

Vendetta

by kyriaofdelphi

Viktor Krum is being accused of collaborating with the Dark Lord during the second Wizard War. Several old friends begin an investigation into the unfounded accusations.

The Whole Story

Chapter 1 of 1

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Libel

Harry Potter walked into Kingsley Shacklebolt's office holding a copy of the latest issue of the *Daily Prophet*.

"Have you seen this? It is another unfounded rumour about Krum. Who is doing this? I want to get to the bottom of it. May I take Alastor with me? I may need to talk to some of the Quidditch teams as well. I'll get Gin to see who on the English teams might know something."

Kingsley took the paper and clenched it in his fist. "This is libel, Harry. Anyone who fought in the war knows Viktor was a hero. He worked tirelessly to smuggle Muggle-born children out to safe havens in Bulgaria and fought in the last battle valiantly. Whoever is doing this has a personal vendetta against him. Have you talked to Hermione about it? Send her an owl. Better yet, I'll send her an owl. I don't know what happened between them, but I know she won't take kindly that someone is libelling her husband. She has got to come back and stand by him. We all have to stand by him."

Just then, an agitated Alastor Moody barged into the office holding the same page of the paper.

"What the bloody effing hell are we going to do about this? That boy did nothing wrong and is being vilified in this idiotic rag. I am using the Floo to Bulgaria; you coming with me, Potter?" he asked.

Harry nodded at Kingsley, then followed Alastor to the Floo receptacles in the main hallway. He heard Alastor say 'Viktor Krum residence, Sofia, Bulgaria.'

Harry followed Alastor into the Floo, and they were transported to a rustic house in the foothills outside of Sofia. Viktor was sitting hunched over on the sofa, his head in his hands. He barely looked up when they arrived, but made an effort when he saw Harry.

His voice was strained as he said, "Potter, have you come to arrest me? I have been put on suspension from the team until this is investigated. I am thinking my Quidditch career is finished. Come, both of you. Sit, I will bring coffee."

He disappeared into the kitchen for a few minutes and returned with a carafe of hot water and the makings of Turkish coffee.

Harry sat across from Viktor in the easy chair in front of the fireplace. He desperately wanted to assure his friend that they were there to disprove these scurrilous stories. He cupped the scalding hot cup in his hands and looked directly at his crestfallen friend.

"We didn't come here to arrest you, Vik. We're here to find out who is behind this and stop them. Alastor and I are going to investigate these stories and put a stop to them. We both know what you did in the war, and it sure as hell wasn't collaborating with the Dark Lord. You go get some sleep and let us worry about things for right now. Have you talked to Hermione, or should I ask?"

Just then, the Floo expelled another visitor into the room. Hermione Granger Krum dusted herself off and glared at both Harry and Alastor. "What exactly are you doing to my husband, Harry James Potter? He is innocent of everything in that story. You ought to know that; you helped organize what he did during the war." She went to sit next to Viktor and continued to glare at her old friends.

"Easy, lass, we're here to help him. Harry, Kingsley, and I are determined to find out who and why these libels are being printed and circulated this long after the war. We know what kind of man Viktor is. We just need to remind the rest of the folks that he saved all of the Muggle-born children in England during the war. The fact that he was so modest about it did not help. Now, you get him sobered up and off to bed, and the three of us will put our heads together and figure out just what is what around here," Alastor told her very bluntly.

Hermione relaxed and managed to get Viktor to agree to go back to bed. While she was attending to him, Harry sent a message to Kingsley through the Floo.

"Arrived on scene. Hermione here. Suggest you have Neville bring in the editor of the *Prophet* to ask where he is getting his stories. Will let you know if we find out anything."

Intervention

No sooner had Harry concluded his Floo call than Hermione came back into the room carrying a box. Alastor took the box, and the three went into the kitchen to sit at the breakfast table.

"These articles are simply the latest in a campaign of hate that started years ago, Harry. I thought for a long time that Ron was behind it since I chose Viktor over him after the war. Then these letters started coming. There are things in them that Ron could not possibly have known about. Some of the stuff is from Viktor's childhood, some from his years at Durmstrang. Whoever is doing this has hated him for a very long time. I couldn't stand to see what it was doing to him, and that's why I left. But I didn't want to leave.

