Subtle Support
by Angeltsuki

Summary

Hermione has a life-debt to pay to Harry Potter and will do whatever she can to pay it back. Harry has no idea. She'll go through the fires of hell to repay him, and he won't even notice. It helps when a spy notices. An unlikely partnership is forged to fulfill their debts. Slow burn. HG/SS Contains: Slash, violence, angst, swearing, and love.
Chapter 1

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or any of its characters, just this plot.

AN: Dudes… it’s fanfiction.

It starts during the Goblet of Fire and it stays pretty true to the book for fourth year, so some of it is from the book. Again. This is fanfiction. I do not know Harry Potter. But some parts I did take from the book because it’s fanfiction from the book. After Voldemort is resurrected that’s when things will get fun.

This is a Hermione Granger/Severus Snape fic. But for fourth year, she is with Viktor Krum.

Summary: Ever wonder why Hermione stayed friends with Harry even after all the trouble that followed him? What if Hermione never had a choice? Hermione has a life-debt to pay to Harry Potter and will do whatever she can to pay it back. Harry has no idea. She’ll go through the fires of hell to repay him, and he won’t even notice. It helps when a spy notices. An unlikely partnership is forged to fulfill their debts.

Subtle Support

The Tri-Wizard tournament had been a great distraction for most of the students, especially with all the visitors in the castle. For some more than others, however it was still buzzing with excitement, after the first task. Hermione though was not exactly pleased, even though it... was interesting and she was allowed the opportunity to meet and talk to new people who came from different schools that specialized in different areas of magic. It was incredibly fascinating. However when it came to people liking her (and her liking them for that matter), and her people skills, she was once again left virtually alone. The fascination wore off quickly after the rudeness shown by the Beauxbaton students, especially from their champion Fleur.

Well that wasn’t exactly true, she made friends with Viktor Krum, who took the time to work up the courage to talk to her. A lot of people didn’t mind talking to her or talking down to her, so it was nice for a change that someone had to gather their courage to talk to her because they liked her. After all the horrible things that people said about her appearance, it was quite a nice change of pace.

When she thought about it, it was a mix of cute and creepy, but she decided to stick to how cute it was that he would stalk the library just for her. She did find it disconcerting at first since he would always be one table away from her, and she could feel him looking at her constantly. She had sadly originally thought the worst of him. She had let Malfoy get to her when he made it quite clear the Durmstrang only accepted purebloods and they didn’t like mudbloods like her. So she wasn’t sure if should be leery of him or not for her own safety.

“Hey, Krum? I’ve noticed you’ve been watching me for a few days. If you have something mean to say, just say it already.” She said, glaring at him, despite the ruckus she could hear coming from his fangirls for her rudeness.

“I haff no mean things to say. Would you like me to move?” He replied softly, his black eyes glimmered.
“No, but if you’re going to sit watching me, please sit closer and actually talk to me. I’ll start, I’m Hermione Granger.” She held out her small hand to the hulky thin boy.

Viktor took her small hand and shook it with his larger one. His cheeks grew pink at her daintiness even though he could tell she packed a powerful punch.

“I’m Viktor Kum, it is pleasure to meet you.”

Her responding bright smile made the corner of his lip twitch up.

The petite witch sat down at her usual seat, and patted the space in front of her to show him where she wanted him to sit. Viktor wasn’t as graceful on land as he was in the air, but she didn’t care, so he walked duck-footed towards her and took the offered seat. She sent him another smile before she began to set up to do her homework.

It didn’t bother her as much as it used to, and now she at least still had Harry and the rest of the Weasleys and Neville were still talking to her. Although it did anger her every time she saw Ronald or heard his voice, his stupidity was beyond her! To blatantly ignore your so called “best-mate” because you think he lied, even though he’s told nothing but the truth? To get upset and jealous over something your “best-mate” has no control over? It wasn’t like Harry was going to lie to him to give him an answer he didn’t have, that was preposterous!

She took a deep breath to calm herself. He wasn’t worth losing her head for, especially when she had to finish her homework. Granted it wasn’t due until next week, but she needed the extra time to devote to her own personal studies. Before she came to Hogwarts, the only books she’d technically been allowed were her assigned year’s school books, and a gifted book *Hogwarts, A History*. Her parents had eventually saved up enough money to convert into wizarding money to buy her other books. They had started a personal library for her and she was grateful for all of their support.

They had been to Diagon Alley before meeting the Weasley’s but had played it off since they went wearing their normal muggle clothes.

Her parents jumped aboard the Hogwarts Express so to say to stay in Hermione’s life. They wanted to blend in without giving it away that they were indeed muggles. So one of their first trips, after making an account with Gringotts and converting their money, they went to Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions. They bought a whole wardrobe for her and half of one for themselves. Her mother absolutely loved how all the robes were fitted and seemed as though she was used to having it done all of her life; a smirk was on her face, directed at her husband the whole time. They quickly made their way to Ollivander’s for Hermione’s wand. They heard the rules and knew she wasn’t to practice magic outside of school, unless she was homeschooled. She had a whole year until she left for Hogwarts. They would make great use of that time.

However she knew that wasn’t enough to understand kids her age, she didn’t know what they grew up with, what was normal to them. So she devoted her time to studying. Studying a world she would be a part of forever, studying all that she had missed growing up in a muggle home that would help her better understand herself and her culture, even though understanding other people was the same in the magical world as it was with the muggle world.

It helped that she was learning things on her own that other students just didn’t bother with. It helped more that she was learning how to make her own spells instead of just learning what other people made.
She didn’t parrot back textbooks ask Professor Snape liked to claim, it was just how she understood it. She didn’t show initiative and creativeness in potions because she didn’t have the ingredients to experiment with ahead of time or in her free time. It was hard enough to get the ingredients for the Polyjuice potion the first time and now she was under a sturdy eye whenever she got ingredients because she was a known thief.

Which wouldn’t have happened if cat hair wasn’t so similar to human hair. She still had slightly large canines from the accident. They weren’t able to be fixed the way her front teeth were fixed from Malfoy’s stupid hex, which was a silent miracle that she didn’t have to go through with braces like her parents were hoping for. She did use a glamour on her teeth twice a day so people didn’t think she was a vampire. It became part of her normal routine (that her parents teasingly reminded her in every letter).

She also retained a few other cat like traits that she benefited from, mostly enhanced senses that took her some time to get used to, which is what took such a long time during her weeks’ long recovery. It took 1 week to brew the antidote, 1 week of constant doses, and the rest of the time was desensitizing. Luckily for her, her pupils went back to being round, even though some of the gold (and surprisingly green) coloring still flecked her irises.

One feature she did not benefit from though was her relationship with certain magical creatures. They all seemed to sense something not human in her, and depending on their intelligence whether to deem her a threat or not. It didn’t help that some of them were already skittish when it came to magical folk. So she had to be extra careful around them. Although cats and kneazles seemed to like her more than ever now, which is how she ended up with Crookshanks.

He was known as a menace, but to her he was loving, devoted, and extremely trustworthy companion. Whom allowed her to baby talk him when they figured no one was nearby and let her talk about her worries and frustrations when no one else would. It was hard being a girl and having two strictly male friends who got uncomfortable when having to face anything that was strictly female.

Ron was a stereotypical guy if she ever met one, straight out of a cartoon, which baffled her considering his brothers and his father. He cared little for his classes and grades, had almost no academic ambition, was over the top in love with quidditch, and ate like he was bottomless pit (although that one she pinned back towards his ever loving house-witch mother Mrs. Weasley).

Harry was not a stereotypical guy, let alone wizard, but he was showing to be able to have the typical teenager brooding stage. She was not looking forward to it, but she would stick by him through it and could hopefully laugh about it later. He was kinder (usually) and more sensitive when it came to certain things, however he was also obtuse about most things. Sadly he was also more emotional, which she expected was from his poor upbringing at not really being allowed to be himself at home. The young witch figured it was because of his new freedom to actually be allowed to do things without harsh corporal punishment. She often wished that her parents could give his family all root canals.

She also had a sneaking suspicion that Harry didn’t tell them everything about his home life and that it was worse than he was saying. She would bet her first book that he was beat by that oaf of an uncle of his. She of course didn’t say anything with the mindful tact that Harry wouldn’t appreciate it in the least. He was set up with an image and pick and chose which of them he liked best. If he wanted to portray that he was fine and his home life was poor but decent, let him. Most of the magical community didn’t care about him, Harry, but rather “The Boy Who Lived”. The mirage versus the reality, Hermione may live in a world where magic did exist, but she could do without smokes and screens. She always preferred the real thing, even if reality was gritty, it wasn’t going to
change just because you decided to remain ignorant. If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it’s a duck. There were ways to be sure, but there was no going around reality, even with magic.
Chapter 2

Hermione often wondered who gave her boys the “talk” and how. She knew Harry attended public muggle school before being coming to Hogwarts, even with his less than stellar upbringing (if one could call it that). She could only hope beyond reason that he learned it in school before he was pulled out, considering they didn’t teach it at Hogwarts.

It was ridiculous that they didn’t have a Health course at Hogwarts at all! If you were ill or felt ill you either went to the Hospital Wing or you went to St. Mungos. Few were taught healing spells, some were passed down in pureblood homes, which was how Molly was able to take care of her children on her own. She knew they sold health books and books with healing spells (and her parents bought many of them), more so after her second year. If she was going to be gallivanting doing who knows what on adventures right under an authority figure’s nose, then she would at least have the knowledge to take care of them in such a situation should there be dire need.

The Weasley family was well known for being fertile, especially since the birthrate for wizards was low. However the matriarch seemed very conservative when it came to things of the sort. It was obvious that most of the pureblood families were of the same conservative opinion, but the Weasley family was the only one she was able to observe in their own home. She also wondered how often the red headed children had “walked in” on their parents since it appeared every child had at least one horror story.

As for Harry she wondered if he had a horror story of the like or if they even bothered giving him the talk at all. They seemed like a type of family that wanted nothing to do with magic, and while she often thought of having her parents casually “meet” the Dursley’s, to help them ease into accepting it, than the horrifying experiences the Weasley’s must have given them. She hoped that if that were ever the case, it would help more than hinder with his dreadful home life as it were. While his … charming, aunt Petunia was his mother’s sister, she seemed to willfully forget certain aspects of the wizarding world and seemed to prefer to claim ignorance in the presence of her family. She wasn’t sure why that was, but his aunt was shrewd; shrewd enough that she would have made a fine Slytherin even if her sister was a Gryffindor.

Luckily for the students at Hogwarts there were a few wards and other preventative measures to keep students from getting pregnant. They were created by Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff themselves. It was a wonderful precaution especially since many of the witches forgot to take a potion or cast a charm with their hormone addled brains. That didn’t mean they didn’t have to be careful, they could still get sexually transmitted diseases (and the magical equivalent was terrifying). Luckily there was a quick spell to make sure that your partner was STD free, one of which Hermione made sure to master. There may not be anybody in her life at this exact moment, but she would be damned by Merlin and Morgana, if she accidentally caught one through non sexual means from one of her roommates because she didn’t know.

At first she thought it was silly, stupid even, but when she found out people could get crabs from sharing towels, and her living in a dorm with other girls who occasionally forgot to tell her that they used something of hers as she was going to use it. For example, the time Lavender used her towel because she forgot where she put her own (which was a pitiful excuse! Lavender just liked the soft quality of her muggle towel instead of the regular magically charmed towel that was her own. Some things were just better the muggle way). Thankfully the spell was subtle enough that it just glowed dimly at the end of the user’s wand instead of person’s being.

With how boy crazy her roommates were, she sadly wasn’t taking any chances. While they
may very well stay virgins until they day they graduated, she highly doubted that for all of them. It wasn’t common practice to be a virgin at their marriage bonding ceremony anyways. Of course if the witch was still a virgin her dowry was indeed larger than if she was not. Marriage arrangements were still common practice however and the witch and wizard in said arrangement usually found comfort or experience in another person’s arms to know what it was like before marriage.

Amazingly enough the preventative measures also worked for the student’s familiars and the school’s owls. How the preventative measures didn’t expand to cover Hagrid’s creatures was beyond her. There were occasions where Hermione did not want to know where the obvious cat sex noises were coming from or who said cats were. Sadly she had a feelings that Crookshanks was a ‘happy helper’ to the females in heat. He was indeed a menace to most of the students, Mrs. Norris as part of the staff, and a majority of the students’ pets and companions, but he was smart, and was most definitely not neutered.

The bushy haired witch herself was given a stack books, both educational and not, (although she did develop a taste for the trashy romance novels that were borderline erotica when it struck her fancy) followed by a talk with her mother on follow up questions. Hermione blushed throughout most of the non-educational books and blushed harder when her mother came to finally talk with her and see if she had any follow up questions.

Since she did attend a private boarding school that taught magic, they were not sure if they taught health beyond the means of how to heal and cure certain ailments. They wanted her to be as safe as possible when it came to relationships, should she have one, knowing that aside from the staff (who reasonably couldn’t be everywhere at once) wouldn’t be able to watch every student at the same time, all the time.

They were proven correct after Hermione had to explain to them the incident she had turning into a cat and being petrified her second year. The first she told them herself so they would know to be more considerate to her new sensitivities instead of having to conceal it, and possibly hide how much pain or discomfort they might unwittingly cause her. The petrification incident, they were made aware by owl, so they understood that she would be unable to correspond to their letters, and that she was being treated and would be cured in a few months’ time considering how long it took to brew the antidote.

While they were at first horrified by what was happening in her world, even considering pulling her out of Hogwarts and making her give up magic forever, they remembered a discussion they had with Minerva McGonagall and the promise they made their daughter.

RING RING

“I wonder who that could be…” Abagail Granger asked herself under her breath. It was nearly 7pm, a typical dinner hour in the neighborhood.

“Honey, can you get the door?” Dr.Granger asked her daughter as she was finishing dinner.

“Yes, Mum.”

Hermione was short for her age, at 10 years old, almost 11, her hair was extremely bushy, but that
was due to her family’s ignorance on how to manage her curly hair. Hermione got her hair texture from her father, who kept his hair trimmed short. Her mother had soft wavy brown hair, but kept her hair shoulder length. So while Hermione had lovely curls when her hair was wet, after a shower and in the morning, she would brush them out, leaving her hair soft yet bushy.

The young muggleborn opened the door and her eyes fell upon a stern looking older lady with a tight smile on her face.

“Hello ma’am, May I help you?” Hermione asked kindly.

“Yes, hello. Are your parents home?” the stern looking lady asked with a no nonsense voice.

“Yes, ma’am. Would you like me to go get them for you?” Hermione could tell from her tone that she was experienced with controlling chaos or hosting meetings or something of the like. She wasn’t dressed like a businesswoman though...

“That would be most appreciated young lady. Before you do, I have a letter for you.” She nodded her head in thanks and handed a sturdy envelope to the muggleborn. The young witch felt the quality of the paper and knew that it would only be used for something serious.

Hermione nodded back at the other woman, “Thank you. One moment please.” and went back into her house to find her mother, her letter in hand.

“Mum, there’s a woman on the front steps and she asked to see you and Dad.” Hermione fidgeted with the candlewax seal on the envelope while relaying the message to her mother. It was very intriguing, to receive a letter with a candlewax seal instead of the typical envelopes with glue already applied to them. It had an interesting crest on it as well, it was lovely. As soon as she finished speaking she started chewing on her bottom lip and actually looked at it, being careful to mind the wax in a way to preserve it for inspection later.

Lady Hermione Granger

Living Room

98 Whittle Lane

Hampstead

England

Abagail Granger looked over at her daughter and saw that she was nervous and staring at a letter with wide eyes. She wiped her hands on her black apron and went to the door to see who this visitor was that made Hermione nervous. She only got that way around parent teacher conferences or when she was waiting for her grades.

“Hello. May I help you?” Abagail asked when she got to the door. She too was greeted with the sight of a stern looking older woman with a tight smile.

“Yes, Duchess Granger, I am Professor Minerva McGonagall. I must speak with you about your daughter Hermione Granger. May I come in?” the way she asked made it seem as though she was going to come into her house one way or another, however she was also shocked wondering why a professor of all people would be knocking on her door. She wondered if it had anything to do with Hermione’s private accelerated lessons.
Her only daughter was like a sponge with knowledge. She loved learning, she loved reading, and she was very advanced for her age. They didn’t want regular schools holding her back because they couldn’t learn as fast as she could. They assumed that would be a waste of time and talent, and if they let it happen for too long they feared she may not try as hard to learn anymore. That she might lose her spark of enthusiasm for learning. They sent her to a private school, and had a private tutor for her to give her extra accelerated work. Hermione was already doing high school level work, was this professor here to have them consider college coursework?

“Yes, please! Come in. I’m Abagail, Hermione’s mother. Would you like a cup of tea? I must warn you we don’t have sugar in our house.” Abagail stepped back allowing the stern looking woman to enter her household.

“That won’t be necessary, thank you. I would like to speak with you and your husband. It is very important.” She said.

“Leeroy! We have a visitor!” She yelled for her husband, “Please, let’s go to the sitting area” She directed Minerva down the hall and gestured for her to take a seat on a beige chair while she sat down on the matching couch.

Her husband Leeroy Granger came in shortly after, he was tall a little over 6 foot tall, broad chested, he had a full bushy mustache that was speckled with some gray strands and full eyebrows to match, and he had expressive green eyes.

The first thing he saw in the room was their guest, and how she sat straight up, perfectly poised with her ankles crossed, and she had a tight smile with a no nonsense aura about her.

He held his hand out towards her, “Hello, I’m Leeroy.”

Minerva took his hand and gave him a firm shake, “I am Professor Minvera McGonagall.”

After 20 years of marriage he fell in synch with his wife and sat next to her on the couch, facing their guest.

The Grangers both had grey hairs, but had a friendly air about them. There was a visible age difference than most muggle couples she had visited in the past. Leeroy had wrinkles near his eyes and set lines around his nose, much like Hogwart’s potion’s professor, even though his nose was wider instead of hooked. Abagail had light grey strands here and there in her hair, barely visible. She was petite with a curvy frame. Her eyes were a warm chocolate brown that glimmered with knowledge.

“Duke and Duchess Granger.“

“Dr. Granger’s. We’re hobby dentists. But do call us Abagail and Leeroy, please. There will be less confusion”, Abagail said.

“Very well. Abagail and Leeroy… I am here on behalf of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Your daughter, Hermione, is a witch. She has been accepted to Hogwarts, and as you have no experience with the wizarding world as per our Statute of Secrecy, it is my duty as Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts to greet you personally and make you aware of the upcoming situations. Normally we have our students owl, or mail, their confirmation by no later than July 31st. However since Hermione is just a few weeks shy of being 11 by the start of term, which is the 1st of September, she will have to wait until next year. Hogwarts is a boarding school, but she will be allowed back for Christmas and Easter holidays and of course must be here for summer holidays.”
Abagail laughed nervously, “Hermione isn’t a witch; she’s a lady. We’re not magical. M-magic doesn’t exist.”

Leeroy looked between his wife and the stern professor, “… would you be able to give us some proof? I mean, our Hermione is very special to us, but I have noticed that she is special.”

Abagail looked in shock at her husband for even considering this, but she too knew what he was talking about. Minerva smiled at them and turned into a cat before their very eyes, walked in a circle on their chair and transformed back. She then took out her wand and said “Not every witch or wizard can turn into an animal, but they can all use a wand to learn spells and transfiguration, the subject that I teach. For example your daughter will eventually learn how to do things like this,” she pointed her wand at their coffee table and transfigured it into a china cabinet. After a few moments she transfigured it back.

The Grangers stared at the proof that had happened before them, and then at each other. Abagail started to chew on her lip nervously. “What if… what if Hermione doesn’t go to Hogwarts, would she be able to live like… like us? Non magical people?”

Minerva looked at the woman with gentle understanding, “If Hermione does not learn how to control her magic it would be very bad for her. She could contract illnesses that only affect magical folk and be left with no cure. She could explode in a fit of accidental magic should her magic grow too strong with no control. Her magic could lash out at dangerous times without her even meaning to. Your daughter needs education in magic so she knows what to and what not to do. It could be the difference between life and death. She cannot simply give up magic, it is a part of her. It always will be. If something were to happen to her magical core, she may very well die...” at this point she sighed sadly, as though having seen it happen a few times before.

“By attending Hogwarts she would be able to learn how to control her magic and take care of herself, we offer a variety of classes for her to choose from, some are mandatory of course and because you are her family, you are excluded from the Statute of Secrecy, but you must uphold it from other nonmagical folks. If you have any questions you are free to owl us at Hogwarts. I have given Hermione her acceptance letter, and included is a list of all necessary books and equipment. I may very well send an owl next year if the list of necessities has changed at all.”

The Grangers looked at her for a few seconds, Abagail’s expression seemed forlorn at the idea of losing her daughter to a magical world she had no part of. Leeroy’s breathing was even, but he seemed to be the one to accept it easier than his wife.

“How do we do this? How do we… how do we be there for her and continue to parent her? She is our daughter and we love and accept her. She’s a witch. Hermione is a witch and we want to be there for her every step of the way. How do we do that without being magical and having access to your resources ourselves?” he asked her looking into her eyes imploringly.

There was no instruction book on how to raise a child. There were parenting guides, but none of them really helped them with Hermione, they had their parents and family help when they didn’t know what to do. However with this new development in their lives, one that has always been there but never fully acknowledged, they didn’t have family with experience to go to for help with this.

Minerva’s eyes brightened at his question, “Your first trip to Diagon Alley will be with an escort from the school.”

She gave them a tight smile, happy that at least this muggleborn would have the support that she would need.
The magical world was dangerous, but so was the muggle world. Wars, kidnappings, guns, car accidents, allergies, sugar, there were many bad things the world. They had to take the good with the bad, they were at least realistic about it. All they asked from Hermione was that she was honest with them about it so they could be involved with her life. They promised her that they would never take her away from the wizarding world, they just wanted to know what was happening in her world.

They had a Daily Prophet subscription, some other news rags for multiple perspectives (can’t always trust one source of the news), a few academic journals that tickled their fancy. What they didn’t understand, they asked Hermione or researched themselves. They kept up to date with her world just as much as she tried to learn about it herself. They all went over her textbooks the same week they bought them so they were all on the same page. While Abagail and Leeroy Granger couldn’t do magic, they could learn about it (and use some of their products). Although they did learn that they indeed could have a magic garden, but it was decided against since then they would have to be wary of magical creatures coming after magical ingredients they were attracted to. They also learned they could prep potions ingredients, and Hermione was allowed to make potions at home, but they couldn’t obtain all the magical ingredients without connections. They tried to be as involved as possible for her though, and they were closer for it.

Regardless, while at school she did occasionally have to blow off some verbal steam and thankfullyCrookshanks was more than willing to listen as long as he got attention and treats. She would treat him extra special with bacon while she was on her period to show him just how much she appreciated him listening to her while she complained about things she simply could not complain about to Harry or Ron. Crookshanks did hate most of the students though, and all the cats in the school regarded him as a tom not to be trifled with. The one reaction no one had seen yet though was how Crookshanks and Ms. Norris got along, but students were willing to bet galleons that the ginger haired menace would win. All they knew about him was that he was mean and wicked smart, they figured he took more after a kneazle than a cat and joked that he should have a XXX classification of his own. He was the only half-kneazle in the castle, and ruled over the others like a king.

What Hermione knew and didn’t diverge was his cat heritage, she had asked Crookshanks if he would be comfortable with it, and he made it silently known, “No”. She respected her cat’s wish and just told people he was half kneazle. His cat half was also a mix, Mane coon and Himalayan. Hence why he was so big (and fluffy) looking like a mini lion, while he had a squished face. Hermione simply adored him and found his appearance quite handsome for his breed. She knew others wouldn’t understand so after the first year of having him, she stopped announcing her opinion on her cat unless asked.

That and it had technically been 2 years for her so the novelty wore off even if her pride and love only grew for him. She did spend a large amount of time on her own though since her friends got mad over her concern on what could have been a cursed or hexed package. All that needed to be done was to have it checked, something that could have been done in less than an hour if they had given it the time. Yet they didn’t even bother and chose instead to be angry with her like fussy spoiled children.

Ronald she could understand; he was a mummy’s boy and was very much spoiled in love. He was also easily prone to bouts of jealousy and pettiness. While he complained about getting everything second hand, he also expected things to be handed to him one way or another, preowned or not.

Harry, she was upset with considering his knowledge that what they had understood at the time. A
well-known murderer intent on killing Harry was on the loose, had broken out from Azkaban just to get to him. Well excuse her for being cautious and following her magic’s lead. All of his mail should have been scanned after that year if anyone asked her. While no witch or wizard could apparate in or out of Hogwarts, there were still portkeys. Simply holding the letter and mumbling the word could have had him off to who knows where!

A lot happened that year and for others it may have seemed to go by in a blur, but she had twice the amount that they did. So she got to learn more about her cat, get further acquainted and deepen their bond, much like the other children her age did from year one. Crookshanks understood what was happening and occasionally pawed at the time-turner to let his witch know that he wanted to go on that turn with her. Hermione didn’t allow him every time, so they settled for every other time. She trusted her new companion to be smart enough to know the rules, unlike her ginger haired friend if he ever knew.

What a lot of people didn’t understand was that she most of what she did was because she owed them both a life-debt. She felt her magic curl around her and settle in the back of her head. While she may have gained a friendship with them, it came at a hefty cost in her opinion. She heard about them, but never thought she would be in one.

Thankfully she repaid her debt to Ron not much later while he was ensnared in Devil’s Snare. She had never been more grateful for someone’s stupidity than in that moment. She however also remembered her own stupid mistake during the challenge and after the shock wore off, she was able to think clearly. It was one down and one to go, however it was almost near impossible if she couldn’t be the one to save him in a life/death situation. He somehow ended up in those either with Ron or alone it seemed. She never got close enough to the situation to save him besides her opportunity in first year, where she had gone back to get help for her new Ginger friend. It was nearly impossible considering there was only one potion, and it was the smallest dose possible.

Was she a wet-blanket? On occasion yes, she admitted she was (at least to herself) and on those occasions she wondered if she should have let the hat place her in Ravenclaw. At least they understood the importance of studying and having their work done.

This year however, no matter what she did to help with his ridiculous trials in this stupid tournament her magic didn’t consider her life-debt repaid. It was becoming quite frustrating. However it seemed to be appeased that she was at least helping him and when he was happy the debt felt light.

She was more than thankful however that her magic did not see Harry killing the basilisk as Harry saving her life; nor the help of Professor Snape with his antidotes. She did deep research and was more than relieved that she could never gain a life debt from one of her Professors while she was under their tutelage and that the Healers all took an oath to prevent life debts, or else most of the wizarding community would owe them.

If that were the case she was sure that Voldemort would have become a healer to ensure that he could never be killed by someone whose life he saved. It would be perfect. Greatly injure a bunch of people, save all of their lives, ensure that they can’t kill you or they die, and if someone else were to try to kill him, someone he already saved would be obligated to save him even against their will, or they would die.

Sometimes the world was lucky that she wasn’t a dark witch, she thought. They were also lucky that she had a personal life-debt to repay one Mr. Harry James Potter. She would do anything she could to fulfil her debt, and she doubted anyone would be the wiser. It was something she planned to use to her full advantage.
Hermione was going out for a walk, a breather really, to get away from Ronald.

“Hermione, Neville’s right – you are a girl….”

“No, you’re not! You just said that to get rid of Neville!”

“Okay, okay, we know you’re a girl. That do? Will you come now?”

She had just came through the portrait hole, and then that… that… THAT happened!

‘ “You’re a girl, Hermione.” Well spotted, Ron. Took you 3 bloody years. Does he want an award or should I just give him a black eye?’

She fumed silently, making her way up the castle to be alone. As she was pacing she noticed Dobby walking a still sobbing Winky into a door that hadn’t really been there before. Her anger dissipating to the back of her mind, she looked around and noticed she was on the 7th floor, and before she thought about it she followed them.

Curiously she got into the room before Dobby could close the door behind them.

“Dobby, what’s going on?” she asked quietly, knowing he could hear her over Winky.

Dobby’s eyes widened as he looked over at the Granger girl who was friends with the Great Harry Potter. The same girl who had done him a great and wonderful kindness of showing The Great Harry Potter where he was and bringing him back into his life once more. She wasn’t as great as THE Great Harry Potter, but she was grand and kind! However he also was worried since he didn’t want her to see Winky drunk as she was. The other elves wanted almost nothing to do with her, and not just for her supposed shame, but for her constant crying and drinking. She was stubborn enough to not work, even though she had more pride than to accept pay, but an elf that didn’t work… it was detrimental to her health, almost as much as the drinking that was quickly becoming a serious problem.

“Dobby is- Dobby has-“

“Take a breath Dobby, it’s okay. I won’t tell if you don’t want me to. I’ll keep your secrets. I promise.” Hermione said kindly.

Dobby’s eyes watered gratefully at her kindness, solidifying her as the Kind Hermione Granger.

“Dobby is taking care of Winky… Winky is… Winky is drinking lots of butterbeer and is hurting herself. Dobby is doing what Dobby can for Winky. But… Winky is not cleaning. Winky is being a bad elf.”

“What do you mean, Dobby?” She asked curiously. There was no information on house elves in the library which alerted her to their enslavement. She was furious on their behalf! However there wasn’t much to know about them other than their enslavement and their loyalty to their owners.
Dobby had softly put Winky into a small bed and pulled the covers over her sobbing frame before turning around to talk with the Kind Hermione Granger. The small house elf knew that the young witch was smart, even more so since her half-kneazle cared for her and ran amuck over those who weren’t half as smart as him. The cat simply did not tolerate stupidity and made sure everyone was aware of his displeasure. He was also loyal and made problems for the house elves who were displeased with her. He scared them into continuing their service of taking care of her needs as well as the other students.

“When a house else is not cleaning for many days their health turns bad. A house elf will be very very sick. If a house elf is not doing good cleaning work after being in service a house elf starts to lose their moons. After 12 moons a house elf starts to lose their magic. All house elves is being born strong. Cleaning helps keeping them strong and healthy. A master can be b-bad but if a house elf is cleaning their magic circulates and takes care of them. A cleaning house elf is a strong healthy elf. But Winky is not… she has not been cleaning. She is a bad elf in a bad place in her mind right now. Dobby is doing what Dobby can, but Winky… Winky cannot handle being free. Dobby is afraid she is losing more moons faster with drinking…”

Hermione’s eyes saddened, she thought she knew that the house elves would be happier free from their enslavement. She figured it was just shock that was coursing through Winky, but not being in service was literally killing her. It went against the whole movement, to better their lives, not end them. She filed away that Dobby didn’t say months or years, but moons. She couldn’t be sure if her literally mean moon cycles or months or certain moons just yet.

“I…” her voice faltered. She took a calming breath and her voice gained confidence, “I will take Winky into service with no pay and no clothes. We can discuss if she gets a day off a month, like you, Dobby. I will be her new Mistress… if she wants.”

Dobby smiled so wide it looked as though it hurt. He looked over to Winky and shook her.

“Winky has found new service and a new mistress. The Kind Hermione Granger is wanting you Winky. With no clothes and no pay.”

Winky’s eyes were red from crying so much over being such a bad house elf that she almost didn’t understand what her dishonorable friend Dobby was saying.

“My master Crouch is wanting Winky back?” She asked softly, hopefully.

“No. The Kind Hermione Granger is wanting Winky.” Dobby said gently, yes surprisingly firmly.

Winky’s eyes started to water again. “Is you wanting to be in proper service or not Winky?” Dobby asked disturbingly low for such a normally kind and happy elf.

Winky’s eyes watedered and started to tear again. She wanted to be in proper service again, she wanted to be a good proper house elf! She however also wanted to be back home with her proper masters of the great Crouch family. The new house of Granger was too new to be honorable, and would die out just as fast after she married, even if she would still belong to the witch. However she knew she could not be picky and wait for her master to call her back into service since he made perfectly clear that he never would. She kept blaming herself for being scared of heights, if she had opened her eyes, she might never have been given clothes.

She wasn’t a dumb house elf, but she was above all else, loyal. She missed Crouch Jr even if he had started doing bad things, she had seen him as a babe with babe breath, when he was pure and
innocent. There was nothing more pure than a baby. But there were no more babies in the house of Crouch and she had in the end appeared to have failed her task in keeping Crouch Jr hidden and safe. He had overcome the bad magic and did more bad instead. She could only take care of them, but they both were doing... bad. At least in proper service she would not be bad.

“Winky is...” She looked at Dobby and to the witch who was willing to take her into service. It was the same witch who bad mouthed her old master. She too had brown eyes. “Winky is happy to be of service Miss. Is Winky to be bound now?”

Hermione smiled kindly at the brown eyed elf who had stopped sobbing and obviously gave some thought to what she was being offered. However once again as there were no books on house elves she wasn’t sure how to proceed. So she looked over to this new firm Dobby.

“I think that would be for the best.” Her stomach churned a little at having agreed to have a slave, even if it was to save her life. “How do we have you bound? Is there a ceremony or something that I need to do?” She looked at Dobby, acknowledging that although Winky was agreeing and had given it proper thought, was still not properly of firm mind at the moment. However Hermione also acknowledged that the Crouch family had a hand in the first War and there may be resentment or even prejudice left over concerning muggleborns and wanted that to not be a factor in her decision making.

She sadly thought back to a moment when she had seen her grandfather piss drunk, and how mean and nasty he was with his words. He had been sober for more than 30 years, but took up the bottle again after his wife had died. Grandpa Mettle had been a nasty drunk, he was abusive to the extreme and only sobered up because his grandmother threatened to divorce him or at least run away if he would deny her even that. She wouldn’t take it anymore now that she was finally pregnant. She didn’t want her mother growing up with a drunk abusive father, even if she had to raise her alone. So her Grandpa Mettle quit the bottle so he would be able to keep the love of his life and their child.

If it hadn’t been for her father to stop him though, Grandpa Mettle would have struck her with his fist for having the easily recognizable hair of a French person. Grandpa Mettle was very subtle about his prejudices, but he hated the French and her father was half English half French. He hated the French in general.

Hermione inherited a lot from her great grandmother apparently on her father’s side appearance wise. Her hair was extremely hard to miss, what was supposed to be curly was bushy, her skin looked constantly tan, even during the English and Scottish winters, and got darker when she went to France for summers. Her Grandpa Mettle was extremely drunk and started yelling about how she was a blemish to his family tree for being born and looking the way she did. He also started to yell at her mother about having bad taste and if it weren’t for Grandma Mettle, he never would have allowed her parents to marry.

Her mother started to prattle on about how he “didn’t mean it”, but her father had cut her off and made it quite clear, “A drunk mind speaks a sober heart.” After that they made sure that Grandpa Mettle was put in bed with a glass of water on his nightstand. Hermione continued to sit in the living room upset that while her grandfather loved her, also hated a small part of her. She thought back to all her visits and interactions with him and noticed that he always avoided looking at her hair when possible, always suggested that they cut it or kept it back or did something with it.

Her grandmother would always soothe her saying that they just hadn’t found the right way to take care of it because at the end of the day there was nothing wrong with it. She never noticed until now that the look her grandmother always shot her grandfather was a warning and not just a look of annoyance like she always thought.
He always did chuckle at her teeth claiming that she got them from him, a true English man. It was such a bad stereotype that no one would cease to admonish him about it. While they were not crooked or knashed or any of the other horrid stereotypical appearances, they were large. Which is why she was pleased that she let Madam Pomfrey fix them after that skirmish with Malfoy and his lot. That and to avoid braces, those were indeed a muggle nightmare in and of themselves.

So despite her feeling bad for taking advantage of Winky’s slight impairment, she figured it was for the best. She was addled, but her heart was speaking more than coherent mind right now.

“Winky is to mean to be bound to you. Her magic must seek yours and your magic must not reject her. Winky is to mean to be a good house elf and to give you and the House of Granger great service. You are a new starting house. House of Granger. Her willing to serve you must be absolute. It is easier to inherit a house elf because they is in service to the house and already bound by magic. But House of Granger might die when The Kind Hermione Granger takes on new last name. So Winky is to be bound to you as House of Granger and The Kind Hermione Granger so bond is true. But The Kind Hermione Granger must also be firm with Winky until she is better.”

Hermione’s brain was wheeling fast and excited at the new information about house elves. She was sure that most purebloods took them for granted without even thinking about it. However she also understood the severity and depth of the bond that was about to take place. It took her mind back to the ancient Egyptians, how even servants (slaves her mind whispered) would be killed and mummified when their master died. It was a deep commitment. She wasn’t sure how wizards and witches could abuse them the way they did! If she couldn’t free them lest they die there should at least be laws on how they’re to be treated! But that was for another time.

She nodded at Dobby to let him know she understood. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, calming her mind.

“I’m ready Winky. You may now bound yourself to the House of Granger.” The young witch said firmly. She looked quickly over to Dobby to be sure that she started correctly. Of which Dobby nodded assuredly.

Winky slowly got out of the little bed and stood, she wasn’t hunched and she wasn’t standing proud. She did hold her hands in front of her heart nervously, even inebriated aware of the situation and what it entailed.

“It is with deepest affections and honor to be bound to the House of Granger and Winky personally to The Kind Hermione Granger. Winky is wanting very badly to be in proper service and The Kind Hermione Granger has given her this gift. It is not to be wasted and Winky shall not. Winky now bounds herself willingly and fully to the House of Granger. To serve to the best of Winky’s ability, to care as best as Winky can, to listen completely and keep all secrets true. Winky gives Miss Hermione Granger house elf’s oath to keep her secrets and Winky’s silence. To honor Miss’s family. To care for Miss and her family. To give Miss all service I can offer from Winky and any children she may have. Winky will be the best she can be for the House of Granger and the hopeful eternal line of The Kind Hermione Granger.”

Winky then closed her doe brown eyes and let her magic feel out and connect with the young witch’s. Hermione felt the little house elf’s magic, curiously. Her magic’s first instinct was to be defensive and reject the house elf magic, but Hermione quickly reigned it in and instead allowed it to touch her magic. She wasn’t mad at the little house elf, and she would not allow her magic to attack her or goodness reject her because she was still angry with Ronald.
It wasn’t a leech relationship, more of an acknowledgement, a sort of peace you get from a good familial relationship. She let her magic slowly accept Winky’s magic and allowed her magic to hug the small elf.

Winky opened her eyes and started to cry at the kindness the young witch that was her new Mistress. Her magic was nicer than her old Master’s magic. She felt as though she were being disloyal to her old Master, but was firmly reminded that she had a new Mistress who wanted her. Her heart ache started to lessen, her shame started to abate. She was no longer a shameful free elf. She belonged to the House of Granger. She belonged to The Kind Hermione Granger.

Her magic receded back into her and Hermione made sure her magic never went on the defensive, offensive, or try to cling on and leech. Thankfully her magic didn’t want to do any of those things, and was proud she was keenly aware of her magic to be able to tell. She came to Hogwarts to learn to control her magic, to make sure there were no accidents (even though they still did occasionally happen with adults), and she was proud of her awareness and control.

“Winky is now belonging to the House of Granger and the wonderful Kind Hermione Granger.” Her voice finally sounded much calmer than it had been earlier, even if there were left over sobbing breaths now that were to be expected. The difference was telling and made Hermione rethink her points on the House Elf Liberation Front and back to the Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare.

Hermione smiled at the small elf, at peace knowing that she helped even at the sacrifice of her belief of elves for an elf. She was aware she had much to learn, and there was no better way than from the source itself. It was back to the drawing board for this project, but in the end she would yet win and get what she wanted.

“Dobby I hope you don’t mind, but I’m sure I’m going to need your help and direction concerning Winky since I’m new to all of this. Would you be willing?” Hermione asked the green eyed elf who adored her best friend more than anything in the world.

“Yes, Miss! Dobby would be honored!” He squeaked, standing tall and proud.

“Is there anything else I need to do right now or is she fine in your care, Dobby?”

Dobby felt as though his chest would explode from happiness he hadn’t felt since Harry Potter had been kind to him.

“Winky will be needing small ground rules for now.” He said gently.

“Will she remember them after she’s slept? Or any of this…?” Hermione asked concernedly.

“House elf magic will know and remind her,” he said factually.

Hermione nodded in response.

Alright then. Winky, you are to be presentable at all times. I will not be giving you clothes but if you need cloth to make such items to be presentable by my standards you are to let me know immediately. You are to take care of yourself. Unless you agree to have one day a month off, you are now allowed to drink anything alcoholic. Like butterbeer,” she gave Winky a firm look, “You may not appear and announce yourself in the presence of others unless I call for you and they happen to be there. This is a safety precaution, not because I’m ashamed of you. You may make me special treats in the kitchens with the other elves. You may also help clean the castle alongside the Hogwarts’ elves as well as… having special jurisdiction over duties concerning me and my
belongings. If a wizard or witch asks who you belong to you are to tell them it is of no concern to
them.” Her voice was firm and no nonsense but wasn’t cruel, she also tried to include things she
thought would make the small elf happy.

Dobby nodded approvingly at Winky’s rules.

“Anything else will be discussed at a later point, or as it comes along. I know you can be invisible
when need be, so for the time being if you are in my presence or need something from me, I will
need you to be invisible. When I’m well and truly alone, it’s fine. Or with Dobby or another trusted
house elf.” Hermione nodded decisively now that she figured she was done putting down the
proverbial foot with… her elf.

Part of her mind wanted to feel greasy for owning an elf and another part of her was oddly calm and
accepting. It was acknowledging the bond and knowing that she saved Winky’s life.

“Come find me after you’re better please. There’s another important thing we must discuss. However
you must be discreet about it like I said earlier. You are free to bring Dobby with you. I just don’t
want you coming to see me if you’re in pain with a hangover or something, okay?” She said last
minute.

Dobby smiled at the young witch for catching on so quickly. The half-kneazle made a good choice
for a witch. It was no wonder he was free to terrorize his fellow elves for speaking ill of the well-
meaning witch.
Chapter 5

Thankfully the next day was a Saturday and there were no classes. It had taken most of the day to finish her Holiday homework. Each year she was more and more thankful for her parents having her memorize books first week home. She was able to do her homework, study from supplement books, and still have time for private research.

However now she didn’t have to worry about her school work and could focus on something normal for her age, a ball. She still wanted to wrap up some loose ends with Winky, and also do personal research for her pet project concerning elvish welfare. However she had a few days to figure out how she wanted to look, and decided it would be mind-shattering for all of Hogwarts. Hardly a single person who attended Hogwarts had anything nice to say about her appearance other than Neville. He was a sweet boy, if Viktor hadn’t asked her, she would have agreed to go with him.

Yet she was also pleased that he did ask her. While she didn’t care for his fame or anything of the sort, she could appreciate that he was handsome and it felt nice to have someone attractive find her attractive. She didn’t put any effort into her appearance because she was here to learn, not find a life partner. Why waste an hour on makeup when that could be a whole book read? That wasn’t to say that she didn’t have a nightly beauty regime, it just fell in line with her nightly ablutions and took no time at all. She’d been doing it as soon as her body started to hit puberty, her mother got her in the habits.

There were some things magical that she preferred over muggle. For example, shaving. While she knew the charms she noticed that the other girls didn’t have a firm grasp on them as she did. Her legs and arms were always smooth and she played with shape designs on her pubic hair. Started out simple, but lately they were getting more complex and detailed. She had no one to show off for, they were for pure self-satisfaction. Currently it was the lion for Gryffindor’s crest.

She considered writing home about Winky, but didn’t want to send them anything just yet. She didn’t want to surprise them, but she also something more substantial to tell them. Not something blunt as;

“Dear Mum and Dad,

A few things have happened concerning my new social justice project with the house elves. You remember, S.P.E.W. Well apparently if they aren’t in service and aren’t working, they lose some “moons” off their lifespan. THEY CAN DIE! FROM NOT SERVING! So that poor house elf, Winky, that I told you about. That one that mean awful Crouch Sr owned? Well she’s mine now because I didn’t want her to die. Just so you know, that’s what’s new with me. That’s all.

Much Love,

Hermione”

Hermione shivered at the thought, she’d rather dry heave.

Hermione was also glad to be going with a wizard who was of age in their world. While her parents loved her dearly, they had planned on keeping her home as long as they were able, and at first she was indignant that they felt the need to coddle her as such. But they reminded her of her status and how it was expected of her until she got married. It was something she didn’t put much thought into since they continuously reminded her to not worry about it and focus on her studies.
Her mother may have been 19 when her and her father met, but she was assured that she didn’t have to follow in her mother’s footsteps. They also loved to joke about how she didn’t have to find someone 13 years older than her. But they did assure her that there was no pressure on her finding someone to settle down with right away.

“It was just luck that your father was so smooth with his words that I fell for them.” her mother always shot her father a secret smile whenever she said it.

“Smooth enough that she laughed in my face and tripped over her own two feet. I simply had to know her name.” her father had a wicked dry sense of humor, and both of his girls loved it.

Hermione also had his sense of humor but had to tone it down for the silly Gryffindors she hung around. They barely understood Professor Snape’s acerbic humor, which she had to bite on her tongue to keep from laughing. She was sure he saw her eyes sparkle at his humor though.

Her parents’ relationship had started out a hot/cold friendship, making quips at each other. They dated other people through their friendship, but everyone else saw that they were merely dancing around each other because of their age difference. That dance didn’t last long and soon they were sneaking off to snog like teenagers.

It was a precarious situation, what with her father’s background that his family almost rejected their relationship because of her mother’s background. It would have been easier if he wasn’t Duke of Clarence, but her mother’s sassy mouth won him over. Not that Hermione would ever let anyone know. She was glad they were extremely private concerning that and her mother grounded his sometimes fat head.

The brilliant witch preferred to keep her status a secret and never gave anything away, preferring to fall back on her parents’ dentistry hobby when people asked. They had both gone and gotten their doctrines in dentistry for a laugh, but it also gave them something to do during the day. It was a struggle near the end, but her mother was more than pleased with herself. She was pregnant her graduate year with Hermione and had to deal with all the stress while dealing with all the pains that came with pregnancy. However they fought to keep her having had three miscarriages before her. So to them, she was worth all the effort.

It was an inside joke that she was so smart because she was learning from the womb, what with her mother studying like crazy. It still made her smile fondly.

However her foray with the time-turner, while being instructed to not abuse it, was indeed mildly abused. Aside from saving an innocent convict and a hippogriff who was to be put down, there were expected turns to get to class, a few more to do her homework (that she instead spent on private study since her homework was done relatively fast per normal), a few turns to include extra meals to keep her body’s metabolism on track, and a few more for extra sleep. She kept a time journal to make sure she knew how old she was, it was extremely important in magic, especially in subjects such as arithmancy.

On the last day before she had to give up the time turner, she was exactly 7 hours away from fitting into a proper 2 year advancement, all the way down to the second. So she wouldn’t have to remember another day for her birthday, it would be the same. So she spent the whole 7 hours on what she called “Hermione Time”
Chapter 6

For “Hermione Time” the hazel eyed witch (or at least they were calling it hazel now) found an empty classroom and practiced outdated, obscure, non-curriculum magic. Nothing dark, some were just plain silly, if anyone asked her she would have said that she was practicing her magic in a safe environment, if you asked anyone else they would have said she was playing around with her magic (if any of them knew).

She took time and transfigured many things they didn’t work on in class, for live transfigurations she thankfully spotted a mouse running against the wall and shot a light stunner at it. She thought for a moment about feeling bad, but then remembered how Crookshanks would sometimes bring her… presents, alerting her that there were indeed mice in the castle (or at least on grounds).

She practiced many many charms, excelling at them. She was even able to practicing conjuration, an obscure magic that most adult witches and wizards seemed to have and practiced frequently. From small things such as flowers, to large things such as furniture.

However it simply wasn’t taught in class. It was too advance, too “old school”. They didn’t last long, they weren’t meant to. The only way to keep something from conjuration was to put a stasis spell on it immediately after. It wouldn’t have the same properties as its real counterparts, but they were fine for momentary things. For example, she would be able to conjure a wooden oak like chair, but it wouldn’t have the same magical properties as oak.

All things on earth had special properties, from large things like the elements, life, minerals even. However they could not be conjugated with the same properties. Which is why a conjured silver knife was not as potent as a real silver knife. It didn’t help that a conjured item was only as strong as the magic put into it.

Say if a 7th year, who had honed their magic properly conjured a flower with a heap of magic put into it, versus a 1st year who conjured the same flower with as much magic as they could, the 7th year’s flower would last longer by days, even months, depending on how much magic they put into.

Their magic cores start as soon as they’re born, some bigger than others, but as they get older their magic grows with them. Their cores stop growing once they reach the age of 17, which is why wizards and witches are considered adults at that age. Their bodies may continue to grow, even though they age differently than most muggles, but once their core has hit maturity, they are considered legal adults.

With her conjured objects she was able to practice other forms of magic. She practiced hexes, spells, shields, and best of all: wards.

Warding was extremely hard magic, very trying, very exact. Hermione loved every moment of it. Her magic seemed to hum inside of her in a very pleasant way.

The charms she played with were cheerful. Some of her conjurations were considered charms, and she was able to blend the two together. She was able to cast a patronus charm, and her little otter swam around her filling her with more happiness.

Without realizing it, Hermione was creating spells. She took her “Hermione Time” to openly laugh and enjoy herself, just being a witch. Year round she studied diligently, spells were not supposed to be cast in the halls or in the common rooms. Students got away with small spells in the Great Hall, but nothing major. All magic had to be practiced under the watchful eye of masters in case of
However she knew for a fact that the marauders were rule breakers to the extreme. They created their own spells, their own inventions. She also knew that the Weasley twins were just as good at creating their own bits of brilliant magic! They were also known for causing explosions for failed experiments and tests, but they thrilled her knowing that such young magicians existed and she got to be alongside them. Even if it was through just knowing and she frowned upon their tom-foolery when they could be studying. They were just so… BRILLIANT that she couldn’t understand why they didn’t take their grades more seriously.

What the young witch didn’t realize was that she was just as brilliant (she thought Lupin was just teasing her), creating different spells on a whim in an empty classroom, laughing freely. She didn’t want to think about dark wizards trying to kill Harry, homework, tutoring, Hagrid and his penchant for obtaining marvelous and dangerous creature, or social injustices.

For the first time since she realized she was a witch, Hermione played with her magic. She was a young witch doing adult things. She was smart enough to realize this, even more so to know that first year the philosopher’s stone was a test. She didn’t want to believe it at first, but she saw it for what it was. Her parents were made aware, and made aware of who her friends were. They were a bit crestfallen knowing that they were also… the only friends she made at her new school. So they kept their disapproval close to their chest and away from their daughter.

Hermione even let her magic do some of what it wanted to do, what she subconsciously wanted to do. The desks were floating up and around her in a circle, she had a teacher’s chair under her as they danced around her reminding her of the scene where Merlin opened his bag and his items came about on their own and set themselves up from the movie, “The Sword and the Stone”.

Her laughter tinkled with every bit of magic she did. The wards she played with, did many things. Everything she did was silly, one of the wards she made, had it so everything in its field non-living turned orange. Another she made had her and everything around her in the room, floating a foot off the ground. She was afraid of heights, not flying, or rather floating in this case.

What she didn’t notice though was that a certain Potion Master found out that she had a time turner and was made aware that it was to be given up the next day. He was done with classes for the year and stalked the halls, easily peering into each of her classes without being obvious to see for himself that she was indeed attending. He knew she was an insufferable know-it-all, and sneered at the fact that she was allowed to take as many courses as she had. Yet he wasn’t prepared to hear laughter from an empty classroom during class time. He was about to sneak in and scare the daylights out of the student and deduct house points while giving them a detention before the leaving feast.

What he didn’t know was that it was Miss Granger, the same student who was indeed in all of her classes. He disillusioned himself to further surprise the unwitting dunderhead. Instead he found was the insufferable bushy haired know-it-all. It was her that was laughing (something he noticed she didn’t really do) and wanted to see exactly what it was that made the muggleborn so damn happy that wasn’t a book. Needless to say he was quite shocked and watched silently as she practiced spell after spell. Charm after charm. He watched her create some of the charms. He watched a 3rd year put up and dismantle wards. They didn’t even teach wards at Hogwarts, they would have to apprentice under a master to learn such magic or learn from a family member.

They had a few books in the library that spoke of wards and some that spoke of what they do and
what they are, but none on how they’re made or how to make them.

He frowned and swished his wand at her to find out how old she was now, a handy spell they used at bars to weed out the under-aged, with the knowledge of when her birthday was. 16 years old, it didn’t take him long to realize what she was doing, and knew that it was indeed the smart thing instead of misuse of her time turner.

‘I have grievously misjudged Miss Granger. She will have to be… watched. I wonder if Albus knows. Knowing him probably not with her being a muggleborn…’

Severus Snape was a cautious man. A man who was also fully aware that the Dark Lord would be coming back, as he had already tried to kill Harry his first year, and was pleased with himself for staying in shape even with the 10 year peace. He was a spy and to be a spy he must know, one tiny detail could be the end all. Just like in a potion, one pinch of sage could calm a volatile potion at the precise second, or it could make another caldron explode.

Watching the young witch Severus’s heart ached for a moment remembering his friend laugh at magic. She was nothing like his lovey, Lily. But at the same time… he was afraid to say that she was better. Lily was praised for being intuitive and brilliant, for being wicked smart. However she was also friends with him and he let her take the credit for some of his creations. He let her be the one to try his spells in public. She was gifted in charms, of that there was no question. However she never made her own spells. She could cleverly transition them, but she was not an innovator.

He never watched Miss Granger or looked at her other than the brains of the annoying Golden Trio. She was never more than a walking talking book, an insufferable know-it-all incapable of original thought or creativity. But watching her now, he could eat his words. He would watch her more next year as Miss Granger rather than one of Potter’s sidekicks. He felt both privileged and sad watching the young witch as she experimented with her magic without fear of judgement.

She was a muggleborn who wanted to fit in, one who would never fit in because she was too brilliant for them. Making a successful NEWT level potion last year, in a bathroom no less, wasn’t a fluke it would seem. She hadn’t lied when she said she made it instead of being tricked into drinking an unknown substance.

She would have to be watched just as closely as Potter it seemed. If only to see how valuable to Potter she would be. Thus far though, it was immensely, rather Dumbledore chose to admit that or not. Like most purebloods he didn’t put much stock into the brilliance of muggleborns, but rather fancied the innovations that they brought over from the muggle world. The Potter boy seemed to keep a few things close to his vest as well it seemed, taking credit for other’s work… just like his mother.
Chapter 7

Yes, bookworm Hermione was going to the ball with a fellow of age wizard, and it was exciting. She took small amusement in how similar he looked to her potion’s master minus the finesse. Thin, sallow skin, dark hair, hooked nose, he seemed surly and brooding, and like her professor, he was blunt with his words just less acidic with them. There were differences such as his thick eyebrows, while Professor Snape’s were more defined, and he was duck-footed and hulking, their voices were more definite. However she had to acknowledge that Professor Snape had a 1 in a million voice, but Viktor’s accent was also attractive.

Of course she would tell this to no one else but Crookshanks. He never judged or doubted her, he even put up with her rants and baby talk (and was more often pleased with it than tolerated it). Hermione laughed under her breath.

“Because Crookshanks is the most handsome regal creature in this castle.” She’d croon at him.

Just as she was leaving to go back to the tower, she felt a subtle tug on her skirt. She knew she instructed Winky to meet with her in private after she felt better, and she was pleased with her discretion. She kept walking and seeing as there were 3 Ravenclaws nearby she spoke softly under her breath without moving her lips as much.

“Good job, Winky. We’re going to that room you were in yesterday.”

With that she kept walking until she reached the correct corridor. She noticed the door wasn’t there as it was last night, but she knew for a fact that it was there. She looked at it perplexed before Winky spoke to her.

“It is known by us as the Come and Go room, Miss. It is a room that is always equipped with the seeker’s needs. It is the Room of Requirement.” Winky spoke softly.

With Dobby’s help Winky had slept off her drink, and woke with a glass of water being shoved into her hand. She drank it, knowing it would help with the hangover she was sure to have, but it also helped knowing Dobby was there for her. Dobby was her mate, but they said friend in front of the humans so their relationship wouldn’t be abused. It was for that reason that Dobby had come to visit Winky when he couldn’t find a home to be of service. She knew how his old masters were, and how they were dark and mean, but being an elf she encouraged Dobby to find a new house to work for. It had taken him 2 years before he decided to face Winky, only to find out that she had just been dismissed from her own service.

His little elf with the nose like a tomato, was proud of being the 3rd generation to serve the Crouch’s. She hadn’t been able to live up to their legacy and let Dobby talk her into finding service at Hogwarts of all places. She had asked where they would find a place that would take not one, but two elves into service. Dobby had come through, thinking about her.

Here she was crying in her shame at not being a proper house elf in proper service, and here was Dobby taking care of her when the other elves would rather not look at her. There were children about and she acted disgracefully, and Dobby pretended that there was nothing wrong for her, so that they would hopefully look over her.
Her new Mistress didn’t. Instead she bad mouthed her old masters, and now she could barely find it in her to be mad at her new Mistress. She had asked and cared, and even though she was ignorant and insulted her as a proper house else, she took her into service to be a proper house elf. She had promised to keep Dobby’s secrets. Her new Mistress was a young witch and her magic was large and kind, but she knew underneath it, her new Mistress was strong. The Kind Hermione Granger, Dobby was calling her. Kind enough to fight for elvish welfare and rights, kind enough to care about house elves, kind enough to take Winky in even against her ideas on how house elves should be set free.

“Thank you, Dobby… you is the best mate Winky could ever hope for,” she said mutely.

She remembered most of last night and was fully aware of her new Mistress, new rules, and current orders. She was embarrassed for the way she behaved, but pleased to be in a proper service even if it was for a new house.

Dobby leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. House elves were rarely afforded niceties and pleasantries. As long as they did their jobs to serve their masters well, they were for the most part left alone unless their master constantly needed an elf on hand at all times. Crouch was one of those masters. Winky was always there, always on hand, and always given something to do, and had been taking care of Crouch Jr since he was sentenced. That was over a decade of constant service. To suddenly have to stop, was cruel to a house elf.

Dobby was usually given orders and left to mind them and himself. He was in a household with other elves, so they shared the work. However Dobby was alive and in service long enough to hold and care for Draco as a babe. He kept an eye and ear out for him and watched him interact with the Potion Master, who spoke quietly to the babe about Harry Potter. How there was a Harry Potter who was supposed to defeat the Dark Lord so he could grow up safe. Dobby listened and kept his silence like a good house elf.

However when bad things were to happen, Dobby took his now free time, to interfere with Harry Potter and try to protect him. He admittedly went too far, but so did Harry Potter in getting around his obstacles.

Dobby now took care of his mate Winky, and would be walking the Kind Hermione Granger through owning a house elf and proper care of them. She was willing to learn, and would catch on quickly. He also knew that she would rarely if ever require Winky to punish herself. Winky was a good house elf, and the Miss Hermione Granger was a nice witch. She was also a smart witch and knew that much like her half-kneazle, wouldn’t tolerate stupidity for long. It would work out well. He was sure.

“The Room of Requirement…” Hermione murmured under her breath, staring at the wall.

“You must walk by it 3 times thinking of what it is you need most, miss.” Winky said softly.

She had been sleeping in this room since she came here, she knew how it worked. The other elves refused to share their sleeping quarters with the likes of her. She was rude and a… bad elf.

Hermione noticed this new subservient Winky and walked by the room 3 times thinking of a place to speak. Some place cozy and inviting for her and 2 elves, some place private.

The door appeared and she walked through smiling at the soft cream and coffee colors that were hard to come by in Hogwarts. They were neutral, muggle even. The furniture seemed as though it belonged in the Gryffindor common room, but was a less gaudy color. Less used as well.
There was a large comfy looking chair and a small loveseat, both cream color with a two level coffee table, coffee colored, with a cream colored rug under it that had coffee colored designs. The walls were and eggshell off white, there was a small fire going on a few feet away from the setting. There was enough space between the furniture and the walls to avoid a cramped, claustrophobic feel.

She walked in taking the seat that was obviously meant for her, as the loveseat was cozy the proper height for a house elf to sit comfortably. She didn’t even have to look to know that Winky followed and sat down, quickly followed by Dobby who closed the door behind him, letting the room know that they did not want to be found.

What the young witch didn’t expect was for Dobby to come prepared with 3 cups of tea, each prepared differently. He set them out expertly of course, sitting down next to a demure clean looking Winky, who took hers off the table with a very small whisper of “Thank you”.

Hermione decided to let her cup sit and cool, as she could see the steam dancing up from the hot drink like a mythical siren. She did stare at the steam however, letting it calm her as she settled her thoughts and organized them the way she liked them, still feeling a bit of nerves fluttering in her stomach. She’d only had to do this one other time, and that too was nerve wrecking, as practice even at home. She stopped thinking about it. She looked over at her small house elf, who had a cute tomato like nose and brown eyes like she used to have.

“Winky, what are you afraid of?” she asked abruptly.

Winky looked at her with dread filling her stomach. She worried that this new witch would hold her fears against her… but she was also her new mistress and she had given up something important for… a bad elf.

“Winky is afraid of being free and Winky is afraid of heights.” She said softly looking at the table top.

Hermione smiled at the little female elf. She could tell she was nervous and scared, a little depressed, but also trying to make an impression. She was sure Dobby had something to do with it, but that was neither here nor there.

“Looks like we have something in common. I’m afraid of heights too.”

Winky looked at the bushy haired witch as though she was standing in a new light.

“Winky who named you?”

Winky looked over to Dobby, who nodded reassuringly. Hermione didn’t miss this and filed it away for later. In the meantime she let it fall under the category of ‘Dobby’s Secrets’.

“Old master Crouch Sr did, miss.”

“Would you be averse to having a new name Winky? You’re starting a new service, practically a new life. I wouldn’t want you to suddenly think back to your old service because I said your name a way to remind you of them. I want you to be healthy; that includes your mental health too. I also think it would be for the best so you’re not mistaken for a bad elf who used a wand, of which I know you were framed.”

Winky looked up startled, as though that was never an option or a thought in her head. She had never in her life heard of such a thing for an elf. She quickly turned her head to Dobby to see if he too would be okay with it. She wasn’t the only one who used her name, and neither was her new Mistress. Of course if she ordered her to have a new name, she would, but she was asking, so she
had a choice.

Dobby squeezed her knee in support, his green tennis ball like eyes seemed as though they were almost twinkling. He was quite pleased with the young witch’s thoughts and concern.

“Winky would… would like that, miss. Winky would like that a lot.” She said looking at her new mistress fondly, if still a bit subdued compared to her theatrics yesterday.

“Would you like to name yourself, or would you like me to give you a new name?”

The poor female elf was overwhelmed by the unfamiliar kindness and her eyes misted slightly, “I would be most honored if you were to give Winky a new name, miss.”

Hermione nodded kindly at the elf’s decision. She wanted to give Winky a clever name, but not one that was too long, nor one that seemed stupid. She didn’t want Winky to have a… a … trinket name. But she also wanted it to be easy for Dobby and the other elves to say when speaking to her. Sadly she noticed they were either one or two syllable names, but she would work with it.

“Thimi, Thi for short.” She said after a while of giving it thought.

“W-Thimi is most honored Miss.” There was a small smile on the elf’s face finally.

“Dobby likes the name Thimi Miss, Thimi is a good elf name.” Dobby said nodding his head while holding his own cup of tea.

“Thimi I’m pleased to see you cleaned up. I was quite serious about the cloth though, for uniforms. I understand most owned elves have toga's of sorts, and if it must be a toga, it will be fitted and it will look nice. I would also ask that you wear socks or something of the sort, I don’t want your feet being cold.” Thimi froze up and Hermione pushed through, “I’m not giving you socks, or any clothes. But I will get you cloth if that’s to be the case. Yards of cloth for uniforms so that you may be presentable as is an order.”

Thimi’s shoulders relaxed as she took in her new owner’s words.

“Is there anything you would like to ask or say?”

“Dobby told Thimi, that Mistress Hermione, is smart and likes smart people and creatures. Dobby says even your cat is smart, so that Thimi is to be smart and sound smart. But Thimi is not smart, but Thimi is trying.”

“Oh! Thimi, you’re doing fine. If I have to, I can give you grammar lessons on the weekend. I do very much appreciate you not groveling about and sounding as though you have self-worth and some sense about you. I know Dobby does and his grammar is splendid, when he chooses to use it.” She threw Dobby a shrewd look.

She noticed when he saw Harry that his eyes lit up like Christmas, but his speech went back to those who were subservient without a mind to think. When he was explaining things, he spoke well.

“I promised to keep Dobby’s secrets, so if one of them is that he can speak properly and chooses not to, that’s his business. But now… now you’re my business Thimi, and I cannot tolerate a weak willed living being sobbing or tripping over themselves to please me. You are going to speak proper, or as proper as I can get you, or even Dobby to get you should he choose to help you. That and if you show any weakness, Crookshanks will pounce on you and make your life miserable, and I don’t want that.”
Thimi nodded her head in agreement, “Yes, miss. Thank you, miss.”

Hermione sighed, it was a start.
Chapter 8

Hermione left the boys to go get ready for the Yule ball. She scowled at Ron’s jealousy. She wasn’t to be someone’s last resort and most definitely not one of Ronald’s last resort. She wasn’t even into him like that, and if he was into her, well that was his problem.

Hermione wanted everything to be a surprise and didn’t tell anyone who her date was, or what her dressed looked like, or anything of the sort. She was going to blow the whole damn castle away. Frumpy, bushy haired, buck-toothed, swotty blooming know-it-all! She had the teeth part fixed thankfully, Professor Snape’s remark still smarted. It was one of her biggest insecurities and he saw “no difference”.

Part of her understood it was because he was a teacher and was not supposed to look at his students like that and if he did say something as though he did notice that would have meant that he did pay attention to her. However there was about a 6 inch difference and he could have said something.

Hermione huffed and continued to walk up the stairs, stopping by the tower only to pick up her attire and accessories, which were hidden in brown packages to keep her nosey roommates away from them. She left swiftly and continued going up towards the Room of Requirement.

She walked back and forth passed the room thinking of needing to get ready for the ball from top to bottom. When the door appeared she took a deep breath and then remembered she would be able to have help.

“Thimi.” She said mutely, knowing that her elf would come.

Thimi indeed did come noticing that her mistress was alone, appeared like a cloud of smoke, without a sound. She looked clean and soft compared to the haggard, red nosed elf she was a few days ago. She was indeed wearing her uniform, it looked like a little toga with an empire waist, black with a gold embroidered G on the hem. Hermione made a barely distinguishable noise of approval.

“Come.” She said, with an air of dignity that she rarely used in the halls of her school.

Thimi followed without a word through the door of the come and go room. Hermione’s blunt command soothed Thimi’s need to serve, knowing that she did not want her groveling and recoiled at the ingrained need to display her eagerness to serve. It was through her magic that Thimi learned of Hermione’s secret status and of each of her family’s homes. It was another facet of her new mistress that she loved, more so since it was something familiar to her. Most old families were wealthy, everyone knew that. Most magical people did not know that muggles also had old families. Thimi was quite pleased to find out that her muggleborn mistress was from an old and honorable family.

Entering the room they were greeted with an old clawed bathtub with some modern equipment attached to it, such as a moveable showerhead. About a foot away from the tub was an array of potions and lotions, that thankfully both of the females recognized; one through experience the other through study. On the other side of the room was a vanity with a seat with an array of cosmetic aids and oils, combs, a black swirl designed jewelry holder. There was a clothing rack for obvious use, and one of the walls was floor to ceiling mirrors.

The little elf had shut the door behind them and made it so no one but Dobby could come into the room.
Hermione turned around to face her elf, ‘Going to take some time to get used to that…’.

“Thimi, I need to get ready for the ball and I would like for you to help me, please.”

Thimi smiled and managed to control herself by clapping her hands eagerly. She had always loved helping her old mistress getting ready for balls and functions. It made her feel important and she loved knowing that other wizards and witches would see how important her family was. Now she had Mistress Hermione and all of the residents and visitors at Hogwarts attending the ball were going see how important her mistress was.

Thimi had been most defensive lately of her mistress to the other elves. They spoke poorly of her for trying to free them, others for her being a lowly mudblood or muggleborn. Most of the house elves at Hogwarts were old enough where blood status didn’t matter to them, but others who had recently found work and service there from old pureblood families followed the blood dogma because their old masters did.

The house elves had a network amongst themselves, all being connected magically in an intricate web. When an elf was owned, all the elves knew and who their family was. They were not allowed to speak of it to their own masters unless it was already common knowledge or if their master or mistress gave them permission or if the family was proud to own house elves and freely let it be known.

House elves kept the best secrets, but if asked properly they were allowed to divulge their knowledge. Sadly most of the wizarding population didn’t think much of house elves anymore and forgot the wealth of knowledge that house elves could be.

“Thimi would be most please, miss!” she verbally responded in a conversational tone.

Hermione nodded at the little elf aware of the fast progress she made behavioral wise. She hadn’t seen or spoken to her elf much, but could tell she had undoubtedly taken Dobby’s gracious advise.

“I would like to bathe first, so that my pores open enough to absorb the oils and my hair is amendable to styling.” As she was speaking the hazel eyed witch placed her packages on the vanity and began disrobing, having toed off her shoes first.

Thimi quickly, and surprisingly very quietly, began to run the bath. She threw 2 potions into the water as the tub was filling. She was noticeably floating on what could only be described as a wispy cloud of smoke. It looked like steam from a fresh cup of tea, but was thicker yet just as clear.

The young witch soon placed herself in the tub, finding it the perfect temperature and leaned back against the high rim to relax. Hermione enjoyed the water so much, she let herself drift further under the water until it was just her head sticking out. After enjoying the water for 15 minutes Thimi decided it was best time to begin washing her mistress’s hair.

She gently leaned her mistress up, tilted her head back slightly, and began to wet the top of her hair (as the rest was soaking in the bath with her). She drained some of the tub so she was able to reach all of her mistress’s hair, which was much longer than it seemed since it was constantly bushy. She gently massaged shampoo onto the witch’s scalp.

Hermione kept her eyes closed and made the choice to enjoy the treatment. The little elf obviously knew what she was doing and Hermione always appreciated any and all help with her hair. She sighed gently, pleased with how nice it felt.

Thimi rinsed out the shampoo and rubbed on a potion that was the equivalent of conditioner that
would leave her tresses silky smooth and healthy. She started from top to bottom instead of from the ends up. Doing so she was able to get the potion evenly through her witch’s hair, as she was piling it on top of her owner’s head as she went along to keep the potion in her hair. As the potion was soaking into the hair, it was not to be washed out or touch the water.

The little elf snapped her fingers and made sure that the hair stayed up until Hermione was out of the tub and away from water.

“It is time to wash, miss.” She said assuredly.

Hermione hummed her agreement and went to grab a container of soap, but was stopped by her little elf.

“No, no, miss! Thimi is to be washing miss! Thimi has potions for miss!”

Hermione looked at her elf as though she had just asked to be handed clothes.

“Thimi, I can very well wash myself.”

If Hermione wasn’t so shocked she would have caught the somewhat haughty and affronted tone that came from her mouth.

Thankfully though Thimi was used to such things and didn’t think twice about it.

“No, no, miss! Thimi is to be doing it a certain way so miss looks her utmost best!” she spoke as though she were speaking to a young child.

“What are you talking about Thimi? I can do it myself.” Slowly confusion started to seep into Hermione’s voice.

It was just a bath, she was going to wash off the sweat and grime she accumulated throughout the day. She knew she’d scrub off the dead skin and perhaps exfoliate while she was at it, knowing that her skin was most likely dry because of the weather.

“No, miss. Please let Thimi do this for you.”

Hermione eyed the elf wearily.

“Okay, but you’re going to have to let me wash my… bits, myself.”

Thimi’s eyes widened. “Thimi will not be touching miss! Thimi will be washing!” the poor elf look scandalized.

“Oh… okay? Well then, if anything, since I’m not entirely sure how this is going to work, at least leave my pubic hair the way it is. I like to style it myself. I’ve come to enjoy it.”

Thimi pursed her lips, but nodded.

Thimi snapped her fingers and Hermione was lifted out of the tub and was laying down as though she were on a bed. It was only a few inches off the water so Hermione felt safe somehow being able to feel the heat of the water on her backside. The elf picked up what looked like a lotion and began to spread it on Hermione with her magic, evenly placing it on most her body. Thimi was well aware of human hygiene and care, knowing that a woman’s private area needed more sensitive care and was not to have soap passed the pubic area.

She grabbed a translucent lotion and magically placed it where elf and her mistress were rightfully
scandalized at being touched.

She let them sit on her human’s skin for 3 minutes before rinsing her off gently, cupping water and pouring it on her. It left her skin keenly aware of the cold of the room compared to the heat of the water.

“There, now miss is not having any dirt or dead on her.”

Thimi gently waved her hand over Hermione’s arms, legs, and under arms. Hermione noticed that Thimi’s magic was gentler on her skin for hair removal than her own magic. The witch did remind herself though that she focused just a tad bit more when magically removing her hair than she did with her designs, noticing a difference.

The little elf then picked up a potion and proceeded to do the same thing as she did with the lotion (which Hermione now assumed was a special soap provided by the room), avoiding her genitals this time. This time she waited 5 minutes before rinsing it off.

“Oh miss’s pores are fully cleared and clean.” She announced happily as she drained the tub and hovered her mistress in an upstanding position. The hazel eyed was hovering an inch above the ground this time and felt safe knowing she was close to the ground.

Thimi then grabbed another potion and repeated the process, this time letting her skin absorb it instead of rinsing it off.

“Any light scars that miss had are gone now.” She sounded a little proud of herself with this one.

Hermione noticed that it smelled an awful lot like cocoa butter and bit on her lip to keep herself from laughing. It was something the wizarding world and the muggle world had in common. Every time she wanted to laugh at wizards for feeling ‘superior’ because of potions like this. The little elf waved her hands a few times and Hermione noticed that the smell was gone and she smelled like herself again.

Thimi grabbed another bottle, it was a small cute jar in the shape of a large cat that looked an awful lot like a jaguar, dark brown and full. The jaguar was in a sitting position with its tail curled around its feet. Hermione was surprised that it had a stopper on the top of its head.

“The Come and Go room has given you this as a present.” She said.

Hermione was startled for a moment taking in the room’s sentience.

“The room… gave me a gift?” she asked slowly, as though trying to wrap her head around the concept.

“Yes, miss. The room is happy that you are learning and trying to do great things. Miss Lady Hufflepuff also wanted to do great things for us house elves. The best she could think was for house elves to have good working conditions here at Hogwarts. It’s a present.”

Hermione’s mind wrapped around that tidbit of information greedily. She was glad to know that all those years ago, in a very different era, that someone else was thinking about what to do for house elves. There wasn’t much they could do at the time, but at least someone cared. Why it was in the shape of a jaguar though was beyond her.

Thimi opened it and was quite pleased with the smell herself. It wasn’t strong or overpowering in the slightest if a bit flowery. It smelled perfectly clean though, quite a natural scent that was most comforting. Lavender and jasmine scent with a tiny undertone of jojoba as a carrier. Thimi raised an
eyebrow at it knowing that it was faint enough that humans wouldn’t be able to smell it.

“The Come and Go room has given you a signature scent. It is also an essential oil, miss! For multipurposes.” The little elf nodded happily as though agreeing with the room’s choice.

The elf opened the jar and dripped the oil on different parts of her body, one again smearing it on smoothly, even getting her face. Thimi looked back at the bottle as she replaced the stopper, and couldn’t help the happy squeal that came out of her mouth.

“Miss! The Come and Go room has it refill itself! It is eternal present!” she clapped her hands excited for her mistress.

Hermione smiled and blushed slightly at the room’s thoughtful present.

‘Signature scent indeed. A lifelong signature scent, so I never go without once I leave the castle.’

“That’s very thoughtful. Thank you, Room. I’m very honored.” She wasn’t sure if the room could understand words directed at it, but knew it was the polite thing to do.

She was answered though when the room warmed up comfortably. Hermione almost laughed; she made the room blush!

As her skin quickly absorbed the oil, Thimi lowered her mistress back on the ground. Hermione thought she would be embarrassed by the elf seeing her nude, but she’d be growing up in a dorm with girls and they’d already seen her naked plenty of times, to her dismay. She’d caught Pavarti staring a few times and pursed her lips each time she caught the Indian descent witch.

The tanned color witch padded over to her brown packaged and opened them revealing her periwinkle dress robed. She would have gone with something more daring, but wanted it to be age appropriate and still shock the socks off the conservative purebloods. She picked up the matching underwear set, simple solid colored and slid them on followed by the matching periwinkle slip.

After that Thimi stopped her mistress from putting on the robes right away. She released the magic that was holding the curly hair from the top of the witch’s head. The curly tresses fell to the middle of her back.

Thimi went over and floated once again, summoning a wide toothed comb into her hand. She gently parted Hermione’s natural curls. They weren’t big and they weren’t tight, but they weren’t ringlets either. Her hair was still somewhat wet, knowing it would take another hour to fully dry.

The elf knew this and figured it would be best to style it now before it dried too much. The hair potion helped immensely, keeping the curly hair smooth and amendable to being moved about. She pulled her hair back gently, allowing some moving space and tied it with a strong elastic that Hermione didn’t notice before. She left one curl to frame part of her face, and began to gently twirl and bunch her hair up into an elegant low bun. The curls were still noticeable, casing them in a tasteful way where they didn’t look messy. Hermione had a lot of hair, so Thimi let some of the curls drift freely outside of the bun, dangling away from her neck.

The room then provided a few pins that had jasmines placed in a stasis charm, which the elf then expertly started to place in the front of her bun. She added an extra one on the side of her face that didn’t have hair framing it.

Hermione was shockingly pleased with it, her lips were slightly parted. It wasn’t bushy, it didn’t have to be pulled back painfully; she didn’t have to drown her hair in SleekEasy’s hair potion like she had originally planned.
It wasn’t sleek, but it was better than sleek. It used her hair’s natural type, it was comfortable, it was simple, it was elegant, and it was beautiful.

“Thimi, this is wonderful. Thank you so much, it’s so much better than what I was going to do.” Her voice was soft, almost breathless in wonder.

She raised her hand up slightly as though in shock that it was indeed her hair.

“We is not done yet, miss. We has to do your make up and nails, and put on your robe.” Thimi reminded her, her insides were glowing, extremely pleased with her mistress’s praise while also exalted at receiving thanks. Something that was still very rare in the magical world.

Hermione nodded dumbly, still looking at her hair in the vanity mirror. She got up slowly and turned to put on her robes. Before she could even touch her robes, Thimi softly snapped her fingers and removed any loose hair that had fallen while it was being styled. Sometimes the elf couldn’t believe how much humans shed their hair. Hermione pulled her robes on, careful not to touch her hair, unaware that Thimi made it so her hair would stay perfect all night.

Once she was sure her robes were on correctly and looked perfectly immaculate and in place, she sat down at the vanity again to do her makeup. Again Thimi stopped her, this time sucking her teeth at her mistress and magically taking her hands and put them in front of her as though she were at a nail salon.

“What is miss hoping her nails will look like?”

Hermione decided not to fight or ask questions seeing that Thimi very much knew what she was doing.

“I was hoping for something simple, like a French manicure with a pedicure to match. Even some nice thin designs that are black and silver with rhinestone studs on them.”

Thimi was partially confused, it must be a muggle thing, and her face showed it.

Hermione smiled glad to know that the wizarding world did not know of this style, meaning that she would be the only one at the ball with it. That was unless some other muggleborn or half-blood thought of it, but she doubted it.

Hermione conjured a magazine she had back home in her room with exactly what she was talking about. It was an older issue, but it helped her get her point across. Hermione wasn’t stupid enough to assume someone could conjure just a picture or a painting, or even books. She just hoped that when she banished it, it went back to her room.

Thimi looked at it closely and nodded to herself. It was just another thing she had now to be pleased with muggles.

Thimi snapped her fingers and Hermione felt what should have been paint coat her nails and start to look exactly like a French manicure. The little elf turned the pages to see these designs and ‘rhinestones’ that her mistress mentioned.

She found them easily enough and started to twirl her fingers in the air in a very precise manner. Thankfully for the elf the room also wanted to help and provided the rhinestones that she would need. Hermione would think more about the room later one, probably more than she intended.

Soon Hermione had the nails that she had been thinking for tonight. She also couldn’t help but noticed that Thimi added some flower designs that looked like the jasmines in her hair with tiny dots
of silver in the middle.

Thimi snapped her fingers again and the process was repeated for her toes. The difference was that the designs were only on her big toes now, her toes were too small for designs. The witch was still pleased with them.

Thimi then stared hard at her mistress and at the cosmetics that were provided by the room.

“You are to be standing still now, miss.” The little elf directed.

“Yes, Thimi.” She smiled.

Thimi started to move her hands and the make-up seemed to come alive.

Hermione stared in wonder. Her roommates’ make-up never did this for her, but she noticed that some items were the same brand, if different colors.

Thimi moved the eyeliner to make her eyes pop, the mascara to make her lashed longer and more inviting. She added a dark lip stick, accenting her skin well. She added a sort of gloss to her lips to make her lips shimmer pleasantly, but not obnoxiously, just drawing some attention. Although she didn’t need it, Thimi thought it couldn’t hurt, and added a light bronze eyeshadow, that was barely visible but made her eyes pop.

It wasn’t much, but Hermione was naturally beautiful, she had high cheekbones, plump lips, almond shaped eyes. Her eyebrows were defined, but not bushy. People were usually distracted by her hair, teeth, and clothes to really notice.

But Hermione Granger was ready, and she was going to *rock* the halls of Hogwarts tonight.
Chapter 9

Hermione did a quick tempus charm to see the time and noticed she had another 30 minutes left. She gave herself 20 giving her enough time to meet up with Viktor.

She summoned her shoes and looked at them again. They matched her robes, but she was starting to hate how blocky they looked at the front, knowing that it would make her look like she had big feet. Surprisingly, Hermione had small feet and sometimes she tried to make them appear bigger. But now that she was ready, she noticed that they would look slightly out of place.

She transfigured them into wedge heels, with curved front for her toes. She considered making them open toed, but then reminded herself that it was winter, it was a Yule ball.

Hermione went to go put them on, but was yet again stopped by her elf.

“Miss is to be placing a cushioning charm on her shoes or her feet will hurt terribly at the end of the ball!”

Hermione looked at the elf having not even considered that herself. She then unhesitantly snatched her wand off the vanity and shot her shoes with a strong cushioning charm, hoping that it would last the night. Thimi nodded at the strength of the spell approvingly.

She then slipped on her shoes and grabbed the jewelry her parents gave her for part of her Christmas present. She slipped on the dangle pearl earrings that had 3 pearls each, from small to large accented in white gold and had Thimi hook on the matching necklace that had a single pearl that landed just under the hollow of her throat. She then walked over to the wall mirror. Hermione was very pleased with what she saw.

She was elegant, poised, chaste, and age appropriate. Her hair was marvelous, her teeth were perfect (“Thank you, Malfoy and Madam Pomfrey”), her robes looked lovely with her skin color, her make-up was simple and tasteful, and her skin looked like it was glowing youth. Hogwarts would remember that Hermione Granger was indeed a girl.

“Remember, Hermione: knock ‘em dead, have fun, don’t let Ronald ruin your night like he is bound to try. Enjoy yourself with Viktor. This is your night.”

She nodded to herself after her little prep talk. It emboldened her choices for tonight. She flashed her reflection a mischievous smile.

“Also, note to self, have Colin Creevey take a picture to send to mum and dad.”

Hermione turned around to face her elf, “Thimi you did amazing! I don’t know how I’m going to repay you for this.” She grinned widely at the little elf.

“Thimi is needing nothing. Thimi is proud and happy to serve!”

With that said the little elf started to gather Hermione’s discarded belongings so they wouldn’t be lost to the room, making sure that she grabbed the room’s present for her.

Hermione didn’t say anything and instead nodded. Tonight was a fun night, no social justice. She turned around and stared at herself some more, before casting another tempus. It was time to meet Viktor.
On her way to meet Viktor she was more than glad to have run into Colin, just the other gentleman she wanted to see!

“Colin! Thank goodness, I was hoping you’d be able to take a few pictures of me so I can send them to my parents.” She called out walking closer to him.

Colin looked over confused at who the woman was talking to him as though she knew him. He looked closer and realized that he did know her!

_Blimey! That’s Hermione Granger!’_

It took Colin a moment before his mind caught up with what she was saying. He was more than grateful for having his camera on him at that moment. No one in the tower would believe him unless he had a picture for himself of her. She was quite a sight.

“Sure thing, Hermione! Do you want one with your date too?” He asked, knowing he was going to keep copies for himself.

It was that moment that Viktor heard her name spoken and walked over to her. He had just reached their agreed meeting spot and was glad to see she wasn’t that far away.

“If she wouldn’t mind, I would also like one of us.” Viktor said standing behind the boy.

Colin could hear his heart pumping.

_‘That’s Krum! It’s Viktor Krum! Wait, Hermione is going to the Yule ball with Krum!? NO one is going to believe me if I don’t get a shot!’_

“I would love one, Viktor.” She smiled brightly at him, “But first I want one of me alone for my parents, and then one of us. Is that okay?”

Viktor nodded and went to stand to the side when Hermione grabbed his hand and started walking towards a staircase. Thankfully it wasn’t a moving staircase, but even so Hermione stood in front of it instead of on it.

Colin understood, also being a muggleborn. It was a classic background and classic shots, and he was giddy at being able to take them for her.

The young witch stood poised and took a few shots at different angles and one up close of her face. Then she took a few with Viktor and got the quidditch player to stand up straight and when she leaned into him to look at him, his cheeks bloomed pink and his lip quirked up in a small smile. Colin made sure to get some candid shots that he would be sure to give to Hermione later too. He would put it in a book and give it to her as a late Christmas present.

_‘I mean, I get to take pictures of Krum for free! I’ll consider it my Christmas present from Hermione.’_

Hermione was sure Colin must have gotten at least 50 pictures and flushed happily, already enjoying her night. Viktor saw that taking these pictures for her parents were making her happy and stored that thought away for later. He was pleased that she was happy and hoped that meant for a good night
with her.

“Think we took enough, Colin?”

“Sure thing, Hermione!”

If Colin hadn’t needed such a steady hand for his camera, Hermione was sure he would be vibrating where he stood.

“I vill also be getting copies, yes?” Krum asked.

“Of course! Should I send an owl or just hand them to you in a few days?” Colin asked the athlete.

“I vill come to you, if is okay?” Viktor asked, so the young boy wouldn’t be trampled over by a heard of his fans.

Colin smiled at the older boy, “Sure!”

Viktor quirked his lips up at the enthusiastic boy. “In library where Hermy-own sits.”

Colin nodded his agreement, knowing where Hermione sat.

Viktor turned to his date and held his arm out to her, “Shall ve?”

Hermione smiled and took it, “Yes.”

Colin made sure he took the candid shot before making his way to the tower. He couldn’t wait to tell everyone who was stuck up there tonight! But first he had to develop the photos so he had proof. If he did them properly they would be done before curfew started. But made sure he remembered to have at least 5 still looking photos for Hermione’s living room. He remembered how disappointed he was at not being able to have his photos on display at home because the rest of his family couldn’t be told.

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Viktor lead Hermione to where the rest of the Durmstrang students were, knowing he would have to make an entrance with them. Having explained it already to Hermione there were no questions, just comfortable silence during their walk. Most of his fellow students were happy he found a witch who could care less that he was a duck on land and a swan in the air, they would tease him.

They were genuinely happy for their friend though, especially since their ignorant headmaster had formed a habit of sticking to his side, hoping his fortune would rub off Viktor and on to himself. They had better headmasters, but were glad at least that their professors were not like him. He was very unprincipled and egotistical, and had most of them not already started their parents would not have allowed them to attend.

Igor Karkaroff was pleased when he saw his star pupil and prized champion. A twinkle entered his haunted eyes that reminded Hermione immensely of Sirius. The headmaster had wanted to say something about his date’s blood, but reminded himself that he was past that now. She was a lovely vision of a witch and was sure to put many in the Great Hall to shame this night. He was glad that such a vision would be seen on the arm of his champion.

“Viktor! So glad you and your date could make it. It’s almost time.” he walked closer to his pupil, “Now remember I want you to be poised and to shine tonight. But also, remember to have fun and
look like you’re enjoying yourself. You too, Miss Granger. I have heard of your brilliance, naturally I might add. Do make it a good night.” His smile seemed desperate, somehow.

Hermione and Viktor nodded coolly as Viktor subtly pulled Hermione closer as though to protect her from his headmaster. He was a known Death Eater and was known to target muggles and muggleborns, and he knew what they did during their revels. The young adult was weary of what his headmaster had meant when he said, “Do make it a good night”. He would never make Hermione do anything she did not want, and he knew she wasn’t ready for anything more than kissing.

Hermione understood the undertones, she was smart enough to “read between the lines”, and she was both intrigued and insulted. If she had not used the time turner she would be under-aged. It was very pleasant to know that Karkaroff had no compunctions of his star having sex with a minor, as long as he was pleased. She would have only been 15, but no, as long as Viktor got his rocks off it would have been fine.

The young witch composed herself, having practice, so she wouldn’t glare or shoot any dirty looks or nasty hexes at the older man. Viktor must have sensed something was wrong because he started to rub his thumb over her hand in a soothing manner rather than one that was leery. Of which Hermione was extremely grateful for.

“Now, let’s make an entrance, shall we? Viktor, after you. Our Champion should lead us to the ball.” Igor said, making a show of his hands to the oak doors of the castle.

Viktor kept Hermione close to him and they walked steadily towards the castle. The doors opened for them and they made their way, the fairy lights were flying about to get where they were directed. It did make for a decent entrance. Hermione was equal parts pleased and upset that Harry didn’t recognize her yet. However she was fully pleased that Ronald hadn’t recognized her yet, after all she wasn’t normally considered pretty.

Thankfully at that moment Professor McGonagall called for the champions and Ron and Padma had to leave. They went to line up, standing furthest from the door. They didn’t want to be close to Fluer, considering she had nothing pleasant to say about Hogwarts and from what little Krum had been able to tell her, Durmstrang was worse. It was also part of Viktor’s reluctance to be shown off again, even if this time he had to be with others.

He was less reluctant though because he got to go with such a beautiful girl like Hermione. He had thankfully checked her age before trying to ask her to the dance, but didn’t ask questions. He was sure that, much like most of the magical world, the reasoning was meant to be kept secret.

Hermione watched Harry check out the other champions and their dates. She smiled nervously, but was also very excited. It was a real ball and she was being showcased. It was also the first time people would see her pretty.

She watched Harry’s jaw drop as he finally realized it was her. She simply smiled and waved at Harry and Pavarti.

“Hi, Harry! Hi Pavarti!”

The unflattering look of disbelief Pavarti wore was perfect. Hermione couldn’t wait to see what the rest of Hogwarts students’ reactions would be.
The Great Hall doors opened and Hermione walked in with her head high, her gaze sweeping for their reactions, internally preening like a peacock.

‘Eat your hearts out!’ she thought equal parts vicious and smug.

The icing on her cake was Pansy’s face and there cherry on top was Malfoy’s silence. She was so alluring that even the most prejudice of the blood supremacists had nothing bad to say about her.

‘I don’t look like mud now, do I?’, she thought at him scathingly.

Tonight was her night. She was going to be poised and elegant, but also vicious. Not many of her fellow school mates had anything nice to say about her for the past 4 years, and now they were all going to eat their words. It was a wonderful feeling and Hermione was sure it would make her patronus so bright it might hurt her eyes.

It wasn’t hard to miss Igor’s now cold gaze, now that people were staring at her in wonder the way they never stared at him while he was next to Krum. Igor was tenacious to have people stare at him the way they were staring at the mudblood. It was salt in his wound that she was doing so effortlessly. At least to him, it seemed that way.

Once they sat down and started to eat Hermione couldn’t help but hear what was so important to Percy that he just had to have Harry sit next to him. Nothing but brown nosing was coming from the red head’s face, and Hermione was quite appalled. Not so much from Percy verbally ass kissing someone who wasn’t even there (although she knew the walls had ears), but from what he had to say concerning Thimi.

“-a huge personal shock with the misbehavior of that house-elf”

“-Blinky, or whatever she was called”

“Naturally, he dismissed her.”

“-I think he’s found a definite drop in his home comforts since she left.”

“-no, poor man, he’s having a well-earned, quiet Christmas.”

Hermione was internally fuming, both at Percy and poor man Crouch Sr. She leaned over towards Viktor for polite dinner conversation to take her mind off the injustice of it. She’d do something about it tomorrow, if nothing active, at least worry it like a dog with a bone.

“Viktor, tell me about Durmstrang please?”

Viktor was more than happy that she had asked a question that wasn’t about him and began to tell her what he could in as much detail as he could think of in English. This was part of the reason of why he liked Hermione, she didn’t focus on him. She asked real questions that other people would be asked, she treated him normal and he loved it.

It wasn’t long though before Igor once again butted in, but was thankfully pulled away by Dumbledore.

Hermione sent a small glare at the Durmstrang headmaster, for once pleased with her own
headmaster’s subtle manipulations. She was sure at some point she would have to thank him for this or he would rather say that she owed him a favor. Time would tell.

Severus watched the champions come in with their dates. He was quite astonished to see Miss Granger of all people there with Viktor Krum no less. He mentally toasted and congratulated his student. Even he could admit to himself that she cleaned up rather nicely, and vindictively it would seem.

While he knew she was of age now, he noticed that she dressed age appropriately for someone who was in her year rather than her year. The robes were tasteful and modest, her jewelry was simple, her hair wasn’t that ghastly rat’s nest that it usually appeared to be and she took full advantage of Poppy fixing her teeth. He was surprised, it seemed almost Slytherin.

After the debacle of SPEW he wasn’t sure she had it in her, but sure enough here she was. He couldn’t help but notice that even Draco had nothing to say to her. The purebloods were eating their words and he was sure that tonight would spark some beneficial doubts that he would be sure to pounce on.

Miss Granger was helping with the war effort before it fully started, she was proving more useful that he thought.

Now that Dumbledore had gotten Karkaroff away from them, she decided to stick to something easy for the night that he wouldn’t feel the need to breathe down their necks. Although she couldn’t help but overhear how the all-knowing Headmaster of Hogwarts knew where the “Come and Go” room was, but didn’t know how to make it work. Although she did catch the headmaster’s wink, even if it was aimed at Harry, his prize.

She decided to teach Viktor how to pronounce her name.

“Her-my-oh-nee”

“Hern-own-ninny”

“Nee”

“Ni”

“Together now”

“Herm-own-ni”

“Close enough” she smiled.

It was a hard name for a foreigner to pronounce, so she would take it. She saw Harry staring at her and smiled at him.

Soon it was time for them to dance and Viktor was more than happy that he took those extra lessons so he would avoid stepping on Hermione’s small feet. They were so dainty that he just didn’t want to hurt her or embarrass himself in front of her. The lanky athlete was also sure that the pretty witch would enjoy dancing.

As soon as they had finished eating and the tables cleared, announcing the end of the meal,
Dumbledore stood and asked the students to do the same. Viktor stood and offered his hand to Hermione, who took it gracefully.

It wasn’t much after that the Weird Sisters took the stage, and Hermione was more than enthusiastic as this would apparently also be her first wizarding concert. The Weird Sisters were such a hit right now, that even Hermione could admit she liked their music. The first song was a slow dance, and the young witch’s heart thrummed with excitement that was expected of the young.

The hazel eyed witch stopped paying attention to her friend, this was her night, and she was going to enjoy it and the first dance was going to be amazing.

Viktor started with a simple waltz that quickly alerted Hermione that her duck-footed date had gotten extra lessons and was trying. She couldn’t help the bright smile that burst forth; someone had actually bothered to take extra lessons for her. Hermione would let the wizard have this one.

She was momentarily surprised when he twirled her, but followed his lead and went with the motion making it seem fluid and planned. Viktor smiled at her, noticing her grace, the way she dancing reminded him of water. Viktor took advantage of it and lead with more confidence, pulling the witch closer to him than a waltzed normally allowed.

When the song ended she was pleased to see the wizard flushed from the exercise.

“I shall go get us drinks.” He said, taking a polite step back from her. It would be unseemly to be standing so close to one another when they weren’t dancing.

“Okay, I’m going to get us seats near my friends over there,” she said pointing towards Harry and Ron.

Viktor nodded both his agreement and understanding, and left towards the refreshments. While he was leaving Hermione couldn’t help but take a quick look at the athlete’s butt, flushing at the sight. She normally wasn’t so brazen, but reminded herself that tonight was indeed a girl. Girls just so happened to look at butts. Stereotype was that they liked to look at athlete butts. She gave herself a mental pat on the back, allowing herself to temporarily slip in to the stereotype and enjoying the view.

The young witch walked over to take the seat Pavarti had just left. To anyone who was watching though would have said that she glided, a whole different poise that they were familiar with concerning the bookworm Gryffindor. She sat down and fanned herself, thanking merlin that if anyone were to ask they would all just assume it was because of the dancing, not a cute butt.

“Viktor’s gone to get some drinks.” She said.

Ron shot her a menacing filthy look, “Viktor? He hasn’t asked you to call him Vicky yet?”

Hermione raised an eyebrow at the red head, quickly shooting a questioning look to Harry, who quickly looked away with a deer in headlights look.

“What’s up with you?” she asked instead, knowing it was probably going to lead to a row.

“If you don’t know, I’m not going to tell you.” He replied, sounding like an angry woman, which quickly reminded her of his mother. Sounded just as hot headed with some undertone of being mentally judgmental.

“Ron, what-?” before she could even finish the question he bowled over her.
“He’s from Durmstrang! He’s competing against Harry! Against *Hogwarts*! You- you’re” she could see him fishing for a proper word to spit at her along with the rest of the accusation coming her way, “fraternizing with the enemy, that’s what you’re doing!”

Hermione was so flabbergasted she almost laughed.

“Don’t be stupid! The *enemy*. Coming from someone who was over the moon that he came here, wanted his autograph, and has a model of him in his dormitory?”

In typical Ronald fashion, he chose to ignore all of the above. I mean after all, that’s *different*.

“I s’pose he asked you to come with him while you were both in the library?”

Hermione blushed, “Yes, he did. What of it? Jealous that he actually wanted to *talk to me* instead of the other way around?” she shot him a cool glance that contrasted with her heated cheeks.

“Wha- NO! It’s just obvious that he’s just getting closer to *you* to get closer to Harry! To get information or near enough to do some harm to or to *help him with his egg*!”

Hermione looked as though Ron slapped her. Her red of her face changed direction and darkened he voice quivering with rage, “For your *information*, he has *not* asked me *one single thing* about Harry or his *bloody egg*. Not that I would *ever* help him work it out, he’s smart enough. I happen to *want* Harry to win. Harry knows that because I’ve been helping him the whole time. Isn’t that *right* Harry Potter?”

“You’ve got a funny way of showing it,” sneered Ron. His face twisted with an ugly gleam in his eyes.

“Not that you would ever know with *your* track record, but this whole tournament is supposed to be about getting to know foreign wizards and making friends with them.” She said, lowering her voice.

“No it isn’t! It's about winning!!!” he shouted, gathering the attention of people nearby.

Leave it to *Ronald* Weasley to make a scene and not care.

“Ron, I don’t have a problem with Hermione coming with Krum…”

Of course Ronald ignored Harry too, because it wasn’t what he wanted to hear. While she knew it had absolutely nothing to do with Harry or the tournament, she wanted nothing of the sort from Ronald like that at all.

“Why don’t you go find *Vicky*, I’m sure he’s wondering where *his* date is?”

“How about you *not* call him *Vicky* and worry about your *own* date, Ronald.” She hissed through her teeth.

She *refused* to give him the satisfaction of storming off. This was *her* night, and the red head could go jump off a broom for all she cared!

“Are you going to ask me to dance at all?” Padma asked, taking the opening for what it was.

“No.” Ron seethed at the twin, still glaring at the transformed Hermione.

“Fine,” she snapped, getting up and joining her sister with a Beauxbaton boy, who had one of his friends to join them so fast, it was clear that the Patil twins were beautiful to them even with their veela classmates raising the bar.
“Herm-own-ni.”

Hermione looked up, the red receding from her face replaced with the light pink it was earlier. There was her date holding two butterbeers, looking at her trying to gauge at what would be an appropriate and acceptable reaction from him, having obviously heard the fight. She huffed a breath at her hair and playfully rolled her eyes and gave him a quick eyebrow wag, letting him know it wasn’t serious and didn’t ruin her night with him.

The quidditch player quirked his lip at her, something she was beginning to understand was his smile.

She patted the seat next to her, and he slid in, nodding at Harry. Both bookworm and famous athlete gave him the elite cold shoulder. Something a few of the purebloods noticed due to their frequent acquaintance with high society functions.

The bookworm had a whole evening to enjoy herself and the wizard who worked up the courage to talk to her was going to make sure she enjoyed it.
The Hogwarts’ famous bookworm apparently was a fascinating book herself. The speechless purebloods were unable to wrap their minds around Hermione Granger. After 4 years they thought they had her pegged as a boring, ugly, over-eager, common, muggleborn that was a freak accident of brilliant. The only other explanation some of them were able to grasp and held desperately onto was that she was a half-blood and didn’t know it because she was adopted. That hope was very low to the ground in the Slytherin common room.

Tonight she was stunningly beautiful, she was on the arm of the Durmstrang tri-wizard champion who just so happened to be a famous and elite wizard, and she was holding herself as though she were used to balls and high society functions like this. She either practiced extremely hard or she was used to high society functions.

While the Hogwarts students were in a buzz, the Beauxbatons students were less so. Although some of them were all in a titter over the beautiful young witch, the veela a mix of pleasurably being outshined and irked that some regular witch from this awful school was the center of attention. The castle’s walls were substandard than what they were used to.

It was less aesthetically pleasing, colder, the food was greasier, and some of the students were simply disgusted by some of their ghosts (mostly peeves).

Champion Fleur Delacour was simply one of the most vocal of them. However because she was a champion she was intimidating to a majority of the male population and simply the idea of talking to her was daunting. She was beautiful and part veela, common knowledge.

Obtaining a date for the Yule ball was harder than most people would think. The males of her own school were all shot down in earlier years so none of them bothered to approach her, even though they still shot her wistful glances leading up to the ball. The males of the Durmstrang school apparently stood clear of any witch that had veela blood, which was concerning for some of them, but many did not give it a second thought.

The males of Hogwarts were a delightful (and not so) mix of reactions. Some asked, some were wistful and never bucked up the courage, or in Ronald’s case: he asked and ran. The only one who bothered to ask Fleur was Roger Davis. Fleur asked Cedric first, and the charming wizard turned her down for his girlfriend, which she understood and respected. Yet while Davis’s attention was flattering, she also knew he was half listening. The poor wizard was to busy being dazed by her allure to really take anything in and it was frankly disgusting.

A strong wizard would not fall for her allure, and yet here she was stranded with one. Most of the witches also fell for her allure, however with sexually straight witches it made them hate her instead of like her. Strong witches, like strong wizards, were unaffected either way.

Sadly Fleur was also a woman with needs, and having someone be attentive to them was a need. She knew she would probably regret it later, but she grabbed Davis by the hand and suggested how she would like a walk in their rose garden.

“Roger, would oo be ‘as so kind ‘as to walk me z’rough ze jardín, s’il vous plaît?”
With that, they left the hall, Roger nearly dragging the quarter veela.

While they were giving the youngest son Weasely the cold shoulder, speaking politely around him, his swotty brother misconstrued it, almost vibrating with contentment. It seemed as though another Weasley was rubbing elbows with important people and was trying to make something of himself one day.

He strutted over and took a seat next to his brother smiling at Viktor. He leaned in close to his brother, trying to keep his voice low so as not to be heard.

“Made friends with Viktor Krum, have you, Ron?” he said chuckling pompously.

“Excellent! That’s the whole point of this tournament you know- international magical cooperation!”

It didn’t take him a moment longer however to notice his other twin brothers accosting Ludo Bagman. The senior Ministry obviously said something to appease them since he made a quick getaway, else they would have bantered a while longer, double teaming the wizard until they got what they wanted.

Percy of course wouldn’t see it that way, and began to apologize as soon as the elder wizard came over, who obviously made a beeline for Harry. The elder wizard seemed as though he tried to appease the younger wizard by letting him know he was simply just going to help his brothers with some contacts. The young presumptuous wizard didn’t look pleased however, and began making work banter with the senior Ministry worker.

Ron took that moment to talk Harry into going for a walk, away from his brother. Not that Harry needed another excuse to get away from the elder Ministry worker. Hermione and Viktor also took the opportunity to get away from the elite leeches.

While the boys slunk away, the other duo rose with grace and went to stand against the wall near the refreshments.

“Your friend he seemed as though he vas jealous.” Viktor said lowly, looking down at Hermione through shy glances.

“He is jealous, but I don’t like him like that. I do love Ronald, but only as a brother. I just hope one day it’ll sink into his very thick skull,” she replied nonchalantly.

Viktor smiled at the witch, his insecurity over her settled.

“After ve finish, vould you like to dance again?” he tried to sound nonchalant, but came across as genuinely curious.

Hermione smiled brightly at him, letting her anger at the youngest Weasley boy seep into the back of her mind, “I would love to dance again, Viktor.”

Viktor blushed lightly and subtly stood closer to her, their arms almost touching, drinking their butterbeers in companionable silence.

When they finished they place the empty bottles on the table, knowing the house elves would take care of it and headed back onto the dance floor. Luckily for Viktor it turned into what seemed to be another slow song.
With the confidence from the other dance still coursing through him, Viktor lead Hermione through a wonderful waltz.

“You dance quite vell, Herm-own-ni,” he said softly.

“My parents made me take lessons. I do like dancing. I’m happy that I was able to take the lessons so I don’t look silly at events like these.”

“You like lessons of all kind?” he asked genuinely interested.

Hermione laughed, “Not of all kind, but most, yes. Knowledge is power. And when you know something, or know how to do something, it’s more fun than if you didn’t know. Like dancing.”

Viktor smiled and nodded his agreement. He was sure that if he took more dancing lessons and knew how to dance like he knew how to fly, it would be more enjoyable.

When the song ended, they left the dance floor so Viktor could take another breather. His face was flushed, but he looked happy. It was turning out to be a wonderful night after all. He was with a witch that he liked, he was with a witch who liked him, and he hadn’t stepped on her feet once.

It was just then that Fleur came up to them, her lips kiss swollen, but her eyes were rimmed red. She looked like she wanted to ask Viktor a question, but was still shaken up from what they were unsure.

“May we help you Miss Delacour?” Hermione asked politely. She had nothing against the part veela witch personally, but she did dislike how he had nothing nice to say about her beloved school.

“I...I” she took a, what seemed to be, a calming breath, “I waz ‘oping zat oo would dance wiz me. Somezing… almost… ‘appened, and… and I am in need of ‘elp. I would go to my ‘eadmistress or ‘is ‘eadmaster, but eet eez too… personal. S’il vous plait, Viktor. May I borrow your date?”

Viktor looked uncomfortable, having read between the lines but nodded, “You have to ask Herm-own-ni yourself. Herm-own-ni Granger is my date.”

Hermione thankfully also read between the lines and her heart almost plummeted into her stomach. While she knew that students couldn’t get pregnant on school grounds, she wasn’t sure about rape. She understood the want to go to an adult in a situation like that, but since nothing happened and there was no proof beyond looking kissed, there was nothing they could do beyond causing a scene and making empty promises. She may not like the witch for her rudeness, but she didn’t hate the witch.

“‘erm-own-ni Granger-“

“Hermione Granger.” The correct was automatic.

The blond nodded in deference.

“‘ermionee Granger, may I pleeze ‘ave zis dance?”, her words were confident while her body language showed that she was afraid of rejection.

Hermione smiled at the witch, the dots connecting, “Mais oui.”

Fleur might be beautiful but she must have suffered the same estrangement as the “ugly” girls as Ron had called them. It was the fear of rejection for being “out of her league” as most people would say, so they didn’t bother.
The blond witch flashed a bewitching smile at the younger witch and held her hand out to her. Hermione smiled back and delicately placed her hand in the willowy witch’s and allowed the taller witch to lead her out onto the dance floor. As she was being lead she turned around and flashed a smile at Viktor, and his smiled back, happy that the witch was at least going to be dancing with someone with more *advance* lessons in dancing.

As they got onto the floor, they gathered the eye of quite a few people, which both witches deftly ignored. Fleur artfully scanned the crowd of faces for her date, and found him quickly, he had a red hand print and a few scratches on his face. Hermione quickly followed her gaze, and stood up straighter and her walk was more purposeful, unknowingly giving her the gait of royalty.

The band began to surprisingly play a tango song, something that made Hermione’s heart beat a little faster with anticipation. It wasn’t often that she got to tango and even harder to find a partner who was able to tango well. She saw the floor mostly clear out, but saw a few troopers on the edges trying to avoid gazes so they could dance. It was obvious that they wanted to dance but were too insecure with their footwork.

Amusingly there were a few Beaxbaton students that were scattered more on the dance floor than the few pureblood Hogwarts students on the edges. Only 3 other girls were from Hogwarts and only one was from Slytherin. What was also surprising was that there were no Durmstrang students willing to tangle with tango.

Surprisingly, or rather unsurprisingly, Fleur lead Hermione to the center of the dance floor. Hermione quickly took her wand and did some quick alterations to her dress robes and slip, giving them even slits on both sides that ended mid-thigh. Fleur eyed the younger witch approvingly before doing the same for herself, but on her left side and made the slit higher, starting at her hip.

Hermione mentally nodded at the blonde’s choice, considering how her silver-gray robes were fitted, but flowed for movement. One strap was larger than the other in an ornate flower design that followed the top of her dress robes, but at a distance would seem like a one shoulder robe.

Fleur smiled teasingly at the younger witch and asked, "*Etes-vous une femme fatale?*"

"*Pour la nuit*, “Hermione said humorously.

Once they finished they quickly put their wands away again, and turned grasping each other. One of their hands was clasped with the other’s and held at level with Fleur’s shoulder while the other was in the middle of their partner’s back with their arm wrapped securely around their partner’s waist.

They started lightly with the music, their legs interweaving as Fleur lead the brunette witch. They smiled at each other, pleased with the other’s obvious experience. The blonde witch quickly became curious and the next step turned the little witch around moving her hand to Hermione’s lower abdomen, and slid to the right, dragging the compliant witch with her, their hands clasped together. The blonde’s long slender leg peeped from the dress during the drag, as Hermione’s dress flowed off her legs, while her hand had moved up being lightly placed on the veela’s neck.

Hermione smiled to herself, glad to know that she would actually be able to have fun tonight. It was all good and fun *having* fun with your friends and your date. It was *better* when you got to really *dance* and have fun. It was like magic, being able to use your magic in class was fun, but being able to use it outside of class was better.

The band noticed that they had actual dancers, their attention having been caught by the young witches’ legs on display. They decided to change the mood of the tango and the music became low and sensual, their cello player taking the lead.
The girls took keen notice to the change in the music, as they were slowly coming up from the dip the slide caused.

“Let’s knock ‘em dead.” Hermione whispered, her head resting on the blonde’s chest.

“Oui.” Fleur responded huskily.

Chapter End Notes

I did the research so the dance will stretch out a little bit.

Jardin- Garden

S’il vous plait- If you please (Basically: Please)

Mais oui- Of course! (Literally: But yes)

Oui- Yes

Etes-vous une femme fatale- Are you a femme fatal? (dangerous woman)

Pour la nuit- For the night
With the witches in agreement, they were going to take advantage of their knowledge, skill, and the music they were being provided with.

As they came up from their slide, Fleur leaned back, and Hermione kicked up her right leg straight up, flashing more skin, and leg it swing down, curling up on Fleur’s leg. Leaving it there for a second, the blonde then grasped the brunette’s shoulders and spun her in a circle twice, before grabbing her wrist and twirling her away to stand right.

Coming out of the spin, Hermione immediately began the sensual sweeping leg weave that was signature to the tango. She danced closer to her partner while they also circled each other subconsciously feeling each other out with their magic.

They took dramatic steps towards each other and Hermione quickly spun around allowing Fleur to lead her into a semi-circular dip. Coming up the smaller witch kicked both her legs up, spreading them in a V, her skirt covering her private area while giving a good show of her inner legs, thighs, and some of her bum. She was extremely thankful that she decided to wear a thong as her mother suggested in her last letter. It was originally so her dress robes didn’t show any undergarment lines, but worked out to have a second purpose tonight.

She brought them full circle, but once her feet touched the floor again, Fleur quickly bent down and lifted her up over her shoulder, one hand holding knee for leverage allowing Hermione to lift her leg up again and kept the other one level with her body that was her anchor. Hermione arched into the pose, allowing her head to loll back and her arms stretched out, only letting her foot point towards the ground. She spun the smaller witch slowly, displaying her legs, the front of her robe covering her groin.

While being brought down, the petite witch wrapped an arm around the taller witch’s shoulder allowing her to turn and face her partner. They wove their legs around each other as they danced in a circular motion, dominating the center of the floor.

Hermione’s legs had gotten the attention of everyone in the vicinity with eyes. The students from the other schools were interested. Those from Beauxbatons were impressed while the ones from Durmstrang were amazed. The delicate strength and beauty they were displaying was awe inspiring to the wizarding soldiers.

The Hogwarts students were speechless. It was shocking to see their resident bookworm appearing on Krum’s arm, looking as though she stepped out of a magazine. It was mind blowing to see that she had sex appeal, the flashes of skin were tantalizing. Her thighs were soft and inviting, her calves delicately toned.

Fleur spun the brunette again, and the smaller witch took advantage of the movement and let it carry her behind the taller witch. She leaned into the taller witch, wrapping her arms around her midsection like a lover, pressing her breasts firmly against her back, as she was sliding her right leg up against her partner’s leg.

As she was sliding it back down the blonde witch spun in the brunette’s arms and dramatically made the brunette walk three paces backwards. They wove their legs together again in the famous intricate
steps. Hermione then stepped back still holding Fleur and danced her partner in a circle, the taller witch’s feet crossed on point as though she were the center of a compass. Once she completed the circle, she stepped closer to the taller witch, and let her hand come up to caress the taller witch’s jawline. The blonde witch leaned into Hermione’s hand, then kicked out her leg, the dress parting for the appealing appendage, and pulling it back. She did this three times, giving the viewers the image of a woman taking off her clothes.

One the last kick she swept her leg in an arch to Hermione, and dragging it up the smaller witch’s leg. She leaned into the smaller witch once her leg was over her hip. Hermione swept her leg in a delicate motion to support them, before taking the taller witch and spinning her.

Fleur ended the turn by landing with her right leg behind her, showing it off, before slowly rising and dramatically stepping back towards Hermione. They clasped hands again and fell into the basic steps again.

Once they were back in the center of the dance floor, Fleur lowly dipped Hermione in a deep sweeping motion, holding the brunette’s knee to her hip before pulling her up closely. They wove their legs together, faster in beat with the music. Their steps became more intricate showing off their prowess making no mistakes.

The witches’ eyes were glazed over, their stare intense and passionate as their steps. Their smiles were practically feral.

Fleur turned Hermione again so her chest was facing the smaller witch’s back. She turned her face towards the brunette’s neck softly smelling her, while one of her arms snaked across her midsection possessively. The smaller witch thrust her head back towards her blonde partner, her arm flashing up to possessively hold the taller witch closer to her. Their dance looked more like foreplay and the room seemed to heat up as their audience watched with bated breath.

They were facing the Great Hall’s doors when Professor Snape walked back in, his eyes zeroing in on what held everyone’s attention.

Hermione lifted her right leg up bending it upwards slowly towards the ceiling, before kicking it straight up, teasing their audience again with a show of skin. From up she brought it down in a sideways arch, the witch behind her moving her hands again, this time to her waist, and lifted her up, Hermione bending her leg upwards again, arching into the lift. Her eyes locked with her professor’s while she was being brought down, heat shot from her eyes to his shocked dark ones.

Severus’s blood warmed up considerably, his breath coming in heavier. While he was a professor, at an esteemed private institute, he was still a man. He was the youngest professor in all of Hogwarts’s history, and it had been some time since he had last been with a woman, but their passion was cool compared to the look in his student’s eyes. It was intoxicating.

Dread filled the wizard knowing that he would have conflicted feelings in the next upcoming months because of that quick moment between them.

Hermione was brought down low, letting one of her legs slide under her and through her blonde partner’s parted legs. She turned over expertly, trusting Fleur to keep her from hitting the floor. Fleur was pulling Hermione up, Hermione dragging her finger’s against the blonde’s displayed leg, while her other hand seemed to be caressing the blonde’s hip and waist. Her breasts eventually slid across the other witch’s midsection as they kept the ascent slow, falling into a display of a lovers embrace.

As soon as their eyes disconnected Severus took the moment to scan the faces of the others in the room. Most of them looked to be in awe, a few of the wizards’ faces were red, and he was sure if he
was to look there would be a few… tents as well. Some of the witches’ faces were red, especially Hogwarts’ students, who were seeing more of their classmate than they ever thought they’d see. It was obvious they thought her body would seem as hideous as her teeth previously were, with the young witch constantly hiding it under baggy frumpy sweaters. Even his fellow colleague, Minerva, was blushing at her favorite cub. However even she could only watch the couple dance, captivated by the swift decisive movements with its intricate footwork.

They barely pulled apart and were again weaving their legs around each other as the last stanza began to play. Each had a hand at the base of each other’s skull, their eyes locked, and their grips firm. Finally the end of the song had come and Fleur swept Hermione in another dip; Hermione wrapped one of her legs around Fleur’s hip, the skirts of their robes gathering between their legs showing a large amount of skin.

On the last deep note from the cello that felt as though it thrummed through them, the peak of their dip, Fleur slanted her lips across Hermione’s in a passionate yet chaste kiss. Too far into the music, Hermione arched into the kiss, pulling Fleur closer.

When the note finished, they lifted up and pulled apart, some of the heat leaving their eyes, but both still grinning wildly, their faces flush from the dance. Fleur kissed both of Hermione’s cheeks in thanks, and Hermione met each kiss, an automatic response drilled into her through family.

“Merci, mademoiselle ‘ermione Granger. Eet waz a wonderful dansce.” The blonde willowy witch said happily, if breathlessly.

“The pleasure was mine, mademoiselle Fleur Delacour.” Hermione said, her voice coming out like a sigh.

They smiled at each other again before they were interrupted by a loud applause.

“Give it up for Champion Fleur Delacour and Miss Hermione Granger! They gave us the gift of watching them dance! Woo! They were on fire!” the lead singer of the Weird Sisters overheard and gave them a shout out.

Both witches took out their wands and reversed their alterations before nodding at the crowd, still grinning. After a few seconds though, they made their way off the floor, sticking close together, making a beeline for Viktor, whom was still standing near the refreshments. When they reached him, they both noticed his cheeks were tinted pink, which made them laugh at the shy wizard.

“You both danced vell,” he said looking them in the face.

“Merci/Thank you.”

“You both moved … gracefully and fearlessly. It vas very daring and entertaining. Like watching two tigers.” He finished with a small grin.

His cheeks were still tinted pink, but he seemed excited, much like how Hermione had seen people after a quidditch match. It was decidedly cute.

At any rate, it wasn’t long before Hogwarts’ headmaster approached him, his eyes were twinkling with a big smile on his face.

“Ladies if you don’t mind an old man saying, that was quite some show you put on.” His eyes twinkled brightly at that, “Hogwarts hasn’t seen a dance like that in quite a few decades, it was quite an honor. Please enjoy the rest of your evening ladies, Mr. Krum.”
He nodded at the three of them before walking away, leaving just as quickly as he appeared.

Hermione quietly wondered why no one else was coming up to talk to them when she remembered she was with two of the four champions for the tournament. One was an extremely beautiful part veela and the other was a famous quidditch player; both made people feel like they were ‘out of their league’ and not close enough in status to be able to talk to them.

She was unaware that Harry and Ron had come back into the Great Hall a few scant moments before Fleur asked her to dance. Both were in their corner, red in the face for different reasons. Harry was flushed because he had seen a lot of his best friend in a way that reminded him that she was not sexless and embarrassed at seeing her kiss a girl (because he liked it). Ron was red in the face, angrier than he had been earlier, making different assumptions about her each crazier than the last and flashing through his mind like quicksilver.

As soon as their friend left the dance floor they quietly kept up talk of giants through the night when they could find their voices again.

Harry was more than willing to pretend that his best friend, who was a girl, was sexless, because he loved her like a sister. He did acknowledged that Hermione was a girl though, unlike his daft red-head friend. However he was quite conflicted and embarrassed with himself for getting excited over Hermione’s kiss with Fleur. He knew it would be all over the school, just like the fact that she came to the ball with Krum. His bit his tongue knowing that he would have to hear Ron complain about Hermione since he was sure his red headed friend’s jealousy was reaching new levels tonight.

The purebloods had the proverbial rug pulled from under them watching the witches tango. Some of the pureblood witches were trying to rationalize it as something that some muggles must do well, while still struggling to maintain that muggles were inferior and uncivilized.

A certain Slytherin blond’s thoughts and feelings were going haywire, tonight had mocked most of his beliefs. He was disgusted. He was excited. He was scared. He was intrigued. At the end of the mudblood’s dance however, he was fascinated.

He thought he knew his enemies, keep your enemies closer and what not, but this had blown those presumptions out of the water.

Hermione Granger had always blown his presumptions of mudbloods out of the water. She was smart and magically talented, something that was chalked up to being an abnormality. Without those oversized teeth of hers, and her hair losing its bushy quality, she was stunning. He had secretly always found her a little cute, but was able to will those thoughts away with over focusing on her teeth and her hair.

‘Is she really a mudblood or is she just adopted? Is she a half-blood bastard child? What is she?’
Draco Malfoy was grasping at straws.

He wanted to keep his ideals in check. He wanted Hermione Granger to be an anomaly not the rule. She had always rocked his belief’s foundations that were always steadied by his father’s words, but tonight she cracked them. For better or worse he wasn’t sure, and planned to pussyfoot around Granger until he was sure. Her two buffoon friends though were still free-game.

In the meantime he had Pansy to keep him company for the night. Even if the snobby witch had said nothing, the insecurity was plain to see in her eyes even if she kept her head high. The small discreet looks she kept shooting at the mudblood was telling. Granger started something with that dance, and the purebloods weren’t sure what. It was obvious that they would be keeping it close to vest though instead of talking about it with their families.
Chapter End Notes

*Merci*- Thank you

*Mademoiselle*- Miss

Dansce- Dance
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Weird Sisters only took a 2 minute intermission before starting back up after the witches’ captivating tango. They decided to change it up and play some of their top songs to get the teenagers blood pumping for a different reason.

Some of the attendees snapped out of their daze or private thoughts faster than others and began to fill the dance floor up again. Other party goers sat down with their friends and chatted; or were chatting with students from the other schools.

The ball was starting to wind down and many of the older witches and wizards were ready to call it a night. They still had a while to go before midnight though and knew they had to tough it out. It was obvious something happened with Beauxbatons’ headmistress and Hagrid, although neither would say what. There were a few verbal confrontations throughout the night, as was expected by the seasoned witches.

There was also a highly curious telling with the now icy French champion and her date, who had scratches on his face. It seemed as though no one either bothered or tried to heal him, but Minerva had a chilling rage bubble in her at what she assumed must have happened. She would be sure to give Davis detention with Severus every night for any infringement she may find on him.

She saw the willowy witch’s eyes when she was walking towards Hermione and Krum and knew she had been holding back tears. It didn’t take a genius to know that Davis was more susceptible to Miss Delacour’s allure than previously thought. Said Ravenclaw was slinking sulkily close to the walls looking extremely put out, watching what had been his date. The older witch was pleased to see that it did not ruin the younger witch’s night entirely. The young blonde witch had a grand smile on her face during and after the dance and that seemed to take care of that.

She had seen more of her star pupil than she had ever thought she’d see though. It was quite flustering, but she was quite impressed and moved with her skill on the dance floor. It reminded her of the muggleborn’s wand movements, swift and precise. It appeared that also extended to other activities, and she was proud of her student.

She had seen the kiss, much as everyone who had been watching saw it, and chose to ignore it. They were at a ball after all. What Miss Granger chose to do with her interactions with other people were her business. Who was she to judge? Albus was her best friend and she loved him unconditionally, even if he was a manipulating old codger.

Fleur had stayed with Hermione and Viktor for the rest of the ball, neither minding, and enjoying her company. Hermione was pleased with the new Fleur she was getting to know, and hoped that the witch would continue to be her friend after the night was over.

The trio did make it back onto the dance floor at some point, if only to enjoy the band. Viktor swayed back and forth while the girls twirled each other. They even got Viktor to twirl them both a few times. They laughed most of what remained of the evening, Viktor chuckling mostly. The other students gave them a little berth, and instead of feeling self-conscious about it for once, Fleur and Viktor took advantage of it to dance with each other and Hermione.
Aside from Fleur’s altercation with Davis, the willowy witch had a wonderful time at the ball. After she started to hang out with Durmstrang’s champion and his date, her night got better. She was sure she made real friends with the witch and wizard. She almost wanted to thank Davis for trying to push himself on her, *almost*.

Viktor was having a grand time with Hermione and Fleur, surprised at himself for smiling for what felt like the whole night. It wasn’t as grand as when he was flying in the air, but it was close. Hermione was beautiful, smart, talented, and funny. It was a dark and dry humor, but he appreciated it. Fleur was a surprise, but he was happy that she opened up a little and wasn’t an ice queen that she portrayed. She also had a dry humor it appeared and they got on well enough.

He was peripherally aware of the attention she got, almost as much as him, but because of her allure more than anything. He was sure her ice queen façade was more of a self-defense mechanism and he couldn’t blame her. He got defensive and awkward around fans in a private setting, but for Fleur it must be an everyday almost every interaction thing. It was like having a kindred spirit and it was just as nice as having a friend like Hermione, who didn’t care.

Even though Ron didn’t like it, he took a page out of Harry’s book after Hermione’s surprising tango and avoided looking at the dance floor for the rest of the ball.

With Harry it was because he liked Cho and Ron understood how a bloke couldn’t see the girl he liked with another bloke.

With Hermione all he understood was that she a *traitor* full of surprises. He couldn’t understand why she couldn’t see that Krum was *using* her. There just simply couldn’t be another reason why someone like Krum would talk to someone like *Hermione*. She was their bookworm, she wore frumpy ugly clothes every day. She wasn’t pretty until tonight, it wasn’t like Krum could see into the future; he wasn’t a seer. Hermione made it seem as though Krum *knew* she could be pretty.

‘*I bet that Karkaroff guy bewitched Krum, that’s got to be it. Now I just have to make Hermione see reason!*’ the red headed wizard thought to himself.

Midnight came sooner than expected for some of the students and not soon enough for the adults supervising them.

Hermione, Fleur, and Krum left as the last song was winding down. They made their way to the door to avoid the inevitable leaving crowd. Fleur decided to take her leave of them there and kissed them both on the cheeks before departing for the night.

Viktor blushed, looking sideways to Hermione, who just smiled at him.

“*Bonne nuit, ʻermionee, Viktor.*”

When the blonde witch took her leave Hermione giggled at the thin boy.

“*It’s a normal French custom between friends and family. Much like Bulgarian customs.*” She shot a sly look at him, “*After tonight I would like to hope we are friends.*” She said the last part dryly.

Viktor smiled, agreeing with the smaller witch, offering his arm so he would be able to walk with her
just a little longer. Hermione took the offered appendage, pleased with his gentility. It was cute, even with the both of them knowing it was just a short walk away to the entrance doors.

Once they were there Hermione leaned up on her tippy toes, and Viktor took the hint and bent down to meet her, curiously. Internally pleased with Viktor’s affability to her whims, Hermione hugged him and kissed him on both cheeks.

When they pulled away Hermione giggled at Viktor again, pushing the dangling bit of her hair behind her ear. The Bulgarian blushed and smiled at the small witch.

“Ah, young love,” came a grandfatherly voice a few feet away.

Both of the teenagers blushed brightly. Viktor more so due to his shyness since he had considered this their first date. For Hermione it was because it was her first date with someone from the wizarding world. It was like a coming out that she was available to date. What a lot of people didn’t know was that she tried to keep her school life professional.

She had many things she had to do, stay on top of her classes and keep Harry Potter alive. Doing both at the same time was quite stressful, but she managed it. Her grades were very important to her, but so was her life debt. Letting someone take up time away from those two things was something she was very reluctant to do, despite liking the attention.

But she was Hermione Granger, and she was expected to manage. She planned on passing expectations rather than living up to them.

“Good night, Viktor. I had a wonderful time with you this evening.”

“I also had good time Herm-own-ni. Maybe ve can spend weekend together soon?” his eyes reminded her of a puppy.

“That would be nice. Thank you, Viktor. Good night.”

“Good night, Herm-own-ni.”

With that Hermione flounced around and made her way up the staircases. She noticed Ronald and gave him an icy look, still disgruntled with him, knowing that he was still angry. She also noticed Harry, and knew they would follow her to the tower.

“Hey – Harry!”

Hermione heard Cedric Diggory call for her friend and kept her ear on them. Ron kept following her, his footsteps sounding just as petulant and angry as he was at the moment.

Hermione heard the Hufflepuff thank Harry in a typical male roundabout way. She rolled her eyes amused at him, it was charming. The Hufflepuff really was a likeable bloke. Still listening she heard him tell Harry what to do, knowing that it was the answer to his egg. She would make sure to ask him about it soon if he didn’t come forth with the information himself.

She barely made it through the portrait when Ron opened his mouth to start another row with her.

“I don’t appreciate it, Hermione.” He started gruffly.

“Don’t appreciate what, Ronald?” she quipped back sharply, glaring at her friend pointedly.

“You going to the bloody ball with Krum is what!” he bellowed at her, going red in the face.
Harry walked through the portrait and froze after closing it shut behind him. He was hoping beyond all hope that if he stood still, they wouldn’t see him and he wouldn’t be brought into their row.

“Well that’s a little too bloody bad!” she yelled back, her face screwing up in a snarl as blood rushed to her face.

“Oh yeah?” Ron yelled back.

“Who I choose to go with to any bloody ball is none of your business, Ronald! Especially as a last fucking resort!”

Ron was flabbergasted at hearing his normally goodie-two-shoes friend swear. His mouth opened and closed, but no sound was coming out.

The witch turned on her heel and stormed up the girl’s staircase to bed, leaving her friend to imitate a goldfish. She heard him sputter nonsense to Harry and was pleased when her bespectacled friend didn’t say anything back. She didn’t close the door behind her until she heard the boys make their own way up to their dorm room.

She stripped on her way to her bed, glad that she was the first one in the room. She let her clothes drop to the floor, knowing that Thimi would be glad to have something to do. She wanted to feel guilty, but she also felt it was the least she could do so the elf felt like she was a good elf.

She let her hair down, but left the jasmine pins that room of requirement had given her in her hair. As she sat down on her bed she was pleased to see that her faithful ginger haired cat had taken residence on her bed.

“Hey Crooks, I looked smashing tonight. I’ll tell you all about it tomorrow… I had a lot of fun.” She curled around her large cat, sharing the bed with him and started carding her finger through his fur.

She had a wonderful time tonight. It was indeed her night, just as she had said it would be. She had rocked the halls of Hogwarts, she stunned everyone, left the purebloods speechless, kissed one of the most beautiful girls at the dance (normally it wouldn’t matter, but she was pleased that half the school would be jealous of that tidbit), arrived on the arm of someone most of her peers thought was out of her league, and left on the arms of two people who most of her peers considered to be out of her league, who just so happened to also be tri-wizard champions.

It was a good night. Hopefully Boxing Day would also be good, even though she knew it wouldn’t be as good.

Chapter End Notes

_Bonne nuit_- Good night
Chapter 14

Hermione slept in a bit later than she usually did, but wasn’t bothered by it since most of the tower slept in today. She still woke up before the rest of the tower. Her hair was somewhat messy and tangled, but she just threw it up into a regular bun instead of the elegant one Thimi put it in yesterday. She would have the elf help her with her hair later, in the meantime she decided to not brush out her curls and let it revert back to what seemed to be its natural bushy state.

She planned to take a leaf out of her elf’s book and not fight her hair, but work with it. She was happy that she finally had someone in her life that knew what to do with her hair. It would make a big difference.

She was glad to see that Crookshanks hadn’t left the bed, but moved towards the end of it instead. It was nice waking up with him still in the bed with her compared to when she woke up without him. He was very independent, but she liked his company.

She rolled onto her side, looking towards the end of her bed where her ginger haired menace was.

“Crooks,” she whispered.

She made a few light clicking noises to get him to come closer to her. He cracked and eye at her and crawled closer to his human until his nose almost touched hers. The petite witch smiled at her half-kneazle.

“Good morning, king Crookshanks,” she chuckled softly at him.

The half-kneazle lightly placed his paw on his human’s face in greeting before pulling it back underneath his girth. He was satisfied with her acceptable greeting. The ginger haired feline was quite fond of all his nicknames that had anything related to royalty. He was glad that his human thought so highly of him, she was certainly smart, especially if she recognized his status.

She grinned at her cat, loving these little moments she had with him.

“I had a wonderful time at the ball, Crooks. I made quite the dramatic entrance. Thimi helped me get ready and I looked quite stunning. Thimi is now my house-elf. Crooks, I have a house-elf. I have to tell mum and dad before we leave.” The last part she whispered horrified.

Crookshank’s only response was the flick his tail as though to tell her that he already knew that.

“Malfoy was speechless, and all the witches from Hogwarts looked like someone slapped them in the face and called them muggle. It was great. Karkaroff was annoying though, it’s like he wants to glue himself to Viktor. Poor guy.”

The ginger cat’s response to that was a long blink.

“Ron of course started a row. Can you believe that tosser had the sac to call me a traitor? For going to the ball with Viktor and talking to him? I can’t wait to hear what he has to say about my kiss with Fleur. It’s great. Karkaroff was annoying though, it’s like he wants to glue himself to Viktor. Poor guy.”

The ginger cat’s response to that was a long blink.

“It was a nice kiss though, heat of the moment thing. We were dancing the tango. Crooks, it’s been so long since I’ve had so much fun dancing. I split my dress so I had more leg movement, but I’m sure Hogwarts got a good look. It’ll be funny to see how the masses react to that later today. You
might have to beat them off for me, Crook. I’m sure I’ll get so tired hexing bits off that you’ll have to 
come protect me.”

Her familiar started to purr at that, making Hermione grin again, knowing that her cat liked the idea 
of that.

“Believe it or not Headmaster Dumbledore actually got The Weird Sisters to play. It was 
magnificent. The first two dances were obviously with Viktor, the third was with Fleur. Davis nearly 
attacked her and she wanted to make a statement, so I agreed to go along with it. She made herself 
out to be a lesbian, but if it keeps the boys off her, I’m glad to help. Poor thing can’t help her allure. 
It won’t stop the girls from trying now though, but I’m sure she’ll be able to handle them easier than 
the wizards.”

Crookshanks continued to purr, flicking his tail now and then to what his mistress was saying.

“The rest of the night we mostly fooled around dancing in front of the band. Viktor twirled us both 
around, but mostly swayed. He took lessons to dance with me, it was cute. But he still can’t dance by 
himself. Me and Fleur danced more with each other and included Viktor. It was fun, like having a 
real girl friend to be silly with. I have Harry and I suppose Ron, but they don’t know how to be silly. 
The rest of the witches here are just… blah. I know that’s not fair since I’ve really only spoken with 
my own year mates and watched others, but still.”

The ginger feline rolled onto his side and stretched out as though to agree with her. He’d also 
watched the humans and they were not much.

“I also swore at Ron last night, I’m sure you heard that part though. I think I scared him,” she 
giggled, “Aside from the rows with Ronald though, it was a magnificent night. I’m also pretty sure I 
rocked some more pureblood foundations. I mean that dance was pretty marvelous. I’m sure it 
looked just as good as it felt. It was like doing magic outside of class, that bubbly feeling you get in 
your chest when you’re having fun. It was nice.”

Crookshanks butted his head under her chin, happy for his witch. He planned on staying close today, 
with what he told her he was sure he would be scratching a few humans today.

Hermione stretched before petting Crookshanks and getting up to get ready for the day. She rolled 
out of bed, absentmindedly grabbing her wand and noticing that her dress robes were taken care of by her 
elf.

She was so thankful there was a restroom attached to their dorms. Hermione was still pretty sure it 
was so students wouldn’t be caught out after curfew claiming the need to use the facilities. 

She made sure she brushed her teeth and fangs extra well before glamouring her canines. 

‘They might as well be fangs.’

She left the restroom deciding that she was going to laze about today.

“Hermione did you sleep in the duff?” Pavarti asked, scandalized from her bed.

Hermione raised an eyebrow at the Indian descent witch. She noticed that although the other witch 
sounded scandalized, she was staring at Hermione’s naked chest. Pavarti was quite shocked last 
night when she had made her debut so to speak, but somehow the dark skinned witch’s eyes always 
found themselves on her chest or bum.

“No, I slept in my underwear,” she replied neutrally.
She had honestly forgot that she wasn’t really wearing any clothes, having just gone to brush her teeth and use the loo. Not that it really should have mattered considering they had all gotten a glimpse of each other’s chest at some point or another. It was obvious the other witch was attracted to wizards, but for some reason she always stared at Hermione. She never stared at their other dormmates. Hermione was uncomfortable at first, but after a year of it constantly happening she became desensitized to it.

She padded over to her trunk and pulled out the jumper Mrs. Weasley made her for Christmas. The petite witch pulled it over her head before grabbing a pair of plaid pajama pants and slipping them on lazily, ignoring the other witch. She quickly threw on a pair of socks and slipped on her house shoes before grabbing one of her Christmas books and leaving the room, Crookshanks running at her heels.

Down in the dungeons Severus had woken up at his usual time, being conditioned despite having gone to bed late.

He made it up to the Great Hall for breakfast noticing that only the other Heads, Albus, and Moody had made it this morning.

“That was some ball last night, wasn’t it, Snape?” Moody growled at the dour man.

Severus merely grunted his response, not having had his coffee yet.

Minerva chuckled knowing that all the response they would get out of the young haggard wizard would be grunts and hums until he got his 2 cups of coffee. The only time he responded before then was if he was in a mood or was brought into one. Nothing nice ever came out from Severus before his coffee.

“That was some tango though,” Pomona said, looking through the corner of her eye to gauge Severus’s response.

Minerva, Severus, and Moody blushed, finding their breakfast quite interesting. They had seen quite a lot and had agreed to themselves to not speak of it the next day.

“Oh, it was splendid! Couldn’t have asked for a better dance,” Albus said clapping his hands together, finding his staff members’ responses amusing.

“It was quite the show,” the pudgy witch said.

“Indeed, it was. Their footwork was marvelous.”

Pomona hummed her agreement.

Crouch Jr. parading as Moody was just two years younger than Severus and he was just as hot blooded. It was worse since he was giving the young witch private lessons.

He wanted to commend the girl; none of the other students had come back after their lesson with unforgivable for extra help. Potter had been able to throw off the curse and he was impressed with his strength of will. The Granger girl though, had stared him down and had asked for private lessons to be prepared. He liked her spunk if nothing else and agreed.

The first thing she wanted to tackle was throwing off the Imperious. Barty thought it would be a waste of an hour of his time, and decided to make it amusing by making her do silly stunts. He had
thought of taking advantage of the opportunity the witch was giving him, but also knew he had to keep his cover. The wizard was shockingly surprised though, after two weeks Granger was able to throw it off.

She demanded they continued until she could throw it off at a moment’s notice. He was astounded that a mere 2 weeks later Granger had enough will about her that the imperio wasn’t working. He threw as much of himself into the curse as he was able, and was stunned that her will was stronger than his. He was frustrated, but also shockingly proud. This witch was his pupil, he helped her overcome an unforgivable that had kept him prisoner in his own home for years.

He was so proud he agreed to keep giving her private lessons to defend herself against dark curses and hexes that he knew they didn’t normally teach at Hogwarts. They were working on counter curses, knowing that he couldn’t very well teach her the dark arts, although he wished that he could.

Now however he was sure that when he saw her, all he would be able to think about was her legs. He envied Snape, knowing that he wouldn’t have to see the witch more than he had to. He could easily dismiss her private lessons, but he also enjoyed working one-on-one with the witch. It was a challenge and kept his school days from becoming boring.

Term would be starting soon, so he had but a few more days before he had to see her alone again. He would be able to do this, for the war effort.

Severus couldn’t help but remember the young witch’s eyes. He had gotten quite an eyeful of her legs and arse, surprised at how shapely they were. It was her eyes however, glazed over with passion. The memory of them was just as intoxicating as the actual thing.

He wasn’t sure if he should conduct his classes as normal or be extra mean to the witch. He was sure it would come to him. He just had to believe that he could compose himself properly when the moment came. When he said he would keep an eye on her he hadn’t meant like that. He wanted to pinch the bridge of his nose, but knew that would be telling.

Severus couldn’t wait until term started again, he would be distracted with work and Potter at least. He was sure that Potter would be the literal death of him, but Granger was coming at a quick second place.
They day before term started Hermione was itching to throw a hex at her red haired friend. While they had been coldly polite to one another, he kept staring at her. It was rude, but she kept brushing him off. It was only after his stares were turning into glares that her temper started to rise again.

Sure most of the guys in the tower kept staring at her too, but all she had to do was look them in the eye and they would go on their merry way. It didn’t work that way with the twins of course, but they at least came out and said what they wanted.

“Blimey Hermione, you looked fit.”

“Who knew you had a body under those robes.”

“Watching you dance-“

“-It was like watching a unicorn give birth!”

“What?” she laughed, having never been compared to a unicorn before.

“You were all legs.”

“And your kiss with Fleur.”

“It was bloody hot.” They finished together.

“What was it like?”

“Was she your first?”

Hermione’s face was lit up with mirth, “Not that it’s any of your business, but no she wasn’t my first kiss. She was my first kiss with a girl though.”

Their eyes widened.

“Our little Hermione, out exploring the world.”

“Experiencing new things and new flavors.”

“Did you like it?”

The petite witch shrugged.

“It was a heat of the moment thing. So it was pretty satisfying, but I doubt we’ll be kissing again.”

The twins were watching her, fascinated.

“Hermione… are you… a lesbian?”

Hermione burst out in laughter, she ended up doubled over, clutching her stomach.

“Am I- am I- am I a lesbian?”

She laughed more.
“No, no,” she chuckled, “I like girls just as much as the next person.”

Fred and George looked at her amused, both of them arched an eyebrow at her.

“Did you hear that, George? ‘As much as the next person’.”

“I heard her,” he said with an amused smile, “Hermione, not all girls like girls.”

Hermione smiled at them with another chuckle, “What?”

“No all girls like girls, Hermione.”

“What? Of course they do, don’t they? Girls are pretty and soft and silly, even if some of them are vapid harpies.”

Fred and George smiled at each other before looking back at Hermione. They agreed with her, those were some key reasons that guys liked girls.

“Hermione, you may not be a lesbian, but you’re definitely not straight if that’s your answer,”

George said humorously.

“What? But I like boys! I like girls, but not as much as I like boys.”

“Little Hermione is young in the ways of love, Fred.”

“Indeed she is, George.”

“You can like both, Hermione.”

“You can also love for love.”

“Or you can just not care.”

Hermione loved and hated when they spoke together. They were a whirlwind of brilliance (and sometimes information). It must be nice to have a soundboard who thought a lot like you.

“You mean like different sexualities?”

“There’s our girl!”

“I told you she was brilliant, Fred.”

“I’m sure I was the one who told you that.”

“What do you mean? I’m not bisexual, and I care, just I don’t at the same time. I care about the person,” Hermione said confused, she started to chew on her bottom lip.

“Love for love.” They quipped.

“Our little Hermione is pansexual, Fred.”

“She’s a fiery pansexual, George.”

Hermione squinted at them to make sure she was seeing them correctly.

How was it they were staring at her, just like everyone else, and the conversation turned to a discussion on her sexuality?
“So I’m pansexual, so what?” she said, starting to feel a little defensive.

The twins looked at each other and then back at her.

“We don’t mean anything by it, Hermione. Just nice to know. We were going to start collecting bets if you were using Krum as a beard though. We would have made a killing for our joke shop.”

Hermione rolled her eyes at them in a friendly manner.

“So what? Is that what has half the tower’s knickers in a twist?” She asked blandly.

The twins grinned at her, knowing at this point she didn’t know.

“Hermione, you kissed a girl before half the tower did.”

“Well those who are into girls at least,” George added as second thought.

Hermione blinked owlishly, completely stunned. She looked at the twins, then at the floor, then back at the twins.

“You mean to tell me that half of the tower is jealous that I’ve kissed someone before they have?” she asked incredulously.

“You’ve reached a mile stone that many people want to reach, Hermione.”

“Well except the firsties, but they’ll come around.”

The witch pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. She had nothing to say about that. That was their problem, not hers. Just because they were miffed at their own lack of progress in life, didn’t mean they had to stare at her like a zoo animal.

“Anyways you were in top form.”

“Half the blokes are jealous because of how fit Fleur is, and she kissed you.”

“They’re just jealous they don’t have as much sex appeal as you.”

“We’re just here to warn you that Ronnie looks like he’s going to blow his top soon.”

“Well that, and tell you how fit you looked.”

“See ya, Hermione.”

And like a breeze, they left. She appreciated the compliments and the warning. She was a little put out how sexualities weren’t covered in her health education, however obscure it was. The witch was happy that at least two of the Weasley’s were aware and gave her a quick rundown, even if she was sure there was more. She’d do some light reading later in the library before term resumed, knowing that most of the tower would be rushing to finish tomorrow.

By the time lunch had finished Ron had burned a proverbial hole into Hermione’s head and she was done with it. They were walking back towards the tower when she couldn’t contain herself anymore.

“Is there a reason you keep glaring at me, Ronald?” she hissed at him.
“I’m not glaring,” he denied petulantly.

“Whatever,” she scoffed under her breath, “Why have you been staring at me then?” she questioned looking at him pointedly.

“You kissed Fleur,” he said with a glare.

“I’m sorry, come again?” she asked, squinting at him, trying to see how that was his business.

“You kissed Fleur. At the ball,” he pushed on.

“She kissed me, but that’s beside the point. What does it matter to you anyways?” she questioned.

“You didn’t push her away, you weren’t disgusted by it, and you looked like you liked it,” he said accusingly.

“I did like it. It was in the heat of the moment,” she said lightly.

“H- Hermione, the kiss… D-did it feel nice?” Neville asked, blushing and looking at the floor. Harry was walking slightly ahead of him, but found the banister to be extremely interesting at that moment.

Hermione blushed and smiled at the shy boy.

“Yeah, it was nice, Nev.”

“So you’re a lesbian! Is that it!?” Ron screeched, half in anger half in shock.

His volume attracted the stares of a lot of people, even if half of Gryffindor was already eavesdropping on the conversation.

“What? No, I’m not a lesbian, Ronald. You can ask your brothers,” the words were out her mouth before she thought about how that might sound.

“M-my brothers? Which ones? How would they know!?”

Hermione huffed at the young redhead, exasperated with his one track mind; also pretty sure that half of the people listening would be thinking along the same lines.

“Because Fred and George know that I’m not a lesbian. And before you ask, no, I didn’t do anything with them besides talk,” she sneered slightly at her friend.

She turned on her heel and walked up the stairs, heading towards the library to get away from certain people.

‘What does my sexuality matter to him anyways? It’s not like he’d ever have a shot with me to begin with. That’d be like incest.’ She thought angrily as she walked quickly through the halls.

Once she made it to the front of the library however she turned abruptly.

“Thimi,” she whispered, knowing the elf would be able to hear her.

Thankfully Thimi caught on and simply tugged on the bottom of her shirt to let her mistress know that she was there. While there technically wasn’t anybody in the halls, it lined up with the fact that she wasn’t to be seen with her mistress.

Hermione felt herself relax and kept walking, knowing that she wasn’t alone. She wasn’t paying
attention to where she was going, but knew that it wasn’t in the direction of the tower. It wasn’t long however before she found herself in front of the door of the room of requirement. It was different this time, the handle was golden and rectangular, like when you went to a doctor’s office.

She wasn’t sure what it was that she needed just then, not having focused on a single thought while walking, more like pacing since she passed the room three times. She stared at the room curiously before turning the doorknob.

Inside the room looked like a spa. There was the calming sound of water, some strategically placed stones. Hermione hadn’t been to a spa since the summer, but with the stress of everything this year, with the added stress of Ronald, she guessed she needed it. Another sweeping look she saw a large cat palace that was more box than scratching post.

“Thimi, can you get Crooks for me please?”

“Yes, miss,” the small elf said quietly.

The elf left and was back just as quietly and smoothly, but with a grumbling Crookshanks in her arms. Thimi didn’t put him down until she was in the room, and let the beast run towards the palace that the room had made for him.

Hermione quickly entered behind them and shut the door firmly, knowing that no one else would be able to enter because she needed peace and quiet right now.

Hermione saw the hot tub and stripped down, not concerned with her elf or cat seeing her naked, and climbed into the relaxing tub with its bubbles on full blast.

“I didn’t even know the room knew about hot tubs!” she exclaimed happily.

“The room knows many things, miss. The room is knowing new and old.”

“What do you mean, Thimi?” she asked, leaning back and enjoying the jets.

“The room is knowing new and old things, miss. It has to exist in current time or the room cannot provide.”

“But a hot tub is a muggle invention,” she said lightly, curious.

“The room is not caring of muggle or magical, the room is knowing,” The little elf was starting to sound exasperated. Both with herself for not explaining better and with her mistress for not understanding.

Hermione let the conversation drift by not saying anything. She sat in the tub letting the water work its own kind of magic while Crookshanks played in the palace and Thimi was fiddling with something next to a table.

“Thimi, what’re you doing?” she asked curiously.

Her and Crookshanks were enjoying themselves, but it didn’t look like Thimi was.

“Th-Thimi is reading, miss,” she sounded ashamed of herself.

‘She can read?’ Hermione filed that away for later.

“Well what’re you reading? I hope it’s something nice, I want you to enjoy yourself in the room too!”
“Thimi is most enjoying when she is taking care of Mistress Hermione!” she said haughtily.

“Well then what are you reading?” Hermione asked, leaning on the edge of the tub, facing her house elf. She had started to come to better terms with having an elf, and she was sure that the bond was helping in its own way.

“Thimi is reading on how to… how to do spa things for miss.”

“Will that make you happy?”

“Oh yes! Thimi would be most happy to help miss relax more!”

“Okay then, let me know when you’ve read it all or when you feel like you’re ready to start practicing. I’ll be here.” With that Hermione went and leaned back against the tub.

30 minutes later Thimi let Hermione know that she was ready. Hermione smiled at her little elf because she sounded confident, even if it was going to be her first time.

“First we is doing hot stone massage!”

With that Thimi started taking care of Hermione’s aches, pains, and stress out of her body. Hermione spent most of what was left of the day in the room, asking Thimi questions every now and again about simple things about how to manage her grooming by herself on the day to day basis concerning her hair, and things about elves and things about Thimi herself.

By the time Hermione and Crookshanks made it back to the tower she felt like she was ready for the start of term. She coolly ignored Ron, seeing him sulk with his brothers nearby, as though they were his keepers.

What happened for the rest of the term would happen. She could only hope that damage control wouldn’t be too bad, but tried to stay realistic about it.

First potions class after yule break was quite interesting so to speak.

The lesson itself wasn’t interesting, it was quite normal. It was in its normal strict and firm boundaries, they were given a potion to create, the recipe on the board, and told to make it within the hour.

It was a simple potion, but explosive. Simple enough for scatterbrains to remember, dangerous enough to make them get it together faster. A medium strength muscle relaxer, it was the salamander’s blood that made it possible to explode.

What was interesting was that Professor Snape was snapping at everyone, including his Slytherins. He seemed to be in a bad mood, and while he was just a tad more acidic than usual, he didn’t pick on Harry as much as he did when he was in such a foul mood. If anything he seemed to pick more on Ron.

“Mr. Weasley! If that is how you powder chamomile leaves, how is it you have anything left that is useful! Even Longbottom’s leaves are more finely powdered and actually still in his bowl!!”

Ron’s face clashed with his hair while the Slytherins snickered.

“Miss Parkinson! Were you or were you not going to add extra ginger roots and allow your potion to
bubble over?"

But not once did he look at Hermione, tease her, make fun or her, or point out how *textbook* perfect her potion was. It seemed more like he was avoiding her, and a small part of her was hurt by it, even though she was unsure why.
Chapter 16

Hermione continued to go about her business, while letting Harry and Ron think she was in the library. She knew that Harry had the map and she was surprised (and quite thankful) that he had never checked the map for her name; although she was concerned that he was developing a bad habit of watching people he didn’t like. She was heading to her first private lesson with Professor Moody since yule break.

She had stayed after the first class back to ask him when he wanted to see her again.

His magical eye spun every which way, but Hermione politely ignored it since his eyes occasionally did that during normal lessons as well.

Internally Crouch was cursing himself for what he wanted to say and made sure the magical eye was looking at everything but the petite witch in front of him. His pupil would be respected, because she was his pupil. The witch was a fine pupil and she would remain a fine sexless pupil.

He knew that Moody’s magical eye could see through many things, and had a great amount of fun the first few days with it, looking at different kinds of magic and through different witches’ cloaks and robes. He would respect Miss Granger and not look through her robes.

He licked his lip nervously, a nervous tick that he always had, and was glad that no one had picked up on it. He was more relieved that the students didn’t know the real Alastor Moody and wouldn’t be able to pick it up.

“I think we should start lessons back up on Friday, lass,” he said gruffly.

His normal blue eye boring into her hazel ones.

“Thank you so much, Professor Moody.”

As she was leaving the classroom she parted with, “I hope you enjoyed the pepper imps I got you for Christmas, sir.”

The door shut firmly behind her giving him no chance to respond.

“That girl is going to be the death of me if Potter or the Dark Lord don’t get to it first!” he kicked his desk.

Crouch enjoyed Miss Granger as a student. She wasn’t quick on the draw at first, but she was determined, passionate, wickedly brilliant, and… kind. 6 months ago he would have said that muggleborn Miss Granger wouldn’t survive the war because she didn’t deserve to live. She was a stupid muggleborn chit who was full of herself and kept her head firmly stuck in textbooks because she didn’t understand magic, because she was a magic thief like all muggleborns were.

But working close with her he was able to see firsthand that it wasn’t true. During his time at Hogwarts they all thought Lily Evans was a brilliant freak of nature, also smart. Smart and good at charms. The fiery redhead was also vindictive and spiteful, even if she was kind to the younger ones. Miss Granger was different. She was kind to everyone but those who were mean to her first, the small witch was no pushover.

A week into her private lessons with him if someone had asked if she would survive the war, he would have said no. She was too soft, too kind, she wouldn’t last an hour with Death Eaters. Now
however, now that he knew her and what she was capable of, she was a force to be reckoned with and he felt privileged to be part of her education.

The Dark Lord was going to be right pissed if he ever found out, but he was busy doing his bidding to help resurrect him. This whole mess was just that, a mess. He might have gone a bit mental the first week his Lord had passed, but that was only because his friend Regulus had told him that as long as the mark existed, the Dark Lord was alive. He made vows and promises and knew that at the end of the year things would go tits up.

The Dark Mark was a magic leech. As long as he, and all the other Death Eaters had it, the Dark Lord was leeching their magic and making himself stronger. It wasn’t in any of their benefits to have someone leech of their magic. If he had to bring the Dark Lord back in order to make sure he was gone for good, he would do so for the war effort. Regulus would have wanted it that way. But before things got better, things had to go tits up.

Hermione continued to show up for private lessons through term, and she progressed nicely. Crouch thought he could trip her up by starting to work on NEWT level cursed objects, just to see how she would do. He expected to have to heal her, and then explain how he didn’t think she would be able to do it anyways.

What he didn’t expect, and should have at this point really, was that she did remove the curses. He layered curse after curse, all of them benign of course, he didn’t want Dumbledore to jump down his throat should something actually happen to the lass, anxious to see how his pupil would handle it. He had showed her how to look for them and dismantle them twice. Once for surface curses then again later on for layered curses. He only gave her the basics in theory.

Crouch wasn’t a curse-breaker, but he used to be friends with many dark wizards. He knew that they loved a good joke, and half the time it meant that something was cursed and someone would get hurt for being naïve. Most of the Death Eaters knew how to dismantle cursed objects, if only to avoid being targeted from other Death Eaters for sport. The tricky ones however were the ones with larger curses hiding the smaller more dangerous curses.

Hermione was thrilled with her private lessons, her eyes twinkling every time lessons got harder. She knew what level spellwork she was doing, and she was honored that her professor thought she was skilled enough to do it. He was a hardened retired auror and he knew his line of work. She never once asked him about his lessons after the incident that he said that she could leave, she didn’t want to risk it.

The little witch however also chalked it up to the retired auror’s paranoia and how one could never be too prepared or too vigilant. It was the words ‘CONSTANT VIGILANCE’ drilled into her after every DADA lesson and every private lesson with him. She figured he would do something sneaky that “a dark wizard would do” and would be on constant odds and ends when working on projects with him.

It came in handy too, finding tiny curses, benign curses, hiding under the larger more prominent ones. It made Hermione appreciate curse-breakers even more. It made her admire Bill more, knowing that it was his choice career to be a curse-breaker.

She started to work on the little box, crouched over it, unaware of the feral smile she had. Crouch noticed it though, he knew that she was loving every minute of the challenge that she wasn’t receiving in class.
She wasn’t as good at Defense as Potter was, he was natural, but she was more advance, quick with her wand and she loved the challenge. However the little runt Potter was also waist deep in shit with the tournament and Rita Skeeter. He still caught Granger helping the boy, practically thinking for him. He was sure that if it wasn’t for the witch constantly telling him what to do he would be dead. At the end of the day though, it was Potter who saved Potter, even if Granger was his brain.

Nearly 40 minutes later Hermione had removed every curse on the little box, grinning at her achievement. As an afterthought however she put a small ward around it, just in case.

“How did I do, Professor?” she asked, standing up and biting her lip to try to keep the smile off her face.

Professor Mad-eye Moody had clunked his way over to the box to see if there was anything left on it. He had told her she had an hour to work on it, not giving away the amount of curses on it. He wanted her to figure it out on her own, she was given two options: either as she went along or by getting zapped and learning the hard way. He had tried to avoid looking at the witch and the box while she was working so he wouldn’t slip up and help her, or bark at her if she messed up.

His magical eye zoomed in on the ward on the box, knowing that he didn’t place it there.

“GRANGER! Who put that ward on that there box!” he barked at her.

Hermione looked at him with wide eyes, “I did, sir. Just in case,” she took a breath, “just in case I missed one.”

He grumbled under his breath, “Good work, girl. If you had missed one, this here ward would have protected someone else from being the victim. Now let’s see if you did miss one.”

Crouch noticed how the ward didn’t prevent him from going about his business, but saw that it would stop another person from getting at the box unless they dismantled the ward. His normal eye widened in awe, the ward was keyed to him. He set about looking for any of his curses, while his mind flew at the implications of Granger being able to make wards.

It simply wasn’t taught anymore. Ward masters and mistresses were hard to find and even harder to apprentice under. Proper wards masters and mistresses had to be in tune with the ley lines around them, it was a gift more than a skill that could be learned. Normal witches and wizards could make wards, but it was advance stuff, too advance for the average witch and wizard to bother with. Those who did and were not in tune with ley lines were considered strong, but their wards wouldn’t be up to the same snuff as a proper wards master.

The Moody imposter made a gruff sound, “Ye did good, lass. Not a single curse left on this here box!”

The petite witch allowed herself a small grin.

It wasn’t often that the wizard praised her. After she conquered the imperius curse it was more along the lines of; “Good! It’ll save your life!” In the beginning it was more; “What’re you smilin’ about!? This is basic stuff girl! Bottom feeders know how to do this in their sleep!”

“Now,” he started softly, “what is it that you know about wards? Tricky stuff they are, obscure in this day n age.”

Both of his eyes bore into her own hazel eyes.

“Wards are magical boundaries manipulated by the elemental ley lines that may or may not have a
keystone, so to speak. Regardless of the elements used in the wards, they don’t technically have an elemental weakness that would usually bend or break under normal circumstances. They’re mostly used for protection usually placed around homes, schools, and rooms. However they can also be placed in gems and stones, allowing for the ward to be portable, protecting the wearer, although more often than not, much weaker than a ward attached to the ground. However they can also be keyed to certain people and be keyed to do certain things within their boundaries.”

Crouch looked at Granger for a moment, “Very good, Miss Granger. Wards can also be used in battle as powerful shields, but normally only masters can do that. The last war all the ward masters and mistresses made themselves scarce, claiming neutrality and became hermits.”

Hermione looked at her professor and tilted her head slightly, as though absorbing the information.

“Where did you hear about wards, Miss Granger?” his voice still at a normal conversational tone.

“In the library, sir.”

