

# Hearts Over Dracontias

*by Isis and Neit*

Charlie Weasley investigates a mysterious dragon killing - a post war tale of murder, intrigue and love.

## Prologue ? A Dragon Falls

*Chapter 1 of 6*

Charlie Weasley investigates a mysterious dragon killing - a post war tale of murder, intrigue and love.

### Summary text:

**Charlie Weasley investigates a mysterious dragon killing - a post war tale of murder, intrigue and love.**

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### Prologue – A Dragon Falls

It was midnight in Romania. The stars had been overhead for hours. Their fragile light was washed out by dazzling, silver moonlight that lent an eerie glow to the darkness. The luminescent moonbeams filtered into the cliff-side cave where the dragon had made his home. Under the full moon, his scales gleamed like emeralds on velvet and his long, golden horns—so coveted by dragon poachers—glittered and glinted.

Resting at the cave entrance, he was watchful; a sentinel of the night. The dragon was one of four Romanian Longhorns that had not sought refuge within the protective limits of the wizarding reservation. No, he and three others were the self-appointed guardians—the Fathers—of the others. They gazed outwards, in the cardinal directions, from the boundaries of the reservation. The dragon keepers at the reservation knew of the sentinels, but left them to their watchful pursuits.

His kind had been hunted almost to the point of extinction before the wizards had founded the reservation in the Transylvanian Alps. Sensing a communal goal, the dragons had accepted the long overdue assistance of the humans. Now, during the daylight hours—beyond the telltale shimmer of the ironclad wards that surrounded the reservation—the Father watched with pride and satisfaction as younglings took to the air.

The dragon gazed out over the landscape towards Turnu Roşu, the steep mountain pass that linked Transylvania with Walachia in the south. Romania was no more beautiful than at night. The crystalline massifs of the Southern Carpathians reflected in the mirrored surface of a pristine glacial lake. And below that, the densely forested mountain slopes gave way to sub-alpine meadows. It was indeed a visually striking milieu.

His gaze turned upwards, to watch the sky solemnly from the warmth and comfort of his lair. His breath steamed in the chilly air as he let out a low, rumbling sigh. The stars had bad tidings in them. He had seen the coming of the war all those years ago in the stars, and now, tonight...

He stood up. The air tasted wrong. There was a sound as if the air was splitting open just off the peak of the cliff, a rip being made where there was no room for it. The dragon crouched at the entrance of his cave, not hiding, but ready to spring. There was a final rush of air, and then something blasted into existence ahead of him.

Two wizards in black, hooded cloaks streaked through the air astride gleaming broomsticks. The dragon unfurled his wings, roaring his protest. The Father sensed a

darkness emanating from the circling wizards, and he breathed in deeply, the air rasping through his multiple lungs. He exhaled, simultaneously releasing a jet of fire that crackled and sparked in the icy night air.

The poachers had always come in larger teams; these two were no match against his firepower. The Father knew that his deafening roar would have carried to the reservation and the other sentinels. If these two knew what was good for them, they would leave now, before it was too late.

Deftly, the wizards dodged his fiery attack. Their black cloaks fluttered and rippled behind them as they dived steeply. Simultaneously, they released two jets of electric-blue energy from wands aimed carelessly over their shoulders. Missing him, the spells struck the cliff-side with a shower of cerulean blue sparks and wispy, glowing threads that fluttered and swirled in the air. The dragon snorted steam contemptuously; his hide was impervious to two minuscule spells. The dragon roared with fury at their impertinence.

He breathed in to generate another fiery reply at the ignorant wizards, who had circled for another attack. Halfway through his rasping inhalation, the Father swayed, suddenly dizzy and unbalanced. His gleaming eyes widened with surprise. He fell heavily onto the ledge outside the cave. The mountain seemed to tremble for a moment, and then the air was still.

The wizards—one far taller than his companion—descended to the ledge and alighted from their brooms. Keeping their faces shrouded, they moved quickly and with purpose, as if sensing that their time was limited.

*"Diffindo."* There was an awful ripping sound as the dragon's thick skull split open, releasing an acrid stench that permeated the crisp air. There was a slight retch of protest from the taller wizard before they leant forward over the dragon's head, industriously collecting a part of the dragon.

As three menacing forms approached, shadowed against the moon, the murderous thieves slung their legs over their brooms and kicked off victoriously before diving off the edge of the cliff. In mid-dive towards the lake, they each performed a complicated loop and the air seemed ripple for a moment before it swallowed them. A sharp crack echoed mournfully against the cliff-face.

Corrosive dragon blood wound sinuously away from the Father's body, bubbling and etching into the crystalline rocks—tangible scars witnessing an inconceivable tragedy. The starlight seemed to fade slightly; the death of the Father witnessed from afar.

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*A/N: A big thank you to our fabulous beta, WickedlyWanton.*

# Chapter 1 - An Icy Morning

*Chapter 2 of 6*

Charlie Weasley investigates a mysterious dragon killing - a post war tale of murder, intrigue and love.

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## Chapter 1 An Icy Morning

Charlie groaned when his alarm clock rang loudly, rudely jerking him from a most pleasant dream about white sandy beaches, blue ocean, and dazzling sunshine...a definite sign that winter had settled in. He wasn't generally a morning person, and mornings during mid-winter mornings in Romania were just sheer torture.

His hand snaked out from under the covers to press the snooze button. He patted the bedside table blindly for a moment, before a sharp stinging sensation tingled up his arm, jolting him to full wakefulness.

"Bloody Fred and George," he mumbled mutinously into his pillow. Their Christmas present was innocuous enough most mornings, but randomly bit or shocked the user just when one had forgotten its last misbehaviour.

He couldn't bring himself not to use their gift; he saw his family...those who remained of his family after the devastating war...seldom enough. Except for his youngest brother. Ron was staying with him...make that sponging off him...and Charlie had almost reached the end of his generally ample supply of patience.

When Ron had pitched up on his doorstep a month ago, he'd been delighted to see him and a little bemused by the fact that Fred and George had fired him and kicked him out. But then, he hadn't lived around Ron for any length of time since he'd left the Burrow after finishing his N.E.W.T.s ten years ago. At that time, Ron had been ten and youthfully bright and cheerful, hardly prone to the fits of temper and sullenness that Charlie was now privy to. Now, he understood exactly why his easygoing brothers had felt the need to turf Ron out on his ear.

It saddened him to see how his youngest brother was now. Yes, Ron must have had a tough time absorbing the after-effects of the war, but they all had, really. They had all lost family members, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Not for the first time, he wondered if the family shouldn't have insisted that Ron see a Mind Healer after the war. He knew that Ron had seen so much death and hatred that it had to have affected him like it had the rest of them. The difference was that Ron was still vastly different six months down the line, so perhaps it had warped him differently, more permanently.

He turned over onto his back and rubbed his eyes, finally opening them. It was still dark outside; work at the reservation started early with the morning feed of the younglings.

*"Lumos,"* he murmured, stifling a yawn. The lights against the far wall flickered on. He blinked a little at the sudden rush of light and then focussed on the ceiling. Normally, Charlie would lie in bed until the second alarm went off, randomly counting the spots on the ceiling.

However, this morning he was trying to find the right words to let Ron know that he wasn't impressed. That he'd better shape up or ship out, so to say. *And I can't just say, hey, Ron, you are a prat and a sponge and I am all dried out. Find a job and get on with life. Can I?*

"No, that wouldn't be right at all. He's my younger brother." It wasn't often that Charlie would actively talk to himself out loud, but that was an indication of how stressed he was with the whole Ron situation.

He sighed, his breath expiring in a little cloud in the chilly air. Warming charms seemed to seep into the thick stone walls of his flat, and it was permanently cold here in

winter. He rented a flat in the wizarding community located on the outskirts of Bucharest. It served his purposes; a base to sleep at when he wasn't up at the reservation in the mountains. But since Ron had come to stay, he'd slept here every night. At first, he had been glad for the company, but later, he had stayed to keep an eye on his wayward brother.

Shifting slightly in bed, Charlie realized that Ron hadn't come home the previous night at all when he heard the familiar squeak of the front door. Clenching his teeth, Charlie fought the urge to go storming into the living room to give Ron a piece of his mind.

*No, you want to be calm when you confront him. It won't do for him to go running home to Mum with tales of evil, angry Charlie who went off on him and then kicked him out into the cold, icy streets of Bucharest. That's just asking for an undeserved Howler.*

Charlie sat up in bed, sighing again. He hated confrontation. Thankfully, the order of his birth had allowed him to avoid a lot of that. Bill and Percy had gone on at it on their own, leaving him out of it most of the time. Now, it was his turn to get the wheels moving and give Ron something to think about.

