

Diggory In Deep

by caughtinblackseyes

Cedric's got a busy year juggling an amorous Cho, Quidditch practices, avoiding hordes of star-struck girls, pleasing his father, Head Boy duties, winning a tournament and studying for his NEWT's. What's a bloke to do when he falls behind in his studies? Call on our resident bookworm, of course.

I own nothing and make no money!

Den Of Decadence

Chapter 1 of 4

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"Cho, stop!" Cedric whispered in a frustrated voice while pushing the girl's hand off his thigh for the third time. He was starting to get annoyed; he was here to study, not devote all of his attention to Cho. It wasn't that he was adverse to her advances, quite the opposite in fact, but overt displays of affection were not his scene let alone frantic groping beneath a library table. No, he quite enjoyed his privacy when engaged in such ventures.

Fact be known, sex was not high on his list of priorities at the moment; there was quite a bit going on in his life. He was extremely anxious to have been chosen as Hogwarts champion, thrilled, but anxious. Hufflepuff, he knew, wasn't exactly a house that most students, or teachers for that matter, would have thought to have produced the Tri-Wizard Champion.

Cedric had taken a certain amount of satisfaction in the fact that the other Houses had been staggered when the piece of parchment that had floated into Headmaster Dumbledore's hand had had his name inscribed upon it. Truthfully, when he allowed himself to be talked into entering, he was sure that someone from another House would have been chosen. But all the same, he had walked proudly to where Dumbledore stood reaching out to shake Cedric's hand while wishing Cedric a sincere congratulation.

As astonished as everyone had been at his selection, though, it was nothing compared to the uproar of Potter's name issuing from the Goblet at the last minute. Cedric hadn't been there, of course. The champions by that point had been sequestered in a room after the third name had been identified. However, Cho had told him later of the unearthly silence that followed. She'd looked on the verge of tears as she continued to describe the scene that had unfolded. Then the hushed whispering had begun. A whispering that grew louder as Harry neared the Headmaster. The students had made their displeasure all too clear, a few had even called Harry a cheat. According to Cho, the ranting and grumbling had not died down even when Harry was ushered into the room where the rest of the champions were waiting.

Cedric knew what had happened after that. All three occupants of the room had turned toward the entrance as Potter walked in, looking bemused, uncertain and abso-fucking-lutely terrified.

Fleur assumed that Potter was bringing some sort of message for them, but when Dumbledore, following closely behind, rushed into the room, his robes flying behind him, they were all disabused of that idea. He roughly grabbed Potter by the shoulder, shook him, and demanded if he had put his name into the Goblet. The harsh manner in which Dumbledore grilled Potter raised a few eyebrows. Cedric, in all of his six years of attending Hogwarts, had never seen the Headmaster so worked up; the wizard was seriously upset.

Then all hell broke loose as Madame Maxime along with that weird Karkaroff character came barreling in accusing Potter of tricking the Goblet, of having another student enter his name, and finally making allegations that Hogwarts made certain that two champions were chosen so as to have a better chance of winning "eternal glory" for their school.

Fleur, finally catching a clue, began spouting French faster than a blast-ended skrewt could move sideways. Krum just grunted and left it at that. It didn't appear as if anything less than a nuclear explosion had the ability to faze the bloke. Besides, Krum's mentor was going plenty mental enough for the both of them. Cripes, McGonagall was twittering away, her voice getting more strident with each twitter while Crouch went on and on about the rules being "absolute!" It was chaos, utter chaos. When Potter tried to defend himself, the poor kid could not manage a word in edgewise.

Later in private, Cedric admitted to Cho that although he'd said nothing, just crossed his arms, leaned back against the wall, and stared at the five hundred year old Persian rug as if nothing momentous was happening all around him; he had been peeved, too. However, what Cedric had felt after his first good look into Potter's haunted eyes far outweighed anything he might have originally felt. At that moment, Cedric had felt a deep and profound pity.

Cho's perpetually wandering hand brought his mind back from the Transfiguration essay that Cho had claimed she had come here to help him with. He grabbed her questing fingers in a death grip while his light colored eyes furtively searched the library, checking to see if anyone had witnessed yet another groping incident. He hoped not: how embarrassing would that have been? It was a sad state of affairs when the library, of all places, was being turned into a den of decadence.

Two tables over, he met the laughing eyes of his mate, Scott, who wagged his eyebrows suggestively while inclining his head toward a dark, rarely used corner of the library. Cedric grinned. If Scott had been in Cedric's shoes, he would not have wasted a second in ushering his girl into the deepest, darkest, most remote place this library had to offer to get his rocks off. Cedric did not doubt for one second that good ole Scott knew his way around a few of Hogwarts' long lost classrooms and corridors.

Cedric's grin slipped from his face when his eyes crashed into those of a girl with incredibly crazy hair. Great, just great, he groaned silently. He wondered just how much she had seen. Her eyes were intense as they stared steadily into his.

Cedric shifted in his chair, partly because the Gryffindor was making him uncomfortable and partly because Cho was making him uncomfortable. Granted, the two were of a very different type of discomfort. The Gryffindor girl with the bushy hair was making him squirm in embarrassment. Cho... well, she was making him squirm, but that had more to do with a certain part of his anatomy than with anything else.

