

The Devil's Game

by Ugly Kitten

The future is bleak for the wizarding world after Voldemort died. Scorpius Malfoy and Molly Weasley become the future's hope for the past. They enlist fourteen-year-old Hermione Granger's help with two stipulations: She can never return to the future and she can't remember it. Dealing with the Marauders is the least of their troubles. Severus/Hermione eventually, Lucius/Hermione to start. Scorpius/Hermione in a sibling relationship. Time-Turner fic with a twist.

Prologue - Slowly Time Turns

Chapter 1 of 18

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Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or the canon characters. I do own the original characters I've created to accompany the Marauders and the 70s Slytherins. This list includes: Sin Avery, Illiad Parkinson, Ellen Hooper, Jane Cooke, and the DADA professors that will be used in the span of the story. If you wish to use anything I've suggested in the way of subjects, you don't need to quote me. Just send me a link so I can read, too!

Prologue: Slowly Time Turns

My name was Hermione Jean Granger and I am fourteen years old. And I had never been more frightened in my life until that very moment. The man before me was about the same age as I am, give or take a year, and he had the same white-blond hair as two other men I knew. However, the pleading, anguished expression of his visage was quite unlike anything I had ever seen Draco or Lucius Malfoy portray.

I was caught between the cold granite of an alcove in the dungeons and his admittedly warm body. His hand was against my mouth, preventing the scream I wanted so badly to emit right now. Something about his eyes, though, something about the brilliant sky blue of them, made me hesitant. His wand gave a slight wave, and he muttered a spell too softly for me to hear. I assumed it was a silencing charm, because he started speaking.

"Please, Miss Granger, please hear me out," he pleaded.

Slowly, though it went against my better judgment, I nodded. His hand fell to his side, and I let out the breath I'd held despite the fact that I could have easily breathed through my nose. The boy sighed and ran a hand through his shoulder-length blond hair.

"She told me you'd be indignant and wary, but that you'd listen," he said quietly. "I'm glad she was right."

I whispered despite my own inner assurances that he had in fact cast Muffliato. "Who is she and who are you, for that matter?"

"Your future self, Miss Granger," he said primly, as though this were obvious. "I apologize for being a bit rough, but I doubted you would simply accept the idea of discussing anything in private with a stranger, in particular one who appears very nearly close to being your enemy. I am not, I assure you."

"Your assurances aren't very well matching your actions," I said, my eyes narrowing. "I am particularly curious as to why you haven't told me who you are."

He hesitated. "I know this is going to sound distasteful, is all."

I crossed my arms over my chest, brushing his with my arms. He seemed to realize just then how close we were and stepped back to a more respectful distance.

"My name is Scorpius. I'm Draco Malfoy and Su Li's future son. I need your help, Miss Granger, please, hear me out." He was begging. A Malfoy, future or no, was begging for me to listen.

"Go on," I said, loosening my stance slightly.

He cast another charm; this time I could hear the Notice-Me-Not spell. "Sorry, I know that this is all going to sound strange... but I need your help with the past. Things are... well, I'm just going to put it this way, Miss Granger, things are terrible."

"How terrible?" I said, unwilling to point out that we had only just lost Peter Pettigrew in this time. Voldemort would be arriving any day now, and everyone knew it.

"Voldemort is dead, if that's who you're thinking of," Scorpius said. Well, I can't rightly think of him as Malfoy all the time, can I? I associate that name with his father. "It's... it's a new dark wizard. One we have no hope of defeating. We need to... I need your help to sway him from his path."

"Who is it?" I asked.

Now he was quite nervous again, shifting from foot to foot. He glanced along the corridors outside of our alcove, but no one had come down the path since he'd first pulled me in here.

"It's my grandfather," he said with a heavy sigh. "Lucius. He's... he's taken over where Tom Riddle left off and simply expounded on it. Muggles dying left and right, Muggle-borns and half-bloods enslaved or worse..."

He bit his lower lip. There were tears threatening to fall from his eyes. "Anyone else who might have been able to help is already dead. Rose... Teddy... Hugo, Albus, Lily, James, they're all..." He choked on a sob, and I couldn't help but put an arm around his shoulders tentatively.

"Shh... it's all right..." I whispered, though I knew it wasn't. He sniffled softly, and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that either this was one horrid act or this Malfoy was not like the two I knew.

"They're dead," Scorpius murmured. "All because of me. It's my fault they're dead, Miss Granger... and... I fear without you, I am lost."

"Why?" I asked. "Why come here, to this time period, to get me, of all people?"

"Because you and I are the only ones who can change Lucius Malfoy's mind about Muggle-borns and half-bloods."

"But you can't go to that time period looking as you do!" I protested. "You all but scream Malfoy, what'll they think if..."

"You underestimate the Slytherin and the Ravenclaw in me, Miss Granger," he said, smiling a bit now.

"Well, all right then, smart ass," I snapped. "How exactly are we to live? It's not as if we can just live at the castle during summer, and where are our parents supposed to be?"

"That's easy," Scorpius said, waving his hand as though playing with time was child's play. I had just ended a very regretful year dealing with time travel. I wasn't about to go into something like this half-cocked. He smirked at my disbelief, and it was in that that I saw not Malfoy, but Li's gentle ways. For some reason, this was a bit more soothing than I thought it might have been. "We just find an adult to bring along, too, to be our keeper and all."

"Pray tell, who would we bring," I asked, wary again.

"Hugo's grandma," he said instantly. "She can be our guardian. We obviously look nothing alike so we can't say we're related. We'll be... adopted."

"Who is Hugo's grandma?" I asked, now truly beginning to see how this could work. I was also truly beginning to see the Ravenclaw in Scorpius Malfoy.

"Molly Weasley," he said matter-of-factly. "She got hurt a while back, and I'm positive no one would be able to recognize her. Her own self will probably be a bit behind the class we'll enter."

"How can anyone not recognize Molly Weasley," I said, also matter-of-factly. He glanced around the corridor and then behind him, further into the alcove.

"Okay," he said, very simply. And before my eyes, a woman Disillusioned slowly. I knew at once that this must be the Molly Weasley of Scorpius' time, though I had to agree with him whole-heartedly she looked nothing like the woman I knew.

For one, she had very short, spiked white hair. For another, she was rail-thin and looked like she hadn't eaten properly for quite some time. But the twinkling way she smiled down at me, the way she held herself, and I knew that she really must be my best friend's mother.

"Hermione," she whispered softly. Yup, definitely Mrs. Weasley. "It's good to see you again, sweetheart."

"Er..." Scorpius murmured, looking unsure of himself as he touched her shoulder. "I..."

"Oh, Scorpius, she's got the right to know," she said softly. "It was... your dying wish that we come here, Hermione. I'm sorry."

My head gave an odd little jerk at this news. "I'm... I'm dead?" I wasn't sure exactly how to feel about that. Sad?

"Yes, dear," she said, even softer.

"Well," I said. "I guess I had best go, then, hadn't I?"

"There is... just one other thing," Scorpius studied a particular outcropping of stone against the alcove wall behind me. He toyed with the edges of his fine silk cloak, which I had hardly noticed before. I didn't realize Malfoys looked quite so good in scarlet.

"What is it?" I asked when he didn't say anything.

"We'll... have to be Obliviated. Me and you."

"What!?" I shouted, glad to hear that my voice didn't echo down the corridors. I had been right about the Silencing Charm. "What do you mean, Oblivia..."

I heard the word and saw a flash, and suddenly I couldn't see anything. Or hear anything, for that matter. The blankness that surrounded me was not black nor was it white, but instead it was a nothingness. If I had to place a color on it I wouldn't be able to. The color constantly shifted from burgundy to deep violet to navy blue to ochre and back again through.

Was I dead?

The colors stopped changing all of the sudden, turning to a straight black. Just before I lost all cognizant thought, I recalled my mother's face.

She was crying.

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So, likes/dislikes?

My Name Is?

Chapter 2 of 18

Hermione and Scorpius wake up at St. Mungo's with very odd injuries and no memories.

I am really sorry it took so long! Real life got in the way. I'd like to sincerely thank Hilaria for looking over this chapter for me. Also to Miss ladyinthecloak for her lovely corrections.

Disclaimer: I am not J.K. Rowling, however much I'd like to be richer than the queen.

Chapter 1: My Name Is?

At first, all I could see were bland, dark colors. Colors that melded one into another, dark blue and burgundy, dark green and ochre. I couldn't think clearly. Each color swirled in and out of my consciousness. It ebbed and flowed, like an endless, blind sea. It wasn't until I realized that I wasn't looking at colors, but seeing them from behind closed eyes that I really gained cognizant thought again.

Being inside my own head was like looking out into the harbor on a particularly foggy morning. Dark gray clouds pulled in amidst the colors. The clouds blocked my memories from me.

Well, first things, first, I suppose.

I tried to sit up. Unfortunately, nothing moved. My eyes didn't open. After a few more tries, I figured it out; I couldn't move. I strained to listen, to hear anything that might tell me something. Anything. My sensory organs failed me.

Was I dead?

Or, worse, was I blind and deaf? The panic hit me like a bowling ball between the eyes. I couldn't move. I couldn't even hear myself breathe. As the minutes ticked by, it grew stronger. The pressure on my chest, filled with panic, was so strong it burned. Was this what a panic attack felt like?

My chest heaved, trying to fill my lungs with desperate, stale air. It smelled of iodine and an odd pine scent that had to have been manufactured. The simple scent pulled me from my erratic breathing. That answered one question, at the very least I was alive.

What had happened to me? I could see and hear before. I know that. I wouldn't simply see colors in my vision behind closed eyes if I had always been blind. Perhaps my eyes just can't open? Or won't open?

But what about my ears? Why can't I hear anything, even the breath of air in my lungs? Or even the quiet throb of my still-pounding heart in my ears?

Desperate now, I plowed through my mental haze, seeking answers. The clouds hid gaping maws, canyons on the floor and ceiling of my mental rooms. Fluttering all around were bits of torn parchment. Like someone had come in, and meticulously torn each and every sheet apart.

At the back of my mind, as though I had taken hours to journey there within my own head, was a bookcase. It was tall and majestic, reaching toward a ceiling that wasn't there in a metaphor that somehow had gained life. There were books on the shelves, written in tiny, loopy handwriting that I somehow recognized as my own.

The implications began to slowly click into place as I perused the books. Horror grew in the pit of my stomach with each one. These were learned things. Spells, wand movements, Dark creatures, Potions ingredients, and the like. Where were my memories stored, though, my friends? My family? My own name?

That is when I found the book on my memory shelf. A book on spells, under the "O". Obliviate. A flash of something, a scrap of a memory I couldn't recall on my own a woman and a boy, featureless, the voice speaking the spell without inflection. That was where all the holes came from. Were these people my family? My mother and brother, perhaps?

For some reason, that calmed me down more than the books on the memory shelf that contained what I'd learned from people I didn't remember. I ran a cold diagnostic of my memories, feeling at the holes. The haze lifted slowly as I felt the ones I could see, revealing just how pockmarked my mental landscape really was. When it had left, there was nothing there for me to see.

For reasons that should have been apparent to me, but were not, I felt that I should probably be insane. After all, I had no memories save for a library of books in the back of my mind. I sighed and slumped against the shelves. There was no use denying it, and no use in panicking over it. I was completely Obliviated from every corner of my mind.

That did not explain why I could not see or hear. Logically speaking, if it were only my mind that had been wiped slate clean, then I should be fine. Physically, anyway. That meant that something else was wrong. Without my memories, however, and without someone there to explain anything, I was at a loss for what.

Had I been attacked? Was I still in danger? Was I lying on the floor somewhere, helpless and hurt?

In all of my musing, I must have missed my body's signs. My racing heart had slowed to a restful beat. My skin was fine; I could feel cloth on it. I was covered, at least, and I felt rather comfortable. There were some aches, some pain. Nothing that I really could say was horrible. Since this was my first recollection of pain, I marveled at the way that I dismissed it. My body, at least, remembered that I'd had worse even if my mind could not.

That's when I finally heard the murmuring. At first it was indecipherable. It felt entirely as if my head were underwater, and I was trying to listen to merpeople above the surface. Cool glass pressed to my lips, and I felt my mouth and throat work to swallow the substance. It tasted foul. The sheer relief at being able to feel, to taste, to hear,

however, overshadowed my distaste.

I don't know how much later it was when my hearing cleared. The woman, whoever she was, must have been humming for quite some time before I caught the difference between the muddled murmurs. Her voice was familiar, but the tune was not. Who was this woman? Was she a friend? A relative? My mother, even?

The hope that she was my mother burgeoned in my chest like a Roaring Lily. A hand brushed my hair from my still-shut eyes. It must be her. The humming faded slightly from a short distance, but did not cease. Had she just sat back? If she was only seating herself, she would be closer, I think. It sounded like she was several feet away. Was there another person she was looking after?

The woman and the boy from what muddled memories my mind seemed able to recall popped into my vision. Perhaps she was the woman? Maybe the boy was here, too. The humming ceased with the sounds of an opening door and padded footsteps. The door shut, and I felt the wind ruffle my hair again.

"How are they doing, Healer Pomfrey?" asked the woman's voice. It was familiar, but not enough for any new memories to crop up.

"Physically, they're just fine," Healer Pomfrey's voice said. He sighed and paused for a few beats. "You weren't so well yourself. You should be resting."

"I will, once they're awake."

Healer Pomfrey sighed again. "You mustn't blame yourself for anything that..." He trailed off uncertainly.

"I need to know they're all right."

The sound of rustled cloth came then, and a few wet snuffles. More cloth rustled, a squeak of a chair on the floor. This woman couldn't possibly be crying over strangers, right? I prayed that I was right, and she was my mother. That everything would be okay now. "What if they're brain damaged? Or worse, what if "

"Ms. Taylor, we can stand here and exchange 'what ifs' all day and it would do them nor you any good." Another few beats. "Can you tell me what happened?"

I listened eagerly, wanting to know the same thing myself. The woman sighed. I could hear her shifting in a seat somewhere to my right. "I just found them, Healer Pomfrey. They were... they were amidst a good deal of... I think they were attacked."

Attacked? Was I on someone's "to kill" list? Why Obliviate me?

"Their physical states suggests a Death Eater attack, yes," Healer Pomfrey said, as though he had seen this far too many times. "But to Obliviate them... it's beyond my comprehension. Somehow, I think that someone wanted this to look like a Death Eater attack."

Ms. Taylor was silent.

"It is feasible..." Healer Pomfrey fell silent for a few seconds. "I think they may have been attacked for reasons other than being of impure blood. That would explain their loss of memory."

"What do you mean?"

A sigh. "I don't know what I mean. It just doesn't seem plausible that they were attacked by Death Eaters. You-Know-Who doesn't pick random targets, and these two seem like very random targets to me." Another pause. "What about their parents?"

"Dead when I got there."

My heart froze.

She wasn't my mother. My mother and father were dead. Dead, and I couldn't even remember their faces, their names? The despair that clenched my heart was so powerful, I felt the pain ricochet around within me. But he'd said... he'd said "these two". I had a sibling? A brother or sister? The boy's image, the one in my mind, reappeared there. Was this person, this vague outline of someone, my brother?

I strained to open my eyes again, to no avail.

"Poor things," the Healer said sadly. "What are you going to do?"

"I have enough money to support them and me for some time," said Ms. Taylor slowly, as though she were thinking hard. "I'll adopt them. They're obviously students, looks like third-years. I just hope they recall their schooling."

"Perhaps." Healer Pomfrey did not sound hopeful. What would they think if they knew that's all that I remembered? What the hell kind of enemy had I obtained that would delete all but how to use my magic?

I heard a soft moan then, and the rustle of cloth. The Healer spoke quietly, but I could still hear the words.

"Hello, young man." A brother! "How are you feeling?"

"Like I just got hit by a dozen Bludgers," said a coarse, throaty voice. He was trying to sound humorous, I think. His voice, however, dispelled the humor, as it sounded parched by days of thirst.

"Do you recall what happened?"

A pause. "No."

Healer Pomfrey sighed. "What's your name, son?"

Another pause. "I... I don't know, sir. Where am I?"

"You are in St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries," said the Healer. "Your sister there and you were found by Ms. Taylor there. I'm afraid your parents did not survive."

A series of squeaks came from somewhere to my far right, followed by a single loud one that signaled silence again. I think it was the bed, but I couldn't be sure. The boy's voice wavered slightly.

"W-Well... at least I can't r-remember, th-that would make it worse," he murmured. Ms. Taylor murmured nonsense under her breath, too quiet for me to hear her words.

My heart clenched again. My brother if he was my brother didn't recall his own name. Didn't recall mine. Didn't recall our parents. Our friends. Did my brother and me fight? Did we get along all right? I couldn't even recall a faint birthday memory or a Christmas. The faces were smudged out, the memories gone, fuzzy, deleted.

I heard swishing noises and the Healer sighed. "You're all right aside from a few new scars and this loss of memory. I couldn't imagine why Death Eaters would want to Obliviate... they usually just torture and kill."

"Death Eaters?" the boy asked. He sounded like he'd rather not catalogue said new scars if he could even recall old from new. I knew I wouldn't be able to.

"We're at war," said Healer Pomfrey. "But that isn't for you to worry about. We aren't even sure that it was the Death Eaters." He didn't say anything else for a moment or two, and then I felt warm, rough hands on my face.

"How are her eyes?" Ms. Taylor asked.

I tamped down on the panic that screamed in the back of my mind. If I was blind, I would accept it. I would.

"They look fine," Healer Pomfrey said. The blunt end of a wand tapped each of my eyebrows. As though commanded by the Imperius Curse, they flew open of their own accord. The light seared my eyes. I blinked rapidly.

Then, I tried to move. "Don't panic, young lady, your body is under a medical stasis." He murmured a few more spells over me.

"I... " My voice sounded just as bad as the boy's, if not worse. "I heard... "

"It's all right, don't strain yourself, now," said Healer Pomfrey with a warm smile. He was a gentlemanly looking man; neither short nor tall, thin nor fat. He looked about thirty years old, with warm brown hair and cool grey eyes. He had a very handsome face, and a tender smile. That must be why he made a good Healer.

I swallowed and moved to sit up. The Healer and Ms. Taylor both helped me sit up. I glanced over at the other bed. The boy I had seen so vaguely in my memories was there. He brushed a few strands of honey-colored hair out of his eyes, as though nervous to have me looking at him. Ms. Taylor was the woman, I was sure of it.

"I was listening," I said before the Healer could ask me the same questions. "I don't remember much more than he does."

The room was the same as any other St. Mungo's room, though how I could say that I didn't know. It was white with a bewitched window and two beds against the wall. A curtain was scrunched up between the two beds and then on the other side of the boy's bed, this one obviously to wrap around both.

"You've been hit with multiple Cruciatus Curses," the Healer said. "You've slept off the worst of your healing process. You shouldn't feel anything more than light twitching and headaches; we'll give you some potions to take with you."

"Where will we go?" I asked softly.

"You'll be coming home with me," said the woman. "I've offered myself up as your foster mother."

I nodded and attempted a smile. I'm sure it was probably more of a grimace. She didn't comment on it, at least.

"I never had children, you see," said the woman, and I knew in an instant that this was a lie. "I've only just returned to Britain from a long stay in Egypt, so I'll have to look into a flat first. When will they be released, Healer Pomfrey?"

"Oh, probably Wednesday morning," said the Healer with a crinkly smile. "We need to keep an eye on them for a bit, in case there is any improvements on their memories."

Some emotion flashed over Ms. Taylor's face, but it vanished faster than I could name it. I exchanged a glance with the boy, glad he had the observational skills to notice both the woman's visage and catch my eye. He gave an imperceptible nod.

"We'll be fine," I said. It was more to convince myself than the two adults. "At least from what I can tell, we've been through the ringer. I feel quite well considering."

"I'll go get Madam Pomfrey and make sure you lot have something to eat," Healer Pomfrey said with a smile. He stretched his back out as he stood up. "Don't try moving around too much for a bit, your muscles are very sore and require the rest."

The woman smiled softly. "You two will be all right if I go?"

"Of course," I said. "We're in splendid hands here, aren't we, um...?" I trailed off, glancing at the boy in the other bed.

"I don't know my name, either," said the boy with false brightness. "We'll make something up. Should be fun."

"That's probably best," I said, laughing in spite of the trickle of fear running up my spine. It sounded a bit hysterical even in my own ears. Healer Pomfrey gave an understanding though sad grin at this.

"Well, you let me know when you've got something," he said.

"We'll just take your last name, if that's all right," I said, turning to the woman. She smiled at this.

"That would make me very happy, young lady. My name is Molly Taylor, by the way."

"Taylor," I said, tasting the name on my own tongue. "I like it."

"Oh, you are a little angel, aren't you," Ms. Taylor said. She chuckled and with that, Healer Pomfrey swept from the room. She glanced at the door, and then at the boy, as though pondering whether she should do something or not. "I wasn't sure... oh, well, here." She handed him a small, silver locket. "I found this on you. I couldn't get it open, though, so I..."

He offered her a tiny smile. "Thank you, Ms. Taylor."

"Call me Molly, dear," she said. She patted his head once, uncertainly. "I had best go, then. I need to find a place for us to live, after all."

"Bye, Molly," I said, waving. She smiled back at both of us and then left the room.

As soon as the door latched, I snatched my wand from the side table how I knew it was mine I don't know and cast a Silencing Charm on the door. I put a warning ward over it just to be safe, too. For a few moments, we were silent.

"Are you really my brother?" I asked quietly, in spite of the charm.

"I don't know," he said. He looked as confused, if not more so, than me. He held up the necklace for me to see. "It has... my name on it."

I gave a wry half-smile. "What's your name?"

"Scorpius. I remember my schooling, too."

My eyebrows rose slightly. "We remember our learning, but not who we learned it from."

"Well... guess we really had better come up with something to call you. I was named after a zodiac. Maybe you were too."

"Yes, but there aren't exactly very nice female names in the Western zodiac," I pointed out. "And I'm not going to go around being called Virgo or Taurus."

He hesitated a minute before speaking again. "Well... how about if I'm the head and you're the stinger?"

"Pardon me?"

"Uh... the tail... the stars on the end... Shaula and Lesath, they're sometimes referred to as the Cat's Eyes," he murmured. "We could come up with something cat-ish, you know."

"How about Hecate, then?" I asked.

"How did you get to Hecate from 'cat'," Scorpius asked, amazed.

"I like it," I said with a shrug. "Think of the etymology. The Greek Hecate can be traced down to Catherine, which is long for 'cat'."

"Who represents witchcraft," Scorpius murmured. "Very interesting, that. I like that name. Hecate Taylor, I am pleased to make your acquaintance, sister."

"Scorpius Taylor, likewise," I said, smiling. The wards went off. I quickly removed them and set my wand back down. Just in time, I snatched my arm back under the covers as a very young woman walked into the room. She smiled sweetly at us both as she pushed a small cart in with two covered trays on them.

"Good morning!" she said. "I heard all about your memories, dreadfully sorry for it, dears. I am Mrs. Pomfrey."

"You're married already?" I asked before I could stop myself.

"Oh, yes, dear." She giggled a little as she conjured up a table for my tray. She showed me a golden band on her left hand as she set the tray down. "I only married last week. Lovely man, my Gideon Pomfrey. He's the Senior Healer here, you know."

Mrs. Pomfrey set the tray down on Scorpius's newly-conjured table. "And we'll probably get to know one another a bit more. I've been hired as the new mediwitch at Hogwarts!"

"I've read about Hogwarts," I said. "The history of it. I apparently liked reading it, because it's committed to my memory."

"Oh, you'll love it, I'm sure," Mrs. Pomfrey said. "It's a lovely place, I'm glad to be going back there. The Great Hall, the professors..."

In spite of myself, I smiled. From the way Mrs. Pomfrey made it sound, Hogwarts was next to heaven. And for a person who had nothing but schooling left, that really was saying something.

"I can't wait," I said.

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Thank you for all you lovely readers! I so enjoy reading comments. I'm not used to them. ^_^

Too Much Relaxation

Chapter 3 of 18

Scorpius and Hecate deal with themselves in the news, with their first visitors, and greet their new home.

I'm back with the next chapter, and I should be getting these to ya'll on a fairly regular basis now. Sorry for all the delays, homework was insane these past few weeks.

In light of all the things I'm trying to keep straight in this fic and in my own head about the HP Universe, I've started an LJ account. Go there for more information: www.hpmuse.livejournal.com

I almost forgot to thank TPP staff for catching my commas. Thanks, ya'll!

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter. If I did, do you really think Severus would have died?

Chapter 2: Too Much Relaxation

Scorpius turned out to be quite the chatterbox. At first, we talked haltingly, nervous around this other person we should but didn't know. After two days of dancing around each other, though, we grew comfortable enough to exchange academics. We had nothing to truly discuss aside from what few memories we'd obtained since waking up, and those in our mental libraries. He was delighted to discuss every subject we had ever read a book on. Especially, it would seem, Potions.

"Negative charges are generally used in potions with downward qualities, though," Scorpius said as Mrs. Pomfrey brought in our supper. "Why would you put it in an anti-depression potion, I'd like to know?"

"Filtered water is only negative when used in potions that affect the body, not the mind," I retorted. "The base isn't nearly as important as the ingredients for mind-altering potions, Scorpius."

"Yes, but most anti-depression potions address the physical parts of depression," he pointed out, spearing a broccoli floret.

"You two," Mrs. Pomfrey chortled merrily. "I've never seen such adamant debate between people so young. Are you sure you're only thirteen?"

We exchanged glances, both shrugging at the same time. "We don't know." And it was really unnerving, I wanted to add. However, she seemed to understand, because she immediately changed the subject.

"You know," she said, sitting at the very edge of the visitor's chair Molly had vacated earlier that day. "Usually, when people have been Obliviated, they go mad from not knowing themselves."

Scorpius looked alarmed. "Y-You mean..."

"Well, obviously, you're not mad," Mrs. Pomfrey said with a placating smile. "It just makes me wonder. You've made such progress, and you're both so very intelligent."

She climbed to her feet again with a slap on her legs. A sigh escaped her lips. "I wonder if this isn't just some simple Oblivate, to be perfectly honest." She smiled at the two of us, swinging her head from side to side. "Well, dears, it's the end of my shift. If you need anything at all, just tap the wall behind you. The Healer on duty will come."

Mrs. Pomfrey made her way over to the door, and then turned back around. "Don't take my words too much to heart, you two. After all, I've only just finished my Healer training, and..." She allowed her voice to trail off. "Well, good night, dears."

"Good night, Mrs. Pomfrey," we said together.

The following morning, we had our first discussion outside the boundaries of academia. It all began with the now-usual morning visit from Molly with updates on the flat hunt. She handed us each a pamphlet from a complex, neatly depicting a three-bedroom place.

"Found a place in Muggle London, just a short walk from an ASDA and the Leaky Cauldron," she said, brimming with smiles. "Do you remember the Leaky Cauldron?"

"Vaguely," I murmured, perusing the pamphlet. "It's a pub that opens up into um... Diagon Alley, right?"

"That's right," Molly said kindly. "What do you think of the flat?"

"It looks good," I said, setting down the pamphlet at last. I offered a tiny smile to Molly. "I wouldn't have minded having to share a bathroom or anything."

"You won't feel that way in a few years, Hecate, dear," Molly said, with a bit more force behind her voice than necessary. I had the feeling that I wasn't going to be left alone to be bookish, as I seemed to like to be. "I'll go on and close the deal, then. We'll be able to Floo straight there when Healer Pomfrey says you can leave."

Before we could say anything more, an owl flew in through the open door. It landed on Molly's knee, holding a rolled-up newspaper on one claw and a tiny bag on the other.

"Looks like the *Prophet* followed me here," she said. She shoved a Knut into the bag, and accepted the paper. Without pausing, the owl flew out again. I was about to ask whether we could read it when she was finished, when she spoke again. "Oh, for heaven's sake!"

"What is it?" Scorpius asked.

"I'll... ooh, just you wait!" Molly threw the paper down on her visitor's chair, and stalked out into the corridor beyond our door with a huff.

With minimal movement, I managed to snatch the paper out of the chair. I promptly dropped it. No need to open it to see why Molly was so upset.

"What is it?" Scorpius repeated, this time a little impatiently.

"It's... us." With a shake of my wavy hair, I began to read aloud:

MYSTERY CHILDREN OBLIVIATED

Attributed to Dark wizards or witches unknown, two unknown children were mysteriously found in Knockturn Alley three days ago. Although an adult witch's and wizard's remains were found at the scene, there are no lingering clues as to their identity not even in their own memories.

Insiders at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries say there is no hope. "Everything from their names to their ages is completely gone," said one Healer. "It is curious to mention, however, that they have somehow retained some of their schooling, however limited that may have been."

A Ms. Molly Taylor, who discovered the children, will be taking custody of them after they are released from St. Mungo's.

"The real question everyone's asking is why," says Senior Healer Gideon Pomfrey, 31. "If this is the work of Death Eaters, why the careful Oblivate?"

Another question that everyone seems to be asking is whether these two children will be able to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The school does not usually accept late-comers. With their spotty memories, it may even be difficult for them to keep up with schoolwork.

Headmaster Dumbledore assured the press that the school will do everything in its power to accept them at their level. "It is, after all, every witch and wizard's right to an education."

I traded a dark look with Scorpius after I finished reading the article. "We... we might not go to school?"

"That Dumbledore man said different," Scorpius said, setting his jaw. Still, I could see his jaw clench, ticking just beneath his ear. "It's our right. And we know our stuff... Mrs. Pomfrey said we're smart."

"Yeah, that's right," I said, taking comfort in that still-small bit of reassurance. It didn't do me much good nor, I think, did it Scorpius. "Dumbledore sounds reasonable. We could do some studying before he comes."

"Molly would get us the schoolbooks," Scorpius said. He grinned ear-to-ear. "So we'll study. They won't be able to keep us out if we know our stuff."

"That's right," I nodded. There was still a tiny tendril of fear that I couldn't quite shake, but it was enough. I flipped through the rest of the paper idly, but found nothing more of real interest.

Molly returned a few minutes later, looking flustered. "I have to leave again, dears." She gestured to the paper, sitting on the edge of my bed. "I take it you've seen?"

"They can't really keep us out of school?" I asked, an incredulous tone seeping into my voice.

"Of course not, it's a lot of rubbish," Molly retorted. "I'm going to send the Headmaster an owl and see what can be done."

"Molly," I said. "Could we get some books? So we can study... What year do you think we should be?"

She paused to glance at us both. "I'd say third-years," Molly said. "I'll bring you copies of the first- and second-year textbooks when I come back tomorrow morning."

When she was gone, Scorpius sighed, settling back against his pillow. "You don't suppose we're going to be left alone when we get to Hogwarts, do you?"

My lips pressed into a thin, grim line. "Somehow, I doubt it."

He leaned his head back against the wall with a groan. Mrs. Pomfrey bustled in moments later with our breakfast. She had also brought a magazine in from the Visitor's Tearoom upstairs, a really old copy of *Potions Today*.

"I know it's not much, but I thought you might like something to look at aside from the walls and yourselves," she said with a smile. "It's almost a year old, so I know it won't be missed upstairs."

With nothing else to do, we had little choice. To the people upstairs, this was probably old news. To us, however... it was a brand new day. Scorpius began reading the first article aloud as soon as he had finished eating.

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As Molly had promised, she returned the next morning with first-year and second-year textbooks. We had only just cracked open our respective texts him Potions and me History when Mrs. Pomfrey knocked on our open door.

"Hello, dears," she said. "There are some... people in the lobby wanting to know if they can visit with you for a bit. Do you want to see them?"

"What kind of people?" I asked, noting her hesitation.

"I think they're just well-wishers, but I know my husband isn't too fond of the Blacks," Mrs. Pomfrey said. "It's up to you."

I exchanged a look with Scorpius. "Sure, I guess."

"Sure," Scorpius echoed.

Mrs. Pomfrey scurried out through the door back down the hall.

"What the devil do you think this is all about?" I asked.

"No idea."

My first instinct said to hide away until I knew more about what was going on. My second instinct said to take Scorpius with me. All logic, however, pointed out that I didn't know anything more about the situation than Healer Pomfrey didn't like these people. Therefore, I had nothing really to go on other than that.

Mrs. Pomfrey stuck her head in through the door again. She mouthed, *Are you sure?* I smiled at her, nodding as I sat up a bit straighter. Might as well look confident in my assurances. The short woman sighed melodramatically as she gestured to someone behind her.

"Only a few minutes, there, boys, I don't want them exhausted, now."

"Yes, madam, we understand."

Two boys around our age ducked under the short witch's arm no small feat considering they were both taller than she was. The taller of the two had classically handsome features, with long, curly black hair and a broad grin. The shorter of the two might have been related to him somewhere, but it was obvious these boys weren't of the same cut. This one had softer features, a long nose and rounded cheeks. He wore round glasses, and had wildly untamed hair.

"Hey," said the taller one. "My mother said I should come and... well, introduce myself, considering we'll be in the same year at Hogwarts. Name's Sirius Black. This is my best mate, James Potter."

They both looked like they would rather have been anywhere else than in our hospital room. Scorpius studied the two of them in silence for a moment.

"Call me Scorpius," he said. "Tell your mother thanks for thinking of us."

Diplomatic while subtly hinting at distaste. Bravo, little brother.

Sirius winced. "That came out wrong, sorry."

"It's all right," I said. "We understand. Mothers do that."

"No, no, you don't..." James spoke for the first time. "I came along 'cause I wanted to say 'hi', too. I mean, no use in not knowing anyone before you come to school, right?"

I tilted my head to the side, intentionally keeping a steady, piercing gaze on him. He really wasn't trying to hit my nerves. "It still hasn't been decided whether we can go or not."

Here, Sirius laughed, though it sounded rather forced. "Are you kidding? With Dumbledore behind you, I doubt even the Governors could keep you out."

For reasons beyond my comprehension, that made me feel all the better. I gave the nervous boys a genuine smile. "I hope you're right."

James grinned, casually ruffling his hair. "We know we're right. I mean, c'mon, they let our mate Remus in, and he's always... well, he's always sick."

I wanted to point out that losing all of our memories could hardly be called "sick", but Mrs. Pomfrey bustled in before I could open my mouth. "That's enough, now, boys, these two need their rest."

James and Sirius glanced over their shoulders at us. Scorpius and I waved as Mrs. Pomfrey steered them out. I could have sworn I saw James wink. Could've been my imagination, though.

__~*~__

Wednesday morning dawned bright, cheerful, and full of Molly's smiles. Senior Healer Pomfrey and his wife came in at seven o'clock on the dot. The curtains hung around Scorpius and I separately as we changed into jeans and t-shirts, courtesy of Molly. The Healer who had been so patient with us over the past days sighed.

"You've taken all legal consideration for them, correct?"

"Yes, they're officially my adopted children as of yesterday," Molly said. "Are they up for a bit of shopping, or should I take them straight home?"

"Please!" Scorpius' voice came out as a wail. "If I have to rest for ten more minutes, I'm going to go 'round the bend!"

I murmured my agreement to this as the Pomfreys laughed. The Madam was the first to find her voice. "Well, I think that answers your question, Ms. Taylor. You'll have your hands full with this lot."

We said good-bye to our favorite pair of Healers, and then made our way down into the lobby for the Floo. Luckily enough, I had read a book on magical travel somewhere along the way, and it was still in my mental library. Scorpius wasn't so lucky.

"We've got to go into the fireplace?" he said, glaring at the emerald flames as the witch in front of us vanished into them.

"It's quite simple, dear, just say 'Constellation Flat' when you step through. Watch your sister. You remember, don't you, Hecate?"

"Yes, I do." Scorpius looked slightly dismayed to hear that I recalled something that he didn't.

I stepped into the fire with my pinch of powder. Clearly, I said, "Constellation Flat."

What happened next was entirely outside of my recollections. Fireplaces whirled past, faster and faster, spinning in a dizzying array of rooms beyond. I tucked my arms in tighter to keep from smacking my elbows. At last, the destination fireplace spat me out.

Molly Taylor was not a woman to be trifled with. In the span of just a few days, she had found a three-bedroom flat, furnished it, and stocked it with food. I wondered just how well off she really was, but didn't think it prudent to ask.

The front room was separated from the kitchen by only a small half-wall, and the dining room was really just a part of the living room. A small pine wood table sat against the deep ochre wall outside of the kitchen. That room was only big enough for two people to be in at once. I knew that if Molly was cooking I'd best steer clear.

Molly must have decided we were at least part Muggle, because a TV set sat against the wall next to a beautiful oak cloak. The sleek black couch and love seat set looked like it had been gently used before winding up in our apartment. But that only seemed to make it that much more comfortable to sit in. The coffee table was the same pine wood color as the kitchen table.

Scorpius came out a few seconds later, looking rather dazed. Molly appeared after a few more minutes. She looked completely unaffected.

"The bedrooms are through there," Molly said. "Go on and take a look. I'll start on some breakfast before we head out."

We made our way through the small hallway. There were four doors down this way – a laundry room, a rather large bathroom with a Roman style tub, and our two bedrooms. Molly's room was on the other side of the house, with her own bathroom inside, I wagered. I caught only a glimpse of Scorpius' black-and-silver room before I made my way into my own.

Above all else, I had requested a large bookcase, and Molly had outdone herself. A solid oak bookshelf, albeit empty, sat along an entire side of my room, my chest of drawers, full-sized bed, and bedside table, complete with a simple white lamp, the only other furnishings, all in the same natural oak color. The bed lay against the opposite wall, with enough space to comfortably walk between it, the closet, and my chest and table. My bed was swathed in deep blues and greens, and my walls were a gentle, soothing pale blue. I smiled to myself.

If nothing else, I was lucky to have Molly.

Remus Lupin

Chapter 4 of 18

Scorpius and Hecate gain a new friend. Hecate learns a valuable lesson. Molly searches for work.

This chapter was originally both chapters three and four. I combined them because they went together better than apart.

For more information on how I come up with ideas used in this story, please see my LJ www.hpmuse.livejournal.com. Also, I've painted a few watercolors of Hecate and Scorpius on my dA, www.theodusa.deviantart.com.

Disclaimer: I assure you, I do not own Harry Potter. I also don't make money off my writing.

Thank you TPP team for allowing my story on your site and for all of your help!

Chapter 3 Remus Lupin

Muscle memory seemed to recall for me that hospital food was not the best tasting. However, since my own memories couldn't back them up, each food had been a new and exciting experience. The hospital food, however, had nothing on Molly Taylor's cuisine. Flapjacks made from scratch with real butter and maple syrup – to die for. Sausages with Molly's own blend of spices – heaven. And don't even get me started on her orange juice. I could *subsist* on her orange juice.

Molly laughed with delight as we tore through her offerings like starving third world citizens. "Don't eat so fast, Scorpius, you're going to make yourself sick. Hecate, you've got a bit of butter on your cheek there."

Scorpius managed to slow down a touch, but I wasn't sure if it was going to help him not get sick or not. I cleaned my face off. With an eye on Molly, I matched my pace to her. An obscure book on Japanese manners was all that I had to base myself on – and that was the biggest tip for pace.

"Did the hospital charm our dinners so we couldn't get sick from eating?" I asked between small bites of flapjacks.

"Something like that," Molly said. "Scorpius, a little slower, dear."

By then, however, Scorpius had finished his flapjacks, and half of his sausages. There was hardly any point in him ceasing. If he was going to get sick from eating too fast, the damage was already done. I sat back in my seat with a sigh.

This whole situation was unnerving. I had only just gotten comfortable in Scorpius' presence. Mrs. Pomfrey was nice enough, too. I didn't know enough about Healer Pomfrey, Sirius Black, or James Potter to really make any judgments there.

But Molly Taylor was a mystery to me. She was a formidable woman, not to be trifled with. She had managed to scrape together a very lovely flat and furnish it in the little time I'd known her. I didn't know enough otherwise to know anything – and here I was sitting at her table, trying to figure out what to say to her.

It was like taking the baby steps to talk with Scorpius all over again. And really, we still weren't entirely sure of the other. After all, sitting in a bed for a week discussing things we remembered reading surely couldn't be counted as sharing your deepest secrets. We didn't *have* secrets. We were just two empty vessels, waiting for memories.

Was this what being born was like, those first few memories? Everything based on instincts, muscle memory to latch on to mother's nipple, vague recollections of sounds from within the womb. Only that all we were left with was anything we had ever read in the thirteen(ish) years before we ended up in St. Mungo's.

I shook off my musings as Scorpius finished eating. Molly stood up, gathering the dishes from the table. She carried them over to the sink. The best way, I decided, to get to know Molly was to help her do stuff. I picked up my own glass, plate, and fork and carried it into the kitchen. Scorpius wasn't too far behind with his dishes. He must have come to the same conclusion.

"Thank you, dears," Molly said, taking the dishes from us both.

She raised her wand, and with a flick, the dishes leapt into the air over the sink and began to wash themselves up. As we backed out of the kitchen, they flew into the cupboards one by one. The last fork clinked into the drawer no less than five minutes later.

"Feeling up to a short walk?" Molly asked. "We can always hail a cab."

Scorpius and I exchanged a glance. "I think we're fine with a walk."

"Yeah, all right," he said.

Molly shut the door behind us as we stepped out into the dense heat. The hall outside the door was made entirely of dull gray concrete, our pale yellow door being the only one on the floor. She glanced down the stairs and then quickly cast a few wards on the front door.

"All right, you two, let's go," she said, smiling brightly. There was an amount of falseness to it, though. It was the kind of smile you forced through nerves.

We followed Molly down the concrete stairs in silence. A door like ours was on each of two landings, the last of which was on the ground floor. The building outside of the halls was painted the same color as our door, with a large brass "A" hanging by the window of the second floor.

"Our apartment is 3A," Molly said. She pointed down the lane, where there were more buildings similar to ours. "I think there are another ten or fifteen buildings, not really sure. There were a few Muggle children your age in building C when I was here last."

We nodded politely, unsure of what to say to this. At least I was. What the hell do you say to the woman who not only saved your life, but took you in and was feeding you and clothing you? Fighting for you to go to school?

What do you say to someone like that?

Neither Scorpius nor I managed to say a word the entire short walk down to the Muggle ASDA. Nor did we manage to say much more than "yes, thank you" or "no, thank you" all throughout the store.

Molly bought various foods, including things we would be able to make on our own. She promised to teach us to cook for ourselves so that when she had a job we wouldn't have to deal with just sandwiches or microwave dinners.

She bought us underwear making Scorpius blush cutely socks, and a handful of bras for me. We also got a few pairs of Muggle blue jeans, most of which came with flared legs at the bottom, and t-shirts in various colors.

When at last we left the store, Scorpius and I still hadn't managed to say much more than "thank you". We just didn't know what to say. Even with one another, behavior outside of the normal academic discussion was stilted.

We perhaps may have continued on like this, had it not been for the haggard-looking boy our age who happened upon us. He was carrying a single ASDA bag in either hand, walking slightly behind us. He did not greet us immediately, nor did we pay him much mind. At least, not until we reached the turn-off into our apartment complex.

"You live here, too?" he asked in a slightly husky voice. With a movement far too quick for his slightly-less-than-healthy appearance, he switched his bags over to one hand. With his arm extended to Scorpius, the nearest, he continued. "I'm Remus Lupin. You must be the Taylors."

Scorpius and I exchanged a surprised look, and then we glanced up at Molly together. She smiled down at us. "Now, you didn't think a new tenant moving in would escape notice, did you?"

"Especially fellow wizarding folk," Remus said, barely suppressing a smile. "My dad could feel your wards going up this morning." His hand was still out, carefully hovering in the air.

I reached out around my brother and took the other boy's hand. Though his manner was quiet and steady, his hands felt thoroughly roughened by the elements. There were several scars criss-crossing his hands and what little I could see of his arms. Even in this broiling heat, he was wearing long sleeves. His clothes looked extremely worn there were holes in the t-shirt he'd pulled over the longer-sleeved one, and his pants were ripped to shreds at the knees and bottoms. He had very light brown hair, just this shade of not being dirty blond.

"Call me Hecate," I said. I hadn't yet gotten used to being called it, as I knew it wasn't my real name. However, I also knew that I would have to get used to it there was no regaining my lost self.

"Scorpius," said my brother, finally taking the boy's hand. "What's your apartment? Maybe we can do something some time."

"I'm in 1C," Remus said, grinning. "I would love to have you over. Summer's getting too long for my tastes. My mum's been making some of her fudge for you guys, anyway." He raised his bags. "She just ran out of a few things. Anyway, I best get going, or she'll think the Death Eaters have Obliviated me. See you."

When he was out of earshot, Scorpius turned to me. "You reckon he doesn't know?"

"I think so," I said, blinking at the boy's hole-ridden back. "I think I like being treated like I do remember who I am."

Scorpius laughed. "Me, too."

And by some unspoken agreement, the three of us decided to do exactly that. Sure, it was still rather stilted. We were, in essence, strangers thrown together as a family. Neither Scorpius nor I recalled how we were treated by our family, nor how we treated them in return. But, from what limited literature we had read at least in my case I did remember that family was there to help, to love, and to cherish. Molly seemed to love us, and she was helping us.

Therefore, it could logically be said that we were, in essence, a family.

"Go put your things up, dears," Molly said as we entered our flat. "And then we'll make some lunch."

Eager to relearn, we worked together to figure out what pants and shirts were whose we were roughly the same size and wore roughly the same style. Certainly, we knew the pink blouse and the amber-colored baby-doll style shirt were mine. The rest of my shirts, however, were so positively tomboy that we had some amount of trouble.

We stood in the hallway between the two bedrooms, folding the shirts and leaving the pants ready to be hung. We'd already separated the unmentionables at the store.

"Is this one yours or mine?" Scorpius asked, pulling a dark blue t-shirt out of the plastic ASDA bag. The front of it held a full moon with a wolf howling. It looked so realistic that I would have mistook it for a photograph had it been on paper.

"I don't remember," I said, chewing my lower lip. I called lightly into the living room. "Molly! Can you help us?"

The elder woman appeared around the corner, a little bemused to see us in the hall instead of in our rooms. Her expression was odd, something I didn't recognize right away. "Yes, Hecate?"

"Was this shirt mine or Scorpius'?" I asked. Scorpius, for his part, held up the shirt in front of him.

She looked as though she may burst out laughing, but held herself. "Well... I suppose if it fits you both, you could share it."

We exchanged a look. Neither of us had even slept in the beds we would call our own. We had never seen what habits the other had. I, for one, would not like to wear the same shirt that had been left on the bathroom floor for weeks on end. I'm sure he had similar misgivings. I wasn't even sure whether he had moved beyond the "girls have cooties, must ignore them" phase of his boyhood.

I did not even know whether there was such a phase, as I had only recalled it from the books I'd read.

But it was a nice shirt. I did rather like it, and from the look in Scorpius' eyes, he did, too. So, it was with a feeling of hopeful camaraderie that I nodded. "You have it first, Scorpius."

"Thanks," he said, grinning.

Molly, for her part, just started pulling the remainder of the clothes from the bags, helping us sort them between us.

I had only just finished folding my last pair of socks neatly into one mate when the Muggle doorbell rang. Scorpius met me in the hallway, one narrow honey brow raised. We were both thinking the same thing, I think: Remus' mum's fudge had arrived.

Sure enough, a mousy-haired woman and a tall, elegant man were already talking animatedly to Molly. Remus stood off to the side, trying to be unobtrusive. He smiled a bit, wriggling his fingers slightly when he noticed us.

"Oh, here they are," Molly said, ushering us over with a couple of waves of her hand. "Mr. and Mrs. Lupin, this is Hecate and Scorpius."

"Hi," Scorpius said, grinning broadly. I gave a shy smile, uncertain what to say beyond what my brother already had.

"Are they absolutely sure the two are related?" asked Mr. Lupin, eyeing us both with something of a calculating gaze. The abrupt question faltered my steps, even as Mrs. Lupin began shushing her husband in an odd hissing tone. I don't know whether she meant for us to hear or not if that was a stage whisper, it did its job.

"Why don't you kids go chat for a bit?" Molly asked, turning back to Mr. and Mrs. Lupin without another word. I think she was trying to tell us to give her some time with them alone.

"Come on," I said, nodding toward our rooms. "We can talk better that way."

I could almost watch the tension between Molly's shoulders melt. Apparently, I'd read the meaning correctly. Remus and Scorpius followed me into my room, where I'd already put the first-year and second-year textbooks on my new bookshelves.

"Are you planning on owning a library?" Remus asked, amused.

"I like to read," I said, shrugging.

The amusement vanished from the tired boy's face, changing to chagrin. "I do mean to apologize for being so callous earlier. Had I known you were the one's who'd been Obliviated, I would not have made that comment."

Scorpius and I exchanged what was fast becoming a habitual look. Perhaps it was because neither of us were certain how to act. Or maybe we were just coming to rely on one another more. Both? I didn't know. All the same, we came to a mutual, silent agreement this boy was a friend.

"It's all right," Scorpius said. "We... we prefer being treated normal."

"Yeah," I added, taking a seat on my bed against the pillows. "We do. It's kind of hard to know how to act if people are careful about how they act around us. So just act normal."

Remus chuckled softly. "I suppose that's true. May I?"

He gestured to the bed. I nodded, and both he and Scorpius sat cross-legged on top of the quilt. I hadn't noticed, but Remus was in only a pair of socks. His shoes must have been at the door. Was that one of Molly's rules? That's one thing I did remember I had to follow the rules. They were there for a reason. Molly probably had rules for her house and it was hers, after all that she wanted us to follow. Is that why she had looked at our stuff in the hall that way?

Suddenly, I was terrified we'd done something wrong. We would have to make it up to Molly somehow. But how? What were things people enjoyed? I remember breakfast was something good. People liked other people making their breakfast. But would that be an appropriate way of expressing... what? Expressing what?

Well... here was a normal boy right here in front of me.

"I think we did something wrong," I said, my brow furrowed. "Earlier. Molly looked at us odd."

Scorpius glanced at me, perplexed. "You mean when we were sorting our clothes in the hall?"

