

The War Within

by emie554

In the middle of the war against Voldemort, two people come together to help try and defeat the Dark. As they work vigorously towards finding a solution, will they be able to find friendship or possibly more.

Grimmauld Place

Chapter 1 of 7

In the middle of the war against Voldemort, two people come together to help try and defeat the Dark. As they work vigorously towards finding a solution, will they be able to find friendship or possibly more.

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry, oh how I wish I did and I could have my way with him and so many other ickle characters. Alas, I am poor and pathetically obsessed with the world of Harry Potter so I only can write about him.

"Perhaps kind heaven in mercy dealt the blow,

Some saving truth my roving soul to teach,

To wean my heart from grov'ling views below,

And point out bliss beyond misfortune's reach."

SHAW.

As the plump colorful figure of Molly Weasley shut the bedroom door behind her, tears sprang from Hermione's eyes. All Hermione had in the world sat on the strange bed that was not her own. She couldn't see her parents, but yet she felt safe for the first time in two weeks. She cried at the conflicting emotions and let it out.

It had been a long two weeks since the end of her sixth year at Hogwarts; the war had progressed to such a point where her parents had been placed under a Fidelius Charm, and not knowing if she would ever be able to see them again was weighing on her mind heavily. How could a world that held so much wonder, also produce so much pain due to the ignorance of bigotry.

Bigotry of someone's blood was no excuse. For if purity of blood was the holy grail of their beliefs, how could the followers of Voldemort not see the fallacy of the situation. How could blood be so important, to those that would follow a half-blood? Was it just an excuse to cause pain on a world they did not understand? Was there some past wrong they thought allowed them to ignore the humanity that every human should feel?

The bigotry they were taught in childhood, if maintained, could even end their own magical world. There were fewer than seventy-five "true pureblooded" families left, and intermarriage had led to birth defects and squibs at a rate that was alarming. How could you promote such a policy that would be the end of not only your line, but possibly your world? Could men like Malfoy and Parkinson really want that for their children?

Now here she was stuck at Grimmauld Place, the house that had become a virtual prison for Sirius Black, now a prison for her as well, and it had her dwelling in thought. The thought of being in such a dour dark place, when she should be enjoying the summer holiday, the last before they left Hogwarts for their future, added to her sadness.

What lay beyond the final year of learning? What would the war leave them? What friends would she lose as the battles raged on?

No answers were to be had; no certainties were available to her. The books she immersed herself in, could hold no peace, no answers for her now. Not for her and not for an average boy that was destined to save the wizarding world, or die trying.

She cried for the unfairness of a world that could place all of their hope on an emotionally fragile boy, someone that knew all too well the pain of war. The same war that tore from him his parents and godfather that took his childhood away by demanding him to complete tasks that would have broken most grown men.

She cried for the unfairness of a world that required a strong man to debase himself in front of a crazed leader to glean a small amount of information, to help the war effort. A professor that had to risk the possibility of being tortured to try and atone for sins and choices made when he was but a boy.

She felt the pain of the world, which stole the innocence of school children, the pain they felt when realizing a friend would not be coming back to school, the pain of knowing their mum or dad would never tell them goodnight again. The children that would not be free, until the hate use was put aside.

The pain of choices made by the Ministry of Magic, which was supposed to protect them that instead hurt them. The very leader who denied the very existence of the threat until it was too late. Who was corrupt enough to let Galleons buy people out of justice.

She cried until she felt she could cry no longer, eyes red and puffy, throat sore, curled up on the bed in what was her room and prison.

She woke up hours later, still feeling the grief that she was sure would never end. Hermione felt a resolve enter her; to help those she loved most to have the strength to face the horrors ahead. What good would it do to fall apart? There was work to do.

Headmaster Dumbledore had asked her to assist in making an experimental potion, one that if developed correctly, would steal the magical strength of the evil megalomaniac that called himself Lord Voldemort.

She hoped that working with Professor Snape would in time lead to a friendship between them. The feelings of respect for his work had grown over the last year, the love of potions and of reading, which were dear to her own heart, had strengthened those beliefs even further. A belief that underneath the icy exterior was a man that was worth knowing.

She hoped the potion would be a success, so the man who risked his very life every day, to save the future of the world she had come to love, would finally know peace. The pain he felt showed, not in his expressionless face but in his fathomless eyes, eyes that were so mesmerizing you could lose yourself for days in their inky blackness.

But mostly she hoped for selfish reasons, from a need to see her parents, a wish to not know the pain of losing further friends, the joy of being able to see Harry enjoy a life outside of the war.

Placing her maudlin thoughts in the back of her mind, she wandered down to the kitchen to procure some breakfast. As she opened the kitchen door, she was surprised to see Professor Snape sitting at the table drinking a cup of tea.

"Professor, good morning. Would you care for a spot of breakfast?"

"No thank you, Miss Granger," Snape replied.

Walking over to the stove, she started to cook some eggs and sausages. "May I ask when we are to start working?" she asked.

"We will start when you are done eating."

"Do you have any notes that I may go over, I have not found much research done on potions of this type."

"That does not surprise me, very few people would want it known that they were trying to take the magic away from someone. I do have some research; however, the Dark Lord will pose a greater challenge due to the reptilian nature that is part of him."

"Sir, do you think that may be his downfall in this instance instead of an advantage? I mean maybe interfusing a reptilian DNA into his own might have caused weakness that we could exploit?"

"Explain your theory?" he questioned.

"Well, sit, I did some reading into Muggle medical science and, well, DNA is a very delicate thing. Say you want to create a new plant; you splice the DNA and combine it basically in simple terms, to hopefully get the traits that you want the new plant to contain. But if the DNA is not compatible, if there is even the slightest error, then instead of creating the stronger more resistant plant that was your goal, you might have created a plant that is unstable, maybe weaker or even unable to sustain life. What if instead of making him stronger the reptilian part of him makes him weaker? Reptiles are cold blooded, how would the cold affect him? Would he grow tired, maybe even hibernate?"

"Slow down Miss Granger. These are all good questions, which may provide an avenue to research. Did you bring these DNA books with you? I would like to read more on this theory," he replied, amazed at the wealth of information her mind contained. It was a joy to teach someone who had a love for learning, and a shame that due to political circumstance, he could not openly encourage her.

Hermione had really grown into a beautiful, intelligent woman; it really was unfortunate that she had become a target for the Dark Lord, not only because of her friendship with Potter, but the fact that she was proof that the rhetoric he spouted was lies. Here was a Muggleborn student, top of her class, a pure talent not just of magic but of the intricate love of the art of potions. In all of his years of teaching he had never seen a student with as much talent as the young woman in front of him. Maybe if this war ended this year and he managed to live, he would offer an apprenticeship.

He pulled his mind in quickly and stated, "We don't have all the time in the world. Let's get to work."

Hermione quickly placed her dishes in the sink and followed him to the potions lab. The lab was set up in the cellar of Grimmauld Place, and was a fantastic sight to behold. It had everything she could ever want in a lab of her own. It was a bitter sweet feeling to know that, here in her perfect room, they were plotting a way to kill a man.

Not that she didn't want to destroy him with her own hands; it just was a heavy feeling. The power that they could wield to their advocacies, the destruction that could be caused by the knowledge if it fell in the wrong hands, hands like those they sought to destroy.

"I want you to start to read these notes. I will expect you to know this information thoroughly," Snape informed her.

"Yes Sir," Hermione replied.

Hermione read and Snape started brewing, falling into a working companionship easily.

A/N Thanks to my beta Teacher Bev

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 7

In the middle of the war against Voldemort, two people come together to help try and defeat the Dark. As they work vigorously towards finding a solution, will they be able to find friendship or possibly more.

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All wars are planned by older men

In council rooms apart,

Who call for greater armament

And map the battle chart.

But out along the shattered field

Where golden dreams turn gray,

How very young the faces were

Where all the dead men lay.

Portly and solemn in their pride,

The elders cast their vote

For this or that, or something else,

That sounds the martial note.

From the Two Sides of War by Grantland Rice

Hermione spent most mornings in the library researching, and her afternoons were devoted to potions brewing. Creating this new potion was a slow process, leaving her wondering if they would manage to find the solution they needed in time for it to make a difference.

Voldemort had been busy the past few weeks and attacks on Muggles and Muggle-born had increased tenfold. Even the Muggle news had noticed the crime wave that seemed to be spreading through England. Panic was sweeping the country as people were afraid to go shopping or even let their children play outside for fear that they too would become victims. No one knew what to make of the rampant carnage that was sweeping through not only large cities but small hamlets as well. The government had created tip lines and new task forces to try and solve the mystery of what was happening, but there were few clues as to who was causing this mass destruction.

The Wizarding world, on the other hand, knew all too well what was causing the increase in violent crime sweeping the nation; it was hitting them just as hard. Just this week, Death Eaters had attacked and killed two Muggle-born Hogwarts students and their families, whose only sin was the blood that ran through their veins. Professor Dumbledore was scrambling to assure the parents of students that Hogwarts was the safest place for their children and that they would be protected within the castle walls.

The Order of the Phoenix was trying to stop as many attacks as they could without uncovering their spy. The information that Snape passed on, while sometimes unimportant, helped them remain ahead of the Dark.

The members of the Order were wandering around Grimmauld Place in a frantic pace, no one stopping for long; there was just too much to do and a short amount of time to accomplish it. The grim look of determination on their faces told of the horrors they had seen in the latest attacks. However, they continued, knowing that even if it was one life they saved, it was worth it.

As Hermione watched the people and efforts of the Order, doubts weighed heavily on her mind. Could they create a successful potion in the amount of time they had? Watching the destruction and loss of life made her realise just how important it was that this war ended soon.

Hermione struggled frequently with her doubts. The combining of Muggle science and Potions was a daunting task, one that was made more difficult knowing that their success could mean the difference between winning and losing.

It was with this knowledge that she worked tirelessly, scouring every Muggle text on DNA and Potions book she could get her hands onto. Unfortunately, the combination of Muggle science and Potions was not commonly done; there were very few texts for them to rely on. In a way, they were creating a completely new science, a completely new way of looking at things.

In the few short weeks that Professor Snape and she had been working together, she could never imagine that his personality could be so different than the one that he showed in the classroom. She had come to realize that his favouritism to the Slytherin students was an act, designed to hide his true loyalties. Snape was by no means warm and fuzzy, or even a nice person. Nevertheless, he respected intelligence.

Hermione had hoped that working closely with Snape would help her overcome her crush on him. Instead, she felt herself liking him even more. The way his hands moved so precisely when making a potion, the way his mind worked when he researched, and accumulated wealth of knowledge in his mind made him that much more attractive to her. Now she knew that Professor Snape would never be considered a classically handsome man with his greasy hair, hooked nose, and yellow teeth; he made for a somewhat intimidating picture. However, her tastes no longer ran to handsome men. Hermione had learned that what was on the inside was more important than what someone looked like.

