, the sun was still warm.

The setting was beautiful, not that they spent much time admiring the staggering views or walking around the lake or hiking in the surrounding mountains. No. Most of their time was spent engaged in the amount of rampant sex they used to have before children became a part of their lives. Every room in the chalet was christened, from the three bedrooms, two bathrooms, kitchen and the rug in front of the huge fireplace. They laughed, ate, drank but mostly, they made love. It was an idyllic time, free from the constraints of children. Of course they used privacy charms at home, however, young children had an uncanny knack of knowing when their parents wanted private time and so something usually came up, unfortunately … sometimes it wasn’t Severus.

She adored him; loved him; cherished him. He could still arouse her with a look or kiss or an intimate touch. Time alone together was a precious commodity and one they always grabbed with both hands. They loved their children dearly and would not be without them, but sometimes ….. Their time in Switzerland was therefore, precious and she knew the exact moment this baby had been conceived.

It was their last night and Severus had suggested they take a couple of blankets, a bottle or two of wine and go and sit by the lake and watch the stars appear. So they had walked the fifty yards to the lakeside, found a suitable spot, spread out the blankets and had toasted each other with crisp, white wine. She had then snuggled into his shoulder, her leg loosely over his. They had watched entranced as a meteor shower danced across the ink black sky before burning away to nothing as they hit the Earth’s atmosphere. When it was over she wanted to swim. Severus had said it would be freezing, but she was already stripping.

‘Make it warm,’ she had laughed as she ran towards the water.

‘You have altogether too much confidence in … my abilities,’ he replied, but was undressing and following her. He waded in up to his waist. ‘It’s freezing!’ he had yelled.

‘Be careful of the family jewels then,’ and she had splashed him with the icy water. They had swum around each other, coming together every now and then to kiss or caress. They left the water and wrapped themselves in the blankets as they lay down and watched the full moon rise.

‘I have a perfectly wonderful idea on how warm ourselves up,’ she had said.

‘Oh good … does it involve a warm fire and hot Dragon Brandy?’ he had asked.

She laughed deep in her throat and had shaken her head. ‘Oh no … nothing like that … just … magic.’
He had risen up on his elbow and looked at her; she saw his eyes flash with desire. ‘We have not used magic since …’

‘… Our wedding,’ she finished the sentence.

‘We almost killed each other.’

‘But it was sooo worth it.’

‘Hermione …’

‘I am your wife, Severus. Take me.’

‘I will not be gentle.’

‘Good … then nor will I,’ and she stood and dropped her blanket, he did the same.

The use of magic during sex was both erotic and dangerous. Releasing sexual magic was only undertaken by those who trusted each other completely. But for those who did, the outcome was as close to an out of body ecstatic experience as could be achieved. It was also loud … very loud. They stood before each other, eyes locked together. He sent a ripple of pleasure across her nipples; she reciprocated. His leer was feral and she responded with wild abandon. They progressed through the many levels of arousal, each more intense than the last. He used a ‘constrictus!’ on her, rooting her to the spot while his magic devoured every inch of her body outside … and inside. She was screaming her pleasure and pain by the time he released her and she could move; and when she did move, she had pinned him to the ground with a strength that belied her size. Now it was her turn to make him scream in ecstasy. She projected images into his mind, lustful, daring images that only served to heighten his pleasure. Then her mind was weaving the pattern of her desire within him. He shouted, he yelled, he threatened. His erection was swollen to the limit; how many times she brought him to the brink there was no counting. He had returned the favour by bringing her to the edge of orgasm, only to bring her down again, an act that brought many a long wail of frustration from her lips. He threw her off him and picked her up as if she were a mere feather. With his mind he was arousing every drop of blood, every nerve and every inch of her body with a magic tinged with dark power that heightened the experience for both. And what he gave to her, she returned to him … and more.

He slammed her against a tree. She only grunted. It now became a game of who would break first.

‘I WANT TO BE INSIDE YOU,’ he had screamed as he tried to pry her legs open. But she denied him; instead she kissed him and bit his lip, drawing blood, which she lapped up.

‘Inside me … NOW!’ she had yelled.

‘Not yet … I want more.’

So she had given him more; more than she had done on their wedding night. Her magic, powerful and ancient coursed through him, heating every cell with sexual desire. When she knew he could take no more and his erection was leaking so much she could feel the wetness against her, she allowed him in. Once inside her he thrust wildly; he filled her and she revelled in him. For one split second their eyes re-focused on each other and they knew they were ready. Leaning into the tree for support, she threw her head back, gripped him firmly around the waist and pushed herself down onto him to the hilt. She squeezed her pelvic muscles around him, making herself tighter; he cried out. She roughly pulled his mouth to hers and kissed him hungrily; he thrust once, twice then came deep within her. They screamed in unison as their shared orgasm carried them from the solid earth up into the starry sky.
He held her as he muttered ‘Tempore Tardum!’ and time slowed. Their shouts were the only thing that they heard and their thrusting bodies the only thing that moved; they were locked in an orgasmic embrace that flowed on and on through them. She let go completely at some point and had allowed his terrible power, tinged with Darkness to drift in and out of her mind and body. He held her, controlled her and wholly enveloped her in his love. A voice said ‘Resolvo!’ it could have been him or her, she didn’t know, didn’t care; she wanted this feeling to go on forever. Then they were rolling on the earth, he still thrust into her, moaning and groaning, his face beaded with sweat. She released him then, and gently, gently, she pulled her mind away from his. He slowed and as he stopped, he gave a strangled cry and slumped onto her.

Desire.

They fell asleep and it was only the sun’s rays that stirred them. And she knew as she opened her eyes and blinked in the light, that despite the contraceptive potion she took every day, sperm had met egg and had fused. She was pregnant.

‘Hullo,’ he said as he opened his eyes. ‘Remind me never to except an invitation for magical sex with you … ever again.’

She pushed him off her. ‘You enjoyed every second of it. Are you ready to go again?’

‘You are an extremely … bad woman,’ and he swatted her.

‘Ah, but you love me. C’mon, let’s take a dip in the lake,’ she pulled him up and they ran into the frigid water and ran straight back out again it was so cold.

They had returned home and about three months later, when she had confirmed the pregnancy to him, he had held her in his arms for many minutes; she was certain then that he desired another child as much as she had. The children’s responses had varied from “not another baby … muuuum,” from Eileen Lily aged eleven; “great” from Valerius Harry, aged nine; “how are babies made, mum?”; Corwen Albus, aged seven and “I’d rather have a Hippogriff”, from four year old Aurora Jean. All in all she thought that the news of another addition to the Snape clan had been well received.

This pregnancy however, was bad; really bad. She had had chronic morning sickness for nearly five months and had experienced intermittent bleeding. This baby was also a mover; it kicked, twisted and turned inside her as it grew. It was also a much larger baby than all the others, the consequence of which meant her ankles were swollen and her temper was growing shorter with each passing month. The midwife Healers at St Mungo’s assured her that all was well; but it was only Severus’s potions that kept her comfortable and sane.

She picked up another report and glanced at it just as sudden pain made her yelp. ‘Cut that our, please,’ she chided her baby.

‘Everything alright, Hermione?’ Albus asked.

‘Oh the usual Albus, I think this one want to be out sooner rather than later.’

‘Do you need anything?’

‘No thanks, I’ll be fine … at least I’ll be giving birth during the holidays.’ She wiped her hand across her forehead. ‘Was there always this many parchments, Albus?’

‘Always … most people think it’s easy being the Head, but you need to keep up with all the administration work or you’ll never have time for anything else. My advice to you is to do it while it’s fresh … get it out of the way … then you will have time for … other things.’
‘Oh … like what?’

‘Whatever you like to do,’ Albus chuckled. ‘Are you getting a nanny for the baby?’ he asked.

‘No, I will bring it with me for a little while; Moaner has said she doesn’t mind looking after it if I have to do things around the school and can’t take it with me. Then Astoria has offered to help out and you know Narcissa and Lucius love babysitting … and Severus will help out as well, so I think we’ll get by until the Yule holidays.’ She moved the pile of parchments to the side and stood up. ‘I think I’ll go to the staff room for a cup of tea, a piece of cake and put my feet up for a while. See you later, Albus.’

She left the office and made her way to the staff room. She was looking forward to taking up her post properly in the new term. Minerva was still teaching Transformation so would be around to give advice and help; and Albus would help her as well. Harry had been Defence Against the Dark Arts professor for four years; Draco was Potions professor and Head of Slytherin for three years; Neville was professor of Herbology, his appointment at Hogwarts had been something of a coup for the school as Durmstrang, Beauxbatons and several smaller schools were eager to recruit him; after all, he was now the wizarding world’s most acclaimed Herbologist. Luna had taken over Divination as well as Astronomy and Astrology; she was very good at both Astronomy and Astrology; her divination skills however, were still on par with Sybil Trelawney’s. Although Ginny worked at The Daily Prophet, she had recently cut her hours to a part time position so she could be the flying instructor and Quidditch coach for the school team. There had been a new tournament added to the Quidditch season two years ago; there was now an international school league that was proving very popular. And of course, Hagrid was still game keeper, grounds keeper, strange and magical animal keeper, Forbidden Forester and brother of Gawp. Professor Flitwick still taught charms and Madam Pomfrey still ruled the infirmary. So she knew she would be surrounded by friends and a highly qualified teaching staff.

She passed pupils in the corridors who greeted her politely and she stopped to poke her head into the Great Hall where NEWTS were in progress this afternoon. She went into the staff room, poured herself a cup of tea from the everlasting tea urn, picked up a large slab of fruit cake and lowered herself carefully into a large armchair. She moved a footstool to her and with a sigh of relief, put her feet up. She was half way through her tea when Harry came in.

‘Mione, how are you?’

‘Grumpy, Harry; I’d stay back if I were you.’

‘Hear you loud and clear,’ he said with a laugh, sitting on the arm of the chair and giving her a hug. ‘Baby giving you gyp?’

‘And then some … it was never this bad with the others,’ she finished her tea and gave the cup to him.

‘Only a few more weeks then you can put your feet up and let Severus take over,’ he said with a grin taking her cup and putting on the side.

She stood up quickly, ‘Harry? I don’t feel well … I need … to get to Madam Pom …’ but she didn’t get any further as she collapsed.

‘Bloody hell, Hermione!’ Harry rushed to her. ‘Hogwart’s elf!’ he shouted and Moaner appeared. She ran straight to Hermione. ‘Moaner, quickly … get Madam Pomfrey, get Master Severus and get Draco … quickly … GO!’ Moaner who seemed loathed to leave Hermione vanished. He reached down and took her hand and patted it, ‘come on Hermione, c’mon …’ he then glanced down her
prone body and saw the blood creeping down from under her dress. ‘No! no no no … please not this … Hermione … please not this.’ He was desperate, he could stop the bleeding, but this looked like something that was going wrong with the pregnancy, so he knew he mustn’t interfere.

Madam Pomfrey bustled into the room followed closely by Draco. ‘Oh goodness me, we need to get her to the infirmary quickly,’ she knelt beside Hermione, ‘but first I need to see why she is bleeding. Gentlemen … turn away.’ Draco and Harry obeyed. ‘Oh dear me … not good, not good at all. There … that should enable us to get her to the infirmary. Your assistance please gentlemen … ‘Leviosa!’ she commanded and Harry and Draco added their power to her own.

‘Moaner will take Madams Hermione and Pomfrey,’ the little elf appeared and before anyone could protest, she had taken Madam Pomfrey’s hand and disappeared. Harry and Draco ran to the infirmary where Hermione was already on a bed with the curtains drawn.

‘Moaner, where’s Master Severus?’ Harry asked the elf who was pacing up and down.

‘Can’t find Master,’ she said.

‘Go and find him, please … try the Ministry … he has to be somewhere.’

Moaner nodded and vanished. Madam Pomfrey emerged from the behind the curtains. ‘She needs to be at St Mungo’s … I can’t help her … this is beyond my experience.’

Harry was frantic. ‘How do we get her there? Moaners’ gone. Will another house elf take you and her?’

‘Bix!’ Madam Pomfrey called and Moaners husband appeared. ‘Bix, can you take me and Hermione to St Mungo’s?’

‘Can nae do it with the bed,’ Bix said.

‘Then I shall carry her,’ she turned to go back behind the curtain, ‘you two apperate from outside.’ She drew the curtains aside and picked up the pale body of Hermione who seemed to be hardly breathing. ‘Right Bix, I’m ready,’ the elf took her hand vanished.

Harry started out of the Infirmary. ‘You coming Draco?’

‘You go on, Harry, I’ll let Minerva know what’s happening. See you there.’ With a nod, Harry sprinted out and down into the grounds. Draco ran to find Minerva.

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Minister for Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt; Deputy Minister for Magic, Severus Snape; the Head of the Department of Mysteries, Lucius Malfoy and the Minister for Muggle Liaison and Protection, Arthur Weasley were in the Cabinet Room of number Ten Downing Street. They were attending a high level meeting with the Muggle PM and his Cabinet on proposals to amend the Protection of Muggle Laws. The meeting was making slow progress as most of the Cabinet didn’t believe in magic or the need to be protected by a group of “so called wizards”. The PM had been elected the year before and only he, his Deputy and the Secretary of State openly believed in magic. That is, until a small creature with large eyes and ears wearing a floral tea towel and a rather sweet tartan bow on her head appeared out of thin air in the middle of the Cabinet table. It ran straight to Deputy
Minister Snape.

‘Master Severus … Madam Hermione not well. She fell down and is bleeding … she is in the Infirmary at Hogwarts.’ Then she did something she had only done once before, she grabbed hold of Severus’s hand, ‘come quickly, Moaner take you.’ And they were gone.

There was confused mutterings around the table. ‘Was that performance for our benefit, Minister?’ a member of the Cabinet asked.

‘No, indeed not, Minister. The elf was referring to Deputy Minister Snape’s wife who is heavily pregnant … it would seem she has had some kind of accident.’ Kingsley gave a worried look to both Lucius and Arthur.

‘Gentlemen, ladies, if we can resume the meeting and pray that Mrs Snape is not seriously hurt,’ the PM said and the meeting resumed.

Moaner landed Severus in the middle of the Infirmary. He turned and saw the bloody sheets, but no Hermione.

‘Severus!’ Minerva called as she came towards him with Draco.

‘Where is she?’ he almost shouted, his voice edged with despair.

‘St Mungo’s, Madam Pomfrey took her. Oh Severus, I’m so sorry,’ and she hugged him. He didn’t say a word, merely pushed her gently away, nodded his thanks, took Moaner’s hand and disappeared. ‘You go as well Draco … keep us informed.’ Draco ran outside.

In the main reception area of St Mungo’s, Severus went straight to the reception witch by pushing his way to the front. ‘Severus Snape, my wife was brought here earlier.’

The reception witch checked her floating admissions card system. ‘Top floor, Ward ten, you can take the lift …’ but Severus had already gone ‘… or you can apperate, it’s up to you. Next!’

Harry was standing outside the door to the ward; he turned and saw a grim faced Severus bearing down on him. ‘Severus, I don’t know what to say … the Healers and Healer midwife are with her now.’

‘Let me through, Harry … I …’ he was pushing against Harry in an effort to get to the door to the ward. Harry was physically restraining him.

‘No … you can’t go in there, Severus,’ and he pushed the older man away.

‘Let me through or so help me I will …’ he hissed as he raised his hand, ready to cast a hex.

Harry placed his hands on Severus’s chest and gave him another push back. ‘Severus … listen to me … you do not want to go in there. Let them do their work …OK?’

Severus slumped then, his face contorted in his anguish. ‘I … apologise, Harry. Tell me what happened?’ At that point Draco appeared and ran towards them. He embraced Severus.

‘She came down to the staff room for a cup of tea; she said the baby was giving her gyp. She was sitting down with her feet up, but she suddenly jumped up and said she didn’t feel well, and then she just collapsed. She was bleeding …’

Arthur and Lucius appeared and came up to Severus; they simply stood by him as if lending him
their support. ‘Any news?’ Lucius asked, gripping Severus on the shoulder. Severus shook his head then looked around in panic.

‘What time is it? The children … the children need to be … collected from school.’

It was Arthur who clapped him on the shoulder this time. ‘Don’t worry Severus, Molly and I will take care of them. Where are they?’

‘Magdalene Fitzpaine Infants and Junior School, the same as Scorpius,’ Lucius answered.

‘Right, I know where that one is … do you want me to collect Scorpius as well? I can take them all back to The Burrow for tea.’

Draco nodded gratefully. ‘Thank you Arthur, Astoria and mother are Paris,’ he said by way of explanation.

‘Right you are then,’ Arthur said and turned to leave, ‘Severus? We are all with you, remember that,’ and he was gone.