"Yes," I nodded. "We sorted our clothes shopping from the ASDA in the hall."

For his part, Remus smiled in understanding. If there was anything else, I might not have trusted his judgment of what had happened. "Did she look sort of amused, like this?" He made a passable duplicate of the expression Molly had used on us.

"That's the one," Scorpius said, nodding.

"She was surprised, then," Remus said. "I expect she didn't think you would help one another, in particular in the hall. She wasn't upset, if that's what you're worried about. You didn't do anything wrong. Just odd."

"Oh... what should we have done?" I asked.

"I imagine she expected you to each take clothes into your own rooms and sort it out from there," Remus shrugged. "I wouldn't read too much into it."

And that is how we began learning what could not be learned from a book.

Molly called us back out into the living room about half an hour later. Mr. Lupin had to get to work. Remus turned eyes to his mother, a pleading in his eyes alone. Mrs. Lupin laughed at him, a warm laugh that made me smile, too.

"Of course, Remus, if Molly will have you, you may stay with your new friends," she said.

"He can stay for lunch, Wanda, we're just going to have sandwiches," Molly said, smiling at her own new-found friend.

Mrs. Lupin pushed a Muggle leather purse onto her arm. "Don't forget, we have guests tonight, Remus."

"Yes, mum."

Molly saw her the few feet to the door. The moment she turned around, she went straight to the kitchen and started pulling out bread and meats and cheeses from the

refrigerator. "Hecate, please set the table. Scorpius, pull down some glasses and get out the pumpkin juice."

"May I help?" Remus asked.

"Oh, no, Remus, dear, you're our guest. Go on and take a seat at the table."

And she proceeded to teach us how to make ham and cheese sandwiches. I think I would have recalled it from just the name alone, but there was no stopping Molly Taylor once she got on a roll. I suspected Scorpius felt the same way.

It felt good. Whatever it was, whatever this feeling was that I could not truly describe, it was good. Friendship? Family? It ran together like melted butter. It was not until much later in my life that I realized this warmth in my chest was caused entirely by a single emotion.

Love.

~*~

Molly had, once she knew we could fend for ourselves, begun seeking employment in Diagon Alley. We spent the next couple of days in Remus' most agreeable company. And then, most peculiarly, we received an owl missive from his mother, Wanda Lupin, telling us that he was ill. We weren't allowed to come see him. Though we were worried about him, Molly insisted that we go along with Mrs. Lupin's wishes.

It was three days since we last heard anything from the Lupins. Scorpius and I used that time to study second-year material as best we could without casting the spells. It soon became apparent that Scorpius and I had very different study techniques, however.

I would read our books several times, checking myself for correct answers, and often reciting the definitions to myself. Since it was not a good idea to use our wands, I practiced spell movements with a chopstick, the nearest thing to my wand's size, if not weight.

Scorpius, on the other hand, read through each book once, making a series of notes in a Muggle spiral. He practiced the spell movements once or twice and was done with it. He spent the rest of his free time watching the Muggle news and television shows called sitcoms.

However, whenever I asked him a question, he would answer immediately. In spite of his minimal study habits, he always knew the answer. It frustrated me to know that he could study so limitedly and still get every question right. He was every bit as intelligent as I was a great mind for debate but he never had to read a text more than once like me.

On the fourth day since Remus had taken ill, I finally could not stand it any longer. "How the hell can you manage to remember the twelve bloody uses of dragon's blood when you've only read the text once?!"

Scorpius laughed quietly, turning toward me on the couch. He shut off the Muggle television set with an easy flick on the remote. "Simple. I commit it to memory the first time. Writing it down makes me recall it. Reading over the notes once more cements it in. Sometimes I need to look over the book or the notes for stuff I don't recall, but it mostly stays put."

A soft tapping the sound of something hard on glass interrupted my returning remarks. A barn owl hovered just outside the large double window. Scorpius vaulted over the love seat to unlatch the window. The owl fluttered in, hooting. I grabbed a bit of bread from the counter for it, along with a bowl of water. Scorpius pulled the scrolled letters from its claw, and it hopped over to the refreshments I laid on top of the half-wall outside the kitchen.

"It's from Remus!" Scorpius said, handing me the letter.

Scorpius and Hecate,

Sorry for getting sick for so long. I was wondering if you wanted to come over and have a spot of lunch with my friends and me. Give me about half an hour to get dressed and all. Mum caught Molly before she Apparated to Diagon Alley a few minutes ago. She says it's all right.

By the way, this is my dad's owl, Bernard.

Your friend,

Remus

"Bernard," I said, glancing up at the owl. It nibbled on the bread, apparently pleased to have delivered a letter from two flat buildings away. "It suits you, you know."

The owl hooted pleasantly. Scorpius grabbed his quill from his note-taking and penned a quick note. "I hope he's all right, you know, he seemed so sickly last time we saw him, too."

I nodded, chewing on my lip. He was right, of course. The last time we'd seen Remus Lupin, he had looked like he'd been hit with something nasty already. I tied the letter to Bernard's leg, and Scorpius led him over to the unlatched window.

"I'd better get dressed," I said. I hefted my copy of *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi* up and replaced it on my bookshelf in my room. In almost the same motion, I had taken off my pajama top and bottoms.

I had taken to wearing A-shirts underneath my t-shirts, mostly because I still got random cold flashes from whatever curse had been cast on me. The Pomfreys both suspected the Cruciatus Curse, at the very least. The Madam was a bit undecided why the cold spells were continuing so long after the fact, though. I pulled a black tank on and then the shared wolf shirt. I winced at my closet; there was only one pair of black jeans left. I needed to do laundry today.

By the time I'd gotten back out into the living room, Scorpius was ready to go, too. The TV was off.

"We should leave Molly a note," I said and pulled a blank sheet of parchment out, along with Scorpius' quill.

"She already knows where we're going," Scorpius argued. His hand was already on the doorknob to leave.

"Yes, but it's nice to let her know."

He snorted derisively. "You don't know that for sure." He leaned bonelessly against the door, glaring at the doorknob under his hand. "Neither of us do."

I sighed and finished the short note. "No. We don't. But I think Molly cares about us, and even if she did say it was okay... I think we should just confirm that's where we went. Just in case. I mean, those people who Obliviated us are probably still out there."

Scorpius scowled, but nodded. "Yeah. They are out there. Somewhere." He shook his head, as though shaking off the tails of our pursuers. "Let's go over and meet Remus' friends. He's probably wondering if we've decided not to come by now."

I locked the door behind me the Muggle way Molly's wards were based on the Muggle keys. The heat of the August day buried its way into my lungs, tripping one of the odd cold spells. I shuddered. My hands shook on the banister all the way to the ground. The hairs on my arms and neck rose in direct opposition to the cloying heat.

Scorpius led the way down the walk, past opened windows and dying bushes. In spite of how short the walk was, I was gasping for breath by the time we'd reached Remus' front door. Scorpius was well aware of what the problem was, as I had long since explained the shivers to him. My body wanted to believe I was somewhere in Antarctica rather than in the dead of summer in London.

Scorpius knocked on the door as Molly had taught us was polite. Remus appeared at the door, and the words were out of my mouth before I could wonder if they were polite or not. The same words came out of *his* mouth at the same time.

"Are you all right?"

Making Scorpius and two very familiar black-haired boys inside the house laugh, of course.

But I was far from joking. Remus looked even more terrible than we'd last left him. New cuts marred his handsome face, his lanky arms, and what I could see of his chest under his shirt. Worse, his eyes were rimmed with red, and his hair looked shaggy, as though he'd not touched it with a brush in the entire week I'd known him. He looked utterly exhausted.

Remus, for his part, just smiled softly. "I'm fine, I'm quite used to feeling ill. You, however, are not."

I blushed and muttered. "It's an effect from our Obliviate, we don't... we don't know what it is. I just get really, really cold."

Remus shook his head. "Where are my manners? Come inside."

He stepped away from the door, and we removed our shoes. It was almost amusing to look at Remus' own shabby Muggle tennis shoes, a set of black loafers, and a pair of shiny dragon-hide boots next to our new, stark white Muggle tennis shoes.

Almost.

"Hecate, Scorpius, these are my friends"

"We've already met, Moony," said James. He fluffed up his already-messy hair and gestured toward the kitchen table.

"Yes," Scorpius said. Mirth crinkled the skin around his grey-blue eyes. "Your mother sent you. Sirius, was it?"

"Yeah, that's me." Sirius grinned broadly in spite of the jab. "C'mon, Remus' mum made lasagna."

Almost as soon as I'd sat down with a piece of Wanda Lupin's wonderful-smelling lasagna, Sirius began talking.

"So, seriously," he said, wagging his eyebrows as though he'd already made a clever joke. When only James gave him a pained smile, he continued. "What's it like not having any of your memories? Like, do you remember how to do stuff?"

Remus immediately looked gobsmacked and I took that to mean that it really wasn't any of Sirius' business. I was about to say so when Scorpius' hand found my shoulder.

"It's okay," he whispered.

"No, it's not," I protested. "He's got no right!"

Scorpius grinned wryly. "And you're basing this on...?"

I scowled. "How I feel about it."

Scorpius turned back to Sirius. "You heard the lady. Seriously. Just treat us normal. It's how we prefer it."

"Sure, cool," Sirius shrugged. But I knew the subject wasn't closed as far as that pair went.

I let the conversation drift, more interested in the differences between Remus' mum's kitchen and Molly's. The initial design was similar to ours after all, we did live in the same complex. However, where Molly kept her kitchen entirely put away and spotless, Mrs. Lupin's was full of odds and ends. I recalled vaguely that Remus' mum was a Muggle. Various appliances sat on the countertop. Though they looked familiar, they were at once something alien and foreign. Some dishes sat in the sink. Oh, not enough to look dirty or anything just enough to catch my eyes.

The dining room melded into the living room, the same as with our flat. The walls were all white, and the furniture sleek and black and silver. Even though there was only Remus and his parents, the flat had three bedrooms the same as ours, too. Why? Did they keep the other room for a guest room? I didn't imagine a family like this one to get many guests. From Remus' clothes, it looked like they were barely making ends meet.

So why the need for the extra bedroom?

"Hecate. Hecate, are you listening?"

"Huh?" I whipped around to glance at Scorpius, who was grinning.

"I asked if you were familiar with Quidditch."

I blinked, the question as needed as it was unnerving. "Yeah. I seem to recall reading *Quidditch Through the Ages*, at least."

"But you've never seen a game?" James pressed.

I grimaced. "Not that I remember."

"James plays Chaser for Gryffindor," said Sirius proudly. "Ruddy awesome at it, too."

"If we get into Hogwarts, I'll be sure to watch the matches," I said, nodding politely. Thank God for Molly and Remus' unspoken lessons.

Sirius waved his hand. "I already told you, with Dumbledore backing you, you're in."

We finished the lasagna shortly afterward, and the boys gathered on the couches. Scorpius was fired up about the Quidditch discussions. He may not recall ever seeing a match, but his subconscious seemed honed on the subject. I sighed and cradled my head in my hands. I had long ago tuned out the conversation.

Remus smirked at me, and I realized that he had been silent much of the conversation as well. He sat down beside me. Scorpius, Sirius, and James looked like they were having the time of their lives.

"Bored?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Unfortunately, this will probably be the extent of the conversation," he sighed and sat back. "It's either this or coming up with new pranks."

"Pranks?"

"We have been blessed with the title of the 'Marauders' at school," Remus said. "I tend not to participate most of the time they're rather amusing. I keep these two from getting thrown out, and Peter from getting hurt."

I wasn't sure how I felt about that. "Who's Peter?"

"The fourth Marauder," Remus clarified. "He's a bit slow on the uptake sometimes. Very funny guy, but none too bright. I don't know whether he means to melt cauldrons or blow spells or not, but he does nonetheless."

Great. So of the four people who I might hang about with at Hogwarts, only one actually had a brain. I scowled.

"You can go home if you like," Remus said quietly. "I'll walk you."

Scorpius didn't even look up. Remus and I walked very slowly to my flat.

"Don't worry about it," I said when he didn't say anything for the first twenty paces or so. "It's not your fault."

"I know," Remus smiled. "I just would have liked... oh, well."

"I'm free to decline future invites with the Marauders?" I asked dryly.

"Quite." He sighed as we reached the landing outside my flat. "They won't be here all the time."

I nodded. "I know. And stop worrying."

He chuckled. After a heartbeat or two, he gestured toward the stairs. "I better get back. Before they think we've gone missing."

"They didn't notice us leaving, I doubt they'll notice you getting back. See you later, Remus."

"See you, Hecate."

We turned away from one another, and I slid the key into the lock. Molly's wards came down. I locked the door behind me and went to my room. I piled laundry into the Muggle washer and read until Molly came home.

"What are you doing back?" she asked. "I thought for sure you two would be over there until supper."

"I didn't really want to talk about a game I've never seen," I said. "Remus walked me home."

"I'm glad he did. Scorpius still over there?"

I nodded. I didn't know how to feel. Should I be upset that Scorpius and Remus were with people whom I didn't like? Did I even have a reason not to like them in the first place? Was I in the right?

Was I wrong?

Molly must have seen the battle going on because she smiled.

"It's okay for you to have separate friends, Hecate."

"But now I'm alone," I muttered.

"That's never stopped you from having things to do, now has it? Scorpius doesn't like to read and quiz all the time like you do, now does he?"

Feeling quite like a child who was still learning her "pleases" and "thank yous", I smiled up at my surrogate mother. "No. I'm going to go and read, then, unless you'd like some help in the kitchen?"

"Go on and read, dear, supper's not for a while."

I gathered my copy of *The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2* and began to read on the sofa. Molly spread the *Daily Prophet* out beside me. We read for half an hour in companionable silence.

I had just passed chapter twenty-seven (basic Warming Charms) for the third time when a tapping came at the window. Instead of an owl, however, a great red Phoenix fluttered just outside our very Muggle window. Alarmed, I raced to let it in.

"Don't worry, don't worry," Molly said, chuckling. "Muggles can't see him."

"Him?" I asked as the bird flew in. He landed on the back of the couch, so gently that his claws didn't even seep into the cushions. He was roughly the size of a swan, with beautiful red, gold, and blue plumage. "Do you know him?"

"His name is Fawkes," Molly said. "He is Headmaster Dumbledore's phoenix."

Turning Points

Chapter 5 of 18

Fawkes' letter, testing, and introducing three important men into Hecate Taylor's life: Lucius, Dumbledore, and Severus.

Note on currency: A lot of Rowling's prices are varied and bizarre, so I've taken liberties with what I say is what price. Rowling has said that one Galleon equals about five Muggle pounds. If we go on that, the same Galleon equals about ten Muggle American dollars. It is this exchange that I'm basing all my pricing on.

After reading the reviews from the last chapter, I decided to add the first three pages of the last chapter to this one. Ya'll are just so keen on seeing Sev!

For more information on this story and on Harry Potter in general, see my blog. May I suggest the entry on the antidepressant potion that Score and Heck were discussing at St. Mungo's (<http://hpmuse.livejournal.com/1968.html>) or the Sociological approach I used in determining how Heck and Score would act (<http://hpmuse.livejournal.com/1968.html>).

Disclaimer: The voices attempted to convince me that I owned Harry Potter once. Fortunately, I am sane enough to ignore them and insane enough to hear them.

A huge thank you to the TPP staff for catching those nasty commas. For a woman who is seriously lacking the formal education sometimes required for writing, they are lifesavers. Really.

Chapter 4 Turning Points

The phoenix cooed, a noise quite unlike any I'd ever heard before. Not that I'd heard that many sounds in my very short memory. Red-gold mixed with a few deep blue feathers. I had read somewhere that phoenixes often reflected their masters. If my reading was correct, then the red and gold of the bird before me reflected a courageous, intelligent man with a touch of oddity. The bird squeezed its feathers gently between the metal frame. He landed on the couch, his sharp talons not even sinking into the plush black fabric.

A leather satchel of sorts was tied to its back. Molly relieved the beautiful bird of its package. Although I'd read much on phoenixes it was a wandlore text I didn't know if the bird would allow me to touch it. Tentatively, I reached for it, my hands curled just slightly in my trepidation. Fawkes' eyes rose and met mine black beady eyes that twinkled in the harsh Muggle lights of the flat. He met my hand.

The feathers of his head and neck were soft, like a duckling's down. His skin burned as though he were aflame within. I was gentle, not wanting to pull any feathers from him. The deep royal blue feathers on his wing seemed almost taut with power. Not since I had first opened my eyes in this world did I feel so at peace.

Fawkes cooed again, and I knew I'd never refer to him again as an "it" or a "bird" he was too sentient for that. His head ducked again under my fingers. I giggled nervously, uncertainty bubbling in my chest. Fawkes fixed his twinkling black eyes up at me again, as though telling me not to worry. I felt the tension in my limbs loosen.

He allowed himself one last touch against my hands. As though admonishing himself for his lack of decorum, he snapped his beak. Somehow the move didn't frighten me as it might have. Fawkes spread his wings an impressive wingspan full of gold and blue and red and flew back through the window again.

"I think you should read this," Molly said quietly, interrupting my thoughts. She pressed the short piece of parchment into my hands. The parchment was rough to my hands, which had only moments before felt the softness of a phoenix's down.

Dear Ms. Taylor,

I am delighted to let you know that the Governors have agreed to admit Hecate and Scorpius Taylor into our school, so long as they can acceptably pass the main subjects. Enclosed find the test packets that each of our teachers have set for first- and second-year material. I will arrive at noon on the twentieth of August for the completed packets. The tests are Anti-Text and Anti-Assistance charmed, I'm afraid, so they will need to do the work without books or help.

I will personally test them for their magical ability on that day.

Thank you for your kind understanding,

Albus Dumbledore

Several prestigious-sounding awards followed, including an Order of Merlin, First Class. It was no wonder such a man was the Headmaster of the school. Even before one took into account that he owned a phoenix in itself impressive he was an important man. Who *wouldn't* want such a prestigious man teaching their children magic?

"The twentieth... isn't that two days from now?" I asked, even though I knew perfectly well it was.

"Yes," Molly said. "I'd best go and get Scorpius, then. You'll need all the time you have to get these done. Here, dear," she handed me one thick packet, "go on and get started."

I found a quill and settled in at the kitchen table. The packet divided again into individual packets Potions, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Astronomy, Herbology, History of Magic, and Transfiguration. I started with my worst subject History.

Name three influential wizards or witches during the era of Muggle-Magical Cooperation, and explain why we still celebrate them today.

I grinned. This was *simple*.

By the time Molly and Scorpius had returned, I was halfway finished with the History packet. Scorpius wordlessly began on his packets, starting with Potions. We worked all afternoon and into the evening, only putting away our quills and inks and packets for supper.

Remus came over the next day for lunch.

"I don't envy you," he said, eyeing the thick piles of parchment. "It looks like the professors gave you all our end-of-term exams. Even I'd be hard-pressed to recall some of this."

"The Headmaster is going to come tomorrow at noon to pick them up and test us otherwise," Scorpius said. "I'm looking forward to meeting him. You guys make him sound so awe-inspiring."

I glared at my brother and friend. "You've been talking about the Headmaster and not telling me?"

"Just about how he is with me," Remus said quickly, as though it would sound less terrible that way. "Professor Dumbledore is a very kind man. Also highly influential, I might add."

Recalling the letter, I was inclined to believe him even if I didn't already trust him. Remus went home right after lunch.

At supper, Molly told us we had one hour to finish as much as we could, and then we were to go to bed. Scorpius all but panicked; he still had half of Transfiguration and all of History. I had half of Potions. We buckled down and furiously scribbled our answers to questions we both were well versed in after so much time reading.

Still, it was for naught. At eight o'clock, Molly spelled the quills clean, the ink bottles shut, and the packets into neat stacks. She pressed chamomile tea in neat white mugs into our hands, sweetened with honey and lime.

I woke early the morning of the twentieth to the smells of Molly's oh-so-scrumptious cooking. It was my turn for the wolf shirt, so I dressed in that, a black under tank, and

dark wash bell-bottom jeans. My feet were bare as usual when I stepped into the dining area.

"Wake Scorpius for me, would you, dear?" Molly said, already piling flapjacks and sausages onto plates for the three of us.

I went down the hall and knocked on my brother's door. A disheveled, bleary-eyed Scorpius answered the door, dressed in plaid pants, his chest bare and pale as moonlight. I barely managed to swallow my laughter at how his hair was sticking up in a perfect rendition of oversized lint. He rubbed his eyes, mumbling something I didn't hear.

"What?" I asked.

"I'm up," he muttered. "I'll be in the kitchen in a minute."

I nodded and turned to walk away. His hand on my shoulder stopped me.

"Hecate, you're not mad at me for staying day before yesterday, are you?" he asked, a slight whine in his voice.

"No, why would you think that?" I asked. "You've got a right to friends, Score."

"So do you, Heck," he said, grinning. "It's just that you've not said anything much to me since then and..." He trailed off, rubbing the back of his neck.

I grinned. "Go comb your hair, Score. I'm just worried about today."

He grimaced, running his hands through the tangled mess of honey. "Sure."

He retreated back into his room, leaving the door open. It was the first time I'd seen the inside of it since we had moved in. Relatively speaking, I suppose it was clean enough. His books were haphazardly stacked on a small bookcase. The bed was unmade. There weren't any clothes on the floor, thank the gods.

He gathered his clothes together for a shower and pulled his bedroom door shut behind him. The bathroom was beside me; I moved out of the way. He went in without another word.

I sighed and went back out to the living room. Molly placed a plate of food in front of me, her wand held like a spatula. "That took longer than I thought it might."

"He was worried I was angry with him," I said, spearing a sausage.

"Are you?"

I paused, considering it. The sausage dangled enticingly in front of me, but I didn't move to eat it. Molly had taught us to never have food in our mouths while we spoke. "I'm a little upset that he didn't realize I left until Remus got back. But other than that, no."

Molly hummed softly as she put a plate in Scorpius' place and then served herself. "I have a job interview later today."

I swallowed the half-chewed sausage in surprise. "Why didn't you say anything?" I sputtered.

"Drink, Hecate," Molly admonished. After I had, and breathed normally again, she answered. "I wanted you two to be able to focus on your tests without worrying about me getting or not getting the job."

"What is it?" I asked.

She laughed for some reason. It sounded a lot like relief, but there seemed to be no reason for it.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, dear, fine," Molly said, taking a deep breath to compose herself. "It's an apothecary in Diagon Alley, called Nellie's Nook. They sell more potions than potions ingredients. I'll start out as a cashier, and they'll retrain me on the usual ones so that I can make them in the off-time."

"The usual ones?" I inquired.

"Like Pepper-Up and Boil Begone," she grinned. "Those ordinary little ones you kids learn, but most never seem to master."

Scorpius entered the room moments later, his hair dripping water onto his deep blue t-shirt. "Did I hear something about potions?"

"Molly's got an interview at an apothecary!" I said excitedly.

Scorpius and I peppered Molly with question upon question about her possible new line of work all through breakfast. We finished eating with only two hours left before the imminent arrival of Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. Scorpius raced through his remaining packet. I could hear him cursing his sluggish hands under his breath. I, on the other hand, leisurely completed the last two questions in my Potions packet.

Once finished, I gathered the *Prophet* from Molly to pass the time. There were several articles in it on defending yourself, and a group of suspicious deaths that Magical Law Enforcement was investigating for foul play. I suspected Death Eater involvement, myself, but the presence of the Dark Mark over all of them seemed not to matter to MLE. I snorted.

Oh, the stupidity of some people.

At five minutes till noon, I put away the paper. Scorpius was frantically finishing up his last question. Three broken quills lay to one side where he'd pressed too hard, too fast. Molly picked these up just as Scorpius blew out a breath and sat back in his chair. He grinned over his shoulder at me.

"Nick of time, eh, Heck?"

"Indeed it is," I said.

At precisely that moment, the fireplace flared up in green flame. An extremely old man in long, fanciful purple robes bedecked with golden pentangles stepped out. With a soundless wave of his hand, he cleaned up the soot that had stuck to his clothes and trekked out onto Molly's clean carpet. Not even a speck of black found its way with him.

Odd, indeed.

He smiled pleasantly and extended his hand in greeting to Molly. Long white hair and an even longer white beard cascaded in odd waves down his front and back. What skin I could see was so pale it almost matched his hair. His gaze found me, light blue and twinkling over a pair of half-moon glasses.

"Hecate, Scorpius, and Molly Taylor, I presume?" he asked in a wizened voice, full of the youth only his eyes could fully carry.

"Not exactly surprised to see you, are we?" Scorpius asked dryly.

The old man chuckled. "No, in that you are right, Mr. Taylor. I see you were working just as I arrived?"

Scorpius flushed scarlet, which was only made worse by how pale he was. If his hair had been paler, he'd be in major trouble.

"He just finished," I said. "And with remarkable timing."

Dumbledore nodded kindly toward my brother. "Shall we, ah, what is the Muggle saying? 'Get down to business?'" He sat down at the table with the kind of grace usually reserved for upstanding gentlemen. Or did all elderly people have that skill? "I'm afraid the Governors have been quite strict on how you are to be admitted into our school."

"Our friends seem to think that we'll get in because of you," Scorpius said. He gathered the rest of our packets together and set them all on the coffee table in front of Dumbledore.

"Ah, I do seem to recall Mr. Lupin lives nearby," Dumbledore nodded. I would call it sagely, but the youthful, mirthful gleam in his eye belied the notion.

"What kind of spells do you want us to do?" I asked. "We're pretty well-versed in most of them."

"Show me what you can do," Dumbledore said. "I'd like to see what you mean by 'well-versed'. Don't worry about the Ministry, they are well aware of what will occur here today."

I blinked. "I'd almost forgotten about them."

He smiled kindly. "That is to be expected, Hecate."

Dumbledore's gentle reminder of my "condition" was by far the most eye-opening one yet. Molly had met it head-on, as a challenge to be sorted out and surmounted. Mr. and Mrs. Pomfrey had analyzed it. Remus, at our request, had ignored it. Sirius and James had been openly and rudely curious about it. But Dumbledore pointed it out, and then left it at that.

I smiled at him. "True. All right, shall I go first?" I glanced at Scorpius. He nodded. For a moment, I thought of what spell I could do that would impress this man. Obviously, I shouldn't do one that I didn't know whether it would work or not, but neither should I do any simple ones.

I smiled and hit upon one that I thought he might like, considering he owned a real live phoenix. "Avifors!"

From the tip of my wand, a bubble-like shape began to form. The bubble grew black and brown feathers, and tiny feet. A beak formed, and a little bird flew from my wand-tip and fluttered onto my outstretched finger. It chirruped noisily as I pet it on its head.

"A conjuring spell," Dumbledore nodded thoughtfully. "And quite well-done, too." He petted the bird on its head. "Tell me, Hecate, do you know what kind of bird he is?"

I thought for a moment, tilting my head to the side. "I believe it's a chickadee, sir."

He chuckled softly. "Do you know where they are from?"

For a moment, I didn't know exactly what he was playing at. Then, it dawned on me. "From the Americas. It's a common bird there."

"Precisely." His eyes twinkled again.

The "tests" moved much like this. Scorpius and I cast spells all sorts of spells between the two of us. We were laughing by the end of things mostly because Scorpius had botched his Cheering Charm and hit everyone in the room.

"I don't think the two of you have anything to worry about," Dumbledore said, as one of our slippers hopped past in the form of a rabbit. "If your tests are as good as your practicals, I believe you'll soar straight in." As though to punctuate his statement, the chickadee from before fluttered past, flashing its white wings.

With a single wave of his hand, all of the spells we'd cast set themselves to right. The rabbits turned back into slippers. The chickadee disappeared. The elated feel of the Cheering Charm seemed to remain, but I think that was more to the fact that we were feeling that way. Most of our other spells did not have lingering effects, like Expelliarmus and Warming and Cooling Charms.

"I will send you the results of your tests with Fawkes," said Dumbledore. "And you will most likely receive your letters in a few days time."

We said good-bye to the Headmaster. He disappeared with a dreidel-like whirl in the green flames. Scorpius turned back to us.

"That went well."

"Yes, it did," Molly said. She glanced at her watch. "Come on, then, grab your shoes. I've got to be at Nellie's Nook by two and it's a quarter till now."

Scorpius and I scrambled for our shoes. We Flooed one by one to the Leaky Cauldron. I stumbled a bit on the cobblestone floor, but Molly made sure I didn't fall.

The Leaky Cauldron stood up to its name. It held a sort of shabby appearance, even though it was pretty clean for a place that thousands of wizards walk through every day. A few patrons were seated at the bar, and a loud bunch of old women were at a booth against a wall. There was a set of stairs near the front door.

"Molly!" a scratchy voice called out. "Finally bringing your kids out?"

A man with dark hair shot through with silver wiped the glass he was working on and then made his way round the bar. When he grinned, I noticed he had fewer teeth than the usual man. He stopped right in front of Molly. This man only had a few inches on Scorpius, and he was far taller than Molly and me.

"Hi, Tom," said Molly. "Yes, these are my children." She put a hand on my shoulder. "This is Hecate and Scorpius."

"Very nice names you've chosen yourselves," Tom said, his grin revealing more missing teeth. "You'll have to come back and see me when you've got time."

"We'll probably come down here and see about supper," Molly said. "But I've got that interview, Tom, so I must be going."

"All right, won't keep you, then." Tom retreated back behind the bar.

Scorpius and I scurried along behind Molly, out the back door. A bunch of dustbins sat to one side. The wall to one side was entirely free of debris and made of rough brick. A handful of them were brokenly concave, and it was here that Molly tapped with her wand.

It happened that first time, in that moment. There was no vague sense of déjà vu, as if this moment had happened before. Oh, no. Literally, everything around me changed and yet remained exactly as it was. Molly was no longer there instead a plump, pleasant red-haired younger woman stood in her place. I didn't wear blue jeans and our shared wolf shirt; instead, I wore crimson witch's robes.

In Scorpius' place by my side stood a red-haired boy. He was tall, gangly, and had the same pointed nose as the woman. As did Molly, come to think. The bricks parted before us.

And as soon as the vision had come, it shattered. I grasped desperately in my own mind for the faint details of that scene, so displaced in time and space. All I could

capture, all that did not fade from my inner workings like so much sand between fingers, was the color of his hair. The boy's face muddled away, the woman almost completely scrubbed out. I held onto that particular shade of red. I had a memory.

I had a memory.

I was so terrified to lose it that I immediately started looking for something anything that resembled the hue of that strange boy's hair. My eyes zeroed in on a particular piece of brick that had chipped off of the wall as it closed. Before Molly or Scorpius realized what I was doing, I picked up the sharp bit of rock.

The color of his hair.

I had a *memory*.

Molly stopped just outside the apothecary Nellie's Nook and pulled out a drawstring bag. She handed us each five gold Galleons. "Go into Flourish and Blotts there to wait for me. You can get whatever books you want with these." The store across the street was a bookshop. "I'll only be a little while."

Though all five round gold coins fit nicely in my pocket, I soon discovered that I had a lot more money than I thought. Some of the cheaper books were around seven or eight Sickles. A large tome called *Dark Arts of Our Times*, detailing some of the stuff Death Eaters have done since the start of the war, cost a little bit more than two galleons.

Scorpius and I agreed to share whatever books we bought. We both broke down in giggles when we saw that we both held a copy of *Potions: a Study of Arithmancy*. I put mine back and grabbed instead a book called *Moste Potente Potions*, which set me back three Galleons and five Sickles. I recalled some of the potions within it and the opening few lines. I must have read it at some point. I dragged that and five other books on various topics to the front.

The cashier at the front was a girl who either was working for the summer or had just gotten this job out of Hogwarts. Her hand paused over my most expensive text, her entire form stiffening. Pale brown eyes flickered up into mine.

"Er, you *do* know that these potions are very difficult and some dangerous, right?" she asked hesitantly.

"Of course I know that," I said calmly. "I don't plan on *making* any of them. It's just reading."

The tension in her seemed to melt away, and the false brightness that she'd exhibited with earlier customers returned. "Oh, right. I knew that." She glanced at the other books quickly. "Four Galleons and fourteen Sickles, please."

I handed her all five of my gold coins and received back three silver ones and a thick cotton bag. All six of my books were cozy within it.

"Thank you," I said.

Scorpius went next. He bought the potions text and two others similar to it, but he also had seven fictional books. He had sixteen Sickles left over when done. We glanced out the window over to the apothecary; Molly was in the window. But we had promised to wait in the bookshop, so we settled down into a handful of chairs at the front of the shop with our purchases.

We had only just sat down when a boy slightly older than us sat down in the opposing chair. He was taller than anyone I'd met so far. His white-blond hair cascaded past his shoulders, kept from moving forward by a silk green tie at the base. He wore expensive dragon's hide boots, soft silver-white gloves, and an expensive green set of robes.

"I couldn't help but notice that you bought *Moste Potente Potions*," said he with a slight smile in my direction. "May I ask why?"

"No, you may not," I said, trying not to sniff indignantly.

The blond boy seemed taken aback. Then, he smiled in the silky way that spiders do when luring tasty insects more firmly into their webs. "I apologize, it was rude of me to ask."

Wary, I nodded. "Apology... accepted."

"Either you are visiting," said the boy, "or you've just moved here."

Scorpius and I exchanged our customary glance. "Er... guess we just moved here."

"You don't know?"

An embarrassed flush colored my neck and cheeks. "No."

The boy's eyebrows rose expressively and then fell in thought. After a handful of heartbeats, they rose again. "You're the Obliviated kids." It was not a question.

"Yeah," I answered anyway. I tried to focus on *Moste Potente Potions* again, but it was no use. He was determined to talk to us.

"Have they decided whether you're going to Hogwarts yet?" he asked. "My father is on the Governor's Board, you see."

"We just finished our tests today," I admitted. "Dumbledore said he'd get back to us soon. We did well on the practicals, at least."

The blond smiled again, this time much less false and more like a real smile. "I'm sorry, where are my manners? My name is Lucius Malfoy."

"Hecate Taylor," I said, smiling shyly. For some reason, his smile sent little frogs hopping inside my stomach. "And this is my brother, Scorpius."

Lucius regarded my brother fully for a moment, his pale grey-blue eyes traveling up and down my brother's form. "Do I... know you? You look familiar."

"If you do, you're the one who's going to have to remember." Scorpius quipped. His tone wasn't entirely friendly. I glanced with my eyes only at my brother, keeping the surprise from my face. My brother had never sounded like that before.

"So I should," Lucius nodded, not unkindly. "Apologies again. Well," he clapped his hands on the chair's arms as he stood, "I should be going. Thank you for conversing with me, my lady Hecate, Mr. Taylor."

He then grasped my fingers delicately between his larger, softer ones. In one graceful move, he pressed a kiss to the back of my knuckles, nodded at Scorpius, and waltzed out of the shop.

As soon as he was gone, Scorpius spoke. "I don't like him."

The query at the tip of my tongue never got there, however, because Molly came in at just that moment. I trusted Molly, but... I think some things were best left between my brother and me.

"Did you find many books?" Molly asked cheerfully.

"Molly!" Scorpius moaned. "C'mon, did you get the job or not?"

Molly sniffed indignantly. My brother's face fell, only to light up again at Molly's words. "Of course I got the job, Scorpius, what kind of woman do you think I am?"

The two of us hugged each other, hugged Molly, and hugged each other again. Molly set her wand down to hug Scorpius again, who was exclaiming loudly how frightened he'd been that she wasn't going to get the job.

As I put my books back in the bag, I grabbed Molly's temporarily-forgotten wand *Moste Potente Potions* turned instead into *Potions of Our Age*. No sense in getting Molly upset over a text. I returned her wand back to where it had been. Molly was none the wiser.

Little did I know the path that today's meeting with Lucius, and my deceptions of Molly, would take me in years to come.

Molly began working for Nellie McKinnon the next day. Every day following that, Scorpius, Remus, and I Flooed into Nellie's Nook after her shift. Molly went in to work at five o'clock in the morning and got off at one o'clock. After we ate lunch at the Leaky Cauldron (to Tom's delight), we would explore the shops in Diagon Alley.

It was precisely two days after Dumbledore's tests that we got the letters. Remus stared at the huge phoenix outside the window.

"Molly says Muggles can't see him," I said, shrugging. I let Fawkes in. Remus and Scorpius reached him and began petting him. I smiled, recalling the pleasant feel of his down. "His name's Fawkes. He's Dumbledore's."

Fawkes waited patiently to allow me to pet him once, too, before flying back out through the open window. I closed and locked it up as the conversation continued behind me.

"I've been in Dumbledore's office every year at the start," Remus said. "But Fawkes is usually out delivering stuff."

"Why do you see Dumbledore at the start of the year?" Scorpius asked. I took the letters from Fawkes. He flew back out the window.

"My illness." Remus said simply, with the quality of an attempted lie.

"What is this illness you've got anyway?" I asked, tearing into the letter.

"We don't know."

Abruptly, I looked up. I could hear the lie. But I trusted Remus, trusted him enough to know that once he was comfortable he would tell us. I returned to opening my letter, addressed to me with the Hogwarts seal on the back. This letter, however, was different from the one Molly had received.

Dear Miss Hecate H. Taylor,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Enclosed please find a list of schoolbooks, the uniform, and supplies required.

Third years are able to go into the nearby village of Hogsmeade. Find enclosed a permission form to be signed by a parent or guardian.

The Hogwarts Express departs at eleven a.m. on the first of September. It awaits no one. We await your owl no later than the thirtieth of August.

Professor M. McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress

As the letter had said, I found a list of supplies, a permission parchment, and also a parchment ticket that detailed the location, time, and platform of our train. Scorpius received all of this, too, the only exception being his name: Mr. Scorpius D. Taylor.

I blinked, returning to the top of the letter.

Hecate H. Taylor.

H.

"Did Molly give us middle names and not tell us?" I said aloud.

"Maybe," Scorpius said quietly. He caressed the top of his letter. "D... I wonder what it is."

"It's quarter till one," Remus pointed out. "Just go ask Molly."

I don't think I'd ever seen Scorpius so anxious to get into the fireplace. Though we'd been using the Floo for Merlin knows how long, he still didn't like it. Neither did I, come to that, but at least I didn't shrink back from the fire when it flared up still. Remus cast an amused glance in my direction.

"In a hurry, is he?"

"Well, what if you had a missing middle name you didn't know about?" I asked, stepping into the fire. I quirked my head to the side. "What is your middle name, anyway?"

"John," Remus said, giving my shoulder a shove. "Now go. I'm going to Floo over to my house."

"Pushy," I said, grinning over my shoulder at him. He blushed in reply. I just stepped into the Floo, "Nellie's Nook!"

Upon exiting the Floo, Scorpius gave me no time to catch my bearings before informing me. "She doesn't know where it came from! It's a magical... what'd you call it again?"

Molly looked like she wanted to laugh and cry at once. "It's a magical connection to your wands. When I registered you to the Orphaned Children's Board, they told me that there was a faint echo within the cores."

"So our... our wands know what our names were?" I asked excitedly.

She shook her head, dashing my short-lived hopes. "Not precisely. They recalled the starting letter to your first name, and the Board put that letter in place."

Confused, I looked at Scorpius. "But his name was on that locket." I pointed to the silver locket that hung from his neck he never took it off.

"Apparently his wand picked up on his original middle name," Molly explained softly.

Remus appeared in the Floo moments later with a jangling coin pouch and a letter much like our own.

"Your mother got a hold of you, then?" Molly asked, smiling.

I glanced back and forth between Remus who was slightly out of breath and Molly. She chuckled and answered my unasked question.

"Remus is coming with us to do school shopping."

The three of us grinned as Nellie came out from the back. "Oh, hello, Taylor twins, Remus, come to pick Molls from work now?"

Nellie McKinnon was a half-blood witch who had married Muggle-born Jason McKinnon way back when. Nellie herself was amazing long black hair and a jolly, but unrecognizable, accent. They were up there in age and had one daughter a couple years our senior named Marlene. Nellie kept trying to get Marlene to come and meet us, but the girl had been sick. I had found all this out a few afternoons ago, when Molly was finishing up a Dreamless Sleep potion.

"Yup!" Scorpius replied. "I wish we could keep doing it even after we go to school. But we know you'll take care of her for us."

"Right you are, little Score!" Nellie laughed and ruffled his hair. He scowled up at her, making her laugh more.

Soon after, Nellie shooed us out of her shop. She took up the spot behind the counter.

We headed for the closest shop on the list: Flourish and Blotts.

We had spent so much time in Diagon Alley since Molly got her job that it was simple going from shop to shop for the required supplies. The hardest part was going into Madam Malkin's, the wizarding clothes shop where we bought our robes. Malkin was a short, young witch, scarcely out of Hogwarts. She had, apparently, only just taken over for her mother the year before. The elder Malkin was actually an Orville, but the shop had been passed down from mother to daughter for generations.

"Needing Hogwarts robes?" she asked on our entrance.

"Yes, madam," Molly said. "The whole set for these two, and a new robe and cloak for this young man."

Remus opened his mouth to argue. It snapped shut audibly at the fiery look on Molly's face. Madam Malkin either did not notice or was polite enough not to point it out. She dragged Scorpius back first, all the while saying that there was another young man being fitted for robes there, too. Remus trailed off into another part of the shop, behind some cheaper-looking casual robes.

It was only about ten minutes or so later that a black-haired boy came out, followed by a tall woman. The boy had a large hooked snout, though not enough to be completely abnormal. He was tall and reedy, with hardly any muscle tone, and his skin a pasty white like he hadn't been in the sun since he was a baby. He was dressed in shorts and long socks, cheap shoes, and an Oxford dress shirt buttoned to the top.

In other words, my first glimpse of Severus Snape was not a flattering one.

"Hello," said the woman politely. "I don't think I've ever seen you around before, Ms...?"

"Taylor," said Molly. "Molly Taylor."

"Oh, so you're that woman who adopted the Obliviated twins!" said the woman, startled. She glanced at me quickly and then over her shoulder as though she could see through the curtains to catch another look at Scorpius. "So you're...?"

"Yes," I said shortly. "I am."

She tilted her head to the side. "I apologize for being rude, it's just that I didn't expect to meet you. My name's Eileen Snape, and this is my son, Severus. He's a third-year at Hogwarts."

"That's what we're in, too," I said, peering at Severus Snape curiously. "We just got our letters today."

Severus did not say anything at all. Eileen, however, continued speaking. "Is that right? So Dumbledore does still have the same influence as always." She didn't look too entirely happy about that. "What are your names?"

"I'm Hecate, and my brother is Scorpius."

"Beautiful," Eileen said, smiling. I wasn't entirely sure I liked her yet. "Well, Severus will most likely see you at school, then. We must be going."

"Good day," Molly said. She looked like she wasn't entirely sure what she wanted to say. Eileen and Severus left just as Scorpius came out.

We carried our school supplies home. Molly forbade Remus from thanking her for the robes and cloak, and he did so only by sheer force of will.

I didn't get to think about Severus Snape at all until we were home. As I was packing my school things up in a rolling trunk, I couldn't help but dwell on the fact that Eileen had spoken for her son. Was he just unable to speak? Too shy? I shook my head and stacked my new books on the shelf.

I'd find out when I got there.

To Hogwarts!

Chapter 6 of 18

All aboard the Hogwarts Express! Heck and Score separate when the Marauders drag Score from his sister. Who does she sit with?

*Art News: Drawings of *surprise OC*, Lucius, and Hecate (both ink and watercolor versions) are up on my dA account. See my profile for the link.*

LJ News: A new musing on the eugenics-like focus of the Harry Potter books is up LJ at: www.hpmuse.livejournal.com. Oh, there isn't a dash between HP and MUSE. That's another person.

Notes: I really have no idea what sort of music would be playing on a wizarding radio/wireless in the early seventies, so I took a rough guess during the chapters that include music from Rabastan. There are more notes on the new characters at the end of the chapter.

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter or "The Ballad of Ira Hayes". I do, however, own the band Sugardale (based on an original story of mine) and their song "Witches Watch You". Harry Potter belongs to the esteemed J.K. Rowling and the "Ballad" belongs to the late great man in black himself, Johnny Cash.

Forgive me my horrid poetry (the poor Sorting Hat!).

Chapter 5 To Hogwarts!

Bronze and gold and scarlet leaves fluttered on the intangible wind that blew by. Subtle scents assaulted my nose – rosemary, cheap perfume, spilt wine, and the greasy oil and smoke of the trains and cars. King's Cross station was loud, filled with chattering people, rattling trolleys, and clackety-clacking trains coming and going.

Scorpius heaved our trunks from the rear of the Muggle taxi while Molly paid the driver. I pulled my wheeled trunk toward the platforms. With skill quite unlike several of the passengers boarding the trains, Molly maneuvered us to the brick columns between platforms nine and ten.

Molly pushed me through the barrier first. The light whooshing noise caressed my ears and pushed my hair from my eyes. It was over too quickly. I stood on the other side of the barrier, staring down the line at the scarlet steam engine. Heat radiated from it with the choking hazy scent of sea spray. The train was larger than I'd anticipated. Grills like the bars in a Muggle prison stood in shining silver at the front. The stack emitted white puffs as the engine idled.

A faint twinge of memory, the lowest form of déjà vu, swirled into the back of my mind. I'd done this before.

The platform was mostly a void; only a few parents and their children were embracing at the edges. I smirked in spite of things. Score and I were early, as was our wont.

"Let's get you two on board," Molly said breathlessly. "Scorpius, dear, can you help Hecate lift her trunk?"

Now, I love Molly. Really, I do. But she's frustratingly obstinate when it comes to me being perfectly capable of doing things for myself. Scorpius knew this and still he did what she asked. We both knew she'd only get upset with him if I did it anyway. I knew all this, yet it still was quite annoying to suffer through. Especially considering I could have picked up my own trunk without hitting the steps of the train.

In spite of myself, I fervently hoped my trunk was dinged.

"I've got to get in to work, dears, so I'll leave you here," she said.

Molly reached out and hugged Scorpius and me tightly to her, one of us in each arm. Scorpius' arms brushed mine. We had never held one another like this – but I knew one thing. It felt right. There was a brush of something warm on my forehead – Molly's kiss – and we let go.

"Now get up on that train," she ordered lightly. "I'll owl you as soon as I can. Bye, Hecate, Scorpius, behave yourselves."

"Bye, Molly!" we shouted.

When I looked back, she was gone.

Scorpius hefted his trunk into a more manageable position. We made our way down the corridor of the train, our trunks making soft clicking noises on raised bits of the scarlet carpet. Compartments sat on either side. Through windows that revealed enough room for six students, I saw that most of them were already full. Scorpius paused outside of one and turned toward it.

James, Sirius, and Remus were inside, along with a chubby brown-haired boy with large, protruding front teeth. He must have been Peter, the fourth Marauder.

"Score!" Sirius shouted. The compartment door flew open, the glass rattling with the force. Sirius took Scorpius' trunk from him. Four of the boys settled down instantly to Quidditch talk. Remus caught my eye and shrugged ruefully. I nodded slowly.

I was on my own.

About halfway down the train, I started hearing whispers in some of the compartments. The upperclassmen were watching me. Behind me, compartment doors opened. I could feel eyes on my back and neck, prickling like the on-again, off-again cold symptom still lingering from... before. After a long walk down nearly the entire length of the train, I found an empty compartment. I pulled out my Arithmancy text, set it down on the seat, and put away the trunk.

I had barely sat down and opened the book before I was interrupted.

The compartment door slid open, and in the doorway stood a girl roughly the same age as me with amber-colored eyes and long brown hair. She smiled sweetly, but it looked false even to my untrained eyes.

"They're saying all over the train that *you're* one of the Obliviated twins," she said. She leaned against the frame, studying me as one would a particularly fascinating piece of artwork. Appraising it for value. "I'm Isabelle MacDougal, Ravenclaw."

"Hecate Taylor," I said.

"So are you?"

Ooh, I liked this game. "Am I what?"

Isabelle sighed in exasperation. "One of the Obliviated twins!"

Aren't Ravenclaws supposed to be smart? "My last name should have given you that clue," I said coolly. "But yes."

She glanced up and down the hall behind her then slid the door shut. I bit back a sigh – no need to tell her she'd gotten under my skin.

"Listen, just thought I'd tell you," she said. "You don't want to be a Slytherin."

I blinked at this piece of information. "I was under the impression that I really didn't have a choice *where* I was going to be Sorted."

"You can tell the Hat not to do it," she said. "I did. I told it not Hufflepuff."

I tried not to smirk. I don't think I succeeded because she scowled.

"Look, you just don't want to be in that one. You-Know-Who came out of them, and that's why you shouldn't be one. You were attacked by his followers, and they're all from there, too."

No *wonder* she should've been in Hufflepuff. I nodded slowly, as though I were agreeing with her. It's not like I would really have a choice. What if ~~I~~ *was* supposed to be in Slytherin or any of the other Houses? She'd obviously made her decision and was missorted for it. I trusted the Hat. In particular in light of the evidence when one did not

do so standing in front of me.

"Well, yeah, anyway, just wanted to tell you that. See you." And Isabelle left with a bouncing step, barely pausing long enough to open the sliding compartment door.

There were still ten minutes left before the train was to depart. I was sure I'd have compartment-mates soon enough. I set my book down to wait for them so I could at least be polite in greeting someone new. Molly had taught me those sorts of manners.

More like drilled them into me with an ice pick and a sledgehammer, but there it was.

Just as the train was about to depart, a familiar face poked into the compartment. Lucius Malfoy smiled upon sighting me.

"Do you mind if myself and a few friends join you?" he asked. "The other compartments are too full to accommodate us all."

I nodded and picked my book back up as Lucius dragged an expensive-looking, forest green trunk into the compartment. Two boys and three girls followed him, each of who silently put away their trunks first before saying anything at all. I watched them over the topmost edge of my Arithmancy text.

The first of the two boys had long, curly blond hair a few shades between Lucius and Remus. He had very pale blue eyes, not quite the same grey as Lucius', and chiseled features. The second boy was a study in contrasts between the Lucius and the other. Everything about him was dark. His hair, his skin, his eyes; the only speck of light color on him were the whites around his irises.

