

Harmonic Resolution

by karelia

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Ut (Tonic) – 396 Hz – Liberating Guilt and Fear

Chapter 1 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

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For Ariadne, who provided the idea.

Ut (Tonic) 396 Hz Liberating Guilt and Fear

Concerning matter, we have been all wrong. What we have called matter is energy, whose vibration has been so lowered as to be perceptible to the senses. There is no matter.

Albert Einstein

It was ironic, Hermione thought, that this *incident*...no, event...happened mere minutes after she'd had a heated discussion with Professor Vector about an historic wizard and an historic Muggle.

"But, Professor, how can you disregard Kepler's mathematical approach just because he was a Muggle? It makes no sense! As a Muggle, he wouldn't have known the existence of magic, so it's only natural that he would have thought Fludd's work based on superstition! That doesn't mean Kepler's findings aren't important! On the other hand, Fludd should have realised Kepler's limitation, knowing he was a Muggle!" She'd shaken her head at her professor's stubbornness. The woman was an Arithmancer, yet she looked upon any Muggle-based sciences with disdain, forcefully ignoring the mathematical association with the magical subject. "After all, his vision of the music of the spheres is based on hard facts of astronomical measurement, isn't it?"

"Apparently so. But you won't find out unless you move to somewhere remote, with no distractions, and find the music of the spheres yourself. History has proven that is the *only* way to find it, and only very few have actually succeeded," the Arithmancy professor said in a challenging tone, as if she'd meant to say *dare you*.

Hermione suppressed the urge to huff and instead decided to go for a walk. It was...yet again...time to ponder her plan of apprenticing with Professor Vector *Retreat to the wild... Maybe I should just do that. If only I could...* Studying the music of the spheres had intrigued her ever since she'd read Kepler's and Fludd's works. So little was known about it, yet so much could be gained.

Her unintentional path took her to Hagrid's hut, and the moment she saw his prone figure on the ground, mere yards from his front door, the music began to play, causing her to stop dead in her tracks.

The entire universe was alive with music, and Hermione unfolded her complete being...body, mind, and soul..., opened her hands outward, and placed her palms to face Hagrid, as if thus instructed by the wondrous celestial tones pouring out from the galaxy.

He rose slowly. "Ermione? Blimey. Didn't know you could do that sort of 'ealing! Thanks, luv!" Hagrid got up, managed to stand straight, and said, "If you want tea, 'Ermione, I'll be glad to make ya some!"

It took her a moment to answer. "No, thanks, Hagrid. I don't want tea. I want you to tell me what caused your... collapse." Rapidly recovering from this most bizarre experience, she looked at him sternly. "I won't tell anyone, but I need to know... for myself."

"I... I... oh, bugger. I... a snake came to visit me. But she was kinda enthusiastic and bit me on one occasion. Is all I remember." He sounded sheepish.

His answer brought back her worst memories. "What snake, Hagrid?" she asked, her tone sharp yet her voice barely more than a whisper.

"Well, I don't know. Not Nagini, if that's what you're worried about." His voice sounded defensive.

The relief sweeping across her bordered on pain. "I think you should go and see Madam Pomfrey, just to make sure you're all right." She turned to leave.

Hermione needed to think. Events she was unable to file under any specific label, occurrences for which she had no explanation irritated her and demanded research until she'd resolve the matter. *But where to start?* She slowly walked back to Hogwarts and headed for the library in the hope of finding an answer.

Hours later, Hermione threw her quill on the table in utter frustration. Too little knowledge had survived since the days of Pythagoras or even Plato. Cicero was nothing more than a starting point, for his vision was perhaps drawn from Pythagorean wisdom or possibly Platonic philosophies. She had made a few notes of possibly helpful book titles, of prospective quotations, but had found absolutely no explanation as to why she'd suddenly heard such incredible music or how Hagrid had been healed. Not even a handful of incidences had been recorded in history where a witch had heard the music and then moved on to heal someone, and each record was lacking in detail. *This library is, for once, completely useless,* she thought. *Spending a year all by myself, with no distractions, is sounding better and better. Damn Vector for putting that thought in my head!*

Given her financial situation, Hermione knew the thought was impossible to pursue into anything more; it would take no less than a miracle. She was honest enough to admit...to herself at least...that the main lure of apprenticing with Professor Vector was a reliable pay package. The salary wasn't much, but accommodation and food were free, and she'd be able to save for the day she'd start out on her own. Of course she loved Arithmancy, but any ideas she'd ever had about research in the subject had always included Muggle science approaches, something her professor would simply not discuss, let alone allow. She couldn't help wondering whether she'd last the three years it took to acquire the mastery of the subject, considering the limitations imposed by racial prejudice.

The universe has a way of showing approval when something right happens and will ensure transformation from impossible to likely, often with incredible speed.

Some...those who use the power of observation...are aware of this and refer to such seemingly unrelated events as synchronicities. Narcissa shook her head impatiently. "Luce?"

Her husband looked up from the parchment in his hands. "Yes?"

"I'm not getting *anywhere* with these Muggle books. Most of them are complete drivel." Her head turned to the recumbent form of the dark-haired man on the bed next to her chair. "Neither the Reiki master nor the homeopath nor the aromatherapist nor the NLP practitioner have made any difference to his state." She took a deep breath. "Let's look into other, *magical*, possibilities, please," she pleaded.

Lucius rose from the sofa and walked over to sit on the edge of the bed. He carefully...almost tenderly...moved a lock of black hair behind the man's ear. "Help me turn him over, would you?"

They moved silently to turn the man who hadn't stirred in an entire year so he'd lie on his left side for the next few hours. "I have a lead. I cannot make promises to find the woman, but I'll try my utmost best. Lyra suggested I approach her, as she herself has exhausted quite all possibilities of bringing him back."

Narcissa nodded and sat down again. "Yes, if it's a woman, it had better be you finding her. Your charms work better on females." She smiled at her husband. "And we know we can trust Lyra; he'd be dead if it weren't for her." Her smile turned sad. "I wish he'd wake. This is no life..." Her voice trailed off, and she stared unseeing through the window into the Malfoy grounds. "At least Draco is happy. Sending him to France was a stroke of genius, love."

Lucius smiled. After a moment, he said, "Cissy? Let's go out. Lyra will be here shortly; she won't mind staying a couple of hours to watch over him." He pulled her up from the chair. "Come. Wear your green robes and those silver sandals that go so well with it, and then we'll go out for dinner. Let me take you to *The Neal Street Restaurant*. I know how you love the food there."

Her face brightened. "Yes. Let's go out." Narcissa laughed; the sound was harsher than intended. "It's been a while, hasn't it...?" She cast a wistful glance at her husband. "Isn't it strange how acceptable visiting the Muggle world has become these days? I do so prefer it over Diagon Alley."

He smirked. "It does make a difference whether one receives looks for *looking strange* or for being a Malfoy. I'll have the *look-strange* glances any time." Then, his smirk died and was replaced with a regretful expression. "I am sorry, Cissy. I never wanted you to be ousted by society the way we were." His hands cupped her face, and he placed a gentle kiss on her mouth.

She smiled. "You know... I don't even find it all that bothersome. I think... I think we actually have become better persons ~~because~~ we are outcasts in our world. And besides..." now her face lit up, "...Carluccio really does offer the best food!"

The Healer arrived when Narcissa was applying the last touches of an eyelash-darkening charm on her ever-blond lashes. "You are going out!" the elderly witch exclaimed with a wide smile. "Oh, I'm so glad! Go, have yourselves a good time! Don't worry about Severus; I'll take care of him! You deserve a break. If you're going to visit Neal Street, have some mushrooms for me, will you?" She smiled while wandlessly taking her patient's vitals. Then her eyes met Lucius's. "Remind me to give you some pointers on how to find the witch I mentioned the other day."

Hermione looked at the letter the owl had delivered a minute ago with increasing annoyance. *Couldn't she have told me that in person?* She read the letter again.

Dear Miss Granger,

It has been four weeks since I offered you the position of Arithmancy apprentice. I would really like your answer today, for if you decline, I have very little time left to find another potential apprentice. Please inform me of your decision whether or not you wish to apprentice for Arithmancy by the end of today.

S Vector

Hermione scowled. *If only I had an option...* The thought of moving away from civilisation, Muggle or magical, had not left her since hearing the music. The prospect of entering a three-year apprenticeship with someone she did not have an accord with soured her mood. *If only there were a way to say thanks, but no thanks...* She rolled her eyes at herself. *If only, if only, if only! Get a grip, Granger!*

"Hermione, oi, what's wrong? Failed your NEWTs?" Harry snickered.

She scowled. "Not quite. Not yet, anyway." Being reminded that NEWT results were due in the next day or two did not improve her frame of mind in the least. Not that she had any doubt about passing them with flying colours...they'd probably let anyone involved in *this* side of Voldemort pass no matter the actual outcome...but not knowing, not holding a palpable result in her hands, made her feel queasy.

Another flurry of owls suddenly arrived...all Ministry owls, Hermione noted. *NEWT results already?* One plopped down in front of her, sharp talons on her breakfast plate. "Thanks, mate. So glad I'm done with eating. Have at it," Hermione muttered as she untied the parchment, carefully avoiding the owl's greedy beak and shooting a disdainful glance at the bird.

As she read the letter, her eyes widened. *Oh, Merlin, the world has just become a better place...* She stared at the parchment, her jaw dropping as she realised that she'd never have a day's worry over finances.

Dear Miss Granger,

It is my utmost pleasure to inform you that, as one of the wizarding world's War Heroes, you are awarded the Order of Merlin, First Class, the ceremony for which will take place at the upcoming Hogwarts Leaving Feast.

The Order of Merlin is not merely a medal. It is a financial safety net granted for services rendered. You have played a significant part in saving our world and are deserving of a regular income for putting others' lives before your own. The amount of 300 Galleons will be deposited on a monthly basis backdating to May 1997 until your death or, should you turn Dark, until your incarceration in Azkaban. A deposit of 3,600 Galleons has been made to your Gringott's account.

Yours truly,

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Minister of Magic

P.S. Hermione, congratulations! Take time off to see the world and enjoy yourself. You truly deserve it! If you need help finding a job or apprenticeship, at the Ministry or elsewhere, let me know, and I'll arrange it. Love, Kingsley

Hermione stared at the parchment. *I can research the music of the spheres!* She looked at the other students. Harry grinned in a daft way, and Ron looked positively catatonic. It relieved her to see them receive equally good news. Harry didn't need the money, for sure, but he deserved more than anyone else to be commended. And Ron... She smiled indulgently at him. Her Ron. He'd always be her Ron, even though he'd never be her lover. Never again.

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Re – 417 Hz – Undoing Situations and Facilitating Change

Chapter 2 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Re 417 Hz Undoing Situations and Facilitating Change

The celestial harmony of the solar system is of a scope and harmonic complexity that no single approach can exhaust. The nearest one can come to understanding it as a whole is to consider some great musical work and think of the variety of analytical approaches that could be made to it, none of them embracing anything like the whole.

Joscelyn Godwin: Harmonies of Heaven and Earth

Dear Professor Vector,

I have, upon the most careful consideration, decided that I do not wish to start an apprenticeship. I feel, given the recent past, that it would be beneficial for me to take a year away from everything and then re-evaluate my future.

Hermione crumbled the parchment. *Sod this. It's not like she really cares!* She took another parchment, wrote a short, polite, and impersonal letter of declining the apprenticeship, rolled it up, and took it up to the owlery.

From there, she headed for the gate and Apparated first to Gringotts and then to Inverness in search of a cottage somewhere remote.

By the time she returned to Hogwarts for another night, Hermione had secured a rural cabin in the Scottish Highlands. From the outside, the place looked like a Muggle's idea of a witch's home: a triangular structure rather than the cottage style typical for holiday cabins in Scotland and entirely built with local logs, blending perfectly with the surrounding forest. It offered the standard Muggle facilities: a functioning kitchen with sufficient utensils and storage space as well as a gas stove and an electric fridge, a bathroom, a small living room with a fireplace, above the mantelpiece a curious-looking clock with three triangles in a circle, a cosy too-pink bedroom with a four-poster bed, a patio with a hammock and a tiny vegetable patch at the back and a small front garden full of herbs and flowers planted seemingly in no particular order. Being able...and willing...to pay up-front for an entire year, together with some formerly unknown haggling skills, had left Hermione with a real bargain of accommodation. She felt positively accomplished and smugly regarded the keys in her hand before Apparating back to Hogwarts.

"Hermione, what are your plans now?" Harry asked, looking up from the chessboard in the common room. "I overheard Vector tell McGonagall that you won't apprentice with her."

Hermione looked at her friend and shrugged. "I decided to take a year off. Kingsley said he'd help me get a job if I need to, so I figured taking some time just for myself would be a good idea." She was not quite willing to share her exact plans with anyone, not even her best friends. Researching a whisper of music from an unknown source wasn't exactly a heard-of pursuit.

Ron's eyes met hers. "I'm going to Egypt for the summer. That money really came at the right time." Then he nodded at Harry. "Still no idea what you're going to do, mate?"

Harry shrugged. "Not yet. Doing absolutely nothing for a few months before Auror training starts sounds great to me."

The last days at Hogwarts were filled with social activity. NEWT results came in, and students were hit with the epiphany that life wouldn't be quite the same. Despite the rapid growing-up imposed upon them by Voldemort's reign, no-one could quite fathom the profound changes adulthood brought, only that life was somehow going to be different...even different to the responsibility they'd been burdened with while Voldemort had been at his most powerful. Everyone made the most of those last days of their recently acquired careless freedom and lack of duties.

The Leaving Feast turned into the wizarding event of the century. Several students received Orders of Merlin, First Class, as did some teachers. Others received Orders of Merlin, Second Class. Professor Snape was...posthumously...awarded an Order of Merlin, First Class. The Minister honoured the dead man with a speech so passionate it left many a moist eye in the audience.

And suddenly, NEWT results were filed away, and Hogwarts was over.

Hermione woke with a start. *A new life today...* She rose, hurried into the shower before anyone else could beat her to it, dressed, then packed her last essentials and headed for a last breakfast in the Great Hall.

"Happy disappearing off the face of the earth, Hermione," Harry said gloomily.

"Oh, stop it," she admonished him. "An owl will find me any time!"

Ron snickered. "Aren't you in a brilliant mood to start a new life, mate?"

"Yes, Harry, what's up?" Hermione enquired mildly.

"I don't know." Harry frowned. "I guess leaving Hogwarts for good, not seeing either of you in the near future..." His eyes followed Ginny from the entrance door to the table, and when she plopped down next to him, he smiled. "I guess it won't be bad..."

Hermione was tempted to take the Hogwarts Express, if only for nostalgia's sake, but in the end resisted. She'd so been anticipating her new life that delaying it even for a few hours and no pertinent reason seemed inappropriate. She accompanied her friends to the station, her luggage reduced and stored in her cloak pockets and, after emotional good-byes, Apparated to the front of her new home in the midst of nowhere.