Cedric lifted his chin and met the girl's gaze head on. If he were going down, he would at least maintain some sort of dignity. He felt a flush crawl up his neck and settle on his perfect cheekbones. As if being caught with your girlfriend's hand on your crotch was even remotely dignified. Nevertheless, he would be damned if he'd look away first.

Her frizzy, curl-clustered head tilted slightly to the left, leaving Cedric with the impression that she considered him a particularly difficult Arithmacy assignment that she was determined to decipher. Cedric did not care for the feeling. As if sensing this, the younger girl finally lowered her gaze.

Cedric sighed in relief now that he was no longer being pinned to the chair like an insect on a display board. What was wrong with him? Why was he the one blushing like some third year caught sneaking a peek in the girls' Quidditch locker room?

So his girlfriend had been getting a bit frisky. It wasn't as if they'd been caught going at it behind a bookshelf or anything equally inappropriate. Plenty of blokes sneaked a touch here or a squeeze there and no one seemed to notice, or at least they had the common decency to pretend that they didn't notice.

"Is there a particular reason why you're staring at Hermione Granger?"

Startled, Cedric whipped his head around. "Huh?"

"Why are you staring at Hermione Granger?" Cho, reiterated slowly, as if speaking to a particularly slow child.

"Oh, is that her name?" Cedric really wasn't interested; but it would give Cho something else to do other than feel him up.

Leaning in until they were nose-to-nose, she whispered, "She's a friend of Harry's."

"You say that like it's a bad thing," he whispered back, feeling like a co-conspirator by doing so.

She sat back, pushing her long black hair off her shoulders. She grabbed her quill and parchments and began shoving them into her bag.

"Well," she sighed, "I just don't get it."

Cedric looked at her, completely confused. "Don't get what?"

"Nothing," she murmured. After a slight hesitation, she continued, "She's not very pretty, is she?"

Now Cedric was beyond confused. Was this some kind of weird girl-thing that only other girls could understand? Because he sure couldn't figure out what Granger being pretty or not had anything to do with her being Potter's friend.

Giving up on his Transfiguration essay, he took her bag and flung it over his shoulder along with his own while reaching for her with his free hand, threading their fingers together.

"She probably should have been sorted into Ravenclaw; she's quite clever really."

Cedric wasn't sure where all this was headed. The only thing he knew about her was he remembered hearing that she'd once walloped Malfoy a good one. Anyone who could get the drop on a Malfoy was all right in his book, even if she appeared a bit of a nosy parker if today was anything to go by.

He pulled Cho through the library doors with her still chattering away about the silly Gryffindor.

"They're always together, you know, the three of them. Do you know what people call them?"

Cedric didn't, and he really didn't want to know but Cho seemed intent on telling him so he let her ramble on. She sighed again, and when she spoke, she sounded almost wistful.

"The Golden Trio." Cho snorted before saying, "As if there's anything remotely golden about her." Cedric assumed she was talking about Granger. "Isn't that the most ridiculous thing?"

Cedric was more concerned as to why it apparently seemed to irritate Cho so much. It wasn't as if Cho wasn't popular or beautiful.

There was real scorn in her voice when she added, "She's short and squat with no shape to speak of, and that hair! Gods, I'd hex it off before I'd walk around looking like that!"

Cedric came to a stand still at that. Cho, not expecting him to stop, stumbled slightly before righting herself. To say that he was shocked by her outburst would have been

putting it mildly. In all the time that he had known her, he could not recall her ever speaking of someone with such malice.

"Cho," he admonished her quietly, "that was really ugly of you, and I can't bring myself to believe that you said it."

Her large, dark eyes suddenly filled up with tears, and he immediately felt like a total git. He pulled her into his arms, hugging her close and rubbing his hands soothingly up and down her back.

"Let's go out to the lake," he murmured into her sweet-smelling hair. "It's a lovely day, and I want to spend some quality time with my girl, all right?"

She smiled into his neck and nodded. "Yeah, that sounds good."

Still nestled under his chin, she wrapped her arm around his waist, and they made their way to the kitchen to grab a picnic lunch, Granger completely forgotten.

A Perfect World

Chapter 2 of 4

Cedric's perfect world is about to develop a serious crack.

I own nothing and no one from Harry Potter, it all belongs Jo Rowlings. Many thanks to my beta freedachicken!

Harry had been trying to catch a glimpse of Cho Chang seated over at the Ravenclaw table and had just made rather shy eye contact when an unexpected jab to his side had him missing his mouth by a mile. Pumpkin juice spilled down the front of his uniform wetting his shirt and trousers.

Embarrassed, Harry quickly turned away, hoping that Cho hadn't seen, but the giggles coming from the vicinity of Cho and her friends dashed those hopes. Harry was going to murder Hermione. She'd just made him look like an arse in front of the girl who was featured in his dreams almost nightly, a welcome change from the nightmares that usually haunted him.

"Harry... Harry..." Hermione jabbed him once more when he failed to acknowledge her first attempt. "I've been thinking."

And, although Ron was perched a bit further down the Gryffindor table between Seamus and Dean, she and Harry had no problem hearing his comment. "What else is new?" Ron snorted into his spoon piled high with mashed potatoes.

Seamus giggled, the arse, and Dean remained silent.

