

Shards

by kyriaofdelphi

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

Truth Will Out

Chapter 1 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

The new millennium brought a spate of magical marriages. Harry married Ginny. Ron married Hermione. Neville married Hannah. All seemed right with the world.

However, within a few months, things began to change. Nothing was obvious at first, just a young husband staying out late, a young wife not being seen anymore. The Weasley household had become a battleground. Eventually it escalated into the worst kind of violence.

Ron had made excuses for her for a long time. He would say she was reading, cleaning house, or didn't feel well. Almost eight months had gone by since their wedding, and Hermione had simply quit leaving the house.

No one knew of the beatings or the rapes. Her broken bones were left to knit without being healed. When Ron wasn't home, he tied her to a chair in the kitchen. Sometimes she was tied there for over a day.

It all came to a halt the day that Ginny Potter came to the back door and looked in. To her horror, she saw Hermione bound, beaten, half starved, bleeding profusely, and barely conscious.

The lies Ron had been spreading for months suddenly evaporated into the stark truth of spousal abuse. Breaking into the house and setting off Ron's wards, Ginny sent Patronuses to her parents, Harry, and St. Mungo's.

Remembering that there was one person who would defend and support Hermione no matter what, she sent an owl to Viktor Krum. Ginny untied Hermione and was doing basic first aid when Harry and the elder Weasleys arrived.

They were appalled at Hermione's condition. Arthur picked her up and immediately Disapparated to St. Mungo's. Molly and Ginny followed after urging Harry to find and arrest Ron. Ginny told Harry that she had contacted Viktor too.

Molly had looked for clean, un-torn clothes for Hermione before they left for St. Mungo's, finding nothing except more of the rags she had been wearing when they arrived. Molly realised that Ron's stories of Hermione overspending on clothes and neglecting the housework were blatant fabrications. She suddenly felt very guilty for not having looked closer at her youngest son's marriage.

As she hurried out to the Disapparation point with Ginny, she swore Ron would answer for this.

At St. Mungo's, there was a problem; the Healers wouldn't touch Hermione without her husband's permission. Ginny sent another Patronus to Harry and asked him to bring Minister Shacklebolt to the hospital.

Harry showed up with Kingsley Shacklebolt and Percy Weasley, who was now the Ministry Barrister. Percy had prepared some documents making Hermione a ward of the

Ministry and issued a warrant for the capture of one Ronald Bilius Weasley. The Healers at St. Mungo's accepted this readily and prepared to begin treating Hermione.

Two and a half hours later, the lead Healer approached Kingsley and whispered in his ear.

"Dammit, man. Tell her family. She is a ward of the Ministry for her protection, but her family deserves to hear what her condition is." Kingsley went to confer with the squad of Aurors guarding Hermione's room.

"Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Mr. and Mrs. Potter, the patient has suffered numerous broken bones which have not been set correctly. There is evidence she has been starved, raped, sodomised, and throttled repeatedly. She is catatonic at the present. We are going to work on healing the bones first, and then see what can be done about her mental state. We think she can hear what is going on around her; if any of you want to speak to her, let us know. She has also given birth within the last twenty- four hours. We have bathed her and given the first of the bone-regenerating potions. This was found in her hands when we got them to unclench." He handed Harry a Snitch.

Harry raised agonised eyes to Arthur, Molly, and Ginny. "This is the Snitch from the last World Cup Game. I know where she got it. And I think I know why she was holding it."

He pulled Ginny aside to tell her what he was thinking, "Gin, Viktor sent her that Snitch. It carries traces of his magic. I believe he Charmed it to protect her in some way. He should have been here by now."

"I am here, Potter. I haff been trying to get here for hours. I got the owl from Ginevra and had to come through official channels." Viktor looked haggard; worry and anger had etched his handsome face into a mask of unhappiness.

He was clutching a sheaf of parchments, which looked to be some kind of official documents. He handed them to Harry, saying, "Here. Read them. I haff had an investigator following Veasley for months now. These are the reports. Vhen may I see her? I vant her to know she vill neffer have to go back to him."

Harry beckoned to Percy to come over and talk to Viktor. He and Ginny went back to where Molly and Arthur waited. Kingsley joined Percy talking to Viktor.

Molly asked a question more sharply than she intended, "Has Hermione been having an affair with him? Ron thought she was. And where is the baby if she gave birth so recently?"

"Mum! How can you think that? Look at what Ron did to her. Viktor hasn't been back to England for years. Viktor loves her. He always did. They were supposed to be married back then, but she changed her mind abruptly and married Ron instead... Oh, bloody hell! Harry, could Ron have used *Amortentia* on her? Or *Imperio*?" Ginny was beginning to see things things clearer now.

"I wondered that at the time, Gin. It is possible. She certainly changed after she married Ron. I'm going to talk to Kingsley and Perce; Viktor needs to be with her right now. He can bring her out of this; I know he can. You talk to your parents and see if they had any inkling. Merlin, I can't believe we all failed her." Harry hugged his wife tightly before going to talk to Percy.

Percy Weasley knew he was facing his worst nightmare, having to prosecute one of his siblings. The reports Viktor had given him clearly showed that Ron had been sleeping around and staying away from his home for days at a time.

When Harry approached him, Percy straightened his shoulders and asked a question, "Do you think we should let Krum in to see her? I have already taken steps to end her marriage to my brother, but I'm not sure if it would be in her best interests to have Krum in there."

"She vas neffer legally married to him. Ve vere handfast in Bulgaria, planning big vedding for later. She is my vife." Viktor's words startled everyone present. He handed the official Bulgarian Ministry document to Harry, who glanced at it and handed it on to Percy.

"This is dated a month before she married Ron. Oh, bloody effing hell! He must have used the Imperius on her. That is the only way he could have managed it. I am so sorry, Viktor. Of course you must have access to her." Percy blushed and tried to make things right for Viktor.

Viktor merely turned his eyes towards the room in which she lay. His hands were clenched in fury.

"She vas pregnant vith our first child." His whispered words tore at Harry's heart. Ginny must have heard as well for she began to cry, softly.

When the door to the room opened, Viktor walked in. He sat at the bedside and held her hand with his head bowed over their clasped hands.

The Healer came out and went straight to Harry. "We have started her on nutritional potions and stopped the bleeding from her uterus. Whoever attended the birth of the child never cleaned her up. It is amazing she is still alive. If she makes it, it will be solely due to your friend in there. She is responding to his voice."

"Thank you, Healer Ormond. Let Viktor stay with her. She needs his strength right now. Give him the same news you give us."

Harry had come to a decision. He blessed Kingsley for having a squad of Aurors there to protect Hermione, but he knew Ron would try to get past them. If Ron found out Viktor was there, he would kill Hermione and blame it on Viktor. *We have to find that baby. If it is Viktor's child...*

"Gin, get Luna to scry for Ron. I am going to go see Minerva and Alastor. We need one of his Foe-Glasses. I'll be back soon. Tell your parents to go on home and not to tell anyone what has happened here."

Where It All Began

Chapter 2 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

Before Harry could leave, Ginny caught his arm, saying, "Harry, if Ron didn't kill the baby, maybe he gave it away. I am going to find out what happened to that child, for both of them. I love you so much. Please find a way to make this right." She was still crying.

Harry pulled her close again and dropped a kiss on her cheek. "Yes, I saw what the news did to Percy. When I get back here, I'll send to your mum to come take over the watch. You stay until I get back. Love you, too, Gin. We'll get this sussed out for them. I swear it. Keep Viktor here. He can come to the house and stay when he isn't at her bedside. I don't want anything to happen to him, either."

Harry stopped to speak to Kingsley, who had been apprised of developments by Percy.

"Harry, this is a right bloody mess. We have to find Weasley. He must be totally insane. She was already married to Krum when Weasley compelled her. This is going to be a nightmare."

"No, Kingsley, it won't. Viktor won't let it become an international issue. He just wants his wife and, hopefully, his child back."

"Child? I'll have the records searched. Percy is desperate to ameliorate all this. He looked ill when he told me about the handfasting. He'll look the records over with a fine-tooth comb. He would love to bring that child back to them. I'll stay here with Ginny while you're gone."

Harry nodded and moved off to the lifts. He shamelessly used his celebrity to grab the first available Floo to get to Hogwarts. He emerged into the Headmistress' office and found Minerva going over student records.

"Why, Harry, how nice to see you. There is a problem, isn't there? I can tell by the look in your eyes. What is it?"

"I can't tell you right now, Minerva. But, could I borrow one of Alastor's Foe-Glasses? It is needed at St. Mungo's for Hermione." He knew that name would make Minerva take notice.

Just then, Alastor Moody walked into the office. "Hello, Potter. What brings you here?"

"Alastor, he needs one or two of the Foe-Glasses. Hermione is in St. Mungo's and they are needed there."

"That prat Weasley hurt her, did he? You'll have all three and whatever else I have that you want. I knew she shouldn't have married that cretin."

Harry grinned at Alastor's words and replied, "It is a long story, but suffice it to say that she isn't really married to Ron at all. Her actual husband has come to take care of her until she is healed."

Alastor went into their rooms and brought back a bag of Foe-Glasses. "You'll have to key them to her. The spell is simple. Put her hand on the glass and cast Protego. If I know my Min, we'll be there later. You have a watch set up, too, don't you? The real husband, would that be Viktor Krum? Thought so. Best man for her."

"Yes, thanks for these. Gin is there right now and Molly will be there later. It is up to Viktor to explain all of this, if he will."

Minerva took one of Alastor's hands in hers, saying, "Goddess speed, Harry. We'll be there soon."

Once Harry had gone back through the Floo, Minerva thrust all the papers into a desk drawer and looked at her husband.

"That rotten, idiotic, smarmy, little excuse for a human being. Poor Viktor, and poor Hermione. We have to go, Alastor. Figure out what they might need to catch Ronald, and we'll bring it with us. Doesn't that boy know that Viktor learned the Dark Arts better than any other student at Durmstrang? He will flay Ronald alive when he finds him."

"I think there'll be a lot of us to aid and abet him if he needs it. For all that he learned at that school, Viktor Krum will never be a Dark Wizard. He has too much love in his heart, Min. He is a decent man: kind, gentle, and very, very private. Let me round up some things. I'll have it ready in a bit."

Harry arrived back at St. Mungo's and opened the door to Hermione's room. He found Viktor still holding her hand and talking to her gently. Tears were streaming down his face, however. Harry closed the door and went to sit next to Ginny.

"Has he been out of there at all?"

"Just for a minute. He talked to the Healer and then went back in. Kingsley stuck around until just a few minutes ago. If anyone can find out about that baby, it will be Perce. I sent to Mum and Dad. They are calling in Charlie and Bill. I'll send to the twins when I leave here. Besides, you need to tell Neville. Luna is scrying for Ron, but no luck so far."

"When we leave, I'll see if we can get Viktor to come to the house. I want to talk to him away from here. I know there is more to this than he has told us. Let's go set these Foe-Glasses up, and I'll send to Molly."

The Foe-Glasses were set up outside the room and by the lifts. Viktor consulted with the Healer for a minute and gave the man a phial of potion.

"Use this to keep her asleep until I return. Is three parts Dreamless Sleep to one part Felix Felicis."

"That should certainly improve her chances for full recovery. Thank you, Gospodin Krum."

Molly had arrived minutes before and was talking to Minerva and Alastor. Minerva excused herself and came to Viktor. Without a word, she put her arms around him and hugged.

"I am so sorry, dear, dear boy. We had no idea this was going on. Alastor and I will do whatever we can to help."

Viktor smiled weakly at her and kissed her cheek, murmuring, "Thank you, Madam Headmistress. I appreciate that."

Alastor walked up to Harry and said quietly, "I hope you are taking him to your place. He looks like he's ready to drop. What the bloody hell happened?"

"I can't tell you, Alastor. It is his story. It looks like Minerva is going to stay with Molly for a bit and watch over Hermione. You come to the house and she can follow. I'm going to take the overnight watch in a few hours. Oho, Kingsley sent in Ministry Security to augment the Aurors. Let me go have a word with them."

As Harry approached the security force, their leader was speaking to Viktor. "Ambassador, we have orders to handle security for your wife while she is in hospital. Minister Shackbolt sends his assurances that all efforts are being made to discover Ronald Weasley's whereabouts."

Viktor thanked the younger man and walked to where Harry stood.

"Ambassador? Vik, what is this?"

"The Minister is my godfather, Harry. This way I have diplomatic immunity. I think I will need it if I ever get my hands on Veasley." The bitterness and hatred sounded clearly in Viktor's words.

Harry just nodded. "Come on, Vik, you can stay at our house. You look worn out."