"He has been dealing with this since before the Triwizard Tournament. The letters began when he first started playing Quidditch when he was thirteen. They are all here. He was going to burn them, hoping they would stop when we married. They only got worse instead. I love him; I want my marriage back. Help us, please." The tears in her eyes began to slide slowly down her cheeks.

Alastor Moody stood up and told her that he would return in just a few minutes, but he needed to go back to the Ministry for something. He threw Floo Powder into the fireplace and disappeared into the green flames. Harry was appalled at the burden his friends had been carrying for this long.

"Why didn't you come to me before this, Herms? We could have started digging into it back then. Didn't you trust me?" Harry asked.

"Viktor refused to take advantage of our friendship, Harry. You know how stubborn he is. He absolutely refused to let me contact you. He said it was his problem, and he would deal with it. It has been eating at him for fifteen years, and it is only getting worse. He started drinking heavily when I left. He is falling apart. You must find this fiend and show everyone what a truly good person Viktor is. I cannot lose him." Hermione's hands clenched on the front of Harry's shirt in the anger she had repressed for years.

A voice from the doorway made them jump. "No! I pushed you away so you would not be hurt. Harry, get out. Leave me to my misery. I have only one alternative left. Take her and go back to England. I don't want her to see me like this." Viktor was standing in the doorway to the kitchen, looking at his wife with eyes so full of pain that Harry cringed. Harry saw that Viktor was at the end of his rope and was trying to get Hermione away so he could kill himself.

"It won't work, Vik. She loves you too much, and I will not let you do it. We are going to solve this, and you'll get your life back, I swear. Do not even think about doing what is in your mind. I mean it. I'll hex you with a Body Bind so fast you won't know what hit you." Harry made eye contact with Viktor and saw the older man sag in defeat.

Hermione had only just realised what Harry meant; she gasped and began to cry. Viktor moved into the room and gently took his wife into his arms.

"Hush, doushenka, I will not do it. You mean too much to me. I selfishly thought if you were free, everything would be better. Hush, love." His eyes were tired and full of hopelessness, Harry saw.

"Vik, when was the last time you ate anything? I am not the best cook, but I can manage soup. Gin says my soup is wonderful. No, you stay there, Herms. Let me at least make tea." Harry was rambling to keep the other two from remembering what Viktor had been planning.

The noise from the sitting room was Moody and several other people stepping out of the Floo.

Alastor barged into the kitchen leading a motley crew of Harry's friends and relatives. Bill Weasley, Percy Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Poppy Pomfrey, Minerva McGonagall, and Molly Weasley had all come to assist.

Molly quietly took over the kitchen and shooed everyone out into the sitting room. Bill and Percy started in on the letters, separating them into years and months. Minerva subtly cleaned the house. Poppy Pomfrey ran a diagnostic on Viktor and made a list of supplies she would need. Neville was to retrieve potions from Hogwarts. He Flooded out and returned shortly. Poppy handed Viktor a strengthening potion as well as a Dreamless Sleep potion.

"You will take both of them as soon as you have showered, shaved, and eaten something, young man. You and your wife both look like hell. Neville here is going to set up wards to protect your privacy and very strong aversion charms around the whole property. I am going to leave some potions and other medications for you to take.

"I'll be back in a few days to see how you are doing. You are the reason I still have grandchildren. This time, you won't get to shush all of us who owe you a huge debt. And you, young lady, dry those tears and let's get him sussed out properly. You get in there and take a shower with him. That should keep him from getting depressed again; you have to provide the TLC. Keep him happy, Hermione. Things will look much better if he knows you're in this with him."

Clues

Hermione nodded at Poppy and followed Viktor into the bath. She started the water and peeled his clothes off him. As she divested herself of her clothes, he began to talk.

"Are they really going to help? Is this a dream? Oh, my love, I have missed you so much." He was leaning back against the tiles of the shower when she joined him in the warm water.

"It isn't a dream, Viktor. This time that fiend went too far and got Harry Potter all riled up. You should remember that Harry does not abandon his friends, ever. He will get the bloody idiot who hates you. We will be free of this at last. Turn around, I want to wash your hair and your back," she told him.

After they showered, Hermione put an exhausted Viktor to bed and went to stand in the doorway of the kitchen. Harry, Bill, Percy, and Alastor were making copious notes about the early letters.

