

Beautiful Terror

by themistresssnape

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

Beautiful Terror

The soft, guttural laughter seemed to be everywhere and nowhere as she stood against the cold stone pillar in the deepest dungeons of Hogwarts Castle. Her breath came in quick gasps, her pulse pounding in her ears, and her palms clammy with sweat. Desperately she tried to wipe the sweat on her jeans and calm her ragged breathing. But it was too late. He had already caught her scent, committed it to memory, and vowed to follow it wherever it lead. Nothing had ever been so desirable, so tantalizing, so obsessing as the scent that wafted from her with every beat of her heart and every puff of her breath.

A form moved in the darkness beside her, causing her to jump and stumble around to the other side of the pillar. She closed her eyes, wishing desperately that she was having a nightmare and would wake up at any moment. The fear that coursed through her was too real, too raw to be a dream, no matter how horrifying her nightmares could be. So, she began to wish she had thought to bring her wand. How could she have been so careless as to be caught so defenseless? She was the brightest witch of the age, wasn't she? Well, wasn't she?

"It wouldn't help you, you know," the voice whispered in her ear. She let out a tiny squeak and tried to run. A cold, marble white hand grabbed her arm in a grip that felt like a vice. She squeezed her eyes shut again and tried weakly to struggle against the force that held her captive. "You may be the brightest witch of your age, but it wouldn't help you with me. Say it, and I will let you go. Say that there's nothing you can do to stop me."

Hermione felt tears spilling over her cheeks. She desperately wanted Harry to be there, or Ron, or the twins. She would even take Draco Malfoy as long as he could help her get away from this monster that was breathing down her neck and sniffing at her as if she were something delicious to eat.

"My magic won't save me. There's nothing I can do to stop you," she whispered, the tears causing her voice to crack.

The guttural laughter started again, though this time it was tinged with something akin to a feral growl. "Of course you couldn't," the voice purred as cold fingers wrapped around her throat. "And you're about to learn how helpless you really are, Miss Granger."

The fingers grasping at her throat moved to the base of her skull and began wrapping her reckless curls in an unbreakable fist. Hermione felt her head being jerked back and to the side. "You said that you would let me go," she gurgled, trying to remove her wrists from their position now pinned behind her back.

The figure moved its face closer, enough that Hermione could finally see the deep onyx eyes, the pallid, sallow skin, the beak-like nose. She gasped as he smiled, baring pearl-white teeth and fangs.

"Never trust the word of a vampire, Hermione. Especially one like me." With that, Severus Snape pulled her against his chest and sank his razor-like teeth into the juncture of throat and shoulder. Warm, copper-tasting blood oozed from the wounds and he sucked at it greedily, all the while keeping his composure, knowing that if he bled her dry it would all have been for nothing. The pain was finally too much, and Hermione Granger fell into darkness in the arms of her Potions professor.

It was several hours later when she awoke. The room was dimly lit, though the glittering flames of the candles hurt her eyes. She felt pain running through her body each time she tried to breathe. Her stomach churned as she realized she was ravenously hungry. Tears appeared in her eyes, glistening like diamonds in the candlelight. Hermione shut her eyes tightly and rolled over onto her side, drawing herself up into a ball.

"The pain will stop soon, I promise," came a velveteen voice from the doorway. "And don't try to breathe, you couldn't stand the smell. It will drive you crazy with thirst."

Severus Snape crossed the room and sat on the edge of the bed beside her. His cold hand rested against her forehead while he whispered something unintelligible under his breath. The pain seemed to ease and the pang of hunger was momentarily staved off. She didn't want to look at him, didn't want to see in him what she had become.

"I hate you," she spat, wrenching away from him. The moment their contact was broken, the pain and hunger came back with a violent vengeance. She began to shake and tremble without control, and yet she fought his touch desperately.

He sighed. "I am sorry, Hermione. You should have listened when you were told the lower dungeons were off limits to students. There are reasons for these things you know. Once you walked in and I caught your scent, I couldn't help myself. I know you could never forgive me, but at least try to understand."

She moaned in pain as sweat began to pour down her face. He grasped her shoulders and pulled her to him, resisting the way she struggled against both his touch and the changes pouring through her.

They sat that way for a long while, until Hermione stopped trembling and she began drawing in slow, shallow breaths. As the scent of a thousand warm bodies flooded into her senses, her head shot up. Her once amber eyes were smoky black and her nostrils flared as she attempted to sort out the new sensations occurring to her.

She smiled, a more vile and wicked incarnation of her former self, showing a row of perfect, pearl-white teeth. Closing her eyes for a moment, she concentrated on the smell of the blood pulsing through the students in the floors above her and felt fangs begin to sprout where her canines once were. "I'm hungry," she purred, a hint of a snarl in her voice.

"I have some food stored away in the other room. It's what keeps me from feeding on the students," Snape replied, moving away from the bed.

"No," she growled, baring her newly acquired fangs. "I want one of *them*." She rolled her eyes upward and sniffed the air seductively. She sighed contentedly. *Ah!* Yes, I want him!"

Snape eyed her warily. He remembered his first few days after his transformation. The thirst was almost insatiable, the constant smell of blood, the sound of hearts beating was enough to nearly drive him to madness. He could see the bloodlust in her eyes now as she sniffed out her quarry. "Who, Hermione? Who do you want?"

Hermione smiled again. "Diggory..."

I

Chapter 2 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

I

"Tell us again, Cedric," whined the girls who were crowding around the Hufflepuff table. "Tell us about the catch you made on Saturday. Please?"

Cedric Diggory smiled, flashing his perfect teeth and pushed his caramel hair away from his forehead. His blue eyes sparkled as he leaned forward on the table. "Oh, okay. Ravenclaw was playing great and Cho was circling high over the pitch watching for the snitch. I was tailing her, knowing that I could get to the snitch in a dive quicker than she could. I mean," he chuckled, "she's good and all, but my broom is much better than hers."

The girls swooned around him, chins in their hands, their eyes sparkling with admiration for their Quidditch hero. "Then what happened, Cedric," breathed a blonde haired girl who sat across the table from him.

He grinned roguishly and continued with his play-by-play retelling of the latest match against Ravenclaw. With each daring twist and dive, the girls gasped and cheered. They watched him with dreamy expressions on their faces, committing his pale blue eyes and tousled locks to memory for use in a thousand daydreams. Seemingly oblivious to his ability to entrance the females of Hogwarts, Cedric reveled in his status as the hero of the pitch.

Besides, the only female he wanted to entrance wasn't even in the room.

Harry was beginning to worry. No one had seen Hermione in hours, not since she had left the common room after dinner the night before. She had said she was going to the library to do some research for an essay for Professor Henxley, the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. It wasn't unlike Hermione to disappear into the library for hours on end, but Harry was going to check on her anyway. Knowing Hermione, she had fallen asleep at her study table with half of the contents of the library around her.

He left the Great Hall and turned up the stairs to the upper floors. Something didn't feel right to him. He could tell when Voldemort was nearby... or any kind of trouble for that matter... and he was getting that feeling now. The feeling made his skin crawl and his stomach tie in knots. Hermione was usually always in the common room before curfew. Harry knew that because he and Ron were accustomed to waiting up for her until she got back.

Madam Pince was just opening the wide doors of the library when Harry turned the corner into the corridor. The vulture-like woman glared at him as he slipped past her into the room. His emerald eyes searched the tables, looking desperately for the familiar form of Hermione's bushy hair splayed out over a pile of books. But Hermione wasn't there.

Harry returned to the front of the library, where Madam Pince was perched behind the desk. Her eyes watched him like those of a hawk as it stalked its prey. "Can I help you, Mr. Potter?" she said, her voice as old and crackling as the worn pages of her many books.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm looking for Hermione Granger. Have you seen her this morning?"

The librarian seemed to soften for an imperceptible moment at the mention of Hermione's name. "Good girl, that one," she mumbled. "Takes care of the books, respects them, she does." She turned her sharp eyes on him again. "No, Mr. Potter. I haven't seen Miss Granger since she left here last night. She was on her way to see Professor Snape about an assignment."

Several floors below, Hermione was lying on the bed, tremors racking through her. She was curled into a tight ball with her forehead pressed against her knees and her arms wrapped around her legs. Tears were sliding like crystals down her cheeks. The moment Severus broke contact with her, the pain and hunger spilled over her once again. The craving that overcame her mind was more than she thought she could manage. The smell of Cedric Diggory's blood filled her nostrils as the sound of it pulsing through his veins thundered in her ears.

She groaned and pulled her legs closer to her body. "Please," she moaned, her voice feeling raw in her throat. It sounded foreign to her own ears, deeper and more mystical. "Please, give me something. Make it stop!"

Severus Snape stood against the wall, watching her beneath long, dark lashes. He was troubled by her quick identification of a victim, especially of a male victim. It was more than troubling, it was devastating. Severus Snape had only bitten one person in his multitude of years as a vampire, and she was lying on the bed in agony. He had chosen her as his mate.

His eyes softened as he crossed over to her. "I will, Hermione. I will, but you must promise not to leave this spot until I get back."

"Where are you going?" she screeched, unwilling to be left alone with her pain and hunger.

"Into the next room. To get you some food. It will help with the pain, too, I promise." He pressed his palm to the back of her head and felt the tremors lessen at the touch. "You must trust me, Hermione."

She laughed painfully. "You said to never trust a vampire like you."

He smiled grimly as he left the bed and retreated to the next room to bring her something to eat. A small, Muggle-style cooler sat beneath a table in a shadowy corner and was hidden by a stack of books and parchment. Gingerly, Severus swept the piles to the side and retrieved the cooler, which was filled with packets of human blood. He removed several packets, knowing that Hermione would be thirsty. Pouring them in a bowl, he pushed the books back in place with his foot.

Hermione sat up with a jolt as she heard the blood sloshing in the bowl in the next room. For a brief moment, the sound and smell of it overpowered the strong essence of Cedric Diggory. She leapt up from the bed with a speed she was unaware that she possessed and sprinted through the open door. She was behind him before Severus had the chance to turn around.

Greedily, she grasped the bowl from his hands and drew the bowl to her lips. She drank deeply, tiny rivulets of blood sliding down her chin. Hermione sighed and licked her lips, an action that drew Snape's eyes. He grinned at the serene look on her face and traced the line of her jaw with the tips of his fingers. She leaned into the touch as he lifted her face toward his own.

He watched her closely, saw her eyes momentarily glow red before growing dark and smoky once more. The thirst had been sated for the moment and it would ease the pains that still racked her body. He knew how painful the transformation was, but also how much the touch of her maker would relax that suffering. The blood still dripped from her chin, an aroma that was stale to him but was enough for him to survive. He leaned forward and, closing his eyes, licked at the blood on her chin.

Hermione sank against him, feeling better than she had in hours. His body was cool and hard against her, but the touch was comforting and welcome. His breath was cold against her skin even though she was only a few degrees warmer than he. An herbal scent flowed around him from the hours he spent with potions ingredients.

"Thank you," she murmured, raising her hand to place it against his cold cheek. "I feel much better now."

He smiled and placed his hand over hers. "You're welcome." He took her hand in his own and led her back to the bedroom. "Sit on the bed, Hermione. I believe we need to talk."

Hermione did what she was told, slightly unnerved by the loss of his touch. He retreated to the other side of the room, folding his arms over his chest. "I want you to know that you are the first person I have bitten since I became what I am now. I have been tempted many times, but you are the first to have caused me to succumb. There is no excuse for what I have done, only the reason that, in my mind, was perfectly rational."

"And what was that reason?" she asked, drawing her knees back up and wrapping her arms around herself. She felt an overwhelming connection with him, a connection that warred with the desire for Cedric Diggory.

"I have lived alone for two hundred years, Hermione. I have known many brilliant, interesting people in my lifetime. But you are entirely unique. If I must live into eternity, I do not want to live it alone." He looked at her sheepishly, trying to hide his eyes beneath his dark lashes. "I wanted you as my mate."

Suddenly he jerked his eyes away from her and turned his face upward, looking at the ceiling. His dark eyes dilated and his nostrils flared. "Potter's coming," he growled. He threw a quick glance at Hermione before sweeping from the room. "Don't leave this room," his voice murmured in her head. "You're not ready to be around them yet."

The anxiety returned as soon as Severus left the room. The hunger had lessened after the food he had given her. She could hear the beating of Harry's heart as he drew closer, smell the blood that pumped through him. Hermione licked her lips absently, yearning to go after him, but she kept her promise to her maker. She stayed put.

Harry could hear footsteps coming down the corridor toward him. They were heavy and yet still lithe. The hair on the back of his neck stood up as Severus Snape turned the corner. For a moment they stared at each other, the dead look in Snape's matching the hate-filled one in Harry's.

"What on earth are you doing down here on a Saturday morning, Mr. Potter?" said Snape smoothly. "An answer, Potter, and quickly."

Harry felt the skin on his arms rise with goose flesh at the unusually biting glare in the Potion master's eyes. "I'm looking for Hermione, Professor. Madam Pince said she came to see you last night about an assignment."

"She did," he replied tersely. "But she left my office before curfew. I have not seen her since."

"Are you sure about that, Professor? Because, you see, no one else has seen her since she left the library last night."

The air around Snape seemed to crackle with the anger emanating off him as he stood, glaring at Harry. "I have told you that I have not seen Miss Granger since she left my office at nine thirty last night. I am sure she has simply slipped into her room without your knowing. Now, please get back up to the main school before I have you pickling frog's eyes for the rest of the day!" With that, Snape turned on his heel and stomped back off down the corridor.

He watched the older man's retreating back for a moment before turning and climbing the stairs back up to the entrance hall. He was lost in his own thoughts, following the instinctual, well-worn path from the dungeons to the Great Hall.

"Easy there, Harry," came Cedric's voice as he put out his hands to keep them from crashing into each other. "You okay?"

Harry seemed to emerge from a daze as his eyes focused on the form of Cedric Diggory in front of him. "Oh, hey, Ced. No, I'm okay. It's just that nobody's seen Hermione since last night."

II

Chapter 3 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

II

Hermione could feel the tremors returning the longer she was away from Snape. She began to curl in upon herself again, listening to the beating of Cedric Diggory's heart on the floor above her. Images of Cedric's handsome face blurred through her mind, warring with dark pictures of Snape's onyx eyes. There were no more tears for her to cry, only the pain that coursed like fire through her. She wanted to wail, to scream, to tear herself apart to stop the way she felt. She opened her mouth in a wordless cry as the color drained from her face and the warmth faded at last from her body.

"Severus!" she wailed, balling her fists in the coverlet. She began to jerk and roll from side to side as fire burned from her head to her feet. "Severus, my maker! Please!"

She began to scream for him. She grasped at great handfuls of her hair and pulled. Her eyes rolled back into her head. Her screams filled the lower dungeons, echoing off the stone walls and rolling back to her ears more magnified than she could bear. Her hands covered her ears as she continued to scream and thrash against the pain.

"Hermione, my love," came his voice softly inside her head. Her entire thought was filled with images of Snape's eyes and pale skin. "Be calm, my love, be calm. I am coming back to you. You see, here I am."

He was by her side in an instant, pulling her to him in a cold embrace. He stroked her tumbled curls, muttering words softly under his breath that soothed her sore scalp. She pressed her cheek against his chest, surprised to feel the icy flesh give slightly, and wrapped her arms around his neck. Pulling her fully into his lap with ease, Snape cradled her like a child and planted small kisses along her forehead.

The calm pervaded her the instant his skin touched her own. She snuggled against him, listening to the sound of his soft murmuring as it overcame the yearning for Cedric's blood. "Severus," she cooed, the serenity flowing in her voice. He liked the way his name sounded when she said it, liked the way he would be able to hear it everyday for the rest of eternity.

"Yes, Hermione?" he replied, lying back on the bed and taking her with him. She clutched at him, desperate to keep him by her.

"Will this ever stop?" She enjoyed the smell of him, the sweet herbal scent infused with the fragrance of mulled wine. Her fingertips touched the cold skin of his throat, mildly surprised to feel no pulse beating. Snape let his fingers trail over her arms and back as he reveled in the feeling of peace and comfort that rolled off her as she lay in his arms.