Beautiful, she thought, taking in the hilly forest, the vivid green leaves and deep green needles of the trees, and the bright green leaves of tall fern scattered about. Patches of grass grew wherever the sun had a chance to penetrate the dense canopy of trees. Hermione turned and started. There, not even ten yards from the cabin stood the three most perfect young, but already tall, king bolets. She grinned. "Dinner sorted."

With a plan forming in her mind, Hermione finally entered the cabin, spelled her luggage back to its original size, and put it on the floor *First things first*. Hermione proceeded to take care of the ghastly pink in the bedroom, and a few wand flicks later, several hues of green interspersed with some very deep burgundy. Pink was now entirely absent.

The living room required no changes. The bizarre clock didn't bother her, and its strangely connected triangles and numbers starting at six at the top remained untouched.

Her next task required more wand work. Keys weren't convenient after having lived in the wizarding world for years, so Hermione set wards to recognise both her wand and herself. Satisfied with her work...nobody would come within a hundred yards of the cabin unnoticed...she moved her belongings from suitcase to drawers and wardrobe and from bags to bookshelves.

A trip to the grocery shop was up next, and on the spur of the moment, Hermione decided to go to Inverness to pay a visit to some book stores as well. The city had a wizarding quarter, and any grocery store there was bound to have a more interesting selection of foods than the nearest one in Grantown-on-Spey. She cast a glance at her watch, then looked at the sun, which was high up in the sky. *No need to pick the mushrooms now; it'll still be daylight when I get back...*

"Luce? You're back already! How did it go?" Narcissa asked as her husband entered the room.

He approached her in fast strides. "Don't ask." He laughed...a bitter sound...as he pulled up a chair to sit next to her and the bed. He glanced at the book he'd seen her put aside when he entered. "Shakespeare? You were reading Shakespeare to him? Hm, yes, makes sense. As refined in taste as Severus himself..." He smiled at her. "I love you."

"And I love you." She smiled back at him. "Now, tell me. How did it go? Did you meet her?" She extended her hands to cup his face and rose to place a gentle kiss on his lips.

He let out a sigh. "I met her, yes. She was not, uh...*quite* willing to talk to me." Another sigh escaped him as he stood up again. "Cissy... You'll have to go next time. She... She made that clear. She's not willing to talk to me. Said I'm tainted *and* male."

Narcissa looked at him, her face a question mark. "Explain yourself more clearly, please. You're not making much sense, love." Her reluctant smile reflected anticipated dread.

Lucius sighed again. "Well, I went to Emery Down, entered the forest, and found the clearing Lyra described. That was the easy part. Then I waited. And waited. And waited some more. Then this... hag appeared out of nowhere hurling insults at me, telling me how tainted I am...as if I didn't know that...and how I'm not worth her time. I just... sat there on this tree stump I'd found while waiting for her." He swallowed visibly before continuing. "She said how she never talks to males in any case, and the only reason she was willing to talk to me was because she'd heard whispers in the woods. And that it had something to do with us. She said..." he took a deep breath, "...she said that was the only reason she even talked to me. Then she told me to send *Narcissa* next time and disappeared."

"Did she mention when this *next time* should be?" Narcissa asked.

"Yes. Three months from now after the full moon." Lucius moved from his chair to embrace his wife. "Cissy," he murmured in her ear, "if you don't want to go, you don't have to. I can ask Lyra to go instead."

She returned his embrace and rested her head on his chest. "You are no more tainted than anyone else in this world, love. Don't let her words get to you." Stroking his shoulders and back, she added, "I'll go next time."

"Look out for mushrooms when you go," Lyra's voice interrupted the couple. "The New Forest is quite famous for them."

"Lyra!" Narcissa's voice was filled with relief at the Healer's arrival.

"Yes, I'm here now, dear. Go, take your Lucius and have yourselves a good time," Lyra soothed. "I'll take care of Severus." She frowned momentarily. "I wonder if a stasis charm might help..." Then she looked at Narcissa and Lucius who both stood up. "Go, my loves; just go and do what you want to do, what you need to do. I'll be here till you get back."

Hermione arrived back at the cabin, stored the groceries, and went back outside to harvest her dinner. The mushrooms had grown a little more since the afternoon but were still in pristine condition.

"Right," she muttered, remembering with clarity her earliest cookery lessons and repeating her dad's instructions as if he'd issued them minutes ago. "No washing, just brushing. Fry in butter after the onions start browning. Add garlic once the liquid evaporates. Then salt and pepper." She stepped outside into the front garden and found some parsley amongst the jungle-like setting.

Her first dinner was exquisite, and not only that; it set the quality for many future ones.

Finding mushrooms with her dad was one of Hermione's happiest childhood memories. As soon as the temperatures had remained steadily above freezing, as soon as cleansing, healing rain had penetrated the earth in Southern England, Hermione had waited impatiently for every Saturday and then willingly risen early, prepared cucumber sandwiches, packets of crisps, a little bit of chocolate, a few water bottles, all stashed into a backpack, grabbed a wicker basket, pocket knife, and off she'd gone with her dad on the nearly two-hour drive to the New Forest. They'd never returned entirely empty-handed. Sometimes, there'd been a handful of chanterelles or hedgehog fungi, often mixed with brambles or crab apples; other times the basket had nearly overflowed with a collection of many species, forever inciting delight in her mum and resulting in cooking frenzies that befitted a queen. She'd always felt somewhat sad to see the end of October, for that had announced the end of wildcrafting for the season.

Penny buns...porcini, as they were now fancily called throughout Britain thanks to an Italian celebrity chef who'd made his home in England...were a rare find before August in Southern England, but the Highland mushrooms held no such reservations. It was only June, and Hermione found them on a near-daily basis on her forays through the forest.

At first, she ventured out no more than a mile from her new home. She discovered a small lake where watercress was growing in abundance. The lake was fed by a spring with water so tasty, so *real*, it made her head spin. *So this is how water should taste!* As soon as Hermione arrived back home, she devised a spell to have the spring feed her kitchen tap.

When she felt she knew just about every inch of a mile's radius, Hermione decided to explore the nearest hill. The forest soon changed from deciduous to pines and firs. Penny buns made way for chanterelles. And a bass...a contrabass...started to rumble savoury nothings into her ear.

Where is this music coming from? Hermione gazed in every direction, at every tree, at every pine cone on the ground. Yet, no instrument showed itself. Suddenly, recognition dawned: it was the same sequence of tones she'd heard near Hagrid's hut. Her eyes widened. *Good heavens...*

She stumbled and landed right by a cluster of six chanterelles. Without thinking, she picked them, placed them in her cotton bag, and hurried back home, the thought *heard the music again* playing in her mind in the same tones the contrabass had brought forth and continuing long after the instrument's sound had faded.

Figured Bass

Chapter 3 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Figured Bass

There is geometry in the humming of the strings, there is music in the spacing of the spheres.

Pythagoras of Samos

A giant took her hand. "Are you ready?" he asked, his baritone voice gentle.

"Y...Yes." Hermione looked at the giant, thinking she should be afraid, considering his height and size, but all she felt was complete ease...comfort even...and her hand felt contentedly warm in his.

He smiled at her, a benign smile that added to her physical comfort. "Come, then."

The giant took off with her, seemingly defying gravity and leaving earth behind rather fast...much faster than Hermione thought possible...and landed in a field of wild flowers.

Hermione looked around and, at a distance, saw an enormous sphere-shaped area in the midst of blueEarth... she thought in wonder.

"Listen carefully," the giant instructed and motioned for her to sit down amongst the flowers.

Hermione felt the rumble before the bass reached her ears, as strong, as savoury as she'd heard twice before. When she absorbed its tones, she felt a gentle nudge and looked to the side, meeting the giant's eyes. He pointed to the distance, and Hermione noticed that not far from earth was now another planet, this one in deep hues of red. Mars... The moment the thought was complete, cello joined bass to play in harmony. She leant back against the ground and absorbed the celestial interaction of bass and cello, their low tones pleasantly pulsating somewhere deep inside her. When a viola joined for the third sequence, she idly looked to see which planet had materialised. It was not a planet this time. The moon... The accord the three heavenly bodies provided with their sounds made Hermione wish to never leave this meadow. The masterworks of Mozart, Bach, even Beethoven paled in comparison to the music these planets had to offer.

"I know I'm late," the hag growled and scrutinised Narcissa.

She really is a hag, the witch thought with a bout of disgust. *Luce was right*. She recalled her son's letter she'd received earlier and managed a smile. "It's fine. I enjoyed the forest while waiting." It would not do to attract the hag's wrath; it was enough that she refused to talk to Lucius. Although, Narcissa admitted to herself, sitting in the clearing for an hour or two had engulfed her in peace the kind of which she didn't remember experiencing ever before.

"You want something." The hag moved too close to Narcissa.

"I..." Narcissa stood up from the tree stump to put some distance between herself and the old witch. "A Healer told us about you. She said you may be able to help a friend we're looking after. He was bitten by a snake and has been in a coma since. It's been well over a year now, and while we've managed to keep him alive, there's been no progress." Narcissa cast a hopeful glance at her.

The hag cackled. "Lyra has heard the rumours, too, then." She scrutinised Narcissa again, but this time, thankfully, she kept a foot's distance.

"Rumours?"

"Rumours," the hag confirmed. "Nothing definite up until today. Today changed everything in that respect." She cackled again before something on the ground a short distance away diverted her attention momentarily. "*Accio*." She suddenly held a large cep in her hand. "Gorgeous."

Narcissa smiled. "I've come to enjoy mushrooms, although I've never found them in the wild."

"Of course you wouldn't." The hag's sneer painfully reminded Narcissa of Severus's better...waking...days, and desperation at her friend's state engulfed her. Then, still holding her prize in one hand, the hag's face took on a dreamy expression. "The rumours are true. I heard it. It is why I couldn't meet you earlier."

"What rumours? I don't know what you are talking about," Narcissa said, her tone exasperated even to her own ears.

"Silly witch," the hag grumbled with disdain. "*The music*," she said, as if all the secrets of the universe could be found in those two words.

"The... *music*?" Narcissa frowned, trying to find some...any...memory from her years of education that might help make sense of the words.

The hag regarded her like one would a wayward child and let out a sigh. Then, in a strangely lucid manner, she said, "There have been whispers about someone coaxing the music of the spheres again. Today, the rumour has been proven correct." Her laugh was callous. "It's a young one that one is. The bass is sounding metallic all around, the *Ut* string of the cello is not properly tuned yet, but alas. She'll get there, fret not." For the first time in the entire conversation, the hag sounded not unfriendly. "She has help now from the cosmos. Even coaxed the moon into joining." The cackle that followed had an almost affable ring to it.

Narcissa had read about the rare cases of the music of the spheres playing and the occasions the music had healed. She'd never known whether or not to believe it, for there was very little evidence. "But... but how will this help my friend?" she asked, not daring to hope.

The hag snorted. "Gee, and you call yourself educated? I guess that kind of thing isn't taught at Hogwarts, eh?" Another sigh escaped her. "Let me spell it out for you," she said, again in a manner of one humouring an evidently slow child. "The music of the spheres is heard once every two hundred years in a good era, once in a thousand in a not so good one. When it's cast on someone, or rather, coaxed into playing *for* someone, no matter how sick they are, they'll heal instantly. But to be able to summon it can take years. That said, the rumours have only been going for a little while, a few months, and I know for a *fact* that three planets are already actively playing the instruments. Once the violins start in earnest, the harmony will strengthen and attract other planets, and even entire galaxies, to join in."

Narcissa took a deep breath, acute hope stroking her like the midday sun on a summer's day. "So, how can I convince that person to heal my friend?"

The hag cackled again. "You can't."

Narcissa frowned. "It's my only hope, you know? The Healer, Lyra, she is good, but at her wits' end. Keeping him alive is all she can do." She cast a hopeful glance at the hag.

The old witch looked thoughtful for a moment. "It'll all play out in the end." She shrugged. "Where there is a will, there is a way. Maybe I'll know more in a month's time. Come back after the next full moon." She turned to leave, but then faced Narcissa again, holding out the mushroom. "Here. Take it. I'll find more."

Before Narcissa could thank her, the hag had disappeared.

Hermione stretched languorously, but suddenly stilled at the memory of the music floating to the front of her mind *It was only a dream...* She sat up in bed and shook her head. *Maybe it was more than that...* Low tones of bass and cello drifted into her consciousness. The sounds of viola remained absent *Maybe... maybe if I go outside...* Her recent Arithmantic calculations had confirmed that she was, at this point, ninety-six times more likely to hear the music in the forest than indoors.

Her mind made up, she swung her legs over the bed's edge and headed for the bathroom. Ready to face the day, Hermione entered the kitchen to grab a bite to eat. She smiled to herself when she saw the small basket filled with eggs she'd picked up from a nearby homestead the previous day. "Hm. Scrambled eggs with that baby penny bun, grated in paper-thin slices, sound yummy."

The sky was a soup of various grey hues, and the scent of rain filled the air as Hermione left to go for a walk in the forest. She stopped momentarily, as the first drops fell, to apply rain-repelling charms to her clothing and hair. Her steps led her up the hill, away from the deciduous woods into the pine forest. She spotted three clusters of three chanterelles each, growing in a triangular fashion... *How strange...* the same moment the low tones of the bass reached her ears. Hermione stopped abruptly and sat down to listen.

Yes! The contrabass had gained quality, its hum no longer so pungent, though equally strong, with an almost tender purr to it, like a deep voice speaking of love. The cello, once it joined, sounded better... better tuned. When the viola gently voiced its opinion, Hermione was not surprised, although pleased that she was able to hear the third instrument outside a dream.

And then, the music was gone. *Damn*. The rain became more persistent, and soon, the charms she'd placed lost their efficacy. Carefully picking and then cleaning the mushrooms to allow their spores to spread, she decided the day was better spent indoors. Some serious Arithmantic calculations were called for.

Hermione sighed at the realisation that the mushroom season was coming to an end. It was early October now, and the moment the first frost hit, the best she could hope for were some honey fungi. The watercress had already stopped growing in readiness for the dark months. *No matter*, she thought. *I'll still be able to go for walks, even if I don't bring anything back... And I have plenty of dried mushrooms for the winter...*

Back at the cottage, she settled on the sofa in the living room and spelled the coffee table to a more comfortable height to write on. Numbers and musical notes spilled onto the parchment in front of her, rearranging themselves in an apparently haphazard manner.