The significant thing they had found was the date the letters began and that they had been addressed to Viktor at Durmstrang. That was the first clue; a letter a week for the entire time he was at school. No letters dated from his summer vacations. Nevertheless, there were subtle clues within the letters. A reference was made to a meeting Viktor had had with Karkaroff about the school days Viktor had lost during the Quidditch World Cup series.

She was glad they were making progress. Only Minerva had noticed she was there, watching. Her old Head of House smiled and nodded at her, mouthing the words 'Go take care of your husband' at her.

Hermione grinned and walked up the stairs to the bedroom she had shared with Viktor for the nearly seven years of their marriage.

He was, as usual, sleeping on his left side, leaving the area in front of him for her to sleep.

Making a conscious decision, she doffed the heavy robe and crawled into bed, nude. She curled up to his warm body and moved his right arm over her waist. His sleepy voice said, "Herm-own-ninny" as he pulled her back against him. His lips brushed the nape of her neck as he settled back into healing sleep.

Just before she fell asleep, Hermione heard a yelp of triumph from downstairs. It was so like Harry to crow when he found something. She knew the morning would bring more answers.

Downstairs, Harry had narrowed the list of suspects to a handful. It couldn't be Karkaroff because the man was dead. Several of the Durmstrang students who had come to Hogwarts for the Triwizard Tournament year had been killed in the ensuing war; others had joined the Order and were allies now, so they were discounted. Only two names remained: Grigor Poliakoff and Nikita Skvortsov, the young man who had been Karkaroff's assistant.

Bill and Percy had gone back to London to find out all they could about the two suspects. Molly had fixed enough food to feed the Krums for several days while the investigation continued. She, Minerva and Alastor had gone back through the Floo after Bill and Percy. That left Neville and Harry to find beds in the guest rooms upstairs. Harry sent a Patronus message to Ginny, telling her where he was and what he was working on.

Down the hall, not having taken Poppy's Dreamless Sleep potion, Viktor found himself back at Durmstrang the day it had been announced that he was to become the youngest Seeker in professional Quidditch history. There were reporters, his classmates, his parents, Karkaroff and Nikita Skvortsov all in the room with him. Karkaroff had been promising his parents that nothing would happen to Viktor while he was at Durmstrang. His classmates had all been asking him for tickets to games. The reporters had been taking pictures and furiously writing down anything he said, except for a woman reporter. She had been standing in a corner with Karkaroff's assistant, who was staring angrily at Viktor. Something about the woman seemed familiar. Maybe it was her glasses.

The letters had started the following week. Hateful, cutting phrases about Viktor's Quidditch playing and his shyness and his gentleness were all ridiculed. Instead of taking them to his Headmaster, he had hidden them, desperately afraid the letters were true.

In time, he had started to ignore the letters. But when he came to Hogwarts, meeting and falling in love with Hermione, the letters had grown vicious. Hermione had been called a strumpet and a whore, to Viktor's horror. He knew it wasn't true, knew that she loved him. He began to put the letters away unopened after he went back to Bulgaria.

When the letter from his beloved Hermione had come the summer that the Dark Lord took over, Viktor had joined the Order of the Phoenix and taken on the mission to spirit the Muggle-born children out of England to safety in Europe. With Hermione's help, each child was taken at night; a Phoenix feather was the only clue to who had taken them. Only once had Viktor been almost too late to save the child. Death Eaters had broken into the house intent on killing the girl and her parents.

The father had been injured by the time Viktor's group had arrived to thwart the Death Eaters. In a search of the house, the child was discovered under the body of her dead mother in the sitting room. Viktor had been furious with himself that he hadn't been there in time to spare the child that ordeal. Lizzie Lewis had become his favourite of the rescued children. Viktor had fought alongside her father during the Battle of Hogwarts, promising the dying man to always care for the child.

Suspects

When morning finally arrived, Hermione woke to the smell of bacon frying in the kitchen. Viktor was sleeping soundly as she dressed and crept downstairs.

In the brightly lit kitchen, she found two of her oldest friends making breakfast. Neville shyly greeted her and handed her a cup of tea. Harry was looking at the notes from the night before. He showed them to Hermione, asking if she knew anything about either Poliakoff or Skvortsov.