"Yes, my girl, it will stop. It won't take much longer now. I will not leave you again until it is over," he whispered softly, holding her more tightly against his hard form. With that, he began to hum a melody softly in her ears, a melody that was altogether unfamiliar and familiar at once. It was deep and somber at one moment and then high and lilting the next. Hermione began to wish that there were words to this beautiful tune, words that spoke of love and loss and a place of eternal night and beauty.

She tilted her head upward toward his. Their eyes met as he continued to hum. It was a small movement, a simple adjustment of the distance between them. The sound of his song drifted away as her lips met his own. She was sweetly hesitant at first, testing the feeling of their cold lips together before she pulled herself as close to him as she possibly could. He seemed to snarl in the back of his throat as she parted her lips slightly and leaned into him with a sigh.

He kissed her lightly, slowly, savoring the taste of her that still lingered. His fingers twined in her curls and caressed her cheek and throat. "Hermione," he murmured against her lips, pressing fleeting kisses against her. "Say you will stay with me. Say that you will never leave me, that we will be together for all of eternity."

She opened her eyes, their smoky depths searching the pale face that was only inches from her own. "I don't think I would have the strength to leave you."

"What do you mean, nobody's seen Hermione?" Cedric exclaimed, staring at Harry with wide eyes. "Like she's locked herself in her room or something?"

Harry looked momentarily puzzled at the older boy's interest but quickly ignored it, his concern over his missing friend taking over his mind. "That's just it, Cedric. No one saw her even come back to the common room last night. Ron and I were up until almost two and we didn't see her. I've just been down to see Snape since he was the last one to see her, but he said she left his office at half past nine."

Cedric felt a slight twinge of jealousy at the thought of Hermione being alone with Snape that late at night. He hated the Potions master just as much as the next Gryffindor, but something primal in him seemed to awake whenever he saw her anywhere near him. His hands clenched into fists at his sides and a muscle in his jaw thrummed. "Did you believe him?"

There was no answer. Harry was staring over Cedric's shoulder at some point far away in the Great Hall. The great, throne-like chair of the headmaster loomed in his eyesight, making him feel incredibly stupid. It didn't matter whether or not he believed what Professor Snape said about Hermione. The headmaster would get to the bottom of it. He seemed to know everything that went on at Hogwarts anyway.

"What's the matter, Harry?" the older boy asked. He followed Harry's line of sight, turning to see the empty chair of Headmaster Dumbledore. "You're going to Dumbledore, aren't you?"

"There's no other option right now, Cedric. Hermione's never been gone this long without telling someone where she is. If anyone can find her, Dumbledore can." Without another word, Harry pushed past Cedric and ran up the stairs, taking them two at a time. He faintly registered the fact that Cedric was following him.

If that bastard has done anything to her, Cedric thought, grinding his teeth, I'll rip him to shreds

The candlelight of the room began to flicker low and dark. The sun shone bright and clear beyond the walls of the castle, but a smoke-filled night descended upon the lower dungeons. Air that had once felt cold and biting now felt warm and repressive on her skin. She could feel puffs of air tickle over her skin in the vicinity of her navel, but they were neither warm nor cold. His hair spilled inky black over her marble skin as he lavied gentle kisses over the icy, supple flesh of her stomach. Hands traced lazy patterns on the skin of her naked hips as her own caressed her aching breasts.

Hermione bit her lip, feeling her newly sprouted fangs sink into the fullness of her lips. She felt strange sensations washing over her, spreading from the tiny points of feeling ignited where his lips touched her frozen skin, coiling, building, rolling themselves together and growing into a torrent of signals that would fry every synapse of a mortal brain. But for her, in her newly awakened state, they multiplied and fed upon one another as they infiltrated her senses, drowning out all other notions and desires. It

was as if every cell in her body was specifically attuned to him, and she knew that no other could fill her brain and body with such wonderful electricity.

He looked up at her, his onyx eyes flashing ruby and gold as he took in the wanton look upon her face. Her eyes were closed as her hands began to migrate toward where his own now lay still against her hips. She took his hands in her own and pulled them upwards to her breasts, molding his long fingers and palms around the swollen flesh. A shudder ran through her as his palms made contact with her tender skin, the sensation magnified a thousand times more pleasurable than it should have been. He crawled up her body, letting his hips settle between her welcoming thighs. Every muscle in his body contracted as his own pale, naked skin made contact with hers. The juncture of her thighs was slightly warmer than the rest of her body, and, although it was a sad reminder of mortality lost long ago, it was exponentially more arousing to him than anything he had known in his two hundred years walking the earth.

"Will you stay and be mine?" he grunted, the exaggerated sensations racing through every synapse and nerve until he was unsure if he could control himself any longer. He had taken no other mate nor taken any mortal woman for his pleasure since the night of his transformation. Two hundred years of patience and waiting simmered behind a dam that was little more than filter paper. It would burst at her command and consume them both in the torrential fire.

She shifted her body, opening her thighs further than she imagined possible and pulled him to her. He sank into her with a single thrust, a movement that sent shivers and tremors spreading through her. Each thrust; each minute shift in his position was enough to send her over the edge in a constant state of bliss. There was something to be said for eternal youth as he pounded into her in a state of abandon as the minutes turned to hours and the continuous orgasm spiraled out of control.

The bed was a jumble of arms, legs, and twisted sheets as they made love for the first time. She keened and sighed, screaming his name as the waves of bliss increased and flowed harder and faster until she didn't think she could take any more. Their breath came in gasps that turned to fog in front of their faces. There was a beautiful sheen of pale color in their skin as Severus gave one final thrust and collapsed beside her, spent and sated.

"Always," she panted, running her hands over her still tingling body. Tremors still spread through her but with less intensity than before. The sheets beneath her were stained with the glistening remnants of the past several hours.

He watched the foggy breath rising from her mouth for a moment and saw her smile with a feral air. "We shall enjoy this forever, my love," he murmured, pressing light kisses to her shoulder. "Hours upon end of mindless pleasure such as you have never experienced before. A multitude of years to traverse the world and see the great sights. A million books to read and all the time in the world to devour them as only the two of us can."

She moaned as his hand began to caress the swell of her stomach, sending a new wave of tingles through her. "A thousand ways and places to feel you beside me, within me, driving me to such heights of feeling as they should be a sin."

He grinned back at her. "They are a sin, my darling. But one we may never have to answer for."

"Fizzing Whizzbee," said Harry as he came to a stop in front of the gargoyle that guarded the headmaster's office. The stone monster sprang to the side as the staircase behind it began to move upward. He stepped onto the rising stairs, followed immediately by Cedric.

"What do you think Dumbledore will do?" he asked, trying to keep the concern from cracking his voice.

"Search the school, probably. At least, that's what I hope he'll do."

They had reached the door that led to the headmaster's study, it's giant brass griffin doorknocker shining in the torchlight. Harry lifted his hand and knocked three times, hard enough to make his knuckles hurt. There was a flurry of movement behind the door as the headmaster came to answer the door.

"Harry! And Mr. Diggory, too," exclaimed Professor Dumbledore as he opened the door. His robes were a deep violet with great silver moons and stars embroidered on them. His pale eyes twinkled as he swept aside to let the boys enter. "What can I do for you gentlemen on this fine morning?"

Before Harry could open his mouth to speak, Cedric blurted, "Hermione Granger is missing."

The headmaster's jovial smile faded quickly at the sound of the older boy's voice. "Missing, you say, Mr. Diggory? When was she last seen?"

"Last night, professor. Madam Pince saw her leave the library to go speak to Professor Snape. No one has seen her since," replied Harry tersely.

A small crease began to form between the wizened wizard's eyebrows. "Professor Snape was the last one to see her?" The crease began to grow as this brow knitted together at Harry's nod. He glanced back and forth between the two boys before staring into Diggory's pale blue eyes. "Go back to the common room, Harry. I believe I shall need an extra sheet of *parchment* for this."

Cedric was confused. What was the headmaster doing, sending Harry on an errand for parchment while Hermione was who knows where in who knows what kind of trouble? But the tone of Dumbledore's voice seemed to stir some recognition in Harry, causing him to turn and bolt through the door and down the twisting staircase.

"Have a seat, Mr. Diggory," the headmaster whispered. He guided Cedric to a warm armchair near the fireplace and held out a bowl of sugarcoated treats. "Gum drop?"

Only Dumbledore could think of candy at a time like this Cedric thought darkly, staring into the fire.

III

Chapter 4 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

III

Professor Dumbledore watched Cedric closely as he sat behind his massive desk, his fingers folded in front of him. There was a ghost of something in the young man's eyes that was hard to decipher, something that grew darker the longer that Harry was gone. The Hufflepuff seeker fidgeted in his seat by the fireplace, clenching his fists against the velveteen fabric. The headmaster could see the unease written clearly on his face, burning orange in the firelight.

"Is there anything I can get for you, Mr. Diggory?" Dumbledore asked quietly. The younger man did not answer or give any indication that he had heard anything. "Would you like me to send to Madam Pomfrey for a calming draught?"

Cedric finally turned toward the headmaster with pain in his eyes. His pale blue eyes were glistening with tears. "You can find Hermione for me, Professor."

The headmaster's heart nearly broke at the sound of Cedric's voice. He stood and crossed the room to kneel at the younger man's feet. "Listen to me, Cedric," he said softly, looking up into the hurt filled eyes of a young man in love. "We will find her, no matter where she is. You must believe that. Harry and I will do everything we can, but you must remain and do something for me. Can you do this?"

"What... what do you want me to do, Professor?" He felt a twinge of comfort overtake him as Professor Dumbledore spoke.

Smiling softly, the headmaster patted Cedric's hand in a grandfatherly way. "Go to the Gryffindor common room and wait there in case Hermione comes back while we are away. I will send a message to Professor McGonagall letting her know that you have special permission to be there." Dumbledore returned to his desk and began to scribble on a piece of parchment in front of him. Once he was finished, he sealed the letter with a swipe of his wand. "I am sending you to Professor McGonagall's office now, Cedric. Give her this and she will summon a prefect to take you to Gryffindor tower."

Cedric stood on shaking knees and took the note from the headmaster. "Hermione is a prefect," he mumbled to himself. He crossed the room and had his hand on the doorknob as a thought occurred to him. "You will send someone to tell me when you find her, won't you, Professor?"

"Of course," Dumbledore replied, nodding. "Don't worry, Cedric. She will be found."

Hermione opened her eyes to a dark room. The candles had burned themselves out and a peaceful darkness settled around her. She stretched herself languidly; pleased to find she wasn't sore from the hours she'd spent in bed with Snape. The thought of him brought a flash of his dark eyes to her vision and the realization that she was alone. Her maker was nowhere to be found, though his presence was always on the periphery of her consciousness. What was most surprising was the fact that she was no longer in pain.

She sat up, hardly aware that she was still naked, and went in search of her maker. A faint pang of hunger registered in her brain; although she was much more interested in the way Snape had disappeared. *I wonder where he has gone?* She thought lazily as she walked around the bedroom, lighting the candles the Muggle way as she went. There were several shelves of leather-bound books of a dozen different shapes and sizes. The titles were embossed on the spines in dark, black ink and in silvery foil. She ran her fingers over them lightly, savoring their worn softness. A few of them looked as if they were first editions and an overwhelming urge to devour them crept over her. She smiled inwardly, grateful to feel a bit of her former self returning.

For a long while she stood in front of the bookshelves, looking up and down the rows trying to find one that appealed to her. She finally chose a well-worn copy of *Mansfield Park* and slipped into a remarkably comfortable high-backed chair in the corner. Curling her feet beneath her, she rested her head in her hand and began to read. Time seemed to be non-existent as she sat, wholly immersed in the world Jane Austen wove around her. She could feel nothing more than the pulsing of the air around her, hear nothing but the wood and stones of the castle as they creaked and sighed as they settled. Even the sound and smell of the blood pumping through the students of Hogwarts were drowned out by the all-consuming rapture that engulfed Hermione as she read.

Harry knelt by the trunk in the boys' dormitory in Gryffindor tower, his fingers deftly feeling along the bottom for the crumpled parchment that hid the Marauder's Map. It felt as if it had been months since he had held the document in his hands as he watched the tiny dots that were the inhabitants of the castle scurry to and fro across the page. He felt a slight twinge of self-loathing that he had not thought of the map as soon as Hermione had gone missing. It was sure to show exactly where she was as long as she was still in bounds. And she was much too well behaved to go out of bounds without permission from the headmaster.

He was tempted to activate the map there in the dorm, so desperate was he to find out where his friend had disappeared to. But he could hear the voice of the headmaster in his head, calmly directing him to do as was asked and bring the map to Dumbledore. Perhaps the headmaster knew a bit more about the map than he had let on the past three years. There may yet be secrets of the Marauders that even Harry could not unlock without Dumbledore's help. It was for that reason that he shook off his temptation, stuffed the map in the pocket of his jeans, and jogged briskly out of the dormitory. The quicker he returned to the headmaster's study, the quicker he would find Hermione.

Ron was waiting at the bottom of the stairs, his eyes questioning whether their friend had been found. The look on Harry's face was enough for him to figure out that they were no closer to finding Hermione than they had been when they went to bed the night before. "Don't worry, mate," he said, clapping Ron on the shoulder. "We'll find her. Dumbledore's helping."

The redhead's face brightened perceptively as Harry scurried out of the portrait hole and walked quickly back toward the headmaster's office.

Minerva McGonagall read through Professor Dumbledore's note a second time before turning her piercing eyes on the young man standing on the other side of her desk. There was a pained look in those pale blue eyes as they stared back at her. The color had completely drained from Cedric's face as he waited, wondering where Hermione had disappeared to and if she was okay.

"Now, Mr. Diggory," said Professor McGonagall with all of her usual sternness, although there was a soft glint in her eyes. "I have instructions from Dumbledore to allow you to wait in the Gryffindor common room in case Miss Granger returns there before the others have been able to find her. Is that the understanding you reached with the headmaster?"

Cedric nodded, his hair falling over his eyes. "Yes, ma'am," he murmured, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

"Well, then, since you have been given special permission by the headmaster, I suppose that I have no choice. Not that I do not trust you, Mr. Diggory. Far from that, actually." Here, she smiled pleasantly at him. "It is simply that this is highly irregular, a student from another house in my common room. However, seeing as it is in Miss Granger's best interest, I will gladly take you to the common room myself."

She stood, and slipped the cover off of a tin of cookies on the edge of her desk. "Have a ginger snap, Mr. Diggory. You look as if you could use something in your stomach." She smiled encouragingly again as he took several cookies, popping one in his mouth. Professor McGonagall placed a gentle, guiding hand on Cedric's shoulder. "Come along then, the sooner we get you to the common room the better."

Cedric followed her through the corridors, his head down and his mind on Hermione. He could see her as clearly as if she were standing beside him. Her brown and butterscotch curls fluttering in the cool drafts of the castle corridor as it fell over her shoulders. Her face, pale from many hours in the shadows of the school, was slightly flushed from running up the stairs on her way to the library. There were light circles under her deep brown eyes like pale, lavender bruises from staying up late and studying. But she was smiling, her perfect and dazzling smile that showed her slightly oversized front teeth. He always thought she looked devastatingly pretty, especially in her Muggle clothes. His phantom Hermione smiled and waved shyly at him before vanishing like so much mist on a warm morning.

Professor McGonagall watched the emotions play over the handsome face of Cedric Diggory as they made their way up the staircase to the Gryffindor common room. She felt a pang of sadness for him. "Dumbledore will find her, Mr. Diggory. You can be sure about that. There is little that goes on in this school that Professor Dumbledore doesn't know about. Miss Granger will be perfectly fine."

They were standing at the Fat Lady's portrait. Cedric drew a cookie from his pocket and began chewing slowly, desperate to avoid looking in the older woman's eyes. "Aurora borealis," she said softly to the portrait, which, with a strange look at Cedric, nodded and swung open.