"Get up, Charlie, and go deal with the mess now before it gets really bad." It was a now or never time. Never would be really nice, but he knew that it had to be done. Ron had been drifting aimlessly for long enough now. Charlie had watched him wasting his life away on the sofa for a month, and who knew how he'd been with Fred and George.

Charlie actually wanted to send Ron back to their mother. That is where he should have stayed all along after the war had ended, until he was able to support himself. Instead, he broke Molly's heart by packing up and moving in with Fred and George, citing that his mother was a nagging, interfering old hag. Yes, their mother could be overly concerned sometimes, but Charlie could hardly blame her for nagging this new Ron.

Sighing again, Charlie finally sat up in bed and rolled over so that his feet touched the icy floor. He reached for his wand, which lay next to the humming alarm clock and flicked it deftly as he stood, refreshing the faltering warming charm.

When he stayed here, he passed on a morning shower. The ghoul in the pipes was most active in the morning and you ended up getting frozen or scorched, depending on its mood. He dressed quickly in thick cargo pants, dragon hide boots and a warm Weasley jumper. He glanced at his watch briefly, noting with satisfaction that he had an hour before he had to Apparate to the reservation.

He opened his bedroom door and frowned when he had to shove it open against a pile of dirty clothes that Ron had left on the living room floor. *Honestly, he's here all day. You would think he'd at least pick up after himself.*

He stepped through into the living room. Ron was lying on the couch on his back, with one arm flung across his face, motionless. He was still fully dressed and hadn't even bothered to pull his shoes off.

Charlie almost tripped over Ron's Firebolt...bequeathed to him in Harry's will...when he made his way over to stand next to the couch. He picked it up and leant it against the wall, running his index finger lightly over the gilt lettering before dropping his hand with a sigh. Harry Potter would be a name of legend in years to come. He was the young wizard who had died to save the wizarding world. But that didn't provide any comfort to those who had loved him.

Charlie suspected that Ron's attitude and depression had a lot to do with feeling guilty that he had survived and that his friend had not. He knew that Ron missed Harry, but he had to realise that he was still alive and that life invariably moved on after losing somebody.

"Ron, I need to talk to you," he said, giving Ron's shoulder a gentle shake.

"Too early," Ron groaned. Charlie felt irritation begin to ripple at the ends of his nerves. The little sod was feigning sleep.

"I heard you come in five minutes ago," he retorted. He sat down in the armchair beside the sofa and conjured two steaming cups of coffee. He tapped the toe of a dragon hide boot against Ron's thigh. "Sit up. I organised coffee," he said brusquely.

He blew over the surface of the coffee and then took a tentative sip, smiling at the initial taste of his favourite beverage. Some said that conjured coffee didn't quite taste the same, but Charlie preferred it to the real stuff. That was probably because he'd spent so much time in the field with only the magically derived version.

He narrowed his eyes slightly as Ron dragged himself up into a sitting position; you'd bloody swear it was the end of the world, the way he was moaning and groaning. Ron picked up his coffee cup, splashing a liberal amount on the wooden coffee table. He ignored it, not bothering to clean up after himself again, and that just added to Charlie's aggravation. It was simple enough to *Evanesco* a spill, but Ron just didn't seem motivated to lift his wand for anything anymore.

"It wouldn't kill you to clean up after yourself, you know," he said, swishing his wand and muttering the Vanishing Spell. Ron rolled bloodshot eyes at him and slurped his coffee loudly. Charlie was finding it harder and harder to stay calm. He could swear that Ron was being annoying on purpose.

"Where were you last night?" Charlie asked, leaning back and resting one booted ankle on the opposite knee. Ron looked like he'd gone bush diving. And he reeked of Firewhisky and stale cigarette smoke.

"Out." Ron barely glanced up at him, choosing to scratch his neck and yawn open mouthed instead.

Charlie huffed disgustedly, but refrained from launching into the now-familiar lecture about the dangers of Bucharest's nightlife and dodgy nightclubs where vampires waited in the shadows for drunken people to stumble into them. Ron had heard it all before, on previous mornings such as this.

"You didn't pitch at the interview that I organised at the bookshop," he said somewhat neutrally, struggling to keep the accusatory tone from his voice.

"I was busy," Ron answered, propping his feet up on the coffee table.

Charlie stared at him and shook his head with absolute amazement. "Busy doing what, Ron? Eating me out of house and home? You've been busy doing nothing on my sofa for just over a month now." Charlie stared at Ron. Ron stared into the depths of his coffee cup, studiously ignoring his brother.

Charlie sighed. "Seriously, Ron, I think you should go back to England and live with Mum at the Burrow, find a job, finish your N.E.W.T.s, get on with life. Do something constructive for Merlin's sake!"

Ron's ears turned pink, but he continued to ignore Charlie. Charlie rubbed his forehead; he felt an impending headache, induced by stress in all likelihood. His tone softened. "The war has been over for six months now. Life has to go on. Dad and Percy would want that... Harry too."

He gave Ron an imploring look. "And what about your friends that made it through the war: Hermione, Seamus, Neville? Don't shut them out forever." Friendships were special, but if you neglected them for long enough, they would eventually wither and fade to nothing but a casual acquaintance eventually.

"*She* shut me out," Ron sneered, "long before the war ended. And Neville is as thick as two planks. I'd rather have no friends than those two, thanks." Charlie knew that Hermione had broken off their relationship some time during the war, but he hadn't been aware of how resentful Ron was about it. He'd assumed it had been a mutual decision.

"Well, if it wasn't going to work, then maybe that was a good thing," Charlie said, shrugging. His brother was acting like he was a pre-teen, not an adult twenty year old.

"Says he who hasn't had a girlfriend since Hogwarts," Ron jeered nastily. "You're just uptight because you haven't had a shag in years." Ron crossed his arms over his chest and tucked his chin down defiantly.

Charlie opened his mouth to counter Ron's nasty jibe when the fireplace flared and shimmered green.

"Charlie? Charlie, you there, mate?" The broad Australian twang of his fellow dragon keeper, Trent Fleming, who was stationed temporarily at the reservation, rang through the small living room.

Charlie frowned; he wasn't due at work for another forty minutes. That could only mean that there were problems *Damn, damn, damn*. He sighed, gave Ron a 'we're not finished talking' look and stood, crossing to kneel in front of the hearth.

"Morning, Trent," he said, nodding at the blonde head floating in mid-fire. "What's going on?" He liked Trent...he was quiet and serious about his work. He was the same age as Charlie, and sometimes Charlie wished that Ron would emulate his friend's attitude about life and work.

"G'day. Volkov asked me to Floo you, Charlie," he said, looking even more serious than usual. "About five hours ago... somebody killed the southern sentinel." Trent's voice sounded incredulous.

Charlie's jaw dropped and his eyes widened with surprise. The sentinels were the oldest and wisest of the Romanian Longhorns, and the keepers steered clear of them. "Poachers?" he asked, raking a hand through his dark auburn hair.

"Don't think so, mate. You'll see when you get here." Charlie's eyebrows rose a little at that comment, but he left it for the moment. The Floo wasn't always the most secure connection, so he supposed there was something off about the killing. Trent continued to speak hurriedly. "We've got the crime scene cordoned off. Volkov wants you to deal with the Aurors. They're arriving in about fifteen minutes."

"I'll be there now," Charlie confirmed. The Floo connection cut off with a little puff of green smoke. Charlie stood up and grabbed his thick wool-lined coat from the coat rack. "I have to go," he said to Ron, who was lying recumbent again.

"So I heard," came the sarcastic reply.

Charlie took a handful of Floo powder from the pewter pot on the mantle. "We'll finish our talk later," Charlie promised. The dragon reservation had an Apparition shield around it, much like the one at Hogwarts. The Floo Network was the only way in and out.

"Whatever."

Charlie was too rushed to argue with Ron, and tossed the powder into the fire. "Carpații Meridionali," he said clearly. He tucked his elbows in at his sides and disappeared from sight...whizzing past countless fires lit against the frosty morning...towards whichever mystery surrounded the sentinel's death.

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Thank you to WickedlyWanton for a fabulous beta job.

## Chapter 2 ? Carpații Meridionali

*Chapter 3 of 6*

Chapter 2 - Charlie arrives at the dragon reservation to begin the investigation of the death of the southern sentinel.

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### Chapter 2 Carpații Meridionali

Charlie stepped out of the enormous stone fireplace into the kitchen at the dragon reservation's headquarters. He shook his head a little to steady the spinning sensation that had not quite wound down its impetus yet. Before stepping over the fireguard onto the rough stone floor, he brushed off the residual layer of soot that always seemed to cling when travelling via the Floo Network.