"Seriously, Ronald," Hermione scolded him. "You could use a bit of thinking, you know. Not all of us have Quidditch on the brain or the all-consuming question of where we can get our hands on the next available biscuit."

Ron shrugged his shoulders, having bigger and better things on his mind, a treacle tart for a start. Ignoring Hermione was the best thing to do when she got all serious and stuff, which was pretty much all the time, so Ron spent a great deal of time ignoring her.

Turning away with a disgusted toss of her head, Hermione focused once more on Harry, who was giving his plate an inordinate amount of attention.

Ron actually wasn't communicating with Harry on a one-to-one basis, not since Harry's name had flown out of the Goblet. When it had happened, Hermione had been as incredulous as the rest of the school, but she'd believed Harry when he had said that he hadn't put his name in the Goblet. Ron had not.

Ron had told Hermione that as Harry's best mate he should have been told, or at least Harry could have helped Ron place his own name in a cup along side of Harry's. Jealousy was ugly business, and it was obvious that Ron was riddled with its poison.

Hermione thought Ron was a dunce of the highest order to believe such nonsense. When she had told him so, he had gotten angry and accused her of siding with Harry. For a few days, he had ignored her as well. To Hermione's singular dismay, she'd found she missed him!

She and Ron had mended fences, but when she had suggested he do the same with Harry, he would not be swayed. Harry was equally as adamant, stating that a true mate would never have believed the garbage spewed by the other students. Hermione had no good argument to Harry's statement because she agreed with him.

Reluctantly, Hermione realized that the idiots she called friends would need to work through this stupidity at their own pace and in their own way. Boys! She maintained good relations with both of them as long as the conversations they had singularly didn't veer toward the other.

Hermione caught Harry stealing what he probably assumed was a covert glance at Cho. Hermione grimaced inwardly. She had no idea what Harry saw in the Ravenclaw, other than her looks. She was stuck up, mean, and from what Hermione had observed in the library, a bit of a slag, too. Moreover, she was as far out of Harry's league as say... Hermione's gaze landed on a certain Hufflepuff, as Cedric was out of hers.

Dipping her spoon in the piping hot potato soup, Hermione spoke again, "I thought we'd practice the Summoning Charm this evening.

"Uh-huh," Harry distractedly replied.

Delicately sipping the fragrant soup, she licked her lips before saying, "We could use one of the old classrooms on the far side of the school. No one will bother us there."

"Right."

Slamming her spoon on the table, Hermione demanded in an exasperated tone, "Do you want my help with this, Harry, or not?"

Harry's messy, black-haired head swivelled around. "Well, yeah," he stated, looking confused, absently rubbing at his scar.

Hermione was filled with remorse. Here she was, virtually Harry's only friend, giving him grief just because he was ogling the girl he had a crush on. What was wrong with her?

If she had to be honest with herself, which Hermione generally was, she was somewhat jealous of the attention that Harry was giving to the older girl. It wasn't that Hermione had feelings for Harry, but it hurt that he'd rather look at Cho than listen to her, especially as she was trying to help keep him alive, for Merlin's sake!

"Sorry, 'Mione." Harry turned toward her giving her his undivided attention. Running a hand through his hair, he continued, "I've been a bit preoccupied."

Hermione gave his hand a comforting squeeze. Dragons were enough to distract any person, and she should stop being so selfish. Harry was her best friend, and he needed her now more than ever. Sure, Ron was her friend too, but it was different with him. More complicated. More confusing. And, if there was one thing Hermione couldn't tolerate, it was not understanding something.

Normally, she'd run to the library and research the problem, not leaving until she had the answer or until Pince tracked her down and threw her out. Still, Hermione knew this was different. Research wouldn't cover this particular problem.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione saw Ron leaning in their direction. Probably trying to figure out what they were up to. Well, bully for him! Hermione had no plans of clueing him in. After all, Ron was acting as if he wanted nothing to do with whatever was going on with Harry, so Hermione was going to honour those wishes and try not to look smug about the fact that he obviously was dying of curiosity.

"We'll need your invisibility cloak," Hermione continued, still keeping one eye on Ron. She pushed her bowl away and refused the sweet that Harry had offered after placing a substantial serving of pudding on his plate.

"Um, Hermione, do you think you could, you know?" With a wave of his hand, Harry indicated his damp clothes.

Hermione scanned the area around her to make sure no one was watching before giving a quick swish of her wand while whispering *Scourgify*."

Immediately Harry's wet garments were returned to their pristine and dry appearance.

Cedric watched in amusement as Granger nonchalantly used a spell that most fourth years were just beginning to master. He was impressed by the ease in which she performed it and no one seemed the wiser.

Here was a witch others seemed to be underestimating; it was a curious thing, considering the professors sang her praises consistently. Oh, he knew that she was intelligent, everyone did, although he'd heard she had an irritating attitude and perhaps that was one of the reasons she was universally avoided by those not Sorted into her own House.

It was a shame really. It was true she wasn't much to look at, and since Cho had made those deprecating remarks, Cedric found himself observing Granger. He noticed how she practically stomped when she walked, especially when in a temper. It didn't even come close to the smooth glide of Cho's, but the movements of Granger's hands and wrists were extremely graceful when she was doing a well-executed spell.