"Poliakoff teaches at Durmstrang now. He is their History of Magic professor. He is a nice man, not capable of this kind of psychological abuse. If I had to guess, it would be Skvortsov. He was always watching us that year. He used to stare at Viktor as if he hated him. I never could figure it out. He gave me the willies. Could it really be him? Oh, Harry, I hope so. I have never, ever seen Viktor so depressed. I was terrified that ... I couldn't live without him.

"I will be eternally grateful to you, all of you, when this is finally over. Tell Gin I'll come see her and the boys, I promise. I'm going back to see about Viktor. He actually slept soundly last night. He did not take that potion, however." She kissed both Harry and Neville on the cheek before going back upstairs with a cup of Viktor's favourite Turkish coffee for him.

He was just waking up when she entered the room. He stretched and sat up, taking the steaming cup from her hands.

"Mmmmm, just as I like it. I guess last night wasn't a dream, after all. You're actually here. Is Harry still here?"

He looked and sounded so much better than yesterday that she almost cried.

"He and Neville are downstairs. Breakfast is ready. Can you eat something?" she asked.

"Not until we talk, Hermione. Are you staying? I need you here, beside me. You said the same vows I did; we are bound together until we die. Will you stay is what I am asking. When you went, so did my resolve. I was going to let him, whoever he is, win at last. Without you, I couldn't face any of it. You know I love you." He was sitting with his back to the headboard. He set the cup aside and patted the bed next to him.

She hesitated only a moment before sitting next to him.

"Viktor, I am staying. But there are terms. I want to adopt Lizzie, and I want a couple of our own, as well. That was what we fought about before I left. I know now that you didn't want to bring Lizzie or a baby into this mess. She misses you. Your parents are frantic. Your teammates have walked off the team when they got word of your suspension. Your mother will probably be here if she can get through Neville's wards." She reached over to kiss him.

"Mmmmm. And where have you been staying these past few weeks, my love? At my parents' house, teaching Lizzie about Hogwarts, I would guess. She is nine going on sixteen and you encourage her. Yes, we will adopt her and have some of our own. Obicham te, Hermione." He pulled her closer and returned the kiss.

As he remembered the dream of the night before, he suddenly asked a question. "Does Harry have access to a Pensieve? I dreamt something last night, a dim memory from a long time ago. It may have a bearing on this."

"Vitya, Harry thinks it may be Nikita Skvortsov behind this. Is that possible? I remember him as being creepy from the Triwizard year, but you knew him better than I did." She wanted to talk to him about this.

"Skvortsov? Yes, he hated me enough. He was a couple of years older than I was. He made advances to me... I told Karkaroff and he said I had misunderstood what he said, but Skvortsov was a pervert. He hated that I found you. He tried to tell me that you were just after my fame. I complained to the Durmstrang governors, and he was let go when we returned after the tournament. I don't know what happened to him." Viktor sat back, thinking if the dream had any other clues. "In my dream, I saw him with a woman with strange glasses. They were at the party when I was named Seeker for Bulgaria. I think she was a reporter."

"Viktor, oh Merlin, Rita Skeeter! Come on, we have to tell Harry." She jumped up from the bed and pulled Viktor to his feet. She threw clothes at him and told him to get dressed.

He pulled on jeans and a shirt before following his agitated wife down the stairs.

She was already making notes for Harry.

Harry noticed that Viktor looked immensely better than he had the day before. He handed Viktor a plate of food and another cup of coffee before saying, "Yes, I have access to a Pensieve. I'll have Gin bring it. She wants the boys to come through and see you. They won't stay long. An owl came a bit ago. I think it was from your parents, Vik. I took the message but did not read it."

"Thanks, Harry. I think you may be onto something about Skvortsov. He had a fixation about me when I was in school, and it wasn't a healthy fixation either, if you understand what I mean."

Harry's voice was cautious when he said what he had been thinking. "Vik, I don't think Skvortsov is the only one involved. The tone of the letters changed Triwizard year; they started to attack Hermione as well. And after you two got married, they took on a still different twist. I think there are three people involved in this. Unfortunately, I think we know one of them all too well."

Identification

At that moment, the Floo in the sitting room lit up. Alastor Moody called through it and said, "Harry, we have the editor of the *Prophet* here in the office. He says he will only talk to you. Why don't you come through and see what the fool has to say."

Harry called through the connection. "I'll be there in a bit, Alastor. Start asking him about Rita Skeeter and if he knows Nikita Skvortsov."