Charlie glanced up from his coat. Trent and his girlfriend, Halyn, stood in an embrace across the room on one of the shaggy fur rugs that were scattered here and there. His arms were at her waist with hers wound around his neck. They were standing close, so close that their foreheads were touching. The unmistakable intimacy and the aura of shared comfort between them had Charlie's heart and stomach clenching with an unwelcome wave of envy. Few understood the relationship between keeper and dragon, and while Hal wasn't a keeper, she seemed to have an affinity with the dragons as well. Trent was lucky to have such a beautiful, understanding woman to share his sorrow with.

Charlie had been in love once, back when the Order of the Phoenix had been restarted in 1995. Gwyneth Jones, Hestia's younger sister, had joined the Order as well. He'd never really felt the time was right for any major declarations though. Not during wartime. He'd contented himself with friendship, but always told himself that he'd wait until Voldemort's remains were smouldering to steal her heart. And then the Death Eaters had stolen her life. Charlie had promised himself that he'd never leave feelings like that unspoken again.

Charlie and Trent worked well together, although the Australian wizard had only been in Romania for a couple of weeks now. After the war ended...in the spirit of reconstruction and rebuilding trust in wizarding Europe...many of the wizarding institutions and Ministries had developed exchange programmes for young professionals. Trent was in Romania for three months, on loan from the British Ministry, and Hal had taken time off from Ollivander's to work with Gregorovich.

They turned their heads and smiled faintly. Charlie knew how they were feeling. It was still hard to believe that someone would have attacked one of the sentinels. So much history had been lost along with the Father...they were ancient dragons that had silently observed humanity for many years. He sighed inwardly and thought that another cup of coffee might go down well.

"Hi, Charlie. I'll get you some coffee," Hal said. Charlie nodded. She had an almost uncanny ability to guess what he was thinking or wanted, which was rather disconcerting sometimes. Trent gave her a cryptic look before turning to him.

Trent tilted his head in greeting, quiet as always. He was very economical with his words, but he was great to talk with when you got him going. "Morning." Trent looked tired, and his usually untidy mop of blonde hair was in even worse disarray than usual. It was understandable; he'd likely been up all night, long past his usual watch.

"Morning." Somehow, small talk didn't seem appropriate in the sombre texture of the room. He knew they would have to wait for the Aurors to arrive before detailing the

facts, but he was eager to find out the basics about what had occurred that morning as well.

He leant against the edge of the kitchen table, crossing his legs at the ankles and folding his arms across his chest. "So, what happened?" he asked.

"Well, last night was quiet until around one o' clock when the other sentinels sounded an alarm. It's the first time I've ever heard dragons roar like that, Charlie. They sounded so mournful, like they were in pain." Trent shook his head slightly. "Anyway, Hildebrand and I were still on duty, so we left on broomstick and headed out to sentinel territory. There..." Trent let out a deep breath and seemed to be trying to settle his stomach before he started talking again.

"We found the remains of the southern Father. It was terrible, Charlie. They had cut open his head. They left the horns, so I don't know what they were looking for. I don't think they were poachers though. The horns are the most valuable part of the Romanian Longhorns." Trent shrugged.

"Hmm." Charlie nodded, thinking hard, and then looked up when Hal handed a steaming mug of coffee to him. "Thanks, Hal." Hal smiled and moved to stand next to Trent, slipping her arm around his waist and resting her head on his shoulder.

As he sipped the coffee, Charlie took the time to digest the information. He had never heard of a dragon killing where some saleable part of the dragon wasn't taken. Other than their parts, there was no reason to kill the creatures.

The fireplace flared green and the whooshing sound of an activated Floo Network connection alerted them that somebody was coming through. Charlie shook himself from his internal reverie and glanced towards the fireplace. A woman tumbled into the kitchen, her long red hair obscuring her face.

Charlie started a little. "Ginny?" He knew that it logically wasn't his sister (security clearance to the reservation was tight), but he could not help but wish to see a family member that might actually smile and be good company. Ginny refused to visit Charlie while Ron was staying with him anyway; she and Ron were not on speaking terms at the moment.

The woman laughed and brushed her hair from her face, revealing amused indigo eyes. "Wotcher, Charlie. Now do you really think that your sister would have left my delicious cousin behind in England to come and visit you?" Tonks asked, grinning broadly.

She was, of course, referring to Ginny and Draco. Draco and Snape had played a pivotal role during the war, living on the tightrope that had been the double agent's role. They had all been surprised to discover that Snape had been acting on Dumbledore's orders and the duress of an Unbreakable Vow. It had taken a while for most of them to accept that the two Slytherins were just as determined (and likely more so than most) to see Voldemort's downfall, but they had proved their worth in spades.

As Tonks stepped forward into the kitchen, she tripped over the fireguard, sending the fire pokers clanging to the stone floor. "Bugger." Charlie stood to help her up.

"Just the same as always, eh?" he teased lightly. He and Tonks had been in Gryffindor together at Hogwarts, and they were still good friends. He was so glad to see that she and Remus were happy together, and planning a wedding. He had been the one to give Remus a pep talk, just before Dumbledore had died, actually. That had been a miserable year for both Remus and Tonks, and Charlie had been glad to see Remus coming to his senses about the situation.

"Trent Fleming, Halyn Lestrangle, this is Nymphadora Tonks, world class Auror," he said, winking at Tonks.

"Tonks, if you please," she said, huffing a little at Charlie. Tonks raised her eyebrows at Hal. "Lestrangle?"

Hal smiled and shrugged, as though she was used to answering that question. "Yes. My mom was Bellatrix. My father...in a rare flash of conscience...sent me to New Zealand when I was a baby. I never knew them."

Tonks laughed happily and barrelled across the kitchen to give Hal a big hug. "That makes me your cousin too, you know. My mother, Andromeda, was Bellatrix's sister," she recited. She grinned as she stepped back from Hal, who was smiling broadly at meeting a friendly member of the Black family. "Welcome to the family."

"Thanks, Tonks. It's wonderful to meet a sane member of the family," Hal said, smiling broadly. She glanced up briefly at the complicated looking clock above the large mantelpiece and sighed. "I've got to get going, sadly. I wish I could stay, but we're going collecting for wand cores today." Hal kissed Trent goodbye and stepped towards the fireplace and Floo'd to Gregorovich in Bucharest.

Tonks turned from where she'd watched her newly acquired cousin disappear. "Now then. To business." She rubbed her hands together and scrunched up her face, concentrating. Her hair shortened to an impish cut and the hue deepened to a midnight black. "I'm in mourning for the dragon," she said seriously.

Charlie shook his head. Yes, same old Tonks. He cleared his throat. "Right then. We'd better head to the scene of the crime and let ouAuror here investigate the visual aspect of the crime. We can only hope that perhaps some sort of clue was left behind."

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They Apparated to the ledge outside of the sentinel's cave, lead by a guiding beacon that Volkov had set up for them earlier. It emitted a magical energy pulse that guided their Apparition, as the ledge was rather narrow. This is why the initial investigative journey by the keepers had been done on broomstick. The Apparition wards around the reserve had been lowered to allow the investigation to proceed expediently.

Charlie wrinkled his nose at the acrid scent of the Father's blood that had etched a deep, curving trough into the ledge. His stomach lurched, but he managed to stay in control of his body. While this wasn't the first dragon he had ever seen killed, it was the worst mutilation he had ever seen. The dragon's head, three foot high, lay split in half, revealing gleaming white bone and shredded, scaly hide. Charlie put his hand over his mouth and leant forward, frowning when he noticed that the skull was empty, the dragon's brain removed.

He grimaced again and shook his head. "Merlin, this is really bad. His bloody brain is gone! How could someone get this close to a Longhorn sentinel, much less kill him like this?"

There was a silence from Tonks and Trent as they absorbed the horrific sight. After a few moments, Tonks cleared her throat and started moving around the massive body of the slain dragon. She snapped on a pair of latex gloves, muttering about Kingsley and stupid Muggle gloves that cut off circulation. Trent and Charlie shared an amused look. Somehow, Tonks had managed to diffuse the tense situation with her odd brand of humour. Then, she pulled a dicto-quill from her robe and started noting her observations.

"The dragon's head has been spilt open cleanly with what appears to be a modified slicing spell," she said, leaning forward to have a look. She had the advantage of morphing a nose without nostrils, which Charlie thought was really nifty.

She glanced up at Trent and Charlie, who were standing off to the side now, observing her investigation. "So, unlike most poaching it seems that only the head was cut open and the brain removed. Is that a typical poaching method?"

Charlie shook his head. "No, this isn't normal at all. Poachers would have taken the hide, claws and at least a couple of teeth. That is where the value is. The head..." He paused as if trying to remember something he had heard before.