She tried desperately to keep her mind on the potion while they were working together, but sometimes it wandered to the maudlin thoughts that were in her head. It was amazingly frustrating how slow their progress actually was. While she knew it was going to be slow going when she agreed to help, she never expected it to be as daunting of a task as it turned out to be.

"Professor Snape, you think we will be able to complete this potion in time?" Hermione asked worriedly.

"Miss Granger," Professor Snape sneered, "you should not waste your time worrying. We have more important things to do."

"But sir, how we know if we're on the right track?"

"Unfortunately, the answers are not always in books. Creating a new potion takes patience... it takes time." Snape sucked in a deep breath through his teeth and let it out with hiss, "I must go, Miss Granger. Please inform the headmaster that the Dark Lord has summoned me."

"Yes, sir," Hermione replied.

Professor Snape hurriedly grabbed his cloak and mask from the cupboard in the lab, rushed up the stairs out of the door, and Disapparated without a sound.

There was an eerie air about the night, as twenty dark-robed villains and one spy met shortly before midnight in the middle of a wood.

"My servant," hissed Lord Voldemort. His serpentine eyes bored into Snape's black ones.

"My Lord." Snape knelt to the ground, and then rose.

"Have you managed to get the location of the boy from the bumbling fool yet?" he demanded.

"My Lord, he hides his location from all."

"I want him found!"

"Yes, sir. But it will take time, my Lord. Unfortunately, Dumbledore does not trust Potter's location to anyone. He considers the brat to be *important*, to risk that information even to his *most loyal* followers," Snape replied with a sneer.

"I am not interested in your failings, my loyal follower. Do what is necessary, but remember that my patience wears thin. You may leave." He stated his red eyes glaring his displeasure at the whole situation.

"Oh, and Severus, just to remind you of why you don't fail me... Crucio."

Snape fell to his knees as his muscles contorted in painful spasms.

It was nearly midnight when the Order members started gathering in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place. As Hermione helped make tea and set out biscuits, she wished again that she had been allowed to join the Order. She knew that due to the rushed nature of the meeting something had to be happening. It was frustrating to not be allowed to hear information that could affect her fate.

She looked around the table at the faces of the Order members: Mr and Mrs Weasley, Professor McGonagall, Mundungus Fletcher, Hestia Jones, Mad-Eye Moody, and others all sipped at the scalding tea with grim looks. Whatever had warranted this late-night meeting was serious, and Hermione's mind ran rampant with thoughts of what could have happened.

She was worried about Snape, as he had been called early this evening and had yet to return. Could he be injured, could they have found out that he was a spy? Hermione grew more frightened as the clock ticked, and still he did not appear.

Snape walking into the room ended her ruminations. The determined look on his face told of the thoughts that weighed heavily on his mind. He chose a chair slightly hidden in the shadows near the large fireplace, and sat down gracefully.

She watched him covertly while she continued around the room, serving tea to the weary Order members. The crow's feet and dark purple circles under his eyes spoke clearly, of how the war was affecting him. Hermione wished again that there were something more she could do to help him.

The kitchen door opened, making Hermione jump. Professor Dumbledore stepped in, so she quickly put away the teapot and left the room. Slowly she climbed the stairs to her room, hoping that the meeting held at least some good news.

I want to thank my beta jedikeladry without her; this story would not be nearly as good. I also want to thank notsosaintly, who has provided encouragement that has kept me going.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 7

In the middle of the war against Voldemort, two people come together to help try and defeat the Dark. As they work vigorously towards finding a solution, will they be able to find friendship or possibly more.

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if i had a bill for all the philosophies i shared

if i had a penny for all the possibilities i presented

if i had a dime for every hand thrown up in the air

my wealth would render this no less severe

Simple Together

Alanis Moressette

Album: Feast on Scraps

She knew that there was no use trying to eavesdrop on the Order members, their silencing charms were unbreakable. As much as she wanted to know what was going on, she knew that waiting on the stairs until the end of the meeting was useless. If Mrs Weasley caught her there, she would fret over why Hermione was not in bed yet. If Snape, on the other hand, was the one to find her here, she would get an earful of snide comments on nosy Gryffindors. Hermione did not want to have to put up with either of those reactions tonight.

She glumly climbed the stairs, telling herself that actually going to bed was best. Once she reached her room, she quickly changed into her nightgown and climbed into bed. Hermione's head hit the pillow with a soft thump. She tried taking several deep breaths; that usually helped to calm her thoughts so she could fall asleep.

However, sleep was elusive. The quiet time, while she was lying in her bed, was always the hardest time for Hermione; her thoughts fluttered about, like a butterfly on errant breezes, landing briefly on "what-ifs before being tossed to could-haves. Tonight was no exception as her thoughts turned to Harry, who she had not heard from for a few weeks.

That she worried about him came as no big shock to her, for truthfully most everyone who knew him did at some time or other. The years had been hard on Harry, even before he had found out that he was a wizard and had the fate of the Wizarding world placed squarely on his shoulders. Hermione had been shocked last year when he had confided in her that he had slept for ten years not in a bedroom, but a cupboard, and when not in his cupboard, he was treated like a house-elf. However, shocking as that revelation was to her, it had answered a lot of questions she had about him: where the poor self-esteem, the desire to prove himself and even his anger had come from. Even with a multitude of other emotional problems, it was his anger that worried her the most; when Harry was angry he did not listen to reason ... or anything else, for that matter.

He had been having an even rougher time since Sirius had died in their fifth year. It was as if grief consumed him, and it did not help matters that Harry blamed himself for the attack at the Department of Mysteries. She wished that there were something she could do to help him get over the loss of the only father figure he had ever known, but she had to accept that the only thing she could do was be there for him when he needed her.

Her thoughts slowly shifted from Harry to the other complicated man in her life, Severus Snape. Oh, how she wished he would allow her to get close, the longing and needing she felt to get to know this man, it was more than she could handle sometimes. Never before had she felt so enamoured by anyone, the dreams she was having of allowing him to possess her fully had her awaking with her body throbbing in a way she had never known before.

It was with those sweet thoughts that she finally drifted off to sleep.

She felt stream of feather-light kisses on her neck and moved her head slightly to give him better access to her neck. A strong arm wrapped around her waist pulling her into his hard body. As she moaned her pleasure at the attention, his lips started sucking and nibbling her earlobe as he rubbed the proof of his arousal into her back.

She felt a pooling of dampness in her knickers as his wonderful hands ran slowly up and down her body. Hands that now were sliding under her nightgown and continuing upward to cup her full breast. While his fingers were slowly rolling and lightly pinching her nipples, she gasped out in pleasure.

"I want you, Hermione," he purred in her ear.

"Yes, Severus," she groaned back.

His hands slowly left her breasts, as they roamed down her body and slipped under her knickers to rub her clit. With a slight move, a finger slipped inside of her while his thumb kept rubbing her clit. She ground into him as the pleasure he was bring her increased.

"Oh God," she managed to gasp.

"I like the sound of that." He chuckled seductively against her neck.

She woke with a gasp, 'Oh, what a dream,' she thought.

Her body was thrumming from the arousal her dream had brought her. Her hand slid down her body and slipped into her knickers as she replayed the dream in her head, her own fingers bringing her to orgasm as she imagined Severus touching her.

Sated, Hermione rolled back onto her side, curling around a pillow she pretended to be her dream lover; she fell into a deep slumber.

With the long and tedious order meeting over, Severus walked over to Dumbledore and inquired if they could talk privately in the library.

"Of course, Severus," he replied.

They both walked in a companionable silence, the short distance to the library. Once they entered Dumbledore sat heavily on the couch, his age showing more as the night wore on.

"What did you need to speak of, Severus?"

"It is the potion, Albus. I am not certain that it is possible to remove the magic from the Dark Lord with a potion. And how are we supposed to deliver the potion once it has been created? How it will affect his serpentine characteristics?"

"You have done difficult things before, what makes this one seem so impossible?"

The answer to that question ran through his head as he surveyed the aging headmaster in front of him. He noticed how the normally robust headmaster was looking frail and extremely tired. Worrying about how this war was affecting his mentor and friend, as he thought over his answer carefully.

Sinking into the overstuffed chair that was directly across from Dumbledore, he felt a horrid headache coming on.

"It is the uncertainty of it all; our whole success rests with this idea which is basically a potion that is not even created, an unknown way of dosing it, and the issue of not knowing how his transformed body will be affected. It is all one big question! Put that together with the short amount of time we have to accomplish said feats, it is not conducive to feeling certain that this plan will work."

Dumbledore rose from his seat and walked the few steps to stand beside Snape. Placing his old weathered hand on Severus' shoulder he stated, "My son, sometimes the tasks that we must do seem impossible, however, I know that you and Ms. Granger will be able to overcome these issues. I know it because you have my faith. For years, Severus, you have been doing things that others think are impossible. This will just be another one for you to astound me with."

Snape raised his head to look into the eyes of the great wizard that stood beside him and saw the proud ... almost parental ... gleam that his mentor's aged eyes held. He felt a surge of protectiveness towards this man and knew that for him he would do anything.

"Thank you, Albus."

Dumbledore squeezed his shoulder for another second, showing his support of the younger wizard. "Severus, I think it is time to turn in. It will be another long day tomorrow."

Snape slowly made his way back through the gates of Hogwarts, his mind running over the night's events. The Dark Lord's order to bring the Potter boy to him was worrisome. No matter how much he disliked the boy, Snape would not wish the wrath of that beast on anyone. However, ignoring the Dark Lord's direct order was suicide and he was not yet ready to die.

As continued up the path to the castle he was again thankful that it was not yet term time and he did not yet have to deal with the dunderheads, after a night like this. All he wanted to do now was to grab a quick shower and down the bottle of Dreamless Sleep. The after effects of the Cruciatus Curse would be easier to handle after a good night's sleep.

He quickly muttered his password and entered into his quarters. Walking straight through his sitting room and into the bathroom, he quickly stripped out of his clothes, turned on the shower all the way up, and welcomed the blissfully hot water that ran over him. Slowly he felt the tension of the day being drawn out by the pulsating water and thick steam.

With the water running over him, he allowed his mind to wander over the complexities of their current situation. The best thing to do was to take Harry Potter out of his grasp in a very public way, one that would not leave a doubt in the Dark Lord's mind, that Snape could not produce him or that anyone even knew of his location. But, how could they accomplish this feat?

He wondered if a public argument and subsequent disappearance would work. Would it be a stretch for them to have such a falling out? He knew it would not hard for him to paint Potter in strife with Dumbledore, their relationship since fifth year had been strained, to say the least. Even, Malfoy would certainly be able to back his report to the Dark Lord, for surely Lucius heard enough complaints about Potter from his son.