The Floo connection closed just as Hermione asked Harry, "What do you mean we may know one of them all too well? Do you seriously think Ron is behind this?"

"Hermione, I don't think it is Ron, but I do think we know the third person fairly well. I want you and Vik to stay here and go through the letters to see if there is anything you can pull out of them that I might have missed. I'll be back after we question the *Prophet* editor. I'll tell Gin to come through this evening. We can have dinner together and talk about it. Neville probably has to get back to Hannah anyway. Wait! Neville, you keep in touch with all of our old classmates; could you put together a list of what everyone is doing now? It would certainly help narrow down who might be involved," Harry said.

Neville answered quietly, "Sure, Harry, I'll put it together when I get home. Hannah has gone to your house to visit with Ginny, so I'll just go there before going home."

Viktor shook Neville's hand, saying, "Thank you for coming to help, Neville. When this is all past and I am back to playing Quidditch again, I'll send you tickets to a couple of games. We both appreciate what you have done."

"We would love to see you play again, Viktor. I just hope it goes better than that game you played against the Chudley Cannons. When that Bludger hit you in the head, and you fell that long, long way to the ground, it was awful. I was just glad that Hermione sent a hovering spell to keep you from hitting the ground so hard. Hannah and I love watching you play. I'll see you all later." Neville gave Hermione and quick peck on the cheek and shook Harry's hand before stepping into the Floo.

Hermione had gasped at the recollection of that game. It was decided by the referees that someone had used a Charm on the Bludger and directed it at Viktor deliberately. She and Viktor exchanged glances.

Viktor spoke up first. "Harry, that game was right after Hermione and I announced our engagement. Do you think that incident could be related to this?"

Harry looked at his friends and realised that there was much more to this than just the psychological torture Viktor had endured for all these years; someone had been trying to kill him. He swore silently, not wanting to let either Hermione or Viktor know how worried he was.

"I don't know, Vik. Right now, I am at a loss to see why anyone would do this, but I promise both of you I will find answers. I'll see you in a couple of hours."

After Harry had gone through the Floo, Hermione and Viktor sat down and started through the letters. With the almost sure knowledge that Nikita Skvortsov was the original letter writer, they were able to discern other hints about who the second person might be.

The mere fact that the letters changed in tone the day AFTER the first task of the Triwizard Tournament, after the confrontation with Rita Skeeter in the tent, made it abundantly clear that Skeeter had to be the second suspect.

The comment that Viktor had made, stressing that the tent was for champions and FRIENDS, was mentioned in the letter. Skvortsov had not been there to hear that. Hermione wrote that down, making sure to add in that the nasty stories about her had started the same day.

Viktor noticed one clue in the letter just after the Yule Ball. It had a spite to it that had reappeared in the later letters.

"Something happened at the Yule Ball that brought in the third conspirator. We have to remember who did what that night. Do you think anyone will remember back that far? It was ten years ago," he said.

"Neville remembers everything, Vitya. That is the one thing about him that I envy a lot. I wish I could do that. He was like my third brother when we were first years," Hermione said.

They skimmed through the letters from Hermione's fifth, sixth, and seventh years until the letter that came just after the final battle. It referenced the kiss that Ron and Hermione had shared after they had returned from the Chamber of Secrets.

"Aha! Neville will surely remember who was there for that. I was just so pleased that Ron was thinking of the house-elves that I kissed him." She looked a bit embarrassed at Viktor's questioning look. He merely patted her hand and said nothing.

She, however, jumped up and began to fix lunch for the both of them.

"It is past one, where is Harry? I need to feed you something nourishing. Poppy will have my head if you relapse. What do want for lunch?"

"If I remember correctly, Molly Weasley was here last night. I am sure she left food enough for a small army in the cupboard. All you probably need to do is warm something up and make tea. I am not concerned about you kissing Weasley. You kiss everyone you feel close to, love. It is simply part of your nature."

Planning the trap

No sooner had those words left Viktor's mouth than the Floo lit up and disgorged Harry, Ginny, James Sirius, and Albus Severus Potter. Right behind them were Neville and Hannah Longbottom. Alastor Moody and Minerva McGonagall-Moody followed a minute later.

Viktor Transfigured a couple of end tables into chairs for everyone and a desk into a playpen for the toddlers. Harry and Neville were brimming with excitement.