Two of the three girls were related, I think. Their faces were both pointed and aristocratic, they held themselves roughly the same, and their skin was about the same cream color. However, one had black hair, and the other cornflower blond. The third girl had black hair and an oddly strong nose. Her skin was caramel-colored, and she had a proud look about her.

Lucius began the introductions only when everyone was comfortably seated. By that time, the train had lurched to a start. The odd clickety-clack of the rails was strangely soothing.

"This is Rabastan LeStrange and Antonio Gibbon," Lucius said, pointing respectively to the blond and then dark boy. "The sisters are Narcissa " the blond, "and Bellatrix Black. And this is our own Iliad Parkinson. Her elder half-brother just graduated last year. Gentlemen, ladies, this is Hecate Taylor."

I really, *really* appreciated the fact that he did not tack on "one of the Obliviated twins" on the end of that sentence. The others all waved. They each greeted me in a polite tone, with nothing more or less than, "Hello."

Lucius stood up after a moment or so, giving a slight bow at the door. "I'm sorry to leave you all, but I must go to the prefect carriage."

Iliad shifted slightly on her seat, looking about to explode. "Soo, Taylor, um, have you read the paper this morning?" She had her hand poised over a shoulder bag and snapped into action only after I shook my head. "You should."

I took the *Daily Prophet* from her and scowled upon seeing the headlines. No wonder we were being stared at.

OBLIVIATED TWINS ACCEPTED INTO HOGWARTS

Hecate and Scorpius Taylor, 13, were accepted into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry right on time to attend with their age group this year. The Obliviated Twins certainly had a tall order to fill. They underwent rigorous written and practical exams, administered by Headmaster Dumbledore himself! Even more surprisingly, not only did they pass they excelled.

"I have not seen a young man with this much knowledge of Potions at his age in quite some time," says Potions master, Horace Slughorn. "They well deserve their spot here at this noble institution."

Still, some speculation about their ability to adapt into the school has been voiced. As a matter of fact, "their psychological states seem a bit unbalanced; I question whether they may even be dangerous to other students," says one worried parent.

"Especially the girl," says Madam Snape, mother of a boy in the Taylor Twins' year named Severus. "She had a devilish sort of gleam in her eyes."

Well, whether the twins are unhinged or not remains to be seen. Hogwarts has accepted them, bright and eager, on this first of September, 1973.

"Devilish gleam, my ruddy arse," I muttered hotly. "Thank you, um... Iliad, right?"

"Call me Ilii," she said, taking the paper back. Everything about her spoke of the earth. Her eyes were a mossy green color, and she wore a chocolate brown jumper and soft, calf-skin pants. "And I wouldn't worry too much about what Madam Snape says, really. She's rather er... unhinged, herself."

"Then why publish such nonsense?" I grumbled.

Narcissa and her sister Bellatrix exchanged an amused glance. The blond girl spoke. "It gets readers and ratings."

"Then they shouldn't be called a newspaper, then," I said. "So I got high marks on their tests. Does that really make me ~~ma~~crazy?"

Antonio cleared his throat softly. "Er, no, not really. You see, usually, people who have complete Oblivates do in fact go insane."

I gave him a withering look. "Do I *seem* insane to you?"

"Nope," Rabastan said lazily. "Which is precisely why you're interesting."

"And why everyone's staring," Bellatrix added.

"It'd be about the same if the Dark Lord decided to walk down the train, though I bet there'd be people trying to hex him," Narcissa said, grinning broadly. "You don't think you were *really* attacked by Death Eaters, do you?"

I thought back to what Healer Pomfrey had said. "No, I don't think I was. Not really. They would have killed me with my parents, if it'd really been them, right?"

"Right," Narcissa said. "And even then they'd only attack you because you were Mudblood or blood traitor."

I blinked owlishly. "A what and a what?"

The three girls stared at me. I felt a blush color my neck until Rabastan slowly spoke in his gruff way. "Don't stare at her, she's got enough of it as is." He leaned forward as the three girls got their composure back. "Listen, sweetie, it's like this. Our world is split into purebloods and Mudbloods, right? Purebloods have magic in them that is passed to them by people who have magic blood. Then there are Muggles who somehow get magic they don't deserve it. Those are Mudbloods. Some magic people believe otherwise. They are blood traitors, people who turn against their own blood."

"Their own blood," I repeated. "Like turning on your family?"

The two boys chuckled softly. Antonio answered instead. "It's something like that, yes. Most wizarding families are related to one another. For instance, I am Cissa and Bella's third cousin once removed, and Illiad is something like my second twice removed."

"And he's technically my step-uncle," Rabastan said, nodding to the boy beside him. "So you see..." He trailed off lightly.

"I do," I said, nodding. Family. These people were *a family* and their own were turning against them. Over people who were outside of their family. I felt slightly sick to my stomach. "I don't... I don't know what I'd do without Molly and Scorpius. They are my family, too."

Narcissa smiled. "It is the same with myself, Bella, and Andy."

"Andy?" I queried.

"Our elder sister," Bellatrix explained. "Andromeda. She's a seventh-year this year. And our cousin Regulus. Don't forget him, Cissy."

Rabastan started rummaging around in his trunk. "You don't mind if I play a wireless, do you, Hecate?"

I knew from my internal library that a wireless played music. However, I had never heard music before. I hadn't watched the television, either. Eager to know what music sounded like, I nodded and shut my book. Rabastan twiddled with a dial on the small pinewood box. Rough sounds, like sandpaper over glass, came from it. Then, a smooth voice came over it.

"...was Sugardale with 'Witches Watch You', and now here's our own Johnny Cash with 'The Ballad of Ira Hayes'. Oh, you've gotta love these American\$!

A noise unlike any other I'd ever heard came from the box. A smooth, sweet sound, like reeds waving in the wind came, and then a low-toned man began to murmur softly, sadly.

Ira Hayes,

Ira Hayes.

Call him drunken Ira Hayes,

He won't answer any more.

Not the whiskey-drinkin' Indian

Nor the Marine that went to War.

"Stupid Americans, more like," Illiad said fiercely. "Bloody righteous bunch of arseholes."

"Illi's mother is from across the pond," Narcissa explained. "Her mother was a Cherokee Indian."

"Was?" I asked.

"She died," Illiad said shortly. "Father named me for her favorite white man's poem." She smiled wistfully as the Ira Hayes song continued.

There they battled up

Iwo Jima Hill.

Two hundred and fifty men,

But only twenty-seven lived

To walk back down again.

And when the fight was over,

And old Glory raised,

Among the men who held it high

Was the Indian Ira Hayes.

Call him drunken Ira Hayes,

He won't answer any more.

Not the whiskey-drinkin' Indian

Nor the Marine that went to War.

"I like this song, even though it's a bit old," Narcissa said. "Cash has been a wild shot, though. Drunk, drugged, and Muggle-loving. His girl is Muggle."

Lucius returned after two or three more songs had played on the wireless. Rabastan turned it off. As though on cue, the compartment door slid open. An elderly witch stood there with a small cart full of sweets.

"Anything off the trolley, dears?" she asked.

There it was again. That rough feeling of déjà vu... but this was different again. I should be here with that boy with the red hair. Was he here on board the train? I fingered the brick piece in my pocket. It was sharp. I'd cut myself a few times on it already. But I refused to give it up. It was the same color as that boy's hair.

The same.

I waited patiently for the others to purchase their sweets and bought myself a large box of Sugar Quills. Of all the sweets we had bought in Diagon Alley, that was my favorite. It was quickly becoming a habit to have one stuck in my mouth while I read. When the trolley witch left, I asked my tenuous question.

"Are there any redheads on board the train?" I asked.

The three girls looked surprised, but Lucius answered without batting a single white-blond eyelash. "There are three that attended since last year, there may be more in the

incoming first-years. Why do you ask?"

I felt rather silly with my piece of brick, but I pulled it out of my pocket anyway. Desperate times, desperate measures. "I had a snippet of a memory in Diagon Alley. I was with a boy whose hair was this color." I held it up for Lucius to see.

While the three girls shifted uncomfortably, Lucius just politely took the sharp stone. Antonio and Rabastan looked entirely unaffected by my odd questions. Lucius studied the stone quietly. He then handed it back to me with the same delicate way he'd kissed my knuckles that very day in Diagon Alley.

"There are no boys, that I am aware of," Lucius said, a tone of apology seeping into his silk-soft voice. "Unless they are incoming first-years, then there aren't any with that shade of hair coming in."

I sighed and put the brick piece away in my pocket. "I thought I'd ask."

"It's quite all right," Lucius said. "I would do the same had I lost every memory, only to find one. What triggered the memory, may I ask?"

Just a month ago, I had refused the same answers to boys my own age. I had not even told Scorpius about my memory snippet. And yet here I was divulging what I had kept from Sirius Black, James Potter, Remus Lupin, and Scorpius Taylor. The question of why occurred to me.

I ignored it.

"When Molly, Scorpius, and I first went to Diagon Alley," I said. "It faded almost as quickly as it came. And I also had déjà vu when I came through onto the platform, and when the trolley came by."

Iliad leaned forward in her seat, studying me slightly. "You don't suppose you've gone to Hogwarts before, do you? I mean, maybe when you were really little or something?"

"I don't know," I groaned, frustrated. My hands plunged into my hair, the heels massaging my temples. "I mean, I Conjured up a chickadee on one of my tests, Dumbledore seemed to think that might mean I was from America... I don't know."

A hand found my shoulder and squeezed gently. "Hey. Don't worry about it so much, ooh-s-tee ooh-luh."

I glanced up at her, my hands still hovering near. "What does that mean?"

"It is my mother's tongue," she said, smiling softly. "It means 'little sister'."

Ooh-s-tee ooh-luh. Little sister. It was this phrase, perhaps more than anything else, that made me fit so easily into a culture I should not have been able to. Lucius Malfoy and Iliad Parkinson were my introduction into the political, troubling world of the Slytherins.

Not that the Hat didn't have something to do with it.

The rest of the ride aboard the Hogwarts Express went smoothly. Ili, Cissa, and Bella dissolved into talk of their holiday excursions. All three were fairly well-to-do. Ili had gone to Oklahoma, in the States, and stayed on an Indian Reservation with her mother's family hence her small amount of Cherokee language. Cissa, Bella, Andromeda, and their cousin Regulus had gone to Paris. Hearing of these places made me wonder, truly, where I had come from.

What was I? British? American?

From my accent, the others thought that I had spent at least enough time in Britain to pick it up. Though Rabastan had argued that I had no memories of hearing any accent at all and I could have just picked it up because that's what I heard. The "what ifs" were endless, and I always ended up right back where I'd begun.

"You girls need to get dressed soon," Lucius said, nodding toward the window. "We're almost there." He ducked back out of the carriage. I could hear him informing other students that we were nearing Hogwarts.

Rabastan and Antonio left silently, and the four of us girls dressed quickly in their absence. I noticed that where my robes were empty black, the others all had a green Slytherin crest on them. Their ties were green and silver striped, with a simple green "S" emblem that appeared there after they had tied them. Their jumpers were all dark muted green. The skirts were all a deep navy so dark it only showed because the color popped against the black of the robes. Anything with green on them was a charcoal grey on me.

"It'll change once you're Sorted," Ili said, as though reading my mind. "Just leave your bags here. They'll be taken to your dorm later."

I nodded, nervous tendrils tightening at my limbs as the train began to slow. The sound of clambering, raucous noises of laughter and nerves spilled into the compartment. I made my way out into the sea of swirling students. Several paused to look at me oddly, but not for long. Most were too busy trying to shove their way out of the train.

A small girl with grey colors like mine stumbled to the ground in all the upheaval. I wasn't so big to keep the bodies at bay, but I was strong enough to heave her to her own feet again. She flashed a grateful smile up into my eyes. I followed her slowly out through the train doors so that she wouldn't get knocked over again. It was like this that Scorpius found me again.

"Hey, sorry about them," he said.

"It's okay," I said.

Outside, bouncing bauble-like lanterns were all that lit the broad platform. A large man, twice as tall as Scorpius and several times wider, called into the night. "Firs' years! Firs' years, gather 'round here! Scorpius and Hecate Taylor! Firs' years!"

I exchanged a glance with my brother. We headed for the large man and Scorpius tugged at his moleskin overcoat. "You called for us particularly, mister?"

"Ah, so you're them, then," said the tall man. "Ang on, then. Firs' years! Firs' years!"

A small hand clenched into mine. I looked down to see the small girl again. She smiled shyly up at me. I held on to her hand a little tighter.

"I'm Hecate Taylor," I said softly as the remaining first-years began to huddle against the wind. "And this is my brother Scorpius."

"Alioth Mulciber, but most people call me Ali," she said quietly. In the gentle firelight from the lanterns, I couldn't tell if she was blond or just fair-haired. But her skin was so pale that it seemed to glow in the combined light of the moon and fire. She hesitated for only a moment. "You don't have your memories. You and him... right?"

I smiled down at her. She was so shy! "No, I'm afraid not. We're going to make the best of it here. Right, Scorpius?"

"Right, sis," he said. He grinned down at the small girl, who curled her other hand around my arm in nervous fright. Scorpius didn't take it poorly; he just backed off.

The large man hollered loudly for us to follow him. Ali and I slipped a bit in the path, but Scorpius kept us both safely on our feet. By the time we reached the edges of a large lake, the girl was giggling at Scorpius' joking manners.

"And then, the Snitch, if you'd believe it, walked right back into his open mouth!" Scorpius said, howling with laughter at his own joke. Ali chuckled softly, answering one

question already: She was a pureblood, or at least half-blood.

The joke, being Quidditch-related, was lost on me.

"No more 'n four to a boat!" came the large man's voice. Sure enough, tiny rowboats without oars sat on the banks of the lake. Ali sat down beside me, still clutching on to my hand.

"Now don't move too much," I said. "We don't want the boat to tip."

She shook her head mutely, but the fear that was in her was not of falling into the lake. How odd. In fact, as Scorpius continued to joke all across the gentle waves, she seemed to relax more and more as though leaving behind those things she feared. The boat ride was relaxing, an omen for things to come.

Scorpius, who had faced forward, released a startled gasp. Ali and I turned round. My lips flew apart, the same noise leaving me. The castle was enormous, far larger than any building I had ever come across. And yet, even as I took in the turrets and windows, the towers and stone, I could not help the feeling that I had been here before. Not only had I been here before; this was home.

Home.

As nothing else in the world had ever struck me, it was this that made me relax and smile in the seat. I was home. The warmth of that one notion overshadowed even the sharp brick digging into my thigh petulantly, reminding me that I had known someone, somewhere. I turned back around for the remainder of the ride, recalling a passage perfectly from a book I did not have before me.

First years cross Hogwarts' lake with the Keeper of Keys as more than just a simple tradition. It is there that the protective spells of ancient times are cast by the simple passing over the water. Students cross the water to receive spells that send their names to the Ministry when they perform underage magic, for instance. It is said that if the crossing is repeated, these spells are repealed. This is why elder students ride carriages drawn by thestrals.

It is also said that the current Headmaster or Headmistress uses these spells to "spy", as it were, on students. Usually, the practice is only used when the rule-breaker might get severely hurt.

I smiled to myself. Whether the idea was true or not, I had the feeling that as long as I knew Headmaster Dumbledore, things would be all right.

Ali, Scorpius, and I scrambled out of our shared boat and up into the warm, inviting entrance hall. I could not even see the ceiling above me. The walls were warm grey, lit by ever-burning torches. The firelight glinted off a pair of suits of armor and the white marble stairs opposite the door. The large man walked away, and it was only then that I noticed the dark-haired woman.

Everything about her bespoke of severity and sternness. Her hair was drawn in a tight, no-nonsense bun, her lips pressed in a thin line. Her square spectacles only made her thin, dark eyes all the more small and scary in her face. A cloak made of plaid draped over her shoulders in marked creases, her blouse and long skirt almost hiding her flat boots. They still made a harsh click every step she made.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," she said, and her voice killed the entire image in one fell swoop. "I am Professor McGonagall. Through these doors your classmates await, but first you must be Sorted into your Houses. They are Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, Gryffindor, and Slytherin." Here she glanced at Scorpius and me with her sternest glare. The look was complete; her voice left much to be desired. "Your House will be like your family."

Family?

She continued on, even though I think I may have said that out loud. I could hear some of the first-years snickering. "You will sleep in your House dormitories, take classes with your Housemates, and spend your spare time in your House common rooms. Triumphs will earn points; rule-breaking will lose them."

A girl who looked much like an older version of Bellatrix Black stuck her head out the oak double-doors. "We're ready, Professor."

"Thank you, Miss Black," McGonagall said. She turned back to us. "Smarten yourselves up; here we go."

Scorpius took McGonagall at her word and began furiously finger-combing his hair. I don't know why he looked perfectly fine to me. The Great Hall doors swung open and with it went my jaw. Four long tables, piled high with golden plates, goblets, cutlery, and tablecloths in their respective colors, sat along the hall. At the head was another table, this one draped in black. Teachers sat there, including Headmaster Dumbledore in the very middle.

But what made my jaw drop was the ceiling or rather the seeming lack thereof. I knew from reading that it was bewitched, but ~~to~~ really see the night sky, the stars twinkling overhead... It was a sight that needs to be seen. Candles floated everywhere, sconces lined one wall, and huge hourglasses hung on another. They were filled with rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and alexandrite. They were all currently lying at the bottom of the glasses.

Ali waved excitedly from the green-swathed table. Remus gave a more subtle twiddle of fingers from the red one. I spotted the girl from the train, the Ravenclaw who'd told me not to go into Slytherin, sitting at the blue. I sniffed inwardly. No way in hell would I go into *her* House.

Ali grabbed my hand again, all but hiding her head under my arm. I whispered softly to her. "It's okay, Ali. No one's going to hurt you."

She smiled up at me and nodded. She stopped trying to hide but she still clung on to my hand. I whispered to her again. "That's not really the night sky, you know. It's bewitched. The Founders did it, over a thousand years ago."

Ali stared up at the ceiling, wide-eyed. I kept hold of her so she wouldn't fall down from not watching in front of her. "Really, Hecate?"

"Really," I said. "I think it was Hufflepuff. She was the Charms mistress, after all."

I could see the question on the tip of her tongue, but I shushed her for now. "We're going to get Sorted."

She nodded and stood between Scorpius and me as McGonagall fluffed up a long piece of parchment. A four-legged stool sat on the dais behind her. On it sat an ancient hat with many darns, many patches of various colors, and a large rip at its rim. It was at this rip that it opened like a mouth and began to sing.

Gryffindor, grey and

White, stood tall and bold

Before the other Founders.

"We grow too old,"

Said he, "To further

On Sort them now,

So how to do it,

When we are cowed?"

Ravenclaw, that wise

Old dame, thought.

As did Hufflepuff,

Who taught the lot!

Slytherin pondered, too,

With cunning on the sly.

But Gryffindor answered

His own query by the by.

He whipped me off his head

I tell you that it's true!

And put the spells on me

That tell me about you!

I Sort you each to that

House in which you belong.

Be you wise, or cunning,

Brave or full of song!

Like me, of course,

Or favor you the lights

Of thinking what's in

The wrongs or rights.

So put me on,

Give me a try!

I'll know what the right

Color to make your tie!

Uncertainly, I clapped along with the rest of the Great Hall. Ali's hand found mine again shortly after. I smiled down at her as McGonagall ruffled the parchment again.

"When I call your name, please come up, and I will place the Hat on your head," she said. "Alders, Mary!"

A particularly large girl with large blue eyes all but skipped up to the stool. The Hat was barely on her head for a second when it shouted for the entire hall to hear: "HUFFLEPUFF!"

The change to her uniform was instantaneous, but I doubted that she noticed. The tie turned yellow and black striped and a patch with a black badger on a yellow background appeared on her robes. Her jumper turned a muted tan. The yellow-clothed table cheered and welcomed her with open, friendly arms.

"Black, Regulus!"

The entire lengths of the red and green tables held their breaths, it seemed. The tension in the room was tenfold over this one little boy. That's when I recalled that Sirius Black, this boy's elder brother, was a Gryffindor. All three of his female cousins, however, were Slytherin.

The Hat took several long seconds atop the small black-haired boy's head. He looked much like Sirius, blessed with a cute, strong nose, beautifully spaced blue eyes, and aristocratic cheeks. Where Sirius' hair was long, curly, and staggeringly soft, this boy had wavy hair, more silk than feather. Ali and I watched him. Scorpius' gaze, however, was on Sirius.

Finally, the Hat shouted: "SLYTHERIN!"

Sirius Black slumped in his seat, covering his face in his hands. James and Remus patted him on the back and the chubby boy Peter patted his head of curls. Sirius seemed to come back to himself, because he started smacking at Peter's hands. On the Slytherin side of things, however, Narcissa and Bellatrix had opened up a space between them for their youngest cousin. Both leaned in and kissed his cheeks on either side, making the cute boy blush.

"Bulstrode, Armstrong!" A few snickers followed this name, but the huge boy who sat down on the stool stilled most of them. He looked more like my age than the eleven he should be. The Hat wasn't even on his head when it shouted, "SLYTHERIN!"

There were more students after that, but I didn't pay as much attention. As we got closer and closer to the "M" on the list, my hand was losing more and more of its blood. I subtly stroked Ali's hair with my free hand and rubbed circles on the hand that clutched me.

"Mulciber, Alioth!" McGonagall's voice came.

I thought she was scared before; now she was terrified. Now she held my hand with both hers and my fingers turned purple, then white with her fear. Her wide, pale green eyes turned up to me. I smiled reassuringly and unwrapped my hands. Scorpius and I both gave her a gentle push toward the professor.

McGonagall managed to soften her gaze for the young, frightened girl. She stumbled a bit, but another first-year caught her before she fell. Ali sat down, trembling, on the stool. Her pale green eyes locked onto mine just as the Hat fell over them.

The Hat sat on her head for minutes, not the seconds that most had before. Only Regulus Black had seen the inside seam of the giant wizard's triangle for so long. After several moments, the brim opened up. "SLYTHERIN!"

Regulus Black offered the frightened girl a place across from him and his cousins, which she took with a grateful smile.

The first years trickled down and down until at last there was only a first-year whose name probably came after "T," Scorpius, and me. McGonagall fluffed up the parchment again. I took a deep breath.

"Taylor, Hecate."

I walked up to the front of the Hall and sat down with all the grace I could manage. Lucius smiled at me from his place at the Slytherin table. The Hat fell over my eyes, my heart pounding now. Why had I been so calm before?

The Hat spoke in my mind. *"Hmm, so we meet at last, Obliviated one."*

I scowled.

It laughed at me. *"Yes, quite a dilemma. You see, I usually use memories to place people. From what I've seen, however, you'd do well in Slytherin or Ravenclaw. Do you wish to have the choice?"*

Slytherin, I thought. *I enjoyed the people there.*

And without saying another word, the Hat shouted my choice. "SLYTHERIN!"

I grinned and bounced off the seat to applause from the green-swathed table. I sat down at the empty space beside Ali and across from the Blacks. Lucius sat on the other side of the small girl I'd met on the platform. The black-haired girl who had told McGonagall that they were ready sat on the other side of Bellatrix. The resemblance was even more defined with them side by side.

I turned around in my seat and held my breath. Would Scorpius follow me into Slytherin? Would he end up in Gryffindor with the Marauders? He was smart too, like a Ravenclaw. Would he end up there? I grit my teeth. Ali's tiny hand found mine and squeezed. I smiled down at her.

"It'll be okay," she whispered.

I nodded and we both turned as McGonagall called Scorpius' name. The Hat fell over his eyes. We waited while the Hat spoke to him. The seconds ticked away on the invisible clock in my head.

After what felt like an eternity, the Hat's brim opened up....

~*~

I think that is the first time I've ever left such an overhanging cliffhanger. At any rate, I did promise you guys some more notes. Illiad Parkinson is indeed Pansy's mother. The reason that she passed on her surname maternally will be explained later. The pug nose came from her dad. Cookies for the people who know where Illi's name originates! Hint: The name becomes ilium in Latin, which means pertaining to the city proper.

As for Alioth, her name is another star found in Ursa Major. It means "dark horse". The connection becomes rather important later on, though not in the usual way.

Dream's Deduction, Part I

Chapter 7 of 18

Scorpius' House and the welcoming feast.

I decided to split this chapter in two so that I wouldn't tax the lovely folk who run this place or myself. It's all written just copy-writing remains.

A huge thanks and lots of cupcakes heaped upon the TPP staff for putting up with my self-deprecating ways. Hugs and kisses for my reviewers and all their speculation it just gives me more evil ideas, you know. ^_^

No Art News right now, but I've made a few more posts on my LJ www.hpmuse.livejournal.com.

Disclaimer: There are two women whom I hold in the utmost respect in this world. One is my mother and the other is J.K. Rowling, my role model. Thanks for letting us play with the wonderful world you've created! I don't make any money from this, only the reviews which I crave so much.

Oh, and I'm sure there are Alarm Charms and whatnot, but I thought Scruffy was an interesting House-wide twist. You'll see.

Chapter 6: Dream's Deduction, Part I

The entire Hall held its collective breath. In the back of my mind, I knew that our Sorting was being closely watched. And not because it paused overlong like it did on Ali's head, nor was it because we had family in two different Houses like Regulus. To my inward fury, the entire British wizarding community for one reason only closely scrutinized us because we were the Obliviated Twins.

The Hat's voice rang out in the Great Hall.

"GRYF "

"NO!"

The whole Hall stared at the Hat and the boy on the stool. Not a person had not heard my brother *my brother* distinctly turn down Gryffindor. I glanced across the Hall at

the red-swathed table, at Remus and the three other Marauders. Remus looked hurt, but unsurprised. The other three buffoons were beside themselves with indignity.

"SLYTHERIN!" Scorpius half-ran over to the green table, his entire face a particularly nasty shade of puce. He sat by me and immediately buried his face in his arms. Still, as though there were more to be seen, they stared. I scowled at the three tables beyond ours, and slowly backs began to turn.

McGonagall cleared her throat, and the Hall turned its eyes to the final boy. I didn't even catch his name before he became a Gryffindor. Away went the stool and the list, and the Hat, and up on his feet went Dumbledore. There was a pensive quality to his stature for only a moment. He morphed before our eyes back into the doddering old fool he usually appeared to be.

"Good evening!" he said, his voice bouncing off the walls jovially. "I think we're all a bit peaked, so I'll be short. Eat up!"

As he sat back down to raucous applause, food in platters, tureens, and bowls appeared on the table before us. I could almost hear the wood creaking under the weight. Carafes full of pumpkin juice and iced water appeared close but not enough to get knocked over. Ali pointed to the roast chicken to my right. I pulled the whole platter over for her and I.

"It's good to see a Slytherin who already protects their own," Lucius said, smiling gently at little Ali. "What might your name be?"

"Alioth Mulciber," she whispered, her hand frozen over a boat of broccoli and rice. "But my friends call me Ali."

"That's a beautiful name," he said smoothly. She smiled shyly at him and then silently offered me the broccoli. To ease her mind, I accepted it and some boiled potatoes before settling in to eat.

Lucius continued as everyone turned to their individual plates. "Hecate, Scorpius, Ali, Regulus, welcome to Slytherin House." There were a few other first-years down the way, but they were out of earshot.

"Thank you," I said, taking a sip of pumpkin juice. I noticed that every one of the elder Slytherins ate with grace, something Molly had never mentioned before. Not an elbow on the table or a single twine faced up. I suddenly felt entirely uncouth. "Er, Lucius..." I trailed off, trying to figure out how to voice my concern.

"Don't be frightened to ask questions," he said, his tone light. "We know that you have lost much of your recollections. As I said, it is wonderful to see a Slytherin who already has the inclination to protect our own." His grey eyes smiled briefly at little Ali again. "It is what Slytherins do. We are a family here, Hecate."

I blushed and glanced down at my plate. "... well, I noticed that everyone else is well... eating different than Score and I."

"Oh, that," Lucius chuckled softly and gestured to a black-haired boy at the far end of the table. I barely recognized him. "Severus, too, did not learn pureblood table manners at home. It's all right. We will help you once you've settled in a bit more."

"And Cissa, Illi, and I are in your dorm," Bellatrix pointed out. "So we'll help you with your hair and make-up and such."

I frowned. I didn't like make-up. Molly'd already tried it though doing up my hair for Potions class would be most welcome. "I'd like to skip make-up, if you don't mind."

"Of course," the elder Black sister said before the younger two could protest. "You possess a natural beauty, Hecate, just as the goddess you are named for. You don't require paint." She cast a stern gaze on her two sisters for emphasis.

"She is right, you know," Lucius said, smiling into his spoon of stew. "You do."

"Of course she does," Scorpius said. "She's my sister!"

"And we can be grateful she doesn't have your arrogance," said little Regulus Black with a teasing grin.

"Hey!" Scorpius protested.

Ali coughed into her pumpkin juice.

"He's joking, Score," I said.

"Score," Lucius said. "I like that nickname. Heck and Score."

Regulus grinned over his goblet. "I like it. My brother's been talking about you nonstop since mum sent him over to the hospital. 'Hecate's so cute, but I think she hates me.' 'Scorpius this and Scorpius that.' He and Potter are enamored, I think."

I blinked at the eleven-year-old. "I only hung around him once after St. Mungo's. Why would he think I hated him?"

Lucius laughed and ruffled the smaller boy's hair. "That would, I think, be precisely the reason he thinks so, Heck. Men of Sirius' constitution are easily wounded by slights."

"I didn't slight him, I just didn't want to sit 'round and talk about a game I've never seen before," I retorted. "It's not like he isn't a pleasant person. He's just... odd. So is Potter, to be honest. Remus is better. He's smart. And Muggle or not, his mum's fudge is to die for."

Scorpius shifted in his seat beside me, slowly nibbling away at a hot roll.

"Well, I should point out that Slytherins rarely get along with Gryffindors, though there are exceptions," Lucius said, glancing down at the end of the table. I followed his gaze. Severus Snape sat all alone at the end, eating politely. He had a book open in front of him.

"Well, I still like Remus," I said, shrugging.

"As Severus still, despite our hints, likes Evans," Lucius mumbled. I didn't think I was meant to hear, so I ignored it.

The main dishes cleared soon after that. The afters included anything you could possibly imagine: puddings and treacle, éclairs and biscuits. To my delight, hot chamomile tea and scones appeared at my elbow. I sipped at my tea and ate one scone and one biscuit. Molly had told me that desserts were to be taken in small portions.

"So what are the teachers like?"

"McGonagall is the worst of them," said Narcissa. "She's super strict, and she rarely gives points to anyone. She teaches Transfiguration."

"But she is fair, especially for the Head of House for Gryffindor," Lucius contended. "She awards and takes points by actions alone. I think she may be color blind except she does know what House you're in when she does take or give."

"Who's our Head of House?"

"That'd be Slughorn," Illi said, pointing up at the table. "He's the walrus-y lookin' fellow there on the end. Potions master. He's a big ole pushover, though, mark my words."

"What about the Charms instructor?"

"Oh, that's Flitwick. They say he used to be a dueling champion, but... I don't know about the truth in that," Illi said. "He's the really short one there. Head of Ravenclaw House."

"Defense?" Scorpius asked around me.

Narcissa and Bellatrix scanned the table. "Don't know. Nobody new up there."

"New?"

"The position's cursed," Illi clarified. "So we get a brand-new Defense teacher every year."

"Every year?" I sighed. "Isn't that a bit... uneven?"

"Don't worry too much," Lucius said. "We self-study in our House. There's a class every Friday night by the prefects. We also do dueling on Saturdays."

"And we girls have swimming at seven every morning," Narcissa added. "To keep up our womanly figures."

"I'd love to learn how to duel and swim," I said, smiling.

Scorpius didn't comment, but shifted in his seat again. His head was ducked low, his eyes firmly on the golden plate before him.

"Don't worry, we've got great activities all the time," Lucius said. "It's all student-run, no teacher involvement."

He said this as though this was preferable, but a nagging feeling at the back of my head spoke otherwise. Ali tugged on my sleeve lightly.

"Do I get to go swimming with you, Hecate?"

"Of course you do," said Narcissa from beside her. "Do you know how already?"

Ali nodded, blushing cutely.

The platters cleared then, leaving behind only carafes of iced water. Dumbledore reclaimed his feet and the Hall went silent. I leaned in carefully to listen to him. I did, however, notice that many of my Housemates did not.

"Again, good evening, welcome, and welcome back! In these troubled times, it is doubly important that you each follow school rules closely, as they are there for your safety." Dumbledore looked especially gravely toward the Gryffindor table.

"First-years will note that the forest on the grounds is strictly forbidden. I ask that all students exercise extreme caution while out on the grounds. We have several new security measures up, but it is not prudent to test those measures.

"On a lighter note, Quidditch sign-ups will go through to the end of the week. Contact Madam Hooch for the particulars. We would also like to extend our condolences to our two new third-year Slytherins, Hecate and Scorpius Taylor, on the loss of their family and memories."

A dreadful blush colored straight through to the ends of my toenails as the whole Hall turned to stare at Scorpius and me *Again*. Whispers hissed from the other three tables. Even some of the teachers leaned over to their neighbor's ears. Dumbledore's voice rose over the whispers.

"Our new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor arrives tomorrow. She will get a proper introduction tomorrow evening at supper. With that last bit of news, I bid you all good night."

Lucius stood up abruptly and lightly called out over the table. "First-years, please remain near at least one prefect. Scorpius, Hecate, Alioth, Regulus, follow me, all right?"

The rest of the first-years gathered around another fifth-year and two sixth-years. There were a total of nine new first-years, plus Scorpius and me as the new third-years. The other seven attached themselves to the prefects, and we left the Great Hall in one rather large group.

"The Slytherin Common Room is quite near, but do keep up, you will need the password," Lucius said over his shoulder. Even then, he was graceful. His school robes billowed out behind him in an elegant sweep.

After leaving the Great Hall, we took a right through the arched doorways beyond the white marble staircase. Several doors lined this corridor, including a recessed doorway with a gargoyle seated ominously in front. Ali's hand found mine yet again; I kept pace with her.

"That's the staff room. Most of these classrooms are unused," Lucius explained, waving his hand over the doors. "Professor Slughorn allows us to use classroom six there for our study groups after supper. The door there on your left is the caretaker Filch's office. You'd do well to avoid him and his cat Mrs. Norris at all costs." On this door was a long list of banned objects.

At the end of the corridor was a set of stairs that went down and another long corridor of what looked like more unused classrooms. Exactly how many classrooms did a school need, anyway?

A door was ajar at the bottom of the steps, and a light on in the far side of the room it held. Lucius poked his head into the room.

"All right, Professor?" he said.

The portly man from the Head Table toddled out, a grin on his broad face that stretched just as wide. "Of course, Lucius, me boy, of course. I see we have our new batch of first-years." His eyes lit on Scorpius and I. "Oho! And the Taylor twins, as well. I'll see you on Friday."

With that, the man spun away, back through the door. I caught sight of a sliding panel in his office that led into what looked like a plush sitting room.

"If you ever need anything, come and see Professor Slughorn," Lucius said, continuing toward the left. "He is our Head of House."

We passed several other dungeon rooms, all of which had a silver number at the top. After passing Dungeon One, we came to a blank stretch of wall. The end of the corridor contained nothing; no other doors, no art, no gargoyles, no suits of armor. Just an empty space of wall leading to a dead end. I opened my mouth to ask where we were going when Lucius stopped. Ali kept walking forward, and I squeezed her hand to stop her from running into Lucius.

"The entrance to our dorms and common room is here," Lucius said, pointing to what looked like a perfectly solid bit of wall. "The password is 'snake charmer.'"

At the words, the wall responded by simply vanishing. No rumbling as bricks moved apart, nor moving to one side or up or down; no, it simply went away. A pale green glow came from within. Ali's hand slid in my hand as she tried to get a better grip.

Lucius led the way again. The common room was huge, about the same size as the entrance hall, but Lucius' head almost brushed the ceiling. I was glad for once I was so short. I was certain Rabastan Lestrange and Severus Snape weren't so happy for their height. Of course, Severus did not look so happy anyway, with anything.

The common room was full of armchairs in green leather and coffee tables carved with snakes. An enormous fireplace, big enough for every person I knew by name to fit in at once, stood off to the left. Two large tapestries, one green and one silver, both with our Slytherin crest hung on the far wall. Windows shimmering with pale green-blue

light sat in the far wall. On closer inspection, they opened not to the night air, but the bottom of the lake. Scones and floating candles shaped like vipers lit the remaining room.

At first glance, it looked rather terrifying. On the second, however, it had a sort of ebb and flow to it, a soothing sort of melody. That is, until Ali's hand clenched harder still than it had all night in mine.

"M-Mister... Mister Malfoy?" she murmured, her voice tight with fear. "I-Is that a-*ahuman* skull?"

My head turned so quick that I cricked my neck, but I didn't care. Sitting on the mantel of the fireplace was, in fact, a white skull. A single candle whose green wax was not melting stood inside of it, casting an eerie glow from within it.

"Oh, no," Lucius said soothingly to the girl. "That is a house-elf skull. I was just going to get to Scruffy; thank you for pointing her out, Alioth." I could feel my mouth quirk at the corners. They'd named a dead house-elf's skull? "You see, first-years, our House is much like a family. Scruffy here," he patted the skull on the top of the cranium, "is our morning wake-up call. She comes to life every morning and wakes us all up, beginning with the seventh-years and working down."

Far from looking soothed, Ali's eyes widened in terror. One of the sixth-year prefects, a girl with plain brown hair, stepped forward.

"Don't worry, she won't hurt you," she said. "Scruffy is an illusion, and she will mimic that which will make you feel most at home. The skull is just to frighten away people who are not of our House."

I glanced at the skull. "So basically it's a charm that mimics whatever means of waking up will be most familiar to an individual? For instance, if a person was used to a Muggle alarm clock that's what they'd hear?"

"Precisely," Lucius said, nodding. "I, for example, have a bucket of water dumped on my head." He gave a toothy grin, but did not elaborate.

"Are you wet in the morning, then?" I asked.

Lucius just grinned wider. "Are you?"

Several of the older students snickered, but Ali and I exchanged a confused look at the quip. Why was that funny? Scorpius, however, was glaring at Lucius, his neck and cheeks a deep pink. I decided to ask him later what it had meant.

Lucius cleared his throat. "At any rate, Scruffy will wake you at six o'clock. The second-years will help you get ready. Hecate, Scorpius, your roommates will assist you. Ladies, your dorms are under the silver tapestry, gentlemen, the green. Good night."

With that, Narcissa, Bellatrix, and Iliad appeared from out of nowhere and dragged me down under the silver tapestry.

I turned around and called, "Good night, Score!"

I hoped that he heard me.

Dream's Deductions, Part II

Chapter 8 of 18

An introduction to the Slytherin way of life just before classes begin. Introducing some new faces and answering a few questions. For instance: How do they do laundry at Hogwarts?

This is continued almost straight from the last chapter. I included the murder/character death warnings only because they alluded to in this chapter. There will be much squickier dealings later.

Disclaimer: I'd like to thank Rowling for letting us play with her characters. Such a nice authoress to us poor folk.

I wanted to have an interesting name for Blaise Zabini's mother, just because I really like the idea of her. My mother suggested I name her after a video game character, but I only heard video game when she said it. Hence, Bejeweled Zabini was born.

Chapter 6: Dream's Deductions, Part II

Narcissa and Bellatrix each had one of my arms, and Iliad prodded at my back. I didn't have any time to protest. I barely caught flashes of the hall we walked down—dark, forest green curtains with silver stitching proclaiming the numbers one through seven, and an eighth door at the far end of the hall. Under the third curtain on the right we went. The trio finally let me go. I spun out from the combined momentum, barely managing to right myself on a bedpost.

"Welcome home!" Iliad said, giving me one last push on the shoulder. "This is our dorm."

"You don't have to say the obvious, Illi."

"Well, maybe she's never seen a dorm before!" Illi said indignantly.

"She's right, I haven't," I said, coming to her defense. She had called me her sister—and to me, that meant she as good as was.

The dorm was dominated by four tasteful, large four-poster beds with long curtains the same color as the one in the door. A large wardrobe sat by each bed, along with a bedside table. The far wall was all glass, looking out into the lake beyond. Several fish swam past, their scales reflecting the moonlight from outside. The time was magically superimposed at the top of the glass in a vibrant green.

Illi stuck her tongue out at Narcissa and Bellatrix before continuing as though she hadn't been interrupted. "We share our bathroom with the rest of the girls in the dorm. I know it might seem weird, but our bath is really big. That's where we go swimming. I'll show you how to do your laundry in the morning, too."

The other girls showed me a charm for cleaning teeth—Dentibus Abluo, all three remarking how much of a pain toothbrushes are during the break. I laughed with them. It really was much easier to do things by magic. It made me keen on my seventeenth birthday—if we ever figured out what my birthday was. Then we all turned our backs on

one another and dressed for the night. I just wore another A-shirt and a pair of pajama bottoms.

We talked a bit longer, but soon the edges of my eyes began to burn. I muttered something and turned to the bed.

I struggled a moment with the hangings, keen on keeping the privacy I'd become accustomed to at home. At first, I left my wand on the bedside table. For some reason, it unnerved me to be without my wand even for a moment in this unfamiliar place. My hand snaked out soon after, curling around the vine wood and pulling it under my pillow. Much more secure, I nestled my head into the pillow, my body into the cool satin silver sheets, and fell asleep.

The Great Hall was lit up for the welcoming feast beautifully. I made my way down the center of the aisle, alone. Scorpius wasn't with me. The faces around me were scrubbed out, as though someone had placed a multifaceted bowl over each one. I was speaking to a stranger beside me.

"It's not really the sky, it's the ceiling bewitched to look like the night sky," I said to her. A woman stood at the head of the group and ushered us quickly around the front of the room, around the Sorting Hat. I stared at it. Hadn't I already been Sorted?

"Hermione Granger?" asked the woman. With a start, I realized that I had moved forward without thinking. My feet carried me all the way up to the stool. I opened my mouth to protest, to tell the woman that I most certainly was not Hermione Granger. Before I could do anything of the sort, however, my traitorous body had sat down and the Hat plunked down on my head.

"Hmm... my dear, I believe that you are going to be difficult. Plenty of smarts in that brain of yours, perfect for Ravenclaw, but your personality... it's most becoming of a Gryffindor."

"But I'm not either," I protested aloud in spite of that. "I'm a Slytherin. You've already Sorted me and my brother both."

"My dear, you show very little inclination toward Slytherin. You are Muggle-born, after all. Snape would have my brim for a biscuit if I put a Muggle-born in Slytherin."

"What does Severus have to do with any of this? And I am not Muggle-born, I am half-blood."

The Hat chortled lightly. "Miss Granger "

"My name is Hecate Taylor, thank you."

"Whatever your name is, I cannot place you in Slytherin House."

"Miss Granger, whatever is the matter with you?" asked the woman who had placed the Hat on my head. "You would rather subject yourself to Snape than be in my House? Or Filius?"

I blinked and glanced up into the eyes of a very much older McGonagall. She looked rather disappointed in me. "But I am not Miss Granger, Professor!"

McGonagall sighed. "Then join the Slytherin table, dear. I wash my hands of it."

I went and sat down, but every one of them gave me at least a ten-foot space. I sighed and set my head on my arms. A boy with white-blond hair came over to me and placed a hand on my shoulder.

"You shouldn't have come," he said, though gently. "My father will rip you apart if you don't learn to control your face and your mind, Granger. Lucius will harm you if you ever let him know who you really are."

"Malfoy?" I murmured, blinking and sniffing. Then, it dawned on me. "Draco!"

"There, you recall my name, at least," he sighed and sank into the seat. The rest of the Hall vanished around us and we were sitting in the Head Boy's chambers instead. "Have you any idea what you've gotten yourself into, Granger?"

"Don't call me that," I snipped.

"Fine. Hecate, that's the name you chose, is it? Good. You can't tell any of them who you really are, Hecate. If they catch one whiff of the idea that you're anything less than half-blood, you'll be dead in a week. Lucius will kill you to cover up any kindness he's shown you. I don't care if Dumbledore is there he will find a way."

I nodded slowly, still not sure of things. "But Draco... what is all this? Why can I remember your name? Why don't I remember things?"

"You shouldn't try to," Draco said, his face contorting in agony. "Knowing you, though, you will meticulously go through the entire library and recall everything anyway regardless of my advice. Hermione... sorry, Hecate. I changed... I changed my mind about Muggle-borns after I married Su Li, though she was half-blood. But my father has never altered his views. You're going to have to earn his trust, and then and only then can you introduce Muggle things to him. Start with something he'd be interested in. You'll find out what he likes as he tries to get in your knickers." Here he grinned.

"Yes, I can imagine so," I said sarcastically. "What do you mean me to do, stop short of seducing him?"

"That is it exactly, my dear Hecate. It's the devil's game, but you'll learn to play it easily enough from here on in."

I sighed and sank my head into my arms. "Then all of this... it's an illusion, isn't it. I'm dreaming."

"I'm long dead in the time I speak from, Hecate. My own father killed me," he said. "This is your subconscious telling you from what little you do recall. Harry and Ron would be so proud of you... I know I am. If I hadn't been so blind, I would have dated you in school. Maybe now I'll get the chance when you really come to Hogwarts as Hermione Granger in twenty years. I hope so."

I smiled wryly. "So I guess I've officially dropped my original name for the new one, then. I can't be a Hermione in this pureblood society. Shakespeare isn't wizard."

"Precisely. And you mustn't be Hermione ever again," he said. He hesitated for a minute and then hugged me awkwardly. "Ron would have loved to see you like this. So strong, so wise... you are beyond your years, Hecate Taylor."

"As are you, Draco."

He chuckled, his mouth twisted in a half-grin. "Well, I'm technically dead and you're seeing me as the same age as yourself as you recall me best, not the age I was when I died. Scorpius is my son, but... he won't be a Malfoy ever again, either. Just heed what I said, Hecate, and please don't think terribly of me after this."

"After what?" I asked.

"This." And he kissed me full on the mouth with a yearning that I would never fully feel awake. I sighed and pressed myself against him. Slowly, the reality of the moment began to fade. When I opened my eyes again, I was sitting in front of the Hall in the Hat again.

"I am not Hermione Granger any longer, Professor McGonagall," I said with venom as I stood. I placed the Hat into her outstretched hands and strode from the Hall.

I woke with a timorous gasp. The dream was so real, the boy's lips so soft and warm. Who was he? I racked my brain, trying to re-emerge the memories that had opened up subconsciously. Nothing came back fully, just like the memory flash in Diagon Alley. I groaned in frustration.

The only thing that remained was that I had recalled the name. A name. It was rather large, and fuzzy in my mind. Still, like trying to put yarn through a regular sewing needle, it was impossible. Her... Her... something. I sighed and sat up. Through the cracks in my hangings, I could see the time 5:55.

Everyone would be waking up in only five minutes time. I sighed heavily once again and began pulling a new set of robes out for the day. Illi, Bellatrix, and Narcissa all stirred five minutes later, sleepily doing the same.

"C'mon," Illi said, grasping my elbow after grabbing just knickers, a bra, her skirt, and her shirt. "I'll show you how to do laundry. Grab something that's dirty."

Obediently, I placed my school shirt from yesterday on the pile of clean clothes. Illi led the way down the hall. Little Ali and the other two female first-years came out of their curtain. I took a moment to study the little girl. I hadn't really had the chance to do so in the light of day.

Her hair wasn't blond, precisely, but rather a very pale reddish color that reminded me of strawberries and cream. Her cheeks were so pale they glowed even in the dim light of the hall. Her eyes were a washed-out looking green, and right at that moment they were smiling shyly up at me.

"Good morning, Ali," I said.

"Morning, Heck," she said, grinning. "These are my dorm mates, Bejeweled Zabini and Kitalus Horntail. But she likes Kiti instead."

Bejeweled was a tall girl for her age and had sumptuous chocolate skin and beautiful slanted eyes that glittered with flecks of gold amongst honey. Kiti looked much like her nickname's sake: tiny, kittenish, and playful. Her hair was a wildly-curling combination of pale pink, white blond, and strands the color of freshly-cut blood. Eyes the color of molten silver graced her wide eyes, and her cupid's bow lips were the same color as the pink portion of her hair. My mind supplied it before I even got a chance to take her in: Metamorphmagus.

"It's nice to meet you," I said, smiling at the two girls.

Illi touched my shoulder. "Well, come on, then, Ali, Kiti, Bejeweled. I was about to show Hecate how to do laundry, so you can watch her, too."

Kiti and Bejeweled made almost identical looks of distaste on their faces, to which Illi just laughed. "Well, if you really don't want to have clean clothes this term..."

That hustled all four of us into the back curtain. What met my eyes was entirely outside of what I had expected.

When Illi had mentioned that our baths doubled as our swimming pool, I hadn't thought it would be quite so... large. The room itself was roughly half the size of the Great Hall, with the low ceiling I was now used to seeing from the Slytherin common room. However, it was made of glass, showing off a disconcerting view of the underside of the lake.

At the center of the room was a literal lake, right there underneath the real one overhead. Huge granite boulders bordered the clear, steaming blue water. Alcoves, big enough for two or three, sunk down by some of the boulders, six-foot waterfalls flowing into them. I noticed that there were several types of soap sitting on a shelf inside the nearest one. Illi gestured toward some swimming sixth- and seventh-year girls, whom were all nude. Some had large breasts, others smaller, and some had broad hips, and others narrow. None, however, had large waists.

"All right, then, come on over here," Illi said, pointing to another area of the room. This particular corner had a table, a large hole at one end of it. "Put your shirt in the hole, Heck."

I did as told, and to a squeal of delight from the three first-years, it reappeared folded neatly on the table beside the hole. I grinned indulgently at Ali. "Now that's convenient."

"It'll do that for anything," Illi said. "Come along, girls."