"Thank you. She will sleep for twelve to fourteen hours. I must be back in morning to look into her mind and remove the worst of the memories. I had almost despaired of finding her alive. Forgive me if I seem distant. I do not mean to be." He laid a hand on Harry's shoulder and squeezed.

"Alastor is coming to the house to see what other security measures we can take. You should probably talk to him alone."

"No, I will tell you and Ginevra what happened. It was all my fault. I should never have told her to go make peace with Veasley."

Empathy

Chapter 3 of 12

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Shocked, Harry tried not to show it, but simply took Ginny's hand and beckoned Moody forward so they could get Viktor into the lift. Harry went through the Floo first to make sure Ron had not been to Grimmauld Place. He warned Kreacher to keep Ron out of the house at all costs. Then he told the house-elf to make a bedroom ready for Viktor. Remembering, he added that there would be five for dinner that night.

Ginny came through the Floo holding onto Viktor's hand. Moody followed them. Kreacher showed Viktor to his room while Ginny informed Harry that Minerva would be there directly. "Everyone is worried sick, Harry."

Moody handed Ginny a phial of potion. "Dreamless Sleep. The boy looks like he could use it. One of the two of us should be able to slip it into a drink when he finishes his story. If anyone says anything, it was my idea, ex-Auror's privilege."

Ginny nodded and put the phial into her pocket. "Harry, I am going to send an owl to Luna to see if she has had any luck scrying for Ron. Go up and make sure Viktor is all right. It is up to us to keep him from doing something drastic."

"I'll make sure he has everything he needs. Kreacher! Bring a pot of very strong, sweet tea to Gospodin Krum's room and a lager for me. Gin, tell Luna to clue Percy in if she locates Ron."

Upstairs, Harry found Viktor lying on the bed with one hand over his eyes. An open suitcase sat on the window seat. Kreacher popped in and left a tray on the table by the window before popping out again.

Harry poured tea for Viktor and opened his lager. He sat at the table and began to talk. "Vik, you have to get it together. You can't do the Legilimency on Hermione. You're too close to losing it yourself. Let me call in someone. I know just the man. Having seen pretty much everything during the war, he would never speak of anything he saw, and could remove the memories without any trouble. I don't want to see you take any more on now. You have got to be strong for her. She's going to need you when she comes out of this."

"I know, Harry. Is it a Healer at St. Mungo's?" Viktor sat up and took the cup of tea from Harry.

"No, Vik. It is Severus Snape. He quit teaching after you and Hermione rescued him. He now takes on the worst cases for the Ministry. He also runs a profitable potions business. He knows how to remove and retain the memories so that the victim doesn't even know they were a victim. If you want, I'll have him meet us at St. Mungo's in the morning."

"Yes, please, Harry. He was a good teacher, but very stern. I have an idea what we could use those memories for." Viktor's mood had lightened up a bit.

"I see where you are going with that. Good idea, but we have to catch him first. A friend of ours, Luna Lovegood, is scrying for any signs of Ron. She will get with Percy Weasley if she finds him. Come on downstairs after you shower and freshen up. We'll have dinner with Alastor and Minerva. I've told them not to ask you about what happened, but you can tell them if you want. We are here for you and Hermione. She is the closest thing to a sister that I have ever known."

"I am aware of that, Harry. I always thought of you as a friend. I will take shower and meet you downstairs. I will tell you all what a fool I was."

Harry took his lager with him as he headed back downstairs. He found Ginny reading a message from Percy.

"Harry, there were only seven babies born in the last two days. Percy has checked out four of the babies: all blond and blue eyed. The next baby was born to a woman who works for the Ministry, so that one is out, as well. The last two were twins. There is no listing for birth parents, which is very odd. And another strange thing is that the babies are in the custody of two of your classmates, the Patil girls. Luna and I are going to go visit them tomorrow afternoon. If there is the slightest chance..."

"Do not say anything to Viktor, Gin. We don't want him getting his hopes up until we know for certain. Alastor, isn't there a Ministry spell to determine genealogy?"

"Quite right, Harry. Come on over here, Ginny. I'll teach it to you while we wait for Viktor."

Almost as soon as Alastor had finished telling Ginny how to do the genealogical spell, Minerva arrived through the Floo. She looked shaken.

"Molly and Arthur are both at St. Mungo's. The two oldest boys are at the Burrow, keeping watch. George and Fred have set up smaller Foe-Glasses at Diagon Alley in case Ron goes there. I cannot believe this. Why? Why did he do this?"

"Because I sent her to him to say goodbye. She didn't want to see him. I made her go. I told her she owed him the courtesy of a face-to-face meeting. This is all my fault." Viktor's voice came from the stairs.

Minerva's voice rang out loudly. "No, Viktor. This is most assuredly not your fault. You could not have known he would do something like this. Sit here, talk to me. I was their Head of House; she was my prize student. Tell me what happened and don't you dare blame yourself."

She had taken his hand, sending a look to Alastor with a nod at the hidden bar in the sideboard. Alastor got up, went to the bar and poured a glass of vodka, which he brought to Viktor.

"Now, boy, what happened?" Alastor added his voice to Minerva's questioning.

"We had done the handfasting a month before. We only found out she was pregnant two days before she came to talk to him. I had made a point of telling her that if she ever wanted to be free, I would let her go. I did not hear from her for two days. On the third morning, I got an owl message. It was her handwriting, but did not sound like her." He fumbled in his pocket for a tattered piece of parchment and handed it to Minerva.

She read it aloud: "Viktor, I have decided I prefer Ron. This is goodbye. Don't try to find me. You are nothing to me."

Harry couldn't keep quiet. "That isn't her style at all. She never is that abrasive. You should have contacted us."

"I was numb. I quit the team and didn't leave house for weeks. It was nearly two months until I realised that she had not sent back the Snitch. I had Charmed it to protect her from the Imperius Curse that last year when you were hunting Horcruxes. I think Veasley must have found it and it nullified his spell on her. I know that when she touched it today, it acted like a communication device. I could hear her screaming. It nearly tore me apart. I swore I would kill him. I was at our Ministry talking to my godfather when

Ginevra's owl found me. I had to wait for the Committee to affirm me as an Ambassador. Then I came straight to St. Mungo's."

While talking he had downed two glasses of vodka.

Kreacher appeared to say the meal was ready, just before the fireplace lit up with green flames.

"Harry, you sent a message. May I come through to discuss this?" Severus Snape asked.

Ginny responded at once, "Yes, please do, Severus. You are not going to believe what has happened."

The flames died down then sprang up again to admit Severus Snape. He greeted everyone and then asked what the problem was.

Harry answered him, "Come sit down with us. Early this afternoon, Ginny went to Ron's house and found Hermione beaten, starved, and tied up. It turns out that she was never married to Ron at all, but had been placed under the Imperius Curse to control her. It is actually Viktor's story since he is her legal husband. But we want you to come to St. Mungo's in the morning and remove the memories of her treatment at Ron's hands. The memories will be used in the punishment of Ron Weasley. It may be worse than anything you've dealt with so far. I'm really sorry to have to ask you, but Viktor was going to do it and I didn't think he needed to see exactly what has been done to her. We're sitting down to dinner, won't you join us?"

"No, thank you, Potter, Gospodin Krum and I need to talk about this. Please excuse us. He will join you for dinner shortly."

Snape's voice had taken on the tight tone and clipped pattern he once used when speaking to Neville Longbottom. He was furious and not trying to hide it.

Mystified, Harry ushered Ginny and their guests into the dining room. He felt strongly that he should listen in to what was going on with Snape and Viktor, so he dug through the sideboard to find an old set of Extendable Ears the twins had left behind.

Ginny took them from him, reminding him, "See to our guests. I'll see what Snape is so upset about. I'll guarantee it is something from when they found and healed him after the battle."

"Okay. But, come tell me if they come to blows. I don't want Viktor any more stressed than he is now."

By the time Ginny had set the ears into place, she heard Snape snarling at Viktor.

"The Potters don't know what you are, do they, Krum? It is still your closely guarded secret. It took me some time to find the appropriate references after you healed me, but I found and read every text about empaths and their special circumstances. I *know* why you look so ragged. You have felt every pain, every emotion of hers since she supposedly left you of her own free will. Merlin save me, you young fool, your emotions were joined to hers the moment you were handfasted. You didn't expect it, even though your vows ensured it. That bond can never be severed, except by death. Yet you were going to come here and sacrifice yourself to bring her back. Do you really think she would want to live without you by her side? You're the first male empath, as far as I can tell. Igor told me you were stubborn, but I certainly didn't think you were stupid. We both agreed the two of you were soulmates, even if you hadn't recognised it yet."

Viktor's voice was very low, Ginny had to strain to hear him.

"If the cost of taking her pain and memories is my life, it is mine to pay. I sent her here. I have nothing left, Snape. She must be healed; if it kills me, so be it. I love her beyond life, beyond sanity." Even unhappy, Viktor was defiant.

"Viktor, I have already been to St. Mungo's. I saw that the rope burns on her arms and wrists that the Healer had reported were completely gone. I know you were in with her for hours today. Let me be the one to deal with her memories. You are simply not up to this. I will deposit the memories in a flask. Then they are hers to dispose of or take back when she is stronger. But, if necessary, I will Stupefy you so you don't kill yourself for love. Oh, bloody, effing hell!"

Ginny heard a thump and then Snape yelled.

"Ginevra Molly Weasley Potter, I know you are listening. Get your husband in here. The young idiot has collapsed."

Ginny had just time enough to think, *He is an empath? Merlin, it's no wonder he looks as bad as he does.*

Rescue

Chapter 4 of 12

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Ginny ran for Harry and Moody. Snape had levitated Viktor into a wingback chair and was examining his wrists. When Ginny and the others entered the room, Ginny saw that there clearly were the same markings that had been on Hermione's wrists earlier.

In addition, there were other marks. Older scars that Snape did not want to consider just then. He needed Viktor calm and focused. Without a phial of Calming Potion, the only thing he could do was cast a spell. "*Imperio!* Viktor, you will wake up and be calm. You will go eat dinner with the Potters and their guests. Then, you will go upstairs and go to sleep. You will meet me at St. Mungo's in the morning at ten o'clock sharp. Together, we will work to bring your wife back to herself. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Snape. I understand." Viktor's response was mechanical. He stood up and went into the room where dinner was being served, right past Harry, Ginny, and Moody.

Snape looked at the Potters and shrugged. "He was picking up on her dreams and is over-stimulated. The boy is close to breaking completely. I used the Imperius to calm and focus him. I'll remove it in the morning. Yes, Ginevra, he *is* an empath. He has felt everything that has happened to Hermione since she left him. Close your mouth, Harry. The reason I know is that after Harry defeated Voldemort, Viktor and Hermione came to the Shrieking Shack, where I lay barely alive. Between them, they healed my wounds and saved my life. I had never seen a male empath before, as they are the stuff of legend. I had already recognised that he and she were soulmates. Only a connection that strong could send him into such agony. I had suspected something of the sort after seeing how upset he had been after the Yule Ball. I have kept his secret; I pray all of you will do likewise."

Minerva nodded her head, remembering things that had seemed strange at the time. "That explains so much, Severus. It was, of course, the reason you sedated him and locked him into the Slytherin guest quarters after the third task of the Tournament. He was feeling the pain of the entire school, combined with his horror at being

Imperiused by Crouch, Jr."

"Yes, with Igor having done a bunk, there was no one to take proper care of the boy. Therefore, I dosed him with Dreamless Sleep and shut him up for a day and a half. He should be fine by tomorrow morning. I instructed him to meet me at St. Mungo's, and I will do the memory extractions. Harry, have you any potions here?"

Alastor spoke up at once. "I gave Ginny a phial of Dreamless Sleep for Viktor. I can Floo home and bring anything else you need, Severus."

"Thank you, Alastor. In the morning I will need a phial...no...two of Draught of Living Death: one for Hermione and one for Viktor. That way, I can pull the memories out without either of them having to relive them. All of you go back and sit with him. He is exceedingly fragile right now. He has harmed himself before because of her plight; there are scars. Take care of him."

Snape disappeared back into the Floo just as an owl tapped at the window.

Harry retrieved the message and scanned it. It was from Percy: he said there was finally a trace of Ron's whereabouts. He was meeting the Patil sisters in Hogsmeade at the Hog's Head.

Alastor and Harry decided to go with Percy. Luna was going to meet them there. Ginny and Minerva went back and chatted with Viktor until he had finished eating and gone upstairs. Ginny had dosed his tea with Dreamless Sleep when she sent Kreacher to take it to him. Minutes later, she went to check on him.

Minerva crept up the stairs with her. They opened the door and found Viktor sound asleep in bed.

Minerva tucked the sheets in around him and brushed a lock of hair away from his face.

"He looks peaceful. I just hope this all works. They deserve some happiness after everything that has happened."