Alastor gave them a cross look and said, "You two sit down and tell the boy what that prat from the *Prophet* had to say. Then you can tell him what we are going to do."

Viktor had taken a seat on the sofa with Hermione cuddled up next to him. She was holding his hand tightly.

Harry shot a look at Neville, who nodded, before saying, "The editor from the *Prophet* said that he had accepted the story from a Ruta Skvortsov. The woman had seemed familiar, but he hadn't realised it was Rita Skeeter using her real name. She came in with dark hair and no glasses. She is Skvortsov's sister. We have a plan. The editor of the *Prophet* has agreed to send a message to Ms. Skvortsov saying that Viktor Krum is dead and his wife is being questioned by the Aurors. All three of our suspects will

assuredly want to see the body. Viktor will simply have to appear to be dead, aided by a Stasis spell from Alastor. Neville will put up an entrapment ward on the room. They will be able to enter the room, but not leave. There will be a barrier between them and Viktor as well. We will all be Disillusioned to capture them. Alastor will supposedly be asleep while guarding the body. Minerva will have set up alerts about anyone Apparating into the vicinity." He was certain that Alastor's plan would trap all three of their suspects.

The identity of the third suspect was still unknown, but Harry had a sneaking suspicion about their identity.

The plan was set for the next morning. In the meantime, Ginny and the two toddlers had brought a sense of normalcy to the Krum household. Hannah and Neville were expecting their first child, she announced. Viktor squeezed Hermione's hand and said, "We are going to adopt the little girl my parents have been taking care of, Lizzie Lewis, and we are going to start trying for a baby as well."

Ginny congratulated both Hannah and Hermione, saying, "I am so glad you are both starting your families. I thought ours were going to be the only kids around, unless you count Ron and Lav's, Rose and Larry. What kind of names are those? I guess it is okay for Australia, but I hope they don't come back to Hogwarts."

Hermione and Viktor gave Harry the notes about the post-Yule Ball letter. It merely strengthened his suspicions. Harry and Neville took their families home soon after. Alastor and Minerva stayed to discuss the plan for the morning.

Alastor apologised profusely but asked, "Viktor, do you have a bloody shirt? One we can enhance so it looks like you lost a fatal amount of blood. I'm sorry to have to ask, but it will lend credence to the plan. I know it upsets you, Hermione lass, but we have to make them believe it."

Viktor sheepishly answered, "Yes, I do have one. I was so depressed the other night that I broke a glass and bled all over the shirt. I was going to throw the shirt out. I repaired the glass after I healed the cut on my hand. I'll get it."

Hermione gasped when she saw the shirt because there was a lot of blood. The look she gave Viktor told him he would have some explaining to do after Alastor and Minerva left.

"That is perfect. Now Neville will be back about nine in the morning Bulgaria time. The editor for the *Prophet* is going to contact the Skeeter/Skvortsov woman about eight in the morning London time. That gives Neville an hour to set up wards and prepare the stage for our charade. Min and I will arrive about half seven Bulgaria time. We can go over what should happen and set the stage. We'll bring breakfast. I am not drinking any of your Turkish coffee, boy.

"We'll have you laid out on the sofa, decoratively, so that it looks like your throat was cut. Min will do the Transfiguration so it looks authentic. I'll be snoring outside the house in a chair. Hermione will be Disillusioned and standing behind you. Harry, Neville, and Kingsley will be Disillusioned and guarding the doors and the Floo. There will also be several of the Aurors here to take these conspirators into custody. Now, you cannot make a sound, lass. We do not want to give them the slightest idea it is a trap. Got that, Hermione?" Alastor asked.

Minerva spoke up because she could see Hermione was uncomfortable with the scenario. "He'll just be asleep, Hermione. It's the same spell which was used on you in the second task at the Tournament. He'll be perfectly safe. I'll cast a spell to amplify the blood on the shirt and make it look like there is some puddled on the floor, as well. If I have to, I'll cast Muffliato so they won't be able to hear you if you say anything."

"That is okay, Minerva. I'll cast it. I will be quiet, but don't be surprised if I use a couple of Unforgivables on these folks." Hermione told her.

Caught

Minerva merely raised an eyebrow and replied, "I wouldn't blame you in the slightest, but I don't think you'll do that. You have too much sense. You'll let them be captured and tried by the Wizengamot. And you and Viktor will go on with your lives, raise a family, and put all of this far behind you."