Illi led the way over to yet another corner where several clothes sat on more tables by a long series of toilet stalls. I set my clean clothes down there. Somehow nervous, I sent my gaze back toward Illi. She was stripping.

Ali, Kiti, and Bejeweled all exchanged glances. Then, slowly, Bejeweled tugged at her black camisole, revealing barely-formed breasts. Ali, Kiti, and I followed Illi and Bejeweled's movements. Nonchalant, Illi shimmied into one of the alcoves. Kiti and Bejeweled followed her.

"Come on, Ali," I said. "We'll find our own."

She grinned and took my hand. Together, we stood under one of the granite waterfalls, luxuriating in the experience of rough water pounding on our heads. Now I understood why Buddhist monks did this it truly felt as though I were cleansing all of my soul. Ali drew me out from under the water and offered up a bit of cloth and soap shyly. I studied her body surreptitiously while I soaped myself. She was adorably shy in many regards and painfully so in others. Her body had yet to start developing her breasts. She was definitely a late-bloomer.

"Don't forget behind your ears," I said, tapping her slight nose. "Or I'll do it for you."

She laughed and obeyed after another moment. We finished washing and clambered up the stones and into the pool. Illi, Narcissa, and Bellatrix were taking laps on the far edge of the pool. They looked so somber, as though this were a serious part of their daily routine. Recalling the way the waterfall had made me feel, I could see why.

"Can you swim?" Ali asked.

I grinned at her. "Nope. How about you teach me?"

Her pretty little face lit up in both embarrassment and pleasure. "Sure. Um... just... get in the water, first."

I must have learned to swim before because I caught on rather quickly. Ali clapped her hands in pure joy at having known something to teach me. I didn't disabuse her the notion that she'd been summarily helpful. There was precious little she was proud of.

Unfortunately for every student in the school in my opinion it was a Sunday. The nervous excitement of my first lesson the next morning made my knees bounce, and I unconsciously chewed on my lower lip for the rest of the day.

Lucius and Illi seemed to have taken me personally under their wings. They spent the entire day teaching me about pureblood manners at the table and in various other social situations. By the time dinner was winding down, my head was spinning.

"Why do the tines have to point down?" I asked, flipping the fork over for the umpteenth time.

"Pointing them up is American," Illi said, not answering my question at all.

"And that's bad?" I asked, spearing a tiny bit of my steak. Before, I'd always just cut it all up and be done with it. Pureblood table manners dictated (literally) that I had to knife each and every piece off separately. Knife in right hand, fork in left. I wanted to grind my teeth. Had I known all this before? Learning a lifetime of information was increasingly getting on my nerves.

That night, I had another dream.

I sat in the Gryffindor common room, entirely shocked to be there at all. A red-haired boy was it the same one? sat beside me, and a black-haired boy who looked much like James Potter sat on the other side. Both had their hands on my shoulders in sympathetic comfort.

"We know," said the red-head. "We know you don't know us."

"We're your best friends," said the Potter look-alike. "I'm Harry Potter, and that's Ron Weasley. And you're Hermione Granger."

"No, I'm not," I said, heatedly. "Why do people keep calling me that?"

The red-head smiled sadly. "It's your name. You were Obliviated, remember? I'm..." He choked a little on the words. "I was your husband. We have two children, Rose and Hugo. And Harry married my little sister, Ginny. She was a good friend of yours, too. They have three children. James, Lily, and little Albus Severus."

I blinked, staring between the two. "But... I'm only thirteen!"

"Technically you're something like fifteen, mate," Ron said, chuckling. "You're from our past. You just finished your third year. Scorpius was just going into his, Hermione."

"What do you want from me?" I asked.

"We sent you back in time to help," Harry explained. "But you had to be Obliviated. You won't remember anything you ever dream of us, or recall. It'll slip away before you can recall. But you'll remember feelings and intuitions, sort of like we're nudging you in the right direction."

Ron chuckled. "You told him to tell you that, by the way."

Harry blushed and mock-punched the other boy. "Don't tell her that; I like feeling smart for once!"

Both boys dissolved into laughter. I couldn't help to smile, too.

"Why won't I remember?" I asked.

"Kinda ingenious, really, but what else would we ever expect from you, oh insufferable know-it-all?" Ron grinned. "You made a potion that would destroy every memory that is not in line with the timeline you are currently present in. You won't remember what you know outside of your subconscious mind."

Harry grinned. "And you told him to tell you that, too."

I chuckled as the boy reddened considerably. He sighed, staring at me with adoring eyes. "I do miss you, though, sweet. I love you. Our kids... wherever they are, they loved you, too."

I couldn't help but smile at the pair of them. "You really are my friends, aren't you..."

"Yes," Harry said. "We're kinda hoping to um, be born, though."

I nodded. "Understandable. Well... I guess I better go."

"We love you, Hermione."

The dream slipped away with my Muggle alarm clock's raucous ringing. I seized hold of the final parting words of the two unknowable boys. My name. My name is Hermione. I held fast to it, repeating the information again and again in my mind. I pulled out a piece of parchment quickly, as I could feel it leeching away with the rest.

Hecate Hermione Taylor.

It wasn't an answer, entirely, but it was enough.

An Eventful First Day

Chapter 9 of 18

Scorps is a prat, Heck learns the student role, Professor Vector rectifies a huge mistake, friendships cemented, the new DADA professor, and a glimpse of life with Severus and Lily. Eventful first day, indeed.

I debated on splitting this chapter as well, but decided I'd only do that if it reached sixteen pages again. More musings are up on my LJ (www.hpmuse.livejournal.com). No new drawings.

There's more information on the Sociology idea of "learning the student role" and how I came up with the Slytherin schedule on the LJ.

Heaps of thanks on the TPP staff for everything they've done for me thus far!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter. I do not make money off of this story. I am a poor starving college student. The only thing you'll get by killing me is my massive debt to

the government.

Chapter 9: An Eventful First Day

My first day of classes began much the way the day before had: pureblood manners lessons. Lucius and Illiad were both adamant on my perfection of reigning in my facial expressions, of walking as though I constantly carried books atop my cranium, and eating with my tines down.

Ali, Illi, Lucius and I sat around the table in the Great Hall for breakfast. The owls had yet to arrive, and most of the tables were full by that time.

"Ooh-s-tee ooh-luh, your arms," Illiad reminded me lightly.

Ali and I both guiltily pulled our elbows back, exchanging an amused glance. Scorpius appeared at just that moment, sliding into the seat by me. He had gone strangely silent and reclusive ever since he'd first sat down at the Slytherin table. His murmured "good morning" sounded strained.

Before I could ask what was wrong, however, Lucius had placed a hand on my arm around little Ali's shoulders. He shook his head minutely, nodding toward my honey-haired brother. I nodded slowly and returned my attention to my bacon, eggs, and toast.

Professor Slughorn waddled into the Great Hall through the teacher's entrance in what I suppose should have been a tasteful set of satin black robes and white shirt. The effect, however, ended up making him look more like an extremely chubby penguin, sleek from returning onto the ice. He headed straight for us, so I wasn't surprised by his words.

"Taylor twins, knew I'd find you together!"

I smiled brightly at the ginger-haired man, but Scorpius just nodded sullenly. I frowned in his direction. Slughorn was unperturbed by the lack of enthusiasm from my brother. He handed us each a schedule. He rifled through his stack of papers, handing Ali, Lucius, and Illi each their own piece of parchment.

I studied mine as he began to move away.

Monday:

9am Herbology

11am Arithmancy

Tuesday:

9am Herbology

11am: History of Magic

Wednesday:

9am Charms

11am Transfiguration

Midnight Astronomy

Thursday:

9am Herbology

11am DADA

Friday:

9am Potions

11am Ancient Runes

Lucius glanced over at my schedule around little Ali it was hardly a feat worth mentioning, considering his height and hers. He smiled gently.

"Ancient Runes and Arithmancy? Interesting that you would choose those particular courses, Hecate."

"I like how the runes interact with our wand movements and such, and I think Arithmancy has merit in Potions." I shrugged eloquently. "I like them."

"There have been several proving statements about how the runes interact with wand movements, especially with laguz and dagaz," Lucius said. "I'm in Vector's and Babbling's classes."

"Are you going to keep them at N.E.W.T. level?" I asked.

"Possibly. They have merit, of course."

Ali looked back and forth between us, then down at her schedule. "How come I don't have anything like that?"

Scorpius' silence after the question made me all the more worried. He would have jumped at the chance to answer a question like that before.

"You start extracurriculars in third-year," Illi said, smiling from her place across the table. "Don't you worry, Ali. You'll get your chance for those classes, and more. I'm in Care of Magical Creatures and Divination."

Lucius snorted in a most unpolite manner; Illi glared at him. "Divination is a bunch of rot, and you know it, Parkinson."

"Oh, and calculating it all up in numbers or with ancient letters we're only just beginning to rediscover isn't?" She snapped back. In spite of her seated position, she had her fist on her hip, managing to look both comical and deadly at the same time.

"Stop arguing, you two," I said sharply, trying not to laugh. "You're both entitled to your opinion, but don't sway Ali's before she even gets the chance to know what they are."

Regulus Black chose that moment to sit down by Illi across from Ali. "Don't sway Ali's opinion of what?" He gave her a grin before returning his puzzled gaze to me. Scorpius glared at him for no apparent reason, but I answered Regulus without letting Score's odd behavior effect me.

"Lucius and Illi were arguing over the merits of Divination, Arithmancy, and Ancient Runes," I said, watching as Slughorn recrossed the hall to present Regulus with his schedule. I studiously ignored Scorpius throughout the exchange.

"My mum says they're all important," Regulus said. "But it's easier to interpret Arithmancy because it's mathematics. Divination's harder to do because it's so subjective."

I scowled at the boy for pressing the issue, but I noticed that Illi and Lucius had stopped arguing the point. Maybe Regulus' easy support of both subjects had caused a ceasefire. Illi sighed as Bellatrix and Narcissa took their seats by Regulus, soon followed by Andromeda.

"Well, come on, Hecate. Let's go get our books for the day."

Scorpius didn't come with us. It wasn't until Illi and I were halfway out of the Hall that I glanced back. Lucius met my eyes and pointed toward what I secretly considered Severus' end of the table.

The black-haired loner was no where to be seen. Across from his usual place was my brother, slumped over his plate with a general scowl planted firmly on his cheeks.

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Our first class of the day was out on the grounds in the greenhouses. The gentle scent of dew hung in the air like swinging vines in the jungle, fading in and out. The grass was so green it matched our ties. We didn't have long to wait for class to begin, but the professor took Score and I aside as the last of the Ravenclaws began to show up.

Scorpius was still sulking. Actually, now that I had a better look at him, he had very dark circles under his eyes like he hadn't slept at all.

Professor Sprout was a kindly, chubby woman with flyaway grey hair. The moment she had us alone, she told us to find someone to learn how to be a student from. Sprout also presented us both with a copy of Van Camp's *How to Write an Outstanding Essay*.

At first, her statement struck me as odd. But then again, I realized, I had never been a student before. As I learned later, I didn't know to raise my hand to speak, to take notes in class, how to write an essay, or how to take a test. I had a vague idea of it from what little I had read in Muggle fiction books that was it.

Illi took it upon herself to teach me everything. I didn't notice whether Score had teamed up with someone else I was too caught up in the experiences of friendship, scholarship, and socialization.

I spent most of my first class observing the others while the professor lectured. Narcissa and Bellatrix promised Illi and me their notes. Illi spent the whole of the class period teaching me how to take notes.

"Don't write every word she says, only what you think is important. If you recall it from the book, be sure to note it down it's definitely important then."

Sprout only gently reprimanded me for talking out of turn the first time. She then assigned us our first homework assignment, an essay on the properties and care of St. John's Wort.

Illi, Severus, Scorpius, and only one other Slytherin boy whose name I didn't know yet took Arithmancy. Professor Vector was a little older than Professor McGonagall, but no less severe. Since it was just the four of us, Vector was keen on drawing us into her lecture.

It was in that class that I made my first mistake.

"Good afternoon, class! I am Professor Septima Vector, and I welcome you to Arithmancy. We will be considering ourselves mostly with the Agrippa methodology, considering that most other numerology works better with languages aside from English. I assume we all speak that language, correct?"

There were some half-hearted nods and weak chuckles at this.

"Now, this subject has a lot of uses in Potions and Ancient Runes, as well as some types of Divination. For today's class, I'd like you to work out what your character number, heart number, and social number are. We'll go from there once you've finished."

I raised my hand. "Our full names, Professor?"

"Yes, if you have a middle name, use it." I chewed on my lower lip and decided that yes, I would need to do this. Hecate Hermione Taylor.

"Has everyone got it?" Professor Vector asked. When no one asked for more time, she continued. "Your character number represents you as a general person. Don't put too much emphasis on this because it can be incorrect. For instance, I am a four and I do not usually behave like a four. How many came up with four?"

My hand shot into the air, as did Scorpius' and Severus'. Illi and the other boy's hands stayed on their desk. I blinked in confusion at Severus. If my quick calculations were correct, his name came out to a two, not a four. Did he have a hidden middle name, too?

"Hmm, how interesting," Vector said, looking between the three of us. "It's rather unusual for siblings to have the same number, even more so for a half a class." I shrugged at this. "At any rate, fours are said to be shy, withdrawn, and very intellectual. They prefer logic and reason. However, they can be quite stubborn and prone to anger."

I laughed aloud at that. That sounded like me, all right, and it definitely sounded like Severus to a point, from what little I knew of him. Not so much Scorpius, but it fit well enough. The class continued on with her going back to the number one, and explaining briefly what each character number represented. I took meticulous notes in spite of the fact that I'd already memorized all of this. Illi just smiled indulgently.

I leaned over to whisper. "Am I doing it wrong?"

"Miss Taylor!" Professor Vector's voice was sharp. "I do not tolerate whispers in my classroom. A point from Slytherin. Do not let it happen again."

Confused, I exchanged a glance with Scorpius and Illi both. Score didn't even bother to make any sort of answer to my usual gaze. It hurt.

The professor, however, had continued on to heart numbers and social numbers, leaving everyone scrambling to keep up their notes. When class was over, Professor Vector called for Scorpius and I to stay behind.

"You don't have any classes after this, correct?" she asked. We shook our heads mutely. "Headmaster Dumbledore has told me all about your exceptional skills. However, I must warn you that you cannot be shown any special treatment." Here she looked at me, her eyes inscrutable. "So I am going to replace the point you lost, Miss Taylor, but take it as a warning. That is what will happen if you behave as such in my classroom again."

"Yes, Professor," I said, feeling my face turn hot.

"Now. I also have noticed that you do not have birthdays listed on your student files," she said. Her eyes glittered with mirth. "I believe I have a solution. If I may see your wands?"

Confused but nonetheless obedient, I produced my wand from my sleeve. Scorpius spent about a minute rooting morosely through his bag to produce his. Vector frowned at him, clicking her tongue.

"Mr. Taylor, I might suggest that you keep your wand at a more accessible location for future references."

Scorpius murmured, but I didn't hear his reply. Vector then placed our wands on her desk and began to cast several spells on each of them. Brilliant gold and red light flashed above both wands. Vector's eyebrows shot up higher and higher as more letters and numbers and then runes appeared. At last the spells ceased, and Vector turned to us.

"Extraordinary. It seems... I'm sorry to say, but it seems you've been mis-Sorted."

"M-Mis-Sorted?" I stammered. "That can't be."

"My dear girl, your wands have both displayed characters conducive to Gryffindors, not Slytherins. How the Hat could have made such a mistake, I don't know."

Scorpius and I exchanged glances. I didn't know what to say. Already, I felt that I had gone wrong with this teacher. To argue with further her might prove disastrous.

"We'll have to go see the Headmaster," Vector said, almost to herself. "Yes, I think that will work. Come along, Taylors."

Scorpius and I trailed along behind Professor Vector. Just outside the classroom door, Illi was waiting for us. "Professor?"

"Not now, Miss Parkinson."

I glanced at her, trying to will her to understand. She nodded once and turned away. I sighed and widened my steps to keep up with the fast-moving Arithmancy professor. Her classroom was on the second floor. We had gone up three flights of stairs already, and she didn't look ready to stop yet.

She paused only to ask a passing Ravenclaw to tell her class she would be back in just a few moments. All the way up on the seventh floor, she stopped at long last by a boar gargoyle.

"Pepsi-Cola," she said.

To my surprise, the gargoyle leapt to the side, revealing a spiral set of stairs that were moving upwards. Vector ushered us onto them first, then stepped on herself. On the landing was a short hallway and an oak door at the end. Vector knocked. I filed that away for later to ask Illi when do I knock on a door? Molly had always mentioned to knock on Remus' door, but I had assumed it only went for outside doors.

"Enter," came Dumbledore's voice from the other side.

Vector steered us both by the shoulder into the room. I felt my breath catch in my throat at the sight.

The Headmaster's office was a room round in shape and filled with all sorts of unbelievable silver trinkets, enormous books, and numerous portraits. The windows revealed a beautiful view of the Quidditch pitch and the Forbidden Forest. On spindly tables throughout the office sat silver instruments, only one of which I recognized from my readings: a Pensieve. Fawkes the phoenix was nowhere to be seen, though a gilded perch sat beside Dumbledore's claw-footed desk.

"Ah, Professor Vector!" Dumbledore proclaimed, his pale blue eyes twinkling at us instead. "I trust our Taylor twins are not in trouble already?"

"Not trouble, no, Headmaster," she said. "I cast the Notitia Charm on their wands. They may need to be re-Sorted."

"Oh? Hecate, Scorpius, may I see your wands, please?"

I had only once heard about the Notitia Charm, and now that I saw it being cast yet again, I knew why. The charm required not only incantations, but a knowledge of runes, of the numbers being used, and the intent of the caster. There were several new numbers and words that came up over both our wands that hadn't been there when Vector cast the charm.

"What does all that tell you?" I asked.

"It tells me, Hecate, that you two have either attended this school before, or you've been taught by someone who did. Since the former is impossible, I'm willing to take a gamble that your parents, whomever they were, taught you at home." Dumbledore regarded us over his glasses. "And did a rather splendid job of it, I might add."

"But what do you mean, re-Sorted?" I asked, barely restraining a shrill note of panic in my voice. Scorpius remained silent.

"Your parents were Gryffindors," Dumbledore said, delicately. He chose his next words carefully. "You see, the Hat chose the House you are currently in based off of what it could see at the time in your mind. It did not see what your wands have stored in their magical cores."

I stared the Headmaster straight in the eye. "So what do we do?"

Dumbledore steepled his gnarled hands on the desk in lieu of an answer. After he seemed to think for several minutes, he spoke to Vector first. "You may go, Professor, I know you have a class now."

Vector nodded once and left without another word. As soon as the door shut, he continued.

"You have a choice." He waved his wand wordlessly, and the Sorting Hat flew into his hands. "Discuss with the Hat your options, and then you can choose to stay in Slytherin House, or move to Gryffindor." He offered the Hat to me first.

"*Hmm, back again, Hecate?*"

"*I... the Headmaster says you may have mis-Sorted me.*"

"*Oh, I doubt it. As Gryffindor as some of your tendencies are, you are far more Slytherin in your approaches. Thinking before acting, gathering up useful people, manipulating them...*"

"*So... I should just stay Slytherin.*"

I breathed a sigh of relief at its single-word answer. "Yes."

Dumbledore pulled the Hat off my head, sometime during my short discussion having come round the desk. "I trust you have your answer?"

"It said I should stay Slytherin," I said.

Scorpius tapped me on the shoulder, his voice very quiet. "Hecate... can I talk to you for a minute? Sir, is that all right?"

"Of course," Dumbledore said. He set the Hat on his desk and waved his hand at one of the bookshelves. It flew open to reveal a tiny hallway. "When you are ready, tap the shelf three times."

He vanished into the hall.

Scorpius remained silent for several minutes in spite of the privacy. I opened my mouth to ask what he wanted to say when finally he spoke. "Hecate, what will you do if the

Hat says that we should separate?" Scorpius asked, his voice still very soft. "Will you be all right without me?"

I thought of my new friends, especially Iliad and Lucius. They had welcomed me into their circle, embraced me into their lives. "I'll be fine. But will you?"

He hesitated, his beautiful eyes darting toward the Hat. "Hecate... I don't feel right in this House, even after only two nights. The others... they don't accept me, not like Remus, James, and Sirius do. Sin even told me... never mind. Everything will be fine, though, if I do move to Gryffindor?"

That's when it clicked into place. "You told the Hat to put you in Slytherin... to protect me?"

He nodded. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to... but..." He smiled wryly. "It looks like you definitely don't need your brother's protection after all."

"You're my brother, not my keeper," I told him, but I grinned anyway. "It's fine. If you're supposed to be a Gryffindor, so be it."

He nodded once and turned to knock on the bookshelf. Dumbledore reappeared seconds later. "I trust everything is all right?"

Scorpius nodded. "I don't need to ask the Hat, sir. I'd like to transfer into Gryffindor, if that's all right."

Dumbledore nodded gravely. "Then it is done. Scorpius D. Taylor, as Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, I pronounce you a Gryffindor."

As soon as Dumbledore's words had finished, the green of Scorpius' clothes had changed to red, his silver into gold, and his crest from that of a snake to that of a lion. As with the night we had crossed the lake, I could not help but quote in my head another snippet from *Hogwarts, A History*.

It is a rare event for a student to transfer Houses. A total of seven such cases have existed. In 1257, Dewert Julians transferred from Hufflepuff to Ravenclaw when her Sorting was tampered with via a Confundus Charm. Ingrid Yule in 1386 (Hufflepuff to Gryffindor); Jules Greene in 1399 (Hufflepuff to Ravenclaw); and Howard Soue in 1720 (Hufflepuff to Slytherin) all had similar cases. The other three cases, Hugh Jones, Ralph Huntington, and Belinda Croise, were all transferred out of Slytherin House with no known reason. It is speculated that they were Muggle-born, but documentation is lacking in all three cases. The most recent of these was Mr. Huntington, who was changed over to Gryffindor in 1818.

I tried not to laugh. Scorpius had made it into my favorite book just by pure choice. Already, he made history. He was the first transfer out of Slytherin House who couldn't be speculated against. We all knew why he was going to Gryffindor. It didn't make it any easier on me.

Dumbledore smiled his dismissal. "Consequently, Hecate, Scorpius, your birthday is the twentieth of October."

I went to the Slytherin dorms alone. I managed to get into the dorm halls before the tears started falling. I drew my curtains in around my bed and buried my head into the pillow so that, I hoped, no one could hear. I should have known it was futile.

"Hecate?" Ili's voice came. "Are you all... are you all right, ooh-s-ti ooh-luh?"

The endearment only made me cry harder. Her hands found my back, soft and small between my shoulderblades. She made tiny circles on the muscles there. It made me feel a little better, but not by much.

"What's wrong?" Ili asked quietly.

I didn't answer.

"Hecate, you've got to talk about it if you want to feel better."

I just shook my head in the pillow. Ili left, and I thought perhaps she would leave me be. I should have known better, again. It wasn't Ili who came this time, but Lucius. He sat down on the bed next to my head and pulled me gently up, up into his arms. His voice was gentle, his movements soothing.

"Whatever is the matter, love?" he asked. His hands traced circles on my spine, large and warm, his fingers firm but soothing. "You are worrying your friends."

"S-Scorpius," I murmured into his shoulder, a fresh wave of tears falling.

"What did Scorpius do?" Lucius said, his tone smooth.

"He's transferring out of Slytherin," I said sullenly. "To Gryffindor."

Lucius' arms tightened around me, his right trailing up into my hair. His fingers slowly brushed down through it, catching all the tangles tenderly. The movements were relaxing, lulling me to sleep.

"It will be all right, Hecate, love," Lucius said. "You can still see him. He isn't moving far, just up into Gryffindor tower."

"I k-know," I murmured. "I fe-feel so stupid, but..."

"Shush, little sister, shush," Lucius said. "I know. Don't think on it. Come, Iliad and Sin told me how your Arithmancy class went today. I'll help you with your homework for that and Herbology."

He reached up and dried my eyes with the sleeves of his uniform.

Soon, I was laughing again at Lucius' character number, which suggested he was "insecure." Ali, Ili, Narcissa, and Bellatrix joined in making fun of his supposed insecurities after that.

After all, it was not as though I had lost Scorpius yet.

My first week of school was an exercise of trial, error, and endless new delights. Ili and Lucius helped me write my first few homework assignments, but left me be after I started adding more than they did. I learned quickly how to act in each of my classes. Of course, I found myself rather melancholy when I discovered that the only class I would have with my brother would be Potions on Friday morning.

Soon, I had met each of the other people in my year. Rodolphus Lestrange was Rabastan's younger brother, and then there was Sin Avery, Henry Wilkes, and Evan Rosier. Of course, no one ever forgot to mention Severus Snape. However, he seemed keen on being left out.

In spite of the promise that the teacher would be introduced at supper one night, I did not meet my Defense Against the Dark Arts professor until the first class on Thursday morning. Most of the others were close-lipped about her, so that we wouldn't ruin our own interpretations of whoever it was. I stood outside the DADA classroom with Ili, Cissa, Bella, Sin, Henry, Rabastan, Severus, and Evan at eleven o'clock that Thursday morning. The fourth-floor classroom swung open of its own accord at five minutes till.

A short, chubby woman with wild blue eyes and swirling salt-and-pepper hair stood at the head of the class. She waited patiently till all of us were seated and then shut the door with a hissing noise.

"Welcome to your third year," said she. "This year, you will focus on Dark creatures in particular. I trust that you've had a decent enough exposure to introductory portions

of this course?"

There was an assenting rumble.

"Good. I am Professor Bellybutter. We will begin our foray into the unknown with a simple creature. Buddy, heel."

A medium-sized dog sat down at her feet, hiding its tail conspicuously behind itself. Professor Bellybutter appraised us each with her wide eyes, as though looking for something in particular.

"You, young man, what's your name?"

She pointed at Severus.

"Snape," he said shortly. My eyes widened. I had never before heard him speak. He had a chilling voice: smooth and crisp like nutmeg and apple butter freshly put under a Cooling Charm.

"Mr. Snape, what is this creature sitting at my heels?"

"A Crup, Professor Bellybutter."

"Very good, Mr. Snape. What do you know about crups?"

He took a moment to think, regarding the dog for a moment. "They are extremely loyal to those who have magic and ferocious toward those who aren't. Their tails must be removed by the age of six months, by law. The tails themselves are used in potions which require an enhancement of the magical elements of other ingredients therein."

"Very good, Mr. Snape, five points to Slytherin. Now, can anyone tell me why they would be considered a Dark creature, when they are so relatively harmless?"

No one raised their hands.

"Miss Taylor, how about you? Venture a guess?"

"Well, Dark arts is sometimes defined by intent alone," I said slowly. "So wouldn't their ferocious nature toward nonmagic beings be enough? They intend harm on anything lacking magic, after all."

"Very good deduction, Miss Taylor, another five points!" Professor Bellybutter grinned at us. "Now, Buddy here has had his tail cropped, of course. Tell me, have any of you ever seen an actual Jack Russel terrier before?"

No one had.

Professor Bellybutter continued on to lecture on the differences between a real Jack Russel and a crup. When class let out a half hour later, she gave us a half-foot essay homework to describe those differences.

"At least she seems to know what she's doing," Illi said with a grateful sigh. "I'm guessing she's going to start us out on less-dangerous Dark creatures, and then we get to things like werewolves and vampires toward the end of term or the year."

"Looks like it," I agreed. "Let's go get this essay done, then we can go for a swim."

Illi groaned. "You and homework! Should have been a Ravenclaw, the way you are. Are you sure you've lost all your memories, or did you pick up that mothering style from Molly?"

"No, I just like being ahead," I said, grinning. "Come on, then."

Reluctantly, Illi followed me up to the library. Lucius met us at the door, though he was working on his Astronomy homework.

"They're really loading us down," Lucius said, a light scowl crossing his brow. "Though I do understand it is O.W.L. year."

"Just you watch, Lucius," I said, pointing to his homework. "If you keep on top of this, you'll get all of the O.W.L.s you need for whatever you want to do."

Illi giggled. "Lucius isn't getting the O.W.L.s for whatever he wants to do; he's getting them so Abraxas'll stay off his arse."

"Too right, that," Lucius muttered.

"Molly seems to think that I do fine all on my own," I said, shrugging. "She's proud of me no matter what."

She had never really said it to me, but I could sense that it was true.

"Lucky," Illi and Lucius both intoned.

A squeal of loud laughter came from the other side of the library. The source of it was a red-haired Gryffindor girl and a mortified-looking Severus Snape. The Gryffindor just grinned at him, playfully punching him in the arm. I couldn't hear anything else, but Madam Pince's glare silenced the Gryffindor.

"Who's that girl with Severus?" I asked.

"That would be Lily Evans," Illi said. She sighed, cradling her head on her wrist. "He's absolutely smitten with her, and I doubt she sees him as anything more than a friend. His heart's just gonna break one of these days..."

Lucius grimaced. "I just hope he realizes that there are people in his own House willing to pick up the pieces."

Eyeing the Gryffindor, I scowled. "I can see why he likes her. She's beautiful."

A hand cupped my chin. Lucius smiled warmly into my eyes, his own grey-blues dancing as his thumb caressed my cheek. "Love, she cannot hold a candle to you."

"Oh, stop flattering me, Malfoy," I said, grinning. "I'm nothing, no one. I barely have a personality."

"Au contraire, mademoiselle," he said, in perfect French. "You are gorgeous, like the devil herself. Charming, alluring, and seductive."

My cheeks burned under his touch. "Yes, well... thank you."

He chuckled good-naturedly and withdrew his hand. Before he could press the issue or, heaven help me, move on to a different topic a loud noise startled us all. Turning back around, I scowled again. Evans and Severus had somehow managed to turn their table over on top of themselves. In movements quick as thunder follows lightning, Lucius and James descended on the two, helping their Housemates up.

Evans tore herself from James' arms in a huff, but Severus grudgingly thanked Lucius before turning back to the Gryffindor girl. It all happened in less than a minute. The

library returned to its previous hum then.

"It happens every fucking time, and he's just too blind to see it," Lucius scowled, sitting rather harshly back down.

"What does?" I asked.

"Potter cast the spell to turn the table over," Illi explained. She pointed out where he was standing, and sure enough, it would have covered up the view of what he was doing both from anyone in authority and my own vantage point.

"I can't do anything about it unless I actually see it," Lucius continued on. "So I can't deduct points from Gryffindor for it!"

Illi patted his arm. "There, there, Lu, it's all right." She drawled, half teasing. "Severus will get back at them, on his own time."

"How?" I asked.

"Oh, this has been going on ever since Severus showed up on the Hogwarts Express in shorts our first year," Illi explained. "The Marauders that is, Potter, Black, Lupin, and Pettigrew are pranksters, and their favorite target is Severus."

"But that's ridiculous!" I said, keeping my voice to an insistent hiss. "I'm going to talk to Remus, he's got to be able to do something."

I was already halfway up when Lucius grabbed my elbow. "Don't, love." He shook his head. "Severus has already asked us all to leave it be. He will take care of it."

"Yeah, I see how he 'takes care of it,'" I grumbled, pulling my DADA book out more forcefully than necessary. "He just hexes them back. Remus would put a stop to it, I'm sure. He listens to reason."

"Lupin doesn't like it any more than you do," Illi said, her lips spreading in a crooked grin. "But he's too desperate for their friendship to try and stop them having their fun."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"I can read between the lines, love," Illi said. "We'll teach you how. It's a usual Slytherin tactic. You know, subtlety, cunning, that whole deal."

I just chuckled at her, not knowing that soon, I would be exactly as she'd said I would be a Slytherin.

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"Notitia" is loosely translated as "data."

St. John's Wort is a real herb that is often used in people with clinical depression. In mild cases, it's more effective than most antidepressants.

Crups are one of JK's inventions, not mine. Its associations with Darkness are mentioned in PoA only in passing; the reasoning is mine. Uses in potions are also my design. I own a Jack Russel myself, and no, his tail is not docked nor forked.

The simple Arithmancy used in the opening class is derived from this site: <http://www.sorcererscompanion.net/arithmancy.html>. Lucius, being a seven, is said to be "pessimistic, sarcastic, and insecure."

Of Blood and Creed

Chapter 10 of 18

Heck's first encounter with her brother is a bit uncomfortable. A letter from Molly makes Heck think twice about her odd chills and dreams. Heck is introduced to the Slytherin Creed in her first DADA study session. Are the older students ever in for a surprise!

Sorry for the wait, I'm in the midst of college finals! No new LJ posts, but by the time this is up there should be two new drawings up of Severus and Hermione on my deviantart. The link is in my profile. A huge thanks to the TPP staff for everything they've done thus far for me!

Happy Beltane, all!

Disclaimer:

She created the pitch,

And the lil Golden Snitch,

I play in her land's tale,

Without making a sale.

Please don't sue lil ole me,

I own nothing but tea.

Chapter 10: Of Blood and Creed

Friday morning dawned bright and early. As was our custom now, I met Ali at the door to the bathroom. We showered under the waterfall and swam laps in the hot, soothing water until eight-twenty. Usually by that time, the others had already left for the Great Hall for breakfast. Owls came at eight-thirty though, so we hurried to dress and raced each other up the stairs to the Great Hall.

I wasn't anticipating any kind of post. There were only a handful of people who knew me at all. Most of them resided at Hogwarts. So imagine my surprise when a barn owl unceremoniously dropped a letter on my eggs, partially soaking the parchment with oil and salt.

"Open it, Heck, open it!" Ali encouraged me when I just stared at it.

I did and gasped in delight. "It's from Molly!"

Dear Hecate,

I heard about Scorpius getting transferred over, so I thought I should owl you to make sure you're all right. How are your classes going, dear? I imagine you're going to go to the last ones when you get this owl, so you can answer in full afterwards.

Let me know when your first Hogsmeade weekend is so that I can send you some spending money. Dumbledore said that you're making friends already. Be sure and tell them hello for me!

By the way, a little birdie told me you've been having strange dreams. When you were here, you were taking a small dose of Dreamless Sleep with the potions from St. Mungo's. So I imagine that your dreams may be side effects of being weaned off it. Have you felt any more of those odd chills? Be sure to eat well, dear, I don't want an emaciated girl home for Christmas!

I had better go, I am writing this just before work. Nellie said to say hi and asked if you needed any potions ingredients. You know her.

Love,

Molly

I frowned down at it and then glanced up at Cissa, Bella, and Illi. "Did any of you tell anyone I've been having odd dreams?"

The three girls shook their heads.

"Huh. Wonder who her 'little birdie' is then."

Illi and Ali both regarded me. "What do you mean by odd dreams, Heck?"

"That's the funny thing," I said, tucking Molly's letter into my bag. "I don't remember them. Nothing at all. Apparently I was taking a Dreamless Sleep potion while I was at home though, and that's why they only just started coming."

Lucius frowned. "You weren't informed?"

"I was taking a whole potion of several that St. Mungo's gave me," I explained. "I thought it was just to help with my chills."

Again, my friends' heads shot up sharply. "Chills?"

Puzzled, I nodded. "Yeah. I get these odd chills now and again. My whole body goes frigid. Warming charms have been helping, though."

"Chills... aren't..." For once, Lucius' eloquence had failed him. It was this, above anything else spoken there, that caught my attention.

Illi's hand on Lucius' shoulder stilled his wavering voice. "Hecate, love, chills are not a symptom of any of what the Healers said you have been attacked with. The Cruciatus Curse doesn't cause chills for more than a few days after."

"Then what is it a symptom of?"

"Usually experimental potions," Lucius said dryly. "No spell would leave you this long with chills, except maybe a botched Freezing Charm."

I frowned. "Healer Pomfrey said that he doubted Death Eaters attacked me, too. He said... we were random targets. You-Know-Who doesn't do random. And I've got to be at least half-blood, otherwise I wouldn't have been home taught for so long."

Illi's eyebrows rose. "Hmm... curiouser and curiouser. And just for the record, hon, you're right about that."

I leaned on the table, breakfast forgotten. "So what do you guys think happened to me?"

Illi scowled. "I don't know, ooh-luh, but I say we get Madam Pomfrey to give your blood a look-see and see if we can't find traces of ingredients. Then we can backtrack. I seem to recall a Healer's spell that can do just that."

Lucius nodded slowly. "Sounds like a plan. I'm free after lunch. Are you two?"

"Yup!" we chirruped.

"Then we'll go see our new mediwitch this afternoon."

Professor Slughorn rose from the Head table. Illi, Cissa, Bella, and I rose from ours, intent on following the old walrus down to class. "We'd best get into Potions class, then."

There were a total of nine Slytherins, the five boys and us four girls. Remus, James, Sirius, Peter, Scorpius, and Lily were the only Gryffindors I knew, but there were three other girls. In the Potions classroom were twenty-four seats, four at each station. Severus and Lily parted off and sat by themselves on the far right-hand corner. They piled up their schoolbags on the other chairs so no one would sit next to them.

Upon entrance into the room, Scorpius turned to silently look at me. We hadn't conversed once since his transfer into Gryffindor. He sat at a table by himself at the front. I took the seat by him without a word. Illi took the seat directly to my right, Remus on Score's left. I swallowed nervously, trying not to show it on my face like a good little Slytherin.

"Hey, Score," I said, casually. "How are the Gryffindors treating you?"

"Well," he said, giving a tight smile. "Still amiable with the Slytherins?"

I nodded tersely in lieu of an answer.

Professor Slughorn turned back to the class, his jovial countenance belying the serious teaching robes he wore. Scorpius and I carried on throughout the lecture with dutiful notes, but when the practical portion came, we were stumped on how to act. Illi and Remus kept shooting us meaningful looks Illi at me more than Remus at Score.

I was painfully aware of the chasm that had opened up between us. Him moving out of my House was almost as horrid as though he had left the family entirely. But that wasn't true he was still my flesh and blood brother Scorpius. Our last name might not have been Taylor while we were living prior to the Oblivate, but we were still siblings.

The fact that he was a Gryffindor and I was a Slytherin shouldn't matter.

But it did. Even as I tried to convince myself otherwise, I could see how Andy, Bella, and Cissa treated Sirius, and they were just cousins! Regulus almost, but not quite, behaved as though his older brother wasn't even attending the same school.

Still, we tried. We tried to at least behave politely toward one another, if not our old way. Severus and Lily had proven already that an interhouse relationship was possible. But the way my Housemates acted toward Severus... and the way that the Gryffindors acted toward him...

I breathed easier when Slughorn dismissed us at ten-thirty. Illi, Sin, Evan, Severus, and I headed at a leisurely pace toward Ancient Runes. Slughorn had assigned us a half-foot essay on the basic uses of tiger's eye in potions brewing. We technically had half an hour before Ancient Runes was to begin, so I took out a piece of parchment and started on the essay. I finished it ten minutes before class. I guess you could say I was rather smug about it, too.

Professor Babbling babbled. A lot. To be perfectly honest, she was a batty, babbling, bumbling, besotted old bat. Besotted with any man over forty who would look at her, that is. Including (I suppressed a shudder) Albus Dumbledore. Whom she did not refer to by his title, but by his given name, again and again. I could not have been more revolted, with or without my memories of what a besotted woman looked like. Professor Babbling was besotted personified at least, that is how Illi described her. Babbling was worse than most fictional characters of whom I'd read, Elizabeth Bennet's sister included.

It didn't help that she was shorter than me, pepper-haired, and wore what looked like vomit-sparkled robes. By the end of the class, I was all but nauseated by her attachment to men in general. I copied down the assignment, which was several simple rune sentences commonly found in the wizarding world. I already knew them all and made the translations while everyone else scrambled to pack. Consequentially, I was the last person out of the classroom.

All the other Slytherins were long gone, so Remus Lupin's presence went unnoticed by all except myself.

"Are you all right?" he asked quietly. "With them, I mean."

"Who are you referring to?" I asked, the early signs of annoyance beginning with a clench of my chest.

"The other Slytherins," Remus said. "I don't watch them much, except for Snape, and he's..."

"Not the best person to base a whole House on," I said hotly. "They've been wonderful to me. Illi and Lucius particularly, and Ali and Regulus, too."

Remus looked surprised. "Malfoy's nice to you? And you're friends with Sirius' brother?"

"Yes, Lucius is nice to me." I scowled at him. "In fact, it was he who comforted me when Score left for your House." My eyes slid to the side, not wanting to look him in the eye. "It... it kind of hurt. To see him go. Even though I know he fits in better with your friends than with mine."

I felt his hand gently caress my arm. "Listen to me. He's your brother, Hecate; he won't abandon you. Not for real. Nor will I. We're still friends, too... right?"

"Yes, of course, Remus," I said, smiling. "I love you and Score."

He smiled softly and hugged me gently around the shoulders. "You still got that wolf shirt? I've got an idea."

"Of course," I said, perplexed. "What's the idea?"

"Go get the shirt and meet me in the library in the Divination section."

__~*~__

Remus and Scorpius sat at the very back of the library, at the abandoned table near the Divination section. Few people strayed back this way, as only those who idealized themselves as Seers really read any books on the subject. The other Marauders were, thankfully, absent. I brandished the shirt at them and slid into the seat across from Remus. Scorpius grinned.

"Glad you could come, sis."

"Glad you're talking to me," I shot back, but answered his grin.

Remus sighed, and glanced all around. Then he cast a few quick spells, none of which I knew.

"What were those spells?" I demanded.

"I'll give you a list of books where I found them later," Remus said. "But all they do is block sound from escaping the immediate area and people from noticing us right away. A different form of the Notice-Me-Not spell."

I set the shirt on the table, folded neatly still from being in the chest portion of my wardrobe. "So what's the idea, Remus?"

"We can't really be seen socializing too much," Remus said, regret tingeing his words. "You see how both Houses act toward Snape and Lily. All three of us would be ostracized."

"What?" Scorpius asked.

"It means we'd be outsiders in our own Houses," I said, turning back to Remus. "I noticed that, yeah. So what do you propose?"

Remus reached into his pack, withdrawing a leather-bound journal and a raven-feather quill. "We're going to cast an old Buddhist Charm on the shirt, this journal, and this quill. I can fit the shirt, too, right?"

"Yeah, Score and you are the same size, and the shirt's pretty big," I said, much more interested in the new style of magic. "What's the Charm?"

"It's called Sanzaru, and it's based on an old legend from Japan," Remus explained. "You've heard of the three wise monkeys, perhaps?"

"You mean the one that goes 'see no evil' and so on?" I asked.

"That's the one," Remus said. He pointed to the three items on the table. "Each one represents the monkey you need three items for the spell to work. It generally works on anything, not just writing notes. For instance, if you didn't want your child to hear a swear word in the company of someone you know who swears, you could cast it on their clothes, some earrings, and some wine that the person drinks, and the child wouldn't hear anything bad that you don't want them to hear. The spell is based on your earrings, in this example."

I cottoned on instantly. "So you want to do the spell so that we can write to one another in this journal, but no one else can see it?"

"Precisely," Remus said, nodding. "It needs three people, three objects. The spell is focused on the final object, held by the final person. So, Heck, you hold on to the journal, okay? Your portion of the spell is iwazaru."

I nodded, testing the word out silently.

"Score, you hold the shirt. That's the trigger item, because we want to be able to see the words in the journal when we wear the shirt. The word is mizaru."

Scorpius nodded and took the shirt. "Mizaru."

"And the second item is the quill, which we need to use to write in the journal for the spell to work. For future reference, the spell for the second item is kikazaru. To cast the spell, drag three lines one after another horizontally as you say your word. Score, you start."

Scorpius dragged his wand in three quick moves as told. "Mizaru."

Remus did his. "Kikazaru."

And finally, my turn. "Iwazaru."

The three objects glowed a brilliant combination of green, gold, silver, and red, sparks sizzling from the tips of our wands. Chinese calligraphy appeared over it in interwoven silver and gold light. The three lines like the spell movement made up the first. The second was so complicated-looking that I didn't try to memorize it on first try.

"The second symbol was the one for 'monkeys' in Japanese," Remus said. "The first being three."

I grinned. "So... how are we going to get the journal to one another?"

"I suggest changing hands of it during Potions, since you two already sit in that class. By the way, we all get to see everything you write, not just Scorpius or myself or Hecate," Remus said, his tone teasing. "So no incest-ridden love-notes, you two!"

Scorpius and I made faces at Remus. "Come off it, mate, she's my sister!"

"My brother!" I scowled. "Seriously, the only person I want to be kissing like that is Lucius, and I doubt that's going to happen."

Both boys stared at me.

"Er... all right, then," Remus said. "Well, we'd better go before someone catches us. I don't know how well that Notice-Me-Not works when people are actually looking."

"And today's Defense class with the prefects!" I said, gasping. "I've gotta go, or Ali will kill me. Remus, how about you take the journal and stuff today?"

"Okay," he shrugged. "We'll write notes to you all this week and give you the notebook on Friday. Sound good?"

"Yeah." I grinned and raced to the library door. Madam Pince scowled at me, but I didn't give her enough time to rebuke me. I was already halfway down the stairs to the dungeons.

I couldn't wait for the next Potions class.

~*~

Lucius wisely did not ask me where I had been when I showed up in the Slytherin common room ten minutes later. He barely allowed me the time to put my bag up, let alone the time to find Illi. The blond wizard hauled me up three flights of stairs.

"We'll give Illi a copy of the list later," he said. We stood outside a set of oak double doors that seemed to be a smaller version of the Great Hall's main entrance. No other students were inside the long room and Madam Pomfrey didn't seem to be in just yet.

Hogwarts hospital wing, as a whole, took up one entire side of the castle, roughly the same size as the Charms corridor. Most of it was a single room full of white beds and curtains and pristine cabinets. Some of these were warded and others were not. A bookshelf at the rear held several knickknacks, which propped up enormous tomes. Several doors led off to other parts of the wing, probably a handful of private rooms, a bathroom, and Madam Pomfrey's office.

Sure enough, the petite witch who had taken such good care of Score and me emerged from one of the doors only a few minutes later.

"Hecate!" Madam Pomfrey smiled at me momentarily before a frown marred her baby-like lips. "Is something wrong?"

"Lucius here was concerned about the chills I've been having since I woke up," I said matter-of-factly.

"I have been exposed to the Cruciatus Curse's symptoms before," Lucius interjected smoothly. "Her symptoms don't add up. In fact, I believe that whoever Obliviated her and Scorpius may have forced an experimental potion on her. We wanted to see if you knew of any way to test her blood for lingering ingredients not used in the potions that Healer Pomfrey administered."

I nodded, seeing nothing more to add.

"I see," Madam Pomfrey said, her frown deepening. "Come sit down here, Hecate, I know just the spell."

Suddenly nervous, I sat down on one of the white beds. Madam Pomfrey didn't give me any time to fret or run.

"Baira racana!"

A brilliant scarlet light brighter than any spell I'd seen yet encased my right arm. Pressure, though no pain, cuffed gently around the crook of my elbow. A quill, pot of ink, and a long roll of parchment flew in from Madam Pomfrey's office. As with the Notitia Charm, several runes, nonsensical words, and numbers appeared in brilliant green and red light directly over the pressure on my arm.

Madam Pomfrey began muttering under her breath. The quill scrambled across the parchment, occasionally dipping itself in the ink. All the while, the information that apparently told the mediwitch what substances were in my blood, continued to repeat itself over and over.

At last, the information ceased, the pot of ink and the quill flew back into the hospital wing office. The parchment fluttered down into Madam Pomfrey's outstretched hand like a falling leaf.

Madam Pomfrey scowled at the parchment list that came from her blood-testing spell.

"Several of these ingredients are most certainly not what my husband gave you in those potions." She struck through several things on the list and handed me the remainder. "Keep in mind that some substances fade out of the system over time, dear."

"Madam Pomfrey, could I ask you not to tell your husband about these?" I asked, taking the list. "I wanted... I wanted to try and figure it out on my own. If that's possible."

Her lips thinned so much that they vanished. "Unfortunately, that's up to Molly and you, dear, not me. I'll owl a copy of this to her."

"I'll do it, Madam Pomfrey," said Lucius smoothly. "I'm on my way to the Owlery to send my father a letter, anyway."

I stood up from my place on the bed. Madam Pomfrey handed a note to Lucius along with a copy of the struck-through list. The moment we were in the hall, Lucius set the note on fire.

"That was easy enough," Lucius said, smiling. "Now let's get downstairs to the DADA study."

"I'll give Illi a copy of the list, and we can look up all the ingredients and see what they do," I said, pocketing my own copy.

Classroom six was a magically enlarged room with lots of pillows, padded walls, dummies, and stacks of books. I later found out that the books belonged to various members of Slytherin House, offered up for borrowing during these bouts. Rabastan Lestrangle immediately let me have *Discovering the Dark Arts*, the introductory book almost all entering first-years were required to read in Slytherin House, anyway.

"And you can give it to Alioth when you finish," he said.

At seven on the dot, Lucius and the five other Prefects stood up in front of the room. The entire House fell silent and sat down on random pillows on the floor. Ali, Regulus, Illi, and I sat in a small semicircle nearest Lucius.

"To our new Slytherins, this night is our official welcome into the House," Lucius began, his voice carrying throughout the room. "To our old brethren, welcome home. It is on this night, the first Dark Arts study that we teach of our doctrines, our ways of life. In the way we responded to our own Hecate Taylor's brother's move, we showed our most powerful of all those that we teach here at Hogwarts: We take care of our own."

Lucius took his seat between Ali and me, giving me a soft smile. The other fifth-year prefect, whose name I can't recall, began to speak.

"The second of those doctrines is loyalty to the House. We take care of our blood, as we take care of our brethren. We ask for your loyalty to this noble House in all that you do."

The sixth-year male prefect stepped forward as she sat. "The third of these doctrines is the teaching of new Slytherins what the old ones know. First-years, when next year you find yourself with a year below you, we expect you to teach them these things."

The sixth-year girl stepped forth. "Slytherin is known for its cunning, ruthless ways without. We do not want to shatter those beliefs. Wait until you cannot be seen by others to express concerns for ours. We will teach you to close off your face, to betray nothing not even pain."