“The library, eh? Did you find out much in the library, Miss Granger?” he asked.

“No, sir,” she said quietly and looked down at her shoes.

“Then how did you learn how to make wards?” a slight growl creeping into his voice.

“I… experimented with them, sir. One of the books mentioned off handedly that gems and stones made for weak but passable wards, which was why they are charmed instead, making a better safeguard for daughters. The ley lines aren’t fixed when they’re portable, that’s how I found out. I was looking up forms of protection, sir.”

Crouch let that sink into his head. It had taken an obscure mentioning for the girl to have found out about wards and how they functioned. He knew for a fact what books they had on wards in the library, having been curious himself in the past. He checked the library the first week to see if they had any new books, and only found new textbooks that had been assigned by different defense against the dark arts professors through the years. Other than that and some new magical beasts books, the library had basically the same books now as they did when he was in school.

“You did good today, lass. Good use of wards. CONSTANT VIGILANCE! Now take down these wards and scurry off. I’ll see ye tomorrow, same time.”

Hermione smiled at the grizzly wizard, took down the wards and left.

“Thank you, Professor! I’ll see you tomorrow.”

When the door shut behind her, he kept watching her with the magical eye.

“Yes, you will lass. Yes, you will.”

Crouch hobbled his way to his office. He had a lot to talk about.

Hermione was walking down the hall, heading towards the library for some light reading before bed. She had originally wanted to research everything she could about Crouch Sr., but Viktor was still a
regular visitor at her table in the library. She would have gladly tore through everything she could find about the last war, but she didn’t want anyone to see her doing it. So she would have to put it off… for now.

She would be asking Thimi about her old master though. While she respected her house-elf, it seemed as though the mystery of his illness if that’s what it was, was becoming serious. She hoped she didn’t have to, but if Thimi was unwilling she would order the elf to tell her.

She was still filtering the information that she had learned through Sirius. She was also filtering out her anger with Ronald. He kept attacking her pet project concerning house-elves, not even bothering to ask how it was going or if any of the objectives had changed.

They were living beings too, and they deserved the same respect. How would he feel if he was made to iron his hands for making a mistake!? He wouldn’t have fingers with how many mistakes he made!

She took a breath, calming herself with the knowledge that at least Sirius partially understood where she was coming from concerning Thimi. She would continue to let them live in ignorance, while Harry didn’t have as much of a big mouth, Ronald was part of the gossip machine. At least Harry knew how to keep things close to his vest. There were some things however that Harry simply could not resist telling Ron, so she would rather not take the risk.
Chapter 17

Crouch walked through his office door, shutting it firmly and locking it behind him with a spell.

While she was walking Severus saw her, noticing that she was coming from the defense classroom. He had considered stopping her and testing the little witch, if for his own amusement, to see how upset or angry he could get her. However keeping a close eye on her face he noticed her eyes flashed in anger momentarily only to be replaced by what seemed like minor irritation.

It was her eyes flashing quickly with heated emotion that brought him back to her eyes that night on the ball. It had been months since then and her eyes still haunted him. The potions master quickly abandoned the idea. He had considered leaving the grounds in search of a witch in Knockturn Alley, but quickly threw that thought aside with Mad-eye Moody being in residence. He was already under enough scrutiny, he didn’t need the old grizzled auror sniffing him for a... call girl’s perfume.

At least that’s what he told himself to help him sleep at night. It was merely the knowledge that no witch there would have half the passion in her eyes the way that Miss Granger did that night. He had indeed lit up a few of their eyes for different reasons, namely his voice, but also for his equipment. The cards of fate hadn’t given much of a face to look at, but they made up for it in other ways.

He would find a way to banish the girl from his thoughts! She was like the damned plague, having turned into a little epidemic amongst his hormonal Slytherins.

Thankfully they weren’t obvious about it, but he knew what to look and listen for. If he hadn’t been teaching for more than a decade, he was sure he would have been scarred for life. Sometimes he wished that their rooms weren’t charmed, allowing for staff members to hear the students in their rooms, silencing charms or not. He knew it was a safety precaution, and he half-heartedly approved of their use of a silencing charm in general, but sometimes he wished he wasn’t so thorough in his patrol.

Once the, now curly haired, witch had passed he shot an annoyed look at her back. It was technically her fault. He was pleased at first with the effect it had on his students that believed in the pureblood propaganda, now however it was simply annoying, if still effective.

He did get at least some sort of satisfaction at seeing their guilty faces when receiving letters from home, that he knew were mostly from family members reminding them about pureblood and their line and how to not let that muggle-loving headmaster corrupt them.

‘Well bravo. The headmaster didn’t even need to corrupt them. A muggleborn did it for him, and now all the skirt chasers have a dirty secret fantasy starring Miss Granger.’

The potions master continued walking down the hall, sneering slightly at the retired auror’s door. With the Dark Mark getting darker, it was worrying, if not unexpected. The headmaster had assured him that there would be a time when it would come again, and the dark mark would be their warning sign. However, as expected as it was, regardless of the time frame, he decided to stay as far away from Mad-eye as he was able lest he be accused of more crimes that he had not committed. More so because he still held enough clout that if framed correctly, could have him behind bars. He’d seen it happen more than enough times, and being marked would just expedite his supposed crime.
Crouch had used the magical eye to make sure that he was well and truly alone. He almost laughed despairingly to himself how well he had fallen into his act as the old grizzly like man, becoming just as paranoid.

He opened the older wizard’s trunk, and found his captive down there.

“Hey, old man”, he said fondly.

“Let’s catch up on today, and while we’re at it, I have mash for you. No gravy though, sorry.”

Crouch lowered a plate of mashed potatoes down for the wizard in the trunk with his wand. The older wizard in the trunk sat up and grabbed the plate gratefully.

“Well then, catch me up, boy!” he growled up at the young man parading to be him.

“You remember Miss Granger, yes?”

“What you’ve told me about the lass. She’s your private pupil, in’t she?”

“That’s the one.”

“What about her?” he asked curiously.

While Crouch had told him her progress from time to time, what he covered, and questions on what he should cover with the witch, he never really spoke of her.

“I found out today, that she has the potential to be a wards mistress.”

The old wizard was stunned and almost dropped his plate.

“What?”, his voice was quiet as though afraid that it was a lie.

“Exactly! She was able to put up a small ward and key it to me!”

“The lass is a fourth year?”

“A fourth year who knows how to make wards!”

“What else?”

“Well I tried to trip her up with a cursed object, don’t worry all benign your name won’t be sullied, some NEWT level stuff. I expected her to miss the two small ones, which I shouldn’t have, I should know this by now. But she did it. She did it, and just in case she missed one she put a ward around the box! A ward that she keyed to me so I could check it!”

“She key warded a box on the off chance she missed a curse?”

“Yeah!”

“Smart lass. Cursed objects shouldn’t be gettin’ by her.”

“I told her that when we started on cursed objects for her private lessons. I even mentioned how some of the Death Eaters did it for fun.”

The grizzled auror in the trunk snorted at him.
The Moody imposter rolled his eyes at the real Mad-eye knowing how he felt about the subject.

“Now that you know, what should I do? I don’t want to tell the headmaster, no knowing what he’d do. But I also don’t want her to go untrained with such a rare gift.”

“Mail order the lass a few books, use my galleons. They’re going to be hefty price. Use some of my pay as well. Start with that.”

“Light, Dark, or Gray books?”

The older wizard frowned, looking at his stump leg in thought.

“… Light and Gray. Nothing Dark… not unless… not unless she might need it.”

“Well considering HE is coming back by the end of the school year.”

The grizzly wizard huffed, “Order one Dark book… Old… Rare. Useful.”

“Actually sounds right up her alley considering taste in books. Old and obscure. Seems useless to most wizards.”

“It’s going to cost a leg!” he barked up at the younger wizard.

“Ha. Ha. Like that ever gets old.”

The older wizard growled, “In my peg leg. There is a good amount of galleons. That book is going to be expensive. Expensive enough that Malfoy would be interested in purchasing it just to brag about how expensive it is. If you could use your own galleons, if not for such a suspicious purchase, I’d make you do it.”

Crouch sighed as though he lost a battle, “Thanks, old man. I know she’ll love it. I’ll check over titles with you tomorrow. Do you need another blanket?”

Alastor looked at his stump leg again.

“Aye, for my leg. Ghost pains. And something else to read. It’s gets damn boring in this blasted trunk!”

“Aye, old man, aye,” Crouch teased fondly.

The next Monday morning brought the post and Hermione was anxious for her morning paper. It was her first subscription, even though her parents had their own. She was quite fed up with finding out information through taunts from the Slytherins, and it seemed as though the older students didn’t much care for a subscription themselves. The few that did though, didn’t bother sharing.

What she was not expecting however was the hate mail that had come in a flock because of that horrid Skeeter woman.

Hermione had taken the first letter from a gray owl, opened it.

“What on earth-?” she started reading it and her nostrils flared.

“Oh really!” she sputtered, her face going red.
“What’s up?” Ron questioned.

“It’s- oh how ridiculous-!”

She thrust the letter at Harry, who saw that it was not hand written, but composed from pasted letters that seemed to have cut out from the *Daily Prophet*.

“**YOU are a WickEd girl. Harry Potter desErVe BeTteR. GO back wherE you cAMe from muGgle.**”

While all the other owls were trying to have their letter taken first, Hermione instead used her wand to take the letters instead of touching them. She knew that many witches had a great unhealthy *fondness* of Harry, and if this letter was any indication of the rest, it would be safer to inspect them than touch them first.

Four of the six were safe, She levitated all of them in front of her while she opened them after scanning them for curses or something equally ask foul so her friends could see them with her.

The first two were safe enough, even if the words were poison.

“They’re all like it!”

“**‘Harry Potter can do much better than the likes of you…’ ‘You deserve to be boiled in frog spawn…’**”

The third one didn’t pass inspection and indeed held something foul. Undiluted bubotuber pus.

Hermione was quite grateful now that she had spent so much time with Professor Moody, or else she was sure that she would have opened up the letter and have come in contact with the foul substance.

She glared at the offending letter. How *dare* these witches target her! FOR WHAT!?

She inspected the next letter and opened it and read it aloud, “*I read in Witch Weekly about how you are playing Harry Potter false and that boy has had enough hardship and I will be sending you a curse by next post as soon as I can find a big enough envelope.*”

“Blimey,” Ron exhaled, “I warned you not to annoy Rite Skeeter!”

“Shut up, Ronald!”

The petite red faced witch swished her wand, packaging her letters all together.

“Tell Professor Sprout that I’ve gone to see the Headmaster about something important.”

She kept her letters at least a foot away from her, to prevent them from accidentally touching her. She considered putting a ward around them, but decided against it. She knew with how Professor Moody reacted that it was a skill that she would have to keep to herself for a while. She got up and turned on her heel, heading up to the Headmaster’s tower.

‘*I’ll ask Neville what we’ve done in Herbology since it’s his best subject. That Skeeter woman is playing with me, well let’s see how much she likes it when I play back.*’

The next night at her private lesson with Crouch imposter Moody, he praised her for her thinking and
found himself agreeing with the half-giant over the advice to stop opening the hate letters. He was concerned that witches were targeting his pupil, some of them with obvious pureblood beliefs that he himself used to believe. He knew that witches would be offended for The-Boy-Who-Lived, however he was reminded of how spiteful and petty upper class witches tended to be.

Especially those who read the rags that Rita Skeeter had articles in. That witch was a real piece of work, but had enough writing out there to be well known and considered credible. If only he could be a fly on the wall to find out how it was that Rita found her information.

With the recent flashes of hate mail however, he decided it would be best to do a refresher on how to scan objects and such for curses and harmful objects. He even decided to teach her some gray spells that would catch some of the curses undetectable by light spells alone. They were gray enough that they weren’t considered dark, per say, but definitely weren’t illegal.

The purebloods would be coming out of the Forbidden Forest for this one, and he would be sure that his pupil would know what to look for and how to protect herself from the masses. He was sure that he would only be there until the end of the year when things would start to go tits up, and he wanted to make sure his pupil was as well prepared as he could get her in a year.

He was also glad for his innate Slytherin discretion when ordering the books or else he was sure if he had mentioned names or anything extra as to why he wanted them. He was sure if he mentioned names, like Miss Granger a student with potential, or something of the like he would have either been denied business or been sent some hate mail full of that bubotuber pus. He was pretty sure of it, respected auror name or no.

House witches could be petty bitches. They have nothing better to do than send hate mail to a Hogwarts student who was not even of age, as far as they knew. They had to send hate mail to a teenager, because that’s the mature thing to do apparently.

‘Witches are such bitches. I’m so glad I never married’, Crouch thought after reading some of Hermione’s letters.
The Easter Holidays were fast approaching and so was the final task of the tournament. Professor Moody was cracking the proverbial whip down harder on his students than he had all year. He was becoming more intense, including than their first few lessons with him. They thought they had adjusted to the old auror, but he was proving them all wrong. Well, all but Hermione, but that was because she was taking extra lessons with him so she was used to intense, and was more secretly elated than not. Although she had to put up with everyone’s groaning and complaining without saying anything or giving anything away.

No one knew she was taking private lessons now, just like they hadn’t known all year. Hermione almost told Harry, but she didn’t want Ronald to know.

They were constantly fighting with each other lately, and he kept picking on her personal pet project and kept calling her names. At first it just upset her and made her angry. The more he did it however the more she acknowledged that he was putting her down in his own way. Whether he realized it or not, Ronald was a pureblood with pureblood beliefs.

Not as strongly, mind you, but he had the same beliefs all the same. Fred and George didn’t, and the way they behaved around her and spoke to her spoke volumes, so she knew it wasn’t simply a Weasley thing. Ginny didn’t behave that way towards her either. Ronald though… sometimes he reminded her of Malfoy.

He didn’t say things arrogantly, but sometimes he said them snidely and rudely as though she were a “stupid muggleborn”. He spoke to her as though there were things she didn’t know because she was a muggleborn and whether he realized it or not, he spoke to her often as though she was his inferior. It often infuriated them both because she was obviously smarter than him, did better than him, but when it came to some cultural norms that he knew and she didn’t (or didn’t agree with), he spoke to her as though she was… beneath him. Not just him however, beneath pure and halfblood wizard and witches.

He even did it first year, while complaining to Harry about her. He often made her cry with his complaints about her, speaking badly of her, simply because she’d done magic well. While the other wizards and witches had problems with her, none of them besides the Slytherins were as vocal about them besides Ron.

He complained about her the first time he met her on the train and hoped that she wouldn’t be in the same house he was in. He complained when she told them not to leave to meet Malfoy for their fake midnight duel (she knew it was a trap). When she wasn’t speaking to them for that incident and then did in disgust at Harry for being rewarded when he should have been punished, Ronald had said “don’t stop now, it was doing us so much good.” Then later on that Halloween night that she got caught up in their life debts, “It’s no wonder no one can stand her, she’s a nightmare, honestly.” And when Harry mentioned that she heard the red head had said “So? She must’ve noticed she’s got no friends.”

Ronald was rude, mean, and had little to no sympathy. She wouldn’t have bitten her tongue so much that year if it weren’t for the life debts. She lied for them, feeling that being expelled was worse than death, or at least that’s what he magic was telling her. She didn’t know why, but she knew she was going to find out.

Harry sometimes agreed with Ronald though, but she could see in his eyes that he knew she was right. She was a bossy swot then, and she was a bossy swot now. At least now more often than not
Harry listened to her, knowing it would probably be right or save his life.

Ron never spoke Harry the way that he spoke her when he didn’t know something though.

He explained things to the best of his ability, while bringing in wizarding history and common knowledge. He did so kindly with little to no judgement. Sure they argued and had their own rows, mostly stemming from Ronald’s jealousy. But that was more of a sibling thing she noticed.

Ron was a better strategist as far as they knew, Hermione was pants at chess, at least wizard’s chess. It was barbaric, and she felt bad seeing the pieces who moved like real people get… killed basically. Not that they ever bothered to play checkers or any other board or card games with each other. It was always chess or exploding snaps, because they were normal wizarding games, and they were games that he was good at.

Since she had repaid her life debt to Ronald Weasley she hadn’t really wanted much to do with him. She had become their friend only because of the life debts. Sometimes she wasn’t sure if that was a good thing. She love Harry like a brother, and that was the only reason she was happy about the troll incident. Ronald, she could well do without, but put up with him for Harry. Ronald was only in her life, on speaking terms, because of Harry Potter, and the less he knew about her business, the better.

Her next private lesson was going as it normally did, intense. He started off with shooting a surprising *Imperio* at her, that she was able to shrug off. She looked at him startled for a moment, but saw that he was proud of her accomplishment.

It had been months since the imperius was cast on her, and it was gratifying to know that she still had the willpower to throw it off as quickly as it had come.

“Good, lass. But CONSTANT VIGILANCE! That could have been any spell! It could have been a stunner or something darker like an entrail-expelling curse!”

The rest of the lesson was practicing shields and redirecting hexes and curses. Today’s lesson was mostly about self-preservation, without wasting magic by retaliating. He had surprised her by telling her that a simple movement such as ducking, could also save her life. While she knew that, it was obvious that many other magical fold weren’t aware of this.

They kept going until her professor decided to have her just work on ducking for a solid 20 minutes. They stopped after she showed signs of fatigue.

“Good job, lass, make sure to practice ducking over the break.”

“Yes, sir,” she said with a small smile.

Hermione went to grab her bag knowing a dismissal when she heard one from the grizzly wizard.

“Ah, wait, lass. I have something important to show you. But I need to swear you to secrecy, so that you won’t share this with anyone who doesn’t already know,” his eyes staring intently on her.

“Sir?” she questioned, knowing how serious he was. He wasn’t asking for an unbreakable vow, but something just as serious.

“It’s important Granger, it could be the difference between life and death. Knowledge is a powerful thing, and of all the people in this castle, you should know.”
Hermione both felt elation and dread at his words. It was very high praise, especially from such a paranoid wizard, but also something very serious. She didn’t want to go headstrong into this, but knew subconsciously that this was a very limited opportunity. It could be the difference between life and death, and more often than not with her close relationship to Harry, it was life and death.

“Yes, sir.”

He looked at her, knowing that she thought it through. It had been a heated discussion to get him to agree to this at all.

“I need you to solemnly swear that you will keep the information that is about to be departed onto you to yourself and only tell those on a need to know basis. Now take out your wand, and level it with mine.”

Hermione looked at her professor shrewdly, but took out her wand and held it level with his and looked him straight in the eyes.

“I solemnly swear to keep the information about to be departed onto me to myself and only tell those who need to know.”

A thin wisp of magic came from the tip of her wand, a ghostly blue, and swirled slowly until it touched her professor’s wand, which glowed gold.

“Good.” He said abruptly, “Follow me to my office.”

Hermione stowed away her wand and followed her professor.

Once they had reached his office and she was inside, he turned around and swished his wand, locking and silencing it.

Hermione’s adrenaline started to pump.

“Granger what you’re about to see and what you’re about to hear, must be kept to yourself. Don’t jump and start hexing by jumping to conclusions.”

Hermione nodded, having already agreed when she swore with her magic.

He turned around and opened a compartment of his trunk. He shifted around a few times that seemed to be quite uncomfortable. She watched as he took out his magical eye and dropped it into the trunk and turned around so she wouldn’t have to see inside of his socket, deciding it would be best to give him some privacy.

“Let me know when you’re ready, sir.” She said, feeling slightly uncomfortable with her professor to her back.

She knew and trusted him, but had also had his motto drilled into her head, and constant vigilance did not mean leaving someone at your back. So she turned so she could see in her peripheral vision should she need or want to.

She heard some clothe swishing and took some deep calming breaths to slow her heart rate knowing that he wasn’t about to molest her.

“Ready, lass.”
She took another breath and turned to look at her professor only to be met with two of him. One of them had his eye closed so she couldn’t see inside of his socket and was leaning heavily on the desk since he didn’t have the peg leg.

“Sir?”

She asked, knowing he had asked her not to jump to conclusions.

“Granger, I am not Alastor Moody, but I have been your professor for the past few months. This is Alastor Moody and your world is about to be shaken quite a bit. Don’t worry, he’s been helping with your lessons, so you might as well have been learning from him.”

Hermione nodded speechlessly.

“Miss Granger, I am Alastor Moody, and I have heard much about ye lass. You’ve done well, and I hope to see some of your feats for myself.”

She quickly looked at her professor, who nodded sternly, and nodded at the real Moody.

Her professor’s skin started to bubble and his whole shape shifted and turned into a haggard looking young man, about Sirius’s age, with lines around his eyes that carried the same haunted look. He was pale-skinned, slightly freckled, and had a small mop of fair straw colored hair. Her professor smoothed his hair a bit with his hand to the side, his eyes just as stern as the real Moody beside her.

She looked at her professor with courage blazing in her eyes. He knew she wanted to hex first and then question him until she couldn’t think of anything else to ask. He knew she was a little scared, but had decided to overrun it with her willpower.

“Miss Granger, I am Bartemius Crouch Jr., but people call know me as Barty Crouch.”

Her eyes widened, “You’re supposed to be dead,” her voice quiet and almost breathless.

The young man nodded, “I would have been had it not been for my mother. I was dying, and on my deathbed my parents came to see me. My mother was dying of cancer, and took polyjuice to trade places with me. My father took me home, placed me under the imperious curse and an invisibility cloak, and kept me hidden and captive in my own home until the World Cup. Winky had been taking care of me every day since he brought me home from Azkaban.”

“The seat wasn’t empty, it was you. You took Harry’s wand, not Thimi,” she said quietly, mostly to herself.

“Winky,” he corrected.

“No,” she said softly, with a small frown. She thought about it quickly and decided that he had his own secrets, but Thimi was a key part in this.

“Her name is Thimi now. Your father gave her clothes because she was caught with Harry’s wand. She started to drink, and… and… I took her in. She was dying. She’s my house elf now and she’s been given a new name so she won’t be associated with the name Winky and Crouch again. Winky was known as a house elf who dared to touch a wizard’s wand. No one knows about Thimi.”

Crouch eyes widened in astonishment. Everyone had heard of her house-elf crusade and had made fun of it. They had heard how she wanted to free all house elves and give them wages. For Hermione Granger to own a house elf sounded like a complete turnaround. It hurt him a little to know that his father had very nearly killed Winky, Thimi now. She was the only one who cared for
him after his mother died, he would even go as far as to say that she loved him. It was her idea that he be allowed to go see the World Cup. He was comforted though in knowing that it was Granger that took her in. She would be treated well, he knew.

“You made a new life for a house elf, Miss Granger?” Alastor asked, with an eyebrow raised, and his magical eye looking her up and down.

“Yes, sir. Thimi was framed and didn’t deserve what she was put through. She doesn’t deserve to be known as a bad and shameful house elf,” she stared at the auror and dared him to tell her that she was wrong, her eyes were burning with a fire in them.

While the old auror heard about her and about her house elf campaign, he could tell she was a lass about justice. The way that she was staring him down, her eyes light with a dangerous fire, she was quite a respectable spitfire.

He burst out in a barking gut bursting laughter.

“Well done, lass! Looking out for those not in a position to do so themselves is very respectable!”

At first Hermione was affronted by his laughter and then shocked when she found out he wasn’t laughing at her.

“Thank you, sir.”

The old retired auror grinned at the young witch, his scars stretching across his face, as his eyes glinted approval.

“The reason you’re about to be in the know lass is very important. You’ll be in a position that almost no one else can be in, you’re going to have to do a job that no one else can. You’re equipped and talented, and we’re going to do our best with ye.”

She raised her eyebrow in question, “Sir?”

“The Dark Lord is coming back soon, Granger. Pettigrew came with him and found me at my house. Bertha Jorkins knew about me and about many things, and was tortured and killed for information. He hatched a plan that involved me impersonating Moody. I have a fine line to walk, lass. So I went with Pettigrew to kidnap the old bear here. He was originally placed under the imperius, but I had to talk to him. It’s important that the right people know about this.”

“The Dark Lord has created… horcruxes. One of my friends found out and tried to destroy one, and destroyed his mind and lost his life in the process. It was an old pendant that belonged to Slytherin. As long as the dark mark exists, he’s alive.”

“What’s a… horcrux?” Hermione asked, keeping her voice low.

She knew it was something dark and horrible, her skin felt slimy just hearing the word.

“It’s terrible, dark, magic, lass. A horcrux is a dark object containing a fragment of a dark wizard or witch’s soul. The idea is that it helps give them immortality. So when they die, they can be brought back to life because a piece of their soul hasn’t been killed,” Moody answered her, his voice grave and gravelly.

“The Dark Lord made more than one. He’s going to return during the final task,” he said, looking desperately at her.
Hermione’s heart gripped in fear.

“Terrible things are going to happen during the final task of this damn tournament. The Dark Lord is expecting me to do certain things, and I need you to understand that I have to play my part. I need to help bring him down, but to do that, I have to be a spy. He already found me, he knows I’m alive. Dumbledore doesn’t know, and I’m probably going to go back to Azkaban for a while,” he tried to smile but it came out more as a grimace as the haunted look in his eyes grew bigger.

“I trust Dumbledore to make great decisions concerning the greater good, lass. However Dumbledore is only human and… and he too makes mistakes. He’s not above using people for the greater good. You’ve got the innate ability to be a wards mistress. If he found out, you would be used and… abused. He would guilt trip you into overworking yourself and possibly sacrificing yourself for the greater good,” Moody’s real eye was looking at the floor while the other one stared at her.

Hermione felt like her gut was punched and she was left breathless. They were pulling the rug from under her, knowing her absolute trust in the headmaster.

“Does the headmaster know about… about…” she looked back and forth between the two men.

They looked at each other slightly shame faced, “We believe so, lass. But he’s always kept his cards close to vest. It wouldn’t be something you would normally share with another unless you were 100% positive. Albus has always been brilliant and with his forays in the war against Grindelwald, he would know about them.”

“… Why are you telling me?”

They were silent for a moment before Barty answered.

“You’re close to Harry Potter. There’s a prophecy and he’s going to be made to fight against the Dark Lord. He needs all the help he can get. He’s a stubborn boy, because he’s just that… he’s a boy, and he’s not ready for war. Soon he’s going to rebel against adults, and he’s going to need someone there to protect and watch him.”

Hermione couldn’t help the sad laugh that escaped her lips.

“I suppose I have no choice. I still owe him a life debt. What else do I need to know?”

Barty smiled sadly at her and Moody lifted his chin up, proud of the young witch. News of an upcoming war was a lot to put on a fourth year.
Moody’s magical eye looked all over the young witch’s magic, seeing that her core seemed suspiciously completely mature. It was the main reason why they had made the joint decision to go ahead with their plan. Potter was still a boy, and Granger was still his year and should have still been just a wee lass. Her core was mature however, which meant that she was an adult, and it would be she who would have to be ready.

The old wizard decided to speak first, “What you need to know is the identity of some of our spies. That’ll be debriefed tomorrow. As soon as the bastard comes back, the Order of the Phoenix will be back. Crouch here isn’t an official spy, and took a damn good convincing for me to believe him. But he took veritaserum and I know you can’t lie around that. I knew it was the real deal instead of water, because I tested it out myself. He also… took an unbreakable vow. And he’s still standing, so I trust him, and I’m sure I’ll be in hot water with your headmaster later on.”

Barty took over, “What you also need to know is how to fight and protect yourself and others and well… wards. We bought you three books, we expect you to read them and practice some of what’s written. Most wizards and witches can’t make heads or tails of what’s written in these books because they don’t understand wards. But you’re smarter than most witches and wizards… And you have an innate affinity for wards, and it should come in handy during the war. One of the books we would prefer if you read in our company. It’s… it’s a dark book.”

Hermione blushed and looked at the floor at that. It did not go amiss by either wizard.

“Lass?”

“I uhm… I’ve… I’ve taken Harry’s cloak a few times to read in the forbidden section. I also got a pass in second year from Gilderoy Lockhart to take out a book from there. I’ve… I’ve read dark books before.”

Surprise flashed across both wizards’ faces. Being able to read about the dark and not practice it was a good sign. Even better now that they knew they didn’t have to worry as much as they had been when buying the damn expensive book.

Crouch decided to push on however, knowing they had limited time until someone became suspicious of the young witch not being in the library.

“Lass, how old are you? Really?”

Hermione looked confused and tilted her head to the side, her lips pouting a bit.

“Your core. With Moody’s mad-eye we can see your core is mature. We have to look really closely and put quite a bit of magic into it, but we could see it. It doesn’t mature until a wizard or witch is 17 in age, making them an adult.”

“Oh. In third year I had a time-turner for classes. I kept track of the time spent and I made sure that I did it exact so I would still have my own technical birthday down to the last second. It makes arithmancy easier. I used it enough so that I would turn 17 this year.”

The way she said it was so offhandedly, as though it was normal. Time-turners were very hard to get, and students and their professors had to cross a lot of red tape to even get one for a week, let alone a whole school year.
Crouch squinted at her to make sure he was seeing her correctly.

“The glamour on your teeth?” Moody asked.

Hermione blushed and brought her hand to her mouth before removing it and fiddling with the hem of her shirt.

“I uh… in second year, I made polyjuice potion, which worked perfectly fine for Harry and Ron, but mine… I… I accidentally used cat hair. It’s so similar to human hair, and well…” she shrugged helplessly.

Moody’s mad-eye zeroed in on her, looking very hard at her.

Crouch had not been exaggerating when he said that she was brilliant. Making a NEWT level potion in second year. It was before she had the time turner. Was she unaware of how much magic went into NEWT level potions? NEWT level was for older magical folk various reasons. They were dangerous, violate, often time consuming, and magically draining.

“Were you tired at all when making the potion lass?”

“Not really no, more anxious than anything. I was… making it in Moaning Myrtle’s lavatory. It was quite stress inducing since it’s not exactly up to code or ideal with potion making” She looked at anyways but the wizards in front of her, hoping beyond hope they weren’t judging her. She thought she was going to learn more not being questioned about her non-academic though technically academic activities.

Moody was impressed, it was as though Circe herself had made sure the lass was born at the right time.

“I thought this was a ‘need to know to prepare for the war’ meeting and now I’m assuming ‘becoming a bodyguard for Harry’ training.”

“It is, lass,” Crouch assured her.

“Basically, we’re going to train you for the upcoming war. You’re going to know how to fight and protect yourself and at least Potter. You’re going to do independent study and practice on wards under our supervision. You’re going to know how to help identify and destroy the horcruxes.”

“Anyways what you need to know is that Snape-”

“Professor Snape,” she corrected on habit and blushed after she realized what she had done.

Barty’s lip quirked up at that. “- Professor Snape, is a spy. He’s Albus Dumbledore’s spy, but he also spies for the Dark Lord. He walks a very careful line, and cannot find out about this. If either lords find out about this, you could be under attack in different ways. The Dark Lord, obviously through attacks and torture. Dumbledore through manipulation and abuse.”

“He seems dotty and kind about it though,” the auror threw in off-hand.

“I know… he’s abused Harry enough, but Harry doesn’t see it.”

“His abuse with Potter and his abuse that could affect you are similar and different. He’ll make you feel like he’s the only person that can help you. He’ll ask you to do things you’re not ready to do.
“Dumbledore is a good wizard now, but before the war with Grindlewald…” Moody looked away, his eye shifting madly, “before the war with Grindlewald, Albus was close with the dark wizard. Before the death of his sister, things were different… he wanted what Grindlewald wanted, but when he fled the scene of her death, leaving Albus and Aberforth, things changed,” he finished in a whisper.

Hermione’s eyes widened. She didn’t tell anyone, but she had heard similar things from Viktor, which was why she was giving him somewhat of a cold shoulder at the second task. She thought he was lying and speaking ill of the grand Headmaster, but now…

“You’ll need to avoid the headmaster and Professor Snape. If you don’t, things might very well…”

“They’ll go tits up,” the older wizard humphed.

“It’ll be easier to train you because you’re smarter and it’ll be one on one or two on one. If you have the time, it’ll be easier if you give us your Easter Holiday to work with you on this. We may not likely have the summer with ye, lass.”

Hermione look shame faced at the mention of the holiday.

“What?”

“I was… going to go home for the Easter Holiday. I have a lot to talk about with my parents that I haven’t said in a letter. Thimi being one of them. But… but we have room… we have a room at… uhm…”

“Where lass?” Moody asked, assuming it would be a guest room in their small muggle house that was on file with the school.

“At our chateau in France.”

Crouch looked stunned for a moment.

“At your castle? In France?”

“Yes, sir.”

“At your muggle castle? In France?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You have a castle?”

“Yes, sir,” slowly becoming a mix of annoyed and amused.

Crouch looked at Moody as though the older wizard was able to explain how a muggleborn had a castle. Most purebloods had castles and manors, it was very normal. It wasn’t normal, as far as he was aware, for muggles and muggleborns to have castles or manors.

“How do you have a castle?”

Hermione’s facial expression morphed into a wordless unamused answer.

“Do all muggles have castles? No right?”
“No, sir. Not all muggles have castles. I don’t like to talk about it.”

“I understand that, lass. Crouch! Leave the lass alone! She doesn’t wanna talk about her castle with you,” the elder wizard stepped in.

Crouch pursed his lips at the older wizard. Normally when the death eaters had gone on muggle raids they all had normal houses or flats or something of the sort. None of them had castles. They were aware of the Queen and the Royals and their castles and manors, they were off limits for some reason. He thought about it a bit more.

“Granger…. Are you? Are you a Lady?”

Hermione blushed and glared while crossing her arms, “Of course I’m a lady.”

“No no no, are you Lady Granger?”

Hermione blushed and looked away.

“Y… yes, sir.”

Crouch walked to the other side of the desk and let himself fall into the chair. He was floored, his muggleborn pupil was a lady. The smart and brilliant witch that surpassed his expectations, was a lady. He didn’t know why he was so surprised, but he felt like he was internally trying to grasp onto something that would explain it.

Moody saw that Crouch was having a moment trying to take it in. He remembered when his own pupil surprised him a few times. But his pupil Tonks was surprising and it was part of what helped made her such a damn good auror.

“Why don’t ye wantin’ the rest of wizarding Britain to know, lass?”

Hermione looked up at the real Moody.

“Because I don’t want them to treat me different. My parents took up a dentist practice as a hobby, so we have a house and we don’t live at the castle or the estate. I’ve been telling everyone that they’re dentists, because they are, so they don’t go digging in my business. I may be a lady, but I’m still a muggleborn. If they knew I was a lady they might treat me different. Probably a good different, but they would probably have Professor Crouch’s reaction. I’m no better than any other muggleborn first and foremost though.”

Moody nodded accepted the young witch’s answer. He knew how the purebloods would act, just assuming she was from a squib line and accepting her as a half-blood at best so their ideologies would be able to stand firm in their minds. They would treat her with the respect a half-blood with a good line would receive, because she had old money. As far as they knew now she was barely richer than the Weasleys with dirty blood. Yet she was more brilliant and more magically gifted, an anomaly. If she were from a squib line, it would be magic descended and would soothe their frayed nerves at her accomplishments. It was part of muggleborn pride, daring them to treat her less while she was better.

“They also didn’t want me growing up like… like Malfoy. My father never had his nose in the air, and my mother was” she paused to think about a proper word, “a regular English citizen. My father is English and French, but his mother was English and because she was a she, she was far down enough that she was able to keep her life private. When she married grand-père, the family decided it would be best to keep it as private and secret as possible.”
Moody secretly approved of the family’s decision, more so now since royal family had a witch in their family. If people were to look too hard or to question too much, they may have had a possible witch hunt in their future, if not at least fake her death. It was better though since the Ministry had to have contact with the Muggle government and a select few knew about them, with the proper vows in place of course.

“Granger, how did your father react when he found out about ye being a witch?”

“My father was… calm and accepting. When we were alone he told me how proud he was and how proud his grandmother would have been and it was... nice.”

“His grandmother?”

“Yes, Mamie Helen. She wasn’t a witch, but she was considered the local witch in her town. It’s different in muggle culture. She read palms and tarot cards. She made homemade remedies for the sick, things like that. She was the only reason why I bothered with Divination when I did.” She mumbled the last part under her breath.

“Does anybody else know about her? Aside from us.” Crouch suddenly asked.

“Aside from my family, no. I haven’t told anybody about my grandparents, let alone my great grandparents.”

“Good. Keep it that way.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow at her professor that spoke for her, silently saying ‘Like I wasn’t?’

Barty pursed his lips at the young lady. He was proud of her, he liked her, but he was also unnerved by her. Sometimes, without meaning to, she reminded him of Snape. The eyebrow movements she sometimes did, they brought back memories. He knew Snape was a spy for the light and dark, and had been assured by the headmaster that Severus had his complete faith.

Even with the headmaster’s assurance, he still wasn’t sure how to feel about Snape, and knew how creepily brilliant he was. He had been doing his best to be Moody, and it had thankfully kept Snape out of his hair.

“So about Easter hols?” The witch asked instead.

“It would be for the best, we don’t have much time. If it weren’t for this bloody tournament I would have had Crouch focusing more on you than he has been tryin’ to help Potter. The lad needs the help, else he’d be dead by now,” Moody grumbled.

Hermione had nothing to say to that since she knew he was right. She was still a bit mad she didn’t think of gillyweed even though she saw it almost every time she went into the potion store room.

She had been firm with herself to not overthink or even so much as look at the other ingredients in the store room. She would have loved to make other potions not on the syllabus, but she would be damned if she got caught… again. Granted Professor Snape still thought it was Harry, but still. In her opinion she was known as a theif, Harry being the scapegoat or not (and he was).

“I’ll have to let my parents know so they can at least air the chateau out and get it ready for inhabitants,” she said instead.

Both wizards nodded.
“In the meantime…” Barty started, fishing around in his desk to take out the books they bought for her, “I’d still feel better if you had one of us here when reading the dark book, so that stays here. I have Potter’s map so he won’t be able to find you in here.”

“Yes, sir.”

He finally found the books, not that they were hard to find, just hard to get to with all the parchments on top of them. He took them out one by one, since they were all thick and heavy.

Hermione’s heart fluttered at seeing them, her lips curved into a small. They were the perfect types of books for obscure branches of magic. They looked just as big as Hogwarts, A History, they smelled old, and looked like they were in excellent condition.

“Wards and Their Keepers, Safekeeping Between Spheres, and Estranged Wards of the Endowed. Estranged Wards of the Endowed is yours, but it’s dark enough where we’d feel better if you were with us. Moody would prefer you don’t practice any of the wards in this book, but—”

“- but war doesn’t care about what you prefer. I tried to not kill when I was given leave to kill. But I’m not a muggleborn who is about to have a price on her head for being friends with The Boy Who Lived. I’m not saying I’m better than you or you are than me, lass. I’m saying that—”

“- that I’m in more danger than you because I’m a target. It’s going to be kill or be killed… It would be better to be prepared than to not be prepared at all,” Hermione finished.

“When you’re practicing the darker wards, you’ll be with me,” Barty said softly.

Hermione tilted her head, “Darker wards?”

“One of the books is gray. It’s magic that depends on the intent,” The older wizard said bluntly.

“All magic is based on intent,” the petite witch said, crossing her arms and shifting on one hip.

“Indeed it is, lass.” Crouch said grinning, “Now come here and grab your two other books. The third one cost Moody a leg.”

Hermione looked over at the peg-legged wizard curiously, going forward to grab her gifts.

“Any other books like that,” he growled pointing to the expensive dark book, “you’ll have to order through me. But you’ll have to pay for them yourself, Lady Granger.”

“Would you like me to reimburse you for it?” she asked politely.

“It’s a gift, lass! You don’t reimburse gifts!” he shouted at the small witch, making her cheeks pink.

She should have remembered what reactions were received when questioning the old auror, even if it was her professor impersonating him. They made her feel stupid.

The curly haired witch picked up her books after stroking the titles admiringly. She hefted them into her bag, sagging a bit under their weight. A smiled bloomed on her face at the weight, a physical sign at how large the books were. They were heavier than some of her light reading, which was exhilarating.

“Sublevo sacoma,” the grizzle wizard said with a wiggle of his wrist, pointing at Hermione’s bag.

The petite witch’s eyes widened and lit up as she straightened up. She saw the wizard’s wand movement and heard the incantation, it was a spell she would never forget.
“Thank you, sir,” she said with a toothy grin.

It was one of the few charms she never found (and was too proud to ask) to make her bag lighter. She would be able to fit more books in her bag now, and no one would know. Especially since she already had an undetectable extension charm on it, courtesy of Mr. Weasley (whether he knew it or not).

“Don’t thank me yet, Granger. Start stretching before bed, you’ll be glad for it during the holiday.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll be sure to write them this evening. Discretion is the word tonight on both our ends. Thimi, my family, my lessons, etcetera. Good night, sirs. We’ll speak more tomorrow, before curfew.”

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Dear Mum and Dad,

We have a lot to talk about, I’m so excited I can barely wait to see you home this Easter. I was hoping we’d be able to go home away from home. It would be one of the most amazing gifts you can give me this holiday! It’s super important to me, pretty please? With chocolate frogs on top?

All my love,

Hermione

Leeroy looked at the letter and read it twice before sighing. Abagail wasn’t home just yet, having run off to the market. Hermione was extremely secret about who she was, and for very good reason, but she also wrote in code from time to time in case her dormmates were to ever get nosy.

This Easter holiday she needed to go to the chateau for something magic related, and had a lot to explain and talk about that she couldn’t find a way to explain on paper. Last year it was a time-turner and her growing up faster. She had waited until after term had ended before telling them. This year it was serious enough that she had to talk to them before term ended.

He ran his hand through his hair and took a deep breath. His little bright princess was grown up and needed them to air out the chateau for something important. Something that would probably lead to his wife fretting over. He made a promise, and he was going to keep it if it killed him. Abagail would pull out her hair and his, but he would keep his daughter in his life until his last breath.

His Mamie Helen was very specific about parts of his life involving children. She had always been excited and weird when he let her read his cards or palms. She warned him and made him promise to stay fast with his child, because it would save his life. If he pushed her away or pulled her against her will, he would die early or they would both die young.

Abagail barely understood, but she tried, and he loved her all the more for it. She had met his mamie, and had gotten her seal of approval with a stern warning to sway with the breeze or she would be met with the ground. He was sure now that it was the same warning he had gotten when he was younger, just worded differently. She never read Abagail’s palms, but she got a good look at them.

Abagail always hoped that Hermione would be like Helen when the idea of her being a witch was floating around. Helen was the first person to notice it, and told her grandson Leeroy. Leeroy had advance knowledge, but didn’t know what to do with it. Helen would just smile and pat his cheek,
telling him he worried too much. Abagail always assumed Helen was saying a witch, like herself. One without real magic.

His daughter Hermione was a witch, she was named after the daughter of Helen of Troy. Mamie was named after Helen of Troy. Hermione was always her daughter in spirit, both were witches, just one had a magical core and the other didn’t.

He would make the phone calls to have the chateau aired out before Abagail came home.

Severus was sitting in his private quarters grading third year essays. He was trying to keep Miss Granger out of his mind, and decided to not work on fourth year’s assignments that evening. He was already disgusted with himself, and didn’t need her on his mind when there was work to be done.

He was almost done when he felt his ears go hot, which wasn’t unusual.

“Someone is talking about me... Probably some dunderhead student if it isn’t Mad-eye trying to talk Albus into having my rooms investigated again,” he murmured to himself.

He reached over the graded papers for his cup of tea and sipped it, glad it was room temperature. Scalding hot tea was good for when he wanted to be distracted at that exact moment, but did little in the ways of keeping the roof of his mouth in one piece. His mouth was heat sensitive, and fresh hot things often melted the roof of his mouth.

The potions master looked across his sitting room pensively. He was still trying to figure out what to do when the Dark Lord called. He knew he was going to have to go back, but he wasn’t sure how soon and how long the Dark Lord would be kept waiting.

He had parts to play, and had been building himself back up after years of respite. It didn’t hurt that Potter looked like his sire. What hurt was that he had her eyes, and he knew he was living with Petunia. Petunia was a jealous shrew of a woman who decided if she couldn’t have magic, she would hate it.

He called Potter out on being spoiled, and other such falsities time and again. It kept his slytherins from nosing about. He would bet his wand though, that it was far from the truth. He saw how small Potter was, how thin he was, the first day of class. The robes hid it well enough, but the boy was thin. He heard rumors how his cousin and uncle were as big as small whales.

After the Dark Lord’s return, he would have to see about that. Albus had been informed, he himself had pointed it out, and Albus had waived him off. The Dark Lord would be itching to return to his original position. Potter needed to be on his A game in other aspects of his life that were not actual game related.

However so far the only other person who seemed to be willing to go the extra mile for Potter was Granger. He would be sure she was in his corner, and neither of his masters were going to know about it, because dammit, Harry bloody Potter had to live.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a day before the students left for the holiday and Severus was patrolling the halls. Tomorrow the dunderheads would either have gotten on the Hogwarts express or stayed behind. It was something he was looking forward too. It wasn’t the first time, but with the Dark Lord’s resurrection approaching, it could be close to being the last.

He would only have to attend his head duties, some patrol, and the rest could be spent on himself. He normally used the free time on personal research, taking advantage of the library and his position to obtain more obscure literature. Being known as Hogwart’s Potions Master, allowed him a bit of leverage. It didn’t hurt that there were still those who knew him as a previous death eater for the more questionable books. He had a solid reputation, but one that left him peacefully alone.

He could go wherever he wanted and was respected for the most part. He was left alone by previous students, who had an ingrained response to his presence. He had a secret side to him outside of Hogwarts, but being as he rarely left aside from the summer break…

He was following up on the sixth floor, pleased at having caught 18 couples snogging or at the worst, dry humping. He was always annoyed at teenager hormones, but amused at being able to see how wizarding teenagers behaved away from their family’s eye. It was funny how someone from a strictly slytherin only family would be dating a hufflepuff, and actually care about them. It was nice to see interhouse relationships even if his ended poorly.

He was stalking forward silently, something he actually prided himself on. It saved his life in the past, and it helped him creep on unsuspecting students. It was something nice for himself whether in a serious situation or not.

He was turning when he caught the glimpse of a robe turning the corner. He followed quickly, unsure who he would find after hours. They were curiously quiet for a student, so he assumed it must have been a sixth or seventh year girl, and from what he could tell they were alone, unless they were with another quiet girl.

He found the student in question standing at the bottom of the staircase that lead to the seventh floor. Instead of seeing the back of her head however, he saw her face.

It was Luna Lovegood.

He looked down and noticed that she had no shoes on her feet again and was probably locked out of her tower again. He was mean spirited and nasty most of the time, but he could never gather it around him with the sandy blond haired girl. Her eyes always seemed surprised, but her expression always as though she had been day-dreaming.

“Good evening, Professor,” she said calmly, as though she wasn’t out of bounds.

“Miss Lovegood,” he acknowledged while trying to think of a way on how to handle her this time. He couldn’t very well be mad at her for being bullied or being locked out of her common room… He wasn’t Dumbledore, he couldn’t overlook it because of his prejudices. Longbottom was a different story, if only because he wasn’t bullied by most of his own house.

“Hermione Granger will be coming down the stairs soon,” she said dreamily to him.
He raised his eye brows curiously, he learned during her earlier years that Luna had an uncanny ability to know things that others didn’t. She might seem barmy, especially to the rest of the school, but she was more clairvoyant than barmy. So he didn’t roll his eyes at her the way the rest of the school did, he was aware that she wasn’t crazy.

It wasn’t unheard of for Miss Granger to be out of bounds after hours. Usually it was with either Potter or Weasely though, but Miss Lovegood hadn’t mentioned them. If it was the trio together it meant that they were up to no good or sticking their nose in something they weren’t supposed to if it wasn’t a blasted test for Harry bloody Potter.

“You should disillusion yourself, Professor,” she suggested with a small smile.

Severus couldn’t help the small sneer that appeared on his face, but nonetheless did as the young witch suggested. She had been quite helpful, and he didn’t want to alienate the already alienated younger witch. He was sure that he was one of the very few who didn’t call her Loony.

As soon as he was no longer visible to the normal eye Hermione Granger was indeed coming down the stairs looking extremely tired. Her eyes were red from the lack of sleep, her hair had more frizz than it had since she started caring for it around Yule, and her shoulders were slumped. He noticed she didn’t have her bag with her, but saw that her infamous cat was trotting next to her.

He was more of a dog than a cat in his opinion. The potions master had caught the ginger menace in the act more than a few times with his slytherin’s familiars. He had also caught the little monster beating up the other felines. He would always win and then he would look the potions master in the eye, flick his tail, and walk away calmly.

If students could lose points or earn detentions for their familiars, Miss Hermione Granger would have had a detention once every two or three days and a loss of 50-70 points a week.

Miss Granger, although tired, straightened up when she saw Luna, her poise was elite pureblood perfect. He wondered how he had missed it before. Was it her bushy hair? Her heavy bag that seemed to be half her weight in books?

She had just reached the landing when Miss Lovegood had decided to speak.

“Hello, Miss Granger. Is the elf you’ve been seeing doing better now?”

Miss Granger seemed taken aback for a moment. Her body pose switch to defensive. Her right foot swished in a small semi-circle behind her and stayed firm. It reminded him that she was a dancer, but also reminded him of a cat. Her ginger cat seemed unbothered with the dirty blond. Miss Granger seemed to have noticed this and calmed down. Her hair seemed to have risen in defense. He hadn’t caught it until it lowered.

“She’s doing much better now. Thank you for asking. Are you interested in the elvish welfare… Miss Lovegood?”

Miss Lovegood smiled at the older witch.

“Yes. I’m glad you’ve changed tactics, the way you were going about it before would have made you their least favorite person. Helga Hufflepuff would be proud of you.”

The curly haired witch smiled softly, the edges around her eyes seemed to soften.

How had he failed to notice these small telling details before? Miss Granger was wound up, that he always knew, he didn’t recognize that she was always on edge.
“I’ve been told as much recently. Shouldn’t you be in your common room?”

“Oh yes. I’ve seemed to have misplaced my shoes though and my tower is locked,” Miss Lovegood said easily.

Miss Granger tilted her head a bit.

“Accio Luna Lovegood’s shoes,” unlike Potter she didn’t shout her spell, and she held her hand up patiently. A few seconds later, sure enough, Miss Lovegood’s red shoes were in Miss Granger’s hands. She noticed they were a bit ratty, “Reparo,” she tapped the shoes with her wand.

The younger witch’s grey eyes twinkled happily, “Thank you ever so much, Miss Granger.”

“You’re welcome. Doesn’t the Ravenclaw tower have a riddle based entry?”

“They do. But every time I answer, someone seems to shut the door before I can open it.”

The older witch’s hair poofed up, surprisingly enough.

“Thimi.”

A house elf appeared. Instead of a ratty looking tea towel or even the hogwart’s uniform, she seemed to be well dressed.

“Please escort Miss Lovegood here directly to her room in Ravenclaw tower. She seems to be having some difficulties and I would like her to have a good sleep.”

“I would be ever so grateful Miss Thimi.”

“Thimi is doing now Missy Lovegood,” with that she grabbed the ravenclaw’s hand and disappeared the way that elves do.

Miss Granger smiled at where the house elf and ravenclaw were. She turned over to her ginger haired familiar, “Luna Lovegood is a good person, isn’t she, Crooks?”

Her large cat closed his eyes and purred a moment before opening them again.

“Maybe she’s not as loony as people say, something that might have to be looked into. She’s eccentric, that’s for sure though. But can you believe that she’s being bullied!? Maybe we can do something about that… When we come back from holiday, would you mind terribly taking up another shift before bed?”

The ginger menace meowed sweetly at his mistress.

Curiously she crouched down to his level.

“You’re welcome, sir Crookshanks. The most regale handsome ruler of the castle,” she crooned and pet him.

The half-kneazle purred under her attention.

Who would have figured that Hermione Granger baby talked the ginger haired menace, and he liked it. No one would have guessed that she would call upon a house elf for help with anything. She obviously wasn’t with someone on the seventh floor nor had she seemed to be arguing.

She stood up and twisted left and right with her elbows lifted.
“Oh Crooks, these stretches are killer. Not really, but you understand what I mean.”

She had been stretching? Aside from the quidditch players, no one in the castle exercised. Keeping their magical cores fit in class helped keep their bodies fit. It was for reasons like that, that Crabbe and Goyle were as thick as they were. They had the magic, and sometimes they showed aptitude, but they didn’t exercise their magic enough for their bodies to be fit.

‘What would she need to stretch for? And where does she think she’s going at this time of night?’

The petite witch turned and continued to make her way to her down the stairs. He followed silently, even though the cat seemed to know where he was since he looked at him as soon as his mistress started walking and he knew she wasn’t looking behind.

That cat was really something.

He followed them until she reached the kitchens.

“Missy Hermy is here!”

“Missy Hermione!”

“Where is Thimi to be helping!?”

“Is Missy not calling on Thimi?”

“I had Thimi do something else for me. Now. Being as I just did a lot of work I was hoping for a cup of tea, with some lemon in it. Nothing fattening, please. So no cake, but I could do with some celery and dressing if you have any.”

Here he was being revealed that Miss Hermione Granger leader of the S.P.E.W campaign, had a close relationship with a house elf named Thimi.

He never bothered to learn all the names of the house elves, he just remembered his assigned house elf’s name: Maga.

Maga had been with him a number a years, and had finally been taught how to speak properly, at least in front of him. She also developed enough backbone to nag him. She made sure he ate and cooked what she thought was best for him. Sometimes when he was sick she would magic the food so he would only be able to eat what she cooked for him. It was annoying, but he appreciated it. He even appreciated that she no longer cried when he yelled at her or growled at her, and instead sassed him.

Maga was also wonderful at being quiet and minding her own business with the solid knowledge that he was spy. She was one of his few friends, Minerva, Poppy, and Hooch being the others in the castle. He respected most of his other colleagues and they were acquaintances, but he didn’t like them enough to consider them a friend.

Hagrid was a good man but too loose lipped, Pamona mothered too much, there was nothing wrong with Septima, but they didn’t have enough in common to talk a lot, Filius was nice, but again they didn’t have that connection, Sibyll… he wanted nothing to do with that witch, even if it was obvious she had eyes for him. He was glad that the witch opted to take most meals in her room. Aurora was nice, but got along more with Septima, Charity he avoided if only because she taught muggle studies and always tried to pick his brain for his childhood, of which he was extremely uncomfortable with.

He waited until Miss Granger left after her tea and snack, and followed her to the second floor before
noticing that she was taking a secret passageway. They arrived on the sixth floor, she walked to the
to staircase and he finite the spell after walking to a corner as though he was there the whole time.

“Miss Granger, out of bounds after hours.”

He almost laughed at the small ‘eep’ she made.

She turned and faced him, her hands fiddling with the hem of her shirt.

“5 points from Gryffindor for being out after hours. Now hurry, Miss Granger.”

“Yes, sir. Happy holidays,” she said as she ran up the stairs with her blasted feline at her heels.

Later that night he would wonder why he only took 5 points. He had wanted to pick apart her brain,
but also didn’t want her to know that he had followed her and learned a few new tidbits on her. He
was sure that some of it would come in handy in the future. He was also… thankful that someone
had helped Miss Lovegood, and had given Gryffindor 10 points for helping a fellow student in a
moment of need.

Thimi had brought the dirty blond haired witch to her ravenclaw tower, next to her bed. She couldn’t
help but notice that the witch’s dormmates were already asleep and not one of them cared that she
had been missing.

“Thank you Miss Thimi. Don’t worry, I won’t tell anybody about you and your mistress. Just start
leaving her editions of the Quibbler for me? I can give them to you after they’re printed, free of
charge. It would be nice to be friends with her, maybe next year,” she said to the small elf.

“You is welcome Missy Lovegood. Your silence and gift is much appreciated. You is getting good
night sleep now.”

“Oh, yes. Good night Miss Thimi.” Luna said as she got into her bed.

“Good night,” she patted the witch’s leg and left the room.

Hermione didn’t say anything to anyone, letting them all assume she was getting some last minute
reading in. As directed she had been stretching, but in the Room of Requirement, and hadn’t
expected to be as hungry as she had been afterwards. She was stretching muscles she knew she had,
but hadn’t felt before. It was a bit painful being so sore. She almost wanted to ask for a paste or a
potion, but decided that she liked the small ache. It was like a reminder that she had earned it.

She hadn’t expected to be caught and let off so easy by Professor Snape of all people. The petite
witch was sure there was something else, but it could have been just a bit better because she wasn’t
cought with one of the boys or snogging someone in an alcove like most of the students tonight.
Walking back from the kitchen must have been the tamest thing he had to deal with all night and had
decided to let her off with point loss instead of detention.

She continued up to her room since everyone was already asleep, and she was thankful of that. She
had waited until after the boys went up to bed before going about her own business, she had
Crookshanks scouting out for her to let her know when they went to bed before coming to get her in
the library.

She hated lying to them, so if she could honestly say she had been in the library when they went off to bed, it wasn’t necessarily a lie, since she had been there, but wasn’t there the whole night. It made her feel a bit better.

Tomorrow she would be going home on the Hogwarts express and then most likely catching the plane to France with her parents. She had received a response letter from her father, it wasn’t signed by both of them letting her know that her mom wasn’t aware and would be surprised last minute. Her father was always prompt with things like that, and it was something she appreciated that she got from him. If her mother had known about it first, she would have dragged it out for as long as possible. They didn’t have that kind of time.

She told her professor and Moody that they should be ready within two days of holiday, and told them to meet her at the Roman temple in Nimes. She also told them to dress inconspicuously, and transfigured them both acceptable muggle outfits so they wouldn’t stand out. Moody would be given polyjuice with Crouch Jr.’s hair, and they would show up as twins. They both agreed that would be for the best and congratulated her on her forward thinking. Moody would be able to use his passport to Wizarding France, and Crouch would be under the invisibility cloak, then once they were in Muggle France they could proceed.

She was nervous and excited. She knew her father would accept it all in stride, especially with knowing that she was but a year away from being an actual adult, it was her mother that would need her father to help calm her down. Knowing her father he would tell her mother that it was a spur of the moment decision to go visit his maman. She would be in for a shock, but at least after a cup of tea spiked with a calming draught she would be fine.

It would be a long holiday, hopefully it would at least be somewhat fun.

Chapter End Notes

Maman - Mom
Getting to France had been surprisingly easy considering that her mother just had a bewildered look upon her face the whole time. It was more than obvious that she had been blindsided with the sudden trip. It wasn’t often that they went to France at the drop of a hat, there was usually planning involved so they could all be prepared. It was usually only certain important events or emergencies that they made trips like these.

The fact that her father hadn’t told her mother anything about it, even during the plane ride, made her think it was something very serious. When she had asked all he had said was, “Not now.”

Hermione felt a little guilty leaving her mother in the dark, but the majority of her knew it would be for the best. It would take about a day for her to calm down as she had already given her father a very brief informing on the way to the car.

“Just two male visitors for a decent stay, Daddy.”

They way that she had said it was easy to misinterpret, allowing an eavesdropper to assume it was her best friends Harry and Ron.

Once they had arrived at the chateau it was clear that it was planned since it was aired out, cleaned, and stocked with food. It took her mother a moment to connect the dots, remembering that her daughter did not looked surprised at the sudden trip abroad.

“What in Hades is going on!?” Abagail faced her husband and daughter, with her hands on her hips.

Father and daughter looked at each other for a quick second before he stepped forward.

“Honey, this is something important to Hermione, she had sent a letter before she came home for the holiday. It has something to do with the magical world and she had asked to come here. She said she had a lot to explain to us, and asked to come here. So let’s go sit in the parlour and talk.”

Abagail pursed her lips before turning around and stalking off without another word to them in the direction of the parlour.

Father and daughter shared another look before following cautiously. Abagail was most definitely a spitfire, but was… weird concerning magic. She loved her daughter and tried, but sometimes it was obvious that she was dubious when it came to the magical world. She agreed and promised to not take Hermione out of the magical world, but it was obvious after the basilisk incident, she didn’t like it.

They found Abagail sitting on her favorite grass green chaise lounge. Hermione sat in her favorite cream colored high backed chair while her father cozied in with his wife on the lounge.

They sat in silence while Hermione struggled with where she should begin. She nibbled on her bottom lip, kicked off her shoes, and tucked her feet under her.

Her parents were quite while they watched their daughter think about how to say what she felt she needed to say. A few seconds went by before she took a deep calming breath, she puffed out the next one and looked up at them after childishly scrunching her face up to the side.

“Well I guess we should start off easy. You remember the house-elves I was telling you about?” her voice was dry.
They nodded.

“Well apparently if they don’t serve someone, they lose ‘moons’ off of their lifespan. So they can basically die from not serving. Which is awful if you ask me! But, they can. So Winky, is now Thimi, and she’s my house-elf. S.P.E.W. was to promote elvish welfare, not kill them. So I did what I could so she wouldn’t die. I have a house-elf, she belongs to the house of Granger, her name is Thimi. I’ll introduce you later. I think you’ll like her, I, for one, adore her.”

Her mother’s eyebrows furrowed into a line, indisputably perturbed.

“Thimi is a secret. As Winky, she’s known as a bad house-elf because she was framed. Her crime was being in possession of a wand and using it. While house-elves and goblins have their own forms of magic, they’re not allowed to have wands, they’re not allowed to wield wands. It’s considered illegal or at least highly frowned upon. I’ll look more into that later so I can better describe it to you. I know that wizards are wand crafters, well wandmakers, would be the technical term. It’s a close to vest secret and goblins are furious, and a whole bunch of other political distressing Gordian knots… and I’m moving away from the point,” she sighed in frustration with herself, knowing that she was allowing her nerves to get the best of her.

“House-elves are subservient only because their magic and lives depend on it. However what was once a mutual understanding between species for mutual benefits has become murky over the course of time. So many of the old houses that have house-elves, have had them for so long that wizards have forgotten why they have them. So because they have someone, something, as they consider house-elves, serving them, for as long as they have, they stopped paying attention to them as beings and consider them things. It’s because of this that they are beneath most wizards’ notice. They don’t remember which house-elf is which and only know because they come with a name, they don’t really remember their faces or anything of the like. So Winky is slowly being forgotten and will eventually be ‘replaced’ with the existence of Thimi. She won’t have the so-called grievous misdeed that lead to her being given clothes following her throughout the rest of her life.”

She stopped, watching her parents absorb the easy part of their discussion. Her father she could see understood where she was coming from and appeared to have approved of her decisions, while her mother was obviously struggling with something she had said, but also understood, although was visibly annoyed.

“The next… not so easy predicament is… well…”

Leeroy noticed that his normally articulate daughter was struggling to tell them something that was obviously going to be very important. If her easy news so far was telling them that she had essentially obtained a house-elf, an entirely different being, into their life for what would seem to be the very far future, whatever she was going to say was going to be hard to swallow. So something worse than owning someone…, his stomach dropped from the anticipation.

Hermione took a deep breath.

“You’ve always known that I’ve been more advance than my peers. You know that I’m technically an adult in the wizarding world. I’ve been taking private lessons in my Defense Against the Dark Arts class. They’re also secret. Not because anything untoward is happening! It was because at first I wasn’t able to… throw off a curse. It was cast on us with the headmaster’s approval and permission as a demonstration so we would know what it felt like. It was one of the unforgivable curses, the Imperius curse. There are three unforgivable curses.”

“The Imperius, the Cruciatius, and the Killing curse,” Abagail said softly. A gentle reminder that they had also done their reading so they could understand her world and her better.
“Yes,” Hermione said softly.

“You have to have a strong amount of will to throw it off. A will stronger than the caster. I wasn’t able to the first time, and I wasn’t willing to accept that. I wanted to be able to throw it off in the case of any emergency that I would have need of it. You already know being a muggleborn, some of the purebloods see me as an animal and an extremist may… justify themselves in using it on me.”

Both of her parents had a pained look in their eyes. As much as they wished such a prejudice did not exist in their daughter’s world, the truth at the end of the day was that it did exist. To some pureblood wizards and witches she was seen as a mudblood; a magic thief, an animal, and a number of other things. Just existing, they knew she was at risk for hate crimes. They read about the most recent war and how muggleborns were killed in their homes. Muggleborns who were as old as them, and muggleborns as young as two or four or however old they were when they showed magic and became a blip on the magical community’s radar. Just existing made Hermione a target for blood extremists.

Seeing that they understood the young witch continued, “So I went back for private lessons until I was able to throw it off completely. After that, I kept going to learn more advance defense work. I’ve already started working NEWT level,” she said with a small smile at them.

“The reason why I’m bringing this up is because Defense professor and his… friend? At least I think they’re friends. They want to train me. The Dark Lord is going to be resurrected, soon, and they want me prepared. I have to be able to protect myself and… and Harry. I’m closest to him besides Ronald, but also… I have to. I owe Harry a life debt. If there is some way in my power to repay the life debt, I have to do it, magic will force it to happen. If I don’t, I die.”

She waited as the horror grew in her mother’s eyes before plowing on.

“So they’ll be coming in two days to train me to the best of their abilities in a crash course sort of way. War is coming… and I won’t be a civilian, I’ll be a warrior. I’ll be able to protect myself better than most witches and wizards can. I’ll be able to protect you to the best of my abilities. I’ll be prepared. I’m already a target just by existing, so…” she trailed off and shrugged, looking at the pattern in the carpet instead of their faces.

She already saw her mother cup her face and start to cry silently, her father had put an arm around the older woman in a solitary comforting manner.

It was harder and easier than she thought it would be to tell her parents that war was coming and she was going to be part of it. They already knew she would be the target of possible hate crimes, they obviously read about the first war with Voldemort, they knew what it would mean for the war to commence. There was no way they could tell her no or make illogical demands such as she pull herself out of the wizarding community. They knew there were whole families who were murdered in their homes, in their sleep, because they had a small magical child. Muggleborn witches and wizards who were barely old enough to walk, in families who knew nothing of the community, slaughtered like pigs, because their child existed.

They couldn’t claim ignorance, but it wasn’t any easier to stomach the acceptance of their daughter’s words.

They had two days to fully assimilate the knowledge before hosting her professor and fellow… tutor? While they were unsure of the technical terms, they knew if their daughter could explain it better, she would have. So they knew she must have promised or made an oath of some sort that made her keep that specific knowledge a secret.
Abagail almost regretted demanding to be put in the know. *Almost.* At least with this, she would be able to prepare.

“So… so what do we do? How can *we* help?” her mother asked quietly.

“I’m… I’m not sure yet. We can ask them when they arrive. They might have a better idea than I do,” she replied.

Her mother nodded in understanding while she leaned into the comforting arms of her husband, tears still leaking from her eyes.

Leeroy held his distraught wife offering comfort as much as he was taking it from her presence and the warmth she was exuding. As part of his lessons growing up, he was taught many things about war and leading it. It hurt to know that his daughter would be a warrior, a soldier. He hoped beyond all hope that she wouldn’t be seen as a number or a disposable soldier.

His daughter was going to war.

No.

War was coming to her, to *them,* and his daughter was just as much as a spitfire as his wife, and hell would rain upon her enemies.

He knew his daughter, her personality, he knew that while she had a big heart, she also had a vicious vindictive side. If push came to shove in a life-death situation, he knew she would kill if she had to. It had only been unleashed once that he was aware of, and she was beautifully and *terrifyingly* fierce. He was glad at the time she was young enough that he was able to pick her up easily. He was upset and proud at the same time, she sported a deep black and blue on her face, her nose was bleeding heavily and coated her small chin, she had a broken rib, and she fought through the pain and gave the older kid such a wallop that he looked worse than she did. She would be a wonderful warrior, and he would support her in this too.

He hoped whoever their gods were, that they showed mercy upon them; because he knew without a doubt that his daughter would not.
Chapter 22

Her mother had cried a little bit longer then excused herself to go fix them all a cup of tea. Father and daughter both watched as she walked out of the parlor, knowing it was an excuse to compose herself privately.

Leeroy leaned over and took a deep breath to compose himself. He was a man, a father, a husband, a doctor, and a Duke. He had responsibilities and he took them on, one by one, head on. He pinched the bridge of his nose and took another calming breath. He looked at his daughter sitting sadly in her favorite sitting chair.

“Give your mum a moment. Will we be able to at least watch you while you train?” he asked, fixing himself back in the chair.

“I’m not sure, but it wouldn’t hurt to ask,” she replied softly.

He nodded at his daughter’s answer.

They heard Abagail blow her nose followed by some soft clinking and running water. A few seconds later she came back into the room with a tea tray, and a small smile. Both husband and daughter smiled at her. She grabbed her own cup and sat down gently.


Hermione smiled at her mother, “I’m pansexual apparently. I just found out myself this term. I kissed a witch who is part veela and I liked it. Nothing is going to happen, it was a heat of the moment thing, but it was very pleasant.”

Her mother blinked at her daughter and laughed. Out of everything they had been told, her daughter’s sexuality was the farthest thing from her mind. It was one of those conversations that she knew other parents had with their children and it made her so happy that under all of this, she was still her daughter. She may not need her for protection, and she couldn’t go to them for guidance in terms of magic, but she could go to them for guidance concerning plain matters. At the end of the day, Abagail was still her mother and no war or magic could change that.

Leeroy looked at his wife and smiled crookedly at his daughter. “Was she pretty?”

Her mother giggled next to her father.

“I kissed Fleur Delacour,” she replied looking her father in the eye with a small blush.

Her father’s eyebrows rose and he mouth moved down and he started nodding his head in an impressed manner. They had seen the blond witch in the paper. She was as pretty little thing, and quite strong.

“I had some pictures taken of my date and I. I had some wizarding pictures and some stills as well. Thankfully the photographer was Colin Creevey, who’s a muggleborn, so he understood,” she laughed good-naturedly.

Her parents both smiled, this would be the first picture they would have of Hermione at school. Well, one that they could show off. They knew she had a scrapbook and that sweet Creevey kid gave Hermione quite a few copies of the pictures he had taken of her and her friends.
They looked at the petite witch expectantly.

Hermione raised her eyebrow at them and moved her head slightly.

“Thimi?”

Thimi popped into the parlor with a folder in her hand and curtsied at the muggles, “Thimi is being here, miss. And Thimi is having the pictures you h-had… taken for your parents, miss,” Thimi looked at the young witch in hopes of approval.

“Thank you, Thimi! And I see you’ve been practicing, I’m so proud of you!”

Hermione leaned over and soothed Thimi’s hair with a smile. The small elf smiled and danced merrily in place while her ears flapped.

“Mum, Dad, this is Thimi. Thimi-”

“Is pleased to meet Mistress Hermione Granger’s parents of the Ancient and Noble House of Granger!”

The Granger parents looked at Thimi bewildered by what she had said, “Ancient and Noble?” Abagail murmured.

“Yes Mistress, Granger family is being very old and honorable for muggles! It has earned itself title of Ancient and Noble with Mistress Lady Hermione beings a witch.”

“Schematics,” Hermione mumbled under her breath with her arms crossed.

“We are pleased to meet you Thimi, I’m Duke Leeroy and this is my wife Duchess Abagail. We are the Granger’s and we are glad to have you as part of the family. We understand there will be things happening soon that we can’t help with. We know that you serve her and take care of her needs, so when we can’t, please take care of Hermione for us,” Leeroy spoke gently, looking into the house-elf’s huge brown eyes.

Thimi’s eyes shimmered with unshed tears, “Thimi would be most pleased, sir!”

Abagail smiled at her husband. Whenever he made small speeches like that it reminded her that he was a leader at heart, and his words moved people, and house-elves apparently.

“Well let’s see those pictures then!” Abagail said, with a small clap to her hands.

Thimi quickly handed the folder to Hermione, who kindly handed it over to her mother who was waiting eagerly.

“Oh Hermione, these are beautiful! I love the moving ones. They’re classically done, and nothing in the background gives anything away that it’s a school of witchcraft and wizardry. The still ones are just as good and will look perfect in the living room. We should send one to your Aunt Carol, so she can eat it.”

Her mother leaned over her father, both of them looking at the pictures together while she was talking.

“Your Aunt Carol called yesterday to tell your mother that your older cousin Phoebe is getting married soon. She bragged that they were looking at prospective dresses costing near 500,000 pounds.”
Hermione made a noncommittal noise of understanding. Aunt Carol always bragged about everything her lovely daughter Phoebe did. She was pretty, she was popular, she was well off, she had a lovely man to call her fiancé now, she wasn’t all that bright, but she was smart enough to get through school. She could never top her mother for marrying her father and becoming a Duchess, so she tried not to visit often, but instead invited them over at her leisure. She also used to rub having a child in her mother’s face, but when Hermione was born, she could only brag about Phoebe’s achievements, most of which were exaggerated.

When Hermione went off to Hogwarts, Abagail could only brag about her being in a private gifted school; a school that was so private they signed papers so they weren’t even allowed to tell other people the name of the school since it was invitation only.

“Who did your hair, dear?” her mother asked.

“Thimi did,” she replied.

“Thimi you did a wonderful job! It looks gorgeous and so natural.”

The small house-elf blushed and gripped the hem of her dress tight, “Thank you, misses.”

“Hermione why don’t we call it a night and solidify everything in the morning after we’ve slept on this,” Leeroy said.

It sounded like an option, but was an order.

“Yes, sir. Good night, Daddy. Good night, Mum. C’mon Thimi, let’s go to bed.”

“Thimi can have the 3rd guest room next to yours in the family wing,” her mother called out as they were leaving.

“Yes, ma’am,” her daughter called out.

Hermione stretched out across her bed with her book *Wards and Their Keepers*. She was almost finished with it, and would soon be reading *Safekeeping Between Spheres*.

She was glad with how the night proceeded and instead of overthinking about that, she would rather over think the intricacies of wards. She was a natural apparently, not the original, but an original. She didn’t have a master or someone to guide her, she had less than a paragraph to work off of where she was now, and she was decent for a beginner.

Tomorrow would be a day of respite before her Professor Moody and real Moody came to the chateau. The rooms were already aired and ready for company. The tea room would be used for training she decided. They ballroom would have done nicely, but she wasn’t too keen on falling on a wooden floor when she could land on plush carpeting given the chance. She wasn’t completely sure what they were going to be covering, but she knew it would be physical and remembered being told to practice her dodging. She had been doing stretches twice a day: once when she got up, and once before she got into bed.

Hermione only hoped that it would be enough. Knowing the pair of Moodys though she wasn’t sure.

Hermione hoped Harry was having a decent holiday. Normally she would have stayed but she needed a break from Ronald Weasley. Even after the letters she received he was near unbearable.
‘I told you so, Hermione. You shouldn’t have annoyed Skeeter.’

Skeeter would wish she never wrote a single thing about her with her acid green quill. She would have told her parents about it, but she knew that they would have seen the trash in their papers. She knew if she didn’t bring it up, they wouldn’t either. They knew better than to trust one source of media, and they always checked the journalist’s name of every article. In this instance she was glad for the Quibbler for not posting any such love triangle nonsense. However she still got sent hate mail, if she didn’t know how to handle that she could have been seriously injured. She wouldn’t have even known.

‘That pest won’t know what hit her,’ Hermione thought vindictively.

She hummed to herself as she leafed to the next page in her book. It was quite a fascinating read. Wards could continue existing even after the caster passed away and she was on the chapter on the different types of wards that had long lifespan. They fed on the ley lines hooked into a corner stone of sorts, and were self-sustaining through the earth’s natural magic. It was simply fascinating.
After Hermione had gone to bed the Duke and Duchess Granger leaned into each other for support as they stared at the wizarding picture of their daughter and her date, International Quidditch Star and Durmstrang Champion Viktor Krum. Their daughter was a lovely sight, and it was nice to see that the castle, just from the look of the stairs alone, was just as huge, if not bigger than how Hermione described it. For all the knowledge that stone was cold, the atmosphere seemed warm.

Abagail traced her daughter’s hair in the picture, and picture Hermione blushed and smiled up at her. It was a beautiful shot, it looked professionally done, of her daughter standing alone. It was one of those things she loved about the wizarding world that she couldn’t be part of, the pictures captured part of the person on film. It was probably some poor old muggle who saw a wizarding photo and thought that it had stolen that person’s soul.

“Her house-elf really did a wonderful job with our princess’s hair,” Leeroy said softly to his wife. Abagail could only nod.

They knew their daughter was beautiful, they saw the potential in her from day one, but she admitted they were biased. Everyone made comments about Hermione’s hair, none of them were pleasant. Even Leeroy’s family teased them about Hermione’s hair. It was like it had a life of its own. But here in this picture they could see that Thimi had done nothing more than let it be itself, it was obvious there was no brush in sight. They probably used a potion of some sort on it, but it wasn’t unlike using a normal hair product, and the result was obviously worth it.

“We’re going to have two wizards in our home in a day. The guest rooms across from the family wing have been made ready. We’re going to pick them up in Nimes, you can stay home, but I’m going to drive. We could have someone else go get our guests, but…”

“I agree. I am upset you didn’t tell me before we left, but now I know why you made that choice and I agree with that too. On the plus side, we always wanted for our daughter to be able to take care of herself,” Abagail tried to say lightly.

“You are the world’s greatest treasure, never stop,” he leaned over and kissed his wife softly on the neck.

His wife smiled and blushed. Even after all these years, it was like they first started, but with the memories of each other they built over the years.

“We can ask Hermione tomorrow, but I think she already chose the tea room for her training. I know she wouldn’t risk your precious chandeliers in the ballroom. You and those damn crystals.”

“What can I say? I’m a girl, I like how it gives the room a romantic and classy atmosphere. That and it just glitters so well,” she quipped at him.

He rolled his eyes playfully at his wife.

Before they had become romantically involved there was an incident where she called one of his dates shallow. She was so in love with the diamond ring he had given her, even though it wasn’t an engagement ring that she went on for days to anyone who would hear about how it sparkled.

Leeroy was smug until the third day when Abagail laughed at him and said,
“Of course she loves it, she’s shallower than a sidewalk puddle.”

“It’s a beautiful ring.”

“Aah yes but, ‘it lights up the whole room’? You would have done better if you just bought her a chandelier, at least it would actually light up the room and sparkle at the same time.”

“So instead of a ring I should have bought her a chandelier?” he asked dryly.

“Yes. At least then she would only be able to show it to people who came to see her instead of her throwing it in everyone’s face in a kilometer radius,” she replied with a straight face.

They both laughed at the ridiculousness of the woman floating about.

The couple chuckled at the memory. When they bought the chateau Leeroy made sure he bought Abagail some chandeliers instead of a ring as a joke gift. She loved it and thought it was fitting.

“We have to do something about that Potter kid,” Abagail said abruptly.

“What do you mean?” Leeroy looked with his eyebrows drawn together.

“Hermione owes him a life-debt. We know for a fact that he’s been abused. We’ve seen him a few times, he swims in those clothes and they’re dingy. He doesn’t like to be touched, he doesn’t know how to socialize, he doesn’t like large crowds, the boy looks ready to bolt at a moment’s notice.”

“Give the boy credit, he stands his ground.”

“Yes, but only when he is facing monsters. He doesn’t shout at people. He allows people push him about. He’s like a rag doll in a social situation. Even when his family isn’t there, he tries his best to stay invisible,” Abagail pointed out.

Leeroy almost wanted to ask how his wife knew all of this from just seeing the boy a handful of times. However he also knew that she was very observant and paid close attention to Harry Potter because he was Hermione’s best friend. He was someone who spent most of the year with his daughter, of course his wife would stare at him. It didn’t help that they always waited in the car until he was picked up at the train station before they left. That walrus of a man who was his uncle was obviously hostile to the boy.

Leeroy tried to rationalize it the first time he saw him. Maybe he had a health problem, maybe he struggled to lose weight, maybe it was a hereditary thing. After seeing his family though he knew it wasn’t. His son was just as large and often seen snacking in the car, his wife was thin, but well nourished. He tried to see the good, but came up short every time.

“So what would you have us do, Abagail?”

“Fight to adopt him. We could legally bring them to court for neglect after school lets out. We should wait a few weeks for the signs to show again, so there is physical proof. With the evidence stacking against them, he should be ours before the year is out,” her eyes bore into her husband as she said this.

They knew their Hermione had a life debt to the boy. They knew he was her best friend. They knew he had a shitty home life and they could do something about it. If they did it when shit was going to hit the fan there would be a lower chance of the magical community knowing of his home transfer. With Hermione telling them about the upcoming war, they could live out of the country legally while keeping their English home listed as their current residence. The house would be empty, but they
would be safe abroad. It was a wonderful idea, and above board.

“Why haven’t you thought of this before?”

“I have been thinking about it. However you know taking in another child, let alone a teenager isn’t something you do on a whim. Let alone one that is…” she struggled to find the proper word, “stunted. I’m sure he’s been mentally and emotionally abused on top of being physically abused. He’s going to have PTSD and it’s not something just anyone can handle. He needs professional help, but with him being a wizard it would be extremely hard. I wanted to be sure that we would be well equipped to take care of him instead of trying to find someone else who would be able to do it for us. It was more detailed thought for him than it was for us. He needs the support and we have to be strong enough to support him. We have to do this legally so no wizard can claim that we didn’t, we would have to have proper papers. Normally a case like that would take years, so many that they’re usually almost an adult by the time the case is finished…” she looked at him in the corner of her eye, “I’ve been putting together a case since Hermione’s second year. I’ve looked into every law and every avenue. I wanted to speak with you first before contacting a lawyer.”

He looked at his wife in amazement. It was no wonder where Hermione got her brains and ideas. He grabbed his wife by the back of her hair and pulled her into a searing kiss. Abagail moaned lowly and kissed back just as hard.

“You are the most amazing woman, we will have custody of Harry Potter and help take care of him, we’ll contact a lawyer tomorrow. For now let’s go to bed,” he said as he stood up and began to drag his complying wife by her hair to their room. She was practically purring the whole way.
Chapter 24

Abagail woke up a very happy woman that morning. She looked over to her husband and sighed happily, he knew just how she liked it. He also said she would get what she wanted and rolled out of bed to begin the day. She decided not to tell Hermione anything about the adoption until it was all settled. It was a good day to be Duchess Granger and she had just the lawyer in mind, she looked into every one who won an adoption case, and then who won the most. It was a daughter and father run firm, and they were going to be in business by the end of the day.

First she had to get ready for the day, and then fix herself a cup of tea.

Crouch Jr. and Moody were both getting ready for their own holiday trip to France. It was decided that Moody would temporarily transfigure Crouch into a hamster then disillusion him, and cross the border with him in his pocket. It would be easier to get to muggle France with a hamster than with someone following invisible. It would be easier magic wise for him to wear an invisibility cloak, but too much could go wrong.

At least that’s what Moody said. When they got to wizarding France, they would find the go between front, and change in the bathroom. Crouch would of course go into the other stall as a hamster before being returned to his human form.

They were packing books, clothes, the usual holiday items so as not to arouse suspicion.

“Let’s run through it again!” Mad-eye gruffed.

Barty sighed good-naturedly, “Physical training, running, ducking, dodging, stamina. Wards, hopefully. Magic, quick thinking, non lethals. Impression of occulmency for something she can work on before she sleeps. We can only shove so much into a week, Alastor.”

“And she will work from dawn until well after dusk! She will sweat, cry, bleed, and swear at us! And you will build up her… resistance to that damn torture curse,” Alastor Moody looked away in distaste.

“I don’t hate her though! She’s my pupil, I’m supposed to protect her not hurt her! Not torture the lass! I don’t want that trust to be broken! It’s bad enough I used the imperius on her.”

“It could mean life or death or insanity. Doing that will save her, and we can’t afford to lose a mind like hers, let alone her talents,” Moody huffed at his younger friend.

He didn’t like the idea either, but after losing Alice and Frank, he knew that it wasn’t any sort of life to live. It did them a disservice. Barty knew that it was possible to train the body to build up a tolerance, most of the death eaters had to. It wasn’t until he became crazed to find the one who would bring about his downfall that he started torturing his followers.

With the plan so far, Hermione was on the frontline to be hit with the torture curse. He just didn’t want to be the first one to cast it on her. It filled his heart with dread since he only wanted the best for his pupil who filled him with pride and taught him the rewards of being a teacher.

He was far from looking forward to it, but logically he had to agree with Alastor. In the end however he would end up asking Granger herself and she would make the final decision.
For the time being though they had to make sure they had everything in order, and the rest of the papers graded for the week before they left tomorrow morning. Crouch was not so secretly excited about being able to see a muggle castle, the only reason he was dreading the visit was because he didn’t want to have to torture his student.

She was a good lass, they knew they were asking a lot from her, but she was the best shot they had.

The Hogwart’s potions master was having a lie in. It was the second day of the holiday week, and he had done his patrolling yesterday, he would make an appearance later in the Great Hall for lunch. For breakfast however he just wanted his cup of coffee that was graciously made by Maga. He noticed that she also made him apple and cinnamon oatmeal with a side of toast and sunny side egg. And since she made sure that he noticed, he knew he was also going to have to eat it before he left his room.

‘Damn interfering elf.’ He thought with a chuckle.

He had picked up his latest read from his nightstand, promising himself 20 minutes now and most of the day in the lab, and then an hour of reading before bed. He was stocking up on medicinal potions for personal use. The dark haired wizard had already made owl the orders from the hospital wing and St Mungo’s Hospital. The hospital wanted the more challenging potions which he gave most of his time to yesterday and made a large batch of the simpler ones to split between the medical places.

He already made plans that after this batch of personal potions he was going to try to tackle his personal projects again. After all, all work and no play makes Jack a stupid dunderhead. He may be a sour person, but even he knew the importance of down time. Even better since he figured this holiday he may finally be left to his own devices with Albus being busy.

His golden boy had stayed at the castle, he had two visiting schools who had to stay, the headmaster had appearances to keep up with in addition to his titles that his holidays normally went to. The old wizard was going to be very busy this holiday, with a little hope too busy to bother the potions master in the dungeon. He didn’t have much hope, but it was still there.

As he sipped his coffee he saw the floo in his living space flash green and sighed in annoying at the floo call.

It was his holiday for Merlin’s sake! Granted he just finished up his allotted reading time, but Merlin’s left tit why bother him?

He answered the call anyways.

“Oh good. Severus, I was hoping I’d be able to drop by later and have a nice chat with you. Alastor is going away for the holiday and—”

“Good morning, Minerva. Yes, of course drop by. It’s not like I had anything planned for my holiday,” he grumped at the elderly witch.

“Oh you hush up, Severus. You can continue your plans, I’ll just make myself comfortable in the corner. Unless you planned to go out…?”

He sighed, “No, Minerva. I was going to stay indoors today in my lab. You are of course welcome
as long as you don’t distract me. I’m making a medical batch today, so it’s fine.”

“Good. Afterwards Hooch and I were planning on dragging you over to the Three Broomsticks. Don’t make plans for dinner, you’re ours tonight, dear.”

She quickly ended the floo call so he wouldn’t be able to get out of it. Leave it to his friends to be strong if meddling witches with a taste to get toasted. At least they were good fun. He might as well enjoy being with them in public while he could. After this year any time in public that wasn’t school business would be seen as free time and he refused to give up more of his life than he had too, to the Dark Lord.

Thimi moved the curtains over silently and invisibly to wake up her Mistress. She let the witch sleep in and now it was time to start the day. It was almost 11 o’clock, she was going to be very busy this week and she would make sure the young witch was taken care of, but she also had to take care of herself.

Hermione slowly started to rise from her slumber as the sunlight hit her eyes. She blinked lethargically and looked around at her surrounding before stretching her body out in bed and rolling over onto her back. She rubbed the grit from her eyes and knew it was time to get up and get ready for the day. After getting ready she would try to figure out the day’s plan.

She had one day of holiday to herself and planned to stop by the Ministry of Magical France. While she had planned on putting up a ward to prevent the ministry from knowing about her doing magic in her vacation home, she wanted to know if she could legally perform magic outside of her home. She looked up the locations of the magical ministries so she knew where to go.

That would be her first stop. Second stop would be their bookstore and then their robe shop. All of her robes were for that of Scottish weather, none for the warmth of France. Nothing too fancy, she was sure it was going to have a few holes in it by the time the holiday finished, but she also wanted to be prepared. She was comfortable in her muggle clothes, but she wouldn’t always be in her muggle clothes during a fight and it would be practical to be comfortable ducking and dodging and what have you in her robes as well as her muggle clothing.

Shouldn’t be too hard. While she was there she would be sure to grab Thimi some yards of fine cloth for herself.

The elf in question had planned on staying at the chateau unless her witch called for her. She planned on cleaning up the castle as much as she could before the wizards arrived tomorrow. She would be so happy to see her old boy master Barty. She adored her new mistress, but holding a new baby, that baby would always be one of hers in her heart.

She just hoped that their training wouldn’t be too tough. Kind mistress Hermione would just keep pushing herself and then where would Thimi be? Taking care of mistress because she wasn’t doing a good job taking care of herself. She was prepared though, because mistress was a Gryffindor.
The petite curly haired witch looked through her closet with a keen eye. She was just stopping by the Ministry of Magical France, but didn’t want to catch anyone’s eye. It wasn’t as though she was up to anything that would warrant attention… yet. She wanted to keep a low profile, and blending in would do that. However she simply could not find anything to wear that would fit in. Every clothing item that she had here either blended in with muggle France or wizarding Britain. It was all too heavy, too dark, too warm, too much of a dead giveaway that she was from Britain.

She sighed in frustration.

She would have to go dressed in her muggle clothes to the robe shop so she didn’t stand out so much. It gave away her muggleborn status and while she wasn’t ashamed of it, she also didn’t want to be under scrutiny for being a ‘stupid lowly muggleborn’. She was of age, in Britain. While most of Europe’s laws were the same there were still those small print ones that could get you into more trouble than its worth.

“Better safe than sorry,” she murmured under her breath to herself as she pulled out a soft cream colored dress.

Meanwhile Abagail Granger had already started her day and was pleased that the law firm was more than willing to do business over the phone internationally. She set up an appointment to meet with them in person and had informed them that she had all the forms and evidence collected for them. She just wanted to wait until the child in question was home for the summer so they didn’t interfere with his education.

She knew that while it was more or less because the young wizards and witches couldn’t really come home unless it was a holiday, it sounded better to the officials that she included his education in his best interests. In truth she did anyways, but she would have made an exception for this. She would have had Hermione tutor him to catch him up on all that he missed knowing that her daughter would have been able to help him with ease. They didn’t know her daughter was shy of a genius though.

Leeroy was sitting next to his wife looking through her well put binder. He had originally asked to see the files, and was surprised and pleased that she gave him a binder instead. Abagail had more than enough evidence, it was too thick to be put in a folder. How his wife got Harry Potter’s old primary school records was beyond him. She even went around his town and questioned the neighbors under pretense of a tea party.

He shouldn’t have been surprised. He didn’t know why she always surprised him with things like this. Out of everything, his wife was bloody brilliant. She was a doctor for fun. It was easy to see that she could have just as easily been a lawyer for fun too. The Dursley’s weren’t going to know what hit them, and that aunt of his was going to be in ruins.

In a separate portion of the binder was her research on blood wards. Harry had to return to the Dursley’s to keep the blood wards working, that’s what Harry was told at least. His wife had been doing her own research on wards, apparently. She had a few theories on how to keep them up while
being able to keep Harry from going there. She even found old family rituals to make a wizard or witch a blood relative. Whatever his wife had planned she had backups for her backups. She might shy from the wizarding world from time to time, but she wasn’t above using it for her own personal gain. This case being Harry Potter.

He saw the obvious signs in the nurse’s reports and every time the proper authorities were called Petunia Dursley explained that Harry had a condition that made him a compulsive liar. She claimed it was the trauma of having lost his parents. She claimed the bruises, cuts, and broken ribs was from him playing outside with his cousin. There was no record or paperwork backing up her claims. Vernon Dursley never attended any of the parent-teacher conferences concerning Harry, but showed up to every single one of Dudley Dursley’s.

Hermione walked down the hall wearing brown knee high boots and a loose cream colored dress. She was passing through the kitchen and noticed that her mother was on an important phone call with her father sitting at the table with an important looking binder. Her curiosity was piqued but not enough to ask questions, she had her own agenda today.

“I’m going to the robe shop, I’ll be back later,” she said softly.

“Have fun, dear,” her mother replied, moving the phone away from her face to kiss her daughter on the cheek.

“I will,” Hermione replied as she leaned over to kiss her father on the cheek as she was leaving the room.

“No boys,” her father grunted.

Hermione chuckled softly at her dad. Even knowing she was interested in more than just boys it was still ‘no boys’. Probably had something to do with the possibility of getting pregnant, she wasn’t sure, and honestly didn’t want to ask.

Luckily though she was only getting a few robes and stopping by the ministry.

The small witch was amazed at how easy it was to get to the local wizarding town. It was a small bed and breakfast inn with a small muggle repellent charm on it. So people could come in and go out, it was out in the open much like the Leaky Cauldron, but with a lot less questionable looking people.

It was moderately busy and looked to be doing well on the outside so muggles wouldn’t think twice about something being wrong with the inn. Muggleborn parents could overcome the charm through willpower, but for the rest of the muggles it was just a place they weren’t interested in.

The secret entrance was in a hall that headed towards the loo. There was a painting of daisies and you had to touch 3 of the petals on the flower second before last on the right.

‘Noon, one, four.’ she recited the sequences in her head.

The wall silently slid to the side with the painting attached to it. Hermione quickly stepped through and noticed that much like the Leaky Cauldron, as soon as you entered, the wall closed behind you.
On the wall however was a mural of the same painting that resided on the other side. It was quite lovely compared to the drab brick wall in Diagon Alley.

She took sure steps forward as though she had been here many times.

The walk way was stone slabs and every shop had a patch of grass in front of it with a small flower garden. The robe shop, Les Robes de Madame Rosa, was three shops in from the entrance.

‘Madam Rosa’s Robes… can a shop name be any less original?’ she asked herself as she made a straight line to the shop. Thankfully all European wizarding currency was the same so she didn’t have to exchange anything at the bank.

She quickly found the seamstress and informed the witch whose name she learned was Marie, Rosa’s daughter, that she was interested in a set of robes for her holiday. Marie was more than happy to help the petite witch. Her French was fluent enough that Marie was able to be quick and efficient. Everything Marie suggested was soft or warm in color, which Hermione nodded to.

She noticed that most of the witches wore pastel colored robes, if not warm and rich neutral colors. The darkest color she saw was navy blue on a few of the wizards she passed by, even the greys were on the light side. In the end however 4 out of 5 of the robes were warm shades of brown and creams. The last one was in a light grey. She also bought a meter of cloth in each of the colors she chose to give to Thimi. She quickly changed into a cream color dress robe, the same shade of the dress she had been wearing, thanked the seamstress and left.

Now that she looked like the witch that she was, she was headed to the Ministry and was going to floo. Thankfully there was a public floo in the shop. She announced her destination in French, unsure if saying it in English would change the destination. She knew the English floo system allowed for other languages to be used and worked fine, but it was better not to chance it. It wasn’t like she would be able to call on anybody to help if she got lost here.

Walking to the information desk at the Ministry of Magical France was a lot less interactive than she thought it would be. The system in Magical France was run by magic, so there was no witch or wizard to ask if you had questions, you simply wrote it on the request parchment, and a brochure was given to you. If you were looking for an office, it gave you a map. It wasn’t as intricate as the Marauder’s map, but a simple: You are Here, and an outline of where you wanted to go. It was very anticlimactic.

However she got what she came for, turned around and left to go home.

Heading into a floo however she bumped into a tall woman.

“Oh! Je suis désolée!” Hermione said as she steadied the tall woman.

“I am fine. Zank you,” the tall woman replied.

Hermione looked at the woman and noticed that she was tall, blond, and impossibly beautiful. It was easy to see even though she was covered up in very modest robes.

“You speak English?” she asked surprised.

“Yes. Are you ‘ermione Granger?'”, the woman asked in turn.
Hermione was shocked unaware that anybody would know of her here. “Y-yes. And you are?”

“Ah! Forgive me. I am Fleur Delacour’s mozzer, Apolline Delacour,” she answered. As soon as she introduced herself she kissed Hermione on both cheeks. Hermione instinctively kissed her back so as to be polite.

“Oh what a pleasure to meet you.”

“Fleur ‘as written to me about you. All good. Zank you for ‘elping take care of ‘er during your Yule Ball.”

Hermione blushed and smiled, “It was no trouble at all. We had fun, she seems like she’ll be a good friend.”

Apolline smiled at the young witch. She was able to tell at once that Hermione was telling the truth and bore no ill will or harbored jealousy towards Fleur. Apolline only had written word about Hermione, both contradicted each other. It was nice to meet the witch and know which one was the truth.

“Were you leaving?”

“Ah, yes! I got what I came for and was just leaving,” she replied, holding up her brochure.

Apolline smiled, “It was a pleazure meeting you, Mizz Granger. I ‘ope it will not be the last. ‘ave a wonderful ‘oliday.”

“The pleasure was mine, Madam Delacour. Merci. I hope to see you again, good-bye,” she smiled at the half-veela.

“Good-bye,” Apolline nodded as the floo turned green.

It would not be the last time she saw Hermione Granger. She only hoped that it would be on good terms. Of course it all depended on what Fleur had to say about her friend. Hopefully things would continue to go well for her daughter. Only time would tell.

Once Hermione returned to the chateau she immediately sat down in the nearest parlor and opened the brochure. She was pleasantly surprised that she would not be breaking any laws. Coming of age was also 17 in France. There was an old ward in the grounds of France that allowed for the ministry to know of under-aged magic performance. So as long as you were 17, the wards would know and not alert the Ministry of Magical France. Apparently there was a similar system in Magical Britain, which was good to know.

Hermione decided not to think about meeting Fleur’s mother. It happened so fast and she was more than glad that Apolline didn’t ask anything more than what she did. She was glad that it wasn’t unusual for people to leave for holiday or else she might have had some questions she didn’t want answered. The anticipation of the upcoming war was starting to creep onto her.

‘It is perfectly normal for people to travel for holiday, Hermione. You aren’t doing anything unusual being in France for holiday. Your activities leave to be desired, but being here alone is nothing to stress about. You’ve been here hundreds of times! Get over it.’ She scolded herself.

It was bad enough Professor Moody and Crouch Jr knew she had a home here. However at least
with them they were under magical oath not to tell anyone.

Hermione sighed to herself and left to go see what her parents were up to.

She found them still in the kitchen her mother was off the phone and they were looking at the binder together. She stood in the archway to the room and leaned against the frame watching them. It looked so normal, so peaceful, it would be things like this that she would be fighting for. For her parents, so they could look over papers together and have a nice theoretical debate. It was something she loved about her parents and hoped to one day achieve herself.

It took her a second to focus on what they were saying before she understood it was a magical theoretical debate.

“I’m telling you, a sibling blood bond would work,” Abagail hissed.

“And I’m telling you, Abby, it won’t happen. It sounds like this woman hates everything related to magic, why would she be willing to participate in a ritual, let alone a blood ritual. It’s borderline black magic.”

“It is not. Blood magic is all about intent, it’s gray. Besides it’s not like I’m jumping at the chance to bond to a woman who could allow such things to happen under her own roof.”

“Why does it have to be her? Wouldn’t it just as well if we did it with him?”

“I’m telling you I don’t think it would have the same effect. She is a full blooded sister to the mother, if we did it with him we would have her blood diluted even more, it might not be enough.”

“What if we just need a little bit of her blood?”

“It wouldn’t be the same. As a full blooded sister she has more of her DNA than he does because they come from the same set of parents, we would need it from her. It would work with a muggle, we would just need a magical binder. They used to do this for some of the older bloodlines!”

“What are you guys talking about?” Hermione finally questioned, only half understanding the debate.

It was lively and exciting, but it was blood magic, which was frowned upon… even if her mother did have a point about it all being about intent. A family blood binding ritual wasn’t seen as so gray since some of the magical orphanages still did it. It was how some of the older families that couldn’t have children due to so much inbreeding were able to have indirect heirs. It wasn’t something people talked about, especially the more zealous bigots since they weren’t always sure if the child in the orphanage was a pureblood or not themselves. They wouldn’t ever want to accidentally dirty their own blood by merging with a half blood. Despite the fact that the child would become a pureblood through the process with all the benefits of their ‘new’ blood.

“Hermione, dear, we didn’t see you there,” Abagail said with a smile, evading the question.

“Did you get what you were looking for, honey?” Leeroy asked.

“Yeah, I got a few robes to wear for training and I stopped by the French Ministry of Magic, I’m legally allowed to perform magic here because of my use of the time-turner. I’m not sure about Britain yet, so I’ll keep from that just yet,” she replied.
“Good! Your mother decided we were going out to eat tonight since we’re sure for the rest of the week you’ll be trapped in the chateau, so go change into that dress you were wearing earlier. I’ll get the keys. Did anyone notice your new robes? They look very elegant on you dear, the seamstress did a fantastic job,” Leeroy led the conversation just as efficiently as he was leading his wife and daughter from the kitchen.

He sat up and pushed himself out of his seat before holding his hand out for Abagail to take. She nonchalantly closed the binder and took her husband’s hand allowing him to help her stand up, even though it was unnecessary. She swiftly grabbed her binder and let her husband put his hand on her lower back and lead her out of the room.

“Well, it’s not like you were anything but the best of company,” Leeroy replied with a smile.

“Don’t dillydally, Hermione,” Abagail called with a smile on her face, laughter in her eyes, and very glad that her daughter couldn’t see her right now.

Her husband was very skilled at leading both conversation and executions. It was sometimes annoying and sometimes it made her love him even more, this was one of those moments where she loved him more for it.

Hermione stared at where her parents left the room nearly flabbergasted. She hated when he did that! It was always about something they didn’t want to talk about. It didn’t help that he was educated in it.

She huffed and threw up her hands knowing it was a losing battle going to change into her dress. She hoped it wasn’t the outline for what the rest of the week was going to be like.

Chapter End Notes

Je suis désolée - I’m sorry
Just as Leeroy figured, Hermione did pick the tea room, and Thimi did a good job clearing it out. All of the furniture except for a loveseat was moved to another part of the chateau where it wouldn’t be damaged, although Hermione couldn’t promise the same for the flooring or the carpet. She wouldn’t ever admit that she whined, but she did wheedle to keep the carpet in there while she was training, and Thimi said she would clean up any mess, ash, or scorch marks should the carpet be inflicted, much like she would for the whole room.

Abagail looked as though she were crossed between appalled and shocked, but held her tongue. They already knew it was going to happen, but the thought that her daughter could possibly be hit with anything that could leave scorch marks was not sitting well with her. Her husband though blinked at her and sent the silent message of, ‘Better alive than dead.’ She took a deep breath and calmed her nerves. She dressed to impress these wizards and wore one of her own wizarding robes that they bought a while ago, in light blue. Her husband wore his own robes, looking dapper in a dark gray. She was always impressed with how similar they were styled to semi-formal clothes, however she knew better than to ever say that to a witch or wizard.

Hermione was not dressed to impress, but was still wearing one of her new robes. She was wearing an oatmeal colored robe, which looked lovely on her. She looked like royalty that she was, Thimi had helped Hermione with her hair and it hung about in untamed curls, framing her face. She stood tall with her shoulders straight looking determined, much like her father did when he had to handle business matters.

Everyone had woken up early and Thimi had fixed them all a hearty breakfast, which was greatly appreciated. More so since Abagail admitted that her mind was so preoccupied that she would have likely burned breakfast. Thimi clucked her tongue to herself, ‘All the more reason for Thimi to be cooking the meals.’

It was nearly 9 now and they were supposed to be arriving in Nimes soon. While Hermione was originally going to meet them alone Leeroy felt that he would be a poor host if he let his daughter meet two grown men alone. At least if he went with they would look like his friends and draw less attention, which Hermione begrudgingly admitted was better than looking like a high end escort.

The guest rooms were aired and ready, the closet and dressers were empty and ready to be filled although Hermione chuckled knowing that most wizards lived out of their trunks on trips, but knew they might appreciate it.

“Well come on then, let’s go meet the Professors, we only have about a week. I’ve been doing my stretches, meditating, and read my books 3 times each,” Hermione said, standing up from the kitchen table.

Leeroy grunted, leaned over and kissed his wife before following his daughter’s lead.

“We’ll be back soon, Abby. Don’t overthink, go over the files again,” he said to his wife.

Abagail hummed her agreement. She stayed seated as she watched her husband and daughter leave the chateau.

As soon as they left Abagail turned and looked at the small elf that her daughter owned.

“So, Thimi. Tell me… what do you know about familial blood bonds?”
Barty and Moody woke up early, already packed. Barty went and helped Moody out of the trunk where Moody quickly transfigured the younger wizard into a small dwarf hamster. Barty was given no warning and started making grating chattering noises.

“Hush, you. We have no time for your fussing!” Moody barked at the straw colored hamster who sneezed in response.

He leaned down with a grunt and held his hand open for the wizard to walk into. The hamster complied and lay pliantly in his calloused hand, looking cutely plump.

Alastor carefully placed his companion in his baggy right coat pocket.

“Let’s be off then,” he said as he summoned his trunk with a flick of his wand and shrunk it down, placing it in his other pocket. He then did the same for the clothes that the lass has picked out for Crouch Jr. Packed and prepared, Moody left his rooms and went to the Great hall to grab a bite to eat before starting his day, and made sure to grab a piece of toast for the hamster in his pocket.

It was too early for students to be up, so it was decently early, none of the professors woke up as early either, so it was nice and quiet before he departed without seeing anyone letting himself out.

As soon as he passed the wards he apparated to the toilets that lead to the ministry of magic. Flushing himself, he hobbled his way over to the Department of International Travel. Much like Hogwarts, the Ministry seemed empty, but he saw the few morning shift employees sitting at their desks drinking their coffee and tea. Very few memos were flying about, but he was no stranger to the Ministry considering he worked there for a number of years.

When he reached the desk he grunted at the half asleep witch sitting at customs.

He softly growled at the witch and his eye spun around.

“Welcome to customs of the Department of International Travel; how may I help you today?” she asked, barely holding back a yawn at the end of her sentence.

“I’m here to travel,” he gruffed at her.

“Where to?” she asked, obviously uninterested.

“France.”

“Time frame?”

“Now.”

“Name?”

“Alastor Moody,” he growled.

“Are you bringing any luggage with you this trip, Mr. Moody?” she asked.

“Aye,” he said taking out his trunk and resizing it, placing it on her desk.

“Are you transporting any illegal substances, creatures, banned plants, or dark objects?”
“Nae.”

“Are you bringing along a familiar or pet?”

“Nae.”

“Passport?”

He handed her his passport extremely annoyed with her lack of professionalism and thoroughness, merely looking at his trunk instead of looking through it. She looked through his passport and firmly placed a stamp of approval on it. She pulled out a chipped china plate and incanted, “Portus.”

“Have a lovely trip to France, Mr. Moody. Please be sure to hold on tightly, you will portkey in approximately 3 minutes. You will be transported to the Ministry of Magical France. Please stand off to the side while you wait,” she said, placing the plate on top of his trunk.

“Thank you,” he growled, obviously annoyed with the witch. He shrunk and re-pocketed his trunk and grabbed his portkey before hobbling over to the area that she pointed to.

Moody growled and left the Ministry of Magical France having arrived in what was obviously a designated portkey area with a sign of “Bienvenue en France” in gold lettering.

As soon as he left the building he went to what looked like a hotel where he made a straight line for the men’s toilet. Luck was with them since it was empty and clean, he walked to the farthest stall.

He opened his pocket to find the young wizard laying there, obviously on good behavior.

“Alright, lad. Out you go, it’s clear,” he said as he carefully picked him up and placed him on the floor.

Barty ran into the other stall on his small legs and waited in the middle and squeaked at Moody.

Moody saw his small hamster body and reversed the transfiguration. Barty swiftly locked the latch on the door. Alastor quickly gave the younger Crouch his clothes and stood awkwardly in the stall waiting for his companion to finish dressing.

When the stall opened, Moody took that as the signal to leave his stall as well, but not before flushing to make it believable in the event that someone was listening. The lass had walked them through a map of France and shown them a recent picture of Nimes and where they could apparate to. Moody and Crouch agreed to side-along as Mad-eye had more experience apparating to places from pictures. He handed the younger wizard his wand before grabbing him by the collar and apparating out of the bathroom to a small alley in Nimes close to the meeting place.

They walked about a block away before spotting the young witch standing next to a tall fellow that couldn’t have been anyone other than her father. They knew that her parents would be here, but it didn’t stop the awkward feeling that crept into their stomachs. It wasn’t often that the professors of Hogwarts had to meet the students’ parents, even with most of them having been graduates themselves. It was a small community and people knew people, but it was different meeting an obvious outsider, but Moody took it in stride and made the best of it, knowing that his leg would catch attention regardless. Barty simply took Moody’s lead and used his pureblood upbringing to his advantage and made it seem as though nothing was wrong.
Hermione was obviously scanning the crowd for them with a keen eye, and Moody silently approved of her vigilance.

“Here we are, lass. Now let’s go, we don’t have daytime to waste,” the older wizard growled.

Hermione smiled at the familiar wizard while Leeroy took them in slightly surprised at the battle worn wizard.

“Yes, sir. Before we do, this is my father Leeroy Granger,” she said.

“Nice to meet ye,” Moody said and held his hand out for a firm shake which was reciprocated. Barty merely nodded.

“Shall we then? Our car is right over here,” he said as he started walking towards the automobile.

The wizards watch witch and father open the doors and sit in, and followed their example. The closest they had to compare was a carriage, but the smooth metal finish was like that of a cauldron.

Leeroy started the car and watched as the engine startled the wizards.

“Don’t worry, we’ll be there in about 10 minutes,” he said as he shifted the car into drive.

As they arrived at the chateau Barty’s mouth opened in amazement. While he had seen quite a few manors in equal size, this was his first time seeing a muggle castle. It wasn’t nearly as impressive as Hogwarts of course, but that was to be expected, not much in the world was. But it was larger than he expected and was reminded that his pupil was royalty and now he had a building to help solidify it. Moody on the other hand scrutinized it silently. It was an impressive size, but he wasn’t impressed by things like that.

Once they were parked and exited the car, they made their way to the side door.

“Welcome to the chateau, we hope you’ll enjoy your stay here even if you’re here on business,” Leeroy said as they walked.

Moody grunted in response while Barty quietly thanked him.

As soon as they entered the building Moody turned and shot a stunner at Hermione, who was quick on the draw and threw up a shield.

“Good. CONSTANT VIGILANCE!” he shouted, startling Leeroy and Abagail who was behind them.

Not even 5 seconds into the house and they had started.

“I assume you picked a room for our purpose?” Barty asked.

“Yes, sir,” the witch nodded.

Abagail looked at her husband and pointed at the wizards with her eyes.

“Ah! Gentlemen my wife and I were hoping that we’d be able to sit in on some of these sessions. We want to support and be there for our daughter, but we’d also like to see what it is she’s doing exactly. Also I didn’t quite catch your names,” Leeroy said.
“I’m Bartemius Crouch Jr., please call me Barty, and this is Alastor ‘Mad-Eye’ Moody,” he introduced them.

“I don’t see why not, we will have to have her ward part of the room so stray spells don’t hit you of course. You will see the lass sweat, bleed, and cry. But at no point are you to interfere!” Moody barked at them.

Leeroy nodded with hard eyes. He knew what was needed to turn a civilian into a soldier and while it would be painful to watch, he wanted to be there for his little girl. Abagail thinned her lips and made a face but knew that there was no other way for her daughter to learn. It was a matter of life and death in this case.

“Well?” Moody growled his magical eye shifting to Hermione.

“Right this way to the tea room. If you leave your trunk here, Thimi will take your trunk to your room which she will show you later,” the petite witch said as she turned and started walking assuredly with her wand in her hand.

The wizards followed her, with her parents tailing behind them. When they reached the tea room Hermione walked to the loveseat that was left in the room for her parents. It was already in a corner nearest to the door.

“This will be one of your first tests, Granger. If you read the books properly you should be able to put up a good ward for your parents,” Barty said walking into the middle of the room, while Moody went and stood closer to the opposite wall.

Hermione thought hard on which ward to put up, there were a few of them that would work well, but she wanted them to be able to pass through with ease, but prevent spells from passing through as well. A magical nullification ward would be ideal, but it would get in the way of training in the room and it might be slow on taking out the magic of a spell that was already flying about. It would be better if they were in a separate room, but they didn’t have a room like that, and if they did Hermione would seriously judge her parents for having something as weird as that in one of their homes.

She tapped her wand against her lip thinking about a proper ward. She couldn’t cast the ward that the ministry put up in times of trouble as that prevented people from entering and leaving, even if magic stayed in or out. If she tweaked it a little bit though, it might work well enough.

She took her wand and felt for the ley lines that ran through the chateau, pleased that it had its own cornerstone and instead of casting while pointing up and letting the ward fall down, she held her wand pointing to the ground and slowly raised it. The magic was showing up in what would be a dome shape over the couch and looked like a waterfall in reverse. Once it reached the high ceiling, she twirled her wrist in an infinity motion, then downwards in a large zipper motion as though she was painting it. It glowed with magic for a few more seconds before disappearing from regular vision. When she was done she lowered her wand and looked at the ward that she could feel standing securely hard.

Then she took her wand and whipped it up quickly and shouted, “BOMBARDA MAXIMA!”

A loud shot gun noise exploded from her wand and her arm kicked back from the force of the spell. The shimmered where the blast hit it, but the couch was never hit. The ward seemed to absorb the magic and strengthened it. The petite witch ran her hand over the ward and then through it and was able to pull it back out.

“Dad, come here and make sure you can move in and out please,” Hermione called out.
She would have called for her mum, but she knew that her spell startled her mother quite a bit. It was loud, forceful, and shook the floor a bit. Her father walked over impressed with his daughter’s magic and spellwork. He did what she did and started with his arm moving in and out, feeling a slight chill where the ward was, almost like a silicone gel. He then stepped in and out of the warded area and grinned at his daughter.

“Way to go, kiddo. That seems like a fine ward to me,” her father said.

Hermione grinned back at her father, glad that he was impressed and happy with her first display of purposeful magic. She looked over at her mum, who smiled shakily.

“Well done, lass! Excellent work in testing it! A strong spell to make sure it can stand strong hits and not just light stinging hexes. Your parents should be safe behind that, now get them in there!” Barty said with a slight growl in his voice.

He had fallen back into teaching mode, which meant that he had fell into his Moody impersonation. After she shepherded her parents behind the ward her lips formed a feral grin, eager to begin.

Moody took the time to cast a silent stupefy at the witch, who dodged, letting the spell hit the ward.

“Good! AGAIN!” he shouted.
Hermione’s mother recoiled from the ward as the stunner hit it. She knew that they would be training, she was given advance warning, but almost being hit with magic somehow brought it closer home.

Hearing her daughter cast a spell that was as loud as a shot gun, but looked like it did enough damage to be a cannon ball from her wand was shocking. She knew that her daughter was capable of it, but knowing and seeing were different. It wasn’t even a dark spell, even though it was clearly capable of doing a large amount of damage. Almost being hit with offensive magic though made the war that was coming more real.

Her legs shook a little bit and she was glad that her husband firmly held her and helped her sit on the couch in the warded area.

“Well it’s nice to know why there are so few rape cases in the magical world. I mean, if a witch could do that on a whim, imagine what she could do scared,” he chuckled at his wife trying to lighten the mood.

Abagail laughed softly. They always wondered why there was more sexual equality in the wizarding world when they were so obviously stuck in the past. Knowing what a witch was capable of first hand made more sense.

Hermione duck and rolled to the side, knowing that her parents would be safe. Her adrenaline was already pumping from the surprise attack when they entered the chateau.

As she was standing up she caught glimpse of a spell heading to where her head would be if she rose any further and ducked down again.

“Good! NEVER LET THEM SEE WHERE YOU’RE GOING NEXT! You’ll walk right into a spell like that!” the younger wizard barked at her.

The petite witch stood warily, making sure to keep both wizards in her view and her wand at the ready. Alastor grunted in approval.

He had worried that she would grow soft in the little bit of time that she left them and planned to surprise her. Even his pupil Tonks wasn’t aware all the time, especially when she first started her training.

“Shields and self-preservation only, today,” Barty said, “No offensive spells!”

Alastor growled from the wall at him and shot him with a stinging hex.

“Ow!” the straw haired wizard cried, jumping back in shock.

“That will not be all that we cover today! We have to start with her resistance, lad!” He yelled at the younger wizard.

Hermione stood on the defensive, her brow furrowed in confusion, “Resistance?”
“Aye! As much as I detest it, even so much as the idea of it! You need to be hit with the Cruciatus to build up a tolerance! Just like you can throw off the Imperio, you can build up an amount of tolerance to the Cruciatus,” the grizzled wizard said as his eyes bore in the hazel ones of the young witch.

Abagail and Hermione’s eyes widened in horror.

“We lost good people to the Cruciatus! YOU WON’T BE ONE OF THEM! The Longbottoms were GOOD people! GOOD Aurors! YOU WON’T BE LIKE THEM! We won’t lose you OR yer mind to insanity! AM I CLEAR, LASS!?” He bellowed at her.

The petite witch’s eyes narrowed in determination, fully understanding where the battle hardened wizard was coming from.

“Yes, sir,” she said solemnly.

Abagail started to softly cry. They were told not to interfere no matter what happened. She was going to sit here and watch her daughter be tortured, for her own good.

Barty looked at her mother helplessly.

“I was going to give ye an option to do it or not, but it seems you’re just as determined as he is,” he said quietly.

Hermione squared her shoulders up and snarled at her professor,

“We are heading to war, Professor Crouch. The enemy will not care if I’m prepared or not. They will not care if I can handle it. They want me dead. Any and all training is so that I can help Harry survive this war and hopefully survive myself. If I have to be tortured every day this week so that I don’t go crazy if I’m hit with it on the field or in battle, then so be it.”

Moody grinned ferociously at the young witch, “THAT’S THE SPIRIT, LASS! Spoken like a true warrior. Now let’s see if you can back up them words!”

With that he shot two stunners and a stinging hex at her, one in the center and two to her sides in the event that she decided to duck and roll.

In response Hermione grinned just as menacingly and batted them away and sent the last one towards Barty, who threw up a shield.

“CONSTANT VIGILANCE!” she shouted.

Alastor gave out a gruff laugh, she had spirit she did! She didn’t fire the spell, but they didn’t say anything about being able to redirect it.

He took a step forward and shot forth two stinging hexes, one behind the other. Hermione responded with a quick shield that reflected the spells back at the caster. Alastor duck and rolled, coming back up with his peg leg up and his other knee down. He shot another stinging hex at her ankle and a follow up for her knee. The witch twirled out of their way and stood ready for what they had to throw at her next.

Barty sighed and made sure to watch her movements, having decided that he would send the odd stinging hex here and there to keep her on her toes since it was obvious Alastor was having fun with her.
Leeroy sat on the loveseat holding his wife. He was less than thrilled to know that his little girl was going to be tortured for her own good, but understood that it would save her from insanity should worse come to worst. Her mind was a treasure and viable asset all on its own, if she had to go through hell to keep it safe, then so be it. In the mean time watching his daughter duck, dodge, and redirect spells was captivating.

Alastor shot a few more hexes at her feet, which she swerved out of the way. Crouch Jr. decided that was the perfect time to send his own stinging hex at her. She yipped as it hit her in the arm.

“AGAIN! THAT COULD HAVE BEEN A DARK CURSE, GIRL!” Alastor shouted without skipping a beat.

He shot four hexes her way while Barty shot two of his own hexes. Hermione twirled out of the way of 3 of them, letting one of her Professor’s go wide, and threw up a full body length shield for the other two that absorbed the spells instead of reflecting them.

“Good! Again!” Barty yelled at his pupil.

Hermione took a defensive stance, breathing hard as sweat started to appear on her forehead. It didn’t take her long to throw her parents to the back of her mind so they wouldn’t distract her. Stinging hexes were a good incentive to avoid spellwork. It hurt just enough to get the point across without making her falter. For every mark that she had from a stinging hex, could have been a spell that maimed or killed her.

Alastor was starting to fire at least 3 stinging hexes in succession with Barty covering the sides. Hermione was running, twirling, dodging, and redirecting more than shielding. She had to conserve magic even if it meant pushing past the burning in her muscles.

She hadn’t been this active in a while so her breathing was labored and she was now covered in sweat, but she kept going. The carpet and the walls had small scorch marks where they missed the young witch. Abagail was at first aghast at seeing how the stinging hexes were being shot at her daughter, knowing they were a first or second year hex. She calmed down though once she saw what it looked like when it hit her daughter’s bare skin, it merely looked like she was pinched hard or in some areas stung by a bee. After she saw that her daughter was just exhausted from running rather than in pain from the stinging hexes, she got more into it.

It was fascinating watching her little girl duck, dodge, and weave through the hexes without retaliating.

Hermione kept pushing though, refusing to give into her body wanting to crash. She wiped the sweat from her forehead and upper lip with the back of her hand before rolling out of way of another hex being sent her way.

“You THINK THEY’LL GIVE YOU A BREAK JUST BECAUSE YER OUTTA BREATH LASSIE!! THINK AGAIN!” Alastor shouted as he shot 4 stinging hexes at her feet as she ran making sure she kept up on her toes.

Barty decided to up the ante and threw a small stunner at where her head would have been. The young witch luckily caught it and backed up a bit letting the red stunner pass her, feeling the heat of the spell on her face.

She turned around and jumped just in time to avoid more of Mad-Eye’s stinging hexes.

She was panting now and the burning in her muscles was starting to make her a little cranky. They
had been working nearly as soon as they got to the chateau and the sun was starting to sink behind the trees.

The witch grabbed her wand tightly making a quick decision.

Alastor shot 6 stinging hexes at her on both sides of her feet while Barty followed with matching hexes aimed towards her waist.

The petite witch growled as she shielded herself before reaching over and redirecting a stinging hex back at them. After she sent it at them she started firing a mass of her own stinging hexes making the elderly wizard roll out of the way while Barty dodged a few of them before getting hit with 4 of them in his left side.

The younger wizard cried out at the shock of the unsuspecting pain, “Defense! DEFENSE!” he yelled at her.

“THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE!” she yelled back.

Alastor stood up and held his belly as he laughed heartily.

“Ye did good, lass! You’ll have to do better tomorrow though! We’re just warming up,” he growled at her.

Hermione’s lips thinned in both annoyance and acceptance.

“Remember! Every stinger you were hit with could have been an Avada! But you were quick on yer feet, and you didn’t give in! Take a breather, meet back here in an hour. We’ll start your… build up… before dinner. Have your elf make you something light,” he said as he hobbled out of the room.

Hermione waited until they both left the room before allowing herself to roll over and lay on her back, taking in deep breaths. She laughed softly to herself. Day one wasn’t even over yet and she was already so exhausted.

Abagail quickly got up and walked over towards her daughter, “Hermione are you okay?”

Hermione laughed more, “Yeah, mum. Just a bit tired.”

“I’ll say, I was breathing hard just watching you,” she teased her daughter, glad that she was alright, just tired.

Leeroy stayed sitting on the loveseat and laughed heartily. He knew it was just beginning, but already he knew his daughter was something. The sass she showed at the end of the session though was something he knew he would remember gaily.

Alastor and Barty walked to the end of the hall before calling on the elf to lead them to their rooms.

“Winky, I’m ready to see my room now,” Barty called.

Thimi popped in, glad to see her old boy master.

“Thimi is Thimi now,” she let him know softly and firmly, “But Thimi would be most happy to be showings master Barty and Mad-Eye to their rooms.”
Both wizards were startled to see the small elf dressed finely, but also looking well. It wasn’t often that elves were dressed finely, and when they were it was a nice pillowcase or towel, but she had what looked like clothes, even though they were sure that wasn’t the case since she was obviously owned by the Granger girl. Barty was both sad and warmed to see his old elf, she looked much better than he had ever seen her when she lived with him, but she wasn’t his anymore.

Thimi walked with steady steps down the hall taking them to the guest wing instead of running and stumbling all over herself like most house-elves were won’t to do.

“Thimi already put your trunk into the room on the right.”

Barty was impressed at her grammar, normally she would have said “youse” instead of “your”, but grunted to let her know that he heard her. He heard Alastor do the same before walking through the door on the right.

“Thimi also left a glass of water on the nightstands next to the beds. Thimi knows that yous was working very hard Master Barty!” as she said this she took her old boy master’s hand and patted it, to let him know that she was proud of him.

Barty smiled at the small house-elf that took care of him, “Thank you, Thimi.”

Thimi smiled and popped away to go check on her new mistress.

Seeing her on the floor Thimi almost panicked, but could thankfully smell that she was merely physically tired and not in pain.

“Mistress Hermione is to be taking a shower now,” she announced.

“Not yet, Thimi. I still have more training to do in 50 minutes. ‘m just taking a breather real quick,” she said to the small house-elf with warm brown eyes.

The house-elf put her hands on her hips, not amused, “Kind Mistress Hermione will be feelings much better if she was to take a shower right now.”

Hermione groaned from her place on the floor in protest.

Abagail couldn’t suppress her chuckle at Hermione’s petulance.

“Thimi, Hermione is going to be hit with the torture curse in 50 minutes, would it be better to take a shower before or after?” Abagail asked.

Thimi’s eyes widened in terror. “Miss is to be tortured?”

“For her own good, Thimi. So if something bad does happen, she won’t… lose her mind,” Leeroy said gently.

Thimi looked at both of Hermione’s parents for reassurance and saw the love they had for their daughter, “Miss is to be taking shower now and Thimi will be making miss broth for dinner.”

Hermione groaned again in protest from the floor, knowing it was a losing battle.

“You heard Thimi, Hermione. Get up and go take a quick shower. Wet, wash, rinse,” her mother said sternly.

Hermione groaned again before rolling over to stand up and do as she was told.
“Fine, fine, I’m going. I’ll be back in 10,” she said walking quickly to the nearest bathroom, “Thimi get me a change of clothes please!” she called out from the hall.

An hour passed by faster than anticipated and soon everyone was back in the tea room. Hermione was the only one dressed down now, since Thimi provided her with soft cotton pajamas.

Everyone was on edge now even though the room was just as a clean and spotless as the first time they entered it, also thanks to Thimi. Abagail and Leeroy went to go sit on the loveseat again. Even though they knew that nothing short of a physical object would block an unforgivable curse, they felt that having a barrier between them and their daughter would help them.

“Would you like me to petrify you? So you don’t go running towards Miss Granger? We won’t put her under the curse any more than a few seconds at a time, but we know the need to help her will be strong,” Barty offered gently, he himself struggling to do this.

Abagail and Leeroy looked at each other and nodded, knowing that if they were able they would try to stop the wizards from torturing their daughter, despite what they said.

“Petrificus totalis;” he said gently, flicking his wand at them.

Both were petrified on the loveseat.

“I’m only going to hold it for 10 seconds,” he said softly to his pupil.

Moody was hobbling around the room in paces, his nerves showing. He decided to be proactive though and started casting silencing charms on the room.

Hermione was standing in the middle of the room, ready to be hit with the curse, but also knowing that she would be woefully unprepared for it. She nodded to let him know that she heard him.

Barty turned around, giving his back to the Duke and Duchess and took a deep breath. He had to dig deep in himself to find something he hated enough to cast the curse. Something good enough to be able to hold onto his hatred even while looking his pupil in her eyes.

He took a few silent steps to the side and looked in the eyes. He nodded at her and she nodded back.

“Whatever happens, Professor. I forgive you; thank you for doing this for me,” she said.

Tears swam into Barty’s eyes, but he refused to let her see them. She was thanking him, of all things, bloody thanking him!

“Crucio!”
Chapter 28

The petite witch dropped to the ground as she with hit with the curse and a piercing scream tore from her throat. Her body contorted in different ways that seemed physically impossible for the human form. Tears ran down her face as she clawed the ground and her skin equally, her eyes dilated until the pupils were almost invisible. Her eyes were wide open, but unseeing as she couldn’t do anything but feel.

It felt like a thousand knives were stabbing her as her skin was being ripped off only to be replaced with coarse salt rubbing against her. Her teeth ached from the inside out, the nerves in her mouth felt exposed and burned her brain. Her body felt like it was on fire and freezing at the same time. Her bones ached like they were being broken over and over again. The roots of her hair felt like they were needles trying to sink deeper into her skin, everywhere on her body. Even though she was a virgin, it felt like her anus was being ripped open and her vaginal walls were being grated with sandpaper. Her lungs burned with every breath, her heart felt like it would pop out of her chest, and her stomach felt like it would expel everything in it. Everything hurt inside and out.

It was a momentous occasion when the curse was ended.

Everything still hurt and she has some left over spasms from the curse. She knew logically it was only a few seconds, but those few seconds were long enough. It felt like an eternity under the curse and it couldn’t have ended soon enough. It hurt so much she couldn’t even find it in her to sob.

Leeroy and Abagail were grateful that they were physically immobilized, because they wouldn’t have been able to stop themselves from going to their daughter at that moment. It was torture just watching her, but knew it must have been worse to be under the curse. They wanted to hate her Professor Barty Crouch Jr., but they couldn’t find it in them because he was doing it for her. He wasn’t doing it because he wanted to, they could tell he was completely against it, and knew it must have been just as bad for him because he was the one hurting her… and she thanked him for it.

Alastor looked extremely uncomfortable as his eye spun madly looking every which way, but made sure that his real eye stayed on the witch. He owed her that much. It was 10 seconds, and he knew it must have felt like a lifetime to the witch.

The young straw haired wizard eyes burned with unshed tears. He never wanted to hurt his pupil and here he was torturing her for her own good. She thanked him for it! She bloody well thanked him! And he knew that he wouldn’t be able to stop here. He wouldn’t be able to stop at 10 seconds. She had to be able to last longer than 10 seconds. The Dark Lord started them all off with 3 or 5 seconds, but eventually it would get to be a minute or 3 depending on his mood. The more crazed he got the longer he held the curse on a follower. She had to survive. They only had a week.

Hermione laid there, twitching as her breath finally came back to her. With her breath came her thought process which was flying as though she were on an adrenaline rush of life or death. Even though she knew she wasn’t, didn’t mean that her body acknowledged those facts. She knew that it was 10 seconds, it was agreed upon, or acknowledged rather. She looked up at her professor and her battered heart filled with warmth. He was crying… he was only hurting her to help her. This man was hurting internally and while she was hurting physically, she agreed to it, and she was grateful for it… or at least she would be eventually when she did build up the tolerance they were working on.

She rolled over onto her back from her side, “Again,” she said. Her throat was raw from screaming and her mind was finally back with her.
Her parents’ hearts dropped into their stomach knowing that they would have to watch their daughter go through that again. Her mother was amazed at her bravery. Her father couldn’t have felt more proud even if it hurt him to hear her in so much pain.

Barty looked over at Moody who nodded gently.

“C-Crucio!” he shouted, his hand shaking a bit.

Almost immediately her screams started back up as her back arched up impossibly, her eyes dilating again as she looked like a woman possessed. She convulsed under the curse, her screams deafening everyone in the room. She was twisting her legs back and forth and rolled over digging her nails deep into the carpet before falling over onto her right side only to convulse more.

Before she knew it, the 10 seconds were up. She leaned heavily onto her left side to land on her back, making a small ‘oof’. She let her tears fall as she continued to breathe deeply.

“Thank Merlin I peed earlier, I don’t know if my bladder could have held it,” she said breathlessly.

Barty dropped his wand, fell to on his backside and started laughing at her. Out of all the things she could have said…

Hermione laughed softly with him.

Alastor was once again impressed with the witch and cracked a small smile, gently stretching his scars. He silently released the elder Grangers from their petrification and they sagged in place.

“Arg, take a minute there, lass, before we go to dinner. I think you’re done for the night,” he said softly in his grizzled voice.

“Yes, sir,” she sighed lightly.

Alastor then took it upon himself and walked out the room. Abagail and Leeroy followed him knowing that although hurt and probably sore, their daughter was fine. There was nothing they could do about the Crucius, so there was nothing they could currently do for their daughter. What they could do for her though was pretend as though everything was normal, and that would mean getting ready to have a nice dinner with friends and family.

Barty stayed with his student, watching her carefully for any signs of serious injury. He reached over, grabbed his wand, and cast a few diagnostic spells and was pleased that the most that was currently wrong with her was fatigue, muscle spasms, and leftover soreness that they couldn’t do anything about. Nothing they could do anything about, but nothing that was to be seriously concerned with. He waved his wand and healed the few scratches that she made in her arms.

“C’mon, lass. Let’s go to dinner,” he said standing up before holding out a hand to her.

Hermione gratefully reached up and held his hand as tightly as she could and let him pull her up onto her feet. She wobbled a bit on her legs and was glad that her professor didn’t do anything more than steady her. She sighed gratefully when her legs finally decided to cooperate.

Dinner was less awkward than Hermione thought it would be. Her father had a few questions and they talked at length about what was happening in the wizarding world as though they were citizens themselves.
Her professors were pleasantly surprised on how up to date they were on current times in the wizarding world which made conversation easy. Alastor was able to grouch about people he knew personally and didn’t like for some reason or other. Barty would interject here and there with tidbits that weren’t in the papers. It was like a regular dinner with friends rather than two wizards who were training their daughter to be a warrior. If they took that out of the equation it would have been considered a wonderful evening.

Thimi had made a nice roast with a side of mash and some peas. There was a bread basket in the middle of the table, a sauce boat that held gravy, and a butter dish. Hermione was served a nice broth that was easy on her stomach. She took a few pieces of bread and butter and was able to handle a spoon of mash. No one said anything or pointed anything out, all secretly pleased that she was able to eat something more than broth after her quick ordeal.

The only thing that cooled their thoughts though was that they had to do it all over again tomorrow and up the time to 15 or 20 seconds, it was still up in the air.

Hermione was more than glad when her tired body was finally able to lay on her bed. She sighed happily as she got under the covers. She was about to pass out when she felt a bony hand on her leg. She groggily opened her eyes to stare into her house-elf’s brown eyes.

“Thimi?” she asked softly.

Thimi helped Hermione sit up before pressing a vial into her hands, “Miss is to be drinking this. It will help. It helped master when he was a boy and just starting to handle the curse. It will help Miss too.”

Hermione looked at Thimi and then at the potion in her hand. It wasn’t one that she recognized. She smelled it and it smelled like plums, something she was also unfamiliar with.

“Thimi?”

“Thimi made it herself. It works,” she assured her mistress.

Hermione looked at it again.

“You made this potion by yourself?”

“Yes,” the house-aelf replied obviously embarrassed.

“You invented it?”

“Y-yes,” she said, fiddling with the hem of her dress.

Hermione took the potion and threw it back like a shot, trying not to taste it just in case it tasted vile like most potions. She was pleasantly surprised when it tasted like peaches even though it smelled like plums.

“Thank you, Thimi. Does anyone else know about this potion?”

“No one other than Thimi’s boy Barty. And he is sworn to not speak of it to anyone. Thimi did not want to be helpings those dark wizards who tricked her boy master.”

Hermione hummed as the potion started to take effect, “You’re good with potions, Thimi. Have you
ever wanted to do that for your life? Work with potions?"

Thimi tutted, “Thimi is a house-elf and is most happy taking care of her family. Thimi has an odd affinity for potions, most house-elves be having affinity for cleaning spells or cooking. Thimi has potions. Potions are good for healing.”

Hermione smiled softly at her elf as she laid back down into bed, “Thank you, Thimi. I really appreciate it.”

“And Thimi appreciates you, miss. Now be a good miss and get some sleep. You has another busy day tomorrow.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Hermione said softly, closing her eyes.

“Don’t forget to clear your mind,” Thimi said lowly, her voice barely above a whisper.

“I won’t, thanks for reminding me,” she whispered back to her house-elf.

If tomorrow was anything like today, which it most likely would be, it would indeed be busy. She would need a clear mind for a good night’s sleep, which the witch admitted her body definitely needed.

Before she knew it the sun was creeping through the window. The light was very bright, but not very warm, so it must have been early. The witch cracked an eye open and looked around her room, she noticed Thimi tying up the curtains so they would stay in place.

“Good. Miss is to be up so she can eat breakfast before the rest of the house wakes up.”

Hermione furrowed her brows at the statement not sure if she was confused or just upset at the unfairness of it. She allowed herself to wallow for all of 5 seconds before remembering that Harry usually had to wake up before the rest of his household to make them all breakfast. He may not have said it in so much words, but he did mention having to make the meals for them. Knowing the Dursley’s demanding ways, breakfast would have to be made so they could eat as soon as they woke up.

She closed her eyes again before rolling over onto her back, having rolled over onto her tummy in her sleep. Taking a few deep breaths before stretching her body, she was surprised that nothing ached or hurt. Her mind quickly supplied her with the events of last night how Thimi had given her a potion that apparently worked miracles.

She sat up and was further surprised when a breakfast tray was placed over her lap, the food still hot. Hermione’s mouth watered letting her know just how hungry she was.

“Miss is to eat now so her tummy can settle the food before training so it stays down,” Thimi said as she began to pick out her mistress’ clothes for the day.

“Thank you,” she said, knowing Thimi would hear her.

It was a nice breakfast to start the day; scrambled eggs, bangers, buttered toast, navel orange slices on a small side plate, and a small side bowl of farina with cinnamon sprinkled on top. Thimi also gave her 3 small cups to drink; one water, one tea, and one milk. She would probably only get to eat breakfast until dinner and Thimi made sure to give her everything she needed from protein to
As soon as the hour hit 8 o’clock Alastor ‘Mad-Eye’ Moody made sure to make a noise loud enough to grab everyone’s attention in the chateau with the use of his wand. He had considered bursting into the Granger girl’s room, but reconsidered after reminding himself that Granger was a girl and for all he knew could be one of those who slept in the duff. It was bad enough he had to see her tortured, he could do without seeing her naked.

But it was a new day and time was wasting! She was going to sweat, bleed, and cry, and be damn grateful for it!

He had kindly waken his fellow teaching partner by summoning the blanket off of him and then sending it back to him, making sure it hit him in the head. Barty of course did not appreciate it even though he knew they would be starting bright and early. The younger wizard went on to swear about Merlin’s saggy sweaty front bits as he angrily got up and ready for the day.

Moody was moderately mollified to see that the witch was already dressed and ready to begin her day having got into the room merely seconds after he made the loud blast. Her parents were also already up for the day and made it into the room barely a minute later.

“A’right, we have another full day ahead of us! Today will be offensive defense. You will get hit with stingers unless you have an eye and arm as keen as a seeker’s! You’ll be shooting your own stingers to cancel ours out. We’ll work on this for the first 2 hours today,” he growled at the witch. He was momentarily annoyed at her parents not getting behind the ward fast enough for his liking.

“Yes?” he asked them impatiently. They were obviously waiting to ask him something.

Abagail didn’t disappoint him, but did raise her eyebrow and tilted her head slightly with a slow blink in a silent reprimand.

“After this exercise I have an errand to take care of. I’m merely letting you know so that I may leave the room uninjured. Leeroy may or may not be joining me,” she said.

“I’ll decide when the time comes if I’m up to it,” he piped up.

Moody growled in annoyance, but Barty nodded in deference knowing that they still had things to take care of. They were adults and they had their own responsibilities, it would be weird if they were able to sit and watch their daughter all week. Even the upper class wizards had to attend meetings despite having enough galleons in Gringotts that ensured that they would never have to work a day in their lives.

“If that’s all?” Moody grumbled, turning around and walking quickly to the corner farthest from the door.

Leeroy smiled at the grumpy wizard and shepherded his wife to the loveseat. If he could be grumpy with them it meant he was taking his daughter’s training seriously, and that made everything okay in his book. He sat down and made himself comfortable, watching his little girl work on her marksmanship with magic should be entertaining. She was a good shot with clay pigeons, but it looked like the older man would accept nothing but perfection. His little girl was good, but not perfect. Not yet at least.
Hermione barely made a step forward before the old auror shot at her, she shot back in quick reflex and somehow managed to hit it, the bewilderment was easy to see on her face.

“CONSTANT VIGILANCE! THAT WAS A LUCKY SHOT GIRL!” the old man bellowed.

He shot two more at the witch and she fired back, one hit its mark, the other went a bit wide. The curly haired witch was hit with one of the stingers in her left shoulder and she hissed on contact.

“We have most of the day to do this, lass. Now let’s try that one over,” Barty said calmly.

He had all night to torture himself mentally and to prepare himself for today. Thankfully W-Thimi popped into his room and soothed him that she did when he was younger and had nightmares. She assured him that he was a good boy doing good things and that she took care of Miss Granger’s pain. Barty felt immense relief at that and quietly thanked the elf before allowing her to rub his back until he fell asleep.

Needless to say he was less frazzled and prepared for today with a new confidence. Miss Lady Hermione Granger would survive and he would be the one to give her the tools to do so.

He shot a stinging hex the same time as Alastor. Hermione’s face scrunched up in annoyance before she shot at one and hit, and then ducked to avoid the other one. Alastor immediately fired one at her crouched form and the witch responded by rolling to the side and then firing at his spell, missing by a hair’s breadth and being thankful that she moved out of the way.

“AGAIN! You’re firing not dodging, lass!” Moody grouched, hobbling closer to her.

“I am firing. Just because I don’t want to get hit with a stinging hex does not mean that I’m not doing the exercise,” she huffed in return.

“Stop sassing the old man, lass! You know what, you get to run around the room dodging hexes for one go ‘round for your sass. Go!” Barty yelled at her.

Hermione stared at him incredulously.

“NOW!” he barked, firing a hex at her.

Hermione dodged and started running around the room, making a small growl, miffed at the fact that she actually had to run. It was like a boot camp now! She tuck and rolled forward avoiding another spell. Merlin, help her through the day.
Chapter 29

Petunia had just finished doing the dishes before walking to the front door to check the mail, which was right on schedule. She knew that it was Easter holidays over at Hogwarts, and was glad that her nephew had decided to stay there. The less she had to see of him, the better. Even if it did mean that she had to do his chores. No matter, he would make up for them during the summer.

She was looking at her mail, glad for any new magazines that she subscribed to. Her husband got to read the news in the morning, her Dudders got to watch the telly, aside from talking to the neighbors and taking care of her garden she liked to read the magazines. Well, that and fill out the sweepstake forms that came in them.

However today she was surprised that she had received a letter from her nephew’s school. Upon opening it she saw that it was an invitation to the… school, her nephew attended. She had begged the headmaster when she was a girl if she could go there with her sister, even went so far as to ask if she could just come visit once, and every time she was denied. Now, she was a grown woman, her sister was deceased, and she had a letter inviting her to the school she had always wanted to go to herself… not that she would ever tell Vernon that. It was bad enough telling him about her sister.

Dear Petunia Dursley and family,

Your nephew Harry James Potter, of whom you are guardian and last of kin, has been entered into the TriWizard Tournament. If you have been keeping up with the news from The Daily Prophet you would know that this year the Triwizard Tournament has been revived with restrictions to stop potential deaths. One of which being that all applicants are to be of the Wizarding Age of Majority (17). Somehow Harry Potter has passed the restrictions, although he claims to not have entered the Triwizard Tournament, must compete due to the binding contract of the Goblet of Fire. Harry Potter has survived and overcome the first two extremely dangerous tasks.

Harry astoundingly retrieved his golden egg from the Hungarian Horntail Dragon. After decoding the clue that was left to him from the golden egg, he was able to save the one he would miss the most, his best friend, Ronald Weasley. However Harry Potter also bravely and heroically went back to save Beauxbaton Academy of Magic’s Champion (Fleur Delacour)’s loved one, Gabrielle Delacour in a stunning feat, as she was unable to complete her task. Due to the nature of the final task, the innermost family of the Champions are invited and encouraged to come see their family member for what could be the last time. Transportation and accommodations will be provided with no cost to the family round trip. We are hoping Harry Potter the best and hope that he survives and wins. Winning the tournament will bring Harry Potter eternal honor and glory for the Triwizard Cup and the winnings of 1000 galleons.

We will expect a response as soon as possible, but no later than June 20th as the task will take place on June 24th.

Sincerely,

Deputy Headmistress,

Minerva McGonagall

Petunia’s hands shook as she finished reading the letter. Despite popular belief Petunia was not ignorant of the wizarding world. She learned what she could as her sister learned. She read her school books and Hogwarts, A History. She bleakly remembered reading about the dangerous
tournament and how it was discontinued in nearly two centuries ago due to the high death toll.

The thin woman bit her lips together as her nose started to burn alerting her that she was about to cry.

They tried to keep the boy from going to Hogwarts for various reasons. One so he wouldn’t learn magic and be a danger to himself or others, afraid that he would turn out to be a dark wizard like the one who killed her sister. Another was because she knew that people would be after him, to kill him, it was because of her blood and the blood wards that Lily had cast in her last moments that protected him. They tried to keep him normal, but even as a toddler he performed accidental magic, which they tried to beat out of him. Overall however it was so the boy would be safe, even living his life out as a muggle. She knew deep down though that they couldn’t keep him from being a wizard, no matter how hard they tried.

They went so far as to even try to tell him that there was no such thing as magic. Even the word was forbidden in their household.

They tried to protect him by keeping him as hidden as possible. There were no pictures of him, they had no physical proof that Harry Potter lived there. He extremely rarely went out on trips that they took Dudely on, so no magical person would see him, even by accident. They told lies that he was an awful, terribly behaved boy, that explained why he was beat and kept at home. When they had company they made him stay quiet and pretend that he didn’t exist, if only on the off chance that someone else knew about the magical world.

After a while they got used to beating the boy, making him scared to perform magic at first. Then it was to keep up pretenses, so he would think that it was normal for him. Vernon often took it too far, venting his frustrations out on the boy physically. He stopped as much after the boy started attending the school. He still did so when he returned from his… school to remind him of his place. Dudely was simply rough housing with him, but she never allowed Harry to hit him back. Dudely was playing, if the boy hit back, he would not. At least that’s how she rationalized it. She loved her husband and refused to believe that he would actually abuse a young boy if it were not for the extenuating circumstances that surrounded her nephew.

Now however it was too much, her nephew was too far gone…

She decided she would go to Hogwarts for the first time in her life, even if it was to say good-bye to her nephew. If need be she would bully her husband into going with her, but regardless she would bring her son. He would some of his sick days or some of his vacation time to do so, she would see to it.

Petunia moved into her living room, sat down, and for the first time since her nephew had been found on her stairs, cried for him.

An hour later she was suffering from a headache and went to grab a glass of water. After drinking the whole glass, which eased her headache, she heard the phone ring.

The thin woman quickly splashed her face with water and patted it dry before answering the phone.

“Hello?”

“Hello, may I speak with Petunia Dursley?” the voice was deep and smooth.

“This is her speaking, may I ask who is calling?”

“… it’s Severus Snape.”
Petunia’s face heated up at anger hearing that name again. “What do you want?”

“I teach at the boy’s school. I take it you received the letter?”

The woman was quiet for a few moments as she was making quick decisions, “… Yes.”

“I know there was no return address on the letter. I asked for the Deputy Headmistress to mail it instead of sending an owl.”

“… that was considerate of you… thank you,” it almost pained her to bite out those last words.

“If you choose to accept I will personally come get you. The boy wanted nothing to do with this farce of a tournament, someone else entered him without his knowledge. I thought you would like to know.”

She took a calming breath, “Why are you telling me this?”

There was a pause on the other line, “The war will be starting back up again. I know what you have been allowing to happen to him while under your roof, Petunia. If it were not for the Headmaster I would have seen to it that he was quickly removed from your care. If you want him to survive the war, provided that he survive the next task, you need to change the way that you… care for him,” she could practically hear the sneer that was common on his face when they were kids.

“I accept the invitation,” she said primly.

“The meeting place would be at the abandoned mill. The front door will be open. Be there at 1 o’clock in the afternoon on the 23rd of June. Do. Not. Be Late,” he enunciated.

The phone was silent and then the tone sounded letting her know that he hung up.

The woman walked and sank onto her couch down feeling defeated. Moments later she heard her husband enter the door.

He walked in, bustling about before he came and saw his wife sitting in a manner he was not familiar with.

“Petunia?” he asked gently.

“Vernon, we need to talk. It’s about the boy,” she said morosely.

Severus hung up the phone with the snarky thought, ‘You hear the tone; now you’re alone.’

After Minerva was chattering about in his lab while he worked on his personal potions, she mentioned her worry about the letter she had to send to Potter’s family. She wanted his opinion considering that for a while he actually knew his aunt personally, if disdainfully. She wanted to know how to go about sending the letter and what they should do should they agree. Normally she would have went to Albus about such things, but she had a gut feeling that it would be the wrong course of action.

He would have suggested that she send twenty owls to the wretched woman, remembering that she hated owls. Especially since Lily’s would always bite her. However he knew that times were about to change and as poorly as she treated Potter, she was the last of kin. It would probably mean
something to him being that he was a sentimental Gryffindor, he rolled his eyes at the thought, glad that Minerva was sitting behind him in a corner.

He recommended that she send the letter the muggle way and offered to go get her, explaining that she might be a bit more at ease seeing a familiar face. Minerva agreed with him that it would probably be for the best as someone else might ramble on about the “greatness” of the boy and leave the family feeling more uncomfortable than they might already be. More so since Minerva did watch them before they left the boy on their steps and learned quite a bit about them in a day than she would have talking to them.

They both agreed not to tell Albus as he was more than likely to stick his nose where it did not belong. Each Champion’s family was sent this letter and Albus simply said that it was of no matter to alert the boy’s family. They hadn’t even sent them a letter letting them know that he was entered to begin with; which was a priority considering that they were his guardians. It was their duty to let them know considering he was a minor, but the Headmaster claimed that he was the boy’s magical guardian and since he knew about it, they didn’t need to alert the Dursley’s about the incident.

Severus may greatly dislike Petunia Dursley nee Evans even he agreed that she had a right to know… if barely.

Elsewhere Abagail Granger was meeting with the lawyers who would be taking her case. She had spoken with Thimi privately, and after getting what she felt was necessary information from the house-elf, she decided to proceed. She asked the proper questions and received a wealth of information.

Thankfully the people who would be taking her case were aware of the magical community and even handled small cases there. Chalice Burming and her father Talbot Burming were aware of who Harry Potter was, and were surprised and excited to take on the case, but pulled back their personal interest and remained professional. They had asked Abagail many questions to make sure that she wasn’t just trying to gain guardianship to hurt the boy, knowing that many people wanted him dead even now.

Chalice was a half-blood and Talbot was a second generation squib, his mother marrying a muggle. Chalice’s mother was Bernice Burming, was also a half-blood. Due to their blood status and unknown last names, it left them less footing in obtaining jobs and did better finding work in the muggle world.

However they agreed that Harry Potter’s case would be one of their top priorities and acquiesced to meeting Abagail in France at a high end hotel.

They arrived an hour early via portkey to check in and set up in the room. They had brought the proper paperwork with them and were setting up, Chalice using her wand to alter some of the room for their purpose. The part that was supposed to be a small living room was now a small meeting room.

15 minutes before the agreed time, there was a knock on the door. They were just finishing making a choice of refreshments, namely tea and coffee which were complimentary, before looking at each other. Clients who arrived early usually meant business, which in this case, was an excellent sign.

Chalice went to open the door, “Abagail Granger?”'
“Chalice Burming, a pleasure. Thank you for meeting me on such short notice.”

The lawyer nodded before she opened the door and noticed the man standing next to her.

“Leeroy Granger,” he said, holding his hand out to the woman.

They shook hands firmly. Before she allowed the petite muggle and her tall husband in.

“Shall we?” she asked as she walked over to the make-shift office.

“We shall,” Abagail replied, her voice was firm and determined.

She sat down confidently before opening her purse and pulling out her binder.

“I have plenty of evidence that I gathered myself in hopes to make this case as smooth as possible.”

“We will hit some bumps concerning his magical guardian though,” Chalice said.

“Of that we have no doubt; but with all the negligence and abuse, it shouldn’t be too hard to convince the judges that both guardians did poor jobs caring for Harry,” she said smoothly.

Talbot raised an eyebrow at her statement. From what the wizarding world knew of Harry Potter, they were sure that he was well treated and cared for. However the muggles seemed to know different, and were extremely confident. It lead to question how well the wizarding world was actually keeping up with Potter’s life and how much was hopeful fiction.
Duchess Abagail and Duke Leeroy Granger returned to their chateau with high spirits before making a beeline to the tea room where they knew their daughter would be. They stood a small distance away from the door frame watching their daughter shoot hex for hex, her arms were obviously swollen and there were other parts of her that were red. She had small cuts on her hands and one on her left cheek, which they almost missed.

The young woman was drenched in sweat and breathing heavy, but her eyes were hard with determination and her arm was fast. Her aim was much better than what it had been earlier when they left.

Leeroy stepped slightly ahead of Abagail before he cleared his throat to get their attention. The unexpected noise cause the two wizards and witch to quickly turn their wands on the unknown quantity.

Hermione blushed and quickly put her wand down when she saw it was her parents. Barty also lowered his wand and looked at the wall obviously uncomfortable that he had drawn on his hosts. Moody was the slowest to lower his wand, his magical eye checking them over thoroughly to assure their identity.

He nodded his head at the elder Granger's in greeting before turning to the young witch.

“Good job, lass! Constant vigilance! You didn’t know who was at the door and did quick recon! Your wand was up and prepared for action!” Moody praised her.

Leeroy grabbed his wife’s hand and led her into the room to sit on the warded couch with him. At first the older woman was shocked but was quickly just indignant that it happened at all. She wasn’t mad, she couldn’t bring herself to be mad at her daughter for being vigilant, which was part of what they were teaching her. So she settled for pouting at the incident and made herself comfortable.

“We’ve passed stinging hexes and moved on to small slicing hexes instead! More of an incentive to be on point,” Moody gruffed with obvious pride.

“We have also gotten to the point where Miss Granger can cast silently without a moment’s hesitation,” Crouch Jr. pointed out.

“It helps that she takes private lessons with me while we’re at Hogwarts so I know where she is at in terms of her Defense Against the Dark Arts education, we are focusing on refining and building up her… reserves of sorts before we move on,” he continued.

Leeroy looked at his little girl who was ready to spring into action at a moment’s notice. Even though she was out of breath and red in the face, she looked fierce and he was proud of her. He was also happy at the small inclusion the wizards were giving them. He nodded impressed at his daughter and what they covered with her, which apparently was a lot. Aside from what was going to happen later, today was a fine day if had to say so.

His wife had more than adequate information for their case, even clippings from The Daily Prophet to aid their case in the magical world. The lawyers were more suitably impressed when they learned that they were Duke and Duchess and wanted to keep everything as low to the ground as possible. There would be no disturbances in the transfer of guardianship from outside forces or sway of public opinion. They were treating it like a normal case and as such there would be no publication of any
type. They were warned that the only reporter who might do so if she heard word was Rita Skeeter. However considering they were muggles, and currently in France, while she had bigger fish to fry during the tournament, they were safe.

Elsewhere Severus was not having a good day so to say. He had just received a summons from Albus during his free time, he was lucky he had not already started anything. Upon reaching the gargoyle he whispered the password, “Pixie Puffs.” And took a deep breath to relieve the annoyance that came every time he had to say a candy password set by Albus.

He walked swiftly up the stairs and let himself in.

“Ah, Severus, come in my boy. Come take a seat,” was the greeting that Severus received.

He noticed that Minerva was already in the room, and her eyes looked a little off. He could see she had a lemon drop in her hand, which was out of view of the headmaster. The potions master had told his friend a while ago not to eat the lemon drops the headmaster offered, and he was glad that she listened to him. She was a bright witch, and if she was holding the lemon drop it meant that the headmaster was insistent that she take one.

The lemon drops in question were “homemade”. They held the tiniest drops of calming draught and a truth serum. It wasn’t veritaserum, but one of the lesser truth serums where it compels the drinker to tell the truth instead of forcing them. In this case it made the person who ate the lemon drop calm enough to be at ease in the headmaster’s presence and the lesser truth serum would “encourage” them to tell him the truth or confide in him. It was entirely possible to fight it off, a first year could do so if they truly did not want the headmaster to know something, but it made things easier.

Not that it mattered as Albus regularly scanned minds, although illegally. He was a master and a person would barely feel a brush, letting them think it might have been a piece of their own hair. Those trained in occlumency were able to prevent these light ‘scans’, as Albus made sure to never get close enough to bump into someone’s shields, should they have them. It kept him out of trouble while allowing him to keep his omniscient façade.

Severus quietly sat down as he saw Minerva seated and figured it wouldn’t be a quick conversation.

“You called, Headmaster?” the surly potions master inquired.

“Yes, yes. There seems to be trouble brewing with this next task. With every task the Dark Mark gets darker. It is not completely dark, but dark enough to cause further concern. Severus, have you spoken with Karkaroff?”

The elderly wizard gently folded his hands together.

“As you commanded, yes. He plans to run.”

“He won’t get far I’m afraid,” Albus said gravely.

If Snape hadn’t known the old man better he would have fallen for the trick that it was and grunted in response.

“Come now, m’boy. Surely you understand where he is coming from?” blue eyes peered over crescent moon glasses.
“Karkaroff is a coward and I will continue to do my duty for the light. The Order of the Phoenix will continue to have its spy,” Severus said calmly as he folded his hands over his chest and leaned back into the chair.

“Severus, you must be careful,” Minerva fretted.

“Never fear, Minerva. I have full trust in Severus to do what must be done,” Albus spoke serenely.

Minerva quickly buttoned her lip, pretending to be soothed by the headmaster’s words even though they filled the old witch with dread.

“Now for this last task there is to be a hedge maze and the boy needs to survive,” Albus said.

“The boy is lucky he has made it this far, Albus. He hasn’t even taken advantage of the time he could to be skipping out on his classes,” the dark wizard sneered.

“Harry knows that his best chance is to stay in class and learn the curriculum we have set out for him. However it also helps that he stay busy, even if it is only because Miss Granger herself cannot help him due to her own studies during the day.” Albus said, slowly moving his hand to stroke his beard thoughtfully.

“If it were not for Miss Granger the boy would not have passed the first task at all. He would have been The-Boy-Who-Lived-To-Be-Charred,” was Snape’s snide remark.

“I have noticed that Mr. Weasley did not inform Mr. Potter what to expect even after you specifically asked for Charlie Weasley to be part of the group to bring the dragons from the reserve,” Minerva commented.

“Hm, yes. I had to ask Hagrid to help take care of the dragons,” Albus commented, now fully stroking his long white beard, “I have also asked our large kind friend to help get creatures for the maze.”

Severus resisted the urge to pinch his nose to stave off the forming headache. He didn’t hate the large man, quite the opposite in fact considering Hagrid was very helpful; but he would be damned if he didn’t admit that his large friend had some large faults when it came to creatures. What was dangerous to most witches and wizards was cute to the half giant. It didn’t help that the large man had received some hate letters and had quite a sensitive reaction to them. He was glad that the Meddling Trio managed to perk up his friend enough to return to his teaching post.

Grubby-Plank was obviously the better choice for the job, hence her being the quick replacement. However Hagrid loved it with the same abandon that Kettleburn did, yet somehow managed to keep all his limbs.

“And what would you have us do, Albus? What is the point in this meeting?” Severus asked. He wanted to get back to his holiday as fast as possible.

“The boy needs to survive, Severus. We need to do something that will help the boy without hindering the other Champions. Perhaps if we were to tell him about his mother…” Albus looked at his potions master.

“Absolutely not, Headmaster. You swore and I refuse,” the potions master glared.

“It might fill the boy with enough love to help him make it to the end of this trial,” the Headmaster tried again.
“No, Albus. If you want someone to share precious moments try Lupin or Black, wherever you are hiding him,” his glare intensified.

“Headmaster, what if we simply leave the boy alone. He has enough sheer dumb luck-”

“Say that again, Minerva,” Albus cut her off.

“If we leave the boy alone?”

“No, after that.”

“He has enough sheer dumb luck?”

“Exactly!”

Severus started to feel uneasy about this.

“Severus m’boy would you happen to have any Felix Felicis in your private stocks?”

“No, sir. It takes 6 months to stew and I do not have the time to make it as I cannot give it the proper dedication that is needed to make it,” he answered swiftly, almost angered at the impudence of the esteemed headmaster.

Albus sighed, “It is just as well that I have some ready, I was saving it for a little recreational use during the summer, but no matter, the boy needs to live.”

“Albus, luck can only do but so much!” Minerva hissed at her employer.

“Calm down, Minerva. He only needs enough luck to survive the tournament, not win,” blue eyes twinkled at the rankled witch.

“We’ll just make sure that Harry has enough to last him an hour,” the elderly wizard said, “and I’ll slip it into his drink before the tournament.”

Minerva and Severus both remained silent as a feeling of dread filled them both, but neither said anything as the headmaster made up his mind. Both however were relieved that it wouldn’t be them who was slipping the boy a potion.

“Anything else, Headmaster?” Severus asked.

“There is one more thing I need from the both of you,” he said.

“And what would that be, Albus.”

“Oh just a little –obliviate.” The headmaster quickly pulled his wand on them, “When you leave here you will think that you have just had another detention dispute concerning your House duties. The detention was given over to Filch and you are both no longer concerned with it.”

The elderly wizard slowly put his wand away.

“Will that be all?” he asked them politely.