"Minerva, would you stay here and keep an eye on him? I want to go to Hogsmeade and see if the Patil sisters brought those babies. If they are the missing children, then we may be able to help both Viktor and Hermione."

"Of course, dear girl, go on. I'll just sit here and read a bit. Kreacher is within call if I need anything."

Ginny ran down the stairs and threw green powder into the fireplace saying, "The Hog's Head Parlour."

She arrived just as Luna walked in the door. The Patil girls were sitting at a back table with two baby carriers between them.

Ginny improvised, calling, "Luna, I was afraid I'd miss you. Harry and Percy are coming. They just had a bit of business to finish. I was surprised to hear you're dating Percy now." She winked at Luna, who picked up on the cue.

"Oh, it is early days yet. We met for lunch a couple of times, but it isn't really serious."

"Let's go find a table. They should be here soon. I'd really like to see Perce find a lady friend. He is the only one of my brothers who isn't married. I was kind of hoping I'd get you for a sister-in-law."

"Oh, look, Ginny. It's Padma and Parvati! Hi, how are you both? And who are these little ones?"

Parvati answered, looking very cross, "Our adopted kids, Luna. This is Mark and that is Jana."

Ginny squealed, "Oh, they are so adorable and tiny. How old are they?" She knelt down next to the little boy's carrier.

Ginny silently said the spell that Moody had taught her. A soft blue light on the child's chest told her this was indeed Viktor and Hermione's child.

Parvati answered, "They were born yesterday morning. Beltane, you know how lucky that is for a baby."

"Yes, of course, Parvati. May I see the little girl, too?" Ginny held the sleeping child and cast Moody's spell again. The result was the same. These two were the missing children. She handed the tiny girl back and went to the table where Luna waited.

Making small talk with Luna, Ginny managed to whisper, "It's them, Luna. You saved them. No telling what Ron would have done to them after he realised Hermione was free."

Luna winked at Ginny and sprang to her feet. "Oh, Ginny, I think there are Nargles flying around in here. I'm going to open the door to see if they will fly out," Luna said loudly.

She walked to the door and opened it, surprising Ron, who was about to walk in, carrying a large burlap sack.

"Hello, Ronald. Stay out of the way, I think there are some Nargles flying around in here. If we leave the door open, they can escape." Luna smiled brilliantly at Ron.

"You are still as looney as ever. What the hell are you doing here with my sister?" he snarled at Luna.

Ginny came to stand beside Luna. "We're here to meet Harry and Percy. There was some Ministry business Percy had to finish up here in Hogsmeade. We decided to have a couple of drinks together. Why is it any business of yours, anyway, Ron?"

Ginny saw Alastor approaching the open door and pulled Luna out of the way of the Stupefy he cast at Ron. Then, she turned and cast the same spell at the Patil girls.

Harry and Percy came through the Floo just at that moment. Alastor had immobilised Ron, casting Langlock to keep him quiet. Ginny and Luna had taken custody of the two babies.

"Alastor, you do the spell. Check both of them. I think these are the babies." Ginny was excited. His results matched hers. These were the Krum babies.

Harry went outside and sent a Patronus to Kingsley. Within minutes, there was a squad of Aurors there to pick up Ron and question the Patil girls.

Both Padma and Parvati swore that they hadn't known who the children were, but were just going to care for them until Ron told them to give them back. He had contacted them that day to bring the children to the Hog's Head.

Percy was so overcome with happiness about the children that he grabbed Luna and kissed her spontaneously. Then he blushed and apologised.

She giggled a bit and patted his hand. "Never mind, Percy. I quite enjoyed it. Do you think I could take care of the little ones until Hermione is better? From what Ginny tells me, neither Viktor nor Hermione is going to be able to deal with babies for a time."

Percy saw a beautiful young woman offering to help him guard and nurture the two children their combined efforts had saved from whatever fate Ron had devised. He was stunned that Luna had actually enjoyed his kiss.

"Oh, yes, of course, Miss Loveg... Luna! I'll have to check in with you about them. Would that be acceptable?"

"Oh my, yes, Percy. We could discuss them over dinner."

She reached out and took his hand again. He clasped her small hand in his, amazed at the comfort her touch brought him.

Ginny and Harry, who were holding the twins, watched the interplay between Percy and Luna with high hopes for a relationship to build between them.

"Come on, Gin. Let's get them out of here."

Alastor made a suggestion just then. "Why not take them to Poppy to check over? She's close by and can do it quickly. Then you can send them on with Luna."

Harry immediately saw the benefit to that plan and agreed.

Twenty minutes later, Ginny and Harry had gotten a clean bill of health on both children and turned them over to Luna and Percy. Alastor followed them through the Floo back to Grimmauld Place.

Minerva was reading quietly in Viktor's room when the others returned. She spoke softly to them, "He twitched a bit a little while ago. Did anything happen?"

"Ron is in custody and we found the babies. They are with Luna until things straighten out. Percy is going to be checking on them and Luna quite often, I think." Harry quipped.

Minerva smiled at the thought of the airy Ravenclaw with studious, precise Percy Weasley.

"What a lovely match. They would certainly be good for each other. Now, I think we should go back and actually have dinner."

Kreacher had imposed a stasis charm on the food, so it was still warm, and everyone helped themselves.

Alastor was extremely pleased with the evening's events. His comment to Harry showed his continuing interest in Ministry matters.

"Kingsley is going to have Ron checked over. There is nothing in his background that would account for this kind of behaviour. Can you think of anything, Harry?"

Suddenly, Harry had a horrible thought. The memory of Ron trying to kill the locket Horcrux and it showing him images of Hermione with Harry... and Viktor.

"Oh, yes, there was an incident when we were hunting the Horcruxes. Ron was trying to use the Sword to destroy the Horcrux in that locket of Slytherin's, and it was throwing images of Hermione with me and with Viktor at him. For a minute there, I was certain he was going to kill me instead of the Horcrux. Could part of the locket have injured him?"

"If the portion of soul in that locket had been there long enough, it may have contaminated the glass as well as the metal itself. A very good point, Harry, I'll have the Healer check for that. Any chance you still have that locket around?" Alastor asked.

Ginny was outraged. "You can't be thinking he didn't know what he was doing? She was nearly dead when I found her. The scars and bruises were awful. He must have known at least a part of it."

Harry put a hand over Ginny's to calm her. "Gin, love, he always had the worst time when we were wearing that piece of shite. It ate at his peace worse than it did ours. And he hasn't been right for a long time. It could very well be possible. The remnants of the locket are at the Ministry, Alastor. I'm sure Kingsley will let you examine it."

Minerva felt she had to speak up. "Harry, that could be true, but remember, he was always rude and discourteous to her even as a first year. It got worse as time went by. When his behaviour was discussed in the teacher's lounge, we felt that he was jealous of her friendship with you. Later, we thought that was why he wasn't happy when you started seeing Ginny."

Toxic Memories

Chapter 5 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

"He was jealous of *me*? Whatever for, Minerva?" Harry was aghast at the implications.

Ginny spoke up in a tight voice, "Because you were famous and if you were *this* friend, he would be famous, too. He talked about that when he came home for Christmas your first year. I had forgotten until now. Oh, love, I am so sorry."

"Not your fault, Gin. Bloody hell, it explains so much. The way he acted towards Hermione those first four years, and the snit he had when my name came out of the Goblet of Fire. Oh, it must have galled him for me to be even more famous and him not sharing the glory. Merlin, I must have been blind to see how superficial his friendship was."

Alastor could not stand for Harry to be so shocked. "Well, lad, he's made himself a name for sure now. Kidnapping, rape, and worse. Near murder as well. The Wizengamot will not be lenient with him, not even if he was infected with a bit of the Horcrux. It isn't your fault, nor is it the Weasleys'. There was something lacking in the boy from the first; had to have been for him to act out that way in your early school years."

Minerva asked a question to get the table away from the disastrous subject of Ron. "Tell me about the Snitch Hermione was holding. I know it was from Viktor, but what is the story?"

"Well, when the three of us decided to go after the Horcruxes..." Harry began.

"You mean when you told me goodbye, and were going to go off on your own, don't you?" Ginny gently reminded him.

"Yeah, that's true. I had it in my head that it was too dangerous for you to be in love with me, and to drag your brother and my sort-of sister on the hunt with me. I am very glad Hermione had made up her mind that I wasn't going anywhere without her. Ron just rather tagged along. The night before we left, an owl came to the window for her. It carried a small box and a letter. I saw her tuck the box into her bag and start to cry when she read the letter. I forgot about the box and the letter until the night that Ron stormed out. She took that box out of her bag and opened it. The Snitch was in it. She held that Snitch to her lips and kissed it. She whispered something that I couldn't hear and cried again. I fell asleep at that point, but I am willing to bet that Viktor showed up that night to comfort her. I *know* he came other times. He had to have done because she would go from nervy and unhappy to radiant. I couldn't figure it out because my head was so centred on the Horcruxes. The times she was happy were the

same times we found food and shelter. I guess Viktor had a lot to do with that. He always did protect her."

"Where is the Snitch, Harry?" Alastor asked. "I have a thought about it."

"It is in my bag. I'll get it," Ginny responded. She dug in the bag and handed him the Snitch.

Alastor's face took on a look of intense concentration and he cast a few spells at the Snitch, finally handing it back to Ginny.

"Interesting. He made the damn thing into a witch's ball. Filled it with emotion-activated spells. I'll wager there is a lock of her hair in it. He aimed it at keeping her focused and calm. A whole lot of love went into that."

"But why would she be holding it today?" Harry asked.

Alastor shook his head before answering, "I think you'll find that Ron told her Viktor was dead or the babies were dead. She was using the witch ball to infuriate Ron into killing her so she could be free. The traces of her wandless magic are fraught with despair and hopelessness. I think we had best get back to the school. You two need to talk."

Goodbyes were said, and the older couple left by the Floo.

Harry told Kreacher to clear the dinner away and then go to bed.

After he and Ginny returned to the library, he lit a fire. Standing, staring at the flames, he asked, "Gin, when do you want to have kids? Those two tonight were so..."

"Harry, it is up to you. You have always known that. I know you are always a bit skittish around our friends' kids. However, you have the instincts to be a very good father. Kids sense that they are safe with you. You're a kind, sensible, funny man. I love you more every day we are married. That really isn't what you wanted to ask though, is it?"

Harry laughed a bit and admitted, "No, I really wanted to ask if you had worried about the time I was spending with Hermione on the Horcrux hunt?"

Ginny smiled and shook her head. "No, I knew she was in love with Viktor and that you were in love with me. Moreover, I got regular reports from our guest upstairs. He wanted me to know there was nothing untoward going on. He was very good about telling me how you were."

"Aha, another reason to thank him when this is all over. You go to bed. I am going back to St. Mungo's to take over the watch. Tomorrow is going to be a nightmare."

Morning found the Potters and their somewhat subdued guest Flooing off to St. Mungo's after breakfast.

Snape met them at the door to Hermione's room.

"Viktor, you will lie down beside her and take her hand in yours, then you will drink the contents of this phial. Everything will be fine. I will wake both of you once my job is done."

Viktor took the phial from Snape's hands and lay down on the bed next to Hermione. He drank the contents of the phial and went to sleep.

"Kingsley approved the use of the Imperius, Harry. He said the circumstances warranted its use. I have several flasks. I will take his memories first. Then, I will go after hers. She has had rather more Draught of Living Death than he has because I expect it to take much longer to retrieve her memories and patch what is left together. Percy has been here already and told me you found the children. Both Alastor and Minerva have been here, bringing potions and clean things for Hermione."

"I know, Severus. I was here until about three when Bill and Charlie came to relieve me. Is taking his memories going to lessen their bond?"

"No, it will simply give him some peace. While I am working on her memories, the Healers will be evaluating Viktor. I told Percy to bring Luna and the children this afternoon. Hopefully, things will be much improved by then."

He turned as if to go, and Ginny caught him by the hand. Planting a kiss on his cheek, she murmured, "Thank you, Severus. I know you don't hear those words enough. You are a very kind man. We are very lucky to have a friend like you."

Severus just looked at her, raising one eyebrow, before nodding and walking into the room.

"Oh, dear, I think I embarrassed him, Harry. But he truly is kind to do this sort of work."

Harry put his arm around her and sat down on one of the benches to wait. A few minutes later, the Healer came out and told them that Viktor had been given several general nutritional potions, and the old scars on his wrists had been removed.

Harry was almost afraid to ask, but did anyway. "What scars, Healer Ormond?"

The reply was curt. "The self-inflicted scars, Mister Potter. He had apparently tried to commit suicide at some point." The man was clearly indignant.

Harry stood up, looked the Healer in the eye, and said, none too kindly, "Healer Ormond, I am telling you this because you need to know, but I want your sworn word that you will tell no one else."