It seemed like this was to be the mostly likely solution to their problems. By placing Potter out of reach, the Dark Lord would be pleased to know that there were significant issues separating them. This might even buy them enough time to finish the potion and solve the other problems surrounding its use.

Feeling more relaxed about the situation he turned off the shower, dried himself, and dressed in his nightshirt.

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Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 7

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Chapter 4

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How to stay paralyzed by fear of abandonment

How to defer to men in solve-able predicaments

How to control someone to be a carbon copy of you

How to have that not work and have them run away from you

How to keep people at arm's length and never get too close

How to mistrust the ones you supposedly love the most

How to pretend you're fine and don't need help from anyone

How to feel worthless unless you're serving or helping someone

Eight Easy Steps

Album: So Called Chaos

Alanis Morissette

Harry woke up in his small bedroom at the Dursleys. He had hoped that after the fuss the Order had made over his treatment that this holiday visit would not be so bad. However, just like many other times in his life, his wish did not come true. He had been locked in his room for the last two weeks, only allowed out a few times a day to use the restroom.

Although he hated being locked in his room, the worst thing about it was the lack of fresh air from the locked and barred windows. Not only did it magnify the summer heat, but it also took away his ability to keep in contact with his friends.

Harry felt listless. As it had been during the summer after his first year at Hogwarts, he was fed through the cat flap on his bedroom door, but his stomach cramped and ached from hunger. That was bad enough, but Aunt Petunia didn't give him enough water to drink, either.

As he sat up on his bed and looked around at his Spartan room, he wondered what was actually going on in the world outside his little room. Even before the Dursleys had taken to locking him in his room all of the time, they had not allowed him to watch any news.

Even though he had been cut off from the outside world, he knew something big was going on. He knew that the Dursleys were scared, but he could only imagine what was going on to make them so afraid. Petunia no longer allowed her precious baby Dudley to wander the streets or even go over to his friends' houses. Dudley's reaction to this pronouncement was heard several blocks away and for several days, of that Harry was sure. However, Uncle Vernon stiffly upheld the new rule and squashed any further objections.

Harry chuckled at the memory of his uncle's beet-red face, his voice loud and cruel as he yelled, "You'll listen to me boy, or you'll end up locked in your room just like that freak."

Even though that memory brought about a small smile, it also marked in his mind the day he knew things were really getting worse. He wondered what could suddenly cause the super-indulgent parents to lay down rules for their spoiled son.

Again, Harry's mind wandered to his friends. He missed their letters, even though they contained little news of any consequence. He felt lost without even a small connection to what he thought of as his other life.

His Hogwarts things locked in the cupboard under the stairs, his owl staying back at the school, no contact with his friends, and being locked away made it seem almost if his memories of school and the wizarding world were just a fantastic dream. Although the scar on his head, the pain of losing his godfather, and the horrific nightmares he had every night made it clear it was not a dream of fancy for Harry. It was the real deal, so to speak.

He jumped at a loud banging on the door.

"Wake up," Aunt Petunia shouted. He heard the clanging of the metal locks as she fumbled with the keys. Quickly he stood up and made his way over to the door. He had learned at a young age that answering her quickly would make his life easier.

Once the door opened, she looked around at the room. The disgusted look in her eyes grew darker as they fell on the skinny, small boy that was in his humongous hand-me-downs, held up only by the belt he wore around his waist. She sneered.

"This room is filthy and it smells horrible, what are you doing up here all day long?" she questioned maliciously. Her gaze drifted over the messy bedroom again. "We should never have taken him in," she murmured. Harry's jaw clenched, but he remained silent. Petunia looked at her nephew again. "It's because of you that my poor Dudley has to make do, cramped into one bedroom while you laze about in here."

Harry lowered his eyes, to keep the anger at her words, hidden from view. "I'm sorry, Aunt Petunia. It's uncomfortable with the window closed and the door locked. Could you maybe open it a little... for some fresh air?" he replied, trying to calm his aunt.

"That window will not be opened so that you can talk to your abnormal friends. Just like that good-for-nothing mother of yours, you are. Always taking what you don't deserve and wanting more on top of it. I won't have it in my house, do you hear?"

"Yes, Aunt Petunia," he replied. He knew that doing anything but agreeing to her ranting would only make her more upset, and he was painfully aware that he had not yet been allowed to use the restroom.

"See that you do remember. Well hurry up I am not going to wait for you all day. You have twenty minutes to take a shower." Her last comment was muttered as she walked away.

Quickly, Harry grabbed some clothes and rushed into the bathroom. They rarely allowed him to shower, so he was not going to waste the opportunity.

In her bedroom at Grimmauld Place, Hermione stretched languidly, as she woke up the next morning. She was determined to make today a good day.

She was not quite sure exactly how she was going to do that, but she was determined to accomplish her goal. For too many days this summer, she had allowed herself to wallow in self-pity and she woke up knowing she needed to make a change. There was no way she was going to ignore what was going on around her, but she was not going to let it rule her life either.

She decided that today she would start out with a nice relaxing bath. She had not allowed herself the luxury of a bath since she had started staying here, and if she was going to change her outlook that would be a good place to start. Quickly gathering her things, she walked down the hall to the bathroom.

Drawing her bath, she added her favourite bubble mixture. Once the antique tub had filled, she climbed in and sighed as the hot water settled around her. This was something she had definitely missed. Although this somewhat small tub was nothing like the grand bathing chambers the prefects at Hogwarts were allowed, it was almost like coming back home.

As the steamy hot water worked the tension out of her body, she allowed her mind to wander to the problems they were trying to solve. The potion was the first thing that came to her mind. Although there were potions that could temporarily weaken someone's magical ability, none of the variations, or even combining strengthening solutions that they added made any difference. Truthfully, some of the combinations they tried were reduced to grey clumps and some even melted cauldrons in spectacular displays of fireworks. So maybe if they looked at several of the active ingredients on these potions they might come up with clues on how to create their own base potion, instead of a modified one.

Once she was out of the tub, her first stop would be to the library for some more research. However, this time it would be in an entirely different direction.

Now feeling like her luxury time was not wasted, she started to wash her hair.

Once her bath was completed, she dressed quickly, and wandered downstairs towards the library. She was surprised when she entered the room, as Professor Dumbledore was sitting at the large oak desk in the corner.

"Miss Granger, I hope you are well rested this morning."

"Yes, Professor, I had a pleasant night's sleep." She replied. "Sir, have you heard from Harry? I haven't had a letter in weeks, and I am starting to worry about him."

"No, I am sorry. I have not talked to Harry since the day school ended."

"Do you think that he's all right? It's not like him not to write."

She jumped a little in surprise when the silky voice answered instead of the headmaster.

"I am sure the ever-polite and studious Mr. Potter would never forget to write his friends," he sneered. "Probably enjoying his holiday with his Muggle relations too much, to worry what might be going on. Tisk, tisk; not a very Gryffindor thing for him to do."

Hermione stared at the sarcastic Potions master and favoured him with an icy look. "Harry never forgets to write, sir. That is why I am worried about him."

Before the snarky teacher could reply, the cheerful headmaster interrupted the conversation that was going on. "Severus, I am sure Harry would not forget to write to his friends. Maybe he has been busy, or perhaps something has come up."

Turning to face Hermione, his blue eyes twinkling, he told her, "Miss Granger, I know that you are worried about your friend, but he is in the safest place possible for him right now."

She barely managed to rein in the snort at his assessment of Harry's home life. Sometimes she had to remind herself that the headmaster was not as all-knowing as people thought he was. She could not imagine him leaving Harry with such horrible people, or at least she hoped he would not.

In the last few years, she had decided that Professor Dumbledore was as sneaky and as manipulative as a Slytherin instead of the Gryffindor she knew him to be. Luckily, he was working for the Light, but even then, she was well aware that working for the good of the people sometimes wreaked its own havoc.

Although she knew that Dumbledore thought of Harry as a son, she hoped he would manage to survive the plans the world and the headmaster had for him. Hermione had played enough chess to know that even the queen, a player's most valuable piece, could be sacrificed under certain circumstances to win the game. She knew that Harry and Snape were both valuable to this war, and she desperately hoped that they would live to see the fruits of their labours.

Shaking her head slightly to clear the thoughts that were running through it, she quickly replied, "Yes, I'm sure he is fine."

Snape quickly ended the conversation by stating firmly, "Miss Granger, I need to speak to Professor Dumbledore in private."

"Yes, sir," she replied. "I would request some time to speak with you later, sir; I have a couple of thoughts on the potion."

"Yes, yes, later. I have some important things to discuss, and don't need a chatty, nosy silly little girl interrupting." He sneered at her.

She left the room in an outraged huff, 'Chatty, nosy silly little girl. Well I don't need an arrogant, pompous, jerk telling me what to do either,' she thought.

"Severus, you should not bait her so." Dumbledore stated as soon as the door was closed.

"You would steal my only pleasure left, old man. Baiting young Gryffindors is entirely too enjoyable to give up," Snape said with a slight chuckle. "Is it true what she said? Has no one heard from Potter since school got out?"

"Yes, Severus that is true. I have even sent him an owl and it came back undelivered."

"And you thought this was not important enough to mention before now?" he sneered.

"I know he is at his relatives and although they do not like the wizarding world, he is safe there."

"Now, I know you did not come here to discuss your favourite student. Or maybe you did, Severus?" he questioned.

"Actually, I did. I have an idea that might work to keep him out of the Dark Lord's hands."

Severus paced back and forth across the library for a moment before sinking into a chair. Placing his head in his hands... realising too late that he had told Dumbledore that he was thinking about Potter and worst of all he had made a special trip to talk about keeping him safe. He was sure the headmaster was never going to let him live this one down.

How in the world could a spy make such a mistake? It was almost like the Slytherin traits that he valued so greatly had disappeared and it was all that insufferable know-it-all's fault. Well maybe there was a way to salvage this situation, make the headmaster think he was only considering Potter's problem because it affected his very life as well.

"Severus, are you still with us?" he questioned with that damn all-knowing twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes, I am here. I was just ruminating on the different options on how to keep your precious boy-who-lived safe," he spat out.

"Yes, yes, you said that. What was your idea?"

"I think that we should stage an explosive argument between you and the boy, maybe even in Diagon Alley. Then at the end have the boy disappear. It would paint a picture of strife within in the Order ranks. The Dark Lord would be pleased to see what he thinks is the opposition falling apart at the seams. Perhaps, he might even get a little too full of himself and become sloppy."

"That might work; have you any thought of where we should send the boy?" Dumbledore questioned.

"I have a friend; he is located far away in the barren countryside of Siberia. They are not affected by the war yet, nor do they receive much news there. He is the former Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher from Durmstrang, so not only will Potter be safe there, he might learn something as well."

