

Interlude--Decision

by cflower

The sequel to *Of Winds and Wisdom* and *Do Save me the Trouble*. In which Hermione makes the decision on what she will learn.

One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I don't own anything J.K.Rowling has written.

Author's Note: Once again, I've written the sequel I wasn't sure I would write. Reviews are truly appreciated.

Thank you, Annie Talbot, for beta'ing.

~oOo~

Dinner in the Great Hall was a noisy affair. A common groan could be heard from students of every house as they reluctantly saw visions of dismal, incomplete homework in their futures. But any expert observer of Hogwarts dinner-time knew to never fear the melancholy sounds, since they were always punctuated by spurts of intense laughter at jokes that would always seem funny and special between friends. Soft smells of various sauces and enticing smells of meats filled the noses of students, teachers, and ghosts. Many were thankful for the imminent chance to take respite in their warm beds for the long night, while others experienced flutters of pure excitement for late night chatter with roommates.

Hermione inhaled the myriad of smells and listened to the cacophony of conversations around her. Her stomach clenched in the familiarity of it all. Once again, she tried to grasp the wisps of comfort, but instead sensed doubt and loneliness. It seemed the only thing she could feel was the burning sensation of unshed tears in her brown eyes as she scanned the Head Table.

One, two, three, four, five, six, and seven... That special chair was empty. Oh, how she hated that word. It was so cold, and it made her wonder if, where he was, he was cold, too.

"Hermione, is something wrong?" Harry asked. "Your eyes look red."

Swiftly, she turned back to her best friend and clumsily tried to smile. The muscles that controlled that particular action protested.

"I'm fine, Harry. I think I just got a whiff of some cream of mushroom soup. You know how much I hate that food."

Next to Harry, Ron gave Hermione a sheepish look (he loved mushroom soup), but instead of remarking, kept silent. And the silence was deafening.

In an effort to destroy the silence, Harry awkwardly issued a burst of mirth, but when that didn't work, he went back to his dinner.

Hermione couldn't help but give him a pained look. His shoulders were hunched over more than a usual teenaged boy's should be, and he pragmatically ate like it would be easier to digest his life if he took logical steps.

One bite... saved a life.

One bite... guarded against loss.

One bite... stole away his fears.

Again, Hermione looked up at the seventh seat. Empty.

Nothing seemed solid these days, Hermione reflected. Each school day she would walk determinedly to class: Transfiguration first for two hours (she would take diligent notes), Charms for one hour that day (she would practice her wrist movements). In every moment she would solicit some drop of meaning from the constant flow of words her teachers uttered. Each sentence was a beautiful pearl of information that dissolved into dust when she tried to truly take it into her mind as her own.

Empty. The magic that was supposed to be so innate was failing her. Throughout the years, she always felt thankful that the wizarding world let her escape from the Muggle world. The world of bullies and disappointing people who didn't understand. Magic was supposed to be her savior. The light at the end of the tunnel. That it could possibly be failing her was... was...

No. There was no word.

It wasn't right.

As she stared at the seventh seat, firm resolve burned through her.

Something had to be done.

Something had to be done tonight.