"Why yes, of course, Mister Potter."

"Viktor Krum is an empath. The things done to his wife affected him as well. Do you blame him for trying to escape their shared pain? He obviously didn't succeed, and your condescension is unwarranted."

"Oh, yes, that does change things. I am so sorry. I should never have presumed to judge. My apologies." He hurried off to check on other patients.

Ginny kissed Harry and said, "I just love it when you defend our friends. You intimidate people. It is heart-warming to watch."

At that moment, in the Auror holding cell at the Ministry, a Healer was doing a complete diagnostic on Ron Weasley. He asked Ron what the old scar on his forearm was and was it infected; the area gave off a strange reading and appeared to pain Ron when touched. Ron glared at the Healer and shrugged when asked questions.

The Aurors let the Healer out of the cell and had him write up his report. A copy was sent to the Minister, and a copy went to St. Mungo's.

The Healer returned some hours later and examined the scar again. Alastor Moody had requested the wound be checked for any foreign substance. The reading matched that of an object in the Department of the Mysteries. The Healer documented the findings and hurried back to St. Mungo's.

Meanwhile, Severus was picking his way through Viktor's memories of Hermione's ordeal. Selecting only the memories of the sexual abuse, he deleted those and removed the Imperius Curse. He had also taken the memory of Viktor harming himself when he was at his lowest.

At least I can take that memory and destroy it. Neither of them needs to deal with it.

What Snape found most interesting was that even though Viktor was still connected to Hermione's emotions while she was with Ron, he had not been able to find her.

Snape made a mental note to see if the Imperius was the reason her whereabouts were blocked. He also removed the memory of their meeting last night. He knew Viktor would be better off not remembering how he had been castigated.

Awakening

Chapter 6 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

When he went to work on Hermione's memories, he was appalled. There were far too many for him to remove them all. Despair and hopelessness made her mind a foggy, dark forest. As with Viktor, he selected only the sexual abuse memories to remove and the worst of the physical beatings. The miasma of memories sickened him. However, he managed to retrieve and deposit them into a flask.

One memory, an old one, made him stop and consider his past behaviour towards her. The beginning of her fourth year, the incident where Draco had used a spell to grow her teeth still was painful for her.

I see no difference. The echo of his own words damned him as callous to a young girl's feelings, especially in light of her later efforts to save his life.

In shame, he took that memory as well. He found the memories of the trip to the Shrieking Shack where they found him clinging to life. She had brought potions just in case they found someone...anyone...alive. She had been pouring potions down his gullet while Viktor had been doing the hardest part. Even then, Krum had hidden his empathic abilities from her, Snape realised.

Kingsley will have more than enough to send Weasley to Azkaban for life.

As he set about weaving the remaining memories into a coherent whole, he found the memory of the last beating yesterday morning. In it, Ron had handed her the Snitch, telling her that Viktor had killed himself rather than try to free her and that the children had been born dead. She had been trying to make Ron angry enough to kill her outright, but failed. Snape cringed at the despair in her mind. That memory was extracted entirely and marked it for use in Ron's trial.

What kind of a depraved monster did Weasley become? He showed the same disregard for her life that Voldemort would have.

When he finally withdrew from her mind, it had been over six hours. Exhausted, he sat in the chair and called Harry and Ginny into the room. He gave them the antidote for Draught of Living Death and told them to give it to Hermione and Viktor.

He immediately took the flasks of memories to Kingsley Shacklebolt's office in the Ministry.

"Ah, all done, Severus?" The Minister looked up from papers on his desk as Snape entered the office.

"Yes, I took the worst of the memories and deposited them in yon flask. It is unconscionable that Weasley would torture her while she was pregnant. I hope I never have to wade through another morass like that. Kingsley, I saw things during the war that appalled me, but this was worse by far. My report will be on your desk in the morning."

"Don't leave just yet, Severus. Have a drink and look at this report. One is the reading on Weasley's forearm. There is something under the skin there. And the other is a reading on this."

Shacklebolt tossed the ruined locket onto the desk.

"Oh, bloody effing hell, Kingsley. Weasley destroyed that damned Horcrux. I watched him do it. It was giving him all kinds of images of Granger with Harry and with Krum. For a half minute, I was afraid he was going to kill Potter with the Sword of Gryffindor. These reports match. Could there be a shard of the glass under his skin?"

"That is what Alastor thinks. We have most of the other ruined Horcruxes here, even the fragments of the tiara. I want you to evaluate them, and then we are going to have them encased in lead or melted down or some such thing. I never want to have to deal with this shite again, Severus."

"I am perfectly willing to testify under Veritaserum about the memories I removed from Madam Krum. I do not recommend anyone else viewing them. Then we can bundle those memories and the Horcruxes together and drop them in a volcano somewhere."

"Tell me exactly what is going on with Krum, Severus. His Ministry has made him an Ambassador; I'm quite sure that was to cover his arse if he found and dealt with Weasley before we did."

"This goes no farther than this room, Kingsley. Your word on it."

"Of course, you have it. Alastor was in here dithering about an argument you had with Krum last night. He said it had to do with you being found in the Shrieking Shack."

"Krum and Miss Granger, as she was then, found me barely alive and almost paralyzed from the snake's venom. She had a myriad of potions in her bag. Krum started doing diagnostic spells on me. I was in and out of consciousness for some of the time. Suddenly, he put his hands on my face and neck and was chanting in Bulgarian. I felt the wound on my neck closing, the pain leaving me. I was desperately afraid I was dying. Then I saw the wound appear on the boy's neck. He is a damned empath, Kingsley. I don't believe there has been a male empath ever recorded. I challenged him last night. I knew he would try to heal her and reach her mind at the risk of his own life or sanity. I owe those two my life. I could not let him do that. They were soul-mates from the Triwizard year. Igor saw it and reported it to me. A soul-mate bond for an empath is dangerous. He knew and took the risks anyway, a very unusual young man."

"He has always been a deep one, Severus. One thing has come out of this. Percy Weasley has discovered he isn't a fuddy-duddy, his words. He has apparently fallen hard for Miss Lovegood. She is much more level-headed than we previously thought."

"The girl has the makings of a first rate Seer. As ethereal as she is, she does have an excellent grasp of things going on around her. She will be an excellent addition to the Wizengamot at some point. I am going to go home and finish off whatever firewhiskey I have in the house. This has been the worst case I have ever dealt with. Send me an owl when you want me to testify."

"Take care of yourself, Severus. I'm sure the Potters will be contacting you. Have a drink for me. I still have to deal with the fallout from this shite." Kingsley scooped the reports and the ruined locket back into his desk drawer as Snape swept out of the door.

At St. Mungo's, Ginny and Harry administered the antidote to both Hermione and Viktor.

Viktor woke up first. He thanked Harry and Ginny, and then moved from the bed to the chair. He took Hermione's hands in his again and closed his eyes.

Harry drew Ginny from the room, saying, "He is calling to her. Now that the horrible memories are gone, she will wake up, I hope."

Healer Ormond brought concentrated nutritional potions for Hermione and gave them to Viktor to give to her.

"Thank you. I will give them to her while she sleeps. I want to ease her back awake. We still have much sorrow to deal with."

Ginny overheard those words and decided that Viktor needed to know his children still lived. She instructed Harry to contact Percy to bring Luna and the children to the hospital in an hour or so.

Harry nodded at his tenderhearted wife and went to do her bidding.

Molly, Arthur, Fred, and George were walking into St. Mungo's when Harry went to send the Patronus. He told them simply, "Now is not a good time. We'll owl you when she has finally woken up. Ron is in custody at the Ministry."

Arthur nodded acceptance for all of them and they left again. Harry knew Arthur would go to the Ministry to try to talk to Ron.

Percy replied by return Patronus that he and Luna would bring the children shortly. Part of the exact message made Harry smile. "Luna is absolutely brilliant, Harry. I think I am in love."

Harry chuckled all the way back to where Ginny waited for him. He repeated Percy's message verbatim and Ginny giggled with him.

Just then, Viktor walked out of the room and sat down next to them. "I think she is scared to come back. I wish there was a way I could convince her."

Harry looked at Ginny and got up to look in on Hermione.

Ginny swallowed and began to speak, "Viktor, last night, after your talk with Snape, we got a message that Luna had found where Ron was going to be. He was meeting two of our classmates in Hogsmeade. The Patil girls had two babies in their custody. Harry, Percy, Alastor, Luna, and I went to that meeting. Alastor captured Ron. Moreover, the two children were twins, just a day old. Alastor and I both did the genealogy spell and, oh, Viktor, they are yours. Percy and Luna are bringing them shortly. We don't know what names you and Hermione would have chosen for them, but right now the boy is called Mark and the girl is Jana."

Harry returned just as what Ginny had said sunk in for Viktor. The happiness in his eyes was astonishing. He kissed Ginny's hands and hugged Harry.

"I must tell her. We had chosen Marko for a boy so that is not far off. We had not chosen a girl's name. She can choose when she wakes up. Thank you, my very dear friends."

He hurried back to his wife's bedside and began to talk rapidly to her. He piled pillows behind her and propped her up all the while he was talking.

The rapid, excited Bulgarian was hard for Harry to follow, so he turned to walk to the lifts. The doors opened, Percy and Luna appeared, each carrying a baby carrier. One of the babies started to cry just then.

The sound brought Viktor out of the room. He stopped and stared at the children, stunned.

Luna brought the carriers to him. "Why don't you take the babies in and let her touch them. You can describe them to her. I think it will heal you both." Luna's words must have touched Viktor's hope. He took the carriers and brought them into the room. He put a baby on each side of her and continued to talk softly.

Hermione's hand rose just a bit and touched the crying baby. Viktor put the child in her arms and she woke. The surprise and joy on Hermione's face was breathtaking.

From where she sat, Ginny could see a wet patch starting on the front of Hermione's hospital gown. She got up and went to the door.

"Viktor, her breasts are leaking. See if she can feed the babies." After having said that, she closed the door to the room.

Harry took her in his arms and hugged her tightly. "Percy, Luna, can you stick around for a bit? You might send the Aurors home, but keep the Ministry security around. I don't want the *Daily Prophet* folks sneaking around and trying to sensationalise anything."

Percy looked at Luna, whose hand he still had clutched in his own, and replied, "I will not let anyone get near them. Dad has arranged for a Legilimens to look at Ron. It isn't looking good for him right now. If the hospital releases her, do you want them to come to Grimmauld Place?"

"Yes, I think she'd feel safer with us. We have enough room. Tell Viktor to send a message. Thanks for your great work, Luna. You, too, Percy. The two of you make a very good team."

Ginny got a mischievous look on her face and said, "Luna, he hates turnips and loves asparagus. In addition, he snores when he is really tired. But he is much nicer than the twins and very shy. Don't hurt him."

Then Ginny pulled Harry, who was trying desperately not to laugh, into the lift.

The last thing they saw, as the doors closed, was Percy blushing bright pink and Luna planting a kiss on his nose.

Late that afternoon, in Minister Shacklebolt's office, there was a meeting. Arthur Weasley, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Horace Slughorn, who had been called in as the Legilimens, and Alastor Moody were listening to Healer Ormond, and the Healer sent to examine Ron read their reports.

Healer Ormond's report on Hermione's injuries and trauma was nauseating to hear. The other Healer's report on Ron Weasley caused a lot of discussion.

Horace Slughorn, in his capacity as Legilimens, recounted that there were two separate sets of memories in Ron Weasley's head.

"One set, gentlemen, is directly tied to the ruined Horcrux. The shard of glass embedded in his arm has infected his mind, setting up a duality of personalities. The one connected to the Horcrux is the stronger of the two and has gradually undermined the boy's grasp of reality. He has been living in an increasingly violent state of mind. He has no grasp at the present of what he has done. It is my opinion that the shard be removed immediately. He needs to be re-evaluated once that has taken place. I have brought the statement I procured from him during our talk preceding the Legilimency session. He was planning to kill the two children and most probably the Patils as well. He was looking for ways to get into St. Mungo's and killing both of the Krums. That personality is definitely not sane. I could only find traces of the Ron Weasley from before the infection by the shard. It is most distressing."

Evaluations

Chapter 7 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

Arthur Weasley looked ill as he realised that his youngest son was possibly gone forever. The Ron Weasley who had done horrific things to another man's wife was not the boy he had raised.

All he could do was wait to see what the Ministry would do. If the case were presented to the Wizengamot, without the mitigating testimony of Horace Slughorn, Ron would probably go to Azkaban for life. If the shard was removed, there was a chance that the real Ron would resurface.

Almost afraid to, he asked, "Is the shard going to be removed from his arm?"