Dumbledore burst out laughing, "You are going to send Harry to Siberia... exactly how long have you wanted to do that, Severus?"

A small snort escaped from Severus. "Sir, I may have wanted him gone, but if I were to send him away for good, that would be a little close for comfort. Although, I have heard that there are small cabins located in the North Pole. Maybe we could send him to live with that crackpot Nicholas and the hundreds of house elves he seems to be breeding."

After a few minutes, Professor Dumbledore wiped the tears from his eyes, and told the usually dour man in front of him, "I have missed that wicked sense of humour these last few months."

"What, you think I was joking?"

"Oh, my boy, what ever will I do with you?" Dumbledore questioned. "Although, in all seriousness, please, contact your friend. Let him know to expect Harry in a week's time."

"Yes, sir," Severus replied. "I will arrange that now. Good day."

I want to thank my beta jedikeladry without her; this story would not be nearly as good. I also want to thank notsosaintly, who has provided encouragement that has kept me going.

Grimmauld Place

Chapter 5 of 7

In the middle of the war against Voldemort, two people come together to help try and defeat the Dark. As they work vigorously towards finding a solution, will they be able to find friendship or possibly more?

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry, oh how I wish I did and I could have my way with him and so many other ickle characters. Alas, I am poor and pathetically obsessed with the world of Harry Potter so I only can write about him.

It had been almost a week since the last Order meeting had taken place, and Snape hoped that all of their planning would lead to a successful mission. He knew that because of the prophecy, Harry bloody Potter was important to the war effort. Otherwise, he might not care if the "thorn in his side" simply vanished from the face of the earth.

But, no; once again he was planning to save that brat's life. Now there were just two more days before the plan was scheduled to be put into motion, and he was almost cursing himself for coming up with this scheme. It was turning into a logistical nightmare, trying to coordinate enough people to protect not only Potter, but Dumbledore, as well. It would be a magnificent victory to the Dark, if the followers of Voldemort somehow managed to capture Harry Potter and slay Albus Dumbledore at the same time.

He would never allow that happen; it would be such a blow to the wizarding world from which it would never recover.

The location for the fake clash had only been decided upon through many hours of squabbling. It seemed that every Order member had their own idea, and each member believed that their plan was the best option. The majority wanted it to take place in relative secrecy. In the end, it had taken Dumbledore to point out that if no one saw the fight, it would negate the whole purpose in staging it. What they wanted was to have the largest amount of witnesses... well, the largest amount of witnesses that would still be safe for all involved.

Once they had agreed that the disagreement would not take place in secret, it had taken almost another three days of constant bickering before they had finally decided that the perfect place would be in the middle of Diagon Alley. On a busy summer day, as this Saturday was sure to be, not only would there be countless people to witness the altercation firsthand, he could almost guarantee that it would rate a front-page story in the *Daily Prophet*.

Although most of what the *Daily Prophet* printed should be taken with a grain of salt, he could only imagine how telling a picture of the Boy Wonder rowing with Dumbledore would be. Not even the Dark Lord could refute such tangible evidence.

Nevertheless, he liked to be over-prepared, and he had found out through discreet questioning that Lucius Malfoy was planning on taking his son Draco to get his school supplies that day. It was almost perfect, really. Malfoy, while always a staunch supporter of Voldemort, would no longer openly risk his position in society. He had always joked, in their relative youth, that there was nothing a Malfoy could not get away with. But he had learned, after the confrontation in the Department of Mysteries, that nobody was invincible. It ended up costing him thousands of Galleons in bribes to keep him out of Azkaban Prison, and even though he still walked around free, he suffered a loss of many of the privileges that he had previously enjoyed.

He had arranged with Malfoy to meet up with them on their trip to Diagon Alley, under the guise that he would be delivering a potion that Narcissa had asked him to make. Although they would only be meeting briefly that day, he had arranged it so that they were scheduled to meet ten minutes before the Order's plan was to go into action.

Therefore, he knew that at least two separate people and a newspaper would give Voldemort independent confirmation that the clash had taken place, while the safety of all major players in this farce would almost be guaranteed. Having two members of Voldemort's inner circle as witnesses was icing on the cake.

He really had to congratulate himself; it was perfect. They would have their proof, yet it would take place in the centre of a well-populated area, so that everybody involved would be relatively well protected.

They had twenty different Order members who were going to be concealed within the crowd, most hiding in plain sight and others dosed with Polyjuice Potion. Everything on their end was planned down to the minute; the only unknown at this point was Potter. However, in his mind, Potter was always an unknown element, kind of like a rogue Bludger: never to be trusted to follow instructions.

However, this time he really was an unknown, even more so than before. The Order had sent owls to his house in the past few days, and they received the letters back unopened. Yet, Dumbledore still assured them that Potter was still at the Dursleys', and of course very safe, but Snape had to wonder. For all of Potter's faults, and there were many, he did not strike Snape as someone that would ignore his friends. The Potions master should know. He had spent the last six years watching those three wander around Hogwarts, almost as if they were stuck together at the hip.

The Order was already planning a trip to collect the boy tonight and bring him back to Grimmauld Place. Snape was glad that he was not in charge of that mission. Potter had made it clear last summer that he did not want to spend time at Sirius' old house. He could only imagine what the spoiled, arrogant boy's reaction would be.

Hermione had spent the last few days researching the active ingredients that were key elements in different kinds of power-controlling potions. Although this branch of Potions was not exactly what they were trying to replicate, it was as close as they were likely to get. There had to be some kind of correlation between the major ingredients in them, maybe even one that they could use to base their new potion on. So far, in all her extensive research, she had found very little usable information. Her eyes were starting to hurt as she had devoured what seemed like hundreds of books already.

It was incredibly exasperating to the young witch; never before had she faced such a difficult problem. Before, it had simply been a matter of finding the right book when she'd had a quandary to resolve. But now, she and Professor Snape were expected to develop a completely new potion in as little time as possible. She had always felt a strong need to prove herself capable in everyone's eyes; therefore, she did what she always did and scoured the library in the hopes of finding any reference that could help them accomplish their goal. In a way, it was exciting and frustrating at the same time.

Deciding that maybe a small break would help clear her mind, she got up from a chair and started looking for some light reading. The old library at Grimmauld Place held a multitude of fascinating things. Its floor-to-ceiling shelves were filled with books, some as old as Merlin himself; it was almost like having her own Restricted Section.

Although, the ratty green furniture had seen better days, it was comfortable, and this little room was easily becoming, at least in her mind, the perfect place to spend days, if not weeks, lost in the treasures it held.

Slowly looking around the room, she tried to decide which shelves might hold something to take her mind off their problems. Walking over to a shelf by the window, she started perusing the books located there. Almost at once, her eyes fell to a thin, brown book; a book she was certain she had never seen there before. Pulling it from the shelves, she noticed that it had no title listed on the outside of the book.

'I wonder what this might be,' she thought. The book's brown cover was cracked and slightly fraying at the edges. 'It looks really old; why have I never seen it before?'

Her time at Hogwarts had taught her to never underestimate what a book could do; she had found books that screamed at her, ones that tried to eat her fingers, and even books that could curse her, so she knew that even the most innocent-looking book had to be handled with care. Slowly, she started to open the cover, but instead of a horrid surprise, it only held the title page. She read *Plants with Uncommon Uses by Perceilius Bartholomew Thornbush* She felt her heart leap for joy. Even though this

book was not exactly what she was looking for, it might just have a clue that they needed.

Feeling rejuvenated, she quickly sat down and started reading. It seemed like only a few minutes had passed when she read:

Extreme caution should be used when experimenting with fluxweed. The major property of this plant is that it causes a change, or morphing, of the person, plant, or potion it has been used in. For example, in Polyjuice Potion this plant's properties are the major reactants that cause the potion to actually change us into the desired form and take on the appearance someone else, for a short period. Yet when we try and substitute fluxweed for a different ingredient, when fluxweed is used in another potion, or even when fluxweed is collected at a different moon cycle and accidentally used in the Polyjuice Potion, the properties of the potion are completely changed.

She continued reading, and after a few paragraphs came to this entry: *As we were discussing previously, the major ingredient in Polyjuice Potion is fluxweed collected at the full moon. However, when fluxweed is collected at the new moon, it has the ability to morph the taker's magic when ingested. Unfortunately, not much research has been done into the effects of using fluxweed collected at the new moon because of this particular side effect. In the few examples we have seen, after ingesting potions made with this ingredient, the morphing of the person's magic is significant. Their raw ability to wield power is lessened and what is left no longer reacts in the usual manner.*

She wondered excitedly if this could be it. Quickly putting the other books around her chair away, she picked up the book and rushed to find Professor Snape.

Gradually descending the rickety old staircase down to the basement lab, Hermione tried to calm herself. She knew that Professor Snape might be working on a delicate potion, and in her exuberance she did not want to startle him. A slight bump of the hand was all it sometimes took to ruin a complex potion.

Finally reaching the bottom of the stairs, she noticed Professor Snape was not working on a potion but was sitting at the desk in the corner. She drew a deep breath, held her chin up, and walked over to him.

"Sir, I have found some information that might help us with our potion," she said excitedly. Placing the open book on the desk in front of him, she watched as he read over the text. Slowly, his eyes ran once over the page and then read over it again. His face lifted from the book in front of him, his eyes met hers, and a small smirk settled on his face.

"Miss Granger, this information has some promise. However, it is not a guarantee that this will work."

"I understand that, Sir. But I do think that this is the most promising information that we have found to date." A large smile spread across her face, and she said, "Sir, what kind of transformations do you think this would do to someone's magic?"

"I'm not certain; however, we can guess that because no further tests have been done with this, they are most likely troublesome changes," he said with a devilish smirk on his face.

Hermione stood there gazing for a moment at the dour Potions master; she was amazed at how much difference a slight smile and glint in his eyes could make. Although he really was not that old, it sometimes seemed that he was aged beyond his years. Her mind wandered for only a moment on what his life could have been like if there had never been a Voldemort. She knew she was just dreaming, but she liked to think that he would be content with life and maybe doing Potions research or enjoying the freedom to do whatever struck his fancy.

She shook her head slightly, hoping he did not notice she was staring at him. She pulled her mind back onto the subject at hand. Suddenly, now that they had a possible potion to test, her mind wandered to other questions she had yet to allow herself to express. Snape looked to be more forgiving than she was used to, so she set about asking a few questions.

"How are we going to test this potion, Sir? I mean we don't know how it would affect somebody's magic, so it's not like we can ask somebody to test this for us," she ventured.