Hermione stared gloomily at the parchment until, quite suddenly, three numbers and six notes settled onto it, and the parchment stopped moving. Three, six, and nine were written all over the parchment, in various manners: Western numbers, then Roman ones followed by Hebrew, Greek, and, finally, Sanskrit. The musical notes throughout were C, D, E, F, G, and A. *What is the meaning of this?* she wondered, narrowing her eyes and unable to make any sense of her work whatsoever. She watched a rune appear on the left of the parchment near the top: *Raidho*. *Hah! I wish I could see a larger perspective!*

She felt cold. The rain had increased in intensity as the day wore on, and the temperature had now dropped significantly. Hermione rose from the sofa and moved to light a

fire. *Nearly winter*, she thought, sighing. Her eyes rested on the strange clock on the wall. The music started again. Bass, most perfect, met a pristinely tuned cello and was shortly followed by violas. Hermione's eyes widened. Right there, in front of her, was the answer. She was rooted to the spot, though, the music keeping her utterly captive.

Mi – 528 Hz – (Mediant) Transformation and Miracles (DNA Repair)

Chapter 4 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Mi 528 Hz (Mediant) Transformation and Miracles (DNA Repair)

Aside from purely technical analysis, nothing can be said about music, except when it is bad; when it is good, one can only listen and be grateful.

W. H. Auden

Hermione threw yet another parchment on the floor. "What am I missing?" Taking a new parchment, she started again, but this time when she cast the spell, instead of forming three, not-quite-connecting triangles, her wand issued Latin words in a spiral fashion complete with musical notes. *Ut queant laxis...*

Her mouth formed an O as understanding began to dawn. *Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La* She made a mental note to find a book on the history of music for better understanding.

Next, her wand produced numbers. *Numbers?* Hermione shook her head in confusion. "Oh!" *The same numbers as on the clock.* She looked at the parchment again and saw a rune appear, this time to the right. *Ansuz. Signal. Communication. Power of word.*

Suddenly, the soundless night was pierced with the tones of the first three notes of the scale, brought forth by a violin in crystal clarity the like she'd never heard before. *Ut, Re, Mi... Mi!*

Hermione listened intently until she looked at the clock. Exhaustion washed over her. Another hour and the sun would rise. Heading for the bedroom, she lay down and was asleep before the covers settled on her form.

"Cissy." Lucius sounded apprehensive.

Narcissa turned away from her task of dabbing Severus's face with a moist towel and met her husband's eyes. "What is it?"

"I... I thought we could get away for a couple of days. Maybe the Highlands. Just you and I. In the middle of nowhere. Maybe we'll even find some mushrooms. You'd like that, wouldn't you?" His expression was anxious and hopeful.

"Really? You wouldn't mind?" Her patient momentarily forgotten, she stood and wrapped her arms around him.

His laugh was one of relief. "Is there anything *would* mind doing with you, love?" His hands cupped her face. "I was hoping you'd like the idea. I read somewhere the mushroom season only lasts so long, and if we're lucky, we might catch the tail end of it."

"I would love to go. But... have you talked to Lyra? We can't leave Severus alone overnight." Narcissa leant against her husband's chest, drawing comfort from his heartbeat, his scent, the soft feel of his robes, and then, from the echo of his low chuckle.

"Not only have I arranged with Lyra to stay here during our absence but I've taken the liberty to book a bed and breakfast just outside Grantown-on-Spey, close to the forest," Lucius said, his tone faintly smug.

Narcissa clung to him more tightly, grateful that he was finding a footing in the world again, something to distract him from the sad state of his oldest friend and the fact that they were outcasts in their own world. "When are we going?"

Lucius weaved his fingers through her hair. "Tomorrow, if that suits you. Lyra will be here in the morning, and she agreed to stay until we return on Sunday."

A ray of sun speared through the narrow slit between the curtains, waking Hermione. She looked at the clock, hurried out of bed to pull the curtains apart, and smiled. The rain had finally made way for a blue sky, and the sun bestowed his rapidly waning strength of mid-autumn on the Scottish forests.

The calculations can wait. Better make use of the beautiful weather, she decided and headed to the kitchen to prepare a quick breakfast. Next, she cast mud-repelling charms on her boots and jeans, took her basket and headed out, at first toward the lake, then on the trodden path leading around it, picking mushrooms as she found them. She knew the path led towards town and pondered a visit to the pub for lunch.

"No," Hermione suddenly heard a voice shriek, "not that one! It's poisonous! Only Severus would know how to use it." She looked in the direction the voice came from. Some blonde was physically preventing her partner from picking a fly agaric.

Hermione shook her head at the ignorant man and walked towards them. "Sir, the fly agaric is poison..." She stopped abruptly, recognising the couple. *Why, oh why?*

"Miss Granger. What a... delight." Lucius Malfoy's sneer was magnificent.

"Lucius! Stop right here! She's right!" Mrs Malfoy hissed at her husband before turning to her with what Hermione figured was a friendly expression for a Malfoy.

"Miss Granger. I apologise for my husband's behaviour. You know what men are like..." Mrs Malfoy looked apologetic.

"I doubt I know men as a species, Mrs Malfoy, but I do know mushrooms," Hermione offered. "And I'd hate to see anyone who survived Voldemort poisoned because of

sheer ignorance."

"Touché, Miss Granger." Mr Malfoy regarded her with sudden interest, as if he were surprised to see a Muggle-born capable of more than incomprehensible drivel.

Mrs Malfoy cast a withering glare at her husband and then faced Hermione. "Miss Granger, would you mind looking at the mushrooms we've collected so far? I've never actually picked them myself before, and although I'm fairly certain I didn't take any questionable specimens, having studied them for several months, I'd like to be sure." She glanced questioningly at Hermione and held out her basket, which was half-filled with various mushrooms.

Hermione took a step forward and looked at the collection. She removed one after the other and in no time had two piles on the ground. "These," she pointed at the large pile, "are exquisite. Chanterelles, king boletes, horn of plenty, hedgehog fungi. Those," now she pointed at the small pile, "I'd call... well, not exactly questionable. They are edible per se, but you'd really have to be desperate to eat them. Some taste bitter or sharp, and those will give you stomach upsets." She waved her hand at some bright coloured russolas. "The ink cap, of course, tastes wonderful, but if you choose to have even one glass of wine with your meal, I'd say stay away from it. It'll give you terrible indigestion."

"Oh. I didn't know about the ink cap. Or the bitter ones. Thank you. I appreciate your help," Mrs Malfoy said, and Hermione could not help but wonder just how much of a lesson in humility the older witch had been receiving since the end of the war. She knew the Malfoys had become nobodies in the wizarding world since Voldemort's fall, but Mrs Malfoy's behaviour suggested she'd learned the painful way that money could not buy everything once a certain line was overstepped.

"You are welcome," Hermione said and then added, "I think I've grazed pretty much the area around this side of the lake." She indicated the direction she'd come from. "But the crops have been abundant all over the area, so you should have no trouble finding plenty. I'll be on my way, then." She nodded at Mrs Malfoy and turned to leave.

Hermione heard Mrs Malfoy whisper something, but paid no attention; nor could she make out the words. Then, the older witch's voice stopped her. "Miss Granger, wait!" Hermione turned around to face the couple, who were now standing close to each other.

"Please. I... I would love to learn more about mushrooms. Would you agree to have lunch together somewhere and share your knowledge?" Mrs Malfoy looked at her with a combination of shy and expectant expressions. "Please?"

Something in the older witch's demeanour stopped Hermione from declining outright. *A lunch with the Malfoys. Well, if I suggest the local pub, she'll probably be put off very quickly...* "Why not?" she answered. "There is a pub not far from here that offers lunch. Typical Muggle pub fare, but most of the fancier establishments are closed now that the tourist season has ended."

"A pub?" Mr Malfoy curled his lip.

His wife rolled her eyes. "A pub, Lucius. If Miss Granger knows it, I cannot imagine it to be the shady kind one typically finds in London's East End."

Hermione noticed his face fall and wondered what his wife's words had insinuated. She'd sounded perfectly normal and civil to Hermione's ears, too civil for a Malfoy even, as far as discussing anything Muggle was concerned. She smiled at the older witch. "It's tame enough. Just a typical country pub in the Highlands, and the food is not bad."

"As long as haggis isn't the only item on the menu," Mr Malfoy whined.

Hermione laughed. "No, they have a variety of foods. I don't care for Haggis either. If we're lucky, chanterelle omelette will be the day's special."

"Wonderful," Mrs Malfoy said. "If you don't mind, lead the way, Miss Granger."

Any awkwardness Hermione had expected initially had dissipated by the time the three reached *The Craig* on the edge of Grantown-on-Spey. The conversation started about mushrooms and soon changed to cooking mushrooms, to eating locally produced food, choice of wines, a subject Mr Malfoy contributed to with gusto, and only paused momentarily when each perused the menu.

Hermione smiled when she saw the day's special. "I'll have the omelette. I couldn't figure out all the ingredients last time. Maybe today is the day."

Mr Malfoy, rather grudgingly, walked to the bar to place the food orders and returned with half-pints of locally brewed ale. "It's supposed to be the best around here," he said, sounding doubtful as he put them on the table.

His mood picked up visibly when he tasted the chanterelle omelette. "They do know how to cook," he admitted, grudgingly still, but with an edge of appreciation in his voice.

"And why wouldn't they, Luce?" Mrs Malfoy challenged her husband. "I know you like Carluccio's...a Muggle's...cooking as much as I do, and we agreed a while ago that a lot of chefs are highly underrated."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully. "There are a few places around here that offer good food, the kind you'd expect to be featured on TV, and yet, they are rather unknown. I'm no longer sufficiently submerged in Muggle culture to base my suspicions on facts, of course, but it seems that Muggles go for instant gratification in terms of food. Many seem to prefer a drive-through, fast-food place to fill their stomachs over sitting down and eating in a more... social environment."

Later on...Hermione had no idea when exactly she'd become *friendly* with the Malfoys...they'd parted calling each other by first names, and Narcissa had asked her for a mushroom cookery lesson in the near future. The sun was setting fast, and she walked at a brisk pace to reach home before it was dark, not wanting to interrupt the swing of the day with Apparating.

As she reached the front door, the universe began to play, stopping her cold. A perfect bass and a faultless cello were soon joined by impeccable viola and violin, and finally, equally unflawed French horns...a sweet symphony that overshadowed the genius of Mozart to its last tone.

Suspended Fourth

Chapter 5 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Suspended Fourth

There is no logical way to the discovery of elemental laws. There is only the way of intuition, which is helped by a feeling for the order lying behind the appearance.

Albert Einstein

Ignoring the cold, Hermione slid to the ground to listen, to absorb the sound, to become one with the music. She sat in rapt silence until the sweet tones of perfectly tuned instruments were interspersed with cries. Cries of a male voice. Cries for help. Cries of agony that far surpassed Bellatrix Lestrange's Cruciatius Curses, making her curl up on the cold earth. Cries becoming so intense her heart ripped apart.

When it subsided and then finally stopped, just as she thought she could take no more, Hermione crawled inside the cottage, fleetingly grateful she'd set the wards to recognise her, and collapsed into bed.

The giant approached her quietly. "Are you ready to see more?" When Hermione shrugged, he smiled. "Surely, you know that your journey has only just begun?"

"I don't know what to make of it," she admitted. A small sigh escaped her. "How does one recognise what to do in a situation like this?" Maybe the giant knew the answer.

"You are doing well. Come, I'll show you." He stretched his hand out just as he'd done before, and she took it, this time aware they'd defy gravity and travel by unconventional, unknown means.

They landed on the balcony of an old, decrepit mansion near the Irish Sea, its former glory long dissipated, chipped away by the passage of time. The giant motioned for Hermione to look inside through the large window.

The light inside was dim, but she made out a bed on one side and a chair next to it. A woman, not old, but her once auburn hair heavily peppered with grey, sat on the chair, her lips moving and her eyes shifting between the book in her hand and the motionless form of a young boy on the bed.

"A few days after his eighth birthday, he was poisoned by a gang of Muggles who thought he was the devil incarnate because of his bouts of uncontrolled magic. He's been catatonic for nearly six months," the giant explained quietly. "Nobody has been able to bring him back. He spent the first three months at St Mungo's, but then his mother wanted to look after him in her own home, hoping he'd be more comfortable here." Hermione watched with almost morbid fascination the scene inside the old house.

She turned to face the giant. "Muggles did this?" Her voice was one of terror. "Oh, Merlin!"

He nodded, his expression sombre.

"The poor, poor family," Hermione whispered, her heart reaching out to the mother for her loss and the boy for missing out on his life. Images of Harry and Ron in her first year came to her mind, tugging further at her heart. He may never experience friendships. Or Hogwarts...

Hermione frowned when her companion smiled. And then, suddenly, she comprehended.

The bass began to play, its low rumble tickling her skin before it entered her ears. The cello followed seconds later, its pristine tones causing her to shiver from the sheer beauty.

When the viola approached, hesitantly at first, but gradually gaining more courage and, with it, volume, Hermione rejoiced. The arrival of the violin, proposing a tantalising cadenza of each note building upon the previous, gaining intensity, no longer surprised her, but the beauty of absolutely perfect harmony brought forth by what appeared to be the melodic interpretation of a planetary alignment left an indescribable sensation within her, one she feverishly hoped to repeat many a time and one she knew she'd never forget.

She didn't notice the tears on her face as she watched the boy looking at his mother with wide eyes, nor did she hear the French horns enter the symphony with nothing less than a full chord.

The mother cried out in perfect tune with the offering of the universe.

A smile spread over Hermione's face as she watched mother and son reunite. Gryffindor, maybe... A sob escaped her, unnoticed. "Merlin, what can I do?" She looked helplessly at the giant.

"Look what you have done!" He pointed at the scene inside the room and smiled.

Hermione did a double take. It really is so. The music woke him up! The realisation knocked her out cold.

When she awoke, the sun was high in the sky or, rather, as high as it reached in the Highlands with winter approaching. The memory returned slowly. Dream? Not a dream? Who knows...

*It didn't matter, and she pushed the thought aside. It did matter when she received an owl carrying a *Prophet* with the headline, *Jonathan Diggle Awake! Healed by Unknown Source!* The article included a photograph of young Jonathan, still in his bed but awake, smiling and sitting up. The same boy she'd seen in the dream, in which he'd been lying in bed, unmoving, unresponsive, while his mother had read to him.*

"Lucius! He moved!" Narcissa called out, excitement ringing in her voice.

Lucius looked at the recumbent form on the bed. "You really think so, love?" He sighed. "I don't mean to shatter your hopes, but he looks all the same to me. I wish I could say differently!"

"No, I know he just moved. I saw it. It was not imagination. He moved his head at least two inches," Narcissa insisted.

"Cissy. Love, I know the article in the *Prophet* is hopeful, but let's remain realistic, yes?" He let out a deep breath. "You know I want nothing more than for Severus to wake up and be well, don't you?" His hands found her neck, and she let him pull her closer.

"I know, love." Narcissa sighed. She *knew* she wasn't wrong. Severus *had* moved. Not much, but it raised her desperate hopes for him.

"You need a break," Lucius said. "It's been weeks since you last went out."

Narcissa nodded slowly. "You're right; it's been too long. I suppose I could owl Hermione Granger and see if she is up to giving me a cookery lesson."

"If that is what you'd like, go ahead. It will do you good to have some female company."