"I remember something about the head, but I can't remember what it was now. I think it was a legend or myth about the head." Shrugging, Charlie looked over at Trent to see if the other keeper knew anything. Trent gave him a blank look and lifted one shoulder. "Nothing rings a bell, mate. But there's loads of old books that might have forgotten legends. You're the reader," he said, managing a wry grin.

Charlie shrugged, but there was still something that niggled in the back of his mind about the dragon's head and the significance thereof. "I'll think about it and get back to you, Tonks."

She smirked a little. "That's what you always said, Chuck," she teased. She frowned at the parchment floating next to her. "Oi, scratch that last bit." She walked around the dragon again, looking for something besides the head that seemed to be out of place. On her second rotation, she tripped over the broad tail of the Father and swore. Molly Weasley would have had a conniption, hearing that sort of language, even from one of her boys. She put out her hands to push herself up and frowned. "What's this then?" she said, lifting a wispy shred for view between latex covered fingers.

Charlie and Trent moved closer. "Hmm," Charlie mused. "Looks like grass to me, but it's not native to this area," he said, looking at the other two for confirmation.

Trent nodded his agreement. "Never seen blue grass before, though. Well, not neon blue at any rate, mate. And you're right, that kind of grass doesn't grow around here."

Tonks placed a sample of the grass into a small plastic packet. "It might have some residue of a potion or something on it. I'll have Neville and Hermione take a look at it." Neville was apprenticed to Professor Sprout at Hogwarts, and Hermione worked in the Potions research division. "Gives me an excuse to visit London for a bit." Her mischievous expression told of somebody else that she'd probably visit too.

"How are they doing?" Charlie asked.

Tonks lifted a shoulder. "Oh, Neville seems to be in his element. He's even given up being heartbroken after Luna told him that her destiny was in Egypt... without him." She chuckled. "Susan Bones seems to have helped with that issue."

She put her quill and parchment, along with her sample back into a robe pocket and scratched her head. "Hermione's working hard: nothing new. She erm... seems to be much happier now that your brother's here with you."

"Lucky me," Charlie muttered darkly.

Tonks gave him a quizzical glance then continued, "She's been very mysterious about her after work life though. I reckon she's hiding a new man." She flashed a grin. "And that, gents, is your gossip update, fresh from the source. Well, I can't see anything else that might give us any clues about what happened. Hopefully that grass will give us a starting point. The perpetrators must have been on broomstick, I reckon. Not much other way to access this ledge if you don't have an Apparition beacon."

Trent and Charlie nodded in agreement. "I'll see what I can dig up about the dragon's head," Charlie said. "Thanks for coming out, Tonks. It was good to see you again. Keep us posted on the progress?"

"You betcha," she said, saluting.

The three of them Apparated from the cliff ledge, leaving the Father's body for Volkov to take care of. The keepers would hold a memorial of sorts for the ancient dragon. It was part tradition, part respect.

The rest of the day passed in a subdued atmosphere, and Charlie was only too pleased to Floo back to his flat, even though another confrontation with his brother was inevitable.

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Thank you to WickedlyWanton for a marvellous beta job and such wonderful encouragement.

## Chapter 3 ? Brothers Weasley

*Chapter 4 of 6*

Chapter 3 - Charlie returns home after a long day at the dragon reservation.

**Hearts Over Dracontias**

**By Isis and Neit**

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### Chapter 3 Brothers Weasley

*It takes two men to make one brother. ~Israel Zangwill*

**The rest of the day passed in a subdued atmosphere and Charlie was only too pleased to Floo back to his flat, even though another confrontation with his brother was inevitable.**

Charlie stepped out of the fireplace with a sigh, looking around for Ron. To his relief, or perhaps his dismay, there was no sign of his errant brother other than the trail of dirty clothing that ended near the bathroom and a large pile of dirty dishes. Shaking his head, Charlie stepped into his bedroom, which was the only place that Ron hadn't left his mark.

After arriving home one day to find that Ron had scratched through all his drawers, Charlie had put a locking charm on his door. Brothers shouldn't have to lock their brothers out of their rooms, but Ron had left him little choice. He owned several expensive Magizoology texts and didn't want sticky fingerprints ruining his treasured collection.

Charlie flopped onto the bed and stared at the ceiling again, trying to decide what would be the best course of action. Obviously he couldn't talk to Ron right now, which was likely a good thing. Honestly, he knew that he had to take the time to carefully word what needed to be said; otherwise the explosion would be too much for him to take in this state of mind.

Getting up again, Charlie decided that a cuppa would be the best way to start what he was guessing would be a very long night. Entering the kitchen made him rethink that plan. It looked like Ron had used every single cup, glass, and plate that Charlie owned. The top of the stove wasn't white anymore, but crusted with whatever Ron had made himself for lunch. A stinking frying pan with a thick layer of hardened fat had Charlie gagging slightly at the rancid smell that was coming from that direction.

Instead of backing out of the kitchen, he whipped out his wand and started cleaning up everything, flicking and jabbing his wand a little more vigorously than the charms

strictly called for. *Bugger, Ron! How hard is it to pull out your wand and cast a couple of cleaning charms? I know Mum taught you better than this!*

Once the kitchen was back to rights, Charlie started the kettle and then rummaged in the cupboards for something to eat. Unsurprisingly, there was very little to choose from as it appeared that Ron had cleaned him out there.

"Would it kill the blighter to even leave me a slice of bread? It's not like he's putting forth anything to contribute to the cause," he grumbled under his breath.

Slamming the cupboard door, Charlie jerked a drawer open and retrieved the take-away menus. He was too tired to deal with going out to shop for food now, and he'd decided to get a proper dinner. *I should be spiteful and eat it all too!*

The kettle sang out, letting Charlie know he that could now proceed with making his cuppa. He sipped at his tea while flicking through the take-away menus that he'd brought back from London. Settling on Indian, Charlie sent his order for Lamb Vindaloo through the Floo, happy that it wouldn't take long for it to return. *I'll deal with everything else once I am not starving.*

Five minutes later, the Floo Network flared to life, and a white clad arm waved his dinner order in the air. "Lamb Vindaloo for two," a voice called.

Grateful to have something other than the untidy living room to focus on, Charlie jumped up from the couch and bounded over to the fireplace. He took the parcel and paid for the dinner. The spicy scent reminded him of the war years when some or other form of take-away had been the staple dinner many a night. Indian had always been his favourite though. He reflected that it was great to be a wizard, able to order take-away through the Floo Network from his favourite shop in London without a second thought about the logistics of the issue.

He went into the kitchen and served himself, leaving Ron's portion in the packet for when he deigned to come back home. Charlie had to wonder where Ron was; he didn't seem to have all that many friends in Romania. Well, none that he'd introduced to Charlie. Charlie just hoped he hadn't gone out drinking again. It was starting to become a concerning habit of his younger brother's.

He sat on the couch, eating off his lap, reflecting on the events of the day. The reasons for the dragon killing were beyond him at this stage of the investigation, and something still nagged at the back of his mind about the way that the dragon had been killed, but he still couldn't put his finger on what. Maybe he needed to find some reference material, because he was sure he'd read something somewhere before. The trouble was that Charlie had read so many Care of Magical Creatures books during and since leaving Hogwarts, it was impossible to recall which book it had been, let alone what the book had said. It wasn't in his collection, to be sure; he'd read those over and over when he was bored on night duty at the reservation.

Just as he finished his dinner, the Floo flared to life again. Charlie glanced up sharply, wondering who was calling. He hoped to Merlin it wasn't his mother...a rather uncharitable thought, yes, but she'd have a cow if she saw what his flat looked like at the moment.

"Oi, Chaz! You home?"

He breathed a little sigh of relief when he heard that it was Bill. Bill was, and possibly always had been, Charlie's favourite brother. They had always had an easy camaraderie. Both of them were intelligent daredevils, and they shared many of the same life philosophies. But, where Bill had always charming and gregarious, Charlie was slightly more introspective and intense.

When Bill had been attacked by Fenrir Greyback on the evening that Dumbledore had died, Charlie had been enraged. When the bloodthirsty sadist had finally been hunted down and killed by the werewolves loyal to the Order, Charlie had felt immense relief and sadistic satisfaction.

He stood, putting his empty plate on the coffee table, and walked over to the fireplace. His face bore his first broad grin of the day at the sight of Bill's scarred face. Charlie had become accustomed to the scars now, but they'd been a huge shock when he'd first seen the evidence of the savagery.

He settled cross-legged in front of the fireplace, eager for a talk with his older brother. Perhaps Bill would provide insight... into his book problem and perhaps his brother problem. "Bill, how're you doing?"