Harry guided Severus to a chair and sat him down. ‘You need some of your famous Rescue Potion, got any in your robes?’ Harry tried to lift the mood.

‘No,’ Severus replied in a dull monotone and his face crumpled. ‘What if … I lose her?’ he whispered. Just then Madam Pomfrey came out of the ward followed by a Healer.

‘Deputy Minister Snape? I am Healer Erasmus. I’m afraid I have some bad news.’ Severus grabbed Harry’s arm. ‘Mrs Snape is Muggle born, is that correct?’

‘Yes … she is one hundred percent … Muggle born.’

‘Quite so. She has gone into labour … but she has a condition that Muggle doctors call Placenta Praevia; something that full or even half-blood witches do not suffer from.’ He saw the confused faces around him. ‘Hmm … the placenta is fully covering the cervix … the baby’s head is engaged and is pressing on the placenta which in turn is causing the bleeding. It is only slight at present, although I know it seems a lot … but once the waters break … there will be haemorrhaging.’

‘I don’t understand the significance of what you are saying,’ Severus snapped.

‘I can do nothing … she will need blood … Muggle blood … we do not carry Muggle blood and she will need to have the baby removed by Caesarean section … again, this is something we are not equipped to handle. I am sorry.’

‘What am I to do … let her suffer … let her … die? How can I take her to a Muggle hospital?’ and Severus slumped forward in his chair in utter defeat.

‘How much time do we have?’ It was Lucius who asked the question.

‘Her waters have not broken yet … but they could at any time … the labour is progressing fairly quickly … so the sooner the better … now, excuse me,’ with that, Healer Erasmus went back into the ward.

‘Leave it to me, Severus,’ Lucius took several paces back and apperated to the Ministry; straight into Kingsley’s office, by-passing Miss Catchpole and therefore, any need to answer her questions.

‘Lucius!’ a startled Kingsley exclaimed, ‘how is Hermione?’
‘It’s bad Kingsley, she needs to be in a Muggle hospital.’

Kingsley thought a second. ‘A visit to the Muggle PM is in order. Come along Lucius,’ and with that, they apperated straight into the Cabinet Room of Number Ten. Kingsley opened the door, ignoring the protest from the portrait whose job it was to announce the arrival of the Minister for Magic and was met with many a surprised stare and two bewildered security policemen.

‘Minister Shacklebolt to see the Prime Minister on a matter of grave urgency,’ he said in his best ‘don’t mess with me,’ voice.

‘The PM is out on official appointments for the rest of the afternoon and evening,’ and aide offered.

‘Where … exactly?’ Lucius demanded in his best 'arrogant and dangerous' voice.

‘What’s going on here?’ A strong female voice asked.

‘Good evening, Madam. These gentlemen are looking for the PM. I explained that …’

The stately middle-aged woman stopped the aide in mid flow. ‘You are Minister Shacklebolt; my husband gave a very accurate description of you … only he didn’t tell me how handsome you are. And this gentleman…?’ she looked at Lucius.

‘Lucius Malfoy of the House of Malfoy at your service, Madam,’ Lucius bowed as he kissed her hand.

‘How charming and such lovely manners,’ she turned to the gathered crowd. ‘Get on with your work all of you, go on … go on,’ and she shooed them away. ‘They do like to ogle so. Now, please follow me, perhaps I can be of help.’ She led them down a corridor and into a comfortable sitting room. ‘Morgana Jefferys, wife of the PM at your service; can I offer you anything?’ both men declined.

‘So, what is the problem?’

Quickly, Kingsley explained the situation and the need for urgency. Mrs Jefferys listened without interruption. When Kingsley finished, she took a deep breath. ‘So … this young woman needs to be admitted to a Muggle hospital, but it needs to be … discreet? Say no more Minister, allow me to help. I shall make a phone call, please wait here,’ and she left by another door. They paced up and down for what seemed like hours, but it was probably only ten minutes before she reappeared. She handed Kingsley a piece of paper with an address and name on it. ‘The Wellinstone Hospital, it’s all taken care of. Take the young woman here and ask for Dr Greyson; he’s my son in law and he is expecting you. It is a private hospital and used to dealing with … shall we say … celebrities?’ She smiled at them. ‘Right, now take what you need to apperate safely from my mind. You do know *Legilimency*, don’t you?’ she smiled again at their confused looks. ‘My family name is Moody; Uncle Alastor was my mother’s brother. I maybe a Squib, but I can still give you the location.’ Kingsley nodded and very gently, he entered her mind for the information, he then passed it onto Lucius. ‘Good, now take the young woman to hospital and don’t worry, I have asked for the bill to be sent directly to me … I will settle any account.’

‘Madam,’ Lucius gave her the formal title, ‘we are ever in your debt. How can we repay you?’

‘By helping bring about that Protection Bill, we can’t have anything happening like last time again.’ Both men bowed to her and vanished.
Severus looked up as Lucius and Kingsley approached him. ‘We have an address and a location to apparate to … you are expected,’ Kingsley said, ‘any more news?’

Severus shook his head. ‘Labour is progressing but her waters have not broken … yet,’ he knocked on the ward door and Madam Pomfrey appeared. ‘It is arranged,’ he said.

‘I will go back to the Ministry,’ Kingsley said, ‘but I expect to be kept updated,’ he grasped Severus’s hand and shook it solemnly.

The door opened and Healer Erasmus stood there carrying Hermione who was deathly pale and whimpering as another contraction rippled through her. Her eyes were glazed and she didn’t acknowledge anyone. It was Lucius who took her from the Healer. Madam Pomfrey handed Severus a file of notes.

‘I’ll go back to Hogwarts with Madam Pomfrey,’ Draco said, ‘I’ll tell Minerva what’s going on then I’ll go to The Burrow to be with the children,’ he nodded to his father and Severus, and with Madam Pomfrey, he left.

‘Hold onto me,’ Lucius commanded and he took them to the Wellinstone Hospital. They landed in the stairwell of the third floor. Harry opened the door and Lucius strode towards the nurse’s station. ‘Dr Greyson, he is expecting us,’ he said. The nurse looked up.

‘Yes, follow me please,’ she led them to the end of the corridor and into a room. ‘Place her on the bed.’ Lucius did so and the nurse began to remove Hermione’s dress by cutting it open. She then wrapped a black cuff around her upper arm, a clip was fixed to her left middle finger and a rod placed in her ear and then scrutinised. The nurse started making notes on a chart. The door opened and Dr Greyson entered the room.

‘I need everyone who is not the husband out of the room. Nurse, set up a line for the drip and one for plasma,’ he then turned to Severus, ‘how many weeks pregnant?’ Dr Greyson studied the notes Severus had given him.

‘Thirty seven.’

‘How many previous pregnancies … including miscarriages and terminations?’

‘Four live births, two miscarriages … no … terminations.’

‘Any problems with the other four pregnancies?’

‘No.’

‘How old is your wife?’

‘Thirty seven … thirty eight … her birthday is in September.’

Dr Greyson moved to Hermione and pressed down on her swollen abdomen, feeling all around her. Her skin rippled as another contraction started to build, Hermione moaned. The nurse placed an oxygen mask over her nose and mouth. ‘Is she currently taking any medication?’

‘No,’ Severus lied; he didn’t care to tell this doctor about the potions he had been making for her. Could they have caused this to happen, he wondered?
‘Has she been bleeding during this pregnancy?’

‘Yes … on and off.’

‘Nurse, I am going to need a theatre, call Dr Gupta, he is on duty tonight and an ob gynea team … immediately.’ The nurse nodded, picked up the telephone and began making calls to the various departments. ‘Come outside,’ he said to Severus. He led Severus outside, Harry and Lucius came rushing over. Dr Greyson looked at them and frowned. Harry was in his professors robes and Lucius and Severus were still in their formal robes from the meeting with the Prime Minister. Harry saw his look.

‘Er … we’re actors … rehearsing for a play … we didn’t bother to change … we needed to get Hermione here quickly … no time …’ his voice trailed away under the scrutiny of Dr Greyson.

‘And you are…?’

‘Harry … I’m … Severus’s son … from his first marriage …’

‘So Mrs Snape is your step-mother?’

‘Yeah … that’s right.’

And you …’ he turned to Lucius.

‘I am the girl’s …’

‘Uncle …’ Harry jumped in … ‘it’s a … family production,’ he smiled weakly. Dr Greyson looked from one to the other, but said nothing.

‘Mr Snape …’

‘Doctor …’ the nurse opened the door, ‘her waters have broken.’

‘Get her down to theatre right away finger prick for blood type have the bags sent to theatre then prep her for surgery I’ll be down shortly … Mr Snape I need you to sign a form giving me permission to operate on your wife.’ The door opened and the bed with Hermione was wheeled out by the nurse who was quickly joined by a porter and the bed was rushed to the lifts. The white sheets on the bed were soaked with amniotic fluid and blood; Hermione was deathly white. Another nurse placed a clip-board into Severus’s hand; he looked at the long complicated form, took the strange writing thing and signed his name on a dotted line. His hand was shaking uncontrollably. Dr Greyson looked at the form. ‘Thank you … now before I go … you have already been informed that your wife has a condition called Placenta Praevia … it can be very serious; St Mungo’s did exactly the right thing by referring her here. Now that Hermione’s waters have broken and she is in full labour, the placenta will be haemorrhaging; I will need to deliver the baby by C section and I have no idea what I will find or … just how serious things are. I need to ask you this Mr Snape … if I cannot save both … who do you want me to save … your wife or your baby?’

He was frozen to the spot. Unable to speak, his mind had stopped functioning and for the second time in his adult life, Severus Snape felt completely helpless.

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It was dim in the room, with only the lights over the bed for illumination. She was propped up on several pillows; her face pale against the white linen. Her hair, always so alive, hung limply around her face. There was a tube carrying blood into her arm and another with a clear fluid that went into the opposite arm. She had a small tube in her nose which he knew was giving her oxygen.

Chapter 30

Everything Good In My Life

Part 2

Molly was getting ready to go and pick up James, Albus and Lily from school when the front door opened and Arthur came in followed by five children. He ushered them into the kitchen.

‘We’ve got guests, Molly,’ he said putting his arms around as many of the children as he could. ‘I’m sure you recognise Eileen, Corwen, Valerius and Aurora Snape; this young wizard is Scorpius Malfoy, Draco’s son.’

‘Good afternoon, Mrs Weasley,’ the five children chorused, without a smile.

‘Thank you for having us,’ Eileen said. A chorus of ‘thank yous’ followed. Molly stared in bewilderment.

‘Hermione is not well and Harry, Lucius and Severus are with her at St Mungo’s,’ Arthur continued, shaking his head at Molly to indicate not to ask any questions.

‘Oh well in that case, welcome to all of you. Now I’m just off to collect the Potter’s, so I will see you in a little while. Arthur, would you see me to the door, please?’ she smiled. The children went into the sitting room and sat down, they were all very subdued. Arthur followed Molly to the door and they stepped outside. ‘What’s going on Arthur?’ she was flustered and just a bit angry.

‘Molly, Hermione is seriously ill, the baby’s not doing well. Those children need to be looked after until their parents come to collect them. So just go and collect our lot and let’s be friends to some very upset youngsters, alright?’ He leaned in and kissed her cheek.

‘Alright Arthur, but if fighting breaks out between them and the Potters, don’t say I didn’t warn you.’

‘It’s all going to be fine,’ he nodded reassuringly.
She wasn’t convinced as she took out the port key and went to Otterley St Catchpole School to pick up her grandchildren. The school bell rang and within minutes, children were running or walking out of the doors, spilling into the playground and shouting greetings to the family members who were collecting them.

‘Nannie!’ the Potter children yelled as they ran up to Molly and hugged her.

‘Anyone would think you didn’t see me yesterday,’ she laughed, giving them all a kiss. ‘Right, back to The Burrow, we have guests.’

‘Who nannie, who?’ they asked.

‘Well … the Snape children …’

‘Is Scorpius with them?’ James asked.

‘Yes …’ she was confused by the general excitement that their guests were causing; it was not the reaction she was expecting. ‘But …’ she looked seriously at the children, ‘… Hermione is in St Mungo’s … something is wrong with the baby.’

‘Oh no!’ they chorused and Lily burst into tears, Molly patted her to comfort her.

‘C’mon, nannie, let’s get back’ James said and Molly held out the port key, the children grabbed hold and they went back to The Burrow. Once outside the door, the children ran inside and the scene that Molly saw when she entered the house she would not have believed could happen. The eight children were hugging each other and Scorpius was comforting a still upset Lily. She shot a look at Arthur who simply grinned at her. He had known all along of course. She tutted and went to put the kettle on.

‘I’ll make tea and cake for now,’ she said ‘then we can have something else later on, alright?’ she said.

‘Any of you have homework?’ Arthur asked. The eldest children, that is Eileen, Scorpius, James, Albus and Valerius all admitted that they did have some homework to do. ‘Let’s all sit at the table then,’ he said, ‘I’ll help where I can and you young ones may learn something.’ He organised the children and soon, they were all engrossed in homework as they drank a cup of tea and demolished a whole cake. Arthur was as good as his word and helped when he could. Molly was dragged in on the Arithmency questions and proved very good at reckoning and working out. She put her hand over Arthur’s at one point and smiled at him.

‘Brings back memories, eh Arthur?’

Although she knew the Snape children and saw them now and again, this was the first time she had really seen them close up and Scorpius, she knew very little about, although again, she had seen him from time to time. Eileen Snape looked like her mum, but her tightly curled hair was black, as were her eyes. She was obviously a bright girl. Valerius was gangly just like his dad at his age; he had dark hair and straight like his dad’s, he had bright green eyes. Corwen was plumper than his siblings, but his hair was as black as a raven’s wing and straight, his eyes were also black and he looked around and took everything in. Aurora was her mother’s daughter. Her wild hair was a mass of curls, as red as the setting sun and when you looked at her face, her eyes seemed to change colour, sometimes blue, sometimes green. Scorpius was the image of Draco and Lucius, tall for his age, with almost white, blonde hair that he wore slightly long. He had dark eyes and a ready smile.

There was a knock at the door; Arthur went to answer it and as soon as the children heard the
familiar voice they all left the table and ran to him with shouts of ‘dad!’ and ‘Uncle Draco’. She
followed the children to greet Draco; what surprised her most was that her grandchildren obviously
knew Draco Malfoy very well as he was hugging and kissing them and giving them just as much re-
assurance as the Snape children.

He held out his hand to her. ‘Molly, thank you for stepping like this, father, Harry and Severus have
had to take Hermione to a Muggle hospital, St Mungo’s couldn’t help.’ She raised her hand to her
mouth, genuinely shocked as for the first time, she realised how serious Hermione’s condition was.

‘Oh Draco, think nothing of it. Would you like a cup of tea or something stronger?’ she smiled and
fussed with the kettle to hide her concern.

‘Tea would be lovely, thank you,’ he replied.

‘Where’s my daddy?’ Corwen asked Draco.

‘He’s with your mum,’ Draco said.

‘Where’s our dad?’ James asked.

‘He’s with my dad and Severus at the hospital. He’s helping look after Severus.’

Draco sat at the kitchen table and Molly watched Lily and Aurora climb onto his lap and bury their
heads in his chest in their sadness. He stroked their hair and kissed the tops of their heads. Molly’s
breath caught in her throat and a great sadness flooded her. She realised that there was a part of
Ginny’s life that she was not privy to. Of course grown up children kept some things from their
parents, it was only right; but she had not realised just how close the three families had grown over
the years. Ginny had stopped joining in the Pure Blood supremacy bashing that she and Ron
sometimes talked about. It saddened her that Ginny felt she could not share this part of her life with
her mum.

She placed a cup of tea in front of Draco. ‘Do you know what is wrong with Hermione?’ Draco
nodded but said nothing; it was clear he didn’t want to say anything in front of the children. She
went and started to make sandwiches for tea, if the other children were anything like her own
grandchildren, a cup of tea and a slice of cake were not going to be enough to stave off their hunger.
She set the table with the sandwiches, cheese, bread, jam, more cake and a large pot of tea and a
bottle of Dandelion and Burdock. Arthur was doing a grand job of keeping the children from
dwelling too much on what was going on and when she called all of them to the table, they went and
washed their hands and came and sat down, their eyes taking in the spread before them. So eight
children and three adults sat down at the large kitchen table and tucked in. The Snape children were
very polite and had good table manners, as did Scorpius.

‘Do you like Hippogriffs, Mr Weasley?’ Aurora asked.

‘Don’t know much about them to tell the truth. Why, do you like them?’

This brought a groan from the other children. ‘I want a Hippogriff of my very own. Mr Hagrid used
to have one and he says they are very gentle,’ Aurora nibbled a cheese and pickle sandwich.

‘Ora, you can’t always depend on what Mr Hagrid says,’ Eileen said, ‘after all, he thinks that
dragons would make good house pets.’