I hesitantly looked at Lucius. What did that mean?

The seventh-year prefect stood up taller. "We are the last remaining dregs of that which is purest. The blood that runs through every Slytherin's veins is at least half-blood. I realize it is sometimes difficult to reconcile all that is Slytherin we ask that you attempt to shed away from the pure those whose blood runs muddled with things afoul."

The seventh-year girl stepped up and stood before us, the last remaining prefect. "We are the Slytherins, the proud, the cunning, the sly, and the undaunted. Come, my family, let us begin our lessons."

Lucius stood at once. "First-years, Cecil and Hecate, come over here."

Ali, Regulus, and I followed Lucius into a far corner. Ali's two friends and Regulus' roommates followed at a droll pace, and a surly second-year came last. I regarded him most curiously of all.

"Cecil has had social troubles," Lucius said, and left it at that.

I glanced over at the other third-years, and with a start I realized someone was missing: Severus. I glanced again at Cecil and put two and two together. Cecil must have been associating with a Muggle-born like Lily Evans. I felt a pang in my gut would this be what happened to me if I were caught with Remus? Well... I suppose not. Lucius didn't seem upset that I liked Remus. He's half-blood, after all. Not the most savory of conditions, but at least he wasn't...

I couldn't finish the thought.

"Good evening," Lucius said. "Now, we usually have a set of spells that we teach all entering first-years, and then we teach you higher-level ones as you advance. The first spell you'll be learning is a simple disarming spell. Repeat after me: 'Expelliarmus.'"

We all intoned the spell together.

"Good. Now, pair up, and we'll practice it for real."

There were eleven of us, and I pushed Ali toward Regulus when she started to cling on to me. Cecil paired with Kiti, and Bejeweled went with another boy. Pretty soon, I was the odd woman out. I blushed.

"Hecate will work with me," Lucius said smoothly. "Hold on to your wands tightly and decide who will go first." He turned to me, a wry grin holding on his handsome face. "Well, Hecate, I believe it is your turn, love. The traditional swish and flick is the way to go here."

I nodded once, noting that he'd raised his voice so that the other five pairs had heard him. He was a decent teacher. With a practiced swish and flick, I cried the spell aloud: "Expelliarmus!"

To my astonishment, Lucius' wand flew straight through the air, landing perfectly in my left hand, handle-first. I blinked at it.

"Well done, Heck!" Lucius said, smiling broadly. "Toss it back and try it again."

I did and waited till he had a good firm grip on it. This time, the wand flew out of his hand with a determined shudder, landing at my feet. I picked it up and tossed it back.

"I think you've done this before," Lucius said. "You ever heard of the Impediment Jinx?"

"I do," I said. "It's 'Impedimenta.'"

"I'll throw this pillow at you; cast it when it's about halfway to you," Lucius said, Summoning the dark green pillow. "Ready?" I nodded. He threw it.

"Impedimenta!" I cried, bringing my wand round in a loop. The pillow stopped in midair and dropped harmlessly to the ground.

Lucius hummed for a moment. "I'm going to regret this one. Do you know how to Stun?"

"And Rennervate afterwards," I said, feeling rather proud of that fact.

His smile broadened into a grin. "Cast it on me."

I stared at him rather dumbly for a moment. "You can't be serious."

"Quite."

I shrugged. "Okay. Er... put that pillow behind you, I'll see if I can swing your landing."

"You think your aim is that good, do you?" he goaded.

I just smiled. He did as he was told, and just as he'd straightened up, I cast the spell, my wand jutting forward with the force of the blast. "Stupefy!"

He crumpled to a heap, straight on top of the pillow. I made my way tentatively over to him and gently cast, "Rennervate."

Lucius was all smiles when he came to. "Brilliant, absolutely brilliant, Hecate." He turned back to the first-years, all of whom had stopped to watch the third-year who shouldn't have any memories at all bringing down the fifth-year. "Who's done the spell right so far?"

Hastily, the first-years returned to attempting to disarm.

Lucius turned back to me. "Let's see what else you know, love."

Spell after spell after jinx after hex after curse came from my wand. By now, the first-years weren't the only ones who had paused.

"The Protean Charm?" gasped one sixth-year. "We're barely getting to those now. That's N.E.W.T. level, that is!"

I blushed. "I don't know how I know it all, though! It's just... in this giant library in my head!"

"Some library. It sounds like you've read half of Hogwarts' library," said Rabastan. He gave a low whistle. "If my dad caught wind of that, shit, girl, I'd have the pressure on me to ask you to marry me!"

I scowled at him.

"I'm afraid Rab's serious, Heck," Lucius said gently. "If half our fathers knew how smart you are... you would be getting marriage proposals before you ever left Hogwarts."

I tilted my head in thought. "Why?"

He seemed taken aback. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know any of these social sorts of things," I said, rolling my eyes in exasperation. "Think of it like this, if you will. My mind is separated into what I know from reading a book and what little my motor skills recall that's how I can still cast spells I've technically never cast before. The other part the part that's gone is the stuff you know from being brought up, from playing with other kids, from going to primary school. I don't know any of that."

Lucius regarded me curiously for a moment. "Do you even remember when is a proper moment for a kiss?"

I stared at him, aghast. I read through all of my internal libraries. "Er... no, not really... Not even courtship things, though I know the definition of a courtship."

Lucius smiled softly. "Then we gentlemen will be certain to remind you, when you are old enough. Slytherins do not date until fifth-year. It is tradition."

I nodded slowly. "All right. Well, what's everybody standing around for? Let's get back to work!"

Lucius continued teaching the first-years Expelliarmus and Impedimenta, but I moved straight through to the seventh-years, who were teaching one another various components. It was only there that I managed to find a challenge.

That night, Lucius kissed me on the cheek before I went to bed. His lips were warm and soft, and the gesture alone made me blush.

__~*~__

End of chapter. Baira racana Hindi, probably poorly translated, as "bad blood write." Translation from www.shabdkosh.com. I based the idea off of basic Muggle drug screenings that find things like cocaine or Tylenol in the blood.

The Sanzaru legend is of three monkeys who "see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil." I made the spell based off the idea that you could "channel" what you want to happen into the third and final object. For instance, the earring example Remus used would be the result of a "hear no evil" result. The journal is a "see no evil" result.

The "Slytherin Creed" is an ancient thing that I think would work best only in instances where you have decent prefects to perpetuate it. Hence why Lucius, Severus, and most of the other Death Eaters are so good at hiding their emotions, on top of their Death Eater "work."

Mysteries, Mysteries

Chapter 11 of 18

Some questions are answered only to bring up more questions. What is with these weird potions ingredients? What is up with Remus' illness? Who should Heck be loyal to under the Slytherin creed?

Huge thanks to the ever-patient, ever-awesome TPP staff for putting up with my mistakes.

Disclaimer: Mrs. Rowling created a playground we love to play in. I am simply enjoying the spoils. I don't make money from this.

Chapter 11: Mysteries, Mysteries

Learning to duel on Saturdays turned out to be more of a joke than anything. We weren't allowed to really duel unless a teacher was present. So the prefects lined us all up against dummies, and we cast spells on them instead. Severus was absent from this activity as well.

After a while, I grew tired of casting the same spells on the dummies. So I sat in the corner and began devouring the book Rabastan lent me. I learned several new spells and tried them out on the dummy. Lucius lent me the next book, and that is how I occupied my time for the remaining "duel lessons" reading, trying the spells I read, and reading some more.

Over the next few weeks, Illi, Lucius, and I looked up all the various ingredients that had somehow wound up in my blood. We got together in the common room at last, a

week into October.

"But why would someone add a Muggle drug to a potion?" I asked. "Statins are used in combating cholesterol. I don't think I was ever fat; I'd have remnants of it."

"And Jobberknoll feathers are supposed to aid memory production, not destroy them," Lucius added.

Illi pointed to one ingredient in particular. "Why Alihotsy leaves and Glumbumble treacle at once? And Malaclaw saliva? Isn't that a Dark potions ingredient, Luc?"

"It's supposed to generate unluckiness," Lucius said, scowling. "But here's its foil, cockatrice beak. That's used in Felix Felicis."

"What about this one?" Illi pointed to another substance. "What do powdered hermit crab shells do?"

For once, even I didn't have the whole answer to that one. All the books I'd read in the library only showed one thing. "I only know of one place I've heard that used... and it's definitely not in a potion like this one."

"Where, Heck?"

"Powdered hermit crabs shells make up the main substance in Time-Turner sand," I said. "Among a few other powdered shell-types, in particular bicorn horn."

"There's no bicorn horn in this potion, though, unless it leaves the body quickly," Illi said, perusing the list again. "I wonder what hermit crab shells do?"

"I don't know," I shrugged. "Anyone we could ask without drawing suspicion?"

"Professor Slughorn wouldn't ask, but I don't want to take that chance just yet," Lucius said. "There's only one person I trust enough, and that's Severus."

Severus Snape and I had never really talked much. In fact, he seemed to get up before anyone else did Scruffy wake him up? and he returned to sleep minutes before curfew. He never stuck around long enough for anyone to talk to him. No one knew where he went to, though no one had ever really checked, either.

"How do we ask him?" I asked.

"We find your brother, of course," Lucius said, standing. He rolled up his copy of the ingredients and the notes we'd made. I followed his lead, not really understanding what we were doing. Illi grinned and stuffed her copy in her satchel.

"What's Scorpius got to do with anything?" she said.

"You two had better start using your eyes," Lucius drawled, but his tone was mirthful. "Whom does Scorpius hang around with?"

"The Marauders," we intoned.

"And who do the Marauders attack on a daily basis?"

Illi and I exchanged a worried look. "Severus. Of course."

Illi turned back to Lucius. "You think the Marauders and Scorpius know where Severus is, then?"

Lucius nodded and began a purposeful walk toward the door. "And where do the Marauders go on Tuesday afternoons?"

"Under that old beech tree," Illi said, rolling her eyes at me. "Okay, we get it, oh observant one."

Sure enough, the four boys who had befriended my brother were all seated under the old beech tree by the lake. Scorpius and Remus were sitting side by side on one of the raised, gnarled roots, scribbling notes from a shared book between them. All five boys looked up when Lucius cleared his throat.

"Good afternoon," Lucius said cordially.

"Afternoon," Scorpius nodded, just as coolly polite. He grinned at me. "Hey, sis."

"Hey, Score," I said, smiling. "Remus."

Remus didn't look too well. He looked just like those upcoming days back in August and again starting on the twenty-first of September. He'd get worse and worse, and then he'd slowly get better. He looked like he needed a good shave, even though he was only thirteen.

"Hello, Heck," he said. "Do those chills still hit you?" I hadn't told them about the odd dreams, which hadn't ceased.

I shrugged nonchalantly. "Once in a while. Listen, that's why we're here. We're wondering if you happened to know where Severus is at the moment."

It was James Potter, however, that answered. "Oh, yeah, he and Evans are in the Great Hall. Evans takes her tea at three every day, unless we've got class."

"What are you looking for him for, anyway?" Sirius Black asked. His eyes were blazing with barely concealed contempt for Severus or for present company, I didn't know.

"Potions assistance," Lucius said smoothly. "Gentlemen." He inclined his head and turned to leave. Illi smiled vaguely, waved, and followed him.

I smiled at my brother and at Remus, the expression disappearing when he began to cough violently. "Remy, are you sure you're all right?"

"Fine," he said hoarsely. "Don't blow your cover, Hecate. Go on. Score will bring you the book Friday."

I nodded, knowing that I really had to go. As much as I hated to admit it, any seeming association I kept with Scorpius and Remus merely put all three of us in danger. I didn't realize it then, but the danger did not stop at schoolmates possibly turning on us; it extended to the entire wizarding world. I was officially a Slytherin there would be no fraternizing with the enemy. Publicly, anyway.

Sure enough, Severus Snape and Lily Evans sat together at the Gryffindor table. They weren't laughing like the last time I'd seen them. Not somber, exactly, but comfortable. Illi and I sat down at the Slytherin table and waited patiently. Lucius approached them and whispered in Severus' ear. The younger boy nodded once. He whispered in Evans' ear and stood with a billow of his school robes. He sat down across from Illi and me; Lucius sank onto the bench beside him.

It was the first time, I realized, that I had really spoken to him directly. His hair was slightly better kept than that day in Diagon Alley, and he was dressed in the same Slytherin green and silver and black Hogwarts robes as the rest of us.

"Precisely what is it you need help with, Malfoy?" Severus asked. His voice was soft very soft. But it was smooth and low, like a quietly playing saxophone. He never once took his eyes off of Lucius. It was as though he was expecting something to jump out at him at any moment, but wasn't going to react to it until necessary.

"A potion with these ingredients," Lucius said, pulling out his list. "We've discovered their general uses, with the exception of this one."

Severus perused the list, his black eyes quick and thorough. "Hermit crab shells?" His tone was slightly incredulous. "I've no idea why anyone would ingest such a thing."

"What does it do?" Lucius asked firmly.

"If ingested, hermit crab shells cause the opposite effect of whatever else is ingested with it. For instance, if you drink water alone, your body will completely dry up. With these other ingredients..." His eyes darted up, his gaze leveling straight on me. For several seconds, our eyes remained locked. When at last he broke off the contact, he stood abruptly. "Whoever did this was either a genius, completely mad, or both."

"Wait!" I cried, cursing the fact that he was on the other side of the table. "What does it do?"

His eyes leveled on me once again, though he did not stop walking. "I doubt you were Obliviated, Taylor. The potion's aim was clear to clear out your memories without losing your cognitive skills. I doubt there is a cure."

Severus Snape looked away and I stopped walking. Illi's hands found mine, and Lucius' arms found my shoulder. I could not stop watching Severus Snape's retreating back, even after the Great Hall door closed behind him.

Friday morning, Scorpius sidled up beside me in Potions class, a reduced bundle tucked under his arms, hidden by his robes. He handed it to me under the table. I reached down to pull out my cauldron and slipped the package into my bag at the same time. I piled all of my things on top of the table. Slughorn was late.

My mind raced. Should I tell Score that we weren't Obliviated? That we'd been forced to take some kind of potion?

"Where's Remus?" I asked, glancing at the empty seat by my brother.

"He's sick again," Scorpius said. "In the hospital wing."

No. No need to make him worry.

I nodded and kept to myself again when Slughorn's belly preceded him through the office door. He began to lecture on the properties of ginkgo in potions making. I tried not to flinch it was one of the ingredients we'd found in my blood. I glanced across the room at Severus and Evans. Both were paying rapt attention to Slughorn. I sighed and took notes, even though I already well knew the effects of this particular ingredient.

Class ended after a shoddy practical, and I followed Illi listlessly toward Vector's Arithmancy class. Though it was my favorite of all Hogwarts classes, I couldn't help but be dismayed. Fridays were the only days I got to see Remus and Scorpius even if I couldn't acknowledge them. To be robbed of seeing my first friend because he was ill made my chest thump painfully.

"You okay?" Illi asked softly, pulling me back from the few others.

I nodded, trying to smile as usual. I think it didn't work.

"Listen, ooh-luh, I know you better than that," she said, her gaze rueful. "You're only fooling the other Slytherins Luc, Ali, and I know you better. What's wrong with Lupin, love?"

I sighed and let my head fall back against the stone of the hallway. "He's sick, up in the hospital wing."

"Why don't you go see him after class?" Illi suggested. "Lucius and I will cover for you."

I clasped her hand in mine gratefully. "You would, Ills? Really?"

"Of course. Now come on or we're going to be explaining to Vector why we're late to a class we have half an hour to get to." She grinned and threw her arms around my shoulders. "It's all right, now. Right, Heck?"

"I wish he weren't sick," I said, but smiled. "It's okay, though."

I waited impatiently all through Arithmancy class, though outward appearances certainly wouldn't have told you that. Living with and observing primarily Slytherins, who rarely showed emotions, had taught me the value of restraint. Nonetheless, I was the first one out of my seat at Vector's dismissal.

"If anyone asks, you, me, and Lucius, when I find him, are in an empty classroom practicing Transfiguration," Illi said. She furtively glanced around. "You can do a Disillusionment Charm, right?"

In answer, I tapped my own head. The warm, wet feeling of becoming a literal chameleon washed over me. Illi waved to where I'd been seconds before and flounced off down the hall. I cast quick Silencing Charms on my bottoms of my shoes and robes and then stole off down the hall toward the third floor.

I waited for the hall to clear around the hospital wing doors and undid the charms. Madam Pomfrey started at my sudden entrance.

"Hecate, what are you doing here?"

"I came to see Remus," I said softly. "Is he okay?"

"I'm sorry, dear, but no one can see him at the moment," Madam Pomfrey said, though she smiled warmly. "He's very erm... contagious. It should be all right to come see him tomorrow morning, though, dear. Run along now."

I sighed and allowed myself to be pushed back out into the hall. So much for that plan. Just as the door began to close, however, I heard a low growl from the other side of the room. It sounded like Remus, but it wasn't a sound I'd ever heard him make. It was far too sinister a noise to be my kind, gentle friend.

Shaking off a feeling of *I should know this* echoing through my tense limbs, I made the trek down to the dungeons. There was only one classroom Illi would sequester in with Lucius to make our story plausible: classroom six. Slytherin House only used the room in the evenings on Fridays and Saturdays, so it was also the only place that Slytherins wanting to be alone for wand practice would go to.

Sure enough, Illi and Lucius were both in classroom six, concentrating on a set of slow-moving tortoises Illi had borrowed from McGonagall.

"That was fast," Lucius said. His tortoise was sporting a rather unflattering floral decoration on its side.

"She wouldn't let me see him, said he was contagious," I said, flicking my wand at Lucius' tortoise. "You know, if you just twist your wand a bit more during the incantation, you should be able to get a proper teapot."

"I haven't done teapots in a while," Lucius said, scowling. "Why would letting you in to see him make any difference?"

"I don't know," I said. "She said I could come back in the morning, though."

Illi shrugged and gave her wand a determined flick over her tortoise. The spout, unfortunately, still looked like a tortoise's tail. "Well, we did give it a go, at any rate."

I sighed and sank onto a cushion. "Am I really so easy to read?"

Lucius gave up on his teapot and sat down beside me. "You are to us. Your face is very easily read, love."

I groaned in frustration. "I wish it weren't. I feel like a failure as a Slytherin!"

"Your cunning lies more with knowledge than with life," Lucius agreed. "I do agree that you are not the most obvious of choices for a Slytherin, Heck, but that is what we love about you."

"I'd love to be able to only let go around you guys and Ali," I admitted. "Lucius, could you... could you teach me how to be like you?"

Lucius caught my hand in his, pressing a gentle kiss to my knuckles. A warm, tingling feeling ran up it, straight into my heart. "Of course, love. I'll help as best I can."

Emboldened by the kiss on my hand and his words, I leaned over and kissed him chastely on the cheek. "I'd like that."

I couldn't look him in the eye for the rest of the day.

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Lucius was as good as his word. He taught me gently, with a hand on my shoulder or a subtle look whenever my façade broke. Illi took over when we were in class, and the two of us quickly eked out a system of looks that no one—not even Lucius—could read. Her Cherokee heritage came to be our spoken language, our code.

Illi taught Lucius and I several new words in Cherokee especially when speaking of Scorpius and Remus. Scorpius became the Cherokee word for "star" no kwi see mainly because the word for "scorpion" was too long to not draw attention to itself. Remus became "wolf" wah yah because his last name sounded like lupus, the Latin word for wolf. And because of our shared shirt.

Illi knew about the shirt, of course, and helped keep the journal, shirt, and quill hidden from Narcissa and Bellatrix. She never knew what I wrote to Remus and Scorpius nor anything they wrote to me. Once in a while, I'd tell her some small thing. Like, "Wah yah is doing well in Defense, but he's got a long way to go before he'll ever be good at Potions." Or, "No kwi see is trying to get McGonagall to change his Transfiguration grades."

But I never told her that Remus and Scorpius were keeping me quite well informed of all Marauder pranks. I finally got the time to look at the journal on Sunday, when all the other girls were asleep.

Monday Scorpius

Snivellus is so amusing to watch. He twitches, you know? We caught him in the boys' toilets on the fifth floor and cast a Color-Change Charm on his robes before he saw us. Who knew he'd look so good in Gryffindor red?

Next week, we're going to see if Peeves will help us put some gel in his hair. We're hoping to give him one of those American hairdos, the one where all his hair sticks straight up. Maybe if we just hang him upside down and put a Stasis Charm on it?

Tuesday Scorpius

Hecate, I was really glad to see you today. And that you got to see Remus sick the way he is now. He was sick the same way last month, and then the month before, remember, over the summer? And it was around the same time of month. He went into the hospital wing on the thirteenth of September and stopped hanging out with us the twelfth of August. He gets like this every month without fail, says James. I wonder why? The Healers have said that they can't cure it, just control it. I hate this. I feel so powerless to help him.

Tuesday Remus

Don't worry about me, guys, seriously. It's been like this since I was small. I'm used to it. Hey, Hecate, tell us when you get the journal back why you guys were looking for Snape. We're all (five) curious about that.

I grinned into the darkness at Remus' abrupt change in topic my time around the Slytherins had taught me well. He was hiding something. As I fished out an inkpot from my bedside table, I thought on what his symptoms were. Coughing and his hair seemed to grow abnormally fast. Not just on his head, but his whole body. Even Lucius, who was two years older than Remus, hadn't begun growing facial hair like him yet. And he gets sick around the same-ish time of month, every month.

I couldn't come up with anything right off, but I decided to go on and read some medical books in the library as soon as possible.

Sunday Hecate

We just had some questions about a weird potions ingredient. Severus is really good at it. I wish you would ask your friends to stop picking on him so much.

Once done, I doused my wandlight and hid the shirt, journal, and quill in a Reduced bundle in the back corner of my nightstand drawer. It was Slytherin custom anyway to ward our things no one thought twice on it. I just happened to have several wards on mine that only the seventh-years had done.

I fell asleep almost instantly.

Ron and Harry paced before the Gryffindor common room fire; Ginny and Luna and Dean watched them warily. Draco leaned against the couch they were sitting on, staring dazedly into the dancing flames.

"You realize, of course, that the potion is not wearing off?" Draco said casually, studying his impeccably manicured nails.

"What do you mean, Malfoy?" Ron snarled.

"The Arithmantic numbers, of course," Draco retorted. "You know, I haven't been rude to you in fourteen years, Weasley. Falling back on old habits?"

Ron sighed and sank into the couch opposite Ginny, Luna, and Dean. "Guess so. Sorry." He ran a hand through his deeply red hair, golden in the light of the fire. "What are we going to do?"

Ginny sighed. "There's nothing we can do, Ron. Everything's up to Hermione from this point on, you know that."

"Wait, wait, explain to me this Arithmantic numbers bit again," Ron said, glancing between Draco and me.

"The potion was specifically made to match Scorpius because he was the one in more danger of releasing information," Draco said, sitting down on the arm of the couch. "And he's a four. Hermione was Obliviated for the sole purpose of renaming her so that her number, too, would match to a four."

"Wait, what?" I leaned forward in my seat. "I really was Obliviated, then?"

"Only your real name," Draco said. "Molly did it the first time you saw her and Scorpius. We pushed some suggestions into your mind for the name. It didn't really matter which one you chose, but... it came out to four, so all the better."

"Not really," Harry pointed out. "The potion obviously doesn't think the Obliviate worked to change Hermione's real numbers."

"So what's happening to me, exactly?" I asked. "Even if I won't remember this in the morning, at least... I'll feel like I've been answered."

The boys all sighed at once. Luna was the one who answered. "Instead of all your memories staying away, you're going to start remembering them. It'll be slow. First, the thing we unblocked that is, your academic readings will start to come back. You've noticed that your fifth-year and now your sixth-year studies are starting to come back to you."

"At the rate you're going, you'll remember everything you've ever learned up until you died in our time stream," Draco said.

Ginny paused. "Wait a minute. We specifically pulled Hermione from her third-year for the birthday thing. How is she getting memories this body has never had before?"

Draco answered. "Because her 'self' in this time stream died, so she's unconsciously pushing those memories into her past self."

Harry groaned. "I'm never gonna be born!"

"Don't be too sure of that." Ginny rolled her eyes. "I want my husband alive when the time comes!"

Draco stood to his feet and crossed the room. Everyone else, even the unspoken Dean Thomas, vanished. "Watch over my son, Hecate. Please. Just keep him alive." He kissed me gently.

I awoke with chills running up and down my entire body, as though I had been dunked into ice water.

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The following Saturday was our birthday, and all through that week I waited for owls at the Slytherin table. It began with an owl to Molly for spending money for Scorpius' present, and then for Owl Order catalogues. Molly gave me ten Galleons more than enough. Lucius and Illi had a million suggestions for ten Galleons, but it was little Ali who finally came up with the best idea.

"Find him something to match that locket with his name on it," she said quietly Wednesday morning. "Isn't that the only thing you guys have left to connect you to your pasts before...?"

It hit me like a tsunami. An earthquake in the faraway sea, the smallest warning before it struck. I hugged Alioth Mulciber's tiny frame with a squeal of glee, suppressed only by Lucius' subtle reminder that I shouldn't be expressing such things in the middle of the Great Hall particularly with the recipient of my gift being on the other side of the Hall. I calmed myself with the gentle breathing exercises Lucius had taught me.

"Ali's right, though," I murmured as the fifth-year boy, my fellow third-year, and the first-year girl leaned in to listen. "It's the only tangible proof that there was anything there, anyone there for us before we took the Obliviate potion."

Lucius nodded. "Have you had a decent look at it, enough to find something to match?"

I mused aloud in answer. "Yeah, good enough. I doubt Score would wear a ring, he'd find it too Muggle." Little did I know that Scorpius' opinions of Muggles were in direct opposition to mine, but this was my train of thought back then. "A bracelet, then, with a charm. Do you think if I put two stars on it, he would understand the meaning?"

"If it's done subtly, I think so," Lucius said. "Perhaps two pentangles?"

I breathed, "Perfect. What better way is there? And I'll put our names on the two of them."

It was with that conversation that I sought out a wizarding jeweler. Immediately, I ruled out anything goblin-wrought the keepers of our gold may be penny-pinching, but they are quite expensive in some things. Score's locket was silver, so it was cheaper than most things. The thick chain it hung on was a style easy enough to come by in most shops. It was getting two pentangles on it with my hidden inscription that proved to be the fuss of things.

First of all, most shops balked at my spending limits. Then I had trouble with them not wanting to put two pentangles on, saying it looked "ridiculous". At long last, I took Regulus Black aside and asked his assistance in drawing out what I wanted. He was quite good with a quill. Finally, after two days of constant owls during breakfast, lunch, dinner, and by house-elf in the evenings, I got what I wanted.

Without the inscription, of course. I made that myself, as it would have cost me three Galleons to let them do it. Lucius, Illi, Ali, and Regulus all watched with bated breath as I cast the Protean Charm on the inward spiral of each pentangle. I didn't have the time to look up anything else, and it did do what I wanted except I had to use a piece of parchment to get it to say anything.

"Look at it this way," Lucius said when it worked. "You can always send him short messages."

I grinned, delighted by this unexpected plus to my folly. "That's true. Well, I hope Score likes it."

"So what's the inscriptions say?" Ali asked.

"The first one says 'Lesath and Shaula' and the other says 'Scorpio'," I said, grinning proudly. "When we were originally speaking of what to name me, he suggested something to do with the 'Cat's Eyes' at the tail end of the constellation he was named for. So I played on that."

"Think he'll remember?" Illi asked.

I sank in on myself as I stared at the bracelet. "He will. When you have no other memories aside from what has happened in three months... he'll remember the first time we saw each other."

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Unfortunately for Scorpius and I, we would not be able to be together for our birthday. So, we exchanged our gifts before Potions class. I explained that I had a matched piece of parchment for the two pentangles in his gift, and if he ever felt a buzzing from it, I was sending him a message. I couldn't open his gift until later, but I was shocked to find that he was handing me not one, but two neat, silver-wrapped gifts. At my questioning look, he pointed to Remus.

I smiled at my brother and my friend, glad for our time in Potions. The latter blushed and ducked his head to get an inkpot from his bag.

Illi urged me to open the gifts as we left the class, and the two of us ducked into a girls' toilet to do just that. I locked and warded the door.

"I didn't think Lupin would give you a present, too," she said, grinning. "Come on, ooh-luh, open them up!"

I opened up Scorpius' gift first and delighted in the reduced book, *Walking the Line, a Study of Spells' Intent* and a box of sugar quills. I had long run out of my supply from Diagon Alley. I popped one in my mouth, letting the quill end dangle, and reached for Remus' gift.

Inside was a black box, and within that a simple gold chain, a clasped locket dangling from the end. I attempted to open the clasp, but it wouldn't come open. Frustrated, I

began to throw out the paper, but black ink caught my eye. On the inside of the wrapping paper was a note, written in Remus' gorgeous loopy scrawl.

Dear Hecate,

This locket is spelled only to open when you speak the code name, Moony and Stingtail. Know that Scorpius and I love you.

Yours,

Remus

"Moony and Stingtail?" I murmured and gasped as the locket flew open of its own accord. Written in tiny script on the left were the words: "To Our Beloved Sister, Hecate." On the right was a photograph of Scorpius and Remus, waving and grinning cheerfully in their Gryffindor school uniforms.

Unbidden, the words Lucius had spoken on our first Defense study night came back to me. *We take care of our own.* Confused, I wondered just who I should consider "my own." Was it my blood brother, Scorpius, and our adopted brother Remus? Did I include Illi, Lucius, and Ali in that? Was the whole of Slytherin House my family, too? Lucius had said so. Slytherins take care of their own.

I was a Slytherin.

I take care of my own.

Secure in that, I snapped the locket on around my neck and hid it under my robes. Illi and I went to class with our usual gusto.

That evening, the seventh-years taught me some advanced Shield Charms, ones I knew the incantation for but had never cast. Vincent Crabbe was one of them, and he struck me as a sort of insipid person. Nonetheless, he could cast some decent hexes he wasn't so decent at the charms he was supposedly supposed to be teaching me.

"Damn, Taylor!" Crabbe snarled, shaking his hand. "You've got some Stinging Hex there!"

"Thank you, Mister Crabbe," I said, taking a mock-bow. "And you have a not-so-some Total Shield Charm there."

The chubby, tall blond grinned. "I'll just have to try *harder* then, eh, Taylor?" His eyebrows rose and fell in what I guessed was meant to be a suggestive manner. What he was suggesting, though, was lost on me. I glanced at the clock on the wall, glad that we had been allowed to stay out until ten as third-years.

"Shall we?" I said, lifting my wand with a mischievous grin. "Mollis morsus!"

Crabbe winced as the hex hit him on the hand, exactly where the previous Stinging Hex had. The door slammed open, interrupting whatever he was trying to say in protest.

"All Slytherins to the common room, now!" shouted our Head of House. The agitated, almost alarmed tone in his voice left no room for argument or otherwise everyone bolted down the hall. Seventh-years made sure that first- and second-years were all in the room or in their beds before shuffling Illi, Cissa, Bella, and me into the room. Lucius turned back to the door where Slughorn stood dancing from foot to foot in fearful anxiety.

"Snape's not here!" Lucius said. "He's the only one."

"Does anyone know where Mr. Snape is?" Slughorn demanded.

"My brother might," I said, wincing at the sudden stares.

Slughorn hesitated a fraction of a second. "Come, Miss Taylor. Mr. Malfoy, you as well. The rest of you, stay here, barricade the door until we return! The safe-word for knowing it's us is Felix!"

Lucius and I ran along the hall behind a surprisingly fast Slughorn. We did not stop until we were halfway up to the seventh floor, and only because we had found Scorpius and the Marauders.

"Score!" I shouted. "Score, wait!"

"Hecate?" he blinked owlishly down at us. "What"

"No time, Mr. Taylor. Do you know where Severus Snape is?"

Score's gaze hardened for an instant, and then the look vanished. "Yes. He and Lily Evans were outside on the lawn."

"Thank you." Slughorn gestured to us. "Come, quickly!"

Slughorn bowled down the stairs three steps at a time. If I hadn't been swimming since the start of term, I doubted I would have been able to keep up with the surprisingly quick man. Lucius flew down the stairs with graceful flicks of his robes and hair, as though he were quite used to bolting after Slughorn.

In the entrance hall, we met with McGonagall. She nodded to us, and we set off down the lawn toward the old beech tree. The moon hung waning overhead. We got about fifty paces from the castle when Slughorn gasped, gaping back up into the night sky.

I had never seen anything quite like it before. Enormous and green, writhing in the sky like some bastardized aurora. The skull glittered like many of the stars overhead, and the snake slithered from its mouth like a Medusa's hair. McGonagall and Slughorn stared at it, both somewhat in a shock. I cleared my throat.

"Yes, it's astonishing," I said quietly. "But were we not more concerned with the whereabouts of Severus and Evans?"

McGonagall shook herself hard and nodded at me. "Too right, Miss Taylor. Come, quickly, we must get you all back inside. Heavens, why did you bring them along, Horace?"

My back stiffened at this last, but Lucius slyly intervened before I could say anything that would get me into trouble. "We held the information on their whereabouts, Professor. Now let us find them and get back inside."

McGonagall nodded and she dragged Slughorn the first few steps toward the lake. We found Lily Evans and Severus Snape behind the old beech tree. Evans had fainted dead away, and Snape's knees were both scraped up. McGonagall cast Mobilicorpus on her and nodded toward the castle. No one spoke as we ran past the image in the sky once again. We followed McGonagall up to the hospital wing with the floating girl.

"Sir, why is everyone being told to stay in their dorms?"

Slughorn started, and then stared at me as though he'd never quite seen me before. "I had forgotten you didn't know, Miss Taylor. That symbol is You-Know-Who's. It means someone has been killed. And this close to the school... we must keep you students safe in the event that they invade the gates."

"Someone has... has been killed, sir?" I asked, my eyes widening. "Like my parents, Professor?"

Lucius wrapped his arms around my shoulders. I didn't realize it until he moved his fingers over my cheeks that I was crying. My shoulders shook under Lucius' arms. For once since I had awoken in St. Mungo's, my shivers were not of cold, but of complete, unadulterated fear.

Madam Pomfrey fretted over Evans in the hospital bed. Several neon blue lighted letters and numbers appeared over the girl. Severus' knees bled freely, but he would not accept any treatment until he was certain Lily Evans was all right. McGonagall paced back and forth behind us.

"Minerva, I'll go check and make sure your Gryffindors are safe in the tower. I'll get Vector to look in on my House."

"Thank you, Horace, I'll stay here."

Our Head of House left, and McGonagall began to pace again. Lucius still had his arm wrapped around my shoulder, his voice crooning softly in my ears. I had not ever heard so soothing a sound, and yet I could not stop shaking. Someone was dead, and it was possible that someone might come to the castle and kill more. The seconds slipped by same as the tears down my cheeks.

"Little one, shush," Lucius murmured. "Everything will be okay. My father would never let anything happen to us. Shush."

Had I had any state of mind to pay attention to his words, I might have caught what he had said. Why would his father, after all, have anything to do with the skull and snake still writhing in the sky amongst the stars? Instead, the words finally soothed me from my tears. I sniffled softly. Lucius pulled a handkerchief from his robe pockets, silver with green trim. I wiped my eyes with it, letting the silk sooth away the fear. My shoulders stopped shaking.

I reached out for Severus' arm and offered him silent support. He flinched under my hand. I glanced over my shoulder at Lucius. He smiled and nodded toward Severus. Tentatively, I caressed his shoulder in the same manner Lucius had. Severus didn't flinch this time, and he seemed to relax just that much more.

"Madam Pomfrey, there's diluted dittany and skin healing potions in your cupboard, right?" I asked, softly so that I didn't interrupt her wand motions over Lily Evans.

"Yes, dear, Professor McGonagall, could you help her?"

Lucius settled Severus on the edge of a bed and helped him roll his trousers legs up over the scuffed knees. The fabric had done little to protect him. Severus must be very poor, as his trousers were darned and faded, grass stains that showed only on close inspection of the dark blue fabric. Which made me wonder exactly what he'd been doing at Madam Malkin's with Mrs. Snape that day in Diagon Alley, if he wasn't getting new trousers.

McGonagall and I chose a weak skin-healing potion, a wound-cleaning potion, and a weak Willow Bark potion for pain. Lucius helped measure out the Willow Bark potion while McGonagall and I dabbed the foul-smelling purple wound-cleaning potion to both knees and calves. Inwardly, I admired how lean Severus' muscles were, and how easily he kept what pain he was in from showing on his face. He watched Madam Pomfrey with rapt eyes, even though Lucius was blocking his complete view of the girl in the other bed.

When Severus was completely patched up, he rolled down his trousers legs. His soft, smooth voice came muffled from his position, but I heard it nonetheless. "Thank you, Taylor."

"You're welcome," I said, just as softly.

Madam Pomfrey's wand-waving finally ceased. She stood straight and turned to us all. "Miss Evans will have to stay here for the night. She hit her head rather hard, and I just want to be sure she doesn't have a concussion. Here, all three of you." She handed all three of us a pale blue potion. "They're Calming Draughts. Here, Professor, you look like you could use one, too."

McGonagall politely declined, but I took mine gratefully. Both Lucius and Severus looked ready to argue. One quick glare from McGonagall had them both tipping vials back into their throats. Immediately, all of my emotions leveled out. I still had the cognitive feeling of myself, but without the upheaval those thoughts held. We had just stepped toward the door, when Headmaster Dumbledore stepped into the room.

"Is Miss Evans quite all right, Madam Pomfrey?" he asked gently.

"Yes, as is Mr. Snape thanks to the Professor and Hecate here," she said, smiling softly at the elder man. "They were just leaving."

Dumbledore inclined his head at the three of us. "Then I bid you all good night."

As the door closed behind us, however, I heard a sound quite unlike any I had ever heard in my short three months' of memory. It sounded like a hound howling at the moon, and yet like what I'd imagine a banshee's shriek might sound. It took me a moment to realize that it was Madam Pomfrey crying. I turned back in alarm, but Professor McGonagall steered me back to the stairs.

"What's wrong with Mrs. Pomfrey?" I asked, struggling against her. "I want to know! She cared for me, I want to know what's wrong!"

McGonagall firmly steered me away. "The Headmaster is helping her at the moment, Miss Taylor." Her gaze softened as she glanced back over her shoulder. "But I may as well let you know before things get out of hand tomorrow morning. Gideon Pomfrey was in Hogsmeade tonight. He was one of the people the Death Eaters killed."

My heart sank in my chest, even as the Calming Draught struggled in my veins to keep my emotions leveled. The warring emotions bubbled beneath the surface, never quite making it to my eyes. I hated having these emotions, burrowed under the potion, and not being able to express them. My voice was calm, level.

"He's dead... he was only thirty-one years old. They just got married threemonths ago." The draught kept me from collapsing, kept my knees from buckling under the heavy weight. Lucius' warm arms found me again, and between Severus and he, I found myself back in the common room amongst friends. Lucius held me in his lap as he had when Scorpius had left for Gryffindor. This time, Illi and Ali curled up on either side of us, offering silent support.

I stared at the clock on the wall, fighting the potion and the emotions that rocked back and forth like a ship in a tempest. It was midnight.

Happy birthday, Hecate.

Mollis morsus I really liked this version of the Stinging Hex. *Mollis* basically translates as "soft, pliant, gentle" and *morsus* is "stinging, biting." It sort of feels like a mild burn or a bee sting.

As you can probably imagine, Scorpius' Marauder nickname comes from his real name. I thought "Stingtail" was amusing.

The various ingredients that Lucius, Illi, and Hecate are looking at were carefully chosen. You can find more information on the Obliviate Potion in my LJ: <http://hpmuse.livejournal.com/tag/potions>. More information on the Obliviate Potion to come in the story.

Galleon For Your Thoughts?

Chapter 12 of 18

Christmas money arrives from Molly. Why's Lucius acting so weird over a simple Galleon?

If ya'll are interested, I have challenged myself to writing a drabble/short fiction every day of the summer until my fall classes. These are posted in my LJ. The easiest way to view them is here: <http://hpmuse.livejournal.com/tag/drabble>

Also, not far down on that page is a YouTube video of me drawing Ali and yapping about her. There is a drawing of Ali up on my dA and an older drawing of the birthday gift from Lucius up there as well. All of this can be found in my Bio here on TPP.

Huge thanks to the TPP staff for catching my mistakes! You guys are awesome!

Disclaimer: If I owned it or profited from it, I certainly would not be living at home with my mother at twenty-three.

Chapter 13: Galleon for Your Thoughts?

I woke the morning of my birthday late, having tossed and turned all night. Cissa and Bella were long gone. Illi had saved me some toast and pumpkin juice. She had apparently barely found room on my bedside table to place it. Atop the table sat a large green-wrapped box and five smaller parcels wrapped in similar silver. I smiled at Illi a little forced, but I wanted to pretend at least that my birthday had not been marred by the previous night.

Illi must have seen something, because she caressed my back gently. "Madam Pomfrey is off for the next couple weeks or so. Mr. Pomfrey's death has hit her really hard, I think."

I nodded. Now that the subject was up, I wanted it gone. The pain in my chest was too much. Mr. Pomfrey did not deserve to die.

"He wasn't the only one killed," Illi murmured on. "The Three Broomsticks' manager, too. Little Rosie Rosmerta is pretty shaken up. Another old man died, too, but no one's been able to... to identify the body."

I stared into space. Three people. Three people dead so nearby. One of them left behind a small child, from the sounds of things. I shook my head ruefully. Why did people kill others? Why?

Illi cleared her throat. "Anyways... go on, then, love, open your presents! It's your birthday!"

I smiled up at her and took her advice. I opened the largest package, the one wrapped in green, first, delighted to find five brand-new books on various topics, a stack of mince pies, a new dark green jumper, and another new box of sugar quills. Did everyone know I was obsessed with the bloody things?

I nibbled on my toast as I started on the other gifts. Ali had bought me a handsome new eagle-feather quill, Illi a book on Cherokee-language spells. The entire dorm had come together and bought me an expensive-looking jade cobra with emerald eyes and silver-painted markings on its hood. The fourth gift was from Lucius, and I thought at first it was just a plain hair ribbon. However, Illi squealed with delight when the simple silk tie fell into my hands.

"By the gods, I knew he'd get you one!"

"What is it?" I asked, even as I opened the note that had come with the ribbon.

"Comb your hair," Illi said, a complete non sequitur. She reached around behind me and pulled a brush gently through my hair as I read the note.

Dear Hecate,

This is no ordinary ribbon. Comb your hair and leave it loose. Then, speak my full name. I'm sure it will come as quite a delightful surprise.

Lucius Malfoy

P.S. My full name is Lucius Abraxas Malfoy.

"Done! Say it, Heck, come on. I want to see what it does."

I felt slightly ludicrous for randomly saying my other best friend's name. But, as soon as the final syllable left my lips, the silver ribbon flew from my hand and into my hair. Illi squealed again and spun around to her own bedside table. She returned moments later with a tiny hand mirror.

The ribbon had not only secured my hair back; it had pulled it into a simple French braid, a perfect bow setting curls afloat at the end. A few wisps of curls had escaped the ribbon's pull, and fell forward. I grinned up at Illi's beaming face.

"It's so cute! How'd he do that?"

"It's one of the reasons the Malfoys are so rich," Illi explained. "The ribbons are sold exclusively by mail-order only, and only one heir knows how it's done in each generation. The ribbons only do one hairstyle at a time, but gods do they ever save time!"

"This is perfect for Potions class," I said, handing back the mirror. "I'll have to thank Lucius when I see him. Thank you for the book."

"It's nothing," she said. "You've still got one more. Who's that from, anyway?"

I held up the neatly-wrapped gift, turning it over gently. "It doesn't say." I slit the small gift open gently, and then the box within the paper. Spiky handwriting fell from the box onto my lap. Inside were three glass phials full of pale pink liquid.

Take a phial of this potion once now, once at lunch, and the last at supper. You shouldn't get any more chills after that.

Severus Snape

I stared at the brief note incredulously. "He... he found a cure for the chills?"

"Who did?" Illi looked over my shoulder. "Snape? Snape gave you a potion that he made himself?"

"I guess so," I said faintly. I sniffed at the potion in the first phial. It didn't smell bad... and he wouldn't poison me, or anything stupid like that and give up his name. I tilted the potion back into my throat and swallowed.

A warming sensation crawled down my esophagus and spread throughout the rest of my body. It felt almost like a soothing hug, rather than a liquid I'd swallowed.

Illi sighed. "You don't understand. Severus is a genius with potions, but the only one he's ever given one to is Lily Evans. Did you, like, snog him in the hall or something?"

I blinked at her incredulously. "No! I didn't *snog him*. I've only talked to him twice now."

"That's more than most," Illi said dryly. "Only Lucius ever seems to get through to him otherwise. Apparently Luc did something for Severus during his first year, and he has been loyal to him ever since."

I hesitated. "Well... I did help him heal up after he wouldn't let Madam Pomfrey leave Evans last night. McGonagall and Lucius helped me, but..."

Illi nodded. "No one really does much for Severus. He's far too stand-offish for most our tastes, plus his obsession with Evans... I think this is his way of saying 'thank you,' then."

"But he must have... I mean... that was midnight last night!" I cried. "Either he already had this brewed or..."

"Or he stayed up to brew it for you," Illi breathed.

We stayed in the dungeon for the rest of the day, our lunch and dinner brought to us on a wide, buffet-style table that appeared from nowhere. I dutifully took the remaining two doses of mystery potion. Severus never caught my eye, nor did he pay any attention at all to me. He sat in a corner and read potions books all day long. His long black hair blocked his line of sight from anyone else.

From then on, I never felt another chill like the ones that had plagued me for three long months.

October slipped away with Halloween at the end, and then November snuck up cold and brittle. Wind howled at the windows all throughout the long month. All along the way, Scorpius and Remus and I traded the journal, shirt, and quill. It did not break. Remus got sick again mid-November, and I tried and tried to determine its cause. I could find nothing of his symptoms in any of the medical books I read.

Lucius, Illi, Rabastan, and I went together for the first Hogsmeade visit. I bought more of my sugar quills. I was thinking about just making certain I had a stock of them and we drank butterbeer at the Three Broomsticks. The cold and the security wizards didn't really let us do much else.

There were two Quidditch matches, starting with Slytherin versus Gryffindor at the beginning of the month and Hufflepuff versus Ravenclaw at the end. I didn't attend either, and I was left mostly to myself in the common room. I preferred the warmth of the dungeon common room to the frigid wind of the Quidditch stands. No one else stayed, especially during the first match. I wanted no part of the game that had taken my brother from me though I knew it was childish to blame it on Quidditch.

I kept getting better at defense spells, and I had almost exhausted the book supply that the older students lent me. The Marauders and Scorpius. I could never think of them as one and the same continued to play pranks on poor Severus. Lily Evans still was the one who escorted him to the hospital wing when he got hurt or hexed.

The daily swims with Ali had toned my body more and more as the weeks passed on. I asked Molly for Christmas spending money and told her how many friends I wanted to shop for. The Hogsmeade visits were getting too cold, but I had catalogues to shop from, too. Molly astounded me yet again by sending me one hundred Galleons in a tightly sealed drawstring purse.

"Use it well. Love, Molly" was all that the accompanying note said. I began the hunt for Christmas gifts at the end of November. Mostly sweets. You couldn't go wrong with boys and sweets but I tried to get something meaningful, too. I shopped first for Scorpius and Remus, knowing that I'd get to give them their gifts in person on Christmas morning. I was excited already, knowing that I would be home for Christmas for the first time in my own memory.

Funny, I hadn't been so excited about my birthday.

Lucius and Illi were sitting in the common room with me as I counted out six Galleons and three Sickles for a book on Japanese charms one early December evening. Lucius was working on a Transfiguration essay, and Illi was attempting in her magnanimous way to help him. I knew eventually I would be reading over it, too.

Suddenly, without warning, Lucius reached over and seized a particularly old-looking coin. "Hecate, can I have this Galleon? I'll trade you for a new one, this one has my lucky number on it."

Bemused, I nodded slowly. "Sure, Lucius, you can trade me for it. What's your lucky number?"

"Ninety-two," he said off-handedly, pulling a silver-gilded bag from his pocket. He picked up a handful of Galleons, casually perused them, and then handed me a particularly shiny one. "I seem to have all the luck when I've got a coin with that number on it in my pouch."

I grinned at him. "I'll have to remember that."

Abruptly, he stood and reached into his rucksack for a piece of parchment. "I have to owl my father, I need to ask his assistance on something." With that, he took off, leaving all of his things still strewn across the coffee table.

Not at all like the Lucius we knew.

Illi blinked. "Wonder what that was all about."

A few seconds later, Lucius returned again, running a hand through his hair in agitation. "Er... Heck, can I see you, um, in your, er, dorm room? Cissa and Bella aren't here, right?"

I stood up, alarmed. "Sure, Luc, anything. Illi, can you watch my things for me till we get back?"

Illi nodded absently, still writing on her Charms essay. "Sure, ooh-luh, just don't kick the sheets on the floor. Cissa will know immediately. You know how she gets."

Lucius flushed scarlet. He grabbed my hand and pulled me through the tapestries and curtains. After a moment or two of staring wild-eyed at me, he warded the curtain, silenced it, and put an Imperturbable Charm on it. Then he pulled me onto my bed, shut my hangings, and repeated the spells again.

I stared at him in utter bewilderment. "Lucius... what's wrong? You look, pardon the Muggle phrase, like you've seen a ghost or something."

Lucius' pale skin looked paler; he was an ashen gray color that matched much of his wardrobe outside of school robes. His silver eyes were wide with terror and shock so keen I wondered whether I should go for Madam Pomfrey. I half-stood to do just that when Lucius' hand wrapped tightly around my shoulder, pulling me back into the bed.

"Heck... love," he paused, his voice struggling for words. His large hands caught at his hair, mussing it well beyond what I've ever seen of him before. "S-Sister, I..."