Her hair was a catastrophe, there was no denying it, but he certainly didn't see the need to hex it all off as Cho had suggested. In addition, Cedric really admired how she would lift her pointed little chin high in the air, proclaiming to all that she had dignity and class in the face of whomever, usually Malfoy, was giving her grief. Most girls would have walked away in tears after being called the atrocious names Malfoy tended to spout from his filthy mouth, but not Granger, although it must have been eating her up inside.

She was strong, resilient, and she didn't give a damn what anyone thought of her, or that was the impression she gave off. Cedric wondered what she was really like. He had the urge to find that out first-hand, but that would raise a few eyebrows, and unfortunately, unlike Granger, he did care what people thought. It shamed him, but it was true.

Cedric, from a young age, had felt the pressure to be perfect. Perfect face, perfect actions, perfect grades, perfect athlete, and perfect friends. Cedric had all of those in his life right now, and attempting to befriend Granger would probably jeopardize his perfect little world.

She was a social pariah because people couldn't tolerate her know-it-all attitude. Too many of the other students thought Granger was a suck up, making them all look bad. As if they weren't enough strikes against her, she had to be one of the best mates of The-Boy-Who-Cheated to gain entrance to the tournament. Hell, even Weasley, who had been joined at the hip to Potter since first year, thought he was a cheat!

Granger remained a staunch and loyal friend when most would have dropped Potter like a hot potato with all the gossip and unpleasantness. Disaster dogged that kid's footsteps, and Granger continued to stride right along side him.

Cedric was envious of such diligent devotion and couldn't keep from wondering if his mates would have stuck by him if he'd been walking in Potter's shoes. Would they have turned their noses up at all and sundry, ignored the gossip and innuendo? Would they have grasped his hand in a tenacious grip and marched off pulling him along while blanketing him in safe comfort?

He was envious, terribly so, and yet for all his envy, for all his admiration of her courage and solidarity to Potter in the face of adversity, for all of that... he still didn't have the courage to follow through with what he really wanted to do. And, what Cedric really wanted to do was get to know her better. Nevertheless, he couldn't befriend her, not with the looming possibility that do so, would be the end of all he'd worked so hard to achieve. For the first time ever, Cedric began to question whether being perfect and living in a perfect world was so perfect after all.

Lessons Learned

Chapter 3 of 4

Cedric catches Harry and Hermione out past curfew.

JKR owns it all, I own nothing. Thanks to freedachicken for checking it over for me.

Cedric was making his rounds. He had confidence in all the prefects, but he wanted to set a good example. He felt better knowing he was doing more than lounging lazily in the Head Boy's quarters, twiddling his thumbs.

Not that he'd actually been twiddling his thumbs or being lazy. He'd been immersed in an Advanced Runes assignment, which in turn was giving him a massive headache. To Cedric's eyes, the entire assignment was about as indecipherable as to why Professor Hagrid had felt it necessary to breed manicores with fire-crabs. He shivered; the result of that little experiment had certainly been nasty.

It was no surprise that Professor Babbling's class was creating problems for Cedric. He'd struggled through Intermediate Runes the previous year as well. Before he'd begun dating Cho, who was quite proficient in Runes, she had volunteered to tutor him, an offer he had been more than happy to accept. Because of her, Cedric had managed to achieve an "E" that year with little to spare, but achieve it he had, and it been all due to her.

As way of thanks, Cedric had accompanied Cho to Honeydukes and told her to pick out whatever she wanted; it was on him. Smiling shyly, she'd pointed out several pumpkin pasties, a treat he'd noticed she'd purchased on the Hogwarts Express countless times. Unfortunately, taking into account their recent attempts at studying in the library, asking for her assistance in this instance was out of the question. It was a shame because he knew she'd have been a great help.

Charms and Transfiguration were by far his best subjects, so he had no concerns there. Advanced Potions was turning out to be a tad tricky, but although Professor Snape had snarkiness down to an art form, he knew his stuff. Cedric could only hope that an "E" would suffice as far as grades go; he needed to do well in Snape's class, as it was a requirement of the ministry's Auror Program.

History of Magic was tiresomely tedious to say the least. The majority of the students slept through the entire course, but Cedric managed to keep his eyes open long enough to soak up some of the facts on Goblin Rebellions and Wars. It would be relatively easy to get an "O" in Boring Binns' class.

Advanced Arithmacy was problematic, which made sense seeing that it was very similar to Advanced Runes. Thankfully, Professor Vector had made it clear that tutoring lessons beyond those of the classroom were being offered and strenuously encouraged for those pupils whose performance in this field was less than stellar.

Cedric's opinion on Defense Against the Dark Arts was ambivalent. Professor Moody certainly had a unique vision on how to properly educate them; unorthodox venues were constantly utilized. The now-retired Auror knew, really *knew* what it was all about, had been in the trenches so to speak. Experience was by far the best teacher, and Moody had it in spades. Yet, there was a sinister element to his ways that Cedric could not help but find slightly repulsive. Cedric could also admit that while he wondered about his teaching methods, he greatly admired Moody's undoubted mastery.

Rubbing his temples, he continued down the vacant corridor. Nothing but his soft footfalls could be heard. Generally, the prefects patrolled in twos, but Cedric wasn't frightened at patrolling alone; he'd done so numerous times without incident. Those thoughts no sooner passed through his head than he heard a noise. Startled, Cedric pulled his wand. A flash of Moody bellowing, "Constant vigilance!" raced through his head.