She knew he had no objections despite his initial reservations about the young, Muggle-born witch, which had soon dissipated over the lunch they'd shared. "Yes. If nothing

else, it'll be a girly day out for me." Narcissa met his smile and moved to her desk to write a note. Then she headed outside to find an owl strong enough for the journey to the North.

Winter had started in the Highlands. Grass and other just-above-ground bushes were covered in a layer of frozen dew. There were no more mushrooms except the most hardy, all inedible. Hermione looked at the landscape in wonder. It was so beautiful, yet harsh, forbidding. Until the bass made itself heard. Then it turned to perfect beauty. She slipped outside in her pyjamas to hear it better, more completely. And it turned perfectly whole. The contrabass, the very base of every orchestra, offered its perfection at her feet, keeping them warm and cosy. The cello granted more precision as it followed the deepest of strings, making her sigh in contentment. When viola and violin joined in, she cried out with joy. But it was nothing compared to the horns and then, the flute. Sweet tones set against dark, savoury ones, wholly fulfilling her very soul.

She cuddled the ground, not minding the plants beneath her, in comfort so acute she doubted it was real.

"Go back inside! You'll catch death!" the giant's voice interrupted her.

She crawled back inside and lit the fire. Then she curled in front of it, cherishing the warmth and dozing off.

An owl knocked on the window, waking her.

Hermione,

If you are willing still, I'd love to meet you for a cookery lesson. How about Thursday? Let me know either way, please. The owl will wait for your reply.

Kind Regards,

Narcissa

Hermione stretched. *Yes, some company will make a nice change... And teaching a Malfoy the art of mushroom cookery will make good conversation when I see Harry and Ron again.* She chuckled at the thought and sat at the table to pen a reply for the owl to take.

It was time to look at the calculations again, now that she'd heard the music several times. Hermione sifted through the parchments, stopping at the last one filled with three-digit numbers and the names of the first six notes.

396

417

528

639

741

852

C

D

E

F

G

A

"Oh! Frequencies," she muttered and pointed her wand at the parchment. The letters changed and righted themselves instantly to each correspond with one frequency.

396Ut

417Re

528Mi

639Fa

741Sol

852La

Looking at the previous parchment, the one with the spiral, Hermione frowned. *The notes correspond to the first syllable of each verse... And it reads like a hymn..* She pointed her wand again, but only a rune appeared. *Isa. Hm. Yes, I suppose this is beginning to frustrate me.*

When the contrabass began to play again, interrupting her thoughts, Hermione looked up, startled. She left the parchments be and headed for the door, grabbing her cloak on the way out.

The cello joined the bass. So did another cry for help. *No, please!* she thought and stopped in the midst of the herbs in the front garden, dreading the imminent anguish. And it arrived with force. The cries grew stronger, the agony piercing her heart in rapid succession like a maniac let loose with a needle. She opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came out. The viola played now, too, but the cries for help, desperately conveying an agony she'd never before encountered, drowned its sweet melody.

Hermione bent to kneel on the ground, her arms wrapped around her chest in a poor attempt to shield her from the torment. The cries became yet louder until the entire violin section of the galactic orchestra came forth to voice its opinion. Then, finally, the volume of the sobs subsided, and only a small whimper remained. The gentle tune of the French horns began to converse with the violins, and a flute chirped in occasionally. Hermione opened her hands to allow the music to penetrate her, to heal her shattered heart. She took a deep breath, and finally, realisation hit her that she knew the voice. The voice of a man the world had thought dead for a year and a half.

Fa – 639 Hz – Connecting/Relationships

Chapter 6 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Fa 639 Hz Connecting/Relationships

Music is in a continual state of becoming.

Aaron Copland

The next days flew by in a haze. Hermione spent much time asleep, for her waking hours were tortured by the memory of the cries interrupting the music, stalling any research, muting any enthusiasm for the beauty nature afforded. Slowly, she came to terms with the fact that her former professor was alive, wherever he was and despite the fact that she'd seen him die, and that he needed her to heal him. How to achieve his recovery, she had no idea.

Thursday arrived, and she woke up with a start. She'd completely forgotten about Narcissa Malfoy's visit. *Damn. The kitchen looks rather needy; I better get organised...*

Looking in the mirror nearly sent her back to bed with a fervent wish to ignore life. A white face, whiter than Snape's on his worst days, with purple shadows beneath her eyes stared back at her. "So much for all that time spent outdoors," she muttered and reached for her make-up bag. No way would she face the world or, worse, a Malfoy, looking like a zombie.

Thus equipped, in a reasonable state where looks...if not mind...were concerned, Hermione Apparated to the large Tesco in Inverness and bought a fortune's worth of groceries. She'd be damned if a Malfoy had any reason to sneer at her kitchen.

Reducing her bounty proved difficult. The store had a 360-degree car park, and it took a while to find an inconspicuous space, but eventually, she did find it, reduced all the bags to fit into her cloak's pockets, and Apparated back home.

Reacquainting herself with the kitchen while finding space for various oils, vegetables, and exotic herbs demonstrated a challenge. When she'd finally managed to put everything away, with the use of more than one expansion charm, Hermione felt hungry for the first time in days. She remembered the homestead nearby and, in an instant, Disapparated to buy some eggs.

Back home, she realised the poor state of the cottage and rushed around to rid it of dust, put carelessly strewn clothes away, and generally make it presentable. She was shocked how far she'd let it go, and all because her former professor had cried out for help. Hermione rolled her eyes at herself.

"Calm down. It's not like you've been neglecting the house because of laziness," the giant said in his gentle voice.

She flew around. "You... you're real!" Her eyes were wide.

The giant chuckled. "Of course I'm real. Did you doubt that?"

Hermione thought for a moment and shook her head. "No, I didn't *doubt* it. It's just... you've only ever appeared in dreams or when I wasn't exactly at my most lucid."

"You've never needed encouragement in other situations before."

"And I do now?" Hermione met his eyes.

He chuckled again. "I think a little encouragement won't go amiss. You're nervous about receiving a pureblood in your home."

Hermione sighed. "Yes, I am. I did enjoy lunch with the Malfoys, but really, to Mr Malfoy I'm nothing more than a glorified Mudblood."

"Don't say that. You are, for him, a great tool for learning that race does not matter. And the fact that Narcissa is coming to visit you speaks volumes. Don't you think he'd stop her if he didn't approve?" the giant challenged.

Hermione pondered his words. "I suppose you're right," she conceded. Then she sat down and sighed deeply. "Really, all I want to know is how to bring Snape back to the living!"

"All in good time, my dear, all in good time," the giant soothed and faded away.

"Thanks, Mr Giant. Nothing cheers me up like a friend disappearing," Hermione muttered and continued to improve the state of her cottage until the wards alerted her of human presence.

Ignoring the wave of trepidation, Hermione hurried to the door. "Hello."

"Hello, Hermione. I hope it's not inconvenient for you. To see me, I mean."

Realising the older witch was just as anxious, Hermione couldn't help herself and laughed. "No, Narcissa. I think you're godsent!" She motioned for her to enter and led the way to the kitchen.

"Oh, really?" Narcissa sounded doubtful.

"I... I've had a few rough days, and I think an afternoon of cooking and talking mushrooms will do me a world of good," Hermione admitted as she prepared some tea and a plateful of biscuits.

"Rough times is a concept I've come to understand only recently," Narcissa said and took a delicate sip of her tea. "It's strange, but I feel better for the experience." She offered a hesitant smile.

Hermione nodded. "I suppose I can't even begin to imagine what you've gone through. First Voldemort taking over your home..." She trailed off, inwardly cringing. *Well done, Granger... Put your foot right in it, why don't you?*

"And then becoming outcasts in the wizarding world, yes," Narcissa offered, her voice laced with amusement rather than indignation. "If I only look at the bad things, I tend

to get rather depressed. But if I look at everything that's happened *because* we were shunned by the rest of our world, I realise how much I've gained."

"Yes." Hermione nodded. "While in the midst of unpleasant experiences, we don't realise how we grow or *even if* we grow at all." She sipped her tea. "But, do tell, how did you come to appreciate mushrooms?"

The two witches chatted amiably, and Hermione was surprised to realise how much she enjoyed Narcissa's company. Within an hour of her arrival she felt as if she were talking to an old friend.

What astounded Hermione even more was how adept Narcissa was at kitchen charms and her considerable knowledge of when to avoid magic to preserve the taste of particularly tender morsels.

"Oh, it's something every pureblood witch learns by the time she's a teenager," Narcissa said dismissively. "True, I *never have to* cook, but I happen to enjoy it, and Lucius appreciates my culinary creations now and then. In fact, he only had the second kitchen in the manor built after we got married; in those days it wouldn't have done for him to have his wife share a kitchen with house-elves." Her laughter matched the tone of her voice.

When the two witches sat down for dinner, Narcissa raised her glass. "I must say I haven't enjoyed myself this much in a long time. Thank you, Hermione."

Hermione smiled. "I agree. I've had a wonderful time, too. Thankyou!" She raised her glass now, too.

Narcissa left late in the evening with the promise that Hermione would meet her in Muggle London the following week, leaving a bewildered but happy young witch behind.

Hermione returned to the kitchen, but decided what little was left to clear up could wait until the morning. It had been an atypically eventful day, and she yawned as exhaustion washed over her.

Lucius eyed his wife with interest. "Spending time with the girl does you good, love. You radiate happiness, I sense the old *Narcissa confidence* returning, and you walk taller. Are you going to see her again soon?"

His greatest regret over having joined Voldemort's ranks was not so much his beliefs in racial purity...he'd been brought up that way and had no scruples to use that reason as a perfectly valid excuse...no, it was the fact that he had failed to maintain Narcissa's happiness at all times. His most often recurring *what if* question was not, *What if I'd never taken the Dark Mark?* it was, *What if I'd never turned up in that ghastly graveyard when the rat helped the Dark Lord create a body?* To watch the effect the young witch had had on his wife was pure joy and made him momentarily forget the state of his oldest friend.

"Oh, Luce, I had the most wonderful time!" Narcissa assured him. "She is great company, offers intelligent conversation, compassion, and blimey, she can cook!" She smiled, making his heart swell. "But let me greet Severus before I tell you all about this afternoon." She rushed past him to reach her friend.

"Oh, Severus. You would have enjoyed this afternoon. I know you love to cook, too, and Hermione certainly knows a lot of the little, not necessarily magical, tricks to improve the taste of food. I had the most excellent dinner at her place," she whispered.

"He moved his head, Lyra said," Lucius stated hesitantly. "She also said it can mean either he's starting to recover or leaving this plane."

"Merlin, please, no." Dread washed over her in strong waves at the thought of losing him. She straightened, determined to concentrate on the problem at hand. "Maybe, just maybe, meeting the old witch on Sunday will bring some solution..."

Lucius nodded slowly. "We shan't give up hope."

Narcissa sighed. The euphoria of the wonderful day was gone without trace, and the fear of loss took reigns painfully once again.

Their lovemaking that night was tender...without even a hint of selfishness on Lucius's part...and held an edge of desperation. When Narcissa nestled against his body, spent after a curiously powerful release, he pulled her even closer.

"I don't want to lose him, love," Lucius whispered. "He's never had a life. He realised a lot sooner than I did that the Dark Lord's seduction was without substance, that it was all based on an inhuman, draconian belief, one that would destroy itself because of its very nature. Then he spent twenty years playing puppet to two masters, neither of whom ever had even the remotest right to control him. And when his slavery finally ended, he had to be bitten by a snake." A rough edge of bitterness laced his voice.

Confidence bulged within Narcissa, the source or reason for which entirely escaped her. "He will live, Luce, do you hear? He will live! When he recovers, we will build him a cottage, with a lab, and then we'll help him start his own brewing business. And we'll make sure he'll be at least content if not outright happy."

Lucius's expression was solemn when he nodded. "I promise."

Rays of morning sun peeked through the curtains, tickling her nose. Pleased that nature celebrated Sunday with the absence of rain, Hermione rose from bed, her feet carrying her with renewed energy in anticipation of a roam through the forest.

Oak and birch trees were bare, and all the fern had died, leaving not even glimpses of its once bright green leaves now all turned muddy brown and ready to re-enter the soil from where it'd come. Pine and fir and conifer, however, gleamed in various shades of green, creating stark magnificence in contrast to the deceptively deep blue sky that spoke of warm summer days. The air carried the promise of snow.

Hermione took deep breaths as she leisurely hiked towards the lake, appreciating the cold, clear air that filled her lungs. Hopes for any kind of harvest were futile, she knew, but few activities lifted her spirits the way a walk in the Scottish wilderness did. Overcome with keen hope, the replenished spring in her gait hurrying her forward, she thought, *Maybe I'll solve some of the calculations this afternoon.*

Reviews are love.

Diabolis in Musica (Devil's Triad)

Chapter 7 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at

the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Diabolis in Musica (Devil's Triad)

If only the whole world could feel the power of harmony

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

When the contrabass began to caress her skin, leisurely strolling towards her ears, Hermione stood rooted to the ground, trepidation washing over her *Professor Snape, I don't know how to help you yet. I need more time.* Her plea did not reach him.

The entire cello section of the galactic orchestra entered as one, its melody transforming rapidly from dulcet to foreboding. Mournful violas joined the cellos, adding sorrow and drawing tears from her eyes.

When violins announced imminent death and an old hag appeared in torn clothes and hair that hadn't seen either brush or water in a long time, starting to cackle like an evil witch straight out of one of the Grimms' tales, Hermione lost her footing and made abrupt contact with the ground. "No, please! You can't die now! I'm trying to find a way to save you! If only I knew how." Her last words were mere whispers before violent sobs, drowning out the funeral-like orchestral performance, shook her body and all she could hear was her own pathetic weeping and the cackling of the hag.

"No! Please, nooooooo!" Knowing he was dying and she was witnessing it all over again, if not in the physical realm this time, ripped her heart to shreds, and even the reassuring voices of the horns were pointless, as were the more joyful chirps of the flute.

Once her sobs lessened, she lay on the ground completely spent, resigned to her fate of being too late to right this wrong, feeling nothing but contempt for the strings and the horns and the flute and despair for herself.

Hermione covered her ears in an attempt to ignore the gentle, yet convincing, almost bullying tones of a piano. Until... until...

A tentative smile lit her face for the first time since the contrabass had made itself heard, a smile because she realised what the piano...a female one, she had no doubt, given its elegant entrance...was doing, and Hermione cocked her head in the direction the sound came from, impatiently wiping off the last tears with her sleeve.

Bully it might be, but the instrument led its contemporaries from death back to life in fast strides with its strong chords, its melodic cascades, challenging strings as well as horns and flute, and coaxing more woodwinds into joining.

The longer it played, the more it gained strength, and yet the farther into the background it faded. Unlike bass, cello, viola, violin, or even horn, the piano did not allow any other sound to drown her out until all was said.

Gradually, Hermione was able to sit up and listen to the symphony the universe was now playing, slowly regaining her senses and forgiving, if not forgetting, the harsh, agonising tones of minutes past.