"Lucius, what is wrong?" I asked, smoothing his hair back.

He swallowed hard, the sound of it audible in the absolute silence of twice-done Silencing Charms. He spoke slowly, as though quite uncertain what he'd gotten himself into. "Heck, do you remember that you mentioned that the hermit crab shell powders are used in Time-Turners?"

"Yes...?"

He took the old Galleon he'd traded with me from the pouch, and then a brand-new one that looked to be in mint condition. It was there that I saw what had taken him so utterly out of his element.

They were the same coin.

Not just the same goblin, not just coincidentally similar... they were the same exact coin. Except mine looked like it was twenty or thirty years old. I stared from serial number to serial number, at a complete loss.

"Molly has something to do with this," Lucius said firmly. "The potion you took, the one that Obliviated you so precisely. It had hermit crab shells in it. What if, when ingested, hermit crab shells change something to do with time?"

I whispered, more to myself than to Lucius. "Either I'm from the future, the past, or I've been de-aged. Scorpius and me both."

Lucius shook his head. "We can narrow it down further. Scorpius is a unique name, and he had a locket found on his person with that name. You two are not from the past, or the present. Damn it to fucking hell, Hecate. You're from the future. And somehow you got hold of one of the Malfoy coins."

"What do you mean, the Malfoy coins?" I whispered.

"This coin," Lucius held up the newly minted coin. "This was created specifically by Guthbert for the Malfoy heir me. They do it for all the pureblood kids, if the family can afford it. My father minted this coin for me."

My breathing grew shallow. "But... but what am I doing in the past? My past? How far in the future am I from? Will I get my memories back...?"

"If... and don't quote me on this, Heck." Lucius stared me down with terror in his eyes, as though I were the one to fear here. "If I got Severus correctly when I wheedled it out of him, the potion will lapse over time you'll get your memories back bit by bit as you move closer to a certain point."

"My birth," I breathed. "It's got to be."

"But what good is it to go to your past if you don't know what you're supposed to fix?" Lucius asked, his tone incredulous. "I mean, fuck it, Heck! What's the point?"

"I don't know," I said. I gestured to the old Malfoy coin. "Could I trade you back for that Galleon? It probably wouldn't do to have such a thing in circulation."

He nodded. "Yeah... keep it. Don't worry about paying me back."

I smiled softly. "Okay." I cocked my head to the side. "What did Ili mean by not kicking the sheets on the floor?"

Lucius chuckled low in his throat. His head came swooping down, his silver eyes level with mine, staring straight into my soul, it seemed. The move sent my heart flip-flopping oddly in my chest. "I think she meant, should we begin doing anything romantic, my dear."

He closed the distance between us abruptly, placing a soft, chaste kiss on my lips. My eyes widened in surprise at the warm, smooth feel of them there, of the jolt of molten magma shooting through my chest and core. A feeling, a throbbing ache started at the apex of my thighs. He backed away almost as quickly as he'd come. I didn't understand it, but he did not kiss me again.

"But you are too young for that, Hecate," he said, his voice a little husky. The sound sent more of those odd sensations shooting to my core. "Starting tonight, I'm going to teach you Occlumency."

"What's that?" I asked, not having come across it in my readings.

"It's closing off your mind to outward invasions, people trying to read your thoughts," he said. "I'm going to teach you to do it so that when you do remember yourself, if it is anyone who knows something someone shouldn't know... I'll teach you so well, even the Dark Lord will not be able to pry open your mind."

I smiled at him, the power of those words echoing within me as surely as his kiss had done. "I'd like that, Lucius."

He settled against the backboard of my bed and held his arms out to me. Feeling a bit like a child in a storybook I'd read once, I sat against his chest, my left thigh meshing with his. Hands, large on my leanly muscled shoulders and biceps, massaged gently. His pointed, long nose nuzzled my hair, the skin behind my ears. Waves of tingles spread out from my ear, sending a very different kind of chill over my body with every whispered word.

"Clear your mind, Hecate. Clear it of every thought, of every memory; focus on the sound of my voice. Close your eyes. Think of a calm ocean, of the Black Lake, or the open field of grass. Think of nothing and yet everything at once."

I did as he bade, and slowly the pleasurable chills lulled into a sleepy sort of haze. His chest rumbled at my back. I realized with a lazy start that he was chuckling so softly that I could barely hear him, even with his mouth so near my ear.

"You learn things so simply, Hecate," he murmured, his voice lower, a smooth quality that I had never quite heard from my white-blond older friend. It sent more of those pleasure-hazed tingles through me. I felt a light bit of pressure on my head; he'd kissed my hair. His hands moved over my arms again, soft yet powerful. "Focus that enormous brain power of yours on an image you are most comfortable with. Your room, for instance, or your dressing room."

My image, however, was neither of those things. It was the library I'd first seen in my head, the library that had held all of the information I had begun this life anew with. The single bookcase, the simple table, the squashy red velvet armchair. The window that seemed to show only snow-covered ground and distant trees. I held the image in my head, nodding even as Lucius' large hands moved from my arms and nestled over my abdomen, just beneath my breasts.

"You have the image, clear in your mind, love?" Lucius asked.

"Yes." I was startled to find my voice breathy. Lucius' chest rumbled under my back again. His hands danced over my abdomen and belly, gently rubbing as though I had a stomachache he was trying to soothe away. It was strangely enticing, setting my nerves on a pleasurable end.

"Good. Now put every memory you have ever had with Scorpius inside whatever you deem safest. In a locked cabinet, or a heavily warded drawer. This space is Extendable, so it can hold as many memories as you like. Picture yourself taking each memory and placing it carefully in the drawer."

I found it strange that he had mentioned Scorpius in particular, but I did as I was told. I had a lot of memories of Score, considering it was he I had hung around with for most of my summer. I took the whole of that time and hid it away. The time chunk was enormous, like a giant poster, but I rolled it up and snapped elastic around it. I stuck the roll in a gouged-out copy of Moste Potente Potions, and continued to do that to each and every memory of Scorpius Taylor.

All the while, Lucius continued explaining in that low, soft voice of his.

"This is similar to a Pensieve, love. You will sense the memories are not there where they ought to be. But anyone who is looking into your head will not sense the gap unless it is quite large, usually spanning weeks or more. They cannot sense your emotions in any memory they find, love, but they can observe memories as easily as you could. Are you nearly done?"

I nodded, my eyes still closed. His hands, I noticed, had stilled on the peaks of my hipbones. He turned my head to face him.

"Open your eyes."

I did, and as soon as my brown eyes had locked onto his grey ones, he whispered a spell. "Legilimens."

I felt the presence in my mind, an outsider probing in my frontal lobes. Lucius' touch was as gentle here as his hands on my hips. Not once did an image of Scorpius come up, even in places that I would have seen him from afar, like the Great Hall.

But Lucius saw me open my Christmas present from Severus, saw Illi's delight at the ribbon he'd given me. He watched the first time I met Severus Snape, when Score had been in the back room. He saw from my perspective the first time I shocked Crabbe; a random Herbology class.

The presence of Lucius' probing left as gently as it came. I had never attempted to keep him from Scorpius' images, but he seemed not to have tried to get to them, either. He smiled gently.

"I only used what is known as level one Legilimency," he explained. "The Dark Lord uses level seven the strongest there is. Take your memories back out of your hiding place. We'll continue this tomorrow evening."

He removed the spells from around my curtains, and then the spells from the dorm's curtains. His gentle hands on my hips stayed, though. Grey eyes crinkled into a sweet smile.

"I'd like that," I said softly, afraid to break the hold this intimate position between us had begun. Slowly, so he had time to back away should he wish it, I stretched up to his face. When he didn't move, when he didn't look away, I closed the remaining space and kissed him chastely on the lips.

He kissed back, his gentle hands pulling my hips back toward his. A hard pressure found the back of my bum. He broke contact with my lips in favor of a hiss.

"Did I hurt you?" I whispered, nearly frantic.

"No, no," he murmured, dipping down to kiss me again, too shortly, too chastely. "You are too young for this, love, but I will not..." He kissed me, the pressure harder, the passion in him coming briefly to the surface. Lucius broke off as quickly as he'd started. "I will not do this until you are ready, Hecate."

With that, he left, not another word one way or the other.

For some reason, I felt rather frustrated with him.

__~*~__

December began to wane, but my various activities continued with no little improvement. Lucius was pleased with my Occlumency skills as if I had many memories to hide, or any that I wanted to hide from him, at any rate. My grades remained high, my homework done well ahead of time. Remus, Scorpius, and I continued trading the journal, quill, and shirt in Potions. Severus continued to ignore me in a more polite fashion than he ignored the rest of the House.

And of course, I continued buying Christmas presents.

Our end-of-term exams were simple at best, and I beamed at my excellent grades. Even Illi conceded that it was damn near impossible to get an "O" in McGonagall's classes, let alone Vector's.

Remus was sick again, in the hospital wing, and it was only a day before we would leave to go home for the holidays. Madam Pomfrey still would not let me see him until the next morning. I was sure he was going to look as haggard and overgrown as before. Still, I had not found what afflicted him.

I sat in the common room that evening, re-reading *Moste Potente Potions*, as Madam Pince had refused to allow me to bring any books home with me. I had read all the others' books, and my birthday presents were long devoured (except a precious few sugar quills).

A knock on the door leading into the hall ceased most conversations. A sixth-year got up to answer. Quavering as though its knees might give from sheer terror, a house-elf stood on the outside, its bulging, tennis-ball-sized eyes shut tight and its long nose almost brushing the plush green carpet.

"F-For Master Malfoy, sirs," it shook.

The sixth-year took a parchment envelope, and the house-elf vanished without saying a word more. Lucius stood from his game of chess with Rabastan who was losing and took the envelope with unnerving grace. With an easy flick of his wand, the envelope vanished and the letter within fell into his hands.

Around us, the common room returned to its usual banter. However, Lucius leaned around the chessboard to look at Illi and me. "My father's invited you two to the Manor for our annual Christmas ball. He thought it prudent to send your invites to me first."

He handed me a silver leaflet and an identical one to Illi. Lucius stood and strode to the tapestry leading to our dorms. I understood without him having to say anything he wanted a private conversation with Illi and me. We both followed him.

He cast the same three spells he did whenever we had Occlumency lessons. Illi hadn't been told about the lessons. So far, she hadn't asked what we were doing alone in the dorm room. I think Lucius wanted it kept secret between us, and I obeyed his wish only because I wanted to keep having the lessons. To be able to block out the Dark Lord himself... even I knew what that could mean for me.

Lucius had explained it to me in no uncertain terms. Slytherins usually joined him in the sixth year. I didn't want to become a murderer like the ones who had killed Healer Pomfrey, but neither did I want to be killed myself. Slytherins who forsook the Master often ended up dead... or worse.

That was why Lucius could block minds so well. He seemed to have several reasons for teaching me how. I wondered often why Illi had not been drawn into these lessons, but I did not ask yet.

It was a Slytherin thing to do, after all.

The silver leaflets told us nothing more and nothing less than that we were invited on the twenty-sixth of December to Malfoy Manor. That was it. No other information, no idea of what to wear or how to act. I didn't know the first thing about how to act in a ballroom. Dancing? Would there be dancing? I knew these things usually required dress robes, but what kind? How fancy?

Lucius must have seen the calculating, escalating panic in my eyes. Even though I had a grasp on my emotions, Lucius said that my eyes gave me away. I would have to eventually keep them blank. For now, he didn't admonish me for it.

"This is... not good," Lucius admitted after a few beats, the wards he'd erected humming with the energy he'd put behind them. "My father has never invited my schoolmates along to the ball."

"What do you think he has in mind?" Illi asked.

Lucius winced as though she'd physically struck him. "I think... oh, gods. I think he wants you to meet the Dark Lord."

My far-more-simple worries of what to wear and dancing evaporated with a gasp. Illi and I blinked at him, our faces identically owl-eyed. *Us?! Now?! Why?*

"The Dark Lord only asks to see people early if they have potential," Lucius said, his irritation coming out in the form of arm wheeling and pacing. "He wants you in

particular, Heck, but Illi is so far along with her duel-lessons that he asked for her, too."

Slowly, the implications of his statements clicked into place. "You *told your father* about our *marks*?" My voice hit a shrill note at the end.

Lucius paled. "It's my job. That's what the Dark Lord has me do. He chooses one child of a Death Eater... when I graduate, I daresay Ali will take over."

My heart froze in my chest. Ali... little Ali, reporting to the Dark Lord the achievements of the House? She was still so terrified! So shy!

Something in the way Lucius looked, however, made me fear all the more for her. "Lucius, who refused to go?"

Lucius glanced back at me on a pace toward Narcissa's bed, his expression openly startled. "Wh-What?"

"I asked, who refused?"

He grit his teeth. "Severus did. When the Dark Lord heard that he refused because he was so enamored with a Mudblood... I have never seen my father cry before. I don't ever wish to behold it again."

Lucius unconsciously wrapped his arms around himself, and I knew that Abraxas Malfoy had cried not because it was he who would have been hurt, but Lucius. That Lucius was more disturbed by his father's tears than his own body's pain was a testament to the fifteen-year-old before me. A flare of pride swelled in my chest.

"Don't worry," I murmured gently.

"Yeah, ooh-doe," Illi said. It was the first time she'd ever called him "brother." "I don't think you'll need to worry about Heck and me."

I was reminded of the first time I spoke to Illiad Parkinson on the train. Unbidden, Johnny Cash's song played in my head *He died drunk, early one morning, alone in the land he found to save, two inches of water in a lonely ditch was a grave for Ira Hayes*. I shuddered at the thought.

Surely this was entirely different?

Surely the two Indians were completely different, my Illiad Parkinson fighting against Mudbloods in our school, and Ira Hayes fighting a war he didn't start for a group of people who didn't even care about him?

Somehow, though, the similarities shook me to the core.

I swallowed and asked a question that I had dared not bring up since that first day on the train. "Er... Illi... how did your mother die?"

The question was completely out of the blue, and I knew it. I also knew that I wanted the answer. The fact was written on my face. I knew it. I also knew that I was being quite Slytherin in the way I asked, in the way I probed. Somehow, that didn't ease the clench in my gut as Illi answered.

"My father caught her in a liaison with a Muggle man in the States," she said softly. "He divorced her. She killed herself not long after that. He died a year later. I was a first-year. My maternal uncle took my half-brother and me in during the summers. That's why I'm always over in the States. My half-brother has been staying with the Crabbes these past few years, though."

"I never asked, what's your brother's name?"

"Half-brother," she corrected instantly. "His name is Hamlet Mulciber. Our mother was the same, not father." She tossed her hair in a fit of pique. "If ever have a child, I'm going to give her *my* surname. I'd name her something that I'd put in a love potion, perhaps."

"Pansies, daisies, and roses are common love potion flowers," I said, instantly drawing on my old habit of spouting knowledge. "And pansies are used for inducing creative thoughts."

"Pansy Parkinson..." Illi smiled dreamily. "Doesn't that just have a lovely ring to it, Hecate?"

I tried to recall how we'd gotten into this string of conversation and gave it up as a bad job. Going from discussing the terrifying idea of visiting the Dark Lord day after Christmas morning to what to name Illi's future daughter was unsettling.

Illi shook her head, bemused. "Well... how should we act when we get there, Lucius?"

Lucius started pacing again, as though the conversation had never derailed. "I can't teach you how to act or anything. The Dark Lord will be satisfied with however you deem appropriate to act it's Christmas, and he's very understanding of new people. He'll be especially lenient as you're from the States and you're... well, Obliviated."

It didn't take a genius to figure out which of us he was referring to on each of these statements, even though he never looked up from his pacing. I reached out and stopped him.

"Then don't worry about it," I said. "It will be all right."

"He won't try to read your minds the first time you meet," Lucius said, barely taking my words into account. "But I will have to start giving you Occlumency lessons, Illi. We can't let the Dark Lord find out about Hecate's associations with Lupin and her brother. It would be disastrous."

I didn't need to ask how it would be; just thinking of Healer Pomfrey was enough of an answer. Illi nodded solemnly.

As Illi turned to leave, I turned to Lucius and whispered. "Why hadn't we been teaching her before this?"

"I didn't want her to have access to your other memories, should you have gotten them," he whispered back. "I should not even know, love."

I drew back in surprise. Lucius merely nodded toward the common room. Slowly, I returned the nod it would not do to lose appearances, after all.

Not in this House.

~*~

The idea of pureblood Galleons came to me when my mom started going through my old baby stuff. I figured that purebloods HAD to have something that they could present to their children at some time in the future. This is also Molly's thievery of the Malfoy vaults coming back to bite her in the arse.

As for Lucius teaching Heck Occlumency, I figured that as Sev considered him such a mentor figure early on, that this may have been where he learned to Occlude in the first place.

Tea Time

Chapter 13 of 18

A light-hearted before-the-storm chapter. Heck's already thinking about marriage, Draco makes another dreamtime appearance, and Heck gets to know a bit more about the Noble House of Black.

Ya'll can thank the gods for miracles my computer crashed. Fear not, I had Devil's Game all saved on a pin drive, including everything I've written thus far. So, here is a major "thank you" to my guardian goddess, Bastet, for protecting what's important to me. I bought myself a new laptop in the wake of the other one's death.

The bad thing about not having a beta? I totally screwed up the chapter numbers. I'll attempt to fix them...

Also, huge thank you to the TPP staff for their patience!

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter or the song Drift Away.

Chapter 11: Tea Time

Remus did not ride home on the train with us. He was still in the hospital wing when we were boarding the train. Scorpius rode with the other Marauders. I didn't even see my own brother until we were all the way on the other end of the train trip. The compartment I sat in was comprised entirely of Slytherins Ali, Illi, Lucius, Regulus Black, and Rabastan Lestrange. Although Rodolphus was in my year, he and the other third-year boys preferred to hang around with Bella and Cissa sometimes it was like Illi and I didn't exist.

Not that I wasn't around with those two; I just preferred Lucius, Illi, and Ali. And when I wasn't with Lucius, he was with Rabastan the same with Ali and Regulus.

The ride home was quiet for the most part, save for Rabastan's wireless belting along with the *clicky-clack* sound of the train wheels. The combination was soothing. Although I had slept well the night before, I sank against Lucius' warm, comfortable body and fell asleep.

Draco sighed, sinking into the compartment seat beside me. We were in the Prefect's carriage, though why I didn't know. I was only a third-year, after all. But the Malfoy boy wrapped his arm around me and sighed again.

"I can't believe you've managed to pull it off so far," he said, glancing out the window at the passing blue-grey mountains. "Not only infiltrating Slytherin, but befriending Lucius, too. And getting noticed by the Dark Lord! How are you ever going to handle it, especially if he manages to break through your Occlumency?"

I sat back into Draco, much like I was with his father in the waking world. "I... I think I'm falling in love with Lucius."

Draco managed to look both alarmed and impressed. "You c-can't! I'll never be born if he doesn't marry..." He trailed off, careful not to name his mother even though I wouldn't remember it when I woke.

"Would it be so bad if I was your mother, Draco?" I whispered, kissing his cheek gently.

"No, not particularly," Draco murmured. "Except... if you change things that much, if you change who my mother is, I really won't be born. It doesn't work like that."

I didn't know how to respond, so I didn't.

"Go back to him, Hermione. If I'm not born, I understand. At least my father will have married for love... this time."

I jerked awake. Lucius smirked down at me. "Nice nap, love?"

"Yes..." I murmured. My body was still sluggish, but my mind grappled with the fading details of my dream furiously. "Lucius, I have a question for you."

"Hmm?"

"Do purebloods have the same thing as Muggle purebloods, where they... that is, where your father arranges your marriage?"

Lucius' hold on me tightened. "He hasn't mentioned... no. But it is... it is a usual occurrence. Why?" And I'd never seen so intense a gaze from his grey eyes as the one that was trained on me now.

"Nothing... I was reading on it and... never mind."

The wireless began a new song, and I sank back against Lucius again. His tight hold on my waist did not relax for well into the next few beats of the nondescript music. I didn't blame him. Though I had no experience with love, lust, marriage, or anything, I knew that marriage meant to be tied to a single person forever. What if I really had no choice for which person I would spend the rest of my life with? For the first time since I had met him, I pitied Lucius Malfoy.

Rabastan began to softly sing along with his radio, the words more somber in his gentle voice than the man who originally sang the song.

Day after day I'm more confused,

Yet I look for the light

Through the pouring rain

You know that's a game that I hate to lose

And I'm feeling the strain

Ain't it a shame

Oh, give me the beat boys,

And free my soul

I wanna get lost in your rock n roll

And Drift Away

Give me the beat boys

And free my soul

I wanna get lost in your rock n roll

And Drift Away

I allowed myself to drift away on the confusing, freeing strains of the music. I almost didn't notice the way that Lucius rocked me gently to the beat, so caught in it that I had closed my eyes. Suddenly, I remembered myself back in the bed at St. Mungo's, my eyes magically closed, running through the confusing canyons of my memories. The bookshelf that stood alone amidst the fog.

Now, however, the canyons were filled, at least somewhat. By my friends. My family. My sisters, my brothers. My mother, Molly. I knew she wasn't really, but that was the only thing I could consider her.

Illi, Ali. Lucius, Scorpius, Remus.

Lucius suddenly leapt to his feet, pulling me up with him to the strains of a new sound on the wireless.

"Dance with me," he said, grinning as "Your Mama Don't Dance" came on the air. My eyes widened, and I shook my head. He just nodded more firmly, grasped my arms, and swung me in a graceful arc.

"Oh, Lucius, don't make her!" Rabastan cried, but he was grinning. "She can't know how."

"No time like the present to learn," Lucius said, pulling my right hand in his, tossing my left hand on his shoulder, and placing his on my waist. "Follow me, love."

Regulus jumped up beside the older boy and me, dragging Ali to her feet. Rabastan reached around him and pulled a far-less-than-resisting Illi into his own embrace. The six of us danced as only ones who didn't care about the world outside could dance.

Never before or since have I felt so exhilarated to be stuffed in a tiny compartment, rubbing bums with Rabastan Lestrangle and thighs with Illiad Parkinson, laughing in the arms of Lucius Malfoy.

~*~

The chill air of December tasted like herbal tea and smelled of wild ice, even once we had stepped off the platform at King's Cross station. I will never forget that late December day, because it was the first time I'd ever met Abraxas Malfoy. I had changed into my Muggle clothes (ugh), pulling a deep green cloak on just to feel even generally "right" after so many months in robes.

How our perceptions change.

To show it off, I wore Lucius' ribbon. I was glad, far later down the line, for this previously unknown insight into the Malfoy perspective. Not Lucius'; Abraxas'.

Lucius politely helped me put my trunk on the ground, though it wasn't near as heavy, considering I'd left most of my clothes at Hogwarts. Rabastan and Regulus did the same for Illi and Ali. All three of us girls blushed and thanked our gentlemen. In spite of our young age, it was still a treat to know such sweet men.

Simultaneous cries wrenched the air with shrill harpy voices.

"ALIOTH!"

"REGULUS!"

And just as suddenly, Ali and Regulus were on the ground, covered with their mothers' kisses. Regulus was quite futilely trying to get up. Ali just shrieked back a word that sounded suspiciously like, "Mummy!"

All four seemed to rise at once. Ali tugged her mother, a woman who looked like an older copy of her daughter, over toward Lucius, Illi, and me.

"This is my mum, Juniper Mulciber," she said, regaining her Slytherin sensibilities. The elder woman smiled and held her hands out to Illi and me. Lucius kissed her right hand after she released ours.

"Good afternoon," she said politely, the shrieking from before causing her throat to husk the words slightly.

"Illiad Parkinson, Mrs. Mulciber," Illi said, smiling.

"Lucius Malfoy."

"Hecate Taylor."

Mrs. Mulciber blinked several times. "I'm terribly sorry to be rude, but... You are the same girl who...?"

"Was Obliviated?" I supplied, smiling. "Don't worry, you're not the first."

Regulus pulled his own mother over to us. She looked well-aged in spite of her sons' ages, her face lined and pallor yellowed. Her hair, though, was as black as both her sons', and straight as string.

"Walburga Black," she said primly, her eyes warming over me. "I heard good things from Sirius about you, Hecate Taylor. And more of the same from Regulus."

I ducked my head with a delighted blush. "I'm... pleased to hear that, Mrs. Black. I'm also quite glad that you sent Sirius to keep Scorpius and me company in St. Mungo's. We were going a bit stir-crazy before then."

Mrs. Black chuckled softly. "Please, you must meet my husband, Orion. Come to tea sometime during the holidays? Your brother is, of course, invited as well."

But the invitation for Scorpius sounded more like cold politeness and nothing more. I decided against bringing him, unless he really wanted to meet Walburga and Orion Black.

"We're having Cissa, Bella, Andy, and their parents over for tea tomorrow," Regulus said excitedly. "Could they come then, mother, please? Could Ali come, if... if that's okay with you, Mrs. Mulciber?"

"Of course, that would be lovely, Regulus," Mrs. Black said. She smiled down her long nose at me. "Shall I owl Ms. Taylor the particulars?"

"I'll let Molly know," I said, grinning. "Thank you. I'll see you two there, then."

Mrs. Mulciber, Mrs. Black, Ali, and Regulus said good-bye and walked away. Illi hugged me round the middle and left too. Sometime in the exchange with the two first-years' mothers, Rabastan had vanished. Lucius smiled at me.

"Shall we tell Molly of your invitation to the ball now, then, as well?" he asked.

"Sure, that's a good idea," I said. I picked up my trunk handle and wheeled off toward the entrance. Lucius wasn't far behind, and he stopped me with the minutest of movements.

"That's my father," he said, nodding toward the walkway.

Standing off from the crowd, alone and tall, his eyes trailing off with a bored air of indifference, was an exact replica of Lucius twenty years his senior. His long, white-blond hair was bound in a black velvet ribbon, not a hair out of place. Even his nose was shaped the same. I smiled up at Lucius.

"You can tell you're related."

Lucius let loose a delicate snort. "I wish he weren't so cold sometimes. After mother..." He stopped, but I could hear the end of that sentence *Died*. I had never asked why Lucius never spoke of her so this was why. She wasn't alive. He guided me toward Abraxas Malfoy with the polite air of a pureblood scion. I knew that only because Lucius had trained me how to act when he did.

"Father," Lucius greeted him. "May I present Lady Hecate, sir?"

"Charmed," said Mr. Malfoy. He accepted my hand, bent to it, but did not kiss it the way Lucius did every time he did so. I felt only cold air on my wrist. "I assume my son has informed you of my invitation, madam?"

"Yes, sir," I said, polite indifference crossing my features. "I look forward to it."

Now he smiled. "That is good to hear, young lady. I see Lucius has given you one of our ribbons."

"Yes." I returned the smile politely. "It is quite useful. Thank you for letting him give it to me."

Mr. Malfoy's smile widened. "You are welcome. Lucius?"

"Father, may I go with Lady Hecate to inform her mother of the invitation?"

"Be quick, Lucius. We have a Manor to prepare for the ball."

"Yes, Father."

Lucius led me away with the same polite, aristocratic air he had brought me over with. As soon as we were out of earshot, he let loose a huge sigh. "Thank the gods that's over with. You did beautifully, Hecate. He was pleased."

I smiled nervously, feeling as though I had been disturbingly close to being hexed. Lucius just shook his head and returned seamlessly into the friend I'd come to know. Scorpius had already found Molly by the time we found her in a corner of the platform.

"Molly!" I grinned and raced forward to hug her tightly. She gripped my cloak in her arms.

"Oh, look at you, scrawny as the day is long!" Molly scowled. "I told you to eat, girl!" She hugged me good-naturedly, all the same.

"She has been, trust me," Lucius said from behind me. "She eats more than most women in our House."

Molly turned her glowing eyes on Lucius. A flicker of emotion passed in front of her eyes, but I didn't quite know what. Lucius, for his part, did not act as though he had seen it. If he had, I would know about it soon enough.

"I'm Lucius Malfoy, one of Hecate's friends from school," he said, offering his hand to shake. Molly shook it with a polite smile. "My father invited her to our Christmas ball on the twenty-sixth, and I was just wondering if that would be quite all right with you, Ms. Taylor?"

"Oh, please, call me Molly," she said. She glanced down at me another odd emotion in her eyes, as though she were wary. "Of course she can go. What time is it? I'll need to buy you some nice dress robes, too, Hecate."

"No need to do so, Molly," Lucius said, smiling softly. "I... I'd like to take her somewhere to buy the robes. As a Christmas gift."

I turned surprised eyes on my friend. "R-Really, Lucius?"

He nodded, smiling shyly through his pale, long eyelashes, somehow managing to look up at me from his advantaged height. I threw my arms around his neck.

"Thank you," I murmured.

"It's the least I can do, love," he whispered back. "I'll pick you up at your Floo at three o'clock, then?" He glanced at Molly.

"Of course," Molly said, smiling. "We will see you then, L-Lucius." I noticed the trip over his first name and wondered at it. Oh, I most definitely would be discussing Molly's odd reactions with him.

After all, if our suspicions were correct, Molly had something to do with my apparent Obliviate.

"Oh!" I covered my mouth. "I've been invited to tea at the Blacks tomorrow, too! Mrs. Black said she'd owl you the details."

"Awfully popular, aren't you?" Molly said, but she was grinning.

"Regulus said Score could come if he wanted to..." I said, glancing at my brother. He looked horrified at the prospect.

"That's okay," Molly said. "Wanda said that Sirius' family doesn't like him much."

Lucius cleared his throat. "I'll see you on the twenty-sixth, love. Molly, Scorpius." He nodded a greeting to each of them and bowed to kiss my hand. "Hecate."

He turned and was gone in a flourish of green silk robes.

"Well, come along, then," Molly said. "We ought to get you two home so you can unpack. Wanda said that Remus would come over tomorrow afternoon. I'll see if I can

catch Bernard's attention after we find out when you'll be going to tea, Hecate."

A shivering cold smacked me in the chest. It took me nearly as long as it took to get into the Muggle cab before I figured out what it was guilt. I got to see Lucius, Illi, Ali, and Regulus all during the school year, and now I wasn't going to be home to possibly to hang out with Remus.

On the other hand, I'd never met any of the Blacks. This would be my first opportunity to meet Orion, Cygnus, and Druella Black. And I'd never really gotten to hang out with Andy at all, her being a seventh-year. Of course, that excuse was kind of out there. I hung around a fifth-year and a couple first-years all the time. In fact, now that I think of it, I hardly ever hung around with any of my fellow year mates aside from Illi.

Now isn't that a sobering thought.

I blew a deep breath out of my mouth, telling myself that it wasn't that difficult of a situation.

__~*~__

I dressed in a deep green set of robes, pulling my cloak closer around my neck. Regulus was going to Floo in to escort me to the Black household, but I still preferred wearing my cloak for appearance's sake. First impressions, after all, had Sticking Charms attached to them they didn't just go away. That's what Molly kept telling me about Sirius, James, and Peter, anyway.

It really wasn't so much that I didn't *want* to give the other three Marauders a chance. More to the point, it was too dangerous to associate with them. Try explaining that to someone like Molly, who had never attended Hogwarts during a war.

Oh, how little I knew.

Remus and Scorpius were already over at Remus' flat with James, already lamenting that Sirius couldn't join them. Molly was at work already. I'd spent most of the morning doing my holiday essays I only had my History of Magic one remaining. I couldn't start on it in only fifteen minutes, so I was pacing the space in front of the fireplace waiting for Regulus.

Just as Mrs. Black's missive had said the day before, Regulus spun out from the fireplace at exactly two o'clock. His long black hair had been tied back in an elegant, gentlemanly ponytail at his nape. He wore black dress robes that seemed to glisten as he walked except where the ashes had stuck to them, of course.

"Heck!" he grinned up at me. "All ready to go?"

I nodded, smiling down at my favorite Black boy. "All ready."

He glanced around, obviously intrigued by the front room. "This is real nice, for a Muggle flat. What's that thing?" He pointed at the TV.

"It's a television," I said. "It shows programs with moving pictures. Sort of like extended wizarding photographs with sound."

"Really?" His slim black eyes widened. "How do they do that without magic?"

"It's electricity," I said, smirking. "Were we going, or are you going to stand and gawk at my sitting room for much longer?"

The twelve-year-old blushed. "It's number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Careful about the number, there's another wizarding family in number four."

I nodded, making a mental note to ask who later on. Regulus stepped back into the fireplace with a pinch of Floo powder. I followed him as soon as the green flames cleared. The fireplaces whirled around like a sick Muggle carnival ride and finally spat me out in what had to be the gloomiest sitting room I had ever laid eyes on.

Not that that said much.

Almost as soon as I'd stepped clear of the fireplace, a man that looked much like Sirius might at forty stepped forward and muttered several incantations. I recognized only half of them.

"Dad! Could you at least wait until she's out of the way before you start all that?" Regulus whined slightly.

"I will not have anyone finding our home, Reggie, as you well know," said the serious-looking man. He turned to me. "Orion Black, madam, and a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance. I doubt Reggie would have given us time of day unless you were somehow involved." His black eyes glittered with mirth at that.

"Nice to meet you, sir," I said, smiling politely.

Walburga Black was sitting at the long, wooden table in a silver-painted chair. She smiled in greeting at me, and then returned to her *Daily Prophet*.

I appeared to be in a basement kitchen. At the far end was a house-elf, who cheerfully hummed along to a wizarding wireless as he worked. The table was set with good silver goblets and plates. Regulus grinned.

"I have to go pick up Ali, so I'll be right back, okay?"

"All right," I said. I took a seat across from his mother as Regulus stepped back into the Floo. Walburga Black smiled up at me through her eyelashes.

"Sirius is gathering Cissa, Bella, Andy, Cygnus, and Druella," she said. Her husband settled into the head chair of the table, taking his wife's paper with him. "He should be back soon."

"I've not really had a chance to speak much with Sirius," I admitted. "My brother Scorpius is on much more friendly terms. I believe they, James, Remus, and Peter are rarely without one another."

"I have heard much the same of yourself, Illiad Parkinson, Alioth Mulciber, my son, and Lucius Malfoy. You surround yourself with odd company, I admit, Miss Taylor."

"Please call me Hecate, Madam Black," I said. "I rarely answer to Taylor even at school. And I honestly wouldn't know that it is strange, considering..." I allowed my tone to drift.

"Call me Walburga, then, Hecate," she said. "Too many Blacks will be here to know to whom you are speaking. And I sympathize as well as I can."

"Why would it be strange?" I asked.

"Usually people tend to enjoy being with those their own age," Walburga said, gesturing toward the fireplace. "Parkinson is the only one who fits in with your group, and even she is a touch odd, considering her American heritage."

"Native American," I pointed out. "And I don't find it odd. She acts as British as the rest of us. Cissa and Bella are great companions for some things... others not so much."

Walburga chuckled softly. "Make-up spells not your cup of tea, then?"

Vehemently, I shook my head. The fireplace flared back up again, this time with Sirius Black spinning from the flames. Cissa, Bella, Andromeda, and a man who looked like

Orion, only taller, and a woman who looked like an older, extremely petite version of Cissa, followed him. Not even a minute later, Regulus and Ali appeared.

Quite suddenly, I felt like a unicorn foal in a Care of Magical Creatures class, and all those present were deflowered men. Ali, Cissa, Bella, and Regulus, at once or so it seemed, cleared their throats. Orion Black rushed to gather more chairs at the table with off-handed flicks of his wand. Sirius and Regulus dutifully pulled out the chairs and Cissa, Bella, and Ali took the seats. Regulus smirked at me as he took the seat between Ali and me.

Ali usually wore high-necked, long-sleeved shirts, but I was astonished to see that she was wearing a delicate silver scarf. I could see the outline of a bruise just underneath it. I put it to the back of my mind for now, at least.

"Uncle Cygnus, Aunt Druella, these are my friends from school, Ali and Heck," he said, gesturing with a nod of his head toward us. "Heck shares Cissa and Bella's dorms with Illiad Parkinson."

"Pleased to meet both of you at last," Cygnus said, giving an easy smile that he passed back and forth between all three of us. "I've heard good things. Is it true that you're both so adept with a wand?"

"Dad!" Cissa and Bella groused as one.

"Well, I'm curious!" he said, shrugging. "It's not every day that I see a pair of girls so quick to study beyond their years. You would do well to take from their books." He eyed his two youngest daughters with a fatherly pout. Apparently Andromeda was already a lost cause as a seventh-year, or she didn't give him the same worries.

"Ali is the one who's a quick study," I said quickly. "I just had all of my studies still in my head."

I'd said the wrong thing. All heads swiveled round to look at me, waiting for me to explain. I bit back a sigh. *hated* this.

"It was the only thing I *did* remember," I murmured, feeling my face growing hot under their scrutiny. To my surprise, it was Sirius Black who changed the subject.

"So how are things progressing with finding Andy here a mate, then?"

Druella and Cygnus pounced on the subject. I was glad their gazes no longer rested on me, but I did feel guilty to have the pressure simply shifted to the seventh-year girl. Apparently this was a long-running debate. Andromeda had declined to marry four eligible bachelors so far, and time was cutting short to find her a "man of suitable reputation," as Walburga put it.

I was shocked to find in the course of the discussion that Walburga was actually Orion's second cousin. One of the four "eligible bachelors" who had been suggested to Andromeda was Sirius himself. Both had scoffed at the notion alone.

Would I be asked for someone's hand in marriage in such a fashion? I was a Slytherin; that seemed to be the Slytherin way. I had embraced much of the social norms that permeated my mostly pureblooded House, but this... Then I recalled the conversation I'd had with Lucius and Rabastan. *If half our fathers knew how smart you are... you would be getting marriage proposals before you ever left Hogwarts...*

I shoved the entire thought out of my head before I could worry. I was fourteen years old. There was no way I'd be asked to marry so soon. The niggling reminders of the conversation before me made the thoughts creep back in on their own.

I wouldn't always be fourteen. Then again, I doubted I would mind much if it was Lucius or even Rabastan... I shuddered at the thought of James Potter, the only out-of-Slytherin pureblood I knew. Sure, he was handsome and a friend of my brother's, but far too arrogant. Come to think, Lucius was fairly arrogant, too.

But he wasn't a Gryffindor.

He understood me.

I shivered at the mere notion of Crabbe touching me at all. I felt as though his stupidity could rub off on me just by hexing him.

But what about Remus? Warmth ran through me at the thought, and then it quelled in my chest as suddenly as it came. Remus was half-blood. His mother would want him marrying for love. I didn't know quite if I'd say I loved Remus, but I wouldn't mind him kissing me.

"Hecate, your tea is going to get cold," Ali whispered softly in my ear. I blinked down at her, and then down at the full cup in front of me.

"Thank you, Ali," I whispered back. I sipped at the lukewarm liquid, chastising myself for drifting again. Lucius had warned me against doing that, especially amongst purebloods.

By the end of the tea, I was glad I came. Regulus was much more open amongst his family. Orion and Cygnus were quick to embarrass their sons and daughters with an array of anecdotes. I will never forget that Cissy had once driven her sister to baldness because she'd convinced Bella that black hair made her a boy. Or the exploding Muggle toys Sirius had slipped into Regulus' bath. I didn't know what rubber duckies were until Sirius explained through gasps that they were tiny yellow plastic things that Muggle children bathed with.

Above all else, though, I Flooed away with a greater understanding of how a family should act. In particular, how siblings act. And it was with great relish that I realized that I had always acted that way around Scorpius. Instinctively, somehow, I'd known how to be a sister.

The tea had been something of a success. Best of all, Remus was still there when I got home.

Before the Ball

Chapter 14 of 18

A discovery, a discussion, and dress robes...

Huge thanks to my reviewers (especially June W for pointing out a grave error on my part) and to the TPP staff for their patience.

Also, yay! Ya'll have officially left me more than one hundred reviews. This may come as a surprise, but this is only the third time I have ever gotten that many on a single

story. Both were part of a trilogy. Thank you all for fulfilling one of my silly little fantasies.

Disclaimer: I don't own them, I'm just playing in their world.

Chapter 14: Before the Ball

I sat on an unfamiliar, pale blue couch in an unfamiliar, suburban-style, Muggle sitting room. And yet, I knew that if I stood and walked up the stairs, I would find a loo and two bedrooms. One bedroom would hold a king-sized four-poster bed with eggshell curtains and a deeply stained oak dresser. The other room would be painted white, wall-to-wall with bookshelves; a single twin bed would be tucked neatly in one corner.

If I opened the closet in that second bedroom, I would find an organized space, with several black Hogwarts robes, a set of pink dress robes, and more Muggle blue jeans than I could count. At the top would be a trunk, full of school supplies. A flat-faced tabby cat with a bottlebrush tail would be sitting on the bed, demanding my attention.

But here I sat in the sitting room, with a pair of adult strangers. They were Muggles, the ones who lived here. I was reading *The Canterbury Tales*. A knock came at the door. The woman moved to get the door, a woman with wild, untamable black curls. She opened the door. Another woman stood on the other side, this one a familiar face Professor McGonagall. She was a bit older, but her stern stance, warm smile, and tartan robes were still readily in place.

"Oh, please, do come in, Professor, we've been expecting you ever since the letter arrived," said the black-haired woman. "I'm Jean Granger. This is my husband Thomas Granger and my daughter Hermione."

I glanced around in surprise there was no girl here, no girl except me. But then I remembered. I am Hermione Granger. In a past life, another life, another time.

Professor McGonagall sat down beside me. Jean and Thomas Granger and Professor McGonagall all vanished at once. Draco Malfoy trailed into the room, looking around with keen interest.

"So this is a Muggle house," he said. "It really doesn't seem all that different from the Burrow... except no knitting needles suspended in midair."

"I wouldn't know," I said dryly.

Draco sighed. "Of course. I apologize; I should have spoken to you earlier, on the train. Hermione, listen to me. Whatever you're thinking by going to the Manor for this ball, don't. If you reveal yourself to Voldemort, you'll destroy everything you've worked for. When you get your memories back, you'll be so sorry for everything."

I stiffened in my seat. "And what, pray tell, will I be sorry about?"

"Damn it, girl!" Draco shot to his feet. "Do you want to go round killing Muggles and Mudbloods? Do you?"

The dream dissolved before I could answer him. By then, I didn't recall the discussion anyway.

The flat was quiet, the rooms dark. My Muggle alarm told me it was just shy of six o'clock. I rose, showered, and dressed in a simple maroon set of walking robes. Lucius wouldn't be taking me to any Muggle shops, and I refused to dress like a Muggle unless I had to.

I grinned to myself. Lucius was taking me dress robes shopping as my Christmas gift.

Molly came out of her bedroom in her scarlet dressing gown, her usually spiky white hair falling in soft short tendrils. She smiled upon seeing me.

"What time is Lucius coming to get you?" she whispered.

"Seven. Since Illi's going to be there, we changed the time," I said softly.

"I have to get to Nellie's shortly, Hecate," she said, glancing at the plain black clock on the wall. It was six thirty. "I had best leave now, actually. I'll see you when you get home. I love you."

"Love you too, Molly."

She stepped into the Floo and vanished.

I sat down at the kitchen table with some cereal and milk. Scorpius' calm, soft snores came from his closed bedroom door. Never in the short months of my memory had I experienced so quiet, so empty a time. I could not start reading I'd accomplish nothing doing so. I didn't want to watch the Muggle news.

I began to wander through the flat, reacquainting myself with a place I'd lived in for so short a time before school, and now only the past couple days. I began running through all that I'd learned about myself my past self now. I was from the future...

"Molly has something to do with this. The potion you took, the one that Obliviated you so precisely."

Why hadn't I thought of it before? Molly was bound to have more evidence of who I was prior to this, especially since she'd so easily done things. She had to have more things from the future aside from a Galleon from the Malfoy vaults. I listened closely for any signs that Score was going to wake I didn't want him knowing what I was going to do.

And then, I walked into Molly Taylor's room.

Molly hadn't done much to her bedroom. She had a queen-sized bed with red and gold bedclothes. A beech trunk sat at the end of the bed. Her dresser was beech, too, and the mirror that hung over it was framed with simple beech branches instead of a normal frame. Her bathroom was still steamed up from her early-morning shower.

I wrapped my hands up inside the cloth of my robes and opened her closet. Potions ingredients and cauldrons of several styles were stacked neatly inside. A black Muggle purse sat on the other side. I opened that nothing but Galleons, though it looked like an Expansion Charm had made it so that the purse held more than usual.

The trunk was locked, but I found the key between the mattresses of Molly's bed. I chuckled softly how utterly Gryffindor. Inside, various items jumped out at me at once. The undeniable scent of the ocean, of seashells and salt, overwhelmed me. There was a black leather journal dated... 1991 at the start. At least that confirmed we were from the future.

A photograph sat on the opposing page of a woman who looked much like Molly with brilliant, long red hair. She stood with a boy in the pre-Sorted Hogwarts uniform. Unbidden, I recalled the sharp brick that often poked my thigh during class in my pockets.

It's him. It was the boy in my memories. I turned back to the start of the journal and began to read.

Ron is starting Hogwarts this year, and Ginny will be following him next. Arthur thinks that if I start this journal, I won't feel so bad when Ginny graduates and leaves the Burrow for good. I can't stand to think of it my babies, all grown up! It was bad enough when Bill and Charlie left. Percy's next my little Prefect! I love them all so much, even Fred and George. I wish they'd stop poking fun at Percy, but that's their way. My little boys.

I skipped a few pages to Christmas, shocked to find a photograph of a young girl with curly brown hair and a boy who looked quite a bit like James Potter. Had it been my hair, I'd say the girl was... me. Maybe she was related?

Ron finally sent a photo of his friends for me to put in here, journal. I'd like you to officially meet Hermione Granger and Harry Potter yes, that's right! The Boy-Who-Lived is my own sweet son's best friend. Who would have thought it? And Hermione is so very bright. She's borrowed books from Percy, and he's a fifth-year!

I flipped toward the end of the journal, to the last entry. I was surprised to see that instead of some far-gone date, I'd found myself at today's date.

Hermione and Scorpius seem to be getting along as siblings in spite of the House affiliations. I don't know what I'm going to do if Hermione ends up dating Lucius Malfoy. Will it be for the better? Will he not become what he is, in the future? Will this lead to the end of... Oh, I can't even write it.

And what will I do, if instead, she continues down this path? If she, God forbid, becomes one of them?

A whooshing noise from out in the sitting room interrupted my reading. I closed the journal shut with a snap and returned the entire trunk to its rightful place. I locked it and hurried out of Molly's room.

Lucius smirked at my bedraggled appearance.

"Snooping, Hecate?"

"Something like that," I said, rubbing my fingerprints from the doorknob with my robes. "Quiet a moment." I listened hard in the silence and breathed a sigh of relief. Scorpius was still asleep. I turned my eyes on Lucius. "We've things to talk about. Molly was in on my Obliviate."

__~*~__

It took me several moments to actually move from the elegant crystal fireplace into the silk-draped room. Lucius had to tug on my arm, and I stumbled against his chest, my eyes still locked on the silver drapes, the chic vanity that sat before a ceiling-to-floor mirror. Lucius chuckled softly, the feel of it in his chest shaking me from my stupor.

"I take it you've never seen anything quite like it?" he whispered in my ear. The warmth of his breath on the shell of my ear sent firecrackers off in my veins.

"What is this place?" I murmured, stepping out of his impromptu embrace.

"Bienvenue en En Beauté, mon cheri," said a thick accent somewhere to my right. I turned wide eyes on a petite woman, whose sleek blond hair hit the floor with every step. She was dressed in fine silk dress robes that matched the exact hue of her pale blue eyes.

"Bonjour, Madame Rouge," Lucius said, bowing lightly. "You will have to forgive our lovely Hecate for any oddities; she is still learning yet the ways of the snake."

"Forgiven, forgiven," said the woman. "Ah, let me look, let me look, mon cheri, you are a peach on a tree, indeed, indeed! Madame Taylor, oui?"

"Er... yes?" I said, not entirely certain how to answer that. I borderline hated being referred to as "Taylor" it didn't sit well with me.

"Madame Hecate is here to be fitted for my father's Christmas ball this evening, Madame Rouge. Might you have something appropriate for a blushing maiden such as this exquisite specimen?"

I truly had no idea whether I was pleased or infuriated by his comments. So, I made the wisest choice under the circumstances. I appeared neither. Inwardly, I made a note to talk with Lucius about what *exactly* he meant by "blushing maiden" and "exquisite specimen."

Before I could dwell on it much more, Madame Rouge had lifted her wand and I suddenly was quite unclothed. Lucius had the decency to turn his back as I stood there in my ASDA knickers and bra. Madame Rouge simply waved her wand again. Out from behind one of the silver curtains came a chocolate-colored gown. I didn't even move the dress had found my skin and attached like a leech.

The gown was tasteful and long, cinching in at my waist and spreading out to billow around my ankles. The neckline was shaped like a lotus petal, revealing nothing but concealing little. Silver robes revealed the chocolate, swishing on the floor. There was a hidden pocket in the sleeve for my wand.

Lucius turned back around and tilted his head in scrutiny.

"What about deep green, Madame Rouge?"

A wave of the wand, and the gown was green. I turned to the mirror. It did look good on me, flattering the curves of my hips and bust without making me look like a prostitute. Lucius nodded.

"It is perfect, thank you, Madame Rouge," he said. He turned away again just as the petite French witch spelled me out of my gown again. My day robes redressed me, and before I knew it, we were preparing to leave again.

"We can talk about Molly in my room," Lucius whispered as we stepped back into the crystal fireplace. "I believe we've much to discuss. Malfoy Manor, sitting room!"

The familiar spin of fireplaces and sitting rooms flew by, spinning in a vortex of brilliant colors. When we stepped out of the grate, however, I knew why Lucius was not impressed by En Beauté.

The room we stepped out into was enormous, easily the size of the Slytherin common room or larger. There were three doors leading out and a floor-to-ceiling window. A bookcase and pine china cupboards with glass windows in them, all displaying various artifacts, sat against one wall. Ornate coffee tables sat by the window, green upholstered armchairs flanking each one. A couch and two armchairs surrounded a larger coffee table near the fireplace we'd just come from. Rich carpets lined with silver tastefully surrounded the seating areas. The floor itself was polished marble.