"Surely, the all-knowing Miss Granger realizes that all creatures have a form of magic. Otherwise, we would not be able to test our potions on animals; they would not give us the accurate representation on whether the potion would work or not. You must know that many of the ingredients we use in our potions would kill Muggles and most animals almost immediately. It is not only our magic infused in the brewing process, but also the magic within us that changes the poisonous properties into our medicines, elixirs, and salves." Snape continued to lecture. "Take for example, when you ingest aconitum, or more commonly known as monkshood; it literally only takes three to six milligrams to kill someone. Yet when brewed correctly, it is an important ingredient in the Wolfsbane Potion."

"I understand that, Professor. However, that still leaves us with how will we know exactly how it will affect Voldemort's altered state? It's not like he's a normal human, like we are... he's changed himself, as I am sure you're well aware, so that there will be no way for us to know for sure exactly what kind of animal to test on. How will we even know if the changes in his body allow potions to work the same way on him as they do us?"

"Unfortunately, sometimes with research the answers are never easy to obtain. However, in this instance, I think our best bet is to test this new brew on animals that have a similar characteristic to humans and snakes. So, in essence, we will be testing two separate animals. This issue is one that we have some time to work out. Our main concern right now is to first brew a working potion, and then we will determine exactly how to test it. Just like the Polyjuice Potion, this altered concoction still takes thirty days, so right now we have time to think about it."

"Sir, would it be possible for us to partially transfigure an animal into a snake?" she questioned further. "I mean, people mess up their Transfiguration all the time in class. Take a Ron for example; one time in second year, he was trying to change his rat into a goblet and it only partially changed. Is there some way to control that?"

"Well, since neither of us, thank the gods, is in possession of a broken wand, I don't think that Mr. Weasley's particular form of Transfiguration accident will work for us." He sneered as he continued, "Though Transfiguration accidents are quite common in school, I am not aware of any spell that would accomplish your desired effect. However, I will speak with Professor McGonagall; she may know of one."

Knowing from the look on his face and the tone of his voice that she had pushed her luck with this particular topic to the end of his patience, she racked her brain to find another topic that might open him up once more. She had greatly enjoyed his lecture earlier on the magical properties of animals, and was hoping that she could coax him to share more of his extensive knowledge. Deciding on what her next topic would be, she took a deep breath and hoped it would work.

"I take it that we will have to wait five nights to harvest the fluxweed," she stated weakly.

"I am well aware of when the new moon is, Miss Granger," he stated viciously. "I am a Potions master. Besides, the wait will actually serve our timetable well; we have many things that are going to be taking place in the next few days. I would suggest that you continue your research in the meantime and stay out of our way."

"But Sir, isn't there something else I can help you with?"

"No, Miss Granger, there is nothing you can help me with right now; you need to focus on staying out of the way. There's too much to be done to worry about some nosy chit sticking herself where she doesn't belong."

Surprised at the fierceness of his words, she blinked several times to keep her tears from running down her cheeks.

Hermione knew not to force the issue any further, or she would likely find herself relieved of the few duties that she had left. She quickly gathered up a few books, and climbed the stairs to go back to the library.

It was just after ten o'clock at night when Harry heard a strange noise coming from downstairs. It almost sounded like people were whispering, and he heard the stairs squeak softly, like someone was climbing them. He knew that it could not be his aunt and uncle, for they had already gone to bed almost an hour ago, and truthfully, they would never worry about being quiet, anyway.

He wished again that his wand was not locked away with the rest of his school supplies, for it made him feel like a sitting duck. He desperately wanted whoever it was soon to be just on the other side of the door to be members of the Order. However, he knew it could just as easily be a group of Death Eaters.

Although Professor Dumbledore had always told him that the Dursleys' house was the best place for him during the holidays, Harry never quite believed him. Harry thought that Dumbledore would always do what was best for him as always tempered in the back of his mind, knowing that he also wanted a weapon that would be victorious against Voldemort. Add that to the fact that the headmaster had always kept important things from him in the past, leaving him with a lack of knowledge about some things. And too often, that lack of knowledge had managed to get people hurt or even killed, which made him sometimes question what the old man told him.

Of course, that lack of trust was also compounded by the fact that he had always been told that Hogwarts was safe as well. Yet several times over his years there, Voldemort or his followers had managed to gain entry to the school.

His ruminations were stopped suddenly when he heard voices right outside of his bedroom door. Quickly, he climbed behind his bed, hoping that it would at least give him a chance to surprise whoever was on the other side of the door.

"What do you think they got all these locks on the door for?" he heard a female voice ask.

Harry breathed in a sigh of relief as he recognized Tonks' voice. Slowly rising from his hiding place, he hoped that she would not make too much noise opening the door. Getting out of the house without his aunt and uncle finding out would make this escape easier on all of them. He could imagine how angry they would be at having their sleep interrupted, but that anger would be made worse at having their sleep interrupted by people that they loathed.

One by one, he heard the locks being charmed open. Knowing that his freedom from the small room was imminent, he hoped that he would not have to explain the locks or his magical belongings being kept locked in the cupboard under the stairs.

Even though he had many friends that were Muggle-born, all of their families seemed to accept that magic was just a part of them, not that it made you some kind of unnatural freak. Harry could not think of even one friend or Order member that could truly understand the irrational fear that his family held for the magical world.

Years before he even knew he was a wizard, he had wondered what it was about him that made the Dursleys hate him so. Then, once he had heard the truth about his parents and the magical world, it still made no sense to him. How could they hate a part of him that he could not change even if he wanted to? Could it really be a fear of what they did not understand that turned into a fierce hatred that could cause them to treat an innocent child so cruelly? He knew deep in his heart that he would never find the answers to such questions, but he could not stop himself from wondering

Only once had he confided to Hermione the truth about the way the Dursleys had treated him. Although he was well aware that she had already known that things were not quite right at his house, the look of pure shock on Hermione's face had made him realize that he could never confide the whole truth to anyone else again. She had wanted to go straight to Dumbledore and tell him, but Harry knew that would do no good.

He remembered the disappointment that he felt in his first year when he had practically begged the headmaster let him stay in school over the summer, and he was informed that it was against the rules. Of course, that feeling had doubled when he learned that the Weasleys would have gladly taken him in. At that time, he was never really given a good reason as to why they were not allowed to. In his mind, a house with a wizard or witch would surely have been just as safe as his relatives' house. He learned later the reasons why he was forced to live with the Dursleys, yet it did not make it any easier.

He was now aware, though, that there were many people out there that actually loved him, and that fact really made a difference to him. It was the love of Sirius Black, and his subsequent death, that ended up bringing the harsh realities of life into perspective for Harry.

He had known even in his first year, when he had to fight his possessed Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, that Voldemort was a real threat to him. The situation with Voldemort had only escalated since that time, and now that Harry knew the truth, he would do anything in his power to see that Voldemort was defeated for the last time.

Harry was beginning to wonder exactly how long it could possibly take to open up a few locks; what was happening on the other side of the door?! Maybe in his fervent wish to escape this house, he was just imagining that people had actually come to collect him. However, he wondered how that could be; he was positive that he had heard people.

The bedroom door opened, slamming loudly against the wall. Harry cringed, knowing that there was no way anyone in the house could have possibly slept through the racket.

"Wotcher, Harry," Tonks said cheerfully. "What are you doing with all those locks on your door? Don't you know if you want to keep people out that they need to be on the inside of the door?"

"I'm sure he is well aware of that fact," a soft voice replied for him. "You all right?"

Harry watched the slightly ruffled man enter his room. Remus Lupin looked even older than the last time Harry had seen him. He imagined that Remus was still taking the loss of his old school chum even harder than he was.

"Yes, Remus, I'm fine," he told his former professor, and friend. "Do you think we could just get out of here?"

Before, anyone was able to answer his questions; a loud bang was heard down the hall.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, boy?" he heard his uncle screech. "What have I told you about making noise?"

His uncle's questions were ended as he barged into Harry's room and noticed several people in there.

"What do you think you are doing? Inviting your freaky friends into MY house now, are you? Leave NOW!" he shrieked.

Remus stepped forward and calmly told the red-faced man, "We are just collecting Harry, and then we will be gone."

"What do you mean, you are taking the boy?" Uncle Vernon questioned. "That freak isn't going anywhere; not with you people, and not to that blasted school. Every year it is the same thing; he goes and learns those unnatural things. All it has ever done is get his no-good, lazy parents killed, and then they stuck us with this ungrateful wretch... I won't have it anymore."

Harry looked at Remus in time to see him pull his wand and point it at his uncle. He had never seen Remus' eyes so full of fury as he walked up to Vernon and said, "He will be leaving tonight. Harry get your things... we are going."

"Remus, my things are locked up downstairs," Harry said apprehensively.

"Well, then we'll just have to go get them, won't we? But, first...*Petrificus Totalus*."

Harry watched as his uncle's large body froze up and fell to the ground with a loud thud. Harry smiled to himself; he had wanted to do that to his uncle many times before. It was only the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Under-Age Sorcery that had kept him from it before.

Following Tonks, Mad-Eye, and Remus out of the bedroom door, he noticed his aunt spying out from her bedroom door. She had hidden Dudley partially behind her body, Harry guessed, in case they decided to attack her as well.

Dudley, even though a horrible bully, was still very frightened of magic. Of course, if Harry's only exposure to magic had been receiving a pig's tail, a Ton-Tongue Toffee, watching his beloved aunt swell up and fly off like a big balloon, and the Dementors, he might even be afraid of magic too.

Not that he felt sorry for Dudley. Memories of his cousin's abuse took away any real compassion Harry might have had for him. Even so, he could understand Dudley's fear.

Once downstairs, a quick *Alohomora* took care of the locks on the cupboard door. Remus cast a levitation spell on Harry's trunk, and they walked out the front door.

"Everyone, grab a hold of this handkerchief. The quicker we get out of here, the better," Mad-Eye said, his magical eye swirling around in its socket.

As much Harry hated Portkeys, he quickly grabbed a hold of the handkerchief and prepared himself for the nauseating ride.

Harry stumbled when his feet hit the ground. Travel by Portkey always left him fighting to keep his balance, with a queasy stomach, and too disoriented to pay attention to his surroundings. Being disoriented meant that he was defenceless, and that was what bothered Harry the most. Too many times in his life he had been defenceless against what was going to happen: Dudley and his "playful games", Aunt Marge's mean temperament and horrible yapping dogs, the Basilisk and its poison seeping into his bloodstream, knowing that death was just around the corner, and facing Voldemort in fourth year... that had been the worst experience of his life: kidnapped by Portkey, tied to a gravestone after watching Cedric's murder, and then having his blood used to bring that sadistic bastard back to life.

Harry knew that these people were Order members and friends. They would not harm him. Nevertheless, he felt a growing wave of terror through his body.

Taking several deep breaths to calm himself, Harry slowly felt the terror recede as his surroundings came into focus. He noticed they were standing in front of Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. His mind reeled with emotions, and suddenly he was not sure if he would rather be still locked in his room at the Dursleys' than here, at Sirius' house.