‘Well, if I had a dragon I would train it and then it could live with me in my bedroom,’ Aurora said,
not wanting to be put off.
Chatter about dragons and training them continued around the table. All the children were impressed by the fact that Charlie Weasley actually worked with dragons in Romania. Conversation then turned to Hogwarts.

‘I want to be Sorted into Slytherin then Uncle Draco would be my Head of House,’ Eileen said. ‘It was dad’s House of course and then me and Scorpius could study together; could I have the jam please?’ and she spread jam on a thick slice of bread and munched away.

Molly glanced across to Draco who gave a knowing smile to her; it was clear that Eileen Snape had already set her cap at Scorpius Malfoy.

‘What if I get Sorted into another House?’ Scorpius asked.

‘Not a chance,’ James answered. ‘If you want Slytherin the Hat will take that into consideration; that’s right isn’t it Uncle Draco?’

‘That’s right James; the Hat will take choice into consideration.’

‘I want to go to Durmstrang,’ it was Valerius who spoke. Molly had thought him shy, but he was perhaps just thoughtful.

‘Why Val? Why would you want to go so far away from home?’ Corwen asked his brother.

‘More Dark magic,’ came the simple reply.

‘Mum will never let you do that Val, so you should just forget about it,’ Eileen told him.

‘But dad might let me go; after all, he liked Dark magic.’

‘Do you like Dark magic, Val?’ It was Draco who had asked the question, very matter of factly.

‘Dunno much about it, but if dad used it … and Uncle Lucius, it must be alright,’ he gave a small shrug and took a long drink of his Dandelion and Burdock.

When all had had enough and the food very nearly all gone, the children helped to clear the table.

‘Right … I have a shed full of Muggle things … who wants to come and help me sort them out?’ Arthur beamed at the room and the three youngest Snape children, Albus and Lily followed him out. The older children sat and played a very subdued game of Wizard Snap. Draco picked up a tea towel and started to dry the crockery.

‘That was a lovely tea, Molly … thank you.’

‘That’s alright Draco, it’s lovely having a whole bunch of children in the house again.’

‘Do you think I should mention to Severus what Val said?’

‘I think it might be wise and then he can explain the ways things work to the lad. After all, if Val thinks that Dark magic is attractive, he may want to experiment. I get the feeling that he is already using his powers.’

Draco nodded. ‘I think you’re right. I will also get my dad to talk to him; he will put him straight,’ he finished the drying up and placed the tea towel to dry over the stove.

‘How’s your mum, Draco?’ Molly asked.
‘She brilliant; she loves what she does and she spoils Scorpius rotten and she adores Astoria, they get on very well.’

‘Good. I always liked Narcissa; she is very different to her sister,’ Molly knew as soon as the words had left her mouth that she shouldn’t have brought the subject of Belladonna up not as how it was her who had hexed Draco’s aunt to a pile of dust. But Draco didn’t appear upset and any further conversation was ended by the door opening.

‘Mum? Dad? You home?’ Ron called as he walked into the house. ‘Oh … hello you lot,’ he greeted Eileen, James and Scorpius.

‘Ron! How lovely,’ Molly rushed over to her youngest son and kissed him, then she wiped his cheek with a handkerchief she had in her pocket.

‘Mum!’ Ron protested and then he saw Draco. ‘Oh, hello Malfoy.’ Draco nodded his greeting. The three children watched with interest the exchange between the old rivals.

‘Hello, Uncle Ron,’ James called and Ron gave him a wave. James considered himself far too old to give hugs anymore.

‘I’ll make a fresh pot, come and sit down,’ Molly busied herself with filling the kettle and putting it on the hob. She was acutely aware of the tension between the two men. Ron had never forgiven Lucius for what he had done to Ginny in her first year at Hogwarts. Then when Draco helped plan the invasion of the school during the Last War, it only cemented his animosity towards the family.

She had worried terribly about Ron after Lavender’s death. He was devastated and had spent almost two years locked in despair. But in true Weasley fashion, he had eventually emerged from that despair mainly thanks to his brother Charlie. It was Charlie who had suggested to Ron to visit him in Romania and see if he liked working with dragons. So Ron had gone and spent a year with Charlie and his dragons. He discovered he hated dragons but that he did love a local girl called Tanya. They had courted for a while, under the watchful eye of Tanya’s family, then he had asked her marry him and she had agreed. The wedding was held in Romania and was a very happy affair, although Molly could still see the hurt and pain her youngest son carried. Ron and Tanya had come back to live in England and had found a house fairly close to The Burrow. They now had two children Rose and Hugo, Rose was eight and Hugo was six and of course, Ron and Tanya had numerous nephews and nieces and Rose and Hugo more cousins than they would ever need. Ron had gone back to his old job as an Auror and Tanya worked in the Ministry as a Deputy Controller for the Intercontinental Movement of Dragons and other Magical Beasts.

‘Tanya not with you?’ Molly asked as she placed his mug of tea on the table.

‘Not yet, Rose has got one of these play dates with a friend, so she has taken Hugo out for tea in Diagon Alley. What’s Malfoy doing here and Eileen Snape … and the other lad …?’

‘Scorpius,’ Molly added. She looked across to the sitting room; Draco had joined the children in their game. ‘Ron …’ but she was interrupted by the door flying open and her grandchildren and the Snapes bursting in.

‘Nannie, look what Gramps had made,’ Albus held something that Molly didn’t recognise, then he noticed Ron. ‘Uncle Ron,’ and Albus threw himself at Ron with Lily not far behind. Ron looked at the other children; he shook his head in puzzlement.

‘Ron, I don’t think you know Aurora, Valerius and Corwen Snape,’ Molly introduced them; ‘I think you may have seen Eileen before.’
Very pleased to meet you, Mr Weasley,’ the young Snapes chorused.

‘Mum, what’s going on?’ Ron asked, ‘why are all these children here?’

‘Come and sit down, Ron,’ Molly guided him to a sofa and sat down next to him.

‘Ron … it’s …’ but before she got any further, Ginny burst in through the door followed by Arthur.

‘Mum!’ her children shouted and ran to her, hugging her for dear life.

‘What’s going on? I’ve just come from Hogwarts … Harry wasn’t there and Minerva …’ she burst into tears at that point.

‘Arthur? … pour her a cup of tea … Ginny, come and sit down.’ Ginny saw Draco and went and gave him a hug, sobbing quietly into his shoulder. Molly watched as Draco kissed her cheek and brought her back to the sofa.

‘Perhaps Draco should tell everyone, Molly. After all he was there,’ Arthur said as he handed Ginny a mug of hot tea.

Draco took a chair and told them about the events of the afternoon. How Hermione had collapsed in the staff room and how she was bleeding and Moaner took her and Madam Pomfrey up to the infirmary. How Madam Pomfrey was unable to help and how Hermione had been taken to St Mungo’s for treatment. Severus, Lucius and Arthur had been in a meeting with the Muggle PM and his Cabinet; Arthur nodded in confirmation of the fact. He told them how St Mungo’s couldn’t help because Hermione was a full Muggle and that she needed to be in a Muggle hospital.

‘Then father went off; when he came back he was with Kingsley. They had gone to the Muggle PM for help, but he wasn’t there so his wife helped them. She arranged for Hermione to be admitted to the hospital. Father, Harry and Severus took Hermione to the hospital and I came here to be with the children.’

There was a silence in The Burrow. Molly looked at the faces of her gathered family. Ron was obviously in shock knowing that his first love could be in mortal danger. Ginny was sobbing on Draco’s shoulder again and he was patting her gently in a brotherly fashion. The children were simply sad.

‘I want my mummy,’ Aurora started to cry, ‘and I want my daddy.’ Eileen swept her little sister up into her arms.

‘I want my mummy too,’ Valerius and Corwen said together, tears streaming down their faces. It was James and Scorpius who went and comforted the two boys. Then Albus and Lily started crying, Ginny reached for Albus and Draco picked up Lily and hugged her. The door opened again and Tanya, Rose and Hugo came in. Tanya stopped as she took in the scene before her.

‘Break out the Dragon Brandy, Arthur … we’re going to need it,’ Molly said as she went to greet her daughter in law and grandchildren.

‘Mollee … what is happening?’ Tanya asked, Rose and Hugo had run to their dad, who was currently hugging them. Then their cousins came and hugged them. ‘And who are these other childrens?’

‘Come and sit down, Tanya dear and let me explain,’ she sat Tanya down, gave her a glass of Dragon Brandy and told her what was going on.
‘Oh, I have heard abouts this Hermione … she was Ron’s girlfriend no?’ Molly nodded and took a sip of her own Brandy. ‘She married someone else … ah, now I understand … these are her childrens?’ Again Molly nodded. ‘And my Ron … he looks so sad.’ Tanya got up and went to sit next to her husband; she put a consoling arm around him.

By now the light was fading and discussions started about what to do with the younger children. They were all tired. Molly suggested putting them to bed upstairs, that way they would all be together when their fathers arrived. The children agreed, so Ginny, Tanya and Molly got them upstairs and ready for bed. One of the large bedrooms was rearranged so that they could all be in one room as none of them wanted to be alone. They were asleep within minutes, exhausted. When Tanya came down, she asked her children if they wanted to go home, Rose and Hugo decided they wanted to stay, so they curled up next to Ron and he cuddled them until the fell asleep with their clothes on, he then carried them upstairs into another bedroom. James, Eileen and Scorpius were sitting together, talking quietly. Draco was chatting to Arthur; Molly and Ginny were sitting knitting and Ron and Tanya were sitting together. Ron would glower at Draco from time to time and Ginny would kick him to get him to stop. Time ticked away.

‘So … Draco … how’s Hogwarts treating you?’ Ron asked.

‘Very well, Ron. I’m Head of Slytherin which keeps me pretty much on my toes.’

‘Oh, yeah, I reckon that would.’ Ron said. Ginny was about to thump him for being rude when there was a knock at the door and it opened. Harry came in followed by Lucius and finally, Severus.

‘Arthur …’

‘Way ahead of you Molly,’ Arthur said, holding up the bottle of Dragon Brandy. Ginny and James flew into Harry’s arms; Draco and Scorpius flew at Lucius and hugged him. Eileen Lily Snape stood and stared at her father, her eyes appealing for good news. Then she ran to him.

‘Oh daddy … daddy,’ she cried. Severus held her and kissed her, shushing her as he stroked her head. Then five children came running down the stairs with shrieks of dad or daddy. Albus and Lily ran to Harry.

Aurora ran to Severus. ‘My daddy, my daddy,’ she cried and flung herself into his arms. His sons followed and Severus was draped with sobbing bodies of his four children. Molly watched with a lump in her throat as Eileen left her father, went to Lucius and gave him a hug which he returned with an added kiss to her forehead. She then went and hugged Harry.

‘Come and sit down all of you,’ Arthur said as he pressed goblets of Dragon Brandy into grateful hands. ‘Molly … I think they might be hungry …’ Molly nodded and set about putting a huge Shepherd’s pie together with the economical use of magic. She had the pie in the oven by the time Arthur was offering refills.

‘Dad …?’ Eileen asked the question that was on everyone’s lips. Severus was seated on one of the sofa’s with his children still hanging on to him. He nodded and kissed Aurora.

‘It was … successful. Hermione is recovering in hospital. She was in surgery for … several hours. She lost a lot of blood, but they are giving her transfusions of Muggle blood.’ There was a general muttering of thanks and his children kissed him. Harry and Lucius remained serious.

‘Dad … what about our baby?’ Eileen’s voice quietened the room.

‘Yes daddy … what about our baby?’ Aurora echoed.
All eyes turned to Severus. Molly watched as the man crumpled and tears rolled down his cheeks. 'She … she … didn’t survive …' and with that he jumped up, scattering his children and headed out of the door and into the night. Crying children were picked up by equally distraught adults. Molly blew her nose and wiped her eyes.

'Does Hermione know?' she asked.

Harry shook his head. 'No, she was still asleep when we left. Severus wanted to come see the children … to tell them …' Ginny held him.

The timer pinged on oven.

'Harry, Lucius? Would you like something to eat?' she offered.

'Very kind of you, Molly,' Lucius said and headed to the table with Harry, Draco and anyone else who wanted food. Molly laid the dish of Shepherd’s Pie, bowls of vegetable, crusty bread and butter on the table.

'Help yourselves,' she said. She watched as the adults who wanted to eat sat at the table and then the children sorted themselves out with the adult of their choice. Eileen was with Draco, Scorpius and Valerius. James and Albus were with Ginny; Corwen was with Harry and Hugo and Rose were sitting next to their parents. But it was Lily and Aurora that surprised her. She watched the two little girls climb onto Lucius’s knees and they watched as he helped himself to Shepherd’s Pie. He started to eat, carefully balancing each girl on a knee. Molly was amazed when Lily, her little Lily who usually wouldn’t say boo to a goose said all innocently.

'Oh look, Uncle Lucius, do you see that thing over there?' and she pointed across the kitchen into the sitting room. Lucius had to turn his head to see what she was pointing at. He made great play of looking for something; while he did so, Aurora helped herself to Lucius’s food. ‘There …’ Lily insisted, ‘…do you see it now?’ Lucius shook his head and returned to his food. He picked up his knife and fork and looked suspiciously at his plate, and then he looked at both girls, who smiled sweetly at him. They allowed him a few mouthfuls before Aurora said.

'Oh look Uncle Lucius, is that a magic Hippogriff on that shelf?'

'Where?' he looked all around and while Aurora kept him busy, Lily polished off what was left on his plate. Molly found herself laughing as Lucius lifted up his empty plate to look underneath, making sure his food was not hiding.

'Draco? Did you eat my Shepherd’s pie?' he accused.

'Certainly not, father; I have my own.'

The girls were giggling by now; Lucius ignored them.

'Harry, did you see who ate my Shepherd’s Pie?’

'No Lucius, it must have been the Pixies,' Harry smiled as he played along.

The girls couldn’t contain their glee any more. ‘It was us! It was us!’ They laughed.

Lucius eyed them. ‘But you are not Pixies … are you?’ The girls squealed in delight. ‘Because if you are … I will have to reach for my wand …’ Lucius went as if to pick up his cane, instead he pulled both girls into a squealing hug and kissed them. ‘Now go and annoy your brothers while I have more of Molly’s splendid Shepherd’s Pie.’ The girls gave him a kiss on each cheek and went to where
James and Valerius were sitting. Lucius then filled his plate once again with food and this time, he was allowed to eat without interruption. With everyone eating and the mood in The Burrow lifted, at least for now, Molly slipped outside.

She found Severus standing in front of the reed bed. She stood by him and reaching out, took his hand and patted it in a motherly fashion.

‘Arthur and I lost two babies,’ she said quietly, ‘one was early in the pregnancy. The other, a little girl died when she was a few days old. We called her Dorothy. She was our first girl; she was so beautiful. We were thrilled because we already had Bill. Then, after a couple of days she stopped feeding and was crying all the time. She was burning up with a fever. The Healers at St Mungo’s couldn’t save her; she died soon after. The Healers think her heart hadn’t developed properly and wasn’t pumping her blood … then she got an infection somehow. She stopped crying, closed her eyes and went to sleep.’ Molly dabbed her eyes. ‘I blamed myself, Arthur blamed himself, and we both blamed St Mungo’s. But sometimes, there is nothing and no one to blame; sometimes, it simply happens because somethings are meant to be. So you carry on, you love and cherish the children you have … but you never forget the ones you lose. Dorothy would have been forty three this year.’ She patted Severus’s hand again. ‘Hermione must be allowed to hold her baby and say goodbye, otherwise she will hate herself … and you for a long time.’

‘She’s going to hate me anyway, Molly,’ Severus whispered.

‘Why?’

‘Because I had to make a choice. The doctor said he might not be able to save both … so he asked me to choose between my wife and my child. I chose … my wife.’

‘Oh Severus,’ she squeezed his arm, ‘you don’t have to tell that. Allow her to believe the baby couldn’t be saved.’

‘But the baby could have been … saved,’ Severus cried, his voice filled with anguish.

‘For what? So that five children would be motherless? So that you would waste away without your soul mate, leaving five orphans? You know how the Old Magic works Severus; when one dies, so does the other. You have your wife and four children. Be happy and proud of that.’ She stood by him in silence for a while. ‘Come on in and have some food before you go back to the hospital … that’s if they have left you any.’ She turned and headed back to the house, his footfalls close behind.

‘Saved you some, Severus,’ Arthur said as he removed a plate brimming with hot, delicious food from the oven. Ginny got up and went and hugged him as he made his way to the table.

‘Are you all right?’ she asked.

‘Yes, thank you Ginny. Your mum is very sensible … and wise.’ A place was set for him and he sat and devoured his food.

‘Do you want anyone to go back with you?’ Harry asked.