Professor McGonagall led the way into the common room, which was deserted except for Ron, who was sitting in his favorite chair by the fireplace. He looked up at the sound of the portrait swinging open. "Have they--"

"No, Mr. Weasley," she replied curtly, not waiting for the rest of his question. She saw his eyes flick questioningly to Cedric, who stood uncomfortably at her side. "Mr. Diggory will be waiting here in case Miss Granger returns before Professor Dumbledore has found her. If she is found, word will be sent here to let you know that she is safe."

McGonagall gave Cedric a reassuring pat on the shoulder before disappearing through the portrait hole once more. Cedric looked around awkwardly for a long moment before Ron spoke up. "Have a seat over there, mate," he said, indicating Hermione's usual spot. "No need of standing there. Harry thinks it may take a while."

Smiling thankfully, Cedric settled into her favorite chair and averted his gaze to the fire that flickered in the grate. He could almost sense her in the room, curled up in the very chair in which he now sat, a book balanced precariously on the arm, her hair drawn back in an elastic. Gods, he missed the sight of her, the way his heart seemed to stop for a fraction of a second when she came into the Great Hall so blissfully unaware of the effect she had on him.

"So," came Ron's voice, breaking through his thoughts of her. "Now we know why you can't keep your eyes in your head on Hogsmeade trips."

Professor Dumbledore was waiting at the top of the stairs to his study when Harry came rushing down the corridor. The young man took them two at a time, clutching at a stitch in his side by the time he reached the top. "Here you go, Professor," he panted, pulling the slightly crumpled map from his pocket.

They made their way back into Dumbledore's study and flattened the Marauder's Map on the desk. Much to Harry's surprise, the headmaster drew his wand and, tapping the map, said, "I solemnly swear I am up to no good." Images began to appear on the apparently blank parchment as if someone had spilt ink on the page. The outline of Hogwarts castle and its grounds formed along with a multitude of miniscule dots that represented each of the inhabitants of the school.

"How did you..."

Blue eyes twinkled behind the headmaster's glasses. He smiled and tapped his temple. "Ah, yes, well... Let us just say your father and his cohorts did not keep as many secrets from me as they would like to think. Now," he muttered, turning his attention from Harry back to the map on his desk. His eyes searched the parchment carefully as his wand poked and prodded, causing the map to shift its view from one floor to the next. A faint frown discolored his features as Harry watched. Something was very wrong.

"What is it, Professor?" he asked, standing to look over the older man's shoulder. "What's going on?"

Dumbledore looked up from the map, twisting the end of his beard in his fingers. The headmaster spent nearly half an hour examining the map, looking for any sign of Hermione.

He finally turned his attention back to Harry, a look of worry and frustration on his face. "Miss Granger does not appear to be anywhere on the map. I will send word to Hogsmeade to have the aurors search for her there in case something has happened that I am not aware of as of yet." While he spoke, something strange caught his attention. He watched the map a moment longer, flicking quickly through the many floors. The dot labeled *Severus Snape* was missing as well.

A unreadable expression appeared on the headmaster's face, a look that somehow frightened Harry. "Professor? What is it?"

Miss Granger disappears, having lastly been known to be en route to see Severus. And today, both Miss Granger and Severus seem to have disappeared thought Professor Dumbledore. *Perhaps it is merely coincidence. But I cannot take that chance.*

"I believe I may know where Miss Granger is, Harry. Stay here." With that, Professor Dumbledore stood and promptly disappeared from his office leaving Harry to stare at the map in confusion.

IV

Chapter 5 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

IV

Severus strolled slowly through the earthen passageway, letting the cool, musty air wash over his icy skin. There were no torches or candles, only the tiny pinpricks of light that were his eyes. He had always preferred the dark, even before his change, and now that he could see infinitely better in the dark than he could during the day he loved it all the more. Sounds and smells seemed heightened and more profound when the shadows crept over the world. The shadows had grown longer, the smells growing more pungent and tinged with metal, the sounds more unreal and less earthy as the years had passed him. He missed the quiet rustle of the wind through the grass, the way the nightingales would sing in the dank emptiness. It had been many years since he had felt those sensations, years that still pained him when he thought of them.

He was born in 1779 in a small hamlet outside of Oxford. His parents, Joseph and Elizabeth Snape, were peasants, poor farmers who were barely able to grow enough food to feed themselves and their three children. Severus was the oldest of the three and the only son, born five years before his twin sisters, Sophia and Georgiana. They were sickly from the day of their birth to the day they died in 1786. His mother had suffered half a dozen miscarriages between Severus and his sisters, and their death was difficult for her to manage. She seemed to waste away after their burial, and his father turned to the bottle to numb his grief and disappointment. His wife had given him but one healthy child and that one was still thin, gangly, and more inclined to spend his time with a traveling monk than in the fields.

As a child, Severus had developed the love of learning that followed him throughout his lifetime. Neither of his parents could read, having no need for it, although they were both well versed in mathematics. It was necessary to keep track of how deeply impoverished they really were. So Severus spent his mornings following after his father in the fields, pushing a plow, sowing seeds, digging up roots and weeds, and spreading manure and water. He would slip away quickly after lunch, when his father would sample a good measure of whiskey and drop into a stupor until supper, and run barefooted to the village church. The priests and visiting monks took kindly to him, amazed to see a young boy of such limited means so desperate to devour all types of knowledge. They taught him his letters, guiding him toward literacy by giving him passages of the Scriptures to copy and memorize.

His father despised the fact that his pitiful, good-for-nothing son would attain a life better than his own. He turned violent, fueled by his own self-loathing and grief, and began beating his wife. It began with Elizabeth, who was so drowned by her own despair over losing so many children that she refused to fight back. For years it continued, the beatings becoming more frequent and escalating in their ferocity until young Severus could no longer stand idly by and watch his mother so willingly submit to such a tyrant. He was thirteen the first time he stepped between his father's fist and his mother. He was twenty-one when he beat the wretched drunk to death after Joseph trampled her with the plow horse.

Severus left his childhood home the very same night after dousing the small house with what was left of his father's drink and setting it afire. The flames burned away everything that defined who he was, who he had been, and who he would have become. He spent several years wandering the countryside, spending the night in the dense woodlands and glens or preying upon the hospitality of the clergy. The night of his twenty-fifth birthday, he arrived in a village outside present day Leeds. It was

there he met Madeline Gorout, the youngest daughter of the town vicar. They were married at Christmas 1814. Having what learning he had gathered on his wanderings, the vicar appointed him as schoolmaster and allowed him to use a portion of the meetinghouse as a schoolroom. It was the happiest Severus could remember being in his human life.

Although Madeline was young and healthy, she was unable to bear children. But it did not matter to Severus. He was pleased enough to love her and be loved in return. They lived pleasantly together for five years before it happened...the night of his transformation. The circumstances surrounding the arrival of the coven were blurred in his memory now, many of his human memories were buried too deeply beneath the being that he had become. He could remember running from the meetinghouse as he heard the bloodcurdling screams erupting from the small home they shared nearby. By the time he was able to break through the barred door, the leaders of the coven had drained Madeline of every drop of blood in her veins. They were on him before he could resist, tearing at him with such ferocity that he could feel nothing but a searing pain.

Time moved quickly for him after his transformation. He fled when he awoke to find his maker staring down at him, his pale skin nearly translucent in the quiet light of dawn and his fangs tinged scarlet with the blood he had taken. "Be still, my son," said his maker, careful to keep contact with his victim. "The pain will fade quickly as long as you stay with me for a while longer, then you may go as you wish, to feed or to join my coven." Severus felt such anguish, such overwhelming loneliness that he could not refuse the offer of a new family. He followed the coven for nearly a hundred years before he grew weary of the carnage and destruction they left in their wake as they traveled across the world. In early 1914, he left the coven and exiled himself to the furthest reaches of the North.

He paused in his memories, feeling with his mind for Hermione. Relief washed over him as he felt the peace radiating from her as she remained curled up, reading as if her entire being had not changed. It was astonishing how easily she slipped back into her former self, how easily she seemed to push the murderous instincts of her new life away from her. He was jealous of her ability to do so. It had taken him forty years to master his urges, during which time he discovered a new gift that his maker had passed on to him. He was able to do magic.

"You've noticed, have you?" Cedric asked through clenched teeth. He wasn't sure if he wanted to look into the younger boy's eyes. There was a dark warmth that spread through his face.

"Not that hard to miss, mate," Ron answered. He stared at Cedric for a long moment, wondering why Dumbledore and McGonagall had allowed him in the Gryffindor common room. "Every time we go in the Three Broomsticks you're there, staring at her like she's going to disappear. You watch her through the window when she's in the bookshop, but you act like you're looking at whatever it is they've got in the display. I'm not as much of a dunce as everyone thinks I am, you know."

Cedric grinned ruefully, picturing the look on Hermione's face as she slowly paced the aisles of the bookshop. He wanted desperately for her to turn that gaze of intense satisfaction and desire on him. He wanted to hold her in his arms, to feel her curls flow like silk between his fingers and her skin soft and warm beneath his fingertips. "I'm that pathetic, aren't I?"

"Nah," the redhead replied, feeling genuinely sorry for Cedric for the first time. "You've just noticed what the lot of us are too slow to realize. 'Mione's like my sister now. When they find her, if you hurt her..." He paused, arranging his face into a grimace of authority. "If you hurt her, I'll kill you."

Professor Dumbledore walked through the dungeons stealthily, his wrinkled hand gripping his wand as a precaution. In all the years that he had known Severus Snape, never once had Snape taken another's life. He had spent so long denying himself, striving to maintain his distance from everyone around him that it was unfathomable that such resolve could suddenly shatter. The headmaster was unsure of what he would do when he found them, though he hoped desperately that his assumption was wrong.

His footsteps echoed off the deserted stone corridors, his very breath seemingly amplified by the silence. He knew that he was no match for Snape's strength and speed, although he was confident they would be an even match if it came to wands. The determination that Snape poured into repressing his thirst fueled the strength of his magic to such a degree that he was nearly unstoppable.

"Headmaster," came a silken voice from a short distance further down the corridor. Snape stood in the flickering light of the torch on the wall above his head, his onyx eyes fixed steadily on the withered old man with a gaze akin to affection. "May I help you with something?"

Dumbledore's grip tightened reflexively on the handle of his wand as he faced the enigmatic being in front of him. "Severus," he replied calmly. "Where is Miss Granger?"

"Miss Granger? I'm not sure I know what you mean, Headmaster."

There was a strange look that stole over Dumbledore's usually genial features. "Do not lie to me, Severus. Neither of you appear on the map of Hogwarts. Now tell me what you have done with her."

V

Chapter 6 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

V

Hermione was amazed by the speed at which she finished the novel in her lap. It seemed that her eyes moved more quickly than normal, transmitting information in a rapid buzz of electricity to a mind that operated at top speed. It was almost as if she had suddenly developed a photographic memory...she could clearly see and remember the contents of each page. Emboldened by this new discovery, she swept gracefully to the shelves in search of a new book to devour. She was running her fingers over the spines of those alluring volumes almost before she made the conscious choice to move.

She slipped the copy of *Mansfield Park* back in its place on the shelf, all the while searching for a new book. Her eyes found a plain, worn leather volume tucked away in the corner of the top shelf. It was so nondescript, antique, and beautiful at the same time that she was drawn to it with a strange magnetism. The volume was in her hand and her lithe form folding comfortably in her chair in a breath.

As soon as she opened the cover she recognized the cramped, flowing script of her maker. It was one of his many journals. The first entry was dated early April, 1969, and recounted a conversation between her maker and a Siberian gypsy.

I had been in the North for many years, feeding on the occasional rodent or fox, when I stumbled upon the encampment of gypsies. They were huddled together around a small brush fire that melted the packed snow. Many of them were young and inattentive, though the elders noticed my presence perhaps the moment I arrived. The oldest

of the encampment, a woman whose face was the appearance of worn hide with deep wrinkles and sunken eyes, followed me into the darkness.

"Shadow walker," she said, her voice like the crackle of dry leaves. "Why do you flee? My people do not fear your kind."

"You should," I growled in return. "We are not safe for any living thing that wanders the Earth."

"But you are not like the rest of your people. We know of you, Shadow walker. My people have seen you before, many years ago when I was a little girl. It has been a generation of men since you have taken a human life. You live on the blood of the lowest creatures, and you keep far away from people to avoid the temptation of their blood," she said calmly, her sunken eyes kinder than any human's eyes had been for a hundred years. "You are not the demon you were made to be."

I turned on her and bared my teeth so that they glowed pearl-white in the moonlight. "I am a demon, old woman, a demon from the very pits of hell. No matter what I feed upon, there is no joy in my existence, no peace in my being, no love in the heart that is dead in my breast. The pits of hell open before me, ready to devour any that come near. So I flee, from you and your people, before you sink into the abyss before me."

She seemed unperturbed by my anger. Her eyes closed and she began to whisper under her breath, words in a language I didn't know. She looked serene as she looked at me. "If my people had the power to give you anything you wish, what would you ask of us?"

I was shocked and unable to answer for a long moment. "I would have another chance to be like you again, to see the sun rise over the mountains, to feel my heart beat in my chest again."

A fire blazed in her eyes as she began to chant some strange spell. The wind blew and howled in a whirlwind around us. Her wrinkled hands touched my own, and a spark seemed to travel between us. My body felt as if it were sinking in upon itself. "So be it," the old woman said, her voice clear against the howling winds. "So be a child again, Shadow walker. Go back to your world and learn to be alive again. Enjoy your time with the living, for it will not last forever. You will return to your current state at the age of your new birth. Now go, find your way to your ancient home before the new moon rises. Find your peace, Shadow walker."

"What have you done with her, Severus?" cried Dumbledore, his voice barely hiding the anger coursing through him.

Rage seemed to pour through Snape as he stared at the feeble old man. Here he was, so old that his eyes were failing, his instincts playing second fiddle to his desire to see the good in all, trying to separate him from his mate. His hands closed upon themselves in an iron grip.

"Answer me, Severus!" the old man boomed. He raised his wand and pointed it at Snape's chest. "What have you done with Miss Granger?"

"What it is in my nature to do, you pathetic fool!" Snape hissed. He stalked toward the old man, his eyes blazing with fire. "You will leave her with me. She is mine now, for she is like my kind."

Dumbledore gasped, his wand clattering to the ground. "Severus, you didn't? How could you do such a thing! She is just a girl!"

"Don't you understand, Headmaster? She is a girl no longer, and yet a girl she shall ever remain. Do not doubt me and what I am capable of," he replied, striding forward and placing his foot lightly on the wand on the ground. He held back a bitter laugh as he reigned in the little strength it would take to snap that pathetic piece of wood, to tear that pitiful man to shreds. "I have lived two centuries alone, fleeing from place to place, never to have a home or peace of my own. It has been a lifetime of man since I have taken the blood of the living. What am I to do, you blind, ignorant fool?"

"Am I to crawl the face of the Earth in loneliness and despair until God breaks through heaven and earth to chain me in the abyss? No, I do not think so. You see, my dear Albus, I am no longer alone." He smiled, baring his pearl-white fangs. "No, Hermione is mine, my mate for eternity."

The color drained from the headmaster's face as he finally comprehended what had happened. He was too late to save her. Anguish crept over him, and he felt his heart begin to fail. "Then there is no hope for her."

"No. You cannot save everyone, my friend. But we will spare you the trouble of having to watch over two vampires. Hermione and I will leave the school at the end of the term," Snape said softly. "You will not have to worry about us, you have my word."

Professor Dumbledore seemed to sink in upon himself, withering before his eyes. "Can you guarantee that no one will be harmed before then?"

"I will do what I can to restrain her, but she must return to my rooms everyday to feed. Will you make the necessary arrangements so that no other is aware of this?" The headmaster nodded feebly, defeated. "You must also excuse her from Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures. I leave it to you to find a reason, but be certain that I will teach her these things."

"It will be taken care of, Severus. But if a single student is harmed, you will leave the school immediately and risk being hunted by the Ministry."