Kingsley Shacklebolt looked at the Healers who nodded and replied, "Yes, Arthur, we plan on removing it first thing in the morning. Harry is going back to the place where the locket was destroyed to see if there are any other fragments to collect. Horace will make another foray in Ron's mind to see if the evil memories can be safely removed. The whole thing hinges on whether or not Ron knew what he was doing and if he could have stopped himself. I have a meeting with Ambassador Krum tonight to discuss things."

Arthur knew Kingsley wanted to talk this whole thing over with Viktor to see what the younger man's feelings on the subject were.

He walked out of the building, wondering how he was going to explain to Molly what Ron's chances were.

A young woman stepped into his path and said, "Mr. Weasley, what has happened to Ron? He has changed so much from when we were in school. The last few times I saw him, he was cruel and mean. He didn't used to be that way. I know he supposedly got married to Hermione last year, but it isn't legal. He and I, well, we were handfast just before the Millennium."

"Lavender, isn't it? Ron talked about you. How you understood him and loved him in spite of his faults. Would you walk with me a bit?"

"Oh, sure. Ron didn't seem to mind that there was a good chance that I couldn't have kids after being bitten by Greyback. The Healers at St. Mungo's said that it was lucky that Hermione's boyfriend, that Viktor Krum, was able to heal my injuries so fast. He did a lot of chanting in Bulgarian, and Hermione fed me a bunch of potions. They saved me, Mr. Weasley. I think Ron was a bit jealous of that. He certainly didn't like Krum."

By the time they had reached Arthur's Apparition point, he knew Lavender Brown would certainly be the perfect wife for Ron. She was sweet, caring, easy-going, and she loved Ron utterly. He was not going to enjoy telling her what had happened. "Lavender, tell me how to reach you. Molly and I will be in touch shortly, I promise."

"I can be reached at Eeylops, Mr. Weasley. I am learning the business from my aunt and uncle."

"Wonderful. I promise Molly or I will let you know something before tonight."

As soon as the young woman was out of sight, Molly's Patronus appeared and said, "Arthur, we are all at the Cauldron. The kids want to know what the story is with Ron. Come quickly."

Arthur was only a few blocks from there, so he walked briskly toward the pub.

Bill was talking to Ginny and Harry. Charlie was talking to Molly. The twins were listening to both conversations, and Percy was slumped down in a chair, his head on his crossed arms on the table.

"Arthur! There you are! What has happened now?"

Bill handed Arthur a lager after getting drinks for everyone. He and Charlie were standing next to the wall behind the large table.

"Ron is definitely guilty of doing unspeakable things to Hermione Krum during the months he was supposedly married to her. He gave away the two babies she bore within hours of their birth. They have been found and restored to their parents at present. The memories of the worst of her treatment at Ron's hands have been removed from Hermione's mind, thankfully. Viktor is aiding in her recovery. It appears that Ron has been infected...possessed...changed by a shard of the Locket Horcrux that he destroyed before the War ended.

"That shard will be removed from his arm tomorrow. The Legilimens will see if that nullifies the possession. Ron has not been himself for many months; he kidnapped Hermione and used the Imperius Curse on her. She was beaten, raped, and tied up for most of the time the last months. We, as a family, have to face the possibility that the Ron we know is gone forever."

"We should have seen what was going on with Ron. After the Battle of Hogwarts, he just got more and more distant. I thought it was because he didn't get the Keeper's job with the Cannons. But it got worse, and none of us noticed." Ginny's voice broke on those words.

Charlie spoke up, hesitantly, "I thought it was because the publicity had gone to his head. He was surly and downright nasty when I tried to talk to him about two weeks before he supposedly married Hermione."

Molly spoke up, very sadly, "He told me she was having an affair with Viktor. That he had caught them in bed together. He said she was continually shopping and not doing the housework. It was all lies. He had used the Imperius Curse on her to leave Viktor. She was already pregnant with Viktor's children when Ron kidnapped her. I had thought he was serious about Lavender. Harry, what can we do?"

"There really isn't anything, Molly. Snape did the memory removal this morning. He was almost physically ill afterwards. He took the flask of memories to the Ministry. As far as I know, Minister Shacklebolt has them under lock and key. I think it is probably best if the only Weasleys she sees are Gin and Percy for the time being. Viktor is going to bring her to Grimmauld Place as soon as she is strong enough. She was just waking up when we left this afternoon," Harry said sadly.

The twins, for the first time in their lives, did not make jokes. Instead, they went to Ginny and hugged her, saying, "Tell her we love her, and we miss her. There really isn't anything else we can say."

Bill went to talk to Percy. Charlie approached Harry and said, "Tell Vik to contact me. I have worked with him in the past on some Order things. We became friends. I hope he doesn't blame the rest of us..."

"No, Charlie. He knows what happened had nothing to do with the rest of you. I'll tell him, but I'm not sure he is up to talking about it."

Molly was talking to Arthur, and Harry overheard her say, "I should have known there was something not right with him. It is my fault."

Harry turned to Ginny. "Go talk to Molly. She is about to wind herself up. None of us saw what was going on. Tell her that, please, love."

As Ginny hurried over to Molly's side, Bill beckoned Harry over to where Percy was still looking miserable.

"What's wrong, Bill?"

"Perce just told me that the Wizengamot has decided that Krum is going to be the one to question Ron. Surely, that isn't wise."

"Bill, I heard the report from the Legilimens who looked at Ron. I also heard the report from the Healers who treated Hermione. Neither was easy to hear. You do not want to know what your brother did to that girl. If the Wizengamot wants to let Viktor interrogate Ron, so be it. It is their decision," Arthur answered his son wearily.

Bill wasn't going to let it drop. "Dad, Perce said Krum is an Ambassador now. Could that be the reason they are allowing this? Is there something you aren't telling us?"

"William, there are things even I do not know. Harry may have answers to some of it. He and Viktor have been friends since the Tournament. I have to see to your mother. She is working herself up to a collapse, and it isn't her fault," Arthur snarled at his eldest son, reaching the end of his patience.

Bill turned to Harry and said, "Just what the hell is Krum trying to do? Have Ron sent through the veil? He is an arrogant bastard, isn't he?"

Ginny stepped between them and pushed her brother back a bit. "Bill, you don't understand. You didn't see the condition Hermione was in when I found her. Ron had been systematically raping and throttling her for months. She was bleeding to death before my eyes. Moreover, there was worse. He had taken her babies away when they were born; given them to two silly, stupid girls to treat as live dolls. He had warded the house against intruders so no one could rescue Hermione. Bill, she and Viktor were handfast and are soul-mates. Do you understand what that can do?"

Stunned, Bill Weasley asked, "They used the old Bulgarian handfasting, didn't they? The ceremony where their thoughts and emotions are linked. It would be hard on him, but it is not as if he is an..."

Ginny put her hand over his mouth before he could utter the word.

Harry looked at everyone present and knew his hand was being forced. "Arthur, the rest of you, I need a Wizard's Oath from each one of you not to reveal what I tell you."

Eight Weasleys nodded and the twins held up their hands to show they weren't crossing any fingers.

Ginny cast Muffliato to make what Harry had to say unheard by anyone else in the room.

"Vik is an empath. Snape said he is probably the only male empath in recorded history. Vik knew what was being done to her; he felt it. He suffered as much as she did. Apparently, the Imperius that Ron cast only shielded her whereabouts from Vik, not their connection. He had been looking for her for months. The only thing that made Hermione fight back was that Ron finally gave her the Snitch Vik had given her. It somehow nullified the Imperius. Therefore, Bill, this isn't just about what was done to Hermione. It was done to Vik and the two babies as well. Vik has a right to question Ron. The Aurors said that Ron was meeting the Patil girls to get the babies back so he could kill them. He would probably have killed the Patils, too."

"Bloody effing Goblin Gizzards!" Fred and George said, a sentiment echoed by both Charlie and Bill.

Molly gasped and nearly fainted. Percy came to stand by Ginny and took her hand in his.

"Harry is telling you the truth. Within hours of Hermione being found, Luna Lovegood was scrying for Ron's whereabouts. She found a trace of him at the Hog's Head in Hogsmeade. I sent an owl to Aberforth, who said that Ron was going to meet the Patil girls there. Harry and I were going through the Floo to accost him, but Ginny and Luna had gone early. Mad-Eye had gone with them. He captured Ron. The Patils hadn't really known what was going on. Ron admitted to the Aurors that the burlap bag he was carrying was to put the babies into, and it would be thrown into the lake. Then he had planned on killing the Patils slowly."

Bill Weasley went white with shock. Being a curse-breaker with Gringotts meant that he had been subjected to more unusual types of wizards and witches. He knew first-hand about empaths and their powers.

"Oh, bloody hell. Dad, Harry, I have a treatise on empaths from the Alexandrian library. Offer it to Viktor for me, will you? It is a how-to manual on learning to control empathic powers. It is mine; I didn't find it on Gringotts time. There was a male empath centuries ago, a good one. The treatise was written by him."

Bill and Charlie went to help Arthur with Molly. The twins had cornered Percy, talking earnestly to him. Ginny and Harry looked at each other and decided to go back to St. Mungo's. Harry stopped to have a quick word with Charlie.

"We're for St. Mungo's. I'll send an owl later with any updates. Take your parents home now. You and Bill might want to go with Arthur in the morning when that shard is taken out of Ron's arm. You'll understand a lot more if you see what it has done to him."

Bill spoke up quietly, "I'll send an owl with that treatise. I need to check on the cottage anyway since Fleur is at her parents' home in France."

In Loco Parentis

Chapter 8 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

Harry and Ginny left to walk back to St. Mungo's.

"What are we going to do? Should we go tomorrow? Mum and Dad were really torn up. I didn't expect Bill to be so hostile to Viktor, though," Ginny mused.

"One of us should probably go. I'll let you decide. I want to talk to Severus again, though. I'll Floo-call him when we get home."

"I'll have Kreacher set up the third floor rooms for Viktor and Hermione and the babies. It is quieter there and they'll have more privacy. You have been wonderful, Harry."

"I know it has been hard on you, Gin, and I'm sorry. I'm just glad you found her. You had the presence of mind to send for Viktor. That was brilliant."

"I envy them, Harry. They were so much in love, even from the Tournament. He was always there for her, strong and caring. Then this happened; it's so senseless. Did you find anything when you went back to look for shards of the locket in the forest?"

"Yes, there were some shards still on the ground around the rock. It almost seemed like the ground didn't want any part of the evil to get into it. They even felt strange to me. I gathered them up and took them to St. Mungo's."

"I hope Mum and Dad can get hold of Lavender. Ron told me he was going to marry her even though she probably can't have children. She really loves Ron and I think he must love her as well. She understands him which is more than anyone else ever has."

"I know she is helping her aunt and uncle out at one of the shops in Diagon Alley. Her parents were killed by the Death Eaters that last year of the war. Ron did behave better around her after the war. I don't think the shard had taken full control of him then."

"We're here. I hope the security stuck around. I want to get Vik and Hermione back to our house and away from prying eyes. Maybe we should invite Luna and Percy over for dinner if Hermione is up and around?" Ginny looked around before they entered St. Mungo's.

"Let's wait and see how she's doing. Good! The security folks are still around. They look pleased about something. I'm going to see what has been happening while we were away. Be with you at her room in a few." Harry strode over to the young man in charge of the security detail.

"Evening, Potter. I think you'll be happy to know the ambassador's wife is doing much better. We caught that sneaky witch, Skeeter, trying to get in here. One of the lads has a bug collection, and he noticed the strange markings on a beetle. He has her tucked into a jar, where she can't make any trouble for anyone. Go on up to the floor. Snape was here looking for you. I told him you'd Floo-call him when you got here."

"You might tell that lad there is a reward for capturing Skeeter while she is transformed and trying to sneak into restricted areas. The Ministry frowns on her behaviour. She'll probably earn herself another stint in Azkaban. Thanks."

Once Harry exited the lift, he found Ginny and Luna talking on the bench outside Hermione's room. Luna had been shopping for baby things to get the Krums through the first few days with their new infants.

The door to the room opened and Viktor stuck his head out. "Please come in. Nin wants to speak with you." He looked much younger and happier.

Hermione was sitting up in the bed with a baby in her arms. The other child lay in one of the carriers, sleeping soundly. Harry and Ginny entered the hospital room together hand in hand. Luna stayed outside to wait for Percy.

"Oh, Ginny, thank you so much, both for saving me and sending for Viktor. I know Snape removed many of my memories; Viktor and I discussed it. However, I know you were the one who found me. You have seen them before, but let me introduce you to our children. The one sleeping in his carrier is Miko Viktorevitch Krum, and this is Irina Viktoria Krum. We talked about it and decided that the little ones needed two sets of godparents. We're asking you, Harry, Luna, and Percy."