The soft, yet decisive interaction between strings and horns healed her broken heart like a tonic, taking away not only the recent anguish but pain, agony, and suffering of times past, leaving only faint memories behind. When the final cadence rang out, Hermione felt more refreshed than ever before, her entire being filled with improved resolve to work out how to heal her former professor.

Narcissa leant against a bare birch tree, occasionally stepping from one foot to the other before casting yet another warming charm.

She was about to give up waiting when the hag finally arrived. "Hello..." Narcissa did a double take at the elder's appearance. "You look out of sorts; are you all right?" The woman's face had aged by a few decades since she'd last seen her a month ago, and she was swaying slightly, as if completely exhausted.

The old witch waved her arm in a dismissive gesture. "I will be. No need to worry about me." Her voice held an even rougher edge than Narcissa remembered. She sat down heavily on the ground. "Cast a warming charm on me, would you? My magic's gone a bit... wonky."

Narcissa did as asked and then Transfigured a leaf into a cushion to sit on so she would be eye level with the hag. "What happened?" she asked, her curiosity piqued.

"Your friend happened." The hag sneered and then sighed. "Lest you ask, no, I cannot give you details. You need to trust, to believe that everything will work out." She turned to face Narcissa and placed her hands on the blonde's shoulder, shaking them with surprising strength. "Do not lose that belief, no matter how hard it is, do you understand?" she asked urgently. Then her arms fell to her sides, and Narcissa noticed her entire body shaking. She discreetly cast a strengthening charm on the old, frail hag.

Before she could think of what to say, though, the witch stood up with a speed belying her fragile appearance. "And tell your young friend I'm not death personified. But if I hadn't turned up, death *would* have beaten her progress," the hag spat and Disapparated.

Narcissa sat for a while. *How bizarre.* Pondering the hag's state and words, she slowly stood and walked through the forest. It was a while before she was ready to Apparate back to the manor. She'd have to ask Lyra why the Healer thought the hag could be of help.

Lyra's words were a revelation. "Oh, she might be a hag and uneducated in ways we perceive education, but she's spent her entire life on the edge of civilisation, and that enables her to see things the likes of us cannot. We have succeeded in preventing dragon pox and other epidemics because she alerts us every time there are rips in the tapestry of the grid."

"Tapestry?" Lucius asked.

"Grid?" Narcissa asked.

Lyra smiled. "Only part of a Healer's training is about actual healing. Other parts include education about the sources of illness in order to avoid them in the first place. The grid is an electromagnetic field surrounding our planet. It resembles a tapestry in that it appears to be woven. Events that cause emotions to flare, thoughts even, can cause it to rip, which in turn causes imbalances."

She met Narcissa's eyes and continued. "Certain events, such as a wave of compassion brought forth by groups of people or even an individual, can lead to the tapestry of the grid to mend itself. Which is what happened recently, and the hag...nobody knows her name, by the way...recognised it as someone tapping into the music of the spheres. This is the reason why I suggested you meet her in the hope that she'll take more of an interest. I'm not entirely sure of her power, but let's say she has considerably more powers than she lets on." Lyra swallowed and took a deep breath. "You see, there are quite a few poor people who suffer from chronic illness, some unconscious or catatonic even, and nobody knows how to heal them. It would be a blessing if the music returned and these wizards and witches could be healed." She smiled hesitantly. "I would love to see Severus live consciously, and I would love to see the two of you living a life that's enjoyable. But you..." she waved her hand to include Lucius, Narcissa, and Severus, "...are only a fraction of what could be done if the music of the spheres is once again called to heal humankind."

Narcissa nodded thoughtfully, remembering the old witch's last words with still no idea what to make of them. "Yes, that makes sense."

"Yes," Lucius agreed.

Hermione was not surprised to open her eyes to face the giant and readily took his proffered hand. The destination, though, came as a slight shock.

The Janus Thickey Ward at St Mungo's had not changed at all since her visit there during her fifth year at Hogwarts, nor apparently had Gilderoy Lockhart. The damaged wizard sat in a chair, admiring his looks in a mirror and muttering about needing to sign at least another hundred photographs, completely oblivious to the new presence in the room.

"Go on, you can do it," the giant encouraged as Hermione threw a questioning glance at him.

"How, though?" she asked. The young witch still had no idea how she'd succeeded in summoning the music to heal Jonathan, and even the knowledge that she'd been successful did little for her confidence.

The giant merely smiled. "Keep in mind that you must continue, even if you feel you can't do more," he added.

Ever so helpful... Hermione took a deep breath and turned to contemplate her former Defence Against the Dark Arts professor. He'd been an exclusively self-serving man from what she knew of him, but he'd paid very dearly since the incident in the Chamber of Secrets. Her heart reached out to him when she thought of his utterly wasted life, and she wondered if he'd ever recover and, if so, if he'd still be as self-serving. His actions seemed to suggest so, but then, with a memory as botched-up as his, he probably didn't even know better than to utilise what little recollection remained, and it was no wonder it consisted of nothing but admiration for himself.

She didn't hear the bass until a slightly dissonant intonation invited the cellos to revert back to resonant accord. Violas and violins glided in with the offering of a harmonic prance. Hermione stood rooted to the floor, staring unseeingly at the wizard, as the music filled her with joy so pure she felt at one with the entire universe.

Her emotions had a seemingly ping-pong effect, for the horns skated in long strides towards the centre and from there spread this unadulterated delight across the world and beyond while the flute twittered its consent with enthusiasm.

Lockhart stilled for a moment and then glanced around curiously. Hermione realised that the giant had cloaked them, as the wizard looked right through her.

"Where is this gorgeous music coming from? Am I going crazy?" he asked aloud. Something...Hermione had no idea whether it was his own poignant question or the music...triggered Lockhart to continue the questioning.

The giant tugged at Hermione's arm and whispered, "Keep playing, no matter what happens."

Hermione still had no clue how she was conducting the music, but trusting her instinct seemed to suffice.

"*Going crazy?* Merlin, I have been out of my mind for...how long? It's been years and years, and the world sees me as nothing but a vegetable, at best a magical vegetable. Those who remember me. Most probably don't by now." His body was wracked with sobs, and Hermione wanted to comfort him, take his despair away, if only she knew how.

She took a step towards the wizard, but the giant held her back. "No. Concentrate on the music."

The revelation of how offered itself with a most jubilant piano solo. The orchestra had gradually quieted, almost unnoticeably, to make space for the piano's opulent opening.

Lockhart stilled again, evidently absorbing the healing resonance, as he cocked his head in deep concentration.

"Stupid..."

Tears were running down his face, and occasional sobs came out as he appeared to ponder the state of his being.

"Wrong, so wrong." He quieted again to soak up the increasing tempo of the violins, their rhythm commanded by the strumming of the cellos.

"Only doing right from now on. Serve the wizarding world..." The rhythm slowed, the sound of the strings now ringing gently through the room. The piano danced the chromatic scale from low C to high C, as if in greeting, and when a harp replied with an arpeggio from high to low, Hermione realised it was a greeting.

Harp and piano conversed like old friends, and the strings proffered their approval with gentle caresses until piano came forth with a cadence, encouraging harp to exit in a most illustrious manner with an all-encompassing crescendo that lingered in the room long after the music had stopped.

Lockhart, his expression more lucid than Hermione remembered ever seeing, slowly stood, stretched, and sat down heavily on his bed. "Whoever, whatever you are, Music, thank you for opening my eyes." He lay down, and seconds later, his regular breathing suggested he'd arrived in the land of Nod.

The giant smiled at Hermione. "Well, well done." She took his hand, satisfied with the day's accomplishment, and minutes later found herself back in her bed, more than ready to embrace sleep.

A/N: Authors thrive when there are reviews.

Relative Minor

Chapter 8 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Relative Minor

Who hears music feels his solitude peopled at once

Robert Browning

The implications of her accomplishment did not hit Hermione until a few days later when a *Prophet*-carrying owl knocked its beak on the kitchen window. She put the paper on the table, fed the owl a treat, and prepared her breakfast before finally sitting down to peruse the news.

She grinned at the front page headline. **Gilderoy Lockhart miraculously healed!** A frown shadowed her face as she read the subheading. *Department of Mysteries called to St Mungo's*. Her breakfast remained untouched as she read on.

Unspeakables were called into St Mungo's following the most miraculous healing of Gilderoy Lockhart, a once successful author whose books continue to show up in the bestseller lists of the Prophet to this day, then professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts during the days of the position being cursed by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Lockhart appeared to have suffered from the cursed job worse than most, aside from Quirrell and Professor Snape, who both died; Lockhart's memory was botched to such an extent that all he seemed to remember was to groom his appearance continually and sign photographs which the many fans he imagined asked for. Everything was as usual when he was served his lunch this past Sunday. When a Healer (name withheld) checked on him in the evening, he was fast asleep. Monday morning, however, found him in a most lucid and humble state. He emphasised the need to serve humanity, and not once did he mention either his looks, locks, or his fame, which was a first since he had been admitted to St Mungo's in 1993. When several Healers checked and questioned him carefully, they agreed that he was perfectly stable and furthermore appeared to have left his selfish ways behind. Not only that but he also appeared to remember who he was beyond someone famous and expressed sorrow for having wasted so many years focussing on his ego. The Department of Mysteries was called in to investigate, as Healers arrived at the conclusion that a new occurrence...the first in several hundred years...of a witch summoning the music of the spheres has happened.

Hermione's breath shortened. *What if they find out it's me? What are they going to do?* Then she straightened, her rational thinking taking over. *It's not like that ET movie where they try and abduct someone.* She focused her attention back on the article and read on.

The last two wars left many casualties, and if, indeed, the music has been summoned, it would be an economic relief on the wizarding world, not to mention a major boost to the health factor. We will report any news on this particular subject as we receive them. Stay tuned!

The music piped up, and she knew instinctively it was for her and her only. Strings, woodwinds, brass, and even timpani were connecting like content children in paradise's playground. Her arms rested on the table, and she rested her head on them, absorbing every single tone like a lifeline.

"Do I look all right?" Narcissa turned to her husband.

Lucius regarded her and smirked. "You look like a Royal family member trying for the casual look, love. In one word, fabulous!"

Narcissa was unable to suppress a smile. "Thank you, darling. I'll be off then. Not sure what time I'll be back, but I shan't be late."

She Apparated near the corner of Carnaby and Beak Street in Central London and found Hermione already waiting. "Hello, dear! I hope you haven't been waiting long."

Hermione shook her head. "Only just got here myself." She eyed the smoothie place with interest. "I'd totally go in there, but if I have one of those smoothies, I won't feel hungry for days," she said, gazing through the window.

Narcissa followed Hermione's eyes. There was fresh fruit in the display, and the staff inside seemed to be enthusiastic over liquidising the various fruits and adding honey, lemon juice, and powders. It was rather intriguing; she'd never tasted half the fruits on display. "Maybe we could share one? They look interesting."

Hermione beamed at her. "What an excellent idea!" The two witches walked inside the shop and perused the menu. "Gods, so many choices!"

"Hm, I'd love to go for the mango, orange, and lime one, maybe with some vitamins added for good measure," said Narcissa, and Hermione readily agreed and ordered two half-cups of the concoction.

The two witches walked along Regent Street, sipping the smoothie contentedly and looking occasionally at window displays of clothes stores.

Narcissa started to laugh. "You know, I never thought I'd actually enjoy perusing Muggle London like this! But I'm really having a ball. Look at this!" She stopped in front of a children's clothes store displaying suits, and even tuxedos, for small children. "I think Draco would have invented the Killing Curse if I'd ever dressed him that way!"

Hermione laughed. "I'm sure only the nouveau riche type Muggles would make their children wear this kind of clothing."

"Yes. Frankly, I cannot imagine anyone with such atrocious taste, but then again, look at this!" Narcissa pointed at the large windows they were now approaching. It was Hamley's, Europe's flagship toy store. "It's ostentatious, don't you think? And how can any parent want to drown a child's creativity with all these mindless electronic toys?" She shook her head.

"I think most Muggles don't even realise. They just want their children to be happy and keep up with their peers," Hermione said as they strolled past the window.

"Peer pressure," Narcissa sneered, "is as bad as amongst purebloods?"

"Hell, yes," Hermione muttered. "My parents were probably more anti-society than any others I knew when I was a child, but even I was gifted with *Barbie dolls*." Age-old, renewed embarrassment washed over her at the memory.

A few more fashion displays earned the women's disdain until Narcissa stopped in front of a shoe shop. Her eyes glinting, she admired the contents of the display. "These boots look marvellous, I think. Mind if we go in?"

Hermione grinned. "I've not bought shoes in about a year! I must remedy that instantly. One needs fantabulous shoes even in the Scottish wilderness, I think!"

Narcissa snickered. "A lady of my own heart."

Hermione had never particularly enjoyed shopping, but with Narcissa, it was decidedly entertaining and enjoyable.

"You do know that all the electronic equipment interferes with magic, don't you," Narcissa challenged when Hermione cast a questioning glance at the wand resting discreetly in her hand. "And, really, I have no wish to wait until I get home to make these boots fit perfectly." Narcissa sat down to try on an elegant black pair of knee-high boots with high heels. She looked around carefully before magically adjusting the height of the heels to a more comfortable level. Then she stood and walked to the mirror. "Ah, yes. I knew they'd be perfect."

"They do look beautiful on you!" Hermione agreed, admiring her friend's taste. From the corner of her eye, another boot drew her attention, and she headed to the shelf for a closer look.

"Oh, these are pretty!" Narcissa exclaimed. "Totally you, dear!"

Hermione hesitantly tried the not-quite knee-high, flat-heeled, suede grey boots. "They're a bit small," she grumbled.

Narcissa looked at her incredulously. "Are you a witch or what?" she asked, her tone matching her expression.

Hermione blushed. "Professor Flitwick never taught us fashion-related charms."

"Of course not. Forgive me, I keep forgetting," Narcissa said. "It's something most children learn before they're even old enough to attend Hogwarts." Her snort was delicate, though it was a definite snort. "There you have it. Even after years of Dumbledorean Muggle-born championing, they still forget that Muggle-borns can't learn these basic spells at home. Here..." Wand surreptitiously held in her hand, she cast a silent spell. "Better?"

The relief was instant, and Hermione smiled. "Excellent. Thank you! What do you think?" She stood and admired the boots in the mirror.

"Perfect! Understated, elegant, simply beautiful." Narcissa nodded approvingly.

A quickly cast *Finite Incantatem* brought the electronics equipment back to life, and by the time the two witches had changed back to their old shoes and were ready to pay for their purchases, the cash register was running smoothly once more.

"I'm getting hungry," Narcissa remarked as they headed back to the street. Dusk had arrived, and with it, masses of Muggles hurrying towards the various tube stations in the vicinity in an effort to leave the working day behind.