Snape closed the distance between them. "So be it," he said softly. In an instant, his icy hand was around the headmaster's throat in a vice-like grip. He lifted the feeble wizard from the ground with ease. "But know this. If you unleash the Ministry on us, if anything happens to Hermione, I will come for you and drag you down to hell with me."

Harry was beginning to worry as he sat in the headmaster's study. It seemed as if he had been there for hours, waiting for some news or some sign that things were going well. The silence was deafening, each tick of the clock magnified until it was painfully loud.

There was a soft click as the door sprang open and Headmaster Dumbledore staggered into the room, white faced and visibly shaken. "Professor," Harry exclaimed, nearly leaping from his chair. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, my boy," the old man answered, waving a shaky hand as he dropped into the chair behind his desk. "You will be pleased to know that Miss Granger has been found."

Harry sighed with relief and flashed a bright smile. "Really? Where is she? Why didn't she appear on the map?"

Dumbledore laughed slightly. "One question at a time, my boy! Miss Granger had a nasty run-in with a poisoned vampyr mosp in the dungeons. She got a bad sting from the thing, and...it being a good-sized mosp...dragged her off to its hole. That's why we couldn't see her on the map. Now, though she will be right as rain eventually, she was in too much pain to be moved very far, so she is resting comfortably in Professor Snape's quarters at the moment."

"When can we see her, Professor?" Harry asked, trying to disguise the fear and anger in his voice.

"On Monday, Harry. She will remain in Professor Snape's quarters until she has recovered enough to return to her classes. Meanwhile, he will treat her with a potion he has developed to stop the spread of the venom. Miss Granger will be confined to the school...as sunlight irritates the wound...until the end of term. Until then, she must see Professor Snape several times daily to obtain further treatments. At the end of term," here the headmaster sighed, "Professor Snape will escort Miss Granger to a hospital in Germany that specializes in treatments of this kind."

A confused expression passed over Harry's face. "Can't Madam Pomfrey treat her? Why does she have to go near Snape?"

"Professor Snape, Harry. While Madam Pomfrey is a wonderful matron, she does not have the experience with wounds such as this. Professor Snape will take good care of Miss Granger. Now," he replied, seeming to slump against his desk. He slowly drew a piece of parchment toward him. "I must write to Miss Granger's parents to let them

know what has happened. Run along to the Gryffindor common room and let Mr. Diggory and Mr. Weasley know she is okay."

Hermione was out of her chair before Snape had even put his hand to the doorknob. She bounded across the room in a graceful dance and wrapped him in her arms as if she had not seen him in days. She pressed light kisses along his jaw and twined her icy fingers in his own. A shadow crossed her face as she saw the worried expression in his eyes. "Severus? My maker, my love, what's the matter?"

"You must return to the school on Monday," he said, his voice a little hurt. "The headmaster knows."

She felt a fire of rage blaze through her, causing her eyes to glow ruby as she bared her teeth and snarled. "I won't. I won't leave you!"

He caught her wrists in one of his pale hands and held her tightly. His other hand wound into her hair, forcing her to look at him. "You will do what must be done to keep the Ministry at bay. I will not have you taken away from me," he growled, kissing her fiercely. "Albus will not betray us, not if he wishes to keep his position. But you will not be attending Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures any longer. You will come here for those lessons."

"Someone else will find out. They will soon understand why I no longer go out into the sun."

There was a musical laughter that erupted from him. "As you found out Lupin your third year? No, my dear, no one else will know, for you and I are leaving Hogwarts at the end of the term. We will go far away, where none shall bother with us. We shall spend our days in bed and our nights roaming the world to see all there is to see."

The thought of leaving all she had known was suddenly unnerving, no matter the fact that she would be with him. She felt a wave of calm warring with the anxiety that rose up in her. "Severus..."

"Do not worry, my love. I have survived this long, and I shall make sure that nothing happens to either of us. We must simply survive another month in this place, then all the world shall bow at your feet." He drew her to him, pulling her beautiful, soft form to him. "As will I. I will worship at the altar of your form, pray to your breasts, and seek my penance in your depths. My goddess," he groaned, feeling his desire for her begin to bubble to the surface. "Grant me pardon for my sins!"

She smiled at him, the ruby glaze fading to warm gold in her eyes. "You must pray first and do penance until I am satisfied."

"May you never be satisfied, my love," he replied, grinning with a feral air. He lifted her to him in a blinding motion and disappeared with her into the bedroom.

VI

Chapter 7 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

VI

Cedric and Ron stood each time someone came through the portrait hole, dropping back into their chairs with a heavy sigh each time it wasn't Harry. They felt their anxiety over Hermione increase with each passing moment. They tried to distract themselves, reliving Quidditch glories and playing a few games of Exploding Snap or wizard's chess, but it was no good. Thoughts of Hermione suffering some unimaginable terror filled their minds, making them wish they could take her place.

"I wish someone would come tell us something," Ron groaned as Colin Creevey clambered into the common room. He glanced sideways at Cedric, watching the nervous shift of his eyes and the tick of the muscle in his jaw. The portrait hole opened once more while they sat in silence, a tousled head of black hair appearing through the opening.

"They've found her!" Harry called, stumbling out of the opening with a wide smile on his handsome face. "Professor Snape and Professor Dumbledore found her down in the dungeons. She'd been attacked by a vampyr mosp!"

Cedric leapt up and made for the portrait hole. "Have they got her up to the hospital wing yet?" he called over his shoulder.

"No," Harry retorted, grabbing the back of the older boy's shirt. "They can't move her, so she's down in Professor Snape's rooms. He's looking after her until she can be moved."

"*What!*" Cedric and Ron cried together. "The headmaster's letting Snape stay with her?"

Guiding both of them back to their chairs, Harry bit back a bitter laugh. "During the day, I suppose so, though I think Madam Pomfrey will be staying with her at night. Snape's sleeping in his office."

"I want to see her," Cedric muttered, a pout spreading across his face. There was a bitter taste in his mouth as he thought of Hermione so near the Potions master while she was so vulnerable. He wanted to rush to her side, to stay by her and do whatever he could to ease her suffering.

Harry gave Ron a questioning look, wondering what had come over the Hufflepuff seeker. "He's in love with her, mate," Ron muttered quietly.

Severus traced faint, ticklish circles over the frozen, soft flesh of Hermione's breasts. She threw her head back against the pillows, letting the sensations flow over her, sending her already heightened senses into overdrive. "My goddess," he murmured, placing cold, open-mouthed kisses around her taut nipple. "My most beloved saint. How beautiful you are, so pale and perfect! You skin is so soft and cold, your flesh so sweet and divine!"

Hermione sighed in happiness as his voice hummed over her body, raising gooseflesh in their wake. She turned her scorching eyes upon him, taking in the way his lips caressed her, the way his hands deftly stroked her into oblivion, the way his midnight hair looked against their pale forms.

"My poor, lonely demon," she whispered, stroking his hair affectionately. He gazed up at her, his heated eyes raking over her face. She smiled at him, feeling the uncertainty that seemed to flow off him in waves. "I will give you piece if you let me."

He seemed to crumble at her words, sinking against her and burying his tearless face against the swell of her stomach. He clutched at her, inhaling the faint remnants of her human scent that he wished for her to never lose. She held him close as she stroked his hair and shoulders in an attempt to transfer her love and tranquility to him.

"My darling Severus," she cooed, raising his face to meet her gaze. She smiled and stroked the worried lines that marred his marble-like forehead. "Don't think that you are

unworthy or that you deserve anything that's happened to you. Severus, you are my beautiful, dark angel. I will stay with you always, to remind you that you are very much loved."

His brows knit together once more as he lay his cheek against her stomach, nearly purring with delight as her fingers stroked through his hair. He breathed lightly against her skin as his fingers traced lazy patterns over her abdomen, driving steadily toward the springy curls at the juncture of her thighs. She let out a soft string of praises to the deftness of his slender digits.

"Such treasure you keep for me," he moaned as his fingers slipped through the cool, slickness of her nether lips. He thrummed his fingertips against that bundle of nerves that sent her spiraling upwards toward a shattering release. Two digits slipped deftly into her spasming opening, thrusting her over the edge of pleasure with an ear-splitting cry of feeling. "Hermione, your cunt is so tight!"

She splayed her thighs open even more, feeling his fingers hit a spot so deeply within her that it was painfully delicious. Severus felt the tremors pulsing through her body, making him desperate to feel the strong, rolling contractions squeezing around his cock. He pulled his fingers from her, letting them slide through the slickness on either side of her clitoris. A devilish grin crossed his face as he brought himself to her opening.

He groaned aloud as he slid into her tightness, feeling those wonderful waves of release begin to tingle through him the moment they came into contact so intimately. "Oh, my love!" he exclaimed. He pushed her hair back, away from her face, watching the way her eyes glittered violet as her pleasure coursed through her body. He smiled and feathered kisses over her face as he began racing toward that painfully wonderful release of which the waves currently pulsing through him were only an echo.

Harry, Cedric, and Ron sat on the stairs directly beneath the Gryffindor portrait hole. "So," Harry sighed, trying to process the story he'd just heard. He looked down at his hands, which were hanging between his knees. "I never would have guessed... I mean, you and Hermione?"

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Cedric replied, flashing a crooked, half-smile that made his pale blue eyes sparkle. "You have no idea how cool it is when she walks into the room. The way her hair blows in the wind at the Quidditch pitch or the way her eyes light up when she answers a question. She's just so beautiful, in a kind of unique way, you know. She has this way of carrying herself, like she doesn't care what anyone says or thinks. It just knocks the wind out of me whenever I see her."

Harry grinned, nodding slightly. He looked sideways at Cedric and began to wonder about his sudden attachment to Hermione. Perhaps there was something more to the Hufflepuff seeker than the looks that made half the girls at Hogwarts swoon. Maybe he wanted more than groupies hanging around until all of the Quidditch glory was gone. Maybe he wanted something more substantial. Harry couldn't blame him for wanting Hermione. If she wasn't just like a sister to him, he would have went after her himself.

"You plan on *telling* her?" Ron asked, shoving Cedric gently against the banister with his shoulder. "I mean, it's kind of weird, you gawking at 'Mione and her not knowing or anything."

"Like you don't drool over Luna Lovegood every time you see her," Harry retorted, grinning.

Cedric bit back a laugh. "*Looney* Lovegood?" His eyes grew wide as he had a brief vision of her radish earrings. "I guess you could get much worse."

Ron's ears went bright red as Harry and Cedric began laughing. "She's not so bad once you get used to her," he mumbled, hiding his face.

"I bet," Harry choked out. "Talks about goblin assassins and Crumple Horned Snorcacks all day, does she?"

"No," the redhead returned, burning an even deeper shade of maroon. "She's really smart and nice. It's kind of fun to hang out with her."

Cedric groaned, picturing Luna deep in conversation about the Wronski Feint or the correct way to evade a bludger. It was a strange picture, true, but stranger things had happened. Like the hotshot hunk of the Hufflepuff Quidditch team falling for the walking encyclopedia of Gryffindor tower.

"Maybe we'll double date in Hogsmeade," he said, flashing a taunting grin at Ron. "If Hermione will have me."

"Stupid if she doesn't," Harry replied with a chuckle. "I think it'd do her some good. Get her out of the library every once in a while."

"I'd go with her, you know. Hermione Granger could ask me to eat powdered doxy droppings, and I would. And I'd probably like it, too."

Ron held back a grimace and clapped his hand on Cedric's shoulder. "You've got it bad, mate."

"Don't I know it!" Cedric grumble, trying to hide the desperation in his voice. "Don't I know it!"

Headmaster Dumbledore stood by the fireplace in his study, staring at him spindle-legged table and its swirling silver contraptions without really seeing them. His mind was many floors below with Hermione. There was nothing he could do for her now, nothing that wouldn't endanger the life of every person in the school anyway. He wasn't sure of his next move, of what needed to be done. He had known Severus Snape for many years, known his secret from the moment he reached his thirtieth birthday. Never had he imagined that Severus would take another human life, not after having a second chance to be human again. But the unimaginable had happened, and now one of his students was dead.

Dumbledore started as the flames burned emerald and the form of Professor McGonagall spun into view. "Mr. Diggory is in my common room, Albus. Something that has never occurred, not once in the history of Hogwarts. Now, please tell me what has happened. Why was Cedric so upset? Why did you send him to Gryffindor tower? Where is Miss Granger? How is she?"

The headmaster pinched the bridge of his nose and looked at the carpet. "Do you want the truth or the lie that must be told?"

McGonagall looked incredulous for a long moment before sinking onto a low footstool, her brow furrowed. "The truth, Albus. Please tell me the truth first, then tell me what I must tell the others."

There was pain in the old blue eyes that glittered behind the headmaster's half-moon glasses. "Severus has succumbed," he muttered, a wail hidden in his somber voice. "He has bitten a student and made her his mate."

Professor McGonagall gasped, her hand grasping her throat. "No, Albus!" she exclaimed. "Not Miss Granger!"

"Yes, Minerva. She is lost to us now. She will return to her classes on Monday, when Severus has been able to calm her thirst. Then he will take her away at the end of the term." He groaned and sank into his armchair, holding his head in his hands. "I have failed them, Minerva. I thought I could protect everyone, but it has all gone terribly wrong. What have I done?"

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

VII

Severus handed Hermione a bowl filled with blood as he joined her on the long sofa in his sitting room. He pulled her against his cold chest, watching with vague interest as she sipped at her supper. "Are you happy, Hermione?"

She turned her head towards the sound of his voice. Her eyes blazed the color of roasted honey as she took in the shape of his face: the way his eyes were a deep onyx ringed with gold, the harsh curve of his usually scowling mouth, the jagged turn of his nose. His cold skin glittered in the firelight. "Yes," she said softly, pictures of his face drowning out the bloodlust pounding through her thoughts. "Yes, I am happy. But I feel as if I'm being split in two. I don't want to leave you, and, quite honestly, I'm afraid to. But I miss my friends, Harry and Ron. Will I be okay when I go back, Severus?"

His eyes were solemn as he thought. "If your thirst can be managed and you keep your temper in control and your head about you. I promise I will do what I can, my love. You must manage for just a little while longer, to the end of term, and then we shall go far from here."

"*What!*" she screamed, her voice the pitch of nails on a chalkboard. The bowl of blood went flying across the room and smashed against the stone wall, splashing onto the floor. She darted away from Severus, her movement so fast it was a blur, and turned to face him with her teeth bared and a snarl in her throat. "I'm not leaving Hogwarts," she growled.

The calm look in his face was annoyingly serene as he watched her fight to control her raging anger. Her eyes flashed ruby and her fingers clenched at her sides. A thousand thoughts whispered through her brain, ways to get past his desire to leave, to stay where she had always felt at home.

"None of them will work, Hermione," he said calmly, watching the play over her face as if he could read her mind. Severus stood up and walked slowly to her, his actions measured and his hands held out, palm out. "I do not wish to, but I will make you follow if I must. Always remember that."

Hermione relaxed her stance, straightening out of her crouch with her eyes still flaming as he approached. "How?" she asked, her voice as wary as her glare. "How can you make me?"

There was a grim note to his voice when he spoke. "Magic, my love. You see, my kind came first...born into this world after Man. Whatever magic there is in this world came from my kind, from the mothers and fathers of my people. Passed on through a failed bite or from more... unconventional methods of conception. But it was my kind that brought magic to the world. It was given to us to create, to change, to manipulate reality as we saw fit. No witch or wizard would ever have existed were it not for others like me."

She watched him, feeling the waves of unease and doubt roll off him. Anger still pounded through her body, but it was twined now with the pain darkening his eyes. Her back was still pressed against the stone wall, but her arms reached out toward him. He took her hand and pressed it to his pale cheek, missing the strong thump of her pulse in her wrist.

"You wouldn't make me go, would you, Severus," she whispered, stroking her fingertips against his icy cheek. Her eyes began to fade from ruby to their normal roasted honey color. There was still worry in her face as she waited for his reply.

He looked at her for a long moment that seemed to stretch out into eternity. A soft smile twitched the corners of his lips upward. "No," he murmured. "I doubt even I, with all the magic I possess, could make you do something you didn't want to do."