‘No thanks Harry, I will go alone. But thank you for your support; I just need to know the children will be taken care of … for a day or two.’

‘What would you like to do children?’ Draco asked. ‘You can come back to Hogwarts with Harry and me or you could stay with Uncle Lucius, just until your mum is out of hospital.’

‘You would be welcome to stay here as well,’ Molly added; she handed Severus a goblet of Dragon
Brandy, he nodded his thanks. Eileen and Scorpius took the children to one side. It was at that point that there was another knock at the door. Arthur opened it and Narcissa and Astoria came in.

‘Mother! Grandmamma! Tante Story!’ filled the room. There was a melee of hugs and kisses for the new arrivals.

‘We’re sorry to disturb you Molly and Arthur, but Lucius sent his Patronus to tell us to go to Hogwarts. When we got there, Minerva told us what has happened and we came straight here.’ She went across to Severus. ‘Oh Severus,’ and she embraced him.

‘The children are just deciding what they want to do, my dear,’ Lucius said, ‘in the meantime, let me tell you the rest of what has happened.’

‘And come and have a cup of tea … or something stronger,’ Molly offered. The two women sat and sipped Dragon Brandy and listened to what Lucius had to tell them. By the end, they were both shocked and in tears. Astoria went to Draco who held her while she wept and Lucius pulled Narcissa into him to comfort her.

Molly watched as Ron approached a silent Severus. ‘Er … I’m so sorry about Hermione, Professor … and your baby. Would you give her my love and tell her … that Tanya and me … wish her better?’ He blushed as he finished speaking.

Severus looked at him. ‘Of course, Ronald … I will tell her.’ Ron went back to sit with his wife. Molly thought it was very brave of him to say that to Severus, the man who had terrified him for years and was now married to his first love.

‘I don’t understand, Ron,’ Tanya said as he sat down, ‘why do you not likes Mr Snape and Mr Malfoys?’

‘It’s a long story, Tanya; a very long story,’ Ron replied.

‘But you will tell me this story, yes?’

‘Yeah, I will tell you the story and maybe Harry will help me tell it; how about that?’ Tanya smiled and kissed her husband and snuggled down into his shoulder. Molly, who had heard the exchange, thought that at last, her son might find some closure on the past.

Eileen came up to the table. ‘Dad, if it’s alright with you, we would like to go to Hogwarts and stay with Uncle Harry and Uncle Draco.’

‘Can I go as well, dad?’ Scorpius asked. ‘I don’t fancy being in school without my friends.’

‘And us,’ the Potter children chimed in, ‘we don’t want to be left behind.’ Harry looked at Ginny who nodded.

‘Well, we could arrange a Room of Requirement for all of you,’ Harry said, ‘so, it looks like you will all be starting Hogwarts early,’ he looked at Draco who smiled and nodded in agreement.

‘Good,’ Severus said, ‘now … I am going back to the hospital. Children do you have any messages for your mother?’ His four children ran up to him and each planted a kiss on his cheek. ‘I shall be sure to pass them along. Please behave all of you … listen to Harry and Draco and I expect you to give Professor McGonagall your utmost respect while you are at Hogwarts … she is still Headmistress until the start of the new term.’

‘We will,’ they said in unison.
The adults then surrounded him and gave their best wishes to Hermione. Harry flung his arms around him. ‘Don’t worry about a thing … they will be fine, just make sure she gets better,’ he said.

‘I will … and Harry? Thank you for all your … support.’ He turned to leave and Lucius followed him outside.

‘I will update Kingsley … you don’t have to worry about that. Take care of her, Severus, I have grown fond of her,’ Lucius said.

Severus stared at the older wizard. ‘Oh drop the act … Lucius; you fell for her the night you removed the Cutis.’

Lucius laughed. ‘Perhaps I did at that,’ and they shook hands and Severus apparated.

Lucius went back into the house where Harry was telling everyone how he had to convince the doctor he was Severus’s son from his first marriage.

‘… But I don’t think he believed that Hermione was my step-mum … or that Lucius was her uncle …’

For the first time that day, The Burrow was filled with laughter.

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Severus walked down the quiet corridor to Hermione’s room.

‘Ah, Mr Snape, Hermione is still asleep and Dr Greyson would like to speak with you. I’ll page him to come to her room,’ the duty nurse said as he passed the nurses station. He nodded his thanks and went into the room.

It was dim in the room, with only the lights over the bed for illumination. She was propped up on several pillows; her face pale against the white linen. Her hair, always so alive, hung limply around her face. There was a tube carrying blood into her arm and another with a clear fluid that went into the opposite arm. She had a small tube in her nose which he knew was giving her oxygen.

For the first time since falling in love with her he realised just how vulnerable she was as Muggle born. Witches and wizards had a much stronger physiology; even half-bloods usually take all the positive aspects of their magical parent that make them much stronger. Hermione may be a witch, but her family were fully Muggle. He sat by the bed and took her hand.

‘Don’t you dare die on me, Hermione Danger,’ he whispered.

‘And why would I?’ her voice was raspy. ‘Can I have some water, please?’ She turned her head and smiled at him, her eyes still closed. He pressed the call button on the bed as he had been shown earlier and a minute later a nurse came in.

‘She’s awake and wants some water,’ he said.

‘Hello Hermione,’ the nurse looked at the monitor, made a note then placed the rod in her ear again. ‘How are you feeling, eh? Thirsty?’ Hermione nodded. ‘You can wet her lips with water first of all, then little sips, OK?’ The nurse placed the black cuff around her arm and pressed a button. She made
notes on her chart. 'Good, normal temperature and blood pressure, you’re doing fine Hermione … you’ll be up and around tomorrow.'

Severus poured water into the glass and dipped his fingers into it; he then wetted her lips, she licked the droplets greedily.

'You need the toilet you ring for one of us … we don’t want you out of bed tonight …OK? Now if you have pain … ring … doctor has written you up for painkillers … so don’t be shy about asking for something to make you comfortable OK?’ she smiled and patted Hermione’s hand before leaving.

He let her have a small sip of water. ‘Hullo,’ she said, her eyes now fully open.

'Hello,’ he kissed her. ‘I have messages from the children.’

'Oh … what?’ He leaned in and kissed her cheek four times. ‘One from each of them.’

'How they doing?’

‘Harry and Draco are taking them back to Hogwarts with them, along with Scorpius and the Potters. Safety in numbers,’ he held her hand, wishing for the contact. ‘Arthur picked them up from school and took then to The Burrow. Ronald and Tanya send you their love as does everyone … including Lucius,’ and he smiled. He lifted the water to her lips again and she drank more this time.

'I’m sorry …’

‘You have nothing to be sorry about,’ he said gently.

‘Severus …?’

‘They couldn’t save the baby … I am so sorry my darling.’

‘Boy or girl?’

‘Girl,’ and he lowered his face and wept. ‘Hermione … it is my fault … all my fault,’ she lay her hand on his head as he cried.

‘I want to see her,’ she said. He lifted his head and she tried to wipe away his tears, but her hand slipped. ‘I love you so much, Severus; how long since she left?’

‘About six hours,’ he replied, ‘why?’

‘Let me see her then I will explain.’

He left the room and went to the nurse’s station. ‘I have just told my wife; she wants to see the baby, is that possible?’

The nurse nodded and smiled gently. ‘I will bring her to your room, Mr Snape.’ He went back and together they waited. A few minutes later, the nurse wheeled a small hospital cot into the room. Lying on the soft mattress was a small girl child, swaddled in a pink blanket with a soft, pink hat on her head. She could have been asleep. The nurse lifted her up and placed her into Hermione’s arms; she turned and left the parents with their daughter.

‘Hello baby,’ Hermione said and she kissed the smooth forehead. ‘Look daddy, isn’t she beautiful?’ Severus looked at his wife and daughter and placed a protective arm around them both. ‘I give you the names, Arietta Githa Snape,’ she whispered to her daughter. ‘Know that you are loved now and
always. I love you, your daddy loves you; your sisters, Eileen Lily and Aurora Jean love you as do your brothers, Valerius Harry and Corwen Albus. We will never forget you and your mummy and daddy will see you again one day.’ She kissed her daughter again and handed her to Severus.

With the practiced ease of a father of four, Severus cradled little Arietta in his arms and kissed her cheek. ‘Hello my darling daughter, this is your daddy … please know I will always be here for you … I love you very much and you will be in my heart forever. Goodnight, little one.’ He didn’t put her down, he simply held her.

‘You need to take her …’ Hermione said, ‘… there’s not much time left.’

‘Take her? Take her where … to the Veil?’

Hermione shook her head. ‘Not the Veil … if she goes into the Veil we may not see her again. No, you must take her to Finn.’

‘But …’

‘Take her to the Dolmen where we first met Finn … stand at the entrance and call him. When he arrives, ask his name three times … he must give you his real name on the third asking. If it is not Finn … tell it to be gone and call him again … please don’t interrupt my darling … if a woman appears … ask her name three times … should she reply ‘Danu’ three times … it is safe to give Arietta to her. Give her to no-one except Finn or Danu … will you do this … please?’ It was an effort for her to speak and she slumped back onto the pillows.

‘It is a long way to apperate,’ he said.

‘A powerful Necromancer such as yourself will have no problems,’ she smiled at him. ‘Do you remember the place?’

‘I remember,’ he said and he leaned in and kissed her. ‘I will do as you ask … will she be safe with Finn or Danu?’

Hermione nodded, ‘quite safe …’

He stepped away from the bed and vanished.

It was dark in the meadow so with a simple ‘Lumos’ he produced enough light so that he and his precious bundle arrived at the Dolmen safely. He stood at the entrance, leaned in and called ‘Finn! Finn Dagda!’ and he waited. The stars were out and he turned his eyes skyward to watch them shine and twinkle above him.

‘Who calls for Finn Dagda?’ A tall woman, with wildly curling hair, wearing a flowing, red and green dress stood before him. Her arms were naked; one arm was covered in an intricate design of intertwining knots and symbols; the other arm was clear except for a gold arm torc. She bore an uncanny resemblance to Hermione, but he shook his head to dispel the idea.

‘I am Severus Snape … what is your name?’

‘I am Danu.’

‘What is your name?’

‘She has taught you well … I am Danu,’ and the woman smiled.
There was a pause and the woman sighed. ‘You are wasting time … give the child to me.’ But Severus would not, he held his daughter close. ‘Very good, mortal one … you are steadfast. I am Danu and your daughter will be quite safe with me.’ She held out her arms to receive the small baby. Yet he was still reluctant to part with her.

‘It’s all fine, my lad,’ a familiar voice said. Finn Dagda stepped out from the Dolmen; he was dressed in his Druid whites and seemed much taller and younger than the last time Severus had seen him at his wedding; he was also beardless. ‘You do well to be circumspect, but Danu is who she says she is just as I am Finn Dagda. We will care for your daughter until you come to claim her.’

‘I apologise … but Hermione told me to be cautious … you will take care of her … won’t you?’ he said as he handed his daughter to Danu.

‘Do not fear mortal man, she will be loved by all and well taken care of,’ Danu lifted the baby to her lips and kissed her forehead. ‘Look Finn, she is beautiful so and her Spirit has not yet fled her body.’

Finn leaned in and touched the tiny cheek with a long gentle finger, ‘Ah my darlin’, she is that,’ he turned to Severus again, ‘so your youngest is the one promised to me?’

‘Yes … we will bring her here when she is seven years old … as agreed,’ Severus stood tall and met their gaze with a steady eye; he was not going to be cowed by either of them.

‘She has herself a feisty one in him,’ Danu said to Finn, ‘he’s handsome as well, in a dark, severe way; but his eyes are deep and kindly. We will be waiting for you when your time comes, mortal man. Love her as she was meant to be loved and you and I will have no quarrel,’ and with that, Danu turned and went back into the Dolmen.

‘Give her our love, lad. Tis sad when we lose a young life, but this one will not be wasted and she will bring much joy to us all. I will see you both at the Midsummer Night so,’ Finn gave him a small wave and he too went into the Dolmen.

Severus was at a loss as to know what had been said to him and by whom. Who were the two who had simply appeared and taken his daughter with them? And what did Danu mean when she said “we will be waiting”? He stepped back and apperated back to the hospital. He landed in the stairwell and went back into her room. She turned to him.

‘That was quick’ she said, ‘who did you give her to?’

‘Danu and Finn, they were both there. They both send their love to you … Hermione … who are they?’ But before she could reply, the door opened and Dr Greyson came in. He looked at the empty cot.

‘I see you have taken her already …but I still have to fill out a Death Certificate … it will be ready by the time you leave … which will be in a couple of days, then you can take her to St Mungo’s for more rest and Healing.’ Severus and Hermione both looked at the doctor in shock. Dr Greyson raised his eyebrows. ‘I know all about you … Deputy Minister Snape and soon to be Headmistress Snape … my mother-in-law may be a Squib, but she keeps up to date with all the goings on and she subscribes to The Daily Prophet,’ he grinned at them both. ‘Now I expect you want to know what went wrong, Hermione.’

She gave a small nod. ‘Yes please.’

‘You had Placenta Praevia; that caused the initial bleeding as you went into early labour. I’m sorry I
couldn’t save your daughter … her umbilical cord had twisted around her neck at some point … possibly when her head engaged; then because her head was resting on her umbilical cord, it ruptured … you said earlier that the baby was a ‘mover’.

‘From early on, yes …’ Hermione answered. ‘She kicked and twisted … sometimes it was painful.’

‘If that is the case … I would guess that the cord was already around her neck and she was in distress.’

Hermione burst into tears again. ‘It was a difficult pregnancy … and all I did was complain …’ she sobbed.

‘Hermione, listen very carefully. You have four other children; this could have happened with any of those other pregnancies, you have been very lucky not to have had problems before.’ The room fell silent except for the occasional beep from a monitor. ‘I also need to tell you one more thing … again I’m sorry to have to tell you this … I have removed your uterus.’ Severus grabbed Hermione’s hand as she moaned. ‘Hermione, Mr Snape, I cannot emphasise this enough … another pregnancy would more than likely kill you … or the next baby. It is not something I ever do lightly … but in your case with the condition your uterus was in and your loss of blood … it was necessary. Now, you will continue to receive the transfusion for another few hours; then tomorrow I want you up and moving. You have stitches in your tummy so it will be sore … take the painkillers. I expect to be able to discharge you the following day.’

Severus stood and held out his hand to Dr Greyson. ‘Thank you for everything, doctor. I will make sure she is cared for.’ Dr Greyson shook Severus’s hand and left the room. Severus went to the bed, pulled the chair as close as he could and laid his head on the pillow beside her.

‘Have I told you how much I love you, Professor Snape?’ she said sadly.

‘Do behave yourself, Professor Snape, you are in no condition to be seductive,’ he leaned over and kissed her. She fell asleep with her head against his and he watched over her for the rest of the night.

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Chapter Summary

‘How is she able to do it … she’s four years old. Do you know how many times I have
met the Muggle Prime Minister with jam on my robes or over my face?’ Hermione was
leaning against him, shaking with laughter. ‘It’s not amusing, Hermione … he thinks
I’m a messy eater,’ he gave her a quick kiss, stepped into the floo and with a green flash,
was gone.

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Chapter 31

What Was; What Is; What Is Yet To Come.

Hermione opened her eyes, stretched and then turned over to face Severus, who still slept. She had
been home for eight weeks now after being in St Mungo’s for three days after her discharge from the
Wellinstone Hospital. The Healers released her into Severus’s care; and Moaner’s, Bix’s, Narcissa,
Ginny, Harry, Lucius, Molly and anyone else who had free time to come and make sure she was
behaving herself.

Physically, she was fully recovered, stitches gone, wound healing perfectly; emotionally, she still
hurt. Arietta was safely with Finn and Danu; she would be waiting for Severus and herself when
their time came. But emptiness filled her; she had carried the new life for eight months and her body
had reacted to not having a baby to nurture. Her breasts had filled with milk and had swollen
painfully. Severus and Lucius had brewed a potion to alleviate the swelling and stop her milk
production. Then she had cramp like pains in her belly that were like labour pains. Severus had
brewed another potion to ease those pains. She wasn’t bleeding anymore, which was a positive. She
stretched again and revelled in the feeling of being pain free.

She felt his hand come to rest on the curve of her hip and she reached her hand around and held the
curve of his bottom cheek. He no longer slept in the nude; tee shirt and underpants were the least he
wore nowadays as the younger two still liked to climb into bed with mum and dad. She squeezed
him and he smiled as he brought his hand up under her top and fondled her breast. Full intercourse
was not on the agenda … yet, but they enjoyed the intimacy of touching, stroking, fondling and
kissing. He kissed her and moved himself against her, bringing a soft moan from her lips. It was then
that the running feet of two children came from the landing.

‘How do they always … know?’ he whispered.