There was a certain amount of homeliness to it all, though, in spite of the size of the room. It reminded me a little of Molly's flat in some ways, and in others it just made my jaw want to drop. Lucius smiled at me, his cheeks a rosy pink.

"Home sweet home," he murmured.

"It's beautiful," I said, grinning. "Like a dream..." If, I thought, I could remember my dreams.

Lucius shook his head, cleared his throat, and stood just a touch taller than before. "My father should be in the ballroom, so we'll be all right. Ili is already in her room for the night."

"Ili's spending the night?" I asked, blinking.

"You could too, if you like," Lucius said quickly. "Ili doesn't have much in the way of family, and I figured you would want to spend more time with..." His words trailed off in polite query.

"To be honest, I don't know how much I can trust Molly at the moment," I said quietly.

Lucius nodded and wordlessly escorted me up to his rooms. The path up the marble stairs was lined with portraits of Malfoys past most of them had the same white-blond hair as Lucius. Crystal sconces lighted the walls, sponge-painted cream and white with silver baseboards. What surprised me most was the sheer vastness of it all. There were rows upon rows of rooms, though most of them appeared empty.

"Malfoy Manor allows for the entire Malfoy clan to gather at once, each with their own set of rooms," Lucius explained in a low voice. "A long time ago, there were a lot of us. That I am an only child is unusual for our family. I think the Dark Lord is behind that, though."

Somehow, it seemed prudent not to ask why.

"Would you like Illi there with us?" he asked.

"Yes," I murmured. I wondered briefly why we were keeping our voices down. Then I realized it. If we were to speak much louder, the room would echo our voices, and probably Abraxas would hear us. It was with a start that I realized Lucius was hiding things from his father. Just like I was hiding things from Molly.

Did all kids hide things from their parents?

With nothing and no one else's life to base this on, I had no idea. I decided to ask Remus the next time I saw him.

My musings were quite rudely interrupted by a reverberating CRACK. Lucius' hand found my shoulder for a moment, and then he knelt by a wide-eyed house-elf.

"Tell Illiad to meet me in my room," he said. "Bring tea and sandwiches."

"I is doing what Master Lucius is saying, I is," said the elf. The CRACK came again, and it was gone.

"That was Darin, my house-elf," Lucius said. "He answers only to me. My mother made certain that I had one who would not tell my father of my doings."

"Is that... preferable?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, and I was surprised to see his eyes darken considerably. "It is quite preferable. Abraxas is... not a kind man."

Lucius didn't elaborate, and I didn't push him.

Illi met us in the hall outside of yet another of the nondescript silver doors. She wore a simple set of traveling robes, so I was glad at least I wasn't the only one not dressed for the ball yet. She grinned at the sight of us and embraced us both around the middle.

"I was starting to think you would never get back from En Beauté, Luc," she said. "Will I get to help you dress tonight, Heck?"

"No make-up," I said. "But yes. That would be great."

Darin the house-elf was waiting for us in Lucius' sitting room. Unlike the blatantly Slytherin sitting room downstairs, his was decorated in varying shades of blue. A trio of armchairs sat on either side, and facing a fireplace much too small for Flooing was a coffee table with carved phoenixes making up the legs. There were no portraits here, just a pair of blank navy tapestries hanging on either side of the bedroom door. A silver tea caddy with all the trimmings sat on the coffee table.

"The snake motif gets tiresome," Lucius said blandly as the door shut. "Darin, my privacy wards, if you don't mind."

A slight shimmer of magic glowed from the doors, around the walls. Darin turned his bright blue eyes up to his master. "Is Master Lucius needing anything more?"

"No, that is all for now," Lucius said. Darin vanished with another crack. He gestured to the table. "All right, Heck, we have all the privacy in the world."

I took a deep cleansing breath and sat down on one of the armchairs. Slowly, I explained to Illi and Lucius everything I'd found out so far.

"But you don't know if she's really against you or not," Illi said. "Maybe she was saving you from whomever Obliviated you?"

"That makes no sense, though." I shook my head. "Why save me from my Obliviated captors and bring me back *itime*?"

"Maybe you're here for a reason," Illi said. "Maybe you're here to stop something from happening?"

"By Obliviating me," I said rather than asked.

"Well... I mean, what if that's the point?"

Lucius and I stared at her, teacups suspended between saucer and lip.

"What I mean to say is what if the point of coming back in time was to put the essence of you here, without the memories that would make you... act differently toward people."

I set the teacup back on the saucer and carefully back on the coffee table. "That could be. If I was to go back in time, and I had none of the skills to act differently toward other people that I know later in life..." I gasped. "That explains it."

"Explains what?" Lucius asked irritably.

"It explains Molly's weird reactions to people," I said, knowing I was on to something. I stood, unable to contain my excitement. I paced behind the armchair. "That explains why she's so keen on Remus and me being friends. That's gotta be it. She wants me to save Remus! She bought him an extra cloak and stuff when we were at Madam Malkins, and she's encouraged both of us to stay friendly with him. The *Marauders are going to do something to him*."

"That can't be all, though," Illi argued. "I mean, come on, it's one life. Why would someone go to such trouble to save one life?"

"I don't know." I threw my hands in the air in exasperation and sank back into my seat. "But that's all I can think of until I can get back at that journal."

Lucius sighed. "We don't have any other information to go on. But at least we've confirmed you're from the future, Hecate."

"I can confirm one other thing," I said softly, staring into the flames. "My name. My real given name."

Illi and Lucius both stilled. Illi's voice was breathless. "What is it?"

"Hermione."

"That's so pretty!" Illi said, her lips spreading into a coy grin. "Isn't that some derivative of Hermes, the messenger god?"

"I prefer Hecate," I said off-handedly. "It's... more natural to me now."

We whiled away the rest of the morning discussing various situations in which I would have needed to be Obliviated. Some of them were quite outlandish (like that I was the

Muggle Queen's granddaughter and I was being taught magic in the past to keep my identity a secret). Others were... reasonable (perhaps I was the daughter of the Dark Lord, and he wanted me by his side at a younger age!).

But after Darin delivered a delicious lunch of savory beef stew and fresh baked bread, Illi started pushing me toward the door. "We've got to get ready, you know!"

"The ball isn't until seven tonight," Lucius protested against her shoving me.

"Even worse!" Illi shrieked. He was still scowling when Illi closed the door behind her with a kick. "Come on, doing your hair is going to take at least an hour by itself."

Bemused, I simply followed the half-American girl down the hall to her guest quarters. I was surprised to see that they were much the same as Lucius'. Illi didn't pause at the sitting room, and I was shocked again to see that my new dress robes were already laid out on a luxurious bed. Illi shoved right past it, however, and right into the bathroom, which looked like a fair miniature of our Slytherin common bath.

"Lots of lavender and sandalwood," Illi said, grinning broadly. "We're going to relax, boy-less, for a while."

Iliad undressed before my eyes. Though the three of us Ali, Illi and I had been bathing together since the beginning of term, this was somehow different. The spice of the lavender, the smoothness of the sandalwood, and the gentle curve of Illi's naked belly had a different sort of effect on me. I had been tense and worried about meeting the Dark Lord that evening.

Illi smiled over her shoulder at me, her smooth, dark skin lighting up her beautiful, moss-green eyes. She extended her hand toward me, drawing our nude bodies together. We slowly entered the steamy water, her breasts pressing against mine.

"Heck... I couldn't tell Lucius this, but... I'm terrified."

"Me, too," I confessed. "I mean, it's the Dark Lord we're meeting tonight."

"What if I say something wrong?" Illi said, hugging me closer, her breath cooling the water on my shoulder. A shudder ran through her body, passing on to me. A spot of warmth fell on my chest she was crying. "What if he kills us? Or tortures us, like Ali said? What if he tries to get into our minds and our Occlumency doesn't hold?"

"Sh-sh-shush," I murmured, wrapping my arms around her and caressing her shoulder blades. "It'll be all right. We won't, ooh-luh."

"But what if we *do*?" Illi whispered back.

I did what Lucius always did to calm me down I kissed her softly on the lips. She gasped, her eyes going wider. "I'll be right here. If anything happens, I'm right here."

Illi smiled softly.

We washed languorously, rubbing away our worries with calming lavender and soft caresses. Iliad was my sister by choice only, but that didn't make her any less precious to me. I had the same worries as she I was just better at hiding them.

Wrapped in towels, we began placing the memories we did not want the Dark Lord or anyone else, for that matter away. All of my discussions with Scorpius and Remus, the book, the shirt, the journal my true name I pushed all of it into the tiny space inside of the hollowed-out *Moste Potente Potions*. I left the one conversation in place with the Marauders that had eventually led to my discovery of the truth of my origins.

I was still especially angry with Molly, in spite of Illi's protests to the contrary. The Dark Lord knew I was Obliviated. If he asked, I wouldn't hesitate to tell him about Molly's transgressions.

We dressed slowly, taking all the time in the world to powder, primp, lotion, and otherwise abuse our flesh. In spite of my aversion to make-up, I allowed Illi to talk me into a light lip-gloss and a pale shade of amber to bring out the golden color of my eyes.

By the time we were ready, there was only fifteen minutes left before the ball was to begin. Lucius appeared at our door only five minutes later, accompanied by none other than Rabastan Lestrange.

Never before, or since, had I taken the entirety of six and a half hours to get dressed in a single set of dress robes, my hair up in a stylish twist.

As Rabastan escorted a now-terrified Illi away, Lucius offered his own arm to me. The thoughts on Illi's mind were on mine as well.

What the hell do you say to a man like Lord Voldemort?

__~*~__

I am French Canadian on my father's side, but in no way have I ever studied the language. Bienvenue en En Beauté basically means "Welcome to In Beauty." The other words are mostly in common use, I hope. =)

No, I did not forget that Lucius' mum is dead. She made sure that Darin was Lucius' alone before her death. I chose that name consciously Darin is sure darin', if you get my meaning.

The scene between Illi and Heck was not meant to be sexual, though Illi may have taken the kiss that way. I put the warning in just to be safe.

Lord Voldemort's Assignment

Chapter 15 of 18

The ball, a discussion with the Dark Lord, and a betrayal.

Note: All table manners are sourced from my own experience (American) and the differences I've noted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_manners. Never really understood the British method of things, since in my experience stuff slips off the fork if it's tines-down. (America, it's tines-up.)

All dancing is own experience.

Disclaimer: She built the world. I just play with it. I also don't own Johnny Cash's "Man in Black," no matter how appropriate it is for this story.

Chapter 15: Lord Voldemort's Assignment

Illi and I stood side by side at the elaborately carved double doors leading into the Malfoy ballroom. Lucius and Rabastan had preceded us to announce our presence. I was running through the breathing exercises the other Slytherins had taught me to alleviate anxiety. Illi's caramel skin was as pale as my own. Her hands shook with nerves. I reached out and touched her shoulder gently.

"Calm down," I whispered.

"I can't, Heck, this is insane," she murmured.

"Breathe in with me," I said firmly. I breathed in deeply, glad to see her copy the move. I held the breath deep in my diaphragm. Her slowly released breath toyed with the fringe of her straight black hair. We repeated the motions together. Her color pooled slowly back into her cheeks and the shaking stopped.

"Better?" I asked.

She only nodded. The door swung open, revealing not Lucius but Rabastan Lestrange. He was resplendent in soft gold dress robes, his dusty blond hair tied at the nape of his neck with a satin ribbon. Illi and I smiled at him. Rabastan offered his arm in a gentlemanly manner to Illi.

"Lucius is coming for you, Hecate," he said softly.

A glimpse of the room was all I got before the door shut again. No sooner had I considered peeking through the keyhole like a common eavesdropper, Lucius opened the door. I smiled on reflex, even though I'd seen him dressed up already when he'd come up to lead us to the doors. His white-blond hair was tucked back like Rabastan's in a silk, baby blue ribbon; his dress robes a pale gray. The combination set off his milky skin and pale hair, accentuating the beautiful blue streaks in his eyes.

"Ready to meet our Lord, my lady Hecate?" he asked, offering his arm.

"Yes," I said. I was exceedingly proud of myself. I wasn't shaking in fear, my heartbeat was slow and normal, and there was no sweat upon my brow or in my hands. For the entire world without, I was the epitome of Slytherin aloofness. Within was a completely different story.

But that, as they say, was of no consequence.

I was doubly proud of myself as I entered the ballroom. I didn't gasp aloud. Still, Lucius chuckled softly. "The house-elves did an excellent job this year."

That was an understatement.

First off, the room had to be the size of the Great Hall and the entrance hall at Hogwarts combined. What was with Malfoy Manor and absurdly vast rooms? One end of the room was set up for supper, with small round tables cloaked in silver tablecloths and elegant chairs. The other side held a wide dance floor. Against one corner floated several instruments, playing an enchanting melody.

At the curve of the ceiling and the walls was a single long garland that circled the whole room, candles sitting at one-foot intervals. There were at least ten Christmas trees, all decorated in unique ways. Crystal chandeliers floated over every portion of the room, decadently draped with more garland. Boughs of holly floated at intervals, interspersed with glowing silver baubles.

The tables were all filled with people. It seemed as if they were waiting only for Lucius and me, and I realized with an inward start that they were. Lucius guided me unhurriedly to the table where Illi and Rabastan were already seated, along with Sin Avery and an older gentleman I didn't recognize.

Lucius pulled the seat out for me, the sound of the dull scrape echoing in the hall in spite of the music. I took it as I had been taught. He sat down to my right. I took another deep, cleansing breath, careful to let my shoulders rise slightly.

The music slowly came to a haunting halt, the last strain of the violin seeping into the silence.

Abraxas Malfoy stood at the table to my right, the scrape of his chair loud in the perfect silence. "My dear friends, I welcome you to here on this Boxing Day to celebrate our Lord's triumphs in the past year. Welcome to the annual Malfoy ball. Let the feast begin."

There was a general murmur of assent amongst the occupants of the room. A small salad appeared on my plate in a silver bowl, baby spinach decorated with dried cranberries, sliced almonds, blue cheese, and some kind of fruity vinaigrette. I waited for Lucius to start before grabbing the fork. Tines down, of course.

The house-elves were very adept at getting food on the table and empty plates off. Every person in the room was obviously well-versed in the traditional way to place a fork in the "finished" position on the plate. I guessed that the house-elves took the plates when it was done. I didn't make the faux pas to test my theory nor did I think it prudent to ask.

"So you're the Obliviated girl, then," said the stranger at our table. "I'm to understand that you're the one who took my baby girl under wing?"

"Pardon?" I blinked politely.

"Mizar Mulciber," he said gruffly. "You *are* Hecate Taylor, right?"

"Oh, yes, sir," I said. "You're Alioth's father, then?"

"That's right," he grinned. "She came home, and blimey, was I impressed. Knows all sorts of things I never learned as a first-year. Says she learned it all from you."

"That is correct, Mr. Mulciber," Lucius said smoothly. "Hecate has an... unusual charm for knowledge. She has sent many of our seventh-years across the room with her hexes."

"You don't say!"

"Indeed I do, sir," Lucius said, smirking. "And our Illiad here isn't much behind her, I'd say."

"Oh, stop embarrassing us, Lucius!" Illi protested with a feminine titter.

Rabastan smiled. "I'd say you could embarrass us all with the things you two women can do. That is, after all, why you three are here."

Sin blushed at this. I realized that he, too, was here early.

"Sin's father was the very first Death Eater," Lucius said. "He's been taught things that make even my head spin."

I glanced over at the host's table, where Abraxas sat in a tight circle with three other men. One looked much like Sin—broad-shouldered with deep brown hair and a thin nose. I guessed this was probably his father. A tall, wiry man with sandy hair sat by Sin's dad. Abraxas, Sin's father, and the sandy-haired one sat reverently across from a

very good-looking black-haired man.

Unlike most of the men in the room, this one had his black hair cropped short, no longer than an inch or two. His handsome features were focused on the other three, his strong chin resting nonchalantly on his hand. He ate with the same manners as everyone else, but he seemed almost above them. Everyone else in the room wore festive colors he wore black dress robes that set off his tanned face. I was near enough to see the deep blue of his eyes.

"Who is that man sitting across from your father, Lucius?" I asked.

Lucius glanced over. "That, love, is the Dark Lord."

"Him?" I whispered, my eyes widening. My stomach coiled in on itself for an entirely different reason now. "But he's so..."

"Don't let appearances fool you, girl," Mr. Mulciber said, his tone low. "The Dark Lord is a very dangerous man."

"I can tell," I murmured, my eyes still wide and trained on him.

He was so *handsome* power flowed from him unlike anything I'd ever felt before. Only one other wizard had ever seemed quite so formidable to me before. Even Dumbledore paled in comparison to this man, though. It wasn't just the power it was his charisma. I could practically feel it digging into my skin.

Mr. Mulciber chuckled. "You're not the first lady to be so taken with him. He isn't interested in that so much, though. Sorry to dash your hopes."

"I'm not interested in him like *that*," I snapped. My gaze fell back on the black-haired man. "He's so powerful... it pulls at my magic."

"You can sense it?" Lucius stared at me. "I knew you were intelligent, but damn, Heck."

Suddenly, the Dark Lord's dark blue eyes rose and met mine. He smiled at me and lifted his wine glass with an appreciative nod. Slowly, I returned the nod with one of my own. He turned back to his table and sipped the wine, all pleasant grace.

For some reason, the acknowledgement soothed what remained of my nerves.

"The others are Sinbad Avery, Senior, of course," Mr. Mulciber continued, "and Dagwood Lestrage."

"My father," Rabastan added.

The main course, a delicious chicken breast soaked for what tasted like hours in garlic and pineapples, appeared on our plates. I was suitably full by the time I finished it all. Abraxas Malfoy stood at his table and sauntered betwixt the chairs. When he came up again he was leading a beautiful elder woman the same way Lucius had always done me. The music changed into a recognizable waltz. I watched Lucius' father and the woman dance flawlessly across the ballroom floor.

Couples sprang up all across the tables. It was only then that I really noticed it. We that is, Lucius, Sin, Rabastan, Illi, and I were the only children here. The rest of the diners and dancers were at least twenty, if not older. Not that I had doubted Lucius' word. It just seemed extremely odd that of all the people in the room, we were the only ones underage.

My eyes returned to the table, only to find Lucius, Rabastan, and Illi gone. Sin and Mr. Mulciber were chatting about Quidditch (ugh!).

"May I have this dance, my lady Hecate?"

Well. That explained where Lucius went. I smiled, drinking in the handsome view of him politely offering his arm to me. I took it, as I'd been taught. "I would adore a dance, Lucius, except I don't know how."

"Trust me."

And because I always had, I followed him out onto the dance floor without another word. He placed my hands my right held in his, my left on his shoulder and stepped back. His gentle pull, his firm push, and across the floor we went in time to the slow music. I wouldn't say I was entirely graceful, but I did manage to dance.

The song ended on a long viola note. I only noticed because we were quite near the instruments. Before Lucius could offer to return me to the table, or dance again, Rabastan was at his side. I smiled at the quiet boy as he stepped into Lucius' place as easily as one used to dancing. The song began, and I danced.

I got better and better with every dance. Sin, Rabastan, Lucius, and one odd dance with Mr. Mulciber. After that one I begged to sit down again. The shoes I wore were not sensible attire to dance in. I was tempted to Transfigure them but couldn't without invoking the wrath of the Ministry.

I was having so much fun I almost forgot the reason I was here. The reason we all were here. Illi had no such difficulties, though she had only just broken away from Mr. Avery's dance to join me again at our table.

"Ladies," said a smooth, high tenor drawl. I glanced up, my eyes widening only so slightly at the sight of the Dark Lord himself seating himself across from us.

Illi froze, apparently too terrified to speak. I cleared my throat gently. "My Lord."

"Ah, so young Mr. Malfoy has told you of me after all," said Lord Voldemort lightly. His lips twitched in amusement. "How much has he told you?"

"Not much, my Lord," I admitted, casting a glance at Illi. She was the color of ash. Subtly, I rubbed my toes on her calf. "He said that you wanted to see us because we were doing well."

Lord Voldemort smiled. "Yes, I have heard of your accomplishments." His dark blue eyes narrowed on Illi. He sat back nonchalantly. "Why are you afraid?"

She stuttered. Never since I'd known Illiad Parkinson had I ever heard her tremble so with fear. "I-I n-not-"

"Do not lie to Lord Voldemort." This said with such tender fierceness that I felt a flash of pity for my dearest friend. He was quiet, but in that quiet was something approaching menace.

Illi glanced at me. "T-The things we've heard... I-I wonder if they're t-true."

"That depends on what you have heard and from whom," Lord Voldemort said, returning to that easy tone. "I am gracious with my followers and... quite malicious toward those I despise."

The warning was there any Slytherin worth their snake-crest would have heard it. Nothing stopped me from blurting out my undying question. "Why did you kill Healer Pomfrey?"

I regretted it instantly, but Lord Voldemort was nothing if not kind. He answered me honestly. It was in that, and that alone I sometimes think, that he drew me in. Though I did not take the Dark Mark that night, I forever became one of his Death Eaters. My mind told me, as my body relaxed in the seat: this man was not my enemy.

"Gideon Pomfrey was not on the list for death that night," Lord Voldemort said calmly. "He tried assisting the two we were there for into the Floo. His death was most unfortunate, in particular with his assistance in bringing yourself to full health, Miss Taylor."

I relaxed in my seat, satisfied with his response. "Please do call me Hecate, my Lord. I find that name distasteful."

Lord Voldemort's eyebrows rose, but he did not comment on the request. "I have heard that you have made progress where others have not regarding Severus Snape."

I blinked. "You mean that he helped me, my Lord?"

"Young Malfoy has been attempting to bring him to these little 'get-togethers' for two years now," Lord Voldemort said. "He has not received anything in return for his attempts at friendship, save the occasional assistance in Potions. Snape brewed you a self-created, effective potion within twelve hours."

I nodded. "Yes, for my chills. My Lord?"

"I want you to cultivate a friendship with him," Lord Voldemort said, his voice a caress. "Separate him and the Mudblood. When the time comes for Parkinson, Avery, and yourself to be Marked, I want him here with you. Is that understood, Hecate?"

"Yes, my Lord," I said.

"Do not fear Lord Voldemort," he said softly, placing his hands on both our heads gently. "I am a kind master. Do me proud, ladies."

And he was gone again.

Illi let loose a breath of air, wilting in the seat. "Oh, gods. You're going to get yourself killed, keep talkin' like that to the Dark Lord!"

"And *you* need to start standing up for what you believe in," I said, scowling at her.

She smiled. "Yeah... I should, shouldn't I?"

Before I could answer, Sin asked her to dance again. I watched them careen across the ballroom and out of sight.

"Your friend is rather trying." I blinked and glanced up over my shoulder. Lord Voldemort had returned.

I smiled lightly. "Yes, my Lord. She can be."

Lord Voldemort did not meet my gaze, instead choosing to watch his followers dance. I took his unstated advice and watched them, too. "I am curious about your condition."

I kept my gaze trained on the crowd. Most of the dancers, if they did notice us, were keeping their faces on their partners. "I have made a few discoveries in light of my 'condition', if my Lord is willing."

"By all means."

"We were able to convince the mediwitch at Hogwarts to give us the contents of my blood shortly after term began," I said. "We have been able to determine that it was a potion, not an Obliviate, that took my memories. It is time-specific, if Severus Snape's analysis can be trusted. We think I may have come from the future, though for what purpose we have yet to discover."

I did not tell him about Molly's influence. I wasn't quite sure whether I should believe everything from the evidence I had thus far. I had been so angry to discover her bit of treachery that I hadn't yet been able to discern why. Until then, I did not want the Dark Lord privy to that portion of my life.

"You have been a busy little devil, then," said Lord Voldemort, a soft, mirthless chuckle erupting from his full lips. "Have you discovered just how far from the future?"

"I believe 1993 or 1994, my Lord. I found a photograph of myself as a first-year in 1991... amongst what remained of my belongings."

He turned to regard me and I double-checked my Occlumency boundaries just before he met my gaze. Harmless, non-incriminating images flashed in my mind. The moment was gentle and almost unnoticeable. Had Lucius not trained me, I would never have noticed at all.

"Interesting," he murmured. "If you find out more, send word with Lucius' owl addressed to his father. Understood?"

"Yes, my Lord."

He graced me with a slight bow of his head and left again before I could even move to return the favor. I did not want Lucius or Illi to find out about this particular portion of my dealings with Voldemort so I placed that memory carefully in the pages of *Moste Potente Potions* within my mental library.

Lucius walked up moments later. I danced the rest of the night away in his arms. I was quite good at it by the end of the night, if I do say so myself.

~*~

Molly was waiting up for me when I finally Flooed home around eleven o'clock. She had obviously sat there for quite a while. Her feet were propped up on the coffee table, a book open between her thumb and two forefingers. The silence was punctuated only by Scorpius' snores.

"I had expected you home a little sooner, Hecate," Molly said quietly. She marked her place in her book with a bit of twine in measured, careful movements. "I didn't ask you to, but I had hoped you would tell me if you were going to be home quite this late."

"I'll keep that in mind for next time," I said, giving her an apologetic smile. "Did Score enjoy having the Marauders over?"

"They spent the entire evening watching football," Molly said, chuckling softly to herself. "Didn't think I'd ever say that."

"Why *did* you get the television?" I asked, sliding out of my cloak. "We're not Muggles."

"No," Molly agreed. "But we live in a Muggle community, and it looks more appropriate should Muggles come over. I have to change the wall color back to white, of course, but that's simple enough. I like the dress robes."

I lifted my arms up for her to have a better look, smiling. "He took me to a French place, I have no idea where. The fireplace was crystal. It was called En Beauté."

Molly nodded, smiling. "It sounds lovely. Lucius has excellent taste in robes." She sighed and pulled me into a gentle hug. "Go get some sleep, love. Remus is coming over in the morning, so just the three of you can be together."

I went to sleep not quite knowing whether I had done the right thing or not.

A fifteen-year-old boy sat across from me in a very familiar kitchen. Though why a Remus look-alike would be seated in the basement kitchen of Grimmauld Place was beyond me. He watched me curiously. After a handful of heartbeats, a younger red-haired girl and a brown-haired boy sat down on either side of me. Both were staring at me as though they didn't quite know what to say.

The red-haired boy, whose hair color I had latched onto like a leech, came around a corner. Except he wasn't a boy, but a man. He was around forty or so, with long lean muscles and his hair tied back with a scarlet ribbon. The three kids watched us both carefully, all breathing deeply in spite of their wide eyes. Both the kids at my side had blue ones.

"Hermione," he said, his voice rough and low. "Do you know who we are?"

"You're Ron," I said. I glanced at the kids. I didn't know them.

"Do you know who you are to us?" asked the man.

Slowly, I shook my head. The man sighed and sank into the seat across from me at the table. His time-roughened hands found mine, pulling them in an intimate motion I didn't expect.

"Hermione, my name is Ron Weasley," he said slowly, as though he expected me to fly off the broom at any moment. "You are... you married me in 1999. We had two kids. This is Rose and Hugo, your son and daughter. This guy here is Remus' son, Teddy. You don't know her, but Dora is his mother. She's Andromeda Black's granddaughter."

I glanced at the boy and the girl, at the elder boy, and then back at the man. "So it is true, then. I am from the future."

"We Obliviated you and Scorpius because we needed you to be able to befriend Lucius Malfoy," Ron said. "You've done your job with flying colors so far, except we sort of hoped you'd stay... Hermione-ish."

"What do you mean?"

"Hermione, you are a Gryffindor. You are bloody intelligent, you are unendingly loyal and kind and you protect the weak. And yet here you are, on the cusp of joining... V-Voldemort."

"Don't say the Dark Lord's name!" I cried, leaping from the table. "I still am loyal to my family. I still protect the weak just look at Alioth Mulciber and Illiad Parkinson."

"You would have never accepted a house-elf the way you did at the Manor today, Mione," Ron said. "And you're buying into the whole 'Muggles suck' mantra of Slytherin House!"

"Muggles don't 'suck', per se," I said, crossing my arms. "They're just ignorant, and at times stupid. I feel sorry for them. I wish there weren't any Muggle-borns at Hogwarts, though, because they are just so..." I cut myself off with a growl.

"Listen to yourself," Ron said softly, leaving Teddy, Rose, and Hugo staring at us both. "Hermione, don't you realize it at all? You are a Muggle-born."

"No, I'm not!" I snapped.

"Love... your parents are Hugh and Jean Granger. They're Muggle dentists."

"No. I refuse to believe my own blood to be so sullied."

Infuriated, Ron rounded on me. "You are playing with the fucking devil, Hermione! Playing his games!"

"No." I stepped to the door, glaring at the blue-eyed, red-haired man who claimed he had loved me in a future that would not be. "I am the devil."

The dream vanished. I woke feeling as though I should remember something; that pins and needles feeling that left me uneasy. Though I had only had six hours of sleep, I rose and showered. The water running down my back, pounding lightly at my scalp, soothed away the uneasy tension in my shoulders and neck. I had completely forgotten it by the time I was dressed in a Muggle t-shirt and bell-bottoms.

Scorpius was still asleep in spite of the hour.

Molly was already gone.

Elated, I smirked to myself. Using the same techniques to leave behind none of my presence in Molly's room, I slipped in. The journal was in precisely the same place as before. I opened it to read, to find out more of my past...

Only to find it completely blank.

"I thought so."

I whirled around, book still opened in my hand, to find Molly standing in the bathroom door. Stupid, Hecate. Not even checking to be certain that she wasn't home. Molly waved her wand at the door. It flew shut with a soft click.

"I apologize for having to do this to you, Hecate, but you leave me no choice," Molly said softly. "You weren't to find out your origins until 1981. It will stop the true time from progressing forward."

I opened my mouth to argue, but Molly's wand had already moved. *Obliviate*."

Blackness engulfed my vision yet again.

__~*~__

The doleful sounds of Johnny Cash's "Man in Black" played from Rabastan's wireless into the dull compartment. Illi, Ali, Regulus, and Lucius were quiet. The music and the steady clickety-clack of the rails beneath us were the only sounds. Illi sat back with a sigh against her seat.

"Well, I know one thing for certain," she murmured. "The Dark Lord won't be happy with this."

"No, I doubt he will," I agreed. "I can borrow your owl, right, Lucius?"

"Of course," he said softly. "Heck... I don't think we can trust Molly."

"I've known that since I found the journal." I snorted. "But that is neither here nor there. Without the journal, my past and by default, my future, are unknown. Only the portions that I told you, and the short summary I told the Dark Lord, are known. What if I'd kept portions from you guys? What if I'd found out something?"

Illi and Lucius exchanged the look usually reserved for Illi and myself. "Heck, love... I think you told all." Lucius smiled softly at me, an expression he reserved only for when we were in trusted company. "We trust you to have done so."

That, by itself, was all that let me know that he and Illi did indeed know all the contents of the journal that I had read. I only wished I had known more before Molly's betrayal.

Rabastan chuckled softly, his gravelly voice quiet in spite of the silencing charm on the door. "Most teenagers believe that their parents are evil at some point in their lives... to think that you are one of those few who actually have one."

"Molly is *not* my parent," I snarled. "She shoved a potion down my throat and dragged me to a time not my own. She might have killed two people just to make our story stick. She did things to my body to make the Healers suspect the Dark Lord, of all people. She cast at least one Cruciatus Curse on me; hurt my eyes same thing to Scorpius. She stole my name, my identity, and forced her own on me before I even knew what was going on. And now I can't change it until I marry someone and my poor brother can't ever change it!"

I fumed in the stunned silence that followed my tirade. Only Johnny sang on, unperturbed. Even Lucius didn't dare meet my eyes. I took a deep breath, allowing the air to reach into me and *pull* the stress from my body at least temporarily.

Why does my appearance

Seem to have a somber tone?

Well there's a reason

For the things that I have on.

"It is of no consequence. Discussing it won't change it," I said calmly. "But the task our Lord has set for Illi and me demands our attention."

"Severus is going to be difficult," Lucius warned. "He has resisted every other Slytherin's extended hand in friendship save mine, and he barely tolerates me. And the odd exchange between him and Hecate, of course."

"How have others attempted to confront him?" I asked, allowing what I did know of Severus Snape to roll in my mind like tasting fine wine.

"Directly, indirectly, through Potions, through books, the boy's interests are fully there on display," Lucius said.

"His reaction to me that night," I mused aloud. "I think I know how we can crack Slytherin's lone wolf."

"How?" Illi asked.

"Through his Mudblood girlfriend," I said, smirking.

Johnny filled the silence again.

For the reckless ones

Whose bad trip left them cold

I wear the black in mournin'

For the lives that could've been

Each week we lose a hundred fine young men

And I wear it for the thousands who've died.

"And how, exactly, are we going to go through Evans?" Lucius asked.

"We'll have to move slow," I said. "Very slow. We can't all just suddenly change our attitudes, especially you guys who've been here longer. Ali, Regulus, and I have an excuse to move a touch faster. And since you guys are our friends, you'll follow reluctantly at first."

"Slow doing what, Heck?" Illi asked.

"We are going to befriend Lily Evans."

There was a choked silence in which Rabastan shut off the wireless. "Did I hear you right, Hecate?" He asked.

"Yes," I said calmly. "If you heard me say that we are going to befriend Severus' Mudblood girl."

"But once we've... befriended her." Lucius swallowed. "What do we do when we want to bring Severus to the Dark Lord?"

"Why, we prove just how spiteful and hateful the Mudblood really is," I said brightly, as though I were discussing a brand new spell. "All Severus has to do is get dumped on his arse."

"And how do we do that?" Illi asked.

"Simple. We watch. We wait. We act. The best way that Slytherins know how."

Lucius grinned. "Because Slytherins protect their own."

The compartment dissolved into laughter.

__~*~__

Sinbad Avery, Dagwood Lestrage, and Mizar Mulciber are my names, as J.K. was lovely enough not to give us canon names for these three "original" Death Eaters.

Sinbad is indeed named for the Arabian tale 1001 Arabian Nights. Since the elder Avery seems to keep getting in trouble with Voldie, I thought it was amusing. In other words, Avery gets into trouble seven times in my mind, matching up with the seven voyages of Sinbad. Of course, this Sinbad isn't as fortunate as the wealthy sailor. Whether I follow up on that subplot is tossing around in my head. I do know that I am going to have him screw up at least once while Heck's in school.

Dagwood is not the comic character. He's actually one of the boys in Ann M. Martin's book Ten Kids, No Pets, one of my favorite children's books. Dagwood is the fourth child in the book and is nicknamed Woody for Woody Allen. He attempts to be witty. You won't see much of Dag here, but I think the Dark Lord would find Rodolphus and Rabastan's father amusing for a time.

Mizar's name is a bit more serious. Mizar A and B are a binary star system that make up the "star" near the end of the "handle" on the Big Dipper. You may recall that Alioth

is another star in that same constellation. In Arabic, Mizar means "girdle or waistband." However, Mizar A and B also make up an optical binary with a second star, Alcor. If you look closely, you can see Mizar and Alcor together side by side. When viewed together, they are called the "horse and rider." Alioth, to remind you, means "dark horse."

The food they ate at the ball are real recipes that I've invented. If ya'll are curious, I'll post them at the end of the next chapter.

The Hitchcock Match

Chapter 16 of 18

This is why birds and brooms do not mix well.

Disclaimer: Don't own it.

Chapter 16: The Hitchcock Match

I could be as bold and blasé about approaching Lily Evans as I wanted to in the comfort of our compartment. However, watching her from across the Great Hall with her friends was an entirely different thing to think about. What could I offer such a repugnant girl? A girl who openly revealed her emotions for all to see, who laughed and cried and shouted at her whim?

And why, in the deepest secrets of my heart, did I envy her that?

Oh, but Lily was beautiful. She could barely even compare to the radiance of Narcissa, to the seduction of Bellatrix, to the candor of Andromeda... The Black sisters together only, I think, could compare to the combined talents of Lily Evans. She really was beautiful, her scarlet hair and brilliant green eyes reflecting so sharply against one another, against the tanned skin she showed off with her name-brand Muggle clothes.

If she were a Slytherin, I'd kiss her.

Thus began my observations of one Lily Evans. Oh, I certainly wasn't overt about it. In fact, I doubted even Lucius could have called me on it. Evans blocking the Marauders my brother included from Severus as she left the Great Hall. The way she angled her own body between them in every class, including Care of Magical Creatures. It was only through the journals with Remus and Scorpius that I knew about that. Not that they knew I was watching her, of course, but one could conjecture these things.

I knew, too, when they were going to plan a big prank.

The end of January brought my first opportunity to be of assistance to Lily Evans. Remus was sick (again), and Score had brought me the journal in Potions class. I read it before Arithmancy. Most of it was the usual gibberish about what was going on in classes that we didn't have together (all of them save Potions).

But it was the last bit that really pulled me in.

We're planning a major prank at the Ravenclaw-Slytherin Quidditch match this time, Heck. I want you to be there to see it. It's going to be great! And I got the idea from you, sis, so I hope you appreciate it!

Score a.k.a. Stingtail

I did not allow myself to wilt. I did not allow my attention to drift in class. But once I had Illi and Lucius safely ensconced in my bed with silencing, locking, and warding charms on the curtain into the room, I sank into Lucius' arms. The familiar scent of his skin, a subtle hint of limes and spearmint, soothed me as much as his swirling hands on my back.

"They're going to do something at the match," I murmured. "Score says he got the idea from me."

Lucius wrapped me securely in his embrace. "Well, love, at least you can't get out of coming to the match this time, right?"

I growled half-heartedly.

"Come on. We need to practice Occlumency, Hecate, or you'll never best the Dark Lord's Legilimency."

"Why would I want to anyway?" I asked quietly, sitting up. "Why are we doing this?"

"Because there are sometimes things you will want to keep safe," Lucius said. "I'm sure you don't want him watching the first time you made love, Hecate."

My face heated up, and I'm sure I looked more than a little flustered. "Well, yes, that's true, but..."

"Just trust me, love. It's all I ask."

In the years to come, those words would mean more to me than anything that would follow. It would mean more than anything spoken to me before I'd ever met Scorpius.

More to me than perhaps even my own life.

Because a Slytherin protects her own.

__~*~__

Snow fell out of the sky in silent, calm movements, sullied only by movement from the ground. It was the third Quidditch game of the year, but my very first. Just as well. I should have gone to Slytherin versus Gryffindor at the start of the year. Lucius led the way as Illi, Rabastan, Ali, Regulus, and I followed out onto the Quidditch pitch. The ground was blanketed in grey slush from the many feet that had traveled this way.

The stands were decorated with the Ravenclaw and Slytherin crests on each tower. As was my wont since this term had begun, I sought out Evans and Severus. They

were both sitting in a mostly-empty Slytherin stand. I had figured that Evans would root for Slytherin if there were no Gryffindors playing. It took everything not to roll my eyes typical Gryffindor.

It would only take so much to twist her against him.

I tugged at Lucius' arm. "By them, but not too close. Ali, Regulus, you two and I will sit closest. It will show that we're not as 'Slytherin' as the others."

A short time remained before the match was to begin. Ali and Regulus chattered excitedly about the previous games in front of me. Lucius spent the time explaining to me the rules of the game. Though I had read *Quidditch Through the Ages*, some of the finer points were left to the imagination. Unfortunately, I knew next to nothing of any physical game, let alone one played on brooms.

Sin Avery soon joined us. Cissa and Bella were higher up, giggling loudly. I scowled in their general direction.

"Oh, leave them their fun, Heck," Lucius said, his tone lightly chastising. "The Slytherin players are all... what is that word you women use? Charming? Debonair?"

"That doesn't mean to giggle like morons before they've even come out of the changing rooms," I snarled under my breath.

Lucius' brow rose expressively. "I was under the impression that they *were* morons, love."

I chuckled softly. "No. Simply unnaturally ignorant."

Lucius glanced down at me from the corner of his eyes. "Some would argue that those two notions are combined in this regard."

"You've obviously never seen one of their Hair-Thickening Charms," I said, sitting up straighter. "They simply place more emphasis on insipid things."

Lucius chuckled softly. "That's my little Hecate."

He put his hand on my opposite shoulder and pulled me into a half-hug against his chest. The familiar pressure of his lips on my forehead, the warmth of his body in the cold, relaxed me as nothing else ever did. I smiled up at him. Enough, yes, enough to ignore the squealing giggles of Narcissa and Bellatrix Black.

Professor McGonagall sat in the stand opposite us. I could tell because only she wore green tartan robes. A machine sat before her and behind it sat one of the older students. I think he was a seventh-year. From his scarf, I'd say Hufflepuff. Though, since it was yellow, he may have been a Gryffindor.

"Good afternoon, Hogwarts!" he cried, his voice magically amplified. "Welcome to the third match of the year, Slytherin versus Ravenclaw! Representing Ravenclaw is... Yue Chang, Keeper!"

The sound, like a blast from a cannon, came from the right-hand side of the pitch. A streak of royal blue flew past the stand, coming to a halt right in front of Madam Hooch. It was only then that a pale sixth-year Ravenclaw in royal blue robes materialized.

The process continued with Underhill, Bumbo, and Davies (Chasers); Wendell and Holmes (Beaters); and a Huxley (Seeker).

From the opposite side of the pitch flew our team: Flint (Keeper); Norstram, Beluge, and Norfolk (Chasers); Crabbe and Goyle (Beaters), and Bulstrode (Seeker).

The Keepers sat on the edge of the floating circle with Madam Hooch at its core. The Beaters and the Seekers flew over everyone else and the three Chasers hovered nearest Madam Hooch. The young, short-haired witch might have been the inspiration Molly had for short, spiky hair. She held the Quaffle and the Snitch in either hand. An assistant was on the ground with the Bludgers.

I could scarcely hear Hooch's mumbled words, let alone make out what they were. Down below, the Bludgers were released. Hooch let go of the Snitch in a flash of gold. The Chasers on both sides tensed. The Quaffle flew into the air almost of its own accord.

Norfolk and Underhill lurched forward almost as one. To the cheers of the Slytherin supporters, Norfolk caught the Quaffle. I watched in almost mystified awe as Norfolk wove in and about the blue-clothed flyers, making his way with ease to the three rings at the other end of the pitch.

As though it were the most simple of motions, Norfolk threw the Quaffle into the air straight up. He swung the whole broom around like a top, using the bristles to smack the ball straight in between Chang's outstretched fingertips.

"SLYTHERIN SCORES!" shouted the announcer. "Ten points, Slytherin!"

The stands around me erupted in cheers so deafening that I stood up to see over into the pitch. Underhill caught the Quaffle and raced toward the other end of the pitch. However, he was nowhere near as graceful as Norfolk. Almost immediately, Slytherin was back in possession.

The world shifted around me, flashing.

It was snowing. It wasn't snowing.

I sat by Lucius. The red-haired boy I couldn't name sat by me instead. Lucius. No-name. Lucius. A younger girl with white-blond hair wearing an atrocious lion's head fashioned into a hat. Lucius again.

A black-haired boy... Potter?

The teams flying changed, flashing through all the Houses and most definitely not the people I was watching. Sometimes people who looked like Crabbe and Goyle remained, but a boy that looked like a short-haired Lucius was flying with them instead.

I barely noticed that the people around me had leapt to their feet in cheer again. It happened on both "sides" of the memory flashes. At one point, an older-looking Hagrid was sitting a little farther down from me.

I wore red.

I wore green.

I wore Muggle clothes.

I wore my green wizarding cloak.

The flashes came faster and faster, so quickly I couldn't tell whether I was Gryffindor Hermione Granger or Slytherin Hecate Taylor for seconds at a time.

The prank, however, pulled me back to my reality.

At first nothing really happened. A black cloud off in the distance moved in, to drop more snow on us, no doubt. The cloud grew darker and larger, approaching far too quickly to be a simple cloud. I didn't see the birds until they were crashing into the barrier surrounding the pitch, the barrier that prevented the Snitch and Bludgers from escaping into the audience.

The birds battered against the shield, making loud crunching noises that could only be their bones breaking before they vanished.

One thing I learned that day about Quidditch pitches enough wildlife battering like rams against the shields will, inevitably, bring them down.

The birds flew into the pitch, aiming specifically for the players. People shrieked in terror. I distinctly heard, "HITCHCOCK! HITCHCOCK!" from the Ravenclaw stands to our immediate left. Birds of all shapes and sizes flocked about the stadium, landing on the empty benches, pecking at some of the observers' clothes.

Scorpius' words came back unbidden to my mind: *I got the idea from you, sis.*

Avifors.

I studied the birds more closely, in spite of the chaos around me. The tiniest ones were Chickadees, flying in amongst the red-tailed hawks, the golden eagles, the ravens (of course), the jays, and the cardinals. A distinct tack-tack-tack noise was coming from the general direction of my left I think it might have been a woodpecker.

The players all headed for the ground, but not before Norfolk was caught by a swooping kestrel. He cried out, the noise barely heard over the shrill cries of women who I might add weren't even being attacked. I saw red, blood. Was he okay? I jumped to my feet, intent on getting everyone else from the stands.

That is when I saw them.

Both Bludgers headed straight for Severus Snape and Lily Evans.

"Evans!" I shouted.

She glanced around wildly for the source of the shout, rather than toward the Bludgers. Thinking fast, I cast the first spell that came to mind.

"Protego Compleo Consummo!"

A flash of blue and white the Bludgers bounced loudly against my shield, but it held. Lily Evans stared straight ahead at the black balls as they continued to try to get in at her. Severus, however, took matters into his own hands.

"Gelo! Gelo!"

The Bludgers fell harmlessly with a loud *thud* apiece to the ground at their feet.

McGonagall's voice came then, magically amplified. "All students return to your House common rooms immediately. We will sort this out from there."

Lucius and Illi flanked me on either side. However, the moment I spotted Score's head amongst the crowd, I split from them. Illi tried to argue, but I reassured her. "I'll be there as soon as I've finished with my brother."

The rest of the Slytherins made their way down the stairs. I grabbed Score and Remus' scarves and dragged the two of them into an empty classroom.

"What the bloody fuck was that about? The Bludgers aimed straight for Lily and Severus!"

"That wasn't us," Score retorted. "Just the birds. Wasn't it wicked?"

"Oh, it was wicked, all right, but not in the way you think," I snarled. "You broke the barriers to allow for the Bludgers to attack in the first place!"

"We didn't intend for it to..."

"Sure you did! All for a laugh, all for what, just to say you set a bunch of birds on a Quidditch match?" I knew I wasn't being rational. I was too upset to care.

Remus spoke softly. "Hecate, we really didn't mean for anyone to be hurt."

I glanced from brother to friend and back again. "Let me see for myself."

"What do you mean?" Score asked.

I scowled and looked him straight in his blue-grey eyes. "Legilimens!"

A series of images from the previous Quidditch matches showed up. Then their plans for the bird prank. Definitely not the way they had planned it. Apparently James had thought that the birds would simply fly around, not try to peck people. It really was all just a misunderstanding.

I pulled out to see a gasping Scorpius. "Wh-What was that?"

"Legilimency," I said, my voice softer. "I don't know what those other... boys have been doing to you. So I..."

Score glared at me instead. "So you go poking around in my head to make sure of that, is that it?"

I blinked. "It's perfectly safe, Score, it"

"You can take your Slytherin sensibilities and leave me the hell alone!" Scorpius snarled.

And he left the empty classroom without so much as a single backwards glance. Remus blinked. "Hecate... What have they been teaching you in those dungeons?"

"I didn't..."

"Mean for it to end that way?" Remus hugged me carefully around the shoulders. "Please be careful, Hecate. It may be best if you let Scorpius cool off for a bit."

And then he left, too.

~*~

What would later become known as the Hitchcock Match (apparently a Muggle filmmaker) had two very different effects on my life thus far. The first effect was quite obviously a step toward pleasing the Dark Lord, separating Lily Evans from Severus Snape and my continued "friendship" with Severus. The second effect, however, was completely undesirable. I had never had a row before in my short memory.

And gods did it hurt.

I made it back to the common room just as the last stragglers from the match had appeared at the blank stone wall. Crabbe and Goyle were gentlemanly enough to remember to allow me in first, but uncouth enough to stare. Later, I would use these two idiots as a perfect example of why Muggle-born witches and wizards sometimes had it better than purebloods.

They had learned the manners, but not why they mattered.

Alioth immediately pounced upon my entrance, holding out her arm. Her wide, innocent, pale green eyes were filled with tears. And like the good big sister that I was, like the honorable Slytherin that I was, I led her down the hall into the bath to gather a clean towel.

"What happened?" I murmured.

Her arm was sliced open in three distinct marks roughly halfway between the meat of her wrist and her inner elbow. From the blood on her hand, I could tell she had tried to staunch the flow. It was still bleeding sluggishly in spite of the time gap.

"A big bird attacked me," she said. I was proud of her in that moment. Though her eyes trembled with unshed tears, though they glittered, her voice was level. Ali's hands did not shake.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I cast a Freezing Charm on it," she said, her back straightening a little with pride. I grinned down at her, in spite of the ache in my chest.

"That's good. So it only got your arm, then."

"Yes."

"We should go back out to the common room. I'm sure Slughorn will be here soon. He might want you to go to Madam Pomfrey."

Ali nodded and pressed the cloth tighter to her arm.

Sure enough, I was right. Slughorn waited at the end of the hall, his belch-like voice needling in through the tapestries. "...is Miss Mulciber and Miss Taylor?"

I winced and quickly drew up the tapestry. "We're here, Professor, I was just getting Ali a cloth. She was hurt by one of the larger birds."

"Come stand by me, Miss Mulciber," Slughorn said. "Were you hurt, Miss Taylor?"

"No, sir."

Slughorn returned his attention to the room at large. "Does anyone have any inkling as to who conjured the birds?"

I glanced at Illi and Lucius. Illi nodded. Lucius shook his head. Both were so subtle I could act like I'd missed the mixed signals later. Ali's hand gripped mine tightly. I made my choice.