"Freezing my bollocks off, but otherwise good. You?" Bill's grin was good natured. He'd never let the attack get to him like some would have. Where some would have retreated behind heavily guarded barriers to lick their wounds, Bill had been more active for the Order than ever after his ordeal, perhaps even more determined to see the end of the war and spare others his fate.

Charlie snorted a little, feeling some of his tension from his hellish day bleed away. "Freezing in Egypt? You have got to be kidding! You should try it here for a bit. How's Fleur adjusted to the move, by the way?" he asked.

Now that the war was over, Bill had resumed his work at the Gringotts branch in Cairo. He'd heard that Bill was even more adept at Curse Breaking now than he had been before he'd gone on extended leave to work with the Order. Perhaps it was the slight edge of the wolf in him; who knew?

Whenever Charlie asked after Fleur, Bill would get that look on his face: the one that said that he still couldn't believe that the beautiful witch had wanted to marry him after his attack. "Oh, she's loving it," he said with that dreamy-eyed look of disbelief. "She's teaching 'Eegleesh' at the local wizarding school, if you can believe that one." Bill chuckled.

Bill's expression sobered a little in the next moment though. "Listen, Chaz, why I called... it's about Ron. He Floo'd this morning, wanting to know if he could come to Cairo and live with Fleur and me for a while. What the hell is going on? First Fred and George, now you..."

Charlie scowled. "I haven't kicked him out if that's what you wanted to know," he said sourly. "Well, not yet at any rate." He sighed heavily. "Merlin, Bill, I don't know what's wrong with him. He sleeps all day, drinks all night. Never fucking cleans up after himself. He doesn't even pretend to be looking for a job. I mean, enough is bloody enough, you know?" Charlie threw his hands into the air disgustedly. "I reckon we should just send him back to Mum. She'll sort him out quick enough."

Bill snorted. Charlie had a good idea of what that snort was all about; while their mother had a reputation of being hard-nosed with her children, Bill had always thought that she had a soft spot for Ron because of all that had happened while Ron had been Harry Potter's best mate.

"He's that bad then?" Bill asked. "I thought that the twins had just been overreacting. You know how they are." Bill frowned a little. "Nah, let's not send him to her yet. Perhaps some tough love will help him? Too bad Percy's gone. You know he could always get Ron to do things, even if Ron never really respected him. He had scary qualities."

Charlie nodded sadly. During the war, Percy had finally seen the light and rejoined the family, only to be slain by Death Eaters on his first mission for the Order. He thought life was horribly ironic sometimes.

Bill changed the subject, obviously seeing that he'd depressed Charlie a little by talking of their lost brother. "So, little brother, how was work today?"

Charlie's expression became even gloomier at Bill's obvious attempt to turn the subject to lighter matters.

"Oh, Charlie, what happened?"

Charlie sighed and tried to think of the best way to convey his news. While he knew that Bill wouldn't take it nearly as hard as he was, he also knew that Bill was aware of how important the dragons were to him.

"There was a dragon slaying last night, Bill. It was really bad; I've never seen anything like it before." Charlie's voice broke over the last sentence as the memories of the

morning hit him hard.

Bill's face creased into a concerned frown. "Aw, I'm sorry to hear that. You've seen dragon poaching before though, Chaz. What was so different about this one?"

Charlie ran a hand over his face and through his hair, exhaling an exhausted breath. "Thing is, they didn't take any thing they could sell." He bit his lip and rolled his eyes. "I can't really talk about it over the Floo, though. The Aurors are still investigating. Tonks, if you can believe that one."

Bill nodded. "I understand. Gringotts won't let us near the bloody Floo for business calls. I have to Portkey in for every bloody meeting." Bill laughed, amusement creasing the parallel scars that marred his cheek. "What did she trip over this time?" he asked sardonically. A hint of amusement sparked in his eyes.

Charlie had witnessed that she was still as clumsy as ever. If anything, being head over heels for Remus had only made it worse. "Just about everything," Charlie said, snickering slightly.

He frowned again, returning to his dilemma. "I dunno, there's just... something niggling about the case, though. I read something somewhere and now I can't remember where." He tapped the wooden floor with his boot, annoyed at himself.

"Typical," Bill said, rolling his eyes. "Well, if you want a good collection of old tomes, you should try the wizarding library in Alexandria. They have books that they've even forgotten about. Way cool place. If you're going to find any obscure fact, you'll find it there. And the librarians are usually way helpful too," Bill said helpfully. "And, that way, you can stop in for a visit." He flashed a roguish grin at Charlie, which might have actually scared somebody that didn't know him.

Charlie returned the grin. "Thanks, Bill. I think I'll do that." He grimaced. "What the fuck are we going to do about Ron, though? I'm not bloody leaving him here while I'm gone." If this was what his flat looked like while he was here, he didn't want to imagine what Ron would get up to with him gone.

"Fleur is probably going to whip my arse, but it's fine to send him this way," Bill said. His little smirk indicated that he probably didn't think that was a bad idea, being tied up by a half-Veela. "I'll try and see if I can get him to see a little sense."

Charlie nodded. "Thanks, Bill," he said, feeling relieved that his elder brother had solved both of the nagging questions that he'd had since arriving home from work. "I'll probably head down to Egypt tomorrow, if I ever get this place cleaned up," he said, shuddering at what must have been a week-old piece of toast lurking under the coffee table. "I'll see you then."

"Later." Bill disappeared and the emerald-green flames receded, leaving Charlie staring at an empty fireplace.

He glanced up when he heard the door squeak open. The prodigal brother had finally returned, it seemed. *Probably because he's hungry*, Charlie thought uncharitably.

"Ron." He kept his voice neutral, a constant struggle for him lately.

"What's for dinner?" Ron asked without preamble as he dropped his jacket to the floor, ignoring the coat rack that stood less than two feet away from him.

Charlie rolled his eyes and stood. "Good to see you too, Ron," he said sardonically. "Indian take-away in the kitchen. And you're welcome," he said, without waiting for the thank-you that would likely not be forthcoming.

He picked up the pile of plates off the coffee table. "I have to go to Alexandria tomorrow. You're going to stay with Bill for a while, so you'd better pack up after dinner."

Ron gave a non-committal grunt as he disappeared into the kitchen, although Charlie knew he'd contacted Bill about staying there *Ungrateful little brat. You'd think he'd at least be pleased he's getting his own way.*

Two hours later, Charlie had showered, cleaned the flat, cleared his trip via Floo-call to the reservation, moaned at Ron for leaving his dinner plate on the coffee table, packed a bag for the trip to Egypt, and nagged Ron until he'd done the same.

Exhausted, he lay on his back in the dark, watching the shadows dance on the ceiling as clouds danced across the moon. He hoped that he'd be able to find the answers he sought in Egypt, and he hoped that Bill would find a way to get through to Ron.

He sighed and closed his eyes. *It's no use agonising over that now*, he thought. Finally, he drifted off to sleep after what seemed like the longest day of his life.

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Thank you to WickedlyWanton...her suggestions and encouragement are invaluable.

## Chapter 4 - From al-Qahirah to Aleksandreia

*Chapter 5 of 6*

Chapter 4 - Charlie Weasley arrives in Egypt to begin research.

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### Chapter 4 - From al-Qahirah to Aleksandreia

Charlie sat on the Hathor Express and stared out of the window as the train crossed the bridge from the Nile island of Gezira into Cairo. The new, modernised Egyptian Ministry of Magic was located on the island, hidden from Muggle sight alongside its Muggle counterpart. He and Ron had taken the International Floo Connection from Bucharest into Cairo, and now they were headed west to Cairo's magical community where Bill and Fleur had made their home.

"Why do we have to take the train?" Ron's voice was petulant. "We could have Apparated, you know."

Charlie glanced up at his brother, who was slouching on the opposite seat. He sighed. The trip had been tense so far, with Ron acting like Charlie had committed a criminal offence by wanting to leave him with Bill (when the little brat had actually asked Bill if he could stay with him). Charlie was trying to take it all in stride, but still couldn't believe how much his brother had changed in the last year.



"I like taking the train out from Gezira. The scenery is amazingly exotic," Charlie said mildly.

He ignored the annoyed huff from the other side of the compartment, as well as the muttered, "S'not like you've never been here before."

The modern buildings, wide streets, public gardens, and open spaces of the newer, eastern half of Cairo gradually changed as the train chugged toward the older, western parts. Here the scenery was more haphazard: narrow lanes, crowded tenements, and hundreds of ancient mosques hinted at a country with a varied and rich history.