“Yes, that will be all, Headmaster. Thank you,” Minerva said slowly as she and Severus got up and turned to walk out of the door.
They both walked quietly to the dungeons. Once they had passed the threshold of Severus’ rooms, the wards went up and Severus quickly cut off the floo.

“I can’t believe he really just tried to do that!” Minerva screeched.

She had never been more thankful that Severus insisted that she keep up her occlumency walls up at all times than today.

“I can. What I want to know is why? We all have much to lose should the Potter boy die. What was he speaking about with you before he called me?” Severus asked his older friend as he paced his floor.

“He asked if I contacted Harry’s family in any way concerning the tournament, which I denied. Apparently he has been intercepting all owls that go to the Dursley household. It was a good thing we mailed it the muggle way… he said that someone tried to owl them a copy of The Daily Prophet. There was nothing wrong with it, but… he’s been keeping them in the dark, Severus. They aren’t even allowed the Prophet, even if they paid for it,” she muttered the last part.

Severus sat there thinking about many things before deciding that he needed to talk to the Granger girl as soon as she returned from holiday.

“Minerva, I need you to call a meeting with Miss Granger. In your office. I think Albus is going to try to have it so the Weasley’s are there as Potter’s family. Something is going on there, Molly Prewett has never invited anyone into her house unless they were her family. Even friends are kept out of her house as much as possible…”

The elderly witch looked at her friend curiously as she pondered his statement. As Molly Weasley she was given the image of a loving, caring, generous witch, which stemmed from her kind-hearted husband. Molly Prewett was always self-serving and self-righteous, always believing that she deserved something or other she did not earn or was not entitled to. The only reason she married Arthur was because her father found out that she lost her virginity to him and demanded that the Weasley patriarch at the time give him retribution. The only thing Septimus could think of was to offer for the girl as a bride. Molly had heard that Arthur was -ahem- gifted and only wanted the best to be her first, because she deserved it. At the time the Weasley’s owned a well reputed tavern in Diagonally, that was later bought out and replaced with another store. Arthur’s mother Cedrella Weasley nee Black sold it after her husband Septimus’ passing.

There were quiet rumors that Cedrella only sold the tavern so Molly couldn’t have it. She knew her son aspired to work in the Ministry and did not want the shrew that he was saddled with to make his life miserable by making him work at the tavern he never wanted to be in to begin with.

Molly at the time was quite pleased with the arrangement her father made for her, if embarrassed at how it came about. The Weasley’s were well to do at the time, and while they were blood-traitors, they were still pureblood and respectable. It wasn’t until after her in-laws passed away and sold everything that was worth a good galleon that Molly felt cheated. Her family deserved the best, but had to settle for hand-me-downs because she was a proper witch, and would not be seen working. She would rather her husband afford what he could than become an improper witch by working.

Molly Prewett always sniffed at witches who worked claiming they had to be muggleborn, half-bloods, or widows. Any other witch she knew that worked was a disgraced witch and exceedingly improper. It was for that reason that she never encouraged Ginny to think about anything other than marriage to a well to do proper wizard. She allowed Ginny her ideal dreams of being famous, but
knew how slim those chances were. She made sure her only daughter knew how to be a proper witch and filled her head with the idea of The-Boy-Who-Lived. What better wizard for her daughter?

Minerva blanched. Molly had been working with Albus the whole time. Molly had spent more than 10 years making trips to Platform 9 ¾ and all of a sudden the year that Harry Potter starts Hogwarts she doesn’t remember which Platform the Hogwarts Express is located on?

“I’ll see to it, Severus,” the older witch said to her friend looking her age not for the first time this year.

That dour potions master stopped pacing and sat down on the adjacent couch, with his elbows on his knees he put his face into his hands and said “Thank you,” knowing that the cat animagus would hear with her enhanced hearing.

Gryffindor and Slytherin sat in silence letting the day’s events crash over them as they pondered in companionable silence.

Elsewhere in France, a young witch’s screams bounced off silencing charms as she writhed in excruciating pain on a carpeted floor.

It was only day two, and it was only 20 seconds, and it was going to get worse.

The young witch’s house-elf busied herself, making sure that the potion was ready for her mistress’s use and that dinner would be prepared for the castle’s occupants. She spent much of the day cleaning to avoid thinking too much, but still she thought about all that was happening around her.

She just got a new family and they were placing themselves firmly in the upcoming war. She didn’t want to lose them, but she didn’t know how to protect them either. She couldn’t save them, she was only a house-elf. Thimi would ask Maga once she returned to Hogwarts for her advice. But how would she ask without revealing any of her new family’s secrets? Oh what to do, what to do!?

Hermione laid on the floor, letting her mind sink back into focus. This was the fourth time she had been hit with the torture curse and this time she was able to float her mind into a safety bubble, like a mental ward of sorts. She was able to take inventory of her mind and her body, she likened it to an out of body experience, but knew she was on to something. It wasn’t an out of body experience and she knew she was safe and able to come back to her body at any point in time.

She protected her mind, she was able to keep focus even while her body thrashed about. This could be the trick that would save her mind should she ever find herself in such a situation. She hoped not, but knew better than to hold out for luck. There was only one way to be sure that she could do it on will.

“Again,” she ordered, her eyes alight with a new burning determination that sent a terrifying thrill through Barty Crouch Jr.
The petite witch was determined to repeat the feat that protected her mind even while her body was being *crucio*ed, every nerve in her body, inside and out, knowing nothing but excruciating pain.

She was amazed as she took the little time she was allowed while being tortured to examine the magical feat that was once thought impossible. She was still in her body and aware of everything around her, including the pain which seemed to be unavoidable at this point, but her mind was still focused even as her body screamed. She mentally reached out to the boundaries that were around her mind and noticed that it felt like a ward instead of a shield.

Before she knew it, yet to her body it wasn’t long enough, the curse stopped.

“**I figured it out,**” she rasped, her eyes glittering with tears and excitement.

Moody and Barty looked at each other for a quick moment before looking back at the witch who was laying awkwardly on the floor with one leg bent so her foot was closer to her hip.

“**Figured what out, lass?**” Moody spoke quietly, his voice barely above a whisper.

“How to keep my mind,” she replied with a small grin, causing her cheek to spasm slightly.

The wizards left the witch on the floor where she was, afraid that touch would aggravate her nerves so quickly after the curse was cast.

“How?” Alastor asked, looking at her intently.

“A ward. It’s like a ward around my mind,” she said softly, “It doesn’t feel like a shield or a wall built up, it feels like a ward, strong but… it’s hard to describe.”

The old auror felt something like excitement beat around in his belly, it was something close to a breakthrough that he hadn’t felt in some time. His breathing changed with his excitement, catching the attention of the younger wizard.

“Are you sure?” Barty asked patiently.

“As sure as devil’s snare hates sunlight,” she replied her grin getting a little bigger as the muscle spasms in her face started to stop.

“Lass, if ye be willing, I’d like to perform *legilimency* on ye to see what you mean. I’ll be gentle and stay away from all personal thoughts that I can. I want to see if it’s like an occluding yer mind,” Alastor said, walking closer to the witch.

Hermione thought about it for a moment.

“What is *legilimency*? It’s not mind reading like the name would suggest, a mind isn’t like a book, it’s more complex than that,” she murmured.

“Correct as usual, lass! *Legilimency* is the act of navigating through a mind. The better the *legilimens*, the deeper they can navigate and the better they can interpret. Dumbledore is a master *legilimens*, as is Snape. I am not a master, but I know the basics. I know enough to know when someone be lyin’ to me. It’s unethical to perform on people unknowingly and unwilling, so the ministry tries to discourage its teaching. They teach the basics at Durmstrang though,” Alastor said in
the manner he would at Hogwarts… well Barty as him at least.

“Okay, do it,” the curly haired witch replied.

She slowly started to sit up, and was grateful when Professor Barty helped her. He continued to help her and nothing was said as he conjured her a chair to sit on. Hermione whispered her thanks as she made herself comfortable and stared at her other professor.

“Oh the count o’ three, lassie. One – two – three. Legilimens.”

Hermione allowed herself to sit behind the… mind ward, she was still unsure what to call it as Professor Moody tried to navigate through her mind. She felt him move about like a wave in her mind, but knew that he wasn’t really seeing anything, so allowed him to continue to be in her mind. After a few moments the waves started to get stronger and harsher, but rolled along her ward as though it was just rain on a window pane. She smiled in her mind behind her ward.

Quickly after the old grizzled wizard pulled out of her mind and grinned, stretching the scars on his face.

“It’s not like occluding at all, lass. But I saw nothing just the same. I was able to be in there, but I wasn’t able to see anything or touch anything. It was like swimming in pool instead of a lake. It was there, but there was nothing in there,” he said with slight awe in his voice, “I could still feel ye emotions though, so you will have to work on occlumency!” he barked, feeling like he was getting too soft for a moment there.

“You can practice occluding your mind on your own at night. You start by clearing your mind and then controlling your emotions and yourself. You must suppress these things so a legilimens cannot read them or use them against you,” Barty explained.

“Although it mostly be emotions with ye, lass,” Moody cut in.

“Oh. Like meditating. I can do that,” she said calmly and confidently.

“It’s not as easy as it seems, lass,” Alastor nearly growled.

“I think it is. I do it all the time to organize my thoughts. You don’t think I’ve survived being Harry’s friend by being emotional during times of stress, do you?” she countered.

“Legilimens!” The auror growled, pointing his wand at the witch in front of him.

Hermione allowed herself to fall into the mindset she had specifically for times of trial. It was something her father had raised her to do, so she could think clearly in times of stress.

Moody expected her mind to still be open like a pool, but instead found that he couldn’t get anywhere near. He tried again, pushing more and using more magic, only to find himself against a hard wall. There was nothing to be gained from the lass’s mind. He tried one last time, pushing as hard as he could to at least break to the top layer, even if her mind itself was behind that unusual mind ward of hers. The only sign that he was doing anything was Hermione’s nose twitched in annoyance.

He pulled back annoyed yet pleased, “No need to practice if you’re a master already. Who taught you?”

“My Dad,” she said with a proud smile.
“Yer father, eh? And he’s pure muggle?” Alastor asked.

“As far as we’re aware of, yes,” the witch replied.

“If he agrees, then we’ll see if he can occlude. It may be a family thing,” the older wizard said, more to himself than those in the room with him.

“While Moody was trying to enter your mind, was your inner ward still up?” Barty asked curiously.

The petite witch looked at him, her hazel eyes showing a little more gold and green than brown, “Yes. Now that it’s there and I know how, it feels natural to keep it there.”

“And there’s no magical drain?” he inquired.

Hermione sat there for a few seconds, thinking about it before answering, “Actually, no. It feels the same as when I set up a ward with the ley lines. Once it’s there it’s self-sustaining. But I didn’t use a ley-line, and it’s not tied to my core. It’s… weird. But a good weird; comfortable, natural.”

While she was speaking with Crouch Jr. Alastor took it upon himself to hobble out of the room looking for the Duke. How a muggle could teach a muggleborn an obscure branch of magic that aurors only learned after they had been recruited was curious indeed.

For the rest of the week Barty reluctantly agreed to continue to perform the cruciatus curse so her body would at least become used to the pain, even if only a little bit. It helped ease his conscious that he knew Thimi was healing her afterwards at night. They continued to work on her aim at least three hours a day, and made her run around the room any time they felt she sassed them too much.

Finally on the third day they started working on basic healing spells and her wards. Moody was reluctant to let her perform the darker wards, but understood the need for them. For the most part however the darker wards were similar to those that were found around older houses of the Sacred Twenty-Eight, especially those who practiced the dark arts. Some of the wards were… vicious. They were cast around small areas of space and quickly dismantled after they reacted properly.

The first ward they had incident with shot fire at intruders, they had the witch key it to herself, allowing her to pass through without incident. Barty went to follow her and the ward shot fire up just as he was about to walk over the line, nearly scorching the young wizard who jumped back just in time. His robes were not so lucky.

“Merlin’s sweet staff!” he yelped.

“Aquamenti!” Moody shouted, trying to put the fire out, only succeeding at putting out the fire on Barty’s robes.

Hermione quickly dismantled the wards when Moody’s spell didn’t put out the fire that was the ward. After that it was agreed that wards similar to that one would be quickly dismantled as soon as they reacted for the safety of the others involved. The witch was pleased however that the fire didn’t leave a mark on the carpet it was on, the only signs that there was a fire were on Crouch Jr.’s robes.

It was two days later that Moody decided it was time to try putting up a ward large scale, like around
the chateau itself.

The Grangers spoke at length about what kind of ward should be set up around the chateau since they figured it would be for the best to keep it instead of taking it down afterwards. They avoided typical wizarding wards, such as muggle-repellents, but decided something of the like would be preferable. It took Hermione a bit before suggesting a ward that would repel those with ill-intent towards the Grangers. She had considered those bearing the dark mark in general, but remembered that not all the death eaters were marked. Even then it would be an insult to her professor, who had done so much to help her, especially when he didn’t have to.

If anything he was helping her against what would normally be his best interests. She didn’t want to proverbially slap him in the face, more so since she was extremely thankful to the wizard. However those with ill-intent would be fine, allowing muggles and wizards to be affected equally. It would make the chateau safe for the family inside without going so far as to put it under a Fidelius Charm.

The family agreed upon the ward choice and the wizards were pleased since it would be one of the stronger more archaic wards. It was a ward that hadn’t been used for hundreds of years due to the lack of ward masters being available and wizards being full of themselves. Others however considered it to be in poor form, especially if they were in politics. They assumed there would always be someone who wished them ill-intent, and it would be poor form if someone was not able to enter their home because of a ward.

How were they supposed to react if something like that were to happen; “Oh. I’m sorry. It would appear as though you wish me ill-will and can’t enter my home. I guess we can’t have that meeting in my study now. Or anywhere really, since now I don’t trust you enough to not kill me.” Or “I swear Alice it’s the ward. I didn’t put up a ward to single her out! It’s not my fault Gladys wishes me ill-will or else she would have been able to come to the engagement party as planned. Oh she was in love with him? How was I supposed to know she now hates me?”

It made things a bit awkward, especially since pureblood society was extremely political. However with the upcoming war, sod politeness. Leeroy did suggest she somehow put in the suggestion for the person to go home, should they not be able to pass the ward to avoid questions, which both wizards agreed with.

Hermione huffed good naturedly claiming that she might as well make it a blood-ward. No one laughed and instead looked at her intensely.

“What?” she asked.

No one said anything and continued to stare at her.

“What? No! Why!” she yelled at them.

“It would make the ward a bit stronger… harder to break down…” Mad-Eye said softly.

“Blood magic falls into the gray area, but it is all about intent,” Barty pitched in his two knuts.

The petite witch glared at them and pursed her lips already knowing she was going to lose this battle.

“Fine,” she ground out.

“Ah! Hermione Jean Granger! We do not grind our teeth young lady!” Abagail scolded her daughter.

Hermione threw up her hands in defeat and stomped out of the castle.
“Where are you going?” her mother called out to her.

“To put up the stupid ward!” was the witch’s reply.

The rest of the occupants gave her a 10 second head start before following after her to watch her put up the wards. There weren’t many instructions on how to put up the wards in the books, it was an innate gift unless you were learning from a master. Ministry workers were only taught one ward and aurors were taught three. Anything better they had to hire a master or someone through Gringotts, and even then they were able to pick and choose clients, which was unusual for someone working for Goblins.

Hermione was able to cast and create wards as long as she had the intent and purpose in mind and did what she felt was best, and so far none of her wards had failed or fallen unless she dismantled them. Alastor tried to dismantle a few of them in the beginning, the easier ones, and whenever he got close the ward would somehow bounce back into full strength. Hermione called it her fail-safe and wouldn’t explain any further other than ‘I can’t, it just… I can’t it makes my magic feel weird in a bad way whenever I try.’ So they stopped asking her. Mad-Eye still tried from time to time to see if he could trip her up, without any success.

Hermione followed her magic and walked to the most northern point of the property. From there she conjured a silver dagger and cut her right palm, letting her blood spill onto the odd rock that had been there for as long as she could remember. She absentmindedly noticed Crookshanks sitting next to her. The witch then took her wand and banished the dagger before squeezing out more blood from her hand. After it looked like the rock was painted by a toddler she healed her palm and put her wand back into her dominant hand. The witch then siphoned the blood on the rock upwards as though she was a musical conductor instructing the musicians to slowly raise the volume.

Once her blood formed a thin line from the stone to the top of the tallest tree in the area, which was a smidge bit taller than the chateau. She then waved her wand in a upwards motion in a large half circle only moving her wrist before returning it back in the same manner. From there she slashed it slowly in a diagonal motion to her wand hand’s opposing hip. Then the witch stepped forward, bringing her wand up with her slowly and then moved it in small reverse arches at timed intervals, each time her wrist snapped in motion when it came up. Crookshanks followed her faithfully as she put up the ward.

Then she opened her mouth and began to chant in a soft melody taking a step with each verbalism,

“Ley lines I ask that you protect me and mine/
From now until the end/
Keep those with ill-will on the descend/
Turn them around/
Make them go back/
Protect those within from attack/
Let there be laughter and love/
Protect us from below and above/
Cleanse us as we pass/
Let no evil through/
Like all life, we depend on you/
Ley lines heed my call/
Barricade the chateau and never fall.”

The blood followed her wand movement, stretching itself thinner to cover the terrain like a small fence. The magic from the ley lines responded favorably and met up with the witch’s blood with each step she took as she encompassed the chateau. Once she had rounded the grounded and finished where she started the ley lines merged with each other and continued to rise until it met itself in an arch similar to a dome over the chateau. It flashed red before slowly lightening up in the color spectrum until it turned white. Then the ley lines gradually lowered themselves back into the ground.

After that Hermione turned around and headed back to the castle.

“… are the wards still up?” Abagail asked, unsure of what else to say.

“Yes, all that you saw is the perimeter of the ward. The ley lines are aware and responded like they were supposed to. So the chateau is now warded. What you saw above was on the off chance that someone decide that flying was a good idea if they couldn’t come in from the ground.”

“And below?” her father asked.

“Taken care of,” she replied unconcerned.

“Need a blood replenisher, lass?” Barty asked.

“That would be wonderful!” the witch replied happily.

Thimi then took that moment to pop in front of her mistress and handed her a vial of blood replensiher.

“Thank you, Thimi.”

“You are most welcome, Miss!” she replied before popping away just as quickly.

Crookshanks took that moment to purr sitting next to his mistress’s feet. He fully approved of the ward, it made protecting his humans much easier.
Chapter 32

Alas they had reached the end of the holiday and it was time to return to Hogwarts. The elder Grangers were a bit sad to see their new friends go along with their daughter, but knew a holiday had to end.

The only other thing Alastor insisted Hermione work on was disillusioning herself. Those who were stronger and well-practiced didn’t need an invisibility cloak. Those who were not were still visible if they moved about, looking like some weird chameleon. Even the demiguise were sometimes semi-visible.

The last day was Easter but the Grangers refused to participate so they simply had a large meal to send the others off. Thimi of course helped with most of it and begrudgingly let Abagail help her and teach her the Granger secret recipe for Easter pudding. It was one of the few days a year they allowed sugar to be consumed in their house.

“So why aren’t we celebrating the holiday again?” Barty asked.

Hermione blushed slightly and looked away before she answered, “We aren’t celebrating because my parents refuse to partake in a fertility holiday. They feel that it’s inappropriate even with the Church trying to over layer the holiday with something Christian. As a child I was allowed to hunt Easter eggs like the rest of the children, since there was no harm in a scavenger hunt. When I got older though and the egg hunts stopped, we stopped.”

“So muggles know about the fertility holiday?” Moody asked.

“Those who look into it, yes. The information is there for those who want to know,” the witch replied.

“In the wizarding world most of the children go home to partake in the fertility rituals. Those who are of age of course, but with how hard it is for purebloods to conceive they encourage witches and wizards as young as 16 to begin preparing their bodies. Especially pureblood witches, since most of them have marriage contracts set as soon as they’re three and those who don’t, usually before they graduate Hogwarts,” Barty said conversationally.

Hermione looked at them as though the wizarding world was crazy. Leeroy happened to come into the room in the middle of Barty talking. He was torn between wanting to agree with Hermione, but also understood on some level.

“Is it because of the wizard to witch ratio?” he asked politely.

“Aye. Usually a pureblood couple is given potions so their first child is a male so the family has an heir. However with how hard it is for some couples to conceive their first child is their only child. There are some exceptions, like the Black sisters, however it is rare. I mean look at the Weasley’s, they have 7 children, and only one of them is a girl. They were gifted with unusual fertility for purebloods, but that’s the way things are,” Moody said.

“Most of the older families have one child, they’re considered lucky if they have two, and blessed if they have three. Then with the war, some families were wiped out completely, including the children,” Crouch Jr. said sadly.

“Bones was lucky that her niece survived. However like the Bones, some of the families don’t believe in the use of contracts on the off chance that their child is queer. Others don’t care and
believe that getting married and having children is their duty to their family,” Moody growled.

“In the end however it is up to the wizard whether they get married or not. Most contracts have been broken this way because of the marriage ceremonies. Once married, they’re married for life. So if the wizard really can’t see himself with the witch, he can terminate the contract. Of course it’s seen as a slight against the other family and the parents of the wizard are usually embarrassed by this,” Barty continued.

“How does a contract like that work? Is there a bride price?” Leeroy asked.

Hermione looked at him incredulously before looking at her professor, also curious. It made sense, more so since they were part of the royals and it was common practice in the older days.

“Of course. Often times the witch’s parents ask for a high price, which is understandable. Then there are the more peculiar ones who take arithmancy into account. There are those who hold out for a witch that is 3rd born, but the Weasley’s actually have a 7th born, which makes the girl extremely sought after,” Barty explained.

“Ginny is exceptionally pretty and smart, but most of her brothers are also smart. Have any wizards made offers?” she asked curiously.

“Many have offered Arthur for his girl. If she wasn’t a Weasley I’m sure even Malfoy would have offered for her. He’s turned them all down sayin’ that Molly already made plans, but never said what,” Alastor answered.

“Malfoy?” she asked with a slight twitch of disgust.

“Aye! Narcissa was the 3rd Black sister and Abraxius Malfoy offered for her as soon as she was born for his son. Everyone knows that if he hadn’t married or if his wife made him a widower he would have offered for her for himself,” Mad-Eye said with a sneer.

“So there are wizards who hold out for younger brides?” Leeroy inquired.

The elder Granger was extremely curious about this aspect of the wizarding world. In the muggle world he was sometimes seen as a cradle robber himself, considering how young his wife was compared to himself. It appeared in the wizarding world it was normal, so it made more sense that they blended in better when they wore their robes when they took their daughter to do her shopping.

“No, I wasn’t interested in witches at the time. There was a war brewing and the Dark Lord preferred his followers to be more dedicated to him than to their family. He expressed his… support of the old ways, but overall he rarely made allowances for family. Only Lucius was allowed to go see his son born, from what I remember. Narcissa went into labor during a meeting. None of the other Death Eaters had enough favor. I had a job to do and I didn’t want my family to be held against me,” Barty said softly.

“I was married to me job. It was luck that me mother n’ father were both aurors or else me mum would have never settled herself. She still worked for the force when I was a lad, though. Honestly she scared me away from marriage. She was a firecracker! Any time m’ father did something wrong, she would be the first to hex him. I wasn’t of the mind to want to watch my back while I slept.
Constant vigilance is what it taught me!” the old auror exclaimed.

“But wouldn’t it be easier to trust a witch who was your partner?” Leeroy asked kindly.

Alastor blushed, “Normally, yes. That’s why so many of the force are married to each other if they weren’t married off beforehand. Personally none of ‘em caught my eye long enough to consider marriage. There was one witch, and she turned another man down as soon as the idea that he would keep her from her work, so I never bothered. She eventually married after the man died and became a widow after three years. She was only a wee bit older than me.”

“What did she do?” the witch asked, “For work.”

“She worked with the DMLE for a time before she stopped liking it,” he said with a crack of a smile.

“Did you have a marriage contract at some point?” she asked baffled.

“Nay. M’ parent both joked that I never half assed anything and if I startled the witch it wouldn’t be half to death. So they agreed that I would have to find a witch with enough backbone on me own.”

This caused those seated at the table to laugh. Shortly after Abagail and Thimi came in with the meal they prepared.

It was agreed that each party return to Britain the way they came to decrease any suspicion there might be.

Mad-Eye and Barty went by way of portkey, and the Grangers by plane.

Once there Granger was to call the Knight Bus and have it bring her directly to Hogwarts. Barty would once again be polyjuiced as Alastor and would let her in through the gate. It would be better than to have her travel on the Hogwarts Express so she could spend some time with her friends before term started back up.

Abagail and Leeroy thanked them and told them they were always welcome, even if they had to be discreet about it. The wizards in turn were mollified and assured they would keep in touch when able. After much discussion the Grangers were convinced on buying an owl both for Hermione and themselves. After they bought their new owls, they would take a picture of it and send it to Hermione so she would know and show them. Then they could burn the picture so there was no solid evidence. For all anyone else knew it could have been a new owl at some local owl post, which was how they sent letters before.

Alastor and Barty left the chateau that day realizing that some of their opinions of muggles had changed during their stay. The Grangers were exceptional muggles, bright and up to speed about the on goings of the wizarding world. They were clean, their chateau was slightly modern by muggle standards, and weren’t sick or diseased in any way. Their medicine was less than sufficient by magical standards and they freely admitted it, but other than that it seemed as though they were on even standings. The Grangers blew a lot of muggle misconception out of the water.

After getting off the plane and going straight to Diagonally to the Magical Menagerie, Hermione glad that her parents decided to wear their robes, they agreed that whatever owls they left with
Crookshanks had to approve of.

The owner of the shop looked at the half-kneazle distastefully, but acknowledged that a familiar had to get along with other animals in the household. In this case it could be the meaning between having an owl or just buying the ginger monster food that could deliver mail. The salesman who remembered him demanded that the ginger menace wear a harness set if he was to be released from his carrier.

The Grangers were given a harness set to use while they were in the shop. Hermione bent down to talk to her familiar through the carries

“Okay Crooks, to make sure the owls pass your inspection you have to wear a harness. Would that be okay with you? Because if you don’t you’ll have to try to pass inspection from the carrier,” she spoke gently to the large cat.

Crookshanks meowed gently, letting his mistress know his consent. After all to help take care of his humans and allow the flying creatures near them he had to approve. He was most pleased that they were allowing him to be the one who made the final decision in this choice. He knew his human was smart.

Hermione smiled at her feline friend and opened the carrier door. She grabbed the red harness set from her father and quickly placed it on the complaint half-kneazle. The salesman watched impressed that the half-kneazle monster favored the young witch so much. Once he had the harness on Crookshanks stood up prepared for work, looking much like a service dog.

The curly haired witch and her parents walked around the small shop, looking at owls here and there. Hermione flat out refused to get a snowy owl on the off chance that it be mistaken for Hedwig. Her parents understood and followed suit.

Abagail stopped in front of a small tan colored barn owl thinking it was adorable. Before she went to pet it however Crookshanks let out a small yowl, thankfully Abagail listened as the owl lunged against its cage trying to bite her. The older woman glared at the mean owl before looking down at Crookshanks.

“Thank you, Crookshanks. This small cretin is obviously not meant to be part of our family,” she said coolly.

They walked around the shop for another 15 minutes before Hermione stopped in front of a medium sized greater sooty owl. It was a bit on the large side, with a deep brown almost black coloring that was speckled with tiny white spots. It had a pale grey belly that matched its facial disc. The owl hooted softly at the witch, making small jumps to the edge of the cage, closer to her.

Hermione’s breath caught in her throat. She knew instinctively that this was the owl for her. It was almost the same feeling she had when she saw Crookshanks for the first time.

“That owl is a bit temperamental miss. She’s been here since she was a hatchling. Give her 5 minutes and she’ll go to take a chunk out of you, I’ve got the scars to prove it,” the salesman said.

Hermione hummed in response, not really giving the salesman half a mind. She watched him in the corner of her eye, but she didn’t really care for his opinion. He was completely wrong about Crooks, who proved to be intelligent and faithful.

“Crooks?” she asked.

Crookshanks stared at the dusk barn owl intently for a minute before sitting on his haunches,
blinking his eyes slowly and purring.

“You get to come to Hogwarts with me, would you like that?” Hermione asked the owl.

She received a soft hoot in response and smiled at the owl.

The Grangers smiled, having seen the owl and their daughter connect as soon as their eyes met. It was just about the same as when they had come home with Crookshanks. They were more than happy that the ginger haired cat approved.

The salesman sighed in exasperation, but also glad to be rid of the damn thing.

“I’ll give her to you for 10 galleons and throw in a carrier and some food,” he said.

“Deal,” the witch quipped, “but we’re not done yet.”

The wizard nodded and grabbed the items for the owl so she would be ready upon check out.

The family continued to walk around the small area looking at each owl carefully. There weren’t many, but they still had to pass the kneazle inspection.

Near the back of the store closer one of the top cages held a Eurasian eagle owl. Leeroy stared at the owl until something clicked in him.

“How about that one, there?” he pointed to the owl.

“He’s been here for a few years now. His old owner came here in a fit and gave him to us for free, just glad to be rid of the thing. Apparently he thought the bloke’s pinky finger was a worm or something and nearly bit it off clean,” the salesman replied.

Leeroy hummed in the same manner his daughter did.

“Crookshanks, what's your opinion on the chap?” he asked.

The salesman look affronted that the half-kneazle’s opinion matter more than what he had been through concerning the care and temperament of the animals in his care.

Crookshanks meowed and walked back and forth.

“Can we see him up closer please?” Hermione asked politely.

The salesman grunted but took out his wand and slowly lowered the cage the owl was in next to the register.

Crookshanks immediately jumped up and sat in front of the cage staring eye to eye with the large bird. Both animals were silent although things seemed to be going well when the owl ruffled its feathers up contently. Crookshanks meowed and purred in response, blinking slowly.

Up close the owl was very large and heavy looking, his tufts were black and his face was a warm brown. His eyes were a startling orange and he was speckled black and browns that ranged from tan to dark brown. The owl let his eyes close slightly giving him an extremely judgmental expression.

Leeroy grinned at the owl.

“How would you like to be part of the family?” he asked the owl.
The owl hooted lowly, ruffling his feathers again. It was quite nice to know that a human cared about his opinion instead of just demanding things. He liked this human. His mate would take some time to get used to, she was skittish he could tell, but he would behave as long as she did.

“I’ll give him to you for 12 galleons and give you the cage he’s in now for free. You’ll have to buy his food though, he has a large appetite,” the salesman huffed.

The Grangers left with their new family additions. Hermione agreed to send them a letter later letting them know her name and giving them some time for her to get used to them before they sent her back. Her parents likewise agreed to do the same, but of course asked her to give her professors a picture of him as they said they would earlier. They warmly parted a block away from the Leaky Cauldron and waited as Hermione called the Knight Bus.

When the bus shot into view Hermione quickly apologized ahead of time to Crookshanks and her new owl, letting them know that it was going to be an unpleasant ride.

As Hermione boarded the bus and shot out of view the elder Grangers looked at each other and grinned.

They loved their daughter and knew she was going on to do important and dangerous things as well as continue her education, however it was hard meeting with the lawyers. They tried to keep their meets as inconspicuous as possible, so they couldn’t leave every day or even every other day. Without Hermione there to worry about, and they did worry, they would be able to keenly focus on their case.

First things first though, they had to contact one Missus Petunia Dursley. It was time that the woman had a free check-up. They had found the address in the telephone book. Sometimes it amazed them how stupid wizards could be. No matter what wards were around the house that prevented them from finding the boy, they could always open a public telephone book. But when they had owls who knew where to go automatically it made a little more sense.

Vernon and Petunia had talked about the upcoming trip extensively. At first Vernon didn’t want to go and almost forbade Petunia to go, they were normal people and going to the freak school would probably put them in a danger of sorts. It was one of the reasons why they tried to keep the boy from being a freak in the first place. He never held Petunia’s sister’s freakishness against her nor her nephew. He loved his wife and he loved his son and in some twisted way he … did care for the boy.

It was Petunia’s constant crying that he could die in the blasted tournament that had been resurrected that cracked Vernon’s heart. He couldn’t stand to see his wife cry, and he knew it would hurt her to lose the last piece of her sister, no matter how much of a freak she was.

The fact that they would be bringing Dudley with them though was unsettling. He didn’t want to have to expose his son to more freakishness than he had to. However he couldn’t exactly ask his sister Marge to watch his son without explaining where they were going that involved the boy. Petunia explained that he was entered into this… tournament against his will. It was supposed to be for adults only, so the odds were obviously stacked against him. Petunia told him he hadn’t even
passed the equivalent of high school, which would be his next year if he survived.

However after they agreed to go say what could be their farewells to the boy they laid down and talked about something important in their bedroom before they went to sleep, quietly in the dark. They didn’t even look at each other, afraid of the small truth they were going to be exposed to. They did however hold hands for comfort…

“We won’t be normal when we go there… to them we’ll be the freaks.”

“We’ll have to watch what we say, we’ll be at the school where they can do… m-magic.”

“Do you think we’ll be safe? We can’t… defend ourselves against their… magic.”

“Whatever happens, I love you.”

“I love you too… We can handle this together. We’ll get through it.”

“I hope so.”
Chapter 33

The trip on the Knight Bus wasn’t as bad as she thought it would be, having decided to sit in the back away from the other passengers. There were only four people who had to be dropped off before her, so she took the time to talk to her new owl. She was a pretty thing.

“I think you’re beautiful. It’s like you took a dip in space and came back looking like the stars. Realistically that’s improbable, but you are beautiful,” she said softly.

The owl in question nibbled softly on her fingers, allowing Hermione to pet her through the cage.

“Of course you have to have a name though. What should we call you?” she asked the bird quietly, knowing she could hear her clearly.

“How about… Elara?” she asked gently.

The owl hooted quietly and nuzzled against Hermione’s fingers.

“Elara is fitting. A beautiful name for a beautiful girl. One who will be kept hidden from others whom are jealous,” she whispered to the owl, “I am not ashamed of you but times are coming where no one must know you are mine. For your safety. Okay? If you want, Crookshanks can explain it to you better.”

The owl looked at her new witch with her large black eyes taking in every detail she could. She was pleasantly surprised that her witch had finally come into her life. The sooty owl made sure to scare off potential buyers until her witch or wizard came for her. Like most familiars as soon as they met, they simply knew. She was the slightest bit upset for all of two seconds to see that her witch had another familiar. He was commanding for a half-kneazle, strong too. Surprisingly his presence calmed her just the same as the witch’s did. They were hers and she was theirs. She decided she would speak with the feline one soon.

Soon they arrived at the Gates of Hogwarts and Hermione gathered her belongings and familiars quickly before stepping off the bus as though she owned it. They asked for her name and she refused to give them one, merely raising her eyebrow and standing impossibly straight. She gave off the appearance of high society with little choice than to be on the bus; being a witch made it seem like she was a pureblood and she was left to her own devices.

The bus pulled away as soon as she was safely off of it. The petite witch took a few steps towards the gate before Professor Moody… well Crouch Jr. appeared before her.

His magical eye peered at her and her luggage before he flashed her a quick smile as he opened the gate.

“Miss Granger, nice to see that ye’ve arrived safely,” he said in his raspy voice.

“Thank you, Professor. Would you by chance happen to know where Harry is?” she asked politely.

“I believe he be on the quidditch pitch with Mr. Weasley. But first I think it would be best if we got yer things in the castle!” he said loudly.

“Yes, sir,” she said.

Professor Moody then flicked his wand at her things so they wouldn’t have to carry them to the
castle. Normally one would tell the witch to leave them there and an elf would bring it for them, however Moody was a paranoid one and would prefer to make sure that his belongings made it where they belong without being tampered with.

“Thank you, Professor,” she said, happy at the trailing luggage.

She quickly turned around and opened the cage that held Elara.

“To the owlery with you. Behave, but don’t let anyone walk over you. Try to make friends with Hedwig, she’s a snow owl. Quick now,” she said as she let the medium sized owl walk on her arm before it took flight.

Hermione quickly tapped the cage and shrunk it, fisting it into her pocket.

“Her name is, Elara,” she said quietly to her professor who had spent the holiday with her.

They walked in companionable silence to the castle. Once they were in the castle Barty tilted his head at Hermione, “Miss Granger.”

She nodded back, “Thank you, Professor Moody,” and they parted ways so as to keep down any suspicion.

Once she reached the Gryffindor Tower she opened Crookshanks carrier and let him walk out of it as though he were never in such a thing to begin with. She rolled her eyes and smiled at his peculiarity. She walked up to the girls’ dormitory and placed her trunk at the foot of her bed and cast her normal anti-theft charm. She then cast a small ward on the latch to prevent people from wanting to touch her trunk.

She didn’t know what made her do it, but it felt like the right thing to do. It was low level enough that it could be mistaken for one that came with the trunk or one that was keyed to some small jewel inside the trunk itself.

After settling her belonging she made her way down to her head of house’s office to check in.

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Quickly parting ways with Miss Granger, Barty made his way to McGonagall’s office to report that he let a student into the castle, as was his duty. If it weren’t for the fact that he was a Death Eater and supposed to be dead, he would have rather liked being a Professor at Hogwarts. He hated some of the students and he had gotten in trouble from time to time for going against protocol concerning student discipline, not to mention grading the homework, but overall it was nice to know that he was teaching the future how to defend themselves. There was a war coming and he would be part of the reason some of them could defend themselves.

He knocked on the door before letting himself in after three seconds.

“Minerva, I let a student in through the gates. Just letting you know due to protocol,” he said offhandedly.

“Which student, Alastor?” the older witch asked primly.

“Miss Granger. I suspect she’ll be here to let you know herself soon though,” he replied.

She looked slightly surprised considering that the witch usually arrived on the express with the rest of
the students, “Thank you, Alastor. Was there anything else?”

“Nay. That be all, Minnie,” he said with a slight growl and a wink, letting himself out.

The witch blushed furiously and glared slightly at the grizzled wizard. That wizard.

Quickly however she remembered that she was supposed to call Severus into her office. She walked quickly to the fireplace and grabbed a pinch of floo powder before throwing it in calling, “Severus Snape’s quarters.”

The fireplace flashed green as she got on her knees and stuck her head in, waiting for Severus to accept her call. Thankfully she wasn’t left waiting long.

“Minerva? A surprise, usually you just let yourself in,” the dark wizard said lightly.

“Of course, normally I would, Severus. However this isn’t just a social call. Alastor just came to let me know that he let Miss Granger in through the gate. She’ll be here soon, that’ll give us a clear opening,” she said.

The potions master raised an eyebrow at this, it was good luck.

“I’ll be there soon,” he said and ended the floo call.

The curly haired witch made her way down the stairs, taking her time. There was no rush, she wasn’t holding anyone up and had no one waiting on her; there were no pressing obligations. She arrived and after she reported in, she would go meet with her friend.

Speaking of her friend, she looked out of the closest window and spotted easily her friend in the air, flying with no other reason than to fly. She smiled at him, even though she knew that he wouldn’t be looking for her. After a minute of watching her friend the witch continued making her way to professor McGonagall’s office.

Hermione knocked on her head of house’s door.

“Come in,” the familiar voice was muffled by the door.

The hazel eyed witch then opened the door and let herself in. She was surprised when she saw the potions master in the room as well.

“I’m sorry, Professor. I was unaware that you had company. I was just coming to let you know that I returned just a few minutes ago,” the young witch said plainly.

“It’s quite alright, Miss Granger. Actually you were just the person we were waiting for,” the elder witch said as she flicked her wand at the door, closing it behind the younger witch.

Hermione’s eyes widened a bit. The potions professor then took it upon himself to cast a few muffling and silencing charms.

“Miss Granger, please have a seat. I’m afraid this will be quite a discussion. One that must remain secret,” the elder witch said with her lips thinning a bit at the end of her sentence.
“We will require a wand oath,” Professor Snape said, the first time since she entered the room.

Minerva looked over at her colleague and friend and nodded before looking back at her prized student.

“Professor, what is this about?” Hermione asked firmly.

“I’m afraid I cannot let you know until you take the oath, dear,” McGonagall said sadly.

Hermione sighed, reluctant to take this oath, but held up her wand anyways. It was her head of house who returned the motion.

“I solemnly swear to keep whatever information imparted to me will be kept secret.”

A thin blue wisp of magic crept from her wand and ghosted over like smoke until it touched her professor’s wand, which then glowed gold.

“Very good, Miss Granger,” the elder witch said, sitting down.

The curly haired witch followed suit after tucking her wand away. It would be bad form to pull her wand on a professor… more so since she had done so in the past… more than once.

“Miss Granger, are you aware of what… transpires when Mister Potter returns to his family’s household?” the potions master spoke.

It was obvious that the younger witch was uncomfortable speaking about her friend, especially about something that was obviously very private. However she did nod hesitantly.

“The champions’ families are invited to the last task of the tournament, to say what could be their farewells. We have contacted the Dursley’s… however it would seem that if we sent an owl, it would have been intercepted by the Headmaster. Mister Potter’s family has not been privy to the tournament this whole time, which is against school rules. Should a student be placed in a dangerous life or death situation, of which this tournament is no doubt, we are to inform the family or guardian immediately. The Headmaster has felt that… it wasn’t necessary since he is Mister Potter’s magical ‘guardian’, the last part was said with as much sarcasm as possible, which was a lot coming from the potions master.

Yet Hermione knew what he was alluding to immediately as her heart sunk into her stomach.

“I have personally contacted Missus Dursley, and they will be coming. It would probably set the family at ease if a muggleborn were to be present, as Missus Dursley is familiar with them. However, the Headmaster doesn’t know about this. It will be a surprise to him…”

“I’m sorry, sir, but wouldn’t that be for best? Considering Harry’s… upbringing,” she said delicately.

“If things were as they appeared Miss Granger, yes. In the beginning I even brought up my concerns for Mister Potter’s home life, as I do for every student that appears to have a… difficult home life. However, the Headmaster simply claimed that the blood wards were more important and that the boy would be fine. Yet I have spoken with Missus Dursley over the phone, she sounded as though she was going to cry. In the end, Miss Granger, she does… care… for Mister Potter. In her own twisted way, or else she would have sent Mister Potter to an orphanage immediately.”

“Miss Granger, that is not the only reason we asked for the oath,” the transfiguration professor spoke up.
“There’s more?” the witch asked surprised.

“The war is coming… Miss Granger, it is imperative that you watch Mister Potter’s back, so to speak. We can only do so much and you are closer to him, you’ve been doing so since the troll incident. Mister Weasley is close, but there are new… surprises popping up that we find we cannot confide in the boy,” she said.

Hermione almost laughed, it was like déjà vu “I owe Harry a life-debt, Professor. If it’s in my power to save him, I have to. My magic seems to think that even if I’m not near him, it is my responsibility to make sure he survives.”

Severus’s eyebrow rose at this information. It shouldn’t have escaped his notice, an incident like that did not happen without extra consequences.

“And Mister Weasley?” he inquired.

“I already repaid it, first year. Getting pass the devil’s snare, he was struggling and would have gotten himself killed if I didn’t step in,” she replied with a small blush.

“And your magic has not considered your debt repaid even after all the… help you’ve given him? Your wit has most certainly saved Mister Potter’s life on more than one occasion,” he replied.

“No, sir. I’m not sure why, so I simply must keep trying,” she said almost dejectedly.

“Well, Miss Granger it appears that there is more at work here than we know. How is your occlumency?” McGonagall asked.

Severus looked at his older friend with a raised eyebrow as though it was questionable that a muggleborn know about the mind defenses at all. An obscure branch of magic that wasn’t mentioned in any of the books at Hogwarts.

“My mental shields are efficient,” the younger witch replied a little tersely.

Severus’s eyebrow rose again, seriously doubting that the know-it-all knew what she was talking about for once.

“Then you wouldn’t mind me testing that, Miss Granger?” he asked softly.

Hermione let out a breath of exasperation and reluctance, “Of course, sir,” she replied dutifully.

Severus took his wand in his hand, on the off chance that she was telling the truth, her thin walls wouldn’t last if he pushed just a little more than usual.

“Legilimens,” he cast, staring into her hazel eyes.

The potions master was surprised when he came in contact with a wall almost immediately. It was as though she was teasing him, with it being obscure, like a bathroom window. The window was distorted and showed nothing but shapes, teasing the outsider with nothing solidly identifiable, not even emotions. He pushed a little harder, believing there might be a small crack of some sort, and was surprised again when it was indeed solid. The dark wizard then decided he would push harder, actually testing her limits.

Hermione’s nose twitched in annoyance as she felt the wizard actually try to break into her mind. Her nose tickled last time when Professor Moody tried, and it tickled now. It was nice to know that he was taking her seriously now though.
The professor was starting to get annoyed and decided to ram into her shields, perhaps a surprise blunt hit would shatter it. He was surprised when instead he seemed to bounce off of it, like a balloon was surrounding it. He tried to pierce it instead, and instead met it solidly again. He pushed harder using more magic than he had intended, and eventually slipped into her mind, but it was protected by a shimmering ward. He could feel her emotions now, but that was all. And right now she was a mix of annoyed and amused.

The dark professor pulled out of her mind and looked at her surprised.

“It would appear that Miss Granger had given us an understatement, she is a master. Even when I passed her shield, she had a backup one. Her mind is safe…” he said, looking at her intrigued.

It would appear that the young witch learned a new form of magic under his nose, again. He knew last year that he had to keep an eye on her, but he was busy staying out of Moody’s eye as it was.

Minerva’s eyebrows shot upward, having watching Severus practically try to batter her favorite student’s mind. At first she was concerned, but understood the necessity and allowed it to happen without stepping in. It would seem they would be able to rely on Miss Granger more than they originally thought.

“My dear, we have much to discuss with you,” the elder witch said firmly.
Chapter 34

Hermione sat in the chair, her heart had not returned from its place in her stomach. It was exceedingly hard to hear that the Headmaster, whom her best friend placed such high regard, did not do the same for him. It was a feeling of dreadful betrayal she felt for him.

“While we trust the Headmaster to do what is best for the wizarding world, the Greater Good as he likes to say,” McGonagall said distastefully, “we don’t trust him to do what is best for individuals. We feel there is something not quite right, happening under our very noses. You of course, have an alliance with Mister Potter, so I feel safe in letting you know these details that may assist you in your dealings with Mister Potter,” she sighed at the end.

The younger witch trusted the Deputy Headmistress to do what was best for the students, regardless of what the Headmaster said, as she had done so before.

“Such as, Professor?” the curly haired witch inquired, opening the door for either to answer.

“Miss Granger, have you ever seen the Weasley’s have any company other than yourself and Mister Potter?” Severus cut in, almost nonchalantly.

“No, sir,” she answered, extremely curious where this line of questioning was going.

She could tell that whatever it was upset her head of house.

“The Weasley matriarch, while a loving mother, is also a quite self-serving witch,” he said softly, “No one other than family members have been invited to stay with them. Unless it is under the request of the Headmaster, no other witch or wizard have particularly been inside of the Burrow.”

“That would mean that she considers us family,” the witch supplied, as it was the most obvious answer.

“Yes, but why? Out of seven children, Miss Granger, only the sixth son has had friends invited into the Burrow,” he questioned, letting her come to her own conclusions.

“She… plans for us to be part of her family?” she asked, unsure of where this was going.

“Indeed, Miss Granger. The Boy Who Lived and the Brightest Witch of Her Generation,” he said the last part sarcastically, even if it might be true.

“She wants us to marry into her family?” her voice raised and octave.

“It would be something that Molly would do. She has always had a reputation of wanting the best, feeling that she deserves it, no matter how baseless that idea is,” Minerva supplied, slightly uncomfortable being so familiar with a student.

“That’s how Ronald gets…” Hermione whispered to herself, now knowing that it seemed to be a family trait.

“Exactly. So you are to be careful Miss Granger, unless you want to marry one of her sons,” Snape said with a slight sneer.

Hermione was unaware of the distasteful reaction she had at the mention of such a thing before it flitted off her face. For some reason Severus was pleased with her reaction. While not all of the
Weasley’s were horrible people, some of them were indeed intelligent, for example Bill Weasley, he still felt that she deserved better. What better was though, he was unsure of himself just yet.

“Please watch yourself when you are around Molly, Miss Granger,” the elder witch said beseechingly.

“I will, Professor. Thank you for letting me know,” she said earnestly, thankful for the information about the family who took them in.

“Potter will need your support with the upcoming task. We are not asking that you trail him through the … task, however you should be there with him when he sees his family. Normally it is not allowed, however I will see that this receives an exception, placing you as his sister, if that would be alright with you,” McGonagall continued.

Hermione nodded, “I see Harry as nothing more than a younger brother, Professor. He is important to me, but I couldn’t see myself with him as anything more than family.”

This caused Severus to roll his eyes, however it pleased him to know that she would not waste her intelligence on the boy. She was obviously smarter than that, and not swayed by his riches or captivating eyes that looked so much like Lily’s…

“You would probably consider making a blood bond with the boy. Becoming his blood sister would get you around this, easily. It makes it easier in the long run to cover our ends, and considering you are already entwined with Potter for an unforeseeable future, it might make things easier,” he said.

“I will take that into consideration,” Hermione replied.

“We need more than consideration, Miss Granger,” Minerva said sharply, “Professor Snape is onto something. It would indeed cover our tracks and keep us safe instead of having us seen as using favoritism or some underhanded reasoning to break rules. It would also give you beneficial connections, you’d be more in tune with Potter in a way.”

“In tune how?” the young witch asked, slightly uncomfortable with idea.

“Nothing as far as mind link unless you shared the same magical affinity, which I doubt. However it would make it so you are aware of where he is should he be in danger or in need of you in terms of emotional distress. You’d be more inclined to bond with him, spend time doing leisure activities together,” the elder witch replied.

This calmed Hermione down in abundance and she let out a breath she didn’t know she was holding.

“That is acceptable,” she responded.

“We will have to perform the bond before term begins. I will ask you to come here and meet us as I gather Mister Potter myself this evening,” McGonagall decided.

Severus was surprised at how insistent his friend was about the sibling blood bond. It would be beneficial, however it wouldn’t be an end all, just a small leg up. Something they could have worked around should the witch decide she didn’t want to entwine herself with Mister Potter for the rest of her life. However it seemed that his intelligent friend decided they needed the boost more than he thought. He trusted her and often used her a soundboard so if it sounded good to her, she must have thought of something else in the meanwhile.

Aside from that though, it really did cover their asses when it came to the family thing they were going to be doing. Albus would surely be upset and do his best to blindside them. However Miss
Granger’s mind would be unaffected should the Headmaster decide it was best to cast a memory charm or a confundus charm on the witch.

“Now Miss Granger, how would you feel about working closely with Professor Snape?” Minerva hedged.

“In what sense, Professor?” she asked cautiously.

Cautiousness was good, she wasn’t trusting them blindly, and she hadn’t said ‘no’.

“Since you will be vital in Mister Potter’s safety, Professor Snape is willing to take you under his tutelage for things we don’t normally teach here at Hogwarts,” she said primly.

“Such as?” the witch probed.

“I will teach you how to fight, physically, Miss Granger. It is something most wizards don’t think about, and a surprise such as that could mean life or death,” he interjected.

“It has come to my attention early on that most wizards seem to lack simple logic, so I could see that being a reality,” she replied lightly, “Yet…”

“Your hesitance is understandable, Miss Granger. However I assure you that I will work you up to high standards and take care of any physical injuries you may sustain during sparring matches, or any physical injuries you may sustain should you prove… clumsy,” he supplied.

This time Hermione rolled her eyes. If there was one thing she was not, it was clumsy. Unless someone cast a hex upon her person, she was very balanced. Probably part of the reason why she disliked broom riding, even when she only hovered. There was nothing but her magic to keep her balanced, she simply wasn’t comfortable with that. What bothered her was the fact that she was told be wary of the Professor himself.

“My concern isn’t that, Professor. I’ve been given intelligence by an anonymous source that you are a spy… for both sides. I don’t know which side you are truly on, and I don’t know how much you need to divulge to the other side if you are on the light side. However I am not one to put my life into the hands of another without fully knowing the facts,” she said firmly.

At first his eyes widened in surprise then narrowed in anger, “What business is it of yours, Miss Granger?”

“It is my life, it is my business. I am a leg up for Harry. I am not stupid, Professor Snape. Should you be on the other side, I can become more of a target than I already am just by being his friend,” she said, her voice turning light, almost unconcerned.

He had heard Narcissa use that tone quite a few times. He knew just how serious she was. She was correct however, it was her life that was being placed on the line in this case. If this information got to the wrong person, she would be more of a target besides being the muggleborn friend of Harry Potter. More so if she became the blood bonded sister of Harry Potter, she would be sought after for the bond alone.

“I solemnly swear to Hermione Granger on my magic, that I am on the side of light and will not give her secrets to others without her permission.” He said softly, “Lumos.”

The tip of his wand lit up as a ghostly blue swirled around the room, looking for Hermione’s wand. When it found her wand in her pocket, it glowed gold before he incanted, “Nox.”
Hermione’s lips twitched into a ghost of a smile, “I would love to take lessons from you, Professor Snape.”

Minerva felt her heart beating so hard it felt as though it was trying to break out of her chest. She was unaware that she was holding her breath. Somehow Miss Granger had found out inside information about Severus’s side occupation. Granted if someone wanted to know they could look at the Ministry archives, but it was under tight lock and key, how Severus avoided Azkaban.

Minerva trusted her friend with her life, however she understood where Miss Granger was coming from. It was indeed her life she was placing on the line, more so than others in the war that was to come. She was glad that the potions master understood and gave an oath that would not be questioned.

“I will see you half an hour before dinner, Miss Granger,” Minerva dismissed the younger witch with a smile of pure relief.

Later on Severus and Minerva would remember Miss Granger’s tone that would remind them of high class society only seen by purebloods.

Hermione walked slowly, letting all that happened sink in. It would seem that she was no longer able to tell her other professors about this change, nor assure them of the potions master allegiance. She would only be able to tell them to trust her, and while they should know her better, she knew Moody wouldn’t accept that flat out.

It had become more complicated than it already was. On the plus side, she would have more in her arsenal to protect Harry. She was actually a bit thrilled at having him as a brother, and she would let her parents know as soon as she was able. However it appeared that she would have to put a warded band on Elara’s tarsus, to protect her mail, especially if the Headmaster was intercepting owls.

Who knew who else was intercepting owls?

It was almost late lunch though, so she decided she would meet the boys in the common room, knowing they would have to take off their cloaks before they went to the Great Hall. She was so glad that last day holiday meal times were different than regular term times, taking into consideration teenage sleeping schedules and the Hogwarts Express.

Ron and Harry came in through the portrait covered in snow and red in the face, breathless, but happy. Hermione smiled knowing that Harry had so little to be happy about.

“Hermione! When did you get back?” he asked with a huge smile.

She got up and hugged him tightly, “I’ve only just arrived today. I saw you on the quidditch pitch and figured I’d wait since I just took off my cloak.”

“What you didn’t want to see Vicky before us?” Ron asked snidely.

“Why would I put a boy before my friendship, Ronald?” she asked with a small sneer.

She hadn’t seen them in quite some time and already he was picking on her! Not that she even
thought of Viktor during break, honestly she had forgotten to keep up correspondence due to her strict regimen. The nerve of him though! She saw Harry become uncomfortable though and glared at the redhead before smiling again at her green eyed friend.

“Did you have a nice holiday?” she asked lightly, looking keenly on Harry.

Harry smiled, “It was alright.”

“Did you do your holiday homework?” she wheedled with a sly look.

“I did some of it,” Harry said with a nervous chuckle.

“Lay off, Hermione! Not everyone focuses purely on school work during their holiday,” Ron stressed, his face reddening in anger.

“Indeed. Harry since you did some of it, I’ll gladly help you work on it later if you want,” she said, looking coolly at Ron.

Harry’s face smiled with relief, “Thanks, Hermione. I’ll take you up on that. After dinner?”

“I’ll hold you up to that,” she said with a playful smile.

She waited while the boys ran up to their dorm to take off their cloaks.

“What’s the matter with her!?” Ron yelled as soon as their dorm room door shut.

“What’re you talkin’ about, Ron?” Harry asked, clearly confused. His redheaded friend had been quite pleasant over the break.

“Hermione! She hasn’t seen us all break and the first thing she asks is about homework!” he fumed.

“Well, honestly she asked about our holiday first…” Harry said, trailing off.

“It doesn’t matter! She shouldn’t go breaking a bloke’s balls for enjoying his break!” he continued.

Harry remained silent and looked away, uncomfortable with how his friend was complaining about his other friend. She really didn’t do anything wrong or out of character. She actually handled Ron well instead of exploding back on him.

Ever since he found out she was dating Krum, Ron had been letting his jealousy get the better of him. For all that he acted, it was like Hermione belonged to him and didn’t have a choice in the matter. His friend never even expressed interest in their female friend... It was very disconcerting.

He was happy for his friend, he knew dating Krum was a confident boost for the witch. She held fast like a true friend since the whole debacle happened. She helped him with everything and actively tried to make sure he survived the tasks. Granted he was a bit annoyed at her persistence with the egg, but when it came down to it she was the only one who knew what to look for. He’d be dead if it wasn’t for her, and her studious nature. He was decidedly very uncomfortable with Ron bad mouthing Hermione.

“Let’s go eat, mate,” Harry said instead.

“Oh good! I could eat,” his quick tempered friend said happily.
The trio made their way to the Great Hall with no incidents. They sat down to the wonderful aroma wafting from the food.

Hermione made her plate neatly while Ron piled as much as he could fit on it. Harry almost laughed at how opposite they were all the way down to their eating habits. Hermione was neat and precise, with Ron it was a wonder the food made it into his mouth at all. Ron was his mate and all, but he agreed with the witch about the redheaded wizard closing his mouth when he chewed.

Thankfully Ron was too distracted by food to start another argument.

Time passed by quickly, the way it usually did on the last day of break. Hermione took the moment that the students were getting off the Hogwarts Express to make herself scarce, claiming she was going to take a bath in the prefects’ bathroom. She grabbed her toiletries, but knew she wasn’t going to do so, instead made her way to her head of house’s office. The witch knew she was taking advantage of the craziness that normally occurred when the students returned.

Thankfully she made it to the office before the students made it to the top of the stairs and let herself in.

“Miss Granger, you’re a little early,” the elder witch commented.

“I decided it would be best to avoid the masses,” she replied.

“A wise decision. Please relax and make yourself comfortable while I go retrieve Mister Potter, but not too comfortable,” the strict professor said.

“Of course, Professor,” was the easy reply.
Minerva walked quickly to Gryffindor tower, knowing it was the most likely place that Harry Potter would be at this time of day. Luckily her office was close enough to the tower that she would be able to avoid most of the students coming off of the express, and she was nor scheduled to retrieve them. Thankfully Hagrid and Pomona were gathering the children, ensuring that they made it to the castle in one piece.

She gave the Fat Lady the password and was granted access. The elder witch passed through the portrait entryway and stood up straight, her eyes sweeping over the common room. She easily spotted the wizard with messy hair that resembled his father’s with his mother’s beautiful eyes.

“Mister Potter,” she called clearly.

“Yes, Professor?” he asked, uneasily.

“If you would come with me please?” she asked, although they both knew it wasn’t really a request.

“Of course, Professor,” he replied politely and got up to follow his professor.

The youngest Weasley boy looked at his friend as though he felt sorry for him. He sent the other boy a look of which Potter shrugged, letting the other boy knew he didn’t know what this was about.

When he was two paces away, the witch turned around and walked out of the portrait, expecting the young wizard to follow her. The wizard in question did not disappoint her.

“What is this about, Professor?” he asked.

“We will discuss it in my office, Mister Potter,” she replied tersely.

She honestly didn’t want the Headmaster to catch wind of any of this. It was all being done under his crooked nose. It was unseemly the way he kept a close eye on Potter, if Minerva didn’t know any better she would have been uncomfortable with the attention he gave the boy.

Harry quietly followed his head of house the rest of the way to her office. He was surprised by how fast she was walking, it was quicker than her normal brisk pace. If he weren’t so fit he knew he would have a hard time keeping up with the older witch, who didn’t show any signs of being out of breath or strained in any way.

She held the door open to her office, “After you, Mister Potter.”

Harry quickly stepped into her office and was surprised at seeing Hermione there. His heart dropped and hoped it wasn’t something to do with the tournament. It was bad enough that both of his friends were already bait, he just hoped Hermione wouldn’t be used that way again.

“What’s going on, Professor? Hermione are you okay?” he asked, quite panicked.

“I’m fine, Harry. Please sit down. It’s important,” the younger witch reassured him.

The professor walked around her desk and took her seat, only then did Harry sit down, following her example, knowing it would be weird if he were the only one standing.

“Hermione, what’s going on?” he asked again.
Hermione looked away and pursed her lips. She wanted to tell him a lot of things, but she made an oath so she wouldn’t be able to be the one to tell him anyways.

“Miss Granger has taken an oath so she cannot answer that, Mister Potter,” the transfiguration professor announced.

The green eyed boy looked away from his best friend and looked at his professor beseechingly.

“Mister Potter, it has been discussed between myself and a colleague as well as Miss Granger, and we think it would be best if you were to perform a blood bond with Miss Granger,” she said primly, as though she were speaking about school rules.

“A blood bond?” he asked.

“A sibling blood bond, Harry. It would mean that I’m you sister, even in blood. I see you as a brother, and you’re everything I could ever ask for in one. You already know I’m an only child, but I would love to have a brother. But, I want you to be my brother. Will you be my blood brother, Harry?” the curly haired witch asked, knowing it would go better if she asked instead of bossed.

“A sibling blood bond… You’d be my sister. My blood sister. Would that make you a Potter?” he asked, not saying no.

“It would make me a Potter as much as it would make you a Granger,” she said with a large smile.

“Do I have to have an answer right now, Professor?” he asked.

“I’m afraid so, Mister Potter,” she said with a small sigh.

“Why isn’t Ron here?” he asked.

“Harry if you’re related to Ron, then you’d be related to Ginny. You know how she feels about you,” Hermione hedged. She hoped Harry didn’t feel the same way as Ginny, but she would rather that Harry stay away from them for now.

Harry blushed and nodded at Hermione’s explanation. Even if he didn’t feel the same way as Ginny, he knew that Missus Weasley would most likely be upset that he upset Ginny.

“Hermione are you sure you want to be my sister? I mean… that would mean you’d be related to the Dursley’s,” he asked.

“Harry,” she grabbed his hand with hers, “if it meant being your sister, I would be okay being related to Malfoy,” she said, her face as serious as she could keep it.

Harry’s face scrunched up at the idea of being related to the blond ferret, but laughed at Hermione’s joke. He was glad when Hermione joined in, and was further lightened when he saw even Professor McGonagall’s lips form a tight smile.

“Hermione, if it meant having a wonderful person like you for a sister, I would be the luckiest boy in the world. How do we do this, Professor?” he asked with a large grin on his face.

Minerva’s smile widened a little bit before answering, “Well Mister Potter, first you’d both have to cut your wand hands. Not deeply mind you, but enough to draw blood. Then you each make sure that your palms are touching, the blood mixes easier this way. I’ll be your binder, so all you’ll have to do is follow my lead. Is that clear?” she asked.
“Yes, Professor,” they answer simultaneously.

The elder witch pull out a silver mirror from her desk and transfigured it into a silver dagger. She passed it to Miss Granger, whom she knew was serious about this.

Hermione grabbed the dagger carefully, noticing that her head of house made it sharp, before opening her wand hand and dragging it down carefully, biting her tongue. After taking the cruciatus this felt like a papercut, but that didn’t mean it didn’t sting a little.

Harry watched with awe as Hermione didn’t even hesitate. His heart filled with something unknown but made him happy and sad at the same time, she wanted to be his sister with no hesitation. She was his friend without holding back. She always believed in him even if she didn’t always believe him. If there was one person he would choose to be related to, it would be Hermione.

She passed him the dagger, which he copied her actions of cutting his palm, but hissed as he did it. The professor then took the dagger from his hand as she had walked around her desk to stand next to them. Hermione held her hand up for Harry to hold, he grasped it tightly. Normally you couldn’t pick your family, but he was getting the rare chance to do so and was going to grab onto it as hard as he could.

Minerva waved her wand over their hands, a gold light was flowing from her wand and wrapping itself around their hands, up to their arms like a ribbon.

“Do you Hermione Jean Granger, take Harry James Potter to be your brother in blood?”

“With all my heart, I accept Harry James Potter as my brother.”

“Harry James Potter, do you take Hermione Jean Granger to be your sister in blood?”

“I accept Hermione Jean Granger as my sister with everything I am.”

“Do you accept Harry James Potter’s claim?”

“With everything that I am.”

“Do you accept Hermione Jean Granger’s claim?”

“With all my heart.”

The gold magic that wrapped around the witch and wizard glowed brightly, nearly blinding them, but they kept their eyes open, staring at each other with bright smiles. The light dwindled down before dispersing itself in what looked like glitter to the two teens.

Minerva smiled at them, happy for her cubs.

“Congratulations Mister Potter, Miss Granger.”

“Thank you, Professor,” they chimed together.

They pulled their hands apart slowly and were both pleased that the cuts were sealed and there was no scar.

“Remember, this should stay secret for as long as possible,” the stern professor said to them.

“Why?” Harry asked, confused. He was proud to have a sister, he was proud to have family.
“You’ll understand later, Harry. Just listen to her on this, okay?” Hermione implored.

Harry turned and nodded at his sister.

‘His sister! He had a fucking sister!’

The young wizard’s eyes watered with emotion. He had a family. He had family he considered family, someone who loved him!

“Oh, Harry, don’t cry now.” She said, grabbing her sleeve and wiping his eyes.

He laughed softly through his tears.

“Professor, I told the common room that I was going to take a bath in the prefects’ bathroom. Would you happen to know the password this week?” the witch asked.

The elder witch sighed, “It’s Tugging Thorn.”

“Thank you, Professor!” the witch exclaimed as she grabbed her new brother’s hand and dragged him out of the transfiguration professor’s office. Harry laughed at his sister’s antics. Minerva smiled at the boy’s laughter, it was so far and few in-between. He chuckled of course, to Mister Weasley’s stupidity, but he never really laughed like that. It was good for him.

Hermione pulled her brother down the hall, making her way to the prefects’ bathroom.

“Don’t forget after dinner, we’re going to finish your homework,” she reminded him.

“I didn’t forget, Hermione. You’re my sister not my mother,” he said, with a goofy smile.

Hermione grinned back.

“I really am going to take a bath though, you should too, you were on your broom this afternoon,” she said lightly.

After she forced the wizard to walk her to the portrait (well dragged him rather, but semantics) she turned around and threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. Harry hugged her back and cried.

All he ever wanted was family who loved him. That was why he was so enamored with the Weasley family, they loved him like family. Now he had family who loved him. The witch in his arms was his family. Was his sister.

It wasn’t anything like he always imagined it would be… it was better.

As soon as they returned home with their owl, Leeroy let him out so he could get used to the house.

“Well?” he asked the owl.

The owl ruffled his feathers, obviously pleased. The house was clean, the room they were in had nice open space, and the windows were large.
“Glad you approve. Now you need a name. It would be rude to call you owl,” he said.

Abagail rolled her eyes at her husband, having already left the pair to go into the kitchen to go through the phone book. She knew that the owl would be part of the family and would make a fine pair with her husband. She saw the click as sure as she saw Hermione’s. She just hoped he wouldn’t be mean to her, that’s all she asked for.

“How about… Martin? And we’ll call you Marty?” Leeroy asked with a grin.

“God of War?” Abagail called, making sure that she heard him properly.

“Yep! How about it chap? Marty?” he asked.

The owl hooted and leaned over to nibble his new master’s hand affectionately. Leeroy smiled as he pet the owl softly.

“I have to take a picture of you and send you to Hogwarts. Hermione has to know what you look like, okay?” he spoke gently to the newest family member.

He received a small hoot in response.

Abagail smiled, listening to her Leeroy. At this rate the owl would be better than having that dog Leeroy always asked for. Well she hoped at least.

She ran her finger down the page, leafing through the phone book. She would find the Dursley’s, get their phone number and address, and pay them a home visit. It would be nice to have a chat with this Petunia woman. First she would discuss things with her lawyers, then she would call and serve the papers herself, if they would let her… or she would just show up to the homemakers’ house. Whatever she was feeling in the moment.

Abagail smiled predatorily at the name she was looking for.

_Dursley, Petunia and Vernon_

_4 Privet Drive,_

_Little Whinging, Surrey_

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Petunia had packed light for her and her family. She packed what she remembered seeing those people wear at her sister’s wedding. It was bad enough they had a name for normal people, muggles. _Ugh._ The least they could do was try to blend in. It would be in Scotland, so it would be chilly she was sure, so she made sure to grab coats. Her husband was a bit large for a button up vest… Her Dudders would be fine as long as she made him wear black slacks and a jumper. Her husband though would be hard to dress, black slacks to match their son, but he was too old to just pass by with a jumper. He would be wearing a heavy coat… so she supposed he could just wear a button up.

She had already picked out her outfit, a long slimming grey ankle length dress, with simple flats, for the next day she had a similar dress, but a dashing green to go with her blond hair. Vernon and Dudley would just have to wear the same styled pants, but different shirts.

Vernon was not looking forward to going, at all. He put his foot down and told Petunia that they would tell Dudley that they were going two nights in advance. That was all the notice he would get.
It was bad enough that they were fretting over the date, their son shouldn’t suffer under the stress with them. Dudley was still traumatized with his experiences with magic thus far, no need to worry him.

Albus was pleased that Harry was still in the castle and not moping about under his cloak this holiday. He had planned to slip the boy some liquid luck in a cup of tea or cocoa, he wasn’t sure which just yet, maybe pumpkin juice… The boy would be unknowing about the Felix Felicis and it would keep him alive long enough.

He knew the time was close when Tom would be resurrected. He had debated with himself for over a decade whether to ruin the name Lord Voldemort but telling the public his true name. However he had to respect the other wizard in front of the masses, if appear unconcerned and undermine him with his true name. It would infuriate him, to use his muggle name in front of his followers. However after the Chamber of Secrets fiasco, he was tempted to bring out the truth concerning the half giant in his employ. He knew that Hagrid never released the basilisk, he was good with creatures, but he wasn’t a parslemouth.

However it was easier to have someone do anything for you, being grateful and feeling that they simply had to than to convince them otherwise. The large man was indeed an asset that he didn’t want to lose, even if he had a broken wand. He might have been better use with a wand, but then the truth would come out that he knew how to support his case better in the first place. It would place him in a tight spot with the giant. He already did well enough getting the half breed out of Azkaban.

Sirius however, he made sure the wizard was forgotten about. He was so sure that the dark wizard betrayed the Potter’s that he confound the aurors in charge of his case. He waited the minimum in custody and by day 20 everyone forgot that he was entitled to a trial. Then he escaped and he almost had the wizard kissed.

He gave the Granger girl the idea of saving him, only after remembering that Black had a house they could use for the Order when the time came. Of course he played innocent that he had no idea what the teenagers did that evening. He hadn’t expected them to save the hippogriff as well, but it was no matter. They could have let the hippogriff go into the wild at any time, but he let Hagrid think differently considering that the Minister wanted the beast dead at Malfoy’s behest.

It was just another thing to add in his pocket. He could have had the half breed demoted, or sacked even, but instead said it was easier to say his farewells to the creature. He wouldn’t have the half giant sacked, he needed him. Although it was easier in Britain where the wizarding society held high disdain for half breeds to have him thinking that he wouldn’t be able to find employment anywhere else.

Hogwarts was always open to those in need…

… as long as they did what he wanted them to do. It was better when they felt like they need to do it though. For the Greater Good of course.

He was Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, the Greater Good needed him to lead the side of light. Harry Potter was supposed to be his replacement as the Boy-Who-Lived, however if things turned south, he could always turn to the Longbottom boy, it could have easily been him. He was soft, but in time he would be able to turn the boy into a warrior. His only problem there was he would have to do it when Augusta was unaware, that was why he picked the Potters. Augusta Longbottom was force to be reckoned with, and even he knew it.
Chapter 36

As soon as the teenagers left her office the door shut closed behind with a soft ‘bang’. Minerva waited a few minutes before leaving her office herself, appearing busy to outside nosing portraits. The witch knew that the Headmaster had them occasionally report to him. It wasn’t often and the portraits had a small amount of sentience to them, so they could make their own choices. That was how the portraits in the Headmaster’s office were able to aid the current Headmaster. It was a shadow of their previous selves, but with enough sentience that they were helpful and ever learning.

She then transformed into her tabby cat form and made her way swiftly to the dungeons. It was easier on her joints, she told people who inquired. Truly though it was liberating to give into a part of her wild side. She was strict, firm, fair, and imposing. As a cat however she was free from those obligations to hold a certain appearance. She did on the first day’s class for first years, but only to keep them hooked for the rest of their Hogwarts career. Being an animagus was a huge transfiguration feat, and to show off that skill to impressionable minds left a nice mark.

Even bigoted purebloods showed her respect for the achievement. She hardly had a problem with new and even old students. Hence the reason that Malfoy senior always went to the Headmaster instead of contacting the Deputy. He could sass and talk politics with the Headmaster all day, both of them dancing around one subject or other. With her however, it was straight to the point without any of that nonsense. It threw the old Slytherin off balance as it left no wiggle room.

The Headmaster may figure it was because he was the Headmaster, however the blond pureblood always made himself scarce whenever she entered the room. She had asked Severus why he was still friends with him at some point, but he had replied; “To each their own.” And she left it at that.

Once she arrived at Severus’s private portrait she whispered the password and barged in.

“Severus, are you busy?” she called, as she shut the portrait door behind her.

Severus was sitting in his armchair reading the latest Potioneers journal.

“Obviously, not,” he said slowly.

Sometimes he wondered why he allowed her and Hooch to have unlimited access to his rooms. They knew his passwords every month, they were keyed to his wards and his floo; they pranced into his rooms whenever they felt the need, or want. In the beginning it was annoying and he cut their access for all of two weeks before he missed them. Now they at least kept to the sitting area and small kitchenette. Unfortunately each woman had seen him in a state of undress or with… company. Thankfully it was Hooch who caught him with the woman and merely catcalled from the doorway.

“Good. I’ve just performed the bond, it went splendidly, by the way. You know, in case you were wondering,” she said teasingly, making herself comfortable on the opposing couch.

“Good to know,” he said uncaringly, going back to his journal.

“Potter started crying, it was such a sweet moment, Severus. If there wasn’t any animosity between the two of you I would have insisted that you be there!” she exclaimed.

“Minerva, I don’t want to hear about every time something sentimental happens with the boy,” he said exasperatedly.

The potions master threw his head back against his chair, practically throwing a small temper
“Oh Severus, you’re just as bad as the kids with your brooding,” the witch’s voice was light.

“I would thank you not to compare me to our angst riddled students,” he said looking up at the stone ceiling.

“I don’t know,” she said singsong. “Tall, dark, and handsome falls into certain categories,” she teased.

If Severus didn’t know he would think she was a young witch again with all her teasing. She was exactly like her animagus form, catty and often playful. She simply loved to bat his ego around. Hooch on the other hand had an eye that often saw things that she shouldn’t.

“Minerva, are you in here?” called another feminine voice.

Speak of the devil…

“Yes, Hooch, I’m here,” the elder witch replied.

“Keeping tall, dark, and handsome company?” she teased, strutting into the room as though she owned the place.

“Of course, dear,” the cat animagus practically purred with a mischievous smile on her face.

“Is he upset that the students are back?” the yellow eyed witch asked.

“I would thank you not to talk about me like I’m not here,” Severus called annoyed.

They always did this to him! Why was he friends with them again?

“Don’t worry, Sev. I know you’re here. And in good company now that we’re both here!” the short haired witch called, placing her hands on her hips.

The wizard rolled his head, his hair hanging softly to stare at the high spirited woman. His eyes were screaming, ‘Why’.

“Don’t look at me like that, Sev. You know you wanted us to be down here. I brought the whiskey for our last shot of the break!” she announced, pulling a bottle of Ogden’s Finest out of her robe pocket.

It was tradition that they get together and take a shot of whiskey to ‘help’ get them through the term. They all had high enough tolerance where it didn’t affect their teaching or cognitive abilities. It was simply the comradery between friends, a social drink, since they all stayed sober for the semester.

“Drink up!” the athletic witch shouted, as she poured them each a healthy shot.

Severus absently noted that she summoned his taller shot glasses so she could make them drink more. With how the year was turning out, he wasn’t going to complain. They each held their shot and tossed it back with practiced ease.

Dinner in the Great Hall came faster than most of the residents wanted. With dinner though, came the post.
Hedwig came in steadily with a package of Easter eggs from Missus Weasley, of which also contained Percy’s letter. Apparently Harry did owl Percy a few questions, but the letter itself was disappointing and rude (in the witch’s opinion at least). What was more disappointing however was the egg package for Hermione.

Harry’s and Ron’s were the size of dragon eggs, whereas Hermione’s was smaller than a chicken egg. They were full of delicious homemade toffee. Hermione’s face was crestfallen when she saw it.

“Your mum doesn’t read Witch Weekly, by any chance, does she Ron?” she asked quietly.

“Yeah, gets it for the recipes,” replied the redhead whose mouth was full of toffee. Secretly the boy was pleased that his mother sent Hermione such a small package. He could have cleared up the misconception at any time by sending her a letter. Yet he was still mad that she was dating Krum, she wasn’t supposed to be doing that. His mum would fix her right though, he was sure, his mum fixed everything.

Hermione looked back at her egg and pursed her lips. So it appeared that even though the Weasley matriarch was upset with her, she still had plans for the bookworm. The witch filed this information away while planning on bugging her new brother for some of his toffee later.

A few moments later a large owl that looks faintly familiar to her, held his leg out to give her a letter. Ron tried to take it instead and the owl bit him, giving him a bit of a dirty look. Which was amusing considering his tufts looked like angry eyebrows. He held his leg out again to the witch and she took it gently. He nibbled lightly on her fingers affectionately. She pet him a bit and give him a piece of meat before he took off again.

“Whose bloody bird is that!?” Ron asked indignantly, holding his finger in his mouth. The owl had bit hard enough to draw blood.

“Fucking mental, that one,” he said lowly, shooting the owl and Hermione dirty looks.

Hermione ignored him and opened the letter carefully, recognizing it from her parents.

_Hearme,_

_I hope Martin gets this to you alright. We’ve taken to calling him Marty. He’s a good bird so far. Pretty smart too. Here’s a picture of him so you remember what he looks like. He’s friendly._

_Love,_

_Mum and Dad_

Hermione laughed to herself.

‘Friendly to Granger’s apparently. Not friendly with others.’

Hermione pocketed the letter and the enclosed picture of Marty looking regal. She could tell the picture was taken in their living room. Which promptly reminded her of her training in the tea room. They had only but so much time to train, and Hermione was going to be sure that Harry had some nice spells in his arsenal for the upcoming task. First however, he had to finish his homework.

The trio made their way back to the common room where Harry sat dutifully with his homework. It
was due the next day and Hermione was glad that Harry had at least finished a third of it alone. Unlike Ronald who had done none of his homework.

The boy tried to wheedle Hermione into helping him, or rather giving him the answers.

“C’mon, Hermione,” he whined, “You already did all of this. Help a bloke out, it’s due tomorrow.”

“I know, which is why I did mine early. So I wouldn’t be here doing it the night before,” she said tightly.

“You’re helping Harry,” he complained.

“Yes, because Harry actually did some of it on his own. He made an effort,” she said easily.

“He’s got a leg up on me, ’mione,” he tried the puppy face.

The young witch glared at the third in their group. He knew she hated nicknames. If he thought that he could emotionally manipulate her, he had another thing coming.

“He does. He already finished a decent portion of his homework. He didn’t wait for me to spoon feed him answers, did you, Harry,” she turned to look at the messy haired wizard.

She knew he was uncomfortable with their arguing, but she refused to be used in this matter. He yelled at her about it earlier, but it finally sank in that it was due tomorrow. Harry shook his head, trying to stay out of their argument.

“Can’t you just let me look at yours so I have an idea of what it should look like?” the redhead tried again.

“No, Ron. Knowing you, you would just copy the answers,” she said, “You know the more time you try to get me to do your homework, the less time you have to do it yourself?”

Ron’s face flushed red.

‘Why couldn’t she just GIVE him the answers!? She already did it! It would help a bloke out! He would do it for her if he did it!’ he thought furiously.

Of course, that would be the case if he ever did his homework without her. Before the troll incident he knew his homework was less than stellar, but since she had been helping he at least received A’s for Acceptable, on the rare occasion EE for Exceeds Expectations. The bookworm of course almost always received O’s for Outstanding. The only one she didn’t was for potions, only because the greasy bat Snape hated Gryffindors, he was sure of it.

“Please, Hermione?” he whined.

“Ron, why don’t you actually try to do your homework? Then if you really don’t understand it she might help,” Harry said quietly.

Ron looked at his best mate, screwing his face up. What was the point of being friends with the smartest witch in the school if she wouldn’t do your homework for you? But Harry knew how to soothe the beast that was Hermione Granger, and if he said to at least try, then it couldn’t hurt.

He sighed loudly before pulling out his parchment and trying to do his homework himself.

‘The bitch should be doing my homework for me.’, he thought grumpily.
Dumbledore sat serenely at the head table with the rest of the staff members. It was nice to see that the students were back, and amusing to see the teenage angst about term resuming.

He watched Harry in the corner of his eye as he ate his dinner. Molly had sent him Easter eggs filled with her grand goodies he was sure. The witch sitting next to him paid him no more mind than she did the youngest male Weasley. The romance rumors were unfounded it appeared. He would ensure the eventual breakup between her and the quidditch star. He had a deal with the matriarch and he would see it through. The witch had been keeping up her end after all.

If anything he was sure he could put a spin on it. If she was so admirable to a quidditch star, she must be beautiful (in addition to her brilliance). Imagine how much better the Weasleys would look when she chose to be with them instead. Yes, it would give the Weasleys the political boost Molly was seeking. The-Boy-Who-Lived married to her daughter and the brightest witch of her age, married to one of her sons. It didn’t matter which at this point as they were all unattached. The young witch would have her pick.

Not to mention the Potter fortune would be in their grasp. Just another few years. He already used most of Harry’s guardian funds for himself and the Weasleys as it was. He didn’t allow Harry to take much of his student allowance, taking it instead for himself.

What he wanted, was to get into the main Potter vault. He had his own vault of course, the Dumbledore vault was quite full of riches. But it was often watched, and he was proud to be able to show off his bank statements as proof that he wasn’t spending gold on whatever he was accused of. One of which was funding a vigilante organization.

The Potter’s were an old family, they had old money. As they were dead, their vaults weren’t watched. So he was able to take out large amounts of gold at a time. They gave their son thousands of galleons for a simple yearly allowance.

He had made himself the Potter guardian in hopes that it would allow him access to those vaults so he could further fund the Order, despite the late Potter’s wishes. Yet the goblins wouldn’t allow it as he wasn’t a Potter although he was the guardian of one. That was why he left him with his muggle family. He needed access to the boy whenever he felt was the right time. He needed to know where he was at all times.

They were muggles who wanted nothing to do with the magical world. They wouldn’t receive stipulations for taking care of the boy, they wouldn’t be anywhere near his money. His gold would be untouched for the most part, all he had to do was bide his time.

He had to pick someone who he could put trust in. Someone who trusted him blindly. The Weasleys were steadfast in their loyalty to the Order, so when they had a daughter, he spoke quietly with Molly. The witch latched onto it as quickly as he had let the idea slip out of his mouth. It was coming out wonderfully.

The Potter boy would marry the Weasley girl, and Molly would have access to the vaults through her daughter. The Weasley family would be back in good standing with the fortuitous marriage. The muggleborn was simply for bragging rights. No one else would probably want the bucktoothed bookworm. Even after the Yule ball, she simply went right back to dressing in her normal frumpy clothes. No one would want her, he was sure. They didn’t want her before, why would they now?

Albus took a drink of the wonderful elf wine he had the house-elves serve him.
Things would work out well for him, he was confident in that.
Term resumed as usual and the curly haired witch took advantage of it. First day of classes Hermione waited to see Professor Moody (and Barty), and gave him the picture of Martin, letting him engrave it into his mind before lighting it on fire.

The Defense Against the Dark Arts professor nodded at the witch as though nothing happened.

“When will we be able to resume lessons, Professor?” the witch asked.

“Same as usual, lass,” he replied.

“Will it be the same times?” she inquired.

“Why wouldn’t they be?” he asked sharply.

“Professor Snape is going to be giving me some private lessons…” she trailed off, not wanting to look at her professor.

“Snape, eh? And you agreed lass? Even after I told you to watch out for him?” he asked, looking at her sharply.

“Professor McGonagall was there, so she knows, but I don’t know when he wants to do private lessons since our lessons are secret too,” she said quietly.

“What is he going to be teachin’ ye, lass?” he asked.

Hermione’s face screwed up, “I can’t tell you,” she said looking him in the eye.

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Can’t. For the same reason you can’t talk about my personal life,” she stressed, hoping the little lightbulb would go off in her professor’s mind.

Sure enough, his eyes widened, “I see,” he said softly, “And Minerva was there?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” she said, more relaxed now that he was aware of why she couldn’t divulge details.

“Stay on yer guard, lass. Don’t trust him. Some nundu can’t change their spots,” he said.

“Professor, that’s slightly hypocritical of you,” she said pursing her lips.

“Enough sass from, ye!” he yelled, shooting a stinging hex at her.

The young witch cast a silent shield and laughed at him.

“I’ll let you know what days I can’t make it, Professor,” she said with a smile.

As long as he fired random spells at her, Hermione was confident that she was forgiven. It was an unusual relationship, but she accepted it for what it was. Without him she wouldn’t be as equipped as she was now, so she would take it with grace.
Potions class had gone as usual and for that the witch was glad, it was a brain teaser, so they were given a second year medical potion to make.

“I see that you are all still mentally lollygagging from your recent holiday,” he said quietly, forcing the room to quiet themselves so they were able to hear him.

“There are ingredients and instructions on the board. Those of you who fail to brew such an easy potion will have to write me 18 inches of parchment. I will expect it on my desk by next class, Mister Longbottom,” he said with a slight sneer, he paused until his house was done appreciating his caustic humor, “Whatever is salvageable, will be taken to the Hospital Wing. Begin.”

He flicked his wand at the chalkboard, and his spidery handwriting made an appearance in chalk. The students took notice before they got up to gather the written ingredients.

A few of the smarter students took notice and recognized the potion. It was for seasonal allergies and if any of the potions were salvageable, as their esteemed potions professor said, they would be going to the Hospital Wing. It was a simple second year potion, and some of the students felt insulted at the subtle quip, but of course kept their opinions to themselves.

Hermione was seated next to Neville, so she was able to help the boy from botching up his potion. Harry and Ron were seated behind her and she could hear the younger Weasley gripe about the assignment and heard Harry softly grunting his agreement.

It would appear that Harry was smarter than to verbally acknowledge his friend, as the sound of a book hitting the back of Ron’s head was clearly heard throughout the room.

‘Will he ever learn?’ the petite witch asked herself.

She set about cutting, dicing, and powdering the proper ingredients. It was a simple potion that she could have easily made in her first year. Her hands moved swiftly around her cauldron, almost as though she was at home.

She would make a noise in the back of her throat any time Neville almost did something wrong, which was every time the professor chose that moment to walk near the poor boy. Poor Neville was simply terrified by the dour man.

“Miss Granger, perhaps after class you would be willing to stay and test one of these potions? It might help you with whatever is wrong with your throat,” he hissed, knowing exactly what the witch was doing.

The witch in question narrowed her eyes, but politely answered as was expected from yes, “Yes, sir,” the answer was quiet, as she kept moving about her potion.

Neville’s face was crestfallen, knowing that he was the reason Hermione had gotten in trouble. She always helped him without fail and he was so grateful for the witch. She had been helping since she met him on the Hogwarts Express, and how does he help her? By getting her in trouble all the time, the least he could do was give her notes for Herbology the few times she missed the class. He would apologize to the witch later, knowing from experience if he did so now he would only get them both into more trouble.

Harry glared at the greasy haired professor, if his sister had a medical issue of any sort wouldn’t it be best if she went to the Hospital Wing? However he knew Hermione was able to get herself out of trouble if she wanted to. Not that it usually mattered when it came to the Slytherin who found reasons imagined or not to punish
Gryffindors. On the plus side points weren’t taken this time.

The rest of the class passed by mostly quiet. There were a few whispers from the Slytherins, but the Gryffindors knew better than to make any extra noise since Hermione used up their noise allotment. The potions were finished, most of them turned to be the right shade of pink. It was an easy potion to make.

Goyle, Crabbe, and Neville’s potions however turned out to be a bit redder than what was expected. Pansy and Ron’s were a tad closer to orange.

“Crabbe, Goyle, Longbottom, Parkinson, Weasley, 18 inches of parchment on my desk by next class on the properties of Seasons’ Solution. The rest of you are dismissed,” he said clearly, “Except for you Miss Granger, stay.”

The Slytherins snickered, hoping that the know-it-all would be taken down a peg or two. Her fellow Gryffindors looked at her with pity. Harry tried to say he’d wait for her outside, but Hermione shook her head and mouthed, ‘I’ll find you later.’ Her brother made a face, but nodded.

When all the student left, the professor cast a silent silence charm.

“Miss Granger, we did not finalize details concerning your extra lessons,” he said smoothly.

He had quickly removed the idea of verbally ripping her down for helping Longbottom, again. If anything he should thank her from time to time, for preventing unnecessary explosions. That and her eyes had burned with emotion for a moment during class and he had a flashback to the Yule ball.

“We shall meet twice a week until the end of term on Wednesdays and Fridays. I would suggest you pack a change of breathable clothes in your bag. Since I feel we have wasted this week, we will meet an extra night, Saturday, for the next two weeks,” he said crisply.

“Yes, Professor. Anything else?” she asked formally.

“Yes. You are not to tell Potter or Weasley,” he said with his trademark sneer.

“Of course, Professor. I assumed as much considering the oath that I took,” she replied evenly.

The oath she took had briefly slipped from his mind, more focused on typical Gryffindor tendency to share things with their friends.

“Indeed,” he said instead, “Meet me at my office, for 7 o’clock pm, Miss Granger.”

“Yes, sir,” she said gathering her bag, hearing the unsaid dismissal.

“Oh and Miss Granger,” he called out as her hand touched the doorknob.

“Yes, sir?” she asked, turning around to look him in the eyes.

“I would suggest you start stretching,” he said, lifting his eyebrow as though he expected that she was greatly out of shape.

“Yes, sir,” she said just as evenly before leaving the classroom.

The petite witch made a beeline for the owlery, she already wrote a quick missive to Professor
Crouch (and Moody she supposed), to alert them to the weekdays she would be unavailable.

Once she was there she was pleasantly greeted by an affectionate owl.

“Hello, Elara. I’ve got two letters for you to deliver. One is for Professor Moody and the other is for Mum and Dad. No one has taken your band?” she asked softly.

The owl in question held out her leg so her mistress could see the small band she had given her. It hummed with magic and frankly she liked the way it shined. It didn’t get in her way when she hunted either.

The witch smiled at her owl before attaching the letters to her leg.

“Off you go then, be safe,” she spoke, her voice still soft.

As she was leaving, she was greeted with Hedwig landing on her shoulder.

“Hello, Hedwig. Have you been getting on well with Elara?” the witch asked, knowing that Hedwig was one of the most respected owls in the owlery. She had one of the higher beams as her resting area.

The snow owl ruffled her feathers and nibbled the witch affectionately to let the human know that her owl was acceptable.

“I’m glad. I’ll make sure Harry comes to see you soon, okay?” she assured the owl.

The owl nuzzled her before taking flight to her resting perch.

She found Harry in the common room trying to convince Ron to write his essay.

“C’mon mate, the sooner you write it the sooner you can forget about it,” he said trying to coax his friend into completing his responsibilities.

Ron simply grunted in response, upset that he had done so poorly that he had to write an essay. He felt singled out although four others had to write a paper as well. He couldn’t even claim favoritism as three of the other ones were Slytherins.

Hermione rolled her eyes at his childishness.

“H-Hermione?”

The witch turned around and spotted Neville looking at his shoes.

“Yes, Neville?”

The wizard looked up at her and quirked his lips into a small gentle smile, the small witch never turned him away.

“I’m sorry about what happened in Potions. Would… would you please help me with my essay? I know I added something extra, but I’m not sure what,” he said.

“Sure thing Neville, let me just drop some things off in my dorm and we can head to the library,” she said with a smile.
She didn’t mind helping Neville with homework, he always asked and he had always treated her kind. In the beginning, before they were anything one would call friends, he was the only one who would talk to her. He always spoke to her kindly and explained things nicely too, unlike Ron. It was something the muggleborn witch appreciated more than she would let others know.

As she disappeared up the stairs to the girls’ dorm Ron took the moment to blow his top at the other wizard.

“Why is she helping you, instead of me?!” he asked incredulously.

“What?” Neville asked, confused.

He looked over to Harry to see if he knew what his friend was going on about. Sadly Harry looked just as confused as he did, and threw the other boy an apologetic look.

“Hermione! Why is she helping you with your essay? She should be helping me!” Ronald said, his face starting to clash with his hair.

“I asked her and she said yes,” he said simply, his voice gentle.

Neville was firm in his belief that he didn’t do anything to warrant the Weasley’s temper. He acted the same way when he found out that the petite witch had a date to the Yule ball.

“Hermione is allowed to have other friends, Ron. You need to stop treating her like property. She’s not yours, you’re not even dating,” Neville said softly yet firmly, so his voice wouldn’t drift up to the girls’ dorm.

“What’s that got to do with anything!? She’s been our friend first!” the redhead belted, ignorant of his volume, “Tell him, Harry!”

“He’s right, Ron. Hermione’s allowed to have other friends. Besides, Neville was Hermione’s first friend. They weren’t best friends like we are, but Neville has always been one of Hermione’s friends,” the green eyed wizard said, standing up for the other wizard.

The redhead looked flabbergasted that his best friend didn’t side with him. How was he supposed to handle the knowledge that the third member of their trio actually had other friends? She had a friend before them?

“Some friend. Where were you, when there was a troll in the girls’ lav?” the redhead argued.

“With the rest of the first years, where he belonged,” Hermione said clearly.

“While I am forever grateful you two did come save me from the troll, you can’t call someone a bad friend for not risking their life against a troll. How would you feel if someone called Ginny a bad friend because she didn’t go tackling a mountain troll her first year for them?” she asked sarcastically.

“No! That’s – It’s different ‘mione!” he yelled at her, embarrassed at her logic.

“No it’s not, Ron. Now if you’ll excuse me, Neville and I were going to the library,” she said coolly, “See you at dinner, Harry.”

“Okay, see ya, Hermione,” he said, glad that it was over.

As soon as the two left Harry turned around and punched his friend in the arm.

“Ow!”
“Really, Ron! Why do you keep picking fights over Hermione?” he asked.

“I don’t know! It’s just not right is all! She’s our friend!”

“She’s allowed to have other friends, Ron,” he said patiently to his friend.

“Why can’t she have girl friends?” he whined.

“Why does that matter, mate?” he asked.

“I – She – I don’t know! She kisses them both anyways!” he huffed angrily, “I don’t want her to be a scarlet witch, Harry.”

“She’s not a scarlet witch, Ron. She’s Hermione. Do you really think Hermione could be a ‘scarlet witch’?” he asked his friend gently with a small laugh.

He was glad when his friend started to laugh with him, “Nah, mate. That thought is mental. I’m just concerned, that’s all.”

“Ron, Hermione is more interested in books than romance. Education will always come first for her,” he explained, “Remember, ‘Or worse, expelled’,” he said mimicking his sister.

They both laughed.

“You’re right. Witch’s priorities aren’t straight. She’ll be fine,” he said reassured by his best mate.

Neville opened the door gallantly for the small witch, who smiled up in thanks at the taller wizard.

The taller wizard followed the witch as she sat at her normal table. Two tables away was Viktor and Goyle. Hermione was surprised, but didn’t say anything since the Durmstrang students seemed to get on better with the Slytherins than the rest of the houses in Hogwarts.

Viktor smiled when Hermione came in, he had missed her over the break. He got up and convinced his friend to follow him.

“Herm-own-nee, I haff missed you,” he said as he picked up her hand and kissed it.

Hermione blushed and smiled, tucking a random piece of hair behind her ear, “I missed you too, Viktor.”

“I see you are here vith friend?” he asked, his accent thick.

“Yes, I’m helping Neville here with his potions essay,” she explained to her boyfriend.

“I am also helping friend vith potions essay. But my English, is not so good. Could you maybe also help my friend?” he asked her kindly.

Hermione looked shrewdly at Goyle. He had laughed and threw curses are her more than a few times. He even laughed with Malfoy when he called her a mudblood.

“I’m not sure, Viktor…” she started, obviously uncomfortable with the thought.

“Haff you bad blood vith Gregory?” he asked gently.
She was surprised at the use his Goyle’s first name, but furrowed her brow a bit, “Not really… but I’m not partial to people who have called me a… a mudblood,” she whispered the last part, looking down.

Viktor heard her clearly though and understood her reluctance immediately.

He grabbed his friend by the collar of his shirt, “You vill apologize to Herm-own-nee,” he said menacingly.

Everyone was surprised at the swift change in Viktor and his quick course of action. Hermione however also felt her face flush with embarrassment and attraction, having never had someone defend her in such a way besides her father.

“I-I’m sorry, Granger. I’m sorry. Please forgive me?” he said softly.

Viktor looked over at the petite witch who held his affections, “Herm-own-nee?”

Her face was still flushed but she was able to answer clearly, “I accept your apology, Goyle.”

Viktor dropped his friend and smiled at the curly haired witch.

“You don’t haff to help my friend, Herm-own-nee. I haff missed you though,” the Bulgarian said.

The witch smiled shyly, “I missed you, too. I’m helping Neville anyways, there’s not that much difference helping two people at once. But you know my rules, as long as you don’t interfere with my studying, that includes helping, Viktor.”

The older wizard smiled at her and seated himself, “Da, Herm-own-nee. I know.”

He looked over expectantly at his friend, who quickly grabbed his belongings and seated himself across from Longbottom awkwardly.

“You both practically made the same mistakes since your potions came out looking about the same,” the witch stated, trying not to let it be awkward.

Both wizards were quiet though and nodded in deference to the witch.

“It was a simple second year potion meant as warm up, so I’m sure the professor will chalk it up to fuzziness or some other from the recent holiday,” she said, “I mean it didn’t explode, you just added something extra. It was still a working potion, just not perfect.”

Both wizards blushed, but were also assured by the witch’s explanation. They spent the next two hours writing their essay with the petite witch helping and explaining some things to them when they asked.

When they were both done, they rolled up their parchments, glad that it was done and feeling better that the young witch took her time to help them with it.

“Thanks, Hermione. You’re a lifesaver,” Neville said with a smile, “I’ll see you at dinner?”

Hermione nodded at her fellow Gryffindor.

“Hey, Granger?”

Hermione looked over at the Slytherin carefully. He was well behaved the past two hours and was a lot like Neville when he wasn’t being a mean spirited bigot.
“Yes?”

“Thanks for your help… with the essay. Would… would you please help me again in the future?”

“Like a study buddy?” she asked, surprised by the request.

“Is that someone who studies together?” he asked, unfamiliar with the term.

“Yes,” she answered.

“Then, yes. I would like that. I-I’m sorry about Draco too. You’re not so bad for a muggleborn. I’ll do my best to keep from fighting you in the future,” he said carefully.

Hermione smiled, “I’d appreciate that. Thank you, Goyle.”

With that the Slytherin left, his mind working hard. The wizard had a lot to re-evaluate. He was sorted into Slytherin for a reason and he could see the advantages of being on speaking terms with Granger. Yet was he prepared for the consequences that came with it? After the other schools left, it would be different. Was it worth it?

Hermione turned her smile onto her boyfriend, unaware of the mental turmoil the Slytherin was going through.

“Thank you, Viktor. That turned out a lot better than I hoped it would.”

“You are welcome, Herm-own-nee,” he replied with a smile, “You never answered about Bulgaria.”

“I still have to talk about it with my parents. Can I owl you when summer break starts with the answer?” she asked, hopefully.

“Da. I vill respect your parents’ answer no matter vich they choose,” he said.

Hermione smiled brightly at the older wizard. She leaned over the table and kissed him softly.

She was unaware of her potions professor lurking behind a bookshelf nearby.

The potions master was unsure why seeing Miss Granger kiss the Bulgarian infuriated him so much. It wasn’t even really a kiss, she wasn’t even snogging him, so he couldn’t attack her for impropriety! It was a peck, short and simple. Now why did it bother him?

The potions master left the library before he did something he knew he would regret. He needed time to think about it and get himself together.
Abagail had kept in near constant contact with the lawyers, hoping to speed things up so they could have custody of Harry before the next term. The lawyers understood the gravity of the situation and planned on using the TriWizard Tournament to their advantage, since Dumbledore let it happen.

There were statements, claiming that it was a binding contract that forced the Boy-Who-Lived to compete. However they looked into the fine print and found some surprising terms in the contract that they were willing to exploit.

The Grangers read it over with the Burmings, also finding small print details that they could expand on to help the young wizard. It would appear that things had not been as they appeared, even in the paper.

The Burmings were surprised with their clients, normally they would do all the legwork and the process would drag on since they had to spread themselves between cases. However the Grangers were very hands on in the process, and it sped things along quite nicely. They were more than willing to help with research and it turned more into a think tank than it ever had in their career. It was very refreshing.

The Burmings enjoyed their jobs, and they enjoyed essentially being political sharks, especially in the wizarding world. For a whole group of people to simply dismiss you for your name or blood, it was quite satisfying to be the one that flipped them on their metaphorical ass. A proverbial punch in the nether regions.

The Grangers were very educated so they didn’t need much help understanding certain words. There were a few here and there that they needed brushing up on, which was normal even for them when they were looking through the more archaic laws. It was just as helpful that while they worked alongside the Grangers their feeling about the case in general was much better than when they began.

Soon they would be able to confront the Dursleys about Harry Potter’s guardianship.

The petite witch confidently made her way to the potions master’s office, knowing that if she looked like she had to be there, not many would think to ask why. Of course there would be a few wondering why a Gryffindor would willingly seek out the professor who was known for his biased opinion, however they would simply assume it was due to her know-it-all nature.

It was 6:59 when she knocked on the door.

“Enter,” came the reply.

The witch waited a few seconds before opening the door. It was exactly 7 o’clock when she entered the room. She wasn’t in the mood to hear him knit-pick about her being early or late, so she would arrive just on time.

The potions master was seated at his desk as the witch quietly let herself into his office. He was slightly annoyed that he wouldn’t be able to berate her for being too early or too late. He had considered waiting a minute before answering, making her late, but decided he would be above such pettiness. That was usually reserved for Potter. These lessons indeed had something to do with Potter, but it was not Potter he was dealing with. Besides, it was his idea that these lessons should
take place.

“Miss Granger, right on time,” he said instead.

His eyes took in her attire, noticing that she wore her school robes over whatever it was she was wearing under. The wizard was impressed, almost expecting her to appear in only her breathable attire. However he was working with the brain of the golden trio, so it would make sense that she be aware not to attract undue attention.

The young witch did not respond and the wizard did not expect her to.

“We will not be having your lessons in my office, but an unused classroom is attached to it. I have cleaned it out and re-purposed it. It’s under a notice-me-not charm and a pattern based password, much like the one to Diagon Alley,” his voice was deep and soft, much like it was during class.

Like most witches, Hermione found his voice to be his most appealing trait. It was deep, smooth, it had an almost hypnotic quality to it. If it were not for his sour attitude Hermione was sure the professor would get unwanted advances every year, like clockwork. What she was unaware of was that the professor did get unwanted advances from students like clockwork. As soon as a witch (and some wizards) became of age, they propositioned the wizard if they could tolerate his personality.

Usually it was a Slytherin, but the odd Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff cropped up. He always turned them down, disgusted that they would even think he would be swayed by sex. He was almost tempted his first year of teaching, but quickly diminished the temptation once the witch thought it would be the perfect exchange for better grades. It was a pathetic attempt, in his opinion, to think that they could obtain good grades by being a good lay. If they wanted better grades, they could open a book.

Surprisingly it wasn’t against school rules to be in a relationship or to have relations with a student. It was mostly because when the school first opened some of the staff members had spouses much younger than themselves, and were often their students. It was normal for a staff member to have a wife or a betrothed as young as a fourth year. While it was sometimes frowned upon, it was not against school rules. That and it wasn’t uncommon for a staff member to take a student lover from time to time, considering how rarely the staff left the castle. After a time they only had relations with witches or wizards who were of age.

The last one to take a lover was Septima. She was a fair and strict professor, and extremely professional in the classroom. However she did occasionally take a seventh year for a lover every other year or so. Usually it was an effeminate wizard, but her last known student lover was Nymphadora Tonks. There was a betting pool to see if she would have Draco Malfoy during his seventh year.

The professor stood up and walked to a wall that was casually ignored, courtesy of the notice-me-not charm, and tapped the stones in a particular pattern. The witch couldn’t see as the tall professor blocked her view with his back.

Then, just like in Diagon Alley, the stones started to move, and left a doorway in their wake.

“Come along, Miss Granger,” he said walking through the door.

Hermione walked briskly, following that dark professor through the door before it sealed itself up again.

She was surprised when she saw the ‘re-purposed’ classroom, as Professor Snape had called it.
There were clear lines on the stone floor, a full length mirror that covered one of the walls, and some practicing dummies. She wasn’t sure if they were for sparring or target practice. It was more like a personal gym room the more she looked at it.

“Inside the perimeters on the floor are permanent cushioning charms, in the event that you fall, it won’t hurt too badly,” he sneered at the witch.

“Professor, do you use these rooms often?” she asked curiously, stepping in the perimeter.

“Not that it is any of your business, Miss Granger, but I do use these rooms at least once a week. I find working out to be quite therapeutic,” the wizard answered.

He rationalized it by thinking he was doing himself a favor. Should he not answer her annoying invasive question, it might buzz about her mind the whole session causing an irritating and completely avoidable distraction. He did come to work out in these rooms at least once a week, but often tried for three times. It helped relieve his frustrations, to be able to take them out physically in a healthy manner was merely a bonus.

In the beginning he had tried drinking and later sex, but both were unhealthy.

Drinking for him was a terribly vicious cycle. It reminded him of his father, who was a mean and angry drunk, so it disgusted him as he often compared himself to his father when he drank. He didn’t like it, even though he did like to drink, which made him hate himself more. To help forget this problem, he would drink more, it didn’t always work. Originally he drank just for the sake of drinking, to get as wasted as possible. If it weren’t for sober up potions, work would be completely unbearable; not to mention incredibly dangerous. Later on in life though he came to appreciate drinking socially, with his friends. He noticed that he had a different personality when he drank with people he liked.

Sex was a hazard in his opinion, considering he refused to bed students and refused to look for a bed partner. He was sure that no one would be better than Lily in his heart and it wasn’t fair of him to use another witch as a substitute. He refused to enter a relationship that would go nowhere, it was a waste of time and effort. He had considered bedding drunk witches as one night stands, but disliked how it was essentially taking advantage of the witch. The wizard would rather occasionally pay a call girl for her services as they both knew where they stood at the end of the night. They were nothing to each other and they would go their separate ways after.

The risk there however was that he had to be sure they were completely sexually disease free. The higher end escorts who checked themselves were more galleons and often expected to be treated to dinner or such. He would pay for sex, but he would not pay for a date. So when they arrived he had to check the girls himself to be totally sure. The first and last time he had a sexually transmitted disease he had firecrabs, of which did not go well with him. He thanked Merlin that it was just firecrabs. He was able to brew the potion himself and no one knew about his… infliction. What gave anything away that something was wrong was his temper, it was quicker and more vile than usual; even his Slytherins avoided him that week.

In response to his answer though, the witch merely hummed to herself.

“Now Miss Granger, do you have any experience with physical fighting?” he asked, assuming her answer would be ‘no’.

“Yes, sir,” she replied dutifully.

The potions master was not impressed. She answered in the same tone she did while in the
“I’m not referring to hair pulling, Miss Granger. Nor that debacle that was your second year with Miss Bulstrode. I’m talking about a fight, with fists or even kicking,” he sneered at the young witch.

“I know what you were talking about, Professor Snape. Yes I have experience with physical fighting. I have been in fights before, Professor,” Hermione answered as politely as possible, although her stance did shift as she put more weight on her right leg causing her hips to tilt a bit.

“Then what do you do when someone does this”, where the wizard then aimed a quick careful punch to her face. He was going to stop before his fist even touched her. However he was completely taken by surprise when the petite witch blocked his punch by redirecting it with her forearm and headbutt him hard in the nose.

The witch backed off in a defensive, obviously street styled, stance before it clicked in her head what she just did. She covered her face with both of her hands while her hazel eyes widened comically.

“Oh my sweet Merlin,” she breathed into her hands, obviously shocked by her reaction. ‘I just headbutt Professor Snape in the face.’

“I am so sorry, Professor Snape!” she said, inching carefully toward him, “Are you okay? Are you bleeding?”

The wizard in question was hunched over holding his nose that was indisputably in pain, his eyes wide in shock. Whatever he was expecting, it sure as hell wasn’t being headbutt in the fucking face. He looked up at the witch incredulously.

The curly haired witch bit her lip self-consciously, obviously concerned with whatever course of action he was going to take for attacking a professor. If they weren’t lessons on physical fighting he would have taken 100 points from Gryffindor and given her a week’s worth of detention. He wasn’t a stranger to pain, and he was obviously fit, but his nose was sensitive and it at this point in time it fucking smart.

He stood up, still holding his nose before he tentatively moved his hands away from it. Then touched above his lips to see if there was any blood. He was shocked to see his fingertips covered with blood. He looked over at the witch again with his eyebrows furrowed, the witch in question had paled at seeing she had drawn blood.

“Congratulations at drawing first blood, Miss Granger. Do see to it that there are no more further attacks on my nose. I understand that it is on the large side, however I would greatly appreciate it if you left my nose out of our skirmishes,” he said as smoothly as he could.

“Yes, sir,” she mumbled, still chewing on her bottom lip, looking at him with doe eyes.

Severus cast a silent healing charm on his nose, using the mirror for guidance. It had been years since his nose had last been injured, he just hoped it wouldn’t become a frequent occurrence. The witch had a surprisingly hard head, he would have expected all that hair to cushion such a blow, apparently not.

Once he healed his nose he turned around to face the young woman, standing straight as though the small altercation had not happened.

“It would appear you are familiar with a good old fashioned brawl, Miss Granger. Knowing such, why had you allowed Miss Bulstrode to put you in a headlock?” he asked quietly.
Hermione fidgeted under his gaze, “It was supposed to be a duel, not a physical altercation,” she answered softly.

“So you decided not to fight back?” he asked her delicately.

“I was caught off guard and was not expecting it… I figured if I hit her back I would get detention,” she answered, knowing it was no real excuse.

The potions master merely rolled his eyes at her answer. It was indeed something he would expect from the bookworm; even while being attacked, she had been concerned with obtaining a detention should she strike the other witch. To be fair though he probably would have given her detention at the time…

“I see,” he said instead.

“While you are… adequate at brawling, I take it you have not had real training?” he inquired.

“No, sir. Aside from… brawling; what bit I have learned is dirty, in the event of an emergency,” she replied.

Severus’s eyebrow rose at the answer, “Such as?”

“The usual… kicking or kneeing a man in his nether regions, elbowing a woman in the stomach, kicking kneecaps, punching someone in the throat, teeth, or chin, hitting someone with the heel of my hand to their nose, breaking fingers in case of unwanted advances… things like that,” she said, blushing a bit in embarrassment.

She knew that at least two of those could kill someone if she hit them hard enough.

Her professor on the other hand was surprised at the self-defense tips the witch was given should such a need arise. Some of them were typical, but the last few were not.

“What do you mean by ‘breaking fingers in case of unwanted advances’? Please clarify,” he instructed.

Hermione blushed more, “In the event that someone should want to… um… molest or uh, rape me… I have been instructed to break the attacker’s fingers. So that in the event that such an event continue to take place, there would be physical proof that it was unwanted. So I’m not accused of ‘asking for it’. Broken fingers clearly mean that the advances were unwanted and I cannot be accused of misleading my attacker. It’s a solid defense for such cases.”

Severus was fascinated with her answer. He would clearly be discussing this with Poppy at some point in the future. It was solid advice to be given to students. There were few cases of sexual assaults in the wizarding world, considering that a well-placed hex usually got the message across. However for under-aged witches and wizards that option was unavailable, especially in the muggle world. He filed that piece of information away.

The professor hummed in response.

“While we will not be fighting dirty just yet, although we will get there further in our lessons, we will be practicing punches,” he asserted, “These dummies,” he summoned them with a flick of his wand, “will be for practicing. You will hit them precisely and confidently. Your main target areas will be the sternum and just below the rib cage. Hitting the second area will normally wind your opponent, giving you a free opening. Once you are able to actively hit those two areas securely, we will move on. I would have you work on punching the facial area as well, but I saw Mister Malfoy’s eye in
your third year and while he would not confirm who it was, it was clear that the hit was clear and concise. In the end, such a direct hit was not a fluke.”

He walked over to one of the dummies and struck both areas that he mentioned in a demonstration. Two were straight hits, one was arched, and another was underhanded.

“I have given you a demonstration, you will repeat the motions. Is this understood?”

“Yes, sir,” she replied.

“You may remove your outer robes and begin. You will do this for an hour or until I say so, whichever I feel is better for you,” he announced, “I will assume you have stretched as instructed.”

“Yes, sir,” the witch affirmed, as she stripped out of her school robes, her cooler ones she bought in France were underneath. She folded her other robes and placed them neatly in a corner.

Once she was done, she walked back quickly to the dummy and began to strike it as Snape had in his demonstration. She hit hard and fast, the sound of her fists hitting what sounded like flesh sounded in the room. He noticed she bounced every time she pulled one of her arms back from the strike.

Severus stood to the side and watched the young witch as she worked up a decent sweat. He was almost stunned, having expected her to be breathing heavily within the first ten minutes. She wasn’t breathing hard, she was obviously pacing herself which showed him that she was used to physical exercise. The curly haired witch wasn’t straining her muscles, she was obviously limber. He wasn’t sure if she had been stretching for a while or if she simply did it when he instructed. He was slightly distracted with how her hair bounced around her, like a brown curly halo.

At forty minutes he was amazed at her endurance. She hadn’t slowed down in the slightest since she began and her breath didn’t get any heavier. Perhaps these lessons would be easier than he had originally though. Albeit he noticed her breasts jiggled with every hit, so he wasn’t entirely sure about that.

At forty-five minutes the professor moved the second dummy slightly away from her and began to punch it in the same sequence he had demonstrated earlier. Hermione stopped for a moment stunned at the tall dark professor.

“Don’t get distracted, Miss Granger. I did not tell you to stop.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied, returning her attention to the dummy.

She didn’t know why, but her heart rate increased when she watched her professor punch the dummy. The hazel eyed witch couldn’t help but notice that he moved gracefully. Her face flushed at the thought, and she started to hit the dummy harder.
The next two weeks went better than Hermione would have expected. Lessons with Professor Snape were turning out to be more fun than she thought they would be, if disconcerting. She was noticing things about her professor that she hadn’t noticed before. They were the cause of some recent inappropriate dreams starring the potions master. She was extremely embarrassed having long considered herself past that stage in her life. However the lessons were a nice way of working out her frustrations with Ron.

The curly haired witch had been helping Harry with some spells that he could possibly use in the third task. One problem she did have was that she could cast some of the shielding spells silently without thinking much about it. So she had Ron be on the receiving end when practicing with Harry. Of course the redhead complained, but there wasn’t much she could do about it. Thus she avoided it letting the obnoxious wizard think she was simply scared to be on the receiving end herself. It was hard enough having to say the spells aloud to begin with to help them. Harry was a natural of course, but they were very much behind her in these skills.

The witch still had private lessons with her professors Moody and Crouch Jr., they had decided that it was fine to both be in the same room when it was just them. She warded the room for them and they had her brother’s map, so they were fine from being discovered for a bit longer. Moody was working her just as hard as he had at the chateau.

He drilled into her the importance of the disillusionment spell. It was the reason why he didn’t need an invisibility cloak and wouldn’t be happy until she was on his level. He knew she could do it, so he refused to accept anything less. While they had given the spell to her as homework, the auror decided he wasn’t satisfied with that. He wanted her to be able to cast the spell silently and wandlessly and to be able to cast it even in her sleep!

Disillusion was one of the finer aspects of being an auror, part of their stealth and tracking. He was still debating whether they had enough time to teach her the tracking parts since they were most definitely making use of stealth. Moody was keen on making the witch a fine auror.

After discussing it quite thoroughly, it was decided that Hermione would disillusion herself, cast a silencing charm on herself, and follow Harry through the maze. They knew about the third task since Barty would be the one to put the portkey in the center of the maze. As soon as he touched the trophy the war would begin. Hermione had to be there with Harry. Of course she wasn’t allowed to tell Harry about the task, nor was she allowed to tell him that he wouldn’t be alone.

The witch was uneasy about the whole thing, but was slightly comforted that Moody didn’t like it any more than she did. It was the whole reason why the auror was kidnapped in the first place. Regardless of what happened, Hermione was to let the restoration ritual happen. There was a small disagreement on whether she should have an emergency portkey or not. They knew she wouldn’t leave Potter behind, but it was more if she saved Potter and left herself behind.

Severus was very pleased and disturbed with his private lessons with the Granger girl.

The curly haired witch was quite good when given a task and had surprisingly excellent aim, although the first part he already knew. She had breezed through what he had originally planned to be her warm ups. He hadn’t expected her to be so fit, she had excellent endurance, and his first few
lesson plans were designed specifically to build up her endurance. However it was apparently entirely unnecessary, but he decided to keep going with part of his original plans if only to let her body get used to the motions.

Minerva had told Hooch about the private lessons, who laughed in both of their faces. Hermione Granger was a bookworm through and through. At first glance no one would expect the witch to have a single athletic bone in her body, what with her face being permanently stuck in a book. He did tell them both about her progress and his constant surprise.

Yet it was after they had spent a lesson working on kicks that he slunk into his rooms feeling like a dirty old man. With his luck it had been that day that Hooch decided that her dark friend was in need of her company.

“What’s wrong with you, Sev? You look like a brooding teenager, laying like that. I thought you had your workout with Granger today?” she fussed, standing over his flat form.

“I did,” he mumbled, his face planted firmly in his couch cushions.

“Bad day?” she asked.

“… No.”

“No? Well that doesn’t look like a ‘no’ kind of pose. What were you two working on today?” she pestered the wizard.

“Kicking.”

“Kicking?” she repeated, more to herself, “Did she kick you… there?”

“No.”

“Did she have bad form or fall over or something? Was she bad? Did you see her knickers?”

“… No.”

“No? Severus, you’re not giving me much to work with here. Tell me already!” she whined.

He turned his head slightly to the side so he was less muffled, but still looking away from his friend.

“She had perfect form,” he groaned.

“Wouldn’t you like that though? It means your lessons are going well,” she tried to cheer him up.

The grown man just groaned in response. His yellow eyed friend huffed before plopping herself next to him and thinking hard about his situation.

‘What’s so bad about having perfect form when kicking? He wasn’t injured, his lesson went well, she did well… so what could – Oooh.’

“She has nice looking legs, huh?” Hooch guessed.

The wizard just turned back to his previous position and groaned loudly into his couch.
“It’s okay, Severus, we’re only human. I mean, I catch myself looking at some of the quidditch players still. So she has nice legs, that’s okay,” she tried to reassure her friend.

“I’m a dirty old man,” he complained, still refusing to look at his friend.

“Severus, you’re not a dirty old man. You’re the youngest one on staff still! I mean we don’t think Septima is a dirty old woman, do we?”

“… It’s different,” he replied.

“It is different, because you’re not sleeping with her. So one would think that makes you better than her already,” Hooch said cheerily.

“I notice her breasts, Hooch!” he confessed to his friend.

“So you notice her tits? Does she have a nice set?” she asked her friend curiously. The last time she had a good look at Granger, she was a first year.

“… Yes,” he answered after a while.

“So she’s physically attractive and she’s fit! It’s not your fault you like the fairer sex, Sev. I mean, imagine how I feel. I don’t come into contact with many witches who swing my way here,” she tried to cheer her friend up.

“You know I won’t tell Minnie, right?”

“I know…” he mumbled.

That was one of the reasons him and Hooch got along well. They were able to speak frankly with one another about sex, both being interested in witches. Hooch called it girl talk and Severus refused to partake when she called it that. So when Severus was having witch troubles, Hooch was always the one to find him.

There were times when his prostitutes weren’t clean and he turned them away just as quickly as they undressed. There were also times when a witch made a pass at him at Hogsmeade and he wanted nothing to do with them; not the way they were interested in him. Then there were the propositions that he received yearly from students. Hooch was the one who had these conversations with him. He was simply too embarrassed to even mention finding a witch attractive to their older friend.

Hooch understood the potions professor’s dilemma though. Aside from his first year Severus hadn’t found a student attractive enough to garner his attention. He was strictly a professor and was extremely professional. He was probably the only one on staff, aside from Hagrid, who could say he never bedded a student. He noticed some of the witches of course, but not enough for him to be distressed by it. It was that moment that Hooch knew that Granger was special.

When the time came she would support her friend, she was sure it would happen. When it did though she would have to let Minerva know in a gentle manner. She knew the older witch had a soft spot for the younger witch and would probably come out claws first.

Hermione continued to go to the library to do her own homework, where Viktor would find her and spend some time with her. After starting her private lessons with the potions master she couldn’t help but notice the similarities between the wizards. It was a curiosity to her, while Viktor didn’t have
Snape’s voice, they were similar in appearance. They both had dark hair and eyes, large noses, and they were both tall and thin. While Viktor was awkward on land, he had a certain grace in the air. Professor Snape however had a certain grace about him, everything he did. After finding him graceful while he sparred with the dummy, she payed extra close attention to him in everything he did.

She had always loved watching him demonstrate how to dice or mince ingredients, watching him work with his hands was always a guilty pleasure. She wondered what else the professor could do with his hands. She blushed furiously every time she thought about it. She was starting to feel a little guilty constantly comparing the two wizards, but she wasn’t sure what to do about it just yet. With so much going on her romantic life wasn’t exactly at the top of her list.

She was pleasantly surprised when Goyle would join them, the Slytherin was very polite and courteous. During class times and in the halls he politely avoided her. When Malfoy tried to start something, he would simply stand there. He would sometimes chuckle at his friend’s antics, but he stopped being an active member.

Hermione understood not being able to control your friends, yet still standing there even when they made an ass of themselves. So she wasn’t upset with Goyle for who he was friends with. She was just lucky that people weren’t upset with her with how Ron acted.

So they did their homework together and it was pleasant. She was right, he was similar to Neville, which she liked. She just hoped things would be the same or at least similar when the other schools left.

Thimi had continued to take care of her mistress like a good elf. She didn’t meet up with her mistress as often as she used to, but she did check up on her and give her potions at night. She made sure her mistress wasn’t in any more discomfort than she had to be. With all the training she was still doing, she knew her mistress’s muscles had to ache. She had forgotten to give her a muscle relaxer twice and wanted to iron her hands for her forgetfulness.

Secretly Hermione liked the dull ache in her muscles, if only a little bit. She would sometimes stretch her sore muscles out to feel the ache better. She had to bite her lip to keep from moaning at the pleasurable pain. Overall she knew that it wasn’t logically ideal to go about her day sore.

She did the two days Thimi forgot her potions, and each day her knickers were left in a most embarrassing state. Thimi was used to dealing with such things, especially having had to clean up after a teenage wizard, so she didn’t say anything. She knew that it was natural to have sexual urges and that the body would sometimes just pleasure itself at unusual times. For Hermione though, each time she was in a small amount of pain, and she was thoroughly embarrassed.

Thimi had decided against going to Maga for help. Things had gotten more complicated with her mistress having gotten her a blood-bonded brother. Their relationship was secret so no one was supposed to know. She had spoken with Dobby about it though, and the other elf assured her that he took care of Harry Potter’s things.

The house-elf had however busied herself more with checking on the Lovegood girl from time to time at the behest of Crookshanks. The half-kneazle had taken Hermione’s request to heart and he made sure he included the Ravenclaw in his patrols. He protected the young witch from quite a few attacks and protected some of her things.
Luna noticed this and had taken to thanking Crookshanks by giving him some scraps of food from the Great Hall. She even appreciated Thimi finding some of her missing things and even washing them. She hoped that next year her and Hermione would be good friends. Her familiar and house-elf were like a blessing, she was extremely thankful to the older witch.
In the last week of May Professor McGonagall held Hermione’s brother back to instruct him that he had to meet Mr. Bagman with the other champions at 9 o’clock. So Hermione went about her normal business, knowing that she would be able to return to her common room by at least 8 o’clock so she could see him off.

That night Crouch Jr surprised the young witch by casting a few *imperios* at her. Hermione was able to shrug them off as she had with practice, but it forced her to focus on her lessons than her worry for Harry. She was angry, but she appreciated it. It was a nice reminder that even though she was worried for her brother, she still had to focus on what was going on around her. She could be as worried as she wanted, but as long as it didn’t drive her to distraction it was fine. It could be the meaning between life or death, and the use of an unforgiveable reminded her of the fact.

“You already know what the third task is, lass and we’ve been preparing ye for the past few weeks,” Barty said at the end of their lesson.

“I know,” she huffed.

“If you know, then why are ye worried?” he asked kindly.

“Because once the war starts… things will just…”

“They’re go tits up, lass!” Moody barked.

“Yeah, they’ll go tit’s up,” she said, repeated the old wizard.

“That and… you’ll be going back to Azkaban, Professor,” she said softly, her eyes filling up with tears.

“I’ve always known that I’d be going back since I got here, lass. I’ll be honest, I’m not looking forward to going back either! But… I also know that the Dark Lord gets along well with the dementors and he will be staging a mass break out,” he said, his eyes were hard.

Moody’s electric blue eye was looking every which way, upset with the news. After getting to know the truth about Barty, he was quite fond of the young straw haired wizard. He remembered how the young wizard almost died being in that hellhole and was concerned for the lad. While they both knew it logically, it wasn’t said aloud in quite some time, and it was distressing.

“When I… when he comes to release us Death Eaters I’ll speak with some of them… I know some of them only joined the Dark Lord because their fathers insisted. In the beginning they were called The Knights of Walpurgis, instead of Death Easters. They did some things I know they aren’t proud of, some of them are hardened warriors, but they are very smart. You’d be surprised by which ones only did what they felt they had to…” he said, his voice drifting off.

“I’ll see some of them on the battlefield… which ones should I… should I avoid killing?” she asked, biting out the last part.

“Dolohov, Yaxley, and … *Snape* I suppose,” he said, “In the event that you run into the first two without me, or if I don’t see them first… Yell or whisper *Siempre Daragaya*. Yaxley and Dolohov are blood-bonded brothers. Only… only Snape and I were trusted with their secret. Dolohov’s mother is a muggleborn. To know about her is to be trusted above all others, not even the Dark Lord knows. He hid her away as soon as the first war started.”
“Two different languages? Wouldn’t they just kill me for knowing?” she asked.

“No. It’s like a safe-word. To be protected at all costs. ‘Always Darling’. They will find you later, and you should explain about… about the horcruxes with them. Dolohov is extremely intelligent, he’s ruthless only because he has to be. He does take pride in being successful, which is often misconstrued as him taking pleasure in killing and such. He doesn’t, but he does like getting things right,” Barty explained. Moody could be seen scoffing with his arms crossed, his opinion on them was clearly not as high as Barty’s.

“You are free to tell them about being my pupil. They will respect that, if not you. You will have to earn their respect even if you don’t earn their trust,” he continued, pretending not to hear the grizzled wizard, “It might even endear you to them. They will keep your secrets.”

Hermione wasn’t sure how she felt about being endeared by confirmed murderers. Especially ones that were confirmed to be brutal in nearly every one they were part of. She didn’t hide her unease from her professors.

“Lass, you have to understand that the Dark Lord expects nothing less than brutality. To be one of the best, to be an exception, you had to be brutal. Perhaps only the Lestranges are proud of that. Snape’s initiation was perhaps the most brutal, which is why he was given special treatment. The more brutal you are, the more you are left alone. The Dark Lords allows those who are most brutal the most privacy. Others are subjected to constant summonings and having their minds ransacked. They’re treated worse than interns unless they were gifted to him.”

“Gifted?” she asked.

“Some of the Death Eaters were given or promised to the Dark Lord to help him achieve his goal in creating the utopia they had spoken of together. They weren’t really given a choice although you have to be there of your own free will to obtain the Dark Mark. Regulus… Regulus was forced to be there, Walburga was a real nasty piece of work, and she promised the Dark Lord one of her sons. Sirius refused and was almost killed because of it. Regulus was made to watch and was told it was an example of what might happen to him should he refuse, but was reassured that it wasn’t necessary since they had faith in him. No one knows how Sirius ended up at the Potters after that since Walburga refused to let him go to St Mungos. He was expected to bleed out and die on the parlor floor.”

“That’s horrible!” Hermione exclaimed.

“It is, but it was a catalyst and Black became a wonderful auror, one of the best. Until he was arrested framed for Pettigrew’s death.”

“What about Regulus?” she questioned.

“Regulus Arcturus Black… he discovered that the Dark Mark was like a magical leech. He’s also the one who discovered the horcruxes. It was actually with the help of his house-elf… he died trying to do what was right. He was fighting in the shadows, trying to end the war, but he didn’t get far,” he said with a heavy sigh.

“Don’t think too much into it, lass. Life isn’t white and black, it’s shades of grey. Regardless what I think; Dolohov, Yaxley, and Snape aren’t black, they’re grey, and are to be treated as such. You yourself will be grey. You need all the friendly wands you can get on your side,” Moody growled, “Now off to dinner with ye.”

“Yes, sir. Good night, Professors,” the witch called out, as she was already leaving their office.
“Old man, when I’m gone, please make sure you keep an eye out for her,” Barty asked the old wizard quietly when the witch was out long of ear shot.

“Aye, lad, aye” was his response.

The next few days were tense. Something was seriously wrong with Crouch Sr and no one could find him. While Hermione agreed with her brother that they should go check in with Professor Moody, the witch could tell straight away that it was Professor Crouch Jr.

She almost sneered at Ron, disgusted at how quick he was to discredit Harry. While they had helped Harry pass some of the obstacles, it was still Harry who went through to face Voldemort alone. She didn’t mind being their brain from time to time, but half the time she wasn’t sure what drove Ron.

“We helped. Me and Hermione helped.”

Honestly! What did it matter that they helped? She didn’t care who got the credit for that little adventure. They broke so many school rules that night, she was surprised that they weren’t expelled.

Meanwhile the Grangers finally had things organized enough to be able to serve the Dursleys the papers.

Abagail was practically vibrating with excitement. She knew Petunia was a homemaker, so she was sure to be home, unless she was having tea with one of her neighbors. Either way the woman would be in the neighborhood.

Martin and Leeroy took quite well to each other, so the owl was often seen close to the man. Leeroy found it to be relaxing to stroke Martin’s feathers and did so often, the owl enjoying the attention. Abagail found it adorable and took to treating the owl to pieces of bacon at breakfast. Overall Martin loved his new family.

Aside from the nice trips to Hogwarts, he found himself traveling to other parts of London.

The Grangers found that corresponding the legal documents via owl was easier than fax machine since most of signatures and such had to be on the original document, although Abagail did make copies for her binder.

But today was the day and it was decided that Leeroy would drive since Abagail was too excited to really pay attention.

One car ride later they pulled in front of a small cozy looking home with a well-manicured lawn. Abagail glared at it, knowing that even the lawn was probably treated better than Harry Potter. She took her time getting out of the car, making sure she looked absolutely picture perfect. From all the research she did, Abby knew that the Dursleys were all about appearance.

She had trouble deciding between muggle clothes and her witch robes. The duchess decided on one of her nice witch robes, the ones that looked like a well fitted Chanel dress. They were an off white
color and knee length with tasteful lace around her bust, the whole thing hugged her curves tastefully. Her outer robed looked much like a nice tan color trench coat that went well with her robes. It was simple, but gorgeous on the petite woman.

She wore natural make-up; her lips were touched up with a nude colored lipstick, eye-shadow was a tasteful blend of natural browns, eyelashes were lengthened with black mascara, she also wore dangle diamond earrings and a matching necklace. She even went so far as to get her nails done the day before, a pleasant French manicure and matching pedicure.

The Duchess succeeded in her goal of looking picture perfect.

Leeroy decided it would be best if he stayed in the car. If things got bad, then he would get out of the car, but he knew his wife would be able to handle this.

Abagail let herself out of the car carefully, her open toe wedge heels delicately hit the pavement. She grabbed the manila folder that held the papers that declared their intention of taking custody of the boy they had abused. The woman walked confidently to the Dursley’s doors and rang the doorbell.

It wasn’t long until a thin woman opened the door with a shrewd eye. Petunia took in the strange petite woman who was dressed impeccably, looking like a model. The tall thin woman wasn’t sure if she should be pleasant or if the other woman was here with plans seduce her husband. She was obviously from a higher class.

“Hello, how may I help you?” she decided on pleasant for now.

“Yes, are you Missus Petunia Dursley?” Abagail asked with a large smile, flashing off her perfect pearly whites.

The thin woman was caught off guard, “Yes, I am,” her voice was bewildered, “Who are you?”

“Hello, I’m Abagail Granger,” she said holding out her hand, which the other woman shook, “Duchess Abagail Granger.”

“I happen to be here to give you this,” she said, smile still in place, as she went to hand the manila folder to the tall blond woman.

Petunia took the folder looking terribly confused, “What’s this?”

“Those are papers I’ve come to **personally** give you letting you know that I’m going to fight for legal custody of your nephew Harry Potter,” Her smile turned slightly predatory.

“The boy?” her voice shook slightly, “What would you want with **him**? He’s away at school, he goes to St Brutus’s Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys.”

“No he doesn’t, Petunia. See, my **daughter** goes to his school. She’s a muggleborn, I’m sure you’re familiar with the term?” Abagail said sweetly, “She’s very bright, smartest of her generation they call her.”

“They called my sister that too, look where that got **her**!” Petunia said shrilly, now uncomfortable with the woman and conversation.

“Now, now, Petunia. Do you **really** want to have this conversation out here in the open?” she asked, still calm.

Petunia glared at the woman, and knew as much as she **wanted** to slam the door on the petite
woman’s face, she had been give legal papers concerning the boy.

“Come inside, now.”

“Why thank you Missus Dursley! I thought you would never ask,” Abagail decided to kill the woman with kindness.

The tall blond woman quickly led the woman to the kitchen and sat down at the kitchen table.

“Since you have one of those freaks for a daughter I don’t need an answer as to why you want another one of them in your house,” Petunia snipped.

“My daughter is far from a freak, dear. Before going to Hogwarts she was taking high school courses. She actually managed to obtain her diploma before going to Hogwarts. As I said, she’s quite bright,” was her calm reply.

“You may not be aware since you yourself are normal, but the boy has to be here for his protection. We tried to stomp the freakishness out of him, but it didn’t work.”

“You should be glad that it didn’t. He would have become an obscurial. He would have essentially developed a dark parasitical magical force as a result of his suppressed magic, called an obscurus. They usually cause massive damage to buildings and other things. They also usually cause the child to die before their 10th birthday. You could have literally killed him,” her voice was light but chilly.

Petunia blanched at the new information. She didn’t know any of that. The whole reason she took him in was to protect him, but she almost did the exact opposite. What else did the petite woman sitting across from her know?
Chapter 41

The tall thin blond woman with blue eyes stared at the short petite woman with rich brown eyes sitting across from the table. She had done what she had thought was best for the boy. However it would appear that the woman across from her knew more than she did. Petunia thought she knew enough having grown up with her sister being a witch. However just having the petite woman across from her, with a daughter who was one of them, tell her different was nothing short from shocking.

Having grown up with a witch and then raising a wizard were two totally different things.

“From your reaction I can tell you didn’t do your research, dear,” the duchess said calmly, even though her eyes were frosty.

“I thought we would be able to protect him better if he just didn’t do those things,” the thin woman whispered frantically.

“Well you thought wrong!” Abagail hissed.

“How was I supposed to know!?” Petunia finally shouted at the well-dressed woman.

“By doing your research and looking into it! Like a good mother should,” she glared at the blue eyed woman.

Petunia recoiled like she had been slapped. She was a wonderful mother, but she never considered herself to be anything more to the boy than his aunt. It completely slipped her mind through all these years that she was technically the boy’s mother figure.

“Well I am not his mother, I am his aunt. I will never be like my sister. I will never be like Lily,” she said the name with a strange mix of poison and reverence.

Abagail looked at the woman shrewdly, “You’re right, you won’t ever be like your sister. Just because you’re not a witch doesn’t mean you couldn’t have been a mother. Did your mother treat your sister as less than a person?”

“No she didn’t. She loved Lily. Both of my parents loved her! They were so proud to have a witch in the family!” she shot at the other woman, “Well, being a witch got pretty perfect Lily killed!”

The petite woman noticed she hit a sore spot and was filled with a small warmth of satisfaction.

“No,” her voice was firm, “Your sister was murdered because a madman wanted to kill her son. Your sister gave her life to save her son. It had nothing to do with magic,” she said calmly.

“There was a war going on in their world!” Petunia shouted, as though that detail mattered.

“Yes. There was a war going on, but it was not secluded to ‘their’ world as you call it. Do you not remember those missing persons? Those random ‘gas’ explosions? Those were because of ‘their’ war. There were terrorists and they were killing and terrorizing citizens in both worlds,” the duchess clarified.

Petunia was shaking in her seat. She did remember those missing persons and the gas explosions, she remembered her sister telling her to be safe. Her and Vernon had watched the news together and shook their head every time there was news of a gas explosion or a missing person. It was no one they knew, but she remembered that they blamed the neighborhood those people lived in. It always
went right over their heads, and Lily tried to tell her.

“… He didn’t just lose his parents that night…” Petunia’s eyes were shiny, “I lost a sister. I planned their funeral. I picked their grave plot. I had to bury my little sister,” she wiped a tear that escaped her eyes, “I picked a magical,” she spat the word, “cemetery, because I knew it’s what she would have wanted.”

Abagail took a deep breath, knowing that it was probably the first time since she buried her sister that she cried about it. She knew the other woman had denied her sister’s existence for quite some time, and even lied to her nephew about how she died. While she was sympathetic to the woman across the table from her, it still gave her no excuse to treat the boy the way she had.

“Do you think she would have wanted Harry to be abused? Neglected? Locked away?” she asked instead.

“Of course not! We only did what we thought was best!” the woman snapped at the well-dressed duchess.

“Locking a boy in a cupboard under the stairs for eleven years is best?” Abagail sneered.

Petunia looked down at the manila folder, refusing to meet the brown eyes glaring at her, “… no,” she answered meekly.

“I am doing all within legal rights to take Harry away from your custody,” Abagail said firmly.

“He’s safe here. There are ancient blood wards here that keep him safe!” Petunia tried to explain.

“No. You sister didn’t die here. The blood wards make this house safe because you live here. As long as you are near for a certain amount of time, he’s safe. However there is another way for him to remain safe,” Abagail’s voice was now clinical.

“What would you have me do?” Petunia fretted.

“As much as I greatly dislike you, we would be able to perform a blood bond. It would make you my blood sister, and I would have the blood necessary to protect him.”

“B-but you said your daughter was a muggleborn,” the thin woman stuttered.

“She is. We would need a bonder, but I know someone who will be willing,” truthfully Abagail hadn’t asked anyone, but she did know a few witches and wizards who would be willing.

Petunia sat quietly, letting the new information and her thoughts bounce around in her head.

“In the end Petunia, Harry will be part of my family. He will be well taken care of and loved. You will be invited to family events if only so you and your son may see him a few times a year. You are currently his only family and it would be best to keep that bridge open, even if only tentatively,” the duchess looked unconcerned at her nails.

The thin woman’s lip quivered. She never thought in all the time that she was guardian of her nephew that someone would want to take him from her. He was what was left of her sister. As much as she hated magic, she still loved her little sister. She would always love her sister, and she was miserable every Halloween. All she had to do was say sorry and she would have had her sister in her life. Vernon tried to console her by reminding her that she sent her sister that vase for Christmas, even if it was ugly. She tried.
Yet the woman sitting across from her was right. She didn’t have to treat the boy the way she did. They had always had that second bedroom, Dudley didn’t need two bedrooms, but they gave it to him anyways. She didn’t have to make the boy cook all their meals and then give him scraps, they could have fed him… Vernon didn’t have to hit the boy so hard, she knew that he at least cracked a few ribs. She always assumed that the boy would fix them as easily as he fixed his hair when she gave him haircuts.

Petunia never thought for a moment that her actions would have consequences when it came to her nephew. He wasn’t even part of their world anymore, not really; but here was a woman who just served her papers that were very much real in their world. She would have to go to court for the boy.

Just then the front door opened.

“Petunia, I’m home. Today was a fine day you wouldn’t believe —” the large man that was her husband had just walked into the kitchen and noticed their well-dressed guest.

“Petunia?” he questioned his wife gently, he could see that she had been crying, but he didn’t know who the woman was.

“Vernon, t-this is Duchess Abagail Granger, she’s come t-to…” the blond woman was surprised to find how hard it was to tell her husband that they would be losing the boy.

“I’ve come to serve you papers letting you both know that I’m going to fight for legal custody of your nephew Harry Potter,” Abagail finished calmly.

Vernon’s face turned an awful shade of red, “What do you want with the boy!? He's away at school —”

“She knows, Vernon,” Petunia said meekly, “She’s normal, but her daughter is like my sister.”

The large man paled considerably, but continued to bluster about, “What lie has the boy said this time?!”

“Mister Dursley, I have not spoken with Harry. I have done my own research and would like you to not insult my intelligence. Not that it is any of your business but I happen to have a doctrine, so you put two and two together,” her frosty brown eyes froze the man where he stood.

Petunia and Vernon could see they were outclassed on every side in this situation. The woman was certainly from a higher class, had a obtained a higher education, and had more information about the wizarding world than they did. Knowledge was power, and this pretty petite woman, she had it.

Vernon couldn’t help himself and reached for the seat next to his wife and plopped down.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“I want Harry Potter to be safe. Even with the blood wards, he is obviously not safe here,” she answered plainly.

Petunia’s shoulders shook whether from sobbing or laughter Abagail wasn’t sure.

“He won’t be safe, the war will be starting back up again,” Petunia admitted softly.

“I know, but I will do the best I can to keep him safe,” Abagail replied with a deep sigh.

“Then why do you want him? He’ll be a target won’t he?” Petunia needled.
“He will be a target, but my daughter is already a target for being a muggleborn. Do you not remember people calling your sister that disgusting slur?” The shorter woman responded.

“What slur? They have a slur for certain freaks?” Vernon asked loudly, unaware of most of what went on in the wizarding world.

“Mudblood,” the thin woman whispered, her voice was so soft it was almost missed.

“Mudblood?” the large man asked nervously.

“It means dirty blood; because they are born to muggles. Us. Some wizards and witches believe in the propaganda that they’re only magical because they stole magic,” the petite woman scoffed.

“There are many medical books that explain how that’s untrue. A witch or wizard is born with a magical core. Of course not all people are smart,” she murmured the last part.

“We are normal people we don’t go about messing with freakish thing,” Vernon scorned.

“Knowing about and messing with are two entirely different things, Mister Dursley. You can ask your wife later how you almost killed your nephew with your willful ignorance,” the duchess snapped.

“NOW SEE HERE –” Vernon bellowed, his face starting to turn puce as he balled his hands on the table.

“NO! YOU SEE HERE VERNON DURSLEY! Harry Potter is an orphan who you’ve abused and neglected, and you expect people to just ignore that!? He may be a wizard, but he’s still just a kid! I will be gaining custody of Harry and he will be a respectable member of my family! You’re lucky I have not called the authorities on you! If he were not a wizard I would have brought the full force of the authorities upon your heads and seen to it that both boys were removed from your care!” her voice was waspish and it terrified the Dursleys into silence how serious her face was as she pointed her finger at him.

“W-w-we are going to see the b-boy in June at H-Hog–”

The brown eyed woman cut the thin woman off, “Hogwarts, for the TriWizard Tournament.”

The tall woman nodded her head whimpering.

“When you see Harry don’t tell him a thing about this. It’ll be bad enough that he has to focus on his task, he doesn’t need to think about this until after. I will leave my number here with you, do stay in contact with me,” Abagail’s tone was firm as she grabbed the pen and paper that was next to the blond woman’s magazines.

“Was there anything else?” the dentist asked lightly.

Dudley took that moment to come in through the back door.

“Hello mum, dad, Miss,” the large boy said.

“Dudley, isn’t it?” Abagail made sure to sound interested.

“Yeah,” he said with a large smile, he was used to playing it up for his mum, the woman made him out to be an angel.

Petunia bit her lip, unsure of what the woman wanted with her son.
“It’s lovely to meet your acquaintance. We’ll be seeing each other more around the year, isn’t that right, Petunia?” she looked over at the thin woman who nodded, “Please call me Aunt Abby,” she flashed a perfect smile at the boy, who blushed and nodded.

“I’ll be seeing you soon. Do be sure to appear at the appointed time. I made sure it was when term was out in case they wanted to see him themselves. I’ll see myself out. Petunia, call me about that bonding thing okay dear?” She called as she walked herself out of the Dursley household with a large grin.

A few days later was quite startling for Hermione. While she was in Arithmancy class and Harry was in Divination (such a worthless class in her opinion), she felt her brother need her. She wanted to get up and run to him, but decided to keep her calm and think rationally. He was in class, if anything seriously wrong happened, he would either go to the Hospital Wing and she would find him or he would tell her later. She was in class and their relationship was supposed to be secret.

It wasn’t long after though when she felt her brother calm down and the feeling of him needing her wasn’t there at all. She would still question him about what happened and hoped he would tell her… she was not disappointed, but felt he was keeping something from her. She didn’t fight it since she had her own secrets, so she would leave him alone with his.

The 24th of June was coming quicker than she anticipated, but that’s how time seemed to work.

That morning after reading the latest trash article Skeeter wrote, they had bantered on the possibilities of how that horrible woman could have known about that.

It wasn’t until Harry had snipped at her that she was the one who was supposed to be researching magical methods of bugging that it clicked. Her mind was working so quickly that her body started to slow down to compensate.

‘Bugging… bug. There was a bug in my hair when Viktor asked me to go to Bulgaria. My hair is so large that I wouldn’t feel a bug in it. It’d be perfect for a bug… but could she be a bug? Sirius gets around undetected being a dog. Can an animagus be a bug? You wouldn’t think with the name, but it’s possible…’

She touched her hair, and brought her hand to her mouth to see if it would be within hearing range for someone else. She had sensitive hearing so she didn’t always think about other people’s hearing ranges. But even for small sounds…

“Are you alright?” said Ron, frowning at her.

“Yes,” said Hermione breathlessly. She ran her fingers through her hair again, and then held her hand up to her mouth, as though speaking into an invisible walkie-talkie. Harry and Ron stared at each other.

“I have an idea,” Hermione said, gazing into space. “I think I know… because then no one would see… even Moody… and she’d had been able to get onto the window ledge… but she’s not allowed… she’s definitely not allowed… I think we’ve got her! Just give me two seconds in the library – just to make sure!”
With that she grabbed her school bag and dashed out of the Great Hall.

She left her brother and his friend, knowing that if she got there in enough time she’d barely be late for her exam. She simply had to be sure! She would have that bitch, or rather that pest right where she wanted her!
Severus had apparated to his home at Spinner's End before walking to the old mill where his father worked. He knew that it was locked and abandoned, which made it the perfect place to apparate a whole family. He wasn’t stupid enough to think he could apparate two strangers so he planned on doing it in trips, he just hoped Petunia wasn’t stupid enough to throw one of her famous fits. Her nephew was in grave danger and didn’t need a bitch fest before going through one of the worst trials.

He would have assumed the dragon was bad, but they had Hagrid get the creatures for the maze. Hagrid had a knack for picking some of the most dangerous creatures, he was sure if the half-giant could he would have picked another young dragon or three, but was declined.

Severus arrived a bit early so he could magically unlock the old mill’s door and wait inside. Minerva had reminded him to hold his tongue and to refrain from antagonizing the horrid family. So his face held one of his famous scowls. He would behave if they did.

Petunia fretted, the day had finally come, they would be going to Hogwarts. She packed what she felt they needed, they were dressed so they would fit in…

It was 10 o’clock in the morning and it was less than an hour’s drive to the old mill. She looked at the phone number from Abagail once again. She couldn’t help but look at the number at least seven times a day. The thin woman was shaken about the petite woman, but was startling comforted by how nice she was to her son. As much as she loved her son and turned a blind eye to all of his faults she knew that he was main tormenter to her nephew. It would seem as though the woman was telling the truth where she said it would be best to keep the bridges open, the best way was being polite…

She took a deep breath, she had been putting it off, but it would be for the best if she was… bonded to the scary woman before going to see her nephew.

Petunia picked up the phone and slowly dialed the phone number.

Ring Ring… Ring Ring…

Her nerves were started to fray.

Ring R-

“Hello?” came the calm voice that had been in her nightmares.

“… Hello. If you have the time… would today be good for you? I’m going to meet one of the professors for one and I thought it would be for the best if we were… b-bonded before I left for the school.”

Abagail smiled pleasantly.

“Yes. I’ll be over soon. I’m glad you came to your senses, Petunia. It will make things much easier. It might almost be pleasant,” she replied.

The blond woman was unsure how to respond for a moment, “I’ll be ready.”
“I’ll see you soon, dear. Bye.”

“Bye.”

The woman had hung up, so she put her phone down and wiped her sweaty palms on her dress. She walked slowly to her living room, sank onto her couch, and closed her eyes. She felt a tear escape and wiped it away quickly. It was for the best.

She knew her sister would haunt her if she knew what she had done to her son. Her temper would be as hot as the color of her hair.

Petunia knew she would be just as mad and upset if she had died and her sister treated her son the way she treated the boy… Harry. They hardly called him his name, barely in public…

Abagail quickly called Chalice. She had spoken with the lawyer about what she wanted and how she would go about. The woman instructed her to call her as soon as possible. She agreed to be the bonder and agreed it would be for the best concerning Harry. Being a half-blood had its benefits even if obtaining a job in the magical world was hard.

A soft pop announced her arrival.

“Shall we?” the young lawyer grinned, holding out her arm for the other woman.

Leeroy had decided he would go to the office and handle the patients. There were only a handful and he would be able to take care of them himself.

Abagail grinned back at the witch and grabbed her arm.

“This will be a bit unpleasant, so hold on,” Chalice warned the Duchess, holding her arm tight against her.

She gave the petite woman three seconds before apparating to the backyard of the house on Privet Drive. They let go of one another, so Abagail could gather herself together. Apparating was most definitely unpleasant, it was like being squeezed through a tube of toothpaste. It had made her stomach a little queasy, so she was glad they arrived outdoors. Taking a few deep breaths calmed her, before she was able to shrug her shoulders and walk confidently to the Dursley’s backdoor and knock.

Petunia heard the knock and was surprised, but realized she shouldn’t have been. Lily was able to appear in a seconds notice because of her… magic. She got up and went to open the door for her… guests.

She smiled shakily at the fine dressed woman and was glad that her neighbors weren’t about to see them.

“Come in, please.”

Chalice could see the unease in the woman and was slightly glad. Harry Potter was seen as a hero and celebrity in the magical world, but in the muggle world he was less than a nobody because of this woman and her family. She was glad for the Grangers after she saw all the evidence they had gathered, it was basically an airtight case.
“Missus Dursley, I’m Chalice Burming of Burming & Burming,” she introduced herself.

The two shook hands, and the witch could feel the woman’s weak grip and sweaty palms. It gave away how nervous she was, but also how she saw herself. She was *dainty*. The lawyer had to refrain from rolling her eyes. However she was here for business.

“Let’s get down to business, I brought the knife. While you’re both muggles, my magic will heal you afterwards, so don’t worry about that. Missus Granger I know you know what is expected and what to do. Missus Dursley, just say what feels natural, don’t think about it. It’ll cause a bad bond and leave a slight blood feud between you two making later relations hard. All you have to do is follow my lead.”

Petunia nodded, scared. However she knew how serious this was and for the sake of her son, she would not let something like that fester. She had a pension for being petty, but magic was not something she could turn off since she herself was *not* a witch.

“Now you’re both going to have to cut your palms and hold hands. Whatever you feel would be your wand hand. Then I’m going to wave my wand and start the ritual.”

She handed Abagail the dagger first, she knew that calling it a knife would calm the women down slightly in case they were feeling a bit of anxiety. The petite woman dragged the knife across her right palm, unaware that she was mimicking the way her daughter had cut her hand. She barely winced, wanting to appear strong to the other woman. She then passed the dagger to the taller woman with her hand up.

Petunia shook a little when she grabbed the dagger and cut her own right palm, and whimpered a bit from the pain and her concern about blood. She was a germaphobe through and through, the thought of sharing a bloody knife was unsettling, but it was what the ritual called for. She then weakly grabbed onto Abagail’s hand, which the other woman gripped tight.

Chalice took the dagger from the woman and place it on the floor, not wanting to get blood on her robes. She took her wand and wave it gently over the muggle women’s hands, a gentle blue light came out.

“*Do you Abagail Marsha Granger, take Petunia Dursley to be your sister in blood?*

“*With patience and forgiveness, I accept Petunia Dursley as my sister.*”

“*Do you Petunia Dursley, take Abagail Marsha Granger to be your sister in blood?*

“*I accept Abagail Marsha Granger as my sister with respect and reverence.*”

“*Do you accept Petunia Dursley’s claim?*

“*With great respect.*”

“*Do you accept Abagail Marsha Granger’s claim?*

“*With patience and forgiveness.*”

The gentle blue magic glowed peacefully and glittered as it sunk into their joined hands. They slowly pulled their hands apart and looked at their hands, amazed that they were scar free.

“Congratulations ladies, you’re now sisters. This will make things easier in your future.”
Abagail smiled gratefully at the witch as Petunia looked at her hand in amazement. Magic felt…
warm, nice. It didn’t hurt like she thought it would, like the knife did. Her hand was clean and it felt
a little tingly. She was glad that this left her a better impression on magic than losing her sister did, if
marginally.

“Shall we, Missus Granger?”

“We shall. Good-bye, Petunia. We’ll see each other soon,” Abagail smirked at her new sister.

Petunia nodded, speechless.

She sat there for another hour, surprised that the bonding took less than twenty minutes. Vernon and
Dudley were making a quick stop at the market for a snack on the chance they didn’t like the…
wizarding food.

When they returned though, time seemed to move faster and they had to go meet Snape.

________________________________________________________________________

Vernon huffed at the rundown mill while Dudley scrutinized it. Petunia looked at it with nostalgia,
walking slowly to the door. She was sure it would be locked, but knew with magic it would be easy
to undo something as simple as a lock.

Opening the door, leading her family she spotted Snape, her sister’s childhood friend. She took in his
appearance, not much had changed facial wise from what she could see, but he was impeccably
dressed and stood tall and proud. He had put on some healthy weight, but he looked… old. He was
younger than her and she knew wizards aged slowly, but she could tell he was under a great deal of
stress to look the way he did… She almost felt bad for him. Almost.

“Snape.”

“Petunia.”

She was almost startled by how smooth his voice was. Puberty had done him a world of good and
gifted him at least something attractive. His voice over the telephone did him no justice. It was deep
and seductive. She was embarrassed at feeling a light moisture in her undergarments and the way her
belly flopped in pleasure.

“How will we be arriving?”

Severus smiled almost nastily at them, “By apparating. We shall arrive at the Shrieking Shack and
walk from there. It’s less than a ten minute walk. It would be faster if we could take the secret tunnel,
but I’m afraid your… husband and son are too large.”

Petunia was nearly offended, she knew her boys were overweight, but surely they could fit.

“And why would that be,” she sneered.

“It’s underground,” he said almost acidly. He was trying to behave after all.

Vernon wanted to yell at the freak that knew his wife, but was instructed to behave and be civil.
They spoke at night at how to behave around them since they would be surrounded and at their
mercy. It would do to be on their good side.

Petunia’s nose twitched in irritation.
“Well then? Let’s get on with it.” She said instead.

“Indeed, let’s,” he replied.

The potions master walked closely before offering his arm in a gentlemanly fashion to the woman, lifting an expectant eyebrow.

Petunia blushed and grabbed onto his arm the way he offered. She was loyal and her husband was right there, she was embarrassed that this man had aroused her with his voice, especially since she greatly disliked him.

Severus gave her no warning before apparating her to the shack and letting go. They arrived with a soft whisper. Something he picked up as a Death Eater that he was grateful for. He left the woman as she hunched over feeling ill, to grab her son.

He reached out and grabbed the boy tightly by his collar and disapparated to rejoin him with his mother. When he arrived he noticed the woman was still gasping in large amounts of air as her son proceeded to vomit on his shoes. Severus rolled his eyes and evansco-ed the putrid mess before leaving again to grab her walrus of a husband.

He sneered at the large man before grabbed the back of his sleeve tightly so he didn’t have to touch the man more than he had to and disapparated quickly. When they arrived it was clear that his body did not agree with the mode of transportation. Vernon was left light headed and groaned slightly from his discomfort.

“Once you’re all finished, we can leave for the castle,” Severus said smoothly.

Hermione was going through advance transfiguration books, opening them specifically to sections that focused on animagi. She was cross checking them for references so see which ones had lists of possible animals, and ones that had confirmed animals.

Then she found a footnote, and the witch was so glad she could have kissed the author of the book.

‘Despite the name, an animagus could take the form of a creature that is not specifically a mundane animal. An animagus could take the form of a beast or even an insect. They cannot take the form of a sentient creature such as a centaur, merman, goblin, etc.’

Hermione’s heart beat erratically in her chest. She had discovered Rita Seeker’s secret. This was how the journalist was able to get her information for her articles! This was how she was able to get ‘inside’ information!

‘And that horrible witch is going to find herself in a position she’ll wish she never put herself in.’

With that Hermione quickly returned the books to their proper shelves by hand. She knew how Madam Pince preferred the books to be cared for and as a regular it did well to stay on the librarian’s good side. Then the witch grabbed her bag and ran to her History of Magic exam like hell hounds were at her heels.

She was out of breath, but she made it on time.
Hermione was a bit disappointed that the exam didn’t deviate much from the book and didn’t ask any hard questions. She still double checked her book after the exam *just to be sure* that she wrote down the correct answers.

Ron of course was groaning about how long, boring, and *impossible* the exam was. Hermione tuned him out knowing if she listened she’d be too annoyed to focus later on. So she excused herself from his presence saying that she had to go to the loo.

The young witch wasn’t sure why, but she felt like she *simply had* to make a beeline for the loo closest to the Great Hall. So after setting about her business, Hermione left the girls’ lavatory and spotted Professor Snape escorting a vaguely familiar group of people.
Chapter 43

Hermione stood still simply observing the oddly familiar family wondering why they were in Hogwarts. They were receiving a lot of visitors since the TriWizard Tournament started, but aside from the competing schools they were mostly officials or people who were considered important in their world. She had this odd nagging feeling that she had to investigate, thus she found herself walking calmly towards the strict potions master.

“Hello, Professor Snape,” she greeted formally.

While they had been having private lessons there were only a few select moments where he slightly relaxed into informality, but she knew it was only allowed behind closed doors and never to be spoken of or acknowledged in any manner.

“Miss Granger,” he acknowledged the curly haired witch.

Every time he saw her he was amazed at how beautiful her hair was once her curls were tamed instead of reverting to what had been their bushy state. He didn’t notice before how many shades of brown existed in those curls, nor did they hold a pleasant smell. Normally he only smelled the school’s brand of shampoo, which didn’t have a smell and allowed the students’ hair to smell like, well, hair. It was how cat hair and human hair often got so mixed up in the castle. However somehow she had this pleasant scent in her hair and he could only imagine what it would be like if he ran his fingers through her curls. Of course these thoughts only existed in his dreams… that’s what he convinced himself.

Vernon and Petunia looked keenly at the young witch. They knew the Duchess had a daughter and that she was a muggleborn who attended Hogwarts. Petunia stared at the young woman with her heart performing flips in her stomach. This pretty young witch was her niece.

“Hello Miss Granger, it is a pleasure to meet you. I’ve been speaking with your mother, Abagail,” Petunia said, still staring at the witch.

Hermione looked at the tall thin woman with surprise. Of course it was a secret that she attended Hogwarts and her mother only had the briefest of interaction with the magical world aside from their recent holiday.

“My name is Hermione. Who are you?” she asked curiously.

“I’m Petunia Dursley, this is my husband, Vernon, and my son, Dudley,” she stood straighter, proud of her family.