"Catch, Ron," Harry called, tossing a balled-up piece of parchment at his red-haired friend. They were in the courtyard now, sitting cross-legged on the flagged stones, facing each other in a small circle. Ron glanced up in enough time to see the ball coming and reach up to catch it. He bounced the parchment between his palms before passing it on to Cedric.

"I'd love to go see Hermione," Cedric mumbled, swatting the paper back to Harry, who began tossing it over his head. Cedric's pale blue eyes were bloodshot, dark circles beneath them, and his face was pale and drawn. "I wish I knew she was okay."

"When was the last time you slept, Cedric?" Harry asked quietly, taking in his new friend's face. A spasm of pain tore through him as he felt compassion for Cedric's suffering. It was one thing to love Hermione as a sister and be tortured by her absence, as he and Ron were. But it must be very different for Cedric, loving her the way he did. It was physically painful for Harry to watch, more so when he thought of what would happen if Hermione didn't return the affection. Poor Cedric, he thought, wondering what would be left of the older boy if Hermione broke his heart.

"I don't remember," Cedric replied, running his hand over his face. Clammy, cold sweat beaded on his pale skin and his hands shook. Everything looked bleak and dull as he waited to hear about Hermione. It was like a knife stuck in his heart and each moment without knowing was like a violent twist of the blade. "It must have been a while, I guess. What day is it?"

"Saturday," Ron grumbled, put out that he was being overlooked in the conversation. He watched Luna come through the castle doors with a few other fifth year Ravenclaws. He smiled at her when she waved him over, pointing to Cedric and shrugging his shoulders.

"Thursday night then. But I'm not so tired right now," Cedric replied, even though he was fighting to keep his eyes open. "Besides, I'm not going back to my room until I've seen Hermione."

Harry stood up at that, brushing dirt off his pants and reaching out a hand to his friend. "C'mon then, Ced," he said quietly. "You can crash in our room for now. Ron can go with Luna, and I'll keep everyone off your back. Hermione'll never have you if you look like death warmed over."

Cedric smiled grimly, knowing that she would never be that shallow. No, she could look through the outside and see straight through to their hearts. Would she like was she saw in him? Or would she file him away as just another distraction from her shining academic career? He stood with Harry's help, and followed the younger boy back up to Gryffindor tower.

"You have yet to tell me why Mr. Diggory is in my common room," said Professor McGonagall with a grimace.

"Sibyll has seen something... Now, don't look at me like that, Minerva. It was a genuine vision, although she was insistent that it was not completely clear. I felt it important to cover all of my bases, to protect Cedric as much as possible," Dumbledore said plainly, his voice nearly devoid of emotion. "She saw Cedric attempting to jump off the Astronomy tower after hearing about Miss Granger's disappearance. It was very helpful that Harry found him and took what charge he could."

McGonagall pursed her lips, trying to shove the image of a dead Cedric Diggory from her mind. "Does Sibyll know why her vision was unclear?"

"Her best guess is that Cedric himself was unsure what he would do if Hermione rejected him. There is little that is certain about the future, you and I both know that. But Sibyll was quite clear that something would happen to Cedric if anything happened to Hermione." The headmaster stared out the window as he pondered what he had allowed to happen. "Perhaps it was Harry that made the difference. I am not sure. I feel as if I do not know anything anymore."

"You are a good man, Albus," she replied. "You have always done what you could to help everyone. As you have said, there is very little that is certain about anyone's

future. Severus had been doing so well for so long, how could you have known? You mustn't blame yourself for this, Albus. We will do what we must to protect the students that remain in this school." McGonagall placed her hand gently on his shoulder as she joined him at the window. "They will leave Hogwarts at the end of the term, and then we will have one less worry on our hands."

"But it will be replaced by Mr. Diggory's well-being. You know as I do that he will follow them," he replied with a heavy sigh. "And if he gets too close, Severus will kill him to protect Hermione. I have no doubt that Cedric would let him, if that was what she wanted."

"Then we must do what we can to make sure Hermione does not want that," she replied, leading the headmaster back to his favorite chair. She sat on the footstool and looked up into his pain filled eyes. "When will Miss Granger be able to withstand our presence?"

Dumbledore closed his eyes and rested his head in his hands. "No earlier than tomorrow night, I should think. We must certainly speak to her before she rejoins the main school. And there are arrangements to be made to allow Miss Granger to go to the dungeons as often as needed without drawing attention. There is much to be done to protect the students. Am I doing the right thing, Minerva?"

"You are doing the best you are able with what you have been given, Albus. No one could ask for more than that."

"But they will, Minerva," he groaned. "But they will."

Cedric groaned as he stretched out on Harry's bed in Gryffindor tower. Even if he wouldn't admit it to the others, he was exhausted. He hadn't slept in at least two days, and he felt even worse waiting for news about Hermione. All he wanted right now was to sink into some kind of oblivion, to keep a safe and healthy image of her in his head, to sleep and dream only of her, to wake and find out that everything was okay. Harry had promised to wake him up if they heard anything new.

He stared up at the canopy of crimson above him, letting out a breath he wasn't aware he'd been holding. His head was spinning and his heart was pounding in his ears as he thought of her. It was strange to be so close to her things...her dormitory was just across the hall...and yet feel so far away from her. His body literally ached for her, for just a brief glimpse of her face or a hint of the wafting fragrance of her. What he wouldn't give to hold her close to him, to feel the warmth of her skin against his own, to smell the sweetness of her breath. It made him want to cry...tough Quidditch player or not...and groan over her name with the pain that tore through him.

It took a long while before he drifted off into a restless sleep that was plagued with nightmares. Image after image of Hermione gasping in pain, crying in fear, and screaming in agony flitted through his overtaxed brain. She was covered in blood, her clothes rumpled and torn, and her hair in muddy knots. The worst part was not seeing these pictures, but being held back and helpless, unable to take even one step to aid her. Her pain became his, her fear became a part of him, and everything she was suffering flooded into him in a torrent. It tore at his insides, pooling blood and bile in his body, shooting poison through his veins.

He awoke with a spasm, sweat beading on his face and the blood seemed to drain into his toes. His eyes were blurry with tears and his hands were clenched into fists at his sides. "Hermione," he moaned, closing his eyes again and pressing his fists against them.

The door opened quietly and Harry stuck his head around the door. His green eyes were full of pity as he took in the form writhing in agony on the bed. "Ced," he said quietly, creeping to the bedside. "Hey, you hungry?"

Even though he would much rather have stayed in bed and wallowed, his stomach lurched and growled. Cedric rolled onto his side and sat up. He felt horrible and was sure he looked much worse. "Sure, I guess. Where we gonna get something this late?"

Harry looked down at the older boy sadly. "Ced, it's Sunday morning. You slept through the evening and most of the night, too."

"Oh, geez, I'm sorry, Harry. I wish you'd have woke me up." He stood up and followed Harry out of the empty dormitory. His eyes lingered on the door to Hermione's room for a long moment, and he heard Harry stop on the stairs below him.

"It wasn't any problem, really. Ron kept an eye on you, and I slept on one of the sofas in the common room," he replied after a moment of silence. As he led Cedric through the portrait hole and through the corridors, he pulled a crumpled piece of parchment from the pocket of his jeans. "Professor Dumbledore sent this by Dobby this morning. He's going to see Hermione this afternoon, and if she's feeling up to visitors, McGonagall will come get us."

The rhythm of Cedric's heart faltered and then began to race. His face was flushed, and his head began to spin. "We can go see her tonight?"

Harry nodded. "If she's up to it."

For the first time in days, Cedric began to feel like it was all going to be okay.

VIII

Chapter 9 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

VIII

"You don't mind, do you, Severus?" Hermione asked, holding the leather bound journal she had found the day before. She had sat by his side most of the night, sleepless and thirsty. He warned that he may have to leave her soon, to replenish their store of blood. She had already had several pints since her birth, much more than a mature one of their kind would need to survive a week.

Severus raked his eyes over the volume in her lap, remembering each experience he had recorded on those yellowed pages. The last forty years of his existence flashed through his mind in a fraction of a second. "No, love, of course not. What is mine is yours now, Hermione. You may help yourself to anything in my quarters that you desire."

He took a deep breath, remembering the scent of her that permeated the air around her before he had bitten her. The sound of footsteps echoed in his thoughts, drawing his attention away from her. "The headmaster is coming, and he is bringing Minerva with him. Go and drink as much as you can. Quickly, before they get here. It is the only way you will be able to stand having them in the room. *Go! Now!*"

Hermione's movement was a blur as she raced from the room with graceful steps. She removed several pints from the cooler behind the pile of books in the study and

grabbed a bowl on her way to the bedroom. It seemed as if the action took only seconds as she bounded onto the bed, landing lightly on the balls of her feet in the middle. She dropped to her knees and began filling the bowl. The sound of the blood sloshing into the bowl overwhelmed all other noise, the smell overpowering all other scent. She drank greedily, one pint after another, tiny rivulets running red over her chin, until she felt as if she might burst from it.

Voices echoed clearly from the room where Severus remained. She could distinguish the sound of their heartbeats; Dumbledore's being the more sluggish of the two. It was obvious to her enhanced senses that the old man did not have much longer. More than the sound of their voices or their heartbeats, the smell of their blood encircled her senses and made her stomach turn. She understood now why Severus made her feed before they arrived. If she had been thirsty when they walked in the door, she would have drank them dry in a fraction of a second.

His voice came through the haze filling her sated brain. "Hermione, please come in her whenever you feel up to it," Severus said quietly, knowing she would hear even the lowest of whispers.

She sprung from the bed, her motions lithe and beautiful as she seemed to move from the bedroom to the sitting room in the blink of an eye. Her new eyes took in the astonishing frailness of the headmaster and her Head of House. They looked suddenly dry and brittle, standing on bones that were all too easily crushed into dust.

"Please, stay where you are," she said, holding up her hand to stop them from crossing the room. "I may have just fed, but it is not a good idea to come too near me."

Professor Dumbledore took in the form of the creature that had once been the girl Hermione Granger. Her complexion was pale white, making the deep walnut tones in her hair stand out. This, too, had changed. Curls that had once been bushy and unruly now fell like glossy silk down her back. She moved with lithe grace and ethereal surety. Her eyes, perhaps, held the most signs of her change. Their once milk chocolate depths now echoed with the multitude of hues that existed in the spectrum. Irises that used to glow with warmth and humanity now glittered with an ebony wariness. Hermione's features remained much the same, only tinted with a haunted, angelic beauty.

"Miss Granger, I do not fear you," said the headmaster, arranging the shock on his face into a vague concern. He took a sure step forward, undeterred by the snarl that rumbled through Snape's chest or the exasperated hiss from Hermione. "What humanity you carried in life is somewhere inside of you. I am certain you will not hurt me."

It happened so quickly that Dumbledore couldn't put together the movements that led to his current predicament. Hermione stood behind him; one hand pulling his head backwards while the other pulled his chin to the side. The smell of his blood made her stomach turn, and the grinding of his brittle bones grated on her nerves.

"Not hurt you?" she purred, a feral growl hidden just below the surface. "I could snap your neck like I was tearing tissue paper. I could drain you dry before your next breath. How easy it would be for me to rip your throat out, to tear your heart from your chest, to crumple your bones into dust. Don't tempt me, you old fool."

A whisper of wind and a blur later, Hermione was standing beside Snape with her pale hand placed gently on his shoulder. He looked up at her, his black, obsidian eyes softening to liquid brass. There was a ghost of a smile on his lips as her eyes melted to match. "Stay here with me, my darling. No need to put yourself through such discomfort."

She wrinkled her nose. "How do you stand it, Severus?" she asked, leaning her cheek against his and murmuring in his ear. "Their blood smells like dust and rust."

The laugh that erupted from Snape was like the gurgling of a pure, clean waterfall. He placed his hand over hers. "I hardly smell them anymore," he said softly. "I usually stay so 'well-fed' that I ignore the smell entirely. You are the first I have smelled in a long time because I wasn't full Thursday night. As horrible as it may sound, I am glad I neglected my usual precautions. Otherwise, I would not have you here now."

There was softness to his eyes that made her want to sink into the carpet. While her human personality...with all its stubbornness and tenacity...was slowly making its way through the haze of her new creation, there was still an alarming ripple of utter need that ran through her when she looked at him. It made her chest ache with connection, her body convulse in pain at the thought of being separated from him. She was unsure how much of the feeling belonged to her new existence and how much was blooming from some hidden want of him that resided in her human form. Either way, she welcomed the lurch of her stomach as he touched her with his cold hand and looked up at her with his liquid brass eyes.

Professor Dumbledore had finally regained his bearings and stumbled over to where McGonagall still waited by the door. Her lips were set in a severe line and her brows were pulled down in a scowl. "Listen when you are warned of things," she hissed. "Don't just listen, heed them!"

He grumbled and sulked as if he were a chastised child. McGonagall turned back to the couple across the room. "I am sorry if we are causing you discomfort, Miss Granger. We meant only to check on your well-being and to ensure that proper precautions will be taken when you return to the main school tomorrow. I am sure you want to do everything possible to protect your classmates from any mishaps."

Hermione looked up, focusing on the old woman's face for the first time with her new eyes. The face that stared back at her was leathery and worn, gouged with deep wrinkles. Steel-gray eyes looked back with strain and blurred vision. The bones beneath her skin seemed frail and chalky. It unnerved Hermione to see how truly old Minerva McGonagall was; she whom Hermione thought would exist forever as the stern Transfiguration professor.

"We will do everything we can," Severus said quietly. His voice was sure. "She will be thirsty every few hours for the next few days, so she will need to return here once every three hours. As I mentioned to Albus, she cannot go outside. Therefore she will come here during Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures. Do not expect her to eat during meals, either. That is more trouble than we must put on her shoulders for now."

"She is standing right here," she said playfully. Her wide eyes burned blue as she giggled, a musical sound like a harpsichord. It filled the room and made his eyes tint navy.

"I realize you are," he replied, inwardly glad her human personality was fighting through the blind devotion of the newborn. He wanted her as much as her human self as possible. "These are simply precautions that must be taken to protect everyone."

She smirked. "I can protect myself."

"Of course you can, darling. But can you protect your friends from yourself?" He hated saying those words, to remind them both of the monster she had become. But it was something that must be done. "Please, Hermione, do this for me, and I may be willing to make certain... concessions."

Her eyes blazed black with wariness as the laughter faded into silence. "What kind of concessions?"

So quickly only Hermione was able to see and hear him, Severus was standing beside her and murmuring in her ear. "We can discuss leaving Hogwarts."

Cedric was pacing in front of the doors to the Great Hall. Harry and Ron sat on the stairs, watching him with vague expressions. He was chewing his thumbnail as he paced, staring at the dungeon steps with a mixture of fear and impatience. He jumped at the faintest sound and began mumbling to himself as the minutes dragged by.

A sudden movement in the shadows caught his eye, and his jaw went slack as Hermione appeared out of the dungeon corridor. Severus had taught her a few glamours to help hide the drastic change in her appearance, but she still looked otherworldly to Cedric. Her skin glowed alabaster, her eyes a deeper shade of brown than he remembered, her carriage a bit more sure. She stared at him, her eyes seeming to set his skin on fire, and flashed him a wide smile. His heart stopped at the beauty of it.

"Do you feel better?" he asked, his eyes wide and his voice nervous.

Her dazzling smile widened, and she nodded. "Yes, I do," she said, her voice an octave lower than usual. "Thank you for worrying about me, Cedric. It's very sweet."

"You're welcome, Hermione. Could you eat something?"

Her eyes raked over him, her nostrils flaring at the scent of his blood. She longed to feel the chords of his muscles bunch beneath her fingertips, to listen to the steady

rhythm of his heart slow and falter as he succumbed to the change burning through him. It was in that instant, that fraction of a fraction of a second, that she realized that she not only wanted to taste his blood, but she wanted to change him. A strange pull drew her closer to him beyond her will. It was more than the attachment she felt toward Severus, her maker. It was something primal and resolute, something so deep within her that it seemed as if her entire being was entwined with the flesh, blood, and bone that was Cedric Diggory.