Cedric had it drilled into him from a young age by his mum to always carry his wand and have it within easy reach. Cedric was aware that Hogwarts was one of the safest, if not the safest place to be, but he still thought his mum's advice sound.

Edging his way down the hallway to an ajar door, Cedric slowly manoeuvred himself until he could peer through the open space. The sight that met his eyes should not have surprised him, but it did.

Potter was waving his wand around and rather awkwardly at that. Cedric wasn't sure what he was trying to accomplish until he heard an exasperated voice admonish him.

"No, no, no, Harry! Pay attention or you'll never be able to call your broom for the first task."

Call his broom? The first task? Now, this sounded interesting Cedric thought. He felt a twinge of unease at eavesdropping, he was a hardly a Slytherin after all, but he decided to hang about; his conscience be damned.

Potter lowered his arm, an overwhelmed look on his face. "We've been at this for hours, Mione." Potter did, indeed, look exhausted. "Can't we give it a rest?"

Granger stepped into Cedric's line of vision. Placing her hands on her hips, Hermione answered in a stern but sarcastic voice, "Do you think the dragon's going to take into account that you're tired?"

Cedric's head jerked up. Dragon?! The first task involved a *dragon*? Cedric knew the tasks would be difficult, no one had ever accused him of being daft, but dragons! Weren't they just a tad too dangerous?

Hermione continued, "It's not going to say, why sure Mr. Potter, sit down and take a rest on that rock right there, and hey why don't you slip off your shoes and give your poor weary dogs a break while I practice my fire-breathing skills over yonder."

Cedric would have found that funny except he was still trying to wrap his befuddled head around the fact that he was going to have to deal with a dragon.

"That dragon is going to roast you alive..."

"Thanks, Mione, you really know how to make a bloke feel good about himself."

Potter sounded both angry and despondent. Cedric knew he should break up this little to-do; it was after all way past curfew, but curiosity and the possibility of gleaning pertinent information kept him glued to the spot.

Cedric watched as Granger approached Potter, took his wand hand in her own, and slowly guided him through the proper wrist motions for the spell.

"Think you've got it now?" This time her voice was much less strident and more encouraging. "Here, let me show you one more time, and then we'll pack it in for the rest of the night, okay?"

There was a note of cajoling now and that did make Cedric smile. Granger was a tough bird, that was for sure. Then he heard something that really disturbed him.

"I bet Fleur and Krum have it all figured out." Potter sounded glum. "What with Madame Maxime and Karkaroff being adults and all."

They knew about the dragons too?! What is this? Would he have been the only one unaware and therefore unprepared for the first task? Cedric's sense of fair play was outraged.

He wouldn't have had a problem with Potter having a bit of an edge. He needed it; he was still just a kid for Merlin's sake. But Krum and Fleur? They were adults in the wizarding world and had a much larger arsenal to use in the way of charms and spells than what Potter had access to.

"Maybe," was Granger's supportive reply, "but you have me, and I'm not going to let anything bad happen to you."

It was said with such conviction that Cedric couldn't help but believe her himself. Potter gave what sounded like a choked sob and threw himself at his friend who grabbed him up into a tight bear hug, soothing him like Cedric's mum used to sooth him whenever he had a bump or a bruise.

Cedric was dumbstruck at the sight of the two embracing. Dumbstruck and what? Was this jealousy twisting at his gut, snaking stealthily between his ribs, causing an actual pain? Cedric placed an unsteady hand on his stomach as if to ease the ache that had taken up residence there, but it did not abate.

What must it be like to have someone, a friend, hold you like that? Hold you, without the end result being a bout of serious snogging or hot sweaty sex, but instead, with a straightforward, heartfelt caring? He was once again made glaringly aware of the contrast. Cedric, knowing it was wrong and feeling like a dirty voyeur, continued spying on the pair.

Granger pushed Potter's perpetually messy hair off his forehead exposing the infamous scar; her fingers grazed over it then trailed down Potter's cheek where she patted him lightly.

Clearing her throat, she said, "One more time, Harry. You can do it, I know you can. Let me show you and then you give it a go."

Potter nodded and watched closely as Granger brought her own wand before her, the sleeve of her robe fell back revealing her fine, delicate looking wrists and forearms. With a swish of her hand, she stated clearly and with absolute certainty, "Accio pillow."

She was a bloody marvel, Cedric thought as he watched the pillow rush toward her, stop about a foot away and just hang there until Potter plucked it from the air.

Potter was equally impressed. "Wow, 'Mione! Maybe you should brew another batch of Polyjuice and complete the first task in my stead."

Cedric was reeling. The surprises were certainly running rampant this evening. He had to have heard Potter wrong. There was no way someone in fourth year could have brewed a potion with such difficult components.

"I doubt I could have handled a basilisk, Harry. Besides," Hermione mumbled, "I didn't exactly brew it right, now did I?"

Cedric did a double take. Everyone knew that Potter had tangled with a basilisk his second year, so that would mean ...he was speechless. That would mean that Granger had actually produced a Polyjuice potion two years ago?! No... no bloody way! Impossible!