Hermione’s heart dropped. These were the people who hurt and tormented her brother for most of his life. They were the reason why he had such confidence issues.

“Charmed,” she said flatly, the change was palpable and chilly.

Petunia was able to hold back a shiver. There was a clear resemblance between mother and daughter when it came to their… displeasure.

“I’m your aunt,” she blurted out.

Vernon’s eyes widened, unaware of this new development. While he was aware that she was going to do that bond thingie, he didn’t know when since they hadn’t discussed it.
Hermione looked like she had been struck. There was no way that this woman knew about her blood bond with Harry. They hadn’t told anyone but two people, their binder and Professor Snape. She looked quickly over to the tall man, who subtly shook his head.

“I – your mother and I. W-we were – we did a blood bond earlier today. We’re here to see the b – Harry before his next task. I know you’re friends with him…”

Hermione stared at the woman, her mind working quickly trying to understand the ramifications of this new development.

“Would you… would you like to join us while we speak with him? I know it’s considered a private moment and the champions’ last interaction before they perform their last task. I think it would be good if you were there with us,” Petunia said, extending the olive branch.

She was a muggleborn like her sister was… she was also her niece now. She could only imagine how surprised she was when she found out that she was a witch. Lily… while Petunia secretly blamed Snape for taking her away, at least her sister had someone to help her and talk to her about the magical world. This young witch came into this world without that, without anyone there for her. She couldn’t make it up to her late sister, but maybe she could be kinder to this muggleborn to make up for it in a way…

Hermione was flabbergasted, her mother never mentioned any plans about having a blood bond with Harry’s aunt. Something was going on and she would find out after the tournament. Right now though, she saw the olive branch for what it was and knew her mother would ask here to at least try.

“I would like that. Thank you, ma’am,” she said a little less frosty, but still formally.

“Aunt Petunia, please,” she gave the young woman a small smile.

“Thank you… Aunt Petunia,” she nodded slowly as her heartbeat increased tempo, “My name is Hermione. It would seem strange if you called me Miss Granger when we’re related.”

The witch quickly turned to look at her professor. She didn’t know why, but she was calmed just knowing he was there for her in this moment whether he wanted to be or not, he was there. Her heartbeat slowed down until it was its regular steady beat.

“Where are we going, Professor?” she asked, so it didn’t appear strange that she was staring at her professor like she was dying of thirst and he was a glass of water.

Severus however noticed the change in the young witch with hazel eyes and his heartbeat increased. He didn’t know why but he was pleased that she needed him. He was also upset with himself, for acting like one of his hormonally charged students.

“We are going to the side chamber of the Great Hall. We best hurry, I’m sure there was some change while I was away knowing the Headmaster,” Snape grumbled the last part with a slight sneer.

He knew how much the older wizard did not want Potter’s family here. He wasn’t sure what he did, but he knew it would be to his benefit in some way or other. He just hoped he hadn’t slipped the boy the Felix Felicis.

“Yes, sir,” she replied automatically.

She stood closer to the professor than she did her… family, but at an appropriate distance. They walked swiftly, Hermione found it strangely cute that the potions master continued to walk his normal pace despite the obvious struggle from their male guests.
They arrived to hear Harry ask the Weasleys about their ambitious son, Percy.

Hermione’s heart dropped at seeing the group of redheads quickly followed by anger and a bit of jealousy. They weren’t Harry’s family, as much as he spent time with them it wasn’t nearly enough for them to be his family. A few weeks throughout the year. A bit of summer, maybe a Christmas, but that didn’t make them his family.

She was his family. She was his sister. These horrible people were his family. Her mother was obviously his family, but thought it better to not surprise the boy before the third task so he wouldn’t be distracted.

That was when Harry felt his sister need him. He turned and saw his sister standing next to his least favorite people in the world. He almost assumed the worst, but saw the anger and tears in her eyes as she looked in his direction. He knew how Missus Weasley had been towards Hermione and knew it must have seemed like a slight betrayal, with her being here in place of his family, when she was his sister.

“Hermione!” he shouted instead, interrupting whatever Missus Weasley was saying.

He ran over and pulled his sister into a hug, which she returned fiercely. He normally wasn’t one for hugs, but he always made exceptions for Hermione. While he appreciated Missus Weasley, he always felt a bit uncomfortable and smothered, but it was natural hugging his curly haired sister.

A tear escaped her eye which was quickly wiped away by her brother.

“It’s not what it looks like. They surprised me,” he explained quietly, after pulling away.

Hermione nodded, feeling better with the explanation. She looked over his shoulder and was pleased to see Fleur and Viktor with their own families.

“What are they doing here?” he asked her just as quietly, even though he knew this was a time for families to greet the champions before watching the final task.

“They’re here to see you, Harry. They’re your family. Luckily aunt Petunia saw me and asked me to come with,” she said, her eyes shining merrily.

Harry was surprised before he smiled, for once glad with his aunt. While she was technically their aunt he wasn’t sure if she knew that though.

“Thank you for inviting Hermione along, Aunt Petunia,” he said quietly, with a small smile.

Petunia watched them interact even if she couldn’t hear them. She was surprised when she saw the boy smile. They were rare to come by and she knew it was their fault, but it always hurt her to see her sister’s sparking eyes in his face. This time however, her heart fluttered in a sad way and she smiled pleasantly back at him.

“What are they doing here?” Missus Weasley asked, her face red with her famous temper.

Severus decided to intervene at this moment, having watched the siblings interact. He was relieved to see that there were no drinks in the room, so the headmaster hadn’t tried to slip him some liquid luck.

“They are Potter’s family, Molly. I am unsure as to why you are here,” he said snidely.

The plump woman’s eyes flashed for a moment. One that Harry has seen any time the Dursleys were mentioned. Once he would have gladly seen the fiery woman rip his family a new one, but they had
surprised him by bringing his _favorite_ family member with them. Even after all they did, he felt like it was the best present they could have _ever_ given him, but acknowledging another _freak_ as part of their family. Instead he felt a sludge of dread in his stomach and slowly inched in front of his family, Hermione discreetly following him.

“Hello, Hermione,” she said stiffly, surprised to see her with those _awful_ people. She gave the young harpy a cold look.

“Hello, Missus Weasley,” she replied with a false smile.

“Missus Weasley, you didn’t believe that rubbish Rita Skeeter published in _Witch Weekly_, did you? Because Hermione’s _not_ my girlfriend.”

“Oh!” said Missus Weasley. “No – of course I didn’t!”

The witch was obviously caught off guard and _did_ believe in that rubbish since she stopped looking at Hermione with frosty eyes. However Harry was just happy that the redhead matron stopped looking at his sister like she was a _scarlet witch_ as she called them.

The Dursleys wisely kept quiet, Vernon and Petunia quickly coming at head with one of their fears, being defenseless against their magic. They were surprised to see the young witch and wizard walk discreetly to protect them. Petunia almost cried, it was more than what _she_ ever did for him.

“Molly?” he asked, knowing that she had avoided the question. However he had to deal with hundreds of students a day who often tried to avoid answering his questions.

“Albus invited us saying that Harry would like to see us since we’re like _family_ to him,” she said crossly, her hands on her hips.

“Yes well as you can see Potter’s _family_ is here. So what do you think is the proper response to this development?” he asked slowly.

Molly flushed in anger and embarrassment. Harry’s _family_ was here, which wasn’t what Albus and her had planned for. He was going to be part of _her_ family one day, she had a right to be here. Even if he didn’t know it yet…

“I want to speak to Albus, let’s see what _he_ thinks about this matter,” Molly ground out.

Bill was obviously _uncomfortable_ with this new development. He was surprised when his mother had told him that they would be seeing Harry off before the last task in place of his family. He was aware that his mother had _wanted_ him to be part of the family, but he didn’t think they were close enough to take place of their family. He was reassured when his mother told him that Albus had thought it would be a pleasant surprise for the boy to see friendly faces before heading off to danger. Now he knew something underhanded was going on and he _did not like it_.

“Mum, I think we should go,” he said calmly, “Harry’s _family_ is here and we came as a placement.”

The matron however was unhappy with his response.

“Harry is practically part of the family! We should be the ones spending the day with him!” she argued.

“Mum, as much as I agree that Harry is _practically_ part of the family. Harry’s family _rightfully_ deserves to be the ones to spend the day with him,” he said diplomatically.
“Absolutely not! I’m going to see the Headmaster about this, don’t worry Harry,” she said as she rushed up to him and pat him on the face as though to reassure him.

Petunia saw how uncomfortable her nephew was and grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled him closer to her. She felt him tense up and released him, but noticed that he felt better as his shoulders sagged with relief. She took careful notice in this, recognizing his unease with touch. Petunia was a shrewd woman and took notice to details. Normally it was with appearances, this time it was with his actions and responses. This could be his last day and she wanted to make it… nice for him. She didn’t want to think about him possibly *dying* in this tournament, but there was a reason it was discontinued in the first place.

Molly was shocked that the other woman pulled the boy away from her. How *dare* she!? She was the one who was comforting him, how dare that *bitch* deny him comfort!

“Can’t you see he’s in need of reassurance?” she hissed.

“Can’t you see he is *uncomfortable* with touch?” Petunia shot back with a glare.

Molly took a step back like she had been slapped. All of her children needed to be comforted with physical touch. Harry was going to be one of hers, he couldn’t be uncomfortable with her touch of all people?

Hermione stepped back and leaned in towards her brother, their arms were touching. Harry was a bit taller than her or else they would be shoulder to shoulder.

“How can you say that? Hermione is touching him!” she shouted.

“Hermione is different, Missus Weasley,” he said softly.

Molly’s eyes snapped onto Harry. “How so, dear” she tried to sound motherly.

“Hermione is my family…” he said softly, looking down at his feet, “by blood.”

He knew it came out tactless, but Hermione *was* his blood family. It made her more important, more *special* to him somehow. He wasn’t ashamed of her, or them being related, it was just… aloud it sounded insulting.

“What? Since when? How come we never knew you and Hermione were related?” Molly asked, her voice increasing in volume.

Hermione’s nose twitched, Molly was making a scene… now she knew where Ron got it from.

Of course Molly’s voice crashed over the other conversations in the room so they were able to hear clearly. However that was also when Ron showed up, surprised to see his family. He was going to say something, but hearing his mum yelling caused him to keep silent. It had nothing to do with the fact that he *also* wanted to know the answers. He was Harry’s best mate, how come *he* didn’t know that his mate and Hermione were related?

Hermione and Harry didn’t want to say anything, still wanting to keep their blood bond a secret. Petunia and Vernon also held their tongue not wanting anyone to know that Petunia was part of a blood bond, not really knowing what it meant aside from being blood relatives with the Grangers.

“Since *when* was it any of your *business*?” Snape said dangerously.

He didn’t know why, but seeing Molly verbally attack Hermione triggered something inside of him.
He refused to look into it, but acknowledged that it wasn’t any of their business. Blood magic was tricky business, blood bonds weren’t made often for a reason.

If a blood bond was made with any ill intent it could literally cripple them. Should someone be underhanded and have selfish reasons for wanting to be related to another person and trick them into a blood bond, they could be robbed of their magic or their life. If they were completely honest and in sync, it was a good match and the magic would harmonize with the bonded pair. However so many other things could go wrong, and with so many families having their own agendas, it was in their best interest to stay away from such blood magic.

He was almost surprised at finding out that Petunia had blood bonded with Miss Granger’s mother. Petunia was a shrewd woman and was quite the opportunist, and in their childhood was quick to throw someone else under the proverbial bus. Yet it would appear that Miss Granger’s mother was an honest woman and was clear and concise with her reasons for wanting a blood bond with the other woman.

Hermione was surprised by her professor’s reaction and felt her stomach fill with an embarrassing heat. She was sure that if she stuck her hand in her knickers she’d find them wet.

Molly blinked in surprise at the tall dark wizard. The redhead matron was sure that her heart stuttered. She knew that he was part of the Order and was technically on their side. Still, everyone knew that he was a dark wizard and he was feared and revered for a reason, even if nobody liked him. Nonetheless she knew that she wasn’t really owed any sort of explanation. Her deal with Albus was a marriage contract with Harry and Ginny with a side bonus of Ron marrying Hermione. She didn’t really ask any other questions since they were both sure that Harry was only related to the muggles, aside from obvious pureblood cousins. Of which no pureblood really looked deep into.

More traditional purebloods had family trees so they could make marriage contracts without having the couple be too closely related. The basic rule of thumb was no direct lineage, no siblings, no direct aunts or uncles, and no first cousins.

Bill fidgeted a bit away from his mother.

“Mum, he’s right. We don’t have any business knowing things like that. Realistically if word got out, Hermione could be in danger. It was probably a conscious decision for her safety,” he said quietly although he knew everyone in the room was listening.

“Listen to your son, Molly. William is an astute wizard,” Severus said silkily.

Hermione felt her heart beat in tune with her nether regions. She thought she was beyond this! She just hoped that no one was paying attention to her at this point aside from speaking about her instead of to her.

Molly’s face grew redder.

“I’m going to speak with Albus about staying to spend some time with Harry. That’s if he wants us to?” Molly looked shrewdly at the boy, knowing she was putting him on the spot.

She often did this with her own kids and knew it made them fidget. The only ones it didn’t work with were Fred and George.

Harry’s heart dropped into his stomach as his hands grew sweaty, even with his sister there. Hermione however could feel his need for her grow strong, and this time she was able to do something about it.
“Missus Weasley, while we appreciate your generosity and your support, I do not appreciate you making Harry uncomfortable like this. He is not one of your children Missus Weasley and you don’t have to right to punish him like this. You know for a fact a tactic like that is extremely uncomfortable let alone nerve wrecking, which is why it works so often. However you don’t have a right to emotionally manipulate him like this and if you continue to do so I will make it clear that you are unwelcome this day,” Hermione glared at the older witch.

Molly’s eyes widened in shock, how dare a child speak like that to her. It didn’t matter if she was right or not, it was rude.

“Hermione! You know better than to talk to your elders that way!” she scolded instead of responding, her eyes were intense and it put everyone on edge.

“Missus Weasley, was it? While she could have said it in a nicer way, I believe my niece is correct. You actions were most uncalled for. If you would like to spend the day with our family, you can start by apologizing to him,” Petunia said primly.

While she had planned on keeping her mouth shut, she was upset that someone else was making the boy uncomfortable. She raised him to be kind and polite, which is what he was doing. She had high standards and expectations, and she admitted they were indeed abusive, but this woman was emotionally manipulating him! While they damaged him emotionally, they never lied to him or showed him affection only to use it against him! Lily had done that and Petunia had hated it. At least that was one thing she didn’t do.

Molly flashed dangerously as she glared at the muggle. Severus however was impressed and kept a keen eye on Molly to see what her reaction would be. Her dislike for the muggles was clear for all to see. It was against the law to attack a muggle, but the Weasleys were famous for their Weasley temper.
Chapter 44

Molly glared fiercely at Petunia, her wand hand itching dangerously.

“You shouldn’t even be here! Hogwarts is supposed to be SAFE from muggles! Unseen! How you got here is a mystery and one that should be rectified IMMEDIATELY!!” she screeched.

The Dursleys’ eyes widened in shock.

“So what you’re saying is that my family shouldn’t be allowed here at all? At Hogwarts? They shouldn’t be allowed to see me graduate? They shouldn’t be allowed to see the school they’re spending four times the amount that you are? Is that what you’re saying, Missus Weasley?” Hermione asked shaking in fury, her eyes were flinty and red with unshed tears.

Petunia went to go put her hand on her niece’s shoulder for comfort and was surprised to see her husband’s hand on her opposite shoulder.

Severus kept his eyes on the redhead witch, but was mildly surprised that Miss Granger knew about the tuition difference. He shouldn’t have been, but tuition was a close to vest knowledge. Not secret per se, but most definitely something they tried to keep from muggles. Even half-bloods were charged the tuition that purebloods paid if only to keep suspicion down from the magical parent.

Harry was aghast at what Missus Weasley had said. While it was common knowledge that he didn’t care much for his muggle family, he didn’t feel that should extend to all muggles. He was more surprised since Arthur was simply fascinated with muggles. However it would make more sense considering that his shed full of muggle ‘artifacts’ was a ways off from their house. As though Molly couldn’t get them far enough from her home… Which was a contradiction to the wizard considering muggles and wizards had more in common than they thought.

The redhead witch turned her glare onto Hermione with an ugly sneer on her face.

“Don’t talk about things you don’t know enough about, girl! Why should they be allowed to see a witch or wizard graduate from a top standing school like Hogwarts!? Who cares if they pay more!? It is a privilege for their children to even be here in the first place!” she shouted before her words caught up to her.

She gasped, “Hermione dear, I didn’t mean that.”

Bill looked at his mother as though he were seeing her for the first time. Ron thinned his lips while looking at his mother having known that Hermione was supposed to be his witch. While he agreed with most of what she said, even he knew it was a bad move to say that to Hermione. She was a brilliantly scary witch, and this could possibly enforce a new tear in their relationship.

“I think you should leave, Missus Weasley,” Petunia said with a hard glare directed at the woman.

Molly’s temper quickly flared back up again before Bill quickly put his hand on his mother’s shoulder.

“Mum, I think we should go,” he said firmly.

He was trying his hardest to be respectful while also telling his mother that they should indeed leave. His mother had made it more than clear that she didn’t like them, or muggles in general, and felt they didn’t deserve to be there. He agreed with Hermione, while he was surprised at how much more
muggles paid for their children to attend Hogwarts, they should be allowed to at least see their children graduate.

However Molly was beyond reason at this point. She would not have a muggle tell her what to do!

“Absolutely not, William! They should not be here! I’m going to speak to Albus to rectify this travesty,” she growled and moved to bowl through the family.

Severus was ready to throw up a shield, his eyes narrowed at the witch. Her façade was fading and her Prewette was starting to show.

However she was startled when Vernon pulled Hermione behind him and stepped in front of Harry. Severus on the other hand was merely surprised and approved of the large man’s response. He begrudgingly gave the disgrace of a man one point to the muggles. Internally of course, but still it hurt almost as bad as giving a point to Gryffindor, but seeing as they weren’t in any of the school houses... muggles would have to do.

“You can speak to whoever you want, but I don’t want you near my family, witch! You have upset my niece and insulted the boy’s mother! Mister and Missus Evans were wonderful people and should have been allowed to see their daughter graduate from this establishment! They paid the amount, they should be able to see their children receive the honor of graduating from here!” he blustered.

Harry and Petunia blushed. He had never stood up for Harry before, nor his mother or grandparents. Petunia was proud of her husband and was pleasantly surprised at his anger regarding the insults that spewed from the witch’s mouth.

Harry was surprised at never having his uncle stand up for him or his mum before. He could understand now why Dudley was quick to tattle on others if this was how it felt. It didn’t make it right or any better, but he understood now. He was also surprised at another name that popped up in his head.

‘Maybe this is why Malfoy is always so keen on telling his father all his discrepancies. It’s nice to be cared for…’

The boy was so surprised by everything that was happening so fast that he simply let it happen. He was overcome by his emotions finally having a small taste of what it was like for your family to stand up for you instead of against you. It was also shocking at how mean Missus Weasley was behaving, it made him leery of the motherly witch.

Molly stood back flabergasted that this man would yell at her. Normally her response was to turn and yell at Arthur so he would stand up for her, but he wasn’t here right now. Even after all these years she had a bit of trouble standing up to men. She could yell at children and anyone else younger than her, she could yell at other women and her husband, but she had never yelled at another man. It was one thing she was always surprised that her daughter could do that she couldn’t.

Her brothers were older, but they never picked on her to the point where she could yell at them. Her parents never allowed it, so it was ingrained in her that yelling at older men wasn’t something she was allowed to do. She didn’t know what to do.

So for all her Gryffindor courage, she quickly made her way around the family and Severus Snape.

Bill watched his mother before turning to the family of which were mostly behind the large man that couldn’t be anyone other than Harry’s uncle Vernon Dursley.

“I’m so sorry for what my mother said. I know it’s not enough considering everything, but you have
my word that my father and I don’t feel the same way. My father is actually an activist in the Ministry to allow muggle parents and guardians to attend Hogwarts graduation. Again, I’m sorry for my mother,” he profusely apologized.

Hermione took in a deep breath as she could see her… uncle start to turn a disturbing shade of puce.

“It’s not your fault, Bill. You can’t control your mother or her actions. Your father is a good man. I know they don’t have the same ideals so we won’t hold them against your family. Just… please try to keep your mother away from us today and be sure to inform your father on what happened,” she said, poking her head around her large family member.

Bill nodded with a weak smile at the witch and her family.

“If you’ll excuse me then, I have to go see what she’s up to,” he said and quickly walked off to catch up with his mother.

It was awkwardly quiet as the other families stared at them. Amos wasn’t sure what to think of the newest development. While he was sure Harry was trying to steal the limelight from his son, even he didn’t wish this on the boy. Cedric had sympathy for the family and was upset for them. Viktor didn’t know that muggles had to pay more tuition that his family did, it wasn’t fair. It anything it would probably be harder on the muggles since he was pretty sure most of them didn’t come from old families with old money.

Viktor was pleased. He had pulled Harry aside a while ago to ensure that there was nothing between him and Hermione. It had taken some convincing from the boy that they were just best friends, but he was happier that they were family instead. Muggleborns were more disinclined to marry their cousins, magical or not, which worked out in his favor. He had nothing to worry about concerning his witch.

Fleur was upset for her friends while her sister was upset for Harry. The champion was also pleased that the cute Weasley apologized and tried to respectfully stand up to his mother for his friends. She would have disregarded him entirely if he had allowed it to happen without doing anything about it. Apolline was upset for the family seeing firsthand the prejudice that muggles and muggleborns had to face. While they had to face their own prejudices being part veela, it would appear that muggles were given the same treatment. Miss Granger was a nice girl, very polite, and very smart too. She was pleased that the witch and wizard had captured a place in her girls’ hearts.

Fleur was the first one to walk over, followed by her family. Of course to others it appeared as though the veelas were gliding rather than walking. Monsieur Delacour was quite imposing as he walked beside his wife with his daughters in front of him.

“Bonjour, I am Fleur Delacour, champion of Beauxbatons Academy of Magic,” the half veela curtseyed, “Zat waz seemply rude. I am sorry zat you ‘ad to go zrough zat. ‘arry and ‘ermione are my friends and I am appalled zat eet ‘appened at all,” she introduced herself while expressing how she felt at the same time.

Vernon and Dudley were slightly hypnotized by the angels that were in front of them. Dudley more so than Vernon, who was loyal to his wife. Petunia felt the self-consciousness she felt as a child next to her redhead sister. While she was also blond and had blue eyes, their hair was lighter, silky, their eyes were bluer, brighter and more vibrant. Vernon however simply chalked it up to his penchant for blonds much like his wife.

“My daughter is right. I am appalled at what I have just witnessed, should the Headmaster try to say anything I can guarantee that my family will stick by you,” the half-veela said.
“Merci, Madame Delacour.” Hermione said.

The tall witch smiled at the muggleborn and looked at her husband, “Miss Granger, you have a strength that is to be admired. You will be a force to be reckoned with when the time comes. When it does, you shall have allies in the French Ministry of Magic,” Monsieur Delacour said.

Hermione curtsied as she was instructed to at a young age when at court. While they were not in court, it felt like it was the proper response. When the wizard smiled at her she knew it she made the correct choice of response.

Petunia glanced at her niece who appeared more like her mother than she figured. It seemed that without even trying the girl was rubbing elbows with the right type of people in her world just as her mother did in her world. To have allies in any ministry, let alone foreign ones, was a spectacular thing.

Vernon looked down at her impressed with his new… niece. Aside from his wife and sister, Vernon didn’t have many female relatives. He was harder on boys since they were going to one day be men, but this girl was going to be a strong woman like her mother. Brilliant, pretty, strong and scary. His sister was a strong woman, and he had a softness for her, so he was surprised that he had already developed a small softness for her as well. Family looked out for one another… freak or not, he supposed.

Viktor promptly followed after he saw the quick lull in conversation with the Delacours. He walked over, clicked his heels together so he was ramrod straight, and bowed to the family. Once he stood back up he kept his hands to his side looking as much like a soldier as Durmstrang had made its students. His eyes were dark, but blocked off, he was obviously occluding.

“I am sorry you and your family had to go through dat, Herm-own-ni,” he said, finally relaxing some of his stance and taking hold of her hand and kissing it.

The Dursleys were struck by the formality of such a militaristic stance. Hermione blushed when Viktor kissed her hand and she quickly looked over at her professor before pulling her hand away as politely as possible. She would later think about her reaction as before it would have pleased her, and now it filled her with an unnerving form of guilt. Of course Petunia quickly picked up on the blush and knew there was something going on with the young dark eyed wizard and her niece. She also found it quite peculiar that he looked somewhat like a young Snape with a thicker jawline and facial hair.

Severus fingered his wand when the Quidditch Seeker came near, even though he knew the young wizard wasn’t as much as a threat as Molly had been. However he was more than tempted to hex the boy when he kissed Granger’s hand. He was pleased however when she looked at him and pulled away from the other wizard. He noticed Amos Diggory in the corner of his eye and was disgusted by his hesitation. Cedric he noticed was upset, but unsure how to go about it, more so since he was leery of his father’s response considering that Amos wasn’t listening to what his boy had to say in the first place. He approved of Diggory’s thought process as he was aware it could turn into another confrontation. He did however nod seriously at Harry when the boy looked over. It was nod that was often seen by a comrade in arms.

Molly marched up the stairs heading straight to Albus’ office, Bill not that far behind, but properly leery of his mother. He kept an eye on her as he did on a potential trap in the pyramids. He was aware that his mother had a reputation about her, his grandmother had warned him.
However his mother of course always tried to place a wedge between her children and their grandmother. She always said never to trust her because she was originally a Black and they weren’t known for being mentally stable. Fred and George were the only ones who didn’t take their mother’s warnings to heart, and they honestly seemed to be better off for it.

His mother was originally a Prewette and while they all heard about their uncles during the original war, their mother had a way of twisting words. It was evident with the way she tried to manipulate Harry back in the chamber off the Great Hall. His grandmother always said that she loved them and that she wouldn’t lie to them, especially about family. Knowledge was power, and it would help you survive.

He just hoped his mother wasn’t deep in dragon dung without his father knowing.

“When I speak to the Headmaster, I want you to wait outside, Bill,” she said, huffing.

“Mum, I’m an adult, I can handle it,” he replied making a face of annoyance behind her back.

“It has nothing to do with that, William. I have to speak with the Headmaster concerning this travesty and something else that does not concern you,” she said waspishly at her son.

Bill looked at the back of his mother’s head as though he was looking for a pair of horns. He subtly started casting checking charms to be sure that she wasn’t under any influences and was pleased and disheartened to know that was not the case. He didn’t know what it was, but it was certainly not good.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Molly barked the special password Albus had given her for frequent visits if she didn’t simply speak with him through owl or floo, “Peppered Treacle Tart!”

She quickly turned around on her son, “Stay here!” she snapped and stomped up the stairs.

“I’m not a crup,” he said under his breath as he waited for his mother to finish speaking to the Headmaster. It was bad enough she was acting like Ginny when she had one of her temper tantrums.

He knew something was going on, and after this tournament he wasn’t going to be anywhere near his mother. Somehow he knew it was going to blow up in her face, and he didn’t want to be caught in the aftermath. Grandmother Cedrella warned them, and for once in his life he was going to take her warning to heart.

Molly marched up the stairs and knocked loudly on the door. Normally she would have barged in, but with so many officials being about she knew that would cause unnecessary attention.

“Come in,” he said grandfatherly.

She threw the door open with a loud bang and glared at the elderly wizard as though it was all his fault.

“Ah, Molly. What a wonderful surprise, aren’t you supposed to be spending time with Harry?” Albus said, while his eyes twinkled.

“That’s what I thought was supposed to happen, Albus,” she hissed at him, “You told me that the muggles weren’t going to be here! Well guess who waltzed into the room where the families were meeting up!”

Albus’s eyes stopped twinkling as his eyebrows furrowed. He knew he asked Minerva if she had sent the muggles an owl and she had said no. However he didn’t add a compulsion spell afterwards that would prevent her from doing so in the future. That and considering that he obliviated his deputy about the meeting entirely he wasn’t able to give her directions on not to send the family a letter. He wasn’t sure how they would get the letter though since he intercepted all of their owls, so he didn’t think he had to worry about it. Aside from their first attempt at muggle post, which didn’t go overly well, he didn’t think to check their muggle post… While it threw a stone in his plans, he couldn’t be as upset with Minerva for doing her job. It simply meant that she was still doing all the menial tasks that he didn’t want to do.

It was a lack of thought on his part and now he had to work through this mess. He should have assumed that Minerva would be thoughtful enough to consider trying muggle mail before owl mail. He took a calming breath and looked up at the irate matriarch.

“They weren’t informed last I checked, Molly. It was a minor mistake on my end since I was not clear with Minerva about sending out invitations to the Champions’ families,” he said calmly.
It was the truth. He had simply informed Minerva that the Champions’ families had to be owled invitations before the final task. Normally they didn’t owl the Dursleys anything, so he didn’t believe that he had to do so involving this. He was the boy’s magical guardian, however he wasn’t the boy’s family. His Deputy was an intelligent witch, those details simply slipped his mind this time.

“Well then get them out of here, Albus! Muggles do not belong in Hogwarts! It’s a school that’s supposed to be safe from them! It is a travesty that should be seen to immediately!” she shrilled.

Albus looked at the redheaded woman coldly.

“Molly, I’m afraid it is not against the rules for a Champion’s family member to be on the grounds, muggle or not. If it was a normal Hogwarts event, I would be able to enforce this. However, TriWizard Tournament rules allow for the family of the chosen Champions to spend the day with them before the third task. With it being such a dangerous tournament normal rules are overridden for cases like these,” he sighed, “I’m afraid my hands are tied, Molly. Have you tried asking the family if you could spend the day with them anyways?” he asked kindly.

The plump witch blushed and looked down at the edge of his desk to avoid his eyes.

“I may have said some things that offended them after they had offered me the invitation…. I simply wanted the boy to spend time with my family alone today, Albus. Those muggles aren’t his family! Did you know that Hermione was part of his family Albus!? Because I certainly didn’t,” she said working herself up into a state again.

Albus looked at the witch sharply. “Come again, Molly?” he asked.

“Hermione Granger, Albus. She’s related to Harry and no one knew about it! They were keeping it secret from everyone!” she shrieked.

Albus folded his hands together under his chin and ran his thumbs through his beard. This was indeed news to him. However he was honest with himself and knew he didn’t look past Lily’s immediate family so he wasn’t aware of any other family members the boy may or may not have outside of the Dursleys. Yet if they knew, then it was would have been for their safety and he had to admire that. It would explain why the boy was so keen on rescuing her from that Troll their first year. He feared for some time that it was because he fancied the bushy haired, buck-toothed witch.

“That is their business, Molly. You don’t go shouting from the roof tops that you’re related to the Blacks through Cedrella,” he said looking over his glasses at her.

Molly clamped her lips together. It was a little known fact and she was glad people didn’t talk about it. So she could understand on some level, however it was still upsetting that she didn’t know in the first place, she should have known! It would have prevented her from being angry at the young witch because of Skeeter in the first place. She would have been able to keep on her warm motherly face to the muggleborn, instead she sent her an Easter egg that was barely that size of a chicken’s egg… how embarrassing.

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“Now Molly, there are marriage arrangement agreements and even with your new found information, they’re still valid. Now you simply know you don’t have to worry about them becoming too close,” he tried to soothe the brash witch.

Molly fiddled with her skirt, “I suppose you’re right, Albus. But I would appreciate it if you were to come down to have those muggles understand their place. Harry belongs with my family through his marriage with Ginevra, so he is our family, and we have a right, Albus!” she cried.
“There have been no marriage bindings just yet, so you can’t claim anything on those grounds. It’ll give away too much information, so you might just have to apologize and try again,” he shook his head at her.

Molly’s eyes started to water, “He yelled at me, Albus. The muggle yelled at me that he didn’t want me near his family. I said the wrong thing and he wouldn’t let me say sorry,” she admitted.

Albus sighed internally. Even as a grown woman Molly was an entitled spoiled pureblood and ran to the highest power she could to get her way. He had a feeling she shouted that she would tell him and have him straighten things out to her liking. While he easily could with a simple obliviate, he simply didn’t want to. Molly dug herself another hole and he wouldn’t fix it. Besides it was risky with it being so close to the task and he still had to slip Harry the potion.

“Then I’m unsure of what I can do to help you,” he said instead in his best grandfatherly tone.

“You can try to ask them for favor or you can make your way back home. I’ll let you use my floo. The choice is yours,” he said to her.

Personally he wanted her to just go home considering that she messed up his plans with her brash temperament. He was annoyed with Minerva, but only minimally so since she was merely doing her job. It caused him this small headache, but he didn’t do anything to prevent it either. He wanted to blame her though, but he was old and above such pettiness… or so he told himself.

Molly’s lip started to quiver, “Won’t you come with me, Albus?” she asked quietly.

“I’m very busy right now, Molly. There are little details that must be taken care of immediately for this task. Perhaps you can ask Professor Snape,” he suggested.

Molly pursed her lips and looked away from him again, “He was there when the incident happened…”

Albus wanted to rub his forehead to stave off the impeding headache she was causing him. She was being exceedingly stubborn, it would be so easy if she just went back to the Burrow.

“What about Bill?” he asked.

“Bill thinks we should go back home,” she twisted her face in dislike at the idea.

She knew where this was headed, her son and Albus were practically on the same page instead of her page. She couldn’t go to Snape since he was the one who escorted the muggles into the room, and the only other person who might be able to override their decision would be Minerva, and she wrote the invitation. She was an intimidating person as well, she could be a force to reckon with, but she had facts thrown at her and blew up in typical fashion that her family was known for.

“Hermione knows about the tuition difference between purebloods and muggleborns, Albus. Shouldn’t that be rectified at least?” she tried again.

Albus stifled a groan, of course Miss Granger would know about the tuition difference. However it would seem that she was keeping that tidbit of information to herself, so he really wasn’t sure how to go about that.

Suddenly there was a loud series of knocking coming from the door.

“Come in,” he said, glad for any distraction from Molly’s screw up.
Alastor barged in, his peg leg clunking loudly as he walked. His magical eye spun around his socket taking in his surroundings.

“Albus, I’ve placed the trophy where it belongs,” he said vaguely, his magical blue eye staring at Molly like he didn’t trust her with any tournament information.

Albus nodded glad that something was going right, “Thank you, Alastor.”

His Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor nodded to him and his guest, “Molly, your son is walking in front of the gargoyle like he’s going to wear the stone down. Get him out of here,” he growled and took his leave from the office.

“I have further details to take care of concerning this tournament, Molly. Perhaps you can come back later and sit in the seats designated for the Champions’ families. Although I should stress how beneficial it would be to the future for you to make amends now,” he said with a raised eyebrow.

Molly pouted petulantly, she shouldn’t have to lower herself to apologize to muggles. There was a reason she never went to pick up the boy from that horrid home. She didn’t want to be anywhere near them.

“I will see you later, Albus,” she said instead and took her leave.

The Headmaster rolled his eyes at the woman. Sometimes he wasn’t sure why he picked the Weasley matriarch out of all the witches in Great Britain. Then he remembered she was loyal to him to a fault. Whatever he thought was best, was best. If he wanted some of the Potter fortune for arranging such a prestige and beneficial marriage, he would accept some of it as part of Ginevra’s dowry.

Barty walked, lifting the old man’s stump leg as swiftly as possible. The deed was done and his time at Hogwarts was growing short. He knew he would see his pupil one more time before he was found out and hauled back to Azkaban. He did what he could with Alastor’s help, but he couldn’t help but wonder if it was enough. He didn’t dabble enough in the dark arts and Alastor refused to, so they couldn’t teach her how to use the dark arts or understand it on a personal level. The darkest they went were the gray wards with her, which she excelled in. She was able to dismantle and break the curses that he did know, so it gave her an idea of what to look for, but he was worried that it wouldn’t be enough.

He knew she was also taking lessons with Snape… he didn’t like it, but he knew that Snape was a practitioner of the dark arts and was able to ignore its sweet callings. He was one of the few to be able to use the dark arts and not go crazy with it. He was unsure how, but he begrudgingly respected him for it. He didn’t trust him, but he could admit that he respected the strength of his willpower.

Hermione had a strong willpower, strong enough to shrug off the imperius with no thought to it. He struggled for 10 years, and she struggled only for a few weeks at a time. He knew that if someone with a stronger will than hers tried to curse her, she would be able to break out of it in less than five minutes. He had great faith in her. She was going to be a great warrior in the upcoming war.

The question was; would anyone ever know? Which was quickly followed by: Would she want anyone to ever know?
After tension had settled, the Delacours and Krums had decided to spend their day with Potter and his family. Krum of course was really there for Hermione, but she kept things as proper as she could without alerting anyone that anything was wrong. Viktor was thankfully taking it as nerves as he continued to try to reassure her things would go well.

Cedric and Amos were invited to spend time with them, but they declined, instead choosing to walk around the grounds.

Vernon and Petunia were trying their best not to be standoffish, but were finding it hard to find common ground with the other adults. Dudley was having trouble as it was from constantly looking over his shoulder.

However as things were won’t to do, they turned to one of the most common grounds in any culture: sports.

“I must say, Krum, your catch at the World Cup was astounding, it’s a shame Bulgaria didn’t win,” Monsieur Delacour said.

His English was superb, but with his wife being able to also speak it fluently, it barely came as a surprise.

Krum nodded, uncomfortable with the change in direction. It was one of his favorite parts of the tournament, was that he was not the only center of attention.

However the term ‘World Cup’ was one the Dursleys were all familiar with.

“World Cup? What World Cup?” Dudley asked.

“The Quidditch World Cup,” Hermione answered, “It was held this past summer. Bulgaria versus Ireland. Ireland won even though Viktor caught the snitch. It was a mindful catch though I noticed,” she said looking at Viktor, who knew she wasn’t into quidditch as everyone else was.

“Da. Vas to save face. Dey vere vinning. I did not vant Bulgaria to lose badly. Trained hard to make it to Cup,” he said, looking down at Hermione, thankful for the save.


“Da,” was Viktor’s response.

“Viktor is amazing Seeker. He vas spotted by talent hunters and it has made life easier,” his mother said.

Viktor blushed at his mother’s praise.

“Mama, you are amazing seeker. I learn from best,” he said with a small grin.

Hermione grinned at his mother glad to see Viktor be so humble.

Harry looked at Viktor’s mother with awe.

“Would you be able to give me a few pointers, Missus Krum?” Harry asked.

He hadn’t asked Viktor for anything, but felt comfortable asking his mother for a few tips. He understood the being a seeker that some skills were unteachable and others were close to vest secrets. Harry was simply a natural.
Viktor’s mother had long black hair and hazel green eyes. They weren’t the brilliant green that Harry’s were and they weren’t the hazel that Hermione’s were. They were kind and sharp with intelligence. She was taller than Hermione, but shorter than Viktor. Her husband was a bit taller than Viktor, a bit broader, with dark eyes and dark brown hair. It was obvious that Viktor took more after his father with his mother’s hair.

Viktor’s mother stared at Harry for a few silent moment’s searching his face for something only she could see. After 10 seconds it seemed as though she had found it, and smiled at the young boy.

“Da. I vould love to teach you,” she said with a smile.

“But I don’t have broom,” she said with a faux sigh, looking at Viktor in the corner of her eye.

Viktor blushed and summoned his broom, “Idvam drŭžka za metla.”

Hermione looked at Harry in a sly manner and he blushed as he summoned his own broom, “Accio firebolt.”

The Dursleys froze as they cast their spells with their wands, however they were intrigued that all they did was call their brooms to them.

It appeared that some of their fairytales had some truth to them, even though the brooms looked nothing as it did in picture books.

Viktor handed his mother his broom, which she took with a spark in her eye and looked over at Harry as she mounted the broom. Harry took her que and also mounted his firebolt.

“Please, call me Tatyana,” with that she shot up into the air with a warm throaty laugh.

Harry smiled at the older woman and shot up after her at top speed.

Petunia was beyond startled when her nephew shot up into the sky at breakneck speeds. She turned to her niece since she never listened to Lily as she went on about how great quidditch was.

“Hermione, what is a seeker?” she asked quietly.

Hermione’s face screwed up. She knew she was going to describe it poorly, but decided to tell her in terms that she knew and hoped for the best.

“A seeker is a quidditch player that chases the snitch. A snitch is a small golden ball, about the size of a golf ball, with silvery wings that flies fast and is hard to catch. It is the only position where the player is allowed to touch the snitch. Their objective is to catch the snitch, once the snitch is caught the game is over,” she said with a blush.

Viktor looked like he was going to burst out laughing at how his girlfriend had described his position. It did the game no justice and he could tell she knew it before she even began speaking with the face she made. It was quite funny for someone so brilliant to be unable to bring across the excitement that was quidditch. It was part of why he liked her too.

Severus on the other hand had to bite his tongue to keep from saying anything. He was tagging along, sticking to the background if only to make sure the Dursleys were as safe as they could be while they were at Hogwarts. While it was illegal to use magic on a muggle, they were in a school surrounded by dunderheads and unsavory people. However hearing Miss Granger try to explain a quidditch position was almost worth the bother. While it was no news that she was a horrid flyer, it was beyond amusing that she was inarticulate when it came to the sport game in general.
“Quidditch is like… rugby on brooms with some exceptions,” she tried again, her eyebrows scrunched up with frustration.

Fleur hid her mouth behind her hand to keep from laughing at her friend. The way she was trying to describe the game to her muggle family was adorably funny. Yet it seemed to cross some barrier in their minds since they seemed as though they understood part of it.

Dudley looked up at his cousin in the air, amazed at how fast he was going. He was almost jealous, but decided that riding a broom would be too hard and that they were way too high.

Harry and Tatyana flew around each other weaving in and out as Tatyana would throw what looked like glitter to them around in the sky. Truthfully she was throwing a shiny button and was amazed that he was able to see it at all. It had taken Viktor some time as a boy to see the button that his mother would catch. It was as fun as it had been teaching her son though, he was a quick study.

Vernon was upset yet amazed that the boy was good at something. He wasn’t a pansy like he had thought all those years since he was a beanpole and didn’t wrestle like Dudley did. However playing air rugby seemed like a man’s sport, even if they allowed women to play. From what he could see the boy was quite good.

“How many games has th – he won?” Vernon asked.

Hermione grinned at her new uncle, “Harry has won nearly every game there wasn’t an incident in. He’s been playing since first year.”

“Nearly every game, eh?” he said mystified.

He was proud whenever Dudley won, but the boy won nearly every game he played since he started attending the establishment. He hoped the boy didn’t die, if there was one thing he approved of was sports… even if it meant getting involved more with… his kind. After meeting Abagail Granger and meeting her daughter he knew that it was bound to happen. If he didn’t fight it all at once, it might not be as painful as he thought it would be. It was quite peaceful watching his nephew zoom around the sky at extremely high speeds.

Apolline smiled and conjured a large picnic blanket. It would be a wonderful place to spend time with the children before the final task in the tournament.

Hermione noticed and started helping set the picnic setting up. It was the perfect place, there was some shade, the lake was within viewing distance, and they could see Tatyana and Harry zoom around the sky. Even Professor Snape sat peacefully under the tree, keeping a vigilant watch on the family.

Chapter End Notes

Idvam drůžka za metla – Come Broomstick
The day had gone by smoothly and for once Harry enjoyed spending time with his... family. His sister was there, the Dursleys were there and they didn’t embarrass him or belittle him or... anything else for that matter. They actually stood up for him. Petunia protected him to the best of her ability, Vernon verbally defended him, and Dudley wasn’t an asshole. Hermione was there with him the whole time, and while Snape was there, he was as invisible as possible. Which he thought was impossible considering he always had an imposing presence, but it appeared that the man could be... a human, surprisingly.

He was surprised that he didn’t see his best mate, Ron. He figured they were going to meet up, but then he ran into his mom and that whole... thing. He hoped Ron didn’t get the wrong idea if he heard anything, but knowing his friend he probably did and that’s why he never showed up. Hermione however didn’t seem to care one way or the other, which was probably for the best since they would have probably started a fight.

He felt like he was on cloud nine, he had a picnic with family and friends. He had a normal day, for the most part. It was spectacular. He only hoped that it wasn’t his last day on Earth, or that would explain why he had such a great time.

He tried not to think about it, but Professor McGonagall found them and let them know that it was time for the evening feast and they should use that time to get ready for the final task. The family was invited to send off the Champions in the Champions’ tent before they were led to their reserved seats. She did warn them that the Headmaster had granted the Weasleys permission to sit in the reserved seats to watch the task. Her brisk no nonsense tone made it hard for others to see if she approved or disapproved.

However all those who had been taught by her were able to tell she disapproved by the way she tilted her head.

“Good luck on your task. I expect you all to do your schools proud. Do remember to hold your heads high, you are champions,” she said firmly.

She was stiff and perfectly herself, but the champions took her speech to heart and it was a good morale boost they didn’t even know they needed. Even their families stood straighter, proud of their family members for being part of the tournament.

She led them to the Great Hall where they were to be seated, Hermione cleared off the end farthest away from the staff table. She had noticed that the Minister and Ludo Bagman were back and joined the staff table. Bagman was cheerful while Fudge looked stern sitting next to Madame Maxine. Harry subtly nudged Hermione and pointed, both of them noticing that her eyes were red and it seemed as though she had either been crying or was about to cry. Hermione felt her hair fluff up with indignation knowing that Fudge blamed her simply because she was half giantess. Harry noticed that Hagrid kept glancing down the table at them.

There were more courses than usual, but Harry ate what he could and Hermione did the same. The Dursleys were amazed and tried a little bit of everything. They had admitted to themselves that they were jealous if Harry got to eat like this every night.

“There’s extra courses this evening,” Hermione murmured, making sure her family heard.

She didn’t want them to take out anything on Harry before the task with petulant jealousies, knowing
by appearance that her uncle and cousin loved a good meal. Her aunt was obviously picky, but had to admit that the house-elves were amazing cooks. The Dursleys were behaving themselves, but were naturally jealous and petty.

Not long after Dumbledore made an announcement that the tournament was going to begin soon, and he would be asking them to make their way down to the quidditch field for the third and final task of the blasted tournament.

He asked the Champions to follow Bagman down to the stadium, and Gryffindor table cheered as Harry stood up. He was more than thankful however that McGonagall came down and led them instead, even though Bagman was technically near them.

She led them to the Champions’ tent before nodding her head and walking away, hoping they would make time before they had to stand on the stadium.

Vernon was surprised at the wistful feeling that arose in him when she left. Even though she was a witch, she was strict and firm, someone he felt would be wonderful to teach Dudley. He knew his son was no angel, and he knew that if that woman was in his life, he would be afraid to step out of line.

The families broke apart for last hugs and kisses. Tatyana hugged her son tightly and pulled him down so she could kiss him and fix his hair one more time. His father wrapped his large hand on his son’s shoulder and squeezed tightly with a tight smile on his face. Fleur was on the receiving end of many hugs and kisses.

Harry however was starting to feel awkward until Petunia held onto his shoulder.

“I know you didn’t want to be part of this tournament, and I know there’s no backing out. However we are… proud to be your family, and we will be rooting for you,” she said.

Her grip was firm, but not tight, it was almost comforting.

Vernon patted his back, “Good luck, boy,” he said gruffly.

Dudley nodded nervously at his cousin. He wasn’t sure what to do. They didn’t hug, a high five seemed inappropriate, he didn’t want to accidentally break his hand with a fist bump or crack his ribs with a hug. He had beat up his cousin more than enough times to know how to hurt him, he never touched him aside to cause pain so it was more than a bit unnerving. However it appeared that nodding was the proper response and he felt lighter when his cousin returned it.

Hermione however pulled her brother in for a tight hug, squeezing him firmly.

“I will drag you back from the depths of hell and kill you myself if you die in this task, Harry Potter,” she said sternly.

Harry grinned and laughed at his sister knowing that she would probably find some way to do it.

The Dursleys quickly smiled at Harry before shuffling out to their seats, Snape was surprisingly close beside them. He was like a shadow and he was doing a fair job at keeping them safe.

No sooner than they left did Dumbledore arrive with a small cup of butterbeer.

“Harry m’boy,” he greeted, “Miss Granger. I figured you could do with a quick pick me up before you went out there. It’s butterbeer,” he said with a wink, his eyes twinkling madly.
“Thanks, Professor,” Harry said grabbing the offered drink.

Dumbledore smiled and clapped his hands, appearing pleased with Harry, even though he was internally pleased that he had managed to find a drink that he knew his student liked. It was the perfect way to slip him the potion with the excuse of, *liquid luck*, ironically enough.

“Good luck, Champions,” he said and waltzed back out the way he came, his job done.

Harry looked at the drink and offered it to his sister.

“I don’t think I should drink this before I go in,” he said with a weak smile.

Hermione smiled in understanding knowing that his stomach either wouldn’t be able to hold it or knowing that his bladder would give out first. Either of those scenarios were not on her brother’s list of things for the audience to see. So she took the drink and downed it so there was no evidence that it existed at all.

Surprisingly as soon as she was finished Hermione felt... *lucky*. She knew the only way for that to be possible was if the butterbeer was laced with a potion. The curly haired witch wanted to hit herself in the forehead for not checking the drink beforehand. However that would seem suspicious, to not trust your own Headmaster. So it wasn’t worth crying over spilt milk. She had a mission to do, and she was going to do it right.

“Good luck, Harry,” she said as she kissed him on the cheek and flounced out of the tent, disillusioning herself as soon as she turned the corner.

She would be going in with her brother to protect him. She would let him participate in the task as he was supposed to, but she would be his shadow. She would be with him every step of the way and hoped after tonight it would be enough for both of them to survive. While she felt lucky, she knew it was dangerous to rely on that feeling.

Meanwhile she noticed Bagman come over to lead them to the stadium and started talking to her brother and she glared at the man. She knew he was placing bets on her brother and would have liked to kick him where the sun didn’t shine. Her brother was a human, not a horse.

The stands started to fill and Hagrid, Moody, McGonagall and Flitwick came to the stadium and approached Bagman and the Champions. All but Hagrid were wearing large red luminous stars on their hats, Hagrid’s was on his back.

Hermione had taken advantage of their appearance and silenced her feet, following them so she could stand closer to her brother.

“We are going to be patrolling the outside of the maze. If you get into difficulty and wish to be rescued, send red sparks into the air, and one of us will come and get you, do you understand?” McGonagall said as though she didn’t see them less than five minutes ago.

They all nodded.

“Off you go then!” Bagman said cheerfully.

Hagrid quietly wished Harry luck as he was walking off.
Bagman was announcing the points and the order of which the champions would enter the maze. He was riling up the audience and the cheers were deafening.

“So… on my whistle, Harry, Cedric! Three – Two – One –!” Bagman gave a short blast on his whistle, instructing the two Hogwarts’ champions to enter the maze.

Hermione quickly followed behind, once again glad for all the running Barty and Moody made her do. She wouldn’t be breathing heavily and give herself away. She could have silenced herself as Barty had suggested, but she wanted the advantage of having to whisper a spell if she truly needed to.

As soon as they entered the maze they could no longer hear the audience. Hermione was impressed, either they cast a large sound dampener or placed sound canceling runes around the edges of the maze. It certainly wasn’t a ward, which surprised her considering how much easier it would be. But there was more than one way to skin a kneazle.

She watched as Harry and Cedric split at the fork and bolted after Harry. They heard the whistles being blown for Viktor and Fleur, but Hermione was completely focused on her brother. Terrible things were going to happen tonight and she had to make sure he made it back alive. She knew Barty was helping make things easier for Harry so he could get to the trophy… the portkey… before the other champions. If she wasn’t aware of the plan she would be just as uneasy as Harry was at the moment.

“Point Me,” she heard him whisper, holding his wand flat in his palm.

She raised her eyebrow at her brother. While it gave him a general direction of where to go, it didn’t help him decide which paths to take in the maze. Granted it was a spell she helped him with, she felt that he could have used something better.

She was proud of her brother for being wary at how ‘easy’ the maze was so far considering the danger of the other tasks. She felt a lot better being able to be here with her brother in the task rather than sitting in the audience and hoping for the best. At least she could do something this time.

Hermione heard the movement behind them and kept her wand at the ready while crouching. She was invisible to Harry at the moment and she wasn’t keen on being hit with a spell simply because he didn’t know she was there.

Thankfully it was just Cedric who had rushed out of a path with the sleeve of his robe smoking. The wizard was clearly shaken by whatever it was he ran into.

“Hagrid’s blast-ended skrewts are bloody enormous! I only just got away!” the wizard explained himself.

He looked self-consciously at Harry and then took off into a run again, obviously trying to put as much space between himself and the skrewts.

Hermione wanted to laugh at him even though she knew what he was talking about. Those skrewts were their project for most of the year and with how big they got she supposed they didn’t do too poorly with raising the odd creatures. The task was dangerous, but she couldn’t help but want to laugh. It really was a task of knowledge considering that a Fourth Year would be able to pass them with a small amount of trouble since they had hands on experience with the monsters.

Harry also had the same idea however and took off at a run, not wanting to be any closer to the blast-ended skrewts any more than he had to. However as he turned a corner he saw a dementor making
its way towards him.

It was at taller than Madame Maxine, its face hidden in its hood while its rotting scabbed hands were reaching out for him. Harry felt the familiar cold clamminess wash over him and he scrambled to pull up the happiest thought he could think of. It helped that he had such a wonderful day with his family, with his sister.

“Expect Patronum!”

The familiar silver stag leapt out proudly from Harry’s wand and charged the dementor. Yet the dementor didn’t disperse or run away, it tripped over the hem of its robes.

Harry stared baffled at the unexpected turn of events. The only other experience he had with something taking the form of a dementor was… “A boggart! Riddikulus!”

Hermione was surprised that even with the lack of laughter the boggart exploded in a wisp of smoke. She wondered if anyone else had stumbled upon that breakthrough. A patronus coupled with a riddikulus would make a boggart explode.

Alas her brother was on the move again and, ever vigilant, she followed.

In front of them was a strange golden mist. Hermione was curious as to how her brother thought he would get by it. She was happy that he didn’t just charge through it though. She had her doubts about his common sense from time to time, but it would seem to be something that just rubbed off of Ron. Apparently you could catch stupid, she would be sure to keep her distance.

“Reducto!” he shouted.

Hermione glared at her brother. While she was pleased he didn’t run into it, it was a gas. Mist was a gas. The reductor curse was for solid objects!

She watched as Harry thought about his next course of action when they heard a scream.

“Fleur!?” Harry yelled.

There was no answer. Hermione was worried for her blond friend who seemed to get nothing but the short end of the stick in this tournament. Harry was looking all around him trying to figure out where the scream came from.

It was obvious that he decided his friend was worth the risk of the odd mist. He held his breath and ran through. Hermione watched his disbelievingly.

‘That moron! For all he knows that could be a flesh dissolving potion in the form of a mist! But for all purposes, “If I hold my breath, I’ll be fine!”… At least he did hold his breath,’ Hermione mentally grumbled to herself.

She pulled out her wand and started casting reveling spells. She discovered that it was the pollen from a plant, which had planted its roots at the top of the hedges. Unsurprisingly it caught Harry. He was hanging upside down by his right foot, holding his glasses to his face, looking just as terrified as he did first year trapped in devils’ snare. Only this time he was alone… at least he thought so. He clenched his eyes tight and Hermione took the opportunity to stun the plant as he decided to try to pull his foot as hard as he could.

Hermione walked slowly past the plant as her brother dropped onto his knees. Would have served him right if he fell on his head. Harry took a deep breath before getting back up and hurrying
forward. The witch hurried after the wizard wondering what he would do if she wasn’t there. With his reaction to the plant all it would have done was strangle him tighter, didn’t his experience with devils’ snare teach him anything?

After quite a few dead ends they eventually ran into a blast-ended skrewt. This one was at least 10 feet long, looking more like a giant scorpion than anything. The witch was exasperated but impressed with Hagrid’s obviously illegal creature.

“Stupefy!”

Hermione ducked as soon as she heard the spell leave her brother’s wand.

‘Of all the asinine things!’ she thought furiously.

Harry ducked as his spell rebounded off the skrewt’s body armor. The skrewt quickly retaliated by blasting a bit of fire from its end. They could both smell burning hair, and Hermione was thankful for once that it was not hers. It was a close call though, but she couldn’t even be mad with the damn thing since Harry fired first.

“Impedimenta!” he shouted.

The spell bounced off the hard exoskeleton. Harry stumbled backwards and shouted the spell again, “IMPEDIMENTA!”

Hermione was going to jump in, but was glad that Harry finally hit the blast-ended skrewt’s underside. He was right there! Hermione had to take a deep breath as she chalked it up to shock. Not everyone thought clearly when they were in shock. She was still haunted by first year;

“But we haven’t got any wood.”

They were surrounded by a plant… and they didn’t have any wood… she would never let herself live it down.

She followed Harry as he ran like Fluffy was on his heels, she was starting to get a lovely cardio workout. The small breaks were nice as it kept her breath even, even though she was starting to work up a small sweat.

They were heading down a path for a while when they heard Cedric in the path next to theirs.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

There was no answer.

“What they hell do you think you’re doing!?”

And then they heard Viktor’s voice, “Crucio!”

Suddenly all they heard were Cedric’s screams. Hermione was privately comparing the tone of the curse to the one cast on her. It was less emotional, like he didn’t mean it. It sounded off… she wasn’t sure how to explain it, but she knew the pain wasn’t as bad as what it could be. However she was trained to handle it, to bypass the pain, Cedric was not.

Harry was blasting a hole into one of the hedges, Hermione cast a few silent reducto’s and an impedimenta on it, thus avoiding attracting attention to herself. Granted with Cedric screaming it was pretty hard, but to be on the safe side…
Harry was kicking and struggling, tearing his robes, to make it to the other side of the hedge where Hermione was waiting for him. She didn’t look to see what Viktor was doing to Cedric, more concerned that her brother wouldn’t be overcome by the plant.

As soon as he made it through, Krum looked up and tried to run for it. Harry shot a stunner that hit the wizard directly in the back.

The green eyed wizard ran over to the Hufflepuff, checking on him. Hermione left Cedric to Harry as she went over to check on her boyfriend. She knew Viktor wouldn’t do that and cast a few spells of her own. She couldn’t tell anything so she knelt down and opened one of his eyes… it was cloudy and starting to clear up. He was under the imperius when he cast the unforgivable and for some reason she felt lighter and heavier at the same time.

She was glad that he didn’t cast the torture curse on his own, more than glad really. However she was disappointed that he wasn’t able to throw off the curse. She knew that Barty must have cast it, causing an altercation for Viktor or Fleur being too close to the trophy before Harry. She just wished that he hadn’t given such harsh instructions to the wizard.

Further thinking though she realized it was an order that Viktor could have pushed through if he tried hard enough. It was an action so deplorable to most that they would be able to overcome it. Either Viktor was too close to dark magic which left him unable to avoid its tempting call, thus making him want to cast the dark spell, or his will wasn’t as strong as he made it seem. Both left a disgusting taste in her mouth.

Thankfully she was able to place his face back in the dirt before her fellow Hogwarts students came over and shot a shower of red sparks over the fallen wizard.

There was a moment of awkward silence as the two wizards checked their surroundings.

There was another awkward moment where Cedric reminded Harry that they should continue with the task. It was hard to imagine that they were still partaking in the tournament and went in the same direction before going their separate ways.

They ran for a while, hitting more dead ends before running into a magnificent creature that had Hermione stunned. How they managed to obtain one for the task was simply beyond her current mental grasp. It was a sphinx. She had the body of an overly large lion. Her clawed paws were huge and she had a long yellowish tail ending in a brown tuft. The head, of course, was that of a woman.

The young witch was mildly surprised that she didn’t have the torso of a woman as well, just the head. She supposed that it might be a sub-species thing. She kept her eyes trained on the sphinx hoping that her brother wouldn’t be stupid and cast first and ask questions after.

The sphinx was pacing, so she was obviously guarding something since she didn’t move from the path.

“You are very near your goal. The quickest way is past me,” she said. Her voice was deep and hoarse, as though she hadn’t spoken in some time.

“So… so will you move, please?” Harry asked, figuring he’d give it a try.

Hermione smiled at her brother’s naïve hopefulness. The sphinx also thought it was cute apparently as she merely answered him instead.

“No. Not unless you answer my riddle. Answer on your first guess – you may pass. Answer wrongly – I will attack. Remain silent – I will let you walk away from me unscathed.”
Chapter 47

The sphinx kept her eyes on Harry the whole time she paced. She scented Hermione, but considered the extra being to be part of his party. She was given instructions not to do so for the champions. She was given a sample of each of their scents and this one did not match up to any of them. It was common practice ages ago to travel in packs, so it was not unusual for one person to answer for the whole group, so she allowed it without saying anything.

She watched the boy struggle to make his decision, obviously wistful for another. Whomever he was thinking of was probably better at riddles than him and she felt a soft pity for the cub.

“Okay,” he came to a decision, “Can I please hear the riddle?”

She appreciated that he was polite, but acknowledged his lack of proper speaking. He did not take pity on her for her form or treat her disdainfully, so she decided to be kind to him in turn. She sat in the middle of the path and recited:

“First think of the person who lives in disguise,
Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.
Next, tell me what’s always the last thing to mend,
The middle of the middle and end of the end?
And finally give me the sound often heard,
During the search for a hard-to-find word.
Now string them together, and answer me this,
Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?”

Hermione bit her lip to keep from giggling. This was one of the easier riddles they gave to younger kids.

‘Spider.’

“Could I have it again… more slowly?” he asked carefully.

The sphinx blinked at him and smiled before repeating the riddle. The respect he was giving her was quite nice.

“All the clues add up to a creature I wouldn’t want to kiss?” he asked.

The sphinx merely smiled in return, trying to keep herself from laughing at the innocence of the wizard cub. Even if he failed to answer her riddle the most she would do was probably bat him around and then groom him. His hair was most messy.

Hermione crossed her arms and pursed her lips at her brother. He went to muggle primary school, he should know this one.

Harry was muttering to himself trying to figure it out, but with her sensitive hearing she could make out the words he was saying. Apparently so could the sphinx.
“… a – an imposter. No, that’s not my guess! A spy? I’ll come back to that … could you give me the next clue again, please?”

The sphinx repeated the next lines of the riddle.

Harry continued to work out the riddle, shouting out parts that he figured out in excitement at the sphinx. Hermione saw her tail end flop around in amusement. The creature kept smiling at her brother, her eyes glowed with a small fondness.

Harry started pacing as he figured he was getting close to the answer.

“A creature that I wouldn’t want to kiss… a spider!”

The sphinx smiled brightly at the wizard cub. He was so proud of himself with such an easy riddle she almost wanted to groom him anyways. She got up and stretched her front legs before moving to the side to let the small party pass.

“Thanks!” he said, obviously surprised at his own intelligence, running past the mythical creature.

“Thank you,” Hermione whispered as she also ran past.

Harry once again use, “Point Me” before running off in that direction.

He ran with Hermione close beside him, the TriWizard Cup was glowing about a hundred yards away. Hermione spotted Cedric before Harry did, but spot him he did. The witch made a quick dash for the trophy just to make sure Harry grabbed it, on the off chance she had to trip the Hufflepuff. She saw the spider and decided to see what would happen before she stepped in if she had to.

“Stupefy!” Harry yelled.

Hermione wanted to slap her brother. For all the love in the magical world and knowledge that would do him right, firing a spell at a creature with an exoskeleton as hard as armor? How well did that work with the blast-ended skrewt!?

Harry continued to throw stunners and impedimenta spells at it, which only served to make the spider agitated. Of course this cause the spider to turn its attention on the Boy-Who-Lived. Harry had looked it in the eyes as it looked at him before it charged him.

That was when Hermione felt dread fill her stomach, more so as Cedric seemed to follow Harry’s example and shoot his own stunners. Hermione wanted to hit both wizards but instead shot an incidendo at the huge eight legged monstrosity. The spider was extremely fast and closing in on her brother. Thankfully spell hit the spider in its spinneret and the spider caught fire and flipped onto its back before curled in on itself as it started to burn to death, its eight legs pulled towards its abdomen.

“Harry! Are you alright!?” Cedric yelled, running towards the younger wizard, “Did it fall on you!?” the other wizard was practically frantic, unable to see around the large spider.

“No, I’m alright, it fell before it touched me,” he replied.

Hermione was getting antsy now with Cedric so close and Harry not moving towards it.

“Go on, take it, you’re closer,” her brother said.

Hermione was practically livid, but silent. How she wanted to hex her brother with a set of stingers! HE WAS GOING TO TAKE THE BLASTED PORTKEY OR SO HELP HER MERLIN
WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO SAVE THEM!

Cedric however was unaware of the watchful third party and was making his own decision. He looked between the cup and his fellow wizard.

“You take it, you should win. You’ve already saved my neck twice in here,” the older wizard said.

“That’s not how it works,” Harry argued, “The one who reaches the cup first gets the points, that’s you. So take the bloody thing already!”

“No,” Cedric replied.

“Stop being so noble, grab it and let’s be done with this damn tournament,” Harry groused.

Hermione’s anger grew to a simmer as the wizards argued over whether or not Cedric should take the cup or not. It was obvious that the older boy didn’t want it so she felt better about it. Her brother on the other hand was another story.

“Both of us,” Harry said.

“What?”

“We both take it, we’ll tie. For Hogwarts. We both got here, helped each other out, we can take it together. School unity, house unity,” Harry said insisted.

Cedric grinned at the other boy, “Agreed!”

Both wizards walked up to the cup, took each other by the arms and reached out for the opposite handles. The cup was bright and inviting, it was shiny and clean amidst the horrors that were in the maze. Hermione quickly latched onto her brother’s cloak as the portkey took them to the graveyard.

The three of them crashed into the ground, Hermione bit her tongue to keep from making a sound. She quickly scrambled away from the pair so they wouldn’t notice her, finding purchase behind a stone.

“Where are we?” Harry asked, looking around.

Cedric shook his head in the negative, unsure himself.

“Did anyone tell you that the cup was a portkey?” the older wizard asked.

“Nope,” was Harry’s simple response, taking out his wand, “Constant vigilance though.”

Cedric nodded and pulled out his own wand. Harry kept looking around feeling like he was being watched. Cedric was also looking around assuming Harry was checking their surroundings with a fine comb.

“Somebody’s coming,” he hissed at the older boy.

Both seekers squinted their eyes as they watched a figure move swiftly in their direction between the graves. They couldn’t make out the face, but it was obvious the figure was holding a bundle with great care.
The wizards looked at each other in confusion before going back to watch the mysterious figure. It stopped beside a large marble headstone. For a moment the three of them looked at one another.

Suddenly Harry’s scar exploded into a new world of pain that he had never experienced before. He dropped his wand as he put his hand over his scar. He fell to the ground feeling as though his head was going to split open, his scar being the seam that was holding it together.

Hermione saw this and quickly disillusioned a large tombstone before banishing the rock in front of the young wizards as a shield. She did some quick wand work to keep the stone hovering in front of them.

She heard the high cold voice say, “Kill the spare.”

The witch watched with dread as the figure that was holding the bundle that was none other than Voldemort, flick his wand about before screeching, “Avada Kedavra!”

Hermione shot a strong stunner to the back of the Hufflepuff’s knee causing him to fall down as the killing curse struck the invisible tombstone. Hermione was so thankful that her spell was strong enough that the stone didn’t become visible again even after it was struck. It did however have invisible debris fly about and one of the pieces caught Cedric in the face. She then quickly cast a *petrificus abdominis* so that his chest wouldn’t rise and give away that he was still breathing.

Although the flash of green shined through Harry’s eyelids and he heard a thud near his head. The pain in his scar started to hurt with such an intensity that his body tried to vomit. Then the pain started to ease and the young wizard was terrified to open his eyes. He wished he had his sister with him, but at the same time he was glad she wasn’t because that meant that at least she was safe.

He opened his eyes and looked over to where the Hufflepuff was beside him, sprawled out. He was *dead*.

Harry stared at the other wizard, his mind not accepting what he was seeing. He felt his body numb with denial, but felt something foreign pull him up to his feet dragging him somewhere.

The short man put down his precious bundle and lit his wand with a soft *lumos* before tossing Harry against a marble headstone with the name TOM RIDDLE upon it. The odd wizard proceeded to tie Harry to the stone with some conjured ropes from neck to ankle. Hermione swallowed hard before she remembered to cast a cooling charm on her body.

Barty warned her that the Dark Lord’s snake might be there, and it would be prudent not to be seen because of her body heat. She also cast a soft *scorgify* on her body to get rid of the sweat and grime she gathered while running through the maze. It was still harsh on her skin, the reason witches and wizards did not cast it upon themselves, but comfort wasn’t high on her list of priorities at the moment.

She crept slowly towards Cedric’s body, casting a light cooling charm on him as well. She knew theoretically bodies were supposed to be warm for more six hours upon death, but she wasn’t sure with the Killing Curse not having any experience with it and did so just to be on the safe side. Harry’s wand was lying by the Hufflepuff’s feet and she grabbed it, planning to hand it to him when the time was right. The witch was no seeker, but she also spotted Cedric’s wand and slipped it into his pocket for him.

She looked up sharply when she heard a slap.

“You!” Harry gasped.
Hermione glowered at the rat animagus, wishing that Crookshanks killed him when he had the chance. She was glad that he didn’t reply or she would have silenced it for him. Still she knew that he had a ritual to perform and it had to happen.

She watched the disgusting short man check his handy work and sneered at him. The witch crept closer hiding behind the other tombstones even though she was disillusioned. She watched as the rat shoved a black cloth into her brother’s mouth. Hermione hoped for his sake that it was at least somewhat clean. She didn’t want him to get sick after the whole ordeal because of some bacteria that was on the gag.

The curly haired witch noticed that he couldn’t move or talk and was only able to see what was ahead of him. Sadly one of those things was Cedric’s body, whom Harry didn’t know was still alive. The only other thing in his line of sight was the bundle that she knew was none other than Voldemort.

She heard the slithering with her sensitive hearing close by her brother. However she wasn’t that concerned with the snake since they needed him alive. They needed him alive and his blood untainted. She wasn’t exactly sure how well that would work with their recent bond, but she knew regardless it had to be free of snake venom.

Hermione watched as Pettigrew set up one of the largest cauldrons she ever had the pleasure of seeing. If it weren’t for an insidious ritual she would actually take the time to admire it. The cauldron was certainly the right size for their purpose. It was clear though that Pettigrew was not the best at potions the way he was setting up. He was struggling to light the fire under it, one of the easiest things to do with potion making.

Once it was lit the witch saw the large snake slither away. The dark wizard’s familiar was clearly old with how large she was. How she survived 13 years without him though baffled her.

“Hurry!”

“It is ready, Master,” the large man groveled.

“Now…”

The witch grimaced as she caught glimpse of the homunculus that housed the dark wizard. He was as thin and weak looking. His skin looked more like that of a snake and just as hairless. He was black and red, even his face was snakelike. How his servants recognized him… if it were not for the dark mark she was sure no Death Eater would know.

He reached his thin arms up much like a small child did asking to be picked up until Pettigrew lifted him up in a disturbing semblance of one aiding a cherished family member. Pettigrew’s hood fell and the siblings could see the revulsion on the man’s face holding his master as he lowered the homunculus into the cauldron.

They heard the potion hiss as the frail body hit the bottom with a soft ‘thud’.

‘Let it drown, please let it drown,’ Harry mentally begged whichever deity was listening.

Pettigrew’s voice shook, terrified, as he began the ritual.

“As the homunculus that housed our dark lord thrives, may his son be reborn!”

Hermione watched amazed as the ground below Harry opened and a fine trickle of ground bone made its way into the cauldron.
‘Tom Riddle… Riddle is a muggle’s name. Voldemort is a half-blood!’ she thought frantically, thinking of the implications of this discovery.

The cauldron hissed spitting sparks all over, turning a poisonous bright blue.

“F-flesh – of the servant – w-willingly given – you will – revive – your master.”

They watched as the frightened wizard held up his right hand, gripping a bright dagger in his left. Harry shut his eyes tightly as soon as he realized what he was going to do, Hermione winced as she watched. Even with his eyes closed Harry couldn’t block out the sound of Pettigrew’s screams, whereas Hermione felt that he deserved that and more. The witch watched as the grown wizard picked up his mutilated hand and dropped it in the cauldron.

The potion turned into a bright burning red, bright enough to shine through Harry’s eyelids.

Pettigrew was groaning and whimpering in pain. His breath was heavy and rancid. Hermione watched with her hair standing on end while the deplorable wizard stood in front of her kin.

“B-blood of the enemy… forcibly taken… you will… resurrect your foe.”

The rat animagus had tears running down his filthy face, clearing tracks in the grime that layered his skin. Harry tried to squirm, but he was tied too tightly. Pettigrew took the dagger, his hand shaking as he struggled to keep his hold, and made a cut in Harry’s right arm. It was smaller than the cut he had to make himself for the family bond, but it hurt just as much.

Pettigrew struggled, patting down his pockets with his remaining hand, looking for an empty vial. He eventually found it and fumbled with it, it fell to the ground and he quickly picked it back up hoping that no grave dirt got in it, before holding it and catching a few drops of blood, not unlike what Hermione had seen at a muggle hospital during check-ups.

The large wizard stumbled back to the large cauldron drunkenly and poured the vial inside. The cauldron flashed a blinding white, which Pettigrew took as a good sign, since he allowed himself to drop and cradle his deformed arm. The grown wizard sobbed as blood oozed from his stump arm.

The cauldron simmered, dispersing glitter like sparks everywhere, so bright that everything else was surprisingly black. Then… it stopped. A large amount of thick white steam crept from the cauldron, obscuring everything else from Harry’s vision. Hermione took advantage of it and ran to the tombstone next to her brother.

They both saw the dark outline of a man, tall, and skeletally thin, rising slowly from the cauldron and their blood ran cold.

“Robe me,” he said in his high cold voice.

Pettigrew rolled over and grabbed the robes that Voldemort was previously residing in, still sobbing, as he did his best to please his dark master, reaching up and carefully pull them over his master’s head. The man stepped out of the cauldron, staring at the Boy-Who-Lived.

The-Boy-Who-Lived stared back at the face that haunted his nightmares since first year. His face was whiter than bone, his eyes a creepy scarlet red, and his nose were but two slits in his face. Hermione was nevermore glad for her proficiency in the disillusionment charm as she made a face that expressed her wide disgust, for the first and last time in his presence.

The dark wizard turned around to inspect his new body, unconcerned with his teenage foe, who was securely tied up. He ignored everything around him; his servant, his foe, even his familiar, as he took
in his body with a disturbing pleased grin. After he was satisfied, he reached into his robe pocket and pulled out his long trusted and familiar wand.

Voldemort then proceeded to lift and throw his faithful servant against the headstone that Harry was tied to. Hermione watched in horror and relief as the large man did not collide with her brother. The thin wizard turned and laughed high, cold, and mirthlessly. Hermione was sure that it would haunt her dreams.

“My Lord… my lord… you promised… y-you did promise,” Pettigrew whimpered.

“Hold out your arm,” Voldemort said lazily.

“Oh, Master… thank you, Master…” he said as he held out his bleeding stump arm.

“The other arm, Wormtail,” Voldemort said as though the animagus was being stupid.

“M-master, please,” the large wizard begged.

Voldemort sighed in exasperation as he bent down and grabbed the fat wizard’s left arm and yanked the sleeve down, exposing the dark mark. It was red and angry, bright even, instead of the dull black that Hermione had seen before. Pettigrew continued to weep as his master ignored him and instead inspected the mark that originally made him a Knight of Walpurgis.

“It is back, they should have noticed it by now… and now we will see… and when we see… we shall know…” he said softly.

He reached out with one of his pale fingers and touched the mark of his making, turning it jet black.

Harry and Pettigrew both screamed in renewed pain. Voldemort smirked cruelly, it was like music to his ears, a fresh symphony. He straightened back up, and looked up into the dark sky.

“How many will be brave enough to return? How many will be foolish to stay away?” he whispered to the sky, as though he were alone in the graveyard.

The dark wizard started to pace and start a monologue that Hermione kept half an ear open to. It was fascinating in a morbid way, as though he was having a pleasant conversation with a friend, expressing secrets he knew his followers were unaware of.

“Listen to me, reliving family history in my old age,” he said quietly, “I believe I’m growing quite sentimental… But look, Harry! I may call you Harry, correct?” he chuckled to himself as the boy had nothing to say even if he weren’t gagged, “My true family returns…”

Suddenly the air was amidst with swishing cloaks, all hooded and masked. They all moved cautiously, unbelievingly, but also aware that it would spare them pain. Eventually one gave in to old protocol, murmuring, “Master,” as he kissed the Dark Lord’s robes, before taking place in what later appeared to be a circle as the rest followed example.

There were more than a few gaps, everyone obviously knowing their place. The group shivered, although there was no wind.

“Welcome, Death Eaters. It has been thirteen years since we last met, and you answer my call as though it were only yesterday. We are still united under the Dark Mark… or are we?” he hissed.

The thin wizard made a great display of sniffing, his weird nostrils flaring.
“I smell guilt,” he said, “There is a stench of guilt in the air.”

The circle shivered again, although they held fast and stayed in place. Hermione crept closer to her brother as the depraved wizard talked down to his followers, making her way behind the headstone. She crept silently to the forgotten dagger but a few feet away, made her way back, and started to cut the ropes one by one. The scared breathing of the returned and Pettigrews pathetic cries covered any noise that she made.

“Master! Master, forgive me! Forgive us all!” one man cried.

Voldemort laughed as he raised his wand, “Crucio!”

The wizard fell and screamed, writhing in extraordinary pain. Harry was too distracted with what was happening, wishing for some form of authority to come aid him, to recognize that he was being untied. Hermione ignored them, still hearing odd bits.

“… and Lord Voldemort rewards his helpers…”

She would remember that bit for years to come even if she didn’t know it yet. The witch kept cutting the ropes, using her wand to levitate them so as not to alert any possible onlookers. The dark wizard was much like one of the snakes that he spoke to. He continued to ramble, telling a long quiet tale that everyone listened to as though their lives were upon it.

“… the boy you all believed had been my downfall… Crucio!”

Hermione felt more than saw her brother writhe in pain under the curse. She felt the need to help him more now than any other time before, and she couldn’t help him just yet. Not without giving herself away! She leaned onto the ropes trying to strengthen their hold again so nothing would seem amiss. Tears fell from her eyes as she held her brother in place as he was tortured.

“Now untie him, Wormtail, and make sure he has his wand.”

Hermione quickly repaired the ropes that she cut as Pettigrew untied him from the front. She was to remain unseen and get him back home alive. She knew it would be hard, but it was easier said than done. She quickly reached around and pressed Harry’s wand into his hand, as if it had been up his sleeve the entire time.

Harry’s eyes widened, unsure if there was someone else or if someone in the area could perform wandless magic. He thought about running for it, but decided that would be stupid considering how easy it was to take down Krum when he started to run.

The Death Eaters were making a tighter circle around their master and the teenaged boy.

“Have you been taught how to duel, Harry Potter?”

Quickly one spell flashed in the wizards mind, as though it was his lifeline. He didn’t answer the monster in wizard’s clothing though.

“First we bow to each other, Harry,” he said in a falsely kind voice, bending very slightly himself.

“Come boy, bow. Dumbledore would be distressed that you weren’t showing proper manners. Now I said bow, to death!” he hissed.

The Death Eaters laughed as their lord silently forced his will upon the boy to make him bow.
“Very good. And now you face me like a man, straight back and proud, much like how your late father died – and we duel.”

Before Harry could do anything he was hit with another bout of cruciatus. He was screaming loudly as invisible hot knives stabbed him everywhere! Then it stopped and Harry rolled over shakily onto his legs, the aftereffects causing his whole body to shake like a leaf.

Hermione watched as the older wizard taunted her brother. She looked away and saw that no one was paying Cedric any mind. She quickly ran over to him and sat next to his head and levitated the cup closer to them. She was going to bring her brother back alive, but that didn’t mean she was going to leave Cedric behind.

“Expelliarmus!”

“Avada Kedavra!”

Hermione’s blood froze as she stood and looked over to make sure her brother was still alive. The two wands were connected now by a strange golden glow. Her brother and Voldemort lifted into the air as their wands shot out a web like ward around the area.

The Death Eaters were starting to get rowdy until their master yelled at them to do nothing.

Then amazingly one by one people were coming out of Voldemort’s wand. The people who had been killed by his wand that were not ghosts. Most of them were shouting advice and support to Harry and telling him not to let go. Then his mother came out… and she was gorgeous. She said something to him, and her smile was kind and disarming. Then a man came out, looking stunningly like Harry, and walked over to what could only be his son.

“When the connection is broken, we will only linger for a few moments, but it’ll give you just enough time. You must get to the portkey and go to Hogwarts. Your sister is waiting for you by the portkey... congratulations by the way, she’s a good girl, always listen to her,” he said with a wink, “Sirius was my blood brother, and I always trusted him. You need to always trust her.”

“Listen to your father dear, Hermione is a smart girl. I’m proud of you, I love you both,” Lily said as she quickly hugged her son for the last time, “Make sure you tell her that, and that you support her choices.”

Harry felt the love and warmth that could only come from a mother’s hug. It was nothing like Missus Weasley’s and very similar to Hermione’s.

He was choked up with emotion but managed to reply, “Okay, Mum.”

“Be ready to run, son … do it now… no– ”

“– NOW!” Harry yelled, as he pulled up his wand and broke the connection. The figures that had come from Voldemort’s wand shielded the young wizard as he ran for the portkey. He ran for Cedric’s body. He ran to go home to his sister! He zigzagged like a rabbit and knocked two Death Eaters over.

“Stun him!” Voldemort screeched.

“Accio Harry Potter! Accio Peter Pettigrew!” Hermione shouted, her knees were tightened on Cedric’s torso. If it were any other situation it would have been exceedingly inappropriate with her bum practically in his face.
Harry and Pettigrew flew through the air, Peter’s large body knocked over a number of Death Eaters who were getting ready to fire spells.

“Expelliarmus! Stupefy! Incarcerous!” shot in succession, the first two spells hitting the animagus as he continued to soar through the air where the third one tied her brother to the grotesque wizard. She quickly caught the flying wand and braced herself for the impact of two wizards.

As soon as she felt the ropes touch her hand, “Accio Cup!”

In a speeding whirlwind of nausea from behind her bellybutton, bringing three wizards with her, they were going back to Hogwarts.

They crash landed somewhere on the ground, the weight from Pettigrew and her brother broke her left wrist and she screamed at the impact.

“Hermione!” he yelled reaching out for her.

“Harry!” she replied, grabbing him with her good hand, her wand hand.

Then a pair of hands grabbed Harry tightly and turned him over, “Harry! Harry!”

Startled green eyes met bright blue.

Harry could see so many people! He reached for his sister’s hand, holding tightly for support.

“He’s back! Voldemort ‘s back!” Harry shouted in the elder wizard’s face.
Albus looked at Harry somberly, as though he wasn’t surprised and had merely waited for the news as calmly as one waited for an owl. Fudge however rushed over, only seeing two TriWizard Champions and some extremely unsavory large man, who happened to be tied to Harry Potter.

“What? What did he say? What’s happened?” Fudge asked loudly, trying to hear over the crowd.

Hermione squeezed her brother’s hand in the firm support that he needed, even as his arm was being chaffed by the rope.

“Voldemort is back and he – he –” Harry tried to tell the Minister, but for some reason he started to choke on his words as his vision started to blur.

“Sweet Merlin – Diggory! Dumbledore, Diggory is dead!” Fudge yelled, turning the crowd into hysterics.

“He’s dead!” “He’s dead!” “Cedric Diggory! DEAD!”

Hermione ended her disillusionment and surprised those surrounding.

“Oh! Get off him, girl! Can’t you see he’s dead! You perverse monster!” Fudge yelled at the curly haired witch, “How dare you try to desecrate his body!”

Hermione looked at the minister incredulously. Her hair was as crazed as the situation and curls and frizz was sticking up every which way. Her face was pale and her pupils were dilated, her adrenaline was still high.

“Excuse you!” she shouted, sitting up straight, which did not help her situation as it pressed her bum directly on Cedric’s face. Her face flushed as she realized what she just did and with as much pride as she had left, she removed herself from the older boy’s face. The witch brought her broken wrist close to her chest as she reached over and grabbed her wand. She cleared her throat, “As I was saying. I am not a perverse monster, thank you, Minister Fudge. And he is not dead,” she finished with a glare.

“He is deathly pale and he’s not breathing, do you think I’m daft girl!?” he shouted at the young witch.

Hermione glowered at the wizard, refusing to openly admit that she did indeed think he was a daft fool.

“Finite Incantatem,” she said, with a large display with her wand.

Immediately Cedric’s chest started to rise and fall with deep breaths. He was still unconscious, but he was very much alive.

“They’ll need to go to the hospital wing immediately!” Fudge yelled, neglecting to apologize entirely to the witch.

“He’s ill, he’s injured, she’s injured – Dumbledore I must insist!” Fudge continued to talk loudly as the crowd continued to rise in their hysterics. Witches were wailing over the news that the prefect was deceased that was spreading like wildfire.
With the situation no longer a life or death moment, Harry started to shut down from shock. Hermione looked over concerned for her brother, but decided to let his mind handle the excessive stimuli the only way it could think of. He had just duelled one of the darkest wizards of their time, he had just thought he’d seen his classmate die, a madman was resurrected, he saw his parents for the first time since infancy that wasn’t a photograph, and there was now a monster back and ready to start where he’d left off. They were at war.

“Harry stay here,” Dumbledore instructed, completely ignoring his bushy haired friend… relative… whatever she was, was not of consequence, Harry was important not her.

Barty was on his last dose of polyjuice potion as he walked over as quickly as he could. He had felt the burn of the Dark Mark, it felt like a white hot poker stick being pressed into his skin, all the while his blood turned ice cold. The war was back, _He _was back. The only way to kill him was for him to be alive, so he hoped beyond all hope that he was doing something right and he wouldn’t live to regret it.

He saw his pupil and she looked back at him. Even though he was sure that she hadn’t suffered a round of the torture curse, considering that she was alive, the witch still looked like she had been put through the wringer. She obviously suffered a heavy physical injury with the way she was cradling her wrist, but seeing who she brought back with her, well…

He spun the magical blue eye and checked her down carefully, relieved that at least _she _was alright. There were no signs of dark magic anywhere on her person and for that he was grateful for. He had sent her into one of the pits of hell, into a circle of scared Death Eaters, and she came back unmolested. She even brought evidence with her, something they hadn’t talked about, smart lass.

He stopped by next to the witch he had grown so fond of, but had to keep his distance. He was about to be revealed to the masses as alive and an escapee. At least he wouldn’t be the only one who was surprisingly not dead this night, and both were marked Death Eaters.

The wizard was impersonating Mad-Eye however and had to play the role of an insanely paranoid retired top auror. He untied his pupil’s ropes, impressed by the tightness of them, and recast them on Pettigrew. It would be a shame if the rat found a way to escape again, at least this time he was unconscious. Yet, so was the other Champion…

“Renevate,” he incanted, reviving the young Hufflepuff.

Cedric groaned, moving his hands to his chest to feel his heartbeat. He had seen his life flash before his eyes in the venomous green that was the Unforgivable _Avada Kedavra_. There was nothing he could do to stop it, he was so caught off guard. Cedric was sure he was dead, but he felt his heart beating, his body ached terribly, and the crowd around him was going wild.

“Diggory, get up and show your fans that you’re alive,” the wizard growled.

Cedric looked at his Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor before closing his eyes and groaning as he struggled to get up and do as he was asked. The young Hufflepuff took in his surrounding and the people around him. Minister Fudge was yelling and fussing, Headmaster Dumbledore looked a bit disappointed, Harry Potter was shaking and in a serious state of shock, and Harry’s … cousin? She was there too, but she looked like she had been to that awful place and back with them.

The hysterical crying in the crowds quickly turned into cheers. Amos was running as quickly as he could to check on his boy.

Barty looked at Granger… Hermione, he looked at his pupil Hermione Granger and she looked back
at him with a trust that almost made him cry.

“Miss Granger, you seem to be in walking shape. You can make your own way to the hospital wing, I’ll take Potter, he’s in no condition and looks like he’ll be dead weight until Poppy can take care of him,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” she said with a deep breath, relieved that he was alright for now.

“It’s all right, lad, I’ve got you… come on… hospital wing”

“Dumbledore said stay,” Harry replied around his tears, his scar was pounding and made him want to start retching again as his vision started getting blurrier.

“You need to lie down… Come on now…”

Hermione watched as her professor dragged her brother away, knowing he was going to play his part to the end. She watched as people shouted at the two of them, mostly at her professor who was still disguised as Professor Moody. She knew it was Professor Barty Crouch Jr, by the way he licked his upper lip when he was nervous. The witch looked over to see the minister’s reaction now that Cedric was alive, if disoriented.

“Diggory! You’re alive, boy!” The Minister yelped as the boy swayed on his feet.

“Yes, sir. Somehow…” he said, and he looked at Hermione through the corner of his eye. He would figure it out later, because his magic was telling him that she was important to him now.

“Cedric! Cedric!”

The Hufflepuff turned as his father bowled into him, hugging him almost as tightly as the bind that was on his chest felt. He hugged his father back however, crying, not knowing until now how afraid of death he really was. He treated the tournament as a joke, a way to fame, and a way to get money. He never thought about the consequences since there were always a few people around to help if things looked like they were really getting bad. There were always safety checks in place, even though half of them did Harry almost no good. Cedric thought he was ready to be a man, a wizard of age, and facing death the way he did… he wasn’t ready. He was ashamed and felt so much regret for not telling his family that he loved them as often as he could.

“I love you, Dad,” he said, muffled into his dad’s neck.

“I love you do, Cedric, I love you too,” his father replied, hugging him tighter.

Hermione watched the scene with a small part of detachment. She was sure that she should be having a reaction like that, but for some reason… she didn’t find that she wanted one. She had already expressed to her parents that she was going to war. She told them that she loved them and they reciprocated through actions, words, and support. They even got their own owl.

Speaking of family, the Dursleys weren’t far behind from Amos, and Snape was there with them. Yet instead of the shadow that he had been for most of the day, he was once again his regular imposing self. His presence was definite as soon as he walked in the area, he looked taller, stronger, and his eyes looked colder.

“Headmaster, Minister, I see you have found a living dead man,” he said clearly.

Even without raising his voice the two were able to hear him with an astounding clarity.
“What do you mean by that, Snape?” Fudge sniped.

Severus however sneered in return before explaining himself, “That large man over there, happens to be Peter Pettigrew. A man long thought deceased.”

The minister paled at the potions master’s words.

“Pettigrew, but I thought Black killed him?” he said in a harsh whisper.

“Indeed we all did, Minister. However he is there and… weezing as it. Obviously quite amongst the living,” Severus said.

He noticed that Granger had two wands in her wand hand, even as she cradled her broken wrist. The dark wizard bent down to be at her eye level, knowing that she had probably gotten herself mixed up in whatever crazy mess this turned out to be.

“Miss Granger, I see that you’ve injured yourself,” he said with a smaller sneer.

Hermione pursed her lips at her professor, “Yes, sir.”

“Let me see your wrist, Miss Granger. I doubt we’ll have time for you to see Madam Pomfrey with such important things going about,” he instructed smoothly.

Hermione bit her lip quickly thinking about the possible repercussions and hesitatingly stretched out her broken wrist towards the dark potions master. Severus gently grasped it with feather light touches, which caused the witch to flush at contact. His fingers were calloused from constant use, but they were extremely warm and the light touch, while slightly painful was also embarrassingly pleasurable.

Severus handled Granger’s broken wrist as one would an injured wild animal. Her wrist was so thin and fragile, he could have easily mistaken it for a small bird. It was a clean break so he would be able to do what he could here and then give her a potion later to speed up the healing process, but for now he would be able to set it back properly.

“Brace yourself, Miss Granger,” he said softly.

He gave her a few seconds before he swished his wand over her wrist, softly muttering a healing spell he had invented for broken bones years ago. It hurt, but it would help with the healing process, and be fine on its own until the injured was able to see a real doctor or healer.

Hermione hissed at the pain she had braced for and was pleased that it didn’t hurt as much as the cruciatus. Compared to that spell however, a lot of things didn’t hurt as badly. Being put under the spell as often as she had been had given her a higher tolerance for pain. She would be more than sure to have Thimi give Harry one of her special potions to help with the aftereffects.

The witch and wizard looked over and saw that the Minister and Headmaster were looking over the captive with a fine comb. For all of his years, Albus could be a poor actor at times. He didn’t seem as surprised to see the rat animagus as he should have been. It also wasn’t something they could simply cover up considering there were a few hundred witnesses and a large amount of them were foreign.

While they could have claimed that most of the students at Hogwarts were probably seeing something else, they couldn’t claim that for two other esteemed schools in the wizarding community. They would simply have to go with the best truth they were willing to give, either way would see Sirius Black free. Albus wasn’t sure how much of a wrench that would be in his plans, more so since he did not do his best to get the estranged pureblood out of the hellhole that was Azkaban.
Severus stood up to his full height thinking quickly and carefully, knowing that Albus knew that the Dark Lord had already called his faithful followers. He only hoped he would be able to get out of the next meeting alive by claiming that he was trying to keep his cover to remain useful to the cause. He would be able to dredge up memories of him being cruel to Potter to help support his case, while also being able to give a large mass of truth of how he helped Slytherin win the house cup through excellence, cultivating the purebloods to be the best as they were the best. Such information like this would be sure to please the mad man, new and fresh recruits that were of equal intelligence to their purity would hopefully be a fine way to keep his sorry arse alive.

“How do we know if it’s really him though?” Fudge hissed, he was grasping at straws.

Severus looked Granger directly in the eye, something he had been avoiding for most of the term now, and something he wished he continued to do. He was looking for silent permission to take hold of the wand that was so obviously the rat’s even if it would give Black a new lease on life, but instead almost found himself drifting in a calm river. He stared into hazel eyes that were more gold than brown now with the flecks of green that he had seen in other eyes before… they were mesmerizing, and infused with such emotion he could spend hours trying to decipher it. They weren’t kind and they weren’t scared, they were soft, but hard with a steely determination, it was an odd combo for sure and he loved a good puzzle.

“Miss Granger, his wand,” Severus said instead, holding his hand out for the important piece of wood.

Hermione looked into her professor’s eyes, almost as though she was trying to reach out to him, begging him to read her mind, pulling him in, while finding herself distracted by his own dark orbs that seemed darker than the death eaters’ cloaks. Yet the witch still heard the wizard and pressed the offending wand into his hand, hard, as though trying to impress in him the importance of the wand.

Severus nodded, understanding her insistence.

“Minister, I seem to have found Pettigrew’s wand,” he purred, “Surely Mister Ollivander would be able to confirm if it is really his or not?”

Fudge felt as though Snape had placed a hot spotlight on him, and it wasn’t a place he was ready to be just yet. However he also saw the slim silver rope that the potions master had given him. He wouldn’t have to verify whether the shady looking man was Peter at all, he would be able to have Ollivander do it in his place! All he had to do was have the old wandmaker look at his wand, hoping that he had sold it to him, as nearly all Hogwarts students and alumni had their wands made by him. If he remembered the wand, as he did all his wands, it would be a simple case that he wouldn’t have to go deep in. He would even be able to force the brute into taking the max dosage of veritaserum to admit if it was really him or not.

“Of course, Snape. We will get to the bottom of this!” He tried to say as confidently as possible.

Albus watched the interaction between the minister and his potions master. He was staring at the backstabber while trying to see if it would be possible to disguise him as someone else, but with his wand as proof it was a dead end. He had to have Black as thankful to him as possible, being a free man made that harder than it did hiding a fugitive.

“Where is Harry?” Albus asked, now assuming that Cornelius Fudge had chosen his course of action. The Headmaster was positive that the minister would see him about the final decision, as he was Chief Mugwump, and decided to move on to more pressing matters.

He had deliberately stated that he wanted the boy to stay. So whoever moved the boy against his
explicit orders was surely not one of his men.

“He went with Professor Moody, Headmaster,” Hermione answered.

She too had a part to play and wished it wasn’t her that was sending her professor back to a place that he almost died.

“Alastor Moody would not move him if I insisted it, Miss Granger. I’m afraid that’s not Moody at all,” he said sharply, “Severus where would he have taken the boy?”

“I’m not sure, Headmaster. We were of the opinion that he was to be taken to the hospital wing, but that may be false now.”

“We must find him!” Albus said harshly.

“We can call Minerva, she knows what the boy smells like. I’m certain she can track him,” Severus replied.

Barty had Harry retell the story, asking questions like one of the Dark Lord’s mad followers. He kept insisting things, ignoring the foe glasses as best as he could. The old man and him had planned on it. The grizzled wizard tried to talk him out of it, to find a way that would keep him from going back to Azkaban, but Barty knew there would be no other way to convince the Dark Lord that he was true and loyal to the cause.

Even as he rambled at his pupil’s best friend, he didn’t feel nearly as emotional as he did for her, and he had been trying to help the boy out as much as possible. However it wasn’t the boy who tried to look for extra lessons on how to survive, even though he was a natural. He had the chance to learn from a top auror and never looked as it being an opportunity to learn things he would never be able to learn from another regular DADA professor. Granger did though, she sought him out and got her private lessons. She was the one who was brave enough, bold enough, to ask for extra lessons with the terrifying paranoid retired auror.

She was the one who was brave enough to train to become a warrior… He was glad that he was able to see her one more time. She was fine for the most part, she was strong and able, he did his part, he helped. He only hoped that he helped enough.

Barty continued to play the mad death eater, going on about conquering The-Boy-Who-Lived. He was simply going to stun him if they didn’t arrive soon, but he was planning on being stopped ‘just in time’, keeping a half eye on the foe glasses.

“Stupefy!”

Albus stood in the doorway with his wand pointed at the imposter Moody, knowing without a doubt that his spell hit. He had known that he used excessive force, he was a strong wizard. So it wasn’t entirely called for to knock him back a few feet with a stunner. However it was someone who didn’t listen to him, and they had to be taught a lesson.

He was radiating power, knowing that it would impress the young boy. Harry would be easier to handle if he felt safe with him. It was imperative that the boy listen to him now that the war was upon them.

Minerva walked around him and ushered the boy to the hospital wing. Dumbledore stopped her, and
with some feeble protests she understood that Harry had to see what they were up against.

“Severus, please fetch me the strongest truth potion you have and bring up the house-elf called Winky. Minerva, kindly go down to Hagrid’s house, where you will find a large black dog sitting in the pumpkin patch. Take the dog up to my office, tell him I will be with him shortly, then come back here.”

Both witch and wizard left to follow their orders, leaving The-Boy-Who-Lived, the Headmaster, and the Moody imposter alone.
Chapter 49

Albus barely gave Harry a look over, noticing how the Death Eater didn’t do anything other than threaten the boy with his wand. Instead he walked straight over to the closed trunk and began opening its compartments. While there were some valuable things in Alastor’s trunk, he figured it would be better to not touch the retired Auror’s belongings, friend or not. It was when he reached the seventh compartment did he find his friend with what looked like a few blankets.

Albus heard the boy gasp, apparently also looking in Alastor’s trunk as he was going through it. However finding your professor, who was never really your professor, at the bottom of his trunk was indeed quite the surprise.

Alastor however was well aware of what was happening and was quite stressed and worried about a few things. However he pulled up old training and compartmentalized his emotions to the background so he could at least meditate and appear as though he was sleeping. He was supposed to be a prisoner, one who was ill-treated, not camping out in his trunk having full meals, entertainment, and a warm place to sleep.

He had Barty cut a few places of his hair, knowing that it would be easily grown back to look like he took more hair than was needed for the polyjuice. The old wizard also had the young Death Eater take his glass eye, knowing that his eye socket wouldn’t shrink from being empty for a few hours. He had explained that he at least needed a glass eye or else it would take some time for his good eye to fit comfortably again.

Alastor knew he was asking a lot from the younger wizard, but he also asked that he at least put a small imperius on him. When Barty had asked with what instructions Alastor looked at the young wizard with a pained fondness. Crouch Sr. was a right pain in the arse, but his wife was right when she said that he was a good kid.

“To stay still,” he replied, knowing that if he were left to his own devices he would pace the bottom of his trunk.

Dumbledore climb down into to the spacious trunk to check on his old friend.

Harry watched with a slow detachment as his Headmaster announced his professor’s current status. However even in his own state he recognized an order and responded on auto, finding himself fetching a cloak. He threw it down carefully, hoping that there was nothing heavy in the pockets that would hit either of them and get him in trouble.

After wrapping his old friend in a cloak, trying to warm him up, Albus explained the simple brilliancy of the imposter and how he was able to pull it off. After an estimated guess Albus stood next to the young boy and watched carefully for the potion to wear off of the unconscious imposter. While he had an idea of who it might be, he also wasn’t entirely sure himself. The imposter was an occlumens and, while not a master, was efficient enough to keep him out from his surface glances. As soon as the imposter was conscious again, he planned on slipping into his mind so he at least appeared as though he knew most of the time. It would be unseemly to lose his omniscient façade.

Harry watched as his professor morphed into a man he had seen before, but younger. Instead of grizzled gray hair, it was a straw blond. He had a whole nose, less scars, and the magical eye his professor was known for popped out of his socket, obviously filled with his real one. He was pale skinned and slightly freckled… Now he had age lines around his eyes and looked much older than
the 19 that he was when he was on trial in the pensieve. Harry was so preoccupied by the spark of interest that was kindled in him that he barely heard the hurried footsteps of his other professors.

“Crouch… Barty Crouch!” Severus said as he saw his old comrade and brother in arms.

“Good heavens!” Minerva gasped, stopping beside Severus in the doorway with the house-elf Winky behind them.

Thimi looked around the professors of Hogwarts and noticed her old boy master was crumpled on the floor. Her heart dropped at the sight of him. She remembered the diligent care she had to do perform to get him healthy again after his short stay in Azkaban.

She remembered her Mistress’s commands to keep her ownership and name secret from those who didn’t know. She almost didn’t respond to the potions master when he was looking for a house-elf called Winky. The other house-elves knew that it wasn’t her name anymore and looked at each other with worried expressions since they weren’t able to give the professor an answer. Thimi however popped away quickly and invisibly to her Mistress and told her what was happening.

Hermione at that time was surrounded by a mass of people, some aurors, but gave her house-elf her discrete attention. She was instructed to follow the potions master and answer to her old name for that short time, but also keep to her original orders pertaining to her new house fealty.

Thimi held out for a few seconds trying to remain dignified and strong before her fear grew too strong. Barty was still her old boy master. She ran to her old boy and laid herself on his crumpled body.

“You is killed him… You is killed him! Old boy master is dead…” Thimi cried on his chest.

It wasn’t until she sobbed that she felt his heart beat in his chest and stopped her blubbering.

Albus was disturbingly surprised at the turnaround of the elf. She was not deranged as Dobby had become, but she was steady and clean. Nothing like what the house-elves reported last time he asked about Winky. She looked extremely well, she was not out of her mind, even if she was overcome with some distressing emotions. Something had happened with the house-elf that he hadn’t looked into. She looked like she was in the servitude of a well to do family, but she worked at Hogwarts.

None of the other Hogwarts’ house-elves looked as she did. Most of them still wore pillowcases and tea-towels. Her last uniform was a tea-towel dress look alike, that he had made her wear. However it looked like she was wearing something that was made with new fabric that was not common in Hogwarts. If Dobby spent his money on another house-elf that was his business, however it wasn’t common for any house-elf to want clothes of any sort…

“He is simply stunned, Winky. Now step aside, please. Severus, the potion?” Albus said, slipping into his kind grandfatherly disguise like a second skin.

Severus handed over the vertiaserum. While it was technically a ministry controlled substance, Albus abused his titles claiming that he was entitled to have his potions master brew it in case of emergencies. Really though Severus would have had a small batch anyways, any potions master worth his salt would have several ‘ministry controlled’ potions in their private stores. When it came to Albus though he had about 10 milliliters in a bottle with a dropper that was strictly for the Headmaster’s use.

They watched as Albus forced the wizard’s mouth open and pour three careful drops inside. Thimi was on her knees shaking, her hands were over her face. She was worried about so many things that
the truth potion may reveal that they had all worked hard to keep secret and private. She knew that some vows were unbreakable even with truth potion influences, she only hoped that her Mistress and old boy master made the right ones.

Albus pointed his wand to Barty Junior’s chest and cast, “Renneverate.”

Barty opened his eyes, his face was slack and his gaze was unfocused. The most obvious signs that the potion was working.

“Can you hear me?” Dumbledore said quietly.

The young wizard’s eyelids flickered.

“Yes,” Barty murmured in response.

To the others looking at them it seemed as though Barty was woolgathering as quickly as his brain was able, not being allowed to completely wake up. Reality though Albus had quickly tore into his mind and the younger wizard’s mind was unprepared for it. However with all the vows he took, it protected most of the information Albus wanted. Some of it, the basics he was able to see; the rest however was just as mysterious to Albus as it would be to others who weren’t in the know.

“I would like you to tell us how you came to be here. How did you escape Azkaban?” Albus asked, already having seen the answer for himself.

“My mother. She asked my father to save me as as a last favor, she was dying. He loved her more than he loved me and agreed, for her. They had a draft of polyjuice, one for me, one for her. We took on each other’s appearances,” he took a deep breath, “The dementors are blind. They sensed one healthy and one dying person entering, and one healthy and one dying leaving. I was smuggled out… My mother died shortly after. She was careful in drinking the polyjuice potion dutifully until the end. She was buried with my name and appearance, and everyone thought she was me until the end.”

His eyelids flickered again. Dumblebore tried to look for details pertaining to the information they were just given, any information on dementors and Azkaban would be helpful in the upcoming war.

“And what did your father do with you, when he had got you home?” he asked just as quietly.

“He staged my mother’s death and held a quiet, private funeral. The grave is empty. Although my father honestly mourned the loss of my mother. His grief was real. The house-elf nursed me back to health. Then I had to be concealed. Controlled. He used a number of spells to subdue me. When I had recovered my strength, I thought only of fulfilling my promise… I had to return to the Dark Lord’s service.”

“How did your father subdue you?” Dumbledore asked.

It was difficult for him to get a solid grasp of anything in the young wizard’s mind. Recent memories were easier, but earlier memories were blurred, misshapen… hard to understand. It was an obvious sign of mind alteration.

“The Imperius Curse. I was forced to wear and invisibility cloak day and night. I was always with the house-elf. She was my keeper and caretaker. She had a fondness for me. She persuaded my father to give me the occasional treats. Rewards for good behavior.”

“Old boy master is mistaking love for fondness,” Thimi cried into her hands. She wish she was more demonstrative, but knew under her orders she wasn’t allowed. It was no wonder he only thought she
was fond of him.

“Did anybody ever discover you were still alive? Anyone except your father and the house-elf?” Dumbledore inquired.

“Yes”, his eyelids flickered again.

Albus was trying hard, without destroying the other wizard’s mind, to look for the answers that he wanted. It was just so frustrating to have the answers in front of him and not be able to decipher them! The only ones that were clear were of him recently serving as one of his professors… and doing a good job at teaching them.

“A witch named Bertha Jorkins, she worked in my father’s office. She came to the house for his signature for some papers, but he wasn’t home. The house-elf led her into the kitchen and left her alone to come take care of me. Jorkins heard the house-elf talking to me, she came to investigate. She heard enough to guess who I was. When my father arrived home, she confronted him and he put a very powerful memory charm on her to make her forget what she’d found out. It was too powerful. He said it damaged her memory permanently. It caused him another set of problems since she was known for having a perfect memory.”

“She nosed about where she did not belongs,” Thimi cried.

“Tell me about the Quidditch World Cup,” Albus said.

“The house-elf talked my father into it. She spent months begging and pleading for such a reward for me. I had not left the house in years. I had loved quidditch. Let him go, she said. He will be in his invisibility cloak. He can watch. Let him smell fresh air for once. She said my mother would have wanted it. She said that my mother died to give me freedom, not for a life of imprisonment. He agreed in the end.,” He took another deep breath.

“Father carefully planned the outing. He led the house-elf and me up to the top box early in the day. The house-elf was to say that she was saving a seat for him, even though I was to sit there invisible. When everyone left the box, we would leave. The house-elf would appear alone. Nobody would ever know. But she didn’t know I was growing stronger. I was able to fight the imperius curse. There were times I was almost myself again. There were brief times I was outside of his control, or so it seemed. It happened in the top box, like I was waking up from a deep sleep. I found myself in the middle of the match, and in front of me I saw a boy’s wand sticking out of his back pocket. I had not been allowed a wand since Azkaban. I stole it. She didn’t know… she’s afraid of heights, she had her face hidden.”

“Barty, you bad boy!” Thimi cried, her eyes overflowing with tears. If she were a different being she would have struck her old boy master for his stupidity. He made her a bad elf, he took advantage of her fear. She had a new family because of him. Even though she loved her new family, very much, she would always love her old boy master. Even if he was a bad boy!

“So you took the wand, and what did you do with it?” Albus asked, ignoring the distraught house-elf’s outburst.

“We went back to the tent. Then we heard them. Death Eaters. The ones who had never been to Azkaban. They were not enslaved, as I was. They were free. Free to find him, free to live. They were making sport of muggles instead. The sounds of their voices awoke me. My mind was finally clear. I was angry. I had a wand. I wanted to attack them for their stupidity. My father left the tent to go help the muggles. The house-elf was scared to see me angry and used her magic to bind me to herself. She pulled me from the tent, to the forest, away from the Death Eaters. She was trying to
protect me. I tried to hold her back. I wanted to return to the campsite. I wanted to remind them what
it meant to be a Death Eater. Not a knight of Walpurgis like we were told. I used the stolen wand to
cast the Dark Mark into the sky,” another breath.

“Ministry wizards arrived. The shot stunning spells everywhere. One the spells came into the trees.
The bond connecting us was broken, we were both stunned. When she was discovered, my father
knew I had to be by. He found me. He waited until the ministry members left before putting me back
under the imperius curse and took me home. He dismissed the house-elf. She had failed him by
letting me acquire a wand. I almost escaped under her watch.”

Thimi wailed. She was forcibly reminded of her failure to her old family. However she also heard the
undertones, even with him being under the truth potion influence. She heard him try to be sarcastic,
“by letting me”, he didn’t blame her. While she hated to think of that time, she was beyond the moon
emotionally that he didn’t blame her at all.

“And then… He came for me,” his face remained passive, but a glint of ferocious passion appeared
in his eyes.

“He arrived in the arms of Wormtail, an animagus. He had found out I was still alive. He found and
tortured Bertha Jorkins in Albania, and she told him a great deal. The TriWizard Tournament. Old
auror, Moody, was going to be teaching at Hogwarts. He tortured her so much the memory charm
broke. She told him about me and my imprisonment. He conceived a plan around the information
Jorkins had given Him. He needed me.”

“It was over quick. He arrived at our house near midnight. My father answered the door and was
quickly under the Imperius Curse himself. He was forced to go about his business as usual, to act as
though nothing was wrong. I was released only to be forced to follow orders immediately.”

“And what did Lord Voldemort ask you to do?” Dumbledore said.

Severus cringed as his mark twisted painfully.

“He asked me if I was ready to risk everything for him. The answer was yes. It is always yes. Yes or
death. He told me he needed a faithful servant at Hogwarts. A servant to guide Harry Potter through
the TriWizard Tournament without appearing to do so. A servant who would watch over Harry
Potter. Ensure he reached the TriWizard Cup, which had to be turned into a portkey. But First –”

“You needed Alastor Moody,” Dumbledore finished, his eyes were blazing with anger while his
voice was still passive and kind sounding.

“Wormtail and I were sent to gather and subdue the old auror. There was a fuss. I bound Alastor and
stunned Wormtail. I explained what had to happen. He thought I was crazy. I stunned him and
proceeded with His plans. Eventually he understood and agreed to help. I packed what he told me to,
including him. I was able to mimic him perfectly. I had to fool everyone, especially Dumbledore. I
had all the ingredients for the polyjuice potion. I was even able to steal boomslang skin from the
dungeons. When Snape found me in his office, I said I was under orders to search it.”

Severus and Harry looked at each other behind Albus’ back with looks of distaste. While Harry had
a history of stealing from his stores, he didn’t do so this year. Harry was upset at being accused of
thievery (even if it was a well educated guess) and Severus still thought Potter was a little shit. He
wasn’t a terrible teenager, but he was still a dunderhead that didn’t apply himself, and that made him
a little shit.

“And what of Wormtail?”
“I revived him and told him the auror took him out before I took the auror out. Then he returned to take care of Him in my father’s home, and to keep watch over my father.”

“But your father escaped,” Dumbledore continued.

“Yes. After a while he was able to overpower the curse as I had. There were periods when he knew what was happening. The Dark Lord decided it was no longer safe for him to leave the house and forced him to send letters instead. To claim that he was ill. Wormtail neglected his duty and my father escaped. The Dark Lord guessed that he was heading here to Hogwarts. My father was going to tell Dumbledore everything, including smuggling me out of Azkaban. I received word from the Dark Lord to stop him at all costs. I used the map that I had taken from Harry Potter. The map that almost ruined everything.”

“Map? What map is this” Dumbledore asked quickly.

He had a private map in his office, under heavy ancient spells, that was for the Headmaster of Hogwarts only. He didn’t use it often, and he probably should considering the situation they were in now. Only the Headmaster could see or know of its existence, if he was able to see the map with some obscure spell Tom uncovered…!

“Potter’s map of Hogwarts. Potter saw me on it and thought I was my father. I took the map from Potter that night. I told him that my father hated Dark wizards. Potter believed that my father was after Snape. I waited for a week before he showed up on the grounds. I put on my invisibility cloak and went down to meet him. He was wandering around the edge of the forest. Then Potter came with Krum. I waited. I couldn’t hurt Potter, I was under strict orders. Potter ran to get Dumbledore. I stunned Krum. I stunned and transfigured my father before hiding him under the invisibility cloak. He’s currently an owl in the Owlery with a broken wing. I’ve been feeding him scraps from dinner.”

“Barty what is you saying!? What did you do!” Thimi asked terrified. While she was extremely happy that her old master was still alive, that didn’t mean she was happy that he was angry and upset, himself.

“I doubled around and followed Dumbledore out, claiming that Snape told me where to come. Dumbledore told me to go and look for my father. I went to pet the threshals instead until I saw that everyone was gone from the map before I made my way to the owlery and explained to my father that he was going to be stuck like that until my objective at Hogwarts was over.”

“And tonight?” Dumbledore asked, calmed that it wasn’t his map. He knew about the marauders’ map and was not concerned with it.

“I offered to carry the TriWizard Cup into the maze before dinner. Turned it into a portkey. Made sure Potter got to the Cup first. He is now back among us. The real work begins and the war starts anew.”

The straw haired wizard looked old and tired. His old house-elf crying next to him with a mix of emotions. He was Slytherin and was able to tell the truth and obscure it at the same time. Twisting words was a common game amongst Slytherin’s now he only hoped Snape was able to look past his emotions to decipher them. If not, his pupil would have to tell him herself.

His leading objective was complete. The Dark Lord has risen. The main objective was now in place, to put him in the ground and remove the magic leech for good.

Dumbledore looked at Barty with disgust before he raised his wand and bound the dirty blond death eater. He then turned to this deputy.
“Minerva, could I ask you to stand guard here while I bring Harry upstairs to the Hospital Wing?”

“Of course,” she replied, looking quite ill, even though her wand hand was steady. She knew there was more that was going on than what Albus had be able to get out of the imposter.

“Severus, please tell Madam Pomfrey to come down here; we need to get Alastor into the hospital wing as well. Then go get Cornelius Fudge, and bring him up to this office. He’ll want to question Crouch Jr. himself. Tell him I will be in the hospital wing in half an hour’s time if he needs me.”

“Oh and Minerva, while Cornelius is questioning him, please go get his father from the owlery.”

Severus nodded without saying anything and swept out of the room, his robes billowing around him. While the potions master understood the severity of the situation, he was not an owl. They had patroni messengers for a reason! However he understood that if he was passing messages on foot, it would excuse his absence for half an hour as he kneeled at the Dark Lord’s feet, begged for forgiveness, and hoped to make it out alive.
Hogwarts’ potions master Severus Snape made his way to the Hospital Wing to see Poppy before his night turned into a real party. As most of the school was out in the stands of the quidditch pitch, it was a faster walk than usual since he didn’t have to stop to dock point or give detention. If there was one drawback to teaching teenagers at a boarding school, it was catching them trying to… canoodle.

He opened the doors and let himself in, automatically scanning for the school Healer.

“Poppy?” he called.

Poppy Pomfrey poked her head out of her office, she would have been by the sidelines of the maze, but was instructed that a group of St. Mungo’s healers were called in for the final task. She took partial offense to it, considering that she was able to patch up a majority of the students and on very rare occasions had to send students to specialists at the hospital. Poppy was one of the best healers in all of Magical Britain. She wouldn’t consider herself a specialist, but in the end she was a specialist in ‘unknown’ causes, as the medical field termed it. With new generations inventing new spells and pieces of magic, she was the one who had to figure out how to undo damage done.

She wasn’t well versed in treatments concerning dark magic, more so she was limited in that area and had to send her patients to another. Her wand had a unicorn hair core, and wilted when it came in contact with dark magic.

Healing magic was usually considered light magic, but there were some instances where the spells were gray. Most of the darker spells started out as healing spells, so it was no surprise to the matron. Her intent was always pure, but her side knowledge was made aware in her casting.

She had been through 3 wands, each incident involving dark magical ailments. After her third wand she acknowledged that she simply couldn’t heal dark magical ailments without killing her wand core. Four wands, and each of them had a unicorn hair core. The unicorn hair core simply couldn’t handle dark magic, but that was the core that worked best with her magic. If she was able she asked the current potions master, who was more than adequately skilled in healing dark magical inflictions. If not, she sent her patients to St. Mungo’s and let the healers there tend to her patients.

“Yes, Severus?”

“Poppy, Alastor has been found in his trunk. The Headmaster insists that he be brought up here to be seen by you immediately,” Severus informed her.

Poppy had given Severus a look of bewilderment before she took a deep breath and blew it out evenly. She looked up to the ceiling as though to ask for Merlin’s assistance.

“Thank you, Severus. I’ll be there as quickly as I can. Was there anything else?” she inquired.

“No, Poppy. Thank you,” he said.

She nodded to him as he turned around and swiftly walked out of the Hospital Wing as quickly as he came.

Severus walked quickly down to the quidditch pitch, past a crowding audience, down towards the Minister who was parading around a bunch of aurors who had shown up. Whether the Minister called them or someone in the audience, he was unsure. Considering what he had to do, Severus was not too keen on being near so many witches and wizards who would be able to throw him into a cell.
at a moment’s notice. However seeing them so close would also give him viable excuse for his
tardiness as they would be fresh in his mind.

Walking closer he was able to see a familiar bushy mass of hair. The curls she had been able to tame
them too were slowly diminishing as the night passed. The curls, while pleasant, did not have the
bushy quality that she was known for.

She was sitting close to her bounty, the rat animagus, keeping a careful eye on it, even as the aurors
around her ignored her and looked down on her for being a student. It was clear that their opinion of
her didn’t matter to her. Personally he was quite frustrated with them for belittling her whether they
knew it or not. Even though he himself was guilty of the same thing last year, he knew better now.

Granted he was normally of the opposite opinion since she was known as the brightest witch of her
age, and thus most of the professors fussed about her in the staff room. They fussed over Potter and
they each had their own personal favorite for every year, but Granger was almost unanimous for
being accepted as the brightest witch of the current generation.

Sybil was not of that opinion since Granger didn’t have the… aptitude that allowed her further vision
with her third eye. Something of which the potions master was grateful for. The bookworm’s
walkout was legendary. Severus agreed that she was the brightest witch of her generation even if he
refused to acknowledge it. For him, Lily would always be the brightest witch of the generation…
Granger was a fast second though.

He found himself towering over the Minister as the last thought entered his mind, and left just as
quickly.

“Minister Fudge, the Headmaster would like you to come into the castle as we have discovered an…
intriguing imposter. If you would follow me,” he drawled out.

Hermione heard her potions professor speak to the minister as she watched the traitor keenly for any
signs of awareness. Her ear perked up at the mention of ‘imposter’. Her heart felt as though it would
break, she felt a keen loss at Barty Jr’s discovery. She bit her lip instead though and refused to let
tears gleam in her eyes even as her nose burned with the desire to do so.

“Of course, Snape, let’s go,” Fudge blustered.

Hermione watched her dark professor walk away with the minister struggling to keep pace with the
long-legged wizard. She was instructed more than once to presume that he was fighting against the
Dark Lord and to eventually confide in him should she need to. After tonight, she very much wanted
to, however she also realized that he wasn’t there, or at the very least was extremely late to the
calling. She hoped that if he went, he survived.

The madman that was calling himself Lord Voldemort was unhealthily thin, exceedingly pale, she
saw him nude, an image that would give her nightmares by itself. What was worse was that he
started out as some weird red and black reptilian thing. He was also… quite angry at everyone who
failed to show up, except for Barty Jr.

She remembered him saying that those who were alive and failed to show would be hunted down.
Hermione knew there were no questions that the madman was serious. In the meantime he would be
losing a faithful follower, even if he followed out of fear.

Speaking of the rat she kept an extremely close eye on him, despite being surrounded by aurors. A
younger version of herself would have felt at ease with so many authority figures being around, and
would have happily left it to them. Yet she had seen the rat escape from authority figures before. It
would be challenging, but not unfeasible for him to escape again.

There was an auror who looked like she had graduated not too long ago, her hair was a startling bubblegum pink. Hermione faintly remembered her, but didn’t bother trying to place a name to the hair. Still the young witch wasn’t in a talkative mood with the evening she had, not that any of them had asked her questions.

Severus had left the Minister alone with Barty Jr. and made his way down to the dungeons as quickly as he could without running. It was bad enough that he was late to the latest… meeting, but he also wasn’t keen on seeing the Dark Lord as it meant his leash would be tightened once more. He was surprised that he didn’t see the house-elf with the younger Death Eater as she seemed emotionally attached to him.

He quickly grabbed his mask and cloak, his heart sinking at how easy it was to fall back into old habits. The dark wizard slid his hand over a select stone that had more iron in it than the others, allowing him entrance to a secret tunnel. The professor made his way into the tunnel letting his occlumency shields rise, reinforcing themselves over select memories. Most of them had to be open for inspection to prove that he was telling the truth, however twisted he made it out to be. He continued his fast pace until he was out of Hogwarts’ wards and placed his wand to the dark mark and disapparated to where his old master was.

As soon as Severus landed, he was on bended knee with his head down, knowing that he would be facing the monster that was his master.

“Ssseverussss, how kind of you to join uss,” the mad wizard hissed.

“My Lord, I was detained. I am pleased you are back with us again, I have been waiting,” Severus said reverently, his face still facing the ground.

“Excuses! With the chaos that has ensued with Potter’s appearance I am sure you would have been able to get away faster. Crucio!”

The dark potions master fell forward, screaming as his body twisted, glad that he didn’t have far to fall. It had been years since his body had felt the pain that was caused by the torture curse. He hoped he had something in his stores that would at least help alleviate enough for him to get a few hours’ sleep.

When the curse ended, he struggled to bring himself into the kneeling position he was originally in.

“My Lord, I stayed to gather information on current events,” he gasped.

The Dark Lord was intrigued as he had wanted to know what had happened because of Potter’s escape. When the wizards escaped, bringing Pettigrew with them, he was so furious he started to crucio the lot of them for their incompetence as he was held back by some strange magic.

“Go on.”

“Pettigrew has been detained and surrounded by aurors and Crouch has been discovered. He tried to bring Potter back to you, but Dumbledore realized it wasn’t the real Mad-Eye Moody too soon.
Pettigrew is stunned and unable to escape. Dumbledore ordered me to give him vertiserum, which he used on Crouch, but the information he had given was old and about himself. Nothing that could be condemning to anyone other than his father, My Lord.”

“What of Potter?”

“He is in shock, My Lord. He is currently under the careful eye of Dumbledore.”

“I see…” the Dark Lord said softly, thinking.

“You were late, but you have done well, Severus… However I want to know why you didn’t look for me,” he said dangerously soft.

“I still bore the mark, My Lord. I knew you were about, but I didn’t know where. I waited for your call and held my position as you instructed,” he answered.

Voldemort glared at the potions master, but was well aware that in those terms he hadn’t done anything wrong. He had also been hit with a crucio and continued to give his report, proving his loyalty to him and the cause. He was still positioned in the castle as a spy, still close to Dumbledore, and continued to be his eyes and ears.

“Show me, Severus. Show me, Harry Potter,” he said.

Severus looked up, his forehead smeared with grave dirt, looking directly into the red eyes of the monster the Dark Lord had become. Before his defeat the Dark Lord was classically handsome, smooth dark hair, dark gray eyes, and pale skin. Admittedly before his defeat, Voldemort’s complexion had started to take on a waxy and reptilian appearance, his eyes looked constantly bloodshot, but as… ill as he started to look he still had a semblance of what once was.

Now his eyes were red with slits that reminded him of Granger’s polyjuice debacle.

Severus offered up memories of Potter from his first year onward, most of them containing how horrid he was to the boy, making his life as miserable as he could as a professor within reason. There were cases that were biased and highly unfair, however nothing that could question his position as a professor or bring him in front of the Board of Governors.

The Dark Lord was pleased with his spy’s treatment of the boy, showing his loyalty through his hatred. However he wanted to see what he did during his free time, and started to sift through his spy’s mind. Yet aside from the occasional drink with co-workers, as was expected to maintain appearances, he was devoted to his practice and was seen gathering potion ingredients instead of ordering them. He made potions for St Mungos and the Hospital wing, some of them he received pay for. He made a name for himself within the potions community, spoke and intimidated apothecaries for better prices. Everything he was supposed to do.

“Good… Continue to keep face with your fellow professors. You have done exceedingly well with your orders, Severus. Despite the fact that you did not actively look for me, you continued to follow my orders throughout the years. You didn’t dally away with muggle sport,” he spat, “I even watched you while I was partially possessing Quirrell, your suspicions were admirable,” he praised his spy.

“Which is more than I can say for many of your brothers,” he hissed, allowing his gaze to rake over his followers, “As much as I would prefer you to stay, I acknowledge that you must go before your disappearance is noted.”

“My Lord,” Severus replied.
“Before you go, Severus…” The Dark Lord whispered.

Severus looked up at his dark master.

“Crucio!” he held the spell for 10 long seconds, “Let that be a reminder to you and your brothers that our cause is to come first. You will do your job and report to me when I call for you. Should there be anything pressing that is time sensitive, you may request an audience with me by pressing the tip if your wand to the left eye socket of the skull.”

“Y-yes, My Lord,” Severus gasped.

“You may go,” he dismissed his spy.

Shakily the potions master stood up and bowed his head to the dark wizard before disappearing.

Voldemort continued to stare at where his spy was.

“My brothers, even Severus Snape has something to offer still. While he did not answer the call immediately, he still answered it. He continued to follow his orders, even knowing he would most likely be punished for his delayed arrival. He did not arrive without answers that we had questions to moments ago,” he spoke to them.

Many of the death eaters were jealous of Snape at that moment, they wanted to be dismissed as soon as possible. He had been hit with the cruciatus twice, but that was a small price to pay to be able to leave practically as soon as you arrived. Granted he also had the Dark Lord rip through his mind, and that was keenly as painful as there was no method to ease that pain.

Severus arrived back in the tunnel that he had originally left in and allowed himself to sink to the floor. The Dark Lord was never gentle when he entered his mind. A true master would be able to slip in almost unawares, so he was never sure if the Dark Lord was a master and simply loved to cause pain or if he was so bad at it that there was no other way.

He put his head between his knees and allowed himself to breathe as his body shook with the aftereffects of the cruciatus. He sincerely hoped that he wouldn’t be called again tonight for any appearance, as he wouldn’t be able to hide the spasms. There wasn’t much to report to Albus, so he would answer any questions the Headmaster had tomorrow.

Hermione watched with a careful eye as the aurors cuffed the animagus. There was more than one of them checking to make sure they were in place, while leaving the ropes on his person. If it was anyone else the witch might have thought it was a bit excessive detainment, however she couldn’t help herself for wishing they were able to do something more.

They had revived him and she couldn’t help but glare venomously at the fat wizard.

“He’s an animagus,” she said loud enough for the aurors to hear her.

This caused for them to quickly replace the magical cuffs with a different set that had runes engraved in them. She watched as they read him his rights, as he whimpered and tossed his head back and forth looking for a sympathetic face.
“Where is his wand?” the young witch asked.

“It was found, broken along with his finger, 13 years ago,” another auror answered.

“He’s been using this one,” Hermione said, as she held up a wand that felt sluggish in her hand. Her magic obviously didn’t like it, it had been corrupted too much by the dark magic. She knew that normally dark magic tempted a witch or wizard, in this case however it simply felt as dirty as people talked about it.

“I’ll have to take that for evidence,” a dark auror said.

Hermione looked at the wizard, checking his badge before silently handing it over.

“Thank you, Miss. Hopefully we’ll be able to settle this mess soon,” he said, trying to reassure her.

His voice was deep and reminded her of smooth chocolate, however it didn’t have the velvet quality that her potions professor did. She merely nodded, hoping that would be enough of a response for the auror. He nodded in turn and continued to go about his job.

Now that they had his wand and him in proper suspension, Hermione got up and started to make her way to the Hospital Wing. Before she entered the castle however she made a beeline to look for her… family. She found them fretting in the same place in the stands that was reserved for family along with the Weasleys.

“Hermione! Oh my goodness, what happened!?” Petunia shouted as she saw her niece.

“A lot has happened, Aunt Petunia…” Hermione sighed.

“Where were you, dear!? You practically missed the whole thing and then you just showed up on top of Cedric no less!” Missus Weasley shouted.

“I was bringing them back, Missus Weasley,” she shot back, in no mood to deal with the redheaded woman.

“Bringing them back? Where ever from!? How did you get there!?,” she continued to yell and fuss at the younger witch, “Why didn’t you inform an adult!?”

Hermione’s face twisted into a mutinous expression as she decided to answer one of the rapid fire questions, “They would have been too late.”

“Aunt Petunia, they took Harry to the Hospital Wing. I’m going to go, would you like to come with?” She asked her family, giving Missus Weasley the cold shoulder.

Petunia was pale but nodded, grateful that her nephew was alive, if injured. She grabbed her son’s shoulders as Vernon placed a hand on one of hers.

The family followed the petite witch, keeping to each other closely. With all the excitement, they realized that the magical people were just as clueless as normal people when it came to most things. They were just… people. It was a startling revelation for them. Their stomachs had filled with lead when they saw that boy show up looking like death, and were relived, if barely, that he was still alive. From what they could tell it was a close call, and they had nearly witnessed it.

Whoever decided the TriWizard Tournament was a good idea was bloody mental.
Chapter 51

Petunia was hounding Madam Pomfrey about the whereabouts of her nephew, who should have been in her care by now. Missus Weasley had also decided to follow them, but was not as vocal as she usually was.

Hermione used her impressively shrill aunt as a distraction to look around the matron at her professor. The older wizard looked a right mess, his hair chopped to bits, his magical eye was on the stand next to his bed. She knew that he was fine, she just wanted to see him for herself, more so since she could not see her other professor.

Madam Pomfrey was doing the best she could to answer Petunia, but the thin muggle woman was quite waspish with her words.

“– above all! As his caretaker it is astounding to a muggle such as myself that you don’t have a spell as simple as find him for a school full of children who are known to disappear at a drop of a hat! In this castle no less! How would you find a missing eleven year old on their first day here!? Send a search party!? Shouldn’t you have tracking spells of the sort on them at least!? Like in their ties or the buttons on their shirts!!”

Molly was blushing at the accusations considering that she was a Hogwarts Alumni herself and she was aware of the shortcomings of magic. As a mother she was more than aware of the mischievous nature of curious children out on an ‘adventure’. She had felt as though she had lost all but 3 of her children at some point. Percy, who was such a well-behaved child; Ronnie, who held onto her skirt until he was 10; and Ginny, whom she tried not to let leave her sight unless she was with her brothers or at school. To not use simple tracking spells on the children as Petunia was suggesting made them seem… stupid for not having thought so beforehand. The redhead witch was embarrassed that a muggle was making more sense than how most muggles appeared.

Albus came in at that moment with Harry behind him. All heads swiveled as they entered with a large black dog.

“Harry! Oh, Harry!” Molly let out a muffled scream as she started to run towards the boy even as Petunia looked at her incredulously. Thankfully Headmaster Dumbledore stepped between them.

“Molly, please listen to me for a moment. Harry has been through a terrible ordeal tonight and just spent the moment reliving it for me. He needs sleep, peace, and quite. If he would like you all to stay, you may do so. But do not question him until he is ready to answer, certainly not tonight. Miss Granger, about twenty minutes after Harry goes to sleep would you please join me in my office?”

“Yes, sir,” Hermione answered quietly, as Molly nodded before she rounded and hissed at her sons that Harry needed quiet. Even though neither son were even speaking.

“Headmaster, if I may ask what –” Madam Pomfrey started.

“Ah, this dog will be remaining with Harry for a while. Don’t worry, I assure you he is extremely well trained,” his eyes twinkled as he answered the school healer.

“Harry, I’ll be back to see you after I’ve met with Fudge. In the meantime I would like you to remain here until I’ve spoken with the school. Mister and Missus Dursley, you are welcome to stay the evening with Harry in a private area of the Hospital Wing, usually reserved for staff.”

The Dursleys nodded in response. With that, he left.
Harry got into a bed that the matron had prepared for him, and his family and friends surrounded it with care. He had never before heard Aunt Petunia yell for him, it had always been for Dudley, it was embarrassing… but it was also nice. Of course Madam Pomfrey had nothing to do with it, but she was asking important questions… questions he knew Hermione must have asked when she first started Hogwarts, if not before. Knowing his sister she probably found the answer in her favorite book too, *Hogwarts, A History*.

The matron came bustling back from her office, with a small bottle of a purple potion and a goblet. Hermione recognized it as a dreamless sleep draught and was nervous, knowing that it was an addictive substance.

“You’ll need to drink all of this, Harry,” she said, “It’s a potion for dreamless sleep.”

Harry took the goblet as instructed and started drinking it, he fell asleep before drinking all of it. The matron sighed and helped him finish the potion with the help of her magic. It wasn’t often that she had to give the potion to a student, but rarely did they finish the potion on their own. Something she was glad for since it meant they hadn’t had previous experience with it. Others had of course, but even they only had it prescribed once or twice to them.

She rarely gave it out, but she remembered when she did on a near daily basis during the first war. She hoped she wouldn’t have to again anytime soon. Hope that would be dismissed as soon as it began.

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Hermione held her brothers hand as he drifted off to sleep, and she pet his hair, trying to tame the untamable even in his sleep. She smiled as his hair shot back up after she tried to flatten it. At least there was one thing that wouldn’t change about him.

Vernon got up and started to speak to the matron about their sleeping arrangements as Petunia and Missus Weasley fussed needlessly with the bedding around him.

Out of the corner of her eye Hermione saw a water beetle with an interesting marking that looked like glasses. It was sitting innocently on the windowsill, and the window was cracked just so. Hermione conjured a small glass jar and cast a silent unbreakable charm on it, with her back to the beetle so it would be unawares. The curly haired witch saw the water beetle twitch with what could only be human excitement.

The young witch nonchalantly untwisted the jar cap and singed a few breathing holes into it with her wand. Everyone else was looking at Harry with similar degrees of worry and in Ron’s case, a green case of terror. Dudley was sitting next to his mother as she fusssed over his cousin, in as much shock as Harry seemed to be before being put to sleep.

Hermione waited patiently with her small jar. It fit nicely in her hand, but was large enough for a specimen. Small enough though to avoid everyone’s attention. She got up when a small breeze came through the window above Harry’s head, as though to close it and keep the room free from draft. Instead she slammed the jar down, over the water beetle with a small sneer. Sliding the jar quickly and carefully with the lid waiting at the side, Hermione tightened it, and pocketed the beetle, before closing the window firmly.

She would deal with her pest problem later. It was now time to meet with the Headmaster.
Hermione walked as quietly as she could, building up her mind ward around areas she didn’t want anyone to see. She kept them up regularly, but she didn’t have time to put The Dark Lord’s resurrection in the ward. Instead she made one separate from it so it wouldn’t… *taint* her normal memories.

However, on her way up the stairs past the gargoyle, she heard the minister yelling at the headmaster. She pondered on whether she should knock or just enter as she was instructed to meet with him at this time. Mulling it over, the witch knocked demurely, which could easily be taken as polite. With no answer other than the minister continuing his tirade, she knocked again. She waited ten more seconds before opening the door and letting herself in.

“You’d have me take the word of that *lunatic*!?” Fudge shouted, as the petite witch allowed the door to close with a loud thud.

The minister quickly turned around to pin down the intruder with a piercing gaze.

“And what’s this!? I thought your students knew better than to *barge* into the Headmaster’s office!” he shouted.

“I knocked twice, sir. No one answered me. I was scheduled to meet with the Headmaster,” Hermione answered coolly, as though the minister had spoken to her.

“Miss Granger, I’m glad that you could make it,” Albus said with a small smile, “Please have a seat.”

“Thank you, sir,” she said as she glided over and sat politely, with her back straight and legs crossed at the ankles. Minerva was standing straight, but her eyes burned fiercely as she glared at the minister over her spectacles.

The minister glared mutinously at the young witch who had appeared atop of Diggory.

“I’d also have you take the word of Harry, Minister,” Albus replied smoothly as though she had been there the whole time, “Although I cannot permit you to question him tonight.

A demented smile appeared on Fudge’s face. Hermione’s hair rose up as though she were a cat in response.

“You are, er, prepared to take Harry’s word on this, are you, Dumbledore?”

An automatic cool sneer appeared on Hermione’s face. She looked as though she could have been related to Malfoy, which disturbed the minister, even though his smile never left his face.

“Certainly, I believe Harry.” His eyes were blazing even as his tone was mild, “I’ve heard Crouch’s confession and I’ve heard Harry’s account. The two correlate and explain everything that has happened since Bertha Jorkin’s disappearance.”

“You’re prepared to take the word of a lunatic and a boy who… well…” the minister left off with the demented smile growing bigger.

“I see you’ve been reading Skeeter’s writings, Minister,” Hermione said coolly.

“So what if I have?” he snarled.

His face had reddened and obtained a defiant look. One that was a familiar face amongst the students
that lived in Hogwarts’ halls.

“You’d do well to check her facts on your own,” she said with a light one shouldered shrug.

“Coming from a gold digging witch…” he said nastily.

“Cor –” Albus started, but was cut off.

“Harry and I are related, Minister. Even though I’m a muggleborn, I \textit{do} come from old money. So I don’t have need of his. Some details Skeeter didn’t know about when she was wrote that article. How embarrassing for you,” she said lightly with a small pout.

“Indeed, Cornelius, Miss Granger here is also at the top of her classes,” Minerva interjected.

“What about those facts that Skeeter discovered? Certain facts about the boy that have been kept very quiet, Headmaster. A parslemouth? Having funny turns all over the place – ?”

“I’m assuming you’re referring to Harry’s scar pain?” Dumbledore cut him off coolly.

“You admit he’s been having these pains then!?” Fudge said quickly, as though he was onto something.


“Harry is as sane as you or I, Cornelius. That scar upon his head has not addled his brains. I believe it hurts him when Lord Voldemort is close by or experiencing extreme emotions.”

“You’ll forgive me, Dumbledore, but I’ve never heard of a curse scar acting as an alarm bell before…” He said, taking a step back, still looking as stubborn as a teenage wizard.

“You’ve never heard of anyone surviving the killing curse either,” Hermione quipped.

“However Lord Voldemort is back. I saw him. You’ll see that you also have Pettigrew to question as well, minister,” Hermione said with a chilly, polite, smile.

“As Minerva has stated, Miss Granger is at the top of her class Cornelius. Is her brain also addled?” Albus interjected.

He had his own questions for Miss Granger, but she was making fine shots at the minister. Her intelligence was quite sharp, her poise was perfect as well. Minerva also stood firm behind her Gryffindor cub, and she was not one to lie. So she \textit{did} come from old money, of which were rare amongst the muggle world.

“It seems to me that you are all determined to start a panic that will destabilize everything we have worked for these past thirteen years!” he shouted, his face turning an ugly purple.

“As though the wizarding people will take the word from a lunatic, a parslemouth, and a muggleborn!” he shouted.

Hermione sucked in air through her teeth as she felt her Professor’s hands cover her shoulders and squeeze them firmly.

“A muggleborn is as much a citizen in wizarding Britain as a pureblood, Minister. It would do well for you to remember that, as an \textit{elected} official,” Minerva said coolly.

“Voldemort has returned. If you accept the facts straightaway we may be able to save the situation.
The first and most essential step is to remove the dementors from Azkaban!” Albus insisted.

Fudge looked at Albus as though he had finally seen that the elder wizard had gone senile.

“Remove the dementors!? Preposterous! Some of us only feel safe at night because of them! I’d be kicked out of office for merely suggesting it!”

“The rest of us sleep less soundly, Cornelius, knowing that you have put Voldemort’s most dangerous supported in the care of creatures that will join him the second that he asks! They won’t remain loyal to you, because you don’t feed into their pleasure the way he would, the way he did! He offered them a wider range than you have or will, Cornelius! With the dementors and his old followers returned to him, he’ll quickly regain the power that he had thirteen years ago!”

Fudge was gaping like a fish, his mouth opening and closing but no noise was coming from him.

“Next you must send an envoy to the giants,” Albus began, “As they were the last creatures he was trying to court onto his side before the end of the war –”

“Giants! Are you mad! The people hate the giants, Albus! I’ll be kicked out of office faster than you can say giants! It’ll be the end of my career!”

“Then stop focusing so much on your career, Minister, and get on with it!” Minerva shouted behind Hermione.

“Take the steps I’ve suggested Cornelius, and you will be remembered in history, in or out of office, as one of the greatest Ministers of Magic we have ever known! If not you’ll be known as the one who stood to the side and allowed Voldemort a second chance to destroy the world we have built!”

Fudge fiddled with his bowler hat, mumbling about how mad everything sounded. He didn’t have much to work with either, as the young witch had brought both champions and Pettigrew back from wherever they were. And wherever they were, Voldemort was revived!

“If you’re determined to try to brush this under the rug and pretend it doesn’t exist, Cornelius I’m afraid we’ve reached a parting of the ways. And I – I shall have to act as I see fit,” it was a statement.

Albus was truly of the belief that he would do what he saw fit. It wasn’t a threat or any other sort of coercion. Yet Fudge acted as though Albus had drawn his wand upon him.

“Now, see here, Dumbledore!” the minister wagged his finger, “I have always given you free reign. I’ve had a lot of respect for you and your decisions whether I agreed with them or not! There aren’t many who would let you hire a werewolf or keep Hagrid, for that matter! I even agreed to let him break laws concerning the mixed breeding of magical creatures in the name of the Tournament –”

At this point Hermione looked at Dumbledore through the corner of her eyes. The blast-ended skrewts were Hagrids idea, but they were sanctioned by the Headmaster and the minister. Those creatures were monsters and a right handful during class.

“– or decide what to teach your students without reference to the Ministry! But if you decide to work against me –”

“The only one I’m going against is Lord Voldemort. If you are against him, then we remain on the same side, Cornelius,” Albus said softly.

Finally the minister didn’t have words and continued to look at those around him, while fiddling with his bowler hat.
“He just… can’t be back, Albus, he can’t,” the minister said with a hint of a plea, as though with his word, Albus could make the whole thing go away.

“He is back, Minister. You can ask Pettigrew or even look at the Dark Mark on his arm, it’s darker that whatever they were before. It looks… renewed,” Hermione said softly.

Fudge was silent as he looked at the muggleborn witch with the poise of a pureblood.

“… I will be in touch with you tomorrow, Dumbledore, to discuss the running of this school. I must return to the Ministry.”

He was about to turn around when he reached into his pocket and handed it to the young witch.

“Be sure this gets to Harry, please. I would have done so myself, but I believe he is resting. I will see Diggory and also give him his winnings, even though we were not expecting two winners in the tournament. Normally there would have been a ceremony, but under the circumstances…”

Hermione nodded her head at the minister.

“Minerva, I will have to speak to Molly and Arthur soon. I’ll speak with her while she is here watching over Harry. First though, Miss Granger, what were you doing in the maze?” The Headmaster asked.

Hermione looked down at the desk as though she were embarrassed, but was discreetly trying to avoid his eyes.

“I felt that Harry would need my help in making it out of the last task alive. I didn’t care if he won or not, I just wanted him to make it out alive,” she said.

“So you felt justified in entering a dangerous tournament all on your own?” he asked.

“I had asked Professor Moody, or who we thought was Professor Moody, what his opinion was, and he told me it was admirable and if I really thought it was possible, then I should do so. As long as I remained invisible, it should have been fine. I was going to until the very end, but Harry needed me,” she said, “If he didn’t need me so badly when we returned, I would have stayed invisible. However I didn’t want him to appear insane, calling for me, when no one else could see me, even if he could feel me.”

“Was Harry aware of this, Miss Granger, Before you went into the maze?” he asked.

“No, sir. I didn’t tell him,” she replied.

“Did you witness the ritual?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you try to stop it?”

Hermione finally looked up at Albus Dumbledore, leader of the light, “… no, sir. It needed to happen.”

Albus closed his eyes and nodded, “You are a bright witch, Miss Granger. I am glad we have you on our side. It must have been just as trying for you as it was for Harry. Yet you seem to be made of sterner stuff than him. I’m unsure of what has happened in your life, Miss Granger, that has made you sterner than most, but I would be a fool to not be thankful for it. I’m afraid that I’m going to have
to ask you to remain with me part of this summer. Professor Severus Snape is one of the best potions masters in Great Britain, and he will need an assistant now that Lord Voldemort is back."

"Why not with me, Albus?" Minerva asked, her voice laced with concern.

"Because Miss Granger was able to brew a NEWT level potion in second year, Minerva. She has the makings of a potions mistress. But under that, should Severus be working on an important or even volatile potion, we would need someone who knew what they were doing to take over at a moment’s notice. You know what will happen, Minerva. It would be a sin to say that Miss Granger wouldn’t figure it out on her own, given her brilliance," he answered his Deputy looking over the young witch’s hair.

"I know it is asking much of you, Miss Granger. However I also know about your time turner, and I know you are of age. I am going to reinstate an underground resistance. It would be trying, and you would have to give an oath to the Order, but the future depends on it. We would be remiss not to have you as one of our own. Your potion skills will come in handy and could save a life or two. Would you be willing to do this, Miss Granger? Will you join the Order of the Phoenix for the Greater Good?"

Hermione stared at her headmaster, knowing that he knew about half of what he said before restating it. She knew that he was merely saying it for Professor McGonagall’s sensibilities, but it was still flabbergasting. She was still a student, but because she was of age, she was being asked to join a resistance group, a vigilante resistance group, because Professor Snape might be called to a Death Eater meeting, and no one else in the Order of the Phoenix, knew how to brew dangerous potions. Because most of the Order of the Phoenix was bollocks at potions.

"Yes, sir. I’m honored," she replied.

While she had her own goals, she knew that being a part of a resistance group that Professor Snape was part of, would make her goals easier. If she was lucky she might even be made aware of the current state of affairs.

However it seemed nothing short of a miracle that she were to be made an assistance to the one person she was allowed to confide in. She had both Professors Crouch and Moody’s support, and with their support she was willing to take that leap of faith. They helped her protect her parents, they helped her prepare for this war; the game was afoot. She was playing to win.
Minerva stared at Albus incredulously.

“Albus! None of us have had to give an oath before, and I know you won’t require it when The Order’s original members return if they are willing and able. I will not stand by and watch as you request one out of Miss Granger!” she shouted, squeezing her prized student’s shoulders tightly.

Hermione however was having conflicted reactions to this. Part of her wanted to reassure her Professor that it was okay, but she knew the seriousness of a wizard’s oath, and not knowing the words or intent of the oath that the Headmaster wanted, it was not okay.

Hermione refused to be a lab rat, however she also wasn’t going to vocally object as that would imply that she had something to be wary of.

“Considering what happened last time, Minerva, those who come back… will be asked. We can’t risk losing this war,” he said.

“What about Severus then? How will this oath affect him? I know after Alastor is recovered he’ll insist on being witness to his oath of all members!” she said particularly loudly.

Her grip tightened on Hermione, as though physically holding and protecting her would protect both her and Severus. Hermione didn’t say anything, knowing that the elder witch needed the physical comfort more than she felt the need to comfort. The curly haired witch understood, considering she went through something similar in the graveyard. She was more than willing to give the transfiguration mistress the silent comfort she needed.

Albus looked carefully over his glasses at his Deputy, knowing that the witch was merely watching out for the young lad. She was quite smart, which is why he spoke with her about certain things before obliviating her. He tried not to do so often so her mind wouldn’t lose its profound qualities that he was so interested in.

“I trust Severus without having him need to take the oath,” he replied softly.

“If you trust him, then surely you can trust Miss Granger as you’re asking her to work closely with him.”

“It is not the same, Minerva. Miss Granger, forgive me for saying so dear, is not proficient in occlumency, so I feel disinclined to allow for accidents. It would protect her and the Order,” he said.

“Then teach her,” the elder witch said nonchalantly.

“Excuse me?” He asked, blinking a bit dumbfounded.

Minerva was always quite the quick firecracker when it was the two of them, and sometimes she made him feel like an errant schoolboy. Not that he would ever tell her, of course. Yet this complete switch of attitude caught him off guard.

“You heard me,” she said, lessening her grip on the younger witch, “teach her. You were a professor once, Albus. You can do it. I doubt she has to be mastery level to be proficient.”

Albus stared at his friend, wondering if he was speaking with the same witch. It wasn’t until she blinked slowly and looked at him through slit eyes, that he knew it was still her. However she wasn’t
backing down, but rather trying to make it seem polite even while she was being catty. He knew that if he didn’t come up with a solution that she approved of she would find one way or another to make him miserable for a time. Time he didn’t have.

Minerva was ever the cat and she would exact her revenge at some point if she didn’t like the turnabout. He had caught her quite a few times, as a cat, sitting on the table in the staff room before the other staff members came in, as the elves places their preferred drinks in their normal selective seating. She would wait for him to walk into the room, and then paw his cup over the edge of the table. It was childish, but entirely within her realm considering her animal form.

“Indeed, Minerva. I believe Severus will be able to teach her, and I’ll test her weekly on her progress over the summer. It would bring them a bit closer, and Severus would have a better idea of Miss Granger as a person rather than a student,” he smiled faintly, “Does that sound alright with you m’girl?”

He was trying to compromise at least, she would give him that. Hermione was quite amused at the banter and knew it was best to keep quiet. However having Professor Snape fish around her mind in general was not something she was looking forward to. She had mental protection, and it was perfect considering the Headmaster wasn’t even aware. Yet she specifically left embarrassing and useless information about herself floating around for those who decided to peek in.

She grinned weakly, “Whatever it takes, Headmaster. I’m sure Professor Snape will be more than adequate, if unhappy with our private lessons.”

Albus smiled gently at the young witch, “I’ll try to make sure he isn’t too rough on you, Miss Granger. Professor Snape is firm in his methods, but we would prefer if your mind was as fit as a fiddle and as protected as Gringotts.”

“Was there anything else, Headmaster?” Hermione asked politely.

“I will come retrieve you from your house one week before Harry’s birthday. As bright as you are, I will be able to arrange for you to take you potions OWL early, at the very least. I’m sure we can arrange for you to take the rest equally as early and pass with flying colors,” he chuckled, “But Harry will need you, so it would be for the best if you were to attend classes as normal. We won’t be having you take your NEWTs just yet, even though I have faith in your potioneer abilities. If plans change, we will act accordingly, so study hard Miss Granger, but don’t forget to sleep,” he finished with a smile and an eye twinkle.

Hermione paled, but managed to smile back, “Thank you, Headmaster. I’ll be sure to study hard. Will there be any other tasks for me?”

“No, my dear. Not at the moment, should something arise, I will see you,” he said, “Now go see, Harry. I’m sure you’ll feel better about these decisions once you see him. While you’re there, please let Missus Weasley know that I’d like to speak with her.”

Hermione stood up and nodded politely at the headmaster and her professor, “Yes, sir. Thank you, Headmaster. Professor McGonagall,” and left to see her brother.

The headmaster’s eyes followed her as she made her exit. He would have to watch her carefully, she would be useful, but how much use was yet to be seen.

Minerva regarded Albus as he watched the young witch leave his office. Whatever mind shields the witch had was more than adequate considering he did not know that Severus and Miss Granger were already familiar with each other in terms of private lessons. This subject however would be more
“Albus, I’m going to have a nightcap, I will see you in the morning,” she said with a weary sigh.

The Scottish witch left before her employer and friend could say anything.

Harry was breathing deeply, his eyes were closed and he looked so peaceful her heart almost broke. He was still suffering from the occasional tremor and she could see some of the small spasms. This would probably be the most peaceful sleep he would get until the war ended, even with the aftereffects. Hermione brushed his hair out of his face, looking at his scar.

“Missus Weasley, the Headmaster would like a word with you. He’s in his office,” she said politely. Her voice was soft and light.

Molly wrung her hands together, her nerves getting the better of her. She wanted to be next to Harry, but she couldn’t tell Albus she’d see him when she wanted to either. Her sons were there and they would watch and make sure nothing romantic happened. Ronnie knew that Hermione was supposed to be his, so she had nothing to worry about.

“Thank you, Hermione. Bill, please go get your father. Tell him I’m meeting with Albus. Ron, Hermione, you both behave, Harry needs his sleep,” she huffed.

Bill got up and left to do as his mother asked, not wanting to sit around in the Hospital Wing. He was worried about Harry, but he also wasn’t close enough to the young wizard to feel comfortable doing so.

Ron rolled his eyes behind his mother’s back, whereas Hermione had to hold back a sneer.

“Where is Aunt Petunia?” she asked her friend quietly.

“You just missed her. Madam Pomfrey gave them their own room somewhere in here and they all left to turn in for the night,” he replied.

She hummed in response.

They sat in quiet for a long time after that, neither saying anything to the other. Ron didn’t hound her with accusations or questions, not that he would get any answers. He was too busy turning green when he looked at Harry’s scar.

It was red and angry, not nearly as much as it had been in first year when they went after the stone. However it was a near close, it looked fresh… almost as fresh as the dark marks…

She was out of her element since there was nothing for her to reference to, nothing to study, he was the first person in recorded history to survive the killing curse, and almost immediately he was hidden away amongst muggles. There were no records for her to look up. His scar worried her.

She hoped she would be able to talk to him, to get him to see a healer. It had been 13 years, but if it was spell damage they would still be able to find a trace of something. She refused to have people like the Minister floundering for an excuse to shove his claims to the side on the off chance that he was off kilter because of it.

… it would be taken care of before his birthday and before the headmaster retrieved her for the
summer. She would speak to her parents about it in person. If he wouldn’t go willingly, she would find a way around it.

Ron let out a long breath, “I’ll be back, ‘mione. I have to go use the loo.”

His chair scraped against the floor as he got up without waiting for a response. The black dog woofed softly, also getting up. He jumped down gingerly, only his nails making a light tapping sound, and followed the young wizard. The young witch watched them from the corner of her eye to see which toilet they were going to use. When they left the hospital wing entirely, her shoulders dropped, unaware of how tense she was.

Looking over she noticed Moody was also sleeping, if a bit fitfully, which didn’t surprise her. He was sleeping in an unguarded, unwarded, area. Hogwarts was supposed to be one of the safest places on Earth, but in reality there were too many residents for that to be true. She didn’t blame him. She also couldn’t set a small ward around him, it would alert the Headmaster and Madam Pomfrey.

“Thimi,” she said softly.

There was a faint pop and a brush against her thigh alerting her that Thimi had arrived and she was invisible.

“If you have any more of that special potion, please give some to Harry,” she requested mutely.

Thimi patted her thigh twice, letting her know that it would be done.

Hermione watched as a potion vial made itself visible in front of Harry. Thimi was still unseen as she gave Harry Potter a potion of her making and the young witch was relieved when her brother’s tremors lessened until they stopped.

The vial disappeared and the witch felt her heart lighten knowing that her brother would not be in pain. Thimi patted her thigh twice more and the witch reached over with her hand and held the house-elf’s hand for comfort.

She wanted to say more, but felt that it wouldn’t be appropriate. So she sat and watched her brother sleep.

Petunia wrung her hands together nervously as they all got ready for bed. They had been provided with 3 infirmary cots. She had forgotten how scared she had been for her nephew when he first came into their lives. She had forgotten how scared she was for her sister when she mentioned being part of a war and going into hiding.

Vernon tried to comfort her by telling her it was their war and their problems, but even he knew that they were empty words. War excluded no one. He was a bright chap, was one of the best in his old academy sport wise, but he remembered the smarter lads being frustrated when tutoring him. He would say the same things then and they told him that he would regret thinking the way he did in the future if there ever was a war.

Petunia knew he was trying though and appreciated it. She didn’t reply, as she was tuning him out, but holding his hand helped.

She almost wanted to be out there with her nephew, to keep a close eye on him. However she also didn’t want to be around that redhead woman. Lily’s hair was prettier than hers by far. Even if she
was a muggleborn, her sister was a much better witch in every way. Yet she knew that for a while that witch was more motherly to him than she had been for a very long time.

Dudley was laying down on the cot, staring at the ceiling, his skin was clammy and pale. That Cedric kid nearly died. They had stared at nothing but hedges for about an hour, but they could see the colors from time to time from their magic. They could hear screaming, and it chilled him to the bones, not that he would ever say so. Seeing Harry and that boy just appear out of nowhere, looking like they had gone through one hell of a wringer, then Her-Her… his new cousin, that girl just appear on top of him. It was chaos. That important looking man made him believe that the other kid was dead. He looked dead as far as he could tell… he hoped he wouldn’t have nightmares about it.

It was his first experience with death, his parents always kept him home when there were funerals or wakes, so he was never prepared for the bomb that was a dead body in his face. Even if he turned out to not be dead, for those few chaotic minutes, to him, he was dead. He knew that it would dwell with him for the rest of his life.

“Albus, you wanted to see me?” Molly asked, letting herself into his office.

“Yes, Molly. I’m reinstating the Order, can I count on you and Arthur once more?” he asked heavily, there were no twinkles in his eyes for her.

“Of course, Albus. You can always count on us,” she said, knowing that her husband would agree.

There were many other things they could have spoken about, but with Voldemort coming back into place and the second war coming back up, everything else seem insignificant, at least for the night.

He thought about telling Molly about his places for Miss Granger but decided that would be more on a need to know basis, and at the moment she did not need to know.

“I’ve sent Bill to go fetch Arthur,” she informed the elder wizard.

“Good, good. This summer we’re going to be quite busy. I was thinking of speaking with Sirius and having the Order meet at Grimmauld Place in London,” he said grimly.

Molly grimaced, wanting nothing to do with a Black residence. She didn’t like her mother-in-law and she was sure she wouldn’t like what was left of her family.

“I’m sure since it has been uninhabited for nearly 13 years now, it’ll be in quite an uninhabitable space. I’m going to need your help to give it a nice, spring cleaning we’ll call it,” he chuckled lightly, trying to make light of the situation.

Molly forced a small smile for Albus, she was a house-witch and she was good at what she did. She had seven children, and they did make quite a mess, she was familiar with cleaning large messy places quickly.

“I’ll need the children to help, of course,” she mentioned.

“Of course, of course,” he said.

“I’ll give you the address after I’ve been make secret keeper,” he said.

The floo turned green and Arthur walked out, brushing soot off his robes.
“Albus, I came as soon as Bill informed me. What do we need to do?” he said straight to the point.

Albus smiled at the other wizard. With old members ready to return to the fold with nary a question, reassembling the Order would be easier than he thought.
Chapter 53

Harry was a bit shaken up and skittish the following days. He only calmed down when Hermione was close by because he knew he could count on her to have her wand at his side, protecting his back. While he was sure he would have been able to get to the portkey himself, he was more than relieved when he felt his sister’s magic pull him to her. She had her wrist patched up overnight, after finally letting Madam Pomfrey see it (which she didn’t do until after he went to sleep).

He wanted to ask her questions about why she let it happen, but when Hagrid said that it was only a matter of time, his heart dropped into his stomach. Dumbledore knew that Voldemort was going to come back and didn’t do anything to stop it. The older wizard could have helped prepare him to fight, learn spells, something!

Yet Hermione would lean into him or subtly play with his hair when his anger at Dumbledore got too close to exploding. He had to return to the Dursleys and he was waiting for Aunt Petunia to flip like a light switch and return to her old ways. At Hogwarts when she was nearby though, she watched him like a hawk. First Harry thought it was because she was waiting for him to do something to disgrace her, but then he realized (after Hermione pointed it out) that she was scrutinizing people who walked up to him rather than him.