He had hoped that his last few weeks of the summer holidays would be spent at the Burrow, or even Hogwarts. Almost anywhere was better than being stuck here. This place was a constant reminder of the mess he had created.

He knew that, in the real scheme of things, where he spent the rest of his summer was not important as long as he was safe and his friends were safe, as well. At least here he would get to see them, and maybe even find out what was going on in the world. Bucking up, he straightened his shoulders and followed Remus into the house.

Almost as soon as he had walked through the door, he had an armful of squealing girl. Wrapping his arms tightly around Hermione, he returned the hug almost ferociously.

"It's good to see you, Harry. I've have been so worried," she said, stepping away from him. She looked him over to see that he was indeed okay.

"I've missed you too, Hermione. I am sorry I couldn't write, but Uncle Vernon -" He stopped talking suddenly, very much aware the eyes of several people were on them, not even trying to hide their blatant eavesdropping. "We'll talk later."

"Okay, Harry," Hermione replied. "You look hungry; would you like something to eat?"

"Most definitely; dinner was a long time ago." Harry tried to hide his eagerness at the thought of actually eating a full meal. "I am a growing boy, after all."

Hermione entered into full mother mode as she ushered the skinny boy into the kitchen. Harry's appearance really frightened her. It looked almost like he had lost a full stone since school let out less than a month ago.

Her mind worked overtime as she fixed Harry a plate of leftover food. She took in his pasty skin that betrayed a lack of sun and clothes that were hanging on him even more than usual. It told Hermione what his summer had been like, so far.

As she was setting down the plate in front of Harry, Professor Snape walked into the room. She noticed immediately how tired he looked. It seemed that for days he had been working untiringly. She knew that something was going on; there had been several Order meetings over the last few days, and Professors Snape and Dumbledore had been at Grimmauld Place almost continually.

When Harry arrived, she had thought that his "rescue" was the reason for the increased meetings. However, with Snape here after the team had already returned, she was aware that something entirely different was being arranged, and again she was being left out.

Her temper flared. Here she was, old enough and smart enough to be working on finding a way to defeat Voldemort, yet not allowed into Order meetings or to be included on whatever other plans they had.

Harry and Hermione were slightly startled when Snape said, "Mr. Potter, Professor Dumbledore will be here to speak with you tomorrow morning. I suggest you not keep him waiting. It may not be term time, but that does not mean you can laze about all day long."

Harry's green eyes flared in anger as he replied, "Don't worry; I wasn't planning on lazing about. I will be up to meet with Professor Dumbledore."

"Make sure you are," Snape sneered back. "Insolent boy."

Snape turned around quickly and strode out of the room with his robes billowing around him.

Author's note: I want to thank my betas Keladry and GingerGurl. Without them, this story would not be nearly as good.

I would also like to take a moment and thank the wonderful people that have reviewed this story.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 7

In the middle of the war against Voldemort, two people come together to help try and defeat the Dark. As they work vigorously towards finding a solution, will they be able to find friendship or possibly more?

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry, oh how I wish I did and I could have my way with him and so many other ickle characters. Alas, I am poor and pathetically obsessed with the world of Harry Potter so I only can write about him.

I'll give you countless amounts of outright acceptance if you want it

I will give you encouragement to choose the path that you want if you need it

You can speak of anger and doubts your fears and freak outs and I'll hold it

You can share your so-called shame filled accounts of times in your life and I won't judge it

(and there are no strings attached to it)

You owe me nothing for giving the love that I give

You owe me nothing for caring the way that I have

I give you thanks for receiving it's my privilege

And you owe me nothing in return

You can ask for space for yourself and only yourself and I'll grant it

You can ask for freedom as well or time to travel and you'll have it

You can ask to live by yourself or love someone else and I'll support it

You can ask for anything you want anything at all and I'll understand it

(and there are no strings attached to it)

You Owe Me Nothing In Return

from under rug swept

Alanis Morissette

Hermione watched as Snape walked out of the kitchen. 'How could he be so rude,' she thought. 'It's obvious that Harry hadn't had a good summer... I mean all you have to do is look at him, and you can tell that.'

Her eyes raked over him again, taking in his pale skin, the dark shadows under his eyes, and clothes that were baggier than ever before... However, she then thought, 'When did Snape ever really pay attention to Harry? Well, pay attention to him when he was not getting into trouble.'

Harry and Snape seemed to have a hate/hate relationship, and it had been that way ever since they first laid eyes on each other. She remembered that first Potions class... Those silly questions, it was really more like a battle of wills. Let's see if I can break you, but of course, Harry would not break. In fact, he gave him a cheeky answer instead.

She shook her head slightly, clearing all thoughts of Snape temporarily from her mind. Harry, while usually obtuse, could at times notice things, things you never wanted him to find out. And, her crush on Snape was one thing she definitely wanted to keep to herself.

She looked back at Harry and noticed him watching her, with an odd look in his eyes.

"What?" she asked.

"What's going on between you and Snape?" he asked.

"It's Professor Snape, Harry, and nothing is going on... Why do you ask?"

"Well, you just stared after him, for like the last five minutes," he answered.

"Oh, well... I just thought it was terribly rude for him to come in here and yell at you. And, he never did tell you what time you were supposed to meet Professor Dumbledore in the morning."

"I guess he didn't. I wonder why... Do you think he didn't tell me, so I would get in to trouble and he could yell at me again?"

"He probably just forgot. Everyone around here has had a lot on their minds recently..." She trailed off, not wanting to give him too much information.

Harry's head shot up, and he gave her a piercing glare. "What's been going on?"

"I don't know a lot, Harry. You will most likely find out more in the morning," she answered.

Changing the subject quickly, she managed quell his questions.

They continued to talk quietly until he had finished his snack. Once the dishes were done with a quick spell, they traipsed upstairs to the room where Harry would be staying. His trunk was already placed at the end of his small bed and surprisingly, Hedwig sat in her cage, hooting happily.

"When did Hedwig show up?" he questioned.

"I am not sure. She wasn't here earlier today. She must have known that you were going to be here. I don't really know how, but an owl can deliver post to a person without knowing their address, maybe they can also sense where there owner is?" She continued lecturing. "Professor Snape told me that all animals have some form of inert magical ability, and this might be the owls' ability."

"You know, now that I think about it, that makes sense. I never really wondered how an owl located someone... It was always just something that they did," he stated.

Harry walked over to pet Hedwig, his snowy white owl. Hermione could hear him whispering softly to Hedwig, but could not make out what exactly he was saying. Once Harry had stopped petting his owl, he walked over and gave Hermione a hug. "I've missed you this summer. You, Ron, and well, everyone... I didn't know if everyone was okay or what was going on in the world," he said.

"Oh, Harry, there has been so much going on... I don't even know where to start," she answered, as they settled on to his bed. "Mum and Dad were placed into hiding. Voldemort has really stepped up his activities; it seems like every week there is an attack. It's as if he is flaunting his power over everyone. I think he is trying to lure Professor Dumbledore into a confrontation."

"What makes you say that?" he questioned.

"He is starting to attack the parents of Hogwarts students, and just last week he raided Hogsmeade. We were lucky that no one was killed. However, there was significant damage done to several shops. I sometimes wonder if he wants to prove that Hogwarts is not invincible, you know, by attacking that close to home."

Harry's eyes flashed in anger. He did not want to be sitting here doing nothing, while this mad man destroyed the only place he called home. "Hermione, I have to do something, I can't just sit here and twiddle my thumbs. I should be out there... fighting him."

She quickly interrupted his rant. "What we need is for you to be ready to face him. What are you going to do? Storm his hiding place and then what... get yourself killed? You told me about the... the... prophecy, Harry. Do you want the Order to lose? What would happen then? What about all the Muggle-borns and half-bloods that will die, because you couldn't wait?"

"You know I don't want that. I want that bloody bastard dead. That's what I want," he yelled.

"I know you do. But, think for one moment. It's not as if we have been sitting here, doing nothing all summer, Harry. Wait. Find out what the Headmaster and Professor Snape have planned."

She watched his face harden at the mention of his hated teacher. "How can you trust him? He hates me, Hermione, in case you haven't noticed?" he seethed.

"You know he is not a spy for the Dark. How many times has he saved your life? If he wanted you dead, Harry, you would be dead already."

"I know that," Harry said, taking a deep breath to calm himself. "All right, Hermione, I promise not to run off and face Voldemort. I will listen to what they have to say... I know I won't like what I hear, but I will listen. Please, let's not fight. It's been a long holiday already, and I want to know everything you have been doing."

She hated the fact that she felt the need to walk on eggshells around him. However, right now she found herself more inclined to try and shake some sense into him. Taking deep breaths to calm herself, she let the anger leave her body. She knew that the time he spent at the Dursleys' was hard on him. He always returned sullen and slightly aloof. However, now was not the time for him to be falling apart on them. She knew in her heart that something was in the works, and Harry was going to be playing a big part in whatever it was.

"Alright, Harry. I won't fight with you. So, um, I have already told you most of what I have been doing this summer. Why don't you come here and tell me what you've been doing this summer?" Hermione said, as she sank down on Harry's bed. She lightly patted the bed beside her, inviting Harry to come and sit by her.

Harry climbed onto the bed and wrapped an arm around Hermione. "You know, I missed you?" he questioned.

"I know. And, I missed you too. I just worry about you. I think of you as my brother and wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

"I worry about you too," he stated. "Whatever would I do without you?"

"I am not going anywhere," she answered.

Feeling slightly better, he started to tell her about what had been going on since they last had seen each other. They talked late into the night, neither one noticing when they dropped off to sleep.

It was early the next morning when Professor Dumbledore, Professor Snape, and Molly Weasley sat at a small table in the slightly grubby kitchen, drinking strong breakfast tea. The silence, while not menacing... was not quite friendly either.

Three very different people... Yet they were very similar at the same time. And, it was because of those slight similarities that it was of no surprise that while their thoughts wondered in different directions, they were centred on the same person.

Molly Weasley had not been at the Order's headquarters very often this summer. After the problems that they had faced last year, it had been decided that it would be better if Ron and Ginny were housed elsewhere. Their curiosity had become quite an annoyance, and while she could understand their need to know what was going on, it was really safer if they did not.

Ron, Hermione, Harry, and lately Ginny were known to run off with half-baked schemes and not fully informed with all of the pertinent facts. Molly's heart still fluttered at the memory of their "adventure" last year. Really, the sheer idiocy of those four was enough to give her grey hair. Who in their right mind would take off after receiving an anonymous letter claiming that Sirius Black was alive? Moreover, not only did they leave Hogwarts, unprotected, they walked straight into a Death Eater's trap.