"I wouldn't mind a bite to eat," Hermione admitted. Now that Narcissa had mentioned food, she realised she was hungry. "I have no idea where, though. It's been a while since I knew London eateries even remotely..."

They had reached Leicester Square, which was teeming with people heading in every conceivable direction.

"Well, do you know The Neal Street Restaurant?" Narcissa asked. When Hermione shook her head, she added. "It's a mushroom lover's paradise."

"Oh, that sounds interesting. It's close enough, and new ideas for preparing mushrooms can only benefit one's culinary skills." Hermione grinned.

The food was perfect, the atmosphere as well as the ambience of quiet and subtle elegance, and the company enjoyable.

Hermione felt a sting of sadness when, at the end of the most excellent meal, Narcissa fidgeted, seemingly uncomfortable. "Are you all right?"

Narcissa cast a wistful smile at her. "I'm fine. Every time I eat here, I'm reminded of a dear friend, who unfortunately..." she swallowed visibly, "... is not with us these days." She stared at the empty plate in front of her.

"I'm so sorry," Hermione said, images of the lifeless bodies of Colin and Fred forming in her mind. "Living in solitude over the past few months has made me forget all the losses we've suffered."

"I can imagine. We rarely leave the manor these days so as not to be confronted with an unpleasant and painful past." Narcissa sighed and then straightened. "I didn't mean to spoil the mood. I had a most wonderful afternoon, and I hope you'll agree to meeting up again soon."

"You didn't spoil the mood," Hermione assured her. "And I'd love to see you again." She met the elder witch's smile.

Narcissa insisted on paying the entire bill, ignoring Hermione's objections, and then the two walked out onto Neal Street and headed to a deserted side road.

"I'll have to check with Luce if he has any plans next week, but I'll owl you," Narcissa said.

"Sounds good. And thank you for a lovely afternoon and a wonderful dinner," Hermione added and, with a last wave, Disapparated.

Narcissa felt guilty for abruptly ending an enjoyable day, but the foreboding that had threatened to overwhelm her towards the end of the meal had not loosened in the least. She Apparated to the manor, and renewed dread washed over her as she arrived outside her home.

Sprinting from the front door to Severus's room, she stopped abruptly in the door. "Luce?" It took her a minute to get her breath back.

"Cissy!" Lucius sounded relieved. "Thank Merlin you're back!" He pointed to the unconscious wizard. "He was unchanged when Lyra came by around five, but then, quite suddenly, he broke out in a sweat, and now he appears to be getting colder...too cold." He held his palm against the man's forehead.

As if on cue, Severus started to shiver. Narcissa was by his side in an instant. "Severus," she said, her voice filled with urgency and desperation. "Sev, please don't leave now. We are so close to finding a way to heal you."

Shivers were now racking his body. "Please don't die now!" Narcissa pleaded, tears running down her face unnoticed, and turned to Lucius. "Please do something. There has to be something we can do!"

His breathing even shallower than usual, Severus seemed to reach the end of his lifetime. Narcissa sobbed. "Lucius, he's dying." She threw herself against her husband who hushed her, patted her shoulder, and headed for the fireplace. "I'm Floo-calling Lyra."

The hag's words came to Narcissa's mind. *Do not lose that belief, no matter how hard it is, do you understand?* Belief was lacking, but she fervently held on to that one glimmer of hope, for it was all she had at this moment.

Sol (Dominant) – 741 Hz – Awakening Intuition

Chapter 9 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Sol (Dominant) 741 Hz Awakening Intuition

Do you know that our soul is composed of harmony?

Leonardo da Vinci

Hermione breathed in the clear, cold Highland air, appreciating its purity after hours of London pollution, before she entered the cottage. It was cold, and she rushed to light a fire and cast a Warming Charm for good measure.

Within minutes, the Muggle thermometer in the corridor rose to show room temperature, but the cold prevailed. *Maybe I'm just tired.* She tidied the parchments she'd planned to work on and instead headed for bed. *Tomorrow is another day.*

Hermione was floating across a decidedly foreign landscape. East Anglia was as flat, but its scenery did offer more than barren fields that were only occasionally interspersed with conglomerations of identical-looking houses and the odd copse of trees. Yet something was attracting her to the setting.

"It is the energy, Miss Granger, love in its purest form, that called you here. The land is nothing to write home about except, perhaps, as a warning why monoculture is a bad idea. But the love, created, maintained, and increased multi-fold by the inhabitants of this tiny town is what has been keeping me alive thus far, combined with the love of those who look after my physical body; although I admit I'm beginning to lose strength. It has become troublesome to hold on to the physical."

"Professor!" Hermione exclaimed. "I've been hearing your... calls for help, and I've been trying ever since to find a way to help you!" She shrugged and opened her hands and hated the sound of defeat in her voice. "I don't know how."

She expected a sneer or a clipped smirk at best at her admission and maybe some sarcastic remarks. What she did not expect was the smile he offered. "Trust. Trust your heart, Hermione. That is all it takes."

He looked haggard, she noticed, but the once seemingly permanent sneer was absent, and so was the ever-engrained sarcasm. The look he cast her was a mixture of contentedness and sorrow.

"That's all it takes?" Hermione asked, voice heavy with disbelief. "I've used Arithmancy for calculations, and while I'm nowhere near a solution, I think I've made some progress. I have managed to coax the music into playing to heal a little boy and Gilderoy Lockhart, but I still have no idea how I did it."

His smile was bordering on a smirk. "You may have no idea how, but what matters is that you succeeded, no?" He raised his eyebrow. "You have your entire life ahead of you. Plenty of time to figure out the details. For now, allow yourself to simply be."

Hermione awoke with a start, the last words of her former professor ringing through her mind. *Allow yourself to simply be...*

A weak winter sun was slowly rising above the horizon when Lyra finally turned around to face Narcissa and Lucius. "He's pulling through for now. I don't know for how long, but it looks like he's here for another day at least."

"We'll take it day by day, then," Narcissa whispered, relief washing over her in such strong waves it was nearly painful. She let herself fall onto the sofa, exhausted from anguish as well as lack of sleep.

Lucius, looking as tired as she felt, plopped down next to her. "Lyra, I don't think we can ever thank you enough."

Lyra waved her arm dismissively. "Don't be daft. That's what I'm here for." She smiled at the couple before turning to check on her patient. "He is stable for now, so I'll go home and catch up on some sleep. Maybe you two should do the same." With a last smile and friendly gesture, she disappeared into the fireplace.

Lucius eyed his wife. "As tired as I am, I think a bite to eat wouldn't be amiss. Join me?"

"Yes!" Narcissa realised she hadn't eaten since parting with Hermione the evening before. As if in agreement, her stomach growled, eliciting a laugh from Lucius.

"Come, love. Let's find something edible in that kitchen of yours." He pulled her up from the sofa.

Narcissa checked once more on Severus. His temperature was back to normal and his breathing shallow. "Please be well, Severus," she whispered before turning to join Lucius for breakfast.

Hermione smiled as she read the parchment, recognising the familiar writing.

Hermione,

You can't expect us to believe that you'll enjoy spending Christmas all by yourself, so we've decided to come and pick you up on Christmas Eve and take you to the Leaky Cauldron, and afterwards, we'll all go to the Burrow together. Don't worry one bit about presents, your company is all we want, and we know what you're like when you're in the middle of researching something.

Be ready on Christmas Eve, around five. 'No' is not an option.

Love,

Harry

Ron

It would be nice to see her best friends again, and Christmas at the Burrow had always been fun. "Hang on a sec, would you?" she asked the owl who perched on the backrest of a chair. The creature hooted and patiently waited while the witch grabbed a quill and ink.

Once the owl flew off with her reply, Hermione decided it was time for a day of shopping for presents. She'd go to the wizarding quarter in Inverness to find gifts for Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Molly, and maybe to Muggle London to find something for Arthur.

Hermione wrapped herself in winter clothes and Apparated from the front of her cottage straight to a quiet alley near the wizarding quarter. She smiled as the lively atmosphere engulfed her in a warm greeting. Diagon Alley might be the biggest wizarding quarter in Britain, but Inverness was by far the more sophisticated, elegant one.

She entered *The Wizarding Scholar* first, indulging in a selfish moment, knowing perfectly well there was nothing to be found for either Harry or Ron. But the shop had a café in its midst where she'd be able to peruse books and enjoy a cup of coffee, the ideal start to a day that might well turn into a chore.

It wasn't her first visit, but the content of the musical section was certainly new. She found herself hard put to choose from *Robert Fludd...The Life of a Wizard Genius*, Alana Lohengrin's *Chasing the Music of the Spheres...Historic Occurrences*, and Cicero's *Musica Universalis and its Mathematical Connection*. One title elicited a snicker: *Johannes Kepler...The Man who Outbrighted Fludd*. The image of her former Arithmancy professor came to her mind, and she thought, *Take that, Professor Vector! It might be educational.*

As she stood pondering which book to purchase, it suddenly occurred to Hermione just how sparsely she'd been spending money since she'd moved to the cottage. She

grabbed all four books. *Sod it. I can afford it, after all!*

At *Quidditch for the Advanced Sportswizard*, Hermione didn't take long to find appropriate presents for Harry, Ron, and Ginny.

Once out on the street again, Hermione looked around. Her eyes fell on a window displaying dining ware and kitchen gadgets, and she slowly headed for it. Molly's present might be easier to find than she'd anticipated. *Culina Magica* read the vividly purple sign above the door. Hermione's eyes widened as she entered. It was a culinary witch's paradise. From books about cookery and kitchen charms to self-sharpening knives, from Always-Clean-Plates to paper-thin slicers for those who liked to make their own crisps, from recipe collection parchments to never-burning-ovens, everything a witch could imagine was there, and a few things unimaginable, such as the egg-lover's three-eggs-a-day laying hen. The bird, Hermione thought, looked more like a piece of decoration than a live animal.

In the end, she settled for a self-cleaning bamboo cutting board for Molly, herself intrigued by the magic imbued on it; ten seconds after its being used, it turned pristine again. It also came with a life-time guaranty, which would please Molly no end.

The sun was setting quickly by the time Hermione Apparated back to the cottage, and the temperature had dropped significantly. The air smelled strongly of snow, accentuated by a sharp, cutting breeze, and Hermione hurried inside.

She cast one warming charm after another as she walked through the house into the kitchen to deposit her goods on the table. Then she headed to the living room to light a fire. As soon as the fire sprang up, she added an extra log, no doubt that the ground would be covered in snow soon.

Reflecting on the day, Hermione sat down at the kitchen table to wrap her purchases. She'd reached the last one...Molly's...when the bass rumbled. A shiver ran down her spine.

"Are you ready?" The giant had once again appeared out of nowhere and stretched his hand out in invitation. His face held a solemn expression. "If not now, it may be too late, young one." The tone of his voice was sombre.

Hermione felt the blood leave her face. "It's Professor Snape, isn't it?" Upon his nod, she whispered, "I have no idea if I can do it, but I could never forgive myself if I didn't try my best."

Deceptive Cadence

Chapter 10 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Deceptive Cadence

When words leave off, music begins

Heinrich Heine

Hermione took a deep breath, met the giant's eyes once more and then, with determination, grabbed his proffered hand.

When they slowed down and Malfoy Manor appeared, Hermione shuddered, painful memories invading her mind. She had no eyes for the stark beauty the carefully manicured grounds presented with an eerily glowing snow cover against black trees and the night sky.

"Do not think of those days," the giant advised in his gentle voice. "Clear your memory of unpleasantness and concentrate on what your task is."

Hermione met his eyes. "Yeah. Not like you're asking much," she muttered.

The giant graced her with a benign smile and remained silent.

"You're joking!" They'd landed on one of the balconies of Malfoy Manor. Hermione began to shiver as images of torture, memories of the shrieking cackle of Bellatrix Lestrange, and her own despair washed over her.

The giant shook his head. "Have you ever known me to joke?" His even gaze met her eyes. "I am aware you experienced pain in this very house. But since then you learned that it was not at Malfoy's instigation that you were tortured, and what's more, you've made friends with the lady of the house. I am under the impression that you have, indeed, forgiven the Malfoys for playing the part they did during those dark days. It is the Malfoys who have been looking after the professor all this time. Look inside."

She followed his eyes and gasped, her own misery instantly forgotten. An elderly woman, probably a Healer, was firing spells at Snape, who lay unconscious in a large bed. Narcissa was sobbing, and Lucius, holding her tightly with one hand, was brushing tears off his own face with the other.

"No! He can't die! But what can I—" Hermione stopped mid-sentence, for the bass was piping up again, reminding her of its presence with a timbre both loud and clear.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you! She was none the wiser as to what to do, but the presence of the sound reassured her, and its never-before heard volume instilled hope.

The cellos arrived as one, playfully dancing around the contrabass before inviting more strings by rising to a higher pitch.

When the violas joined in the blithe banter, Hermione realised she and the giant had crossed through the physical barrier of the window into the room. She found herself standing near Narcissa, but never noticed her friend's incredulous, "Hermione! It is you?"

She knew the violins would join shortly and wondered momentarily. Would they play? Would they mourn?

Immense relief washed over her as the violins danced in with a crescendo that promised nothing but joy.

Snape moved, and Narcissa let out a cry of surprise.

Contrabass, with its deep tones, pledged a return to life, and cellos reinforced the declaration. Violas and violins spoke of delight and called for more.

The horns strutted in like kings, turning the hope and promise to reassurance, eliciting a smile from Hermione.

Snape's eyes fluttered open, and he turned his head, looking around.

Narcissa stared at him with wide eyes. Lucius's mouth dropped open, and the Healer smiled.

Flutes chirped approval, and Hermione locked eyes with the man.

Piano! Piano, I need you...

She arrived in a most deceptive manner with tones so low they could have been mistaken for bass, only to abruptly change to a high pitch, chirruping like a piccolo. But then, the chromatic scale from high to low left absolutely no doubt of her identity nor of the extent of her magic.

The piano's tune slowly changed into an intriguing tale of fighting, then survival, and finally, rejoicing in the delight of life.

Snape offered a lopsided smile.

The piano, now dancing the lure of a rumba, seducing her listeners to live, charming them to return to the earthly pleasures of life, amplified the tempo, inviting the harp, who arrived promptly as if he'd been waiting.

His greeting, an arpeggio from lowest to highest C, flowed into the room like a most graceful danseur. Another, moving to a lower pitch, commanded the piano to rejoin. Her happiness was expressed in a cheerful dance of major chords, which strings were readily joining.

Hermione listened raptly as this symphony unfolded its layers of joy and pleasure. Snape, she noticed, was sitting up now, as if about to get out of bed from a night's sleep. Lucius was still holding Narcissa tightly to himself, as if preventing her from running towards Snape.

Eventually, the symphony announced its final cadence with a roaring crescendo, which quieted only gradually. As the last tone rang out, Hermione swayed, feeling exhausted. The last she saw was Lucius turn to her and hurry towards her, but she never knew he caught her before she hit the floor.