When they were parting Aunt Petunia squeezed his shoulder lightly whereas she hugged Hermione lightly. She did the same with Uncle Vernon and just smiled at Dudley. If he didn’t know better he would have said that they were family that only saw each other on holidays (at least that’s what he noticed families did by watching when Aunt Marge visited).

McGonagall was in charge of transporting them back to Surrey and he was surprised when Vernon nodded his head in deference to the strict witch. Petunia or Vernon kept a hand on Dudley most of the time, but it was Petunia who held his cousin’s shoulders as they followed the strict Deputy Headmistress to the Hogwarts’ gates.

The following leaving feast was just a blur to the young wizard.

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News had spread in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement office about the capture of Peter Pettigrew. The rat animagus was placed in a highly guarded holding cell that had special runes against animagi. He wasn’t on the Animagi register, so it was another charge against him.

Amelia Bones, Head of the DMLE was barking orders left and right. She was looking for the trial for Black so they could hash out the details again in another trial, as he was sentenced in part for murdering his friend, who they found alive. However, as much as they looked, they never found such scribes.

She couldn’t even find members of the Wizengamot who sat on that specific trial, and a majority of the members had not changed in the thirteen years that had passed.

It was just getting worse, even though she couldn’t be held accountable as she was not the Head of the department at the time, involved in his case, or capture. They were the DMLE they were supposed to have records of every trial, private or public, scribed and dated on parchment. They had records from over a century ago! But they couldn’t find a sentencing from 13 years ago!? Wizards and witched convicted and sent to Azkaban’s files were placed in a special cabinet as it was a
different facility compared to Fort Black Lake. Azkaban was the highest security penal institute that they had in Magical Britain. As Black was sentenced to Azkaban, his file should have been in that cabinet. As it stood, it was not. They found his other file, the one that dated his overnight stays in the holding cells at the Ministry for misdemeanors. But when a wizard became high profile, their file was condensed and placed in the special file in the special cabinet. Where Sirius Black’s was not.

The fact that they only had his regular file, and there was no Azkaban file for Black, meant that he was sent to Azkaban illegally! However as he was considered an escaped convict, it was hard to tell him that he was released and due at a retrial. A retrial that wasn’t a retrial because according to their records the original trial never happened!

Amelia groaned under her breath at the headache this was causing her.

“Amelia! AMELIA! I need a word with you!” Fudge yelled as he stalked his way to her office.

“Shit,” she whispered under her breath.

“What do you need me for, Minister?” she asked deadpanned.

Fudge tried to stand imposingly, but only succeeded in making himself look like an arse. His posturing was something that Amelia Bones knew that she could do well without.

“Is the man in the holding cell really Pettigrew?” he asked, she noticed a slight nervous twitch when he swallowed.

“Yes, Cornelius. Pettigrew will have his trial tomorrow at 10am.”

“Private?” he asked, his forehead was starting to shine.

“Public,” she said flatly, “Pettigrew will be tried under vertiserum with the antimorphic restraints on him. As soon as he woke he tried to attack one of my aurors and take their wand. An innocent man wouldn’t attack an auror. This will be public so that the citizens will know that Black is innocent in the case of what was his death.”

She folded her hands under her chin as she looked up at the Minister as his mustache bristled.

“Black is an escaped convict who is still to be kissed on site!” he yelled.

“I think you should retract that order, Cornelius. My department has been tearing itself apart since Pettigrew has been secured in his holding cell looking for Black’s file. Do you know what we found, Cornelius?” she raised an eyebrow at him before continuing, “Nothing. We found a regular file on him. The one that has the misdemeanor cases where he was seen causing a racket at the Three Broomsticks. Every single one of them were cases of stupid drunken acts in public. Every single one of them harmless. Every single one of them, he was placed in a holding cell and charged a small fine. He was never tried and sentenced to Azkaban. We have no records and we’ve been following up with the Wizenmagot and no luck there either.”

Fudge paled at the news.

“B-b-but those muggles!” he tried.

“Sir, with the revelation of Pettigrew being alive and faking his death, it is obvious that those murders could have easily been something else that we are unaware of. Yes they were murdered, but we don’t know if Black murdered them or if he was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. He was never tried! He spent twelve years in Azkaban without a trial!”
Amelia slammed her hands on her desk, looking like a raged bull.

“You need to retract the order and have him sit a trial! If he knows that he’s not going to be kissed on site, and actually given a trial, he might show up. He was an auror before he was- was just thrown into the highest secure prison we have to offer! I wouldn’t be surprised if he didn’t show up either!”

Fudge puffed up his chest before he wilted. Amelia wiped her face with her hand understanding part of the Minister’s stress. Unlike her, he was an elected official and could be kicked out of office for the simplest of things. Granted, he could fire her on a whim, but the chances of that were slim since he had to speak to the Wizenmagot about such decisions first.

“It wasn’t our fault. I wasn’t head of the DMLE, it was Crouch’s call at the time. We can’t be held accountable, but we can try to turn it around.”

Fudge nodded at her sound words, clinging to them like a life raft. He wanted to speak with Dumbledore about such things, but admitting that they were at war and that Voldemort had really returned was something he wasn’t ready for. Amelia wasn’t speaking about war though, but another problem he had.

That student witch was right. He wanted to blame her, not knowing why she was there or anything like that. How was she at the right place at the right time? How did she know to bring them back with her with the portkey? In the end though, it didn’t matter. She brought a Death Eater with her, not just any Death Eater, someone they didn’t know was a Death Eater, and thought dead. Someone who wasn’t tried after the First War. Living proof.

He wanted to sweep this whole fiasco under the rug, but there were hundreds of witnesses.

“So what would you suggest that we do?” he asked instead.

BLACK INNOCENT?

The notorious incident that we thought we all knew about could be wrong! The Ministry of Magic has retracted its order that stated that Sirius Black was to be kissed on site! Our Aurors have recently taken Peter Pettigrew into custody. Peter Pettigrew is not dead like we were all led to believe. Apparently the wizard faked his own death, and severed his finger to escape Auror Black thirteen years ago. However Ex-Auror Black was too close to the situation and had been put on temporary leave due to stress. Thus he was acting of his own accord and was found passed out and surrounded by twelve dead muggles and Peter Pettigrew’s finger. According to Head of the DMLE, Amelia Bones, Black was never given a trial and was never formally sentenced!

After Peter Pettigrew’s trial, which is to be tomorrow; July 1st at 10am, Black has been invited to have his own trial. We here at Daily Prophet have been informed that The Wizenmagot will take Black’s illegal incarceration of thirteen years into account! If anyone who knows where Sirius Black is, please be sure to let him know that he is free to walk into court unimpeded for his trial, which will take place immediately after Peter Pettigrew’s trial.

For more information please turn to page A6

Sirius stared at the newspaper with unbelieving eyes. He was invited to his trial, and he would be
able to witness Peter’s trial. He would be able to have his name cleared! He would be able to be a free wizard again! He wouldn’t have to scrounge around and beg like a dog! He wouldn’t have to rely on Dumbledore for anything. Especially hiding him.

Tears started to prick in the corner of his eyes. It had been years since he thought that he would be given this opportunity, and he knew he would be tried under vertiserum. They even mentioned how he was an ex-auror, painting him in a better light than the monster they had been portraying him as. He noted under the article that it wasn’t sensation hogwash since it wasn’t written by that witch Rita Skeeter. It was real.

He had been given orders to send news to certain old Order members and tell them to lay low at Remus’s cabin. Remus of course was worried about being a good host, more so since his cabin, while tidy, wasn’t the coziest of homes. A werewolf that hadn’t held a steady job for quite some time meant that his home wasn’t exactly up to standards.

In any case it most certainly wasn’t as bad as his old family home, which apparently Molly had been given the task of cleaning. He sent his blessings to the witch with the best of luck attached.

Sirius had plans to stay as low as possible with this recent bit of information. No one was going to stand in his way of possible freedom. He was innocent and by Merlin he was going to be cleared. He didn’t care if it interfered with any of Albus’s orders, he would be of better use free than not!

There was a knock in the other room, someone had dropped something. Quickly the wizard transformed into a grim and sank into the shadows. Freedom was less than 24 hours away, and he would be damned if anyone tried to take it from him.

Severus glared at the newspaper knowing that Black would be sure to be there. While he couldn’t blame Black, considering the hellish nightmare that Azkaban was, didn’t mean that he was ready to be in the same room as him just yet. Before he left on Order business Albus had tried to get them to settle their differences in his office, of which Black barely managed to behave civilly. Ex-auror he may be, but he was still nothing but a bully in the end.

The dark wizard glared at the newspaper knowing that with his freedom chances were that Black was just going to be more annoying than he already was. More so than Mad-Eye since their history was personal. Although the intense fixation the older auror was placing on him was slightly creepy.

Ever since he was up and about the retired auror kept his magical eye on him and he wasn’t sure what to do. It wasn’t as though the older wizard didn’t know he was a spy. They attended the same meetings, so he wasn’t sure why the sudden intensity was being placed on him. Thankfully his occlumency was in place so he never appeared anything more than annoyed, but behind his shields the wizard had to admit to himself that it was creepy.

Speaking of occlumency there was also the matter of teaching Miss Granger occlumency as well as advance potion lessons. Albus had seen fit to handpick an assistant for him, and even made plans for her to take her potion OWLs early.

As if she wasn’t insufferable enough.

As if he didn’t have issues with thinking about her enough.

Now he had to be inside of her head and see things he most likely never wanted to see. Minerva chuckled saying that it was probably the best way to get to know the witch.
Their physical lessons were bad enough, now he had to see inside her mind. Her memories, thoughts, emotions, if she didn’t pick up the skill quickly, he would see them all. He was surprised when Minerva pointed out that Albus had looked into her eyes and didn’t know about their private lessons to begin with, so he was hoping that he already had some foundational ground to work on. The old man barely had any sense of propriety of staying out of people’s minds.

Hermione arrived at the station, watching carefully as Uncle Vernon escorted Harry to their car. Her mother and father had greeted her with love as usual, and said they had a surprise. The surprised started when they started to follow the Dursleys’ car.

“Where are we going?” Hermione asked.

“We’re going to Surrey, dear. I’m sure you’ve met your Aunt, Uncle, and cousin?” Abagail responded.

“Of course. I thought it was a nice cover for Harry and me. We had a familial blood bond not too long before we met. So I wasn’t sure if she knew she was my aunt, because Harry’s my brother.” She said.

Abagail looked surprised as she looked at Hermione through the rearview mirror. Leeroy lifted an eyebrow at the new information. They had barely sent letters when the task got closer, he knew it was because most of it was sensitive information, so they were a bit out of the loop.

‘Like mother, like daughter.’ He thought fondly.

“Petunia and I also did a family bond, she’s my sister.”

It was Hermione’s turn to look surprised.

“You did a familial bond with Petunia? When?”

“Not too long after you left.”

“Who was your bonder?”

“A lawyer I’ve been in contact with. She’s a half-blood. While you’ve been busy with your things, we’ve been busy with other legalities. One of them being the custody of, well I guess he’s your brother now,” Abagail finished.

Hermione’s mind stuttered for a moment, taking this in.

“He’s going to be one of us?”

“Legally, he’s going to be one of us.”

“He’s going to live with us and be safe in France as well,” her father interjected.

Hermione felt her heart swell with the news.

“We’re also fighting for custody of him in the wizarding world. Apparently he had two different guardians and neither were doing their jobs. He’s been such an important person in your life, more important now it would seem, that after thinking long and hard we made this decision without you,” Abagail said, “We’ve been building his case for months! We have enough information and evidence
that our lawyers are sure it’s a guarantee case.”

The curly haired witch’s heart stuttered.

“What?”

“Yes, Harry’s magical guardian is actually Albus Dumbledore. If it hadn’t been for him, Harry would have never been in his situation to begin with.”

“We’re following them because we’re going to tell Harry ourselves,” Leeroy said, amused at his daughter’s state of shock.

Hermione was glad that she was sitting down or she was sure that she would have dropped. They were going to take custody of Harry Potter from Albus Dumbledore.

‘My muggle parents are going to fight one of the greatest wizards of all time for custody of Harry Potter; and the lawyers are sure they’re going to win. Harry’s gonna live with me. He’s going to have a home! A REAL home! He’ll be able to see our properties. I’ll be able to introduce him as my brother without hiding our bond… HARRY I CAN’T BELIEVE THIS! I CAN’T WAIT TO TELL YOU! UGH AND YOU’RE ONLY A CAR AWAY!’

Hermione wanted to scream and laugh at the same time. This was bloody brilliant!

In the car ahead Harry could feel his sister’s excitement and could only wonder what made his sister so happy with something so sinister having just happened. He didn’t know how he was going to make it this summer without her.
Pulling up into the driveway, the Dursleys got out per usual, with the same amount of grunting, but this time it was more about the ride than the inconvenience. Harry however decided it would be best to stay quiet as that was usually the best way to handle his family. Vernon went round to the back of the car to retrieve his nephew’s school trunk as the boy had his hands full with his owl.

As soon as the large man had the trunk on the ground, the Grangers were finished parking in front of the house. Hermione shot out of the car like a stray hex, launching herself at her brother.

“Harry!”

“H-Hermione? What are you doing here? What’s with all the excitement? We just saw each other,” he said, blushing furiously.

While he was aware that the Dursleys knew that they were ‘related’ he was extremely unused to public displays of affection. Granted he was unused to and uncomfortable with most forms of physical affection, but with Hermione, it simply felt natural. He thought it might be a little different once they were back amongst muggles, one of his random daydreams where he was allowed to see his friends. Hugging his sister back, he was glad that was not the case.

The only other being who had been allowed the luxury of physical affection from him was actually Hedwig. The snowy owl hooted softly, happily fluffing her feathers at seeing the curly haired witch.

Abagail got out of the car much more dignified, laughing softly at her daughter’s antics. It wasn’t often that they had seen their daughter behave in such a manner. There weren’t many people on her small list of loved ones that deserved that kind of affection. Her brother it appeared was one of those few that deserved it and more. It only further solidified her resolve concerning Harry. Her father was also an exception, but they kept their affections private lest someone think something improper was happening.

“Abagail, what a pleasant surprise. You didn’t let me know you’d be showing up,” Petunia said as she subtly fixed her dress.

The Duchess smiled at her sister, “What can I say, I thought it would be proper to let him know ourselves. It’s a huge change, it would be extremely impersonal and careless to just drop a bomb on him like that.”

“Indeed,” Leeroy said walking around his car, Elara was perched on his shoulder.

He was surprised at first, but knew that Hermione had given the owl instructions to find Harry. There was a small letter attached to her foot, which Leeroy tried to take, but couldn’t. So he decided not to bother with it since he was aware of the enchantments on her bracelet. It was a letter for Harry, so Harry would have to take. In the meantime he was the newest perch.

Vernon flushed at the sight of the other man standing casually with the owl on his shoulder. He didn’t want his neighbors to think they were freaks, and here was the Duke walking about with a bloody owl on his shoulder like it was no big deal!

“Let’s get inside,” he gruffed.

The large man knew he had to play nice with his relatives. He wouldn’t explode on his sister Marge, so he wouldn’t explode on his sister-in-law Abagail, and he would try to refrain from exploding on
her husband. They were good standing British citizens, well to do, and it would behoove them to clash with such people. The Duke and Duchess were people they had been working hard all their lives to meet, not them specifically, but people of their status.

They were family now, which was a boon of itself. Everyone shuffled into the house as quickly as possible, Petunia immediately turning the kettle on as she directed everyone into the living room, including Harry.

Harry was surprised and waiting for the other shoe to drop, but did as he was instructed. He was only allowed in the living room when he was cleaning it.

The Grangers were making themselves comfortable on the couch, as Dudley sat on the floor nearest to the TV and Vernon in the chair. Harry stood awkwardly until Dudley lightly tapped the floor next to him. Taking a breath and hoping that he wasn’t following the wrong cue, Harry sat next to his cousin on the floor, but was facing the Grangers.

The kettle whistled for a few seconds before Petunia came out with the tea tray. Upon it was Petunia’s finest porcelain tea cups and silver. They were a wedding present from her parents, and their only appearances thus far had been for Vernon’s boss and his wife.

She placed the tray on the coffee table and passed out cups, taking her own last as she was able to fiddle with the cup to hide her fidgeting.

“I’m not sure how you take you tea, but I remembered that you were dentists so I didn’t bring out the sugar.”

Abagail smiled, “Thank you, Petunia! My daughter and I actually take ours with lemon and honey. Leeroy takes his black,” she giggled, “Don’t worry though, we’re fine with drinking black tea.”

“Thank you, Aunt Petunia. You didn’t have to,” Hermione murmured.

Leeroy simply saluted his new sister-in-law with his cup.

The thin woman blushed pleasantly. So far their first family gathering was going smoothly, and there wasn’t any tension. It was like a blessing of what was to come into the future.

The Grangers all started to nurse their tea, taking their time, as Petunia continued to fiddle with her cup, sipping every so often. Dudley and Harry didn’t have cups of their own and Vernon cupped it as though he were drinking coffee.

“Hermione, you never answered my question,” Harry tried to whisper.

The witch in question however merely smiled at him like the cat who ate the canary. Her eyes glowed merrily and he could feel the giddy warmth that swirled inside her like a tornado. It was such a wonderful feeling that he couldn’t help but grin back at his sister, unable to contain her emotions.

“Actually, Harry, we would like to answer that question,” Abagail said with her own smile; it wasn’t as large as Hermione’s, but just as warm.

Looking at his sister’s mother with a burning curiosity fit for a first year, his green eyes shined with a bright with that curiosity. The extreme derailment of his normal return for the summer temporarily pushed the darker recent events to the back of his mind.

The Duchess put her hand on Leeroy’s knee as though to include him in something he wasn’t already a part of.
“In a few days we’ll be going to court to gain full legal custody of you. You’ll be able to move in with us whenever you want, be it today or after the proceedings. We’ve already spoken with your family here and were able to convince them that it would be better for you. I’ve already bonded with your aunt, making us blood sisters, on the off chance that you still need the blood ward to keep you safe. It was more so that it would be a moot point in the terms of the magical protection being an argument to keep you here. In some custody cases though you will be asked which family you want to go to. So the real reason we’re here, Harry, is to ask if you would like to be part of our family and live with us?”

The poor wizard could only nod as his bottom lip started to tremble before he bit it. He didn’t know what to say. He had always wanted to live somewhere other than the Dursleys, but they had always said he was too much of a freak and no one would want him. Then there was Dumbledore who told him it was necessary due to the blood wards, but they had already taken care of that too. He didn’t know Hermione’s parents well aside from knowing that they were dentists, but he would get to live with his sister. That would be more than worth it, and considering they had raised her, they couldn’t be bad.

The Grangers grinned at Harry’s positive response. They could tell he was overcome, but had been trained not to have outbursts of emotions and thus turned a blind eye to it.

“We’ll have to get your passport ready,” Leeroy said, “We’re not going to stay here any longer than we have to.”

Harry looked at Mister Granger with a furrowed brow. Passport? Why would he need a passport to leave the Dursleys?


From their accents and Hermione’s knowledge of muggle school, he thought it was safe to assume that they were also English citizens. He had spoken with Fleur and heard her speaking with her classmates. Their English didn’t sound like the Queen’s English.

Hermione laughed.

“We live in England, Harry. But we’re going to our home in France for the summer,” she supplied instead.

It wasn’t a lie, however she also didn’t want the Dursleys to know about the chateau. She felt she was already pushing her luck by mentioning them having more than one home.

“So… does that mean he’s going to be rich?” Dudley asked, trying not to look at his cousin.

Hermione frowned a little at the question.

“What are you talking about? Harry may be a halfblood but he comes from a long line of purebloods,” Vernon flushed a horrid red at the mention of the magical world, “He’s already rich.”

It was so quiet they could have heard a pin drop.

Harry flushed looking down at the table. It was one thing he had managed to keep secret because the Dursleys didn’t want to know anything about his freak family or want anything to do with it.

Petunia paled, having already known that before taking the boy in. She remembered her sister gushing in a letter about how her wedding could be the way she always wanted it due to not having a fund limit. Instead she looked into her teacup as though it would be able to swallow her up and
give her safety.

Abagail frowned a little. She remembered reading in a few papers Miss Burming was able to get for her that the family in guardianship of him should receive a stipend of 5000 pounds a month, or the wizarding equivalent of 1659 galleons, 3 sickles, and 26 knuts.

“Petunia, you don’t have to answer me if you don’t want to, but… did your family receive a stipend for Harry?” she asked carefully.

Vernon looked at his wife, also wanting to know the answer. He worked hard for his money to support his family, and was much too proud to accept what would essentially be a handout. Granted there were times where he thought that was something that came with being a guardian of an orphan, so he wasn’t sure, never having dealt with one aside from the boy.

“No. We just found him on our doorstep one morning with a letter. Once we read it the darn thing burst into fire and nearly startled me half to death!”

Abagail tilted her head ever so slightly, it was something Harry had seen Hermione do numerous times when she was thinking while talking to someone. Usually it was to him, Ginny, or Neville. Like she was trying to read them like one of her books, but had to tilt her head just so to see the words.

“Do you remember what the letter said?” she inquired gently.

Petunia shot a fearful look over to Dudley before looking back at her sister, “I don’t remember all of it word for word. I only got to read it once.”

“What did it say?”

“It basically said that Lily and her husband were dead and he had to stay with us because of some magical ward that would protect him and us from w-wizards.”

“I’m sorry something as important as being informed of deaths was given to you in the form of a letter. Someone could have at least had the nerve to knock on your door and tell you in person!” she tutted, “That’s why we’re here anyways. How rude,” she muttered with a slight sneer on her face.

“It appears that you were also misinformed. Whoever was guardian of Harry was supposed to be receiving at least 5000 pounds a month, to provide for him. I suppose his magical guardian took that as well. He wasn’t even on the list in the will,” she grumbled, her expression turning dark.

Harry sat dumbfounded and he looked over at Hermione.

Hermione frowned and shook her head letting him know that she didn’t know that either.

“We were supposed to receive money for taking care of the boy?” Vernon asked with an odd expression on his face.

“We already agreed what you did was hardly care for him, Vernon,” Abagail said coolly.

The larger man blushed before pushing through his gaff, “I was left with the impression that his parents expected us to just take care of him out of the blue.”

Abagail sighed, knowing how upset she would be if her sister just dumped her child on her. She mentally rolled her eyes at her niece Phoebe. As much as she disliked her niece she knew she wouldn’t have treated her the same that they treated Harry. However her sister would do something
like that just to spite her after death.

“No. There was a list of people Harry was supposed to go to in the case of their death. However certain incidents happened that left you the next of kin. It was supposed to be Sirius Black, his godfather,” Harry smiled at the mention of the old marauder, “Alice Longbottom, his godmother,” his smile slid off his face slowly, “Remus Lupin, was their third choice. There were no others after that.”

“Well what happened to them?” Dudley asked, now confused.

“Sirius was arrested without trial, he’s being given a trial tomorrow. With the new evidence that Pettigrew is alive, he should be able to walk a free man tomorrow. Remus is a werewolf, it wasn’t long before Harry was born that so many anti-werewolf laws went into effect. It’s hard for them to get jobs in the community, with so much misinformation the people simply won’t take the chance,” Hermione answered, “I’m not sure about Neville’s mum though…”

“She was cursed by Bellatrix Lestrange. She has a permanent bed at St Mungos in the Janus Thickey Ward…” Harry answered softly.

“Oh,” the young witch said.

“Everything happens for a reason, Harry,” Leeroy said gently, “Some reasons we might never know."

Harry nodded softly at Mister Granger’s comforting voice.

“Think of it this way, dear. If things didn’t happen the way they did, would you and Hermione be bonded? Could you imagine your life without your sister?”

He looked at Missus Granger and a gleam came back into his eye. While he would have wanted a better childhood, he wouldn’t trade it because it allowed him to meet his sister. His best friend and biggest support system. If it wasn’t for her… he didn’t even want to think about it.

Without her he wouldn’t have survived first year. They wouldn’t have known it was a basilisk second year. He wouldn’t have been able to save Sirius, Buckbeak, or even himself third year if she wasn’t taking so many courses. He wouldn’t have survived this year without her help in training and learning all those spells, even solving the clues for the tasks! He probably would have been expelled if it wasn’t for her and Dumbledore being so keen on him.

He took a deep breath and smiled at his sister who smiled back. She was definitely worth it.

“I couldn’t even if I tried. She’s too amazing.”

Hermione blushed and stuck her tongue out at him childishly causing him to laugh at her. Abagail simply smiled at her children.

Petunia watched Abagail and Leeroy as they slid into their parenting roles like a second skin. They made it look so easy. If it was her or Vernon they would have simply yelled at him and told him not to ask questions. He didn’t ask any questions, but they still comforted him and answered some he might have had. It was gentle and not overwhelming for him. They didn’t even have to touch him, as she felt she had to every time she tried to comfort Dudley.

Vernon let out a gruff sigh, which made him sound like a walrus more than it didn’t. He would give it to them, they were good parents and they would make good caretakers for the boy.
“Well, you didn’t unpack, your trunk and your bird are still in the hallway,” he bumbled.

He wasn’t used to being nice to the boy. It wasn’t his fault, and the Duchess already made it clear that they didn’t care for him, so it would be pointless to ask to be reimbursed for all the years he was in their care. It was part of their case, and they were kind enough to not push it farther where they stood a very real chance to lose Dudley. His son was worth more than that and he wouldn’t push boundaries trying.

Abagail grinned at her brother-in-law, she could see he was trying, and that was all that matter right now. Harry got up quickly and started to make sure he had everything together. He didn’t have much of anything in Dudley’s room, almost all he owned that was of value to him was in his trunk.

“We’ll see you in court soon. I called our lawyer, we’ve bumped the date and time. You _should_ have received a phone call, but I’m not sure if you got it or a voicemail. I know you were busy at Hogwarts. We’ll see you tomorrow at 7.”

“In the morning?” Vernon asked.

“In the morning,” Leeroy said with a small sigh.

“If your workplace troubles you too much about the lack of notice, call in sick and I’ll give you the quid for the day’s work,” he said with an easy smile.

Vernon’s face started to scrunch up and turn that awful shade of puce that Harry knew so well before Petunia placed her arm on his shoulder. As she was rubbing it soothingly his face turned down to a red.

“We would appreciate that Leeroy,” Petunia said instead.

“Please, call me Lee. We’re family, we have to look out for each other, right?” he said.

“Right,” she said quietly.

“Oh, goodness me. Harry, would you care to go for a walk with your cousin. It’ll be a while since you’ll see him next,” Abagail said.

Dudley looked at his aunt strangely. He didn’t want to walk anywhere with him, even if he didn’t hate him.

“Go on, son. Say good-bye to the boy. You’ll be seeing him on holiday,” Vernon said, “and we’ll be able to tell him all about your boxing accomplishments then.”

Dudley wasn’t sure what was wrong with his dad, but he sounded kind of choked up. He was probably holding back some choice words, though. After almost seeing a dead body it was surreal thinking about normal things, such as boxing.

However he got up and walked to the door anyways, his cousin falling in step behind him.

They walked down the street about a block away before either of them said anything. The sun was almost finished setting as they made their way around the neighborhood.

“That was some tournament, a lot longer than mine,” Dudley started.
“Yeah,” Harry said in a breath.

“My cousin, Her… Her-my– something,” he said with a roll of his eyes, annoyed with himself.

“Hermione.”

“Yeah. Hermione. Did she really help you in the tournament?” Dudley asked curiously.

“Yeah, she did. She’s wicked smart, I wouldn’t have survived without her help,” he admitted.

“So she saved your life?” he asked.

“No, she helped me save my own life. It’s not the same in our world,” he said.

“Oh… but she helped you?”

“Yeah. She looked up the spells and helped me practice them and train and stuff,” he replied boyishly, “Like a coach would show you maneuvers.”

“Oh.”

There was an awkward silence.

“I think if we weren’t cousins, I’d have a chance at her,” Dudley said suddenly, as they were walking through a dark side street.

“I doubt it. She’s dating an international quidditch star,” Harry replied gruffly.

“So she’s a groupie? I think she’ll wet her knickers for me, I’m a champ after all,” Dudley insisted.

“Hermione isn’t like that. So stop talking about things you don’t know about,” Harry said angrily.

“So she’s dating a international star, just because?” he sneered.

“She’s dating an international quidditch star because she doesn’t care that he’s famous. That’s why he asked her, even with his groupies following him around like cats in heat.”

“I’m sure she’s dropped her knickers for him.”

“That’s my sister, Dud. So stop talking about her and her knickers.”

“Or what? It’s not like she can drop them for me now,” he said.

“Shut UP!”

“Or what? You can’t do magic outside of your castle freak school, they’ll expel you!”

“What if they changed the rules for me because of the tournament?” Harry shot back.

“I– I bet they didn’t,” Dudley said feebly, looking away from the other boy.

Harry tutted.

“I bet you wouldn’t be so brave if you weren’t leaving tonight,” Dudley said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Harry asked with a glare.
“You wouldn’t be so brave, reaching out for your sister, who was sitting on a bloke’s face.”

“She had to have a good grip on him for the portkey.”

“So she had to sit on his face? I bet that Cedric kid got a good whiff of her quim.”

“She had to have a good grip on three people and the portkey. She broke her wrist getting us back there and all you’re thinking about is her knickers!”

“He survived!”

“You didn’t know that!”

“So what!? Your sister must be a tart! Even that red headed fat lady thought so!”

“Don’t even talk about that again” Harry pushed his cousin against the wall, with his wand pointing under his chin, snarling. “D’you understand me?”

“Point that thing somewhere else!”

“I said, do you understand me?”

“Point it somewhere else!”

“DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?”

“GET THAT THING AWAY FROM —”

Dudley gave an odd, shuddering gasp, as though he had been doused in icy water.

Suddenly everything was pitch-black dark. There were no lights, no moon, no stars, not even the streetlamps. There were no sounds of any other life, no cars, no people, not even the wind. The hot evening weather was suddenly icy, biting cold.

Harry had a moment of panic thinking that he did accidental magic, but even he knew he didn’t have the power to blot out the sky. He tried to see if he could see anything.

“W-what are you d-doing? St-stop it!” Dudley’s voice was terrified, Harry could only imagine his face.

“I’m not doing anything! Shut up and don’t move!”

“I c-can’t see! I’ve gone blind! I –”

“I said shut up!”

Harry turned around slowly, but kept his hand on his cousin the whole time. He made sure he stayed pressed against the wall. The cold was so intense that his skin had goosebumps and he was shivering. The hairs on the back of his neck and his arms were starting to stand up.

‘They can’t be here. That’s impossible. Why would they even be in Little Whinging.’

He strained his ears, knowing he would hear them before he saw them.

“I-I’ll tell Dad!” Dudley whimpered, “W-where are you? Wh-what are you d-doin –?”

“Will you shut up I’m trying to lis– ?” he hissed.
But before he could finish his sentence he heard what he had been listening for. He heard his mother’s dying screams. Beyond that they were drawing long, hoarse, rattling breaths. The smell of rancid flesh was coming from down the alley.

“C-cut it out! I-I’ll hit you! I swear I will!”

“Dudley, Shut–”

THWAP!

Small white lights were dancing in Harry’s vision. Dudley had obviously used his best right hook to hit him in the head. Harry hit the ground, his wand fell out of his grip rolling a little but away.

Harry knew he didn’t have time to give into the pain though, not yet.

“Dudley, you fucking moron!” he yelled even as his eyes teared up.

He got onto his knees, feeling for his wand. Once it was safely back in his hand he stood up, still listening to his cousin run and bumble along in the dark.

‘He even sounds stupid when he runs.’ He thought amazed.

“DUDLEY, COME BACK! YOU’RE RUNNING RIGHT AT THEM!!!” He yelled, hoping it would make his cousin see sense.

Of course as luck would have it his answer was his cousin’s frantic squealing yells.

‘Sweet fucking Merlin!’

“DUDLEY KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT! WHATEVER YOU DO KEEP IT SHUT! KEEP YOUR MOUTH LITERALLY SHUT!”

He cast a quick lumos to help him see as he ran to his cousin. Thanks to the small light he was able to see a dementor coming to sweep in on him, sucking the air around him.

“Expecto Patronum!” a silver wisp came out.

Harry stumbled back, tripping over his feet, trying to put distance between him and the dementor.

A pair of gray, slimy, scabbed hands slid from the robe reaching for him.

“Expecto Patronum!” another wisp came out.

He could smell the dementor’s putrid, death cold breath, that seemed be filling his lungs and drowning him on land.

‘Something happy, something happy. The Grangers, a new family, Hermione!’

“Expecto Patronum!!”

A brilliant large silver stag shot out of his wand at the dementor. It charged its horns at what would have been its heart, launching it back with a screeching scream.

“This way!” he yelled at his patronus.

“Dudley? DUDLEY!”
He ran towards his cousin, who was curled up on the ground with his arms over his face. The other dementor was grabbing his wrists, appearing as though he was pulling them slowly and lovingly apart, lowering his hood, getting ready to kiss his cousin…

“GET IT!” Harry shouted angrily.

The stag shot off like a rocket and charged its horns at the dementors face, throwing the dark creature into the air like nothing.

The stag came back and walked around the two boys, filling them with a bit of cheer before he disappeared. Suddenly the lights and sound returned, just for Harry to hear feet rushing towards him. He turned around with his wand out prepared to defend himself and his cousin.

Hermione appeared at the end of the alley, Mister and Missus Granger were behind her.

“Harry! Oh, Harry! Are you okay!?” she screamed as she came closer to hug him and reassure herself.

“I felt it, I felt you,” she said with her arms around him.

“I’m fine, Hermione, Dudley almost got kissed though,” he said.

Leeroy walked past them and checked Dudley’s vitals.

“He’s cold, sweaty, and his heart-rate is up, but he’s alive,” he released a breath, “Harry give me a hand with him. Abby, go get the car,” he said as he tossed his wife the car keys.

Abagail caught the keys nodded and ran back. On her way she passed an old woman who was running after her cat.

Harry leaned over and helped Mister Granger pick up his cousin. When he stood up he saw Missus Figg.

“Keep your wand out, girl! They could come back,” she hissed, “Hurry, we have to get you lot back! This is going to cause trouble that Dumbledore didn’t want!”

“You know Dumbledore? You’re a witch?” Harry asked his neighbor.

“No I’m not a witch, I’m a squib. Couldn’t do a lick of magic to help you. Of course I know Dumbledore, who doesn’t?”

Hermione looked over to her brother to check him for shock.

“Never mind the Statue of Secrecy now! This is exactly what Dumbledore didn’t want. And it’s not even been a day! The Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery my tea-kettle!”

Leeroy kept a careful eye on the squib woman who Harry knew. They were making slow progress due to his nephew’s dead weight and the odd placement of weight between them. She obviously knew about Harry, and was keeping contact with Dumbledore. Even though he wasn’t in Harry’s life, apparently he still ‘watched’ him and kept tabs on the boy.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were a squib?” Harry asked.

“Dumbledore’s orders. I was to keep an eye on you but not to say anything, you were too young. I’m sorry I gave you such a miserable time, but the Dursleys wouldn’t have let you come over again if you enjoyed yourself. But oh my word when Dumbledore hears of this he’s going to have a
kneazle! I don’t even know how to tell him! I can’t apparate—”

“I have an owl,” Harry said, trying to be helpful.

“Harry, you don’t understand! He’ll need to act as quickly as possible! The Ministry has their own ways of detecting underage magic, they’ll already know!”

“The trace, Harry. Underage wizards and witches have a trace on them if they’re not homeschooled,” Hermione said.

“Surely they’ll be more concerned about dementors than a bit of magic?” Harry tried.

Leeroy scoffed at the boy’s optimism,

“It’s politics Harry, it doesn’t work like that. The bigger the issue, the more they want to ignore it. The smaller the issue, the more they’ll want to make a mountain out of that molehill so they can ignore the real issue.”

“He’s exactly right, I’m afraid,” Missus Figg said.

“You could floo?” Harry tried again.

“Yes, that I’ll do that I’ll floo.”

Abagail pulled up the car to the alley.

“Thank, Merlin,” Hermione said, putting away her wand as the men got Dudley into the car.

“Poor, dear. I hope Petunia doesn’t cause too much of a fuss,” Abagail said, “She was already fretting when we ran out the house.”

Harry groaned at the thought of having to deal with his aunt and uncle. Dudley was almost seriously hurt, almost worse than killed, and he had to face them one more time before he left.

There it was. The other shoe dropped. He knew it. On the bright side, he wouldn’t have to stay one more night in their house.
They arrived back at the house sooner than Harry would have liked, even though his sister was
doing her best to soothe him throughout the car ride. Dudley was against one of the car doors, Harry
was in the middle, and Hermione was next to him. His sister had said she didn’t mind sitting in the
middle but Harry had insisted that he be the one to sit next to their cousin.

He didn’t want to tell her what had happened or what they argued about. They were family now, and
he felt it was his duty to protect her from people like Dudley. It hadn’t quite sank into the older boy’s
head just yet that they were family, so he had planned on letting this roll under the proverbial carpet.
Dudley was as stupid as they came, he had always known that, so he wasn’t all that surprised at the
stupidity that spewed from the hole in his face that was his mouth. He was however extremely
thankful that said stupid hole had stayed shut like he had told him to while the dementors were
attacking them.

Harry knew he would have nightmares about the way the dementor was moving Dudley’s arms. If it
were anything other than the horrible act it that was to occur could have been mistaken for quite a
romantic notion. He supposed that was part of why it was called a dementor’s kiss…

Leeroy and Hermione had gotten out of the car simultaneously and Harry followed them. Leeroy had
prepared himself for Dudley to practically fall out of the car and looked at Harry to give him a
soundless cue. Abagail had turned off the car and made to stand to the side to watch the proceedings
so she could herd them into the house.

Upon opening the door carefully, Leeroy waited until he was sure Harry had a solid grip on the other
boy before opening the door fully. They then gathered the large teen between them and hobbled into
the house with Abagail holding the door open and leading them, whilst Hermione was closing the
car door and following them.

Leeroy and Harry had made it to the front door when Dudley slipped from their grips, leaned over
and vomited on the doormat. Wringing their faces in disgust they waited for Dudley to stop being
sick. Tentatively reaching out, Leeroy rubbed small soothing circles on his back, like he did when
Abagail had been pregnant with Hermione. Harry decided that the Grangers could watch his cousin
as he went and got the hose to clean up the foul mess.

Petunia was fretting in the hallway wringing her hands together, her eyes prickled with tears as she
heard someone become ill in front of her house. She wanted to go see what was going on, but she
knew Abagail was a capable woman and decided to trust her sister to handle this. Vernon however
looked about ready to throw a punch of his own, but the assistance they were receiving was evident.

After Harry had cleaned the doormat, which took all of 30 seconds, before they had brought the
large boy into the house and laid Dudley out on the couch where Leeroy once again took Dudley’s
vitals. Everyone was quiet for a moment so he was able to hear properly. A dentist he may be,
however he still had to go through proper proceedings to get where he was. It helped that a majority
of what they taught a person during a CPR certification course was practically the same in terms of
vital monitoring.

“Heart rate has lowered, however he’s still cold. He’s stopped sweating, which is a good sign,”
Leeroy announced.

“He needs some chocolate,” Harry said.
The Dursleys looked at him with something akin to accusation as Dudley was coming around.

“Chocolate always helps when it comes to dementors. Professor Lupin taught me that…” Harry said a bit lower than before.

“Chocolate – what’s this codswallop?” Vernon asked, squinting his eyes as hard as he could.

“De – men – tors, two of them,” Harry said slowly. Hermione stomped on his foot making him hiss and send looks of apologies at her.

“And what the ruddy hell are dementors!?”

“They guard the wizard prison, Azkaban,” Petunia said.

A few seconds later Petunia brought her hands to her mouth as though she realized belatedly that she said something foul, like a curse. Vernon was gawking at his wife.

“How d’you know that?” he asked her, astonished.

Petunia looked at Vernon apologetically before plowing through, “I heard – that awful… well… not so awful now I suppose… that – boy – telling her years ago,” she said jerkily, blushing a bit.

“So they actually exist? The demenwhat’sitthingies?” Vernon asked his wife kindly.

She nodded jerkily in confirmation, before getting up and rushing over to the kitchen.

Abagail rolled her eyes at her sister and her husband and quickly made her way back to the car. Both women returned to the living room at the same time each with a different chocolate bar in their hand. Abagail quirked her lips up at Petunia’s choice of chocolate, milk chocolate, whereas hers was dark chocolate.

“He should eat this one, it has more cocoa in it than milk chocolate,” she said.

“But he loves milk chocolate,” Petunia insisted.

“Be that as it may this is for medical purposes, not pleasure, as delicious as it may be,” Abagail replied.

Petunia frowned a little, but nodded. Placing her chocolate bar on the table, she turned around to see Abagail already unwrapping her chocolate and handing it to Dudley.

“Don’t eat it just yet, Dudley. Petunia, could you please get him a glass of water? He needs to rinse his mouth with it so the acid doesn’t damage his teeth,” she stated.

Petunia rushed to do as she was asked, wanting to take the best of care of her son. She was sure it had something to do with the boy, but since Abagail was here there wasn’t anything they could do that they normally would. Vernon was already trying to keep himself in check as much as he could. They were sure it was his fault, but after the tournament, she couldn’t help but have her doubts.

Harry stood in the corner of the room, wanting to leave as soon as possible, however he knew that wasn’t possible.

“How do we know he didn’t use his… thing?” Vernon said, red in the face, trying to control his temper.

Abagail huffed at her short tempered brother-in-law, “We know because Hermione had her’s out too.
We, as muggles, can’t see them, but we can feel them. Vernon I assure you it’s... more than extremely unpleasant. Why they were so far away from their... home, if you can call it that, is beyond us. Never you mind though, we’ll get to the bottom of it. A case like this falls under endangerment of muggles, with Harry being there to cast a patronus charm, it’ll save him and you’ll be compensated for this travesty.”

Vernon nodded, knowing what it was like to be on the business end of the Duchess. If she said she could do it, he didn’t doubt she would.

“So they were really there?” Petunia asked.

Abagail nodded solemnly.

Just then a screeching owl swooped in through the kitchen window, almost skinning the top of Vernon’s head, dropping its letter at Harry’s feet before making its getaway.

“OWLS! MORE OWLS IN MY HOUSE!?” Vernon shouted, unable to control himself.

Bulldozing himself into the kitchen he slammed the windows shut.

“I’LL NOT BE HAVING ANY MORE OWLS IN MY HOUSE!!! TWO IS ENOUGH!”

Abagail arched an eyebrow at him, while Harry was opening the letter, Hermione looking over his shoulder.

_Petunia:_

_Harry:_

_Hermione:_

_**Dear Mr. Potter,**_

_We have received intelligence that you performed the Patronus Charm at twenty-three minutes past nine this evening in a Muggle-inhabited area and in the presence of a Muggle._

_The severity of this breach of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underaged Sorcery has resulted in your expulsion from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Ministry representatives will be calling at your place of residence shortly to destroy your wand._

_As you have already received an official warning for a previous offence under section 13 of the International Confederation of Wizards’ Statue of Secrecy, we regret to inform you that your presence is required at a disciplinary hearing at the Ministry of Magic at 9am on July 1st._

_Hoping you are well,_

_Yours sincerely,_

_Mafalda Hopkirk_

_Improper Use of Magic Office_

_Ministry of Magic_

Harry stood numb and cold staring at the letter. His sister however had no compunctions heating up, snatching the letter out of his hands.

“How dare they! They can’t just send someone to snap your wand and then say you are to attend a
hearing, that’s not how it works! Whoever sent you this, it was not this Hopkirk lady,” Hermione growled.

Abagail swiftly took the letter from her daughter, to read it for herself.

“Harry, whatever you do, don’t give them your wand. This is a political movement all on its own. They could have at least tried to wait a few more weeks to be subtle about it though. How droll,” she said nonchalantly.

Suddenly there was a loud bang and a thud against the kitchen window.

“MORE BLOODY OWLS!?"

Hermione looked closely, “Oh poor, Errol. Why they don’t just retire him is beyond me,” she tutted as she opened the window and let the bird in, ignoring her uncle.

She handed the letter to Harry, sticking close by to read it with him, Abagail was looking over his other shoulder, though barely touching him.

_Harry –_

_Dumbledore’s just arrived at the Ministry, and he’s trying to sort it all out. DO NOT LEAVE YOUR AUNT AND UNCLE’S HOUSE. DO NOT DO ANY MORE MAGIC. DO NOT SURRENDER YOUR WAND._

_Arthur Weasley_

“What - WHO are all these OWLS from!?” Vernon demanded.

“The first one was from the Ministry of Magic, expelling me,” he said calmly, keeping an ear out for Ministry workers, “The other was from my friend Ron’s dad, he works at the Ministry.”

“Ministry of Magic?” Vernon bellowed before Leeroy cuffed up.

“Honestly, man. You don’t want your neighbors to know about what is happening, but you’re the only one yelling about it. You saw the Minister of Magic at the tournament, did you not?”

Vernon blushed madly, and looked away mumbling, “I s’pose so.”

Abagail sighed loudly, in an extremely girlish manner, looking much like Harry’s classmates when they were disappointed by something.

“What is it, luv?” Leeroy asked.

“Plan B,” she said with another sigh.

“Plan B?” Harry asked.

Abagail had opened her mouth to answer when there was another owl soaring in to deliver its letter. Vernon’s face turned red once the bird was in his sight.

Harry picked it up and opened it with both Granger women looking over his shoulders again.
Dear Mr. Potter,

Further to our letter of approximately twenty-two minutes ago, the Ministry of Magic has revised its decision to destroy your wand forthwith. You may retain your wand until your disciplinary hearing on July 1st, at which time an official decision will be taken.

Following discussion with the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the Ministry has agreed that the question of your expulsion will also be decided at that time. You should therefore consider yourself suspended from the school pending further inquiries.

With Best Wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Mafalda Hopkirk

“I’ll give it to him, he works fast,” Abagail muttered.

“Plan B is that we explain, with our lawyer, that you are no longer considered a minor in the wizarding world, due to the fine and binding print of the Goblet of Fire. As only witches and wizards of age were able to participate this time around, you are therefore considered an adult wizard. Since the goblet was final and binding, lest you lose your magic and possibly die, it legally emancipated you,” she said kindly, “I’m not sure if it would work in the muggle world, so we’ll be proceeding as we were here. Magic is already done though, we’re family, I’m not only your aunt’s sister, therefore your mother’s sister, but also your sister’s mother, and I’ve accepted your bond, making me your other mother. Magic wise, you’re mine anyways.”

Leeroy smiled at his wife before kissing her on the forehead.

Harry looked at her then at Hermione, the resemblance was uncanny, if brilliantly scary.

“Wicked,” he said under his breath.

“Indeed,” she said smugly.

“Now I know our plans were to take you tonight, however it appear a wrench has been thrown into our plans. Dumbledore will most likely collect you from here, if not send someone else to do this for him.”

“Whereas I was given instructions to have private lessons with Professor Snape over the holiday,” Hermione piped in, “I think we’d be going to the same place.”

“Be that as it may, we have different plans from Dumbledore. You’ll be staying overnight in a hotel with us,” Abagail decided with finality, “I’ll contact Charity and let her know the situation. Petunia I’m borrowing your telephone.”

With that she sashayed into the kitchen and grabbed the cordless to call their lawyer.

Petunia moved over to clean up her son from the mess her made on himself. She noticed it earlier but was too preoccupied with making sure he was alive rather than clean.
“Dudley, be sure to finish that chocolate bar. It’ll make you feel better. Harry has had close dealings with them before, myself thankfully only twice,” she said, “So be sure to get some rest.”

Vernon was fussing with his pockets, finally dressed in respectable normal clothing, but more so to make a better impression on the judge. They agreed to sign the boy over, and he was thrilled, however Petunia seemed to be borderline tearful. Still due to their eagerness to sign the boy over, they didn’t hire a lawyer for this matter, and decided to represent themselves.

The Grangers had already arrived, Hermione having smiled upon seeing them, Dudley was looking and feeling better than last night, he nodded at them. Petunia wanted him to stay home, but Dudley insisted that he go with. He made it known that he wanted to go to the boy’s other hearing that was to take place after this meeting. While Petunia and he had their reservations, they agreed that it would probably speak more in the favor of the boy than to just take his word for it. Had it not been for the Grangers they would have jumped down the boy’s throat with their own accusations, he would have at least anyways.

“All rise,” they all stood silently as the magistrates walked into the courtroom and sat down, “The proceedings are about to begin.”

The three magistrates on the panel took their time looking at the paperwork before them.

“This is case number 5489 Grangers versus Dursleys custody of Harry Potter. From what we could see there is a mutual agreement in the case of Potter’s custody. Is there anything you feel that we should know that we might have missed in the paperwork concerning Mister Potter?”

“No, Your Honor,” Chalice said.

“So we are here merely on the formality and legality of his guardianship, due to the hasty nature considering his next of kin?”

“Yes, Your Honor.”

“Mister and Missus Dursley, are there reasons why you have not come before us before this?”

Petunia stood up shakily, “No other reason than for our peace of mind, Your Honor. We love and trust the Grangers as though they were our family and know he will have a good home with them. We just wanted them to be sure they were ready.”

Petunia shot Abagail a fearful look in the corner of her eye after she sat down. They hadn’t mentioned the other evidence concerning the boy’s neglect and abuse. Abby had soothed her nerves and told her that it would be for their best interest to cooperate. Being in the court made her nervous all over again. Even Vernon was sweating from nerves. Keeping evidence of the boy’s abuse under wraps was surprising, it would make the whole process easier and keep Dudley secure in their care.

All that being said, she did still have the binder in her lap with said evidence.

Overall the proceedings went better than expected. The Grangers were given custody of Harry, no mention of abuse was brought up about him, the Dursleys were complacent and got to keep custody of Dudley due to their willingness to give up Harry. There was a lot of legal jargon and such, they
did have to meet with Harry, who expressed his desire to go with the Grangers and how Hermione was already like his sister. The Duke and Duchess were able to provide proof that they could care and afford to care for him, not that they really needed it.

They all left the court together, the Dursleys with nervous smiles. From one courtroom to another, they were making their way to the Ministry of Magic to go to Harry’s hearing there, then off to Sirius’s trial if they could make it. Chalice was thankfully leading them the way there, as it wasn’t that far off from the building they were currently just at.

She was explaining how to get into the ministry from the telephone booth, or even the toilets. She discreetly pointed out the long line that was to the toilets and just a lever away from the ministry. The simple process was because they had to think of a way for squibs to enter the ministry, as they had no magic of their own. They agreed that the Dursleys would go into the booth with her, and they would wait for the Grangers and Potter. It was a simple process.

“62442” Hermione dialed.

“Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. Please state your name and business,” came a cool woman’s voice.

“Duke Leeroy Granger, Duchess Abagail Granger, Lady Hermione Granger, Lord Harry Potter, we’re here to attend Potter’s trial” Leeroy said firmly.

“Thank you,” said the detached voice, “Visitors please take the badges and attach them to the front of your robes.”

Badges popped out where the change would have, and they placed them over their left breast.

“Visitor of the Ministry, you are required to submit to a search and present your wand for registration at the security desk, which is located at the far end of the Atrium.”

“Very well,” Leeroy said, “We shall do just that, thank you.”

Suddenly the floor of the telephone box moved and the pavement was over their heads, signaling that they were going down. A darkness surrounded them for a few seconds before a beam of golden light hit their feet and surrounded them when the doors opened, like an elevator.

They stepped out together, the Grangers with perfect poise, and Harry as best as he could. He was surprised at the transformation, they reminded him of Malfoy, and he knew he wasn’t hearing things when Leeroy announced them as… royal family. That was news to him.

Chalice was waiting with a grin for them however and lead them straight over to the atrium to have their wands registered. Once they were at the security desk Burming’s smile turned frosty, as did Abagail’s when Hermione handed over her wand.

The ministry worker on duty was quick about it, feeling like a bleeding fish in a shark tank. The Duchess may be muggle, but she was wicked scary. That and he was a bit star struck. A Duke, a Duchess, a Lady, AND The Boy Who Lived. He couldn’t wait to tell his wife about this later. He was quick to handle Potter’s wand as well, Burming was keeping a careful eye on it and thus him. He wanted the damn things out of his possession as soon as possible.

A memo flew by Chalice and fluttered until she caught it and opened it. She read it quickly before tutting to herself.

“Follow me then, they’ve tried to change the times and location and we haven’t a moment to spare,”
she said coolly, walking briskly, “We’ll take the elevator then we have to walk the rest of the way. If I didn’t know all the courtrooms like the back of my hand…”

They kept up as fast as they could, managing to secure an elevator to themselves. They all followed Chalice’s example and reached up holding onto the straps that were hanging from the ceiling. Once they reached the Department of Mysteries, they got out and followed the brisk-paced woman.

After they went down the flight of stairs they were in a long corridor that reminded Harry and Hermione about the dungeons at Hogwarts. They passed by a few doors that were heavy and wooden with large iron bolts and keyholes.

“Courtroom 10. Duke, Duchess, you in first, Harry and Hermione in the middle, you lot behind them, and I’ll file in back. C’mon now, first impressions are important,” she said lowly, even though it was quiet enough that they could all hear her clearly.

Harry’s heartbeat seemed to speed up, he could feel it all over, but when Hermione brushes her shoulder against him he felt like he could handle it – they could handle it.
Harry gasped at the familiar place he had seen in Dumbledore’s pensieve. His heartbeat started to increase thinking it was a foreshadowing of some sort, that he was going to have his wand snapped as the last person he knew in here had been sent to Azkaban. Brushing her hand against his, he looked ahead and felt relaxed that his family was here with him and they were not unprepared as he would have been.

It was dark for certain and the torches gave off very little light making the room look more ominous that it should have. The high benches were full of shadowy figures that were speaking lowly to each other until the door behind their party had closed with a resounding finality.

“You’re late,” said a cold voice.

“S-sorry –” Harry started.

“No he’s not. He received no notice or letter, had it not been for the front desk, my client wouldn’t have known at all,” Chalice said firmly, “Being barely a minute late due to a failure of communication is hardly a call for stating that he’s late.”

There was low murmuring that had an aura of surprise.

“And who are you?” asked the cold voice.

“Chalice Burming, of Burming & Burming, Potter’s legal representative,” she said just as coolly.

“And they are?” he asked with a sneer.

“They are his family,” she said nonchalantly.

“You brought muggles into this courtroom?” he asked dangerously, as the murmurs rose to whispers. “Yes and no, Lady Granger is a witch, whereas his immediate family is allowed to be here, sanctioned in clause 247, section C, paragraph 11,” she said unconcerned.

The whispers stopped. They had obviously thought that they would be dealing with an errant child and nothing more with such short notice and abrupt time change.

“As we understand it, Potter is an orphan and lives with his muggle relatives. Your party seems to be more than that, excluding our fellow witch.”

“Technically speaking, my client is an orphan as his biological parents are deceased. However due to a familial blood bond and acknowledgement and acceptance, The Duke and Duchess, his bond parents, are also here,” she said with a predatory smile.

The whispers rose again furiously as this was the first time any of them were hearing about it.

There was a grunt of discontent, “Please take your seat, Mister Potter. I apologize, shall we conjure a seat for you as well?”

“No, I’ll stand, thank you for the consideration.”

In the middle of the courtroom was a lone chair covered in chains. Chains that he knew would burst into life and bind whoever sat in the seat. He walked carefully to the intimidating seat and gingerly
sat in it, waiting with baited breath for it to cover him. The chains coiled around the chair like snakes, but they never bound him to the chair, for which he was thankful for. Even with his family here he still felt sick sitting in the seat and tried to distract himself by looking up at the seated Wizengamot members.

There were fifty members in all, each with plum colored robes and an elaborate silver ‘W’ on their left breast; one of them was the Minister himself. They were all staring down their noses at him, making him want to squirm, but he felt his lawyer lightly brush her hand over his shoulder reminding him he wasn’t alone.

“Very well,” he said, “The accused is present, so let us begin. Are you ready?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” Harry replied respectfully.

The young wizard noticed Percy Weasley sitting among them, but without the robes that signified the Wizengamot. His face was looking studiously at a parchment in his hand, with a quill poised. The redhead didn’t look once in his direction and Harry felt a pang of loss.

“Disciplinary hearing of the first of July into offenses committed under the Decree for Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery and the International Statue of Secrecy by Harry James Potter, resident of number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey.”

“I must interrupt, Minister. My client no longer lives at that address,” she said swiftly and firmly.

“I beg your pardon,” he asked as whispers sprung up again.

“My client no longer lives at that address in Surrey. His residence is number ninety-eight, Whittle Lane, Hampstead, London.”

Percy quickly wrote this down.

“Yes… well, that is now recorded, let us carry on. Interrogators: Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister of Magic; Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister. Court Scribe, Percy Ignatius Weasley –”

“Witness for the Defense, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore,” said a quiet voice from behind Harry.

“I mean no disrespect Chief Dumbledore, but I am the Witness for the Defense, Chalice Marjorie Burming. However it would be an honor to have you as my second in this case,” Chalice said benignly.

The lawyer was in her element and she was as swift and furious as a shark. Abagail was very pleased with her choice, she didn’t back down and refused to be run over. While Dumbledore seemed to be the reason of the change of time and location, they were obviously trying to circumvent his inclusion, they had it covered with or without him.

“Ah, Dumbledore. Yes. You – er – got our message that the time – and er… place – had been changed, then?”

“Yes. I must have missed it. I was simply lucky that I had been at the Ministry three hours early,” he said with a smile, ignoring Chalice.

Abagail raised an eyebrow at him. For someone who had been here for three hours, he certainly was late. It was almost like he wanted to swoop in at the last possible minute to give Harry the
reassurance that he would have needed had it not been for them. With practiced ease she was able to keep the sneer off her face.

“Yes well, I suppose we’ll need another seat? Weasley – if you could –”

“No to worry, not to worry,” Dumbledore said conjuring himself an elaborately cushioned and chintzy chair next to Harry.

Chalice swished her wand and moved the chair about a meter away.

“I apologize Chief Dumbledore, this is only so the court may see that neither of us are influencing my client. A precautionary,” she said.

“Of course, of course, thank you for thinking of it,” Dumbledore said with a mild frown.

A lawyer was not something he had planned for, and she was doing a fine job, so she was obviously not a green thumb, but well-seasoned. He pressed his fingertips together and looked at the Wizengamot with polite interest, as his mind was turning wheels about the inclusion of the lawyer and the others in the courtroom. He was surprised to see the Dursleys and Miss Granger, and what he assumed were her parents in the courtroom. He faintly remembered that they must have been related or some sort.

The Wizengamot was still whispering amongst themselves, some were shifting nervously. Fudge himself was shuffling the papers in front of him, trying to hide his own nervousness.

“Yes. Well then. The charges,” he grunted.

He pulled out a piece of parchment from his pile and took a deep, most likely calming, breath before he read from the parchment.

“The charges against the accused are as follows: That he did knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Ministry of Magic on a similar charge, produce a Patronus Charm in a muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a muggle, on June thirtieth at twenty-three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offense under paragraph C of the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, also under section thirteen of the International Confederation of Wizards’ Statue of Secrecy.”

“You are Harry James Potter of… number ninety-eight, Whittle Lane, Hampstead, London?”

“Yes.”

“You received an official warning from the Ministry for using illegal magic three years ago, did you not?”

“Yes, but –”

Chalice placed her hand calmly on Harry’s shoulder, letting the anger flow out of him.

He had a legal representative that had so far put the Wizengamot in front of him in their place, so he would take her cues.

“And yes you conjured a Patronus on the night of June thirtieth?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Knowing that you are not permitted to perform magic outside of school while you are under the age
“of seventeen,”

“No, sir.”

“N-no?” the Minister stumbled, “… Knowing that you were in an area full of muggles?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Fully aware that you were in close proximity of a muggle at the time?”

“Family, sir, but yes,” Harry answered, remembering how Chalice kept mentioning that they were amongst family when they first mentioned muggles.

The witch with the monocle on the Minister’s left, Amelia Bones, cut across the room with a booming voice that demanded respect.

“You produced a fully-fledged Patronus?”

“Yes, ma’am,”

“A corporeal Patronus?”

“I’m sorry, a what?”

“Your Patronus has a clearly defined form? I mean to say it’s not smoke or vapor?”

“Yes, ma’am. It’s a stag, it’s always a stag,” Harry answered a little self-consciously.

“Always?” she asked, “You’ve performed the charm before now?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Harry answered a bit shyly.

“And you are fifteen years old?”

“Y-yes, ma’am.”

“You learned this at school?”

“Yes, ma’am. Professor Lupin taught me in my third year, because –”

“Impressive,” she cut across him staring down at him with a twinkle in her eye, “a true Patronus at that age… very impressive indeed,” she said ominously but with a small smile.

Some with the wizards and witches around her were muttering amongst themselves again, this time some of them were nodding or shaking their heads.

“It’s not a question of how impressive the magic was,” Cornelius said testily, “But that fact that he performed said magic in front of a muggle!”

Those who had been shaking their heads were now frowning and nodding in agreement. Even Percy was nodding in agreement.

“Family, Minister. Don’t forget the muggle was family.”

Fudge grunted, “Yes… well…”

“I did it to protect him from dementors,” Harry said firmly taking advantage of the Minister’s lull,
“There were two dementors and one was about to kiss my cousin. I had to do something.”

Silence fell to Harry’s announcement.

“Dementors?” Madam Bones asked first, her eyebrow were raised high and it seemed to make her monocle teem a bit off her face, making it close to falling.

“What do you mean by that, boy?”

“There were two dementors that came after me and my cousin down an alleyway. We didn’t know what was happening at first, because everything went dark and it was silent. There were no sounds of life anywhere, and it was very very dark, like we were blind. Then I felt the cold, and my cousin can’t see them, but he felt them. Had I not known what they felt like before we both would have been kissed. I managed to summon my Patronus to save us, it rammed its horns into both of them and sent them flying in the air. I was almost too late when it was close to my cousin, Dudley. He’s here today. Since he couldn’t see them he ran, but I told him to keep his mouth shut. Thankfully he listened since he tripped and the dementor got hold of him. The dementor started to move his arms away from his face when I sent my Patronus to get the dementor,” Harry answered looking Amelia in the eyes.

“Ah, I thought we’d be hearing something like this,” Cornelius said, as though inviting the rest of his peers in on a joke.

“Dementors in Little Whinging?” Amelia asked in surprise, “I don’t understand –”

“Don’t you, Amelia? Of course he’s lying! He –”

“Minister before you finish that thought, there is a reason we are here for this hearing. Should you not believe in him, I suggest you put him under vertiserum. It is at your disposal, and it is a substance controlled by the ministry for such cases as this. Before you simply write off my client, at least give him the opportunity to subject himself to the potion to tell you nothing but the truth. Unless you’re uninterested and plan to make this hearing in a reputable courtroom, nothing but an example of kangaroo court,” she said sharply.

Amelia looked through her monocle at Chalice, “Indeed, Minister. Her idea has merit.”

“Why would we waste such an important expensive potion on this farce!?” Fudge exclaimed.

“Minister Fudge, I’m sure if you have any concerns as to the expense of three drops of such a potion, my client would be more than willing to pay the Ministry a fee for such use of the resource. We are having this hearing to hear the truth, not simply what you want to hear.”

“I must agree with her Cornelius, that’s what a hearing is all about,” Albus said gently with a twinkle in his eye.

“I agree with them Minister. If your concern is due to our resources, and they are willing to reimburse us for the use, we shouldn’t have any qualms accepting their alternative. It would get us to the bottom of this quickly,” Amelia said with finality.

The Minister’s face puckered as though he had tasted something sour. If it had just been Dumbledore he would have been using this to his own gains and he would have been able to reroute this to how he expected, especially backed up by so many others against him. If it wasn’t for that damned lawyer, who he would see if he could put on retainer for himself after this, he was sure things would be going much more smoothly.
“To agree to their alternative would suggest that there were indeed two dementors in Little Whinging. They are under the order of the Ministry! There is no way that they would be there by mere coincidence!”

“Indeed, Minister. Unless they’re under the orders of someone other than the Ministry of Magic,” Albus piped in with a smile, “Of which I’ve already given you my views on this matter.”

“Yes, you have,” said Fudge with a sneer.

“Hem, hem,” said a girlish voice.

There they saw a large fat woman, who could give Vernon a run for his money on who was larger. Her neck was large and bulging in a faux reminder of a pale frog croaking. She was squat and broad, with a flabby face to go with her neck. A very wide and fat mouth, that looked like it had been stretched to fit her wide face. Her eyes were large and round, and looked as though they were slightly bulging. She had a little black bow on the top of her head, full of short brown curls that reminded them of a fly she planned to eat for later.

“The Chair recognizes Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister,” Fudge said, looking much more appealing.

The witch had a high girlish, fluttery voice, that didn’t fit her appearance.

“I’m sure I must have misunderstood you, Professor Dumbledore,” she said with a simper that didn’t match her cold dark eyes, “So silly of me,” she said with an obvious fake laugh that reminded them of an annoying silver bell that belonged at a hotel.

“But it sounded for a moment that you were suggesting that the Ministry of Magic order an attack on this boy!”

She laughed louder, her silvery laugh resounding in the courtroom, a few other members of the Wizengamot laughed with her, but it was obvious they were also faking an few of them were uncomfortable doing so.

“If it is true that dementors attacked two boys, and they are only taking orders from the Ministry of Magic, unlike what I was suggesting, then it simply follows logic that the Ministry must have ordered –”

“Minister, we’re getting off point. Regardless of the matter of why there were dementors in Little Whinging we are here for this hearing on my client’s use of magic in front of a muggle, of which he is related. Anything else I’m sure can be spoken of at a different time and place,” Chalice said firmly bringing attention back to the matter at hand.

Chalice refused to let this hearing turn into a kangaroo court to run other political matters under the appearance of a hearing with Harry Potter’s name on the file. If Dumbledore and Fudge wanted it scribed they could hold a Wizengamot hearing and do so there instead of under the guise and file of Harry Potter. Potter didn’t do anything other than act in self-defense and Abagail had made it clear that she didn’t want him to be used as a political pawn.

Madam Bones readjusted her monocle and agreed with the lawyer’s tactics. She was aware of the political movements happening, more so since Pettigrew was to have his own hearing today, and here were these two grown men having words that would be written down forever in their files, under the name of Harry Potter. Words that had no place in this hearing.

Fudge blushed and bumbled, having expected the political clash with Dumbledore over his golden
boy, but was not expecting a professional to keep things crisp under her watch.

Amelia took over as her colleague was trying to pull himself together.

“The Chair accepts your request of vertiserum and you will not be charged for reimbursement. Marone, if you would please,” Amelia said.

A wizard off to the side in the shadows close to Percy brought forth a clear potion.

“Miss Burming, as Mister Potter is underage by magical core standards, and it is not recommended by potion masters for a witch or wizard to be under a full three drops of this potion, please observe and bear witness to the administration of the vertiserum. Mister Potter is to receive only two drops.”

“Yes, Madam Bones, thank you,” Chalice said as she moved and stood close to the wizard with the powerful substance.

The wizard in question was extremely careful, as Chalice made him quite nervous. To be sure that he only gave Harry Potter two drops and nothing more, he made sure to measure it over the vial itself that the dropper only held the desired amount. Then with a careful hand he moved the dropper over to Potter,

“Mister Potter, I am going to place two drops on your tongue. If you would please?” he said gently.

Harry nodded and opened his mouth, sticking his tongue out. Chalice watched carefully as the drops were administered and Harry’s eyes glazed over.

“The drops have been administered to the accused,” the wizard known as Marone announced, before taking his place back amongst the shadows.

“What is your name, boy?” Amelia asked, taking over.

“Harry James Potter,” he answered with a bland face and a voice to match.

“When were you born?”

“July, thirty-first, 1980”

“Very good. Mister Potter, did you use a Patronus Charm on June thirtieth, in front of a muggle?”

“Yes.”

“For what reason?”

“They came after us. One tried to kiss my cousin. I reacted to save him.”

“So you used magic, in front of a muggle, who is your family, in self-defense?”

“Yes.”

“Were you aware that you were performing Underage Magic?”

“No.”

“No? Why is that Mister Potter? You are under the age of seventeen, which makes you underage.”

“The Goblet of Fire was for adult witches and wizards. No one under the age of seventeen was
allowed to compete. It spit my name out. Under magical binding contract it made me an adult wizard, even though I’m under seventeen.”

There was a mass burst of whispers in the Wizengamot. Dumbledore’s eyes widened marginally in shock, although he tried to play it off by making his eyes twinkle more than usual. He had hoped that little tidbit would fly under the boy’s radar under all the stress and pressure he was under.

“What about the Hover Charm you used three years ago!?” Fudge interrupted.

“I didn’t. It was a house-elf that belonged to the Malfoys,” Harry said in the same monotone that the advertiserum caused.

“A house-elf in a muggle home!? HE’S DELUSIONAL!”

“The house-elf in question is currently employed at Hogwarts. I can summon him here if you’d like, Cornelius,” Dumbledore said.

“I – I don’t have time to listen to house-elves,” Fudge ground out with a glare, “H-He blew up his aunt for Merlin’s sake!”

“Minister, accidental magic still happens when a young witch or wizard is overcome by extreme emotional distress. Besides of which, he was not accused or charged at the time, as it’s been years since the incident he is not to be held accountable,” Chalice said unamused.

“And I haven’t even gotten to what he gets up to at school –”

“ – but as the Ministry has no authority to punish Hogwarts students for misdemeanors while they’re at school, his behavior is irrelevant to this case,” Dumbledore said smoothly.

“Oh! Not our business what he does at school? You think so!?” Fudge yelled.

“Minister, the Ministry does not have the power to expel Hogwarts students, or any student for that matter, nor confiscate wands until the charges have been successfully proven. In your haste to confiscate my client’s wand and expel him from Hogwarts, you have overlooked a few laws that were made to protect British wizarding citizens. Should this matter have happened to, excuse the example ma’am, Madam Bones’ niece, I would hope that you have remembered those laws,” she said nonchalantly, “Regardless of my client’s status in our society, he is still a citizen, like the rest of us.”

“However, it seems excessive to hold a full criminal trial to deal with a matter of what was supposed to be underage magic. Magic that was performed in front of family, which is acceptable under Decree Agreeable Home Magic, section 11, clause B, 1412,” Chalice said, inspecting her wand.

A few members shifted uncomfortably in their chairs. Fudge looked like he had been punched in the face whereas his Undersecretary had a cold blank look upon her face, but murder in her eyes.

“There is no law that I am aware of that says it is the court’s job to punish Harry for every bit of magic he has performed. He has been charged with a specific offense, has presented his defense, and awaits your verdict,” Dumbledore said with a grandfatherly smile.

Chalice brushed Harry’s shoulder lightly to reassure him, even though he was under the truth serum’s effects. She knew that a witch or wizard could still feel, even if it felt like they were confounded into a sluggish state, some of them felt panic under the effects and couldn’t express it until after.
“Those in favor of clearing the accused of all charges?” Madam Bones called loudly.

More than half of the Wizengamot rose their hands in favor of clearing said charges. By this point the potion started to wear off and Harry’s heartbeat increased again, this time with hope.

“Those in favor of conviction?” she asked.

Fudge raised his hand, as did that Umbridge witch and a few others. Two stood out, one had a heavily bristled mustache and the other was a frizzy haired witch.

The Minister looked like he had swallowed something extremely distasteful, “Very well… cleared of all charged.”

“Excellent! Well I must be getting along. Good day to you all,” he said and left as quickly as he could without looking like he was running away. He didn’t look at Harry once throughout the whole ordeal. Abagail’s eyes followed the elderly wizard predatorily. He had his sights on her son, and she would be damned if he got him.

The Wizengamot started to stand up and gather their belongings for the next trial, which clearly wouldn’t take place here, but another courtroom.

“Madam Bones,” Abagail called out, “It was, Bones, wasn’t it?” she spoke to the auburn witch.

“Yes, how may I help you…?”

“Duchess Abagail Granger,” she smiled politely.

“How may I help you Duchess Granger?”

“What courtroom is Pettigrew’s trial being held in? We would like to attend as he was the reason why my son’s parents were killed, and we would like to see justice,” she said with a flinty look in her eyes.

Amelia stared at the woman with mild surprise, “Courtroom 44.”

“Why are you telling that muggle woman, Amelia!” Umbridge screeched.

“Duchess Granger, would like to see justice. Members of the royal family have always been included in the Statue of Secrecy, as we are also citizens of the British Empire, or did you forget that Dolores?” Amelia said loudly, her voice booming in the room, covering over every conversation that may or may not have been occurring.

Umbridge flushed a horrid shade of puce, “It must have slipped my mind as they haven’t been involved in some time,” she simpered.

“Indeed. Try not to forget in the future, it could get you into trouble,” Amelia said, sweeping past the fat woman.

Severus was making himself comfortable in courtroom 44, sitting in the back. He knew it was bound to be crowded, hopefully not more than Black’s. He wanted to see justice of his own. The downfall of Lily would be sitting with that rat bastard and he hoped that the poor excuse of a wizard was given the kiss. As he was already cleared he hoped that he wouldn’t be called to be a witness since he did not know that Pettigrew was also a spy for the Dark Lord.
Even with him being resurrected, he still wanted to see Pettigrew get his due. Should the Dark Lord ask however, he could say that he was merely watching the proceedings to bring him news, since he didn’t want to out himself just yet. As the term was out for the summer, he could claim to be useful in this matter, as he watched a ‘fellow brother’s’ trial.

He seriously hoped he would be kissed instead of just sent to Azkaban. If he was sent to the guarded prison he knew that the Dark Lord would just break him out since he had his uses. He really fucking hoped not.
Severus sat silently, glowering at those who thought it would be a good idea to sit near him. He had originally intended to be as obscure as possible, but when one of the witches who wanted to sit near him had an extremely overpowering perfume that made his nose hairs burn he decided he’d rather sit alone and stand out than have to deal with that. He had to deal with horrid and questionable smells when around the Dark Lord, when dealing with botched potions from the dunderheads that were supposed to be students, and from students’ (or Peeves’s) pranks, usually in the form of dung bombs.

The room was filling up quickly and the Wizengamot finally seemed to be filing in and seating themselves. He tried to keep his glare at a minimum when looking at them as they were considered important people in their community. Half of them were as stupid and bigoted as they looked whereas the other half were actual respectable members of society. Amelia Bones was one of them, as was Augusta Longbottom. Lucius was his friend, so he knew he was biased in that matter, but even his prejudiced friend possessed some intellect. There were perhaps fifteen or so on the board that were only there because they inherited the seat. Some of them he grew up with, thankfully none he taught… yet.

Then he saw someone come close to his chosen seating area. He had managed to scare away everyone who might have thought to sit next to him, and even those in front of him. He turned to glower at these people as well before he smelled her. Working on her physical fitness, he knew what she smelled like… lavender and jasmine.

Petunia and her family sat in front of him, which he decided was better than next to him. There was a witch who passed him, followed by what could only be Miss Granger’s parents and Potter. He inhaled her scent discreetly as she sat next to him.

“Good morning, sir,” Hermione said to him, her heart hammering in her chest.

“Miss Granger,” he nodded.

He was surprised at the respect she had shown him, more so by acknowledging him in public. No one else had done so that morning, admittedly due to his own actions, but he repaid the respect in kind. Potter ignored him and he would ignore Potter. Better than baiting and antagonizing each other.

They were not here for pleasantries… well… not with each other at least. They were here for the hopeful pleasantry of justice being dealt to one who most deserved it.

Hermione looked at her professor in the corner of her eyes. He had obviously been scowling and scaring away the other witches and wizards, so why had he allowed them to sit next to him? Had Harry’s presence startled him? As far as the wizarding world was concerned Harry was a bit of a recluse, hiding away at home during the summer, to make a public appearance would seem startling for an active member, even one such as Professor Snape.

“I hope you don’t mind us sitting near you. All the other seats are full and it would be crude to stand,” she said lowly.

She didn’t turn to look at him, but knew that he would be able to hear her. It had taken her less than a minute to realize the repercussions he might face being seated so close to her brother in public. She knew that some of the members of the Wizengamot were Death Eaters, and they had seen her professor. It would stand out to those members that one of their own was sitting so close to someone whose trial just pulled the proverbial rug from under them.
Severus didn’t know what to say and merely nodded.

The murmurs amongst the Wizengamot started to settle as the doors burst open with cogency. The whole courtroom quieted down as four aurors dragged Pettigrew, heavily chained with what could only be special cuffs. They were on his hands and feet with a slight glow to alert that the wards were in the middle of working.

The potions master sneered at the cowardice of the rat. Even now, in front of more than fifty members of their society he was trying to escape. There was an auror on each side of the pathetic wizard, as well as one in front, and one behind. Once they reached the middle of the room, they shoved him into the chair of the accused. The chains slithered and bound the rat animagus to the appliance.

His whimpers were loud in the hushed silence of the body that surrounded him.

There was a low growl next to him, he felt it more than he heard it. Severus looked over and almost lost balance looking at an angry grim. It took him a moment to recover. He knew Black was going to be here. Why the mutt had to sit next to him was beyond him! However he did agree with the mutt’s animosity when it came to the rat.

He should have known better, for all that he felt that Black was stupid, he knew how to use his brain when he wanted to.

“Peter Pettigrew, you have been brought here in front of the Council of Magical Law to answer to charges relating to the activities of Death Eaters, the death of twelve muggles, blatant use of magic in a muggle area, framing ex-auror Sirius Black for your crimes, who was an auror at the time, and being an unregistered animagus,” Amelia said, “We have evidence against you, and we are about to reach a verdict. Do you have anything to add to your testimony before we pronounce judgement?”

“I-it wasn’t my fault! H-he-who-must-not-be-named made me! I was a good and l-loyal friend. I only left Sirius behind because he was simply mad with grief. I was so scared that I had a burst of a-accidental magic, you see? Then I apparated away and I splinched my finger off!”

Amelia glared at the wizard over her monocle.

“An innocent man does not go into hiding for fourteen years, after his supposed assailant is sent to Azkaban. We have received on good word that your silver hand was a gift from You-Know-Who for your service,” she said sharply, “As these are such serious claims and your story not withholding you will be forced to take three drops of vertiserum.”

“Lucius, you believe me don’t you? Black has always been mad,” he whimpered, “Most of that family has been known to go mad.”

“The Ancient and Most Noble House of Black is a member of the Sacred Twenty-Eight. To throw a reputable family name and drag it through the mud in a most shameful manner is reprehensible,” Malfoy drawled.

Hurried whispers of agreement spread throughout the council.

“Marone, please administer three drops to the accused,” she said steely.

Pettigrew started to whimper and grovel for the council to change their mind.

“I’m surprised the Minister isn’t talking much like he did at Harry’s hearing,” Hermione said lowly to the dark man next to her.
Severus was glad for the low lighting to cover his initial surprise. His heartbeat increased slightly before he was able to calm himself down.

“He wasn’t Minister when most of the charges took place. Amelia Bones was at least working in the Ministry at the time. As she’s head of DMLE now he’s more than happy to let her take charge of this trial. With so many people and press around it would behoove him to stay quiet lest he be seen as taking a side. With Potter it was more to do with the Headmaster rather than Potter himself,” Severus explained softly.

Hermione nodded letting him know that she heard him. Her face flushed with a warmth at his voice. It was sensual as always, but he spoke so softly that she could feel it more than she could hear it. It sent a pleasant shiver down her spine.

“What is your name?” her voice boomed in the hushed quiet of the room.

“Peter Cain Pettigrew.”

“When were you born?”

“April 4th, 1960”

“What is your animagus form?”

“A brown rat.”

“How long have you been an animagus?”

“Since I was fourteen.”

“Are you a Death Eater?”

“Yes, I always have been since the first war.”

A mass of whispers broke out.

“Were you under influence through an unforgivable?”

“No.”

“Did you frame Sirius Black for the murder of twelves muggles, yourself, and the subsequent deaths of James and Lily Potter?”

“Yes.”

“How? How were you able to betray the Potters?” Augusta Longbottom asked firmly.

Silence reigned in the courtroom.

“I was their secret keeper. I convinced them to change it from Black since he was too obvious and too dangerous since he was an auror, and could die at any moment on the field. I convinced them to keep it a secret from Dumbledore to make it a more secure secret. No one would suspect me. I gave their location to the Dark Lord the same night.”

“Is You-Know-Who back?” she asked.

“Yes. The resurrection ritual was successful,” he said monotone.
Fudge sputtered in his seat.

“Did you play any part in this ritual?” Amelia asked.

“Yes. I performed the ritual with the Dark Lord’s directions. I brewed the potion and gave my hand as part of the sacrifice.”

“And your silver hand?”

“It was a gift for being loyal to him. For sacrificing my flesh, willingly given.”

“We have heard enough,” Amelia said, a sneer blossoming on her face.

“Peter Pettigrew you are guilty on all charges. A minimum of 5 years for being an unregistered animagus, in your case, 15. Black spent 12 years incarcerated before he escaped. A minimum of 30 years for his incarceration and another 10 for framing an auror. 5 years for almost exposing us to muggles. 20 years for the death of twelve muggles. 30 years for the subsequent deaths of the Potters. One lifetime sentence for being a Death Eater and another lifetime sentence for performing a dark ritual and successfully resurrecting You-Know-Who and by doing so putting the wizarding community’s safety in jeopardy!”

“We will now put your sentence to a vote,” she sneered.

“All those in favor of Peter Pettigrew serving out his sentence in Azkaban?”

A large number of hands rose swiftly. Severus noticed that a majority were either supporters or Death Eaters.

“Those in favor of Peter Pettigrew receiving the Dementor’s kiss?” she hissed out the last part.

A large number of hands rose steadily, Amelia’s included. There were two more hands for the kiss than a sentencing.

“Peter Pettigrew, you are hereby sentenced to receive the Dementor’s kiss. Post haste,” she growled out.

Sirius and Severus sneered at the same time at the rat. Receiving the kiss was something he deserved, but it still felt like he was getting off too easy.

A chill washed over the room as two dementors were released from a cage and sent to glide down to Pettigrew who was still chained to the chair.

His eyes started to gain some life back into them, only to quickly give way to fear. He was whimpering and had pissed himself as a dementor stroked his face in what parodied a loving manner. The other floated behind him, sucking the happiness away from him. They danced around him, each taking turns draining the happiness from him. Pettigrew cried and groaned loudly, reminding Harry and Hermione of the graveyard. Finally the first one who stroked his cheek brought its face in close to his, sucking his soul out of his body. A small bright grayish light floated from his mouth past his horrendous yellowed rat looking teeth. Everyone could see his soul laid bare before the dementor, including the Dursleys even though Vernon and Dudley couldn’t see the dementors themselves.

Finally the dementor placed its mouth over Pettigrew’s soul, pressed its mouth against his, and devoured his soul in the courtroom.

After they feasted the dementors drifted to the cage they were in before, temporarily satisfied and one
There was a moment of silence, some in grim satisfaction, others in a small state of shock. They weren’t sure what to do afterwards. Sirius turned around and jumped over the bench to sneak out of the courtroom to go to his own trial, satisfied at knowing first hand that Peter was properly dealt with.

He should have died instead of betraying them. Now he had been given a fate worse than death. It was only fitting.

“We are going to watch Sirius’s trial next. Would you like to accompany us, sir?” Hermione asked quietly, standing up.

Severus looked up at the young witch, ignoring the rest of her party. Her hazel eyes saw nothing but him at that moment. He had originally planned to not attend and to stay clear. However… However Miss Granger had asked for his company. He should say no, but her jasmine and lavender infused scent…

“I would appreciate that, thank you Miss Granger,” Severus said.

“It’s Lady Granger, Severus,” said a smooth voice behind him.

“Lucius, what a surprise. I thought you’d be heading to Black’s trial next.” Severus stated, the question unsaid.

The blond nodded, “Indeed. I won’t be a moment longer. Please be sure to properly escort Lady Granger, Severus. The Duke is escorting the Duchess, and it would be unseemly for Lord Potter to escort his… sister. They are our esteemed guests. As you do not work in the Ministry I ask as a friend that you escort our esteemed guest as their lawyer guides them to the proper courtroom.”

Severus nodded, “Of course old friend. How careless of me,” he replied standing up.

With that the blond aristocrat took his leave.

“Mi- Lady Granger, I appreciate and accept your invitation. Would you please allow me to escort you to the next courtroom?”

The dark potions master extended his arm for her.

Hermione blushed, “Yes, sir. That would be most generous of you,” she said as she gently took his arm.

“Professor Snape, thank you for escorting my daughter properly,” her father said.

Severus looked up and saw the cool look that his blond friend wore often. It was a polite cool curiousness that belied their interest and approval. Severus felt his cheeks burn, although he was able to compose himself. He was in his thirties, what did he care about the approval of Miss Granger’s father?
The courtroom was further into the ministry than Pettigrew’s but not as deep as Harry’s. It was a smaller courtroom and Sirius had snuck in before the rest of the body arrived. Shifting from grim to man he seated himself in the chair and was pleased that the chains decided that he didn’t need to be restrained.

Black already knew that the Minister had most likely thrown a fit about him receiving a trial to begin with, however he wasn’t going to throw his chance at freedom away. He would be able to walk down the street, buy things, buy food, and not have to worry about being a fugitive! They were all things worth having his name cleared for. Then there was Harry, he would be able to be there for Harry, in public.

If he didn’t want to do it for himself, and he very much did want it for himself, he would have done it for his godson. Now that Pettigrew was essentially a husk that wouldn’t die right away, he wasn’t at peace… but he was less crazed. He wasn’t as angry. However being locked up and having your frustrations being pent up for over a decade, one act wasn’t going to simply wash all that rage away. Never mind the effect of being surrounded by dementors all day, every day, every night, without break or holiday.

He hoped he would be able to portray a better frame of mind than what it probably was. Sirius had taken the time to find a place to shower, and at least transfigure his clothes to be somewhat acceptable. His robes were still faded, but they weren’t tattered and ratty. The dingy grey was less dingy, but still a faded warm gray, as though he had bought them that way. They weren’t pressed, but they weren’t wrinkled either. His hair was washed, but didn’t have the sheen that belonged to healthy hair, it had strands of gray and dead ends. He was grateful that his hair had at least survived from being turned into one giant dreadlock. His facial hair he at least tried to trim neatly with his wand, but decided that a dark shadow didn’t look so bad when he realized his wand hand wasn’t steady enough for such a close shave.

What he couldn’t see was the haunted gaunt look that lingered in his bright grey eyes. A look that would stay with him for years to come.

The Wizengamot filed in and took their seats, whispering amongst each other. The Minister looked as though he has sucked on something particularly sour. Bones looked as though she was ready to look death in the face and make a deal with it. Malfoy looked at him with disinterest, however Black noticed it wasn’t down his nose that was typical of the aristocrat wizard.

Not being able to help himself Sirius looked to see who decided to come see his trial. He was surprised and pleased to see Harry in the stands with Hermione and what was surprisingly her family. He was more surprised to see the Dursleys, of whom he had the pleasure of meeting once, plus what had to be their son. They looked nervous, but not outright scared or hostile. Next to Hermione though was Snape. He wanted to sneer at the wizard, but thought better of it. He and Snape were of the same opinion at Pettigrew’s trial and he didn’t make a fuss when he noticed he was sitting next to him. Plus he was sitting with his godson and wasn’t looking at him with a foul hatred that he always looked at him and James with...

At least he was no longer atoning for the sins of his father. As much as he wanted to think more on it, he had his own issues to think about at the moment. One of them being this trial.

He had despised growing up a ‘proper’ pureblood. Being a free spirit growing up in a strict environment was torture. The lessons were horrid, the punishments for not behaving or responding
properly were worse. His father turned a blind eye to most of it, but his mother had keen eye upon him as much as she could. This moment however, seated in this courtroom, he was glad for the lessons. He appreciated them. He knew if he acted accordingly, he would be able to walk out a free man, respected by those present (or at least publicly), and with more than he had before he was shoved into hell on an island.

The Grangers and their party made sure to sit in the front row of the courtroom. Severus was polite and just as formal as the rest of them. He fit in seamlessly and Hermione’s heart beat erratically the whole time. She hoped beyond hope that he couldn’t hear or feel it. This was the most contact they ever had aside from light sparring.

He was firm and warm. He smelled like sandalwood with a hint of orange. It was surprising but very pleasant to the nose. His hair shined, but had bounce in it that was normally absent while at school. Hermione guessed it had to do with all the potion fumes, but she wasn’t entirely sure.

They had all managed to seat themselves in the front row, but were pressed against each other. Not uncomfortably so, just enough to be aware of the persons next to them. The potions master waited until Hermione was seated before sitting next to her. He sat between Hermione and her mother, both crossed their ankles and tucked their feet neatly under them, but leaning a bit to their right. Harry was next to her, and next to him was their lawyer.

“Professor, who was the blond fellow?” Leeroy asked him.

The Duke was sure he knew who it was, or at least who his son was, but wanted to be sure.

Severus was startled for a fraction of a second before he answered, “That was Lucius Malfoy.”

“Is he related to Draco Malfoy?” he asked calmly.

“Yes,” Severus nodded slowly, “Draco is his son.”

Leeroy made a small sound and nodded, leaving it at that.

Severus prevented himself from looking at the Duke, concerned and curious about the line of questioning. It was short and might have been nothing, the questions themselves were innocent enough, but he had been around politics long enough to know that there was a slim chance of that.

“Sirius Black, your presence has been requested today for a trial you were due thirteen years ago. You were to be held accountable for the deaths of James and Lily Potter, twelve muggles, and Peter Pettigrew. However, recent evidence proves without a doubt that none of those deaths were your fault, and one of those victims was still alive. As you were unjustly imprisoned in Azkaban for twelve years before escaping we, at the Ministry, feel we owe you a restitution for your trouble. We will not offer you a petty apology as we on the board were not in the places we are today. We cannot apologize for others’ actions, but we can do our best to make amends,” Amelia said, “and right those wrongs. Do you have anything to say Black?”

Fudge was red in the face, flustered, but managed to keep his mouth shut. He agreed with Amelia that with the reveal of Pettigrew being found alive and guilty, Black’s incarceration would make the Ministry look bad, and thus him look bad. Even while knowing that Black was an innocent man, he
still somehow felt *wronged* that the wizard would be walking free. Amelia *was* doing an excellent job covering their asses though.

Sirius was surprised that he didn’t have to present so much as a defense for his trial, but act accordingly. He could feel the ghost pain his mother would have caused him otherwise, alerting him that this was important. He could always feel it before it happened. A wicked harpy she could be, but she beat the lessons into him. He hoped she rolled in her grave with the knowledge that she was helping him, especially since she blasted him off the family tree.

“No, I think that about covers it, Madam Bones. I thank you and the Wizengamot for this long awaited trial and clearance. While I understand it is of no fault of those present; damage was done to my name, my livelihood, most likely my vaults, my wand, and my homes. I am considered a convict, even though I am a non-convicted convict, the people will not see that for a few decades to come.”

The Wizengamot stirred in their seats, especially those of the older families. They understood the travesty that had befallen one of The Sacred Twenty-Eight and that it would take a while for his name to be clear once more. There were those of their community that were not always up to date and that Black would face hardships due to the stain that was on his name and image.

“No, if you would allow me, I would like to personally invest an undetermined amount of charitable galleons to help with these issues,” Lucius said, silkily.

Fudge’s face lose some of the redness seeing that his major backer was giving Black support. As a politician he knew it was best to agree with your best backer.

“The Ministry would like to offer you your position as an auror back, should you want it,” Fudge said, trying to appear generous and humble at the same time.

Umbridge simpered at Cornelius with a trembling bottom lip and what seemed to be a smile.

“That is most generous of you, Malfoy, Minister. I would very much appreciate such generous offers. I would like my job back, I worked very hard to get it. Only on the merit that I go back through training considering that I might be… rusty,” he tried to joke, “As for your monetary assistance it is appreciated, and very generous, but I couldn’t. If your wife would assist me in managing my homes however, that would be appreciated. I remember Cissy had a way with décor, and I have to admit I’m pants at it.”

Lucius raised an eyebrow at the gaunt man, “As you were my wife’s favorite cousin, I will see what we can arrange in private.”

“Splendid,” Sirius said with a tight smile.

“In terms of your vaults, they were to be frozen, however there was never any finality. Should you find anything amiss in your statements we will do all we can to rectify that,” Amelia said mildly, although her voice still boomed.

‘*If the Ministry can’t, I know the goblins most definitely will,*’ Sirius growled in the back of his head.

“I very much appreciate that. I would however also like for it to be released in the press, both wizarding and muggle, that I am innocent. I have had enough of being a wanted wizard... a wanted man. Being innocent I would like to walk down the street without having to worry about having aurors or the bobby called on me. Granted as an auror it would simply waste precious time in the department over what are more pressing manners,” he said with a nod and a slight smile.

Those who worked in the ministry nodded, pleased at hearing this. They were pleased that he was
already worried about what would be his department, in a way that they considered efficient thinking. It was good work ethic, especially for one who would be responsible for protecting the wizarding community.

Severus however felt the corner of his lip twitch up before he regained control of his face again. He could see right through Black. He dealt with Slytherin children a majority of the year, most of them from pureblood families. All that he was doing was giving them the proper lip service that a ‘respected’ member of society was expected to give. It was frankly quite hilarious to the potions master.

“Of course,” Amelia said surprised, as though there was never a question of the matter.

In spite of what Amelia said Sirius saw Fudge flush and fidget in his seat. They were obviously on two separate pages, if not working from separate books altogether. Of course he held his tongue and nodded with a polite smile.

The rest of the proceedings was polite talk and agreements on what would be done to help Sirius get back on his feet. Some members of the Sacred Twenty-Eight were pleased with the development that was backed by Malfoy’s blatant support.

“Sirius Black you are hereby cleared of all false charges and will be given restitution for the gaffe of your wrongful incarceration; as well as autonomous care at St Mungos until you are hale from your constant exposure to dementors.”

Sirius’s eyes twinkled at that.

“You are too kind. I would like to thank you, the Wizengamot, and the Minister for this provisional legal proceeding,” he said with a grin.

“It is your right,” Amelia said, her face less severe, and a smile in her eyes.

Harry gripped his pants tightly throughout most of the Sirius’s trial, trying not to get his hopes up too high. His poor experiences with the Ministry had left him worried where they were concerned even if it started out well. When they were talking about his restitutions he couldn’t help it and reached over to hold his new mum’s hand, which she took firmly and gave him the solidity that he needed. He would have rather hold Hermione’s hand, but she was two people away. Their mum however had done a lot to get him to be part of their family and he appreciated all of it, even if it hadn’t all hit him yet. Her touch was like Hermione’s just not as strong. He felt better… after all his sister and mum were with him.

When it ended he grinned so hard that it hurt. Padfoot was officially free! He was given back his job and was going to receive the health care Hermione insisted he needed. They could hang out and do family things together! He could get to know him better. Find out more about his birth mum and dad. Padfoot was free to live his life. Settle down, and have his own ‘pups’ if he wanted.

Sirius stood and made his way over to his godson.

“Well, Pup? I’m a free wizard now. How about we go celebrate after I stop by Ollivanders’?” He suggested with a grin.
Harry smiled before looking remembering that his family was there and they should be included too. He looked over with a smile and his eyes green sparkled.

Severus’s heart skipped a beat seeing his best friend’s eyes sparkle again. They were still in the face of the boy, but they looked exactly like hers. Her eyes sparkled the same way when they first boarded the Hogwarts Express. They were brilliant. His heart clenched at the memory. The longing for his lost friend filled his whole being, and it hurt.

He wanted to sneer and say something, but felt Miss Granger lean over him slightly, her shoulder lightly brushing against his chest. Her scent filled his nose and his heart unclenched, the longing didn’t go away completely, but it was a dull thrum.

“I think it would be nice, mum. We could go to Fortescue’s ice cream parlour,” she said warmly.

Abagail smiled at both of her children. They came because Sirius was important to them, it would be nice.

“I think that’s a wonderful idea. But I do think it would be best to make it a rain date, for tomorrow,” she said with a small smile.

Both teenager’s and Sirius’s face fell at the ‘but’. Before anyone else could get a word out she continued.

“We should wait until the Prophet is released stating that Mr. Black is free. We wouldn’t want to cause pandemonium over a simple misunderstanding. Imagine the stray hexes people would fling in what they would think is self-defense. At least when it’s released the public will know, and those who don’t, will be told by their friends and neighbors,” she explained.

Hermione nodded, understanding her mother’s logic, and Harry agreed after thinking about it. He wanted to go out with his godfather, but he also didn’t want to be in the thick of it over a misunderstanding.

Sirius looked sad, but with the haunted look in his eyes, he looked miserable. However, even with his childish ways he understood the grown woman’s thinking. It was no wonder where Hermione got it from.

“I can see where you got your brains from, Kitten,” he winked at Hermione, trying to liven things up.

Hermione blushed.

If she didn’t know better she would think that he was flirting with her. She had never been called anything other than her given name or a derogatory term. It was startling since it was a first for her.

Severus noticed the blush that bloomed on her face at the endearment and felt himself burn slightly with jealousy. On the bright side, he was no longer sad. Jealousy was close enough to anger that he was able to handle the emotion better and went with it.

Before he said anything however, he was cut off.

“Mr. Black, a pleasure to meet you. I am Duke Leeroy Granger, Hermione’s father. She is a lady and I expect her to be treated as such,” he said politely, a smile on his lips and a warning in his eyes for Black.

Severus was pleased with the development, mostly since he hadn’t been on the receiving end. All of
a sudden he was glad Miss Granger’s father approved of him.

“We shall see you tomorrow, Mr. Black,” Abagail said.

“Sirius, please. Mr. Black is too formal,” he said with a kind smile.

“Sirius, we’ll meet you tomorrow at the Leaky Cauldron around noon, does that sound amendable?” she smiled at the shaggy wizard.

Sirius lit up, he had something to look forward to tomorrow, “That sounds wonderful. I’ll see you lot then.” He said with a grin, “Pup, Kitten,” he nodded with a cheeky smile, and left.

“I too, shall be taking my leave,” Severus said formally.

“It was a pleasure, Professor. Thank you again,” Leeroy said with a smile.

The Duke stuck his hand out for a hand shake that Severus met firmly. Leeroy’s eyes had a slight gleam of approval in them.

Again Severus felt himself almost blush.

The Granger women smiled at him and he nodded pleasantly at them, before nodding a farewell to the rest of their party.

He knew that while Miss Granger had done well, Lucius would be sure to whisper their interaction to the Dark Lord. He had always been odd when it concerned the royal family. The potions master wasn’t sure what this new development would mean for the future.
Chapter 59

Chalice had taken them back to muggle London, extremely pleased with how well the cases had gone, and the wonderful publicity her firm would receive. She felt good having helped Potter, for all he had done and all he had lost, and sticking it to the higher up purebloods.

That and the Grangers were excellent clients. They had assured her that the Burmings were officially their lawyers. The Burmings were easy to work with and in the know, it was perfect. Of course the Family had efficient lawyers, some were in the know, however it was different when your lawyer had also grown up in the wizarding world instead of just ‘knowing’ about them. To know the laws, the archaic ones as well, with a firm grasp and understanding the terms instead of guessing what they could be…

Abagail and Leeroy decided it was better in the long run.

Petunia’s bottom lip quivered knowing it would be quite some time before she saw any of them again. Vernon rubbed her shoulder, his mustache bristling with emotion. Dudley looked at all of them forlornly. His touch with the dementors had changed him, and he felt crummy about how he spoke of his cousins.

“Harry, I’m sorry about… the things I said and did,” he said flashing a quick look at Hermione hoping he would understand, “I hope you’ll keep in touch and… write, yeah?” he said somewhat bashfully.

He shoved his hands into his pockets.

“Just send it to mum or Aunt Abby so they can send it in the post though, secrecy and all that,” he said looking at the ground.

Hermione smiled gently at her taller cousin, Harry stared at him for a little bit before pushing his glasses up and nodding before responding, “Yeah, I’ll do that. I’m sure Hermione will remind me if I forget.”

“Write to us too, please. Or write to Abagail and she can tell me over the phone. I… I want to stay in touch. More than just the occasional Christmas card,” Petunia said, her eyes glassy.

She was still somewhat scared of her sister, but she was also somewhat scared of Lily. However with the familial bond she wanted to have a good relationship with her sister. She liked Hermione and she knew Vernon… Vernon never had a daughter and now he had a niece, and he was sweet on her. He had always wanted a son to be proud of, and she had gladly (and proudly) given him one. However she knew secretly he also wanted a girl to dote upon, to protect.

Vernon cleared his throat, his mustache still moving.

“Hermione. Keep up with your grades. Keep the boy out of trouble. And… and give your uncle a hug. I won’t be seein’ you until either holiday or… or after the war,” Vernon said gruffly.

Hermione smiled, her eyes watering, and she moved over and hugged her uncle fiercely. She wanted to hate him, after all he and Petunia did to her brother. However she could tell from the tournament, his protection of her, that she was special to him. He was a cruel man, gruff and reminded her of a walrus, always ready to fight, but at the tournament he was like a different person. He stood up for Harry, he tried to protect them from Missus Weasley. He tried. It could have been Harry’s last day on Earth and instead of rubbing it in or hoping he died, or something of the like, he tried to make it a
good day.

Harry smiled at his sister hugging his walrus of an uncle. The man had given him something before he left the Dursleys. He had done right by Hermione and treated her kindly. He didn’t care of he was treated because Vernon didn’t treat his sister the same way.

He was right in a way, only they were allowed to cause him misery. Still, at least publicly in the wizarding world, they stood up for him, his sister, his grandparents, and his mum. That was almost good enough to forgive them. Almost wasn’t enough though, so he would take a leaf out of Petunia’s book and pretend half of it didn’t happen.

Abagail was extremely pleased with this turnabout.

“We will keep in touch,” she said as she leaned over to hug her sister and nephew, as Vernon was still hugging Hermione and muttering something into her hair.

“Listen to me Hermione, you’re smarter than the boy. Please take care of him. We messed him up trying to keep him safe by keeping magic out of his life. We did what we could and we failed. He has magic in his life, he has you. Make sure he does well. If you ever need us for any reason, we’re here for you. Just try not to send word with a bloody owl,” he chuckled the last part weakly.

Hermione listened keenly and her heart ached for the Dursleys and Harry. They tried to keep magic out of his life to keep him safe. They hurt him to try to beat the magic out of him to keep him alive. They were horrid to him… to keep him alive. Magic took away Harry’s parents, Petunia’s sister, to them magic wasn’t all that it was cracked up to be. It got his family killed. It was better to be cruel and keep him alive rather than send him to his death. It was extremely misguided, but they thought they were trying to do their best by him.

A child’s magic manifested more often when they were happy, loved, and felt secure in themselves. It also happened when they were trying to protect themselves (without them knowing). Lily’s magic must have always manifested when she was happy… that’s why they worked so hard to keep him miserable. It was a shockingly cold, yet warm revelation. They loved Harry, in their own way. They did what they thought was a necessary evil.

“I will, Uncle Vernon. I’ll keep Harry as safe as I can,” she murmured back.

“You’re a good girl, Hermione. Remember to keep in touch, okay?”

With that he smoothed her hair and smiled at her gently. He nodded to his nephew.

Harry nodded back with a quick quirk to his lips.

“Thank you for coming with to the trials,” Abagail said, “Now let us pay for your cab back. You can use whatever’s left to help cleanup Harry’s old room.”

Petunia flushed at the barb but nodded. She decided at that moment to make that the guest room and send small apology gifts to Harry throughout the school year. Of what though, she wasn’t sure yet. She’d think of something.

After seeing them off, Abagail looked at Harry kindly.

“Now, Harry, I’m not sure what Hermione has or hasn’t told you about us, but if you have any
questions, feel free to ask and we’ll answer appropriately. It all depends on setting, as you’re aware of secrecy and such,” she chuckled.

Harry smiled and nodded.

“Now I hope you don’t think it too forward of me, but I think our next stop is Gringotts. You’re a man in the wizarding world now, I think it’s time you’ve seen all of your assets and such, and what is going on with them. If you have any questions about managing them, you can either as us, Chalice, or the Goblins, however you see fit. If you don’t want us in the room with you, that’s fine as well,” she said with a smile.

Harry stood quiet for a moment, looking over to Hermione who was close by, thinking about it. He was perfectly fine with Hermione knowing, he would have told her anyways, but their lawyer was also an amazing witch who knew her stuff. So he wanted her there definitely. Abagail and Leeroy Granger… they raised Hermione. They were a Duke and Duchess, they had to know a fair amount of things he had no inkling about. He didn’t want to go in there unprepared and alone. He knew goblins could be greedy and he was sure they would be opportunistic if they saw he didn’t know anything.

“I would like all of you there, please. I don’t know much of anything and I would feel better having people who knew something about what the goblins might be talking about,” he said quietly, fiddling with the hem of his shirt.

Hermione walked over and leaned into him, which helped Harry breathe easy.

“Shall we then?” Abagail started.

Chalice walked beside Abagail as they headed toward the Leaky Cauldron, Leeroy was closer to Harry and Hermione.

“So what do you- our parents really do, Hermione?” he asked quietly.

“Well I never lied, Harry. They are dentists, just they have the practice as a hobby. They didn’t want to spend all day doing what dad considers, boring things. They’re low enough that they don’t have any real responsibilities to the family or the public. We put in the occasional appearance, but no one really notices if we show up or not. So it’s whatever they feel like doing really,” Hermione explained.

“So… like Malfoy is a politician or whatever?” he tried.

“Yes and no. Malfoy makes his money through investments. He’s a sleazy palm greaser, but really he doesn’t have to do anything, the Malfoys are that wealthy,” Hermione said.

Harry didn’t question her knowing that she knew more about the wizarding world than he did. Heck she knew more about derogatory slurs than he did and they entered the castle at the same time.

Leeroy listened carefully to what his daughter was telling his son. He had a slight butterfly feeling in his stomach thinking of the term son. It was thrilling.

Harry screwed his face up trying to imagine the Grangers doing political things like the Malfoys and couldn’t imagine it.

“Don’t think too hard about it, Harry,” she teased.

“She’s right, son. We’re wealthy enough to not have to do anything, but frankly that would be
extremely boring. Once upon a time, it was grand, but I was a lady killer before I met your mother. After that, I had a bit too much time on my hands realizing that I didn’t really have any other hobbies other than chasing skirts,” he laughed.

Harry grinned at this information. He sounded a lot like how Remus described Sirius. It was nice, familiar.

“So we took up dentistry. Went to school together and everything. It was challenging enough for your mum, but also lacked the ‘ick’ factor that comes with dealing with the sick. She’s got a bit of a thing about catching someone else’s illness. It’s quite cute,” he said with a smile.

“Mum is a germaphobe without being a germaphobe,” Hermione said.

“So like how aunt Petunia wants everything clean all the time because she doesn’t like germs, but with people?” Harry asked.

“Exactly,” Hermione answered with a grin.

Before they knew it they were in Gringotts. Chalice and Abagail stopped and turned around to look at Harry. The two teens noticed, as they were following them without really paying attention, and Harry’s cheerful disposition tempered a bit.

“What do I say?” he asked Abagail, his stomach churning with insecurity.

“Let them know that you would like to speak with your account manager. We’re not going to your vault, so you shouldn’t need your key,” she said.

“I… I don’t have my key,” Harry said worried.

Abagail looked down at him shocked for a moment before recovering, “We’ll take care of that as well,” she said offhandedly.

Her nose however flared the way Hermione’s did when she was upset with something on the behalf of someone else. It was soothing in a way that he was able to pick out characteristics that he was familiar with. Harry nodded in response out of habit.

He walked up to a teller and waited until the goblin to notice him.

“I’m here to speak with my account manager,” the green eyed wizard said calmly.

“Name?”

“Harry Potter.”

“Wand?”

Harry held his wand up to the goblin, who looked at it shrewdly.

“Ragnok will be with you in a moment, Mister Potter,” he said his sharp teeth shining in his mouth.

He turned to another teller and started talking in gobbledegook. The other goblin made a noise that was a cross between a bark and a hiss before walking away.
Abagail had to keep herself from baring her teeth at them, knowing it was a threat. However whenever she heard gobbledygook she always felt her hackles raise. She wasn’t sure why, but the language spoken by natives made her aggressive. She didn’t want to be seen as weak, but she also didn’t want to start a feud or an all-out war.

“Mister Potter, I’m Ragnok, please follow me,” A thin goblin said, bowing at Harry before turning around and walking towards his office without waiting to see if the wizard was following or not.

Harry quickly cottoned on when Hermione started to drag him with her, others followed behind them.

“In here, Mister Potter. Are these other people with you?” he asked with a steely countenance that bordered hostile.

“Yes! This is my family, they adopted me today, and our lawyer,” he said with wide eyes.

Ragnok’s face smoothed from hostile to merely grumpy, and opened the door for the party to enter, where he followed quickly behind. He raised his hand and locked the door, before walking over to a filing cabinet and pulling out a large file.

“What is it you came to speak about specifically, Mister Potter?” He said, his voice sounded like rocks rubbing against each other.

“I would like to see my assets and… uhm… mum?” Harry looked over his shoulder for her.

“As I’m sure you’re aware Mister Ragnok, due to the rules surrounding the Triwizard Tournament and the finality of the Goblet of Fire, Harry is now considered an adult. We would like to see his assets, contracts, statements, everything that you have related to his account,” she said, “We would also like to ask for a new key to his vault, or vaults. According to our lawyer, Miss Burming here, his old magical guardian was doing some borderline illegal things pertaining to Harry’s care. We would like to rectify anything and everything that we can.”

Ragnok turned his head slightly, his lips were parted and let out a low slow growl that sounded more like a purr.

“What you are saying… Miss?”

“Duchess Granger. I’ll also answer to Doctor Granger, Missus Granger, and ma’am,” she said.

The goblin tilted his head the opposite way, looking at the family before him.

“What you are saying is something we take very seriously Duchess Granger.”

“I would like to hope so. This is a very serious matter.”

“I have to let you know that once money has been withdrawn we usually do not meddle in wizarding affairs. We protect the gold that is entrusted to us here, after that it is usually out of our hands,” he said.

“With all due respect Ragnok, I believe this matter is within your sphere. You are aware of who Mister Potter’s wizarding guardian was, of this we have no doubt. What you might not know is that his guardian was never involved in his life personally. Aside from what I’m sure the Potters originally set aside for Hogwarts’ tuition, the first time Harry stepped into Gringotts himself is the first time he had ever seen a galleon. Every year after I’m sure he’s been taken to his trustee vault that was set aside for other school matters?” Chalice said.
“Yeah, I’ve only been here maybe once a year since I’ve turned 11. Anything other than that, I didn’t have anything to do with,” Harry confirmed.

Ragnok opened the file and looked at the group before him piercingly.

“That is a very serious accusation.”

“We know,” Leeroy said grimly.

“The statements from the last 15 years please?” Hermione asked, holding her hand out.

Ragnok looked at Harry, seeing he was just as curious as the witch next to him, handed the witch the proper papers. The older woman, who Potter called ‘mum’ also looked over their shoulders with a keen eye and a dark look.

Harry looked at the numbers, a little overwhelmed by the large amount, but looked helplessly at the amount that was withdrawn every month since January following the year his parents died under the term ‘Guardian Stipulation’. Additionally to that was ‘Allowance’. It wasn’t until the year Harry turned 11 that there was an additional change ‘Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardy tuition’.

“I’ve never seen my allowance…” Harry said.

“And my sister never received a stipulation, I can assure you, Harry. We checked,” Abagail said with a clipped tone.

“And the trustee vault…?” Abagail said looking at Ragnok carefully.

“The trustee vault is only accessible to Mister Potter, with his key.”

“So that’s 5,500 galleons a month, unaccounted for, for the last 14 years,” Hermione said softly, “962,500 galleons to date.”

“That’s nearly 1,000,000 galleons missing,” Chalice said.

“And we are certain that none of it went to Mister Potter, as it was intended?” Ragnok said carefully.

“Positive. I’ve never had an allowance and I’ve lived with my uncle’s and cousin’s castoffs for clothes and other things. They’re the muggles who were taking care of me, the ones with the real guardianship.”

“We dug deeply to be assured that they weren’t misappropriating guardian stipulations and came up empty. They paid for everything they have out of their own accounts,” Chalice said.

Ragnok frowned toothily at this new information.

“We apologize Mister Potter, we were assured by your guardian at the time that the funds were going where they were meant to. The guardian stipulations were meant for the guardian of whose care you were in. It was to help with living costs. As for your allowance, it was asked for as a large monthly sum and hinted at that you were receiving it weekly. We didn’t ask for details,” Ragnok said, “We will however obtain all missing galleons and return them to you. Should we send the stipulation galleons to your muggle family whose care you were in or your family here?”

Harry was startled for a moment, “Uh… I guess… to the family I was living with. But space it out as every other week please? Converted into muggle pounds please. I’ve been assured that my current family has enough and I know my uncle and aunt are working class.”
Hermione beamed at her brother.

“Your allowance shall be given to you in a full amount then?” Ragnok asked.

Harry’s eyes widened, “N-no. That won’t be necessary. Just… weekly? Please? Like a real allowance.”

“How much per week, Mister Potter?”

Harry’s mouth was gaping like a fish. Hermione twisted her lips and elbowed her brother, pointing at the high amount of galleons kept over the years. In response though he looked at her pleadingly.

“Roughly 2,125 galleons per week until he’s evened out, please,” Hermione said almost exasperated with him.

The goblin looked at the witch fascinated. She was good with numbers, and quick. Leeroy’s lips twitched as he kept himself from laughing at his daughter’s exasperation. She still forgot that not everyone could do mental math as quickly as she could. Her mother was a quick second though.

“Will his allowance be released into another vault? Or how does that work?” Hermione asked curiously.

She only ever came in to exchange pounds to galleons, she didn’t have a vault of her own so she didn’t know how it worked.

“No, Lady Granger. Normally a trusted someone would come in on Mister Potter’s behalf, if he couldn’t be here himself, and we would give them his allowance. Another option is for him to have special Gringotts pouch, which we give to our valued customers at a fee, which will automatically fill up with the allotted amount of galleons.”

“What if someone else comes into possession of the pouch?” Hermione asked.

“Unless Mister Potter were to temporarily hand it over, it is impossible for another being to take the pouch or take from the pouch. If someone touches it with the intent to steal from it, it burns the would-be thief with smelting temperatures,” he said with a nasty grin, “and for those who would withstand such temperatures, the pouch itself becomes unmovable from its position, unless the owner retrieves it.”

Leeroy nodded impressed with the security of the pouch.

“How much is the fee?” he asked.

“1,000 galleons,” Ragnok answered plainly.

“I’ll take it,” Harry said.

Abagail nodded with approval. It was a bit harsh, but if someone wanted to steal, they would pay a price. If they wanted to steal from her son, better the pouch get to them than her.

“When we’re done with this, how much would it be to open a vault here? Or check to see if we already have one?” Leeroy inquired, very happy with how the goblins took care of the gold in their care.

Ragnok looked at the family before him again, taking them in. Even with their lawyer present, the family before him were not like the posh purebloods they dealt with daily. Thus far he had no quarrel.
with these humans, and they treated him respectfully and with manners.

Abagail lightly hit her husband, an amused smile danced on her lips.

“As for the contracts?” Chalice asked.

Ragnok frowned again, and removed the proper paper before handing them to the witch in front of him. He would have handed it to Potter, however the witch was obviously smarter and quicker on the draw. He noticed that Potter would rather the witch look at things as she was obviously more efficient. He had no trouble explaining things himself to the young wizard, but he would rather this meeting speed along as he had some serious issues to deal with.

Albus Dumbledore came to them under the guise as magical guardian. However what appeared on paper, did not appear in action and duty. All of his transactions needed to be audited.

Hermione looked at the real estate contracts with a raised eyebrow, impressed at the Potter fortune and what they bought. It held the locations to all of them, information on if they were deserted, magically updated on their current condition, it was fascinating.

“Harry, you own real estate in Hogsmead. You rent a cottage out up there,” she said interestedly.

“Really?” Harry asked surprised.

“Mhm, look,” Hermione said as she passed him properties that she already looked at.

“I own a manor?” Harry said with disbelief.

“You’re from an old family Harry, I would be more surprised if you didn’t,” Hermione said without looking up from a paper.

Abagail was reading over Hermione’s shoulder, simply checking matters over. She didn’t care what he owned so much as she cared that he wasn’t being taken advantage of in any way.

“The property taxes are paid in full?” Abagail asked.

“They are automatically paid dutifully on the second of January,” Ragnok said.

Abagail made a ‘hm’ noise to alert him that she heard.

Hermione had passed along every paper she had read over to her brother to gape over. The last contract however she stopped. It wasn’t a real estate contract. It was a marriage contract.

Hermione was in such shock that she stopped breathing before her mother touched her shoulder.

“What. Is. This?” Abagail said, glaring at the contract.

“What’s what?” Harry asked, looking over, unsure of what would make both Granger woman react poorly.


“They warned me about her,” Hermione said lowly, “but I didn’t think Missus Weasley already got you. It’s no wonder she feels entitled to you.”

Harry looked over at his sister, “Who warned you?”
“Professor McGonagall and Professor Snape. Before we did the bond. They warned me. They told me to watch myself when I’m around her,” she said looking into space, “They pointed out that no one other than family stays at the Burrow, no one else has really been inside of the Burrow.”

“They consider us family,” Harry said.

“That’s what I said until Professor Snape prompted me to think about why. They have 7 kids, Harry. And only Ronald has had friends inside. Why would we be allowed inside? Out of all the Weasleys, only Ron has had friends inside.”

“They plan for us to be part of the family,” Harry said in a whisper.

“She plans for us to be part of the family, Harry. Mister Weasley is too kind to even think of something like that,” she said.

“Harry, I’m going to ask you a personal question, is that okay?” Abagail asked.

“Yes, what is it?”

“Do you like Ginny that way?” she asked calmly.

“No, I see her more as a sister,” he replied honestly.

“Do you see yourself being married to her? Do you see yourself being a Weasley?” she asked just as calmly.

“Not really, no,” Harry answered.

“Do you care that she’s the 7th born? Which makes her a highly sought after witch,” Leeroy asked.

“Not really. She’s just… well she’s just Ginny,” Harry said.

“This contract, once completed would be binding. Do you want this contract terminated?” Abagail asked.

Harry’s eyes widened as he thought about being married to Ginny, “Yes, please,” he answer his mum before turning to his account manager, “Ragnok, can I please have this marriage contract terminated?” his voice taking on a tinge of panic.

“You can, but if the contract is terminated, the other party will be informed of it,” Ragnok said.

Harry looked over to Hermione and his mother, trying to see what they think was best. His heart was filling up with a panic he’d never felt before.

“I don’t want to marry Ginny, Hermione. I don’t want to marry any girl right now,” he whispered to her in panicked tones.

Hermione looked at her brother’s green eyes, his pupils mere dots in his panic. Her heart dropped in panic for him, so she grabbed his hand tightly. She looked over at her mother for guidance.

“We don’t want the Weasleys to be informed, but now that Dumbledore is aware that you’re of age, it’s not uncommon for there to be under-aged brides. All they need is a parent signature. If it’s not terminated before they find out, you could be stuck in it,” Abagail said, “It would be better to terminate it now instead of getting cornered later,” she advised.

“If the Weasleys have anything to say about it, you can send them our way,” Leeroy said.
Harry felt a relief flood him. “Terminate the contract, please.”

“Then *incipendo* it,” Hermione muttered.

“The contract is fire-proof, Lady Granger. We need the original as proof that it existed, and then *was* terminated. We can however make a copy for you to set flame too,” he said, liking her spirit.

“That would be very much appreciated, Ragnok, thank you,” Hermione said.

“Ragnok, if you don’t mind my asking, would it be possible to check the Weasley vaults for any deposits by Dumbledore?” Chalice asked.

“It is possible, but that would be classified information that only the Weasley family and the Ministry would be allowed to have. Even then, the Ministry would have to fill out a few forms and provide sufficient reason that they should be allowed such checks,” he informed her.

“It’s not an easy process I take it?” she asked.

“No,” he grinned nastily, “And it needs quite a bit of high clearance.”

The lawyer nodded, appreciating the goblin for answering her.

“Even though we can’t see it, if the Weasleys were receiving deposits from Dumbledore, can you just… take the money from Dumbledore’s vault? I understand that Dumbledore shouldn’t have been messing around with my money, and it was most likely with Missus Weasley knowing all along, but I can’t do that to Mister Weasley. Chances are he didn’t know about – well – any of this.”

Hermione nodded understanding Harry’s dilemma. Molly was a force by herself, and she kept Arthur out of the loop about many things. He simply went to work, ate, and tinkered with broken muggle electronics.

“That was the last contract?” Harry asked, hoping to just move on.

Hermione nodded, knowing what her brother was doing. The contract was terminated and could be fussed over later with her mother.

“Next would be your assets Mister Potter,” Ragnok said handing the papers over to curly haired witch.

Hermione looked at them bored. Aside from a few small islands in Europe and one in the Caribbean, there were a few mineral mines that he owned. She handed them over to Harry as she had before, this was the only pile that didn’t have anything meddled with.

“Oh. Harry you own that empty shop in Diagon Alley. Your last tenants couldn’t afford the rent,” she said.

“Oh. Well, we’ll see what happens. If someone wants to rent or buy it from me, can I have them contact you? It would be better than people knowing that I own it,” Harry said.

“Of course, Mister Potter. As you are of age however, you will have the final say over who rents or buys the shop,” he informed the young wizard, “We will owl you details as they come our way.”

“Okay. Thanks, that would be nice,” he replied nodding, “Is that everything?” he asked.

“We also have a copy of your parents’ original will, Mister Potter. However aside from listing your potential guardians and in which order, the factoids of stipulations and allowances, and it merely
states that you are to obtain everything upon reaching adulthood. Everything we’ve already gone over today,” he said candidly.

“Was it hand written by them?” he asked slowly, hopefully.

“No sir, it was written by one of our staff members. It’s standard procedure that we don’t allow clients to write their own wills. It’s either written by a staff member or a lawyer in the presence of a staff member. No witch or wizard is allowed to write their own will, however they are allowed to write letters to go with the will,” Ragnok replied.

“Was there a letter attached for me?” he asked, trying not to let his hopes up.

“No, sir. However they did leave a few pictures for you in the event that they died. They were left strictly for you and were not written in the will, so your guardians wouldn’t know about them. Considering what has transpired I supposed that was a good thing,” he said handing over the last few items in the folder.

These he handed to Harry specifically, and he took them gently.

Looking at the pictures he saw his mum and dad. A few had Sirius and Remus. A thinner and cleaner Pettigrew. There were two of their animagus forms that he touched reverently. There was a picture of all of them together, his dad was holding him up. There was a picture of him, his mum, and a cat. They were all pictures he didn’t have in his photo album Hagrid made him. They were more intimate. He loved them.

“Can… can I have copies of these please?” he asked quietly.

“Of course, Mister Potter,” Ragnok said.

As they were leaving Chalice politely detached herself from the party and wished them the best, reminding them that they knew how to get in touch with her.

Harry was glad that it was over, and was pleased with the turnabout of the day.

Hermione was glad that things had turned out the way they did. It illuminated the darker sides of Missus Weasley and Dumbledore without her family having to point them out to Harry. She didn’t want her family to be the ones to cast stones at two people who had appeared to do their best for Harry. The truth had a way of showing up, and they had left a paper trail all.

Harry would be in shock later, but for now he was okay. Tomorrow was another story as he’d have time to let it stew and think about it properly.

“How about we stop by the book shop before we leave?” Hermione suggested.

Harry’s lips twitched at the predictability of his sister and her love of books.

“That sounds like a wonderful idea, dear,” Abagail said, “You and Harry can pick out 5 each.”

Leeroy made a face of loving exasperation, “Go get your books Harry, then we can get some broom polish and whatnot for Quidditch. I’m sure you can use a new set of gloves, yeah?”

Harry grinned at Leeroy, “Yeah.”
Hermione grabbed his arm and dragged him into the bookstore with their parents following behind them at a sedate pace.

“I think we should each grab a book on defense. We don’t know who we’re getting this year. We’ve had two years of decent professors, even if one was an imposter, he was still good at teaching. I don’t think we’ll get lucky a third time in a row. After Lockhart, I think we’d do well with some independent study since it’s OWLS year,” Hermione said quietly.

Harry wanted to groan, but agreed with Hermione’s sound logic. OWLS were important and their DADA professors always had something wrong with them, one way or another.

Remus was fine, the best they had even, but he had resigned because he was a werewolf. He would never hold it against Remus, but the mass population considered his lycanthropy a serious issue. After being in the wrong place that one missed potion, he partially understood why. He shouldn’t have been in the shrieking shack to begin with, as it was Remus’ designated transformation area, so potion or no he would have been fine.

He stayed close by Hermione as she was picking her defense book, and was hoping that she would pick his too. Like magic she handed him a defense book that seemed perfect and he let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

“Thanks, Hermione,” he said with relief.

With that out of the way he browsed the bookshelves with interested looking at different titles that stood out to him. Some of them were interesting, but not as thick as the books Hermione was looking at. He pulled out another defense book, two animagi books, and a book on meditation (which he was sure would help with becoming an animagus).


After everything tonight, she refused to forget about her private lessons with Professor Snape. She was thrilled to be getting private one-on-one lessons with him. She wouldn’t have to wait for the rest of the class to catch up and hopefully he would teach her some advance techniques. She didn’t know how she would let him know that she wouldn’t be at her house for the summer, she would speak with her mother about that concern when they boarded the plane.

They didn’t tell Harry that they would be leaving the country tomorrow evening. It was a safety precaution, and after the recent dementor event, it seemed as though it was for the best.

Before they left though they had to celebrate with Sirius on his new freedom. He had done his waiting… they could at least spend the afternoon with him, openly enjoying his freedom. She also still had to teach Skeeter a lesson. At the moment the pesky witch was in her home, being watched over by Elara, who had already pecked the glass, pretending as though she wanted to eat Rita. It was quiet funny, and she praised Elara for it.

Rita Skeeter would remember for the rest of her life not to get on Hermione Granger’s bad side.
Molly was putting the final touches on a light lunch for her family. The twins, Ron, and Ginny were home with her, Arthur wouldn’t be back until a little after 5 unless Albus needed him. Being a member of the Order benefitted her and her family in many ways.

They would have more protection than their neighbors, more wands willing to fight by their side. They would have access to information that was not being released to the public. Intelligence on who was and wasn’t a Death Eater also helped as it would help her keep her children away from theirs. That and it gave her easy access to Albus and Harry.

She needed to speak to and confirm things with Albus, but it was easier if she would be seeing him in person more often than the monthly floo call. Molly knew she probably fussed about things more than was necessary, but after her plan to marry Arthur backfired on her she decided fussing was an acceptable offense.

There was also the knowledge that Albus would keep Harry where he felt was best. If he planned on removing Harry from those horrid muggles, then she could make sure that Ginny was around to keep him company. Not too much company, she would see that they were busy with chores.

The plump redheaded witch looked out of her kitchen window ready to announce lunch when she noticed a large owl was flying towards the house. It wasn’t a familiar owl, so she was rather leery with the recent commotion of You-Know-Who’s return.

The large eagle owl landed in front of her, his feathers were a warm gray, allowing him to easily blend in with a tree’s bark. However sitting on her windowsill he looked regal, official, and stared at her coldly. He held out his leg for her and she promptly took the letter from him. She reached for a treat to give him, but instead he screeched at her and she cringed, before taking flight again.

“Blasted bird,” she muttered, straightening out her apron before looking at the letter.

The envelope was thick and heavy, turning it over she saw it was from Gringotts.

“What is this all about?” she asked herself quietly. The letter was addressed to the Weasley family instead of someone in particular.

Molly knew they had some sickles and knuts in their vault. She made sure to put her change back after spending the regular amount of galleons she received from Albus, so it couldn’t be about the low amount in their vault. It also wasn’t their monthly statement, the goblins only sent them at the end of the month (which she always hid from Arthur anyways).

The short witch opened the envelope and carefully took the papers out.

Dear Weasley Family,

We are writing to notify you that the marriage contract between Ginevra Molly Weasley and Harry James Potter has been terminated, effective immediately.

Termination was completed this afternoon in official capacity with the Potter account manager present. Conditions and reasons pertaining to termination are not required to be shared with the corresponding party and will not be released per request. Should you have any questions that
correspond with this matter you are free to contact Gringotts for legal terms, or the corresponding party, of your own will.

The void contract has been attached for your perusal and personal records.

Sincerely,

Gringotts Bank

Molly’s hands were trembling with trepidation as she shifted the papers to see the contract Albus and her had agreed upon years ago with a large red ‘VOID’ stamp on it.

Her heart started beating erratically unsure of what happened. She had just seen Albus yesterday and everything had been going as planned. They both benefited from the agreement, so there was little to no reason that he would void the contract without talking to her. Surely there had to be some sort of mistake? She felt lightheaded.

She couldn’t even claim that someone had done so on his behalf illegally, as the goblins were very efficient at what they did.

Stumbling over to the kitchen table, she allowed herself to sink down onto a bench chair. Taking a few deep breaths, she allowed herself to calm down before deciding what to do.

The twins were still upstairs in their room, doing who knows what. Ron was outside flying on one of the brooms, with Ginny. She hadn’t announced lunch yet and none of them were aware that it was done, or close to being done. They only knew that she was in the kitchen and not to come in until they were called.

Taking another breath the Weasley matriarch sneered before taking her wand out and marched to the fireplace. She cast a cushioning charm on the stones before grabbing a pinch of floo powder and tossing it into the flames.

“Headmaster’s Office, Hogwarts,” she announced clearly before sticking her head into the green flames.

Albus had returned a while ago from the Ministry and was making plans for the Order. He had arrived three hours early to find out everything he wanted to know about Harry’s trial. Where it would be, when, who was on board, and which members of the Wizengamot were going to be present. He wanted to make a stand, he wanted to sweep in and save the lad from what were his over exaggerated fears. He was never going to allow the Ministry to expel Potter, he would have pulled every favor he had to keep him in the magical world. He was not expecting a lawyer.

She had done an excellent job, no doubt. Most likely saved him a headache or two. However she got into the way of his plans. It was going to be on record that he spoke with Cornelius about Voldemort and the upcoming war. She kept the case crisp and clean. There were no power plays, no scouting to see who was willing to be aware and who wasn’t, he didn’t have the floor to do so.

He was considered a political dragon! But he didn’t have the floor, he didn’t command their
attention, he didn’t have their ears! He was going to use this to his advantage, and it was a missed opportunity. He had been prowling those halls waiting for Harry’s court date to be changed. He knew Cornelius would try to do something drastic, or give in to peer pressure from someone else to do so.

Arthur told him after that he hadn’t brought Harry to the Ministry as planned. It was concerning.

So Albus sat there and thought long and hard about everything he noticed that transpired while he was at the Ministry. He made sure to stay out of departments where he had connections. He avoided previous Order members (even though they had been sent coded invitations). He made sure there was nothing he did that could be investigated or put those with him under a magnifying glass.

A flash of green caught his attention alerting him to a floo call and he answered.

“What am I talking about?” she hissed scathingly, “The contract, Albus! The marriage contract has been terminated! I want to know WHY! WE HAD AN AGREEMENT, ALBUS! SO WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE US!?” she wailed.

She wanted to yell at him, but he was Albus Dumbledore, and she knew yelling wouldn’t get her anywhere. Molly wanted Albus as an ally not an enemy.

Albus looked piercingly at Molly, “Terminated? Molly, I didn’t terminate the contract. When did this happen?” he asked seriously.

“What?” she asked quietly, “I- I got the letter just now. It said that the contract was terminated this afternoon.”

“What letter?”

“The letter from Gringotts,” she said pitifully.

Severus had decided that he would make a few stops by Knockturn and Diagon Alley before he went home. He wanted to pick up a few questionable potion ingredients for his personal stores before the Dark Lord called him as well as a new book or two.

Word would get back to the Dark Lord quickly about Miss Granger’s social status, and he was unsure how the madman would react. One of the few boundaries they were given was that the Royal Family was to be left alone, and muggleborn Miss Granger just so happened to be a member of that family. Would the Royal Family rule supersede her being a muggleborn? He would simply have to wait and find out.

At least he would be able to go about his usual business and socialization for the time being. The Dark Lord was pleased that he ‘kept up appearances’ and told him to continue to do so. At least this time around he was allowed to hang out with his friends. He would have had Minerva come to his
rooms anyways to keep him company, but he would have had to cut Hooch out. As much as Hooch bothered him, she was also a decent friend. He just had to be careful when he drank liquor.

Walking through the shelves he heard a few other customers enter and sneered to himself. From the sound alone he could tell it was a group of people, most likely a family. At least they were here because they liked books rather than because they had to. Nothing irritated him more than a bookstore full of students who didn’t care for their books… besides dunderheads.

He turned holding a new edition of Magical Drafts and Vapors, ready to leave the store when he saw her hair. It was unmistakable, as he was now extremely familiar with the mass due to their private lessons. His breath caught in his lungs before his heart reminded him he needed to breathe.

He just saw her this morning, what was wrong with him. Severus scowled at himself and walked steadily toward the register.

“Ah, Professor, fancy seeing you again. Twice in one day,” Abagail said charmingly to him.

Her voice was low enough to be respectful of the atmosphere, but loud enough for him to have heard her.

“It would appear so,” he said baldly.

“Now my daughter mentioned that there would be lessons going on this summer,” she continued, walking closer to him, her voice getting lower in volume as the distance closed between them.

“Yes, she’s going to be taking her potions OWL this summer before term. She is to be my… assistant. As I’ve been told,” he replied.

“Yes, my husband and I gathered as much. I’m not sure how Hermione would feel about it, but if you’re not against it, wouldn’t it be better if she were your apprentice?”

Abagail looked him in the eyes and raised a challenging eyebrow, while the rest of her face was politely neutral. Severus was almost taken aback being on the receiving end of what would characteristically be determined as one of his ‘faces’ as Hooch would call it.

“Duchess Granger, with all due respect, do you understand what would be required of us should Lady Granger be my apprentice?” Severus asked pointedly.

“We have a lot of books in my home, Professor. We did as much research as we could to understand this world better for our daughter. Even with the private resources allotted to our family. So yes, I do understand.”

“And you would be agreeable, even knowing the intimacy of such a relationship?” he asked carefully.

“Frankly, not for some time. My husband on the other hand, yes,” she took a breath, “Aside from our social standing, an apprenticeship would help keep her safe with the political climate.”

“I’m not sure if I’m the right person…” he said, drifting off.

“Professor, I can read my husband better than I can read a book. He has a good feeling about you, and his feelings are never wrong. Honestly, chances are Hermione got her magic from his side. But he has a good feelings about you, and doesn’t hate you being so close to our daughter. Which is a hair trigger reaction with him,” she explained, “so you are the right person. However I won’t force you into such a binding relationship. So think about it, please,” she finished and walked back to her
husband to explain what had just transpired.

Severus on the other hand finished making his way to the register and paid for his book before leaving the store and apparating himself to Spinner’s End.

Carefully placing his book on the coffee table, he walked over and laid down on the worn couch.

Spinner’s End was Severus’s childhood home. He inherited it after his father died. It would have gone to his mother, but she saved enough to rent a nice cottage and refused to step foot back into the house. After suffering domestic abuse and nearly being killed on several accounts in the house, he never pressured her and dropped the subject altogether.

The house was decently sized; it had a porch, a yard, and 4 bedrooms. One had been repurposed into a library and another as a home office. His bedroom was the second biggest room, the largest was the library. The smallest, that was once his bedroom, was now his office; and the last was a spare bedroom. Not that he ever had any company over, but he figured it would be for the best should something unexpected happen,

The first thing he did when he officially owned the house, was gut it. Anything he didn’t like that reminded him of his horrid past or his father, he changed. He kept whatever furniture was salvageable though, often times a worn in couch was better than a new hard one. Severus remodeled the whole house, using magic for the whole thing. All the walls and floors were redone and all the wallpaper was removed. He put his wand to use and transfigured some parts of the house, so it was hard to tell that it was the same house. The hardwood floors were clean, solid, and bright, looking nothing like the near rotting dead brown wood before.

Once upon a time the bathroom was small and cramped, but functional. There were water stains in the walls, cracks in the rusted white tiles, and leaks in the pipes. He fixed it all with a swish of his wand. His mother could have fixed it when she lived there, but Tobias snapped her wand when he was 9.

It had a large porcelain clawfoot tub with shower attachment, a short toilet, and an awkward sink. He expanded the room, changed the tiles to a solid marble gray, fixed the water stains and made the walls a light slate grey, made the toilet taller, and changed the sink entirely. He made the claws on the tub black, he had the pipes bend until they were nearly invisible (but fully functional), and transfigured the old shower curtain into a waterproof sheer that had white to black gradient.

The bedroom walls were a soft green with white trimming, simple and clean. The library had two chintz couches, a coffee table, and wall to wall bookcases. The hallways were a warm cream coloring, and the walls were bare. The kitchen was a warm yellow, and the floor tiled an oatmeal brown, it had a breakfast bar that looked into the living room. The basement had been remodeled into a proud potions lab.

He didn’t like it much here, as Hogwarts was home, but he made sure he was comfortable returning to his house.

The potions master rubbed his face with his right hand.

He couldn’t get away from her if he tried, not that he had mind you, but all the same. He gave her private lessons at work, he was forced to give her private lessons on his holiday, and now her parents wanted him to give her a special kind of tutelage that was a sacred right in the magical community.
Taking an apprentice was no walk in the park, it was a lifetime relationship. Granted his master met an untimely death in what was said to be a potions accident, but Minerva still kept in touch with her master. A master didn’t just teach you their specialized field, they taught you all that they knew.

Minerva wasn’t horrid when it came to potions, but she struggled to remember certain recipes from time to time. If the recipe and instructions weren’t in front of her, she wouldn’t remember how to make it. Never mind the recipes that left out ingredients on the list on purpose. Waving her wand and directing her magic was about intent, focus, and purpose. Often for her they were instinctual. Things that weren’t an exact science. Her master still teased her in his letters.

Was he prepared to form an amicable working relationship with Miss Granger? Was he prepared and willing to interact with her for the rest of his life?

A master apprentice relationship was special. He still found himself wistful when he saw Minerva’s master’s owl. In the beginning his master sent him weekly owls, giving him advice and much needed banter. It was like missing an old friend, but one he could look up too. The only one he had ever been able to look up too…

And he was to be that important to Miss Granger?

Duchess Granger wasn’t forcing him, but if either of his masters found out, they probably would. He wanted to make his final decision before either of them got wind of it. Either through gossip, mild conversation, or ligilimency.

He was given a choice. The first time in a long time, he was given a life altering choice. He wanted to make the right one this time. So he laid on his couch and thought about it and Miss Granger until the sun fell and he fell asleep with it.
Chapter 61

Thimi had seen to the spare room and had turned it into Harry’s room. They wouldn’t be staying at their home in London for long, more so since it would be more of a front during the war. However they needed to show that he lived there to the muggle government should they ask to see and he needed a place to sleep and call his own when they were there. It would bring it to the forefront of Harry’s mind that this was real, and he had a real home.

Hermione had spoken with her parents and they agreed that Thimi should be kept a secret until they made the move to France before introducing them. Harry was kind and sweet, and entirely naïve when it came to certain information. He tended to share with people he felt that he could trust, however those on his trust list and those on Hermione’s were different.

Hermione was not that fond of Ronald and his mother at the moment and should Ron find out, she was certain that Molly would as well. It wasn’t something she was ready for yet. It would just be another explosive argument out of jealousy. She knew it was considered a prestige to own a house-elf, and Ron would somehow take it personal that she had a house-elf, and he didn’t.

The curly haired witch knew that if she told her brother that she didn’t trust Ron as much as he did it would probably cause a fight or some other disagreement. Thus far Ron’s jealousy tended to get the best of him, even in situations where it was a life and death matter. She refused to put her family through that simply because Ronald had different aspirations. He was terrible at keeping their secrets when they were on outs (mostly because he would to complain about them to whoever would hear) and would let something drastic happen to them because he was slighted. The incident with the dragon at the TriWizard tournament was proof enough. She just knew that Molly would let all of the Weasleys know that Charlie was back from Romania, even if it was just for work. The fact that Ron didn’t tell Harry made her mad enough to want to pull her hair.

So when they made it to the house Hermione left her brother with her parents and made her way to her room.

Walking into her room, Hermione easily spotted her familiar and owl tormenting the bug in the jar, which they knocked over on her desk.

“Crookshanks, Elara, I’m back. I see you’ve been keeping a close eye on our guest,” she said smoothly.

Elara had been pecking the glass threateningly and Crookshanks kept a careful eye on the lid, occasionally batting at the jar himself.

Walking over she picked up the jar and sat in the wicker chair that was there.

“Hello, Rita. I see that you’ve met Crookshanks and Elara. They’re gorgeous creatures aren’t they? They do however have what we would consider strange appetites,” she smiled eerily, “For instance they both enjoy eating fish, frogs, mice, rats, and bugs. Crookshanks also enjoys just hunting things. Some I get as presents, some he eats, and some he just kills for the fun of it,” she finished lightly.

Crookshanks took that moment to walk to the edge of the desk, lean over, and nuzzle his mistress with a purr.
“Thank you, Crooks. I missed you too. I’m glad you’ve been getting along with Elara,” Hermione smiled at her cat, nuzzling back, knowing he appreciated it.

Elara watched from her place on the desk, turned her head and hooted cutely. Then she hopped a bit before flying over to her cage and fluffed up her feathers in a pleased manner. The witch smiled at her owl glad that she was settling in without problems.

“Now Skeeter, I know you’re very keen on leaving this jar, but if Crookshanks ever loosens the lid you already know you’re safer in there than out. Seeing that they tipped it over, I already know they tried to break it to get at you. So you see I’m really keeping you safe by making it unbreakable. Imagine being dropped and being stunned from the fall, you wouldn’t have a chance to get your bearings before Elara or Crookshanks got to you,” at that moment Crookshanks stuck out one of his paws and placed it on the glass as though telling his mistress that he wanted whatever was in it.

“No, no, no, Crooks. This is our guest. She’s not food,” Crookshanks pawed at the glass as though trying to convince Hermione that she should give him the bug anyways, “You see, Rita? Crookshanks already wants you for himself, even though I’ve told him no. He’s half kneazle, so he’s a lot more intelligent than your average cat. I know he’s able to open jars on his own, as well as other things.”

Crookshanks took his paw off the jar and paced the desk three times before laying down on one facing Hermione. The ginger cat blinked slowly as he tucked his front paws under his chest. The hazel eyed witch smiled and placed the jar back on the desk, about a hand’s width away from her familiar.

“I suppose you want to know what shocking news you missed out on at the trials,” she said looking at the bug in the jar, “You could have been there yourself, had you stuck to facts instead of writing lies. But even when you write facts, you write them in such a scathing way, that it hurts people. Poor Hagrid almost resigned because of the hate mail he was receiving from your fans. He couldn’t pick his parents any more than you could. Then there were the rabid harpies who sent me hate mail for your bullshit story about that love triangle. Did you know one of them sent me undiluted bubotuber pus? Imagine that a first year had touched it?” she sighed lightly.

“Your words have power and meaning… and you know it. Words and actions have consequences, Skeeter. I had told you before to stop, but you didn’t listen. Instead you wrote that bullshit story, because that’s what it was, Rita, and you know it. One that would sic witches at me for ‘messing with Harry Potter’s emotions’. I gave you a chance, and you blew it,” she hissed, “I’m not a witch who forgives easily, Rita. This isn’t about me though, whatever you may be thinking. No. You used Harry. You used my brother’s name for your own personal gains. Regardless of what you might think, you used my brother against his will. That is entirely unforgivable. Even when The Dark Lord used the imperius on him, he had a fighting chance. What you did though…” she growled glaring at the bug in the jar.

Her anger was so profound the glamour flickered as her magic danced through her hair in blue sparks. She flashed her teeth threateningly without conscious thought.

“You’re mine until I feel you’ve learned your lesson,” she said dangerously low.

Rita stared at the witch, extremely glad that she was in her animagus form or else she knew she’d have pissed herself and be shaking with how weak her legs felt. She was held captive by Harry Potter’s sister? The Potter’s only had one child, so what the fuck was she talking about sister? Hermione Granger was a muggleborn. What clue was she missing? None of her classmates said anything about them being related!
It was true that she didn’t think that she used Potter per se, just his name, but how the teenage witch compared it to You-Know-Who, she internally winced. As a writer she was used to embellishing the truth from time to time, knowing how to pull heartstrings, and she did so with no regrets. The journalist was extremely well seasoned and slept easy at night regardless of whose life she shook up. It was all in a day’s work after all.

Although being stuck in a jar being watched constantly by two predators was nerve wracking. She spent a majority of the time cursing the witch in front of her, but was keeping watch hoping the witch’s spell was as shoddy as hers was when she was a fourth year. Thus far, no luck.

The more she thought however the more she felt secure. What was a fourth… well fifth year muggleborn going to do to her anyways? Shake her in the jar? She had a hard exoskeleton, so she’d be fine, she’d weathered worse.

Hermione saw her antennae twitch furiously before it calmed down and twitched twice. Even though bugs didn’t have expressive faces, they did have antennae. Rita had gone from scared to calm. The trash journalist obviously had written her off as a threat, which enraged the already angry witch.

The curly haired witch took out her wand and muttered a spell, producing her favored blue bell flames. Moving her wand carefully she compacted the 3 bells into one and placed it in front of her. With the same care she cupped the blue bell with her left hand, with the other she used her wand to levitate Rita’s jar over the flame.

“Let’s see how well a beetle can sweat, shall we Skeeter?” she said menacingly.

Crookshanks watched his mistress and flapped his tail, purring as he watched his witch work her magic. He was a proud nightmare in the Magical Menagerie, he waited for a witch or wizard who was just as smart and fierce as he was. The ginger menace knew he made the perfect choice in choosing her. Harry, he knew, was her brother and she was protecting what was hers in what he thought was a superb manner. Personally he would have just maimed her, but he knew his mistress had laws to follow and avoid, which she was doing most splendidly.

Hermione decided to use the blue bell flames because she knew it would be hot enough to bothersome, but not hot enough to kill Rita, even as a beetle.

Barty Crouch Jr was sitting in his holding cell waiting for his trial and meet his fate. He had been placed in a high profile cell, so he was magically cuffed, but they adjusted the chains enough for him to be able to use the loo on his own. The door was fortified silver with a small window.

He had done what he could to fulfill his promise to his friend, he did his part to bring down the Dark Lord. The straw haired wizard sighed, staring into space wondering if he would be forced into a cell or be given the kiss, either way he’d be seeing the dementors soon.

“I don’t CARE!!! I want to see the death eater!” a familiar voice screamed.

There was shuffling going around, he could hear running outside of his cell. Barty stayed seated despite his curiosity. He wouldn’t give them the satisfaction or allow himself the chance to be disappointed in something.

There was a loud bang on the door and the young wizard looked at his cell door. It swung open revealing the grizzled auror he impersonated for almost a year. Barty had to bite his tongue to prevent a smile spreading on his face and kept his face impassive.
"Bartemius Crouch Junior. Ye performed an unforgivable on me! But ye didn’t make me do anything, ye didn’t force me to do anything harmful to myself or others. Ye kept me well fed and tried to keep me comfortable, even in shit conditions. Ye were wrongfully imprisoned the first time, simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But ye did some of your time. This time I want ye to know, I’ll be witness to yer trial.” He growled, with what looked like a greenhorn auror behind him.

Barty’s eyes turned red from holding back tears.

“Thank you, sir,” he said quietly, nodding in deference.

“Arg,” Moody said before nodding and turning around, leaving the new auror to close the holding cell behind him.

Alastor Moody knew the plan, but he couldn’t in good conscious let the boy suffer the worst the wizarding world had to throw at him. He was doing it all for a good cause, much like Snape, but Snape had Albus backing him. He was hoping he still had enough clout to pull the boy from certain death. He would be speaking with Bartemius Crouch Sr, an impromptu meeting you could say.

At the end of the first war he tried to show that he had no favoritism even to his own family, so he gave Barty a harsh punishment. It was no secret though that he didn’t have much love for his only son, he was rather indifferent to his heir. He never spoke kindly or bragged about his child much like a normal parent. People from the Weasleys all the way to the Malfoys bragged about their children. There was no shame in loving your children, but Bartemius never once mentioned his son in any light other than a grunt of acknowledgement, before redirecting the conversation.

The retired auror found Bartemius’s office before barging in without knocking, knowing he had a second door to go through before finding the wizard he was looking for.

“Mr. Moody, we are not expecting you, you don’t have an appointment,” Weasley said pompously.

“I don’t need an appointment, Weasley,” the grizzled auror said, walking to the other door.

“Mr. Moody, I’m afraid I can’t allow you to see Mr. Crouch!” the redhead said, standing up, running to interfere with Moody’s path.

“He was transfigured into an owl with a broken wing. He was fine. Crouch Jr could have simply killed him,” he growled staring into the young Weasley unblinkingly with his mad eye, “He was warm, fed, had a decent place to sleep. The school nurse saw to him, as did the healers at St Mungos. So tell me, what has he to recover from, Weasley? Or is it Weaslebee now?” Alastor said, getting closer, their noses almost touching.

Percy backed up, his head lightly bumping into the door behind him, his arms spreading across the surface. He was merely doing his job, he wasn’t prepared to stand up to one of Britian’s best aurors. Usually if he sounded as professional as possible and actually stood up to do something witches and wizards were deterred enough to leave the office.

Staring into the magical prosthetic electric blue eye, his chest constricted with a different type of unease. Everything Moody was saying was the truth.

‘What do I do? He’s not taking no for an answer, and I’m not trying to lose my job…’

“It’s still Weasley, Mr. Moody. I still must insist that you desist. You don’t have an appointment with
Mr. Crouch. I would be more than willing to set one up for you! It wouldn’t take more than a few seconds to quill you in,” Percy said lightly, hoping to reason with the seasoned auror.

“You’ll do yourself a favor to let me see Crouch, now, Weasley. I’d have no problems wiping the floor with ye!” The auror growled, narrowing his eye.

Percy’s legs started to shake as he turned around and knocked on the door.

“Mr. Crouch, Mr. Moody is here to see you, sir,” Percy said, his voice cracking, making his face turn red.

Percy’s Adam’s apple bobbed as he waited for his boss to answer the door.

The wizard was more than thankful when the door opened revealing his boss.

“Weaslebee! I told you I didn’t want to be seen this week!” Crouch yelled at his shaking assistant.

“I know, sir. I tried to tell him you needed time to recover bu-”

“I’ll not be havin’ an assistant tell me who I can n’ can’t see, Crouch! I need to speak with you about private matters, now,” the auror said, his eye working overtime checking to see if the room was had listening spells or not.

He shoved Percy to the side and stepped close to Crouch, making the man back up into his own office. To try to show some semblance of control, Crouch walked to the other side of his desk and sat down.

“Weaslebee, as you were,” he called out calmly.

Alastor shut the door behind him, making sure he threw up a silencing spell so no one would be able to listen in.

“Crouch, we have to talk,” Alastor said as he made his way to one of the chairs in front of Bartemius’s desk.

Bartemius cleared his throat before asking, “What about, Alastor?”

“Your son,” he said simply.

“What about him? He’ll be going back to Azkaban where he belongs or be given the kiss,” he said nonchalantly, “Surely that’s enough for you?”

“Enough? ENOUGH!?” Alastor banged his fist hard against the desk, “The lad won’t make it! He almost died the first time! Which was yer fault for giving him the harshest punishment available for his crime. The lad was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He didn’ cast a single crucio!”

“What does it matter to you!? He’s my son!”

“Yer sure don’t act like the lad’s father, Crouch! Yer wife was of the righ’ mind, he’s a good lad, he don’t deserve to be kissed,” Alastor sneered.

“A good lad? You must be out of your mind! He put you under the imperious! He impersonated you! He transfigured me into an owl!”

“He turned Malfoy’s boy into a ferret. The boy survived and so did you! All he told me was to ‘stay still’. He could have done anything else, but instead of letting me wear m’self out ‘stay still’. Does
that sound like evil to yeh, Crouch?”

A quick look of fondness passed through Crouch’s eyes before he replied, “It doesn’t matter. An unforgivable is an unforgivable, Alastor. Leave it alone. I tried to help him the first time and the ingrate went and almost exposed himself by casting that blasted mark with Potter’s wand of all people.”

“Putting the lad under the imperius for years isn’t help, Crouch. It’s worse than caging him. If anything had you not messed around with Jorkin’s memory she wouldn’t have given him away. Take credit for yer own actions, it might make ye a better man. Yer son is doin’ it all on his own. Must’ve learned it from ‘is mother,” he growled before leaving the stunned wizard behind him, slamming the door closed and removing the silencing spell.

Abagail laid in bed, being spooned by Leeroy, thinking about their future. There was a war that was starting and they would be moving abroad to avoid most of it. The kids would still be attending Hogwarts, Hermione would work harder at being Harry’s bodyguard. She would probably be apprentice to her potions professor, a bond as close as being married. She would be protected and in more danger at the same time.

Abagail read about him, he was a spy for the Order of the Phoenix, meaning he would be back in constant danger. However Hermione would have more protection, the purebloods knew about such a bond, if the apprentice died, so did the master. She would have to become a master herself before their bond was complete, but usually they kept in contact with their masters. The dark wizard would be in her little girl’s life forever.

Leeroy had a good feeling about him, and Abagail was putting faith in her husband’s feelings about the man. They would be meeting with Sirius Black tomorrow for ice cream to celebrate, and Leeroy already didn’t like Harry’s godfather.

Not that she blamed him, calling their daughter ‘Kitten’ of all things, she scoffed in her mind. The evening prophet announced his verdict and it was all over the muggle news that it was a case of mistaken identity. He was an auror, so she supposed that was something beneficial to her children…

Harry loved him, she just hoped that Sirius wouldn’t disappoint her son. It was easier to love someone for their image and what they imagined them to be. She had been told that Sirius and Harry’s father were practically brothers, and Harry was nearly a spitting image of his father. Harry was Harry, he couldn’t be his father too. She hoped Sirius would remember that…

The next day Severus sat in his kitchen reading the Daily Prophet, sneering here and there at the community’s stupidity. If it didn’t take genius to reproduce he was sure the wizarding world would have long been extinct.

He had thought long and hard about the Granger women. He admitted to himself that Miss Granger was brilliant and if it weren’t for her muggleborn status, starting next year she would be getting plenty of owls from masters wanting to apprentice her. He had no issues with her blood status, and some master’s didn’t care about blood more so than image. It was still unseemly to honor muggleborns with such prestige, but with Miss Granger being a Lady, he was sure they would overlook her blood status.
Being a master would give him a certain prestige as well, he would benefit from having an apprentice as much as she would benefit being his apprentice. It would peeve off Albus as well, not having sanctioned such an important decision of his life.

The Dark Lord could go either way. He would either be furious or extremely pleased. He liked when his Death Eaters elevated themselves in society, he praised them for bettering their lives. However he was a spy, he had to devote his time to the cause, he had other responsibilities that his brothers in arms did not. If he put a spin on it though, such as her closeness with Potter, it could be overlooked or some such, but only if he was angry.

He would love to divulge secrets and tips to a brilliant mind that would soak it all up like a sponge. He was to take her on as an assistant anyways, it wouldn’t be that much different in the beginning. He would be able to teach someone who was more than willing to learn what he had to teach, it would be a pleasant change…

He would ask Miss Granger in person during their first occlumency lesson. With that the potions master got up to go write the girl a letter announcing today’s lesson at one.

Hermione woke up later than usual, looking over at her blue bell flames that were still hovering under Skeeter’s jar. Skeeter herself was as close to the lid without touching it, knowing that it was possible that it would be scorching hot to touch. Crookshanks was also staring at the lid.

She grabbed her wand and got out of bed canceling the spell.

“Good morning, Rita. I trust you didn’t sleep well,” she said with a lazy smile, “You’ll get off lucky today, you’ll be watched by Elara and Crookshanks though. They do have a strong interest in you, I suppose you look more attractive as a bug than a woman. Also, your plants may be warm, but they’re still edible.”

With that she flounced away from the jar and started to get ready for the day.

The morning flew by quickly, Harry was very excited to see Sirius. It would be a novel experience for him to see his godfather in public without worrying about him being sent to Azkaban. Leeroy seemed to sulk a little bit, but kept it to himself. Abagail made sure that her family was ready for their outing and dressed decently.

They were going out for ice cream, but she felt with their statuses being revealed they should at least dress semi-formally when going out as a family. Either that or in wizarding robes. She reassured Harry and Hermione they could dress in their muggle clothes should they wish while they were at Hogwarts. However they now had to dress for the public. It was annoying, but it was something they had to do until the novelty wore off.

Harry and Hermione immediately decided to wear their robes whereas their parents opted for semi-formal. Abagail’s dress however seemed as though it could pass for robes, it was a shimmery light blue and looked smashing on her. She paired it off with nude open toe shoes.

Harry was forced to wear formal shoes and Hermione decided to compromise and wore flats. After exaggeratedly huffing, Hermione and Leeroy agreed they were more than ready to go out for ice cream. Harry gathered it was best to follow Hermione’s example, but tried to keep himself from
laughing when she huffed much like their housemates did when she talked about homework.

Walking into the Leaky Cauldron, they were greeted with the sight of one Sirius Black. He had taken advantage of his morning and had his appearance taken care of.

His hair was now black silky waves, no dead ends to be seen. His facial hair was trimmed perfectly, his high cheekbones were more prominent in his sallow face, but his eyes glittered with happiness.

That wasn’t what gave the Duke and Duchess a moment pause it was what he was dressed in.

Sirius was dressed in muggle clothes. He was wearing faded black jeans, an old Black Sabbath t-shirt, what looked like combat boots, and a clean worn in black leather jacket.

That was when they remembered once upon a time the man had a motorcycle. This must have been his usual dress before he was incarcerated. Abagail took a deep breath before puffing it out. She knew because of Harry he would be in their lives for as long as they lived, so she might as well get over it now.

She had no ill will towards him, hell she even dated a few bikers, it was just something they hadn’t seen when they made trips to the wizarding community. She tugged her husband closer so they could be seated with their children.

“Sirius,” Harry grinned brightly.

“Hey pup, glad you could make it. So, what do you think?” He said cheerfully, holding his arms up spinning around slowly for them.

“I love it,” Harry said.

“Very you,” Hermione said with a quirky smile.

“Love the jacket,” Abagail said, Leeroy just nodded.

“What are you going to do now that you’re free?” Harry asked.

“Well like I said, I’m going to start my job back up. Probably look for another motorcycle to tinker with, and I’m not sure what else just yet,” he said his grinning back at his godson, “Maybe when it’s all settled you could move in!”

Harry’s grin faltered, “About that Sirius…”

“What is it, pup?”

“The Grangers here, they adopted me. I was planning on staying with them with all they’ve gone through to help me,” he said quietly, scratching the back of his head.

“Wouldn’t it be better to live in the wizarding world though, like you were meant to?” Sirius said, his grin dimming to a smile.

“My parents know more about the wizarding world than you’d think, Sirius,” Hermione piped in.

“Yeah?” Sirius asked, a little skeptical.
“Yeah, they’re amazing, Sirius!” Harry said with another grin, “They helped me win my case, they hired a lawyer and everything. That and I mean, they had, Hermione. Mum is just as brilliantly scary.”

“Mum? Lily is your mum, Harry,” Sirius said, his smile dimming more.

“I know, but she’s my other mother. Hermione and I are blood bond siblings, and they accepted and acknowledged our bond, so they’re my parents too,” he said with a smile, “Mum even blood bonded with Aunt Petunia, just in case I still needed the blood ward protections. It was before she knew we blood bonded, but it just makes us closer as a family cause she has my birth mum’s blood in her too.”

Sirius looked at Hermione’s mother in a new light. Blood bonds were serious business, he had one with James, so he knew what Harry was talking about. They adopted Harry in all the ways they could, and anyone who did that earned his respect.

“Anyone who would go to such lengths for you Harry, is freakin’ fantastic in my books. I’m sad you can’t live with me, but they’ve gone above and beyond,” he said grinning at them, “I remember Lee, I never caught your name the other day though, you already know mine.”

“How rude of me,” Hermione scolded herself, “These are my parents, Abagail and Leeroy Granger,” she finished with a grin.

“Lee, Abby, I think we’re gonna get along splendidly,” she said with a smile.

Abagail giggled, he might have been about her age, but he was clearly still of a younger mindset. She couldn’t find it in her to begrudge him of it. Better cheerful than bitter, he could be drinking himself away, but here he was trying to spend time with his godson.

“Shall we? We came for ice cream, did we not?”

“That we did, madam, that we did,” with that he turned around and walked with what could only be a natural strut to the back of the bar.