Ginny squeezed Harry's hand and answered for the both of them, "Yes, Hermione, we would be honoured to their godparents. I'm so glad you are better." To emphasize her words, she hugged Hermione tightly.

Harry leaned over to kiss his 'sister' on the cheek and said, "When you are ready to leave here, we have room for you at Grimmauld Place. The third floor is yours for as long as you want to stay. Kreacher has recruited his younger relatives to help out with the little ones."

Ginny noticed the look that passed between Viktor and Hermione. Then Viktor shook his head. "Yes, ve vill take you up on that kind offer. I haff sent owl to my parents to set our house to rights, but ve want to be here to giff effidence about Veasley."

Luna peeked into the room and asked, "Did someone mention my name? Those are the sweetest babies, Hermione. I had such fun taking care of them last night. Percy just sent a Patronus to say he would be here shortly."

Ginny pulled Luna into the room, saying, "Viktor and Hermione want to ask you something, Luna. Have you ever met Viktor before?"

"No, it is a pleasure to meet you, Gospodin Krum. Percy says you are a Quidditch star. I think perhaps, you are a very unusual man. You'd have to be for Hermione to love you as much as she does." Luna tilted her head as she spoke to Viktor.

Viktor and Hermione both smiled at the petite blonde-haired woman. In answer, Viktor took her hand and kissed it. "I am wery happy to meet you, Miss Lovegood. Ve thank you wery much for your tender care of our babies."

Percy appeared at the door to the room and motioned to Harry.

Outside, he said, "Lavender is adamant that she wants to be there when the shard is taken out of Ron's arm. She has the right. Her handfasting with Ron, though unusual, was duly recorded at the Ministry in a book no one ever looks at, unfortunately. Somehow, we have to get these records to send up a red flag when someone is already married and tries to commit bigamy. Anyway, Snape, Slughorn, Mum, Dad, Lavender, Minister Shacklebolt, and Healers Watson and Ormond are all going to be there. I think you should be as well."

"I will, Perce. Now, come on. Vik and Hermione have a question for you and Luna."

"Oh, dear, whatever it is, I didn't do it."

Harry just laughed and pushed Percy into the room.

Percy took Luna's hand as if his life depended on it, then he faced the Krum couple. "Hermione, Ambassador."

"Please, call me Viktor. Hermione and I want to ask if you and Luna will be godparents to Miko and Irina. With two babies there should be two sets of godparents, no?" Viktor chuckled.

Luna squeezed Percy's hand and smiled up at him. He turned to Viktor and answered, "Yes, Viktor, Luna and I would love to be godparents to the children. I think a name that means peace is a good choice as well."

Hermione answered, "We thought so, too, Percy. Viktor told me how helpful you were, and that you and Luna worked together to find our babies."

"I was more than happy to help out. I think I may have found more than I thought." Percy looked down at Luna as he spoke.

Hermione looked to Ginny, who was grinning at Percy and Luna. "We will be moving to Grimmauld Place in the next two days or so. Perhaps you and Luna could have dinner with us there. If Harry and Ginny are agreeable?"

Harry chuckled and answered, "A meeting of both sets of godparents with the actual parents. I think we could handle that. I know Gin would welcome them, if you're sure you are up to it, Herms."

"I'll be fine, Harry, now that I have my husband back and my babies. Snape left me enough memories to know that Ron used the Imperius on me. He wasn't acting at all like himself, so jealous and hateful. I tried to run and he cursed me. I thought I'd never see Viktor again."

Viktor took the little girl from Hermione and tucked her back into the carrier. "The Healers say Nin can be released tomorrow afternoon. Ve vill go to Grimmauld Place from here."

Harry answered him, "That is perfect. I think Minister Shacklebolt wants to talk to you tonight, Vik. You can talk to him in the library at the house. I am going home now to

get Kreacher to set up the rooms for you and the babies. I need to talk to Severus again, anyway. The rooms should be ready when you get there tonight. Do you want to come home now, Gin?"

"I'll be there in a bit, Harry. I want to talk to Hermione."

"I think we will be off, too. Some pleasant time with a new friend will do wonders for my state of mind," Percy said.

Luna handed Hermione the diapers and clothes for the babies before leaving with Percy.

Viktor kissed his wife and left to go to the house.

Ginny Transfigured the carriers into bassinets for the babies. Then she hugged Hermione, saying, "I am so sorry that this whole thing happened. You were already married to Viktor and Ron was handfast to Lavender. There is a piece of the locket Horcrux embedded in Ron's arm. It is thought that it has enhanced his worst characteristics. I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but you have a right to know. I am willing to bet that he became enraged when you told him you were married to Viktor and pregnant." At Hermione's nod, she continued, "I thought so. His behaviour was always odd around you, and he was exceedingly jealous of your closeness with Harry. His tantrum at the Yule Ball was because he was afraid you would help Viktor win, and he and Harry would be laughed at. Everything was about Ron wanting to be as famous as Harry. The locket Horcrux found Ron's weaknesses and exploited them. There isn't any part of Voldemort left in the shards, but the piece of soul was in there so long that it contaminated the glass."

Hermione hugged Ginny back. "It seemed that he went berserk all at once, Gin. One minute he was thanking me for coming to see him to tell him, then suddenly he went stock-still. When he moved again, he was completely different. I didn't even have time to Disapparate."

Shard Speculations

Chapter 9 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

"Thank you for telling me, Ginny. Viktor isn't saying much, which worries me. If there is still a set of Extendable Ears at the house, maybe you should listen in on Viktor's conversation with Shacklebolt. You don't have to tell me about it. But maybe you could discuss it with Harry. I am going to get some sleep until these two wake up for another feeding. Kiss Harry for me. He really is family and so are you."

Ginny kissed Hermione on the cheek and left St. Mungo's by the Floo. She arrived back at the house in time to find Harry talking to Severus Snape in the library.

She walked in and sat down to listen. Both men acknowledged her with a nod.

"Does that shard in his arm carry any traces of Voldemort?" Harry queried.

"Harry, it has no portion of Voldemort's soul. He can't regenerate. It does, however, carry a great deal of the evil that Voldemort embodied. That shard has been in Weasley's arm now for close to three years. It did not take over his personality until less than a year ago. What could have triggered it?" Snape was musing aloud.

Ginny spoke decisively, "Ron was always jealous: jealous of me because I was the only girl and the baby, jealous of Harry's fame, jealous of Hermione finding her true love so early. He was eaten up by his insecurity. He was handfast with Lavender just weeks before Hermione came to talk to him. I think insecurity, jealousy, and his innate weakness of character woke up that shard suddenly."

Snape sat up and looked at Ginny in astonishment. "I think you have it, Ginevra. Your brother was never one for purely evil doings, but he was weak, petty, and secretive. This helps immensely. I have to go write up a report for Kingsley. Are either of you going to be there tomorrow when the shard is removed?"

Harry shrugged, saying, "I'll be there. I want to talk to Ron before it is removed and afterwards, too. If the old Ron is in there still, I think he just might be horrified at what he has done. Percy says that Lavender will be there, too. Maybe seeing her will have a beneficial effect on him."

"I will be there with the flask of memories, Harry. I think Kingsley wants Weasley to view those before the shard is removed. Kingsley should be getting here soon to talk to Krum. I'll be off home, then." He stood, and spoke directly to Ginny, "Tell Krum I would like to talk to him after this is over, please."

Ginny spoke before Harry could utter a sound, "I think he and Hermione will both want to talk to you. You don't have to do these things, Severus. You do them because you're atoning for the things you had to do as Dumbledore's pawn. We understand and thank you. Don't you dare get on your high horse; you know it's true."

Snape merely sent Harry a look that meant...*She has definitely been around Granger too long.*

Then he went through the Floo in the parlour.

Viktor was just coming down the stairs when Harry and Ginny came out of the library. He had been arranging things in the bedroom he was going to share with his wife and the babies.

Kreacher announced that dinner was served just then. The three went into the dining room and served their plates from the dishes Kreacher had set out.

"Harry, Minister Shacklebolt wishes to talk to me about Veasley this evening. I think you and Ginevra should also be present. I haff a feeling you know a lot of vhat he is going to tell me. Is that true?"

"Yes, Vik, the Legilimens who looked at Ron says that there is a duality of personalities in Ron's head. The reason is a shard from the Horcrux he destroyed during those last few months before the war ended. It is embedded in his arm. The Healers are going to take it out tomorrow morning."

"The shard could haff caused him to do these things to my Nin?"

"The glass in the locket had been in contact with the evil bit of soul for so long that it became impregnated with evil. The shard had been in his arm for a long time before something happened to 'wake' it up. Ron was always insecure, and Hermione was always a trigger for him to lash out. He must have seen her happiness at marriage and a child coming as an insult, and he snapped," Harry explained.

"Viktor, my brother was handfast to a girl he dated in his sixth year. He truly did love Lavender, and I think he will be horrified at what he has done. I know he didn't do it

deliberately, but I am so furious with him it sickens me." Ginny looked to Harry and continued, "This has torn my family apart. I wish this had never happened."

"Yes, I know. I haff to tell you my secret. Snape has berated me for keeping this from eferyone, efen my Nin. I am an empath. I vas avraid of vhat people might do. If the other teams had learned of it, they vould haff found a vay to use it against me vwhile playing."

Harry and Ginny shared a look, then Harry replied, "Severus told us. Hermione's Healer knows as well. Moreover, we had to tell the Weasleys. I imagine Shacklebolt knows, too. Everyone has sworn an oath to keep the secret. Bill Weasley, Ginny's eldest brother, is a curse breaker for Gringotts. He has a treatise on empaths in his personal collection that he is going to send you. He said it was a training manual for controlling empathic powers."

"Ah, I haff heard of such, but nefer seen one. I must thank him. He is the one married to Fleur, is he not? Nin told me of Ginevra's antipathy towards Fleur at the beginning," Viktor teased.

Ginny rolled her eyes and laughingly admitted, "Yes, I absolutely loathed her until I realised that Bill adored her and she made him happy. Now we are friends. He has a quick temper, but is also quick to admit when he is wrong. Much like the two of you, I think."

Both Harry and Viktor chuckled as the sound of the Floo from the parlour announced Minister Shacklebolt's arrival.

Ginny got up and called out. "Kingsley, we're in the dining room. Come in here."

Moments later, Shacklebolt entered the room and took the chair opposite Ginny. He asked Kreacher for a glass of wine. The house-elf brought the wine and a plate. He helped himself to the dishes on the table.

"I gather that you have filled the Ambassador in on the shard and the Ministry's findings."

"Yes, they haff told me of your findings. It vould seem that efen years after his death, the Dark Lord continues to inflict harm on those who opposed him. Harry vas telling me the shard is going to be removed from Veasley's arm tomorrow. I am assuming you vish me to be there as vell?"

"I think it advisable, Ambassador. The Wizengamot will be watching from a shielded room. Weasley's family will be with them. Only the Healers, both Legilimens, Harry, I, and you will be in the room with Weasley. I have hopes that will keep the emotional pressure off you. There hasn't been a decision about where to let Lavender Brown-Weasley watch from."

"Let her stay vith her husband. He vill need her once the shard is removed if he truly did not know vhat he vas doing. I can shut out her emotions somevhat. The others vill not be oferly emotional, merely clinical. I can deal vith that."

"Ron may get overwrought after it is removed. Maybe you should ask the Healers to bring calming potions, Kingsley," Harry suggested.

"Excellent idea. Slughorn hopes that the duality of minds will go away once the shard is dealt with. Severus thinks that Weasley had been fighting the thing since he destroyed the Horcrux, but it fed on his worst qualities. He had been getting distant and strange. The meeting with Madam Krum was the catalyst that sent him over the edge." Kingsley stood up, getting ready to leave.

At that moment, an owl flew into the room and landed on the table next to Viktor. It cocked its head and held out its leg. Viktor took the weighty roll of parchment and gave the owl a bit of meat from his plate. It took off again, flying out the open window in the dining room.

Kingsley left through the Floo as Viktor opened the parchment.

Ambassador Krum,

I would like to offer my sincere apologies for my youngest brother's actions. This treatise is one I recovered from the Archives of the Alexandrian Library. I would be honoured if you would accept it.

Bill Weasley

P.S. My wife, Fleur, says to tell you hello and wants to invite you and Hermione to our home for dinner soon.

The enclosed sheaf of parchments was indeed the treatise on Empaths, how to control their powers, and limit their susceptibility to the emotions of others.

Viktor tucked the treatise in a pocket and said, "Thank you both for all the kindnesses. Ve vill infite you to our home vhen ve haff official naming ceremony for babies. I appreciate all the things eferyone has done. I bid you *leka nosht*."

Ginny smiled and replied, "*Leka nosht* to you, too, Viktor. We will see you in the morning."