Using the quiet time to reflect, Charlie thought about the conversations he'd had just before they had left Romania early that morning. Tonks had Floo'd with news about the blue grass that she had collected at the dragon killing site. According to Neville Longbottom, the grass itself was native to Ethiopia. Although, in this modern day and age, seeds for all types of grasses were readily available from any Herbologist, and could be grown anywhere with the appropriate greenhouse charms in place. That had not been much help to further the investigation.

Of greater interest was that the grass had apparently been soaked in a powerful sedative potion. The potion had likely been carefully selected, for laboratory tests had indicated that it wouldn't have taken much of it to down a dragon. Incongruously enough, though, it would have been nearly impossible for the dragon to actually die from inhalation of the potion-soaked grass.

Charlie shuddered at the realisation that the Father had been alive when his head had been sliced open. The news suggested that whoever had killed the Father had been very careful to keep him alive until they had harvested what they had sought.

Answering the mystery of the origin of the blue grass had only triggered more questions that demanded to be answered. The most pertinent of these was why the killers had required the dragon to be alive. Why had they not killed the dragon?

Since Charlie wasn't entirely knowledgeable on the field of potions, he'd contacted somebody who thrived on answering such questions... Hermione Granger (with a Silencing Charm around the Floo while Ron had still been sleeping, of course).

An odd smile came to Charlie's face as he thought about his brother's one time girlfriend. It hadn't taken a genius to figure out that they wouldn't last long. During the war, Hermione had announced that she'd had enough of Ron's possessiveness. The ensuing personal war between them had almost divided the Order, with Molly practically calling for Hermione's head. Charlie reflected that it couldn't have been very easy for Harry during that time, fighting his lifelong nemesis in the strained atmosphere between his two best friends.

She had seemed a lot less stressed than when he'd seen her last, just after the war. He remembered his father mentioning that she was an absolute workaholic; a fact that was a little at odds with the serene woman sitting comfortably in a cosy armchair, her knees drawn up to her chin.

By the end of their brief conversation, Charlie had been very glad to have Floo'd Hermione for her perspective because (as always) she'd been incredibly insightful and helpful.

She worked for the Ministry of Magic in the Magical Patents Office, testing all new potions that were submitted for patenting. She said that if Tonks hadn't already had the residual potion tested, that she would be more than willing to test it for its individual components. She'd seemed very interested in a sedative potion that could topple a dragon in such a short period of time.

In terms of research about dragons, Hermione had been a little less knowledgeable, but she'd been full of praise for the Wizarding Library at Alexandria: *"Oh, Charlie, you have to see the library to believe it. I was there last year with Se- Snape, for research on one of his patents, and I almost didn't want to go home, I swear."*

And she mentioned that one of her friends from Hogwarts, Luna, worked at the library, and would probably be more than willing to help him find whatever he needed. He'd chuckled a little at her added, *"If you're patient,"* because Hermione had to be one of the most impatient people that Charlie knew.

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The wizarding community of Alexandria was remarkably similar to the one in Cairo, where Charlie had dropped off Ron and visited with Bill and Fleur the previous evening.

The trading centre was obviously magical, but completely unlike Diagon Alley in most respects. Where the cobbled streets in London held an 'Old World' charm, the dusty alley in Alexandria was slightly overwhelming. Stalls of vibrant silk lined the already narrow main street, and exotic smells enticed the shoppers to stop here, taste there.

Charlie stopped outside a Magical Creatures shop for a moment, unable to resist the Magizoologist's call. He gazed, enthralled, at the rainbow-bright Fwoopers in gilded cages that sang silently behind ironclad Silencing Charms. A sphinx gazed unblinkingly at the crowds (Charlie gave her a wide berth), a magnificent scarlet and gold phoenix trilled musically at passers-by, and bejewelled scarab beetles clicked irritably in boxes. Charlie loved the variety of Magical Creatures that could be seen in different countries across the globe.

As he moved onwards up the street, Charlie could barely hear himself thinking above the din; merchants haggled loudly over the price of a cauldron or a particularly fine bolt of robe material, and the murmuring rise and fall of voices from crowds of shoppers buzzed randomly from all directions.

He let out a sigh of relief as he turned into a quieter side street that wound through the small apartments off the main shopping street. Children played in the shade, within protective Intruder Charms; little toffee-skinned urchins who gazed up curiously at the foreigner with the flaming-red hair and rugged looks. He waved cheerfully and grinned and then winked at a small crowd of teenaged girls who giggled furiously and whispered behind their hands.

He reached the gates of the wizarding Library and took a breath of awe, his eyes widening at the magnificent building that held the wizarding world's historical intellectual wealth. Charlie had little doubt that had Alexander the Great been alive he would have included this elegant architecture on his Wonders list.

Beyond the elegantly crafted gates, a long stone pathway led the eye through magnificently landscaped gardens and up a broad flight of stairs to the elegantly colonnaded portico. The polished white stone almost put Gringotts of London to shame, and the various small turrets and levels boasted elegantly rounded, gilded domes that glittered in the afternoon sunlight.



Charlie meandered towards the entrance of the library, and every now and then, he tilted his head back to enjoy the glow of warmth on his face and the scents of the magically enhanced gardens. He smiled at the strange juxtaposition of this corner of this small paradise with the busy, noisy world beyond the gates.

He stepped through the tall entrance and raised an eyebrow as he felt the telltale frisson of magical charms wash against his skin, tickling lightly. He turned back to gaze back towards the garden and was impressed. Not even a shimmer of warning that the charms were in place. *Must have been a highly talented Charms Master,* he thought. He could tell that there was a sound-dampening charm in place, as well as a climate control charm and he chuckled softly as he realized there was a dust removal charm in place also; his leather jacket and heavy dragon hide boots were cleaner than they'd been since ... well, since he'd bought them.

Here, out of the sunlight and in the cool shadows, it was peaceful; all the hubbub of the outside world shut away. Charlie could already smell the scent of old parchment, and he could see why this was one of Hermione's favourite places in the world.

Across the entrance hall, a young witch was talking with an elderly looking, scholarly man and Charlie patiently moved to the display table against the side of the room, waiting to ask for directions to the Magical Creatures (or dragons) section of the Library.

He picked up a pamphlet idly and read the first page, giving a quiet, "Huh." *You learn something new everyday*, he thought. He'd never known that this library had originally been part of a larger library, shared with Muggles:

*Bibliotheca Alexandrina: The Royal Library of Alexandria - A Wizarding Perspective*

*"In ancient times when Pharaohs ruled the land of Egypt, great and powerful wizards counselled the leaders of Egypt, and were indispensable in their courts.*

*The Royal Library of Alexandria was founded in the fourth century BC by Ptolemy I, Alexander the Great's Greek successor. He built what would become the first part of the library complex, the temple of the Muses: the Musaion. It was enlarged to its legendary state of unsurpassed beauty by his son, Ptolemy II.*

*The library was not only a major centre for research and learning, but also a repository for the largest collection of scrolls, books and documents, both Muggle and wizarding. The library is rumoured to have held almost three quarters of a million manuscripts; knowledge accumulated by ancient philosophers, scientists, alchemists, historians and poets. The works of Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Sophocles, Euripedes, Hippocrates and Euclid were housed in this phenomenal library. The head librarians included the mathematician Archimedes and the astronomer Aristarchus.*

*In 48 BC, Caesar arrived in Alexandria to occupy the city and court Cleopatra. It was during a battle with Ptolemy XII that Caesar was forced to burn his own ships, setting fire to the docks and threatening the Library.*

*Sensing a shift of power to the Romans, the wizarding authorities moved the wizarding tome and scroll collection from the Royal Library of Alexandria to the Wizarding Library of Alexandria (a replica of the original Muggle version), situated in Alexandria's wizarding community. They closed and warded the wizarding community to all but those magical, and distanced themselves from Muggle involvement at this time. Incidentally, the Egyptians were the first wizarding community to do so, over a millennium before the International Code of Wizarding Secrecy was passed in 1692.*

*The city of Alexandria passed formally under Roman jurisdiction in 80 BC. The decision to distance themselves by the wizarding authorities had been fortuitous, for it was during this time that Alexandria acquired importance as a centre of Christian theology and church government, even though its original historical importance had been derived from pagan learning.*

*From 270 to 275 AD, during the taking of the city by the Emperor Aurelian, Muggle records indicate that the contents of the Muggle library were essentially lost, and that only the smaller library located at the Serapeum survived.*

*In the late fourth century, persecution of pagans by Christians reached new levels of intensity. In 391, Emperor Theodosius I ordered the destruction of all pagan temples, and Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria complied with his request. Temples and statues were destroyed throughout the Roman Empire. Pagan rituals became forbidden under punishment of death."*

"Uh, hmm."