He quickly tapped the wall which opened for them and they made their way straight to the ice cream parlour, ignoring the looks they were receiving.

Abagail wasn’t sure if it was them, Harry, or Sirius. Whoever it was, they were bound to catch attention anyways. Just as they were about to enter, an owl headed straight towards Hermione.

“Hermione, dear, you’ve got a letter,” Abagail said, looking at the owl.

The curly haired witch lifted up her arm for the owl to land on before taking the letter from him. As soon as she retrieved it, the owl took flight again.

_Dear Miss Granger,

Our first lesson will begin today at 1pm, your house.

I will see you there.

Sincerely,

S. Snape_
Hermione’s heart beat increase.

“I have to be home for one, I have my first lesson today,” she said casually, a small smile on her lips.

The Grangers nodded, while Harry frowned.

“Lesson?” Sirius asked, “It’s *summer break*. What are you doing this summer that couldn’t be done during school?”

“Occlumency,” Hermione answered nonchalantly.

Sirius paused, looking at Hermione as she walked past him.

She was a force to be reckoned with when she was a third year. She hadn’t even started her fifth year and she was already learning obscure magic. Harry was right, she was brilliantly scary.
Leeroy was honest with himself, their little ice cream date hadn’t gone as terrible as he thought it would. Harry was happy, Hermione was content, Abagail was happy that the kids were happy, and the ice cream was delicious (they’d all be brushing their teeth when they got home). Still he couldn’t help continuously looking at his watch, waiting for quarter to one. He would offer to take Hermione home if the others wanted to stay, he hoped not, but he wouldn’t be the wet blanket to Harry’s meet up.

Hermione was happy that Sirius was free and that he was happy for Harry. At first she could tell the older wizard had some reserves about her family and Harry living with them instead of with him. Mentioning the blood bonds though had cheered him right back up, and he didn’t mention it again. If anything he seemed to support it. Instead he mentioned sleep overs and weekend get togethers.

Abagail was quiet most of the event, letting the children enjoy themselves. They could have come alone, but she didn’t want to risk it with the war picking up, albeit slowly. That and she was in agreement with Albus Dumbledore on one thing; Harry should not be out in public alone. Death Eaters wanted him, Voldemort wanted him, and well-wishers were sometimes a tad exuberant. He had to be protected from those who wished him harm and those who wished him a bit too well. Harry sadly had little to no people skills and didn’t know how to handle a crowd.

She’d work on that this summer…

However she was listening and did think the male bonding sounded splendid. Something that he needed in his life. He would be able to do some of that with Leeroy, but Sirius seemed as though he’d be able to get Harry to do some physical things, probably learn about a motorcycle, whereas Leeroy would be able to teach him how to chase skirts and manage personal business.

Sirius did seem a bit like a young Leeroy with his smile though… he was probably a bit hit with the ladies in his youth too…

She looked at her the clock waiting, hoping that Harry would be agreeable to going home for Hermione’s lesson.

“Hermione, luv, we’re going to be leaving soon for your lesson, alright?” Leeroy said, looking at his watch again.

“Yes, Daddy.”

“Harry, would you like to come with or stay here with Sirius?” he asked casually.

Harry’s eye brightened up at the question. He wasn’t given many options when it came to where he was during the summer. He was always watched closely at either the Dursleys or the Weasleys house. He was rarely allowed to leave the property when he was with the Dursleys and not at all at the Weasleys.

He looked over at his new mother knowing that Hermione had to leave since it was her lesson, and she looked extremely bored. She was polite and didn’t say anything while they caught up, but drank her ice cream float slowly, playing with the cold glass.

“As much as I would love to stay, I think it would be better if I went with,” he said with a smile.

“You don’t mind, do you Sirius?” he asked after, looking at his godfather insecurely.
“Not at all, pup. Family is important and I’m sure you want to learn as much as you can about them,” he paused for a moment. “*Real* family is important, and that’s what you have here.”

He ruffled Harry’s already messy hair with a fond look on his face.

The older wizard looked at the royalty sitting across from him.

“Would you like me to escort you home? I don’t have training for the next two weeks, then it’ll be intense. Malfoy hasn’t gotten back to me yet about Cissy helping me with redecorating and to be honest I’m avoiding the place. I would just get a new flat, but Albus asked if we could meet up at my place and it’s large enough *and* well hidden,” he explained standing up, “Don’t worry about the glasses they’re set to go to the kitchen after we leave the parlour.”

“That would be lovely, thank you,” Abagail said, knowing that Harry and Sirius both wanted to spend more time with each other than anything.

Leeroy stood up before helping Abagail out of her seat. He wanted to say that they didn’t need an escort, but both wizards were doing a fine job of not vibrating where they stood. Their excitement was nearly contagious, but Hermione had lessons that would help her survive and that took precedence.

Sirius and Harry were walking a little behind Hermione since she was leading the way, practically giggling together. Hermione on the other hand was subtly wiping her hands on her robes. She was excited and nervous to see her Professor so soon, she didn’t even do her meditative exercises before she went to sleep. Hopefully he would accept mind wards as an acceptable occlumency shield.

Severus took a deep breath, having remembered Miss Granger’s address in London, he was going to floo to the Leaky and walk the rest of the way. He knew he walked quickly and the house was a mere 5 minute walk for him, most likely 10 for others.

The potions master dressed muggle, hoping he wouldn’t stand out as much as he usually did. He wore black dress pants, his black dragon hide boots, a white button up shirt, and a breathable black jacket. It was close enough in style to his normal robes that he was comfortable leaving his house in it. He was going on business and was of firm belief that it was best to dress for the occasion.

He grabbed a book on occlumency in case Miss Granger needed it, or at least to provide evidence she could show to Albus that they were proceeding the lessons as *suggested*. He placed it securely in his jacket’s inner pocket, before making his way to the floo.

Once they made it to the house Abagail offered to give Sirius a tour of the house, which he declined saying he’d have to take a rain check. He had to go buy an owl since he was sure that the family owl was either dead or had been released. Either way, he needed an owl of his own, explaining how much of a pain it was to have to use the Post’s owls.

Harry and Abagail were in the door seeing him off when Severus turned the corner, walking swiftly towards the house. He caught sight of the hound and had to take a deep breath. He refused to ram into Miss Granger’s mind angrily as it could hurt her physically, which would be detrimental to making her amendable to his proposal.
Sirius turned and came face to face with Severus and his nose twitched up, obviously wanting to form into a sneer. However managed to control himself and instead nodded in a steely fashion to the acerbic man.

“Snape.”

“Black.”

Sirius turned around slowly, knowing how much his godson hated the professor, “Don’t worry, Harry. Snape is one of the best occlumens in Britain. Hermione is learning from the best, she’ll be fine.”

Harry ran his hand through his hair obviously agitated, but nodded reluctantly at Sirius’s reassurance. Hermione was the smartest witch he knew, so it would only be fit that she would learn from the best. She taught herself amazing magic alone, learning from one of the best would only help her, and make her happy. His sister and the twins were the only ones who respected him even when he wasn’t around, although Hermione was a more stern about it. So he supposed she would be fine….

“Professor,” Harry nodded.

“Mr. Potter,” Severus nodded back.

With that Harry left to do something else in the house, away from Snape.

“Professor Snape, come in please,” Abagail said with a pleasant smile, “Hermione is waiting for you in the living room. Hermione, Professor Snape is here!”

Severus could barely hear her steps, so the room was obviously carpeted. The witch poked her head, curls bouncing with the movement, looking at him with a smile.

“This way, Professor,” she said, sounding as she usually did.

Severus made his way seeing that his student had made herself comfortable on a couch, her legs daintily tucked to the side. He was mildly surprised to see her wearing robes, but continued, taking a seat across from the witch.

“Miss Granger, as you’re aware the Headmaster wanted me to teach you occlumency this summer. He made it clear that since it would be the first time we were meeting for lessons alone, that it may be a tad uncomfortable around you. Yet we both know that’s not true. Your shields obviously did a job well done, or else he would have said something else. We agreed our previous lessons would be private, and you managed to keep it secret even from him. So I must applaud you Miss Granger.”

“Thank you, sir. I feel I must let you know that he did that after the incident in the graveyard… my front shields weren’t as strong as they normally were, but my backup as you call it was still firmly in place. The events of the night however, were there for him to see. I didn’t have the energy to pull it in,” she admitted.

Severus raised an eyebrow knowing what she was referring to. It must have been a light touch that allowed him to feel her emotions and see part of what happened.

“It seems that, that worked out in our favor, Miss Granger. I did bring you a book should the Headmaster actually remember that he wanted to ‘check’ your progress. So you have something physical you may show him that we have been following his suggestions.”

Hermione nodded in agreement.
“Aside from that Miss Granger, I didn’t come here just to give you a book. A book which I know you’ll treat with respect and give it back in the same condition,” “Of course, sir.” “I came to make you a proposition.”

Hermione shifted curiously in her seat.

“The Headmaster has already asked you to be my potions ‘assistant’,” he spoke slowly.

Hermione nodded, knowing he would take his time. She loved the way he spoke, his voice was sinful and the way he annunciared words when he spoke was music to her ears.

“I have decided that I would rather you be...” he paused, his stomach clenched in anticipation at the words that were about to come out of his mouth “… my apprentice. If you are amendable?”

The curly haired witch felt a fluttering above her pubic area, forgetting to breathe for a second.

‘An apprentice? Me? This is a dream, it has to be. I’m a muggleborn, I’m not respectable enough to be an apprentice. But here he is, offering to be my master. He’s so brilliant and he wouldn’t teach me just potions. The youngest master in a century and he wants to apprentice me!’

Hermione tried to take a low calm breath in an attempt to ease the feeling in her lower stomach, it didn’t work.

“I would be honored to call you master, sir,” she said breathlessly, her cheeks were flush as her eyes were lit with passion.

Severus felt a spike of smug pleasure knowing that it was him that made her breathless. The young professor also felt a twinge of something more primal looking into the same eyes that haunted his dreams and the way she said ‘master’. At the same time he felt a huge amount of relief flow through him at her acceptance.

Thinking quick on his feet he responded, “The honor is mine to call you apprentice, Miss Granger. We can perform the ceremony here, by ourselves or we can call Professor McGonagall to aid us, should you like.”

“Which would you prefer, sir?” she said, her eyes still burning and lighting his skin on fire everywhere she looked at him.

“We do need a witness, but I’m sure your mother would be willing. The only other thing we would need that I can’t transfigure is elven wine, but I can get some.”

“I may have some here, I can check. Just give me a moment,” she said, quickly standing up and making her way to the kitchen.

———

“Thimi,” she said lowly.

She felt the familiar hand touch, the system they worked out at Hogwarts worked just as nice at home.

“Do we have any elven wine?”

Thimi took her mistress’s hand leading her to a cabinet so it didn’t look suspicious if Thimi opened the cabinet herself disillusioned.
Hermione opened the cabinet and leaned over hovering over Thimi as the house-elf reached in and grabbed the bottle she was looking for. Thimi handed it to Hermione carefully in a way that it was easy to think that she grabbed it herself. The witch lightly caressed the house-elf’s hand in a silent thank you.

Since talking wasn’t always an option they were able to say small things with light touches, and as Hermione insisted using her manners, Thimi had accepted it as one of her mistress’s quirks.

Hermione was about to go to the living room when she remembered her mother would be needed as a witness. She didn’t have to go far, her mother was walking down the stairs.

“Mum, Professor Snape just asked me to be his apprentice, and I accepted,” she whispered excitedly, “Would you be our witness? Please?”

Abagail’s eyes sparkled happily, “I would love to, dear. I see you got the elf wine,” she said to her daughter, grabbing her by the arm and escorting her as though on her wedding.

They returned to the living room with the bottle in Hermione’s hands, walking gracefully alongside her mother.

Severus looked over and saw his apprentice-to-be blushing beside her mother, who looked as excited as he felt. The bottle was quite large, but he knew they wouldn’t need more than a half a goblet.

Abagail released her daughter, shooting a dazzling smile towards the dark wizard in her living room.

“Oh! I should get the silver tray, it’ll be better for the ceremony. Unless you have a silver goblet on you, Professor?” Abagail asked curiously.

Severus shook his head, “The silver tray would be sufficient.”

The Duchess nodded and disappeared for a moment, her steps were quick and hurried.

“Your mother is familiar with bonding ceremonies I take it?” he asked, his eyebrow arched looking at Miss Granger curiously.

Hermione shrugged half-heartedly, “She read as much as she could to understand the wizarding world. I’m not surprised she knows as much as she does.”

“Hn.”

Abagail hurried back into the living room holding the silver tray with both hands, her eyes sparkling as bright as the tray in her hands.

“Here y’go, Professor,” Abagail said, unable to keep the grin off her face as she handed the tray to the Professor.

She was beyond pleased that the wizard had given her request serious thought and regardless of his reasons decided it was worth it. Her little girl was going to be given a prestige in her world all on her own merit, she couldn’t be happier. The protection of course was the main reason why she wanted it, but the way he went about it she knew it was most likely scholarly reasons. Hermione didn’t know that she asked him to consider it, and it was clear that he didn’t mention it to her either.

Severus took the tray from her carefully before taking out his wand and transfiguring it into the
desired goblet shape and size. He could tell from the weight that the tray was real silver instead of nickel plated silver. Since it was something that was going to be special to the Granger family, he decided to keep true to the tray’s original damask designs and made sure that it showed on the goblet’s handles and base.

“Miss Granger, every apprenticeship is different, so just as your bond with Potter, your responses must be natural. Now hold the goblet and I’m going to fill it.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied, giving him the elf wine, and taking the goblet from him marveling at the small details.

’Silly wand waving indeed,’ she thought admiring his craftsmanship.

Uncorking the bottle Severus took a breath through his nose before releasing it through his mouth. After this they would be sacredly bonded for the rest of their lives.

“Hermione Granger, I would take you as my apprentice. I will bestow my knowledge unto you, who I think worthy of such effort.”

“I would accept you, Severus Snape, as my master to enlighten me of all your knowledge. I will give in return my loyalty and trust.”

Severus took the wine and filled the goblet halfway. Abagail discreetly took the bottle from him.

“I will take what you give and will not abuse it. Our bond is to be ours and will not be affected by outside forces.”

“I will be happy in the ways that you guide me. Our bond will be resilient and unyielding.”

The wizard took the goblet and drank half of its contents.

“Under my tutelage I will see you prosper.”

He handed it back to the young witch. Hermione drank the rest of the wine, making sure there was nothing left. Abagail swiftly took the goblet from her daughter; neither witch nor wizard took much notice.

“Under your aegis I will heed your sagacity and share with you my passion.”

Severus blushed lightly before he grabbed her face carefully, staring deeply into her hazel eyes flecked with gold coloring that he knew were once a warm chocolate brown.

“Under the eyes of a witness our bond shall be sanctioned as pristine and true. I shall dispense of my falsities with you and be authentic in all ways.”

“Our bond genuine and intuitive, I shall dispense of distrust and gift you full confidence.”

He tilted the crown of her head towards him and lightly kissed her. His magic passed through his lips and gently shrouded her, appearing as a silver waterfall.

“Master,” she sighed happily, closing her eyes, his magic tenderly caressed her giving her a feeling of coming home.

“Apprentice,” he said lowly, his voice sending delightful shivers down her spine from the top of her head.
Slowly he allowed her to straighten and removed his hands from her. Abagail was standing there, her bottom lip quivering. The bond and their vows were so beautiful, it was such a wondrous occasion.

“Congratulations. It was beautiful,” she sniffed lightly, “Will you be picking up the official apprentice badge now or before term starts?”

“I believe it would be prudent to pick up the badge when I bring her to the Ministry to take her potions OWL,” he said, his eyes softer than Hermione had ever seen.

Abagail nodded.

“Speaking of my OWL prof- master, would we be able to create potions away from Hogwarts or no because of ingredients?”

“I have my own storeroom, apprentice Granger. You will be able to brew the necessary potions I know will be on your exam until I’m satisfied with the outcome.”

Without knowing she was tense, Hermione felt her body relax. Abagail smiled again and left them to their ‘shop’ talk.

“In private master, you can call me Hermione or Miss Granger if you prefer,” she said with a smile, somehow knowing he would appreciate it.

He nodded, a smile hidden in his eyes.

“I feel today has been productive, however I think there’s just enough time to go over some textbook answers. I’m sure you’ve already read the advanced texts, but I will provide other books for you to pursue next lesson.”

The young witch beamed at him.

“What do you add to a halcyon canis potion after you’d added the powdered lavender?” he asked calmly.

“Daffodil pollen,” she retorted.

“How much?”

“A dash,” she quipped.

They went on for another 15 minutes, Severus asking questions that would be on her exam and questions that would eventually be on her NEWTs.

“Very good, Hermione. You’ll do excellent on the written,” he said lowly.

The curly haired witch blushed at the praise that she had wanted as long as she had been at Hogwarts.

“Thank you, master,” she said softly.
Severus allowed a ghost of a smile to grace his lips. It didn’t take a genius to know that she appreciated the praise more from him than she did from other professors. He waved his hand and muttered, “Muffliato.”

“Miss Granger, I feel I must let you know that between us I will be as candid as I can. This relationship is as new to me as it is to you, but teaching dunderheads and having been in your shoes I have an idea. In public I will remain the same, it won’t do to have the populous of Hogwarts blow themselves up due to their carelessness.”

Hermione laughed under her breath understanding where he was coming from. The majority of her classmates didn’t take their education seriously unless they liked the subject. There was a difference between having an affinity for a certain branch of magic and merely being ignorant. She knew that even if you didn’t have an affinity for a specific branch of magic it was better to have the knowledge and skill of others to be a well-rounded individual.

“I will be fair to you in public, you will mostly be an extension of myself, so I will be aware of you peripherally. I hope I don’t need to inform you that I will no longer be able to give you points nor take them away. All detentions, should you obtain any, will be with me. Any discrepancies will be directed towards me, despite you being an adult. Of course that doesn’t include legal matters.”

Hermione nodded, knowing that if he gave her points it would appear as though he was playing favoritism and taking them away would simply be redundant since she wouldn’t be able to earn them back. The detentions made sense since he had a higher authority on her now that he was her master.

“Until you pass all of your OWLs you may remain in your current dormitory, unless asked. After that you will be given a room in my personal quarters. We will set ground rules when that happens. You will continue to attend your classes per normal, and I will review with you. Should I feel that you can do more or better, I will see that you do. I will essentially personalize your lessons to your abilities and merely expand what your professors are teaching you in class.”

The young witch grinned brightly at him, excited to learn above what was taught in class. She knew the professors had to cater to the general level and understanding of the whole class. They usually praised her and then left her to own devices unless it was a group assignment. It was quite boring, so she’d perform the spell a few more times until she perfected it. Depending on the lesson she’d add extra details or flair to the assignment.

“Honestly, that was one thing I was disappointed with when I started Hogwarts,” she said.

“How do you mean?” he asked, honestly curious.

Hermione decided to be frank with her master. He promised her that he would be authentic, she decided that she would like to reciprocate. She had vowed to confidence in him and dispense with distrust. She would be herself with him, fully. She had to confide to give confidences.

‘You’re a Gryffindor, Hermione. Grab your courage. He is your master, this is your leap of faith.’

“Well when Professor McGonagall came to give me my letter, mum was unsurprised that a professor came to our house. I was already taking high school, or secondary school which ever term you prefer, level courses and I had a private tutor to give me accelerated work. I was only in school to socialize with others around my age. It was recommended,” she said mulishly with an eye roll, “not
that it mattered. When I got my letter my parents agreed that it would be a good idea for me to get my GED before I started Hogwarts. A backup in case things didn’t go swimmingly I wouldn’t be without if I decided to just live in the muggle world. So when there was mention of professors, in general, at Hogwarts I was under the impression that there would be people like… like me and we would be given accelerated work. Not a primary, secondary, and university school rolled into one.”

Severus was impressed, he knew she was bright, brilliant with magic, but to be advanced in muggle school as well was something he hadn’t wagered on. He was able to understand her disappointment under such circumstances. Usually muggleborn students had the benefit of attending public or neighborhood schools, rarely private institutes. They didn’t get farther than primary school. It would also explain her infamous epic papers.

“No many people know this, but I’m a half-blood, so I am familiar with the muggle world. Not as up to date since I’ve made my mark our world, but you may be pleased to know that I did obtain a chemistry Ph.D,” he quirked his lip up at the spark in her eye.

“Normally when taking on an apprentice a master teaches all they know about the magical world. Even other half-blood masters tend to stick strictly to teaching about our world. It is quite difficult teaching a pureblood about muggle things, as I’m sure you’ve noticed.”

Hermione snorted in response. It was practically sad watching purebloods either turn their noses up at muggle things or not understanding at all, even when interested. Mister Weasley was considered one of the most knowledgeable purebloods when it came to muggle things, which was quite sad.

“Which is why we don’t bother. You however have knowledge and the ability to grasp the concepts, so if you’d like I’d also share my muggle knowledge with you. I can’t pull rank in the muggle world of course, but I know that it’s possible to do self-paced courses if you’d like.”

The curly haired witch’s eyes softened. It was something that she had wanted, but had planned on doing after she graduated Hogwarts. Here was her master unknowingly offering to help her accomplish post Hogwarts goals.

“I would love that, Master Snape. I had planned on attending Uni after Hogwarts, but to do self-paced courses would be immensely better for me,” she said softly.

“That will be something we will focus on during your seventh year, should I survive that long,” he said with finality.

Hermione’s heart clenched painfully at the idea of his death and let it show in her eyes.

“What about NEWTs?” she asked instead.

“Why, Hermione, you should know that I plan on having you take your NEWTs early. At the end of your sixth year if possible, if not then that summer most definitely,” he drawled in sophisticated tones.

He ignored the pain in her eyes, but was humbled that she cared for him in a way that let him know that should he die, she would miss him. The witch however nodded listening to his academic plans for her, even if she was internally frazzled at technically skipping a year and consequently having to take her NEWTs early.

He took a deep breath preparing himself to speak about another hard subject.

“I am aware that you are going to be joining the Order soon to be Potter’s official bodyguard. As your master you must know that I am a spy for both sides. I walk a fine line, but he’s been pleased
with how I’ve conducted myself in his absence, so I’ve been instructed to continue as I have been. I will have to continue to publicly be rude and whatnot to your brother, he cannot know so that his reactions are genuine.”

She nodded sadly, knowing that Harry was pants at acting. He could barely pretend not to know something he shouldn’t. Professor Barty Crouch had told her about his double agent position in the war.

At her lack of reaction to his position in the Order he raised an eyebrow curiously, “You aren’t surprised.”

“No, sir,” she said as she remembered her vow; ‘Only tell those on a need to know basis.’

“I was taking private lessons with Professor Barty Crouch and Alastor Moody. I was aware before everyone else… they were working together. No one was supposed to know. I took an unbreakable vow. The knowledge was to be kept to myself and only tell those on a need to know basis. You’re my master, and I feel that you need to know,” she finished with a shrug.

Severus’s breath caught in his throat.

“My parents also knew, they came over to our chateau during Easter hols, to work more on my training. They said I have the makings of a wards mistress,” she said quietly, even knowing that they probably couldn’t be overheard.

“Mad-eye and Barty were working together? Miss Granger I don’t know if you’re aware of the state that Moody was found in at the bottom of his trunk,” he said incredulously, he had already known about her ability to play with wards.

Hermione sighed and looked down at her hands playing with her fingers, “It was a ruse. Overall Professor Moody was kept relatively comfortable, if bored. It wasn’t until the day of the final task they faked abuse. You can ask mum and dad, they stayed with us after all. They were… quite the duo,” she said with a ghost of a smile, “they were slave drivers. It was like being in a boot camp. They did all they could for me, they taught me as much as they could in the short time we had together,” she stilled her fingers, “I loved it.”

Severus looked over his apprentice, she seemed genuine, and given the nature of their new relationship he knew she had to be telling the truth. She spoke of them with a soft fondness, as though they were lost to her forever. He knew they took Barty Crouch away and he was awaiting his own trial. As a Death Eater he knew that Barty played a crucial part in the Dark Lord’s resurrection.

“Alastor Moody is a member of the Order, so you may see him at the meetings,” he offered.

“I know, he said as much. It just won’t be the same without Professor Crouch. Honestly I’ll miss him as much as I’ll miss Professor Moody. They did a lot for me, taught me a lot of things, told me important things…”

“Like what?”

“They told me about the war before it started. They told me about the final task. About you. The Headmaster… How to avoid being killed by Dolohov and Yaxley. Regulus Black. About … the Dark Lord’s… horcruxes,” she said word hushed.

An unpleasant shiver went up Severus’s spine, one that he was well acquainted with when it came to the Dark Lord.
“I must apologize, I don’t know what that is in detail, but I’ve heard it in passing.”

The hazel eyed witch looked at him uncomfortably, “It’s a dark object containing a fragment of a dark wizard or witch’s soul. It helps give them a false *immortality*. So when they die, they can be brought back to life because a piece of their soul hasn’t been killed. I’d rather not know how they’re created, but I know it’s horrible… he… he made more than one.”

Severus took a moment to let the dread fill his stomach, shocked but unsurprised at the knowledge.

‘*Of course he would. The Dark Lord can never do anything that would be so simple.*’

“You’ve spent a lot of time with them then?” he asked carefully.

Hermione smiled sadly, “Not enough time. I spent most of the year learning from them though. Professor Moody taught me what he thought would help me survive. As paranoid as he is I’m sure I was given a quick version of the auror’s program,” she chuckled to herself.

The potions master couldn’t help but agree with her assessment. Alastor had a tendency to go overboard on everything when it came to safety. However he was one of the best aurors they had in Great Britain. The strength of his disillusionment was admirable.

“Did he teach you how to disillusion yourself?” he asked curiously.

Hermione smiled at her master before disappearing before his eyes, only the indent in the couch gave her away. There wasn’t even a shimmer that was a usual tell-tale sign that someone was disillusioned. He took careful notice that she performed the spell silently and wandlessly.

“Wave your hand, let me see if I can see it,” he said.

The witch did so and Severus was impressed still.

“Don’t forget master, I was disillusioned the whole final task and the Dark Lord’s resurrection. No one saw or heard me enter,” she said as she dispelled the charm.

“Indeed,” he said, not having been aware of those details, “I supposed you know a great amount of Defense concerning the Dark Arts, then?”

His apprentice shrugged as though she wasn’t sure, lifting her hand up while making a face. It was a novel experience for him since he was so used to her knowing the answer, whether he wanted her to or not.

“I will teach you the Dark Arts, I will keep you from falling to its seductive pull, if only to teach you how to better perform counter curses and come up with cures. There are a few elite Death Eaters that have created dark spells and only they know the counter curse. Some of curses though don’t leave enough time to counter, the blood boiling curse is one of them. You’d have mere seconds before it would kill you.”

Her face was grim, but she nodded without blanching. It was a testament to the training Barty and Mad-Eye had run her through. They helped him a great deal, teaching her some of the most frustrating aspects of magic. Still he knew that Alastor wasn’t the best at ancient runes and Barty was bollucks at arithmancy. Regardless they were teaching her defense, how to stay alive, not so much the other fields of magic that a witch or wizard would need at least an O for their NEWTs to be an auror which consisted of potions, transfiguration, herbology, charms, and defense against the dark arts.
“Aside from that the Dark Arts are ever changing, as though they have a life of their own. There is more than one way to counter a curse. The more you understand them, the easier it is to defend yourself against them. It is one thing that Alastor never understood,” he said carefully.

The witch tilted her head, nodding as his words made sense. The grizzled wizard was stubborn so it would only seem right that he was firm in his beliefs. He was one of the only wizards in the first war who refused to use unforgivable even though aurors had been given the go ahead to use them. The old wizard simply refused, but he admitted to her that for her part in the war it would be different and she would be most likely be grey.

“Is there anything else I should know?” he asked the witch who seemed to throw him for a spin.

“We’re going to be in France for the majority of the summer. As my master you are of course welcome to visit, but I did plan on traveling back here to at least maintain the façade that we are staying here. We don’t want people knowing where we are. I have a house-elf, her name is Thimi, and she’s a wonderful part of our family. Harry hasn’t been told or met her yet though. You may formerly know her as Winky though. That is also staying secret. Also,” Hermione fidgeted in her seat, “I … I have Rita Skeeter in my room.”

Snape looked at her, his eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

“Come again?”

“I have Rita Skeeter in my room.”

“Why would you have that blasted journalist –”

“She’s in a jar!” she said quickly.

“I’m sorry?” he said in a confused manner.

“She’s an illegal animagus, and I have her in a jar in my room. I plan on keeping her in there until I feel she’s learned her lesson,” she said with a large blush across her cheeks, not looking at her master.

Severus looked at his apprentice shrewdly. It appeared as though she did have a dark side as she technically had a human being in a jar. Not just any human being, a fellow witch in her illegal animagus form, until further notice.

“Hermione,” he paused, “I think this is the beginning of a wonderful relationship,” he finished with a purr.

The witch blushed furiously.

“The Headmaster can’t know of anything that I told you, I took an unbreakable vow, and it was need to know basis. As my master I trust you and I feel that you need to know. Some of the information was given to me under the vow explicitly to be kept from the Headmaster. Before our lessons you as well, but that was a bridge we crossed when it came.”

Severus nodded, “I will take what you give me and not abuse it, Hermione. I will keep this information safe from both the Headmaster and the Dark Lord.”

“You are most welcome,” he waved his hand taking down the muffling spell, “I feel that is enough
enlightenment for the day, apprentice. Will you be in public tomorrow around one?"

“Most likely not, master.”

“Then wait for my patronus and I will see if I can come to you. Should something come up, I will let you know.”

“Thimi can come get you, sir. She was going to bring me back and forth for our lessons; but we can switch it up if you’d like. Some days here and some days there,” she suggested lowly.

“That is a sound idea, apprentice. I will send my patronus tomorrow,” he said standing up.
Hermione rose with him and led him to the front door.

“Until tomorrow,” he nodded his head and took his leave.

“Until tomorrow,” she whispered at his back.

Hermione shut the door when her master had officially left the property. She turned around to see her mother grinning from ear to ear.

“I’m so proud of you! I’ve already told your father. After we get off the plane we’re going to go out to celebrate at that restaurant in Nimes. We’ll tell Harry when we get there,” she said excitedly.

“Harry, luv, I hope you haven’t unpacked your trunk! We’re leaving for a plane now!” Abagail yelled up the stairs.

Leeroy walked out of the kitchen swinging the car keys on his fingers.

“Don’t worry, luv. You’re already packed and ready to go,” he said placing a comforting hand on her shoulder, “Congratulations, Hermione. You deserve it.”

“Thanks, Daddy.”

They briefly explained in the car that they were going to spend some time on holiday in France. Harry was quite excited as he had never been out of the country before for holiday. Abagail had assured him that she already took care of his passport with the help of their lawyer. For his photo they explained that they simply copied one from Hermione’s school album and froze it to finish the passport.

Once they boarded the plane Harry was a bit disappointed as it was nothing like flying on a broom. So he sadly looked out the window watching the clouds. They had agreed that Harry should get the window seat as it was his first time on a plane. Hermione brought a book of course, as did Abagail, and Leeroy decided to watch the shitty movie the plane was playing.

When they landed they would explain most of what was going on to Harry. Nothing about the war, as Hermione didn’t want him to know about her part in it. Abagail wanted to tell him, but agreed that it wouldn’t be smart as he had a bad habit of going to face danger half-cocked. There was only one Harry, they didn’t want to lose him to his own stupidity.
Dinner had gone delightfully well, Harry had felt out of place being the only one who didn’t speak French, but Hermione translated for him. As it was his first time abroad they decided to order him something he would be at least somewhat familiar with; hachis parmentier. It was essentially a French shepherd’s pie to ease his discomfort over foreign food.

“Don’t worry, Harry. You’ll learn the more you’re exposed to the language. It’s the best way to learn a language anyways. It will have a certain dialect, but that’s to be expected,” Abagail laughed.

They made polite small talk over dinner, avoiding talk of the magical world since they were blending in. It wasn’t that hard as the Duke and Duchess were telling dinner jokes and amusing work stories. Harry laughed glad to be part of a normal family dinner. He didn’t know the occasion for the celebration and didn’t ask in case it was about him. He had enough attention on himself to last a lifetime, so he was more than happy that they were treating him the same way they treated Hermione. Attention was given almost equally, their mum however had a twinkle in her eye whenever she looked at Hermione.

Once they arrived Harry was stunned with how large the castle was. He hadn’t been anywhere as large in the muggle world. He had assumed it was a hotel though with its massive size. It wasn’t Hogwarts, but for the muggle world it was pretty breath taking.

Hermione kept looking in the corner of her eye to see what Harry’s reaction would be to their chateau. So far he was quite astonished, so she was highly curious to see what his reaction would be when he found out it was one of their homes.

She had decided to leave Rita at their home in London, the water plant she left in the jar would be suitable enough to eat. She did a bit of research on the journalist’s animagus form and was able to establish that aside from eating other bugs, she would be able to eat water plants. The witch was less concerned as she had at least made it so the horrid journalist wouldn’t starve in her captivity. It was better than bringing a witch with a grudge to a warded house, she wouldn’t make it. Hermione wasn’t fond of trying to test her ward’s limits when someone who harbored ill will was forced over the ward’s barrier line. For all she knew it would possible kill or handicap the other witch for life, which wasn’t something she wanted, despite holding her captive.

As they got out of the car Harry looked up at the chateau barely believing that it was part of the muggle world. He knew from history books that they existed, but it was different seeing a photo and seeing one in person.

“Welcome home, Harry,” Abagail said softly with a smile.

Harry quickly looked at his new mother with shock, “Home?”

Abagail laughed, “Yes, home. This is one of our homes. It’s a chateau, we usually spend holidays here or just come for a weekend trip. In those cases we have someone come air it out before we come in if we’ve been in England too long. I mean if we didn’t take a plane, it would just be a train ride away. Some people even swim to France through the channel,” she said finishing with a shrug.
Harry blinked before slowly nodding, his eyes a little glazed as he took it all in. He knew in theory how close France was, however having never been, he usually didn’t think about it. Yet he was more stunned not having known that Hermione had a large home in France. Not so much as a home as so much as a castle. He assumed it would be a common home, perhaps a floor or two, much like the one in London.

‘With how Ron is, it’s no wonder she didn’t want to tell us though. Bloke is sensitive when it comes to money things. Why mention a second home, let alone a castle, when he could barely handle that she’s able to buy candy from Honeydukes every Hogsmead weekend?’

Albus waited a few days before making a trip to Gringotts, he didn’t want his visit to raise suspicions. He was extremely concerned about the termination of the contract between Harry and Ginevra. Molly had called practically hysterical, which at first he thought was her being her normal overdramatic self. After she sent him the very official letter from Gringotts though he felt a mix of anger and fear. The goblins weren’t a race he wanted tangled relations with as they were the ones who managed his gold.

Although it wasn’t just his gold, they also had an account for Hogwarts, so he needed to maintain a healthy relationship with them. As Headmaster he was allowed to make certain decisions without the board of governs getting involved, however they also had a treasurer to look over the account. Still he was the one who made the most visits, if he didn’t send one of the staff members, he had to make sure he didn’t personally step on their toes.

Walking up to the closest teller he gave them his best grandfather’s smile, “Good morning, I would like to check the Potter account today.”

The goblins were all aware of the situation concerning Albus Dumbledore and decided to marginally allow their natures to show. He may have been in charge of the Potter account, so he did not outright steal from them. He did lie to them and stole from one of their wealthier account holders. One who was not involved in the magical world in any way and was denied essential rights to his finances.

“Name?”

“Albus Dumbledore,” he replied cheerfully.

“Which account?”

“The Potter account,” he said smoothly and reached into his pocket to take out the key, “Here is the vault key and,” he lifted up his wand for show, “my wand.”

“The Potter account is currently being audited and the vault is inaccessible at the moment,” he said with a sneer.

“I beg your pardon? Inaccessible? How will the boy afford new clothes for the new school year? He’s still young, I’m sure by the end of the summer he’ll have grown a few inches,” he said with a small frown.

‘Audited? Why would the account be audited and essentially frozen? I haven’t done anything out of the ordinary. I have the account key.’

“The vault will be accessible when the audit is over, Mr. Dumbledore,” his sharp teeth glinted threateningly.
“I would like to speak with the account manager: Ragnok,” Albus replied.

“Of course,” the goblin turned around and started speaking gobbledygook to a fellow coworker.

The goblin was sure to use ‘polite’ terms not taking the chance that the wizard would be able to understand the language. They didn’t want to raise any alarms with the human, they wanted to catch him alone in the most unsuspecting way. It was a good thing they did as the Headmaster was familiar with most languages that could be spoken in the country.

‘’Blavork, go get Ragnok. Tell him that we have a client that wants to speak with him about the Potter account.’ Of course I want to speak with the goblin in charge. I want to get to the bottom of this. That marriage contract is an important part of my plan! He oversaw the termination and I want to speak with him personally. I had given him specific instructions to keep the contract away from the boy’s eyes. He shouldn’t even have the authority to make such changes if he did see it anyways. I’m in charge of the bloody account’’

The goblin had been waiting for his visit as soon as the letter was sent out concerning the contract termination, so he was able to calmly meet the wizard in the lounge.

“Mr. Dumbledore, if you would follow me,” he said, turning around knowing that the old human would do so.

Albus took a breath as his nostrils flared, before following the goblin to a room his was quite familiar with. He waited as the goblin opened the door before making his way inside and helping himself to one of the seat in front of the desk.

The goblin before him took what seemed like leisure time getting into his seat, making a show of going through the filing cabinet, grabbing a few thick files, and getting comfortable. Albus almost ground his teeth in frustration at the subtleties that hinted at a time consuming meeting.

“Mr. Dumbledore, I have been informed you have concerns…,” he trailed off, waiting for the wizard to bring up his grievances.

Albus interlaced his fingers together and looked the goblin in the eyes, subtly trying to perform legilimency. He had done so from time to time on the tellers in the main lobby, the normal skimming he did, but never one on one. He never saw more than the faces the tellers were seeing. It wasn’t until now that he saw his own face, it was like looking at a mirror with minor irritation emotions.

“Mr. Dumbledore, do refrain yourself from trying to assault my mind. It is unseemly,” Ragnok growled, flashing his teeth.

Albus’s bushy eyebrows rose swiftly, unaware until now that the goblins were using their own kind of occlumency to keep him out. They weren’t thinking blandly of the clients in front of them, rather he saw the person they were seeing, what he could already see.

It made sense considering that they were in charge of sensitive information…

“My apologies. I let my mind slip as I’m simply flustered as to how the account has come to be audited. It’s the first time that I’ve been involved with such a situation as this,” he said benignly.

Ragnok kept a straight face as he snarled in his mind. He slid his hand across his desk, subtly raising protective shields and charms on his side of the desk.

The history between goblins and wizards had made it a standard precaution. They were in charge of high profile accounts, there was no stealing to be had in Gringotts. Of course there were oily witches
and wizards who had tried in the past to confound or imperio goblins into allowing them access of vaults or information. Thankfully the farthest a witch had gotten was to a vault, of which she tried to steal and was such burned and buried alive by the riches she desperately wanted.

“Yes... While I understand your concerns, please refrain from doing so again,” he said with an obvious show of his teeth.

Albus briefly narrowed his eyes at the goblin wanting to flash his own teeth in response. Of course he had been in the wrong for trying to gain entrance into his mind, but it rankled him to be in the receiving end of the subtle threat.

“Of course, once again, my apologies, Ragnok,” he nodded, “I’ve asked to speak with you about the reasoning of the audit and the letter pertaining to the termination of the marriage contract between Mister Potter and Miss Weasley. Missus Weasley floo called me in tears asking why I had done so, but I had to admit to her that I did not. She showed me the letter and the termination was completed in your presence. As the person in charge of the account, I would like to rectify this matter, as I was not the one to order the termination and Mister Potter cannot do so as I am in charge of his account.”

The wizened wizard watched the goblin shrewdly, but instead of seeing the reaction of someone who was guilty he saw a flash of what could be identified as a cheeky grin.

“Mister Dumbledore, I’m afraid that is no longer the case. As Mister Potter is now emancipated and legally an adult, he is legally in charge of his account.”

“I am certain that is not the case. Regardless if he is considered an adult, Mister Potter is still under aged and his will was left with strict instructions that he was not to be in charge until he was of age,” Albus said firmly.

“You are partially correct in that. Mister Potter is considered an adult, he is legally emancipated in our world. In the muggle world he is still considered under-aged. However, before he was left in the care of a family. Of which you know made you guardian.”

Albus felt an uneasy feeling creep into his lower abdomen.

“Mister Potter is no longer in the care of a family. He has been officially adopted, cancelling out the need for a guardian. As such he is no longer your concern.”

“Preposterous! I would have known if someone tried to adopt him. I would have received an owl informing me of such a process,” he said loudly.

‘And I would have stopped it immediately!’

“The process was done in the muggle world, but is still legally binding, official, and recognized in the wizarding world. In such a case you would not receive an owl, and it was done with those he was in care of present.”

Albus paled before thinking quickly trying to bring this back in his favor.

“If I may inquire does his new… family, know of the wizarding world? If the process was done in the muggle world surely it would be breaching statue of secrecy if they are unaware. A wizarding family wouldn’t have bothered with the muggle world and even a squib would know that it would be more binding done in our world. Considering such angles I think it would be best if I was still in charge of his account. For all we know they may not know the due process concerning galleons! I’m merely looking out for the boy,” he said putting on a grandfatherly façade.
Ragnok grinned deviously, putting his elbows on his desk and folded his hands in front of his face before placing his chin on them. “There is no need for concern Mister Dumbledore, they are indeed aware and possess a grand amount of knowledge concerning the due process of our money. If you are concerned about his age not meeting legal standard, despite being legally emancipated, he came in with his family and was in the presence of his new parents when they looked over his account information.”

“Regardless of that, Mister Potter was supposed to marry Ginevra Weasley upon reaching adulthood. With the tournament being in place during a school year it was for the best for both of them to postpone the marriage until after term. Afterwards he had an ordeal that had him facing a hearing within the Ministry. Termination seems to be a breach of the contract in my opinion.”

“Mister Potter was within his rights to terminate the contract, Mister Dumbledore. It is not your concern any longer. The Weasley family was left with instructions that should they have an issue with the matter they were free to contact us and we would have told them similar. Mister Potter was in his legal rights, and thus he terminated the contract.”

“That contract was made before he could walk! It is standard to uphold marriage contracts whether those affected were part of the agreement or not!”

Albus banged his fist on the desk before him, releasing a large wave of magic. Normally such an outburst would terrify others who were in the room, let alone the one who was the reason for such anger to be released.

The goblin before him however merely frowned at his behavior.

“While it is usually standard among wizards, it is still possible to terminate such contracts. It is usually family politics that keep those affected from saying anything and going along with it. Another typical reason is that the dowry was already paid, and then it is an impetuous decision, however not impossible.”

Albus glowered at the goblin before him.

“It is prudent for those involved that Mister Potter marry Miss Weasley. She is the seventh born and therefore a most amenable marriage prospect. It would be beneficial for both parties, so I must insist that you overturn the voiding of the contract.”

“Mister Potter was fully informed of that fact before he made the decision,” he sneered.

The gall of the wizard in front of him was enough to push his patience. Albus Dumbledore’s behavior was a reminder of why there was such an imbalanced relationship between the races.

“He is still a child!”

“Mister Potter is an adult and was comprehensively advised while making his decisions.”

“By whom!” Albus shouted, his plan wasn’t going accordingly and without the necessary and insured funds he would barely be able to afford the Order’s expenses. It was a voluntary vigilante group, but he still paid for the expenses. They had to afford potion ingredients, food, questionable items that would assist them, and bribes he had to pay for information and votes!

While he was not vocal or obvious about it, he was a damn good politician and even he had to ensure he had enough votes. He occasionally allowed himself to lose a battle if only to keep from seeming suspicious and he always made them take vows of silence. He was a leader of the Light, but even he had to do some backhanded things to do what was best for the Greater Good.
“His family and his lawyer, Mister Dumbledore,” he responded gutturally, his voice was like rocks rolling against each other.

Albus glared at the goblin, his wand hand was itching to shoot a spell at him.

“What about the reason for the inaccessible audit? I have his key, my wand, and I’m on the approved list for access,” he said irritably.

“Just as you’ve been informed, it is being audited for suspicious transactions. Mister Potter has seen his statements and has informed us that he hasn’t seen a knut of the galleons he or his caretakers were to be given.”

“He must be mistaken. I have given him his allowance and as his guardian I was given the stipulation,” he said hoping that the goblin wouldn’t see through his fabrication.

“His lawyer had shown us statements that say otherwise. Your access has be revoked and we demand your copy of his key back. I would like to personally inform you that your vault is also being audited and any missing funds that belong to the Potter vault will be taken from yours,” Ragnok said in a low growl.

The old wizard sat there shocked for a few seconds before lifted his wand and pointing it at the goblin.

“You will do no such thing! I was within my rights as his guardian –”

“You were never Mister Potter’s proper guardian. He was unaware of the wizarding world until he was of age to attend Hogwarts. He lived with his muggle family, of whom never received the stipulation they were supposed to receive to help with living costs. You lied to us with your greed. You did not specifically steal his galleons but they were misappropriated, which we will not tolerate as he is one of our best accounts.”

Albus glared at the goblin before abruptly standing up, “Confundus!” he hissed.

The shield around Ragnok flared upon impact and activated an alarm. The thin goblin glared at the tall willowy wizard.

“You will be charged a fee for that, Mister Dumbledore. You will also be escorted off the premises and suspended for six months,” as he said this a small troop of five armed goblins came into his office, their swords and armor glinting dangerous, “Good day.”

Albus blanched at his faux pas not realizing that he didn’t have a chance. He normally would have tried to fight the other race if he had been alone, but the goblin’s craftsmanship was imperious to most magic. He was essentially defenseless and on goblin territory. He stowed his wand and held his hands up slowly.

One of the goblins patted his robes before reaching into a pocket and taking Harry’s key. Ragnok raised his hand and summoned the key from the security soldier.

As he was told, Albus was escorted from the building by the group of armored goblins.

Chapter End Notes
I want to thank you, my readers, for sticking with me and this fic. You have no idea how much it means to me, your reviews are extremely motivating and help me continue writing.
Chapter 65

Thimi looked around the corner, sure to keep herself unseen, as she watched her family enter the foyer. Dobby had spoken highly of the young man and her kind mistress had made him her brother in blood. She hoped that he wouldn’t mind that she was a part of the Granger household when they told him about her. She knew that they had their reasons for not telling Harry Potter about Thimi. She was reassured many times that they were not ashamed of her. She was a proud member of the Ancient and Noble house of Granger.

Hermione looked in her direction, somehow just knowing she was there. The curly haired witch subtly tilted her head in a jerky motion towards the kitchen. The small house-elf understood the signal and went to wait in the kitchen.

Abagail noticed her daughter’s movements and gently guided Harry towards the kitchen.

“Harry, we have someone we want you to meet,” Abagail said gently.

Harry’s pace slowed with slight trepidation, “Who?”

“Don’t worry, she’s family. But we keep her a secret for safety reasons,” she replied.

He furrowed his brows in confusion wondering if it was for the safety of the family or for the family member. Now knowing that the Granger family was high profile and well to do he was sure they had more than a few secrets and safety precautions.

Taking a wayward step to bump into his shoulder, Hermione grabbed his hand and squeezed it reassuringly. Squeezing back Harry smiled and let his sister drag him into an open spaced kitchen towards the large table. She made sure he sat next to her, away from the end of the table. The only one with the chair out from under the table.

They all took seats at the sides of the table instead of one at the end and made themselves comfortable. The kitchen light was dimmed, but comfortably so.

Harry looked towards the doorway they just entered wondering if the person would be coming in after them. With his nerves making him anxious he looked at his sister who just shook her head and looking at the end of the table. Curious now at what she was looking at, or looking for he stared hard in the direction she was looking in. Hermione was many things, but she wasn’t crazy nor was she a fool.

“Harry… meet Thimi,” Abagail said quietly, her voice was warm and soothing.

As soon as her name left the Granger matriarch’s tongue, Thimi appeared soundlessly, her disillusion dispelling like a wisp of smoke. She was nervous, but thrilled with how she was being introduced to the newest family member. It was a little discombobulating since she was still a house-elf and used to certain ways, but her family was unusual in traditional aspects concerning the wizarding-elf relationship. She knew the original agreement like many house-elves, but after a hundred years they had resigned themselves to the eventual mistreatment after the third generation started assuming more and listening less.

“Hello, Master Harry, I is – I am Thimi. I serve the Ancient and Noble house of Granger. It is a great honor to serve such a wonderful family,” she said with a shy smile.

The wizard’s eyebrows furrowed tightly looking at Thimi closely, “Hello, Thimi. Would you happen
to be related to Winky? Your eyes and nose are practically the same.”

A small frown slid onto Hermione’s face at his question, but decided to let Thimi answer it however she wanted.

The little house-elf flushed in response, immediately looking down and wringing her hands self-consciously. She fidgeted in her seat before looking back up at the young wizard.

“Thimi was once Winky before sh – I started serving the Grangers.”

Harry frowned at her response knowing how miserable Winky was, practically drinking herself to death. She was unkempt, filthy, and full of self-loathing all the while crying about how she was a bad elf and wanted nothing more than to serve the Crouch’s again. Sitting in the chair before him now was a house-elf that reminded him of slightly of Dobby, self-respecting and happy with how his life was now. She wasn’t as exuberant as Dobby, but it was clear that she was happy as she was a far cry different from the last time he saw her. Seeing her wearing clothes though made him slightly suspicious.

“Thimi, do you still want to serve the Crouch’s?” he asked, looking hard at the small elf. Hermione had to bite her tongue as she glared at her brother out of the corner of her eye.

Thimi frowned, aware that he was still not told of her old boy master’s part in their lives, but responded anyways, “Thimi does miss her old family, they were her home and family since birth, but she is extremely happy serving for her new family now. I willingly bonded myself to Mistress Hermione and her magic accepted me. I would do anything for my Mistress.”

“What if Crouch said he would take you back?” Harry pressed.

“Thimi is a proud member of the Ancient and Noble house of Granger. Old master Crouch and old young boy master cannot have Thimi. Thimi belongs to Mistress Hermione and the House of Granger,” she replied folding her arms as though his questions were insulting and annoying.

In that simple action though, Harry recognized his sister’s behavior. Thimi was annoyed, but dealing with his persistent questions only to calm his nerves and emotions.

“Oh… why are you wearing clothes?”

“Thimi does not wear clothes, Master Harry. Thimi wears a uniform since being presentable at all times is an order,” she pouted, “Mistress insisted on buying Thimi cloth.”

His lips quirked up, “It’s nice to see you’re doing better, Thimi.”

Thimi beamed at Harry Potter, newest member of the Ancient and Noble house of Granger.

Severus had returned to his childhood home and was about to kick off his boots when he felt the burning fire in his Death Mark.

He waved arm and summoned his cloak and mask, quickly putting them on before putting his wand to his mark and letting it whisk him away to the Dark Lord.

Once he landed, he bent onto one knee and let his mental shields snap into place like an elastic band. They glimmered softly like the sheer shower curtains he had in his house, barely noticeable.
Voldemort knew about them, but Severus always told the Dark Lord that it was to save him the trouble of sifting through memories of his sexual encounters.

Before he switched sides it was the truth, and he proved it to his lord by letting down his shields allowing the twisted dark wizard to see all the debauchery he had been involved in up until that date. His... unique tastes intrigued the older wizard, but also left him feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious. He had left Severus’s shields alone since then.

Severus assumed it had to do with growing up in the 1930s. However he was simply glad that out of all the Dark Lord’s ‘discrepancies’ he wasn’t a voyeur. It was obvious he enjoyed what could be considered a little burlesque, from the way Bellatrix flaunted her breasts and flitted around him.

Bellatrix was sadistic, it was no secret that she enjoyed it a little too much. Still even when she was enjoying herself, putting on private torture shows for the inner circle, she only showed but so much skin in teasing flashes, nothing that could be considered truly indecent. Only her wanton behavior.

Growing up in the 1970s, a decade well known for the sexual revolution had benefited him at least in some way. While the magical community was ahead of the muggles in some aspects pertaining to social acceptances of sexual liberties, the older generations were still private and conservative about it. The witch hunts were a small factor. It was more the half-bloods and muggleborns who lived in the muggle world bringing their knowledge with them. That and a few of the more daring and rebellious purebloods who had somehow obtained copies of the Kama Sutra...

“My Lord.”

“Sseverusss, I’m so glad you could join us. Rise.”

The thin wizard slowly rose to his usual imposing stance, keeping his hands by his sides.

“Luciusss here has informed me that royalty has graced the walls of Hogwarts with magical blood.”

Severus’s eyes quickly flashed over to his blond haired friend before returning to Voldemort.

“Yes, my Lord. I only recently found out myself at the end of Pettigrew’s trial. It was Lucius who told me.”

“He told me that his son has slighted the young Lady with his misinformation. Tell me... how much has the Malfoy heir distanced himself from her?”

Severus could see Lucius’s spine go rigid at the question.

“He has... caused a rift that would be hard to overcome. He has ridiculed her for her upbringing and her appearance up until last year.”

“I sssee. It would appear that the youngest Malfoy should be reminded how to properly treat the fairer sex. Regardless of proper beliefs, he should have a public face of indifference pertaining to witches. Going out of his way to be cruel to a young lady... is it only her, Severus?”

Severus almost hesitated, “Yes, my Lord. While he is an opportunist in taunting his fellow unbecoming students, he goes out of his way for Potter and the rest of Dumbledore’s golden trio. A Weasley and muggleborn Lady Granger.”

The wizard waited with baited breath, hoping he had worded it well enough that it would keep his godson from being in too much trouble. The damage was already done, even if the young heir didn’t know it. If it weren’t for his apprentice being of royal blood he was sure that it would have flown
under the Dark Lord’s notice.

“I see… with it being put in perspective I suppose it was only his youth clouding hisss judgement. Potter is a thorn in my sside and the Malfoy heir sshowing disssdain for Potter and his friendsss iss what I would encourage,” he paused raising his thin pale hand to his face, “Luciuuss, tell your son to make amendssss with the young lady. He may continue his treatment towards the others, but it would be easssier to get on her good side if he stopped.”

Lucius’s spine relaxed, “Yes, My Lord. I’ll see to it right away.”

“While you are here Severus, have you any newsss?” he asked lightly.

The professor internally steeled himself.

“Yes, My Lord. After I was made aware of Lady Granger’s true background I began to contemplate her potential. It was with great deliberation that I decided to offer her an apprenticeship with me,” he took a calming breath, “She accepted.”

The silence was almost deafening. Staring at his friend with a bright light in his grey eyes that bordered on awe, Lucius was filled with a brotherly pride. He had taken Severus under his wing when they were at Hogwarts together and had helped cultivate his friend. It was in this moment that his dark haired friend’s ambition was shining like a beacon.

Voldemort stared at his spy impressed, trying to decide whether to be pleased or not with his choice of action. The dark wizard weighed the pros and cons before deciding. He knew that his spy was secretive, even before he joined his side as a Knight. The potions professor’s knowledge was his prize possession having grown up desolate and poor. The witch would have to be brilliant for his spy to deem her worthy, royalty or not.

“Severus,” he paused, “You have done well. She is now under your wing, your protection, and you will fill her with all of your knowledge. Knowledge that you have guarded fiercely. You have finally decided to share it with someone who is sure to be worthy. I am proud of you.”

The dark eyed wizard held his breath waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“I know that an apprenticeship relationship is sacred. One of the most prestigious in our world. When she is ready… when you feel she is ready, as her master, I would like to meet her. It is an occasion that must be celebrated.”

Ice filled Severus’s veins even as he forced his lips to quirk upwards.

“The honor shall be ours, My Lord,” he replied, bowing his head in deference.

The words flowed off his tongue like silk, but left an aftertaste that resembled ash. He knew it was a possibility but had hoped that the Dark Lord wouldn’t entertain the idea for some time. The Duke and Duchess had somehow been aware of the protection he could offer from both sides. At least Hermione entered the apprenticeship with full knowledge of his position before she accepted. She knew what she was getting into, especially as the body guard of Potter.

Sitting alone in his office, glaring at the fire, Albus was appraising the situation that had thrown a niffler into his design.
‘I have to find a way to bring Harry back under my influence. His galleons are needed just as much as his sacrifice. It’s the only way for the wizarding world to win the war.’

Fawkes watched his wizard under the guise of preening his feathers. As an orphaned chick he was grateful to the wizened man who had cared for him. It was for that reason that he had stuck by his side even as the wizard walked a dangerous and shady path. Until a dark magic started to caress his person, Fawkes would stay with him. Even as a misguided wizard, Albus was doing what he thought was best for the Greater Good.

Barty was sitting in his holding cell waiting for the final decision on what was to happen to him. They kept his hand and ankle cuffs on to prevent any attempts of escape he may have considered. He didn’t have much faith knowing he would either be sent to die surrounded by dementors in Azkaban or given the kiss. He waited until the aurors had left him before allowing himself to cry. Merlin had gifted him a little bit of happiness in the form of his pupil. Now that he was back in Ministry custody and waiting the verdict of how he was to die, he cried.

Barty had wanted to live, but he was also grateful that he had been able to do something good before he died. Only two people would ever know, but at least someone would remember him as something other than a criminal. Someone would remember that he was innocent and did his part in helping take down the Dark Lord.

“Thank you, Lady Granger… no. Thank you, Hermione. Whatever happens, you were my saving grace, and I can die happily knowing that the words left my lips, even if you’ll never hear them…”

Tears dripped down his face as silent sobs shook his body.

Bartemius Crouch Sr. frowned as he listened to his son cry on the other side of the door. Alastor Moody may be mad, but he wasn’t wrong about a dark wizard, and he was right. His son was no dark wizard…

He breathed slowly to calm his nerves and straighten his face before opening the thick metal door.

“Barty, it’s time for your trial.”

Barty looked up at his dad and nodded, his eyes wet and red before standing up waiting to be led to the courtroom. His father grabbed his arm firmly but not painfully and slowly walked him down the halls of the Ministry.

When they reached the door to the courtroom Crouch Sr. paused.

“Barty, I… I’m not on the panel this time. I’ll stand with you, not against you. I love you, son.”

Before Barty could respond his father opened the doors and lead him to the chair. The chains slithered around the chair before settling on the back of it. Before he knew it, he was alone in the middle of the room facing the Wizengamot, the Minister, the Minister’s Undersecretary, and the head of the DMLE.

He ignored most of the trial not expecting anything but a death sentence. At this point he was sure it was all a simple formality, despite what his father said. He was already an escaped convict, it was a mere miracle that it was a private trial.

They hadn’t administered any potions, usually it was because the Wizengamot had already decided
what they were going to vote. They hadn’t administered anything his last trial either, instead letting
his father talk over him. Barely allowing him to defend himself or say anything. Being caught at the
scene of the crime with the Lestranges and two incapacitated aurors was enough.

He saw a blur of colors, at least ten different members of the community took the stand either to
testify against him or as part of his defense. Barty wasn’t sure of which or whom they were, already
resigned to his fate.

If he looked up he would have seen the old wizard who had become his friend walk up to the stand
as he tuned out the rest of his trial.

“Alastor Moody, you were subject to an imperious curse cast by Bartemius Crouch Jr. Were you
not?”

“I may have been,” said a gravelly voice with a huff. Barty recognized the voice and looked to see
who was on the stand.

“Mister Moody, we know that you were one of the best aurors in all of Magical Britain. No one will
think less of you if you were caught unawares by an unforgivable while in retirement in your own
home,” Amelia Bones replied.

“Don’t ye think if I were unable to throw off a measly imperious during m’ time that I’d still be
alive!?” He barked at her.

“Mister Moody we are not questioning your abilities,” she said as a few murmurs went up at his
response.

“Do ye think if I thought for one moment that I was in danger or there was somethin’ serious I
wouldn’ be able to take care of m’self?” he growled.

Amelia’s temple throbbed; while she respected Alastor and knew it was an exemplary auror, he also
knew how to get under her skin.

“Then why were you found at the bottom of your trunk at Hogwarts with Bartemius Crouch Jr.
posturing as you?” she asked through grit teeth.

“I was fusssed about in m’ home by Pettigrew and this lad here! If it weren’ for him, I’d probably be
snake food. He may have pretended to be me, but all he told me to do was ‘stay still’. He could have
told me to hold m’ breath. He could have had me sleep the whole time. Could have poisoned me or
put me under a draught of living death! ‘Stay. Still.’ I believe a lot of things, but I think this lad
deserves a second chance. Lad did his time! He was in the wrong place at the wrong time firs’ go
‘round. His father was harsh when he didn’t need t’ be. If anythin’ slap him with a fine! 1000
galleons!”

Barty chuckled softly to himself. He was all cried out and had dissociated so much that his body
barely made a noise as he did so.

With a loud sigh Amelia pinched the bridge of her nose, “That will be all, Mister Moody.”

Alastor hobbled off the stand with a loud ‘Hmph!’, a pink haired witch tried to help him only have
him lift his arm away from her with an obvious growl on his face. The straw color haired wizard’s
heart ached at the sight, glad that he could at least see his friend one more time.

“The Wizengamot has heard testimonies both for and against Bartemius Crouch Jr,” she said, “Now
they will decide –”
“Hem hem.”

Amelia looked at the witch with the black bow and pink robes poking from under her black ones. Inhaling slowly Amelia closed her eyes and looked up at the other witch.

“Yes, Undersecretary?”

Umbridge smiled coldly, “We have heard the testimonies, but if the Wizengamot decides to give this upstanding citizen a second chance, deciding give him a lesser sentence; how will we know he won’t repeat the offense? Wouldn’t it be best to keep him in custody just to be sure? He has slipped through the cracks before…”

Uncomfortable murmurs rose around the court.

“Should he be given a lesser sentence; he will be on parole. He will still be under watch and his wand will be subject to inspection each meeting. If he violates his parole, he will be sent back to Azkaban.”

“I just wanted to be sure. Ultimately if Crouch Jr. is seen fit to return to society he should know that with the severity of his last sentencing he won’t be getting off without penalty.”

Amelia made a noise of derision.

“Without further ado,” she cleared her voice so it was once again booming, “How does the Wizengamot find this wizard? Those in favor of Bartemius Crouch Jr’s innocence?”

Barty looked down and closed his eyes tightly, ready to meet his fate.

“Bartemius Crouch Jr. you are found…”

“NOT! GUILTY!”

His head snapped up in disbelief. Pettigrew was sentenced the Dementor’s kiss. He looked at the Wizengamot’s members and noted that they were almost evenly split. Those who found him innocent were those who once followed the Dark Lord or were supporters. Four of them were neutral, and surprisingly he had five who were considered light. His eyes looked at each individual witch and wizard and finally fell upon Malfoy. The platinum blond discreetly nodded his head at him.

Barty knew then that there was an undercurrent at his trial that hadn’t been there last time. Last time his brothers in arms were also awaiting their own trials and had galleons flowing to keep them out. His father was head of the DMLE and had come down on him the hardest, there was no hope to save him, even if he claimed imperious.

“Bartemius Crouch Jr. you will be released into your father’s custody and will receive an owl containing the details of your parole,” she boomed.

Standing up slowly, the cuffs around his arms and ankles clinked open and fell in a pool between his feet. He rubbed his wrists gently.

“Thank you, Lords and Ladies, for giving me this second chance. I hope I do not disappoint you again,” he bowed at his waist with a flourish.

His pureblood etiquette was showing, impressing many of those in the room. It may have been more than a decade, but he remembered his upbringing and manners. A good sign to most of those in the...
Nonetheless, he had to go to the Dark Lord’s side at his earliest convenience. The dark mark on his arm meant that he was still a Death Eater. Those who didn’t answer the call were hunted down and killed. The only excuse acceptable was being kept in custody by the Ministry or a resident of Azkaban. Of which he was now neither.

Molly glared at the food she was cooking with red rimmed eyes. Arthur had asked her what was wrong and she couldn’t tell him. Instead she lied to her husband and blamed it on Harry’s muggle relatives. Throughout their marriage she had withheld information from Arthur, but this was the first time she ever felt like she had lied to him.

She had the best marriage contract she could ever have hoped for, for her daughter, and it was voided. Albus had told her that he didn’t do it, but that meant that someone else had the authority to do so. Gringotts allowed it. What made matters worse was that she couldn’t demand anything from them less she be fined on their behalf or potentially cost her son his dream job.

Arthur felt miserable that he couldn’t do anything to help his wife, his youngest son filling him in on details of their grievances with Harry’s muggle family at the Tournament. He let Ron tell his side of the story, from which he knew his son was much like his mother and often felt slighted by the littlest of things and didn’t take much of it seriously. From what he gathered Molly had thrown a tantrum and someone had told her no. Anything that happened afterwards he wasn’t entirely certain.

His wife had come home solemnly before informing him that the Order was being reformed. After that she let him know there was an Order meeting the next day. His redhead wife was fine for the first few days, then after that she changed. Her eyes were rimmed red like she had been crying for hours. She was moody and closed-mouth, thus he spent more time in his shed to take his mind off what he couldn’t fix. He had told her repeatedly he couldn’t fix what he didn’t know was broken.

Ginny was deeply unsettled by her mother’s behavior. Every time she caught her mother looking at her, her mother would break down and start crying. No one knew why and she refused to tell anyone.

Molly had stubbornly hoped that she would be able to convince Harry that her daughter was the one for him. She just had to try harder now to convince him that he was family. That he belonged. Be that as it may, her hardest task was Hermione Granger. The matron had no idea that they were related and had treated the witch indifferently and even scorned her for a few months. She was obviously important to Harry, so her opinion mattered. The trouble though was that the muggleborn was already extremely opinionated and smart. How was she going to convince the young witch after she had thoroughly offended her and her parentage?

‘Who cares if they pay more!? It is a privilege for their children to even be here in the first place!’

She put her head in her hands and sighed soberly. Molly had let her Prewette temper best her again, and she had to think of a way to fix the mess she made. From what her kids had told her, Hermione Granger easily forgave, but her tongue had slipped and showed her distaste for muggleborns in general. That was something that the matron knew would not be easily forgiven.
Chapter 66

The hazel eyed witch groaned as she stretched her arms above her head before getting out of bed. She had to meet her master in London today and Thimi was going to bring her there. The curly haired witch had spent most of the night reading the occlumency book he had given her.

Some of it sounded complicated and yet familiar. Most of it her father already taught her, it was standard practice among The Family. The more she thought about it, it was most likely a skill muggles could learn and the royal family had to learn to keep their mind secure for national security. They just didn’t call it occlumency, but a ‘firm mental frame of mind’ that was important to keep. Mental practices she already did, mostly to keep from getting confused when she studied. It wasn’t something she kept up all the time, not knowing it was something that had to be done. It was different than her mental wards.

Occlumency was a mind art that could hide thoughts and emotions. Her wards helped her hide thoughts, kept her safe from mental attacks, and helped her protect her mind under great bodily duress. Her emotions were still there to be read for any legilimens who decided to try. She would be able to observe them from inside of her mental ward, but due to the knowledge that her thoughts themselves were safe she was merely disgruntled that someone would dare try to enter her mind.

The Headmaster would be testing her occlumency shields, which were subtly different from her mental wards. The only benefit she could think of would be hiding her emotions, but as an emotional person, she wasn’t sure how she felt about that from a personal stance.

Thankfully Moody had already tested her and with her father’s help it was easy to do. Occlumency would be more of a proxy for her mental wards. She was surprised that the exercises were practically same her father taught her but with different terms.

Hermione once asked who taught him, he had said that Mamie Helen had taught him, and he wanted to pass that down to her. When she asked her mother, she said she learned because it was standard for The Family before they were allowed to look at the archives that were under heavy security.

Today she would have her master test her occlumency, leaving the more recent things outside of her wards. She would try to rely on the occlumency instead of just her wards. So she would have to hide Harry meeting Thimi, something small. She would tell him anyways, but it was something to use for practice.

“Thimi is to be taking Mistress to her lesson now.”

Hermione sighed before she turned around and gave Thimi a piercing look.

“Try again,” she said kindly.

“Th – I – I am to bring you to your lesson now, Mistress,” Thimi rephrased her sentence, working hard on her grammar.

Hermione smiled at her house-elf, “Close. ‘I am supposed to bring you to your lesson now.’”

“I am s-supposed to bring you to your lesson now, Mistress,” Thimi repeated.
“Very good, Thimi! You’re getting better every day,” she grinned holding her hand out for Thimi to take.

The small house-elf grabbed Hermione’s hand firmly and apparated her to her bedroom in London.

Landing smoothly they both smiled before looking at the beetle in the jar. The witch’s smile turned wicked whereas her house-elf’s dropped off her face, glaring.

“Thi – I may not be able to hurt a witch or wizard, but I still d-do not like her. It makes my blood feel hot,” her voice holding what sounded like a growl.

“I don’t like her either, but she will come in handy. Master knows of her, she is… alive,” she walked closer to the jar and picked it up, “We will keep her that way until I feel we should let her go.”

She silently waved her wand over the jar canceling all previous spells, before recasting the unbreakable charm. It was more in the event that Rita’s magic had somehow accidentally reacted to her benefit. Hermione tapped on the glass jar with the tip of her nail before placing it back down on her desk. She looked over at Elara, leaving her owl at her London home was a conscious decision. The witch had decided she would have Elara stay to intimidate the pest in the jar.

“I hope you’re enjoying the company, Skeeter,” she said airily, “If there’s one thing I can say without a doubt is that she pays attention and looks at you keenly. That attention is just so hard to find nowadays. People are just so… scatterbrained,” she chuckled lightly, “I do hope you are appreciating the attention she provides.”

Hermione reached over and started to pet Elara, giving her loving affection with soothing hum.

“I do have a letter I need you to deliver for me though,” she said kindly, “Just give me a moment to write it.”

Hermione turned back to her desk, pulling out a piece of parchment and grabbing a quill. She sighed with a small frown but knew it was in her best interest. The beetle was at the edge of her jar watching the schoolgirl. Hermione noticed with a small sneer and placed a thick book between the jar and her parchment before turning her attention back to the blank sheet in front of her.

With a small frown marring her face she began writing.

Dear Viktor,

I hope this letter finds you well. With Magical Britain on the brink of war with the recent resurrection of that foul dictator, I must apologize and decline your offer. I was looking forward to spending time with you in Bulgaria, more so since I’ve never been there. However with recent events it’s just not feasible.

I have recently been offered an apprenticeship, and I accepted! I must dedicate my time to my lessons and my master. It is also for this reason that I must end the small relationship that we had. It was enjoyable while it lasted, and I hope that you will still consider me a friend (I still think of you as my friend).

I hope you won’t be offended, but I also think that you should practice more defense skills. I admit that I was disheartened that you fell victim to the imperious. It was worse since you were forced to cast the cruciatus… I hope you aren’t punishing yourself for it since you weren’t in control of your body. You were caught unawares and it wasn’t your fault.

I understand that it’s not something people are put under often so it’s hard to fight off, but it all
comes down to a battle of wills. I learned how to fight it off. From what I learned the best way is to be strong willed at all times. I hope this will in help the future, even though I hope more that you’ll never have to go through it again.

Please send a letter back with Elara so I know where we stand.

Thank you for everything.

Always your friend,

Hermione Granger

She looked over her letter twice, hoping that her words wouldn’t cause adverse effects in her friend, but also relieved that she had ended the relationship. It simply didn’t sit well on her conscious to be attracted to another while with someone else. It was silly she was sure since it was only human nature to find other individuals attractive even while in a committed relationship. However when it came to her master… it was different, it felt different. Instead of feeling unfaithful to Viktor is was more as though she felt unfaithful to her master, Professor Snape.

Sighing again she finished folding up her letter and placed it in an envelope. Elara hopped onto the desk and stuck her leg out ready for her journey. As soon as the letter was secure, Hermione opened up a window and Elara took flight.

Suddenly a ghostly blue panther emerged from a wall, landing in front of Hermione gracefully.

The familiar sensual voice came out of the panther’s mouth, “Apprentice, it is time for our scheduled lesson.”

“Mistress, shall I fetch your potions master now?” Thimi asked, her voice back to its normal chipper self.

A bright smile illuminated her face, “Yes. Please bring him to the living room, I shall meet him there. And then bring Crookshanks here to keep our guest company!”

“Yes, Mistress,” As soon as the words left her mouth Thimi left and the witch turned tail, hurrying to the living room.

Thimi arrived at Spinner’s End, on one knee.

Severus immediately saw the house-elf and waited to see what it would say. It wasn’t one that he recognized on sight, and it was dressed too well for any of his ‘cohorts’. He held his breath as it spoke.

“Potions master of my Mistress, it’s time for Mistress Hermione’s lesson. I will be bringing you.”

He released his breath and rolled his eyes while it wasn’t looking. The elf wasn’t wearing the same toga she was wearing last time he saw her. He should have known his apprentice would provide different colored cloths for her house-elf.

“Then let us go, Thimi. Your Mistress can barely keep herself settled in a classroom setting, I’m sure being home makes it that much more difficult,” he remarked with a smirk.

Thimi hid a smile as she reached for him and disapparated them from Spinner’s End.
Rita had water and a leaf for food, so she wouldn’t starve since it was something her form could properly eat. Still it was unsettling to not be able to eat real food. She had felt movement before she saw the hand pressed up against the glass that was her prison. The face of the young witch sent shocks of anger and dread throughout the animagus.

Anger at the audacity of a witch barely out of puberty holding her captive and dread at what her next course of action would be. Being suspended over fire wasn’t something she had thought the witch would do to her. It was obviously a calculated move since she was still alive, instead of cooked alive, even though she felt as though she would be. Then she had that horrible owl watch her the whole time. It was like the creature didn’t sleep! Just staring at her! Every time she looked at it.

When the young witch started talking Rita felt it would be in her best interest to pay attention. For all she knew at some point the witch would come to her senses or even make demands that would end with her being released from her glass prison.

“… appreciate the attention…”

‘Appreciate the attention!? Is she mad!? She should know damn well I don’t appreciate the attention of that damn predator that she calls a pet.’

At the mention of a letter however Rita was immediately interested at the possible dirt she could uncover about her captor. Needless to say in a jar she couldn’t be as discreet as she usually was and the witch placed a dictionary of all things between them.

‘Of course the witch would have a dictionary on her desk. Frumpy know-it-all bitch.’

Rita listened as the young witch’s quill scratched on the paper, internally pouting that she wasn’t at least allowed to read the letter. It would serve to be something interesting as it was distracting her from the predator’s unavailing gaze.

Severus felt himself land gently in the Granger’s living room with his apprentice sitting properly in front of him. The sight warmed him as he was finally allowed to acknowledge her the way she was always meant to be.

“Miss Granger,” he nodded.

“Master,” she replied with a brilliant smile.

Taking a breath and flashing his apprentice a small smile he took the same seat he had sat in yesterday before waving his hand and casting a muffliato.

“Today we will go over recent events, then I’ll ask you some questions that will be on your OWL. As much as I wanted to wait until the end of summer to have you take your OWL at the ministry, things have come up that it would be prudent for you to take it sooner rather than later.”

Hermione’s face blanched as he mentioned the test date being moved up. She felt extremely underprepared for it!

“B-but, Professor Snape –”
“Miss Granger, you will be taking your test based on the answers of the questions I ask you. If they are sufficient we shall return to my home and you will practice by making potions in my private lab,” he said in his teacher voice.

He took a calming breath, “I’m sorry I snapped at you, Hermione. Honestly though, you will do fine. You already answered most of the questions and more, quite sufficiently. You will do fine on the practical. I will show you a few different ways that will help make better use of the ingredients. I will ask you a few questions to refresh your memory, but overall you already know the answers. After you take the test, we can work on something different that is just as important.”

The witch fidgeted in her seat. He raised an eyebrow at her antics since she had managed to control most of her antsy antics in his classroom.

“Yes?”

“Master, you said that things have come up and that was the reason for my test’s changed date. Yet, you never told me the reason.”

The corner of his lip twitched up.

“Were you still just a student I would have told you that it didn’t matter since the reasons were beyond your reckoning, and to do as you were told. As my apprentice I encourage you keep asking questions.”

She smiled shyly at his words. Being the exception was a lovely feeling. Normally she would have abhorred being treated differently. The witch had tried to fit in as best as she could growing up. Any time she was treated differently or praised she was sure it was to be done on her own merits instead of something she had no control over. She refused to tell anyone that she was rich, just as much as she refused to tell anyone about her social status. However being an apprentice was something she earned. She knew her master wouldn’t ask an idiot to study under him. She looked at him waiting for him to proceed.

“The reason isn’t particularly a good one,” he frowned, “The Dark Lord has found out that you are part of the royal family. Lucius told him. When he asked me about you, I informed him that I had recently found out myself, lest I be subject to punishment,” she gasped, “I also told him that I had just taken you on as my apprentice.”

She frowned and bit her lip, thinking hard about what he just told her. She knew from Barty and Moody that it was something that was bound to happen when her status was revealed. The Dark Lord was always interested in The Family, even when the Death Eaters were the Knights of Walpurgis. It would only make sense since she was the first in The Family, of which they were aware of, to be magically gifted that he would want to meet her.

“I suppose it’s better on friendly terms rather than hostile ones,” she murmured.

Severus nodded, “I agree. It’s better than being kidnapped and held against your will just to satisfy his curiosity.”

“When would he like to meet me?” the squeak at the end betrayed her nerves.

“When I feel you are ready. That means that I have less than a year to prepare you. As my apprentice he will assume you are versed in the dark arts, so I will have to get you accustomed to them, while also keeping you from their pull.”

Hermione could only nod in response.
The wizard cleared his throat, causing her to look back at him expectantly.

“He also asked about your interactions with Draco. Or rather Draco’s interactions with you.”

“Malfoy?” she asked, her nose crinkling in distaste.

“Yes. He obviously wanted a good step towards getting to know you from reports and it would have frankly been best from a fellow student. Someone you wouldn’t have initially suspected.”

“The boys would have,” she said under her breath.

“I have no doubt that Potter and Weasley would have assumed something underhanded from Draco, but that’s a kneejerk reaction I suppose over your yearly… interactions.”

The curly haired witch bit her lip to keep herself from laughing, although it did nothing to stop the smile from blooming across her face.

“Regardless, Lucius has been ordered to have Draco apologize and try to get on your good side.”

Her face scrunched up in confusion, “Why? If he could have answers from you directly, why have Draco change his ways?”

“Because Hermione, you are a Lady. Someone of importance even in our world. Some witches and wizards may overlook it thinking themselves above muggles in general, thus even some muggleborns, but the more respectable Houses respect the Royal Family regardless of their lack of magic. Those families with higher standards continue to respect the Royal Family, even if some of the members feel differently. The Black family was one of those who were split evenly. The Malfoy family has always been one to respect them. The Potters were also one of those. The Cormac family, did not.”

“But wouldn’t that make the Malfoys blood-traitors?” she asked, still trying to figure out the logistics of blood purity even now.

The dark wizard took deep breath, knowing it was an impromptu lesson, “No. They aren’t what some would call muggle-lovers, but they are patriotic and love their country. The leader of our country, is the Royal Family, despite all the checks and balances with the Parliament and Ministry. To the rest of the world they still see a monarchy. We have a Queen. Even the Ministry of Magic bows to the Royal Family because they are the faces of our country. Ancient and Noble Houses of Magic are families who were originally around the time of Merlin and allied with themselves with Merlin or Morgana le Fey. Noble Houses are families who uphold the beliefs of Merlin or Morgana’s beliefs. Those who fell into ruin and are no longer, or never were in some cases, a Noble house are because they stopped aligning the family with Merlin or Morgana’s beliefs.”

“But Thimi said that the House of Granger was an Ancient and Noble House,” she murmured, her eyes lit with curiosity.

“Your house-elf?” he asked in turn.

Hermione nodded firmly.

“Then I suppose somewhere your family allied with Merlin or Morgana. It’s a fairytale, but they say that the Royal Family is what’s left of the Pendragons… at least amongst the wizarding world. So it could be you are either related to Morgana or your family allied with Merlin, considering she was Arthur’s half-sister,” he finished with a nonchalant shrug.
Hermione laughed in response. It was a running joke amongst The Family that they were related to Arthur in some way should he have existed, but considering that Merlin was considered very real in the magical world she should have known. It was a humorous joke of speculation of how they were related to him. Were they direct from Arthur, were they from Morgana, or his lesser known sister Morgause, or were they from an incestuous mix of a pair; Mordred. It was made even more humorous in Hermione’s perspective since there was now another facet to speculate on.

Severus looked at his apprentice, confusion coloring his face. He didn’t know what he said that was so funny for her to laugh her face red with tears in the corners of her eyes. He tried not to let himself get angry as he did not like to be laughed at, but he was sure that he didn’t say anything funny. Perhaps it was in the way he finished? He decided to take the opportunity to skim her mind and test her occlumency shields as he was supposed to. Finding nothing other than a glimmer of her mirth, which he couldn’t fault her given her state, he found her shields acceptable.

The witch kept laughing, now holding her stomach from what was sure to be a stitch in her side, the volume not as loud as she seemed to be mostly out of breath at this point. The tall wizard crossed his arms as he waited for his apprentice to get ahold of herself.

“What whenever you’re done,” he grumbled.

She giggled in what could be termed a feminine fashion, taking deep breaths, before breaking down into fits of giggles.

The wizard’s face started to take on a pinched look.

Finally the witch calmed down and leaned back into the couch, breathing heavily trying to catch her breath. Her chest heaving greatly from her efforts.

Severus blushed lightly at noticing his apprentice’s ample chest. He quickly looked away, waiting for her to gather herself together.

“What was so funny?” he asked, still looking away from the young woman.

Hermione’s face was bright with a silly grin, “It’s an inside joke in The Family. You just added further speculations for us. It’s okay, I wasn’t laughing at you, just what you said,” she said breathlessly.

Severus looked back at her in the corner of his eye, drinking in the sight of her red faced with a happy expression on her face. She was… quite a beauty when she was deliriously happy. It was something he hoped to be privileged with more often, especially since he was the cause of it… if indirectly. Still he was the reason she was so happy, especially after bringing her bad news.

When she gathered herself together, her breathing more even, the red in her face looking more like a happy blush accompanied by a giant smile, he turned back and faced her.

“Since you are done. I think we can go brew some potions in my private lab,” he stood up bushing off invisible dust from his knees.

“What about my occlumency?” she asked.

“I already tested your shields, and aside from the barest exuberance that seemed to be overflowing from within, you did excellent. Even while you were preoccupied, your shields held up. Now, shall we?”

Hermione took his cue and did likewise, “Yes, master,” she said with a smile. Her nerves gone for
Luna was helping her father with some minor edits before publishing for the Quibbler. She smiled at some of the articles, knowing she wouldn’t be able to read them all until the next issue was published. He published and edited the magazine, but he said he liked having a few surprises in there for her. He spoke with her at length about a few of the articles before and after publication. It was nice to have a soundboard, and some refreshing theories.

She was so similar to her mother in so many ways, but she was also part of him. The main difference was that she had no interest in making her own spells, merely using them. She was more interested in magizoology, like her father. She knew the dangers of untested spells, having lost her mother to one and witnessing it. Her spells would make special appearances in the Quibbler, but since her passing, they stopped. Once a year on their anniversary, her father would publish an archaic spell that Pandora loved.

In place they started publishing more articles about current politics, and their takes on it. She skimmed most of them, not taking in the words only changing spelling errors. During this skim she stopped when she saw a name she knew well.

‘Hermione Granger’

Luna stopped and looked back up at the title of the article and read the whole thing.

Royalty in Hogwarts?

There have been sightings of Royal Family members in The Ministry of Magic. The Family was sighted at the Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black (or Stubby Boardman) trial. When one of the members of the Wizengamot asked why she wanted to know which courtroom they were having Pettigrew’s trial in she merely responded, “We would like to see justice.”

It wasn’t until further inquiry that we discovered that the matron sighted was a muggle woman. “How would a muggle know how to get into the Ministry of Magic despite being allowed to have full knowledge of the Magical World?”

Simple: They have a muggleborn daughter; Lady Hermione Granger.

Muggleborn Lady Hermione Granger has been known as the Smartest Witch of Her Generation. She is also the best friend of Harry Potter. Whom she did not have any romantic relations with. There isn’t much known about her as she is seen mostly with Harry Potter and one of the Weasley sons. She is a curiosity, perhaps she’s a Fey come back reborn? Morgana Le Fey was known to be a brilliant and strong witch. Maybe Circe has seen many great things in her and decided to gift her with the original beginnings of magic. We must remember, dear readers, she is a witch first. But The Family gracing us with a witch? How? If you know anything, please send us letters on your theories and findings!

Luna’s hands were shaking slightly as she read the article.

“Daddy?” she called quietly.

There was no response.

“Daddy!” she called again, panic and worry in her voice.
There was a crash followed by loud fumbling, “What is it, Lulu?” he ran to his daughter.

“What is it?” he asked gently.

“Daddy we can’t print this,” she said firmly even as her hands continued to shake.

Xenophilius looked at the article his daughter was holding.

“Why? What’s wrong with it?” he asked, gently taking it out of his daughter’s hands.

“Hermione is my friend, Daddy. She’s been taking care of the nargles for me. She has Crookshanks chase the wrackspurts from my bed. We can’t do this to her, Daddy. Hermione doesn’t like the attention. She didn’t tell anybody, she doesn’t want people to know… she doesn’t want people to know and we have to protect her,” she said firmly, her brilliant silver eyes steely.

Xenophilius’s heart clenched as his daughter told him this. She wrote home about the nargles hiding her things, even about a handsome kneazle guarding her, but she never mentioned her friend by name. He placed his hand on her shoulder.

“We will protect her, Lulu. Inciendo,” he lit the article in his other hand on fire, burning it to ashes, “Let her know she has friends at the Quibbler.”

“I will. Thank you, Daddy,” she said, turning around in his grasp to hug him tightly.

In turn her father wrapped his arms around her, his hand cradling the back of her head gently.

“Of course, Lulu, of course.”

Hermione wasn’t given time to look at her surroundings in her master’s home. He apparated them directly to his backdoor. He then unlocked the door and steered her straight to his private lab not giving her a moment to really notice her surroundings. His pace was quick, much like the one he used walking down the halls of Hogwarts. He whispered a password to his private labs before nudging her forward.

“Watch your step,” he said, not giving her a moment to gather her bearings.

They walked through the door and onto a brightly lit landing.

“Master?” she asked.

“I am… unused to pleasant company in my home. I remodeled so it is habitable, but we are here for my lab, not to gawk at my house for you to blab about to your friends.”

Hermione frowned and turned around looking up into his eyes, “Master Snape, I would never betray your trust like that.”

Severus stared back into her bright hazel eyes, the gold standing out with her sincerity. Since her potions accident he noticed that they weren’t the chocolate brown they were when she was a first year. There were so many colors in her eyes now that he could spend hours memorizing them.

“My apologies, you’re right. As I said, this relationship is new to me. There will be some bumps along the way, but your response was proper. I am unused to being here myself so I admit that I am not fond of it. I live more at the castle than I do here. I will give you a proper tour once you finish
your test and have your official apprentice badge.”

“Thank you, sir,” she smiled softly.

“Severus.”

“I’m sorry?” her face confused.

“My name is Severus. In private, you may call me Severus or Master Severus if it makes you feel better,” he said, walking in front her down the steps to the lab.

“Thank you, Master Severus,” she replied quietly to his back as she followed him down the stairs.

Molly wrung the hand towel again, her nerves reaching new heights. She had finally come to terms with what she had to do. First thing she had to do was talk to her husband, who would be coming through the floo at any moment.

She had already fixed an early dinner and sent her kids off to bed with full stomachs. She had dosed their pumpkin juice with a bit of sleeping potion she kept on hand for when they were sick. The plump witch didn’t want any of her children eavesdropping on her conversation with her husband. She did fine with privacy spells, but she knew that her kids often found ways around it.

The floo flashed green before Arthur walked through. He proceeded to use his wand to dust off what little soot there was as Molly had kept their home clean. Arthur figured it was the least he could do to help his wife keep their house clean.

He looked up and saw his wife wring her hand towel, it was something he had come to recognize as a telltale sign that she wanted to have an important conversation. He also noticed there was a distinct lack of noise that was caused from their rambunctious children.

The man smiled at his beautiful wife as he walked towards her. He kissed her gently, his lips soft as they caressed hers. Molly melted into her husband’s loving kiss. His kisses were like a special potion brewed just for her.

“Hello, Molly,” he said softly.

“Hello, Arthur,” she said quietly.

The wizard gently directed his wife into a seat before pushing her seat in and sitting across from her.

“You want to talk about something?”

Her face flushed red, but she nodded firmly.

“Has this got anything to do with your mood these past few days?” he asked carefully.

Molly paused before she tilted her head to the side, as though thinking about it and then nodded meekly.

“Well then?” he prompted, reaching across and caressing her hands in a loving manner.

“I had a marriage contract for Ginny,” she started.
Arthur nodded having assumed so over the years since she didn’t care much for the offers they had received over the years.

“IT was terminated recently without any reasons attached,” she said looking down at their hands, “I got the official letter from Gringotts.”

The wizard’s eyebrows flew up into what used to be his hairline. While he figured that Molly had a contract for Ginny he didn’t know it was properly taken care of in such an official manner since they couldn’t really afford any of that. He didn’t say anything, hoping to encourage her to talk more by rubbing his thumb across the back of her hand.

“The person who was his guardian didn’t terminate it, so the young wizard did so himself,” her bottom lip wobbled.

“Who was the lucky wizard?” Arthur asked gently.

“Harry,” she said softly.

The gentle wizard closed his eyes and sighed. He continued to soothe his loving wife. He had known that she had plans on Ginny forming a relationship with Harry, but he had hoped that it was a relationship his little girl could look back on fondly. Harry was a good boy, he would treat their daughter right he was sure, but taking the decision from him wasn’t something he could agree with when it came to him. Having already lost so much, the least he deserved was to marry someone he fell in love with, not someone he was forced to be with.

“Harry terminated the contract without any reasons attached. I wanted to try to appeal to his better nature to reconsider, b-but…”

“But what, Mollywobbles?”

“Harry and Hermione are related and I said some awful things to her. I made the wrong assumptions and treated her harshly without bothering to find out all the details.”

“Was this about the article Skeeter wrote?”

“A little yes a little no…”

He continued to rub his thumb on the back of her hand in a soothing manner.

“I thought she was a scarlet witch, leading Harry on and cheating with that Krum boy. So for Easter I sent her an egg the size of a quail’s egg. I sent the boys what could easily be mistaken for dragon eggs. Then when I went there for the Tournament…”

Arthur wisely stayed quiet having heard various versions of this.

“His horrible muggle family was there. After all they did to him, he wanted them there. Albus said that we could go there in proxy, but no one figured that Snape would be able to convince them to come see him before the big event, considering how much they hate magic. They had Hermione come with them since she’s family. I said some… horrible things, Arthur.”

“What did you say exactly, Molly?”

“I said that they shouldn’t even be at Hogwarts since it’s supposed to be safe from muggles. Unseen. Then I said that I would have that rectified, hoping that Albus would be able to get that – that family out of there. Then Hermione…” her bottom lip started to wobble more.
“Then Hermione what?”

“Hermione asked if her family shouldn’t be allowed at Hogwarts at all, or see her graduate, or see the school they apparently pay four times more than us…”

“What did you say, Molly?” he asked, knowing that Hermione was right in asking all of those questions, even if the Dursleys were in a class of people all their own.

“I told her not to talk about things she didn’t know… I asked her why they should be allowed to see a witch or wizard graduate from a top standing school such as Hogwarts. I told her it doesn’t matter that they pay more. Then… then I told her… I told her, that it was a privilege for their children to even be allowed to be Hogwarts… at all.”

Arthur stopped caressing Molly’s hand.

“Molly, you didn’t,” his voice practically begging her to tell him different.

“I did…”

He pulled his hands away from her and hung his head in disappointment.

“I don’t know how to fix it Arthur. I want to, but I don’t know how,” she said lowly.

“Molly you essentially told her she shouldn’t be here… where she belongs,” he said sadly.

“And I shouldn’t have. And I wanted her for Ron too,” she said, her eyes filling up with tears.

Arthur looked up at his wife, “No. You shouldn’t have,” he grabbed her hand with his again, “But I know we’ll find a way to make it up to her. Ron says she forgives easily, but the twins say she knows how to hold a grudge,” he took a breath, “I don’t think Ron deserves her, Molly.”

Molly’s bottom lip trembled more as a few tears escaped even as she nodded in agreement. While she was angry and frustrated at the whole thing, she realized that she messed things up on her own. Her youngest son however still felt slighted as though Hermione had done it on purpose and was doing nothing but talking poorly of her.

He could have sent home a letter clearing up any misunderstandings she may have had. Any of her children could have, but they didn’t. The twins usually didn’t owl her anything, so that was nothing unusual. Ron and Ginny though, they still wrote to her. Ron wrote more, but she assumed it had to do with Hermione’s influence. There would be some months where she received weekly letters, and some when she only received one. From Ginny’s letters those months Ron was on the outs with Hermione. But Arthur was right, as much as she wanted Hermione for her Ronnie, she was too good for him. She treated Hermione poorly, but Ron was treating it worse.

“What do we do, Arthur?” she asked through her tears.

“We do what we can, Mollywobbles. As we’ve always done. And right now, what we can do, is apologize. When we see them at Diagon Alley, that’s one of the first things we do. The Second thing you can do is put on a smile and bake them some of your fantastic cookies.”

She smiled tearfully at her husband and received one back. Arthur picked up her hand and kissed it.

“I love you, Molly. We’ll fix this together.”

All the witch could do was nod at her wonderful husband.
Harry sighed after he left his new room and went to explore. He already knew that Hermione had probably gone to meet Snape, reading a few things before seeing him. If it weren’t for the fact that Hermione loved learning so much he would have thought it was the worst thing in the world. However her – their – parents seemed extremely happy for her.

He took notice of a few family paintings, found more than five bathrooms, a library, an office, and decided he would explore more later and went to find the kitchen.

Abagail was sitting, sipping her morning tea, while her husband sipped coffee. The older woman smiled when she saw Harry’s messy hair.

“Good morning, darling. Thimi has already made breakfast, it’s still warm.”

Harry smiled back at her and went to grab his plate. It was unusual for him, but it was a nice different.

“Hermione is with her master,” she said, sipping her tea.

A grimace graced the young adult’s face.

“How…” he licked his lips self-consciously, “How are you okay with Hermione apprenticing Snape, and calling him master?” he asked.

Abagail scrunched up her face whereas Leeroy just pursed his lips.

“An apprenticeship is an honor in the wizarding world. They’re hard to come by and are usually only given to purebloods. And even then, only those with an actual talent in those fields. Every professor at Hogwarts was an apprentice, it’s how they became a master.”

He nodded understanding the logic, “But how are you okay with Snape being her master. Or even her just calling him that?”

Abagail sighed, “I’m not quite comfortable with her calling him master, but I am proud of her. I respect their new relationship. Professor Snape has always been strict, but Hermione loves that. He challenges her in ways that the other professors don’t. He makes her work harder. Hermione has always been bright, but because of that a lot of her teachers in the past, and I guess a few at Hogwarts too, stopped challenging her. They just accept that she knows the material they’ve given and leave her be.”

Harry frowned thinking about her words.

He had never thought of it like that. His sister loved to learn, and she was most definitely brilliant, but after showing the professors that she knew the material they left her alone. They asked her to demonstrate occasionally, and then she’d sit in class and read, if she wasn’t trying to help him or Ron. It was completely different with Snape. He was a git to all Gryffindors, and a few of them got angry for Hermione when he didn’t accept that she was just brilliant.

Thinking about it, Hermione never got mad about it, but her eyes would turn darker and her jaw would set in a specific way. When Hermione was angry, she knew how to express herself, so it wasn’t as though she was hiding her anger. She always respected him, even out of the classroom. Snape never said anything other than ‘acceptable’ when it came to perfect potions. From Hermione’s
perspective he guessed it would just make her want to work harder.

“Don’t think too hard about it, Harry. I get a good feeling about Professor Snape when it comes to our spitfire,” Leeroy said.

“He’s actually the only guy he’s had a good feeling about concerning Hermione since she was born,” Abagail threw in.

Wide green eyes looked at Leeroy.

“I have a warm feeling concerning you, son. Almost the same as Hermione. That was never an issue. Your redheaded friend however…” he took a drink from his cup, “Just remember she’s daddy’s favorite hellion, so while I learn to love you, I’ll always love her just a little bit more. The more I get to learn about you son, the more I’ll be able to love you for you. Not what Hermione says, not what your mum over there says, but on your own merits. I’ll never hate you, I may occasionally be disappointed in you, but I will eventually love you as my own blood son.”

Harry teared up a bit overcome with emotion, never expecting the man that helped Hermione exist, to love him; and rubbed his eyes, “Morning sand,” he mumbled as he gathered himself, “So what about her calling him master? I think it’s just weird…” the young wizard said, bringing the topic back to hand, while also avoiding emotional territory.

“It rubs me the wrong way, but that’s the title that comes with the apprenticeship,” Abagail said.

“I think it’s fitting. If it were any other man there would be an issue, but Professor Snape… there’s just something about him,” Leeroy said, staring into his coffee like it would give him the answer.

“Their ceremony was beautiful though. It was almost like witnessing a marriage. She was so happy she was glowing,” the Duchess sighed dreamily.

Leeroy’s eyebrows furrowed at the mention of his daughter getting married. Who would be worthy enough for his daughter’s hand? Any boy her age wouldn’t be half as worthy. Any older lady killer wouldn’t make it to their front step. Any girl she wanted would have to be smart to keep up with her. Actually anybody she brought home would at least have to be able to have a conversation with her where she wouldn’t have to dumb herself down. As much as he detested the idea of Hermione marrying someone who wasn’t worthy of her, he also didn’t want her to be unhappy. Being a spinster wasn’t something he wanted for his little warrior. He may fight off many of her suitors, but only those willing to fight back would have a chance.

Disliking the way his thoughts were turning, he took another sip of his coffee savoring the drink.

‘Bad for my teeth, but oh so worth it.’

“The best way to get juice from a sopophorous bean, or any bean, isn’t to cut it like the books say. And when you cut it, you lose more juice. So for every two beans, you only need one.”

Hermione watched as her master crushed a bean with the flat side of his knife. The dark wizard had decided that demonstrating ingredient preparations instead of just explaining it to her would work better. The crunch sound demonstrated all by itself how thick and hard the bean’s shell was despite being so small.

“Most people struggle with cutting beans because of how small and hard the shells are. So most
people waste time trying to grip the small bean that just slides from under the knife like a piece of ice.”

“What about with a leech or a slug? When we juice it from the tail to the front we also get some of the mucus that covers its body in the potion. Wouldn’t it keep the juice from being contaminated? Or would it be better to wash them first, as a way to prep them?”

Severus looked up at his apprentice who was staring keenly at what he was doing.

“I admit that I haven’t tried it in practice, but it has crossed my mind. With the assumption that the mucus is too slippery for a knife, or any surface to properly squish it, it hasn’t been done. But with having people cut up beans that prove to have the same problem, it’s something to look into… After you pass your NEWTS we can test that theory together. It can be something that you discover that will help you obtain your mastery.”

The witch beamed, pleased with the future project. Normally she would have been frustrated but since Master Severus was having her take her potions OWL and NEWT before the rest of her classmates she would have time to dedicate to her mastery while in the castle and make use of the library.

“After I put the sopophorus bean juice in a vial, you can get started on your calming draught. If that is satisfactory then you will make a strengthening solution.”

“What about the draught of peace?”

Severus scoffed, “If it was up to me that would be something you teach to Fourth Years. But since most of your classmates are bumbling buffoons they wouldn’t be able to handle the process without being in the proper frame of mind that it might be important for them to learn that year.”

“But what if it’s the one I have to make for my OWL?” she asked.

“Hermione, from a professional standpoint they hardly ever have a student make that potion for their OWL since it’s too easy. Besides they will give you the recipe and ingredients, so it won’t be as though you’re going in blind. It won’t be until NEWTS that they’ll try to add or remove an ingredient from the recipe to see if you actually know the recipe. But you should already know I don’t accept anything lower than an Outstanding on a potions OWL to even set foot into my classroom for Sixth and Seventh years.”

The curly haired witch paled at the prospect of getting anything less than an O on her OWLs.

“Master Snape, I’m not prepared!”

“Hush, girl! If I felt you were not prepared I wouldn’t have offered you the apprenticeship to begin with!”

Hermione flinched as though she were slapped. He snapped at her as he would have Harry or Ron. His tone was harsh, but his words weren’t and she nodded.

He sighed, “Now grab a cauldron and begin. I will give you two hours. You only get the extra hour because you are unused to my potion stores.”

“Thank you, sir,” she replied with a small pleased smile.

Normally she would have cried at being yelled at. However despite his tone, his words were an enormous compliment. Something she had craved for years from the acerbic man. He had faith in
her, and she would live up to it. She wouldn’t let him down.

Once she had finished and decanted her potion into a vial, Severus had put a stasis charm over her caldron.

“Should your potion be up to par, I will bring the rest to the Hospital Wing. It has a two year shelf life. OWL and NEWT students tend to need them closer to the test dates. There are always a few that burn themselves out. You will not be one of them, I will see to it.”

Handing over her vial she looked at her master in the eye before saying, “Thank you. I hope I don’t disappoint you.”

He nodded in response before looking at her vial carefully. As it was the right color, which he expected no less, he decided to grade it in front of her. Holding it up he looked at it to see its opacity, then swirled it to test its consistency. Finding those satisfactory he opened it and gently wafted the fumes to his nose.

“Acceptable.”

The witch nodded solemnly hoping to have received something better than acceptable. Still her eyes glinted and her jaw set she looked hard at her potion.

‘I will do better. I’m apprenticing to be better than acceptable, I will earn that satisfactory.’

“It will pass for your OWL. We will use it for the Hospital Wing so we don’t waste ingredients. It’s acceptable where it won’t poison or cause any harm to your fellow students.”

“What did I do that wasn’t satisfactory, master?” she asked quietly.

Severus looked at her in the corner of his eye. He saw the same face she made while she was in class, but this time she had the benefit of being alone to ask him how she could improve.

“The lavender sprigs,” he said simply.

“I ground them up in the mortar until they were a fine dust like the recipe said,” her eyebrows furrowed.

“And like the beans, the ingredient could have been improved differently. With an extra lavender sprig, you could have taken the lavender off the sprigs, and just ground up the lavender.”

Hermione scrunched up her face, “It’s so simple. But what about the rest of the sprig? Wouldn’t that also affect the potion?”

Severus nodded in approval. “It’s used for consistency, but with a few counter-clockwise turns every third turn, the consistency is the same with a better potency.”

Hermione smiled at her first real private lesson with her master. She actually learned a few things that she hadn’t found in her personal studies. It filled her with a sense of accomplishment to learn something that wasn’t in a book. It was the same with her wards, but having a master to guide her was better.

“You will take this one with you and drink it promptly at seven tomorrow morning. We shall meet at 9 at your home in London. Inform your elf so you won’t. Be. Late.”
The curly haired witch felt her heart flutter at his annunciation, dragging out some of the words longer than necessary.

“Of course, master.”

“Now I will either bring you to my living room where you can call your elf, or I can bring you back to your home in London.”

“Before I leave, would you mind… do you have a potion that could cause terrifying hallucinations? But a dosage where it won’t cause the drinker to go insane?”

The dark wizard stared at her with mild shock, his eyes widening a fraction before he composed himself.

“For what purpose? And for whom?” he asked delicately.

With such a question it gave him more of a glimpse to his apprentice’s darkness. Even knowing she kept that foul pest in a jar in her home, he wasn’t sure how dark she was willing to go. Being with him, it would be better for her to have a sense of morals, but also to know when to bend them or ignore them entirely. She knew she was going to war, she knew she would be Potter’s bodyguard. So with her intelligence she should also know what that would entail.

It wasn’t something that was to be taken lightly, mostly because some of the actions that needed to be taken weren’t always light. They were gray, bordering more on dark. At some point he was afraid she would have to touch the darkness to protect the light.

She blushed and averted her eyes from her master, not really wanting her to see the darker side of her personality, but also wanting to go through with her plan.

“I want to dose Rita with it, by putting it on the twig I gave her to stand on. The other night I had blue bell flames lit under her jar. I’ve had Elara, my owl, and Crookshanks watch over her. I can tell they scare her and make it hard for her to sleep. When I go back this term, I want her to know that it won’t do well for her to cross me and mine. When she looks at me I want her to have flashbacks of how horrible it was to be in my… care. I want her to think twice before ever writing anything about me and mine again.”

Severus felt his abdomen flutter at her words. His apprentice was so vindictive that he couldn’t help but be attracted to her. She had the perfect mask for the world to see, but inside she was fiercer than he thought possible. And that was with knowing she was a secret brawler and after training with him physically.

“I believe I do have something, you would be able to give your guest,” he replied, walking over to a cabinet above the lab sink.

He opened it to show rows of potion vials, and plucked one from among them. Turning around and walking towards her with a darker look in his eyes, he handed her a light transparent fuchsia colored potion. The look in his eyes caused a dampness in her knickers. She took the vial from him with a flushed face.

“Formido Dormabilis. It’s a poison, but not illegal. It’s a mastery level potion, simple to make, but the ingredients must be exact and precisely timed. Much like the wolfsbane potion. A minute too early could cause nauseas gas that will knock the brewer and any other person to inhale it unconscious, while giving them horrible hallucinatory dreams that affect them asleep and awake. The gas only lasts for five minutes, the effects at least a week. A drop of this can cause a day’s nightmare.
A vial a month or three, depending on the victim’s defense against such poisons. Take care while using it. A drop should last three days for that trash journalist.”

Her eyes glimmered brightly, “Thank you, master.”

“The pleasure is all mine, Hermione. Now then. Your place or mine?” he asked.

The witch flushed more at the innocent innuendo, her breathing becoming slightly labored.

“You,” she whispered.

Severus felt his member twitch, quickly becoming somewhat hard.

‘Fucking chub,’ he internally growled to himself.

“Shall we then?” he asked instead, keeping his face clear.

The young witch nodded and turned around to go up the stairs. The potions master followed two steps away, unknowingly putting himself at level height with her butt. She was far away enough for it to be polite, but close enough for him to still smell her. He couldn’t hold back the dark blush that bloomed across his face. Thankfully she walked through the portal allowing him a moment to collect himself.

‘Merlin, help me,’ he whispered in his mind.

With that he stepped through with his neutral face and nodded at his apprentice.

“Thimi.”

The elf popped in and knelt quickly before standing up.

“You called, Mistress?”

“Yes. My lesson is over until tomorrow. I have to take this potion tomorrow at seven in the morning sharp. We have to stop by the house in London first though so I may give our guest a drop of this in her jar,” she said, holding the potions in different hands before putting them back in her cloak.

“Yes, Mistress,” Thimi said before grabbing her hand and popping out.

“Merlin! She’s going to be the death of me!” he said as soon as they left.

He went to his fireplace to floo call the only witch he could talk to about these things: Hooch.

After the bright grey haired witch sprawled across his couch, putting her leg up around the back, she leaned her head backwards looked at him with her hands behind her head.

“You called me over with such a groan I had to wonder if you were having an orgasm,” she said bluntly.

Severus covered his face with his hands. He needed more friends he could talk to.

“No,” he dragged his hands down his face, “I’ve made the decision to take an apprentice –”

There was a loud squeal from his couch, the witch there couldn’t keep her eyes from shimmering
with happiness. Her hands were in balled up under her chin.

“It’s about time! With your brains it was almost a waste to keep them locked up! I know you keep your trade secrets from you students and teach them the standard ways, but none of them know how fucking brilliant you are! Who’s the lucky worm?”

The wizard’s face twisted in a semblance of a pout as he crossed his arms over his chest and avoided her eyes, “Granger. Hermione Granger is my apprentice.”

The golden-eyed witch gasped, “Did Albus make you –?”

“No. No one made me. This was my decision. I am happy with it, and I haven’t told Minerva yet. I wanted to tell you both at the same time, especially since you’ll be seeing more of her. But you know those instances I was having this last year…?”

“With how fit you find her?”

“… yes,” he mumbled.

Hooch grinned wildly, “So?”

He sent a small glare to the witch, “So I had her here to start her lessons. The lesson went well. Her potion came out textbook perfect. But then I accidentally made an innuendo –”

“Wait! What innuendo?”

“Well I was trying to see how she wanted to get home. So I was asking her if she wanted me to apparate her home or have an elf take her from here.”

“That’s not an innuendo, Severus. What were the exact words?”

A light blush found its way to his cheeks, “I said: ‘The pleasure is all mine. Now, then. Your place or mine?’”

A loud whistled came from the couch, the witch reassembling herself, putting her hands back behind her head.

“That’s suave. So what’d she say.”

“Well that’s the thing! She obviously recognized the innuendo and it obviously made her a little hot because she was decently breathless and said ‘Yours.’”

“Wait wait wait! It made her breathless? Sev! You made her hot!?”

His blush got darker and he glared at the floor, his face turning petulant.

“I suppose so.”

“Then what happened?”

“Then I got chub and I ignored it like a gentleman,” he sniffed, “And walked her up the stairs.”

Hooch made a face.

“But I obviously wasn’t thinking much since I only left two steps between us. Normally that’s fine. But I forget how tall I am, and my face was basically level with her arse.”
The grin made its way back onto the witch’s face.

“And?”

“And she was most definitely ‘hot’… I smelled it. I smelled her. Merlin help me, Hooch!”

“Well now this is interesting, but it’s not weird.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well obviously masters taking on apprentices is a big deal. But most of them wait until they’re old or married or bonded first or whatever.”

“What? Why?” he asked, “Minerva’s master wasn’t bonded until after she gained her mastery.”

He was taken as an apprentice, but his master was a wizard. Minerva’s master was a wizard, but he acknowledged that he was about 50 years older than her, and bonded.

“Yeah, but he was also betrothed and courting his witch at the same time.”

Severus gave her a look that told her to stop being deliberately stupid.

Hooch’s wild smile turned into a genuine one.

“Sev. A master usually forms a special bond with their apprentice. Everyone knows that.”

He nodded, knowing that much.

“Usually the first apprentice is the same gender, or opposite if they chase for the same team. If not… they usually end up bonded. The relationship is so special, on a whole different level that it almost always happens. That’s also why they’re so rare. That’s also why they’re usually with purebloods.”

The wizard’s eyes widened, “Because most of them are betrothed.”

“Bingo!”

He put his face back in his hands, “Sweet Merlin, what have I done?”

Hooch smiled sympathetically, especially since she was never in an apprenticeship herself.

“Well tall, dark, and handsome, you’ve put yourself on a one way track to deserved happiness.”

“… but what about Lily?”

The witch frowned, “Lily married Potter, and she would have wanted for you to be happy too. I know you loved her… she knew you loved her… even Potter knew you loved her. But after their spawn was hatched, you made up, and she was happy to have you back in her life. She was happy wasn’t she?” Hooch asked gently.

Severus nodded, “She was so happy that if it wasn’t for Potter, she said that I would have been made Godfather… But I just feel like it would be betraying her…”

“How?”

“I don’t know. I just feel like…” he stopped to gather his thoughts properly, and his friend waited patiently knowing this was important. Especially if she wanted him happy, they had to have this talk.
It would have been better if Minerva was there, but he was also… self-conscious talking about Lily, and apparently any witch he fancied, in front of her.

“I feel like I’m betraying her by not having her there. She wanted to meet any girl that I brought home, so to speak, so she could meet them and see if they were up to snuff. It was something that I… that I was honestly looking forward to. I feels wrong to not have her there, even after all these years. I have you and Minerva, but…”

“But we’re not Lily. It’s alright to say it, Sev. She was your best friend. Sure you had the outs, but in the end she was your best friend. We’re your friends, extremely good friends, but we’re not Lily. I’m sure Minnie comes a close second, but she’s still too prim to be the loose fun loving Lily we knew.”

Severus nodded.

“… how would I ever be able to go ahead with it, if it were to happen? I’d want Lily to be there to meet her… to show her who might make me happy like Potter did for her.”

A curved smile twisted on Hooch’s face, “Tell you what. We’re not Lily, but I know a small séance where she can talk to us. It only lasts for a few minutes, mostly because if they’re already reincarnated it could hurt who she is now. Would that help?”

Severus looked up and stared at Hooch in a way that he never had before. His eyes, they were lighter, they had… hope.

“I would love that,” he said choked up.

“Anything to see you happy, Sev.”

He gave her a small shaky smile.

“NOW THEN! I think we should go and tell Minnie about this apprentice business!”

Severus grinned, appreciating Hooch’s change of direction. She wasn’t for tears any more than he was.

“Not just yet. I have yet to get her the official badge from the Ministry.”

It was Hooch’s turn to screw her face up with distaste.

“Yes.”

“Then why!??”

“Because I’m also having her take her potions OWL. We’re going to get the official badge after that. Then I’ll go back and badger Marchbanks for her score.”

He was greeted with a loud cackle from his couch.

“What!??”

“She always did have a sweet spot for you. You’ll walk out there with your apprentice and her OWL in hand.”

Severus turned his head away from the witch, but smiled. He knew it was a good idea to floo Hooch.
Hermione woke up to Thimi opening the curtains before she gently lifted her into a sitting position. The witch looked down at her house-elf and breathed lightly before she remembered her agenda for the day. She blinked the sleep from her eyes, her hair starting to spark with her magic. Thimi took her hand and firmly pressed a vial into it.

“Mistress is to be – has to take this now,” Thimi said clearly before she mumbled under her breath, berating herself.

Hermione looked at the potion in the vial that she made yesterday and uncorked it before knocking it back. It had brought her back from the brink of having a nervous breakdown. She pursed her lips thinking about the taste. Normally potions tasted quite… horrid, but she shouldn’t have expected anything less considering the ingredients they used. This one however tasted more like lavender tea.

After taking her potion she took a deep breath, letting its effect wash over her. She got up and went about her morning business, her body moving smoothly even though her mind was elsewhere.

‘Today is the day of my potions OWL. Severus is sure that I’ll pass… I just wish I had more time to study. But he was sure of my abilities, had me make a potion, and had me take it this morning. It works. Perfectly. I can make it better next time. I’ll show him I can make it better.’

She was sitting down eating the small amount of breakfast Thimi made for her. Savoring the meal, but still temporarily lost in her mind.

‘Calling him master, even though I know it’s the technical term to use in an apprenticeship just makes me feel so… kinky. It feels natural but at the same time with his voice… I wouldn’t mind calling him master in a private setting.’ She blushed, covering half of face with her hand, ‘It’s entirely unbecoming! He’s my master, I’m his apprentice. As much as he makes me brilliantly hot for him, I know the time and place for such things, and even though it was appropriate, I cannot believe that I practically verbally threw myself at him. I mean it was a simple phrase and I was immature enough to turn it into an innuendo. Although his eyes… they took on a different look and it was… thrilling to say the least. I just hope my apprenticeship doesn’t become awkward with my hormones flying about.’

She finished eating and sighed. Turning her head, she looked at the clock on the wall and pursed her lips. She had another hour before her exam, but knew it would take some time to get settled, and more time for the potion to lessen its effect so she could be more alert. However it did leave her with enough time to go have a little fun with Rita. Scaring the pumpkin juice out of her while she was hallucinating would be lovely.

“Thimi, let’s go to the London house. I’d like to check on our guest.”

The house-elf’s ears flapped happily as she did a little dance, “Yes, Mistress! I shall get your clock and be taking – take you to the London house.”

Hermione grinned, “The light grey cloak I got this Easter break please.”

Severus looked at his watch knowing that his apprentice was just as timely as he was, and was waiting for the potion to lessen its effects. He had already made the proper correspondence, so the
examiners were expecting them. It was his decision to pick up the goblin wrought apprentice badge before they left for the Ministry. While most of the workers knew how important her family was now, it would suit her taste better entering the building with her own merit shining on the breast of her cloak.

“Expecto Patronum,” the panther leapt from his wand and faced him, waiting for orders, “Apprentice, send your house-elf so we may depart.”

The dark wizard appeared in the Granger living room smoothly. Seeing his apprentice ready for their outing, he looked down at her house-elf and nodded.

“Thank you, Thimi,” the witch said lowly giving the brown eyed elf a smile.

“Apprentice Granger, good to see you’re doing well this morning.”

“Thank you, Master. The calming draught helped.”

“Good,” he said smoothly, “Now our first stop for the day will be Gringotts. I’ve decided that you will enter the Ministry, not as Lady Granger, but as Apprentice Granger. Or Apprentice Lady Granger, I’m not sure which you prefer;” he ended with a curious eyebrow arched up.

“Apprentice Granger will do perfectly. Although I won’t stop someone from calling me Apprentice Lady Granger, as much as I dislike it, they would still be correct,” she said nibbling on her bottom lip.

“Indeed,” he said with a sigh.

It would be annoying the more that it got out, but it was expected. With Lucius in the know, he would inform all the ‘proper’ people, and it would be through the wizarding world like wildfire. The only thing that would make it go by faster would be Rita Skeeter and her trash writing.

“We’re going side-along apparate, so if you would place your arm firmly around mine,” he said holding his arm out as though he was going to properly escort her, “I know you will not embarrass me, Hermione. I am very proud of you.”

“Thank you, Master Severus,” she replied, taking a deep breath and doing as he instructed.

Standing in front of Gringotts for a few seconds until Hermione ground her center again, they entered the bank with their heads held high. They held a proper business air about them, Hermione following a foot behind him on his right side. The witch had her high society face about her. Her master had believed that she wouldn’t embarrass him, but being a muggleborn with no high society manners, she was sure that would embarrass him. She was given a position usually given to purebloods. She would show them that a muggleborn was just as elite as a pureblood. She would show them that Lady Hermione Granger was worthy of her position regardless of birth.

A few of the wizards and witches in there stared and started whispering amongst each other. Severus had a reputation for himself, of course, but to be with someone without his infamous sneer was new. He was well known for his academia and his position at Hogwarts. It was also known that Hogwarts usually had Minerva McGonagall take care of the castle’s business.
“Next.”

The dark wizard glided to the teller and spoke in a low volume to avoid suspicion.

“We are here to speak with Gorvuk.”

The teller looked at the witch behind Severus, who smiled politely at him.

The teller pulled up a ‘closed’ sign at his register before replying, “Of course, I will lead you there.”

He went around the counter and bowed slightly at Master and Apprentice before turning around and walking down the hall, sure they would follow. The goblin made a few turns in the hall, leading them deeper into the bank than Hermione had ever gone above ground.

They stopped in front of a finely crafted metal door. The design was intricate, the corners had goblin knots instead of dragon knots, and they were interconnected to each other. In the center of the door had the Gringotts Crest engraved into it with the same knots that left Hermione in silent awe.

The teller moved his finger along the bottom of the shield and loud unlocking noises could be heard from the thick door.

There was a bark from the other side of the door, of which the teller responded with a harsh growl. The two goblins proceeded to talk quickly in gobbledygook. It ended with a bark like laughter from inside the room.

The teller then removed his finger and the door parted from the middle.

“Gorvuk will see you now,” he said, then without warning left the witch and wizard at the door.

Severus walked calmly into the room with Hermione following closely, the door shut firmly behind them.

Inside the walls were dark, carved out of stone, still jagged in some places. There was a fireplace on the farthest wall away from the door. A forge was a few feet away from the fireplace as well as an anvil and with a slew of tools above it. The furniture was cold dark metal lined with what looked like velvet. A large shield with the Gringotts Crest was hung proudly above the fireplace. The table closest to the door they entered from was small, intimate, but formal. There was one seat at the head and two at each side, reminding Hermione of a family dinner table, made out of metal.

“Gorvuk, may your wealth increase and your enemies fall to your craft,” Severus said with his fist over his heart. Hermione quickly followed suit, not knowing goblin customs well.

The goblin, Gorvuk, covered in man scars, big and small, grinned with feral delight; “May your enemies grow dull and your profits prosper,” he responded, his hand also formed into a first over his chest.

“Your words soothe my anger,” the goblin said with a rumble.

“It is only proper to give respect where it is due,” Severus replied silkily.

Gorvuk looked at Severus with a keen eye, before looking over to the young witch whom he didn’t know.

“You have come both sooner and later than expected. Sooner with no contract, later with your experience.”
“Indeed, my ignorance was revealed to me afterwards,” His voice stayed steady as did his will.

While he didn’t want Hermione to know just yet, he had promised to be honest with her. It was too much too soon for him, but she would need time to adjust as well.

‘I shall dispense of my falsities with you and be authentic in all ways,’ his vow echoed in his head.

“Then rejoice, for your magic is happy and your wills are both fierce,” Gorvuk said while lifting his scarred eyebrow, “You are here for proof of your apprenticeship?”

“Yes.”

“You have my congratulations, please young Master, be seated. Your apprentice shall stand before me.”

“Thank you, Metalsmith. Apprentice, do as Gorvuk says.”

Hermione nodded as she set her jaw and walked, although to the others it looked more like she was gliding, towards the goblin. While crossing the small space, the metalsmith keenly watched the witch and took in as many details as he could.

Once she was before him she felt a small tug in the back of her mind that felt vaguely similar to that of a ley line. It whispered gently and softly to her. She placed her fist back over her heart in what she thought was right the way, and recited a rote the way she did for the stronger wards, by following its call, “You honor me Metalsmith with your craft.”

Gorvuk hummed pleasantly, “With honor you shall wear it proudly, Apprentice. You are the first in about three hundred years to follow the call. Your warrior spirit is strong and admirable. What is your name?”

“Hermione Granger,” she replied easily.

“Hermione Granger, I will remember that name…” he ended with a nod before turning around and going to grab what looked like a staff.

“What is your master’s main field of work?”

“Master Snape is a potions master.”

“And you have an affinity for potions?” he asked with a slightly disbelieving tone that had Hermione blush lightly.

“No.”

“What is your affinity, young Hermione Granger?” he asked, already having surmised that.

“… wards,” she said lowly.

“With all those masters gone underground like cowards, your potions master will take up the mantle to train you until you become a master yourself,” he said, his voice rumbling like stones clashing together, “I am glad that at least one of you isn’t a coward.”

“Thank you?” she said, slightly confused, looking over to her master in the corner of her eye. Severus merely sat watching the proceedings, allowing himself to be slightly amused.

Gorvuk hummed to himself in a curious manner as he stared at the witch a little longer, squinting his
eyes as though he was looking for something specific.

“Remain standing and facing this way,” he said as he turned around and walked to the wall with his tools of craft. He reached over the anvil and grabbed what looked like a metal rod, with a sharp end. It was approximately one meter in length. He then bent down and grabbed a small hammer, not unlike the ones on the wall.

Turning back he walked surely towards the witch with the rod in his right hand and the hammer in his left. Hermione watched curiously, even as she stood still as she was directed, cautious not to cause ill will.

“I will be measuring your for your badge, and then have you show your will so I know what design shall suit you,” he answered the unspoken question.

Gorvuk thrust the metal rod that was shockingly cold length wise into her side, as though measuring her with a measuring tape. The witch pursed her lips on contact, forcing herself not to flinch like her body wanted to, but remained silent. The goblin then turned the rod width wise and measured her hips. After that he stepped back and placed the rod forcefully in front of her, the rod ringing on impact.

“You will hit this rod as hard as you can,” he looked at her as though he was judging her, “Should you miss, I will wait until you hit it,” he added as an afterthought.

‘How rude. But I suppose with not a lot of people having such coordination, despite playing quidditch it’s bound to happen...’ she thought to herself.

The goblin held the hammer out to her like a baton, holding the middle with obvious practice as his arm was firm, as though holding a wand.

Hermione grabbed it firmly and Gorvuk released its weight into her hand. As expected it was much heavier than it looked, and she gripped it with both hands holding it in front of her. She was slightly surprised that the handle had a leather wrap around the handle.

“Whenever you’re ready, Apprentice.”

The curly haired witch nodded, and swung the hammer back before bringing it full force into the metal rod before her causing it to ring like a small church bell. Unbeknownst to her, her face twisted into a determined grimace. Her hands hurt on impact and stung from the recoil, but she squeezed the leather on the hammer harder, so she wouldn’t drop it.

Gorvuk smiled, pleased with the proceeding. He deftly took the hammer from the witch, and lifted the rod at the same time. He swiftly turned on his heel and returned to the anvil.

“You may be seated, Apprentice,” he spoke.

Hermione bowed her head at the goblin, and turned to sit next to her master. They sat in silence as the metalsmith began his work. Metal was ringing throughout the room, as they waited patiently. Some rings were louder and more high-pitched than others.

Severus sat still, his hands in front of him with his elbows off the table, breathing evenly. Hermione on the other hand sat, but was fidgeting with her fingers, puffing her breath every so often.

An hour and a half later the metal ringing stopped and was followed by a loud hiss. Hermione stilled her hands, her eyes alight with a new curiosity. Severus could barely control his own curiosity, knowing that each badge was different. Gorvuk’s steps echoed as he walked towards the table. His
hand was once again fisted over his heart.

“Apprentice,” his voice was surprisingly soft with a gravel undertone, “as you struck the rod it sung loudly. It echoed these walls telling me what to craft for you. Much like ley lines tell you what you need to know.”

Hermione nodded, knowing exactly what he was talking about. She wasn’t much of someone who followed emotions blindly, but the pull of a line was much different… it was like someone gently turning you around by the shoulders. You could resist easily, but when you turned it felt like falling into an embrace. It was comforting, loving, and somehow… understanding. It knew you from the inside before you even knew it existed.

“I present you the turn of my craft,” he said lowly.

He moved his fist outwards and opened his hand. Laying in his hand was a goblin-wrought silver badge the size of a Victorian brooch. It was a cauldron with a beautiful Indian oleander flower in the middle with two swords crossed behind it pointing upwards. The flower petals were evenly overlapped on each other.

“It’s beautiful,” Hermione said in awe, “What is the intended meaning behind the oleander?”

Gorvuk grinned, his teeth flashing, “Beware.”

The witch’s lips twitched at the goblin’s humor. “It’s fitting, Metalsmith. Other witches and wizards will see almost anything but beware in the ‘desert rose’ that’s come to mean so much in terms of power and more recently romance.”

The dark wizard’s eyes twinkled with delight. It was perfect.

“You honor us with your craft, Metalsmith,” Severus said, with a nod in Gorvuk’s direction.

“I am pleased to see such fierce wills in both master and apprentice. I was glad to craft this for one who can hear the lines of a dying art.”

Both witch and wizard brought their fists over their breast again.

“Young master if you would bestow this upon your apprentice,” he said more than asked.

Severus nodded stiffly, gently grabbing the badge and standing up walking towards Hermione. Taking his lead once more the curly haired witch stood and faced him.

“With this badge, all who can see will know you are an apprentice. It can never be stolen, it will never be lost, if taken it will grow heavy and wreck its own wrath until it is with you again. The metal was designed by your will as the rod sung its tale to help it be born. This is for those who wish to see why you are my apprentice,” he pinned it to her robes gently, “Let them see what they wish, a benign truth to hide a more dangerous truth.”

Hermione blushed and grinned up at Severus.

“Thank you, Master Snape.”

They both turned and again placed their fists on their chest.

“Thank you, Metalsmith. Your craft will be worn with pride, and your skill admired. May your wealth grow and your enemies grow poorer.”
“May you be victorious and your enemies tremble on sight.”

Severus nodded again and turned around, with Hermione following behind him, his robe flowing about him in its typical manner.

“Now the Ministry,” he said silkily.
With her badge proudly on the left side of her chest, they entered the Ministry through the telephone booth. Hermione was content in the knowledge that she had gone through this route before and dialed the patterned number ‘62442’.

“Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. State your name and business,” came the same detached cool voice.

“Severus Snape and Apprentice Hermione Granger,” Severus enunciated clearly.

“Why not Professor or Master before your name, sir?” she asked talking over the animated voice.

“Because it would be pretentious as both hold their own weight. My name alone should be good enough for the people we see. Your name, however, must seep into the community as my apprentice.”

The witch pouted at his flawed logic, “You just don’t want a long name badge…”

“That too,” he said as he pinned his name tag to his cloak with a slight smirk.

Hermione pinned hers under her apprentice badge.

The potions master made an imposing entrance, his cloak billowing the way it always did in the castle halls. His eyes were cold and held their usual disdain for those around him. His apprentice behind him with her head held high and her eyes stony to match his. He walked towards security and gave them a light sneer.

“Mister Whitewater, Miss Jeckle,” he said slowly, “I see Mister Munch is absent today.”

“Professor Snape,” said the witch with a squeak in her voice, “Eric is on vacation this week.”

“I see,” he said in the same tone.

She cleared her throat as the wizard beside her paled into an almost alarming white, “Y-your wand please, sir.”

He took out his wand and placed it in the wand weigher, his eyes boring into hers. Her forehead began to sweat as she quickly scanned him with a probity probe as the machine printed out his wand’s specifications.

“All clear, sir. Please have a good day,” she said her voice strained.

“Miss Jeckle, still trying to rush through things I see,” he said while looking down at her, “You must also weigh my apprentice’s wand and scan her as well.”

Even through the fear there was a light of curiosity in her eyes, “Of course, sir. My apologies. Apprentice…” she quickly moved her eyes and saw a curly haired witch with cold eyes and an arched eyebrow. It was obvious she was younger than her, but there was something about her that made her just as nervous as seeing the Minister the first time. She looked down at her name badge and her eyes widened.
‘Hermione Granger. Lady Hermione Granger?’ she thought to herself slightly astounded.

There were rumors going around from those in the Potter court case that Hermione Granger, the witch who was rumored by the Daily Prophet to be playing with his heart, was royalty and his sister. Some people scoffed at the idea, but the older families were on the fence as were those who grew up in a more traditional background. Personally she was on the fence as well.

“Apprentice Granger, y-your wand please,” she said, blushing at her stuttering.

Hermione placed her wand on the brass machine in the same manner her master did and waited with a shrewd eye for the witch to scan her so she could retrieve her wand posthaste. The witch behind the security desk scanned her as fast as possible mentally rushing the probity probe, eager to for the other witch to have her wand back.

“I hope your Ministry visit is a pleasant one, Professor, Apprentice,” she said with a shaky smile.

Severus nodded at her in a more cordial way whereas his apprentice smiled brightly at her and said, “Thank you, Miss Jeckle.”

The witch stared at them with her eyes wide and her mouth slightly ajar. Their reactions were entirely different than what she was expecting. From cold to slightly warm and bright were not what she was expecting. If anything the witch was expecting indifference, but it seemed the pair had more of a practical reaction that the aurors’ had at check-in. It was curious, but not unexpected from Severus Snape. They were better than Moody who always gave her the creeps when he visited. The retired auror growled at them and seemed to stare through them with his magical eye while burning a hole in them with his regular one until he was allowed his wand back.

“I take it they were past students, Master?”

Severus looked at her through the corner of his eye, “Yes. Miss Jeckle was a Hufflepuff, she graduated most recently and Mister Whitewater was a Hufflepuff who graduated a roughly 6 years ago. He wasn’t as bad as Mister Longbottom, but his magic was just as hectic in potions as Mister Finnegan’s is in... everything. He managed an Acceptable for his OWL.”

Hermione nodded in understanding. With potions being as volatile as they were it was easy to accidentally make a poison or cause a harmful explosion. An extra pinch of one ingredient or put in the wrong order could cause someone to end up in the infirmary or worse. It was why they were given such basic potions in the beginning. If it was made the wrong way the worst thing that would happen is someone exploding their cauldron and the remaining insides just a foul concoction. It was a simple lesson, to not want flobberworm guts upon your person. It prepared them for later on when the cauldrons would hold something more toxic.

As they strode through the Ministry there were a handful of people that broke out in whispers after seeing Hermione. It irritated her in ways that made her want to grind her teeth. Instead she looked at them coolly in a way that reminded them of the Malfoys. Narcissa was the epitome of a Lady, but her disapproval glance was just as legendary as her husband’s. Whereas Lucius had one that could also be taken as threatening, his wife had one that made other people feel as though they were beneath her. Which was quite a feat when some of those on the receiving end were taller than her. The simple reminder of the blond pureblood made them pause and think.

They went down a few halls and finally stopped in front of a warm brown door with an opaque glass. Hermione noticed the difference and took a deep breath.

“I’m ready,” she said. Her voice was warm and steady.
Severus nodded without looking at her and then turned the handle.

Upon entering they walked towards a witch sitting at a rather large desk. She was elderly and had frown lines around her lips. Her gray hair was pulled back firmly in a bun and she had an elegant classic witch’s hat on. There was a crimson ribbon wrapped around it, but all Hermione could think was, ‘Professor McGonagall could pull it off better…’.

“Do you have an appointment?” the witch asked nasally with pursed lips. Her brown eyes were shrewd as he looked above the rim of her gold cat-eye glasses.

“Yes. We have an appointment for Hermione Granger, to take her potions Ordinary Wizarding Level exam,” Severus replied pleasantly.

The witch looked at him and then at Hermione before looking away at a schedule.

“Yes. Miss Granger does appear to have an appointment today. Since this is not a retest is she prepared to take the practical as well?” she looked at the curly haired witch with a keen eye.

“Yes. Apprentice Granger is more than prepared to take the practical part of the test,” Severus replied smoothly.

The witch’s eyes widened fractionally with a small fascination.

“Is she your apprentice, Professor Snape?”

The dark wizard looked down at the elderly witch, “She is.”

There was a moment of silence before her eyes crinkled up, “Congratulations on becoming a master, Professor Snape. She looks like a fine Apprentice.”

His eyes softened and he nodded, “Thank you.”

“Good on you, Apprentice Granger. If your Master believes you are prepared, you are prepared,” she said with a smile.

“Thank you, ma’am.”

“I will lead you into the adjacent room to take your written portion with Professor Tofty. You will be provided with the standards: paper that is charmed with anti-cheating spells and an anti-cheating quill. Madam Marchbanks will then oversee your practical. Normally we have another witch or wizard do so as with retests, but I see that you haven’t started your Fifth year yet,” she said pointing to something on a piece of paper in front of her, “With Madam Marchbanks overseeing your practical portion today your grade will be expedited. All grading is done here and normally your results would be owled to you a week or two following the exam. Since your Master requests your exam score, we will be able to grade your work today and give him the score. You will be owled your score on an official score sheet in a week or two.”

Hermione grinned at the elderly witch, “Thank you so much.”

“Please,” she said rising from her chair, “This way, Apprentice Granger.”

The elder witch walked toward the dark wood door behind her desk, opening it to reveal a surprisingly sunlit room. Seeing the young witch’s surprise she answered the unspoken question.
“Professor Tofty finds that it’s easier to oversee exams in sunlight rather than by torchlight,” she said with a small smile, “Please be seated, Professor Tofty will be in shortly. After this he’ll take you to the next room.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Hermione nodded and then took a seat in the middle of the room. Her nerves weren’t frayed, and it was comforting to be seated in sunlight even though she was just as comfortable doing things by candlelight, it was an easier transition after coming straight from the muggle world. After she was seated the witch gently closed the door shut.

Severus watched the elderly witch lead his apprentice into the examination room. He knew she would do fine, even though she normally overstressed herself about tests and exams in general he was pleased that her hair wasn’t a rat’s nest that it often found itself to be at year end exams. When the door was shut, cutting him off from his apprentice he watched the elder witch return to her seat.

“The exam will last its regular time, but if she finishes before then, she will move on accordingly. Shall we send you a memo or an owl when she finishes?”

He thought about it for a moment, knowing that whatever potion she was going to make was going to take at least an hour long, not including her written portion. However he also didn’t want to just leave her in the Ministry alone. If he had the patience to sit in an office, he would, but knowing what type of people were about…

“A memo would suffice, thank you. I would appreciate if one was sent as soon as her potion is being decanted so I may retrieve her in a timely manner.”

“Of course, Professor Snape. I’ll see to it.”

Severus nodded his head at the witch genially and left the office.

Arthur was hearing whispers around the halls today. Apparently someone from the royal family graced the halls of the Ministry recently. It was surprising, something he would mention to Molly later.

Arthur wasn’t a proper pureblood, but he was well liked by many of his co-workers. He was well meaning and most of his sons were gifted and dedicated to their chosen field of magic. His son Bill was a hardworking curse-breaker, Charlie was a dragon keeper, Percy was a ministry worker looking to move up, and the twins were inventors. As much as Molly wished they’d make something of themselves, they loved playing pranks and inventing pieces of magic to do just that. He knew they were brilliant, but he also knew that if they showed more potential on paper she’d demand more of them like she did him when they first got married. He also knew his mother fawned on them and was glad they at least had some of her influence on them until she passed beyond the veil. He occasionally worried about Ronald and Ginny, who didn’t remember their grandmother before she passed, but he would hold reservations until they took their OWLs.

While he was looked down for being a blood-traitor, he was praised for his virility. Even if he didn’t make anything grand out of himself for a pureblood he was gifted with virility, and his wife fertility. Their magic meshed well and their blood wasn’t too close that they were able to bring seven into this world, all gifted with magic. It was a blessing considering most purebloods were having so much
trouble having children. Most died prematurely and a witch’s body could only take so much. So those with one were proud, two were happy, and any more were considered blessed. Others were happy to have children, but extremely disappointed and often embarrassed if they turned out to be a squib.

So while he wasn’t kept in the complete know, as he was a known blood-traitor, he was a respectable pureblood because he was blessed. Thankfully he never told Molly how many ‘offers’ he received on a weekly basis to help magical couples conceive. They always either asked for his participation in their consummation or for some of his seed. He always declined, as he loved his wife and wanted her to be the only mother of his children, but if Molly ever knew she’d call everyone immoral despite it once being a common practice in the older families.

He saw what he thought was Hermione from behind following Severus down the Division of Magical Education. The back of her head was familiar, especially with how much time she spent with his family at the end of summer breaks. Now that he knew why, he was a little melancholic. He enjoyed having company over, especially his children’s friends, but now that he knew it was only because of Molly’s manipulations he wasn’t sure how safe it would be for them. Nonetheless he still had to apologize for his wife’s most recent choice of words.

‘Curious. I’ll have to see if it’s her when they finish,’ he thought to himself.

He was aware through one of the smaller meetings that Hermione was going to join the Order and be Severus’s assistant so she could take over any potions that he may have to leave unattended. While he wasn’t too shabby, they all knew that none of the current members were quick on the draw when it came to potions. Defense against the dark arts, sure, they had fought in a war after all. Well, except Molly, who simply patched them up and fed them after since she was busy taking care of Bill and then Charlie. However potions was something that was precise unlike some wandwork. One mistake and they could blow the roof off a house.

Albus had asked Molly to do so once, but while she was pleased that he recognized her skill, she declined saying that she couldn’t devote the type of attention that a cauldron needed because of the children. Really though it was probably because his children would want to be involved.

Arthur cringed remembered an incident involving the twins. They were inventors alright, or else they’d be without a home right now. All those inventions of theirs, plenty of explosions, and the Burrow was still a fully functioning home.

That and ingredients were expensive. One botched potion could cost what he made in a month. The Order usually had uncommon and rare potions in their stores only because Severus made them. A few of them were simple, but others were too exacting in their making that no one else remembered how to recreate. Several botched potions later and Severus raged about how he didn’t want anyone who didn’t know what they were doing touching any of his potions. He either harvested or bought the ingredients themselves and when he listed them and their common prices it pained him physically just thinking about how expensive potion making was.

Before he turned to go down the hall for the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office he saw Severus leave the room alone.

‘She must be taking an exam. I’ll make a trip back in roughly two hours to catch them.’

Severus was checking in with some of his contacts at the Ministry. It was a good idea to make sure
those bridges were still intact and reinforced. While he did not have many friends, he did have a
good amount of contacts and acquaintances. Those who were in place to benefit him should he need
it in exchange for good quality potions. Some of his contacts had their own private gardens with rare
flora and fauna. He rarely met with them, but they had a mutual beneficial relationship. Rare plant
clippings for a well brewed rare potion seemed extremely fair. Some he felt he was getting the better
deal, especially when they wanted a simple potion they could easily make themselves. Granted he
improved on those potions so they were better quality than if they did make them, but a few simple
changes to the standard recipe was nothing. Not that he’d tell them that.

He had just finished setting up a date to come over to retrieve some pieces of a contact’s plant when
the memo flew towards him. Lifting his hand and catching it gently he opened the memo with a
sparkling glint in his eye. The dark wizard smirked to himself and made his way to his apprentice.

“Ah Severus, I didn’t expect to see you here,” came a silky voice.

“Lucius,” he nodded, “I came on personal business;” he replied seeing his platinum blond haired
friend.

The aristocrat lifted an eyebrow, “Oh? Care to share, old friend?”

Severus looked at him in the corner of his eye, clearly annoyed at the personal intrusion.

“If you must know, I came to have my apprentice take her potions OWL. I’m going to collect her
now.”

Lucius smiled, “Congratulations. I’m sure the witch did brilliantly. Mind if I join you. I wish to give
her my personal felicitations.”

“You may, however I will not hold her tongue. She may have personal issues with you that I am yet
unaware of,” he said blandly.

Falling in step Lucius walked next to his friend, “Is it about Draco?”

“Mm, perhaps a small part of it. However I believe I was thinking more along the lines of your
treatment of house-elves. How you wish to treat them is your business, but she feels strongly about
treating all beings and creatures humanely.”

“A bleeding heart then,” he replied.

“Not so much, but she does tend to be the voice of those who aren’t given one. A Gryffindor.”

“Ah. I almost forgot the young witch was a lioness instead of an eagle. Hopefully with extended
exposure she can see the truth.”

“Perhaps, but she may surprise you with her own research to state otherwise. She is tenacious.”

Lucius frowned knowing his friend was right, he had to pull many strings to win the case against the
hippogriff that scratched his son. The witch’s case was extremely compelling, but he was able to
compel the jury even more with his confidence and mention of his experience, which worked well
since she wasn’t there to speak face to face. He was also able to make jabs about her being so young,
a mere third year. Who would they agree with? An adult or a muggleborn child not even half way
done with her schooling.

However as much as he wanted to stay fast to his beliefs he also wanted the witch as an ally. Severus
was indifferent to many things he did not agree with, or he agreed with him to slight degrees. The
potion master was many things, but he wasn’t exactly an extremist when it came to such topics. His witch on the other hand was very much like a young dragon from what he heard and indirectly dealt with.

“We shall see. For one as gifted as her, I suppose I would be willing to make a few concessions with some concrete reasoning or even evidence on her part. If you feel she is intelligent enough to make her your equal then she can’t be that wrong, merely misguided.”

Before they knew it they were in front of the door and Severus was turning the knob. Opening the door completely, they were greeted with the sight of Hermione’s curls as she smiled brightly thanking the witch.

As though she knew it was him, she turned around and beamed at him.

“Master Snape! I think my potion was well done, although I think I missed a few questions on the written…” she slowed down her happy chatter upon seeing Lucius behind him and her smile dimmed with it, “Lord Malfoy, my apologies. I didn’t see you.”

“It’s quite alright, Apprentice Lady Granger. I came to personally give you my congratulations on your apprenticeship.”

“Thank you,” she replied politely.

“Apprentice, I do believe you should wait in the hall while they give me your final score. They should also be giving me a copy of your written portion so I may personally check if you missed any questions. If you did we will go over them together,” Severus said smoothly.

“Yes, Master. Excuse me, Lord Malfoy.”

“Of course,” the blond replied in dulcet tones.

Leaving the office Hermione closed the door behind her before releasing a breath.

‘Of all the people Master Severus could be friends with, is Malfoy’s father. I suppose I’ll have to try get over it… but I will not concede, I will see him bend to truth instead of that pureblood rubbish.’

She moved over to stand next to the door, and let her face relax into a well-practiced pose. Her posture was perfect, as her eyes coolly watched those who were walking. It was interesting that for the most part, Ministry workers wore drab colored robes, but all had something bright in color on them. Be it a hat, a sash, shoes, glasses, or whatever else.

As she was about to release another breath, she saw Mister Weasley walking towards her with a smile on his face. She quickly put on a small smile for the other man, unsure of why he was coming towards her.

“Hermione! I thought I saw you earlier. How has your holiday been so far?”

“It’s been pretty good thus far. Thank you, Mister Weasley. And the Burrow’s?” she asked, politely.

“Ah, you know them,” he chuckled, “Lively as ever.”

The witch nodded in agreement knowing full well how lively the Weasley brood was at home.

“I have to say, I’m glad I caught you now. I just heard about what happened at Hogwarts with Molly, and I can’t possibly describe how sorry I am for my wife…” he seemed as though he was
gathering himself, “Hermione you are beyond brilliant from what my kids say. You were born with the gift of magic, which means you do belong here. I don’t agree with Molly in anyway and when I spoke to her about it she admitted she was greatly in the wrong.”

“I don’t know Mister Weasley… what she said hit very hard. She meant what she said, even if she said it out of anger. You may not agree with her, but she obviously feels very strongly against muggles and muggleborns, like myself,” her face fell and became slightly guarded.

Arthur tried again, “Hermione, please know you are always welcome at the Burrow. I would like to make amends, I know you won’t be able to forgive something like that overnight. What Molly said was extremely uncalled for and I can’t apologize enough – ”

Just then the door swung open and Lucius stepped out with Severus in tow.

“Weasley,” Malfoy drawled, “Have you come to congratulate Apprentice Lady Granger on her apprenticeship? Or apologize for tarnishing some more of her reputation by speaking to her in public?” he asked with a sneer on his face.

Arthur instantly bristled on site of the blond wizard, “What are you talking about, Malfoy? Hermione’s reputation can’t be tarnished just by speaking to me. And what is this sudden change of title: Apprentice Lady…?” his words trailed into silence as he turned and looked at Hermione’s name badge.

‘Apprentice Hermione Granger. -“Oh yes! I heard about that, some royal figure was down in the court the other day for Potter’s trial! From what I heard they’re also related!”- Apprentice Lady Granger. Sweet Merlin, Molly!’ he thought berating his wife.

Not only did his wife insult Harry’s family, but also the talk of the Ministry, royalty in the Ministry.

“Hermione, is what Malfoy saying true?” Arthur asked, trying to keep his tone civil.

“Yes. Master Snape took me on as an apprentice. We retrieved my official badge this morning,” she said grinning, very proud of her achievement.

“Th-That’s fantastic!” He said, genuinely happy for the young witch, but also aware of the outside ears and piercing grey eyes, “Congratulations. You’ve definitely earned it.”

“Thank you, Mister Weasley,” she said with a pleasant smile.

“Yes, thank you, Weasley. It would seem that your family has been rubbing elbows with the right crowds lately. Hopefully hers hasn’t become sullied. It would be more befitting of your status to refer to her by title though, would it not?” Malfoy asked condescendingly.

“Hermione has been a good friend to my children for years, Malfoy. We’ve passed the formalities between us, unlike you.”

Severus watched dispassionately, rolling his eyes at his friend’s antagonizing. There was no controlling the feud between the Malfoys and the Weasleys, there were too many generations of bad blood between them. He learned a while ago to just leave it be. The potions master walked around the two bickering wizards to be closer to his witch.

“Apprentice, let’s take our leave. Our company has dwindled and we have much to do. I also have your grade,” he finished with a blank look in his eyes.

Hermione’s eyes widened and she paled, the calming draught finally having left her system. She had
momentarily forgotten since the stress had been lifted from her shoulders and the Weasley patriarch had showed up. However this was a small moment of truth. If she didn’t receive a high enough grade she would have to retest!

“May I please know now? The suspension is positively nerve-wracking,” she insisted.

Unbeknownst to the curly haired witch, her eyes widened impossibly giving them a wide-eyed gleam. While her pose remained perfect, her facial expression was practically begging. Her bright emotion was reminiscent of his old friend Lily, who also felt the same way about her grades.

His lip twitched, forming an involuntary smile, “If you insist on knowing,” he took out the paper from his pocket and unfolded it, “Overall you received, an unsurprising, “O.”

The light in her eyes grew as did a grin.

“Now, let us take our leave. You may pester me for details once we leave here.”

“Yes, Master,” she said joyously, fighting to keep a bounce out of her step, as she glided next to him. Her poise still causing an outbreak of whispers in their wake.

Meanwhile Albus was having a distressing conversation with the Minister and half of the Board about the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor.

It was an unofficial meeting with a few select board members. Minister Fudge wanted Malfoy to be there, but knew that he and Albus didn’t get along on a personal or professional level. It was decided that those with a more neutral disposition, but also those who didn’t quite see eye to eye with the Headmaster, would be best.

Cornelius had personally written a proposal and they agreed. When they appointed a professor, there would be an official meeting, in the meantime they felt it would be best to corner Dumbledore with the recent turn of events. The Headmaster’s recent announcement that You-Know-Who was back, was not well met from those without a strong stomach. They were giving him a time limit, and with the position having a reputation for being cursed he was having a hard time finding a replacement so soon. If he couldn’t find one, they would appoint one from the Ministry.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I implore you to reconsider. Hogwarts is a school, a private school at that, not part of the government. I feel it would hinder the learning process should there be a faculty member who is also a ministry worker. Not to mention the conflict of interests,” he spoke gently.

“Dumbledore,” one of the elder members sighed aggressively, “It is more important to have a professor to teach the subject rather than not. Unless you feel it’s prudent to take up the mantle yourself, we will appoint someone to teach should you not find someone within the next four weeks.”

“That’s hardly enough time for someone to make the decision to agree to teach the subject to learning wizards and witches,” he frowned at them.

“If you really feel that way, we can decide now,” the same wizard spoke.

The Minister cleared his throat, “If it pleases Dumbledore’s sensibilities, I feel that we should give
him 6 weeks. Should he not find a replacement then I can personally assign one of my top staff members.”

There was a grumble among the few members of the board, five wizards and two witches, as they conferred with each other. One of the wizards harrumphed and two others glared at him. It was another minute before they decided.

“We agree to your terms, Minister Fudge. However if we find your staff member’s scores lacking they will be restricted and unable to teach the students practical magic. This is mostly for the safety of the students. After the debacle with Lockhart, we simply cannot take that risk.”

Cornelius mulled over the words, his mustache moving about as he fidgeted. He already knew his choice, and was aware that they weren’t entirely competent with practical magic. Looking at his staff’s scores was one of the first things he did before promoting them or keeping them close to him. It was why he trusted Lucius Malfoy so much.

“Of course, it would be for the best. With my staff being seniors, they may have forgotten some of the material since the ministry spells are more frequently used than what they were taught in school. With such spells mostly being taught to only ministry officials it wouldn’t be prudent for them to slip up due to habits,” he spoke, even as his stomach coiled with nerves and anticipation.

Dumbledore looked at the Minister with disappointment apparent in his eyes.

“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen for your decision to expand the time for my search. I still feel it isn’t enough time, but I understand the need for the new staff member to make lesson plans and choose the appropriate books for all seven years before letters go out,” he sighed dejectedly, hoping for some of the board members present to feel sympathy to his plight.

The truth was that the Minister didn’t want the students to acknowledge that You-Know-Who was back. Despite there being a proper witness, he was hoping to discredit the witch, even though she was a very prominent member of society. With his choice of staff member, he was almost reassured that what needed to be done would be done. After all there was a reason why he chose Delores Umbridge to be his undersecretary.
Having gone back up the telephone booth, Severus decided to side-along them back to Spinner’s End.

One they arrived in the familiar area, Hermione allowed herself to relax and bounce excitedly behind Severus, happy with her grade. She had received her first OWL and had gotten an Outstanding on it. It was a shame she wouldn’t be able to take all of her OWLs at the Ministry if it meant getting her grade back the same day. Now they would go over any questions she missed or miswrote, which she knew was a luxury since usually only their grades were mailed back to them. This would give her an insight as to what she may have missed or done wrong.

Ironically the practical portion was making a calming draught. Of which she knew she made recently, so it was fresh in her mind. She had to stop herself though from changing the recipe that was given to her with the tips that her master had given her.

The dark wizard stepped in and held the door open for her, catching her bubbly excitement. He noticed that she held herself different while they were out, reminding him much like his pureblood friends and old brother-in-arms. If he hadn’t dealt with his Slytherins on a daily basis he would have been concerned, but his snakes normally held themselves differently in the halls of Hogwarts compared to their common room.

While the older ones started to further cultivate their public face with trusted friends, the younger ones would occasionally watch, taking mental notes. Of course their families taught them how to behave from an early age, but spending most of their time at Hogwarts after they turn eleven they had to teach themselves. They got traditional family lessons on holidays, so they could properly act in the manner that befit their family name.

He shouldn’t have been surprised with his apprentice also knowing proper public behavior, but took it in stride. What did surprise him was her polite deference when dealing with Lucius, however he wondered how long that would last. Or if it was only something that would exist in public, especially considering that they were at the Ministry…

As she walked past him with a bounce in her step he couldn’t help but notice how content he was knowing she was happy.

The curly haired witch walked through the backdoor into the kitchen. She kept walking, taking a seat at the breakfast bar. Hermione looked into the living room, taking in the comforting looking room, before turning around to look at the kitchen and finally her master. She didn’t have time to look around before due to his discomfort.

Severus closed the door quietly, keeping a close eye on her. He was grateful for the previous private lessons at with the witch as it left him accustomed to her presence in close quarters. As she inspected his living room and kitchen curiously, he was hit with a sense of belonging for the first time since he was a child. It was almost overwhelming and he was almost unsure of how to proceed until she looked at him. The hazel eyes rimmed with more with gold in his home than it had been in the Ministry, gazed at him trustingly.

He mulled over an internal conflict for a moment before deciding it was best, even if he felt it was too soon. Other purebloods knew, so their children would obviously know, even the goblins knew…

“Hermione, I… we have some things to talk about before we move on,” he said, looking at her
intensely.

The witch in question’s heart dropped at his tone, unsure of why it made her anxious.

“Yes?”

Noticing her the change in her composure he walked and leaned back against a counter, facing her, and crossed his arms. His posture was completely nonchalant, the witch’s heart skipped a beat at the entirely domestic sight, leaving her further confused.

“First, I do want to tell you how proud I am of you. You did extremely well even though I expected nothing less from you.”

She smiled shyly at him.

“Second… this one is rather heavy,” he shifted his weight, “As you know I’m a half-blood. I was raised in more of a muggle-styled background. While my mother was able to tell me some of the magical community, she was restricted in other ways because my father detested magic. So she wasn’t able to teach me all basic things she knew, although she taught me some family spells and potions. Frankly, I learned more from my housemates at Hogwarts. Common things like fairy-tales, and other basics. Of course it’s hard to teach someone else something that comes as second nature to you, so they struggled. Some things they missed until it came up.”

Hermione nodded knowing exactly what he meant. She was able to research a lot in the year before she started Hogwarts, but still learned things from her classmates all the time just overhearing their conversations.

“Honestly, despite being part of the community for so long I’m still learning things and one thing was brought to my attention recently,” he self-consciously leaned forward so his hair fell in front of his face, “When a master takes on an apprentice they’re usually old or already bonded, married, or even betrothed. If not their first apprentice is almost always the opposite of their natural attraction. So a wizard will usually have another wizard for his first apprentice or witch if he is attracted to wizards. It is usually is set so one or both are uninterested in the other. The same goes for an apprentice despite it being such a prestigious position. Normally one or both are already… taken so to speak, even the younger apprentices are already betrothed, being pureblood.”

Hermione nodded slowly, following his words with bated breath.

“Usually this is because the bond is so sacred, so intimate, that a special bond is formed… I’ve been told that the relationship between master and apprentice is so special, on another level of intimate, that they almost always… end up bonded to each other. There are a few rare cases, but those don’t truly have any weight as they ended up with one or both dead. I didn’t know until after I asked you to be my apprentice. If it’s something that troubles you, I offer you my apologies. However… I must admit I’m… genuinely pleased with the turn of events,” he finished with a blush, turning his head to the side so she wouldn’t see despite his hair being in his face.

Letting out a long slow breath the curly haired witch sat silently processing the huge load of information. It gave what the metalsmith was talking about more depth. The process was taking a bit longer than it usually did for her due to the shock factor.

‘It was unintentional, but he’s not unhappy with it. I should be upset or something, but I’m just… warm. I suppose I don’t have to worry about my hormones,’ she thought distractedly, ‘It’ll be weird calling him master in private now, knowing what’s most likely going to happen. I should… probably say something so he doesn’t think I’m upset. He’s obviously embarrassed or something by the turn
of events.’

She looked at the wizard peculiarly. “I have to admit I’m a bit shocked… but not unhappy… not … forlorn if you will. I will probably need a bit longer for it to settle that one day we may be… bonded. I don’t want to rush into anything, I don’t think I’m ready. Meanwhile, knowing that I should probably just get used to calling you Severus. I… I hope to get to know you better sooner than expected, and I hope that we’ll be able to take things slow. I’m still…” Hermione turned bright red, “I’m still… vanilla… and a virgin. So please… I don’t normally want or ask for it but do mollycoddle me in that aspect.”

Severus slowly turned and looked at the witch across the kitchen from him, his face still tinted with a small amount of pink. She didn’t bust out into a fit, she didn’t break down crying, it was obvious she was in shock, but taking it rather well. He wasn’t sure if her admittance was out of shock or not though, but did tuck that piece of information in the corner of his mind.

“I hope likewise and I believe I’ll be able to comply with your requests.”

They sat in comfortable silence taking in the considerably large turning point in their relationship. A few moments later Severus had to ask a question that had been bouncing around in his head.

“How do you know the term vanilla? While it’s common knowledge you read a lot I wouldn’t expect the term to show up in your normal type of reading material,” his voice was light and eyebrow was arched in a manner that showed how perplexed and curious he was.

Hermione blushed brightly and crossed her arms, she turned her head quickly, her hair swirling around her.

“If you must know I do read a wide variety of books. When my parents gave me the ‘talk’ my mom gave me some of those… romance novels, to supplement my understanding,” she pursed her lips in mild annoyance.

His eyebrows furrowed letting his mind process that bit of information…

“Your mother gave you erotica so you would understand sex?”

“Yes. My mother gave me erotica so I would understand the process better instead of just textbook terms. I understood the basics and just assumed it was a rather plain and bothersome process, but with the books I learned it was not that simple.”

Severus pressed his lips together in confusion while also trying very hard not to laugh at how innocent she was.

“It seems as though it was helpful. However I doubt your mother would give you a book that was anything but vanilla.”

Hermione blushed harder wishing she would just accidentally apparate home under her bed.

She took a loud breath, “I liked them and I decided I wanted more. So I had my mum go to a specialized shop that I thought looked interesting. I was too young so I had her go for me and buy a few different books,” her voice was defensive.

The wizard tried to imagine Hermione and her mother conspiring behind her father’s back to purchase obscene erotica. Hermione walking down the street and trying to nonchalantly look at sex shops with a Gryffindor’s stereotypical definition of discreet. After today he knew she was probably a lot better at it than he was imagining, but he couldn’t help it. The image playing through his head
caused him to stifle a laugh. He tried to play it off by coughing.

Finally after controlling breath Severus stood up straight and spoke plainly, “I did say that I would give you a tour of the house once you finished your exam. I’ll look over your answers later, I’ll need time to read them.”

Hermione looked up at him and then gave him a small smile chuckling at the blatant subject change, “I would like that.”

Arthur stepped out of the floo, dusting himself off with a practiced wand motion. He heard his youngest children arguing through the window from their backyard, so rightly assumed that the twins were in their room creating bits of magic.

“Arthur! You’re home rather early, is everything alright?” Molly asked, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Yes, I just decided to leave earlier than usual,” he said taking off his outer cloak.

“Oh, nothing serious then?” she asked again.

“Well nothing really, but I found out something that I think is rather important to our situation with Hermione.”

“Oh?” Molly asked, all of her attention suddenly focused on her husband.

“Yes. I saw her earlier and noticed she was taking her OWL, like we knew she would, so I decided to apologize to her while she was there.”

“Good. Did she accept your apology?” she asked with a bright smile.

Arthur looked at his wife sternly. It was apparent that she took Ron’s word over the twins’. The twins were mischievous but they weren’t liars. Ronald on the other hand had occasionally lied or purposely kept information away from them. Out of all the boys he was the least observant. He loved all his children, but he was just as aware of their faults as he was their strengths.

“No, Molly she didn’t.”

The plump witch bristled, “Why ever not!?” she shrieked, “That insolent little witch! How dare she not mind her manners!? She should know better to respect her elders!”

Her yelling sparked her brood’s curiosity. It was something they all learned early on was when their mother yelled it was best to be informed about what it was she was angry about. The twins crept down the stairs, being sure to avoid the ones that creaked when stepped on. Ginny and Ron however flew towards the house, hopping off their brooms and walking through the back door.

“What’s going on, mum?” Ron asked, knowing that she wasn’t mad at him.

“That bratty witch wouldn’t accept your father’s apology!” she barked without thinking.

“Who wouldn’t accept Dad’s apology?” Ginny asked curious.

“Hermione!” she snapped, bristling again just mentioning the young witch’s name.
The twins winced at their mother’s volume. They knew that she said something horrible to Hermione, but they didn’t know why she would expect the witch to forgive her so easily.