Harry hesitated when he saw the way Viktor was looking at Ginny. When Viktor spoke again, both Potters were surprised.

"I think your vishes vill come true tonight, Ginevra, if my friend Harry cooperates." Viktor smiled at both of them and went up the stairs.

"What was that about, Gin?" Harry was mystified.

"About something you asked me the other night. Come up to bed, Harry. I have plans for you," she teased.

"Oh, *that* question... I am a willing conspirator, Gin."

(*** *Leka nosht**** translates as good night)

Dissociation

Chapter 10 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

In the morning, Harry suggested that Viktor use the Invisibility Cloak during Ron's questioning before the shard was removed.

"If he doesn't see you, he might stay calmer. Trust me on this, Vik. You were the focus for his rages even before the shard was in his arm."

"I will use it. Thank you. I want to bring Nin out of hospital today. Is best I stay calm as well." Viktor agreed.

"You two behave yourselves. I am going to the Burrow and sit with Mum. If I know her, she has been knitting up a storm. I'll run by St. Mungo's and check on Hermione, too." Ginny waved at them as they left.

Harry personally thought Ginny had a special glow this morning. He remarked as much to Viktor on their way to the Ministry.

"Is happiness, Harry. Nin had that same look the day she left to see Veasley *Posdrawlenia**, my friend."

It took about thirty seconds for what Viktor had implied to sink in, then Harry broke out laughing.

"You're congratulating me and I am terrified. What if I am an awful father?"

"Harry, you loff Ginevra. She loffs you. You vill be vonderful father. You haff much loff to giff. Trust me." Viktor winked at him and they both laughed.

When they reached the Ministry, Harry asked at the desk where the hearing for Ron Weasley was to be held.

"MLE floor, Mr. Potter. In the training rooms. Here is the guest pass for the Ambassador." The man at the desk seemed to be quite busy, so Harry took Viktor's pass and they went to the lifts.

In the lift, Viktor said, "You must act surprised when Ginevra tells you. It would not be good idea to haff her mad at me for spilling secret. You and I vill go book shopping after I bring Nin to house. Ve buy books for me, which I vill giff to you after she tells you. Ve do sneaky things so vifes not mad at us."

Harry was trying his best not to laugh when the lift doors opened, and he saw the crowd of people waiting to get into Ron's hearing. That effectively killed the laughter.

All eyes were riveted on Viktor, Harry knew. Alastor and Minerva stood a ways away from the rest of the crowd, so Harry steered Viktor to them.

Alastor opened a door into one of the offices and ushered them inside.

Minerva hugged Viktor, saying, "You look so much better, dear. Ginny sent an owl saying that Hermione is awake and taking care of the babies. That is wonderful news."

"Ve are bringing her to Grimmauld Place this afternoon. I know she vould vish to see you both."

"We'll be there. I just think it is best if Weasley doesn't see you when they bring him into the room," Alastor said as he peered out the door.

"Alastor, I loaned him my cloak. He can be standing next to Ron and Ron wouldn't see him at all. Go ahead and put the cloak on, Vik. You can sit next to Alastor when we get in there," Harry suggested.

"Yes, definitely, do that. I am going to run by St. Mungo's and see if there is anything I can bring for Hermione. I'll see all of you later at the house," Minerva commented.

The members of the Wizengamot had filed into the smaller of the two training rooms. A Charmed mirror was going to be their window on what went on.

The larger room had many chairs in it. The Weasleys and Lavender were seated at one side of the room. Kingsley Shacklebolt, Harry Potter, and Alastor Moody were seated at the other side of the room. The apparently vacant chair between Moody and Harry was occupied by Viktor. Snape, Slughorn, and the two Healers were seated in the middle of the room just in front of the chair where Ron Weasley was to be shackled.

When they brought Ron into the room, the Aurors fastened his shackles to the chair. Ron looked around and snarled, "This isn't an effing freak show. I had the right to punish the stupid bint any way I wanted."

One voice contradicted him. "No, you didn't have a right to treat anyone like that, Ron. Moreover, she wasn't your wife. I am your wife." Lavender had risen to her feet and looked Ron squarely in the face.

He momentarily lost the belligerent look and seemed surprised at his surroundings. Harry saw, fleetingly, the old Ron looking back at him.

Shacklebolt nodded to Slughorn, who rose to cast Legilimens at Ron. A Pensieve was brought for Slughorn to deposit memories in.

When Slughorn was finished, the Pensieve was sent into the room with the Wizengamot. Healer Ormond went into the room with the Wizengamot to read them the transcript of Hermione's injuries.

Severus Snape was called into the room where the Wizengamot were viewing Ron's shard-induced memories. A second Pensieve stood by Augusta Longbottom, the witch in charge of the Wizengamot. Severus asked that only Madam Longbottom view the memories taken from Hermione Krum. That request was granted readily and a vow was made that nothing of those memories would ever be made public.

Severus poured the flask of memories into the second pensieve and Madam Longbottom viewed them. When she raised her face from the Pensieve some minutes later, she was as white as a sheet. Horace Slughorn handed her a cup of tea which had a few drops of Calming Potion added to it.

"You say you did not take all the memories of abuse, Severus. Which did you leave her? The minor injuries: slaps, shoves, and suchlike, I presume. Is she doing better now? I would like to talk to her at some point after this hearing. I think it best if I talk to Potter and her husband right now. Tell the Healer to remove the shard and bring it to me."

Severus bowed and left the room. He whispered to Harry that Madam Longbottom wanted to see him and Viktor at once.

Harry opened the door, then looked back at Ron while Viktor went through the doorway. Once inside the inner room, Viktor removed the Invisibility Cloak.

Augusta Longbottom had conjured a small table and three chairs set in a back corner. Harry and Viktor sat on either side of her. Harry cast Muffliato so whatever was said would not be overheard.

"I have viewed the memories taken by Horace Slughorn from Ron Weasley, and the ones taken from your wife, Ambassador. I think there is a very delicate situation here. If this shard has brought out the worst characteristics in Ron Weasley and amplified them, then he was not in control of his actions. But he did know he had been injured by the shard and never sought help, which makes him culpable all over again. I need input from both of you."

Harry answered her, "I want to talk to Ron, the way he is now. When Lavender stood up and spoke to him, I saw a glimpse of the old Ron. I think he's still in there. I'll be back." He stood and walked back through the door. Ignoring the rest of the people in the room, he pulled a chair up close to Ron. "Ron, I know you're in there. Fight it. Talk to me. Why did you do this? You were already married to Lavender."

The struggle was evident on Ron's face. Finally, the sheepish face of the old Ron looked back at Harry. "I don't know, Harry. I thought suddenly she should have been mine. That I loved her..."

"I know what you are saying, Ron, but you must never have loved her. It was my love for my friends that kept Voldemort from possessing me in the Ministry back in fifth year. Had you really loved her, and not just been obsessed with having someone else's girl, then you would never have done this. Did you even know that you'd been hurt by that effing Horcrux when you used the Sword on it?"

"I thought it was a thorn from the brambles in the forest. It bothered me for a bit, but then I forgot about it... Is that what happened to me?"

The cold, cruel look came back over his face again as Harry watched. The shard-Ron smiled an intensely evil smile at Harry and fell silent.

Harry replaced the chair where it had been before and walked back into the other room.

"Ron is still in there. I don't think he knows what he has been doing. I asked him, the real him, about being injured by the Horcrux. He said he thought he'd picked up a thorn running through the forest. I watched him change back to the shard's control. I don't know what to think."

Augusta thought about what Harry had said and asked, "What about you, Ambassador?"

Viktor took a deep breath and answered her, "Madam Longbottom, I do not know if you have been informed of my unusual abilities. I am an empath. When that woman spoke to Veasley, I felt the evil leave him for a few seconds. The man who looked out of his eyes was scared and confused."

"Yes, Ambassador, Minister Shacklebolt told me and swore me to silence. That is the best evidence I have heard so far. Harry, tell the Healers to take the shard out of his arm now. You may stay here, Ambassador. Our viewing screen can be enlarged."

With that, she waved her wand at the gilt-edged mirror and it grew even larger. The rest of the Wizengamot were making notes or talking amongst themselves.

Harry walked back into the other room and nodded to the Healers. Both of the Healers, Slughorn, and Snape approached Ron, who began to scream epithets and imprecations at them. The curses had no effect because of the dampening field Snape had set up.

Only Ron's right arm was out of the field. Healer Ormond touched the pulsating bubble on Ron's arm with his wand and murmured a spell. The bubble burst and green pus began to ooze out. The other Healer levitated both the ooze and the shard into a flask while Healer Ormond healed the sore on Ron's arm.

Ron had lost consciousness when the bubble had split. When he came around again, he was confused and scared. Slughorn immediately performed Legilimency on him to see if removing the shard had achieved the intended goal.

Snape, in the meantime, was examining the shard and the oozy pus. With a triumphant look at Harry, he took the flask into the room with the Wizengamot. Harry followed, certain that Snape had had a revelation.

Snape held up the flask in front of Augusta Longbottom and said, "Augusta, this green substance looks to be the same as the one Harry and I had to remove from the cave where Voldemort had stored the locket. When we went to deal with the Inferi, we found the remnants of a potion in the basin. I am sure that poison, along with the shard, is the cause of Weasley's break with reality. With your permission, I will compare this..." he lifted the flask and continued, "...with the flask in the Ministry vaults. I can be done in less than an hour. The hearing could proceed while I check."

"That was the poison that was killing Dumbledore when we returned to Hogwarts that night, Madam Longbottom," Harry added.

Augusta nodded, saying, "Do it, Severus. I think this changes the whole picture."

A/N: **Posdrawlenia* translates as congratulations.

Verdict

Chapter 11 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

While Snape was gone, checking the green substance against the poison from the cave, Ron was watched by everyone in the room.

Lavender asked the Aurors if she could touch him. Permission was given as long as she did not try to free him.

Arthur, Molly, and the other Weasleys came to sit around Ron and talk to him. Bill, especially, tried to explain to Ron why he was being held. Ron seemed horrified by what Bill was telling him.

Slughorn had finished the Legilimency and brought those memories to the Wizengamot. There was much debate about Ron's culpability or lack thereof. The memories of the shard personality were uncomfortable to view.

Augusta Longbottom questioned Slughorn at length about whether or not Ron had any memories of his misdeeds.

"Augusta, the boy has only scattered memories that he attributes to nightmares. His mind flinched away from the memories when I was looking at them. I think he had absolutely no control over his own actions. If Severus finds that the shard had some of that potion dried on it, there is a very good chance that Ron Weasley was poisoned and possessed by the shard. The Healers may find that his health is impacted as well. I extracted the memories generated by the shard personality. They go back to before the end of the war. He does not seem to know what has happened."

"Thank you, Horace. I think we will wait for Severus to return and see what he has found out."

Viktor had listened carefully to what Slughorn had said, and watched what was going on in the other room. He could also feel what Augusta Longbottom wanted to do to Ron Weasley. Very quietly, he gestured for her to take her chair again at the back of the room. He sat facing her.

"Madam Longbottom, if Snape is correct and there was poison on the shard, then he should not be sent through the Veil. Nor should he be sent to Azkaban. If you will allow me, I think he should have to view my Nini's memories and then be banished to somewhere isolated with his wife."

"Ambassador, I think viewing those memories would be reasonable. Banishment would also be fitting. Shall we wait to see what Severus has to say?"

"As you wish, Madam Longbottom." Viktor continued to watch Ron and the interplay with his family.

Severus came back into the room a few minutes later, looking concerned. "Augusta, the poison does match. It will definitely shorten Weasley's life; how much I do not know. If he had ingested it, he would have been dead within hours. However, this way, absorbed through the skin, I just do not know. It *will* kill him eventually."

"Severus, ask Arthur and Molly to come in here, and Kingsley."

With a quick look at Viktor, Severus went to call in the others. When Arthur, Molly, and Kingsley had entered, Augusta instructed Severus to tell them what he had just told her. After explaining about the poison on the shard, he continued, "However, he appears to have been taking a potion of eyebright, angelica, foxglove, and valerian. That may be what kept the shard from taking him over any earlier. It is a delicate potion to brew and could have serious consequences if brewed incorrectly. He has not had any in the last few months. I will see if Horace has any idea where he was getting the potion. I'm sorry to be the bearer of such news, Arthur. But at least we know it was not just the shard that turned him to violence."

Severus quickly conferred with Horace Slughorn and was astounded to find out the person who had been making the potion was Neville Longbottom. When Severus thought about it, he realised that it made sense. Neville would know the properties of each herb and the way they would interact. The combination would serve to act as a stimulant against the poison and keep Ron on a reasonably even keel.