Lucius only just caught her, inches from the floor. "Merlin, girl, that was the greatest act of magic I've ever witnessed!" He turned to his wife. "Cissy, get Severus some water, would you?" Then he turned to his awoken friend. "Severus." They locked eyes until there was a knock on the window.

Before Lucius even reacted, the giant pulled the old hag through the window, ignoring the density of the glass.

"Hector," the hag rasped, "I'm done here." She sounded tired, defeated even. "Take me home, please."

The giant bestowed a smile on her. "You've done better than anyone could have hoped for, you wondrous creature, you." He pointed at the dark wizard who sat up in bed, silently watching the scene in front of him. "If you hadn't turned up when you did, Hermione would not have succeeded. Yes, my work here is done as well. I'll take you home." He stretched out his hand in an inviting gesture. The old witch took it, giving him a watery smile, and together, they faded out of the visible realm.

After a long silence, Severus smirked lightly and moved to the side of the bed without effort. He patted his hand on the space beside him. "Lay her down here so the Healer can take a look at her."

"Yes," Lucius confirmed and carefully put the young witch next to his friend, who promptly put his hand on her forehead. "Lyra has been looking after you for the past eighteen months or so."

"She's cold. Put another log or two on the fire, would you?" Then he looked at the blond with an incredulous expression. "WHAT?"

Lucius cast a warming spell over Hermione and turned to tend to the fire. "What, what, Severus?"

"Eighteen months, you said?"

"Indeed, my friend. We never gave up hope completely for you, of course, but there were moments recently when we feared checking on you after some sleep..."

Narcissa sat down on the bed, stroking the young witch. "Hermione," she whispered. "Please wake up so I know you're all right."

"You..." Severus swallowed heavily. "You and Cissy actually looked after me all this time?"

"Well, Lyra helped us a lot. She is a wonderful Healer." Lucius's eyes met Lyra's and then turned to Narcissa. "Let her take a look at Hermione."

The Healer rushed to the bed. "Severus! Oh, Merlin, never have I seen a happier sight!" Her attention turned to the witch beside him. "I take it you know her?" She looked questioningly at Narcissa, who'd stood up to allow Lyra closer.

"We've become friendly over the past month or so." *That's what the old hag—witch—meant!* Narcissa swallowed. "I should have known, really, or at least connected the dots..." She shook her head. "It was she who brought the music to heal Severus."

Lyra had already started casting diagnostic spells on the recumbent witch, clucking now and then. Finally, she looked up with a sombre face. "Her magic is depleted. Badly. She needs all the rest she can get." She went silent for a few moments. "I want to check out Severus, and then we can consider the options for Hermione."

A/N: Reviews make authors write more.

Dissonance

Chapter 11 of 12

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Dissonance

Without music, life would be a mistake

Friedrich Nietzsche

Lyra left shortly after she'd cast every conceivable diagnostic spell at least twice on Severus, who was surprisingly good-natured about the attention. For the first time since he could remember, he felt not only wide awake but energetic and truly well, both physically and mentally. The last remainder of mental anguish had evaporated upon hearing the news that the Dark Lord was gone, his death caused by his own reverberated Killing Curse, with not even the remotest chance of a comeback.

Lyra had suggested the best action for recovering Hermione's magic would be a few days of light sleep, which Narcissa instantly agreed to take care of.

"Feeling hungry, Sev?" Narcissa asked, back on the bed to keep a close eye on Hermione, who hadn't stirred.

Severus regarded her. "A little, I suppose. A cup of tea would be heavenly. I can't say *missed* it, obviously, but, yes, I'd love that." He smirked at her.

Narcissa smiled and turned to Lucius. "Will you stay here while I go and prepare something to eat for us all? You must be hungry, too, love."

Lucius stood up and pulled a chair near the bed. "Yes, splendid idea. How about an omelette with morels? I saw your order arrived from France this morning." His grin was smug.

Narcissa laughed. "You've read my mind." She left Hermione in the two wizards' care to prepare some nourishment and tea.

It was early morning when Lucius finally gave in to the yawns calling for sleep. "Are you going to be all right?" he asked Severus.

"I slept for eighteen months, according to the two of you, so I'm sure I can stay awake for a few hours. And even if I do fall asleep, it won't harm Hermione."

"No," Narcissa agreed. "She'll be fine. I doubt she'll move, let alone wake up." She'd renewed the sleeping charm only an hour ago.

Light dawned on the horizon as the couple made its way to the bedroom. Lucius smiled at his wife. "Happy Solstice, darling."

Narcissa regarded him with wide eyes. "I hadn't even realised." Then she smiled. "And what a happy one it is! I didn't dare dream Severus would wake up, let alone be so well!" Wistfully, she added, "Hermione will be fine, won't she?"

"Yes, love. She'll be all right."

Lyra came by the next day, checking on Severus and Hermione. She was happy with Severus; although his gait was slightly awkward, it was more due to not having used his legs in over a year rather than lack of strength.

Casting diagnostic spells on Hermione, she frowned. "Her magic is still as depleted as last night. No change at all," she murmured.

"She's not moved either," Severus said. "Do you know whether I was the first to be healed by the music?"

"No, you weren't, from what I understand. There was a boy who was healed with music a few weeks back, and then, of course, there was Gilderoy Lockhart. That case even got the Unspeakables' attention."

Severus nodded. "And I suppose the only reason they haven't turned up here is because she hasn't regained consciousness. Are you in contact with Lockhart?"

Lyra shook her head. "No. I left St Mungo's years ago. I preferred to focus on the less conventional methods of healing than St Mungo's approved of." She met Severus's grin with an almost mischievous smile.

"Are you saying Lockhart might be able to help?" Narcissa asked sharply. "See, when that boy, Jonathan, turned up in the *Prophet's* headlines, I saw Severus move for the first time. Lucius didn't believe me, but I know what I saw. So my guess is all the ones healed by the music might be connected in one way or another."

"Yes, I was thinking along those lines," Severus admitted. He peeled himself out of the covers and moved carefully towards the end of the bed without disturbing Hermione.

The moment he'd left she started to whimper. Narcissa was at her side in an instant. "Shshshsh, Hermione, all is well." She placed a hand on her forehead. It felt hot suddenly, and the horror of the night she had thought Severus would die hit her with full force. "Luce," she choked. "Do something."

Lyra cast calming charms, but Hermione continued her whimpering until Severus returned. The moment he took up residence next to her again, she calmed down, let out a shuddering sigh, and returned to simply breathing.

Lyra and Narcissa both regarded the dark wizard.

"There is a connection," Narcissa observed.

"I'll go and find Lockhart," Lyra offered, standing up and heading for the fireplace.

"Sev. Do you feel a connection of any sort?" Narcissa asked.

"For crying out loud, Cissy, she saved my life, yes? It would be obscene to not feel a connection!"

She ignored his sneer and suppressed the smile that threatened upon seeing the old Severus return. "I'm merely wondering what... all this entails. Ideally, I'd like to see her awake and well rather than unconscious, you know."

"You say that about a Muggle-born?" His tone was incredulous.

Narcissa sighed. "Yes, Severus. You have no idea how much has happened since the day the Dark...since Voldemort!...was defeated. One of the many things I've learned is to not judge anyone by race. And Hermione is a remarkable witch, whom I've come to not only respect but also have the honour of calling my friend."

Severus smirked at her. "Who'd have thought, eh? Cissy Black makes friends with a Muggle-born know-it-all... Whatever is next on the agenda, I wonder."

"I don't know about you, but I'm going to bring the tree in and decorate it. It is Yule, after all!"

Narcissa filled her friend in on what had happened in the wizarding world since Nagini had bitten him, occasionally interrupted by easy banter, as Severus watched her casting spells to beautify the tree into a piece of art worthy of a Malfoy. When Lucius entered, he admired the result, taking his wand out. "No Yule tree without fairy lights," he murmured and charmed the lights to half in size and double in number and spelled them to twinkle subtly. Then his attention turned to the young, still unconscious witch. "Lyra is visiting Lockhart and will pop in later to let us know what..."

A loud knock at the front door interrupted him. "Who could that be?" Lucius frowned.

"If it's Unspeakables, try to keep them away for a few more days," Severus muttered.

Lucius went to open the door and returned shortly with the Minister of Magic himself.

Shacklebolt's expression turned into a wide smile when he spotted Severus. "Merlin, it really is true, then! When the Department of Mysteries informed me of the music of the spheres playing at Malfoy Manor, I had the riotous hope that you did survive after all, Severus!" He turned to Narcissa. "My apologies, Mrs Malfoy, for turning up completely unannounced, but I decided it would be better if I came here instead of a bunch of Unspeakables."

"I appreciate that, Minister. Given Hermione's current state, I'd rather not have a houseful of strangers to deal with," Narcissa said as she motioned for him to take a seat. "I was about to make some tea; would you care for a cup? Or perhaps something else?"

"Maybe a Scotch?" Lucius offered. "I am about to pour one for myself."

Once everyone had their drink of choice, Narcissa sat down again, sipping her tea as she followed the conversation between the Minister and Severus.

"I really don't know anything else, Kingsley. From what I understand, I spent eighteen months in a coma. Lucius and Narcissa looked after me and employed a Healer by the name of Lyra."

Kingsley looked impressed. "Excellent choice. She's helped the Order several times during the dark days."

The fireplace flared green. "Ah, and here she is," Lucius said as Lyra stepped into the room.

She looked at Kingsley in surprise. "Minister! I didn't expect to see you here!"

"No need for formalities, Lyra," Kingsley said, smiling at her. "I figured it would be less traumatising if I arrived on my own. The Department of Mysteries is incredibly excited over the music of the spheres, as you can imagine."

"Yes. And you can tell your Unspeakables they are not to contact Hermione until I give the all clear, and that won't be this year," Lyra said and turned to her patient, already firing various diagnostic spells and soon clucking and tutting. She took a deep breath before turning to Narcissa. "I detect some magic, but nowhere near enough. If she recovers at this rate, it'll be a year or more before she regains all her magic. Now, I don't know her circumstances. Does she have someone to look after her?"

Two wizards and one witch answered simultaneously, one with "I will," the other two with "We will."

Lyra smiled. "Good. I'm hoping that bringing Gilderoy Lockhart tomorrow will help her some. On the other hand, of course, I have no idea how one who's been healed by the music can coax it to play. But we'll see."

She turned to Severus, but only cast a few spells this time. "Healthy as a horse, my dear." She straightened. "I'll take my leave then."

Hermione felt the music more than heard it. A soft contrabass brushed her skin, gentle cellos followed with warmth, and violas and violins joined in tender strokes, as if coaxing her out of some dilemma, providing the answer to an unasked question. The French horn and a lone English horn put forward a serene calm that blended with the strings in absolute perfection.

The harp waltzed in, twirling with the piano in an elegant and jubilant dance.

Hermione stirred and sighed. She suddenly comprehended why Lockhart had reacted to the music the way he had; the infusion of pure, unadulterated joy made her to never, ever want to shout at anyone, let alone put her own wishes before others'.

The strings had gradually withdrawn in favour of the harp and piano's magnificent entrance, but were now starting again in the same gentle, soft, calming tones, bringing the dance of delight to a crescendo that left her entire body tingling.

"Oh, she's moving," someone near her whispered. Hermione frowned. The person, a male by the sound of it, seemed to speak reverently about her. Or maybe he was talking about someone else. Maybe she was dreaming.

Then, a voice she recognised. "Hermione, would you do us the honour of waking up, please?" *Professor Snape! Either he's alive, or I'm dead.*

"Well, I'll be on my way then," the previously whispering voice said, now in a normal volume. "So glad it worked. And good to see you alive and well, Severus."

There was a commotion of scratching chairs and other voices that quickly faded into the distance.

Hermione felt a hand on her forehead. "Come on now, Hermione. Surely, four days of sleep should suffice, don't you think?"

Alive, then, she thought in wonder and finally opened her eyes.

"Ah, better late than never. Welcome back to the world, Miss Granger." He sounded more like the Potions master of her school days now.

"It sounded much nicer when you called me Hermione," she said, voice heavy with sleep and slightly raspy.

"Hermione, then." He removed his hand from her head, and she felt the loss acutely.

Turning away from him, Hermione glanced at Narcissa.

"Merlin, Hermione," she whispered. "I was so worried you wouldn't wake up."

Hermione's arms stretched out of their own accord and within a moment, she embraced her friend in a resounding hug that returned the joy delivered with the music.

A/N: Reviews feed the muse.

"Ah, music. A magic beyond all we do here!" Hermione had long forgotten the fateful words Dumbledore had uttered at the end of her first Welcoming Feast when they proved true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

La 852 Hz Returning to Spiritual Order

No, a symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything.

Jean Sibelius

Hermione sighed. She'd been tossing and turning for hours now, and sleep was nowhere near.

When she'd been well enough to leave, neither Narcissa nor Lucius would hear of it. "No, darling, you cannot possibly return to the wilderness up there and have us Apparate hundreds of miles every time we worry about you!" Narcissa had pointed out, then added, "Look, we have more space here than we could ever use, so pick a room and at least stay until the new year."

The room was beautiful, Hermione admitted, but had it been up to her, she'd never have left the one she'd woken up in. The bond they'd formed was subtle but ever-present. She wondered if he was asleep.

I could go and check, and if he's asleep, I'll just come back here... she thought and sighed. Now that the idea was there, she definitely wouldn't go to sleep until she knew whether he was awake or not.

He felt her approach before he heard her bare feet tap over the wooden floor.

"Severus?" she whispered.

"Yes, Hermione, I'm awake." He grinned at her sigh of relief and grabbed the wand on the side table to light a few candles.

She stood next to his bed now, worrying her lip. "... I couldn't sleep, and I'm feeling restless, and I was wondering if you were awake, so I figured I'd check."

"And found me awake. You may as well sit down and cover your feet with the quilt so you don't catch death," he muttered, but his hand patting the pillow next to him belied his grudging tone.

She flew into the familiar space and instantly stretched her ice-cold feet into the covers. "Thank you." Once she was comfortable, her back resting against the headboard and her feet rapidly warming after he'd silently cast a warming charm, she started, "I have a strange feeling. It's the same sensation that preceded the other occurrences of the music playing to heal someone. But it... the giant always appeared and took me to wherever the person in need of healing was. I don't think he'll come now." She sounded dejected and hopeless and helpless, and all he wanted was to take her into his arms and chase her worries away.

He would have acted upon it had the contrabass not intervened. His head perked up at the same time as hers.

"Hear that?" They'd asked at the same time, and both smiled.

"The cello will follow," she whispered, and as if on cue, a cello gently entered with soothing tones.

She locked eyes with him then, and they gazed at each other until violas interrupted.

"It's somewhere in St Mungo's." Her voice was still a whisper. "Would... would you come with me?"

The plea and trust in her eyes threatened to derail him, but now was not the time. "Naturally," he said gruffly. "I'd hate to see you end up spending New Year's Eve in a hospital. Narcissa would never forgive me." He added a sneer for good measure.