“Molly!” Arthur yelled over his wife.

All noise stopped in the Weasley household as the patriarch rarely raised his voice.

“You didn’t let me finish. Hermione knows how you feel about muggles and muggleborns. You may have hidden it well over the years, but anyone who knew you from your Hogwarts days knows how you feel. Anyone who remembered you before you became Missus Weasley remembers how you feel. When you snapped at her, she was able to see exactly how you felt about muggles and muggleborns, like her. It’s not something easy to forgive! Not to mention that Malfoy interrupted while I was trying to fix things.”

“What was Malfoy doing there?” Ron asked with a sneer of distaste on his face.

“Malfoy was there to congratulate Hermione. He found out a bit of information about her that has changed his demeanor towards her entirely,” he said with slight loathing.

“What did he find out about her that made him want to congratulate her? Congratulate her for what?” Ron asked with his face screwed up.

He was unable to imagine anything that would make a pureblood like Malfoy treat Hermione anything less than the dirt under his boots.

“A few things, Ron. Firstly her apprenticeship. Hermione is now an apprentice under Professor Snape. Secondly she took her OWLs, I assume she did extremely well. And lastly Hermione is… Hermione is actually Lady Hermione Granger. She’s a member of the royal family, which makes her a very important person,” Arthur said, his voice was calm.

Ron stood there dumbfounded before his face screwed up again. Molly however lost all the blood in her face, turning whiter than her clean sheets.

“So what? Harry’s important,” Ron said with a scoff.

Ginny turned and looked at her brother with furrowed eyebrows. She knew her brother could be stupid, but even she knew how great an achievement it was to be an apprentice. Added to that Hermione was part of the royal family, which she really didn’t understand, but she knew that royalty was more important than Harry, who was seen as a hero. Hermione was born important, Harry achieved importance.

“She’s Apprentice Lady Granger?” Molly asked weakly.

Ron turned and looked at his mother who looked horrible. He didn’t understand the importance, after all it was only Hermione. Apprentice or Lady or not, she was still just bookworm Hermione.

Arthur nodded.

Fred and George looked at each other seriously taking in the new information concerning the curly haired witch. They were glad that they were friendly with the witch, even if in passing even privately, because she was bound to make waves when news reached Hogwarts.
Sitting in the library together Severus was reading over the written portion of her OWL before remembering something.

“I think tomorrow I’m going to invite a few friends over and introduce you,” he said aloud.

Hermione was slightly startled, not expecting him to say anything until he was done reading over her exam answers.

“What?”

“Tomorrow after your lesson I think I should introduce you to a few friends. You already know them, but I think it would be nice for you to meet them in an informal setting,” he said, his eyes were still looking at her exam.

“It’s not Malfoy is it,” she asked gruffly.

“No, but that will be as inevitable as meeting the Dark Lord. It’s actually Minerva and Hooch.”

“Professor McGonagall and Professor Hooch?”

“You’re not a parrot, Hermione, but yes. Outside of classes they’re Minerva and Hooch. Rolanda doesn’t really like her name so we just call her Hooch. They also have unlimited access to my rooms so you’ll see them a lot during your apprenticeship.”

“Do they know about your… position in the Order?”

“Minerva does, Hooch is not aware and I would prefer her to stay neutral. So I will most likely have to cut time with her short as she likes to do shots when she visits. Not enough for us to be intoxicated, but enough for us to loosen up. I can’t afford to be loose now though…”

Hermione nodded in understanding, both surprised and sad. Surprised at his activities and friendships, but also sad that he would have to keep a friend at arm’s length.

“Master, aside from avoiding intoxication, despite how minor, why would you have to hold Hooch at arm’s length?”

Severus looked up at her quickly before looking back down at the paper, “Because I expect the Dark Lord to call me at random times. He always calls after curfew, as that is also the time that those who work in the Ministry would also be at home. We cannot ignore a call…”

“So you wouldn’t be able to come up with excuses with her in your rooms…. Even though she has unlimited access to them.”

The dark wizard frowned at the paper, “I see your point… I’ll think of something.”

Hermione nodded.

“Your answers were almost all textbook perfect. I’m pleased to see some of your intuition showing for once in a test. Granted they were things we spoke of recently, but it was your curiosity and your ideas, I merely confirmed them. A perfect O. Would you like to go over any of the questions?” he asked smoothly.

Hermione grinned and leaned forward immensely delighted to discuss academics with him.
Chapter 71

Dolores Umbridge was sitting in her office polishing her wand, waiting to hear the good news from Cornelius. Their plan was to try to minimize any fear mongering and prevent the public from acknowledging the resurrection of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Mostly the children in Hogwarts so they would still adhere to what the Ministry said instead of that uppity mudblood. They had to have it so the public would see the Ministry’s word was better than what the muggles claimed were royalty. The public had to see that their government was more important, even if the royal family wasn’t allowed as much control as they once had.

It would have been easier to discredit Potter and the mudblood with simple claims of over-excitement, attention-seeking, and straight out lying under the impression that it was just something the two children would do. However with Peter Pettigrew confirming such incidents and admitting to have assisted with the act, thus being sentenced to being kissed, it was moot point. That was all the evidence the public needed. All they could do now was try to minimize fear mongering and stopping an all-out war without doing much about it, despite Cornelius wanting to claim Voldemort wasn’t back at all.

With a wizard, a pureblood wizard, being kissed after being questioned under the truth serum… There really wasn’t much they could do about that. Thankfully the press showed more interest in Black’s trial than Pettigrew’s. Apparently that quack paper, The Quibbler, was the only one that covered it accurately. Unfortunately for them, the following article was about another creature that didn’t exist.

If it weren’t for Potter coming back with that mudblood and that dirty rat things would have gone fine! He would be silenced instead of being given political clout and power that was sure to rise. Power that could potentially overthrow the Ministry. He was The-Boy-Who-Lived, the one who ended the war last time, so surely he would do so again. That wasn’t even mentioning that he was blood-bonded with that uppity mudblood. Muggle royal family be damned.

It was unfortunate that Skeeter couldn’t be reached at the moment. There was a witch who earned her gold!

There was rumor that she had to lay low after gathering some specific information. It wouldn’t be the first time she had to do so. So no one was worried about her recent disappearance. Journalism was dangerous business, only because information could be dangerous in the wrong hands. Umbridge however felt that the Daily Prophet was a good controlled source of information since they were controlled by the Ministry.

They didn’t want to publicly discredit Potter as a savior, yet. After the courtroom incident following her failed attempt at silencing the Potter brat went horribly, she decided to have a more proactive approach. It was common knowledge that Hogwarts was almost always in need of a Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, and what better than a Ministry trained official?

It would give her power over those brats and she could punish them herself. Then she could slowly take over the school to control information from inside and get any and all dirt on them that she could to discredit them at a later time. Preferably after she left the post so she had a whole year’s worth of damaging information on them. After all, how unseemly it would be that The Boy Who Lived and the ‘brightest magic thief’ failed their Defense class and then their defense OWLs?

Any real pureblood would be able to practice magic at home under parental supervision and then retake their OWLs for a fee at the Ministry. There would be no lasting harm done to anyone…
important. Then if she was nice, but most certainly firm, it would get back to the parents who worked at the Ministry and she would be in further good graces with the right people in the right departments. It was perfect.

It didn’t help that the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black’s Lord was actually innocent of previous charges from the first war, they had a close friend in the auror department. There were a few other loose ends from the first war that needed to be trimmed properly before they could clip the brats’ vocal cords. Children were meant to be seen, not heard. She would see to it that she did all she could to help Cornelius.

Besides even if You-Know-Who was back and decided to pick up where he left off, there wouldn’t be much harm. Granted there was the loss of a few magical upstanding families… While she didn’t agree with his methods, cleansing the wizarding world was something they needed. If they were going to be blood-traitors they were a weak link in their society that needed to be pruned anyways. Mudbloods didn’t belong, those dirty magic thieves should be arrested and their stolen wands snapped. Good wands that should have gone to those poor squibs who had their magic stolen as babies. Muggles were worse and filthier than cattle. What happened to them didn’t matter to her as long as their community was safe from outsiders. Safe and pure. Muggles and muggle royalty be damned. They had their own aristocrats, why bow to some muggle who couldn’t do anything besides try to hunt them?

A memo flew from under her office door and hovered in front of her until she tapped it lightly with her wand.

‘Everything is going well. He only has a few weeks to find a replacement he won’t find. Start making those lesson plans and looking for appropriate books. I suggest you try to retake your Defense OWL and then NEWT or you won’t be allowed to teach practical magic. But they’ll be your students, so do whatever you feel is best. You have my support.

C.F.’

Dolores grinned darkly at the memo.

‘Whatever I feel is best? Then why bother wasting my time taking that test or even bother with the NEWT? The only thing they’ll learn is that it’s best to trust the Ministry. I’ll pick some of the older, Ministry approved, books for the homeschooled. Why learn how to defend against the dark arts? That’s what aurors are for! If everyone knew then we wouldn’t need that department, it’s simply smart business. I’ll have the youth eating out of the palm of my hand. Young minds are so impressionable.’

Hermione woke up the next morning after a small lie in. She was meeting her master later in the day, around noon London time. Stretching and getting out of bed she padded over to her bathroom for her morning routine.

Once she finished and made to get dressed for the day Thimi popped in front of her Mistress, surprising Hermione.

“Mistress, Master Harry would like to see you before you meet with your Master for the day. He is in the kitchen.”

“Okay. Thank you, Thimi.”
Hermione quickly put on a comfortable set of muggle clothes, jeans, a t-shirt, and a fresh pair of socks. She frowned as she was putting her wand in her waistband, before heading towards the kitchen.

‘There’s gotta be an easier way to carry your wand when you’re wearing a t-shirt and muggle pants,’ she thought to herself.

Making her way into the kitchen she saw her brother flash her a small smile, and smiled back.

“What’s up, Harry? Thimi said you wanted to meet with me before I meet with Master Snape for lessons,” she said, sliding into the chair next to him.

Harry frowned momentarily before nodding to himself, “Hermione, I love you, but I have to know, Snape isn’t doing anything bad to you is he? You’re okay with your apprenticeship and everything? He’s not my favorite person in the world, but I’ll try to get along with him as long as he doesn’t make you miserable. Just… I’m having a hard time wrapping my head around it,” He said quietly.

The witch stared at her brother, before folding her hands under her chin, thinking about her response carefully.

“I love you too, Harry and no. I enjoy my apprenticeship, he even had me take my potions OWL the other day. I got an O,” she smiled at him, “He’s extremely different outside of Hogwarts than in, but from a professional perspective if you were teaching young witches and wizards who didn’t know a ladle from a cauldron? I’d be strict too. Potions can be very volatile, we both know that. There have been quite a few cauldron explosions,” she sighed, leaning on her hands now, “As much as I don’t like being on the receiving end of his… classroom persona, we should say, I understand it. Neville would probably do better if Master Snape taught him differently, but if he didn’t command the classroom the way he does, can you imagine what would happen if Ron decided to be more careless than usual? Just him fiddling with a potion ingredient throwing it and catching it, carelessly. Even the smallest ingredients can do harm if they’re entered at the wrong time. A porcupine quill? It could cause an explosion if it’s put in the cauldron too soon. Ron would fiddle with it, it’d slip out of his reach and land in someone’s cauldron, and if they weren’t paying attention because they were preparing their next ingredient they would get hit with a nasty cauldron explosion. Neville freaks out with anxiety Master Snape causes him, and everyone knows he’s Neville’s greatest fear. So that’s something else entirely.”

Harry nodded understanding entirely what she was saying. Ron goofed off in almost every class that he could for as long as he’d known him. History of Magic was ‘the perfect class for a kip’. Granted Harry was guilty of passing out in that class as well, he didn’t go in thinking he was just going to go straight to sleep. If Ron could goof off in potions, given Hermione’s scenario? Ron was his friend, but even he knew Ron had competitive issues. If Crabbe or Goyle were doing better than him, flicking beetle eyes into their cauldrons while they weren’t looking would be bad.

Mulling it over carefully, Harry had to be honest with himself, if Ron wasn’t friends with Hermione her cauldron would probably be one of those he would try to sabotage.

“What about when he’s not in the classroom?” Harry asked.

“In Hogwarts he’s still Master Snape. If you caught him smiling at a group of first years for being funny, some people would think they had a chance of getting off easy in class if they managed to make him smile or laugh in general. I mean, Professor McGonagall teaches the same way.”

“Yeah, just she doesn’t spit out acid when she talks,” Harry mumbled.
Hermione pursed her lips.

“Come on, Hermione,” Harry whined, “You’re the only one that I know of that he hasn’t called a dunderhead. Instead you’re a ‘know-it-all’.”

Hermione smiled softly, “I know.”

Harry’s eyes widened at the smile on his sister’s face. He’d seen that smile before on other witches’ faces at the dance. Those who were dating their dance partners or fancied them. Hermione didn’t have that smile then. So why now?

“Are you… do you…?”

The witch tilted her head and an eyebrow at her brother questioningly.

“Do you fancy Snape?” he whispered.

The witch blushed furiously, her face falling, but not denying it.

Harry waited for the words that never came.

“Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Hermione, tell me you don’t fancy Snape,” he begged.

“I would if I could without lying to you,” she mumbled, looking away.

“Hermione what do you see in him?” Harry whispered.

“He’s intelligent, skilled, clever, witty, and he’s got a wicked sense of humor,” she grinned.

“So are the twins! Why don’t you like them?” he beseeched her.

“They create brilliant pieces of magic, but they’re not mature enough for my tastes,” she said looking up, “and don’t you ever tell them I said that,” she glared at him from the corner of her eye.

“What about Cedric? He’s mature,” Harry tried again, “Or even Viktor!”

“Harry, I haven’t had a single conversation with Cedric. And… I broke things off with Viktor. Honestly what I liked in Viktor… I also see in Master Snape. Except Master Snape’s voice is… exceptional and he’s more experienced. But my apprenticeship comes first and foremost. Besides, what is this sudden interest in who I like and such?”

“Your face. The way you smiled.”

Her eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“You looked happy, but… in a deeper way. I don’t know how to explain it. Like all the stress from class and school and even Voldemort, it was gone. All of it was gone. You… looked like you were glowing with happiness without actually glowing. Just because I brought up that he only calls you a know-it-all.”

“Being a know-it-all got me the apprenticeship. I wouldn’t change a single thing about it,” she smiled.

Harry smiled back.

“Did you get started on reading any of your new books?”
Harry blushed and nodded, “Yeah. The Defense one is pretty good. I was going to start with the meditation one since it’s smaller, but I thought it would be better to do it with you or mum.”

“You should do it with Dad, he taught me. Mum knows how, but since she married into the Family, she was taught later in life and is bad at explaining it. Dad was taught as a kid so he’ll be able to teach it to you easier,” she replied decisively.

Harry nodded understanding the pragmatic thinking, “Okay.”

‘How could it have all gone wrong? They’re not even in fifth year yet! They haven’t even passed their OWLs! I have to think of something before it goes any further. Then I have to wait for Hagrid to get back to me with news from the giants,’ Albus thought.

Sitting in his chair, Albus laced his fingers together as he further pondered the current situation. It was imperative that he get access of the Potter vaults. The contract between Harry and Ginevra was also important to his future plans, but not as pressing at the moment.

Having found out through his contacts at the Ministry, Hermione Granger was Harry’s blood bonded sister. They were closer than he thought, but at the same time they weren’t romantically interested in one another so that boded well for him at least. Considering she was also part of the royal family it would give Harry some extra clout that he could use to his benefit.

Being Albus Dumbledore had gotten Harry out of (and in) a few sticky situations and even let him get away with a few illegal things on the side simply because of who he was and how powerful people knew he was. He was respected by most of the community, those who were considered light families also tended to listen to his private requests or words before they believed the Ministry or the Prophet.

With Voldemort having gained a new body however meant that he had access to his magic… While he was disembodied he was less of a threat, even with his great mind, because he had no access to his own magic. The other wizard was admittedly strong and well versed in magic.

Albus decided he had to limit his interactions with the boy in case the dark wizard was able to control the horcrux that was in the boy. He wasn’t sure if it was possible, but if it was it wouldn’t bode well for him if it was. Imagine Voldemort being able to use legilimency through the horcux! Sure he had his own occlumency shields, but then he’d be in a battle of wills with the man from a distance. Then if he was able to do that, what if he was able to get into the boy’s mind! He would be able to pick apart anything and everything that was said to Harry. He couldn’t be around potential information. Even a slip of something innocent that wasn’t controlled could tilt the scales.

Still… even with his limited interactions they had to be important enough that Harry understood the importance of being firmly on his side! He needed those funds! He needed to marry the youngest Weasley!

Maybe it was time to convince Molly brew again. All of her children were at Hogwarts or out of the nest so to speak… Her cooking was exceptional, and she could easily slip some of that love potion to Harry that she slipped to Arthur when she was still in school.

While Molly was admittedly pretty when she was younger, and she attracted a fair amount of attention, she wanted the best to be her first. When she bragged about it to those who would listen another student, who he thought was jealous, had sent an owl to her father. Mister Prewett was so
angry he demanded to speak with his daughter immediately. It was in his office that it was discovered that Molly had slipped Arthur a love potion so her plan was guaranteed.

She claimed she didn’t want the embarrassment of being rejected so came up with a fool-proof plan to get what she wanted. It wasn’t uncommon for students to have little rendezvous in the castle, or even at the Three Broomsticks on Hogsmead weekends. Rooms could be rented there as easily as they could be rented at the Leaky Cauldron. What she didn’t know though was that her father had planned on raising her bride price because she was a virgin and her plan ruined his.

However even a week after having been slipped the potion, Arthur was still sweet on Molly. After a few more doses Arthur believed that he was really in love with her. When she stopped dosing him, a few months later, his body was in such a habit of being around her that he continued to do so of his own free will. Her love potion was so potent, so subtle, that the potion lasted about 2 weeks after a dosage.

If they could slip that to Harry, he would most likely want to marry the girl of his own free will. It would be easier to do so if he convinced her to send him, and her kids to prevent suspicion, a few “home care” packages. More than the usual special occasion packages.

After all it was his OWL year and the twin’s NEWT year, which was simply a wonderful happenstance in this occasion.

‘Yes, that’s what I’ll do. I’ll send Molly an owl and have her meet me in a few days to discuss a few things. Just a quick note, we can talk in person. I know she’ll be amenable,’ he thought to himself, as he dipped his quill in ink.

Severus was in Minerva’s living room, refusing to call it a parlor since it was not a place where she typically invited people over. It was for her and her few friends to sit and talk, read, and occasionally take a cat nap. Hooch was sitting beside her, sprawled out on her couch.

“You’re actually inviting us over?” Minerva asked, “Why over your house and not your quarters as usual? You hate your house,” she stated.

Severus made a face, pursing his lips and arching an eyebrow. It was a face that only they had been able to see since Lily.

“I would like to spend time with you in a private setting. I will be having other company and I don’t want to have to bring them to the castle.”

Hooch’s eyes shimmered knowing who the company was.


Severus willed himself to be calm and to not blush, “My apprentice.”

The elder witch blinked not having expected that answer.

“You have an apprentice? Why didn’t you tell us you were considering taking one, Severus? You know we would have supported you,” she said gently.

The dark wizard nodded, “I did bring it up with Hooch. But only after I already completed the bond.”
Minerva’s eyebrows furrowed, “I know you like your privacy, especially what you do during the summers, but wouldn’t you have told us both?”

Hooch comfortingly toed Minerva from her spot, “He wanted to, Minnie, just something came up that he wanted to talk to me privately about.”

Minerva pursed her lips knowing that usually their private conversations dealt with sex or their general attraction to witches in general. He would never call it girl talk, or even guy talk, but she knew it was healthy to speak about those things with a close friend. Sometimes she wished he would talk to her about those things, but also knew from when he was a student that he had certain tastes that she admittedly would find embarrassing talking about.

“Who is it?” she asked.

Hooch grinned in response.

“Hermione,” he said, “Hermione Granger is my apprentice.”

The elder witch froze for all of 10 seconds letting the implications pass through her brilliant mind.

“Neither of you are betrothed. Neither of you are in a solid, fortified, or binding relationship aside from to each other.”

Severus blushed, “I know. Hooch told me afterwards. I… spoke with Hermione about it yesterday. I admitted I didn’t know, but that I wasn’t unhappy with it.”

“How did she take it?” Minerva pressed.

“She said that she was shocked, but not unhappy or forlorn about it and she doesn’t want to rush into anything. She also said she would need a bit of time for the idea to settle.”

“Severus, that’s excellent! I’m so happy for you!” She exclaimed.

“Thank you,” he said his eyes shone with happiness.

He took a quick breath before plowing through, “Since she’s my apprentice and will be in my life for the foreseeable future I want you to get to know her in a personal setting instead of a professional one. You’re both important to me, and I don’t want there to be changes between our friendship. I did offer her the spare room in my quarters for when she wanted it, so you may see her when you guys pop in.”

They both nodded, agreeing with the sound logic.

“Now that I know she’s your apprentice though you’ve given me a bit of extra work,” she looked at him with a hint of distaste.

“And what do you mean by that?” he asked with his typical eyebrow raised.

“I was going to have Miss Granger –”

“Hermione. In a private setting I think it would be better if we called her Hermione,” he cut her off softly.

Minerva nodded with her eyes softening for a moment with understanding, “As I was saying, I was going to have Hermione be a prefect this year. With her being your apprentice she outranks a prefect, even if she won’t be able to give or take away points, she can assign detentions.”
The dark haired wizard looked down nodding, not having thought of that. He should have expected Minerva to pick her favorite cub as a prefect, but the thought slipped his mind. He should have anticipated the opportunities that wouldn’t be applicable to her because of her new status.

“I think she will be disappointed, but I also think you should tell her. I think she would like that,” he said.

Minerva ‘hm’ed in agreement.

“I’m expecting her around noon London time. If we leave now we can have half an hour to settle before she shows up.”

“Good, let’s go,” Hooch said, swinging herself off the couch and leading the way.

Meanwhile Leeroy had been around the corner of the kitchen doorway when he heard his children talking. He knew Harry had a personal issue with Hermione’s master, despite his good feeling about the other man. Hearing his daughter talk about him in a romantic fashion, while still pointing out that her education was still first, actually set him at ease. It wasn’t a response he was ready for, but his intuition hadn’t steered him wrong yet.

He had a good feeling about the man, and Hermione liked him too. That was good enough for him. He knew with her intelligence that she would probably be like her mother and end up with an older man anyways. They had expected it when she was about six or seven. She was emotionally on track for her age, but intellectually she was far beyond. As much as she would probably get along with people her age, on an emotional level, intellectually she would be bored or eventually unhappy with someone her age unless they were mentally up to par with her.

Thankfully the other man didn’t give off the ‘lady-killer’ vibe, which probably made him like the other man more. Unlike Harry’s godfather. Severus respected his daughter, even when he caught him looking at her legs a little too long.

The attraction was mutual and having done his own reading he knew they would most likely end up bonded rather than not. Abagail looked at the logistics, he however looked deeper since he was given more clearance than she was.

He heard Hermione suggest that the boy ask him for the mental help rather than his wife, knowing she was speaking from experience. He agreed from beside the wall that would probably be for the best whereas he knew Abby wanted to work with Harry on his people and crowd control skills. Hermione was considered bossy, but he knew if she was a boy it would be considered assertive instead. Something that was admired in a man rather than a woman. So it would work out for the kid.

He chose that moment to enter the kitchen.

Out in a field near her house Luna Lovegood was laying on her back, watching the clouds. She couldn’t wait to go back to school and have a real friend. She had missed Crookshanks and Thimi, which also meant that she missed Hermione. With that article burned she felt a relief at finally being able to do something for Hermione like she had done for her.

‘I can’t wait for the school year to start. Even if she doesn’t talk to me in public this year at least I
know I have a friend at Hogwarts,’ she smiled at her thoughts.
Harry and Hermione heard someone entering the kitchen and blushed, knowing they weren’t as quiet as they may have thought. It was unusual for them to not have a real moment of privacy, as everyone else was usually too busy with their own self-important things to even consider listening to them. It may have crossed a few of their minds but for some reason there was always some sort of compulsion charm around them to keep other students away when they were talking about ‘important’ things. After first year the incident with Neville trying to stop them from leaving the common room the only one who seemed to be able to notice them was Severus. Even Professor McGonagall looked over them as though they were having an everyday conversation.

Leeroy noticed their rosy cheeks and chose to ignore it.

“I couldn’t help but overhear that Harry was interested in learning how to keep a firm mental frame of mind.”

Hermione smiled and nodded, whereas Harry nodded bashfully.

“It’ll be easy to teach you. Once you learn it it’s hard to forget since it’s one of those exercises you do daily to the point you never forget. Like jumping jacks from primary school.”

Harry nodded at the analogy. It’d been years since he’d participated in any physical education, but even without doing so he’d know how to do jumping jacks at any given time.

Hermione however rolled her eyes considering that it’d be more like learning the alphabet. Looking at Harry’s reaction though she supposed it would be better to compare it to a physical activity since he was more of a kinetic learner than an auditory learner. They were both visual learners as well, they needed to be when learning wand movements, but Harry was more of a natural learning how to do while doing it.

“We can get started this afternoon if you’d like,” Leeroy offered.

Harry grinned at the older man, “I’d like that. Thimi already made me breakfast and I just wanted to talk to Hermione a bit before she left for lessons. So if you want to start earlier…” he hinted suddenly feeling embarrassed for being excited, “Unless you haven’t had breakfast yet of course.”

“I already ate before you even woke up, kid. We can get started now if you’d like,” the older man replied, glad that he was finally able to get a foot in to spend time with his new son.

The young wizard was obviously already comfortable with Hermione and Abagail, but was more self-conscious and standoffish when it came to the older man. It would be his opportunity to have Harry get used to him in the small time he had off from boarding school.

“Yeah.”

“Come on then, let’s go to the parlor,” he said as he already turned around to leave, Harry quickly getting up to follow.

Hermione smiled to herself and got up to do a bit of reading before she left.
Thimi popped in the tea room, turned training room, and lightly tapped Hermione just as the witch looked at the clock and noticed the time. The curly haired witch had been caught in one of her new defense books, while also missing her professors. Just thinking about them made her feel like she was wasting her time doing what they felt was lazing about when she had the time to train. While it was hard, it was also fun taunting them as they were shooting hexes at her…

Maybe she just had a demented sense of fun, already knowing her sense of humor was closely morbid.

She smiled at Thimi and got up, holding her hand out, she would have time to mourn their time together at a later time. It was time to meet her master’s friends.

As Thimi brought her to Master Sn- Severus’s house, she remembered that he had said that he’d be able to at least get her in touch with Professor Moody. It jolted her as she landed evenly in his living room, seeing an amusing set up.

Hooch was sprawled on the couch with her head on an arm, a leg on Professor McGonagall’s lap and the other on the back rest as the professor sat up proper as she usually did. Severus was over in his chair, away from them, but nothing gave anything away that this wasn’t a normal layout for them.

The witch smiled at them.

“Apprentice, since this is your first induction to an informal meeting between my friends I feel it’s prudent to reintroduce you to people who you’ve met in a professional setting.”

Hermione smiled and nodded while Hooch rolled her eyes with her eyebrows raised in a most relaxed manner and Professor McGonagall gave Severus a look as though communicating a whole sentence without words; of which he ignored.

“How’s it goin’, Hooch?” he said with a flourish of his arm from his chair.

Hermione smiled at her master indulgently before turning her attention to the witches, “It’s a pleasure to meet you in this setting. Please, call me Hermione or Apprentice, if you’re more comfortable with it,” she added as an afterthought.

“Apprentice, hopefully you’re better in person than you are on a broom,” Hooch said with an impish grin.

The younger witch blushed furiously while Severus chuckled at her expense.

“Come on Minnie, you thought it was funny too,” she replied just as easily.

“Minnie?”

The older witch smiled fondly at the yellow eyed witch.

It was in that moment that Severus realized that Hooch was hogging the couch and Hermione didn’t have a place to sit. Unless Hooch moved over, which he highly doubted, she would have to sit with him, or rather on his lap. Looking over at Hooch with a pinched look he was sure that she was aware
of it as well.

Noticing his look, Hooch’s grin grew.

“Hermione why don’t you have a seat. It’s awkward with you just standing there in what’s supposed to just be us getting to know you,” Hooch said.

Hermione looked back and forth noticing that all the seats were taken.

“You’d have to move your legs for me to sit down,” she replied with a hand on her hip.

Hooch pursed her lips making a humming noise as though she was thinking, “Mmm, no. I’m very comfortable. You could always sit on Severus’s lap,” she retorted, her face sporting a cheshire grin.

The curly haired witch’s face burst red with wide eyes before flicking them over to Severus who was also sporting a small blush and looking away from her.

“I- I don’t think that’s, uhm… feasible?” she tried weakly.

“Why not? I’m too comfortable to move, and Severus didn’t say ‘no’,“ she responded.

Minerva was hiding her own grin behind her hand.

Hermione’s eyes flicked back over to the surly wizard, who was still looking away from her, staring holes into the white haired witch. She did notice however that he moved his arms that would allow her to sit on his lap comfortably, making her blush harder.

She walked over to him and daintily sat on his lap, her body turned facing the witches on the couch and, extremely aware of the warmth that came from his crotch. Unbeknownst to her Severus blushed harder once her bum was squarely on his lap, now intimately aware of how firm it was pressed against him. It didn’t help that Hooch and Minerva had front row seats to this discovery and baptism to their physical intimacy.

“So Hermione, aside from what we know about you in a professional setting, please tell us something we might not know about you,” Minerva initiated.

Looking quickly at Severus in the corner of her eye before looking back at the other witches, her blush still firmly in place, her brain stuttered for a moment being put on the spot.

“I’m not sure if Master Severus told you, but I’m a member of the Royal Family. I’m sure you remember,” she nodded at Minerva, “It won’t hit the papers just yet, but the rumors are strife and I’m sure word will get to Hogwarts sooner than later.”

“So you’re a princess?” Hooch asked.

“She’s not a princess, she’s Lady Hermione Granger,” Minerva said.

Hermione nodded, “I’m not close enough to be a princess. It would take a lot of deaths before I’d be in line to be the Queen.”

“I’m sure it’ll put a bee in half the school’s knickers,” Hooch grinned.

Minerva looked at her friend and chuckled, “It should be somewhat amusing. Hopefully it doesn’t become disruptive though.” She finished with a crooked smile.

“What do you think will be the most amusing reaction?” Hermione asked.
“Before I would have assumed young Malfoy, but I think it might either be Miss Parkinson or Miss Chang.”

“I think the best reaction will actually be Sybill,” Hooch purred.

“Trelawney?” the young witch asked incredulously.

“Oh yes. She’s quite sweet on Severus here, even though he’s never given her the time of day.”

Hermione looked at him in the corner of her eye, “Good on you.”

The witches cackled at the curly haired witch’s response. Her opinion of the spindly witch was legendary. Even in the privacy of the staff room Sybill would fiddle with her shawls any time Hermione was mentioned. Severus pursed his lips and glared at his friends on the couch.

“Sybill is an annoyance and thankfully the rest of the staff is aware of the unspoken agreement to keep her at least one seat away from me,” The dark wizard further explained.

The hazel-eyed witch laughed, that sudden tidbit catching her off guard. The thought that the staff purposely put a buffer between Severus and the fraud, as though he needed the protection from her was beyond amusing to the apprentice.

“I do look forward to that announcement. Sybill disliked you before, but I’m sure you’ll be the focus of her annoyance after your apprenticeship is announced,” Minerva said.

Hermione pursed her lips, her face showing exactly what she thought of the other curly haired witch.

“I have tea with Sybill at least once a month to check up on her since she only attends mandatory meals. Severus here would do the same, but as a Head of House he’s not afforded that luxury,” the elder witch said with a smile.

“I was in her class but for so long, but I could still smell the sherry on her. She tries to hide it with all the incense in her classroom,” Hermione replied with a slight sneer of distaste, eerily reminiscent of her master.

Minerva blinked and turned her head slightly with a small look of concern, “What do you mean? I know she drinks in her private time…”

“Oh. Something you actually don’t know about me in a professional manner. That incident I had with the polyjuice potion?”

Minerva nodded, whereas Severus was listening interestedly knowing that the reverse effects were different for all when it came to animal hair for a rare and controlled potion were far and few between. It wasn’t recommended and some people were never able to fully transform back into humans. One of the potion masters who decided to experiment with becoming an aardvark and ended up keeping the hump for the rest of his life. The white-haired witch however never heard of anything involving polyjuice potion. It wasn’t a potion they made at Hogwarts, even for NEWTs. The furthest they got was the base to be tested, never a fully finished potion.

“Well even though Master Severus was able to reverse a large percentage of it, near perfect, I was told beforehand there wouldn’t be any guarantees,” she shrugged, “I still have sensitive senses, and my teeth are still pointed,” she said putting it lightly, “I have to glamour them every morning. It’s the one piece of magic I was allowed to use outside of school.”

“You simply must leave them for Halloween, the rest of the castle might think it’s your partaking of
the holiday,” Minerva suggested.

Hermione was pleasantly surprised at McGon- Minerva in an informal setting and nodded with a smile.

“So you were able to smell sherry on her?” Severus asked, steering the conversation back to more serious matters.

Hermione wiggled a little bit before she remembered she was on his lap and blushed fiercely fully aware of the semi-hard flesh across her bum. Severus on the other hand sat still and looked up towards the ceiling as though praying to Merlin for Grace.

Hooch grinned impishly, “The sherry?”

“Yes, she smells heavily of sherry and if it weren’t for my sense of smell I would have never caught it under all the incense.”

“Did the incense give you a headache?” Severus asked.

“The incense is so heavy in there it gave Harry a headache, it gave me a migraine. So on top of her trying to teach a facet of magic that can’t be taught her classroom is heavy on the senses.”

“What if it is just your ‘eye’ being closed?” Hooch asked playfully.

“If it was just my inner eye being closed then the smell would have had it squeezed so tight it decided it wasn’t worth it for the next millennia,” Hermione replied cynically, tossing her hair over her left shoulder, away from Severus’s face.

A loud laugh burst from Hooch’s mouth, and the witch slammed her hand over it in surprise.

“You and Severus will have a marvelous apprenticeship,” Minerva quipped.

“Thank you, Professor,” Hermione said.

“Please call me Minerva,” she smiled at the wild haired witch.

“Thank you, Minerva,” Hermione said, the name feeling foreign on her lips. It was another name to practice in private.

“You’ll be seeing more of us in the castle, so behind private doors you should call us by our names,” Hooch said, finally gathering herself together.

“We should be going. We don’t have much to do today, but I know Sev probably has a semi and would like us gone now. We’ve tortured him enough for one day. You can use the rest of the day for whatever else you’d like,” Hooch said with a saucy smile, stood up and pulled a red Minerva to her feet.

“See you later, Sev,” she said, “Hogwarts, Hooch’s quarters,” she held the older witch firmly and pulled her through the floo with her leaving before either of them could get their bearings.

They looked at each other red faced.

“I would apologize for her, but it’s something to get accustomed to,” he said.
“So it’s safe to assume that’s just Hooch?” she asked, her voice one octave higher than normal.

“That is a very safe assumption.”

They remained seated for a bit longer despite the couch now being free. The close proximity was comforting and quite cozy. They both chose to ignore the hardness that was now firmly against her bum.

“I had planned for the meeting to be a bit longer, and a tad more awkward,” he said.

“Overall for a first informal meeting, I think it went well,” she replied.

“Agreed. Minerva even told you to call her by her first name.”

The witch nodded, agreeing that it was a good stepping stone.

“Was Hooch ever a Slytherin?” Hermione asked as an afterthought.

“Surprisingly yes, although not many people would guess that. Most assume she was either a Hufflepuff or Gryffindor. It became a moot point after she started to play professionally. She was a reserve for seeker, but when some people started to accuse her of cheating because her eyes were yellow like a hawk’s, it grated on her nerves. Many people who knew her before could attest it was her natural eye color, but many of the foreign teams and older players had doubts. She retired not long after one team tried to have her team disqualified for cheating because of her ‘obviously magical’ eyes.”

Hermione sneered and rolled her eyes at the stupidity of some people.

“So I take it to avoid backlash she just left on her own terms?”

“Yes.”

“Are all your friends smart?” she asked teasingly.

“They wouldn’t be my friends if they weren’t. As you should know I can barely stomach stupidity in my classroom. So that leaves the question as to why I would want to associate myself with dunderheads in my personal time.”

The curly haired witch just giggled at her master.
Severus just watched her as she giggled. Her eyes shined with happiness and the sides crinkled when her lips were upturned in such a way that it was impossible to hide her merriment. It wasn’t the heat that shot from her eyes lighting his body aflame that night that farther than it actually was. All the same though, it was captivating, but this time he didn’t have to avoid her.

He gently moved the few pieces of her hair that had fallen in front of her face, sweeping them back with the rest of her mane. Her breath hitched as she stared into his face, her cheeks pleasantly coloring themselves.

Looking from her eyes to her lips and seeing no trepidation on her part, he leaned in and gently placed his lips upon hers in a chaste kiss. Their noses touched before their lips did, his pressing into hers. Hermione sucked in a breath, almost in surprise, before turning her head slightly and leaning in and kissing him back, pressing her lips firmly against him. Severus moved his other arm over her waist, to touch more of her. The witch sighed softly with happiness and started moving her lips against his, her hands gripping her robes as she did so.

When they eventually stopped kissing both were red in the face and shyly looking at one another. Hermione though smiled despite it, and leaned into his chest, resting her head on his shoulder. Severus moved his hands so he was comfortably holding her waist and sitting on his chair. They stayed like that for the rest of the trip, just enjoying each other’s company and basking in the afterglow of the new step they had taken in their relationship.

Hermione had told Harry that her and Snape had kissed. She went on to explain how she hoped it would be a regular thing since, it was nice. Harry had quickly told their parents her next lesson. Normally he would let Hermione handle her own business as she was one of the smartest people he knew, but this concerned him. While he knew intellectually that it was bound to happen, he still wasn’t prepared emotionally and went with his emotions instead of thinking about it rationally.

He thought they would be concerned as well, but was surprised when both his new mum and dad had wry smiles on their face as though they expected it. He was more surprised by Leeroy’s reaction since he knew that Hermione was still his little hellion, as he called her. He thought that their dad would be spitting angry or at least contemplating having a confrontation.

Instead Abagail told him the story of how Leeroy and she became a couple. It was a story they had told Hermione time and time again, including their age difference. Harry was basking in the telling, once again happy and surprised.

‘This is what it's like to have parents.’

The curly haired witch had opened the letter she received from Viktor a few days after Elara had initially returned, but had yet to show it to her master. Their lessons had been going very well and she had learned the layout of his personal lab with ease. After lessons they agreed that having a cup of tea and discussing both the lesson and a bit about themselves. It was a little awkward in the beginning, but slowly they were getting more comfortable in each other’s presence in private and
would give each other a small kiss in greeting and one in farewell.

They had continued with occlumency pretense with the thought that Albus would check in on her randomly. Severus had owled him and asked in person a few times, and each time the Headmaster had said he was too busy at the moment and would check on her in a few weeks.

It was now August 6th. Hermione had been waiting for the Headmaster’s checkup before bringing the letter to Severus’s attention and knew it would be a disaster if she waited any longer.

“Thimi before lessons I would like to go to my room please, I have to get a letter from my desk and check on our ‘guest’,” she said.

Thimi nodded, “Yes, Mistress. I will bring you a few minutes before lesson, will that be enough time?”

Over the course of the summer the house-elf had greatly improved on her English. Hermione had managed to find the time to help her an hour each day, daily. Thimi would also practice under her breath while she cleaned the chateau. It had taken months and she still had the random slip up, but overall she was doing very well.

“Are you doing anything else today, Thimi?” Hermione asked kindly.

“Thimi will be dusting Mistress’s castle, making lunch, and dinner. Laundering the clothes. Cleaning all the beds, changing the sheets, making them all nice, and waiting for Mistress’s lessons to finish for the evening.”

Hermione thought about it and nodded, as big as the castle was it was already more than clean, so dusting was more of a touch up, and everything else sounded manageable with a free day. She had done so before with the house in London, before ordering take out. There were more rooms of course, but Thimi had insisted that she liked it and the witch consoled herself with knowing it wasn’t as bad since it was already clean.

Over in England the rest of the Order was doing what they could with Albus’s instructions. He had eventually decided that with Tom Riddle back they needed to protect something that might tide over the war. Knowledge. Tom had incomplete knowledge and he was sure after the dark wizard’s resurrection that he was aware of it as well.

The elderly wizard had started placing some of his members there at night to watch the door to the Department of Mysteries, saying there was a secret weapon there that could turn the war. He didn’t tell anyone of them what it was, but that it could not fall into the enemy’s hands. He specifically left his terms vague, on the off chance that there was another mole in the Order and knowing that his members were old and rusty. They had let themselves grow soft during times of peace, and they could not be trusted with certain information in case a death eater ever got ahold of them and tried to invade their mind or torture information out of them. They couldn’t divulge what they didn’t know.

He had spoken with Sirius about having the Order meeting in his house since no one would know where it was. Sirius had thought about it, and eventually agreed, but admitted his house was currently inhospitable.
Albus had clapped his hands and said that it was no matter, that he was sure Molly would help and would speak with her.

It was the conversation of his house being placed under a new fidelius charm that things got sticky. Sirius insisted on being the secret keeper of his own house, despite Albus being the leader of the Order.

Albus insisted that it was for the best, but Sirius wouldn’t budge on the matter and merely said he would write the address a few times, as though he were writing lines in detention, and give him the parchment to hand out at his will. The elderly wizard almost didn’t want to agree, but knew that it was closest to London out of all the members, so it was a key location. He did, but put on his disappointed grandfatherly mask.

Sirius didn’t allow for it to happen though until he had contacted goblins at Gringotts. He had hired them to set up new wards around his home and asked for a few curse-breakers to check every nook and cranny, not trusting his family one bit.

He had glared at Kreature and gave him strict orders not to interfere with their work as they were going to destroy every cursed item under the roof. Kreature had at first been muttering obscenities to his new master, but stopped at the mention of destroying all cursed items.

“Kreature will be able to carryout good Master’s last order. Kreature is… thankful for Mistress’s bad son. Traitor master, I will gather what items I can to help the filth that will enter this home."

It had taken the goblins and their workers a few days as they also took care of a few doxies that got in their way and a boggart, but made it clear that they were not pest exterminators. Everything cursed they found, they listed. Most of them were given to them on a silver platter, literally. They had found one item that was so dark in the pile they had to bring it to their higher up’s attention.

It was a locket.

Those who had more seniority had recognized it faintly, as they had come across a few of the dark artifacts in the Egyptian tombs. Everyone was different, and only the most proficient stayed abroad as they were better able to break them. It wasn’t that hard to destroy it, as it only needed to be broken with goblin steel. What was hard was breaking the curse without breaking the item. Thankfully Sirius Black had practically given them carte blanch to take care of the items, and one of the higher goblins was able to stab it with a knife, the cursed item released a piercing scream that shook the wizards to the bone, glad that it was the darkest item in the house. There were no questions to the owner of the house as he had been incarcerated for 13 years and hired them for a reason. If he wanted those items, he wouldn’t have hired them, he said.

The painting they were told they could burn if they could get it off the wall, after they witnessed an eye opening argument between son and deceased mother. The goblins turned it saying they could turn it into an alarm system of sorts, but could break whatever curse may be on the painting. It turned out there was a curse placed on the frame, feeding it dark magic that altered the painting’s mind, so to speak. It took a few days to see the difference, and another two for mother and son to come to an agreement, but she was left on the wall. But they did remove the curse at his insistence that kept her on the wall.

After that, Sirius said that the Order was now free to meet at his house, not telling Albus what business he needed to do before allowing Molly to come over and clean.

It took the redheaded witch all of twelve hours to acknowledge that she would need more time to clean the house than she thought, but made the kitchen her main priority. A few weeks of heavy
cleaning Molly nodded and said the kids could now help her by scrubbing rooms that had been checked and cleared of all pests. When they were down to the last three rooms Molly had cornered Albus.

“Albus, the house is mostly cleaned now, and it’s definitely safe, why not have Harry come over? He could help clean the last few rooms with the kids,” she said.

Her eyes gleamed at the idea of having Harry and Ginny clean a room together to at least plant the idea into the boy’s head.

The old man nodded, it was a good step towards their plans without the marriage contract now. And they wouldn’t have to lace him with potions until their efforts weren’t working.

“I’ll contact him two weeks before term starts, Molly.”

The red headed witch pursed her lips, having wanted more time to push the teens together, but nodded knowing not to push. She only had to wait a week after all, and would have her kids clean the stairs and hallways in the meantime.

Thimi had popped Hermione into her room and waited for the witch to finish her business.

The curly haired witch walked up confidently to the jar. The last potion she gave her should have run its course by now and she would be coherent.

“Hello, Rita. Feeling better? Come closer to the glass for yes,” she said calmly, as though she hadn’t kidnapped and been torturing the reporter for the majority of the summer.

The water beetle had slowly moved on the stick she was on, closer to the jar. She was obviously in bad shape. One of her antennae was broken, the gold ring around her eyes was cracked on her shell, and she was slow to respond.

“Good. I’ve come to offer you a proposition,” the witch said primly, pausing as though the beetle could respond.

“I release you and you refrain from writing about my family without my express permission and okay. Which you will only receive after I’ve seen the final edit, which I may approve or not. If you’re lucky I’ll simply correct a few facts. However downright slander is forbidden. I will also keep your skittering secret, Rita Skeeter. Does this sound agreeable?”

The beetle in the jar was moving its antennae fast, as though excited by what it heard.

“Move to the middle of your branch, so I can take that as a yes,” she instructed.

The beetle slowly moved to the center of the stick she was given.

“Good. Now I’m going to release you from the jar, so can give me a witch’s oath so I know for a fact that you agree. I’ve already had my house-elf place anti-apparition wards around my room, and if you try anything funny she’s be given the orders to restrain you, even if she has to rely on her own magic. Understood?”

The beetle was frozen for a moment, but knew without hesitation that she witch in front of her was not exaggerating anything that she said. If anything she had a habit of understating what was going
to happen. But she moved her antennae, knowing that it would probably be the only way she would be free again.

“Good.”

Hermione opened the jar, and took out the stick, placing it and Rita on the floor. Rita hesitated for a few moments before she transformed back. She had originally thought she was dealing with a simple school girl. The time she spent in what she assumed was a step down from Azkaban, so she quickly dispelled that notion. This witch was something else.

Rita’s robes and hair were askew, her glasses were crooked and broken, and her eyes were almost wild with fear as she looked at the younger witch.

“You want a witch’s oath? And I’m free to go?” Rita said slowly, looking between her and her house-elf.

“I want a specific oath, not one with clear loopholes for you to exploit,” Hermione said with a straight gaze that made Rita shift uncomfortably.

“Such as?”

“I thought about it and wrote it down on a note card for you. When you’re done reading it, give it back to me,” Hermione replied in a business like tone, pulling out a note card and her wand from her pocket and holding the note card out to the older witch.

Rita shakily took the paper from the witch that didn’t feel like the regular parchment and read it once, then again, then looked up at the young witch with a pale face, before she took her wand and raised it before she read it aloud.

“I, Rita Skeeter, hereby make a vow that I will not write anything involving Lady Hermione Granger, her family, including her blood-bonded brother Harry Potter and his immediate family, Luna Lovegood, Severus Snape, or her house-elf without her express permission. I will also not write anything involving the staff of Hogwarts that can equate to slander, unless approved of beforehand. I will not include those aforementioned in writings based on hearsay or speculation. I will also not look for a way to retaliate against Lady Hermione Granger for this incident, or involve anyone in this matter. I will not harm Lady Hermione Granger or aforementioned. I will not speak of this incident to anyone alive or dead. I solemnly swear this on my magic,” Rita said softly, knowing that she was helpless to do anything about this.

She had hopes to plan for revenge against the younger witch, but she was ruthless. She had been terrorized and tormented for weeks. She was worse for wear and now she swore on her magic that she would do nothing about it. She was left to leave at the young witch’s will only, and it was debilitating.

The soft blue floated to Hermione’s wand and glowed a pale yellow. Hermione arched an eyebrow at that, but accepted it. Rita handed the note card back to the young witch as quickly as she could.

“May I leave now?” she asked, sounding like a child who had just gotten a scolding.

“Thimi, take down the wards so Miss Skeeter can take her leave.”

“Yes, Mistress,”

A moment of silence occurred as Rita pocketed her wand and looked down at Hermione’s shoes.
“Guest may leave now,” Thimi said.

There was a crack of apparition as soon as Thimi finished talking.

Hermione put her hands on her hips, looking over at Thimi, “I think that went well. I hope you don’t mind that I worded the vow the way I did, you know I think of you as family but I know that others don’t.”

“I am more than okay with the way Mistress worded the vow. I am very happy to be considered a part of the Ancient and Noble house of Granger, Mistress,” Thimi said nodding her head, her ears flapping around her.

Hermione smiled at the house-elf before she moved over to her desk and grabbed the letter from Viktor.

“Now let’s go see Master Snape.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

Thimi apparated her directly into the potions master’s living room as had become the norm.

The dark wizard stood and walked over to his apprentice, towering over her, before leaning down and giving her a gentle peck in greeting.

“Good morning, master,” the witch said with a small blush.

They had spoken about it when Hermione slipped and had called him master again, even after being told she could call him Severus. She had admitted that she liked calling him master, and wouldn’t mind doing so once they made it to the bedroom. Severus had been shocked at first, but his abdomen clenched with anticipation, more than willing for that to happen. So while the title was currently appropriate in public, it was an unspoken agreement that later it wouldn’t be.

Severus nodded, “Morning, Hermione. Is there anything you’d like to talk about before we start today’s lesson?” he inquired.

The potions master had started to ask this every few days, as he was more than happy to assist his apprentice in dealing with her guest. Usually she would take him up on his offer and ask about different potions and poisons that she was considering using on the journalist. Thus far the hallucinogen had been her preferred poison for the journalist.

Hermione bit her lip, “Actually, yes.”

Severus stood there waiting for her to continue. While he was in the classroom, she wouldn’t be afforded this luxury, but he was aware that even she needed to gather her thoughts. More so since she had been opening up to him about more than a few things, and he knew of her cursory walks into the gray area. Usually it was this that had left her nervous, and he waited as patiently as he could, as though waiting on a simmering potion.

Hermione sighed as she straightened her shoulders, “Two things. First, I released Skeeter. Before I let her go however I had her give me a witch’s oath. I wrote it in a way so she wouldn’t have a way to find loopholes or retaliate,” she went through her pockets and handed him the note card with the oath, “Read that first before I talk about the second thing.”
Severus arched a curious brow before he started reading the note card that contained Rita Skeeter’s oath word for word. It was sufficient and declawed the trash journalist when dealing with his apprentice and those she mentioned. He hummed as he read, curious to see Miss Lovegood’s name on the card and decided to wait to ask about it.

“Concise. I believe it works for your purpose and protects you from her and others she may have been able to have attack you on her behalf,” he nodded, “Continue.”

“Second, I’ve been meaning to give this to you, but I was trying to wait for the Headmaster to test me. I feel like I waited too long at this point, but,” she looked down to his chest before looking back up at his eyes, “but I would like to go.”

She reached back into her pocket and gently handed over the letter.

Dear Hermione,

I am sorry we could not be more, but I am very happy for you and wish you happiness. Apprenticeship is a great achievement and I wish you and your master the best. I am also sorry I took some time to reply to you, as you are one of those I care about. I did not recognize your owl and mistook it for one of my fans’. It was not until no one else could remove the letter that I read it. I would like to maintain our friendship as it is wonderful to have someone who is not blinded by my fame and sees me for myself.

Your hopes that I will not be overcome by such dark magic again makes me feel better but I feel it is best to prepare. I have asked my mother for advice and showed her your letter (she is better with English than I am). With a war looming we would like to offer how to teach you battle magic that we know is not taught at Hogwarts. In exchange I hope you would help show us how to keep a strong will. This is an invitation to you and your master. Please feel free to share this letter with your master. If they are unfamiliar with battle magic we would also be honored in sharing this knowledge with one who has seen your brilliance.

I spoke with my family and we would like to extend an invitation to Bulgaria for both you and your master. It is my understanding your apprenticeship is the reason you declined as it was for a nice vacation. This time it is to exchange knowledge.

I have attached a portkey that will activate August 6th, as it is then I will not have quidditch practice and it is before you go back to Hogwarts. The activation key phrase is Friends.

We understand if you and your master choose not to accept, but we will have our house-elves prepare as though you are. The worst that happens is the guest rooms will have been aired and ready for company. (Also I hope you do not mind, I showed it to my mother so she could help me more with my English).

Your friend always,

Viktor Krum

Severus read it, then read it again. He stared at the letter as though trying to intimidate one of his students. It was obvious that she broke off whatever relationship they had and decided to be friends. This was an invitation of ‘quid pro quo’. While he was proficient in battle magic, he was not a master in it. He spent a week with another wizard during his apprenticeship who taught him and worked from there. He would be able to see just how proficient he was in this area of magic, and learn more himself while he was there. Hermione would also be getting these lessons which was a good direction as their fighting lessons had turned more to sparring. Her street fighting had helped her with
those lessons, and while he continued to show her different moves until her body remembered them and reacted before her mind did, he still felt she could learn more.

Potter was a menace, and a magnet for trouble. At this point even he had to admit the boy didn’t go looking for it like his father once had. He had a target on his back from the Dark Lord, and that wasn’t even the boy’s fault. Not really…

Speaking of the Dark Lord he had left Severus alone for the summer so he could further get Hermione acquainted with the idea of the dark arts and embracing them. Thankfully the Dark Lord let him be, thinking that he was working hard with his apprentice. As crazy as the dark wizard was, he wasn’t stupid.

In exchange however they were asking for what sounded like occlumency lessons. He was curious about this as Hermione had told him about those lessons along with how much she missed them.

“Did you ever tell Krum about your private lessons?” Severus asked instead.

“No, master,” she replied evenly.

He nodded at her answer, still staring at the letter while he thought.

“Have Thimi pack your bags Hermione, it seems in a few days we’re going to Bulgaria. While we’re there we will gather a few potion ingredients so we have a cover should anyone question too much.”

Hermione grinned, bouncing on the balls of her feet. When Severus finally moved the paper from his line of vision, Hermione launched herself at him, throwing her arms around him to pull him down as she stood on the tips of his toes to kiss him. He kissed back, pleased with the response, as he enjoyed the softness of her lips and the small hint of mint on her breath.

When they broke apart the curly haired witch’s face was rosy, but still had a wide grin on it.

“Thank you, Master Severus,” she said unnecessarily.

“You’re welcome, Hermione,” he said pressing a soft kiss to her forehead.

“Don’t forget to let your parents and Potter know, so they don’t think I kidnapped you,” he said with a wry look on his face.

It had taken Severus a few weeks to get rid of the dirty feeling when they mentioned her parents. It wasn’t until Hooch reminded him that plenty of people had parent, and potential in-laws, and it was common to talk about and visit said parents. Despite his phrasing they both knew only Harry would think such a thing, even with their relationship.

“Now shall we go on with today’s lesson?” he asked, moving on.

“Yes, Master.”

“Good. Today we’ll be working on the wolfsbane again and then prepping some more ingredients,” he said turning around and walking towards his potions lab.

Hermione happily followed, pleased that this had gone better than she thought it might.
Chapter 74

It had taken a few days for Molly to finally stop moping over her faux pas. Cleaning Grimmauld Place had helped, as it gave her a new task to focus on and a new place to think. While she still felt that way she knew better than to make her opinion known, especially as a Weasley. When she was simply a Prewett it was more than fine, it was acceptable since she was a pureblood from a good home. Just because the best happened to be a blood traitor didn’t faze her one bit, after all he was still a pureblood. Being forced to marry said blood traitor was different. Everyone involved, minus the Weasley’s as they didn’t care, were at least happy they were purebloods and were content to soothe their nerves with “at least they’re pureblood”.

The exception had always been the Royal Family. While she may have wanted the mudblood for Ron, as a consolation prize mostly, with her being the brightest witch, her blood could be overlooked. Out of their generation she was the best.

Now it also seemed she was a member of the Royal Family and she had stepped on toes. While she was young and should know to respect her elders, she was… of a higher station. That alone technically made her their betters.

Out of all her wonderful children, only her wonderful Ronnie seemed to be on her side. He recognized that they had known Hermione before they knew about her status and knew her personally. That should have given them some leeway, being personal friends, real friends. They accepted her into their house, fed her, and treated her like one of their own. Molly however willfully chose to ignore how she responded to the article in *Witch Weekly*.

It was the twins who had been on her nerves the most. They had continuously told her that she shouldn’t have listened to Ron about Hermione’s reactions. Even Ginny agreed, claiming that her brother was a bit dense. Still she chose to believe her Ronnie since he was one of her best friends, not them. However… she reluctantly agreed with Ginny that her Ronnie had always been on the slow side. Out of all her children’s grades, Ron’s was the worst. In the beginning he had a few P’s, and then they eventually rose to A’s.

She had thought it was because Hogwarts was raising their expectations and increasing the difficulty in the classes. It wasn’t until Ginny started however that she was proven wrong when her daughter was bringing home O’s and EE’s.

This whole situation was a mess. If Hermione was a regular muggleborn none of this would be an issue! But that wasn’t the case and she had to accept it when Arthur put his foot down.

Just as she was about to go start making lunch when the fireplace started to show green, alerting her to a floo call.

‘Now who could that be?’ she thought.

Molly walked over to the fireplace, absentmindedly placing a cushioning charm before she kneeled to answer it.

“Hello?”

Her expression brightened as she saw Albus’s face.

“Hello, Molly. Is it safe to talk?” he asked mildly.
The plump witch’s eyes widened for a second before she placed a silencing charm around them.

“It is now. What’s the problem Albus?” she asked worriedly. She immediately thought he wanted to speak of something involving the Order.

“Nothing too serious,” he replied in his normal grandfatherly tone, “But I seem to have come up with a possible solution to our problem involving Harry and Miss Granger,” he said, purposely ignoring her status.

Molly thought nothing of it as he was a powerful and important figure himself, focusing more on why he called. Her heart leapt with hope.

“What is it?” she asked.

“How do you feel about coming out of your ‘retirement’,” he chuckled, “and brewing a few more potions?” he asked.

It had taken a little bit of needling for Harry to be reassured that she would be fine, but less so for her parents. There was a small bit of discussion concerning her safety, but after she told them it was approved by her master and he would be attending, they were reassured. Her parents had nodded and hoped that she had fun in Bulgaria.

It was a non-spoken agreement that they wouldn’t tell Harry anything pertaining to the war, or at least Hermione’s active role in it. If he knew that his sister was going through all this training to protect him he would most likely either be mad or upset and avoid her, or lash out by engaging in risky behavior regardless of what that meant to her. There was a third possibility, that he would accept it with grace, but they weren’t going to put their money, or their daughter’s life, on that one.

Before she left Harry snuck into her room so they could talk privately, learning early on that their conversations weren’t mysteriously overlooked or ignored at the chateau like they were at Hogwarts.

“Hey, Hermione?”

The witch in question dropped her book and quickly rolled out of bed and before she stood up, grabbing her wand and training it on the intruder. It was quickly discovered however that it was just her brother. The curly haired witch blushed as she grabbed the sheet on her bed to cover herself while she still had her wand pointed at the messy haired wizard.

“Merlin, Harry, don’t do that!” she hissed at him.

Her brother turned bright red having seen his sister naked, if only for a few seconds. He didn’t question her pulling her wand on him as it was a normal response for her in school. Being on the business end of her wand was not something unfamiliar to the boys.

“Sorry!” he squeaked.

“Why are you in here?” she asked, pulling the sheet closer to her body as she lowered her wand.

“I wanted to talk to you before you left tomorrow,” he said, his face still red.

“And you couldn’t do it in the morning?” she growled.

“I thought it would be better if we talked tonight. I tried to go to sleep, but it kept bothering me,” he
admitted.

Curious, she sat on her bed, “About what?”

Harry started to fidget, “I know we haven’t talked about your relationship with Snape in a while, and I know it’s not my place, but um…”

“What?”

“Y-you’re not doing anything right?”

“What?” she asked confused now.

“You’re not… doing it?” he whispered, as though saying it any louder would make it a very real possibility.

Hermione flushed, “Are you asking if Master Snape and I are having sex?”

His face still bright red, the green eyed wizard nodded.

Hermione was in such a state of shock that she let go of the sheet and covered her face with her hands. The sheet pooled around her feet exposing her nude form to her brother. Her pubic hair was in the shape of an oleander flower that perfectly matched the one on her apprentice badge. It was small and just above the hood of her lady bits. He couldn’t help but notice the intricacy of the design. Hermione was many things, but vain about her appearance was not one of them.

“No, we are not having sex. We’ve just started kissing!” she hissed.

His stomach now lighter that he knew his sister wasn’t shagging his professor, he couldn’t help but stare at her.

“Hey, Hermione?”

She looked through her fingers at him.

“What, Harry?” she asked exasperatedly.

“How did you do that?” he asked, his voice lit with curiosity.

“Do what?”

“Make that design in your um… hair.” He said, trying to be tactful about it.

“Design in my…?” It was then that she remembered that she was nude and tried to cover herself again, this time with her hands as her body flushed red.

Harry blushed again waving his hands, “Don’t worry I’m not interested! I’m gay!” he exclaimed.

Hermione’s body started to return to its regular color, her eyebrows now furrowing.

“What?” she asked partially shocked.

Having realized what he said he looked down at his feet, “I-I’m gay. I’m not into girls. I’m not even attracted to them. I can admit when they’re pretty, but… they’re not for me,” he admitted, “Besides, you’re my sister.”
“Then why did you ask… are you, coming out?” she asked, still shocked.

“I-I guess so,” he said still looking at his feet.

“Harry, the whole tower knows I’m pansexual”, she said, letting her hands drop to her sides, “Why would I judge you for being gay?”

Heaving a sigh her brother looked back up and looked into her eyes, “I don’t know, it’s just… the Dursleys have always considered me a freak… and I was afraid that…”

“That it would make them right,” she finished, “Harry that’s farthest from the truth. I mean… the wizarding world is backwards on a lot of things but they’re pretty accepting of things like that, the only one in the castle that seemed to have a problem with me kissing Fleur was Ron.”

“I have to room with Ron,” he reminded her.

She ‘hm’ed and nodded, understanding his point.

“Is that why you canceled the contract with Ginny?” she asked.

Still looking down her brother nodded.

Hermione sat on her bed and pat the space next to her, no longer caring about her nudity. Harry followed her silent order and shuffled to the other side of her bed and sat on it with his legs crossed.

“Harry it’s more than fine that you’re gay. Mum and Dad accepted me, and I know because of that they’ll accept you,” she said, grabbing on of his hands.

Taking a calming breath Harry nodded and looked up into her eyes smiling.

“Now about that design?” he asked in a teasing manner.

The witch’s lips quirked up into an amused smile, “Well there’s this charm…”

Having had their heart to heart the previous night Harry felt closer to Hermione than he had before, and agreed to tell their parents while she was away. If there were any issues he could have Thimi send a letter for him, but she doubted that he’d need to.

She hugged each member of her family, telling them that she’d be home before term started and she was an owl away. She pet Martin and cooed at him, while Crookshanks and Elara had already gotten their fair share of attention and cuddling.

With that Thimi popped her over to Severus’s house where he was waiting with the portkey and his belongings in hand.

“Ready?” he asked.

“If I wasn’t I wouldn’t be here,” she smiled at him.

“Cheeky witch, hold tight,” he instructed.

Grasping tightly onto his arm and her suitcase there was a pull behind her navel and they were whisked off to Bulgaria.
Their landing was a bit ungraceful as Severus had landed on his feet and had to catch Hermione to keep her from falling on her behind.

Their hosts however ignored that and instead were happy that they arrived. They were unaware of who the witch’s master was and were pleasantly surprised that it was the potions master they had seen while they were there and it was not an entirely new stranger for them to meet and get to know. Tatyana however discreetly hid her smile noticing the similarities between her son and Hermione’s master. It would appear that her attraction to her son’s physique was genuine.

“It’s nice to see you again, Viktor, Tatyana, Mister Krum,” Hermione said with a bright smile, “This is my master, Severus Snape,” she introduced her dark wizard.

“Messieurs and Missus Krum, it is a delight to be here,” Severus spoke first.

“The pleasure is ours, Master Snape,” Tatyana replied as her husband and son bowed.

“Please, call me Boris. Ve vant to thank you for accepting our offer on teaching my son in exchange for learning that which is not taught at Hogvarts.”

Hermione looked at Severus in the corner of her eye before he nodded discretely at her, “It’s no trouble at all. I meant what I wrote, Viktor is a great friend and I want him safe.”

“From what you wrote you have stronger will than him. Is dis true?” his father asked.

“Yes. To throw off the imperious curse you must have a stronger will than the caster,” she replied.

“And you know how?” Tatyana asked in a kind manner.

“I took lessons from our Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. It was one of his first lessons this year and I got extra tutoring at my request,” she answered easily while adding the proper omissions.

Severus was impressed, even if it didn’t show.

“The best way to keep a strong will is to have a firm mental frame of mind,” Hermione said.

“What I have found is the best way to have her frim frame of mind, as my apprentice calls it, is to practice occlumency,” Severus said, knowing that neither of them could cast a full powered imperious on them.

“Ve haff heard of it, but it is taught only to control our emotions,” Viktor replied.

Severus nodded knowing it was an obscure art. It was studied and taught in the older, purer families, but lost its luster as the generations went on. Some families did not trust the younger generations and did not teach them the mind arts so they could see into their minds. Instead it was taught in its most rudimentary base, to control one’s emotions so they didn’t embarrass the family. Thus eventually the secrets and arts started to die off with those family members. It was not an unfounded mistrust as there were mysterious deaths from time to time, allowing an heir access to the family fortunes earlier than what would have happened naturally. Most of the heirs newly married.

“My apprentice learned in a different way than it is usually taught. She did not have the benefit of someone testing her as she learned. I will gladly teach you in her place,” Severus asserted.

Tatyana smiled brightly, glad for the pair.
“Our elves will have your things settled, and we can get started, da?” she suggested in a polite, but with an underlying insistent manner.

Severus arched an eyebrow, “Yes. We have but so much time, and it would be prudent to not to waste it.”

“Lead the way,” Hermione said with a bright smile.

““You will not learn it all in one day, but I expect improvement by dinner. The objection is to keep me out.” Severus announced.

Many hours later the potions master was almost frustrated with the family’s lack luster manner. They were not catching on as quickly as he had hoped, even with their basic. Their shields were weak, like a thin glass, allowing all their thoughts to be available to him. He was able to break through every time with little prodding. It was no wonder Viktor was able to be imperioused with ease.

The curly haired witch caught on, seeing the telltale signs of her master’s temper, and spoke up, “It would be best to try to keep him out as though your will was a solid wall or a rapid river, to hide your thoughts instead of just your emotions, as if they were behind your eyes, the forefront of you mind.”

Tatyana caught on to the younger witch’s suggestion and nodded, the men struggling to accept the concept as they tried to visualize what she was saying in their minds’ eye. The intelligence in the elder witch’s eyes had a gleaming effect. They had all felt the dark wizard swim in their minds, but instead of trying to keep or push him out, they tried to simply be strong and intimidating, most of their efforts had they simply glaring at him.

“Again if you please,” the older witch said looking at the potions master’s eyes.

Without saying a word Severus focused on her and dove into her mind, but was surprised to see a waterfall surrounded by daunting jagged rocks in place of the nothing there was before. He prodded it and was pleased that it would take some effort to get past her defense. The rocks surrounding it were firm, but not without their cracks. The waterfall was strong, and if he were a lesser man, he would either be ejected or possibly lose his mind and drown in her rapids. He backed out and nodded with clear approval.

“Your rock wall can be more mountainous to be rid of the cracks. But it will hold strong, especially against a lesser legilimens. It is much better and impressive that you were able to create that instead of trying to push me out.”

The Bulgarian witch smiled proudly, “Thank you, Master Snape. You and your apprentice are a wonderfull duo.”

“Mama has always been de smartest of us,” Viktor smiled at his mother, proud of her accomplishment.

“Dinner is being ready,” a small elf squeaked before it popped away quickly.

“Ah! Dinner. Let us eat,” The matron proclaimed.
The next few weeks had them continuously practicing both arts, keeping their mind clear and trying to keep the potions master out of their mind. Unlike the first day there had been breaks so they could focus on what they could do better, Tatyana explaining to them in their native tongue what it was like when she kept Severus out of her mind. In between breaks, that Hermione had insisted on so her dark wizard wouldn’t explode on their hosts in anger, the duo was instructed to relax, trust themselves, stretch and practice falling into prescribed stances.

The schedule for their days had been almost nonstop practicing and training. They’d wake up eat, wait half an hour for digestion, and continue. They would stop an hour after dark had settled in. Both parties had agreed that while the company was pleasurable this visit was for business purposes only and that next time would be for fun. Despite what they said everyone but Boris was having fun.

Master and apprentice were pleased that due to their constant exercises and sparing learning the physical aspects of battle magic wasn’t as taxing as it would have been if they weren’t used to it. The Krum family was surprised at first, but overall pleased as that meant they could transition into the second part with ease.

When Hermione had asked what style it was Viktor paused and thought hard and eventually answered Nozh Tochka, Knife Point, but they just called it Battle Magic in Durmstrung. Tatyana then claimed that the name had little to do with the art, and that the wizard who named it was just dramatic.

“Again!” Tatyana shouted.

Hermione panted and wiped the sweat off her face before falling back into the proper stance. Her legs were apart and slightly bent, her wand poised next to her face as though she were pulling back an arrow on a bow, and her other arm was in front of her as though she was going to block a physical hit.

In front of the young witch was Viktor Krum also in the same state and panting just as hard. Viktor and Boris had gotten the rudimentary basics of occlumency enough to protect their minds and give Severus at least 10 minutes to get through their shields. They were instructed to try to strengthen their shields and meditate every night before they went to sleep. Severus promised to test their shields once more before they left, claiming they were adequate enough to protect themselves from intrusion and do something about it if they recognized someone trying to use legilimency on them. Thus they had more time to practice what they had come for, battle magic.

The curly haired witch had to agree with Tatyana, the name of the art had little to do with the art itself. There was less physical interaction than she had initially thought there would be, but enough that it would stun or startle the average wizard. They would shoot spells at one another, moving all the while. The spells were aimed at venerable areas; the head, chest, wand shoulder, knees, and feet. When hit it was debilitating or deadly, thus they only used stinging hexes. All the while the objective was to get close enough to your opponent to physically disarm them. It was the defensive part that the witch had the most fun with though. After training with Barty and Moody she had come to enjoy such activities.

Defending from these attacks was the most exhilarating. There was much movement, ducking, tilting, jumping, and instead of moving to the side by stepping as she was instructed, Hermione had found that twirling worked best for her. Moving over felt clunky and felt awkward when the witch did as she was instructed. When they had started practicing, it became intense, and one attack at her knees was coming so fast, she twirled out of the way instead of stepping to the side. It was in this
moment that Hermione realized that she was able to twist some of the movements she was instructed to do into a semblance of the movements and dancing. It was beautiful and would eventually become deadly.

While moving out of the way of the attacks was encouraged instead of shielding, firing a counter spell was also encouraged. The counter however would either be the counter curse or simply another spell, and it would be aimed directly at the spell instead of the opponent. The objective was to cancel out the spell midway. Eventually they moved on to chain spells, which made it harder to do so, thus forcing them to move while dueling, or rather battling.

Viktor was often her opponent, while Boris was often the potions master’s opponent, but the Krum family switched things up so one of them was always observing. Tatyana often observed as she was the slowest of the three. They admitted that while slow she was the fiercest.

They never allowed for more than one sparring to occur at one time so that they could focus and make sure no one was seriously hurt. Sometimes they were forced to fight through a certain hit, other times they were stopped so they could be healed. At one point Severus had been hit his eyebrow and it swelled enough that his eye was practically swelled shut.

Severus was also enjoying himself, but looked a little more serious than Hermione did. Whereas his witch was fierce and feral, a terrifyingly sexy combination, a grin to match was often found on her face. He admitted it would unsettle most wizards and witches. Whereas he was terrifyingly intimidating. Darkness rose off him in waves as he glared at his opponent, his face either impassive or twisted in a sinister sneer.

“Begin!”

Hermione growled out the stinging hex, aiming for his head while moving her wand in a deft manner, to aim her following hexes at his wand arm and his heart, moving with his steps. Her spells moving fast as she stepped closer, taking a step with each hex leaving her wand.

In response Viktor had to move, only able to deflect the one that was coming straight for his face. He side stepped the one aimed at his wand arm, only for the one aimed at his heart to hit it instead. The more they sparred the more unpredictable the witch became. The only thing that stayed constant was her first spell was always aimed at the head. It was smart though as the opponent would always be more distracted by a bright light aiming for their face, drawing most of their attention to the first one, rather than the follow ups. This left the following spells an almost guarantee hit. Would she fire at their stomach? Their feet? Their wand arm? She also had a knack for hitting their wand hand too. Something she improvised on.

The wizard hissed in pain as he moved to return the hex at her knees and feet, angles that were hard to combat against, forcing the opponent to either take the hit or move.

The witch twirled to the side with a delicate jump forward, her wand pointed above her head as her elbow had moved during the action, before she fell back into the stance. Her wand poised like an arrow, and fired more hexed at the lanky wizard.

Her spells shot to his knees and one to just below his left hip, hoping to hit the joint that connected his leg to his hip.

Viktor quickly stepped, practically jumping, to his left, just for her third spell to hit his crotch. The quidditch professional groaned before he doubled over and fell holding his groin.

“Break!” the elder witch exclaimed as she walked quickly to her son’s prone form.
Hermione blushed a brilliant red, standing in a shocked mortification, before running over to the wizard on the floor and crouched next to him. The other wizards winced with small “Ooo”s slipping from their mouths, and covered their own groins in sympathy in a kneejerk reaction.

“I’m so sorry, Viktor! I aimed for your hip, I didn’t think you would walk into it!” she cried.

Viktor groaned in response.

Tatyana rubbed her son’s back glad they were using light spells.

“It’s not your fault, Hermione. I saw him walk into it,” she couldn’t help but giggle at the end.

The younger witch smiled ruefully.

“You have gotten much better, I am proud,” the elder witch said, as she continued to rub Viktor’s back.

“Thank you, Tatyana. I wouldn’t have been able to do it without all your family’s help,” she replied.

The older witch smiled gently at the younger witch.

“Please, I would be honored if you called me Mama or Mama Tatyana. I know you will never be with Viktor again, but I would be honored to keep you in our lives.”

Hermione blushed and grinned, “Thank you, Mama Tatyana. I hope we stay close, even through this war.”

“I think we should call it a night,” Severus suggested lightly.

“Agreed,” Boris replied in a quick secondary motion.

Tatyana shared a secret smile with Hermione.

“Alright,” the elder witch replied loudly enough for the wizards to hear her, “Severus, please come here?”

It wasn’t uncommon for the Bulgarian witch to call Severus over to assist her with healing. More so to help the wounded party to sit still or move them in a manner which it would be easier for Tatyana to heal them.

“What can I do to help?” he inquired.

“I need you to move Viktor onto his back, and I need you to start calling me Mama, or Mama Tatyana like your apprentice,” she said in a businesslike manner.

Severus froze in the middle of turning the boy.

“I’m sorry?” he asked.

“Call me Mama. You’ve earned it,” she said.

“We’re practically the same age,” he said uncomfortably, trying to decline the offer.

The elder witch laughed, and she helped him move her son onto his back, “Severus, I can assure you I am nearly twice your age. We had Viktor at a later age, I was 51 when I gave birth to him. Thank you for the compliment though,” she retorted.
Severus froze recognizing that she was at least 30 years his senior and had to concede that she was old enough to be his mother.

“Yes, Mama,” he replied dutifully, his face tinged pink as his chest filled with warmth. The wizard held Viktor by his shoulders to keep him grounded on his back so she could heal the poor wizard’s groin.

Hermione smiled at her master. She could tell it meant something to him to call the Bulgarian witch his mama. Owning his childhood home she assumed that his parents were dead, and it had been a long time since he had a mother figure in his life. She was glad that they came to Bulgaria, even under the set circumstances.

Elsewhere Ron was writing a letter to Harry, only because his mum told him to. He was excited that they were going to get Harry, but that also probably meant Hermione was going to be there too. He hadn’t written to Harry at all this summer, and Hermione was on the outs with his whole family as far as he was concerned. The redhead was still upset that they didn’t tell him they were related. Even when Bill had said it could have been for security reasons and Ron could understand that, after the stone incident they should have told him. They could trust him! They didn’t even write him this summer!

Ginny however shook her head whenever Ron would grumble about it. Ron seemed to complain about everything this summer. The twins rolled their eyes at him and instead pranked him more than usual rather than argue with him. While it was unusual that both Hermione and Harry didn’t write this summer, the most of the Weasley’s could understand.

Their mother had insulted all of his living relatives thus Hermione, one of the Harry’s few family members Harry actually got along with. She insulted muggles and muggleborns, which included his mum. Ron got mad that he didn’t know about them being related. The prat argued with Hermione about almost everything this past year: her going to the ball with Viktor, dating Viktor, ‘fraternizing with the enemy’ which led him to hating Viktor his once all-time favorite quidditch seeker. He also got upset that she had kissed Fleur. He had hurled words about her sexuality at her as though it was something to be ashamed of. He was one of the loudest members of the ‘Harry cheated to get in the tournament’ club. Even Fred and George were still talking to him, even when they thought he had cheated, they at least supported him.

The youngest Weasley at least hoped it wouldn’t be as tension filled when Harry showed up as she thought it was going to be.

Dolores Jane Umbridge was setting up her office, wanting everything to be perfect. She made sure all her kitten plates were just right. The Hogwarts letters with the supply lists were to be sent out later that day, and she had picked just the right books. Since she picked it she could claim that it was Ministry approved. After all Cornelius said he would support all of her actions, as she was given leave to do whatever it took.

However she did have to retake her OWL and then take the NEWT. The board of governs refused to allow her appointment unless she passed both as she would be teaching so they students could take their own OWL and NEWTs. Regardless of who the students were. Surprisingly it was Lucius who was most insistent that she have a score of at least EE for her OWL and an A for her NEWT.
Defense Against the Dark Arts was not her strongest subject, if it weren’t for her forcing one of the auror trainees to tutor her, she wouldn’t have passed. She wanted to curse Lucius but he was one of their better, most upstanding citizens and she knew that he was right. He pointed out that some of the proper witches and wizards didn’t have parents to teach them the proper subjects at a satisfactory level. Some of them were lost in the previous war, and others didn’t do well on their OWLs and NEWTs. Some of them even stopped attending after they received their OWLs and some of their children needed to take their NEWTs for proper jobs, such as becoming aurors.

However she thought hard about how to properly teach and hinder the right witches, wizards, and magic thieves. Theory could be taught in class, and the proper witches and wizards could join a club run by her. A simple club that was invitation only, one that almost no one would want to join unless she told them what it really was, a wand polishing club. Who would want to join a club whose goal was to clean your wand?

The fat froglike witch waddled to sit behind her desk. She opened her desk drawers and started filling it with the stationary she brought from the office supplies closet at the ministry and some special ones she picked up special for troublemakers.

Dolores smiled as she placed her special blood quills next to regular self-inking black quills. After all it wouldn’t do for proper purebloods to be taught lessons that would sink in, but had to show a semblance of fairness in her classroom. She couldn’t wait for the school year to start, then she would be able to renew the pride of attending Hogwarts by cleansing it.
While Hermione was with her master in Bulgaria Harry was bonding more with his new family. Abagail was gently teaching him court manners, Leeroy only interjecting when asked, which was usually at the dinner table when they all congregated for the night. Thimi was often asked to sit with them, but it was obvious that the little house-elf was missing her mistress. When she was fussing over her new family her words were often peppered with “Mistress would want” or “Mistress would be most displeased if”.

It endeared her all the more to the Granger family, instead of annoying them. The one thing they all had in common without a shadow of a doubt was their love for the curly haired witch. It was also nice to see someone else caring a great deal about the often overlooked girl, now young woman.

Leeroy continued to teach him how to keep a firm frame of mind, lightly stressing that it was important for The Family to know how to do so at all time. In response Harry did his best to learn, wanting to live up to his new family’s expectations and not disappoint them. The green eyed wizard was surprised that once he kept up at it, it was easier to maintain. It also made things easier to remember from his new mum’s lessons.

While he missed his sister, he was also slightly glad that she was away in Bulgaria as it made both of his parental figures pay him more attention and had time to spare to get to know him, and he them. Sometimes it was daunting, but well worth it. All the while he worried in the back of his head how his parents would react when he came out. He trusted Hermione to know their reactions better than he did, but he was worried that it would be different because he was a guy. Still he knew he had to do so before she came back from her trip.

He thought back to his birthday, which was nearly a week before she left, and smiled. He was sure it would help him cast a patronus when he needed to.

Harry woke up to someone knocking loudly on his door. Reaching over he grabbed his glasses before remembering what day it was. He smiled to himself, he didn’t tell his family his birthday since he didn’t want a big affair. Harry was used to small birthday presents from his friends since he started Hogwarts, but he had never been comfortable with the idea of a party.

He did when he was younger, but soon learned that when too many people focused on you, it usually wasn’t for anything good. It was practically the same at Hogwarts. He knew it shouldn’t apply to all aspects of his life, but he couldn’t help it.

The knocking got louder.

“I’m coming!” he yelled, so whoever was on the other side of the door could hear him.

As soon as the words left his mouth, his door opened and a mass of curly brown hair launched itself onto his bed before pulling him into a tight hug.

“Happy birthday, Harry!”

As his body didn’t immediately tense up he knew who it was, even without the sound of her voice.

“Thanks, Hermione,” Harry said with a small smile, turning to look at her.
Upon sight, he noticed her face was lit with a bright grin that he had seldom seen on her face he noticed. He couldn’t help but turn his smile into a grin.

“Get dressed and come downstairs,” she instructed as she would at Hogwarts when she took the time to wake him up.

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied exasperatedly.

Hermione smiled at him knowing it was said in jest. The witch was excited as it was her brother’s first birthday with his new family. Her parents already knew it was his birthday as she had reminded them plenty of times when they were just best friends. It was impossible for them to forget when she’d fuss about it for a full week, worrying what to get him. They even went so far as to take her to the owl post so he could get her presents. She always limited herself to one or two things at max so his aunt and uncle wouldn’t confiscate them, or in case Ron found out as she’d usually just get him candy or a jumper. She stopped worrying about weight so much after seeing the owl deliver Harry’s first broom, and after ordering a few books via wizarding catalogues.

With that she flounced out of his room, with a bounce in her step, stunning him that she actually flounced.

‘She looks like she’s more excited about my birthday than I am,’ he though with amusement.

Hermione made her way into the kitchen with a giddiness that came to her only a few times a year, one of them being shopping for a new school year.

It was the first year that she didn’t have to hold back and contain her excitement and affection for the young bespectacled wizard. So she had went ahead and bought as much as was reasonably possible, her mother went with to set the limit. Abagail didn’t want Hermione to shower the young boy in as many things as she could possibly buy to make up the many years for him, or overwhelm him.

The older woman was sure that he would be overwhelmed anyways, but it was expected. They had shopped in both muggle and magical shops for the boy. They also contacted a few people for a small party.

Finally dressed for the day, Harry made his way downstairs for breakfast as was now routine. He was the last one to be seated, but the first one to be served, which was surprising since Thimi usually served them all at once. He was given a small stack of pancakes with a single candle in it.

“Happy Birthday, Master Harry. For your birthday I wanted to make you something special, so you can celebrate by having cake for breakfast and dessert,” Thimi grinned.

Harry blushed and smiled. “Thank you, Thimi. It smells wonderful,” he replied knowing he would have to accept the house-elf’s gift lest he upset her. He was aware that she didn’t want money, and was happy to serve her family, and if that was how she wanted to gift him, he wouldn’t stop her.

His parents also wished him a Happy Birthday after he thanked the house-elf. It was a pleasant affair and just as they were finishing up Abagail spoke up.

“Harry, since it’s your first birthday with us we planned a small party. Family and Master Snape,” she smiled before her face twisted, “Rather, just us, Hermione’s Master, my sisters and their families. So Petunia and hers will be arriving in about an hour while my other sister will be arriving with hers…”

“Mum loves her sister, Aunt Carol, but she’s a bit like Malfoy. She likes to brag a lot, exaggerates
about most things, and turns everything into a competition. But like Aunt Petunia she goes on about her daughter, Phoebe,” Hermione finished with her face scrunched up.

Harry’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion. “Why would you invite her if you don’t like them?” he asked.

Leeroy sigh good-naturedly, “Because from what I’ve noticed that’s how they are. They love each other, but everything has always been a competition between them for as long as I can remember. Carol can be quite tactless at times, and other times just flat out mean, but she’s still family. However your Mum gives as much as she gets, and with the whole secrecy thing, as Carol is unaware, she doesn’t get to brag as much as she used to. So now she gets to brag about you and Hermione now,” he finished with a grin.

“Phoebe is an airhead. She’s pretty and from what I understand, popular. She enjoys being social… Gossipy, focuses on her looks, keeping up with fashion, and generally has good luck with most things. If something bad happens, Aunt Carol ‘takes care of it’. However unlike Aunt Carol, Phoebe doesn’t really care. I’ve never been pretty enough for her, I don’t care for fashion or socialites, she’s jealous that I can and I’m often invited to social parties with the upper classes, I just don’t. Mum and Dad do, but they always make an excuse for me such as lessons. Most of which are true, but I’d rather be learning something new than politicking. After a while Phoebe stopped trying to connect with me. Especially when she found out that I got my high school diploma before leaving for a boarding school.”

“So, Carol – Aunt Carol, is Aunt Petunia with a daughter,” Harry surmised, “And Phoebe is jealous enough to not care about just what you have access to.”

“That’s Carol’s fault, but yes. Hermione would rather talk about a book, and Phoebe would rather talk about fashion. Carol would then talk about how Phoebe was more fitted for fitting in, and I’d remind her that people wanted to fit in with Hermione. Carol would talk about how Phoebe was rubbing elbows with the right people, and I would remind her that Hermione is one of those people who others want to rub their elbows with.”

The more Harry listened the more confused he got.

Leeroy seeing that, lightly put his hand on his shoulder, “Ladies are all about politicking. Hermione doesn’t care for it, but she can put on her big girl knickers and outclass them all. You saw at the Yule Ball.”

It took Harry a second before his eyes lit up with understanding. Hermione didn’t have many girl friends, more acquaintances from what he could tell. The girls in his year preferred to talk about fashion, boys, and other things that Hermione didn’t care for. He’d seen the way they laughed about her hair, how she bothered more with her books than her looks, and how she would never get a boy ‘looking like that’. Being friends with him she didn’t have to do any of that. Him and Ron didn’t care about any of that. Even Neville didn’t care about that, just about Hermione being herself.

At the Yule Ball however she cleaned up so well that it left half the school speechless. She could put up with the best of the girls, and still beat them all around at everything. Like with school, it wasn’t a challenge for her.

“What can’t you do?” he asked his sister.

“A few things. I’m still learning how to knit, even though I don’t have much motivation to do so now. But I guess if I can make something nicer than Missus Weasley, that would be nice. I can’t play table tennis, I’m bad at woodcarving, I’m horrible at sculpting, I can’t do yo-yo tricks to save my
life. I’m horrible at football, kite-flying is completely laughable. I can’t powerlift, I’m a poor fisherman, and believe it or not, I’m bad at most board games,” she grinned.

“Our Hermione isn’t perfect, but she takes lessons to learn as much as she can. She seems like it, but that’s only because of how much time she puts into learning those activities. For some reason though most 3-D art forms escape her. You should watch her attempt to fly a kite. She is pants at chess and checkers, even though she memorized the plays,” Abagail continued, “and she has poor dice rolls on the other games.”

“We had to throw out all of her woodwork attempts. They were all just… sad,” Leeroy said.

Hermione at this pointedly folded her arms in front of her chest and blushed with a firm put out look on her face. Harry however smiled at her.

“Anything else other than some art and sports?” Harry asked.

Hermione pouted and gave him a stern side glance, “Drinking, I can’t hold my liquor. I can handle some wine, but nothing harder… and I can’t ride a bike.”

“Is that why it’s so hard for you to balance on a broom?”

She nodded petchulantly.

While he knew she wasn’t all that great at wizard’s chess, and disliked the idea of playing quidditch, she seemed to excel at everything else she put her mind to. Well… her knitting attempts were atrocious, but she was getting better. It was nice to know that while she had this secret side, and she seemed to be good at everything, she wasn’t perfect. It was hard to tell when she was at the top of their year, but thinking about it she didn’t play exploding snap, gobstones, or board games, and they didn’t do much of anything else at Hogwarts. So it was understandably hard to miss. His perfect sister wasn’t perfect.

Herbology taught them how to garden. Potions was like cooking. Astronomy made it so you were able to make star charts, which in turn made it so you could chart most things; that was all year 1 stuff. Most things that were taught at Hogwarts made witches and wizards proficient in most things. Getting the hang of wand movements was great for wrist and hand dexterity. Those who didn’t, honestly he noticed, didn’t practice enough. He wasn’t anywhere near the top of their year, but he was in the top 20. As for athletics, it was hard not to be fit walking all the stairs at Hogwarts, especially if you lived in one of the towers.

Suddenly he didn’t feel inadequate next to the brightest witch of their generation. She studied hard, practiced hard, at things they were all taught. She put forth the effort making her seem perfect, but in the end she was still just human.

Instantaneously he wasn’t so confused at meeting this competitive Carol and Phoebe. While it seemed like they tried to put Hermione and his Mum down, they were able to hold their own and even gave better than they got. Now he understood while Malfoy’s behavior didn’t bother Hermione as much as the blond ponce’s attitude bothered him and Ron. She was used to that type of behavior before she went to Hogwarts.

“What about your side?” Harry asked, looking at Leeroy.

Leeroy shrugged, “We don’t bother with the rest of The Family more than we have to. There are some events we have to, and we keep up correspondence, but we try not to be all together any more than we have to. It’s a safety precaution. The more of us there are, the more security we need.”
“That and the more of The Family that are here, the more risk there is that the public will find out, and someone who isn’t happy with The Family in general, the more of a target we make. It’s not as bad as it was about a hundred years ago, but there are still some people out there who would rather we didn’t exist at all,” Abagail finished.

“What about a ward?” Harry asked, thinking about the blood wards that were around Privet Drive. They had yet to make him aware of the wards they already had up.

“While The Family can know about the wizarding world, if they bothered to look or ask, others still can’t. So if we have a ward here to prevent that from happening, people will begin to question if there’s a force field or something like that, most likely a large scientific discovery that we’re keeping to ourselves, which would also cause a huge backlash – ”

“What Hermione is trying to say is that it would raise too many questions. That and my side of the family don’t know about magic. Phoebe and Carol are big gossip hounds and wouldn’t be able to keep it to themselves. So those presents will be given to you after they leave,” Abagail cut in and finished.

“What about Thimi?” Harry questioned.

“I will be invisible, and everything will already be served before the guests arrive,” Thimi answered.

The young wizard nodded accepting it for what it was.

“Dave is fine though,” Leeroy put in, finishing his breakfast.

As informed most guests arrived within the hour. Hors d’oeuvres were set up in a buffet style, a marvelous 3 tier treacle cake with toffee topping was made and displayed on a cart by itself next to the food.

Greetings were exchanged and people milled about, Dave actually talking with his new nephew for a bit before he started talking about sports and girls. As Harry had come off as shy, Leeroy had taken control of the conversation while letting his new son make his escape.

Eventually the 3 teens made small talk. Harry was telling Dudley about all the lessons he had to go through and how he was getting on with his new parents, and Dudley was telling them about the new atmosphere in their home. Phoebe was in between as Abagail tactfully shunned her without appearing to be rude, with Petunia following her lead. Carol kept trying to integrate her daughter in their ‘adult’ conversations, as the young woman was now 19 turned 20, instead of being allocated to speaking with the younger circle, without success.

For her part Phoebe was embarrassed and upset that she wasn’t the center of attention and the other women simply waived her off. While her mother tried to include her the other women wanted nothing to do with her. She wanted to bring her fiancé along, but was told he was not invited. If she hadn’t wanted to go to shopping in France so bad, she would have stayed home in England.

Her new cousin was cute, with gorgeous eyes, but had a wild mop of hair. The other part of his family was beneath her notice. Hermione surprised her, being put together in such a casual way that it almost made her jealous. Her hair wasn’t the rat’s nest it usually was, she wasn’t wearing her frumpy jumpers (surprising her as she’d never seen her cousin’s body shape), and her teeth had been fixed (she had been sorry she didn’t have pictures of that mess). Instead her cousin’s hair was in beautiful wild, but tamed curls, her dress was loose and a warm brown, with brown flats to match. She didn’t have any make-up on, so aside from her hair (which she thought was permed) it looked natural. Moreover it looked effortless.
She refused to engage with her younger cousins in conversation. She was an adult now and would prefer to have adult conversations. Besides they were all probably talking about books, she scoffed. Ignoring how Petunia was going on about her son being a boxing champion.

It was after the fifth failed attempt that the door was opened, and a man dressed in all black with black eyes to match glided into the room. His hair was long, but pulled back tastefully. His nose large and slightly hooked, but fit on his face. While the black made his skin look extra pale, he had some color about him. The man, who was obviously not family, greeted her Uncle Leeroy and Vernon before walking towards the ‘kids’.

Hermione saw him and glided over to meet him half-way. She placed her hands on his chest and lifted herself up on her toes, as he leaned down and kissed her cheek softly. Nothing that could be deemed inappropriate, especially in France.

Harry had mixed feelings, but settled on contentment. His sister was practically glowing softly with happiness. The dour man obviously cared for her with the tender way he greeted her, even in front of strangers. It wasn’t something he expected, knowing the image would change as soon as they were back at Hogwarts, but he was happy that this was how his sister would be treated in private.

They separated and joined different circles again, Severus with the men, and Hermione back with them. Carol narrowed her eyes at the strange man before the ladies walked over to them.

“Severus, so glad you could make it,” Abagail grinned pleasantly, pressing her cheek to his in a kissing motion.

The potions master nodded when she pulled back.

“Ah where are my manners, Severus this is my sister Carol and her daughter Phoebe.”

“Severus, it’s a welcome surprise to see you here,” Petunia said before anyone else could saying.

Meanwhile Harry, Dudley, and Hermione watched to see what would happen as Phoebe had made it quite clear that she was so disappointed her fiancé couldn’t be there.

“And who are you? One of Harry’s relatives?” Phoebe questioned, her tone confrontational.

In response the dark wizard raised an eyebrow at her while looking down his nose, “No. I am Hermione’s Master, as she is my apprentice,” he said smoothly.

His voice filled their bellies with a pleasant, but extremely surprising warmth, causing every woman but Abagail to blush. Phoebe was extremely embarrassed by her body’s reaction to a man who didn’t fall under her definition of handsome. His voice was positively sinful.

“And what is she apprenticing in?” Phoebe asked, a slight glare accompanying her blush.

“Pharmaceuticals. It’s for a private company,” he answered with a slight sneer.

“I thought she was in a boarding school. Besides you behaved awfully friendly for a professional relationship,” Carol said with her own sneer.

“Our personal and private life are separate I assure you, Madame. It is not unusual for a master and their apprentice to form a close bond.”

“Then why are you here?” Carol seethed, “Phoebe’s fiancé couldn’t be here, but you’re not even close to family.”
“I’m a close family friend. Isn’t that right Petunia?” Severus implied.

Petunia lightly cleared her throat, “Yes. Sev is a childhood friend. We’ve known each other since he was 8 or 9, around there.”

“Oh? That still doesn’t explain Hermione and Severus’ obviously close relationship,” Carol said.

“Indeed? It’s been discussed that when she is of age, it is possible we may consider courting. Abagail and Leeroy have approved, as has Hermione herself.”

Carol and her daughter immediately curled their lips in distaste, “So you’re a pae-”

“Don’t you dare accuse of him of such a foul thing,” Hermione hissed. “It’s not uncommon for two intelligent minds to be attracted to one another. As he said, when I’m of age, we may consider. It.”

“Indeed. Need I remind you of what happened when you accused Lee of that as well?” Abagail sneered at her sister, “Besides, Hermione already told you we approve. Severus is a very intelligent, honorable, man who will challenge and care for our daughter in every way that he can should they decide to date,” she crossed her arms practically looking down her nose at her sister.

“It’s no wonder she’s confused about a proper age gap in a relationship,” Phoebe sniffed.

“Considering the people we go to school with, it’s not uncommon to have a betrothal contract before they even attend school. So half of them are betrothed to older people already,” her cousin said with her arms crossed like her mother and an eyebrow raised, eerily similar to Snape’s Harry noticed.

Carol and Phoebe’s eyebrows furrowed in scandalized confusion.

“Ah. Of course the people Hermione are talking about are heirs to lords and ladies with very large and very private companies. It’s not uncommon among the higher class. Most of the arrangements are business mergers,” Severus said silkily.

Harry thought about that for a moment before it finally clicked into place why there weren’t as many couples in Hogwarts that he thought there would be. Granted Hogsmead was a go-to for a date, and there was even a tea-shop that seemed practically made for snogging, but aside from perhaps a handful of each year 3 and above, not a lot of students seemed to date or try to get a date.

“And what would you know about the school? I heard it was extremely private,” Carol said, hoping to wheedle some information out of the tall man.

“It is. It’s a school for the gifted. I attended there when I was younger, along with Petunia’s sister. As an alumni I was requested to help students learn how to make natural medicines. Hermione has proved herself more than gifted in this area and I’ve taken her as an apprentice,” Severus said smoothly.

While he acknowledged he was more of a chemist, most potions that he taught were cures or could be used as cures, so it wasn’t that far off. They were the magical versions of medicines that a witch or wizard could brew in their home, if they weren’t complete dunderheads. So he wasn’t lying. He was asked by Dumbledore to teach, but left out the part of being an actual core teacher, lest he give them any more ammunition against him.

Harry stood there and tried not to stare at how masterfully Snape took care of the situation without snarling at them. He was even telling the truth without giving them details. He even made it sound like his class was optional so he wouldn’t look like more of a dirty old man to them.
“Lee how do you feel about this,” Carol asked, hoping to get something else instead of a united front.

“Believe it or not, I approve of Severus. If they decide to date down the line they have my blessings. No one else would be able to keep up with Hermione. As much as I want grandkids through immaculate conception,” he shot a look at his daughter and wife, “I want her happy. I know she’d rather stay an old maid than be unhappily married to a buffoon. If Severus can make her intellectually happy, so be it,” he said with a bored look upon his face, “Besides we’re not here to talk about Hermione and her future relationship. We’re here to celebrate Harry. It’s his birthday, and his first one being part of this family.”

Hermione grinned, “That’s right. He’s finally 15 and if he does well this term he’ll finish core classes before getting advance classes,” she said walking away and latching onto his arm.

“If he does better he’ll either end up in an internship or his own apprenticeship,” Abagail said.

Carol blinked slowly while Phoebe blinked rapidly trying to catch up to speed. Gifted indeed.

“Are you done posturing Carol? You’ve barely said 4 words to the lad besides ‘happy birthday’,” Dave said, finally speaking up.

Carol blushed in both embarrassment and also a bit of shame. She had come for a birthday party, just to try to squeeze her daughter into being accepted as an adult and completely ignored the main reason they were there to begin with.

Aside from his looks, his name, his birthday, and now how old he was, she didn’t know anything about her new nephew.

To keep up appearances Severus reached into his cloak, and pulled out a small tattered book, “Happy Birthday, Harry,” he said. The name felt weird on his tongue, but he forced it out anyways to prevent suspicion.

“Thank you, Sev,” Harry said cheekily, holding the book gently.

With a stern look the potions master let it slide. It was obvious the boy had caught on to the game of ‘old family friends’, he was lucky that they boy hadn’t deigned to try to call him uncle. It would make their future co-existence awkward, with Hermione being his sister.

Harry looked down at the tattered book that was brown and bland on the outside, obviously well-worn and read. He opened it and saw on the very front page: “Lily and Sev’s Idea Journal”, in curly hand writing.

His heart both filled up and dropped at the same time. It was true. His mum was friends with Snape. The green eyed wizard turned the page and skimmed the first page. It was an idea to find a way to play muggle music at Hogwarts along with a list of who they liked. He was surprised at the bands that were listed: Queen, The Who, Judas Priest, The Clash, Sex Pistols, and ABBA. He was surprised to see names like David Bowie, Jimi Hendrix, Cat Stevens, and Elton John.

Even though half of it was Snape, the other half was his mother. This was the most personal item he had of her, a way to get to know her rather than about her through stories. He could see both their handwriting on it, with some hearts next to Snape’s choice of musicians.

“Thank you, I’ll take good care of it, Sev,” Harry said quietly with a soft smile, his eyes shining with heartfelt sincerity.
“Indeed,” Severus replied, slightly uncomfortable. It was nice to see Lily’s eyes happy for once, and it made him feel better that he was the cause. He hoped she was proud of him if she was still watching over her son.

“What is it, Harry?” Abagail asked.

“It’s an idea journal Sev and my mother wrote together,” Harry said with a large smile.

Abagail and Leeroy beamed at the dark wizard.

“Maybe you and Hermione can pick up where they left off,” Abagail suggested.

Harry grinned at his new mum, “Yeah. I would like that.”

Severus also allowed a quirk of his lips before fixing his face.

“If you need any extra help with those ideas, you are free to ask me. I tell you some of what we tried to do and where we failed,” he said.

Surprise lit in his eyes, but it was the brightness in his sister’s eyes that tied up any loose thoughts he made have had.

“Thanks, I’ll do that,” he smiled brightly at the pair.

An olive branch from his least favorite professor, an idea journal from him and his mother, and support from his new parents. It was more support that he’d received from an adult figure that wasn’t obligated to support him.

“Mum… Dad,” Harry said softly from the doorway.

The pair were sitting on the couch, Abagail resting her head on her husband’s lap while reading a book. Leeroy was playing with her hair, looking at the book every so often.

“Yes, son?” Leeroy replied, curious. There was only a handful of times Harry had called him that and he wanted to positively reinforce it.

“I…” He took a deep breath, “I have something to tell you.”

Abagail sat up, “What is it?”

‘Gryffindor courage.’, He braced himself.

“I’m gay,” he mumbled.

“I’m sorry? I didn’t hear that,” Abagail admitted.

“I’m gay,” he repeated, his face burning bright with embarrassment and a little shame.

“There’s nothing wrong with that, son,” Leeroy responded in his normal tone.

“You’re not… upset or… disgusted?” Harry asked, a bit timidly.
Abagail furrowed her eyebrows, “Of course not! It’s who you are. We accept Hermione for who she is; why would we not accept you?”

Leeroy nodded his agreement, “Now we just know to pester you about whether you’ve found a boyfriend yet or not,” he said impishly with a congenial smile.

Harry smiled, a weight lifted off his chest. It went much better than expected. He should have known to trust Hermione, she would be happy when he told her.

“Was that all?” he asked.

Harry nodded, “Yeah. That was all,” he finished with a smile.

“We should go robe shopping soon then,” Abagail said absentmindedly.

“Hm,” Leeroy agreed as his wife laid back down on his lap with a smile on her face.

“What?” Harry asked, confused.

“You’ll feel better about yourself. That and you’re growing like a weed,” she said with a grin, while opening her book.

“Don’t worry she’ll make sure you look handsome enough to catch a bloke’s eye,” his dad threw out with a lopsided smile.

Harry stood in the doorway dumbfounded before his senses came back to him, “Yeah. I’d like that. Just let me know when,” he beamed, before taking his leave to go practice the wand movements for the spells in his new defense book. He couldn’t wait for Hermione to get back.
The plump redhead calmly finished stirring her cauldron and moved it from the fire. It had been years since she made a potion that wasn’t used by healers. Taking care of 7 children made it hard to afford a lot of things, but it helped that she knew how to make most of the potions they used at St Mungos. It was easier to keep them in stock at home than to floo with her rambunctious children in tow. With the first 3 it wasn’t as troublesome, but once the twins were born it was near impossible. Still she wouldn’t give any of them up for the world, not even Percy.

She had agreed with Albus’s plan and thankfully her kitchen was her domain. No one bothered her while she was in the kitchen, some of her children tried to avoid it so they didn’t get wrapped up into doing chores while she was in there. Arthur didn’t mind whatever it was she had cooking or brewing as he trusted her as a fully grown witch and his wife.

All that was needed now was a hair from Ginny, which was easy to get, perhaps from her brush, and one from Ron, probably from his pillow sheet.

The doses she would give each of the children would vary since she didn’t want it to be too noticeable. She wasn’t an amateur.

Hermione would have to be worked slowly, as there was some tension. Harry however would be open to a higher dose since boys tended to fancy different girls all the time (or so she told herself).

There were a few other potions cantered in her cabinets. They already had pieces of her and Albus’s hair. The older wizard was fine with parting with a few hairs from his long beard. After all it was his idea.

Now that it was done, she merely needed to meet the children at Grimmauld Place. Harry and Hermione were supposed to be there within the week to spend some time with Sirius.

Hermione and Severus took the portkey back to England, landing in his living room. Severus landed fine while Hermione ended up on her behind.

“You forgot to move your legs,” Severus said as he bent over and offered her his hand.

Hermione shot him a petulant look as she grabbed it and let him help her up, “I figured after I landed on my bum instead of my feet.”

He smirked at her, “I must admit I enjoyed my time in Bulgaria and that we were able to get a few fresh potion ingredients from there.”

The change on the witch’s face was instant as it was lit up by a bright smile, “Me too. Thank you, Master.”

His eyes softened as he looked at her face, “You’re welcome, Apprentice. It was well worth it. You learned a new skill, and we were able to grab ingredients for our next project. I know since it is nearly time for the new term to start that you and Mr. Potter will no doubt be headed to Headquarters.”

The witch’s hair bounced as she nodded in agreement. She wasn’t looking forward to it since Harry
didn’t know she was part of the Order. Granted she would be pleased to see the Headmaster’s reaction to their tweak in his plan. Apprentice instead of assistant, a position that required more time and dedication on both parts.

“We will still continue our lessons, I will ask Black if he has a room we may borrow so your brother doesn’t become more concerned. If not we will continue our lessons here.”

Hazel eyes looked up through lashes.

“I would prefer to continue our lessons here…” she said, her words drifting off as her cheeks started to glow with a light blush. She leaned into him, resting her head on his shoulder left shoulder, having gotten into the habit of always making sure their wand arms were free.

He kissed the crown of her head, cushioned by her hair.

“There are benefits of brewing in both locations. There you will have the benefit of brewing with a few distractions. While you’ve obviously brewed while also aiding the walking disaster that is Longbottom—”

“Excuse you,” she interrupted looking up at him, “Neville is a good friend. It’s not his fault that you’re his boggart. He’s seriously terrified of you, Severus. It would be much easier if we could rectify that. As your assistant and apprentice I think it would do the classroom a world of good.”

He studied her for a few moments trying to decipher her motive before breathing a sigh of defeat.

“What would you have me do, Hermione?"

“We can start by trying to lighten the classroom up a bit. It’s in the dungeons, but we have magic. I know for a fact that the rooms down there aren’t all as dark as your classroom. It was significantly lighter in my first year,” she said with a raised brow.

“I darken it for every year. Not just your class, but for second years to sixth years. NEWT classes get the same lighting as first years since I believe they have earned it,” he admitted.

“Well that might have to stop. It’s distracting, and is probably one of the main reasons for all the mistakes. It’d be nice to stop having to dodge exploding cauldrons and their contents. Not to mention making sure that I don’t let melted cauldrons and such touch my feet. Not everyone can afford dragonhide boots.”

With another defeated sigh he nodded. Hermione let out a soft breath.

“It doesn’t help that the darker the room the harder it is to tell the different between some of the ingredients. If they’re distracted by terror from you, instigating from fellow students,” here she raised a pointed eyebrow at him as they both knew what she was talking about, “and have difficulty seeing the ingredients, let alone reading the instructions….?”

He huffed, “Fine, I see your point. I will rectify this immediately.”

She smiled at him before lifting up to the tips of her toes to kiss his cheek, “Thank you.”

He nodded in a slightly petulant manner.

“Now be off, I know you’re leaving soon,” his words at odds with his actions as he moved his fingers through her hair.
She smiled more and nodded, “I’ll see you at Headquarters soon, Severus.”

“Sev.”

“I’m sorry?”

He blushed, “I – I…” he coughed into his hand trying to hide the light blush that was creeping onto his cheeks, “I wouldn’t mind if you started calling me Sev.”

“I’ll see you at Headquarters, Sev.” She beamed at him. “Thimi, I’m home!”

The little elf popped, immediately hugging Hermione’s legs, “Mistress, I’ve missed you so much! I’m so glad you’re back!” her voice squeaked in her excitement. Another moment and the petite witch was no longer in his living room.

Sirius walked through his house making sure the rooms were ready for his incoming guests. Albus and Molly insisted on the children sleeping here until term started. While he didn’t mind Harry and Hermione coming over, to invite Molly’s brood all at once, including the bossy witch herself?

He grumbled under his breath. The plump witch went so far as to even designate rooms to the children, he comforted himself that they were at least on what he reassigned to be the guest floor.

The twins were in a room together, Ginny was to bunk with Hermione, and Ron with Harry. He didn’t tell her but he planned to have the two on the family floor. Harry would have a room of his own, and since Hermione was his sister, she would have one as well. Kreature had already been informed and kept that information to himself from the red haired harridan.

Said witch kept running back and forth between houses, doing what Sirius didn’t care. As much as Molly cooked, and he admitted she cooked well, he preferred to have Kreature cook for him lately. Something told him there was something off with her food lately. To avoid suspicion he had Kreature make the same thing she would so it looked the same. When no one was looking the elf would switch the plates and Sirius would dig in, complementing the witch with a smile on his face.

As much as his instincts told him there was something wrong he felt it would be incredibly rude to shift into his dog form and sniff the food.

At the same time he was pleased that Molly at least cleaned up after Dumbledore’s guests. Not that it mattered as Kreature cleaned up after her, grumbling about her and her children.

He had nothing against the kids, until they were in his house. The twins he liked, mini-marauders after his own heart. Them he would allow in his house whenever they had need. Ginny, while spirited, he noticed that she had moments of yelling like her mother. It was an ugly side of her. Ron… he liked the boy at first. Really he did! He was Harry’s best mate. But sitting at the dinner table eating next to him… no. He made sure Ronald Weasley sat elsewhere at the dinner table after that. However it wasn’t just that, he noticed aside from a lack of manners, he had a lack of tact and respect. He complained about Hermione whenever she was mentioned. He complained about Harry keeping secrets and all else he could think of when he was brought up.

Sirius didn’t say anything, and let it be. The more he heard, the more he learned. The twins stood up for his godson and his sister, which helped endear them to him immensely while throwing the younger two more into thestral dung.
“Hermione!” Harry shouted as soon as he saw her. The boy ran to her and threw his arms around her in a grand hug, the witch returning it fiercely.

“I hope you had fun, I missed you.”

“I missed you too, Harry.”

They pulled back to look at each other as though it had been a year. It was the longest they had been apart since the bonding.

“You look good. New robes?” she inquired.

He blushed, “Yeah. New wardrobe. I told mum and dad, and they took it a lot better than I thought they would.”

Hermione grinned, happy to hear the good news, “Very handsome.”

“Thanks,” he looked down at his shoes, “Mum said so too.”

“How did you find the wizarding area?”

“We asked Thimi,” he said, not looking at her.

“Harry?” she asked him, looking at him with a small amount of concern.

“We tried, we were talking about it at breakfast the next day, but we came up blank. We had no idea. We asked Thimi if you knew, and she said yes. Then she said that she knew and she could take us there,” he rambled.

She looked at her brother for a moment before pulling him into another hug. “Oh, Harry.”

When she pulled back Thimi was handing her a letter, which she took curiously.

*Dear Harry and Hermione,*

*As soon as you send a reply to this letter, I’ll come over to fetch you. If I’m working, I’ll send Remus. Can’t wait to have you both over!*

*Cheers,*

*Sirius*

“It’s rather… short,” she said.

Harry nodded, his brows furrowed in confusion.

“Hermione!” a well-known voice shouted.

“Mum!”

The witch ran over and threw her arms around her mother.

“There’s my hellion.”

“Dad.” The witch switched parents.
“Did you have fun?” he asked.

“Yes. I had a lot of fun. Tatyana even insisted that I call her Mama.”

“Viktor’s mum did?” Harry asked.

“Yes. Both Master Snape and I. She’s a wonderful woman,” Hermione said with a big smile.

Harry nodded in agreement. Tatyana was a wonderful witch, very caring, but not overbearing.

“Did you?” Leeory asked in amusement.

Hermione blushed, “I wasn’t too comfortable with it, so I ended up calling her Mama Tatyana. However I will admit I was very flattered and pleased that they accepted me so much. Even Boris was pleasant.”

“That’s good. We’re glad you enjoyed yourself,” he replied.

Hermione grinned.

“I don’t know if he told you, but Harry here got a whole new wardrobe!” Leeroy practically boomed with pride.

Hermione laughed softly, “Yes, he did. All new robes.”

Abagail looked over at Harry with a knowing smile.

“He didn’t get just new robes. We went through the whole field. Muggle and magical. We threw practically everything out since he’s grown out of most if not all of it,” she bragged.

“Really?” Hermione looked over Harry with a sly look in her eyes.

“Oh yes. Even his school robes are cut very finely. Including his quidditch robes,” Abagail said.

“We’re gonna bag Harry the best boyfriend ever!” Leeroy shouted, his chest puffed out and his hands on his hips.

“Your mum has been giving him lessons, which he’s taken very well. He’s made leaps and bounds in keeping a firm frame of mind! We’re very proud of him,” Leeroy said, grinning at his son.

The three Grangers looked at Harry grinning at him with love. The green eyed wizard smiled back, his chest filling with a warmth and happiness he knew would make the brightest patronus he’d ever cast.

The rest of the day was spent catching up and enjoying each other’s company as a family again. Thimi was very happy with and for her family.

Harry and Hermione waited a day before broaching the subject of leaving with their parents.

“It’s that time of year again?” Abagail asked with a wan smile.

“Yeah,” her daughter nodded a bit sadly.

“We’ll write as much as we can when we get to Hogwarts,” Harry said in an almost begging
manner.

“I know you kids will,” she reached out and stroked both of their cheeks lovingly.

“I figure you and Thimi have packed your trunks?” Leeroy asked.

They both nodded.

Leeroy smiled at them sadly, “We won’t be able to see you off this year I take it?”

Hermione shook her head, “No, it’s too dangerous.”

They both nodded in understanding. They knew the wizarding world fell on a fence when it came to the royal family, so it was decided not to tempt them until things calmed down with the civil war. With the dark lord being resurrected, it was only a matter of time before shit hit the fan and Hades had more work than usual.
Chapter 77

After sharing a round of farewell hugs and kisses, Thimi popped Harry and Hermione back to the house in London. She made a second trip and brought their trunks. It was agreed that Thimi continue to shadow her mistress. If she was discovered (Hermione suspected by another house-elf), then she would make herself known as The Royal Family house-elf.

Crookshanks puttered down to weave between his mistress’s legs, head butting her and Harry’s shins, purring loudly.

“We missed you too, Crooks,” Hermione said gently.

The half-kneazle purred louder in response. Harry smiled at her familiar.

Soon Elara and Hedwig swooped down and ruffed their feathers up happy to see their humans, Elara landing on the railing nearby and Hedwig on Harry’s shoulder. The snowy owl started grooming his hair with little soft hoots. The young wizard let it happen lest he be bit on the ear by his familiar. Family or not, she would always mother him.

“Oh girl, think you can send Sirius a quick message for me?” He asked.

Hedwig ruffled her feathers up more and stuck her leg out waiting for the parcel to be tied to it. Elara hooted softly knowing that Hedwig would take all primary postings. In the little familiar family menagerie they started, Elara was second ranking. Crookshanks and Hedwig were tied for first, although Hedwig admitted that Crookshanks had better instincts concerning humans.

Quickly tying the response to her leg, Harry let Hedwig out of the back window. When he came back he seated himself on the steps in front of the door making himself comfortable.

“Since Hedwig flies second to none we should have someone get us soon.” Hermione announced.

The curly haired witch looked at Elara, “You already know when term starts, Thimi will let you know if Hedwig hasn’t already, that Crooks will be coming with me on the train. You’ll meet us there. The rules say one familiar per student…” she said drifting off.

“Hermione?”

“One familiar per student. I’m an apprentice. I still attend as a student, but I’m also an apprentice which gives me more leeway,” she grinned, “Meet us at the school so no one can say anything on the train. You’ve already met the most important people to me.”

Hermione softly petted Elara as the owl started to coo at her. The sooty owl also knew it was so certain people didn’t know who her mistress was. There was a reason she had her special bracelet after all.

“Wait, if you’re not a student how will you be prefect?” her brother asked.

She gave him a chagrined lopsided smile, “Believe it or not, I can’t be a prefect. Since I’m an Apprentice I have more luxuries, because I have more responsibilities, and I don’t have the time to dedicate strictly to the school. Professor McGonagall already admitted I was her first pick, but couldn’t give me the badge since I’m Master Snape’s apprentice.”

“So you’ll never be Head girl?” he asked quietly.
“I guess not. At this point though, as upsetting as that would have been last term, I find I’m rather happy with what I have.”

Harry nodded even though he didn’t seem to agree.

“I’m an apprentice, Harry. It’s… a very coveted and special thing. I’ll be a potions mistress. Well respected throughout the entire wizarding world,” her eyes had a slight glimmer.

The young wizard’s face twisted to the side. He both understood and didn’t. They were both well known in the wizarding world now. What with him being the boy-who-lived and her being royalty.

His sister noticed the look and sighed, “Harry, I was hiding in plain sight. I was just a muggleborn… a mudblood. Britain is the worst in terms of blood purity. I know how witches and wizards feel about me. As a muggleborn I’m a freak of nature, and it’s a slap in the face that I’m the top of our year. Being top of our year, even with the best of NEWTs, I’d still struggle to find a decent paying job, just because I’m a first generation witch. I mean I have other theories about muggleborns, but that’s a different tangent. As a mistress I’ll be able to have a better job, be more respected, be… accepted,” if begrudgingly, ‘she thought, “If not, I’d have to look outside of the country or go back to the muggle world. It’s hard for muggleborns in Britain.”

Harry frowned but nodded, “I don’t like it, and you’re not a-a that word,” he glared at her for a second, mad that she referred to herself as a mudblood, “but you’re right. You’re always right,” he gave her a grin understanding where she was coming from.

The doorbell rang.

Hermione looked at the door with slight suspicion in her eyes before she went over to the window next to the door and peeked through the blinds. She heaved a light breath of relief. There was a familiar figure wearing semi-casual muggle clothes standing at her door. She was glad he decided to dress well enough that he wouldn’t gather undue attention. He was wearing a light blue button up shirt and khaki pants.

Which was just as well since both her and Harry had decided to wear their most casual jeans and t-shirts. Harry’s was a sea green v-neck, so Ron wouldn’t complain about him wearing ‘Slytherin’ colors, where Hermione was wearing a light grey v-neck, with a white camisole underneath.

“It’s Remus,” she told Harry, as she moved to open the door.

The young wizard bounced up and leaned around his sister’s hair to smile at the werewolf.

The sandy haired man grinned at the two, “Harry, Hermione! You’re looking well. Glad we got your note. The Weasleys are already at headquarters so you won’t be left with just us stuffy old people,” he chuckled.

Hermione’s smile turned into a grimace.

“Oh! Before we go, read this. The house is under a fidilus charm, so you won’t be able to find it without reading it. Read it, remember it,” He gave Hermione the strip of paper with Sirius’s handwriting.

‘The Black home is located at number 12 Grimmauld Place, London.’

Both siblings nodded. Remus then took the paper out of her hair and burned it.

“Since we’re in London we’re going to walk, better than the original plan if you ask me.”
Hermione looked at him and raised an eyebrow, “What was the original plan?”

The older man’s cheeks turned pink. “Uh,” he looked away from the witch for a moment before looking back at her, “We were going to get Harry at night –”

“We?” Harry asked.

“Mad-eye Moody, Nymphadora don’t-call-me-Nymphadora Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and myself.”

“And will we still be meeting these people?”

“Of course! I’m sure you’ll be introduced into most of The Order.”

Hermione cleared her throat.

“Oh, yes. We were going to, ah, get him and travel by broom,” he trailed off his voice going a bit quiet near the end.

The petite witch tilted her head at him and blinked slowly. “Whose idea was that?” she asked lowly.

Remus looked at her feet feeling a bit stupid now, “It was a group decision.”

“Did no one think of side-along apparation?” she pushed, squinting hard at him.

The werewolf blushed more, answering her more than his words would.

She took a deep breath and let out a long sigh at wizard’s poor critical thinking skills. They could learn a lot from muggles if they weren’t so biased.

“Let’s go.” She said.

“We’ll be coming up by the house soon,” the werewolf said as they stepped onto the curb that turned into Grimmauld Place. “It’ll be on our left.”

The walk was far enough that it would have been a nuisance to walk every day, but not impossible. It was just shy of walking to Hogsmead from the castle.

Hermione followed him, having decided to simply keep quiet the whole way while Harry and Remus made small talk.

About halfway into the block she saw a house that seemed to push itself between 11 and 13, making itself known. To keep the inquisitiveness off her face she merely raised an eyebrow, unaware that it was a near perfect imitation of her master’s. Harry looked over at her and grinned, knowing what she was trying to do but decided to needle her instead.

“C’mon, Hermione. It’s not that bad.”

His sister blushed and turned an amused glare on him, not saying anything. They were still in a public muggle place and she decided to play along, pretending that she just got caught judging someone’s house.

“No, but it’s bad enough,” she said with a straight face, even while her eyes twinkled with mirth.
Harry laughed, slightly bending over. It wasn’t often that his sister made a joke, and he was quickly recognizing the dry humor that their dad had in her.

She bumped her hip into his side, “Come on. Let’s go then. I can judge the inside just as well as the outside.”

Harry kept laughing as he straightened up and started to follow Remus up the stairs while the werewolf chuckled, opening the door.

Upon entering Remus called for Sirius. Harry however tripped on an umbrella stand that looked like a troll’s foot, but managed to catch himself before he fell. Hermione lifted her lip up in distaste at the offending object.

The grim animagus bounced into the hall to greet his guests, “Harry, Hermione! So glad you could be here!”

Both smiled at the excited wizard. It was clear that if he were in his canine form his tail would be wagging ferociously.

“We have a lot to talk about, but let me bring you up the stairs,” he said leading them through the house, “I had Kreature set up your rooms. In a moment there’s going to be a bit of drama, so gather yourself and don’t lose your heads.”

The curly haired witch’s lips thinned, having expected nothing less as soon as she heard the Weasleys were there. Harry’s face however twisted into one of distaste having enjoyed a mostly drama free summer thus far. His new family was very understanding and the louder portion of the Weasleys were… not.

“If it gets too bad, I want to go back home,” Harry said to Hermione, who simply nodded and ‘hm’ed in agreement behind him.

As soon as the words registered in his head his chest filled with warmth again. Having a home and family he loved, who he knew loved him in return. If he saw the mirror of erased again he wasn’t sure what he would see since he had a family now.

Before it was his parents, because he wanted a family who loved him and would be proud of him in a way that the Dursley's weren’t. Now he had that and a sister. He saw his parents for a few moments in the graveyard and got their approval. They told him they were proud of him, loved him, and essentially gave their blessings approving of Hermione. Any guilt would have had over having a new family was gone with that short meeting and those simple words.

Pretending to not have overheard that Sirius continued to walk up the stairs, “This is the guest floor, there are 2 bathrooms on this floor. The Weasley's have taken up rooms here. Molly and Albus insisted,” the last part was grumbled, “We’re going to continue going up.”

He lead them down the hall and up another set of stairs, “Up here is the family floor, I’ve banned all guests from this floor for obvious reasons.”

The wizard walked to the middle of the hallway, knowing there was plenty of room for the 2 teens to stand there comfortably.

“Three of the rooms here have bathrooms attached to them, one of them being the master bedroom, mine of course. The other two are next to the master bedroom. The ones I’ve reserved for you. Kreature cleaned them up, you can decorate them however you want. I want you both to know you can consider this another home, I want you both as comfortable as possible here. I know it’ll be hard
with our current guests, but you can at least come up here for respite. Merlin knows I do,” he grumbled.

“Are you sure, Sirius?” Hermione asked.

“Of course! Harry’s my godson, you’re his sister, making you both family!” he exclaimed, “Remus also has a bedroom up here, but he rarely uses it. The common bathroom is the door in the middle on the right. Second door on our left is Buckbeak’s room. I would have made it my mother’s old room, but Kreature outdid himself and I have to say, I appreciate it.”

“Thanks, Padfoot,” Harry grinned, “We’ll put our trunks in our rooms then and be right out.”

“Okay. And then we’ll meet in Harry’s room. It’ll be the best place to talk,” the bright witch stated.

Both boys nodded.

As soon as Hermione brought her trunk into her room Thimi touched her hand letting Hermione know silently that she would take care of her unpacking.

“Thank you,” the witch murmured, keeping her voice low so no one would hear her, sensitive hearing or otherwise.

It didn’t take long for them to meet in Harry’s room, the siblings making themselves comfortable on Harry’s queen sized bed.

Sirius closed the door quietly and gathered his courage hoping what he had to say wouldn’t devastate them or push them away.

“Okay, before I start I’m going to ask that you don’t get mad and let me finish first. I also want to remind you that I care for you both and only want the best for you,” Sirius said, running a hand through his hair.

Both nodded. Sirius nodded in turn and cast a quiet muffliato.

“Taking precaution. The twins invented this cool thing that helps you eavesdrop on private conversations. They’ve managed to make it get around silencing charms, but this one doesn’t silence, just makes the listener hear a soft buzzing noise, like people mumbling in the background,” he explained.

Hermione nodded in appreciation and respect at the twin’s genius.

‘If only they applied themselves.’

“First off, I’ve noticed something. I know Ron’s your best mate, Harry, and your friend Kitten,” Hermione made a face at the nickname, “But he’s been doing nothing but talking bad about you behind your backs.”

They were quiet, knowing how Ron got when he felt he was wronged in some way, imaginary or not. However Sirius was taking their quiet as something else.

“I’m not trying to tear your guys apart!” he added hastily.

“Sirius, we know how Ron gets. We’re not mad at you. We’re aware of it, he has a bad habit of
“Oh. Well…” Sirius started, trying to figure out where to start next, “I don’t know what they’re planning but Albus and Molly have been sharing weird looks in the Order meetings. I can’t tell you what goes on in them and such, I’m sworn to secrecy, but I can tell you that I’ve been getting a bad feeling about Molly lately. I don’t know what she does during her free time, honestly I don’t care, but I do know is that she’s putting something in her food. I’ve been having Kreature make the same thing and switch my plates when she isn’t looking. I don’t know what, it’s kinda rude to just turn and sniff her cooking,” he grimaced.

The siblings looked at each other and nodded. “We trust you, Padfoot. If you think Missus Weasley is putting something in her food we won’t eat it. We’ll do what you think is best.”

Hermione nodded, even as her face turned serious. It was clear she was thinking at a frightening speed.

“I’m not sure if Master Snape asked you yet, but we were hoping to set up a lab here, temporary, so I could continue some of my lessons. It would be easy for me to take a plate in there saying it was either so I could eat while I work or to bring a plate to him and we could look for potions in it,” she spoke up.

Sirius blinked in surprise, “Snape has asked and I didn’t give him an answer yet, but that would be bloody brilliant. Maybe you could take our plates too, the ones I’ll have Kreature replace, and see if there are different potions in them. She was our potions mistress until she retired, so it’s more than possible.”

Harry paled at the thought, having trusted the mothering witch. He had seen a few of her true colors this past term, so he wouldn’t put it past her.

“I want you both on your guard. I know a few of your adventures, so you know it’s better to find out yourself rather than be surprised later. If I thought they would give up whatever it is they’re doing while you were at Hogwarts I would have insisted you stay at your place. But I can only find out so much on my own.”

Neither could fault him that logic, especially since he was a prankster. Following a gut instinct that something was hidden in plain sight, such as the food, would have saved him a lot of humiliation from retaliation.

“We’ll do our best,” Hermione said for them.

Sirius let out a sigh of relief, “Thanks.”

After taking another breath he looked at them, “If you guys want, I could start training you to be animagi. From someone who did it before their fifth year, I have a few tricks that will help you skip over a lot of it. If that Rat Pettigrew could do it, I know you could.”

Both look excited and nodded, “We’ll register afterwards though,” Hermione said with a small smirk.

“Knowing Harry he’ll get upset at some point and want to run around in his animal form without a care of who’s there or not,” she laughed, “That and it would be fun to patrol as an animal.”

Both wizards looked at the curly haired witch with a grin.

“Hermione, that’s brilliant.” Sirius grinned, too excited to tease her.
No one wanted to say it, but Sirius rolled his shoulders trying to hint. Hermione leaned to the side dramatically, “Let’s face the music.”

They stood up getting ready to leave the room.

“Wait before we go, I should warn you, Molly tried to assign you rooms with Ron and Ginny. Obviously I refuse to let that happen, so that might be an issue. Just so you aren’t blind sighted.”

Hermione’s lips thinned again, “Thanks for the heads up. Shall we?”

Taking the spell down they went to greet the rest of the house.

Walking into the kitchen they saw everyone eating what looked like stew for lunch.

“Oh! Harry, Hermione! I’m so glad you’re here! Come, come. I’ve made a hearty stew with rice. I wasn’t sure if those muggles were feeding you right, you’re a growing boy after all. No offense to Hermione’s parents, but boys eat differently than girls,” Molly said, shoving plates into what was to be Harry’s and Hermione’s seating. ‘Harry’s’ plate had about twice the amount of food of ‘Hermione’s’. The witch also set a plate up at the head of the table for Sirius as he took his seat.

“Thank you, Missus Weasley,” They both said, taking their seats.

They took up their forks and Hermione waited for her food to flicker before sticking her fork into the plate, letting Harry know it was safe to eat now. Following his sister’s lead, Harry smiled as he ate.

“This is wonderful as always, Molly,” the elder wizard said.

The plump witch beamed at him pleasantly.

Harry ate politely, “Thank you, Missus Weasley. I have to say though that mum and dad did feed me rather well.”

A weird look crossed the redhead’s face, but it was there long enough for them to notice.

“What do you mean, dear? Lily and James are dead,” she said softly as though trying to comfort a young child.

“I was adopted. Hermione’s parents adopted me,” He said calmly, twirling his fork.

“Oh? I don’t know if it’s binding in our world though dear, you’d still need a magical guardian –”

“Which I am, Molly,” Sirius said firmly, “Not that it matters since it’s just on paper. Hermione’s parents are higher stationed that they are considered acceptable on our side of things.”

She tried to smile, but it looked more like a grimace, “Of course, how silly of me. We’ve known Hermione so long I forgot she wasn’t just a regular muggleborn.”

Hermione looked at her plate coolly letting the jab wash over her. She refused to say anything, instead letting her formal training kick in and resumed eating. The change was like a transformation.

One moment Hermione was there, the next a member of society’s elite was sitting at the humble table in the kitchen. The change was discomfiting to everyone other than Harry, who had been taking lessons with their mum. Even Sirius was startled.
Harry followed suit, the pair looking perfectly poised, and out of place in the kitchen.

Molly didn’t like the change, she was more than thankful that Ron had said something before she did.

The young wizard looked at them with envy, “What’s with you guys? Last I checked you were eating with friends, not at some palace. Too good for us now!?”

“Just because we have manners doesn’t make us better, Ronald,” Hermione replied calmly, “However we would be remiss if we didn’t use the manners our parents taught us.”

Ginny glared at her from down the table as the curly haired witch made her feel insecure. The other witch’s poise would have her Aunt Muriel praise her. Her manners and holding were “most befitting of a lady of her stature”. Now that Harry was using manners befitting his stature, she would look like a country bumpkin in comparison!

“You know when you guys sit like that it looks like you’re looking down on us. It’s okay to relax, y’know,” Ginny said.

Hermione ‘hm’ed in a way that made it sound polite, acknowledging her even though she continued what she was doing.

The only ones who had no issue were Remus and the twins, who thought it was brilliant. The best way to ruffle her feathers without her being able to say anything was to be better behaved than everyone else.

After a quick tense meal Molly started cleaning the kitchen up rethinking the dosage of the potions she would be slipping the teens.

“I don’t know if Remus told you on your way here, dears, but Harry, you’ll be sharing a room with Ron. Hermione, you’ll be sharing a room with Ginny,” Molly said as kindly as she could.

“Oh. I didn’t know that, Sirius showed us our rooms when we got here,” Hermione said primly.

“Your rooms? No, no dear. You must be mistaken.” Molly looked pointedly at the muggleborn, “The other rooms on the guest floor are reserved for Order members.”

“Then it’s a good thing we have rooms on the family floor,” Hermione said through her teeth, forcing her face to form a smile.

The older witch roughly dropped the plates in the sink, a few of them could be heard breaking, as she whirled around with her hands on her hips.

“Family floor? Sirius knew you would be sharing a room with Ginny! Sirius, tell them!” Molly said, her face turning red.

“They’ve always had a room on the family floor, Molly,” he said calmly sipping his pumpkin juice, “I just didn’t say anything so Ron and Ginny could have their own rooms,” the grim animagus said, hoping to come across as benevolent.

Ron and Ginny beamed at the dark wizard. They weren’t happy about Harry and Hermione getting special treatment, but they were happy to have their own rooms.
Molly glared at him.

“Well we still need to clean the parlor and other rooms, so they’ll be cleaning it together,” she said firmly.

Sirius hummed noncommittally.

“You can get started after you’ve washed your hands. I’ll take you there. You need to help clean the floor, dust the shelves, get rid of the rubbish, we have a lot to do!”

Harry and Hermione didn’t even look at each other as they went to go wash their hands not ready to ruffle her feathers any more for the moment. Being on their ‘best behavior’ seemed to be doing that well enough.

Ron and Ginny were waiting impatiently in the parlor with their mother. The siblings were wearing jeans and a t-shirt that were worn in, but presentable and what could be called comfortable. Ron was wearing an orange shirt to match his favorite quidditch team, Ginny was wearing a light blue.

Thankfully they didn’t have to wait long as Hermione and Harry walked in calmly, still holding themselves with elegant poise. Molly willfully ignored it.

“Ron, you’ll work with Hermione with sweeping the room and cleaning the windows. Harry, you’ll work with Ginny with mopping after them and dusting the room,” Molly said, standing next to the broom and mop holding some rags.

“Yes, Missus Weasley,” they replied.

Molly stared at them for a few seconds before nodding and holding the broom out to Hermione. Hermione took it before her eyes brightened, “Oh! Missus Weasley, I hope you don’t mind, but I won’t be able to work as much as the others since I have work to do with my master.”

Ron glared at the witch feeling a monster claw at his chest, “You’d rather spend time with the greasy git than me!?”

The redheaded wizard was usually oblivious, but even he noticed her new appearance. She had filled out rather well, it was a shame he didn’t notice under her frumpy school robes. If it weren’t for her going to the ball with Krum he would have completely missed how pretty she could be. She would never be a Lavender, but she was pretty enough. He had planned on spending some special time with her, practicing until he found a proper witch. Now that he knew she was rich though, he realized how pretty she was under all of that bushy hair.

Hermione turned her head slowly to look at the aggravated wizard, “Yes. I would much rather spend my time working with my master towards my mastery than clean with you.”

Ron glared at the witch feeling a monster claw at his chest, “You’d rather spend time with the greasy git than me!?”

Hermione turned her head slowly to look at the aggravated wizard, “Yes. I would much rather spend my time working with my master towards my mastery than clean with you.”

Ron’s face started to redden while his mother glared at the muggleborn.

“You’ll be staying here, so you need to help out, young lady!” Molly yelled.

Hermione turned to look at the older witch, “There is a wonderful house-elf here. I don’t need to help out, Missus Weasley, Sirius made that clear,” she fibbed the last part but it was clear that he wanted them happy and were welcome any time, “I have an apprenticeship and when my master calls for me I am to answer.”
“So you’re just gonna abandon your friends for your fancy apprenticeship!? I bet you abandoned your family too! Don’t worry about Harry, we’ll take good care of him!” Ron shouted at her, spittle flying from his mouth.

“Woah. Ron, mate, she never abandoned us and I don’t appreciate you yelling at my sister like that. She has her own responsibilities,” Harry said firmly with a glare. He was doing his best at using his dad’s new mental teachings, and he was glad they were working for him.

“All of a sudden she has an apprenticeship and she’s better than us!” Ron shouted. Ginny hid her face in her hands, she’d rather be in detention with Filch than be here.

“All of a sudden I have an apprenticeship with more responsibilities. An apprenticeship takes time, work, and effort, Ronald. You don’t just have an apprenticeship and wait until a certain amount of time has passed to gain your mastery. I have a lot to learn, which means I have a lot of work to do,” the curly haired witch bit back.

Ron scoffed and crossed his arms, “You do enough learning at Hogwarts. What? Are you done with Hogwarts too now?”

Hermione crossed her arms and glared coldly at the redheaded wizard, “No. I have an apprenticeship on top of my regular Hogwarts work.”

“I’m sure Severus will still make sure you have time for your friends, dear,” Molly tried, knowing she already stepped on the younger witch’s toes.

‘I’ll dose her more at dinner…’

“Master Snape has made sure that I have time for my family; and my family has respected that my apprenticeship is important and that it requires a lot of time and focus. No one has held it against me,” Hermione replied pointedly.

“I bet Harry only said that since your parents said to and he was too scared to say anything else! Well he’s here now! Right, Harry? Tell her!” Ron snapped.

“Hermione is right, Ron. We do support her; and mum and dad encourage her to spend time with Master Snape. He even came to my birthday party.”

Molly did not like how this was playing, and was angrier that he didn’t spend his birthday with them. This was not going according to plan. At this rate she would need to dose the witch up so much that she wouldn’t want to spend time on her apprenticeship or with Severus.

“Just clean the floor then,” Molly snapped and she left the room.

Things were not going the way she hoped at all. There should have been a more pliable change with the stew. Perhaps she’d add a bit to dinner and maybe in their juice…

The next day Hermione left with Severus for a short brewing session, and to get out of the tense atmosphere Molly was creating. When they got back 3 hours later, they smelled Molly’s cooking. Thankfully Severus had been brought up to speed, including Sirius’s suspicions, and had to agree with the animagus. They had brewed a large batch of generic antidotes that were to be taken after every meal, once a day for her brother so Molly wouldn’t be too suspicious that her potions weren’t
working. So he left, stating that he had a few errands to take care of before he returned later.

Molly wasn’t concerned with Severus, while he was a fly in her plans she also knew about Hermione having to spend time with him to brew potions for the Order. It was part of Albus’s plan, so she wouldn’t interfere.

After the meal Severus returned with Minerva, both bringing the teens’ Hogwarts’ letters. Molly was quick to follow.

The transfiguration professor handed the Weasley’s and Harry’s letters to the proper students.

Severus handed his apprentice the letter that had her bouncing on her toes. She took it from him calmly belying her excitement before tearing into it.

Just behind her Harry and Ron were opening theirs, and the redhead gasped.

“I made prefect,” he said dumbfounded.

Hermione turned slowly, “You made prefect?” she asked incredulously before looking at Minerva. At the same time that Molly squealed like a teenager.

“The Headmaster overrode my decisions,” she said with a look of distaste.

Hermione nodded knowing that the Deputy couldn’t do anything about that. While the final decision should have been with the Heads of House, she knew it was possible that the Headmaster was able to override their decision should he feel they chose poorly. It left a bitter taste in her mouth knowing that every other boy in fifth year would have been a better choice than Ronald Weasley.

Thankfully Molly was too busy gushing over Ron to take notice of the interaction.

“Now it’s too dangerous for you to go out to Diagon Alley, so I’ll do your shopping for you,” Molly said.

“Harry, if you’d be a dear and get your Gringott’s key?” she instructed with a smile, everyone knew it was an order.

Hermione fixed a stern look onto the older witch, “That’s alright Missus Weasley, Master Snape is taking me into the Alley to get my supplies and a few other things I need. I can get Harry’s things while we’re there.”

“He’ll need a few things that you might forget to get. He’s a boy and I’ve raised enough to know what they need. No offense, dear,” Molly said in clipped tones.

She was supposed to go into Harry’s vault and grab a few hundred galleons for the Order.

“I don’t need anything aside from my school supplies. I already went clothes shopping and everything else while I was with mum and dad,” Harry said.

“I’m sure you forgot something, dear. The Granger’s have only had Hermione until recently after all,” she replied.

“And last I was aware of dad has a talleywhacker,” Hermione sniped.
“Language!” Molly yelled.

“Missus Weasley, I will be shopping for my brother while I’m out with my Master. Anything else that might be forgotten could be gotten through an owl order,” she replied before leaving the room tossing her hair over her shoulder.

The finality left Molly fuming. She was the adult!

It had been about a few days since then, Severus and Hermione had spent those days setting up the temporary lab in one of the guest rooms. Things were still extremely tense with the loud Weasley’s. Molly hadn’t taken being told no well at all.

The plan to check the food for the potions was going well. The story was more believable as he did take his meals in the temporary lab room, of course he ate the meals that were prepared by Kreature while they checked the meals prepared by Molly.

The dark wizard took the time to show Hermione how to test for potions in food or drinks, and was pleased that Kreature’s food showed up negative every time. If there were left overs he would place a drop of the hallucinogen that he had as an example.

Hermione was fascinated and was surprised by how similar it was to scanning for curses and harmful objects. There were a few minor differences, but was simple enough. Severus then showed her three different methods of deciphering the hidden potion or poison.

One, made it so it listed the ingredients of the potion. Two, listed the potion by name. Three, listed if the potion was keyed to someone or something.

He instructed her to use the first one to break down the potions before she used the second one if she couldn’t tell what it was by ingredients.

Molly had been almost unbearable to the witch, but Hermione has smiled and nodded politely while trying to be amicable with Ron in front of her. Ginny had started to try to flirt with Harry, which was a great source of humor for Hermione. Harry however looked extremely uncomfortable.

The gentle ribbing she’d give her brother that was overheard by Molly pleased the older witch that Hermione, despite the adoption, had no such feelings towards Harry. Said older witch was curious as to how shy Harry must be however since he hadn’t done more than trying to stare at Ginny while she wasn’t looking.

Hermione however was angering her. She had decided against her original plan, dosing her slowly, and had started placing half a vial of the loyalty potion in her drink with a quarter of the love potion keyed to Ron in her food. Still nothing! She would listen more during a meal, but after leaving for the bathroom she’d be her stubborn self again.

It was 5 days until they were going to head to Hogwarts. There had been a few Order meetings, of which Harry and Hermione (even though she was a member) had been excluded from along with the Weasley brood. The twin’s extendable ears had been quite helpful.

It was because of them that they found out a few more important facts and they knew that Sirius
thought they should indeed be allowed in on the meetings since he didn’t cast any spells to distort what was being said. They were also aware of how much Sirius was trying to be polite to Severus, even Moody despite his growling.

Harry and Sirius had tried to get Harry into some of the meetings, but Molly bulled over them. She made painful potshots at them both. Sirius had told Harry some of what he could, despite Molly fuming and yelling, but couldn’t go into details. Harry appreciated what his godfather could tell him, and was anger with most of the other members.

Moody, Tonks, Kingsley, and surprisingly Severus, were of the opinion that he should be included in the meetings as it was his life that the plans were mostly centered around. In the meantime all they could do was protect the ‘secret weapon’. It wasn’t enough action for the aurors, or Severus, but they followed orders despite not agreeing with them.

Albus refused to meet with the children despite his anger with them, or rather due to his anger with them. He had hoped to speak with them at Hogwarts where he was the adult in charge where they wouldn’t be able to run to another adult that wasn’t under his control. The anger and shame he still had over the incident at Gringotts hadn’t left his mind, he was just glad that Skeeter hadn’t been aware. Not that it had stopped the slander that was coming from the Prophet. Even then he had a plan as Hermione Granger had not been slandered, he was surprised. He had expected who they knew to be Death Eaters to be vocal against her, publicly or subtly. The only one who had been truly crude was Dolores Umbridge…

Hermione had been ecstatic to see Mad-eye again. She had hugged him and demanded information about Barty as soon as she was able to get him into the lab alone. The gruff wizard had hugged her back and pat her hair. He was normally not an affectionate man, but he knew how hard she had worked. Of course that didn’t stop him from shooting an imperius at her, which he was pleased that she shrugged off.

The only time Molly had restrained herself from drugging the teens was when the grizzled auror came over for meetings, knowing he would be able to tell as soon as he checked his food. Every meal was potioned so they would trust Albus more than they would. Molly felt it wasn’t completely necessary but she understood how teenagers rebelled and it wasn’t the time for that. She also slipped one in so they would trust her. Should something happen she would need them to believe her over someone else, just as much as they trusted Albus…

Nevertheless Thimi had been giving Hermione and Harry antidotes daily. The house-elf was furious with the plump witch, trying to control her family. She was just happy that her family trusted her enough to take their potion when she handed it to them. She was worried about her master Harry, who hadn’t realized he was being slipped love potions in his drinks. He would go through the day confused about the younger redhead witch.

Harry had slipped into Hermione’s room after knocking and making sure she was there. They would be going to Hogwarts in 2 days. He was upset with his emotions, confused, even though he was sure he was missing Missus Weasley’s potions. He had made himself comfortable on her bed while she changed into her nightclothes.

“Hermione, I… I’ve been feeling weird practically since we got here,” Harry mumbled, looking at his feet instead of staring at his sister.

Hermione was pulling on a shirt when she looked at him concerned, “What do you mean, Harry?”
“Since we’ve been here, after Missus Weasley started cooking dinner, and the rest of the meals, for the whole day I’d be wondering about Ginny. But not in a way where I would normally consider. I know I don’t like her that way, I don’t… y’know. So I’m confused since I wonder what she would be like if she was a guy,” He admitted with a small blush.

“Harry… Thimi has been giving us antidotes to Missus Weasley’s potions at night. After me and Master Snape were able to determine the potions she was slipping us, we’ve made a large batch to counteract them. I know we didn’t tell you what they were, but I have to take an antidote after every meal. Missus Weasley… Molly,” she hissed, “Has been giving us love and loyalty potions. Loyalty to Dumbledore and her. I don’t know what their game is, but I don’t trust it. I haven’t said anything since I don’t want to start trouble, the less they know what we know, the better. And,” she took a breath, “And a love potion. She’s been trying to get us to be with Ron and Ginny, respectively. She doesn’t know you like guys, so I think she assumed it would be fine,” Hermione grumbled with her arms crossed.

“Ron has been smiling and **leering** at me more than usual. I don’t like it,” She glared at the floor.

“Ginny… has been holding onto my arm and pressing her… chest, against my arm. It’s extremely uncomfortable,” Harry admitted.

The curly haired witch’s head snapped up to look at her brother intensely, “Ginny has been pressing her breasts against you?”

“Yeah,” he mumbled looking down.

“Harry… don’t take this wrong, but I think… I think they might know what she’s doing. Either that or she’s telling them that it’s only a matter of time or something since they loyalty potions are in the food, like she mixes it in after so no one can tell.”

The green eyed wizard furrowed his brows in concentration. He was thankful he kept up with his mind exercises as it helped him with his emotions and thinking, so he didn’t fly off the handle. He now understood how Hermione was able to think about things before reacting, usually.

“I… I think you’re right. Missus Weasley was the one who signed the contract, so I know she wants it to happen and she’s been telling Ginny about me since she was little. So she probably just figures it’s meant to be,” he said softly, feeling a little pity for the young witch.

“And now that she’s developed, she’s obviously making her move…” she pondered aloud.

Harry groaned.

“She’s probably gonna send some of her baked goods while we’re at Hogwarts too,” Hermione continued.

“So we don’t eat them?” Harry asked.

“I would recommend that or keeping an antidote on you for when you eat it,” she replied.

“Or I could give them away,” he grumped.

Hermione looked at him, “Harry, no. Then you’d be just as bad as her, since you’d be essentially potioning someone else.”

He looked back down at his feet embarrassed, “I didn’t think of it like that.”
“I know,” she murmured, “At least we leave soon. Ron is seriously getting under my skin. He keeps… staring. I feel like I need to take an extra shower,” she shivered.

‘I know I can protect myself, but I can’t be on guard all the time around him. We live in the same house.’

“We should go to bed,” she said.

He nodded and got up leaving, “Night, ‘Mione.”

“Night,” she replied getting into her bed.

The next day Hermione and Kreature dismantled the lab. While Sirius had contemplated keeping it, Hermione and Severus didn’t want one of the members, namely Molly, to snoop and mess around with their set up. She was obviously brewing potions somewhere else, so she had no need of being around their ingredients. Hermione was worried the witch would tamper with them, which was why she placed a thin ward around them, only letting herself and Severus touch them. So she took it down when they were clearing out the room.

It would have been her and Severus, but he had to deal with something important at the castle he said. She would have bothered him for details, but he was grouchy and obviously not happy with the errand that needed his attention. He did kiss her on the forehead before he left though.

They were keeping their relationship quiet even though they were very open about the apprenticeship in public. She was more than okay with that being a decently private person, never really one for public displays of affection.

She couldn’t wait to leave.

“Dirty Royal Miss should leave the rest to Kreature and Thimi,” the crotchety house-elf said.

The house-elf had shown bigoted pureblood beliefs from the start, but he was as respectful to her as he was to Sirius. He had a nasty mouth, but it was easy to ignore. His common mention of her house-elf didn’t surprise her, even though no one else knew of her. It seemed the house-elf understood that she was a personal elf, as far as he was concerned.

Hermione nodded at the old house-elf knowing that arguing wouldn’t do her any favors, “Of course, Kreature. I shall be in the library.”

Harry was sitting in the library playing chess with Ron while Ginny was wearing a low-cut shirt that was practically scandalous by wizarding Britain standards. Harry was doing his best not to look at the witch, focusing instead on the chess game he was getting thoroughly trounced in.

Ginny was mildly glaring, trying to get Harry to notice her new assets. Her breasts had grown enough to compete with some of the seventh years. She wasn’t close to Bones, but she wasn’t that far behind either. Her hair was smooth, shiny, and silky to the touch. She had grown in height making her athletic looking legs fit the ‘mile long’ stereo-type that she was sure he would appreciate. She was mildly upset she didn’t have ‘womanly’ hips and thighs that Hermione seemed to have hidden, but decided that long legs worked better for her anyways, matching well with her hair. She
knew that she was attractive, so why wasn’t Harry paying her more attention!

Her mother had suggested trying to make him jealous by dating other wizards to show him what he was missing, but she was determined to make him notice her before she tried that.

Hermione walked into Ginny ‘accidentally’ dropping something by the chessboard, watching her slowly bend over to giving Harry, and her, an ample view of her breasts.

Harry made a face, concentrating harder on the chess game before him. The brunette witch however raised an eyebrow at the younger witch’s tactics while appreciating the view. She crossed over the room, looking through the books on the wall suddenly feeling a pair of eyes boring into her from behind.

From the dirty feeling she was getting, she would guess it was Ron. She picked up *Common Household Spells*, feeling she’d be able to use it in the lab or find an alternative use.

A few minutes later Ron had announced “Checkmate,” ending the game. The lanky redhead got up and made to sit closely next to the curly haired witch.

Hermione looked at him over her book coolly, “Yes?” she asked, her tone just as frosty.

“Don’t be like that, Herms,” he said with what he thought was an attractive smile.

“Call me that again, Ronald, and I’ll show you a hex worse than Ginny’s bat bogeys. I don’t like nicknames, and you know that,” she said.

The redhead decided to ignore the threat and continued on, “I noticed you haven’t been writing Krum. Did he break up with you?”

“I broke up with him, but we decided to still be friends. I figured it would be stupid to send letters while at a secret Headquarters,” she said, looking at him unimpressed.

Ron grinned getting confirmation that the quidditch player and the bookworm were no longer together.

“Well I was thinking…” he started.

“Shocking,” she retorted.

Again he ignored her, slightly disturbed by her recent acidic behavior that was similar to Snape, “How would you like to be my girl?” he said, reaching his arm over to hold onto her shoulder.

The witch quickly leaned out of his reach, his hand brushing against the side of her right breast instead, making Hermione shiver in disgust. The wizard misinterpreted it as desire and grinned lecherously at her.

“No,” she said firmly, glaring at him heatedly.

“What!” he asked, his face turning red with embarrassment and anger.

“I said: No,” the witch repeated, holding the book in front of her chest.

“Why not!? It’s not like you’ve got a bloke! We could be good together, Herms! We’re like an old married couple!” he shouted at her.

“Old married couples don’t disagree on *everything*. My grandparents hardly argue, instead they talk
things out *civilly,*” she hissed.

“Well *my* mum and dad argue, they’re in love, and they have seven of us!” he argued.

“Good for them! It works for *them!* I don’t want a relationship like that,” the witch seethed.

“Yeah what do you want? Someone with money? Someone famous!? I’m a prefect! Is that not good enough!? ARE YOU TOO GOOD FOR ME!?” he shouted causing people to come see what was happening.

Hermione stood up and moved away from the furious wizard, putting her book down on the nearby table. She felt her brother come stand beside her for support and as a precaution should things get too out of hand.

“Just because I don’t want to be with you?” she said lowly, her tone was biting.

“Why else wouldn’t you want to be with me!?” He said standing up, his fists clenched as he tried to intimidate her with his height.

“Because you’re not my type. You’re not what I look for in a partner. Hell *Ginny* is more my type than you are, *Ronald,*” she hissed, glaring up at him, her fists also now clenched.

“Oh! I forgot! You’re a *cauldron LICKER!*” he snapped.

Hermione’s hair started to bristle and crackle with her magic, “I’d rather lick a cauldron than have your *broom* anywhere near me!”

The argument was startling, everyone knowing how Hermione felt about vulgarity.

“I BET YOU BROKE UP WITH KRUM BECAUSE YOU’RE REALLY A CAULDRON LICKER AND COULDN’T STAND THE IDEA OF FUCKING HIM!”

“FOR YOUR INFORMATION RONALD WEASLEY I WOULD ENJOY A GOOD COCK JUST AS MUCH AS A GOOD TONGUE AND A PAIR OF TITS!” she snarled “SO IT’S A GOOD THING I’M ALREADY WITH SOMEONE WHO ISN’T RONALD FUCKING WEASLEY!”

“WHO WOULD WANT YOU FOR MORE THAN SOMEONE TO PRACTICE ON!?” he bellowed.

The accusation saw Hermione lift her lip up in a furious snarl, her magic now moving her hair with an unseen wind along with the crackling magic.

“Is that what you think of me, Weasley?” she asked dangerously.

“YEAH!”

Molly was furious with her son and crying at the same time, ruining all the time she spent brewing those potions to win him the mudblood. She didn’t know Hermione liked witches and wizards. She could have tried to set her up with the twins if she knew how *debauched* she was.

“Fuck you, Weasley,” Harry growled, “Not that I would. Let’s go, Hermione,” he said, wrapped his arm around her shoulders, leading her out of the room.

“Fuck ME!? FUCK HER! She doesn’t know she’s passing up a good thing when she sees it!”
Harry turned around and looked Ron up and down, “Really? Because I see a spoiled, gross, deplorable, wizard who made a pass at my sister and got all pissy when she turned you down!”

“She’s not even your sister!” The other wizard hollered.

“We blood bonded! She’s my blood sister you twittering homophobic asshole!” Harry yelled, shocking the onlookers.

The new information took the wind out of the redheaded wizard. Harry didn’t care, saying what he had to say, and took his sister, leading her out of the room, their audience moving out of the way.

Severus watched them, nodding at the younger green eyed wizard.

He waited until they had left to the family floor before stepping into the room his apprentice and her brother had vacated. Minerva had followed him having her own piece to say to the young wizard.

“As term has not yet started I can’t give you detentions for the year, however I will be making this term unpleasant for you, Weasley,” he said staring down his nose at the pathetic wizard with a sneer before leaving.

Minerva ignored her friend’s threat staring at the wizard with her lips thinned, “Mister Weasley, your words and actions were nothing less than deplorable; should your grades be below acceptable I will have your prefect badge before the term is out. I will be keeping an eye on you,” she said dangerously.

Ron looked away from his professor. She always made him feel small and being the focus of her ire made his insides squirm discomfortingly.

“Way to go, Ron,” Ginny grumbled angrily, leaving the room.

The room and hallway cleared out giving the audience much food for thought. Hermione was apparently more important to Harry than most of them thought. Albus had convinced them that the adoption was just Hermione’s family taking him in with misguided concern. He was wrong. What else was he wrong about?

They still trusted him, thanks to Molly’s potions, but they did start to question his information.
Chapter 78

Getting to King’s Cross was easier said than done, but Hermione had managed to convince Moody, Tonks, and Sirius to take her and Harry separately from the other family, knowing that the Weasley’s wouldn’t make it until the last minute. Sirius insisted he go see them off, being able to do so for the first time.

Thankfully the aurors had witnessed the debacle between them and the youngest male Weasley. If it weren’t for Moody having to pretend to not have a close relationship with the hazel eyed witch he would have hexed the young redhead this way and that. Molly watching or not.

Harry and Hermione had skipped dinner that night, instead taking it in Hermione’s room. They did the same for breakfast that morning. Kreature had brought it to them. The crotchety house-elf had considered switching the hateful Weasley’s food with one of theirs, but couldn’t bring himself to want that on the youngest female blood traitor. She didn’t yell at the young dirty mistress.

The house-elves had tidied up both Hermione and Harry’s rooms, and packed their trunks for them. Both teens were grateful being relieved of a stressful task for them knowing that nothing would be left behind, Hermione more so.

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Getting onto the red train Hermione and Harry found an empty compartment in the back. Once they were in the compartment they let their familiars out of their cages, giving them more attention than they had that week.

Thankfully the animals understood and didn’t hold it against them. If anything they understood too well. Crookshanks had taken it upon himself to barge into Ron’s room and shredded the clothes he left around and used his trunk as a scratching post. His mother had repaired his clothes, but she couldn’t completely repair his trunk.

10 minutes until the train would leave, the door opened and Luna was in the doorway.

“Hello, Hermione Granger, Harry Potter. May I join you?” she asked politely in her dreamy voice.

Harry and Hermione looked at her. Harry had seen the young witch around, she seemed lost most of the time and her appearance was often strange.

“Of course,” Hermione answered.

“Oh goodie,” the sandy blonde witch said with a bright smile.

After getting settled in, the young witch plopped down and took out the latest issue of the Quibbler turning it upside down after putting on the glasses it came with.

“I noticed the Quibbler didn’t post anything about my status. I don’t know if you had anything to do with it, but I was hoping you’d be able to send my thanks to the editor,” Hermione said as soon as she saw the magazine.

Luna grinned at the curly haired witch, “You’re welcome. I’ll let Daddy know you appreciate it too.”

Harry tilted his head and looked at the witch curiously, “Is your dad a journalist?”
“Oh, yes. Daddy owns the Quibbler and he’s the editor,” she replied.

Harry nodded, “I didn’t catch your name,” he realized.

“Luna, Luna Lovegood. Most people call me Loony though,” she said, her eyesight seeming far away again.

“Miss Lovegood I have to ask, I’ve been getting issues of the Quibbler and some of the articles fascinate me, but I have to admit some of them don’t make sense to me. You know I’m a muggleborn and I have to admit there’s only so many books on magical creatures in the library. Surely there’s more than what Newt Scamander has published,” Hermione said, trying to make conversation.

At first she considered the magazine to be nothing but a tabloid paper, but seeing some genuine articles in it she had changed her mind.

Luna looked at the witch surprised. She was aware of how most academics viewed the Quibbler, even if it offended her on a personal level. Hermione Granger was one of the most academic witches in Hogwarts, so it was pleasantly surprising.

“Please, call me Luna,” she smiled before answering, “Yes. Some of the creatures published in the paper are hard to find and document. Much like the demiguise were before some naturalists were able to find a way past their shyness that triggered their invisibility,” she replied with a nod.

Harry looked at them both with surprise, “Are they the creatures that invisibility cloaks are made of?” he asked.

“Only their fur thankfully. However without it, it leaves them defenseless making them easier prey. That’s part of the reason why invisibility cloaks are so rare.”

“So some of the articles in the Quibbler are sightings of undiscovered and hard to find creatures?” Hermione asked.

“Mostly,” the younger witch nodded, tilting her head to the side.

“So it’s the magical version of a cryptozoology magazine,” Hermione stated.

“What,” Harry asked completely lost.