I remained silent.

Ali and a handful of others left with Slughorn. Everyone sat in subdued silence in the common room. I sighed and headed for the tapestry once again, Scorpius' words rolling around in my head like too much water in a cauldron. I changed into pajamas and cast the Tooth-Cleansing spell.

I pulled the curtains closed and cast a handful of privacy, silencing, and locking charms on the drapes.

I did not want to be held. I did not want company. Because for every stroke on my hair that Lucius would make, for every kiss to my temple, I would be reminded of why I was trembling in grief. I would be reminded that I had broken the trust of the one person whose trust I should have kept.

I had lost my brother's trust.

~*~

Lucius tried to get in.

Illi tried to get in.

Ali tried to get in.

Bellatrix tried.

Narcissa tried.

Hell, they even brought the Head Girl in to try.

All failed to get through my wards. All failed to get through to see me crying, to see me curled into a ball atop my covers. On one level, I was proud my wards held against a seventh-year Ravenclaw. On another level, I was grateful so many people cared enough to try to help me.

Above all the levels of emotions, though, I was boiling with anger. Angry at Scorpius for not listening. Angry at Lucius and Illi for not giving up. Angry at myself for not telling Slughorn just precisely *who* had set those fucking birds on the stadium, just *who it was* who had hurt Ali and nearly killed Severus and his Mudblood girl.

I trembled with the rage.

It consumed me.

I slept fitfully, dreamlessly, the anger, the terror, and the grasping tentacles of horror at what I'd done and not done. The sun rose, casting pink and purple light through the glass wall opposite my bed. Sleep captured me again in its gentle embrace, tugging me, pulling at me under the surface like grindylows beneath the lake.

Unable to keep a Slytherin face, unable to understand precisely what made me so upset, I stayed in my bed with my homework. Illi, Cissa, and Bella all woke up, tried the curtains again, and left. Ali came back half-hoping... but no.

My wards would admit no one.

I was hungry, but I refused to give in until I could hold my own.

It was early afternoon by the time someone actually got through.

I heard the muttering, heard the wand swishing and flicking precisely in the air. I heard the rustle of pages in a book, felt more than saw my wards crash around me. But the face that emerged through the drapes was not one I expected.

"Insufferable know-it-all." Severus scowled. "You do realize you have half a room of dunderheads out here worried for your health."

Numb with shock, I nodded.

Severus glanced over his shoulder then back at me. "Why did you help us?"

I only had one answer that I was willing to give. "Slytherins protect their own."

He glared with his tiny black eyes. Sullen, they narrowed. "Indeed. And yet here you sit." He glanced over his shoulder again. "Come. You should eat."

Severus thrust the curtains aside with two smooth movements. On my bedside table were a smuggled plate of sandwiches and a flagon of pumpkin juice. I must have stared at it for longer than was necessary.

"You didn't think your friends would allow you to suffer, did you?"

"Who brought this for me?"

"Mulciber and Black," Severus said. "Eat, woman." I bit back the urge to ask which Black he was referring to. Only Regulus spent any real amount of time with Ali.

Was he always so formal? So curt? I was reminded of Lucius in the way he demanded I eat and of Illiad in the way he tapped the plate impatiently. Of Ali the way he was silent, of Rabastan in the way he moved. Even a little of Scorpius, in the way that he sat down on the floor to watch, his ankles crossed and head resting on his knees.

And yet there was a hurt, a darkness in him that echoed my own. A sense of longing to belong, hovering at the edges of his soul. I ate slowly and hoped he would remain. He did. Instead of speaking like a normal person, however, he simply sat and stared off into a distance far beyond the wall behind my bed.

"Malfoy loves you," Severus said quietly after two sandwiches.

"Of course," I said, blinking. "He's my ooh-doe."

"Your what?" Severus looked at me for the first time since he'd last ordered me to eat.

"It's Cherokee for 'brother,'" I added. "Illi taught us."

"Ah. Parkinson. American. I don't mean *brotherly*" he spat the word "love, Taylor."

I scowled. "Don't call me *that*."

"Your little memory problem is like a double-ended dagger," Severus said, his eyes finding that spot over my shoulder again, "if you can't see that Lucius wants you. Or perhaps you were always so unobservant, which I highly doubt." He stood abruptly. "Go to your friends, woman, before they do something stupid."

And he left as though he had not said that my friends might do something idiotic, as though he hadn't reduced my Obliviate to a mole hill. As though he hadn't just... well.

Severus Snape was an enigma; that was certain. One I intended to figure out. After all, if there's one thing Hecate Hermione Taylor enjoys, it's a challenge.

~*~

Hey, it's UK with some notes. The Quidditch players are all random names, some canon (like Davies and Chang). They really aren't important at this time, so I won't go into them. The birds the Marauders conjured are all real birds, though I'm not certain whether any of them live in the UK or not.

As for my screwy Latin: Protego Compleo Consummo is obviously a derivative of the Shield Charm. Compleo means "to fill up, to fulfill, to finish" and Consummo means "to make perfect, to complete." Basically, I meant it to "protect fully and completely," and it's meant for solid objects (like Bludgers) as opposed to other spells.

Gelo is a partner-spell to Glacius. Where Glacius is meant to "freeze" enemies, Gelo is used to "freeze" objects (also like Bludgers). The third spell in this little trio is Gelaglacius, which is used to freeze liquids (like water).

I know I promised recipes from last chapter. I'm kinda slammed with Real Life at the moment, but I will find my cards so I can give ya'll the recipes. Promise.

Cursed

Chapter 17 of 18

Heck decides on a new course of action regarding Remus and Severus. Unfortunately, another complication with the Obliviate Potion delays it.

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry Potter. I am merely having a lot of fun with the characters.

And... um. UK made herself a banner. It's the first time I've attempted photo manipulation. Forgive my dorkness!

□

Chapter 17: Cursed

Lucius and Illi were very Slytherin in asking the reasons for why I had basically locked myself inside my bed curtains via wards. They waited for the proper moment to spring the question on me. They knew eventually that I would need to tell them what had happened. It was positively Gryffindor of me to need it but I did.

The Great Hall was lit by the usual overhanging candles. The platters were filled with their usual foray of delights. To me, however, it was unusually bleak. The house-elves' crumpets and biscuits tasted like sawdust in my mouth. I glanced across the Hall to see my brother seething between James and Sirius; Peter's back was to me. Remus was a little farther down the table than usual. I swallowed hard the only outward sign I was distressed. What had he done to be pushed aside by the other Marauders?

Was it my fault?

"Heck!"

I blinked, my attention back on Lucius.

"Are you back to us? Should I ask Professor Urdritch to read your tea leaves or did you manage to See with that Inner Eye of yours?"

I scowled at him. "I was not trying Divination, I was just thinking."

"Some thoughts rolling 'round in there," Lucius said, grinning. "So what made you come back to the land of the living?"

In all the time I had spent with Lucius and Illi, there was nothing they did not know about. Somehow Severus' visit seemed like it should be something better kept to myself, though. I smiled softly at my best friend, and for the first time lied to him.

"I just realized that I shouldn't let something Scorpius does get to me," I said, which was half-true.

Lucius had taught me well even he did not sense the lie. "What did your illustrious brother do this time?"

"We had a fight over what happened at the match. Score told me to keep my 'Slytherin sensibilities' out of his business."

Every Slytherin within hearing range that is, Lucius, Illi, Ali, Regulus, Rabastan, Rodolphus, Narcissa, and Bella gasped in outrage. So much for private conversation.

"You rarely get angry, Heck, especially with Scorpius..." Lucius shook his head. "I imagine the Gryffindor has decided to not speak with you for a time, then."

"I don't know," I murmured. I hadn't thought of that. "And it looks like Remus has tried reasoning with him, to his own detriment."

"He was sick again just a bit ago, wasn't he?" Illi asked, glancing over at the red-clothed table. "Poor bloke. To be sick like that all the time..."

Without warning, unbidden, I had an answer to a question I had not thought of in quite some time. I knew what was wrong with Remus. The shock must have shown on my face, because Illi misread it.

"What? Just because he's half-blood doesn't mean he's not a good guy in some ways. Even if he is a Gryffindor. Severus is half-blood and he's all right most ways."

I smiled at her, taking this excuse not to tell them what I'd discovered. Now all I had to do was confront Remus to confirm and find out where to go from here.

__~*~__

Scorpius refused to work near me in Potions on Friday. Remus cast me an apologetic smile from across the room. The other Marauders did not even glance my way. And the journal the precious journal that had been my only connection with Remus and Scorpius was nowhere in sight.

It was then that the fear Lucius had originally brought forth was realized. Scorpius wasn't speaking to me.

What was odd, however, was that Severus and Lily had moved a bit closer to our table. Not close enough to talk, but not as far away any more.

If Slughorn noticed, he didn't comment.

__~*~__

It was early March before I at last was able to corner Remus alone in an empty classroom. As far as I knew, only one person had ever managed to break my wards. The remaining friendly Gryffindor was silent the entire time I was casting them. My shoulders shook with the intensity of my fear that I would soon lose him, too.

"Hecate..." Remus' voice came from behind me. "I'm sorry it's taken so much time to see you. Scorpius is... not happy with you."

"Lucius explained it to me," I said quietly. "I only learned after the fact that it was... quite rude of me." Another lie I'd found it out in a book.

"That isn't it, not entirely, Hecate," Remus said, his hands finding my shoulders tenderly. "He is frightened he is losing you to your House's sentiments. Afraid you are taking up with the Muggle-hating afraid you might join He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named... and scared for what that might mean for him."

The truth of things was that I had already joined in my mind. That I already hated Muggles. That Score's fears had true basis. I was quiet, facing the door, Remus' rough hands more soothing on my shoulders than the pounding waterfall in the Slytherin baths.

"Most of all, though, Heck, he's tired of hiding his true relationship with you."

"I can't not hide it," I murmured. "It's as much for his protection for your protection as it is my own."

"I know that, Heck," Remus whispered. "But your brother and you for that matter have not had the social contact required to know that completely. That you do know is amazing."

"I've figured out some things," I said vaguely. "Remus... do the others know that you are a werewolf?"

His hands tightened on my shoulders, almost painfully so. "How did you figure it out?"

"You just confirmed it, actually." I smiled wryly over my shoulder at him. "Don't worry. I won't tell on you. I love you too much to get you kicked out of school."

Remus smiled sadly. "So my being a werewolf doesn't scare you?"

"Not at all. I just wish I could be with you when you transform... not as a werewolf or potential, though."

"The others have been trying to become Animagi," Remus said. "Not quite done it yet, but apparently it's safe. I don't... attack animals."

"Then I'll become one, too," I said matter-of-factly. "Will you bring the journal?"

"I don't know how I could possibly get it to you," Remus confessed. "And besides, Scorpius has destroyed the quill."

I sighed. "I had actually thought as much. Can you agree to meet me half an hour before curfew on Monday in dungeon eight?"

"Yes. I'll do some research, see if I can't figure something out for communications."

"I'll just find something to cast a Protean Charm on in the meantime," I said. I stood on the tips of my toes Remus was so tall! and kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you... for being a good friend."

He smiled softly. "Thank you for understanding."

So began my forays into magical communication, Animagus Transfiguration, and werewolf research. If there was ever a thing I was good at, it's research. If there was one thing being a Slytherin had taught me, it was how to hide what I was researching. Slytherin had taught me that if I had an advantage any at all then I should keep it secret.

So that's what I did.

Even Lucius would not know that I was an Animagus soon to be, anyway. That Remus was a werewolf? Please! Have some faith in a Slytherin girl. Magical communication? Well... that I didn't really have to hide. After all, what else would I hide everything under?

Transfiguring one's body into an animal was risky business. Each book I pulled from the shelves warned that one should have someone else nearby to Transfigure you back should you make a mistake. I couldn't ask any of my friends I didn't want even them to know that I still had contact with Remus. Somehow, I thought, it would get back to Score and the other Marauders.

And I couldn't have that.

So I decided to ask the one person who would not care, who would not tell.

I would ask Severus Snape.

Oh, I wouldn't tell him why, of course. That was just as well. And I had something to offer him, something that only I (and Lucius or Illi) could teach him.

Occlumency.

I planned it for weeks. Approaching Severus was risky business. He could decide to tell the whole of Slytherin and in turn the Gryffindors via Lily of my plans. No, I needed him to understand. I needed him alone. So as I had watched before, I observed closer yet. I had notes written on a paper that Vanished without my password. Where he went after class, before class, his schedule.

By the time I was ready to approach him, Lucius and Rabastan were frantically studying for their O.W.L.s. Illi and I were helping them and helping Ali and Regulus study for their first end-of-term exams. All of my Legilimency and Occlumency lessons were at a stand still. I had found several ways to write short messages to Remus, but none the likes of which we'd been able to do with the journal.

All the while, Scorpius had not once spoken to me. The other three Marauders snubbed me just the same.

In my daily observances of Severus Snape, I could not help but see all of the horrid attacks. Illi assured me that they had originally been quite benign. No longer. Often times, I saw Lily tugging Severus up the stairs to Madam Pomfrey. Sometimes he stayed overnight.

An hour before curfew the eve before Lucius' O.W.L.s, I slipped away from Illi and Lucius for a supposed quick snack from the evening tea in the Great Hall. They were so engrossed in their studies they didn't even notice that I took a book on Occlumency with me. If my observations held, Severus would be escorting Lily Evans to Gryffindor Tower now, via the staircase by the statue of Barbados the Brawler.

I dashed up stairs that thankfully did not change. At the top of the stairs that spilled out onto the seventh floor, I was just in time to see Severus bid Lily good night. The portrait of the Fat Lady swung shut.

Satisfied that we weren't going to be interrupted by the appearance of any nosy Gryffindors, I stepped out from behind Barbados the Brawler.

And promptly into a completely different situation.

My body moved of its own accord, none of my limbs or mouth even remotely able to respond to my own thoughts. As though from a different life, a different person... as though my very mind was being run by someone else. A voice drifted around me my own voice.

Oh, God!

A black-haired boy raced in front of me, his hand wrapped tightly around my wrist, so tense his knuckles were white and my left hand purple. Another boy, chubby and short, ran behind me. We ran pell-mell down a black hallway, not even slowing to check where we were going.

In front of us, in another darkened room, two masked, black-clothed men ran toward the door. The black-haired boy ducked into a tiny room, an office by the immediate looks of it, and slammed the door behind the three of us. My wand rose of its own volition in my hand my mouth formed a spell.

"Collo-"

But the words never finished forming. Both masked men flew into the room, crying out in utter jubilation. They raised their wands and as one cried, "Impedimenta!"

As if from a dream, my body flew back against the wall. The pain seemed far away, detached, but real. Books fell from the shelf atop my head.

"We've got him!" shouted the nearest masked man. "In an office off-"

Again, up came my wand, and out through my own lips flew a spell. "Silencio!"

The man was instantly silent.

The boy who'd been buried with me spat his own spell. "Petrificus Totalus!"

The other man fell to the ground stiff as a board.

"Well done, Ha-"

But the first man the man I'd merely Silenced made a complicated series of movements, in a spell I knew only too well *thé'iolet Cleave Hex Vis Adhaera* A slicing hex that aims straight for the inner organs, straight for the heart. My body flew back, the pain leaving almost as quickly as my vision.

I heard two completely separate shouts, but they were both in alarm.

One was "Hermione."

The other was "Hecate."

I couldn't tell the voices apart.

__~*~__

Antonin Dolohov. I shouldn't know that name. But I did. I knew his face the color of the robes he wore to the Malfoy ball. Deep sage with black trim. A kind smile, a joking gait. He hadn't danced with me. I hadn't been introduced. But now there he was, slightly older, but he was nonetheless the same man.

He had tried to kill me. In the future, I reminded myself. He tried to kill me in the future. Actually, Antonin hadn't looked so good. He'd looked *mad*. Barking, to be honest. What had happened to him?

And the boys I'd run through the halls with... Harry Potter. James' son. My best friend, a Gryffindor. He'd obviously cared about me. And I him.

My body felt detached from my mind. Floating in open ocean with nothing to ground it but the deep blue water of Davy Jones. I sank into it, embraced by the warmth of sun-heated silk. So, with nothing better to do, I allowed my mind to wander back to examining the events leading up to the... vision? That word was as good as any.

The boy in the vision was not Severus. That much I knew. Nothing about being up near the Gryffindor Tower reminded me of that cold, dank, dark place in the vision. The office? Nothing. Thus far none of my sporadic feelings of déjà vu had hit on anything quite like this before.

Was I really injured?

Had I really been hit by the Violet Cleave Hex?

Was I... dead?

Somehow that didn't panic me half as much as it had months ago. As then, colors blended and roiled beneath my closed eyes, various shades of dark blue, puce, burgundy, and emerald. This was dissimilar in ways, though. I could not feel anything. No pain, no pleasure, no limbs. Nothing. Just the floating motion that did not match up with my last truly cognizant thought. The ocean of nothing.

If I was dead... it wasn't all that bad.

The pain started.

Not all at once. More like a slow awareness, a tiny root sticking out from a bean just before it sprouts fully. Just like that, just as I pictured the bean, the floating came back, drowning me. Slowly I swam toward the surface of an ocean that I couldn't see, an ocean of nothingness.

The nothingness opened into something, but that something was all-encompassing agony. Like the heat twin suns hovering over a desert with no cover, it was there, all around. The pressure of water on all sides. Suddenly, the ocean of nothingness was something again, the pressure building and building like an underwater volcano.

Tremors flowed through me like earthquakes. A sound like a broken clock's ticking reverberated in my mouth, a mouth I could only just now feel.

Cool glass pressed to my lips.

I sank again into the water, the pain buried under the ocean once again.

~*~

Numbness more than pain greeted me the next time I woke. I could hear speech somewhere off to my right Madam Pomfrey.

"...No magical residue to be had! It is as if she simply dropped to the ground with a gash in her chest!"

A gash?

"We understand, Poppy, don't get yourself up in a dither." Dumbledore. "We are quite lucky Mr. Snape was there to alert us. If he had not been..."

"If she hadn't been found, she would be quite dead by now," Madam Pomfrey said tartly. "Scorpius and Hecate were my last two patients at St. Mungo's, Headmaster. I feel very protective of them. I think... I think that Hecate may be receiving memories from another person."

Not quite right, but near enough. I sighed, trying to will myself the rest of the way awake. Another phial of potion touched my lips and I was out again.

~*~

The third time consciousness deemed to grace me with her presence, I woke to shouting.

"I'm her brother!" Scorpius.

"You haven't acted like one!" snarled Lucius.

"That doesn't matter! She's hurt, she needs me to be here for her!"

"She needs you like she needs another hole in her chest!"

Two voices shouted in unison Remus and, surprisingly, Severus. "Shut up!"

Silence.

"Who are you to tell me what to do, Snivellus?" Scorpius snarled.

A shuffling sound. "Leave or bite your tongue, Taylor."

Nothingness.

~*~

The next time, I woke suddenly. There didn't seem to be a cause. The room was quiet. Slowly, I cracked my eyes open, fighting the potion-induced haze. Pink and orange light cast through the windows sunset or sunrise. Being unconscious doesn't lend much to time keeping, after all.

Although I knew, somehow, in the back of my mind, that I had been hurt, it was still a bit of a shock to find myself in the hospital wing. My school robes were nowhere within sight. A stack of parchment lay on a small table next to my bed. The subtle scent of cleaning charms hovered in the air. I could not see beyond my bed because there was a white curtain surrounding the immediate area around me.

With a sharp *rack-tack-tack* sound, the curtains swung back. Madam Pomfrey bustled into the bed area, nonchalantly humming what sounded like Aretha Franklin's *Respect* under her breath. The curtain closed and she turned around. The moment she realized I was awake was immediately apparent she sucked in a breath, her wand clattered to the floor, and she rushed the remaining two steps to my side.

"Hecate! Do you hurt anywhere?"

I blinked at her abrupt change. Slowly, I wiggled my toes, my legs. I flexed my arms, squeezed my fingers into a fist and released them. I rolled my neck. Aside from the occasional crick of bone-to-bone, I felt nothing. Then I tried to sit up. A dull ache in my chest, as though I had taken a blow to my ribs.

"My chest hurts little, but other than that, I'm fine," I said.

"Oh, thank goodness! Gods and spirits, girl, Macmillan's broom tumble was nothing compared to that horrid slash." Madam Pomfrey sniffed. I realized with a start that her eyes were glassy. "You're going to have to tell the Headmaster what happened, dear, but not until you're ready to see him."

"I'm fine," I repeated, more for her sake than the sake of getting out of the hospital wing. "But I am curious what you did to heal me up that curse wasn't a passing fancy."

"It was obviously an experimental one, indeed," Madam Pomfrey nodded. "Wherever did you find such a thing?"

It was in that moment that I figured out precisely what she thought had happened. Madam Pomfrey thought I'd tried to commit suicide.

"I didn't do it to myself," I said, a little more sharply than I meant to.

The tension in Madam Pomfrey's shoulders seemed to dissipate with a long, relieved breath. With a flick of her wand, a rather stiff-backed wooden chair appeared by my bed. "Then could you satiate my curiosity and tell me exactly how you managed to be cursed whilst alone in an empty classroom?"

I frowned deeply. I could feel the downward curl of my lips, the tension above my eyes that much more fiercely than usual. "An empty classroom?"

"Yes. That's where Mr. Snape and Scorpius found you after you ran past him like the very hound-fiends of Hades himself were nipping at your heels. It was quite odd how they brought you here amiably, together, carrying you in a sling between their arms. Minute I had you in the bed, though, the whole truce seemed to fall apart!"

I filed this information away for future reference. I couldn't tell her that I was from the future, though. So I played it Slytherin vagueness. Acting weak where I was not. I stuttered and stammered, and told a partial truth.

"I think I had... I don't know, really. A vision? A memory that manifested itself in my present?"

She bought it, puppydog tails and all. Her hand flew to her mouth. "You remembered the attack on your parents and you, didn't you?"

Perfect. "I think so."

Madam Pomfrey leaned forward so far that her elbows rested on my bed. "Did you see who hurt you?"

"It wasn't... wasn't Death Eaters," I murmured, suddenly embarrassed. "But I still don't know who they were."

Madam Pomfrey sighed, a tired smile crossing her thin lips. "Gideon always did say that it wasn't Death Eaters."

I could have told her that he hadn't died in vain. I could have said that Voldemort hadn't meant to kill her husband. I could have done something to ease the clear pain that shimmered in Poppy Pomfrey's beautiful liquid brown eyes.

But I told her nothing, said nothing, and did nothing but stare at my hands. As I was about to ask something else, a soft knock came at the hospital wing door. Madam Pomfrey jumped up and headed for a cabinet near her office door.

"That'll be Mr. Snape, right on time."

I'm fairly certain that Madam Pomfrey does not get out of the hospital wing very often. She seemed to be of the opinion that Severus and I were friends. But...

"How long have I been out?" I asked.

"You've missed exams," Severus answered instead. He took the uncomfortable wooden chair that Madam Pomfrey had vacated. "It's the sixth. Trolled out of school by a scar how utterly ridiculous."

I sat up abruptly, ignoring the searing pain that sliced through my chest at the move. "What? Trolled out?" I'd been kicked out of school?

Madam Pomfrey chuckled as she poured at least ten vials of potion into a steaming goblet. "Mr. Snape is joking, Hecate. Professor Dumbledore is going to allow your grades to stand as they were. You've passed with flying colors."

Severus wasn't laughing, or smiling. But there was a tiny curl of one side of his mouth, and his black eyes were shimmering with light.

"But... what happened?" I murmured.

"I could ask you the same," Severus said. His thick eyebrows rose expressively in disdain. "You started running, screeching. The whole of Gryffindor Tower thought a banshee had appeared in the castle."

"Obviously they were mistaken," I snapped. In my fury, I sat up straighter on the bed bringing on a sharp, stabbing pain that sliced into my chest. Like a stone cast in a pond, the pain rippled, ebbed. I clutched at it; only to have small but strong arms push me bodily back onto the soft sheets and pillows.

"Don't get her excited, Mr. Snape," Madam Pomfrey said sharply. She glanced down at me again. "The Headmaster wants to speak with you while you're conscious, Hecate. I'm going to go and get him."

"Can you get my ooh-does and ooh-luhs, too?" I asked.

Both the school matron and Severus stared at me; her eyes were wide and his narrowed to thin slits.

"Lucius, Scorpius, Remus, Alioth, Regulus, and Illiad," I clarified.

Severus remained seated as the young mediwitch released my hands. "Of course, dear. I'll be but a moment."

We sat in surprisingly comfortable silence, alone, just Severus in his chair and I in my bed. I took the opportunity to study him. Even though I'd watched his goings-on for months on end now, I really hadn't gotten this close to him since... well, since that day in Diagon Alley.

Since then, the hollows in his cheeks had filled out some. He was still thin as a rose stem, just as prickly, just as tight as the bud that would not open. From up close, his greasy hair appeared soft and frayed. The nose that every Slytherin secretly snickered at, the nose that made Gryffindors goad and guffaw openly, wasn't nearly so bad as people said not up close.

"You shouldn't cry so easily. It makes you vulnerable," Severus said, so quietly I barely heard him. He paused long enough to contemplate his next words, but not long enough for me to retort. "Why did you follow me?"

I drew back from him in surprise.

"Don't act like you didn't. I'm surprised Lucius hasn't taught you the subtle art of seeing without being seen," Severus scowled. "Now why have you been following me?" His tone brooked no argument.

"I wanted to ask you to do something for me," I murmured. "I can't ask any of my brothers or sisters for various reasons."

"Do what for you?"

"Help me become an Animagus."

Severus' answer was swallowed by the arrival of Headmaster Dumbledore, Molly, Lucius, Ali, and Scorpius. Remus and Illi raced into the room side by side almost unnoticed amidst the shouting of Score, Ali, and Molly.

"You're all right!"

"Sis! Sis!"

"Heck!"

Madam Pomfrey stormed back into the room in full Healer mode. "I will not have you tiring her out!"

All noise ceased. It was only because it was quiet that I noticed Severus had left only to come back in the room beside a smirking Regulus Black. Severus, on the other hand, didn't look too thrilled to be back in the infirmary.

I made a split-second decision, one that might ruin me or sustain me.

I cleared my throat softly. "I asked that you all be here so that I can set the record straight on my... injuries." Before anyone could protest, before any of my friends and family could argue with the thought of sharing any of this with any of the others present, I went on. "I believe I had a momentary lapse into a memory... that happened to me in another time."

The silence was palpable. I had here in the same room four separate sets of people. My lawful family Score and Molly; my school family Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey; my closest friends, who were more family than my family was Lucius, Illi, Ali, Regulus, and Remus, and I could possibly consider Remus by himself as well; and the person who teetered on a fine line between friend and foe, Severus Snape. I had no doubt from my brief snatches of consciousness that many of these people had fought over me while I was unconscious.

I was not deluded in thinking that they would ever stay in the same place for very long. I knew, in my heart, that I would have to make a decision soon. What that decision entailed, I did not know.

Instead, I waited patiently for their responses. It was Remus who spoke first.

"From another time?"

"I had two memories, one I think of my parents' deaths, and one when I was older," I said, continuing with the lie that I'd told Madam Pomfrey. "I was in a place completely different from here. With different people. A man tried to kill me. I Silenced him. The curse would have killed me otherwise."

Madam Pomfrey gawped. "Then you knew the curse?"

I blinked at her. "Yes... why?"

"I don't know what it is! I've never seen anything like it before," she said. "Was it... a killing curse?"

"No," I said, surprised. "It is called the Violet Cleave Curse. Its purpose is to cleave all major organs in two that I Silenced him prior to his casting it meant that it acted more like a slicing hex."

Dumbledore spoke next. "Where did you hear of such a curse?"

I blinked, considering his words. "I don't remember. It's one of the things I knew before... well, before. I don't even remember what book it came from." I wasn't about to go into my Obliviate-that-wasn't. I wasn't quite that stupid.

My Slytherin friends seemed to understand the need for silence. Remus, Scorpius, and Molly all looked between the Headmaster and me. Madam Pomfrey seemed to teeter between wanting to know more and wanting to throw everyone out so I could rest.

To alleviate the stress on everyone's shoulders my own included I faked a yawn. Madam Pomfrey made her choice.

"Everyone out! She needs rest!"

And before I could think about it, she'd shoved another flask to my lips and out I went like I'd cast Nox on a scone.

~*~

Violet Cleave Hex, or Vis Adhaero, is the name of the curse that I made up to match Dolohov's curse. Vis means violence, a great deal of it. Adhaero is basically to "hang on" or "adhere." Hermione's explanation of it isn't entirely accurate. The magic basically adheres itself to the vital organs of the person it's cast on, slowly cleaving away at them. Silenced, it does so a lot more slowly.

Trusting Molly

Chapter 18 of 18

Scorpius and Severus visit Heck in the Hospital Wing, the dream-children scold Hermione, and Molly and Heck have a heart-to-heart chat.

Five years ago, I started to write a story that I felt near to my heart. Real Life prevented me from concentrating and giving Devil's Game its proper due. Now, five years later, I seek to complete it. The continuing story of the Obliviated Twins begins again.

I'd like to thank Brena Marie for taking time from her busy schedule to alpha this fic for me. She gave me the most wonderful reviews way back when, and I'm honored that she continues to help me.

I'd also like to thank TPP staff for any corrections they might apply. I'd like to think the fact that I'll be an English teacher in fall 2015 makes me invincible to grammatical

error. It does not.

I do not own Harry Potter, but I'm glad that JK Rowling allows us to play with her toys.

Without further ado:

Chapter 18: Trusting Molly

Harry, Ron, and Draco were pacing in front of the Gryffindor fireplace. It's a testament to its size that all three, in their fifteen-year-old forms, were capable of doing so. Fourteen-year-old Ginny watched them from beside me on the couch. She sighed. It seemed to break the tension in the air.

"What do we do?" she said. "Hermione won't be able to remember the dream enough to take the right path. We can only give her nudges, not direct orders."

"There's not much we can do," Draco said. He ran his hands through his white-blond hair, coming to a stop at the base of his neck to tug at it irritably. He glanced at me, his stunning grey eyes vivid in the dream. They reminded me of Score's. "You have to stop revealing information to them. Everything you know could devastate the entire wizarding world. You have to stop telling them things about the future."

"But why?" I said. "It can't hurt to be prepared."

"Being prepared for something that may or may not happen," Draco said, a tinge of desperation coloring his voice. "You realize that even the smallest change in events could make everything completely different? If you marry Lucius, I won't be born. If you kill Peter Pettigrew, Harry's parents will live and Voldemort will never have lost his body. If you prevent Sirius from tricking Severus into meeting the werewolf, he won't owe James Potter a wizard's debt."

"S-So what? I just let it all happen?" The Slytherin in me is appalled.

"That's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that you have to understand that if you change things now, things won't be the same. They already won't be the same because Lucius is your friend. Alioth and Illiad. There are events that you don't know about that you've inevitably altered beyond recognition to someone who lived through them the first time. But if you start telling people about events to come, they will expect them. And they might happen, yes, but they won't happen in the same way. You will have made something happen because you said that it would."

"The mind persuades," I said softly. I recognized the concept, though I hadn't applied it to the situation. "But what do I do as the memories come? Just not tell anyone?"

"Molly knows about them," Harry said, speaking for the first time. "Talk with her. I know Hecate doesn't trust her at the moment, but you need to regain that trust in your heart. You need her now more than ever."

The three boys offered words of comfort, reiterating what I already knew my mind would recall come waking: I must not reveal any more of the future. I must not act on the knowledge I receive of the future. And I must regain my trust in Molly, come hell or high water.

I awoke with a start, trying to hold on to the memories of the dream. The words were lost on me, but the three principles to which I'd agreed were stark in my mind, as though I'd been reminded of a long-ago conversation.

The Hospital Wing was silent. Sconces were lit high enough to see shapes and shadows but little else. The moon was new. How long had I been out? Madam Pomfrey was nowhere to be seen, so it was probably well after midnight. I sighed, cringing when my chest contracted in pain against the too-deep breath. I would need to be very, very careful.

I considered the information I had revealed of the future so far. Every single one of my friends and family knew now that I was from a different time. Lucius and Illi knew that I was from the future. Only those two knew about Molly's deception with the journal. She was unaware that I'd read portions of it before then, with every intention on reading it again. It was obvious, then, that Molly had no capabilities as a Legilimens or Occlumens dangerous, on both parts.

Why on Earth would someone like Molly come from the future, to a time period when the most accomplished Legilimens of the age was seeking blood traitors? It was a question I

What was that?

I strained to listen in the graveyard's silence of the Hospital Wing. A whispered spell intoned in the general direction of the double doors. I had my wand in hand, a Shield Charm in place before another sound could come through. I was therefore momentarily startled, and relieved, when Score's head appeared in midair.

The relief vanished when I realized that his head was all that had appeared.

"Don't yell," he whispered. He cast another charm and removed an adult wizard's cloak, revealing his Muggle bedclothes. It took me several moments to scramble through my internal library to realize what it was he was holding.

"That's a... an Invisibility Cloak," I murmured.

"One and the same." Score grinned. "James let me borrow it to come see you." His grin faded to serious contemplation. "I... wanted to apologize. For not talking things out... before. After you got cursed, Remus got through to me." He scowled and glared at me. "Don't get me wrong, Heck. What you did is still..."

"Wrong," I said. "I've wanted to apologize, too, but..." I gestured to the very air around me. "Politics." I met his eyes with a wan smile. "I'm sorry, Scorpius. I was wrong. I used magic on you without your permission to get private information that you would have given me of your own accord, had I only asked. I've broken your trust."

Score shifted uncomfortably. "I'm sorry I... everything. Something told me that what you did was evil, but I don't know what it was. I didn't even know what was happening." He paused, considering his words, most likely. "Do you really think we're from a different time?"

"I know we are. From the future." I shifted in the bed, wincing at the sharp pain. "Molly too. But she wasn't Obliviated."

"Then we must know something dangerous." Score sank onto the corner of my bed and gathered me close for a brotherly hug. "But we must've had personalities ingrained in us otherwise that the people Molly knew from then thought could help now."

"My every instinct says trust Molly, even though I didn't really after I found her journal." I confessed. "It started in 1991, Score. I think I might have revealed more than I ought to have. I won't be any more."

"I haven't gotten any more memories," Score sighed. "Not like you." He buried his hand into his long honey-colored hair.

"I think the potion the one that took our memories was keyed Arithmatically to you, Score. That's why I'm getting mine back. Your knowledge must be more dangerous than mine."

Score nodded, fiddling with the plain white sheets on my bed. "What if we fail? Or make matters worse? We don't even know what we're meant to do."

I shrugged. "We won't. Only Molly will."

"We'll be going home tomorrow," Score said. "We'll ask."

I nodded, though I had my doubts what we would find out. "Get back to bed." I sighed. "We have our parts to play, yet."

Score nodded, obviously disconcerted. He disappeared beneath the Invisibility Cloak. His disembodied voice whispered to me. "Good night, Hecate." He took off the spells that protected our conversation, cast smaller versions on his boots, and left via the double doors. They slid closed with a soft click. I shimmied down under the covers again and fell back to sleep. I remember dreaming, but of what I don't recall.

~*~

Madam Pomfrey woke me several hours later, with the sun. She was pleased to see that I'd made enough progress that I could leave my bed with only the faintest of twinges. I'm rather more pleased to see that Severus Snape showed up just after I was dressed. I had hoped to have more of a conversation with him before we all left for the summer holidays. I was still standing from pulling my robes on.

"Good morning," I said, straightening my wizard's robes. "I didn't get a chance to tell you what I'd do for you in return." I didn't mention my Animagus training whatsoever.

"I will help you." Severus didn't meet my eye. "If you will help me learn to hide my thoughts like you do."

I blinked in surprise. "You've looked?"

He smiled, but it wasn't the sort of happy smile of someone getting what they want. It's different from any other kind of smile I'd ever seen before. It's like Lucius' sneers or Ali's innocent raptures. It looked like a secret, one that is safe.

"I have a talent with Legilimens," Severus admitted. "But to Occlude is something else entirely."

Considering that I had already decided to show him how to do so, it was an easy feat to agree. "It's a deal. Would you like a few books on the topic? I've read all of mine." I gestured with my wand to my school trunk, which had been graciously brought to the Hospital Wing by Madam Pomfrey before I woke up. "*Accio* Defenses of the Mind. *Accio* Occlumency: A Study." Both tomes flew from the depths of my wheeled trunk, landing firmly in my hands. I was honestly rather stunned it had worked. I hadn't actually cast the spell before, and my magic was somewhat depleted from so many brews in my blood.

Severus must have also been stunned by my magical prowess because he was gaping at me when I turned to him. I shut his mouth with the tip of my wand, smirking. "It's rude." I explained shortly. I handed him the two books with no less aplomb.

Severus seemed to shake himself. "I will look them over. If you'd like to meet sometime during the holiday, send an unassuming note to Lily." He handed me a tiny folded piece of parchment. "Use this cipher. I will recognize it for what it is."

He made a stiff, almost courtly bow. The gangling boy I'd been watching for so long was back, but only long enough to leave.

In his absence, I reviewed the code he left. It was a basic Arithmancy cipher, written with numbers, wand movements, and symbols anyone from the basic course would recognize. Without the code breaker in my hand, however, the message would be unreadable without at least a few hours of deciphering. I smiled to myself.

If I ever let my eyes leave Lucius as my future paramour, Severus would come in a close second.

Madam Pomfrey reappeared just then, carrying a small chest.

"These are the remaining potions you will need to take over the next two weeks." She opened my trunk and placed the chest on top without looking inside before shutting it. "If you feel any ill effects, tell Molly to Floo my cottage in Hogsmeade immediately. You will be aha, here they are."

Lucius, Rabastan, Regulus, Illi, and Ali were standing mutely in the doorway. Lucius stepped away from the others to hold my hand.

"We'll take good care of her on the train, Madam Pomfrey. You needn't worry for our Hecate's safety."

Madam Pomfrey beamed at him. "I know you will, Mr. Malfoy. If she tires, please let her rest before continuing. If need be, you may place a hover charm. Good bye, my dear. I hope to see you next year and no sooner." She ushered us out of the wing. I caught the barest glimpse of a house-elf taking my bag.

Sometimes I wondered at my ability to attract people beyond my year and beneath it. Lucius and Rabastan were both two years ahead of me. Regulus and Alioth were both two years below. Illiad was the only year mate in Slytherin with whom I'd made a connection at least so far. I sort of wondered if Severus would become a part of our little circle of friends, or if he'd be a separate friend like Remus was.

Then I wondered if Severus would be offended that I'd thought of Remus and him in the same sentence inside my head. I blew my hair out of my face in a breath, a sure sign of agitation on my part. The others ignored it in favor of helping me delicately descend the first staircase.

"Heck, are you okay?" Ali asked quietly. It sounded more like a question I should have been asking her, from the terrified tone of her voice.

"I will be," I said, smiling. "It doesn't hurt near as much any more."

"Why aren't they having Molly come pick you up?" Lucius asked. "You're obviously still quite hurt."

I set my feet down on the ground at last, gritting my teeth to hide the real pain. If Lucius knew just how much I was really in, he might just insist I return to the Hospital Wing. It's with some small surprise when I looked up and realized that we're across from Filch's office.

"We're on the ground floor," I mumbled.

"The castle moved the Hospital Wing," Lucius said, glancing only for a moment about. "You didn't answer me."

"Well, how would I get home otherwise?" I sniffed.

"Portkey, Floo, and Side-Along Apparition are all completely out of the question. The train's the only way to go safely if I want to go home before I'm better. And Madam Pomfrey has better things to do than to hover over me for the next seven days."

By this time, we'd reached the front steps. The carriages that took us to Hogsmeade Station were waiting, appearing horseless. I knew from *Hogwarts, A History* that they were actually pulled by Thestrals, but it was still an odd sight. I grit my teeth to climb in, only to shout in surprise when I lifted into the air. I glared at Lucius.

"Wasn't me," he said, pointing at Rabastan. The boy in question snickered as he climbed into the seat across from me. Hmph. If it weren't for propriety's sake, I'd kick him in the shins.

Proprieties be damned. I kicked him anyway. His howl of surprised pain was completely worth the twinge I felt in my chest. Damned curse.

"I think you deserved that one, Lestranger." Regulus smirked, his voice quiet. I think he was trying not to set me off again. Wise beyond his years, that first year. Of course,

now that I thought of it, he was technically a second year now.

"So what are your plans for this summer?" Lucius asked nonchalantly. He waved his wand lazily in Rabastan's direction. The corners of the now-sixth-year's eyes were less crinkled than before. I think Lucius cast a mild healing charm on his year mate's shin.

"I'm going back to visit family in Oklahoma," Illi said, sighing. She turned to me with the excitement of one who'd hit on a great idea weeks ago, but only now was bringing it up. "Heck, do you think Molly would let you come with me? It's only for a week, but my aunt is really interested in meeting you."

"I'll ask," I said, bemoaning internally. Holidays were the only time I could hang out openly with Remus and Scorpius. As much as I loved Illi as much as a visit to a real Cherokee reservation would make my summer I'd really hoped to spend it making up for lost time with my brothers.

"The Oklahoma reservation is one of the few that openly uses magic in front of their non-magic members," Lucius said. The carriage stopped at Hogsmeade station at last. Lucius reached out and helped me climb down from the steps. I was glad that no one thought to levitate me down again. "Not in front of Muggle visitors, of course, but they're rare enough where Illi's relatives live."

"And you have to come to tea at my place sometime this summer," Regulus said. "My mum won't stop asking about you."

I smiled and nodded. "I'll ask Molly if I can visit you all." I held Lucius' gaze for a moment over my shoulder. "Maybe we can even have tea with your father's friends."

Only Lucius and Illi would know that I meant the Dark Lord.

We found our favorite compartment with all of our things carefully stacked within. In spite of all of my protests and bravado, and no little amount of Slytherin pride, I was exhausted from the short trip from the Hospital Wing to the Hogwarts Express. I told everyone that I was going to sleep for a bit and to wake me when the trolley came by so I could buy my supply of sugar quills with my student discount. By the time the train pulled out from the station, I was fast asleep.

~*~*~

Draco Malfoy sat across from me at the Griffindor House table in the Great Hall. He sighed, staring at me morosely. In the far corner of the hall, the four House points bar made small clinking sounds in the deathly quiet of the large room. The bewitched ceiling revealed dark, rolling storm clouds.

"You realize that now you've met him, and agreed to communicate with him, that you can't back out from Voldemort's grasp?"

"Why would I want to?" I queried, suddenly cold. "I was sent back to befriend Lucius Malfoy, right? And join the Death Eaters?"

Draco glanced up, startled. "No... you were sent back to make sure my father did not become the next Dark Lord after Voldemort's been defeated."

My entire world tipped on its axis.

"Forget that I told you that," Draco said, firmly. "You will eventually learn on your own not to trust Voldemort. If you do join the Death Eaters, I'm certain you will eventually learn your error. And Hermione Granger is not so different from Hecate Taylor as some people like to think."

"Why are you telling me all this?" I asked, my voice faint. "I won't remember half of it."

"Today, the reason is because Molly will be very sad when you see her. I do not want you to go flying off the handle, as it were, if and when you find out why."

I nodded, still uncertain.

"Go back to the living, Hermione. Lucius is trying to wake you."

Lucius called my name again. "Hecate... wizard to witch, come in..."

His grey eyes were only a few inches from mine when at last I opened them. "Hi, Lucius."

"Good afternoon," he said, smiling playfully. "Glad to see you back among the living. You should get dressed, we're almost at King's Cross station."

I nodded, making a face. I had to wear Muggle clothes for the duration of the summer, something that is distinctly less than comfortable for me. Lucius, Rabastan, and Regulus left the compartment so that Illi, Ali, and I can get dressed.

"So there's an article in the *Daily Prophet* about some blood traitors the Dark Lord got," Illiad said as she pulled on a pair of grey slacks. "Pair of Prewitts. They've been advocating for more Muggle protections."

"Huh," I said, zipping up my bell bottom jeans. "Straight Avada, I take?"

"The one was sodomized first," Illi said, making a face. "I know there are some Death Eaters who like doing stuff like that, but still. They were wizards. Turns out they were protecting a Muggle orphanage for some reason. Fabian and Gideon Prewitt."

I nodded as I pulled a plain green t-shirt over my head.

"Prewitts? Isn't Regulus' mum related?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure." Illi shrugged. "They had a little sister. Molly Weasley now. She was barely out of Hogwarts when she and Arthur Weasley got married. Reddest hair you'll ever see, both of them. They already have two kids, from what I heard. Youngest barely more than a couple years old, I think."

I considered this new information carefully. Molly was a fairly common name, even amongst wizarding folk. I guess the red-haired boy in my visions and dreams could be her son. Could be my Molly's son. I wondered briefly if the Prewitt's deaths would bother my Molly. If it did, I could infer that Molly Weasley and Molly Taylor were the same woman.

It was with some trepidation, therefore, that I stepped off the train. Lucius and Rabastan were taking care of my bag until they could get me into Molly's care. I scanned the crowded station in search of my adopted mum. She was standing at the edge of the crowd, her posture cowed. Closer inspection revealed black circles under her eyes and puffy splotches on her cheeks.

She'd been crying.

I was surprised to note that the sight sent a far deeper pain echoing in my chest. Lucius wrapped his arms around me to steady my limp knees. "Heck, are you all right, love?"

"I will be," I said. "Done too much."

Which was partially true. Getting dressed and walking the length of the train had left me physically weakened. But it was the sight of Molly in distress, in spite of my earlier lack of trust in her that was really the problem. I just hoped I was capable of holding myself up until we got home.

Unlike the holidays previously, the Blacks and Mulcibers were a little more circumspect in greeting their youngest children. Ali and Regulus left me with Lucius and Illi with no more than tight hugs and a quick good-bye. Lucius weaved through the crowd to Molly, leaving me with a polite murmur. Molly gingerly wrapped her arms around me, though it was obvious she would have rather held me like Ali's and Regulus' mums had.

When my lips were close to Molly's ears, I whispered. "Are you okay?"

"I'll explain later," she murmured.

I gave no indications that we'd had this exchange. When Scorpius finally met up with us, Lucius and Illi had also left. Score solemnly took the handle on my wheeled bag as we left Platform 9 ¾ for a Muggle taxi.

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In spite of our covert conversation, Molly and I did not get a chance to talk for three days after Score and I returned home. The potions Madam Pomfrey had given me kept me asleep. I had briefly told Molly that Score knew nothing more than what I had told him while she was in the room. I wished to keep it that way. Between sleeping off potions and Score's admittedly welcome presence, we didn't get the chance.

Score was oblivious to Molly's pain, I think. He chattered happily about his Griffindor friends, moaned about our summer essays, and played Exploding Snap or wizard's chess with Remus. Molly's work schedule kept her away a lot too.

It was early morning, before Score was awake, before Molly left for work. Muggle blinds kept most of the light and heat out during the day, but I had them open to tempt the cool breeze into my room. I was out of bed, though I shouldn't have been. My bookshelf had filled in nicely, but was disorganized still. I could smell the oak and varnish for how near I was to it. I didn't hear her approach.

"How much do you know, Hecate?" She kept her voice hushed, so as not to wake Scorpius. I placed the last second-year book on the shelf before I answered.

"Not much, really," I said. "I know my name is Hermione, but not my surname. I know with some certainty that I'm from 1994. My best friend is Harry Potter and a red-haired boy named Ron Weasley. Antonin Dolohov cast this curse on me in 1996, but that doesn't match up with me being from two years prior. I know that I was given some sort of Obliviate Potion, which was Arithmatically aligned with Score, but not me." I glanced over my shoulder at her. "And you're Molly Weasley, not Taylor. Your brothers were just murdered by the Dark Lord."

Molly nodded, a deep soul-searching sigh exploding from her lips. "You weren't supposed to recall things like this until 1981. She said you wouldn't."

"Perhaps I won't recall terribly important things until then," I whispered, shutting my eyes. They were stinging. "Of course I'd remember my own name at some point. Of course I'd recall my best friends, and my best friends' mum."

"You shouldn't have more than your name," Molly said, sadly.

I glanced up at her, and really looked. She had finally gained a little weight since last I saw her, and her white hair had grown to her shoulders. Her eyes were staring at me, the piercing blue color all the more startling against the shock of freckles on her pale nose.

"I know I shouldn't know," I said at last. "I'm taking steps to keep others out of my brain so that I will not let them know. I hate lying to my friends especially Illi and Lucius but it's for the best. I realize that now."

"How are you taking steps?" Molly asked.

"I've learned the rudiments of Occlusion from Lucius," I said, smiling proudly. "I can keep him out entirely now, and Illi too."

Molly nodded, her gaze far from my bedroom now. "It's a skill that will come in handy, on many occasions. I've seen it. I should like the Headmaster to test your skills, if he will."

"Dumbledore?" I reared back, startled. "He's a Legilimens?"

Molly smiled. I didn't realize just how much I'd missed her radiant smiles. "He is the very best, Hecate. Better, some say, than even You-Know-Who."

I felt my body wilt in mortification. If the Dark Lord ever found out what Molly had said, I was almost certain she would be punished. But why? Why would I know that? I'd never seen him punish anyone. A flash of memory a dark-haired angel, beaten within an inch of his life pouring potions down his throat...

I could not recall more than his long black hair and overlarge nose in regards to his identity. But the bruises and not all of them new covered more of him than his own ghostly white skin. Molly's eyes pulled me back from the memory of another time, another place.

"Another?" she asked.

"I've never seen the Dark Lord punish anyone before." I chewed on my lower lip, considering my next words. "I recall a man I knew to be punished like that, but not his identity, or why he was punished."

Molly's eyes widened fractionally. "Thrust that memory as deep into your mind as you can, love. As far from the surface as you can. You must not ever let You-Know-Who see it."

We danced a fine waltz over it, but in those words, Molly knew I'd met the Dark Lord and I knew she wished I would never see him again.

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