"I could, but I shouldn't, not now at least." She knew he wouldn't understand the double meaning behind her words, but couldn't resist the sweet smell of his warm blood. She swayed slightly, just enough that Cedric reached out to steady her. He caught her by the waist, shuddering at the cold, hardness of her skin. She stared up at him; aware that she had forgotten the drastic change the past few days had wrought on her. Her eyes blinked shut, trying to hide the fact that they had suddenly burned black. She thought furiously, trying to come up with a convincing lie.

Cedric tried to smile as he pulled her nearer and began helping her toward the Great Hall. "Is it very cold in the... dungeons?" he said, trying to drive the image of Snape nursing her out of his mind.

The mention of the dungeon caused her to glance up at the staff table where Snape, her loving maker, sat watching her. "Not really," she mumbled, turning her blue-tinged eyes away from him. "The mosp stung me nearly everywhere, and the welts get cold and hard before they heal."

Cedric nodded absently, trying to whisper his fingers over her skin without her noticing. But her new senses were so alive that she felt the slightest tingle in his nerve endings. She let her eyes drift closed as he ghosted his strong, firm hand over the skin of her back and sides. His blood pounded in her ears, sending a sizzling spark of desire through her. She leaned against him and reached back to entwine her fingers in his hair. He pressed his cheek against hers, less startled now by the cold tingle of her skin. An intoxicating scent rolled off her and filled his brain until it was fogged.

"I was so worried about you, Hermione," he whispered into her ear as he pulled her silken ringlets away from her neck. The scent licked flames across his skin and made his mouth go dry. He traced open-mouthed kisses down the length of her neck, feeling his heart jump into overdrive as the taste of her skin hit his tongue. "God, Hermione, what's happened to you?"

"You don't like it?" she whispered, too lost in the desire and bloodlust rushing through her to realize what she was saying or that they were just outside the doors of the Great Hall.

He inhaled her intoxicating scent once more and traced his fingers quickly over her breasts before tracing the swell of her stomach. "No, I think you're wonderful. Better than wonderful... beautiful, amazing, seductive, addictive. Pick the word you like best, just stay here." He pulled her more tightly against his chest, allowing her to feel the erection growing beneath his robes.

Hermione smiled a feral grin, grinding her hips back against him and fisting her hand in his hair. "Hmm..." she moaned softly. "You *do* like me."

IX

Chapter 10 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

IX

Severus watched their exchange with a hollow feeling in his chest. He fought to keep the snarl from rippling through him as Hermione molded her cold, hard body to Cedric's. The warmth of the younger wizard must have been blistering against her skin, the draw of his pulsing blood nearly unbearable. Severus could feel the desire for his blood as it coursed through her. He cursed the connection he had with his darling newborn mate. He didn't want Hermione's desperation for Diggory's blood filling his mind.

If it were possible for a vampire to cry, Severus Snape would have been. He was so closely linked with his creation that he felt everything as she did. It worried him that she was so strongly drawn to the boy, that her infinite brain was so entirely consumed with the intoxicating scent of his blood. Never in his long existence had Severus experienced such a desire for a human's blood. Perhaps it was because she was so young that her bloodlust was so strong. But perhaps it was much worse.

Cedric was the first scent she had latched onto. She seemed to be losing herself in the warm heat of his blood. It was unusual, rare in a newborn, but Severus had heard of it happening before. His Hermione had made a Blood Claim on Cedric Diggory. The temptation of his blood would continue to torment her, burning fire through her throat and consuming her thoughts. There was nothing she could do about it. She could not control it. A Blood Claim was something that happened regardless of whether the vampire already had a mate or not. It would drive her to the edge of sanity until she had partaken of his blood...enough to either kill him or change him.

The smell of Cedric's blood seemed to sear from her mouth to the pit of her stomach. Her body clenched as his heat sank through her skin into her bones, simmering in her dry veins, as he stroked her icy skin with deft fingers.

"Cedric," she mumbled her voice low and pleading. Her fingers contracted around his brown locks as a heady spasm of desire pulsed through her. She was clutched against him, matching him in a way that was impossible with her maker. "Cedric, my Cedric."

"Yes," the young wizard replied in a husky, lust-filled voice. He groaned and ran his fingers through her silken hair. He repressed a shiver as the scent around her permeated his thoughts. Images of Hermione whispered through his mind, of her face flushed with pleasure, a wide smile gracing her soft lips, her white teeth glistening. An unexplainable urge welled up in him to sacrifice himself to those beautiful lips and those shining teeth. "My perfect Hermione."

A bolt like electricity shot through her, scorching every inch it touched and forcing her gaze up to Severus. His eyes were a dark, angry black that reflected her form in their infinite depths. She saw the red bloodlust that pulsed in her eyes, the way the air around her seemed to pop and crackle like shattering ice. Her self-control crashed around her feet, and she darted away from Cedric toward the dungeon stairs, skirting away from the light filtering through the windows above the front doors.

She fought back a guttural snarl as she edged away from the light. Her eyes flicked to Snape, who had stalked his way through the Great Hall and was crossing the entrance hall. His black eyes were fixed on her face, and Cedric was gaping at them with wide, curious eyes as she fled from them both. She moved with nimble grace as she retreated down the stairs, her maker following close behind her.

"You're not to do that again," Severus grunted through clenched teeth. His temper was flaring, and his eyes tinted orange and red. "Stay away from the boy."

Hermione glared at him, fighting the urge to snarl and bare her teeth. She felt the rumble rising in her chest war with the feeling of calm he was trying to pass to her. "Stop

it!" she screamed, lashing out her arms. Blood splattered onto the floor from the bowl in her hands. "Stop forcing me to feel things, Severus! I want to be angry. I want to feel human!"

He was across the room in a fraction of a fraction of a second. His fingers clenched around her arms in a vice-like grip. "You. Are. Not. Human. Anymore." He shook her hard. Fire blazed in his eyes as he bared his teeth at her. "You are like me, Hermione, and you will be forever. There is no going back. Only forward...to walk the earth forever or to eternity in the pits of hell!"

She wanted to cry, but knew no tears would come. This form would not know how to cry. Her only comfort was the tightness in her throat and the burning behind her eyes. "Please, Severus," she sobbed dryly. "Please, stop. You must try to understand! I can't help it! I smell his blood and hear his heart and I cannot stop what I do. I didn't know what I was doing to him!"

"It is a pheromone, Hermione," he said, his voice still tight, but his eyes and grip softening. "It is within your very skin, your breath. From the venom that changed you, so comes this. We are nearly irresistible to our prey, dearest. We are beautiful; we draw them to us, promising the fulfillment of their deepest urges. And when they have surrendered to us, we take what we want from them."

He released her, and his eyes faded to a pale gray. Her thoughts were so open to him that he could sense what she wanted from Cedric Diggory. But he needed to hear her say it aloud. "Tell me, my love, what it is you want with the boy."

She looked up, her eyes burning the deepest black. She knew her words would break his heart, but neither could she refuse him. "I want him. To change him as you have changed me."

Cedric sat at the back of the Herbology classroom, his head spinning. One moment, Hermione had been in his arms in the most obscene way. The next, she was a blur disappearing down the dungeon stairs in fear as Snape stormed behind her. He stared after her, his head still filled with the fog induced by the scent that surrounded her. Rage blazed through his veins at the sight of the way she ran in fear from the bastard.

"Best go on to class, Mr. Diggory," Dumbledore said, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Miss Granger will be just fine. Professor Snape is simply making sure she takes her treatment on time."

Cedric did as he was told, but with growing dread. He feared he would not see Hermione again, not like today. He couldn't explain what happened, why he had said and done such things. All he could remember was that he had felt the overwhelming desire to do anything Hermione Granger asked of him.

Professor Sprout was asking him a question, but he could not make his brain form words. He understood her when she asked him to remain behind after class, but his mind ceased to function afterward.

"Is there something the matter, Cedric?" Professor Sprout asked as she took the seat next to him. "You look dreadfully pale. Do you need to go to the hospital wing?"

He shook his head, glad some of the fog lifted as he did. "No, ma'am," he replied softly. "I've just been worried about Hermione Granger. She was attacked by a vampyr mosp in the dungeons this weekend."

"Nonsense, Cedric! A vampyr mosp could not survive in the Hogwarts dungeons. It is far too cold for them. No, they prefer the warmth of the tropics and the humidity of the jungles." Professor Sprout looked at him quizzically. "Who told you Miss Granger was attacked by a vampyr mosp?"

"Harry Potter," he replied. "But it was the headmaster that told him. Professor Snape's the one that found her." His brows drew together and his forehead scrunched in confusion.

"The headmaster told you boys this?" Professor Sprout said, her voice filled with disbelief. Cedric nodded, confusion on his handsome face. "Perhaps there is a good reason for that then. Why don't you go on to the Common Room and rest? I'll let your other teachers know that you aren't feeling well."

Cedric thanked her and walked out of the classroom in a daze. He was trying to understand why Professor Dumbledore would make up such a lie. A dull, throbbing ache was beginning over his eyes as he tried to sort through everything that had happened in the past several days. He could not make the pieces fit together, Dumbledore's lie, the drastic change in Hermione's demeanor and appearance, the blind rage that coursed through Snape. *Something isn't right*, Cedric thought as he fell onto his bed in the Hufflepuff dormitory. *Something's going on with Hermione, and I'm going to find out what.*

X

Chapter 11 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

X

Cedric had been unable to sleep with so much on his mind, so he crept from the Hufflepuff dormitory and climbed the stairs to the library. Madam Pince was sitting at the desk by the door, glaring like a hawk at everyone who came and went. Her piercing eyes followed him as he strode purposefully through the room to the shelves that held the books on magical maladies.

The book he wanted was easy enough to find. *Maladies of Questionable Nature: Bites, Stings, Curses, and Cures* Professor Lupin had required them to read it for Defense Against the Dark Arts, and Cedric had never gotten around to buying his own copy. From the looks of the checkout slip, he was the last person to have taken it out of the library. He carried the heavy tome to a table and flipped it open to the index, following the column with his finger until he found the V's. The page he wanted was near the front of the book, and it took him a moment to find it. When he did, his blood began to run cold as he read.

Vampyr mosp...a magical creature considered to be highly poisonous to any creature afflicted by its sting. The vampyr mosp is approximately the size of a small pumpkin, is capable of flight, and has a retractable stinger on its thorax. Poison is transmitted through the hollow stinger to the victim, usually in a single attack... Victims suffer from paralysis within moments of sustaining a sting, allowing the mosp to drain the victim of blood at his leisure. Indicators of vampyr mosp stings include violent fever, raised red welts, a green tint to the skin around the sting, and bouts of delirium. If caught soon after sustaining a sting, a victim can be treated using essence of dittany and mandrake extract. Treatment is useless more than twelve hours after sustaining a sting... The vampyr mosp prefers habitats of extreme humidity and temperature. They are generally found in the South American jungles, although members of this species have been found in India, Hawaii, and Polynesia.

Cedric could not make his brain wrap around what he was reading. The symptoms described were like nothing he had seen on Hermione. Her skin was hard, ice cold, and pale white. She seemed entirely lucid, although devastatingly different than her usual self. There was no way that a creature that was no bigger than a pumpkin...and could fly...could drag a fully-grown woman into a hole. And why would a flying creature live in a hole to begin with? None of it made sense.

Cedric left the book on the table and looked through the shelves for more books on vampyr mosps. He was quickly frustrated, as none of the books were specifically about the elusive creature, and he was unsure what classification it would be in. Madam Pince was stalking past a table of first years as he emerged from the shelves on his way to her desk.

"Excuse me, Madam Pince," he whispered, doing all he could to endear himself to the harpy librarian. "Could you help me with something?"

She glared at him, although grateful that he was respecting the silence of her library. "What do you want?"

"I need whatever books you may have on vampyr mosps. I am doing a paper on them for Professor Kiergan." Cedric stared at her with his wide blue eyes, hoping she would be willing to help him. Madam Pince glared at him a moment longer before pushing swiftly passed him toward the shelves.

Cedric followed with desperation as the librarian swept through the aisles, pulling books from the shelves as she went. She stacked the leather bound volumes in Cedric's arms before disappearing back to watch over the first years with her precious books. He looked down at the pile of books in his arms, glancing over their titles as he carried them back to his table; *Poisonous Creatures of the Amazon, Magical Mischief in the Jungles of South America, Magical Creatures to Avoid, Creation of Creatures: Myth and Magical Creatures of the New World, and Mistaken Muggles: How Magical Creatures Influenced Myth and Legend in the Muggle World.*

He opened each of the books to the index and began searching for anything to do with vampyr mosps.

Hermione stared out the window that looked out from the highest level of the dungeons. Her line of sight followed the sloping lawns that stretched out from the bottom of the window down toward the lake. Her eyes were perfectly adjusted to the twilight that hung over the castle, their rainbowed hues taking in every minute distinction in color and shade. The burning behind her eyes was a welcome pain as her new form cried in the only way it knew how. She pulled her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them, letting her cheek rest against her knees as she stared across the grounds.

Cedric's face swam into her vision, his blue eyes staring longingly at her. His face was flushed with blood, his lips parted in a tantalizing smile. "Oh, Cedric," she moaned forlornly. Her eyes faded to a sickly green as despair poured over her. She didn't know what to do. She wanted her old life back, but at the same time she didn't. She loved Severus, had promised to stay with him forever, but it was in a way that she felt as if she didn't have a choice. He was her maker; forever a part of her, and his claim on her was strong.

Then there was Cedric, with his sweet smelling, warm blood that called to her with every beat of his heart. She felt as if every fiber of her new being was in tune with him. She could sense where he was in the castle at all times, could hear his heart beating in her mind, smell the scent of him stronger than any other person in the castle. Something within her desired him more than anything in existence. She would leave her maker for him. She would become a maker for him.

What has happened to you, Hermione? She jumped, startled by the sound of his voice so clear in her head. Severus had projected his thoughts into her mind before, but only because the venom that filled her body joined him with her. No, hearing Cedric's voice was quite different. It was tinged with warmth and sweetness. It was the desire for his blood that filled her mind with his words. She closed her eyes and focused on the thudding of his heart, which brought his thoughts into her consciousness more clearly.

I know something has happened to you, and it wasn't what Dumbledore told us. Everything in the library about vampyr mosps says the exact opposite of what happened to you. Not that you don't look absolutely gorgeous... An image of her face filtered through his eyes filled her vision. It was a strange blur of the way she was and the way she used to be. Cedric had not missed the changes in her face, but the soft glow that radiated from his mind seemed to indicate that he didn't care. *But then again, I always thought you were. I just wish I knew what was the matter with you. Then I could help you, and you wouldn't need him anymore!*

Hermione expected a rumble to erupt as he began to insult her maker with vehemence. But it did not come. Instead, she was filled with the joy of new discovery. Cedric was worried about her, and he was jealous of her need for Severus, even though he didn't fully understand what was going on. She wanted to go to him, to comfort him, and tell him what had happened to her. Perhaps then the maddening draw of his blood would not consume her as much as it did.

She focused on his voice harder, trying to break through his mind and see through his eyes. It was dim, and his footsteps echoed off the stones beneath his feet. Torches burned in brackets on the wall every few feet. A portrait of Helga Hufflepuff hung on the wall directly in front of him. He was at the Hufflepuff common room, not far from where she was now. She listened carefully as he muttered the password, too caught up in his thoughts of her to pay close attention. She stayed with him as he wandered through the teeming common room and made his way down a long hallway with doors on either side.

He entered the last door on the left, which had a plate stating *Seventh Year Boys* on it. There were four beds pushed into the four corners of the room, each surrounded by walls of thick blue curtains. It was as if each boy had his own private room, as Hermione could not hear anything from the other two boys in the room when Cedric pulled the curtains around his corner shut. His bed occupied the corner furthest from the door. A mirror was propped against the wall at the foot of the bed, a set of Quidditch robes hung haphazardly over the glass. A dresser with a pitcher of water stood beside the head of the bed. His trunk peeked out from underneath the bed frame. The curtains around the bed were drawn back, revealing charcoal drawings that had been affixed to the wall.