"Ever so helpful and pleasant," Hermione said lightly as she moved her feet onto the floor and stood up.

He followed her and stopped when she cast a questioning glance his way. "St Mungo's, then. I don't know if you're strong enough to Apparate on your own." He proffered his hand, and she took it and smiled.

To her surprise, Gilderoy Lockhart was standing in front of the building. "Oh, thank goodness you're here! I heard the music, so I followed a hunch to come here and then wasn't quite sure when I didn't find you."

The violins piped up and ushered the three inside and up the stairs. One floor, two floors, three floors...

And the universe laid out its symphony before them. Earth was rumbling in the low tones of a double bass, simultaneously warning and inviting. Mars played along in low-key strings of the cellos, and Moon and Jupiter added the higher registers of violas and violins. Mercury and Saturn competed for first violin in a duet so skilfully, and joyfully, delivered, it soon became clear that only both could rise as winners and would have to settle with two first violins in this orchestra.

Venus danced into the performance with the piano, and the strings moved to the background, clearing the stage for a spectacular solo.

The Seven Sisters joined with their heavenly choir, met by Andromeda's deeper rumble in a sea of tenors. Orion threw his spear, the clarinet, a single clear note that ascended into the sublime. And finally, Neptune joined in with the resounding tones of the harp, playing arpeggios from low to high to low in a playful conversation with Venus.

Tears ran down Hermione's face unnoticed as she watched the first lucid communication between Neville's parents in two decades.

"Frank?"

"Alice?"

"Do you feel like there's some lost time?"

"Yeah, for sure." Frank's eyes widened.

"Merlin, Frank. We missed bringing up our Neville!" Alice started to cry.

He embraced her. "We did, didn't we? And yet, he's always been loyal to us, visiting whenever he could."

"And your poor mum! Not only did she bring up our child but she's visited every single day since we ended up here!" Then, with a wistful smile, she added, "I wonder how many Blowing Gum wrappers our boy has collected over the years." Alice met her husband's eyes again. "You know, we should be proud of him. So proud. He killed Nagini!"

Frank hugged her. "Yeah. I remember him telling us that," he said into her hair. "What a great wizard we brought into life, eh?"

"Didn't we just! Oh, remind me to deal with Uncle Algie when we see him. He should~~not~~ have done that!"

Hermione swayed, but all Severus had to do was tighten his arm that was already resting around her shoulders. He frowned when he looked at her tear-stricken face. "We're done here, yes? Shall we leave?"

"Take... please take me home." Her plea was interrupted by sobs.

Lockhart put a hand on her shoulder. "Hermione. Get some rest. If you need anything, anything at all, an owl will find me." He waved at Severus and Disappeared.

"Come. I'll take you home." Severus was holding her tightly with both arms now.

"Not to the manor. I need to go home to my cottage." Sobs interrupted her, and she impatiently waved an arm. "I need to get used to being alone again, and I have research to do. I felt so much at home when I was staying in *your* bed, but I know it's wrong to get used to that." She once more gave in to her misery, sobbing her heart out. "And Harry and Ron must be terribly worried because I was supposed to meet them at the cottage on Christmas Eve, and it's nearly New Year's Eve!" She was positively wailing now.

He patted her shoulder awkwardly. "For what it's worth, Cissy figured you'd made plans to spend the holidays there, so she had Kingsley send an owl to the Burrow explaining that you were busy with important things and would get in contact once you're done, so stop worrying." His heart reeled when she cast a grateful glance at him. "And as to home, do you seriously think I'll leave you alone? I saw...and felt...Narcissa's anguish when you were out cold for four days after you healed me. I have no doubt there'll be a fire lit to warm the room at the manor, and probably tea charmed to stay hot, but if you really prefer your cottage, I'll take you there."

Her tears had stopped when she met his gaze again. "In that case, take me wherever you're willing to stay with me. Sod the tea. I need sleep."

Severus lifted the witch into his arms, ready to leave.

"Look, Frank. A new love is blooming." Alice whispered as she tugged her husband's arm, pointing as the couple Disappeared with a pop.

Narcissa smiled at the sight of Severus and Hermione fast asleep in his bed, his arm tugged around her midst. She wondered where they'd gone so early in the morning when Severus opened his eyes.

An owl knocked on the window, and Narcissa walked across to let it in, frowning and wondering who'd be sending a letter so late in the evening. "Sleep well?" she enquired as she opened the parchment.

"Like the dead," Severus muttered. He pulled his arm away from her, ready to rise. "Anything interesting?"

"I suppose it has to do with wherever you went this morning." Narcissa handed him the parchment.

Mrs Malfoy,

This time I won't be able to keep the Unspeakables away. They are keen to meet Hermione as well as Severus and Mr Lockhart after this morning's miraculous healing. I managed to convince them not to turn up at the manor before 4 pm. Sorry about the inconvenience.

Yours,

Kingsley Shacklebolt,

Minister of Magic

"Is the Department of Mysteries after me now?" Hermione asked, yawning.

"Yes, I suppose so. The note is from Kingsley, warning Narcissa that Unspeakables will turn up," Severus said.

Hermione took a deep breath. "I have no idea what to tell them. This whole music experience is overwhelming."

"If it's any consolation, they want to see me and Lockhart as well," Severus said as he finally rose from bed.

Narcissa smiled inwardly when she saw Hermione's expression change to one of relief.

"I'm glad you'll be there," Hermione said. "And I don't care much about Lockhart, but maybe he's got something that escaped my notice."

Severus nodded. "It's a possibility. And stop worrying, Hermione. When Unspeakables come out of the woodwork like that, it's usually for recruitment. So you may have a job that pays you for doing exactly what you want to do. That can't be bad!"

The two Unspeakables had left, as had Lockhart, and Hermione had not said a word. Narcissa and Severus exchanged glances. He shrugged.

Eventually, Narcissa stood. "All right, time to prepare our New Year's Eve dinner." With a look at Lucius, who was preparing drinks for himself and Severus, she addressed Hermione. "Feel free to join me in the kitchen, dear, if the men's company bores you."

Hermione looked up distractedly. "I will in a bit. I think I need some fresh air." She went to fetch her cloak and stepped through the French doors leading into the grounds.

Severus sipped on his cognac and sighed deeply. "So the silly girl's been offered a job doing exactly what she wants to do, with a virtually unlimited budget, a far better pay package than a headmaster at Hogwarts could dream of, as much staff as she wants, choice of location, and she doesn't say a word." He sounded frustrated.

Lucius nodded knowingly. "Yes, the species is called women, Sev." He smirked at Severus's raised eyebrow. "Joking aside, I think she is simply overwhelmed. I don't know her as well as Cissy does, which isn't all that much, but from what I've observed, Hermione is not only a remarkable witch but also a very humble one."

"Yes. Yes, I think you're right." Severus took another sip.

"You like her." It was not a question. "She likes you, too. I think you would make a good match, Severus. Think about it. If she accepts the Department's offer...and she'd be silly not to...you'll be working side by side."

"I'm too old for her," Severus replied. "Besides, how could I be sure that it's not just this strange bond we've formed because she healed me? It's too risky."

Lucius didn't suppress the snicker. "And you call *her* silly? Lyra must have missed the fact that the long coma addled your brain." Then he turned serious. "Severus, don't be a dunderhead. You've fallen for her like I fell for Cissy the second time we met. I can tell you one thing. Without experiencing this love, no matter how short- or long-lived it is, life wouldn't be worth living." He shook his friend's shoulders. "Go, find her. Talk to her. Here, take my cloak." A silent *Accio* floated the desired garment straight

at Severus.

He wrapped the cloak around himself and headed outside. Entirely unappreciative of Lucius's choice of aftershave, he cast a silent *Scourgify* while looking for the witch.

She was standing on the edge of the lawn, her head bent upwards, staring at a starry-lit sky. When he approached, she turned towards him. "Severus." She offered a hesitant smile. "I'm sorry I rushed out like that. I'm," she sighed, "I'm overwhelmed I suppose."

"What do you think you'll do?" he asked quietly.

She laughed helplessly. "How can I not accept their offer? It's a dream come true. There is so much to find out, so much that needs documenting about the music, and," she met his eyes, "I like the idea of working closely with you. That is, of course, if you accept their offer."

His heart soared to unknown heights when she cast a hopeful glance. "I think I might be very tempted to accept. Provided, of course, you do the same," he murmured. His feet had carried him closer to her out of their own accord.

Her face lit up. "Really? I'm so glad." Then she looked away. "I was worried you'd hate the idea of working with me," she said quietly.

His fingers turned her chin towards him until her eyes met his again. "There is nothing I hate about you, Hermione. On the other hand... there is a lot I like. Such as having you sleep next to me. Or spending waking hours discussing interesting subjects with you. Or watching you eat. I like the way you daintily take each bite and appreciate it with such gusto."

Hermione swallowed heavily. "Really?" She sounded disbelieving, but now was the moment to convince her of the truth of his words.

"Really." Their faces inched closer and closer until his lips met hers. Soft lips gently caressed each other until a tongue lightly requested entry.

His arm stayed around Hermione's shoulder when they entered Narcissa's kitchen.

"Ah, just in time. Dinner is nearly ready!" Lucius stood leaning against the Welsh dresser as Narcissa efficiently sprinkled arugula leaves with balsamic vinegar followed by olive oil.

"There. Luce, if you could direct the dishes onto the dining room table, I'll get the plates and cutlery."

Lucius and Severus floated the dishes to the dining room while Narcissa opened the cupboards to choose plates.

"I attempted that mushroom dish we made at your cottage. I have no idea how it came out," Narcissa said and handed Hermione an armful of plates.

"Oh, that's wonderful! I'm sorry I didn't join you earlier."

Narcissa interrupted her search for cutlery and smiled at Hermione. "Do I detect some particular happiness, darling? I hope the two of you will be very happy!"

Hermione blushed. "Thank you. I didn't know I was missing anything, but life seems more complete right now."

"Oh, I'm sure it is. Lucius and I have been together for well over twenty years, and we still enjoy each other every single day. A little bit of give and take goes a long way."

The two witches headed for the dining room to have the last meal of the year, ready to enjoy, to indulge in the pleasure of a marriage between vegetables and meats and herbs and spices that Narcissa had created with love and great skill.

When everyone had finished eating, Lucius addressed Hermione and Severus. "So, any ideas yet as to your future? You are accepting their offer, aren't you?"

Severus nodded slightly at Hermione, and she answered, "Yes. It would be really silly not to. Initially, I planned to take off a year to research the music, but I've been doing it for nearly six months, and no matter how ambitious I feel about it, even if I did manage to work twenty-four hours a day, a year is nowhere near enough. I feel more like it is a life-time project, even more so given how little is documented about the music of the spheres."

Severus put a hand on her arm. "It'll be easier from now on. You won't be alone." His heart lurched when she smiled and answered in the affirmative.

Lucius exchanged a glance with his wife.

"I know it's early days yet, but do you have any plans as to where you'll be living?" Narcissa asked. "And, please, nothing would please us more than both of you deciding to stay here! The manor is big enough to offer plenty of privacy, and we could easily give you an entire wing."

"Thank you. I don't quite know what to say to that generous offer!" Hermione said and then added, "I have the cottage until June. I very much enjoyed living there. There is nothing like rolling out of bed and picking mushrooms for breakfast in front of your door." She smiled as memories of many mushroom forays entered her mind. "Of course, once the temperature dropped, I had to make sure to remember to cast Warming Charms. But being able to simply walk outside and be one with nature was priceless, really..."

"Ah, yes, *the* cottage. Cissy has been waxing lyrical ever since she visited you. So, I figured if..." Lucius's hand went inside his robes to pull out a piece of paper...Muggle paper, "...I purchased it for you, we might have a chance of visiting every now and then." He handed the paper to Hermione, smirking.

Hermione looked at it, her eyes widening as she read on. "You... Oh, Merlin!" It was the deed to the cottage. She met Severus's eyes. "Severus. What do I do?"

He smirked. "Just say thank you, like any well-mannered witch would do."

"Thank you," she whispered, eliciting happy laughter from the Malfoys and Severus.

Bells started ringing a distance away. "Happy New..." Narcissa's words died in her throat as the contrabass piped up, announcing the galactic orchestra's entrance to bring in the new year with a greeting of joy and hope.

The performance, dedicated to those present in the manor, brought forth primarily joy but also temperance, sheer happiness, restraint, and a reminder of the abundance of love.

The manor was silent for long minutes after the last tones...pristine interaction between piano and harp...had rung out.

"Happy New Year," Hermione said in a small voice.

Severus turned to her and pulled her close. "Happy New Year, love." His head bent towards her, and her lips readily embraced his.

Lucius locked lips with Narcissa until a pop announced the arrival of champagne on the table. He slowly stood to uncork the Veuve Cliquot and pour four glasses.

He lifted his own, looked from one to the next, and said, "May the rest of this year continue the way it started."

On New Year's Day, Hermione returned to the cottage with Severus. When she entered, it felt just like the early days: exciting, exhilarating, homey.

"It's beautiful, Hermione. But you know we don't have to stay here if you don't want to. Malfoy Manor will always be open to us, and we also have the choice to live within the Ministry."

Hermione scoffed. "Really, that last option isn't an option. I want real light in my life, not some magically created light during daytime hours." She sighed. "I actually like it here. It is where I encountered you first." She shuddered lightly as the memory of his cries washed over her.

He wrapped his arms around her and rested his chin on her head. "Then, perhaps, we should consider enhancing the place. We can expect regular visits from other Unspeakables as well as Lockhart. And we should consider adding a second bedroom so Narcissa and Lucius can stay here."

"And maybe add a fireplace to every room so we don't freeze. Although," her eyes danced with mischief when she faced him, "if it's cold, we'd have a perfect excuse to stay in bed."

"What a splendid idea," he murmured, and slowly, arms still entangled in each other's, they walked towards the bedroom.

A/N: Most grateful thanks to my friends who helped tremendously by offering concrit and giving encouragement all the way: Ariadne for providing the amazing idea of Hermione hearing and then researching the music of the spheres; Debjunk, without whose musical expertise and pertinent questions this wouldn't be what it is; witchywoman for the initial beta; machshefa for rearranging my thoughts in the right order in a moment of panic; mollyssister, stefdarlin, and kittylefish for cheerleading at various moments of writing; Lucius, my Muse; and last, but most important, annietalbot for the final beta-read.

According to history, Pythagoras was the first to discover the music of the spheres. Plato, Cicero, and much later Kepler drew on the original material, or what was still available, to further investigate the music. There is some school of thought that Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven knew more about the music of the spheres than other composers. Jamie James, in his book, *Music of the Spheres*, goes into some detail in that regard as well as into the idea that the music plays a part in modern rock/pop. Personally, I drew most of the inspiration from Mozart's *Requiem* (Dresden Semper Oper recording) and Sibelius's *Violin Concerto* (Hilary Hahn's recording).

Reviews are music.