A huge grin split across Potter's face. "Believe me," he snorted, "I'd have much rather been a cat than one of Malfoy's brain dead-body guards."

Cedric assumed Potter was referring to Goyle and Crabbe, and Cedric had it on good authority via Ernie Macmillan, who shared several classes with Malfoy's cronies, that Potter was correct in his assessment. Ernie had remarked more than once that they were both idiots of the highest order.

Hermione blushed. Cedric thought the colour rather becoming; it gave her complexion a sweet, rosy glow. He noticed other things about her appearance as well. Her hair was a mass of curls bunched up into an untidy knot at the back of her head, and he thought it didn't look half-bad, cute actually. She definitely wasn't conventionally pretty, but she was fascinating to watch. The more he watched, the more he was intrigued, and this latest revelation only made him more so.

"Harry," Granger began in a hesitant voice. "Maybe," she paused, "maybe you should tell Cedric about... you know, the dragons."

At Potter's flummoxed expression, which probably was a mirror image of his own, Granger added anxiously, "It's hardly fair that all the champions save Cedric know."

When Potter didn't answer she rushed on, her face filled with exasperation, "Come on, Harry." Potter flinched as Granger's voice rose in volume. "How would you like it if you were the only one left in the dark?"

Cedric thought she had a valid point, mainly because he was the one left in the dark and it sure wasn't a fun place to be. Still, it was mighty decent of Granger to suggest it. Cedric felt a warmth where earlier he'd felt that stabbing ache; this was a much more pleasant sensation. Granger would have made a fine Hufflepuff; she was a good sort!

Cedric was highly interested in Potter's response. Would he follow his friends' advice? Would he put aside the House differences and all the ugly insinuations and remarks that his fellow Hufflepuffs had been throwing Potter's way?

Cedric had to admit that his house was carrying this rivalry with Potter a bit too far. The buttons had been the last straw, and Cedric had told them all point-blank to stop wearing them. Privately, Cedric felt that it only served to tar the reputation of their own House, but Scott had said that they felt justified in what they were doing. Potter had cheated, and cheating was cheating and that was all there was to that.

Scott failed to mention, although Cedric knew it, that the suggestion of cheating was only part of the reason. His friends and even Professor Sprout, their head of house, were outraged that Potter had stolen Hufflepuff's glory, their moment to bask in the sun. An excited voice broke into Cedric's thoughts.

"Well done, Harry! Well done!"

Granger was currently jumping up and down in uncontained excitement. Potter beamed from ear to ear, looking as if he had just won the lotto.

"I'm so proud of you." Granger gushed.

But Potter's face fell quickly at Granger's next suggestion, delivered with what she hoped would be contagious enthusiasm. "Now that you've done it, you shouldn't have any problem doing it again."

Apparently, Potter was more than able to fend off the enthusiasm contagion bug, for he looked far from enthused to Cedric's amused eyes. Cedric had to bite his lip to keep from laughing out-right.

Judging Potter's downtrodden, irritable appearance correctly, Granger sighed as if she had the weight of the world on her slender shoulders.

"Fine, fine... but on one condition, Harry."

Potter bucked up considerably at the thought of quitting this evening's lesson. He would agree to just about anything at this point, Cedric surmised.

"Sure, fine... whatever."

Wagging her finger at him as if he were a wayward child, Granger stared pointedly at him while saying, "You must tell Cedric about the dragons."

It came out as a demand, not a request, but Potter ignored that little detail and with a loud groan mumbled, "Awww... 'Mione."

"Harry!"

Potter pocketed his wand all the while glaring at Granger, which she studiously ignored while pulling back her robes to place her own wand in an interior pocket.

Cedric's eyes followed the flow of her robes which when pulled back gave an enticing glimpse of her knees. Giving them the once over, Cedric decided that they were lovely knees indeed, well rounded while not being too fleshy.

So caught up in his ogling, Cedric barely had time to scramble back when he heard them approaching the door, thankful his seeker reflexes served him well. He flitted down the corridor with nary a peep and pressed himself against wall. He was tempted to steal a look from where he was hidden but did not dare.

Cedric stayed where he was for at least five minutes, wanting to make sure they were away before making his own way down the hall. He found himself in front of his quarters far sooner than he would have thought possible, but then, he had been indulging in some seriously deep thinking.

Reading himself for bed, Cedric followed his nightly toiletry routine before turning back the yellow and black duvet and climbing into the welcoming comfort of his four-poster bed. Though extremely weary, Cedric found himself unable to sleep. Who could blame him with visions of dragons, essays, and Granger running amok inside his head?

Ignoring The Masses

Chapter 4 of 4

Cedric goes against the grain and asks for help.

Hermione, who had been in the library flipping through a copy of The Department of Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures researching for her pet project, was extraordinarily confused by Cedric's request. "I don't understand why you're asking me. Aren't you dating Cho Chang? She is in Ravenclaw, where the super intelligent set up shop." Cedric wasn't an idiot, either, Hermione thought to herself, not by any stretch of the imagination. And yet here he was asking her, Hermione-nobody-of-consequence-Granger, for help in his studies! "And you're no slouch when it comes to brains, either, so..."

Cedric rubbed his forehead with the tips of what Hermione's mum would have called piano fingers, long and slender but strong and capable looking. She wondered if they were calloused as well. Harry's were; Quidditch required Herculean strength and a grip like no other, so it would stand to reason that Cedric's hands had suffered a similar fate.