Cedric dumped a pile of books onto the mattress and looked out the window at the head of his bed. The twilight had deepened, turning the lake an inky black that reflected the pale silver moonlight. He rested his forearm against the frame of the window and pressed his forehead against it. *Hermione*, she heard again. *I want you here with me, not with him. I want you here with me.*

Hermione sighed and let Cedric's mind drift away from her. She felt the pull from his blood, compounded by the desperate plea. At that instant, she wanted nothing more than to go to him and tell him everything. Her maker be damned.

The pale, silvery moonlight shimmered off the sleeping face of Cedric Diggory. Hermione crouched in the shadows at the foot of his bed, watching him dreaming peacefully. His cheeks were flushed with blood, and the blankets had been kicked to the side. The lean, sinewy muscle of his bare torso rippled as he rolled onto his side. His muscled legs pushed the blankets completely away, leaving him lying in naught but his boxer shorts. His flawless golden skin seemed to glow in the moonlight as his brown locks lay tousled against the pillow.

Warmth seemed to stir in her silent heart as she watched him. She longed to reach out and touch the skin stretched across those beautiful muscles of his chest. His head turned, exposing the beautiful expanse of his throat, and venom pooled in her mouth. *Wake up, Cedric*, she thought, her mind's voice taking on a tantalizing, singsong quality. *You've gotten what you wished for Cedric. I'm here. Wake up, my darling, wake up. And I will give you anything you desire.*

He moaned softly in his sleep and rolled onto his back. His eyes fluttered open, unfocused and blind in the darkness. Fear rushed through her as she realized what she was doing. She retreated further into the shadows, taking care to avoid hitting the mirror. *Please, forget you heard my voice. Forget you know me* she pleaded halfheartedly. She didn't want to hurt him, and yet she did. She wanted to touch him, to make him hers, and yet she wanted to flee from him as quickly as her new body allowed her.

Hermione? came his sleep-fogged voice in her mind. He was sitting up in the bed now, staring into the darkness. Her perfect eyes took in every inch of him and felt the venom drain down her throat. She couldn't take his life from him, not tonight. He looked too perfect in the moonlight, the warm night pulling his blood to the surface, for her to change him. She didn't even know how, not without taking so much it killed him.

"Hermione?" It was his true voice, directed into the shadows where she crouched. He slipped from the bed with grace that shouldn't belong to a human. He came toward

her slowly, his arms held out to her, his handsome face completely devoid of fear. "Come here, Hermione."

She shook her head, sending her silken curls bouncing. He had no idea how much she wanted to give in to that request. "No, no, no," she chanted, trying to move deeper into the shadows. "I can't, I can't. I'll hurt you."

He smiled, a beautiful, lopsided grin that would have stopped her breath had she needed to breathe. His blue eyes were sparkling as he walked deeper into the shadows surrounding her. She sulked away from him, pressing against the wall and dropping into a crouch. She hid her face against her knees, horrified by the bloodlust that still pulsed around the edges of her thought.

"Do you trust me, Hermione?" he asked, kneeling next to her. He stroked her hair softly and waited. The air around her was as cold as ice, but it was comfortable in the unnatural heat of the night. "Well, even if you don't, I trust you. I don't believe you would hurt me, not if you didn't want to. And I don't think you want to. So, will you look at me?"

She turned her eyes to him slowly, surprised that his nearness did not send venom flooding into her mouth. That smile still graced his face, and his hand was still resting gently against her hair. "Promise me something," she whispered, her muscles loosening and the urge to spring drained out of her. "If my eyes turn red, tell me to run. Beg me to get as far away from you as possible."

"I promise," Cedric replied, holding out his hand to her. Her frozen skin was a welcome jolt against the hot night air. He pulled her up and drew her towards the bed. "Stay with me tonight, Hermione."

She stared into his blue eyes, desperate to trust him, before nodding. With a nimble step, she leapt onto the bed and settled with her back against the wall. The charcoal drawings were tacked to the wall by her head, and a familiar pair of eyes stared back at her. She saw her own face lovingly and meticulously drawn over and over again, as well as people she assumed were Cedric's family. The forlorn eyes of a young girl stared back at her, and she couldn't resist the urge to trace the shape of her fragile face.

"My younger sister," he said softly as the mattress dipped beneath his weight. He stretched out on his back next to her and watched her with wonder. "She should be entering Hogwarts in a few years. She's in school abroad now."

The softness in his voice made her smile, her teeth glistening white in the moonlight. Cedric's eyes widened as he caught sight of her shining teeth, but he reached out his hand toward her mouth anyway. Hermione drew back, pressing herself against the wall as hard as she dared. The stone began to give way beneath her shoulders, and she knew the imprint of her form would be left in the wall.

"Don't be afraid, Hermione," Cedric whispered softly. He traced his finger over her bottom lip, slightly surprised at the fact it was as cold and hard as the rest of her.

She stiffened, feeling the venom begin to surge into her mouth once more. Her lips parted and her canines grew to a point. A soft hiss grew in her chest, and her eyes tinged red.

"Go," he said urgently, drawing his hand away from her. "Run! I'll see you tomorrow."

Even though she didn't want to, she knew she had to. She leapt from the bed and landed lightly on the windowsill. With a farewell glance over her shoulder, she jumped lithely to the ground a few feet below.

XI

Chapter 12 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

XI

The thirst was reaching a painful pitch when Hermione sprang through the ground level window in Snape's rooms. She sent the panes crashing against the wall, shattering the glass. The sound seemed remarkably loud to her ears, but it seemed as if no one else noticed. She could not hear Snape's voice at the edge of her thoughts, only the raging thirst that consumed her. It took her no time at all to reach the cooler hidden behind the pile of books in the sitting room.

She grabbed a handful of bags and crouched in the corner with them, not bothering to pour them into the bowl on the table. Venom rushed into her mouth. She grasped the first bag in her fingers and sank her teeth into the packaging. Blood squirted out of the tears and dripped down her chin. Hermione sucked greedily until the first bag was emptied. The other four followed suit quickly.

Satiated, she lay on the plush sofa and stared up at the ceiling. Cedric was up there, sleeping soundly and perhaps dreaming of her. She sighed as she felt the red tint fade from her eyes until they were her normal, roasted honey color. His thoughts were playing around the edges of her mind. It was strange, seeing her face in his thoughts that way. She'd never thought herself beautiful, but it seemed that both Cedric and Severus did.

Severus, she thought with a pang of guilt. His presence crept into the edges of her mind, and she reached her thoughts out toward him. It felt as if she hadn't seen him for days. She drew in a deep breath, tasting the mustiness of their dungeon home on her tongue, before she thought his name again.

Severus, where are you? she thought, pushing her mental voice out with all her might. His thoughts toyed at the edge of her consciousness, as if he longed to answer her but wouldn't. She reached further, feeling the warmth spread through her as the pinprick of awareness grew and bubbled out into the form she knew so well.

She could see him, see what he saw, feel what he felt. The cool night air was blowing across his face as he lay on his back atop the Astronomy tower. His long legs were stretched out, his heels resting up on the parapet. The blackness of the sky with its myriad of stars filled his vision. Her face filled his thoughts.

Oh, Severus, she cooed when she felt the joy sweep through him at the thought of her. She smiled and pushed outward with her thoughts *I'll be with you soon*.

Severus was staring up at the stars, his arm outstretched, tracing the constellations with his finger. Dawn was coming, and Venus could just be seen over the eastern horizon as a bright speck of light. The moon was close to the western edge of the world, its full orb glowing silver. He'd always liked the watching the skies at night, and had taught himself Astronomy and Astrology in the past centuries. It gave him something to do. He couldn't ever sleep.

He felt her thoughts before he saw her, vaulting lithely over the parapet where his feet were propped up. Her lips were drawn back in a satisfied grin, and her brown eyes

sparkled as she looked down at him. *I jumped all the way up here on the first try, Severus* she thought with glee.

He couldn't help but smile in return. The moonlight filtered through her perfect curls, making it look like she was glowing. It turned her skin the most beautiful white marble. It made lights dance in her eyes. It made her even more beautiful, and he tried in vain to understand how that was even possible.

She lay next to him, wrapping her fingers around the hand that lay between them. Her smile broadened as she felt him return the pressure. *I've missed you.* It seemed right to speak to him with her mind rather than break the perfect silence in words.

He was silent for a long while, alternately staring up at the stars and back at her profile. His thoughts seemed to stifle a sigh and a deep well of regret. *Have you, Hermione? Have your thoughts not been taken elsewhere?*

The guilt returned to her in brutal waves. For a moment, Cedric's crystal blue eyes flashed through her thoughts. The image made Severus wince in pain.

I really am sorry, she thought softly. A rush of agony overwhelmed her at the sight of her maker's pain. She pressed her cheek against his shoulder, fighting the dry burning behind her eyes. *I hate to cause you pain, I really do. You must know that.*

Must I? he replied, a grim smile in his thoughts. *I know that you do not mean to. And yet every thought you have of that boy is as painful as a thousand knives. But I cannot expect you to understand, not when you cannot control yourself.*

Hermione wished again that she could cry, knowing she would feel better if the tears could come. She pressed her face into the rough wool of his coat, wishing with all her might that things could be different. The tears were evident in her thoughts. *I'm sorry, Severus. Really, I am. If it will make you happy, we can leave.*

There was a dark laugh in his mind as she thought this. *Leave? I could not be happy unless you were, my darling. And leaving Hogwarts would make you miserable. Besides, I will not separate you from the boy now even though I so desperately desire to.*

The quiet settled around them as Hermione pondered his last thought. She could sense Snape's mind in touch with her own, letting her think in peace. He was good to her, even though she did not deserve it. How many times had she broken his heart in the last twenty-four hours? How many more times would she break it in the centuries to come?

Centuries? he wondered, astonishment in his mental voice. *You plan to stay with me for centuries, Hermione?*

She was startled at his surprise. Drawing back, she stared into his fathomless eyes. It was difficult to make out their color in the darkness. *I want to, if you will let me. Cedric or no Cedric, you are my maker. And I love you. Dearly. Can't you understand that?*

He pulled his hand free of hers, stuffing it in his pocket. *Understand? Yes, I understand. But believe? No, I do not think I can believe it.*

Hermione fell silent as he looked away from her. A sob choked in her throat, making it constrict and burn. *You do not love me, then?*

Of course I love you, Hermione. My love, my darling, yes, I love you. More than you could ever know. He stared at the sky as he thought, letting his mind reach out to hers. His hand was drawn to her, tracing the soft line of her face. *It is only that I don't believe you could live without Cedric, as much as I wish you could.*

They spoke no more, lying beside one another in silence. The stars glimmered and faded above them as dawn broke over Hogwarts. The moon dipped at last over the western horizon as Venus rose in its last brightness, heralding the rising of the sun. Severus stood, pulling Hermione up gently. They stood together in the early morning, the ghost of Cedric dispersed in the faint orange dawn. The golden light rose over the edges of the world and glittered like the facets of a thousand diamonds across their skin.

"We must go inside now, Hermione. It would be dangerous for someone to see us like this," Severus whispered, brushing dust from her perfect curls. He smiled, a gentle upturn of the corners of his mouth.

She opened her mouth to respond, but felt all thought drain from her mind as she saw the glowing reflection of his skin in the morning light. He was radiant, every beam of light infinitely reflected from his face and hands. She knew instinctively that the rest of him would glow and shine just as radiantly were it not for his clothes. "Do I...?"

"Yes," he replied with a genuine smile. "You are a more perfect reflection than I, my darling. Now, let's go before someone sees." He took her by the hand, drawing her to him as he stepped upon the parapet with ease. "You have come up, now let us go down!" He bent his knees and sprang from the top of the tower. She followed behind him, her silken hair billowing as the air rushed past her face. It was hardly a sixteenth of a second later when they landed softly on the balls of their feet at the bottom.

Cedric blinked his eyes tightly. Perhaps it was the sun reflecting off the windows of the tower, or some remnant of the dream from which he had just awoken. He was certain that he saw some glowing thing fall down the side of the Astronomy tower. It was impossible. No one could survive a jump from that height.

He groaned and threw himself face down on his bed. He was trying to figure out if the late night visit from Hermione had been a dream. Wincing, he stretched his arms out to the sides, brushing his fingertips against the worn stone of the walls. They encountered a smooth depression in the surface.

Surprised, Cedric sat up and faced the wall. His eyes traced the distinct outline of a small person pressed into the stone. His fingers traced over the smooth indentation as he remembered Hermione shrinking away from him in the darkness. Her visit hadn't been a dream. She had sat there on his bed last night.

Hermione, he thought softly. Her face swam into his vision, her eyes glittering in the pale moonlight. He placed his palm flat against the depression in the wall where her heart would be. *My Hermione.*

For a moment, his curiosity of what he'd seen earlier was forgotten. He crawled out of bed, struggled into a t-shirt and pair of sweatpants, and headed off to the prefect's bath before breakfast. Perhaps she would be in class today.

Hermione stood in front of the mirror in Snape's sitting room, twisting her hair around her fingers. Her face was pale, and there were dark purple bruises beneath her eyes. *I wish I could sleep*, she thought dejectedly. *I look absolutely horrible.*

No, no you don't, my darling Severus thought as he began setting up the day's potions experiments in the lab. There was a smile in his thoughts as he set out bottles of lacewing flies. *You are a beautifully made creature. Now, eat something before you go to class. And remember to come back every few hours, just to be safe.*

She smiled at her reflection, her teeth showing pearl white. *I will... I love you.*

Cedric was waiting at the top of the dungeon stairs when she appeared. He felt his heart begin to race as she smiled up at him; the deep bruises beneath her eyes seeming to disappear. Her eyes were a pale brown, and her hair was drawn back into a loose knot at the back of her head.

The overwhelming sense of losing himself washed over Cedric the moment she was close enough for him to breathe in her scent. He remembered what happened the last time they had met in the entrance hall, and his blood began to pulse in his ears. She had complete control over him. Every other thought was driven from his mind.

"Good morning," she whispered, flashing him a wide smile. The air between them seemed to sizzle and pop as they stood facing one another. Her hand lifted of its own

accord and placed itself over his heart. She could feel the thudding beat beneath her fingers, just as he could feel the icy coldness of her fingers.

He smiled back and folded his warm hand over her cold one. "Morning."

It seemed as if the world around her shimmered and disappeared when she felt the blazing warmth of his hand. Her skin felt as if it were blistering in some painfully pleasant way. She felt the color in her eyes begin to change. It was a dizzying sensation, to see the world swimming in rainbows of colors before settling into beautiful tints and hues. For the moment, the world seemed unable to make up its mind as to what color it would be. Cedric's face grinned at her through a scarlet haze that faded to a golden shimmer. At last, her world was tinted sapphire.

Cedric gasped when he saw the change in her eyes. His hands began to tremble and sweat. He traced his thumb over the pale shadows beneath her eyes. "Hermione, what...?"

She let out a deep breath and closed her eyes firmly. Every cell in her body wished that she could will her eyes back to their normal color. Her eyes changed on their own, as her mood and feelings changed. Her throat constricted, and the backs of her eyes began to burn. Keeping her eyes closed, she whispered, "I'm sorry, Cedric. I'm not the same as I was. I know that. I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about, Hermione," Cedric whispered back. He held her face in his hands and stared down at her. "Open your eyes."

Hermione slowly opened her eyes, struggling to see through the sapphire hue of the world around her. She stared up at him with fear pounding through her. Cedric was looking at her seriously, his gaze flicking from her dark blue eyes to take in the rest of her face.

The side of his mouth twitched upward in a lopsided grin. "I kind of like them, actually," he said. "They may be a way to keep you safe, so that you don't do something you'll regret."

"Keep *me* safe?" she exclaimed, startled by the way her voice echoed through the entrance hall. "What do you mean? The vampyr mosp..."