Viktor decided it was time to act. He asked Augusta Longbottom if she agreed that Ron should be shown Hermione's memories of the abuse. Severus, Horace, and Augusta all agreed that was probably fitting. Kingsley said he would agree with anything the Wizengamot decided about Ron. Augusta conferred with the members of the Wizengamot, who all agreed that the memories must be viewed, and then Ron would be banished to the Orkneys.

Harry and Viktor walked back into the other room carrying the Pensieve with Hermione's memories.

Ron struggled when he saw Viktor. He looked at Lavender, who shook her head. "You'll have to see them, Ron love. You cannot deny doing those things. I'm here. I'll hold your hand; you aren't alone."

"But he hates me, Lav. Harry! Don't let him near me. Lav, help me!" Ron was extremely agitated.

Harry looked at Viktor's face and saw how hard the older wizard was trying to shut out Ron's emotions. Thinking quickly, Harry wandlessly erected a partial shield around Ron.

Viktor immediately relaxed and sent Harry a look that said thank you.

Viktor stepped back and let Harry place the Pensieve in front of Ron.

Snape entered the room and stood by Viktor. He whispered just loud enough for Viktor to hear. "I filtered them, took out the repetitive things, and made sure the one about the Snitch was the last thing he will watch."

"Thank you. Will you come to Grimmauld Place again, tonight? I know Nin wants to talk to you, as do I."

"Yes, of course. Now we should be watching his reactions."

Ron had lowered his face into the Pensieve and was watching the memories floating there. When he raised his head, his face wore a look of horrified revulsion.

"No, I couldn't have... I didn't... Oh, Merlin, Lav, what did I do?" Tears ran down Ron Weasley's face as he struggled with the things the Pensieve had showed him.

Ron looked directly at Viktor and felt the Bulgarian invade his mind.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Ron tried to say to the presence in his head.

You owe her. You owe us. You will never be free of that debt, Weasley. Viktor's thought seared into Ron's brain.

Viktor abruptly turned and walked out of the room. Alastor followed him. He pulled a flask out of his pocket and handed it to Viktor.

"It's your brand of vodka. Drink it. You need it," he growled.

Viktor took the flask and drained it. "Da. Thank you, Alastor. It is offered, now. I think she will banish him. The memories were appropriate punishment. He will have to live with what he did for the rest of his life. I am going to get Nin and the babies." He handed the flask back to Alastor and began to walk to the lifts.

Inside the room, Ron weakly called Harry over. "I deserve to be sent through the Veil, Harry. If that's what is decided, then please, just watch over Lav for me. I should have had someone look at my arm; I know that now. I'd been feeling weird since the war was over, and Nev made me a potion that seemed to help. I hadn't taken it when Hermione came to see me. Tell her I'm sorry. I know words can't make up for the awful things I did to her, but I really didn't mean them."

Harry watched Ron squeeze Lavender's hand as he sat up straighter in the chair. Percy had arrived at some point and was standing by the door watching his youngest brother quietly.

Harry put a hand on Ron's shoulder, and then he went to talk to Percy.

"I understand why you wanted to be off this case, Perce. He is different, but the evil is gone. Severus found there was poison on the shard and that is what took him over. Viktor was here until a few minutes ago."

"I know; I saw him in the Atrium. Are Mum and Dad still here?"

"They're in the back room with the Wizengamot. I'm going to see if I can help Vik get Hermione back to the house. Let me know what happens."

"Right, Harry. Alastor was with Viktor. Tell Ginny I'll be over there when this is all over."

Just then, Augusta Longbottom walked into the room followed by the Wizengamot. "Ronald Bilius Weasley, it is the finding of this court that you be banished to the Orkney Islands for a period of thirty years. You are to be allowed visitors and your wife, Lavender, may accompany you. Furthermore, you are to have no contact with the Krum family for the remainder of your life. Do you understand?"

Ron's voice wavered, but he answered clearly. "Yes, Madam Longbottom, I do understand. Thank you."

The Aurors moved to remove Ron from the room as everyone dispersed. The Weasleys were thankful that Ron had only been banished.

Hermione's memories were eventually sealed in the vault in the Ministry where the findings of various Wizengamot trials were kept.

Molly and Arthur Weasley went home to deal with the fact that Ron was never coming home again. They sadly packed his things and brought them to Lavender at Eeylops. A small cottage on the tiny island of Muckle Skerry was to become the home of Ron and Lavender Weasley. They would be raising birds for Eeylops and doing a bit of farming.

That night after the verdict, Percy, Luna, Alastor, and Minerva all came to dinner with the Potters and the Krums.

The babies were upstairs being cared for by a host of house-elves all vying for the job of nursery elf to the Potters, eventually.

Hermione came down and the mood was almost festive. Over dinner, Luna and Percy were quiet, only listening to what the others said.

Hermione finally asked them a question: "What is this I hear about you two working *closely* to find the children?"

Percy blushed and looked at Luna before answering. "Harry and Gin had called in Luna to scry for Ron, and I was handling the Ministry's investigation. When Luna located the first trace of Ron, she owled me and then Harry."

Luna took up the tale where Percy had left off. "I was going to meet with Harry and Percy at the Hog's Head, but Ginny got there before they did. Alastor had taught Ginny the spell to determine bloodlines, and she did it on both of the babies. We were trying to distract Ron when Alastor showed up and Stupefied him."

Harry continued the tale. "Luna offered to take care of the babies while you were still in hospital, and Percy said he would personally look in to make sure they were cared for. I think somewhere along the way, these two found a bit more than just a co-worker. Just after you woke up, Gin was telling Luna all about Percy's likes and dislikes and warning her not to hurt him."

Ginny laughed and took over the end of the tale. "I think I'm finally going to have the last of my brothers married off to a female I like. You have no idea how vexing that has been, worrying about who Percy was going to fall in love with."

Viktor took Hermione's hand in his and said, "Ve want to thank all of you for eferthing you haff done to help us. The official naming ceremony for our children will be in January. Vith my wife's permission, I am inwiting all of you to the ceremony. The godparents vill need to be there, of course, but ve want Alastor and Minerva there also. Maybe there might efen be more festivities, if Percy moves a bit faster to catch his prize."

That brought a laugh to everyone. Soon, the females went upstairs to tend to the little ones, leaving the men downstairs.

Alastor had no compunction about asking Percy what had been decided about Ron. "I know they said he was to be banished to the Orkneys, but where up there? Azkaban is up that way as well."

"There is a small freehold farm on Muckle Skerry. They will be living there. Lavender is still going to be raising birds, and Ron can do a bit of farming. I think there is a boat as well. It is isolated, but the family will visit, and it will give him some time to reflect on how this has affected the rest of us. He wasn't a bad boy, just spoiled and thoughtless. I think some of the blame has to go to the twins and me. They tormented him and I pretty much ignored him, being too wrapped up in my ambitions. I really am sorry for what he did. I know Mum and Dad are devastated."

"Percy, none of this was anyone's fault. Sure, Ron should have told someone about the injury to his arm, but he never wanted to be fussed over for minor injuries. When he was playing Keeper our sixth year, he never went to the infirmary to have cuts looked at. That just wasn't his style. It was bad luck and possibly a bit of Karma that he wound up with that poisoned bit of the Horcrux in his arm. I think Hermione is going to go on with her life and put this all behind her. And so are you, Vik, aren't you?" Harry asked.

"Yes, ve are going to raise the children and stay away from the public eye. I want to make a toast to good friends and true loff. Here is hoping the years are kind to all of us."

When the little ones were put to bed, Ginny, Luna, Minerva, and Hermione talked quietly.

Minerva stated her thoughts. "You need to put this whole thing with Ron behind you and move on, Hermione."

Luna agreed. "Yes, I think it just as well Snape removed those memories. You don't need that coming between you and Viktor. Ron will have to live with this for the rest of his life, but you can move on and get past it."

"I know. I just want to thank all of you for helping out. Without Ginny, I'd probably be dead. I can't quite forgive Ron, even though I know the shard and the poison made him into the monster he became. He just didn't have the same sweet nature that Harry did. We grew up, but Ron just rather stayed lost in immaturity. I will always consider you, Luna, and you, Ginny, as my sisters. In addition, you, Minerva, are a dear friend and mentor. I think Viktor and I will return to Bulgaria in a few days as soon as I feel stronger. Thank you all again, for everything," Hermione said.

Ginny reminded them that the men were downstairs. "They are probably discussing this to pieces down there. We should go sort them out and let Hermione and Viktor get some rest."

The evening ended soon after and life went on.

Epilogue

Chapter 12 of 12

Things have changed drastically for the Golden Trio. Horrible things are about to come out.

Twenty-five years later

The day began brightly with storm clouds near the horizon. Daniel, Ron's son by a Squib before he married Lav, was on the boat sailing toward Scapa Flow to fish.

Ron hadn't wanted to worry Lavender, but he knew his magic was leaving him. He realised it was the poison from the shard that was causing it. It would someday cause his death, as well. He had accepted that. There wasn't a day go by that he didn't feel the guilt of what he had done to Hermione eat at his soul.

Lavender was gone to the mainland to deliver a shipment of birds to Eeylops. Her cousins now ran the shop, and she could visit family while she was in London.

Ron had decided that he should take it easy. When he came out of the house after lunch, he saw that a sailboat had run aground. The boat hung on the rocks as Ron swam out to rescue the man.

He knew where to avoid the current and got to the young man swiftly. The boat was sliding off the rocks into the sea as Ron caught sight of the name on the stern *The*

Golden Snitch

Swimming back to Muckle Skerry towing the young man, Ron thought it was merely a fanciful name for a boat, not realising that his past had just caught up with him.

Once ashore, Ron checked the young man for injuries other than the lump on his head. Finding none, he stripped the shirt off and wrapped him in a towel. In the buttoned pocket of the shirt, he found a wand, miniaturised.

The young man was no older than Daniel. He was coming around, and Ron was startled to see a remarkable resemblance to Viktor Krum in his features.

"Lad, who are you? Your boat went up on the rocks because of the bad currents out there. I'm afraid it slipped off the rocks and sank."

"Thank you for saving me, sir. My name is Miko Krum. My parents are going to be livid when they find out I sank the boat. Have you got a phone I can use?" He was sitting up now, looking even more like Viktor. However, the boy had Hermione's eyes, Ron saw.

"Send a *Patronus*, lad. I can't anymore since my magic is almost gone. My son won't be back for another couple of hours, but he can take you back to the mainland of Scotland when he comes. Or you could Apparate back. My wife should be home soon, I think. She can make you a Portkey, if necessary."

"I'll wait until my clothes dry. Mum and Dad are visiting Uncle Alastor and Aunt Min in Inverness. I took the boat out to try it. Dad will kill me for wrecking it."

"Lad, your dad's a kind, good man. He may be upset with you, but he'll be too glad you're still alive to care about the boat. Tell your dad I have paid off a bit of that debt, now. He'll understand. Sit out here and enjoy the sun while your clothes dry. I'm going in the house and write a note to your parents. Come see me before you go."

"Yes, sir, I will. Thank you again for rescuing me."

The boy stuck out his hand and shook Ron's hand. Ron just nodded at him and went in the house.

Dear Viktor and Hermione,

I never intended to have any contact with you again, as per my sentence. However, your lad was caught in the strong current that runs just off this island and grounded the boat on the rocks. I managed to get him off the boat, but it sank. I haven't told him who I am. He's a good lad and one to be proud of.

RBW

Ron sealed the note before going to the window to watch the boy. Miko walked the beach for a bit, gathering shells. Eventually he walked back to the house and came in.

"Sir, my clothes are dry and I've let my parents know about the boat. I guess I'm ready to Apparate now."

Ron handed him the sealed note and said, "Take this to your dad, Miko."

"Yes, sir. And thank you again. I owe you my life."

Soon after the boy had Apparated away, Lavender arrived home to find Ron shaking and in tears. He told her what had transpired and she was afraid that he would be sent to Azkaban. Daniel returned home a bit later and, between them, Lavender and Daniel put Ron to bed.

He was very ill. Lavender sent to the Weasleys, fearing the worst. Harry and Ginny notified the Moodys.

In Inverness, Miko had delivered the note to his father, who showed it to Hermione.

"It is good to see that Veasley finally became a man," Viktor said.

Hermione responded, "Viktor, Minerva just handed me this note from Lavender. Maybe we should do something... it sounds like he's dying. He saved Miko; we owe it to him to go." She had read the note from Ginny telling them that Lavender feared Ron was fading fast.

Viktor and Hermione came to the island with the Weasley family.

Harry and Ginny stood witness to the talk that the Krums had with Ron. They thanked Ron profusely for saving their son and told him they would appeal to the Wizengamot that the rest of his sentence be commuted.

Two nights after that visit, Ron died peacefully in his sleep, the poison having finally overwhelmed his system.

The end.