Escaping with their lives, only because Neville Longbottom found the letter they had left laying on Harry's bed and reported it to Professor Dumbledore. Quickly, he called the Order together. They wasted no time and Apparated to the desolate grove, finding the children completely surrounded, trying to defend themselves against twenty Death Eaters.

Luckily, the Order had managed to surprise the Death Eaters, and after a ferocious battle, they managed to defeat them. However, winning was not without harm to themselves. Kingsley Shacklebolt and Nymphadora Tonks had both been gravely injured. It had taken many months before they were able to leave the care of St. Mungo's Hospital.

Just the memory of all the injured and the bedraggled look of the teens, when they were brought back the Order headquarters, was enough to give Molly nightmares for months. She wished she could take all of them far away... somewhere that they would never again know the pain of war. However, she knew that would never be possible.

So right now, she settled with keeping her kids safe and away from the fray, even if it was only for a summer. At least she knew that they were safe for a short while.

She had pleaded with Dumbledore to let Harry come to the cottage with them for the holiday, but he would not hear of it and instead, sent him back to those awful Muggles.

That was the reason she was here this morning, for as much as she enjoyed the cottage they were staying in, today she needed to put her mind at ease. She considered Harry a son and they had not heard one word from him all summer. Her worries about him were weighing heavily on her mind.

She knew that the Order had collected him from his relatives' house last night and even though everyone had told her that he was fine, she needed to see it with her own eyes.

Molly had been at Grimmauld Place since eight this morning, and she had yet to see either Harry or Hermione. She was beginning to wonder what was keeping them.

Professor Snape got up from his chair and started pacing the floor. To Molly, he looked like he was going to explode soon. He was well known for his temper, and it was a little too early in the morning for her to be able to deal with it.

"I will just pop upstairs and see when Harry will be down," she told the men.

"I told Potter that we would be waiting for him," Snape sneered. "That insolent brat thinks he can just laze about. I will go get him."

"Severus, calm down. I think it would be best if we let Molly knock him up. I am sure he just lost track of time," Dumbledore said, calmly.

"Yes, I will just pop up there. We'll be down in a moment," she said.

Harry opened his eyes slowly, noticing that the room was still fairly dark and there was a strange weight on his chest. Looking down he saw a mass of bushy hair... 'Oh,' he thought. 'We must have fallen asleep.'

"Hermione," he stated, his voice rough with sleep. "It's time to wake up."

"Just five more minutes," she grumbled, as she buried her face into his chest.

Harry chuckled lightly at her response. He had known Hermione for many years now and usually the only time she was not up, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at the crack of dawn, was when she was overworking herself.

And, it was obvious that she was overworking herself this summer, though what she was concentrating this much energy on was, at this point, still a mystery. However, it would not be a mystery for Harry much longer. He was going to find out what was going on around here. Hermione had given clues in their late night talk, but no specifics. All he knew was that it was something that involved him and he was not going to wait any longer. He was going to march down and make them tell him everything.

With his mind made up and with a new determination to find out the truth, he moved his arm to shake Hermione.

Before he could even move, the door opened gently and Mrs. Weasley's face poked into the room. "Harry, Professor..." she trailed off, her eyes taking in Harry and Hermione lying in the bed together. Her face grew bright red with anger.

"What do you think you are doing?" she screeched.

"Mrs. Weasley, its not like it looks... we just fell asleep," Harry hurriedly answered.

Harry, however, had no further chance to explain, because at that moment Professor Snape quickly entered the room, with his wand drawn. He took in the room with a sneer on his face. His eyes narrowed when he noticed Harry and Hermione under the covers, in the bed.

Harry looked over and saw Hermione's face pale at the hard glint in the professor's eyes. She quickly jumped out of the bed and straightened her clothes. "Sir, please. It's not what it looks like."

"Did I ask you for an explanation? It is lucky we're not yet at Hogwarts... It would have been most unfortunate for you to be facing expulsion... Wouldn't it Miss Granger?" Snape sneered.

Hermione's breathing became hitched and she lowered her head to hide the tears that were rolling down her cheeks.

"Potter, I suggest you hurry. The headmaster is waiting for you downstairs. Miss Granger, follow me."

Hermione followed Snape downstairs and into the library.

"Sit down," Snape told Hermione.

She picked her favourite stuffed green chair and sat down. Keeping her eyes locked on the floor, she hoped he would not be able to tell she was crying.

"It is apparent that we have been too lax on you so far this summer. Believe me when I say that this will no longer be the case. Inappropriate displays of juvenile lust... Have you lost your mind?"

"Sir, I am sorry, but we just fell asleep. We were talking and we must have dozed off. I swear there is nothing going on between us. He's like my brother. It would be sick for anything to happen between us."

"Be that as it may. Remember appearances are everything, Miss Granger. If you are to be the Head Girl next year, your character must be above reproach. And being found in the bed of a boy could lead to many unfortunate rumours." Snape lectured silkily, "Also... as my assistant, your mind needs to be focused on potions, not some silly boy. Go get dressed, and hurry. I have many potions for you brew today."

Snape watched Hermione scamper from the room. He took a deep breath; it had been almost painful to see her in bed with Harry bloody Potter. While he knew, his growing feelings for her were inappropriate, that could not stop him from having them.

These feeling had started when Dumbledore forced him to take her as an assistant. Slowly, their stilted questions and answers had turned into almost friendly conversations, and their awkward silences were growing into companionable silence.

However, he had to admit that not all of his new feelings were of a friendly nature. He knew that she would never return his feelings. So, he tried to keep her at an arm's length and that did work somewhat. Well, it worked until she started haunting his dreams.

He remembered the first time that had happened; it had seemed so real that he had woken up expecting to find Hermione in his bed. It was then, after that first dream, he had almost pled with Dumbledore to remove her from this project. However, the headmaster would not hear of that. That would have been too easy of a solution.

So now, he tried to limit their time alone, but that was almost impossible. In addition, the amount of time that they were going to spend would be dramatically increasing in the next few weeks. He did not know how he was ever going to stand it. To see someone he desired, and yet could never have, was incredibly painful.

He almost wanted to use this morning's indiscretion as an excuse to have her removed from Grimmauld Place and placed into the cottage with the Weasleys. Nevertheless, he knew he would not do that, for as much as he wanted to remove the temptation that would place her right in the hands of that Weasley brat.

Ronald Weasley. Now there was one person he did not want around his Hermione. Twice last year he had come upon them hidden in Hogwarts alcoves... that dunderhead trying to convince her that he loved her and if she loved him too, she would sleep with him. Just the thoughts of the simpering little weasel laying his grubby paws on her... It was enough to make his blood boil.

She might not return his feelings, but she was still his and no one else was going to touch her.

Well, he decided she might not return his feelings yet. However, he was going to do everything in his power to change that. Right then, he vowed that he was never again going to see her in the arms of another man.

Authors note: I was going to include the meeting with Dumbledore and the upcoming attack on Diagon Alley... Um, I meant staged fight, yes-right fight.

Thanks to my beta GingerGurl. Who makes this story much better.

Just to let you know, this story is now AU, as of Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince, but I will continue.

Oh, and before I forget... knock up someone is British slang for waking up someone, I swear Molly was not going upstairs to get poor Harry pregnant.

Please take a moment and review.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 7

In the middle of the war against Voldemort, two people come together to help try and defeat the Dark. As they work vigorously towards finding a solution, will they be able to find friendship or possibly more.

Chapter 7

By emie554

Disclaimer: I do not own Harry, oh how I wish I did and I could have my way with him and so many other ickle characters. Alas, I am poor and pathetically obsessed with the world of Harry Potter so I only can write about him.

"Potter, I suggest you hurry. The Headmaster is waiting for you downstairs. Miss Granger, follow me."

Harry watched as Snape led Hermione from the room. He could not believe the audacity of that man. That he would threaten her with expulsion, simply because they had fallen asleep in the same bed. Moreover, even if there was something going on between them, what business of his was it anyway?

"Greasy git," he muttered to himself.

What right did that man have to be the morality police? It was not as if Snape could say that he had never made a mistake in his life. One would think that joining the Death Eaters, no matter what the reasoning, would be a much more horrible mistake than anything that could have happened in that bedroom last night.

If he did not know better, he would almost have guessed that the Potions master was jealous. Nevertheless, he knew that could not be possible. There was no way that a petty, vicious man would ever fall for someone as sweet as Hermione. It was impossible. Besides, he was her teacher. There had to be rules against that kind of thing.

Harry shuddered slightly at the image of Snape touching Hermione. No, that was not it; there could be no way that they would ever be together. He would just put it out of his mind... "I mean, who would ever love Snape?" he asked.

Putting those disturbing thoughts aside, he quickly dressed and headed downstairs to meet with Professor Dumbledore.

Tears streamed from Hermione's eyes as she fled the library. That man could get under her skin like no one else. She wondered if everyone had that power over the person they loved.

"Yes," she thought, 'loved.' Not that she would ever admit that to anyone. All they would do was tease her for being in love with the "black bat" of the dungeons.

However, none of them knew the man that was hiding inside that icy exterior. Well, if she was going to be completely honest, she barely knew that man. However, the mere glimpses she had seen inside his shell were some of her fondest moments. When she could see that man, she wished she could spend eternity with him.

Hermione could imagine them having long conversations about the books they were reading, time spent together working on research, and even sometimes, a picture of a small boy with curly black hair, dark soulful eyes, and her nose invaded her daydreams. She could not help the sigh that escaped from her lips; it was a beautiful dream... Not that she allowed herself to believe it could ever come true, because she knew that Snape would never return her feelings.

She held no delusions of how admitting those feelings would make others treat her. Imagining the snickers of other students talking about how the "Head Girl" got her position and even her friends would look at her with pity, or even contempt. No one really understood how it was possible that she could love Professor Snape.

She was so lost in her thoughts that she let out a slight yelp when she ran into a hard object on the landing. She took a quick step back and looked up into the face on Remus Lupin.

"Professor Lupin, I am sorry I didn't see you," she said.

"Hermione, I haven't been your teacher in a while. Please, call me Remus. Are you alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine," she replied.

"You don't look so fine to me."

"I swear, Pro... Remus, I am ok."

"Come, Hermione, let's go and chat for a moment... I do think you could use it," Remus stated firmly.

"Oh, alright."

Remus led her into a small sitting room that was located near the stairs.

There were many small sitting rooms and parlours located in this old house, and this one in particular was not used very often.

She looked around the room, taking in the slightly shabby chairs, and decided to sit in the one that was closest to the fireplace.

Watching as Remus lit a fire, for the room was quite chilly, and then he took the chair that was opposite her. His eyes ran over her as he took in her appearance.

She was suddenly very conscious that she had slept in her clothes, had not yet had a chance to brush her hair, and that she had recently been crying. No wonder Remus

had not believed her when she said she was fine. She must be quite the sight.