"Don't give me that. I'm not sure what happened to you, Hermione, but I know for sure it wasn't a vampyr mosp." His eyes were sure, the set of his lips firm as he discarded her lie. "I won't ask you to tell me if you don't want to, but I think your eyes can help. Like last night. They turn red when you could do something dangerous, so we just split up when they do."

Hermione looked at him with awe. He was taking this so calmly! And he didn't even understand the half of it. "And when they're black. That's when I'm gonna get mad, and that can be almost as dangerous as when they're red."

"Red and black it is then. Now, let's get some breakfast before class."

Severus felt Hermione's rush of joy and wondered what could have made her so happy. Even though he was loath to admit it, he was almost certain it had something to do with Cedric Diggory. He would have to get used to the feeling of Cedric making her happy.

The Blood Claim had complicated their lives, but he would not deny Hermione anything that would make her happy. She could sense that there was some strange connection with Cedric, though she still loved her maker fiercely. He could not keep the secret from her much longer. Tonight, Severus would have to explain the Blood Claim to her.

XII

Chapter 13 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

XII

Severus, what do I do? she thought desperately as Cedric led her to a seat between Harry and Ron at the Gryffindor table. The smells of eggs, toast, sausage, and bacon wafted up to her. Scents that had once made her mouth water now made her stomach turn. They were so strong that she could taste them on her tongue. They tasted like dirt and ash.

Snape's voice echoed softly in her mind. *You are faster than they are, Hermione. Pretend to eat. Hid the food in your napkin. Drop it on the floor. Otherwise, you'll have to cough it back up right after breakfast. Pretending is easier.*

A grimace ghosted over her face as she slid onto the bench between her friends. Cedric remained behind her, his warm hands resting gently on her shoulders. She felt some of her anxiety ease knowing he was near. He must have told Harry and Ron what to expect. Neither of them made any sign that her new appearance disturbed them. She could see Ron's brain working furiously to match this new Hermione to the girl he'd known.

"I'll meet you at the door after breakfast is over," Cedric whispered in her ear. Hermione watched with nervousness as Cedric retreated to the Hufflepuff table. He chose a seat in her line of sight and smiled warmly as he pulled a plate of eggs toward him. The world shimmered emerald as a group of Seventh Year girls moved to crowd around him. She felt her muscles tense and fought the urge to drop into a predatory crouch. Her breath rumbled through her chest, begging to form into some feral snarl.

Get away from him she thought angrily. She pushed her will forward, feeling it expand away from her. There was a jarring sense of power as she realized half the school was now subject to her every desire. At that instant, all she wanted was to stake her claim on the brown haired boy with the crystal blue eyes. *Stay away from Cedric. He belongs to me.*

The air around her grew stifflingly hot before she drew back with a snap. She watched intently as the girls around Cedric scoot away nervously. Those who had sat under her will when she'd made her demands did the same. En masse they shifted away from the Hufflepuff Seeker. A satisfied grin twitched her lips, and her eyes settled brown.

Cedric caught her eye and quirked an eyebrow at her. He followed her gaze around the room, and he noticed for the first time how everyone had unconsciously moved away from him. He stared, his lopsided grin returning with vengeance. He covered his mouth with his hand as he tried to stifle back the laughter that threatened to erupt from him.

"Feeling okay, Hermione?" Harry asked around a mouthful of toast and kippers.

She turned to her friend and searched his face as if she'd never seen it before. Her new eyes took in the dark, nearly blue-black hues of his hair. Flecks of gold seemed to sparkle in his green eyes. His skin was tinted brown from being in the sun. Freckles dusted lightly over his nose, all but hidden beneath his glasses. His cheeks were flushed slightly pink, and his lips were full and tinted like coral.

Her inspection lasted only a sixty-fourth of a second. She felt a rush of love as she took in his familiar features. "Much better, but Professor Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey think it will be a while before I'm completely healed. Sev...Professor Snape agrees."

"Did it hurt? Getting stung so many times?" Ron asked from beside her.

She hated having to lie to them. But this part, at least, would be close to the truth. "Loads," she said, making a pained face. Ron nodded, his hair flopping over his face.

She turned her new eyes on Ron. His hair was flaming orange and appeared longer than she remembered. It settled over his eyes and fell down below his chin. His face was paler than Harry's and more than dusted with freckles. He had more than she'd ever noticed with her old eyes. He smiled mildly at her, showing thin, bright pink lips and slightly crooked teeth. His brown eyes reflected like burnished brass beneath long lashes.

Her gaze wandered back to the Hufflepuff table. Cedric was still watching her, his blue eyes keen. He raised one eyebrow and laughed so softly that only she could hear it. He was still sitting alone near the end of the table, watching her.

Harry's voice drew her attention once more. "He told us, you know. What you'd look like. Ced's been in the library almost as much as you lately, looking up stuff about vampyr mosps and things. He was really worried about you."

"Yeah," Ron piped up, the sound muffled by the food stuffed in his mouth. "Dumbledore let him stay up in our common room until they found you. I kinda felt bad for him, he didn't sleep for so long."

A quizzical expression passed over her face. "Really? That was sweet of him."

Ron snorted into his pumpkin juice. "*Sweet!* Damn it, Hermione. The guy was a mess. He wanted to go after the thing as soon as he found out about it. I'm surprised he hasn't stormed the dungeons already."

"Why would he do that?" she asked softly. She felt dizzy. Her head was spinning. She had a horrible vision of Cedric, pinned against the wall with Snape's hands at the younger man's throat. Part of her didn't want to hear Ron's answer. That part that was tied irrevocably to Severus Snape.

"Hermione? You really don't know?" asked Harry. He tried to catch Ron's eye when Hermione shook her head. He knew Cedric wouldn't want her to know...not this way. But there was no stopping Ron's mouth once it got started.

"Ced's in love with you, 'Mione."

If Hermione thought her head was spinning before, she had no way to describe what was happening to her now. Ron's words were echoing in her brain. Cedric's face was blurring her vision. The world around her glared black...red...orange...green...then finally purple. She saw spots and felt the world fall away from her.

"*Hermione!*" Cedric's voice rang in her ears as she fell. Her body smacked against the stone floor of the Great Hall. It gave way beneath her, cracks radiating out from where most of her weight landed. Her eyes glazed over, and her thoughts went blank. Her new body fought against the feeling of powerlessness and uncertainty, but her mind could not hold on any longer. This was what it felt like to faint.

The reverberations from Hermione's fall echoed through the dungeons until it shook every bone in Snape's body. He felt the uncertainty that ran through her and dropped the bowl of beetle eyes he was holding. His head snapped upward, staring through layers of rock and mortar. Without mercy, Snape invaded the mind of the nearest student and watched with terror as a crowd formed around Hermione's still form.

A howl erupted from his chest as he ripped himself from the child's mind. He was moving before he consciously made the decision. He moved with inhuman speed and grace, taking the dungeon stairs three at a time, a blur to anyone who looked his way. They had waited too long. The Blood Claim was draining her body of what life it held.

Cedric watched in horror as Hermione's body seemed to fall in slow motion. The castle seemed to shake as she hit the stone floor, her head bouncing with a sickening crunch. He jumped from his seat and climbed over the table, knocking plates and glasses aside as he went. The Ravenclaw table met the same fate. Cedric pushed people out of his way and stepped in plates of eggs and butter as he walked across the table.

He fell to his knees next to Hermione; surprised to see Harry and Ron move out of his path. Wide cracks opened in a web around her body, and the floor was sunken in a few inches where she lay. Unseeing eyes, tinged with purple, stared up at the enchanted ceiling. He pressed his palm against her forehead, tilting her head backwards and exposing her neck. His eyes swept over her form and, for the first time, caught sight of the pale white scars at the juncture of her throat and shoulder.

His fingertips traced over the scars as his mind whirled out of control. Thoughts moved so rapidly that it was difficult for him to keep track of them. Faint footsteps echoed in his ears as a growing dread fell upon him. With the impact of a rogue bludger, the truth hit him. He lost his breath and felt as if cold knives were stabbing his chest.

Heavy, black boots filled his watery vision as the Potions master pushed students out of his way in order to get to her. He dropped to his knees opposite Cedric, a dull cracking echoing through the stone beneath him. Cedric's eyes snapped upward and latched onto Snape's face. His eyes were a shale gray rimmed with black. His usually pale face was nearly transparent. His thin lips were drawn back over his teeth, where slight fangs glittered pearl-white in the filtered light.

"YOU!" Cedric snarled, unconsciously pulling Hermione closer to him. He felt the blood rush to the surface of his face, felt the room burn hotter than the pits of hell as he stared at the monster in front of him. "You did this to her!"

Snape glared back at the younger wizard, his teeth clenched in fury. "I made her what she is, but *you* are the one who did *this* to her," he hissed, jabbing his finger in her direction. "You force yourself on her, torturing her with your blood, and she resists. She resists to the point of madness!"

Hermione's form twitched on the floor between them. Her eyes rolled back in her head as she began thrashing on the floor. "She's having a seizure!" someone in the crowd shouted. Cedric looked around for Harry. They stared at each other for a quick moment, a silent message passing between them. Harry began pushing people backward; demanding that they clear out the hall so the teachers and Healers called from St. Mungo's could get to her.

"Fuck all," Snape muttered, his eyes darting from side to side. "They've called the Healers already. I must get her out of here before they arrive. It will be too obvious for me to carry her out of the room. They will follow me."

For an endless moment, Severus and Cedric stared at one another. Hermione's thrashing was lessening, and she was lying motionless on the floor with froth at the corners of her mouth.

"Do you love her?" Severus hissed quietly.

Cedric nodded. "More than you, you bastard!" he growled.

Severus let the comment go as he grabbed at Cedric's wrist. With a silent *Accio* he summoned a knife from the table nearby. "You love her? Then save her," he said flatly, staring into the younger wizard's eyes as he drug the knife over the pulsing veins of Cedric's wrist.

Crimson blood oozed from the gash on Cedric's wrist. Severus squeezed his wrist to force more blood from the wound and pulled it toward Hermione's mouth. He pressed the bleeding flesh against her lips and waited as droplets of blood dripped into her mouth. Cedric's heart pounded furiously, and he could sense the lightheadedness that was threatening to overwhelm him. He watched his blood drip between her pale lips and prayed that it wasn't too late.

Hermione felt as if she were floating. There was no air in her lungs, no thoughts in her mind, no being in her body. She was nothing and everything at once. Vague images flashed before her consciousness, faces of people she knew but could not name. People she loved but could not touch. She felt empty, hollow fear coursing through her.

She fought to return to her body, to those faces she could sense but not see. The fear anchored her to her mortal form and the faces pulled at her like tethers. The struggle to return was taxing, more than she could handle in her insubstantial form. If she had a voice, she would cry out in pain and frustration. But she was silent. No voice in her throat...

And then, with a jarring yank, her anchor found purchase and the tethers around her pulled with superhuman force. She no longer felt the sensation of weightlessness. She was too solid, too real. Pain crashed through her skull and radiated through her back and limbs. She could hear voices pounding in her ears in a high-pitched drone. It seemed as if her mind jump-started, and she found her control over her body.

She opened her mouth to scream and felt her lips brush against warm, wet flesh. Her tongue contracted and pleasure erupted in her brain as she registered the sweet taste of blood in her mouth. It was a taste she had thought of a thousand times, a taste that matched a smell she could pinpoint anywhere in the world.

Her lips latched onto Cedric's wrist and sucked greedily at the warm blood that flowed down her throat. She blinked as the purple-white film disappeared from her eyes and the world turned crimson. Her sight focused above her where Cedric and Severus were bent over her body. Severus was holding Cedric's wrist against her lips with one hand and a knife in the other.

The sight was too much. She felt her body cringe at the sight of the knife in her maker's hand and the look of dazed consciousness on Cedric's face. She wrenched her head to the side, smearing Cedric's blood along her cheek, and began coughing up as much of it as she dared.

Hermione pushed her way up from the floor until she was eye to eye with Severus. Her eyes were pinwheels of red and black as she glared at him. His eyes had tinted blue with happiness at seeing her recovering. She snarled and bared her teeth at him, snapping at his outstretched hand.

"Get away from me!" she snarled, backing away into a crouch. "How could you? How could you do that," she pointed at the still oozing wound on Cedric's wrist, "to him? To me!"

"I had no choice, my love," Severus whispered, still reaching out towards her. "You would have sunk into madness if I hadn't. And it was not against the boy's will. He offered it freely."

Hermione growled so fiercely that the rafters of the Great Hall shook. The students who remained backed against the wall in fear. Harry and Ron grasped Cedric's arms and pulled him to the side, away from the pacing lioness that was Hermione Granger. Blood smeared the floor, dripping into the cracks that spiraled out from the impression of her body. The smell threatened to overwhelm Hermione.

"Listen to me clearly, Severus Snape. I am no longer the replacement for your simpering Madeline," she hissed angrily. She paced to and fro before him, clenching her fingers into claws as her muscles tensed beneath her marble skin. "You are my maker, but I am no longer yours. Do not touch me again, with hand or mind, unless you wish to be torn to pieces. I am done with you!"

With that, she forced her hatred, her anger, and her dismay into a burning thought that consumed her mind. She glared at him; at the face she had once loved more than any other, and pushed that thought out with all of her might. She watched as his eyes grew wide and his body sank in upon itself as her thoughts overwhelmed him. He fell to the floor, covering his face with his hands, and wailed like a dying animal.

She turned her gaze to her friends, to Harry, Ron, and Cedric. Her vision faded to clear as her eyes regained their normal, roasted honey color. "I am sorry, I truly am," she whispered, straightening from her crouch. "Know that I love you all, no matter where I go or what I have become. I will miss you."

With that, Hermione turned and ran from the Great Hall. The oak front doors banged open as she pushed them out of her path. Her feet didn't seem to touch the ground as she ran with all of her strength from the only place she'd ever felt truly at home. With a gentle bound, she vaulted over the castle wall and felt the protective wards ripple over her as she landed on the other side. She sprinted down the lane and into a grove of trees on the near side of Hogsmeade.

Her new form found easy foot- and finger-holds in the bark of the trees as she climbed to their highest branches. From the top of the trees, she could barely see the outline of Hogwarts against the morning sky. She knew it was there, knew the shadow and form of each tower and parapet, but saw nothing but the dilapidated ruins any Muggle would see if they came upon the castle. The burning began behind her eyes as she wept for her lost home, her lost friends, and her lost loves.

Epilogue

Chapter 14 of 14

THE HOGWARTS VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: Part I. There's a vampire creeping around the grounds at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And it has claimed its next victim.

Epilogue

Harry and Ron would rather have taken Cedric up to the hospital wing, but the older boy refused to go until he had seen for himself that Hermione was gone. And so they stood on the front lawns of Hogwarts, Cedric supported between them, and stared into the mountains around them. For a fleeting second, Cedric thought he saw some shining, glittering thing in the trees by the road. But as soon as his eyes focused on it, it was gone.

"She's gone, Ced," Harry whispered sadly. His green eyes scanned the horizon even while he knew he could not see her. "I don't understand what's happened, but she's gone."

Cedric stumbled away from them, clutching his wounded wrist to his chest. He stared at the trees where he had seen the glittering object. Deep in his heart, he knew that he had seen her. It was his last glimpse of the girl he loved, the girl that Severus Snape had turned into a vampire.

He understood everything now. The pieces of the puzzle had all fallen into place, and there could be no more doubt. A vampire had lived in the castle for almost thirty years, and Dumbledore had known the entire time. While Cedric would hate Severus Snape until his dying day, he felt new hatred bubble through him as he thought of the

headmaster. It was he who was to blame for what happened to Hermione, now and until the end of time.

With a grunt, Cedric turned back to his new friends. His face was set in a grimace. "C'mon, guys. We're going to settle a few things with Dumbledore."

He didn't wait for an answer, but strode up the lawns with renewed strength. Although he couldn't see them, he felt Harry and Ron fall into step on either side of him. Dumbledore would not feed them lies any longer. They were going to get the truth, and then they were going to find Hermione.

And So Ends The First Part of The Hogwarts Vampire Chronicles