Cedric Diggory, Hermione was forced to acknowledge, was what Lavender Brown and Pavarti Patil referred to as prime grade-A beef. While Hermione detested such idiotic and frivolous euphemisms, she couldn't deny the validity of their observations. Yes sirree, if Hermione were to show up at the house over the holidays with someone like Cedric in tow, her mum would be doing back flips, front flips, flips from any angle you could come up with, a pipe dream if there ever was one! The Cedric Diggorys of this world, both wizarding and Muggle, were far beyond the realms of reality for girls like herself.

How many nights had her roommates oohed and ahed while giggling and lamenting the fact that "Hufflepuff's Hot Head Boy" was off the market while Hermione had sneered at their juvenile antics? She had refused to be drawn into what was bound to become a prolonged dialogue on Cedric Diggory's delightful attributes. Why should she squander invaluable study time with such nonsense? There was also the degradation of demoting Cedric, a first class student, into nothing more than an object of lurid lasciviousness. It made Hermione's stomach turn!

Cedric wondered how much he should tell her, since his reasons for not studying with Cho were of a decidedly personal nature. She was a distraction he couldn't afford right now, yet she still insisted on coming to the library every day. It was starting to drive him and his libido nuts.

Should he tell Granger that Cho was too damn sexy for him to think straight? That the divine scent of hyacinth and oriental musk wafting from Cho's ebony hair teased his nostrils, making all comprehensive thought disappear, only to be replaced by the sudden urge to carry her off for a good old-fashioned, thorough snogging? No, Cedric decided. Definitely far too much information.

It had taken days for Cedric to work up enough nerve to approach Granger with this little brainstorm. Brain fart more like, Cedric was now of that distinct opinion. Especially as Granger was peering up at him with her fathomless brown eyes, no, not just brown. They were more like the deep, rich color of caramel. Cedric, it just so happened, was partial to caramel.

The expression of consternation on her face after he'd ask her to tutor him had him regretting his decision. Maybe he should find someone else, someone less intimidating, someone less inclined to question his motives. But, hell, she was the most proficient student in Runes and Arithmacy, and at Professor Vector and Babblings' recommendation, he had made up his mind to at least ask her if she'd be willing.

Cedric's mates, Scott in particular, were flummoxed by his decision. Scott sought him out after he had informed his housemates of his intentions. Cedric hadn't been looking for their blessing, but he did want them to know of the potential possibility that he would be spending some serious time with Granger.

Looking utterly bemused, Scott had demanded, "Ced, you're having me on, yeah?"

Cedric had glowered at him, annoyed by his friend's interference. "No. Why would I kid about something like this? What's the big deal?"

Scott had back-pedaled a bit and spread his hands in a placating manner before stating quietly, "It's not a big deal, Ced, but she's *fourth year!* What good will she be to you?"

Before Cedric could expound on Granger's extraordinary credentials, Scott barreled right along, "That aside, why would you want to fraternize with one of the only two members of the Harry Potter Fan Club? Huh?"

Cedric opened his mouth, but Scott once again butted in stating nastily, "Oh, yeah, I forgot, she's now the *only* member. Weasley finally wised up to the limelight hog of Hogwarts! He's now best mates with that Irish kid." A satisfied look followed Scott's last statement.

Cedric frowned at the bitterness dripping from each and every word that escaped his friend's mouth. Did Scott really hate Potter this much? What had the younger boy done to deserve his contempt?

"Great Merlin, Scott," Cedric exclaimed. "Where is this coming from?"

Scott gaped at Cedric, looking at him as if stupid were Cedric's middle name. He waited patiently while Scott struggled to contain himself. Looking dejected, Scott hesitated briefly before responding to Cedric's query. "You just don't fucking get it, do you?"

As a matter of fact, Cedric didn't, but he was trying. Scott settled himself on the common room couch, closing his eyes as he let his head fall back against the cushion behind him. He mumbled in a tired voice, eyes still shut, "He's an arse-wipe, Ced. He's a user of the worst sort. Dippy Granger doesn't get it either."

Cedric bristled. Granger was not dippy, though why it should bother him that Scott thought so hadn't quite added up in his brain yet. But Cedric didn't interrupt his friend; he really wanted to hear where this was headed.

"When are you going to catch a clue? Potter... Potter's..." Cedric waited patiently, giving his friend time to come up with whatever it was he was trying to say. "He's going to win, Ced."

Cedric blinked. "Win...?"

Jumping to his feet, waving his arms around wildly, Scott rounded on Cedric.

"Yeah! Win, Ced! Win! Fuck, talk about being dim!"

Comprehension hit home. It was with a great deal of shock that Cedric finally cottoned on. Scott actually believed... that he... Cedric Diggory... was going to lose the tournament to, of all people, Harry Potter! *A totally inexperienced fourteen-year-old kid*

"Finally," Scott barked, noting Cedric's dawning comprehension. "Good one on you, mate." Scott's tone was derisive, but his face told a different story. He looked defeated.

Cedric was mad as hell and didn't bother trying to hide it from Scott. Narrowing his eyes into mere slits, he snarled, "So, I'm going to lose am I? The first task hasn't even begun, and already I'm lagging behind?"