Charlie glanced up when the witch at the desk cleared her throat softly, as though to catch his attention. He stuffed the pamphlet into his jacket pocket and walked towards her, smiling his most charming smile. "Morning, ma'am," he greeted cheerfully, smiling. "I'm looking for the Magical Creatures section, please."

She gave him directions and told him that the librarian there would be able to assist him with any searches he wanted to make. A gallant grin and wink later, Charlie set off up two flights of stairs, taking them three steps at a time. He felt ... better than he had in weeks. Perhaps it was mean-spirited of him to be glad that he'd left Ron with Bill and Fleur, but right now, he had other things than Ron to be concerned about. The most important of those was discovering why the Romanian dragon had been killed, for in the wizarding world, an obscure motive was never good news.

The Magical Creatures section was enormous with bookshelves and scroll filing systems that reached up to the soaring roof. His mouth fell to the floor as he realised how pitiful his prized collection was in comparison to this wealth of knowledge that had been preserved and treasured by generations of witches and wizards.

He had no idea where to start looking, so he wandered up the first aisle in search of the section librarian. Somehow, calling out in the sacred quiet seemed sacrilegious and he took the time to tilt his head sideways, examining the titles along time-cracked leather spines. He soon discovered that tracing his fingertips along the spines was not an option. A protective charm seemed to be in place on all the bookshelves.

He turned the corner to the second aisle and saw ... an angel? The low afternoon sunshine that streamed in through a two-story high window backlit somebody floating at head height, their silvery hair gleaming and creating a halo effect. As his eyes adjusted to the light, he realised that it was a witch standing on a levitating platform, shelving several scrolls of age-yellowed parchment.

*Clever*, he thought. *Much safer than the ladders that Madam Pince had implemented at Hogwarts.* But those wouldn't be at all effective in a library where the shelves were at least four times taller than those at Hogwarts. *Although*, he mused, *the platform isn't really conducive to looking up robes.*

What looked like a brightly coloured peacock feather, a pair of chopsticks, a wand, and a pencil were all securing her hair, and stuck out in odd directions from her head. She wore a silvery-blue robe with a metallic sheen that shimmered in the bright sunlight.

She held out an index finger in his direction, obviously gesturing that she'd be with him in a moment, as she carefully filed the last ancient scroll. The platform lowered slowly and she turned, gazing at him frankly with large grey eyes. Glittering, swaying wire pyramids hung from her ears and she wore a silver necklace with a plethora of charms dangling from it: an owl, a crystal ball, broom, a witch's hat-

He shook himself, realising he'd been staring at her unusual charm necklace. "Good afternoon," he said, watching as she stepped off the platform, still gazing at him with that frank look that made him feel rather uncomfortably scrutinised.

She smiled at him, and Charlie could have sworn the sunlight around her increased in intensity. "Hello, there. Oh, let me guess. You're a Weasley. You'd have to be with all that red hair, only you're far better looking than the other Weasleys I've met already," she said in a matter-of-fact tone.

Charlie was slightly taken aback by her straightforward manner. "I ... er ... yeah, Charlie Weasley." *Oh, well done, Charlie. Very smooth that was, mate.*

"Well, nice to meet you, Charlie Weasley," she said, stepping forward with her hand extended. "I'm Luna Lovegood."

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A/N: Thank you to WickedlyWanton, who is the most incredible beta; her suggestions and encouragement are invaluable.

The picture of the Library of Alexandria was taken from a Google image search. The little history lesson was woven together from a number of (conflicting, might I add) history sites.

# Chapter 5 ? Luna Lovegood, Librarian

Chapter 6 of 6

Charlie begins his research at the Library of Alexandria, with the aid of a rather eccentric librarian.

*Disclaimer: All Harry Potter characters belong to JK Rowling.*

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## Chapter 5 Luna Lovegood, Librarian.

Charlie shook Luna's hand politely and then opened his mouth to say something charming, something clever, but found that he'd lost every shred of his gregarious charm under her wide-eyed gaze.

"I'm sure I would have met you at your brother's wedding if I'd gone," Luna said contemplatively saving him from the embarrassment of saying something utterly stupid, "but I went on an urgent trip to South Africa with my father. I mean, who would pass up the opportunity to see a Tokoloshe?" She frowned slightly. "Although, we didn't get to see him because he was invisible at the time ... silly magical pebble."

*Tokoloshe?* Charlie opened his mouth to ask what the hell that was, but Luna had already started speaking again, in that strange, matter-of-fact manner. Coupled with her dreamy tone, it was an odd juxtaposition that made him feel a little off-kilter ... unsure of what she'd say next to throw him off his guard.

"Anyway, I don't think anybody missed me there anyway ... I think they only invited me because I was at the Ministry for the Hall of Prophecies battle with Harry and everybody. But it was nice of them to ask," she said, beaming and nodding to herself. "I never had that many friends at Hogwarts, but when Neville, Ginny and I joined the others, I felt like we were the Secret Six," she said, her tone far-away now, as though she were visiting memories in a distant part of her mind. "Anyway. It was nice to be included." She stopped speaking and resumed her frank, unblinking appraisal of him.

Charlie vaguely recalled Ron's tales of that evening, where he'd been attacked by the brains in the Department of Mysteries. He couldn't remember Ron ever mentioning Luna, though. A long, blonde strand of hair had escaped from her haphazard hair style, and she lifted a hand to wind it back around one of the chopsticks. For some odd reason, his fingers itched to pull all of the silly things from her hair.

Charlie realized that he'd been staring back, and he searched frantically for something to say, something to distract him from the thought that the silence was oddly comfortable for two complete strangers.

"So ... you know Hermione then?" he asked and immediately wanted to slap his hand against his forehead for such an obvious question. Of course she knew Hermione. Hermione had told him that much, and Luna had just been speaking of the Golden Trio.

Luna smiled broadly, not giving any indication that she thought his question silly in any way. "Yes. She and I have become good friends over the last few years. She comes to Alexandria often for research. You're not allowed to remove the books and scrolls, by the way." She shook her head to compound the seriousness of the statement, and the wire pyramids at her ears swayed back and forth.

Charlie nodded, still unable to voice an intelligent thought.

A slight frown crossed her forehead for a fleeting moment, and then Luna said contemplatively, "Sometimes I wonder if we became friends because I'm a librarian here. Hermione always did like her books. She didn't have much time for me when we were at school ... she always thought that I was making things up," she said, shaking her head, almost in suspended disbelief. "She was so surprised when I showed her the books about the Crumple-Horned Snorkack that I discovered here."

*What?* Charlie thought. He had shelves full of Magical Creatures books, including Newt Scamander's Comprehensive Encyclopaedia of Magical Creatures in the Wizarding World. He'd never heard of a creature like that before.

Luna smiled dreamily. "That's why I like working here so much. There are so many hidden secrets." The slight frown of contemplation creased her forehead again. "Although, I'm still looking for a scroll that proves the Wrackspurts exist. I wish I could have found it before Harry died...he never did believe that they existed," she said, her tone a little sad and wistful now. "I liked Harry. He was my first real friend, you know. I'm sorry he died."

Charlie's brain was still stuck on the Wrackspurts. He felt like he'd stepped through into some parallel universe, where logic was traded in bucket-loads for whimsy and wild imaginings.

She sighed a little and shook her head, making *atsk* sound before she pressed her lips together briefly. "I told Headmistress McGonagall that the Ministry was plotting to kill Harry as well...she didn't believe me." Luna paused and schooled her face into a very good approximation of McGonagall's pursed mouth when she was expressing absolute disapproval.

Charlie frowned. Harry had been killed because of the backlash of magical energy between his scar and the *Avada Kedavra* he'd cast on Voldemort.

"Oh, you don't have to believe me either if you don't want, Charlie," she said, smiling indulgently at him. "Nobody ever does; I'm used to it."

"I ... er..." He'd started to deny that he didn't believe her, but she was talking again already.

"Oh, it's always so nice to see somebody from England here in Alexandria," she said, beaming at him. "How is Ronald?" she asked. "The last time I saw him, he was being a bit of an idiot. He was upset that Hermione dumped him, you know. But it was best for her...she's much happier now ..." Luna trailed off and left her sentence oddly unfinished, like she'd just realized she was speaking out loud.

Charlie nodded. "He's with Bill in Cairo." *Wow, finally, a full sentence, mate.*

"Oh, yes. His wife's a Veela descendent, isn't she?" Luna tapped her lip contemplatively. "I wonder what kind of children they'll have ... a half-werewolf and a quarter-Veela ... hmm, I'll have to do some research on that one. She pulled the peacock feather quill from her hair...causing a section of it cascade down to her waist...and scribbled a note on a piece of parchment that popped out of thin air."