Moody, however, winked at Hermione behind his wife's back. They left through the Floo a few minutes later.

Hermione Transfigured everything back to its normal shape and began to pick up tea things until Viktor stopped her.

"I wasn't trying to kill myself, love. I was angry and threw the glass into the fireplace. I had clutched it too tightly and it broke, cutting my hand, I swear. I did repair it." His voice was resigned, knowing she was mad at him.

"I don't care about the effing glass, Vitya. I don't want to lose you. I know how much all this has cost you in anguish over the years. I don't want to lose US, do you understand that?" She almost snapped at him.

He walked to the window and stared out at the landscape. Without turning, he asked, "Are we going to move forward from this, Hermione? I want you back so badly I could cry. I want to adopt Lizzie and have babies of our own. I love you, dammit. I have loved you since that damned Tournament. I was such a wreck that year; the letter turned more vicious and they started attacking you. I wanted to kill the person sending them. When it finally dawned on me that you returned my feelings, I was overwhelmed that you could love a man everyone else thought was dirt. The letters had been slowly destroying my self-esteem. You brought me back from the depths of despair more than once over the years. I never could wrap my mind around why you loved me. But, I am very glad you do."

He turned back to her and opened his arms. She moved into his embrace at once, tilting her face up for his kiss.

"I never could figure out what a world-famous Quidditch star wanted with a mousy bookworm. But I love you more than you'll ever know, Vitya. I want to move forward. Beginning tonight. Help me with cleaning up and I'll dig out that bottle of the really good elf-made wine. Then we have all night to ourselves."

His answer was a low growl and a very passionate kiss. They tidied the sitting room and kitchen before going up the stairs to their bedroom. Viktor was carrying the bottle of wine and Hermione had the two glasses.

After soaking in the large copper tub together, they retreated to the bed and finished off the bottle of wine.

When Hermione reached into the nightstand for her contraceptive potion, Viktor waved his hand and said *Evanesco*. You do not need that. Tonight we begin that family."

She leaned over to kiss him, and he rolled her onto her back as he untied the sash to her robe. His hands began their tender assault on the sensitive places of her body until she arched against him in passionate need. He divested himself of the black silk pyjama bottoms and positioned himself between her thighs as he kissed her again. His first thrust into her waiting body earned him deep nail scratches on his shoulders. Her moans of pleasure urged him to lift her hips to wrap her legs around his waist. He made love to her three times that night. When they finally went to sleep, he was on his back and she was draped halfway over him. Neither let go of the other all night. Dawn found them cuddling and kissing until the arrival of Minerva and Alastor interrupted.

They set up the staging for the conspirators and Neville set up the wards and barriers when he arrived. Kingsley and Harry arrived soon after and took up their spots in the room. Alastor performed the Stasis Charm on Viktor and Minerva did the Transfiguration on his shirt and the blood on the floor.

Just seconds after Minerva had finished Disillusioning everyone, the Apparation alert sounded softly. Alastor took up his post outside the door and pretended sleep. Hermione had just silently cast the Muffliato spell when three people entered the house. They climbed to the sitting room and looked at Viktor's body gleefully.

Hermione was horrified to learn the identity of the third conspirator.

Parvati Patil, who had been one of the most ardent of the fangirls when Viktor came to Hogwarts, was now one of the criminals who had persecuted him and tried to kill him.

As soon as the three turned to leave the room, Hermione, Harry, Minerva, and Neville stunned them. Alastor had used his time outside to best advantage and called in the

Aurors to remove the prisoners.

Minerva had cleaned up the gruesome faux death scene, Alastor had awakened Viktor, Harry had thanked everyone for their help and told Viktor that Neville had been the one to put it together that Parvati was the third plotter.

Both Viktor and Hermione thanked Neville, Harry, Alastor, and Minerva profusely.

Once everyone had gone away, the two newly reconciled lovers went to pick up their soon-to-be adopted daughter from his parents' house.

Nine months to the day after that, Hermione gave birth to the first of their four children, whom they named Harry Neville Krum in honour of his two godfathers.

Finis

Hermione Diggory said:

A series of extremely negative articles about Viktor have been popping up in the international media. An old friend turns up to help him sort things out.