‘Beats me,’ she replied as the knock came to the door. They waited a few more seconds, ‘You under
control?’
'Yes … for now,’ and he moved to his side of the bed.

‘Come in,’ she called and Aurora and Corwen ran into the room, carefully climbed on the bed in between their parents. They gave each child a kiss then Aurora handed Severus the book she had carried with her.

‘No … not ‘Hubert the Very Hungry Hippogriff’ … again,’ he complained, rolling his eyes.

‘He’s my favourite,’ Aurora said brightly.

‘Can’t we have ‘Polly Potions Maker’ … just once?’ he said as he opened the book.

‘Boring!’ came the response from the three other occupants of the bed. He started to read the story; Corwen snuggled into his mum and Aurora lay her head on her dad’s shoulder so she could see the pictures as he read. About half way through, Eileen and Valerius came into the room and sat at the end of the bed, leaning against the footboard as they listened.

‘… And so Hubert spread his wings and with his family, flew away to their new home in the Faraway Mountains. Who knows what new adventures lay ahead for Hubert, who was no longer a ... very ... hungry ... Hippogriff? … The End.’ Severus snapped the book shut and Aurora laughed and clapped her hands in delight.

‘You look very serious this morning, Eileen, what’s troubling you?’ Hermione asked.

Eileen twisted the belt of her dressing gown around her fingers. ‘Well … we know you nearly died, mum … and we have discussed this … all of us,’ she stopped and looked embarrassed ‘… but … we don’t want you to have any more babies,’ the words tumbled out and two large tears escaped from her eyes. Hermione held her arms out to her eldest daughter and Eileen fell into them, sobbing. ‘We don’t want you to die,’ she said between sobs.

‘Not yet anyway,’ Corwen added, ‘not until you are very old.’

Hermione looked at Severus who nodded. ‘Right, well I’m glad you like having me around, because I am going to be around for a long time,’ she paused to look at each one in turn, ‘and … there won’t be any more babies. The doctor had to remove my womb, the place were a baby grows inside its mother … so without a womb … there will be no more baby Snapes. Your father and I agreed it was for the best,’ her children all looked very relieved. ‘So there we have it … four there are and four shall it remain.’

‘Can we get a baby Hippogriff then?’ Aurora asked.

‘No!’ Severus replied, very firmly. ‘We have a hound, two cats, a rat, several owls …’

‘… And bats in the belfry!’ Everyone shouted.

‘… Which is quite enough for any family,’ he finished. ‘I am going to get dressed, have breakfast and go to work,’ he got out of bed and padded towards their dressing room and bathroom, ‘… you lot … behave yourselves,’ and he closed the door.

‘What’s the plan for today?’ Hermione asked.

‘A picnic with the Potters, Malfoys and guess what?’ Val said. Hermione shook he head. ‘The Weasley’s are joining us. Hugo and Rose are very nice but Ron doesn’t like Uncle Draco. Tanya does though. So we have a plan to make sure they try and make friends.’
Hermione didn’t ask what the plan was; she knew it would somehow involve one or more of the younger children getting in a ‘fix’ so that the dads would have to rescue them. This was all usually done under the watchful eye of the older children. ‘Should be a good day then; where are you going?’

‘The beach!’ they all yelled. Hermione got out of bed and Eileen handed her dressing gown to her.

‘Tante Story is going to teach me to swim,’ Aurora said, ‘she’s a very good swimmer, like a mermaid,’ and with that she fell to the floor and swam across the carpet. The door to the bathroom opened and a fully dressed Severus almost tripped over her.

‘Great Merlin, child! … what are you doing on the floor?’ he asked.

‘Being a mermaid,’ she replied. Severus looked at Hermione and smiled.

‘Of course you are … how stupid of me not to know that,’ he said as he stepped over his mermaid daughter who continued to swim. He held out his hand to Hermione; she put her arm around his waist and they went downstairs to the kitchen.

The table was already set for breakfast and a pot of tea was gently steaming. Hermione cut up bread for toast. Moaner appeared.

‘Good morning Master Severus, Madam Hermione,’ she greeted them.

‘Good morning Moaner,’ they replied as the children came in and sat down.

‘Good morning, Moaner,’ they chorused. Severus and Hermione had agreed early on that their children would be brought up to respect their house elf and not treat her as an unpaid subordinate.

‘How’s Dink?’ Eileen asked. Dink was Moaner and Bix’s eldest elfling, born a year after Eileen. They had a daughter Ruby who was the same age as Aurora. They had learnt that house elves don’t have many children.

‘Dink has been a very naughty elfling and is being punished,’ Moaner said, as she placed the plate of toast on the table for the family.

‘Oh, what did he do?’ Corwen asked.

‘Dink used a very bad word in front of his father,’ her face was stern, Dink’s transgression was serious.

‘What punishment?’ Corwen pressed. He liked to know what punishments other children got so he could measure his own parents methods of discipline. Of the four, Cowen was the one who got into trouble most. Although he looked like a placid child, when roused he had a ferocious temper. ‘When I’m naughty, mum and dad make me sit on the stairs to think about what I did or said. Then I have to say sorry.’

‘Yes, Moaner knows what punishments young Snapes receive, including you, Master Corwen. But Dink was very disrespectful. So he will stay in the cellar at Hogwarts until he knows better.’

‘Make sure young Dink learns his lesson,’ Severus said.

Hermione poured tea for her and Severus. ‘But …’ she started to say, but Severus’s look and Moaners glare made her leave the sentence unfinished. ‘Nothing …’ she said.
‘I will make sure of it, Master Severus,’ Moaner seemed pleased that Severus was supporting her.

‘And let it serve as a warning to you … my children,’ he looked at each one with his stern Professor Snape face, ‘house elves take punishments very seriously … so be careful I do not hand you over to Moaner for some … discipline,’ he finished his tea as his brood took great interest in their toast, making sure they did not look at their father. If they had, he would have seen a grin on each of their faces; he wasn’t fooling them at all. ‘What are your plans today?’

‘We’re going on a picnic …,’ Valerius said.

‘… To the beach,’ Aurora finished.

‘And you, my darling?’

‘I am going to the Ministry to pick up the latest report from Kingsley; then Hogwarts. I want to have a good walk around the place … on my own … you know … to get a feeling for it.’

‘Good …’ he stood up, ‘I must be off … I will see you all later. Have a wonderful time at the beach, children.’

Aurora left her chair and launched herself at her father; he caught her and gave her a hug. She kissed his cheek noisily and with ‘I love you daddy,’ she slithered down and resumed her breakfast. The others shouted their love and goodbyes as Hermione walked with him to the floo system. She pulled him into her and kissed him hungrily. When they broke away, he was panting slightly and she was smiling at him.

‘… have I told you how much I love you?’ She shook her head and smiled again. He turned to enter the floo and stopped. He turned around. ‘She’s done it again, hasn’t she?’ Hermione nodded, trying to keep the laughter contained, but failing. ‘Where?’ She moved her hand over his cheek, his collar and his coat sleeve, removing all the offending smears.

‘All done,’ she said.

‘How is she able to do it … she’s four years old. Do you know how many times I have met the Muggle Prime Minister with jam on my robes or over my face?’ Hermione was leaning against him, shaking with laughter. ‘It’s not amusing, Hermione … he thinks I’m a messy eater,’ he gave her a quick kiss, stepped into the floo and with a green flash, was gone.

She went back into the kitchen. ‘Aurora Jean Snape, you are a bad girl,’ she said.

‘Did he notice?’ Val asked.

‘Today, yes he did,’ she replied.

‘My daddy loves me!’ Aurora said with a confidence that comes from knowing she was truly loved by her daddy.

‘Dad loves us all, ‘Ora,’ Eileen said.

Hermione sat down and refreshed her tea. ‘Right, go and get washed and dressed while I finish my tea.’ The children got up and left the kitchen. ‘And don’t forget to clean your teeth,’ she shouted after them.

She sipped her tea and thought about what Eileen had said; Severus really did love all of his children and all for different reasons. Eileen, because she was a natural at potions and they would go into his
potions room and brew. They would laugh together and sometimes there was a soft ‘bang’ as something exploded. Valerius, because he was a younger version of himself; Val was going to be a powerful wizard, he had found a spare wand in the house when he was eight and with his dad’s help, he was already able to use some of the very simple charms and he could already call his Patronus, a Hare. Corwen, Corwen was quick, clever and soaked up information like a sea-sponge. He also had a temper which would explode and just as quickly, subside. And Aurora; if Aurora was the apple of her daddy’s eye, nobody minded. She was confident, loving and had an affinity with animals that was uncanny. But the one thing that bound all of his children to him was his unconditional love for them. He shared hugs and kisses easily; he played with them; he listened to them; he praised them and helped them not just with school work, but with the problems that come with being a young witch or wizard. In short, he was being the father that his own father never was.

Not that he was a push over or soft in any way with them; there were strict boundaries that they could not cross.

Earlier in the year, when he just turned seven, Corwen had thrown a temper tantrum because Valerius had made a snotty comment about seven year olds. Corwen had launched himself at his brother and they were rolling around on the floor like a couple of cats, snarling and yowling. Severus, who was home that day, had stepped in and picked both of them up by the scruff of their necks; he had placed Val on one side of the room and taken Corwen to the other side and demanded that Corwen apologise to Val for his behaviour. Corwen who still had the red mist of anger in his eyes had lashed out at his father, with his hands and with words. When Severus had merely rested his hand on Corwen’s forehead so that his son was flailing at nothing, Corwen had shouted ‘Crucio!’ and pointed his finger at Severus. The rest of the family gasped in horror. Corwen stopped and had stood stock still, his mouth open as he realised just how much of a gigantic mistake he had made. Severus had looked at his young son, turned on his heel and left the room without a word. Corwen had crumpled and started to cry, big juddery sobs racked his body and in between gasps for air, he was saying ‘I’m sorry mummy; I’m sorry daddy’, over and over. He was inconsolable; Hermione held him until he had cried himself out and he was calm. Valerius had handed him a goblet of water that he drank in one go. She brushed his hair out of his eyes, gave him a hankie to blow his nose and stood him up. She didn’t have to say anything to him; just as with the other children, Corwen knew he had to go and apologise to his father. She had watched him leave the room and heard the knock on the library door. Corwen went in to face whatever Severus decided to serve up.

Corwen stayed in with his father a long time and when the pair finally emerged he was smiling and holding his father’s hand. That night, when they were in bed, Severus had told her that Corwen had heard about the Cruciatius and its effect, discussed in the playground by other young wizards. He told her he was going to help their son deal with his anger and teach him how to control it. She had said it was a good thing that all their children felt secure enough to express their anger, but she agreed, there had to be strict limits. Severus had been as good as his word.

However, she was the everyday disciplinarian in the family. It was she who would get cross and shout at them; it was she who had started the punishment of sitting on the second stair up, one minute for each year of age. Then came the apology, then the hugs and kisses of reassurance; it worked surprisingly well especially when she had found an old Muggle timer so that she could set the time and it would ring to say ‘time up’. Severus never lost his temper with the children, nor did he shout; all he had to do was walk away, as he had done with Corwen. That was their slap in the face. Their beloved father, who loved them all more than all the Galleons in the world, and who they loved and adored more than all the chocolate frogs in the world, would turn away from them and take his love away with him. All of the children had now had it happen to them once, all except Aurora, and once it had happened, they made sure they never let it happen again.
She finished her tea and started to clear the table. Moaner popped up, which still made her jump and said she would do it. Leaving Moaner in charge of the kitchen, she made her way upstairs, following the noise. The children were in their bathroom, washing or cleaning teeth; at least the older ones were; Aurora had decided that Buncle, her rat, needed a bath. Buncle was not happy and protested loudly, but made no attempt to bite or scratch. Val had named him Carbuncle when Aurora had first shown him to the family. She was only three at the time and couldn’t quite get her tongue around Carbuncle, so she had called him Buncle and it had stuck. No-one knew where she had found Buncle and Aurora simply said he was ‘just there’ one day. A bit like Barker, their hound.

She was in the garden with her brothers. The boys had said they were playing with her when they had seen this big hound in the garden. They said that Aurora had squealed in delight and on her little two year old legs, had run toward the large dog. The dog had sat there until she reached it, she had thrown her arms around its neck and that was it; Barker was an official member of the Snape family. Of course, Severus had made sure Barker was not an Animagus, and when he had been pronounced ‘just a hound’, he had followed Hermione as she carried Aurora upstairs. He slept on her bed and when Aurora wanted to, she slept on him. She was often found fast asleep, curled up with him. Barker was her protector and she loved him. Aurora was fearless around animals, which is why she hero worshiped Hagrid. Severus would joke that his youngest daughter would end up training Norwegian Ridgebacks to do tricks.

Hermione helped to dry Buncle and she had to admit that he did look and smell much better. Once dry, she put him on the floor and he bolted back to his box in Aurora’s room. She then helped her youngest to wash and clean teeth before Aurora chose what she was going to wear for the day; tee shirt, shorts and sandals.

‘Anyone home?’ Harry’s voice came up the stairs followed by the pandemonium of feet coming up the stairs and the shouts and shrieks as young friends greeted each other. She went downstairs to greet the adults. Harry, Draco, Astoria, Ron and Tanya; Hugo and Rose stood by their parents, unsure of what to do.

‘Hugo … Rose?’ James shouted down, ‘come up … you have to see this.’

‘Just follow the noise,’ she said to the two Weasley’s’ and the two ran upstairs.

‘So, the beach?’ she said.

‘We’ve found a wonderful beach in Wales,’ Draco replied, ‘sandy, quiet and nicely shallow, perfect for this lot.’

Moaner appeared and handed Hermione a very large picnic basket. She stared moonstruck at Harry for a minute or so before leaving with a deep sigh. Harry Potter would never lose his standing in the eyes of Moaner.

‘What are you doing today?’ Harry asked as he took the basket and with a Reducio! placed it in his pocket.

‘Oh, trying to get organised before the start of term; it’s only a few weeks away now,’ she said.

‘Come on you lot!’ Harry shouted upstairs, ‘we’re leaving. Didn’t you get a clean bill of health from St Mungo’s last week?’ he turned his gaze on her.

‘Yes … how did you know?’ she felt herself blush.

‘You should know by now that Ginny can’t keep any gossip to herself,’ he smiled knowingly at her.
Then Draco winked and Astoria raised her eyebrows.

‘I’m sure I have no idea what you mean,’ she turned to Eileen who had come down first. ‘Have you
got a change of clothes for everyone?’ The rest of the children came down, with Lily and Aurora
holding hands, fishing nets held firmly in the other hand.

Harry did a quick head count, always necessary with so many children, ‘… 8…9 and … 10,’ all
present and correct.’

‘The Longbottoms are going to meet us there, mum,’ Corwen said, ‘and we’re going to play cricket.’

‘Great … well, have fun … all of you. Good to see you Ron and Tanya … please bring Rose and
Hugo over to play … you’ll be welcome … anytime.’

‘Right, everyone outside,’ Draco said as he started to usher the children out of the front door, ‘your
mum is going to be busy today … so we must let her get on,’ and he got a scowl and a punch on his
arm from Hermione.

‘Have fun you,’ Harry said knowingly, as he closed the door and the house was suddenly silent.

She smiled as she went upstairs to view the chaos that would be the children’s rooms. Eileen’s was
tidy, bed made and clothes put away. Valerius’s wasn’t too bad; she made the bed and put all his
dirty clothes in the laundry hamper. Corwen’s looked like a clothes bomb had exploded in his room.
Clothes, both dirty and clean were strewn everywhere; hanging out of drawers and draped over
chairs. She stood in the middle of the all the chaos and with a wave of both arms, the room was neat
and tidy. She brushed her hands against each other and gave a satisfied nod. She stopped on the
threshold of Aurora’s room and stared. On the bed, Barker was stretched out and fast asleep; as he
was a mixture of wolf and deer hound, he was big and took up nearly the whole of the bed. Curled
up between his paws were Isis and Cleo, the cats, also fast asleep. To one side was a large box, this
was the domain of Buncle. He was gnawing on something green and he looked up at her as she
peered into his box before going back to his food. His box was spotlessly clean. Hoots and Boots,
orphan owls who happened to fly into her room one night, were perched on top of the wardrobe;
heads under their wings, also asleep. Her windows were wide open so that the owls could fly in and
out should they so please. The family owls lived in the owlry and she doubted that Hoots and Boots
would ever be allowed to carry messages. The butterflies on the window ledge were new.

She tidied as best she could without disturbing the menagerie before going into her bedroom. She
was looking forward to the day.

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Severus was sitting in Kingsley’s office. The Minister had already taken him through recent reports
from Mainland Europe and had now decided that another pile of parchments needed their urgent
attention. What was meant to take thirty minutes was now stretching into a full hour.

‘Everything all right, Severus?’ Kingsley asked mildly.