Charlie watched, bemused. He'd never met anybody quite like Luna before. She was brutally honest, confusing, beautiful, scatter-brained, and completely quirky, all in turns.

"So, what are you doing in Alexandria, Charlie Weasley?" she asked in a direct manner, gazing at him expectantly with bright, clear eyes.

Charlie found himself feeling distinctly wrong-footed again at her abrupt turn towards business after her long monologue about, well, the wizarding world and his Crup.

Trying to collect himself, he was certain that his face was probably as red as his hair. "Er ... yes, well, I have a bit of a mystery on my hands, and Hermione suggested that this would be the best place to look for the answer." *You dolt, didn't you say that already?* Charlie could sincerely not remember what he had and had not said thus far. Luna was far too ... distracting. He ploughed on with his explanation. "See, a dragon was killed at the reservation recently, and I can remember reading something significant about a dragon's head once, but the details are all very ... fuzzy. Where would the best place be for me to start looking here?"

Charlie felt a little sheepish for his less than lucid babbling (Merlin, he was generally the most logical bloke he knew), but from his first impression of her, *he'd* have the notion that either Luna wouldn't notice, or that she wouldn't care. Either option meant that he wouldn't be teased for it. Looking down at Luna, Charlie was pleased to see that he was right; she appeared to be deep in thought as she considered his request.

"Well, you are in the right section of the library, so that helps." She gestured around at the soaring shelves. "Although there are so many Magical Creatures, it'd take you days and days without my help," she said succinctly. "But, you'll probably be more comfortable in the reading room if you don't know exactly what you're looking for. Please follow me."

Turning quickly, Luna's robes swirled gracefully around her legs. For such a petite girl, Charlie was surprised that he had to make an effort to keep up with her. Luna twisted and turned between the stacks, following a mental map that had to be all her own before they stopped in front of a door. Luna opened the door to reveal a bookshelf lined reading room with a large desk and a comfortable looking desk chair.

With a wave of the wand that she pulled out of her hair causing it to fall down her back in untidy waves again she muttered an incantation that he only understood one word of: "*Praebeo Draco Liber Libri Corpus Corporis*."

Immediately, six shelves shimmered brightly for a moment and then shifted forward slightly in comparison to the rest of the shelves lining the room. "You will find the most comprehensive books on dragon physiology on these shelves. It's probably the best place to start if you remember reading about a dragon's head. While you are looking around, I will run an index enquiry charm for 'dragon head'. Don't worry ... I will be certain to keep you informed of my progress."

Then as quickly as she had come on, efficient Luna vanished, and the misty-eyed, quirky woman who talked about wild and wonderful schemes and things people didn't believe in was back. She gave him a dewy smile. "I hope that helps, Charlie, I will see you later."

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Charlie yawned widely as he stretched his arms above his head, wincing when he heard his joints click audibly in the quiet room. He leant forward over a thick tome and propped his cheek on his palm, sighing gustily as he resumed his (still fruitless) research. The towering pile of books on the desk had yielded nothing remarkably different from his NEWTs Care of Magical Creatures text on dragon physiology.

The text was slightly blurred as he read the same summaries, studied the same skeletal diagrams for what felt like the tenth time that day: "Dragons are homeothermic warm-blooded creatures, internally controlling their body temperature." *No shit, Sherlock*, Charlie thought sarcastically. *That's why they can live in all climates*.

"Dragons have hollow bones to enable flight. All dragons are covered with armour-like scales that have a translucent, horny surface. This gives the dragons the iridescent hue to their bodies. The skull often has horns and sharp teeth..." *Bloody obvious! Oh, bollocks to this*. Charlie slammed the book closed, scowling.

He leant back in his chair, arms folded across his chest, wondering if he hadn't been imagining that there was something important about the dragon killing ... the head of a dragon. Maybe it had been in one of those ... Muggle science fiction books that his father used to leave lying around the house.

He glanced up at the high, mullioned window and frowned. The golden afternoon light had dimmed to faded, silvery lavender and grey shadows had started to shift across the room. He sighed; he'd hoped to have finished his research by now. He'd have to either find a hotel here in Alexandria, or Apparate back to Bill and Fleur's place in Cairo. *Although*, he thought wearily, *I am so not in the mood for Ron*.

The door opened and Luna drifted in, empty-handed as well, Charlie noted, groaning inwardly. "Did you find anything, Charlie?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No, not what I was looking for."

She glanced at the bookshelves that she'd filled for him earlier. "Well, you're only done with one out of six ... there might be hope yet," she said, beaming. The washed-out light blended in with her silvery hair, and if he squinted through his tired eyes, he could almost imagine that she was part air, part magic ... a mystical, beautiful creature, utterly unfathomable.

"I ... er ... don't think the rest'll be much help," he said, gesturing to the tower of books on the desk. "These ones all had a variation of exactly the same information." He realised it was time that somebody wrote a comprehensive dragon text one that told the reader more than "a dragon has teeth and breathes fire."

Luna rolled her large, grey eyes. "They do that sometimes. Anyway ... the index enquiry charm is still running on my catalogue," she said, gesturing in what Charlie presumed was the direction of her office, so that the arm of her robe fluttered through the air gently. "It should be finished by tomorrow morning," she said, beaming again.

Charlie nodded and rubbed his eyes tiredly. "Thanks, Luna," he said, stifling another yawn. "I'm buggered anyway, I think."

"Are you going to stay with your family tonight?" she asked. Charlie was certain he heard a slightly longing, perhaps wistful note in her voice.

Charlie shrugged. "I dunno," he said, standing and placing the books back onto the first bookshelf. "I'm actually a little tired to deal with all those people, to be honest ... I reckon a hotel here in Alexandria will be a lot more peaceful."

And it was just Charlie he was a friendly guy, but at heart, he preferred the quiet solitude that the outdoors offered to the hustle and bustle of the city. Growing up in the Weasley house had always been a bit of a challenge for him, and he'd often escaped into the overgrown garden for the entire day during the holiday, appearing as the sun set for one of Molly's home-cooked meals.

Luna pulled a face. "Oh, the hotels here are just horrid, and they over-charge ... tourists, you know." She gave him a contemplative look. "Well, if you like, I have a spare bedroom. If Hermione trusts you, then I think I can." She laughed a silvery, charming laugh that warmed the room somehow. "Anyway, I know your mother ... you'll be bombarded with Howlers if you don't behave."

Charlie rolled his eyes. "Yeah, Mum's lovely, isn't she?"

A slight shadow flittered in her eyes for a moment. "Oh, yes. My Mum died when I was younger."

*Oops*. "Oh ... er ... I'm sorry?" Charlie felt a little guilty ... being sardonic about his mother when Luna had lost hers so young.

"Oh, it's okay. The veil is just a divide in time, isn't it?" she said, lifting a shoulder. "I'll see her soon enough ... when it's my time." Luna pulled a large, silver pocket watch from her cleavage and opened it. "Well, it's almost time to close, Charlie. What's your verdict then?"

Charlie hesitated for a moment, although he knew what he wanted his answer to be. He was too intrigued by Luna not to accept. And although some might say her eyes were too big, or that her mouth was a little wide or perhaps that her hair was scraggly, to Charlie, Luna was very appealing.

He made his decision, convincing himself that she was a friend of the family ... of sorts. "Ah ... er ... yeah, thanks, Luna," he said, picking up his bag and slung it across his chest. "That's really nice of you."

"Oh, no problems, Charlie," she said, wrapping her hand around his arm companionably. "I like having people to stay. It makes me feel less lonely."

Charlie had no answer for that statement and merely let Luna lead the way out of the Library and into the mild Alexandria evening.

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A/N: Thank you to WickedlyWanton for the brilliant beta work she has done for us again. As always, her suggestions improve and enrich each chapter.

According to [www\(dot\)vanhunks\(dot\)com](http://www.vanhunks.com), a Tokoloshe is: *a domestic spirit found in the households of witches and wizards in southern Africa. It is a brown, hairy dwarf, which is usually naked, but sometimes wears a cloak. The Tokoloshe has a single buttock. The penis of the Tokoloshe is so long that it has to be slung over his shoulder. Thus sexually well-endowed, the duties of the Tokoloshe include making love to its witch mistress. In return, it is rewarded with milk and food. The witch keeps the Tokoloshe docile by cutting the fringe of hair that hangs over its eyes. Witches sometimes inherit these demon lovers from their mothers. The Tokoloshe is usually invisible to adults, but if you do see one, you should on no account annoy it by speaking to it, or pointing at it. The Tokoloshe achieves invisibility by means of a magic pebble, which it keeps in its mouth. The creature is mischievous, but only malevolent when controlled by an evil sorcerer.*

(Ahem, brownie points to anybody who writes Tokoloshe crack!fic for Neit).