"What is going on? Please, don't tell me it's nothing. I can tell you have been crying."

"It's really nothing important. It was just a misunderstanding, really."

"Well, tell me what this misunderstanding is," he said.

"First, promise me you won't tell anyone else," she said hesitantly.

"Hermione... You know I cannot do that. What if someone one gets hurt because I was keeping a secret."

"No, I swear it's not something that will get anyone hurt... It is more embarrassing than anything else."

Remus looked thoughtfully at her and then said, "Alright, if it won't get anyone hurt then I promise not to tell anyone. However, if I decide that this is important or dangerous, I will inform Albus."

Although it was not exactly what she wanted to hear from him, it was enough of a promise for her to start telling him her story.

"Last night, after Harry arrived here, we went up to his room to talk. I guess it got late and we fell asleep. The next thing I know, Molly is there yelling at us, and then Professor Snape walks in and threatens me with expulsion... I jus... just don't know," she ended with a sob.

"Oh, Hermione, it will be alright. Severus can't do anything to you while you are not at school."

"Yes, he can. He told me that his research assistant shouldn't be bothering with boys...basically told me that he could take me off the project."

"He won't do that because Albus won't let him, Hermione."

"I don't want to be on this project only because Professor Dumbledore won't let him take me off. I want to work on it because I deserve to," she cried.

"Albus would not let anyone work on something so important, unless he thought you were capable of doing the work. You are really the smartest witch of your age. Remember that."

"Do you really think that, Remus?"

"Of course I do, and you know what? Professor Snape would not let anyone work with him if he didn't believe it too," he told her.

Hermione wiped the last of her tears as she looked up and asked, "He wouldn't? Couldn't Professor Dumbledore make him?"

"Honey, if Severus didn't think you were able to handle the work, nothing that Albus could say would make him work with you."

"Thank you, that makes me feel better. I just need to go get ready, I am needed in the lab," she said while getting up.

"Well, hurry up. You wouldn't want to keep Severus," Lupin chuckled.

It had been only a few short minutes since Harry had entered the kitchen and found Professor Dumbledore waiting for him. He took a seat at the table when the aged professor had motioned for him to sit down.

"Have some tea, Harry," Dumbledore said, placing a cup of tea in front of him. "I have heard there was a little excitement today. Molly came down and told me what she saw... Why don't you explain to me what happened."

"Professor, we were up late talking last night and fell asleep. There is nothing more to the story. I had only woken up moments before Mrs. Weasley walked in, and then Snape barged in and threatened Hermione. Sir, it's not fair... I mean nothing happened, why should she get into trouble?"

"It is Professor Snape, Harry. In addition, I am sure Hermione will not be in trouble if what you say is true. Now, I need you to remember that just because school is not in session doesn't mean that certain school rules should not be followed. Please, remember to sleep in your own bed...alone," Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eyes.

Harry blushed slightly at the implications in the Headmaster's words. "I am sure that will not be a hard rule to follow. We really were just talking and fell asleep, sir."

"No matter, my boy, things do just sometimes happen. I would advise you not to get too comfortable though; you will not be staying here for very long."

"Where am I going? Will I get to stay at the Burrow?" he questioned.

"Alas, I am afraid not. No one is staying at the Burrow right now. Unfortunately, Death Eaters raided it. Luckily, no one was home, but it is too dangerous for anyone to live there. We do have a place for you to stay, but for now we are keeping where that location is secret."

"Don't I have a right to know where I am going to be staying?" Harry yelled. "I am not some five-year-old child. I deserve to know what is going on!"

Harry was so wrapped up in his anger at Dumbledore's words, he failed to notice that Snape had entered the room. Silently, the man approached Harry, almost like a tiger stalking his prey.

He waited until he was just inches away from the irritated boy and then spoke in a silky tone.

"Well, well, Potter. Are you afraid that someone other than yourself might be in the spotlight? Afraid you might have to share your glory, for once? Did you ever think for a moment that there might be a good reason why you are not given certain pieces of information? Oh, wait a moment, thinking about others might require you to use your brain for something besides Quidditch."

Harry whipped around to face the teacher who was speaking to him. "What the hell do you know? You overgrown bat...maybe if people told me everything, I wouldn't have to seek it out in other ways," Harry yelled.

"If that were true, Potter, then you would never have placed your friends' lives at risk with your hair-brained schemes. Maybe, the reason people don't tell you things is because they can't trust you." Severus spat out.

"Severus, Harry, calm down. We need to discuss what is going to happen, not fight about things we can't change," Dumbledore said. "Severus, please sit. We have many things to discuss and not a lot of time left."

"Why? What is going on?" Harry questioned.

"All in good time...all in good time, but first, Severus, have some tea," Dumbledore replied.

"Headmaster, now is not the time for tea," Severus stated.

"There you are wrong, my boy. Now is the perfect time for tea. Would you like a lemon drop, as well?" he questioned, his eyes twinkling madly.

"You know, I can't stand those blasted things. Let's just get back to business. I have other things that require my attendance today."

Once, Dumbledore had his way and all three men sat with steaming cups of tea in front of them, they went over their plans.

Hermione walked down the stairs about an hour after her meeting with Remus. She felt much better after her shower and making her hair at least semi-presentable.

She had decided, on her slow trudge upstairs, that Professor Snape would wait for her. He had no right to come upstairs during her summer holiday and tell her what to do. To threaten her with expulsion without even asking for an explanation, she felt she deserved more from him. After all the time they had spent working together, they had seemed to come to an understanding, and while not fast friends, they did mostly treat one another as colleagues. In addition, if he wanted her to continue working with him, he needed to understand that he needed to treat her better. It was not as if she was some petulant child, she was an adult and in less than a year, an equal in all things.

Yet, for all her thoughts, she did not know how she was going to inform her professor that he needed to treat her better. She knew not to threaten to quit the project. That course of action might just play into his wishes. Well, that, and she did not want to risk that the potion would not be developed in time. No, she just needed to find a way that would get him to see that she was his equal in all things.

Down in the kitchens in Grimmauld Place, the meeting among Harry, Dumbledore, and Snape was just ending. Snape pushed his chair back, clearly stating without words that the boy-wonder arguments were failing.

"We are not getting anywhere, Albus. I refuse to argue with this child. Here we are, planning once again how to save you, and you do not seem to care. Do you want to get your friends killed? Do you really want to be brought in front of the Dark Lord to face your death? Because, you are not yet ready to face him," Snape growled.

"What makes you think I could not defeat him, right now? I think you really want him to win...you greasy git," Harry yelled.

"How dare you question my loyalty? How many times do I have to save your life before you realize I want us to win?" Snape yelled.

"Severus, Harry, calm down. Sit, both of you," Dumbledore shouted. "Harry, this is not an option. You must follow through on this plan. We need time."

"But everyday that Voldemort is alive, he is murdering people. How many people need to die before you let me face him?" Harry questioned. "It is my destiny. I know that now. And until I face him, more people will die because of me."

"If you face him before you are ready, you will be defeated. Then more people will die. Our way of life will be in danger...surely you must see that?" Dumbledore pleaded. "We are working on things, things that we cannot share right now, but I promise that the end will come soon, Harry. Do your part in all this, study and learn all you can, so that you are ready and can prevail when the time comes."

"Alright. I don't like it, but I will do it," he said.

"Capital, my boy, I am sure there are many things you need to do, and I need to speak with Severus."

Snape watched as the boy sullenly got up and left the room. His eyes turned to the Headmaster.

"Do you think he will follow the plan, Albus?"

"I am sure he will. He gave his word, after all," Dumbledore said with his eyes twinkling.

"I am sure you didn't keep me to talk about supposed Gryffindor honour. What did you need?"

"How goes the potion work?"

"It is slow, but I do believe we might be on to something. We are going to brew a modified Polyjuice Potion, which is rumoured to cause mutations and diminish the magic of a person. However, even if the potion works properly, we would still need to find out what possible modification might be needed for it to be effective on the Dark Lord."

"How long?" Dumbledore asked.

"At least a month to brew, and Merlin only knows how long it will take to work out the possible modifications. It will take even longer because the term will be starting soon."

"What if we removed Miss Granger from school and placed her on the project full time?"

"Well, that would make the work faster, but do you really think she would give up her N.E.W.T.s or even Head Girl status?"

"Severus, you know as well as I do that she could take her N.E.W.T.s and pass them right now. I don't have to tell you that Voldemort grows stronger every day...we have to stop him and soon. It has to be our top priority."

"How do we explain her not being in school? It will be noticed. I have to explain it before it comes up."

"Since so many students are being taken out of schools, the Ministry of Magic has decided to offer OWL and NEWT tests quarterly. The first of these tests are scheduled in one week's time. I would like Miss Granger to take the test then. She would then be issued her Hogwarts diploma. I require you to take her on as an apprentice. You have no choice in this."

"But, the Dark Lord knows that I have never taken on an apprentice. How am I to explain not only taking one, but one that is a Muggle-born..." he trailed off.

"Severus, your employer requires you to take on an apprentice, just like I am requiring all the teachers to do. I am assigning recently graduated students to all of you. The only difference is yours is graduating a year early. Here is your copy of the letter I sent out to all the teachers, stating who your apprentice is to be."

Snape took the parchment, unrolled it and read the letter:

Due to current circumstances in the Wizarding community, many qualified, recently graduated students are not given the opportunity to apprentice under masters. Because of this, I am requiring all teachers to take on apprentices.

Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress, and I have gone over school records and NEWT scores (where available) and assigned apprentices according to several factors. All these people are believed to have sufficient motivation and the underlining skills necessary to become masters in their chosen fields.

Ancient Runes: Vicky Frobrisher

Arithmancy: Ian Inglewood

Astronomy: Alfie Omega

Care of Magical Creatures: Mathew Strongarm

Charms: Gemma Barnes

Defence Against the Dark Arts: Neville Lufkin

Divination: Star Lighta

Flying: Oliver Wood

Herbology: George Greenbush

History of Magic: Beaumont Marjoribanks

Muggle Studies: Charlotte Smithe

Potions: Hermione Granger

Transfiguration: Imogene Arkwright

I hope that you all understand the necessity and importance of this program. I expect all of you to work diligently to guarantee the successfulness of this new endeavour.

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore

Headmaster, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

"Yes, Albus, I will make sure the word is passed along," Severus stated, as he got up from the kitchen table. "I am afraid I must cut this discussion short. I am supposed to meet with Miss Granger."

"Of course. Please, do tell her the news. I'm sure she will be excited."

Author's note: I apologize for this chapter taking so long to get out, but I was waiting for my other beta to get done with it. She has unfortunately had some issues come up (start of a new job).

I do wish to thank my betas gingergurl and Alexandra for their wonderful work.

Any mistakes found are solely my own. Please, read and review.