‘Perfectly Minister … why do you ask?’

‘It just that you have looked at my clock several times since we started this meeting; is there
somewhere else you need to be?’
‘No … no of course not,’ Severus replied and picked up another parchment. He unrolled it and scanned the contents.

‘The children have gone to the beach today, I understand,’ Kingsley smiled.

‘How do you know that?’

‘Arthur said his lot have talked about nothing else all week. Should be quite a gathering … and good fun. Cricket, eh?’

‘So I have been … informed. Now, this report on the escaped Griffons … why has it come to us and not gone straight downstairs?’ He passed the parchment to Kingsley and glanced at the clock again. Then he looked at the pile on the table in front of him; there were at least another seven to look at. He couldn’t help but sigh.

‘They crossed International borders … but you are right … let’s send it downstairs; are you going to join in later?’

‘Join what … Minister?’

‘The beach … I am right in thinking that you are clock watching because you want to go and join in the fun?’ Kingsley beamed at him.

The question caught him by surprise. ‘Er … I hadn’t really thought about it …’

‘Nonsense … of course you have … because I have. So how about we sneak out and go and have some fun, eh? Let the Ministry run itself for the rest of the day.’ Kingsley got up and with a wave of his hand, the parchments flew to a large table on one side of the room and organised themselves neatly in date order. ‘Come along, Deputy Minister … this is a direct order from your Boss, we are going to the beach,’ Kingsley clapped him on the shoulder and ushered him out into Miss Catchpole’s office. ‘Going out, Miss Catchpole,’ was all he said. Miss Catchpole just nodded. Once outside the inner sanctum, Kingsley turned to Severus, ‘tell you what … I’m going to fetch Adam … he should come along as well. After all, it was he who taught us how to play the game. I shall see you at the beach, Severus.’ And with another clap on the shoulder, the Minister for Magic strode off in the direction of his own personal floo system.

Severus breathed a sigh of relief, the last place he wanted to be was the beach; he headed down to the Atrium and the general floo system. He should still be in time.

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Hermione ran a bath and added two drops of the precious Oudh. This was the third pot he had given her; she loved it and couldn’t get enough of it and probably used far too much of it, but she didn’t care. Severus loved buying her gifts and Oudh was one of her very favourites. She sank into the deep, steaming and fragrant water and sighed. Everything was done and the house tidy; all was in readiness.

She chuckled again at Aurora and her ability to smear jam, honey or marmalade on Severus just before he left for work. She loved her family; they were a constant source of laughter, pride, frustration and sometimes … anger, but she and Severus wouldn’t have it any other way. He was a brilliant father despite all his earlier doubts. On the night Eileen Lily was born, he had been banished
to the expectant father’s waiting room. With Valerius he kicked up a fuss and he was reluctantly allowed into the delivery room. With Corwen he didn’t even ask, he just went in and with Aurora, the Healer Midwife invited him in. It all came with experience. He had been terrified of holding Eileen when she was born for fear of hurting her. But he had overcome the fear, picked up his first born and touched her cheek with his finger; when the new born had grasped his finger and held it, he had wept. By the time Aurora was born, he could hold a baby and make a cup of tea with toast at the same time as having a conversation. It all came with experience.

So confident was he in his own ability as a father that her favourite memory was of her darling husband, powerful wizard, Necromancer and the second highest ranking member of the Ministry Of Magic, laying on their large sofa one winter’s day in front of the fire; Aurora was perhaps seven weeks old and was laying on his chest; Severus had one hand resting carefully on his daughter, the other trailed over the edge of the sofa; both father and daughter were fast asleep. Or the time when he had four children on his back, giving them pony rides; he would suddenly collapse and the children would be tumbled off, all laughing and squealing with shouts of, ‘again, again!’ What made it so much fun was it was only last year, and a ten year old Eileen had joined in.

They had stayed at Spinners End until she was pregnant with Corwen, when it became clear that the little house was not large enough for a growing family, especially as Eileen and Val were active children. So they had searched for a family home. They had found it in the North of the county of Dorset. It was a solid, greystone Victorian grange with enough rooms for as many children as they wanted. It was set in large gardens at the end of a narrow lane. It was a Muggle house and in need of a great deal of work; the roof leaked, the plaster on the walls had perished and the floor boards were rotten; but as soon as they had seen it, it drew them in. They had been flying over the area searching for houses and they had spotted it at the same time. When they landed in the garden and went up to the door, it was a done deal. Hermione had made enquires about it in the nearby village of Marchwood St Botolph. She was informed by the pub landlord that it had been empty for nearly forty years, the last owners having died. It seems the house had fallen out of everyone’s memory. The landlord directed her to the local solicitor who told her his father had been the owner’s adviser and indeed, he did have all the papers … somewhere. Perhaps if she was to come back tomorrow he would have the papers and they could discuss a purchase? Hermione agreed and within three months, the house was theirs. The children adored it at first sight and so she and Severus had set about making the house habitable.

They used some local tradesmen to give the illusion that the work was being carried out in the Muggle way. It only took another two months to have the house looking as handsome and homely as it once certainly been. They named the house ‘Snape Grange’ and they lived in harmony with their neighbours, who thought them the most considerate newcomers into the village in decades. Corwen was born two weeks after they had moved in. Spinners End had become their bolt hole, a place where they could escape to when the children were being babysitted or away with any of their friends and parents. In the future, it would serve as a house for the children to live in should they so wish.

Her parent’s house she had sold a year after they had married. She had found the Deeds in the large bureau in her parent’s room, all safely kept and labelled. She had donated most of the proceeds to the orphanage in Australia where her two adopted siblings had started their lives. Some she had put into her Muggle bank account and the rest had been converted to Galleons and placed in the family vault at Gringotts. She received regular updates about her parents from Kingsley; she had thought several times about going to Australia to see them for herself, but somehow … it didn’t feel right.

She washed, got out of the bath, wrapped a towel around herself and went to get dressed. Time was getting on.
Severus was about to step into the floo when he heard his name being called. He turned and saw Arthur coming up to him.

‘Ah, Severus … there you are. Do you have time to come up to the office and talk through the latest amendment sent across from the PM? It won’t take long,’ Arthur smiled genially at him.

He took a deep calming breath and pinched the bridge of his nose. ‘I’m sorry Arthur … I was on my way …’

‘Ah … off to the beach no doubt. Molly and I plan to go along later; nothing like a game of beach cricket to get the competitive juices flowing; but this shouldn’t take long.’

Severus felt trapped. All he wanted to do was … ‘I am sorry Arthur … perhaps tomorrow?’ He tried to smile, but it was only the very corner of his mouth that moved. But Arthur already had him by the arm and was steering him towards the lifts.

‘Five minutes, that’s all it will take. They’ve got great weather for the beach. How’s Hermione?’ They stood by the lift and waited for it to arrive.

‘She is … very well … look, Arthur … I really must be …’

‘Somewhere else you need to be … hmm?’ Arthur smiled. Severus was sure he saw a twinkle in his eye. ‘Well … tomorrow then. I’ll not keep a man from his duty. See you later?’

Severus turned and headed back to the floo. ‘Yes, of course, probably,’ he called back; ‘not a chance’ he thought to himself. At the floo he stepped in and out into the hallway of Snape Grange. He undid the buttons on his coat and threw it on a chair; at last … he and Hermione were going to catch up on what they had been missing for … months. He felt his blood begin to heat up and his heart rate increase. As he went up the stairs he was undoing his shirt. ‘Right woman,’ he called, ‘you had better be naked and ready for the shag …hello, Harry,’ Harry was standing on the landing, outside Aurora’s room. His youngest daughter appeared at the door, Barker was with her.

‘Aurora wanted Barker … you know, so they can run along the beach and play, she got quite upset. You alright Severus? You look quite put out. Slack day at the Ministry?’

‘Daddeee!’ Aurora said as she passed Severus, she grabbed hold of his leg and hugged it before going downstairs. ‘C’mon, Uncle Harry … Barker wants to go.’

‘Hermione’s at Hogwarts … at least I think that was her plan. Lost your coat? And your shirt buttons are undone,’ Harry’s tone was far too innocent. ‘And what’s a shaghelllo?’ Harry was down the stairs and gone before he could reply.

Severus stood on the landing, perplexed. What was going on and why wasn’t Hermione running into his arms, wearing nothing but a dab of Oudh? He went into their bedroom, which was neat and tidy. No Hermione. He groaned in frustration. The plan was to be back here at eleven o’clock giving them the rest of the day in private. Yes he was late … had she gone off in a snit because he was running late? He shook his head, it wasn’t his fault … Kingsley had kept him longer than necessary and Arthur had wanted him to go to his office … and Harry being here and telling him … He let out another groan. He was being played. Everyone knew that Hermione had been given the all clear by
St Mungo’s and that today, with the children taken care of, would be the perfect time; he ran down the stairs, he stopped to take off his boots, pull his socks off, the less time he needed to undress once he was with her, the better. Pulling his shirt out of his trousers he stepped into the floo just as his name was called from the hallway; ‘Spinners End,’ he said as Lucius appeared in the door way. ‘Too late Lucius … I know your little plan,’ he grinned at a surprised Lucius and threw the floo powder.

He ran into the kitchen of Spinners End and Hermione was waiting for him.

‘Severus!’ she shouted in delight, ‘you’re on time!’ and she ran into his arms and kissed him.

‘You are delirious woman … I am an hour late.’

‘No … you are right on time,’ and she pushed him against the wall and tried to climb onto his lap.

‘But …’ he was trying think, but his mind seemed to be somewhere south of his brain at the moment. She pulled away from him and gave a knowing smile. ‘You fall for it every time,’ she saw his frown. ‘How everyone seems to know that I’m good to go … and they all try to stop you from leaving. Who was it? Kingsley, Harry … Arthur?’

He nodded, ‘… and Lucius.’ Now she frowned.

‘I didn’t think Lucius was in on it … anyway … you are here and we are alone and I am feeling very frisky. Did you bring the Girding Potion?’ She took his hand and led him upstairs.

‘Of course not … I am a married man … with children. What possible need could I have for Girding Potion?’ She opened the door to what had been their bedroom and he stared in surprise.

‘Do you approve? I thought we could re-live our early days together.’

He stepped into an exact replica of his bedsit from when they had first met and started upon their adventure into love. ‘It’s perfect,’ he whispered. ‘Single bed?’ he raised an eyebrow.

‘… And it’s rigged to collapse at some point … just like it did that night,’ she poured two glasses of Muggle Champagne and they toasted each other. ‘To my total git of a potions master; my lover; my husband and father of my children,’ she downed the Champagne in one … then pushed him onto the bed.

It was late afternoon as they sat facing each other on the small bed, feeding each other fresh strawberries. The bed had not collapsed … yet; but it was still early and they had only made love three times so far. Hermione left the bed and came back with a plastic tub; she removed the lid.

‘What … is that?’ he eyed the stuff suspiciously as he took the tub from her and smelt the contents. ‘Dr Chocewycoxy’s Chococoklicks’ he read the label, ‘… you know I hate chocolate and why is chocolate spelt incorrectly?’

‘Ah … but I love chocolate and this is not for you … if it had been, I would have bought Chochicklick’, she took the tub back.

‘But what is it for? Is this to be some form of Muggle … sadism? I get to watch you devour a tub of chocolate like some … decadent … strumpet, while I sit and what …twiddle my thumbs?’

She merely grinned at him and took a large dollop of the chocolate onto her fingers, from where it fell into his lap. ‘Oh dear … how clumsy of me … I wonder how I can clean that up? Oh yes … I know,’ slowly, she licked the remaining chocolate from her fingers, one by one.
‘That is … disgusting’ he pulled a face just as she lowered her head ‘… now … let me get cleeeeean,’ he gasped as her mouth and tongue started to suck and lick the chocolate from his lap. His own mouth fell open and he rolled his eyes in total ecstasy and suddenly understood what the label meant. He managed to lie down on the bed before letting go of all coherent thought as he became a delicious pool of melting chocolate.

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Severus ran up the main stairs of Hogwarts two at a time. He was under strict instructions from Hermione not to attend the Sorting ceremony so he was disobeying a direct order from the new Headmistress of the school. No doubt he will be punished and points taken from Slytherin; but he didn’t care. She was here, Harry, Ginny, Luna and Neville would be here as part of the teaching staff and he felt peeved that he should be excluded. Their other children were being watched over by Moaner and Bix. Eileen had travelled down by train from St Pancras with James, Scorpius, Lorcan and Lysander so that they would start their time at Hogwarts as part of the first year and not as children of staff members. Any thoughts of his own arrival at Hogwarts for his first year, he pushed firmly to the back of his mind.

He went around to the back of Great Hall, down the corridor of portraits and slipped in by the teacher’s door, behind the High Table and was surprised to see Lucius, Narcissa, Astoria, Molly and Arthur already standing by the small door, trying to make themselves inconspicuous. He nodded to them and they shuffled up slightly to allow him a view of the Great Hall. The first years were standing at the foot of the High Table and Minerva was explaining the Sorting process to them. Eileen and Scorpius were standing next to each with James and the Longbottom twins close by.

‘Now, when I call your name come and sit on the Sorting Stool,’ Minerva said. ‘Mavis Prewett,’ Mavis made her way to the Stool and the Hat was placed on her head. Immediately ‘Ravenclaw!’ was called by the Hat and Mavis made her way to her House. Mavis was followed by five others before ‘Lorcan Longbottom,’ was called. Family and friends waited with bated breath. The Hat took his time with Lorcan until it finally called ‘Slytherin’ which came as a stunned surprise to everyone, including his parents. But Lorcan went off quite happily to the Slytherin table.

‘Eileen Snape,’ Severus felt his stomach flip; Eileen wanted to be in Slytherin so much. What if the Hat decided otherwise? The Hat hummed and ha-ed, going back and forth over her attributes and her loyalty.

‘But … perhaps Gryffindor? After all, the mother did well in Gryffindor … oh yes … very well.’ Severus couldn’t see his daughter’s face, but he knew she would be whispering ‘Slytherin’ over and over. ‘Oh … Slytherin eh … but why? … Of course! Can’t separate them can I? Slytherin! It called at last,’ and an overjoyed Eileen Lily Snape went to her House. James was Sorted into Gryffindor and Lysander into Ravenclaw. Which left Scorpius; he sat on the stool and the hat was placed on his head. ‘Hmm … another Malfoy … tricky one this … so like father and grandfather … but something else as well … you would do well in Ravenclaw or Gryffindor … oh yes … oh yes … but … hmm.’ The Hat fell silent as if deliberating ‘… very well … Slytherin!’ Scorpius flew off the stool and ran to Eileen; they hugged each other before he turned to his other housemates and greeted them.

Severus felt his heart lurch with pleasure. Then Minerva was standing before them.

‘Malfoy, Weasley and Snape, I might have known you would disobey a direct request from the Headmistress; ah well, as you are here now,’ and with a wave of her wand, six places were laid at
the High Table,’ you may as well stay for the feast,’ she turned to take her place at the table,’ … oh aye, and five points from each house … for each of you, except you my dear,’ she turned to Astoria, ‘you are always welcome,’ and she patted Astoria’s hand.

‘Er … Minerva … that is fifteen points from Slytherin,’ Lucius complained, ‘…Gryffindor only has ten points removed.’

Minerva turned her gaze on Lucius. ‘Aye … well let this be lesson to you Mr Malfoy,’ and she sat down.

The five chastened former pupils took their places and enjoyed the feast. The school was buzzing with conversation and the ghosts made the newcomers shriek as usual. Minerva tapped her goblet to gain everyone’s attention. All pupils turned to her.

‘Your attention, please; the Headmistress will now say a few words.’

Hermione stood and made her way to the podium; the owl spread its wings as she laid her hands upon it. He noticed she was wearing a long, traditional dress of a deep grey, her official Headmistress’s robe was black; she looked every inch the Headmistress of Hogwarts.

‘Welcome to you all. My name is Professor Hermione Snape and I am the new Headmistress of Hogwarts. I have two notices for the school before introducing the teaching staff to you. Firstly, for years six and seven; the Protection Jinxes have been reinforced over the summer. So unless you wish die a horribly painful and messy death, do not try to apperate anywhere … except within the school grounds. And for the first years and as a reminder to the rest of you, the Forbidden Forest is strictly out of bounds. It appears that there were always two Blast Ended Skrewts … and over the summer holidays, they found each other … and have laid eggs. Now, until Mr Hagrid has … dealt with them … no-one, I repeat no-one … will enter the Forest. The penalty for disobeying this order will be dire … and yes, once again … death may be involved.’

Severus looked at the pupils faces, they all looked suitably scared. Hermione went on to introduce the teaching staff so that each new pupil could put a face to the name. She had started down the far end and made her way along the High Table. When she got to the six guests she stopped. A wicked smile broke out on her face. Severus felt his heart sink; he knew that look.