Cedric had intended to share what he knew about the first task with Scott but not now that he knew of Scott's disturbing lack of faith in him. Well, Scott could just stuff it up his arse!

"Where's the bloke who badgered me until I put my name in the cup? The one who all but shouted from the skies that I was going to be 'The Hero of Hufflepuff'?" Cedric shoved Scott in the chest with his finger. "Where is he?!"

Scott flushed darkly but didn't look ashamed. In a weary tone, he replied, "It's not your fault mate. The deck's stacked in Potter's favor."

Cedric felt the sudden urge to wallop Scott but good. A highly unusual reaction as he wasn't usually prone to violent outbursts. Going toe-to-toe with Scott, he thundered, "What's Potter got that I haven't?! What's one reason that you think Potter's going to wipe the Quidditch pitch with me?"

Scott, never one to back down from a confrontation, yelled right back at him. "I'll give you two reasons, Ced. *Two!*" Holding up one finger Scott stated pointedly, "Dumbledore, Potter's got Dumbledore." Holding up a second finger, Scott enunciated clearly, "Granger, brainiac of the century, Granger!"

Ignoring the reference to Dumbledore, Cedric went directly for the part relating to what Scott saw as Granger's role in all of this was.

"Granger shouldn't be a problem," Cedric bellowed, "since she's dippy-ness personified, remember? And on top of that," he added with exaggerated civility, "she's nothing but a lowly, imbecilic fourth year that according to you doesn't have enough brain cells to tutor me, so how the hell is she a threat?"

"I didn't mean dippy as in dumb..." At Cedric's disbelieving glare, Scott amended his statement. "Okay, I did mean dippy dumb but only in regard to Potter. Outside of him, she's as brilliant as they come, but it's obvious he has her completely hoodwinked about his true character. Have you seen the two of them together?"

Indeed Cedric had, and Hermione hadn't appeared the least bit hoodwinked by Potter when Cedric had been spying on them. Cedric winced. Spying was such an ugly word. When he *came upon* them. Yeah, that was better. Head Boys didn't spy, they came upon people while performing their nightly duties.

He was so caught up in his thoughts that Cedric almost missed Scott's next words. "Put her with Dumbledore, and there'll be no stopping him. It's inevitable."

All the anger in Cedric's body suddenly dissipated leaving him with shaky legs and a spinning head. Talk about idiots, Scott was head of the class!

"You're an arse, Scott," this time it was said with a sad form of affection. "There's positively no way, none, that Dumbledore is in cahoots with Potter, and I'd be real careful to whom you spout that slanderous drivel to... Mr. Rita Skeeter!"

Just as he'd hoped, that last bit made Scott smirk and then break out into genuine laughter. Laughter in which Cedric was all too pleased to join him in. It went a long way into easing the tension and clearing the air.

Hermione impatiently tapped her quill against the wood surface of the library table, waiting for Cedric to answer her question. Her hand stilled, and she sat as if hypnotized by the slight pink flush, which crept up from the confines of the collar of his white oxford school shirt. Hermione wondered if he had a condition, he sure did seem to flush an awful lot.

"Well," Cedric started, then decided to change course. "You see... um," he trailed off. His lips curved into what Hermione could only call a grimace, although it looked like he had actually been trying for a grin.

Soft snickering coming from the section of the library that housed various books on Invisibility claimed Hermione's attention. It didn't take a rocket scientist to surmise that the simpering bunch of girls peeking round the sky-high bookshelves were eyeing up Cedric as if he were a gift from the gods. The attention wasn't anything new; he'd always been admired by the throngs of female denizens of Hogwarts. But since Cedric had been named one of the Hogwarts' champions, his already overwhelming popularity had amplified ten-fold. Not that Hermione paid attention to such goings-on.

More giggling drew Hermione's eyes farther across the room to where the Bulgarian seeker Viktor Krum was surrounded by his own little fan club. Hermione had to admit, the library was the very last place she had expected the famous seeker to frequent, but frequent it he did. Hermione supposed his initial aim had been hiding out, as it had to be taxing to have a constant flow of Quidditch groupies hounding your every step. She had to give him credit; it had worked for a while. The nickname "Dumb Krum" which envious classmates from all three schools had dubbed him, seemed in her opinion to be far off the mark.

Cedric was now fidgeting with his yellow and black striped tie. Hermione didn't think she'd ever seen Cedric Diggory so discomforted, and it was quite amusing. Hermione had things to do though, so she decided to put the poor bloke out of his misery. "No problem, Cedric. I can squeeze some extra tutoring lessons in somewhere." Cedric's face miraculously cleared. "Just give me your schedule, and we'll work out times."

Hermione, now in teacher mode, continued, "The library will be the best place to meet; everything we need is right here, all the resources and such."

Cedric nodded his agreement, his gratitude obvious. "Thanks, Granger. You have no idea of how much I appreciate this."

Hermione smiled at his enthusiasm. Little did he know that it was just as big a thrill for her. Finally, she was going to study with someone who was eager and willing to learn, someone she might actually be able to have an intellectual conversation with. Now if only Harry would get around to telling Cedric about the dragons. She was going to have a word with him again on the subject, and if she had force Harry to fess up by the point of her wand... well, then she damn well would!