“Like a jackolope. Some people claim they’ve seen them, but no one has been able to catch a live one and most people who ‘have’ one eventually say they glued on antlers to a rabbit,” his sister explained.

“Oh!” he exclaimed in understanding.

At the moment of his enlightenment the train’s whistle blew signaling its impending departure.

The compartment’s door opened again revealing Neville, “Hey guys. The other compartments are full, can I sit with you?”

“Sure, mate,” Harry said with a smile.

Looking out the window Hermione saw the Weasley’s finally rushing onto the train. Hermione glared at the lanky redhead who was running onto the train.

“Um, Hermione?” Neville mumbled curiously.
“Yes, Nev?” the curly haired witch asked.

“Did you have a fight with Ron?” he asked tentatively.

The hazel eyed witch glowered, “You could say that,” she said in clipped tones, turning to glare out the window not wanting to take it out on anyone.

Neville looked at Harry for help, Luna also looked at him curiously.

“Weasley noticed how Hermione’s, ah, developed,” he tried to say delicately with a blush, “and has been staring at her inappropriately. He was made prefect and then asked Hermione if she wanted to, um, be with him. Hermione said no and he blew up on her.”

Said witch growled under her breath, startling Neville, who again looked at Harry imploringly for details.

“He accused her of a bunch of things and she eventually just told him he wasn’t her type. She told him during the fight that Ginny was more her type than he was, and he flipped his top calling her a bunch of names. Then insulted her some more about her sexuality and tastes, then he…” Harry sighed hating this part the most, “he asked her who would want her for more than just someone to practice on.”

Neville sucked in a breath while Luna glared.

“Then I said ‘fuck you’ to him, then told him that I wouldn’t, and he yelled more about ‘Mione and then said she didn’t know she was ‘passing up a good thing’. So I told him he was a gross, deplorable, homophobic ass hole, basically, who made a pass at my sister and got all pissy when she turned him down. He flipped out,” Harry looked away, “I was adopted by Hermione’s family this summer.”

Both listeners smiled at him, happy for the orphan.

“And he told me she wasn’t my sister then…” Harry stopped, trailing off.

“Can you guys keep a secret?” he asked vulnerably.

“Of course, Harry,” Neville said.

Luna nodded, “You may not know me, but I can take a witch’s oath if you’d like,” she offered.

Harry stared at her with shock, “No. Just your word is good enough,” he smiled at her.

“Well, he said that and I admitted that Hermione is my blood bonded sister.”

Neville’s eyes widened whereas the silvery blue eyed witch tilted her head, not really surprised.

“He didn’t have anything to say to that.”

Neville looked pensive.

“Well Ron’s an ass and he’s going to flunk his OWLS. It’s nothing less than he deserves,” Neville said under his breath.

Luna nodded in agreement, “Ronald isn’t a very good friend. He’s the one who started calling me Loony when Ginny was my friend. After my mummy died Molly Weasley stopped letting her play with me.”
Deciding to move on to lighter subjects Neville pushed forward with something he was excited about.

“Guess what I got for my birthday?” he asked with a grin.

“Another remembrall?” Harry asked.

“No,” Neville sighed, “I could do with another one, I lost the old one ages ago… but no, look at this!”

He rummaged through his school bag that held his robes so he wouldn’t have to go through his trunk later and pulled out what looked to be a small gray cactus in a pot, only it was covered in boils instead of spines.

“Mimbulus mimbletonia,” he said proudly.

“It’s really, really rare,” said Neville, beaming. “I don’t know if Hogwarts even has one in the greenhouse. I can’t wait to show it to Professor Sprout. My great uncle Algie got it for me in Assyria. I’m going to see if I can breed from it,” he said excitedly.

Harry stared at it warily, it looked to be pulsating making it look like it was ready to burst. It reminded him of some sort of diseased organ that would be found in potions. However he was happy for his friend who he knew loved herbology.

“Does it do anything?” Harry asked politely.

“Loads of stuff! It’s got an amazing defense mechanism…”

“Please don’t poke the boils, we’re hours away from the Hospital Wing should something happen,” Hermione begged.

Neville blushed and nodded, listening to his intelligent friend.

They made small talk for the rest of the ride, getting to know Luna better. She was odd, but nice and friendly making Harry and Neville more than willing to be her friend. Hermione was extremely pleased with this knowing how friendless the witch was last year. She agreed to be her friend and watch out for her, but now she had 2 other people to be the younger witch’s friend with her.

Harry was surprised that Malfoy hadn’t made his typical appearance to antagonize him, but wasn’t too upset. He was upset however at how Ron had yelled at some students, which upset Hermione enough that her magic was crackling through her hair again.

“He’s going to abuse his power, I just know it,” she growled to herself.

The rest of the group looked around uncomfortable with the truth.

What surprised the siblings was when Cho made an appearance, “Um, Hello, Harry.”

Harry twisted his head, “Um, hi?”

“Um, I just thought I’d say hi. Bye!” and she left just as quickly as she came, confusing the occupants in the compartment.
When the warning whistle blew they took turns changing in said compartment, the girls dressed first.

Luna noticed the difference in the older witch’s clothing compared to the regular student robes. Her skirt was black, her socks here black, her shirt was a pin stripe brick red, and her tie was black with the Gryffindor insignia at the base. Considering her master was the potions professor who seemed to live in the color black it was nice to see that the curly haired witch was wearing color. The sandy blonde was surprised, but pleased, happy that the witch hadn’t been passed up as prefect. She hadn’t noticed her apprentice badge before as it was hidden under a light cardigan, but was now lovingly placed on her black robe.

“Congratulations on your apprenticeship,” Luna said.

“Thank you,” Hermione replied with a small grin.

Opening the door to let the boys know that they could change saw Neville and Harry glaring at Ron.

“What’s going on here,” Hermione inquired slowly, sounding a bit like Severus.

Neville shivered a bit before answering, “Weasley thought it was imperative to check the compartment, even though we told him you were changing.”

“Is that so?” Hermione replied, settling her glare on the redhead.

“Feel free to look in the compartment, prefect Weasley,” the witch said mockingly.

Ron’s ears turned red. He knew he wasn’t sneaky enough, but he hoped to catch a peek at Hermione while she was changing. Harry and Neville though took it upon themselves to block the window with their bodies, making it hard to see anything. He tried to threaten them with point loss and detention, but they stood firm.

To save face he stepped into the compartment, looked around and left.

“Thanks guys,” Hermione breathed, her anger dissipating with Ron’s leaving form.

“No problem,” they mumbled, going to take their turn to change into their school robes.

Once they were all set, familiars now in cages, they discussed studying, if only to help calm Hermione down and cheer her up a bit.

“Would you mind if I joined you occasionally?” Luna asked in a small voice.

“I would love for you to join me,” Hermione said with a happy grin.

It wasn’t often that someone asked to join her to study instead of helping them with their homework.

The young witch grinned happily.

“I might not always been in the library now though since I have to work with Master Snape to further along my apprenticeship, but when I can I would love to. I also study a bit during meals,” Hermione said, “I wouldn’t mind you coming to join me at the table. If you’re not comfortable with that, I can sit with you.”

Luna’s grin widened, “I would like that very much, Apprentice Granger,” she replied dreamily.

“My friends call me Hermione,” the curly haired witch smiled, knowing how much it would mean to the sandy blonde.
Getting off the train Harry waited to hear the familiar voice of Hagrid calling for the first years, but it didn’t come. Instead it was a female voice.

Looking he saw it was professor Grubby-Plank. “Where’s Hagrid?” Harry asked confused, and concerned.

“I’m not sure…” Hermione answered, looking around.

In the corner of her eye she saw Malfoy pushing around a young second year from a carriage and almost went to say something. However she was in no mood knowing he would be just as bad as Ron, perhaps just a bit less horrid.

Walking to get what they thought was a horseless carriage Harry and Hermione startled seeing black reptilian skeletal horses with wings. Their heads were dragon-like while their eyes were white, staring at them.

“Oh you can see them too?” Luna asked.

The siblings looked at Luna startled.

“What are they?” Harry asked.

“Threshals. Only those who have seen death can see them,” she said petting one on the nose, “They’re seen as a bad omen, but they’re really gentle and friendly.”

Hermione’s eyes sparkled at the discovery. Something magnificent that had been hiding in plain sight the whole time, much like her.

Walking into the Great Hall, Hermione made sure to resume her poise, and Harry followed her lead.

Finding a seat Hermione noticed Harry received a few quick overly friendly ‘Hi’s’, trying to hide the fact that they were talking about him moments before. Hermione narrowed her eyes at them, but said nothing more.

Looking at the staff table Hermione quickly saw a new witch, who she hoped was not their new Defense professor.

‘Umbridge… Senior Undersecretary of the Ministry if I remember correctly. What’s she doing here? Unless the Ministry, unless Fudge, is trying to interfere and censor us, or discredit us, I see no reason for her to be here.’

Hermione waited calmly with the rest of the school for the Sorting Hat to sing its song and sort the new firsties.

In times of old when I was new

And Hogwarts barely started

The founders of our noble school
Thought never to be parted:
United by a common goal,
They had the selfsame yearning,
To make the world’s best magic school
And pass along their learning.
“Together we will build and teach!”
The four good friends decided
And never did they dream that they
Might someday be divided,
For were there such friends anywhere
As Slytherin and Gryffindor?
Unless it was the second pair
Of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw?
So how could it have gone so wrong?
How could such friendships fail?
Why, I was there and so can tell
The whole sad, sorry tale.
Said Slytherin, “We’ll teach just those
Whose ancestry is purest.”
Said Ravenclaw, “We’ll teach those whose
Intelligence is surest.”
Said Gryffindor, “We’ll teach all those
With brave deeds to their name.”
Said Hufflepuff, “I’ll teach the lot,
And treat them just the same.”
These differences caused little strife
When first they came to light,
For each of the four founders had
A House in which they might
Take only those they wanted, so,
For instance, Slytherin
Took only pure-blood wizards
Of great cunning, just like him,
And only those of sharpest mind
Were taught by Ravenclaw
While the bravest and the boldest
Went to daring Gryffindor.
Good Hufflepuff she took the rest,
And taught them all she knew,
Thus the Houses and their founders
Retained friendships firm and true.
So Hogwarts worked in harmony
For several happy years,
But then discord crept among us
Feeding on our faults and fears.
The Houses that, like pillars four,
Had once held up our school,
Now turned upon each other and,
Divided, sought to rule.
And for a while it seemed the school
Must meet an early end,
What with dueling and with fighting
And the clash of friend on friend
And at last there came a morning
When old Slytherin departed
And though the fighting then died out
He left us quite downhearted.
And never since the founders four
Were whittled down to three
Have the Houses been united
As they once were meant to be.
And now the Sorting Hat is here
And you all know the score:
I sort you into Houses
Because that is what I’m for,
But this year I’ll go further,
Listen closely to my song:
Though condemned I am to split you
Still I worry that it’s wrong,
Though I must fulfill my duty
And must quarter every year
Still I wonder whether sorting
May not bring the end I fear.
Oh, know the perils, read the signs,
The warning history shows,
For our Hogwarts is in danger
From external, deadly foes
And we must unite inside her
Or we’ll crumble from within.
I have told you, I have warned you. . . .
Let the Sorting now begin.

The students applauded awkwardly.
“I wonder if the Sorting Hat as ever given warnings before,” the brunette witch wondered aloud.

“Yes, yes it has,” Nearly Headless Nick answered, “The Hat is honor bound to give warnings whenever it feels the school is in danger. The warning is always the same: Stand together, be strong from within.”

“Together we stand, divided we fall. It’s a common saying in the States,” Hermione said,
understanding the warning.

She watched the sorting and applauded for everyone.

After the meal Dumbledore stood to give his opening speech.

“If I could have your attention after eating such a magnificent feast, I have some start of the term notices. The Forbidden Forest, is forbidden. This is a warning for the first years as well as some of our older years,” he looked over his glasses at the students, “Mister Filch, the Caretaker, has asked me for nearly the 500th time, to remind you all no magic in the halls, among a number of banned items. The long list can be found posted on his door.”

He watched as some of the students snickered knowing they were won’t to do despite what the caretaker wanted. While magic in the halls was against school policy they were witches and wizards and magic was a part of them, so as long as there weren’t duels the rest of the staff turned a blind eye.

“We have two changes in the staff. We are pleased to welcome Professor Grubby-Plank back, and she will be teaching Care of Magical Creatures. We are also delighted to host Professor Umbridge, our new Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor.”

There was a polite round of applause, Harry seemed a bit panicked that the half-giant wasn’t there. He enjoyed Hagrid’s class and was worried about him. He knew the man lived at Hogwarts year round, and for him to not be there was startling.

Hermione reached her arm out and rubbed his back feeling his distress.

“Another important change is in addition to the Head Boy and Head Girl, Professor Snape has taken on an apprentice. His apprentice will have all the liberties and privileges as the Head Boy and Girl, as well as the ability to give and take points along with detentions,”

This announcement roused the student body to look around, the purebloods wondering who would bother to form such a close bond with the surly professor. It had to be someone in Slytherin; who else would he consider?

“There may be occasions where she will have to miss class, either working on something he assigned or even helping in his class. All punishments she may receive will be headed by Professor Snape, aside from points, all detentions shall be brought to his attention by those assigning them.”

All of the prefects shivered not wanting to risk Snape’s ire by trying to assign his apprentice detention. Chances are he would override them anyways.

“Apprentice Granger, if you would please stand.”

Hermione rose from her seat, her head held high and her expression aloof. The hall burst into furious whispers.

The headmaster cleared his throat, disbursing the whispers.

“Tryouts for Quidditch teams will take place in –”

“Hem, hem.”
Dumbledore looked at the large witch curiously who rose from her seat. The witch was not that much taller standing than she was sitting. The fact that she interrupted the headmaster earned her a few glares.

The headmaster looked on disapprovingly as it was clear she wanted to make a speech. However he felt he would be gracious enough to allow the witch to talk. He sat down and gave the witch his utmost attention. His expression startled some of the students as his grandfatherly façade faded.

The fat witch looked slightly startled as she shifted her eyes a bit.

“Thank you, Headmaster for that warm welcome,” she simpered, her voice was breathless and girlishly high. It grated on half of the student’s ears and send a shiver of revulsion down the other.

“Hem, hem. It’s lovely to be back at Hogwarts, and I’m so glad to see so many happy little faces!” The students shifted angrily, none of them taking kindly to being spoken to like a bunch of 5 year olds.

“I’m looking forward to getting to know all of you and being great friends,” she giggled girlishly high that did not fit with her appearance.

“I’ll be her friend if I don’t have to borrow that horrid cardigan,” Pavarti whispered to Lavender, who giggled quietly.

Hermione rolled her eyes, silently agreeing with the statement of the offending article of clothing. It was as though she let a small child dress her.

“Hem, hem.”

The petite witch glared, ‘That’s going to get annoying very very quickly.’

“The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young witches and wizards to be of vital importance. The rare gifts with which you were born may come to nothing if not nurtured and honed by careful instruction. The ancient skills unique to the Wizarding community must be passed down through the generations lest we lose them forever. The treasure trove of magical knowledge amassed by our ancestors must be guarded, replenished, and polished by those who have been called to the noble profession of teaching,” she bowed at some of the professors at the table, none of who bowed back.

Minerva looked as though she was going to bore a hole into the pink clad witch just by staring at her, before exchanging a look with Hooch who was also watching her with hawk-like eyes.

Umbridge fidgeted clearing her throat again.

“Every headmaster and headmistress of Hogwarts has brought something new to the weighty task of governing this historic school, and that is as it should be, for without progress there will be stagnation and decay. There again, progress for progress’s sake must be discouraged, for our tried and tested traditions often require no tinkering. A balance, then, between old and new, between permanence and change, between tradition and innovation…”

The witch quickly lost interest in a majority of the student body, some, like Luna, took out a magazine and simply ignored her. Hermione of course sneered discretely at her, taking in everything she was saying just as much as the rest of the staff.

“… Because some changes will be for the better, while others will come, in the fullness of time, to be
recognized as errors of judgment. Meanwhile, some old habits will be retained, and rightly so, whereas others, outmoded and outworn, must be abandoned. Let us move forward, then, into a new era of openness, effectiveness, and accountability, intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited.”

When she sat down Dumbledore clapped. The staff clapped once or twice, or in Severus’s case, not at all. The students heard it and just followed along glad that the boring speech had ended. The only thing that kept them awake was being able to ignore her and not have to pay attention. It was nearly as bad as History of Magic.

“Thank you, Madam Umbridge. As I was saying, quidditch tryouts will be held…”

Hermione was thinking furiously, absentmindedly explaining to Harry in short terms what the large witch’s speech was about. Needless to say the petite witch was not happy.

Getting up Hermione noticed that Romilda Vane started herding the first years, barking at them to get up and follow her, scaring them. Ron wasn’t far behind calling the little ones “Midgets”.

Hermione glared at them. “First years, this way!” she called commandingly, glad that Severus had given her the password before she left Grimmauld Place.

The first years looked at the apprentice and quickly followed her. She spoke in a way that they felt the need to follow her and she spoke to them kindly, making them feel comfortable. Romilda arched an eyebrow and let the apprentice do so knowing she was higher ranked than her. Ron however glared heatedly at her.

Harry followed his sister’s lead and made sure to stand behind the first years so none of them got lost if they lagged behind a little. While he didn’t agree with Ron’s choice of words, he had to admit they were… small.

Hermione rounded up the first years before leading them down to the Great Hall, promising to show them around so they wouldn’t be late. She also instructed the older prefects to help direct them, a harsh glint in her eye that promised retribution if they didn’t listen to her.

Knowing she was a force to recon with before she was an apprentice they agreed quickly.

Sitting primly at the table, surprised to see that Harry was there before her, she smiled while they ate breakfast in near companionable silence. She could tell something was bothering him, but wouldn’t ask him about it until she had at least had a cuppa and a muffin. If it was something bad she would rather already have something in her stomach than go through the morning hungry.

As the parliament of owls came down with mail Hermione paid the owl that held her Daily Prophet, noticing the dirty look Harry gave it.

“Yes?” she asked, looking at him through the corner of her eye.

“Seamus and his mum are calling me a liar and he’s acting as though he’ll catch ‘the crazy’ by being around me,” he huffed, “All because of that ruddy paper,” he finished glaring at it.

“Lavender started that as well, until I told her to shut her gob or I’d shut it for her,” she informed opening the paper “Anyways, lucky for you, you nor Dumbledore are mentioned in it,” she replied,
“Besides that would mean they’d have to call Diggory a loon too.”

Harry nodded, a haunted look crossing his eyes. He had been haunted by ‘What if’s’, had Hermione not been there. He knew for a fact that Cedric Diggory would have died and he felt conflicted by it. Just trying to be fair he almost got the other boy killed. Until they returned to Hogwarts he had thought the other wizard died.

Hermione had leaned into him, shoulder to shoulder, offering him silent comfort that he took greedily. Harry brightened when Neville sat across from them and started talking about nonsensical things taking his mind off petty problems.

Minerva came by soon after handing out their class schedules. Luna skipped over sitting next to Neville holding her own schedule. The group of three smiled at the younger witch.

Neville groaned softly under his breath.

“What’s wrong Neville?” Luna asked kindly.

“We have History of Magic, double potions, divination, and double defense today. Professor Umbridge gives me a bad feeling, and I’m rubbish at potions,” the blond haired boy lamented.

Hermione ‘hm’ed in acknowledgement. Instead of Divination she had Arithmancy. She was looking forward to potions though.

“Yes I get a bad feeling from her too. I believe the best method of dealing with her would be to treat her with extra kindness,” Luna said airily.

Hermione looked at the young witch and raised her eyebrows. Her idea had merit. Kill her with kindness.

“I agree,” Hermione said, “The less we antagonize, or give in to whatever mess she might come up with, we should be fine.”

Harry pouted, but knew that Hermione wouldn’t have agreed if she didn’t think it would work. They practically did the same thing to Missus Weasley and it worked better than he thought it would.

Enjoying a lazy breakfast, Hermione was glad that Ron was sitting further down the table with Dean and Seamus, she could see bits of food coming out of his mouth. She rolled her eyes and took another sip of her cuppa.

“Apprentice Lady Granger,” came a respectful acknowledgement.

Hermione looked up with mild surprise seeing Malfoy standing behind Luna and Neville.

“How many I help you, Malfoy?” she asked with polite aloofness. He hadn’t started with insults and acknowledged both of her high positions.

“I would like to apologize for my extremely rude and uncalled for uncouthness involving you and our interactions in the past. I would like to hope that you will find it in yourself to forgive me,” he said, bowing at the waist towards her.

The petite witch was surprised would be an understatement. Her facial expression was one that screamed ‘unimpressed’, even though her eyebrows gave away the intrigue she felt. It was an expression often seen on her master, but a touch more emotive than the acerbic man.
“I will have to think of it, Mister Malfoy. Four years is a bit to get over in one day, especially the small stint of you wishing me dead one year.”

The young blond blushed and looked away with shame.

“However I believe we can be cordial until I’ve decided,” she said.

“Thank you, Apprentice Lady Granger. It is more than I deserve,” he gave her another bow before leaving back towards his table.

His interaction with her had caused whispers, none more than among the gossip queens Lavender and Pavarti.

“Hermione what did he mean by that?” Lavender asked, leaning eagerly towards the witch hoping for juicy details.

Hermione gave the blonde witch frosty look, “Exactly what he said. I am an apprentice, and I am Lady Hermione Granger. Daughter of Duke Leeroy Granger and Duchess Abagail Granger, of The Royal Family.”

Lavender’s eyes widened almost comically. She had been rooming with a member of The Royal Family for 4 years and didn’t know it. Pavarti had been ogling a Lady for 4 years. She had nearly argued with the Lady last night. Knowing her peerage and new position as apprentice gave her a new outlook on her interactions with the bushy haired witch, although her hair seemed to be curlier than bushy now.

History of Magic had been just as boring as always. Giant Wars instead of Goblin Wars weren’t that much different. Hermione rolled her eyes when she caught Harry playing hangman with Neville, where Ronald was drawing Quidditch plays. She hoped he realized that he wouldn’t be getting any help from her that year. If he didn’t it was a right shame he’d fail his History OWL.

Walking across the courtyard in the light drizzle, Hermione and Harry pulled their hoods up. Neville was walking slightly behind them. The witch cast and impervious on their cloaks, letting the water slide off their cloaks instead of soaking into it. It was a good call considering there were heavy drops splashing on people heading back into the building.

Before they reached the entry however Cho came and flounced in front of them.

“Hello, Harry,” she said with a winning smile.

“Hi,” he replied, mild confusion on his face.

He realized he asked her to the ball last year, having still been in the closet, but he didn’t think he’d given her the idea that he was keen on dating her.

“Did you have a good summer?” she asked.

“Yeah, how ‘bout you?” he questioned trying to be polite.

“I’m not sure if you heard, but me and Cedric broke up,” she said shyly looking at him through half
lidded eyes.

“Oh. I’m sorry,” he said, unsure of how to reply to that.

“That’s okay, I broke it off with him,” she shrugged, moving her hands behind her back lightly twisting side to side.

“Oh,” hesitant on what to say. He didn’t know why she would leave the Hufflepuff. He was a good guy, good seeker, handsome, extremely well liked, and if he wasn’t mistaken also the new Head Boy.

“I was wondering if maybe you’d like to go to Hogsmead with me on the upcoming weekend,” she battered her lashes at him with a coy smile.

Harry furrowed his eyebrows, “I’m sorry, Cho. I’m not interested. Maybe we can be friends,” he suggested instead.

The Chinese witch paused and stared at him. She knew she was one of the prettiest girls at Hogwarts, smart, and a good quidditch player. She was very desirable.

“Come again?”

“I said no thanks?” Harry tried again.

The witch narrowed her eyes at him, “Why not?” she prodded, leaning forward to look hard into his eyes.

Hermione glared at the witch whilst standing next to her brother.

“You’re not my type,” he explained.

“Not your type?” the Asian witch cajoled.

“No.”

“And what is your type, Harry Potter?” she glared heatedly, grinding her teeth.

“Tall, nice, and handsome,” he replied, confident with his sister next to him.

His answer startled her, “Handsome? Don’t you mean beautiful?”

“No. I mean handsome,” he said more comfortable now that it was out there.

“Oh.” She said stunned.

“Yeah,” he ran a hand through his hair, knocking his hood back before fixing it, “So, um, see ya.”

With that they left the witch standing in the rain heading to potions.

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Entering the potions classroom Hermione left her brother to find a seat while she went to stand next to her Master’s desk.

The hazel eyed witch was pleased with the change in the classroom. It was brighter almost as sunny as when she took her OWL at the ministry. The students settled into their seats marveled by the
sudden change. She noticed that Harry and Neville were sitting at their usual table leaving an empty seat.

“Settle down,” Severus said deeply, shutting the door with a bang behind him.

“Before we begin today’s lesson I am going to go over a few things,” he said, his cloak billowing behind him as he walked down the aisle to the front of the room, “First, my Apprentice will be here even though she’s already taken her OWL. She will either be brewing a different potion than you lot, a different one I may assign, or I will have her go around to help me keep an eye to make sure you don’t kill yourselves. Second, I believe it is *appropriate* to remind you that this is your OWL year. An important examination that you will be sitting next June. During the exam you will be tested on how much you have learned about the composition and use of magical potions. As moronic,” he sniffed, “as some of you are. I expect you to at least scrape by with an ‘Acceptable’ or suffer my displeasure for the rest of your educational career in these halls.”

His eyes swept across the room, lingering on those who often botched up even the simplest potions.

“Third, it has been brought to my attention by my Apprentice that some of you may have been having *difficulties* due to the lighting in my classroom. While originally I lowered the lighting to increase the difficulty she has pointed out that it *may* confuse some of you when choosing and preparing your ingredients. Never mind reading the blackboard. I expect improvement with these changes that are meant to *help* you,” he curled his lip in a slight sneer.

“After this year many of you will most likely cease studying under my tutelage as I only take the best for my NEWT classes. Depending on your choice of career, I highly suggest you pay attention and *study* this year.”

His students fidgeted in their seats. Most of them hadn’t considered that their choice of career may depend on them actually getting an O on their OWL as most of the other classes accepted EE and some A.

“Today we will be brewing a potion that often comes up on the Ordinary Wizarding Level examinations: Draught of Peace, a potion meant to calm anxiety and soothe agitation. Many of you will become familiar with this potion closer to the exams coming up. Be warned: If you are too heavy-handed with the ingredients you will put the drinker into a heavy and sometimes irreversible sleep, so you will need to pay close attention to what you are doing,” he said softly.

“The method and ingredients are on the blackboard,” he flicked his wand twice, “You will find everything you need in the store cupboard,” the blackboard revealed the spikey writing and the cupboard opened, “You have an hour and a half. Begin.”

While they were mixing their potion Severus turned to Hermione.

“I expect a quarter of the class to make something acceptable, I want you to brew a perfect batch. I would like some of this ready for the Hospital Wing. Last year, believe it or not, Madam Pomfrey ran out.”

Hermione nodded and got to work knowing this potion forward and back with her shortcuts and know how.

Many of the students were already stressed complaining that he had picked one of the harder potions to start them off with. On their first day back too.

“A light silver vapor should be rising from your potion,” Severus said with 10 minutes left to go.
Hermione had already brewed and bottled the potion, making sure the vials were charmed to be unbreakable. Severus nodded at his Apprentice.

“We, my apprentice and I, are going to be walking around to look at the sorry excuses that you call the draught of peace,” he said, walking down one aisle with Hermione down the other. He left her in charge of the Slytherins to subtly show them he wasn’t going to allow favoritism just because she was a Gryffindor.

Harry’s potion had a grey vapor instead of silver. Ron’s was spitting green sparks. Seamus’s fire had gone out and he was poking at it with his wand. Surprisingly Neville’s potion had a light grey, almost silver, vapor coming from it.

On the other side of the room Draco’s potion was giving off a small silver vapor, but it sputtered in an odd pattern. Crabbe’s was somehow orange. Goyle’s was similar to Neville’s, his vapor just a tad shade darker. Hermione smiled at the Slytherin proud of his work.

“Weasley, what is this?” Severus asked softly.

“Draught of peace?” the redhead hedged, refusing to look at the potions master.

“Indeed. Can you read Mister Weasley?” he asked.

Half of the class was snickering, even some of the Gryffindors.

“Yes,” the wizard replied, his ears tipped red.

“Read lines 4 through 9.”

“Allow to simmer until the potion turns purple/ shake powdered porcupine quills vigorously until they are ready and then add until the potion turns red/ stir the potion until the potion turns orange/ add more porcupine quills until the potion turns turquoise/ allow to simmer until it turns purple/ add powdered unicorn horn until it turns pink,” he read, his face turning red.

“Yes. You however didn’t let it simmer long enough, added too many porcupine quills, and forgot to add powdered unicorn horn,” he glared at the young wizard.

“A waste of ingredients and time to make this pathetic mess. Evanesco.”

With that Ron’s cauldron was empty. Most of the class snickered, Harry being amongst them.

“Those of you who have managed to read the ingredients, canter your potion, label it, don’t forget your name, and place it on my desk for testing,” he turned around leaving the flustered Weasley, “Homework will be 12 inches on the properties of Unicorn horn and its purpose in the draught of peace. You may thank Mister Weasley for that. It will be due Thursday. Dismissed.”

The rest of the afternoon passed by relatively normal until Defense Against the Dark Arts.

The room was gloomy which was at odds with the professor that was wearing a vibrantly fuzzy pink cardigan with a little black bow in her hair. The class remained silent unsure what kind of teacher she while they took their seats.

The toad like witch grinned at them with fake pleasantness.
“Well, good afternoon!” she exclaimed brightly once everyone was settled.

Only a few people replied, Harry and Hermione were part of the handful.

The ministry worker tutted, “That simply won’t do. When I say ‘Good afternoon’ I expect you to reply: Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge. Now let’s try again. Good afternoon, class!”

“Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge,” Hermione and Harry said in fake chipper tones, greatly reminded of primary school.

“That wasn’t too difficult now was it?” she asked rhetorically, “Now. Wands away and quills out,” she chirped.

Most of the class did so mulishly. A DADA lesson without a wand was usually a boring one. As the students were getting their quills and parchment the stubby witch went into her handbag and pulled out a surprisingly short wand, proceeding to tap it against the blackboard making words appear.

*Defense Against the Dark Arts*

*A Return to Basic Principals*

“As I’ve understood your teaching in this subject has been rather lacking. Often disrupted and quite fractured what with all different the professors. Many who have not followed a Ministry approved curriculum. Therefore you are woefully unprepared for your O.W.L,” she frowned theatrically, faking sympathy.

“Never fear, I am here to rectify this travesty!” she chirped, “We will follow a carefully theoretical centered, Ministry approved, curriculum of defensive magic. Copy the following, please.”

Umbridge tapped the board again erasing the previous words and revealing:

*Course aims:*

1: Understanding the principals underlying defensive magic.

2: Learning to recognize situations in which defensive magic can legally be used.

3: Placing the use of defensive magic in context for practical use.

The students diligently copied the board. When the sound of scratching quills stopped Umbridge smiled.

“Has everyone got a copy of *Defensive Magical Theory* by Wilbert Slinkhard?”

The class murmured an affirmative where Hermione and Harry said a calm, “Yes, Ma’am.”

The pink clad witch squinted at the class and gave them a tight smile, “We will try this again. I expect a: Yes, Professor Umbridge or a No, Professor Umbridge. Now. Does everyone have a copy of *Defensive Magical Theory* by Wilbery Slinkhard?”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge,” they choired.

“Good. Turn to chapter 1 on page 5, ‘Basics for Beginners’. There’s no need to talk,” she giggled.

Hermione sighed and stared at the book, not bothering to turn the page as she had already read the pathetic excuse for a book, looking around the class with her head down. Harry tried to read it, but
couldn’t focus or read past the first paragraph.

Pavarti however had raised her hand. Seeing this Hermione also raised her hand so she wouldn’t be singled out. Umbridge looked over the witches, trying to ignore them hoping they would give up. 5 minutes later the ministry worker pursed her lips before calling on the Indian descended witch.

“Did you have a question about the chapter, dear?” she asked cheerfully.

“No, Ma’am I –”

“Well we are reading the first chapter, if you have any other queries please wait until the end of class,” she said flashing her teeth in a threatening manner.

Pavarti looked at the fat witch carefully, “I have a question about the course aims, Ma’am.”

“Your name?”

“Pavarti Patil, Ma’am.”

“Miss Patil, they’re written very clearly in English on the board,” she replied sickening sweet.

Pavarti glared at the slight, “I can read them just fine. I noticed however there was nothing about the practical portion of class.”

This caused the rest of the class to shift uncomfortably. Hermione refused to move, keeping her calm poise. Harry’s eyes glinted as he lifted his eyes from the page, no longer pretending to read.

“Using defensive spells?” she giggled, “I don’t see why you would need to use such spells in my classroom, Miss Patil. I assure you, you won’t be attacked in my classroom.”

“We’re not going to use spells!?” Ron protested.

“You will not speak out of turn Mister…?”

“Weasley.”

“Mister Weasley.”

“Miss Grangmer, you have a question?” Umbridge called, butchering her name.

“Apprentice Granger, and yes. There is a practical portion on the O.W.L. and I simply don’t feel comfortable enough going into such an important exam without having some practice. I’m perfectly adequate at reading theory, you could say it’s a hobby of mine, but I find it hard to perform a spell on the first time,” the last bit was a bit of a fib. Emotion based spells were often times difficult for her to cast, but with a bit of meditation she was able to cast them after a few hours’ worth of practice.

“If you study the theory enough you should be fine, dear,” The older witch brushed her off.

The curly haired witch put her hand back up in the air.

Umbridge glared at her, “Yes, dear?”

“Will you be giving after class tutoring for those of us who would like to practice under qualified supervision?” she asked in an innocent tone, knowing that complimenting the witch in front of the class and claiming that she was indeed qualified to teach and supervise them wouldn’t give her an out.
Umbridge pinched her lips together. The uppity mudblood was asking class and school appropriate questions pertaining to her class, so she couldn’t even call her out on straying from the subject. The young witch wasn’t even mentioning anything about past classes, professors, or claiming that she was unfit to teach. She had been hoping one of them would mention something about the Dark Lord or speak out of turn so she could punish one of them.

“Perhaps you should study harder, I don’t believe I have the time to offer such tutelage,” she simpered, as though she wanted to do so.

Lavender raised her hand next making Umbridge internally sigh in frustration.

“Yes, Miss…?”

“Lavender Brown, Ma’am,” she answered in as innocent a voice as she could muster.

“Yes, Miss Brown?”

“I don’t believe I’m comfortable without practicing under proper qualified supervision,” she said following Hermione’s lead, “Apprentice Lady Granger is our top student and has been every year since first year. Everyone knows she’s the best at understanding theory, but I believe I’ll need all the help I can get. With your guidance and tutelage, especially since you’re Ministry trained, I’m sure I could get an O,” she finished with a dazzling smile.

Dolores stared hard at the pureblood not saying anything as she thought about her answer, “I will see what I can do, Miss Brown. I am pleased that you have such faith in the Ministry. In the meantime everyone please return to reading the first chapter,” she stared at the students disdainfully daring another one to raise their hand.

This had not gone as she had planned. She would simply have to prod them harder. Potter was known to be extremely emotional, so it shouldn’t be too hard to goad him into making a foolish outburst. She just had to bide her time. She was here to punish and learn as much dirt as she could on the brats.

Everyone was happy when class ended and packed up as quickly as they could. Hermione took her time with a small smile as she packed up, giving Dolores an uneasy feeling. The mudblood was just as unconcerned and poised as Narcissa Malfoy. A witch everyone knew not to cross, especially since she was Narcissa Malfoy nee Black. A family who was well known to dabble in the dark arts, most of them smart enough not to get caught.

She knew better though, that brat was unfit for proper society and should be stripped of her magic.

‘Magic thieving mudblood...’ she hissed in her mind as she watched the curly haired witch leave her classroom confidently.

Hermione smiled predatorily as she walked down to the dungeons to meet her master. The impudent ministry worker would learn her place, and learn not to interfere with her education. It was simply unforgiveable. The fat witch would learn fear. She could play the game better than that toad and she intended to do so.
Severus sat grading the poor potions, although he was surprised at Longbottom and Goyle’s turn out. They were just a few minutes of simmering away from earning an Outstanding. The worst potion students he had the misfortune to teach, the bottom tier respectfully, and their potions came out better than the rest of their classmates, with the exception of Draco.

Hearing his classroom door creak open, having not heard a knock, he was pleased to see that it was his apprentice.

“Hermione,” he greeted with a smile.

“Master Snape,” she replied giving him a crooked grin, closing the door behind her as she continued with her even stride as she walked towards him.

“I have to say your idea of brightening the classroom had plenty or merit. While the majority of you year mates are still woefully stupid, I was surprised. Longbottom and Goyle made the second and third best potions in the class,” he said.

The petite witch’s eyes brightened, gold shining more than usual, “Good! I knew they could do it.”

“Indeed, at least one of us did,” he conceded.

“They took to the theory well last year. I let them study with me and they usually made the same mistakes,” she offered.

His face showed surprise at the admission.

“I have to say, thank you and I’m proud of you for your behavior in that class. You made changes to the classroom, didn’t antagonize or show favoritism, and you didn’t pick on Harry,” she said leaning over and giving him a quick kiss.

“Give me more of those and I shall endeavor to maintain this change,” he quipped.

The curly haired witch grinned before settling herself onto his lap feeling emboldened by her giddiness. Severus flicked his wand at the door, locking and silencing it, before putting his hands on her waist.

Hermione smiled at him, her eyes sparked with a warmth that was similar to the warmth she felt gathering in her nether regions. She ground her hips onto his pelvis as she leaned over and kissed him soundly on the lips.

The dark wizard firmly held his witch, kissing back and enjoying her ministrations. He felt the warmth of her quim and felt himself harden.

The witch mewled in delight and started pressing herself against him, grinding her hips more firmly into him.

Severus held back a groan letting his witch continue, easing his tongue into her mouth, Hermione moaned and returned the favor. The wizard then proceeded to suck on her tongue, moving his hands to her hips and helping her grind harder on his lap.

The petite witch moaned, breathing heavily through her nose. She was so close.

He released her tongue and moved so his mouth was next to her ear, “Cum for me, Pet,” he
murmured silkily.

The witch bit her lips to stifle her moan as she came in her knickers. His voice was a sinful delight, and she enjoyed the pet name, no pun intended; add in the firm grip on her hips and it was a sure thing. She leaned heavily on him, her forehead resting on his shoulder as she tried to catch her breath.

This was the most they had done so far, and it was… wonderful.

He kissed her softly on the neck. While knowing it was probably a heat of the moment thing he couldn’t find it in himself to feel guilty about any of it. He did feel a pleasant wet spot on his pants and knew he’d clean it up before they left the room.

Finally catching her breath she leaned back and gave him a small kiss with an easy smile. She waited until she was breathing more regularly and when she did she wiggled until she was off his lap. Surprisingly she wasn’t embarrassed, but extremely pleased and relaxed. Heaving what was a comforting breath she smiled at him again.

“That’s not what I came down here for, but it was extremely lovely all the time. Perhaps a repeat performance will be in our near future,” she grinned cheekily at him.

The dark wizard smirked at her, “When you wish it.”

“Care to give me a small lesson on more proficient ingredient preparation methods?” she asked.

He grinned at her, “Of course.”

“Afterwards I would love to tell you about what happened during my Defense class. Harry was thankfully silent. That witch however has another thing coming. She’s going to wish she never came here,” she said airily.

Severus grinned at her back as she sauntered to his demonstration table. He loved it when she was in the midst of retribution. She was utterly thorough and covered her tracks. Beauty, brains, and vicious. What more could he ask for?
Dumbledore watched the students carefully from his position at the Head table during dinner. He made sure his eyes didn’t stay too long on any one student and forced a small smile upon his face, as though he were just happy to see the students. Internally he was wracking his brain with all the new information Molly had laid into him. Harry had blood bonded right under his nose to that muggleborn.

‘It was probably her idea too,’ he grumbled.

The old wizard was upset that the witch had burrowed herself into the boy’s life making it near impossible for him to separate them should he feel the necessity. It also made it hard for him to justify sacrificing her to the boy. The only bright part was she was officially out of the running for the boy’s attentions, so he needn’t worry about that.

The elderly wizard was also upset since he had just gotten over the fact that Severus had made her his apprentice. Meaning the witch was important to two of his key players! He was wracking his brain on how to make her a key player in order to keep things in his favor. Either that or he was going to try to sow discord, but that was a bad plan considering he needed his people to stand together now more than ever. Perhaps during a less crucial moment since he needed his key players undistracted.

Until the curse took care of the Undersecretary posing as a professor he had to keep the water as calm as he could, so to speak. When he tried to ‘warn’ her about the curse she scoffed, but at least he had the memory to prove that he gave a token effort to warn her should the worst come to happen.

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Once dinner was over Hermione settled herself into a chair at an open table in the common room; Crookshanks was happy to see his mistress and weaved around her legs before laying at her feet. She decided to forego her perfect prim poise so she’d be able to work faster, however she still managed to look properly poised for her status. She had found Fred and George’s flyer earlier and wanted to hex them sideways. However she managed calm herself and decided to play it by ear to see what the prefects would do before she felt she had to step in.

Harry had run up to his dorm to take a shower and change before he did his homework. Normally he would put it off until the last minute, but he didn’t feel like fighting over the shower or talk to two of his dorm mates. Specifically Ron and Seamus. Both were infuriating and the less he had to talk to them the better.

Neville decided to sit next to Hermione, getting at least his potions homework done.

They both worked in companionable silence, Neville asking for clarification here and there.

The messy black haired wizard finally made his reappearance, his hair still wet, and sat down next to his sister wearing plaid flannel pajama bottoms and a black t-shirt to go with it. They looked nice and fit comfortably, much like his relaxed pose. Hermione mentally nodded with approval. Mum and dad had bought Harry a whole new wardrobe so he would look and feel good.

She noticed peripherally that he garnered a few appreciative looks from other Gryffindors. Mostly from the girls, but she noticed a few boys give him a double take, and was please for her brother.
“What are you working on, Hermione?” he asked as he too started to work on his potions homework.

“Arithmancy. We were assigned homework today due Thursday, but she also wrote our next few homework assignments on the board. The more I get done now the more free time I have to work on my apprenticeship,” she answered.

“Time management,” Harry confirmed, learning the importance of it from their mum. The curly haired witch looked at him and beamed, glad he understood.

“Well aside from this potions paper, we have to keep a month long dream journal for divination, that I am not looking forward to,” he informed her.

Hermione made a face, “I don’t even have a regular journal, let alone a dream journal,” she said conversationally.

“It’s going to be hard since we don’t have dreams every night,” Neville mumbled, still writing.

“I would tell you to drop it, but it’s too late now –” the witch was cut off by the sound of Ron’s loud laughing.

Looking over to see what had the redheaded wizard had found so funny, Hermione froze seeing little firsties fainting and falling in chairs, one hit their head falling out of the chair rather hard. A few of the other room’s occupants were laughing too, but none as loud as Ron.

The hazel eyed witch stood up imperiously and walked over to the twins who were writing on a chart.

“Fred, George,” her voice came out impassively.

The twins looked up confused before seeing the hard look in the witch’s eyes.

“What can we do for you, Apprentice Granger?” Fred asked with a smile.

“Have we mentioned how lovely you look in your new robes?” the follow up compliment came from George.

“No you haven’t, but thank you,” she replied before moving on, “I noticed your fliers earlier and I had hoped someone, she glared at Ron and Romilda, “would at least bring it up with you. I understand you’re paying students to be test subjects, something that also happens in the muggle world, but I feel I must bring up how unsafe this is,” she answered firmly.

“Don’t worry your pretty head, Hermione,” George said.

“We try everything on ourselves first. We just need to see how it affects others, not just ourselves,” his twin finished.

“I understand, and that’s all well in good but –”

“We’re paying them ‘Mione. So they know what they’re getting into,” the first one said hoping to brush off her concerns.

At that moment Lee was putting purple sweets into their mouths, waking the fainted students. Some looked confused as to what happened, proving her point.
She fixed a heavy stare on him making him squirm, “I understand, but I can’t allow you to test on the firsties.”

One of them was going to butt in but she kept talking, “I know you’re paying them, and I can’t stop you from testing since I know you’ll just find another way to do it, but not the firsties. Every other year is fine, but no testing on the first years,” she finished sounding eerily similar to Snape with and underlying growl.

One them was tempted to ask ‘Or what?’, but she sounded so much like Snape in that moment they didn’t dare. In that moment she was like an angry lion and Snape combined, namely: scary.

“Come off it, Hermione! They can test their candy on whoever will take their gold,” Ron huffed with his arms crossed.

“No, Weasley, they cannot,” she said coldly, “Should you continue to neglect your duties I shall inform Professor McGonagall that you allowed first years to place themselves in potential harm’s way. As I’m sure you didn’t read the prefect handbook, you should know that you are not just in charge of handing out punishments for breaking school rules, but helping your fellow students and being a role model. As such you are obligated to help lead the younger years and give them proper guidance, helping them succeed instead of fail, and keeping them out of harm’s way.”

Ron’s ears went red and he went to retort, but the witch continued with a hard edge in her voice, “Meaning Prefect Weasley,” she hissed, “that you are supposed to help them so they don’t get lost in the castle, provide them with homework help should they ask, and give them good advice that will help them in their educational career here at Hogwarts.”

The wizard sneered at the older witch.

“You’re just mad you didn’t make prefect on top of your apprenticeship!” he snarled.

Hermione curled her lip at him in disgust, “For your information you cannot be an apprentice and a prefect at the same time. My position is higher than that of a prefect, and even Head Girl. Besides,” she paused, “Professor McGonagall already informed me I was her first choice but had to change it since I’m not allowed to hold be a prefect while an apprentice.”

Romilda watched from her seat on a chair across the room. She knew she wasn’t Hermione Granger and was surprised when the other witch didn’t get prefect, now she knew why. She shrugged off the fact that she was second choice since she was at least a top contender. Romilda watched as the other witch turned on her heel after looking down her nose at Weasley as though she’d seen something repulsive.

Hermione took her place back at the table and started working furiously on the arithmancy equations in front of her. Neville and Harry let her be knowing how angry she’d be after the confrontation with Ron. Neville was amazed at how fast Hermione was working compared to earlier. Harry however was impressed and looked back at his own work with an internal sigh and got back to work.

‘At least she doesn’t room with him. She’d probably be in Azkaban already for killing him.’

The next day was another full schedule, double charms, double transfiguration, and care of magical creatures.
All the professors reiterated about the OWLs, reminding them that it was an exam encompassing not just this year, but the previous 4 as well. Flitwick had stressed about how the exams would follow them and influence their futures. Those who had barely passed felt dread settle in and knew they would either be studying harder or asking for help, or both.

McGonagall had sternly reminded them that it wasn’t just about studying but also about application and practice. Some students had paled knowing they would have to relearn how to perform certain spells and transfigurations they had given up on previously. Neville had made a sad little disbelieving noise while Goyle whimpered quietly.

The cat animagus pinned the Slytherin with a look while she said, “That includes you as well, Mister Longbottom,” departing the message to both boys.

She proceeded to teach them the vanishing spell, which she announced was one of the hardest spells that would be on the exam. Most of the class found she was telling them nothing but the truth as they struggled to perform it.

Hermione had gotten it down quickly, earning 10 points for Gryffindor and no homework.

Ron had growled under his breath that their Head of House was favoring the witch, not giving her homework only because of her stupid apprenticeship. It didn’t matter that she cast the spell correctly, perfectly even not long after the lesson began, just that she had been excluded from more hard work. He wouldn’t even be able to pilfer her paper to copy since there would be no original!

Hermione had spent her lunch hour eating and reading ahead in the Great Hall. Harry decided to spend time in the library to work more on his potions homework before he moved on to transfiguration. Luna had skipped over and joined the witch, sitting on her left side to enjoy the company of her friend.

The curly haired witch was amused as the younger witch spooned pudding into her mouth after propping her potions book on a small bookstand she had carried in her bag.

“Where did you get that, Luna?” she asked.

“At Florish and Blotts."

“The bookstand?” Hermione replied confused, knowing she would have seen one.

“Oh! No,” Luna said turning to look at the other witch, “Daddy transfigured one for me when I told him I was in Ravenclaw. The nargles took it and hid it away a few days later.”

“You got it back last year, didn’t you?” The potions apprentice asked concernedly.

“Oh yes. Thimi managed to find it and Crookshanks protected it,” she answered quietly with her head tilted to the side.

Hermione smiled, “Good. Would you mind letting me see it so I can cast a spell on it. Nothing bad, just an anti-theft spell so the nargles won’t be able to touch it,” she added knowing the girl tried not to believe that people would steal. If blaming magical creatures helped her, she wouldn’t take them away. Even if said creatures existed she was sure they wouldn’t be found in Ravenclaw Tower.

Luna smiled thankfully and moved her book.

“Antifurta pernamsus.”
“Oh I’ve never heard of that one,” the sandy blond said.

“I tweaked it a bit,” Hermione admitted with a bashful smile.

“You would make a great Spells Mistress,” she placed her book back on the stand, “if you weren’t so good with… well you know, and I don’t think you want other people to know since you’re studying potions.”

Hermione raised her eyebrows knowing what the little blond was saying. She had a keen sight to see that what others could not and was glad that the little witch was a gentle spirit. After a moment though she nodded.

“Do you know of a better way to hold a sophorus bean? Daddy has a few and they’re quite hard. I’m sure cutting them would just make them slip. He tried to make something that would hold it tightly, but the juice fell through and the shell popped up and hit him in the forehead. I figured asking a potions apprentice would be the best person to ask.”

The petite witch smiled, “Crush it with the flat side of the knife.”

Luna nodded sagely, “Of course. It can’t hit anyone in the forehead if it can’t slip anywhere.”

“You get more juice out of it too,” Hermione said.

Luna grinned at her first Hogwarts friend.

Care of Magical Creatures had gone pretty well, but boring. Malfoy had needled Ron without sniping at Hermione or Harry, even if some of what was said grated on Harry’s nerves.

The green eyed wizard missed his friend, missed him teaching, and wanted the sharp toned Grubbly-Plank gone. The wizard had taken extra care not take out his anger on the bowtruckle knowing that he would be ashamed to look at Hagrid if he hurt one of his precious beasties. Big or small, the beasties were beasties and Hagrid loved them.

Harry had tried to ask the professor where his friend was only to be told to mind his business. Hermione stood stoically by her brother’s side, silently letting the woman know she didn’t like the way she had spoken to them.

The woman was knowledgeable, but lacked the kindness that was almost intimately mutual with the position. Rumor had it that Kettleburn loved the creatures, even though they took some of him with them, and was a joyous professor. Hagrid seemed to be the same. Grubbly-Plank however, not so much.

Her lesson plans were year appropriate, OWL related, her behavior however was lacking. She was as cold to the creatures as she was to the students, which was not as beneficial as one may think. Socializing creatures was just as important as the information to properly care for them. To carefully handle a creature as a student, one needed the creatures to be pre-handled and shown affection so they wouldn’t be as weary of the students, which could lead to injuries.

The affection shown by the professors to the creatures often lead to more respect and affection from another person. Much like one would lovingly pet a dog, another person would then be more inclined to pet the dog as well.
Hermione silently admitted that Hagrid was the better professor, just he needed to pick more year appropriate creatures. If they worked together as co-professors it would probably be a universally well liked class.

Herbology had gone much the same as Charms and Transfiguration though, stressing OWLs. They were all given an essay for homework and smelled like dragon dung fertilizer. It was a weary bunch of Gryffindors that trudged up the stairs for a quick shower. Even weary, Hermione still managed to walk with her head held high in a prim manner, Harry walked slightly behind her with a more Devil May Care attitude. He held the air of subtle confidence that Hermione had, but was less stiff. Thankfully it wasn’t a cocky swagger, he just looked more relaxed. He felt better too.

He realized earlier in Care of Magical Creatures that he wasn’t Hermione, and holding the same position left him tired. Prim suited Hermione, it was like a sheer veil, practically natural on her, but not Harry. His emotional frustration, even with his mental teachings, showed. He noticed in public when Hermione disapproved, whomever she was talking to or upset with, she would either be frosty with clipped tones or heated like an angry fire.

When she was taking “the high road” she became frosty. Getting down to it and taking care of things herself though, that’s when her heat blazed. Often the cold shoulder worked better than not, especially with those who were of “authority” positions. Much like their Head of House behaved he noticed. Witches were scary.

Going down to dinner, feeling much better after a hot shower, they took their seats. As Harry was piling his plate however an irate Ron was standing intimidatingly over a familiar blond and shouting.

“You can’t sit here!” he spat, “Nobody wants you here! Go back and sit with the Claws!”

Luna however looked up at him calmly, as though seeing through him which made him angrier.

“Can’t you hear me, Loony!?” he yelled.

Harry felt a burning anger and knew it didn’t belong to him, before he knew it Hermione was walking to the pair with purpose.

“I can hear you, Ronald Weasley,” the dreamy blond said.

“THEN WHY AREN’T YOU MOVING!?” he clenched his fists to his side as his ears turned red, “I SHOULD GIVE YOU DETENTION FOR THIS!”

Students turned and looked, Albus Dumbledore sat there watching and not doing anything about it. McGonagall had not yet come to dinner, dealing with an errant student. Umbridge had not seen fit to leave her office just yet.

“Because Prefect Weasley,” her tone making it sound like an insult again, “it is not against school rules to sit at other tables aside from the Opening and Leaving feast. She is my friend and I want her sitting with me,” Hermione said with her arms crossed over her chest. Her tone was angry with an underlying warning hidden in it.

“You would know,” Ron growled, the red started to branch out to his face.

“Yes, as you should know,” she replied in clipped tones walking closer and standing beside her dreamy friend.
“Come on, Luna, let’s go eat. I’m sure they’ll be pudding later. I think we can try it with some sort of sweet bread,” Hermione appealed after a slow blink at the redheaded wizard, dismissing him.

The next few days went by as they settled into a routine. Severus and Hermione would take an hour before lunch to at least go over NEWT level material. He even had her practicing her ingredient preparations, forcing her to make them as perfect as possible. He would use those he considered barely passable for his first years, and those that were better he would store so they could be used at a later time.

“Wouldn’t the ingredients be better if they were freshly prepared?” she asked curiously, “Does it make a difference?”

Severus looked at her, “Good question. It’s not so much as it being freshly prepared that helps improve the quality, but it makes it easier to measure out. I often have some students take the eyes out of beetles for the stores. It’s an inane task, but helps in the classroom. Less of a chance of a student also using part of an antenna and bollocksing up their potion.”

“Which is part of ingredient prep,” Hermione concluded, “Instead of dealing with the whole, we just deal with the parts that we need.”

“The inane tasks that I have them do are part of what we have to do after harvesting, should we decide to harvest ourselves.”

Hermione looked at him in question.

“We get so many beetles because they’re found around Hogwarts and they can be used. I don’t actually go out looking for them,” he explained.

Hermione grinned at her master. While he often saw the glass as half empty, Severus was also an opportunist it seemed.

Dolores Umbridge was quite upset. While it had been a few days, she had been extremely condescending in her class, hoping someone would speak out of turn. You-Know-Who’s return had been kept quiet, even though it was (barely) acknowledged thanks to Pettigrew’s trial. It was her goal to make sure Potter, Dumbledore, Diggory, and that Granger chit, were not stirring up trouble or inciting panic. Inciting panic by making that knowledge extremely public.

They had managed to have the Prophet make small columns about Potter’s scar being unusual and possibly causing hallucinations. They had worded everything as speculation that was highly probable so they wouldn’t be in the position to be sued for defamation of character. Every piece was ended in a way that managed to say it was possible, and with it being unprecedented they were unsure.

They also managed to drag Dumbledore through the mud a bit by mentioning as Potter’s magical guardian he should have brought the boy to St. Mungos to be examined. The boy was never looked at, as he should have been taken to Spell Damage as soon as possible. While he was defacto guardian for all muggleborns and some orphans, he was obviously unfit for the position. Possible endangerment of the wizarding youth lost him the Chief Warlock position. Loss of that position left the rest of the ICW wary, if he was unfit to head Britain, how was he fit to be Supreme Mugwump?
Naturally it was unwise to head both to begin with, but he managed. It came to bite him back in the ass as it caused a domino effect. It was merely a happy accident for the Ministry.

However Potter was quiet, Dumbledore for the most part just smiled at the students if he wasn’t in his office doing paperwork, Diggory was Head Boy and spent most of his time helping the younger students like a good pureblood. Granger however… that little uppity mudblood was simply spitting in her face! She praised the Ministry in her class when she was allowed to speak, she asked every few days about practical tutoring, and she was an Apprentice! She was just a step below Professors in terms of authority! NO mudblood should be allowed to have that much power, let alone above purebloods.

It bothered her more that purebloods had nothing bad to say about her! Just earlier that year in Teen Witch Weekly there were quotes from students claiming how much of a miscreant she was! Now they had nothing bad to say. Parkinson was the only one who mentioned something, but it was nothing worthwhile and ended up with her complimenting the mudblood.

“Her hair used to be such a bushy rat’s nest, but she’s learned to take care of it now.”

The Minister was scared that Dumbledore wanted his job despite losing two of his other positions. It would be easy to convince the masses to flock to him and save them from this Dark Lord as he had done before. To discredit him by claiming he was trying to scare the people instead of helping them would have to work out well. They had managed to relieve him of his Chief Warlock position when he started talking about parlaying with the Giants. The ICW had not been involved last war and they were not inclined to do so should another happen.

She had no problem waiting, but giving herself extra work was a problem she was annoyed with. Reading and correcting homework was such a bother. Seven years’ worth had her grinding her teeth. Usually she made someone else do it, but she couldn’t here, it was extremely frustrating. The sooner she found someone screwing up the sooner she could initiate step two of her plan!

The day of tryouts Hermione went to watch and give her brother, and the team, moral support. She even managed to convince Ginny to tryout.

“All right you lot!” Angelina shouted, “Today we’re holding quidditch tryouts! Everyone will be trying out for a position, even if they’re already on the team!”

A few members of the team made faces at that.

“I want the best team we can have!”

Hermione watched dispassionately before she went down to the field.

Everyone there looked at Hermione in surprise, her distaste of flying was legendary.

“Apprentice Granger, Are you trying out for the team?” Angelina asked, her brows furrowed extremely confused at the other witch’s sudden appearance from the stands.

“No, but I thought I could help you out a little so you don’t strain your voice or pop a blood vessel doing so,” she replied.

Angelina frowned in slight distaste, but admitted she could feel her throat scratching up already. It wasn’t like the petite witch was judging her or said anything negative.
“What would you suggest?” she huffed instead.

Ron growled as his face turned red further in the back with the other hopeful keepers.

“A sonorus.”

Angelina blinked at the other witch and gave her a lopsided grin, “You are brilliant, Granger. Do you know how?”

The curly haired witch nodded and moved closer, “Ready?”

“Yeah.”

“Sonorus.”

“All right you lot, Chasers first,” the witch said, her voice loud enough to be heard but not hurt anyone’s ears. Her throat didn’t hurt anymore either.

Harry was still seeker, the twins were still beaters, and Alicia, Angelina, and Katie, were still chasers.

Tryouts for keepers was going better than they thought it would. There were a few who were neck and neck. Ron and some third year were the best so far. McLaggen had complained the whole time in the tower that he wasn’t going to be there to show them what real keeping was because he had detention with Snape. Apparently the wizard threw a few newt eyes into a Slytherin’s potion that caused it to bubble over and burn the other wizard’s hands as he tried to move it off the fire to stop the excessive bubbling.

In the end Ron made keeper.

“Thanks for trying out guys –”

“Angelina?”

Instead of talking the witch looked over at the hazel eyed witch. The last time she spoke it was useful, but she was still under the sonarus charm.

“Have you thought it might be a good idea to have a few reserves?”

Angelina grinned.

“Ginny Weasley, Lily Moon, Demelza Robins, stay.” She said happily before nodding to Hermione and pointing to her throat.

“Quietus,” the witch responded, canceling the charm.

“Weasley, Moon, Robins, you’re reserves,” Angelina said writing on her clipboard.

“Weasley you’re reserve for seeker and chaser. Moon, chaser and beater. We’ll have you practice more with the twins so you can synch up with them. Robins, chaser. I’ll let you know when practice is,” she smirked at the new team members.

Turning around the witch looked at the apprentice, “Thanks for the idea. If I didn’t know how uninterested you were in quidditch I’d ask you to join the team, even as an honorary member since
you don’t like to fly,” she grinned at the shorter witch.

Hermione blushed, “Thank you. I just know how important quidditch is to Harry, and I know important it is to Gryffindor to win the Cup.”

“You’re alright, Granger. Whenever we have practice and you see something, don’t be afraid to speak up,” Angelina finished with a grin.

The following day was the first weekend and Hermione left Harry to his quidditch practice while she went down to the dungeons to meet with Severus. Half way down however she saw Luna walking around barefoot again and stopped.

“Luna?”

The little blond looked up and smiled, “Good morning, Hermione.”

“Good morning. Luna, are your shoes missing again?” she asked calmly.

Luna looked down and wriggled her toes before looking up at her curly haired friend.

“Actually yes. I had just taken my morning shower with my clothes laid out, and when I got back none of them were there,” the younger witch answered serenely, “The nargles must have taken them since no one else was in the room when I got back.”

Hermione took a deep calming breath. Not even a whole week into the first term…

“Thimi, I would like you to get Luna’s missing belongings and place them in her trunk please. I would also like you to get my fuzzy slippers. The slippers first please,” she murmured so the elf would hear her.

With a light brush against her hand the witch knew the house-elf heard her. Hermione finished walking down the stairs and stopped in front of Luna. She felt a pair of slippers being pressed into her hand and grabbed them.

“Here. These are my slippers. They’re very warm, and I know the castle stone must be so cold. They’ll warm your toes right up!” Hermione handed them over with a grin.

“I couldn’t possibly! What about your toes? Won’t they get cold tonight?” Luna replied with furrowed brows.

“Don’t worry. If you’re that concerned about my toes you can give them back after dinner. I’m going to spend most of the day with Master Snape,” she smiled at her young friend.

“I was going to do some self-study in the library,” the silver eyed witch admitted.

Hermione bit her lip as she thought about something furiously. Unbeknownst to her, her eyes were shifting in color. The gold and green were becoming more prominent the harder she focused. It was obvious when she came to her conclusion as the colors dimmed.

“Why don’t you come with me? You may be able to learn a bit more about potions than what the Hogwarts’ library may have,” Hermione suggested instead.

“Are you sure you want to spend time with me? Wouldn’t I be intruding on time meant for you and
Master Snape?”

The petite witch’s face twisted a bit.

“Luna, I was serious. I’m your friend. I want to spend time with you, not just at meal times. Come on,” she finished with a light head nod in the direction of the dungeons.

The little blond grinned and nodded, she bend down to put on the oatmeal colored fuzzy slippers. She was surprised that they were extremely soft inside despite the obvious used appearance. They fit snugly, the backs covered half of her heels.

After wiggling her feet with a smile, Luna turned and started skipping towards the dungeons with Hermione following her, a smile on her face.

Severus was setting up his private lab for his apprentice. He was going to have her brew a NEWT level potion today and gathered all of the ingredients for her. The book he had propped up was the standard text, which she knew by now to alter as her instincts told her. Her affinity laid in wards and ley lines, but she was started to gain an intuition for potions with constant lessons and exposure.

Hermione smiled as she led the younger witch past the classroom and knocked on a door before opening it.

“Master Snape, I hope you don’t mind, but I brought one of my friends,” she said walking in.

Luna walked in behind her, although it looked more like the young witch was floating.

Thankfully Severus looked up when his apprentice knocked and watched her enter. At her words he immediately made a small scowl before seeing the young witch. Seeing her bright blond hair he allowed his face to reform its previous passive expression.

“Miss Lovegood,” he greeted and nodded in her direction.

“Good morning, Master Snape. I hope you don’t mind me being here, Hermione insisted,” Luna remarked airily.

“Yes, my apprentice does have that way about her,” he replied. “Apprentice, today you will be brewing Elixir to Induce Happiness. Should it be good enough we will be sending it to St. Mungos. Care to guess why?”

Hermione confidently walked into the room, pulling out a stool for Luna to sit on the opposite side of the table, as she made her way to the cauldron.

“In small doses it can help with depression. While a full dose simply induces happiness that’s well, exuberant, partial doses can make a person relatively happy enough to function,” Hermione answered, “Because of that it has the possibility to be abused by people who suffer from depression, but the proper dosage admitted by a healer helps people manage their depression enough to function, much like antidepressants used by muggles.”

Severus nodded, “Good. You’ve been doing the extra reading and making connections between potions and muggle medicines.”

Hermione smiled at the praised for what it was.
“As you can see, before you is the standard book with the standard recipe,” he finished with a raised eyebrow that was a signature of Snape.

“I’m to make the proper changes to improve the formula,” she stated in understanding.

“Oh goodie,” Luna said clapping lightly with a large smile.

Hermione grinned at her friend while Severus looked at her with a ‘Hn’, his expression that of mildly impressed.

Brewing with Severus and Luna had Hermione smiling the whole time, even as she focused on her cauldron studiously. When she added the sprig of peppermint she took 3 leaves from another sprig. She stirred anticlockwise and added one leaf each turn, the fourth turn was alone. She let it simmer for 45 second exactly as she crushed 3 of the 7 sophorus beans. She put in 4 whole beans with the juice from the other 3. She let the potion shimmer as she squeezed the innards partially out of the shivelfig before she shook it into the cauldron. Again she let the potion shimmer before putting in the wormwood that she deftly removed from the sprig.

Once she was done and removed the cauldron from the fire the elixir was a perfect sunshine yellow with a brilliant rainbow.

Severus waited until the rainbow disbursed and looked at it, taking a clean stirring rod and turning it.

“The consistency is smoother.” He waved his hand over the cauldron to waft the smell, “the smell is correct and also induces calmness,” he looked at her impressed, “and there is enough peppermint to counteract the common side effects. Well done, Apprentice.”

“Why did you only juice 3 of the 7 beans?” Luna asked curiously.

Severus allowed a quirk of his lips, “It is a good question apprentice. Explain your thought process.”

Hermione blushed as she grinned at her friend, “The beans help add the consistency instead of making it entirely water like, the shells and the shrivelfig give it its syrup like consistency. The potion needs the juice of 7, but only 4 shells, and removing the other 3 shells it removes the cloying part of the syrup like property making it smoother to take.”

Severus nodded, “And the wormwood?”

“The main body has no real purpose, but the common witch and wizard struggle removing the leaves in one go, and measuring the plucked leaves is too…” she thought of a word, “elaborate, considering the texture of the plant. It’s easier to grab a sprig, so to speak, as it has just the right amount. Estimating what would be a proper amount leaves an expansive margined for a mistake and would essentially ruin the potion.”

“Good.”

“How do you do that?”

Severus and Hermione looked at the sandy blond.

“Do what?” Hermione asked.

“When you took the wormwood off the base, it just slid off,” she clarified.
“Oh. I pinch the bottom of the sprig and hold it firmly, then with my other hand I grip it and slide my hand up so it takes everything up with it.”

“Not everyone can strip a sprig cleanly. The proper pressure and grip cannot be… explained properly in a book. It’s very easy for a few sprigs to have stubborn… branches, which would startle an ordinary witch or wizard, causing abrupt motions that may carelessly cause bits of the ingredient to fall into the cauldron at the wrong time,” Severus explained.

Luna tilted her head and nodded.

“Are potion instincts and ley lines similar for you?” she asked.

Hermione froze for a moment before relaxing. She figured the other witch could see more things that others did not. Her small interaction last year with Luna’s mention of the Thimi was a fine example. Her start of S.P.E.W. was wide spread, her care of Thimi was not.

Taking a small breath she answered, “No. The ley lines… they speak to me. When I’m… interacting with them it’s like they’re hugging me and welcoming me. Then they help guide me with what I want or need to do. It’s very… intimate. With potions it’s like… a little tickle in my head.”

Luna nodded, as though agreeing with the weather.

“We are done with today’s lesson, Apprentice. You may clean up your station and bottle your potion,” Severus intoned.

“Yes, Master.”

The dark wizard looked at the light witch. Her skin was pale, her eyes were silver, even her sandy hair was a bright blond with ash brown roots.

“Miss Lovegood, should you end up in another one of our lessons I will be more prepared and set aside something for you to do unless you would like to just observe.”

Luna grinned at the potions master, “I would love that Master Snape. Watching Hermione work is enlightening, but I know not all lessons are just brewing. I would like to help or do something during those lessons.”

“Even if I were to have you relabel the potions store?”

The blond tilted her head as though listening to something in the distance, “Yes.”

Severus nodded at her, “Very well. As long as you remain unobtrusive you may join us during your free time.”

Normally he would push other people away and would rather secrete Hermione away, but this was his chance to further help the young witch.

She was now Hermione’s friend and he would endeavor not to push her away. He noticed her wearing what were obviously Hermione’s slippers and felt a cold anger settle inside him. At least with the marauders he fought back, Miss Lovegood took it in stride. If there was one student in the whole castle he wanted to help protect that wasn’t a Slytherin (excluding Potter), it was Miss Lovegood.
Chapter 80

The following days up to Hermione’s birthday were pleasant, nothing exciting had happened. Hermione had practically wrapped Luna in cloth, keeping her close as possible when she could. Luna was ecstatic. The young blonde was a delight to have and she helped Neville and Goyle with their homework. They had decided to keep up with the practice that they had started the following year, and were glad for it.

While Neville had the opportunity to ask her questions in the common room, Goyle did not. He even now referred to her as ‘Apprentice Granger’. The young Slytherin was more than glad that he was able to make his final decision concerning the witch without stress. When his father came home one day and asked about Granger, he was told that she was an ‘alright sort’ and was encouraged to offer her the same services that they offered the Malfoys. When Gregory had admitted that he studied with her last year while she was dating Krum, his father smiled and congratulated him before suggesting he do more than study with the witch such as being friends and offering her the Goyle protection they were well known for.

Goyle had told Hermione and the petite witch was just happy that Goyle decided he wanted to keep being study buddies with her. She was more than happy to help the Slytherin that reminded her so much of Neville. Luna even commented that she might see him more than previously. The petite witch took the comment as it came without overthinking it. Her young friend could see more than most, and if she said that she’d interact with him more, it had to be for a reason and as it wasn’t a warning she would just let things happen as they would.

Harry would occasionally join them, becoming closer friends with Neville, and even extending a small olive branch to Goyle. Luna beamed the whole time after watching her friend Harry Potter make more friends.

Severus took it all in stride, internally pleased. Goyle and Longbottom were now in the top 5 in his OWL class, which meant less melting cauldrons and less explosions. Granted it had been less than a month into term, but as he had pushed them as he always did, it was promising.

Potter wasn’t coasting by now, the effort was noticeable. Lovegood had always been one of his top students, but he was pleased that her potions had improved in quality even though she had somehow always managed just above textbook perfect. He believed it was her… creativity.

Prefect Weasley was a sour spot and he made it a point to belittle and criticize all his work. It wasn’t hard when he was now barely a step above Crabbe. Finnegan was, as always, fucking something up with his flames that affected the temperature of his potion. The boy’s magic was so volatile he often considered telling Minerva to send him to St Mungos for a check-up. The rest of his students were as they had usually been.

Albus had not interacted with the students unless they were sent to his office. With Umbridge watching him carefully he had to make sure he didn’t interact with the students any more than was necessary. He wasn’t particularly as hands on with the students when he was teaching while she was student and worked to maintain the image she remembered. Interacting with Harry the way he had was important for the war, he had to keep an eye on his queen after all. Severus was a bishop, Minerva was a rook, and Granger had gone from pawn to knight. At least that was how he was classing her as it looked like she would go straight, but then she’d make an odd turn.

He supposed it was for the best however as it gave him an excuse to avoid Harry. Voldemort had been restored and the horcrux in his scar might turn Harry into a second vessel. He couldn’t afford
Tom using legilimency on him through the boy. It was farfetched, but he wasn’t an expert on horcruxes. All the information on them were obscure, even when he did dabble in the Arts he had never considered sacrificing any part of himself that went further than blood.

Umbridge smiled in a threatening manner while belittling all the students, quickly becoming everyone’s least favorite professor. It was originally a tough call, especially with Snape, but soon she beat him by a mile. Snape at least was honest and snapped at them for their work and being less than perfect. He treated them as though they should be *more* mature for their age, and while they disliked it they were now thankful for it especially after dealing with the fat witch. Granted this year he was more tolerable, but still sniped as he prowled down the aisles of his classroom.

Hermione woke up and went about her morning routine before meeting with Harry and walking down to the Great Hall. Hermione acknowledged it was her birthday, but as no one but her parents ever got her anything she never made a fuss. Last year Harry got her sugar quills, which she was pleased with. Ron of course forgot and got her nothing, so the red head had settled for a ‘Happy Birthday’ and a lackadaisical shrug with a smile. The petite witch was unimpressed and let it slide. As she was eating she was pleased when Luna skipped towards her and sat on her other side.

“Good morning, Hermione,” she said dreamily.

The blonde witch was wearing her dirigible plum earrings and her butterbeer cork bottle necklace.

“Good morning, Luna,” Hermione replied with a smile, “Do you want some oatmeal with berries today?” she asked calmly.

Luna beamed, “Yes, thank you! How did you know?” she asked.

“You usually want oatmeal and berries for breakfast after you’ve had soup for dinner,” the curly haired replied easily.

Luna’s eyes twinkled, her friend remembered something about her! Her friend took the time to go out of her way to learn some of her likes!

The petite witch made a bowl of said oatmeal with strawberries and blueberries, adding a dash of sugar on for her friend.

“Thank you,” Luna grinned, “But shouldn’t I have done that for you? It’s your birthday after all.”

Hermione grinned at the other witch. Her friend somehow found out when her birthday was and remembered. “That’s alright. Thank you for remembering.”

Luna leaned over and gave Hermione a chaste kiss before snuggling into her side.

“Happy birthday, Hermione. A birthday kiss for the birthday girl. I figured you would like it better than birthday spankings.”

The older witch blushed lightly but knew it was a friendly kiss that was nothing more than what she said it was. That and she much preferred that than being spanked by the sandy blonde. Chances were her body would react in an extremely embarrassing manner.

“Oh! Before I forget, I made something for you!” Luna exclaimed before digging into her robe
She pulled out a pair of earrings and handed them to Hermione with a smile. A gentle smile bloomed on the other witch’s face as she took them and cradled them in her hand while she looked at them carefully.

They were very lovely. They were small dangle earrings with moss green stones wrapped in gold wire. The stones were smooth and round and the gold wire was wrapped in a spiral around it. It started from the bottom, coiled tightly pressed flat against the bottom of the stones and then wrapped around the stones twice, finishing with tight coils going up about a centimeter before connecting to the dangle parts that would go through her ears.

“They’re beautiful,” she said softly, staring at them a bit longer before putting them in her ears.

“They’re serpentine. I chose them to help you meditate and develop a better relationship with nature. If you’re interested in looking for your animagus form, they should help you with that too,” Luna explained airily, “I charmed the backs of the earring to not stab you, sometimes they can dig into your skin and cause pain. I’m very proficient at it so they should last for a long time, perhaps a decade or three. They should be very comfortable. I also cast that spell that you used on my bookstand on them!”

Hermione grinned and hugged the blonde tightly, “Thank you, I love them.”

Luna grinned, her eyes twinkled more. Luna then looked up as a few owls came in, 3 landing in front of Hermione and 1 landing in front of her.

“Oh goody, Daddy sent something,” Luna announced taking the small package from the large eagle owl and feeding it some bacon from the plate to the left of her.

Hermione recognized 2 of the 3 owls, Hedwig and Martin, the third she used her wand to take from the owl and cast a series of detection spells on the package. Once it was clear she took the packages from the other owls and gave them all bacon. As she was opening the package from Harry the owl that was in front of Luna hopped over to her and held out his leg. Attached was a very small package.

The petite witch blinked quickly before taking the package from the owl and also gave him a treat.

She looked over at Luna, as she knew it must have come from her father. The blonde witch however just beamed and watched excitedly.

Opening the small package was another set of earrings with the same stones as the earrings Luna gave her. She smiled at them and looked at them curiously. They were simple studs, the stones small and round like beads.

“Tell your dad thanks for me,” Hermione said.

Luna nodded, “Well? Aren’t you going to put them on?” she pale witch was clearly excited.

“I only have one set of earring holes,” Hermione replied, as though that answered everything.

“Oh psh,” Luna responded in a no nonsense manner. She took Hermione’s hair and lifted the curls away from her ears. With a wave of her wand the hair was held away from her face, leaving her ears open. She quickly shot spells at the top of her friend’s ears. Hermione bit the inside of her lip as her finger twitched, resisting the knee jerk reaction that was to hold her wand and attack. With another quick wave they were healed, but not closed. Luna then took the earrings and put them in for her
friend who was looking at her shocked. She had not planned to have her cartilages pierced, especially not in the Great Hall at breakfast.

Luna however ignored the incredulous look and stood up, and moved to stand behind the petite witch. She took the mass of managed curls and proceeded to style her friend’s hair. The younger witch was quick about it, two large twist braids framed her head like a halo, resting above her ears before being tied in the back with a green ribbon Luna conjured. It was simple and cute, displaying her ears and keeping her hair out of her face.

“There,” Luna said, her tone clearly pleased with her work.

With a large sigh Hermione decided to just accept it. Luna was her friend, and at this point she knew she was Luna’s best friend and made the decision to return the status. Best friends were often given leeway involving a lot of things.

“Luna I was not aware that I would have my ears pierced again, let alone my cartilages,” the witch announced with clear annoyance.

Neville and a few of the older years arrived and started fixing themselves breakfast.

“I know,” the blonde replied, “But I also know that you don’t mind piercings. I know you’re going to get your nipples pierced soon,” Neville choked on his water while Harry slapped on his back even though was laughing. Hermione however turned bright red, knowing she couldn’t deny it.

“Although I think you should stick with bars during the weekends and rings on the weekdays instead of the reverse. Of course your nipples are a bit bigger than most girls, so rings might be more comfortable unless you get bigger bars. Thankfully with magic you can lengthen or shorten them however much you need,” she finished brightly.

“No one else needed to know that, Luna,” the exasperation was clearly heard from the other witch.

Her clairvoyant friend had almost no brain to mouth filter. She couldn’t exactly fault her for it or hold it against her, she still went into lecture mode when it came to obscure facts during a conversation.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t think anyone else would hear me. Neville and Harry were the only ones really paying attention.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” Neville inserted, his face beat red.

“Thanks, Nev,” the petite witch replied. It was more an acknowledgement at this point.

Hermione opened her remaining gifts, clearly intent on ignoring the conversation that just happened. Her parents had sent her a new set of robes and a barrette in the shape of a small witch’s hat. It was made with gold with black glass inlaid. It also had a purple ‘ribbon’ that was also made of glass in it. Overall Hermione liked it. She wasn’t a fan of hats even though her mum thought they looked lovely on her. It was a nice compromise as she would indeed wear her new ‘hat’ that was not a hat.

Harry had given her a set of deluxe sugar quills as well as a piece of parchment that revealed itself to be a homemade voucher, ‘Good for one Hogsmead shopping trip. One book Mandatory. Love, Harry.’

The last one, the mystery gift, revealed itself to be two old books. The outsides had no titles but clearly were worn leather. She opened the thickest one, the smell wafting into her nose. The title was indeed on the first page inside; ‘Ward Masters and Mistresses Through the Ages’.

There was a note inside.
‘Thought you would appreciate this Lass. Don’t take any of the Undersecretary’s bullshit.’

It made her smile. She knew who it was from. The second she opened immediately; ‘The Eminence of Ancient Ley Lines’. There was another note.

‘As my favorite pupil I thought you’d like to get to know your friends better.’

‘They sent their presents together’, she cooed to herself.

Hermione put her gifts away, very happy with them. Throughout the whole event Severus sat in his normal seat and observed the proceedings with a blank look. He was happy for his apprentice. Lovegood had obviously shocked his witch, and he could see the exasperation clearly on her face, but knew immediately that he would be stuck with Lovegood for life. It appeared that Hermione had made another ‘best friend’. Much better than Weasley.

At that moment Umbridge strolled in with her head held high, she had noticed the mudblood had a few owls around her. As she sat and her fat pressed almost uncomfortably against the sides of the chair she looked over at the surly potions master.

“Hem Hem, Severus –”

“That would be Professor Snape, or Snape to you, Dolores,” Severus snipped.

“Yes, well, Snape, would you happen to know the reason for the extra owls surrounding your apprentice,” she inquired.

“Yes.”

She waited a moment until she realized she would have to press for details with the wizard.

“What reason would that be?” she asked.

“What does it matter to you?” he asked with a perfectly arched brow.

“Just curious. She is just a step below staff, so I believe the staff should be informed,” she answered.

“The rest of the staff is aware, it is a personal matter,” he replied, still avoiding the answer.

Umbridge narrowed her eyes at him.

“I am part of the staff here. I should be aware of this event as well,” she simpered in her annoyingly high voice.

“Really Dolores, as a personal matter it has no bearing on your job. The rest of the staff has been here longer so we are more aware of the students’ lives. As much as some of us would not like to know, students do gossip in the halls,” he said with his lip curled.

Dolores pursed her lips at him. She knew he was right, and as she was not yet in control of the school she didn’t have the authority to look through the students’ mail.

Minerva gave Dolores a side glance. The woman had no tact and her busybody attitude was grating.

“Dolores we are here to teach and guide the students, not meddle in their lives above that,” the older witch said in clipped tones, “It is unprofessional.”

Umbridge had wisely kept her mouth shut.
Classes had gone by swiftly, to Hermione at least. It was mostly application that Tuesday. Charms, Transfiguration, Arithmancy, and Herbology. No Umbridge, which she considered a small present herself. She also didn’t have patrol that night!

She was walking down from her shower, Harry waiting for her in the common room. They were both wearing casual clothes with their school cloaks over them. Both had opted to leave them open.

Harry was wearing a dashing red v neck shirt and black slacks while Hermione was wearing a casual black and light green pinstripe dress robes.

“Looking good, birthday girl,” Harry said with a grin, his hands in his pockets, “and in green? Your apprenticeship is showing.”

“Thank you,” she replied with a cheeky smile.

A few of the younger students looked at Hermione, some of the boys blushed taking note that while her robes didn’t cling to her indecently, her figure was nicely displayed.

“What are you all tarted up for?” came a snide remark next to them.

Looking over with distaste they could clearly see Ron sneering at them.

Hermione looked at him as though he were something filthy under her boot.

“It’s her birthday, Ron. You should know by now,” Neville said coming down behind them, “You look nice, Hermione,” he said in a less confrontational tone.

“Thank you,” she replied with a grin.

Ron’s face flushed red, she had just looked at him and then ignored him.

“What so you’re too fancy to say anything to me now!?” he barked.

The curly haired witch squinted her eyes at him.

“Did anybody else hear something? It sounded rude, but I can’t place where it came from,” she said loudly.

Ron’s face was now an ugly red that clashed with his hair.

“Oh well, let’s head to dinner shall we?” she chirped.

As they were leaving the portrait hole Ron grabbed his wand, sparks flying out of it.

The younger years were looking at the prefect wearily. They had quickly discovered that he was mean and had a quick temper. He also took things from them whether they were against the rules or not. One of the students had all of their chocolate frogs confiscated because they ‘looked like they could be potioned with something’. It was an extremely poor excuse, especially since they were still in their wrappers. He also pushed them around a lot. At one point he yanked a first year out of one of the chairs claiming seniority. The witch he pulled on had to go to the hospital wing because he dislocated her shoulder. She told Madam Pomfrey that it was an accident, but refused to look her in the face.
He always did so when some of his year mates weren’t around. Neville, Harry, Lavender, Pavarti, and Apprentice Granger. Lavender yelled at him once and he took points off her claiming it was talking back to a prefect while he was doing his duty.

Her response was next time she would just tell Hermione.

They were on the last staircase going to the Great Hall when Hermione felt magic coming at her from behind. The witch ducked, seeing a dark orange spell pass over her. She felt another one coming at her, but she was already crouched so she did the only thing she could think of without giving her secrets away, she rolled down the stairs. She knew she would bruise, and it hurt, but she managed to turn around once she landed on the base floor looking up at the top of the staircase.

Neville was frozen in shock, Harry ran down to check on her. Making sure she was alright, he looked up with her.

No one was there.

She looked left and right before she saw another spell come at her from the same place. She jumped to the left and shot a stunner at the spot. Harry ran up to where he heard the thud of someone landing hard. He felt around before he felt something. Pulling on the soft fabric he realized it was his invisibility cloak, on the floor was Ron. Harry quickly pocketed his cloak and glared at the redhead.

Hermione walked up quickly, her movement was predatory. She cast an enneverate on him.

Ron looked up to see Harry kneeling next to him, glaring at him. Hermione was standing over him with her wand raised.

“What is the meaning of this?” Hermione asked quietly.

“Oh so now you notice me!?” the redheaded wizard shouted.

“You were shooting spells at my sister!” Harry yelled, grabbing Ron’s cloak and lifting him up, “AND you took my cloak!”

“So what!? You weren’t using it! I was just gonna take her down a peg since Miss High and Mighty is too big to talk to us peasants!”

Harry growled and punched Ron in the face.

Unluckily for him Umbridge only heard the last part, but saw Harry punch Ron.

“Fighting in the corridors?” she walked as quickly as she could down the stairs. Umbridge couldn’t believe her luck! She noticed it was a Weasley and saw the prefect badge on his cloak. “Assaulting a Prefect? I believe a week’s worth of detention with me is in order. I will see you starting tomorrow night at 7.”

“Mr. Weasley, I’m sorry this hooligan assaulted your person. You should go to the hospital wing,” she said with her bottom lip quivering as though she was extremely upset to see him in that position.

“Yes ma’am,” the redhead said leaving.

“Yes, Professor Umbridge,” Harry replied, looking at the ground knowing no matter what he said it wouldn’t matter.
“Apprentice Granger, I am shocked that you allowed this to happen! Just standing there!”

Hermione raised an eyebrow at the other witch.

“It would appear that you are unfit for your position! A muggle pretending to be a witch! An apprenticed witch! I shall speak to the headmaster about that immediately. In the meantime I shall be taking that,” she reprimanded, snatching Hermione’s apprentice badge off her cloak, tearing it.

With that Dolores Umbridge marched into the Great Hall, unaware of the enemy she made.

Neville and Harry looked at Hermione with wide eyes.

“Hermione, your badge,” Neville said softly.

“My badge cannot be stolen. The goblins assured me of that. I will have it back before the night is out,” she replied calmly.

Marching into the Great Hall, Umbridge made her way to the Staff table.

Whilst she was firmly headed to her destination the silver badge in her hand started to become heavy. Once she was at the table she needed to use both hands to hold it.

Severus noticed his apprentice’s badge and glared fiercely at the witch.

“Dolores, why do you have my apprentice’s badge?”

“She is no longer an apprentice. She doesn’t deserve the honor. That muggle stood by and watched Mr. Potter assault a prefect! I want her expelled, Albus.”

“Do you know what happened?” Severus asked, his lip curling into its normal sneer.

Dolores narrowed her eyes at him, “It shouldn’t matter. One wizard should not be hitting another like a muggle. I do know there is no fighting in the halls, Snape.”

“Indeed. It is against rules and the offender is to be punished.”

“Mr. Potter has earned himself a week’s detention with me,” Dolores confirmed, “It was a matter of time with how volatile he is.”

“And my apprentice’s badge?”

“She is no longer an apprentice, Snape,” she snapped.

As she said this the badge grew heavier and started to prick at her skin as though it was growing thorns.

“Ah!” she yelped.

The badge started to shake and dent the table. Hermione walked in with her brother and Neville, two with their heads’ held high and the other looking around.

Hermione walked up to the staff table, looking directly at Umbridge.

“Madame Umbridge, are you ready to return my property to me?” Hermione asked calmly.
“That’s Professor Umbridge. It is no longer your property, Miss Granger. You are no longer an apprentice.”

“Are you as dense as you teach?” Hermione sniped, “The badge doesn’t hold the position. To be an apprentice you must take magical oaths. The badge merely allows other people to know.”

“How dare you!?” she shouted grabbing the hall’s attention.

“I dare very well, having taken my oaths and vows,” she replied, crossing her arms.

“An apprenticeship is sacred! A muggle like you doesn’t deserve the honor!” Umbridge barked.

“I am muggle born Madame Umbridge. There is a difference. Considering you are not a master in Defense Against the Dark Arts, you are unaware and uninformed of such things. It would be best if you returned my badge to me now,” Hermione glowered.

“Or what little girl?” Umbridge growled.

As she said this Hermione’s badge started to shake more, turning red, and heating up. The wood under it started to smoke.

The petite witch pointed at the badge while her arms were still crossed, “Or that and more will happen. Again you wouldn’t know anything about it.”

The badge made a noise as though it were a dragon’s growl.

“AH!” the fat witch shouted.

“Will you be returning my apprentice her badge or will you continue to make a fool of yourself?” Severus inquired.

The badge chose that moment to start burning itself a hole in the table.

“Dolores, give Apprentice Granger her badge back!” Minerva snapped.

Umbridge looked around frantically searching for a sympathetic face. Instead she saw various looks of disgust and cruel amusement. Even Ginny was looking at Umbridge with a weird expression.

Ginny Weasley may be upset with Potter and Granger, but even she was aware that an apprenticeship was sacred and couldn’t be broken just because someone decided it couldn’t exist. An apprenticeship was very similar to that of a traditional marriage bonding. The only way out was death. It was during this incident that gave away that Umbridge was a halfblood.

The Slytherins watched the event uncomfortably. One of the staunchest supporters of purebloods and their movements wasn’t even a pureblood. Apprenticeship knowledge was one of the first things that was taught alongside manners and traditions. In pureblood homes it was something respected, sought after, admired, and common knowledge.

Many Slytherins would be writing home that night with this new information.

“Well, Madame Umbridge?” the witch inquired as though her badge wasn’t burning and growling. Hermione started to tap her foot as she blinked slowly at the other witch.

Umbridge made a quick decision, “Evansco!” she pointed it at the badge.
The cauldron shaped badge quickly multiplied, growling loudly, the extras started shaking and making their way towards the pink clad witch.

“Oh! Stay back!” she shouted at them, “Evansco!”

They were all red and leaving scorch marks as they moved across the table. The growling was starting to echo in the hall, sending shivers of fear down many of the students’ spines.

“Dolores, it will stop as soon as you give Apprentice Granger her badge back!” Albus shouted over the growling.

Frantic Dolores Umbridge grabbed the original that was quickly burning itself through the table and shrieked in pain after she picked it up. At that moment she threw it, aiming at Hermione’s chest. The younger witch however ducked.

What she didn’t expect was for Ron to walk in at that moment and get hit with the flying projectile.

On impact Ron screamed and dropped to his knees, curling into himself.

Hermione sighed, unconcerned for her old friend, shocking more than half of the students in the hall as she walked at a sedate pace toward her badge. Meanwhile the extra badges were jumping down, making loud ringing noises, and were steaming. As Hermione made it toward her old friend, she noticed that he was clutching his eye while screaming.

Crouching down, she was about to grab the badge when she heard high pitch screaming coming from behind her. Turning around she curly haired witch saw that the extra badges were jumping and attacking the fat witch, each one burning her badly.

Hermione kept her face unconcerned as she turned back around and picked up her badge without a poor reaction. Upon touch the badge immediately returned to its cool silver state. The multiples went up in a puff of smoke and the growling stopped. Standing up, Hermione quickly repaired her cloak and pinned her badge back into its proper place.

“You should both probably see Madame Pomphrey about those burns. They look quite nasty,” Hermione said before she walked calmly to the Gryffindor table. Luna chose that moment to skip towards the table that housed the lions.

“Aside from that, how was your day?” Luna asked with a smile.

Hermione leaned over and kissed the blonde on the cheek. “It went very well. Lavender and Pavarti complimented my new earrings. I love them.”
Chapter 81

The Great Hall had broken out in a mass of whispers which turned into full out loud gossiping as soon as Umbridge and Ron were out of the Great Hall. Both had to go to the Hospital Wing, one making a return trip.

“Hermione! What was that all about!?” Dean asked, leaning in close.

Hermione looked at him sideways. Dean was just as much of a hypocrite and a gossip as Lavender and Pavarti, but at least the witches were able to suss out what was true and what wasn’t. Somehow. It was a gift of theirs.

“Ronald Weasley thought it would be a good idea to try to hit me with a spell from behind while I was on the stairs. Apparently he thought it would, in his own words, ‘Take me down a peg since I am not Miss High and Mighty, and I’m too big to talk to you peasants’. Harry saw it and punched him in the face after he asked why Ron thought it was a good idea. Umbridge only saw Harry punching Weasley. Harry has to serve detention with her, but since I was there I somehow ‘allowed’ it to happen, which made me unfit for my position. Then she snatched my apprentice badge and you saw the rest,” she informed the nosy wizard.

It took her all of a few seconds to decide it was better to answer him than allow the rest of her classmates to speculate. At least it came ‘from the horse’s mouth’. They would surely make up other speculation, but as they saw what happened with her badge, it would hopefully curb their tendency to make more wild accusations. It was a slim hope, but a hope nonetheless. Thankfully the gossip queens were also listening carefully so most of the truth would make its way around.

“What are you going to do about DADA?” Neville asked.

That was something she would have to take up with Severus. She had insulted Umbridge to her face, in front of the whole school. She was too angry to really think that part through.

“I will speak to my master about taking that OWL early and dropping the class,” Hermione said, quickly spooning some mashed potatoes into her mouth to avoid further conversation.

After dinner Harry and Luna escorted Hermione to the Great Hall where she met up with her master. They were good buffers she realized as no one wanted to be near loony and Harry had on his ‘angry’ face. It looked more like sulking to her, but she was more privy to his emotions than not, especially with their bond.

The pair walked quickly and silently into the dungeons, Severus scaring all who were in the halls, including his Slytherins. Once they reached the dungeons he opened the door for her for both the potions classroom to his private lab.

He nodded at her and then turned around and used his wand to put up many spells in quick succession to prevent entry and eavesdropping. Hermione was amused. What he and others did with charms and spells she could do with a simple ward. However he hadn’t asked that of her yet and she wasn’t going to offer on the odd chance that their esteemed Headmaster decided to pop in for a visit that lead to questions they didn’t want to give answers to.

Once they were set the dark wizard turned around and calmly gestured to one of the stools.
Somehow the curly haired witch could tell her master wasn’t angry and that calmed her. She knew that while Umbridge had pushed the wrong buttons she too was somewhat out of line when she was supposed to do the opposite of cause waves.

With a soft sigh Severus looked at his apprentice and placed his hand on her head.

“I am not angry with you, nor am I displeased with how things turned out. I do want to know what happened before we discuss how to proceed,” he said calmly.

He knew there was more to the story than what that fat sow claimed and there was more than what his witch could say in public.

Making a small face of displeasure thinking about the events Hermione had planned on telling him anyways.

“Harry and I decided it would be nice to dress nicely for the evening considering it’s my birthday and we can’t celebrate by going out to dinner or the like. Weasley decided to make rude comments about me being ‘tarted up’, his words. I ignored him. He yelled at me and I looked at him before asking if anyone else could hear something that sounded rude. I said I couldn’t place where it came from and then left for dinner.”

Severus’s lips twitched.

“Of course he didn’t like it. That deplorable excuse for a wizard decided he would try to teach me a lesson by stealing Harry’s invisibility cloak and shoot me in the back while I was on the stairs. Thankfully I managed to duck out of the way, but then he shot again and I had no place to go but down and rolled down the stairs to avoid it. I… don’t know what spell he was using.” she said her face clearly uncomfortable with that, “It was a dark orange, almost sickly in color. It was… muddy, if that makes sense to you,” she said looking at him.

He nodded having an idea, “I will be sure to check his wand. If it is what I think it is, he will at least be on probation with Albus at the helm. With the Weasleys being his greatest supporters he tends to overlook what they do.”

“I noticed, he helped them financially as well,” she grumbled, still upset with how they were stealing from her brother.

With a quick roll of her eyes and a breath she continued, “Anyways I managed to hit him with a stunner. Harry made his way over and reached down, clearly finding the menace, and stuffed his cloak into his pocket. I revived him and asked him, quote, ‘what is the meaning of this?’ he was a prat and shouted ‘oh now you notice me?’”

“Harry of course did not like that someone was trying to hurt me and yelled at him for shooting spells at me and stealing his cloak. He said that he wasn’t using it and that he was going to take me down a peg since apparently I’m too big to talk to said peasants now. Harry didn’t like that at all and socked him in the face. That’s when Umbridge waddled her way over and caught Harry. She ignored Neville, not sure if I should be grateful or not for that since he had nothing to do with it. He’s actually been a really good about everything this year, considering.”

“Yes, he’s also improved greatly in class. Frankly I am surprised, but pleasantly so,” he said.

She nodded in agreement then tilted her head, “Then she gave Harry a week’s worth of detention with her starting tomorrow at 7 for punching assaulting a prefect. Which… I understand. I want to make sure he’s okay though, she’s been trying to get him into detention with her since she got here. I
have... a bad feeling about it,” she admitted with her eyebrows furrowed, “After that she apologized to Weasley for that hooligan for assaulting his person, load of tosh, and told him to go to the Hospital Wing. It was then that she looked at me and said she was shocked that I allowed it to happen and was just standing there. Granted, I was going to just let it happen, but considering it did just happen and wasn’t premeditated I was also taken by surprise.”

He nodded in understanding.

“Then that toad said I was unfit for my position, said I was a muggle pretending to be a witch, an apprenticed witch, then said she’d talk to the headmaster and snatched my badge off my cloak. Ripped it too,” she muttered the last part with more irritation than the rest of the story, “You saw the rest.”

“Sadly I must admit it is something I would do, but never to an apprentice. If you were a prefect I might have tried to have your badge removed, however I would never go so far as to touch your person to do so. I would go through the proper channels. Then again I’m nowhere near as disrespectful or dense as that toad.”

Hermione nodded slowly, she too could see her master doing something like that before her apprenticeship. She agreed not to that extreme, but making Harry suffer detentions was something he was well known for.

“His detentions are earned, despite for a good cause, however if you have a bad feeling I want him to report to me afterwards.”

“Yes, master,” she said deferentially.

“She was making quite a scene before you walked in and stole the show. I cannot be upset with you as she took it upon herself to get somewhat physical with you and then tried to have you expelled.”

Hermione looked at him sharply, “She did what now?” her voice was dangerously silky. It sent a thrill down his spine.

“It would appear that you were one of her targets all along. We are both aware of the prejudice that runs rampant and unchecked in our society, how she managed to get so high up…”

“Probably blackmail. Her poor excuse for honey probably smells like vinegar. Others she probably gave them enough lip service,” she growled.

“Was that... a double entendre?” he asked with a slight uncomfortable sneer, his eyes showed disgust at the mere idea.

“It wasn’t meant to be,” she looked at him with wide eyes, her face also twisting in disgust.

“Why would you do that!?” she asked him incredulously, “Now it’s burned into my mind! I want nothing of the sort anywhere near my mind. Is there a potion that acts as mental bleach?”

“I didn’t mean to. You said honey. It has multiple meanings! And sadly, no. There is not. As tempted as I am to make one now,” he looked at her, “it would probably be too dangerous and bleach out the wrong things.”

They both shared looked of disgust.

“Moving on!” the witch pushed through, “I feel the need to take my Defense OWL sooner rather than later so I may drop her class.”
The tall wizard blinked, dispelling the horrid image to focus on the petite witch in front of him.

“Considering you insulted her to her face in front of all of Hogwarts, it would be the safest thing for you to do…”

“How though?” she looked at him imploringly, “I know how to fight, I know counter curses, I know a few auror tricks as well. She was right about one thing, the teaching in the subject has been rather lacking. Professor Lupin taught us how to defend ourselves against mostly creatures. Barty was more hands on. I hope I know enough for the practical, but I’m not so sure on the written.”

Severus sighed through his nose. Her fears were not unfounded. Quirrel was a stuttering mess when he was teaching, despite the whole mess that ended him that year. Lockhart was a strutting peacock that told them nothing but dragon dung and what not to do. Lupin however was one of their best, actually taught the students what they needed to know for the year. Barty and Moody were more focused on the practical than the theoretical. This year’s lot would be lucky to learn anything with the propaganda they were being forced to read.

“Lupin did teach you what you were supposed to learn for your third year. It was appropriate. The rest of the school also learned what they were meant to. Out of the last few years, he was honestly the best to have taught here, despite my personal feelings. Strictly from an educational standpoint those that were taught by him that year did excellent on their OWLs and NEWTs. Barty was a close second. So that is one less thing to worry about. We will temporarily switch our main focus from potions to defense,” he tried to reassure her.

“We will withdraw you from her class immediately and you will be taking private lessons with me. She should not have a legitimate leg to stand on, but she does not seem to be one of reason,” he said, “We will inform Minerva once we’re finished here.”

With a breath of relief Hermione nodded.

“Before we do begin however, happy birthday my apprentice,” he murmured.

He silently and wandlessly summoned a gift from the back of the room. The package was medium in size not giving away what it was. It was wrapped in metallic green paper with a black bow. He carefully handed it to her.

“As it is your day, so to speak, we will not be doing anything that could be considered work,” the wizard said with a quirk of his lips.

“Thank you, master,” she whispered, taking the gift and smiling back at him.

She undid the ribbon, wrapping it around her wrist so she could keep it for later, and then tore the paper off revealing a brown box. Ever curious she quickly opened the box to see what was inside.

She bit to lip to try to stifle the grin that wanted to burst forth. It was a series of things within the box. The first she pulled out was on top was a choker necklace, black in color, roughly half an inch thick. It was soft lace. In the middle hung a black pearl.

“It has many meanings and properties, but the main ones that stood out to me were protection, strength, prosperity, and balance. I was not aware that Miss Lovegood was also getting you jewelry.”

“Both her and her father. Luna made me these,” she said jiggling the earring on her lobes, “Mr. Lovegood gave me the studs,” she finished, fingering her new cartilage piercing.

The witch lifted another present out of the box, a bubble tea kit, which caught her interest. There
were tea leaves, boba, a wide glass straw, and a cutely crafted glass cup in the shape of a potion bottle complete with a glass latch top. Thankfully it also looked like sea glass, so it was impossible to mistake for an actual potion bottle.

“It’s a relatively new drink originated from Taiwan. Serendipitously created in the early 80s. It’s better served chilled, in my opinion. I like it and thought it wouldn’t hurt if you had your own set.” He explained.

She smiled shyly at him, a twinkle in her eyes. It was another facet of Severus that was kept from the world. A drink that wasn’t of England or wizarding orientation? She never would have guessed, and she was sure not many others would either. Especially since she’d never heard of it until he gifted it to her.

“How did you come by it?” she asked.

He looked mildly surprised for some reason.

“I was traveling one summer and happened to go to Taiwan. I was looking to harvest potion ingredients not native to Europe that year for personal projects. I figured I’d be able to see some of the world where people don’t know me on sight and gather some ingredients that would otherwise be lucratively expensive.”

“Did you like it?” she inquired.

“I did,” he answered.

“What about it?” she pressed.

“I didn’t stay there long, I was on holiday to collect as many Asian ingredients that caught my fancy, but I enjoyed some of the wilderness. In the locations I stopped by the wildlife was in abundance, even some of the ingredients harder to come by in Europe. Mostly the plant life since it would appear most Northern Europeans don’t know how to preserve more… tropical ingredients. I gathered a few bugs, but I stayed away from snakes and such. I wouldn’t want to harvest them alone.”

Hermione nodded. It was smart to only harvest what you could alone, anything that had potential risk without a party seemed foolhardy.

“Now open the rest of your gift,” he sniffed, causing her to smile.

She pulled out a dark gray robe, almost black, and it was so soft, but wasn’t thin like most of her newer robes. Hermione couldn’t help but roll her fingers across the fabric.

“It’s Egyptian cotton,” he answered the unspoken question.

She looked at him quickly in surprise, before pulling it fully out of the box. It was a bit heavy, but she knew she would appreciate it in the coming months. Scottish winters were no joke, they were tolerable with their constant exposure, but still biting cold, especially in the dungeons.

At the very bottom of the box was a book.

‘1001 Obscure Potions’

It smelled old, it felt worn and well read.

“Thank you, Sev. I love them so much,” she said, “Put the choker on me please?”
He blushed lightly and nodded taking the lace and walking behind her. She lifted her hair and he purposely clasped it. Making a quick decision once he was done he leant over and pressed a light kiss to the back of her neck.

She left out a sigh of pleasure.

“Thank you.”

“Would it be possible… to give you a nickname?” he asked.

“Like a pet name?” she questioned, curious.

“No, not yet. I mean like… something special, a nickname only for your closest ones. They’re usually given,” he said, stopping after he found himself rambling.

“What did you have in mind?” she probed, afraid to turn around, much like he was to look at her while asking.

“Mia,” he conferred, his tone held a simplicity that was congenial in and of itself.

‘Mia, Mia, Mia,’ she whispered in her head.

“Mia,” she mused aloud, annunciating the vowels feeling the way it rolled off her tongue pass her lips.

“Yes. You may call me Mia,” she answered.

He let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding and gently wrapped her in his arms, placing his face lightly into her curls.

“Happy birthday, Mia,” he said.

Something clicked in Hermione and she smiled. She was never one for nicknames before since she didn’t like her name being butchered. Hermy, Herms, etcetera were all… she disliked them, with a passion. ‘Mione was acceptable, if barely, but she knew it made some people feel better to call her something other than Hermione, which she knew was a mouthful for others. Harry, for example, was allowed to call her that. Mia though… was one syllable, pleasant, and impossible to make fun of.

“Thank you,” she mumbled.

Barely a second later Hermione looked up as though it would allow her to see the potions master.

“Sev?” there was a slight tilt in her tone.

“Hm?” he intoned.

“Would you mind if… if other people called me Mia?” she intoned.

Severus looked at her curly mane.

“It’s not a pet name, but a nickname, I would assume someone else would eventually try to call you that if they heard me.”

“But would you mind?” she pushed.

He felt a flutter at her consideration, “No Mia, I would not mind.”
She smiled and leaned into him.

They stayed like that for a few more moments, enjoying the moment. It was nice to… snuggle, although neither of them would ever admit to such a thing this early in their relationship.

With a final squeeze Severus let go of his petite witch and walked to the other side of the lab table.

“I know the plan is to drop your Defense Against the Dark Arts class, but will you resume the class once the jinx takes her?” he inquired.

“I’m not sure. I suppose it’ll depend how far I get in my personal studies,” she admitted.

“Sev? Everyone knows you’re constantly asking for the Defense position. If you know about the jinx; why do you continue to ask about it?” she asked trying not to sound unduly curious.

The dark wizard raised his brows at her before answering, “Because it’s not really the position that’s jinxed but the paperwork.”

“The paperwork?” she asked incredulously.

“Every contract is gone over with the headmaster, signed, and once it’s placed in the proper file a duplicate is made and files itself in the board of governs’ files. The filing cabinet that’s strictly for the Defense position is jinxed. No one is aware of that before they sign the papers since the papers themselves are not jinxed.”

“I don’t understand,” she pressed.

“You confusion is understandable,” he admitted before continuing, “When people with magic use a natural writing instrument, like a quill, our magic goes through it and lightly imbues itself in said instrument. When we use ink, after the quill has been dipped and a moment has passed, our magic is subtly fused with the ink.”

“Like a fingerprint,” she breathed.

“Yes. Our magical signature is then lightly in the paper.”

“And magic is alive,” she said making the leap.

“In its own way, yes. So when it is filed in the jinxed cabinet…” he said drifting off looking at her.

“It jinxes whoever’s magic is in the file until it carries itself out,” she concluded, “Like the Goblet of Fire?”

“Yes. It was for that exact reason that Mister Potter had to compete.”

“Because the artifact only read Harry’s magical signature, not caring who exactly put his name in there, but that it was his magic itself that was in there.”

“Exactly,” he affirmed.

“That makes so much more sense now,” she continued, “I always wondered why we didn’t use pens, or even fountain pens.”

“They don’t carry our magic onto the paper as well as quills and the people must be comfortable doing so,” he said.
“What about for note taking and such? Dictaquills?” she asked “Not going to lie, I do miss pens.”

“Dictaquills must learn your signature first and require that you use them for a minimum of a week, and you must at least write down the alphabet once,” he lectured, “As for note taking, it is alright to use a fountain pen. After the Goblet fiasco I would even recommend it for homework…” he drifted off as his mind started working.

“From now on you’re to use fountain pens for everything short of your main exams and official paperwork. Ministerial, Gringotts, and the like,” he stated firmly.

“Yes, master,” she reassured, knowing he made the decision in his official capacity.

“We will see about your brother as well seeing as he’s already been the victim of such an abuse,” he informed her.

She beamed at him, “Yes, my Master.”

“Change of plans. Now gather your gifts, we’ll make our way to Minerva’s office now.”

“Yes, sir,” she said, already putting the rest of her new things away.

Severus knocked firmly on Minerva’s office door, Hermione was standing off to the side behind him. He knew she didn’t have patrolling duties tonight and it was early enough that she allowed herself to be accessible to the students should they want to talk about anything.

“Enter,” came the Scottish brogue.

Both master and apprentice’s eyebrows rose. The accent wasn’t thick, but noticeable, which meant she was already a bit emotional.

The potions master opened the door, letting his apprentice in before him before allowing himself entry.

The transfiguration mistress was sitting at her desk with papers strewn about her desk. She had carefully placed her quill down and was looking at her latest interlopers.

“Severus, Apprentice Granger, what do I owe the honor?” she inquired.

“We are here in the official capacity in regards to some scheduling changes,” Severus said slowly.

“Schedule changes?” she scrutinized.

“Yes. Apprentice Granger will be dropping Defense Against the Dark Arts immediately and will be taking private tutoring sessions with me,” he intoned.

“I see,” she said noncommittally, “It will be done.”

Severus nodded at her and turned around before she cleared her throat. Slowly the wizard turned back around to face the Scottish witch.

“I have a suggestion, you make acknowledge it at you leisure,” she started, “While I’m sure you will take your OWL soon, the sooner the better,” she grumbled, “I’m sure our esteemed Ministry liaison will try to make further trouble for you for this evenings incident. I would recommend that you fill
out the paperwork for the room extension in your private quarters. Should she press that Apprentice Granger is receiving… favoritism or some rot or other, it would be better to have her removed from the tower and further under her Master’s protection. Should push come to shove she can then merely relocate herself.”

By the accent that only got slightly heavier while she was talking it was clear that something had already been mentioned to her and she was not happy to be losing one of her cubs in any way. Severus sneered and nodded, sitting in front of her desk.

Hermione stayed quiet throughout, her face grim. She hadn’t meant for any of this to happen. She was just enjoying her birthday and refused to let that sour excuse of a wizard ruin her day, and it ended with just that, but worse. She didn’t end the day by crying but by stirring up the hornets’ nest. Ron was a prat and Umbridge was just… a bitch. It helped that most of Gryffindor saw Ron’s behavior before she left for dinner, but still….

“I apologize Professor McGonagall if I’ve made your life more difficult with this recent situation,” Hermione lamented, taking a step forward to stand next to her master.

Minerva’s eyes softened, “It’s not your fault. She’s been heckling the staff, but mostly the Headmaster and myself about you since you were first introduced as an apprentice. She’s been trying to find out how to remove you from your ‘position’ and give it to someone ‘more worthy’ as she says,” she snarked the last bit, “We’ve been trying to tell her that it’s not possible and the decision has already been made. I’m sure now that she wasn’t aware of the ceremony or magic that goes into the forming of an apprenticeship. It wasn’t the best way to come about it, but I must commend you Apprentice Granger, for being blunt. Perhaps now she’ll stop trying to have your ‘position’,” she rolled her eyes, “given to another.”

“Instead she’ll try to have me expelled or removed in another way,” Hermione finished.

With her own sneer Minerva nodded.

“Master Snape, since I will shortly be moving into your quarters and receiving my own room, may I make a request?” Hermione asked with amusement dancing in her tone.

Both professors looked at her.

“Can you see if the house-elves will install a cat tree and rafters for Crookshanks?” she pleaded.

Minerva smirked at the younger witch. She may be Gryffindor, but she was an ambitious opportunist.

Severus blinked slowly at her, “I suppose I can make the request.”

“Thank you, Master,” his apprentice practically purred.

“Hn.”

“Apprentice Granger, why don’t you head up to the tower and get some rest?” Minerva suggested.

“That sounds like a fine idea,” Hermione admitted, “Master?”

“You may go, Apprentice. I will see you tomorrow,” he said.

“Apprentice Granger?” Minerva called after her before Hermione reached the door.
The witch turned around and looked at the elder witch curiously, “Yes?”

“Happy birthday,” she smiled at the younger witch.

“Thank you,” she replied with a grin.

“Goodnight, Mia,” Severus said, dismissing her.

“Goodnight, Sev,” she answered shyly before leaving.

Meanwhile Albus sighed at the Undersecretary’s stupidity and consigned himself into writing a letter to the Minister and the Daily Prophet about Umbridge trying to forcibly dispel the apprenticeship bond between Severus Snape and Hermione Granger. Even he knew it wasn’t a matter of choice once the vows were made. He had no choice but to accept it or else he would have already dissolved it.

Better he write it first than that damnable woman.

Dolores Umbridge scowled at her bandaged hands. They were badly burnt according to Poppy. The Weasley boy was also badly burnt and had to stay overnight to make sure his eye healed properly. Thankfully he blink at the last moment.

She was so sure an apprenticeship was just a paper agreement between one to another. She didn’t know there were magical oaths and vows involved. That little uppity bint made her look like a fool.

She should have been able to demote the muggle from apprentice to student. She’d rather not even have that, but at least as a student she wouldn’t have any power. Chances are even if she had the bint expelled she wouldn’t have her wand snapped. She already had an OWL which was the minimum a real witch or wizard needed to keep their wand. She wouldn’t even be kicked out of the school, having to stay close to Snape.

At least she had Potter in her grasp now. It was merely a stroke of luck on her part, but she would use it to the fullest. Potter would know to respect his betters.

Elsewhere in the castle Luna was writing an article for the Quibbler about tonight’s events and planned on owling it to her father. The people deserved to know what was happening at Hogwarts, especially with dark witch in the castle. She was a well-known Ministry official after all, it would only look more damaging. Luna wanted to keep Hermione’s status a secret, but knew that it would be an open secret now that Malfoy knew and outed her in the Great Hall. Still the blonde was aware that she could, and would, omit that small tiny detail.

Unbeknownst to her a majority of the Slytherins were also writing to their parents.

One Draco Malfoy was carefully detailing everything that happened to his father. Once again he was glad that Pansy was one of his best friends and that she was a gossip. Of course she called it networking through her connections, but he decided not to get into that discussion again. The
Malfoys were full supporters of the Monarchy, the old ways, and traditions. Umbridge personally attacked two of the three in front of him.

Once Hermione was in the tower she noticed Harry sitting in his favorite chair by the fire. She smiled lopsidedly at him. He was clearly sulking, glaring into the fire.

Harry was leaning back, sitting in a devil may care pose, with his chin resting on his fist. Hermione felt through the bond and was able to see that he was a bit more angry than normal and wasn’t sure why.

Walking over with purpose she propped herself on the opposite armrest.

“Hey,” she started.

“Hey,” he replied mulishly.

“Don’t be like that. I spoke with Master Snape and a few things came up you might be interested in.” The green eyed wizard’s brows rose as he looked at his sister through the corners of his eyes.

“Yeah? Like what?” clearly intrigued.

“First, when you’re done with detention he wants you to see him immediately. Not because he’s mad but…” the witch hesitated, “I have a bad feeling about it and he said to have you see him after.”

The Boy-Who-Lived turned to face her fully. Hermione was a witch that rarely let herself be led by her gut instinct. If it was bad enough that she was that concerned he would do so.

“Okay. As soon as detention is over with Umbitch I’ll go see Professor Snape,” he said slowly with a nod.

His sister grinned, not even correcting his language, and it looked as though a heavy weight was lifted off her shoulders.

“What else?”

“Two more things. I know you won’t really care about the schematics, but we’re going to stop writing with quills immediately for homework and notes. Apparently using a natural instrument, like a quill, helps our magic transfer onto parchment leaving a small amount of our magical signature in it. After last year’s incident with the Goblet, since your name could have been ripped from your homework, it’s a safety precaution,” she explained without going into further detail.

Harry nodded with an impressed look on his face, liking the sound of that. If he could keep someone from doing anything like that again, he would be more than willing to do so.

“Am I going to like the last thing more than that one?” her brother asked cheekily.

“Prat,” she said with a playful nudge, “Maybe…” she nibbled on her lip knowing she didn’t want other people calling her by her new nickname who she didn’t trust and leaned in.

“He gave me a nickname. I asked if he was okay with other people calling me it, and he said since it was a nickname it was fine. Of course only my closest ones can call me it,” she whispered.
Harry looked at her, his bad mood forgotten, “What is it?” he asked quietly.

“Mia,” she said with a smile. The name clearly made her happy and it was less of a mouthful than Hermione. It was short, simple, and it made her happy.

“Mia,” he nodded again, “I like it. It suits you,” the wizard smiled.

“Thanks,” she grinned.

“Who else are you going to let you call you that?” he asked, curious.

“Mum and Dad of course, Luna, Neville, and maybe Goyle if he’d like,” she answered.

“Goyle?”

“Mhm. He’s been much better this year and he’s very respectful when he’s not being a prat. We’re study buddies. I was kinda hoping that… he would be okay with being a friend instead of just a buddy,” she fiddled with her hands.

Harry had also seen the difference in Gregory Goyle and approved of them. It helped that the chubbiness that once described him was now more clearly toned muscle. Being in close proximity with the Slytherin, he could admit, at least to himself for now, that Gregory Goyle was physically appealing.

He still had big feet, but everything else was not how Harry originally pegged him when they were younger. His eyes were grey, he was just a bit taller than Ron, definitely burlier. His eyebrows were defined, his hair was dark brown and short, but was long enough that he had some fringe on his forehead. Some days he could tell that the other boy also shaved frequently. Once in a while Goyle had what some would call 5 o’clock shadow.

“I think he’d like that,” Harry said, not giving away what he was thinking.

Although Hermione could feel his slight embarrassment through their bond and had to hide her smile.

After the paperwork was filled out Severus made his way to the Hospital Wing. That Weasley whelp not only fired a spell at his apprentice’s back, but with a gray curse.

‘Sickly orange indeed…’ he growled in his mind.

Opening the doors to the Hospital Wing, the dark wizard made his way to Poppy’s office. He knew she kept all of her patients’ wands in her office before she discharged them. Thankfully it wouldn’t be seen as anything odd. After all he was the potions master and in charge of the medicinal potions that were kept in stock. He would be sure to leave with a list of potions that would be needed. With the evening’s incident he was well aware he would be making more than just burn healing paste.

“Poppy,” he announced himself.

“Severus what do I owe the pleasure?” she asked with wry amusement.

“A few things, first being that I would like the potions list needed now rather than later so I can get started on it tomorrow. Second being Mister Weasley’s wand. I have suspicion that it needs to be checked. Lastly, I would like your support if what I think was his last used spell was indeed that. It’s
dark gray and was aimed at my apprentice. I know Albus would never expel him, but would at least put him on probation,” he said.

Poppy sighed but nodded. With a wave of her wand she unlocked the drawer in her desk that she used to keep her patients’ wands. It wouldn’t do for a patient to sneak off in the middle of the night. Aside from keeping them from using magic, especially when their magic was helping aid their healing, it essentially kept them hostage. They need their wand to participate in classes and the professors needed them for daily life.

She handed the wizard the wand in question before she went to grab a quill and parchment to write the list.

“Prior Incantato.”

The tip of Ron’s wand glowed a rusty orange and made Severus sneer.

“As I thought,” he spat in disgust, “Suffocat Pirum Totum.”

Poppy looked at him concerned, her quill stopped moving, “What spell is that Severus?” her voice wobbled a bit.

“Total Choak Pear. The Choke Pear hasn’t been used in decades. How Mister Weasley found it… unless he didn’t think and merely let his magic do the talking.”

“Severus I don’t know what that is,” she murmured.

“The Choak Pear was a muggle torture device. Of course wizards found a way to improve,” he scorned, “it. It was pear in shape with sharp metal leaves. The muggle would turn the key, much like a music box, and it would open like a flower. It was never meant to be opened fully since it was only meant as a punishment and used for torture rather than death. It would severely mutilate the victim as their body would be stretched beyond their limits. Wizards found a way to make it so the main human orifices would be subjected to this torture,” he explained.

The medi-witch’s eyes widened. Used correctly it would have severely tortured the young apprentice. Her vagina and anus would be stretched wide at the same time causing multiple lacerations as she would literally be torn apart internally and all the while her mouth would be subjected to the same torture guaranteed to break her jaw until it unhinged in a most disturbing way.

“You have my full support Severus, I’ll inform the rest of the Head staff immediately,” she said as firmly as she could.

The potions master could only nod at her. There was such rage boiling inside his body he had to leave. She finished the list with a flourish and handed it to the wizard. He took it carefully making sure not to snatch it from the medi-witch and left with the signature billowing of his robes.

Morning came swiftly along with Umbridge’s release. Umbridge needed her bandages changed and was informed that she would need to return to the hospital wing every 3-4 hours to have them redressed. There was nothing more she could do for her and was aware she couldn’t keep the professor from teaching. Not that she would really need her wand considering it was all theory. Poppy was aware that her class was a farce and didn’t want to see the whining witch more than she had to.
Poppy didn’t get to leave the Hospital Wing often, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t aware of the happenings in the castle. Portraits reported to the portrait of Helga Hufflepuff that was located in her office and ghosts reported any incidents that happened in the Great Hall to her. They did so in shifts and it was a general consensus that no news was good news. A few would come and talk to her about something funny or some student drama so she was aware of such things. She knew before they arrived that they were instigators.

Umbridge practically declared her stupidity for all to see trying to break apart the apprenticeship between Severus and Hermione Granger. Never mind the fact that she tried to have the girl expelled for witnessing an act of violence. From what the Helga told her Harry had just punched the youngest Weasley when Umbridge turned up.

Poppy huffed at the large witch. The sooner she left the better.

Weasley however was being kept. She talked to the other heads through Helga, who was thankfully more than willing to help, and they agreed to wait until the witch was discharged before doing anything about Weasley. The medi-witch kept his wand safe in her drawer and waited for the other staff members to arrive to handle the situation. She was tempted to just call the aurors, but knew Albus would twinkle his arse through the ‘misunderstanding’.

Weasley was just informed he needed to stay in the Hospital Wing for further care and observation. It helped that she had to dress his burn just as frequently as Umbridge’s, but his was in a more delicate location.

Barely an hour after breakfast the Heads staggered into the Hospital Wing, one at a time, to avoid suspicion, heading straight to Poppy’s office.

“Poppy I know you couldn’t say much last night, much like I couldn’t. It’s deplorable how Albus uses the portraits to keep tabs on our conversations after serious incidents,” Minerva scoffed, “Thankfully Helga is a founder’s portrait and loyal to the school only. As odd as it is, I am often thankful that the founder’s portraits don’t have to answer to the Headmaster as though his word were law.”

The rest nodded in agreement.

“What exactly happened?” Filius inquired, jumping straight to the heart of the matter.

“Before Miss Granger entered the Great Hall, where of course I’m sure you know is where Madame Umbridge stupidly confiscated Apprentice Granger’s apprentice badge, Mister Potter punched Mister Weasley for firing two spells at Apprentice Granger’s back.”

The Head’s faces were grim.

“Of course Apprentice Granger informed Severus. She didn’t know the spell but remembered the color. Severus had a hunch and checked his wand last night… Mister Weasley shot a torture curse at Apprentice Granger that would have done horrible things to her. How it is not a dark spell is beyond me!” she growled.

“It fell out of favor and slipped through the cracks,” Severus informed her.

“What spell?” Filius pressed.
“Total Choak Pear,” Severus announced.

The half-goblin sucked in a breath. Minerva and Poppy frowned deeply, not knowing what it was beside bad.

“Like Severus said it fell out of favor, it’s old and very medieval. Depending on how long Mister Weasley held the spell Miss – Apprentice Granger would have either suffered internal tearing the least or been in critical condition the worst,” Filius explained to the two witches.

Minerva paled even as her eyes turned flinty.

“I am unsure how Mister Weasley learned the spell, but I’m sure it was more his magic doing the talking rather than him doing any thinking,” Severus drawled.

The others felt as though they had to agree. Ronald Weasley was many things, studious was not one of them. He was prone to anger and fits of jealousy. The wizard was also known to fling spells first in his highly emotional states.

“I think we should call the aurors,” Poppy stated, “Umbridge and Albus be damned.”

The Ravenclaw Head quickly agreed.

Minerva’s face was pinched and Severus’s was stuck in one of disgust.

“Sadly I don’t think that would be very feasible,” Severus said.

“Why not?” Pomona asked, knowing there was something more going on if Severus thought it wouldn’t go well.

“Albus has close personal ties with the Weasley family. He would be more than willing to use his silver tongue to get Mister Weasley out of any serious trouble,” he explained as though it pained him to admit it.

Minerva nodded and proceeded, “Albus has been paying favoritism to the family for many years now. I’m not sure why, but Mister Weasley’s behavior has gone unchecked every time I’ve brought it up with Albus or Molly. Whenever I try to get a hold of Arthur Molly seems to redirect him and says she can handle it.”

“So what do we do,” Pomona demanded, crossing her arms.

“We file papers under Albus Dumbledore’s crooked nose,” Minerva replied with a small sneer.

“What kind of papers?” Filius prodded.

“Probationary ones,” she asserted, “Should he receive detention or detentions on three separate occasions any time throughout this school year, he is hereby expelled.”

“I can’t expel students without Albus’s final say, but I can file those papers and document them with dates as well as dates of any and all detentions afterwards. They go into the file that duplicates itself with the Board of Governors. Albus can’t do anything after that point,” she explained.

Filius thought about it, rolling it around his mind. Albus had prevented aurors from being called many times during his reign as Headmaster. Even when cases called for it, he swept the issues under the rug with mere detentions with dragon dung excuses to go with them. Aurors weren’t even called when Quirrel died! Granted it was his fault, but the aurors should have still been called. Instead
Albus said he died of natural causes, which… the magic that surrounded Mister Potter was a natural defense, but he waved it off as schematics.

He nodded solemnly, “That’s the best we can do without Albus interfering.”

The group there all made faces at what they had to do. A good Headmaster would normally be right with them and call the aurors when needed. For some reason Albus never wanted the aurors to be called for any reason…

The day passed by with an undercurrent of tension. Harry was distracted and barely able to focus whereas his sister kept a close eye on him. They shared small comforting touches, Harry was unaware that he needed it until she gave them. Somehow she just seemed to know. Neville kept close to the duo while also trying not to impose.

As Luna was only there at meal times she ate and absently stroked Hermione’s hair as though she were able to give Harry comfort through that. Honestly Hermione found it odd, but acknowledged that the blonde probably needed to feel as though she was doing something as that was often how she felt when things were tense. Harry was uncomfortable with most touches and as he wasn’t close to Luna as he was to her, Luna did the next best thing. Somehow it did help as Harry was able to feel some of the comfort through their bond and was even bemused to see his sister being petted by their friend.

Before they knew it Harry had detention with the toad like witch.

“Don’t forget to come see Master Snape after,” Hermione softly reminded the green eyed wizard.

Harry couldn’t do anything but nod, his mouth was dry. Hermione pulled him in for a quick tight hug before she let him go and moved a piece of hair out of his face.

With a sense of dread the two split up. Both held their heads high despite their internal turmoil.

Harry made it to his destination first. With a deep calming breath he knocked on the door.

“Enter,” came the sickly sweet voice.

Harry sneered at the door before letting himself fall into his firm set of mind. With a cool head and a blank expression, Harry Potter opened the door.

Umbridge was giddy all day. At long last she got Harry Potter into detention with her! Her hands were still badly burnt, but as she didn’t really need her hands for most of the day, it was fine. Eating was a chore, but she willfully chose to forget that. When her classes ended she went into her office and reached into her desk petting her blood quills. Soon.

Even with her routinely bandage changes the day sped up. If anything she used them as an earmark for how many hours passed and how many more she had left until her first detention.

Finally! It was nearing 7o’clock. She took her blood quill from her office desk and walked into her classroom where she muttered some spells, swishing and flicking as needed.
Dolores Umbridge wanted Harry Potter to feel intimidated, like the degenerate he was.

She moved all of the other desks and chairs to the side, leaving one set for him in the middle 8 paces from her desk. She wanted to see him take his punishment. It was because of him and that mudblood that a pureblood was kissed. The witch willfully ignored that neither teen were the ones to vote on whether he was sentenced to Azkaban or kissed. It was there fault he was there to begin with.

As far as she was concerned, aside from the subsequent death of James Potter and framing of auror Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew did nothing wrong. There was the technical of him being an illegal animagus and casting magic in front of muggles, but those were usually crimes that received a slap on the wrist.

He took up the banister with the rest of the purebloods to cleanse their world of filth. Again, she didn’t like He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named’s way of going about it, but she agreed with him. All he did was kill 12 worthless muggles, indirectly kill a mudblood (who was now considered a hero, the thought always left a bad taste in her mouth), and hide out for a few years. Helping resurrect the dark lord was inconsequential to her. She personally voted for him to be placed in Azkaban.

With the waited knock finally arriving she grinned.

“Enter.”

Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived, walked into the classroom and took note of the room’s sudden change.

“Good evening, Professor Umbridge. What will I be doing for detention tonight?” he asked politely.

“Oh nothing too bad,” she said in her high pitched voice, “Just writing lines.”

Harry sat down at the desk that was obviously there for him and pulled out parchment. As he was going back for his quill he heard the witch clear her throat.

“Hem, hem.”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge?” he asked, his face neutral.

“You won’t be using your quill Mister Potter, but instead one of mine,” she said, holding out the seemingly innocent black quill.

With a quiet sigh Harry stood up and went to the fat witch’s desk. She handed it to him delicately giving Harry the impression that she was trying to pretend to be a lady from a higher class. His face remained impassive. As soon as he touched the quill it felt different, dirty. The feather was soft and clean, sharp even, but somehow it felt… dirty.

“Thank you, Professor Umbridge,” he said. He was trying his damnedest to follow her annoying expectations to prevent her from doling out any more punishment.

“Of course, dear,” she replied with a disturbing smile.

Once seated he went back to look through his bag.

“Oh, no, no, no,” Umbridge started, “You won’t be needing any ink, Mister Potter. My quill will take care of that.”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge,” he replied, sitting straight in his seat, “What will I be writing this
evening?”

“You will be writing ‘I will respect my betters’,” her following grin was something that could only be classed as evil.

“How many times, Professor Umbridge?”

“Until it sinks in Mister Potter,” she purred in her high voice. It didn’t come out as a purr though, but sounded more like she was choking on spit.

Harry was very suspicious at this point, but didn’t let on to it. He wrote the first line of many and hissed at the surprising pain on his left hand.

Looking at it he saw the words he had written on paper on the back of his hand. The ‘ink’ was shiny and red, and clearly not ink. His hand healed just as fast as it was cut into.

“Is anything the matter, Mister Potter?” she asked sweetly.

“Of course not, Professor Umbridge. My apologies,” he said as smoothly as he could.

The messy haired wizard bit his tongue to prevent anymore noises escaping his mouth. Unfortunately after the 20th line he couldn’t help but wince. He wouldn’t give her the satisfaction however and kept writing.

Dolores was mildly put out that he wasn’t putting on as much of a show as she’d be hoping for. She was satisfied however knowing that he was being forced into mutilating himself in a sanctioned manner. A forcible reminder that he was less. Then again she would ensure he didn’t go telling anyone with a mild warning. She couldn’t really cast any spells on him like that, they weren’t her forte, blackmail however was. With a few words she would ensure that he wouldn’t go to the Hospital Wing and that no staff member would see it.

After 5 hours she called to a halt. She didn’t really know how long he would have to write until it stayed permanent, but she was guessing.

“Let me see your hand, Mister Potter,” she said.

Harry put down her quill and went up to the dark witch, holding out his hand for her to see. She grabbed his hand with her greedy pudgy fingers and inspected it carefully. Harry suppressed a shudder. Her touch was as ugly as the gaudy rings on her fingers.

Umbridge looked at the back of his hand carefully. It looked like it was carved in, as it was supposed to, still bleeding lightly, but she wanted more. She knew it would probably scar just as is, but she wanted to be sure that it would stay that way as a permanent reminded, not just one that would fade with time.

With a tut she let go of his hand, “I don’t believe it’s sunk in just yet. We’ll simply have to try harder. I will see you same time tomorrow, Mister Potter.”

“Yes, Professor Umbridge,” he said dispassionately.

He started to clear up his desk and returned to the Undersecretary’s desk.

“Your quill, Professor Umbridge,” he acknowledged, handing it to her.

“Thank you, Mister Potter,” she said with a false smile.
As he pulled his hand back she struck.

“Mister Potter, I would like to remind you that this is a punishment. You are forbidden to go to the Hospital Wing to see it treated.”

Harry quickly bit his cheek to curb his instinctual reaction and instead answered as he was expected, “Yes, Professor Umbridge.”

“Oh! And a pass so you can get to your dormitory. We wouldn’t want you to get into any more trouble, would we?” she grinned.

“No, Professor Umbridge. Thank you,” he replied dutifully. With a slight nod of his head he walked back, rolled up the parchment, and took his leave.

He had a stop to make before going to bed.

While Harry was in detention Hermione and Severus were making the potions Poppy needed replenished for the Hospital Wing. While Luna was a regular visitor she didn’t go to every session and that was fine with them.

Although she was nervous, Hermione knew she had to focus on the potions in front of her lest she ruin the potions or waste her master’s time. The two worked comfortably waiting for Harry to finish his detention. As the hours went by Hermione’s nerves were starting to fray and her hair started to spark.

Thankfully they had just decanted the last potion of the night. At least as far as Severus was concerned. They could brew more tomorrow. Right now his witch needed consoling. It didn’t even cross his mind to send her to her tower until her brother showed up.

It was while Hermione was cleaning the lab that he noticed she was spacing out and nibbling on her bottom lip.

“Hermione,” he called.

She continued to clean, clearly not hearing him.

“Hermione?” he tried again.

Still no response. If he hadn’t been working with her for the past few hours he would have been more concerned than he currently was.

“Mia,” he tried.

“Hm?” Hermione responded and looked up at him.

“I called you twice. What’s on your mind?” he asked.

He was prickly by nature but he wanted this to work. His witch was distracted and clearly wound up. He knew he would be the one to guide her in most things, as that was the basis of an apprenticeship. As Minerva constantly told him, he needed to be a bit more approachable when dealing with witches.

Thankfully he had some experience soothing young witches. It wasn’t a secret per se, but he was
Head of Slytherin and he had to be there for all of his students. It wasn’t unusual for first and second years to come seek him out when they were homesick. It wasn’t unusual for some witches to come confide in him when they were surprised by their menarche, afraid they were dying. It was just something Slytherin House kept to itself.

“I’m worried about Harry,” she said heavily, “Barely 5 minutes into his detention and he felt like he needed to take a shower. The feeling hasn’t gone away. He’s also…” she looked for a word, “disturbed, but…,” she chewed on her bottom lip again, “I can feel him holding himself in check.”

“He will be here after she’s done with him,” he reminded her gently.

He walked up to her, grabbed her gently, but firmly by the arms and pulled her into his chest.

“As much as it pains me, I know how much he means to you, and we will take care of the aftermath,” his voice was just as firm.

He was sure he said the right thing as he felt her sag, tension leaving her body.

The petite witch turned herself around in his arms and looked up at him as though she were searching for something that could only be found in his face. She gently cupped his face, lifted herself up on the tips of her toes and placed a soft kiss on his chin as it was the closest she could reach.

Severus leaned down to give her more access to his face, giving her silent permission. She stood back up, wrapping her other hand on the back of his neck and kissed him solidly, pressing her lips against his. Severus returned in kind, wrapping his hands around her waist and hoisting her up onto his lab table, walking in between her legs and kissed her back.

Tension left both of them as they lost themselves temporarily in their own world that consisted only of each other. Once Hermione no longer felt the pressing need to mold herself into her dark wizard she kissed him softly once, twice, thrice, and pulled away, putting her forehead on his lips.

Severus placed a light kiss there, wrapping his arms around her.

“Potter may not be my favorite person in the world, but he’s important to you. Umbridge is her own special kind of witch and we will take care of the aftermath together,” he reaffirmed.

Hermione nodded relieved that she wouldn’t be alone taking care of her brother this year.

They stayed like that for a long time, just enjoying each other’s presence until there was a knock on Severus’s office door.

“That must be your brother,” he said filling in the space.

His apprentice nodded and slid off the lab bench. With one more kiss to her crown the dark wizard walked purposely to open the door. He glanced at the clock and was surprised to note it was after midnight.

Opening the door revealed one Harry James Potter holding his bag as though it held an important treasure.

“Mister Potter, come in. We’ve been waiting for you,” he said baldly.

Harry let himself in and looked for his sister before his heart rate lowered. Walking over to her he placed his head on her shoulder.
“That witch is sick in the head, Mia,” he said.

“Professor, I brought the lines she had me write,” Harry said, “They weren’t just lines though. She had me use a weird quill. She said I wouldn’t need any ink. The quill didn’t use ink. It used blood,” he rushed.

The dark wizard sucked in a breath and made his way over to the pair.

The messy haired wizard quickly placed his back on the lab table and pulled out the rolled parchment, opening it. Severus leaned over and looked at it concluding that it was written in blood.

“Mister Potter, I have to ask… when you wrote with this quill did it look like it was cutting into the back of your opposite hand?” he asked carefully.

Harry nodded and lifted up his hand, pulling up his cloak’s sleeve. There to see was an agitated hand with pink letters on the back of them spelling out ‘I will respect my betters’.

“A blood quill,” Severus growled glaring at Harry’s hand.

“We won’t let her get away with this Mister Potter. I swear.”

Severus looked into Harry’s eyes as he said this firmly impressing on Harry that they would do something about it. For once when Harry looked at his potions professor he was glad that he knew the man.
Chapter 82

The following morning everyone went about their daily routines. Hundreds of letters had been sent out the night of the incident, some students snuck out later that evening, others rose much earlier than normal, trying to skirt the curfew rules. Everyone was sure however that their letters would be received before breakfast.

Two Slytherins went to breakfast earlier than they usually were won’t to do. Instead of sitting and eating their own breakfast however they were standing by the Great Hall’s entrance. A few other students gave the duo a double look.

Luna skipped and stood next to them, she greeted one and seemed to stare through the other. Then she turned their back on them and waited.

Once Hermione, Neville, and Harry descended the steps Luna skipped over and latched onto the curly haired witch’s arm.

“Good morning, Hermione,” she said whimsically, “Harry, Neville.”

“Good morning, Luna,” Mia replied.

Harry grunted, Neville nodded.

“Good morning, Apprentice Granger,” The duo greeted.

Hermione looked at them, one brightly, one politely cool.

“Good morning, Goyle, Malfoy.”

“Apprentice Granger, I’ve written a letter and notified my father of the abysmal treatment you’ve been given by Madame Umbridge. He replied to me yesterday. You may expect a letter from my father this morning. I wanted to be the first to inform you that Slytherin House is appalled by her actions and stand behind you,” he said. Draco finished with a bow.

This surprised the Gryffindors, Harry the most, but new better by now to hold his tongue to see what would happen next. Malfoy had apologized for his behavior the previous years and if Hermione was giving him a chance to redeem himself, Harry decided he would not interfere. He had his own opinions, but this was new.

“Thank you, it is unexpected, but appreciated,” she replied evenly.

With a small smile, Draco Malfoy turned on his heel and walked into the Great Hall.

“Goyle?”

“I wanted to tell you essentially what Malfoy did. I wrote to my parents and I stand by you. What she did was beyond uncalled for. Even if you weren’t royalty, an apprentice is given respect they are due. When you’re an apprentice, blood purity falls second. Every pureblood knows that. She’s… well known for being a purist hound. She showed us loud and clear that she herself is not pure. That’s not an issue for me anymore, but it’s enough to have people turn on her and cut her off,” he informed, “I wanted to tell you yesterday, but I could tell you were pretty tense and I didn’t want to add more to it.”
Hermione nodded, her mind working quickly. People turning on the toad and cutting off her network would be very beneficial. She was a horrid woman. Without those connections she would lose her powerbase and no one to back her up or make up excuses. She wouldn’t be able to get away with her disgusting deeds. It would be easier to strike her down, and Severus said, she would not get away with hurting her brother.

“Thank you, Greg,” she replied flashing him a smile.

Hermione walked closer, and Gregory Goyle looked down at the petite witch curiously. Without noticing she tip-toed and hugged the burly wizard. Gregory hesitatingly hugged her back.

“Thank you,” she said again before pulling away, “I want you to know, I consider you a friend. I like being study buddies, but I think being a friend would be better. That is, if you’d like to be my friend…”

The wizard grinned, “I would like that, Apprentice Granger.”

“Mia,” Harry said stepping up.

Gregory looked at him with surprise, “Mia?”

“Her close friends call her Mia,” he explained with a light blush, shoving his hands into his pockets.

The petite witch grinned and turned looking at Neville and Luna, “That includes you guys too.”

Luna beamed and threw herself at Hermione again. The other witch caught her and hugged her back fiercely. Neville just gave her a shy smile.

“I think you’ll be most pleased, if embarrassed, by the on-goings in the Hall today,” Luna said carefree.

Hermione made a face of concern as she followed the blonde witch. Pleased but embarrassed could mean many things when it came to the witch who saw what others could not. With a kind firmness Harry placed his hand on the small of his sister’s back and led her into the Great Hall. Three of the four seated themselves at the Gryffindor table.

Hermione made herself a light meal, eating as quickly as politely possible before she lost her stomach. She knew when the owls arrived with whatever mail came she would most likely lose her appetite. Those around her continued to eat as normal.

The hazel eyed witch looked at the Head Table discreetly. She noticed all the staff, including Trelawney, were there.

One by one the parliament arrived, each owl carrying letters, and surprisingly editions of The Quibbler. Hermione noticed that Umbridge in particular was being overwhelmed with owls and was vindictively pleased. A few owls landed in front of her, their legs extended.

With practiced ease Hermione cast detection charms on all of them and was utterly pleased that they all came back clear. She took them all and fed each owl some bacon. Elara also made an appearance even though she carried nothing.

Hermione grinned and pet her owl. The sooty owl was showing her own cunning, sneaking in with the rest of the owls. She gave Elara a small plate of bacon with another affectionate rub.

There was a happy squeal coming from her blonde friend causing Hermione to look over.
“It’s here!” she said, quickly moving the magazine in front of her friend.

“I wrote an article the other night and sent it out to Daddy,” she quickly explained, “He said he worked as quickly as possible to have it printed for today as a Special Edition. He left out some of our regular articles to give it more credence he said to not detract from the main article that I wrote. He left the rune puzzles and such though. He said he sent a few editions free to Hogwarts and about 50 more to members of the Wizengamot and Heads of Ministry Departments,” she finished excitedly.

Hermione picked up the magazine and didn’t have to look hard for the article Luna was talking about.

**Attack on Confirmed and Respected Apprenticeship**

You read correctly readers. There was an attack against one of our most respected traditions: Apprenticeships. Recently at Hogwarts Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, has been hired as the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor. While her methods of teaching are questionable, being purely theoretical, she is not a master of the subject.

This was made clear recently when she accosted Apprentice Hermione Granger, ripping her apprentice badge off her cloak. On the witch’s birthday no less! Snatching the badge off her chest the Senior Undersecretary was seen with it in her hands in the Great Hall. Upon sitting Apprentice Granger’s master, Potions Master Severus Snape, asked the witch why she had his apprentice’s badge. The Senior Undersecretary stated that she was no longer an apprentice! Claiming that Apprentice Granger didn’t deserve the honor.

Apprentice Granger was taken by surprise when a student fired two spells at her back. Another student then physically hit her attacker. Apprentice Granger barely had time to assess the situation when Madame Umbridge walked onto the scene. Without asking questions she gave the student who defended the apprentice detention, sent her attacker to the Hospital Wing, and seized the apprentice’s badge off her person.

Thankfully the goblins who craft the apprentice badges make sure they are unable to be stolen. It appears the enchantments are time based, but we are not sure. Before sitting it was clear to all who saw that the badge was becoming increasingly heavy. After another moment it seemed to hurt her and she dropped it on the table. It started to shake and even dent the table! All clear signs that it should have been returned to the apprentice immediately.

However Madame Umbridge still refused, even at the behest of the rest of Hogwarts’ Staff.

Apprentice Granger calmly walked up to the Head Table and asked if the new professor was ready to return her badge to her.

**Madame Umbridge then said “It is no longer your property, Miss Granger. You are no longer an apprentice.”**

It was clear to all who are aware that Madame Umbridge knew nothing of apprenticeships.

Apprentice Granger informed the new professor that magical oaths and vows had to be made and the badge was just to inform others of an apprenticeship.

**Madame Umbridge then yelled at Apprentice Granger “An apprenticeship is sacred! A muggle like...**
Apprentice Granger was quick to dispel that notion reminding the Senior Undersecretary that she was muggleborn. It should be noted, dear readers, that muggleborns have been documented by Healers to be born with magic like any other witch or wizard. A few muggleborns have been noted to be descended from squibs. While many squibs marry muggles, they are still descended from magical lineages. It is possible that is true for all muggleborns, but that is still to be seen.

After another attempt to have the Senior Undersecretary return the badge back to the apprentice, the new professor refused. It was then that the badge grew hot, turning red, and emitted a dragon’s growl that echoed in the Great Hall.

Despite that, and many more attempts from the rest of the Hogwarts’ Staff, the Senior Undersecretary still refused and instead tried to vanish the badge with a spell. Instead of making it vanish the badge multiplied and started to advance and attack the new professor.

Once again the Headmaster implored the new professor to return the badge to Apprentice Granger. Frantic, the witch threw the badge at the apprentice, who thankfully moved out of the way. Instead of colliding with the witch, it collided with Apprentice Granger’s attacker who had made it to the Great Hall. Clearly the nameless student had not been badly injured by her defender as the school healer, Madame Pomfrey, did not keep him overnight. After being hit with the apprentice’s badge, he fell in pain. Both had to go to the Hospital Wing where both were treated for very serious burns.

All this because Senior Undersecretary Dolores Umbridge did not want Apprentice Granger to be an apprentice! Apprentice Granger continues to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, but when the witch was just a student she was first in her year every year since her attendance. Apprentice Granger has been called The Brightest Witch of Her Generation, clearly Potions Master Severus Snape saw her potential and her apprenticeship was earned. Many masters are sure to be dismayed that they were not the first to offer her an apprenticeship.

What are we to do, dear readers, when a high ranking Ministry Official is blatantly attacking our apprentices? What are we to do when our Ministry is allowing this behavior from their Senior Undersecretary?

Hermione had to admit nothing was embellished and it made for one hell of an article.

“This is amazing, Luna,” she said, passing the magazine back to the blonde.

“Thank you,” she beamed at the praise, “…You’re not mad are you?” the young witch finished timidly.

Hermione leaned into the blonde, “I’m not mad. You reported nothing but the truth and nothing a few hundred other people didn’t see. Nothing written was private or secret. If another reporter saw what happened they would also be within their writes to write an article about it.”

Luna clearly felt much better at her friend’s admittance.

Once she was sure Luna felt better the witch turned to her own mail. One was a letter from Skeeter.

Do I have your permission to write about the incident involving you and Dolores Umbridge?

- Rita Skeeter

Hermione was glad the reporter sought her out before doing anything. She was also glad she didn’t
have to contact her first. She would most likely embellish the attack and drag up more dirt on the pink clad witch than the Quibbler ever would. It was something she had fully intended on allowing, but Rita was quick on a scoop, she’d give her that.

The next letter she opened was of finer quality. Clearly from Malfoy’s father.

Dear Lady Apprentice Granger,

I was most aggrieved to hear that the Madame Undersecretary accosted your person. You can be assured that the Malfoy family will no longer be dealing with her.

I was on the panel when looking for someone to temporarily hold the position for the year. I made sure the applicants at least had an Exceeds Expectations in their O.W.L and Acceptable in their Defense Against the Dark Arts N.E.W.T.

To fix this, I would be most willing to hire a Defense tutor to travel to Hogwarts weekly. I am sure Severus will be more than happy to assist you, as he is thorough in everything he does. However I would not wish for this atrocity to impede on your main studies with your master. As I am on the Board of Governs, I hereby apologize and hope to aide you so you have nothing more to do with the witch.

Cordially,

- Malfoy

Hermione stared at it in surprise. It was… polite and generous. While he was part of the reason Umbridge was there, she still appreciated it. The additional information concerning the bitch’s test scores appeased her.

Putting it down she noticed another piece of parchment behind it.

‘Dear Lady Apprentice Granger,

I am most sorry you were subjected to Madame Umbridge. She is clearly beneath you and I applaud your response to her impudence. Madame Umbridge is most uncouth in dealing with those from polite society.

Should you ever need assistance in navigating our society, I humbly offer my services. Severus is by far more than adept and adequate, but I fear he lacks a witch’s touch and knowledge. I’m sure you are familiar the subtleties of polite society and how there are slight different rules ladies must follow from the men. I believe there are a few more subtleties in our society and I would be humbled to teach you. I hope you accept my offer.

Sincerely,

Narcissa Malfoy

Hermione blinked at the letter from the Malfoy matriarch. Narcissa Malfoy nee Black was very well known in pureblood society and considered one of the most elite. Even she knew that. If anyone could give her tips to navigate and further understand the wizarding world it would be her. She could mess with the best in muggle society, but she was well aware that she lacked the same knowhow for the magical one.

Thinking more upon it Hermione acknowledged that it would also be a decent cover for Severus to further integrate herself with his friends. It seemed like a win/win to her. She learned from one of the
best and Severus wouldn’t have to make excuses to not see one of his, clearly, best friends. Instead of seeing him however, she’d be able to meet with his wife.

Opening the next letter she noticed it was from someone anonymous, much like some of her previous hate mail. This however was encouragement.

‘Don’t let that witch get you down! An apprenticeship is always earned!’

The witch was surprised and opened the next one.

‘Dear Apprentice Granger,

I hope this letter finds you well. I would like to state that I am most envious of Potions Master Snape. If what is written is to be believed I’m afraid I missed out and Master Snape was right to bond with you while he had the opportunity. I wish you all the best on during your apprenticeship journey.

Sincerely,

Potions Master Julius Marco

Reading a few more letters, Hermione was heartened that seemed to be the general consensus. A few more of them were from other masters, some not even from the potions community.

“Well?” Harry asked.

“Much better than my last bunch of ‘fan mail’,” she grinned, “I actually plan on keeping these. Here.”

The witch passed the letters over to her brother and even handed some to Luna. The younger witch wore a small grin. It was just the response she was hoping would happen. Harry also seemed to be happy with this turnabout. Letters from other masters were clearly her favorites.

Soon a smattering of whispers broke throughout the hall. A small silence from the end of the table close to the teacher’s table alerted the group that something was up.

There was a howler in front of Umbridge hissing as she looked at it with a pale face. Clearly one of the other staff members removed it from the owl’s leg before it opened.

With trembling pudgy fingers the witch touched the red envelope before it burst.

“DOLORES!!! I AM APPALLED AT HOW YOU WOULD TREAT ANY STUDENT IN SUCH A MANNER! ESPECIALLY ONE THAT IS AN APPRENTICE! WHAT GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO THINK YOU CAN RIP OFF AN APPRENTICE’S BADGE FROM HER CHEST!! WHAT MADE YOU THINK YOU HAD ANY SAY IN IT!!?” the howler snarled at fat witch.

“I HOPE THE STUDENTS DON’T CATCH YOUR STUPIDITY DOLORES!!!”

“Who is that from?” Hermione asked impressed.

“Janus Snicket, he’s a member of the potions guild. He’s a friend of my Gran’s and my Uncle Algie… he also tutors me during the summer,” Neville said, admitting the last part quietly.

“Do you think you’ll need him this summer?” Hermione asked curiously.

“Nope,” Neville said pleased.
“Master Snicket specializes in herbology potions,” Luna piped in.

“Yeah?” Harry asked.

“Hm,” Luna said with a nod, “He helped my mum with the dirigible plum bushes since they’re not native to England.”

“Wow. Do you think I could have a cutting of it?” Neville asked.

“Sure,” the blonde replied with a grin.

Before they noticed another howler exploded.

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOLORES!?!? A MINISTRY WORKER PRETENDING TO BE A PROFESSOR!! I DON’T KNOW WHO PUT YOUR NAME DOWN AS A SUGGESTION BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU THEY ARE FEELING EXTREMELY EMBARRASSED BY YOUR ACTIONS!!!! IF IT WEREN’T FOR PROTOCOL I WOULD HAVE MADE SURE YOU WERE SACKED THE MOMENT I READ THE NEWS! PUT ANOTHER TOE OUT OF LINE AND I WILL SEE YOU STAND BEFORE THE BOARD OF GOVERS!!!!!”

The hall was silent listening to the howlers yelling at the toad like witch. However no one felt the least bit of sympathy for her.

“Oh my. I’ve never heard Missus Fawley scream before,” Luna said.

“Is she Sullivan Fawley’s mum?” Hermione asked.

“Hm,” the blonde nodded, “She likes to personally stop by our house to pick up her issue. She also brings over a nice casserole with her.”

“She’s also on the board of governs with my gran,” Neville put in.

“For once I think this is an instance of the cauldron starting to boil instead of out of pan and into the fire,” Hermione mumbled.

Harry was reluctant to agree but had to admit she was right. They had to suffer a whole year with Lockhart, Dumbledore would probably have them suffer the toad.

The petite witch reached into her bag and flipped over the request from Rita. She made a face at her quill but proceeded to write her short reply anyways.

“Yes. You have complete freedom to write about Dolores Umbridge. – H’

“Elara, be swift,” she said, quickly tying the note to the owl’s leg.

The sooty owl affectionately nibbled at her fingers before taking flight.

“Let’s get this day over with,” Hermione said, gathering her things, “Our study session will still be held today.”

This last bit saw Luna and Neville breathe easier. It was heartening.
Apprentice Granger made her way to the dungeons to meet with her master. Her walk was purposeful and her head held high. Her cloak billowed quietly in a manner similar to her master’s. Students walking by her were both impressed and apprehensive.

Soon she was before his door and knocked.

“Enter.”

Hermione opened the door and closed it behind her. Thankfully no one else was in his office and she walked to stand beside him.

“Sev, I was hoping we’d be able to travel today to get the pens. I had to write a reply this morning. I was hesitant but it was important.”

Severus watched her bite her lip and understood her plight. For someone like her not having something to write with at a moments’ notice must be extremely hard. He had the next two hours free. While he preferred to be in the castle in case his snakes needed him, his apprentice needed him now.

“Let me gather my outer cloak and we will make our way to Hogsmead. We’ll stop by muggle London and grab a few pens. A few for you and all the color inks you like to use,” he teased, “we should also gather some for your brother, Lovegood, Longbottom, my godson, and Goyle. I’ve noticed he’s become a part of your group.”

“Yes,” she sighed with relief, “We can stop by Gringotts and exchange some gold.”

“Or you can let me pay for them,” Severus intone with his brows raised.

The witch tilted her head and looked at him, “Are you sure?”

“As sure as you turn me on,” he quipped enjoying her blush.

The wizard leaned over and kissed her, lightly nibbling on her bottom lip before pulling away leaving his witch redder than before.

“Come,” he said, opening the door for her.

Mia fixed her face as best as she was able before following him.

Once they returned with a bag full of fountain pens Hermione had a bounce in her step and her chest was lighter. They placed the pens in her messenger bag as soon as they entered Hogsmead and vanished the plastic bag.

“I will continue to use sugar quills in her class you know. I’d rather not give her more ammo to use against me.”

Severus ‘hm’ed. The candy would not transfer the magic making it perfectly acceptable.

“I take it your study session with your friends will commence as usual?” he inquired.

“Yes. I told them so. It will be easier to give them the pens since they’ll all be in one place,’” she answered.
“Very good, Apprentice,” he said as they entered the wards of the castle.

“I will see you after your study session,” he told her.

“Yes, Master,” she replied as they parted ways.

She made her way to the library and was happy to see her friends and brother sitting in their usual seats, Harry’s bag saving her place. Each of them had different books open. Thankfully none of them were potions as they all completed that bit of homework earlier in the week. They only had to review their homework and refresh their minds once a day. The group was determined to be on their O game. Their Hermione was a potions apprentice and they couldn’t do any less.

Taking her seat and handing Harry his bag she placed her on the table and dug into it.

“Before we continue Master Snape and I went to a market and purchased some fountain pens. Some of you might know the importance of using a quill, but after a few incidents and with Umbridge in the castle we decided it would be safer to use these since it won’t transfer our magic into the parchment. If it really bothers you I think you can charm it to look like a quill. Personally I’m going to use only sugar quills in her class.”

While she was talking she was passing out pens to everyone at the table. Thankfully everyone respected and trusted her enough to not question her even though the purebloods who were looking at the fountain pens questioningly.

“At least the tip is the same as a quill so it shouldn’t be too hard to get accustomed to it,” Luna said dreamily.

Hermione nodded happily. “And if it gets to be too much you can probably transfigure the handle to be a little bit softer. I purposely got you thin pens so it’s similar to quills. I got myself thin and standard sizes. My Master was kind enough to suggest I get a few one them for the different ink colors I use.”

Harry was impressed with Snape’s thoughtfulness. He was surprised that Goyle and Luna were not. He studied Goyle’s face a bit more.

It was then that Cho walked up to them with her hands on her hips.

“So Potter. I couldn’t help but notice you keep staring at Goyle. You said that I wasn’t your type, but he is?” she asked incredulously.

Looking behind the witch it was clear that her friends were uncomfortable with this confrontation. Noticing this Hermione sneered at the Asian witch.

“Chang I suggest you go back to your friends,” she said dangerously.

The raven haired Ravenclaw involuntarily took a step back.

“Well Potter didn’t deny it,” she tried again.

“Why should he? Goyle has become quite handsome,” Luna said in a carefree manner, but her eyes were surprisingly focused.

Cho stood up straighter feeling more comfortable talking to the blonde. However her eyes kept her just a bit off kilter.
“Y-yeah? What? You want to date him?” she pushed through.

“Oh no, he’s not my type. No offense, Gregory. I’m not yours either,” she shrugged before turning back to Cho, “However I can appreciate that he’s grown into himself.”

Goyle blushed and nodded.

“Cho take a hint, swallow your pride, and walk away. Just because you were turned down doesn’t make it the end of the world,” Hermione drawled.

Cho took another step back, fear settling in her chest, and made her way back to her friends.

“H-Harry, is it true?” Goyle asked quietly.

Harry looked at the table, his face bright red with glassy eyes, “Yeah.”

“I-I think you’re h-handsome too,” the Slytherin admitted.

Harry looked up slowly staring at the other wizard.

“W-would you like to, erm, go to Hogsmead with me?” he asked nervously.

“Yeah, I’d like that,” Harry said with a grin.

“Oh you two will be sweet together,” Luna sighed happily.

Hermione nodded.

“Now that that is over, what are you guys working on?” she asked.

With that the study session got back on track as though nothing happened. They knew Hermione wouldn’t tolerate anything less. They also knew she would not waste her time if they decided to do otherwise. Like Severus, she ran a tight ship.

When they finished and were packing up Neville stood up and looked at the petite witch.

“Hermione. Earlier...,” the shy wizard started.

“Hm?” she asked looking up at him.

“Earlier you were pretty scary, but brilliant. It was pretty amazing,” he admitted.

“Thank you,” she beamed.

With a few hugs they departed, Hermione making her way back to the dungeons. Little did she know a certain witch was thinking up a way to get back at her. The humiliation she suffered because of the little mudblood was simply unacceptable. Thankfully Potter still had detention with her and she could at least take it out on him for the time being… Dark satisfaction filled Dolores.

Elsewhere Molly was brewing another batch of love potion while mixing up cookie dough. Beside that she had the beginnings of treacle tart.

Ron was clearly the wrong wizard for Hermione, but the twins seemed to be a good replacement in her opinion for the debauched witch. She hoped this batch would take. She decided to leave out the
loyalty potions in case it was a small deterrent in making the witch focus on the love interest.

Harry she still had hopes for. The housewitch was convinced the boy was just shy and needed a little push, but would end up with her Ginny.

For some reason none of her children decided it was prudent to write their newfound information in any of their letters home. Ron complained more about Hermione, but Ginny was a dutiful daughter and wrote about her new classes. Even Albus hadn’t written her in fear of his owls being intercepted and his floo watched. If only she knew her efforts would be useless.

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