‘And finally … we have several former pupils with us tonight; so, please give a Hogwarts welcome to Mr and Mrs Arthur Weasley; Mr and Mrs Lucius Malfoy; Astoria Malfoy and my particular favourite, Professor Severus Snape, former Potions Master and Headmaster of this school,’ she motioned for them to stand. The school applauded them and as Molly blushed and the other took a small bow, Severus merely stood and scowled; he knew what was coming. When the applause had died away, Hermione turned back to the pupils. ‘And as former pupils, they all know the punishment for not following a request from the Headmistress of Hogwarts … ten points from Slytherin and Gryffindor,’ the groans that issued from the House tables was loud and prolonged. ‘Right, I think dessert can be served,’ she turned away from the podium.

‘But we have already had points deducted,’ Lucius hissed to Hermione as she passed them to get back to her place.

‘Oh … really?’ and she frowned. Lucius thought he was winning and smiled in triumph. It was short lived. ‘Well, this must make you the unluckiest former pupils to ever come back to Hogwarts. Except you Astoria … you are welcome anytime, come and have tea with me.’ And she wafted by them on a cloud of Oudh and rustling satin.

Lucius, Molly and Arthur groaned. Severus merely allowed a small smile to twitch at the corners of
his mouth. She was brilliant. With that one punishment she had sent the message to the whole school that she might be young, but she can control three of the most powerful wizards at the Ministry. She also told her own daughter and the others that although they may be the children of staff members, there will be no special treatment for them.

‘Madam Headmistress sent this for you, Master Severus,’ Moaner said as she placed a dish of chocolate ice cream in front of him. He lifted his goblet and toasted his wife; she met his eyes pursed her lips and blushed. Then, without any prompting, Lucius lifted his goblet to her, as did Arthur and Molly; the salute went along the table until it arrived at Harry who was sitting on the far end. He looked straight at Severus and raised his own goblet to him and smiled. This time, the smile that Severus returned was broad and sincere.

He sat back and looked along the table. It had taken so much hard work to arrive at this point; but Kingsley, after his initial doubts, had worked just as tirelessly, as had Arthur, to have these bright young wizards and witches, sitting at the High Table at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry; the crème de la crème of their generation, now in a position to pass all their knowledge on to the new generation. They had fought a War and won; they had skills that would enable the new generation to be prepared for whatever evil would come along next. And evil was already stirring in the East. It was the never ending battle of good over evil; only this time, they were more prepared than at any other time in the history of the wizarding community of Great Britain.

He watched Minerva go to the podium and give instruction to the Perfects to take the first years to the dormitories. The High Table rose and began to disperse. Friends and family gathered around the six guests and said their goodbyes. Hermione leaned into him.

‘Of course I won’t take the points away from the Houses, not on the first day of term,’ she whispered in his ear.

‘What about Minerva’s?’ he asked.

‘Oh they stand, can’t be upsetting Minerva, can I?’ she kissed his cheek and with her arm around his waist, they walked down the corridor of portraits and out onto the main landing.

‘I’ll see the children tomorrow; Hagrid has another dragon egg he wants to show Aurora. I will see you … anytime you like. We have your Room of Requirement after all … if you catch my drift,’ and she winked outrageously at him.

He pulled her into a swift embrace and walked down the stairs to collect his broomstick. Everything was in place for the next phase, as it had all been planned. Somethings are just meant to be.
“After the Second Wizarding War, the aim of the Ministry was to bring people together, whether Pure Blood, Half Blood and yes, Muggles. Another aim was to teach future generations the nature of Dark Magic so they would understand, rather than fear it. We did this by getting the best of the best to teach; those with first-hand experience of battling the Dark, and being victorious; but always, and I stress this, always remaining in the Light. When you have unity and understanding, evil cannot prevail; when you have unity and love; evil cannot prevail and when you combine unity, understanding and love, then the Wizarding Community will be ready for the coming of the next Great Evil; for evil is coming whether we acknowledge it or not. The next time, however, we will be prepared.”
Kingsley Shacklebolt;
Minister for Magic: (Retired)

This extract from his best-selling book: ‘ALL THE WORLD’, From Reform to Reality; is used with the kind permission of Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minister of Magic (Retired) and the publishers, Brace & Bracket.

Chapter Notes

Sidhe = Shee – the Faery or Fey people
Angus Og and Balor are Gods of the Tuatha de Danaan

Chapter 32

In Sunshine And In Shadow

They stepped out into the afternoon sunshine and hand in hand, walked to the cliff top. The ocean sparkled below them and the blue, almost cloudless sky showed it was a fine Midsummer’s Day. They stood for a moment, watching the play of sunlight on the almost still water; listening to the call of the gulls above and breathing deeply of the fresh, brine tanged air.

‘Who do you think will be the first to arrive?’ he asked.

‘I bet … Aurora,’ she replied.

‘Good choice … but I bet … Harry.’
‘Not a chance,’ she laughed.

‘We shall … see,’ and he hugged her.

They didn’t have long to wait; they watched as a broomstick gently landed in the meadow, closely followed by two others.

‘I win … pay up,’ and she lifted her face to him for a kiss.

They watched Aurora place her broomstick against the upright of the Dolmen and go to greet the other two women, her daughter Maeve and her granddaughter, Leanan. The three women set up their blankets and baskets for the picnic. They spoke in low voices and moved with practiced ease around each other.

When Aurora had arrived at Hogwarts for her first year, she had sat on the Sorting Stool and the Hat had remained silent for a very long time. Then it started arguing with itself; ‘Ravenclaw, no Gryffindor, Slytherin; no no, Hufflepuff’. This went on until the Hat was frantic and Headmistress Snape approached the Hat and asked what the problem was. The Hat, almost in tears, told Hermione that the child belonged in every House. Hermione had asked if it was permissible for the pupil to decide which House she wanted to join. The Hat gave up and with a resigned sigh said, ‘I think that would be for best.’ Aurora had jumped off the Stool, given her mother a kiss and skipped out of the Great Hall. She was found with Hagrid talking Magical Beasts.

Aurora attended only those lessons she thought useful, the rest of the time she was with Hagrid or in the Forbidden Forest. She was known to all who lived in that immense, gloomy place. She did not sit O.W.L.s or N.E.W.T.s yet seemed very well educated and although she had a capacity to use magic, she rarely did. She spent many years travelling the world, seeking out those places where magical beasts lived, or were husbanded. She would arrive back at Snape Grange without any warning after years away, fling her arms around her father and mother and stay for some time, before setting off again. She came home one day with a baby, Maeve. No mention of a father was ever made. She seemed content then to stay with her parents as Maeve grew into a bright and gifted young woman. Maeve did not attend Hogwarts; instead, her mother taught her at home, using Severus and Hermione’s vast library as a teaching resource.

The day came when Hagrid disappeared. He had packed up his belongings and with Grawp, had set off to the High Mountains in the East in a final attempt to make friendly contact with their mother’s family. A letter of explanation was found in his house; in the final sentence, he recommended Aurora as his replacement. So Aurora Jean Snape became Keeper of Keys and Grounds; Keeper of Magical Beasts; Protector of the Forbidden Forest and Gate Keeper. She was the first witch in the history of Hogwarts to hold the position.

She had been presented to Finn Dagda when she was seven as agreed, and from that moment onwards, she seemed happy to live in both the present and in the other, Fey Realm. Her relationship with her parents remained strong. Her daughter Maeve was also presented to Finn and mother and daughter lived happily in Hagrid’s house. When Maeve was a grown woman, Aurora confided to her father that his granddaughter was pregnant and a few months later, Leanan was born; once again, no mention of a father was ever mentioned. The three women continued to live in the grounds of Hogwarts and Aurora’s childhood wish for her very own Hippogriff came true; all three women also had Unicorns as friends and Leanan, Hermione realised as she grew up, was fully Fey.

Hermione and Severus looked fondly at their youngest child and knowing she was observed, she turned to them … smiled and waved.

Family were arriving thick and fast now. Valerius was the next to arrive with his partner, Lysander
Longbottom. Both men were tall and stately; Val had long, ebony dark hair and Lysander, long, blond hair. Val had been Sorted into Gryffindor. Although he and Lysander had known each other all their lives, Val spent more time with Lorcan. Several times when they were growing up, Lysander had accused Val of not liking him. They avoided each other as much as possible at school and it was only when both of them were working at the Ministry, Val as an Auror and Lysander in Magical Law Enforcement, that they started to like each other. They soon fell in love and started to live together at Spinners End.

Eileen and Scorpius arrived with their family. They had been joined at the hip since they first knew each other and surprisingly, after countless years of marriage, four children, ten grandchildren and four great-grandchildren so far, they still were. Scorpius was the image of his father and grandfather and like Lucius, he wore his hair long. He was now Headmaster of Hogwarts and the Malfoy family had the respect of the Wizarding community. Eileen took over the position of Potions Professor at Hogwarts when Draco retired and became Head of Slytherin. Lucius and Narcissa had passed into the Veil together, but not before they became great-grandparents and Malfoy Manor was filled with children’s clamour. Lucius complained all the time about how boisterous the children were, but everyone knew he enjoyed every minute he was around his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Harry and Ginny arrived in an armada of Potters, Weasleys, Snapes and Longbottoms. Corwen had been Sorted into Ravenclaw the same as Rose Weasley. They apparently fell in love over a discussion about the historical use of magic; Corwen was sixteen and Rose seventeen. Corwen was the one who became interested in Dark Magic and so after leaving Hogwarts with more O.W.Ls and N.E.W.Ts than anyone else in the family, including his mum, he went to Durmstrang to continue his studies. He didn’t return home for five years and Rose waited for him. He had matured into a tall, handsome man, adept at the Dark Arts; he was now the Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor at Hogwarts. It took Ron a few years to come to terms with the fact that his son-in-law was a Snape; but as he had become friendly with Draco over the years, he would often say that ‘if he could be friends with a Malfoy, having a Snape as a family member was a doddle’.

Corwen and Rose had three children, two girls and a boy, Marcus. Marcus was married to Albus Potter’s daughter, Ginevra and already had a young son.

Hermione and Severus watched their family arrive, and when it seemed that no-one else was going to arrive, they crossed to the Dolmen and sat with their backs against the ancient stone and watched with pleasure as blankets were spread on the grass, picnic baskets were emptied and adults as well as children moved between different groups and helped themselves to whatever was on offer. Games were set up and played; magic kites were flown along the beach with dad’s vying with each other to create the most spectacular magical animal. The children simply flew kites made from material and bits of string. There was paddling and beach cricket was still as popular.

‘Are all of these family members,’ Severus asked, ‘surely some have just come along for the free food and drink?’

‘Well my darling, it would seem that you and Kingsley were very successful with your plan,’ she snuggled into his arms, ‘I see Snapes, Potters, Malfoys, Longbottoms, Weasleys, Prewitts, Blacks and Greengrass’, quite the melting cauldron.’

He kissed the top of her head. ‘How many are ours?

She did a count; ‘… about thirty, but I could be wrong.’

‘What day is it today?’ he asked.

‘Midsummer Day, why?’
‘I shall put it in my journal … the day Hermione Danger got it … wrong. A holiday must be declared.’

‘Git,’ and she thumped his leg.

‘Ow! Now be quiet woman … there are speeches coming.’

It was Eileen that stood and called for attention. Parents gathered their children in and settled them. When all was calm she spoke.

‘We are here to honour our parents as they requested last year when they passed into the other Realms. Mum knew she was dying and because they loved us so much, they started to say their goodbyes many weeks before they came here, to this place so loved by mum. Aurora tells me that they are here with us and listening … so I had better make it good,’ there was laughter at this and several people looked around to find them. ‘Our dad used to say this to us: “family isn’t always blood. It is the people in your life who want you in theirs; the ones who accept you for who you are. The ones who would do anything to see you smile and who love you, no matter what.”’

‘Did I say that?’ Severus muttered.

‘Yes, I think it is very well thought out … for you.’

Eileen smiled at the gathering. ‘Mum and dad loved each other passionately,’ there were many groans and knowing smiles. ‘They loved their children without reserve … but with strict boundaries; and they also loved their friends. They were inclusive, and because of that, our lives were enriched and as often happens … friends become family. That is the legacy of our parents, of Lucius and Narcissa, of Molly and Arthur and of course … Kingsley and Adam. Mum, dad, I know we will see later tonight when the Veil falls away, but I want to tell you now before all the merry meetings that will go on tonight … I love you both. I thank you for your wisdom, friendship and support. I miss you and I have been charged by your grandchildren and great grandchildren with telling you that they all miss you and love you to bits, and they can’t wait to give you a kiss later on. Right … I know Val wants to say something, so I will shut up now,’ Eileen wiped he tears away and embraced her husband.

‘I think I may have something in my eye,’ Severus said.

‘Yes, me too, hankie?’ and he accepted the hankie she passed to him and dabbed his eyes.

Valerius stood up. ‘I never did tell you both how much I appreciated your support when ‘Sander and I first got together. I should have said something back then … but … anyway, you made it possible for him to talk to Neville and Luna … and dad, … I know you took Lorcan aside and told him to grow up … or you’d hex him,’ there was laughter again.

‘Yes, I couldn’t decide on bogies, pimples or slugs, so I never got around to it,’ Severus grinned.

‘So … from me and Sander … thank you. Mum, dad … I love you and always will. I miss you every day … but I also know that you are still with me … still in my life, see you later,’ he sat down and was hugged by Lysander.

‘Nice boy …’ Severus said.

‘Like his father,’ Hermione added.

Corwen stood up and Aurora nodded in the direction he should face; he turned to his parents. ‘Dad, mum. I love you both. Dad, you helped me control my anger and direct it into other things. Mum,
you never once shouted at me when I didn’t deserve it. I was a little git, to coin the phrase Uncle
Harry used on more than one occasion. But I am not here to prattle on about me. I love you and miss
you both, but it is Marcus and Ginevra who want to speak to you,’ Corwen sat down, wiped his eyes
and kissed Rose.

Marcus and Ginny Snape stood up and approached the Dolmen and knelt in front of them.
‘Granddad, grandma … we both miss you, but we have some news for you,’ he took a deep breath
and nodded to Ginny who opened her cloak to reveal a tiny baby. She opened the blanket and
showed the babe to its great grandparents. ‘This is Arietta Githa Snape; she was born a month ago.’

Hermione gripped Severus and started to cry. ‘She is still so beautiful,’ and she reached out her hand
as if to touch the baby but met only air. Aurora came over and knelt by her nephew and niece.

‘Can you ask them how they knew her name? We never told anyone,’ Hermione said.

Aurora repeated the question. It was Ginny who answered. ‘I was at the Grange, in the garden and
Finn Dagda came into the garden,’ she said softly. ‘He said I have the chance of giving life to one
who was denied such a blessing. He said it was entirely my choice. You see, we didn’t tell anyone,
but after Freddie was born, something went wrong and the Healers said I wouldn’t have any more
children. So I didn’t have to think about it, I agreed … being given the chance to have another child
… I took it. Finn told me it would be a girl and that we will call her Arietta Githa … and here she is.’

‘Mum says she is beautiful and she says thank you for giving Arietta another chance. She also says
she loves you both … and so does dad.’

The young parents stood up and left. Hermione turned to Severus and kissed him.

‘Just so you know,’ Aurora turned to the gathering, ‘they are kissing,’ she stood up. A barrage of
groans and eww’s went around and then laughter and applause.

Then Harry stood up and turned to face them. His hair was still thick, but now shot with silver at the
temple and it still fell over his forehead. He pushed his specs up his nose. ‘I asked the family if it
would be alright for me to say something today; they agreed, thank Merlin or I would have had to
beg. Not something the Minister for Magic should be seen doing,’ he waited for the laughter to die
away. ‘Right … ‘Mione first. My best friend … I miss you more than words can ever express; you
were a hideous know-it-all in that first year at Hogwarts. By the second year, everyone was
beginning to see you as the brilliant, brave, exceptional and talented witch you became.’

‘Uncle Harry?’ Aurora interrupted, ‘mum says you left out beautiful and dad says you left out
exasperating … oh and sexy,’ Aurora grinned.

‘Yeah, well … moving swiftly along, ‘Moine, working with you at the Ministry and then at
Hogwarts was the best. Then, when you retired and took up writing, life became even more
interesting; I would wait for you to come rushing into the house or worse, my office at the Ministry,
usually when I was having a high powered meeting. It was always the same, “Harry, I was having
trouble finding something … so I went …’

‘… To the library,’ everyone chorused and laughed.

‘… And you would then tell me about some obscure fact you have found or little gem of information
you had discovered. So no-one was surprised when ‘House Elves – A History’, went on to become a
best seller; or ‘Muggles – Here to Stay’. But it was when you wrote our story in ‘Voldemort – My
Part in His Downfall’, that you told the whole story, the whole truth; not some made up rubbish that
was forever being printed in the Prophet. You told it all, about us, our part, but more importantly,
you told the whole Wizarding world the part Severus played.’ He paused, ‘… we all loved you, me, Lucius, the boys … and some of the girls at Hogwarts; Kingsley adored you and Adam was fiercely loyal to you. But it was Severus who claimed you … and you him … and … well, somethings are meant to be, and you and he together, is one of those things. I still love you, ‘Mione and I know Ginny won’t mind me saying that … and I miss you every day,’ he pushed his hair away from his forehead again. ‘This next bit is very personal and … difficult … but here goes. Severus, there is so much I could say about our relationship, but I don’t have to because Hermione did it for me in the book. But there is something I need to say to you before things kick off tonight …’ he turned to Aurora, ‘can you take me to them?’

Aurora led Harry to her parents and showed Harry where to face.

‘Right …’ he cleared his throat. ‘… There is one word that I should have used in all the years we knew each other, one word that would have meant the world to you. I used it just the once, on that terrible night Arietta was born. But you were in too much pain and shock to notice …’ he took a deep breath … ‘Arthur was a father to me while I was growing up. Well, I think I am grown up now.’

Severus grabbed Hermione’s hand and held onto it; he was sitting ramrod straight, his face an impassive mask.

‘I didn’t know James Potter … and we had some very volatile disagreements about him. But I grew to know you. You were always there with advice, whether I wanted it or not; with support when I needed it and with putting me right when I was about to make a complete prat of myself. You encouraged me in my careers and you were always right about what I should do; even naming me your successor to be Minister for Magic.’ He ran his hand through his hair. ‘What I am trying to say in my usual roundabout way … is something I should have said to you decades ago. You were a father to me over the years, the father I never had and never recognised. So … and I have nearly finished … I promise … Severus … dad … I need to say thank you for being there for me; for protecting me because you loved my mum; for protecting me because you loved Dumbledore; for supporting me because you love Hermione … and simply for just loving me … and my family. Yeah … right … when I was young and stupid …’

‘That would have been last week then,’ Draco called out, which brought more laughter.

Harry smiled in spite of himself. ‘… When I was young and stupid, from my first day at Hogwarts, I always thought you were the person who had the smallest capacity for love. Turns out, you are the person who loves the most.’ He leaned in and dropped his voice to a whisper, ‘I love you dad … and I miss you every single day.’ He stood quickly and went back to his family who fell on him with hugs and kisses.

Hermione was holding Severus in her arms as he wept into her shoulder.

‘Mum says, thank you, Harry. She always loved you and cherished your friendship. Dad is too overcome …’ Aurora stopped and nodded. ‘He says, thank you … son.’

By this time everyone was wiping tears away and blowing noses. It was Draco who stood up.

‘Everyone, please charge your goblets and be upstanding.’ Anyone who could hold a goblet or cup found it filled with wine, beer, mead, cider, dandelion and burdock, lemonade, milk or water, although there were only two of those, and they all stood and faced the Dolmen.

Severus and Hermione also stood, arms wrapped around each other.
Draco lifted his goblet. ‘To Severus and Hermione … two minds, two hearts and two souls joined forever in love. We love you both and you will always be in our hearts,’ he lifted his goblet and drank as did everyone. ‘Oh yes … and Severus? About Snape Grange; you know how it kept getting changed to Granger? You would get mad and remove the ‘R’ and blame anyone you could think off … my dad, Val, Arthur, Ron and even Molly got accused once! Well, I can tell you now who the culprit was …’ he looked around and pointed, ‘… it was Harry, he thought it was very funny and I kept telling him not to.’

‘Thanks, Malfoy you git … I’ll get you for that,’ Harry called back. Draco lifted his goblet and saluted him. The mood was lifted and sombre afternoon was now gentle twilight. Mage lights were lit and more food was produced and more games played, including cricket and charades and people still cheated outrageously.

‘How you doing?’ Hermione asked him.

‘Amazed. I was convinced it was … Lucius.’

‘No, no that … Harry,’ she giggled.

‘Proud, happy … sad that he didn’t tell me when …’ he shrugged.

‘The light has changed,’ she said, ‘they will be here soon.’

‘I miss them all,’ he said.

‘I know you do,’ she said with a small squeeze of his arm.

As much as she adored him, she was aware that Severus was not entirely happy being in her realm; and that concerned her. They were still very much in love, but she would catch him looking wistful at times; and she knew why. She sighed as she saw Finn and Danu walked across the meadow to them.

‘Hermione? Who are they really?’

‘Sure you really want to know?’

‘Yes … I … quite sure,’ he smiled at her.

‘Technically … Finn is my father and Danu my mother.’

‘Technically?’

‘Here, in this realm of Tuatha da Danaan, they are the mother and father of everyone; it gets complicated.’

‘So biologically … who are your parents?’ he pressed.

‘Cian of the Tuatha de Danaan,’ she paused, ‘my mother is Druantia … also known as Queen of the Druids.’ Severus shook his head. ‘I know, I know … my husband has been asking all the right questions,’ she greeted Finn and Danu.

‘About time, mortal man,’ Danu said.

‘But … what I really want to know,’ Severus looked straight at Finn, ‘… who you are when you walk … in the World?’
Finn clapped Severus on the shoulder and laughed. ‘You should know … after all, my name is known far and wide and I am credited with many things to do with magic.’

Severus looked piercingly at Finn, then at Hermione, who simply smiled and shrugged. ‘Oh no … no, no, no,’ he groaned, ‘… you’re not …?’

‘Bright lad you’ve got yourself here,’ Finn chuckled and held out his hand, ‘Merlin … at your service.’

Severus took the offered hand and shook it, still not believing who was before him.

‘It is time,’ Danu said.

At that moment, day and night merged, sun and moon ruled in the sky in the magical twilight; only this night, the moon was full and she seemed as big as the sun and the Veil between the worlds, lifted. From the Dolmen, shadows emerged that once under the Midsummer sky, solidified into people.

‘Hermione …?’ Severus breathed.

‘Yes, my love … they have come to see their families and … you,’ she threw her arms around him and held him close. ‘Go and join them … I need to speak with Finn and Danu … I won’t be long,’ and she kissed him and then watched as he walked across the meadow towards Lucius and Narcissa.

‘You mean to continue with your scheme, then?’ Danu asked when Severus was out of earshot. Hermione nodded.

The night progressed and those who had passed into the Veil greeted their families and friends. Tears were shed, introductions were made and grandchildren and great grandchildren and beyond were introduced to their grandsires and those children marvelled that such things were possible.

Hermione joined Severus and together, they sat with their family and friends, catching up on news of every kind. They talked long into the early hours of the morning, sharing stories, laughter and hugs. Food and drink were consumed and as usual at these gatherings, songs were sung. Severus stopped suddenly and stared across the meadow. Hermione followed his gaze. Standing at the portal of the Dolmen was a tall woman, looking around as if lost.

‘Go to her,’ she whispered to her husband. She watched as he walked across the meadow, dappled in the light of Midsummer magic, to greet his mother. She watched as he stood in front of her for many, many minutes; then he took her hands. Eileen reached up to him and touched his cheek and he fell into his mother’s embrace. At some unspoken word, Hermione and Severus’s children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren came and sat with her. Ginny gave her Arietta to hold and Leanan came and sat in her lap and cooed at her cousin.

‘Who’s that with dad?’ Val asked.

‘That’s granpa’s mum,’ Leanan replied without looking up.

Hermione saw mother and son approach, Eileen with her arm through Severus’s; they stopped and the family stood to greet her. One by one the children introduced themselves to their great, great, grandmother, who looked amazed that Severus had so large a family.

‘And this is my wife, Hermione,’ he said at last.

Hermione went up to Eileen and hugged her. ‘I am so pleased to meet you at last, mum,’ she smiled
at mother and son and saw Severus gulp back a sob.

‘I am happy to meet you all, but confess to being overwhelmed, but Sev,’ she turned to face her son, ‘I am happiest because you have found great happiness,’ she joined them in their family circle and shared the stories of childhood, education, work, marriage and children that all families share with each other when they are together. Severus sat close to his mother and every now and then, she reached out her hand and held his.

Then Hermione saw her.

She was standing with Harry, surrounded by his family. To one side were James, Sirius, Remus and Tonks. With an ‘excuse me’ she got up and went to Harry and Lily. Harry threw his arms around her.

‘How is this possible, ‘Moine? Why doesn’t it happen every year?’

‘Because tonight it is a full moon on Midsummer night which happens rarely, and this is the second full moon in a month, which happens … once in a blue moon,’ and she hugged him back. ‘Would you like it to happen every year?’

He looked at her for a moment. ‘No, you’re right, it has to remain special.’

Smiled at him and kissed his cheek, ‘… you are learning, Minister,’ she turned to Lily. ‘Hullo Lily, I’m Hermione,’ and she held out her hand. Lily grasped it and smiled at her.

‘Well, well, well, Hermione Granger. I always said you were the most exceptional witch of your generation,’ Sirius smiled at her.

‘Hullo, Sirius … professor and Tonks,’ and she went and hugged them both.

‘I see you got landed with Snivellus,’ James Potter said with a snarky grin.

‘And I see you got landed with not growing up,’ came her swift retort. ‘And he is a thousand times a better wizard and man than you ever were and your son is a hundred times a better wizard and man that you ever were Snotter; just remember that as you go down through eternity,’ she turned on her heel and walked away as her anger at James threatened to spill over and she was biting down the urge to do something nasty to him.

She returned to Severus and fell into his embrace, knowing that James and Sirius were still watching her.

‘Is that James and Sirius?’ he asked.

‘Yes … and I have been very rude to James,’ she said sheepishly.

The first red streaks of dawn were creeping over the horizon as Severus strode purposefully towards James and Sirius. She watched as he went up to James … and held his hand out. James hesitated, but eventually shook the offered hand; then Severus did the same with Sirius who also shook his hand. Remus hugged him. Then, he turned to Lily. She was standing with her arm around Harry. Hermione didn’t hear what passed between them, but Severus then took Lily’s hand and kissed it. She threw her arms around him and held him for many minutes. Then he hugged Harry.

Farewells were being made and those who had come from the Veil began to drift back into the shadows. As Severus came towards her, she saw his face was sad; she put her arm around his waist and started to walk with him towards the Dolmen.
'Why haven’t they gone?’ he asked nodding towards a small group of people gathered by the entrance to the Dolmen, which included Lucius and Narcissa.

‘They are waiting for you,’ she replied.

‘I don’t understand,’ he stopped and looked at her.

‘I love you so much Severus Snape but I know your sadness and I cannot bear it.’

‘Hermione …’

‘My darling man, my beloved, this is my world, my realm. In the Veil you have your family and friends. I am gifting to you a return to the Veil … to be with your mother and eventually … to be with our children and their children.’

‘Hermione … no!’

‘Oh you don’t get rid of me that easily; you can come back on the four main festivals and if I can make it happen, for all the minor festivals as well,’ she smiled gently at him.

‘But …’

‘We will have a night, a day and another night … then you will have to return,’ she was fighting back the tears.

‘I don’t want to leave you,’ he grabbed her arms and shook her.

‘You will never leave me my darling … but you are unhappy in this realm. Go with your mum, get to know her properly; go with Lucius and Narcissa. Be there when our children pass into the Veil … and Harry.’

‘But …’ the tears were streaming down his face now and the sun was peeking above the horizon.

‘I will have Aurora, she will come here, as will Maeve and Leanan. Leanan is fully of the Sidhe and she will find love and have her children … I will not be alone … and you didn’t meet my brother … Angus Og … you’d hate him, but he plays wonderful tunes on the harp. And then there’s my grandfather … Balor … I like him a lot, but he scares most people … so you see I will not be alone, nor lonely.’

‘When can I come back?’

‘Samhain will be the next time. Then Yule, and if I make enough fuss … Imbolc … I tend to get my own way when I whine,’ and she laughed and drew him into a deep kiss. ‘The sun is raising and you must leave.’

He nodded. ‘Thank you … I love you … you have always known that … haven’t you?’ He walked towards the small group and took his mother’s hand.

‘From before I was born, darling man,’ she replied. ‘Severus?’ He turned to her as the golden light of day hit his face. ‘Love you.’

He nodded, smiled and followed his mother into the Dolmen as the sun bathed the now empty meadow in its light.

Hermione turned and walked to the corner of the meadow, over the stile and disappeared.
It was Beltane night. A sea mist drifted up from ocean and swirled around the woman standing on the cliff top. The chill wind whipped her hair across her face; she pulled the large shawl closer around her. She wore a simple, knee length skirt of red and her top was green. Her arms were bare and upon one, intricate patterns were drawn upon the skin; upon her other arm was a fine golden torc. She turned her face inland and saw the Beltane fires already burning brightly and the dancing had commenced. It would be a long and wild night.

Then she saw him coming out of the Dolman and she ran on bare feet across the wet grass and flung herself into his arms. Their mouths met and hungry kisses were exchanged. He pulled away and looked at her.

‘That is … a different … look,’ he said as his eyes ran up and down her body.

‘I’m not sure about it … I think it makes me look fierce,’ she linked her arm through his and they walked across the meadow towards their little cottage.

‘How are our girls?’ he asked.

‘Fine. You will see them tomorrow.

Smoke rose from the chimney of the cottage, filling the air with the sweet tang of peat. Lamps and candles were lit in the house and their soft glow from the windows made the little home welcoming. He opened the gate for her and they walked up the path, through a neat garden. She opened the door and they slipped inside.

‘Did you bring any Girding Potion?’ she asked, taking his coat and leading him to the fire.

‘Would I turn up here without any?’ he replied, ‘… everyone who comes into the Veil nowadays has a bottle in their pocket,’ he rolled his eyes and she laughed. He handed her a bottle of potion and something else, a small flat box.

‘What’s this?’

‘Freddie found it at Snape Grange … he bought it with him.’

‘Freddie has passed into the Veil?’ He nodded. ‘It must be getting quite crowded with all those Snapes, Potters, Weasley’s and Malfoys,’ she said with a sad smile.

‘You should here Lucius complain. He sends … his love, by the way,’ he pulled her into him and held her close. ‘What’s up, my darling?’

She was silent for a long time. The fire burned brightly in the grate, supper was cooking on the stove and the little cottage felt safe and warm.

‘I need to tell you something … and I don’t know how,’ she said at last.

‘Tell me,’ he encouraged.
She took a deep breath. ‘I am to be reborn … again. I don’t want to … I didn’t ask to … but these things … are out of my hands.’

‘I don’t follow … I thought you …’ he said.

‘Finn walks in the world; Severus … there is a great shadow moving across the world … not just the Wizarding world … but the Muggle world as well. It threatens all things … and it must be stopped … and that means fighting … again.’

‘Freddie said something about a powerful Necromancer in the East … Hermione …?’

‘I will go back; just as I did with Voldemort … there will be others like me … who will join with me … we will fight for what we know is good.’

‘But it means … I will not …’ he held her tightly as if it would stop her leaving. ‘ … When?’ he whispered against her hair.

‘I don’t know … a suitable mother has to be found … yes … I start again as a baby … and I grow up … there is plan … but I have asked for something in return for doing this.’

‘What? Tell me … please.’

‘This time … I will not fall in love and I will not marry and have children. I will be born to help the fight and I will die fighting … that is how it will be this time ….’ She held up her hand to stop his interruption. ‘ … And when I die, I will go into the Veil … and I will be with you.’

‘What of our girls?’

‘They are of the Sidhe now; they slip in and out of the realms at will … you will understand what I mean when you see them tomorrow.’

They sat in front of the fire holding each other until supper was ready. Later, they went into their bedroom with windows that overlooked the vast ocean. A little fire warmed the room and under the soft covers, they spoke of their love; their family and the future. When they had no more words to say, they touched, caressed, kissed and made love with a passion that had never left them.

On the nightstand, beside an unopened bottle of *Girding Potion*, was the little flattened box. Its colours had faded with age; it was creased and torn along one edge, but even though faded, the writing on the small box was still visible.

*W easley’s W izarding W heezes ~~~ Patented*

**Daydream Charm ~~~ (Single Use )**

~~~ Results not guaranteed – no refunds

given ~~~

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Well, this is the final chapter; I have enjoyed myself in this world and I may just have to come back to HG/SS at some point.

Thank you to everyone who has been reading this story, I hope you have enjoyed it. I know some haven’t liked the story because I took liberties – but hey that’s fanfic and the moment writers are censored or castigated because of a creative idea – then the world is doomed.

To understand the final reference to ‘Patented Daydream Charm’ you will have to read ‘Better than Life’ by anoesis – from whence the seed of my idea came. Go read it – if you like the SS/HG ship - you may just like it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!